

A Four-Sided Model for Reading Hypertext Fiction^[1]

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Abstract

I will not pursue the issue of a hypertextual competence (or a multimodal hypertextual competence) here. Rather I would like to take a closer look at literary hypertext and electronic literature itself, and the fact that electronic literature, just like print literature, prefigures different modes of reading. I will insist on the necessity of examining what mode of reading and what kind of responses are prefigured in hypertexts when we make conclusions about hypertext reading. I want to approach the topic by putting weight on how Megan Heyward's *Of day, of night* (2002) prefigures the reader's response. The aim of this article is to explore some of the preconditions for reading *Of day, of night*, and to identify three modes of reading in this hypertext fiction. In addition to these three modes I will argue for a fourth mode of reading hypertext fiction. This mode can be identified in several literary hypertexts, but is less relevant for describing the preconditions for reading Heyward's text. Consequently I will make use of other work to exemplify this mode.

Four modes of reading are identified and described. These are semantization, exploration, self-reflection and absorption. These modes arise as the reader interacts with textual elements and utilises contextual features. Through the article the modes of reading will be discussed in relation to similar established concepts, such as the four approaches to playing MUDs identified by Richard Bartle (1996), and different attitudes of reading print literature represented in Wolfgang Iser's theory on "die Appellstruktur der Texte" (Iser 1974, 1978), or what he later in his text game theory calls "text game structures" (Iser 1989; 1993).

Ignorance, not links, may cause distress

The question "how do we read electronic literature or literary hypertext?" has been widely explored (Moulthrop 1991; Kaplan and Moulthrop 1991; Snyder 1997; Miall and Dobson 2001; Ryan 2001; Gardner 2003; Gunder 2004; Mangel 2006; Page 2006). In many of these explorations there is a consensus regarding the views on the reader's experience of literary hypertext. Many critics claim that reading literary hypertext generates frustration and insecurity. They seem to regard hypertext fiction as unstable texts with little or no coherence, and as texts that are at war with institutionalised genres (Memmott 2006). As far as I can see there are two problems concerning the reader aspect in the theory of hypertext. 1) Some of these studies are based on observations and interviews of readers with little or no experience of literary hypertext [2]. 2) The exploration of the reader in these studies does not sufficiently take into account the response structures prefigured in hypertext fiction.

Much of the research on hypertext reading partly fails in that it puts too much weight on the response from readers who lack knowledge on hypertext fiction. The readers are not familiar with clicking on links when they read stories, so it seems that the hypertext mechanism is the one to blame for their frustration and insecurity. The consequence is that many studies on hypertext reading suffer from limitations which lessen their valuable contribution to our knowledge about reading hypertext fiction. In her book *Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology* (2006) Ruth Page refers to a project where her students read literary hypertexts. Page writes that her students ended up being frustrated when they were reading these texts. She concludes that it is obvious that the students did not enjoy the kind of reading experience that hypertext literature gave. The reason for this might be the power of print conventions, as Page suggests. A more significant reason for the student's response, I think, is that they were unfamiliar with reading this kind of literature. Colin Gardner (2003), which in his study of hypertext reading concludes that hypertext reading causes frustration, admits that none of the participants in his research had had earlier experience of reading hypertext fiction. In other words, it is a lack of an elaborated genre knowledge that made his students frustrated. The same seems to be the case in much of the research on hypertext reading. The readers lack what Anna Gunder (2004) calls a *hypertextual competence*. Gunder develops the concept "hypertextual competence" from Jonathan Culler's literary competence (Culler 1980). Her point is that just as the reader needs to be familiar with conventions for reading when approaching literary texts, the hypertext reader needs to be familiar with conventions concerning reading hypertext fiction. Today we might just as well add "multimodal" to the concept "hypertextual competence" to emphasise the reader's need to read or interpret different semiotic resources when reading hypertext fiction. The idea of a specific competence for reading hypertext fiction is later and more thoroughly pursued by other scholars, for instance Astrid Ensslin in her book *Canonising hypertext: Explorations and*

Constructions (2007).

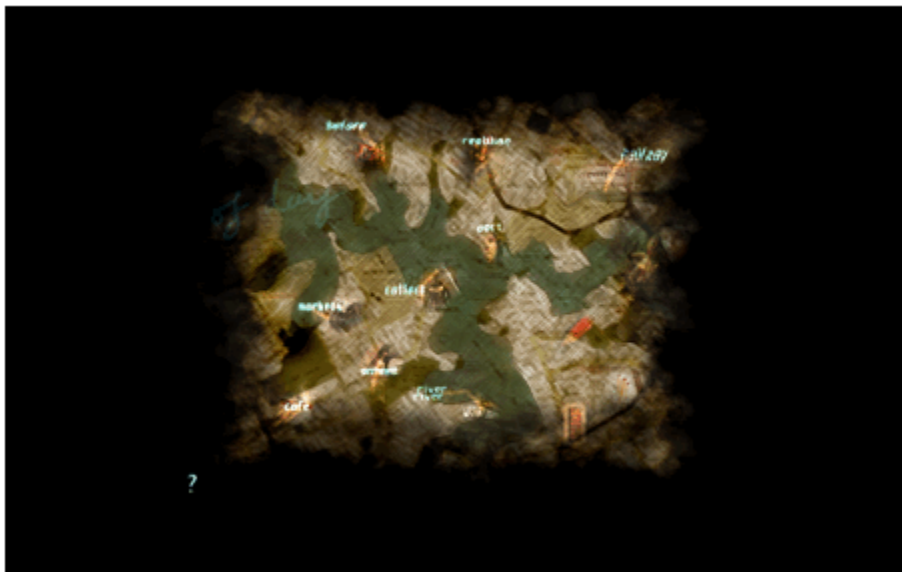
It is crucial that the readers used as research cases on the reading of hypertext fiction are to some extent familiar with this kind of literature. Otherwise their reading will doubtless be a frustrated and subversive experience, such as the response one of the readers gave Nancy Kaplan in her research on hypertext reading: "Uh, are we reading yet?" (Kaplan and Moulthrop 1991). Kaplan's study is from 1991, when hypertext fiction and doubtless hypertext reading were in an early state, which explains their choice of informants/readers. Today hypertext readers are easy to be found, and studies on hypertext reading should focus on these readers or at least partly on those readers who have gained some kind of hypertextual competence. If not, we might be caught in a moebius strip, continually repeating to ourselves that hypertext reading causes frustration and offers a counterproductive experience.

It is fair to say that the reading of *some* hypertext fiction might cause frustration and produce vertigo, but to conclude on behalf of a text type like hypertext fiction, which includes a broad spectrum of literary genres that in rather different ways take advantage of hypertext technology and other affordances provided by digital technology, is misleading. Michael Joyce's *Afternoon* (1990) or Talan Memmott's *From lexia to perplexia* (2000) would without doubt make a different reading experience than Megan Heyward's *I am a singer* (1997) or Milorad Pavic's *The Glass snail* (2003). The two first are network fiction and the two latter are axial hypertexts. They also differ in regards to how they utilize literary conventions and reading conventions. In other words, there are hypertexts that are actually more conventional, which give the reader a closure, which leave the reader with just a few choices of reading path, which guide the reader through his choices, which make good continuities between the nodes etc. These are textual aspects that guide the reading and prefigure different types of aesthetic responses. To a great extent the empirical research on the reading of hypertext fiction referred to above, employs readers which have their first experience with hypertext literature. By making use of readers with little or no experience with this kind of literature we risk that our research tells us more about these readers' ignorance on hypertext, and less about any significance on hypertext literature per se.

The reading is done when a meaning is found

Of day, of night is Megan Heyward's second multimedia narrative work. In 1997 she published her first multimedia narrative work, *I am a singer*, and in 2006 she launched her latest new media work, the cell-phone narrative *Traces*. *Of day, of night* includes written text, speech, music, pictures, graphics and videos, and tells the story of Sophie, a young woman suffering from a condition where she has lost her ability to dream. As readers we travel along with her as she explores her memory and her surroundings in search of objects that will make her dream again.

Of day, of night contains two parts, "day" and "night", and in order to move from one part to the other we have to read all the screens in the first part, "day". The links into the different sections and nodes in "day" are collected in a single node with a graphic map and "words that yell". The links to different sections are visualised when the reader moves the mouse cursor over the map.



A screen shot of the nodal node in part 1 "day" which visualises some of the available links and pathways.

The links into different sections of the narrative are obvious, in the sense that it is obvious where to click. The links in the nodal

node in part 1, "day", are organised in such a way as if the order becomes a path to recognise. The order tells us how we might read the hypertext fiction. It recommends a precise sequence of reading, a sequence that is confirmed because we get access to several sections as we read. The first time we arrive at the nodal node in "day", we only have available three links and sections. These are "before", "realise" and "halfway". These three links are organised on a horizontal line on the top of the screen, inviting the reader to approach the links from left to right. In that case the reader will read the information in the section called "before" first, then the information in "realise", and third the information in "halfway". As we read we get access to several other links and sections, such as "act", "collect", "markets" and "café". Again the links that are visualised in the nodal node are organised in such a way so that the reader might recognise a pattern. This time the links constitute a recognisable diagonal line from top right to bottom left on the screen. The reader might interpret this line as an author-intentional or conventionalised way of reading, and thereby read the information in the different sections in this order. And again, as we read the information in these sections several other links become available, and once more the links are organised in such a way that the reader might use the spatial organisation of the links to read the information in a particular order.

In *Of day, of night* Heyward takes advantage of technological affordances, including hypertext technology, in a manner which does not conflict with or go at the expense of important aspects in the reading process, such as genre recognition and the experience of coherence. The work balances cultural affordances, like literary and narrative conventions, coherence patterns etc., and the creative explorations of the advantage for storytelling brought forward by new technology. We can say that Heyward's work bridges the gap between conventional print writing and new media writing. The bridging foregrounds recognizable patterns, which prevents the readers from approaching the text and clicking on links more or less by chance. The same is true of the "return link" which is found in the same place on each screen so we do not have to search for it and become frustrated when we don't find it. The links are also categorising links and give us some idea as to what the narrative inside the section is about. We know more or less or have a pretty good idea of what we will get when we click.

The interplay between different semiotic resources (video, sound, speech, written text, pictures and graphics) can be characterised as what Roland Barthes calls "anchorage" (Barthes 1980: 119), or what Theo van Leeuwen in his theory on multimodal coherence calls "elaboration" and "specification" (van Leeuwen 2005: 230). This means that the different resources guides the reader in the interpretation of other resources, and in that sense frames our reading. The interplay narrows the interpretative space – or alternatives, making some alternative more attractive and plausible than others. When we click on a link we first come to a node where we hear a guitar playing and a written text appears. For instance in the section "act", we read: "By now it's clear I need a different approach. I have worked out a series of small tasks." By clicking on "tasks", the only available link, we come to a new page showing a notebook where different tasks, instructions or advice are written by hand. For instance: "Wander to places you haven't visited before." And if we mouseover this sentence, a new line of written text appears on the screen, more or less repeating with specificity, and confirming, what has been written by hand in the notebook: "Wander through unfamiliar places and locations". Together with the text that appears and confirms the instructions, a sound is heard which emphasises the action recommended in the notebook. When the text says "wander", we hear someone's footsteps as if they are wandering, and when the text tells Sophie to describe the objects she sees, we hear a sound of scribbling, as if Sophie is describing objects she sees in her notebook.

What is more, *Of day, of night* does not represent genre subversion. It has a clear narrative structure, following an Aristotelian poetic practice with a beginning, middle and an end, and it contains different conventionalised narrative qualities: narrator, inciting incident, climax, resolution. These features highlight a "genre-belonging" and direct the reader towards a genre recognition which guides the reader in his approach and response. The narrative fiction genre is extended and adapted to new media, because *Of day, of night* shows how narrative fiction might be in digital media, and how the genre narrative fiction can utilise digital technological affordances without risking the loss of narrative qualities.

The obvious and categorising links, the anchorage-relation between modalities, and the genre recognition, make it fair to say that *Of day, of night* prefigures a mode of reading we might call semantization, a reading mode which Iser in his text game theory calls *the semantic orientation of reading*. This mode of reading can be described as a reading process primarily oriented towards meaning-making, for understanding the text's message. Iser describes this mode of reading as "a game that ends when meaning has been found." (Iser 1993: 276). This means that the reading is led by the necessity for understanding, the quest for comprehension, just as this mode of reading indicates a defensive impulse where the quest for meaning is a rampart against the intrusion of the unfamiliar. The defence, and the mode of reading, is implemented or put into effect by the text which protects its reader from losing control, from experiencing a lack of coherence, and from a lack of genre recognition.

The process of semantization corresponds to one of Bartle's (1996) categories of MUD players. Those players who are primarily oriented toward a goal and find pleasure in achieving this goal are named "Achievers" by Bartle. This goal-oriented strategy might involve goals such as finishing a game, points-gathering, rising in levels, and thereby leaving the lower levels done and used up. The semantic orientation of reading is related to a text game structure which prefigures a search for meaning. The construction of

meaning is then a goal. This structure appears when the text dictates the reader's action and forces him to visit all the different sections and read them properly before he gets access to part two of *Of day, of night*, part two, called "night". The reader must complete some tasks to make the narrative continue, or, we might say, to reach a higher level in the hypertext narrative. And in order to do so, the hypertext fiction guides the reader through, and more or less gives him a reading and navigational strategy it is not easy to stray from.

The explorative mode of reading and the element of chance

Of day, of night is dominated by a (text game) structure which prefigures a mode of reading where the goal is first and foremost to create or find a meaning, and, taken to the extreme, where the reading is done when a meaning is found. It is not as if the reader's turn to the text always changes it. Each new reading of *Of day, of night* does not generate a new text, new combinations of clusters and semiotic resources and new potentials for meaning-making from the same underlying text. These features mentioned here in contrast are technological and aesthetic features often found in digital texts which turn the reader's attention away from the process of semantization and towards exploration and the fascination for transformation.

While the semantic mode of reading is based on predictability, confirmability, and the reader's intentionality, there are some parts of *Of day, of night* that undermine predictability and lack patterns guiding the reader's choice. This is the case, for instance, when the reader has to search for hidden words on the screen. In parts of the hypertext fiction hidden words appear on the screen as a result of the reader's more or less accidental traversing the screen. These mouseovers do not affect the narrative sequence, but they give the reader a feeling of insecurity as to whether or not he has found all the words and read all the information available in a node. Consequently we might say that the reader is invited into a mode of reading dominated by exploration and where the outcome of his search might be the achievement of new experiences and new underlying texts.



*A screen shot from **Of day, of night** where the reader is invited to search for hidden words, to explore the spatial environment, and thereby practise an explorative mode of reading.*

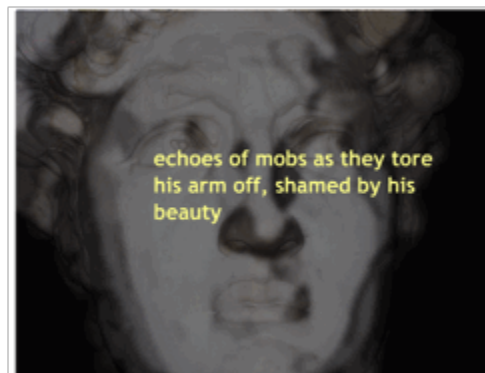
In addition to a semantic mode of reading we can describe minor parts of the prefigured reading in *Of day, of night* as an *explorative mode of reading*. This is a mode of reading where the reader to some extent is driven and played by chance, and not by confirmation and predictability. What is less important is the manifestation of a statement or a meaning. Here the primary goal is to gain experiences through exploring the hypertextual world. Here we have entered a realm of hypertext fiction which takes chance as one of its main principles. Chance, according to Roberto Simanowski, is used as "an aesthetic means of going beyond traditional, familiar and predictable ways of seeing and describing things" (Simanowski 2002 120-121), as he describes the rule of alea in literature. Chance is also an aesthetic means to make the reader give up his desire for control, and his aspirations for predictability. This explorative mode of reading is important to recognise and acknowledge in *Of day, of night* because it puts the reader in a similar situation as the one the protagonist Sophie is in. Both Sophie and the reader are searching for objects and

words that might be of relevance, and their search is more or less led by chance.

The explorative mode of reading should not be confused with what Espen Aarseth calls "the explorative function" (Aarseth 1997:64). Aarseth claims that in addition to an interpretative function, the user in hypertext needs to decide which path to take. This is what he names an explorative function, a function that is present in every reading of hypertext. The explorative mode of reading must be defined in a narrower sense than Aarseth's concept. Exploration is not present in every reading, but is a specific mode of reading that is put forward or encouraged by those hypertexts which lack patterns that readers can recognize. In this sense it seems reasonable to make use of a concept similar to the one found in Iser's reading theory. In relation to print literature, Iser operates with a mode of reading he calls "a mode of gaining experience." Iser claims that in this reading mode the pleasure is related to discovering something new. And in order to gain new experience, Iser writes, we have to put our own code at stake and be guided by an aleatory rule in literature. Instead of trying to control the text, and make it confirm our expectations, and our previous knowledge and experiences, the text makes us challenge our expectations, knowledge and experiences. It guides us towards the unsafe, unpredictable route.

Alea is a well known concept for categorising games which has chance as its dominating principle. According to Roger Caillois' (2001) classification of games, aleatory games include "betting", "roulette" and "lotterie", as well as games like "heads or tails". Computer games also have their moments of randomness. According to Bartle unpredictability favours those players who are oriented towards exploration, and who find pleasure in having the game surprise them. These players "try to find out as much as they can about the virtual world." (Bartle 1996:3)

In regards to hypertext fiction this happens when the text encourages or opens up for a random exploration and not for one particular way of reading. It does not recommend one reading path over another. Alea undermines the reader's expectations, his previous experiences, and his literary competence. This is so because the reader is cut off from utilising literary conventions and codes, so clicking on links and combining semiotic resources and text fragments are accidental and unintentional. This means that we are not able to predict the consequences of our actions. We are unable to control the narrative or poetic sequence. J. Yellowlee Douglas demonstrates this in her reading of *Afternoon*, where several of her readings are born out of luck and chance (see Douglas 1994: 165-166), and the same seems to be the conclusion of Simanowski's (2002) reading of Simon Bigg's *The Great Wall of China* (2000). The same goes for Deena Larsen's *Carving in Possibilities* (2000) where the title of the work gives us a clue of its dominant mode of reading. In *Carving in Possibilities* the reader moves his mouse and carves the face of Michelangelo's David, represented as a picture in the background. At the same time different bits of text appear on the screen depending on the reader's movement, accompanied by sound and music.



Screen shot from Deena Larsen's *Carving in Possibilities*

The point is that *Carving in Possibilities* invites the reader to randomly move the mouse over the screen and make text elements appear by chance. This mode of reading is then what I would call an *explorative mode of reading*.

In contrast to the semantization as the process of signification, in the explorative mode of reading it is not statement or meaning that is important, but the quest for *new* meaning. The goal is to gain knowledge of different ways of combining semiotic resources, to discover new reading paths and the experience how these new paths evolve or turn previous interpretations upside down. More than a search for a meaning, the reader's search is uncoupled and shifted to the process of transformation. The text wants the reader to experience continual transformations. The reader experiences the act of change – the textual change and the change of meaning - without understanding its starting point or result. In this case the reader surrenders to the aleatory rule of the text game through an undermined intentionality.

As if being in touch with Sophie

A third mode of reading, also a minor mode, is present in *Of day, of night*. This is a mode of reading I would call self-reflection. In some of the scenes it is almost as if we are present in the fiction and observe and are in touch with the reality of Sophie through the computer. We can see Sophie walk on the street at the same time as we hear her footsteps and hear cars passing her on the street, and we can see Sophie at a market, hear people talking in the background, see Sophie picking up a toy car and hear the sound of its wheels as she pushes the car across the table.



Screen shot from Of day, of night. The close-up video represents Sophie's point of view, and the reader can observe and examine objects as if he is playing a role as being Sophie.

The point is that the fictional world appears coherent and reality-like, it is as if we are in touch with reality through the computer. Rather than bringing different messages, sound and visuals have the same content. The sense of reality is heightened when they align. The imitation of reality gives the reader the opportunity to play a role, being someone else or being somewhere else. As the reader is drawn into this reality-like fiction, he is invited to activate his own codes. Such "an activation makes the reader into a player allowed to watch himself or herself playing a role", writes Lser (1993:96) in his theory on the reading of print literature. The self-present in the fictional world is an experience of how the reader's own codes constitute the text-game mimicry. The pleasure is here related to a self-enjoyment in the enjoyment of being someone else or being somewhere else. In this self-enjoyment the reader becomes aware of his own codes, his own experiences and expectations, and this awareness turns the reading into a self-reflective mode of reading.

Reading as self-reflection does not seem to have a companion in Bartle's theory, but that does not make it less relevant for MUD players (and vice versa). Bartle identifies what he calls "the socialiser", whose primary goal is to socialise with others through the game's communicative facilities. To converse or otherwise interact with fellow players, the socialiser must both play a role and activate his own code, Bartle writes. This kind of socialisation might be observed in electronic literature as well. Both Bartle's socialiser and the self-reflexive reader are thereby involved in role-playing.

The self-reflexive mode of reading is prefigured when the reader gets involved in a fictive character and begins to socialise with this character. Jill Walker's enjoyable description of her e-friendship with Caroline, the fictional protagonist in the 24-part online drama *Online Caroline*, illustrates the connection between socialisation and self-reflexive mode of reading:

I connect my computer to the network, sipping my morning coffee. My hair is still wet from the shower when I check my email and find it there in between other messages: an email from Caroline. I read it quickly and then visit her web site. She's waiting for me. She holds a shirt she's just bought up to the webcam so I can see it, asking me afterwards by email whether I'd like her to send it to me. "Yes", I answer, clicking and typing my responses into the web form and giving her my physical address. Caroline knows I like coffee and she knows I read her email in the morning. Caroline and I are friends." (Walker 2003:65)

Walker is role-playing, and through her friendship with Caroline her own preferences and experiences, her non-playing codes, are activated and come into play: "Being a heterosexual woman, I fill in those blanks in Caroline's character and in my own self-presentation so they will suit my expectations of a relationship between girls talking about boyfriends and work and emotions." (ibid.:76) *Online Caroline* encourages readers to play a role as well as play themselves. The reading is then turned into a self-reflexive mode of reading when the engagement turns out to be a suspenseful attention to oneself. This is what Iser calls "aesthetic enjoyment", which is, according to Iser, the quintessence of aesthetic experience, the "self-enjoyment in the enjoyment of something other" (Iser 1993:278).

As we know, computer technology easily offers ways to fool the reader by simulating a real person, or make the reader believe he is communicating with a real person, or make the reader believe that what he sees and hears is real. A more intensive mode of self-reflexive mode of reading than in *Of day, of night* is therefore often to be found in digital text, as is the case in Walker's interaction with her e-mail-friend Caroline. As Walker has explained, the reader is fooled into believing that Caroline is real, that her problems are real, that she lives in New York and wonders if she should break up with her boyfriend David. And the reader is also fooled into believing that his conversations and interactions with Caroline make a difference, when actually they don't. When Caroline for instance asks whether or not she should break up with David, and the reader, being a male fascinated by this cool girl, of course advises her to do so, she still chooses to stick with David. *Online Caroline* is mimicry, creating an as-if reality. And when this as-if world breaks down, when the reader discovers that Caroline is not real, he becomes disappointed and angry (see Walker 2003).

Subversion and absorption

So far I have identified what I see as three different modes of reading, all manifested and embedded in *Of day, of night*, and which make the reader shift between the dominant mode of reading – the semantic reading, and the two minor modes of reading – reading as exploration and reading as self-reflection. A fourth mode of reading is relevant for understanding the preconditions for the reading of some hypertext fiction: *reading as absorption*. This mode are to be identified in works that to a far greater extent challenge institutionalizing processes.

Electronic literature perhaps more often than not prefigures a semantic reading or a self-reflexive mode of reading which to some extent acknowledges cultural and social systems, such as conventions for coherence and genre conventions. But a part of the digital practices happens outside of traditional literary concepts and values. This is why Talan Memmott calls this practice a "war machine resistant to institutional(izing) processes." (Memmott 2006: 304). Memmott's *Lexia to perplexia* (2000), Jim Andrew's *On Lionel Kearns* (2004), and *I, you, me* (2001), by Dan Waber and Jason Pimble are examples of works that seem to invert literary conventions. The lack of coherence, the lack of genre recognition, and the impossibility of creating a stable meaning, keep the reader in a condition of confusion. This is perhaps why Katherine Hayles describes *Lexia to perplexia* as illegible, or claims it hovers on the borders of illegibility (Hayles 2002: 51). The same goes, as I see it, for the mix of genre and the too fast transforming texts, that is; too fast for us to grasp, in *On Lionel Kearns* and the cube of endlessly rotating verbs in *I, you, me*.

It seems fair to say that these texts set up the reader to experience frustration and subversion.

They seem to pursue vertigo because they consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid reader.

They keep us so busy that our effort to discover meaning, intentional or accidental, or play a role as being someone else or being somewhere else, falls apart, so the reader's more or less only option is to slide into the text and let himself be absorbed into the play of textual elements. I find it reasonable to categorise the game structure in these texts as *illinx*, to borrow a concept from Caillois' game theory (Caillois 2001). We might identify this kind of structure in both print and electronic literature which prefigures an intensive absorption of the reader, a self-eliminating mode of reading. Iser, deeply inspired by Barthes' concept "the pleasure of the text" (Barthes 1975), describes this reading as an experience of the site of loss, the seam, and the cut. This, according to Iser, is a reading where "the subject is swept into this split, which itself is "the subject of the text" insofar as everything that is played in the text emerges from it." (Iser 1993: 279) Electronic literature prefigures this mode of reading when it stages a break up and give the reader no other option than to slip into an in-between position. As readers we slide into the text, or flow into the river of verbs, as *I, you, me* is described in *Electronic literature collection, Volume one* (2006).

Again I find it fruitful and interesting to compare different modes of reading with Bartle's categories for MUD players. One of the four player types abstracted by Bartle is labelled *killers*. According to Bartle, "the killers" goal is to grow powerful. They find their pleasure in the imposition upon others and cause distress. Readers practising an absorptive mode of reading cannot be characterised as killers, but the experience and outcome of their reading are to some extent similar with the outcome enforced by killers. Killers sabotage the game, turning the game upside down, "killers don't care" (Bartle 1996:7). In electronic literature that encourages the absorptive mode of reading, it is literary and cultural conventions, values and social systems, and expectations

that are sabotaged. The outcome then might be distress and frustration, or pleasure and bliss, caused by the experience of lack of control, and lack of knowledge on how to approach the text.

A four-sided model for reading hypertext fiction

I have discussed four modes of reading and their relevance for understanding the preconditions for reading hypertext fiction. These are: the semantic orientation of reading, a mode of gaining experience, reading as self-reflection, and reading as absorption. Naturally, these modes of reading cross over, and readers will often drift between all four, depending on the hypertext fiction and which game structure or "Appellstruktur der Texte" dominate a reading path. Three of these modes are relevant for the modes of reading *Of day, of night*.

In our search for knowledge on the reading of hypertext fiction I find it fruitful and valuable to bring into play relevant established concepts from other neighbouring fields, such as literary theory and computer games. I take comfort in the fact that all four modes of reading are useful in describing basic aspects of the reading process of electronic literature, such as genre recognition, the experience of coherence and the reader's interaction with the work.

What I want to suggest is that a model including these four modes might be a fruitful approach in our research on the reading of hypertext literature, concerning both real and intended readers. This four-sided model might show us why it is not the hypertext mechanisms per se and its multilinearity that generate frustration. Rather it is a specific kind of text game structure or "Appellstruktur" inherent in hypertext literature that for instance makes the reader frustrated and confused. I would insist on the necessity of examining what mode of reading and what kind of responses are prestructured in literary hypertext and electronic literature in our search for knowledge on the reading of this kind of literature. To understand the preconditions for reading hypertext fiction we have to distinguish between those texts that invite the reader to be insecure and frustrated through a mode of reading we might call "reading as absorption", and text that encourages other modes of reading and other aesthetic experiences. The four-sided model suggested here might be a fruitful approach for doing that.

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Notes

- [1] I wish to thank the members of the Digital Fiction International Network for their comments on this article and The Leverhulme Trust for funding such collaboration.
- [2] We all know that many readers lack competence in reading hypertext fiction. This will continue as long as we have new readers, at least until it abates in later generations who grove up hyperlinking as they read. My point is here not to make a historical chronicle or reflection of hypertextual incompetence, but rather to argue for the obvious: the use of incompetence hypertext readers as informants are worthless if we want to characterize hypertext fiction and the reading of this literature.

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