

**HYPERTEXT AND CRITICAL CONVERGENCE**

**A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
GRAPHIC DESIGN  
AND THE INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS  
OF BILKENT UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

**By  
Borat Çekel  
June, 2000**

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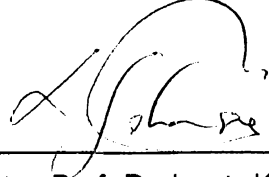
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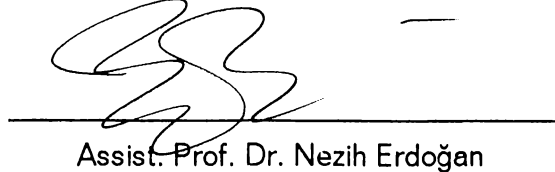
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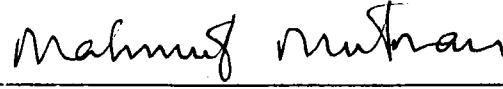
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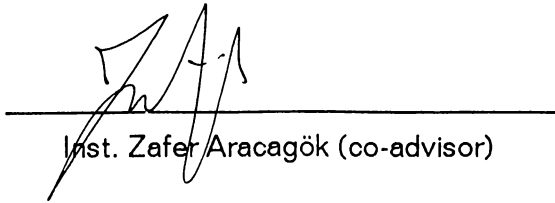
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# ABSTRACT

## HYPertext AND THE CRITICAL CONVERGENCE

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M.F.A. in Graphical Arts

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June, 2000

Today, within the information and telecommunication technologies, internet technologies occupies the dominant role. Hypertext is the system that underlies many of the main digital multimedia with its capacity to hold different media like text, image and sound together by linkage. Upon this linkage capability of hypertext, some theorists call for the turning of an age towards a new digital democracy, by employing ideas of contemporary critical theorists and philosophers. This thesis examines the points of convergence in their claims, criticizes the way that they employ philosophy. Consequently it is shown that how these claims of convergence between critical theory and hypertext, turn out to be the convergence between liberal democratic ideals and digital democracy.

**Keywords:** Hypertext, Hypermedia, Technology, Deconstruction, Politics

# ÖZET

## HİPERMETİN VE KRİTİK YAKLAŞMA

Berat Çokal  
Grafik Tasarım Bölümü  
Yüksek Lisans  
Tez Yöneticisi: Öğr. Gör. Zafer Aracagök  
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Günümüzde, enformasyon ve telekomünikasyon teknolojileri arasında internet teknolojileri baskın bir rol taşımaktadır. Hipermetin de, metin, imaj, ses arasında kurduğu fiziksel bağlarla birden fazla medyayı bir arada sunabilmesi sayesinde, bir çok ana digital multimedya teknolojisinin altında yatan sistem haline gelmiştir. Bir takım kuramcı da hipermetinin bu kapasitesi sayesinde dijital demokrasiye doğru bir açılımı işaret ettiğini söylemektedirler. Bunu yaparken bir çok çağdaş eleştirel kuramcıların ve felsefecilerin fikirlerini gündeme getirirler. Bu tez hipermetin kuramcılarının iddalarının, çağdaş düşünürlerin fikirlerine ne ölçüde yaklaşabileceğini sorgular. Temelde vurgulanan nokta ise sözedilen bu yaklaşmanın aslında liberal demokrasi idealleri ve digital ortamın önerdiği demokrasi anlayışı arasında olduğudur.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Hipermetin, Hipermedya, Teknoloji, Yapıbozum, Politika

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## INTRODUCTION

We live in an age in which information and telecommunication technologies become an essential part of our lives. Amongst these online technologies, the internet occupies one of the dominant roles because of its multimedia capabilities, that is to bring together different mediums like text, image, and sound together in the same format of the digital. What underlies some of the main internet technologies, namely world wide web and ftp, is the system of hypertext that enables the bringing together in the same digital format. Hypertext achieves this very capability by the logic of linking certain parts of the documents to other texts, images or sounds, either internally or externally. When stored in the digital format these links become the choices for the reader/viewer where he selects his/her own path of reading/viewing the digital document.

However, concerning upon the same character of hypertext, i.e., linking, some theorists try to develop an understanding of hypertext. They, somehow, extend the definition of hypertext by employing the ideas of contemporary critical theorists, namely those of Barthes, Derrida and Foucault. They borrow the terms like 'intertextuality', 'web', 'network',

non-linearity', etc. and use these terms to expand the borders of hypertext and claim a vast convergence between the ideas of contemporary critical theorists named above and hypertext. Hypertext, then, becomes the ground for the realization of their (critical theorists) ideas, or a laboratory to 'test' their concepts.

Consequently, upon these claims of convergence, hypertext theorist develop a positive understanding of hypertext, where this new technology will call for the liberation of human kind by altering the reader's or viewer's view of the multimedia hypertext through the links provided. Starting from the disappearance or the decrease in the authorly control in the construction of hypertext, the boundaries between author and reader will begin to blur, thus, with the universalization of hypertext systems all hierarchies will begin to blur forming a new kind of democracy which can be called as 'digital democracy'.

Thus, before any claim of convergence, I shall ask the question again: What is hypertext? Then I will continue to analyze how these theorists extend the definition of hypertext by considering hypertext as the 'new' text. We shall then see the attempts to embody contemporary critical theory. Then, in the second chapter I shall concentrate on the points of convergence and how these theorists employ Derridean concepts of

'intertextuality' and the 'text' and how hypertext becomes a ground for these theorists literally to 'test' these concepts.

In the last chapter I shall try to dismantle how these attempts to develop a new democracy through hypertext 'converge' with the idealism of liberal democracy through the arguments of Richard Rorty. The question is how one can develop a new understanding of democracy without being involved in today's condition of democracy but before this a question of hypertext again.

## **Chapter1: HYPERTEXT CELEBRATED AS A NEW TECHNOLOGY**

### **1.1 What is hypertext?**

Hypertext is a term that refers to a medium of electronic information that exists only on-line in a computer. Since many of the current systems actually also include the possibility of working with graphics and other media, some people prefer using the term hypermedia, to stress the multimedia aspects of their system.

What hypertext or hypermedia achieves is a step forward in electronic text. The computer offers a new medium for writing, which involves both the computer screen where text is displayed and the electronic memory in which it is stored. It is this digital coding that enable somehow flexibility in writing process. Electronic text brings an ease of editing with the use of text processor programs. Anyone can easily work on the presentation of a text by changing the page layout, font size and type, colors and etc. with the help of such kind of programs which provide us with a softcopy before the hardcopy. Softcopy offers a process-oriented rather than a product-oriented mode of writing. Softcopy documents are written to be displayed rather than printed, and designed for provisional

recording in electronic storage, pending the rereading or rewriting of them.

However, electronic writing that is not aimed at producing hardcopy brings with it another feature that forms the basic principle behind all hypertext systems. This is linkage. Once a text is written only for electronic display, computer technologies enable the linking of certain parts of these kinds of text to other parts.

A typical hypertext document would open with a top-level menu or home page which might include conventional texts, audio recordings, still pictures and/or video samples: indeed information of any kind which can be stored digitally. On selecting highlighted or colored words or phrases, or specially boxed graphic frames, a hypertext reader is led to a further screen containing more words and images which explain or expand the initially chosen item: and so on, potentially indefinitely. Each verbal or graphic point can be thought of as a node in a grid of nodes, such that the path traversed in any particular session of reading will be open to the interests discovered by the reader as she or he passes through the grid.

Here are some examples of hypermedia provided in an introductory document on world wide web, *Guide to Cyberspace 6.1: What is hypertext and hypermedia?*:

You are reading a text on the Hawaiian language. You select a Hawaiian phrase, then hear the phrase as spoken in the native tongue.

You are a law student studying the California Revised Statutes. By selecting a passage, you find precedents from a 1920 Supreme Court ruling stored at Cornell. Cross-referenced hyperlinks allow you to view any one of 520 related cases with audio annotations.

Looking at a company's floor plan, you are able to select an office by touching a room. The employee's name and picture appears with a list of their current projects.

You are a scientist doing work on the cooling of steel springs. By selecting text in a research paper, you are able to view a computer-generated movie of a cooling spring. By selecting a button you are able to receive a program which will perform thermodynamic calculations.

A student reading a digital version of an art magazine can select a work to print or display in full. Rotating movies of sculptures can be viewed. By interactively controlling the movie, the student can zoom in to see more detail.



These examples are mostly about the recently developed multimedia technologies that either appear online on www or digitally encoded on some storage disks such as CD-ROM's; the time when hypertext has already became the backbone for World Wide Web and CD-ROMs. But before all these, in 1960s Thedor H. Nelson first coined the term "hypertext" to refer to "nonsequential writing--text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways" through stored visual, auditory, or written materials. The Macintosh HyperCard software program is a version of hypertext. HyperCard is structured by "cards," or screens of information, organized into "stacks," or categorized screens. Using a menu of commands, a user can flip successively through the cards of a stack, jump between cards in the same stack, or jump between cards from different stacks, all the while generating electronic links between jumps that are the "Ariadne's thread of the hypertext web" (Landow, 1992:4)

Along with the spread of personal computers Apple's hypercard became a useful system for categorizing information, thus, the backbone for www and many other text-based digital media. But what is fundamental to hypertext, the ability to link certain parts of the digital documents to each other, has always remained at the center of attention. Today, the

World Wide Web and other Internet technologies, is the medium through which people can reach the same information provided and can share their ideas with their easy-to-publish character, namely desktop publishing. In this environment, by somehow over-emphasizing this fundamental characteristics of hypertext we are confronted with a so-called "hyper-literature" consisting of hyper-stories in which you pick-up your own adventure, hyper-poems from which you select your own verses, hyper-novels in which you set up your own characters.

Besides these attempts to create a hyper-literature, some theorists (or in Vicky Kirby's words "mavens") in English Literature departments in United States are trying to establish a hypertext theory. Richard Lanham the author of *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology and the Arts* (1993), Jay David Bolter, author of *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (1991), and George Landow, author of *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (1992), the other primary exponents of the digital word of whose work I will address and further analyze to expose the theoretical substructure and assumptions which underlie their claims.

## 1.2 Hypertext as defined by hypertext theorists

### 1.2.1 Hypertext as the 'new' text

Hypertext as it is commonly defined is a means of organizing information in a 'nonlinear' fashion, consisting of chunks of text ("lexias") connected by links to other lexias in a networked manner. The term refers to both the system and its contents. Theorists began exploring hypertext from a literary perspective in the late 80's and early 90's, claiming that the interactive nature of hypertext invites us to reconfigure our conceptions of 'text', 'narrative' and 'author' (Landow & Delaney 2) in a fashion more suited to the nature of the medium. Hypertext shifts the responsibility of construction partly to the authors who write the links and partly to the readers who activate them. It also encourages connection across disciplinary boundaries, abandons print-based conceptions of fixed beginnings and endings and challenges narrative form based on linearity due to its dispersed, networked nature. Hypertext heralds a new form of writing: instead of the linear, passive narrative of the book and Codex Culture, we have the multilinear universe of the networked system.

Bolter, Landow, and Lanham equally praise the way in which the computer's ability to coordinate a reconciliation of divisive aesthetic and epistemological structures creates a synaesthesia of aesthetic effects or information bits. In fact,

all three writers aim to explain how, in Landow's word, this synaesthesia promises "to produce effects on our culture, particularly on our literature, education, criticism, and scholarship, just as radical as those produced by Gutenberg's movable type. (Palatella par. 5)

They assume that there is a self-evident difference between hypertext and traditional print text. The very basic character of hypertext allowing for supposedly free choices to the reader has led communication theorists to think of hypertext as revolutionary, as distributing "power" away from the text producers to readers.

Definitions of hypertext are continually elaborated against a particular and rigid notion of print text. The definitions accorded to the text are also presumed to be the determinants of reading practices. Delaney and Landow, for example, elaborate their definition of hypertext against a notion of the traditional text, which they define according to three attributes: "that the text was linear, bounded and fixed". Their definition of hypertext is then able to become "the use of the computer to transcend the linear, bounded and fixed qualities of the traditional written text" (Delany and Landow 3). Their extended explanation proceeds negatively, contrasting hypertext with the static form of the book: accordingly, hypertext can apparently be composed and read non-sequentially as a variable structure comprising blocks of text connected by electronic links.

Landow has frequent references to the fluidity and instability of hypertext as opposed to the fixity of print-based text. This is premised on hypertext's electronic status, the fact that it is potentially able to be improved and added to by the reader, and so forth (Landow, 1992).

### **1.2.1 Bush's Memex and the Human Mind**

Both Landow's and Bolter's cognitive theories link the conceptual origins of Nelson's hypertext back to the "memex," or mechanized memory, a device which Vannevar Bush, a MIT professor of engineering and wartime director of the U.S. Military Office of Scientific Research and Development, described in "As We May Think" in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1945. Armed with a military sense of mission, Bush grappled with the problem of mechanically organizing and making accessible the bewildering store of knowledge that modern science had created, especially during World War II. Bush proposed manufacturing the "memex," a desk-like device assembled from levers, screens, and motors, all designed to rapidly to search and retrieve information from microform records. This concatenation of gadgets ostensibly replicated the brain's processes of selection and association. As he describes it:

The human mind does not work [indexically]. It operates by association. With one item in its grasp, it snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the association of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain. It has other characteristics, of course; trails that are not frequently followed are prone to fade, items are not fully permanent, memory is transitory. Yet the speed of action, the intricacy of trails, the detail of mental pictures, is awe-inspiring beyond all else in nature. (34)

Bolter and Landow consider Bush's description of the electro-mechanical memex to be a prescient description of hypertext, which they maintain reproduces the mind's tendency to think topographically; that is, like the mind (which for them is synonymous with the brain), hypertext stores and enables the establishment of a dense network of associations between memorized topics. Although Bolter and Landow don't trace the capacity of association to a particular hemisphere of the brain, as Lanham does, they nonetheless share with Lanham the belief that hypermedia can perfectly model cognitive processes embodied in the brain's neural network.

Bolter and Lanham maintain that certain ways of processing information are universal, based on the way the human brain functions, and this assumption enables them to reduce learning to certain basic cognitive operations, or heuristics, insisting that the best method for teaching and



acquiring those heuristics is through the development and use of programmed learning models.

Lanham proclaims that digital technology can perfectly shape human consciousness because it replicates the binary oscillation between the cognitive processes of the left brain and the right brain and between orality and literacy, between opaque and transparent forms of language, between playful and hierarchical semiotic patterns, between synthesis and analysis

### **1.3 Hypertext and the embodiment of Critical Theory**

#### **1.3.1 Embodiment of Critical Theory**

The most basic, if not the most important, question to ask hypertext theorists is, whether they think that the links provided in the hypertext can ever exceed or even draw near to the capabilities of the human mind? Dyck in a way answers this question when talking about the convergence that hypertext theorists see between contemporary theorists and hypertext theory:

Contemporary theories of text as network center the networking activity in the mind of the reader. Hypertext, on the other hand, must largely rely upon the author to create a

web of links. Barthes theorizes an "ideal text" in which a galaxy of signifiers is networked in an infinite number of ways. Hypertext obviously resembles this ideal text, but is it what Barthes had imagined? Intertextuality and the world of connections that we make as we read is not primarily a material reality, but an interior, reflective activity. Each reader produces an interior web, a galaxy of signifiers the complexity of which that individual is barely aware (or only ever partially aware). Landow's assumption that a material tool such as hypertext could adequately mirror the way an individual reads seems to have little respect for the reader's mind. (Dyck par.1)

In his argument, Dyck opposes the central claim among hypertext enthusiasts is that hypertext is 'readerly', as opposed to 'writerly', with this distinction based very loosely on that of Roland Barthes. Landow, Bolter, Lanham, Joyce and a handful of other hypertext theorists point out that the Barthesian Text, a text which writes itself across the interface between the body and the unconscious as a living network, "the blocks of signification of which reading grasps only the smooth surface, imperceptibly soldered by the movement of sentences" (Barthes, 13) is finally realized in the new medium.

At the beginning of his book *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* George Landow states that "critical theory promises to theorize hypertext and hypertext promises to embody and thereby test aspects of theory, particularly

those concerning textuality, narrative, and the roles or functions of reader and writer” (3). Landow goes on to explain his understanding of the theories of Jacques Derrida and of Roland Barthes and to see their material presence in hypertext. Landow claims that an experience of reading hypertext or reading with hypertext greatly clarifies many of the most significant ideas of critical theory.

On the opening page of book *Hyper/Text/Theory* Landow describes hypertext as follows:

Hypertext, an information technology consisting of individual blocks of text, or lexias, and the electronic links that join them, has much in common with recent literary and critical theory. For example, like much recent work by poststructuralists, such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, hypertext reconceives conventional, long-held assumptions about authors and readers and the texts they write and read. Electronic linking, which provides one of the defining features of hypertext, also embodies Julia Kristeva's notions of intertextuality, Mikhail Bakhtin's emphasis upon multivocality, Foucault's conceptions of networks of power, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's ideas of rhizomatic, "nomad thought." The very idea of hypertextuality seems to have taken form at approximately the same time that poststructuralism developed, but their points of convergence have a closer relation than that of mere contingency, for both grow out of dissatisfaction with the related phenomena of the printed book and hierarchical thought. (1)

Landow's discussion of hypertext invokes the standard Proper Names of the American hagiography of the poststructuralist avant-garde: Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, Bakhtin, add Your (Favorite Theorist's) Name here. (Palatella par. 25)

According to Landow critical theory promises to theorize hypertext and hypertext promises to embody and thereby test aspects of theory, particularly those concerning textuality, narrative, and the roles of functions of reader and writer. Using hypertext, critical theories will have a new laboratory in addition to the conventional library of printed texts, in which to test their ideas. For him, hypertext greatly clarifies many of the most significant ideas of critical theory (1992:3). Hypertext has so much in common with such matters as Derrida's emphasis on 'decentering' and Barthes' conception of the 'writerly' (which co-opts its readers as co-creators) that it constitutes "an almost embarrassingly literal embodiment" (Landow and Delenay 6).

Presenting his case a little differently, Bolter concludes that "hypertext is a vindication of postmodern literary theory" (1991:24). He points out that "the past two decades, postmodern theories have been talking about text in terms that are strikingly appropriate to hypertext":

When Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish argue that the reader constitutes the text in the act of reading, they are describing hypertext. When the deconstructionists emphasize that a text is unlimited, that it expands to include its own interpretations - they are describing a hypertext, which grows with the addition of new links and elements. When Roland Barthes draws his famous distinction between the work and the text, he is giving a perfect characterization of the differences between writing in a printed book and writing by computer. (ibid.)

Bolter finds it 'uncanny' that many of those postmodern pronouncements which scandalized print-bound readers seem no more than descriptive of the properties of computer generated hypertext. In many ways, suggests Bolter, hypertext confirms what deconstructionists and other contemporary theorists have been saying about the instability of the text and decreasing the authority of the author. "What is unnatural in print becomes natural in the electronic medium and will soon no longer need saying at all, because it can be shown" (143).

Like Bolter, Lanham also identifies an "extraordinary convergence between technological and theoretical pressures" (1993:279), which he would later call a "curious case of cultural convergence" (132). Lanham believes that Western culture, "for which 'the Great Books' has come to be a convenient shorthand phrase, is not threatened by the world of electronic text, but immensely strengthened and invigorated" (ibid.). He

argues that "digitizing the arts requires a new criticism of them", and that "we have it already in the postmodern aesthetic. The fit is so close that one might call the personal computer the ultimate postmodern work of art" (108). He goes on to suggest that the electronic word, as pixelated upon a computer screen, replicates the logics of postmodern thought by "literalizing them in a truly uncanny way" (287).

Similarly Johnson-Eilola believes that hypertext helps us to "revise technologies of reading, writing, and literacy in key ways by making various traits of these theories visible" (1992:203). He explains that the text can be "deconstructed [not only] in the reader's mind or in a secondary, parasitical text, but also visibly on the computer screen" (382).

'Convergence', 'embodiment' and 'literalization' are metaphors commonly used by these writers to characterize the relationship between hypertext and contemporary literary theory. However, these claims of a convergence between contemporary critical theory and technology, specifically hypertext, is an over-rationalization on the technical definition of hypertext and appropriation of contemporary critical theory. The convergence of terms to which Landow points between these areas is simple appropriation -- the theoretical connections have not been established in any systematic way. Landow's thesis is that the non-sequential, branching networks of hypertext produce the same kind of



economy of reading and writing defined by the French literary and cultural theorists Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault.

Hence Landow writes:

From the vantage point of the current changes in information technology, Barthes's distinction between readerly and writerly texts appears to be essentially a distinction between text based on print technology and electronic hypertext, for hypertext fulfils [to quote Barthes (1974: 4)] 'the goal of literary work (or literature as work) [which] is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness -- he is intransitive; he is, in short, serious: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom to either accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a referendum. Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read but not written: the readerly. We can call any readerly text a classic text'. (1992:5-6)

### **1.3.2 Hypertext and Barthes' 'readerly' and 'writerly'**

Landow claims that Barthes' distinction of readerly and writerly is just the distinction between printed book and hypertext,

respectively. For him, hypertext blurs the distinctions between reader and writer by allowing the reader to choose his own path of reading. Thus, hypertext provides a more democratic environment through the multi- or non-linear 'readerly' text.

Hypertextualism, in its opposition to the 'writerly', the 'monologic' and the 'linear' appears to think that, prior to the advent of hypertext, reading was a single process, something like the scanning of a printed book from the first to the last word, with information passing into cognition in a sequence dictated by an author, allowing no space of intervention to the reader. It is as if the page-bound' text was under the dictatorship of the author, whereas in hypertext, the author is no more a dictator but an usher.

According to McHoul and Roe in their reading of Roland Barthes, Landow makes a "terrible category mistake". "While Landow wants to make a complete separation between types of text such that the 'writerly' type is conflated with print (and hence closure) and the 'readerly' type with hypertext (and hence openness), Barthes himself is more equivocal. For Barthes, the writerly text denies the reader the pleasure of writing, to be sure. But this is precisely what forces the reader into a readerly position, into the space of 'what can be read but not written'. He consciously tropes on Nietzsche's idea of a slave ethics

in introducing the readerly itself: it arises from a denial of entry into writing; it is a 'negative, reactive value'. It conforms to the writerly, gives itself over to it, plays its game. It too works with the rule of 'what can be read but not written'. And that is precisely why it is 'classic'. Where Landow finds an idealist space of liberation, Barthes only marks the side of the slave who is dependent on the master." (Par. 11) Barthes uses this opposition of writerly and readerly to define each text or encounter with a given work, language or system by this difference. It may be suggested more generally that both the readerly and writerly connote in fact or in effect, situations, economies or acts of reading or writing, or, in Derrida's phrase, acts of literature and acts of reading. In Landow's American liberalism, the oppressive simply has to be named and overcome by a word of negation - 'readerly'. In Barthes, the apparent opposite always depends on what it opposes, plays its game, and finds ways of operating within the same rules. The readerly and the writerly are two prongs of a single forked instrument - an instrument which may be writing in general and, if so, it will always contain possibilities of violence, one way or the other. (Par. 11) "Reading is like soup or slime. We should not want to specify its essence according to any neat digital calculus: not that it has no soul as such - rather it has a multiplicity of souls and "any one of them could at some stage take over and guide the sequence in its own direction" (Staten, 103).

## 1.4 Hypertextual Structure Through Authorly Rules

In *The Rhetoric of Hypermedia: Some Rules for Authors*, George Landow lays out rules for a smoothly functioning, efficient, and friendly hypertext. He argues that it is not enough simply to make links, but that one requires a carefully thought-out rhetoric of linking. He identifies three main goals that the hypertext author should accomplish: to orient the reader with an efficient and pleasurable navigational system, to allow the reader to purposefully exit a given lexia by providing clear links out, and to guide the reader's entrance into a new document. By implication, one can accomplish these goals by obeying the rules that Landow provides. Landow's central assumption, that the form of hypertext itself plays upon the content presented, seems widely held by theorists in the area. More specifically, he argues that the informing idea of hypermedia is that one proceeds in understanding any particular phenomena by relating it to other contexts.

Landow's rules do address practical design concerns. The very attempt, however, to write 'rules' for 'authors' raises some deeper questions, however. For one, the often made claim by Landow and others that the reader of a hypertext becomes in significant ways 'writerly' must be examined in light of the fact that the reader can only participate with a hypertext to the extent that it has been well-authored. Has the writer

really lost control when s/he determines how much control to give the reader?

McKnight et al., in *The Authoring of Hypertext Documents* note that most writings on hypertext have focussed on reading, on what is presented to the reader, and generally on reader-based research strategies. Authoring becomes something which is always oriented to reading (a very narrow and specific notion of reading), so that many hypertext systems in actual use blur the distinction between author and reader, particularly in cases "where the 'reader' will add links to the document, customize and annotate it, thus making the distinction between the author and reader less clear" (140).

Yet McKnight et al. also attempt to re-establish the place of the author, and do so by putting into opposition the hypertext author against the author of the conventional book. The crucial point they make here is against the basics of hypertext enthusiasm whose short history has always privileged the reader, and the readerly. They say:

Once we have it in our hands, the whole of a book is accessible to us as readers. However, sat in front of an electronic read-only hypertext document we are at the mercy of the author since we will only be able to activate the links which the author has provided. (McKnight et al. 140)

This argument contrasts with the celebration of hypertext as constituting the pioneer of the readers' liberation movement; for it conceives of reading practices as essentially determined by the structure of the text, implying a traditional relationship between author and reader, mediated by intentionality. With these assumptions about reading, it becomes possible to understand the provision of links in a document as choices for a hypertext reader, which don't otherwise exist. McKnight et al in fact conceive of the links in a document as a constraint on the reader in that such links specify a structured, organized and thus limited number of options.

So although it seems that a critical position towards improperly celebrating hypertext receives some backing from McKnight et al, it's also true that one can object to them when they analyze hypertextual readings (indeed any readings) in terms of a very narrow communications model involving authors' intentions set in place specifically to impart limited information to readers who thereby become victims of the text. What this position misses -- along with the celebrationist position -- is that quite 'ordinary' (including pre-hypertextual and hypertextual) forms of reading cognition can be quite fluid, artful, nodal and so on: there is nothing special about this and this is why there is nothing special about hypertext. Along with the celebrationists, McKnight et al seem to think that what is called 'reading'



can only be one thing: a single practice with a set of fixed and identifiable criteria. 'Reading' has always taken a number of highly diverse forms, some of which just happen to be used in electronic formations.

I don't believe that George Landow (or anyone else) could adequately map his own readerly thoughts, never mind authoring a hypertext that could somehow account for the networking capacity of another person's thoughts (see real readers). Just say that a reader could have every text, every movie, every sound recording available to a hypertext engine. Could even that readers truly map out the networking capability of the human brain? When one reads, one makes connections to other books, to movies, to songs. But the more significant links are often to personal memories of people and places, to moments, to epiphanic sensations impossible to quantify. These mental "links," infinite, complex, and protean have only a superficial similarity at the most to hypertextual links, which are fixed, consciously constructed, and according to Martin Rosenberg, not complex. (Par. 9)

### **1.5 The Rigid Structure Underlying Hypertext**

Rosenberg notes that much of the language (the tropes) used to describe and to theorize hypertext has its origins in physics. He then argues that this language is often used inaccurately, that many of the claims made about hypertext do not stand up to scrutiny. In particular,

Rosenberg tackles the often-stated claim that hypertext liberates the user from the linearity of the conventional text. To pursue his argument, Rosenberg looks to the binary and opposed categories, the dynamic and the thermodynamic.

Martin Rosenberg argues that hypertext, though it seems to break into a new contingency, actually resides in a thoroughly geometrical space. He says that while hypertext theorists claim that hypertext literalizes the complexity and hence liberation of the thermodynamic, hypertext systems themselves are fundamentally dynamic, bound within a strict system of relationships that do not change. Hypertext forms closed geometrical systems in which the reader has complete control over directional choice. Every hypertextual act is reproducible, in effect, a hypertext system can be learned and understood thoroughly. Ironically, in this very quality of hypertext--the power of the reader which Landow claims as liberation--lies the boundedness of hypertext to deeply pervasive geometrical thought. In making his point, Rosenberg refers to Ilya Prigogine's critique of physics, in particular, his articulation of two basic assumptions of physics. The first of these regards being. Accordingly, "the laws of nature are transcendent to nature and are reversible with respect to time. This means that time has no real existence with respect to physical laws . . ." (279). Thus the purpose of physics is to identify in simplest possible terms the laws of nature. The

second, contrary assumption regards becoming. Here, time is irreducible and irreversible; that is, because it remains inconstant, the laws regarding its behavior cannot be simplified to simple, immutable laws" (283).

Just how much power does the reader of a hypertext have? Martin Rosenberg argues that the multilinearity of hypertext "explode[s] the relationship between writer and reader by making the role of the reader more participatory, even subversive" (273). J. David Bolter says that the "reader may well become the author's adversary, seeking to make the text over in a direction that the author did not anticipate . . . The computer therefore makes visible the contest between author and reader that in previous technologies has gone on out of sight, 'behind' the page" (154). Rosenberg would even have us call the user of a hypertext a "wreader." Is the difference one of degree or kind? Of substance or of perception? Bolter is careful to say that the contest itself is not new, but that our awareness of it is increased. But whose awareness? Will the expert reader read a hypertext more actively than s/he would a book? An encyclopedia is also "multilinear;" does one's reading of it make one a "wreader?"

What becomes apparent in the way hypertext practice is organized (because of its orientation to this narrow kind of informational reading),

despite the claims, is that it is still based on conventional structures of writing and linearity (albeit with a more clearly defined, and also more clearly limited, multilinearity). The metaphors of hypertext (and hypertextualism) are illustrative here. Shneiderman and Kearsley (6), for example, have a section on "hierarchies" in which the predominant metaphors are the "tree" (roots, branches and leaves) and of the "parent-child" (defined as superordinate and subordinate concepts). The definitions and descriptions they provide for these terminologies function as instructions for reading which organize reading cognition in terms of a series of metaphors connected to several of what are now fairly conventional discourses. These metaphors -- browsing, indexing, searching, maps, filters, tours, navigation, etc. -- constitute a conventional conceptual reading apparatus. While the implied function of this apparatus can be read as a bridge or transition between 'old' and 'new' modes of reading practice (enabled by the rigid definition of print text and the reader's relation to it), it appears more as the overlaying of conventional reading practice on new technology. The technology may be new, but the approach to it and the relations to it are wholly conventional. "Hypertext has already been colonized by conventional reading practices -- how could it not be since, in a sense, it is thoroughly conventional -- and the colonizers don't seem to have noticed."(McHoul and Roe par. 24)

As mentioned above the pro-hypertext position claims its object to be revolutionary by virtue of the supposedly non-linear way in which reading cognition takes place in such electronic environments. Hypertext, then, as the ultimate "nonlinear organization of information" (Schneiderman and Kearsley 158), appears to signal an historic shift: the end of the book, the end of linear writing and reading. In our experience, there is no doubt that hypertext documents do have some unique aspects: they speed up the rate of information retrieval and they do allow certain kinds of access to proceed at a pace which would previously have been thought impossible, or to require massive and painstaking archival research.

The reader's paradigmatic interest is displayed in the unique path which she or he takes through a potentially infinite number of such paths in an information web. But each path, as the computer links from node to node, is a purely linear movement. Then, once retrieved, the image, sound or screen-print may or may not be inspected linearly. However it is inspected, the means of its inspection, at this point, will be precisely as it would be under any quite ordinary conditions of reading.

Outside the hypertext environment, print can be inspected either sequentially or, say, globally: such as when one looks at a page for its typographical characteristics. Outside the hypertext environment, still images are routinely inspected in

non-linear fashion: in fact it's very hard to know what a linear reading of a photograph could be like -- except that we know that computer scanners can divide photographs into pixels and proceed to reproduce them in a left-to-right, top-to-bottom form. Again, it's the computer technology which is more linear than the human and quotidian method of inspection. Outside the hypertext environment: films and videos can be viewed in 'real' time, sequentially from frame 1 to frame n -- but simple VCR equipment also allows them to be looked at in freeze frame, in reverse, shot by shot, scene by scene and so on. Quite simply then, there is a very broad variety of processes, both inside and outside the hypertext environment, which can be called 'readings'. The celebration of the supposedly new 'readerly', 'exchange-based', and 'non-linear' forms of reading which hypertext permits may, then, be premature. Moreover, it may be based on (in order to be opposed to) a far too narrow conception of what 'ordinary' reading is. Let us turn to this problem. (McHoul and Roe par. 28)

For example, the ways in which Landow and others describe the 'revolutionary' forms of reading involved in hypertext scanning appear to us to be extremely close to the ways in which readers use reference works such as encyclopaedias. Hardly anyone (except perhaps a proofreader) would read such texts from start to finish. Instead a particular set of interests will lead a reader to an index, then to the selection of an item in print, then (perhaps) to a graphic, or to a cross-referenced item, back to the index, to a different source text and so on. Each item can be thought of as a node, if need be; and (again, if need

be) the encyclopaedia and the internal and external texts to which it leads can be thought of as a web of such nodes.

But Landow insists that these nodes are the nodes of "representation of knowledge" where knowledge is distributed throughout a network. He claims that contemporary science and critical theory offer converging theories of human thought and the thought world based on the network paradigm (1992:26). Hence he writes:

The general importance of non- or antilinear thought appears in frequency and centrality with which Barthes and other critics employ the terms *link*, *network*, *web* and *path*. More than almost any other contemporary theory, Derrida uses the terms *link*, *web*, *network*, *matrix* and *interweaving*, associated with hypertextuality; and Bakhtin similarly employs *links* (Problems, 9, 25), *linkage* (9), *interconnectedness* (19), and *interwoven* (72). (1992:25)

It is bizarre and superficial to claim that an important theoretical and practical convergence has taken place simply because a number of terms ('link', 'web', 'network', 'interwoven') happen to be used in both hypertext discourse and in Derridean theory. Derrida's work on writing, for example, concerns writing in general -- a general condition of undecidability preceding all particular signs, texts and communications -- and so hypertext as a form of writing must be implicated just as much as

other forms of writing. No 'special relationship' between Derridean conceptions of writing and hypertext has been established despite the claims. "That could only happen if one -- wrongly -- thought of Derrida not as a philosopher interested in writing's general preconditions (which he is), but as a prophet of sematic anarchy and the reader's liberation movement (which he most certainly is not). And Derrida notwithstanding, any claimed relationship between hypertext and 'reader-power' must be problematic, especially given the highly conventional and organized structuring of hypertext." (McHoul and Roe par. 8)

In the next chapter, I shall further analyze these claims of convergence between hypertext and Derridean concepts of 'writing', 'text' and 'intertextuality'.

4



## Chapter 2: DERRIDA AND HYPERTEXT

### 2.1 Hypertext and Intertextuality

Landow has frequent references to Derrida in his book, apart from Barthes. He establishes many literal connections between Derrida's works *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena*, *Glas*, *Dissemination and Structure*, *Sing and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* and hypertext. He claims that among major critical theorists, Derrida stands out as the one who most realizes the importance of free-form information technology based upon digital, rather than analogue systems. He proposes that Derrida, more than any other major theorist, understands that electronic computing and other changes in media have eroded the power of the linear model and the book as related culturally dominant paradigms as he quotes Derrida in *Of Grammatology* "The end of linear writing, is indeed the end of the book...it is within the form of a book that the new writings - literary or theoretical - allow themselves to be, for better or worse, encased" (Convergence 29). For Landow Derrida is a theorist who seeks for a way out of linear, stable form of the book in order to reach a new, freer, richer form of the text, therefore, in a way searches for a new technology to break with the investiture of the book,

but he cannot find a way out. When he quotes Derrida again in describing deconstruction "[there also exists] the possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken and written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semiolinguistic communication...Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written...can be cited, put between quotation marks," (Derrida cited in Landow 8) he claims that Derrida is searching blindly for a way to foreground his recognition of the way text operates in print medium. Derrida, as a thinker working with print, sees its shortcomings but:

...for all his brilliance cannot think outside this *mentalité*. Derrida, the experience of hypertext shows, gropes toward a new kind of text: he describes it, he praises it but he can present it only in terms of the devices - here those of punctuation - associated with a particular kind of writing. (1992:9)

Similarly Bolter claims that in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues that non-linear writing has been suppressed though never eradicated by linear writing. He says that, believing that modern experience could not be recorded adequately in linear forms, Derrida concluded that we would begin to write in new ways. In this, argues Bolter, "Derrida was prescient, but he could not know that electronic writing would be the new writing to which he alluded" (116). Instead of Derrida's phrase "the

end of linear writing is indeed the end of the book" (1976:86), suggests Bolter, "the new electronic medium [in the form of hypertext] redefines the book in a way that incorporates both linear and non-linear form" (116).

From a Derridean emphasis on discontinuity, according to Landow, comes the conception of hypertext, which is a fundamentally intertextual system and has the capacity to emphasize intertextuality in a way that page-bound text in books cannot. "When one moves from physical to virtual text, and from print to hypertext, boundaries blur - the blurring that Derrida works so hard to achieve in his print publications - and one therefore no longer can rely upon conceptions or assumptions of inside and out." (Landow, 1992:43)

Landow claims that the most interesting thing about hypertext is not that it may fulfil certain claims of structuralist and poststructuralist criticism but that "it provides a rich means of testing them". It is possible to say that he misreads what he refers to, but he also goes on to tell that Derrida cannot be successful in his attempts to break with the investiture of the book because he also writes in the book form. Here, Landow is too blind to realize that none of Derrida's "words" call for a literal end of the book and for all his blindness he thinks that he has the right to criticize Derrida for not writing in hypertext. Landow

says that he is unable to grasp why Derrida, (for him) who described dissemination as a description of hypertext, cannot think of writing *Glas* in hypertext but then he somehow acquits Derrida by quoting Miller:

*Glas* and the personal computer appeared more or less at the same time. Both work self-consciously and deliberately to make obsolete the traditional codex linear book and to replace it with the new multilinear multimedia hypertext that is rapidly becoming the characteristic mode of expression both in and in the study of cultural forms. The 'triumph of theory' in literary studies and their transformation by the digital revolution are aspects of the same sweeping change (1992:28).

For Landow, Derrida conceives of text as constituted by discreet units of reading which are separate yet bound together. According to Landow, in *Glas* Derrida acknowledges "that a new, freer, richer form of the text, one truer to our potential experience, perhaps to our actual if unrecognized experience, depends on discreet reading units" (1992:8). In the case of every mark spoken and written, Derrida sees a possibility of disengagement. Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, can be cited, put between quotation marks. The implication of such separability is that here, as in hypertext, every reading unit "can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is illimitable" (1988:185). Thus, Landow establishes the relation between *Glas* and hypertext, in the way that they both work deliberately to make

obsolete the linear convention of printed books and to replace them with the more complex, networked, multi-linear and multimedia hypertext.

Similarly Bolter says that in *Glas* Derrida "lays down a textual space and challenges his reader to find a path through it... Whatever else he is doing, Derrida is certainly writing topographically, as if for a medium as fluent as the electronic" (116).

Another claim by Landow is that hypertext creates 'an open, open-bordered text, a text that can not shut out other texts'. This open text, Landow argues, embodies the Derridean text, which blurs "all those boundaries that form the running border of what used to be called a text, of what we once thought this word could identify, i.e., the supposed end and beginning of a work, the unity of a corpus, the title, the margins, the signatures, the referential realm outside the frame, and so forth" (Derrida cited in Landow, 1992:127). Indeed, according to Bolter too, Derrida's characterization of a text sounds very much like "text in electronic writing space" (162). For him, when Derrida speaks of marginality, or of the text as extending beyond its borders, "he is in fact appealing to the earlier technologies of writing, to medieval codices and printed books" (ibid.). Like other contemporary theorists, Derrida sets out to reverse a literary hierarchy while assuming the technology of printing that generates or enforces that hierarchy. Bolter asks, if the

margins that concern Derrida are the borders of the printed or written page, what he would say about the electronic text. In hypertext, argues Bolter, the only margins and the boundaries are the 'the ultimate limitations of the machine'. Hypertext supports a network in which all the constituent elements have such equal status that 'to be at the margin itself is only provisional:

The author can extend and ramify this textual network limited only by the available memory<sup>ii</sup>. The reader can follow paths through the space in any direction, limited only by constraints established by the author. No path through the space need be stigmatized as marginal (ibid.).

Hypertext can be used to electronically link all the allusions and references in a text, both external and internal. This capability, both for Landow and Bolter, in hypertext systems, links within and without the text, that is intratextual (internal) and intertextual (external) connections between points of texts, become equivalent thus bringing texts closer together and blurring the boundaries through them. Bolter claims that the printed book encourages one to think of the text as an organic whole, a unity of meaning independent of all other texts. Hypertext however gives us a unique opportunity to visualize intertextuality:

Stressing connections rather than textual independence, the electronic space rewrites the possibilities of reference and allusion. Not only can one passage in an electronic text refer to another, but the text can bend so that any two passages touch, displaying themselves contiguously to the reader. Not only can one text allude to another, but the one text can penetrate the other and become a visual intertext before the readers eye. (163-4)

The space of hypertext, for Landow, is a fundamentally intertextual system with the capacity to explore intertextuality in ways that page-bound text in books can not match. Although print can be made to display intertextuality, it does not encourage it, because the books' existence as bound object serves to separate its constituent pages from those in other books. The ease with which a conventionally parenthetical citation can become a hypertext link to a completely different text "promotes an intertextual conceptual space" (Johnson-Eilola 112).

Landow says that another far-reaching feature of hypertext's intratextuality is its capability to hold verbal and nonverbal information together in the same environs. Hypertext, in Landow's words, implements Derrida's call for the inclusion of visual elements in writing as a means of escaping the constraints of linearity. Derrida, who asks for a new pictographic writing as a way out of logocentrism, has to a large extent had his requests answered in hypertext because:

Hypertext systems link passages of verbal text with images as easily as they link two or more passages of text, hypertext includes hypermedia. Moreover, since computing digitizes both alphanumeric symbols and images, electronic text in theory easily integrates the two. In practice, popular word-processing programs, such as Microsoft Word, have increasingly featured the capacity to include graphic material in text documents. Linking, which permits an author to send the reader to an image from many different portions of the text, makes such integration of visual and verbal information easier. (1992:43-44)

So it happens to be anyone who has Microsoft Word installed on his personal computer can include images in his text with links, write in hypertext format, therefore can write in the way that Derrida proposes, if there exist such a way.

Opposing to all these claims of convergence Grusin, on the other hand, attacks the embodiment argument as a pointless exercise, in so far as literary theories like poststructuralism, postmodernism and deconstruction do not need to be instantiated or embodied in new electronic technologies. The force of the Derridean critic is "to demonstrate the way in which thought and speech are always already forms of writing: For Derrida, writing is always a technology and already electronic" (475). Grusin believes that Barthes' distinctions between



'work' and 'text' or between the 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts - both of which are "habitually cited as theoretical anticipations of the technology of electronic writing" (ibid.) - have been similarly misread. For Barthes as for Derrida, "the 'writerly' text is always already immaterial, allusive and intertextual - even in print". As Grusin goes on to argue,

This is not to deny that electronic writing the 'work' has taken a different form, one that seems more closely to resemble the Barthesian 'text'. But in describing hypertext or electronic writing as embodying the assumptions of Barthesian poststructuralism or Derridean deconstruction, electronic enthusiasts run the risk of fetishising the 'work', of mistaking the 'work' for the 'text', the physical manifestation (electronic technologies) for the linguistic or discursive text... The force of deconstructive and poststructuralist critiques is to illustrate the way in which this destabilization is true of all writing. To think otherwise is not to instantiate or embody this critiques but to mistake or ignore them (470)

We have so far illustrated that this procedure of literal parallelism is incapable of following and discussing the concepts that are posed by Derrida in the procedure of writing, which involves tracing and difference. However, unlike Grusin, I do not want to continue on a discussion to ensure the relative concepts that introduces Derrida in the realm of hypertext, rather I shall count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces one to rethink these concepts before they have been pragmatized with the liberal thought that surrounds

them. It's better to question these themes of a reduction, a uniformization of diversity, and an equalization of an inequality stitched together in a strange alliance between liberalism, hypertext and very Derridean concepts concerning the discussions of the recent computer technologies. However, this is not a question of alliance rather it is a break between Derrida and the former that should be followed. If it is not an alliance it is also not a contradiction that we need to point out; rather we have to concentrate on the irrelevancy of such discussions. The more contradiction arrived, the more the values peculiar to Derrida in contemporary philosophy disappears. It would be to fall into the same mistake with hypertext theorists, if one would try to point out every claim of convergence and to follow each with an explanation of Derridean concepts. Instead I shall concentrate on Derrida's concepts in *Of Grammatology* again, free from any hypertextual claim.

## 2.1 Derrida and his Concept of 'Writing'

Landow cites Derrida in his book *Hypertext and the Critical Convergence*:

The end of linear writing is indeed the end of the book, it is within the form of a book that the new writing - literary or theoretical - allow themselves to be, for better or worse, encased (1976:86).

The concept of 'linear writing' and the 'book' that Derrida mentions here, is not literally writing in linear format or the physical presence of the book. This sentence occurs in the chapter *Grammatology as Positive Science* and in this chapter Derrida has nothing to do with the physical presence of the book. The concept of "non-linearity" mentioned here, as Derrida says in the former paragraph, is 'Saussure's linearist concept', more openly the linear relation between the signifier and the signified. Derrida says that the "line" represents only a particular model and "this model has become a model and, as a model, it remains inaccessible." Here this "enigmatic model of the line" is indeed the model or has become the model that philosophy does not realize even when it analyzes its own history deeply. " That's why beginning to write without the line, one begins also to reread past writing according to a different organization of space". In order to understand more clearly one must concentrate on the Derridean concepts of 'writing', 'textuality', 'non-linearity' and the 'end of the book', and how he deconstructs Saussure's linearist concept, thus I will refer to the opening chapter of *Of Grammatology* to comprehend what this different is organization of space that Derrida seeks by deconstruction. Landow cites an important sentence from this chapter:

All appearances to the contrary, this death of the book undoubtedly announces (and in a certain sense always has announced) nothing but a death of speech (of a *so-called* full speech) and a new mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing. (1976:8)

Against any misunderstandings Derrida continues:

'Death of the speech' is of course a metaphor here: before we speak of disappearance, we must think of a new situation, of its subordination within a structure of which it will no longer be the archon (1976:8).

By declaring 'the end of the book' and then 'the end of the speech', Derrida problematizes the treatment of writing in philosophy (Western metaphysics) as a means of expression which is at its best irrelevant to the thought it expresses and at worst a barrier to that thought. "Philosophy defines itself as what transcends writing, and by identifying certain aspects of the functioning of language with writing, tries to rid itself of problems by setting writing aside as simply an artificial substitute for speech." (Culler 92) It is important to figure out this condemnation of writing because "the phonocentrism that treats writing as a representation of speech and puts speech in a direct and natural relationship with meaning is inextricably associated with the logocentrism of metaphysics, the orientation of philosophy toward an

order of meaning - thought, truth, reason, logic, the Word - conceived as existing in itself, as foundation." (Culler 92) Logocentrism situates writing in a secondary and derivative state, as a representation of speech, where speech is seen as natural and direct communication. Writing thus seems to be not merely a technical device for representing speech but a distortion of speech, a technical device or external accessory that need not to be taken into consideration when studying language (Culler 100). Thus, Derrida deconstructs this writing and speech hierarchy through Saussure's formulation of signifier and signified which are also set through a linear relation, an oppositional hierarchy.

Saussure defines language as a system of signs. He argues that signs are arbitrary and conventional and that each is defined not by essential properties but by the differences that distinguish it from other signs. A language is thus conceived as a system of differences. Structuralism and semiotics develop the distinctions between a language as a system of differences (*langue*) and the speech events which the system makes possible (*parole*); between the two constituents of the sign, signifier and signified. Acts of signification depend on differences such as the contrast between "tree" and "not-tree" that allows tree to be signified, or difference between signifying elements that allows a sequence to function as a signifier. The sound sequence 'bat' is a signifier because it contrasts with pat, mat, bad, bet, etc. "However if

one tries to ground an account of meaning on difference, one fares no better, for differences are never given as such and are always products. A scrupulous theory must shift back and forth between these perspectives, of event and structure or *parole* and *langue*, which never lead to a synthesis. Each perspective shows the error of the other in an irresolvable aporia." (Culler 96) Derrida shows that signifiers are not necessarily connected to their signifieds; that there is no one to one correspondence between them by exposing how Saussure's formulation deconstructs itself.

We can extend to the system of signs in general what Saussure says about language: "The linguistic system (*langue*) is necessary for speech events (*parole*) to be intelligible and produce their effects, but the latter are necessary for the system to establish itself. ... " There is a circle here, for if one distinguishes rigorously *langue* and *parole*, code and message, schema and usage, et. And if one is to do justice to the two principles here enunciated, one does not know where to begin and how something can in general begin, be it *langue* and *parole*. One must therefore recognize, prior to any dissociation of *langue* and *parole*, code and message, and what goes with it, a systematic production of differences, the *production* of a system of differences - a *différance* among whose effects one might later, by abstraction and for specific reasons, distinguish a linguistics of *langue* from a linguistics of *parole*. (1972:39-40)

Derrida introduces here the term *différance* which "alludes to this undecidable, nonsynthetic alternation between the perspectives of structure and event." (Culler 97) By employing the word *différance* Derrida plays with French language, to challenge the oppositional hierarchy between speech and writing. *Différance* sounds (exactly) the same as *différence* but ending with *-ance*, which is used in French to produce verbal nouns. By changing only a letter in a word, namely the letter *a*, which change cannot be heard in spoken language, Derrida challenges the traditional logic based on phonocentrism. *Différance* thus designates both a passive difference already in place as the condition of signification and act of differing which produces differences. *Différance*, as he writes:

"is a structure and a movement that cannot be conceived on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. *Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing by which elements relate to one another. This spacing is the production, simultaneously active and passive (the *a* of *différance* indicates this indecision as regards activity and passivity, that cannot yet be governed and organized by that opposition), of intervals without which the "full" terms could not signify, could not function." (1972:38-39)

From these concepts of spacing, asignification and *différance* Derrida produces a new concept of writing. Derrida asks how one can illustrate a

purely differential unit if all the identities are relational. If speech is put forward as an absolutely pure, transparent form of representation, it must be possible for me to repeat to a third party what someone said because a sequence of sounds can function as a signifier only if it is repeatable, if it can be recognized as the "same" in different circumstances. "A speech is not a sign sequence unless it can be quoted and put into circulation among those who have no knowledge of the "original" speaker and his signifying intentions... This possibility of being repeated and functioning without respect to a particular signifying intention is a condition of linguistic signs in general, not just of writing" (Culler 102). Writing can be thought as a supplement to or a representation of speech but as Derrida notes, "if 'writing' means inscription and especially the durable instituting of signs (and this is the only irreducible kernel of the concept of writing), then writing in general covers the entire domain of linguistic signs." (1976:65) Thus writing in general becomes the condition of both speech and writing. Moreover, everything, including speech, in language operates on Derrida's generalized concept of writing; to put it in other words, there is nothing outside the text. Once writing is put forward as "a machine operating in and through every mark, utterance and thought, always producing an excess (therefore a loss) of signifying potential that cannot be boxed into the linguistic model of the sign" (Dienst 131), textuality in a Derridean sense involves not only the relation of speech and writing in



philosophical discourse but also the "metaphysics of presence" in search for a foundation, an absolute truth. Logocentrism, in all its philosophical attempts, tries to describe "what is fundamental and has been treated as a centering, grounding force or principle. In oppositions such as meaning/form, soul/body, intuition/expression, literal/metaphorical, nature/culture, intelligible/sensible, positive/negative, transcendental/empirical, serious/nonserious, positive/negative, the superior term belongs to the logos and is a higher presence; the inferior term marks a fall. Logocentrism thus assumes the priority of the first term and conceives the second in relation to it, as a complication, a negation, a manifestation, or a disruption of the first." (Culler 93) Deconstruction thus becomes the philosophical strategy to dismantle these hierarchical oppositions.

In traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), occupies the commanding position. To deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the hierarchy. (1972:56-57)

But Derrida's mention of the reversal should not lead us to think that deconstruction is a reversal of hierarchies which would keep the hierarchy. Reversal may be called as an initial step in deconstruction, a step where one problematizes the dominance of one term over the other.

What Derrida does is a kind of reversal when claiming that writing is a condition of speech, but he does not stop here and continues to "create" a generalized notion of writing which can then be called textuality. He demonstrates that this external *différance* of speech according to writing is at the same time an internal one, which makes speech always already a mode of writing. Thus Derrida's concept of deconstruction does not merely oppose or reverse the hierarchy rather it builds itself through it, in it; constitutes itself on the very existence of binaries. An opposition that is deconstructed is not destroyed or abandoned but reinscribed. Thus deconstruction works as a double operation, a double which does not simply have opposition hierarchical other. It divides the singularities into two, then again which then become a multiplicity requiring a fundamental shift in our textual ontology, a way from the "text itself" toward a conception of the textual system as an illimitable matrix crossing at variable speeds through all cultural, political and social dimensions (Dienst 137). Thus, deconstruction is to read in terms of *différance*, which is "to delimit a formation of value by continuous passage through it, out to its aporias, its limits" (Dienst 133).

### **2.3 Hypertext as applied deconstruction**

Having briefly reviewed Derridean concepts of writing, *différance* and textuality therefore of deconstruction one would object to Landow's

claims that there is a convergence between hypertext and the contemporary critical studies, to be specific between hypertext and Derridean concepts, in terms of two main difficulties in Landow's claim of convergence; misreading and application (or appropriation).

First, misreading in the sense that Derridean concept is not literally the act of writing as Landow employs it; rather it is a metaphor that Derrida uses in developing the strategies of deconstruction. "Writing refers to the notion of textuality which Derrida employs in his critique of philosophy and of other essentializing theories to emphasize that discourse, meaning, and reading are historical through and through, produced in processes of contextualization, decontextualization, and recontextualization" (Culler 128).

Second, the so-called achievement of hypertext, which is described by Landow as the blurring of the boundaries between reader and writer is not something that deconstruction proposes. What is proposed by deconstructionist strategies is not simply a blurring between the two ends of binary oppositions. Landow and the other hypertext theorists are trying to derive methods, techniques or procedures out of deconstruction in other words they are trying to 'test' deconstruction. Thus, a blurring of boundaries is a desperate attempt to "unite what they [it] separate [s] but only in its separatedness" (Debord, 54). Hypertext

as a form of writing in itself and as a form of writing in Derridean sense is always already hypertextual long before it is said to be hypertextual.

Richard Rorty draws our attention to these attempts of "applied deconstruction" in United States. For him there are two dubious Derrida readings:

Derrida is read, by conservative know-nothings in the United States and Britain, as a frivolous and cynical despiser of common sense and traditional democratic values. Many of my colleagues in the Anglophone philosophical community support this reading, and attempt to excommunicate Derrida from the philosophical tradition.

Derrida is read by his fans in American departments of literature, on the other hand, as the philosopher who has transformed our notions of language and the self. They think of him as having demonstrated the truth of certain important propositions, propositions the recognition of which undermines our traditional ways of understanding ourselves, and understanding the books as we read. They also take him to have given us a method - the deconstructive method - of reading texts: a method which helps us to see what texts are really about, what is really going in them. (13)

In opposing philosophies of representation and construction, deconstruction resists any positive truth built into critical systems and becomes an anti-methodical method. It works as a system of differences with no positive terms; the elements of the "system" are multivocal,

undecidable, indeterminate, differential and such a system replaced the tradition of the metaphysics of identity with a new "tradition" of differences. Thus thinking of deconstruction as providing new, improved tools for unmasking books and authors - showing what is really going on behind a false front is, a simple application of deconstruction of which deconstruction resists. Deconstruction is not a *method*, which one can apply to text. Applied deconstruction means standing outside what you "deconstruct", in order to analyze it, understand it or perhaps cure it. Applying methods or techniques to better understand any text is to be drawn back into the logocentric circle and placed into neat categories in that circle. One must remember that deconstruction does not free itself from what it deconstructs, from metaphysics it contests, since it uses its metaphors and concepts. There is no "outside" beyond the metaphysics of presence. Metaphysics or logocentrism holds within itself, however, the resources for deconstruction. Deconstruction is not a denial, but the drawing out of inconsistencies, contradictions, of "differences" within the text. Derrida showed that the simple rejection of philosophies falling within the tradition of the metaphysics of presence is a fall into that which we seek to avoid, finally, because all texts can be read in ambiguous ways, first advocating presence, second, as deconstructing presence.

Kathleen M. Wheeler draws our attention to the fact that Derrida's own essays act quite openly as a ribald parody of such critical writing which implicitly claim to have advanced beyond conventional, traditional criticism, yet actually remains rather firmly within its limited idioms.

A borrowing of Derrida's "ideas", or his methods and approaches, which merely applies and reiterates them within the limits of ordinary critical discourse and practice, is an example of the inevitable process of "taming" Derrida's wild originality - that Derridean deconstruction - a taming which, admittedly, many critics have deplored. (Wheeler 216)

Now it is quite clear that Landow's claim that hypertext provides a ground to test Derridean principles is problematic both in the sense that deconstruction resists testing or application and Derrida cannot be said to provide new principles. In the next chapter I shall try to analyze how these hypertext theorists try to employ the ideas of critical theorists, namely of Barthes and Derrida, in order to develop a liberal democratic utopia through hypertext.

## **Chapter 3: Digital democracy in the United States**

As I have discussed in the previous chapters hypertext theorists claim a vast convergence between hypertext and contemporary critical theory. However, this claim becomes more problematic when they continue to develop a fantasy of digital democracy out of this convergence. Enforcing their argument with Balthus' and Derrida's ideas, they call for the turning of an age, where the new age will be the ground for blurring of hierarchies.

### **3.1 Hypertext and Democracy**

Since hypertext is said to have altered a reader's or viewer's relationship to print and visual language in a way that readers have more control over the text they read with the choices hypertext provides, hierarchies will begin to disappear beginning from the author/reader relationship. A reader's becoming author will then result in the blurring of boundaries in every field and the intertextual nature of hypertext will not allow any ruling center. This hypertextual dissolution of centrality, moving the boundary of power away from the author in the direction of the reader, makes hypertext a model of a society of conversations in

which no one conversation, no one discipline or ideology, dominates or founds the other (Landow, 1992:70). Hence Landow writes:

One sign of disappearance of boundaries between author and reader consists in its being the reader, not the author, who largely determines how the reader moves through the system, for the reader can determine the order and principle of investigation. Hypertext has the potential, thus far only partially realized, to be a democratic or multicentered system in yet another way: as readers contribute their comments and individual documents, the sharp division between author and reader that characterizes page-bound text begins to blur and threatens to vanish, with several interesting implications: first by contributing to the system, users accept some responsibility for materials anyone can read; and second, students thus establish a community of learning, demonstrating to themselves that a large part of any investigation rests on the work of others. (1992:178-9)

Therefore one reads in Landow's claim that the only obstruction before the new age of a more democratic world is that we have not, yet, digitized all fields of art, culture and education. Similarly, David Bolter confidently concludes *Writing Space* with an utopian claim: hypertext epitomizes how "an extremely powerful leveling force is at work in our society."

Our culture is itself a vast writing space, a complex of symbolic structures. Just as we write our minds, we can say



that we write the culture in which we live. And just as our culture is moving from the printed book to the computer, it is also in the final stages of the transition from a hierarchical social order to what we might call a 'network culture.' For decades all forms of hierarchy have been disintegrating, as greater and greater freedom of action is granted to the individual. (32)

Bolter establishes an analogy between digital technology and democracy and notes that the transformation of social hierarchies into egalitarian networks accords with the benevolent goals and forces of liberal democracy. We are confronted with the same ideals in Lanham arguing that the digitization of arts (literature, music, art) radically democratizes them in two related ways. First, translating different artistic techniques into a common digital code makes the arts radically interchangeable--a particular technique or medium no longer distinguishes one art from the other because hypermedia programs designed to replicate those techniques all use the same digital template. Second, the common digital code opens "levels of symbolic transformation, and the work and information that went with them, to people hitherto shut out from this world." (39) That is, to paint, compose, or perform, one need not devote a life to practicing techniques; instead, one devotes time to manipulating formatted techniques in a hypermedia program.

According to John Palattella Lanham praises this digitization of the arts because "it forces an answer to the problem of multiculturalism that he thinks has recently beset humanities departments: how to educate the first-generation Americans and non-native speakers of English who now comprise the majority of the student population in the arts in many universities" (par. 36). Lanham thinks that digitization enables one to teach the humanities to an economically and culturally diverse student population because it provides a common, democratic language and thought process (Par. 36). He describes how interactive CD-programs enable students in art history classes to paint like Matisse in order to learn about art, or students in music theory classes to compose like Mozart or Bach in order to learn about symphonies. "Can you democratize genius?", an imaginary interlocutor asks Lanham in his book's last chapter. Lanham responds, "No, but I think you can democratize music-making" (60). How one can claim that he can democratize music making? What kind of a democracy is this?

Electronic hypertext and contemporary discussions of critical theory, particularly those of the poststructuralists, display many points of convergence, but one point one which they differ is tone. Whereas most writings on theory, with the notable exception of Derrida, are models of scholarly solemnity, records of disillusionment and brave sacrifice of humanistic positions, writers on hypertext are downright celebratory. Whereas terms like *death*, *vanish*, *loss* and

expressions of depletion and impoverishment color critical theory, the vocabulary of the freedom, energy, and empowerment marks writings on hypertextuality. (Landow, 1992:87)

'Empowerment', 'energy' and 'freedom' are all terminologies of liberal democracy that hypertext theorists borrow to develop their digital democracy (which is nothing more than liberalism). At this point I shall pass to analyze which liberal ideals underlie these claims of digital democracy since to read hypertext as a smooth, unified object with a liberal democratic ideology (that's what these hypertext theorists do) says more about the political composition of the critics concerned than it does about hypertext. In the previous chapter I referred to Richard Rorty's ideas criticizing the two readings of Derrida in the United States. However, if one asks why these hypertext theorists talk about a digital democracy, the answer again underlies Rorty's arguments because he shares the same liberal democratic ideals with hypertext theorists.

### **3.2 Rorty's Derrida and Democracy**

Rorty is known in the United States for his books on Derrida and where he displays the similarities he finds between pragmatism and deconstruction. He puts himself as a follower of Dewey and Wittgenstein and develops a

liberal-pragmatism upon their ideas. Thus, his books on Derrida are a somehow a liberal democratic approach to deconstruction.

Rorty sees Derrida as sharing the same 'utopian' rules hopes with Dewey but not showing any clear or direct way to the realization of this hope. Rorty divides philosophers rather 'crudely' into two groups; public liberals and private ironists. The first group consisting of philosophers, namely Mill, Dewey and Rawls, as he proposes, produce works that "fulfil primarily public purposes" (16). The second group involving Derrida, Heidegger, and Nietzsche who are problematizing Western Metaphysics which in result produces "private satisfactions to people who are deeply involved with philosophy (therefore necessarily, with metaphysics) but not as politically consequential, except in a very indirect and long-term way" (ibid.).

So Rorty thinks of Derrida 'at his best' in his works like 'Envois' section of *La Carte Postale* where he works in his "private relationships to his two grandfathers, Freud and Heidegger" (ibid.). Then, Rorty takes a step forward in his categorization by dividing Derrida's works into two main chronological periods. For him, Derrida's earlier works like *Of Grammatology* are "less idiosyncratic and more strictly philosophical" where Derrida works out his private relationships to figures that meant most to him. Rorty prefers Derrida's later works like 'Envois' and 'Circonfession' because they seem to him "more vivid and forceful forms of self-creation" (17)

Because I read my favorite Derridean texts this way, I have trouble with the specifically Levinasian strains in his thought. In particular I am unable to connect Levinas's pathos of infinite with ethics or politics. I see ethics and politics - real politics as opposed to cultural politics - as a matter of reaching accommodation between competing interests, and as something to be deliberated about in banal, familiar terms - terms which do not need philosophical dissection and do not have philosophical presuppositions. (17)

Rorty concludes his speech saying that he sees 'romantic and utopian hopes' in Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* which contribute to Derrida's 'private self-fashioning' thus texts like *Politics of Friendship* can have no contributions to political thought. Politics, as Rorty sees it "is a matter of pragmatic, short-term reforms and compromises - compromises which must, in democratic society, be proposed and defended in terms of much less esoteric than those in which we overcome the metaphysics of presence" (17)

When Derrida talks about deconstruction as prophetic of the 'democracy to come', he seems to me expressing the same utopian social hope as was felt by these earlier dreamers. (Rorty 16)

Rorty grounds all his categorizations on the basis of the opposition public and private. For him public and private are two domains that are theoretically impossible to reconcile. "The private is defined by Rorty as

being concerned with idiosyncratic projects of self-overcoming, with self-creation and the pursuit of autonomy. The public is defined as being concerned with those activities having to do with the suffering of other human beings, with attempt to minimize cruelty and work for social justice” (Rorty cited in Critchley 21). To confuse the field of application for each of these vocabularies would be to engage in a form of category mistake; first, in the sense, that to judge the public by standards of private and second, to judge the private by the standards of the public.

Therefore, for Rorty, Derrida can only be understood as a private thinker whose work has no public utility and no interesting political or ethical consequences. “Concealed in this claim is...a normative belief to the effect that Derrida *should* not be considered as a public thinker. The reason for this is that Rorty believes if Derrida's works were extended into the public realm, then this would produce either useless, pernicious or possibly even *dangerous* ethical and political consequences” (Critchley 20). Thus, in a way, Rorty confines deconstruction to the domain of the private. The consequence of Rorty's thesis is that Derrida's work has no ethical, political or public significance in so far as it has given up on the attempt to reconcile theoretically the public and the private. Unless this happens Rorty will consider Derrida as having done with “the history of philosophy what Proust did for his life study” (Rorty cited in Critchley 30), thus belonging to the

realm of literature rather than philosophy as for Rorty 'beneficial' philosophy has to deal with the public realm.

For Rorty, deconstruction is not (quasi)-transcendental philosophy, but must be understood as part of a tradition of philosophy as world-disclosure, a tradition that includes Plato, Hegel and Heidegger, where all vocabularies of self- and world-description are challenged, redescribed and replaced by new vocabularies. Thus, the crucial distinction to draw is that between an argumentative form of language which addresses the problems of social justice - what I called the 'public' - and a non-argumentative, often oracular, form of language that is world-disclosive and concerned with the quest for individual autonomy - what we called the 'private'. (Crichtley 29)

It is quite clear that underlying Rorty's distinction between public and private, there is the strict separation of theory and practice. A philosophy, therefore a theory is not beneficial unless it can be utilized by the public realm. Philosophy has to be prepositional to derive certain visible criteria to 'apply' for the sake of growth in common wealth. If not, then, it will be an activity of self-problematization to "save for weekends" (Rorty 44).

Ernest Laclau asks a very simple question to Rorty: How is the very distinction between the public and the private actually established? Laclau notes that this distinction itself becomes problematic and reveals itself as what it actually is: "just an ideal-typical attempt at stabilizing an essentially unstable frontier which is constantly trespassed and overflowed by movement

from its two sides” and adds that “only in an tidy rationalistic world can the demands of self-creation and those of solidarity be so neatly differentiated as Rorty wants them to be” (Laclau 51)

Apart from Laclau, Simon Critchley also asks another question to Rorty and himself: Is Derrida a private ironist? Grounding his discussion on Rorty's distinction, Critchley says that this distinction paves the way to understand Derrida, in the sense that, once this distinction is put forward one must also recognize the limits of public and private are undecidable. Then, it turns out to be Rorty, himself, is the ‘utopian’ in the sense that he tries to separate what is inseparable. Critchley draws our attention to the circumstances under which his utopia can be achieved. “Rorty’s utopia is the vision of a society of liberal ironists, and progress towards such a utopia will be achieved by the *universalization* of liberal society” (Critchley 23). In fact in his response to Simon Critchley, Rorty quite openly describes his utopia:

As I see contemporary politics, we do not need what Critchley calls ‘a critique of liberal society’. We just need more liberal societies, and more liberal laws in force within each such society. I see European philosophical thought as still dominated by the Marxist notion of *Ideologiekritik*, and by the romantic notion of the philosopher as the person who penetrates behind appearances of present social institutions to the reality. I distrust both notions.



My principle reason for distrusting them is a political guess about which are the most efficient casual mechanism for fruitful institutional change. My suspicion of metaphysics and of the whole contrast between Appearance and Reality, is, politically speaking, just an optional extra. As somebody trained in philosophy I get my most romantic kicks out of metaphysics-bashing. As a citizen of democratic state, I do not think that metaphysics-bashing is - except in the very long term - of much use. (45-6)

Isn't this the same utopia of digital democracy that hypertext theorists develop and which would be only possible through the digitization of arts? The main argument in Rorty is that public and private, therefore theory and practice should be clearly distinguished from each other. Thus he develops a utilitarian view of philosophy, a philosophy which would only be valuable through applicability. In this way Rorty gives a hand to the hypertext theorists in constructing their hypertext laboratory where they 'test' and determine the feasibility of philosophies.

### **3.3 Liberalist-hypertextual ideals**

When Rorty talks about philosophy, especially deconstruction as allowing for the blurring of the boundaries between philosophy and literature, he confines deconstruction in the field of literature. He clearly distinguishes the profession of politics and the 'profession' of philosophy claiming that many of philosophies have no public utility, and are

therefore useless. Then, what hypertext theorists try to achieve in applying Derrida's ideas, is the search of a utility for deconstruction. However, in the end it turns out that which can have public and ethical consequences is hypertext, not philosophy, since philosophers are still engaged within the same limitations of print culture.

Liberal democracy involves the process of apolitization. We see the applications of this process both in Rorty's arguments and the claims of hypertext theorists. On one hand Rorty excludes deconstruction from the 'profession' of politics by saying that "deconstruction is too marginal for politics" (Rorty 71), and situates Derrida in the 'profession' of self-problematizing philosophy. On the other hand, hypertext theorists accept Derrida as providing neutral, objective methods to apply in any field, which is, in their case, hypertext.

The difficulty in both of these arguments is that they both keep the strict distinction of theory and practice. In the case of Rorty this distinction is put forward in the form of the distinction between public and private and for hypertext theorists the distinction is between Derridean theory and its application, hypertext. Both carry this distinction to the field of democracy through the universalization of liberalist ideals. While hypertext theorists call for a more democratic space through hypertext, Rorty says that the only thing we need is more liberal countries and

more liberal laws in force within each such society. Thus, to employ deconstruction in order to develop a fantasy of digital democracy has two difficulties: to read deconstruction as a neutral theory as having no political and ethical consequences and to read hypertext as a smooth, unified object free from any prior relation to politics.

I shall make the first point explicitly referring to Derrida's concepts of undecidability and justice upon which we can talk about the 'politics of deconstruction'. As mentioned above Simon Critchley and Ernest Laclau, against the distinction of Rorty, both mention that the limits of the public and private are undecidable. Similarly when Rorty talks about the perfection of liberal ideals, liberal laws and therefore liberal justice, Critchley mentions the undecidability of justice according to Derrida. As relation to this very undecidability Critchley quotes Derrida saying that "justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructable. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice" (34). However, it is important to note that this conception of justice "does not arise in some intellectual intuition or theoretical deduction". Rather, for Derrida, it is an experience of that "which we are not able to experience, which is qualified as 'the mystical', 'the impossible' or 'aporia'. In Derrida's more habitual vocabulary, justice is an experience of 'the undecidable' (34).

The undecidable is not merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions, it is the experience of that which, though heterogeneous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged - it is of obligation that we must speak - to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of laws and rules. A decision that did not go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable progress. (Derrida cited in Laclau 53)

Since politics is the realm of decision, Critchley argues, of the organization and administration of the public realm, of the institution of law and policy "the central aporia of deconstruction - an aporia that must not be avoided if any responsible political activity is to be undertaken - concerns the nature of this passage from undecidability to the decision, from the ethical 'experience' of justice to political action, to what we might call the moment of judgement" (Critchley 35).

For Derrida, no political form can or should attempt to embody justice, and the undecidability of justice must always lie outside the public realm, guiding, criticizing and deconstructing that realm, but never being instantiated within it. From a deconstructive perspective, the greatest danger in politics is the threat of totalitarianism, or what Jean-Luc Nancy calls 'immanentism', in all its most recent and terrifying disguises: neo-fascism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, theocracy. (Critchley 35)

Then justice becomes the inexperiencable aporia, that no particular person, system, state, community or territory could be said to embody. "One might say that the 'experience' of justice is that of an absolute alterity or transcendence that guides politics without being fully present in the public realm" (Critchley 36).

It is now asked what political form best maintains this dis-embodiment of justice, then I take it that Derrida's response would be *democracy*: not a democracy that claims to instantiate justice here and now, not an apologetics for actually existing liberal democracy (but neither a dismissal of the latter), but a democracy guided by the *futural* or *projective* transcendence of justice - what Derrida calls *une démocratie à venir*. (Critchley 36)

Returning to our earlier argument of the difficulties in hypertextual claim, the second point is the reading of hypertext as a smooth, unified object, free from any political position and, developing an understanding of a new democracy through it when "all technological developments are overcoded by images of consumption and production" (Palattella par. 12).

Capitalism has its own desires, and these desires are often coextensive with hypertext as it unfolds before us. Indeed, this is actually one of capitalism's desires: it wants to be immanent to everything we do, it wants to move our trigger-

happy finger as it runs the mouse across those baubles and  
bright links (ibid.)

In this sense there is no need search for a 'perfect match' between Derrida's theory and hypertext in order to construct a digital, liberal democracy since hypertext is always already included in the capitalist mechanisms. The structuation of internet technologies with the emphasis on e-business, e-commerce and other technologies dominated by capitalism, are the points where this 'invisible hand' becomes the most obvious one.

'Let's not ask is hypertext like this thing/that thing/a Derridean network/a rhizome/liberatory/a Barthesian text/a poststructuralist whatever. Let's not overcode, play with cookie-cutters, make the edges neat" (Palattella 3). Better to ask, is it possible to resist this 'nightmare regime of calculable subjectivity' (Dienst 41)?

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that one has to ask other questions, in spite of all these negotiations that I have tried to discuss until now. In contrast to undertaking hypertext theories in themselves which are striving to maintain the rules, to impose the measure and to fix a goal, the resistance is a movement that escapes all aims and resolutions. Resisting to the universal logic of the conception of hypertext is yet to be suggested. At this point, such a resistance questions the logic of this universalization of the concepts of art, science and philosophy as they were represented by hypertext theorists as the default part of the society's demand for progress. Thus so far, the inherent structure of all these difficulties, I think, is dependent upon the opinion that through the emerging technology we have come up with something unfathomable, something that has to be deciphered. This general approach to technology has another proposition that we should try to understand what is being developed; and consequently *philosophy* must follow the practical influences, *art* should be able to use these new tools of creation, and *science* should take one step further in the process (thus following its own steps). And more generally, to *follow* praising emerging technologies as being smooth-unified, and defining the good and bad

only in terms of its beneficent or mal-use, would be a naïve question according to Ulus Baker:

What I am trying to say in short is, are we going to accept totally and then complain about everything we are faced with; all these information highways, nanotechnologies, or all the projects that genetic engineers will work out; or are we going to put forth a multi-resistance over against 'single-oriented consensus' in order to expand until its 'inside' and 'limits'.  
(par. 10) [my trans.]

From the point of view of Baker, it seems difficult to deny a relation between an anxiety towards the flow of progressive technologies and a reaction which is uncertain at the moment of its formation. Involved in society's habits in the form of a passive synthesis, one could differentiate two reactions: a complete denial or a total acceptance. However, are not denial and acceptance here the same precondition of the functioning of this flow without resisting it? Isn't it the search for a ground to *apply* questions in binary oppositions such as true-and-false, good-and-bad dichotomies? Moreover, would not to *apply* such a grounding critique serve only to justify traditional ways of thinking?

This encounter between progress and its anxiety is never new, when we look to the history of art. If it is true that History understood as such are the jumps from one state to other, then the identification of the Baroque art with the knowing of the world, Modern art with industrial revolution,



Postmodern art with the post-capitalist society would be definite. However, the identification of the artist with the period he lives may still remain indefinite. For example, in the case of the modern, this indefinite and suspended relationship between an acceptance of the modern as all there is, and hints at what lies hidden within it, does not make the description of the Baudelairean flaneur into an all-accepting of the modern, although he seems to be giving himself to the fleeting moment. It does, however, signal an attempt to come to terms with an experience which is both a threat and a challenge.

For Walter Benjamin, the history is a feature yet to be discussed implying that the resistance can be found towards an understanding of time. In *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Benjamin holds a discussion on a painting by Klee. 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed.

"But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future

to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. *This storm is what we call progress.*"  
(1995)

This statement clarifies two things:

Firstly, Benjamin states that if one wants to understand any advancement through human evolution the past has to be included and if one (ad)ventures to include, one sees it is full of suffering. Benjamin's strong proposal is this opposition: If you are trying to understand anything involving progress you have to brush the past's hairs in the opposite direction. "We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a *real state of emergency*, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism." Therefore to resist to what is being proposed by the developing technologies defined as being neuter, as being independent of a past which is marked by its wars and suffering, as being an innocent tool, would be worthy according to Benjamin. A real state of emergency, thus, is the resistance to the storm that the 'angel' is caught up, whether it questions fascism or the liberal discourse of contemporary theories of hypertext.

The second point that this painting by Klee implies is that it points out to the possibility of another reading: *for the angel is caught up in the*

*storm, the storm does not remain unaffected from being interrupted.* To put in Derridean words, the storm holds the possibility of resistance in itself.

After this point, what I propose is that we need a different reading of hypertext than these theorists who consider hypertext as a smooth, unified object. I would suggest that hypertext, as one of the media of telecommunication technologies, holds the interruptive forces in itself. Such an interruptive reading of hypertext is, according to Geoffrey Bennington, would be interesting in Derridean sense, too. In regard to discussion of the Internet, Bennington states that:

There is a double logic here we might want to explore, whereby the (in principle democratic) increase in 'communicability' made possible by electronic communication leads to a commensurate increase in 'contaminability' of all sorts, so that advances in communication seem not to lead in any straightforward way to transparency or clarity, still less to equality, but quite possibly to the opposite. Perhaps something about information technology made it possible for Derrida to formulate things about communication and contamination that turn out to have been around since Plato and that in a sense philosophy exists to control. (par. 4)

If the communication can not be thought without contamination this is a deconstructionist resistance. Perhaps these are the topics that would be interesting to explore for Derrida, for the reason that they reveal not

the 'encyclopedic' but the 'interruptive' forces inherent to the technological forces. So that instead of claiming a theory that hypertextuality somehow realized the supposed aims of deconstruction (which is mistaken according to Bennington) it should be stated that, deconstruction does not have aims in any standard sense, and even on a interpretation that thought it did have aims (to bring about something called 'textuality', or some such thing), hypertext could not be said to realize those aims. Hypertext exploits some features of textuality that traditional forms of writing tend to conceal 'a degree of non-linearity' or even repress 'the order of the Book', but these features do not automatically make it the deconstructionist's dream come true. Indeed, hypertexts can just as well be presented as a fulfillment of a metaphysical view of writing driven by the Idea of an absolutely accessible Encyclopedia of all knowledge.

As Bennington states, in 'Two words for Joyce', Derrida suggests that Joyce's text is already more powerful in its hypertextual capacities (he doesn't use the term, but that's what it's about) than any super-computer. I think, he means that hypertext is not a simple chronological progress of invention, thus, in that sense, a (real) hypertext is a sort of image of textuality rather than a realization of it.

In a discussion about deconstruction Derrida states that, with regard to philosophical hegemony, the deconstructive force is a gesture that consists

of finding, or seeking, whatever in the work represents a resistance to philosophical authority. This, Derrida claims, is important to any discourse, whether it be literary, philosophical or political. (par.10)

Derrida emphasizes the fact that deconstruction is not that which comes to the text, but rather that there is text as soon as deconstruction is engaged: either the use of 'text' in hypertext, nor the employment of deconstruction to hypertext theories could succeed. Derrida emphasizes the fact that, since deconstruction begins with the deconstruction of logocentrism, to confine it to linguistic foundations would be most suspect. Deconstruction is not that which destroys the conventional forms of text, but rather that which affirms a certain condition of a construction of a text through deconstruction in which the foundations themselves have been deconstructed. As Derrida notes: 'If the foundations are assured, there is no construction; neither is there any invention... Thus deconstruction is the condition of construction, of true invention, of a real affirmation that holds something together, that constructs' (1987:27).

So that deconstruction is not a mere criticism but through interruption of general economy of texts it creates. This interruptive force elemental to the technology -thus in our case general economy of texts as hypertext- can be best understood in terms of Derrida's conception of the postal regime in contrast to Rorty's understanding of it. Derrida, evokes the postcard as a metaphor for a culture which is 'cast as an immense number of postal

transmissions, each stamped by authorities and tradition" (1987:296), from this set the object of the postcard is divided not only within its text-image but also the exchange is deferred.

It is clear that the postcard in Derrida's *The Post Card* is evoked as that which refers to the general economy of texts. The postcard bears many duties at once: it must not only carry its message and image, but also has the obligation of having a sufficient address, a legible signature, and a tax or investment paid to the delivery apparatus. The postcard is therefore always responsible along with its senders and receivers to the system that sends it. The postcard is always in danger of having its transmission *interrupted*, or its message smeared. Insofar as it submits itself to these necessary conditions, the postcard is a technology or communication in Derrida's sense. As Dienst writes: 'Both postcards remind us of the prices we pay (to culture, to the state, to capitalism) for our images and messages' (297), as we always pay for the technology in terms of suffering as Benjamin stated.

A reading of postcard can be stated as some way which hinges on the question of hypertext as a general economy of culture: the information technologies reminds us that communication is always sent, emitted, diffused, circulated. The postcard, in this sense, figures the process of transmission rather than inscription, sending rather than writing. Here I would suggest that postcard has the capability to show how a Derridean writing is always already a sending in the sense of a communication however

interrupted and interrupting. This makes clear that there is not a simple 'sending' or 'receiving' the message or any smooth understanding of the texts and images to be composed in an hypertext, rather there is a resistance in the medium itself as the postcard can not arrive without carrying the possibility of the non-arrival along with it.

This possibility deriving from an impossibility can be said to correspond to a resistance only as an art form, towards technology and its problematization of hypertext or any other instance, for art is the only way to fulfil such a demand of organizing such a resistance,. As we can repeat Klee's statement, art is 'waiting for a community which would never arrive'.

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<sup>i</sup> Landow employs this term to disparage the physical form of the book

<sup>ii</sup> Here the term 'memory' refers to the random access memory of computers that is abbreviated as RAM.

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