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A Neo-Derridean Critique of Hypertext: The Problem of Presence and Absence Between Text

and Hypertext

      Since the 1990s, the rise of digital media has greatly changed our understanding of how language operates through the ever shifting media for text. Many of the early digital hypertext theorists such as Lev Manovich, George Landow, and Ted Nelson have defined hypertext largely in opposition to traditional texts. J. David Bolter, another such theorist, writes that "what is unnatural in print becomes natural in the electronic medium" (*Writing Space,* 143). This dichotomy between what is natural or unnatural in print media versus digital media harkens back to the binary opposition of speech and language Jacques Derrida criticises in *Of Grammatology*, where he says "[the voice] has a relationship of essential and immediate proximity with the soul" whereas "[w]ritten language would establish the conventions linking other conventions among themselves" (*Of Grammatology*, 11). Using Derrida's system of binary oppositions between presence and absence, I offer a Neo-Derridean critique of hypertextual theory. Drawing from the definitions of hypertext provided by early hypertext theorists, I reconfigure this system of binaries to suggest that all hypertext is intertextual in the same manner as traditional texts. From this overarching argument that all text is hypertext, I propose two subsidiary arguments. The first argument is focused on the text-hypertext relationship in that while individual examples of text and hypertext can suggest vastly different experiences in consuming different media, I propose

that the effect of those experiences is vastly overstated due to the parochial view of the experience of text. I then shift to how the implications of Derrida's assertion that the metaphysical tradition that enforces such binaries is inescapable. Derrida argued the metaphysical tradition that values binary oppositions is inescapable, and the continued debates and comparisons between digital and traditional media demonstrate the pervasiveness of existing epistemological and ontological frameworks. Consequently, while the development of new digital media is a progression in technological evolution, these new media continue to maintain the ethnocentric centre as the Western metaphysics of presence becomes adapted into new technologies.

I will begin with a brief history outlining notable developments in the history of intertextual and hypertextual thought covering Mikhail Bakhtin up to Scott Rettberg. While the intertext and hypertext is closely related, especially during the early development of hypertext theory, they have always been viewed as separate theoretical categories. Hypertext is an incredibly broad term referring to hypertext as a medium, but also as a sub-genre, an apparatus, a digital system, an overall conception for computer programmed systems, and a theoretical framework. This broadness is not afforded to intertextuality, which exists purely as a theoretical concept regarding how texts refer to one another thematically, if not literally. What I intend to demonstrate in my exploration of the understanding of hypertext theory is how the hypertext is fundamentally understood in opposition to the intertext due to the mechanical nature of hypertext.

Shifting to an example that exists as both a text and as a hypertext, I will look at how the parochial view of the experience of texts limits our conception of hypertexts. Using Alfred, Lord

Tennyson's poem "In Memoriam A.H.H." in contrast to the *In Memoriam Web*, I will draw upon George Landow and N. Katherine Hayles' respective analyses of an antilinear proto-hypertextuality and close reading in a hyper context. In this section, I intend to demonstrate how despite the seemingly ever-broadening definition of what constitutes a text, literary studies "continues to view close reading of print texts as the field's essence" (*How We Think* 60). My argument is not that reading digitally and physically are the same, as they are demonstrably not -- digital texts contain "hyperlinks that draw attention away from the linear flow of an article [consequently] leading to the desire to skim everything because there is far too much material to pay close attention to anything" (*How We Think* 63). While it would be remiss to claim that there is scholarly agreement regarding the effects of digital reading, there is a soft consensus that suggests digital reading allows for a different readerly experience. What that experience may be continues to be a topic of debate. However, what I am interested in is what specifically denotes the difference between hypertext and text, and why the hypertext is seen as separate from the intertext. The hypertext affords the reader greater autonomy over how a text is to be read, but hypertext makes explicit the implicit intertextual references. The problem is that intertext is required to be a suggestion towards another text, not an outright connection. As the hypertext makes explicit such connections, hypertexts become excluded from the intertext. This interplay of explicit and implicit connections between texts as the defining feature excluding the hypertext from the intertext serves to demonstrate how arbitrarily the binary opposition between hypertext and traditional text is set up.

Finally, I will shift to a discussion on how the binary opposition between speech and writing and the Platonic suspicion of media is criticized by Derrida, how Derridean

deconstructionism in *Of Grammatology* relates to the binary between hypertext and traditional texts, and how despite Derrida's criticisms we are still trapped within the same Western metaphysics that Derrida pushes back against. Ultimately, Derrida's assertion that we cannot escape Western metaphysics remains intact as we have applied an old binary to new developments in media. Here, I will briefly look at how Plato sets up his opposition to writing and how it relates to a fear of new media before devolving into how the philosophical framework criticised by Derrida remains upheld. Given that texts and hypertexts are discussed in opposition to one another, Derrida's pessimism regarding our ability to supercede binary oppositions rings true. Because our discussions of texts and hypertexts are misconstrued within this metaphysical framework, even the most revolutionary technology leads us to remain embedded within this system of thought.

A History of Intertexts and Hypertexts

In order to discuss hypertextuality, it is important to first understand intertextuality due to the shared themes. In some ways, our understanding of intertextuality can be seen as a precursor to the hypertext. Despite the shifts in medium between intertextuality and hypertextuality, the "principles of multilinear reading, interrelating, annotating and cross-referencing, and indeed the the link, on which hypertext is formally based, are over 1,000 years old" (Ensslin 10). In looking at the similarities between intertext and hypertext, three key recurring themes emerge: the relationship between author and reader, the linking of texts, and multivocality. The first theorist to identify the layers of voices within narratives in text was Mikhail Bakhtin whose concepts of dialogism and multivocality established a proto-postmodernist basis for the development of

intertextuality in post-structuralist literary thought. Multivocality is the layering of voices in a text, constructed "not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses" (Bakhtin 18). This multivocality is the common denominator between Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Bakhtin. Within the polyphonic novel, the authorial authority is diminished and multivocality is achieved through "visualiz[ing] and portray[ing] personality as another, as someone else's personality, without making it lyrical for merging it with his own voice" (Bakhtin 13). The aforementioned voice is that of the author, whose voice is rendered obsolete in the polyphonic novel. The minimization of the authorial voice grants greater authority to the reader and the text itself. While Bakhtin's literary polyphony is concerned with the layering of multiple narratives within a single text, the decentering of the authorial voice allows the connectedness of the voices within the text to demonstrate how "each opinion really does become a living thing and is inseparable from an embodied human voice" (Bakhtin, 17).

Drawing heavily upon Bakhtin's dialogism, Julia Kristeva's conception of intertextuality is that "each word (text) is an intersection of word (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read" (Kristeva 37) which creates a "mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva 37) . Subsequently, it is implied that all texts are directly connected to each other. Although Kristeva first used the intertext as a literary term, she writes that Bakhtin replaced the concept of 'intersubjectivity' with the concept of 'intertextuality' by situating the text in the author's socio-historical context (Lesic-Thomas, 5). According to Tzvetan Todorov, Bakhtin's dialogism and Kristeva's intertext differ in that Bakhtin used dialogism "to refer to the actual verbal exchange between two interlocuters" while the intertext

was the "most general and inclusive term form for the relations between utterances" (Todorov qtd. in Lesic-Thomas 3). The relationship between the author and the reader is "a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (Kristeva 36) which gives the reader a degree of control over the writing of the text. The reader who is in dialogue with the text becomes a rewriter of the text as the reader superimposes one's own will on the text. The interconnectedness of texts is the vertical word status as "the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus" (Kristeva, 37). Although Kristeva has been criticized for misreading Bakhtin and "transform[ing] Bakhtin's concepts by causing them to be read in conjunction with ideas about textuality that were emerging in France" (Clayton and Rothstein 18), Kristeva still owes much to Bakhtinian multivocality. Kristeva's concept of intertextuality relies on readerly action which draws heavily upon the lack of centrality in the Bakhtinian dialogism. It is the absence of centrality which affords the reader control over how to read the text and emphasizes the text in relation to other texts.

Likewise, Barthes writes "what the intertext is: the impossibility of living outside the infinite text [...]: the book creates the meaning, the meaning creates life" (*The Pleasure of the Text* 36). Echoing Kristeva, Barthes cements the notion that the intertext is comprised of all texts at he shifts meaning from within the book to outside the book. The individual text must find meaning within the broader web of all texts. Considering that Barthes' author is dead, the reader is not a reader of text so much as he is a rewriter of texts. Within the intertext, the author is given diminished authority over the text as the reader is "the space on which all quotations that make

up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" ("The Death of the Author" 171).

Barthes differs from Kristeva in that Barthes views texts within the intertext to be much more closely intertwined. There is the implicit suggestion in Barthes that all texts are the same text. He writes that the "Death of the Father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures. If there is no longer a father, why tell stories? Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus?" (*The Pleasure of the Text* 47). In conflating all stories about the Father to Oepidus, Barthes suggests that all texts emerge from a shared premise. Barthian writing is more or less unoriginal given that anything the author wishes to convey is something that mimics something else that already exists. Despite the shifts in the understanding, Bakhtin, Kristeva, and Barthes's notions of intertextuality and the dialogism share the fluidity of authorship and texts existing only in relation to other texts within the intertwined system of texts. The decentering of authorship and textuality is highly conceptual, but it leads into the development of hypertext theory as this tortuous and abstract connection in the intertext is made determinate in hypertexts.

Hypertextuality, with its direct links connecting one webpage to another, can be seen as the actualisation of intertextual connectivity through a digital apparatus. The original definition of hypertext, as coined by Ted Nelson in 1963, reads "let me introduce the word hypertext to mean a body of written or pictorial material interconnected in such a complex way that it could not be presented or represented in paper" (*Computing Machinery,* 96; qtd. in Landow). Nelson further builds on this definition as "*non-sequential writing* -- text that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interaction screen" (*Literary Machines*, 3). There are two points which Nelson's hypertext fixates upon: technology and readerly authority. Nelson is

explicit about viewing paper as an inappropriate medium for hypertext; however, his definition of hypertext is a thematic continuation of intertext. A shift seemingly occurs in Nelson through his emphasis on non-sequential writing which affords greater authority to the reader though it is a logical continuation to move from Barthes' devaluation of the author to the exaltation of the reader. Thematically, Nelson follows the trends set by Kristeva and Barthes as his hypertext features the complex layers found in Bakhtin's multivocality, the author is diminished in favour of the reader, and connectivity between texts. What sets Nelson apart is his conviction that paper is no longer an adequate medium to share ideas; machinery is made necessary in order to bring connectivity beyond what can be afforded through paper.

Although there is a significant lapse between Nelson's early writings on hypertext and the wave of theorists who emerged during the 80s and 90s, the hypertext theorists at the beginning of the development of the World Wide Web during the 1990s maintained the connection between machinery and hypertext identified by Nelson. Machinery, as I will be using it, refers primarily to the ability to create digital links using a computer. Hypertext, according to Landow, is a combination of hypertext ("text composed of blocks of text [...] and the electronic links that join them" (*Hypertext 3.0,* 3)) and hypermedia (an extension of "the notion of the text in hypertext by including visual information, sound, animation, and other forms of data" (*Hypertext 3.0,* 3)). Landow acknowledges the relationship between hypertext and intertext, saying "[h]ypertext, which is a fundamentally intertextual system, has the capacity to emphasize intertextuality in a way that page-bound text in books cannot" (*Hypertext 3.0,* 55) which, like Nelson, demonstrates a conviction in the inadequacy of paper for the intertext. This conception of hypertext maintains the distinction between paper text and electronic machinery associated

with the notion of hypertext originated by Nelson. However, the claim that hypertext is intertextual in a manner beyond what can be offered by traditional text suggests that there is a fundamental divide between traditional text and hypertext. Without the electronic aspect, the implication is that text and hypertext exist in somewhat distinct and separate categories. That is not to say that there is a complete binary between text and hypertext as hypertext "reconceives conventional, long-held assumptions about authors and readers and the text they write and read" (*Hyper/text/theory* 1) without opposing such assumptions. Yet an opposition is created as while hypertext is viewed as text, not all texts are hypertext.

Like Landow, Jay Bolter emphasizes the multivocality that is fundamental to the user-oriented nature of hypertext systems. For Bolter, a "text as a network has no univocal sense; it is a multiplicity without the imposition of a principle of domination" (*Writing Space* 25). The capability for the existence of multiple pathways leading to multiple endings is a continuation from the death of Barthes' author as the reader/user is given complete control over, and agency within, the narrative created by the author. User agency is emphasized by Bolter, which feeds into the multivocality of the hypertext. With the creation of multiple pathways, the idea of multiple consciousnesses espoused by Bakhtin is actively practiced through the usage of hypertext systems. This is not exactly a parallel analogy as Bakhtin was pulling from the layered voices in Dostoevsky's novels. Dostoevsky, as the sole author of his novels, has full authority over the layering of his work. There are several consciousnesses at play in Dostoevsky, but Doestoevsky is the puppet master manipulating the interactions of each consciousness. By contrast, the layered voices in Bolter's hypertext come about through the stepping back of the author/creator. In the hypertext, the role of creator is that of a distant parent. The creator

establishes a system that allows users to interact on their own terms and create their own pathways of understanding the text, not to dictate each layer of consciousness. The creator maintains the system, but has limited interference within it.

Scholarly definitions of hypertext further developed throughout the naughts to become more inclusive of non-traditional media for text while retaining a focus on the electronic aspect of hypertext. Lev Manovich has said that "the computer media revolution affects [...] all types of media -- texts, still images, moving images, sound, and spatial constructions" (*Language of New Media* 19). Borrowing from Halasz and Schwartz, Manovich also says hypermedia systems "provide their users with the ability to create, manipulate, and/or examine a network of information-containing nodes interconnected by relational links" (Halasz and Schwartz qtd. in Manovich 40-41). Hypertextual systems become further defined by individual user authority, emphasizing the role of what would be the "reader" in traditional texts.

Jaishree Odin further broadens what is considered hypertext as she uses hypertext "specifically from electronic or film narratives in which discontinuity is a major artistic strategy, but [she] also use[s] it as a metaphor for describing the complexity of postmodern culture, where different cultures, discourses, and media are in constant interaction with one another against the background of technocapitalism" (2). While Odin has broadened the understanding of hypertext beyond what can be loaded onto an internet browser, Odin -- like her predecessors -- is still tied down to the relationship between hypertext and machines as she specifically notes the importance of electronic narratives in hypertext. Although Odin has also connected hypertext more closely to socio-cultural factors, the emphasis on machines excludes traditional texts which parallels the text-hypertext opposition in Landow. Despite the development of hypertext theory,

the themes shared in intertext theory continue to resonate in Odin. The relationship between the author and reader has become such that hypertext is "a complex network of signs that presents texts and images in an order than the artist has shaped but which the viewer chooses and reshapes" (Joyce qtd. in Odin 31). The reader is given complete agency over the hypertext within the limits set by the author. The narrative in hypertext is not a singular narrative, but plural narratives. That said, Odin's hypertext is less concerned with the narrative itself; rather, Odin suggests the process of exploring a hypertext narrative supersedes the narrative itself as "hypertextual tracing itself becomes the object of navigation, so that the discrete nodes are subordinated to the lines of traversal" (Odin 31). By minimizing the narrative structure in favour of narrative exploration, Odin's conception of hypertext is a direct actualisation of the multivocality and linking of texts found in earlier intertext theories.

Recent hypertext theorists, such as Scott Rettberg, and current digital media scholars, such as Astrid Ensslin, have largely maintained the connection between hypertext and intertext while also maintaining the importance of machinery in the creation of hypertext. Rettberg classifies hypertext fiction as a form of electronic literature, defined as "native to the digital environment -- for the most part they could not easily be produced or consumed in print literature" (5) which re-emphasizes the centrality of machinery to hypertext systems as "our understanding of electronic literature must be informed by our understanding of the technological context in which it is produced" (11). The classification of hypertext fiction as a subcategory of electronic literature is a departure from previous theorists as Rettberg goes beyond the idea of hypertext as a genre of text and identifies clear delineations within various forms of digital media. That said, Rettberg's subcategories of electronic literature is not an

entirely new idea as he has been developing the idea of subgenres of digital media since 1999 as a founding member of the Electronic Literature Organization (Rettberg 4). Likewise, Ensslin makes the similar observation that hypertexts are formally based on the link (Ensslin 10) which allows for non-hyperlink based digital texts to exist outside of the umbrella of hypertext. Rettberg and Ensslin have consequently complicated the notion of a hypertext in a different direction from their predecessors. While Odin branched out the definition of hypertext itself to become more inclusive of socio-cultural factors and media beyond what has traditionally been considered hypertext (such as film), Rettberg and Ensslin have expanded our understanding of hypertext by limiting the direct definition of a hypertext. Through this limitation, there is an implicit acknowledgement that the digital aspect of hypertext should not be its sole defining feature. If other genres of electronic literature can exist, then hypertext itself should not be framed in opposition to the traditional text. Interestingly, it is worth noting that while hypertext can be viewed as having derived out of the notion of intertextuality, the hypertext is rarely considered to be part of the intertext. The intertext, it seems, remains limited to traditional media.

Clarification of Terms

For the purposes of this paper, hypertext will refer to a description provided by N. Katherine Hayles wherein a hypertext is identified by three central characteristics: "multiple reading paths; text that is chunked together in some way [as lexia on the computer]; and some kind of linking mechanism that connects the chunks together so as to create multiple reading paths" ("Transformation of Narrative" 21). There are limitations to using such a narrow definition as there are media such as video games, which could have easily been classified into

an earlier definition provided by Nelson or Landow, are somewhat of a stretch in Hayles'
definition. However, I will be excluding video games from my study as I am interested solely in
the literary and philosophical ramifications of hypertext as it relates to the intertext. Conversely,
while this is an older definition from 2001, Hayles' definition is closely related to Ensslin's
definition of hypertext -- a text which is based on the hyperlink (10) -- with the caveat in that
Hayles presents the connectivity of divergent reading paths as the defining feature of the
hypertext. However, as Ensslin's definition specifically denotes the function of the hyperlink as
the defining feature of the hypertext, it is too narrow as the role of a specific function of the
machine is too explicitly embedded in Ensslin. In using hypertext specifically in reference to
how hypertexts are interconnected, I aim to focus on the interconnectivity across texts and
hypertexts in order to create a closer and more explicit relationship *between* intertext and
hypertext. This will build on the work of numerous scholars who have focused on connectivity
within intertexts and hypertexts. As such, while my definition of hypertext is such that it is
directly connected to a machine that makes digital texts possible, my usage of intertext refers
only to traditional texts that are not associated with machinery. References to hypertextual
theory, rather than the hypertext as a genre, will be demarcated as such.

To contrast the hypertext, the intertext will address the references across traditional texts
as defined by Kristeva and Barthes. The intertext is composed of traditional texts which are
non-digital and do not require the function of machines. Note that hypertext has been used to
refer to both a single hypertext in addition to the interconnected hypertext system comprised of
multiple singular hypertexts. Conversely, the intertext refers solely to the interconnected system
of shared ideas comprised of multiple singular texts. As such, the hypertext is comparable to

both the intertext and a singular text. Within the limitations of this paper, a text refers primarily to texts associated with traditional media. In particular, I will be focusing on Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem "In Memoriam A.H.H." as it appears in the medium of a book and then contrast it with the hypertext system of Tennyson's poetry established by George Landow through the *In Memoriam Web*.

While much of the criticisms regarding hypertext and hypertextual theory have been oriented around the ways in which hypertext has revolutionized our understanding of text and textuality, the relationship between intertext and hypertext is seen to overlap regarding the relationship between author and reader, the linking of texts, and multivocality. As seen through the examples of Landow, Odin, and Rettberg, the key difference that is consistently identified between intertext and hypertext is in the digitization of hypertext: the machine component. This digitization allows for hyperlinks in web pages to take the reader directly from one page to another, creating a network of hypertexts directly interconnected with one another. While Odin and Manovich broadened the hypertext to be inclusive of other media beyond a pure HTML webpage, Rettberg and Ensslin limited the hypertext as only one example of a digital text. However, I will eschew discussing the nature and scope of hypertext. Rather, I am interested in how the relationship between traditional text and hypertext relates to the Derridean metaphysics of presence.

Tennyson, the *Web*, and Limitations

Looking at Tennyson's poem "In Memoriam," one can easily observe the many references to Romantic tropes, Biblical imagery, and historical and personal events. As a text, its

intertextuality is something inherent and central to the existence of the text. At the same time, Tennyson's authorial persona is especially prominent throughout the poem as it is an elegy to his friend, Arthur Henry Hallam. Tennyson makes a specific autobiographical reference in the final stanza of canto VI:

> "O what to her shall be the end?
>
> And what to me remains of good?
>
> To her, perpetual maidenhood,
>
> And unto me no second friend." (Tennyson, 208)

The "her" in question is Tennyson's sister, who was engaged to Arthur Henry Hallam. Such a clear autobiographical note may appear to be at odds with the minimized authorial persona in the intertext, according to Kristeva and Barthes. After all, "In Memoriam" is a clear chronological exploration of Tennyson's experience of grief. That said, Tennyson himself argued against the idea that "In Memoriam" is a personal poem saying "it is rather the cry of the whole human race than mine. [...] it is a very impersonal poem, as well as personal" (Tennyson 582). Furthermore, I would argue that the minimization of authorial persona is not from the direct relation of the author to the subject of one's text. Rather, the minimization of the authorial persona comes from the poetic techniques that are inspired by Tennyson's predecessors. Tennyson's authorial persona in "In Memoriam" is not determined solely, nor amplified, through the autobiographical detail so much as it is diminished through the style of his elegy. The grief is personal, but the tools used to convey that grief are not. Tennyson "borrows from Wordsworth's elegies to help him conceive and write the poem, weaving their language and phrasing into new configurations and connections" (Thomas 81). The wording of the final lines "And one far-off divine event/To

which the whole creation moves" (Tennyson 292) is inspired by Wordsworth. Given that the "borrowings from Wordsworth form a chamber of echoes that Wordsworth harnesses, reworks, reconfigures, replays in a different context and different time" (Thomas 81), the intertextuality of "In Memoriam" is central to the structure of the poem yet that intertextuality remains largely unacknowledged by the reader.

Once transferred to a different medium, the relationship of "In Memoriam" to the intertext changes from an implicit connection to an explicit connection. In the printed book medium of "In Memoriam," the reader is left largely unaware of the extent to which the intertext is at play in Tennyson's work even with limited endnotes. As "hypertext has the power to change the way in which we understand and experience texts" ("Hypertext in Literary Education, Criticism, and Scholarship" 174), the role of the reader becomes increasingly powerful. While the reader of Tennyson's book has the same agency as the reader of Tennyson's hypertext, the reader of the book does not have the same explicit experience of the plethora of ways in which the text is connected to other texts and events.

Landow uses the example of a webpage he created for the purposes of teaching "In Memoriam" to talk about the hypertext. Yet, once "In Memoriam" appears in a digital form on the webpage, the now digital poem belongs to the hypertext. Landow established the *In Memoriam Web* to use "electronic links to map and hence reify a text's internal and external allusions and references -- its inter-and-intra-textuality" (*Hypertext 3.0,* 71). Here, the reader becomes more present as they are able to leave their marks on a hypertextual "In Memoriam," but the text becomes less present as it is ever changing. As noted by Hayles (*How We Think* 73) and Ensslin (11), Landow is optimistic about the increasing usage of hypertext systems. It is

worth reiterating that Landow did much on his work on hypertext during a period when there was much optimism regarding the development of the internet. However, as it relates to Derrida, one might consider that Derrida has been described as the theorist who best "understands that electronic computing and other changes in media had eroded the power of the linear model and the book as related culturally dominant paradigms" (*Hypertext 3.0,* 67). In establishing blocks of texts in hyperlinks that can explain references in "In Memoriam" directly through the digital means, it would not be unreasonable to say that Landow has succeeded in disrupting a linear model of reading. Instead of reading "In Memoriam" without interruptions, as intended, the presence of the hyperlink is itself an interruption. One could reasonably state that the reader of "In Memoriam" in a traditional textual format could likewise interrupt the linear model. When holding the physical book, the reader retains one's agency to interrupt the linearity to flip between endnotes and the intended text. While Landow suggested that the inclusion of hyperlinks in the *In Memoriam Web* would be conducive to situating readers within the intertext to create direct links between Tennyson's writing and his intertextual connections ("Hypertext in Literary Education" 177), research has since found the contrary to be true. As cited by Hayles:

> "[A study led by Erping Zhu at] the University of Michigan had test subjects read
>
> the same online passage but varied the number of links. As the number of links
>
> increased, comprehension declined, as measured by writing a summary and
>
> completing a multiple choice test." (*How We Think* 63)

It seems, then, that the experience of reading of hypertext affects the reader differently than the traditional text.

The problem is that what Landow has actually done is set up the hypertext of "In Memoriam" in binary opposition with the traditional text medium of "In Memoriam". As "this hypertext presentation of Tennyson's poem also contains a heavily linked graphic overview of the poem's literary relations -- its intertextual relations, sources, analogues, confluences, and influences" (*Hypertext 3.0,* 75), the idea of the hypertext becomes framed as a derivative of text. This comparison becomes an issue of scale as what is a hypertext is known only in relation to a traditional text. Landow asserts that

> "combinations of literary homage to a predecessor text and claims to rival it have been a part of literature in the West at least since the ancient Greeks. But the physical separation between texts characteristic of earlier, non-electronic information technologies required that their forms of linking -- allusion and contextualization--employ indicators within the text" (*Hypertext 3.0,* 193)

This focus on the existent literary tradition emphasizes how there appears to be an undertone of subtlety required in the intertext. The idea of literary homage through non-electronic technologies calls back to exactly what the intertext is, as conceived by Kristeva and Barthes. What the hypertext does, in the *In Memoriam Web*, is make explicit those connections. Without the subtlety, a text-made-hypertext no longer fits within an intertextual framework because those indicators are no longer within the text. Indicators, denoted through hyperlinks, are made explicit and it is this explicitness that arbitrarily delineates the difference between a hypertext and the traditional text. Derrida would reject the hypertext as an intertext. In being made explicit, the hypertext rejects how "the movements of deconstruction are not interested in [*solliciter*] structures from the outside" (*Of Grammatology* 25). For Derrida, reading deconstructively in *a*

certain way is a means by which to read from within the text that inhabits the text. The hypertextual reading of Tennyson offered by the *In Memoriam Web* takes reading outside the text due to the hyperlinked web page. As such, Tennyson as a hypertext is rejected from intertextuality due to the hyperlinks taking away a perceived "text-ness" that exists in the physical form that allows for implicit references. *In Memoriam Web* is consequently viewed as less present because it lacks the subtlety that manifests in a traditional book.

How Philosophy Permeates Media

In order to understand my overarching argument regarding the arbitrary division between hypertext and intertext through a Derridean lens, one must first look at Platonian notions of media. Plato has a deep suspicion of a new media, as he views media as an active ingredient that affects and hinders communication. This is exhibited by his deep suspicion of writing in the *Phaedrus*. Regarding writing, Plato says "it is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance" (*Phaedrus* 157). The idea that writing is inferior to the spoken word is further emphasized through the representation of writing as dead language and the orphaned, bastard child of speech. As Plato continues:

> "Oratory is the art of enchanting the soul, and therefore he who would be an
>
> orator has to learn the differences of human souls -- they are so many and of
>
> such a nature, and from them come the differences between man and man. [...]
>
> he who knows all this, and knows also when he should speak and when he
>
> should refrain, and when he should use pithy sayings, pathetic appeals,

sensational effects, and all the other modes of speech which he has learned

[...] then he is a master of his art." (*Phaedrus* trans. Jowett).

Oration is depicted as a superior media due to the ability for the orator to tailor one's words to the audience. For a disinterested audience, the orator knows he must re-engage the audience; for a confused audience, the orator must clarify his words. As the orator acts in dialogue with the audience, both audience and orator are able to influence each other. Plato's critique of writing, as a then-new media, rests on the belief that writing is dead speech. Writing is likened to painting, which "stand before us as though they were alive: but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence" (*Phaedrus* 158). There is no room for the possibility of a critical reader for Plato. This leads to Plato's characterization of writing as the orphaned illegitimate child of speech which creates a dichotomy between speech and writing wherein speech is language and writing is not. A written work that is "ill-treated and unfairly abused always needs its parent to come to its help, being unable to defend or help itself" (*Phaedrus* 158) is illegitimate because writing cannot justify itself or respond to criticism. Not only does Plato demonstrate his lack of faith in hermeneutics, Plato also reflects a deep suspicion towards new media. This suspicion is closely related to the Platonian theory of forms as Plato establishes a hierarchy of media that places writing at the bottom.

The Platonic theory of forms' privileging of speech as a medium closer to the pure truth is a hierarchical model that devalues new media genres. The truth can only be found in the pure form. This devalues human creations as "if he does not make that which exists he cannot make true existence, but only some semblance of existence; and if anyone where to say that the work of the maker of the bed, or of any other workman, has real existence, he could hardly be

supposed to be speaking the truth" (*Republic* 278). Since humans do not have the means to create existence, "work too is an indistinct expression of truth" (*Republic* 278). Regarding language, speech is a step down from the pure truth as it can only indistinctly refer to the truth. However, it is closer to the truth than writing as "it is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance" (*Phaedrus* 157). As writing is merely a reflection of a reflection of the truth, writing becomes more dishonest than speech because it is a step away from the pure truth. This opposition between speech and writing is an example of what Derrida terms a binary opposition. In terms of media, this binary opposition can be complicated if one considers that Plato would view the creation of hypertext on a non-physical format as another step away from the truth. Although Derrida does not make a direct critique of the Platonic form in *Of Grammatology*, the hierarchy of media is closely related to the theory of forms. As Plato has influenced nearly the entirety of Western philosophical thought, his views on speech as a superior medium to writing have persisted through the development of Western philosophy.

While Plato has a very specific critique for a singular form of media that Derrida is responding to, the idea that a new form of media would take us further from the truth is reflected in the discourse surrounding traditional text and hypertext. Just as there is a binary opposition between speech and writing, a binary opposition has now developed between printed text and digital displays of text. It is not necessarily a Platonic truth that is at stake now; rather, it is a broader notion of authenticity. Within the Platonic framework, the authorial relationship, possibility of multivocality, and the interconnectivity of texts exist in a specific static space.

Although Plato does not discuss authorship much beyond dismissing the author as the distant parent of a writing, Plato does state that "once a thing is put into writing, the composition

[...] drifts all over the place, getting into the hands of not only those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong" (*Phaedrus* 158). Authorship is not an issue for Plato in the way it was for Bakhtin and the post-structuralists but the existence of an author has value insofar as they can speak for and explain the contents of the written work. Plato's concern with who is allowed to read the text brings forth two observations: the author has lost control over who has access to the work, and a significant number of readers lack the ability to critically process the written word. The possibility of hermeneutics is limited as Plato is fixated on the absence of the author. For Plato, multivocality is not an issue within the text; in terms of a reader-oriented multivocality, they are unable to change the text and the text is equally unable to respond to them. Interconnectivity between texts is seemingly unfathomable for Plato. Since writing is "dead discourse" which contrasts the "living speech " (*Phaedrus* 159), the idea that written texts can exist in dialogue with other written texts contradicts Plato's understanding of writing. These limitations come about as a consequence of Plato's static view of writing: because it cannot literally respond to the reader, writing is merely the mirror image of the spoken word. Writing relies on spoken language to receive definition and is subservient to how the spoken language frames and highlights the text.

This static discourse of writing conceived by Plato becomes a narrative of language as a superior medium that persists throughout the Western philosophical tradition and is exactly what Derrida challenges. To understand how this is done, it is necessary to examine the Derridean concept of presence as it pertains to writing. The Derridean presence functions on the binary opposition of presence and absence. Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, is interested in how the

foundational instability caused by presence has prioritized speech over writing as he says "the epistemological phonologism establishing a science as a master-model that presupposes a *linguistic* and *metaphysical* phonologism that raises voice above writing" (111). The arbitrary valuing of one medium over another is the result of a philosophical tradition, rather than an inherent and non-arbitrary value in a medium. Just as Derrida concludes that all writing is language, I intend to demonstrate how the hypertext belongs to the intertext as much as traditional texts. The issue with the problem of presence and absence in hypertext and text, as I will demonstrate, is that it suggests Derrida was correct in his assertion regarding the impossibility of transcending the ethnocentric metaphysical model that Western philosophy is grounded in.

Derrida's approach to the problem of speech and writing assumes it is one that is deeply rooted in Western philosophical history. This dichotomy is established by Plato between old and new media and has since become a baseline for all new media. Walter Benjamin's critique of cinema demonstrates this binary as film is characterised as the process of screaming of film "lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition" (Benjamin 221) and this shattering is seen in hypertext as "today we are in the middle of a new media revolution [...][which] is arguably more profound than the previous ones" (Manovich 19). The development of new media is not in itself a new development, yet each time we face new media as though it will upend the social fabric. To a degree, that is true. The media revolutions identified by Manovich include the invention of the printing press and the development of photography which have had insurmountable effects on the development of our societies. However, just as media has developed and evolved over time, so too has the nature of western metaphysics. Even with its changes, western metaphysics has

maintained its foundational dichotomous framework as a means by which to understand new media.

In her Afterword to *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak describes a "young Derrida [who] writes in the hope that cybernetics and informatics will join hands with a philosophy defeating itself" (345). With hindsight, the development of such technologies has not resulted in Western philosophy re-evaluating its own foundational instabilities. That is not to suggest that new technologies of media have changed nothing. One factor behind Derrida's metaphysics of presence is the question of eurocentrism. He opens *Of Grammatology* with the question of ethnocentrism, saying "this triple exergue is intended not only to focus attention on the ethnocentrism which, everywhere and always, had to control the concept of writing" (3). The increasing accessibility of media and writing have made challenging ethnocentrist ideas an increasingly achievable feat. Technological developments in media have allowed the voice to become dispersed amongst broader populations, serving to lower the standards upheld by traditional media gatekeeping, and making it easier to challenge the tradition of ethnocentrism. However, the problem through the act of challenging ethnocentrism as the act paradoxically forces the acknowledgement that ethnocentrism is the present standard. While new technologies facilitate the re-centring of such ideas, the same Western metaphysics of presence critiqued by Derrida remains the centre. As hypertext and text evolve to become parallel to writing and speech, it is Derrida's belief that the metaphysical tradition cannot be superseded that becomes prophetic. If "it is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can therefore only announce itself, *present* itself, in the species of monstrosity" (*Of Grammatology* 5), then the

advancements made through hypertext and other digital media are only a continuation of the aforementioned "constituted normality."

Conclusion

The question of new media is not a new question. Each successive progression in the development of a new media has raised questions and created new contradictions within our frameworks for understanding. Plato is the original skeptic, questioning the validity of writing, but this skepticism of new media has always and will continue to dominate our nodes for understanding. In my analysis, I looked at how the hypertext emerges out of intertextual themes to become oppositional to the intertext.

While much of the criticisms regarding hypertext and hypertextual theory have been oriented around the ways in which hypertext has revolutionized our understanding of text and textuality, the relationship between intertext and hypertext is seen to overlap regarding the relationship between author and reader, the linking of texts, and multivocality. As seen through the examples of Landow, Odin, and Rettberg, the key difference that is consistently identified between intertext and hypertext is in the digitization of hypertext. This digitization allows for hyperlinks in web pages to take the reader directly from one page to another, creating a network of hypertexts directly interconnected with one another. While Odin and Manovich broadened the hypertext to be inclusive of other media beyond a pure HTML webpage, Rettberg and Ensslin limited the hypertext as only one example of a digital text. These multifaceted descriptors of hypertexts demonstrates how difficult it is to point at a work and say, definitively, that it is a hypertext. The same problem exists when identifying texts. Consequently, the idea that

hypertexts and traditional texts can be easily placed in opposition to one another is a consequence of the Western metaphysics of presences that forces understanding through the creation arbitrary binaries.

The problem of how new media functions in relation to hegemonic forces is not a new question either. Even beyond the purely Derridean notion of the western metaphysical framework, new media is only able to be understood in relation to existing media which forces us to conceive of new media through binary oppositions. When cinema was a new medium, Benjamin's optimism was captured in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" wherein cinema became this grand destructor of the aura that allowed for exhibitionary work over cult value. Yet, hindsight has since demonstrated to us that the revolutionary factor inherent to cinema is not nearly as subversive as Benjamin perceived it to be. Instead, cinema became folded into the pre-existing and dominant hegemonic framework. The development of cinema was opposed to photography, which was in turn opposed to painting, which was in turn opposed -- by Plato -- to nature. Likewise, hypertext has emerged in opposition to the written text, which opposed the voice, which opposed the Form. Seeing as the oppositional framework of western metaphysics continues to dominate the ways in which media is understood today, the metaphysics of presence continue to remain the at the centre of each new medium. Despite the relative democratization of hypertext in further eschewing traditional notions of authorship and textuality, its presence within this metaphysical framework demonstrates how all-encompassing the Western metaphysical tradition is. Ultimately, Derrida's assertion regarding the impossibility of superseding Western metaphysics has become the

Cassandra as we continue to speak of reading deconstructively as if escaping this metaphysical framework is a possibility from within.

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