REMEDIATING THE REMEDIATED:
PRINTED PROSE IN THE AGE OF HYPERTEXT

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Abstract

The article argues that with the spreading of computer hypertext into the social sphere, hypertext is no longer merely a writing technique or an organising principle; it becomes the logic implicit in the functioning of postmodern[1] societies. Its actualisation can be performed via any medium - TV, internet, radio or print. Based on instances from 1990s and early 2000s printed American fiction, the paper examines the ways in which print already is hypertextual, and attempts to provide an insight into the future of printed literature in an era no longer governed by the Modern Age principles and paradigms.

REMEDIATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS: HYPERTEXT TECHNIQUE VS. HYPERTEXTUAL LOGIC

It has been a while – at least in the fields of contemporary critical theory and new media – since the term "remediation" referred to its original meanings of administering medicine and removing pollutants from environmental media. Especially when appearing in the vicinity of term "hypertext" as in the title of this paper, the word automatically brings to mind the connotation introduced by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their seminal 1999 work on hypertextual theory *Remediation: Understanding New Media,* and further developed in Bolter's *Writing Space*, where he defines it as a shift in which "a newer medium takes the place of an older one, borrowing and reorganizing the characteristics of writing in the older medium and reforming its cultural space" (23).

The concept Bolter and Grusin are referring to is not new – the refashioning of existing writing spaces as a result of the emergence of new technologies and new media can be observed since the invention of the papyrus roll. What is new, however, is the nature of the medium that triggered the need to apply a primarily biological concept to the field of new media studies in the first place – namely electronic writing

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[1] I'm using terms postmodern and Postmodernity with the meaning of the epoch following the Modern Age, anticipating a Geistesgeschichte frame no longer describable with the Modern Age understanding of the basic paradigms: subject as the immanent transcendence, and the truth and reality of such situation (cf. Kos 1995 7, 11, and Krevel 2005 153).

and computer hypertext.[2] Grusin and Bolter develop their concept of remediation with regard to the relation between the old medium – print, and the new medium – hypertext, or, specifically, observing the imprinting of print in hypertext. As such hypertext is generally observed and studied as expression of print through the electronic medium, which could, in fact, be considered the prevailing view among the researchers in the field of hypertext from Robert Coover and Michael Joyce to Espen Aarseth, George Landow or Marie-Laure Ryan.

The main problem with such approach, however, is that the authors in question all too easily fall into the trap they are warning against, namely, reducing the phenomenon of hypertext to merely a writing technique, ignoring both the specifics of the medium as well as the governing mechanisms and characteristics of its social, political and cultural environment. When discussing its practical aspects, they are often lured into the more familiar critical discourse, which is still fundamentally defined by the intrinsically Cartesian linearity and hierarchical, cause-effect structuring. Thus when speculating on the merely theoretical level, Bolter, for example, typically claims that

> [i]t is not a question of seeing writing as an external technological force that influences or changes cultural practice; instead, writing is always a part of culture. It is probably best to understand all technologies in this way: technologies do not determine the course of culture or society, because they are not separate agents that can act on culture from the outside (19).

Nevertheless, when proceeding from the field of theory to the level of actual practice, he seems to overlook the implications of the statement with regard to the intrinsic *modus operandi* of hypertext[3], and – like Landow in *Hypertext 2.0* – discusses Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and Jorge Luis Borges' short story "Library of Babel" from *Ficciones* as early examples of hypertext. But if Landow cautiously suggests the works as examples of "quasi hypertextuality" (182), emphasising that such approach "uses hypertext as a lens, or a new agent of perception" (*ibid.*), employed predominantly to "make the medium seem less threatening to students of literature and literary theory" (*ibid.*), Bolter analyzes the narratives in terms of their flexibility, instability and interactivity. Thus he is explicitly treating hypertext as merely an organizing principle, the logic of which can be applied and exercised at random. Such attitude is, of course, in direct opposition to the realisation that I nevertheless consider central to both Bolter's overall message – leaving aside occasional slips into Cartesian logic like the one referred to above – as

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[2] As I will show on the following pages, especially when discussing the changes occurring in the field of metaphorics and style since the 1980s, the shift referred to was inevitable within the social, economic and cultural environment, the existence of which is essentially enabled by the media.

[3] In *Writing Space*, Bolter explains hypertext as a model for any type of electronic writing:
At present, electronic (or digital) writing describes a larger category than hypertext or hypermedia. Electronic writing includes word processing, e-mail, listservs, chat rooms, and MUDs and MOOs, none of which have the node and link structure of classic hypertext […]. [A]ll electronic writing shares important qualities with hypertext (flexibility, instability, interactivity), so that hypertext, once again in the form of the World Wide Web, serves a paradigm for our cultural experience with electronic writing (xiii, xiv).

well as to the very relevance of discussing the future of printed book in the age of hypertext at all: "The behaviour of the writing space becomes a metaphor for the human mind as well as for human social interaction" (13).

Implicit in this statement is namely the aim of this essay, which is to seemingly invert the standard direction of remediation and in turn consider print as the refashioning of hypertext in order to examine the possibility of a printed book of fiction in a social, cultural and economic environment defined by the electronic media. Such approach, of course, demands from the electronic writing to be no less than the defining cultural paradigm of Postmodernity, and not merely a writing technique, which is the initial point I hope to establish through a brief investigation of those critical approaches and theories of Postmodernity that have found their realisation in the practice of our every day existence.

HYPERREALITY AND HYPERTEXT

Since the days when television became the *sine qua non* piece of household equipment, a lot has been said about the profound and above all destructive effects of electronic technologies on the future of printed book, especially printed prose. The concerns only intensified with the emergence and spread of computer hypertext within the everyday social reality of individuals. Both the hypertext enthusiasts and its fiercest critics seem to share the opinion that hypertext will in some decisive way affect the notion of printed literature. The enthusiasts predict its extinction, stressing the multisensory and interactive appeal of electronic fiction,[4] while the traditionalists see the spreading of hypertext as a potentially fatal threat to the concept and institution of literature altogether,[5] and therefore to be protested and fought against at all cost.

The scenario that I would like to propose is, however, much less catastrophic. I believe that with the spreading of computer hypertext into the social sphere, hypertext ceases to be merely a writing technique or an organizing principle: it becomes the logic governing each and every sphere of our contemporary, postmodern society. As such, it is no longer limited to the computer; it turns into the mode of thinking, which is at work within any existing medium – printed literature being no exception.

From the point of view of printed tradition, the rise of hypertext and its rapid spread to the social and cultural spheres in the second half of the 1980s and especially in the 1990s may have seemed shocking, revolutionary and above all devastating to the

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[4] Raymond Kurzweil, like most electronic technology enthusiasts, predicts that printed books will not stand a chance against the electronic books of the 21st century, as the latter

> will have enormous advantages, with pictures that can move and interact with the user, increasingly intelligent search paradigms, simulated environments that the user can enter and explore, and vast quantities of accessible materials. Yet vital to its ability to truly make the paper book obsolete is that the essential qualities of paper and ink will have been fully matched. The book will enter obsolescence, although because of its long history and enormous installed base, it will linger for a couple of decades before reaching antiquity (qtd. in Bolter 2001 4).

[5] A typical example of such grim predictions is Swen Birkerts' mourning of traditional – printed – literary culture in his 1992 *Gutenberg Elegies*: "A change is upon us – nothing could be clearer. The printed word is part of the vestigial order that we are moving away from – by choice and by societal compulsion" (118).

existing notions of culture and – probably most acutely – literature. However, from the broader perspective of social, cultural and economic development after the Second World War, hypertext is hardly a surprising concept as the principle at its core seems to embody the mechanisms theoreticians from various fields of humanistic studies have been identifying as the defining paradigms of Postmodernity for at least the last thirty years. In this respect, I am primarily referring to the philosophical framework developed by Jean Baudrillard, which, as we will see, literally coincides with the very definition of hypertext; but the structural principle and functioning of hypertext are also implicit in the systems developed by such diverse theoreticians and thinkers as Jameson, Lyotard, Debord, McLuhan, Deleuze and Guattari,[6] and, as Landow shows in his study of hypertext from the point of view of existing – primarily poststructuralist – critical theories, even in Foucault, Bakhtin and particularly Derrida (33-35).

However, hypertext as a flexible, instable and interactive system that can "encompass, incorporate or supersede many other user interface paradigms like menus and command lines, and can be used to access both static collections of cross-referenced documents and interactive applications"[7] most literally corresponds to Jean Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality. Therefore it seems only logical to illustrate the point implicit in the previous paragraph – namely that hypertext and its structural logic provide an insight into the metaphysical structuring of Postmodernity – relying on the concepts and terminology he has developed.

Baudrillard defines hyperreality as reality created from third order simulacra, where the copy, the model, is before the original. From the point of view of our everyday lives such reality is simply the reality created from information – essentially copies – we receive via media. Our quotidian existence is namely so completely permeated with information, their rendering, mediation and manipulation that it is virtually impossible to verify them all, which is why we verify each new cluster of data against the systems of information that have already become part of hyperreality instead. Information thus functions as the building block of reality.

The situation is a consequence of the shift of production relations, increasingly coming to effect after the Second World War, with objects of consumption taking on their meaning "in their differential relation to other signs" (Baudrillard 1981 66), and functioning as signifiers. As such they acquire social meaning and ultimately serve as the basis of identity creation. With that all the aspects of reality and consequently subjectivity are essentially network systems of differential signs that can be arbitrarily

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[6] I'm referring to Jameson's concept of culturalisation of all the aspects of social life within postmodern situation (cf. Krevel 45-46), Lyotard's model of the self as a node in an information network, Debord's theory of society of spectacle, Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of rhizome, and above all the famous McLuhan's statement in his *The Medium is the Massage* that "[s]ocieties have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication" (8).

[7] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypertext (6 June 2006). In quoting free online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, I'm fully aware of the general academic scepticism concerning its credibility. Nevertheless, a recent comparative study of entries in Wikipedia and in online edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica by *Nature* journal has shown that the reliability and accuracy of topics in Wikipedia are only slightly smaller than those of Encyclopaedia Britannica: »[T]he average science entry in Wikipedia contained around four inaccuracies; Britannica, around three« (Cauchi).

combined, dismantled and shifted according to one's preferences, which brings us back to the *modus operandi* of hypertext. In other words: creation, structuring and functioning of contemporary reality and subjectivity rely upon the same logic as our predominant writing technique.

Since our preferences are conditioned by the number of information received on the given aspect of reality, the more information one obtains on something and the more stable a system the latter create, the more real something is. The media are then crucial for the formation of reality. They are also subject to one's interests and preferences: we choose our favourite medium in much the same way and according to the same principles as our preferred brand of clothing, make of car or our favourite TV program. At this point it is already clear that hypertext fulfils a double function. On the one hand, it embodies the "cultural logic of late capitalism" or "hyperreality" or whatever we choose to call the social, economic and cultural reality of our every day existence, and as such provides the perfect medium for commenting on it. On the other hand, its omnipresence and ubiquitous usage further accelerate the logic of its functioning into the social sphere, truly determining our society in McLuhan's sense.

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With that we can finally articulate the central assumption of this study: namely, if the invention of print coincided with the dawning of the Modern Age, residing upon and endorsing the defining Cartesian paradigms of linearity and hierarchisation, hypertext seems to be coinciding with postmodern fragmentation, decentralisation, rhizomatous structuring and fluidity. Consequently, within such circumstances, printed book has a future only if it can adapt to as well as integrate the principles of absolute flexibility, instability and interactivity. In other words: printed literature has a future only if it can remediate hypertext.

The most obvious and practical method to establish whether and how such remediation is possible seems to be the application of the hypertextual logic to the traditional, print governed understanding of literature. In order to do that, let us first indicate those characteristics of the existing hypertextual electronic fiction, which seem the most at odds with the foundations upon which the institution of traditional literature resides. Then I will attempt to translate the latter to the printed medium, simultaneously examining whether the results can in fact be already observed in those instances of recent American printed fiction which literary criticism has found the most puzzling and ambiguous in terms of discussing it by means of the established critical apparatus.

A page of a hypertext novel is structured like any other web page. It consists of textual blocks, often appearing alongside visual and sometimes also audio materials. The page offers a certain number of links and by clicking on them the reader is taken to the page the link serves as the connection to. Generally the point of arrival is somehow, usually semantically, related to the point of departure. Such arrangement already signals some important differences between hypertextual and printed fiction. As it is essentially up to the reader, which links he or she chooses to follow, the "story"

in the classical sense is structured by the reader and his or her preferences. Often, the readers can also participate with their own contributions, textual or otherwise.

The traditional role of the author as the guarantee of meaning thus disappears, there is no fundamental difference between the author and the reader and they both merge into a new category of reader-author. Consequently, a hypertextual novel has as many meanings as there are readings, which would ultimately still amount to a finite number, if the very notion of the medium would not reside precisely upon cross-referencing. That means that anyone can link their own page to the novel, one can "fall" into the novel browsing for something else, perhaps not even realizing it is a work of art that they are reading. Thus, another important novelty of hypertext fiction is the blurring of textual and contextual boundaries; the novels are completely fluid and as such a part of the over-all virtual reality, shaping and co-creating it. To illustrate, by adding a single link within a prose work, the structure of the entire web – according to the laws of cybernetics – changes. Furthermore, there is also no distinction between a work of art or any other work, between literature or any other text, it is entirely up to the user whether to consider something literature or not.

Similar logic applies to the character creation – the notion of "subjectivity" and its creation correspond to the notion and creation of reality. Literary characters, too, correspond to the preferences of the reader-author, namely, which characteristics the latter chooses to follow. Thus, they are created in much the same way as any persona appearing on the net,[8] which means that there is absolutely no difference between a literary character and any other avatar: they are all just systems of signs acquired according to one's preferences.

FROM SILICON TO CARBON: PRINTED BOOK AS AN INFORMATION GENERATOR

I will use this last assertion as a bridge to take us from the electronic environments back to the experiential reality, as its formulation directly coincides with the theoretical framework introduced on the previous pages. That is, the concept of reality, subjectivity and meaning as rhizomatous, arbitrary, fluid and interactive systems of information that the users choose and manage in line with their preferences exactly corresponds to Baudrillard's model of hyperreality created according to the preferences of postmodern fractal subjects. One's preferences, as already indicated, are shaped according to the same logic: they are conditioned by the number of data on a given aspect of reality. The more information one receives on something and the more stable a system they create, the more "real" something is for that particular individual. For example, our favouring of one brand over the next depends solely on the information we receive on the desired product and how they fit into our existing systems of what Baudrillard calls hyperreality. Needless to say our actual technical knowledge of the product plays a negligible role when we are deciding for a purchase. It has to be

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[8] The creation of hypertextual literary characters is best illustrated by – or closest to – the creation of chat-room personae, structured according to one's momentary preferences and interests.

said, though, that for now the shaping of preferences is best used by the structures and institutions of economic power – we would not be too far from truth if we claimed that the whole structure of contemporary capitalism resides upon this logic. Yet the concept of shaping people's preferences via media applies to any given field of human activity, art and literature being no exception.

To summarize: within hypertextual logic, online and offline, the media – that which generates information – are crucial for the formation of reality. They are also chosen according to one's interests and preferences: one either prefers the internet, TV, newspaper, radio or a book. Quality wise, there is no difference between the information one receives from respective media, as before the actualisation in hyperreality all data have the same value. What is important, though, is if and how the information provided fit within the existing collective and individual systems of hyperreality.

At this point it is probably already clear that from the perspective of mediagenic reality we seem to have entered well over two decades ago, printed book is no more endangered than any other medium, provided, of course, that it abandons its traditional, elitist stance in order to successfully compete with other media. That is why I will proceed with transferring the novelties observed in hypertextual fiction to print by treating the latter as merely an information generator. As we will see, not only is such approach perfectly applicable to the medium of print, but there already is a comprehensive body of actual printed books of prose that seem to embody the hypertextual logic, although in a slightly different manner than suggested by Landow and Bolter at the beginning of this essay.

The most blatant consequence of the fact that all data have the same value before they are incorporated within hyperreality is that we can no longer operate with terms such as "real", "fictive", "abstract", "biographical" and "autobiographical". The data are there for the readers to verify against their systems of reality, and – if the simulacrisation process indeed takes place – to participate in the formation of hyperreal systems which also no longer rely on certainty but merely on greater or smaller amount of possibility. In other words: the more they coincide with the reader's systems of hyperreality, the more "real" they are.

The over-all tendency of both literary critics and literary public to discuss literature after postmodernism in terms of the return of realism (cf. Larry McCaffery, Kenneth Millard, Robert Rebein) is the most obvious and telling confirmation of my point. From the traditional point of view, most of recent American fiction gives the impression of realism, which is only logical if it provides the building blocks for hyperreality. And perhaps the most notorious practical example of the above claim is the controversy regarding the publication of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, at the core of which were, typically, speculations on whether Brown built his story on the actual historical data or not. In the domain of what has traditionally been considered "serious" literature, similar approaches of refusing - or better failing - to differentiate between mediated faction and fiction have been most symptomatically undertaken by Don DeLillo in *Libra* and *Underworld*, in all Douglas Coupland's novels, in Ronald Sukenick's *Mosaic Man*, Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*, or Jonathan Saffron Foer's

Everything is Illuminated, the works of the so called literary Generation X, Mark Leyner, etc.

Since the actualisation of information provided relies on the systems of reader's already existing hyperrealities, the meaning is, similarly as in hypertext fiction on the internet, conditioned by the reader, the category of which thus broadens into the familiar concept of reader-author. This tendency is namely implicitly at work already in postmodernist metafiction, the understanding of which relies upon and is conditioned by reader's knowledge of and attitude to prototexts. From the perspective of considering printed book as merely a generator of data, it is crucial that the information it provides is compatible with as many existing hyperreal systems as possible, if it is to have the same impact as other media.

That is why in literature transcending both postmodernism and its metaphysical frame, the function of prototexts is best carried out by the media enhanced artefacts of popular culture, which function as Baudrillard's third order simulacra – systems of information that had been already verified in hyperreality.[9] As such, these artefacts operate in much the same way as hypertextual links. They are points of recognition, broadening and reconfiguring reader's existing systems, and thus interfering with reality. From the perspective of recent American fiction, I recognize these characteristics already in the tendency first observed in cyberpunk fiction, namely that the notions from the fields of informatics and technology are used as metaphors for natural phenomena. However, with the spread of hypertextual logic into the social sphere and subsequent formation of a mediagenic reality, each event is *a priori* technological: technology ultimately becomes the warranty of nature's existence. And within such technology conditioned mediagenic reality, coming to full effect in the mid-1990s, cyberpunk's technological metaphors have expanded across the entire spectrum of media phenomena, forming the basis for creation and understanding of the more complex segments of everyday hyperreality.[10] Frequent usage of neologisms that rely upon artefacts of popular media culture – a characteristic that is hard to overlook in both mainstream and avant-garde American fiction of the last 20 years – serves much the same purpose like "mediagenic" metaphors since our understanding of them crucially defines how we follow and what we make of the story[11].

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[9] For instance, Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* with its complex reference system of brands, celebrities, 1980s pop music and other segments of popular culture is a wonderful example of how the reader's hyperreal environment conditions the understanding of the story, its protagonists, their environment and their motivations. To illustrate: a reader not familiar with the concept of Evian, for example, not only fails to understand what kind of substance the protagonist is drinking but, more importantly, also misses on the economic, social and cultural implications of drinking that specific brand of bottled water.

[10] Some random examples of using notions pertaining to the field of contemporary mediagenic consumerist reality to describe behaviour and places from Coupland's penultimate novel *Eleanor Rigby*: "Mother looked at Jeremy as if he'd been marked with a thirty percent discount" (96), "I suspect that Europe is now one big IKEA" (56), "I finally found a place in which I felt secure enough to disintegrate – across from this stubby Eurocratic man who looked like Václav Havel's cellmate (210)."

[11] Such usage of neologisms is best illustrated and even thematised by Coupland's system of footnotes in *Generation X*, which provide more or less random explanations of hip-terms and neologisms. However, when the reader comes across a concept that the neologism describes, he or she names it with the word provided, and so the neologism, thus far just a piece of information, starts functioning as third order simulacrum and becomes part of hyperreality (cf. Krevel 2003 138-139).

Another consequence of considering printed book as merely an information generator is that creation of fictional reality corresponds to the building of any given hyperreality. The underlying principle is that of verifying the data received against systems of information that have been already incorporated into the systems of hyperreality. Fictional reality is no less real as any other reality, which means that traditional boundaries between a literary work and its environment disappear. The claim may seem farfetched and hard to conceive, but the stir and controversy surrounding the already mentioned Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* are symptomatic of the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality, literature and history, pulp and classics. What Brown offers is a system of information to be verified against the existing systems of individual and collective realities. Considering the aftermath of the book's publication, we must agree that the information he chose to launch fit within many various, more or less incompatible systems, thus providing a number of very stable hyperreal structures inviting further verifications. It is namely such maintaining of relevance of a work of art – triggering an eruption of related hyperreal systems – that might very well prove to be the foundation of postmodern literary evaluation.

Similarly, the construction of literary identities – or literary characters – is conditioned by how the data on them correspond to reader's already existing structures of hyperreality. The more mediagenic "links" they involve, the more stable, or real, they are for more readers. And since – as I have shown at the beginning of this essay – within postmodern condition the logic of creation of a literary character or any other identity is virtually the same, there is no essential difference between the formation of a literary or any other subjectivity. In other words: creation of a literary character in no way differs from the creation of a chat-room persona, and it is implicit in the fluid network structuring of postmodern fractal subjects, appropriating "personal" characteristics according to their preferences. From that point of view, the traditional notions of autobiography, biography, the past, narrative perspective, etc., are turned inside out, as the literary characters are technically the facets – transient personae – of both the reader and the author.[12]

The described mode of identity creation is in my opinion at the core of a relatively novel tendency gaining ground in recent American fiction, namely that main protagonists have the same name as the author. Mark Leyner is the most obvious example as playing with identities seems to be the central theme both of his fiction as well as his life[13]. The main protagonist of all of his novels and most short stories is writer "Mark Leyner", so we could assume that the works are autobiographical. Narration strikes us as realistic, events provide an impression of a consistent structuring of the world. However, the literary "Mark Leyner" constantly moves within the mediagenic reality, arbitrarily choosing elements from it to update or reconfigure his existing system of identity: he is a body builder, a surgeon, a forensic expert, a superstar, a multimillionaire, etc. Leyner's "autobiographical" identity is thus constructed

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[12] For a more thorough explanation see Krevel 2004.
[13] I am referring to the futility of my and my students' attempts to find any kind of biography on Mark Leyner, apart from the short story »About the Author« closing his 1990 *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*.

along the way, the reader places individual information on "Leyner" within systems of information, the probability and stability of which depend on their connectivity. The reader is, in short, reconstructing Leyner's construction of Leyner.

Similar "autobiographicality" and the notion of identity as a simulacrised simulation can also be found in Sukenick's short story collection *Doggy Bag* and in his novel *Mosaic Man*, in Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*, Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, or Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*, to name just some of the more visible authors. Same logic also governs Don DeLillo's reconstruction of Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra* and J. Edgar Hoover in *Underworld*.

READING PRINT HYPERTEXTUALLY

At this point we can probably return to our initial question whether print can adapt to and assimilate the logic of hypertext, which would ensure its future. The established characteristics of electronic hypertext fiction, identified as essentially foreign to traditional literature, indeed seem to allow transfer to the printed book, provided that the latter is stripped of its elitist aura and treated for what it fundamentally is: an information generator. I hope to have shown that electronic literature specific merging of reader and author, author's loss of authority and control over the written, the blurring of textual boundaries and subsequent potential of literature to crucially interfere with surrounding non-literary environments are not only perfectly translatable to print theoretically, but can in fact already be identified in the American fiction of the last couple of decades.

To summarize as well as to illustrate the points made, I would like to wrap up this predominantly theoretical investigation into the hypertextual potential of print by a brief analysis of a randomly selected paragraph from a contemporary work of printed fiction. My selection of the work and the paragraph presented was guided chiefly by the density of artefacts of popular media culture – which, as I argued, have the same function as links in the electronic hypertext – in it. I decided for the following extract from Mark Leyner's *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist* as it enables the illustration of a broad range of points both directly stated or implied on the previous pages of this study:

> Anyway, I got home at about 9 P.M. I popped a <u>Lean Cuisine</u> into the microwave and ate it in front of the TV. There was a <u>miniseries</u> on based on <u>James Michener</u>'s <u>*Lincoln*</u> – the saga of men and women who built the <u>Lincoln Tunnel</u> (27).

The underlined words are the "links", points of connections between adjacent systems of reality. Media artefacts – notions already verified and as such part of hyperreality – define our understanding of the data yet unconfirmed. For example, our familiarity with the concept of Lean Cuisine crucially defines both the direction of our reading (the traditional "story") and our perception of the main protagonist and his actions. The more familiar we are with the concept of Lean Cuisine, the more stable and the more networked hyperreal system it presents to us, which enhances our

understanding and knowledge of the character and his actions. Connecting Lean Cuisine with a Nestlé range of prepared and packaged low calorie meals, prescribed in the Weight Watchers weight losing programme, and containing no preservatives or artificial flavours,[14] we perceive the main protagonist as somebody very conscious of his body, either trying to lose weight or taking care not to become overweight; that he is also very sensitive to advertising and brands, and that he is concerned about health and healthy lifestyle.

The "miniseries" node functions similarly – it depends on our acquaintance with the concept of and our personal experiences with that particular type of TV programme. Its potential, however, comes to full effect in connection with "James Michener's *Lincoln*" as the systems of connotations it triggers radically multiply. Before us is namely a demonstration of the very process of verifying and incorporating media-generated data within hyperreal systems. The name, of course, functions as a link if we are aware of the fact that there was a James Michener, namely, James Albert Michener, a Pulitzer Prize-Winning American novelist, who wrote mainly historical novels. On the whole, his work covered great collective achievements in (mostly American or America related) history. An average reader, most probably knowing Michener by his *Hawaii* trilogy or *The Tales of the South Pacific*, would process the information on "the saga of the men and women who built the Lincoln Tunnel" with regard to his or her existing knowledge on Michener's topics. As the systems seem compatible, especially when relying upon a notion that had also already been confirmed in our everyday hyperreality – that of the existence of the Lincoln Tunnel –, most readers would incorporate the fact that one of Michener's novels is titled *Lincoln* within their systems of hyperreality, and proceed to verifying the information on the existence of a miniseries based on the novel.

If, however, the reader is an expert on Michener, or, let us say, writing an article on remediation of hypertext in print, the act of verification of this new piece of information would be much more complex – and much more literally hypertextual – as it would involve confirmation of this information against systems external to the reality of Leyner's novel. In other words, one would consult an encyclopaedia or the internet or both to establish that the novel of that title was very probably never written by James Michener, which nevertheless still interferes with the existing systems of reader's hyperreality, especially if checking whether it was perhaps written by somebody else and what it was about.

It has to be emphasised, though, that the processes described above are more or less automated and a consequence of our general comprehension of and functioning within the mediagenic environments around us. They are implicit in our deciding on which brand of mobile phone to buy, what concerts to see and which diets to follow. It is – in short – how we create and reinvent ourselves and our environment according to the information received via various media. And this is where the greatest importance of hypertext lies: in the implicit non-linearity, rhizomatous structure and fluidity its logic is promoting, which also coincide with society and reality today. Contem-

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[14] This is how Lean Cuisine is advertised in the media, which corresponds to our hyperreal notions of it.

porary literature as the product as well as mirror of such society is, of course, hypertextual in the sense that it functions according to hypertextual logic regardless of which medium it is employing. That is why it is so utterly irrelevant – if not even counterproductive – to search for hypertext in the instances of the canonized literary tradition. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, for example, might as well have been written in the form of a codex or on stone tablets, it would still be a "pinnacle of the English sentimental novel" (Kos 1986 159, my translation), even though "simultaneously already transcending all hitherto known forms of traditional novel" (*ibid.*).

To conclude: in a mediagenic society where media are the generators and the guarantee of reality, printed book is one of the media. Its function is the supplying of data which, according to Baudrillard's theory of the copy without the original,[15] contribute to the creation of hyperreality. This is the environment into which printed book has entered approximately a quarter of a century ago. Within such environment, printed literature has a future – even a very productive one considering its reality-forming potential – provided that both the reader-authors[16] as well as literary science finally abandon the dead-end streets of Cartesian nostalgia, and start searching for and exploring the ways in which literature can not only secure its own future but primarily ensure that the adjective "human" remains the essential – if only metaphorical – part of the neologisms of the future.

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[15] For a more detailed investigation into the relevance of Baudrillard's theoretical thought to the structuring of contemporary society as well as the actual embodiments of his theoretical presuppositions, see Krevel 2003 46-51.

[16] As individuals functioning within the paradigms of contemporary society that is what we are regardless whether we admit it or not.

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