Internet Fictions

Internet Fictions

Edited by

Ingrid Hotz-Davies, Anton Kirchhofer
and Sirpa Leppänen

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Internet Fictions, Edited by Ingrid Hotz-Davies, Anton Kirchhofer and Sirpa Leppänen

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-0108-9, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-0108-9

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume assembles an international and interdisciplinary group of contributors from the fields of linguistics and literary, cultural, gender and media studies. The initial versions of many of the papers collected here were presented at a panel organised by the editors at the 8th conference of the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) held at the University of London in 2006. We would like to express our appreciation to our audience on this occasion who contributed to the development of our ideas. Very special thanks are due to Anna Auguscik (Oldenburg), Christian Lassen (Tübingen) and Johannes Reinke (Oldenburg) for all their work in preparing the volume for print.

With regard to the illustrations reproduced, every possible effort has been made to contact copyright holders. Where this has proved impossible, would those concerned please contact the contributors directly in order to receive proper acknowledgement.

INTRODUCTION

INGRID HOTZ-DAVIES, ANTON KIRCHHOFER AND SIRPA LEPPÄNEN

"A Hypertext Link Can Point to Anything": Truths and Fictions

In his "very short personal history" of the World Wide Web, Timothy Berners-Lee, the acclaimed inventor of the World Wide Web, talks about the vision that guided him:

> The dream behind the Web is of a common information space in which we communicate by sharing information. Its universality is essential: the fact that a hypertext link can point to anything, be it personal, local or global, be it draft or highly polished. There was a second part of the dream, too, dependent on the Web being so generally used that it became a realistic mirror (or in fact the primary embodiment) of the ways in which we work and play and socialize. That was that once the state of our interactions was on line, we could then use computers to help us analyse it, make sense of what we are doing, where we individually fit in, and how we can better work together.[1]

Of course, the intentions of inventors are not always something to go by. The connection between these intentions and the results and effects of their inventions is at least as complex and problematic as that between the intentions of authors and the literary works they produce. Yet, well into the second decade of its existence, the internet certainly is a medium that is very widely used – and used, as its inventor foresaw, for all sorts of purposes including those of work, recreation and keeping in touch with people.

At the same time, we might still legitimately ask: what exactly is it? For Berners-Lee, it is a medium for the indiscriminate and global dissemination of information, and this is certainly true if we take "information" in its cybernetic sense as bits of data – any data. If, however, we take "infor-

[1] Tim Berners-Lee, "The World Wide Web: A Very Short Personal History," 7 May 1998, http://www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee/ShortHistory.html, 3 Dec 2004. Our emphasis.

mation" to mean something more in the line of what the *Oxford English Dictionary* has in mind, "a knowledge communicated concerning some particular fact, subject, or event", something which, as "knowledge", comes specifically loaded with claims to truthfulness and the factual and which is contrasted explicitly to mere "data", one might well wonder what exactly this "information" is that is supposed to be located on the Net. So, we might make the Internet research itself and let Google do the work on the keywords "Internet" and "history", as, presumably, we want to find "information" on the history of the internet.. Google's first 20 hits refer us to the extensive archives of the Internet Society (ISOC), the sites of a Computer History Museum, one Wikipedia entry, journalistic sites, users' guides to the Internet, a reference to the Paul Halsall / Fordham University's Internet History Sourcebook Projects, the latter a very useful tool which allows access, however, not to research on the internet but to reliable editions of primary texts and source materials relevant for the study of history. Even this short foray then shows just what "information" means in this context: it is or purports to be factual, but for scholarly purposes it is all but useless as none of these facts (all of which may, of course, be true: that is not the point) which remain unsubstantiated. The only site which can meet scholarly standards of what "information" would mean in an academic context – if "information" means something like "the knowledge resulting from research and academic reasoning" – is Wikipedia which gives sources, further reading, footnotes showing where a specific piece of "information" came from (and allowing the researcher to backtrack the path of this "information"), etc. As we have said, this does not mean that the information gathered on these sites is false or misleading (though it may be), but rather that it leaves the visitor of the site in the position that she has to simply believe this information – or become a researcher in turn. It is information, then, that essentially has the linguistic status of claiming rather than demonstrating. We are in the presence of opinions, claims, conversations, talk, hypothesis, conjecture, and if we were to choose key words less emptied of affect, for example "hate" and any one of the current objects of mass hatreds (take your pick), one would have to get ready to be drenched in vituperation, hatred, violent affect and, of course, more opinions.

It appears obvious then, that the vast majority of the sites available on the net today (though this may change as scholars start publishing more on the net rather than in books) does not lend itself naturally and unproblematically to scholarly purposes. Quite the opposite, in many cases. The internet is a place where you can order purpose-written term papers, or simply download them ready-made, integrating larger or smaller chunks

into your own work. And even if there is no intention to deceive, the internet is bound to be a tricky and unreliable place for those seeking to access "information" whose value they are not qualified (and who would be, in all fields of knowledge?) to assess. After all, anyone may put anything on the web – and take it off again. And even as a place for publishing work of assured scholarly quality – who can be sure that what is here today will still be there tomorrow? Or if it is, who can be sure that the new software that is continually being developed will be backwards compatible. That we will still be able to access and read that work? Academic discourse requires permanence instead of a presence of uncertain duration, quality control instead of an indiscriminate inclusiveness, stable identities, intellectual property and copyright instead of plagiarism and unverifiable sources. But of course, these qualities are themselves not a result of the medium of print. Print culture itself has a long history of anonymous publishing, a long history of publication under false identities, a long history of plagiarism and breaches of copyright, a long history of printing all sorts of stuff that has never undergone any kind of quality check whatsoever. Even the permanence of print based scholarship is not simply founded on the permanence of paper if we think of the vast range of ephemeral production, matter printed and read today and used to light a fire or wrap up groceries tomorrow. Since the nineteenth century, more specifically, the use of cheap but highly acidic paper has doomed many publications to a slow disintegration which is very difficult and very expensive to stop. Environments suitable for academic work and scholarship are based ultimately on the existence of institutions (such as libraries and archives) and on the existence of publications produced for the purpose of being used and preserved in these institutions. There can be no doubt that the process of producing the equivalents of such institutions on the Web is in full swing, especially in relation to Anglophone materials, and especially in Britain and the US. But it is well to be fully aware that the electronic medium, by its very construction, is essentially rhizomic and anonymous. As Timothy Berners-Lee writes: "a hypertext link can point to anything."

As a consequence, the "information" that is being "shared" on the internet is of a very specific kind which, in its closeness to opinion, gossip, slander, editorializing, lying, emotionalizing, etc. is exceptionally close to that which is invented: fiction. In general, this is of course not a problem which plagues the internet alone, as we know that even the knowledge produced by the most meticulous of scholarly practices is hardly free from bias, misinformation, strategic blind spots, etc., that "knowledge" is hardly synonymous with "truth". Most famously, this question has been heatedly debated in the wake of Hayden White's famous claim that the writing of

history actually follows narrative patterns, is in fact a variety of narrative fiction. In that sense, the internet's problems with the truth of its "information" are neither new nor unusual but represent a central epistemological given. At the same time, however, the absence of academic mechanisms demanding and regulating the referencing and verifiability of facts, interpretations, and scholarly findings certainly exacerbates the problem in ways which are new at least in the vastness of the resources which are affected by it. Contaminations between fact and fiction have accompanied the novel since its beginnings in the works of Aphra Behn, Delarivier Manley, Daniel Defoe or Eliza Haywood, and have similarly affected journalism since its beginnings in broadsides, pamphlets and early newspapers. Despite the fact that the communities established on the internet by shared practices and affinities all quickly develop and rely on their own norms of conduct and systems of sanctioning those who breech these norms, the net remains particularly vulnerable to contaminations and alternations between facts and fictions (or lies) in its imperviousness to mechanisms of more general societal feedback or control.

At the same time, and here Timothy Berners-Lee may well be right, it is an invaluable resource for those researching what exactly are the fictions we spin, the fantasies we dream, the lies we tell, and to what end. It can inform us about how we as individuals and members of social and cultural groups have found in the internet a meaningful social space for displaying to others with whom we may have nothing else in common our fictions, interacting with the like-minded, impressing discerning niched audiences and persuading potential victims of our ploys.

The internet may not exactly be the "realistic mirror" – still less the "primary embodiment" – of how and what we fantasize, for like all media, it is not an exact image, a "realistic mirror", but something whose specific properties affect the way we use it and interact in it. In other words, it is a mirror whose image is an imagined and fabricated one, a conglomerate of stories of how and what we fantasize. Thus, it is a massive resource for an investigation of the kinds of "information" that are fiction. In the realm of specific narrative formats developed on the internet, specifically on fan fiction, some excellent research has already been done so that this can be said to be a developing field (cf., e.g., the new the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, or indeed Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse's 2006 volume *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* to which many of the following contributions refer). However, fan fiction is only one of the ways in which the internet works with and through fictions ranging from various narrative formats to acts of imposture and the manipulation of facts. It is the purpose of this volume to investigate some of

the many and various types and purposes of internet fiction, and to do so from a variety of perspectives.

Fictions upon Fictions: How this Volume is Organized

After around one and a half decades of internet based fiction, this collection attempts a first overview of its development, and looks at the different forms and sites in which it is practised – both in the spaces explicitly reserved for acknowledged fictions of different type and complexity, and in the spaces whose fictionality is doubtful or not evident at first sight.

We begin with two chapters on two classic sites of narratives as they have been developed and continue to be developed on the Internet: hypertext and fan fiction. Jukka Tyrkkö provides a narratological and linguistic discussion of how the new medial possibilities of hyperfiction specifically those of hyperlinking affect basic narrative and text linguistic phenomena like coherence and the development of narrative sequences. By contrast, Roberta Grandi's essay is designed to provide a first entry of the breadth of genres, concerns, and story telling conventions and innovations as they have developed in the field of fan fiction writing, using as her basis of departure those fictions which have sprung up around the works of Jane Austen, specifically her novel *Pride and Prejudice* and its renderings in contemporary filmings of the novel.

The next section offers a variety of different approaches to fan fiction as certainly the most prolific, most widely practiced and most varied field of narrative fiction on the internet. Daria Pimenova provides a first overview and discussion of the theoretical frames of reference within which fan fiction can and has been read: as a collaborative effort between authors, readers and source texts, as play, as story tree, as a realm of multilayered polyvocalities. Sirpa Leppänen takes up some of these aspects, specifically those of the playfulness of fan fiction and its polyvocal and interactive qualities by complicating the picture through the inclusion of a culturally diverse sampling of Finnish fan fiction writers interacting with cultural material from American and Japanese popular culture. Ingrid Hotz-Davies takes up a challenge often levelled at fan fiction, that it be fantasy driven, and asks what kinds of stories exactly are being written for the fan fiction circuit and what it might entail for the stories if they are indeed driven by the requirements of wish fulfilment. Kristina Busse and Alexis Lothian extend the field of fan fiction studies by exploring a special variety of slash fan fiction in ways that both extend and inflect the findings of the previous essays. Also assuming that fan fiction is a field of fantasy and desire driven interaction between texts, writers and readers, they focus

on the innovative potential in "slash" fiction to show how "slash" can work to extend, experiment with and playfully 'queer' the for the most part 'straight' material it works on, allowing readers to imagine and test out otherwise culturally and even biologically unavailable constellations and combinations of bodies, desires, and gender options.

But specific formats of narrative and literary (in the broadest sense of the word) story telling are not the only areas in which the internet proves to be a site for the dissemination of fictions. For this reason, in the third section we open up the perspective to include phenomena whose fictional status is problematic and not always readily acknowledged. Inger H. Dalsgaard provides us with a bridge here in that she investigates the practices of romance fiction writers and readers on the net through the lense of late capitalist marketing strategies and ideologies which seek to market products as goods designed by the customer rather than as prefabricated objects: romance sites, she contends, and the marketing of toys for children have a lot more in common than one might suppose. Johanna Roering also focuses on the overlap between "fan" activities and marketing, in this case the marketing of American television programmes directly to the viewer via network authored fictional "blogs" written purportedly by various characters of *Grey's Anatomy*. Anton Kirchhofer turns his attention to the internet scams we have all encountered on our spam filters (and sometimes our in-boxes): the heirs of those fabulously rich inheritances, tied up, alas, at the moment but seeking our aid to unfreeze (and share in) those assets. As the 'scammers' and the 'scambaiters' who take them on exchange their hard luck stories, a form of interactive fiction emerges which follows its own agendas and patterns of global interaction, and which cannot evade the agonism that often underlies the constructions of race and gender, as well as the relationship between 'truth' and 'fiction,' in the virtual space. Finally, Katherine Gregory and Emily Wood take the collection into an equally fraught encounter with the conflicts around truth and fiction on the Web by tracing the outlines and internal dynamics of saving fictions which have sprung up in the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, as purportedly factual formats are used to develop and further conspiracy theory driven narratives of what 'really' happened on and before that day. At this point we have come full circle, entering again the realm not only of fictions on the net but also of the problematic nature of the 'factual' in the vast reaches of the internet.

I.

CLASSIC POINTS OF DEPARTURE: HYPERFICTION AND FAN FICTION

HYPERTEXT AND STREAMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS: COHERENCE REDEFINED[1]

JUKKA TYRKKÖ

1. Introduction

This chapter discusses hypertextual works of narrative fiction, a subtype of hyperfiction.[2] As a genre label, hyperfiction covers a range of literary works that have come out following Michael Joyce's *afternoon* (1990), the first widely noted hypertext story. New hyperfictions have emerged at a slow but steady pace, both online and commercially on CD-ROM. For an emergent literary genre with a relatively small readership, hyperfiction has already managed to point attention to a surprising number of new challenges both to the nature of narration and textual coherence. Although some of the issues have been raised to a degree in studies of "ergodic" works of literature that predate electronic literature,[3] the simple fact is that the literary effects facilitated by the digital medium cannot be adequately described by analogy to similar features in print narratives.

The present paper will focus on the narrative effects of the coherence challenges innate to multilinear narratives and, more generally, the narrativity of hyperfiction. After a brief introductory discussion of the relationship between narrative and coherence, this chapter addresses the narrativity of hyperfiction primarily from the global perspective. The global coherence of hypernarratives will be examined under the paradigm of cognitive framing, showing how alternative readings of a multilinear narrative

[1] This study was conducted under funding by the Research Unit for Variation, Contacts, and Change in English (VARIENG), funded by the Academy of Finland, at the University of Helsinki.

[2] For a general introduction to hypertext, see e.g. Landow (1997). For introductions to hyperfiction, see e.g. Aarseth (1997) or Douglas (2001).

[3] *Ergodic literature* is a term used by Aarseth (1997) for literary works the reading of which requires "non-trivial work" on the part of the reader. Significantly, although all hypertexts are ergodic by definition, the term is not synonymous with hypertext.

can make use of the same narrative fragments but construct vastly different plotlines and narrative meanings. All examples will be drawn from *Holier than Thou* (1996), a hyperfiction by Michael Shumate, freely availably online.[4]

2. Causality, Coherence and Narrative Structure in Hyperfiction

One of the most subtle and at once conspicuous stylistic features of any literary genre is the way it addresses coherence. When readers are called upon to describe or define the short stories or novels of a particular genre or narrative style, attributes related to coherence are among the first to be mentioned. Realist prose tends to be viewed as straightforward and uncomplicated, while *avant-garde* and postmodern are felt to be difficult, fragmented and unpredictable. Hyperfiction mixes the pot further by introducing the concept of instability into narration. This instability differs markedly from the more established "plotlessness" of particularly twentieth-century fictions (see Richardson 2005, 167-169), for hypertexts challenge coherence not only by being contradictory or open-ended, but also by actually transforming themselves in the course of – and because of – each reading. Through the use of fragmentation and multilinear discourse, hyperfictions create narrative ambiguity by seemingly doing away with two of the most fundamental features of conventional narratives: causal linearity and the presence of a narrative voice (see e.g. Scholes and Kellogg 1966, 4; Genette[5] 1980, 29). The fact that both causality and the continuity of an identifiable narrative voice are intimately tied to the concept of coherence, leads naturally enough to the examination of the most significant identifying features of hypertext, namely *linking*, *fragmentation*, and *multilinearity*. These, in turn, manifest in the way hyperfictions complicate the dichotomous relationship between discourse and story, cast doubt on the metaleptic boundary between the story world and the real

[4] *Holier Than Thou* is available online 15 July, 2007 at http://www.duke.edu/~mshumate/fiction/htt/index.html. A more comprehensive analysis of *Holier than Thou* and several other hyperfictions will be included in my forthcoming dissertation on coherence in hypertextual narratives.

[5] It ought to be mentioned that Genette uses the term 'hypertext' in *Palimpsestes* (1982) as one of the five types of transtextual relations. In Genette's terminology, hypertexts are texts derived from other texts through transformation like parody and translation. For discussion of Genette's narratology and electronic hypertext, see Liestøl (1994) or Eskelinen (2000).

world,[6] and blur the line between written and spoken storytelling by turning the interaction between text and reader from an abstract conception, as in e.g. Iser (1984), into a participatory *act of reading* which finds resonance with modes of oral story-telling,[7] particularly in the way hypertexts emphasize the unique experience of each reading or *text-event* (see Beaugrande 1997).

Most significantly, however, linking and the resulting multilinearity challenge the notion of a singular sequence of telling in narration. Because the narrative fragments[8] of a hyperfiction can be read in a number of orders, the same fragment – or set of fragments – can serve as a building block in a great variety of alternative readings arising from the same text. This allows new kinds of juxtapositions between alternative points of view, but more significantly the possibility of alternative story lines within one text. Several new narratological issues are thus created, particularly with respect to the construction of coherent timelines of events, and the relationship between alternative plot sequences. Ryan (2006, 103) describes the fundamental paradigm of a narrative sequence by saying that

> A story is an action that takes place in time, and time is irreversible. Any diagram that allows a return to a previously visited node cannot, consequently, be interpreted as a chronological succession of events, because the same event never occurs twice.

Naturally, sequential and causal relations between narrative events do not impose on the discursive order of representation – even in conventional print narratives. As Herrnstein-Smith (1980) argues, virtually all fictions manipulate the temporal sequence for narrative purposes. In the case of hyperfictions, the theoretical challenge is to explain the specific effect that readerly choice has on narrativity: is the effect of readerly participation limited to the plot (the telling) or does it extend to the story (the told)? Ryan (2006, 103) appears to suggest that readerly choices do not alter the actual order of events in the story world, only the discursive ordering of narrative events. Along the same lines, Liestøl's (1994, 96-97) solution is to expand Genette's (1980) well-known three level model of discourse with a fourth one, *discourse as discoursed*. With hyperfiction, it is not sufficient to limit the analysis to the discourse or the narrating, but

[6] On metalepsis in general, see Herman (1997) and Malina (2002). On metalepsis in hyperfiction, see Ryan (2006, 204-230).
[7] See Tyrkkö (2006) and (2007, 151).
[8] It would be ill-advised to describe the fragments of a hyperfiction as *episodes*, because narrative episodes can span several fragments.

instead we have to look at the precise manner in which each instance of narrating relates to other versions of the same narrative, let alone to other discourses of the same story.

The point of departure between a mere sequence of events and a narrative is causality. The concept implies not only the placing of narrative events in chronological relation to one another, but more importantly an operative interrelation between events in the story world: one state of affairs affecting another, in a manner that is meaningful and interesting to the reader. Gerrig (1993), for example, points to empirical evidence in suggesting that "the perception of causality is critical" and that "comprehension is guided by the search for causal relations." In narrative hyperfiction, the fragmented nature of the narration frequently obfuscates the straightforward construction of causal chains by introducing tangential episodes which may, at least temporarily, appear superfluous and inconsequential. *Holier than Thou*, the fiction that will be examined shortly, is chronologically unpredictable and causally complex, requiring the reader to pay close attention to episodic relations in order to work out the underlying story structure. In this respect, it is a typical example of much of hyperfictional narration, in which the structural aspects of narrative are emphasized. As Kirschenbaum (2000, 128) notes, "some of our most compelling works and writers have been obsessed with the pliability of textual structures and narrative forms." However, one of the most striking consequences of narrative fragmentation in hyperfictions is that readers tend to become hyper-aware (pardoning the pun) of story structure, both in terms of the sequence they have actually read and the apparent organization of all the fragments in the textual space (see Douglas 2001, 77). The pervasive sense of being trapped in a maze frequently reported by readers not only invests them with a sensitivity to the texts structure, but also informs hypertextual theory with an undeniable structuralist tendency.[9] By far the majority of theoretical attention paid to hyperfiction has centred on the structural integrity of the stories, and on problems related to closure or lack of it. Spatial metaphors also play a distinct role in theoretical discussions of hyperfiction and hypernarratives (see e.g. Ryan 2006, 100-107). The conceptualization of hypertext as a "writing space" was first introduced by Bolter (1991) and has since become a major strand of hypertext theory. In testament to this intrusive *structurism*,[10] hypernarratives are

[9] Miall (1997) observed that "an emphasis on the spatial characterizes all recent rhetoric about hypertext." In the subsequent ten years, little has changed.

[10] I use *structurism* to emphasize the pervasive sense and awareness of textual structure which is part and parcel not only to virtually all hypertextual reading, but also to the narrative strategies of hyperfictions. The term is not used here in refer-

frequently both envisioned and represented as maps of different kinds. Furthermore, as a natural consequence of reading strategies focused on maps and structure, hypertext narratology and hypertext narratives show a noted affinity for the journey metaphor; to the extent that these dominant metaphors frequently feature as thematic tropes: Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden*, David M. Yun's *Subway Story: An exploration of me, myself and I*, Geoff Ryman's *253*, and Arellano's *Sunshine 69* are just some examples of hyperfictions[11] explicitly constructed as stories of road trips or journeys, albeit sometimes breaking the analogy when it comes to having a beginning and an end. The idea of using the topography of a map thematically is likewise realized in a number of hyperfictions, and many authors opt to provide readers with maps of various kinds, in an effort to help them negotiate the maze of the text and, one suspects, to emphasize the structural construct of the text. Indeed, the metaphor of the map is so all-consuming that the very structure of the story world is sometimes designed as a topography that can be drawn out as a visual representation of the subject matter as in Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995).[12]

Not only does the multilinearity of hyperfiction make it tempting to represent the relationships between narrative fragments as maps, but also it appears to promote a type of 'completism' as a prevailing reading strategy. Preoccupation with reading all of the story is peculiar to multilinear textuality, in which there is often no natural means of knowing whether one has, in fact, explored all that the story world has to offer. This characteristic feature of hyperfiction-reading marks a curious dichotomy between verisimilitude – after all, do we ever known *all* of the story in real life? – and conventional reading of fiction.[13] Although readers and literary critics

---

ence to the mid 20th century art movement associated with Biederman, but to draw a distinction with *structuralism* as a distinct theoretical approach.

[11] Moulthrop's *Victory Garden* (1995) was published on CD-ROM by Eastgate Systems. Yun's *Subway Story* (1997) is available online at http://www.cyberartsweb.org/cspace/ht/dmyunfinal/frames.html, Ryman's *253* (1997) at http://www.ryman-novel.com/info/about.htm and Arellano's *Sunshine 69* (1996) at http://www.sunshine69.com.

[12] It goes without saying that there is no limit to the types of metaphors that can be enacted in hyperfiction (see Landow 2004). The particular interest of the journey metaphor is that it ties in with the structural aspect of the hypertext itself, thus performing a kind of metaleptic association between the act of reading and of the story being narrated.

[13] By "conventional reading" I refer to the almost universally pervasive mode of reading literary texts, that is, one page after another in the order predetermined by pagination. Although any text can naturally be read by scanning, skipping, and

alike often profess to prefer stories which capture life and the human condition realistically, it appears we in fact rather enjoy the sense on control and closure conventional literary fictions provide (cf. Kermode 1966), and find it difficult to leave parts of the story world unexplored. Because hypertextual structures often intentionally discard the conventional paradigm of closure, the network structure of the narrative space is emphasized. Douglas (2001, 96) points out that "readers of hypertext fiction generally must supply their own senses of endings."[14] Interestingly, the way readers go about accomplishing this is by transforming the paradigm of closure into a chase for the 'complete' text; closure is only accomplished when every last fragment has been read.

A fundamental difference between hypertext and conventional text can be located on the level of the prevailing coherence strategy. While conventional linear texts build coherence primarily between structural units of the text, hypertexts appear to remake the very concept of coherence by suggesting that the sense-making of local continuities, down to the individual word (of the hyperlink), is on equal footing in importance to global coherence formation (see Tyrkkö 2007). From the reader's perspective, the fact that any two textual elements can be connected together through hyperlinking means that the relationships between individual textual elements need to be evaluated distinct from – though not instead of – the global structure of the text. While Essid (2004, 322-323) is right in observing that hyperlinks "need signal little else" than an association between two text fragments, it is true what Chanen (2007, 173) notes that "in a digital narrative environment [...] there is an assumption of some degree of relevance in link structures despite their complexity." However, although hyperlinks are not necessarily markers of anything more than the possibility of narrative redirection, they are usually functional instantiations of what Todorov (1977, 111-113) calls *narrative propositions* and Rimmon-Kenan (1997, 13-14) describes as *event labels*. The word or phrase used as a link element is not merely a clue to what the following narrative event is likely to be about, but also a suggestion on how to integrate it into the story-at-large.[15] As we shall see below, the way narrative events are labelled affects the interpretation of the unfolding narrative in a fundamental fashion. One of the most fascinating narrative opportunities afforded by hyperfiction derives from this very ambiguity: by being such semantically rich markers of association, hyperlinks encourage readers to

---

other such alternative ways, there can be little doubt that such readings are aberrant to the intended order and very rarely practised as the primary reading strategy.

[14] See also Douglas (1994).

[15] See also Burbules (1998), Miles (1999) and Bernstein (2000).

fill in the missing bits – over and over again. Whether a link is followed or not, its form – the link element(s) – invites the reader to envisage the possible narrative strands that lie behind. Consequently, links can be used to misdirect readers, to set up expectations which turn out to be false, or to convey the views of a particular, perhaps unreliable or biased, narrative voice.

3. Global Coherence and Cognitive Frames in Hypernarratives

With both generic and specifically academic meanings, coherence is a multilayered term with plenty of potential for misunderstandings and inaccuracies. In the everyday sense, coherence refers to the sensible coming together of facts and events. An argument or a text is said to be coherent when we can follow its logic and when it appears to be reasonable – regardless of whether or not it is ultimately found to be factual correct. In text linguistics, coherence is most effectively discussed on two levels, local and global.[16] The first refers to sequential transitions between sentences (and occasionally other textual units in close proximity), while the latter concerns sense making between macro-level units such as paragraphs and chapters. It may be tentatively suggested that along with the thematic features and tropes that define them, each genre of writing also introduces its own particular brand of macrostructural coherence. I have argued previously that hyperlinking builds immediate coherence primarily based on local coherence models, albeit reserving global coherence through discourse topical continuity and cognitive frame activation (see below) as secondary coherence negotiation strategies (see Tyrkkö 2006 and 2007).

In narratological theory, coherence is more often discussed as a measure of a narrative's structural integrity and meaningfulness. For experienced readers, the coherence strategies necessary in the negotiation of conventional narratives have become naturalized and thus transparent, but for those unused to such conventions they may in fact hinder understanding and even render texts incomprehensible (see Black 2006, 36-52). At the simplest level, episodicity itself can be experienced as a coherence challenge. The fact that readers do not object to a cognitive frame shift at the transition between chapters is merely the result of our being used to the prevailing narrative convention that such shifts are acceptable and, more

[16] See van Dijk (1986, 91). For hypertext related discussion of local and global coherence, see Tyrkkö (2007).

importantly, that the connection between the two frames will become coherent later in the story. If each of the first ten chapters of a novel were to set up a new cognitive frame with no reference to previous ones, most readers are likely to feel exasperated and unable to maintain an ordered sense of the cognitive frames. More complicated coherence challenges are constructed in the non-sequential, alternative and repetitive plots seen in postmodern narratives, particularly in metafiction. In Coover's "Magic Poker" (1970), for example, the metaleptic narrator rewrites parts of the story, challenging the two sisters with new encounters and changing the physical story world in a series of what-if-instead scenarios, all of them allegorical of the writing process itself. Likewise, in Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979) the story is retold, challenged and double-backed on. Hyperfictions, for their part, frequently challenge coherence by presenting spatio-temporally diverse narrative fragments without a clearly established sense of chronology or causal chain, and by motivating juxtapositions of such frames through lexical linkings which may – only at first, and sometimes ultimately – appear inconsequential.

One of the most effective frameworks for analyzing the structure and the processing of hypernarratives is Emmott's (1999) contextual frame model.[17] It allows the formalized representation of the spatio-temporal frames used in a narrative, and thus makes it possible to access the elements of sequential episodic structures precisely. In Emmott's terminology, at any given moment in a reading, one frame is *primed* or active in the reader's mind, while all previously established frames are passive. Frames can be *modified* or *switched*, and in the latter case *recalled*, if the switched-to frame is already established. Characters and objects are *bound* to frames, either *overtly* (i.e. indicated to be so in text) or *covertly* (i.e. assumed by the reader to be bound). When Emmott's frame model is applied to hyperfiction, the first thing we notice is that individual text fragments typically comprise of single contextual frames, switched with each linking. A pattern like this is in itself conducive to coherence negotiation, because it affords the reader a chance of orienting him- or herself to the upcoming frame switch and thus saves some of the cognitive load associated with surprising switches. On the other hand, the reader of a hyperfiction will need to stay highly attuned to the clues signalling frame primacy. Because hypertextual narrative fragments are predominantly presented out

[17] Text world theory, superbly outlined by Gavins (2007), would offer an alternative set of tools to use in operationalizing the description of hypertextual narration. Emmott's model is preferred here as it is, arguably, more readily accessible. The visual representation of cognitive frames employed in figures two, three and four is in some respects similar to the one used by Gavins.

of chronological or even direct causal sequence, and because frame switches are considerably more frequent than in most genres of fiction, issues of contextual boundedness are less transparent and global coherence challenges are therefore more frequent. The switching of streams-of-consciousness, implied in the chapter title, also make coherence negotiation more difficult. As shall be shown shortly, hyperlinks are frequently used to the effect of jumping from one narrative voice to another 'mid-stream', a narrative device which demands considerable competence from the reader.

4. Two Beginnings of *Holier than Thou*

To illustrate the narrative effects made possible by hypertextual multilinearity, let us examine one particular hyperfiction more closely. *Holier than Thou*[18] is an "externally exploratory interactive" fiction, to follow Ryan's (2006, 107-120, especially 108-111) nomenclature,[19] meaning it is a hyperfiction in which the reader is positioned outside the story world and his or her actions do not directly affect the events, but are restricted to the organization of the discourse sequence. Thematically, *Holier than Thou* is a story spanning several decades and three generations about a dysfunctional family in the American south. The central character, though not necessarily the protagonist in a traditional sense, is Carl Tucker, a fiery preacher. Due to multilinearity, the fiction is difficult to describe much more extensively in terms of plot – after all, as we shall see, there are hundreds and hundreds of them. The various possible plotlines follow the life of Carl and those around him through seemingly isolated episodes that over the course of reading begin to form a coherent picture of the underlying story. Because the fragments are told in the first person, the reading of the fiction involves not only constant switches of spatio-temporal frames, but also narrator switches which frequently complicate coherence negotiation. In *Holier than Thou*, hyperlinks typically enact a switch between both spatio-temporal frames and narrative voices. Both can create considerable coherence problems, the former particularly in terms of story time, the latter in the correct identification of the newly primed narrator.

[18] *Holier than Thou* was first published online 1995 and revised by Shumate in 1996. As of June 15, 2007, a few fragments are defined as drafts and several links appear to be dead. The fiction comes with Shumate's comments on its structure and comments.

[19] The term "exploratory hypertext" was originally coined by Joyce (1988).

Holier than Thou consists of 55 fragments and 170 hyperlinks (see figure 1).[20] The number of links per fragment typically ranges between two and four, while the average number of links leading to a fragment is slightly lower – the discrepancy already indicating that some fragments are configured as more focal than others. Seven fragments stand out in this regard: the ones describing the major characters in the story world average seven links out and ten in. The discursive effect of this difference is that these focal fragments, which coordinate and motivate the narrative, are guaranteed to come up sooner rather than later in most readings of the fiction.

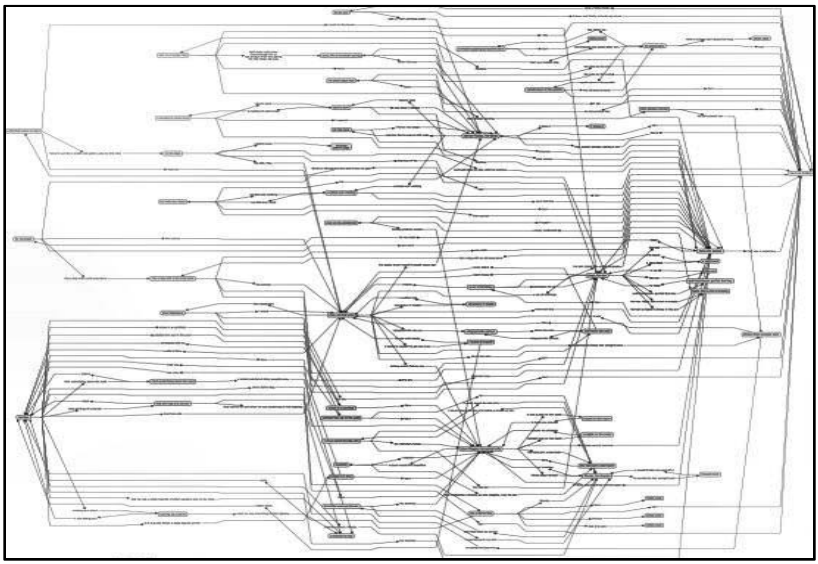

Figure 1 – Structural map of *Holier than Thou*

Like many hyperfictions, *Holier than Thou* offers several alternative starting points, and no explicit closure. Consequently, 'beginning' needs to be defined somewhat differently from conventional fictions. On the first page of the story, each of the fourteen letters of the title leads to a different fragment of the textual space. Depending on this arbitrary choice – in the

[20] The map was created by hand and rendered with CmapTools. The number of fragments and links makes it impossible to provide a comprehensive, legible map with this chapter. Figure 1 should therefore be taken merely as a visual representation of the complexity of the hypertext structure.

sense that the reader has no way of anticipating the topic of the subsequent fragment at all – a reader will get a radically different introduction to the story. Choosing the letter "H" of the word "Holier", he or she will begin the story with a fragment entitled "Carl, his brother." Choosing "E", on the other hand, would take him or her to a fragment called "May, his first wife", while the letter "L" would open the story with "his fans." None of these fragments are explicitly written as 'starting points'; they all function as *in medias res* openings and feature as narrative fragments at some point of most possible readings of the fiction.

To uncover the narrative focal points and to examine the narrative effects created through multilinearity, we shall employ frame analysis to identify the spatio-temporal structure of a reading. Let us suppose we begin reading *Holier than Thou* by choosing the letter "H". For clarity later on, let us label the sequence of fragments we are about to trek as *Reading 1*. The opening lines of the first fragment establish a contextual frame with a clear spatial identification:

> ***Carl, his brother***
> Nellie he's settin in the corner by the window. A sunbeam streams in off *his shiny black hair* the dust floats all around his head. I say Nellie come on we'll fetch *Paw's* drinking water now. He makes a face like he eat something sour. Just don't let him catch you making that face I tell him. I pick up Paw's bucket in the kitchen dump the old water on the ground when we go out in the yard. The chickens scatter they are the dumbest things and Nellie he runs after'em. He's always running he can almost catch me even though he's only ten. Nelson's *lean as a hungry dog Momma* always says. But I'd rather try to take a bone away from the hungry dog than take it away from Nellie. Stop runnin them chickens Nellie we got to go. *We pass by the well*. Let's say it today Nellie says. Sure, they ain't nobody here but us chickens. He laughs then we go.

From this opening section, we see the story is set somewhere in the countryside, perhaps a small farm: there is a house, a yard, some chickens, a bucket for carrying water. The temporal frame implies a historical setting, but is left vague. The fragment establishes two young boys: Nelson, also called Nellie, and the narrator, who is perhaps called Carl. Paw (a literary spelling for "Pa" in Southern drawl), the boys' father, is established but not bound to the frame. Supposing we follow the link *Momma* (on line seven), a new fragment is opened up:

> ***Anne, his mother***
> We finish supper and I ask Nelson, "Do you want a piece a cake? Bertha brought it. She's like that."

> "No, Momma, I don't want any I told you. I already had some pie. I'll put it up for tomorrow."
> In that ill tone he uses more and more the older he gets. He knew what was right even when he was growing up. *Carl was a sweet boy.*
> "Now don't put it in that calvinator. That thing just kills the taste in some food."
> "I don't see why you say that. They say people can't taste as much when they grow older. Maybe that's it."

With no explicit spatio-temporal cues to signal a frame shift, and the continued presence of Nelson, we are at first likely to assume that the house in which supper is enjoyed is the previously established one. However, we soon come to suspect two cognitive frame shifts: the narrator is no longer Carl, but the mother, Anne, and a temporal shift has also occurred, signalled by "the older he gets" and the language used by Nelson, which doesn't fit a ten year old. Once the temporal shift is established, the previous narrator Carl is unbound from the frame, because it is not reasonable to assume him to be even covertly present with years in between. And indeed, a little later on in the fragment, Nelson reads a letter signed "Carl and Molly", signalling that Carl is in West Virginia. Further down the fragment, we learn that Nelson is in fact an adult man by now, the temporal shift therefore having been well over thirty years. He is divorced from his first wife, May, who left soon after their son Dean died. Links are provided from both *May* and *Dean*. Supposing we follow the one for May, the next fragment reads:

> ***May, his first wife***
> The first time I saw Nelson I saw him standing on the back row of the choir. He was holding a hymnal in his big right hand and when he sung he lifted his eyes like he was gazing into the eyes of the Lord. He sung the bass line, and it seemed like the lower his voice sunk the higher his eyes sought. He was only seventeen then but already taller than all the grown men. I could always see him even though me and my folks sat near the back. *He slicked his black hair straight back.* I never saw a man that was beautiful before except Valentino and I didn't know what to think.

The point of view is again changed, which at this point helps us establish a tentative coherence strategy: fragments are told from the first person perspective of the character named in a link. However, unlike in the first two fragments, the events are described in the past tense, leaving the present story time (in which May's frame is located) unclear. The cognitive frame is presented as a remembrance, the events May describes establishing a cognitive frame perhaps fifteen years prior to the previous frame, in a

church. Later in the same fragment, a long narrative propositional link is offered:

> Nelson still stayed with his momma, then, and said it was up to him to be the man of the house since Carl had moved out and *his daddy drunk hisself to death years ago*. Which was good of him, but I worried it would hold us up gettin married.

The link expression begins to establish a causal chain: the father's alcoholism serves to explain the hostility the young boys appear to have for him in fragment 1. Should the reader not follow the link, he or she would be left with this tidbit of narratively significant information, and be left to wonder at the narrative strand that lies behind the link. If the link is followed, the next fragment begins predictably:

> ***Vernon Tucker, his father***
> Not in the door five seconds, *that woman already railing at me again*: "You're drunk." She had a candle. Saw her head-shadow moving on the wall.
> "The hell I am. Looks like you'd'a learnt how to tell that after all these years."
> "I can. I can see it in your eyes and smell it from here to there. Shut the door. It'll blow out the light."
> "See it? Too goddamn dark to see anything in here." Nellie and *Carl* was standing in the bedroom door rubbing their eyes. "C'mere boys. Your momma thinks daddy's drunk. Whaddayou think?"

As expected, the frame shift primes Vernon, the father of Nelson and Carl, as the narrator, and shifts the spatiotemporal frame back to the past. Notably, the new narrative voice also manifests itself in the hyperlinking: *that woman already railing at me*, hardly a flattering description, is a link back to fragment 2, "Anne, his mother." Although the referent fragment is the same, the tone of the link element is strikingly different from *momma* used in fragment 1.

At this point, we can begin to chart the cognitive frame structure of the story more formally. In the four fragments discussed above, we witness three cognitive frame shifts, each featuring a change of narrator (figure 1):

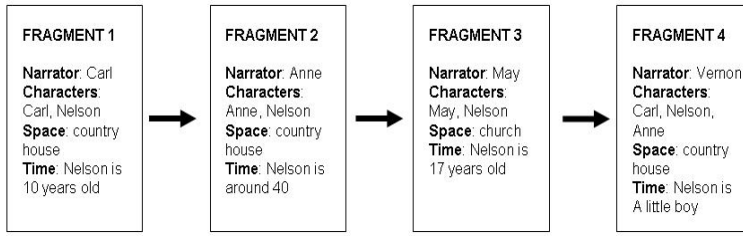

Figure 2 – Schematic view of cognitive frame shifting in *Holier than Thou*, Reading 1.

So far, the frame shifting discussed could have been enacted in a conventional narrative. The hypertextual nature of *Holier than Thou* becomes relevant when we start considering the alternative readings of the story. If, for example, we chose the link *what y'doin Nellie* instead of *Momma* in fragment 1, the frame sequence would change considerably (figure 2).

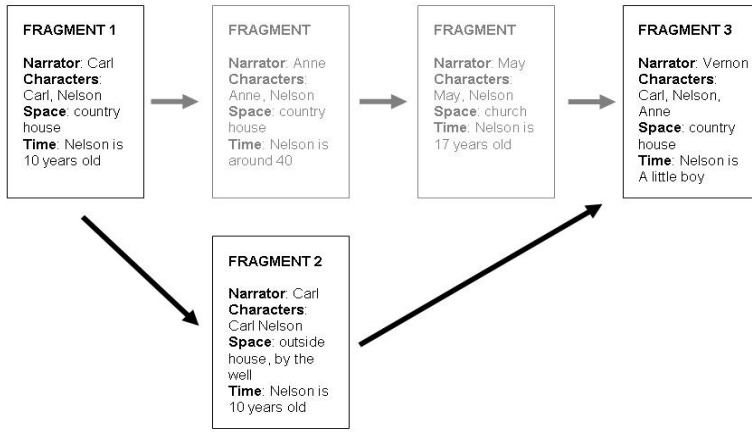

Figure 3 – Schematic view of cognitive frame shifting in *Holier than Thou*, Reading 1(2).

The transitions between the first, second and third narrative fragments of this alternative reading no longer shift cognitive frames. The effect of this, compared to *Reading 1-1*, is that we get a more comprehensive narrative about the early life of the Tucker family but do not learn about the later events. How does this affect the narrative? Because *Reading 1* gives

us a flash forward to what happens to the protagonist, Nelson, later in life, we read the episode about his father's alcoholism quite differently from *Reading 2*, where we interpret it exclusively from the perspective of the wife and the young boys. If the reader continues to follow the story from fragment 3, he or she soon learns about dramatic events in Nelson's youth involving his father's violent behaviour.

To explore the interplay between alternative readings in a more radical way still, let us abandon *Reading 1* for now and embark on a completely new one, *Reading 2*, from the very beginning. Difficult as it may be, to fully appreciate the difference between *Readings 1* and *2*, we should also imagine reading the fiction for the first time. So, choosing the letter "L" from the first page, we are presented with a fragment that begins:

> ***His fans***
> A bunch of us was down at Loafers Glory the other day. It was half-time and we were trying to think of something to pass the time until the second half started. Hank Craven was watching the TV from his usual stool behind the cash register. Somebody whispered, "Hey, ever hear Hank get started on old Nelson Tucker? Funny as hell."
> So one of us said, "Say Hank, we was wondering ... do you remember Nelson Tucker that used to live around here?"
> Hank pushed his greasy cap back on his head. "Nelson Tucker? I remember Nelson, all right. I reckon he was one of the wildest varmints t'ever crawl out of these hills. Let me go over here and get a CoCola before I get started on him. That stove's got it hot as a chimney corner in here. Will one of you boys open the door? New Testament's what some called him. He was probly getting up toward seventy when he bought him this used hearse and took to driving it up and down the highway all the time.

The spatio-temporal frame is a bar, Loafers Glory, during a football game shown on the TV. The narrator is unknown, though perhaps identifiable as one of "his fans", whoever he is. The only named and overtly bound character is Hank Craven, probably the bar keeper. Another character, Nelson Tucker, is also named – a name we recognize from *Reading 1*, but which a first-time reader would hear for the first time. Nelson is described as "old", and a frame narrative is set up with Hank Craven's recollections of Nelson. A little later, we read this:

> Course now this was after he got done marrying all them women. He was getting a little older and a whole lot uglier and they wouldn't look at him any more. I reckon that third one didn't stay with him six months."
> One of us said, "Now how about the second one, Hank? *Sara* Teague? *Is it true she threw a meat cleaver at him* and it lodged in a tree trunk?"