

# **Storytelling in the Digital Age**

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## INTRODUCTION:

“Technologies are not mere exterior aids, but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word” (Ong 315). Walter Ong, a forefather of the study of writing and technology, uttered these famous words asserting his belief that “writing is a technology that structures thought” (315). Writing, in other words, is a technological vehicle capable of altering human perception. Ong’s mentor, Marshall McLuhan, stipulated that “it is specifically modes of communication that shape human existence (Griffin 343). Both Ong and McLuhan avow the psychologically transformative power of changing written mediums. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is a relentlessly changing digital age where innovative writing technologies are emerging everyday. In this time of rapid change, our search for relevance and meaning in these budding technologies is guided by the innovative theories of Ong and McLuhan.

Hypertext narrative, an embryonic deviation from traditional narrative, challenges the foundation of its predecessor while endeavoring to broaden the structures of human thought. Critics of hypertext narrative emphasize its structural departure from the standard, historical narrative form. The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms ascertains that “hypertext alters our conception of the text, which has been traditionally thought of as a linear construct with a beginning, middle, and end determined by the author” (Murfin 206). This perversion of standard narrative form leaves other critics wondering whether “it is even possible to tell a good story interactively” (Robbins 2). The word “narrative” derives from the Latin word *narrare*, meaning “to tell,” and the Indo-European root *gna*, meaning “to know” (Turner 163). Nowhere in the definition of narrative, however, is a superior structure of “telling” or “knowing” implied.

Hypertext authors see narrative structure as a malleable medium capable of challenging human consciousness through amendments to the narrative standard. Proponents of hypertext narrative, like Janet Murray author of Hamlet on the Holodeck, believe that “by giving us greater control over different kinds of information, [hypertexts] invite us to tackle more complex tasks and to ask new kinds of questions” (7). Rather than belittling narrative form, hypertext is an extension of traditional narrative form with innovative and multifarious methods of extracting meaning. Authors and advocates of hypertext narratives believe so fervently in the power of the medium that some question

whether “hypertext will kill off narratives” altogether (Kovner 1). While the extinction of traditional narratives is highly unlikely, hypertext narrative is a technology that deserves respect, attention, and explanation.

This paper seeks to illuminate hypertext narrative’s divergence from standard narrative form, and the possibilities for such a medium in the future. A comprehensive overview of narratology, the study of narrative, will highlight standard qualities of print-based narratives like linearity, closure, author-control, and unity. Next, an analogous portrait of hypertext narrative will emphasize the non-linear properties of hypertext, as well as its rhizomatic, open-ended, ambiguous, reader-centered structure. Finally, the representative properties of hypertext narrative will be explored in an attempt to illustrate Ong’s claim that electronic literature is a technology capable of altering human consciousness.

### **NARRATOLOGY—FIDELITY TO STANDARD NARRATIVE THEORY**

Throughout history, the bulk of literature considered “narrative” prescribed to the constructs of narratology; every story had a set beginning, middle, and end determined by the author. Hypertext narrative challenges the “inherent qualities of [narrative] such as fixed sequence, a definite beginning and end, definable magnitude, and overall unity” (Fraser 1). In his essay, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” Hayden White defines a narrative in terms of what it is NOT:

...It possesses none of the attributes that we normally think of as a story: no central subject, no well-marked beginning, middle, and end, no peripetia, and no identifiable narrative voice...there is no suggestion of any necessary connection between one event and another. (7)

Therefore, according to White, narratives should have a central subject, an easily identifiable structure, a narrative voice, and connections between episodes. In other words, the story should possess an overall cohesiveness and unity. Traditionally narratives have been “deep and narrow” (Robbins 2), as opposed to hypertext literature’s broadening of the narrative scope and subversion of the author-reader relationship: “hypertext trashes the writer’s dearest beliefs...that a work is a single shapely whole, that

the writer guides the reader” (Gates 2). Narratology demands a linear ordering of plot and author guidance through the story.

The logical, linear sequencing of the text is of utmost importance in standard narratology. All narratives should have a plot that develops logically and coherently. White defines plot as “a structure of relationships by which events contained in the account are endowed with a meaning by being identified as parts of an integrated whole” (9). Events in story, therefore, derive their meaning from their logical sequence within a coherent design, or plot structure. White further ascertains that narrative authors seek “fullness and continuity in an order of events” and that “continuity rather than discontinuity governs the articulation of the discourse” (9-10). A story must be cohesive and structured to merit respect as a narrative. Likewise, White explains that coherent narrative discourse not only frames the structure of the story, but the structure of the actual meaning of the story: the events must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure or order of meaning (White 5). Meaning and narrative resonance are products of fidelity to the guidelines of narratology. A story without a center, without a “chronological framework,” cannot elicit meaning or merit consideration as a true narrative (White 11). In a second essay, “Critical Responses: The Narrativization of Real Events,” White advances the notion of what determines meaning in a narrative.

Narrative is a form of human comprehension that is productive of meaning by its imposition of certain formal components on a virtual chaos of events, which in themselves cannot be said to possess any particular form at all, much less the kind we associate with stories (5).

The reality White suggests insinuates that the world is a disorderly, “chaotic” place lacking any sort of meaning without narrative to cohesively bind the pieces of reality together. If one supports White’s view that narratives create meaning in life, it can be deduced that authors are the supreme entities responsible for coherently constructing meaning in a text.

In traditional linear narratives the authors guide their readers through their coherently constructed texts. The reader does not choose which path to follow, like in a

hypertext; the author informs the reader of narrative direction with a sense of finality. If the reader does not like the path the author insinuates, their only option is to stop reading the book altogether; the author assigns a “prescribed order of reading” as opposed to hypertexts where “the order changes according to the actions of the reader” (Fraser 7). Robbins believes that many readers take joy in a dogmatic author: “the sense of being led is precisely the joy of linear stories” (2). Instead of choosing their own paths, readers can “indulge in something safely outside [themselves] upon which [they] can project [their] feelings” (Murray 100). Murray experienced the negative repercussions of an interactive story firsthand when she went to see “Peter Pan” and the protagonist asked the audience if they believed in fairies—she was mortified—the characters were not supposed to interact with the audience! She believed (at that time) that “art [was] dependent on creating distance” (101). Therefore, the author should create a framework for the narrative, but remain consciously hidden within that framework. Wayne Booth, author of The Rhetoric of Fiction, reinforces this notion of a veiled author:

The rhetoric of fiction is that the author’s judgment is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it...We must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear. (qtd in. Arnsdorf 1)

The nature of a narrative cloaks the author within the text, but is non-participatory on the part of the reader. The power a reader has within a “traditional linear narrative” is limited to his ability to “turn the pages, proceed from paragraph to paragraph according to the author’s preconceived organization of the work, and to close the book” (Arnsdorf 1). The author, therefore, is the supreme artist in traditional narratives, weaving his meaning throughout the text through the apparition of his person, leaving the reader no control over the direction of the narrative.

The ultimate control the author exerts on the narrative is his ability to create a sense of closure with a moralizing ingredient. Closure is the sense of bringing a story full-circle, of tying up all the loose ends in the plot. White believes that medieval annals and chronicles were not narratives for this exact reason: they “do not so much conclude as simply terminate” (5). Furthermore, “the nineteenth-century editors of the medieval chronicles denied [the annals and chronicles] the status of genuine histories” because they

“simply terminate[d]” (White 16). In order to be deemed a narrative a text needed a sense of finality in narratology. The general consensus of many narrative scholars furthers this assumption stating that narratives need a “moralizing” conclusion. White states that “the demand for closure...for a moral meaning” is a demand that “sequences of real events be assessed as to their significance as elements” of a narrative (20). In other words, narratives derive their meaning from the insinuated closure created by the elements of the narrative. White is suggesting that narrativity and morality are innately linked together:

Narrativity is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, this is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any mortality that we can imagine...[moreover] is the fiction of such a world, a world capable of speaking itself and of displaying itself as a form of story, necessary for the establishment of that moral authority without which the notion of a specifically social reality would be unthinkable? (13-14, 23)

White implies that morality is function of narrative—that narrative is a moral authority of sorts—his assertions underlie and bring into questions some assumptions of hypertext narrative. Since the reader determines the outcome of hypertext narratives, does this mean that there would be no moral authority? Or would each individual reader act as a moral authority? The answer to these questions will be addressed later in the paper; for now it can be assumed that narratology is a precise discipline. Standard narrative theory demands that the author create a linear, coherent, logically structured, story with a moralizing ending.

## **THE HYPERTEXT NARRATIVE**

Critics of traditional narrative theory argue that narrative “sequence is suggestive and controlling” (Fraser 7); and that they “tell of life’s history as static, archival, linear, reversible, and literally retrievable” (Shafer 32). Hypertext narratives, a technological offspring of traditional narrative, seek to fill in these gaps of linear-storytelling through their non-linear structure, rhizomatic nature, reversal of traditional author/reader roles, and the ambiguity of closure in their stories.

## I.) Non-Linear Form

N. Katherine Hayles defines “hypertext” as a text “that has links, chunked text, and multiple reading paths” (33). The basic premises of hypertext narrative are shared with traditional narrative but the means of storytelling are altered. There is no set structure to a hypertext narrative. “The facilities of manipulation, individual navigation, and freedom from given, authoritative structure [in a hypertext narrative] provide [the reader] with new practices of reading and writing” (Murfin 206). Rather than reading a text linearly from start to finish, hypertext narratives allow the reader to progress through interconnected links at their own pace.

The traditional view of narrative—a beginning, middle, and end—is something we’ve been growing beyond. Instead what we have is a constellated, fragmented-but emergent way of seeing things. It’s almost like a kaleidoscope: you shake it up and there’s another set of patterns. (Kovner 1)

The kaleidoscope is indeed the perfect metaphor for the hypertext narrative: each new lexia (or link) traversed represents a twist of the kaleidoscope. Furthermore, the odds that two twists of the kaleidoscope are identical is slim, much like the odds that two people will read a hypertext narrative in the exact same sequence. Nonlinear works require more cognitive effort on the part of the reader; hypertext gives the author

...the ability to present simultaneous actions in multiple ways...we can lay out all the simultaneous actions in one grid and then allow the interactor to navigate them. We have the expansiveness of the novel with the rapid intercutting of the film. (Murray 157)

All in all, hypertextual narratives grant readers greater choice in the plot of the story, and permit them to create their own paths across the nonlinear terrain.

The primary way in which narratives create their nonlinear domains is through the use of links. Links are material connections between related chunks of text; furthermore links are a “synthetic device [or tool] that brings multifarious elements together into some kind of orderly unit” (Johnson 198). Links can lead to the next step in the plot, to a definition of an unknown word, or they can reinforce the importance of an idea by having the reader repeatedly return to an important page. The field of psychoanalytic literary criticism asserts that “clarification [in narrative] is achieved through the circular and

coordinate study of past and present...through new modes of constructing experience” (Shafer 32-33). Links perfectly perform this circular, multidimensional examination of the past and present. For example, one page (or lexia) in a hypertext narrative may contain a link to a stream-of-consciousness digression by a character, while another link may connect the reader to the character’s childhood memories. Links, therefore, are symbolic connections between two related, but unsequential ideas. Turner reports that some critics of hypertext narratives “have been neglecting the role of symbols in establishing connexity between the different levels of a narrative structure” (141). In other words, Turner believes that links are symbolic connections within a hypertext that join ideas in a nonlinear fashion. This new method of connexity within the text created by links is a fundamental difference between standard narrative and hypertextual narratives.

Maiden hypertext narratives, those written in the past 20 years, have garnered the majority of their praise from link usage. Links provide the foundation for hypertext literature’s nonlinear structure, and the most dynamic modification of standard narrative form. Elementary teachers, for example, have found that the links in hypertext narrative’s are both inviting and informative for their students. When a hypertextual version of Tom Sawyer was used by one professor, she found that it made the information more accessible to the children:

[The hypertext narrative] reprints the novel and fleshes it out with evocative historical illustrations, hyperlinks for unfamiliar words, and a running commentary by Twain scholar Richard Bucci. The hypertext additions make the American classic seen unstuffy—it is possible—kind of cool. (Gajilan 1).

Teachers are not the only ones discovering the powerful ramifications of links in hypertext narratives. Johnson sees links not only as powerful connective devices, but also powerful agents in creating material connections between ideas. At times the links connect two related ideas, while other times they have the ability to link two seemingly unrelated ideas—causing the reader to have to play cognitive catch-up, or decipher what *they* believe the connection is between the two links. After reading one well-written hypertext Johnson wrote that the links,

...like the passing resemblances of *Great Expectations*, triggered that sense of

mystery, the sense of code half-deciphered...the rhetorical slight of hand was this; whereas every other Web site conceived hypertext as way of augmenting the reading experience, [they] saw it as an opportunity to withhold information, to keep the reader at bay...they used hypertext to condense their prose, not expand it. (132)

Through the narrative's condensation of prose Johnson believed the text elicited greater reader participation, which he saw as a positive outcome. Johnson's example and the Tom Sawyer example illustrate two ways that links force the reader to think critically about the text in ways that they would not have to in a standard linear narrative.

Hypertext narrative's ambiguous, pliant organization through linkage mirrors the complexity of real life. Where traditional narratives prefer to rearrange life in orderly designs, hypertext narratives acknowledge that life is not a linear process. While "linear narrative echoes the birth-to-death trajectory of our lives, hypertext reflects the associative memories and stray thoughts that flicker and babble along with out real-time words and deeds" (Quittner 2). Capturing these divergent pathways of the human mind is an underlying goal of most hypertext narratives. Authors of hypertext narrative, like Murray, believe this crucial element of human experience cannot be captured in traditional narratives: "a linear medium cannot represent the simultaneity of the processing that goes on in the brain—the mixture of language and image, the intimation of diverging possibilities that we experience as free will" (281). In Penelope Lively's Moon Tiger, the protagonist, Claudius, asserts Murray's belief that a linear history is not a *real* history; a narrative seeking to capture the complexities of life must transcend the barriers of standard linear narrative:

The question is, shall it or shall it not be a linear history? I've always thought a kaleidoscopic view might be interesting. Shake the tube and see what comes out. Chronology irritates me. There is no chronology inside my head...The pack of cards I carry around if forever shuffled and re-shuffled; there is no sequence, everything happens at once. (qtd. in Landow 1).

Multiple links in hypertext, therefore, mirror the shuffling and re-shuffling of thoughts in the brain. People do not think in lines; thoughts are random, free-flowing associations. The inclusion of these thought processes, edited or omitted from standard narrative

constructs in an effort to acquiesce to a correct form, “derive from [authors] attempts to be more truthful” in the presentation of human experience (Landow 1). Rather than being a perversion of standard form, hypertext narrative is seeking to further the capabilities of story-telling. Murray believes the sophistication of hypertext narratives simulates the complex labyrinth of human experience:

To be alive in the twentieth century is to be aware of the alternate possible selves, or alternate possible worlds, and of the limitless intersecting stories of the actual world. To capture such a constantly bifurcating plotline, however, one would need more than a thick novel or sequence of films. To truly capture such cascading permutations, one would need a computer. (38)

Hypertext narratives capability to capture “alternate possible selves,” is made possible through linkage. Readers can fully immerse themselves in characters thought processes, as opposed to the static representations of linear thought in traditional narratives.

This lack of centrality in hypertext narratives produced by associative links is problematic to traditionalists who believe narratives should be comprehensively unified. N. Katherine Hayles calls this type of decentralized story a “rhizomatic” story (55). In his discussion of narrative, however, White precludes certain stories classification as narratives because of their deficient nucleus: “It is the absence of a center that precludes or undercuts any impulse [the annalist, for example,] might have had to work up his discourse into the form of a narrative” (White, H. “The Value” 11). While some critics substantiate White’s view and find the “lack of centrality disconcerting and distracting,” proponents of hypertext narrative emphasize that their stories must be seen as “belief networks” (Fraser 16). In other words, readers must assume that the author created the link for a reason—that there is meaning by the associations. “Readers must assume that [the links] relate in some way for the author to have created the hyperlink between them” (Fraser 17). In standard narrative books readers innately trust the author to connect the elements in a story. Hypertext narrative, however, is a primitive story-telling construction—making it less trustworthy for readers. Parts of the story are woven together by what Sapir and Wharf call “threads of symbolism;” there is no chronological or sequential order like standard narratives (Turner 141). Advocates of hypertext

narrative, however, believe this general mistrust of decentralized storytelling will diminish as more hypertext authors become established.

## **II.) Author-Reader Relationship**

The recalibration of the relationship between the author and reader is the second deviation of budding hypertext narratives from their traditional predecessors. Authors of hypertext narratives give the reader choices; in turn relinquishing some traditionally authoritative roles and allocating greater responsibility on the reader. White's assertion that narrative is recognized as "proper narrative" only when the author "fills in the gaps" (21) is fundamentally challenged by hypertext narratives where authors "intentionally problematize expectations of storytelling, challenging [the reader] to construct [his] own text from the fragments the author has provided" (Murray 58). Interactivity is a key component of hypertext narratives. Authors construct their narratives in ways that grant the reader control over the tempo of the text.

In electronic narrative the author is like a choreographer who supplies the rhythms, the context, and the set of steps that will be performed. The interactor makes use of this repertoire of possible steps and rhythms to improvise a particular dance among the many possible dances the author has enabled. (Murray 153)

The author writes all the paths present in the text, but it is up to the reader to choose which path to take. Dennis Baron postulates that the interactivity of hypertext narrative creates a "new dialogue" between the text and the reader allowing multiple readers to infer divergent meaning from the same text (86). It is apparent, therefore, that hypertext narratives reconfigure the authorial role in stories. Arnsdorf sees this role transformation by an "active, even intrusive reader [as infringing] upon the power of the writer, removing some of it and granting to the reader" (1). This distribution of power, however, is precisely what the authors of hypertext narratives endeavor to accomplish in their stories.

Hypertext narratives yield reader discretion through the reconfiguration of authorial role. Interactive readers are able to choose how they want the plot to unfold. Some critics claim that the "absence of possibility" in standard narrative form is the key

difference between linear and non-linear narratives (Fraser 8). Murray believes that agency, “the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our thoughts and decisions,” is one of the most beneficial components of hypertext narratives (126). While some critics believe agency should be limited to the author, others believe allowing the reader autonomous decision-making increases their interest and involvement in the story. Theorist Paul Hernadi undermines the traditional narrative assumption that the author controls the movement of the text: he believes that “there is no literary convention indicating the proper tempo of the text” (198). The flow of the story, therefore, cannot be definitively determined by the author. The primary way hypertext authors allow readers control over narrative development is through linking different parts of the story. In choosing between two links in a story, the reader is guiding their own experience. Another way hypertext author’s grant readers control over the story is through the use of “avatars” (Murray 114). Avatars are like actors or characters—readers are allowed to chose which avatar they wish to follow through the story. Oftentimes the author will allow the reader to follow several characters in a story which grants them the “unique perspectives” of different characters, rather than following the same character throughout the story (Quittner 1). Because the reader makes choices which directly influence the outcome of the narrative, there is a new sense reader-accountability in hypertext narratives—the author is no longer solely responsible for everything that transpires in the text. Arnsdorf agrees that “when the author gives the narrative depth, and the reader breadth, a linguistic aesthetic is attained (1). In other words, by granting the reader choices the author allows the reader to become an interactive, fully-immersed participant in the narrative development.

### **III.) Ambiguity of Closure**

White decisively characterized a traditional narrative as story with an ending that has a sense of closure provided by the author. He believed the intrinsic meaning of the narrative was discovered through this narrative closure—a moment of clarity the author bestows upon the reader. Turner agreed with White that “the meaning of every part of the [narrative] process is assessed by its contribution to the total result” (153). However, most hypertext narratives are characterized by ambiguity of closure rather than a

definitive ending. Murray hypothesizes that meaning is found in the narrative process, not the end result: “electronic closure occurs when a work’s structure, not its plot, is understood” (174). When readers understand the motivations behind the author’s linkage and the associations made between ostensibly anomalous ideas in the hypertext, then—and only then—can the narrative have a sense of closure and a deeper moral meaning. Ironically, White dismisses chronicles as a form of narrative because “the chronicle represents [their stories] as if real events appeared to human consciousness in the form of unfinished stories” (“The Value” 5). He is suggesting that in real life we perceive events in the form of finished stories; once we experience something and assign it meaning the event is over. But, is this the way people really perceive their lives? When people look back over their lives, do they see clearly partitioned chapters or a blending of experience, an evolving creation of meaning? White must have foreseen this notion as problematic because he qualifies his previous statement claiming that narratology itself is faulted: “[standard] narrative appears to be lacking in the means to track shifts in meaning” (22). While White refused to believe narrative capacity incorporated shifting meaning, hypertext narrative is the realization of these faulty notions. In other words, narrative meaning has the ability to evolve synchronically with the reader and developing social climate. Meaning is not static it is dynamic. Hypertext narratives are a non-linear, decentralized, reader-oriented, interactive medium adept to accommodate the dynamic nature of meaning. Unlike traditional narratives with a fixed meaning, temporal meaning, hypertexts lend themselves to the creation of individual meaning capable of transcending author, reader, and social circumstances.

## **CONCLUSION:**

At the onset of his essay “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” White asks his audience to consider whether their preconceived notions of narrativity coincide with their perceptions of reality: “Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of a well-made story with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see the ‘end’ in the very beginning” (23). Proponents of hypertext narrative would answer White’s question with a resounding, enthusiastic “No!”—to them the world is not series of finite occurrences with

static meaning. Hypertext authors seek to create stories that mirror real life. Through their unconventional aesthetic properties (i.e. links) hypertext narratives seek to embody the complexities of real life in their materiality, or physical representations. While White acknowledges the complexity of human life, he believes that humans primarily use narrative to bring order to their chaotic lives:

I have sought to suggest that this value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary. (“The Value” 23).

The monolithic meaning White assumes people desire from narrative is fundamentally undermined by hypertextual narratives. Rather than assembling a coherent vision of how life is or should be hypertext authors place the interpretation in the reader’s hands. A reader traversing a hypertext narrative in search of a simple moral will be readily discouraged.

Meaning in hypertext narrative is not only found in the text, but also in the unconventional structure and materiality of the work. Unlike White and other theorists who believe the structural fidelity and moralizing theme of a story grant it merit, authors of hypertext narrative find value in the challenge of discovering meaning in a text. Author Coraghessen Boyle believes that the goal of standard narrative has been to trick readers into accepting a monolithic view of narrative worth and reality:

Standard narrative fiction is intended to deceive (or better to seduce) its audience into believing that the reality it presents is the only reality—even if it takes us to a planet inhabited by Nalidusian Dergs or a dingy Central European town where ordinary people turn into cockroaches—fiction is a version of reality. (66)

Coraghessen suggests that the traditional nature of narrative is deceitful—rather than letting readers decipher their own meaning, traditional narratives put all the power in the author’s hands. Landow mimics Coraghessen’s assessment of traditional narrative intent: “Narrative exists as the main or right [meaning] and reading narrative has brainwashed [people] into expecting and demanding a single right answer and a single correct story line” (2). Rather than endeavoring to create their own meaning, readers have been historically conditioned to accept the realities presented by narrative authors. Through

the medium of hypertext literature, readers will finally be allocated the power to make their own decisions. While this may scare tentative readers leery of decision-making, readers who think critically and wish to challenge themselves will be excited by the possibilities of hypertext narratives.

With the multifarious possibilities insinuated by hypertextual narratives many people wonder why only a scant number of noteworthy hypertext narratives have been written, and furthermore why those that have been written have not been widely disseminated. Michael Joyce, a forerunner in hypertextual theory, does not see a demand or creative drive behind most attempts to create hypertext narratives: “There is no popular need right now for the multimedia. That’s obvious. No one knows how to make this a popular medium. The web is all edges without much depth and for a writer that is the trouble” (qtd. in Quittner 3). As a strong advocate of hypertextual narratives Joyce recognizes the importance of the medium, yet he is uncertain how it can garner wider popularity. The possibilities of reader-driven and reader-created meaning will no doubt excite a brilliant author sometime in the near future. Joyce believes with time the medium will find its place in the field of narrative study: “We’re very close to some shared moment, a transformative medium—something big is happening” (qtd. in Quittner 4). Joyce is one of many theorists discussed in this paper who are excited, intrigued, and anticipatory over the possibilities of hypertext narratives in the future of narrative study.

All in all, while critics of standard narrative resist hypertext narrative as a valid form of storytelling advocates of hypertext narrative maintain that its diverse, thought-provoking attributes grant it consideration as a valid storytelling medium. Through its unconventional story-telling components, hypertext narratives provide readers with the opportunity to development new methods of meaning derivation. Nobel Prize winning poet Herman Hesse believed that “there is no reality except the one contained within us. That is why so many people lead such unreal lives. They take the images outside them for reality and never allow the world within to assert itself” (qtd. in Liukkonen 1). Hypertext narratives are one way people can allow the world within themselves to assert itself: rather than the author determining a prescribed narrative meaning, hypertext allows reader’s to determine their own narrative-significance, and in doing so assert Ong’s

notion that writing not only promotes “interior transformations of consciousness,” but they it is also a technology that restructures human thought (315).

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