

The Author Is Dead--Long Live the Author!

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## Abstract

According to George Landow, we are fortunate that hypertext has manifested, in material form, the principle of authorial indeterminacy proclaimed by such Postmodernist theorists as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Their claim is that, because all texts are interpreted variously, or “polysemously,” by their readers, they are ultimately not the texts written by their authors, but those read by their readers. Thus results the “death of the author” in the newly declared “writerly” text, as distinguished from the traditional and presumably moribund “readerly” text. Landow posits that, owing to the interventionist capabilities afforded readers, hypertext instantiates the writerly text technologically. But far from revealing previously hidden qualities of text, such an indeterminacy principle in writing is nothing new, and claims of the death of the author are overstated and premature, in light of concrete publishing realities. The current highlighting of the contingent relationship between readers and texts may be connected to McLuhan’s distinction between the “light through” of the cathode ray tube and the “light on” of reading words on the page. As a result, the kind of literacy being fostered by hypermedia may resemble the state of “craft literacy” (to use Eric Havelock’s term) prevalent in the Middle Ages. We can perhaps see what is happening to the author more clearly by revisiting St. Bonaventura’s delineation of four types of book makers--scribes, compilers, commentators, and authors--than by declaring his or her absolute death.

## The Author Is Dead--Long Live the Author!

On June 1, 1897, Mark Twain penned the following note to the London correspondent of the New York Journal in response to a recent notice in that paper: “The report of my death was an exaggeration” (Bartlett, 1992, p. 528). Were he alive today, I speculate that Twain would have much the same to say regarding the Postmodernist claim of the death of the author in general and its embrace by proponents of hypertext. In Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology, George Landow (1997), who is very much alive and well, as are his books, asserts that the technology of hypertext manifests or, to borrow the jargon, “instantiates,” principles of deconstructionism proclaimed by Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, and others. These theories, most of which were developed with only stable, printed text in mind, and before hypertext software had even been created, are seen to converge with those of Vannevar Bush (1945, July) and Theodor Holm Nelson (1981, 1987), the latter of whom coined the terms “hypertext” and “hypermedia.” They find embodiment most particularly in such systems as Microcosm, Storyspace, DynaText, the now-defunct Intermedia at Brown University, and to a limited extent on the World Wide Web.

The particular claim with which this essay is concerned arises from the observation, not only made by Postmodernists but also shared by I. A. Richards (1925/n. d., 1929/n. d.) and other Modernist proponents of Practical Criticism, that all texts are interpreted variously, or “polysemously,” by their readers. Texts by their very nature are pervious to varying interpretations, and as a result they are ultimately not the texts written by their authors, but those read by their readers. But New Critics and Postmodernists part company in their attitude towards this contumacy on the part of the reader. In Practical Criticism, or what became the New Criticism when transported across the Atlantic to the South and to Yale, the purpose of criticism

is to sharpen the reader's perceptive faculties and to disabuse him of his willful notions. By contrast, Postmodernists actually celebrate the revolt of the reader over the illegitimate authority of the hegemonic author. Here is how Barthes (1970) puts it in S/Z, his deconstructive study of Honoré de Balzac's tale "Sarrasine":

[T]he goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its consumer, between its author and its reader. The reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness--he is intransitive; he is, in short, serious: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a referendum. Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the readerly. We call any readerly text a classic text. (p. 4, qtd. in Landow, 1997, p. 5)

Thus in the Postmodern text we have the "death of the author," which occurs because the writer, now no longer an author, cedes to the reader some measure of control over the entry point, order, and manner of proceeding through the text. I wish to examine how Landow and others, such as Jay David Bolter (1991, 2001) apply critical theory to an understanding of the implications of hypertext for the future of the book. I wish to suggest that when tested by some of the realities of publishing in history, today, and as they are likely to be in the near future, the claims made for the transformative nature of hypertext are at least somewhat overstated, and that pronouncements of the death of the author are by the same token premature.

Throughout Hypertext 2.0, Landow (1997) shows how hypertext systems allow both creators of hypertext webs and their users varying degrees of agency over the generation and use of hypertextual links. For example:

- In Storyspace, the text consists of a number of short, screen-sized readings units, or lexias (using a term coined by Barthes). The author creates a web of associations among the lexias by whatever principle suits the subject matter or genre, whether it be reoccurrences of the same word or phrase, key terms, topics, or subjects. He or she can also provide the reader with a variety of interfaces for the text, as well as navigational aids such as a Roadmap, a Page Reader, and a Storyspace View, which allow different means of choice for the reader to traverse the lexias.
- In Microcosm, the author creates a web of connections among documents or files in any medium by designating for each file key words or phrases that describe its topic or subject. The document or media file is called up whenever the reader activates the key word or phrase in another file, which can call up any number of other related documents or media files. These are so-called implicit or generic links, which come into being only upon a reader's demand. No special formatting of the text or any kind of button indicates the presence of linked material, but the links are activated only by a reader who adopts an active role in relation to the text, in a sense prodding the text to reveal connections. Users may also add materials created in any application program that runs on the underlying operating system and make those files accessible by designating text strings that activate generic links.
- In Brown University's Intermedia, users could call up a topic web consisting of a variety of related subject materials and append commentary, links to texts of their own, and

links to external materials relating to the topic. It also possessed a variety of graphical orientation aids for the users.

- In Ted Nelson's envisioned Xanadu, users would be able to freely use and publish openly available material entered in what he calls the Docuverse, with a system of micropayments to manage the problem of reproduction rights in a manner analogous to copyright in the world of print.

From such examples, it is clear that hypertext affords readers a quite different set of controls over the reading experience. Indeed, reading on the screen is a paradigmatically different sort of experience from reading from the page, analogous in some senses to moving from the passenger seat of a car to the driver's seat. But the question arises, why does granting a greater sense of agency to the reader necessarily diminish the agency of the author? Why should this be presented as a kind of zero-sum game?

#### A Paradox

An even more essential question is, if the author is dead, why are there so many authors writing about how dead the author is? Do these authors seriously propose that any reader's words to any other effect are just as valid? If so, then it becomes just as valid for one to say that the author is not dead as it is to say that he or she is. Or that computer technology does not, to use the jargon once again, instantiate the theories of postmodernism as to say that it does. Claims by authors that the author is dead seem to recapitulate the conditions of Epimenides' paradox: "All Cretans are liars...One of their own poets has said so" (Weisstein, 1999a). An even more pointed analogy would be the Eubulides paradox, "This statement is false" (Weisstein, 1999b). If it is true then it must be false, but if it false then it must be true. One is also reminded of the cross-ironies of the title of Abbie Hoffman's (1970/2002) apparently deathless work, Steal This Book.

The irony is made only more delicious by the fact that in 1995, Steal This Book was released in both a library binding and a 25th anniversary facsimile edition, and on the back of the recent reissue the publisher once again announces, “This paperback edition of Steal This Book is the original edition, the ONLY one authorized by Abbie himself (before he died). All royalties from sales of this edition go to the Abbie Hoffman Activist Foundation, which is run by Abbie’s Estate.”

To be sure, hypertext systems such as Brown University’s Intermedia (now defunct) and Microcosm allow readers to add notes to a text, provide links to related materials, and share views collaboratively, all of which can be called up by any other user. These are useful features in any learning system, but to suggest that this expansion into letting everyone share his or her own marginalia constitutes the negation of the original author, or blurs the distinction between the author and the readers, would appear to need more concrete support than it has been given. Landow (1997) himself points out that the copy of the original file called up remains untouched by any changes or additions made by anyone but the original author (p. 90). The “virtuality” of the text seems to have nothing to do with authorial control over original work.

He then goes on to assert,

but it does narrow the phenomenological distance that separates individual documents from one another in the worlds of print and manuscript. In reducing the autonomy of the text, hypertext reduces the autonomy of the author. In the words of Michael Heim, “as the authoritativeness of text diminishes, so too does the recognition of the private self of the creative author” (Electric Language, 221).  
...Hypertext and contemporary theory reconceive the author in a second way. As we shall observe when we examine the notion of collaborative writing, both agree

in configuring the author of the text as a text. As Barthes explains in his famous exposition of the idea, “this ‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite” (S/Z, 10). (pp. 90-91)

If we link to this the deconstructionist idea that all texts are simply webs of signifiers with no necessary connection with anything signified, the author is thus rendered out of existence, merely a convenient fiction we read into the text to make it comfortable and “readerly.” To fully test this notion, let us examine the very evidence Landow puts forth to support it, his discussion of collaborative writing, in both print and hypertext environments.

To begin, Landow (1997) posits a sharp distinction between practices and attitudes towards authorship in the science and the humanities. In the sciences, shared authorship of published research is a given, particularly since graduate student research is generally supported by funding for laboratory group projects under the supervision of a laboratory director as advisor. By contrast, in the humanities, graduate student research is funded mostly by teaching assistantships, and even though graduate advisors perform functions analogous to those in the sciences, the advisor is never included as co-author (pp. 106-107). Thus, “[o]ne reason for the different conceptions of authorship and authorial property in the humanities and the sciences lies in the different conditions of funding and the different discipline-politics that result” (p. 107).

But he then goes beyond this social constructionist explanation for such differences to an indictment of the humanities for distorting the true nature of authorship:

Another corollary reason is that the humanistic disciplines, which traditionally apply historical approaches to the areas they study, consider their own assumptions about authorship, authorial ownership, creativity, and originality to be eternal verities. In particular, literary studies and literary institutions, such as



departments of English, which still bathe themselves in the afterglow of Romanticism, uncritically inflate Romantic notions of creativity and originality to the point of absurdity. (p. 107)

One detects a note of bitterness in this observation which might be attributable to the tensions felt by someone whose project activities have so decidedly crossed frontiers between the humanities and computer science, but as a claim in revealing the root cause of the issue it itself engages in a distortion. One wonders if he would extend this caricature of the humanities to the authors who have provided the theoretical foundation for his own work—Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Bakhtin, and others. Does the validity of their theories suffer from inflated “Romantic notions of creativity and originality”? If so, we are back to the conundrum of the liar’s paradox. But if not, there must be some other explanation for the tendency in the humanities not to credit collaborative work as “original” and not to count it towards matters such as tenure and promotion in the academy.

Aside from the matters of funding and politics, it is clear that today, collaboration in the theoretical and empirical sciences is not only a desirable condition but a necessary one for generating new knowledge. The size and complexity of scientific research in advanced technological societies are responsible for such necessary conditions of teamwork. It was not always so. The mathematical and scientific principles upon which current research is based were developed by such authorial natural philosophers as Copernicus, Newton, Leibniz, and Descartes, whose discoveries emanated not from the teamwork of a grant-funded laboratory but from the mind of an individual. As Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979) and Marshall McLuhan (1962) have pointed out, it was the printing press that made it possible for such advances in empirical science to develop at such an accelerated pace, but in looking at the same evidence Landow

wishes only to emphasize the negative aspects, in asserting that

book technology and the attitudes it supports are the institutions most responsible for maintaining exaggerated notions of authorial individuality, uniqueness, and ownership that often drastically falsify the conception of original contributions in the humanities and convey distorted pictures of research. (p. 108)

#### Print as Paradigm

One must of course acknowledge that he does have a point in this. As Eisenstein (1979) observes,

Scribal culture could not sustain the patenting of inventions or the copyrighting of literary compositions. It worked against the concept of individual property rights. It did not lend itself to preserving traces of personal idiosyncrasies, to the public airing of private thoughts, or to any of the forms of silent publicity that have shaped consciousness of self during the past five centuries. (pp. 229-230)

Moreover, “the cult of personality was repeatedly undermined by the conditions of scribal culture and was powerfully reinforced after the advent of printing” (p. 232). Still, to emphasize this aspect of print culture is to exclude other evidence provided by Eisenstein and others that printing and publishing provided, for the first time, opportunities for collaborative work in the production of published works that scribal culture could not sustain.

Aside from the added labor of rubricators and illuminators in producing manuscripts, scribal work was an essentially solitary occupation, with one man producing one copy of a work at a time. With the increase in demand for books after the growth of the medieval universities, the process was augmented by what was known as the “pecia system,” whereby quires of books were broken out and lent individually for copying either by students themselves or hired copyists

(Eisenstein, pp. 12-14). The invention of the printing press prompted for the first time the development of an assembly line process, necessitating the collaborative ventures of editors, compositors, printers, proofreaders, pressmen, printer's devils, binders, and booksellers, often under the same roof. Given the considerable capital outlay needed for such productions, the cooperation of moneylenders and travelers in the book trade was required, establishing much of the basis for modern capitalism and marketing, which are characteristic of publishing, as well as many other endeavors in the modern age (Eisenstein, pp. 3-71). Thus, book technology was responsible for establishing not only the notions of authorship and copyright that Landow accuses us of naturalizing, but also the very conditions for collaboration necessary in producing any kind of published work, whether in print or in hypertext.

For we must recognize that the very technologies that produce hypertext are made possible only by the accumulated body of printed books and articles that support their conceptualization, development, and documentation. These printed works are the products not solely of other texts but of real authors whose presence in their works is vital to their conception, production, and distribution. But such works can be published only through the cooperative and collaborative efforts of large numbers of others whose jobs and roles have been established by five hundred years of print culture. When hypertexts are created, the nature and names of some of these jobs and roles may be changed somewhat, but their functions, mutatis mutandis, do not go away. Thus, it is somewhat puzzling for our author (Landow, 1997) to present as he does an account of the production of his Dickens Web for the Intermedia system (pp. 111-114) as a new paradigm for publication and an example of how hypertext production blurs the identity of the author: "Creating The Dickens Web involved dozens of 'authors' and almost that many kinds of collaboration" (p. 111).

There are too many details to go into here, but in essence what Landow describes is a process not significantly different from what a publisher goes through in creating a reader, anthology, critical edition, reader's companion, or other sort of encyclopedic survey in print. There is a general editor--not a manuscript or acquisitions editor, but a "name" with academic credentials--who conceives the work, provides some if not most of the content, organizes the process of gathering other contributors of text, and is accorded the place of "author." For any visuals necessary, there is an art editor who engages both in-house artists and freelancers to produce it. Others may be brought in to contribute supplementary materials on a work-for-hire basis. Obtaining permission for use of third-party content is the responsibility of either the author, the individual contributors, or an in-house permissions editor. Those who contribute original text or overviews of the work of others are given byline credit, while in an encyclopedic work contributors are often identified by their initials at the end of the individual piece they write. Nothing in this description of the publishing process is inconsistent with that Landow presents in the creation of The Dickens Web, yet he sees the latter as presenting a "complex problem of authorship" (p. 113) and summarizes by claiming, "As this account should make clear, 'authorship' of individual texts in a hypermedia environment becomes even more problematic than in the world of print" (p. 114). But one looks in vain for any compelling reasons to think so.

While we know that Samuel Johnson was the author of his Dictionary of the English Language, and that Noah Webster wrote An American Dictionary of the English Language, who is the "author" of Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged? Who is the "author" of The Encyclopædia Britannica? Of The Cambridge Chaucer Companion, or Our Exagmination Round His Factification For Incamination of Work in Progress, or Chilton's Repair and Tune-Up Guide, Capri, 1970-1977, or The Holy Bible, King James Version?

From these few samples it is clear that we do not need hypertext for the notion of shared or indeterminate authorship, for all these works were created for the culture of print. By the same token, the proto-hypertexts and many of the hypertexts that have been published have clearly defined authors, and their works are sought out largely on the strength of their authors' reputations and prestige. People who read Julio Cortazar's Hopscotch, Jacques Derrida's Glas, and Roland Barthes's S/Z doubtless do so because they want to read works by those authors. And no matter how much control they may or may not cede to their readers, Michael Joyce, Stuart Moulthrop, and Shelley Jackson will always be clearly identified as the authors of afternoon, Victory Garden, and Patchwork Girl, respectively.

Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that authorship in the vastly more immense realm of book publishing is in any danger of going away, and considerable evidence to the contrary. In Book Business, Jason Epstein (2001) has noted that

[b]etween 1986 and 1996...sixty-three of the one hundred best-selling titles were written by a mere six writers. Tom Clancy, John Grisham, Stephen King, Dean Koontz, Michael Crichton, and Danielle Steel--a much greater concentration than in the past and a mixed blessing to publishers, who sacrifice much of their normal profit, and often incur losses, to keep powerful authors like these. But name-brand best-selling authors may follow King's innovation [publishing Riding the Bullet on the Web as a download] to its logical next step and exploit their electronic rights without the help of their publishers. (pp. 33-34)

If this is a significant and lasting trend, it would then seem that, by a far greater measure, electronic publishing is not only fostering the continuation of the readerly text, but is doing so on the strength of the hegemonic author. Under such conditions, it would make sense to worry more

about the death of the publishing house than that of the author. Similarly, the recent travails of Doris Kearns Goodwin and Stephen Ambrose for having been accused of plagiarizing from the prior works of Lynne McTaggart and Thomas Childers, respectively, demonstrate that the property rights of authors are far from having eroded and may be entering a stage of even more vigorous defense. Certainly, the passage of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and the attempts by music publishers to protect their property rights against such threats as Napster show that the digitalization of intellectual property has only increased the pressures for defending copyrights. Whether this movement be in the name of the author or of the publisher is beside the point, which is that the challenges of electronic publishing to the traditional, long-held rights of copyright owners are trending in just the opposite direction from that claimed by the Postmodernists.

#### Retrieving the Manuscript

So why is it that the proponents of hypertext believe so strongly in the death of the author? A possible answer is suggested by Stuart Moulthrop's (1991) analysis of hypertext using McLuhan's (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988) tetrad as developed in Laws of Media. Moulthrop's analysis is perceptive in noting that

[h]ypertext differs from earlier media in that it is not a new thing at all but a return or recursion (of which more later) to an earlier form of symbolic discourse, i.e., print. ... At the kernel of the hypertext concept lie ideas of affiliation, correspondence, and resonance. In this, as [Ted] Nelson has argued from the start, hypertext is nothing more than an extension of what literature has always been (at least since "Tradition and the Individual Talent")--a temporally extended network of relations which successive generations of readers and writers perpetually make

and unmake. (pars. 18-19)

The deconstructionists are right in asserting that texts have always been open, and that the particular technology of printing was responsible for fostering the notion of a unitary text. But readers have always recognized that authors can write books only because they have read other books and use them for their own purposes. As T.S. Eliot (1975) has famously put it in his essay on Philip Massinger, “Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal...” (p. 153).

Rather than considering this the death of the author, it would be more useful to see that the resources put in the hands of hypertext users allow them to create electronic illuminated manuscripts of their own, broadening the definition of authorship by retrieving the medieval definition. As I (Morrison, in press) have suggested elsewhere,

...Landow (1997) notes, “Medieval manuscripts present some sort of hypertext combination of letter sizes, marginalia, illustrations, and visual embellishment, in the form of both calligraphy and pictorial additions” (p. 63). This is a promising tack, for it seems to recognize that electronic communication through the computer is reprising, with variations, many of the conditions of medieval manuscript production and consumption. It also suggests connections between the computer screen and the “light through” of stained glass windows and illuminated manuscripts, as McLuhan (1962) notes (pp. 105-109).

In the thirteenth century, St. Bonaventure wrote that there are four roles that someone who makes books can fill:

A man might write the works of others, adding and changing nothing, in which case he is simply called a ‘scribe’ (scriptor). Another writes the work of others with additions which are not his own; and he is called a ‘compiler’ (compilator).

Another writes others' work and his own, but with others' work in principal place, adding his own for purposes of explanation; and he is called a 'commentator' (commentator) ... Another writes both his own work and others' but with his own work in principal place adding others' for purposes of confirmation; and such a man should be called an 'author' (auctor). (Eisenstein, 1979, pp. 121-122)

We can see strong similarities between such "makers of books" and Landow's conception of the Postmodern hypertext author. In both cases, authorship is a matter of degree rather than a sharply defined role, and in neither case is original creation ab nihilo part of the picture. The medieval book-maker could not be focused on creating original compositions because so much of his energies necessarily had to be devoted to preserving the writing of the past. It was not as it is today in "the late age of print" (Bolter, 2001, pp. 2-3), when one is obliged to quote, cite, and give credit to prior authors whose work is often readily available. This latter condition is of course the product of the commodification of books made possible by the invention of the printing press and the tradition of copyright that gradually ensued. The medieval maker of books had quite a different primary obligation, which was to make sure first and foremost that the works with which he was dealing were preserved, for there was no means other than those of his fingers and hands. What energies were left over after this act of preservation was fulfilled were in a sense a bonus, rather than the prime focus for his energies.

Of course today, knowledge workers have no such hobbles attached to their boots--indeed, our problem is just the opposite. As so many commentators have reminded us, our problem is not so much the preservation of scarce texts as the need to winnow through the plethora of what we now designate as "information" so as to make sense of our world. As Neil Postman (1990, October 11) has put it, we are in danger of "Informing Ourselves to Death." In "the industrial age



of print” (Bolter, 2001, p. 2), a rather brief span between the French Revolution and the Great War, what now seems to have been a relatively leisurely, Edwardian age of gentility, authorship was a not quite so harrowing an experience. Authors could devote their energies to developing a unified and consistent voice, a point of view, to borrow McLuhan’s metaphor, from which the world of their book could emanate. But with the development of the steam press and the burgeoning of printed matter produced, the world of print expanded to a state of overload, resulting in the fragmentation and incoherence against which the manifestoes and manifestations of Futurism, Dadaism, and Constructivism became a reaction or, in another McLuhanesque term, an anti-environment. With the further explosion of information made possible by electronic storage, against which Vannevar Bush’s (1945, July) memex was the first conceptualized anti-environment, it became necessary to deal with information at not just the surface level, but at what Stuart Moulthrop (1991) terms its

hypotextual “form” as well--e.g., the way nodes are divided to accommodate data structures and display strategies, or the types of linkage available and the ways they are apparent to the reader. Practically speaking, this means that users of a hypertext system can be expected to understand print not only as the medium of traditional literary discourse, but also as a meta-tool, the key to power at the level of the system itself. (par. 35)

Hence, the pressure on the contemporary maker of hypertexts is not to preserve, as it was with the medieval maker of books, but to program the interface, or to deal with the already programmed interface. The mental energies expended in thus manipulating the information at the system level puts her activities in the realm of what Moulthrop (1991) terms a state of “secondary literacy”:

Ong and McLuhan have argued that television and radio introduce “secondary orality,” a recursion to non-print forms of language and an “audile space” of cognition (Orality and Literacy 135; Laws of Media 57). By analogy, hypertext and hypermedia seem likely to instigate a secondary literacy --“secondary” in that this approach to reading and writing includes a self-consciousness about the technological mediation of those acts, a sensitivity to the way texts-below-the-text constitute another order behind the visible. This secondary literacy involves both rhetoric and technics: to read at the hypotextual level is to confront (paragnostically) the design of the system; to write at this level is to reprogram, revising the work of the first maker. Thus this secondary literacy opens for its readers a “cyberspace” in the truest sense of the word, meaning a place of command and control where the written word has the power to remake appearances. (par. 36)

Moulthrop’s “secondary literacy” thus has features in common with Eric A. Havelock’s “craft literacy,” that is, “literacy of a secondary type” (1986, p. 41), “an expertise managed by a restricted group of the population” (1982, p. 188). This is the stage of literacy that prevails in any society in which the means of producing text are limited to a small group or class because (a) the materials for production are recalcitrant and require years of apprenticeship before they can be fully mastered, and (b) the coding of the spoken tongue is in a symbol system that is either so ambiguous or so complex that responsibility for generating the text has to be entrusted to a mandarin of scribes specially versed in the code by years of elite schooling and theoretical studies. These conditions have prevailed in all cultures in which the phonetic alphabet devised by the ancient Greeks from the system of consonants used by the Phœnicians has not been fully

adopted and interiorized by the bulk of the population--that is, any non-Western culture, Greek culture before at least the fourth century BCE, and European culture of the middle ages. It is just such conditions that are being reprised by the added requirement of hypertext that creators and users master the manipulation of text at the "hypotextual," system level. By retrieving the illuminated manuscript, one might say that hypertext and hypermedia systems are recreating the undemocratic and even anti-democratic ethos of the craft literacy of the middle ages. Hence, one would expect hypertext to do nothing to erase the "digital divide" but actually to increase it, particularly in concert with the undermining effects of extended television viewing upon levels of literacy.

For despite the purportedly greater degree of democracy afforded readers of hypertext in controlling their interactions with what they read, in reality the added burden of learning a metatextual operating system, whether as writer or as reader, or both, interposes a set of hurdles to reading that is decidedly undemocratic. For we must remind ourselves that the centers of training in hypertext are such elite institutions as MIT, Brown, Dartmouth, Georgia Tech, and Carnegie Mellon, and that the theoretical paragons of the movement trace their lineage to the Collège de France and the École normale supérieure. No matter how inclusive and meritocratic some of such institutions strive to be, they inevitably fall far short of inculcating hypertext into the culture at large, owing to the sheer logic of numbers. Michael Joyce (1988, p. 14) has pronounced hypermedia as "the revenge of text upon television" (Bolter, 1991, p. 26), but one would have to be an inveterate snob not to acknowledge that Oprah Winfrey has done more to promote engagement with literature than any promoter of hypertext ever has or probably ever will. To their credit, the deconstructionists would so acknowledge, but then they would go on to say that this is not a good thing. They would say that all she has been doing is promoting

readerly texts, content to allow readers to wallow in the comfortable shackles of their bondage to the Simon Legrees of authorship. Better to take Nat Turner's route, they would say, and break free of servitude to the author as master, no matter what the consequences.

In The Gutenberg Galaxy, Marshall McLuhan (1962) declared,

We now live in the early part of an age for which the meaning of print culture is becoming as alien as the meaning of manuscript culture was to the eighteenth century. . . . Far from wishing to belittle the Gutenberg mechanical culture, it seems to me that we must now work very hard to retain its achieved values. (p. 135)

I believe that this is what the attack on the author boils down to. The Postmodernist challenge to print culture is not essentially to its technique, but to its ethos. The declarations of the death of the author are not just exaggerations, but rather the last fading gasps of the philosophy of a "Literature of Exhaustion," (Barth, 1967, August) fostered in the hothouse of the academy and allowed to linger on long past the time when it should have naturally expired of its own weight. This orchid of decadence, this fleur du mal, persists in an artificial environment that in time may die, thus leading to its demise. Meanwhile, the wildflower of free thought, always adapting to change, this pensée sauvage, prospers in the open air.

If the Postmodernist author is dead, as a consequence of natural forces, then like true subjects we can only take recourse in the continuation of authorship which the power of print has afforded the cultural realm and proclaim, "The author is dead--Long live the author!"

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