Issues in Multimedia Authoring
Lecture 16: The Changing Notion of “The Text”?

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Summary

• Landow and Delany’s “Hypertext, Hypermedia and Literary Studies: the State of the Art”

• Claim that hypertext / hypermedia illustrate theses of Derrida, Barthes, etc.

• Originally written in 1991; available in *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality*

• Lecture today has two aspects:
  • Present and illustrate L & D’s views
  • Provide a criticism of L & D
  • Will not be commenting on whether they “get Derrida (etc)”
L & D I : The Traditional Text vs Hypermedia

- 3 characteristics of traditional:
  - linear
  - bounded
  - fixed

- Hypermedia “transcends” these characteristics
L & D II : The Traditional Text vs. Hypermedia- Linearity

• Deals with composition and reading order of a text
• Nonhypertext book read sequentially from beginning to middle to end
• Hypertext can be read in many ways by following links
• Some text not even present for some readers
L & D III : The Traditional Text - Linearity 2

A → B → C → D → E  Linear

A → B → D → E → C  Nonlinear
L & D IV: The Traditional Text vs. Hypermedia - Boundedness

- Typical text is well circumscribed - think of a book and how it is isolated from others on a shelf.
- By contrast a hypermedia document can have “fuzzy” edges.
- Overlap possible - for example, texts ABCE and ABDE overlap.
L & D V: The Traditional Text vs. Hypermedia - Fixity

- Traditional document hard to “reassemble”
- With hypermedia can make new connections
L & D VI: The Traditional Text vs. Hypermedia - more properties

- Multivocality (Barthes)
- Intertextuality
- Decentering (Derrida)
L & D VII: The Traditional Text vs. Hypermedia - Example to work from (see handout)

http://www.macnn.com/articles/07/04/05/best.buy.apple.boutiques/
L & D VIII: The Traditional Text vs. Hypermedia - Multivocality

- Story is about Best Buy featuring Apple boutiques, by MacNN staff
- Also contains the reactions from the readers who have written into comment also the “voice” of the various advertisers, even one in French!
- Reader must distinguish them to understand the page
- Note that most prominent item at the top is NOT the story! (“Got Duplicates” ad item.)
- I can even change the vocality: contribute to the user comments
L & D IX: The Traditional Text vs. Hypermedia - Intertextuality

- Related to unboundedness
- Look at all the links to other places and other subject matters
- Some automatically generated “just for me” (the French language eBay.ca ad)
L & D X: The Traditional Text vs. Hypermedia - Decentering 1

• Comparison between a hypermedia document and a conventional text: L&D’s own!

• L&D encourage us to see conventional text as static, narrative as essentially sequential in scope.

• Web page can be taken in a different way. The eBay.ca ad (presumably) changes depending on my IP address (~ location)
L & D XI: The Traditional Text vs. Hypermedia - Decentering 2

• L&D’s text simply ends - no attempt to connect it to what’s next

• Could do this automatically with hypermedia document, even to one’s not written at the time

• Can decide that I want to proceed in any number of ways: can read comments on the story, can follow advertising, etc.
Pause and reflect

(Source: http://cutestthingever.typepad.com/photos/kittens/paws002.jpeg)
Criticism of L&D I

- Traditional texts only read in one way? L&D mention footnotes. Are FNs clunky compared to hyperlinks?

- Conventional books can overlap too

- If hypertexts are dynamic, something (what?) underlies the change? How do we know we have a changed text rather than merely a different text when I (e.g.) add a comment?
Criticism of L&D II

• Conventional books can be have two readings - “Centralians” in The Boomer Bible

• In order to test that the literary concepts apply more to hypertext, a comparison must be done with conventional texts. L&D have not done this.

• To show that they apply better requires at least an ordinal scale of “decenteredness” (etc), which has not been developed.
• Are footnotes clunky compared to hyperlinks?

• Take a photo from somewhere and illustrate the literary studies concepts with it.
Projects

• Discuss how *The Boomer Bible* is (or is not) a work of hypertext.