

Free Writing: Hypertext and Plagiarism  
Version 0.0  
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This version is dedicated to Karen Eliot.

*This writing is mostly fake (copied from other writing) so you should go away and not read any of it.*

A list of voices overheard by this text is available on request.

## 1 Entry

Readers of the electronic version of this text should "click" on any boldface word to access the lexia bearing that title and discussing its topic further. Readers of its print model should consult the **code** list included for the page number of the lexia corresponding to any term in boldface.

This text models a **hypertextual** discussion among various writers from various discourses: expert, lay, popular, underground. It artificially constructs a textual **athenaeum**, or discussion by a gathering of intellectuals without the exclusions and politics imposed by the late capitalist academy. It requires the use of **plagiarism** to make its point.

**Hypertext** and **plagiarism** share the potential for the **decommodification** of knowledge.

This text, as any, is in process and can claim no closure. It is designed to become an appendable **hypertext** and acknowledges that any given point within it is open. This text offers its apologies for its linear limitations.

It is a blueprint for a forthcoming electronic **hypertext** based in Q-Edit Earth-Editor, Hypercard, or both.

Postmodern (post-**deconstruction**) speech, knowledge, meaning, are located in conflicting, multivocal dialogue, not in univocal statement. The totality of voices counts for more of, more nearly approaches, the "reality" of existing discourse than the silencing, commanding speech of the "individual" subject.

## 2

| Code                     | Lexia: |
|--------------------------|--------|
| <b>access</b>            | 7      |
| <b>architecture</b>      | 4      |
| <b>athenaeum</b>         | 5      |
| <b>code</b>              | 2      |
| <b>copyright</b>         | 8      |
| <b>decommodification</b> | 9      |
| <b>deconstruction</b>    | 10     |
| <b>entry</b>             | 1      |
| <b>hypertext</b>         | 3      |
| <b>memory</b>            | 11     |
| <b>plagiarism</b>        | 6      |

## 3

### Hypertext

The kind of hypertext this text discusses and patterns itself on is an electronic text program allowing unlimited commentary, appendices, and new entries in a sort of equal pool. Connections are made by key words which act as bridges linking all blocks in which they appear: the reader chooses which direction she wishes to read in, designing her own path within the **architecture** of the text. Since she creates her own path through the text, she quickly bumps into the edge of the textual field surprisingly quickly. When she

arrives at a dead end, she can opt to continue the discussion path herself, or request that others do, by adding a new lexia. The borders of the hypertext are liquid, its form amorphous.

The hypertext being discussed here at the time this block is being written consists of read-only lexias (unalterable once locked by the "original author": we are thus preserving at one level that which we wish to break down on another [the lexia as a *morceau* within the tumult of **deconstruction**]) with potential to write new lexias which will automatically be attached to other blocks via links. Alteration should occur before placement (or re-placement) in the text, which remains a site of production. Total annihilation and alteration of knowledge is not **plagiarism**, and would have momentous and disturbing political implications. This hypertext will be concerned with creating new options through free use of the old.

A program freely allowing alterations of its texts is, however, another hypertext possibility, as yet unexplored here, and one which would fully destroy the vestiges of the "author." *The hypertext at large is a space for the death of (the) author-ity.*

*Hypertext cross-references terms and ideas, removing the boundaries of its subtexts, which then function in a kind of textual conference. It demands a new, non-linear (and less consumerist and objectified (**decommodification**)) way of reading (each text can access many others).*

#### 4

#### Architecture

Hyperspace is spatialized as a hard structure or network, built of textual blocks or lexias which are connected by links or bridges. *Nets or structures keep the whole book together.* Every reader enters through an **entry** hall. She then chooses a discussion topic from those listed in the **code** menu. Every discussion is coded by its key topics. The reader could also determine her point of entry by entering a word, and thus broaching the topic of her choice. The system would tell her in this case in which coded lexias that word appears. Every word should be referenced in the database. The reader would then select and arrive in a certain block. While reading a block, she can click on any word to see a list of lexias it appears in. When she wishes to contribute to the discourse she may append a new lexia with code and the machine will pick up on each word to cross-reference it.

This virtual architectural model avoids the social and political determinism inherent in the concrete architecture of today's academy: office structure, even the division of disciplines, sides of town, placement of offices no longer confer differences of status, power, meaning, proximity. In the digital **atheneum** there is no "head of the class," no front or back of the room, no physical intimidation to affect the discursive dynamics. Cultural power dynamics would be reduced to dynamics of rhetoric.

#### 5

#### Atheneum

An atheneum is a meeting of scholars or intellectuals for the discussion of ideas. The atheneum is differentiated from the (present-day) academy.

The atheneum constructed here on paper is a simulation of such a conversation linked by computer, or a **hypertext**. Here chunks of previously extant texts are brought into conference: the result is necessarily linear, but simulatedly non-linear. This demonstration is an authored example of a prototypical **hypertext** atheneum, **access** to which is discussed elsewhere in this text.

Were all knowledge and information made electronically available, the implications for cultural **memory** and **decommodification** would be radical. Without **copyright**, would writers and artists be put out of work and merely become disenfranchised in an otherwise hypercommodified social system? This text acknowledges the problematic of the breakdown of the book for the "full-time" writer and the necessity in capitalist society of some sort of funding for the artist and intellectual. This text proposes and mimics a **hypertextual** atheneum as primarily a forum for intellectual discussion, works-in-progress, arguments and the hashing out of ideas, not for the propagation of large finished "closed" works (aka books), though it advocates the free dissemination of all text.

#### 6

#### Plagiarism

For any writer to make any text, "stealing ideas" is necessary: no thought can be original, and no text or sign is closed, as **deconstruction** has taught. Does the writer hold a **copyright** to a particular combination of words, in a particular order? To any semblance of that combination? To an "idea," or in other words, arguably anything extant which might somehow be seen as signified by or in a chronologically later work? Whether combination of words, melody, or evocation of a patented aura, produced knowledge or information attributed by anyone to one "original author" can in fact never be traced to a definite origin, nor should establishment of its origins be held a necessary precondition to the use (intellectual or otherwise) of its content. As there is no originality, no closure, as all text refers, there is no plagiarism.

The scramble to own ideas and knowledge in a capitalist system, like the scramble to own land, has disenfranchised and silenced "non-specialists" and subjects not established within sanctioned disciplines (squat words).

The use of plagiarism (in the subversive and blatant form it takes within literary practice) is an attempt at **decommodification**. *The great advantage of plagiarism as a literary method is that it removes the need for, or commodity value, of talent or at least steals talent from those who possess it, makes cultural capital available to anyone, unchains this intangible commodity.*

*Who owns words?*

*The purpose of many different magazines and people using the same name is to create a situation for which no one in particular is responsible and to practically examine Western philosophical notions of identity, individuality, originality, value and truth. To test this assertion, sign the name "Karen Eliot" to the next document in which you intend to make a similar point. If you publish a magazine in the plagiarist spirit, call it *Smile*. You will quickly discover that you are in interesting company. *Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it.* There are only so many possibilities for original text. *Nothing is new everything is permissible. Plagiarism is a highly creative exercise because with every plagiarism a new meaning is brought to the plagiarized work.**

*We are not responsible. Steal everything in sight.*

## 7

### Access

**Hypertext** allows articulations by new voices to more easily enter into various discourses.

A **hypertext** network may or may not be open to the (computer-literate) public. A **hypertext** network can be used as a fully democratized (for the (computer-)literate) space for education, communication and debate in which physical factors of identity are not pertinent.

The task of educating people to be computer-literate is a pressing one. Already many public schools have computers; at some point they all should. As digitalization becomes more pervasive, public libraries will need terminals with modems, online to various existing **hypertext** areas. One important condition must not be elided: an exclusionary zone still functions in the technological dissemination of knowledge. Financial and physical access to technology, literacy and technological literacy preclude inclusion in the discursive game. Yet **plagiarism** and electronic communication (**hypertext**) are two means of broadening access to information and knowledge within these limitations.

This text principally confines itself for the moment to exploration of the possibilities of an electronic **athenaeum**, an admittedly elitist "academic" **hypertext** network (not confined to those already within the existing academy). It provides space for a particular kind of informed discussion for those with serious interest in its field.

At present an educated elite with access to information and technology is the only group eligible for **hypertext**. This elite includes all of the United States academic establishment. A hierarchical structure, surveillance mechanisms, and power dynamics function within this community. Should the entire infrastructure of the academy be transported intact into hyperspace, its existing social dynamics would confront a problematic power vacuum and a re- or destructuring. Power relations within it would necessarily change, as would the boundaries of academia itself.

Will the academy someday go electronic? This text does not assume such a prophecy but wishes to demonstrate through content and form some possibilities of **hypertext** of which the academy might avail itself should it enter electronic space, and more immediately, to suggest and prototypify an **athenaeum** which would function parallel and tangentially to academia with exclusivity based on factors of interest and consensus rather than of economics and professionalism.

**Hypertext** would equalize its users through the **decommodification** of their (academic) exchanges, as a substitute or alternative form of academic thought, and a new metaphorical or literal structure for reading. In **hypertext**, as in cyberspace, you are anyone you choose; physical identity (i.e race, gender, perceived attractiveness, other easy class/status markers of the credibility hierarchy) is no factor at all.

The **atheneum** might by consensus be available for all to read, with write privileges available only to members. *Among* members the hierarchy collapses. Membership as a writer is by invitation only, by any member. Expulsion is by vote or consensus. At any given time, however, a contract among the members would determine any user guidelines. Access at the present time would probably be through the Internet since it is the most extensive network (of networks) available.

*In privileging nothing*, a non-hierarchical knowledge *forecloses on cultural critique*, some might argue. Does cultural critique, then, come only from privilege? Privilege guarantees academics the freedom to criticize and be heard: their critique has been legitimized. If a critical voice was not occupying one of those precious few slots within the academy reserved for authorities, would it speak? If there were no such slots, but merely space for the creation of slots at will, *more* space for critique would be created. One contribution to the discussion appeals to a reader more than another; consensus and majorities could form.

## 8

### Copyright

Methods for controlling the copying of recorded or printed work to safeguard profit restrict knowledge to those with sufficient economic means, turning it into capital.

The only critical means of information production is making texts freely available (**decommodification**), through **plagiarism**, copying and electronic access for purposes of reading and publishing (printing and dissemination), all with access to appropriate technologies may join a given discourse.

## 9

### Decommodification

**Hypertext** provides the possibility of the **decommodification** of knowledge: the abolition of ownership and **copyright**, thus free access and reproduction.

Print literature necessitates a clear division between producer and consumer, between reader and writer. The producer of a book easily becomes the *owner* of a certain "knowledge", becomes privileged through holding the license on that cultural capital. The consumer buys (into) this commodity. **Plagiarism** counteracts this privilege; with plagiarized work a reader never knows whose intentionality might direct this text, or whether it has anything to do with anyone bearing the name on the work. **Hypertext** counteracts this hierarchy of privilege, ownership and prestige likewise. Like any electronic text, **hypertext** can be freely reproduced, and then altered or disseminated. It lends itself handily to **plagiarism** and the flouting of capitalist attempts at **copyright** control of text and language as commodity. Through it we may steal knowledge as we have need of it; no one need go hungry (once holding access to the necessary technology, which itself is problematically commodified).

Beyond that, **hypertext** is multivocal and post-**deconstruction**, has no one author and it thus owned by no one.

Once language loses its stability as capital (when knowledge becomes unstable it loses its exchange value), the business of academia could be radically transformed, or even go bankrupt as "business."

**Hypertext** defies commodity-lust for books (the reader/consumer cannot be lured, at least with today's technology, by an attractive or trendy cover, by exclusivity or other market ploys).

*The real content of the bourgeois story line is the property structure of reality. It's about ownership. Thought derives from the forces and modes of production.*

## 10

### Deconstruction

*We must abandon conceptual systems founded upon ideas of center, margin, hierarchy, and linearity and replace them with ones of multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks.*

A book is a text is a network of references. One definition of literature is that it evokes, connotes, more than it denotes or seems to say - and more than supposedly non-literary writing is thought to evoke. This is problematized by the fact that all writing, all language, exists inextricably within a *galaxy of signifiers* and can connote an infinity of signifieds. In its potential for cross-referencing, **hypertext** more closely approximates the way language works. The very divisions in this text are problematic: any given sentence could be placed in more than one lexia.

**Hypertext** reifies poststructuralist theories of textuality, narrative, and the functions of reader and writer. It is not susceptible to criticisms leveled by deconstructionists at the print text, since it makes possible things that print ruled out: impermanence, appendability, mutability, nonlinear reading, and therefore **decommodification**. The **hypertext** is free and the work of many "authors."

It is intertextual: Attention has shifted from the trinity of author/work/tradition to that of text/knowledge/culture. The evolution of literature is replaced by a synchronic literary sign system *freeing the literary text from psychological, sociological, and historical determinisms*.

It is multivocal: multivocality is *the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other*. There are no third persons, no quotations or usages, just subjects, just voices.

It is decentered: the center, *focus or organizing principle* continually shifts, becoming one with the interest of the reader. A model of a network of centers with *no primary axis of organization* replaces the model of one center as a hub, as the pinnacle of a hierarchical pyramid. There is always a center, but now each reader becomes that center.

**Hypertext** removes control of the conclusion of an argument from one authorial voice. Only the reader can draw conclusions from this contradictory and unclosable mass.

*The first step of decomposition is the bite. The morceau is always detached as its name indicates and you do not forget it, with the teeth - quotation marks, brackets, parentheses: when language is cited the effect is that of releasing the grasp or hold of a controlling context.*

What's in there doesn't decompose (yet): we do not know what swallowing and digestion of the *morceau* would entail.

## 11

### Memory

The **hypertextualization** of material can prevent its falling prey to cultural amnesia. The deluge of information, the *ecstasy of communication*, mandates the instantaneous forgetting of yesterday's events in the breathless rush to keep up with each day's new trivia - the unstoppable march of regimented time dictates that every day, precisely the same amount of "news" as yesterday (and tomorrow) is expected. Yesterday's news, however big, whatever its impact, is never rehashed (it might be updated, but only if something "new" has happened). So that each day's "news" will seem even with every other day's, trivia are amplified and take their place alongside disasters of global impact.

In 1945, before it was technologically possible, Vannevar Bush conceived the electronic Memex. The Memex was a prototypical hypernet which would store all recorded information. *An enlarged intimate supplement to one's memory... Memex trails do not fade*. The Memex model was to *replace essentially linear fixed methods that had produced the triumphs of capitalism and industrialism with what are essentially poetic machines*. The hyperrational structure of Enlightenment representation, sanctioned knowledge and the linear print text shuts out "irrational" connections and multiple dimensions. These disappeared possibilities rematerialize in **hypertext**.

What if all news, all information, was hyperreferenced? For a start, no one need involuntarily read (or wade past) ads or anything else. Hyperreferencing would both save time in the search for information of interest and make all information equally available (commercial "information" and use by commercial interests could be excluded, to unclog the channels of "junk"). The reader would follow issues important to *her* which linear, private newspapers and other media might otherwise ignore or bury in low-priority placement.

Media overload and competition dictate that in the information glut there is a fight for control over which information will be privileged before it reaches the reader; yet imagine a **hypertext** news system. There might be a headline option, comprised of what the compilers consider important, should the reader prefer that someone preselect what she reads first. But in default mode the reader would choose her own topic **codes** and explore the areas of her choosing in her chosen order. She would pursue as much information about a given topic as she desired. She could avoid the everyday assault of unwanted information she faces today (for example, she might prefer to bypass advertising, sports writing, anti-choice fetus-waving

editorials), without even having to see it at all. And her access to cultural memory would simultaneously be reinstated, since she would have the option of going as far away in time and space as the machine's memory capability could allow.

For a universal, Library-of-Congress-like **hypertextual** network, the problems of designing, constructing and managing a sufficiently sized machinic memory (which would theoretically and ideally hold every piece of information) would be fundamental. The amount of memory needed in the **atheneum** would depend on what the members had written or read and wanted access to. This particular **atheneum** is for a certain community. Once this community takes shape, the information aired and stored there will be determined by each of its individual. Other networks could be linked to the **atheneum**, towards that theoretical ultimate **hypertext** composed of all written and recorded information and images in an endless linked continuum. **Deconstruction** has taught us that every text is open and there are as many links between bits of information as there are potential readers alive.