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2005

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/17679>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Lee, Shuen-shing: How Do I Cool Down the Overheated Medium? Reading Stuart Moulthrop's Hegirascope 2, "the most typical hypernovel". In: *Dichtung Digital. Journal für Kunst und Kultur digitaler Medien*. Nr. 35, Jg. 7 (2005), Nr. 2, S. 1–31. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/17679>.

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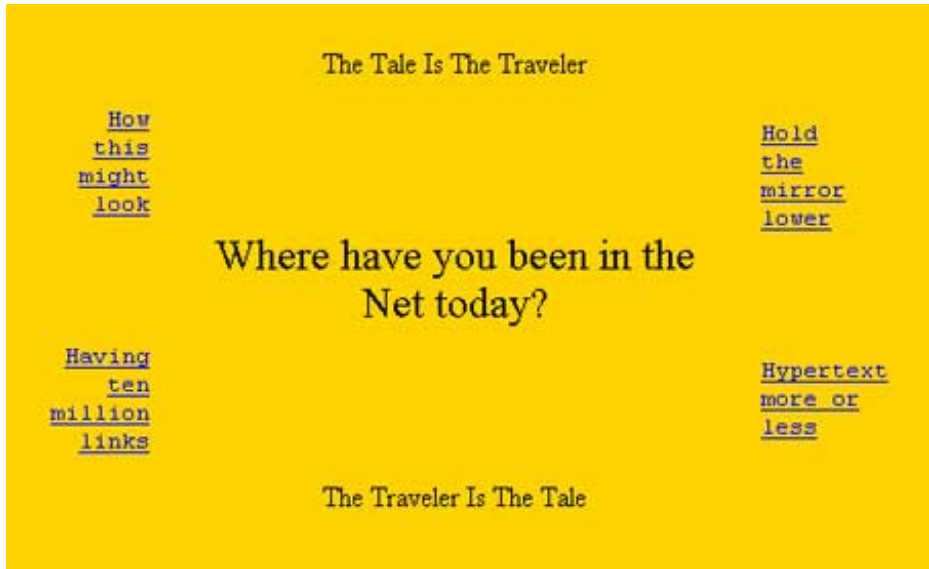
# How Do I Cool Down the Overheated Medium? Reading Stuart Moulthrop's *Hegirascope 2*, "the most typical hypertext novel" \*

By Shuen-shing Lee

No. 35 – 2005

## Abstract

*Hegirascope* appears to be structurally disorderly due to its disorienting hyperlinks and discomfiting temporal pull. We suggest that, to grasp *Hegirascope's* structure, the first step is to stop it from running automatically. Once the temporal pull comes to a halt, one is able to sort through the content space for narrative threads and non-narrative units. The paper also illustrates the distinctive use of hyperlinks and color tricks, instances that exhibit the fluidity of digital materiality. This maneuvering of links and colors reveals Stuart Moulthrop's meticulous organization, which further posits that *order* is buried in the *disorder* of the apparent "narrative confetti." *Hegirascope* incorporates non-verbal (visual and interactive) elements into the narrative, in ways resonating with one of the print prototype—Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Based on this observation, the paper contends that *Hegirascope* is "the most typical hypertext novel in digital literature," echoing Victor Shklovsky's statement that *Tristram Shandy* is "the most typical novel in world literature."



The added effect of the temporal pull turns *Hegirascope* into a hypertext parody, an excessive fragmentation that overheats the medium, as Marshall McLuhan (who is, perhaps not incidentally, one of the characters) might have said.

--Espen J. Aarseth (1997: 81)

## 1. "These words are not the same": A Novel Phenomenon

The meaning of Stuart Moulthrop's *Hegirascope 2* (1997a) is difficult to grasp, particularly when it is approached as a novel. The work "is not a novel," Moulthrop preemptively declares in the introduction to its first version (1995), seemingly informing the reader to be prepared for the work's non-novelness. Of this issue, Espen J. Aarseth remarks:

... judging by both *Hegirascope's* temporal mode and its verbal content, here novel (in the literal sense) does not seem to fit as description. The previous hypernovels could be contemplated as the reader's pace, just as any other novel, but *Hegirascope* does not allow for contemplative reading . . . . *Hegirascope* has left the stationary, reader-relative, space-time position of previous literature and gone where no literature has gone before . . . (1997: 80)

Despite Moulthrop's denial that it is a novel, *Hegirascope* has been widely selected as a must-read in hypertext literature classes. But doubts remain. Teachers have confessed they have difficulties understanding its themes or treating it as literature. In her annotated bibliography, Professor Caren Irr notes on *Hegirascope*: "Each page consists of a very short text. I am not too sure about the underlying theme of the content, however, because a lot of it just seems so random. Also, it is kind of strange that the links do not seem to really indicate what they lead to because the text that i [sic] get does not appear to be relevant to whatever was written as the link" (cyberfiction-links.html). But the links in *Hegirascope* are not all random or irrelevant to their destinations. For readers acclimated to the coherence found in fragmentary texts such as T. S. Eliot's "Waste Land," *Hegirascope*'s "excessive fragmentation" may obscure any possible "underlying theme of the content." A basic mechanical understanding of hypertext can help a reader in identifying various associations between lexias. Irr's response is typical of those seen since the first version of *Hegirascope* hit the literary scene. In 2002, Scott Rettberg, a media professor and a well-versed hypertext reader, disclosed that he had been searching for a comfortable way to teach *Hegirascope* as literature in his class: "while I can competently discuss 'Hegirascope' and 'Reagan Library' as media—I can take apart the interface a bit, try and parse out some of the decisions that Moulthrop made about the structure and navigation apparatus of the work—I have a hard time discussing the work as \*literature\*" (2002). His predicament bears upon an ontological issue: what is literature? Moulthrop has never slackened his challenge of the borders of literature as we know it. A creative writer of hypertext, he tends to position himself in the interzone between literature and non-literature. This tendency is most manifest in his latest work, *Pax* (2003), which, as Moulthrop introduces it, "is not a work of literature in the ordinary sense." He calls it "an instrumental text," "meant to be played as well as read"<sup>1</sup>. One unusual non-literary design in *Pax* is that it possesses the interactive "intelligence" to tell the reader at the end of a reading session with which character the reader has spent the most time (about.htm). *Hegirascope*'s timed pull anticipates *Pax*'s reading time calculation. *Hegirascope* as a whole is also an embodiment of Moulthrop's interzone position, given that it incorporates a high proportion of non-literary discourses and non-verbal elements. Most non-literary discourses in *Hegirascope*, along with some literary narratives, practice meta-interrogation, a post-modernist strategy intended to expose the construction of a textual world<sup>2</sup>. Meta-mediacy also permeates *Hegirascope*'s non-verbal (visual and interactive) spaces, but the self-reflexivity therein often manifests playfully<sup>3</sup>. In view of this hybridity, literariness in *Hegirascope* is infused with play and playfulness. Put another way, meshing/messing-up literary and non-literary elements in the text, *Hegirascope* tends to de-limit the conventional contours of literature, analogous to *Tristram Shandy*'s redefining of the genre of the novel, by absorbing into its text digressional discourse and non-verbal elements.

N. Katherine Hayles in *Writing Machines* recognizes multimedia components as compatible with verbal texts in "second-generation electronic works" but she does not take up the "question of what constitute[s] literature." In her response to Robert Coover's concern with the writer's voice being "overwhelmed" by the increasing ration of non-verbal elements in electronic literature, Hayles writes: "She [Hayles in the third-person pronoun] was less interested in reinforcing boundaries . . . than in seeing what happened if you romped over them, which second-generation works were exuberantly doing as they moved toward multimedia, creating works that contained components drawn from literature, visual arts, computer games, and programming practices. To her, this was part of their appeal" (2002: 45). What interests Hayles most is transgressing boundaries rather than enforcing definitions. She chooses to evade the definition of literature, which is actually unattainable for all of us, mainly because literature is a living art, the parameters of which are fluid, subject to the manipulation of artists' imagination. Traditionally recognized boundaries, inevitably imbued with ideologies, are derived from consensus. Approved boundaries are conventions. The rise of one school of literature generally hinges on the breaking down of boundary-conventions, but once accepted, new boundaries are drawn and ineluctably turn conventional. *Tristram Shandy* was radically defamiliarizing at its inception, but later its adherents confined themselves within the new boundaries they helped to draw. Such works are more than literature, or using Aarseth's terms in an extensive manner, they have "gone where no literature has gone before." I call such achievements literary sphinxes. They are "literary" because their literary elements take up a greater portion than the other constituents. They are "sphinxes" because they play/prey on the boundary-conventions of literature, leading to the birth of a synthesis. Judging from the role non-verbal elements assume in *Hegirascope* and the portion these elements take up in comparison to the literary parts, *Hegirascope* occupies a moment in digital literature similar to that of *Tristram Shandy* in print literature. According to Wayne C. Booth, ". . . many critics . . . have been unable to agree about what kind of work [*Tristram Shandy*] really is" (1983: 222). But Victor Shklovsky called *Tristram Shandy* "the most typical novel in world literature" (1965: 57), for it transforms the exposure of its literary technique into "the content of the novel" (1965: 30-1). *Hegirascope* can be called the most typical hypernovel in digital literature, in that it transgresses the boundary-conventions of early hypertext, inhabiting new forms made possible by digital technology.

## 2. Mis-Reading?

Aarseth may be the first critic to have given *Hegirascope* a formal investigation, though very brief. He points out several distinctive features of the work, particularly

the significance of the "temporal mode" (1997: 79-81). Marie-Laure Ryan agrees with Aarseth's observation (2001: 217) and on another occasion cites *Hegirascope* as an example to illustrate her interpretation of hypertext as space, in which "the reader's role . . . can also be conceived along the lines of the supermarket-shopping experience" (2001: 219). Raine Koskimaa provided a brief discussion of this work, highlighting its "Self-reflexive metatextuality" (2000: Chapter 8). But none of these discussions deals with *Hegirascope's* content to a satisfactory degree, let alone undertaking an examination of its world proper. An exception, Sarah Sloane, offers a glimpse of that world. After quoting the first lexia of a narrative thread titled "Drivers," "the first familiar looking bit of narrative" in her opinion, she presents a quick synopsis of the world:

*Hegirascope* continues by describing the journey of Gina and Bent, driving toward Memphis and breakfast, or rather, toward "the dream of breakfast," shifting between second- and third-person address, between settings, between styles of narration and diction, between allusions to Wallace Stevens ("Sunday Morning") and to the "mayhem" on the street below the window, between Bosnia and Oklahoma City. The references feel interior, personal, associative, yet the narrative intrigues. (2000: 139)

Sloane's reading is problematic in three aspects. Her reading appears to have been passively determined by the work's timed links, which would be to ignore the many permutations of the work that are created by actively pursuing the hyperlinks that appear on each lexia. Such a passive reading owes more to traditional printed narratives, in which the reader apprehends whatever a turn of the page presents, than an exploratory hypertextual interactivity, in which the reader's involvement influences the shape and nature of the narrative. Second, the slide-show reading comes to a halt at a black page, file-named "HGSXX2.html" (hereafter abbreviated as XX2; the other file-names occasionally following suit), which contains no timed link. Only an active search for an exit link allows the reading to continue. The presence of this black page, along with other blank pages, occupies a pivotal point in the world of *Hegirascope*, but without active involvement it is impossible to understand their role or explicate their meaning. Third, a passive reading of *Hegirascope* leaves out at least two thirds of the work, as this can only be accessed by moving beyond the black screen.

The above critics do not differ much from each other in implying that *Hegirascope* is a jungle world, wherein patterns are random and theme(s) undefined. What will turn up if a much closer reading is applied to the text, particularly considering Moulthrop's hint that the work's structure is "obsessively" designed? In his email response to Sloane's inquiry, Moulthrop writes: "Though 'Hegirascope' probably looks on first presentation like narrative confetti, it is in fact obsessively (and linearly) structured, which clever readers could have figured out for themselves if I hadn't spoiled the joke" (Sloane 2000: 140). Moulthrop is not talking of an "orderly unit" or

an "overarching narrative" (Steven Johnson's terms) underlying the world projected by *Hegirascope* as a whole. Collage-like in form, heterogeneous in content, *Hegirascope's* world is a kaleidoscope, its configuration shifting in tandem with changes of perspective. But this kaleidoscope is a meticulously designed construction, rather than a motley mingling disparate elements without pattern or principle. One indication of premeditated structure is that the background colors have an important role in the text. The whole lexic world could be divided into several sub-worlds according to their background colors. By resorting to the lexias' background colors, one can organize into meaningful units all the seemingly disparate narrative and non-narrative fragments scattered throughout the work. Alternatively, one can trace the title of a specific thread and may find it used in a group of dispersed narrative fragments. Following such patterns dispels disorientation. In contrast to Sloane's reading, a reader who traverses the whole work would collect all ten lexias of the "Drivers" narrative. These lexias are distinguished as belonging to a single narrative by the heading "Drivers" at the top of the lexia and by their identical medium-brown background, unique to this thread. Such a reading would reveal coherence in this narrative<sup>4</sup>.

### **3. "What if the word will not be still?" vs. "How Do I Stop This Thing?" Or How Do I Cool Down the Overheated Medium?**

In an investigation of how media bring changes to a culture, Marshall McLuhan divides media into two categories: "media hot and cold." A hot medium is of "high definition," or of more data and information but low in audience participation or completion. A cold medium is of "low definition," of less data but high in audience participation or completion (1964: 22-3). Aarseth pronounces *Hegirascope* an overheated medium (1997: 81). This remark denotes that the work carries a heavier load of data than a regular hypertext and at the same time allows less participation from the reader. *Hegirascope* as an overheated medium has a symbolic meaning. To understand the formation of its "overheat," one first has to "cool it down," i.e., to stop the machine from running automatically and examine its components. Electronic hypertext is a medium composed of an interface and codes that respond to the user's navigation. *Hegirascope's* codes are easily accessible, and thereby open to the detailed inquiry of the well-informed hypertext reader. Examining its codes can reward one with a better understanding of the work's structure. The inquiry of the codes can also be playful, like what the narrator in Ronald Sukenick's "The Death of the Novel" suggests: "A story is a game someone has played so that

you can play it too" (1969: 57). One can playfully cool down the overheated medium by dismantling it.

"What if the word will not be still?" This is the first slide-like screen that greets the reader once he enters the narrative-space from the cover page. It heralds a series of quasi-aphorisms which are vital in the signification of the text. This particular question-phrase appears three times at different locations<sup>5</sup>. Viewed retrospectively, this phrase insinuates a premonition of *Hegirascope's* automatic page-loading device, similar to that of the automatic advance function on a projector. For a beginning hypertext reader, this warning/question can do him little good. At this stage, the only option available to him is to either drift along with the sliding automatic pace or to surf the navigable space through a random selection of links. For Umberto Eco's second-level model reader, who craves a comprehension of the narrative design, drifting or surfing in *Hegirascope* is unsatisfying<sup>6</sup>. If it happens that this second-level model reader is also well-versed with hypertext, the first question he may ask is: "How Do I Stop This Thing?"<sup>7</sup> In *Hegirascope*, only when the sliding is turned off, a detailed check of its design, its mechanism, and even its slippery content, is possible.

To stop the automatic sliding, one can choose to access the code section of each lexia-file and delete the code that sets off the timed pull. Or, one can download *Hegirascope's* files into HTML editors such as *Microsoft Frontpage*<sup>8</sup>. Taking notes is a must in reading *Hegirascope*. Composed of some 175 lexias, mixed up in a variety of patterns, *Hegirascope* is a text that teases one's memory-processing capacity. The fact that each lexia is regulated by a limited reading time makes narrative processing all the more difficult. Not to be humiliated, not to be embarrassed by the machine, one has to countermand it, finding ways to subdue it, tame it, and eventually disembody it. Taking it apart, one is able to examine each component. It is a truism that the combination of parts does not amount to a whole. However, a full understanding of *Hegirascope's* parts serves as an effective basis for a re-examination from a holistic standpoint, i.e., for a full perspective of how the wholeness arises from the forging of parts, from the associations of lexias. Aarseth suggests a similar tactic in reading *Afternoon*: ". . . the reader has to become a metareader, mapping the network and reading the map of her own reading carefully. This is not interactivity . . . but a strategic counterattack upon the limited role or perspective offered to the reader by the hermetic text and an effort to regain a sense of readership" (1997: 93-4). How does Aarseth execute the "mapping" and the "counterattack" against "the hermetic text"? One of the things he did to *Afternoon* is that he "cracked" its text, according to Koskimaa. Aarseth has loaded all the lexias of *Afternoon* into a word processor for a linear check of the text, a move which Koskimaa calls "resistant reading." Koskimaa himself also follows suit and reports that "the experience to some extent resembled reading Virginia Woolfian modernist narration" (2000: Chapter 8)<sup>9</sup>.



How readers take notes varies. Inspired by Moulthrop's hint that *Hegirascope* is "obsessively structured," I used the background screen colors to guide my roving through the "confetti." This approach was very rewarding. Parsing lexias, I found I was able to queue them into distinct groups. For a better view, these groups can be divided into two categories: (1) literary narratives; and (2) non-literary discourses, hereafter to be termed non-narratives.

The literary narratives can be further split into regular and broken ones. Regular narratives are those in compliance with definitions established by traditional narratologists. To Mieke Bal, for example, a narrative can not do without essential elements such as characters, action, and story/fibula (1997: 5). *Hegirascope's* "Drivers" narrative is a typical example of this category. Bent and Gina, a couple of lovers, are assigned to execute a domestic car bombing. Starting from Dallas, they drive a silver Ford along interstate highways toward Manhattan, their destination, stopping in a roadside hotel along the way. In New Jersey, they miss the exit leading to Manhattan. The thread ends with Gina continuing north and starting to sing. Some other *Hegirascope* narratives use forms such as correspondence ("Amanda" and "Amandus"), conversation (the narrative concerning a talk between a father and his son; hereafter briefly called "Father and Son"), monologue or first-person address ("Curtis LeMay's Web Workshop"), and log ("Your Agent Called" and the narrative concerning the death of a critic). These narratives are less based on dramatic actions, and take up the greater portion of *Hegirascope*. All these seemingly independent threads can be woven into greater grids, based on tangential relations. For instance, a domestic terrorism grid sprawls over several other disparate narratives, which at first glance do not intersect at all in terms of content. The links interspersed in these narratives, however, can suggest a different story. That Bent and Gina's mission involves domestic terrorism is strongly suggested by an indirect connection with Amanda's report on the Oklahoma City Bombing in "Amanda" <sup>10</sup>. One lexia of the "Drivers" narrative is the destination of a link in "Father and Son," the narrative of which is partly concerned with hydrogen bombs. This connection invites one to conjecture that Bent and Gina's Ford is not a common car bomb but one of nuclear nature <sup>11</sup>. If one clicks the link/anchor <sup>12</sup>, "too far east," on the supposed last page of "Drivers" (HGS168.html), he will get to a lexia of the narrative titled "Ideas of Order in Park Slope" (HGS091.html). This path will give rise to such a story-extension: after missing the route to the destination Manhattan, Bent and Gina end up in Brooklyn, or to be more precise, Park Slope in Brooklyn, where live Roman and Celia, the two major characters of the narrative "Ideas of Order in Park Slope." In their Sunday morning conversation, together form a greater network that encompasses a universe emerging from the interplay of chance.

Broken narratives are those comprising narrative fragments, irrelevant to each other in terms of story but grouped together based on thematic syllepsis <sup>13</sup>. The series titled "Catalog of Dreams" makes a good representative of this category. It is

composed of eight different dream-episodes. Aside from the lexia "Catalog of Dreams #401" (HGS025.html), the others are all narrated in the second person. Dream contents include such objects as breakfast, red rock, a Chinese restaurant, remote control, and impossible music. Some dreams are about flying, falling, and lying in an open field. These dreams could be related to characters in other narratives, if read associatively. Viewed as an independent unit, this series is a collage of dreams. Seen as a part of the world of *Hegirascope*, the dream-content and dream-like form of this broken narrative resonate with *Hegirascope's* invoking dream as a metaphor for its hypertextual structure. The same thematic syllepsis also governs another series that collects a number of personal vision-confessions from different characters. This series can be considered a reinforcement of the dream-like structure of *Hegirascope*. "On Other Pages" is a collection of short fact-fictions, clustered around the issue of people's misunderstanding or abuse of digital technologies. This series echoes one of the central themes of *Hegirascope*: the imminent dominance of hypertext over print.

Non-narratives designate those quasi-aphorisms, epitaphs, epigraphs, hints, quotes, statements, and literal number-word play, dispersed throughout the *Hegirascope* space. A few non-narratives are "noises," such as those lexias titled in serial numbers from "one" through "eight." They function like annoying commercials that disrupt our viewing of a TV drama. A close look shows that most of *Hegirascope's* non-narratives are closely concerned with themes such as the end of the world, the rise of the Internet, print vs. hypertext, and linearity vs. hypertextuality (All these themes, not surprisingly, receive endorsement from *Hegirascope's* regular narratives). The first eight slides (A1-A8) constitute a group of hints, serving as the reader's guidelines in their mulling over the complex meaning of *Hegirascope*. Since no links accompany these eight special lexias, they are a digital duplication of photo-slides. Eight more slides (B1-B8) ensue. Aside from the quasi-aphorism in the third slide (B3), they repeat the text and appear in the same order as those of the previous group. But in this group, links are found adjacent to the text and the background color changes from black to yellow-brown. The textual repetition can be taken as instructional, a way to inform the reader of the themes and form of the work.

In the introduction to *Hegirascope* (HGSAbout.html), Moulthrop encourages the reader to "simply . . . dive in" to the work. But if one prefers "a more stable reference point," Moulthrop recommends he start with an "index" (HGSTable.html), which consists of an array of "interesting" links. Other than the link/anchor, "index," in the introduction page, at least three more links in *Hegirascope* can lead to the index page. These three links/anchors are "Tabular!" in XX1, "Don't click here" in XX2, and "SURPRISE!!!" in XX33. Most significantly, these links/anchors are invisible before being activated, for their colors are identical with the backgrounds. That means the reader can encounter them only accidentally in their fumbling for an exit. If one feels

disoriented at this moment and activates the particular links, the "index" can really be a "SURPRISE," relieving him of confusion. The black page XX1 offers another benevolent suggestion. The word "click" in yellow type sits in the center of the darkness. It is meant to motivate the reader into clicking/searching over the black screen for hidden links. It is a warm-up exercise for the ensuing encounter with the black page XX2 or possibly the white page XX3.

However, in one instance, Moulthrop creates a sub-world that can be only accessed from one specific portal. There are lexias stacked behind the pages file-named in serial numbers from XX41 to XX48. Each of these pages carries four links that lead to four pages file-named in numeric-alphabetic order. For example, in the case of XX41, its four appendices are file-named XX41a, XX41b, XX41c, and XX41d. Forty lexias are included in the group XX41-XX48. Intriguingly, XX43d is the only portal in the whole of *Hegirascope* that provides access to lexias XX44 to XX48d. There are no links/anchors posted on XX43d. That is, one has to wait for the timed pull (3 seconds) to take one to the next lexia, XX44, which then offers links leading to the rest. To get to portal XX43d, one has to click the only valid link/anchor, "ant," on XX43. If one misses the sole portal, he will skip a total of 25 pages in his reading. These specific pages create a secret garden in their own right, a bifurcation from the labyrinthine castle <sup>14</sup>.

## 4. Bad News or "Good news about the end of the world"?

The themes "the end of the world" and "the rise of the Net" converge in *Hegirascope*. On the literal level, "the end of the world" designates the annihilation of human civilization, most possibly by nuclear conflagration. It is declared by the oxymoronic proclamation, "Good news about the end of the world," and reasserted by a phrase attached below it—"Feeding Your Fears Since 1945" (HGS0A4.html), the year of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings. A looming reminder of the end of the world is registered in a lexia titled "Science" (HGS068.html). The narration of this lexia touches upon the development of a "bottled water reactor" and an "ultra-secret" experiment beneath a volcano, which strongly suggests the making of atomic bombs. The fear of weapons of mass destruction haunts the conversation of a father and his son:

Hey Dad, you remember the hydrogen bomb?

Why of course, son. It gave me howling nightmares for seven long years back in the 1960s. Before we had Prozac.

Wow. Say Dad, do you think they'll ever drop the Bomb again?

No son. Never again  
... (HGS021.html)

The father's reassurance is satirically subverted by the sideline message embedded in the four accompanying links/anchors, "Never" "Say" "Never" "Again." If the reader keeps tracking the development of this sideline message by clicking the link/anchor, "Again," he will get to the "Drivers" narrative, i.e., the one which recounts Bent and Gina's terrorist mission, involving using their Ford as a bomb.

On a metaphorical level, "the end of the world" celebrates a phenomenon analogous to what Fredric Jameson calls "the waning of affect" of a physical world in our mentality (1991: 15-6). Concurrently, this waning encourages the rise of Virtual Reality, simulacrum, cyberspace, and the Net, worlds that endow more freedom to one's mind for a "bodiless hegira" in the cyberspace, or to one's "disembodied consciousness" to be projected "into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix" (William Gibson 1994: 5). The rise of the Net in connection with the end of the world through weapons of mass destruction is expounded in another segment of conversation between the father and son:

[Father:] Did you know the Internet was designed to survive a thermonuclear attack?

[Son:] No shit.

[Father:] Back in the early days people didn't grasp the significance, but now we understand. The Net is reversal of the Bomb. The Bomb takes the world as we know it and turns it into a big zero. But the Net creates another world inside this one. Lots of worlds, in fact. Worlds without end. (HGS155.html)

The supposition on the relation between the Net and the Bomb has its echo in the narrative "Curtis LeMay's Web Workshop." Therein, LeMay, a web designer, declares that the rise of the Internet is related to a preemptive strategy to prevent the "communist domination during a time of cowardly intellectual retreat." Immersed in Capitalist ideology and American patriotism, LeMay urges "Americans to use the Internet to spread the free market to all parts of the earth so the communist menace will finally be destroyed." He concludes: "Then the world can end" (HGS098.html).

The rise of the Internet, or the emergence of hypertext in different terms, also signifies that "Print is dead" (HGSXX42.html), and, eventually, "the closure of the book" (HGS112.html). This concept constitutes another major theme of *Hegirascope*. It can be found explicitly stated in some non-narratives and dramatized in some regular narratives. The mass destruction of Hiroshima atomic bombing has inscribed a traumatic sense of doom on the humanities that may not be erased easily. Incidentally, Vannevar Bush's "As We May Think," an article

preceding the rampage of digital networks, was published in 1945, and started the surge of "feeding fears" to print media. The Net, an augmented open version of Bush's imaginary machine called Memex, turns out to be one of the alternative lands for survival, exactly identical to those "Worlds without end" suggested by the father. Today, the Net's endless dissemination endangers print's hegemony. At the same time, the non-linear mode of expression empowered by the Net prevails over others. One of the victims is linearity, a mode mostly adopted by analog media, one primary representation of which is books.

The end of books entails the demise of the print reader and critic. *Hegirascope* provides an "Epitaph" for the reader (HGS094.html). The death of the critic is represented in one narrative. Therein the critic, abducted after his Book Talk show, is placed in a specific location and under close surveillance by un-identifiable captors who seem to be doing media researches on human subjects. The critic is code-named "Evergreen," an irony indeed, given that he is an expert on print media, composed of paper made of pulped conifers, and that he is doomed to die soon in his captivity. A strong lover of print, he has proclaimed: "The word is the only proper register of beauty, without which human experience becomes a meaningless jumble of fleeting intensities, which is to say, television" (HGS087.html). He is also quoted as having said: "The end of books reflects a more profound privation, the loss of nature itself. For every book was always in essence a book of nature, an assertion of that most human desire to understand the order of Creation, if only in small and fleeting fragments of sense. As the future will no doubt show, we abandon this great project only at our peril" (HGS238.html).

*Hegirascope* reasserts the imminent death of print by quoting *Wired's* statistics and its confident prediction that the number of webpages will only grow and that "Some of them will even be worth reading" (HGS114.html). One epigraph-lexia quotes a passage from media theorists Mark C. Taylor and Esa Saarinen, to affirm that hypertext has become our environment, an inseparable, integral part of our perspectives: "History ends and the books disappears [sic] when narrative continuity collapses in the instant. Speed is the agent of this collapse. To attempt to resurrect history or reopen the book is to try to put the brakes on the speed that has become our milieu" (HGS112.html). "When narrative continuity collapses" or when hypertext dominates the scenario of Net writing, the formal manifestation of this mode of expression is that of schizophrenia, as posited by a quote from John Barth (HGS093.html). The traditional mode of reading is not supposed to work effectively in this new scenario, as observed by Sven Birkerts. He suggests ironically: "What is it that we do with B [i.e., hypertext]? Do we still call it reading? Or would we do better to coin a new term, something like 'texting' or 'word-piloting?'" (HGS113.html). Moulthrop seems to agree with these two terms in essence, regardless of their inherent antagonism. Fully aware of the irreversible surge of hypertext, Birkerts, one of the most outspoken Gutenberg elegists but not a happy one, declares his

frustration with hypertext aesthetics, based on his judgment on a sole reading of Moulthrop's *Victory Garden*: "I stare at the textual field on my friend's screen [reading *Victory Garden*] and I am unpersuaded. Indeed, this glimpse of the future—if it is the future—has me clinging all the more tightly to my books, the very idea of them" (1994: 164).

The trend of hypertext is bad news to Birkerts and his supporters. To them, this "hegirascope" stands for a disruptive, untamable, de-centered space which threatens print values and criteria. But is it good news to Moulthrop and those sharing the same vision? It depends on how hypertext is defined and used. Viewed from a historical perspective, hypertext as a digital writing/reading space has partially fulfilled the vision of a non-linear communication domain enthusiastically conceived and quested by forerunners such as Jorge Luis Borges ("The Garden of Forking Paths") and Ted Nelson (The Literary Machines). To critics such as Timothy Murray (2000) and Steven Holtzman (1997), this space currently remains stuck between old and new since we have not grasped the full grammar of digitality yet. Moulthrop somewhat endorses this perspective, as insinuated in the quote from Michael Joyce: "Yet in the adolescence of our technological age it is hard to go too far" (HGS0A8.html). Even so, *Hegirascope* demonstrates that Moulthrop has managed to go beyond the hypertextual space of his peers. This accomplishment has to do with his employing hypertext as an environment rather than as a tool:

The first generation uses a new technology, a new culture, a new idea as a tool.

The next generation uses the technology, the culture, the idea as an environment.

And the final generation uses the now old technology, the vanishing culture, the abandoned idea as tools for reflection, and as the basis for critical decisions about the new tool<sup>15</sup>.

What Gutenberg elegists are doing is mostly in line with the third stage in relation to print technology, mentioning it in passing as a starting point. Modern media materialists caution that hypertext is essentially a tool of "remediation," encompassing media old and new and their hybrids (J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin 2000). However, in terms of hypertext technology, *Hegirascope* uses hypertext as an environment to showcase its hypertextuality. By environment, I mean a full embodiment of hypertextuality in both form and content. One feature that distinguishes *Hegirascope* from *Victory Garden* is the former's extensive use of hypertext as an environment. *Victory Garden* disperses narrative segments on a hypertextual space. This design makes *Victory Garden* hypertextual in form. But because its narrative segments are globally homogeneous in content, all the stories generated from different trajectories mostly turn out to be linear. By contrast, *Hegirascope's* narratives and non-narratives mostly stay local and independent. In

light of content, the work's fragmentary lexias are heterogeneous. In addition, the amalgamation of these broken lexias creates a hypertextual scenario in form.

Hypertext is not without its downside, particularly in the case of being a general communication sphere. "This restless change of place for place" or this "bodiless hegira" (HGS0A6.html) in hypertextual space seems to signify a total emancipation from physicality. This celebration of total virtualization of mind may lead to what one character claims in *Hegirascope*: "Cyberspace is vast, shiny, and infinitely bright. I am the sum of all that I perceive" (HGS255.html). On the other hand, the *hegirascope* could suggest a completely meaningless chaos. Or it could refer to any possibility between these two opposite poles. The character who positively declares cyberspace a "shiny" place remarks elsewhere: "Cyberspace is a lonely place" (HGS247.html). To cite one more example of negativity, the freedom of hypertextuality could entail the rampant distribution of artifacts that cater to the human instincts only, completely devoid of intellectuality. This phenomenon is observed but downplayed in tone in the quote from *Wired*: "We can expect a billion Web pages by 2000. Some are even worth reading" (HGS114.html).

## 5. Distinctive Use of Links

*Hegirascope's* links create an aesthetic dimension only possible in hypertext. The above-mentioned links/anchors, "Never," "Say," "Never," "Again," are among the most defining instances. If clicked with a mouse, the link/anchor "Again" sends one to the first lexia of the "Drivers" narrative. The last "Drivers" lexia carries two particular links, "The End" and "Numb" (HGS168.html). When activated, "The End" leads to the black void (XX2), while "Numb" brings up the lexia of white emptiness (XX3). It is not difficult to recognize the connotations of the black vacuum in relation to the "End," and the white emptiness in relation to the sensation of being "Numb." The connotational relation between "The End" and the image of darkness is particularly perceptible if the reader has realized that the drivers' mission is a domestic terrorist bombing.

The four links/anchors in the "Epitaph" lexia are another group of good examples. The lexia displays an intriguing message on the death of the print reader:

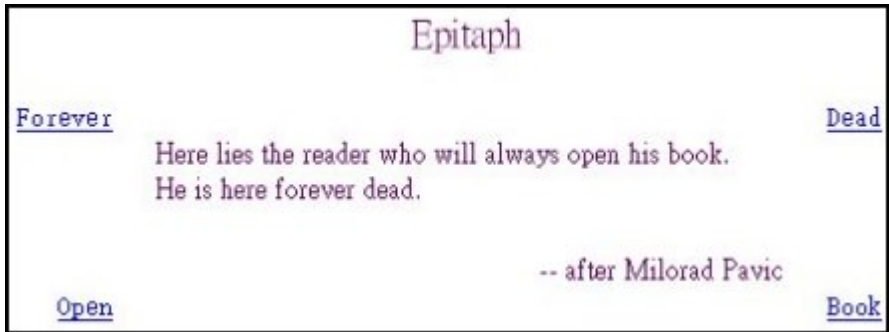


Figure 1. A screen shot of "Epitaph" (HGS094.html) <sup>16</sup>.

The four anchors that occupy the corners of the lexia are taken from the epitaph. Of keen interest to us here is "forever," whose destination is the epitaph/lexia itself. That is, it is a self-pointing link, or in Johnson's terms, "a self-referential link" <sup>17</sup>. Reading within the context of the death of the reader, particularly that of the demise of the "readerly" reader, the self-pointing link reinforces the message: the reader is flat out dead, no further explanation is needed than what is said in the epitaph. User clicks, presumably in search of further implications offered by the link/anchor "forever," turn out to be an ironical movement of return. The linking is a moment of reflexivity, stuck at a point of spatio-temporality, a state of "death" and being "forever" static.

XX2 and XX3, the two blank lexias in black and white, serve as the destinations for a great number of links in *Hegirascope*. Their seeming emptiness may be interpreted as a metaphor suggesting termination of a certain progress or concept. For instance, the link/anchor "Open" in the "Epitaph" for the death of the reader (HGS094.html) takes one to the white page XX3. The whiteness readily connotes a book without text, or the end of books. This link design reinforces the message of the particular epitaph. Both "Dead" and "Book," two links/anchors posted by the side of the same epitaph, bring up the narrative that recounts the death of the critic "Evergreen." If one traces the message in the narrative concerning "Evergreen" the critic, he can locate therein two links/anchors, "Dark" (HGS215.html) and "Failure" (HGS238.html), both leading to the black page XX2. Actually, the link/anchor "Failure" appears twice in this narrative (HGS214.html, HGS238.html). The first "Failure" (HGS214.html) leads to the lexia XX41, which carries the question: "What if the words are not still?" In reference to the death of the critic, these two lexias, XX2 and XX41, are parallel in conveying the confusion suffered by the print reader confronting hypertext.

There are four lexias with the heading "Epigraph," all consisting of quotations. One "Epigraph" contains a passage cited from Taylor and Saarinen, its four attached



links/anchors are all named "Faster" (HGS112.html). In the passage, Taylor and Saarinen argue that the end of history and books is a technological issue, rather than philosophical or literary. The two critics explicitly claim that no one can resist the technological speed that accelerates the downfall of books. With this in mind, the four repeated links/anchors, "Faster" "Faster" "Faster" "Faster," form a string of exclamations on the screen, intensifying the message in the quote. The first three "Faster" take one to three other "Epigraphs," respectively comprised of quotes from *Wired*, Birkerts, and John Barth. *Wired's* quote includes a statistic showing the exponential growth of hypertext (HGS114.html). Birkerts' "texting" and "word-piloting" are quoted to designate a new type of communication with text (HGS113.html). John Barth's schizophrenic manifestation is brought forward to make an allusion to the distorted, fragmented form of hypertext (HGS093.html). These epigraphs and their interlinking set forth the primary themes of *Hegirascope*, and are especially poignant considering that they are accessed by links called "Faster."

As mentioned earlier, the yellow "click" in the lexia XX1 is meant to motivate the reader into looking for links hidden in the black color by moving his mouse over the space. The author plays a color trick here. This is also the case for the group of blank white pages file-named XX3, XX31, XX32, and XX33. This white cluster can be mistaken as a sole page because the only thing that varies among them is their file names displayed on the browser. They form an endless loop, another kind of dead end, a variant of the black page group.

The links/anchors hidden in the black and white pages, once activated, will shift their anchor colors from invisible to visible. This trick is reversed in an independent lexia titled "Elsewhere in This Hypertext" (HGS144.html). Once its links are clicked, their anchor color will shift from visible to invisible. This visual and interactive playfulness in conjunction with links is innovative in hypertext writing.

Another unusual design in *Hegirascope* is that of two lexias sharing the same text but with different links. The lexia titled "Heavy Tomes Magnify Load" (HGS073.html) belongs to the narrative concerning Hattie Malloy and "you" in a sea-cruise dream. This lexia involves a particular object snagged from the sea's surface—books that are all titled "Book of the Everlasting Book." Its four links/anchors can be arranged into a meaningful phrase: "The Same," "Yet different," "Everlasting" "Book." The first link/anchor, "The Same," leads to "Hobble Through My Library" (HGS107.html), a lexia with the same content as "Heavy Tomes Magnify Load," except for the four accompanying links/anchors. This state of being the "Same" in text, "yet different" in links interestingly reconfirms the message conveyed by both the content of "Heavy Tomes Magnify Load" and its four links/anchors. The four links/anchors, particularly the one named "Everlasting," exhibit an irony, quite like that embedded in the name "Evergreen" given to the print critic. In a subversive manner, the link/anchor "Everlasting" leads to the quote in which *Wired* glorifies the growth of

webpages, while the link/anchor "Book" sends one to the epitaph for the death of the reader<sup>18</sup>.

Yet the relation between "*Heavy Tomes Magnify Load*" and "*Hobble Through My Library*" (italics and bold type mine) does not come to a stop at this point. The initial letters of each heading form the acronym, "HTML," a word abbreviated for "HyperText Markup Language." Popularly used to create hypertext documents, "HTML" is sometimes treated as a term designating hypertext. The seeming coincidence between the two headings provokes one to investigate further. We haven't examined the link/anchor, "Yet different," in "Heavy Tomes Magnify Load." The linking result shows that its link destination, "How the Man Laughed" (HGS108.html), does not look peculiar, except the "HTML" embedded in its heading. Since the three lexias that carry "HTML" in their headings all belong to the same dream narrative, it induces one to look into the other members' headings<sup>19</sup>. The pattern is identical, surprisingly. This word-play persists beyond the dream narrative. It happens that, "*Here True Meaning Lies*" (HGS111.html; italics and bold type mine), a one-of-a-kind lexia in *Hegirascope*, also has "HTML" embedded in its title. It presents a series of phrases, pondering on what "HTML" might be. Some samples:

Hi there! Maybe later...  
 How to minimize linking  
 Hot times, menu lovers  
 How the mighty laughed!  
 Hefty tomes made light

....

Hypertext, more or less (HGS111.html; eaning Lies" has nothing to do with the dream narrative in terms of story. Its appropriating lexia-headings from the "Hattie Malloy" narrative as its content makes both sides loosely connected. One more tie between them is that two links/anchors, "True" and "False," on "Here True Meaning Lies," lead to two lexias of the "Hattie Malloy" narrative. With these in mind, one cannot help but suspect a strong association between them. However, there is not much to brood upon other than the connection in relation to the acronym "HTML". One possible approach is to take the last phrase "Hypertext, more or less" as a hint and read the lexia "Here True Meaning Lies" as a metaphor. In this lexia, its 4-word phrases are irrelevant to each other in terms of context. As it turns out, a chaotic form arises from the juxtaposition. If this combination can make sense as a unit, it is due to the acronym, "HTML," embedded in the initial letters of each phrase. In a metaphorical turn, this lexia suggests: "HTML" (i.e., hypertext) allows the user to organize dispersed texts in its environment into meaningful units by various kinds of association. The "Hattie Malloy" narrative, along with others, embodies this metaphor. Before the "Hattie Malloy" narrative comes into being (a meaningful unit), its constituting lexias are scattered over the hegirascope.

Its chance to become a coherent and meaningful narrative relies partly on the reader's recognizing the "HTML" clue placed in its various lexia-headings and partly on "hypertext, more or less," as an environment that offers the reader freedom of association.

## 6. Fact-Fictionality

The death of print is one of the core themes in *Hegirascope*. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Marshall McLuhan, a media theory pioneer and "death-of-print prophet" (HGS121.html), is evoked in the text. One of *Hegirascope's* narratives recounts his adventure in the digital world after he is awakened from his death by Disney scientists<sup>20</sup>. Metaphorically, the resurrection signifies the recent revival of his media theory, the popularity of which climaxed in the sixties but soon descended into oblivion. His adventure in the digital world is intended as a critical comparison between his theory of now "old" media (TV) and the current phenomenon of "new" media. The narrative implies that his dictums, such as "the medium is the message" and "the medium is the extension of man," have proven pertinent far beyond his imagination. This point is particularly clear in his response after a VR demonstration hosted by Brenda Laurel, another *fact-fictional* character whose counterpart in the real world is noted for her forerunning studies of hypertext. "After the demo, McLuhan is uncharacteristically quiet. 'I thought he'd had another stroke,' Laurel tells a friend. Back at his hotel, McLuhan locks himself into his room for three days" (HGS122.html). After that, according to the story, McLuhan secluded himself, rebuffing any inquiries, and eventually disappeared forever.

The explosive extension of human sensorium is not all positive in the opinion of the *fact-fictional* McLuhan. In his touring the wonders of World Wide Web, hosted by *Wired* Magazine, "the well-preserved professor keeps backtracking to the Penthouse site. After downloading a couple of skin shots, McLuhan shakes his head in disgust. 'They're not the same *without the staples*'" (HGS121.html; italics mine). These digital copies of skin shots differ from their analog counterparts in materiality and in ways of dissemination. Thereby, they produce their own mode of communication and activate a series of chain reactions that keep expanding human cognition into territories unknown before. For a comparison, consider email systems in the network communication era. Email was praised a great invention in expediting human communication, a great improvement upon our old mailboxes standing by the side of the street. But viruses and spam have created new problems inconceivable in print mail, to the degree that many users discard their accounts, have to create new ones, or resort to anti-virus and anti-spamming programs. The real McLuhan informs us that a railway creates new cities along its course (1964).

In a similar fashion, the email invention has spawned a great number of new businesses along with its unpredictable development. It induces one to say of e-letters, paraphrasing the *fact-fictional*/McLuhan: "They are not the same without the sealing glue."

WWW is much more complex than email systems, and avails itself of the network technology in a more relentless, reckless manner. Not long since its birth, WWW has turned out to be much like a chaotic dump, so complex that no one can fully grasp its meaning as a whole. For some, it's a new terrain for adventure, economic, political, or social. The downside is that it is a "digital" jungle, filled with dangers sometimes worse than their counterparts in the analog world. By and large, the intellectual ratio of the WWW is shrinking, and content is getting shallower, mostly due to the exacerbating domination of commercial interests. Moulthrop's critique of this trend is manifested in the lexia "TIRED: LINKS... WIRED: LINKS," which belongs to the "On Other Pages" narrative, a thread consisting of independent *fact-fictional* episodes. This lexia pokes fun at *Wired's* shift from its upscale review of digital technologies to issues less relevant:

With high-level interest in information technologies fading fast, Wired reinvents itself as a golf magazine.

"This is really an organic evolution," write the editors, "since golf is the first and highest form of virtual reality. Further, we believe this game is a great metaphor for all technologies and most life experiences. Are you on the green?"

Stock in Wired Ventures, Inc. rose sharply after its initial public offering last week . . . (HGS243.html)

This is the negative side of the Net or hypertext as Moulthrop perceives it, in contrast to his positive observation of the hypertextual freedom offered by the Net. Moulthrop's challenge of the Net sometimes evolves into satirizing critic's misunderstanding of hypertext. One can find several instances of this kind in "On Other Pages." Among them, the attack on Brenda Laurel stands out as the most prominent one. Represented in a contorted mixture of fact and fiction, Laurel, the cyberspace expert in the "Marshall McLuhan" narrative (HGS122.html), now takes on the authorship of a book titled *Television As Radio* in "On Other Pages." The book, according to the narrator, argues that downsizing the audio-visual capacities of television and turning it into an audio medium, one can experience more from television. To this introduction, the narrator adds a satirical sentence in parenthesis: "(Similar effects can be achieved, Laurel notes, by turning your set to face the wall)." With that, the narrator's review continues: "'Stripped of its images, television is a much more engaging, intellectually stimulating medium,' Laurel writes. 'We are able to set ourselves apart from ordinary viewers. By listening, we learn to see in a new way'" (HGS218.html). This lexia is a travesty of the real Laurel's approaches and

perspectives employed in her book, *Computer as Theatre*, first published in 1991, one of the early extensive studies of hypertext. Drawing upon Aristotle's poetics, Laurel attempts a general theory of human-computer activities in the first half of the book and "illustrate[s] the applicability of the general theory in a variety of contexts and [suggests] some new design approaches" (1993: xix). Basically, Laurel treats computer or hypertext as an Aristotelian drama medium. In light of McLuhan's dictum, "the medium is the message," Moulthrop's parody pronounces that Laurel conveys the wrong message. To take computer as a mere medium like theatre is to ignore the true form of computer, i.e., hypertextuality, a force that celebrates the collapse of "narrative continuity," including the disruption of linear dramatic human-activities in accordance with Aristotle's poetics.

## 7. The Most Typical Hypernovel

*Hegirascope* "makes more sense," when treated as a novel phenomenon, with novelty unfettered by conventional expectations of the novel or hypernovel. Or simply put, *Hegirascope* proclaims another "death of the novel," congruous with Ronald Sukenick's short story "The Death of the Novel" (1969), which uses playfulness to countermand the quest for grandiosity in "great works" <sup>21</sup>. A typical metafictional story, "The Death" is composed of narrative and non-narrative chunks, mostly irrelevant to each other. One overarching themes that unites the disparate chunks into one meaningful body is concretely stated in the following passage:

There's one of the ideas we have to get rid of: the Great Work. That's one of the ways we have of strangling ourselves in our culture. We've got enough Great Works . . . . What we need is not Great Works but playful ones in whose sense of creative joy everyone can join . . . . A story is a game someone has played so that you can play it too, and having learned how to play it, throw it away" (1969: 56-7).

Play is one way to bring about innovation or what John Barth calls "replenishment" (1984). The concept of play goes far back in the history of the novel. One frequently cited example is the "laying bare" technique of *Tristram Shandy*, as pointed out by Shklovsky (1965). Writers have never tired of defamiliarizing the form of the novel readers are acclimated to. Milan Kundera is one of the most distinguished advocates and practitioners of literary re-invention, and he acknowledges *Tristram Shandy* as a direct influence on his three-act play, "Jacques and His Master." According to Kundera, this play, "renouncing strict unity of action," opts for "the technique of polyphony" and "the technique of variation" (1985). Or in other words, the play's three stories are "intermingled" in "loose association," a technique not far from

that frequently practiced in hyperfiction. The "polyphonic" phenomenon is particularly obvious in *Hegirascope*. Its narrative threads and non-narrative clusters, though globally connected, flaunt their own distinct voices. Also, "variations" are scattered throughout *Hegirascope*, including *fact-fictional* fabrications such as Brenda Laurel's book and Marshal McLuhan's adventures. In the same article, Kundera remarks: "Tristram Shandy' is a game novel . . . . For [Sterne], the novel, that great game of invented characters, means unlimited liberty of formal invention." The word "game" in the quote refers to the concept of play, an "unserious" attitude towards established forms. This point is best suggested in the following passage: "Tristram Shandy' is unserious throughout; it does not make us believe in anything: not in the truth of its characters, nor in the truth of its author, nor in the truth of the novel as a literary genre. Everything is called into question, everything exposed to doubt; everything is entertainment (entertainment without shame) - with everything which that implies for the form of the novel" (1985).

Writers' drive to defamiliarize form ineluctably turns inward to the writing process, including such metafictional acts as exposing how the form of the novel takes shape. As Robert Scholes observes in accordance with Formalism, forms have to evolve to defamiliarize readers' perception, but when forms come to the point of being "overcomplicated, obstructed with conventions of their own," they "require simplification and renewal through parody, which 'lay bare' their own formal properties"(1974: 175). Other than plain metanarrative techniques such as authorial addresses to the reader, "laying bare" also includes utilization of non-verbal and thereby non-literary constituents. Among a variety of self-exposures, non-literary elements such as blank pages in *Tristram Shandy* also play an intriguing role in revealing the literary construction of the work. Chapter XII of the work's Volume I ends with two completely black pages, right after the passage that depicts the death of Yorick and the epitaph—"Alas, poor Y O R I C K," given by his friend Eugenius. The darkness of the two blank pages suggests Eugenius' grief or an after-life emptiness. One modern editor notes: "Sterne's black page may reflect an earlier elegiac tradition in which words were printed with white letters on black paper" <sup>22</sup>. In this light, one can speculate that Sterne chooses to leave the two pages blank to express the verbally unspeakable sorrow of Eugenius'. On another occasion, instead of describing Mrs. Wadman, with whom Uncle Toby had fallen in love, the narrator offers the reader a white page, urging him to imagine how she looks: "To conceive this right,—call for pen and ink—here's paper ready to your hand. —Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind—. . ." (1965: 388).

Playfulness arises here from a clash of two media, i.e., verbal and visual, or to be exact, literary and non-literary. In terms of materiality, Sterne makes use of the visual potentials the print provides and incorporates them into the verbal world, not hesitant to extend the conventional verbal construct into a verbal-visual world of fictionality. This amalgamation begets a new form, a synthesis between two

different media. Calling *Tristram Shandy* "the most typical novel in world literature," Shklovsky's argument heavily counts on instances of "slowing the action of a novel," which is made possible partly by "transposing parts," such as placing the preface in the middle of the novel (1965: 28, 57) <sup>23</sup>. It is noteworthy, however, that the visual components also constitute defamiliarizing effects in the process of verbal narration. They are not pictorial illustrations that occupy a dimension independent from the verbal world with which they are juxtaposed. Rather, these visual spaces, playful in essence, are indispensable part of *Tristram Shandy's* world as a verbal-visual construct. Interestingly, this integration of verbal and visual spaces enjoys a resurgence in our postmodern literary arena. In his discussion of the employment of spacing in postmodernist fiction, Brian McHale cites an array of examples and expounds the aesthetic correspondence between blank space and an empty mind (1987: 183). Incidentally or coincidentally, *Hegirascope* employs blank pages like those in *Tristram Shandy*, among other non-verbal elements. Though different in signification, their defamiliarizing function is similar.

Visually, *Hegirascope* continues the playful tradition glorified by *Tristram Shandy*, only that this tradition has recruited one more non-verbal element--interactivity. Structurally and thematically, *Hegirascope* is an electronic variant of "The Death" and its metafictional legion. *Hegirascope* inherits their revivification of the novel by means of verbal playfulness. However, through its digital fluidity, *Hegirascope* not only precipitates the deaths of the novel, the critic, and the reader, but also the death of previous hypertexts by creating a distinct anti-form. The visual-interactive play and the timed pull make obsolete the experimentalism of first-generation hypertexts, which are highly obsessed with link-node design but treat links and nodes mostly as transitional instruments. Moulthrop elevates some of the work's non-verbal elements into the realm of aesthetic innovation. Moulthrop's fresh approach to color, playful interactivity, and temporal links displays a digital refinement that contributes greatly to the rise of the second-generation digital literature <sup>24</sup>. In this sense, *Hegirascope* lives up to the spirit of innovational potential proclaimed by early hypertext writers and critics and is thus the most typical hypertext in digital literature.

## 8. The Net-Line Hybridity

*Hegirascope* "maps" hypertextuality, but one of its quasi-aphoristic slides reminds us: "Where you're going there are no maps" (HGS0A2.html). The two phrases accompanying this quasi-aphorism, "Structure Without Order" and "To Live beyond the Line," inform the reader again that he is going to enter a world of non-linearity, a machine "lazier" than linear ones, requiring from the reader not only interpretation

but also configuration <sup>25</sup>. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, the background colors and lexia-headings can help the reader identify an array of clan kinships among the lexias. It is noteworthy that these particular colors and titles are not clues or hints to the resolution of a puzzle. *Hegirascope* is neither a puzzle nor maze. The background colors and lexia-headings are limited in functionality. Generally, they help the reader attain an overview of the structure and thereby provide a stable point of departure. Beyond that, they leave the reader to a guideless navigation. The distinct groups of lexias in *Hegirascope*, seemingly analogous to the colored blocks of a puzzle game, do not fit together perfectly. It is not that there are blocks missing from a complete picture, but that *Hegirascope* encourages the reader to make the journey as a trail blazer in an uncharted, and to some extent unformed, territory. As such, the reader's "travel is the tale." Or, as two phrases concisely point out: "The Tale Is The Traveler [i.e., the reader]," and "The Traveler Is The Tale" (HGS0A7.html). These two phrases accompany this question: "Where have you been in the Net today?" Stringing these phrases together, one comes up with this picture: *Hegirascope* is a Net, wherein your path gives rise to your tale.

But is *Hegirascope* "at war with the Line"?

At first glance, provocative phrases such as "Structure Without Order," "To Live Beyond The Line," and "A Time Outside The Lines," impress one as bellicose towards syntactical structure. This is not really true. In his essay "No War Machine," Moulthrop asks: "Is hypertext at war with the Line? Does it seek to exterminate the old Linotype patterns engraved on Culture Brain in favor of new matrices more to its desiring?" (1997b: 272). His answer is definitely no. To Moulthrop, hypertext, and particularly hypertext fiction, is not an avant-garde, essentially and/or technologically. But he holds that hypertext fiction is a "mutant machine" that embraces both the Net and the Line. Consonant with critics such as Michael Joyce and Mark Bernstein, he supports the view that "hypertextual discourse cannot entirely separate itself from the culture of the Line, but that the two exist in an equilibrium or balance of forces" (1997b: 279). With this in mind, his act of declaring "Beyond and Outside The Line(s)" as the mode for hypertext writing and reading can be considered a slight exaggeration for the sake of argument. The Net is on the rise but it does not signal the imminent death of the Line. Likewise, *Hegirascope's* proclamations of the death of the print critic and reader should not be taken at literal face value.

Hypertext as Net-Line hybrid implicitly demands a reading suitable for the peculiarity of its hypertextual environment <sup>26</sup>. My reading attends to the text's networks of association. In my interpretation of *Hegirascope*, I have been conscious of or perhaps haunted by a type of misreading warned of by McHale. In a chapter titled "'You used to know what these words mean': Misreading Gravity's Rainbow (1985)," McHale exposes a great number of critics' misreadings of Thomas Pynchon's work, particularly those concerning the use of the second-person pronoun. He argues that



these misreadings are mostly consequences of critics' "paranoid reading," which tends to take that "everything is connected, everything in the Creation, a secondary illumination—not yet blindingly One, but at least connected" or in Keat's terms, the "irritable reaching after fact & reason." Pynchon's critics, McHale writes, seem unable to resist anti-paranoid reading, or "particularly incapable of remaining in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts for very long," in light of Keat's Negative Capability (1992: 87-8). However, McHale eventually notes that these misreadings are "both intelligible and inevitable, even necessary":

Intelligible, because they are the consequence of habits of reading of which we can give an account; indeed, it is these very misreadings that help us to formulate that account. Inevitable, because these habits of reading have developed in response to texts radically unlike *Gravity's Rainbow*, while the habits that would enable us to read texts like *Gravity's Rainbow* adequately are still scarcely conceivable. And necessary, because it may well be part of Pynchon's purpose to provoke just such misreadings. (1992: 112)

A radical text like *Hegirascope* poses the same problems to hypertext critics. But these problems uphold no obstruction in our constructing hypertext reading "habits." The old habits will not go away easily, and will never be completely eradicated, since hypertext cannot be totally rid of the Line. Current hypertext readings tend to highlight the Net, but when it comes down to association, they inevitably engage the Line. The various associations among narratives in this paper and in other critics' work testify to the remains of traditional reading habits. Nevertheless, such accounts all contribute to the growth of hypertext reading habits that, "still scarcely conceivable," cater to the Net-Line hybridity.

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## Notes

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\* I am grateful to the Fulbright Program for a Senior Research Grant and the National Science Council of the Republic of China (Taiwan) for an Overseas Research Grant, which allowed me to undertake this paper's research at the University of Baltimore during the 2002-2003 academic year.

1. In his interview with Noah Wardrip-Fruin, Moulthrop acknowledges that the concept of "an instrumental text" is derived from John Cayley. According to Moulthrop, what particularly interests him is "the notion of a middle space between literary texts and ludic texts—between interactive fiction, or hypertext fiction, and games." He also informs us: "The idea of an instrumental text is part of my continuing movement away from node-link and disjunctive hypertext" (Wardrip-Fruin 2003).
2. Two writing strategies frequently used in exposing meta-fictionality are (1) authorial intrusion, i.e., a statement recounting issues related to writing and wedged into the story proper of a work; and (2) dramatization of how fictionality takes shape and how the borderline between reality and fictionality breaks down, such as that illustrated in Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Both strategies are utilized in *Hegirascope*. Take, for example, the non-narrative lexia titled "*Here True Meaning Lies*" (italics and bold type mine). A typical authorial intrusion, the lexia presents word-play on the acronym "HTML," an alternative term for hypertext. On the other hand, the issue of hypertext (the Net) as the new dominant medium of communication is dramatized in the narratives such as those concerning the death of the critic and the revival of Marshal McLuhan. All these distinctive instances will be elaborated in the coming discussion.
3. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000) defines a work's "fascination with the medium itself" as "hypermediacy," a representational strategy to sustain the medium visible to the user, in contrast to "immediacy," a tendency to make the

medium transparent, to get the user fully immersed in the representation as not to notice the presence of the medium. Bolter and Grusin do not touch upon meta-mediacy. This notion can be considered a broader definition of hypermediacy, for the reason that the former is concerned with exposing not only the presence of the medium but also the fictional world as a textual construct. Like verbal authorial intrusion found in metafiction, *Hegirascope's* non-verbal elements also contribute to the exposure of its fictionality, mainly because of their de-familiarizing presence in the verbal context. *Hegirascope's* visual design and, more significantly, the interactivity engaged, constantly remind the reader of the presence of the medium that carries the words. The timed pull, another non-verbal element, very often shifts the screen before one can complete the reading of a lexia. This disruptive behavior also induces one to realize the presence of the verbal medium. All these non-verbal elements pose a difference, a break, a crack in the space of the verbal medium, and thereby induce one to notice the existence of the verbal medium and the text as a multimedial construct. In short, *Hegirascope* flaunts meta-mediacy.

4. The ten lexias of "Drivers" are file-named HGS012.html, HGS013.html, HGS052.html, HGS096.html, HGS097.html, HGS133.html, HGS134.html, HGS165.html, HGS166.html, and HGS168.html. The 6-digit color code designated to display the background color is "#999966." The color effect may vary as.
5. -
6. Eco defines the second-level reader as one "who wonders what sort of reader that story would like him or her to become and who wants to discover precisely how the model author goes about serving as a guide for the reader" (1994: 27). The model reader is elsewhere defined as "a model of the possible reader," whom the author presumes he is able to communicate with in his text, composed of an "ensemble of codes" shared by both sides (1979: 7). Generally, the first-level model reader refers to one inclined to immerse himself into the narrative of the text. The second-level model reader, in contrast, is one inclined to alienate himself from the narrative, aiming at a revelation of the author's writing strategy.
7. The question is taken from the title of a paper by J. Yellowlees Douglas, "How Do I Stop This Thing?: Closure and Indeterminacy in Interactive Narratives" (1994). As its title suggests, the paper partly examines the issue of closure in hypertext reading. I assign different meaning to the question, however. Hypertext prior to *Hegirascope* can be all read at the reader's pace, i.e., one can "stop the thing" any time. In my case, the question denotes how one can stop the text from loading pages automatically.

8. After downloading a *Hegirascope* lexia into an HTML editor, one can choose to delete the tag that effectuates the timed link. For instance, the specific tag in the code source page of the lexia file-named HGS0A1.html is: <META HTTP-EQUIV="Refresh" CONTENT="3; URL=HGS0A2.html">. Deleting this line or simply add an exclamatory mark "!" at the beginning of the tag will nullify the client pulling function.
9. Aarseth points out another way to "crack" *Afternoon* elsewhere: "*Afternoon* is certainly mappable; it can be loaded into the full version of *Storyspace* and its links studied there in detail" (1997: 88).
10. The word/link, "pressure," on the lexia file-named HGS052.html in "Drivers," leads to the lexia HGS022.html, wherein a father and his son talk of a hydrogen bomb and terrorism. The word/link, "heartland," in this lexia takes one to HGS078.html, a lexia occupied by Amanda's report of the Oklahoma City Bombing.
11. The lexia "You Must Remember" (HGS021.html) presents a brief conversation between a father and his son, the topic of which is concerned with a hydrogen bomb in the 1960s. The link/anchor, "again," takes one to HGS013.html, one lexia of "Drivers."
12. An anchor designates the locus where a link lies. An anchor might be a verbal or pictorial text, affiliated with code that can execute the switch of lexias (nodes) or layers on a screen.
13. In *Narrative Discourse*, Gérard Genette proposes the term syllepsis, which literally means "the fact of taking together," to designate "those anachronic groupings [in novels] governed by one or another kinship (spatial, temporal, or other)." He continues: "Geographical syllepsis, for example, is the principle of narrative grouping in voyage narratives that are embellished by anecdotes . . . . Thematic syllepsis governs in the classical episodic novel with its numerous insertions of 'stories,' justified by relations of analogy or contrast" (1980: 85).
14. The link/anchor, "ant," does not amount to a conditional link. According to Anna Gunder, a conditional link "can be followed only if certain conditions are fulfilled" (2002: 116). Normally, the reader encounters this link by chance. In addition, its link destination, XX43d, is defaulted.
15. These words appear in a QuickTime VR movie by Sean Cohen, which accompanies Moulthrop's speech text (1998) posted online at <<http://iat.ubalt.edu/moulthrop/talks/ht98>>.
16. Milorad Pavić's passage printed on the page after the cover of *Dictionary of the Khazars* goes as follows:

Here lies the reader

who will never open this book.

He is here forever dead. (1988)

17. For a discussion of "self-referential links," as used in the now-deceased online column *Suck*, see Johnson (1997), 134.
18. HGS066.html and HGS105.html are another two lexias that duplicate what goes on between HGS073.html and HGS107.html. I had suspected that both cases might have been results of textual misplacement in the making of *Heg-irascope*. To my inquiry, Moulthrop responded that these unusual arrangements were intentional.
19. The "Hattie Malloy" narrative possibly consists of these lexias: HGS045.html, HGS046.html, HGS072.html, HGS073.html, HGS107.html, HGS108.html, HGS141.html, HGS142.html, and HGS143.html.
20. The narrative concerning McLuhan includes the following lexias: HGS26.html, HGS27.html, HGS.html, HGS61.html, HGS62.html, HGS121.html, HGS122.html, HGS161.html, and HGS162.html.
21. My interpretation of Sukenick's concept of playfulness is indebted to Patricia Waugh's brief but insightful discussion (1984: 34).
22. Melvyn New and Joan New (1997), 553, note 10 (of Volume 1, Chapter XII).
23. *Hegiriascope* is not short of such "transpositions" that violate the conventions of the novel. For instance, the four "Epigraphs" (HGS093.html, HGS112.html, HGS113.html, and HGS114.html) do not appear at the beginning of *Heg-irascope* or any individual section, as dictated by the conventions. Actually, the concept of beginning has been problematized by hypertext critics. One of them is Moulthrop himself, who has remarked: "In hypertexts and other sorts of machine-dependent 'cybertexts' there may be strictly speaking no **first** line or lexia, since the starting point of any given reading may be computed on the fly" (1998).
24. N. Katherine Hayles observes that hypertext writers have endorsed the trend of integrating multimedia into literature along with the development of technology: "a new breed of SECOND-GENERATION ELECTRONIC LITERATURE began to appear that looked very different from its predecessors, experimenting with ways to incorporate narrative with sound, motion, animation, and other software functionalities" (2002: 27).
25. Eco remarks: "Every text . . . is a lazy machine asking the reader to do some of its work" (1994: 3) and "[expecting] a lot of collaboration from the reader" (1994: 28). The reader's work, as conceived by Eco, basically refers to interpretation. By association, a text that requires both interpretation and participatory interaction is "lazier."

26. In a similar manner, Hayles urges us to attend to "the specificity of the medium" or "the materiality of the inscription technology" in our hypertext reading (2000, 2002, 2003). In her analysis of hypertext's characteristics, she points out: "Electronic Hypertexts Initiate and Demand Cyborg Reading Practices. Because electronic hypertexts are written and read in distributed cognitive environments, the reader necessarily is constructed as a cyborg, spliced into an integrated circuit with one or more intelligent machines . . . . Although this subject position may also be evoked through the content of print texts, electronic hypertexts necessarily enact it through the specificity of the medium" (2000: par. 13).