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"Quibbling": or Riddling the Reader

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1. Purposes and Research Context

The purpose of this exercise is to find out what in the world we gain from literature's turning "interactive." What is the benefit of being compelled to read from a screen? This question will be discussed in the account of an extended reading experiment with "Quibbling," a piece of interactive fiction by Carolyn Guyer (1993). Of course, there is more to this than merely "text on a screen." "Quibbling" is a hypertext, undoubtedly sophisticated literature, a poetic text about interesting persons, a widely ramified "story," and (on top of everything?) it is also "interactive." Who is the reader demanding such interactive literature? In what reading model will the recipient find himself or herself?

Interactive computer fiction still appears to be largely unaware of its value and its reception. Thus, the author at one point has her literary alter ego, Priam, who broods over a hypertext about Margret & Henry, guess that this hypertext, with its many references, may never see publication: "Who in hell publishes computer fiction anyway? Let alone reads it." I did read "Quibbling" largely the way it befits a reader of computerized literature, namely at the computer. This will be the subject of this report, mainly a description of phenomena, not a theoretical debate which, of course, also exists especially by authors such as Michael Joyce.

His "Afternoon" (1992) has meanwhile become one of the best known examples of American hypertext fiction. The author also deals with the theoretical aspects of reading and reception (cf. Joyce 1995). Reports exist about the reception especially of "Afternoon." I had to stop reading with a rather sobering result (cf. Wingert 1996), but I have learnt from Jane Yellowlees Douglas in the meantime that the story does work out (cf. 1994); her patience with "Afternoon" exceeded mine by one round.

Another theoretical frame of reference is the theory of hypertext. Indeed, the thesis that the reader is released from the constraints of linearity, is no longer separated from the author, and is no longer the victim of the author's authoritarian voice, may be considered one of the central aspects of hypertext.[1]

The piece of research to be described here, the self-experiment in reading a hypertext, is also connected to a project on electronic books (cf. Böhle/ Riehm/ Wingert 1997) in which, among other things, an attempt was made to develop three

prototypes of electronic books, align them to different types of text, and evaluate them after development - a program which the project group managed to complete in only one of the prototypes, a brief description of the project (cf. Riehm 1994). The other two prototypes were only partly subjected to such reading and reception tests.

In one case, the object was a text about electronic manuscripts and publishers into the electronic version of which an SGML editor was integrated. The third prototype was about a lecture by the media philosopher, Vilém Flusser, which was processed in such a way that the reader was able to listen to the author, read the author's "text," or critically review the author's arguments. This multiple choice clearly indicates that the reader may assume different roles and engage in different communication relations.

He or she can also try out different modes of reading, such as the three types discussed frequently: reading as flying over the text and as a hasty selection of bits and pieces (often called „skimming"), a step by step procedure, retrieving items and sometimes searching for them („browsing"), and a third mode („reading") as a sense-driven process, but at times stumbling and then turning to deciphering and unraveling. (Incidentally, "to read" also has a meaning like "to guess;" cf. Flusser 1989, 79; Hasebrook 1995, 194; one of the meanings of "quibbling" is ambiguous).

In this project, researching the changes in reading brought about by hypertexts and electronic books continued to be an important issue (cf. Wingert; Böhle; Riehm 1993). It is obvious that "hypertext," as a new mode of structuring and presentation, is bound to entail new approaches to reading and new strategies of reception. This report will essentially be an account of experience; theoretical aspects will be dealt with only as a sideline (e.g. about "closure").

2. The Object of Study: "Quibbling" under Storyspace

"Storyspace," a hypertext platform like "Guide" or "HyperCard," was developed expressly to offer software for writing, for composition, for organizing ideas. My own attempts at writing with "Storyspace" are not sufficient for a valid assessment of whether this platform will truly support writing as a process analogous to thinking. There may be something to it, as the development was helped by, among others, a veritable author (Michael Joyce), a theoretician of writing (David J. Bolter), and a computer scientist (John B. Smith). As the software is to support writing, not text layout, "Storyspace" largely functions without typography; incidentally, it is available for the Macintosh and Windows operating systems.

In contrast to the "folding mechanism" of "Guide" and the "card and stacking mechanism" of "HyperCard," "Storyspace" may be compared to a nesting principle similar to that incorporated in Russian dolls: "Storyspace" contains a basic unit, "writing space," which is made up of two parts, i.e. a text field and a space in which more "boxes," as we will call them below, can be generated. This mechanism needs to be understood because it is important to the structure of "Quibbling" and for finding ones way in it.
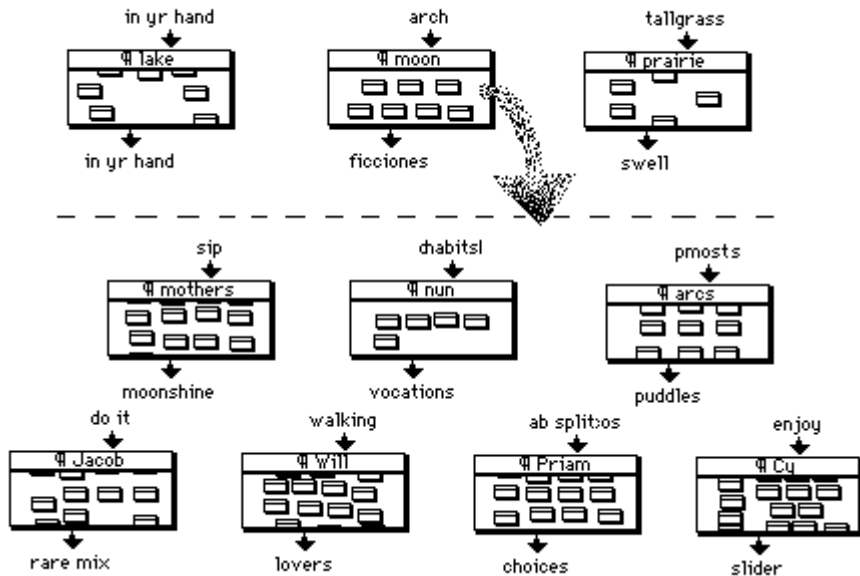

Figure 1: Two levels from "Quibbling"

Figure 1 shows only two levels, first the "lake," "moon," and "prairie" parts located below the title, and then those in "moon."

- "Lake" is a small compartment with a sequence told in a relatively straight way. Its beginning is a scene in which Heta gives Priam a cigar box; the other boxes tell what she collected at the shore of Lake Michigan.

- "Prairie" (on the right in the diagram) is a writing space with highly condensed and sparse texts, in a way corresponding to the landscape.

- "Moon" is the main section. By double clicking on the writing space we reach the next level (indicated by the arrow), at which the four men, Jacob, Will, Priam, and Cy, are placed opposite three probably more extensive boxes ("mothers," "nun," and

"arcs"). This contrast is not only an impression gained of the reader and viewer; the arrangement corresponds to the author's intention, as she explains in "arcs," which also contains some editing comments.

The writing space of a topic only shows the boxes of the next level. It could be that clicking into the space at "Priam" would reveal the boxes visible there, but would not indicate any further breakdown in depth. In actual fact, however, we can go through "cellaress" (a story in the story about "Margret & Henry") on to "Priam writes," a kind of diary about the effort of writing this story; then we could go on to "untitled" with two boxes, one of them on "Dimitra," and then on to "Catherine." Only her text field reveals that Priam lives with Catherine who, in turn, has a close relationship with Emma whose daughter Dimitra (as we learn in the text in "Dimitra") reminds Catherine of her own daughter whom she had given up for adoption as a baby.

This structuring pattern has consequences which will have to be covered in greater detail under the heading of "findings," and which can only be alluded to at this point: One must have read relatively much, gone over certain passages with very great attention, observed the hints hidden there and filed them away in one's memory "for further reference," if one wants to place this network of relationships opening up with "Catherine" into the proper place of the reconstruction of the story up to this point. This also reveals the type of fragmentation and the narrative structure. The entire story is subdivided into a great many boxes arranged more or less consistently by topics and "interlinked." The total scope is indicated to amount to 662 writing spaces, 1064 links, and 352 KB of data.

The arrangement of the pieces of the narration, and the possibilities for navigation attached to the "reader version," result in three or four, respectively, fundamental ways of reading this hypertext:

1. The first way of reading is indicated by the arrangement by topics of the boxes, mainly by subjects and characters, respectively: After the introductory sequence of "lake" one could go on to one of the women, perhaps "Heta," and then on to "mothers," and on to one of the men, perhaps "Priam," etc.

2. Another way of reading may be called traversing, i.e., moving across the network. In this approach, we may be guided by the author and take part in something like a guided tour, or we detect the points of departure and the links on our own and are driven by our own conjectures and associations.

3. Finally, there is a third way of reading, which I would call assembling. Even in the reader version of "Quibbling," the reader has a possibility to shift text boxes, establish his or her own order in the writing spaces, and rearrange boxes also between levels. Thus, for instance, we could select from "nun" the boxes of the four women and assign them to the men: Angela & Jacob;

Agnes & Will; Heta & Priam; Hilda & Cy. After extensive reading in "Heta," the reader would know that she has a relationship with Priam, while it is still completely open at this stage of reading that also the other combinations may result in couples (cf. Section 4.3).

All three or four ways of reading are offered by the "object," and by accepting these valencies as requests to start exploring, we already talk about "tasks." Actually, all these modes of reading were tested. But the reading task by far exceeds merely trying these modes of reading.

3. Study Design, Task, and Working Environment

With "Quibbling," the task was to "read" this interactive literature and adapt the working environment to it. The emphasis on "reading" means to "move into the role of a reader," sustain all the hardships involved and not limit oneself, for instance, to some evaluation along the lines of software ergonomics in which consistency would be checked and reliability tested, and there would even be some reading but no consistent adoption of the role of a reader. That role must be assumed until there is the feeling that the story was "read out" (which is called "closure" by Michael Joyce and Jane Douglas).

To be precise, the reading task comprises three subtasks:

1. At a primary level of content, the purpose is "to read the story," combine the pieces of the narrative, detect those areas where they match, uncover relationships among persons, and understand the entire structure.

2. In this kind of reading, this reconstruction of a story, this working in "the vineyard of text" (cf. Illich 1991), which takes days, weeks, even (because of unavoidable interruptions) months, a complex process of reception and reconstruction develops, the characteristics of which must be discovered because it may herald novel moments of literature.

3. Finally, this reading of "interactive" literature is constrained by technical conditions affecting various levels, the effects of which must be traced: It means reading from a computer screen; the text units are presented under specific conditions of structure and content (hypertext) as well as operation (special linking; type of movement up to prosodic elements introducing a rhythm into reading).

This triple task must be fulfilled: Read the story, discover reception phenomena, and also read the "technical" conditions of reading.[2] The whole exercise is a self-

experiment, thus requiring methodological backing, especially by concurrent documentation.

Now for the mode of working. After the experience acquired with "Afternoon," two things had to be ensured above all: firstly, enough time and patience; secondly, an operative working environment allowing jumping between the task levels. The first condition was met, inter alia, conducting two reading campaigns during two weeks of vacation.
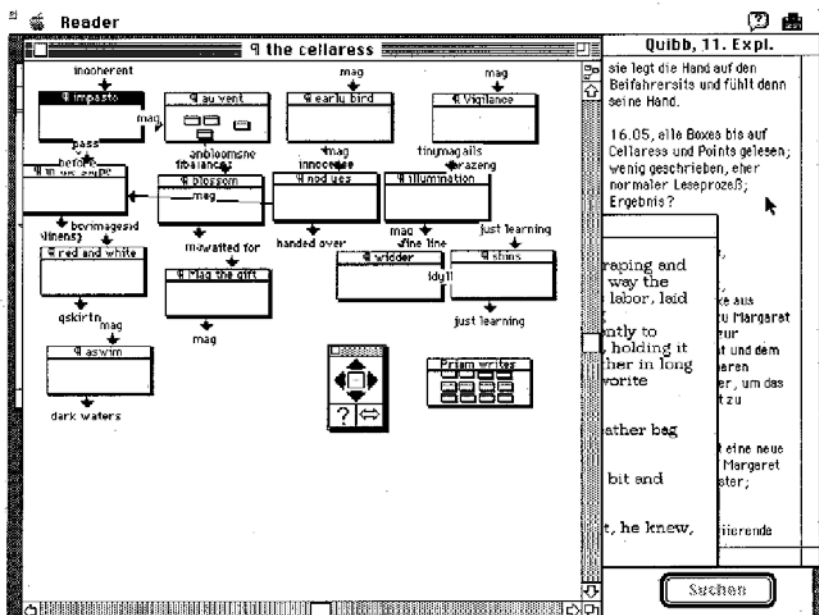

Figure 2: Explaining the four working levels

In the working environment, four levels were combined (see Fig. 2): The main level is "Quibbling" in the two views with the writing space, in this case that of "the cellaress," and the associated text boxes; next to it, on the right, there is part of the text of the beginning, namely "impasto," shown inverted on the field on the left; next, on the right, is my memo pad headed "Quibb, 11. Expl.," which is the 11th exploration, at the end of which, approximately at "16.05" (= 4.05 pm) I begin reading "the cellaress" (on November 15, 1997); at the very bottom, there is a field "Suchen" (= search) which is the key for activating the online dictionary implemented for rapid reference (but was not always sufficient).

The whole process takes place on a 15-inch screen. Most of it indeed was read in conformity with the role, i.e. off the screen, accompanied once by many notes and

then again, deliberately, by only a few notes taken; some pieces were read off-line. Computer printouts can be generated only with the "Storyspace" program; the reader version alone does not have this capability.

4. Results

The results will now be assigned to the three reading tasks referred to above, namely the story (contents), reception, and technology. These three tasks also indicate different levels which are intermeshed and cannot always be separated clearly and without loss. Thus, the reader version allows the so-called "assembly" type of reading, which is a reader-produced, post-coordinated order differing from the author-produced, pre-coordinated order. This is made possible by "Storyspace" (as a technology); the reader can perceive this as a way of reading (and a chance of reception) and, in this way, may arrive at a different idea of the story (as far as content goes). So, the technology, the reception, and the content closely interact with each other, and the resultant effects can be filtered out in one or the other sense, depending on the point of view taken.

4.1. Time Spent, Reading Motivation, and Reading Strategy

Before the results relating to contents will be communicated, three prior aspects will be discussed: The time spent for reading, language, reading motivation and strategy. The narrative will be demonstrated by two quotations from the text. A few data about the time spent and some subtotals are reflected in Table 1. The 104 hours shown are the time documented; some "off-line time," such as reading on the train, escaped documentation. The 104 hours thus represent a minimum estimate for the total of 17 explorations; on the other hand, this is a relatively high value compared to earlier reading evaluations.

The subtotals for the person boxes cannot be compared directly. Thus, the nine and a half hours for "Heta" include not only the time for getting accustomed to the setup, but also the expense involved in learning to understand the type of narration. Moreover, the style of reading was varied; normally, reading was accompanied by rather close documentation (the 17 explorations gave rise to 36 pages of text); after some familiarization, however, I also deliberately neglected documentation, for normally you read a novel without a memo pad. This is where, in my opinion, a question arises which is critical to "Quibbling," namely whether it is possible to manage the variety of relationships " in one's brain alone."

The extensive documentation, of course, is also owed to the language. With this literary style of American English, any non-native speaker has to overcome high

hurdles. Especially for this reason, sufficient time had to be reserved for reading. On the other hand, it is precisely the language, the way in which characters and their relationships are described, and the poetic tone occasionally verging on the hermetic, which sustain reading motivation. Nevertheless, the expense is quite high. The 662 boxes produce approximately 200 printed pages.

The amount of time spent is also indicative of the type of reading; it is not (only) reading for private pleasure, it is not an individual, even personal reading process (which would require no documentation); instead, the reading process is to explore paradigmatic moments of interactive literature, which makes it a piece of comparative media research.

The figures in Table 1 also refer to the reading strategy. As mentioned above, "Heta" marked the beginning; this was followed by the thematic boxes of the other characters and by "lake" and "prairie," and also by the texts in "arcs." Taken together, this represents reading by topics. Next, the other styles of reading referred to above were tried out, namely traversing (guided by the author and self-controlled), and assembling, which was practiced especially with Angela & Jacob (as explained in Section 4.3).

But first of all, I thought, I had to be clear in my mind about the "structure of time and events" of the whole story. Consequently, all boxes were re-read, and their content was fixed in small paragraphs (this was practically the second reading), and these bits of paper were arranged and pasted on to two sheets of kraft paper (75 cm x 100 cm). Establishing this "time structure" took more than fifteen hours; the phase to "mind map" all the parts and their relations, preceding the first "guided tour", alone required nearly an hour and a half.

Grand total = 104 h
->before February 25, 1998 = 53 h; 38 min
->after that date = 50 h; 15 min

Heta (74 boxes)	09 h, 21 min
Hilda (57)	02 h, 05 min
Agnes (31)	02 h, 10 min
Angela (31)	01 h, 46 min
Priam (62)	02 h, 05 min (without the cellaress")
Cy (20)	Not documented
Will (42)	03 h, 52 min
Jacob (26)	not shown separately
"Time structure"	15 h, 25 min

Table 1: Documented amounts of time spent (reading, note taking, analyses).

All this implied that I already knew the boxes and texts marked on the "guided tour;" but I wanted to fully assess the associative leaps, for Carolyn Guyer herself says that the links she had established had resulted from her own repeated readings.

Thus, one implication of the reading strategy pursued is that "reading by traversing," which is often theoretically claimed for hypertexts because, allegedly, it goes a long way to guarantee the freedom of the reader, in my case was just an excursion on well trodden paths. Although I started the first reading sequence as a "guided tour," I stopped it after approximately one hour because I could no longer manage the large number of characters and relationships.

At least two quotations from the text will be shown in order to draw attention to the language of "Quibbling" and the tone of narration and, at the same time, lead into the results with respect to contents, which will be discussed below. The first example is one of the four descriptions of Angela's way of moving and walking: "Angela walks" (the title text):

> The way she walks, open and slightly flailing, the parts of her flying out and back as she goes. Like an 11-year-old closely anticipant of puberty but still retaining fragments of the thoughtless charm of a 9-year-old. Her children loved her to walk with them, which she did often, shopping, hiking, "chaperoning" field trips with their classmates. Her style was recognizable to them. They knew what it meant to walk like that.

The other example, the part from the beginning about the story of Margret & Henry ("Impasto"), is a lyrical story the inspiration for which Priam took from a medieval event and which enabled him to consider his own relationships:

> It was her sleeve, rolled and secured at the elbow, draping and redraping as she tied the grain upright in bundles. The way the light, in deep afternoon angle, dust-filled from the day's labor, laid bright impasto across the cream fabric, the long, rolling roundnesses echoing her forearm. Henry turned frequently to watch Margaret embrace the grain he cut, pull it to her, holding it in place while she started the wrap. They worked together in long rhythms, not speaking, but occasionally singing some favorite hymn of the lay sisters at the abbey.

4.2. About the "Story"

Whether "Quibbling" can be or may be regarded as a "story," and what other constituents it still meets, is a question I would like to discuss at the end of this section. Undoubtedly, the individual characters are confined in a story and in constellations, and they maintain relationships also among each other, some of them close, as is documented in many hints and letters. The characters occupying

center stage have been mentioned already: the men displayed in individual boxes: Jacob, Will, Priam, and Cy; then the women united in one box called "nun": Angela, Agnes, Heta, and Hilda, who are in the company of "sisters." This is where we also find Bea, with seven boxes, the title text telling of an encounter in a monastery with Cora, and a few letters and diary entries by Bea in the period between February 1979 and October 1982.

Those who spent a long time reading in the "Heta" box (like myself) were surprised by the existence of separate boxes on Bea, for she is mentioned only once (in "Heta/await:" "Heta remembered Bea once telling..."). The e-mail exchanged by Heta and Priam also mentions one "Jane" who comes to visit Priam, and with Priam himself we find, in a description of a dispute between the two, the expression "Cora-come-lately." This is the phrase Bea had used on Cora already in the monastery when Cora had complained of another sister in arts training, how some "Cora-come-lately" dared to rush in and always know better; the same allusion is seen in the argument with Priam, where Cora complains that the Ghetto program designed for boys did not accept girls. Replies Priam: "We don't need some Cora-come-lately stepping in telling us how to run this program."

What relationship exists between Bea and Priam, since both use the same turn of phrase? And what is the relationship between Cora and Jane? Could it be the same person in the end? This is precisely what we are shown under "Priam" in "cora jane by bro," but the resolution of this reference - and this is one of the difficulties of reception - is days, even weeks away.

However, it is not necessary to retell the entire cast of characters and the configurations at this point (after all, those who are interested in "Quibbling" must not be spoiled their fun). Yet, there are some other, hidden characters in this puzzle about relationships. Part of the interest is generated at this point, but it not exhausted with the question of "who is attached to whom."

Upon a closer look at the entire structure of time and events, and the dates communicated, the entire setup seems to disintegrate into two trains: Jacob & Angela; Hilda & Cy (including the correspondence with Bea); and Agnes & Will take place in the period between 1973 and 1981, while the story about Heta & Priam is between 1988 and late 1990. On January 4, 1990, the author notes in her Quibbling diary ("arc/ Jrnl - title text"):

> We live in time and space, our stories will always have a temporal quality to balance the simultaneity of associations. Linearity is like the individual, or even kind of like a man, we'll never get rid of him.

Of course, this does not have to be real time; it may just as well be the fictionalized time of this work. On June 12, 1990, Priam notes in his working diary whether he should explain the medieval expressions contained in Margret & Henry, but then

finds it too obtrusive ("It's just obtrusive somehow."). On the same date, he sends an e-mail to Heta in which he reflects on whether he should leave all references in the narrative, but then ends in the resignation we are already familiar with: "Who in hell publishes computer fiction anyway? let alone reads it." However, we find this not with Priam, but with Heta in "daily weave/ bmk-cellaress/ I know." This type of reading across time is probably impossible in the hypertext proper; I took it from the "timeframe." Around this time, in early or mid-1990, the story about Jacob & Angela seems to be over already.

These examples show that "Quibbling" deliberately uses different text types which are types of communication and types of representation at the same time: There is the usual narrative (in a "bookman" font), the e-mail correspondence (that by Heta is printed in "Geneva", that by Priam, in bold face); as shown above, there are accompanying texts like diary entries, typed letters (e.g. by or to Bea), quotations, references (e.g. with Priam about an incident in a monastery: "This is an actual complaint to a bishop in 1449 about a cellaress named Margret Belers."), and, infrequently, graphic elements, thus with Hilda, who is a secretary at a college wondering why others are hardly able to read between the lines: "Sometimes I only have_ ... and then simply know_____"

"Quibbling" comes to stage as a hypertext and consistently fragments the pieces of the narrative while, at the same time, playing around with linearizations. It is one of the surprises (and recovery periods in reading) to find completely normal, linear sequences of the narrative which do not impose any puzzles about relationships, arrangements, and order upon the reader. This includes the initial sequence in "Lake," where the guided tour follows the logical, pragmatic order, at least inasmuch as the story may have developed.

There is one such sequence in "Stoic tears" with Heta, where the reader is well advised not to start with "Begin" (leading the reader up the garden path is part of the game). Or there is a prelinked sequence with "Dazes" with Heta where only the linkage generates the question about the subject of comparison the author may have had in mind, e.g. in "Cora per Ha," which is about an epileptic seizure suffered by Cora in the courtyard of the school, where she regains consciousness while lying on the asphalt pavement and seeing the horrified faces bending over her. This piece is linked to others about similar states of confusion and daze. Such "dazes" exist also with the other persons or, more precisely, with the female characters.

Once more: Story or no story? The individual persons and characters, respectively, are put into a network of relationships and described in it; individuals are linked to others, couples to other couples, i.e. the story is about such person-related stories, and about the story keeping the whole thing together. However, the story is not told in a biographically ordered way; it is attributed to individual persons as a subjective perspective of an extended life sequence which is reflected on only in a highly

selective mode. This is the reason for one of the difficulties the reader experiences. But, of course, it also constitutes the attraction namely to combine those pieces again and arrange them about a center.

The center of gravitation of the whole story is Bea; the characters are associated with Bea more (such as Hilda) or less (such as Jacob). The story is also a puzzle, for one of the meanings of "quibbling" is fiddling at something. Would this make it a reading exercise of the kind used in completing a puzzle, a kind of reading like guesswork or detection? It is not for this reason that the title of this article refers to "riddling the reader"; at content level, it is first and foremost a matter of turning the narrative into a puzzle (after all, "quibbling" also means arguing over trifles, worrying about minute details).

4.3. About the Reception

The widespread story, which shows up in many hints, but also in concrete indications and dates, the detailed, precise and yet poetic language, the empathy and care the author shows for her characters, the melodious flow of description - all these are sources of continuing and, initially, unwavering reading motivation. To the German reader, the foreign language acts like a veil which must be pulled away by precise reading and translation. In toto, this builds up a strange contradiction between two tendencies: an accelerando of rapid references, of traversing and wild reading, on the one hand, and a ritardando of restful pictures and poetic passages unraveled only in precise discovery.

"Quibbling" needs these qualities, because without such provisions the reader would soon give up: A lot of patience and reconstruction effort is required. "If you're not enjoying this, maybe it's because it hasn't been done very well. Or maybe it's because you know you could do better," says the author in one of her footnotes ("arcs/ Jrnls"). "Absolutely not," I would like to reply, for the separation between authors able to tell stories and readers liking to read good stories is preserved, in my opinion. The hypertext theory likes to refer frequently to the transition of such borders; this may perhaps succeed in technical and argumentative texts, but in a literary story?

In "Storyspace," there is the possibility of "linking to the tunnel" by first defining the point of departure and then the provisional end point (tunnel) from which the open end may be retrieved later, at faraway places, and secured at a destination. In "Quibbling," the reader has a corresponding job: Especially at the beginning, he or she must store a large number of unresolved references. We presented some examples, such as "Cora-come-lately." This means a considerable burden on the reader, which is aggravated further by the decontextualization typical of hypertexts, i.e., the narrative produces a dialog between "her " and "him," or even without that characterization, without resolving these contexts later or at all. This gives rise to a

cautious, guessing, groping, reflective type of reading which can be very tedious in the long run and must be kept going by surprising details, effects, and linguistic fireworks.

The reader progresses carefully, reconstructing, carrying along in his baggage the story he or she already read, and keeping in mind the unresolved references; in some places he or she gets into vexing situations, rather similar to the "dazes," and into sudden reconfigurations, "upside down." Thus, the e-mail correspondence between Heta and Priam mentions one "Catherine" (e.g. "Catherine's deep in a project...;" at that already quoted point where Priam expresses his doubts as to whether his hypertext will ever be published); she could be a friend, perhaps another daughter, who knows?

The diligent reader completing his way through "Priam" will be rewarded at the lowest level, as we discovered before: Priam, a former priest, is married to Catherine. However, if one only looks at the side of the narrative as one would reconstruct it from the points of view of Heta and Priam, one would never find out. This reversal of perspective, the front and viewing side in relation to the side facing away, the side only implied, constitutes one interesting feature of reading, perhaps even the philosophy of the whole piece.

In this section about reception, a comment should be made about the three ways of reading: Reading by topic and figures, sticking to the given order; reading by traversing, following the pathways sketched by the author or the impulses of the reader; and reading by assembling, which I tested with Angela & Jacob. The author herself triggers off this experiment ("arcs/ jrnls/ topographic"): "I wonder what would happen to the story if I changed how I have it organized right now." So, let us put Jacob & Angela into one box, relinearize the whole thing into a thread, read and see what emerges?

This is precisely what I performed; the arrangement, however, was made off screen. This "joint story" then was subjected to an independent analysis examining, for instance, what references are contained in the respective piece of the narrative, especially whether the respective text furnishes a bracket combining both persons, a situation or a scene for both, a description from changing perspectives, such as "Jacob's hands:

> They are large and coarse, not rough, just broad, deep lines. A farm boy's hands. Freckled, but pale skin - he's not a farm boy anymore./ His hands feel good to her body.....

So, first of all, the appearance is described, but then recourse is made to a sensation which is associated with Angela ("His hands feel good to her body"); consequently, this text can also be read as a description originating from Angela. Such "commonalities" and combining brackets can be found in 29 out of the 44 boxes

selected (18 for Jacob; 26 for Angela). This documents the great extent to which this narrative is a story about a common relationship; i.e., combining these person boxes in one relationship box is justified.

But the question raised by Caroline Guyer went a bit further, asking whether such pooling would be able to entail a different story. In accordance with my reception experience, this is not the case; no other story results, but the resulting story has a different emotional flavor inasmuch as reading the "combined version" emphasizes the closeness of the relationships among persons as well as their limits. For instance, it is mentioned in "for Jacob" how Angela once wanted to go beyond the merely purposeful, rational aspects of giving presents, which Jacob had been satisfied with, and bought him a necklace made of pieces of horn which had the elegant movements of a snake. To make her feel good, he wears the necklace a few times, but that was all the emotion Angela was able to observe.

It's my thesis that the experience of readers with fragmenting and cutting has advanced far enough for the text, at least for the case of Angela & Jacob analyzed here, to be presented also as one train from which the reader would pick those parts which belong together. It could even be imagined that all theme boxes be dyed in some color (suggestions for these shades of color are found in the "Notes"), that all pieces of text be written on filing cards, put into a box, and the reader then literally should pick and read the story. What would be the result? What would a reader miss in the paper case which a reader of a hypertext would have? The link. So, what is furnished by technology?

4.4. On Technology

In an article titled "Text in Tüttelchen" (Text in Quotation Marks), Dieter E. Zimmer (1997), in a review of the 2nd literature competition organized by the weekly newspaper "Die Zeit" and the IBM company, expressed himself skeptically about web literature, even suspecting "... that 'web' and 'literature' are mutually exclusive." This would mean "literature" and not just literature.[3] "Quibbling" is in a different sense 'not a real text', not only in quotation marks, but placed in real boxes, packaged operationally. This packaging and linking are the two functions provided by "Storyspace" in a really efficient way. Does literature gain from this technology?

We must distinguish here between the possibilities offered by the reader version of "Quibbling" and the additional functionalities of "Storyspace." The reader version offers a "'Storyspace view," following the principle of "one page at a time;" we see the representation in a network or the text field. "Storyspace," the program, also allows a multiple-window arrangement or a separate "Storyspace" and text view or only a pure text view, as in "Afternoon." The author obviously wants us to read the "packaged text" in accordance with the central initial sequence in which Heta gives Priam a cigar box which releases cigar smoke, but does not reveal cigars, but only

those glass fragments collected on the beach which she gives him as a present. Objectively, what is being handed over is without any value while, subjectively, it is very important. She watches attentively his reaction.

This packaging of text and giving titles to boxes produces hints to the content to appear later: The titles and the text may be descriptive (such as "Angela walks;" "Priam's hands"), sometimes realistic ("Grocery store" actually describes scenes in a grocery department); some are metaphoric ("Soup" does describe a soup, but is a metaphor for Angela); some have a guiding effect (such as the "Dazes" mentioned above), while others are misleading (such as "Begin," which is anything but the beginning); others arouse curiosity (such as "Foufouing" for Angela's beautification); and others again are unintelligible (such as "virga," which Langenscheidt's Muret-Sanders tells us is rain which has not yet contacted the earth and may be the only source of consecrated water (as Angela was taught at monastery school)), etc.

So, this is a game of hide and seek, of references that work out and others that do not; it is playing on the expectations of readers. On this tightrope between expectation and disappointment, the author entices the reader into a story she offers him only in bits and pieces, like a heap of broken fragments, with flags pointing here and there, and she puts her faith on the motivating forces which mend broken entities. The reader patiently collects the bits and pieces; might that be the message in the end?

If contents are known sufficiently well (for instance, in the case of "Dazes" with "Heta," or the story about Angela & Jacob, which I read very thoroughly), there is a possibility of glossing over the box titles as in meta-reading and dwelling on recollecting the contents (with the lids closed!). That would be a kind of second order reading. However, the price to be paid for this pleasure is high because it demands truly thorough reading, and this is worthwhile only if the text warrants it.

Finally, one other component of interaction should be mentioned which we already found in a hypertext by Bolter, an element of prosody, something like tacking the text together by clicking, as in the "points," for Angela: "She is a lover / of gardens, libraries, and mistakes / pictograms, questions, and the number 3." The oblique stroke, "/," indicates that a new screen is opened so that the entire sequence is clicked on in the rhythm of reading.

5. Outlook

Spreading the pieces found, and explaining the findings, would have to be followed by a conceptual discussion, by classification, clarification, and theory. In this article I have given precedence to a description of the findings; this is not meant to diminish

the value of a theoretical discussion, but that discussion cannot be held at this point. I will therefore limit myself to an "outlook," and conclude with a surprise: The way in which "Quibbling" was read, perhaps even wants to be read, namely slowly, with a lot of reconstruction, with attention over long spans of time, in a cautious process of groping, detecting and preserving traces - all this points to moments of reflection. Though not continuously, the reader is always made to return to himself or herself, his or her reception is becoming a riddle to himself or herself (hence, "riddling").

Among the most surprising experiences in this "interactive fiction" is the length of time and the patience with which I sustained this complicated, tedious way of reading without losing attention; it shows that language will support us for a long period of time. That there was no "closure," where the reader would have been exhausted before the story would have been fully exploited, looks as if "Quibbling" had secret powers. And these, I think, have far more to do with language than with technology.

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Notes

1. The second thesis would be about writing as an analogy to thinking and memorizing; the third thesis would be about the interconnectivity of written (and oral) communication. Multimedia, finally, could add the release from monomedia constraints.

2. For other forms of reading tasks, cf. Sauer (1999).

3. Zimmer, Dieter E.: Text in Tüttelchen. Die Zeit, 46, Nov. 7, 1997, p. 61: "Die Linearität der Erzählung ist nun aber kein Fluch, den die lesende Menschheit nicht bald genug abschütteln kann." (The linearity of a narrative is not a curse from which the community of readers must be redeemed as soon as possible.)