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Electronic Literature and the Mashup of Analog and Digital Code

By Eduardo Navas

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Abstract

This essay examines the complexity of contemporary electronic literary practice. It evaluates how electronic literature borrows from, and also influences, the reception of the textual message in other forms of communication that efficiently combine image, sound and text as binary data, as information that is compiled in any format of choice with the use of the computer. The text aims to assess what it means to write in literary fashion in a time when crossing over from one creative field to another is ubiquitous and transparent in cultural production. To accomplish this, I relate electronic literature to the concept of intertextuality as defined by Fredric Jameson in postmodernism, and assess the complexity of writing not only with words, but also with other forms of communication, particularly video. I also discuss Roland Barthes's principles of digital and analogical code to recontextualize intertextuality in electronic writing as a practice part of new media. Moreover, I discuss a few examples of electronic literature in relation to mass media logo production, and relate them to the concept of remix. The act of remixing has played an important role in the definition of literature in electronic media. All this leads to a recurring question that is relevant in all arts: how does originality and its relationship to authorship take effect in a time when the death of the author is often cited due to the growing amount of collaboration taking place in networked culture?

The rise of new media and emerging technologies has contributed to the complexity of contemporary literary practice. This becomes evident when one looks over the development of electronic literature over the last thirty years.¹ Electronic literature shares certain elements with other areas of creative production, particularly the visual arts, when we consider works such as *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War* by Olga Lialiana, a net art project that uses strategies specific to electronic literature. This crossover was explored in "born digital"² writing with early hypertext literature, throughout the 1980s, loosely entering a second stage around 1995 (Hayles). N. Katherine Hayles in her expansive essay, "Electronic Literature: What Is It?" explains

the definition of literature in electronic media, as according to the Electronic Literature Organization (ELO). The organization states that electronic literature can be defined as “work with an important literary aspect that takes advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer.” (ibid.) Hayles endorses this definition in her essay and explains how electronic literature is taking shape in various cultural forms, including, gaming, theater, as well as diverse types of time-based media.

When considering ELO’s definition, we should reflect on the reception of the textual message in relation to other forms of communication that efficiently combine image, sound and text as binary data, as information that is compiled in any format of choice with the use of the computer. In this regard, Hayles’s expansive survey of electronic literature contributes to the contestation of what literature could possibly be in our time of networked culture. She is well aware of this when she writes “... The place of writing is again in turmoil, roiled now not by the invention of print books but the emergence of electronic literature.” (ibid.) Hayles’s statement reminds us that the definition of literature has been contested practically since writing became a field of aesthetics. Therefore, to ask what is literature at the beginning of 2011, a time when it is more than certain that the concept of writing has been extended beyond words on paper to every conceivable form of communication, begs that one reconsiders the common understanding of literature in relation to new forms of production. Due to this, ideas become embedded as information and are recycled across all media in terms of intertextuality.

I will examine this implication in what follows in order to assess what it means to write in literary fashion in a time when crossing over from one creative field to another is ubiquitous and transparent in cultural production. To accomplish this, I will relate electronic literature to intertextuality as defined by Fredric Jameson in postmodernism, and assess the complexity of writing not only with words, but also with other forms of communication, particularly video. My emphasis on video is due to the fact that moving images are pervasive in every conceivable form of communication, from film in theaters to iPhones. I will also cite the theories of Roland Barthes in order to analyze how reading in terms of intertextuality takes place during and after postmodernism. I will then discuss a few examples of electronic literature, and relate them to the concept of Remix; because, as I argue in what follows, the act of remixing has played a role in the definition of literature in electronic media, since the rise of the hypertext. This crossover blurs the lines of creative disciplines, and leads to a recurring question that is relevant in all the arts: how does originality and its relationship to authorship take effect in a time when the death of the author is often cited due to the growing amount of collaboration taking place in networked culture?”³

E-Lit

As previously noted in the introduction, N. Katherine Hayles surveys electronic literature with the awareness that to consider literary production in an electronic and ephemeral, and certainly unstable space (due to the constant changes in emerging technology), contests the definition of literature once it enters the digital realm. For ELO and Hayles, the definition of electronic literature as work of literary aspect that takes advantage of “context provided by the stand-alone or networked computer” expands to all types of digital production, as long as the literary is strongly present. In this fashion, while Hayles is specific to separate electronic literature from print literature, she is not so clear on where to draw the line within the electronic field. Some of the works she surveys from what she calls the early or classical period, roughly between the early 1980s until the mid '90s, include hypertexts such as *afternoon, a story* by Michael Joyce, as well as *Victory Garden* by Stuart Moulthrop. After 1995, however, some of the works included in electronic literature are no longer necessarily dependent on reading an actual text in the traditional sense—even in experimental fashion via hyperlinks. Indeed, when looking at the *Electronic Literature Collection* v.1 (published online and on CD by the Electronic Literature Organization, 2006), and considering it included works such as *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw* by Donna Leishman, it becomes evident that new technology allows the user to navigate literary projects which do not always include text— that is written words. Instead, in works like Leishman’s, the user is expected to click on hidden links and discover a narrative told through visual compositions.



Fig. 1. Screenshot from *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw*.

The inclusion of literary projects such as Leishman's is justified by Hayles because such works implement "alternating game play with novelistic components, interactive fictions [that] expand the repertoire of the literary through a variety of techniques, including visual displays, graphics, animations, and clever modifications of traditional literary devices." (Hayles) Along these lines, Hayles sets out in her essay to define different genres of electronic literature. She argues that hypertext fiction evolved into interactive fiction, such as the aforementioned works by Leishman. She also considers electronic literature in relation to immersion and actual three-dimensional spaces, and discusses works that explore the CAVE as a space for interactive literature. In this case, John Cayley, Talan Memmott, and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, among others, explored three-dimensional interactivity with technology available at Brown University, which enabled the user to manipulate and navigate text with hand and eye coordination. Hayles elaborates: "Performed in a three-dimensional space in which the user wears virtual reality goggles and manipulates a wand, these works enact literature not as a durably imprinted page but as a full-body experience that includes haptic, kinetic, proprioceptive and dimensional perceptions." (ibid.) Nevertheless, even when this case is made, most of these elements can also be found in the visual arts⁴, as I will demonstrate in the following sections. For the sake of precision, I will focus on video projects that clearly are accepted in both art and literature. This will enable me to argue that the material is considered part of literature because the artists involved align themselves with literature as their field of legitimation, even though they clearly share creative methodologies with other areas of creative production.

My aim here is not to question ELO's definition of literature. Rather, I am interested in making clear why it is that Hayles is able to extend this definition to works that clearly crossover to other areas of aesthetic production as literary. In other words, to include elements described above as part of literature is possible by Hayles in part because, prior to her evaluation of electronic literature, during postmodernism, the concept of intertextuality was repositioned as a phrase to read across media. Intertextuality in postmodern thought is the tendency to read signs, as previously understood in literary practice, across diverse cultural production, including architecture, the visual arts, film and video, and media at large. To this we now turn because understanding why the act of reading in literary terms extends to all areas of culture will not only enable us to evaluate why and how Hayles's assessment is validated, but also understand why this development took place.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality in the literary tradition is the act of embedding a text within another text, a conceptual remix of sorts where ideas are cited, but not necessarily the material object or concrete instantiation (which is what the act of remixing achieves in actual sampling of content). An intertextual work is, in essence, a literary mashup (a direct juxtaposition) of concepts.⁵

Intertextuality functions in broad terms once it is extended to cultural production at large—beyond literary practice. Fredric Jameson, arguably one of the most important thinkers on postmodern thought, uses the literary concept of intertextuality as a way of reading signs across different cultural spaces. Jameson relates intertextuality to a collapse in modernism which, he proposes, makes possible postmodernism. This collapse consists of one's cultural relation to history as a dismissible form. In postmodern culture people value the moment, not how that moment is linked to preceding events. In this regard, contemporary networked culture is even more dependent on such norms, as people are expected to care for "just-in-time" information.⁶ Facebook and Twitter are two examples of this tendency—of people being concerned with updates, which include photos, videos and snippets of text. Postmodernism began to implement this norm and networked culture takes it as a given. For Jameson, then, intertextuality is "a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and is the operator of a new connotation of 'pastness' and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displace 'real' history." (21) He links this collapse to a "waning of affect," defined by "a set of texts or simulacra" (ibid.) that empty the subject being read. In other words, a cultural indifference develops to what may be real—only the recurring illusion can persist in postmodernism.

Jameson's interest is in understanding how signification may function with a certain emptiness of meaning, where only the recognition of exchange value can be validated, while history is pushed to the periphery for the sake of a momentary recognition of fragmentary citations. What we can take from his use of intertextuality in the postmodern sense is the ability to read meaning (that is in terms of commodification) across diverse forms of representation in all types of media, as an act derived from literature. As I note in following sections, this tendency affects critical production, when artists are able to extend their practice by appropriating intertextuality to produce their own work.

Intertextuality is, indeed, the key element of postmodernism; it enables people to treat everything with the same attitude. Following Jameson's argument as outlined above, this is possible because everything is a commodity in postmodernism—that is the one thing that may be truly democratic of late capitalism: high and low culture are equally sold to anyone who can afford it. But even within this apparent democratic possibility, class difference makes sure that the quality of production

and proper distribution is kept in check—while pretending that everyone can have access to the taste of the ruling class.

It is this same shift in culture, paradoxically, that enables critical theorists, such as Jameson, to treat all areas of culture with a broad approach and read every conceivable high and low commodity essentially as a text. Intertextuality in postmodernism, then, is used to deal with disparate forms of production that can be anchored into a type of *reading*, which is concretely founded in literature. This extension of literature, in its canonical sense, to culture at large in terms of intertextuality is what enables Hayles to discuss works such as Leishman's "Deviant" as literature proper with no major controversial claim. However, when the work is analyzed formally, it becomes evident that it functions more as a second generation work of Internet art developed with Flash, a commercial graphic software application.

Code

Taking into consideration the definition of Intertextuality begs that we understand the relationship of writing and reading in texts in contrast to other forms of communication such as video or photography. One aspect that, in my view, is not discussed enough in postmodern theory is how the act of reading is different across media and culture. It is this difference that needs to be revisited in order to understand why electronic literature can so comfortably appropriate textual and visual language to develop strategic narratives as defined by the ELO and elit-theorist Hayles. This is possible because of two particular terms discussed by Roland Barthes: digital and analogical code—which, to me, have not been considered enough in relation to new media culture.⁷

In his essay, "The Rhetoric of the Image," Barthes discusses how image and text are understood in advertising. He chooses a commercial ad for his analysis because, in his view, the message of this image is "purely intentional," meaning that the advertisement presents signifiers and signifieds as clearly as possible. The image Barthes discusses is a Panzanni advertisement (a brand of Italian foods), in which packets of pasta, a tin, a sachet, tomatoes, onions, and other vegetables are deliberately set up, he argues, to deliver a message that exudes "Italianicity" (48). Barthes considers this myth: a metalanguage that deliberately proposes a carefully constructed message as natural.

In the Panzanni image, Barthes notices that text is deliberately used to "anchor" the message; that is, the text directs the reader to interpret the image in a specific way. This is necessary, he claims, because the image (without the text) is analogical, thus

the readers take-in the information in no specific order, by comparing the different objects that appear within the frame. A denotation is needed which comes through with the use of the textual message which reads, “pates – sauce – parmesan, a l’Italienne de luxe” (53). Consequently, the message is read as an advertisement because the textual message instructs the reader to negotiate the image as a representation of the idea of Italianicity in French culture (the add is from a French magazine). The analogical code, then, is the image, which is obviously understood through analogy (comparison of elements), while the digital code is the text, which is understood through a specifically structured system of signification (digital units as phonemes) (33).

What is exposed in Barthes’s analysis is the difference in *reading* signification across culture. If we take his differentiation between image and text to hold true, then we have to consider it when evaluating the concept of intertextuality in relation to postmodern thought and electronic literature.

Mashups

Intertextuality as defined by Jameson and digital and analogical code as defined by Barthes are useful concepts that enable us to evaluate the type of reading that takes place in contemporary culture. They also help expose the efficient exchange of image and text that is intimately linked to mashups as originally defined in music.⁸ The innovation of the mashup lies in the simultaneous recognition of songs that play together but also sound as though they play independently (ibid.). Often times it is the lyrics of one song that are combined with the instrumental version of another. The most successful mashups are the ones that combine songs that would not be considered mixable. Arguably, the best example is *The Grey Album*. Danger Mouse, a DJ Producer who eventually became part of the duo Gnarls Barkley, took the Beatles’ White Album and mixed it with Jay-Z’s black Album (ibid.). The remix was so successful that EMI pushed Danger Mouse to take the mashup offline.⁹ The aesthetics of the mashup, as the term implies, is to smash two or more things together to the point that they could become noise—the more unexpected the combination, the more effective the mashup. Mashups carry a certain shock value, which is also expected in media at large, from Hollywood films to news as entertainment. Therefore, it is understandable why mashups have become popular in media. In the United States, the term mashup reached such a level of popularity that primetime news anchor Campbell Brown used to have a segment called “The Mash-Up” on her nightly news show.¹⁰

Analogical and digital code are often mashed up in contemporary culture: they are designed to collide for the sake of recognition. This is the key reason why an image

in mass media generally can be read (or at least approached) as text because of its pervasive repetition. This ideological feat of late capitalism is what enabled the musician Prince, for example, to dismiss his name for a graphic symbol, and force the media to refer to such a sign as “the artist formerly known as Prince.”

The sign was always understood as a graphic symbol with the impossibility to become embedded within digital code because it demanded that the musician formerly known as Prince be recognized with no proper name. An actual word could not be read when presented with the sign, but the demand of a digital reading as an analogical element was, nevertheless, at play. The artist formerly known as Prince eventually called himself Prince again, but during the period of 1993 to 2000, he used the graphic symbol instead of his name due to contract disputes with his record label, Warner.¹¹ Prince’s gesture exposes the limitations of the conventional reading of analogical code as digital code—that is the conventional attitude to read both with the same approach, even when, as Barthes notes, this is not really what is taking place when we take on the process of signification.

A naturalized form in which a graphic symbol can be read as digital code (or at least comes close to it) can be found in the logo industry. Logos are everywhere. Some include text, but many do not—or don’t need it after some time, once they become simply graphics that function as digital code after enough repetition takes place. Perhaps the best example of this shift in reading signs is the McDonald’s golden arches. The repetition of the arches has reached such a level that the name of the fast-food restaurant is no longer needed. Just about anyone around the world who has been mildly exposed to some media is likely to recognize the graphic symbol that stands for one of the corporations that helped define globalization as that which elusively comes after postmodernism.¹² Another example that uses analogical code is the Pepsi logo, which, like McDonald’s, does not need the word “Pepsi” any more in order to be recognized. Coca-Cola dealt with this differently as the logo which spells its name with a wave under it is no longer read, but simply recognized; and more recently, they opt to use a pristine white bottle with a wave, or the words “Coca-Cola” against a red background.

Prince took these strategies and repurposed them deliberately to resist the capitalist structure that, according to the press, he claims intervened with his creativity, leading him to “retire” at least for some time (Lee). These examples expose the collision (mashing) of signs, both textual and visual (digital and analogical) in culture and media.

De-Coding

Based on Jameson's approach to postmodernism, one can examine with a deliberate literary attitude diverse cultural production in architecture, art, fashion, film and literature. This is in fact what he does in his own research. His theory is based on the awareness of digital and analogical code as defined by Barthes. Consequently, during the postmodern period people were encouraged to read through image and text similarly—to take them to be the same, as demonstrated in the examples discussed above. This is still in effect at the time of this writing, and is pervasively promoted by mass media with the aim to break through the noise that they, themselves, create with the constant bombardment of ads in every conceivable form.

It must be emphasized that postmodern language reached an unprecedented level of media saturation, in which contemporary networked culture is even more ingrained. An example of such saturation is the Monochrome Apple logo, introduced around 1998¹³, which takes over where Coca-Cola and Pepsi left off. The Apple logo no longer uses text; it is a bitten apple designed with the same sensibility of a typeface. This conceptual approach to the logo functions in opposition to Prince's strategy. In Prince's logo one cannot recognize the name "Prince" at all—as the sign is so abstract and complex that it takes effort to remember its shape. The Apple logo is developed with the understanding that a graphic can be "read" because it "spells" apple. The logo is not just linked to the actual idea of an apple, but also the actual computer company. It connotes and denotes simultaneously several signifiers that lead the reader to recognize Apple Computers as a major brand.

At the beginning of 2011 (when this text was written), more than ever, there is a need to shorten, if not erase, the separation in the digital and the analogical—to make them appear as the same. It must be noted that this happens deliberately in mass media, mainly in advertising. This encourages the attitude of taking for granted intertextuality that can be appropriated in all of the arts, including literature. And this is also the environment that enables electronic literature to take on analogical code to be read as digital: image as text and text as image.¹⁴ To this effect, electronic literature often borrows from the culture industry, as Hayles herself states: "it is informed by the powerhouses of contemporary culture, particularly computer games, films, animations, digital arts, graphic design, and electronic visual culture." (Hayles) Electronic literature, in effect, turns the ideological paradigm of sameness upon which the reading of signs in mass media are at play into an important part of its aesthetics; and it is because of this reason why Hayles and other e-lit theorists can look at Flash projects presenting primarily analogical code as narratives in the realm of literature.

E-Lit Remixed

Electronic literature, as noted by Hayles, takes on many forms, including video. Using time-based media makes sense if we consider its overall production, given the affordability of shooting and editing moving images in relation to the creative drive by writers to explore innovative ways to present their stories. In terms of electronic literature, as surveyed by Hayles, video becomes a vehicle to deliver the literary message. This is evident in e-lit videos such as the ones available in a special mashup issue of *Bunk Magazine* and *Mad Hatters' Review*, titled "Madbunkers Review Mashup." Some of the works presented are straight mashups of two or more texts, but it is the videos that point to the rich crossover that is taking place across media. Selected videos combine moving image and text that carefully cite as much from literature, as well as film, and graphic design. Two examples are *Distant Place* and *Playing Jeff* both by Cecelia Chapman and Jeff Couch.

Distant Place is a one-minute short about a woman's murder. It consists of sped up imagery and a voiceover by a man who tells the story of how a woman was killed and how the victim's mother eventually takes revenge eight years later. The video presents a literary aspect, as defined by Hayles, because the narrator takes on a poetic tone, while revisiting the mystery novel genre. *Playing Jeff* is a thirty-second short which instead of a voiceover uses text on top of the image. It opens with the title, followed with the words "Scene 1" which presents a series of outside shots of a shadow on the open grass field.



Fig. 2. Screenshot from *Playing Jeff*.

The montage implicates that the mystery person is looking at a window of a nearby house. "Scene 2" consists of "the action" and shows a hand throwing a ball, along with shots of the window, while we move from day to night, at which point we are able to see different people moving inside the house; and we enter the third scene, "The End." The video reads at times more like a motion graphic exercise, but the specificity in narration makes it obvious that this video also belongs to the literary.

These videos, and others also included in the special issue of the *Madbunkers Review Mashup* are literary because the medium of video is appropriated along the lines defined by Terry Eagleton, who explains that a proper contextualization dictates when one is dealing with "literature": "If you approach me at the bus stop and murmur 'thou still unravished bride of quietness,' then I am instantly aware that I am in the presence of the literary. I know this because the texture, rhythm and resonance of your words are in excess of their abstractable meaning" (2).

To recontextualize Eagleton's argument: video, then, becomes the framework to present the literary message. It is merely a vessel to explore narratives as defined in literature, and, again, this is possible because in networked culture we have entered another stage of intertextuality that has moved past of what Jameson described during the eighties. Digital and analogical code can now also be swapped, in large part, because of the technological advancements made. And interaction as initially explored in hypertext literature is assimilated as another conventional element of storytelling in experimental interfaces unconcerned with textual (digital code) messages. This convention is updated and best experienced in the rapid growth of the video game industry, which at this point is bigger than film (Yi). It is worth noting that film was the previous inheritor of the literary message just over a hundred years ago.

The challenges that these videos bring to literature, however, are multifold. They recycle narrative strategies, well established in both literature and film, and bring them together—mash them up—in a way that makes it obvious that they are referencing conventions. *Playing Jeff*, in particular, is a stripped down story where both image and text are used economically. Just enough is provided to develop a vague storyline, along the lines of what ELO calls "work with an important literary aspect."

The videos also point to the concept of recycling and intertextuality proper, and revisit questions of originality: when we realize that they are templates well understood within genres. They ultimately point to the crossover in disciplines as one of the authors, Cecelia Chapman, calls herself not a writer but an artist.¹⁵ These videos could be presented in a fine arts context and would be accepted with ease. Intertextuality allows for this crossover, as the literary mashups just discussed could also participate in video festivals. This is because intertextuality as found in electronic literature is also prevalent in other areas of culture. What is literary, then,

is affirmed while questioned by the same elements that are also used in the arts as well as commercial production.

I should note that the videos analyzed in this section were not chosen for their innovation or promise as important works of art. They are, in fact, rather generic on their vision. However, they do serve as examples of the role that intertextuality plays across disciplines. It is now worth considering how the aesthetics that inform electronic literature also may be at play in other areas in remix culture itself. We must now consider how literature affects video itself as an aesthetic reference.

Remix

In New York City, at the [Open Video Conference](#), on October 1, 2010, I presented a paper written by a remix theory and praxis collective of which I am part. In the text, we correlated video with literature, citing video as poetry of contemporary culture. I quote at length:

We claim video as the preferred medium for poets of networked culture. Poetry from the very beginning has been about quality and selectivity: it is to this day exemplar of knowledge as a process of selection from a large data bank of references, experiences, and literary strategies which the poet deliberately reconfigures for her own vision. Video poets (or as we know them, video remixers) find quality in selecting from pre-existing material, much like poets borrow from their respective literary traditions. The difference between poetry and video is that the former has roots in a past economic system, in which intellectual property was not contested with quantitative and qualitative precision. The latter is current and active in time, when data-mining and real-time search tracking are redefining how intellectual property is distributed and acknowledged in culture. The result is a recurring question on originality which is closely linked to copyright issues.¹⁶

And I must quote one more excerpt before I elaborate:

Taking our analogy of poetry, then, it is evident that video is informed by a poetic license—not just in terms of convenience of access to material (as the poet could just consider words from his growing vocabulary—the video remixer can easily access databanks of pre-existing video), but also in terms of economics (as writing has been a rather inexpensive endeavor, video editing has become unexpectedly affordable). This may be due in part to the fact that generations of people have been bombarded with moving images as

consumers, and that once computing made the production of video accessible, the practice of developing amateur or independent video productions was almost as natural as speaking a sentence. (ibid.)

I quote at length because the statements that the collective developed are quite relevant for us to come to terms with how electronic literature may be understood in culture at the beginning of 2011. To claim that video is the preferred medium of poets of the twenty-first century is to acknowledge the intensity of signification between digital and analogical code already discussed above. I am not referencing the text presented at the conference to claim a direct correlation between video proper and electronic literature. Rather, my aim is to demonstrate how the intertextual strategy that informs electronic literature is an aesthetic of great influence in all areas of culture. This is our inheritance from the postmodern. Consequently, it is worth noting that the members of the remix group that collaborated on the paper are not invested in literature, but actually share different interests. Some are video makers, others study film, while others look at media in culture at large, and some are artists; but all are aware of how literature is an important element in the development of remixes. This is the result of intertextuality.

Conclusion: [inter]mixing Textuality

All of this is to argue that we have entered a new stage of production with electronic forms of communication which makes obvious that to call a cultural object part of a specific camp is a strategy that supports the camp's tradition—in a time when disciplinary boundaries are, yet again, eroding.¹⁷ With technology of mass production, beginning with the photo image and continuing with the digital image, then on to hyperlinks, intertextuality as understood in terms of embedding and recycling of previous content (once intertextuality is extended to all possible forms of communication, not just the literary, as I have demonstrated above), becomes part of a material reality that in turn opens the door for new cultural production that can be concretely measured in terms of its re-appropriation and constant reintroduction as a commodity.

All of the issues I have brought up throughout this text lead to a friction that must be confronted at this point: mashing, mixing and remixing material across various media may appear to be putting in danger creativity. This proposition sounds like a cliché to anyone well exposed to writers such as the ones I have mentioned throughout this text, but I dare argue that the issue of originality still plays a role for researchers in the humanities. This is due to a specific reason that must now be reflected upon.

One of the common themes in postmodernism was that there is nothing original, that things are only being reinterpreted through new forms. I must emphasize that this issue is key to electronic literature, and especially literature as a canon because the latter is primarily founded on the concept of originality and the author. Such foundation is best expressed by literary scholar Ian Watt who explains that the novel is a proper vessel of culture because of the conception of the author as the originator of ideas: "The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well named." (13) Watt actually does not necessarily celebrate authorship in his research, but rather tries to understand how it was constructed in the novel. What his statement demonstrates in our case is that originality had to become cemented as a necessary element for the novel to thrive. The name of the genre (novel) as he explains in the quote is testamentary of the implementation of the "new" in terms of sole authorship in culture. This is what is challenged when ideas, content, and actual material (through sampling) is transferred from one creative field to another—when video is used by people invested in literary aspects to tell a story in the tradition of literature, while also clearly crossing over to the field of film language and the visual arts.

The result of the new stage of cultural production described is of online collaborators who are not yet celebrated as authors, but are accepted with measured consideration.¹⁸ Moving from the arts to culture at large, bloggers when they first began to write were seen with skepticism, but now they have become assimilated by the media (*ibid.*). *CNN*, *Fox News*, and other major cable networks try to keep pace by having qualified bloggers of their own, who will no longer give an independent opinion, but that of the news corporation.

Blogging in academia for the most part is used for the means of sharing ideas that may lead to major research. They are also used as educational tools to engage students in writing proactively about a subject of study. In both of these cases the acknowledgement for the need of constant communication of an idea is apparent.¹⁹ In both cases it is acknowledged that the key is to engage the audience in a way that the author of the novel as defined by Watt could not expect to achieve. The reason for this is networked communication. This is the shift that enables electronic literature to crossover from "one way communication," that of publishers deciding what is released and what comments on what is released are worthy of attention in other modes of communication such as newspapers, to a stage where the real value of any type of writing (whether it be actual text or video production) can only have immediacy if it is circulated among people at a consistent and viral rate.

The new form of authorship is quite a challenge for emerging authors because they must be in an ongoing conversation with people who find interest in their work. Literature, electronic literature at least, as Hayles explains, is therefore closely linked to other areas of the commercial market, including gaming, which is where we find

the development of contemporary narratives best exposed. In games, the basic story is laid out and gamers are expected to add and develop new elements and characters as they explore game worlds. The most obvious examples of this would be World of Warcraft, as well as Second Life. In all games today, people expect to play others, to interact with others. To play with/against the machine is fruitless. Along these lines, to write or read a text with no feedback from like-minded individuals is fruitless. One must engage with a community. This is a type of peer review outside of academia. The remix theory praxis group, of which I am part, is sensitive to this concept of peer review as collaboration online, and tries to develop work that is relevant to Remix by learning from literary practice, as discussed above.

At the time of this writing, authors are expected to have a Facebook, as well as a Twitter account in order to stay relevant with fans and the media that supports their work. An author's work only has value if it stays in the "now" that is in the realm of constant updates. If this states anything about contemporary culture, it is that we are entering a stage in which the dependency on constant exchange of ideas makes obvious how an author may come to develop a specific story based on constant feedback, if not from peers, certainly from her environment. In this regard, then, the author has always really been a filter—for what else does a fiction writer do but interpret her experiences (or the research performed) in order to develop an engaging story? It is the publishing institution that has carefully guarded this reality. What is cherished in contemporary networked culture is how well one is able to function as a selective remixer of ideas. The author can gain autonomy, and proper authorship when a new (and yes, unique) composition that appears "original"—whether it be writing, video, painting, or net art, etc—develops its own autonomy, based on a careful selection and recombination of previous ideas and possibly sampling of forms. Once we acknowledge this, it becomes evident that the author has always been a mashup artist who privileged ideas over other forms. As I have demonstrated above, now an author in the literary sense can crossover and be part of other fields. How and why she may do so is left for other researchers to study. Consequently, this is how specializations and experts develop (who are also filters and selectors—editors—of information, themselves).

Throughout this text, then, I have evaluated how electronic literature may be understood as an emerging field that shares creative tools and aesthetics with the visual arts, as well as mainstream media. Along the way I demonstrated how literature no longer is necessarily dependent on actual text as understood in writing with words. All that is necessary, as Hayles has attested in her own evaluation of ELO's definition of electronic literature, is that the work demonstrates some literary aspect. Our analysis of intertextuality in relation to digital and analogical code helped explain how this shift to an interdisciplinary stage has developed in postmodernism, and is now part of globalization as defined by networked culture. It is my aim and hope that this examination makes evident the strengths and

weaknesses of new forms of creative production and communication. Such forms must be examined, critiqued and reused (yes, remixed and mashed up) incessantly by those who are devoted critics of culture.

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Notes

1. This is if we agree that the hypertext novel is the first form of electronic literature, and take Michael Joyce's "afternoon, a story" published by Eastgate Systems in 1989 as one of the important works that mark this beginning.
2. "Digital born" is a common term used in the growing field of digital humanities to refer to works that were produced in, and meant to function within some form of electronic or computing environment.
3. For more on this issue see my short text "[The Author Function in Remix](#)"
4. I have reviewed at length the early relationship of hypertext and new media art. An example of hypertext literature accepted as art include "The Grimm Tale" by Marianne Petit with John Neilson, "North Country: Part 1" by Helen Thorington and Eric Schefter, "The Sad Hungarian" by Nick Didkovsky and Tom Marsan, and "The Story of X" by a Russian author. See my text "[Turbulence: Remixes + Bonus Beats](#)", 3 X 3: New Media Fix(es) on Turbulence
5. For a proper definition of mashups see my text "[Regressive and Reflexive Mashups in Sampling Culture](#)"
6. For an analysis on "Just-in-time" see, Gina Neff and David Stark, "Permanently Beta," *Society Online: The Internet in Context*, Edited by Phillip Howard & Steve Jones (New Delhi: Sage, 2004), 173-188.
7. This may be perhaps because Barthes's text could be considered too obvious, or even too close to the structuralist school of thought. As it is well known to scholars who study semiotics, structuralism and poststructuralism are often viewed in opposition. The former is critiqued for presenting social systems too well structured, while the latter for becoming invested in finding the slippages within such systems. In my view, Barthes's theory of analogical and digital code falls somewhere between the two positions, which is why I find it useful. For a decent overview on the different schools of thought see Richard Harland. *Superstructuralism: the Philosophy of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism* (New York: Routledge, 1987).
8. See my text "[Regressive and Reflexive Mashups in Sampling Culture](#)"
9. See Corey Moss, "[Grey Album Producer Danger Mouse Explains How He Did It](#)"

10. Campbell Brown left CNN on May 18, 2010. See "US: Campbell Brown leaving CNN". On mashups, see the blog entry "tonight: The Mash-Up"
11. See Will Lee, "The Artist Formerly Known as Prince." *Entertainment Weekly*, June 4, 1999.
12. What globalization might be is still contested to this day. Postmodern thinkers, such as Fredric Jameson moved from discussing postmodernism proper to globalization. The reasons for this may be many but it is clear that contemporary intellectuals see globalization as the next defining moment: "... I do think we have an interest in at least provisionally separating this now familiar postmodern debate from the matter of globalization, all the while understanding only too well that the two issues are deeply intertwined and that positions on the postmodern are bound to make their way back in eventually." (Jameson "Notes" 55)
13. See "The Evolution and History of the Apple Logo." April 20, 2009.
14. Of course once a reader sees a large body of text, she understands that the text has to be read as digital code. But even this understanding is currently being challenged by text messaging and tweets. The result is a concern by educators for the next generation to perform in-depth analysis.
15. Her website reads: "Chapman is a multi-media artist and video producer." <http://www.ceceliachapman.com/>
16. "Remix and The Rouelles of Media Production." On copyright issues, see Lawrence Lessig. *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*. Penguin Press: New York, 2008.
17. One could argue that this is the nature of disciplines: to constantly evolve by combining with other disciplines. Art History, the foundation of my interdisciplinary research, was originally primarily linked to archeology. It was not until the 20th Century when we see art history taking the proper disciplinary model currently in place. But the discipline itself consists of methodologies borrowed from archeology, cultural studies, history, semiotics, and sociology, among many others. See Donald Preziosi *Rethinking Art History*.
18. This is a comment related to how authorship has developed online. See my text "The blogger as Producer" as well as "After the Blogger as Producer"
19. I state this with first hand knowledge of blogging technology as both an educational tool as well as a tool of authorship. I developed various blogs since 2003, including my main research blog <http://www.remixtheory.net>