

Hypertext - The Concept which Interconnects Us¹ – Book review –

Tatiana CARTALEANU
State Pedagogical University “Ion Creangă”
Irina COJOCARU,
Information Society Development Institute

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E-mail: philobib@bcucluj.ro

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The beginning of year 2014 was marked by the release of the monograph authored by dr. in philology Elena Ungureanu, *Dincolo de text: hypertextul*, published in Chisinau: ARC, 280 p.

The book addresses a topical issue, examined by a specialist in humanities: the relation between the concept of TEXT and information technology. This research proves to be bold and somewhat risky, as long as the science of printed text has not yet said its last word. Taking as landmark two famous fundamental definitions by Barthes “Text is a tissue, a woven fabric” (“Text veut dire Tissu”) and “Every text is an intertext” (“Tout est un intertext”), the author adapts them to the new format of online writing and reading, paraphrasing them as “hypertext is online fabric” and “Every online text is an online intertext, therefore a hypertext”.

“Text as tissue, text as a parasite (text feeds from other texts), text as a labyrinth, text as a cobweb (the network and the World Wide Web are associated to the cobweb), the text as jouissance /the “pleasure of thinking” (J. Kristeva)” (p. 15) are the most important metaphors of the study. Noting a genuine inflation in the field of textual theory (textology, intertextology, a term belonging to the famous Russian scholar G. Kosikov, translator of the works of R. Barthes), the researcher has oriented her interpretation towards a new path, that of cyberspace as a defining phenomenon of the digital era. But prior to operating with several definitions of the concept of hypertext, which turns out to be not quite new, dating from 1965 (Theodor Nelson), the author takes several roads towards explaining the broad and versatile vision of “text as language” and “text as sign”, because the text is a fundamental unit of communication. This canonical interpretation is supported by the vision of Coseriu, where “poetic text as absolute language”, because postmodernist and especially avant-garde poetic text is where language evolution is the most obvious.

A particularly relevant chapter in the context of texts types variety is “The text and the-texts”, designed as a dictionary (<http://idsi.md/node/1295>), also available online. The dictionary of derivatives from the *-text* root comprises encyclopedic definitions of

¹ Elena Ungureanu, *Dincolo de text: hypertextul* (Beyond the text: hypertext) (Chişinău: ARC, 2014), 280p. ISBN 978-9975--61-777-2

65 terms, many of which are present only online: *alotext*, *antetext*, *antitext*, *archetext*, *architext*, *autotext*, *avantext*, *blogtext*, *chat-text*, *context*, *countertext*, *copytext*, *cotext*, *cronotext*, *cybertext*, *quasitext*, *digitext*, *epitext*, *exotext*, *e-text*, *extratext*, *fenotext*, *genotext*, *hipertext*, *hypertext*, *hypotext*, *iconotext*, *infratext*, *intertext*, *intext*, *intratext*, *macrotext*, *maxitext*, *megatext*, *metatext*, *microtext*, *miditext*, *minitext*, *nanotext*, *nontext*, *ontotext*, *palim(p)text*, *paratext*, *peritext*, *posttext*, *pretext*, *prototext*, *pseudotext*, *semiotext*, *sms-text*, *spatiotext*, *stereotext*, *stretchtext*, *subtext*, *supratext*, *teletext*, *totext*, *transtext*, *unitext*, *videotext*, *webtext*, *wikitext*, *wordtext*, *xenotext*. The list is still open, the author warns us, based on the statement of Coseriu “The system of language is always open to the future, a system of possibilities, partly achieved and partly achievable” (*Lingvistică integrală. Interviu cu Eugeniu Coșeriu* conducted by Nicolae Saramandu. Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1996, p. 77). The definitions are presented unevenly, depending on their importance in the triad text–intertext–hypertext.

Chapter 2, dedicated to intertext, reviews the most important purchases of intertextology, starting with the resounding term of intertextuality (J. Kristeva), other representatives of the Tel Quel group, late poststructuralists, emphasizing the idea of A.J. Greimas: “meaning is not a function of the text, but of the intertext” (p. 53), an idea that will be further elaborated in relation to the electronic text of the virtual space. Pausing briefly at the relationship between intertextuality and postmodernism, the author notes that “postmodern thinking requires a permanently syncopated, abbreviated, fragmented rhythm (...), the writing in its new format – electronic (...) has become accessible, visible, and citable in spatial and temporal dimensions, unknown to mankind until recently. But the freedom and democracy of this kind of access to the world’s texts arises new kinds of terror for the text, loss in chaos and indeterminacy, forms of alienation of language/text”, which sets the issue of “changing the world or creating other *possible worlds*” (p. 59). In another book chapter, the intertext is seen as part of “repeated discourse” (E. Coseriu, Șt. Dumitracel), which, according to M. Bahtin, as the syntax of great verbal ensembles, “is still awaiting substantiation” (p.67). Several types of “intertexts” are listed: quotation, parody, pastiche, palimpsest, plagiarism, allusion, compilation, clichés, wooden language, irony, imitation, bias, stereotype, paraphrase, common place, topos, reason, theme with variations, motto, cultural archetype, artifact, etc. (p. 72), three of these being discussed in detail: quotation, reference, and plagiarism (which probably would have deserved to be allocated more space).

The largest chapter of the book is dedicated to HYPERTEXT (term, metaphor and slang), which is a fundamental concept of the web, considered the most important component of the Internet. For easier understanding, the author resorts to truly suggestive associations of hypertext – as technological, scholarly concept of computer science (“HTML language”) to: “document (file), trace (J. Derrida), fabric (R. Barthes), rhizome (G. Deleuze and F. Guattari), formicary (M. Foucault), window (R. Iordache), key, echo, arts, home, life, birth, death, breath, sleep, nutrition, synergy, cloud (cloud computing!), water, sailing, treasure, fight (war), Russian matryoshka, Chinese boxes, puzzle, cluster, travel, adventure, hunting, etc.” (p. 104). Of all the definitions proposed in the study, the following is the most operable: “Hypertext is a hypermedia text, enabled by a system or a network of hyperlinks.” (p. 110), i.e.: hypertext is a text with links, connections with other texts. The author identifies, perhaps too extensively, the

characteristics of hypertext with those of the web: nonlinearity, dynamism, creativity, virtuality, binarity, otherness, globality, freedom and democracy of relations, citability, fragmentation, discontinuity, chaos and order, decentralization, nonhierarchy, fluidity or liquidity, mosaics, variety, visibility, interactivity, dialogism, polyphony, openness, equality, infinity, heterogeneity, multimodality (hypermedia), change of the author – reader relationship, anonymity, depersonalization, double/multiple identity, game of meanings, carnivalesque, temporal and spatial independence, integrability, creolisation, granularity, nodularity (modularity), evaluability (quantification) etc.

The chapter which apparently brings absolute novelty in the space of Romanian linguistics is dedicated to *(inter)net-linguistics*, a term taken from various sources, with a low frequency as yet. The term is more frequently encountered in Russian sources, which are preferred by the author, due to her good command of the language. “As a sub-discipline of general linguistics, (inter)net-linguistics uses text as technology and a communicative unit.” (p. 126) – this is how the author defines this new direction of research of great perspective. Hypertext is considered one of the basic concepts of (inter)net-linguistics. In turn, the hypertext units are, according to the author: the *hypertexteme* (any (inter)texte munit online, which by citation, may become repeated discourse online (or repeated e-discourse), the *texton* (truncated text/fragment of a hypertext (usually the beginning), consisting of a title, finished or unfinished sentence, final peritextual link that connects to the full text (p. 134), and the *hyperlink* (a reference or a technological way of navigating in a hypertext (e-text) to other fragments of the same text or other texts (p. 137).

Moreover, the link or (hyperlink) is the keystone of hypertext. Without hyperlinks the hypertext would not exist. “The link is a type of *junction, connection, anchor, node* (...), *reference, source* or *hypertext reference*, being also called *hyper connection, hyperreference, keyword, tag*, etc. In other words, the links are a kind of “shortcuts in the digital space” (...), “jumps”, “leaps” from one text to another – hence the expression *from link to link*. Connection is the most important category/feature of cyberspace” (p. 136).

Again, the author prefers to operate with metaphors, likening the hyperlink, which is “ubiquitous in hypertext”, to more “earthly” terms, such as: *language, meaning, mouth, saying, aperture, heart, kaleidoscope, bridge, rainbow, jump, spring, leap, gutter, bite, door, gate, hole (place) for input/output, address, location, (fabric) thread, opening (an opening to a closing)* etc. (p. 138).

Although there is room enough for extensions or even controversial discussions on the definitions of the concepts under discussion, the author proposes a list of link functions (p. 142), a typology of links (p. 143–144), and describes graphic means for links (p. 145) – all these issues deserve further study.

In two small poetically crafted chapters, the author promotes a bold association: LINK and SENSE (p. 149–154), which describe the metaphorical similarity *link — mouth, link — opening* and *link — order* (p. 152–153) and LINK — SIGN OF BECOMING (p. 154–160), where the author develops Constantin Noica's philosophical vision: of becoming into being, being represented by all the texts generated during speech, reading and writing.

Echoing the types of “intertexts” described in the chapter dedicated to intertext, Chapter 3 comes to suggest possible types of hypertext, especially generated by

cyberspace: “new hypertext genres” due to the phenomenal expansion of opportunities for citation, the author considers quotation and plagiarism as hypertextual genres (p. 160). Supporting her point of view with references to sources which have already studied the issue in detail, the author continues with the website, e-mail (e-mail message), chat, discussion forum, comments, blog, social network etc. These aspects deserve further theoretical and applied studies from various perspectives. To cover the edges/boundaries that stick to other edges/limits, the reference (hyperlink) is described as a paratext (p. 168), a term placed since the beginning of the book in a specialized glossary. Then the author briefly addresses concepts such as nickname (virtual name, username), electronic title, menu (or electronic content), tags/labels and webography. The most interesting aspect is that the book makes use of all these notions in citations, examples, images, captions, screenshots etc.

Applications of the concept of hypertext on the Romanian material are the subsections devoted to the Bible and the library (p. 179 et seq., 185 et seq.), the Bible being one of the oldest models of hypertext, the whole literature fuelling from the sacred texts. By accessing any “linked” word, the whole picture of occurrences appears instantly, with minicontexts. Below is an example from the online Bible with links to the absolute majority of words. One of them is **word**, a defining concept for the study of text and humanities (“In the beginning was the Word”) with a vast occurrence (used in over 850 sentences) (p. 182):

1 <u>Facerea</u> 15:1	1. După acestea, fost-a <u>cuvântul</u> Domnului către Avram, noaptea,
2 <u>Facerea</u> 15:4	4. <u>Și</u> îndată s-a făcut <u>cuvântul</u> Domnului către el <u>și</u> a zis: "
3 <u>Facerea</u> 26:5	Avraam, tatăl tău, a ascultat <u>cuvântul</u> Meu <u>și</u> a păzit poruncile
4 <u>Facerea</u> 41:39	dar tu peste casa mea. De <u>cuvântul</u> tău se va povățui tot popcrul
5 <u>Facerea</u> 44:2	<u>Și</u> a făcut acela după <u>cuvântul</u> lui Iosif, cum poruncise
6 <u>Facerea</u> 47:29	Iosif a zis: "Voi face după <u>cuvântul</u> tău!" ~
7 <u>Iesirea</u> 8:12	<u>Și</u> a făcut Domnul după <u>cuvântul</u> lui Moise <u>și</u> au murit broștele
8 <u>Iesirea</u> 9:2	cei ce n-au luat aminte la <u>cuvântul</u> Domnului, acela <u>și</u> -au lăsat
9 <u>Iesirea</u> 32:28	făcut fiii lui Levi după <u>cuvântul</u> lui Moise. În ziua aceea
10 <u>Levitic</u> 10:7	Domnului " <u>Și</u> s-a făcut drept <u>cuvântul</u> lui Moise. ~

<http://www.intratext.com/IXT/RUM0001/4B.HTM>

850 <u>Apocal</u> 19:13	<u>și</u> numele Lui se cheamă: <u>Cuvântul</u> lui Dumnezeu. ~
851 <u>Apocal</u> 20:4	mărturia lui Iisus <u>și</u> pentru <u>cuvântul</u> lui Dumnezeu, care nu s-au

http://www.intratext.com/IXT/RUM0001/4B_2.HTM

Another equally important model is Wikipedia and DEX online (p. 187 et seq.), innovative textual-technological products, accessed by many users, but not quite accepted by traditional lexicography. However, they present an overwhelming interest for the information and knowledge society. The major differences between the printed encyclopaedia and Wikipedia are the same as those of the text vs hypertext: static vs liquid, dynamic vs linear, nonlinear/multilinear; printed pages vs textons and links; finished text vs infinite, open text; books vs network; an author/several authors vs multiple authors; homogeneous and coherent vs heterogeneous and not coherent; hierarchical structure vs democratic, free structure; author's control vs interactive reading; single meaning vs multiple meanings and interpretation trails (p. 191), features valid for dictionaries in print format vs online dictionaries (p. 193-198).

The study approaches aspects of a future hypertextual literature, motivated by the interest shown by many international projects, such as Eastgate, Storyspace etc. Briefly reviewing some timid attempts, the author is quick to note that “Romanian literature has not yet achieved anything in this respect, but it is possible that in the near future hypertext products worthy of being registered in the digital literary history will appear.” (p. 211).

The first case study is an analysis of Romanian poetic texts, announcing in a way the novelty of web to come with infinite possibilities and openings to other texts. The other three case studies are applications of issues that are part of hypertext: @ – a symbol of hypertext” (p. 212–220), „Ortogr@fia alternativă (Alternative Spelling)” (p. 221–234) and “Em☺ticon and “New creolisation” (p. 235–243). For the record: @ (*at*) is a new digital sign or symbol that allows communication through e-mails; creolised text is a mixed text, consisting of two non-homogeneous components: verbal/lingual and nonverbal, emoticons are a substitute of emotions in the online language, being paraverbal signs that became a symbol of the Internet culture. In order to prevent any possible negative interpretations of the orality that is present in the “net-script” practiced by many netizens, the author states: “Experts find that it is not a new spelling that comes to substitute the academic one, but an *alternative spelling*, which coexists with codified spelling (...). Here we notice particularly the pleasant aspect of the language, bringing marginal phenomena into focus, the pleasure of playing with words, the abolition of code, the freedom of language.” (p. 225). “For many, this alternative spelling is nothing but a game, the freedom of expression and creativity, which also has beneficial effects” (p. 234).

In the Afterword of the book, entitled “The New Tower of Babel, or From Homo Sapiens to Homo Hypertextus (linkus)” the author alludes to the Biblical myth of the Tower of Babel (Tangled Tongues and Scatter of Nations - Chapter 11 of the Genesis). The same motif had inspired the Pieter Bruegel painting that is part of the book’s cover. “The present and future of the Internet might be this eternal big problem of the Tower of Babel: the search for the perfect language” (p. 246). The man himself, in his evolution, has come to be *homo (hyper)textus*. The link has become the new sense, the generator of hypertext” (p. 246). The book concludes on a major prophetic note: “To exist, virtual books will require various types of technological relationships between people, who are hypertext themselves” (p. 248).

The book is remarkable through numerous good “citable” fragments, a rich bibliography and webography, a list of online dictionaries, webopedias, websites, web projects, etc. (p. 278), very useful for further research in this new scientific direction, which joins the humanities with exact sciences and vice versa. Unfortunately, one cannot avoid noticing some mistakes, repetitions, inconsistencies of style etc. In terms of scholarly discourse, the author could be criticized for overtly metaphorical writing, which might be explained by reading sources and the need to better explain several terms belonging solely to exact sciences; either that, or the author has tried not to scare the insufficiently computer literate reader, showing them that links are everywhere, and therefore hypertext is the most modern and technological expression for the union of texts and authors (users) in the online space. Until further research in the humanities, which will broaden the scope of this field and provide a more solid basis, this study opens gates to examine, analyze and use the hypertext for the benefit of the new virtual communication, ever present in reality. Virtuality becomes reality.