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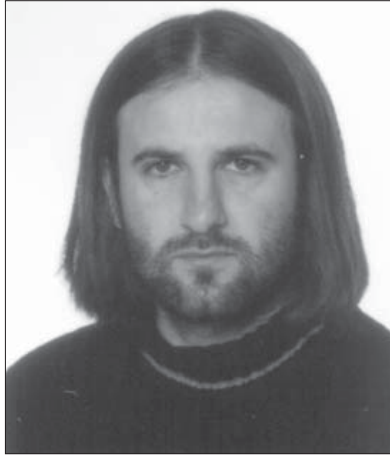
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THE HYPERTEXTUAL COAUTHOR IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SUBJECT/OBJECT DICHOTOMY: EPISTEMOLOGICAL RETHINKING OF THE THEORY OF HYPERTEXT

Introduction

The phenomenon of hypertext (and theoreticians familiar with the theory of hypertext agree on this point) is of significance not only to the future of the book (text), but also to the understanding of the wider social and cultural phenomenon of “information excess” in the “the late age of print”.¹ This phenomenon gives rise to some central questions: Does hypertext merely represent a step forward in the development of western technocracy, or does it offer concrete possibilities in terms of the pluralism of the text? Does hypertext represent a truly symbolic opportunity for the “democratization” of the cultural and social context?

I will approach these questions in a broad manner by focusing on a range of different academic fields, from theory of textuality, media-communication, and literary history, to philosophy and sociology. At first sight, this way of conducting a research might appear to lead either to eclecticism or epistemological heterogeneity. However, I will argue that these potential accusations are misleading based on the constitutional characteristics of the hypertext, which is a heterogeneous structure in itself (it contains large variation of links, nodes, paths, and anchors on the one hand, and text, video, graphics, and audio elements on the other).

At the same time, the hypertext is a large social and cultural phenomenon that extends beyond the boundaries of text, textuality, and digital media systems. Looking at our everyday practices, it becomes obvious that we are already symbolically located in the world of the hypertext. For example, our everyday routines are often hypertextual, bringing us “salvation” from the heterogeneous and chaotic “hyper

information age". In addition, the associative principles of the human mind, which form some of the basic assumptions of rational, intellectual, and cognitive activities, are also hypertextual. The symbolism of the hypertext is visible in the context of human communication, because when we engage in dialog, we tend not to interpret the real meaning as it was constructed in the mind of the person uttering the statement, rather we create new meanings based on our own associations, "verbal footnotes", or the parallel discourses available to us. In short, hypertext and hypertextuality are manifestations of "postmodernism" and as such are being included in classical theories about text, textuality, and the new media. Thus, interdisciplinary methodologies are the most appropriate epistemic tools for this kind of scholarly research.

In the following I intend to research the concept of the "coauthor" or "writereader" (or "wreader", as George P. Landow puts it) in hypertext. This concept exists in the theory of hypertext as a construct derived from the synthesis of two parts: the author (creator of text) on the one hand, and the reader (the consumer of text), on the other. One of the most important questions in the theory of hypertext is the position of the author in the space of the traditional book (author, subject - reader, object); another is that of the location of *the writereader*, or coauthor, as an active component of hypertext. The concept of the "hypertextual writereader" is an example of the creation of virtual identities in new media systems. Virtual identities are created through the dynamic interaction between users and contemporary digital media technology. In this approach, the user of the hypertext is able to establish direct contact with the electronic text in a nonlinear manner; he/she can choose between different links, anchors, nodes or paths, as well as possibilities to cut or add parts of the text; he/she shares feelings of a unique narrative structure which are the result of the user's method. According to this thesis, hypertextual links, nodes and paths connect the reader with other texts, graphics, audio and video materials. They construct decentralized schematic structures and make possible the transfer of a part of the author's functions to the reader. For that reason, the reader of hypertext is an active user: he enjoys an interactive relationship with the hypertext and becomes a hypertextual coauthor or *writereader*.

In this paper I will make a critical examination of the questions that show that the old dichotomy between the writer/author and the reader does not dissolve in the space of hypertextuality or with the introduction of the idea of the hypertextual writereader. My approach to the problem

of the coauthor in the hypertext is much broader than the question of the “destiny” and future of the contemporary reader in his or her contact with electronic text. Namely, I argue that the construct of the hypertextual writereader is one of numerous epistemic efforts typical of the last century that focuses on the question of how to resolve the elementary epistemic dichotomy: the relationship between subject and object.

The problem of the epistemological antagonism between subject and object is very old. Its history can be traced back to ancient philosophy (ancient physis/thesis dichotomy – i.e. the negative dialectics by Heraclitus) and was later developed in the contemporary science topics of the seventeenth century (the so-called Cartesian turn and Descartes thought), followed by Hegel’s dialectic, the linguistic structural dichotomy introduced by Saussure, and the classical nature-culture opposition by Levi-Strauss. We can also add psychoanalytic theory to this path of research, as well as Lacan’s concept of the big Other. At the same time, multiple efforts have been made to find the solution to this scientific problem, such as that in the theory of deconstruction by Derrida. Derrida criticizes the dialectic model itself, pointing to its logocentralistic simplification of thinking, so characteristic of “western thought.” Some other criticisms of the antagonistic dualism that focus on social context appear in the theories of Heidegger, Adorno and Horkheimer. Also of interest here are works by semiotic theoreticians, such as “late” Barthes (*Le Plaisir du texte*, and *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*). In his works, Barthes rejects the differentiation between denotation and connotation, which had been very typical of his early texts (*Mythologies*, 1957). Also, Judith Butler, under the strong influence of Foucault and Lacan, defines identity as a social and ideological construct, and not as a biologically determined category. Her analysis has as its final aim the deconstruction of the dichotomy of the sexes.

There are similar developments in the domain of the “exact” sciences, such as in physics. Classical physics (Newton), in the context of the objective experience of the world in three-dimensional space (i.e., *Quattrocent*), runs parallel to the narration of the classical linear text in the novel at the end of 19th century realism. On the other side, there is contemporary physics, and the new understanding of space and time initiated by Einstein’s theory of relativity and, in particular, quantum theory (the role of the observer in observing processes on the micro-atomic level, called as the “Uncertainty Principle” by Werner Heisenberg). This theory is of interest to us because here we recognize elements of the

symbolic relation between the role of reader in the hypertext system (coauthor) and the aforementioned characteristics in the theory of Heisenberg. However, Heisenberg's observer is positioned on the micro-atomic level, while the hypertextual reader is located inside the virtual configuration of computers.

Taking the classical scholar's approach, the epistemological problem of the relationship between subject and object relates to a Cartesian and Enlightenment heritage. In other words, it reflects a need to establish a distance in relation to which a liberal, humanistic subject belonging to the age of philosophical rationalism and the Enlightenment constructs its own identity. At the same time, this turn is a symbolic example of the "break" with the pre-modern and pre-technological traditions – a moment of breakdown with a human organism's origin, his/her natural environment. This form of subject-object dichotomy developed in a linear fashion (reaching its zenith in the scientific positivism of the nineteenth century) until the beginning of the 20th century. The period after that was (through the science, art, and the wider social and cultural context) one of developing critical thinking, indicating that such a simple, black-and-white matrix was not acceptable in a time characterized by strong individual modalities, tiny differences which appear "somewhere between" these two extreme poles.² According to contemporary philosophical thinking, these two sides are in a process of continuing intertexture and dialog which produces a mixing of the identity differences. It reflects the need for a new kind of holistic approach.

In this text I am interested in anthropological, communicational, and philosophical dimensions of the aforementioned epistemological problem as well as users-identity models constructed through contact with computer screens during the Internet "surfing process". The metaphorical question related to this could be: what lies behind the "simple" user's clicking of the computer mouse?

The most common term used to explain this kind of process is that of "interaction". The process of interaction between the computer, its screen, and the consumer should be seen complexly – i.e. also through the "back side" model of the interaction process – as the concept of so-called interpassivity. The other parallel topics developed in this text relate to the characteristics of the computer screen in relation to that of the television; the application of the concept in psychoanalysis (that of Lacan) of the gaze in the context of this problem; and the definition of the contemporary virtual subject.

Interactivity/interpassivity

It is useful to rethink a character in the interaction process from within the context of the contact between the viewer/subject and the perceptive/object, as well as to explore the phenomenon of interlacing, which takes places between these two sides, using the approach based on the concept of interaction. Namely, the “classic” interpretation of the subject-object distinction insists on the difference between the subject being represented as an active, dynamic pole and the object, opposite to the subject, being passive and fixed in one position.

It is possible to observe a kind of scientific conceptual change during the twentieth century. What is the most characteristic about this is the tendency it showed of replacing the strictly epistemic canons of scientific positivism, which was so typical of the nineteenth century, with other knowledge models from the beginning of the twentieth century (e.g., quantum physics).

A rethinking of the interactivity/interpassivity concept thus appears to be one of the key points in a better understanding of the epistemic problem of the subject-object dichotomy. At the same time, this places emphasis on the concept of the hypertextual coauthor. Looking from the perspective of the wider etymological framework, the term “interactivity” defines reciprocal activity between different elements inside a given environment. In this text I am interested in so-called Human Computer Interaction (HCI) or the Human Interface which defines the interaction between human and computer and is probably most present in the example of the World Wide Web as its basic user paradigm. More concretely, I am looking to identify the electronic computer interaction dimensions that lie behind the navigational clicking of the computer mouse.

One of the basic ideas related to the concept of computer media interaction is the thesis of the partial transmitting of technological creation potentials from the programmer to the computer user – i.e., its consumer. Here, the computer user is presented with many different programming possibilities and choices and his/her user paradigm is thus interactive – i.e., he/she is given the opportunity to choose between links and programs, he/she chooses content, combines windows etc. In the near future, software designers will take a back seat in terms of computer user practices, and the user will determine future consumer occurrences. The “price” of this “freedom” is that of acceptance of consumer responsibility on the part of the user him/herself.

It is clear that this kind of “glorification” of interaction potentials is only representative of the perspective of new technology media, and this is highly typical of the postmodern times. What is entirely missing in this form of theoretical approach is an appropriate epistemic input, or scholarly research input, which can critically and properly indicate all of the complicities of the interaction process. The term interaction is rightly place in inverted commas in Žižek’s interpretation of this phenomenon:

...The term ‘interactivity’ is currently used in two senses: (1) *interacting with* the medium – that is, not being just a passive consumer; (2) *acting through* another agent, so that my job is done, while I sit back and remain passive, just observing the game.³

The use of inverted commas in this citation is clearly understandable in light of the correlation of the second meaning of the concept of “interactivity” with the term “interpassivity”, which defines the subject that is “incessantly – frenetically even – active, while displacing on to another the fundamental passivity of his or her being”.⁴ That “another” could be present as an object that we consume also means the computer through the other side of the interaction process – the interpassivity.

Does not interpassivity represent the other side of interactivity? Is it not necessarily the opposite side of my active contact with the object instead of the passive attendance of the performance, the position where the object deprives me – steals from me – my one passive reaction to the pleasure (or sorrow, or laughing)? Instead of me, the object becomes that which ‘enjoys the performance’ and, in doing so, liberates me from the superego’s task of enjoying...⁵

The Austrian media theoretician Robert Pfaller is the main theoretical creator of the concept of interpassivity, especially in terms of the media meaning of the term. In his most prominent work, *Die Illusionen der Anderen. Über das Lustprinzip in der Kultur*, Pfaller illustrates with examples of television shows, such as so-called sitcom comedies, a highly interesting and useful model of the concept of interpassivity that is equivalent to the concept of interactivity.⁶ The model of sitcom comedies, which use the mechanism of so-called “canned laughter”, gives us a very usual motive for analyses on the topic of interpassivity. It provides us with radical examples of how to transmit some of the most typical human, organic feelings like laughter to the “other”, to the machine, an

artificial mechanism which is able to laugh instead of us. In psychoanalysis discourse this represents the transference of enjoyment to the big Other.

Mladen Dolar is the author of the text "Interpassivity". At the beginning of this work, Dolar clarifies the common understanding of the interactivity-interpassivity dichotomy. This kind of common sense, according to Dolar, is represented by some of the following typical attitudes:

What qualified a man to the dignity of the subject (a 'modern' subject, 'western' subject) is at least an opposite of passivity.⁷

It is not hard to represent him/herself like a hero of interactivity, as a somebody who controls things, creates them with his/her own creativity, adds new ideas to those that already exist, who does not allow of control above him/herself, but, on the contrary, strikes back – in a word, like somebody who is a subject (although in a double sense of the peasant in a global village). And, what about interpassivity? This pose could hardly be one of 'fashion'. It is obvious that there is something shameful and humiliating in interpassivity.⁸

In opposition to this, Dolar rethinks the interactivity-interpassivity dichotomy from the context of psychoanalysis in terms of the relation between the structure of the wish (inherent interactivity) and the structure of the instinct (interpassivity) – or, in his words, "the key to interactivity is the wish, and the key to interpassivity is the instinct."⁹ More precisely, the principle of interpassivity is just the flipside of interactivity, like aforementioned example in which the instinct is the opposite of the wish. Dolar concludes that "both activity and passivity belong to the sphere of the wish and its 'destinies', while passivity is the limiting example of activity."¹⁰ This provides us with the following dilemma: "Is there any human activity which could not be placed under the rubric of interpassivity?"¹¹

Interpassivity thus appears to be a phenomenon that is permanently connected with the process of interactivity and often forgotten in rethinking of media computer interaction. Or, to use the terminology of psychoanalysis, interpassivity represents the flipside option of interactivity, and its symbolic example is the spiral, so-called Moebius track: the spiral track as a feature of the number eight where subject and object are placed on the two sides of the same matrix. They move constantly, and change their positions: in one moment the subject takes the place of the

object, and, on the opposite side, the object takes the place of the subject, and this repeats over and over again. This means that subject and object are located in the same place – the track – but can never meet. The Moebius track example is the most representative model used in psychoanalysis theory in rethinking the subject-object dichotomy. It testifies to a meeting and the impossibility of a meeting between subject and object at the same time. The subject “falls” into the object, “becoming” the object, while, conversely, the object “becomes” the subject. A distance is canceled. Through Žižek’s reinterpretation of Hegel’s famous thesis, “the spirit is a bone”:

...The paradox of the subject is the fact that it exists only through its radical non-possibility, through ‘the bone in the throat’, which always prevents it (the subject) from reaching its complete ontological identity. In this way we deal with the structure of the Moebius track: the subject is correlative to the object, but in a negative way – the subject and the object can never meet, being in the same place but on different sides of the Moebius track. That is to say, in philosophical terms, the subject and object are identical...¹²

Interactivity and interpassivity form a phenomenon that is closely connected to the same matrix of appearance. For this reason, any future research into interactivity must include the dimension of interpassivity – and not their simple opposition (the black and white binary perspective) – and do so in the context of the heterogeneous differences of the numerous particular modalities – multitudes that arise in the space between these two sides.

The concept of the gaze, the relationship between the television and the computer screen, and the so-called virtual subject

The phenomenon of the gaze is a paradigmatic philosophical topic *par excellence* (Cartesian metaphor: “seeing like knowing”). Of the many different philosophical approaches to the topic of the gaze,¹³ the most appropriate in the context of this text is that developed by Lacan in the ninth chapter, “What is a picture”, of his 12th Seminar: *The Four Elementary Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Lacan offers schematic structure of the gaze:

THE GAZE----->THE IMAGE, THE SCREEN<-----THE SUBJECT OF PERFORMANCE

From the perspective of this schema, most evident is the fact that we are dealing with the concept of the two crossing gazes. In the first case we have the subject of performance on our own position, on the position of the gaze. In the second we testify about a turn: the gaze itself takes on the function of the subject, and it changes me, who I am – the subject who is watching – to the picture, or to the object of performance on the screen. My gaze, the gaze of the subject watching, meets, or better said, crosses with the gaze from the other side of the screen. I am watching, and I am under watch at the same time. Our gazes meet at the image/screen, which is the crossing point. Lacan named this the “scopic field” that signifies the place where “the gaze is outside, I am under watch meaning I am a picture”.¹⁴ The gaze is an instrument that photographs me. According to this interpretation, the screen watches me, its content comes out on the screen cover, and meets there with my gaze. I do not have a way to reach out to the content “from the other side of the screen”, because its content is already directed toward me with the support of the screen – the gaze. It makes me a target of the gaze. It changes me from *the subject who is watching to the object that is being viewed*. I remain on the cover of the screen, there is no “deeper inclusion”. I am “watching” and I am under watch. Thus Lacan’s scheme clearly points out the meaning of Saussure’s concept of the reciprocal relationships between the signifier and signified as one of the basic concepts by Saussure that he applies in his thesis.

An example of television or television screens as a place of intervention in “an inducement” is given in Lacan’s *Television*.¹⁵ In the introduction to this work, Jacques-Alain Miller notes Lacan’s role by himself in this performance:

However, that is the show, the show by the one man (one-man show). The audience could not suppose, not for the moment, that it is allowed to share an intimacy with somebody who leaves himself in total... speaker does not forget, not for the moment, that he is in front of the camera... All that together looks like theatrical tirade... It looks like the narrator is speaking from a distant planet, but periodically he is inside of you.¹⁶

However, there is a chance in a play. The subject, who deals with the schematic structure described above, adds his/her understanding of it. Otherwise, he/she deconstructs the contents from the screen.

Only the subject – the human subject, which is the human essence – is not, contrary to an animal, totally trapped in that imaginary trap. He orients himself in it. How? He, himself, isolates the function of the screen, and starts to play with it. Really, man knows how to play with a mask, the object of the gaze from behind. In this case, the screen is the place of mediation.¹⁷

Lacan's concept is important in this context because it can be applied to the example of television media and the screen. Put simply, the communicational schema of television and its screen is linear, one-dimensional. It designates a form of information flow from the exclusive and strictly controlled television media center to a television viewer, a media consumer. Information, acquired through this kind of media-communication and information transmission, reduces (but does not disable) the potentials and possibilities for a wider qualitative valorization of the media content. In short, *it* ("television inducement") prefers the *it has to be known* type of discourse. Through this kind of approach we are informed at only a superficial level about the event, and we are also deprived of the concrete tools needed for media-communicational deconstruction. This reflects the question: how can we break through the picture of television constructed media and mediate contents?

It appears with the example of television to be possible to theorize about a kind of *interpelation* (in the basic, Althusserian meaning of the word) of the TV spectator (through his/her direct or indirect addressing by the side of the TV subject), and not about the immediate contact of interaction. Interaction, as we saw in the previous chapter, includes the whole palette of different potentials for direct feedback reactions to the offered contents, with the possibilities of qualitative and quantitative changes, as well as the addition of new contents. At the same time, the moments of identification, closeness or distance to the TV program – in a word, the feelings of "warmth" or "familiarization" with the television contents – are the result of the TV *interpelation*, something especially emphasized in television programs such as soap operas, TV novels, sitcoms, or reality shows.¹⁸

If we apply some of the basic concepts of psychoanalysis and its terminology to the epistemic field of understanding of screen functions, it is then possible to say simply, on a primal level, that the subject, places in a three-dimensional real environment and establishes a relationship: from the outside to the screen. On the second level, the content, which “meets” with the subject on the screen, transforms him/her into a “birthmark” implying *emptiness*. According to psychoanalysis’s theory of “emptiness”, like an elementary precondition for the constitution of the subject (and this is indeed what is missing from the subject who is too much “anchored” to “the real reality”), it seems that the screen can symbolize the place of transition: *from the subject who has potential for knowledge toward the subject who knows*. The gaze, and the content mediated through the screen-picture, only offers a “superficial” identification for the subject through the gaze of the Other. The theoretical question that arises here is the following: can we speak, given this example of this kind of communicational relationship – the content (the gaze) – the screen – the subject (or, a potentials’ subject) – about a real, affirmative process of the conceptualization of the subject, about the process of his/her own constitution?

The explicit coordinates of the theoretical problem explained previously are:

- (1) The narrow approach: the space of the computer screen, as a “natural” place of the hypertext, the space of its surrounding, and its concrete realization;
- (2) The wider approach: the computer screen as a place of the transition, the communication channel which mediates the program contents, as well as the position of the body, the physical place of the subject in relation to the screen, its closeness/distance to the screen, and the limitations of the interventional (interpretational) potentials in this kind of consumer contact.

The technological advances in computer screens is one of the most crucial and most important points in the development of the theory of media interactivity. The famous statement by Theodor H. Nelson, the author of the term hypertext (1963) and the *Xanadu* project, points in this same direction:

That the future of humanity is at the interactive computer screen, that the new writing and movies will be interactive and interlinked. It will be united by bridges of transclusion and we need a world-wide network to deliver it with royalty.¹⁹

The computer screen as a “window” to the computer’s virtual reality, which it possesses behind it, is the basic hypothesis in our rethinking of the computer screen in this text. Defenders of the theory of computer interaction principles often emphasize the advantages of computer interaction models which are presenting according to these approaches through the line of the selection potentials. This one of the essential characteristics of the computer screen and the software’s interactive potential: screen active icons, links, nodes, and anchors all create in collaboration user activity between consumer and his/her object of interest. According to this, if we take the simple model of comparison of the computer and the TV screen, which reflects a kind of “aggression” manifesting in the preference for the one-dimensional picture, the computer screen shows a tendency toward the simultaneous coexistence of different screen windows.

The classic example of this model is the simple surfing process on the Internet. Hypothetically speaking, I can enter one or more terms into some Internet search engines and will probably get a hundreds or thousands of results from a database that are directly or indirectly connected to the information I am searching for. This means, I am given the contents but have to make a choice between the given links and sources of information. I move across the computer screen with the support of the computer’s mouse; through the “clicking process”, I intervene in the contents. The so-called *point-and-click interactivity* produces the automatic transition, dislocation, or transfer of my gaze; it realizes my personal moving path through the cosmos of the database and creates unique narration structure. I make a selection, I ask about the offered content, and give priority to some links instead of others. In the words of Stuart Moulthrop, “The reader’s path from one lexia² to another is determined partly by active engagement: the reader selects a word in the present lexia, chooses an option from a menu, issues a command...”²⁰

Interaction feelings are more present, more real in a case like this. This often creates a vision of moving *behind the computer screen*, through the *virtual space*. Illusions of this kind are especially present in the

examples of the conceptualization of *the computer's virtual worlds*, and user identity constructions are produced through them.²¹

If we turn back for a moment to Lacan's schema, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (the crossing between the gaze and the subject of performance on the image/screen), and apply it now to computer screens and not TV screens, it is then possible to actualize the screen, not like a place of crossing, but like a place of *the extension gaze* of the subject of performance, where the (computer) screen is just a place of mediation. The subject positioned in front of the computer screen is "invited" for user intervention (already mentioned in the "click on mouse" process) into the contents behind the screen, through *the extension gaze* from the outside to the screen. It directly changes the character of the media's gaze. In the case of the computer screen, getting to the gaze means, I know ("what I am looking for on the Net"), or I wish ("to learn, to check, to inform myself... about this and that"). In other words, it is impossible to be only a passive user of the computer, staring into the screen. Direct user intervention, through the "click on process" of the computer screen, and supported by the computer mouse, is the first and basic precondition for the practical realization of the computer's media system. Without of the user's active collaboration with the computer, it is impossible to realize its media potential.

By contrast with the case of the TV screen, where the extension of the media signal is "longer" or, better said, more directly relates from the screen toward the TV consumer, the contents of the computer's media system-Internet somehow pulls itself deeper – from the cover of the screen to "behind" itself, toward the so-called virtual space of the computer. Consequently, the consumer's gaze follows the way of the computer contents, and "penetrates" behind the computer screen to the space of "virtual reality". This kind of communication schema favors the creation of immediate closeness and unites consumer feelings in a touch with the computer: that is, *the consumer's immersion* in the media. In this case we can testify about the meeting point between the subject/consumer, on the one hand, and the contents of the background of the computer screen, on the other, which constructs an illusion of the intrusion into "the virtual fourth dimension", as well as feelings of possibility of creating subjectivity in cyberspace. It creates feelings of unlimited possibilities and potential for the creation of subjectivity in cyberspace, for the expansion of the self through interactive contact with the computer screen

– that is, the subject as a virtual *creation*. The theoretical approach that deals with this kind of cyberspace phenomenon is also called *telepresence*.

As an introduction to this way of thinking, we can take •i•ek's question: "How is it possible that we can non-consider reality and drown our selves in the virtual space of the phantasms' screen"?²² In other words, how have the feelings of the loss of reality become so strong (with an important precondition: it is a kind of reality as a specific and clearly definite social construct excepted by the most of the people through their everyday life practices and rituals), while the virtual picture-simulacrum is intertwined with the concrete reality on the level of their non-differentiation? That is the space of the computer screen as the matrix screen through which the cinematic presentation removes "the real reality", the reality of factual presence. The following quotation from Žižek offers a theoretical theory for this and a similar rethinking:

When a user, who is playing with a lot of channels inside the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) says, 'What if real life (RL) is just the one more IRC channel?' In other words, he/she asks, according to the array of windows found in hypertext, 'What if RL is just one more window', his/her illusion, the illusion he/she comes under, is in detail similar to the opposite illusion, to our common sense belief in the complete reality in the virtual universe. More precisely, we have to avoid both traps, the simple direct reference to the outside reality outside of cyberspace, and also to the opposite attitude according to which 'there is no outside reality, RL is just one more window.'²³

This brings us to the conscious/question as to who follows a man during the last few centuries. The problem is that a man constitutively does not know who he/she is, and what he/she is, but he/she asks him/herself intensively about this, and this is the most important point to emphasize. The phantasm of the computer's virtual world, and virtual subject in cyberspace, symbolized through the symbolic of computer screen, needs to be looking through a kind of continuity: as a stage in technological development within which the subject's self-questioning – questioning his/her ontological identity – has a "real-virtual" (Lacan's understanding), conscious/unconscious, practical form of the expression.

Hypertextual coauthor – “writereader”

The theory of the hypertextual coauthor, as an important theoretical concept within the theory of hypertext, has become the hypertextual model of the previously mentioned new media Internet identity. It represents the hypertextual type of the computer’s virtual identity, constructed through a dynamic, interaction relationship between two poles: the author/writer of hypertext, on the one hand, and its reader/consumer on the other, all of which with the support of contemporary, digital media computer technology.

It is necessary to put historical and critical stress on this kind of phenomenon. Media theory teaches us, from a historical point of view, that the invention of any kind of new media in history was always followed by strong utopias with non-critical expectations of the high new media user-identity liberations allegedly offered by the new media systems. In this way, the discovery of radio was probably more of a stimulus for utopian dreams about creation of new media user identities than was the Internet today.

To summarize, the concept of the hypertextual coauthor is the following: a user of hypertext has possibilities for close and intensive contact with the electronic text in a so-called non-linear way; he/she has opportunities to choose between the different electronic links, anchors, nodes, and paths... According to this, he/she shares feelings of the unique narrational structure, which is the result of his/her own user strategy. He/she has possibilities to move or add different parts of the text... A reader of hypertext is its active user, he/she has interactive relationships with it... Put briefly, he/she becomes a hypertextual coauthor or *writereader*. Following the numerous examples from the theory of the hypertext, hypertextual links connect a reader with a lot of other texts, graphs, audio and visual materials; it decentralizes schematic structure, and makes possible the transition of a part of the authorship and author functions from author to reader.

Opposed to the hypertext, which represents, according to the previously explained theory, an example of the textual democratization *par excellence*, we have “traditional” print text, which is centralized, linear, and establishes and promotes a hierarchy of knowledge with the “omniscient” author as the central and advance figure. It becomes obvious that these hypertext theories belong to a long continuity of rethinking on the role and importance of the contemporary author and the “destiny” of

authorship, meaning the theoretical tradition which began at the end of the 1960s, in particular some of the works by Roland Barthes and Michele Foucault.²⁴

For many theoreticians in field of hypertext, hypertextual writing represents a kind of collaborative project, a process of limitless spreading of the text in which all participants in this process become potential hypertextual coauthors.

From this point of view, it is easier to understand many of the hypertext theoreticians who argue that the reader of hypertext takes on some of the authorial responsibility which traditionally (and still do) belong to the Author. In a hypertextual environment the author is deprived of some of his/her traditional means and one can no longer grant the author much intentional authority. Thus, traditional book writing stresses hierarchy, the Author, the linearity of the text and the book publishing industry; against this, the computer hypertext can liberate by destroying the single author, by empowering the reader to reorganize the text, by allowing for collaboration...

Discussion of what an author is and what he/she should be become intriguing to the hypertext theory. Hypertext writing, for many hypertext theorists, is a joint venture in which the text expands infinitely and everybody, through this process of expansion, becomes a co-writer such that we can no longer speak of a master-author. At this point it is necessary to present some of the most knowledgeable authorities in these matters. The theory of hypertext offers many examples of these kinds of theories, in the works of some of the most prominent theoreticians in the field.

One such author is George P. Landow, who characterizes the hypertext reader as a "reader-author" or Landow's "wreader": "Hypertext... creates an active, even intrusive reader",²⁵ or an active and interactive reader.²⁶ He speaks about blurring the distinction between author and reader, which happens at several levels. At a basic level, the reader chooses which links to pursue. A reader navigates his/her own way through the text, and he/she reconfigures the document. When the reader links to other documents, he/she has created a new document.

This construction of an evanescent entity or wholeness always occurs in reading, but in reading hypertext it takes the additional form of constructing, however provisionally, one's own text out of fragments, out of separate lexias."²⁷

Landow concludes:

The virtual presence of other texts and other authors contributes importantly to the radical re-conception of authorship, authorial property, and collaboration associated with hypertext. Within a hypertext environment all writing becomes collaborative writing, doubly so.²⁸

Jay David Bolter, also one of the most famous hypertextual theoreticians, shares a similar view. He says, "In the electronic writing space... The reader performs the text."²⁹ Bolter claims that the electronic text permits the reader to share in the dynamic process of writing and that "the text is realized by the reader in the act of reading."³⁰ He also asserts that electronic technology is "changing the relationship of both the author to the text and that of text to the reader."³¹ Ted Nelson sees his model of the new writing system (*Xanadu*) as a tendency to decentralize authority and empower individuals. It is not so hard to recognize what Nelson had in his mind when he used these terms: the term authority likes "the institution of an Author", and individuals like creative readers or users of the hypertext.³² Jakob Nielsen, in his comments on the electronic text, which he believes should be based on interaction, hypertext linking, navigation, search, etc., wrote: "nobody has time to read long reports any more: information must be dynamic and under the direct control of the reader, not the author."³³ More cautiously, Jane Yellowlees Douglas writes about interactive construction, which does not efface or impair the position of the author, but rather transforms it. Authors of interactive pieces in any genre, says Douglas, come to be what playwrights have always been: creators of initial conditions for later performances.³⁴ This short review of the ideas held on the so-called coauthor or *writereader* by some of the most knowledgeable hypertextual theoreticians will be conclude with the theory of Richard Lanham. Lanham believes that the reader of hypertext is always at least the coauthor of the text, and, more radically, sometimes the reader of hypertext can be the primary author. He emphasizes that electronic readers are interactive readers who can do all the things that are claimed for them, or choose not to do them. In this way, reflects Lanham, "the boundary between creator and critic simply vanishes."³⁵

To summarize the theories of the authors mentioned (and many others): it is impossible to be a passive reader of hypertext; electronic writing emphasizes the impermanence and changeability of the text and tends

to reduce the distance between author and reader by potentially turning the reader into an author. Hypertext lacks the author who selects, arranges and edits the text to build a structure of interrelated ideas or concepts. That is the special characteristic of hypertext, its possibility for recombination, which can describe its interaction style. The reader of the hypertext picks and chooses his/her own way from node to node, from link to link; he/she adds new text to the network... allowing more independence in reader response, allowing the reader to start at any given point in the hypertext, and giving him/her a sense of power. The reader becomes a potential author. All these characteristics, following these theories, enable his/her transition from a passive, "traditional" reader to an active, hypertextual *writereader*, coauthor.

The important doubt here, however, is in the question: does the process of interactivity really eliminate the distance between the observer and the observed, between author and the user of the hypertext? Is this true? At this point, it seems important to mention some of Michele H. Jackson's ideas. He says the link, like a basic tool for the hypertextual interaction does not represent the essence of hypertext – it is merely a mechanism to implement hypertext.³⁶

It is a fact that in hypertext the user is able to interact *physically* with the text. He/she navigates through the links in a clicking-key process, and interactive characteristics of hypertext offer him/her an opportunity to participate actively. This enhanced interaction between the reader/user of the hypertext and the hypertext itself is one of the most significant characteristics of hypertext reading and writing. From this point of view, it seems that the active readership of hypertext predominates over the more passive readership of print. These facts give the statement that hypertext offers its reader much more authority than in printed texts. This allows the reader to become a co-writer or co-author him/herself, thereby through his interaction effacing any authoritative distinction between the original author and him/herself.

In fact, the act of reading could be much more present in hypertext than in traditional print works. For example, can the reader of hypertext participate in the link creation process? Rosenberg suggests that the reader might become a programmer if offered full programmability within the hypertext interface. In this case, might the reader also become a designer of hypertext?³⁷ Contrary to this, a link is limited by the author or designer of the Web page. That means, every link is planned and specifically created by the web designer. The use of the link enables the designer to

control all of the potential ways a user can move through information, and, it should be emphasized, the links between documents may not generate new or unexpected structures. The process of selection of some words or sentences as potential links, their “canonization” – their transformation into hypertext anchors, and their arrangement on fixed locations in the hypertext – all these facts together are the key factor in the process of hypertext design. They are not only some neutral media points in the hypertext system. The real questions are: Why is the one link offered exactly at that position in hypertext? Which sites does it connect to? What are the results of those connections? Hypertextual links are the product of designers, the authors of Web sites, and they create them strictly in accordance with their own interests. The user or the reader of the hypertext has limited choices in terms of links, nodes, or anchors. His/her feeling of unlimited possibilities in terms of hypertextual connections is just an illusion. These kinds of possibilities are always limited by an author’s selection.

The problem of the concept of the so-called coauthor in hypertext might be recognized, as I have already mentioned at the beginning of this text, as the one particular example of a wider, and probably more important epistemic problem of the twentieth century: the dichotomy between a subject, on the one hand, and an object, on the other. Scientific efforts to resolve or exceed this split represent one of the most important struggles of our time. Deconstruction of the hypertextual concept of the coauthor, its “demystification”, is an effort in support of this.

Slavoj Žižek describes “the cyberspace hypertext” as a new media system, where the new “life experience”, meaning the experience of life which breaks off with a linear form and offers an alternative of “multiform flow” of the complex contingencies and considers its own “natural, appropriate objects’ correlation.”³⁸ That kind of the cyberspace narrative, says Žižek, is experienced as a “postmodern”, hypertextual, and indefinite form of the rhizome function, which does not prefer any precise and exactly definite order of reading or interpretation.³⁹ In this context, through an effort to place the interpretation of the cyberspace as a symbolic dimension of Lacan’s Imaginary-Symbolic-Real schema, Žižek also rethinks the theoretical problem of the hypertextual coauthor. He understands it through the terminological construction of “the procedural authorship”, as defined by Janet H. Murray.⁴⁰

...The author (let's say in the interactive environment of the ruin, where we actively collaborate through the playing of roles) does not write detailed literature stories anymore, but just offers the basic rules (the coordinates of the fictional universe where we run down, restricted lines of the acts, possible to be carry out inside of such a definite virtual space, etc.), who could be serve as a base for an active include of the inter-actor (the intervention, the improvisation). That term 'procedural authorship' reflects a need of some kind of Lacan's 'big Other': if the inter-actor wants to be include in cyberspace, he/she must works inside of the minimum of the accepted symbolic rules/coordinates, who are *ordering from the outside*.⁴¹

This citation very clearly points out interesting details about the rethinking of the theory of the hypertextual coauthor. First, there is the marked syntagm – symbolic coordinates *ordering from the outside* – who are set up more or less by the redefined institution of an author inside the digital, cyberspace text. This brings us to the second interesting point of this quotation – the inter-actor. The term "inter-actor" remarks the same as the theory of hypertext defines with the concept of hypertextual coauthor, or *writereader* ("wreader" according to Landow). "As 'inter-actors', we are placed in the position of the 'little god', and have at our disposal the limited power of intervention in a subject's life story..."⁴² (Žižek understands it according to the story by Janet Murray). In this case, it seems important to emphasize the syntagm – the limited power of intervention – which is, the same as in the case mentioned previously of the symbolic coordinates *ordering from the outside*, ordered and limited according to a choice and textual strategy by the new type of "secret" hypertextual coauthor.

Through these examples, I am trying to sketch a wider framework of the theoretical questions surrounding the concept of the hypertextual coauthor and offer possible critical approaches toward it, as well as to show that a "new kind" of Cartesian dualism is still alive today, regardless of the different postmodern efforts to cross on the subject/object dichotomy. The idea of hypertextual co-authority is one more example of the postmodern utopian myth, which has been born and defined through the critic of the binary model (so characteristic for the time of "Modernism"). At the same time, it is a result of the non-critical understanding of convergence between the new informational, and communicational technology, on the one hand, and consumer practices of their use, on the other. The concept of the hypertextual coauthor appears inside the dynamic dialog between an author and the reader/consumer.

It is a kind of synthesis that results from their interaction exchanges. But, although they belong to the same matrix (the process of contact with the text, its interpretation, or consumption), even though they communicate, and “compressively” relate one to another, an author/writer and a reader/consumer could hardly, even in the example of hypertext, become one. They could never meet, or be regarded as identical. The border between author and reader in hypertext is flexible, dynamic, and mobile, sometimes even insignificant, but never reaches a level that could endanger the existence of their particular identities. In this case, a theory about partial change of pro-traditional canons in understanding an author and a reader could be much more appropriate, as opposed to the theory of their particular death and disappearance. These two poles are split, if not with a typical, external dividing line, then with the one symbolic border line inherently internal to their relationship. That kind of dividing line is a precondition for their particular existences at the same time. The distance between these two poles remains, even in the cases of their partial interaction change of positions (as in the case of hypertext), which represents the other side of the same coin of the same concept. The classical author-reader dichotomy also exists in the case of the hypertext, albeit as a partly changing concept.

The theory of the coauthor-*writereader*, as a symbolic synthesis between two opposite poles, becomes meaningful only through the perspective in which an author and a reader are two sides of the same matrix. These two sides are in a reciprocal relationship, though this does not mean that they are identical at the same time. The concept of the hypertextual coauthor-*writereader* is one example of the theory of the hypertext and represents wider theoretical and epistemological efforts: which models can define an identity of the “new kind” that is the postmodern subject in a holistic perspective of its differences, which are absorbed and united inside him/herself. This means that the example of hypertextual coauthor represents an effort of the symbolic split from the Cartesian heritage and the epistemic subject-object dichotomy established upon it. This is the one of scientific efforts of “the postmodern era”, which emphasizes the priorities of the individualized interaction relationships, like prerequisites for the constitution of contemporary subjectivity. Instead of defining precisely with a clear line the distinction between subject and object, postmodern approaches offer an active relationship between the subject-subject (that is, an author-interactive reader in hypertext). The result of such a relationship is a contemporary identity – “nomadic subject”

– that is fragmental and de-territorialized, and the hypertextual coauthor-*writereader* represents one of these. In that way, the postmodern subject has been replaced in a new version of “the pre-Cartesian universalism”. The virtual omnipresence of cyberspace – the digital space of the new informational-communicational media technologies – is one of the most current examples of “the new universalism”, and the hypertextual subject is just an illusion of the fullness of self accomplish created through the contact with other similar individuals “behind computer screens”.

In lieu of a conclusion

If we contextualize the coauthor in hypertext in the field of new media, art, and society today, then we can theorize about the contemporary author’s intellectual rights and copyright. The idea of the end (death) of the genius artist, of the individual who is endowed with God’s initiation and who chooses to give humanity an artifact of invaluable value, took came to the forefront during the period of “postmodernity”. This postmodern concept offers a new kind of artistic identity: an artist who is aware of the collage and dispersion of contemporary society, a society that is divided into numerous particles. The concept of the nineteenth century’s remarkable artifact, which has a holy essence and aureole, has thus been replaced with the idea that any object can potentially become an artifact if placed in a certain context (*La rone de bicyclette* by Marcel Duchamp from 1913, being this transitional moment). In agreement with this, the Author with a capital “A” loses his/her sacred meaning and becomes one among a multitude of equals.

The development of digital media technologies, and well-organized information foundations, as well as the building of computer archives in the last fifteen or twenty years, makes different new creative new possible. This period is signified by the “user paradigm”. This is the epoch of citations, recycled references, copies that become originals for new copies (the old thesis by Walter Benjamin). In this sense, the postmodern author/artist is not somebody who waits for the moment of great inspiration, but somebody who uses materials, which already exist and recombines them into new forms. Thus, the artist/author and the receptor/consumer of the artifact move closer to one another, they cross old divides and mutually transform each other’s identities. Consequently, with the idea of the

hypertextual coauthor or *writereader*, the theory of hypertext joins current postmodern thoughts. Namely, hypertextual theory, like any other postmodern theoretical model, respects the continuity of the postmodern story-tale based on the aforementioned disappearance of great authorities. Hypertextual theory contributes to the glorification of the user (reader) praxis and his/her interactive relationship with the text. In the meantime, this postmodern idea has been disputed with the argument that the author's authority suggests its potential existence and the author is far from dead. Because of this, the theory of hypertext offers a new myth, that of the *writereader*, which is the synthesis of the collaboration of coauthors, a kind of collage made of cooperative individuals of equal levels engaged in the creative process of togetherness.

Additionally, the concept of the hypertextual coauthor is a product of wider social tendencies characteristic of the new type of contemporary individual. It is an example of the postmodern concept of non-normative identity, which is pluralistic, fluid, and changeable. Non-normative identity is the idea of the self-confident, inter-active subject who obediently believes in his/her potentials and possibility to create his/her own identity. Through this concept, personal identity becomes a feature of our self-creation. The maxim of this ideology is the phrase: "take your destiny into your own hands".

Let us then take another approach which offers a better way to analyze the hypertextual coauthor. Is not the survival of the basic, historically determined dialectic and its antagonistic reality a sign of the potential of opposites and, through that, of the potential for the creation of qualitative pluralism? It is not the understanding of the negative dialectic (which is constant in the history of western civilization) signified by the binary model, but the dialectical principle of a dynamic relationship between the multitude of particularities and differences that offer potentials for the flexibility of the whole social structure. This last point relates to the parallel, "back side" option, offered in the framework of the neo-liberal matrix, and its aspiration to the totality of the One — the global economic market under the rules of the Capital "monster".

The ambition of this neo-liberal doctrine, of its postindustrial and multinational capitalism, is to overcome oppositional struggles and powers, and in such a way also to improve the capacity of this system to adjust and absorb any attempts at change of the dominant neo-liberal model. This means the destruction of the potentials for the qualitative change within the political, economic, and social structure of neo-liberalism.

Marx coined the term for this kind of tendency in capitalism as “formal sub-sumption”. By this term he points to the capability of the capitalist system to include in its production work practices which do not directly rise from its domain. Here we witness the institutionalization of oppositional margins and the positions of resistance and change, as well as the endangering of the dialectical mind or “the critical consciousness... which breaks open a closed universe of discourse...”⁴³ Also, Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony brilliantly capture this tendency of the hegemonic order to absorb counter-hegemony in its very structure (i.e. there is no hegemony without counter-hegemony).

Commercialization brings the homogenization and flattering of differences and assimilation of the heterogeneous multitudes into a uniform model. With the incorporation of any changing potential in the total Reality of the One and the one-dimensional society or its contemporary version of Empire, the subversive power, which could protect contradiction, disappears. Methodology for the realization of that model is wide and obvious: acceleration of the rhythm of creation, production, and new consumer fashions, marketing mechanisms that differentiate consumer types, recognition and definition of their specificities and characteristics, development of the strategy for the market sale, etc. All this becomes possible with the growth of living standards among the population of the “First World”, with the development of the consumer culture, or massive pop-consumerism.

If the typical model of the factory and industrial production has been Fordism and its *assembly line*, then the main symbol of the actual postindustrial or post-Fordian production is *the net*, with its principle of circular production, which is oriented toward the production of informational, linguistic, and communicational – that is, non-material – services. That kind of “netlike” decentralized and de-territorialized production matrix of postmodern capitalism has its own symbolic equivalent in the structural, organizational, and functional type of the worlds’ global media — the Internet, or the hypertext.⁴⁴

What place does “our” hypertextual coauthor-*writereader* occupy in this contemporary, global meta-structure, as briefly described above? Is it in the model of the universal One, of the one who is “hidden behind the screen” and who, through an “innocent” click of the mouse, emphasizes the myth of great technological interaction? Is it an ideal consumer who loses any critical distance and perception of his/her own user praxis in the confusing virtual space of highly-developed computer

technology? The idea about the totality of the One is a classical example of totalitarian ideology. It is a monistic ideology, contrary to the dichotomy, its oppositional potentials, and the possibilities born in the domain of pluralism.

With awareness of the possibilities and potential for liberation from the totalitarian ideological matrix – the matrix that hides the absolutism of one hyper-monad behind the scenes of endless choices – the author and the reader are allowed to develop a productive dialog through the active exchange between them. At this point, the concept of the hypertextual coauthor will move to the place where it belongs: to the archives of postmodern mythology and postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism.

NOTES

- 1 J. D. Bolter, *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*, Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates, Hillsdale, New Jersey, 1991, p. 3.
- 2 A good example of the artistic questioning of the subject/object dichotomy is found in the work of the famous Russian painter Kazimir Malevic. Malevic, who worked at the time often seen as the zenith of modernism (the first and second decades of the twentieth century), is a kind of a forerunner of the post-modernistic picture artifacts. His paintings are the best examples of the early Russian avant-garde, as well as the works which achieve a kind of the wholeness only through the certain theoretical reflection at the same time. Probably the most significant of his works in this context is the picture "Black Square" (1913). In his book *Nonobjective World*, Malevic wrote: "Any artistic work – any painting – has to be introspective like the resolving result of the conflict between the subject and the object." K. Malevic, *Nonobjective World* (translation in Croatian, *Nepredmetni svijet*), Centar za kulturnu djelatnost Galerija Nova, Zagreb, 1981, p. 34.
The previous sentences may show us Malevic's efforts at rethinking the models of how to go beyond elementary modernistic dichotomies. Is not his thesis a classic example of the post-modern tendency to leave behind the split between the subject and the object? I develop this thesis further in the text "Od Malevicevega kvadrata do racunalniskega zaslona" ("From the Malevic's Square to the Computers' Screen"), *Apokalipsa* 63/64/65, 2003, p. 215-228.
- 3 S. Žižek, "Is it Possible to Traverse the Fantasy in Cyberspace?", S. Žižek, E. Wright, E. Wright (eds.), *The Žižek reader*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, UK, 1999, pgs. 105–106.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- 5 S. Žižek, *Kuga fantazem (The Plague of Fantasy)*, Analecta, Ljubljana, 1997, p. 130.
- 6 R. Pfaller, *Die Illusionen der Anderen. Über das Lustprinzip in der Kultur*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M., 2002.
- 7 M. Dolar, "Interpasivnost" ("Interpassivity"), *Filozofski vestnik*, vol. XVIII, no. 3, 1997, p. 11.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pgs. 21-22.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 12 S. Žižek, *Krhki Absolut, enajst tez o krscanstvu in marksizmu danes (The Fragile Absolute, Eleven Thesis about Christianity and Marxism today)*, Analecta, Ljubljana, 2000, p. 22.
- 13 A historical summary of the concept of the gaze from the philosophical point of view is given by the book *Downcast Eyes* by Martin Jay (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1994).

- 14 J. Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (*The Four Elementary Concepts of Psychoanalysis*), Seuil, Paris, 1973, p. 98.
- 15 J. Lacan, *Televizija* (*Television*), Problemi-Eseji, Ljubljana, 3/1993. *Television* is a textual version of the TV show on the French national TV from the January 1974 on which Lacan was a guest.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 17 J. Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, p. 99.
- 18 The book by Tony Wilson, *Watching Television; Hermeneutics, Reception, and Popular Culture* (Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1993), offers a detailed and precise analysis of the interpellation of TV spectators through the example of the TV programs mentioned.
- 19 T. H. Nelson, "The Story so Far", *The Ted Nelson News Letter*, Number 3, October 1994. The Ted Nelson News letter: *Interesting Times*, www.sesnsemedia.net/993.
Lexia is the concept introduced by Roland Barthes, and defined in his book *S/Z*, where he analyzes Balzac's novel *Sarrasine*. According to Barthes, lexia represents a line of short, fragment units of reading, which constitute a pluralistic text (he defined 561 lexias, which are separate in five lexical code groups). George P. Landow, one of the most prominent theoreticians in the theory of hypertext, applies Barthes's concept to his definition of the hypertextual structure (G. P. Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory & Technology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1992).
- 20 S. Moulthrop, "Getting Over the Edge", <http://raven.ubalt.edu/staff/moulthrop/essays/edge.html>.
- 21 Classic examples of this kind of creation of virtual computer worlds are given by MUDs (Multi User Domain, Multi User Dungeon, or Multi User Dimension). MUDs are virtual textual worlds constructed with many levels where users/players have the possibility to perform different kinds of "research" inside these created worlds. The historical background of MUDs is seen in computer games like *TrekMUSA*, *LambdaMOO*, and *Dungeons and Dragons*, which were popularized (commercialized) in the 1970s and 1980s (before that time they were accessible only within closed US Army-scientific circles). For more references on this topic, see Sherry Turkle, *Life on the screen, Identity in the Age of the Internet*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1995.
- 22 S. Žižek, "Kiberprostor ali neznosna zaprtost bivanja" ("Cyberspace, or unbearable closeness of the residence"), *Problemi* 7-8/1996, p. 105.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- 24 In the first place this relates to the works *Authors and Writers*, *Death of the Author*, and *S/Z* by Roland Barthes, as well as to the attempts by Michael Foucault, especially in his text *What is an Author*, to revise some of the more recent conceptions of authorship and reconsider the role of the author as it relates to textual production.

In his texts, Barthes stresses the interaction between author and society, and tries to demonstrate that an author is a subject who is socially and historically constituted. Barthes suggests, at the time almost radical access, it is necessary to transform the interest of literary critics from the Author toward a reader. A famous maxim encapsulating this idea is his well-known thesis: "Born of a reader need to be pay with death of an Author". He differentiates between "intransitive" and "transitive" writing. By the former he understands the situation in which the author is the only master of the language, or text. With the latter there is "transitive" writing where "language supports a praxis", and "writers are not part of the literary institution per se". These ideas from *Authors and Writers* are almost complementary to Barthes' theory on differences between *readerly (lisible)* and *writerly (scriptible)* text in his work *S/Z*. Barthes outlines two types of readers, a readerly consumer of text and a writerly producer of text. In its interesting dichotomy, Barthes favors the process of writerly because, "the aim of the literary work is to create a reader who is a producer of the text, not consumer anymore". Similar to Barthes, Michael Foucault understands an Author as a function, or more precisely "an author is nothing else than author function" in terms of how texts are distributed and received in a social environment. The author function, according to Foucault, is located in the gap between the real writer and fictitious speaker, and its basic characteristic is pluralism of ego. He focuses on analyzing the relationship that exists between the name of the author and the text it is connected to.

25 G. P. Landow, and P. Delany (eds.), *The Digital World: Text-Based Computing in the Humanities*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 90.

26 G. P. Landow, *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1997, p. 120.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 195.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

29 J. D. Bolter, *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*, p. 158.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

32 T. H. Nelson, *Computer Lib/Dream Machines*; WA: Tempus Books, Redmond, 1987.

33 J. Nielsen, "Electronic Books-A Bad Idea", *Alterbox*, 1998.
<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/980726.html>.

34 J. Y. Douglas, "Where the Senses Become a Stage and Reading is Direction: Performing the Texts of Virtual Reality and Interactive Fiction", *The Drama Review* 37(4), 1993, pgs. 18-35.

35 R. Lanham, *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993.

- ³⁶ M. H. Jackson, "Assessing the Structure of Communication on the World Wide Web", *JCMC* 3 (1), June 1997.
- ³⁷ J. Rosenberg, "Locus Looks at the Turing Play: Hypertextuality vs. Full Programmability", *Hypertext 98: The Proceedings of the Ninth ACM Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia*, ACM, New York, 1998, pgs. 152-160.
- ³⁸ S. Žižek, "Realno kiberprostora" ("The Real of Cyberspace"), *Problemi* 3-4/1999, pgs. 9-10.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ⁴⁰ J. H. Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1997.
- ⁴¹ S. Žižek, "Realno kiberprostora" ("The Real of Cyberspace"), p. 5 (my italic).
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ⁴³ H. Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, ABACUS, Sphere Books, London, 1972, p. 89.
- ⁴⁴ See also A. Negri, M. Hardt, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

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