

“Keep It Simple, Stupid”. Or: Complexity in Meat Space and in Hypertext Fiction
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Abstract

What is the similarity between nurses’ burn-out syndrome and hypertext? – Complexity! Explained through examples taken from social medicine the term “hyper complexity” is approached from an interdisciplinary angle. Hyper complexity is a negative side effect of the network society’s know-flow and work-flow planning. The obvious answer to this is the use of simple demarcations of work groups, a minimum of power in communications and a maximum of attention on the feedback. Psychology must be applied in both oral communications and readings of papers related to collaboration work. Some of these principles can be transferred in readings of hypertext fiction, and this is demonstrated in a reading of Michael Joyce’s hypertext fiction, *Afternoon. A story* (1987). Due to the digital literary artworks inherent non-linearity, hypertext fictions are generally considered to be extremely difficult to read. The digital “scriptor’s” significance has increased; a characteristic which paradoxically by many readers is seen as an inherent “weakness of the genre’s psychological potential”. This is caused by the hypertext’s many different chronotropes, a characteristic that forces the reader to act more or less like a writer. French philosopher Roland Barthes calls this “reading writerly”.¹

Nurse! Bring me a bedpan, please

“What is complexity? I mean, really? Is it something, which is simply hard to understand, or is it philosophically *and* empirically a symptom of a completely new, historical situation?”

The question was raised by a bright student in one of my classes. We were in the first part of semester of studies in contemporary novels and I knew that I was in serious trouble. Despite meticulous readings of Niklas Luhmann, Lars Qvortrup and Ulrich Beck I was unable to answer the student’s question in an adequate, understandable way. Instead, I answered the question in broad

terms with general, encyclopaedic explanations of expressions like “recursive differentiation of forms within forms”, “reflective readings”, “reflexive modernism”.

Of course, I knew that this was not sufficient. To prove my main thesis about contemporary novels – art is aesthetic complexity and as such complexity theory will serve as an analytic perspective in literary readings – I had to let go of theory and dive into cases from the “real” world. - That is “meat space” in programmers lingo.

At that particular point my wife mentioned some papers, she’d been given as a presentation hand-out. Being a psychiatrist she had participated in a course entitled “Nurses burn-out syndrome in Danish hospitals”. The course was based on studies of research professor Tage Søndergaard, Arbejds miljøinstituttet, and supervisory nurse Kirsten Holmbroe, Dansk Sygeplejeråd, Århus Amt. Something in the matter immediately took my interest.

The first question in the psychiatric course presentation was the following: “Why do many nurses complaint about not only the amount of work but also the work environment and describes the work related collaborations as a constant stress factor?”

From qualitative analysis research the researchers developed a list of job functions which in short concludes that the job causes “cognitive, emotional, mentally and sensory over stimulation”. Step 2 in the study was to place the contemporary case in a historical context. Analyzed within a sixty year time span, from 1935 to 1995, the administrative and clinic changing’s in Danish hospitals could best be explained with industrial logics: If 10 men can build a house in four months, 20 men can build it in two months and 40 will be able to raise it in only one month! In other words: A huge workload can be relieved by hiring more people to do the work.ⁱⁱ

Numbers from a Danish somatic hospital ward looks like this:

1935	1995
15 employees per 20 beds	80 employees per 20 beds
Average hospitalization: 29 days	Average hospitalization: 6 days
Possible interpersonal relations: 105	Possible interpersonal relations: 3160

Going down in average hospitalization time from 29 to only 6 days is a clear success. But in the same period of time the amount of interpersonal relations grows with a factor +30. That is significant, to say the least.

Step 3 in the study consisted of an interview survey of nurses employed in Denmark's largest amt, Aarhus Amt. Asked about their main tasks, nurses both in the day and nights shifts reported that interruptions was the most common phenomena. That is problematic, quite obvious.

The following list illustrates the nurses' rankings of their main tasks.

Nurses in day shift	Nurses in night shift
1. Interruptions	1. Interruptions
2. Conference / report	2. Medicine IV / blood / fluids
3. Medicine IV / blood / fluids	3. Cardex
4. Ward round	4. Physical patient care
5. Pause	5. Ward round
6. Various	6. Contact to patients relatives
7. Cardex writing	7. Patient information / - talks / - mental care
8. Communication w. others wards & discharge	8. Conference / report
9. Patient information / - talks / - mental care	9. Communication w. others wards & discharge
10. Physical patient care	10. Pause
© Kirsten Holmbroe, DSR, Århus Amtskreds, 1997	

In addition to this, Holmbroe's study listed consequences from the large scale hospital ward organization in the following way:

- Significantly raised information load
- A raise in communication mishaps (e.g. Cardex misunderstandings)
- A raise in administrative, employee coordination problems
- A raise in problems concerning nurses collaboration
- A raise in internal administrative problems
- Less time to the patients
- More waste of time and (patients) waiting

Nurses complaining about not having enough time to patient care on a modern hospital ward with a huge flow through of patients, caused by a significant raise in interpersonal relations?! - Now this is complexity, quite simple ... A very illustrating example, in order to explain exactly what is meant by "complexity" and "informational overload" in the information society.

"- And »the cure« for all this is ...?" you may ask.

According to social medicine, there is only one feasible way to go, and that is to reduce the number of interpersonal relations by reducing the number of work demarcations.

Exactly the same goes for teachings in system theory. Only by reducing complexity in your communications and at the same time increase the amount of relevant feedback your teaching's quality can be increased. More positive effect through the use of least power, in other words, and furthermore, through the implementation of resource modularity.

Web developers have a saying for this: "Keep it simple, Stupid."ⁱⁱⁱ

With regards to hypertext, though, it must be underlined from the beginning, that the reader of digital fiction a forehanded must be advised to (inter)act with the text in a much more "aggressive" and personalized way, than the classic hermeneutical dialectical reading suggests.

The digital text

Technically speaking, hypertext is a symbolic digital representation of letters on paper, which typically is mediated by the computer monitor.

In developer circuits hypertext is sometimes called a "generalized footnote" and it must be emphasized from the beginning that hypertext generically is closely related to the encyclopaedia and the reference book. Basically, hypertext consists of only three elements: Nodes, anchors and hyperlinks.

Nodes" are the text's pages holding text chunks, "anchors" are signifiers that tell the reader where to click, whereas "hyperlinks" is the code which connects the nodes with each other. The nodes are part of a system – a network structure – of other nodes; exactly the same way the hypertext – in itself – must be regarded as a node in the general "network" of works within the literary arts.

Instead of this, a computer technician or a webmaster might prefer terms as: "modules", "markers" and "binders". To him, there is nothing mysterious about digitized text. Quite the contrary, says Tim Berners-Lee: Hypertext signifies simplicity through modularity.

Berners-Lee single-handedly wrote the code (HTML - Hyper Text Mark-up Language) and the protocol (HTTP – Hyper Text Transfer Protocol) of the World Wide Web, and today heads the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Both as a web architect and as a professor and teacher at MIT he has repeatedly emphasized simplicity as the main principle in ongoing development of the Web:

Simplicity is easily to quote but often ignored in strange ways. Perhaps this is because it is the eye of the beholder.

A language which uses fewer basic elements to achieve the same power is simpler.

Sometimes simplicity is confused with 'easy to understand'. For example, a two-line solution which uses recursion is a pretty simple, even though some people might find it easier to work though a 10-line solution which avoids recursion.^{iv}

Contrary to current trends Berners-Lee advocates for **simplicity** and **modularity**.^v To Berners-Lee, these qualities, "... are the stuff of software engineering; **decentralization** and **tolerance** are the life and breath of Internet".^{vi}

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In terms of poetics, hypertext can be described with literary modernistic terms like "concept-art" as much as the writing technique, the text architecture, is just as important as the semantic level in the text. Furthermore it must be underlined that hypertext is non-linear, anti-hierarchical and non-physical. Thus, readings are non-repeatable; uniform readings of a hypertext are usually not possible. More so, they are considered to be un-interesting. Contrary to modernistic prose, which often leads the reader by the hand in a very authoritative way, blurring the classical, realistic meanings and pointing strictly towards the semantic level of the text, hypertext is a "weak" genre. Firstly, because it is interactive, secondly, because the main object is completely the opposite: To give power to the reader, which is what Roland Barthes calls, "reading writerly".

In his both strange and inspirational work, *S/Z* (1970), Roland Barthes elaborates on a revolutionary literary ideal: Give the text back to the reader!

The primary evaluation of all texts can come neither from science, for science does not evaluate, nor from ideology, for the ideological value of a text (moral, aesthetic, political, alethiological) is a value of representation, not of production (ideology "reflects," it does not do work). Our evaluation can be linked only to a practice, and this practice is that of writing ... what can be written (rewritten) today: the *writerly*. Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text ... Opposite the writerly text, then, is its counter value, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: the *readerly*. We call any readerly text a classic text.^{vii}

In hypertext the reading experience is generated by the reader, thus hypertext-readings can seem

aggressive and violent, compared to traditional readings of modernistic prose. Perhaps the most provocative aspect connected to hypertext is that it incessantly demonstrates that it is the reader himself that constitutes the signifying literary forces inside a fictional text. In essence the hypertext fiction seems to point back at the reader, saying, “You are the artwork, yourself!” And this is in some ways hibernated avant-garde-aesthetics that is being revitalized in the digital age.

Now, let’s make a list of hypertext reception characteristics, based on the readings of Michael Joyce’s *Afternoon. A story*, appropriating vital points from the nurse’s burn-out case.^{viii} In hypertext fictions, readers experience:

- Significantly raised information load (due to the fiction’s many different nodes and chronotopes)
- A raise in reading mishaps (due to aesthetic changes: paper→screen etc.)
- A raise in cognitive, aesthetic coordination problems (due to navigational problems)
- Less time to indulge in the narrative (due to new media → computer monitor)
- A waste of time and (unwanted) waiting in beginnings and endings of reading

In his essay, “Menneskets felt. En omvej til Peer Hultbergs *Byen og verden*”, Norwegian writer Jan Kjørstad produces a narrow definition of hypertext fiction: “The electronic text exists only as a potential; it materializes only, when you give your commands.”^{ix} Accordingly, this specific aspect – the so-called “potential” of the hypertext – is demonstrated to be the foremost reason why hypertext hasn’t had a larger impact in the literary society and the academic world.

In a later essay concerned with the topic computers and literature, Jan Kjørstad explains himself differently:

This leads me to my critique [of hypertext, RS]. Due to the fact that the text’s development is highly defined by the reader (and by coincidences) and not by the writer – even though the writer decides which words and paragraphs that contains hyperlinks – we lose what is to me the primary target of literary art: to create insights, knowledge. To express myself a little “high browed”: You lose the possibilities of the catharsis-moment.^x

Kjørstad firmly claims that in hypertext it is not possible to control “the moment of catharsis”.

Of course, this is a position which calls for the utmost respect, never the less it would be a constructive move to turn the critique against Kjørstad himself: How it is possible to foresee and control that specific moment on behalf of the readers? Precisely what creates the moment of catharsis and exactly where is it to be found in the literary fiction?

Furthermore, one could argue that Kjærstads critique of hypertext fails its matter: Hypertext's creates multiverses, the opposite of universes. In short, the multiverse is the central epistemological difference between traditional, non-digital literature and hypertexts.

Kjærstad rejects the idea that the writer transforms to the role of a cybernetic text architect. Even though he demonstrated a huge fascination of text production facilitated by computers in novels like *Homo Falsus* (1984), *Det store eventyret* (1987) and *Rand* (1990), he now renounce the literary use of hypertext as a genre. Perhaps because the computer symbolized a certain aesthetic freedom to the post modern artists of the eighties; a freedom that later day seems obsolete to the now more "matured" artist.

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In his textbook, *Of Two Minds. Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics*, Michael Joyce explains hypertext as follows:

Hypertext is, before anything else, a visual form. Hypertext embodies information and communications, artistic and affective constructs, and conceptual abstractions alike into symbolic structures made visible on a computer-controlled display. These symbolic structures can then be combined and manipulated by anyone having access to them.^{xi}

Contrary to what Joyce implies in this specific quote, the narrative principle behind hypertext is much older than the computer and as such not directly related to a specific type of technology. The computer, though, makes the interactive aspect of reading (e.g. turning pages) much more evident.

Hypertext is developed from narrative principles known from among others Laurence Sterne, James Joyce, Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino. Thus, the hypertext can be viewed as a "modification" of the fictional novel, which Bakhtin defines from the perspective of the term "chronotope" and which brings us back to a widened understanding of the term "multiverse":

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic *generic* significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time. The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically

chronotopic.^{xii}

Without doubt Bakhtin has the novel by its balls when he states the fact that it is “intrinsically chronotopic”. This specific quality – the chronotope – is what tradition in literary studies has taught us to expect from fictional prose: The chronotope constitutes the literary universe. Furthermore, tradition tells us, the novel’s narrative involves a reconstruction of the reader’s horizon of expectations.^{xiii} Now, if we subtract the chronotope, the fictional uni-verse and the implicit writer’s image of reader expectations from the traditional theoretical definition of a novel, and subsequently add interactivity we have a usable, though not exhaustive, typological definition of the fictional hypertext genre.

In his text book, *Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics*, Michael Joyce offers the following explanation of why he chose the hypertext as the preferred genre in the process of writing *Afternoon* In an attempt to renew his own interest in the artistic work he came across the “new” genre, the hypertext:

I wanted, quite simply, to write a novel that would change in successive readings and to make those changing versions according to the connections that I had for some time naturally discovered in the process of writing and that I wanted my readers to share. In my eyes, paragraphs on many different pages could just as well go with paragraphs on many other pages, although with different effects and for different purposes.^{xiv}

Afternoon. A story contains 539 nodes and 951 hyperlinks.^{xv} There are no visible anchors in the text. Furthermore, the composition is polyphonic with the use of four alternating voices, interrupting each others narratives. And as if this wasn’t enough, the protagonist’s main contrast character, Wert, openly admits, “I’m not sure that I have a story. And, if I do, I’m not sure that everything isn’t my story, or that, whatever is my story, is anything more than pieces of others’ stories.”^{xvi}

Thus, both technically and aesthetically, Joyce acts what his narrative informs us about. He is working as a text architect, a “scriptor”, or a cybernetic, building all the many parts of his narrative together in an (hyper textual) complex whole.

The restaurant’s chef proudly proclaims that “the secret’s in the sauce!” In hypertext, as well as in HTML, almost the same rule applies, but now “the secret’s in the source”. The anchor’s and the hyperlinks are the “life and breath” of hypertext fiction ... In Joyce’s hypertext fiction, the protagonist, Peter, talks about anchor’s the way film theoreticians do, but of course the narrator let

him speak with a “double tongue” in this part of the hypertext fiction. Peter’s notion about “titles in silent films” points directly to the title of the node itself.

We kept talking about anchoring devices ... these film semioticians or structuralists or whatever kept talking about anchoring devices. It began to dawn on me that they meant things like the titles in silent films (or these screens) ... [anchoring devices]

In his book, *Weaving the Web*, Tim Berners-Lee says: “That, which matter, lies in the connexions.”^{xvii} Exactly the same thing goes for Michael Joyce’s hypertext. The author consistently proves to have a strong grip on both media technicalities (e.g. Storyboard) and of fiction (the different narratives). The bearing principle in *Afternoon* ... is the hyperlink in itself, but the scriptor’s control of the narrative is – contrary to other hypertext fictions – exactly as authoritative as is the case in the classic novel: Only in the beginning of the hypertext fiction do the reader have the true option of multiple choice, concerning the link structure. The more the narrative opens the fewer navigational options do the readers find.

Different factors cause “noise” in the reading process. First of all, the computer facilitated page image, combined with Joyce’s unusual use of code markers (“<” and “>”) as quote-unquote markers, creates uncertainty in the reception of the text. Thus, a great deal of readers admits to having difficulties in determining the identity of the narrator in the hypertext’s many different nodes and merely attempts to map the plotlines of the narrative, neglecting to interpret the story.

The computer monitor and the navigational icons in some readings uphold disproportionate attention in these readings. Readers of *Afternoon* ... often underlines a strong feeling of confusion and frustration, navigating in Joyce’s hypertext.

Now, at this point one could assert that some readers neglect to read the “manual” accompanying *Afternoon* ...^{xviii} The hypertext consists of specific characteristics, which are directly and indirectly caused by the authoring tool, Storyspace, among these are the hidden anchors.

In the introductory node, “read at depth”, Joyce explains that he has constructed the text in the hypertext format, and boldly informs the reader that he hasn’t “... indicated what words yield ...”. The words that yield “... are usually ones which have texture, as well as character names and pronouns.” And furthermore, he mentions that it is possible to read *Afternoon. A story* in a linear fashion, simply by using the keyboards “return” key.

All this is true, of course. If you follow the instructions you will be able to duplicate

your own reading; in a sense, what you experience is a loop. You could assert that Joyce's hypertext from 1987 has "children's diseases": In the strict sense of the word, looping the key storyline should not be possible with a hypertext, so why does the author inform us of the – seemingly – flaw of his fictional hypertext?

I believe it is because it is of significant importance for the scriptor (Michael Joyce) to acknowledge how closely related his hypertext fiction is to the novel.

The main narrative "yields", just like the nodes. Hidden in the main plot-line there lays alternative sequences: A fragmented essay concerning modern art movie directors, a post modern plot line, quoting everything from Homer to Goethe, Borges and (James) Joyce. And, finally, an almost exploded series of nodes, consisting of only single words or signs. In this part of the hypertext Joyce takes the reader to a un-guided tour in abstract word-art ...

Above all, *Afternoon. A story* is a story-about-telling-stories. – Meta-literature, that is. Joyce coyly hints at the hypertext's post modern features in the node "Hop Scotch":

In its own way, this book consists of many books [the intertextual aspect, RS], but two books above all. The first [death by traffic, RS] can be read in normal fashion and it ends with Chapter 56 ... The second [death of the great narrative, RS] should be read beginning with Chapter 73 and the following the sequence indicated ... ["Hop Scotch"]

Take good notice of the node's title, "Hop Scotch", as it metaphorically indicates the nature of the hypertext's reading process. The game of hop scotch is build upon the same principle as hypertext: simplicity through modularity. Just as in the kids' game, you jump forwards and backwards in the reading process, with many turns and pauses. And, speaking of kids' games, the deepest psychological traumas in Joyce's trauma all connects to youth and childhood. Thus, on this level, *Afternoon* ... can be said to represent a rather old and well known literary tradition: The psychological novel. Nothing new and fancy here: This part of the narrative is build right upon Freud's psychoanalysis and dream interpretation.

But, like in a children's game, *Afternoon. A story* is not contingent. Hypertext(ure) or not, there are certain narrative and semantic rules in Joyce's fictional hypertext. Quite clearly, Aristotle's narrative schemata are aborted, but it is never the less a novel in the grand tradition of, say, Dickens, Zola and Goethe.

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The key-trail starts with the scandalous announcement: “I want to say I may have seen my son die this morning.”^{xix} The containing node of this single paragraph is dubbed “I want to say”. One observes the blatant ambiguity in the pronunciation; the verb “want” contrasts “may” in an almost binary fashion. The fact that a large part of the novel’s first narrative is based on a single, expanded dialogue between the protagonist, Peter, and his contrast-figure, Wert, is a specific realistic feature with a pre-eminent status in the narrative: This is a story about telling.

If you choose the strategy of sequential reading of Joyce’s hypertext, the fiction will now run in a “classical” modernistic fashion, towards its rather logical conclusion: The state of mental abyss.

A large part of the narrative is embedded in the aforementioned conversation between Peter and Wert. In the very last node of the key-sequence, “I call”, we read the following paragraphs:

Nausicaa is not in her office. I call her apartment and her machine answers ... I call Lisa’s office and a machine answers. I have Datacom leave my standard call back sound segment, afraid to leave my live voice on her machine. // There are no humans after five o’clock ... I do not call the hospital. I take a pill and call Lolly. [“I call”]

Just before his death, facing eternal solitude, colonel Kurtz whispered “The horror! The horror!” in Joseph Conrad’s novel, *Heart of Darkness* (1902). This feeling is exactly what Peter experiences in *Afternoon*’s ending scene. In the novels closing scene there are no one to talk to, no humans that is. The narrative’s ugly irony is that in our time and age you can always communicate with machines, and if you’re afraid of that you can let the machines talk to each other without personal interaction of any significance.

In Joyce’s fictional hypertext, the protagonist never returns, unlike Homer’s Odysseus. Contrasting, he doesn’t exhale like Colonel Kurtz did, and he doesn’t commit suicide like Goethe’s Werther. Instead, he takes a pill and calls his wife’s therapist, Lolly. Quite interestingly - Joyce plays a well known modernist trick on the reader – the reader is never informed whether the protagonist’s final attempt to communicate will succeed or not. We, too, are in Limbo: Left to our own devices.

However, the reading instruction informs us that there is reason for this ending. The key-trail’s finale is biased by a certain aesthetic idiosyncrasy: the modernist “contempt of the novel’s schemata”. Thus, the node dubbed “work in progress” reads:

Closure is, as in any fiction, a suspect quality, although here it is made manifest. When the story no longer progresses, or when it cycles, or when you tire of the paths, the experience of reading it ends. [“work in progress”]

So, according to the hypertext’s scriptor there is no ending to the narrative in *Afternoon*.... The story will go on and on: Behind the surface of the narrative, though, we sense something, which has been impossible to unveil in a literary sense of the words. Instead, an ongoing psychological trauma (an oedipal, father-son conflict) and a story about modern sexuality is thematized by the links and the anchors of the hypertext.

Wert, Lolly, Peter and Nausikaa, ad nauseam?

Joyce’s blatant coqueties with post modern intertextuality must be regarded as more than a purely stylistic literary feature. The fictional names in Joyce’s hypertext all point towards (social and psychological) scandals: Murder, suicide, incest, paedophilia and different perversities. It can not be a coincidence, that the authors behind the main “proto narratives” in *Afternoon* ... originally caused scandal with their writings. Joyce’s fictional hypertext seeks to revitalize and revoke the psychological drama of both the Greek epic and traditional Western prose. – Sadly, what most people have noticed is the medium, not the message ...

What is in a name, then? According to the main female character in *Afternoon* ..., Nausikaa, “... our names actualize the repressed desires for accomplishment within a preceding generation of women.”^{xx} In traditional literary fiction a person’s name very often represents the characters psychological qualities, his or hers abilities or fate.

Wert (Werther) and Lolly (Lolita), are contrast figures on the surface level of the both the key-trail and the post modern sequence. When published in 1784, the novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, by J.W. Goethe was an enormous scandal. This was due to the fact that it caused a series of “fashion suicides”. The expression “Sturm und Drang” stems from Goethe’s novel that is widely regarded as the first letter novel. Joyce’s “Wert” contrasts Werther in many ways. Most obvious differences are observed in the differences in the character’s sexuality, Werther being the premature, voyeuristic eroticist, Wert the modern age hedonist.

The literary reception of Vladimir Nabokov’s novel, *Lolita* (1955) was pestered by sensationalism. Nabokov’s blunt description of sexual perversities, especially paedophilia, was

shocking to the public and the book was banned in different countries. – Paging through sex ads today exemplifies the impact the name Lolita has had in the western hemisphere ...

Thanks to Homer, Nausikaa is an immortal Greek name. The first song of book 6, Odysseus and Nausikaa, in *The Odyssey* is quoted in the node dubbed “by the sea”. Nausikaa is the hypertext’s female object of desire in exactly the same way Homers presents her in the *Odyssey*. In *The Odyssey* Nausikaa comforts Odysseus with a bath and limpid olive oil, facilitating his tale of battles and adventures. And yes, of course, Nausikaa is also a hidden title of an episode from Michael Joyce’s “surname brother” and re-writer of *The Odyssey*, James Joyce.^{xxi} So, in this way a literary circle definitely seems to be closed in *Afternoon. A story*.

In post modern literature a name is considered a signifier. Thus, a name always points towards a similar name in different narratives. Peter, being a poet in Joyce’s narrative, hints towards the psalms of the Holy Bible. The psalms are the obvious inspirational source to the poetic passages in Joyce’s fictional hypertext.

Peter, as we know from readings of the Bible, was the name given by Jesus to Simon Bar-Jona the Galilean fisherman, one of the first of the twelve chosen disciples. The Greek word *petra* means "rock" and the Aramaic equivalent is "Cephas". Peter and Andrew his brother came from Bethsaida, a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee. Peter was a leader of twelve. Peter hailed Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi, but denied his master three times in the courtyard of the high priest.

In Joyce’s fiction the brother becomes a son: Peter’s son is dubbed Andrew. Possibly, the name also points toward the author Andrew Lang, (1844-1912), an almost forgotten writer of prose and poetry, especially Arabic tales and fairy tales.^{xxii} However, the narrator claims that Lisa and Peter named the boy Andrew “... because it seemed timeless and unlikely to be popular”.

To excite even more commotion, let us now mention that “Peter” is the name of the fantastic hero/helper in J.M. Barrier’s children’s book, *Peter Pan* (1904). Joyce’s Peter is no elf, nor does he possess magical powers, but in the symbolical narrative of *Afternoon* ... he acts exactly like Peter Pan, and follows the dead children (his own son) to the After world.

The only object directly connected to Andrew is a piece of white paper on which Andrew has written: “I am the Sun King.” Upon finding this paper, Peter cries, and the narrative’s gruesome irony is that Andrew of course never was a king, not even a prince. He merely served as a “nuncio”, a representative of his father. This is a fact that is revealed in the node “Nuncio” which in its entirety reads as follows: “I turned my son into a little man, a shadow of me.”

In the Catholic Church, the “nuncio” is an ordinary and permanent representative of the pope, vested with both political and ecclesiastical powers.^{xxiii} Thus, in *Afternoon* ... the deepest psychological insights is the fact that Peter not only struggles with personal fears and traumas, concerning his private life, but the painstakingly notion, that he has induced an oedipal conflict in his son; a conflict that will never be solved, because of the child’s premature death, but will persist in himself.

In J.M. Barrie’s children’s book, “Peter Pan” (1904), we are told from the beginning, that “all children grow up.” This is stated as a fact that follows the notion of toddler’s almost intuitive death conscience.

All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up, and the way Wendy knew was this. One day when she was two years old she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower and ran with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked rather delightful, for Mrs. Darling put her hand to her heart and cried, "Oh, why can't you remain like this for ever!" This was all that passed between them on the subject, but henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end.

The protagonist’s mother, Mrs. Darling, remembers: Peter Pan is said to live with the fairies. The story goes that when children die he travels part of the way with them, so that they shall not be frightened.

So Peter is called “Peter”, because it is he who follows dead children to the after world? Yes and another reason for the name can be found in gender studies of Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. Studies, which demonstrates Peter Pan as a symbol of partly the negotiating of genders in urban, Victorian families, partly of the omnipotent, homo erotic nature of little children’s minds.^{xxiv}

Two is, indeed, the beginning of an both obvious and gruesome end that – despite the scriptor’s assertions - can be found in the network of nodes in *Afternoon* ...

Questions of age and gender are staged in many nodes in *Afternoon* ..., the primary setting being the bizarre love triangle between Peter, Werth and Nausikaa, radicalized further by the suggested lesbian connection between Nausikaa and her therapist, Lolly.

Take good notice of how Joyce characterizes women’s sexuality in the following paragraph: “It is a great blessing to have not simply a lover your age, but one with a poet's sensitivity, trained by women. With Peter I am able to merge into something continuous. It is very nearly masturbatory, the sense of warm familiarity, the willingness to extend. I do not need to see

him for weeks; while with Wert it is urgent and cyclical, like the need for cigarettes, for heroin, and just as transitory. That makes him fun.”^{xxv}

Men are “fun” to women in Joyce’s narrative: Penises with a talking and (sometimes) reflexive head, depending of which mood the subject is in. To the liberated woman a man can be used as auto erotic tools. Thus, the psycho-dynamic schemata in *Afternoon ...* can be constructed as follows:

The modern liberated women – such as Nausikaa and Lolly – are to be considered the strong gender in Joyce’s hypertext fiction. Men are both too weak and over sensitive (Peter as Goethe’s Werther) or self indulgent hedonistic (Wert as Homer’s Odysseus).

What is the explanation behind the reversal of the genders power balance? Beneath these schemata Michael Joyce’s fictional hypertext yields yet another idea concerning modern sexuality, this time uttered by female therapist, Lolly.

Since all fantasy is essentially homoerotic, a woman often must confront herself in the Narcissistic stillness, since its very paralysis often forces her to confront the otherwise determined aspects of her life. Women learn to live for the other but when confronted with the second self, they can be motivated to actualize their own existence. It is the difference between having a character and authoring one's own. [tit]

The founding level in man is claimed to be homo erotic, and used as a metaphor describing the potential, unfolded nature of Michael Joyce’s artwork, the hypertext itself can indeed be characterized as “homo erotic”. The fiction is “cuddling itself” in equilibristic stylistic experiments.

The expression “... the difference between having a character and authoring one’s own” will bring this paper to a conclusion, because it thematizes *Afternoon ...* on two obtrusive levels: the meta-fictive narrative and the psychological therapeutic level.

As readers “reading writerly” we are forced to decide whether we create (the reader reading writerly) or are being created (the author writing readerly) by the hypertext.

As psychological individuals we are being informed about aspects concerning one of the most important modern philosophical cognitions, “I think, therefore I am”, adjoined with the fact that Joyce’s hypertext thematizes the ongoing mental and societal process of self-observation through observations of stories about the world.

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ⁱ 1974, p. 4.

ⁱⁱ Recently the Danish Government suggested a major union of Danish communes. This is discussed in the Amtsråd. See: <http://www.aaa.dk/aaa/index/aktuelt/strukturkommission/kom-strukturkommission-indsigt/kom-indsigt0703-3.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ See: http://www.digital-web.com/features/feature_2001-6.shtml and: <http://www.w3.org/DesignIssues/Principles.html>

^{iv} <http://www.w3.org/DesignIssues/Principles.html>

^v Current trends in Danish public administration and politics relates directly to the industrial logics seen in the hospital case: "Bigger is better" is the mantra.

^{vi} <http://www.w3.org/DesignIssues/Principles.html>.

^{vii} 1974, p. 4.

^{viii} See: www.w3.org/DesignIssues/Principles.html.

^{ix} 1999, p. 141. In Danish: "Den elektroniske tekst ligger der nærmest kun som et potentiale; den materialiserer sig først, når man giver sine kommandoer."

^x *Menneskets felt*, 1999, p. 209.

^{xi} In Danish: "Dette fører mig frem til min kritik. For ved at tekstens rækkefølge i så høj grad bliver bestemt af læseren (og af tilfældigheder) og ikke af forfatteren – selvom forfatteren bestemmer, hvilke ord og afsnit der skal rumme links – taber vi det, der for mig er et litterært værks mål: at skabe indsigt, erkendelse. For at udtrykke mig lidt højtideligt: Man mister muligheden for katarsis-øjeblikket." 1995, p.19.

^{xii} 1992, p. 84.

^{xiii} Hans Robert Jauss argues, that narratives should not be seen as reflections of a historical moment, or imitations of "reality", but as actually intervening in historical struggle, and perhaps changing people's perceptions of the world in which they live.

^{xiv} 1995, p. 31.

^{xv} The text informs its reader this fact under the tabs "Help" > "Status".

^{xvi} [me*]

^{xvii} 2001, p. 15.

^{xviii} <http://engfor-apeever.barry.edu/Internetclass/discussion%20files/archive2002B.htm> &

<http://www.uwm.edu/~vkuhn/mastudy.html> &

<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/landow/cpace/fiction/afternoon/discussionov.html> &

<http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/cpace/fiction/afternoon/kim.html>

^{xix} Lisbeth Klastrup, Assistant Professor at DIAC at the IT University at Copenhagen (ITU) suggest the term "key-trail" in: *Hyperfiction in Practice: Walking in the garden of Forced Paths*.

^{xx} [Lolly2]

^{xxi} *Ulysses*, "Episode 13", p. 346 ff.

^{xxii} http://www.online-literature.com/andrew_lang/

^{xxiii} The nuncia, the Catholic Encyclopedia informs, is "... accredited to the court of a sovereign or assigned to a definite territory with the duty of safeguarding the interests of the Holy See. The special character of a nuncio, as distinguished from other papal envoys (such as legates, collectors), consists in this: that his office is specifically defined and limited to a definite district (his nunciature), wherein he must reside; his mission is general, embracing all the interests of the Holy See; his office is permanent, requiring the appointment of a successor when one incumbent is recalled, and his mission includes both diplomatic and ecclesiastical powers.

^{xxiv} <http://www.utpjournals.com/product/md/434/gender6.html>

^{xxv} [touching myself]