

Reading Hyperlinks in Digital Fiction: an Empirical Approach

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, we present results from a reader response study developed as part of the AHRC-funded 'Reading Digital Fiction' project (2014-17) (Ref: AH/K004174/1), designed to examine the different types and associated cognitive effects of hyperlinks in digital fiction (DF). Hyperlinks are a distinguishing feature of hypertexts, a form of DF in which individual units of electronic texts and/or other material, such as recordings and videos, are organised and connected through hyperlinks (Bell and Ensslin 2011; Ensslin and Skains 2017). The most well-known and largest example of hypertext is the World Wide Web. Most hyperlinks that appear in non-fiction on the Web are *semantic*, in that they usually indicate to the reader their purpose and directionality. In many hypertext fictions, however, the linked term may not always be used denotatively but is often used creatively so that readers have to retrospectively determine what the association is between the link term and the destination text (cf. Landow 2006, Ciccoricco 2007). Hyperlinks in DF may also give rise to instances of multilineal reading, intertextual linkage, and annotation and cross-referencing, concepts that are notably not restricted to its digital setting but date back over a millennium (cf. Ensslin and Skains 2017). Numerous typologies have been proposed to categorise the different types and functions of hyperlinks in DF (e.g. Parker 2006, Ryan 2015) and theories have been developed to explain the cognitive effect of hyperlinks on the reader (e.g. Bell 2014). However, to date there have been no empirical studies that investigate the function of hyperlinks in a particular work. In this chapter, we offer a new typology of hyperlinks which we have tested empirically using a purpose-built hypertext fiction by Lyle Skains: *The Futographer* (2016). Synthesising a stylistic analysis of *The Futographer* with results from our reader response study, we provide an empirically-tested typology of hyperlinks for DF and suggest ways in which DF readers employ specific cognitive strategies to parse multi-linear hypertext narratives.

This chapter begins with an overview of previous work on hyperlinks before arguing for a new typology of hyperlinks that aims to conceptualise the different functions of hyperlinks more comprehensively. It then outlines the set-up of our reader-response study and how we used *The Futographer* as purpose-built hypertext fiction. Our stylistic analyses of particular extracts from *The Futographer* show how particular responses can be generated by the hyperlinks and linguistic features in the text. This is combined with our analysis of reader response data to show that a synthesis of stylistics and reader response analysis can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how readers see hyperlinks than a stylistic or empirical analysis alone, because they offer insights into how different readers might conceptualise the linguistic features of text in the *lexias* (individual screens of displayed text connected through hyperlinks). This study forms part of a third wave of hypertext and DF scholarship in which empirical reader response studies are combined with stylistics analyses to develop an understanding of how readers process, for example, DF's narrative structures and literary meanings (cf. Bell et al. under review, Ensslin and Skains 2017). We argue that, overall, our reader-response research provides an understanding of how readers process the potential disruptive effect of hyperlinks by reading for the plot.

2. Hyperlinks in Digital Fiction

Whilst early theorists (e.g. Landow 1997; Delany and Landow 1991) and hypertext writers such as Michael Joyce and Stuart Moulthrop mostly saw hyperlinks as providing readers with the agency to navigate their own way through the text, critics pointed out that readers can only follow those hyperlinks scripted by the author and that readers might not know where hyperlinks lead (Harpold 1991), supporting the notion that these hyperlinks provide a false sense of agency (Aarseth 1997). Hyperlinks have been characterised as leading to 'repeated disorientation and reorientation' (Ciccoricco 2007: 80), because readers constantly depart from familiar text to be placed in an unfamiliar environment. Choosing which hyperlink to follow may also cause readers to be at risk of becoming cognitively 'fatigued' in their struggle to find a context in which to interpret the text 'in order to satisfy their demand for meaning' (Vandendorpe 2009: 78).

Cognitive approaches to hyperlinks have focussed predominantly on Relevance Theory (Tosca 2000) and Schema Theory (Bell 2014; Trimarco 2012) in explaining the function of hyperlinks. Tosca (2000) applies Relevance Theory to links in Edward Falco's hypertext fiction *A Dream with Demons* and suggests that a reader makes inferences in advance of following a link in order to predict what she or he will find, subsequently searching for relevance once they reach the destination lexia. As such, hyperlinks do not interrupt the flow of meaning, but rather enliven it. According to Tosca, then, links require readers to engage in an oscillation between inference and subsequent retrospective interpretation. Trimarco (2012) examined students' ability to apply Labov's and Waletzky's (1967) narrative structure, Text World Theory (Gavins 2007; Werth 1999) and Cook's (1990, 1994) notion of schema reinforcement and schema refreshment to hypertext fiction. One of her findings was that students felt that the notions of schema reinforcement and schema refreshment were especially valuable to their understanding of the nature of hypertext fiction. Offering a cognitive approach to hyperlinks in hypertext fiction, Bell (2014) uses schema theory alongside Tosca's conclusions about the anticipatory and retrospective nature of hypertext reading to show how individual links work with or against readers' existing schemata so as to either confirm or revise their predictions about what they will find when following a link. She concludes that links express a relationship between the link and its destination; this relationship can be denotative, as is typical in informational hypertext, or might be connotative, requiring more considered interpretation, which is often the case in hypertext fiction (Bell 2014: 156). She suggests that 'empirical work would help to establish whether readers do in fact predict where links are going to go before following them as well as what any predictions reveal about their existing schemata' (Bell 2014: 156).

3. Empirical Approaches to Hyperlinks in Digital Fiction

In line with empirical work on DF in general, empirical studies of hyperlinks have largely focussed on the defamiliarising effects of hyperlinks (e.g. Gardner 2003, Pope 2006, Mangen and van der Weel 2017; Miall and Dobson 2001). Miall and Dobson conclude that, because readers took longer to read a hypertext with multiple links per lexia and reported more difficulty with this text, hypertext fiction distances the text from the reader and that the 'absorbed and personal mode of reading seems to be discouraged' (2001: 12; cf. Hayles 2007, Mangen 2008). Pope (2006, 2010)

and Scharinger et al. (2015) also conclude that hyperlinks increase readers' cognitive load and therefore might negatively affect text reading and comprehension in their studies on link-selection processes during hypertext reading. Employing think-aloud as method, Protopsaltis and Bouki's work suggests that 'the majority of the readers read the hypertext in a linear fashion', and that the order of the links 'seems to be the determinant factor for choosing a hyperlink' (2005: 165). Participants in their study tended to select the first available link, and one possible explanation for this might be their participants' lack of familiarity with hypertext. They also found that when readers felt a personal relationship with the semantic meaning of a hyperlinked word or phrase, they tended to follow these hyperlinks.

Whilst these studies provide a relevant basis for further empirical research, their focus remains largely on measuring reading times and narrative comprehension, rather than on the different types of hyperlinks readers encounter in DF and how they conceptualise these links. Since the types of hyperlinks readers are presented with might also affect their reading experiences, our research builds on this previous empirical research to explore whether reader responses to hyperlinks can be categorised according to existing hyperlink categories, and also what the reader responses reveal about hyperlinks that is not captured in these typologies.

4. Our Typology of Hyperlinks

Various formalist typologies have been developed to categorise the structural or semantic functions of hyperlinks. Bernstein's 1998 typology distinguishes between eleven different categories and four subcategories that focus primarily on the structure of links, rather than the functions of individual hyperlinks. Parker distinguishes between 'blatant links' that 'tell the reader exactly what information will be revealed when activated' and 'links that convey literary effect', such as 'emotive links' implemented 'to elicit a kind of emotional response from the reader' (2001, n.p.). Ryan (2006: 109) develops a typology of links by drawing on the work of other scholars such as Bernstein (1998), Tosca (2000), Parker (2001), Strickland (1997a, 1997b), and Rettberg (2002), which is later modified and refined in Ryan (2015). These typologies focus more on the functions and effects of different types of hyperlinks such as storyworld exploration, adjustment of focalization, or access to exposition and/or paratexts (Ryan 2015).

Many of the typologies previously developed share elements; the notion of a ‘blatant’ hyperlink is fairly universal. Where the typologies differentiate is in defining links that are not clearly functional, or that serve multiple purposes (though some authors, like Parker, eschew the notion of multi-functional links). Narratologists (like Ryan 2006, 2015) are more likely to identify hyperlink types that serve narrative functions; writers such as Strickland (1997a, 1997b) and Parker (2001) are more likely to favour those that serve more ‘literary’ or aesthetic purposes. Some typologies, such as Bernstein’s, list both types of individual *links* as well as link *structures*; for the purpose of this study, we have focused on types of individual links. In Table 1 below, we have brought together various typologies on hyperlinks (Bernstein 1998; Kuhlen 1991; Parker 2001; Persson 1998; Ryan 2006, 2015; Vandendorpe 2009) to create a workable model for the following two research areas: the practice-based study of *writing* a hypertext according to the types of links identified – which will be communicated in a separate paper – and for studying how readers encounter, click, and interpret the various hyperlinks presented in the purpose-built hypertext fiction *The Futographer*. Thus the focus in the ‘meta’ typology we present is twofold: to construct a typology of hyperlinks that can be used as a constructive reference in the writing of the hypertext, as well as an initial framework for analysing reader responses to the hyperlinks themselves.

Table 1. Our proposed hyperlink meta-typology

Basic Navigation	Affective Navigation	Narrative Exploration	Affective Exploration
Dynamic (Bernstein)			
		Other (Strickland)	
		Joyce’s Cycle (Bernstein)	
Basic (Strickland) Blatant (Parker/Ryan) Specified (Kuhlen) Selection & Association (Vandendorpe) Selection, Association, & Contiguity (Vandendorpe)	Temporal (Ryan) Sieve (Bernstein)	Simultaneity (Ryan) Digressive (Ryan) Perspective Switching (Ryan) Temporal (Ryan) Douglas’s Cycle (Bernstein) Contour (Bernstein) Mirrorworlds (Bernstein) Neighborhoods (Bernstein)	Literary (Parker) Referential (Kuhlen) Spatial (Ryan) Tangles (Bernstein)

		Split/join (Bernstein) Missing links (Bernstein) Feints (Bernstein)	
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Each type is defined by narrative strategies (primarily regarding pathways through the narrative) and effects on the reader. The categories presented in Table 1 – Basic Navigation, Narrative Exploration, Affective Navigation, and Affective Exploration – are drawn in part from Persson’s 1998 study of user’s activities in digital environments. Persson distinguishes between *navigation* (actions that are purposefully navigating around, through, and between digital environments), and *exploration* (actions that do not have a clear purpose or direction, but are exploring the digital environment). In typical non-fictional online environments, all hyperlinks are functional and associative, and thus the user’s intent is what differentiates between navigation and exploration. In hypertext fiction, however, ‘non-functional’ links – alternately termed ‘literary’, ‘referential’, ‘other’, etc. – are common. In this meta-typology, we have grouped them under the category *Affective*, denoting that their primary function is to elicit a response from the reader, such as emotional or aesthetic. Affective links are those that often confuse the reader – their reference, purpose, and interpretation (or lack thereof) often counters the familiar schema of links (Bell 2014), and clicking them requires retrospective interpretation for assignation of meaning (Tosca 2000). Affective links without a quick and clear subsequent meaning (Tosca 2000) can be seen as the most ‘random’ on the scale of links, with Basic links the least random (see Figure 1). Finally, we have categorized links as serving narrative purposes: directing readers to alternate perspectives, parallel storylines, backstory, grouping narratively-related lexias together, creating narrative pathways, etc. These links are also not typical on the non-fictional digital environments of the web. The types of links we establish in this study are thus:

1. **Basic Navigation (BN):** links that indicate their destination in a clear one-to-one relationship. These links can be *intratextual* (destination lexia is within the current hypertext), or *intertextual* (linking to a destination outside the current hypertext).
 - a. *Example: In The Futographer, the first lexia has only one link: ‘tag’, with a one-to-one relationship between option (link) and destination (the next lexia).*

2. **Narrative Exploration (NE):** links that expand or develop the narrative of the hypertext. These include links to switch characters, change to parallel storylines, explore backstory, and revisit passages. While the links are usually not basically functional, they generally follow a pattern of meaning, which may be initially apparent, retroactively apparent, or both to varying degrees.
 - a. *Example: The Futographer's third lexia offers a link (one of three) to 'Tiresias Goodfellow'. The link leads to the character's social media profile, offering backstory.*
3. **Affective Navigation (AN):** links that do not indicate their destination clearly, but whose primary purpose is to lead the reader down a narrative pathway. The meaning of the link may be initially apparent, or retrospectively apparent.
 - a. *Example: The Futographer's thirteenth lexia offers two AN links, 'avoided' and 'cope'. The links do not clearly indicate a destination; rather, they offer the reader choices based on characterization and emotion. They lead to alternative pathways, with the player-character acting to either 'avoid' their situation retrospectively, or carry on 'coping' with it.*
4. **Affective Exploration (AE):** links with the sole purpose of eliciting an affective response, with no navigational or narrative purpose apparent, either initially or in retrospect. While the purpose of these links may (or may not) be clear to the writer, their meaning often appears 'random' to the reader.
 - a. *Example: The Futographer's fifth lexia includes one AE link, 'rain' (discussed below). Its context does not indicate a navigational direction, nor does its denotative meaning. Its destination is merely an aside about how much it rains, which neither offers character nor narrative information, before leading back to the narrative.*

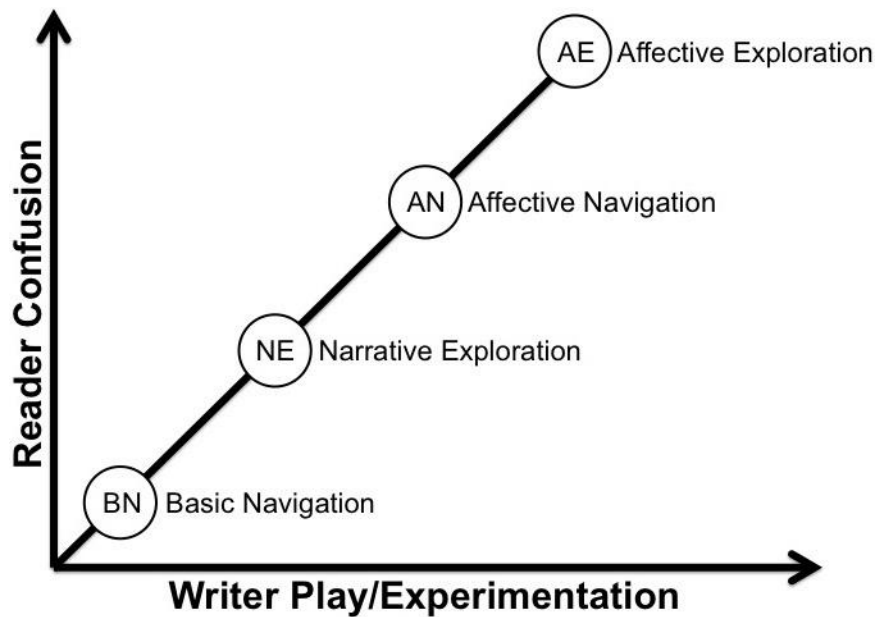


Figure 1. Reader Confusion vs. Writer Play/Experimentation

For narrative *immersion* (Bell et Al. 2018; Douglas and Hargadon 2000; Ryan 2006, 2015), it is best that the apparatus or interface used in the study generates as little cognitive dissonance as possible; in a hypertext, this means leaning toward BN and clearly denoted NE. For narrative *engagement*, cognitive dissonance is part of the pleasure; according to Douglas and Hargadon (2000), the more experienced a reader is in a genre, the more likely they are to gain pleasure from *engagement*, and to derive that engagement from puzzling together elements of the narrative or game. Thus the reader's experience of hypertexts must be taken into account, and so more use of AN and AE are called for. In our study, approximately half of the participants were unfamiliar with hypertext, so the aim was to provide a heavier weighting toward BN and NE. Also of significance to cognitive dissonance is the number of links per page: more links equate to more choices (at least in appearance), more potential narratives, and more cognitive dissonance (cf. Maduro 2017; Schwartz 2004). Too few links, however, fail to distinguish the text as 'hyper', as the defining characteristics of hypertexts would not emerge: networked structures, multilinearity, multiple potential narratives, repeated lexias, branching structures, and reader agency (or illusion thereof).

5. The Futographer

The Futographer by Lyle Skains (2016) is a short story told in hypertext and produced using Twine, in which the narrative 'you' receives pictures of their future self from a stranger on social media, and makes choices accordingly. As much as possible, it is a 'true' hypertext fiction: an artistic creation intended to evoke an emotional response in the reader. The hypertext makes use of the basic functionality of hyperlinks without necessitating an instruction manual, encouraging the reader to progress through the text as any literary art does: by encouraging interest, immersion, and engagement in the text itself, ideally leading to readerly 'flow' (Douglas and Hargadon 2000). It is written using second-person narration and explores issues around social media, online anonymity and privacy, and computer-mediated communication more generally. The text is comprised of lexias connected by hyperlinks that often allow readers multiple pathways through the text. Readers navigate by clicking hyperlinked text on the interface.

6. Method

In this chapter, we focus on the conceptualisation of hyperlinks and the multilinear experience of *The Futographer* by the reader (cf. Ensslin 2007). We were specifically interested in the relationship between what readers think they will find when they encounter a hyperlink and how they interpret what they actually encounter, and whether readers form expectations of hyperlinks and, if so, how they negotiate these. Our methodology is furthermore grounded in Bortolussi and Dixon's (2003) psychonarratological distinction between 'textual features', which are 'objective and identifiable characteristics of the text' (37) and 'reader constructions', which are 'subjective and variable' (37) responses to the text (cf. Bell et al. under review). We argue that the combination of stylistically analysing the textual aspects of hyperlinks and their textual context with readers' response data can provide substantive insight into how hyperlinks function and are conceptualised.

The reader-response study informing the analysis in this article involved a total of 19 readers (9 male, 9 female and 1 gender not defined) who were all Creative Studies and Media students at Bangor University. 10 participants had read some DF before, 7 participants had heard of DF but not read any, and 3 students did not know what DF was and had no experience of reading it. This set-up allowed us to explore

qualitatively whether experienced DF readers approach hyperlinks differently from those who do not have experience reading DF. The participants were asked to read *The Futographer* at a desktop computer in the presence of a researcher, and told that we were interested in how people interpret hyperlinks when they read them in DF. At various points during the reading, the researcher isolated the hyperlinks as shown on the screen and then asked: 'How do you decide which link to click on?', followed by 'What thought processes do you go through when you see and/or decide to click on this hyperlink?', followed by 'What in the text or context influences your decision?' For each tested hyperlink followed and the subsequent lexia read, we then asked the participants the following follow-up questions:

- 'What is this part of the text about?'
- 'Does this relate to the previous part of the narrative? If yes, how so?'
- 'Did you expect it to lead to this kind of thing?'
- 'In what ways does it confirm or contradict what you expected to find?'
- 'What in the text or context makes you think this?'

The combination of questions was designed to prompt the reader to provide as much information as possible of their thought processes when they encountered and processed links, and how this affected their decision-making and reading experience. We also asked them about the text and context to gather evidence about how the extant textual features ('text') and other elements, such as personal experiences (Protopsaltis and Bouki 2005), choice or background ('context') affected their hyperlink conceptualisations and choices. In total, participants were asked 11 times about the hyperlinks on the screen and each reading session took around 50 minutes.

Hyperlinks were chosen for questioning because of the different ways they could be classified according to our meta-typology, to measure whether participants approached each type of hyperlinks differently, and whether they interpreted them differently after having followed the links. 7 BN links, 4 NE links, 6 AN links, and 5 AE links were tested. The reading session concluded with a short structured interview session, in which we asked the participants about hyperlinks in the text in general. Both sessions provided us with qualitative data and were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded using NVivo. The NVivo coding focussed on identifying which

type of links were preferred by participants when given multiple types, which specific cognitive strategies participants adopted to parse multi-linear hypertext narratives, and to what extent participants felt influenced by the text or context. Both explicit and implicit clues in the reader response data relevant to our research questions were coded for.

7. Analysis

In this stylistic analysis, we focus on two lexias in which a variety of different types of hyperlinks were tested. We provide stylistic analyses to show how readers are positioned in the text via textual features according to narrative theory. We then compare our stylistic analyses with reader responses and consider how the readers' responses might provide different or new insight into how readers process and respond to hyperlinks.

7.1 Rain, Danish, New Pics

Figure 2 shows a manipulated version of the 5th lexia in the hyperlinks reading session, in which three different types of hyperlinks were tested. This tested lexia takes place relatively early in the reading session, at which point readers are still familiarizing themselves with the protagonist and potential plotlines. They have just read that a stranger called 'Tiresias Goodfellow' has tagged the player-character 'you' in a photo on social media, and that subsequently the 'you' has decided to take a short coffee break away from the office. The second-person narrative is homodiegetic, with the 'you' as both protagonist and narrator (Jahn 2005: 522). The interactive nature of the text further complicates this narrative style, however, as it requires readers to make navigational choices by following the hyperlinks, meaning that they are therefore actively involved in the construction of the narrative. In combination with the referential ambiguity of the second person pronoun (Herman 2002: 332), readers might interpret 'you' variably, and might shift in their interpretation of 'you' between a protagonist and narrator in the fictional world on the one hand, and feeling addressed, perhaps even taking up the role of narrator, *themselves* in the actual world (see also Bell et al. under review).

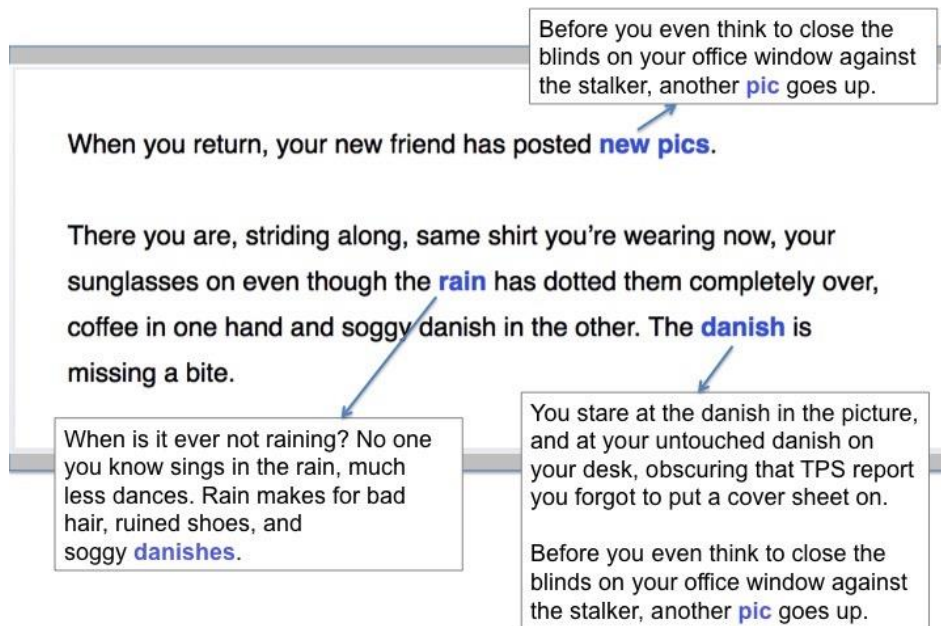


Figure 2. Lexia 5, with hyperlinks 'new pics', 'rain' and 'danish'

In Figure 2, the text of lexia 5 is displayed most prominently, with the hyperlinks 'new pics', 'rain' and 'danish' represented in blue and bolded font. The arrows connected to the different hyperlinks show which lexia readers would see if they clicked on one of these links. This has been added for the benefit of our stylistics analysis here and was not part of the original lexia. The text shown in lexia 5 is comprised of three sentences, with each sentence containing one hyperlinked word. The participants will read that the 'you' has just returned from their break, and that new pictures of them have been posted.

The noun 'pics' is semantically linked with the previous lexia, in which the 'you' discovered they have been tagged in a picture on Facebook. Semantically, this hyperlink is therefore most closely related to the storyline established at this point, and readers might assume that this is a BN link, which is how we have labelled it, because it seems to indicate its destination – i.e. more information will be given about those new pictures – in a clear one-to-one relationship. The word 'new' provides a sense of immediacy that might further entice readers to click on it. Because of its relative shortness and the paragraph break that follows, the first sentence with the hyperlink 'new pics' is visually more striking than the other two. What follows in the remaining two sentences in lexia 5 is a description of the photo that the 'you' is tagged in. In the description of this photo, two nouns that describe

the picture are blue and in bold: 'rain' and 'danish'. Whilst both 'rain' and 'danish' seem explorative and do not suggest a clear narrative pathway, the fact that the danish is 'missing a bite' and seems an object of interest, in combination with the relevant narrative exposure that follows, means that it has been labelled as a NE link. The more generic description of 'rain', however, does not indicate a direction, narrative exploration or a clear narrative pathway, and its subsequent lexia provides a philosophical reflection on rain that stands apart from the main narrative, only linking back to 'danishes', meaning we have labelled it as an AE link.

Readers predominantly chose the hyperlink 'new pics' (see Table 2). Whereas fourteen participants decided to click on 'new pics', only three participants chose to follow 'rain', and only a further two participants clicked on 'danish'.

Table 2. Collated responses to the hyperlinks 'new pics', 'rain', 'danish'

	'new pics'	'rain'	'danish'
Participants' choices of hyperlinks	14	3	2

Interview data confirmed that readers' overwhelming preference for 'new pics' was based in their assumption that this link indicated its destination in a clear one-to-one relationship. Most participants who chose 'new pics' explained that they did so because it seemed to be the most relevant link (7 out of 14). A few participants said they were curious about the pictures or interested in seeing them (3 out of 14). A further three participants stated they were both interested in the pictures and felt that the other links were not relevant (3 out of 14). One participant stated that it was a combination of curiosity and visual prominence that made her click on 'new pics', as it was the first link she saw, which confirms Protopsaltis and Bouki (2005). Holly¹, who had not read any DF before, opted for 'new pics' because it seemed most relevant (see Appendix A for transcript).

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

Like most others who found 'new pics' most relevant, Holly noted that it seemed to be the 'most important' link, referring to it as 'the evidence' (line 149) and arguing that it 'doesn't matter' to her that there is 'rain' and a 'danish', as these are not 'relevant' (lines 143-147). She also states that 'new pics' is visually more salient because it stands apart from the rest of the text, which 'you notice...straight away' and that she is more interested in 'seeing all these photos I'm supposed to be in' (lines 154, 159). This latter justification shows Holly has adopted a first-person, internal perspective and thus a high degree of identification with the protagonist 'you' (cf. Bell et al under review). Relevance here seems directly linked to what is directly impacting the narrative element of character.

Those participants who decided to click on 'rain' did so for varying reasons. They felt that 'new pictures would seem to be quite an obvious answer' whilst 'rain' gives potentially significant information 'about the possibility of the photo being taken at— at a certain time of day' (Josh, transcript BGR105 Josh SHURDA.docx, lines 144 & 137-138), that 'new pics' seemed to have been explained already, and that it was more interesting 'why there's [...] sunglasses when it's raining' (Katie, transcript BGR107 Katie SHURDA.docx, line 92), and that it allowed the reader to 'explore a different way – different method' (Luke, transcript BGR110 Luke SHURDA.docx, line 78). Readers who followed 'danish' chose to do so because it seemed salient, and therefore most relevant to them. Laura mentioned that she found it funny and intriguing that emphasis had been placed on the fact that the danish 'is missing a bite' (Laura, transcript BGR103 Laura SHURDA.docx, line 136-138). Jack decided to click on 'danish' because it was also mentioned in the previous lexia, and the repetition suggested it might be important (Jack, transcript BGR104 Jack SHURDA.docx, line 130-139). The arguments for picking 'rain' or 'danish' rather than 'new pics' suggests that despite not opting for a denotatively clearer BN link such as 'new pics', readers tended to also choose links that narratively seem most relevant or interesting to them.

Once they followed the hyperlinks, participants were asked to explain what the destination lexia was about, whether – and if so how – it related to the previous lexia, and how it contradicted or confirmed what they expected to find. With 'new pics', 'rain' and 'danish', all 19 participants, regardless of the link they had clicked on, felt

that the new lexia they encountered related to the previous lexia, but not all participants expected what they encountered. Of the three participants that followed 'rain', two said they had not expected it, whilst one participant felt it was 'sort of' expected (Luke, transcript BGR110 Luke SHURDA.docx line 118). Josh, who had expected the rain related to the picture and thus might be significant, felt that, although the new lexia seemed related because it referenced the 'soggy danish', he did not expect to be led here, and that he could have just as well clicked on 'danish' because that was the only link on the lexia he had arrived at (Josh, transcript BGR105 Josh SHURDA.docx lines 148-150). Katie also explained that she felt the lexia following 'rain' was related to the previous picture, because it 'relates to the picture, I guess' (Katie, transcript BGR107 Katie SHURDA.docx lines 109-110). By explicitly describing her thought processes 'I guess' (Johnstone 1996: 104), she hedged her statement, conveying an element of uncertainty (Ballard 2016: 93). She also noted 'I dunno, maybe something shows that there shouldn't have been rain, I dunno [...] 'cause there's sunglasses when it was raining, I thought maybe it was Photoshopped' (Katie, transcript BGR107 Katie SHURDA.docx lines 117-123). Luke felt the lexia following 'rain' provided more context, and was therefore 'sort of' expected (Luke, transcript BGR110 Luke SHURDA.docx line 118). Of those that followed 'danish', one participant said he expected that there was only one hyperlink in the next lexia: 'Maybe I expected just the one' (Jack, transcript BGR104 Jack SHURDA.docx line 200), but the 'maybe' in his statement indicates uncertainty. The other participant indicated that 'she didn't know what to expect', and that the new lexia therefore neither confirmed nor contradicted her expectations (Laura, transcript BGR103 Laura SHURDA.docx, lines 159-161). Of those that had opted for 'new pics', eleven felt the new lexia they had arrived at was unexpected. One participant felt he had expected it, whilst two other participants did not provide a clear answer. The eleven participants who felt the lexia that followed 'new pics' was unexpected explained that they expected to see actual pictures (4 out of 11), suggesting they saw it as a BN link; they were surprised by the change in tone and/or atmosphere (4 out of 11); they had expected more talk about different pictures (1 out of 11) they had expected the pictures to stop (1 out of 11); or they had expected a more gradual appearance of pictures (1 out of 11).

One participant, Alfie (see Appendix B), who did not clearly say whether he expected the lexia, conceptualised the hyperlink 'new pics' as 'very blatantly clear' (line 174) that there was 'a definite link [between the two lexias]' and that 'there's no confusion about it' (line 181). The lack of modality at the beginning of this extract (lines 168-181) in combination with his use of the adverb 'blatantly', the grammatical modifier 'very' and his use of negative assertion ('there's no confusion about it'), suggests that Alfie was certain about the function of the hyperlink 'new pics' as a link that indicates its destination in a clear one-to-one relationship. Alfie thus recognised the function of 'new pics' according to our typology. When asked whether he expected the hyperlink to lead to this lexia, he answered that 'narratively', he was 'preparing for the worst, hoping for the best' (lines 183-184), but that he 'feel[s]' that 'there's a stalker coming' (line 190, 188). Alfie's use of the modal lexical verb 'hope' can be categorised as boulomaic modality, used to express his wish that the 'you' does not have a stalker. This feeling ('I feel it, just inside me', line 190) is a form of 'narrative feeling' (Miall and Kuiken 2002: 223), an emotional response to 'an event or situation within the fictional world' (Gavins 2013: 29) suggesting he empathised with the protagonist 'you'.

7.2 *Last Summer, Thing*

Figure 3 shows a manipulated version of a lexia that readers encountered towards the end of their reading session, in which two different types of hyperlinks were tested. At this point in the narrative, readers have read that the 'you' has travelled to London in order to help out their friend 'Andie', who has been mugged. There is a confrontation between Andie and the 'you'. Part of the text is comprised of direct speech. Andie accuses the 'you' of having mistreated her 'last summer', which is denoted as a hyperlink in bold and blue. Readers are likely to interpret its reference to a specific point in the past as indicative that the hyperlink will lead them to backstory or a flashback, and thus see it as a NE link. This hyperlink is furthermore a partial repetition of a hyperlink readers will have encountered earlier in the story, namely 'Five weeks last summer', which might heighten its narrative significance to readers. The second hyperlink in the text is the noun 'thing', which is part of Andie's direct speech and follows the apparent confusion of the 'you'. The 'you' does not seem to understand which mistreatment Andie is referring to, acknowledging that they had a 'thing', but implying there was not more to it than that. Andie reacts to this

by repeating the word ‘thing’, stating that the ‘you’ can now have their ‘thing’ back. This second ‘thing’ is hyperlinked, and suggests that whatever this ‘thing’ refers to will relate to Andie’s perspective of it. The nonspecific meaning of ‘thing’ as an object not described in any detail suggests this link should be characterised as an AE link that has the sole purpose of eliciting an affective response, with no navigational or narrative purpose apparent, either initially or in retrospect. It would be expected, therefore, that more readers will click on ‘last summer’, rather than ‘thing’.

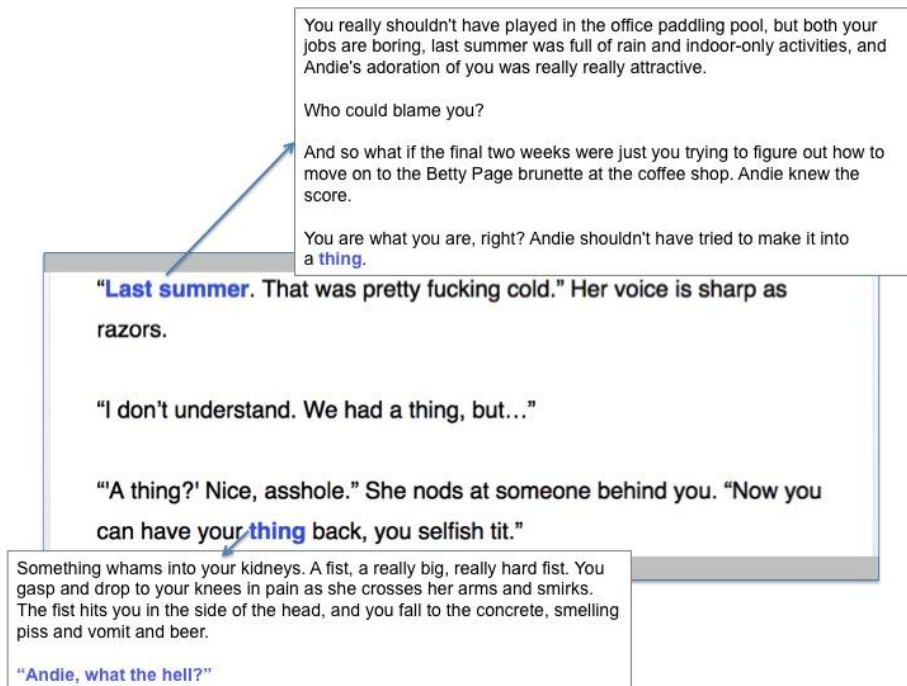


Figure 3. Lexia with 'last summer' and 'thing'

The participant group was roughly split in half in their choice of hyperlink in this lexia. Although a slightly higher number of readers chose ‘last summer’ (10 out of 19 participants), 9 out of 19 participants opted for ‘thing’, meaning the difference between the groups was much smaller than anticipated (see Table 3).

Table 4. Collated responses to the hyperlinks 'last summer' and 'thing'

	'last summer'	'thing'
Participants' choices of hyperlinks	10	9

Readers who opted for ‘last summer’ did so either because they wanted ‘more detail’ or ‘backstory’ (5 out of 10), because it was mentioned previously (4 out of 10), or

because of a combination of these (1 out of 10). Nathan's explanation (see Appendix C) illustrates the ways in which participants negotiate their choice of hyperlink 'last summer'. Nathan explains that he is 'worried' that the same thing will happen as last time, when he clicked on 'Five weeks last summer', which then took him to 'what I expected and then straight after that it took me to what I didn't want to happen'. He, however, feels that the alternative 'thing' will not be much better, because it occurs 'after [Andie] nods at someone behind you, which has to be Tiresias', and that although he feels that 'either way I'm gonna end up face to face with Tiresias', 'clicking 'thing' will make it happen immediately', whilst '#last summer' will give us more backstory'. The 'narrative worry' (cf. Miall and Kuiken 2002: 223) to possibly being confronted with Tiresias and the adoption of a first-person perspective ('I') suggests Nathan empathised with the protagonist 'you'. Nathan's explanation also suggests he conceptualised the function of the hyperlink 'thing' as driving the plot forward, and that because he is hesitant of the expected confrontation between the 'you' and Tiresias, it is therefore better to click on 'last summer'. The hyperlink 'thing' is thus conceptualised as more of an NE or AN link than an AE link.

This conceptualisation is shared by several other participants who opted for 'last summer' or 'thing'. Alfie, who clicked on 'last summer', also stated that he wanted to 'avoid confrontation' when asked if there was anything in the text or context that influenced his decision to click on 'last summer' rather than 'thing' (Alfie, transcript BGR101 Alfie SHURDA.docx line 641). Ravi, on the other hand, decided to click on 'thing' exactly because of '[Andie's] actions... [I]ike she knows someone behind [the "you"]' (Ravi, transcript BGR108 Ravi SHURDA.docx lines 395-397), and Kieran also opted for 'thing' because 'you get to see what happens to...[the] "you"', which then allows you to 'probably work out what happened last summer anyway' (Kieran, transcript BGR115 Kieran SHURDA.docx lines 495-500), supporting the notion that 'thing' is seen by participants as NE rather than AE.

In general, participants who chose 'thing' did so for varying reasons. Some opted for 'thing' because they were curious to know what the 'thing' was (3 out of 9). Others, including Ravi and Kieran, said they felt 'thing' was more current or involved action, and was therefore more important (3 out of 9). A further three participants said they clicked on 'thing' because they felt they had already been to 'last summer', as they

had previously clicked on 'five weeks last summer', and that 'thing' was new and therefore more relevant to them. One participant, Laura, also adds to this latter reason that '[thing is] more specific, [because whilst] last summer is a whole stretch of time...thing is – it's one thing' (Laura, transcript BGR103 Laura SHURDA.docx lines 535-537). Interestingly, Laura's conceptualisation of 'thing' also shows that this hyperlink was not necessarily seen as less specific and therefore as an AE link by participants, but rather as a more immediate, plot-driving action link. All participants who chose 'thing' felt the lexia that followed the hyperlink was related to the previous lexia, but only around half of the participants felt it was expected or 'sort of' expected (5 out of 9). Of those that picked 'last summer', 9 out of 10 participants felt the next lexia related to the previous one and almost all participants indicated they had expected or 'sort of' expected the next lexia (9 out of 10).

8. Conclusion

Our analyses show that readers have different reasons for opting for varying hyperlinks, but that these reasons tend to be largely narratively driven. Readers indicated they were interested in following certain hyperlinks because those seemed most relevant or important to them, and having followed them, would almost exclusively see them as related to the previous lexia. The perceived significance and relatedness of the chosen hyperlinks and subsequent lexias seems at least in part related to the narrative and/or narrative exploration for these readers. This interpretation is also supported by other data from our study. Some participants, for example, indicated when asked about other hyperlinks that they 'just [picked] the one that I think will progress it more' or that 'would probably make most sense in this plotline' (Kirsty, transcript BGR102 Kirsty SHURDA.docx lines 57, 130), or chose a link because it would 'advance...the story' (Jack, transcript BGR104 Jack SHURDA.docx line 615). Such 'reading for the plot' (Brooks 1984) and aiming for narrative resolution are perhaps unsurprising given the human tendency to look for meaning. Brooks defines the plot here as that which makes us 'read forward, seeking in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intention and a portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning' (1984: XIII) and argues for the importance of plot to our reading experience, seeing it as a product of our drive for meaning making in general (cf. McAdams 1993). Although we should add that the genre (mystery) of *The Futographer* also encourages 'reading for the plot', 'reading

for the plot' seems all the more relevant in a DF context, given the potentially disruptive nature of hyperlinks (e.g. Ciccoricco 2007; Miall and Dobson 2001; Pope 2006, 2010; Protopsaltis and Bouki 2005; Scharinger, et al. 2015; Vandendorpe 2009).

In line with these findings, our data also seems to support that readers do predict where links are going to go before following them, and that they make inferences in advance of following a link and subsequently search for relevance once they reach the destination lexia (Bell 2014; Tosca 2000). It is important to note that, although in only a few instances did participants indicate they had no expectations, our methodology explicitly asked participants about their expectations once they had followed a hyperlink, and might therefore have prompted readers to consider this aspect of the reading more strongly than they otherwise would have. Participants furthermore displayed 'narrative feeling' (Miall and Kuiken 2002: 223), often in conjunction with, perhaps unsurprisingly, the adoption of first-person, internal perspective in some instances during the second-person narration, confirming previous research on second person narration and reader identification (e.g. Bell et al under review; Brunyé et al. 2009; Brunyé et al. 2011; Ditman et al. 2010).

With regards to our typology, our analyses suggest that readers did recognise different types of links in several instances during the reading session, and that they displayed a tendency to opt for the link that seemed most clear and relevant to them, leading them to often prefer a BN link over other types of links. However, readers also showed they conceptualised some links differently than anticipated. Future research in reader-response studies to hypertext fiction may provide more detail into how readers perceive the function of hyperlinks, make predictions and engage in meaning-making once having followed a hyperlink.

It is also important to recognise that our data may have been affected by the researcher's presence during the study. Such influence cannot be eliminated from qualitative data (cf. Milroy 1987: 59), because participants will always react to the context of the situation, the researcher, and the order of the questions. Our methodology was designed to recognise and mitigate these effects by making the study as replicable as possible. As a replicable method, our reader-response

methodology can also be used to analyse other hypertext fiction. In offering an analysis of selections of *The Futographer* in combination reader-response analysis, this study forms part of a third wave of hypertext and DF scholarship in which empirical reader response studies are combined with stylistics analyses to develop an understanding of how readers process such highly medium-specific, multilinear narratives as DF.

9. Funding

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [funding reference: AH/K004174/1] as part of the Reading Digital Fiction project (www.readingdigitalfiction.com).

10. Data

The underlying research data are openly available from the Sheffield Hallam University Research Data Archive at: <https://shurda.shu.ac.uk/58/>.

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12. Appendix A: Holly, transcript BGR119 Holly SHURDA.docx lines 143-159

- 143- Holly: Okay, well um I think I'm gonna click on the new pics thing
145 because I mean, it doesn't matter to me that there was rain,
doesn't matter to me that, you know, the Danish i- is a thing
(hehe)
- 146 Researcher: Okay
- 147 Holly: Um, that's not really that relevant, it's the //pictures that I
- 148 Researcher: //Right, okay
- 149 Holly: Think are more important, because that's like the evidence,
really
- 150- Researcher: Okay, so what is – what in the text or context would you say
151 influences your decision to go for that one?
- 152 Holly: Um well – um firstly, like layout-wise, it's the one that's split
apart from the others, so
- 153 Researcher: Mm, yeah
- 154 Holly: //Which – you notice it straight away
- 155 Researcher: Yeah
- 156- Holly: Um and secondly, um yeah, like I said, the rain – the fact that
157 there was rain and the fact that there's a Danish really isn't
that important
- 158 Researcher: //Mm, okay
- 159 Holly: //I'm more interested in seeing all these photos I'm supposed
to be in, you know

13. Appendix B: Alfie, transcript BGR101 Alfie SHURDA.docx lines 168-190

168 Researcher: Yeah, so before you click, some after-questions, what is this part of the text about?

169- Alfie: Uh, this part of the text is finding out that I definitely - this
170 character, me, potentially, uh also interesting that it's second person, um it - it - yah, I've got a stalker apparently

171 Researcher: Okay

172 Alfie: Just finding out that suddenly this person is posting pictures of you

173 Researcher: And so does it relate to the previous part of the narrative?

174 Alfie: Yes, it's - it's very blatantly clear that everything follows

175 Researcher: Okay

176- Alfie: I wouldn't say follows a structure as it were, but it definitely
177 follows on from the previous

178 Researcher: Right

179 Alfie: Lexia, so there's

180 Researcher: //Right

181 Alfie: //There's a definite link there, there's no confusion about it

182 Researcher: Okay, so did you expect it to lead to this kind of thing then?

183- Alfie: I mean, narratively, I'm kinda - I'm kinda - what - what's the
184 phrase I'm looking for - preparing for the worst, hoping for the best

185 Researcher: //Okay

186 Alfie: //I don't want this character, who is ostensibly me

187 Researcher: Yeah

188 Alfie: To have a stalker, but I'm - yeah, yeah, it it - there's a stalker coming

189 Researcher: Okay

190 Alfie: I feel it, just inside me

14. Appendix C: Nathan, transcript BGR116 Nathan SHURDA.docx lines 673-684

673 Nathan: (exhales) Okay, so my options are last summer and you can have your thing back

674 Researcher: Oh yes, thing – yes

675- Nathan: Here's the thing, last time I clicked last summer, it took me to
677 what I expected and then straight after that it took me to what I didn't want to happen, I think – I'm worried the same thing will happen here

678 Researcher: //Okay

679- Nathan: //But my other option is thing, after she nods at someone
681 behind you, which has to be Tiresias (2) I don't know, I don't know, oh (5) I feel like either – I feel like either way I'm gonna end up face to face with Tiresias

682 Researcher: Yeah

683- Nathan: I feel like thing – clicking thing will make it happen
684 immediately, clicking last summer will give us more backstory, so I'm gonna click last summer again