



PROJECT MUSE®

Retracing the Hype about Hyper into Percival Everett

Zach Linge

African American Review, Volume 52, Number 1, Spring 2019, pp. 5-16 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/afa.2019.0001>



AFRICAN AMERICAN REVIEW

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/719813>

Retracing the Hype about Hyper into Percival Everett

In keeping with Roland Barthes's notion of the death of the author, and Jacques Derrida's emphasis on exploring reading and writing forces and structures over interpretation (Culler 260), hypertext appeared to decenter both author and reader, meaning and interpretation: It purported to no longer perform meaning within narrative linearity but instead to act within nonlinear networks of possibilities (Hayles, "Situating Narrative" 573), disrupting interpretative primacy and privileging attention to structure. Some scholars, however, were quick to enumerate this medium's limitations. David S. Miall, for instance, postulates, "The hypertext reader is liable to become restless" (205), and "the recurring requirement to choose among hypertext links imposes a template of self-awareness over the act of reading" (206). Since the early 2000s, relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to hypernarrativity in text. Visibly or not, however, the hyper continues to influence and to take form in both electronic and print media. Reviewing hypertext history—its origins and uses; its reception, both positive and critical; and its current statuses within (non)electronic literatures—I aim to reread the history of this medium in its physical archeology, past and present. I argue that the hyper has not, in fact, failed to persist as a form, but has instead resituated itself in the printed text and in so doing has challenged the technological limitations imposed upon its physical predecessors. I mobilize this articulation of the hyper as *re-physicalized* first by contextualizing this position in relation to media theory, and then by demonstrating its hermeneutic affordances—adapted from Judith Roof's treatment of "Everett's Hypernarrator" in Percival Everett's novels—in application to the latter's short stories. What results is an investigation of how the "hype" about hyper was lost, where it has resurfaced since, and what further considerations this hyper might merit with regard to additional texts that theorize or embody theories of inclusivity.

(Im)Material Communications: Relevant Hyper History

In Kittler's philosophical register, the treatment of any subject that does not consider its material pasts and origins alongside its material present fails to identify the "media-specific historical underpinnings" (*Gramophone* xxxiv) by which humankind conceives of itself, of technologies, and of technologies as indispensable to conceptions of self and vice versa. These media-specific underpinnings include recent *tekne*, but are traceable to older subjects and technologies: "it is such simple things as writing implements and writing surfaces," Kittler observes, "that determine the gain in power in which the introduction of scripts always results" ("History"). A potentially causal relationship between script and a "gain in power" should not, however, be read as part of some linear and irreversible process, but instead, as James Hutton asserts, as part of an Earth history defined "as a dynamic cycle of erosion, deposition, consolidation, and uplifting before erosion starts the cycle anew" (qtd. in Zielinski 4). When Kittler discusses communications technologies, then, what may appear as a cumulative history can be viewed not as a continuous

building upon the past but as one example of a much broader array of systems that exhibit similar qualities.

Kittler's discourse networks, or "communication systems," "comprise all kinds of media . . . from road systems to language" ("History"). As Jussi Parikka observes, these discourse networks operate not only metaphorically, but physically as well (93-94). In Parikka's media archeology, there is no divide between thing and non-thing; rather, the two are interwoven actors in a network, concomitant members of a given scale, or "punctualization," by which humankind can intervene, model, map, and establish proximity to and between parts within a single complex system, "used as a single object" of relation (147-48). In other words, within a complex system, our media technologies enable us to establish an artificial apparatus by which we can observe, articulate, form, and study parts of that system. *We* choose what we want to see; *tekne* determines the how, what, when, and where of such a choice.

Vilém Flusser denotes the "ephemeral role in the life of human beings" that linear texts once played (5-6) and observes that "the universe is disintegrating into quanta, judgments into bits of information" (15) akin to the computer's binary units of storage, and that contemporary humankind's conceptions of bodies in space, and information in conjunction with bodies, more nearly resemble a "brain" than a "village" (30). Terranova postulates that "cybernetics identified information (together with communication, command and control) as a central element of living organisms and physical systems" (286). Information was reconceived as a physical phenomenon. Claude Shannon's communication model exhibits this reconception as it pertains to communications, "given a logarithmic function" that could map and predict the physical flow of information; further, "information [was] also identified in molecular biology with negentropy, that is with the physical force which runs against the natural tendency of life to disintegration" (Terranova 286). These new models, according to Terranova, indicate a conceptual shift "towards a kind of hylomorphism (a new dualism of form and matter) or even a neo-Platonism (where life is reduced to the expression of a pattern that can be abstracted from a physical body and replicated across a number of media)" (286). This new dualism is not between mind and matter, or information and media, but instead between parts in processes of becoming: Matter and form, as function and representation, are inextricably linked components of (neg)entropic formation. Consequently, and beginning with Roof, we can now consider the negentropic quality of enframing, or the emergent characteristics of *différance* as applied to and extending from *physical* hypertexts like Everett's.

In Derrida, we see webs of association in lieu of self-same identity formations, arguments that fruitfully disentangle and frame as one traces their influences. Behind him, we see Michel Foucault. The function of an author, Foucault posits, "is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society" (1481). The author's name groups texts and so "differentiates them from others" (Foucault 1481). "In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse" (Foucault 1489), a *dispositif*, or "tangle, a multilinear ensemble" (Deleuze 159). The turn from a Romantic Author to a poststructuralist non-subject extends from the negentropic logic indebted to cybernetics. We observe logic and technology as a "series of variables which supplant one another," like vectors and tensors (Deleuze 159). The body gives way to its logarithmic function as the function gives way to the body; the two non-subjects operate within and on a matter of scale. The *dispositif* establishes "that we are difference, that our reason is the difference of forms of discourse, our history is the difference of times, that our selves are the difference of masks" (Deleuze 165). Seen in this way, the "self" is indistinguishable from its networks but for a matter of framing. This framing is hardwired into the physical technologies by which one apprehends and experiences reality—as temporal,

as mediated through the senses, as recorded in neural pathways in one's subjective experiences of time as chronological, as linear. All experiences, physical and ostensibly nonphysical, are thus tied to a self-same system within which these *dispositifs*, or, for Agamben, "apparatuses," operate by means of networks (14).

As (post)modernism responded to technologies of its own times with intertextuality, so hypertextuality emerges in response to newer *tekne*, specifically to "Hypertext Markup Language," the language used for creating web pages that relies on binary encoding technologies. The hypertext moves *beyond* "Hyper," in these new textualities, as it is liberated from the physical restraints of the printed page and is mediated instead by new, virtual interfaces. These interfaces' affordances include the tropes with which early hypertextual literature is associated. Johanna Drucker, in "Reading Interface," observes:

Like tables of contents, indexes, marginalia, and commentary, an interface performs rhetorically, presenting an argument as if it were a statement of fact, but engages us by presenting options. Go here, follow this, click, point, play, listen, search—all commands that are motivated by behaviors constrained by features and structures. (217)

A hypertextual narrative might begin somewhere, but proceeds nonchronologically through structured options for reading: One textual surface opens—through a hyperlinked word, phrase, image, or other—to another surface that in turn informs the first. A story thus proceeds nonlinearly, extends outward, and still somehow comments conversely upon itself.

Unlike the "choose your own adventure" story, however, the hypertextual narrative suggests it would extend *forever* outward, would incorporate even the most peripheral concerns. Digital hypertexts are structured like a tree: There is the central narrative thrust from which a reader commences reading, from which point she may act upon the text by making predetermined decisions that lead to a journey down one of many branches; within these branches, the story's potential is inevitably reduced to some semblance of a narrative end. I begin at the beginning; I perform my way into one of a few hypertextual narrative paths; and I follow this path to a predetermined terminus. Contrary to the hypertextual narrative's suggestion that it could extend forever outward, digital hypertextual narratives have not so much opened up possibilities for reading, they have delimited them. Further, as Jurgen Fauth's critique suggests, hypertextual narrative has at times privileged form over content: "Many of the hypertextual narratives found online are lacking in content and quality writing because the novelty of hypertext makes all other aesthetic concerns secondary" (qtd. in Moulthrop 655). Not all, but a sufficient number of, hypertextual narratives have privileged form, and their complexity dwindled—relative to the ideal of hypertextual space as one of infinitely many possibilities—when they began circumscribing themselves within rhizomatic structures.

What hypertext needed, and indeed what it came to find, was not the virtual rhizome, but a more complex structure that would better emblemize systems as recently understood. "Networks are multiplicities," note Galloway and Thacker, "not because they are constructed of numerous parts but because they are organized around the principle of perpetual inclusion" (60). The newly re-physicalized hypertexts, such as Percival Everett's stories, maintain the intertextual qualities of earlier, poststructuralist texts, but they extend in function, succeeding where the exclusively digital hypertext failed: Rather than delimiting narrative possibility, like the rhizomatic virtual hypertext, the re-physicalized hypertextual narrative signals an opening up of possibilities. Symbolism, cubistic planes of similarity, intentionally crafted allusive spaces, and the like serve to reinvigorate the "hype" in hypertextuality as it moves into the internet of things, performing intertextuality on physical planes that maintain the affordances of the digital and reach beyond.

Hypernarrative Fourierism in Percival Everett's Stories

I don't get mad too much anymore over shit like that. . . . It doesn't do any good to get mad at a tornado or a striking snake; you just stay clear. —Percival Everett, *darned if i do* (2004)

I guess by now I'm pretty much past getting offended. After all, you don't get mad at a snake when it bites you. —Percival Everett, interview with William W. Starr (2002)

“““They want to take my land from me,’ Darnell would tell the deputy. ‘And who’s they?’ the deputy would ask. Darnell would look at him like he was stupid and reply, ‘Why, the homosexuals’” (*Weather and Women* 82). Darnell Aimes, the protagonist of “The Bear as Symbol” in Percival Everett’s first short-story collection, is not a homophobic character. Those he calls homosexual may or may not be homosexual, may or may not exist at all. Darnell, who is determined to fight a bear with a knife, is not fighting a corporeal bear, although there is a bear, and it is corporeal. The bear is a symbol. The homosexual is a symbol. Divining these symbols’ meanings requires one to read between the signs, signifiers, and signifieds that Everett makes a career of obscuring, to look to the spaces between words, characters, settings, and names for, if not answers to the problem of how meaning is made in Everett’s texts, then at least additional questions that in themselves become the only approximations of meaning.

Evaluating Percival Everett’s four collections of short stories alongside his interviews evinces similarities between settings and characteristics that frame both the author’s and the stories’ protagonists’ (inter)related experiences. Throughout, nothing is ever only as it seems—like the bear or homosexual—and all seems always to point both elsewhere and back at itself. This portion of the essay applies Judith Roof’s treatment of Everett’s hypernarrator by demonstrating that, in the associations between Everett’s short stories, the construction of character is subordinate to the nonlinear, intertextual constructions by which the hypernarrative develops.

Everett’s hypertextual conversation appears to respond, at least by degrees of association, to Fourierism insofar as his short stories portray numerous protagonists at odds with expectations for sex and sexuality within tightly knit communities. The term *Fourierism* refers to the ideas of, or the movement in the United States and Europe in the mid-nineteenth century that responded to, François-Marie-Charles Fourier (Callahan 167). Fourier advocated sexually free agrarian communities—“phalanxes” or “phalanstères”—in which passion would both organize and encourage collective, harmonistic social production. *Unityism* (or *Harmonism*—he used these terms more or less interchangeably) refers to Fourier’s belief that the communal incorporation of its constituent members’ individual passions would result in a collective passion for the harmonization of the individual’s with the community’s good.

Judith Roof posits that “[t]he narrators of Percival Everett’s many novels have become hypernarrators, fronting a far more complex, systemic, multidimensional effect that reflects the growing complexity and paradigmatic shifts of narrative itself” (202). She demonstrates how Everett’s later novels are structurally and tellingly aware of their own potential for such innumerable activations, that “the hypernarrators of Everett’s fiction derive from multiple manifestations, working simultaneously as a multitude of possibilities” (204). These possibilities for the “working” of the fiction depend, as Everett himself states, on the reader’s participation (qtd. in Anderson 53). The reader finds that an engagement with the text, and the production of meaning through reading—as Anne-Laure Tissot observes of his short stories—“calls upon the reader’s memory and analytical mind, which in their turn set the text in motion, to bring about new meaning” (7). The memory

and analytical mind are both necessary insofar as the reader wishes to mirror in her reading the narratives' own complexities. One might approach Everett's fiction for storytelling at its most superficial and be satisfied, yet a deep engagement with the "multitude of possibilities" beneath the surface requires a trenchantly analytical operation. Such a reading illuminates only a few of the multiple manifestations from which Everett's fiction derives and serves only to suggest, as a start, the multitude of possibilities for how his hypernarrator works.

Toward this endeavor, I will use the aforementioned notion of Fourierism, one of the traceable "intra- and intertextual engagement[s]" (Roof 204) in Everett's stories, to frame a conversation about the subordination of individual characters to the resounding hypernarrative. To employ Fourierism as this frame would seem immediately anachronistic or peripheral, for what would appear, on first read, to be its loose connection to the texts. And yet, as Anne-Laure Tissut asserts, "The complexity of Percival Everett's short fiction lies in the creation of an allusive space, which turns out to be an elusive one, insistently pointing beyond the explicit layer of the text" (1). Should Everett's hypernarrator provide even the remotest allusion to any philosophy or ideology, then it would also fit with Roof's association of said narrator with Richard Feynman's "sum over histories" (203), whereby a reading of even the most peripheral text may open up to or indicate additional possibilities for narrative projection and meaning in the stories.

There is but one ostensible allusion to Fourier in Everett's four short-story collections. This allusion does not speak directly of Fourier; rather, the reader can choose to pursue what Roof denominates the "practice of association, possibility, multiplicity, and polysemy" (214) to reach Fourier through two intermediary personages.

In "Last Fair Deal," from *The Weather and Women Treat Me Fair*, the protagonist reacts to his older brother's characterization of the mole that ravages his ex-wife's garden: "'Atilla the Hun was *cute*.' He paused, looked at the mole. 'He's cute, but he's no Bonnie Jean Cox'" (49). This allusion is delivered ironically: The reader is not intended to believe that Atilla the Hun was "cute"; rather, Atilla was known to be a feared enemy and warlord. How to read the second allusion, however, is not so self-explanatory. Atilla's status as an obvious cultural figure makes the humorous function of Dan's allusion clear, but Bonnie Jean Cox is far less distinct and the purpose of her allusion more obtuse.

We do reach Fourier through Bonnie Jean Cox, however, whose name is a gift for the hypertext's reader in that there appears to be only one figure to which Everett's narrator could be alluding: "Bonnie Jean Cox" was the given name of American essayist and short-story writer Guy Davenport's wife. Tissut observes that, in Everett's short stories, "the narrators' oblique strategies may . . . consist in inserting apparently unimportant sentences which turn out to be loaded with useful meaning to the understanding of the story" (6). This apparently unimportant excerpt is loaded with such useful sentences. Connecting the reader only peripherally to Guy Davenport, Everett allows that reader the opportunity to enjoy the superficial plot, but also provides the material requisite to consider the parallels and purposes of parallels between Everett's writing and that of Guy Davenport. In this fashion, Everett's stories embody an opening up to hypernarrative readability: Readers may *choose* to engage the oblique reference, and in turn (re)read a story, multiple stories, or all of Everett's stories in relation to this additional node or edge in his hypernarrative graph, or they can instead simply proceed with the stories' most superficial plots.

Critics observe how Davenport's stories "proceed the way poems or collages proceed—through apparently random and arbitrary juxtaposition" (Quartermain 168), and that "the more one immerses oneself in them the more one discerns the texts' cohesion" (Furlani 62). Davenport cautiously referred to his texts not as

stories but as “assemblages” (Quartermain 180). These collages, assemblages, cubistic planes embody meaning molecularly, in surfaces, to perform the illusion of a cohesive whole, all the while providing the reader opportunities for departure into the broader network of texts within which Everett’s are situated. Much as Everett’s hypernarrator “operates a potentially infinite ordering” (Roof 204), assemblage endows Davenport’s texts with an ordering, reordering, and reading that positions the reader’s engagement as the locus of meaning-making: The “possibilities” are all always included in the construction of the text out of allusive surfaces.

An abundance of theoretical and experimental similarities between Davenport’s fiction and Everett’s remains unstudied, to include their similar experimentations with the meaning-making quanta between text and image, and their texts being situated, as Laurence Zachar argues, “‘aux frontières intergénériques’ where manifold modes are brought into concord” (Furlani 111). That the *frontières intergénériques* mirror the stated performances of the hypernarrator proceeds logically without further exploration. That Fourier might have inspired Everett’s writing does not necessarily follow, however, but its usefulness is culled from the associative value of an ideology even tangentially or abstrusely related to the organizing principle of hypernarrativity and so, at the least, presents its value as a means of reading the text.

“According to Fourier, human nature was driven—analogue to Isaac Newton’s law of gravitational attraction—by ‘passionate attractions’ such as taste, love, ambition, and the need for variety” (Callahan 167-68).¹ Among the shortcomings of “civilization,” as Fourier saw it, is its abandonment of the natural and inherently organizing principles of attraction in favor of socially constructed morals. Attraction “is the interpreter” of “Nature’s designs” (Fourier 54), and so to heed attraction would inevitably result in a harmonized social ordering and concern for the greater good. Unfortunately, “The learned world,” Fourier declares, “is wholly imbued with a doctrine termed Morality, which is a mortal enemy of passionate attraction.” He continues, “Morality teaches man to be at war with himself, to resist his passions, to repress them, to believe that God was incapable of organizing our souls, our passions wisely” (55).

Everett populates his stories with characters at war with themselves, unable to negotiate their natural desires within the confines of a civilization in which, as Fourier observes, “Love [is] stunted by legalized monogamy” (4). From the start, Everett associates divorce with humankind’s—and particularly man’s—appetite for variety: “It had been a short marriage,” describes the narrator in “A Good Home for *Hachita*,” from *The Weather and Women*. “It had been his over-fondness of women which ruined it” (17). The term *over-fondness* is itself immediately contextualized and moralized: To be over-fond in attraction means no more than to neglect “civilized” expectations for sex. Whatever the disruption to their marriage, the narrator makes clear the persuasion that monogamy did not suit the couple. Similarly, the narrator of “Exposure,” in *Half an Inch of Water*, reflects, “It had taken him six years to realize that he had been no good for [his ex-wife], in fact bad for her; six years to understand that she had abandoned [him and his daughter] as an act of survival” (59). While we have here that rare instance of divorce in which infidelity or a desire for it is not explicitly mentioned, the wife in this story could not survive within the confines of monogamy, and so had to abandon her family. Further, in “A Good Day for the Laughing Blow,” the narrator’s ex-wife partners with a woman (*Weather and Women* 27), and in so doing also disrupts heteronormative expectations of lifelong monogamy and heterosexual coupling—both tenets of the type of capitalistic, heteronormative civilization that Fourier rallied against.

The hypernarrator at times even employs supernatural phenomena to alert men to their dissatisfaction in monogamy, like the large fish in “Epigenesis,” from *damned if i do*, who declares to the protagonist: “You’re not happy” (154). The hypernarrator reaches into the supernatural, and appeals to Nature (with an

especially capital “N,” given the fish’s deific insight and speech ability), as Fourier entrusts Nature as the designer of Association. Frequently, the divorced protagonist is an artist of sorts, such as the recurrent figure of the abstract painter, or the writer. Michael, of “Dicotyles Tajacu,” is an abstract painter who “thought perhaps he had never really loved [his ex-wife], and was saddened by the knowledge that she had loved him, had wasted her time loving him” (*Big Picture* 58). Evan Keeler, from “A Good Home for *Hachita*,” is also a divorced painter (*Weather and Women* 16-17); and Rawley, in “True Romance,” is a single romance novelist (*damned if i do* 64). Divorce and sexual dissatisfaction, like other “effects” Roof observes are, in a “curiously New Critical manner, intrinsic to the novels’ thematic concerns” (205). The hypernarrator is united between and among stories and characters through its connection to recurrent themes, through the texts’ recast narrative line that, as Roof observes of the novels, “from its non-existent start, ramps its inherent multiplicities into a multidimensional continuum” (206). The reader must read between the texts of the texts, into the stories built between Everett’s stories.

One observes, in addition to nonfunctional monogamy and its effects, troubled representations of queerness that mirror the troubled Americanization of Fourierism: “Though in his published works Fourier avoided discussions of homosexuality, his manuscripts rank it along with other sexual preferences” (Manuel 7). In a Fourierist Utopia, natural attractions *are* morality—insofar as one can conceive of a Fourierist Utopia in relation to historical, “civilized” morality. As such, homosexual attraction is yet another thing in the world, not to be considered through the troubled lens of “civilized” morality, but as a fact among facts, like the desire for multiple partners, and any other attraction given by Nature. For Fourier, stifled attractions characterize corrupted civilization.

We see this corruption in every representation of queerness in Everett’s stories, without exception—even those in which the narrator is perhaps more sympathetic toward the non-heterosexual individual. The previously mentioned lesbian partnership in “A Good Day for the Laughing Blow” is between two “witches”; the ex-wife’s new lover is onomastically burdened with the name Lilith; and the ex-wife herself suggests a medieval stereotype of a witch, having lost custody of her son because she wishes to cannibalize him (*Weather and Women* 27-28). Not only is the first lesbian described as prone to cannibalistic infanticide, but the mortician from “Warm and Nicely Buried” in *damned if i do* is depicted as both a homosexual and a rumored necrophiliac (115).

As troubling as these and other representations of queerness are, the hypernarrator also perceives and describes non-heterosexual pairings in a manner that could be read as sympathetic. The at-times-detached tone toward the homosexual reads like Fourier’s own manuscripts: Such attractions are a fact among others, observed but not sanctioned. For example, Harry House, a madman from “House,” avoids the irises, where, “between the azaleas and the wall of the building, a number of the homosexual inmates sometimes gave each other blow jobs” (*damned if i do* 32). The sex act here is simply a fact (despite what it may owe to complicated stereotypes of homosexuality), one act among many and, notably, one the protagonist merely wishes to avoid. Further, one of the abstract painter protagonists in *Big Picture* tells his gay art dealer, “Go fuck yourself,” but follows this verbal attack with, “I don’t care what you do. All I know is, I don’t want to fuck you. And I don’t want you fucking me, which is what you just did there” (143). The sex act here is no longer quite so troubled a judgment, but is instead transposed into its polysemic social-symbolic although power-imbalanced alternative—“fucking me,” as a phrase, does not connote an egregious homophobia, a literal “fucking,” so much as the unwanted *nonsexual* act of taking advantage of someone. Thus, the hypernarrator’s ethical standing remains ambiguous, as it pertains not only to divorce and attraction to women but to homosexuality as well; the person whose sexuality deviates from the status quo of his or her community is at least observed, if not sanctioned.

The hypertext at times intervenes with aplomb, as with the case of the supernatural fish in “Epigenesis” or recurrent onomastic allusions that serve to deepen the stories’ multiple possibilities for meaning. At other times, narrative intervention takes the shape of inaction on the part of Everett’s protagonists. The drifter in “Cry About a Nickel” witnesses a rancher’s tying his son to a tree (*Weather and Women* 44) for reasons related not so much to his son’s possible homosexuality as to how his society reacts to its perception of his son’s sexuality. The narrator here intervenes insofar as the story is told, and the protagonist assesses the boy for his potential utility in relation to a community of laborers, not in relation to sex. Early in the story, he asks about the boy’s chores and asks him to help in the stables; toward the end of the story, he unties the boy from the tree.

And yet this same protagonist is inert to the extent that he chooses not to intervene further: “I wasn’t about to get involved,” he informs the reader. “My mother had a number of hobbies, but raising fools wasn’t one of them” (43). This protagonist possesses and acts upon the liberty to leave a community in which variety—in terms of both sexual orientation and race—is eradicated. The ability to leave consistently parochial communities, and/or the inability to flourish within said communities, characterizes almost every one of Everett’s protagonists, and thus positions his hypertext as the unified purview of strains between the “civilized” and the Fourierist individual—which is to say, for the latter, not an individual at all, in the sense that Morals would confine and conform him, but one of the variant “psychic times” required for a Fourierist Unityism, one of many whose behaviors would be accepted as the composite parts needed to balance “individual with group happiness” (Fourier 5).

Returning to “The Bear as Symbol,” we begin to understand that the “homosexual” in this story represents social wariness toward any force that would threaten community function, as does the bear. The hypertext observes, “Darnell had never seen what he called a homosexual. Old man Wooster down the hill fancied boys all his life, but he weren’t no homosexual, he were just funny. Harmless” (*Weather and Women* 82). Darnell is a member of a community of people with a common interest: the preservation of land and lifestyle. He does not discriminate based on sex or sex act; rather, he aims his disdain at those who would threaten his community.

Although same-sex acts and partnerships do surface on occasion throughout Everett’s four short-story collections, the reader must approach each characterization of homosexuality from multiple directions at once, as she must when reading the hypertext’s portrayals of divorce. Divorce first paints planes of similarities between multiple protagonists for cubistic effect. The hypertext demonstrates no haughtier an indictment of divorce than the same intertextual voice might have for their also being painters or novelists (activities people simply *perform*). In the same vein, although perhaps complicated by how troubled many of the queer characters are, the hypertext presents queerness primarily to demonstrate responses, in a community, to the “other,” and the ubiquity with which civilized morality sanctions.

Applied Fourierism illustrates how Everett’s protagonists exemplify the limited philanthropy that is “civilized” morality and its deductive strata for attraction based on sex and society; it gestures toward the multidimensional coordinates of meaning-making that is assemblage itself, in the text’s very inclusion of the allusion to Davenport, an allusion that opens the stories to a reading through Davenport’s critical foci and creative concerns. Assemblage, one such concern, surfaces in Everett’s four collections of short stories as the hypertext, which creates meaning not only as one reaches outside the text itself—toward Fourier, for example—but also as one reaches within and between the texts of the texts, with any lens as an organizing principle, to witness the stories built between the reader and

the story; the story and the story, in or outside the text; the story and the author; the reader and the author; and all potentially infinite orderings that proceed from these associations.

Conclusion

What Everett's stories provide as an example is an opportunity to consider how the renegotiated hypertext, resituated in the physical text, enacts and embodies a form of narrativity that better fulfills the hyper's potential. Everett's hypertext opens the text back up to a process of reading-upon that is perpetually inclusive, like a graph. By taking one of the most oblique references from one of Everett's stories, I have aimed to demonstrate what Judith Roof theorized: that "these narrators, culled as they are from the narration, leave no mode behind, attesting, instead, to a radiant simultaneity, a beaming intra- and intertextual engagement that breaks down holistic specificity" (204). Everett's are not merely stories, insofar as linear or even (post-)modern nonlinear narratives are concerned, so much as they are networks of possibilities predicated upon their media-specific historical underpinnings—namely, the epistemologies formed in response to virtual technologies, to virtually mediated storytelling. Pluck one string in Everett's graph, and a multitude of interconnected edges shiver in response.

What one finds in Everett's hypertext is the endless "beyond," such that this perpetual inclusivity and uncontain(ed/able) referentiality, at its most basic level, allows users and readers to access related texts; secondly, through these references, the hypertext encodes the hypertext with additional readings, interpretations, and meanings precisely through a consideration of their metaphorical structures over their content; thirdly, the narrator highlights the necessity of choosing a scale within which to read the hypertext; and fourthly, this narrator illustrates, however subtly or implicitly, the ontologies of all bodies within systems—their identities cluster not as essential formations, but as addresses negotiated via difference in relation to other data. As Bruno Latour famously stated: "Networks have no inside, only radiating connectors. They are all edges. They provide connections but no structure. One does not reside in a network, but rather moves to other points through the edges" (46). The hypertext in print is a salve to nascent, digital hypertexts' clunkiness. It provides for the option of engaging a story's opening up of possibilities—an opening up that *was* the hype about the hypertext to begin with, its potential for always pointing outward from itself to related edges, and in turn to comment back on itself, to reform and reveal as always already reformed the original data clusters the user experiences only superficially as characters, themes, plots, and references.

Fourier's Unityism or Harmonism—*i.e.*, a Fourierist ideal—serves as such a framing mechanism. Tracing Everett's stories' treatment of divorce and queerness points outward, beyond the texts themselves, engaging one of their multilinear motions to other authors, other times, other technologically predicated apparatuses. The bear in "The Bear as Symbol" is not only a bear, and not *not* a bear: Strictly speaking, it is at once corporeal *and* noncorporeal, a signifier and the "sum over histories" of its potentially infinitely ordered, associated parts. Yes, there is a bear in these stories; and yes, there are troubling representations of queerness throughout; there is a preoccupation with divorce; and each of these symbols functions on the literal planes of the stories—*i.e.*, as characters getting, or characters after having gotten, divorced, and the like—but each occurrence also reaches outward, toward another: In thematic through-lines between all of Everett's stories, readers also find

an invitation to apply their own systems of categorization; further, Everett offers systems to use as such when he opens these texts through intermediary personages to other authors, other social-systems thinkers. The fact of Everett's having alluded to Davenport at the very least acknowledges his having read Davenport, and the structural similarities between Everett and Davenport speak to the latter's relevance in considering Everett's goals for his own literary projects. Moreover, when the preoccupations of one author so closely resemble another's—like Davenport's critical interest in Fourier and Everett's own thematic continuity between stories, which both echo a social wariness toward any force that might threaten the community function—the space allotted to chance and circumstance disintegrates. In its wake, we find Everett framing his characters by qualities as quanta, his stories by similarities contained within their own discourse networks, and his literary project by its media-specific historical underpinnings—the hyper as an ideal for moving *beyond*, *above*, *in addition to* what appears, on first consideration, the substance of the text.

To gesture toward further applications for this hypernarrator and its role in Everett's stories, I wish to position the shift from the digital to the physical hypertext in additional relations to the human body. In *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, Katherine Hayles describes “complex feedback loops” that emerge between “contemporary literature, the technologies that produce it, and the embodied readers who produce and are produced by books and technologies” (2169). Hayles's is of course only one text on a shelf of books that define and theorize the hyper, but her point regarding the embodied readers is best suited for the following application. To understand the shift from digital to physical hypertexts we must first appreciate the complexity of information systems, but we should also recognize that this shift is further locatable in and likely influenced by the embodied reader-subjects of other texts that more directly address inclusivity.

Hypertext fails within the virtual because it activates too limited an equation. The virtual hypertext's Lacanian and/or rhizomatic register(s) give(s) way, in the physical, to more complex graphs—or for urban designer Christopher Alexander, the use of a semi-lattice in set theory as metaphor for systems (Easterling 34). In application to nonvirtual systems, complex systems theories signal a “return” to the seemingly entropic physical environs and bodies, endowing them with the newly recognized negentropy of framing. On one front, this translates to a disavowal of current computational capacities that seek to explain or illustrate by means of binary computation or rhizomatic systems (perhaps another reading for thematic xenophobia). By extension, this transition is marked by a renaissance of conceptual inclusivity, equity, and positionality.

Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, admonishes the Western mode of “convergent thinking” and “analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal.” She advocates “divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (101). For Anzaldúa, as for Derrida, the goal is to “deconstruct, construct” (Anzaldúa 104). Similarly, in Donna Haraway's celebrated “Cyborg Manifesto,” she proposes a cyborg thinking akin to Anzaldúa's “mestiza consciousness” and postulates, “There is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction” (181). Both of these texts call for an experience of boundaries that celebrates difference, that moves toward an inclusive space that acknowledges and operates upon the principles of fissure and ambiguity within the structure of permeability. Relatedly, Franco Berardi observes, “The bio-info automaton is taking shape at the point of connection [between] electronic machines, digital languages, and minds formatted in a way that complies with its codes” (107), although he postulates that “the automaton will never be assimilable

to the human being because human specificity lies in the relation between conscious rationality and the Unconscious” (108). The hypertext, as evidenced in Everett’s texts, overcomes the automaton’s inability to assimilate: This narrator forges new possible connections by forever gesturing forever outward from, and back into, the text, thus eliding the machinic with the subconscious; this reader need never explore every territory with which the text is connected, but she can. These connections, within this newly re-divided consciousness, are highlighted and emphasized in the physical text, in its very physicality (the books’ edges) and structural story limitations (that the story is always still written upon by the reader, by other texts).

That Everett’s hypertext exemplifies methodological uncertainty, inconclusiveness, inclusion, and an awareness of boundaries that is both physical and structural as well as thematically and allusively articulated cannot require restatement. His stories resolve themselves to the irresolvable in extant technologies: namely, that the printed text, as the virtual, can model and sometimes predict, but cannot yet mediate to the point of certainty all nodes, edges, and interactions in the complex systems of his stories, which is also the information universe that he himself inhabits. Everett’s hypertext appears to respond, to some extent, to calls for speakers, authors, subjects that open up the impermanence of boundaries between self and other (dis)similar nodes and edges in the network, that celebrate while also drawing attention to boundaries. The hype about hyper—that it would usher in new democratic possibilities for meaning between the reader and author functions—continues to be written upon; we need only look back at the physical text.

1. Fourier’s phrase, which Callahan cites here as “passionate attractions,” is best and most widely translated as “passional attractions.”

Note

- Agamben, Giorgio. *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009.
- Anderson, Forrest. “Teaching Voice and Creating Meaning: An Interview with Percival Everett.” Weixlmann 51-56.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 2012.
- Berardi, Franco “Bifo.” “Malinche and the End of the World.” *The Internet Does Not Exist*. Berlin: Sternberg, 2015. 100-09.
- Callahan, Kevin J. “Fourierism.” *The Encyclopedia of Politics: The Left and the Right*. Vol. 1: The Left. Ed. Rodney P. Carlisle. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005. 167-68.
- Culler, Jonathan D. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982.
- Deleuze, Gilles. “What Is a Dispositif?” *Michel Foucault, Philosopher: Essays Translated from the French and German*. Ed. Timothy J. Armstrong. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992. 159-68.
- Drucker, Johanna. “Reading Interface.” *PMLA* 128.1 (2013): 213-20.
- Everett, Percival L. *Big Picture: Stories*. Saint Paul: Graywolf, 1996.
- . *damned if I do: Stories*. Saint Paul: Graywolf, 2004.
- . *Half an Inch of Water*. Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2015.
- . *The Weather & Women Treat Me Fair*. Little Rock: August House, 1987.
- Flusser, Vilém. *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design*. London: Reaktion, 2015.
- Foucault, Michel. “What is an Author?” Leitch 1475-90.
- Fourier, Charles. *Design for Utopia: Selected Writings of Charles Fourier*. Trans. Julia Franklin. New York: Schocken, 1971.
- Furlani, André. “‘When Novelists Become Cubists’: The Prose Ideograms of Guy Davenport.” *Style* 36.1 (2002): 111-30.
- Galloway, Alexander R., and Eugene Thacker. *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007.
- Haraway, Donna. “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.” *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991. 149-81.

**Works
Cited**

- Hayles, Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999.
- . "Situating Narrative in an Ecology of New Media." *Modern Fiction Studies* 43.3 (1997): 573-76.
- "hyper." *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2018. Web.
- Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.
- . "The History of Communication Media." *CTheory.net*. 30 July 1996. Web.
- Latour, Bruno. "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" Leitch 2282-2301.
- Leitch, Vincent B., ed. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2010.
- Manuel, Frank E. Foreword. Fourier 3-49.
- Miall, David S. "Confounding the Literary: Temporal Problems in Hypertext." *From Codex to Hypertext: Reading at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Anouk Lang. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2012. 203-16.
- Moulthrop, Stuart. "Pushing Back: Living and Writing in Broken Space." *Modern Fiction Studies* 43.3 (1997): 651-74.
- Parikka, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2015.
- Quartermain, Peter. "Writing as Assemblage: Guy Davenport." *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1992. 166-81.
- Roof, Judith. "Everett's Hypernarrator." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 43.2 (2013): 202-15.
- Starr, William W. "I Get Bored Easily." 2002. Weixlmann 18-23.
- Terranova, Tiziana. "The Concept of Information." *Theory, Culture & Society* 23.2-3 (2006): 286-88.
- Tissut, Anne-Laure. "Moments of Control: Reading Percival Everett's Short Stories." *Reading Percival Everett: European Perspectives*. Ed. Claude Julien and Anne-Laure Tissut. Tours: François Rabelais UP, 2007. 29-38.
- Weixlmann, Joe, ed. *Conversations with Percival Everett*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2013.
- Zielinski, Siegfried. *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2006.