A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PRINTED AND HYPERTEXT NOVEL *10:01* BY LANCE OLSEN

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by

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SATU KAJIAN PERBANDINGAN NOVEL *10:01* BERCETAK DAN HIPERTEKS KARYA LANCE OLSEN

ABSTRAK

Dalam era pascamoden, kesan daripada pengaruh timbalbalik antara novel bercetak dan media digital, telah menghasilkan antara naratif dengan persekitaran interaktif sehingga dapat melahirkan genre-genre baru seperti cereka hiperteks. Pengarang seperti Lance Olsen telah mengadaptasikan novel bercerita pascamodennya yang bertajuk *10:01* kepada cereka hiperteks yang bersifat digital dengan tajuk yang sama. Adaptasi ini telah menimbulkan beberapa persoalan; begaimana struktur naratif cereka hiperteks ini berbanding dengan yang novel bercetak yang dihasilkannya? Seterusnya, apakah pengalaman estetik yang dialami oleh pembaca yang membaca kedua-dua bentuk cereka itu? Bagi menjawab persoalan-persoalan ini, kajian telah mengenalpasti dua objektif. Pertama; menganalisis persamaan dan perbezaan struktur naratif antara novel pascamoden yang bercetak dengan cereka hiperteks yang berbentuk digital. Kedua meneliti pengalaman estetik pembaca yang membaca kedua-dua bentuk cereka berkenaan. Kajian ini, adalah satu kajian perbandingan yang berasaskan kepada teori genre yang mengkaji perkembangan genre novel bercetak kepada novel hiperteks yang menggunakan medium digital. Kemudian teori hiperteks yang merupakan ekstensi kepada pascastrukturalisme digunakan untuk membandingkan struktur naratif kedua-dua bentuk cereka ini. Seterusnya, pengalaman estetik pembaca pula akan dianalisis dengan menggunakan teori skema di mana perhatian diberikan kepada bagaimana unsur-unsur mutimedia telah memberi kesan kepada pengalaman estek pembaca. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa setelah transformasi dilakukan terhadap novel bercetak

10:01, beberapa ciri-ciri cereka pascamoden dikekalkan dalam cereka hiperteks *10:01* tetapi dalam gaya yang berbeza. Kedua-dua novel, iaitu bercetak dan digital ini memperlihatkan persamaan dari segi desentaraliti, multivokaliti dan keterbukaan teks, namun berbeza dari segi intertekstualiti dan multilinearlitinya. Kajian ini juga mendapati perbezaan struktur naratifnya telah membawa kesan kepada perbezaan pengalaman estetik. Didapati bahawa cereka hiperteks *10:01* yang bersifat interaktif dan ditambah dengan penggunaan multimedia telah menjadikan cereka hiperteks ini lebih kompleks. Kewujudan pelbagai pautan dan unsur-unsur mutimedia dalam ruang digital ini telah memberi kuasa kepada pembaca untuk membuat pentafsiran dalam mod yang lebih terbuka dan keterlibatan. Hal ini telah meningkatkan pengalaman diorietasi, interaktiviti dan keterlibatan (engagement) pembaca dalam konteks pengalaman estetiknya.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PRINTED AND HYPERTEXT NOVEL *10:01* BY LANCE OLSEN

ABSTRACT

In the postmodern era, the mutual impression between printed literature and digital media has embedded narratives into interactive environments and new genres like hypertext fiction are created. Lance Olsen has adapted his postmodern printed novel entitled *10:01* into the hypertext version which is in the digital form. Considering that both novels are postmodern literary works by the same author this adaptation has produced certain questions; how can the narrative structure of the hypertext fiction be compared to the printed one? The second question that arises is how can aesthetic experiences be different in the reading processes of both versions? To answer these questions, this study identified two objectives: first, analyzing similarities as well as differences between the narrative structures of the postmodern printed novel *10:01* and its hypertext fiction. Then, the second objective is to analyze and compare the aesthetic experience of reading both texts. This comparative study applied the genre theory to study the development of the printed novel into the digital novel. Further, utilizing the hypertext theory as an extension of poststructuralism to compare the concepts of narrative structures and readers in both novels has expanded the discussion. Lastly, the supplementary theory of schema is brought into play for analyzing reader's mental process and his/her required characteristics while meaning making within multimedia elements and experiencing immersion and engagement.

By close readings and outlining some particularly narrative strands and multimedia elements this study concluded that postmodern characteristics are retained in both novels, but they are preserved in different styles. The findings illustrate that, both versions have rather similar decenterality, multivocality, and

textual openness, but they are different in intertextuality and multilinearity to some extent. The thesis also found that the differences in the narrative structures impact on reader's aesthetic experience. Indeed, the interactive and multimedia-oriented narratives of hypertext *10:01* are more complex and challenging in compare to the printed one. The existence of various hyperlinks and multimedia elements in a digital space empowers the reader highly in making different interpretations in a more liberated and engaging mode. In the context of aesthetic experience, this resulted in intensifying of reader's disorientation, interactivity and engagement.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Twentieth century and contemporary literature are characterized by an increased attention to the writing process as an inherent part of the written product. This enhanced textual awareness is reinforced by a mutual influencing between literature in print and digital media (Van Hulle, 2007: 139). This is caused by changing in understanding of a nature of art and its forms. Any artistic innovation in a literary work started to be seen as a part of reality and therefore, reader's experience. In this way, digital literature provides an opportunity to open up intellectual life more broadly than ever before and to create a fertile soil in which humanity can cultivate the life of the mind with greater vigor and joy (Crane, Bamman, Bebeu, & Shreibman, 2008: 32).

Postmodernism foregrounds a profound cultural movement in which modernist approaches of the world and the conception of the passive audience are greatly challenged. Just as the twentieth century faces an explosion on interest in the book as a medium, with an impressive canon of artists' books as an artistic and literary venue, electronic literature also has seen a growing body of works as an extension of printed works but by implementing programmable media as the material basis for artistic innovation and creation. This shift in cultural perspective has influenced many fields, including literary criticism in which a French literary theorist Roland Barthes explores a changing notion of author and authority of a literary text. Barthes eloquently announces the death of the author by arguing that meanings in literary text do not come from the author, but they come into existence through its

language (Barthes, 2001). Indeed, in postmodern literary text original and old literary genres are used in collaboration with new, artistic and innovative techniques and elements in a different cultural context to depict a difference between the past and present forms of literary representations and to offer a creative potential of the authors and readers simultaneously.

Alan Liu affirms John Walsh's statement that the nineteenth century and industrial revolution are in large part the parents of the digital age and perhaps digital literature invites us to reconsider and understand how the traditional print codex actually works (Liu, 2007: 22). However, it is not until the development in computer technologies in the 1980s that we begin to witness a heavy examination of these new media forms by scholars like George Landow, who is fascinated to see among other things an almost embarrassingly literal embodiment of theory and technology. In fact, today's media environment is characterized by technological development, and a modern way of reading caused by introduction of a computer and internet. The computer is no longer simply a tool; it is a medium and providing readers with a set of new media forms and genres, just as printing, the cinema, radio, and television have done before. We are living in an age of digitalization and electric text which forces us to take our dreams for reality.

Essentially, one can view electronic literature as literary-oriented works that exist off the printed page and make use of qualities specific to the electronic medium like: sound, visual elements, animation, and real-time delivery. For Kate Pullinger, the digital environment is simply an additional platform for stories, and to her, the internet offers nothing to us, apart from an additional means of communication and leaving the story very open to the reader's own imaginative interpretation (Pullinger, 2008). The post-industrial revolution with its electronic technology has produced the

computerized/electronic text-hypertext. N. Katherine Hayles describes electronic literature as the first generation digital object created on a computer and meant to be read on a computer (Hayles, 2008). Many hypertext devotees believe that the word 'hyper' in hypertext has the meaning of extending into another dimension; it breaks down our habitual way of understanding and experiencing a text and has important implications for changing a concept of the text. Michael Shepherd and Carolyn Watters obtained that the combination of literature, computer and internet has resulted in the emergence of new literary genres like hypertext fiction (Shepherd & Watters, 1998). This sub-genre of a novel has the potential to integrate postmodernism into our perception of the world. It exemplifies non-linear thinking, and illustrated the role of context in generating meaning.

Adapting a print source like a novel to another genre or medium is one of the aspects of literary transformation. As Marshall McLuhan indicates that the medium is the message (McLuhan, 2003), therefore, print novels which are transformed into hypertext version have a new message and should be compared as a part of comparative literature discipline to assess and discuss the transformation in nature, narrative structures and reader's response to both mediums. This adaptation can disrupt traditional ideas of genre, and allow meaning to be mutable through the reader's participation. Moreover, hypertext fiction is the ultimate show and tell of the postmodern literature in which, reader's active role in reading and navigating makes sense of disparate texts and multimedia elements.

Landow who is probably the most enthusiastic literary proponent of hypertext affirms that hypertext systems which insert every text into a web of relations allow for non-sequential reading and thinking. He claims that poststructuralist notions of text have propounded by Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault

could now be tested and realized in hypertext and also post-structuralism is an appropriate framework to understand hypertext and formation of its theory (Landow, 2006). Hence this brings us to the movement in which hypertext theory and post-structuralism come into contact. In all this, hypertext fiction corresponds to what become the signifiers of postmodernism. Furthermore, as comparative literature is an interdisciplinary field whose practitioners study literature across national borders, time periods, languages, genres, and across boundaries between literature and the other arts, therefore, adaptation of postmodern printed novels into the hypertext medium has created a challenging zone for study. This has led the motivation for this research to compare the nature, narrative structure, and readers' reading processes of both versions of Lance Olsen's novel *10:01*; which is adapted from its printed form to the hypertext version in collaboration with a multimedia artist Tim. S. Guthrie in 2005.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

A precise look into the transformational changes in the nature and narrative structure of literary texts like the novels that have been adapted under the influence of new media technology and as an extension of post-structuralism is crucial. Considering why have computer technologies emerged to reconfigure print structures, and to show why the relation between authors and readers or texts and readers have rearranged by situating the reader as a player of the hypertext is essential.

The question is that what are the similarities of the two genres of print and hypertext novels that identify them as postmodern novels, and if they are both from

postmodern literature, so what are the distinctive characteristics that distinguish them to the two different genres and specific literary works? What modification will be applied on a nature and narrative structure of the printed novel when it is adapted to hypertext version? In what way the hypertext version of novels like *10:01* represents postmodern concepts to retain the literary status of printed form once it has become digital. As such the second question arises is that what forms of reading will be experienced in the both versions while reading and navigating within different spaces and how reader's impressions are unique and comparable in this meaning making process? Further, what types of materiality does reader deal with in this literary adaptation and what elements of multimedia affect reader' aesthetic experiences of immersion and engagement are significant issues to be considered.

To state the problem in another outlook is that whether reader's navigation of a fictional hypertext which causes interactivity, disorientation and decentering grant the same aesthetic experiences of reading postmodern printed text or not and how new digital possibilities in storytelling let the reader to play in a text? How the structure of narratives differs in defining qualities of the medium include: interactivity, multivocality, intertextuality, decentering and in what way multimedia environment of hypertext fiction offers experimental elements for testing and justifying readers' experiences. The problem is emphasized by considering the claim that hypertext fiction offers a more satisfying experience because of its associative, non-linear and therefore, more true-to-life structures (Pope, 2010).

1.3   Objectives of the Study

The present study has two objectives that are principal.

1. First objective is to study the similarities and differences in narrative structures of the printed novel *10:01* by comparing with its hypertext version.

2. The second objective of this study is to analyze and compare the aesthetic experience of reading both texts.

Indeed, the initial objective will be done by considering the questions of postmodern print conventions in hypertext fiction and to examine the two genres and their interaction. Deliberating how technology and digital media have influenced the printed literature and particularly to what extent new media can transform the narrative concepts are also intended in the first objective. The second objective also will be gained by analyzing the relationship between the reader and the texts and evaluating the aesthetic experience. Although both versions belong to the postmodern literature and sharing certain identical characteristics but illustrating that which one offer more immersive and engaging experience is essential. How the multimedia space via elements like sounds, graphics, animations impact on the reader's interpretation and their meaning making in compare with printed version is another target. Therefore, examining and comparing the reader's involvement in both versions will be conducted as another aim in the second objective. This comparison is essential in a way as Micheal Shepherd quotes Marshall McLuhan's observation that, "The objectives of a new media have tended, fatally, to be set in terms of the parameters and frames of the older media" (Shepherd & Watters 1998: 3). It is predicted that the result obtained from these assessments will broad the views about

postmodern novels particularly hypertext fiction for opening remarkable perspectives to this new genre.

1.4   Scope and Limitations

In deliberating for the issues about comparing the nature of hypertext with printed novels, Olsen's postmodern printed novel *10:01* and its hypertext version have been selected for this study. Both the novels are characterized as postmodern due to their intertextuality, technoculture, hyperreality, paranoia, participation, temporal distortion and magical realism. The reason as to why these texts from the same author have been selected is that, firstly, an extensive amount of criticism and commentary have been done on the first-generation hypertext fictions like Michael Joyce's *afternoon: a story* which is the first hypertext fiction to make use of the StorySpace program and Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden,* which is the first hypertext fiction to use a graphical map in its narrative space. However, there have been fewer attempts on the second generation hypertext fictions (1995 onwards) which are more multimodal and consist of not only labyrinth texts but also digital elements. Secondly, hypertext *10:01* has multimedia elements such as sound, animation and graphics, which allow for the creation of texts that are not constrained by the physical necessities of a book and provide a suitable framework for analysis of the multiple and largely unused possibilities of the printed novel in compare to its hypertext version. Thirdly, its printed form is the postmodern novel which is converted to hypertext version and creates the main idea of this research problem for comparison of the two versions because both are postmodern novels by the same author. Finally, as readers are unlikely to make a direct transition to a digital fiction

from a printed novel, by selecting the digital version of the same novel that is already familiar to them this problem is diminished, and the two can effectively act in collaboration with each other.

Olsen is a professor at Utah University and serves as a chair of the board directors at Fiction Collective Two (FC2); founded in 1974, it is one of America's best-known ongoing literary experiments and progressive art communities. He is the winner of a Pushcart Prize in 2011, and his novel *Tonguing the Zeitgeist* which has been translated into different languages was a finalist for Philip K. Dick Award. He is praised by Publisher's weekly, "Olsen is a master of an evocative and expressive prose" (Publisher's weekly, 2012: para 5). He is the Mary Ellen von der Heyden Berlin Prize in Fiction Fellow at the American Academy in Berlin from January through May 2013 (Fulton, 2012). Moreover, Olsen is the Mellon International Visiting Senior Scholar at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, during October 2013. He is a fiction editor at *Western Humanities Review.* Brooklyn Rail admired Olsen's pen "Striking, shocking . . . In the world of contemporary fiction, Lance Olsen is a rockstar" (as cited in Anti-Oedipus Press, 2013: para. 4).

Olsen is the postmodern author and has written twelve novels namely: *Theories of forgetting* (2014)*, Calendar of Regrets* (2010), *Head in Flames* (2009), *Anxious Pleasures: A Novel After Kafka* (2007) and also one new-media text, four critical studies, four short-story collections, and a textbook about fiction writing. He is adored by Paul Di Filippo in *Asimov's science fiction Magazine*, "Lance Olsen is a writer whose technical ingenuity is matched only by his fertility of invention and compassion for his characters" (Filippo, 2005, para. 22). Moreover, the hypertext version of his novel *10:01* (2005) is published in Electronic Literature Organization (ELO) and is made in collaboration with a media artist Tim. S. Guthrie who was

selected as Best New Media Artist in 2007. In spite of the fact that the printed and digital novels of this study are chosen from the postmodern literature, but they are different in their genres. The print genre of this study *10:01* is written in pertain to post-structuralism elements, and the digital one is made within hypertext theory and as an extension to post-structuralism. The following figure is a screen shot of the home page of hypertext *10:01*:
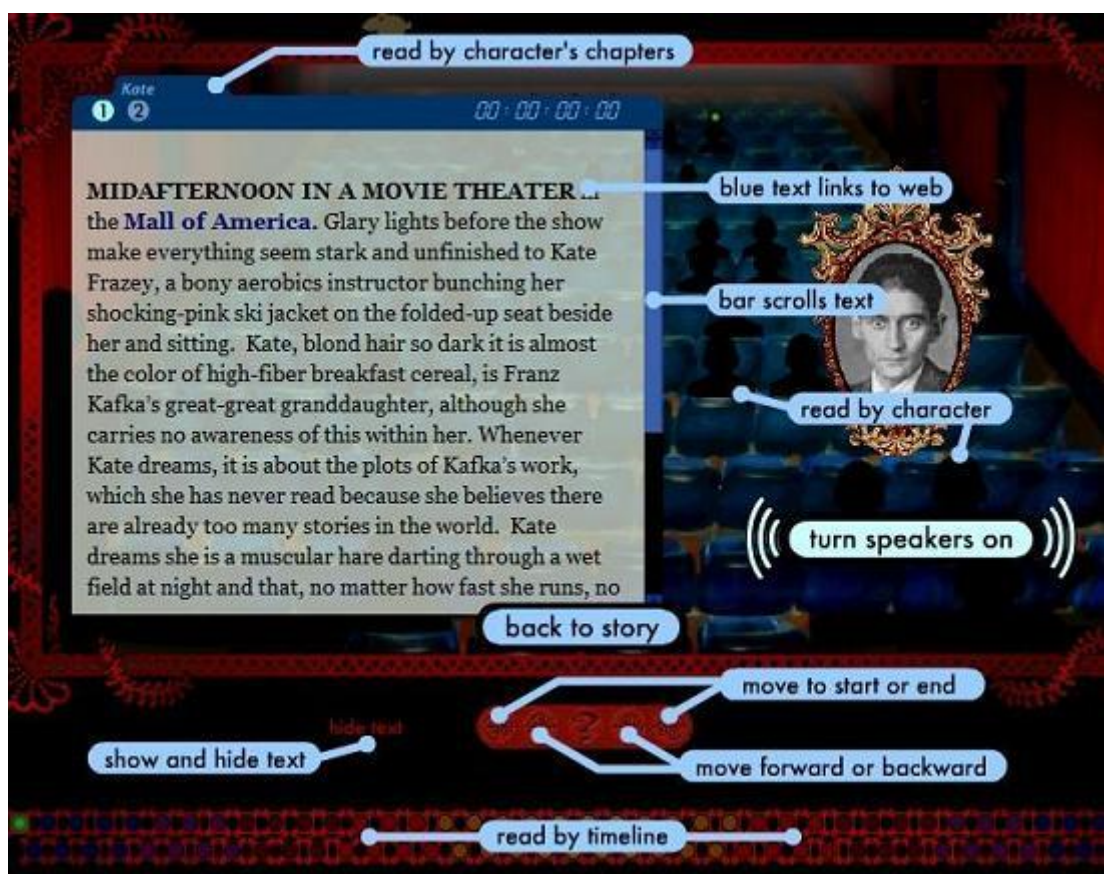
Figure 1.1 Home page of the hypertext *10:01*

Marie-Laure Ryan explains that of all the pleasure of literature, none is more fulfilling to the embodied mind than immersing itself in a fictional world. Further, she adds that hypertext fictions have made important contribution to immersion through their act of make-believe by transferring readers from the world of imagination to a virtual reality in the duration of readers' involvement with the text

and distinctive properties of digital media (Ryan, 2001b). Therefore, understanding how hypertext fiction works in compare with printed novel and how readers interact with computing literary texts and utilizing the rich potential of multimedia is an essential part of the literary possibilities which will be the scope of this study as well.

Additionally, hypertext theory by Landow will be used as a tool for evaluating the quality of hypertext fiction *10:01* and its comparison with printed form due to his great contribution to this new genre with his seminal book *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Literary Theory and Technology*. According to Hayles, this influential book is considered a "landmark" in the academic studies in which Landow states the view that the interpretive agenda of post-structuralist literary theory anticipated the essential characteristics of hypertext (Hayles, 2008). Susana P. Tosca affirms, "Landow attempts to convince humanities' academics that the computer is a serious object of study and not an enemy as well as his efforts to place hypertext at the top of the evolutionary textual chain" (Tosca, 2006: 1). This reason has made him a brilliant hypertext theorist to be selected for this study. Furthermore, concepts of other poststructuralists also will be utilized to distinguish *10:01* from previous works.

1.5   Significance of the Study

The act of reading a book, for most avid readers, is a treasured one. Novels have long been forms of escape and relaxation, offering stimuli for thought and exposure to new and distant worlds. Print fiction of various genres continues to fascinate readers, even in an age of dominated by digital literature culture (Bolter, Pond & Gery, 2001). However, nowadays there is a great connection between

literature and technology, and transformation of literary texts into electronic environments has many implications. New electronic reading environment should be taken as the starting point for continuing, extending, and modifying the history of the print literature.

It is significant to know that in 2011, new works of electronic literature were published at least every week, and in January 2012, the ELMCIP Knowledge Base (Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice) had fifty eight records of creative works of electronic literature published in 2011. Additionally, there are records of more than thirty creative works every year from the year 2000 onwards (Rettberg, 2012: 4). This survey solely in itself indicates that many authors and scholars have entered and started their contributions in the electronic literature around the World. Therefore, one of the most important and profound implications of studying digital literature is that it challenges students of Malaysia and Iran to compete in a highly technological atmosphere. In fact, technology is an inevitable aspect of education today and multimedia features allow teachers to motivate and engage students and create a dramatic impact on them while learning.

Further, digital technologies have been so widely accepted in both industry and the scholarly world in America and Europe which necessitates the authorities in ministry of education of Asian countries like Iran and Malaysia to consider digital syllabi for keeping the students' minds and their qualifications updated. These countries have fascinating ancient tales that can be transferred to younger generation in quite pleasurable environment via amalgamating those stories with computer and media elements. Indeed, teaching difficult and conventional printed texts that may

bore and confuse students can be transformed to digital versions and endow learners interesting space that make their reading a multisensory act.

Moreover, findings of this thesis will illuminate that why schools and universities should follow both printed and digital texts due to their advantageous natures. Alternatively, teachers and professors should be aware of the inconvenient characteristics of both versions and do not keep on teaching just one medium.

Another significant point is that readers now accustom to network and hypertext environments and seeking a more participatory relationship with fictional texts they love. As these readers/communities like ELO (Electronic Literature Organization) grow and become more widespread, it may be valuable to study on hypertext fiction and digital storytelling genre. Bolter says, "This new digital media constitutes a cultural and economic phenomenon; our society is willing to spend a great deal of money on the development of such forms" (Bolter, 2003: 15). Humanists in literature use digital technology to further their traditional research and teaching purposes. Critical works and empirical research from literary studies and their multimedia content provide clues towards a better understanding about the effects of hypertext fiction upon students, and knowledge from conventional works can be productively merged in empirical studies of hypertext. Since postmodern hypertext fiction facilitates the making of connections among literary texts and multimedia elements, it seems an obvious tool to use in college courses of Malaysia and Iran and consequently, create a great cultural dimension in electronic literature studies in Asia.

Accordingly, the significance of this study is more emphasized as Anne Mangen also states, "More empirical research is needed in order to bring us closer to fully understanding the impact of different material platforms and how these are in

fact a major part of our reading experience" (Mangen, 2008: 416). While clearly academic work methods are changing in modern countries, and technology is opening up new possibilities to authors and readers, but it is also obvious that scholars hesitate about the acceptability of the two versions separately or fusion of them. However, the movement of information into knowledge, whether fiction or nonfiction is never stable, every day a new digital component expands the canon of readers and provides a great policy in job opportunities for those who are responsible for making such digital narratives experimental in a temporally and visually dynamic environment. Subsequently, it is this eventfulness that will teach us what we should do for creating such circumstances in order to elevate an educational level in schools and universities of our countries. Considering all the points mentioned above the researcher believes that the present study is by no means terminated in the context of literature studies and definitely needs to be carried out.

1.6   Methodology

The general method for studying the nature of the two sub-genres of the novel and textual analysis of them involve an extensive library research to find a connection between both versions for making a comparative study. The researcher will explore various websites, digital articles, e-publications due to the digital aspect of this study to collect information. Additionally, the method for doing this research relies on comparative approach. Initially, by highlighting the characteristics of postmodern printed novels and hypertext fictions their similar and distinguished features will be shown to emphasize on these genres. Then, analyzing what concepts of poststructuralists' notions and hypertext theorists' ideas are exploited in both texts

will reveal their parallel and dissimilar aspects to compare their narrative structures and reader's aesthetic experience while reading and navigating.

Further, by considering the space and writing tools of each version and their respective power for engaging and immersing the reader, it will be disclosed that how juxtaposition of various media elements denotes more liberty to the reader's role for making meanings in the multimodal environment of the hypertext novel. Finally, the method of comparative approach will be continued in the last chapter as well, where the researcher will demonstrate the similarities and differences in the portrayal of tables. Moreover, the final output of this comparative study under the heading of advantage and disadvantage features of both genres will be exposed.

1.7 Theoretical & Conceptual Framework

Traditionally, comparative study has been based on literary movements, periods and lines of influence, as well as on genres, themes, myths, and legends. Comparative literature has come to include the comparison of literature with other areas of human experience as well. Rane Wellek propounds that comparative literature can best be defended and defined by its perspective and spirit, rather than by any circumscribed partition within literature. Therefore, it will study all literature from an international perspective, with a consciousness of the unity of all literary creations and experience (Wellek, 1970: 12). Developments in computer technology open paths for creation of new literary and digital genres like hypertext fiction which provides the space for comparing different genres of the novel to illuminate similarities and dissimilarities of them. For this reason, in the first stage this study will use theory of genre to find similarities between these postmodern genres of the

novel to make the comparative study possible and then the researcher conceives a model for displaying the adaptation from text to hypertext as well. In the second stage hypertext theory by Landow as an extension of post-structuralism will be used as the backbone theory for comparing concepts of narrative structure and reader in the two genres as Landow observes the fact that "hypertext promises to embody and thereby test aspects that concern textuality, narrative, and roles or functions of reader and writer" (Landow, 2006: 2).

It is necessary to note that, the sub-concepts of narrative structures such as multivocality, decenterality, intertextuality, multilinearity, textual openness and closure and the sub-concepts about the reader and his/her aesthetic experiences, readings, roles, responses, disorientations, and interactivities will be studied in each genre to provide a comprehensive comparative study. Finally, emphasizing on transformation of reading space from book to virtual environment and focusing on the role of multimedia elements like sounds, graphics, animations and video in the hypertext fiction will lead this study to valuable discussions about further reader's aesthetic experiences like immersion and engagement in both environments which necessitate supplemental theory of schema. The intriguing issue is that within the schema theoretic approach, the analysis of literary adaptation from the printed genre to the hypertext will be delineated how the schema of postmodern novels reflects in the readers' interpretation and meaning making while they encounter the adapted version and how this may redesign their achieved experiences and challenge their understanding. David Rumelhart defines schemas as data structures that represent generic concepts, knowledge about the world, that enable us to perceive, understand, and, eventually, act. He further states that schemata are organized mental structures that allow the learners to understand and associate what is being presented to them

(Rumelhart, 1980). Therefore, if we understand readers' aesthetic experiences in reading and navigating of both versions, we can determine which multimedia elements are designed properly to challenge the reader's schemata to associate diverse factors simultaneously and make sense and meaning from different signifiers.

According to these explanations, the following general outlines of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this thesis can be presented, which will be depicted in details with related concepts and sub-concepts in a next chapter:

First comparison:
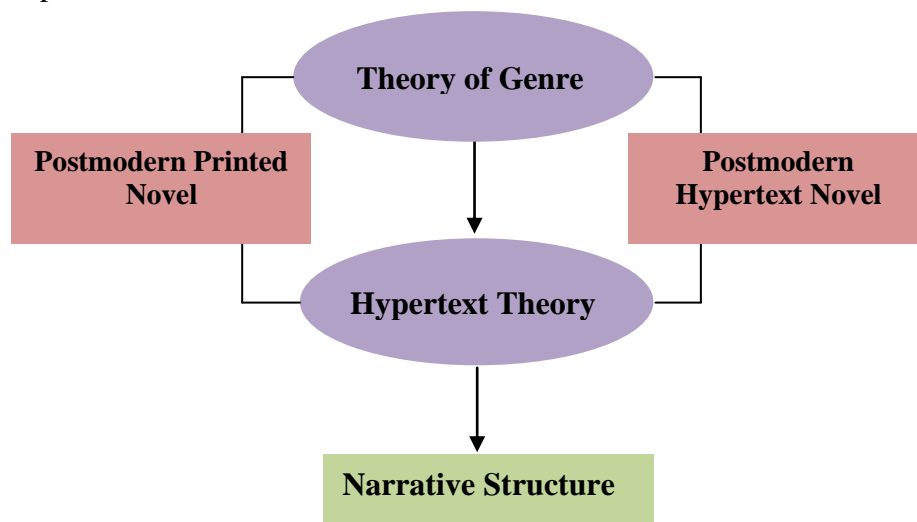
Figure 1.2 Theoretical framework for the first comparison

Second comparison:
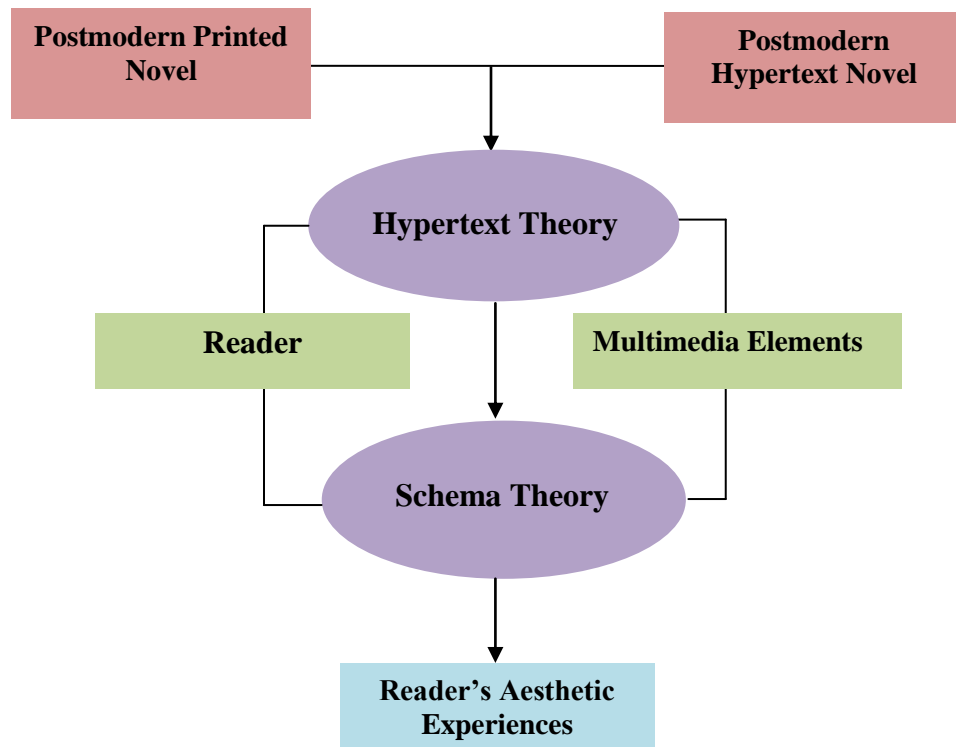
Figure 1. 3 Theoretical framework for the second comparison

1.8   Review of the Literature

Postmodern literary works are heavily relying on innovative and creative narrative techniques to involve reader as a central element of meaning making and undermining the writer's authority. According to Brian McHale, the dominant of postmodernist fiction is ontological and it deals with questions like, what is the mode of the existence of text? , and what happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated? (McHale, 1987, 10). Additionally, Aleid Fokkema stated that, "texts belonging to the postmodern canon display a firm distrust of origins, of the single, unique texts, or of

the strictly referential function of language. They may also foreground the plurality of worlds" (Fokkema, 1991: 16). These issues have brought many authors to combine various subjects and genres to investigate the relation between reality and fiction by implementing fragmentation, intertextuality, unreliable narrators and many other artistic techniques. Indeed, these criteria brought postmodern thoughts to many authors to change their way of thinking and writing and shifting them from realism to hyperreality. As John Gardner stated that, "in a world which values progress, postmodern in fact means New! Improved!" (Gardner, 1978: 56).

Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow* is frequently considered as a postmodern novel which redefined the novel in general. Other eminent figures who are often cited as important contributors of postmodern literature are, Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortazar, Willima S. Burroughs, and David Foster Wallace.

Moreover, America has become a highly economical and technically global influence after the World War II and the growing impact of new media and technology shifted their culture from traditional to post-industrial in order to manifest different aspects of reality. Indeed, according to Robert Durante, "Their conception and perception of reality changed due to the influence of media, the end of industrialization, and the rise of information processing" (Durante, 2014: 5). Subsequently, this transformation contributed to the formation of American postmodern literature and has reflected in many literary works such as William Gaddis' *The Recognitions* (1955), John Barth's *The Floathing Opera* (1956), and Tim O' Briens' *The things they carried* (1990). Beside these early postmodern writers, there are works which can be counted as post-postmodern novels due to their innovative and fresh typology. *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski (2000),

William Gibson's *The Recognition* (2003), and Lance Olsen's *Calendar of Regrets* (2010) can be regarded as different works than early forms. Indeed, the playful and chaotic meta-narratives and experimental-like of the sub-stories via many shifting in settings and characters are concerned as stimuli for collaborating readers higher.

I have selected Olsen among many authors for the reason that "he is at the center of every discussion about the contemporary landscape of innovative and experimental writing" (Allisa Nutting, personal communication, March 2014). His recent novel *Theories of Forgetting* (2014) is written in relation to postmodern traits. It has the elements of fragmentation, non-linearity, micro narratives, and openness. It is praised by many scholars. Brian Evenson believes,

> Lance Olsen's *Theories of Forgetting* is a remarkably fugue-like ode to the intricacies of memory. Offering two intersecting stories about illness, loss, and forgetting, with annotations, this is an extremely smart and moving book about how our lives wind snail-like around one another as they risk flindering away into absence or death (Evenson, 2014, para. 2).

Olsen wrote this new novel by receiving the Mary Ellen von der Heyden Berlin Prize in Fiction Fellow at the American Academy in Berlin from January through May 2013. He is also a fiction editor at *Western Humanities Review.* Further, *Calender of Regrets* (2010) is another postmodern novel by him which is reviewed by Mark Tursi,

> It contains collage, intertextuality, metafiction, fragmentary narration, journal-like postcards with photographs, suspenseful stories, a psychoanalytic interview, and unexpected typography. These elements are indeed all there to indicate the way in which myth, culture, and art from various time periods and geographic locations collide" (Tursi, 2011, para. 1).

In this novel, he utilized many postmodern characteristics, such as combining different literary writing techniques and creating unpredicted composition. Further,

in 'Review of Contemporary Fiction' Peter Grandbois reviewed another novel by Olsen *Head in Flames* (2009). He postulated, "this book is important because it manages to succeed where most innovative literature fails: it plays while being deadly serious… However, Olsen's real success lies not in his critique of the many forms of intolerance but rather in his affirmation of art as salvation" (Grandbois, 2010, para.1-2). Indeed, his proficiency to be an innovative and creative postmodern author can be highlighted in amalgamating artistic typography and micro stories.

Another astonishing novel after his *Nietzsche's Kisses* (2006) is *Anxious Pleasures: a novel after Kafka* (2007) in which Olsen treats another great modernist to postmodernist investigation, this time retelling Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* from the supporting cast's points of view. Olsen hews closely to the original, and his additions, excursions and elaborations are simultaneously stimulating and entertaining. Intricately woven and richly imagined, Olsen's novel is a cerebral treat unto itself and a fine companion to Kafka's original (Cunningham, 2007). He has entered smoothly form modernist to postmodernist experiment and make it quite remarkable and complimentary piece to Kafka's work.

In an interview with Olsen, he is asked about his reputation as a very frontline soldier for innovative literature. Olsen replies, "For me every engagement with the innovative -- whether through the event of reading (which is always a kind of writing) or the event of writing (which is always a kind of reading) -- becomes a fresh and always political investigation into not-knowing (Alissa Nutting, personal communication, March, 2014). From his views about creating inventive and creative postmodern works, it becomes clear that, Olsen is a writer whose fertile mind is far away from constant traditional structures.

Paul Petrovic in his critical review "Between Visibility and Invisibility: Baudrillard, Jean-Luc Marion, and Lance Olsen's Girl Imagined by Chance" stated that,

> Since the digital age has opened the door for digitally reproducing that which has never existed. As a result, photographs of the unreal can now subvert viewers' belief and can begin to have as much power and authenticity as the real. Or so it would seem. This subversion of photography as the thing that-has-been is precisely what Lance Olsen wants to question in his novel *Girl Imagined By Chance* (2002). While the unreal photograph gains credence through the unsuspecting belief of its viewer, this same credence is nonetheless denied when the manipulator fears that he is creating an image—a totality—of absence. Though much of Olsen's novel examines photography's power of manipulation to create a hyperreality, the text ultimately renounces this blurring of the unreal in favor of the real. (Petrovic, 2005: 249)

According to his review, Olsen's novel portrays the mixture of real and unreal with the purpose to impact on readers' perception and blur their imagination in favor of the real.

Freak nest (2000) is one more novel by him, which is described by American book review as a treat for anyone interested in the place of the human's will in a society that seeks at every turn to remove and commodity our memories and selves, turning us all into isolated units locked inside a building, dreaming dreams that were, and never will be, truly ours (Olsen, 2013). JR Foley in his review about this novel mentioned that, "Lance Olsen writes of the near future with the gusto, the comprehensive and comic social knowledge and imaginative passion of a Dickens. I am not the first to note this, but its aptness is more than comparative" (Foley, 2011: para. 1). In fact, the story of this book negotiates the fresh and inexperienced world of tomorrow in detail and suspense in quite impressive way.

After *Tonguing the Zeitgeist* (1994) which was a finalist for Philip K. Dick Award, Olsen wrote *Burnt* (1996) in which he blends elements of chaos theory,

deconstruction and more into a humorous novel that is part environmental dystopia, part academic farce (Book review, 1996, para. 1). Although, this novel can be counted as one of his early works but it emancipates the postmodern traits of disorder and confusion.

Except from his twelve novels, he has a great hand in non-fiction writing as well. Taylor Breslin in her review about Olsen's non-fiction book *there,* stated that,

> It is about countless things, each note building on or jumping off of the last, covering vast terrain in Olsen's mind. The book builds a picture of its writer through art, language, literature, and travel. It shows how travel, and the powerful memories of travel, can draw out aspects of ourselves (Breslin, 2014, para. 3).

This book is the inventive prose which represents postmodern life by mixing various foundations that makes experience of being.

Architecures of Possibility: After Innovative Writing (2012) which is an anti-textbook written by Olsen in collaboration with Trevor Dodge offers various suggestions for generating writing that resists, rethinks, and expands the very notion of narrativity. Sue Bond's review on this book reveals that, "Lance Olsen is interested in creative writing as a series of choices, whereby to write one way rather than another is to convey, not simply aesthetics, but a course of thinking, a course of being in the world, that privileges one approach to reality over another" (Bond, 2014, para. 1). Obviously, besides Olsen' postmodern novels, his non-fiction works also reflect his style as a writer who likes to follow fragmented, radical and semi-real narratives.

Moreover, Olsen serves as chair of FC2 (Fiction Collective Two which a non-profit publisher founded in 1989). His short stories, essays, poems, and reviews have appeared in many journals, magazines, and anthologies, including *Conjunctions* (2014)*, Black Warrior Review* (2008)*,* and *Fiction* International (2002)*.* His short

story collection *Sewing Shut My Eyes* (2000) is reviewed by John G. Nettles in which he stated Olsen as one of the proponent of literary movements who "rejects linear narrative in favor of a melding of words and image, paper and electronics, and fractal-branching text that requires the reader to become an active participant in the revelation of meaning rather than a passive recipient" (Nettles, 1994, para. 1). More to the point, it is noteworthy to mention that in postmodern era numerous American novelists have inspired to shift their writing from printed text to computerized text/hypertext. They make digital novels with the purpose to display distinguished vision of the world via multiplicity, fragmentation, indefinability, and hyper-reality. Indeed, by amalgamating their literary texts with computer, media elements and using linguistic-play, they have displayed narratives in quite disorienting and multilayered ways. Deena Larsen's *Marble Springs* (1993), Stuart Moulthrop's *victory Garden* (1995), and Paul La Farge's *Luminous Airplanes* (2011) can be regarded as significant hypertext novels that grab the attentions for the way fiction is told via digital and networked narratives. Indeed, these inventive and inspired American authors via mixing literature, computer, technology, Internet and new media have tried to challenge their ability to preserve the aesthetic and connectivity of their narratives even in the complex, interactive, elusive and fragmented atmosphere of digital environment.

However, Lance Olsen also is one of the eminent authors who have done literary adaptation of his printed novel *10:01* (2005) in the fall of the same year in collaboration with the media artist Tim Guthrie. A review on this novel by Paul Martin affirms that, "It revolves around the ongoing tension between the cinematic time of frames moving in a linear, mechanistic sequence and the human time of subjective experience moving freely, in many different improvised patterns" (Martin,

2006, para. 3). In fact, this adaptation emphasizes that he is the postmodern author who was not satisfied just with fragmented and innovative printed typography but with incorporating those innovative writing techniques with new media. This transformation from printed space to digital environment intensifies his power as a postmodern author. Moreover, when it is asked from him about why certain times/contents in printed novel *10:01* are not in the hypertext version, he replies, "The novel and the hypertext versions of 10:01 don't synch exactly. My intention, for those who read both versions, was to create the impression of yet a third version that exists between the hardcopy and digital ones" (Ladan Modir, personal communication, March 13, 2013).

Olsen is a writer whose technical ingenuity is matched merely by his fertility of invention and compassion for his characters. Indeed, he makes use of multimedia elements along with written language to create a quite rich multimodal literary text which is different than its original. Harold Jaffe's comment is written on a cover of the book *10:01*. He opines that,

> Walter Benjamin envisioned the underground *Paris Arcades* as the quintessential 19th century industrial dream space and in *10:01* Lance Olsen provides us with the millennial version: the Mall of America, in Bloomington, Minnesota, large enough to contain seven Yankee Stadiums. Each page headlines a different character or set of characters randomly flung together in a movie theater there in the mid-afternoon. They interface (often freakishly) with each other; with the Mall's blandishments; with the images on the screen; with their own fantasies. At the climax, the theater and its inhabitants suddenly implode, perhaps out of the ultimate logic of late industrial capitalism. Or they don't implode but are sucked irresistibly into the black hole of American make-believe (as cited on the cover of Olsen' *10:01,* 2005).

According to this explanation, Olsen's attempt for transforming his printed work to multimodal version of hypertext is to depict the reality of American individuals more vivid as the combination of theory and practice will soon become more widespread