

Hypertextual Thinking: A Method for Resistance in David Kolb's "Hypertext as Resistance"

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Abstract

In 2000 David Kolb released "Hypertext as Resistance" ("HAR"), [1] a hypertext manifesto written, in part, as a response to Sanford Kwinter's "Virtual City, or The Wiring and Waning of the World," published in the print publication, *Assemblage*. Positioned by Kwinter as a "performance" and a "manifesto" (89), "Virtual City" is a polemic against the "promiscuous, multidimensional electromagnetic matrix" called "cyberspace" that had emerged from the "media-technological revolution" of modernity (91). At the time of HAR's release, Kolb, a philosophy professor at Bates College, had already authored *Socrates in the Labyrinth: Hypertext, Argument, Philosophy* (1994), [2] establishing hypertext for creating complex modes of argumentation. [3] With "HAR," Kolb sets out to explore hypertext as a method to resist the "homogenization and oppression" ("Introduction") Kwinter claims digital technologies cause. The result is an elaborate work that unfolds across 97 nodes of text in four major reading paths [4] connected via 272 hyperlinks that sees Kolb pick apart Kwinter's claims.

In 2025 "HAR" was re-constructed for contemporary audiences by the Electronic Literature Lab, which worked closely with the author for guidance and input. [5] While Version 1.0 was published on the Web, created as it had been with Storyspace software and translated with Tinderbox, it predated the official release of Google's search engine by two years and its requirement for responsive design by 15. To reflect both, Version 2.0 saw its code reworked. [6] The lab also updated the interface to a contemporary design that includes a brighter color palette and a more readable typeface. It added navigational elements, like a menu and a return feature, to improve the usability and user experience and fixed a few typos in the content. One other change that resulted in a new edition was the creation of an index page, which did not exist in Version 1.0. Also in Version 1.0, the landing page is called "Hypertext as Subversive," which was confusing to the reader. Kolb recommended that we eliminate that title in Version 2.0. No other changes were made to the body content; the rest of the nodes and links remain the same. That said, Version 2.0 differs from the original in this one major regard: It comes to us today with the benefit of hindsight and 25 years of technological changes affecting society and culture in ways that Kwinter predicted, a perspective Kolb comes to appreciate and articulate in his "Postscript," while still maintaining hypertextual thinking as the hope for the future.

Interest in "HAR" today could focus on an exploration of hypertext systems and structures, a historical study of born-digital writing as it emerged for the Web, research into manifestos, and even questions about the efficacy of hypertext for making philosophical arguments. Driving this essay, however, is its role in responding to Kwinter's manifesto and ways in which "HAR" provides contemporary audiences, living at a time of technological innovations and political instability, a method for moving forward in the midst of these challenges.

Kwinter, Sanford. "Virtual City, or the Wiring and Waning of the World." *Assemblage*, no. 29, Apr. 1996, pp. 89–101.

Kolb, David. "Hypertext as Resistance." *The NEXT*, version 1.0, 2000, https://the-next.eliterature.org/works/2077/0/0/.

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