

CART 351 REFLECTION 3  
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Exprima Talks: Reading Hypertext with Mark Bernstein

Mark Bernstein's interview with Coby Pressman is structured in a way that highlights how digital narratives challenge traditional story structures and introduce new layers of interactivity, where hypertexts play a major role. Bernstein, an expert in hypertext literature and creator of the tool Storyspace, explains the transformative power of links, which compares to the role of punctuation that reshapes how we understand, navigate, and think about narratives. Links in hypertext break away from the linear progression found in conventional storytelling, allowing readers to explore interconnected paths, make choices, and engage with narratives in personalized ways. This framework offers a different sense of agency that blurs the lines between reader and participant, further enhancing immersion and deepening the impact of the narrative experience.

Bernstein's insights address the challenges inherent in hypertext structure, particularly the importance of guiding the reader's path. Often, hypertext narratives can feel directionless without careful design, leading readers into repetitive loops or overly chaotic experiences. This inspired him to create Storyspace, which addresses these issues with "guard fields" that track where readers dynamically adapt the story based on prior choices, fostering a sense of narrative coherence while still providing interactivity.

A good example of the perspective of the text is *Bandersnatch*, the interactive film episode from the TV series *Black Mirror*. *Bandersnatch* lets viewers make choices for the main character at various points, which leads to multiple branching paths and outcomes. Like hypertext storytelling, it gives viewers control, allowing them to explore different narrative arcs based on their choices. This structure mirrors Bernstein's description of hypertext, where the narrative adapts and changes based on the viewer's interactions, creating a unique experience for each person.

Bernstein also mentions some popular digital storytelling tools, like Twine, which, though limited in certain functionalities, have popularized hypertext by making it accessible to more creators. Looking forward, the conversation ushers towards envisioning an evolution of digital storytelling platforms that blend hypertext's interactivity with traditional narrative depth and visual aesthetics. The text addresses the growing importance of adaptive, reader-driven storytelling as digital platforms continue to reshape our relationship with narratives and offer new ways to experience stories that reflect the complexities of human experience.