

# Intertextuality and Cosmopolitanism in Cyberspace

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*De-contextualized canonic references (e.g. Romeo and Juliet as a symbol of happy ever-lasting love) characterize Internet language. Use of such memes – minimal units of cultural memory – is one of the major factors enabling virtual communities, made up of people from different cultural backgrounds, to function as embodiments of true cosmopolitan communities. Internet, as a new model of communication, and particularly virtual communities, challenge the theory of intertextuality in their disregard for the 'shared knowledge' principle and the peculiar way in which they re-establish the traditional terms of intertextuality: author, reader, text, context.*

Key words: literature and internet / literary canon / intertextuality / cosmopolitanism / globalization / virtual communities

## Introduction

This article originated in an attempt to formulate and answer a host of questions concerning intertextuality that have risen in the context of a research project on the Western cultural (mostly literary) canon in multi-cultural Israel in the age of internet.<sup>1</sup> The research covers all mass media, but being conducted in 2007–9, it deals mostly with the global computer network, internet, and its locus of interaction known as cyberspace.<sup>2</sup> Though noted during the research, actual representations of canonic texts in cyberspace, even when they materialize an intertextual structure (such as a particular performance of a Shakespearian drama or a cover version of a Bob Dylan song), have been excluded from this article because they represent a new technology for earlier mass media transmission rather than the new model of communication enabled by this technology. Parodic representations that are found in abundance on YouTube, for example, have been excluded for a different reason. While there is no denying that in order to interpret them as parodies their sources must be known, one could argue that a source can be reconstructed from reading a parody, and that the latter's comic effect does not depend on an activation of its source. The typical structural characteristics of parody, such as the incongruous coupling of various textual levels,

linguistic register and social status of the speakers for example, or over-dramatic presentation of insignificant events, can sufficiently establish the parodic representation as such. Additional reasons for the exclusion have to do with the paucity of such examples in Hebrew cyberspace in comparison with English sites, where this is a customary practice, particularly in educational contexts, as well as a form of rebellion against 'dictatorial' reading norms.<sup>3</sup> The same functions are filled in Israel by local canonic texts and the phenomenon of using the web for creative assignments has just started to catch on. Consequently, the article focuses on potentially allusive references to canonic texts on the web in general and, for reasons that are explained in due course, on those found in computer games and blogs posted by anonymous authors in particular. Although the questions emerged from the Israeli cultural scene and the Hebrew corpus, the article's thrust is theoretical and the examples are not limited to Hebrew.

The uncontested fact of cultural globalization and Anglo-American dominance characterizing it, coupled with the popularity – in Israel as elsewhere – of FaceBook, YouTube, and many other cyberspace sites with a multicultural base of participants and contributors, led the researchers to expect a significant functional presence of major canonic Western texts (complete representations as well as allusions, quotations, parodies and all other kinds of intertextual structures) on Israeli Hebrew internet sites. The heterogeneous composition of Israeli Jewish society: Ethiopian and Yemenite, North African and North American, East and West-European – an astounding assortment of first and often continuous home-spoken languages and cultural traditions that make Israel a multi-cultural state even before taking into account its non-Jewish minorities, led to a complementary expectation of references to canonic texts beyond the scope of what is traditionally coined "western" culture. For example, one might find references to Raskolnikov if not Othello to endow remorseful murderers with cultural depth, to Anna Karenina if not Emma Bovary to achieve a similar effect for a female protagonist losing her mind and life on account of a Romantic view of love, or an allusion to Sinbad if not Odysseus to bestow a tall-tale teller with a cultural halo.<sup>4</sup> The researchers have been divided with respect to the assumed impact of cultural background, in the form of ethnic and linguistic roots as well as educational systems, on the choices and uses of canonic references. Those that believed in the homogenizing effect of cultural globalization and saw the internet as its major conductor expected no differences. Those that believed in the heterogenizing counter-effects expected marked differences. None of the hypotheses can be supported by the findings, due to the rather small number of canonic allusive references and the even smaller amount of readers responding to them.

Nevertheless, two facts stand out: 1) Although there is a marked preference for intra-medial referencing (i.e. pop songs refer to 'canonic' pop songs more than to other media and TV series most often refer to 'canonic' TV series), overall, the same canonic literary texts are referenced across all of Hebrew mass media. While only an international comparative study of referenced texts on the web could predicate similar selections in globalized culture, the principle of largely homogeneous selective referencing within any national culture is, I believe, a general characteristic of popular mass media, and of internet intertextuality in particular; 2) The existing references privilege de-contextualized attributes of canonic texts (mostly names, but also famous quotations, notable scenes and other plot constructions), minimizing the need for effectively shared cultural backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> This too is not a culture-specific feature.

In the context of globalized culture and daily experienced cosmopolitanism these features raise a number of questions pertaining to the linguistic and socio-cultural functions of canonic intertextuality in the age of internet, as well as to the impact of internet and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) on the basic notions of intertextuality:

What roles does canonic intertextuality play in cyberspace in general and in personal CMC in particular? Are these roles similar to or different from those applicable to other, by now traditional mass communication systems? Is the marked preference for employing de-contextualized canonic elements a product of internet as a model of communication with its own semantics and stylistics, or a consequence of the ease with which data can be accessed and referred to? Is this trend a reflection of a general cultural phenomenon, or an augmentation of one? Does such usage of the canon facilitate the construction of a cosmopolitan virtual community and, as a consequence, a cosmopolitan society? Does internet as a new model of communication and in particular the unique nature of its virtual communities oblige us to re-examine the basic terms of the concept 'intertextuality'?

Before I attempt to answer these questions we must look at some examples, familiarize ourselves with some more findings, and look at the terms of this discussion: intertextuality, internet, cosmopolitanism and globalization, in terms of their interactions.

## **Examples**

Examples of de-contextualized canonic references range from those that do not allow activation of source texts, to those that allow it while their authors have not counted on such activation, to those that allow it and can be

perceived as asking for it but their addressees consistently ignore the option. Personal anonymous blogs and computer games, unlike journalism, advertisement or literary platforms, are not strictly bounded by conventionalized uses of canonic references, and because they contain texts and responses of many kinds, they serve as the corpus supplying me with examples.

In the extreme case of mandatory de-contextualization, such pseudo-references are not only severed from their canonic source texts, but the latter often trigger uncalled for expectations and yield mistaken inferences if activated; at the same time these de-contextualized signs exhibit a variety of well-established or easy to construct conceptualizations. For example, Romeo and Juliet can be used to represent love at first sight that ends in an “and they lived happily ever after,” and Don Quixote can represent an idealist fighting real enemies for the right causes against all odds. In both cases the potential readers of the messages that contain such canonic references must be free – through lack of knowledge or the ability to willingly suspend that knowledge – from the impact of activated original features: Romeo and Juliet’s deaths by suicide and the reasons for the tragic conclusion of their romance, or Don Quixote’s hilarious madness and its causes are not allowed in the picture.

When a reader ignores the assumed request to use the reference as an empty sign to be pragmatically signified in its current context, or a cultural concept in its own right – familiar and therefore bonding, interesting clashes occur. A blogger calls himself “Mister Quixote” (The Hebrew ‘adon kishot’ is a pun on Don Kishot – the official Hebrew translation of Don Quixote), but the description of the blog and the items posted there reveal no particular connection to either contemporary common conceptualizations of the protagonist of the canonic text (i.e. the madman or the Romantic Idealist). The blogger thereby exemplifies the dissociation of a canonic name from its original and traditional context, and s/he is ‘justifiably’ rebuked for being an imposter by a learned talkbackist who does not heed the rules of the game. At the same time, another blogger calls his blog “The Archives of Don Quixote: My Journey in the War Against the Monstrous Windmills of Israeli Bureaucracy,” exemplifying – at least in part – the opposite. Not only does the author insist on reminding his readers of the original by expending the reference with details, but, in a move typical of journalistic copywriting<sup>6</sup>, he blends Quixote (Kishot) with another canonic K. – Kafka’s helpless anti-hero. Unfortunately all of the responsive comments that I have seen deal with the commentators’ bureaucratic experiences but show no appreciation of the writer’s ingenuity, nor do they take the trouble to move from petty complaints to considerations of the human condition in a bureaucratic society. As it is

quite unlikely that none of the readers are in some ways familiar with one or both of these canonic texts, I see this lack of reaction as a manifestation of a common internet reading practice.

Another set of examples shows the unexpected presence of canonic texts in popular computer games. The presence of Cocteau's "les enfants terribles" in "Metal Gear Solid," of (The Abridged) Shakespearean corpus in "The Curse of the Monkey Island", of Dante's "Inferno" in "Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening", of "Alice in Wonderland" in Super Mario Bros, to cite just a few examples, reveals a form of superfluous intertextuality, where the intertextual component is clearly marked, the relevant information is within easy reach, and yet where few of the critics and almost none of the gamers we approached respond to it. Obviously we are faced with a culture that flaunts potentially significant rhetorical intertextuality, probably as a wink to highbrow audiences who might look down on computer games and their creators, but assumes no actualizations of intertextual relations.

Jay Clayton (2003) severely criticizes this phenomenon describing it from a different angle as a general characteristic of Postmodern culture:

It has become commonplace to assert that a consumer society has no historical awareness, that advanced capitalism depends upon a single-minded focus on novelty. At the same time, shoppers cruise through a landscape saturated by nostalgic references to the past, hair salons and candle stores labeled with bad historical puns. **These allusions achieve their effect by being taken out of context.** In most cases, **they have certainly lost any literal reference to the past.** They exist only as a kind of cultural malapropism, good for a brief smile, if that. Consequently, the experience of cultural dissonance has become a routine part of daily life. (163) Allusion, parody, irony, and hyperbole are used to place isolated cultural details in incongruous juxtapositions, creating anachronisms that are knowing rather than proleptic or historically illuminating. This form of anachronism can be too eclectic to signify anything other than its own self-awareness. It is an anachronism as white noise, signal fed back on itself to the confusion of meaning. (164) (emphases added)

Clayton's thrust is different from mine, particularly since I do not consider de-contextualized memes anachronistic, but I fully accept his articulation of de-contextualization as "a signal fed back on itself" and moreover, as one which potentially confuses meanings. I also share the view that the same phenomenon can serve many functions: "Anachronism can have other uses, however. The temporal slips, fragments of the past lodged oddly in the present, speak in multiple ways – most absurdly, trivially, diminishing the culture's capacity for understanding; others with the shock of mild surprise; still others with genuine and lasting power." (164)

Indeed, even in the arena of computer games, there are exceptions to the sweeping condemnation of what Clayton sees as instances of anachronism. When games are studied by students of intertextuality, like Peli Greitzer who provided me with these examples and their analysis, some of these instances reveal a great potential for rhetorical intertextuality that can contribute to the game itself. One such example is the PC game *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* (2000). This is a heroic fantasy game; a picaresque sub-genre of modern popular literary fantasy, to be distinguished from the epic sub-genre characterized by a serious tone and a cohesive plot structure. This particular game contains a short humoristic episode that conspicuously, though not explicitly, corresponds with *Romeo and Juliet*. The minor episode is interesting because the episode itself is not comic and its humoristic effect results from the unfulfilled expectations created by the allusive Shakespearian analogy. More accurately, the light comic effect results from the combination of the intertextual allusion and the conventional structure characteristic of the genre to which *Baldur's Gate II* belongs (Turn based PC RPG): The bulk of the game consists of targets and tasks that the group of adventurers convened by the gamer collects while it wanders in the world. Tasks come out of requests, challenges and work contracts that unknown strangers propose to the group. The characters, with whom the gamers interact, and with whom they can dialogue, constitute two groups: they can be passers by, peddlers, or suppliers of expositional materials, or they can be characters with actual functions in the plot. Strangers belonging to the first group usually do not generate any action unless the gamers approach them. In our example, which takes place at the entrance to an inn, the gamer is introduced to a stormy dialogue in the main hall, in which a boy and a girl from feuding aristocratic families have created a scandal and raised the anger of their parents by falling in love. The allusion must activate a plot schema that would make this scene the opening of an ominous dramatic plot line. If the gamer goes in and follows the couple upstairs s/he can watch the couple discussing their problems. Ultimately they decide that although they enjoy each other's company very much, the fun is not worth the trouble it causes. They decide to split up and go their separate ways. At this point the gamer can choose between watching them leave and intervening. If the gamer convinces them to stay together, they leave the inn together, happy and content. Either way this is the end of the plot line. The comic effect results from the surprising closure – an option open even to those who do not actualize the analogy – and is only heightened by the pleasure of the parodic representation of Shakespeare's tragedy. Much as it would make sense to assume that this is indeed an instance of allusive rhetorical

intertextuality, the rules of using canonic references on the internet still apply.

As I have already stated these examples of de-contextualized canonic references are not internet-specific. They are typical of popular mass media canonic intertextuality in general and of advertisement and journalism in particular.<sup>7</sup> However their conspicuous presence on the web, particularly on sites with neither commercial nor political aims, such as anonymous personal blogs or chats surrounding computer games, seems to require a more complex explanation than just the shallowness of the consumer culture of high capitalism, and offers new insights on this phenomenon as a beneficial factor in the age of internet, cultural globalization and new cosmopolitanism.

## **Argumentative Definition of Terms**

### **Internet and Intertextuality**

Internet, a system of global computer networks, is not just a new mass media transmission technology. As Jones and Kucker put it: “The internet could, in some ways, be seen as a ‘carrier’ of culture, in so far as it serves both as a medium of transmission and as a medium whose users selectively attend to texts others have made available” (213). However, internet’s role in today’s culture is not limited to that of an effective ‘cultural carrier’. Due to its particular communication model and the emergence of virtual communities, internet has a distinct cultural role in the real world. As Jones has argued in 1995, human connecting computer networks are by nature social networks.

There are many types – and definitions – of cyberspace communities, from electronically connected “individuals who also share common geographic space” (Virnoche and Marx 85), to Forums connecting “small groups engaged in tightly focused discussions of specific topics, to complex created worlds with hundreds of simultaneous participants, to million of users linked by an interest in market exchange networks for goods and information.” (Wilson and Peterson 449). Other definitions focus on the friendly supportive aspect of communities – one of the major attributes of communities in the real world. Thus Rheingold (1993) defines virtual communities as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net [Web] when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in Cyberspace”. (5) This means that internet has become a venue for

the construction of sometimes international, and always potentially a-local and non-parochial, virtual communities, certainly a significant contribution to cosmopolitanism inasmuch as distant and often anonymous communication inhibits parochial prejudices of all kinds.<sup>8</sup>

While computer games designed for groups, such as Dungeons and Dragons and other Multi-User Domains (MUDs), provide ample grounds for the emergence of a community, personal computer games very often tend to be solitary. However, gamers form communities and use CMC to initiate discussions, and hold debates about such solitary games as well. The relatively small number of such exchanges makes it a manageable corpus. Blogs are a different story. The blogosphere is an incredibly varied cosmos. Blog sites can be classified according to their authors, topics, functions, commercial policies, acceptance procedures (mostly simple and free), or circulation. Blogs have vastly different formats ranging from the uniformity of particular communal blog sites to the highly personal independently created ones. And then there are all kinds of blog writers. We all know about blogs written by journalists, politicians, established authors, and all kinds of celebrities (or their PR agents). We are all familiar with the important role the internet, and blogs in particular, played in Obama's election as president of the USA. This article, however, focuses on blogs written by anonymous bloggers – anonymous in two senses: those who use pseudonyms and those who are known only to a very limited group of family and friends. An anonymous blogger has a rather small number of readers relative to the millions of potential readers out in cyberspace. Another practical reason for choosing such blogging sites as a source of material.<sup>9</sup>

Anonymous Web Logs (shortened to Blogs) are paradoxical versions of intimate diaries: people use them to report to indefinable numbers of potential readers on their daily activities, changing moods, hopes and fears. Use of pseudonyms secures their anonymity and allows them free publication of their most trivial as well as innermost reflections for all to see. Some of them use their real names and all bloggers expect responses and comments; most of all they seek acknowledgement and emotional support. Although in a small place like Israel, with a relatively small number of bloggers and even fewer commentators, bloggers tend to meet and form real-life social communities – both communities (gamers and bloggers) are necessarily virtual communities of readers: they read and discuss the same texts.

With respect to intertextuality we must therefore focus first on virtual communities as potential "communities of readers". This term, coined after Stanley Fish's "interpretive communities" (1980) has come into being as a dam against the semiotic drift suggested by de-Saussure's notions of signs, according to which 'signifiers' refer to 'signifieds', which



immediately become ‘signifiers’ of more ‘signifieds’, with no way of referring outside the individual mind and its mental representations; and against the all-encompassing relativism of all interpretations, characterizing post-structuralist views of the relations obtaining between reader, text, and writer as a result of the unavoidable subjectivity of any interpretation. “Reading communities” consist of individuals who share enough linguistic and cultural knowledge as well as principles of interpretation that enable them to agree in judging the validity of an interpretation. Such a community upholds the ‘shared knowledge’ constraint, imposed by the very notion of intertextuality, with which some of the virtual web communities – in particular those of anonymous bloggers and gamers on which this article concentrates – cannot comply because of the peculiarities of the internet as a model of communication.

Apart from virtual communities, internet technology has also generated a new communication model: not only ‘one to one’ or ‘one to many’ interlocutors (as in face to face conversations, author and readers or advertiser and consumers), but many to many.<sup>10</sup> In this model, participants share the “enunciation situation” in temporal proximity but not in spatial coordinates. They are not participants of roughly similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, but interlocutors of varying cultural backgrounds using, by and large, a mediating language – internet English (and not a translation);<sup>11</sup> not only authors and readers who have some knowledge of or ideas about the cultural make-up of one another, but anonymous partners to the computer mediated multilog; not only communicators sharing codes, norms and ideological contexts, as well as citations, allusions and previous usages that interlocutors (including readers) often need to identify and activate, but interlocutors lacking – at least in part – the intertextual grid required for effective communication.

As all literary scholars have known since the days of Kristeva and Barthes, intertextuality replaced Intersubjectivity as the basic grounds for communication. In its most radical form intertextual theory sees language as a web of codes and pre-used signs and both text and reader as intertextual structures. Barthes tells us that “the reading subject ...the ‘I’ is an intertextuality, a network of citations...” (*S/Z* 16; English translation quoted by Still & Worton, 19). Similarly, Barthes tells us that “The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture” (*Image/Music* 146, 148).

In his analytical survey of Semiotics, Culler explains the meaning of Barthes’ sweeping declaration – “literary works [texts] are to be considered – as intertextual constructs: sequences which have meaning in relation to other texts which they take up, cite, parody, refute, or generally transform”

(38). Consequently, “intertextuality [is] a designation of [a text's] participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture” (103).

This definition could be complemented by and contrasted with Genette's (*Palimpsests* 7–11) conceptualization as presented by Still and Worton: “Intertextuality as referring to the literal and effective presence in a text of another text – [is] – everything, be it explicit or latent, that links one text to others” (22).

I suggested elsewhere (in Hebrew) the term ‘rhetorical intertextuality’ in order to emphasize Genette's “literal and effective presence” and link it with Riffaterre's definition of an ‘intertext’: “An ‘intertext’ is one or more texts which the reader must know in order to understand a work of literature in terms of its overall significance” (56).

Riffaterre's insistence on the control exercised by the author over the process of interpretation via the use of particular intertexts (as against the independent movement of an interpreter within the field of culturally-determined associative options), clearly asserts the rhetorical nature of literary ‘intertextuality’, which stands in opposition to the general linguistic conceptualization. I would like to complete the picture now by adding a cognitive definition: intertextuality is the cognitive mechanism that regulates the simultaneous activation of two (or more) distinct mental knowledge-structures in the processing of information (Ben-Porat, “The Poetics”). ‘Intertext’ can then refer to both an activated text-as-knowledge structure and to the outcome of the simultaneous activation of a number of knowledge structures. In both cases the ‘intertext’ is the solution to a cognitive short-circuit caused by such activation.

The common denominator of all these seemingly contradictory, but in fact complementary, definitions are the assumptions of shared knowledge and of the inevitability of using that knowledge for adequate processing of a new piece of information. In principle, computer mediated communication is no exception to the rule. On the contrary, the web, with its vast knowledge reservoirs situated within easy reach, seems to be the ultimate medium for complying with this “shared knowledge” constraint. Yet, as a model of communication, internet, with the vast anonymous community of potential readers, spread across geographical and cultural borders, poses the severest challenge to this constraint.

Who can guarantee that an implied reference to Hamlet's consideration of suicide, hidden in a neutral phrase, such as “to go or not to go,” would be universally recognized and admired? But more significantly, even if we waive such interpretive failure away because it is a typical problem of

communication and because rhetorical intertextuality can go unnoticed or be ignored or misinterpreted anywhere, or if we claim that, on the contrary, only on the web could the evoked phrase be googled and linked to Wikipedia or directly to the relevant scene performed by Laurence Olivier, the allusion identified and its source text made accessible, even then – who can guarantee that the relevant original, once read or watched, would trigger in an addressee from a different cultural background the same sympathetic response that it usually triggers in the west? To answer this rhetorical question it is enough to read an anthropologist's account of telling Hamlet to her hosts in a small West African village and being taught, among many other lessons, that Gertrude was right to marry her brother-in-law immediately after her husband's death – “for who would take care of her land and cattle?” (Bohannon). Granted that the same interpretative pitfalls lurk at the doors of every linguistic exchange, it is not difficult to see why internet global communication augments the problem.

On top of challenging the “shared knowledge” principle, internet challenges the major terms of radical intertextuality: author, text, reader and context. One of the most extreme renditions of the intertextual revolution describes these terms as follows:

Using the language of physics, intertextuality foregrounds a contrast between a classical and quantum view of reading. From a classical (or Newtonian) perspective... the text, the reader, the author, and the context – comport themselves according to common-sense notions like “things can be only in one place at a time” and are [stable] and well circumscribed. ... Text, reader, author and context signify permanent, constant, and fixed entities that interact – that is, act on each other.

From intertextual or quantum perspective ... the text, the reader, the author, and the context are caught up in the give and take of discursive practices that render them indistinguishable. ... [They] signify changeable, variable, and unfixed constitutions that interanimate – that is, co-constitute the life of each other.” (Hartman, 364)

A web text is indeed an unstable entity, likely to change its form anytime or disappear completely. But its polymorphism seems closer to the oral epic than to varying actualizations by readers that are perceived as co-authors. In the oral epic, unlike in the traditional conceptualization of written literature, text is not a fixed entity, but an ever-changing open string of potential and actual manifestations (performances) of a given theme. Such is also the nature of the text that is published on the web. Its author can (but not often does) change it at whim, or in reaction to readers' responses and suggestions. What might take twenty years in print culture – the publication of a revised edition – could take only a few hours on the web.

The changeability of the text, controlled as it is by the 'author,' does not make the author an unstable entity. Certainly an author's potential instability derives more from the web's hypertextual structure and technology than from the assumed readers' control over signification. Under any guise a blogger or a poster of any internet text can be perceived as an individual, a member of the web community, sending out his private coded message. Moreover, an author can be immediately addressed, questioned about his intentions, asked or at least allowed to verify or discard his readers' interpretations. In short, unless an author either requests collaborative composition or the responses shift to interpretive comments rather than to the text itself – authority remains with the author and is not passed on to the reader.

The internet reader, like the competent decipherer of coded messages who can reconstruct authorial intentions that hermeneutic traditions of written literature posit, is not the co-author that intertextuality and related hypertext theory posit. Moreover, like oral 'readers' who comprise a relatively homogeneous cultural group, whose responses are immediate and visible to the performer, internet readers can respond almost immediately and that ascertains the formation of a web reading community. Yet no one would claim homogeneity for this community, or claim enunciation situations similar to those of an oral epic performance.

The context of reading, and the community of readers that comprise typical web communication, are the reasons for the severe challenge of global culture, in its medium-specific digital form, to theories of intertextuality. In every other aspect, the internet with its hypertext qualities, is indeed the physical manifestation of intertextual theory, as has been shown by George Landow (1991) and many others. Hypertexts can make explicit the links that exist between a textual segment and its sources, analogues and varying contexts. Hypertext can be a tool of combined authorship. Hypertext allows readers to actually participate in authoring a text. But in spite of its hypertextual structure (linked texts that do not encourage linear reading) the web is not an intertextual hypertext to be actively read by post-structuralist readers. Similarly, in spite of some very strong communal markings possessed by the web's virtual community, it is neither a global nor a cosmopolitan intertextual "community of readers" as defined above.

### **Cosmopolitanism and Globalization**

Of the many definitions and discussions of the concept 'cosmopolitanism', let me begin with three sentences from the definition offered by Stanford's digital Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

The nebulous core shared by all cosmopolitan views is **the idea that all human beings**, regardless of their political affiliation, **do (or at least can) belong to a single community, and that this community should be cultivated**. Different versions of cosmopolitanism envision this community in different ways, some **focusing on** political institutions, others on moral norms or relationships, and still others focusing on shared markets or **forms of cultural expression**. The philosophical interest in cosmopolitanism lies in its challenge to commonly recognized attachments to fellow-citizens, the local state, parochially shared cultures, and the like. [emphases added]

This description of the various versions of contemporary cosmopolitanisms refers to some aspects of economic and legal consequences of globalization – a term for all trades. However, most contemporary social theorists endorse the view that globalization refers to “fundamental changes in the spatial and temporal contours of social existence, according to which the significance of space or territory undergoes shifts in the face of a no less dramatic acceleration in the temporal structure of crucial forms of human activity” (Stanford Digital Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Current anthropological and sociological studies of ‘new cosmopolitanism’ emphasize two other aspects: the visceral (as against intellectual) cosmopolitan experience of daily life in the globalized world and the mediated nature of globalization.

In today’s world ‘cosmopolitanism’ is no longer primarily an ethical ideal, a philosophical stance, or the privileged position of members of a cultural and economic elite.<sup>12</sup> Nor is it the opening up to other (often exotic) cultures that characterized Modernism. Rather, it is the very basic condition of life in the contemporary (Western) World, particularly but not exclusively in the big cities. For example, in *Visceral Cosmopolitanism* (2007), a study of the history of Selfridge Department Store and its role in enabling a non-intellectual acculturation of cosmopolitanism, Nava focuses “on the unconscious, non-intellectual, emotional, inclusive features of cosmopolitanism, on feelings of attraction for and identification with otherness – on intimate and visceral cosmopolitanism” (8). From another angle, Rantanen who in *The Media and Globalization* (2005) studies cosmopolitanism as one identity among many in the histories of four generations in four families of mixed marriages and many migrations, emphasizes the role of the media in the growing weight of the cosmopolitan factor, and offers the following definition: “**Globalization is a process in which worldwide economic, political, cultural and social relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space**” (8). On this definition I base my argument, provided we follow Williams’s (98–100) insistence on the constitutive or constituting aspect of the term ‘mediation’ and do not understand it as ‘intermediary’. In simple terms, my argu-

ment is based on the distinction between internet as a mass media tool for communication, similar to the telephone, and as a new model of communication providing for a new kind of cosmopolitanism – cyberspace cosmopolitanism.

Rantanen's emphasis on mediation is accompanied by a methodological anchoring in the real life experiences of the members of the four families under observation. "Actual existing cosmopolitanism is a reality of (re)attachments, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance" (120), characterizing people from all parts of society, rather than only those belonging to an economic or intellectual elite. The democratization of cosmopolitanism carries with it a narrowing down of its ideals. "Previously defined as going beyond the national, cosmopolitanism is now defined as going beyond the local." (119). At best, it is the ability "to live in both the global and the local" (Tomlinson 167; quoted in Rantanen 120). Moreover, regardless of whether we have changed localities or stayed where our families have lived for generations, we all experience cosmopolitanism as a cluster of attachments because we live in McLuhan's "global village" and partake in its global culture. Wherever we are, the American dominated mass media models strongly affect our socialization process. We may long for Paris, the Seine, even for particular locations around it without having ever lived there. The vision of a cosmopolitan community of "shared markets and forms of cultural expressions" as well as of numerous localities in which we feel at home has become a reality.

The question is: do any of these phenomena make people "citizens of the world" in any, or even some, of the meanings we attribute to the term cosmopolitanism today: Psychologically – do people actually **feel at home** anywhere on the globe, regardless of where they are and what brought them there? Legally – is there a **global citizenship** (analogous to the European)? Culturally – the obvious external effects of cultural globalization notwithstanding, are **all cultural terms understood and interiorized in the same way**? Ethically – granted that to a certain degree visceral cosmopolitanism must characterize individuals exposed to life in the globalized world, does it follow that their attitude towards others of all kinds would conform with the traditional and unchanging ethical ideal of **subduing all other identities and the ensuing loyalties to universal humanity**?

I would claim that cyberspace is the only place where all these questions can be answered in the affirmative. Internet – Web 2.0 in particular – is the major mover of such an immense change, with internet language as its major tool<sup>13</sup>, and internet intertextuality one of the most striking symptoms. Please note that this is not a dated utopian claim. I do not believe that cyberspace will necessarily change life in the real world and make

all the people on earth true members of one big human family. As we have seen and shall continue to see as we move on, the intertextual mirror reveals many obstacles to an actualization of such a vision because, paradoxically, the limitations – even shortcomings – of Computer Mediated Communication and virtual communities with respect to intertextuality are the very factors that enable their success.

Criticizing Hannerz's view of the cosmopolitan disposition, strongly grounded in the philosophical tradition, Nava points out that Hannerz's cosmopolitan "has cognitive and semiotic skills which enable him to maneuver within new meaning systems while remaining culturally and emotionally detached"(8). I claim that Hannerz's characterization is adequate despite his disregard for the emotional aspect of cosmopolitanism, not because he upholds the elitist philosophical tradition, but because the citizens of cyberspace have indeed acquired semiotic skills that allow them to jump over cultural fences. The trouble is that this semiotic competence does not entail intimate knowledge of several cultures but rather, the ability to disregard cultural differences as if they do not exist; in other words to use all memes, the basic units of cultural memory, as if they belong to the culture of the interpreter.

Cultural memes, as Richard Dawkins christened them, are the basic 'hereditary' units of culture that replicate themselves via imitations. "We are built as gene machines and cultured as meme machines" (201). Adapting Dawkins' idea and adhering to his gene analogy, I apply the term 'memes' to the smallest cultural units evolving from materialized ideas, rather than to nuclear ideas or the complex molecules (198) and the social institutions generated by them.<sup>14</sup> I claim that memes guarantee their successful longevity, continuous replication, not by expansion but by shrinking. Thus when canonic texts, rather than the ideas they contain, function as memes, it is de-contextualization, a depletion process, and a transformation of cultural units into lexical units, which assures their success. Although a meme's journey of continuous existence begins in imitation, true to Darwin's evolution theory and Dawkins' insights, mutation turns out to be more important than imitation. When an attribute that used to function as a synecdoche and trigger immediate activation of its originating text loses this ability – is depleted of its historical cultural content via a process of de-contextualization resulting from continuous imitations and cultural over-exposure – it acquires different signifying potentials and achieves the ultimate goal of continuous life. Although such de-contextualized memes are not restricted to Computer Mediated Communication, they are part of the necessary equipment used in it. Only under such conditions of depletion through de-contextualization can canonic attributes be effectively

used in a virtual community whose members do not necessarily partake of the same cultural heritage.

## Conclusion

The web's virtual community is a very strong cosmopolitan imagined community, with its own language and its own territory (cyberspace). However, members of the internet community do not share the cultural memory that their language still reflects because of their varying national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and because of language usages privileged by the political and economic forces that have shaped popular mass media as a system of communication. The use of canonic textual elements is usually limited to manipulation of depleted signs. The very deficiencies of such 'empty' intertextuality allow these memes, these minimal transmission units of cultural memory, to acquire new meanings or use existing distinct culture-dependent conventional meanings across cultural boundaries. In this way this reversed intertextual practice contributes to the construction of an international language – a basic requirement for achieving cosmopolitan ideals.

This evocation of canonic source texts only in order to discard them as irrelevant when actualized, is a new type of intertextuality. What enables it cognitively is the fact that even readers of traditional allusive literary texts, who inevitably activate various schemas for processing texts, rarely bother with actualizing allusions. Electronic brainstorming occasioned by the recognition of a foreign element in a text, usually subside when the source text is identified. It takes a special acquired cognitive mechanism and high motivation to go through a complete processing of rhetorical intertextuality (Ben-Porat, "Reader" i-iv, 1–25).

Nevertheless, typical assumptions of both radical and certainly rhetorical intertextuality, concerning common backgrounds or relating to semantic functions and interpretive competence are challenged by the new phenomenon. Intertextual theory must also adjust its central notions (reader, author, text, reading context/enunciation situation and community of readers) as well as its research methodologies in relation to computer mediated communication, engendered and (in)formed by new cosmopolitanism and global culture.

The easy accessibility of most intertexts and often of the authors themselves, the possibility of signaling the presence of intertextual junctions, and authorial ability to direct readers, by providing them with links, not only to the most relevant text but to the aspect s/he has in mind make



– at least in theory – many research questions redundant. How to gain a reader’s attention? What are the conditions for successful actualization of an intertextual relation? Is a text truly open to all associations? How to decide if one association is better than another? All of these questions could have become obsolete if users of the web would have taken advantage of all of these options. But, excluding academic sites, Wikipedia, and search engines, they do not. A blogger might be happy to link his or her post to visual elements or audio texts, but as a rule they would not link a canonic reference to its source. It could be argued that the blogger assumes familiarity with the source text; but as, more often than not the posts themselves do not indicate any familiarity and their readers do not comment on the reference, it is probably another aspect of the inverse intertextuality privileged in internet as a model of communication. The age of information with its virtual communities and new model of communication must be entitled to its particular linguistic norms. Linguists and literary theoreticians should study it alongside communication experts, sociologists and cultural critics. Just as in the case of “dead” metaphors, it might require poets to reactivate the detached source texts, but internet experts might help in implementing reactivation in cyberspace.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by THE ISRAEL SCIENCE FOUNDATION (grant No. 625/06).

<sup>2</sup> The term cyberspace comes from William Gibson’s science-fiction novel *Neuromancer*, but has moved to the real world with the development of all forms of computer mediated communication.

<sup>3</sup> On this subject see Desmet’s (2008) comprehensive discussion of Shakespeare on YouTube, in which the author characterizes and explains the nature of parodies on the internet. Her point on the rising numbers of parodies of individual scenes supports my claims concerning memes.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the problems surrounding the construction of a list of canonic texts and our methodological solutions, see Ben-Porat (“The Western”).

<sup>5</sup> For a survey of linguistic discussions of this interpretive constraint in the theoretical context of indirect language comprehension, see Lennon (28–31).

<sup>6</sup> For many illustrations and a linguistic analysis of such canonic references in the press, see P. Lennon. For an example of blending see p.103.

<sup>7</sup> On this see also Ben-Porat (“The Poetics”).

<sup>8</sup> There is a lot of material published on the subject of virtual communities. Interesting discussions of the relations between virtual and real-life communities based on concrete cases can be found in Rheingold (Rheingold, *Homesteading*) and (Rheingold, *Everyday Life*), Wellman and Haythornthwaite (*Internet/everyday*, part IV), Fung (*Bridging*), Gotved (*Construction*); a useful survey of approaches and methodologies covering the subject of

virtual communities in anthropology and related fields until 2002 is Wilson and Peterson (*Anthropology*).

<sup>9</sup> Although this article has nothing to do with a quantitative statistically valid research some statistics need to be noted. The World Internet Project 2009 (USC Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future), summarizing findings from 12 countries (Australia, Canada, Urban China, Columbia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, Macau, New Zealand, Singapore, Sweden, USA) provides the following statistics concerning blogs: most users of the internet do not write blogs (74–96%); only 3–15% write at least once a week; 40–80% of internet users do not read blogs; 9–37% read blogs at least once a week; in both cases the highest numbers represent the USA. A survey conducted by Tel Aviv University Institute for Researching the internet came up with the following results: Out of 500 owners of personal computers, selected according to statistical analysis norms, only 75% (375) are connected to the internet. Only 10% of those are interested in blogs (37). Only 36% of those interested (13) would read entries that contain literary pieces and only 51% (19) respond to all kinds of entries by commenting. Only 1 person admitted to commenting on the actual reading experience. In complete opposition to these statistics, there is a strong belief in the growth and importance of blogging for all social activities, summed up by David Kline in his title “I Blog, therefore I am” (Kline and Burstein, eds. *Blog*, 237). Carmel Vaisman (*Blogs/Politics*) supports the survey’s results when she writes that in 2006, with 3.9 million Israeli residents connected to the internet, “the Hebrew blogosphere remain underdeveloped and consist only of as few as 50,000 active blogs” (112)

<sup>10</sup> *Many2many* is the name of a blog shared by major academics researching the web: Kley Shirky, Dana Boyd, and David Weinberger among others.

<sup>11</sup> This is in the process of changing, as the number of platforms in other languages increases all the time. But in 2009 most of the materials and linguistic transactions are still in English.

<sup>12</sup> The latter is still a common conception, as attested to by statements describing the cosmopolitan as “having an exciting and glamorous character associated with travel and mixture of cultures (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1989), or “broadminded, catholic, openminded, urbane, well-travelled and worldly-wise” (Collins Compact Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> For a comprehensive study of internet language, see Crystal.

<sup>14</sup> The best known and most controversial application of the term ‘memes’ to the discussion of the history of successful ideas is Howard Bloom’s *The Lucifer Principle* (1995).

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## Medbesedilnost in svetovljanstvo v kibernetnem prostoru

Ključne besede: literatura in medmrežje / literarni kanon / medbesedilnost / kozmopolitizem / globalizacija / virtualne skupnosti

Članek preverja pojme svetovljanstva, globalizacije, interneta in intertekstualnosti z vidika njihovega medsebojnega delovanja. Najprej se loteva vprašanj, ki so jih v ospredje postavili izsledki raziskovalnega projekta, ki se je ukvarjal z navzočnostjo evropskega literarnega kanona v hebrejskih množičnih občilih v digitalni dobi. Vztrajno sklicevanje na ista kanonska besedila v vseh hebrejskih množičnih občilih in privilegirani položaj iz konteksta vzetih kanonskih elementov (npr. atributov kanonskih besedil, zvečine imen, a tudi znanih citatov, posebnih prizorov in drugih elementov zgodbe) razkriva težnjo po velikem zmanjševanju potrebe po skupnih kulturnih ozadjih. V skrajnem primeru obvezne dekontekstualizacije take lažne reference niso le iztrgane iz svojega kanonskega besedila, marveč pogosto vzbudijo neumestna pričakovanja, iz tega pa lahko sledijo napačni sklepi; hkrati ta iz konteksta vzeta znamenja razkrivajo množico uveljavljenih ali zlahka ustvarjenih lokalnih konceptualizacij.

Izsledke ponazarjajo primeri iz računalniških iger in anonimnih blogov. Oboje je internetna spletna stran, tipična za računalniško podprto sporazumevanje, pri katerem opazovalec lahko sočasno vidi sporočila in odgovore njihovih bralcev.

Težnja po velikem zmanjševanju potrebe po skupnem znanju napoveduje novo vlogo pojavov, ki so bili razumljeni kot dokaz plehkosti naše tržno usmerjene kulture ali kot ena izmed negativnih posledic kulturne globalizacije. Kultura se postavlja s potencialno pomembno retorično intertekstualnostjo – verjetno gre za pomežik omikanemu občinstvu, ki nemara zviška gleda na računalniške igre in njihove ustvarjalce ali prezira reklame, ki poskušajo bedake voditi za nos – vendar ne predpostavlja nobene aktualizacije intertekstualnih razmerij.

Nasprotno pa sama trdim, da prav omejitve take »prazne« intertekstualnosti omogočajo memom, tj. zelo majhnim enotam kulturnega spomina, da dobijo nove pomene ali da uporabijo obstoječe, izrazito kulturno pogojene, dogovorjene pomene onkraj kulturnih ločnic. Ukinjena intertekstualna praksa na ta način prispeva k oblikovanju mednarodnega jezika – temeljnega pogoja za doseg svetovljanskih idealov. Ti so prehodili dolgo pot od klasičnega etičnega pogleda na človeštvo, od plemenitega filozofskega stališča, prek modernega vzvišenega navdušenja za tuje in eksotično in kolonialističnega romantiziranja domorodcev in njihove kulture, pa do pogledov na svetovljanstvo kot življenjsko dejstvo globaliziranega sveta. Medtem ko se mi zdi neprepričljiva trditev, da mešani zakoni in ponavljajoče se migracije pomagajo širiti svetovljanske ideale – rasizem je namreč prav toliko značilen za migrante, ki živijo v velemestih, kot za domorodce, ki morajo shajati z zahtevami drugih kultur v svoji domovini –, pa verjamem, da so virtualne skupnosti, v katerih je etnična in kulturna identiteta sogovornika bodisi neznana ali nepomembna, blizu tega, da postanejo resnično svetovljanske skupnosti. Da bi dosegli ta ideal, mora jezik spreminiti nekatere svoje sporazumevalne omejitve.

Seveda je glavna zahteva še vedno splošno razširjeni besednjak, vendar omejitvam »skupnega znanja« (iz katerega izhajata naše pojmovanje intertekstualnosti in ideja o interpretativnih skupnostih), kljubuje težnja po neupoštevanju izvirnih kontekstov, izvornih besedil, ki so dala najbolj znane (tj. najuspešnejše) meme Zahoda. Poleg tega spodbijajo druge temeljne pojme intertekstualnosti: internet kot nov vzorec sporazumevanja, delna podobnost med virtualnimi skupnostmi in skupnostmi bralcev, položaj ustnega izrekanja. Tako kot poslušalci epov lahko tudi naslovniki internetnega sporazumevanja komentirajo – izražajo svoje strinjanje ali kritičnost – domala nemudoma; tako kot pevec zgodb se lahko tudi blogar odzove takoj – avtorju ni treba čakati leta na novo pregledano izdajo; tako

kot ustna epika digitalno besedilo ni ustaljeno; tako kot izvajalec ustnega epa je tudi anonimni pisec bloga zelo stvarna oseba, na katero se lahko obrnemo, in ne interpretativna stvaritev.

Teorija intertekstualnosti mora biti zato zelo pozorna na svoja razmerja do globaliziranega svetovljanstva in interneta.

November 2009