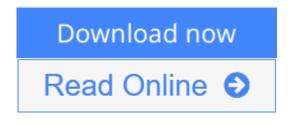# Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature

By Espen J. Aarseth

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Can computer games be great literature? Do the rapidly evolving and culturally expanding genres of digital literature mean that the narrative mode of discourse?novels, films, television series?is losing its dominant position in our culture? Is it necessary to define a new aesthetics of cyborg textuality?

In *Cybertext*, Espen Aarseth explores the aesthetics and textual dynamics of digital literature and its diverse genres, including hypertext fiction, computer games, computer-generated poetry and prose, and collaborative Internet texts such as MUDs. Instead of insisting on the uniqueness and newness of electronic writing and interactive fiction, however, Aarseth situates these literary forms within the tradition of "ergodic" literature?a term borrowed from physics to describe open, dynamic texts such as the *I Ching* or Apollinaire's calligrams, with which the reader must perform specific actions to generate a literary sequence.

Constructing a theoretical model that describes how new electronic forms build on this tradition, Aarseth bridges the widely assumed divide between paper texts and electronic texts. He then uses the perspective of ergodic aesthetics to reexamine literary theories of narrative, semiotics, and rhetoric and to explore the implications of applying these theories to materials for which they were not intended.

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Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature By Espen J. Aarseth Bibliography

Editorial Review

Review

A book that critics and researchers in the field cannot easily ignore.

(*Svenska Dagbladet*)

In many respects, this is the book I and many others have been waiting for. I have not seen any work so comprehensive in its synthesis of previous commentary. Aarseth's brilliant observations remind me of McLuhan's 'probes'?highly condensed, provocative statements meant to generate controversy and insight. This is clearly the best study of electronic texts I have yet read.

(Stuart Moulthrop, University of Baltimore, author of *Victory Garden*)

About the Author

Espen J. Aarseth is associate professor in the Department of Humanistic Informatics, University of Bergen, Norway.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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