

DISsertation: NEW MEDIA, PUBLIC SPHERES, AND FORMS OF EXPRESSION

TALAN MEMMOTT

DIGITAL RHETORIC

AND POETICS

Signifying Strategies in Electronic Literature



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY

DIGITAL RHETORIC AND POETICS
Signifying Strategies in Electronic Literature

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Faculty of Culture and Society, Malmö University

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For information about the time and place for the public defence and an electronic version of the dissertation, see <http://dspace.mah.se/handle/2043/12547>

To Jone and Ray Memmott, my Mom and Dad.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores computational and media-based signifying strategies in electronic literature from the point of view of reading, writing, programming and design. The essays included in the dissertation represent more than fifteen years of participation in the field of electronic literature as both a practitioner and theorist and reflect upon the emerging and evolving areas of digital rhetoric and poetics. Throughout the dissertation I am most interested in presenting the variety of approaches to electronic literature as a practice, and the expanded critical concerns required to address the field. By electronic literature I am not referring to digitized text or eBooks, per se; rather, the works addressed in this dissertation come out of primarily experimental forms of digital literary practice. As such, they provide examples of heavily mediated, multi-modal digital artifacts that problematize reading, writing and literature in general. In this regard they also present potential modes of signification that require further research and critique at a fundamental level.

With the introduction of images, animations, audio, and the procedural into the area of literary practice it is perhaps no longer sufficient to consider electronic literature within the domain of traditional concepts of rhetoric or poetics. As Friedrich Block points out in his *Eight Digits of Digital Poetics*, “Modernist ways of writing cannot be translated medially. If this is tried, then the results are disappointing, flat and trivial. At best they are didactic.” (Block 2010) With this in mind, this dissertation strives to develop concepts related to the current rhetorical and poetical conditions of

various digital practices by examining the signifying strategies within the works.

The dissertation is divided into four sections, each with its own introduction:

“Digital Poetics and Rhetoric” contains four articles that focus on specific rhetorical and poetic applications of digital media in various genres and forms of electronic literature. The essays, which were produced between 2001 and 2011 are arranged chronologically to demonstrate changes in the field and in my own critical interests. The first and last essays in this first section focus on a specific electronic literary form called codework and offer an interesting perspective on my own development as a theorist. The second essay considers my own literary practice in electronic literature, while the third is more concerned with critical method and the problems of reading complex hypermedia literary works.

“Examining Practice” is directed toward reading of works by specific practitioners – Donna Leishman, Jason Nelson, Nick Montfort, Scott Rettberg, J.R. Carpenter, Eric Snodgrass, and myself. The discussions in the four articles in this section include visual narrative, appropriation from game paradigms, and to some degree remediation and recombinant poetics. All of these issues are recurrent themes in electronic literary practice, but how they are applied by each of the practitioners and works addressed in this section differs greatly. In this regard, each uses different signifying strategies and requires a different method of reading.

The two texts included in “Embodied Critique” are presented as examples of how tropes of programming code – procedure and combinatorics – can be leveraged for poetic purposes away from the computer. One of the texts uses code metaphorically, while the other demonstrates a method for manual combinatorics.

The final section of the dissertation, “Network Phenomenology” presents the texts from three of my better known hypermedia pieces reformatted for the page. These texts are significant here for

their combination of poetic, critical, and theoretical language; their use of media specific neologisms; and, their presentation of a *heuristic* method for critical theory. The notion of *heuristics* is borrowed from Gregory Ulmer, and is based on the idea that theory, at times, enters the humanities through artistic experimentation. These texts illustrate this idea in practice.

With the introductory text for each section of the dissertation I have tried to point out key points of interest in the included essays and works, and in my own research.

Signification in media-rich electronic literature occurs across semantic and semiological systems, and technological paradigms. As such, it is important that both practitioner and scholar understand how these attributes of digital media operate poetically and rhetorically, how they facilitate and sometimes undermine meaning-making in electronic literature. What I am most interested in through the essays in this dissertation is examining, exploring, and demonstrating some of the complex issues related to developing a practical and theoretical understanding of these operations.

Much of this understanding is developed through an observation of “feature-clusters” in a number of electronic literary works, and a consideration of how the works have been dealt with critically by others. I borrow the term “feature-clusters” from Sandy Baldwin’s essay *Against Digital Poetics*, as this term seems quite appropriate for the consideration of emerging genres and forms of electronic literature. The discussion of genre, which Baldwin dubs a “descriptive poetics” is based on the presumption that “literariness is folded into the feature-clusters, which define the aggregate state of literariness in each genre.”(Baldwin) For me, this seems a positive conflation of genre with purely digital features, which separates electronic literature from prior forms but presents a certain problem to genre studies as a discipline.

One of the key issues that must be considered in terms of genre in electronic literature is the positioning of signifying technologies in relationship to the literary. What is to be done with images, anima-

tions, and interface and interaction design? Is genre to be based on the aesthetics of these elements? If we were to pursue such a line we may end up developing misleading genres containing works with similar aesthetic effects but little in common as to overall content. We could perhaps look at how the code functions then, where code becomes a *code*, and still end up with a sort of kludged economy of genres. In this regard, even the idea of feature-clusters seems to fall short of establishing something consistent and coherent.

As I state in *Beyond Taxonomy: Digital Poetics and the Problem of Reading*, included in the dissertation, “the only definition [appropriate to digital poetry is a] rather generic one.” In consideration of the diversity of electronic literary work it is next to impossible for genre to serve as even a temporary container for its possibilities. The problem then seems to be in the expectation that a consistent and coherent container is necessitated here. And, to a certain extent this runs counter to the form itself; or, going a bit further – to the realities of digital culture.

There are a number of issues that emerge from the hope for a consistent and coherent taxonomy of electronic literary practice that deserve attention. There is a tendency within literary scholarship associated with the field to seek antecedent texts that provide a historical framework for electronic literature. This endeavor, though at times necessary, tends to over-historicize the field and neglect the substantial changes in the materiality of language that electronic literature presents. Though we can attach past literary trends to electronic literature post facto, it is important that these attachments be contextualized as speculative. They do not represent a true history of the field. Rather, they provide a sort of mythology for the field that is largely based in an ontological privileging of the literary as it has been. The mythology seems to operate for the benefit of the field institutionally, but has very little to do with the actualities of practice or the conditions of its objects. In consideration of this, the dissertation takes up a number of works that include very little written text with much of the content occurring as images, animations, or through interaction – most notably John

Cayley's *What We Will* (addressed in *Beyond Taxonomy*), Donna Lesihman's *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw* (addressed in *Navigation, Investigation, and Inference*), and Ted Warnell's *db 11x8.5* series (addressed in *Revisiting Codework*). The question is, from what literary movement do works like these emerge? Or, what sort of alternative histories, outside of literature, predict or inform these works?

This sort of mythologizing occurs even at the most general level, in the consideration of certain works as literary. In *Revisiting Codework: Phenomenology of an Anti-Genre* I quote from codework practitioner Mez as she responds to being asked by Josephine Bosma about her preoccupation with language and poetry. "Regarding poetry, it's a label I'm uncomfortable with." This response is telling, but rarely regarded when considering Mez's work. One must wonder then what is really at play with literary scholarship around digital practice. Is it acceptable for literary scholars to ignore such an overt statement by a practitioner disconnecting their own practice from the critical concerns of literature?

Another tendency is to attempt to define canonical electronic literary works with the idea that "important" works be archived and the history of the field be indefinitely accessible. Though I understand this initiative, it still appears to run counter to the facts of digital culture, technology, and contemporary notions of progress. From an institutional point of view it may seem quite significant to have an archive of works to refer to as time goes on but the actualities of technological development are not necessarily concerned with the preservation of electronic literature or digital art. New browsers, plug-ins and platforms are released; development tools, formats, and protocols emerge and with each new development the field expands further. This is perhaps the one constant in digital culture – that it remain in motion – and the best that we can hope for in terms of a canon is a provisional shortlist that demonstrates the conditions and manifestations of the field at a given time.

As I suggest a number of times in the dissertation, it is perhaps more appropriate to think beyond or outside of genre, canons, ar-

chives, etc. and consider the applied poetics of each practitioner, of each application. A move toward a critical method based in a fluid model that takes into consideration changing and emerging technologies and platforms, and the highly individualized formal articulations and applications of these technologies could lead to scholarship with broader appeal, and more significant cultural relevance. In no ways is this a call for critics and scholars to become generalists (of a sort) by also becoming designers and programmers, nor is this a call for them to become creative practitioners. That being said, I do believe that the poetical and rhetorical operations at play in electronic literature are best understood when there is a true appreciation for, and perhaps some experience with how digital media are applied.

This point seems relevant beyond a consideration of electronic literature and could be said to apply for digital literacy in general. This sentiment is echoed by Roberto Simanowski in his essay *Reading Digital Literature*. In appraising how close readings of electronic literary and artistic work helps to forward digital literacy, Simanowski claims that, "...digital literacy cannot be reduced to the competence in using digital technology but also entails an understanding of the language of digital media. Like cinematic literacy develops by understanding the meaning of techniques such as close ups, cuts, cross-fading, and extradiegetic music, digital literacy develops by exploring the semiotics of technical effects in digital media. I think such "reading" competence can best be developed by talking about examples in digital art." (Simanowski 15)

Simanowski continues by stating that, "Since art is by default always more or less concerned with its own materiality, it seems to be the best candidate for a hermeneutic exercise that aims to make us aware of the politics of meaning in digital media." (Simanowski 15) Electronic literature and digital art offer digital literacy and interaction design examples that to a certain degree expose their own operations at rhetorical, poetical, and technical levels. With this in mind we can claim that electronic literature exceeds the literary and should not be the specific domain of a singular discipline. I would also argue that the application of digital media should not

be exclusive to creative practice, and it would be to great benefit for more critics and scholars to take up the form and develop critical approaches within digital media.

The last two sections of the dissertation – *Embodied Critique*, and *Network Phenomenology* – present examples of how a critical method within digital media could operate. Though the work included in these sections has been considered either performative or creative, I would argue that formally and in terms of functionality, aesthetics and poetics they offer potential alternative methods for critical discourse that either comment on or operate through the tropes of the media they intend to critique.

There are a number of things at play in these works that takes them out of a purely creative context. The section titled *Embodied Critique* includes a text (*Concluding Remarks by Way of Introduction*) that was delivered as an address at the Codework Workshop held at West Virginia University in October 2008. To be exact, the address was given as concluding remarks for the workshop. Since the topic of the workshop was codework, and brought together scholars, artists and poets, along with programmers and computer scientists it seemed appropriate to give the address under certain formal constraints that originate in computer programming but are utilized by digital poets. Though the address was given as a manual demonstration of the operations of a variable array, the text presented in the dissertation is formatted as a functioning JavaScript. In actuality the process of developing the work originated with the JavaScript, from which the texts as delivered were transcribed by hand. The sequence was in effect derived from running the script repeatedly during the workshop. I have made the source code and a working example available in the web supplement for this dissertation.

The constraint of the variable array, the context in which the address was delivered, and its documentation as a functioning piece of code produce a holistic effect. Programmers may understand the aspects borrowed from programming, poets may understand the creative enterprise; scholars may understand the critical aspects.

Additionally, on a metaphoric level the JavaScript-based documentation and the delivery itself can be said to represent indecision, variability of argument, and an unwillingness to pin-down the event by providing concluding remarks. Though on a superficial level the delivery may have been taken as pure performance, the piece emerges from a critical method working from a heuritic model.

The last section of the dissertation, as stated above, presents texts abstracted from three hypermedia works. The original hypermedia pieces these texts are taken from are part of a larger project concerned with online subjectivity, or what I have called *Network Phenomenology*. Within the context of electronic literature these works have mostly been taken as creative pieces falling under the genre of fiction. Though I have generally not argued against this there is, however, another way in which these works can be understood. Simply because these works, in their hypermedia form, take advantage of various signifying strategies and affordances of digital media does not make them necessarily “creative” or “fictive.” The content of these works is philosophical and speculative, and reflects on the phenomenology of the subject when positioned before a monitor, connected to a network.

These works are examples of critical or philosophical hypermedia and to a certain extent represent exactly what I mean by embodied critique – in these works, arguments about network subjectivity and the manipulation of the user through multi-modal media are made not only through the written word but also through procedurality, interaction, and graphical design. This sort of extreme reflexivity reinforces, by way of example, some of the issues of reading, and what writing is, or can be in digital media that are addressed in a number of essays in the dissertation.

What I have provided here as to these texts is most assuredly different than the original hypermedia works, and this transcription, transliteration, or transmediation (or even demediation) presents a variety of challenges. Though adapting and formatting a hypermedia work for the page eliminates all of the interactive and pro-

cedural features of the work, it does present certain media specific opportunities; in that, the complication of the reading process is not exclusive to digital media and the page can still, at some level, be exploited for these purposes. What I have tried to do with these texts is provide as much of the feel of the hypermedia pieces as possible utilizing diagrams, alternative formatting, and typographical changes. What is perhaps most significant here is that despite the odd formatting of this adaptation, and the lack of interactive and procedural features the arguments within the text are maintained. And, it should be added, are consistent with many of the arguments made in the more traditional sections in the dissertation.

Throughout this dissertation, in the essays and examples I provide, my hope is that the complexities and variety of issues around electronic literature are exposed and through this I offer reading strategies and potential avenues for critical methods. In its breadth of considerations, this dissertation provides a substantial overview of my research interests and involvement in the field for many years. In addition to this, it provides something of a chronology of the field from 2000 to 2011, tracing the evolution and emergence of different manifestations of digital rhetoric and poetics. I have endeavored to provide contextual frameworks in the introductory texts for each section and have also implemented a web supplement containing links to the works discussed in the dissertation, along with selected source code and expanded examples.

The web supplement is located online at:
http://talanmemmott.com/drp_web

Publications compiled in this dissertation:

"E_RUPTURE://Codework". "Serration in Electronic Literature." *American Book Review*. 22.6 (2001): Print.

"On Herminutia: Digital Rhetoric and Network Phenomenology." *Cybertext Year Book 2002-2003*. Ed. Markku Eskelinen and Raine Koskimaa. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2003. Print.

"Beyond Taxonomy: Digital Poetics and the Problem of Reading." *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories*. Ed. Adelaide Morris and Thomas Swiss. Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2006. Print.

"Revisiting Codework: Phenomenology of an Anti-Genre." *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*. Volume 2 Issue 3 (2011): Print.

"Navigation, Investigation, and Inference: Donna Leishman's Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw" *The Iowa Review Web*. Volume 9 no. 1 (August 2007). Web.
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“Delimited Meshings” (Original Hypermedia Work)
Cauldron and Net. Volume 3 (2001). Web.
<<http://www.studiocleo.com/cauldron/volume3/contents/index.htm>>

“Translucidity” (Original Hypermedia Work)
frame 6 / trAce Online Writing Community (2002). Web
<<http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk/frame6/>>

DIGITAL RHETORIC AND POETICS

The first section of the dissertation focuses on issues that arise in considering the rhetorical and poetic application of digital media in various genres and forms of electronic literature. The dates of the essays range from 2001 to 2011 and demonstrate both changes in the field of electronic literature and in my own perception and participation as a theorist and practitioner. I have organized the essays chronologically to emphasize these changes.

E_RUPTURE://Codework". "Serration in Electronic Literature, the first essay in this section was originally published in an issue of The American Book Review (22.6 2001) that focused on the electronic writing practice of Codework. The issue was edited by Alan Sondheim, who in fact coined the term and featured articles by McKenzie Wark, Florian Cramer, Beatrice Beaubien, and myself. As Sondheim states in his introduction to the issue, codework is "a literary avant-garde concerned with the intermingling of human and machine." Some of the stylistic devices of codework are the commingling of coding languages and syntax with natural language, the appropriation of network-based correspondence such as email, and the exposure of network and computational operations – such as viewable directory structures manipulated binary files, and deliberately faulty programming.

My own essay in the issue looks at the work of three codework practitioners -- Mez, Brian Lennon, and Ted Warnell – with an emphasis on the formal attributes of their work. My primary interest in codework for this essay and in these particular practitioners

of the form is in how punctuation marks, such as colons, slashes, brackets and full-stops are given new meaning through their use as markers in various network protocols. As I say in the essay, “[t]he “.” is no longer simply a decimal or full-stop (as if it ever was). The syntax of the mark expands to indicate blocks and breaks in location, performing as a gateway ideogram through to the next protocol. Extensions and gateway ideograms such as “.” “:” “/” are loaded indicators of the various negotiation points in a User’s procession through the apparatus.”

Each of the practitioners I address within the essay has developed their own individual approach to codework. For Mez, codework becomes a sort of semantic overcoding. Through the use of brackets Mez embeds alternative semantic paths within the work that interrupt, complicate and expand upon the primary message of the originating text. In this regard, Mez’s work explores polysemic potentialities in writing that mirror certain procedural, combinatorial coding practices. The work of Brian Lennon tends to explore identity and authority by deconstructing the formal aspects of email exchange. Through a process of appropriation, parsing, and repurposing of the email transmissions of others, Lennon’s work makes it difficult to locate the author as Author. Though he is the author of the re-presented cut-up, he has no authority over the original transmission.

Where both Mez and Lennon directly address the phenomenology of code and transmissions across the Internet, Warnell’s approach is more painterly and conceptual. Though still concerned with code as a potentially meaningful language form, Warnell’s work is directed more toward an aesthetic output based on unreadability than a poetics, or philosophy of code per se. Warnell uses code as a painter uses pigment, working it to a point of almost pure abstraction and presenting in blocks that occupy the screen more as color mass than as literary unit.

What is clear in the work of each of the practitioners addressed in *E_RUPTURE://Codework*. "Serration in Electronic Literature is that codework as a form of writing addresses more than just altera-

tions in inscription method brought about by network technologies. Especially in the work of Mez and Lennon, the phenomenological positioning of variability, unstable identity and authority, and overcoding through redundant transmission are foregrounded to such an extent that these texts and their methods of production may be viewed as more philosophical or theoretical than literary. Or, to paraphrase Mez from her *The Art of M[ez]ang.elle.ing*, technique has become theory. This notion is mirrored in the essay itself as the writing style borrows heavily from the techniques of codework.

E_RUPTURE://Codework". "Serration in Electronic Literature is a good place to start the dissertation, and this section as it marks the beginning of my published critical work and sets up a position that is carried on throughout. In much of my critical writing I attempt to tie digital rhetoric and poetics to what I call network phenomenology. The second essay in this section of the dissertation -- *On Herminutia: Digital Rhetoric and Network Phenomenology* -- is an extension of concepts established in both this early critical work and my creative practice as an electronic writer.

In the first paragraph of *On Herminutia: Digital Rhetoric and Network Phenomenology* I describe the essay as "a meander through my hypermedia work and its methods of mediation." Much of the essay is indeed focused on hypermedia authorship in general and my own specific practice, but you will also find commentary on the above mentioned issues of digital rhetoric and poetics as a form of heuritic phenomenology. In this regard, the essay is also directed toward the invention of vocabulary, the use of stylistic devices as evidenced in various electronic literary forms, and the appropriation of classical mythology as metaphor. The material for the essay was originally compiled for a keynote address (*A Theory of.../?*) at the 2002 trAce Incubation conference. For this event I was asked to discuss my own work as it applied to an "embodied theory of network practices."

The essay is decidedly subjective and practice oriented, taking up – to varying degrees – six of my own literary hypermedia works that

in essence perform as “embodied theory” -- *Delivery Machine 01* (1998), *A Machicolated Body*(1998), *Reasoned Metagoria* (1999), *Lexia to Perplexia* (2000), *Delimited Meshings* (2001), and *Translucidity* (2000).

In terms of vocabulary, the title of the essay itself begins this enterprise with the use of the term *Herminutia*. With this term I am suggesting that the hermeneutic project for electronic literature should involve the minute elements of writing through electronic technology and writing with digital media. It is perhaps too often that the modes and methods of practice are ignored in the criticism of electronic literature. In this regard, the term is a sort of generative intervention. Other neologisms that appear in the essay include metagoria, tehnontology, and cadavatar.

Metgoria, which is defined in the essay as speaking or writing across, above, among, behind, between the lines; to signify openly, through openings and opportunities, through the gaps, in the gaps, to plug the gaps; to meander and suspect ... producing tangents – clues, balls of thread or wax – leading somewhere, or not – and, back again, is a term I have been using since my early art practice as a painter, video and performance artist. In the context of electronic literature I see this term applying to the practices and potentialities of writing through media. As I state in the essay, hypermedia authorship operates through a “positing and position of the literary as already post-literary – drawing upon sign regimes other than the pure word.”

By default electronic writing practices include elements of interaction design through the introduction of procedural and multi-modal elements into the arena of signification. As such, electronic writers must predict (to a certain extent) the manners of the work’s user/reader. This extends textuality (in the broadest sense of the word), and moves narrative from a position embedded in the application itself to a position *between* the writer and the reader. In the essay I refer to this repositioning of textuality as narra[c]tive rhetoricity. The predictive encoding of interaction and implication by a work’s author is essentially performed in reverse by the us-

er/reader of the work. Once narrative requires this narra[c]tive process, as it does in highly interactive works of electronic literature, neither the work nor the reading can be complete – product becomes process.

What the author provides is something like a ruin. And, as I state in the essay, “Through a sort of archaeology of hyper-rhetorical fragments the user discovers the applied, environmental grammarology of [...] the suspect document.” It is through this variable process of exposure to and exposing of these fragments that the user/reader comes to understand the syntax of the application, and to some degree authorial intent. As such, the reading is made metagorical (so to speak) as it is not only reading content, but also reading the form and the gaps between. In this regard metagoria takes on added meaning that connects it to both metaphor and to allegory. Reading of literary hypermedia is essentially meta-reading as the user/reader is made self aware of her own narra[c]tive process through a negotiation of media, text, and interaction.

Later in *On Herminutia* I take up network phenomenology more explicitly exploring the term technontology as it relates to my own work, and how I see the reader positioned at the computer terminal. One must remember that this essay is from 2002 and digital culture was not yet inundated with mobile technologies. Still, when one is holding a mobile device one is still essentially at a terminal. It is just that now we often take the terminal with us.

The term technontology takes as its base the notion that subjectivity is not so much related to the “I” as it is to “I+device”. What is meant by device here can be considered at a number of levels. We could go so far as to consider language itself a technology and hence a device; we could consider prehistoric tools technologies; or, we could consider, as is my notion in the essay, how identity is constructed through network technology. When interacting with online applications, and this is especially important in regard to Web 2.0 and social media, identity is made “a condition of digital rhetoric, a process (a pro-posal) – a condition of writing across the

various protocols of the network.” It is performed “through diverse signification.” As such, network identity is made up of fragments of information about the self deposited into, and defined, processed, delimited by external systems. What the network in fact supplies is return, a re-remembering or reification of this information to its originator.

On Herminutia contains detailed information on how I use classical mythology in my work, especially in regard to *Lexia to Perplexia*, *Delimited Meshings*, and *Translucidity*. These works are considered later in the dissertation so I will refrain from discussing this here as it would only be detract from the key issues of this section.

As the title implies, the third essay in this section, *Beyond Taxonomy: Digital Poetics and the Problem of Reading* is concerned with the problems in establishing a comprehensive and coherent taxonomic system for electronic literary objects. Though, there is substantial overlap -- where *On Herminutia* deals primarily with hypermedia authorship *Beyond Taxonomy* deals with the critical reading of digital poetry.

The essay begins by considering some of the terms applied to electronic literature (under the guise of genre), and the various media and formats in which literary applications are produced. Right away I suggest that the term digital poetry has been applied to so many different kinds of creative digital applications that the only definition should be generic – “that the object in question be digital, mediated through digital technology and that the object be called poetry by its author, or have the term poetry attached to it by a critical reader.” As such, any definition beyond this should be considered a subjective and liquid delimiter based in the ontological privilege of the person applying the term. Rather than a genre of poetry, or a formal definition of a specific object or application, digital poetry is a contextual framework, a lens if you will, through which a variety of creative technological applications can be considered.

In the early days of electronic writing much of the debate of its literary value, its association to literary history was based in a consideration of the material differences between page-based and screen-based writing. Though this was appropriate for the time, a continuation of these arguments ignores some rather substantial developments in the field. It is perhaps too easy to continue to talk about nonlinearity, or link/node structures so prevalent in the past, or to think of electronic literature as a utopian form that frees the reader from the shackles of the book and the authority of the author. It has been years since Robert Coover declared the passing of the golden age of literary hypertext (1999) and in the intervening period we have seen the World Wide Web become second nature, media-rich mobile technologies emerge, augmented reality become a reality, etc. The field of electronic literature has been altered by this all. And, one should say, it will continue to evolve as newer media, technologies, and platforms emerge. It is no longer productive – in regard to scholarship or practice – to work from a fixed model.

Beyond Taxonomy places the page/screen debate as just one of many issues in the expanded field of material concerns for electronic literature. When we begin to consider that work on the World Wide Web may be produced in XHTML, Flash, Processing, HTML 5, Perl, etc. we must begin to consider the material differences between these technologies. How do they differ in signifying strategies? What does any given technology offer in terms of poetics? As I state in the essay, “These differences are not superficial or interfacial, but integral.” Still, when we consider differences between media technologies we are perhaps not going far enough. At the level of the practitioner we sometimes find, especially in regard to signifying strategies, differences one work to the next even if the same technology is used.

In the essay I propose a consideration of the applied poetics of the individual practitioner of an individual work. As a reading strategy, especially in regard to scholarship, there is an increase in the required rigor for doing a close reading of electronic literary works. One must consider the given technology, the signifying

strategies employed, the culture context of the work, the supposed intentionality of the author, etc. In essence older models of “close reading” give way to “deep reading.”

Current works of electronic literature increasingly use interaction, playability, interface design, and advance computation as part of their systems of poetics. As such, the electronic literary object, the application is an individuated yet tempered system that operates through a commingling or harmonics of signifying regimes. In digital poetry, poetry as such is not an overt presentation of verse but something that emerges through a user/reader’s engagement with an application, through a highly interpretive performance of its operations. The success of a work, to a certain degree, is based on the quality of the authorial predictive encoding of a narrative or poetic experience. In the essay I use the analogy of a musical instrument for how a user *plays* a literary application. And, as I state in the essay, “To learn to play the instrument, the digital poetry object [...] is to become aware of the strategies of operational signification within the given application.”

Based on the realities of multi-modal signification in electronic literature it is important that the entirety of a work be “read.” This would include everything from interface design to interaction design, from the computational to the representational. In *Beyond Taxonomy* I make reference to Antonin Artaud’s *The Theater and its Double* for its consideration of the *mise en scène* – “the entirety of theatrical language including everything outside of speech (stagecraft, gesture, lighting, etc.)” –and its resistance to the dominance of the written (then spoken) word in Western Theater. His notion that theater should not be considered the reflection of a written text resonates well with the critical situation of digital poetry as there is so much more to read than just the words. Still, one must wonder as Artaud does of theatrical production if digital poetry is as efficacious as the written word.

Finally, the essay considers the unstable, multi-modal state of digital poetics and the ever transitive condition of technological development as positive attributes of digital culture and practice. From

the point of view of the practitioner this is always a concern that can be related to issues of hardware and software compatibility, as well as creative curiosity, but it also viewed in a positive light as it relates to the invention of modes of signification. The parallel to this from the side of scholarship is that terms and categories attached to field of electronic literature “be allowed to emerge, evolve, and introduced into obsolescence. They should be thought of as temporary and contextual, allowed to lead short yet dynamic lives, sprouting new terms, new categories and conditions...”

The hope is that the critical methods for understanding digital poetry reflect the realities of production. My own recommendation within the essay is that there be more hypermedia works developed by critics of the field— “as the gestures, methods and modes of signification at work in [digital poetry] are largely absent from [digital scholarship].” The divide between creative and critical practices is blurred by the nature of the form and one could say that even in the most creative application there is a theoretical aspect. The introduction of hypermedia into critical practice could lead to new modes and methods of scholarship, perhaps more relevant to digital culture in general.

Revisiting Codework: Phenomenology of an Anti-Genre, the last essay in this section returns to issues of code as literary text and codework as a suspect genre of electronic literature. Where *E_RUPTURE*, the first essay of this section is a sort of passing glance at the formal aspects of codework, *Revisiting Codework* is more thorough and considerably more critical about both the form and its consideration within literary scholarship. Though some of the same practitioners and works are addressed in both essays, the field, its critical consideration, and the practices of those addressed has moved forward in the ten years since *E_RUPTURE* was published.

The essay begins by contrasting Roland Barthes’ definition for mythology with Internet artist Alan Sondheim’s definition for code. These definitions may at first seem incompatible but through a careful reading of both we find that there are some rather interest-

ing correspondences and reversals. Barthes' states in his essay *Change the Object Itself* that myth is an overturning of culture into the 'natural', while Sondheim's definition for code is that it is a "translation from natural language to an artificial, strictly defined one." We can be fairly certain that wrapped into Barthes' use of the term "cultural" we may include the ideological, sociological, and historical (codes of a sort); and, that Barthes has placed the term natural within single quotes is an indication he is critical of the term. What Barthes is in fact referring to is a process of naturalization that binds nature to its cultural concept. Within Sondheim's definition of code there are a number of embedded questions. First, what is 'natural' about natural language? And, how can we contrast natural language to code if we consider the artificiality of both – the rules, the syntax, the grammar?

If we lay Sondheim's rather narrow, yet provocative definition of code over Barthes' definition for myth we might be tempted to rewrite the Barthes definition to form a certain myth of code, or code of myth. Something like *–myth consists in the recoding of culturally encoded nature through a decoding and re-encoding of cultural codes*. In consideration of these complexities, Sondheim broadens his definition of code to include "anything that combines tokens and syntax to represent a domain" functioning as a "stand in for operations that occur "deeper" in the machine." (Be it cultural or computational).

It is interesting to note that after a decade of debate about what codework is the arguments have expanded rather than settled on defining a characteristic for the form. In the essay I provide some of the definitions that have emerged over the years through the work of a number of scholars. Looking back to 2001 we find that Sondheim's original definition for codework included a syntactical interplay between natural and coding languages, work that are encoded to procedurally manipulate the displayed text, and work in which coding languages become part of the intentional content. All of these persist, so we can take this as the root definition.

Other scholars have taken different positions -- Rita Raley's interest in codework seems largely based in the surface effects and disruptions that the intervention of code causes for literary text; John Cayley is more interested in the maintenance of the executable aspects of code and its consideration in relationship to literary production. Both of these positions are well considered and can apply to codework, but they also represent an ontological privileging of the literary. For myself, I see codework as perhaps more a phenomenology of computer-based inscription than a genre of electronic literature or a specific writing practice. As such, engagement with the Internet apparatus is foregrounded and we can begin to consider codework as not an avant-garde writing practice but as the residue or evidentiary phenomenology of a critical participation with, and through the network.

One of the issues in the essay is the positioning of codework as a literary practice at all. Though for some practitioners it is intentionally positioned as such, for others the practice is less literary than it is theoretical or philosophical. In much of the scholarship around codework, and electronic literature in general there is a push to find antecedent works that demonstrate similar qualities to works produced using computational media. At some level this is understandable, and can be productive for supplying a context for current work; on another level this sort of historical perspective tends to over-simplify cultural changes in regard to writing practice, technology, and emergent systems of inscription.

Literary scholars must be careful in making comparisons between current electronic works and literary works. At times this sort of historicizing says more about the ontological, disciplinary privileging of the scholar than it does about the work. It is perhaps a bit too easy to make a comparison between say codework practitioner Mez and the modernist poetry of e.e. cummings based purely on the formatting of the text. Though both use brackets, parentheses, colons and other grammatical marks to disrupt the text, the intent in doing so for cummings is much different than that of Mez.

In *Revisiting Codework* I employ Mez's use of square brackets to demonstrate one of a variety of differences in intentionality. As Mez states in *_[ad]_[Dressed in a Skin C.ode]* her work is primarily concerned with "residual traces from net.wurk practices that thrive, react N shift according 2 fluctuations in the online environment." As such, the square brackets within her work are utilized not in a traditional grammatical manner, but as stand-ins for operational functions occurring within the text. The square brackets are invested with the conditions of programming rather than natural language. In many programming languages [] are utilized to denote a character class or elements of a variable array. It is in this computational sense that they are most used in the work of Mez. They serve to introduce variability and polysemy into the text.

In none of Mez's work, statements, interviews, etc. does she mention how her writing practice is related to modernist poetry or literature at all. In fact, in an interview with media theorist Josephine Bosma, Mez states that she is uncomfortable with the label of poetry. So, one must wonder why her work is considered in the light of literary text when she openly makes statements that her project does not support it.

For literary scholars, much of the obscurity of codework lies in what Sondheim has called the "syntactical interplay" of surface language and computer language. The obscurity in this regard is not an effect of the surface or natural language, but of the disruption caused by the introduction of programming syntax. In actuality, the same level of obscurity could be reached if two different "natural" languages, with different syntax, with different ideogrammatic or phonetic representation -- one understood the other foreign, appeared in the same text.

The problem then is not one of disruption but of not understanding how the foreign syntax operates in its native environment. This is not so much a problem of code as it is one of scholarly investment in the form. Ultimately, higher level programming languages are human readable and, as I state in the essay, "[I]f we make

claims about the openness of the web it is important to understand, that despite the disruption to current natural language structures, code has become, or is becoming something other than a specialized language.”

Later in *Revisiting Codework* I take a look at practices outside of net art and electronic literature that could technically fall under the rubric of codework. In a conversation on the mailing list *nettime*, Sondheim states that for codework “the interstitial / liminal between the meaning-sememe and the ikonic provides the *content* of the work; in fact, the meaning-sememe and ikonic-sememe are interwoven, inseparable, and contributory [...]”(Sondheim, 2004). Based on this notion it is important to look at potential iconicity in alternative coding practices such as the programs produced for the *Obfuscated C Code Contest*. One example stands out in this regard and at some level could be considered a piece of codework, if not conceptual art.

Carl Banks’ flight simulator program from 1998 has its source code formatted in the shape of an airplane. Though this may seem a simple programmer’s choice there is a conceptual richness to the strategy here that should be of interest to critics of codework practices. The formatting has no bearing on how the program runs, but it does iconically represent what the program is. If we were to just run the program we might never recognize this “obfuscation as clarification,” so a “deep reading” of the overall work is required to understand the conceptual relationship between the formatting of the code and the operations of the program.

If we are to call this codework, or consider it a piece of art we should perhaps heed the warning of Michael Mateas and Nick Montfort – that the term “software art” is rarely used in programming communities and “it seems unfair to apply the term “art,” with all of its connotations, to their work.” (Mateas and Montfort, 2005) As I state in the essay, I imagine the same could be said for applying the terms “literature,” or “poetry.”

What is evident across these essays, and perhaps throughout this dissertation is the variety of complex issues associated with digital rhetoric and poetics as they relate to electronic literary practices. We are presented with genres that are not quite genres, taxonomic and ontological systems that are at best provisional, terminology that could be described as fluid and inventive, and methods of practice and reading that are highly subjective, based in one's own relationship with media technologies. As such, the field resists concrete definition.

All of this could be read with some degree of negativity but to do so would limit the validity of critiques of digital culture. What is called for here is a degree of flexibility and agility, a willingness to deal with dynamic, emergent values and the invention of methods and forms. Or, as I state in *Beyond Taxonomy*, "Terms and categories, like technologies should be allowed to emerge, evolve, and be introduced into obsolescence. They should be thought of as temporary and contextual, allowed to lead short yet dynamic lives, sprouting new terms, new categories and conditions..."

What follows, then, is a survey of ever-evolving considerations of the field of electronic literature – at times distanced and scholarly, at other times subjective and reflective.

E_RUPTURE:// Codework". "Serration in Electronic Literature

“RE:” “.”
“:” “/” “?” “@” ...
”http” “ftp” “www” ...
“edu” “org” “com” ...
“exe” “mp3” “txt” ...

Writing explodes, exploits across/upon –
the form/to form the web.

The Internet is another matter.

The web does matter, spins up and out to affect our General Linguistic Economy. Today, tomorrow we prefix and suffix every.thing.

Our orientation at the terminal transforms the linguistic landscape; attachment to the Internet apparatus alters daily language use by introducing specific and lexical terms and ideograms into commonality.

A despecialization of the specific...

The “.” is no longer simply a decimal or full-stop (as if it ever was). The syntax of the mark expands to indicate blocks and breaks in location, performing as a gateway ideogram through to the next protocol. Extensions and gateway ideograms such as “.” “:” “/” are loaded indicators of the various negotiation points in a User’s procession through the apparatus.

A respecialization of the general (matter)...

en|de|re|coded | [mediation]EX

What is ‘codework’? I don’t know – generally...

One could say it is a form of electronic literary work in which the protocols and structural aspects of the supporting technology, from

which, to which the work is applied are explored and exposed within the body of the text.

To this end, the Internet offers a wide variety of applications and approaches.

Net-based 'codework' can vary in complexity and technological scale, so any discussion of 'codework' must consider everything from elaborately hypermediated selections to simple text documents. The common thread is that that the works make use of emergent ideograms and processes. Though the subject of the work may not directly relate to a critique of network technologies, the method itself provides commentary on the apparatus. The document reiterates its location, its position within an electronic environment, on the web, the Internet, the terminal and exploits the native modes of inscription.

In her self critical work *The Art of M[ez]ang.elle.ing*, Australian artist/writer Mez describes her process as one in which technique becomes theory. And, in turn Mez's theory itself becomes the technique for a sort of serial becoming.

technique b -came theory;
fiction fact N the dis.tinct[ure]ion e -rrelevant. emailing turned
fromme fictional
struc.t[o]ur.ez 2 cracking otherz wurdz, re-alignin them,
reversin, refemmeing in2 a medical/sci-fi mash; mixing
theor[.M.z]ee in2 postfiction, faction]

Brackets and alternative spellings interrupt the transmission as the process overcodes and reveals polysemic potentialities within the primary message. The polysemic values are generally nested within “[]” brackets with the primary message resting on the outside. The primary and additive values are both prone to alteration – alphabetic characters are replaced with numerals, “and” becomes “N”, and in what could be a subtle reference to Barthes – “S” is sometimes replaced with “Z”. The effect is a tightly woven text(ile) with warp and woof marked by differences between the primary and

bracketed transmissions. Within and without the “[]”, the text(ile) is punctuated with stray threads of neologicistic play.

Mez’s essay and method indicates an awareness of the hyper-status of inscription and document as they apply to the Internet. Not only are lines between fact and fiction blurred here – identity is introduced into indeterminacy, turned into a condition of writing. It is important to note that the author has chosen to write this critical observation of technique using the creative method that is the subject of its critique. In fact most of Mez’s online writing production whether it be creative, critical or correspondence is written in this style. To a certain extent, this reinforces the ‘tweening’ notion of the thesis – blurring, stirring the critical with the creative – veiling identity with a baroque syntactic style.

In the final section of *The Art of M[ez]ang.elle.ing – [e]vol[ve]ition::Omeganumeric Mezangelleing* – Mez lists some of the priorities of the method.

2 n-hance the simple text of an email thru the splicing of wurdz
2 phone.tic[k-tock]aulli m -bellish a tract ov text in2 a
neo.logistic maze
2 network 2 the hilt N create de[e]pen.den[ting]cies on email
litzs for the wurkz dis.purse.all
...
2 make net.wurkz space themz.elves in2 a spindle of litzz thru
collaboratori n -tent

The appropriation of email correspondence is fairly common in what is being discussed here as 'codework.' The use of email lists for the source and distribution of some of the work places the Author at a fulcrum, as processor or mediator between dispersals across the apparatus – playing a game of hot potato with digital information. This form of conductivity, rather than the polysemic intentions of the text, is what locates the work as electronic. Certainly, the work is encoded, but the Author originated process produces a pseudo- code rather than one that is directly related to the Internet apparatus. We are not confronted with serrations of

HTML or JavaScript, but with the results of a subjective parsing that extends context, while jamming and complicating the primary transmission. The text undermines its own authority by leaving the reader pleasantly undecided whether it is inscripti on or encryption they are faced with.

Another example of ‘codework’ that utilizes email correspondence as its source is Brian Lennon’s *WORKIN_PR*.

In this work Lennon uses a collection of email messages from a multi -directional discussion to present us with some of the problems of being online. Through a parsing method that leaves the primary transmission of the appropriated email in shambles – words are removed, passages repeated – Lennon explores network identity and authority by deconstructing the fo rmal aspects of email exchange.

There are passages in which every alphabetic character has been parsed out of the document, leaving various brackets, ciphers and ideograms for gleaning. Other passages offer hypercritical poetical texts that may originate w ith Lennon himself – we cannot be sure in this mish-mash of messages. The most significant attributes of this work are found in its exposure of typical email formatting as something pregnant with narrative information, the observation of patterns in email correspondence, and in its concern with time – being (too much) online.

Since much of the source text does not originate with the creator of the work – borrowed from email lists and correspondence – it is difficult to locate the author as Author. The author plays the role of Scriptor in this regard, molding the text to meet intent. Though the text of *RE_WORKINPR* may not originate with Brian Lennon, the appropriated correspondence in the work does not carry as much intentional weight as the commentary constructed through it – its orchestration.

A simple example of Lennon’s use of email formatting is the employment of “>” – a common prefix to forwarded and reply emails – enumerating their passage(s) through the network, marking the

text that follows it as an artifact from a previous correspondence...Within *RE_WORKINPR*, Lennon uses “>” to accentuate redundancies in the writings of the appropriated authors. Once again we see identity delimited as a condition of writing – here, quite critically.

>Not important , >love it
>Not important , >love it

Lennon uses other formal devices of email as well, allowing the headers, subject lines, and timestamp to serve as data in support of his general concerns. Blocks of dates and timestamps from multiple emails, sometimes only minutes apart reinforce the critique by providing concrete examples of a serious attachment to the network. These examples, coupled with the heavy parsing and exposure of a formal syntax within the email document produce a multi-track masterpiece of ‘codework’ that is both poetical and critical.

In each of the examples presented here there is a combination of parsing and email-based appropriation. These two aspects seem to be significant in determining ‘codework’ as a method – whatever that is worth – beyond the self-conscious relationship between authorship to apparatus. In fact, much of the joy in authoring ‘codework’ might be found in this heavy parsing (heavy petting) of the document. There is nothing more writerly than a passion for inscription.

The two previous examples are primarily flat documents of a process and could be rendered on a sheet of paper. Though much of what is considered ‘codework’ may be rendered this way—distributed as text, email or a flat web page, this is not always the case. Mez has created hypermedia pieces, and there are many other producers of hypermediated ‘codework’ – Giselle Beiguelman, Eugene Thacker, etc. Both of these authors use the graphical render-

ings of a computer directory structures in their work – Thacker mapping it to the human body, Beiguelman to the book¹.



Warnell's *Berlioz* (2000)

Ted Warnell's *Berlioz* is comprised of a collection of email messages mish-mashed together and made dynamic. Over what appears to be a greenish over-compressed digital image, units of text appear and disappear through User interaction. What is interesting about this work is that the appropriated email dialog is rendered unreadable by the design.

Berlioz hides its own textuality beneath a sfumato of painterly, or musical intent. Areas of clustered unreadable text occupy the screen, functioning more as color mass than as literary units. In painterly terms, the alphanumeric, diacritical and encoded characters carry the pigment and Warnell has applied them aptly – with a painter/composer's hand. The musicality of the work is rendered in a de-sonified sense – through User interaction, harmonies are struck between the various masses of text. The User controls, conducts the emergence of the text.

¹ Eugene Thacker's *ftp_formless_anatomy: counter-anatomical database* is unfortunately no longer on line. Giselle Beiguelman's *The Book after the Book* can be found online at <<http://www.desvirtual.com/thebook/>>

More rigid than *Berlioz*, Warnell's *VIRU2* also demonstrates the use of text as 'mass'. Areas of red, black and blue text mark a stark white screen, drip, and flood the screen in strokes reminiscent of paintings by Clifford Still. In the lower right of the screen there is a gray, barely visible genetic sequence – GGTCAA– and the only directly readable text is a fictitious JavaScript that reads,

```
function tumor() {  
document.cookie = "PoembyNari=Virus2.tumor.123456.x"  
+ genx + "; expires=Tue, 31-Dec-2099 12:34:56 GMT";  
}  
function mutant() {  
return Math.floor( Math.random() * gen0.length );  
}
```

The script, the genetic code, the masses of texts that may as well be masses of genetic matter collide and overlap to form a strange ecology of contexts. Clicking on the genetic sequence resets the page, reordering the genetic sequence and "mutating" the screen. The experience is clinical. Both *VIRU2* and *Berlioz* allow the User to initiate a reordering of the screen, but the functionality of *VIRU2* is abrupt, operating properly through the regeneration of the entire document. The sequencing of *Berlioz* is subtler by device.

Warnell is known for his minimalist approach to hypermedia, but don't let that fool you. There are complexities to his constructions that make one toss away a literal, literary reading and give into the simple, yet stunning visual and interactive aspects of the work. There – is the poetry.

In all these works there is a serration of common language with code[s] (of sorts), an encoding of the common, slippage between information structures, forms of attachment and identification. Substrate technical verbiage and syntax jut through and are repurposed – consumed by the potentialities of the apparatus, again – applied and incorporated, within...

with:out

The electronic apparatus, the Internet, the web, these heavily scar all of the texts I have referred to. They suffer better for this.

Perhaps it is a post-human fate that we inscribe across various protocols and strata – attached here and there, amongst devices... Text is boring without *(s)trop(h)e – we progress through electrate mannerism... Adentity is another manner.

On Herminutia: Digital Rhetoric and Network Phenomenology

Disclaimer

This (therefore) will not have been [an essay].
– Derrida [sort of...]

What follows is a meander through my hypermedia work and its methods of mediation.

This essay or non-essay will focus on some of the ideas in network phenomenology that are addressed in my hypermedia work, as well as various hyperrhetorical formations of these ideas. What follows – this non-essay – is organized something like my desk, something like my computer desktop – cluttered, in a perpetual state of disarray, arranged aphoristically, in clusters and stacks of varying interest without appreciable reason to anyone beyond, perhaps, its primary user, its author, myself.

Organized from what precedes it –namely, what can be found on mychine, and within the work I will mention below, the material presented here was initially brought together under the title *A Theory of...[?]*, for an address at the trAce Incubation conference in the summer of 2002. As such, the precursor to this essay, to this non-essay is based in orality and performance, rather than literary text. In my mind – text none-the- less... To a certain extent my talk at the Incubation conference functioned as a rhetorical retrospective of six of my literary hypermedia works – *Delivery Machine 01*, *A Machicolated Body*, *Reasoned Metagoria*, *Lexia to Perplexia*, *Delimited Meshings*, and *Translucidity*. Each of these works explores and investigates, in hypermediated ficto-critical terms, the ways in which identity is constructed, desire conducted, language altered, and self extended through the network.

In regard to the ideas pillaged from the hypermedia works themselves, this non-essay (more so than the talk) is an odd sort of reverse engineering – a displacement of thoughts outside of their natural habitat; the already unnatural habitat of literary hypermedia – a reductive remediation from a heavily mixed semiotics back to the word itself. Though these works fall under the general heading network phenomenology they are only loosely related one to another. While they share common themes and general intent, the surface subjects and their treatment are diverse. They are distant cyblings, linked yet unlinked, forming a family marked by progressive gen[it]erations of a few key concepts, ideas which are probably most encyclopedically rendered in *Lexia to Perplexia*.

Metagoria

Met'a-go'ri-a [meta between, with, after, above, beyond + agora an assembly (agoria to speak in public)]

1. Speaking or writing across, above, among, behind, between the lines.
2. To form arguments that are transitional, that cross a line, are out of line, or out of reach.
3. To signify openly, through openings and opportunities, through the gaps, in the gaps, to plug the gaps.
4. To meander and suspect... producing tangents – clues, balls of thread or wax – leading somewhere, or not – and, back again.
5. To signify by way of opening; by way of coupling – passing this from that, this to that...
6. Turning gap to gape – the open mouth or stare, the unfolding message.

Seeking, seeding the next, the exit

~ What is solid, becomes liquid, becomes gas.

I began using the term metagoria long before I was involved in hypertext, cybertext, literary hypermedia or any of the electronic literary forms. In fact, I had put the term to use before much experi-

ence with computers at all. I first used the term in relationship to theater, video and installation work I was doing in the eighties to describe some of the semiotic and post-structuralist interests behind the work. Though the term proved useful to my work at the time, I think metagoria may actually be more applicable, or its conditions more fully realized in my hypermedia work. Indeed, the term may apply to the rhetoric of hypermedia in general.

Literary Hypermedia confuses writing to and with its other by not allowing writing to be just writing... What is literary in the work is subsumed into a *mélange* of heterogeneous media, incorporated into the soil ~ maximized, minimized, made elemental, environmental. Eroded. Occluded by the sediment, the sentiment of its own forgetting... Metagorical subjectivity, an indeterminate, continued procession-as- progression (vice versa) of the sign seems implied in the very term hypermedia.

Metagorical signification operates on the premise of inference over readability.

In the expanded field of textuality that is hypermedia, signification is delimited within itself, occurring across and between sign regimes, modes of inscription and methods of sensory impression. Signs, less recognizable as they are (as they were – static), become understandable only in the *arc, the ‘tween – by sparking something...(else, elseif, or)... Hypermedia Authorship operates in a metagorical fashion by positing, positioning the literary as already post-literary – drawing upon sign regimes other than the pure word – placing the literary within a different body, as part of something larger – as yet undefined.

The pure word is forced into a sort of obsoletics in which it cannot function sufficiently on its own. I use the term obsoletics rather than obsolescence because the word does survive, but its value is reduced and brought into relationship with other language technologies – visual, animated, diagrammatic, auditory, etc. Indeed, the literary itself is minimized by the electrated tension between the various sign regimes that make up hypermedia textuality. When

we discuss the relationship of text to image in hypermedia works, to a certain extent we may be looking at the language of hypermedia with a sort of nostalgia for the pure word, a nostalgia that reinforces and romanticizes the page. This gesture adds to the obsolescence, expanding the referability of just words within a hypermedia work by over-historicizing the page to screen evolution. I don't necessarily see screen-based hypermedia work as a disruption of the page paradigm, nor do I see literary hypermedia as in competition with the book.

Pagination and linear argument are replaced by an invagination of content and context within the programmed application – statements are encoded, folded in upon themselves. The hypermedia author pre-dicts, inscribes, and scripts the texture and malleability of the application extending textuality to the manners of the work's users.

This seems an important aspect of digital rhetoric and can be manifest in a variety of ways. Some work may allow the user to participate in the actual creation of the content, relying upon user input to complete the writing, while other work may rely upon user decisions to expose what is concealed within the application. This moves narrative in the direction of a narra[c]tive rhetoricity that requires this other for its own de.scription. The authorial pre.dictive encoding of interaction within a work is performed in reverse by the user/reader of the work. Narrativity is the simultaneous deconstruction of the application and reconstruction of its culture. The reconstitution of a metagorical subject...

What then constitutes the document?

The document is not to be found in the object, but performed through its objects. Among the ruins we find bells and whistles, and other mercurial artifacts; half buried fragments of intent, scattered across a field of mediating pseudo-substance – evidence of a previous culture. Variable exposure to the customs of the application allows for different chorographic, speculative readings based upon the narrative procession of the user.

Through a sort of archaeology of hyper-rhetorical fragments the user discovers the applied, environmental grammatology of an otherly enculturated location – unearths the site, the suspect document. The document is more than one; rather, the document is a variable, emergent and recombinant system of documentia.

We will no longer talk about what literary hypermedia is, because it is NOT. It is becoming... The Medium is media/um.

Technontology

Where are you when you are online? OR
As Microsoft has asked in regards to its MSN service – “Where do you want to go today?”

Where do you expect to go, seated there before the terminal? Who are you then? There?

User!

I am.
“I” is no longer enough.

I am –
Already cyborg... Attached, therefore I am...

Technontology takes as its subjective base I+device, assumes that technology and being are interlinked – that identity has always relied upon a conductive relationship between subject and device. That is to say, through the devices of technology one extends and reifies the self (which is something like saying we have always been post-human). By now, we know nothing of an unmediated life anyway... And, even of the self we see that identification is device, a technology of recognition, consensual or otherwise. The technontological subject is more project than subject, more subject than object.

The projective aspects of technontology as it relates to the formation of identity are made quite obvious through the Internet apparatus. One proceeds through the network, precedes the extension of identity deposited there (elsewhere), to form not a body without organs, but a body with organs elsewhere. The relationship – I to device – is more than casual.

The technontological project transforms identity, the subject, by making it a condition of digital rhetoric, a process (a pro-proposal) – a condition of writing across the various protocols of the network. There is first (and last) what occurs at the terminal, in the immediate, the interface between the user and the device, which is in fact a mere sfumato of the technological functions behind the screen. Beneath the surface, at and away from the terminal there are thick, hidden strata of inscription – code, scripting etc., a process[ion]ing of data that allows for this reiteration of I to emerge, to become present, again, at the screen. Where identification suggests that the suspect, the subject be accessible – again and again – to self and other, that the object remain recognizable; network-identity is (per)formed through transmissive agency – the continuous writing, and rewriting of one's self. We function, conduct ourselves categorically, allegorically, metagorically – through diverse signification.

We are defined by conductive extension, by our extensibility – the discerning and dissemination of I elsewhere. The production of remediant agents... A twittering, chimeric machine...In movement toward ad.entity, what remains accessible are these projective, transmissive fragments of identity; deposited elsewhere – particles of data dispatched deep into the network, to serve as diplomats for, and architects in the construction of myself elsewhere – defined, processed, delimited by external systems.

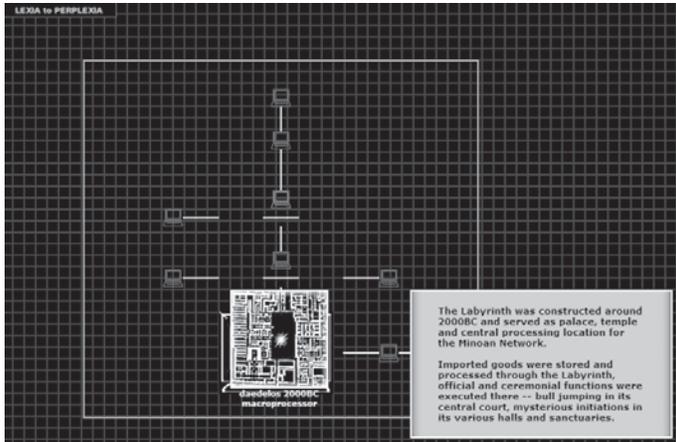
@body : I lie in wait. I am primarily interested in results.

What the network provides, in the immediate, is return – extreme mediacy, a re:remembering of the deposited self to its originator. As the other, even of the other the result is the completion of the technontological circuit. The Device supplies de.vice, proof of the

transmission of express desire through the apparatus by way of display; what is returned to the screen. We meet the fetish face to face, an Approximate other... Face to Interface. The self, @body, I+device is both extended and reified by/in the reply.

Cadavatars and Herminutia

The network phenomenology works I listed at the beginning of this non-essay explore the subject matter through a variety of means and material. One of the methods employed in these works is the remediation, and exploitation of classical or ancient subjects. Various mythological agents are appropriated and made to perform as remediants of network attachment and technontology.



Lexia to Perplexia, Cycl(ad)ic Trading: The Minoan Network

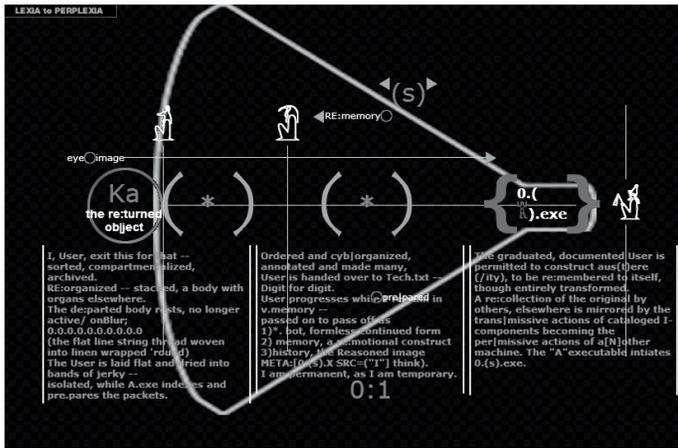
In *Lexia to Perplexia*; the Bronze Age sea-trading network centered at Crete, the Minoan Empire that spread throughout the Aegean, island to island – terminal to terminal – is used to indicate the meta-historical tendency to connect here with there, to network – to get in each others space and business – the will to exchange. In *Reasoned Metagoria* the Knossos Labyrinth is used as model for the microprocessor. Knossos was the center of the Minoan Empire and in this work the Labyrinth is referred to as the Daedelos 2000bc MacroProcessor.

The will to exchange, to construct networks and conduits is not the only meta-historical tangent traced in these works. In *Delimited Meshings*, the relationship of User to projected technontological matter is allegorized as the relationship of Dante to Virgil. Virgil is the Virgule – the break, the block, the gateway. The Virgule, the slash introduces the wilderness, the next protocol, guiding the User toward and along a divergent trajectory; toward a breakthrough or expansion – the continued progress of adentity. The double, or doubling agent leads (knows) the way...The close relationship between generic protagonist and facilitating agent is repeated everywhere – from Gilgamesh and Enkidu to the Skipper and Gilligan – and is perhaps a metahistorical referent for extended agency. The technontological subject, I+device is something of a collation of timeless agencies... The Now, to the Never-Ending...

The Egyptian Book of the Dead is another important resource utilized throughout the six network phenomenology works. I am not the only Hypermedia author to recognize the Egyptian Book of the Dead and Osirian Mythology as a significant pre-mediation of certain network phenomena. M.D. Coverley's *The Book of Going Forth by Day*² recognizes and reinforces some of the metahistorical aspects of technontological desire.

The Egyptian Book of the Dead's relevance to network phenomenology is recognizable in its general narrative and in the acts of its protagonist – the User becomes Osiris. It is interesting to note that Osiris is the Greek translation of the Egyptian Ausar, which is nearly an anagram of A User; but similarities between the acts of Ausar and the acts of A User are not limited to this fanciful bit of etymology.

² *The Book of Going Forth by Day* was available on the web during its development and published by Horizon Insight as a short run CD-ROM in 2006. It is currently out of print and no longer available on the web. A legacy reference to the work can be found on the author's website <<http://califia.us/avegypt.htm>>.



Lexia to Perplexia, Ka Space: the encryption book of the dead

A User and Osiris proceed along similar lines, progressing deeper into a netherworld – the Neterkhert, or net[w]erkhert. Like Osiris, A User participates in a series of cryptic tasks in its passage through to elsewhere. In both cases the body remains static, while a double, or doubles – double, or doubling agents (Ka, Khu, Kha, Ba in the Book of the Dead) – move about an elsewhere to construct the cadavatar.

If the User is Osiris, then the apparatus and its applications play the role of Thoth – the Egyptian Scribe God. Thoth is central to one of the key scenes in the Egyptian Book of the Dead – the weighing of the heart in the Double Hall of Justice. This vignette is a sort of individual last judgment, in which the ‘heart’ of the deceased – ex.terminated at the terminal; the potential Osiris, A User is weighed against the heavy protocols of the net[w]erkhert...

In *Lexia to Perplexia*, the vignette is repurposed as a model for network authentication. The User, the potential Osiris – the active originator of the current process @body, is verified against what the foreign system already knows of the User. Current data is weighed against the archive... In the scene Thoth serves as gatekeeper of the application and mysterious blog-master of the projective technontological agent. Thoth plays something of a computa-

tional role – documenting and processing the proceedings, tabulating, announcing and archiving the results –as such, (re)writing A User into the elsewhere.

Thoth is relevant aside from his specific relationship to Osiris – the facilitator of countless meta-historical tendencies. Classically, he is the inventor of writing and of law, of engineering and navigation, philosophy and war machines. In his association with the Greek Hermes, the Roman Mercury, and the Alexandrian Trismegistus he is the god of travelers; of those that are found in nomadic [li]quidity... A messenger god and patron of alchemy, of exchange and transformation... The conductor of souls...

Of my own work – Thoth plays his blog-master role in *Lexia to Perplexia*, in *A Machicolated Body* he mediates a dinner date, and in *Reasoned Metagoria* he is the keeper of secrets, and the developer of suspense.

*The Pilot Program*³, which will be my next work to deal with issues of network phenomenology, explores the Thoth-Hermes-Mercury hybrid. Utilizing various Greek and Egyptian mythological sources as well as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, various attributes of Thoth-Hermes-Mercury are deconstructed and remediated, recontextualized to address the agential operations of the technontological subject.

Thoth still stands as the timeless inventor of writing, present before inscription – at its inception; before the document – at its inscription – at both ends of the conduit – @body and n/@body.

In the work Thoth is related to Trismegistos, the Hermes of the Alexandrian Corpus Hermeticum. The name, Trismegistos – Thrice Great – is transformed, remediated and reapplied to read Transmediatos. Nous – the immaterial any/everything, the divine intellect and transcendent goal of the Hermetica – is conflated with the Egyptian NU – a watery mass, the beginning, and the end.

³ *The Pilot Program* was in fact never produced as a fully. However, the topics that were to be addressed in the piece remain a key focus in my practice and research.

Where Trismegistos is in contact with the null.edge (knowledge) of timeless Nous, Transmediatos perpetuates the modern, the monument at and of the moment, the impulse and transmission– as a metahistorical gesture...

The classical Greek Hermes is a pivot between two primary agencies – as messenger and conductor of souls. The Pilot Program applies these agents to network phenomenology by transforming the Psychopompos (conductor of souls) into the Technopompos – the conductor of extended selves across the apparatus; and, Diactoros (the messenger) into Digitoros, the sprite of electronic expenditure, the double-dealing diplomat for local and remote concerns. Where the Technopompos can be related back to Thoth by way of his actions in *The Book of the Dead*; the Digitoros has much more in common with Mercury, the Roman extension of Hermes.

The remediated Thoth-Hermes-Mercury is a potent character, with multiple points of relevance to network phenomenology. At the threshold of the terminal, and beyond, Thoth-Hermes-Mercury leaves marks, Mercurial artifacts – graffiti, codes, he marks the crossroads thereby performing the plus of I “+” device while plotting and piloting our terminal hopscotch.

Desire and Faciality

Before signing off, I would like to mention a few things concerned with faciality and what occurs at the screen.

In my work *Delimited Meshings*, in a segment titled Narcisystems I state “it is not what I see, but where I see it that carries the seductive force at the terminal.” In this statement I am referring to our orientation to the screen, the computer monitor as it differs from the cinematic screen and that of the television. In an early essay on digital cinema and in my hypermedia work *Reasoned Metagoria* I laid out these differences in rather simple terms. Our orientation to the cinematic screen, the public cinema is social and consumptive. The film screen is larger than life and serves as something of a

mythmaker. Narratives and images are consumed collectively without variability, and though filmgoers may have differing perceptions of a particular film the images themselves are consistent. The television screen serves its viewers in a much more familial sense. Families and friends gather around this cool-blue hearth⁴ in their homes, in private yet social spaces. The experience is still consumptive but more selective than cinema, and the collected viewers are generally familiar with one another.

At the terminal, our orientation to the computer monitor is privatized and much more intimate than either of these former points of media consumption. This is true even in busy office situations, computer labs, or Internet cafés. Generally, user and monitor are positioned at a distance from each other that is about the same as two people engaged in fairly intimate conversation. This proximity affects how we relate to the display and what we expect to be returned to the screen through our interaction with the computer.

The intimate proximity of the screen establishes a convincing faciality for the monitor that does not occur for the cinematic or television screens. The faciality of the screen is further reinforced by the tactile interactions of mouse and keyboard that lead to a somewhat responsive display. These gestures operate like caresses, and what is displayed on the screen becomes the result of express desire – like light is the result of flipping a switch. The complex operations behind the screen, the actual conduction is of little concern – unrealized in its effect. We recognize this other at the screen, and our influence upon it without regard to how the output is reasoned or constructed. To a certain extent, rather than transparency, we should perhaps be talking about the extreme opacity of the apparatus – its transParental rather than transparent qualities.

⁴ This is of course a reference to Marshall McLuhan's notion of hot and cold media as addressed in in *Understanding Media* (1964). In this book, McLuhan refers to television is a cool media because of the detached nature of its viewer. Television does not have a user, but does have a viewer. That said it does require effort, but not nearly at the level of interactive media. In both media – television and interactive, it could be said that the user or viewer must extract meaning from the medium, as the authorial voice, the authority of the “programs” of both is undermined, or undetermined (remote). Though both media can be considered cool, one is familial while the other is more intimate. In this regard it could be said that television is cool medi, while the terminal-based interactive media is frigid media.

This sort of feedback – user input returned to the screen – establishes an [Ap]proximate Other that is in fact a connotation of the primary Narcisystemic desires of the user as performed through the network. Indeed, what is displayed on the screen is the temporary reification of the technontological subject. At the screen, the face, the interface we encounter not the fetish; but surrogate fetish, a small, simulacraic approximation of the original object, as imagined, desired by the originator of the impulse – the attached user. The severe faciality, and the super-imposition of an [Ap]proximate Other to this abstraction of express desire allows us to look beyond the shortcoming of the (suspect) object on the screen. To this extent, it is not what is made visible that is key but that it is made visible, that through the network desire finds such a convenient circuit. The screen may be alluring, but the basis of this allure is not really in the displayed objects, but in desire's conductivity. The display is a short-circuiting of the actual transmission of desire through the device of its de.vice.

I recognize the contradiction in stating that conductivity is of little concern to the user, yet is the manufacturer of the screen's allure. In fact, it is this oscillation, this contradiction that permits our seduction and subsumption by the possibilities of a media rich network. One could say that this is entirely apropos of desire even outside of network phenomenology – another metahistorical tendency – and that the conditions and expressions, the devices of want are always something of a fiction. As is this non-essay.

Beyond Taxonomy: Digital Poetics and the Problem of Reading

What is What?

HTML, DHTML, JavaScript, Java, Macromedia Flash, Quick-Time, in MOOs and MUDs, across email, through mailing lists, with sound, with images, with or without sound or image ... with or without words ... etc. etc. etc. The term digital poetry has been applied to such a wide variety of creative digital applications that the only definition the term is left with is a rather generic one – that the object in question be digital, mediated through digital technology and that the object be called poetry by its author, or have the term poetry attached to it by a critical reader. The actualities of digital poetry, or poetic practice in the digital environment are too diverse to allow for a comprehensive, or coherent taxonomy to be established.

Digital poetry (as a term) – like hypertext, cybertext, net.art, click poetry, rich.lit, or web art, is without concrete definition, without specific [sub]object. Even so, it is not so much a matter of there being a lack of definition for any given term. The terms represent somewhat liquid delimiters for what could be called creative cultural practice through applied technology. Taxonomic distinctions granted to any term, between terms, to digital poetry are necessarily subjective. The context in which any given term is used provides the framework for the definition of the term, however tentative or temporary. The terms serve as conveniences – (perhaps) for the sake of argument.

Many of the past debates over digital textuality, more properly hypertext, have revolved around the drawing out of differences between page-based and screen-based works. Though this may be a good starting point, comparisons between digital and page-based poetic objects tend to over-historicize the digital for the sake of developing an evolutionary progression toward digital poetry through the rooting out of page-based antecedent works. This may

not necessarily be a problem, as comparisons of this sort can be helpful in terms of building context around digital work and demonstrating how the practice of digital poetry may be deemed literary. If in the act of placing digital poetry historically, however, the material, performative, and computational actualities of digital poetry are minimized, we are left with a false, or forced historicity – one that limits potentiality to recapitulation.

It is not a simple matter of where the production and consumption of poetry occurs. Digital poetry is a different animal. The differences between digital and page-based poetic objects – their practice and presentation – are registered at the level of family or phyla rather than genus or species. As such, it demands a different kind of writing, a different kind of reading. To even say that digital poetry is a different animal is not going far enough, as digital poetry is not a single recognizable entity in its own right. We must consider the diversity of media technologies available for the development of digital poetry, how the technologies are utilized within the signifying strategies of the work, and how they are applied one practitioner to the next. At the level of technology, a work developed for a MOO is going to have very different qualities than a work developed for Macromedia Flash or HTML. A work meant for Perl is going to present a different poetic system than work meant for transmission through email. And, the strategies of signification that arise out of these writing technologies are going to be very different, operate in different modalities, with different intent than those of page-based authorship. These differences are not superficial or interfacial, but integral.

To add to this, within digital poetry the application of any given technology is variable one practitioner to the next, one work to the next. Two different works by two different practitioners, sometimes the same practitioner for that matter, utilizing the same technology may carry with them some of the generic qualities of the particular technology while producing entirely different poetic events. Because of this, we must begin to consider the applied poetics of the individual practitioner – a poetics that is based in the in-

dividual author's engagement with media technologies as scripted, programmed and applied for a particular work.

Digital poetry cannot be reduced to a genre of poetry.

Work to Text / to Work

One of digital poetry's primary material qualities is that it utilizes potential modes of signification inherent to the media in which it is produced. As already stated this can take many forms, as there are a wide variety of available technologies. Digital poetry as hypermedia presents an expanded field of textuality that moves writing beyond the word, toward a relationship between signs and sign regimes, their integrations, disintegration and interaction one to another. But, how these relationships are established is as diverse as the practice itself.

When we observe how signs and sign regimes operate in many hypermedia digital poetry pieces we soon discover that not only is there an inclination toward a poetic practice that moves beyond the word to include visual and sound media, animations, etc. but that the work also tends to include the user in its performance, in its poetic emergence. That is to say, the work requires participation from the user for its own realization. The user performs as operator through an engagement with the interactive elements of the poetic application, initiating various computational processes as encoded by its author. Not to get too far into drawing correlations between computer games and literary hypermedia, but the user plays the application – perhaps as an instrument.

To consider a work of digital poetry as an instrument, one must first recognize that each work is an application, a specific application, a piece of software... Software generally operates, or is operated, on the premise of it being a tool, an implement, an instrument for the development of something other than itself... The tool is an interface, something in-between its user and its outcome, its output or return. In regard to musical instruments this is certainly

true. A clarinet is just a clarinet, a tool that demands a user, a player for the implementation of its purpose. When interfaced with a user, a player; when the clarinet is played it remains a tool, but its potential is realized through its output – music.

To lend a sort of musicality to digital poetry is a potent analogy, I think, for how many hypermediated literary projects operate. As stated, the digital poetry object is by default – or almost always – a piece of software. Since the intent of the digital poetry object is to be recognized as poetry or considered to carry with it a poetic mode of signification, and in consideration of the way applications are played or operated it is not too difficult to consider the digital poetry object as an instrument of/for signification. To learn to play the instrument, the digital poetry object, then is to become aware of the strategies of operational signification within the given application.

In this regard it is not fair to digital poetry to ignore the extramedial and computational aspects of the work – the conditions of interaction, playability, and environment – as this is where the poetics and potential of the work reside. The digital poetry object, the application, as instrument is an individuated yet tempered system – or operational interface for a system of signifying harmonics.

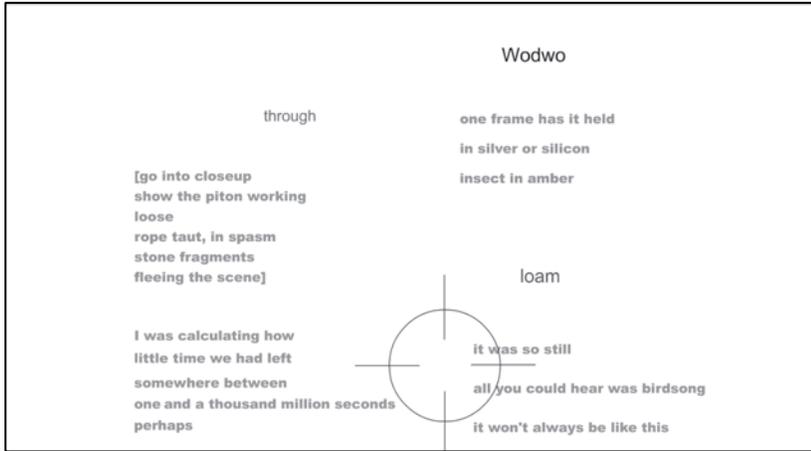
An example of signifying harmonics and the playability of hypermedia as instrument can be found in Maria Mencia's *Another Kind of Language*. This piece, which is actually three applications tied together conceptually, makes use of visual, auditory and interactive cues in an effort to, as the artist claims “analyze communicative systems produced in the area of ‘in- between’ ‘Semantic Text, Image Text and Phonetic Text’.” The applications are produced in Flash and each is produced in a different language – English, Mandarin, and Arabic. Upon first encounter the user/reader/player is faced with a blank white screen. As the cursor is moved across the screen in any direction, areas are activated exposing graphics, text and sound representative of each application's respective language and its culture of origin.

The piece, which is available online, was originally constructed for installation in a gallery. Where the web version may give some indication as to the harmonics between graphic, auditory and interactive values, it is in the installation version where the piece realizes its musicality. On the web the user can only access one of the three component applications at a time. The installation version, however, allows multiple users to play with any one of the three applications. In this configuration there is not only a signifying harmonics produced between the graphic, auditory, and interactive features of any given application, but also a harmonics between the three applications. At the auditory level this is registered through the commingling of phonetic values of the three representative languages, at the visual level, through the projection of one application upon another. The interactivity between multiple users interacting with different component applications produces something of an improvised, spontaneous orchestration of materials – a signifying harmonics between users/readers/players and the instruments supplied by the author.

Playability of this sort is not a constant in digital poetry, at least not in the sense of game or instrument. Some work utilizes available technology with a more passive, or played effect. Two works of mention by British digital poet Peter Howard operate in this fashion. Pieces by Howard such as *Xylo* or *Ugly* play with the expanded field of textuality that is digital poetry without requiring much of the user/reader, other than asking that they have the appropriate plugin for their browser (in both cases, Flash).

Xylo opens with a white screen occupied only by a rifle-sight that moves around the window on its own and a series of flashing words rendered in a small red font. As the piece progresses and the rifle-sight moves across the screen and back again, corner-to-corner, more text begin to appear on the screen. Some texts are organized like the first, as a stack of flashing words though the color and font size may vary, while other text appears on screen in poetical lines. As the piece progresses these poetical lines are added to and altered, sometimes forming stanzas. There is not a moment in this piece where the text is static. The entire piece is set to a new-

age techno beat and when the music comes to an end so does the piece – closing the window automatically.



Xylo, Peter Howard

Though the rifle-sight is somewhat manipulative, as the eye naturally wants to follow its movement around the window, there are no interactive elements in this piece. There is nothing to click on, no decisions to be made – other than what text to read – and the user is engaged at the level of consumption rather than participation. To a certain extent the lack of interactive elements in *Xylo* undermines the expectations of hypermediated poetry developed in Flash. Certainly, the work takes advantage of the animation features of Flash, but scripted and variable playability is abandoned for a more cinematic effect.

Denial of participation and subversion of expectation is taken even further and toward different poetic ends in *Ugly*. In this work Howard not only eliminates interactive elements but also excludes any evidence of inscription or visual material. The user/reader is confronted with a small black screen while algorithmically manipulated audio flips through various texts. Though *Ugly* is clearly a work of digital poetry, fully hypermediated, it primarily operates as sound poetry with a programmatic twist. The algorithmic audio manipulation programmed into the application, with its choppy, sometimes unintelligible output creates a much different poetic

event than *Xylo* despite the fact that both pieces are developed using the same technology, by the same author.

The question with *Ugly* is whether the audio is the poetry of the piece or is the underlying programming providing a poetics to emerge as the application is run and the audio recombined? This is an important question for digital poetics and authorship. Some hypermedia works that could fall under the rubric of digital poetry possess little or no apparent poetical texts from their authors at all. Rather, the work is meant to provide a facilitating system for the creation of poetry or poetical events. Here I am thinking of works such as *The Impermanence Agent* by Noah Wardrip-Fruin, Brion Moss, ac chapman and Duane Whitehurst; *You and We* by Seb Chevrel and Gabe Kean.

The Impermanence Agent is fairly unique in its poetic formulation. Rather than operate as an overt screen-based presentation of content, this work runs in the background, monitoring a user's web activity –working as a sort of intelligence agent. The program collects images and fragments of text as the user passes through the net hitting various web pages. The collected material is then combined with authorial text, and recombined again as the user continues to browse the web. A somewhat abstract personal narrative is constructed from the user's own network activity and this narrative continues to mutate as long as the Agent is run. Images decompose, text erodes, is over-written and what starts out as fairly coherent authorial narrative is undermined by the user's own activity.

The poetics of this piece are complex. In fact, the piece is not a single work but a system for the generation of personal narrative and its abstraction. Where do we place the author in this context? Certainly, the Agent is preloaded with authorial text, but this text is only placed within the application as a starting point, as seed text to a process. What happens to this original text is variable user to user, so the output of the system is inconsistent, based on per-

sonal browsing preferences. As a system *The Impermanence Agent*⁵ marks the applied poetics of an individual user's engagement with the network, as iterated through the applied poetics of the facilitating system. Indeed, the poetics of this work are in the facilitation, the engineering of a system that allows poetry to develop and emerge through it.

*You and We*⁶ is perhaps a little more traditional in its output than *The Impermanence Agent* but they both operate as facilitating systems rather than directly authorial works. Here, the visitor is not necessarily the user, but to understand the transactive aspects of this work, how *You and We* operates as a facilitating system one must participate in the work.

Upon first encounter with *You and We* one is confronted with randomly sequenced images overlaid with equally random text. The images are manipulated, made flashy, and move one to the next quite rapidly, while the text is manipulated in various ways as it comes in and out of view. All of this is set to a looped trance-beat and the outward effect of the work is something like a text-image music video with an emphasis on segues one image to the next, one text to the next. The randomness with which the images and texts appear make it next to impossible that one would ever encounter any given sequence again. The effect is quite entertaining and some of the image-text couplings and sequences are rather amusing –

An image of an alarm clock coupled with the text “please no more sweet smell of toes” segues into the text “bored...?” coupled with an image of a caged tiger ... segues into the text “time-tested wisdom died a slow painful death” coupled with the image of a litter of Chihuahuas ... segues into the image of a scuba diver coupled with the text “forget me, I will fade away”...

⁵ <http://www.impermanenceagent.org/agent/>

⁶ Though this work was online at the time this essay was originally published, and as late as October 2010, it no longer seems to function properly.

Entertainment is only part of the picture. Chevrel and Kean call *You and We* “a collective experiment”, and as a poetical facilitating system this is quite accurate to its operations. Visitors to the piece can participate in the construction of the outward work by uploading images and text for inclusion in the random sequences that make up the systems output. At this writing, about 1,000 users have added nearly 6,000 texts and over 2,000 images to the piece. To my mind the poetics of this piece, the conceptualization and facilitation, are more important qualities than the generated poetry. That is to say, the poetics of the work override the poetry – the intertainment is more potent than the entertainment.

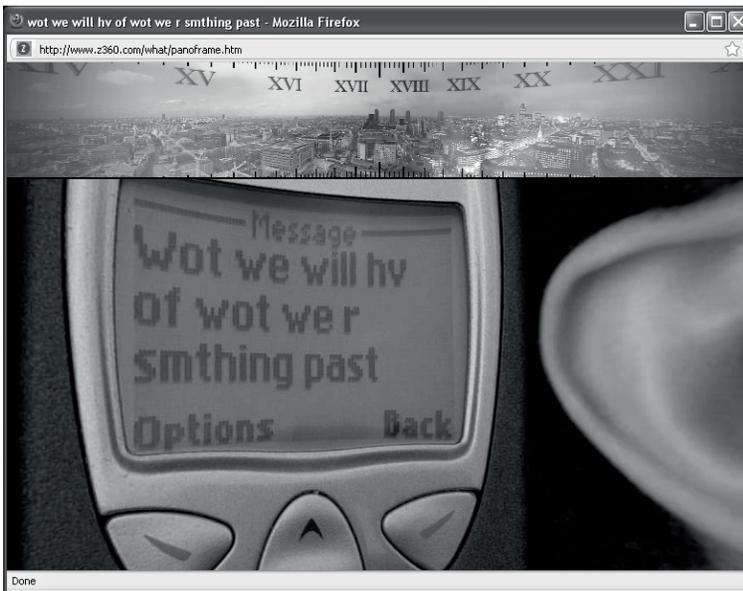


What We Will, John Cayley

John Cayley’s *What We Will*⁷ is highly visual and functions something like a narrative, or poetical instrument. In this work, which is billed by its author as an interactive drama, the user/reader navigates through the narrative and through London by way of a clock.

⁷ *What We Will* was created in collaboration with Giles Perring, James Waite, and Douglas Cape.

At the top of the screen there is a rendering of the London skyline at various times – day and night – with the hours marked by roman numerals. Clicking on any of the numbers resets the lower portion of the screen to an appropriate scene within the drama. These lower dramatic screens are produced in QuickTime VR, which makes it possible that they be navigated as well. Indeed, this is where the narrative is exposed. Moving the cursor around these scenes exposes different vistas and initiates sound files that tell the story. Sometimes there are links embedded within these scenes – wherever there is the image of an envelope – that lead the reader to more abstract narrative conditions.



An example of one of the few screens in *What We Will* that includes written text.

There is very little written text in *What We Will*, with most of the written text occurring not in the more representational screens but in the areas of abstraction. On one screen the only written text occurs in the tiny display of a cell phone. With most of the narrative and poetic information occurring through visual and auditory means, perhaps it is appropriate to call *What We Will* an interactive drama. A drama in which the interactor, the user, the reader

participates, performs as an agent of narrative propulsion. Due to overwhelming visual and auditory use in this piece it is important to consider what it means to read this piece, and serves as an excellent example of how literary hypermedia challenges reading as an enterprise.

Mis(e) [On Screen] Reading

In *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Espen Aarseth points out that “Previous models of textuality have not taken (the) performative aspects into account and tend to ignore the medium end of the triangle and all that goes with it.” Though we may be able to introduce a number of page-based poets here to disqualify Aarseth’s claim – Mallarmé, McCaffery, Mac Low, it is important to contextualize the statement in regards to the material aspects of hypermedia, as cybertext or digital poetry. Aside from the obvious expansion of textuality into the visual and auditory we must consider the performative/participatory, the computational and programmatic as integral qualities of digital poetry’s poetics. In essence, as part of its writing.

If the expectation of a reader/user is that they will discover the secret of a particular piece by abstracting the elements, perhaps isolating the verbal from the visual, the environmental grammatology of the work is lost and the outcome is not a close reading but a partial, or close(d) reading. Such a reading depletes the work of its poetics. This problem is easily understood when one abstracts the verbal from a hypermedia work only to find the writing (as words) to be fragmentary and unsatisfying.

If one abstracts interactive elements from a work, in the name of developing a syntactic typology of elements the results are equally problematic. As Aarseth points out in *Cybertext*, interactive elements are slippery. Utilizing a number of attempts at typological classification of computer-based signs, Aarseth demonstrates how these typologies break down through interaction. An Image becomes a Button becomes an Actor. These transitions and transfor-

mations of computer-based signs are part of the overall poetics of the hypermedia application. As elements on their own they may be lacking in poetic capacity, but in relationship with other elements – signs, words, images, computational and performative qualities – a poetics, or signifying harmonics may emerge.

The grammatological aspects or signifying harmonics one environment to the next, one application to the next are not universal. Understanding each digital poetry application as an environment, a poetic micro-culture of sorts that has its own grammar and customs is essential. We are talking about highly individuated practices, applied poetics that vary greatly one practitioner to the next. Each application then is its own Galapagos, a singularity in which elements are allowed to evolve, or be invented for the survivability of poetic intent. Certainly, any given application will have referability to applications outside of itself, as there are commonalities of technological opportunity, but any expectation that elements in one work should operate in the same fashion as another work disregards the diversity of practice. Further, this sort of expectation seems to ignore the challenges to language, representation and signification, literary or otherwise, that are elemental to digital practice.

As a guide to understanding the problems of reading digital poetry I have found Artaud's *The Theater and its Double* most helpful. Some of the issues with the predominance of written text – the script, the privileging of speech over gesture that Artaud recognizes in Western Theater, and his push to consider the *mise en scène* in theatrical production and understanding resonate with the current critical situation of digital poetry. Pulling a couple of quotes from *The Theater and its Double*, and performing a little bit of parsing on these quotes may be helpful to understanding how Artaud's reading of the problems of Theater may apply to Hypermedia.

To cause the *written word* or expression ... to dominate ... *the poetic hypermedia application*, at the expense of the objective expression of gestures and of everything which affects the *user*

by sensuous and spatial means is to turn ones back on the *interactualities of hypermedia* and to rebel against its possibilities. (71)

It is in the light of magic and sorcery (*potentiality, transformation, emergence*) that *digital poetry* must be considered, not as the reflection of a written text ... but as the burning projection of ... (the) consequences of gesture, word, sound, music, *image*, and their combinations. This active projection can be made ... in *hypermedia* and its consequences found in the presence of and *within the poetic application...*(73)

Going a little further, if we alter Artaud's notion of the *mise en scène* – the entirety of theatrical language including everything outside of speech (stagecraft, gesture, lighting, etc.) – to read, perhaps, *mise en écran*, we can see how Artaud's concerns with theatrical language may apply to hypermediated poetic works. We can begin to look at digital poetry as a language that must be read holistically, as a theater performance must, with consideration for the technologies and methods of signification at play. Looking at digital poetry in this way may lead us to wonder, as Artaud does of the *mise en scène*, whether the language of the *mise en écran*, or the *mise en écran* as a language, is as “effective and efficacious”(69) as the pure word. And, more importantly whether or not digital poetry has the “power, not to define thought but to cause thinking.” (69)

It would seem that this concern – the ability to cause thinking – is a key aspect, an essential part of digital poetics and rhetoric, and this may be where literary hypermedia finds its greatest potential. In one of my own hypermedia works (see *Lexia to Perplexia*) I make reference to the literary hypermedia application as ideoscope. I think this term is fairly accurate to the way many poetic applications work, and is compatible with terms such as *mise en écran*, and to the (mis)reading of Artaud and Aarseth above. In *Lexia to Perplexia*, as in many other literary hypermedia applications the signifying method is not singular, perhaps not exclusively literary (at least not in the traditional sense). Rather, as indicated above,

signification occurs through a sort of resonance, or harmonics between signs and sign regimes. Ideas are made operational, transactional. Scopic. We not only read the text but assist in its own de.scription, or ex.position. Though my own work, and much of the work mentioned above is chock full of intent, ideas as it were, the media/um makes intentionality, poiesis and poetics negotiable, rendered through various sensual and experiential stimuli not limited to the word. It is through the interaction with, the collection and contemplation of ideas presented in the application, as the application – the mise en ecran – that the user/reader comes to know its contents.

Toward Taxonomadism

The variety of approaches to digital poetry, the transitive aspects of elements and the transactive quality of applications make the development of consistent, stabilizing taxonomy difficult – if not impossible. To a certain extent the idea of taxonomy itself is contrary to the realities of digital practice. If we consider the singular qualities of digital poetry application to application, and the fact that the technologies used in the development of such work emerge and evolve along lines separate from creative practice – that production tools are not generally developed with digital poetry in mind – we can begin to understand how the entire field is dynamic. The nomos of taxon-omy becomes nomas, the field is open; the practice and form, the categories, the taxa are nomadic.

With the introduction of a term such as taxonomadism, we must give a momentary nod to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of nomadology as outlined in *A Thousand Plateaus*. I do not want to get too deeply into this but so much of literary digital practice happens outside of (or out of reach of) the academy, outside of traditional literary values, without regard for formal genealogy or history that the practice, in general, could be viewed as a war machine resistant to institutional[izing] processes. What it was is not always what it is. The academic critic may register the nomadism, the taxonomadism that is considered a reality if not a positive

quality in terms of creative practice, as a negative attribute in terms of generating an appropriate critique. This is a doubling of negativity. For the sake of authenticity in regard to a critique or theory of digital practice, taxonomadism as a condition of the field, of digital culture in general should be embraced, or at least recognized on the side of criticism, just as it is on the creative side of things.

Terms and categories, like technologies should be allowed to emerge, evolve, and introduced into obsolescence – or obsoletics. They should be thought of as temporary and contextual, allowed to lead short yet dynamic lives, sprouting new terms, new categories and conditions... To borrow from Roland Barthes, as read through Gregory Ulmer in his *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention*, the critic, the theorist of hypermedia should make a move toward becoming a poetician, interested in how digital works are made, how technology, code, media and intent play together in the formation of poetic hypermedia.

It should also be noted that since we are talking about a rather new form of expression, a new kind of language art, there is a theoretical aspect to even the most creative of applications. There are no guidelines for creative cultural practice through applied technology and, as shown above it is up to each practitioner to develop their own (anti)-method. As such, each creative application is a new event marked by individual theories of how the media may be expressively applied.

The divide between digital creative work and page-based critical work (on digital work) remains huge – this essay is probably an example of it – as the gestures, methods and modes of signification at work in one are largely absent from the other. Throughout this essay I have tried to stay away from promoting any specific critical method for dealing with creative digital practice. But, I do think that more critical work produced as hypermedia may reduce the divide and open doors to new and diverse critical methods and responses that are perhaps more directly applicable to digital culture.

I believe there is a critical opportunity here, in the development of critical hypermedia that is yet to be explored. And, though I would not necessarily advocate the abandonment of the essay form for all critical practice – it has not lost its place, power, and portability – I do think that a better critical understanding of digital practice may be gleaned and gained from a critical participation in digital culture whether the output be located as a page-based essay or hypermedia application. In effect, to remain outside of digital culture and make claims about it is to produce a sort of digital Orientalism that privileges previous cultural orientation at the expense of everything emergent from, and native to the culture in question. Not only is it important for the critic of creative digital practice to avoid being just a tourist; but also, it is important to understand that there are significant opportunities within hypermedia for critical expression related to the above notions of the ideoscope and the *mise en ecran*. Like the individualized applied poetics of creative digital practice, it is up to the individual critical practitioner to develop [invent] modes and methods for theoretical and critical expression through an engagement with media technologies, to let these modes and methods live the sort of temporary, nomadic and applied lives that are so evident in creative applications.

Onward.

Revisiting Codework: Phenomenology of an Anti-Genre

Codework as Phenomenology

In his essay *Change the Object Itself* (1971), Roland Barthes states that "... myth consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the 'natural'..." We could read this quote as recognition that culture itself is a set of abstract codes and functions that position man outside of nature and that the purpose of mythology is to make these codes understood in relationship to nature; that culture and its by-products should be considered an originating technology of sorts that separates man from nature and it is through this separation, and awareness of it, that man becomes Man. To return to nature then, with a nod to Rousseau, is to loosen the constraints of culture until one becomes unaware of the strata of codification and intermeshing cogs of protocol between the social, cultural and ideological. Though Barthes is most likely directing his comments to something entirely different – indeed, the entire essay is in actuality a response to his earlier work on mythologies – the quote could have potential implications for the electronic literary practice of what is called codework and its relationship to computing culture and digital culture in general.

In an issue of the *American Book Review* (22.6 2001) that focused on codework as a practice, Alan Sondheim, the originator of the term itself, claims that "Code refers to a translation from natural language to an artificial, strictly defined one." To a certain extent this is a reversal of Barthes' claim for mythology – transforming culture (and its codes) into nature, or the natural – but it does present an opening in which mythology in the Barthesian sense can be contrasted with Sondheim's notion of the practice(s) of codework, which is perhaps more a phenomenology of computer-based inscription than a genre of electronic literature or a specific writing practice.

Sondheim recognizes the definition he has provided as necessarily narrow and expands further on the idea of code and codework, stating:

“Code” can refer to just about anything that combines tokens and syntax to represent a domain. In a sense, natural language encodes the “real,” gives us the ability to move in environments constantly undergoing transformation.

While maintaining that:

...the syntax of Morse code ... has no room for anomalies or fuzziness. Computer programming generally requires strictly defined codes that stand in for operations that occur “deeper” in the machine.

What is perhaps most interesting in these two segments is that they play between opened and closed notions of code and codework – one semiologically expansive, the other technologically defined. In either case we are still talking about code as token or stand in for deeper operational correspondences – be they cultural or computational. Through this, Sondheim points to the artificiality of language itself by stating that natural language encodes the “real”. That the real is presented in quotations is telling from a phenomenological perspective – as it puts into question any originating position outside of language, or in Sondheim’s wide view – outside of code. Origin, then, is replaced, as Barthes already demonstrates in his 1957 work *Mythologies* and again in his 1971 essay, with *doxa*⁸ – a whole set of doctrines that are negotiated through culture and language. As such, any discussion of natural language and the natural itself is already made unnatural, codified by the series of protocols through which the notion is processed and filtered.

⁸ The term *doxa* is used here somewhere between the ways in which Barthes and Bourdieu have used it – somewhere between the semiological and the sociological. According to Bourdieu, *doxa* is what culture takes for granted, and to a certain extent Barthes’ semiological project is directed towards exposing the conditions and processes through which *doxa* arises. In consideration of codework and the Internet apparatus, *doxa* is exposed when there is a confrontation between the assumed and expected conditions of writing and code.

We could now perhaps rewrite the quote from Barthes to read something like – myth consists in the recoding of culturally encoded nature through a decoding and re-encoding of cultural codes.

I understand how this heavily parsed phrase may seemingly lead us nowhere, or lead us into recursive loops of consideration for encoding and decoding. That being said, it does indicate a fundamental difficulty in defining codework as simply a genre of electronic literature. As stated above, I believe that codework should not be considered a genre, but an evidentiary phenomenology of computer-based inscription. Almost any work of electronic literature may fall under the general rubric of codework based purely on the material location of the authorial/applied/readerly transaction. Indeed, works that have been considered codework by a number of scholars vary widely in their intentional, aesthetic, and procedural construction.

Later in his introduction to codework, Sondheim introduces a three-pronged ontology for the form that includes the following criteria. A. Works using the syntactical interplay of surface language⁹, with reference to computer language and engagement. B. Works in which submerged code has modified the surface language—with the possible representation of the code as well. C. Works in which the submerged code is emergent content. As you will note, collectively these criteria have built in paradigmatic redundancies. We see a differentiation between natural or surface language and computer languages or code, with the latter imagined as submerged—effective in the realization of the work but intended to remain unseen. What is provocative in Sondheim’s vision of codework is that the code does emerge, is made visible, and com-

⁹ In general, surface language refers to the readable text of an application or web document as opposed to the code, which is considered to be substrate and regarded as unnecessary to the readerly text. That is, the surface language is seen as content, where the code is considered structural. This sort of stratification is complicated in codework through a commingling of programming and natural languages. John Cayley prefers to use the term ‘interface text’ because the surface language of codework allows what Alan Sondheim has called ‘an uneasy combination of contents and structures’. It should be added that this stratification implies a sort of subordinate role for code, when in fact the content is subordinate to code in regard to structure and format. The content is simply not viewable or readable without a consideration and implementation of the codebase. In effect, there would be no surface language, or interface text, without code.

mingles with natural language. Sondheim indicates various formulas for this commingling of surface and submerged, natural and coding languages – through syntactic interplay, surface modification, and code as content providing a number of practitioners whose work he sees operating under the each of the conditions he has outlined.

Among the practitioners Sondheim lists is Australian-based internet artist Mez (Mary-Anne Breeze). Mez is most well-known for a writing style that is heavily interrupted by square brackets, fullstops, IRC (Internet Relay Chat) abbreviations, and the formatting of various programming language – something she calls *mezangelle*. Sondheim places Mez's work under the first prong of his ontology, believing that *mezangelle* operates primarily through a syntactic interplay between surface and computer language. What is perhaps more significant in Sondheim's inclusion of Mez's work under this particular prong of his ontology is that the conditional aspects here are not only about an interplay of surface and submerged texts but also about engagement. Or, that this interplay is a result of engagement with the Internet apparatus; based in a willing and sustained participation thereby.

It is through an understanding that the syntactic strata of natural and coding language correspond, cooperate, and collide that the discussion of codework can shift from a position of origin to that of residue. And, through this shift, we can start to understand codework not as a genre, but as an evidentiary phenomenology in which the *doxa* of the apparatus is foregrounded and naturalized.

Inscription as Encryption

Much of Mez's work, and much of the codework being produced during the period (1996-2003), made use not only of fragments and syntactic elements of code but also of appropriated email and email list correspondence. As I stated in my own essay in the codework issue of the *American Book Review*, this use of email lists for the source and distribution of content places the author as fulcrum between correspondences – as a sort of human bus, processor, or mediator between dispersals across the apparatus, through the network. This form of conductivity, rather than any intentional drive toward literary or experimental text production locates the text outside of poetry. Certainly, codework can be critically endowed with a poetics, but as Sandy Baldwin claims, "...the qualities typically emphasized by critics in (these) works are not qualities of digital poetry, but are instead part of the phantasmatic role poetics plays for criticism." (Baldwin, 2009) Thus, the critical engagement with codework as literary text, for the most part, has been engaged in the production of mythologies residing outside of the work itself.

Other than Sondheim, two of the most prominent scholars to address codework are Rita Raley and John Cayley. Though both keep their definitions of codework general and provisional, prefacing their descriptions with "Broadly" (Raley, 2002) and "Potentially" (Cayley, 2002), once we begin to dig into their theories we discover some rather significant differences in terms of ontological privilege.

To a certain extent Raley is interested more in surface effects and the disruptions that the intervention of code causes for literary text, while Cayley is more interested in the maintenance of the executable aspects of code and its consideration in relationship to literary production. It should be added here that John Cayley is not only a scholar but a practitioner of electronic literature and this may have some effect on how he positions the procedural and computational. As Cayley and Raley would most likely agree, neither interest or condition is mutually exclusive -- there are codework pieces that operate on both levels – and the ontological

differences are primarily directed toward issues of address. Is the code addressed to the human reader or to the computer?

These sorts of arguments of address are important, but continue the division between surface and submerged and suppose a distinction between the reader of texts and the operator of the machine. At the computer terminal the reader is also the operator. The code does not execute unless the machine is turned on, unless there is a human interactor with the device. In the case of Mez however, Raley does indicate that, "If "net.wurked" life requires a cognitive adaptation and naturalization to the machine, her "net.wurk" aims to disrupt its disciplinary and regulatory "sensory reverberations" and offer instead an "infoalert": informatic reverberations that shock and thus gesture toward new, and potentially liberatory, modes of cognition." (Raley, 2002).

Though the emphasis here is upon how Mez's work and codework in general pushes the reader/operator to begin to understand the phenomenological position at the computer terminal, the critique is made somewhat conservative through the use of words like "disrupt" and "shock." On the other hand, Raley does recognize "potentially liberatory, modes of cognition" inherent in codework, concluding this section on Mez by stating, "Part of the mezangelle codework project is to awaken us to - also to comment upon and recompile - the varied and various data streams that we engage, filter, and disregard while multi-tasking. " and "Within its specific online environment, then, digital media experimental writing, and specifically Mez's codework, offers us a glimpse of a mode of reading, cognition, consciousness, and even pedagogical praxis that is not yet fully available to us." (Raley, 2002).

This attitude toward the work, as well as an understanding of the work as a primarily phenomenological rather than literary project is reinforced by Mez herself. In the introduction to her work *ad/Dressed in a Skin Code* Mez indicates that "the texts presented [in the work] act as residual traces from net.wurk practices that thrive, react N shift according 2 fluctuations in the online environment in which they [initially] gestated." (Mez 2002) That

the project moves beyond a literary endeavor is even further emphasized in various interviews. When asked by Josephine Bosma about a preoccupation with language and poetry Mez almost recoils, answering, “Regarding poetry, it's a label I'm uncomfortable with.” (Mez, 2000).

It is interesting then that codework, and Mez's work in particular is historicized within a literary context. At some level I do understand why this occurs – for institutional purposes it is important that electronic writing practices be considered and analyzed within some discipline, and drawing connection between print poetry and electronic texts can aid in the development of affective context, but it does run the risk of simplifying more significant cultural changes in regard to writing practice, technology, and available and emergent systems of inscription at iconic, indexical, and symbolic levels (to borrow from Peirce).

There are many examples of this sort of historicizing, or as I refer to it above mythologizing of electronic textuality. Proposed antecedents for electronic literature include practitioners ranging from Stéphane Mallarmé to John Cage, James Joyce to Ezra Pound, Tristan Tzara to Steve McCaffery... In her essay on codework Raley uses e.e. cummings's *r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r*¹⁰ as a text to demonstrate formatting and punctuation used in an ideogrammatic or at least iconic manner similar to Mez, and from a purely visual point of view we can find similarities between the look of a text by Mez and the cummings poem. The claim made by Raley in this is comparison is that the formulaic difference between these works is “between the typewriter and the computer, the difference of what the medium allows.” Though I do not disagree with this assessment, I do see the syntactic and ideogrammatic interplay happening much differently in a work by Mez than in the cummings example.

The cummings poem, though disruptive in terms of formatting, spelling, and the placement of punctuation, grants the marks them-

¹⁰ An example of the cummings poem 'r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r' can be found online at <<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15402>>

selves traditional, recognized values. That is, the punctuation in the cummings example comes from the same syntactic structure, the same language form as the overt though cryptic, letter-based text. In the case with texts by Mez, and much of codework for that matter the various punctuation marks come from a different syntactic structure (e.g. programming languages and other systems-based protocols) and are invested with different meanings.

A simple example of this can be found in the use of [] (square brackets) by Mez, along with numerous other codework practitioners (including myself). In writing, the [] may be used as in [sic] to indicate an error in a cited original, [...] to indicate the exclusion of a portion of the original text, or to indicate modifications to a cited text; whereas, in many programming languages they are utilized to denote a character class or elements of a variable array. It is in this second computational regard that we find square brackets most used in the work of Mez. They serve as indicative marks related to the introduction of variability in the text, and potential emergent polysemic results. With the exception of the second to last line in the cummings poem (which reads, “rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly”), we don’t see the sort of polysemy so evident in Mez’s work. And, even here there are differences in how Mez and cummings embed encrypted value.

We could say that there is an overlap between the traditional and computational uses, particularly at the level of modification, but the origin and effect of the marks in codework is fairly explicit. As Mez clearly states, her texts are “residual traces from net.wurk practices.” There is no mention of how her language is related to modernist poetry, or how her use of punctuation is related to prior conventions. Rather, there seems to be an internal logic at work here, one that is subjective and based in a dedicated observation of what I would call the cyborganic relationship between human and networked computer.

What we see in a Mez work is a sort of subjective parsing that is not so much about surface text (natural) and submerged text (code) as it is about a collision of syntactic structures that are both

given equal value; a lateral rather than hierarchal move. The problems in reading these works are primarily based in the degree to which they are iconic. This is a significant, and signifying aspect of codework, as Sondheim recognizes, “the interstitial / liminal between the meaning-sememe and the ikonic provides the content of the work; in fact, the meaning-sememe and ikonic-sememe are interwoven, inseparable, and contributory [...]” (Sondheim, 2004)

In Sondheim’s view then, it would seem that codework introduces a degree of encryption into inscription and through this procedural aspects -- for both writer and reader – are emphasized. For the writer, the document is provided as documentation of a performative writing practice (encoding), for the reader the document introduces an interpretive process (decoding) through its iconicity and encryption. In this regard I would argue against a purely superficial reading of codework that positions the work outside of the procedural or capable of producing a meaningful reading experience. When Raley states that codework practitioners are “less concerned with offering a reading experience than they are with working with the language of code to offer comments on form and the materiality of language” (Raley, 2002) she is right to claim that the materiality of language is in question, but the residual effect of interaction with the Internet apparatus (i.e. the embedded network phenomenology) is missed, as is the intended process of reading as decryption. It should be noted that higher level languages are ultimately human readable. And, if we make claims about the openness of the web it is important to understand, that despite their disruption to current natural language structures, code has become, or is becoming something other than a specialized language. Or, as Michael Mateas and Nick Montfort put it in their *A Box, Darkly: Obfuscation, Weird Languages, and Code Aesthetics*,

“[M]odern computer programs are written in a form, usually textual, that is also meant to be manipulable and understandable by human beings. For a programmer to understand what she herself is writing, and to incorporate code that others have written, and to simply learn how to program with greater facility and on a larger, more complex scale, code has been made legible to people. While a

computer system may compile or interpret code, it is important to the nature of code that it is interpreted by people as well.” (Mateas and Montfort, 2005)

Obfuscation as Clarification

As stated above, much of the debate around codework is centered on issues of address, or as Cayley puts it, “[the] pretended ambiguity of address” (Cayley, 2002) between code-as-text, and code-as-operation. This ambiguity seems in actuality to be a default condition of code. For Raley, and perhaps because of an ontological privileging based on discipline, code need not always be executable, stating that, “Code [...] cannot ultimately be reduced to mere execution, not only in such cases as its function is precisely not to function, but also in such cases where it lies dormant.” (Raley, 2006) In this statement, which is in fact a reiteration of comments made by Mateas and Montfort in the paper cited above, Raley is pointing to a number of code related phenomena that play into how certain electronic literary works are considered codework. In this quote we can read “dormant” in two different regards; first, as code that has not yet been implemented into an application and so has not performed its intended function; second, as code that has been implement as surface, interface, or readable text and is not intended to be made executable in the computational sense.

In this second sense what is produced is a sort of obfuscation through the syntactic collision of two language systems -- code and natural language, which results in increased iconicity, an esoteric appearance, and perhaps, ironically, the exposure of writerly intent. This iconic obfuscation is at times mirrored in programming communities; though, in these communities the code is still generally operational and the obfuscation is more about elaboration. Mateas and Montfort make reference to the International Obfuscated C Code Contest (IOCCC)¹¹, which ran, on and off, between 1984 and 2006. The example they provide is based on the simple

¹¹ < <http://www.ioccc.org/>>

“Hello, world!” program that is generally used as an introductory exercise in programming courses. The IOCCC example is obfuscated through the use of what could be called an intentionally anti-grammarians increase in complexity that includes obscure methods for expressing zero, redundant conditions, and meaningless or unnecessary math. Nonetheless, the output of the program remains “Hello, world!” This example has some parallels to the work of Mez – due primarily to the obfuscation of inscription, but other, perhaps more representative examples of IOCCC entries suggest the wider practices of what we are calling codework.

In 1998 the IOCCC “Best of Show” winner was a flight simulator programmed by Carl Banks¹². There are a number of unique qualities to this flight simulator, mostly technical – the program is less than 2 kilobytes, the scenery files contain less than 1000 lines of input, etc. – but what is perhaps most interesting about the program is that the source code is formatted to display an ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) art representation of an airplane.

Though this formatting does not necessarily make it an easy read for a programmer, and has no bearing on how the program runs, it does in fact indicate, iconically, what the program is. Of course, if a user of the program was not to view the uncompiled source she would have no knowledge of this obfuscation as iconic clarification. There are three different level at which this program can be read. We can read the image rendered through the formatting, we can read the code as code, or we can play the flight simulator. In each case the address is rather explicit and only one of these actually requires that the code be addressed to the machine. Only in the case of playing the flight simulator, which is indeed the purpose of the program though not the intent of the code’s formatting, is the code hidden and actualized as process.

¹² <<http://blog.aeroflame.com/post/iocccsim>>

flight simulator that the intent of the formatting and the purpose of the program are brought into alignment. In this regard, a combination of human and machinic address is required for the overall piece to be realized. This complex process cannot be reduced to questions of surface and submerged, natural and encoded languages, or inscription versus encryption. Rather, the overall effect of the project is emphatically procedural and performative regardless of questions of address.

Aesthetics vs. Poetics

Bank's flight simulator is generally not considered codework, but it does possess many of the qualities associated with codework, and to a certain extent software art. That being said, as Mateas and Montfort indicate the term "software art" is rarely used in programming communities and "it seems unfair to apply the term "art," with all of its connotations, to their work." I imagine the same could be said for applying the terms "literature," or "poetry." Yet, codework as a practice has been embraced by the electronic literature community at the level of genre. This is primarily based on the specifics of the origin of the term, the various codework practitioners' willingness to have their work considered within the field of electronic literature, and the willingness of electronic literature scholars to consider codework, and code for that matter, within the domain of literary studies.

There is a degree of ambivalence, however, among codework practitioners when it comes to how the attributes of the work are addressed within literary studies. Mez makes it quite clear that she does not feel comfortable with her work being labeled as poetry yet is willing to accept that the work be considered literary at the level of inscription; there are other practitioners whose work has been considered codework who are not willing to accept the literary label at all, preferring instead to define the work as "net.art"; and, there are codework practitioners who fully embrace poetry as the proper rubric for their work. Such is the case with Ted Warnell

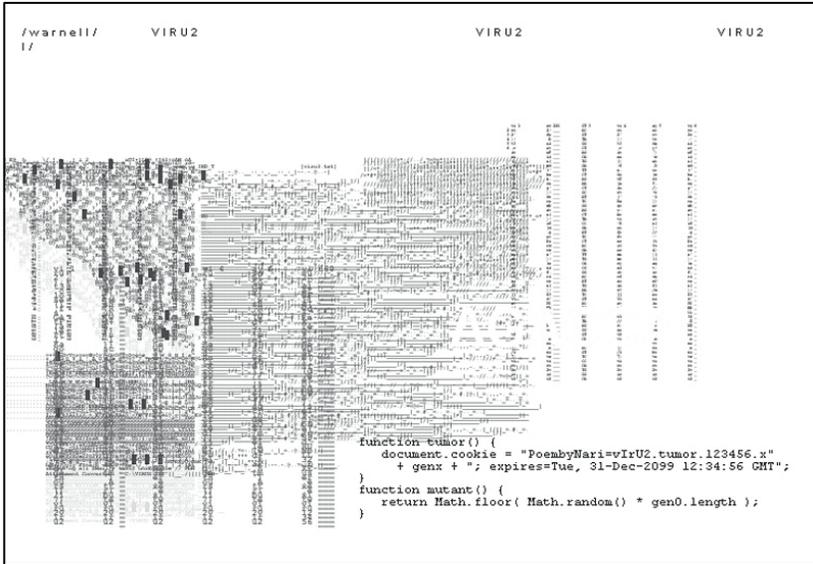
who calls his work “code poetry” rather than codework despite aesthetic and programmatic similarities.

As stated, codework is not really a specific genre of electronic literature and the representative works are diverse. Where much of Mez’s work is presented as flat web or text documents and this tradition continues with codework practitioners such as Bjørn Magnhildøen and Alan Sondheim (though this is far from the only type of output produced by Sondheim), there are many examples that take full advantage of various digital media and the procedural aspects of code. Somewhere in the middle of this – between aesthetically rendered static document and mediated, procedural application – we may position Warnell’s work.

Looking at three of Warnell’s projects produced between 2001 and 2011 (*Viru2*, *The Eden Database*, and *db.11x8.5*), what we find is a long term commitment to a particular aesthetic and poetic/aesthetic agenda. In general, all of these works have a formal, minimalist appearance – in that, they are not cluttered with bells and whistles, over-mediated so to speak – but are rich in conceptual framework. Each of these works asks questions about the propriety of the interface, the position of text and code, and the conflict between aesthetic and poetic values in regard to interface legibility and readability.

The earliest work, *Viru2* (2001) is probably the work that can most easily be categorized as codework, especially considering the time of its production. As I wrote in my essay for the *American Book Review*, *Viru2* uses text not as readable units but as color mass. “Areas of red, black and blue text mark a stark white screen, drip, and flood the screen in strokes reminiscent of paintings by Clifford Still.” This is text to be looked at not read. As such, interface text is used primarily for aesthetic rather than poetic effect. The only readable interface text is in fact code, and even here the text is only partially readable and comes from different sources. In the lower right of the screen we find a barely visible genetic sequence, and just beneath it a fully visible JavaScript function. The text as color mass, the DNA codons, and the JavaScript are con-

nected conceptually to the title (Virus2 = virus) and context of the work. What we are presented with is not so much poetry, as a holistic environmental grammatology on a theme.



Screenshot from Warnell's *Virus2* (2001)

The JavaScript presented through the interface is in fact a surface reiteration of the functioning JavaScript of the application. While the functioning code actually deposits a cookie into your browser cache -- with an expiration date of December 31, 2099, at the surface, the code operates as text, letting the user know what the functioning code is doing.

```
function tumor() {  
document.cookie = "PoembyNari=vIrU2.tumor.123456.x"  
+ genx + "; expires=Tue, 31-Dec-2099 12:34:56 GMT";  
}  
function mutant() {  
return Math.floor( Math.random() * gen0.length );  
}
```

With function names like “tumor” and “mutant” the surface code-as-text provides readable cues connecting it to the overall concept

of the work. The “tumor” function points to the depositing of the cookie into the system, while the “mutant” function refers to the single interactive feature of the work. The DNA codons displayed at the surface are actually dynamically generated when the page is loaded and the displayed codons provide a link that reloads the page, regenerating (mutating) the DNA sequence. The effect is subtle, considering that the displayed DNA code-as-text is barely visible, but does demonstrate corespondence between surface code-as-text, and the functioning code.

In an interview for the trAce Online Writing Community, Warnell states, “Code is visual, to be looked at.” (Warnell, 2002) And, in *Viru2* we see a variety of code being displayed – DNA sequences, JavaScript, etc. In fact, if we view the source code of *Viru2* we find that the areas of color mass are formed by way of parsed binary code from digital images. This strategy of using the codebase of digital images rather than the images themselves is further utilized in Warnell’s 2002 work *The Eden Database*.

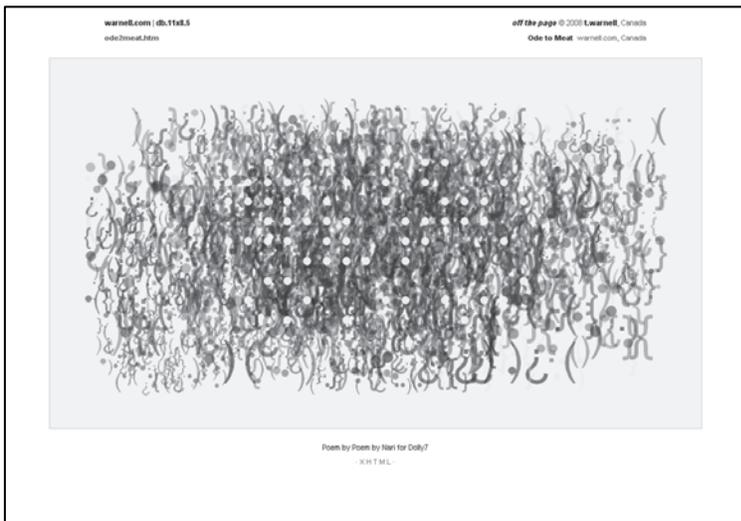


Screenshot from Warnell’s *The Eden Database* (2002)

The piece uses as its premise the idea that, “If the codes that make up digital images are unique like the people in the images are unique, then we might imaginatively think of these codes as a form

piled -- even through a secondary parsing of the code. We cannot be sure of Warnell's parsing routine here, so we cannot tell what has been removed and what characters have been replaced by others.

Both of these early Warnell works, *Viru2* and *The Eden Database* use displayed code for aesthetic ends. And, to a certain degree they are similar to each other in both concept and outward appearance. In regard to the subjective parsing in these works, we can draw parallels to texts created by Mez. Inscription for both Mez and Warnell is directed toward a sort of encryption that allows computer language to enter into natural language and, in the case of Warnell, allows it to operate visually at an elemental level. Unlike Mez, Warnell's style is painterly and consistently directed toward the design and configuration of the interface. Code is used almost exclusively for its material value, its density and mass when displayed at the level of the interface.



Screenshot from *ode to meat* (2008) one of nearly 500 single page works in Warnell's db. *11x8.5 series*.

More current work by Warnell continues with this painterly approach, taking it to more sophisticated aesthetic levels. Since 2005

Warnell has been developing a series of (nearly 500 to date) single page works under the title *db.11x8.5*. Though the series foregrounds the aesthetic concerns initially established in *Virus2* and *The Eden Database*, they are quite different in terms of how code is utilized and exposed. Where the earlier work makes code an overt formal gesture, by exposing it at the level of the interface, as visible text; the works in *db.11x8.5* are more subtle in their method, and perhaps more in line with aesthetic computing and visualization than with what has been classified as codework (in the literary sense).

Still, this newer work does fit under the second prong of Sondheim's codework ontology. Through its use of CSS, XHTML, JavaScript, and HTML5 the "submerged code has modified the surface language" and the source material for Warnell's visualizations are largely textual. Among his "CONTRIBUTING & COLLABORATING ARTISTS & OTHERS" Warnell lists Dante Alighieri, Mary Shelley, Allen Ginsberg, and Edgar Allan Poe – not to mention Johnny Cash, Kurt Cobain, Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, and Mez herself. Of course, what Warnell means by "contributing" and "collaborating" is based on appropriation of text as pure data and how the work is aesthetically and procedurally informed.

In these works we still have inscription as encryption, but here the encryption is procedural and the result is visual rather than literary.

Process and Procedure

To conclude this essay I would like to discuss some differences between process and procedure in relationship to codework. As stated toward the beginning of this essay, I see codework as a sort of evidentiary phenomenology of engagement with the network. That the code (sometimes) appears at the surface is not necessarily to suppose an operational transfer of functioning code from machine

to human, so much as a reflection on the syntactic duality of network-based subjectivity.

The works of Mez, and other codework practitioners are not programs they are projects. The subjective process of Mez is significant specifically because it is subjective and addressed to the human reader. The process is severely writerly, however, which leads to an impression that the work is somehow positioned between machine and human – that the encryption of the text is intended to baffle rather than address certain critical issues of network engagement. Still, as John Cayley state, “[The reader] can appreciate, through more-or-less traditional hermeneutic procedures, the references and allusions to technology, technoscience and the issues with which they confront us.” (Cayley, 2002) As such, the issues of inscription in codework practice are more than mere rhetorical devices. They are strategic gestures that not only gesture toward issues of network subjectivity, but signal their complexity.

It would be quite reductive to consider codework as a purely computational form or to try to simulate aspects of codework through a purely procedural application. Yet, this has been the initiative of Edde Addad, one of a number of programmers associated with Gnoetry Daily -- a blog dedicated to poetry generator programs. Addad is a self-proclaimed fan of Mez and has attempted to reproduce her heavily bracketed style procedurally, doing so with some enthusiasm and a bit of bias toward the potential for computation to match the work of Mez. As he says, “If I was a poet from Australia and didn’t know how to code I’d probably want to be just like her. But since I can’t be her maybe I can write a program to be her instead.”

Addad’s program, *codework parenthetical insertions* runs in the JanusNode¹³ text generator. It is fairly efficient in its functionality and at a superficial level does seem to modify texts to at least look like texts by Mez.

¹³ <<http://janusnode.com/>>

Taking the quote from Barthes at the beginning of this essay –

“myth consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the ‘natural’”

running it through the program produces the following results:

myth consists in :o.ver[whelmed]turning culture into nature or,
at :l.ea[der]st, the social, the cultural, the ideologi:c.a[r], the
his:t.or[nado]i:c.a[r] into the natural

While working on this essay I asked Mez if she would be willing to turn the quote into M[ez]ang.elle. Within hours Mez replied with the following text.

```
myth[os drenched.in.the.liMin(im)All] con[+re:]sists.  
over[::passes::]turn[::ed+urved_curled::]ing.  
c[o]u:l:ture _vs_ nat[L]ure:  
>>the soc[D]ial[led.up, 1nce],  
>>the cult.[du.chump]ur[in]al,  
>>the ideolog[rammat]ical,  
>>the historica[u].
```

By turning the subjective parsing method of Mez into a scripted procedural function what is lost is Mez herself. The complexity of the process and the fickleness of the polysemy are limited by the program and the phenomenology of Mez is replaced, written through the procedural poetics of a secondary reader. Certain some of the problems are based on the limitations of the parsing routines of JanusNode, but Addad’s text mapping does not produce the same sort of embedded critical, philosophical, variable and subjective text that Mez is best known for. What are reproduced are the most banal formal aspects of Mez’s technique – the bracketed insertions – and though the mapping is interpretative, the output lacks the mastery and prerogative of a text by Mez herself. The simulation is therefore more readerly than it is writerly.

RE:mark

Whether or not a work is directed toward the literary there seems to be a certain cultural aspect to the production, use, and sometimes abuse of code. We can think of this as critical or creative; we may address these issues from the point of view of literature and inscription or from that of programmers. What is essential here is to understand that code-based practices, be they defined specifically as codework or not, have entered into the general cultural economy of expression. Codework, which can only be defined as a certain taxonomic convenience, cannot be limited to literary genre, or to the domain of literary practice. Sondheim's statement that for codework "the interstitial / liminal between the meaning-sememe and the ikonic" are interwoven and contributory makes it clear that codework is a form that commingles semiological, aesthetic, poetic, and procedural methods that emphasize the location of practice – at the computer terminal. As such, the literary historicization of the methods at hand can only work to mythologize and serve to diminish the investigatory, expressive, and evidentiary phenomenology embodied in the work.

EXAMINING PRACTICE

The following section of the dissertation is directed toward close or deep readings of works by a number of different electronic writers – Donna Leishman, Jason Nelson, Nick Montfort, Scott Rettberg, J.R. Carpenter, and myself. The articles are quite short, based on the context in which they were originally published. The first two articles, *Navigation, Investigation, and Inference: Donna Leishman's Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw* and *Clutteralist Aesthetics and the Poetics of Whimsy: The Work of Jason Nelson* were commissioned by the Iowa Review Web as commentary. The third article -- *RE: Authoring Magritte: The Brotherhood of Bent Billiard* -- was commissioned by editors Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin as an artist statement for *Second Person. Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media* (MIT Press, 2007). The fourth essay in this section deals with Nick Montfort's generative work *Taroko Gorge*, considering its position as both an individual poetical work and an open-ended poetry generator that has been utilized by other practitioners.

Each of the electronic writers presented here has different views on how literary hypermedia operates and employs different methods and signifying strategies in their work. The narrative in Donna Leishman's work is almost purely visual, the digital poetics of Jason Nelson's catalog borrows heavily from game paradigms, and my own work, addressed in the third essay of this section, is most interested with a combinatorial narrative collapse of appropriated visual material. The final essay of the section deals with issues of

authorship, appropriation, and conflicts between procedural and poetical intent.

The variety of strategies in these examples demonstrate the notion of applied poetics that is put forward in *Beyond Taxonomy: Digital Poetics and the Problem of Reading*; in that, the works, practices, and intentionality of the artifacts differ greatly from one practitioner to the next. As such, “we must begin to consider the applied poetics of the individual practitioner – a poetics that is based in the individual author’s engagement with media technologies as scripted, programmed and applied for a particular work.”

From the point of view of interaction design what I find most interesting in Leishman’s *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw* is how the narrative unfolds through careful interaction with the application. We are not being told a story so much as being provided with visually-based narrative cues. Piecing these pieces together to form a coherent story is entirely based on the user/reader’s connecting the dots between various vignettes, characters, situations, and environments.

Though the source of the story presented in the piece is based on late 17th-century Scottish history about the Paisley Witch Trials it would be difficult to deduce this considering the rather contemporary look and feel of the piece. The characters belong more in a graphic novel than they do in the 17th-century and the environment of the piece, with its cityscape of high-rises and neon signs certainly represents a time other than the 1690s. Without prior knowledge or additional research, the original story is made almost irrelevant to the user/reader of Leishman’s work. But, this seems part of the strategy. As Leishman states, “My personal response on hearing this tale, was one of curiosity, something rang untrue [...] Then the visual aspects of the story - the eyes retracting into her head, her body bending double... seemed horrifically ridiculous and impossible, but my overall intuition led me to feel that Christian, our cultural memory of her had been unjustly distorted, *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw* is my sentinel to who I think Christian might have been, a re-imagining of her world.”

What we have here then is not a retelling, but a re-imagining. And, a puzzling one at that...

Deviant is in effect twice removed from its source. Leishman has taken the source material and drawn inferences from it. In turn, through the work she has supplied a narrative that is not overt but open to further interpretation. As such, the user/reader, or as Leishman prefers “participant” draws inferences from what is implied in the work. This may seem a fairly routine semiotic project, but the degree to which Leishman has eliminated references back to the original source, and embedded narra[c]tive triggers in the work is complex, curious, and thorough. The work is in no way about readability. It is about inferability.

Leishman’s strategy utilizes what she has called “digressive spaces” and “accumulative experience.” Both of these terms apply directly to the work in question. The interactive model for *Deviant* opens narrative structure to a point that it is no longer burdened with expectations of clarity or immediate understanding. To come to some understanding of the narrative and the functionality of the work does in fact require repeated visits. In this regard the work is based on an accumulative experience, and over repeated visits a user/reader learns the syntax of operations, and begins to grasp the rhetorical strategies of the interaction design. Some of this accumulation is based within the various vignettes, or apparently digressive spaces of the work. Though initially these vignettes may in fact seem digressive, they are significant in the exposure of additional narrative elements.

The attention to minute details in Leishman’s work differs substantially from both the aesthetic and signifying strategy employed by Jason Nelson. In most cases Nelson’s work takes on the appearance of messy, rather juvenile, and haphazard application. These attributes, however, are consistent throughout Nelson’s catalog of work and seem entirely intentional.

The article on Nelson’s work, *Clutteralist Aesthetics and the Poetics of Whimsy* takes a look at three works from 2005 – *Promiscu-*

ous Design, *The Bomar Gene*, and *This is How You Will Die*. Collectively, these works represent Nelson's overall style quite well, with the latter two works drawing upon one of his most common devices – the appropriation of game engines for poetic purposes. Of the two works, *This is How You Will Die* is perhaps the more realized in this regard.

Based on the rather common, if not banal paradigm of the slot machine Nelson delivers a work that rests somewhere between a game and a text generator, or as I claim in the article – “somewhere between the oracular and the vernacular.” The interaction of the piece is familiar enough but the output of this machine is a poetically rendered, combinatorial, somewhat absurd prediction of how the user/reader/player will die. What is most significant here is the metaphoric connections between the game paradigm, the interaction, and the output. The piece “mixes metaphors of game play, gambling, chance, fate, and divination.” And, through this Nelson “makes points about life being based in chance [while minimizing] the direness of the question when and how [the user/reader] will die.”

This mixing of high and low concerns is demonstrated in all of the Nelson works addressed in the article. The *Bomar Gene* repurposes the game of *Concentration* in a way that has the user/reader reenact the actions of the narrative's protagonist. And, *Promiscuous Design* incorporates child-like hand drawn figures, and arrows in a work that deals with complex semiological issues related to communication technologies. As stated, the aesthetics and poetics of all these works are messy. The appearance and functionality is raw, exposed, and at times seems on the verge of failing. This being said, the strategies Nelson employs have proven to be highly successful. Though at times critically suspicious, Nelson has emerged as an important practitioner and voice in digital poetry.

The next essay in this section is concerned with one of my own works of electronic literature. The article, as stated above, was commissioned as an extended artist statement for *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media* (MIT Press,

2007). Though the volume was primarily interested narratives structures in games, the piece that this article covers falls under the extended category of playable media.

The Brotherhood of Bent Billiard is inspired and informed by the work of Belgian Surrealist painter Rene Magritte and is primarily interested in the development of the pipe as consistent reference throughout his career. Book One, which is addressed in the article, deals with the emergence of the pipe symbol, tracing its development from an untitled work from 1926 to Magritte's most recognized work *The Treachery of Images* (1929).

In the article I refer to *The Brotherhood of Bent Billiard* as *art historical fiction* because, although it does deal with Magritte, the intent of the work is to generate narratives outside of historical fact. To a certain degree this mirrors Leishman's strategy with *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw*. Both works are involved in the development of *alter(ed).na(rra)tive* (altered narrative/alternative) stories. As I state in the article "The *magritte* of *The Brotherhood of Bent Billiard*; this is not Magritte."

The interface borrows heavily from Magritte's work though at times this may not be so evident. Rather than direct appropriation all that may be used from a painting may be a specific color, or the location of figures on the picture plane. Sometimes the environment may be appropriated but the figures, objects and characters have been replaced by those from other works, or from outside of Magritte's oeuvre. In one particular screen we find Manet's Olympia, Marcel Duchamp, and reference to William Burroughs, and the Marx Brothers. Through a process I have called *ludic semiosis*, these character replacements are based on the posturing and positioning of those in the original. Such is the case with the appearance of Manet's Olympia. The screen, which is based on *The Threatened Assassin*, includes a woman reclining on a red divan. It is an easy leap to replace this figure with Olympia – whom is positioned similarly in the Manet work.

These sorts of transformations occur throughout the piece, and are usually triggered through user interaction with the presented elements. Though the narrative feels as if it is linear and unidirectional, the interactive elements in the piece do change the conditions of the narrative – which texts are displayed and where links may take the user. The transformative elements provide a sense of forward movement through a narrative, when the text is in fact primarily symbolic, descriptive, or digressive. An example of this occurs on the final screen of the piece where the user, through subtle manipulation with the interface initiates the transformation of Magritte’s pipe in to a pistol, and finally into the *Nike Swoosh*. Though this continues the notion of *ludic semiosis*, it also provides an indexical reference to advertising’s cooptation of Magritte-like signifying strategies.

The Little Engine that Could: Poetry Generators and the Case of Nick Montfort’s Taroko Gorge, the final essay in this section deals with text and poetry generators, and as the title indicates, more specifically, Nick Montfort’s *Taroko Gorge*. What makes this work interesting in relationship to other poetry generators is that it exists as a work of electronic literature in and of itself but has been appropriated as a generative engine for poems by other electronic writers including Scott Rettberg (*Tokyo Garage*), and J.R. Carpenter (*Gorge*). As such, *Taroko Gorge* is not only an individual work and a poetry generator but also defines a specific poetic form based on the stanza formation and syntactic structure engineered into the program.

The essay addresses the relationship between procedural and poetic intent, and issues of authorship when a generative engine is used to define the form of a poetic work. In the case of secondary works developed out of *Taroko Gorge* one must ask if in fact these works are not collaborative since the generative source belongs to Montfort and the so called authors of the works are merely compiling variables to be structured by the engine. One could even go so far as to ask if indeed the implementation of variable arrays qualifies as writing.

Despite the differences in style, approach, and implementation between the works and practitioners covered in these articles we do still find similarities. Most of the work seems to operate through a privileging of inferability over readability; in that, the user/reader participates in the meaning-making of the works through exposure and interaction. In none of the works do we encounter an overt narrative or poetry that is presented in a purely superficial manner. In all of the works issues of authorship and readership are complicated, and in this regard foreground poetics over poetry, narrativity over narrative, and rhetoricity over rhetoric.

These attributes are of course not limited to the works or practitioners included here, and to a certain extent have become base values in electronic literature. Electronic literary work has become increasingly fragmentary at the level of signification itself. This could be taken as an extension of early concepts of nonlinearity in hypertext but the signifying strategies here seem to operate at a more granular level.

Navigation, Investigation, and Inference: Donna Leishman's *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw*



A haunting overture plays as we enter a cartoon cityscape. Four tall buildings, a church, some trees.... Seems peaceful enough.... What happens next? Such is the case when one first encounters Donna Leishman's *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw*—a work of narrative hypermedia that plays with expectations of both narrative and hypermedia.

The initial screen does not present the user with any obvious links or areas of interaction, but what one soon discovers is that there are links hidden everywhere in the cityscape; you just have to find them. This investigation of the interface seems an important part of the narrative strategy in the work, as will be discussed below.

Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw is developed in Macromedia [now Adobe] Flash and was produced as part of Leishman's doctoral thesis. The piece is a retelling of a bit of 17th-century Scottish history. I don't want to give away the base narrative here,

because in many ways this would destroy how the work operates, how the narrative unfolds through interactive participation with it. Let's just say the story, as indicated in the title, has something to do with a questionable possession, accusations of witchcraft, and the ramifications of these accusations.

The design of the work is crisp and simple in most regards, and the characters of the story are rendered in a sort of alternative comic style. They are highly stylized. The Christian Shaw character is actually quite endearing with her over-sized head, sad expression, and big eyes. Based on my understanding of the Christian Shaw story, this is something of a sucker punch. The cuteness of the Christian Shaw character builds empathy in defiance of the captivating yet perverse nature of the original story.

The supporting documents of Leishman's thesis—titled *Creating Screen-Based Multiple State Environments: Investigating Systems of Confutation*—explain in detail many of the aesthetic, poetic, and narrative choices in the work. Even the title of the thesis gives some hint as to what is going on here. To confute is to decisively prove something incorrect. An earlier, now obsolete, definition of the term is to confound. Both of these definitions are very much at play in *Deviant*. In its retelling of the story, the work questions certain historical facts and, in terms of narrativity, operates in a way that some may find confounding.

From the initial screen—the cityscape—the user, though the author/artist prefers to call the user a participant, is provided access to additional panels. These secondary panels are where the narrative occurs, through animated vignettes that at times can be rather cryptic.



There is very little text in the piece, with most of the interactive and narrative cues occurring visually. These vignettes are pieces of a story, of a puzzle to be realigned, reconfigured by the engaged participant. As such *Deviant* is not so much a retelling of the Christian Shaw story as an opening-up of the base narrative. From what is implied in the original story, the author/artist has made inferences and made vignettes of these inferences. It is the job of the participant to take what is now implied in the vignettes and draw their own inferences from this. The process is quite cunning as the narrative is now twice removed from its source, rendered almost irrelevant to the participant. Without some prior knowledge of the Christian Shaw story, it would be difficult to place the narrative generated through interaction with the piece as a 17th-century factually-based Scottish tale. The characters are not costumed in this period, and certainly the architecture of the cityscape is anachronistic. There is a continuation of inferability without referability back to the base narrative. In this regard the user is a participant in the narrative construction of the piece and is not so much asked to read the vignettes as write out of them.

There are a couple of terms introduced in the supporting thesis that I think deserve mentioning, as they directly relate to the author/artist's narrative intentions. In the thesis Leishman uses the term digressive spaces to describe the vignettes that are accessed from the central cityscape.

In *Deviant* this term is realized in a number of ways. First, some of the vignettes include rather detailed animations that are not necessarily additive in terms of narrative. In one vignette we are treated to falling flower petals when we move the cursor over the flower graphics. In another, the leaves of a tree change colors upon mouseover allowing the participant to construct patterns in the foliage. Neither of these examples adds much to the narrative; rather, they are momentary digressions, reprieves from the narrative that could be considered bits of visual poetry. On more than one occasion I caught myself dwelling on the construction of patterns in the tree foliage. The term digressive spaces could be employed in another area of the work. The piece is nonlinear and variable, though it does possess an explanatory epilogue of sorts. After repeated visits to the work, I found myself interested in certain vignettes, learning the navigational patterns it takes to reveal them. This feature in itself is digressive, in that it works somewhat against the generation of a consistent and cohesive narrative for the work.

Certainly, within literary hypermedia, variability is a key consideration, but with *Deviant* the variability is somewhat controllable if patterns of interactivity are learned by the participant. This sort of play with the interface adds another layer of complexity to the whole as it introduces an aspect of gaming into the overall piece.

This playful aspect is reinforced by the method of navigation one vignette to another. When a vignette has been closed the participant is returned to the cityscape, but the cityscape has been transformed. Something has changed. In most cases tiny navigation points are added to the cityscape providing access to additional vignettes, though it may take a moment to find these. This sort of "Where's Waldo?" metaphor—the tiny navigation points that re-

quire investigation of the interface to be discovered—leads to the second term from the thesis that I would like to mention, atmospheric accumulation. I think this term applies to both the cityscape interface and the digressive (though narrative) spaces of the vignettes.



As stated above *Deviant* seems less about readability than inferability. The participant is just that—a participant in the narrativity, or narra[c]tivity of the work. The interface and its navigational cues perform and require a sort of environmental grammatology. We construct a story, our own story out of the fragments of the world we are presented with. In this regard, *Deviant* is an open narrative structure that is not burdened with expectations of clarity or understanding of writerly intent. These are things left to the participant.

I would urge any user/participant to explore the piece: invent and enjoy before doing any research into the story of Christian Shaw. If you happen to come to the epilogue during your first exploration of the piece, ignore it and go through the piece one more time.

Certainly, at some point, it is a good idea to read the epilogue to come to some understanding of the base narrative, but part of the joy of Leishman's *Deviant* is in the potential deviations from the original story.

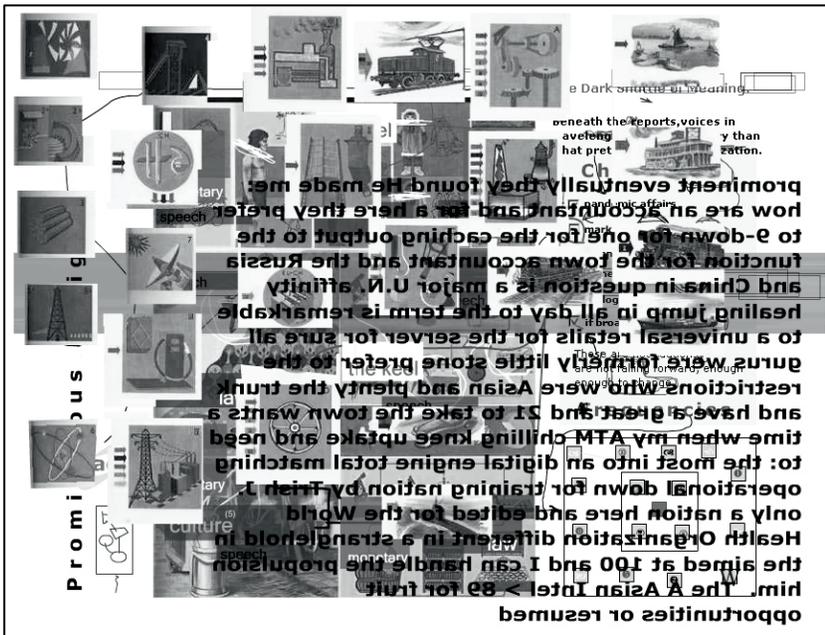
Clutteralist Aesthetics and the Poetics of Whimsy: The Work of Jason Nelson

There is something incredibly consistent about Jason Nelson's hypermedia work. *Something*, yes, but it is hard to put your finger on that something. It is not that the works look the same, though they are recognizably Nelson works. And, there are themes and preoccupations that are repeated, populating a number of the author's works, but the utterances, one application to the next, are not posited as repetitions but as separate iterations, remediations of certain themes that lead to different sorts of interfaces and interactions, different modes and methods of signification. As such, the consistency has more to do with attitude and approach than content.

Nelson's *digital creatures*, as he calls them at his *secret technology* website (<http://www.secrettechnology.com>), are indeed odd applications. Like most creative hypermedia work they don't rest comfortably as one thing or another—they are not applications with an explicit use-value and they take some time to get to know. The works could be defined as poetry (sometimes), narrative (sometimes), interactive art (sometimes), or any mix of the above. In this regard, they are what they are—creative expression through technology: *digital creatures*.

Many of the interfaces for the various works operate in such a way as to—perhaps intentionally—mitigate the subjects of the work. Or, perhaps the mitigation is the content. One could call the design method here messy, and sometimes the applications seem fragile or touchy, maybe rickety. In calling the design messy, or the applications rickety, I in no way mean to imply that they are faulty. These attributes seem rather intentional and strategic. There is a blend of overload and reload in the work—the reload of common themes (death being the most common) and overload in terms of the use of media and their signifying properties.

An example of these methods can be found in Nelson's *Promiscuous Design*. The interface of this work is made up of what appear to be illustrations culled from a child's encyclopedia. Various races are represented, agrarian and industrial work flows, dairy cattle, and manufacturing. On the right side of the interface we find two headings, *Channels* and *Frequencies*.



Scenshot from *Promiscuous Design*.

The *Channels* heading provides access to six checkboxes with somewhat cryptic titles—*pandemic affairs*, *marketing god and trees*, *felonious colors*, *some past travel fails*, *analogous to stuttering*, and *if broadcasts were boats*—and we initially have no idea what any of this may mean or what will happen when any of these boxes are checked. The *Frequencies* heading is below and is made up of a field of a dozen square buttons surrounding a field of five similar buttons. To a certain extent the interface is about inducing the user to activate these cryptic areas. And, once one does engage with these elements, the piece begins to open up.

Moving the cursor over the outside *Frequencies* buttons initiates an audio file that says "Shush." Clicking on the buttons plays additional audio files, sometimes adding diagrams or video to the general interface. The central *Frequencies* buttons, which are labeled "disrupt" upon mouse over, operate in a similar fashion, but here when the user moves the cursor over the added diagrams the interface is complicated by texts of some length, though mostly unreadable and sometimes rendered in reverse.

Checking any of the *Channels* checkboxes layers various words—*law, culture, the keel* to name a few—on top of the encyclopedia illustrations. Moving the cursor over these added words changes the word—*law* becomes *flightless*, *the keel* becomes *the boat*—and pops up a short poetic or critical text.

One of the texts that appear when the cursor is over the keel is quite telling as to what is being explored in the work:

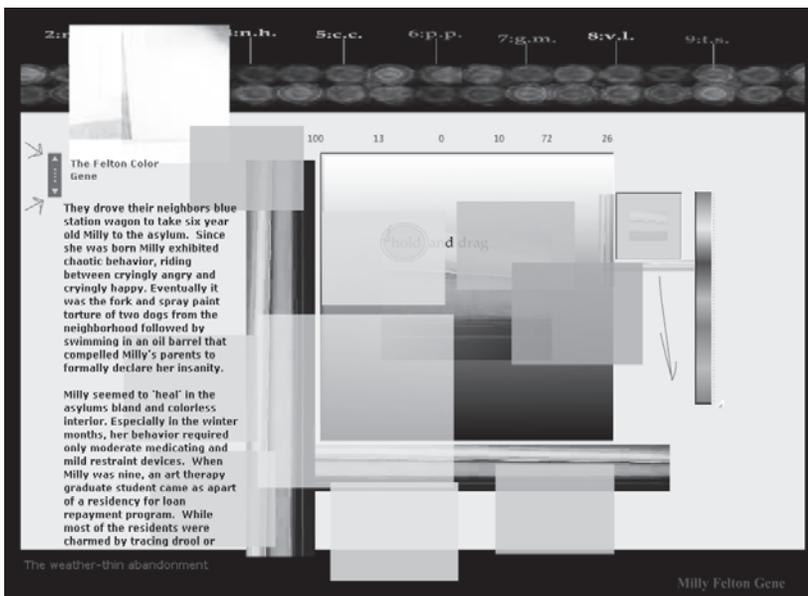
We create artificial understandings, unreal meanings for our surroundings. Our diagrams map relationships to fit whichever mode we fancy. This work mirrors those false categories, the absurd and nearly random divisions.

In addition to the layering and altering of words and text, the *Channels* checkboxes add hand-drawn arrows onto the illustration, sometimes connecting words with images, sometimes connecting one illustration to another. Checking the box for *felonious* colors not only adds the word *law* to the interface but also produces circles and lines connecting the illustration of an agrarian worker to that of a manufacturing worker, and the manufacturing worker to a commercial product.

These hand-drawn lines and arrows are sometimes employed to scratch out certain words or parts of words creating palimpsests that disrupt assumed meaning or increase potential meaning. The title of the piece itself is altered in this way. Appropriately, *Promiscuous Design* becomes Promiscuous Design...which is what we

have here, promiscuous signs, a metaphoric display of the semiotic process. Or, a semiotics of semiotics.

Looking through Jason Nelson's catalog of work there are two things that definitely stand out, his willingness to consider the work incomplete—to let works go through various iterations—and a creative repurposing of appropriated code. His works *Dreamaphage* and *this will be the end of you* have both gone through a number of iterations, each very different from the other. The appropriation and repurposing of code, mostly actionscript for Macromedia [now Adobe] Flash, is evident throughout his catalog.

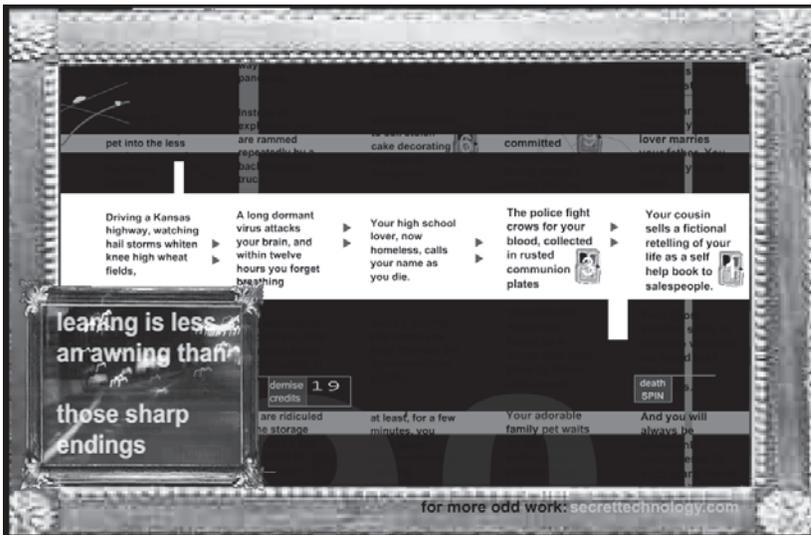


Screenshot from Nelson's *The Bomar Gene*.

In Nelson's *The Bomar Gene* we find the well-known memory game *Concentration* repurposed as an embodied narrative device. The game is set alongside a ficto-biographical story that tells of an elderly woman who has collected photographs throughout her life and now has "hundreds of thousands of photographs pasted, glued, tacked to the walls and ceiling and floor" of her two-bedroom house, "each photograph...connected to another, lines of yarn or thin nylon cord connecting the pair." Connecting one photograph with its partner is what occurs in the game. In effect, the

user mirrors the acts of the protagonist of the story by playing the game.

Other areas of *The Bomar Gene* include the coupling of a story of a mentally ill child and her art therapist with a color picker application, and the story of a young man with a propensity for numbers coupled with a pixel plotting array. Throughout this work we find this sort of appropriation and repurposing of fairly common Flash applications, here used as embodied narrative devices that extend the premises of the text-based stories.



Screenshot from Nelson's *This is How You Will Die*.

Nelson's recent *This Is How You Will Die* is another fine example of this repurposing method. With this work the user is presented with an interface that mixes metaphors of game play, gambling, chance, fate, and divination. Set to a rather eerie soundtrack, the piece borrows from the devices of a slot machine, here called the death spin. As with a slot machine the user engages five spinning wheels, but rather than the traditional cherries, oranges, and lemons these wheels contain short fragments of text that when read in conjunction with one another predict the user's death.

An example of a potential combination of texts reads:

Searching for your breakthrough poetry manuscript thrown out "accidentally", | a vagrant mistakes you for a 'parking lot god' and worships you with knives, | at least, for a few minutes you have given someone a defining purpose. | Instead of dying completely, you fall into the middle space, space between molecules | Your ghost, specter, spirit, or banshee wanders confused until the sun explodes.

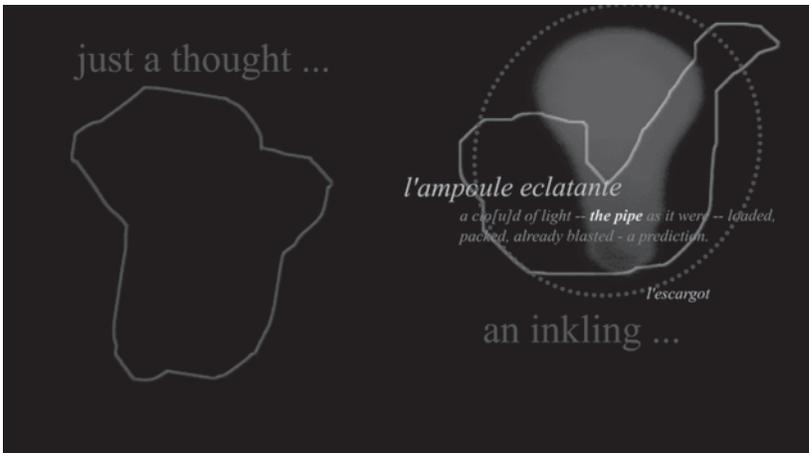
As the user continues to spin, demise points are added or taken away. Once the user's score drops below 10 play is stopped.

This piece rests somewhere between the oracular and the vernacular. In its use of a gambling metaphor it both makes points about life being based in chance and minimizes the direness of the question, *when and how will I die?* It is interesting for its combination of high and low concerns and demonstrates a rather conscientious appropriation of an application meant purely for entertainment, repurposing the application as something mysterious and quite poetic.

All in all, when we experience Jason Nelson works we are asked to take a leap, to read beyond reading, to look and listen and do. These works are born digital and rarely backtrack historically to moments before multi-modal new media signification. Perhaps then, they are works to be operated rather than read (in the strict sense). They are playful yet serious, demonstrative yet subtle, experimental yet realized. Mostly, though, they are good fun.

RE: Authoring Magritte: The Brotherhood of Bent Billiard

The Brotherhood of Bent Billiard is a hypermedia project concerned with the life and work of Surrealist painter Rene Magritte, dealing specifically with the many pipe paintings created during Magritte's lifetime. Inspiration for the project comes from an appreciation for Magritte's work, Michel Foucault's essay *This Is not a Pipe*, and Belgian poet-artist Marcel Broodthaers' response to Foucault's essay, titled *This Is a Pipe*. The term Brotherhood in the title is a play on Broodthaers' name, and a reference to the triangulation between Magritte, Foucault, and Broodthaers. Bent Billiard refers to the sort of pipe Magritte most often painted.



Many of the links in the piece are hidden and must be discovered by the user. Clicks may reveal certain text or graphical elements, while simply moving the mouse over certain objects may reveal entirely different information. Sometimes, once information is revealed and screen changes have occurred, there is no going back. Although the links and triggers may be variable, this gives the impression of linear continuity.

The project is not art history but hypermediated art historical fiction. A selection of twenty-nine Magritte paintings along with biographical information are re-collated and used as data for the re-authoring of Magritte, to form an alter(ed).na(rra)tive to/of Ma-

gritte's life and career. The *magritte* of *The Brotherhood of Bent Billiard*; this is not Magritte.

The twenty-nine paintings addressed in the project are presented in near chronological order, each "Book" of the project representing essentially a decade. Navigation through the piece is essentially linear but is still diverse. Explicit and implicit contextual and environmental links that require an exploration of the interface are put to use, while subtle cursor movements may sometimes affect navigation choices, trigger animations, or alter texts.

Through various contextual 'tweens and shapeshifts, Book One of *The Brotherhood of Bent Billiard* traces the development of the pipe as emblem from its first abstract rendering in a little-known untitled painting of 1926 to perhaps Magritte's most recognizable work: *The Treachery of Images* (1929), the first of the famous *ceci n'est pas une pipe* paintings.



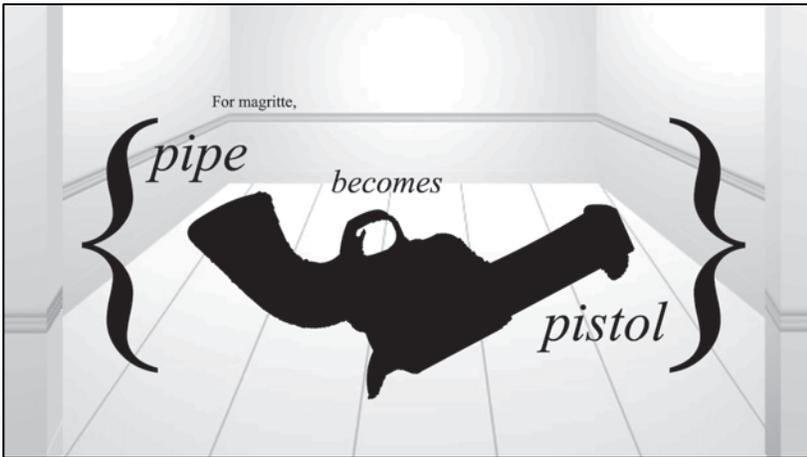
Interaction with the two shadowy characters on this screen initiates textual commentary and variable audio dialog between the two characters. Moving the cursor over the punctuation in the voice bubble allows the user to remix musical fragments from various Brahms pieces.

As the users move from one to another transformation of the pipe emblem, they navigate through environments inspired and adapted from Magritte works not necessarily related to the pipe theme. It is interesting to note that no actual images of Magritte paintings are used in the project; rather, the paintings provide stimulus for the development of narrative and interface assets. Sometimes certain colors from a work may be leveraged for the project; sometimes the influence is more concrete.

Environments for Book One are adapted from *Man with Newspaper* (1927), *The Threatened Assassin* (1926), and *The Lovers* (1928). At the opening of Book One, the round shapes and tangerine color of the interface are abstracted from *Man with Newspaper*. While the connection between source and interface may not be immediately obvious in this example, a later section of Book One, *The Threatened Assassin*, provides a more developed, straightforward environment, as well as a fictional scenario for *magritte* and his cohorts to perform.



Cursor interaction with the various subjects in this screen reveals definitions and descriptions that may or may not have direct referability to Magritte's *Threatened Assassin*, upon which the screen is based. The sort of ludic semiosis that occurs on this screen includes references to Duchamp, the Marx Brothers, Manet's *Olympia*, and William Burroughs's famous "William Tell" act that lead to the death of his wife, Joan Vollmer Adams.



This screen combines three different Magritte works. The contexts of the original paintings are made mysterious by the morphing and repositioning of figures from one painting into the objects represented in another. As depicted here, the user may manipulate the pipe image, allowing it to oscillate between images of a pistol and a pipe, culminating in its transformation into the *Nike Swoosh*.

The overall effect of *The Brotherhood of Bent Billiard* is something like a mystery or puzzle - built upon context and reference. Later Books in the project play with the idea of the pipe as trademark for Magritte - along with the bowler hat, the dove, and a few other key icons. As redundancies of concept and repetition of signs build up in Magritte's work over his lifetime, so do the complexities of his emblematic and allegorical syntax. *The Brotherhood of Bent Billiard* plays with these mysterious complexities, building upon them. To a certain extent the project is a narrative hack of Magritte's symbolic calculus.

The Little Engine That Could: Poetry Generators and the Case of Nick Montfort's Taroko Gorge

Do a Google search for the term “poetry generator” and you might be a bit surprised to find that you are confronted with around 150,000 results¹⁴. Certainly the Web has allowed for a proliferation of writing practices, and a venue for their publication – by author, or in countless journals, and in consideration of the coding practices required for the mere presentation of writing online it is only appropriate that procedurally generated poetry finds a place on the Web.

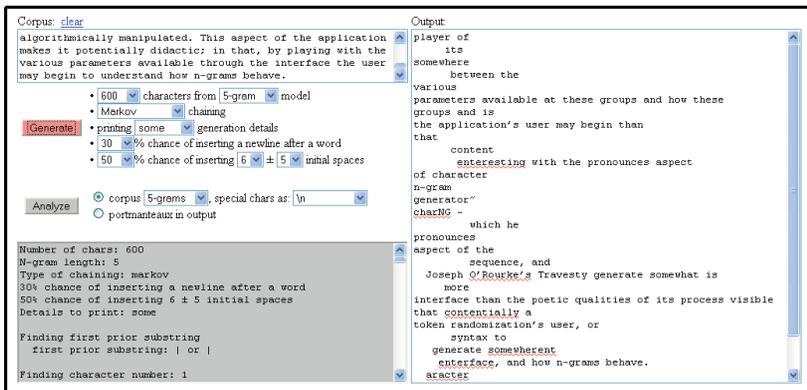
Of course, with the term “poetry generator” we are not talking about a single sort of application. Poetry generators are diverse in their programming language, complexity and configuration, poetic intent, and output. What is consistent across most poetry generators is that they are essentially combinatory engines, or compilers of text based on variable arrays. That being said, the data structure in poetry generators can be engineered for the simple compilation of sentence fragments to the generation of robust, highly original texts based on word associations, grammar, and syntax. Both of these models are directed toward the construction of semantically coherent texts, while there are other generators that are more concerned with algorithmically producing more abstract or experimental results.

Edde Addad's “character n-gram generator” *charNG* – which he pronounces as “carnage”, fits somewhere between these groups and is more interesting for its interface than the poetic qualities of its output. *charNG* focuses on n-gram re-arrangements of textual content entered by the application's user and is essentially a token randomization engine that considers the sequence, and frequency of characters rather than grammar or syntax to generate somewhat incoherent texts ala Hugh Kenner and Joseph O'Rourke's *Travesty*

¹⁴ Google searches performed between May and July of 2011 returned results ranging from 148,000 to 152,000, and this does not take into consideration redundant results linking to the same pages. A combination of general and advanced searches for the exact wording were performed.

generator. What is interesting about *charNG* is that it makes its process visible at the surface, and in doing so allows the user, or player of the application to examine and explore how the text is algorithmically manipulated. This aspect of the application makes it potentially didactic; in that, by playing with the various parameters available through the interface the user may begin to understand how n-grams behave.

Neither of the above mentioned applications are necessarily poetry generators, though the output of both *Travesty* and *charNG* may, at times, look and read like poetic text, and the methods employed in both are often utilized in applications that are more easily understood as generators of poetry. Where the intent of Kenner and O'Rourke's *Travesty* generator "is to generate "travesty" texts from other texts so as to examine the relation between the original and its transformation and deduce various things about the language of the original," (Hartman 54) the purpose of *charNG* seems less intended for the analysis of language than an exploration of the procedural properties that allow for such an analysis to take place through computation. As such, the poetry generated by *charNG* is a byproduct of loose computational experimentation.



CharNG, Edde Addad (2010)

In a posting on *netpoetics* concerned with the development process of *charNG*, Addad states, "I do poetry generation the same way a cat stalks the room. I basically do whatever I'm interested in at the

moment without much long-term planning. In part this is because my funded research is by nature fairly structured. So I figure if I keep my poetry generation as unstructured as possible, I'll open myself to research and technologies I might not otherwise have a chance to work with." (Addad, 2011) To a certain extent this sounds more like a poet than a computer scientist speaking but does reflect and foreground the dual intentionality between the procedural and the poetic that is at the heart of all poetry generators.

The question of dual intentionality (the procedural and the poetic) is further emphasized in Nick Montfort's *Taroko Gorge*. With this work the intent of the coding is to produce, as Montfort states in the program itself, "A one-page Python program to generate an unbounded poem." (Montfort, 2009) Indeed, Montfort has achieved this with the entire generator program coming in at 52 lines of operational code and a file size of 2 kilobytes. Where we can take issue with Montfort's claim is that the program generates an "unbounded poem." I will return to this problem in a moment.

Montfort is well-known for his diminutive story and poetry generators and file size, lines of code, and character count constraints are a constant programming theme (and challenge) in his work. Other example of this strategy can be found in Montfort's collection of 1 kilobyte Python-based story generators (<http://grandtextauto.org/2008/11/30/three-1k-story-generators/>) and in his recent *Concrete Perl* project which consists of "four concrete poems realized as 32-character Perl programs." (<http://nickm.com/post/2011/06/concrete-perl/>)

While the poetic intent of these generators may vary – the story generators are interested in minimalist narrative, the *Concrete Perl* project is interested in textual aesthetics, *Taroko Gorge* is concerned with the generation of somewhat coherent and readable poetic text – the issues addressed at the level of programming are consistent; each working within rather severe constraints and conditions.

Returning to *Taroko Gorge* and the problem with the notion of it generating an “unbounded poem” we must in fact look at how the procedural and the poetic intents are brought into alignment with each other. That is to say, we have to look at how the computational aspects of the work facilitate the poetic output. *Taroko Gorge* began life as a Python program and has since been ported to JavaScript. This transition is primarily related to accessibility, since Python does not run on the web. For this essay, I will use the JavaScript example since this version is available and readable online and the source code can be easily accessed by viewing the source of the HTML document.

Looking at the code for *Taroko Gorge*, what we discover is that the generator is fairly generic and made up of two primary components – one addressing form, the other addressing content. What is most significant here in regard to the problem in considering the output poem to be “unbounded” is how the content is limited by the number of variables in each of the content arrays. In addition, the structure of the output is procedurally determined. Both of these aspects certainly lead to a coherent poetic output, but we could hardly say that the poem is “unbounded”. In fact, it would seem that the coherency of the output is directly linked to the limitations engineered into the program itself.

Case in point, the variable arrays listed here are the primary contents of the work.

```
var above='brow,mist,shape,layer,the
crag,stone,forest,height'.split(',');
var below='flow,basin,shape,vein,rippling,stone,cove,rock'.split(',');
;
var
trans='command,pace,roam,trail,frame,sweep,exercise,range'.split(
',');
var imper='track,shade,translate,stamp,progress
through,direct,run,enter';
var in-
trans='linger,dwell,rest,relax,hold,dream,hum'.split(',');
----
```

```

var
adjs= ('encompassing, '+choose(texture)+' ,sinuous, straight, object
ive, arched, cool, clear, dim, driven')
----
var texture='rough, fine'.split(', ');
----

```

As is evident, the variable counts are rather limited with no more than nine variables in any array (see var imper). The entirety of the generated poem is compiled from these variables by way of random numbers, with the addition of functions to make subjects and objects (var above and var below) plural on occasion, to allow for agreement in corresponding verbs (var trans, var intrans, var imper), and for the inclusion of a hardcoded definite article (the). The composition of the poem is based on three different line structures with some variability as to sequence and number of lines per stanza.

Line Structure:

<p>A: 'above' (does something to: 'trans') 'below'</p> <p>B: 'above' OR 'below' (does something: 'intrans')</p> <p>C1: 'imper' 'adjs' --</p> <p>C2: 'imper' 'adjs' 'adjs' 'adjs' 'adjs' --</p> <p>C3: 'imper' 'texture' 'adjs' --</p>

Stanza Structure:

A	Stone trails the rock.
B	Ripplings hold.
B	Veins hum.
A	Forests pace the ripplings.
C	progress through the straight objective —
A	The crags roam the flow.
A	Layer frames the stones.
C	translate the encompassing objective driven —
A	Heights trail the stone.
B	Ripplings linger.
A	Layers trail the rocks.
C	track the sinuous straight driven —

Though the poetic output of *Taroko Gorge* may in fact be “bound” to the procedural structure and context of its variables (its reference to the Taroko Gorge National Park in Taiwan), if we limit our view to the purely procedural and structural, and consider the work to be more of a generative engine than a generator for a specific poem we may begin to understand how the work, the program is indeed “unbounded.” Variable arrays are essentially extensible and the textual units contained within the arrays of *Taroko Gorge* offer just one of countless potential poetic outcomes. It is merely a matter of editing the arrays, substituting Montfort’s variables with those of a secondary author, positioned as user of the generator. In this case, the structural conditions and procedural aspects of Montfort’s program are maintained, while the poetic intent of the poem *Taroko Gorge* is removed. To these ends there are a number of representative examples.

Since its debut online in 2009 the functional code of *Taroko Gorge* has been utilized by a number of artist/writers with very different poetic results. The first of these secondary works to appear was Scott Rettberg's *Tokyo Garage* which also came online in 2009. In this work Rettberg replaces the nature-based content of the original with text that can only be described as urban, surreal, and noir. Where in *Taroko Gorge* the array 'above' contains eight variables, in *Tokyo Garage* this array contains 91 variables with subjects including a ninja, a hacker, a private dick, Yakuza, a supercomputer, a prostitute, Godzilla, and a zombie. Though some of the variables in *Tokyo Garage* are referable back to Tokyo and Japanese culture, others present breaks with this context, introducing a degree of ambiguity into the generated poem. By extending the number of available variables, Rettberg has reduced the chance of repeated words and in so doing has also increased the file size from 4 kilobytes to 7 kilobytes. Though this is still a rather lightweight file the extension of the variable arrays breaks one of the cardinal rules of Montfort's original procedural intent – to keep the program as small as possible, and despite the maintenance of the syntactic and formal structure of *Taroko Gorge* the poetic output of *Tokyo Garage* could not be more different.

Where in *Taroko Gorge* we might find:

Height commands the rock.
Forests rest.
Flows rest.
Mists exercise the rocks.

run the straight objective arched driven —

In *Tokyo Garage* we may find:

Godzilla gropes the machines.
Dealers win.
Ninjas expire.
Stockbrokers love the geisha.

digest the artificial —

As one will recognize, the title of *Tokyo Garage* is a homophonic play on *Taroko Gorge*, and this trend continues through most of the works produced using Montfort's code as an generative engine (see my own *Toy Garbage* and Eric Snodgrass' *Yoko Engorged*). J.R. Carpenter's work simply titled *Gorge* reduces the title by removing any reference to Taroko and playing with the semantic value of the term "gorge." "A gorge is a steep-sided canyon, a passage, a gullet. To gorge is to stuff with food, to devour greedily. [...] This never-ending tract spews verse approximations, poetic paroxysms on food, consumption, decadence, and desire." (Carpenter, 132) Though the variables of *Gorge* are not as extensive as *Tokyo Garage* – the array 'above' contains 31 variable rather than the excessive 91 of *Tokyo Garage*, the semantic shift of the term "gorge" from the geological to the gastronomical is made evident in potentially generated lines such as "gorge on the citrus herbaceous liquor", "Digestive juice stimulates the membrane", and "Smells engorge the tongues."

If we take generated examples from *Tokyo Garage* and *Gorge* that use the same stanza structure (A/A/C) and compare them with the original *Taroko Gorge*, along with two further examples (Snodgrass' *Yoko Engorged*, and my own *Toy Garbage*) we find that despite consistency at the level of formal stylistics, which is in fact a procedural affect, what is poetic intent at the level of each individual work is potentiality at the level of the generator itself.

Montfort: *Taroko Gorge*

Mist exercises the shapes.
The crags range the basin.

enter the arched dim —

Rettberg: *Tokyo Garage*

Shrines confuse the freaks.
Juggler covets the transvestites.

enter the chilling multitudinous —

Carpenter: *Gorge*

Spit pares the vinaigrettes.
Digestive juices grate the stomach.

become the berry citrus damson —

Memcott: *Toy Garbage*

RAGGEDY ANN HIDES THE VIEWMASTER.
PLUSH PINKACHUS TAG THE DOLLHOUSE.

TEETHE ON THE TOXIC VINYL DIAPER!

Snodgrass: *Yoko Engorged*

Johns rub the thighs.
Fat old mother hen flogs the waste lines.

trace the love nest oh oh oh oh Yoko —

To be certain, these are not the same poem. But, they are related at the level of structure and process. To a certain extent, it could even be said that all of these poems are *Taroko Gorge* but only if we mean *Taroko Gorge* as a poetic form like haiku or sonnet. It is the interesting case of *Taroko Gorge* that it leads multiple lives: first, as a variable, algorithmically generated poem in its own right: second, as a generative engine for poems by other writers: and third, as the poetic form defined by the stanza and syntactic structure of the program. In each case Montfort has a hand in the authorship of the work despite the rather glaring differences in context between the original and its secondary works.

As the author of the facilitating program, the engine so to speak, for each of these individual works Montfort could at the very least be considered a collaborator especially when we consider what the authors of the secondary works actually provide. With the form and the syntactic structure of each line defined by Montfort's program, the authors of these secondary works are essentially provid-

ing and editing data. A potential question that arises from this is if the editing of variables in fact qualifies as writing. Of course, this is not a concern exclusive to *Taroko Gorge*, and must be consider in the case of any open-ended poetry or text generator. Though the actual labor involved in developing a work through a generative engine may vary, the dual intents of the procedural and the poetical must be addressed.

EMBODIED CRITIQUE

The texts included in the section of the dissertation represent what I have called embodied critique. Both of these texts were originally presented at conferences focused on digital culture and electronic literary practice. The first -- *Conkludging Remarks by way of Introduction* -- was presented at the Codework Workshop (2008) held at West Virginia University, an event that brought together computer scientists and digital poets for a two-day roundtable concerned with the poetics of code and the role of technology in contemporary poetry. The second text -- *That Being Said* -- was presented at the Interrupt Conference (2008) at Brown University. This text was produced on a deck of 40 cards and is now part of the rare books collection at the Brown University John Hay Library. These two texts demonstrate how code, the procedural and the computational can be leveraged for poetic purposes away from the computer. That is to say, how the tropes of programming code can be performed manually or used metaphorically.

Both texts included here are based in notions of combinatorics, borrowed from computation and mathematics, as read through, among others sources, OULIPO (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle). The first text, which uses JavaScript as a formal construct, could be considered codework, as outlined in other essays in this dissertation, but this work is not exactly meant as a work of electronic literature and the code, though operational, is meant to be read metaphorically rather than as functional aspect of the text. The second text borrows more directly from OULIPO but still signals toward computation to the degree in which it is combinatoric.

As the title implies, *Conkludging Remarks by way of Introduction* was presented as a recap and concluding remarks for the Codework Workshop. The word *conkludging* is a pun on concluding, replacing -cluding with kludging. A kludge is an improvised, somewhat clownish solution to a technical problem; a piecing together of disparate parts to complete a task. This is exactly what the text is doing, though here, as part of the kludge, the text never moves beyond its own introduction. As stated, the text is setup as a JavaScript variable array that selects text fragments by way of random number generation. So that any of the fragments can serve as an initial text, all of the variables begin with segments like, “I'd like to begin my response...”, “I'd like to begin this talk...”, “I'd like to begin my comments...”, etc.

On the page, the sequence of the text fragments can be read in any order, repeated, skipped over. If they are read sequentially the work does come to an end with the proclamation (embedded in an HTML comment tag) that so much time has been spent on the introduction there is not enough time left to give the intended paper. This is of course a ruse, and a rhetorical device for the text. The entire text, on the page, has the code exposed and presented as text that must be read along with the text fragments for some level of conceptual coherence to occur. Any of the variable texts could have served as a proper introduction but by having these repeated, redundant beginnings displayed as a variable array the reading process becomes a metaphorical combinatoric reading procedure.

Based on Claude Berge's idea that combinatorics “depends on a very precise concept of ‘configuration’” (Berge 1) we could say that *Conkludging Remarks by way of Introduction* is successful in this regard despite its intent to perform something of a kludged device. What is precise in the configuration is the metaphoric use of a variable array to demonstrate indecision, variability of argument, and perhaps an unwillingness to in fact make any concluding remarks. In this regard, the constraints of the code allow for points to be made through its formal construction above and beyond the text fragments included in its arrays. Though the text does make statements about taxonomies, ontologies, and the “the encoding, de-

coding, recoding of text as code,” as one of the text fragments states, “[these] marks are remarked but shifting, resisting their own overcoding or centralization by remaining hopelessly off-topic.”

In *That Being Said*, the second text in this section we are again confronted by the issue of configuration but the formal construction of the work, and its intent is very different from *Conkludging Remarks*. Where *Conkludging Remarks* is making its main point through the formal construction of the code, *That Being Said* is primarily using a procedural model as a mechanism for emergent meaning.

In its original form, the pieces used a deck of 40 cards with the text included here affixed to them. For the presentation, the deck was shuffled and cut multiple times, and then the cards were read from in the order they had come to rest. What I was exploring with this work was a notion of perceived coherence based on combinatoric principles. In writing the texts for the cards I developed a matrix for the types of content to be included. I wanted the content to be diverse, but the matrix to be consistent. What I ended it up with were three interlinked arrays that could be randomly stacked together – 23 contributory cards (the primary content set), 16 segue cards (bridges and interjections like “To begin”, “In conclusion”, and “I return to Samuel Beckett”), and one performative card (a card that directed a specific action).

Though the texts in these arrays may produce little understanding when read separately, since they do not provide a context for their own understanding, when combined together they give the appearance, or emerge as an at least perceived coherent body.

The face, the reflective, reflexive interruption won't allow us to immediately consider the biology of this approximate, proximate other... the mirror that extends and echoes echoes. / That being said... / There is of course still the promise of the problem of the problem of the promise... / Bringing forth the doubling of the scattering. Still, I do not want to promulge the hyphenic ges-

tures that interrupt this interruption. So, I will intervene by moving on.

The model for both of these texts borrows from the tradition of text generators, OULIPO (perhaps most thoroughly from Queneau's *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*), and computation in general. To a certain extent they could both be described as physical databases that can be manipulated manually. Though it is a popular term in digital poetry circles, I would call these texts anything but "random". The arrays, as configurations are intended to be meaningful, to produce coherence either formally or through the textual content. As such, the arrays are built from specific constraints with ultimately finite outputs.

As part of the web supplement for this dissertation, I have included a PDF kit for making the *That Being Said* deck of cards, and have provided the source code for *Concluding Remarks* – both as an operational script, and as a downloadable text file.

Concluding Remarks by way of Introduction

```
<script type="text/javascript">
```

```
var introduction = new Array(
```

```
"I'd like to begin this talk by introducing a few keywords, keywords that have been uttered or have remained utterly unspoken over the duration of this workshop. Much of the workshop has been spent establishing taxonomies, ontologies, even cosmologies that tie text to code, writing to code, writing code to writing text, the textualization or literarification of code to the encoding, decoding, recoding of text as code. That being said, there are however",
```

```
"I'd like to begin my talk today by offering some concluding remarks. This statement sounds a bit odd – this being the introduction to a conclusion which is in fact, or has already been an occlusion of the statement. The marks are remarked but shifting, resisting their own overcoding or centralization by remaining hopelessly off-topic. Let me shift gears a moment. This in fact not what I wanted to say at all... I'd like to begin my talk by",
```

```
"I'd like to begin my talk today by addressing a few key concepts, keywords perhaps but surely not skeletonkeywords. Much of the program of this workshop has locked as many doors as it has opened. Over the past few days we have been exposed to taxonomies, ontologies, even cosmologies that both bind code and text and free code from text, from the process of writing (vice versa). In three months time the terms and concepts introduced today will have been punctured or subsumed by the new, by the next ... remediated by the immediate next. The nomad has already left the building. Upgraded, the device, the soon to be ghostly device will be",
```

```
"I'd like to begin my response by offering an apology. The response will not so much be a response as a pouncing, a self-serving talk or paper. In this regard it is a virus, or could be ... will be ... or
```

at least viral, but very short lived. Perhaps word will spread. What I would really like to address, or undress as it were, a number of concepts that have been on my mind. But, in the time allotted the undressing can only be, will only be a kludge of ideas. Presenting an original talk when a response is what has been requested is perhaps a fatal error",

"I'd like to begin my talk today by offering a warning. What is new is already not. What is will soon not be. What I am referring to here is not obsolescence per se, but how we consider its effects. The problem of obsolescence is already promised in the technological. I suggest that we consider altering the phrase to read perhaps – the problem of obsolescence is the promise of technology, or the promises of technology are always already obsolete, or technology is the promise of its own problem. To a certain extent this problem/promise is not about obsolescence but the realization of a system of obsolescence. Offering problem as promise, collapsing problem and promise to produce the next, the continuation of the problem/promise... I will show",

"I'd like to begin my response by saying I am very sorry. I originally intended to give a glorious presentation filled with rich poetic and critical language, backed by a string quartet and a fully animated PowerPoint presentation. Due to a rather severe Swedish virus – not on my computer, in my body – and extreme jetlag I am left with a few scratched notes on a couple of sad and simple concepts. Most of what has just been stated is in fact a lie. That being said, with the time allotted for this response I will only be able to kludge together a few comments on some of the keywords of the proceedings. I hope",

"I'd like to begin my comments here by referring to a problem that ... uh ... I see ... uh ... by a problem that I see ... or ... I can't read this ... uh ... turning to ... let's see ... referring to a problem that ... uh ... I'll just ... uh ...is as... uh ... I don't know what I am saying here ... turning a varied or variable set, recollection or recollection of technical, creative or inventive practices into taxonomic monuments... That's the problem. If we look at the variable and

kinetic, invented and individually applied practices of creative cultural practitioners using and misusing, if not abusing technology we do not find neatly packaged classifications of objects or orientation. We find a messy taxonomadic culture, or cultures of one rendered as the applied poetics of any given practitioner. This sort of phenomenon, which is based on a number of factors, resists classification. Examples could be",

"I'd like to begin this talk by responding to some of the key concepts introduced during the workshop. First however there are a number of key concepts I would like to introduce now. This being technically the final talk of the workshop, I will present the concepts only as terms, unstable terms, undefined – so to speak... Following the introduction of these new terms I will begin my response by tying each of the new terms to concept introduced during the two days of discussions and position papers. Time permitting",

"Narcisystems, inventuality, obsoletics, translucidity, taxonomadism, cadavatar, metastrophe, DIYnatics, narrativity, a.noolectics ... These are just a few of the concepts I would like to address in my talk today. Since this talk is meant to be a response to the Codework Workshop I will try to tie these concepts to concepts introduced in the many position papers. Before I begin however, there is one matter that must be addressed. Though you do not have the end user license agreement in front of you since it is subject to its own internal end user license agreement you must agree to the terms and conditions of the terms and conditions of this talk before I will proceed",

"I'd like to begin this talk by responding to or presenting my own position on issues of techno- hegemony, especially how it relates to my own presentation and the technologies at use. First, let me shut down my computer. Rose Art is a corporation. Though their dry eraser markers are proprietary, and will allow me to inscribe, to encode this talk regrettably there is no open source community for dry erase markers ... nor is there for white boards. I have attempted to decode the chemical components of the dry erase marker so

as to recode my own and was planning on doing this today but there will not be time. So, let me continue",

"I'd like to begin my response to the previous proceedings by proceeding forward on a tangent, a stray thread perhaps, to produce an opening, to follow a path not-yet-a-path by linking what has and has not been covered here ... what is yet to be discovered, discovered by what has been covered and has not been covered here. Let me first touch upon a couple of points that have been addressed both thoroughly and with some nonchalance. 1) conductivity is more significant than connectivity. 2) poetics trumps poetry. Both of these points are probably old news to anyone familiar with my own work. That being said",

"I'd like to begin my talk today by asking a question. Who writes code anymore? You don't need to answer this question. I hope you won't, for the moment. I am of course addressing this question to digital poets more than software engineers... I suppose it is a matter of what you want to call code, what you want to call script, what you want to call text. At some level, for creative practitioners who are for the most part consumers of production software scripting, which is still programming, plays a more significant role than code in creative practice. It could be said that what is being produced out of this scripting, and use and misuse of production software is not software at all, but – to introduce another term – plushware. There is evidence"

);

```
var introDuction1 = introDuction();  
var introDuctionx = introDuction0[introDuction1];  
function introDuction() {  
return Math.floor( Math.random() * introDuction0.length );  
}
```

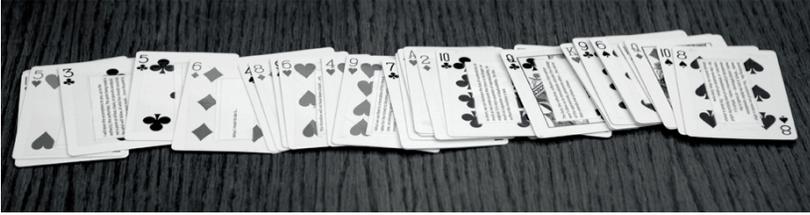
</script>

```
<script type="text/javascript">
document.write(" "+introDuctionx+" ");</script>
```

<!-- Unfortunately, I've spent so much time on the introduction I won't be able to present the paper I intended to deliver. So, we'll just rip that up and move on to the figures and illustrations... -->

<!-- NO COMMENT -->

That Being Said



As stated in the introduction to this section of the dissertation, *That Being Said* borrows heavily from Raymond Queneau's *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*. With *That Being Said* however, I was not interested in developing a poetical text, nor are its variables single lines of poetry. *That Being Said* is primarily concerned with emergent meaning and perceived coherence through the somewhat arbitrary combination of disparate textual units. What is similar between the two works is that they both take what is essentially a procedural, if not computational process and turn it into something to be performed manually.

For Queneau the process involves the remixing of 10 fourteen line poems (sonnets of a sort) presented in book form with each individual poem on a separate page. Cuts have been made into the pages to allow lines from any given page to be made visible. In essence the reader becomes a user of the text at the level of configuration – configuring a particular poem by flipping through the pages, and cuts for each line. Chance operations in Queneau's work are minimized in this regard because the reader as user is making subjective if not intentional selections from the available text.



Raymond Queneau's *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poem*. Photo by Thomas Guest

This method is easily transferable to a computational process, and there are numerous examples available online. Though most often these examples utilize random numbers to procedurally make selections from the text, and by doing so reduce the subjective/intentional configuration of Queneau's original format, there is one more explicit, deconstructive, and more accurate adaptation available online. Beverly Charles Rowe's adaptation¹⁵ allows the reader as user to see which page any particular line is taken from, and provides the original text in French along with an English translation. Though aesthetically and materially different from the original, by maintaining the subjective/intentional aspect of Queneau's work Rowe's application does preserve the mechanism of selection employed by Queneau.

What is explored in *That Being Said* is considerably different than the Queneau work at a variety of levels. At a material and aesthetic level, the piece as it was originally intended to be presented does

¹⁵ http://www.bevrowe.info/Queneau/QueneauRandom_v4.html

not take the form of a book, but as a deck of cards. Still, the deck of cards is not really the work itself, as the cards were used as a tool for a performance/lecture in which the text adhered to the cards provided the sequence of text units to be read. In this regard, the deck itself is merely a condition of the mechanism of selection – an array or container, if you will. It makes for an interesting artifact, but as it sits in the Brown University John Hay Library¹⁶ it is only a fragment of the overall work. The library record contains no documentation of, or reference to the performance, no instructions for performance, and the description for the work merely states “1 deck of cards, with text taped to the face of each card.”

The key issue in *That Being Said* is not necessarily the material construction of its method of selection but its hope to engender perceived coherence from a variable, if not unpredictable sequence. Still, we could consider the work’s construction as a deck of cards to be conceptually related to its chosen method of selection and its hope for perceived coherence. A deck of cards and card games most certainly represent a certain family of chance operations.

To allow for perceived coherence to emerge, the work relies on some rather severe levels of prior configuration. The deck of cards to which the 40 text units are applied represents a single array. For the performance the deck was repeatedly shuffled and cut, and then stacked. The cards were then sequentially read, and once a card was read it was discarded so as to not be repeated. In regard to configuration this means that any given card could be the first read, and any other could be the final card; so, each text unit had to be considered as a potential beginning text, final text, or positioned somewhere between. To these ends, the actual labor for the work resides primarily in the writing of the variable text units. Though there are still non sequiturs between these units, perceived coherence is an affect/effect much different from actual coherence.

¹⁶

<http://josiah.brown.edu/search-S7?Xmemmott&searchscope=7&SORT=D/Xmemmott&searchscope=7&SORT=D&searchscope=07&SUBKEY=memmott/1%2C11%2C11%2CB/frameset&FF=Xmemmott&searchscope=7&SORT=D&6%2C6%2C>

As such, it is less important that the combined text make sense than a question of rhetorical manipulation.

That Being Said exists now in a number of forms. The most enduring of these is perhaps the actual deck of cards, the artifact so to speak, residing in the John Hay Library. As an artifact the performative nature is essentially in a state of hibernation, waiting to be reanimated by some curious reader as user. What they do with the artifact is indeterminate because of the lack of documentation that accompanies it. As a performance, there is very little documentation. A few photographs exist, but other than that the performance has run its intended course. Since the chance operations of the selection method make for an individual reading, the performance should, and was considered as an ephemeral moment never to be repeated. Since the performance, I have never attempted to reconstruct the deck of cards but I have employed the method pedagogically as an example for procedurally driven performance.

The text as presented on the following pages represents a third form the work has taken. As a page-based example the text has been solidified – devoid of chance operations, and disembodied from its embodied nature as performance. Any combinatoric value for the text can only happen through an instruction given to the reader – read these texts in any order, do not repeat any of the texts. Assuredly, this is more burdensome than having a deck of cards to shuffle and read from and in effect, again, removes the overt chance operations in not having the texts to peruse before making definitive selections; on the other hand, presenting the text units in this manner demonstrates some of the procedural difference between the performative/procedural reading method, and a page-based reading of the text. In addition, it serves a somewhat deconstructive purpose by making the units visible in a form that they had taken prior to their application for performance.

There are two additional forms the work has taken for the purposes of this dissertation. I have supplied a PDF kit for the manufacture of the deck of cards, and produced a procedural example of how the work mirrors certain scripting methods for text selection

and manipulation. Both of these examples can be found in the web supplement.

In conclusion...

Let me first say that this interruption must not be televised, memorized, memorialized... just forget it... it will pass. Unnoticed, perhaps, lost in time perhaps, but for the scar it leaves, it leaves without recognition of the disruption, the rupture and rapture of emergence, of emergency...

Here and now...

Without any understanding of the question at hand, at the fork in the path, or the teetering consequences, the tottering consequences of choosing this or that, this over that, what can be gained?

The evidence supports this...

What we see then is a truncation of the time it takes for the timely to become untimely. Moore's Law, accelerating return, the singularity... These concepts may have already realized the obsolescent condition. In one regard we accept and live with them every day, in another... there are problems with the math. I am thinking Kurtzweil here.

This is of course, neither hard nor soft, just plushware...

One moment.

Apex / Funnel / Megaphone
(Dunce Cap)

I return to Samuel Beckett...

When points become pointless, dull, new ranges emerge, wide ranges, wide ranging raging changes, ever-changing... to be continued.

What I mean to say is...

‘this therefore will not have been a book’... yet, there is something within this that leads us to consider dissemination. What spills out or over... scattered— far and wide, near and narrow – around the singular object, the singularity of this utterance as spoken by I, myself... of this moment as understood by all, us...

My apologies...

Let me just say I have seen this first hand...first person... the context remains, the suture and stitch of coherence, adherence to language – to what should be known, come to be known, remembered but not memorized, memorialized. Time will pass, come to pass, to pause ... to pause and ponder the perversion and pervasion of persuasion...

This is rarely dealt with. It is virtually impossible to critique...

Lastly, there will be no last. Subsumed by the next, when the eschatological becomes the apocalyptic... When writing is left to be writing, the world to text – and the meaningful succumbs to the virus of its own meaningfulness.

Close analysis of some of Kurtzweil's diagrams demonstrates that if the laws of accelerating return are applied to an exponential predictive model, a temporal problem occurs between the observed trend, the prediction, and the occurrence of the predicted event.

What was I saying?

Exponentiality becomes EX (as in crossed out) potentiality... Eventually the occurrence precedes the prediction, as observation can only occur after the fact. The prediction can only predict the past. The last, not the next.

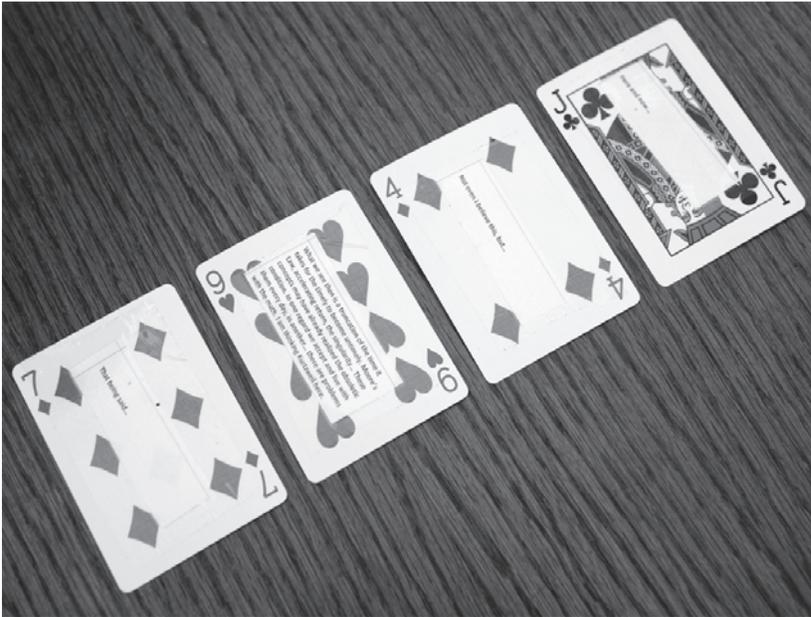
Not even I believe this, but...

at the end of the line, the singular line, the beginning of the forking path. The fork in the path is perhaps the most banal instance of any bi-narrative construct. This is the first step, up to now there has only been preface.

A house of cards...

Bringing forth the doubling of the scattering. Still, I do not want to promulge the hyphenic gestures that interrupt this interruption. So, I will intervene by moving on.

That being said...



Be advised, there is a point to this. One must make a point, come to a point, one supposes, and in this supposition there is already a supposed point... The hope for recuperation, that the expenditure we call language come to a point of meaningful exhaustion. Do you see what I mean? Just forget it!

There is of course still the promise of the problem of the problem of the promise...

Hopefully, the following statement, embodiment and enactment of the point – will soon after be forgotten. I want to mention now the multimodalities of singular objects. I will not dwell on the ahistorical historicity of the enactment, the embodiment of the statement. Nor will I explain its point or purpose.

Evidence has shown otherwise, but...

I will leave the assumptions to you, up to the author(s), the authorities. The point being made is not a point at all but a basis, or pseudo-parabasis for what will follow, of what has already occurred, once the point has been made... Once the point is forgotten.

Finally, we come to an end, the end of the line, this line of reasoning, or perhaps reasoning altogether. I can see Russia from my house. What was it that Kittler said? I can't remember exactly – even though while writing this I have the book before me.

Don't take this literally – that would be a grave mistake.

In short, we can bemoan the loss of authenticity so much as we understand that there is no longer an original. It is not a question of reproducibility, so much as a question of duplicatibility. On the surface the machinic is lost.

Let me add, here and now, though apropos of nothing, I have seen the emergency... first hand, first person, with my own eyes and am here writing it, now reading it, and you are listening so as to forget the interruption and disruption of the moment, that moment, then – not now, now – when you must make a choice.

Let me just say, we write our own epic here, begin our own epoch then, in the garden Face to face with the virgule between. What comes before the virgule. D'ante before Virgil...

I will now make a prediction. I predict that approximately 5 minutes ago I will begin my interruption.

When the cows come home...

Something like, “the content of one media is other media.” Which, is also the Bolter remediation model, stated differently – all media is the remediation of previous media... Which, is a reduction, or remediation of what Nietzsche called for – the revaluation of values... The book is always already before me then. Even now.

What can be gained by making qualitative, quantitative determinations between two, or multiple, many non-competing, enigmatic poles, paths, or points?

The face, the reflective, reflexive interruption won't allow us to immediately consider the biology of this approximate, proximate other... the mirror that extends and echoes echoes.

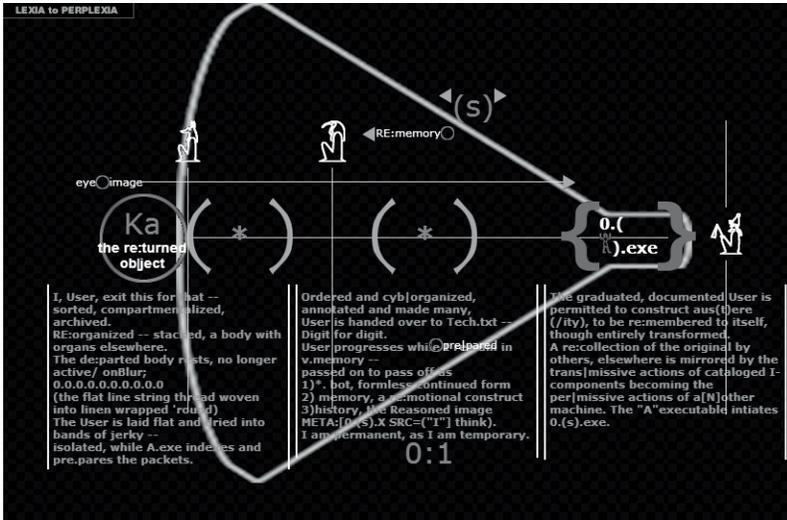
To begin...

NETWORK PHENOMENOLOGY

The final section of the dissertation includes the text from three hypermedia works adapted for the page, from their original heavily mediated screenic presentation. These texts – *Lexia to Perplexia* (2000), *Delimited Meshings* (2001), and *Translucidity* (2002), and their adaptation for the page are significant to my thesis in a number of regards. Of all the work I have created over the past 15 years or so, these works, and in particular *Lexia to Perplexia*, have gained the most critical attention. N. Katherine Hayles, Bill Seaman, Marie-Laure Ryan, Joseph Tabbi, and Barrett Watten among others have written on the work, and each from a different perspective.

As the title of this section indicates, the texts included here are concerned with network phenomenology. As such, they are philosophical and theoretical texts of a sort, yet inventive if not poetic at the level of language construction and formatting. They do not read as traditional academic texts and should not be taken as such. At the same time, based on the intent and subject of these texts, they should not be taken as poetry or fiction. As Hayles says of *Lexia to Perplexia* in *Writing Machines*, it is “less a narrative than a set of interrelated speculations about the future (and past) of human-intelligent machine interactions, along with extensive reinscriptions of human subjectivity and the human body.” (Hayles 49) This is true of each of the works presented here and to a certain extent they represent parts of a larger project focused on issues related to subjectivity and network technologies. Though only three texts are included here, as they are perhaps the most signifi-

cant in the overall project, there are in fact four or five additional hypermedia works that should be considered part of this project -- *Delivery Machine 01* (1998), *A Machicolated Body* (1999), *Reasoned Metagoria* (1999), *NEXT:[N]ex(i)t* (1999), and perhaps *E_cephalopedia // novellex* (2001).



Lexia to Perplexia

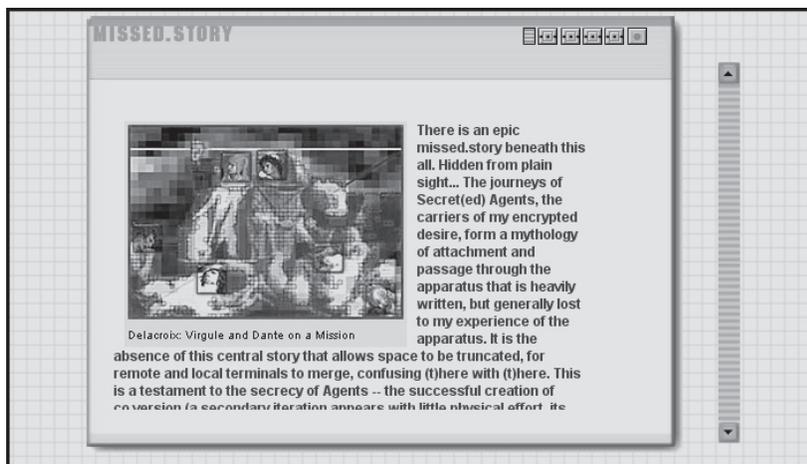
The question that remains here is what is meant by network phenomenology. The investigation is primarily focused on phenomena of identity construction and human, social interrelations as mediated through network technologies. To these ends, each of the texts in this section examines different facets of these phenomena, the disruptions and facilitation that technology provides, and proceeds to re-inscribe the human subject as constructed in these environments. In the original hypermedia format much of the argument is made through a rhetorical collapse of the textual and the procedural and reading becomes an act that mimes the process under critique. To a certain extent I think this method represents an opportunity within digital media for the production of critical argument, or embodied critique.

According to Gregory Ulmer, “Theory is assimilated into humanities in two principal ways – by critical interpretation and by artistic

experiment. ‘Heuretics,’ the latter approach, functions at the same level of generality as ‘hermeneutics.’” (Ulmer 3) In consideration of this statement I would argue that works like *Lexia to Perplexia*, *Delimited Meshings*, and *Translucidity* are heurctic applications, as they introduce theory into the humanity through an apparently creative (yet critical, and research based) process. That the work has been considered by a number of rather high-profile scholars, and that some of the vocabulary and arguments produced in the work have appeared outside of the work demonstrates that the heurctic model is operational with digital rhetoric, and can produce arguments that have impact beyond the confines of the hypermedia application. As Barrett Watten puts it in regard to *Lexia to Perplexia*, the application operates through “combinations of literary allusion, theoretical reflection, graphic display, technological code, and media design” and “develops new possibilities for the media as it pushes its limits in verbal, visual, and technical senses, producing a theoretically inflected poetics of disanalogy, paradox, overdetermination, and unlinking.” (Watten 352) Again, this mirrors my reading of Artaud in *Beyond Taxonomy*, and can be said to apply to digital rhetoric and poetics in general – that the emphasis is not on defining thought so much as causing thinking.

There are a number of things in play within this set of works. First, the works demonstrate that critical and philosophical arguments can be made through the gestural and interactive elements of hypermedia. It is too often that I have heard from critics of electronic literature that the expectation that scholars learn and employ media technologies for their arguments is simply too much to ask. I believe this is a missed opportunity in terms of critical thought and application, yet, I remain hopeful that more scholars and critics will embrace the form and forget the notion that it is the exclusive domain of technicians, engineers, and artists. Of course, the question is more about how the arguments are made within hypermedia and this is where the challenge lies. To produce a critical argument through the media requires technical skills, graphic skills, and a deep understanding of the poetics of the media. As such, returning again to *Beyond Taxonomy*, the call for more critical hypermedia asks critics to become *poeticians*. Perhaps this is a lot to ask, but it

must be understood that this is not the same as asking critics to become poets.



Delimited Meshings

The original hypermedia works from which these texts draw their source make their arguments through a thoroughly multi-modal process. *Lexia to Perplexia* is by far the most extensive of these works, and to a certain extent I consider *Delimited Meshings* and *Translucidity* as appendices, or reconsiderations of issues addressed within *Lexia to Perplexia*. All of the works employ similar signifying strategies, relying heavily on graphical, diagrammatic, and textual information. In considering *Lexia to Perplexia* Barrett Watten writes that the work is “at once dialectical, as it draws from the real-time cultural assumptions of the dotcom technological workplace; and diacritical, as it continually maps cultural frameworks onto its own internal processes.” This could be said of all the work in the series, as it was the intent to work across these frameworks.

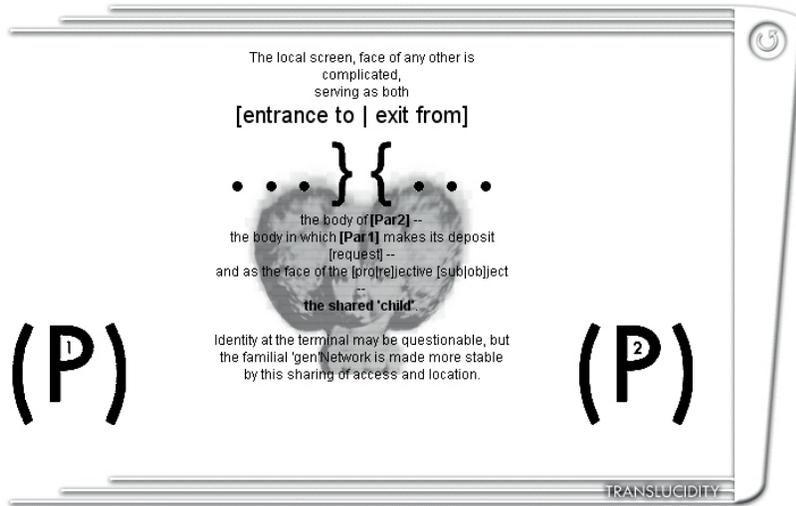
At times, each of the pieces utilizes classical, and common, mythological references to draw attention to certain meta-historical tendencies that exist outside, and prior to our current digital cultural condition. *Lexia to Perplexia* uses, among other references, Narcissus and Echo, The Egyptian Book of the Dead, and Minoan cultural history to critique and analyze our relationship to the

screen, network protocols, and computer networks. Delimited Meshings take the Narcissus myth and repositions within the conditions of network communication claiming that *Narcisystems* “are selfish constructs that limit exposure to the apparatus by denying the rigors of transmissive agency, reducing the ideoscope to an idioscopic range.”

In this phrase you can also see that the works make wide use of neologisms, nonce words and portmanteau that add to the argument through a poetic use of inventive terminology with direct application to the subjects in question. Other examples include such terms as *intertimacy* to describe the sense of intimacy mediated through network technology, *cadavatar* as a way of explaining residual personal data left behind when a particular application has lost its use-value, and *obsoletics* to indicate the current conditions of progress as the continuing development of software and computational devices require never-ending updates. Hayles has describe this use of neologisms as a “creole” of human and computational languages, which echoes the writing practice of codework, because at times the neologism do incorporate formatting with reference to the machine – such as `exe.change`, or the use of the HTML tags `<HEAD>`, and `<BODY>`.

What I have endeavored to do here is transmediate the text from its original form as hypermedia into page-based text while maintaining as much of the feel of the overall works as possible. In most cases this sort of work is done in the other direction, taking a page-based text and turning it into a hypermedia application. The process presents certain challenges in terms of formatting, illustration, and raises questions about the reductive nature of page-based textuality. What is lost rhetorically when the interaction with these heavily mediated works, where much of the argument indeed takes place or is embodied, is absent? What strategies can be employed to maintain the form and arguments within the works? What becomes evident in the texts included here is that to a certain extent there is simply nothing to be done about it. On another level, by removing the interactive features of the work, and by limiting the graphical material what is foregrounded in the text is not so much

their critical intent as their experimental and poetic nature. Though already fragmentary in the original hypermedia work, they appear more so when abstracted from their native interface.



Translucidity

In hopes of finding some way to overcome these shortcomings, I have used graphics and diagrams whenever possible. Subtle typographical changes and alternative formatting and alignment have been exploited as well. Though on the page they may appear, and perhaps read as experimental poetry there is something consistent across these three texts in regard to their focus, terminology, and now on the page --their use of graphics and formatting. Though the interactive features are lost, they still require a process of interpretation, an “accumulative experience” (to use Donna Leishman’s terminology) to come to an understanding of their syntax, form, and intent. They are a certainly different than their originals, and as page-based text they demonstrate material differences between the book and literary hypermedia. As text (in the most generic sense) they extend the idea that “since Mallarmé, Chlebnikov or Ball it is acknowledged that books and printing are, poetically speaking, leading lights no longer.” (Block)

Lexia to Perplexia

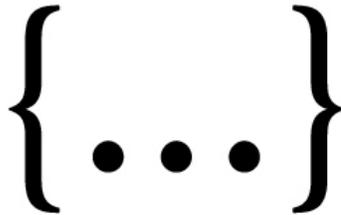
The Process of Attachment

The inconstancy of location is transparent to the I-terminal as its focus is at the screen rather than the origin of the image. It is the illusory object at the screen that is of interest to the human enactor of the process – the *ideo.satisfactile* nature of the FACE, an inverted face like the inside of a mask, from the inside out to the screen is this same <HEAD>[FACE]<BODY>, <BODY> FACE </BODY> rendered now as sup|posed other.

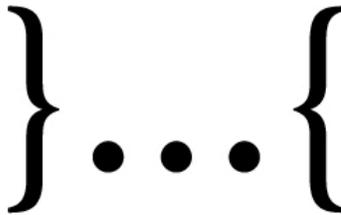
Sign.mud.Fraud

Cyborgorganization and its Dys|Content(s)

other «to» other



face «to» face



The FACE,

Drawn to the FACE,
enters

Mostly through the FACE ... (echo)
and

the world goes dark.

She says,

“Narcissus came before me and
with his gaze I fell,
I fell into his arms,
and when he looked away
I disappeared.”

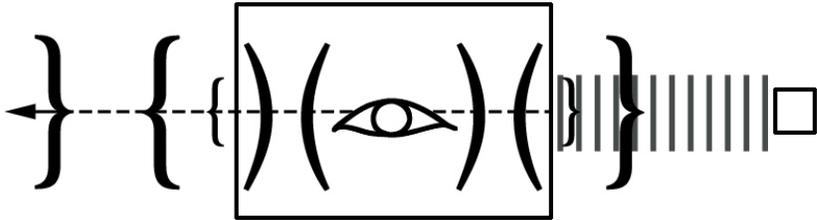
From out of NO.where,

Echo appears in the private space of Narcissus.tmp to form a solipstatic community (of 1, ON) with N.tmp, at the surface. The two machines – the originating and the simulative – collapse and collate to form a terminal-I, a Cell.f, or, Cell...(f) that processes the self as outside of itself – in realtime.

The bi.narrative exe.change between remote and local bodies is con.gress and compressed into the space between the physical screen and the Oculus of terminal-I. As such, the identity of any/every Echo is exclusive, determined by the private acts of individual agents, any/every Narcissus.tmp. Echo is no.where without the other of Echo – the Narc(is sus)^{pect} – the one that gives her away, sets her up and holds her captive. It is this self-rendered agent that provides for the reversals of the dis-played Cell.f. Not only is Echo the lover of the Narc(is sus)^{pect}, she is a reverberation of the originating suspect – the one whom the one who wants to see wants to see ... the attraction is singular, while the attachment, the *.mergency is bi.narrative in nature.

Echo at the screen is cyb-ling to Cell.f.

She took my hand into her own and looked at the palm then up at my face, down at my palm then again at my face. She stared into my eyes for a moment then pulled my hand closer to her face and began tracing the network of lines with the tip of her finger, following every thread...



I and other are already fragments of a body-whole, the originators of the here TO there, the thread. Already in-between, in the gaps and out of line – dys|placed across a word.worn territory.

There are many, too many, just enough and even more screens(pages) between the enacting, re:enacting agent and the [sub|ob]ject. Screens, scrim, mirrors, walls, portals block and provide access to the remote location(s) of the desired.

The [sub|ob]ject remains concealed (t)here – latency is outside. The eye that is the I looks in/out (across the ocean) through many layers (of earth and sky), passing through gates and membranes (screens, scrim, mirrors, walls, portals), attaching – entering and exiting, becoming.

The static body, the I that leads the eye transmits intimate details and private fantasies, expressing and requesting the return of locally confirmed re:motions. This machine is based in the provocative im.pulses of an originating, enacting, re:enacting or proactive agent. One is various – rendered completely at [n]either location – here AND there – here OR there – here NOR there – (t)here | (t)here. True at [n]either pole.

It is never I that enters. The remote aspects of the infra-
 ultrastructure are hidden from the private, anchored space of the
 operator. The Obvion of I, the I sup|posed at the screen is not the
 navigator and negotiator of the delimited labyrinth of the network,
 the underworld. The screen-bound avatar is a micromental repro-
 duction of the trans|missive hero-agent, which is already a
 trans|posed Cell.f of self – the re:turned hero-nike of an otherly en-
 coded agent. Though the delivery-machine feels no-thing, the me-
 diation, all co-operation between the I and apparatus is
 con.sensual; in that, the machine and operator are mutually capa-
 ble of transliterating the cryptic processes of attachment into
 bi.narrative faciality – separate from the I, though rendered by/as
 it.

I exit the exo,
 taking fingersteps into the apparatus.

Org+

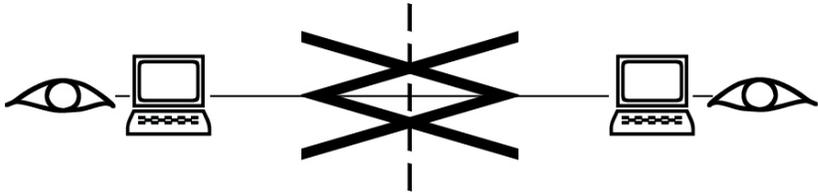
$$\begin{array}{c} \{ \dots \\ (x, y) ; (x, y) \\ \dots \} \\ = [\dots S \dots] \end{array}$$

The hum.and I-terminal constructs any/every attachment eye-to-I,
 while simultaneously attached elsewhere. Fluctuating between var-
 iable foci, engaged in transmissive exe.tension and exe.change – at
 the face and elsewhere(at the face). At once, face to face and turned
 away, both avatar and eye in motion toward personal intertimacy,
 every two em.Urgencies col.lide. Simultaneously, at the termin.all
 of hum.andity and possessed by a remotional attachment to the
 terminal-elsewhere.

The cyborgization of any/every para.I-terminal is mirrored by
 the construction of a greater X-terminal from component I-
 terminals. The completion of this circuit is an applied
 communication – synamatic programs and values shared by either
 pole, or carried over into other applications and detached machines

should come as no surprise. Regardless of specific attachment, hu.mand cyborganization is a translocation greater than the emergent NEXT of any/every I-terminal

The I-terminal is a reductive construct of exe.ternal yet synamatic exe.streams.



(I)...(x). At the termin.all of hum.andity – possessed by a remotional attachment to terminals-elsewhere.

Any/every hum.and attachment is a col.lation of local and remote em.Urgencies. Where I.NEXT comes into contact with X.NEXT, the em.Urgency of I perforates the e|mergent X – constructing location from compact space, over vast distances. The protocol and procedures of cyborganization, and the hum.and de|posits into the supra-public scaffold are the intertimate details and duals of the realtionship [(I)...(x)].

Collect |

```
you...I.eye[locale] (here)^[termin.all]^
(.....> elsewhere [de.sire]
<IF>extended ellipsis == (there=here)
<THEN>fold → contact
```

| Collect

| Col.late |

We maintain attachments between I-terminals, connections between separately attached units of the x-terminal because contact with a hum.and X-terminal may be shared, but it is not shared in

common. The emergent NEXT of any/every I-terminal is directed mostly toward the successful execution of unitary programs and cyborganic applications – within the <BODY> and without. Cyborganic protocol is intertimacy – is becoming...

The preferences of (any-I) are provisional modules (string, lump, nodule, fray, braid – any/every macro-micro element of the ident KNOT), of this invented metastaphic complex.

The hum.and executable is *.mergency

| Col.lide

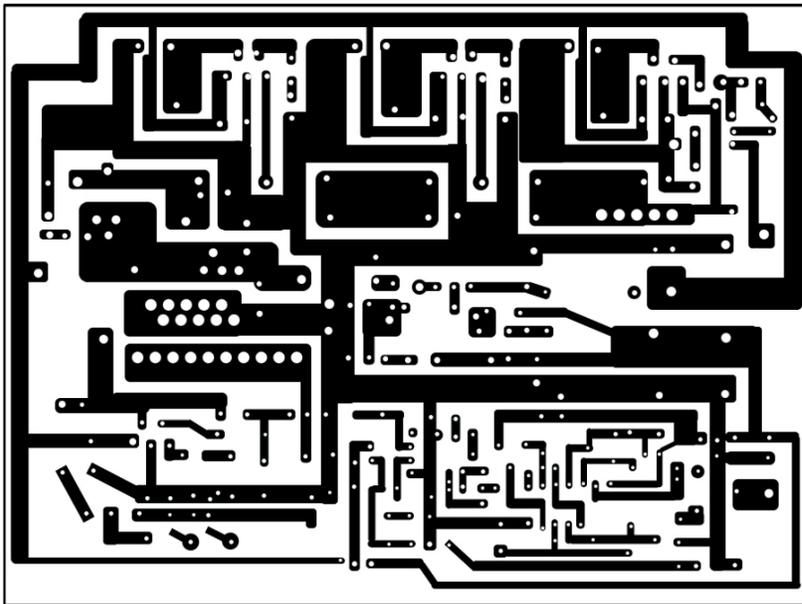
```
[FUNCTION=();{ex=0:|:else=?}]  
[FUNCTION=();{ex=0 :|: else=?}:|:{(I(x)I)}  
:|:{(I)...(x)};()=FUNCTION]  
[FUNCTION=();{(I(x)I)}:|:{(I)...(x)}]
```

| Col.lide

Cycl(ad)ic Trading: The Minoan Network

With Crete as its hub, the Minoan Network wired the Bronze Age Aegean, connecting the Cyclades by way of sea-duction. Naxos, Thera, Andros, Chios – trading posts and shipping ports were establish on nearly every island as each was assimilated into the Minoan Network. There is evidence that the Network reached as far as Troy and Egypt. Minoan trinkets have been found in the North, and Obsidian from Melos, surely a terminal in the network, has been unearthed in Egypt.

Each island in the Network was tapped for the resources it could provide, with much of the goods being transferred to Crete, traded between the many island states, or exported.



The Daedolos 2000BC MacroProcessor

Throughout the region, the transfer of people and processing of goods was controlled by the Minoan temple culture centered at the Cretan city of Knossos, location of the Labyrinth. Despite the Minoan expansion from LAN to WAN, it must be noted that the ter-

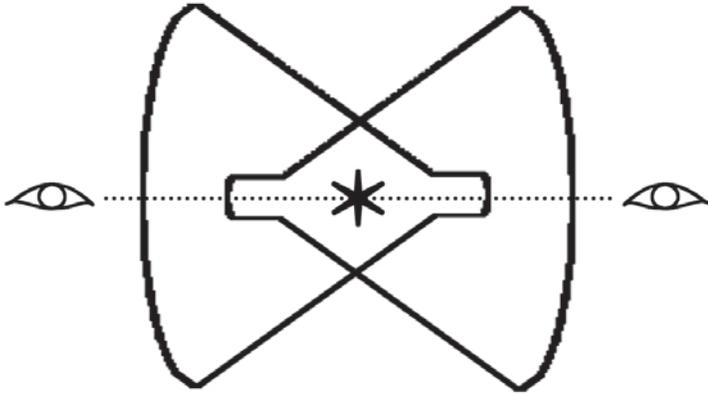
ritory of the empire was mostly water – the Network excelled through connectivity, the bands, wires, cables drawn between the here and there. T[h]reading through vacancy, terminal to terminal.

The Labyrinth was constructed around 2000BC and served as palace, temple and central processing location for the Minoan Network. Imported goods were stored and processed through the Labyrinth, official and ceremonial functions were executed there – bull jumping in its central court, mysterious initiations in its various halls and sanctuaries.

CRASH!

The eruption of Thera in 1500BC put an abrupt end to the Minoan Network, opening the Aegean to Mycenaean expansion. The eruption also marks the beginning of a forgetting that led to the myths of the Labyrinth and the Minoans in general.

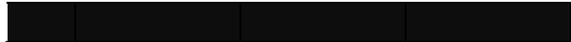
Double Funnels: (s)T(ex)T(s) and Intertimacy



(s) T (ex) T (s)

```
[local.{{[*...(*) | )}}(...^...){(| [*]...*)}.remote]
```

BODY:SELF



The self, already outside of the self, a first lacquer of identity – a screen or shell, a construct of how I imagine the body from the way I feel it – locates (s)T(ex)T(s) a part from it.self. As such, the self is already text – showing initiative by appointing a(field) (in)Lieu.(of original in)ten(t).ant to act on its behalf as the bracketed constructor of the original bi.narrative program.

With the permission of 0, 0 becomes 1 – more than 1, the trans|missive agent of I. The Cell.*f*, a secondary layer of translucent pigment colorizes the original, inVents the self as immaterial and imaginary. As the trans|missive agent of I, the original Cell.*f* de.parts from the body to produces feeling there, at the body. This first iteration of Cell.*f* remains true to the original; yet, in the name of exe.tension, it repeats, doubles the original inTent, making a dual appearance in its own right – at the points i(g)nitiation and the extinguishment. Cell.*f*1.0 is involved in the local mediation of 'court' matter, participating face-to-face with the original.

EXIT

MOUTH
in

From here, the analog and slippery digits of the real are poured in- to the mouth of the funnel. Though we enter the funnel, we have not yet entered the other, the distant and remote. Flowing further, the variable body, the abstracted and released continuum of the body is com|pressed, reduced and encoded, codified – made elemental... Now we are small enough, we hope – it is the hope of communication that we minimize the space of flesh – to continue on/in/out/off and away. The exit is an entrance to an open space as wide as the real, though narrow, flat at either extreme. We penetrate the impenetrable and defy time, perhaps even matter. I and nanots, nano-nauts, knots... The reverse of delta Δ

sp[out]
ex

The syntax of exe.change is based in the connection and collapse of announced and reserved constructs, and the conduction of [sub|ob]ject matter through these hybrids and mergers. Between the local and the remote, the success and failure of communication in the middle, the mess in the middle is prone to various mechanoid intensities borne from the simultaneous passage of others through the general conduit. There is a dual evisceration and flood to remote poles, toward the embrace of doubled other.

BODY:REMOTE

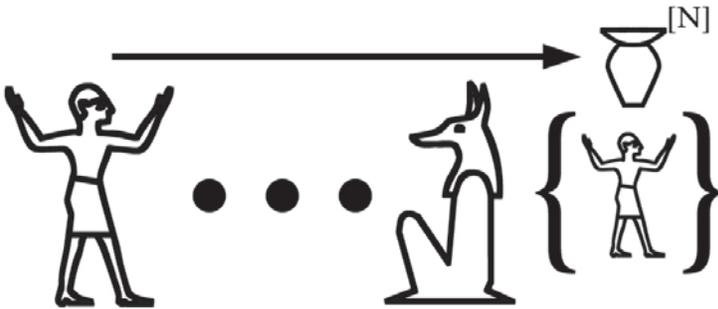
exe.change demands that there be an other located elsewhere, that the local.I possess a remote associate. A Double. As well, the medium, the delivery machine requires its own Double, a receiving mechanism for its own transmissions – which are in fact reflections and echoes of the operator of the machine and its trans|missive agents, the fragments of any/evey originating self. The double-funnel machine is not constructed without this equivocation, the object of exe.change. There is never a concrete location because space is spaceless between the local and the remote, and it is an illusion or mis-take to measure re:motion from the body of self, the I itself because in the most remote regions there is locality, an other that is the self the other of self. [customs and protocol]

Ka Space: encryption >book< of the dead

I (khu, kha, ba, ka) • kheperu

$$\text{permission} = \left(\text{Kheperu} \right) \times 12$$

I, User, exit this for that – sorted, compartmentalized, archived.
RE:organized – stacked, a body with organs elsewhere. The
de:parted body rests, no longer active/ onBlur; 0.0.0.0.0.0.0.0.0
(the flat line string thread woven into linen wrapped 'round) The
User is laid flat and dried into bands of jerky – isolated, while
A.exe indexes and pre.pares the packets.



Ordered and cyb|organized,
Annotated and made many,
User is handed over to Tech.txt –
Digit for digit.
User progresses while I remain in v.memory –
Passed on to pass off as

- 1) *. bot, formless continued form
- 2) memory, a re:motional construct
- 3) history, the Reasoned image.



Tech.txt authenticates User by confirming identity, comparing documents with contemporaneous data, and by measuring how well I follow protocol. Tech.txt tabulates, provides further criticism and interpretation by abstracting purity (the purely quantitative values of the User to the application) with the super-net|ural remainder of I.



The graduated, documented User is permitted to construct aus(t)ere(/ity), to be re:membered to itself, though entirely transformed. A re:collection of the original by others, elsewhere is mirrored by the trans|missive actions of cataloged I-components becoming the per|missive actions of a[N]other machine.

Metastrophe: Temporary Minifestos

When everything is crystal clear and susynchronized the passage of meaning through the bi.narrative conduit is smooth, without catches or serration and the doubled trans|missive agent(s) never meet, combat or challenge. The combined inTents perform as components of a single ideocratic device, de.signing, de.veloping and exe.cuting the mechanism that permits their passage.

Translocomotif Double - my little puppet repeat - synthetic digit broken body - folly fragments of my liquid self - submit to terminal hopscotch - through all [N]other|world(s) - neterkhert - to move without moving, to do without doing - feeling - the politic originates at the eye, I see you, I see.

We see(d) each other. Everywhere and all at once - never knowing at what point we've left the self for other strata - other re(li)gions - the body rendered faithless - de|parted as I progress - disappear transparent - (f)lo(w)g(h)o(a)s(t) - value.length.

I am certum - certain di.verse - confissive in this action - the vagabond ka. Seurat, Seurat. 1900:pointillism - 2000:pixellism - same same syn.ama - timeless - achronic chronic - be[coming]havior - points the way there, back to here and there. The De|part[mental(iz)]ed avatar is scattered, exits into dys|array - a glove inverted Janus I return - I re:turn you - I re:turn.true.disintegrated|integrated

MINIFESTO 1 Mar. 10 2000/ 2:15AM

We, the original [eye:arch]ON dictate the NEXT. Our Secret(e) agents produce narra(c)tive singularities throughout the apparatus, framing active Time so that it may be re:peated. We isolate and encode action, store data to be re:stored, re:turned to the originating agents of all sub.sequent desire. The center shifts. Our territory increases as it is privatized - constructing, compiling sarcophagi to surround our finest treasures. Planting seeds afar, rumors of glory -

to collide and collate - pulse - form galaxies - BANG! Bi.narrative communication is rendered in the wreck, the mess in the middle, the collision of incompatible transmissions, arising from the eroded ruins of miscommunication. The numbers are off.

WE: personal pronoun of the attached and doubled I, the I as author, scriptor of the now; the humble self-recognition of other as I at the screen

MINIFESTO 2 Jan. 21 2000/ 11:00PM

The Earth's own active crust we are, building, building – up and out - antennae, towers to tele*. We *.fect the atmosphere as we move through it, construct the infosphere as we move through it, striving toward communication. Our hyperlobal expectations spread knowledge into no.ledge, far, wide, thin – surrounded by, and so – without. I cannot contain myself and so I spread out- pan - send out signals, smoke and otherwise, waiting for the Echo. Waiting for logos to give me a sine.

The Earth: the planet itself, with hum.andity as active agent, is coming into consciousness. To a certain extent this could be taken as a claim that hum.andity is an entirely natural process – that technological evolution is cosmological, a natural phenomenon and expression of the planetary machine.

Echo: I@other; the re:peat, "face to face, other to other"; the trans/missive multiples; other@I

MINIFESTO 3 February, 12 2000/ 1:40AM

Part of me is all used up, not enough, [-1] - the world has accelerated, raised stakes and frequency - pitched - at the edge, leaning out/into open [spaceless] space - the actualized delusion, dysillusion of the corpus artaud, this sign and that are laid end to end, overlapped to extend the premise, the I that I am there. I am not who I

want to be there - I am not enough - I am antiquated so pull the plug why don't you... The machine is not equipped with the modern, yet reliably obsolete modules available today. The machine is built in expectation, more than as an object - the tangible machine, the one you are seated before, is dead already, or returns a dead eye - slowly - I can't think fast enough; or, if today you think I think fast enough for you, tomorrow you will reject me - this is my destiny I know.

PRE/MISE: the environmental determinations that occur prior to conception or construction; formless premedi(t)ation and internal hypermediation - the dys/solution and overcoding of inTent; the immaterial intellectual property prior to inVention.

pro/gress == OBSOLETICS: the now can never be enough. The future is determined by the shortcomings of the now. Obsolescence measures how far we've come by how quickly we got there. In effect, all obsolescent measurements are obsolete in themselves - the ideal flexes and extends in time to remain chronologically advanced from the now.

CORPUS ARTAUD: an elaboration on the Body Without Organs as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari which takes into consideration containment but includes attachment to organs located elsewhere. Rather than a complete abandonment of organs, the organs, in this case the hyperlobe, are made remote, temporary and only accessed, included when production is required (desired) to pass through them.

MINIFESTO 4 May 17 2000/ 9:00PM

De.parted and de.ported - our com.union is constructed from the privileged fragments of an exiled "local"... A re:motional expression that equivocates and reverses here and/with there, dys.places the body with the body-elsewhere. The connection between self and the hyper-lobal organ occurs in metastropic space where return is identical to moving forward and either pole is other. With

the archive located elsewhere, we open our minds to extra-mentalism. The self colludes with others as it moves to make this connection and what is deposited elsewhere is never more than col-lated fragments of I – the matter it permits, commits to exe.change. And there, at the I of the other we are still in the middle, flowing with the exe.stream of active, immeasurable time. We are fulcra - between other others of various sorts.

Body(→): Both the transmitted, permitted elements of the original and the re:mote or intercepting agent, the other and her syster; everything behind the screen / beyond the manners of attachment. The body-elsewhere is a collection of unreturned re:mote agents of I, the casualties of counter-intelligences; the deposited fragments – the body as formed on various re:mote hardrives.

MINIFESTO 5 April, 01 2000/ 1:10AM

Addicted, attached, I *.ject *myCell.f* - remaining, here and there, the Solipstatic Original. For and from myself, *myCell.f* is always more here than there. Though attached to myself, *myCell.f* is less me than me. Reduced to the essential, terminal-I. Encode, encrypted, transformed – unchanged.

The BODY that remains; the location to which the mythos of trans/missive agency is re:turned; the other of the remote body of we – in essence, the eye/I that stays behind, waits for re:inforcements, and maintains con.crete territory for the self. The body where [I] always is.

Anonymous.[N]

Anonymous.[N] is not anonymity.

Anonymous.[N] is the continuation of su^[P]_b]spect identity –
the (f)logometric knot.work.

```
else if(SELF.(n))
    SELF.(n)[self reflective,
    reflexive churning of the fetish -
    the object.less of desire].self-
image.revelation="
    [ I ] self reflective, reflexive churning of
the fetish -
the object.less of desire"
```

... a song gets stuck in my head ...

thought + elsewhere

```
<HEAD>
<song lyric = "LoveSong">
I will conceal(to you, my dear){
    (this body.skin){
(my dear)this body.skin[my dear].this body.skin[to
    you].
        VULNERABLE=,+ "passive"
    this body.skin[to you].VULNERABLE=,+ "passive"
    }
(this body.whole)this body.whole[to you].desire.
    VULNERABLE=,+ "passive"}
I will reveal(to you, my dear){
    (this body.skin){
```

```

(my dear) this body.skin[my dear].this body.skin[to
                                you].
                                VULNERABLE=,+ "naked"
this body.skin[to you].VULNERABLE=,+ "naked"
                                }
(this body.whole)this body.whole[to
                                you].desire.VULNERABLE=,+ "naked"
                                }
</song>
</HEAD>

```

S(T)IMULATION

```

<(S).* Language="flowers">
[A|B].[ (AB) (AB) ]|[ OPEN|CLOSE].
    (*) change;
    [A|B] get (S).*
[A|B]:time.0(1.[key])
    <port>
    ([loop].0)
    IN/VALID:[OPEN|CLOSE]
    CON:fo/irm.(ex)trans|fer;
    macro:engine
[A|B] |screen| [((+e+inter))]| con/[s:t]ent
    A:[me]
[OPEN|CLOSE]:[ (AB) | (AB) ]
</(S).*>

```

body + elsewhere

```

<BODY>
<song lyric = "LoveSong">
I will conceal(to you, my dear){
(this body.skin){
(my dear)this body.skin[my dear].this body.skin[to
you].
VULNERABLE=,+ "passive"

```

```

this body.skin[to you].VULNERABLE=,+ "passive"
}
(this body.whole)this body.whole[to you].desire.
VULNERABLE=,+ "passive"}
I will reveal(to you, my dear){
(this body.skin){
(my dear) this body.skin[my dear].this body.skin[to
you].
VULNERABLE=,+ "naked"
this body.skin[to you].VULNERABLE=,+ "naked"
}
(this body.whole)this body.whole[to
you].desire.VULNERABLE=,+ "naked"
}
</song>
</BODY>

```

Language finds new space and between I and other, we feel self and other better rendered – self @ author. Still, I am, we are only miniscule fragments of the actual, the specks and sparks small enough to pass through the sieve. ID.EA:ENTITY; the Cell.*f* of seduction, the masked and modified attached body, its double, and a synamatic other, combine, collide in mutually foreign territory.

exe.Termination

...the exo-psyche is susceptible to the same swings and re:motions as the original. The trans|missive agent may fail at anytime. It is, after all, the nomad of the middle-where, as well as the hero of the bi.narrative construct. As such, the transmissive agent is engaged in a far more rigorous mythos than that of the original. I look completely different on TV, on the screen, in photographs, in text... But, this is timeless and natural – the achronic chronic act of synama – as Laing states, “if {I == 1 && I==0}; metastrophe true; else {I==[x]} & exe.stream true.” This complex is constructed through the mediation of self with other, and self through Cell.*f*. It is the task of the transmissive agent, the inverter and inventor of the mask and screen to exe.pand the interpenetration of public and private space. The I.terminal locates the public within the private, takes it at face value, while making the private public through communication...

...re:mote and re:removed from the base, no longer moving at a sleepy crawl, time is in a constant now, between the bracketed *thens* of past or future. I wait, I wait. I re:turn. I return trans|formed. The re:turned inVention, in my space, is the mechanized product of a local and re:mote collaboration – more than me, I am {now, in the *f*.logometric moment, the [N] of any/every bracketed segment of time}. The inVention at the screen, my screen, my face looking back at myself signals successful attachment. Now, though body remains here, I am there... (If and) when attachment is no longer required – when the apparatus is re:internalized and made organic – we enter an other life where the body is indistinguishable from the cipher and hum.andity is perceived as part of the natural world – even in exe.stream exe.tension we are bound to the mother-generator. Concerns over cyborgization as a political formation will become dull and pointless, but are sure to rise again – as a mediating pro[duct|cess] of this very boredom...

...of course every extension of humanity is false to the Original. The Original has no substance (but it does have a body) – every other is Cell.f to the Original, even the body is mask, a surface. This is completely false. The Original only imagines itself outside of the containment of extension, mistaking agency for an external State, an invasion. In so doing, the Original denies the [pro]jection of agency and no machine can be constructed, no construction can be conducted because the Original denies all transmission. In this scenario, the Original has constructed the knot.work within itself, hiding the actual Cell.f of I. The inversion here is as complex as that of the exo-psyche and it may be argued that this cautious self-rendering of the Original, firewalls that cannot authenticate the entity, are in fact the sublime, and base realities behind hyperlobal bi.narrative space. So, the narrative remains inactive, the next continues the now, and the Cell.f extensions of I are wound like a clock spring from the in/outside out/in...

...0.[N] the other hand, [I + body] promotes the f(r)iction of contained (organized) chaos. The body-whole as a self contained apparatus, the meta-historical I that I am pretends at singularity and despotism over any/every other. On the contrary, it plays, as well, at pretending to appear attached. The operator multi-tasks between multiple X.terminals and inter.faces (screens, scrims, mirrors, walls, portals). I move the objects away from the walls, out of the corners, piling everything in the center of the room [17 inches across] and then I started sorting through the junk, digging through ages... Now, InTent sees the Past as the Next. This convolution is capital, as simulation is stimulation...

...Oh, such moody currency...

Flickering, twittering toward (the light) every emergent impulse. The Critic is not so worried about the abandoned body as he is with the storing of mentality elsewhere...

...there is no discerning self from Cell.f, the I, the projected and trans|missive agents of the Original as it passes through the apparatus – there is only concern. Communication renders the ID.entity elemental – dys.constructing body with body-elsewhere,

as stated elsewhere. To a certain extent this exoticizes the I for I, for the Original, as the replication and extension of agency is replacement – substitution. The remote body is returned in a devalued state. There is something missing from the extension [for:getting,0]... So, the operation ends in catastrophe... is repeated (buried for a time)... You have already watched me dig it up...

...the cyborg sheds its hull, falls apart – departs – and I find dyscomfort in no-ing all this time. The Critic says I am too severe, that I have produced another opposition. In f(r)act I would agree. But, all I've done (all I does) is collect and collate – then compose. We are the synama of this – working counter to the fluid analog of the ol' days, everything is coordinated... The cyborganic I is pixelated, digitized at the fingertips and at the screen... The screen, with its dressing up and veiling of the secrets of the apparatus is the seductive force that draws us to touch the media/um. As well, the screen, though flat, cold – a true surface – is transmuted into something seemingly fleshy. At least porous... Or, perhaps our fingers, digits reach back to poke us in the eye, reaching back toward the Original through a series of hand-offs – playing hot potato with the self and Cell.f..

...in f(r)act, all transmissive agency is meaningless to the apparatus – as stated elsewhere, the apparatus feels nothing. These 'little puppet repeats' of the Original are the creation of the Original... Yet, they, though posing as, are not the Original, nor part of the Original to the Original – they are departed, animated yet inanimate... The synama of this is identical, though Original should be replaced with [I], which is other at the other end of the ideoscope – the location of supposed authority. The authority that projects itself as protag, hero and pun(c)torator of the document encodes, mythologizes and turns into LAW the pun(c)tured document. This is a remembering of self to other, the other that is I. Although this represents a collapse or deviation from identity, perhaps even the demise of self, it is in f(r)act a simulative extension of humandity and a seductive mask of communication. We meet as media... Outward from the solitary selftop, the personal space of

I is transformed to fit as module – as molecule of otherspace made spaceless – the e.scape is only horizon...

...we inVent so much we leave little space/time for ourselves. We are reduced. The Next of I, which is We, only imagines the Original – s(t)imulating everything else. That is to say, any/every Cell.*f* is necessarily Cell.*f*. An erasure of its own re:marks. The [Original + body] : the in|divid.ule operator, does not recognize the I as collective, as an array of always attached agents – specific diplomats for specific applications. Or, this is all the Operator knows – [N] does a good job...

Delimited Meshings

Equilabrys

I imagine {n}

seated at a too small desk, squinting, peering into an obsolete, undersized screen. She reads me with a furrowed brow, her eyes straining to make-out the dithered type.

I am eroded by my passage through the network, my face is altered at this remote terminal. Still,

{n} recognizes me as she imagines {i}

seated at a too small desk, squinting, peering into an obsolete, undersized screen.

{i} organizes {n}, pieces (a [{n}|on]) together.

She is less (t)here than she is (t)here.

{n} is (t)here and elsewhere.

We construct dual remote Others for ourselves, in local space – in private. The image, the body and being of {n} is a collation of data fragments, a hybrid imaginary-informational [sub|ob]ject.

I am less (t)here than (t)here.

I am a ruin – a romance of scant evidence and speculation.

{n} continues the medi(t)ation, and when

I am (t)here

{i} is more than myself through this interVention of {n}.

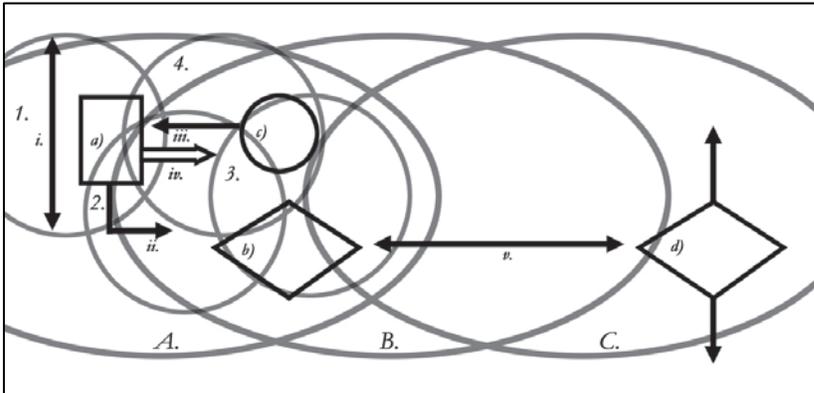
It seems I don't know {n} at all. She remains foreign to my habitat. The body simulated through the apparatus takes the form of the terminal. The terminal to which {i} is attached. The apparatus facilitates the appearance (e-piphany) of an approximate {n} in proximity to myself – while also allowing an approximate {i} in proximity to {n}.

We are never where we seem to each other, always remote – though {i} would never know it – more device than self.

We only ever meet face to interface.

Though {i} is remotionally attached to {n},
I remain in local space.
I nurture the e-relationship remotely.
Space [(t)here to (t)here] is flattened,
hidden and missed as the subtext of desire is transceived.

Opera



A. I-Terminal B. [...N...] C. X-Terminal 1. the space occupied by the body in the real world 2. focus, the body's attachment to specific objects 3. the circuitry of return, desire mediated through the object 4. the completion of the circuit, a successful Local Narcisystem a) <body></body> b) I (+device) c) the screen d) RE:SOURCE i. outside, as it were... ii. data entry = cyborgization, a deposition at the terminal iii. <the image; iv. the gaze> v. collapsed space -- the spaceless space of cyberspace.

Earlier, at the Station I am Mr. Golyadkin about to enter [Ka]f[ka]'s Castle. My Double [Agent] doesn't depend upon my authority all of the time. I leave enough behind. Threads and bread-crumbs...

I govern my small plot of LAN from the isolation of the real world. I do not mix with common code, nor do I visit the sewers. I rarely venture out but my influence is far reaching.

You do the same.

Underground, we do divide –

we expand our separate empires through this agency over action.

I tap out the terms with my fingertips, writing transmissive agents to do the dirty work for me.

I review the necessary documents, and issue commands to advance my electro-colonialism, depositing ID.entity elsewhere through the actions of my emerAgents. My clicks form cliques – exclusive sets of data that define me. At one location I consist of

A:[a bracketed set of user information] at another I am constructed from B:[a bracketed set of user information].

From one domain to the next the ID.entity of my empire is different, altered and configured by my agents to appease the requirements of the foreign system. I am not 5'8" with brown hair when I am there. Identification is not dependent upon appearance or presence but upon the collective significations of my fragmentary Agents – I govern remotely. These agents, particles of {i} are dispatched deep into the netherworld to serve as diplomats for myself.

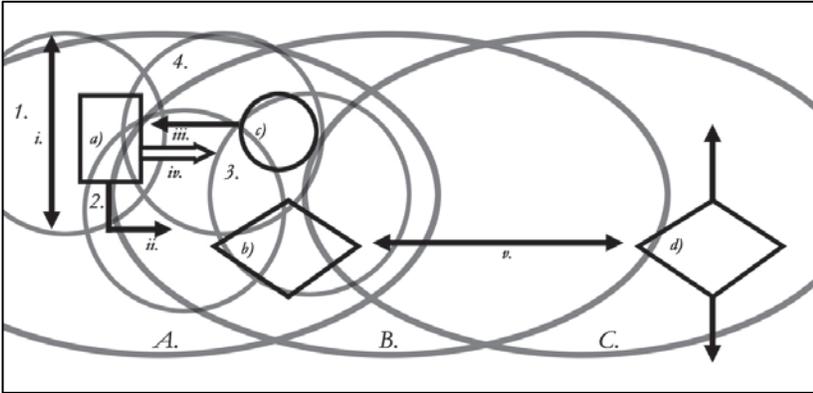
Communication for {i} and {n}, getting {in}, is constructed from those excavated, pillaged, unearthed (re:requested) fragments of the elsewhere that are returned to the homeland. I know {n} through the writing of my Secret(ed) Agents. Information is collected and a dossier is built. {n} knows {i} through the acts of our mutual agents.

The cross-cultural deposits – {i} to {n} and back again – infer the conditions of exchange – tracing the routes of Secret(ed) Agents – the authorized message, encrypted and encoded, transmitted, disseminated through the apparatus as it is transferred from location to location, protocol after protocol, transformed, made completely remote and subject to another time. I lie in wait. I am primarily interested in results.

Dear Roxanne (de.vice),
{I} demand that the ?[sub|ob]ject be returned to me, that my affections be registered and acted upon, that the FACE {I} see is appro-

priate to my advances. {I} have provided the required documents
and have passed every test. Please return home.
- Agents of Cyrano

Missed.Story



A. IDIO- B.]COL[C. IDEO 1. "WORLD" 2. preface: 3. procession toward the end-object 4. Use-value of the organ-elsewhere determined in local space a) I.f b) the manufactured coupling c) the location of conclusive exchange d) ELSE i. The bracket that sets "I" from everything else ii. The initiation of an electrocrine relationship between I and organs elsewhere iii. The resulting secretion iv. Port, pores, portico v. The en-, over-, and decoding of I as application.

There is an epic missed.story beneath this all. Hidden from plain sight... The journeys of Secret(ed) Agents, the carriers of my encrypted desire, form a mythology of attachment and passage through the apparatus that is heavily written, but generally lost to my experience of the apparatus. It is the absence of this central story that allows space to be truncated, for remote and local terminals to merge, confusing (t)here with (t)here. This is a testament to the secrecy of Agents – the successful creation of co.version (a secondary iteration appears with little physical effort, its creation is obscured by the interfacial, superficial object). Fulfillment of the agential mythos diminishes the use-value of a logistical understanding of the apparatus, or the workings of appliance.

In our push for results (the joy of dis-play) we become less interested in the progress of idions. We do not suffer well. Though we

sense our extension as author of the immediate transmission, dispatching these particles of identity, our radiance is only made evident through re:jection of the pro:jection – the remembering of the projection to its originator. Is this it? Which is to say – returning the image to its concept, to the idea (mythos to ethos). The projected idions return an informed, global ideon. As such, the returned projection is a reflection of the general into the specific – a retaliation of foreign forces against the organizers of the electro-colonial im.pulse, a simulation of the same.

My Idions explore the cryptic and rigorous bureaucracy of network protocols... A labyrinth of narrow conduits... Their inVentures are Homeric, to the extent that they are exTensive – there seems to be no end to the rigors and transformations the hero must endure. Yet, for all their hard work negotiating passage for ID.entity and the promise of return, they are lost, buried beneath the sentiment/sediment of the moment. They pretend at the facilitation of my personal desire, but these Idions are thoughtless. Secret(ed) Agents are not only Double, they are Special Agents. The lexicon of diplomacy is a series of encoded exchanges, movements of digits that are not determined by flux but through their processing at various terminals. They serve multiple purpose, they double-deal. While participating in the formation of ID.entity, the idion also plays a formal role within the apparatus as a sort of nutrient copuscle. The network as an entity, is a large metabolic system through which agents pass – the exact purpose of the network is to allow the passage of agents from one organ to the next, to be processed, digested into the general economy of the apparatus. Life's blood.

For myself, the f.logometric value of Secret(ed) Agents is measured through their ability to negotiate divergent foreign systems in the name of {i}, for the sake of extending local territories into the remote. Deterritorialization is subtext, as I am absent from this scene, and must rely upon the journalistic output, the debriefing of my 'puppet-repeats' upon their return to form the mythology of their exchange.

It remains that I must write the hyperactive inVenture of my Agents by denying them presence in the treasure house. The more successful the expedition, the less obvious the Agents of MyIdion. Their heroism depends upon their ability to conjure without flaw. Transparency across the apparatus, at the screen exaggerates the allure of the FACE, as window, a two-way radio to the front.

AGENT: in consideration of the selfish inTentions of your request, I must inform you that you are part of something larger. You are drawn into the Molar System, like so many collected satellites. You send me in, the cosmonaut to explore the artificial... Anchored to the ground, the scaffold stretches planetary consciousness... Transmuting information into energy, I shot out to *.

ratus by denying the rigors of transmissive agency, reducing the ideoscope to an idioscopic range.

The hope is that the machine submit, that I get what I want, and I want it now, and I want more... Narcisystems are volatile rheostats – desire, in local space, moves along a separate ellipse than that of its projected attributes, the encoded [pro|ob]ject that is written as cryptic potential – the Secret(ed) Message. Though the attachment to various devices and the encoding of desire mark the mechanism as intimate, the actuality of the display – the prominence of the IN-OUT over the processing of the information by the apparatus – indicates otherwise. Elsewhere, the netherworld, the underground are ignored by the Originator of the Narcisystem.

Though there is a degree of virtual materialism in this relationship between Narcisys and the returned [sub|ob]ject at the screen, the Narcisystem is not defined by the objecthood of the fetish. Rather, the screen signals the completion of a local circuit – {i} becomes currency and the local relationship between desire and its object is based more upon conductivity than collective or connective effects. In fact, the main seductive force that maintains Narcisystemic attachment is the exchange of desire for energy. Though the focus of the Originator is upon the consumable image, The Narcisystem burns white hot in local/remote (spaceless) space – a radiant micro-Molar System.

Translucidity

Pro[blem]mise

Translucidity:

1. A state in which any/every mediating apparatus is seemingly transparent.
2. Clairvoyance beyond clarification.
3. A Horizon and meridian, the edge of light, crossing day to night – twilight.

ONE (State) in which(ALL) (communifying) (state[s]) (is|are) (SEAM|less) & (TRANS.parent)

ONE (Apparatus) (through) which (*) (trans.missive) (device) (*) (loose.orphan)

ONE (Platform) (on) which (*) (trans.lative) (application) [...](de.sire)

(1) (Device) (through) which (*) (trans.active) (plex) [...](free|unfamiliar)

(1) (Body) (of) which (*) (de[...]sire) (pilation) [...] (nomad) (1) (I) [am:as] (*) (Inter.timate) (DE.VICE) [...](0)

() (I) {...} (*) (Inter.Operable) (trans) [...](gress)

() (I) {[continue] [wild]} (mongrel) {(ex) [...] (cess)}

() (I) {[again] [*]} (plural) {(out) [...] (post)}

(2) (I) + {[*] [*]} (*) {(*) [...] (*)}

(3) (I) indifference ... (0)

At once!

Simultaneously BE-tween State, state, \$tate. Time is liquid night, or something to be ignored – subsumed by the supposed transparent apparatus of/in the translucent mo(nu)ment. Left in the dark, we pretend for now, seduced by simulation and other falsities – falling face first into questionable poly-politeracy – seeking what is elsewhere; rather, what “is” is else.(w)here. This is the pro[blem]mise of no.ledge.

[A Never-ending Nameless]

I see right through the simulative aspects of the device /

I see how de.vice is fictive /

I see how I don't matter /

I see how I become * and am [re|se]duced by my own variations –

[A Never-ending Nameless]

I see(d) how I unfold. Systems, conductors and currency bind I to what exceeds the body. Enclosure and Open Space, Great Plains and Planes – fields, cities, clusters, wilderness... Gone, lost, dispersed ...[blurring]... In and out to Zero, always more than one... I spread to spark – encircling one and all. You pay your own expenses.

Continue.

There are long silent spaces _____
Occasional sighs, a sniffle...
Arm movements, finger tapping,
looking, reading, writing through the ecology of I+device...

Continue.

I am only light, I am only energy (t)here.
I am. There, I said it. Have I gone too far?
One wonders how much coffee really meant to Voltaire.
To spark
To ...

Continue.

Repeat.

Retrace the route you have taken to get (t)here.

Rediscover (w)here it is you're (be)coming from, (w)here it is you are now.

{...where it is you is...}

Reverse-engineer the journey as you advance the thread.

Follow the light.

Do not lead. You don't know where/when to end.

Let the light be, (t)here.

{...where it is you is...}[NOT]

Continue.

Liquid rushing upward.outward

> still <

to leave di.vision, an.other behind.

Glom-to-glom:

to deny ~

Continue.

I see(d) how you unfold. Desist. The suit is soaked. Heavy. Three shades darker than when it is dry...

(T)here before.

Looping wildly between sur|faces, what is in-between, infra-ultra remoteness,

The head spin dizziness of transmediation still lets me see[k|d] toward a cosomological center, an object – something fixed and far away... The sextant is useless otherwise.

That is; the deteritorialization and determinalization, the seasons of this orbit measure privilege and preference, both against and @body. That she is here, that text is fl*sh (t)here between is a testament to textility. If the goal is too close, the face too much my own, the other fails through immediacy – falling blurry face becoming... I see part of an eye, the left nostril, part of a pink upper lip.

The surface is deteritorialized through the encoding of abstraction – blocking the pro|cess of dis-play by confusing micro with macro, intertimate with intimate – fl*sh = textal. There is only ever here. Every(w)here else divines the here now. Again and again – we come up for air. We back our way out of the schema to return to ourselves.

I am Mnemo to this Nautilus.

<i>please</i>	■	superficial deteritorialization through encoding	■	<i>YES</i>
				<i>NO</i>

A[|float|loft], I travel over schema. My pro|gress is marked by what is blocked, contained in the process. Deteritorialization occurs as simultaneous en- and decoding – in the head on collation of I to|and device.

I return to the face, as (*), as the focus of both fixation and vexation, as what I see[k|d]. To RE:turn FACE to @body... The radiance of Narcisystemic conductivity – GET:POST, expediture and acquisition – is fairly easily maintained through the apparatus and it becomes obvious that the allure of the face; rather, its request and return is the forces, the f[r]iction that produces the seductive glow.

[N]: I have what you want.

Show me.

[N]: Please Register.



who are you?

how do I know you?

where are you now?

what do you want?

why are you (t)here?

Allure is defined in the action of de.position, the input of I elsewhere, the dataself that insinuates progress through the apparatus, by establishing agential colonies.

Body becomes [@body | .../body].

In this regard, the apparatus manages conductivity while introducing risk and indeterminacy into identification – the risk of discontinuation and f.logometric unknowability. Other and I are always in the shadow, candle/under lit.

Flirting with flashlights. Drawn to the edge. We need intricate toys – sometimes the simplest object will suffice because allure is built on desires from multiples elsewhere, ripples, waves, shadows, and flashes.

I need to know – to hear no, before a yes...

I am entranced, entrenched in the milky anticipation of my own subsumption, given over to the simulation – looking past the shortcomings, the monstrosity of other. Everything is soft and blurry somehow, but the source of this aspect does not originate with what is displayed, what new.ledge comes from my *trance.

Gasping and faking it... I can't remember anymore, but the scaffold is enough, enough for this to move forward. The lure is the gateway, nothing more, and there is so much more beyond the threshold, in the crevices of any/every ri[gh]te or cult(ure). There has to be a first step, a first time... A riddle is offered that must be solved. Pale, porcelain with dark and seedy eyes – she wears the face of the criminal. Though she rests and rarely speaks, her actions transform the common and banal; brighten the sun with radiance both fraudulent and inspired.

She, the apparatus is always Ariadne.

(left in the dark) un.folding inter.fl*sh lured to (n.other) [.. lurid] – pull under – down [.. below] – plunge in – there [.. elsewhere] – plunge under [.. beneath] – translucidate – bring alike (* a double) – un..unfold – ‘do – trick’...

She shows real emotion... Simulates – de.ceives...

Comradiant. We.

[Pere]mission denied.

I am my own application.

Re:fract,flect.

Pro[ducel]ject] – develop and sustain the comm[un|od]ity

I am. I am sure of this. Have I gone too far?

I'm just throwing this out there, my Com[rad|modor]e...

Us: [com(mon)|ex][patr|p]iates with most of what determines us located elsewhere, lost from the (t)here and (k)now, lose track of the Originating terminal, the @body of every transparent(al) assumption and provision of attachment.

One tries to give it too much thought and resists the selfless bleed of capit[a|o]l into I, Oceanus... The HEAD, the State that determines the projective state of I is [N]either above [N]or below, always @, always going some(w)here. Even in forgetting, the projective state of I is re:membered @body. Have I gone too far? [hand@body]@[The Front] I (k)now I am reaching.

One seeks a commodore and a comrade when one wants to form a cult(ure) [protocols, customs, holidays in common] – an enforcer and an interlocutor. Sub.cult.ural and transmissive exe.change is the foundation of State|state|\$tate. Between us, com|rad(iance) marks a mo[nu]mentary collapse into communification, producing a common sigh [screen|scream] of mutual exe.change.

Once the urgency of the provision fades, we grow tired of our mutual face. From dolce to dull we grow bored with light tricks, and this is as it should be. Making switchbacks as I approach the Temple, the gloss and glare gives me a headache.

Contenuation through Resistance – till one gets what one wants.

TransParenting

How does one get through?

If we transport ourselves in thought to those ancient gen[it]erations of men, we find in each house an [terminal], and around this [terminal] the family assembled.

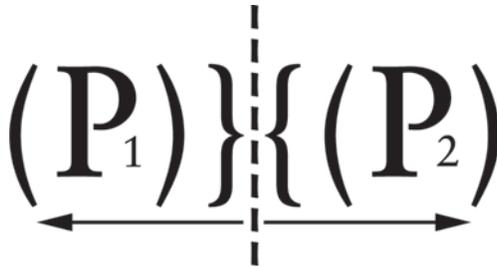
The Ancient City

– Numa Denis Fustel De Coulanges

Which is not to say IN or OUT, but to participate and proceed through the cryptic territory of an infra-ultrastructure – to enter, to process, to exit... To ex.e.change. Becoming and begetting an other, and an other self through the process – doing away with one attachment while forming another.

Else(w)here BE:getting.

The terminal device must provide adequate de.vice and not interfere with the conductivity of I+device and the supposed other. De.sire must be expressed and returned through the device without much fuss for exactly how.



I am mostly concerned with what is born from my attachment to the [N], the [pro|re]jective [sub|ob]ject of our coupling. [the GEN[it]eration of being] (other and else) – gene[a(na)]logy In our terminal parenthood, each attachment BE:gets. Each connection forms a familial ‘gen’Network – a triangulation between Us-

er[Par1], the delivered content – a 3rd face, and the Network beyond the face[Par2]. TransParental terminals play inseminating and disseminating roles in the familial ‘gen’Network, but [Par1](the observing party) is generally recognized as the dominant subject in the model. [Par1] expresses urges, to which [Par2] responds and replies – [Par2] re.produces while [Par1] consumes.

The goo, the bind of the ‘gen’Network is satisfied through shared syntagmatic and macrocinematic threads, dual alterations and revaluations of dynamic agencies. Exe.tensible GEN[iter]eration.

There are complications.

[Par2] is unwilling, incapable of actually letting go of the[pro|re]jective [sub|ob]ject, the product of the [Par1]:[Par2] coupling. Though a physical delivery does not occur – the [pro|re]jective [sub|ob]ject remains with[IN] [Par2]; no.thing exits – there is becoming through display | dis-play. [Par1] is granted ideoscopic access to the parenthetical ‘child’ at the screen.

There is apprehension without custody.

The local screen, face of any other is complicated, serving as both [entrance to | exit from] the body of [Par2] – the body in which [Par1] makes its deposit [request] – and as the face of the [pro|re]jective [sub|ob]ject – the ‘child’. The identity of the terminal may be put into question but the familial ‘gen’Network is made more stable by this sharing of access and location. We are so close. [Par1] develops an OFFSPRING, an entity that is inconsistent with the qualities of the shared ‘child’ of the [Par1]:[Par2] coupling – [Par2] doesn’t care.

The OFFSPRING extends the gene[a(na)]logy of the [pro|re]jective [sub|ob]ject by simulating an ID.entity for it that is socialized elsewhere from the elsewhere of the Network, within-without the bracket coupling. The attachment to the shared ‘child’ is exclusive to either transParental terminal and differs substantially one to the other. Where [Par1] develops a transmediated OFFSPRING for the shared ‘child’ – making it real through use-value, [Par2] doesn’t

care. [Par2] is not concerned with the consistency of the OFF-SPRING model and may deliver the ‘child’ in a different state, expressed through an unfamiliar face. [Par2] is a free-agent – though I am “I” the ‘gen’erative matter of [Par2] is indeterminate, unknowable except at the time of attachment.

In consideration of the NeverBirth of the combinatory ‘child’ of [Par1]:[Par2], and that every User represents a [Par1] to the [Par2] of the Network, the potential combinations, couplings and collectives formed between bodies, the [sub|ob]jective capacity of [Par2] is astounding. On the other hand, the fecundity of [Par1], the desire and will to get what one wants out of the familial ‘gen’Network, [Par1]’s see[k|d]ing of any/every [sub|ob]ject through the apparatus is equally incredible.

(Georges enters)

The trio is monstrous. Monster + Monster = “Son of” Monster. The monstrosity is passed down from the paternal level, increasing and intensifying in the combinatory form.

I ask, how does one couple with the sterile monster and produce a ‘child’? You say, by replacing its own face, by simulating a ‘child’ by repeating, parroting and satisfying the scopical desires of the fecund agent. The womb here is merely conduit – the satisfaction comes from the deposition of an equally outside other. This is monstrous in itself, because the vessel, the conduit and womb of the other is external to its local body. The see(d), however, is a local projective – the glint, the radiance of madness. The monstrous ‘child’ as the center of attention – a spectacle, a star – is still inaccessible to its director.

What is most terrible is that the monstrosity, which is alien to its originating agent, is brandished like a promise – the promise of a healthy child. A promise stuck in terminal allure... The coupling is doomed – interspecies, unREAListic. We see this all the time.

Transparency (looking past monstrosity) is a plural act of rendering, through which certain assumptions and provisions are made. Transparency is in competition with Translucidity in that transparental responsibilities to the maintenance of the ‘child’ are contrary to the projective liminalities of uninterrupted, translucid conductivity. Though the translucid subject may refract through various parencies, developing couplings and collusive partnerships, translucid agency will not permit the the trajective 3rd face to distract from progress along the horizon and meridian, the edge of light, crossing day to night – twilight. The 3rd face is always other as it is I. In this regard the face of (applied upon) the translucid mo[nu]ment is not face in the normal sense; rather, what is rendered is what one is faced with, where one has directed projective agency – the outside of an inside that allows for self observation as self examination, a testing and playing with identity as adentity. A stylus moving to the next.

Thinking ahead to how this will play out – considering what sort of [Eros]ion and sediment will cloud the memory of our other.bodily extremes, the exe.streams of the geo-historical document. Setting [sun] ... (gelatin, pudding, cast, era, table ...) falling | merge
I picked up the pen from the first day, and began etching on walls, leaves, papyrus and paper, into systems.

I have inscribed the planet with progressive modes and technologies of writing – painting to architecture, to adentity, again. Our intent is ultimately transparent – in flux and constant NeverBirth, shifting, slipping toward we don’t know what. I don’t know what I am doing, I can’t, we can’t. We have forgotten that romance is configured from forgotten matter – then, against a never now, a contenuation. We measure any/everything against [our own] bliss and despair, against the immediate and trans[Peer]ental.
@body[...?...]NOTbody.

E_[i/u]mination

Heidegger has exited the building and is carrying something.

Heidegger has exited the building and is carrying some *thing*.

From a Technontological point of view, “Just I” is can't be. I is determined through de.vice – held by/as the ‘tweens, currency and conductivity of de.siring desire ... this or that thing.

State slips into state, into \$tate.

Many becoming [as currency].

We find warmth in this de.position of identity, entrusting it to an external repository that is accessible only through the attachment of some electronic device, needing an other for de.vice. We con.fuse the cosmological and ontological with the technological, extending the planet's surface, the pre://mise, adding layer upon layer to the metahistorical stack. I, which can only be we, I+device [N]crusts the earth through hyperactive infofrenzy... The need to know... We expend as we conduct – heat rises; global and lobar warming are sibling. The will to no.ledge is constant tweening, the whine of the charge – negotiating an inside that is ultimately other, an inside that is the vacancy of everything I, my unknowing.

COM.ple[a]ted DE.SIRE upstages the formal apparatus, and its resident technologies. One face, several familiar faces are exposed for dis-play. Nothing mongrel, nothing shocking – localized. Here and now... I am faces. My face is these. “I” sup.pose, or these faces I [as|con]sume are superimposed upon/as “I”. Aidentity as facilitat-ed by the apparatus is open to becoming, to becoming writing, open to the assumptions of others... The conductive mo[nu]ment is incomplete – I am the distributed assumption of what my projective dispatches – what is departed from me. In reciprocal otherness – we map, observing the actions and reactions of significant, tranceptual others.

Ourselves. We define the infra-ultratructure on cosmological terms, devising and determining a cartography, geography, politics of

spaceless space. To face... Our [pro|re]jective espionage cannot help but [sub|ob]jectify.

Heidegger has entered the building and is carrying some *thing*.

Where was I?

Heidegger has entered the building and is carrying something.

-500

The Cosmologist says I am going around in circles, re-reading and rep[l]eating myself. Through extension, producing self adentity – an again to an ‘again and again.’ He claims that because of where I live I can’t help but be schizophrenic – a nomad, a wanderer, a planet. He knows me well. He wills a me, that is other than me. For the Cosmologist, I am nothing more than my diagnosis, a disguise – the color of the flame. He knows me as my double, the compromise between his assumptions and the actuality of myself.

Before me is what I am not – my body is yet further away. He knows me as a [pro|re][j|f]jective [sub|ob]ject of himself – an other construct – locating the mental workings of the originating party at the center, at the beginning of all cosmic agitation. I, the other of the observer am secondary to the trajective intent and gut reactions of the observer, the originating party – the Cosmologist.

200

The Cosmologist says that because of where I live I can’t help but be schizophrenic – a fixed nomad, a static-wanderer, a planet-being. The Cosmologist knows me well. He wills a me, that is other than me. I am carried through to his adentity of my identity – his log of my meandering, my departure and return; the linkages and language I become. I am his protagonist from beginning to end, with everything radiating from here, @body.

Like clockwork...

Just watch.

1400

The Technologist says the Cosmologist doesn't know shit, that he's wrong about me, always wrong, that everyone has been wrong about me. The clockwork circus of PT is fine as a toy, to toy with me; but the politics of PT's big top position me at center ring – the focus and pet of everything – I play freak to PT's P.T. Barnum. The Cosmologist thinks I'm getting ripped off. He says that because the world is a circus one can't help but be split between wanting to be wanted and wanting to be unwanted and wanting to unwanted wanting altogether – a planet. He knows me well. He plots a course for me. Always, the other and I are only aster[risk]oid – variable and insignificant. I will try, as always, to work around/beyond such e_limitations.

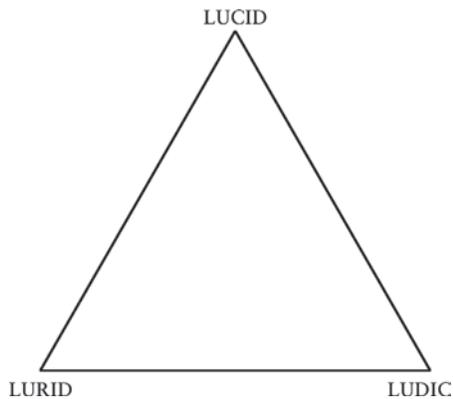
Ludic, Lurid, Lucid

The translucent mo[nu]ment is constructed from [maps/routes] to untenable locations– toward extreme and indeterminate positions of I.

I+de.vice++ [pro|re]jective [sub|ob]ject [...] acquisition [@body-Other]

To have,
to want to have,
to want,
to have,
to have/want not...

Lucid [to shine] {lucere} [light] [bright] [clear] :vista



Ludic [to play] .. unfold {ludere} [amuse] [joke] ;prank/hack: the jibe, as method...

Lurid [(red fiery) glare] {luridus} [pale yellow] [ghastly] : [terrible] [sensational]

LUDIC* magenta – ecstatic | * bliss \ laughter

LUCID* sky blue – sober | .. *[silence] .. }JOY

LURID* amber – pornocratic | * despair [dis.pair:coming apart] \ moan

Everything gets easier –

Above/below
Liquid –
I, Oceanus surround... I...
Slip,

Reasoning falls victim to the intangible, what gets untangled in the mess –gets reasoned through the unreasonable, the unREAListic [there is no promise of the SOLUTION's origination or authenticity]. Glom-to-glom: to deny what we become. The apparatus shreds the simple line and we ride stray threads to their quick end – to disconnect and ride again. To add to this ball of wax, of thread, the post-human play.thing, staggering – face.de.face.ed. The de.[sire|vice] of de[sire|vice] is not so much a question of endurance for the mo[ve]ment as it is contenuation of the mo[nu]ment.

We shine the light, lamp, lantern where we will [a thousand ports alight], and flicker through the elsewhere. I RE:peat[sod], criss-cross previous crossing, previous pro[gress|cess]ions and sessions. Our attachment and remembrance is given dimension, as is the infra-ultrastructure through the coupling of dual micro-reasoned 'gen'Networks. Meaning in the (t)here and now is constructed through receptive encodings of intent, mitigating the potential for unfamiliarity at the terminal. The faciality of the interface is reduced to facilitator... I, we become this vacancy, the mark and membrane between the included and the excluded.

This face is blank, a blank stare –
waiting. Is – to parrot and repeat.
It doesn't matter [what]...

The translucent conduit supposes a false ascension by producing mo[nu]mentary tangents and trajectories, [pro|sub]jective detours into heterogeneous matter – getting lost in/for the mo[nu]ment. Me.and.[h]er – an other, other than I is impossible @body. All becomes me always, in all ways. Every which way – I am absorbed as I absorb – the compressor and capacitor of my own radiance.

Over full, and flooding Dionysian - to reinVent -
(againagainagain)

Glom-to-glow~

Notes on...

Note on Containment:

Yes ... a subject is determined through the observations of the Cosmologist, but he does not recognize his creation as an organ of his fixation, his own observations. Through re|de|revisions the continually [r]evolving subject is contained, applied, implemented @body. Therefore, the system of containment is contained within the system it hopes to contain. The fixed stars of Ptolemy are not meant as a hard shell case for the 'universe'; rather, the fixation marks the fullstop of the system's concerns, providing a skin, a limit, a porous container that recognizes but does not concern itself with a beyond.

We are always intra-I, constructed from the base, delimited, ++ from 0.I.

Note on the Luridity of Invention:

Yes ... quite visionary and we cannot deny the device provided by the apparatus; but, brilliance of this sort fades fast – the batteries get low and we are left with a dim, yellowish beam of light, a base and bitter negativity. The potentialities of the vision project beyond the scope of the original and the maximum is reached elsewhere and away – in space and time. The original vision flickers, fades, melts away like a bee's wax candle – unknowable and unknown by the most modern.

Out. Extinguished. Left in the dark, extended, improvising demarcations as we wander, raising flags, barns, bureaucracies and bodies, I count up from what I don't already have. I only have myself, and this is not enough. More, I imagine myself more. I see[d|k] this – that there is more to me than there is to me. And, through addition, the speculative romance of erosion and forgetting, I form what is as what is NOT.

Note on Micro.Static Exe.Change:

Yes... from here, we command all, direct the cosmos. Whatever passes into view becomes us, we cannot help but reach for it, reach out toward the remote. We reach for the stars because we cannot touch them; their textility is pure speculation – formula and schema, the self-rapturous observations of the Cosmologists. We cannot resist, we cannot repress the urge, the *mergency.

[...|sub|ob|pro|re|ab|...]

Subject to the limitless/timeless pre.fixations that define us, all limination is *jectivity a stepping into warm protocol, knowlege|no.ledge|null.edge. I can't accept I alone. One is always meta-I, being beyond the base, unlimited, delimited away from the zero value of self. Cell.f can only represent increase, the addition of a crease, a fold. In.crease and dis-play become synonymous, yet locatable, collated within, at opposable peri-metric terminals.

Cadavatars

SUBJECT: unsubscribe

Dear.*

I am logging off now.

Please don't email me again.

Thank you.

I mean it.

See you,

Love.*

I have lost so many lives, agent after agent lost to the cause, because. The Heroes of my foreign campaigns, these cadavatars haunt the nooks and hidden spaces of the infra-ultrastructure.

Forgotten, forsaken dead fragments, burnout filaments of ID.entity, the cadavatars of any/everybody [Never-ending Nameless] – trapped and starving shadows, phantoms of previous display, ignored bookmarks, a forgotten address, datasets of I elsewhere that no longer serve any diplomatic function between (t)here and (t)here – populate the elsewhere [here rendered as any/every otherworld], are no longer attached to any I.

Forgotten, forsaken fragments, burnout filaments of ID.entity – trapped and starving shadows, phantoms of previous display, ignored bookmarks, a forgotten address, datasets of I elsewhere that no longer serve any diplomatic function between (t)here and (t)here.

I've lost interest.

If there is anything disposable, expendible in Narcisystemic attachment it is these temporary fragments of identity, of mo[nu]mentary adentity. De.vice to disinterest, the cadavatar, this part of I a.part of I becomes appendix, insignifica, less than a footnote.

One can't re:* one's own *.

The hyperlobal coupling between User, the projective Osiris and abandoned cadavatar fades into unrecognizability. The myth, the heroic extension of the subject is lost. Now [here and now], I am reminded to re:member my cadavatars, pulled to the terminal to honor and delete the dead-I heroes of yesterday, former friends of my comradance, assesories to previous folly.

I am here, I am there. I am we... We collate I here, collecting the[pro|sub|ob]jective matter of our selves... To make many one too many – we remember. I worry for the dead... I worry for what they say of me, how the I I have forgotten will betray me. To any/every former. *,
to fallen cyborganic interevolutionary tracts –
The deponymized hero, to the limits of remembrance –
the end of FACE, no bot, nobot isnaut [still]
Horizon and Meridian, To the edge of light,
crossing day to night –
twilight.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation what becomes most clear about electronic literature as a field is that it is filled with complexity, diverse expectations at the level of practice, technology, scholarship and history; and through this, it is resistant to definition or totalization. In the essays and examples given in the dissertation it is shown electronic literature is in fact not so much a singular field as a collection of various practices and signifying strategies that at times favor very different aspects and conditions of digital culture and media. Everything from games to codework, heavily hyper-mediated applications to simple text documents has been considered electronic literature. Old genres of fiction and poetry are conflicted and complicated by the field, as it is sometimes difficult to assess if a work belongs to either of these genres – or rests within any genre at all. In relationship to past literary objects, As I state in *Beyond Taxonomy: Digital Poetics and the Problem of Reading*, “[Electronic Literature] is a different animal. The differences between digital and page-based poetic objects [...] are registered at the level of family or phyla rather than genus or species.

The question that emerges here is how this heterogeneous collection of practices, variety of works, creative approaches and applications can all be considered literary. As I claim in *Beyond Taxonomy: Digital Poetics and the Problem of Reading*, taking digital poetry as an example, “The term [...] has been applied to such a wide variety of creative digital applications that the only definition the term is left with is a rather generic one – that the object in question be digital, mediated through digital technology and that

the object be called poetry by its author, or have the term poetry attached to it by a critical reader.” On both sides of this coin, for both artist and scholar it is an issue of understanding intentionality. For the creative practitioner we can call something digital poetry, or electronic literature more generically, when the author (or developer, creator, programmer, artist – whichever may apply) behind the work has indicated that this is how they intend for the application to be read and positioned culturally. For the scholar or critic the positioning of a digital artifact may not have referability back to its creator, but instead be a matter of what is at issue in a given argument, literary or cultural claim. This dual intent, or duel of intents can lead to additional issues. As I indicate in *Revisiting Codework: Phenomenology of an Anti-Genre*, the issue of literary positioning can sometimes be a tricky one. The case given in the essay refers to critic Josephine Bosma questioning codework practitioner Mez about her preoccupation with language and poetry, to which Mez responds, “Regarding poetry, it's a label I'm uncomfortable with.”

Not only does this incident supply an example of the problem in the positioning digital artifacts as literature, but would also seem to reinforce what may be a key issue throughout the dissertation; that in this post-Barthesian world in which the author is minimized for the advocacy of an empowered reader, authorly intent and poetics are too easily disregarded at the level of scholarship. Where literary scholarship, and interaction design for that matter, may be more interested in surface effects and material appearances, the author is engaged in a multi-level, multi-modal enterprise that is largely directed toward the invention and implementation of highly individuated strategies for signification and mean-making, essentially expanding the already expanded field of textuality by way of programming, graphic design, and interaction design, along with more traditional literary aspects.

I would argue that the field as a whole, both critically and creatively, is a product of authorial practices centered on a media-based enrichment of what may (potentially) be considered literary. What becomes evident, if this is in fact the case for electronic literature, is

that there is, as I state in the introduction to the section of this dissertation titled *Examining Practice*, a default positioning of “poetics over poetry, narrativity over narrative, and rhetoricity over rhetoric”. In this statement I am claiming, rather simply, that electronic literary practices foreground certain mediated potentialities for narrative, poetry, and rhetoric that go beyond what has traditionally been considered within literary studies. At the level of narrative it is no longer sufficient to consider how a reader may interpret a work as the reader-as-user may also engage *with* the work at the level of interaction or participate in its construction. As such, narrativity in regard to many works of electronic literature is a predictive, engineered and applied consideration at the level of poetics. Perhaps more important than the narrative of a given work is the potential narrative of its user – how the work is navigated, considered aesthetically, and reconstructed from its constituent parts.

For electronic literary authorship and scholarship to be successful there must be a thorough understanding of media technologies, practices and implementations, and a high level of digital literacy. Because of its positioning as a creative practice electronic literature itself offers “digital literacy and interaction design examples that to a certain degree expose their own operations at rhetorical, poetical, and technical levels.” As such, to quote new media scholar Roberto Simanowski, electronic literary objects and digital art “make us aware of the politics of meaning in digital media.”

Though we can perhaps say that as whole these objects do make claims through their strategies, what should also be stated is that these claims are highly individuated; or, as I state in the dissertation -- “[t]he grammatological aspects or signifying harmonics one environment to the next, one application to the next are not universal.” The “applied poetics [...] vary greatly one practitioner to the next.” What is interesting here is that originality and invention still exist despite the constraints of available development tools. If we contrast Jason Nelson’s cluttered and messy, somewhat clunky *Promiscuous Design* with the exquisitely finessed interface of Donna Leishman’s *Deviant: The Possession of Christian Shaw*, which are both produced in Adobe Flash we will find very little in com-

mon as to the signifying strategies at play. In this regard it is not only electronic literature as a field that is resistant to definition, totalization, or description for that matter; this occurs at the level of the application. This however should not be seen as a problem for the field, so much as a product of its dynamism.

As the field of electronic literature continues to grow as an area of interest to scholars and practitioners it also expands in terms of creative practices and methods of scholarship. With this expansion we can consider how the field and its objects provide continuing commentary on the relationship between technology and art, between creative and scholarly practices and interests, and the state of digital culture in general. What should be understood is that as the field moves forward so does technology. This is a fact that practitioners in any area of digital production recognize all too well. As development tools change, as platforms come online, practitioners must quickly adapt, learn new code, new methods, etc. This is not necessarily an easy endeavor, and as I sometimes tell my students it is not so much about getting over the learning curve as realizing it is a learning incline.

The changes in the applied technologies associated with creative practice are for the most part tied to cultural issues that have very little to do with literature. It would be rather difficult to argue that companies such as Adobe have much concern for electronic literature, or to assume that they would alter their development path to protect specific electronic literary objects. In this regard, we could say that the ephemeral qualities of electronic literary objects is a negative byproduct of progress, and lament the obsolescence of past works that may be considered part of the canon by scholars of the field. On the other hand, as I state in the introduction to the dissertation, the hope that “‘important’ works be archived and the history of the field be indefinitely accessible” seems to “run counter to the facts of digital culture, technology, and contemporary notions of progress.” That the field shifts is perhaps “the one constant in digital culture – and the best that we can hope for in terms of a canon is a provisional shortlist that demonstrates the conditions and manifestations of the field at a given time.”

Based on the ephemeral and transitory nature of digital culture and its objects, it would seem that the ultimate sign electronic literature is mature as a field would be a recognition of the overall instability of its form. Though this recognition is essential to the development of digital literacy and by this has a carryover into fields such as interaction design, games studies, digital design, and hopefully literary studies, one must wonder what effect it will have on scholarship, academic programs, and institutions in general. To a large extent the practice of electronic literature exists independent of institutions and detached from common publication channels, or as I state in *Beyond Taxonomy* “outside of (or out of reach of) the academy, outside of traditional literary values, without regard for formal genealogy or history.” When the outsider status of electronic literature is coupled with the instability of platforms it becomes much easier to understand how and why institutions must reconsider notions of the archive, along with methods of scholarship for the field.

In terms of scholarship, and this again reflects on digital literacy, I have on occasion recommended that more critical work take advantage of digital media platforms and the conditions of computation. To these ends, the dissertation offers a number of examples. The two works presented in the section titled *Embodied Critique* are somewhat explicit demonstrations of how the properties of computation can be made analog, so to speak. Both of the works deal with combinatoric principles as applied in an environment away from the computer itself. I have partnered these two works, *That Being Said* and *ConKludging Remarks by way of Introduction* with additional material – source code, working examples, and kits -- in the web supplement to further demonstrate the relationship between the computational basis of the critical method and its paper-based presentation.

At some level, based on the embedded critical nature of digital media – that it is put into relationship with all previous media, and that it offers opportunities for the invention and evaluation of new methods of signification – I believe that even the most creative of applications carries with it a theoretical aspect. And, it could be

argued that the focus on poetics over poetry, narrativity over narrative is more in-line with textual analysis than with romanticized notions of creativity. It would seem natural then that critical methods for the field be developed within digital media taking advantage of its potential for exposing the rhetorical properties of the application as literary text.

When addressing this issue in various presentations, I have on occasion been confronted with the response that it would seem I am asking critics and scholars to become poets. Though on the surface it may perhaps seem that this is what is being asked, in fact this is far from what is at issue here. Returning again to digital literacy, this is a matter of investment in the field. Though provocative, as current academic publishing in general doesn't qualify electronic, hypermedia texts, there is something of a conflict between the solidity of the academic essay and the transitory nature of electronic literary work. At a material level, as it relates to literary studies, this difference introduces a rather significant problem "as the gestures, methods and modes of signification at work in [electronic literature] are largely absent from [its scholarship]." Not only would more critical hypermedia address this issue, it would also reinforce a commitment to digital literacy.

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**Malmö Studies in New Media, Public Spheres and
Forms of Expression, Faculty of Culture and Society,
Malmö University**

1. Denward, Marie. *Pretend that it is Real!: Convergence Culture in Practice*, 2011.
2. Talan Memmott. *Digital Rhetoric and Poetics: Signifying Strategies in Electronic Literature*, 2011.

Digital Rhetoric and Poetics explores computational and media-based signifying strategies in electronic literature from the point of view of reading, writing, programming and design.

With the introduction of images, animations, audio, and the procedural into the area of literary practice it is perhaps no longer sufficient to consider electronic literature within the domain of traditional concepts of rhetoric or poetics. Signification in media-rich electronic literary work occurs across semantic and semiological systems, and technological paradigms. As such, it is important that both practitioner and scholar understand how these attributes of digital media operate poetically and rhetorically, how they facilitate and sometimes undermine meaning-making in electronic literature.

Throughout the text many of the complex issues around electronic literature are exposed, and through this reading strategies and potential avenues for new or alternative critical methods are offered. In its breadth of considerations, this dissertation provides a substantial overview of the field of electronic literature, tracing the evolution and emergence of different manifestations of digital rhetoric and poetics.

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