

Chercher le Texte: Locating the Text in Electronic Literature

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Title: One + One = Zero – Vanishing Text in Electronic Literature

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Abstract:

The concept of “erased” text has been a recurrent theme in postmodernist criticism. While most speculation about the presence or absence of an absolute text is applied to print literature, the manifestations of digital text present a new and entirely separate level of investigation. The combination of visible language and hidden code do not negate the basic questions of language and interpretation – these continue to be important in our study of electronic texts. However, the visible text – under the influence of code – can be modified, transformed, and even deleted in ways that introduce markedly different implications for reading strategies and meaning structures. This paper will explore a selection of works from electronic writers illustrating text/code practices that involve disappearing “text.” Text can absent itself by the simplest of reader actions – the mouseover or the link which takes the reader to another “lexia” in the piece. But text can also be obliterated by actions of the code, unassisted by the reader/navigator. Moreover, there are intermediate techniques to create vanishing text. Oni Buchanan and Betsey Stone Mazzoleni’s **The Mandrake Vehicles** – subtitled “meaninglessness and back” – is a good example of clearly visible, reader-activated, yet code-determined text manipulation. Stuart Moulthrop’s **Deep Surface** takes a different approach to “executed” text – imagining a “deep reading simulator.” Reiner Strasser and M.D. Coverley’s **In the White Darkness** proposes a symbolic function for elusive text and image. Stephanie Strickland’s **slippingglimpse** lets the movement of water itself be the mechanism for creation and erasure of text. These, and other works, begin to suggest a set of categories that might be identified in electronic literature.

The presence/absence of meaningful information in electronic fiction and poetry can signify in many ways. And, we may ask, when the text is gone, does it leave a “trace”? Or is vanishing text in electronic literature actually a case of One (text) + One (Code) = Zero (0)?

Keywords:

- electronic fiction
- electronic poetry
- code
- text

- text manipulation
- erasure of text

Introduction:

Snapchat, an app on iPhone and Android that is growing more popular across the world, **especially among teens, is one of the latest iterations of vanishing text and image in the electronic world. If not quite literature – although it certainly might be by now, as e-writers turn to ever more inventive software for literary expression – it definitely represents a contemporary version of vanishing text and image.**

Snapchat allows users to snap a picture, send it to others, and assign a time frame for that picture to expire and no longer be visible. Typically, a picture can be viewed from one second to 10 seconds.

The app is currently very popular on the iPhone, and a group of students at one U.S. high school said they believe as many as 70 percent of their classmates have it on their smartphones.

Obligingly, the Snapchat app providers have told us what they imagine to be the import of this “disappearance.” According to the Website:

Snapchat is a new way to share moments with friends. Snap an ugly selfie or a video, add a caption, and send it to a friend (or maybe a few). They'll receive it, laugh, and then the snap disappears.

The image might be a little grainy, and you may not look your best, but that's the point. It's about the moment, a connection between friends, and not just a pretty picture.

The allure of fleeting messages reminds us about the beauty of friendship - we don't need a reason to stay in touch.

*Give it a try, share a moment, and enjoy the lightness of being!*¹

Here, the “fleeting” quality of the message (image and text) is expressly designed to show our *affection*. (Not just a pretty picture!) The fact that this photo (and whatever text may caption it) disappears is not to suggest that this act was not important, or that the image was transitory and unimportant – but, rather, that the image carries *more* emotion because it emphasizes the preciousness of the moment.

And so, in the spirit of *the unbearable lightness of being* (apologies to Milan Kundera), of one plus one perhaps equaling zero – or perhaps not – what might be the implications of vanishing text in electronic literature?

Historical Background:

We have always been interested in words and images that disappear. From the ideological and recreational burning of books to the gimmick of disappearing ink – reasons abound. The concept of “erased” text, however, has been a particularly recurrent theme in postmodernist criticism and artistic practice. While most speculation about the presence or absence of an absolute text is applied to print literature, the manifestations of digital text present a new and entirely separate level of expression and implication.

In print literature, actual erasure is difficult to attain. Print writers can allude to a segment of text that might not be present, they can make a part of the text less readable (type size, strike-out, etc.) – or they can leave a space to indicate what has been omitted. Sometimes this faux-obscure text is part of deconstruction practice. Usually translated as 'under erasure', it involves the crossing out of a word within a text, but allowing it to remain legible and in place. As used by Derrida, it signifies that a word is "inadequate yet necessary" - that a particular signifier is not wholly suitable for the concept it represents, but must be used as the constraints of our language offer nothing better.

This approach suggests an ambiguity regarding the text – a suggestion that text can be self-undermining, or that its meaning is undecidable.

But since print text cannot, in traditional form, show a text as both there and not-there, appearing naturally in one moment and absent the next, the possibilities for suggesting a broader range of meanings is limited.

Literature as rendered in digital form – on a screen, typically, posits quite different possibilities for the treatment of disappearing or unavailable text.

In this analysis, I will rely on the descriptions of the authors as well as scholarly interpretations. The stated intentions of the creators seem to be particularly pertinent in light of the many possible kinds of effect that can arise from vanishing text.

Initial Crossovers:

The earliest examples of text erasure in electronic literature can be termed “crossovers” because they combine a text-biased concept with an electronic component.

One of these instances of *intentional* vanishing text in electronic literature was/is *Agrippa*.

(I make that distinction because there were plenty of instances of *unintentional* vanishing text in the early days of word processing. Whole chapters were known to vanish in thin air – and one was advised to “save early and often.”)

Agrippa

Agrippa is a work of art created by speculative fiction novelist William Gibson, artist Dennis Ashbaugh and publisher Kevin Begos Jr. in 1992.

A few years beforehand, Ashbaugh had written a fan letter to cyberpunk novelist William Gibson, whose oeuvre he had admired, and the pair had struck up a telephone friendship. Shortly after the project had germinated in the minds of Begos Jr. and Ashbaugh, they contacted and recruited Gibson.²

The work consists of a 300-line semi-autobiographical electronic poem by Gibson, embedded in an artist's book by Ashbaugh. Gibson's text focused on the ethereal nature of memories. This

poem was stored on a 3.5" floppy disk, and it was programmed to encrypt itself after a single use. An artist's book, included in the package, was treated with photosensitive chemicals, causing a gradual fading of the words and images as the pages of the book were exposed to light.³ (Something we had not seen in print text previously.)

The publisher, Kevin Begos Jr., was said to be motivated by a disregard for the commercialism of the art world. He suggested to Ashbaugh that they "put out an art book on computer that vanishes". The project is also said to have exemplified Gibson's deep ambivalence towards technologically advanced futurity, and, as *The New York Times* expressed it, was "designed to challenge conventional notions about books and art while extracting money from collectors of both".⁴

Not surprisingly, several ELO members have done seminal scholarship on *Agrippa*. Matthew Kirschenbaum, Joseph Tabbi, and Alan Liu and his group at *The Agrippa Files* have done extensive work in tracking the chronology and cracking the code. Stuart Moulthrop points out that "*Agrippa* seems to me very nostalgic for the age of print. . . . Second, with all respect and seriousness, *Agrippa* is a piece of High Concept."⁵ What is notable, though, about this work, is the minimal interest in the poem itself.

Thus, while the entirety of the text exists on Gibson's Website, little of the scholarly investigation has focused on this:

*The string he tied
Has been unravelled by years
and the dry weather of trunks
Like a lady's shoestring from the First World War
Its metal ferrules eaten by oxygen
Until they resemble cigarette-ash*⁶

Joseph Tabbi remarked in a 2008 paper that *Agrippa* was among those works that are "canonized before they have been *read*, resisted, and reconsidered among fellow authors within an institutional environment that persists in time and finds outlets in many media".⁷

Agrippa seems to owe its fame to its conceptual materiality and transmission.

Thus, among possible implications of *Agrippa* we might include a disdain for the commercialization of creative work, an ambivalence about technology, a suggestion that “the struggle for the text is the text” – thus its erasure. And yet, while there is a strong relationship between the idea of a poem about memory and the subsequent erasure, it is the meta-frame, the presentation as high concept art, which dominates our experience of this piece.

Soliloquy

A second example of vanishing text that is still tied to print concepts is Kenneth Goldsmith’s *Soliloquy*. This piece seems not to incline toward a criticism of commercialization or a comment on technology; neither does it suggest that the text might be undecideable. Quite to the contrary, it comments on the sheer size of moment-by-moment data.

Author Description: *Soliloquy* is an unedited document of every word I spoke during the week of April 15-21, 1996, from the moment I woke up Monday morning to the moment I went to sleep on Sunday night. To accomplish this, I wore a hidden voice-activated tape recorder. I transcribed *Soliloquy* during the summer of 1996 at the Chateau Bionnay in Lacenas, France, during a residency there. It took 8 weeks, working 8 hours a day. *Soliloquy* was first realized as a gallery exhibition at Bravin Post Lee in Soho during April of 1997. Subsequently, the gallery published the text in a limited edition of 50. In the fall of 2001, Granary Books published a trade edition of the text. The web version of *Soliloquy* contains the exact text from the 281-page original book version, but due to the architecture of the web, each chapter is sub-divided into 10 parts. And, of course, the textual treatment of the web version is indeed web-specific and perhaps more truly references the ephemerality of language as reflected by the book’s epigraph: “If every word spoken in New York City daily / were somehow to materialize as a snowflake, / each day there would be a blizzard.” In order to achieve this effect, the web version is available only to users of Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape 6+. Unfortunately, none of the prior versions of Netscape support the CSS tag used here: “a { text-decoration: none }”; to view the piece in web form without this function enabled would be to ruin the intended experience of this work.⁸

In other, previous web publication, a web version of *Soliloquy* was published on the State University of New York at Buffalo’s Electronic Poetry Center in 2002.

Although we have print, gallery, and various electronic versions of Goldsmith’s work, it is in the latter manifestations that the idea of erasure or invisibility of the text attains impact. In this case, however, nothing actually disappears. Rather, the sheer, overwhelming volume of the text

suggests that close reading might be an impossibility – that the text itself could be secondary to the conceptual impact of its massiveness.

In an installation at Bravin Post Lee Gallery, entitled *Soliloquy (No. 116 4.15.96 - 4.21.96)*, the piece was pared down as much as possible. Using a laser printer, Goldsmith displayed his talk/record on 341 sheets of ordinary white paper that exactly filled the entire wall-space of the gallery. Although it wasn't *quite* possible to read the text from beginning to end (since parts were not readable near the ceiling), theoretically, no text was excised. Yet, Goldsmith must not have expected most of his audience to read the entirety. Rather, he seemed to want us to see that language occupies space, creates its own textual landscape. By gathering such a large quantity of text, Goldsmith challenges us to visualize a world that is so dominated by language that the word (or words) itself becomes irrelevant.

Goldsmith's piece anticipates many of later e-literature works that, essentially, one does not "read" so much as "sample."

In another contemporary example, Jeremy Douglass' work with Lev Manovich in the visualization of cultural analytics creates a similar effect. While not strictly literary, the condensation of large databases of literary material suggest a different way of viewing text.⁹

The combination of visible language and hidden code do not negate the basic questions of language and interpretation – these continue to be important in our study of electronic texts. However, the visible text – under the influence of code – can be modified, transformed, and even deleted in ways that introduce markedly different implications for reading strategies and meaning structures.

Born Digital Works – Trope and Meaning

If we place *Agrippa* and *Soliloquy* in the category of crossover mode – between print and electronic display – and perhaps between High Conceptual Art and Interface Art, we can look more closely at the way that the interface and the content are treated in more exclusively digital-born creations.

The most important difference between print texts and born digital works is that of input and outcome. As Stephanie Strickland noted in her “Born Digital” essay, “To read e-works is to operate or to play them.”¹⁰

Several electronic writers use text/code practices that involve disappearing “text” or image. Text can absent or present itself by the simplest of reader actions – the click (which might activate anything from a Flash file to a sound clip), the mouseover (which might obliterate text by color change, show/hide functions, time-outs), or the link (which might take the reader to another “lexia” and resist return), or the act of typing in text responses (which might elicit further information or restrict same).

But electronic text can also be obliterated by other, more complex, actions of the code, either assisted or unassisted by the reader/navigator.

The interface in these cases is consistently a zone of revealing or concealing, in responsive transformation between the reader and the work/code. With interfaces that may be activated by bodily gesture, played like a textual instrument, overtly sabotaged, manipulated like a game, explored as territory, or prompted to regenerate or recombine create an environment of unpredictable variables – neither author nor reader can predict the output in advance. Instead, the reader can often spend considerable time investigating a work without encountering it the same way twice. Implicitly, in complicated works, large portions of the text/image/media combination may never be discovered by a segment of readers. We might ask (but not even attempt to answer) – are elements which are not elicited by a reader “hidden” or “erased”? In some sense, it can be said that they are – at least until that reader re-engages the work with a different set of behaviors.*

Regardless, there are ample instances of digital-born pieces where vanishing text is used specifically to contribute substantially to the reader’s understanding of the work. That is, the appearance and absence of the text/image/media elements actually become part of the “meta-text.”

The vanishing or inaccessible text as part of the trope or meaning of the piece

One of the interfaces that can be used for advancing the content of the work is the straightforward animated or kinetic text effect. While, in some cases, animated sequences may simply play through, or respond to a default navigational click, in other cases there are pieces that are read through operations one could call coaxing or probing, a poking and prodding, whereby the user clicks, mouseovers, drags and drops, or otherwise explores standard mouse movement to make a work perform – and in our case, manipulate the text.

Animated or Kinetic Text - Mandrake Vehicles

Oni Buchanan and Betsey Stone Mazzoleni's *The Mandrake Vehicles*¹¹ – subtitled *meaninglessness and back* – is a good example of clearly visible, reader-activated, yet code-determined vanishing text manipulation. This piece is an investigation of the biology, folklore, and ritual uses of the European mandrake and/or American mayapple plant. The work offers us three different vehicles, or texts, and we can read them all in toto and in sequence. In what Buchanan calls the "Mandrake Form" we see an economy of words that's in tune with the ecological motto "reduce, reuse, recycle." The reader can perform, with each text, an erasure across the stanzas in which 7 Words are shed, to be forever lost, or save as could-have-been possibilities. At certain points the poem enters a liquid transitional stage and eventually is re-compacted to form a condensed poem; these actions can be performed yet again on the condensed poem to one even more distilled, yielding, so to speak, the two inner seed- or secret-poem texts that inhabit the full prose vehicle.

Author Description: *The Mandrake Vehicles* consists of three "vehicles," each one surfaced with a large text block concerning the biological development, folklore, occult ritual, magical association, and homeopathic usages of the mandrake plant. The surface text blocks can be read linearly from one to the next. However, each surface text also conceals a depth of two additional poems (as well as liquid layers, when the letters are in a transitional state). In each vehicle, both of these inner poems have technically been visible all along in the top layer, but remain undetected because of the presence of the other letters and characters. The inner poems of each vehicle are unearthed as letters drift off the surface of the poem and the remaining letters solidify into new poems. In addition to the relationships created between the contents of the three poems of each vehicle, relationships are also forged between words of the different layers that share the same letter(s). In the liquid layers, letters cast off scales of themselves which fall down the screen, colliding with other cast-off scales to form the detritus words, the trash cast off by the process.¹²

Most interestingly, the words aren't lost or jettisoned: whatever isn't needed that doesn't "float" away cascades into other words neatly stacked at the bottom of the window.

Another way to read this work is by tracing the trajectory of any letter that *does* remain through all three text stages, as a residue is carried by each letter from its prior to its succeeding word.

So, in a sense, while the poem melts away as the reader mouses over the stanzas, nothing is really ever lost – the language can all be recovered (as can the history and usage of the magical Mandrake) – at the bottom of the page (or in the dustpile of history).

Another type of interface that can use coding practices to indicate the nature of disappearing text might be the Textual Instrument. This category refers to work written and coded in such a way that it is capable, by analogy with a musical instrument, of playing numerous compositions. The reader is invited to become an expert player of the piece, for skill at manipulating it, above and beyond familiarity with how with its interface works, yields various and unpredictable reading and viewing rewards.

Textual Instruments - In the White Darkness

Reiner Strasser and M.D. Coverley's *ii - In the white darkness*¹³ proposes a symbolic function for elusive text and image. The relationship between the appearance and disappearance of images can be initially seen in the title itself – the complete text of which is *in the white darkness.about [the fragility of] memory*. As the fading letters suggest – the darkness and light are being used to expose, combine, and conceal.

Authors' Description; *ii - in the white darkness* is an interactive piece about memory. It assimilates and reflects the experience with patients fallen ill with Alzheimer's or Parkinson's diseases, showing the fragility and fluidity of memory from a subjective point of view. It was not the erasure that mattered so much as the act of trying to recover what we no longer can identify. From the pulsing dots of the background-interface different events can be started, played (and combined). In this process the experience of remembering and loss of memory can be re-created in the appearance and disappearance of words, pictures, animations and sounds. Memories (readable with a general metaphorical meaning) are unveiled and veiled in transition at the same time, arranged by or using your own memory.¹⁴

The opening line implies the relationship between permanence and impermanence: “Just a whisper, at least, of the persistence of this memory, this forgetfulness.”

The use of disappearing images, sound, and text in the piece, then, was created specifically to mirror the experience of memory loss. The reader is introduced to a screen that appears to be a curtain loosed by the wind – upon which float white circles that intensify and fade. The reader can click on any one of the orbs to trigger a sound, image, or more rarely, text.

By choosing these pulsing dots as if from behind a veil, the reader activates collages of photographs and ambient sounds, representing the process of trying to recover lost memories, which surface and fade in and out of intelligibility.

Leonardo Flores, in his *I Love E-Poetry* collection, states: “The animations and sounds are displayed and fade at a paused pace to encourage reflection and allow time for the reader to forget where they clicked last, what they clicked, and where they were headed to next: much like the Alzheimer and Parkinson patients whose plight they seek to evoke. The mapped out sequences of dots reward those who follow them with sounds of nature, language, and gorgeous images— but the visual mappings fade after a few seconds, leaving the readers semi-lost when trying to reconstruct them.”¹⁵

Textual Instruments - Deep Surface

Stuart Moulthrop’s *Deep Surface*¹⁶ takes a different approach to “executed” text – imagining a “deep reading simulator.”

This piece is a story-game in which one must read three tracks simultaneously: the actual story elements, a fainter layer of instructions as to how to access more air—instructions that vary by the second—and the dive bubble indicating position and air reserves; you might also choose to track your current score.

Deep Surface is a textual instrument that plays with the metaphor of immersion. Starting with the irony of a U.S. government report that warned of “reading at risk”, Moulthrop creates an ingenious work born from a strange love affair between a reading machine and a free diving simulator. *Deep Surface* is a suggestive literary image based on a simple question: what would

happen if the pages of a book, or rather, the so-called web-pages were made of a flexible fluid such as water, so that readers could dive gradually from the home page to the next and so on? *Deep Surface* is not just a narrative, because it is similar in structure and approach to a game, but you must enter the literary dimension to learn how to play, how to breathe, and therefore, to be able to keep reading.

Author Description: *Deep Surface* is the monstrous progeny of a strange romance between a reading machine and a free-diving simulator. Literature at crush depth. Hypertext gets wet. Generically, it is yet another instrument: one of those things you can play (or play with), without playing a game. There are rules here, and procedures, and (as in Real Life) a more or less invisible scoring system; so astute players may be able to invent clever and even elegant strategies. But if you're not feeling astute, you can plunge in and have a dip, immersing yourself in what signs and symptoms may present themselves as you pass by, dreaming perhaps of meaning... till robot voices wake you, and you drown.¹⁷

Deep Surface plays with the metaphor of immersion, as if web pages were made of water and we could dive down into them and through them. Divers here encounter four clusters of prose, which show up at their own pace, whether you are there to read them or not. You can earn points every time a new word is added to one of these passages, provided the layer you are viewing is at least 30% opaque. As Moulthrop says, you might find here an incentive to hang around in one place, like a good reader. On the other hand, that strategy is a good way to miss out on everything else that's going on. Your score affects behavior of the system in various ways, making it easier for you to dive without the lifeline. It also determines what you see when your luck runs out. At the bottom of it all, of course, there be monsters.

Stuart Moulthrop writes:

"I found myself writing about the hypnagogic state, that moment when you are half-awake, aware that you have just been dreaming, and able (so you think) to reflect on the substance of the dream. The metaphor for this experience seemed inescapably marine -- layers of flow, or water columns -- giving me an excuse to use the word 'benthic,' which is one of my all-time favorites....DS is a crude simulation of that shifty, drifty architecture of liminal awareness, near to sleep, near perhaps to the final, breathless, big sleep. In that sense it is very much about the things we can never recover, i.e., the days and nights of our lives; and yet, as you say, it is also

about repeatability, revisiting the same reef on later dives, coming across familiar fish on the way up or down.”

He states further:

“Also important in DS is the tension between air and water, or breath and time -- thus about anxiety and urgency, a sense of language as weight and pressure. So text that fades out as you descend is gone only on the visible or lisible scales. It remains ecologically and atmospherically present. . . . DS takes Jay Bolter's old metaphor of 'writing space' and re-tropes into physical, hydraulic space, which is to say, Volume. Thick space.”¹⁸

Here, the trope of a diving-bell-like experience is heightened by the presence and disappearance of the text as we move “through the water.” The very act of “playing the game” is one of trying to stay in place long enough to tap into the clues and information for a particular depth. Whereas Goldsmith's work emphasizes the volume of language, Buchanan and Mazzoleni's piece illustrates both economy and retrieval of words and knowledge, and Strasser and Coverley's piece reflects the fragility of memory, Moulthrop is using the process of language erasure to simulate a movement through water/life – the elusiveness of experience. A similar effect can be seen in *slippingglimpse*.

Textual Instruments - slippingglimpse

Stephanie Strickland, Cynthia Lawson Jaramillo, and Paul Ryan's *slippingglimpse*¹⁹ lets the movement of water itself be the mechanism for creation and erasure of text.

This poem is a verbal-visual collaboration between a poet (Strickland), a programmer (Jaramillo), and videographer (Ryan). Each of its ten parts consists of a video of 'chreods' found in the ocean off the coast of Maine, chreods being the strange-attractor patterns, or paths, by which dynamical systems (such as waves) keep returning, amidst the chaos of crash, to their same flow pattern. The mantra for this: water reads text, text reads technology, technology reads water, coming full circle. Each mode of the poem privileges one of these capacities.

One of the central themes of the poetic text is the materiality of writing and image-producing technologies, ranging from stained glass to C++. This theme echoes the mechanics of the text itself, which in broad terms is algorithmically generated in relation to the movements of the water.

Author Description: In *slippingglimpse*, we model a ring in which the roles of initiator, responder, and mediator are taken by all elements in turn. Our mantra for this: water reads text, text reads technology, technology reads water, coming full circle. Reading then comes to mean something different at each stage of the poem, in all cases involving sampling. Ryan reads and captures the image of 'chreods' (dynamic attractors) in water. Strickland's poem text, by sampling, appropriating, and aggregating artists' descriptions of processes of capture, reads this process of capture. And the water reads, via Lawson Jaramillo's motion-capture coding, by imposing its own sampled pattern. A variety of reading experiences are enabled: reading images while watching text; reading in concert with non-human readers, computer and water; reading frame breaks (into scroll or background); or reading by intervening. For instance, reversibility and replay are available on the scroll, as are reading in the direction and speed you wish; while, in the water, regeneration of text is available, as are unpredictable jostling and overlays.²⁰

The Full-screen mode illustrates the entraining of text by the waves. Text appears only where the water's chreod pattern imposes itself, as measured by sampled changes in pixel brightness. The Scroll-text mode privileges human reading, but only in the sense that the words are stable and the small window has a verso-recto format; otherwise the layout and lineation invite reading on both the horizontal and vertical axes at a speed and direction determined by a click-and-drag pointer. Constant frame breaks by the watery text into the scroll and into the background also invite alternative readings. The Hi-rez mode most perfectly shows the water chreod pattern as read by the videographer who, with both ecologic and topologic knowledge, has gone out specifically to capture it. A regeneration button will reset the word- or phrase-choosing process.

Leonardo Flores writes: "This exquisite poem is . . . interconnected in a creative feedback loop as complex as the chreods which inspire the piece. Each way of viewing the work allows you to focus on the video, the linguistic text, or the behavior of the text when it is following the pattern of the chreods in the video. . . . The wispy lines of poetry floating over the videos hover between readability and illegibility, as they recombine before your eyes, caught in the flows of the chreods. Pay attention to how the movement pattern changes with the water flow from one part

to the next. And notice how your own eyes flow from one cluster of silky verse to the next, making choices based on convention but also on the necessary paths of language.”²

Conclusions from Zero

These, and other works, begin to suggest a set of categories or tropes/traces that might be identified in electronic literature. At the very minimum, text erasure can include practices that suggest self-undermining, undecideability, disdain for commercialization, ambivalence about technology, struggle against the presence of text itself, and response to overwhelming data. Using text and code to imitate a zero presence might also reflect the economy of words, the fragility of memory, the embodiment of physical action in water and of water and words. The versatility of code/text/image interactions in born digital literature suggests that we can anticipate increasingly innovative uses of vanishing media – image, sound, and text that is there and not-there at the same time.

Finally, the presence/absence of meaningful information in electronic fiction and poetry can signify in many ways. And, we may ask, when the text is gone, does it leave a “trace”? Or is vanishing text in electronic literature actually a case of One (text) + One (Code) = Zero (0)?

Footnotes

***Much of the language used in describing the born digital pieces is taken from several presentations made by Stephanie Strickland and this author during conferences in 2012. These presentations were developed to showcase works from the Electronic Literature Collection Volume Two.**

End Notes

¹ The Official Snapshot Application Webpage. <http://www.snapchat.com/#>.

² Agrippa (the book of the dead) Website.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agrippa_\(a_book_of_the_dead\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agrippa_(a_book_of_the_dead)).

³ Agrippa (the book of the dead) Website.

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⁴ Kirschenbaum, Matthew G., "Hacking 'Agrippa': The Source of the Online Text", *The Agrippa Files*.

⁵ E-mail from Stuart Moulthrop. 5/27/13.

⁶ The Agrippa Files. <http://agrippa.english.ucsb.edu/>.

⁷ Tabbi, Joseph (Summer 2008). "Locating the Literary in New Media". *Contemporary Literature* (University of Wisconsin–Madison) 311–331.

⁸ Electronic Literature Collection, Volume One. (<http://collection.eliterature.org/1/>). Kenneth Goldsmith. *Soliloquy*(2002). Author Note. http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/goldsmith__soliloquy.html.

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¹⁰ Strickland, Stephanie. (2009). *Born Digital*. The Poetry Foundation. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/182942>.

¹¹ Electronic Literature Collection, Volume Two. (<http://collection.eliterature.org/2/>). Oni Buchanan, Betsey Stone Mazzoleni. *The Mandrake Vehicles* (2006). http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/buchanan_mandrake_vehicles.html.

¹² Electronic Literature Collection, Volume Two. (<http://collection.eliterature.org/2/>). Oni Buchanan, Betsey Stone Mazzoleni. *The Mandrake Vehicles* (2006). Author Description. http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/buchanan_mandrake_vehicles.html.

¹³ Electronic Literature Collection, Volume One. (<http://collection.eliterature.org/1/>). Reiner Strasser, M.D. Coverley. *li - in the white darkness* (2004).

http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/strasser_coverley__ii_in_the_white_darkness.html.

¹⁴ Electronic Literature Collection, Volume One. (<http://collection.eliterature.org/1/>). Reiner Strasser, M.D. Coverley. *li - in the white darkness* (2004). Author Description.

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