

“Monster Slang: The Metonymic Functions of Textual Archivation”
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Text markup language, once the domain of computer programmers, is quickly becoming an idiom that more and more humanities scholars are speaking. Questions of content – what is deemed important enough for digital encoding and transmission across a network – are giving way to what Alan Liu terms postindustrial processes of efficiency and compatibility. I would like to extend Liu’s argument, avoiding the cultural implications of his engagement in favor of the textual concerns that dot the landscape of digital encoding. Transcribing a print document, be it poem, play, fiction or brochure, necessitates one of these markup languages, the most popular of which is XML (Extensible Markup Language)¹. Liu’s analysis is simultaneously historical and futurist in its construction, buffered with plenty of technological explanations of what constitutes a data stream or pour – the dynamic relationship necessary for the viewing of a web pages content – all while pointing out a medial ecology² between the development of a postindustrial management system from the prior artisan style. My own argument is situated in the aftermath of this markup language boom, XML having replaced SGML (Standard

¹Liu gives a brief description of XML geared towards the lay person (non-technical academic) which I will echo here. Cf. <http://www.w3.org/XML/>

²N. Katherine Hayles defines medial ecology as “the relationships between all the media interacting with one another in a given social, cultural, and temporal context.” Important to this idea is the cycling of behaviors ebbing and flowing between the giant calculators of yesterday and the micro-computers of today, the ghosts of older technologies alive and well in the newer modes of discourse. In a less hyperbolic example, this ghost presence is manifest every time we flip through a book in a non-linear fashion, incorporating hypertextual reading practices into traditional print material.

Generalized Markup Language) as the more efficient of the two. My concerns involve a structural and semantic reading of the bibliographic function of XML, the symbols that surround a text in transparency to create the illusion of a digital “print” document. I would like to frame the use of XML and other markup languages in terms of a translation, the metonym a series of symbols contiguous to the originary signifier. This inversion of our normative view of one-to-one linguistic correspondence occurs across oral language barriers, and similarly across the systemic borders between machines.

The stage on which literature has played out its corporeal drama is shifting. In the theater of the word, “we no longer exist as playwrights or actors but as terminals of multiple networks” (16). Baudrillard’s vision of a telematic universe, where all eyes are forever focused on a screen – to stray from the screen is to render the material and one self useless – is a bit bleak. However, digitization of the written word has been going on for over twenty years and whether we prefer our texts served raw in book form or cooked in the microprocessor oven, the nature of textuality has been inf(1)ected by the digital. Textual archiving requires us to ask questions of translation, questions that have less to do with the efficiency or advantage of a new way of reading or writing and more to do with the inevitability of digitization and its relationship to the original. Fear, aversion, ambivalence, joy, *jouissance*, the reaction of the reader or the author to this digitization is a partial test in a system of tests that the traditional print work and its textuality is preparing for. Jerome McGann’s ideas on marked documents are crucial to my point, and I will devote space later to his arguments. I would first like to argue that the earlier intersections of media and literature, instances when literary theory seemed to best explain what is going on inside computers, fall short of identifying and exploring a crucial aspect of these computers, the bibliographic code. It is not enough to point to “the physical aspects of the

documents as expressive features” (McGann 93). The non-physical aspects, the code that borders the text in a contiguous and metonymical relationship, these markings that are effaced in our final digital version of the text are crucial to understanding the dynamics of reading and writing with computers.

Various literary theories provide numerous entry points into this convoluted and relatively unexplored field of textual archivation. Jean Baudrillard’s ideas on the virtual and simulacrum, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s rhizome and the textuality of Roland Barthes have all played an important role in the current writings of new media. I propose a rethinking of structuralism’s relationship to the process of text archivation, for an exploration of metonymy’s function in the translation of written language to a programmable computer code, and would like to read further into the pre-suppositions that tend to gloss over the admittedly paranoid visions of certain critical theorists. Roman Jakobson defines metonymy as a series of contiguities, understanding signification in terms of a related signifier, regardless of the length along the lexical axis this new signified must travel in order to reach a connexion. A cybertextual structure is being built in and around these digitized texts, that carries over from one discipline to the next, and digital archiving is raising questions of authorship, of readership, that cry for attention. Where does structuralism fit into this new network of production? How does the author function change now that new forms of translation and transcription are literalizing Barthes’ metaphor of work to text? This is the next move, already digitized and reaching for the multiple through a binary code. George Landow’s *Hypertext*, a book that provides key introductory material for an argument such as this, is fond of citing Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes as forerunners to hypertextual writing and reading styles. Landow points to Derrida’s (and Barthes, and Bakhtin’s) use of key hypertextual terms like “web” and “link” in their examinations of

language. While extremely perfunctory in his approach, Landow does cite Gregory Ulmer, a Derridean scholar who promotes' Derrida's idea of the *morceau*, the mouthful, which I will later utilize in an example of a semiotic reading of computer code.

Next up for Landow is Deleuze and Guattari, whose rhizomatic models and writing and reading (and becoming) are a key component to the nonlinearity of hypertext. After spending two pages detailing the relationship of a nomadic and deterritorializing method to cyberspatial modes of being, Landow is ready to disengage and get on with his book. These cursory briefings on the parallelisms between critical theory and hypertextual practice elides the fundamental notion that writing and reading have been hypertextual practices for hundreds of years. Jerome McGann points out the bible as an early non-linear text. If we are going to come to a better understanding of digital textuality I propose a more detailed examination of how the code of archivation is operating semantically. Landow's introduction (his book, not the chapter) makes no mention of Ferdinand de Saussure or Roman Jakobson, and it seems to me that this jump over structuralism to the post-structuralists and deconstructionists elides the linguistic elements of mediation.

Some of these ideas are foregrounded by N. Katherine Hayles. In her *Writing Machines*, Hayles examines three works, Talan Memmott's *Lexia to Perplexia*, Tom Phillip's *A Humument*, and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, that all require a fundamentally different reading style than a traditional literary text. These technotexts (her term) point to a reflexive relationship to their own materiality.³ This different style of reading is a component of Media Specific

3 Hayles' *Writing Machines* is part of MIT Press' Mediaworks, a series dedicated to refashioning the book to reflect both content and the image-based interactions offered by digital media. Heavily formatted and textural, the book includes electronic appendices that provide a broader spectrum of analysis that couldn't be achieved in print alone. The typographical and

Analysis, another of Hayles' terms that readily applies to this idea of materiality. She writes beautifully about the material metaphor, but I would like to argue that this reading cannot continue without a discussion of material metonymy. If the metaphor of electronic simulation is occurring across the symbolic network (in this case, the global paradigm of the World Wide Web) how do we mark or mask the process of signification? These techno/cybertexts are utilizing metonymy in a very strict way. In the case of the hypertext link – a fundamental constituent of the marked text and, as Hayles and other literary critics observe, a notion utilized by an abundance of print authors as well – a part of the text is used to refer or link to another part of the text. The individual morpheme is occasion for a narrative leap or line of flight away from the originary body, oftentimes to a whole other body situated in a different space.

So too for our purposes of bibliographic code. The “body” of a text becomes the <body> of a single unit of code, repeatable as a separate function of the algorithm, able to survive the temporary cutting from the spatially unified original. Jakobsen's “development of a discourse” is taking place alongside paths of either similarity or contiguity⁴, and each instance of either hypertextual linkage or textual archivation follows the latter path. These are Liu's data pours, the text traveling the internet as atomistic packets of information, using the language

narrative experiments – she invents a persona with which to provide autobiographical and chronological frames – result in a unique critical work around which the unfolding of digital mediation takes place.

4 See Roman Jakobsen's “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances” (1956). Condensation is fundamental for the archival operations described here. In Freud's original outline of the work of condensation, he spoke of the pages that would be required to write out the analysis of a dream. So too does our code of archivation take up three or four times as much space on the screen as the final product of this process. In Lacan's “word to word connexion” we now have “word to code connexion.” But meaning emerges in an abundance of symbols, many of which serve to signal the signifier, to prepare us for meaning.

schemas of XML to aggregate in proper order on the receiving end⁵. One of the striking differences in the use of XML to archive print materials is with its human-readability. “XML is human-readable in the sense that its descriptive code consist of plain-text tags in aside brackets residing at the same level as the content they encode (that is, in the same document)” (Liu 55). What Liu brings up, the literariness of code, is fundamental to these questions of signification.

What are the tropes at work here? What elements of a text are contiguous when translated to a digital medium? How are these cybertexts functioning in signification value systems? I suggest that there is a literalization at work in cyberspace, a materiality of difference whereby we are able to read what it is we are not getting. This is really just an extension of the repression that is required for a system to function properly at the social level. For Jakobsen, his examples of aphasia (loss of speech) lead to an examination of metaphor and metonymy. He argues that preference in normative verbal exchange occurs at the level of these two semantic lines. I would like to suggest that this preference for metaphor and metonymy continues at the level of digital exchange, in our case, archivation. The code that speaks for or translates the originary text acts as metonym. The partial object has become the partial word. Lacanian implications aside, there is a condensation of language, in addition to the vehicular aspect of code. The use of previously determined and socially acceptable connotative meanings for the individual symbols in the ASCII language is a counterpart to this metonymic reading. Only when these parts are examined in light of their weighted semantic givens do the semiotic readings undertaken here begin to make sense.

⁵Liu outlines three strata in the morphology of his discourse network 2000, the second of which is transmission management. In addition to the internet’s protocols, data being sent must be logically autonomous, able to sort itself according to the destination program. This is obviously problematic when thinking about the half-life of software or the typographically experimental

There must also be a recursiveness. Hayles writes of the inadequacy of metaphoric thinking, that something is left out, and it is the ability to return to the primary image or signified. Metonymy allows a recursive chain to be set up, to break down the difference in which each function of the cybertext is operating on, what Jean Louis Baudry calls “signifying raw material.” A code is showing us what it wants to show us, is using the quotation marks that signal a transcendence from narrative. So the transcendent code is lifting certain aspects of the signified out of the narrative, to be shown to the viewing subject in this limited space for viewing/reading.

Jean-Louis Baudry begins to question the ideological effects produced by the technical, the forces which seem to be causally related to the ambivalence of the machine.⁶ While he is firing from the cinematic line, I would like to extend his analysis into the realms of digital transmission, to apply Baudry’s “mutation of signifying material” to the digital deformance⁷ of a text with code. The use of space for this mutation is tripartite: a) the focalized space exists within a virtual reality where there enacted is a cinematic Lacanian struggle of symbolic and subjective order, b) the screen which locates the text within a frame of margins and schemas dictated by both markup language and the accompanying schemas, and c) the original page of signifying material. How each piece of text – down to morphemes and sibilants – is accounted for in its new layout is of great consequence to the kind of semiotic reading here. As we get into

poem.

6 Baudry, Jean-Louis. “Ideological Effects of the Cinematographic Apparatus”

7For more on deformance, see Jerome McGann’s *Radiant Textuality*, discussed below. Deformance refers to a heuristic mode of interpretation that stresses the performative – rather than hermeneutic – sense of reading. Citing Galvano della Volpe idea of interpretation as interface, McGann pushes the metaphor to include interpretative record as program or algorithm.

the individual ASCII symbols, it's vital to remember the overall effect produced for the reader (the repression of the signifier in order to signify).

Baudry goes on to explain the relationship between the ideological effect of the camera (in our case, the computer) and the monocular vision of the Renaissance:

In focusing it, the optical construct appears to be truly the projection-reflection of a "virtual image" whose hallucinatory reality it creates. It lays out the space of an ideal vision and in this way assures the necessity of a transcendence – metaphorically (by the unknown to which it appeals – here must recall the structural place occupied by the vanishing point) and metonymically (by the displacement that it seems to carry out: a subject is both "in place or" and "a part for the whole.") (p. 289)

Code acts as both the subject and the part of the new digitized text that is arguably the most important. It is the langue without which there would be no digital parole. Our monocular vision is focused on the computer screen, on our text-space with its strong ties to the physical layout of the page (why else refer to itself as the "page" under the "format" heading?). Our necessity of transcendence relies on the code's transparency and its location. Now that some markup languages are human readable, is there a loss of transcendence? How do we navigate this space? What kinds of reading practices are going to obtain?

Peter Middleton provides us with a overview of the passage of a text to digitization in his "New Memoryism"⁸, picking a delicate path through the mnemonic representation of subjectivity in both contemporary poems as well as the overarching digital mediums in which we

8 The phenomenology of reading that Middleton speaks to is a useful phrase for this discussion. Readers already accustomed to navigating screen-oriented texts are finding ways to cross-pollinate the practice of digital writing, leading to a large-scale dialogue between academics at universities across the U.S. about the growing need not just for a reservoir of digitized texts but for a discursive structure to gird it.

communicate daily. Middleton claims we have undergone (and continue to undergo) a genetic modification of memory by the economy of digital drives that govern our communicative life. While plotting the course of tools like email and our growing use of the internet as a creative tool, Middleton dissects the efficacy of email and explains its rise partly from “the social need to manage degrees of anonymity” (Middleton 144). How does the archivation of a text to an internet friendly transmission interact with this newfound sense of the anonymous? Do we have similar ideas for our authors, or is there a concomitant need to draw parallels in the archival code to establish the bookishness of the now digital work?

Middleton goes on to describe the potentialities of an electronic readership. He pinpoints what Barthes points to in his “From Work to Text,” the “line between writers and readers can blur because readers themselves can easily annotate, revise, or simply rewrite other’s texts [] becoming cowriters along the way” (145). I have left out the parenthetical here because it speaks to the paranoia many of the archivists share when discussing the issues faced in a field which relies on discreet codes to hide the materiality of a work and all its resultant paratextual elements. In the XML platform that is more and more commonly used for textual editing and archivation — so valued because of its independency from whatever display-based language is going to “translate” it — there is no way to talk about the textuality of the code within the code itself. In other words, this language lacks a meta-critical element, a linguistic ingredient that allows our English (and most other spoken languages) to remain in a constantly problematized state. Which is where it should be. Our advances in the understanding of the discursive properties of English would be greatly hindered if the English language suffered this deprivation, its origins and processes mired in a stagnant pool of unrequited answers. There would be no questions. We would be operating from a lack, the desire for understanding forever averted by

the impossibility of asking. This would be the true aphasia that so fascinated Jacobson.

Barthes' Pleasure in the Text

The pleasure derived from digital texts stems from the function of the signifier, yes, but also from the amount of control that a reader has as opposed to the physical text-book. While it is true that the margins cannot be operated on, the essence of computer code is its re-writability. Hayles' remediated narrator points⁹ to a remediated reading subject, one who has been inscribed through the cycling of print and page and ink to screen and code and quantum. This reading subject is doubled in the form of the programmer, who acts as Barthes' producer of the text, assigning the text a new semantic value and allowing it to be reinscribed as a digital text. It is interesting to note Barthes' language in talking about readerly subjectivity, his "I" which is already a "plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite, or, more precisely, lost" (Barthes, 10). Indeed, we star the text, the ASCII and Unicode symbols dressing the words in

⁹Hayles defines the remediated narrator as "a literary invention foregrounding a proliferation of inscription technologies that evacuate consciousness as the source of production and recover in its place a mediated subjectivity that cannot be conceived as an independent entity." Cf. *Writing Machines*, p 117. Remediation continues at the level of reading, the bibliographic code situating the reader inside a process that involves manifold instances of inscription. There is a very real human mediation, that in addition to fusing with the technological apparatus must fuse through that machine with the reader. The transparency of the code eschews an awareness of the remediated reading process and closes textual doors.

ceremonious digital garb:

We shall therefore star the text, separating, in the manner of a minor earthquake, the blocks of signification of which reading grasps only the smooth surface, imperceptibly soldered by the movement of sentences, the flowing discourse of narration, the “naturalness” of ordinary language. (13)

“Breaking the relationship between signifier and signified is another fracture of social control,” (and this control is what typifies the relationship of a traditional text reader and the text itself.

The passage to digitization formats the control differently. The text can be turned on, turned off, made to disappear, which is a much stronger semantic behavior than closing a book. Code can often be accessed in a behind-the-scenes peek into how the digitized text is being put together, produced as a visual document. It helps to have a sense of the narrative of the archiving process, both in terms of the empiricism of the DIYer as well as for my structural examination of this translation.

A different kind of reading performance is required with these digital texts, both the archival and the poetic. The subjectivity of a screen-oriented text has been discussed above, and now we turn to the producerly reading of digitized texts. The metonym of the digital text implies a (w)hole, share a (w)hole, forms a (w)hole. These parenthetical “w”s can alleviate the stress that is certain to come to bear upon the both reader and text when making meaning, can stand for the possessive – whose hole? Is it the reader’s job to intertextually fill in the hole left by the absence of a tangible representation? Or is it the code’s task to sufficiently reproduce a simulation of the original text that doesn’t interfere with a normative reading process? I would like to argue that there must be exposure of the semiotic functions of the code in order to more fully suppress the excess of the computer, allowing for a play of the forces which “strive to unify the work, to hold

it together sufficiently that we may perceive and follow its structures” (Thompson, 130). I am borrowing again from the filmic tradition, but I think it is necessary to look at the computer as an image in order for its opacity to lighten.

The link here between interpretation and digitization is fully explored in Jerome McGann’s *Radiant Textuality* (2001). I would like to revisit the idea of syntagmatic gaps in meaning, in the readerly hermeneutics that foreground the entire digitization endeavor. McGann draws heavily upon the Italian philologist Galvano della Volpe’s ideas of interpretation, which McGann renders as a pseudo-scientific process of deduction morphing to an equivalency. This equivalency usually takes the shape of a paraphrase, which traditionally functions as a metonym. With an uncanny echo, Jakobsen can be heard speaking directly through McGann:

“Interpretation is the application of scientia to poiesis, or the effort to elucidate one discourse for in terms of another” (127). This elucidation is impossible without first exploring these periphrastic units of code. The science of code is not outside the boundaries of performance, nor is it anything less than an extension of interpretive deformation.

The syntagmatic gaps¹⁰ in this chain of signification are so wide as to be invisible (think of views of earth from space). The transformation of codex to digital text is opaque to the average reader of computer texts, and yet we can easily see how the code is working as in Zach Weir’s narrative of the archival process being undertaken at Miami University. Here is an

10 See John Fiske’s *Reading the Popular* (1989). While Fiske is more concerned with television screens, we find similarly appropriate use of Saussure to delineate the avoidance of narrative authorial production in digital poetics and fictions. The reader is forced into action, usually with mouse pad or keystroke, to activate the text’s semiotic game-play. The parallelisms of this kind of reader/author inversion to that of the video game is not lost on the poets. Many of the artists’ notes refer to their own creations as *games* rather than *poems*. This is extremely relevant when we come to digital archiving and its resultant ability to play with the reader’s expectations, how close the digital version will come to the codex.

example of the code used to archive the *Poetess Tradition*:

```
<encodingDesc>
  <editorialDecl>
    <p>This document follows the rules specified for TEI use by
    NINES.</p>
    <p>All quotation marks and apostrophes have been
transcribed
as entity references.</p>
    <p>Any dashes occurring in line breaks have been
removed.</p>
    <p>Because of web browser variability, all colons and
hyphens have been typed on the U.S. keyboard; dashes
have been rendered as two
hyphens.</p>
    <p>Special characters (letters with accents, etc.) have
been
coded according to
Unicode rather than as entity references.</p>
    <p>Page numbers appear at the beginning of each page,
no
matter where originally placed.</p>
```

Notice that dashes have been removed, substituted by nothing. This zero metonym, a displacement of a formal signifying mark from the page to the cybervoid, is effacing a poetic device. Emily Dickinson's use of the dash is proof positive of the value of punctuation above and beyond the break of a line. The <p> designates a paragraph coding, but more interesting is how the brackets function. These brackets – in logic and math arenas verbalized as “greater than” and “less than” respectively, and here used as delimiters – have a semiotic history within the ASCII universe, and the function of them as signifier is interdependent to the social meanings they have accrued by the user.

The following excerpts are taken from the Free Online Dictionary of Computing, a database set up in 1993 by Denis Howe. These symbols have, in the course of an

epistemological tool-building schema, acquired myriad semantic meanings. Above and beyond the surface signification act of coding, these markers repress the semaphoric quality to arrive at a metonymic substitution of what is often the desire of a programmer, either sexual or deviant. Without delving into the Lacanian dimension of nominal desire, we can look at the history of these symbols' names and bring to bear their functionality in more semiotic terms.

<>

Common: <less/greater than>; bra/ket; l/r angle; l/r angle bracket; l/r broket. Rare: from/towards; read from/write to; suck/blow; comes-from/gozinta; in/out; crunch/zap (all from UNIX); [angle/right angle].

Of particular interest in the designation *broket*. The linguistic pun is clear: “We had a bracket, but now we broke it.” But if the symbol has been broken, why not express that in the morpheme? Why wouldn't the substituted “a” become the more parallel “k”? Then we would have *brket*, which implies a lessening of physical space in addition to the “broken” word. A vowel has been removed, and the word no longer functions as a complete whole. It is already functioning metonymically as the “/” denotes the individual syllables serve as signifiers of the appropriate half: “<” becomes *bro* and “>” becomes *ket*.

A similar case can be made for the exclamation point. It is used with great frequency in the encoding process, and most often denotes a negation. I would like to highlight the less common usages for this particular ASCII character. “Soldier” seems to fit the bill for negation, but the sonorous derivations imply a forced sounding in the awful silence of the programming language, a defiant stance against an otherwise aphasic norm.

!

Common: bang, pling; excl; shriek; <exclamation mark>. Rare: factorial; exclam; smash; cuss; boing; yell; wow; hey; wham; eureka; [spark-spot]; soldier, control

The other symbols receive similar semiotic treatments from programmers who seem bent on realizing the duality inherent to their game. These symbols are life-giving (the code they allow for creates a space for texts to breath) and life-taking (the same symbols applied in a different syntactic string can negate that same space). The backslash becomes the “backwhack,” the “slosh” or “bash,” a belligerent beast of a symbol intent on turning again and again to beat the signified into repression, the reference back becoming reference attack. Conversely, the percentage symbol becomes “grapes,” a sign utilized by Christ in metaphor to describe his relationship to the apostles as well as their duty to the dissemination of Christian virtue and knowledge. “The disciples derive their power to bear fruit (which means probably not only the work of the apostolate but also the achievement of Christian life) only by a vital union with Jesus, a sharing of the same life which is the source of power and activity.”¹¹ The digitized text bears a fruit in its transcription, and this metaphor extends to the nascent relationship between scholarly archivation and its academic reader.

Etymologically, the Hebrew for grape is translated literally as “stinking,” which can refer to the rotting grape that isn’t used fast enough. This is a nice segue into another problematic for the archivation of text, that of bit rot. I was recently engaged in a polemic discussion with leading internet-theoretician Alan Sondheim as to the ideas proposed in this paper. I queried him on the archivation of a typographically experimental poet like Susan Howe

¹¹Rather than burden this analysis with cloying spiritual themes, I merely want to highlight the intensified relationship between archiver/programmer and scholar/reader of the texts. A dialectical is working in favor of the reader, as most would rather receive the text in the quickest and most painless fashion, regardless of fixity or alignment. I refer here to notions of textuality that plague archivists concerned with maintaining the bookishness or poemness of a book or poem.

<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/howe/thorow.html>(<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/howe/thorow.html>). Howe's poems are often skewed across the page, lines overlapping lines at a dozen angles, the junction of letters as words spill over the proximal space pointing to historical narrativity's blurring and doubling. Coupled with blended registers of archaic homesteader territory and contemporary verse, these poems defy categorization in terms of form and content.

Sondheim's response to the archivation of a text like this? Why not just put it in as a word document? His solution to the linear-privileging of XML ignores the ephemerality of internet-based formats. "Nothing ages faster and becomes inaccessible quicker than electronic media,"(xx) and this sentiment, from Peter Lunenfeld in his introduction to a collection of dialectic-based essays on new media, certainly applies to Microsoft. At the very least, code is a more reliable platform for the transcription and publishing of texts on the web, and among the various codes used, XML is the most accessible and mutable. Yet the problems I have pointed to, the linear privileging and lack of self-reflexivity, are only compounded by bit rot. Lunenfeld proposes a treatment of digital media as a dance, ephemerality to be celebrated as an integral part of the process. Bit rot, a noxious phrase designed to speak hyperbolically in the tendency of computer lingo, adheres to this ephemerality in a negative way. We can, however, combat this by looking at new ways of working with the same platform, of pushing the limits of a code to get at the structuralist base.

The point is not to overdetermine the language use of programmers but to pay greater attention to how these codes are being wielded as language. Interpretation is not so crucial as is a documentation of the semantic and semiotic activity that is bustling right next to the so-called "meat" of the code. This is where Derrida's *morceau* comes into play. The bibliographic elements of the code are acting as teeth, as a bite, in a biunivocal mouthing of both what is to be

delivered via the code but also what the ordinary text can and can't say.

Much of this articulation is governed by punctuation. McGann notes that this highly evolved set of marks represent signs that were originally introduced as notations both for oral articulation and syntactic differentiation, and that they function in both registers to this day. As a set of oral cues – whether in silent or in articulated reading – punctuation is a foundational element in the affective (as opposed to the conceptual) ordering of the [text]. As a set of syntactic cues it is also a signifying system foregrounding sets of conceptual relations in the text. (156)

McGann refers here to a poem by Byron, but I replace poem with text to elucidate the manner in which punctuation acts a bibliographic code *at all times*. Speech acts, dialogue, citations, the very sentence that is capped and closed by this period. All are governed in a very strict sense by this code. Meaning is not going to bypass these markers, unless the form of the text is poetical in which that lack of marking, the lack of punctuation is a conscious and deliberate rhetorical move on the part of the author. This move is going to directly affect any and every reading of the poem.

For an editor working with XML, the scansion that one would normally parse a poetic text with to gain access to the structured rhythms and stresses of a vocalized (or evocalized)¹² reading can be coded. But more interesting is the resultant display of singularly accented sibilants. The word *écriture*, for instance, would appear in the HTML display as `écriture`. The accented letter is translated via unicode as a numerical substitution. The

¹²Garret Stewart's *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (1990) gives a fine overview and application of evocalized reading practices. Highlighting the shifting phonemic play in most poetic texts, Stewart examines the air/ink (his term for signifying difference e.g. pronouncing "iced ink" and hearing "I stink," which wouldn't work if the text wasn't evoked) dialectic to arrive at a better understanding of what happens when we read (silently).

word itself is broken, much like the brackets in the above example, the character code emerging as a penetration into the solidarity of the unified letters. The number has become as functional as the letter, and this equivalency is an arrow to the metonymic. In terms of contiguity, numbers are not far down the lexical line from the standard set of English letters. It is to this pole that our aphasiatic turns, the word cannot be spoken in its new form, but merely pointed to in terms of contiguous metonyms.

The beauty of McGann's theories of deformance lie in his insistence that the code which we are looking at is just one more reading, one more road taken (or not) among the so-called garden of forking paths. Therefore, the archived text is one node on the network of meanings and readings that constitute this organic system.

Not far from the slightly overdetermined metaphor "we become the codes we punch" (46), I find these explorations of the linguistic nature of code to be of utmost importance to the future of humanities scholarship. It goes without saying that we already rely too much on the "manipulator of codes," the IT department of the university where we teach and study, or (worse yet) rely on the kind of ignorances that queer theorists like Eve Sedgwick cite, ignorances that produce double-bindings of knowledge to power dialectics.

I would like to return to Alan Liu in closing. He offers a solution to the problem of prosumption (a term used to describe the ordering and filtering that occurs on a discursive level amidst the local page consuming the XML code), one that could allow for "variable methods of standardization," a family of codes, if you will, that can interact with the receiving software in more intelligent ways. The option of database-driven web pages

presents another possible solution to the Howe problem. Display-oriented documents, which would certainly include most of the poetry that falls under the taxonomy “language writing,” are better served by XML and its attending style sheets that help map the document into a new format. But even so, the experimental typography of language poetry (or concrete poetry for that matter) requires a rethinking of the metonymical structure of digital mediation. The lack of a self-reflexivity in markup languages like XML would render code poetry completely transparent, the poem folding itself into the formatting schemas in a chameleon-like act of subterfuge. The archiving code would be made useless, lines lacking closing brackets and feeding the processor program nothing but concertina.

These same poets would most likely argue that their work is in a sense already archived, hovering on server space in the World Wide Web for public consumption. They may even argue further that the ephemerality of internet writing, the gestures made by a digital-based poetry, is not meant to last. The discussions that surround ideas like authorship, subjectivity, mediation and (not least of all) structuralism warrant a reinvigorated look at the form that our content is taking. Liu proposes a third term added to the form-content equation, and I would argue that *materiality* is but a substratum on which these questions of form and content continually play out. Rather than an equation, all terms being equal, I would like to give greater weight to materiality. It is this material, this machine, this screen, that can reify what the page holds true – there is a structure operating behind and beyond the frame.

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