

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

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"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 e-mergent 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]jtion::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 lizts for the wurkz dis.purse.all
...
2 make net.wurkz space themz.elves in2 a spindle of litz 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 inscription 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 -- word are removed, passages repeated – Lennon explores network identity and authority by deconstructing the formal 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 with 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 correpondence, 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
>Not important , >love it
>Not important , >love it
>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 renderings of a computer directory structures in their work – Thacker mapping it to the human body, Beiguelman to the book.

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.

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=v1rU2.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 re-purposed – 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.
