



# Poetics of Dynamic Text

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## Abstract

Dynamic texts offer new possibilities for reading and new challenges in how we approach the reading object, forcing the final object away from the idea of a fixed form on a fixed surface. In order to "read" such an object, one must look deeper, into the code itself, and one must consider the various ramifications inherent in a code-based work. Ultimately, one must explore the edge where language apparatuses engage

The apparent

present.

(Rae Armantrout, "Native", *Made To Seem* 30)

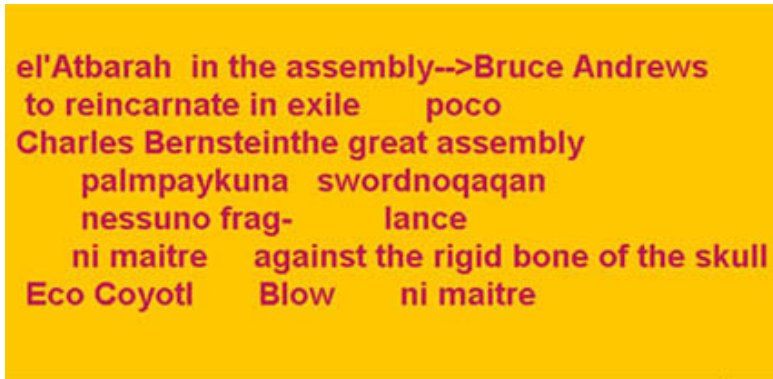
the cookie chocolate-chips

Of course, one might say that dynamic text, or text that is different on each reading, is a mere dramatization of the unarguable fact that even *Wuthering Heights* is different each time you read it, depending on the characteristics of the last Heathcliff or Catherine in your own personal life and whether you are reading it on vacation in Yorkshire or in the depths of the Yucatan jungle. Each reading of such a novel is different, of course, because differences in context, setting, and personal circumstances foster different interpretations, cause different words, images, etc. to jump out.

However, dynamic text, text that is *physically* different each time you encounter it, offers interesting possibilities.

- It forces the literary work away from the idea of a final form presented on a fixed surface "of record". This is why conventional link-node hypertext offers little in the way of innovation and why, when link-node hypertext declares itself to represent new technology, it is actually quite a heinous misrepresentation.

- When the artistic work is forced away from fixed form, one must look deeper for a sense of meaning. This means looking to the concept, mechanism, or operation that underlies the work, querying the core stability underlying the work, that which remains constant beneath its litigious, shifting illusion of the surface. One must find what is solid beneath the transitory – much like meditation!



Detail from "Io Sono At Swoons" by Loss Pequeño Glazier

- This also means literally looking deeper -- to the code. A work of programmed literature, and here I would emphasize works that are hand coded as opposed to interface assembled, present a complex of writing, that is, textuality superimposed on textuality. In this environment, one move can affect elements on other planes of activity. As in 3-D chess, one must think on several levels before making a mark!
- Programmability may be a defining characteristic of what might really be called New Media writing. That is, not writing that has been remediated to sit on the screen like a colored stuffed pheasant on the mantelpiece, but writing that engages a complex of language (im)possibilities. Most importantly, the reader should approach the work keenly aware of the writing within writing that makes such a work happen. Indeed, thinking again of Norman White's robotic artworks and White's tendency to use semi-transparent cases in their construction, one should think of looking at the surface while bearing in mind the "writing" beneath. It is useful to approach programmatological works with such a mindset.
- An example of this might be in processes that engage writing code structures, displaying and sounding them, then altering the code to alter their soundings. Such an interplay offers interesting new ways to conceive of a poetics of coding. This is reminiscent of an interview with a Hispanic

writer I heard, where he mentioned writing a piece in English then translating to Spanish then revising to translate back to English. It was a way of using two language processes to sound against each other to build *un objeto of interlinguistic arte*.

- The dynamic qualities of such works are dependent on specific and varying notions of seed and on supporting randomization and selection algorithms. These are issues in the work also worthy of attention and debate.



Detail from "Cog" by Loss Pequeño Glazier

"Dyanmic" is not here meant to simply mean text that moves. Neither is it meant to mean text that has merely has computational origins. The object that is at the center of this inquiry is one that does not just sit there (or sit there and move). Rather a poetics of dynamic text seeks to engage that delicate edge where language appartuses meet, slip, and engage, to further the possibilities of the poetic text.