University of Alberta

SCROLL / NETWORK / HACK: A Poetics of ASCII Literature (1983-1989)

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ABSTRACT

SCROLL / NETWORK / HACK is a poetics of ASCII text files published and distributed by means of electronic bulletin board systems from the early-1980s until the mid-1990s. This medium offered computer users a means to share information and opinions with one another, but it also gave rise to an innovative literature shaped by the material conditions and technological environment within which it was produced. This writing, influenced by Hacking/Phreaking/Anarchy/Cracking manuals, sought to hack, phreak, and crack the technologies of writing and the conventions of discourse.

 SCROLL / NETWORK / HACK is the product of my experience as a reader, writer, and editor of ASCII text files, and also as an instructor of literary analysis and creative writing. The project is, in part, driven by a desire to courier these obscure texts to my audience, but it is primarily inspired by a need to investigate the constraints of these texts, their extralinguistic signification, and the ways in which they hypermediate, modify, and disrupt code. Perhaps most importantly, I am interested in how we might further extend the artistic practices that are described and implemented in these hackerly texts.

 SCROLL / NETWORK / HACK treats all writing as textual material rather than as an access point to a transcendental signified. Screen captures from ASCII text files are incorporated throughout the study, which might include more or less material than is required for any particular analytical response; this allows me to not only describe the tactics of the courier and pirate, but also to enact them, simulating my own struggle with these unwieldy networks of literary code. Furthermore, the work of critical theorists (e.g. Shklovsky, Barthes, McLuhan) will be treated only as textual material—this material will be valuable to the extent that I am able to repurpose, extend, modify, and riff on it, but the material will not be interpreted, contextualized, nor respected in terms of its authority.

 Ultimately, the project must be a dissertation, becoming descriptive, informative, and at times neglectful of the frame of reference, but it strives, through a discourse bound by convention, to help readers to discover and produce a new, hackerly, style of discourse.

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1.1> HACKER PRO-PHILE

The year is 1989 and I am twelve years old, sitting at the kitchen table. Although the room is cold, sweat is beginning to form on my forehead and my arms. My hands are tingling. It was only a week ago that my mom got this computer, but there's no turning back now. I've already typed in the command to commit the crime of theft. Once I press this button, I'll either be rich beyond my wildest imagination, or in jail for the rest of my life. My finger hovers over the "enter" key. I focus on the words glowing in orange monochrome.

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A> STEAL MONEY FROM BANK
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I take a hit of no-name cola. This is the moment that I was born for. The kid who has lost so much is about to gain so much more. My finger presses the button.

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bad command or file name
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I jot a quick note on the back of a piece of scrap paper. This marks the beginning of my hacking career. Even though I don't understand the basics of computing, I'm already driven to bypass them.

I've grown up watching Star Trek *on Sunday mornings and I understand that a computer can control an entire planet and also be outsmarted by Captain Kirk. I have seen* Inspector Gadget *weekday mornings before elementary school and I have learned that any electricity-driven device in the world can be hacked by a smart kid with a computer-book. I have seen* WarGames, *where Matthew Broderick uses a computer to change his high school grades, and from this I understand that computers are magical devices invested with the power of a sorcerer's sceptre. Of course, the sceptre can only be properly used by a sorcerer,*

just as the power of a computer can only be harnessed by the sorcerer's equal, the hacker.

The day that I attempted my first bank heist, I learned that it is impossible to hack a bank from home, from the DOS command prompt, without a modem. In the push of a button, I had gone from believing that a computer could do anything in the world to believing that it could do nothing at all. On both counts, I was right.

My mom had won a computer that came with MS-DOS 3.1 and GW-BASIC, and we didn't have enough money to buy any other software. I had a stack of old copies of *3-2-1 Contact*, which included transcriptions of short programs in BASIC. By typing these into the machine, I was able to make a few simple games for myself. A few months later, my brother's friend gave me copies of *Leisure Suit Larry*, *Police Quest*, and *Space Quest II* on 5¼-inch floppy disks. The pirated games were more complex and challenging than those I had typed out by hand. When I reached a dead end and was confounded by these narrative games, I would go to Radio Shack to buy walkthroughs (pamphlets explaining the solutions to every puzzle from the beginning to end). From this point on, there was no need to find myself bound in rope without a knife to cut myself free. With a few additional words of information, every riddle could be solved.

A few years earlier, I'd owned *Super Mario Bros* for the NES. The objective of the game is to travel through eight linear worlds, defeat Bowser, and rescue the princess. For the seasoned veteran who could easily finish the game, rescuing the princess no longer posed a challenge and a new goal had to be established: for example, getting the maximum possible number of points that could be registered by the game (999,950) before the score wrapped back to zero. There was no reward for this accomplishment, no special finale or screen of credits, but it demonstrated a mastery beyond fulfilling the game's prescribed objective.

Changing the objectives within a video game is a drastically different project from that of solving it. Solving the game, by means of the information

provided by a walkthrough, is like cheating on a multiple choice exam. With the potential to reinvent the objectives of a game, the possibilities become baroque, technical, adventurous. While these reinventions might venture into the realm of the absurd (since reaching 999,950 points offers no institutionalized reward), they are really no more or less absurd than the prescribed objective of running through a number of stages until eventually being informed: "your quest is over."

In my first year of high school, I met Animal, who claimed to have unlimited power as a hacker. He had a computer, he had a modem that could be used to call other computers, and, in addition to having stolen money from the bank (which he did not provide evidence of), he had accumulated a wealth of pirated software, pornographic images, and illegal information (which he did provide evidence of). One Friday after school, he allowed me to personally witness his trove of wares as proof of the fact of his being a true hacker.

But what is a true hacker? Since at least the early 1980s, there have been numerous descriptions of what a hacker is. This multiplicity can be found in any of the major books on the subject (*Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, *The Hacker Crackdown*, *The Hacker Dictionary*, *Hacker Culture*, etc.). The pivotal question in defining the word "hacker" seems to be this: do you love hackers or do you hate them? Subsequently, the definition operates in a way similar to words like *anarchist*, *communist*, *feminist*, or *humanist*; the definition might include a description of the phenomena of a person, or persons, or a culture, or a subculture, but it also becomes a site for one to declare one's ideology in relation to a particular political situation. The word "hacker," then, can be used to characterize someone who has an intimate and flexible understanding of computer code (who is capable of manipulating, modifying, and disrupting this code), and who additionally might be constructed as a pioneer, martyr, subversive, or deviant (among many other possibilities).

For Steven Levy, the hacker is an innovative programmer and a hero of the computer revolution. For Clifford Stoll, the hacker is a trespasser and criminal. For Bruce Bethke, the hacker is a teenaged cyberpunk. In 1990, anyone

who could do more than I could was, to me, a hacker. If I could do more than someone else, they could rightly consider me a hacker. The ability to call a BBS, to talk with someone via computer, to download a text and print it—these tasks, all of which now seem commonplace, were magicks of their own. They seemed to be acts of technological wizardry, where the hacker stands in relation to non-hackers as the stage magician stands in relation to the members of the audience.

> His fingers trip lightly over the keyboard. With the punch of a return key, a string of characters – writ in the arcane language of computers – scrolls onto the black-and-white display in front of him. "OK," he says, "I'm in." Suddenly, horizontal rows of letters and numbers scroll from left to right across the screen – meaningless to the uninitiated eye. But for the hacker, the mishmash of data contains seductive, perhaps lucrative secrets. ("Cracking the Net" 54)

I left Animal's house with ASCII text files filled with dirty jokes, 101 names for vomit, seven issues of *Anarchy and Explosives*, and the first three issues of *Phrack*. I cracked the files open, filled the whole screen, twenty four rows by eighty columns, monotasking, monospaced letters, bright monochrome words illuminating the black virtual page. These texts changed my place in the world; I had gained new routes of access to the infinite networks of hacker culture: digital scrolls, letters carved in light, hardcore illicit mystical words that I would never find in a high school library or classroom. It was as though I could rip every page out of a library book and paste them together, end-to-end, transubstantiate the paper and ink into magnetic impressions on 5.25" floppy disk, and move through them with an up arrow, down arrow, page up & page down. These were texts broken free of institutions, giving me access to the very means of hacking, phreaking, and blowing shit up with pyrotechnical mastery.

CASE STUDY: *ANARCHY 'N' EXPLOSIVES* 7, by Doctor Dissector (1989).
This issue of *ANE* is a database of chemical cocktails, with thirty thousand words

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ANARCHY 'N' EXPLOSIVES - VOLUME 7
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By Doctor Dissector, 6/16/89


   Well, I've done it again, another issue of this series, all out, in no time
at all... In fact, this issue is being written only a few days from the last,
probably cuz it's summer now, and I can spend what little free time I have on
the computer to Anarchy shit. Anyway, here it is, and my generic warning label:

WARNING: THE INFORMATION CONTAINED WITHIN THIS DOCUMENT IS BOTH REAL AND
DANGEROUS. ACCIDENTAL OR INTENTIONAL MISUSE MAY CAUSE INJURY OR DEATH. THE
AUTHOR ASSUMES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ACTIONS OR USE OF THE INFORMATION IN
ANY ILLICIT MANNER. THE AUTHOR ASSUMES NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR DAMAGE OR INJURY
DUE TO THE MATERIAL COVERED, AND THE READER ASSUMES FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR
HIS/HER ACTIONS AFTER READING THE MATERIAL. AND AS ALWAYS, THIS DOCUMENT IS
INTENDED FOR RELEASE TO RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE, AND USE IT AT YOUR OWN RISK!

   Ok, now, lets cut the crap... This is issue 7, wow, I never would have
thought I'd get an issue out so fast... But, this one should be pretty good for
you anarchy fans out there. In this issue, we will cover incendiaries and
composite explosives; the ones I have in mind include Fire Fudge, the Incendiary
Brick, PETN (Pentaerythrite tetranitrate), RDX (Cyclonite), Composition B,
Composition C4, and Pentolite. Enjoy the phun.....
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Figure 1.1-1: *ANARCHY 'N' EXPLOSIVES 7*

dedicated to recipes for the construction of incendiaries and explosives. Although the first screen (twenty-four lines of text) doesn't provide the reader with any specific technical instruction, it contextualizes itself within the discourse of the computer underground. For the initiate reader, this selection of text might provide a useful node of entry into the network of ASCII text—although the particular passage will not tell us how to make fire fudge, it will serve to introduce us to the textual and technological materials that constitute ASCII literature.

The title contains two words, "ANARCHY" and "EXPLOSIVES," which could be read as dangerous, polemical, or revolutionary. To say the least, these are sensational words, emphasized in a particular way by means of their rendering in capital letters (a throwback to ancient stone carvings, more blunt, more authoritative, and more aggressive to the eye than their miniscule counterparts). The two words are separated by a flippant and informal 'N', distancing the word "ANARCHY" from its potential to be read in an official political sense, and distancing the word "EXPLOSIVES" from its potential to be read as a component of a legal or sanctioned exercise, such as that of the quarry.

The text states that it is "By" Doctor Dissector. The multiple levels of play in this name seem to suggest that it is a pseudonym rather than a proper name. Both words have the same first letter ("D") and the last four letters ("ctor"), the repetition of which provokes the question: how is the word "Doctor" like the word "Dissector," and by extension, what are the similarities and dissimilarities between the actions of the doctor and of the dissector? The name suggests a specialized knowledge (required to attain the title of "Doctor," whether medical or professorial), and also, in the word "Dissector," an attention to the finest details, and an ability to deconstruct, decompile, and cut apart. The two parts of the name also work to limit each other's range of signification; "Dissector" limits the range of "Doctor," at least in the sense that "Doctor" can no longer lend itself, for example, to the character of a trusted pediatrician. Furthermore, while "Doctor" can be a symbol of authority in the professional world, in this context, it renders the potential first name of the writer conspicuously absent, demonstrating perhaps a lack of professional accountability. In so far as this text is "by" Doctor

Dissector, we might also ask who Doctor Dissector is, to what extent we might even consider this to be a person, and if not a person, the extent to which this text's authorship can be assigned to a "Doctor Dissector."

The use of alias adds a troubled mimetic layer to every ASCII text in which it is used. We know that the electronic document was typed by a human being at a computer, and now we are reading a copy of (or at least potentially a copy of) that same document (linguistically, typographically, and materially identical), as it was published by the writer. The writer hypermediates his or her construction of identity by means of pseudonym, which is necessarily a fabricated character. The narrator or speaker within the text is likewise a fabrication, produced by a series of symbols configured by the writer. Now we have two blurry figures, writer and speaker, both gravitating toward a centre which is the text and its deployment (a reader who likewise assumes a character, who would be spoken to or confided in by the writer or narrator, who assumes a certain subcultural status in the masque of producing textual significance).

The first paragraph incorporates many of the linguistic hallmarks of ASCII writing: metacommentary ("Well, I've done it again"); non-standard elements of punctuation; informal language ("cuz"); vulgarity ("shit"); and unconventional grammatical constructions ("I can spend . . . time . . . to Anarchy shit.").

Doctor Dissector proceeds to introduce a "generic warning label," depicting a belief in a pre-existing genre of instructional manuals, within which the warning label is a common trope. Although he refers to the trope as "crap," the disclaimer is slammed across the screen in seven full lines of all-caps text. In the first line of the disclaimer, he declares the information in this text file to be "BOTH REAL AND DANGEROUS," as the disclaimer takes on the visual appearance of a barrier that one must trespass beyond in order to read the rest of the document. The warning functions in part because of its linguistic content, but also because of its typography. The typography of the file constitutes one of the elements with which the reader must be willing to clash if they are going to take up the call to *ANARCHY 'N' EXPLOSIVES*.

In the next paragraph, Doctor Dissector dismisses the disclaimer once again, then explains the promptness of the release of this issue (as though such diligence requires an apology), and finally provides a list of the types of incendiaries and explosives whose methods of manufacture will be revealed in the remainder of the text file. Most of the 30,000 words that constitute *ANE* 7 are drawn from other sources (some of which are uncredited), and the formatting and rhetoric differs from recipe to recipe, some of which appear to have been written on older computers (40-column upper case), while others are written in a more contemporary 80-column mixed case format.

The last phrase in this excerpt ("Enjoy the phun….") employs a phonetic variation on the word "fun." This particular substitution takes its cue from "phreaking" (or *ph*one *freaking*, the unauthorized use of telecommunications systems by phone freaks (or "phreaks"). Despite *ANE*'s focus on anarchy and explosives, it is also connected to phreak culture by means of its orthography and also because *ANE* is transmitted through the BBS circuit by means of telephone.

For me, *ANARCHY 'N' EXPLOSIVES* was one of the first texts that signalled the ways in which ASCII literature could be aggressive, countercultural, and illicit. From this and other files, I learned new lessons about vulgarity, how to make a pipe bomb, how to make a free phone call from a payphone, and how to pick a Master lock. Instead of mastering the codes of the computer, I could use a computer to obtain information about cracking the codes of the world. It was sensory overload, confronted by the mind-blowing vision of a quickening of the transmission, reception, and archiving of infinite immaterial information. Now I, who could only afford one pair of pants, might have the means to possess my own digital library full of arcane information. I could use all of it to my advantage, particularly the four magicks of the computer underground colloquially known by the acronym of H/P/A/C (Hacking, Phreaking, Anarchy, and Cracking), here represented by my own simple (but nevertheless ideological) constructions:

Hacking: using computers in inventive and unauthorized ways.

Phreaking: using telephone networks in inventive and unauthorized ways.

Anarchy: mischief and the unauthorized production of explosives.

Cracking: piracy and the unauthorized circumvention of data encryption.

All of these magicks, as I did (and continue to) perceive and define them, seemed to share a thread of anti-authoritarian style, structure, and technique. BBSes seemed to capture this attitude, using telephone lines to transmit computer data, something that telephone lines were never really designed to be used for. A pocket of technological possibility had opened up and most people didn't know anything about it. To know this made one a kind of hacker.

In 1991, I got my first hard drive, my first colour monitor, and saved up the money to buy a modem (2400-baud, capable of transmitting 240 characters per second). With this, I was finally able to call BBSes and access the computer underground by my own means. I set my computer up in the laundry room, on the clothes dryer, modem line hand-wired directly to the terminal block (a simple feat, but one that required a shift in thinking—who knew that telephony could be a DIY project?). From this makeshift laboratory, I dialled every Saskatoon BBS that I could get the number for. As I explored the city's networks, I laboured to download texts stored in BBS file areas, understanding the incredible fact that these files were written on a computer, then stored as binary code, then converted from magnetic disk storage into audio signals, then transferred through phone lines, converted from sound back to magnetic storage, from binary back to text, and on to my own computer screen:

writer→text→binary→audio→binary→text→reader

The very word, "modem" (*mo*dulator-*dem*odulator), gestures toward the twin functions of the device: to modulate (or encipher) binary data into sound, which can be transmitted by means of telephone line and to demodulate (or decipher)

sound into binary data. This process almost appears to fulfill the model of singularity in text (information that travels through multiple bodies while maintaining its essential *spirit*). That which we perceive as characters on the computer screen is stored on the computer as binary code, where numerical values stand in for ASCII characters. This data is stored inside of a hard drive, loaded into RAM when accessed, depicted as an image on the computer monitor, converted into sound, transmitted via telephone, etcetera. In this model, we have multiple devices of storage and many types of signifier, all in the name of distributing the text. The materiality of the text is different in every stage, whether in binary or ASCII values or typographical characters, whether on a computer screen, on a hard drive, or through the telephone line. And yet, in all of these states and through all of these conduits, there is something that remains the same. This evokes questions about the spirit. Can a soul travel thorough multiple bodies? If a body is dissolved and reconstituted, is the soul reconstituted too? If multiple copies of the same body are made, how is the soul divided?

These questions, in the context of the computer, ASCII, and the modem, inspire a certain kind of scepticism about the spirit of words. Can a word in binary code or as a whistling sound shooting through a phone line *mean* the same as a word on paper? Can there ever be said to be a transcendent spirit to the multiple incarnations of a text? It seems almost absurd that such a notion could be proposed, and yet this kind of reductive thinking presents itself in every undergraduate class that I teach, in which I encounter young people who have been taught by their high school instructors to read for *comprehension*, particularly a comprehension geared toward correctly answering multiple choice questions on standardized exams. But even though conformist reading practices can be monitored and tested, this doesn't mean that there is anything natural about such an approach to discourse. In this regard, *the thing* that young people are being taught to reduce the text to is irrelevant—they are being taught, primarily, that reduction of complexity *is what is to be done*, increasing the speed of discourse in prescribed ways, filtering out the multiplicity that machines can only identify as noise. Our young people are being taught engage with discourse as

though they are machines, and the purpose of this teaching style is clear: if people began to think about the irreducible possibility of every symbol at every juncture, factory labour everywhere would immediately grind to a halt.

Speeding up my own ability to transmit information, to encipher and decipher the messages of text, I upgraded to a 14.4k baud modem in 1994, boosting my transfer rate from one megabyte per hour to six megabytes per hour. Shortly thereafter, the system operator of Saskatoon's Corleone BBS had dialled long distance and downloaded the entire print runs to-date of *Cult of the Dead Cow* and *Hogs of Entropy*. While I had been impressed by *Phrack* and *ANE*, I was astonished by *cDc* and *HoE*, which put into action the kinds of hackerly and anarchic devices that the other publications had only written about. *HoE* and *cDc* were distinctly literary projects—it was not their manifest goal to transmit instructive information, but to disrupt the process of transmitting information. They were not merely explaining H/P/A/C to their readers, but demonstrating it through the structures and techniques that constituted their texts.

CASE STUDY: *Hogs of Entropy* 24: "tHe)<-RaD]<0/x\PiL4Ti0N" (1994).
This issue of *Hogs of Entropy* features three articles dedicated to the concept and language of "K-Rad." The title itself is an example of K-Rad orthography: in conventional symbols, it would read as "The K-Rad Compilation." K-Rad writing combines multiple techniques for modifying written language: for example, replacing alphabetical characters with non-alphabetical characters, corrupting the traditional spellings of words (often in a phonetic manner), and randomizing letter case. In the word "]<0/x\PiL4Ti0N," for instance, we see the following character substitutions:

"C"→"K"→"]<"
"o"→"0"
"m"→"/x\"
"p"→"P"
"i" remains the same

Hogs of Entropy Text Files Present...
"tHe)<-RaD]<0/x\PiL4Ti0N"

By: Abigwar
    Defiant
    Mogel

Warning: After Several Tests on Lab Mice we have concluded that
reading this text file, does, infact cause bodily harm to you. The nature
of this text file is parody, and in doing so the authors have been highly

Figure 1.1-2: "tHe)<-RaD]<0/x\PiL4Ti0N"

"l"→"L"

"a"→"4"

"t"→"T"

"i" remains the same

"o"→"0"

"n"→"N"

The character substitutions for "o" and "i" are standardized in the title, but we have multiple variations on the letters "t," "K," and "a" within the same title. Because the K-Rad style is a kind of hack, a kind of ongoing game, there is no authoritative set of standard character substitutions, but also no rule prohibiting such repetitions—in fact, no rules whatsoever. Any standardization within this system would work against the fluid and inventive dynamic, placing a brake on the style and play at its heart.

Unlike a text with standard orthography, every glyph within a K-Rad text must be actively demodulated, judged in terms of whether it should represent itself, a visual analogue, a phonetic analogue, or a visual/phonetic analogue. For example, the "]<" in the issue's title represents a "C" by means of "K." The simplest kind of substitution is the mixing of case, where "P" could stand in for "p." Although "P" and "p" might be less distant from one another then "]<" and "C," they are nevertheless different characters. If we have ever flattened them into meaning the same thing, we are now becoming aware of their difference. We are now incorporating this difference into our vision of signification.

This vision might seem to work against the natural order of language, but it really only denatures a technology that we have been conditioned to perceive as natural—we have believed in the potential to encode a clear and singular thought into language and to transmit this language to a recipient who subsequently decodes the language back into a clear and singular thought. I have already mentioned that a vision of singular meaning allows for the decreased friction of mechanical processes, such as those of the factory. Furthermore, the vision of a transcendent meaning in text is a mechanism for the production of conformity at every level of thought and action. As Ron Silliman says:

What happens when language moves toward and passes into a capitalist stage of development is an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word, with corresponding increases in its expository, descriptive, and narrative capacities, preconditions for the invention of "realism," the illusion of reality in capitalist thought. (*The New Sentence* 8)

By imagining discourse to be transparent and singular, we are being conditioned to believe in and respect the authority of those who would instruct us how to correctly interpret text, discourse, and world. By contrast, at the most elemental level, "tHe)<-RaD]<0/x\PiL4Ti0N" confronts us with its non-standard spelling, grammar, and orthography, requiring creative parsing in order to even perceive its words *as words*. And yet, when decrypting the text (for example, converting "]<" to "C") we are not actually changing the symbols on the page; although we might attempt to read through to the "C," the "]" and "<" remain physically present and continue to signify, even though we might attempt to filter this continued signification from our minds. If we believe that we have successfully filtered the continued signification of "]" and "<," we are merely relegating the perception of these extra layers to our unconscious mind, as we notice our own inner conflict when attempting to reduce or believe in the reduction of potential textual meaning. Information might travel by means of K-Rad texts, but this is not their primary function. Their discourse, like their visual presentation, is multiple (a field in which numerous elements blend and clash). The writing is not economical and it does not yield meaning easily; in fact, it resists any vision as singular as "meaning," making the goal of decipherment ridiculously inappropriate in this context, and by extension an absurd textual practice in general.

And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art (*Theory of Prose* 6)

There is something in the K-Rad texture, a stony feel, that brings us into a new mode of reading. Here we are actively engaging with glyphs as glyphs,

participating in a construction of meaning at the most elemental level. If we are performing the text in this way, how does it affect our perception of the institution of textual meaning and of our relation to the text as readers? Having been made aware of our participation of the production of meaning, in our performance of the text, our whole paradigm of reception changes, including our vision that there can be anything satisfactory or ideal about the vision of a naturalized discourse. And what is the purpose of this dissertation? I hope that it is not to communicate or to transmit information. This is a hackerly poetics, a recombination of ASCII literature, and a revolution in the teaching of reading and writing. Making pipe bombs was one thing, but there is greater potential energy here. I no longer want to blow things up with pipe bombs. *I want to blow up words with words.*

> The Text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not merely acceptable) plural. The Text . . . answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. ("From Work to Text" 159)

1.2> 1983-1989 (THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE)

This is the history of computing: first there was the dark time. Then, in 1977, there was the home computer. 1977 is not when the first computer was invented, or the year that the first computer was in a person's home, but it is the year that home computing became a major phenomenon with the release of the RadioShack TRS-80, the Commodore PET, and the Apple II. 1977 is also the year in which the Hayes modem—the first hobbyist's modem—was invented, and people gained the ability to transmit binary data via telephone line.

In the following year, Ward Christensen and Randy Suess created CBBS (Computer Bulletin Board System), which was not the first BBS, but was the first hobbyist's BBS—in other words, the first combination of hardware and software that would allow a home computer user to create a BBS server. While it had previously been possible for computer users to connect to one another via modem,

the BBS was an automated service that allowed computer users to dial in to a system featuring localized services such as electronic mail, games, and file areas. By the mid-1980s, a significant BBS culture was beginning to flourish worldwide.

A phone line, once designed exclusively for the purpose of vocal conversation, could now be used as a means for a person to connect to a cultural hub without having to leave his or her computer. The BBS was a world outside of the world, where every node was its own centre. Every BBS was a kind of barony, a region of its own, operating under its own authority, hosting its own unique community. It seemed to be a world of limitless possibility, with numerous territories operating outside of conventional geographical, material, social, and legal constraints. As Bruce Sterling says:

> Boards can be mysterious entities. The activities of their users can be hard to differentiate from conspiracy. Sometimes they *are* conspiracies. Boards have harboured, or have been accused of harbouring, all manner of fringe groups, and have abetted, or been accused of abetting, every manner of frowned-upon, sleazy, radical, and criminal activity. There are Satanist boards. Nazi boards. Pornographic boards. Pedophile boards. Drug-dealing boards. Anarchist boards. Communist boards. Gay and lesbian boards (these exist in great profusion, many of them quite lively with well-established histories). Religious cult boards. Evangelical boards. Witchcraft boards, hippie boards, punk boards, skateboarder boards. Boards for UFO believers. There may well be boards for serial killers, airline terrorists, and professional assassins. (*The Hacker Crackdown* 69)

His prose demonstrates the vision (which was also popular among computer enthusiasts at the time) that the BBS world is full of possibility, providing an environment for any kind of culture, any kind of art. But since computer users can only call BBSes that they have the phone number for, the sense is always one of a network that extends far beyond one's reach. The computer user's own vision of the BBS network will include very detailed impressions of the BBSes that they frequent, partial visions of BBSes that they have accessed a few times, glimpses of BBSes that they have seen a friend log on to, opaque boards that they have read

advertisements for but have never called, and many more (the vast majority) completely invisible, never heard of by the user; in other words, the BBS model is a model of multiplicity, a model of intertextuality, a model of a network that fluctuates between the present and absent, actual and virtual. This is the environment within which ASCII text files most actively thrived.

In 1963, the American Standards Association published the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII), the goal of which was to generate a standard and non-proprietary system for encoding characters (alphabetical, numerical, and a few others) in 7-bit data. In an era when proprietary programs encoded text in radically differing and incompatible ways, ASCII was designed to be a universally-readable file type with minimal additional mark-up.

In 1968, U.S. president Lyndon B Johnson issued a "Memorandum Approving the Adoption by the Federal Government of a Standard Code for Information Interchange." According to this document, the use of ASCII within the American government was inspired by "the need for achieving, with industry cooperation, greater compatibility among computers." Although ASCII was a government staple as early as the 1960s, it was not until the first IBM PCs were marketed in the early 1980s that ASCII became the household standard.

ASCII's history is a sparse one. As reported in a non-refereed narrative from wikidot.com (typographical errors and all): "For 18 years there was no talk of ASCII anywhere per se. At least this wa as far as IBM was concerned." ASCII's history remains elusive, which is acceptable here, because the purpose of *SCROLL / NETWORK / HACK* is not to historicize, but to examine how ASCII and the BBS have contributed to the production of experimental literature.

The combination of ASCII and BBS technologies created a set of very special conditions within which a text file could be produced on one computer and subsequently be recognized by any other computer. A computer user could upload a text file to the public file area of a BBS, and once that file had been uploaded, any other user of the BBS could download and read the file. Uploading a file to a

BBS constituted a form of publishing and disseminating text, and if a writer was lucky, the users who downloaded the file from one BBS would upload it elsewhere, further extending the possible range of dissemination for that text. The system worked against the notion of copyright, because in order to get these files out into the world, writers needed to allow (and encourage) BBS users to further transmit the files to other BBSes and to other area codes.

What I am describing is a participatory dissemination network, where every interconnection is a coupling of the technological means of distribution and the creative operation of that machinery by its human users. The distance that an ASCII text file could travel, in this sense, was determined by its reader as much as its publisher. This stands in contrast to what Adorno calls the culture industry, within which the masses are "an appendage of the machinery" (*The Culture Industry* 99), with no influence on the production or distribution of cultural goods. In the BBS environment, however, ASCII readers and writers have equal access to this machinery. This is in no small part due to the lack of corporate presence in the ASCII/BBS network, because this network was not yet recognized as a means of potential profit for the culture industry. As Jay David Bolter says:

> until the 1980s, it was not apparent to most readers and writers that the computer was a writing technology at all. Before the advent of word processing on personal computers, our literate culture regarded computers as "number-crunching" tools for engineers or as filing cabinets for bureaucratic data. (*Writing Space* 24)

In a Marxist's dream come true, ASCII readers and writers had access to their own unsanctioned means of production and distribution within the virtual terra nullius of the computer underground. Not only could BBS users disseminate text without cost to themselves or their readers, but they had no competition from the analogue culture industry (at least not within the BBS network).

The history of institutional and one-off ASCII documents surely goes back to the invention of the medium in the 1960s, but these earliest files and their histories are mostly inaccessible (at least I have never come across them). What I am particularly interested in here is not government documents, electronic

documents designed to be printed as codices, or codices archived in ASCII format (e.g. Project Gutenberg), but texts that have been produced in ASCII, designed to be read as ASCII, written by BBS users, and distributed by means of BBS.

Of the major publications of the era (1983-1989), four have been the most enduring and influential. Preliminary profiles of these publications are as follows:

Anarchy Inc: An oxymoron, a self-subverting name (as Stanley Fish would say, a self-consuming artefact). Like "hacking," "anarchy" is a loaded word, frequently used in an apolitical sense in order to suggest the making of mischief and explosives. In this context, "anarchy" might mean terrorizing McDonald's, daydreaming about overthrowing a country, or explaining why reality isn't. As frequent contributor the Daredevil says: "the word 'anarchy' stands for the lack of laws, rules, and order. In other words, that's us" ("The Anarchist's Guide to Existance"). With diverse anarchist writers incorporated under one imprint, *Anarchy Inc* produces some of the most playful and absurdist texts of its era, employing a metadiscursive tone and pioneering a highly-stylized ASCII typographic aesthetic. In *Phrack* 3.10 (February 1986), *Phrack*'s editors announced that the *Anarchy Inc* had ceased publishing, but at least one more file was released under the imprint ("B00G][: The Final Chapter") in 1987.

> Primary Area Code: 408 (Silicon Valley, California).
>
> Years Active: ≤1984 to ≥1987.
>
> Number of issues: ~65.

Metal Communications / Neon Knights: A publication with two names. Sometimes files are attributed to *Metal Communications*, sometimes *Neon Knights*, and often both. There is such a grind against an editorial or cultural centre, perhaps, that no one name is able to adequately define them. The group's name is flexible, informal, and resists cohesion. *MC/NK* is the most hardcore and brutish of these four publications, pushing the boundaries of free speech in every direction possible (including illicit information, the trash aesthetic, hate speech,

and explicit descriptions of torture, murder, and necrophilia). "Neon Knights" is the title of a heavy metal song by Black Sabbath (1980); *MC/NK* is inspired by heavy metal and produced and distributed by means of telecommunications; in other words, it is an ASCII publication dedicated to metal communications.

> Primary Area Codes: 201 and 609 (New Jersey) and 503 (Oregon).
>
> Years Active: ≤1985 to ≥1986.
>
> Number of issues: ~60.

Phrack: The name is a portmanteau of *Phr*eak and H*ack*, and the magazine features H/P/A/C instructional manuals and articles about computer underground culture. The word "phrack" is simultaneously a noun and an imperative verb: a phrack is a thing and it is also a thing that one must do. Of the four publications in this study, *Phrack* is the most organized, releasing multiple articles in each issue and dedicating regular columns to hacker world news and hacker pro-philes. In 1989, *Phrack* published "Control Office Administration Of Enhanced 911 Services For Special Services And Major Account Centers" (or the E-911 document), an article on the BellSouth Enhanced 911 system that was illegally downloaded from a government computer. The publication has gone through several editorial turnovers in recent decades, and the original editors are no longer affiliated with the publication.

> Primary Area Code: 314 (St. Louis, Missouri).
>
> Years Active: 1985 to Present.
>
> Number of issues (as of March 1, 1989): 24.

Cult of the Dead Cow: This publication loosely simulates a digital cult, naming its own writers as high priests. Of the four publications in the list, *cDc* has done the most to consciously shape their own mythology, publishing self-referential articles such as "Renegade Cows," "Book of Cow," and "The Bovine Epic of Creation." In the 1990s, they received a significant amount of media attention for their hacking exploits, producing the Back Orifice program and coining the term

"hacktivism." Although they continue to release issues sporadically, this aspect of the group is no longer a central component of their activity or identity.

Primary Area Code: 806 (Lubbock, Texas).

Years Active: 1985 to Present.

Number of issues (as of March 1, 1989): 99.

The historical range of my case studies includes some of the immediate predecessors of these four imprints, but focuses primarily on text files released by these four imprints from their inception until the American adoption of the 1988 Berne Convention Implementation Act (March 1, 1989), which significantly affected the conditions of digital copyright (this will be discussed at length in "NETWORK," which deals with copyright issues, piracy, and recombination). Although the title of this dissertation promises to focus on a period spanning from 1983 to 1989, I will also examine text files from the 1990s, particularly in so far as these files can be said to expand upon the literary experiments established by the four primary publications of this dissertation.

1.3> IS THERE A HACKER CULTURE?

The question is very relevant because hacker culture has thus far been the primary means by which academic and journalistic writing has arrived at the topic of ASCII text. No major articles have ever been written about *Anarchy Inc.* or *Metal Communications / Neon Knights*, and *Cult of the Dead Cow* has been discussed almost exclusively in terms of their hacking exploits rather than their publishing endeavours in the ASCII medium. Of the four imprints, only *Phrack* has made an impression upon mainstream media as a result of their text files, and this is primarily due to a legal and social interest in the E-911 document. Since their indictment, *Phrack* has become an emblem of history, culture, and politics, and in this capacity has been become almost the sole representative of ASCII publishing in depictions of the computer underground. Here is a genealogy of five texts that have adopted *Phrack* not as a study of text but as a symbol of free speech, the legality of computer use, or the recognition of a hacker culture:

1) The collaborative articles by Gordon Meyer and Jim Thomas, and Meyer's MA thesis, supervised by Thomas (1989-1990): Their texts, emanating from the University of Illinois' Department of Sociology, focus on the notion of a hacker culture (which they refer to as the "computer underground"), particularly the social organization of hackers and the potential relationship between hacking and postmodernism. Thomas and Meyer also founded and edited an ASCII-based journal, *Computer Underground Digest* (*CuD*) (1990-1999), as a forum for news, rants, and rumours from (and about) the computer underground. The works of Meyer and Thomas are in part inspired by *Phrack* magazine, particularly the reception of the E-911 document and Knight Lightning's subsequent indictment. By hosting a forum for the discussion of hacker culture, but refusing to publish illicit H/P/A/C information, Thomas and Meyer attempted to assure the continued existence of a forum that could address the concerns of the computer underground while staving off legal scrutiny. Their work particularly frames on hacking as a structured subculture rather than a random assemblage of social and legal deviations. While this approach has been useful in terms of refuting sweeping vilifications of hackerly activity, the publication tends to achieve this by means of its own sweeping statements, frequently reducing hackerly activities into a cohesive and whole culture.

2) "Crime and Puzzlement" by John Barlow (1990): Barlow, co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) provides a stylized libertarian interpretation of Operation Sun Devil and *Phrack*'s E-911 bust. Critiquing "Control Office Administration Of Enhanced 911 Services For Special Services And Major Account Centers" as writing, he says: "It is, quite simply, the worst writing I have ever tried to read" (157). He also ridicules the inflated price at which BellSouth appraised the "entirely virtual" document ($79,449.00), saying: "We will never know how this figure was reached or by whom, though I like to imagine an appraisal team consisting of Franz Kafka, Joseph Heller, and Thomas Pynchon." For Barlow, *Phrack*'s indictment served as a call-to-arms for civil libertarians

everywhere, as a battle for free speech on the electronic frontier, with the publication serving as a political emblem rather than as a material object in its own right.

3) *The Hacker Crackdown* by Bruce Sterling (1992): This book provides a sensationalized narrative account of the history of American telecommunications, the "digital underground," the arrests and trials of prominent hackers, and the rise of the civil libertarian movement that followed these arrests and trials. Among the most prominent narrative threads is the story of *Phrack*'s E-911 publication, a lengthy account of the trial, and a reprinting of the article as it originally appeared in *Phrack*. The book also makes reference to the names of *Anarchy Inc.* and *Metal Communications / Neon Knights* (erroneously referring to them as "hacker groups"), and also names some of the "lesser-known standards of the underground": ASCII imprints including *Legion of Doom*, *Cult of the Dead Cow*, *P/HUN*, *Pirate*, *The Syndicate Reports*, and *Activist Times Inc.* Sterling also reprints excerpts from the Mentor's "The Conscience of a Hacker," one of the most frequently-cited ASCII texts, which was originally published in *Phrack* 7 (1987), and subsequently repurposed in numerous contexts (recently appearing in *The Social Network* [2010], a film about the origins of Facebook).

4) *Hacker Culture* by Douglas Thomas (2002): In this book, Thomas makes the case that technological culture is a culture of secrecy and that hacking is a movement that exploits and reveals these technological and cultural secrets. He examines representations of the self and world within digital environments, using *Phrack* as one of his primary case studies. In the examination of *Phrack*, Thomas discusses the E-911 document at length, but also extends the scope of his study to the "*Phrack* Pro-Phile" (a regular feature where the magazine celebrates a figure from the hacking world), and "*Phrack* World News" (where the publishers reprint and repurpose mainstream news articles and also produce their own). Thomas also provides an in-depth interpretation of "The Conscience of a Hacker," focusing on the Mentor's depiction of hacker culture, particularly in relation to mainstream

journalistic representations of hacking and hackers. Thomas also discusses the Cult of the Dead Cow in terms of their exploits as a hacking group in the 1990s and 2000s, but not in relation to their ASCII imprint, *Cult of the Dead Cow*.

5) "Building Hacker Collective Identity One Text Phile at a Time: Reading *Phrack*" (2009) by Brett Lunceford: This article, launching off from the now familiar E-911 / "Conscience of a Hacker" model, attempts to read the full print run of *Phrack*, particularly in terms of its cultural significance. Lunceford explains: "Research concerning computer hackers generally focuses on how to stop them; far less attention is given to the texts they create. *Phrack*, an online hacker journal that has run almost continuously since 1985, is an important touchstone in hacker literature." The sentiment is valuable, as it seeks to reframe discourse about hacking, but it also says that *Phrack* is among the texts that "they" create, downplaying the magazine's radical polyphony and its calls for submissions that say "Anyone can write for Phrack Inc. now." Lunceford says that "the files in each issue of *Phrack* created a shared rhetorical vision concerning the place of the hacker underground within society and in relation to law enforcement officials, as well as what it means to be a hacker," but I find this construction to be patently untrue, and symptomatic of all of the aforementioned cultural and sociological appropriations of ASCII text files. ASCII text files are produced by diverse writers, even though they may be published under the same imprints. It is important to remember, as Barthes says:

> If you hammer a nail into a piece of wood, the wood has a different resistance according to the place you attack it: we say that wood is not isotropic. Neither is the text: the edges, the seam, are unpredictable. Just as (today's) physics must accommodate the non-isotropic character of certain environments, so structural analysis (semiology) must recognize the slightest resistance in the text, the irregular pattern of its veins. (*The Pleasure of the Text* 36-37)

In so far as ASCII texts have been appropriated for the sake of cultural studies, the potential signification of these texts has been reduced (has been treated as

though isotropic) in order to increase their speed, to improve the effect of their incorporation into cultural/historical theory, and for the sake of turning multiply-signifying texts into singular building blocks in order to subsequently construct stable visions of history or culture. While I do not support the epistemological underpinnings of this kind of history and culture, which reduces real objects into something less than what they are in order to facilitate the construction of a stable reality which can be subsequently be spoken about with authority, these texts have been valuable in reframing hacker culture, particularly in contrast to the culture industry's depictions of hacking as a strictly criminal activity. As framed by Thomas and Meyer in "The Baudy World of the Byte Bandit: A Postmodernist Interpretation of the Computer Underground" (1990):

> media definitions invoke the generalized metaphors of "conspiracies" and "criminal rings," (e.g., Camper, 1989; Zablit, 1989), "modem macho" evil-doers (Bloombecker, 1988), moral bankruptcy (Schwartz, 1988), "electronic trespassers" (Parker: 1983), "crazy kids dedicated to making mischief" (Sandza, 1984: 17), "electronic vandals" (Bequai: 1987), a new "threat" (Van, 1989), saboteurs ("Computer Sabateur," 1988), secret societies of criminals (WMAQ, 1990), and "high-tech street gangs" ("Hacker, 18," 1989). These images have prompted calls for community and law enforcement vigilance (Conly and McEwen, 1990: 2) and for application of the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act to prosecute and control the "criminals" (Cooley, 1984). These images fail to distinguish underground "hobbyists," who may infringe on legal norms but have no intention of pillaging, from felonious predators, who use technology to loot. Such terminology provides a common stock of knowledge that formats interpretations of CU activity in ways pre-patterned as requiring social control to protect the commonweal (e.g., Altheide, 1985).
>
> As Hollinger and Lanza-Kaduce (1988: 119), Kane (1989), and Pfuhl (1987) observed, the stigmatization of hackers has emerged primarily through value-laden media depictions.

According to Thomas and Meyer, mainstream journalists have approached the computer underground with a mandate to inspire a public distrust and scepticism of the computer underground. Let's accept the premise, for a moment, and say that the culture industry in the 1980s did propagate biases against a practice labelled as "hacking." What would the mainstream media stand to gain by depicting computer users as a threat? As Douglas Thomas says:

> Hacking promotes fear, but it is about a contained kind of fear, one that is positioned as a form of "juvenile delinquency" that these youth will, hopefully, grow out of. In that sense, hackers emerge as a type of "vandal," a criminal who is often malicious, who seeks to destroy things, yet is terribly elusive. The threat, like the technology that embodies the threat, is decentralized, ambiguous, and not terribly well understood, but it doesn't need to be. (*Hacker Culture* 32)

Like Noam Chomsky's vision of "Anticommunism as a Control Mechanism" as a means for sustaining the propaganda model of American media (*Manufacturing Consent* 29), hacking can be used to fill the role of the "ultimate evil," the outside threat designed to unite the otherwise fragmented masses under the banners of their leaders. The outside can be constituted by visions of communists, Satanists, drug traffickers, terrorists, or hackers (any of the groups that Bruce Sterling imagines as hosting their own BBSes). But in order to naturalize the state or culture industry, it is important for political and cultural authorities to depict the alternative as a terrifying one. It is even better if the outsider cannot be visually identified, though lurking among us. Even a close friend or family member could be a *hacker* without you knowing it—until, perhaps, it is *too late . . .*

Regardless of whether this kind of flattening of the culture industry is fair or not, this kind of distrust was shared by a large number of self-identified hackers. In this inverted model, a common foe (mainstream media) unites a disparate group of persons (hackers, libertarians, sociologists), particularly because the enemy of the computer underground (reductive, authoritative thought) is framed as the "ultimate evil." The fact that, in some nodes of the computer underground, the mainstream media was constructed and envisioned as a

monolithic, isotropic, straw man exhibits itself in numerous ASCII texts of the era. Thomas and Meyer criticize mainstream media, because:

> "Moral crusades" that lead to definitions of criminalized deviance tend to reduce the meanings of polysemic acts to unidimensional ones that limit understanding of both the nature of the acts and their broader relationship to the culture in which they occur. ("The Baudy World of the Byte Bandit")

But by reading media in this broad and general way, Thomas and Meyer create their own reductive reading, within which they dictate a reduced and unidimensional reading of mainstream depictions of hackers. By using this particular style of discourse to represent scare media, Thomas and Meyer are generating scare media of their own, now intended to terrify a new audience.

I am not trying to say that I don't like the five critical texts about which I have been ranting—in fact, I like them very much. Their contributions to discourse about hacking have been monumental, and they have influenced (and continue to influence) my vision of what might constitute a hackerly act. But I would like to propose a shift from the vision of "the hacker" to a vision of "the hackerly." The five texts have helped to establish such thing as a "hacker culture," but it is precisely this stabilization and reduction that *SCROLL / NETWORK / HACK* rejects. What I am speaking out against is not the intent of these texts, but the discursive models that they employ. These articles that link *Phrack* to "hacker culture" are primarily interested in what is denoted in these texts (rather than connoted), what is contained within its linguistic content (rather than within its typographic coding), what its diegetic messages are (rather than its mimetic potential), and what it signifies (rather than how its signifiers work).

Whether talking about the general concepts of a hacker culture or a mainstream media and its representation of hacker culture, we are clearly talking about something that does not exist in reality, but only through a process of flattening. By creating a definitive (and isotropic) outside, we begin to construct an oppositional definitive (and isotropic) inside. But there is another kind of confidence to be found beyond the confidence of reduction, with which one might deal with moments, with symbols, and not feel the need to stabilize everything

within a fixed framework. The hackerly begins to provide this model, within which we can deal with moments and maintain a flexibility, a freedom from rigid and mechanical thought. But also, in my depiction of depictions of hacker culture, I have likewise reduced the significance of the work of five major critics. I have not done this in order to represent them accurately, nor to advocate for a true hacker culture, but in order to construct and demonstrate the kind of tactics that I hope to avoid within my own writing. It is part of the struggle of this dissertation to begin to move away from (or to productively modify) the kind of textual practices that strive to reduce the potential for signification.

The irreducibility of hacker culture, the computer underground, and ASCII text will be demonstrated throughout this dissertation by means of excerpts from dozens of ASCII texts, a varied group of writings that share certain commonalities (such as the basic material conditions of their production and dissemination, which, if the medium is the message, are potent signifying agents), but which also share a diversity, an anarchy incorporated, a difference that affects the entire paradigm of textuality, extending into every node of the textual network.

Although these texts are diverse, many of them are narrated authoritatively, attempting to function as etiquette guides and manifestos. Some of these diverse texts ignore the potential diversity of their audience (or attempt to homogenize their audience by prescribing certain behaviours), positing the existence (or potential for the existence) of a stable hacker culture or a homogenous computer underground, codifying the structures of this world. Because of ASCII and BBS technologies, these writers and publishers are capable of self-representation through the production and dissemination of their own media. But as Dick Hebdige says of subcultural media:

> There is no reason to suppose that subcultures spontaneously affirm only those *blocked* 'readings' excluded from the airwaves and the newspapers (consciousness of subordinate status, a conflict model of society, etc.). They also articulate, to a greater or lesser extent, some of the *preferred* meanings and interpretations, those favoured by and transmitted through

the authorized channels of mass communication. (*Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 86)

Although I have described hackerly thought as flexible, and hackerly writing as interfering with the flow of information, this is not always the case in ASCII literature—in fact, only select texts seem to display the qualities that I refer to as "hackerly," regardless of whether they are written by those who have hacked or if they are thematically related to hacking techniques or hacker culture. Although we might say that the hackerly attitude champions flexibility and adaptability, numerous articles written by H/P/A/C practitioners and published in ASCII promote fixed visions of hacker culture as it is or as it should be.

As an example of a classic ASCII text that speaks out against mainstream representations of hacking (perceived or real), but which is also authoritative, I will draw from an article that was originally published by *Phrack* in their seventh issue (1986); reprinted in their fourteenth issue (1987); appropriated by *Cult of the Dead Cow* (who republished it as a virtual palimpsest in issue twelve, overwriting the lyrics to Metallica's "Master of Puppets" album); quoted in the movie *Hackers* (in which a character reads it from a copy of *2600* magazine) (1995); and referred to in the last three aforementioned critical articles, each of which quotes from the text and responds to its overarching themes.

CASE STUDY: *Phrack* 7.3: "The Conscience of a Hacker" by the Mentor (1986). "The following was written shortly after my arrest..." precedes the article's title. On the highest level of discourse (the narrative's outer frame), the text appeals to what Tzvetan Todorov refers to as *vraisemblance*:

> one can speak of the *vraisemblance* of a work in so far as it attempts to make us believe that it conforms to reality and not to its own laws. In other words, the *vraisemblable* is the mask which conceals the text's own laws and which we are supposed to take for a relation with reality. (qtd. in *Structuralist Poetics* 139)

The opening line of "The Conscience of a Hacker" attempts to legitimize the narrative that will follow by appealing to a reality that transcends the level of the

```
L 218    C 73    IA    312k    c:\ascii\lit\phrack\phrack-7
===========================================================
The following was written shortly after my arrest...

                    \/\The Conscience of a Hacker/\/

                                  by

                            +++The Mentor+++

                      Written on January 8, 1986
===========================================================
        Another one got caught today, it's all over the papers.  "Teenager
Arrested in Computer Crime Scandal", "Hacker Arrested after Bank Tampering"...
        Damn kids.  They're all alike.

        But did you, in your three-piece psychology and 1950's technobrain,
ever take a look behind the eyes of the hacker?  Did you ever wonder what
made him tick, what forces shaped him, what may have molded him?
        I am a hacker, enter my world...
        Mine is a world that begins with school... I'm smarter than most of
the other kids, this crap they teach us bores me...
        Damn underachiever.  They're all alike.
```

Figure 1.3-1: "The Conscience of a Hacker"

text (in other words, by naturalizing his discourse). Douglas Thomas is quick to express a belief in the reality of this vision, filling the gaps in the Mentor's statement; in his reading of the first line, he says: "the essay is, itself, autobiographical, written as the result of The Mentor's arrest" (*Hacker Culture* 72). If we closely observe the gaps in discourse that Douglas Thomas is filling in, it almost feels like we are watching the first step of a successful con game. Consider the following three points about the actual content of the Mentor's text: one, the statement does not explicitly declare whether or not his arrest was related to his hackerly activities; two, although we are told that the article was written *after* his arrest, it is not indicated whether or not the article has been written *in response to* his arrest; three: there is no indication of how long after his arrest this article was written. These gaps force the reader to fill in these aspects of narrative, collaborating in the construction of the figure of a person who is responsible for the text (whether we read this as the imaginary figure of the speaker or the imaginary figure of the author). Here, Douglas Thomas inserts the details that the text was written *as a result of* the arrest, and also that the text is *autobiographical*. Brett Lunceford takes his interest a step beyond, using the text as a jumping-off point for an investigation of the Mentor's life and times:

> Contrary to what some scholars have insinuated or outright stated, The Mentor was not a member of the hacker group Legion of Doom (LOD) until after his arrest. As part of the settlement with the phone company, The Mentor is not allowed to discuss the circumstances surrounding his arrest, so there can be little historical discussion on the text. (*Democracy and the Hacker Movement* 119)

Just as the text consists of various strata of elements that require assembly in order to be comprehended, so too does the speaker of the text, who we can either consider to be a fictional character called the Mentor or the stylized representation of a real-world person called the Mentor. We can say for certain that neither is a real-world person, and also that a reader shouldn't be deceived by characters within texts—even in the most masterful works of realism, characters, being

assemblages of symbols, necessarily lack the density of real-world persons. Brian McHale, speaking of Roman Ingarden's ontological strata of narrative, says:

> Not only are presented objects and worlds partly indeterminate and potentially ambiguous, they are also inevitably schematic, lacking the plenitude and density of real objects in the real world. Linguistic categories *abstract* properties from the flux of experience, and the world they project is not a completely filled-in picture but more like a connect-the-dots puzzle, a grid through whose interstices the concreteness of the real world inevitably escapes. (*Postmodernist Fiction* 32)

Later in "The Conscience of a Hacker" (selection not shown), the Mentor says, "We exist without skin color, without nationality, without religious bias." It is not that computer users do not live in nations or produce pigment; the personas that we construct by means of digital communication have ontological gaps, because we do not actually inhabit the digital environment—only our words do. We realize and manipulate our own gaps within the computer underground as we create avatars by means of writing. With "The Conscience of a Hacker," the Mentor takes command of these gaps, creating a styled and rhetorical text while also appealing, on a linguistic level, to a reality behind the story. In the first section of the text (the first two paragraphs), we see a clash of rhetorical and discursive styles, which Douglas Thomas reads in the following way:

> Immediately several things are reflected in the language and tone – the depersonalization of the hacker ("another one"); the condensation of all hacker activity into a headline format, suggesting that our only exposure to hackers and hacking comes from what is written about them in the papers and always and only in relation to their arrest; the explicit reference to age ("Damn kids"); and, perhaps most surprisingly, the assertion (which is a constant refrain in the piece) that "They're all alike." This introduction provides a split sense of interpretation. It also constitutes *misrepresentation* at the most basic level. The opening is a parody of the ways in which hackers are represented in media. But what may escape us

is the fact that it is an accurate portrayal of the *representation* of hackers in the popular imagination. (*Hacker Culture* 72-73)

Thomas's reading gestures toward the key junctures of dialogism. Although the article is prefaced by a statement ("The following was written shortly after my arrest...") which indicates that this text will follow narrative conventions associated with the testimonial, the first section includes at least two voices, neither of them clearly identifiable as that of the primary narrator:

1) The first two words of the article seem to depersonalize (or homogenize) the figure of the hacker by referring to a specific hacker in a news article as "another one." Thomas suggests that the voice that is speaking here is a person whose "only exposure to hackers and hacking comes from what is written about them in the papers and always and only in relation to their arrest," i.e. a person who is not a hacker, and therefore not the so-called hacker whose so-called conscience this text supposedly reflects. However, if we were to read "another one" in the same voice as the testimonial statement preceding the title of the article, we might read it as "another one *of us*." Although Thomas's reading is possible, the matter cannot be resolved by the text itself—the text can only act as a script, generating multitudinous possibilities for reading.

2) "Teenager Arrested in Computer Crime Scandal" and "Hacker Arrested after Bank Tampering," which Thomas refers to as being written in "a headline format." The quotation marks around the text suggest, at least, that the words are being quoted by the narrator and therefore spoken by someone who is not necessarily the narrator. Because the words in quotation marks appear immediately after the phrase "it's all over the papers," and because the words are rendered in title case, these phrases might reasonably be read as simulated newspaper headlines. If we do read it this way, it is a significant narrative moment; within an ASCII text, produced and distributed within the computer underground, the text is giving a voice to what we might read as Hebdige's "*preferred* meanings and interpretations, those favoured by and transmitted

through the authorized channels of mass communication." If the text is speaking out against mainstream media, it is doing so by emulating the same structures that it accuses the mainstream media of employing. Because the two headlines (if they are headlines) are so quickly undercut, so easily undermined, we could read their inclusion as straw figures, visions of the culture industry constructed from reductive headlines. In the same way that Thomas describes newspaper sensationalism as "the condensation of all hacker activity into a headline," these phrases might be said to condense all of the activity of the culture industry into two headlines and their shared discursive style.

Because the structural and rhetorical framework of the text is so clearly visible, it is not satisfactory to say that it provides us with immediated access to the *conscience* of a hacker; instead, we might say that it provides us with a demonstration of the *rhetoric* of a person who self-identifies as a hacker. Douglas Thomas, reading the first section of the text, concludes that:

> The Mentor's words have already told us more about the social and popular construction of hackers than they have about hackers themselves.
> (*Hacker Culture* 73)

We should take Thomas's statement one step further and say that the text tells us more about itself as an artefact, about its own structures and devices, than it does about the social and popular construction of hackers, or about hackers themselves. When the speaker in this text says "I am a hacker, enter my world..." (which could potentially be read as an access point to the phenomenal world), we can imagine the claim as an even more realistic one: "enter my world of discourse."

Although "The Conscience of a Hacker" produces a dialogue within which elements clash with one another and from which no singular reading can be derived, it also incorporates a refrain that speaks out against this multiplicity. The first five sections of the text all conclude with the phrase "They're all alike," each emanating from a slightly different perspective (roughly corresponding to the newspaper purchaser, the public high school teacher, the family member, etc.). Douglas Thomas says that "the constant refrain "They're all alike" is used to

demonstrate that hackers are quite unlike most boys" (*Hacker Culture* 74); in other words, like the simulated newspaper headlines, this refrain could be said to represent a reductive attitude toward hackers, emanating from the outside, attempting to strip hackers of their complexity. If we are to read the refrain in this manner, how are we to read the reversal that occurs in the sixth section, which begins with the phrase: "You bet your ass we're all alike"? Has the narrator been indoctrinated by the chorus, or is he reversing the statement's irony? That is, if the statement was once ironic, is he now stating it in earnest? Or, if it was once in earnest, is he now stating it ironically? Or has the chorus prophesied its coming?

We can make "The Conscious of a Hacker" signify in any of a number of ways, and yet none of them can emerge as authoritative. When we give due consideration to the text's clashing discourse, it is unfair, even, to say that "we're all alike" reduces hacker culture into sameness. The fact is, we are not all alike, whether in our relation to technology, or culture, or our experiences with the text. To reduce the text to *meaning*, we would venture into a dangerous territory, where we would run the risk of reducing culture to meaning, world to meaning, ourselves to meaning. From here, we might begin to accept the possibility that these *meanings* can be directly taught to us even in the absence of the thing itself. For more information, consult any student who has been evaluated on the basis of his or her performance on a standardized test. Is the format of the test designed to assess his or her cognitive ability and retention of lessons learned, or is it designed to standardize the student—that is, to reward or punish based on his or her belief in the institutions that propagate reductive thought and a faith in authority?

Is there a hacker culture? As Jack Kerouac says in "Is There a Beat Generation?":

> The question is very silly, because we should be wondering tonight, is there a world? But I could go and talk for five, ten, twenty minutes about is there a world, because there is really no world, because sometimes I'm walking on the ground and I see right through the ground. And there is no world. And you'll find out.

1.4> A HACKERLY POETICS

So far, I have indulged in three different kinds of narrative artifice: the künstlerroman (1.1), the historical narrative (1.2), and the cultural narrative (1.3). While these narratives have helped me to frame the "world" of discourse that this dissertation will relate to, I would now like to abandon these three modes of discourse in favour of a fourth: a hackerly poetics. My goal is not to tie ASCII texts to a history or culture (hacker or otherwise), but to describe some of the formal and structural features of innovative ASCII texts that might be called "hackerly." I am interested in a literature that connects to hacking, phreaking, anarchy, and cracking through its design and devices. I want texts that are fuelled by an obsession with narrative codes and structures, that hypermediate the junctures of narrative fixity and fluidity, that use language in unauthorized ways, that undertake acts of literary mischief, that explode with signification, that break copyright and other laws. I want texts that incorporate illicit information, piracy, signal jamming, and emphasize code. I want texts that hack the codes of text.

The "hackerly," in this dissertation, will suggest a particular approach to reading and writing, one that deftly manipulates the codes and materials of the text, freeing it from cultural and historical *vraisemblance* (which would have us abandon the text in favour of a constructed vision of what the text supposedly stands for). Walter Ong says that even the word "medium" contributes to the acceptance of this kind of reduction:

> Thinking of a 'medium' of communication or of 'media' of communication suggests that communication is a pipeline transfer of units of material called 'information' from one place to another. My mind is a box. I take a unit of 'information' out of it, encode the unit (that is, fit it to the size and shape of the pipe it will go through), and put it into one end of the pipe (the medium, something in the middle between two things). From the one end of the pipe the 'information' proceeds to the other end, where someone decodes it (restores its proper size and shape) and puts it in his or her own box-like container called a mind. (*Orality and Literacy* 176)

The model that Ong describes is structurally similar to the model of telecommunication in the first section of this chapter, whereby data is enciphered and deciphered by means of the modem, except that what is travelling through multiple bodies in Ong's construction is no longer a set of symbols, no longer binary data, but a transcendental signified, a message that exists independently of the text, and for which the text is merely a conduit:

information→writer→text→reader→information

The belief in transparent mediation manifests itself in a number of questions frequently asked by my students, like "what is this text about?" and "what is the writer trying to say?" Although these kinds of question are commonplace, we rarely hear someone ask "what is this chair about?" and "what is the carpenter trying to say?" This suggests to me that people are being trained to ignore the material conditions of the text, since some of the questions that we might ask about a chair could as fruitfully be asked about a text—for example, "what are its qualities?" and "what can we do with it?" This line of questioning does not render the chair invisible, or replace its nuances with rote statements that can be memorized and recited, and so it is incompatible with institutionalized public education, whose goal it is to indoctrinate young people into believing in the objectivity of authoritative statements. As Stanley Fish says:

> "Ordinary Language" is one of a number of terms used to designate a kind of language that "merely" presents or mirrors facts independently of any consideration of value, interest, perspective, purpose, and so on. Other such terms are "literal language," "scientific language," "propositional language," "logical language," "denotative language," "neutral language," "mathematical language," "serious (as opposed to fictional) language," "nonmetaphorical language," "representational language," "message-bearing language," "referential language," "descriptive language," and "objective language." Whatever the term, the claim is always the same: it is possible to specify a level at which language correlates with the

objective world and from which one can build up to contexts, situations, emotions, biases, and finally, at the outermost and dangerous limits, to literature. The claim is a far-reaching one, because to make it is at the same time to make claims about the nature of reality, the structure of the mind, the dynamics of perception, the autonomy of the self, the ontology of literature, the possibility and scope of formalization, the stability of literary (and therefore nonliterary) texts, the independence of fact from value, and the independence of meaning from interpretation. (*Is There a Text in This Class?* 97)

We can pretend to ignore the many sources of potential signification in text, just as we can pretend to ignore certain qualities of the phenomenal world. It is easy to imagine someone who proudly says, for example, "I don't care about architecture at all," who subsequently balks at the notion of living in an aluminium shed or a house without windows. A statement such as "I don't care about architecture at all" could meaningfully be reconstructed as: "architecture might be very important to me, but I choose to remain proudly ignorant of this possibility." Likewise, a proud ignorance of the many competing structures of signification in text forces one into becoming unconscious of the majority of a text's potential. As Johanna Drucker explains:

The notion of linguistic transparency implies *immateriality*, that which is insignificant in its materiality, to which nothing of linguistic value is contributed by the form of the written inscription which serves merely to offer up the "words" in as pure and unmediated a form as possible. The act of repression on which this notion depends is monumental, really, since it requires continual negation of the very evident fact of the existence of what is immediately before the eyes in the name of its signified value. (*The Visible Word* 24)

So, to become conscious of potential and multiplicity, we must resist the naturalization of history, culture, law, etcetera. The structures of discourse frame the entire potential for signification (modifying the vision that the "medium" is the message), and yet these structures (because they are not linguistically denoted

and might not be recognized as contributing to the "content" of discourse) are capable of affecting us on an unconscious level. By beginning to understand the formal qualities of communication, we will become conscious of aspects of discourse that we have been trained to be unconscious of. By recognizing discursive structures, we might hope to develop the tactics to hack them.

In his essay, "The Cyberpunk: The Individual as Reality Pirate," Timothy Leary defines proficient computer users, or "cyberpunks," as persons who "use all available data input to think for themselves" (365). These promethean entities are also known as "mavericks, independents, self-starters, nonconformists, oddballs, troublemakers, kooks, visionaries, iconoclasts, insurgents, blue-sky thinkers, loners, [and] smart-alecks," who do not play well with authoritarian forces such as the state, religious organizations, bureaucrats, and even sensible normal people (365). Timothy Leary uses the word "cyberpunk" to describe "the inventors, innovative writers, [and] risk-taking film directors . . . who boldly package and steer ideas out there where no thoughts have gone before" (369). Into this formula we could add any of those writers who are willing to imagine a mastery that extends beyond contemporary visions of structure, in terms of artistic conventions, discursive conventions, and legal conventions.

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige says, "I shall be returning again and again to Genet's major themes: the status and meaning of revolt, the idea of style as a form of Refusal, the elevation of crime into art (even though, in our case, the 'crimes' are only broken codes)" (2). We might take this to mean that our crimes are violations of codes *rather than* violations of laws, but when every kind of code can be recontextualized and subverted, legal codes are equally vulnerable to the hack. In our case, the "crimes" are only broken codes, not because we do not break laws, but because codified law is arbitrary, and its authority is unable to convince on any natural level.

The hackerly resists any discursive strategy that is authoritarian—even an attempt to codify hacker culture in a positive way becomes a weak play— crystalline codification, on a structural level, only continues to promote the mechanisms of authority. The hackerly hypermediates its own codes as it employs

them, on one hand gesturing toward a range of potential signification, and on the other hand gesturing toward its own material presence. The hackerly presents a metadiscourse, a source code that makes the play of signification accessible to its couriers. As Terence Hawkes (riffing on Viktor Shklovsky) puts it:

> We very readily cease to 'see' the world we live in, and become anaesthetized to its distinctive features. The aim of poetry is to reverse this process, to *defamiliarize* that with which we are overly familiar, to 'creatively deform' the usual, the normal, and so to inculcate a new, childlike, non-jaded vision in us. The poet thus aims to disrupt 'stock-responses', and to generate a heightened awareness: to restructure our ordinary perception of 'reality', so that we end by *seeing* the world instead of numbly recognizing it: or at least so that we end by designing a 'new' reality to replace the (no less fictional) one which we have inherited and become accustomed to. (*Structuralism and Semiotics* 62)

This is a hackerly model, which brings together the processes of reading and writing, which undermines the notion of authority and the so-called integrity of the work, and which hypermediates the codes and structures of discourse. The hackerly text retains a degree of belief in linguistic content, but it purposefully displays its own devices, typography, physical presence, dimensions, number of pages, means of transmission, etc.

By 1994, one could have called "The Conscience of a Hacker" a canonical ASCII text. It was soon to be featured in the movie *Hackers*, and it had been reprinted in numerous ASCII, HTML, and print publications. In terms of its mainstream cultural status, "The Conscience of a Hacker" was perhaps even more well known than the ASCII medium itself. Even into the twenty-first century, the text has continued to represent the computer underground, and the Mentor has continued to stand by its essentializing statements:

> Post-*WarGames* . . . pretty much the only public perception of hackers . . . was 'Hey we're going to start a nuclear war or play tic-tac-toe, one of the two' . . . and so I decided I would try to write what I really felt was the

essence of what we were doing and why we were doing it. (The Mentor, H2K2 speech, 2002)

Having championed the text for its reaction against mainstream media in the previous section, let us now consider the degree to which it reiterates significant aspects of the "public perception" of hackers depicted by *WarGames*, by juxtaposing lines from "The Conscience of a Hacker" and summary of the film.

1) "Teenager Arrested in Computer Crime Scandal": David Lightman, the protagonist of *WarGames* is a high school student who is arrested by the FBI after breaking into a NORAD computer, accidentally initiating a countdown to nuclear war.

2) "your . . . 1950's technobrain." While Lightman's father occupies himself with antiquated crossword puzzles, David plays arcade games, changes his grades via modem, and cracks the passwords of federal computers.

3) "I am a hacker, enter my world..." As David Lightman performs acts of hackerly prowess, he describes his techniques to Jennifer Mack, a fellow student from his science class.

4) "Mine is a world that begins with school... I'm smarter than most of the other kids, this crap they teach us bores me..." Although David Lightman receives a grade of F on his science quiz, he is easily able to outwit his instructor:

> "All right Lightman, maybe you can tell us who first suggested the idea of reproduction without sex."
>
> "Umm . . . your wife?"

These examples are all from the first two sections of the Mentor's text. The main riposte of "The Conscience of a Hacker" (not pictured here) parrots the central concern of *WarGames* by saying: "You build atomic bombs, you wage wars, you murder, cheat, and lie to us and try to make us believe it's for our own good, yet we're the criminals." But while David Lightman is forgiven his trespass at the end of the film (even valourized with a clasping of the neck, a ruffling of the hair, and

a bashful kiss), the narrator of "The Conscience of a Hacker" grumbles "You may stop this individual, but you can't stop us all... after all, we're all alike."

And so, "The Conscience of a Hacker" attempts to refute mainstream representations of hacking while reproducing many of its discursive tactics. Now we will look at a text file written in response to "The Conscience of a Hacker," employing radical literary devices in order to reveal the structures of the Mentor's canonical (and in some ways complicit) text, thickening it through the implementation of a particular form of typographic noise known as K-Rad.

CASE STUDY: *Brotherhood of Warez* **4: "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" by Th3 K0d3s1ay3r (1994).** The text does not overtly state that it is a rewriting of "The Conscience of a Hacker," but instead depends on the cultural competence of its readers to make this connection. The correlation between the structures and contents of the two texts must be parsed by the reader, since the orthographic modification of the text would make the interconnection unrecognizable by means of any purely mechanical process (a comparison of Ngrams, for example, would yield nothing). The reader of "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" must actively substitute alphabetical characters for non-alphabetical characters in order to perceive the similarities between the two texts. This activity textures the text, defamiliarizing signification within its own narrative, within "The Conscience of a Hacker," within digital writing, and within written discourse in general.

There is a further connection to be made between the use of K-Rad orthography and the linguistic content of the text. Whereas the subject of "The Conscience of a Hacker" is the computer adept, the subject of "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" is a character frequently parodied in ASCII literature, the warez courier. The warez courier trades in pirated software, uploading and downloading files on a number of BBSes in order to collect software, to gain file points, and to attain notoriety. According to the folklore of the computer underground, the native tongue of the warez courier is K-Rad. This legendary idiolect goes back at least as far as "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" (1984), which explains:

U b3t U'r3 azz w3'r3 all alik3... w3'v3 b33n sp00n-f3d baby f00d at
sk001 wh3n w3 hung3r3d f0r ANSi and k0d3z... th3 bitz 0f m3at U did l3t slip
thru w3r3 a l!tt13 0n th3 w311 d0n3 sid3 and ! had a l!tt13 tr0ub13 dig3sting
th3m. W3'v3 b33n d0minat3d by int3113ctua1z, 0r ign0r3d by dum sk01ar dud3z.
Th3 f3w that had s0m3thing t0 t3ach ta1k3d in s0m3 fancee shmancee eng1ish
1anguag3 0r s0m3thing, and ! w0u1dn't kn0w what th3y w3r3 ta1king ab0ut anyway.

Thiz iz 0ur w0r1d n0w... th3 w0r1d 0f th3 k0d3 and th3 k0nz013 k0p!3r,
th3 b3auty 0f the f!13 p0int. W3 mak3 uz3 0f s0m3 t313f0n3 thing 0r s0m3thing
f0r fr33 with k0d3z s0 w3 d0n't hav3 t0 pay t0 trad3 -15 day gam3z and th3
lat3zt ANSi r313as3z, and U ka11 uz kriminalz. W3 trad3 cr3dit cardz... and
U ka11 uz kriminalz. W3 diztribut3 c0pyright3d s0ftwar3... and U ka11 uz
kriminalz. W3 st3a1 gam3z fr0m radi0 shack... and U ka11 uz kriminalz. W3
3x!st with0ut skin k010r, (cuz w3'r3 a1wayz insid3 d0wn10ading and up10ading)
with0ut r31igious bias, (cuz w3 hav3 kn0w id3a what th3 h311 r31igi0s bias iz)
with0ut int311ig3nc3... and U ka11 uz kriminalz. U start warz and stuff, y3t
w3'r3 th3 kriminalz.

Y3z, ! am a krimina1. My krim3 iz that 0f stupidity. My krim3 iz that
0f judging p30p13 by h0w much th3y up10ad and h0w k-rad th3y'r3 typing iz, n0t
what th3y 100k 1!k3 0r if th3y can sp311 th3y'r3 nam3 right th3 first tim3
with0ut m3ssing up. My krim3 iz that 0f st3a1ing U'r3 w0rk and putting my nam3
0n it, and U g3t a11 huffy puffy ab0ut it.

Figure 1.4-1: "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r"

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REAL PIRATES DON'T SAY "K-K00L", "K-AWESOME",
"X10DER", "L8R0N", OR ANYTHING OF THE SORT.
REAL PIRATES KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "F" AND
"PH" (I.E."PHILES", "PHUCK", "FONE", ETC.).

As parody, on the most easily identifiable level, we have a warez courier attempting to legitimize his actions by means of the same discursive strategy as the hacker in "The Conscience of a Hacker," but the courier lacks the ability to transmit information as clearly and quickly as the hacker; his typographic noise obscures any illusion of a transcendental signified, and his rhetorical flourishes take wrong turns in relation to the original text. For instance, where "The Conscience of a Hacker" objects to the criminality of certain hackerly behaviours:

> We explore... and you call us criminals. We seek after knowledge... and
> you call us criminals.

"Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" replaces the romantic goals of exploring and obtaining knowledge with unambiguously criminal acts:

> W3 d|ztr|but3 c0pyr1ght3d s0ftwar3... and U ka11 uz kr|m|na1z. W3 st3a1
> gam3z fr0m rad|0 shack... and U ka11 uz kr|m|na1z.

Where "The Conscience of a Hacker" describes the environment of the computer underground with a rosy transcendent humanism:

> My crime is that of judging people by what they say and think, not what
> they look like.

"Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" depicts the computer underground as superficial:

> My kr|m3 iz that 0f judg|ng p30pl3 by h0w much th3y up10ad and h0w k-
> rad th3y'r3 typ|ng iz, n0t what th3y 100k 1|k3 0r |f th3y can sp311 th3y'r3
> nam3 r|ght th3 f|rst t|m3 w|th0ut m3ss|ng up.

If this is to be read as a satire of the courier, it is a very gentle satire, as it targets an archetypical figure rather than any actual and specifically-named person or group. It applies to no real person, and even a courier can laugh at it. But why involve "The Conscience of a Hacker" in this satire? On one hand, "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" might be said to mix the sacred and the profane, corrupting the Mentor's sacred text with the noise of K-Rad; in this vision, the

satire could demonstrate a reverence for "The Conscience of a Hacker." On the other hand, the Mentor's text has been appropriated without permission, essentially pirated, snatched away from the authority and integrity of its original context. The incorporation of the structure of "The Conscience of a Hacker" cannot be a wholly respectful one, but must also allow for the possibility of reading it as a parody of the Mentor's discourse.

By juxtaposing quotations from the Mentor's text and Th3 K0d3s1ay3r's text, we have already seen two examples of potential gaps in the Mentor's rhetoric. One, that it is not incongruent for those who believe in law to refer to people who commit crimes as "criminals"; two, that the computer underground, while a different kind of environment than the familiar physical world, has its own kinds of biases about the etiquette and class markers of its people. In both of these examples, it is not only the caricature of the warez courier that is the subject of parody, but also the rhetoric of "The Conscience of a Hacker."

Orthography aside, the content of "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" faithfully reproduces large blocks of the source text. For example, the linguistic content of the following passage is identical to "The Conscience of a Hacker" except that it replaces the word "hacker" with "courier":

> But d|d U, |n U'r3 3-p|3c3 psych010gy and 1950's t3chn0bra|n, 3v3r tak3 a
> 100k b3h|nd th3 3y3z 0f a k0ur|3r? D|d U 3v3r w0nd3r what mad3 h|m
> t|ck, what f0rc3z shap3d h|m, what may hav3 m01d3d h|m?
>
> | am a k0ur|3r, 3nt3r my w0r1d...

From the simple modifications that occur in passages like this one might conclude that "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" is weak, that its inversions make it a one-trick pony. But by imitating "The Conscience of a Hacker" so closely, it raises some questions about the integrity of the original text. Why is "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" so similar to "The Conscience of a Hacker"? What is it about the structures, the devices of the original that legitimize its being used by Th3 K0d3s1ay3r in this way, barely modified at all? And regardless of the possibilities for how we might begin to answer the question, the point is that the question itself has become hypermediated by "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r."

In "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r," "The Conscience of a Hacker" has been targeted at the level of its clarity, authority, and its ability to produce meaning and significance. K-Rad orthography adds noise to language at the level of the glyph, demonstrating the arbitrary nature of the glyph, of the signifier, of discourse. "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" has not invented the materiality of the glyph, but K-Rad orthography brings attention to the glyph in a new way—by defamiliarizing it. In doing this, the K-Rad brings into question any signifier that is constructed of glyphs. "The Conscience of a Hacker," which has become an emblem of the computer underground (or a rallying cry of so-called hacker culture) cannot become naturalized, but must be revealed, textured, corrupted by a new generation of hackers. As Douglas Thomas says:

> The voice of the hacker, which sets out to engage technology, becomes, in its parental echo, the voice of a society that sees technology through a purely institutional lens. Those echoes, which seek only to order and condense the world (and everything in it) into an outdated institutional matrix, demonstrate precisely why the hacker cannot be integrated into the social fabric. (*Hacker Culture* 75)

In this instance, the Mentor's text is both consecrated (thorough its repetition) and desacralized (through its corruption). "The Conscience of a Hacker" clearly influences "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" not simply as the target of satire, but as a source of energy, like a corpse emitting heat, being overtaken by micro-organisms. The energy pours from it into that which feeds off of it, into the innumerable nodes of the network of texts to come. By inscribing a new text, Th3 K0d3s1ay3r engages in a practice of reading the original, but also decomposes the original material, recomposing it as new text.

As satire, we could read "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" as a gesture toward faults in "The Conscience of a Hacker," invalidating the transparency, rhetoric, style, and logic of the original. We could imagine "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" as mocking the complicity of "The Conscience of a Hacker" and its tendency to reproduce the same cultural assumptions and prescriptions as *WarGames* and other dominant media of the 1980s. Or, we could simply conceive

of the hackerly as that need to modify codes, to reconstruct what already exists, to defamiliarize that which threatens to become deadened by conventional use. In this regard, the function of "Th3 K0nsc|3nc3 0f a K0ur|3r" might be said to bear a strong familial resemblance to "The Conscience of a Hacker," this time responding to a new kind of parent culture, yielding a new kind of text.

> The text is outside pleasure, outside criticism, *unless it is reached through another text of bliss:* you cannot speak "on" such a text, you can only speak "in" it, *in its fashion . . .* (*The Pleasure of the Text* 22)

What I am talking about is the game of game-making. As Bruce Sterling says in *The Hacker Crackdown*, "You still play other computer games, but now you have a new and bigger game" (81). The statement, in its original context, might trivialize hacking, but there is an unwitting intelligence within it, differentiating between two orders of mastery: 1) mastery that takes place within a system, where we strive to expertly follow the codes and rules of a game, and 2) mastery that overruns a system, where we modify codes and rules in order to disrupt and hypermediate the game, moving from writing about hacking to writing that hacks.

1.5> TEXT AS MATERIAL

Each chapter in this dissertation discusses a range of signifying potential in ASCII texts that goes beyond the linguistic characteristics of the text. Talk as we might about the multiplicity of potential signification, if we limit this discussion to the linguistic dimension of text, we are ignoring a great deal of the signal at play. These chapters will investigate the following extralinguistic dimensions of ASCII writing in so far as they contribute to a text's range of potential signification:

SCROLL: The materiality of the digital file, monotasking, the depth of the 80×24 computer screen, the constraints of the ASCII typeface, the ASCII typeface's contribution to concrete art, inventive ASCII typography, the effect of the scroll on narrative arc, and the hypermediated structures of ASCII.

NETWORK: The means of distribution in a digital environment, the BBS network as rhizomatic, the piracy and modification of ASCII text files, the proliferation of corrupted file copies, authorial anonymity, the politics of copyright, reproduction, recombination, remediation, and recontextualization.

HACK: Orthography, character substitution, inter-genre writing, the disclaimer, line noise, signal jamming, and the signifying grapheme.

The dissertation incorporates numerous case studies, each quoting unwieldy lexias of text, each responding with open and multidimensional simulations of reading. The case studies will constitute the majority of the body of this dissertation. They are designed to be numerous, gratuitous, and extensive in order to simulate a network of ASCII literature, within which we might travel in any number of directions, grappling with and manipulating textual materials in a kind of narrative adventure. We will always find ourselves within the moments of textuality, at least in so far as we continue to engage with the materials of text files, ASCII literature, and the technology and materiality of writing. The case studies will contribute to a criticism without building toward an overarching reality or authority, but simulating the experience of interacting with these textual materials and in relation to one another. As T.S. Eliot says:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. ("Hamlet and His Problems" 85-86)

The paratactic arrangement of case studies and other fragments of text in this dissertation is intended to create sparks, to excite the critical and creative imagination of the reader, and not to gesture toward a *particular*, but to juxtapose certain networks of evocative symbols (whether from ASCII texts or literary theory), attempting to demonstrate a multiplicity of possible signification instead

of attempting to harden the connections between objects by means of describing these connections. As Charles Bernstein says:

> There is no evidence that the conventional expository prose that is the ubiquitous output of the academic profession produces more insights or better research than nonexpository modes. There is no evidence that a tone of austere probity rather than tones that are ironic or raucous furthers the value of teaching or inquiry. It may be true that standard academic prose permits dissident ideas, but ideas mean little if not embodied in material practices, and, for those in the academic profession, writing is one of the most fundamental of such practices. Writing is never neutral, never an objective mechanism for the delivery of facts. (*Attack of the Difficult Poems* 22)

This dissertation will not just describe the processes of hackerly reading and writing—it will demonstrate them. Texts become hackerly when they become textured, when they hypermediate codes, when they subvert belief in a linguistic content or a transcendental signified behind a text, whether this text is deemed to be literary or critical in nature. I will approach literary theory in the same way as I approach ASCII, treating it as undifferentiated material that I cannot believe to be authoritative or signifying, but which I must interact with at the level of the signifier and of the structure, unable to exalt or revere it. As Roland Barthes says:

> What we seek is to sketch the stereographic space of writing (which will here be a classic, readerly writing). The commentary, based on the affirmation of the plural, cannot therefore work with "respect" to the text; the tutor text will ceaselessly be broken, interrupted without any regard for its natural divisions (syntactical, rhetorical, anecdotic); inventory, explanation, and digression may deter any observation of suspense, may even separate verb and complement, noun and attribute; the work of the commentary, once it is separated from any ideology of totality, consists precisely in *manhandling* the text, *interrupting* it. What is thereby denied is not the *quality* of the text . . . but its "naturalness." (*S/Z* 14-15)

I presume that Barthes would appreciate the notion of his own work being handled in the same way. I have no interest in summarizing texts or reading them in a reductive manner. I do not want to speak for these texts and I do not want to speak about them—I want to speak *with* them, extending their symbolic networks in order to drive the thoughts and arguments of this dissertation. Within these case studies, information will be impeded, connecting paratactically and opening up in multiple directions. In information theory, this style might be said to be high in noise; in formalist theory, it could be said to defamiliarize the reading process. My hope is that this text will work against the rote labour of information and toward a radical and hackerly imagination.

> I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would try not to judge but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply not judgments but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would invent them sometimes—all the better. All the better. Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms. ("The Masked Philosopher" 323)

2.0> SCROLL

In the introduction to this dissertation, I met Animal, a hacker, for the first time. Upon entering his computer room, I discovered what to me resembled a laboratory, a temple, an archive, a crack house, an isolationist's plywood shack. In this mysterious location, I saw incredible devices powered and interconnected by numerous cables, making extraordinary technological feats possible. From this room, Animal could connect to other computers through a telephone line. He could download games for free on the day they were released. He could even read books that were not printed on paper, but which appeared directly on his computer monitor. All of these feats are now commonplace, but were once a mystery. As Fluegelman and Hewes explained one such feat in 1983:

> Figure 3-7 shows the result of scrolling. What had been the first line of text in Figure 3-6 has disappeared, all the rest of the lines have moved up, and your new line of text has appeared at the bottom. This scrolling process occurs automatically as you continue typing; when you get to the end of the new line, the screen will scroll again. (*Writing in the Computer Age* 55-56)

Even the idea of scrolling was once mind-blowing. Readers and writers were using cutting-edge technologies to simulate the ancient scroll, of all things, a vessel associated with ancient Greek history, the Torah, and *Dungeons & Dragons*. Each ASCII text file is a single page, unrolling in a continuous ribbon of words, beginning at the top of the scroll and ending at the bottom. In a sense, this technology simulates a return to an ancient textual environment before the codex, while at the same time producing a futuristic sensation, with a new textual interface and a new relation to materiality, described by fiction writers as:

> Cyberspace. . . . A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light [range] in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding . . . (William Gibson, qtd. in *Hacker Culture* xii)

Even critical writers of the time were known to invoke mystical visions in order to describe electronic text. For example, in 1987 Michael Heim described the experience of using a word processor in this way:

> You learn to address yourself to unheard of entities. You learn to speak of files that possess no apparent physical dimensions . . . and monitors that provide a certain vigilance over your own words. You learn to navigate with wraparound and with a cursor . . . You even learn the rudiments of RAM and ROM memory, mouse compatibility, and the ASCII code.
> (*Electric Language: A Philosophical Study of Word Processing* 127)

Today, learning how to use a computer is as banal as learning how to watch television. We bank electronically, buy merchandise electronically, register for classes electronically, read electronically, listen to music electronically, and watch television and movies electronically. But before household Internet access, learning how to use a computer could have reasonably been framed as a personal journey of exploration, a kind of chivalric romance into the fairy world of simulacra and immateriality. In the 1980s, and even in the 1990s, certain writers even insisted that computers were still within the realm of science fiction, and that the digital was not real. In the words of Bruce Sterling (1992):

> Cyberspace is *not real*! "Real" things are physical objects, such as trees and shoes and cars. Hacking takes place on a screen. Words aren't physical, numbers (even telephone numbers and credit card numbers) aren't physical. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but data will never hurt me. Computers *simulate* reality, such as computer games that simulate tank battles or dogfights or spaceships. Simulations are just make-believe, and the stuff in computers is *not real*. (*The Hacker Crackdown* 81)

If the simulated world within a computer game is not real, this is only to the same degree that the simulated worlds within cinema, television, and books are not real. The worlds depicted within the simulations might not actually exist, but the mechanisms that create these simulations are undeniably real. It is true that ASCII texts appear on computer monitors as projections of light and shadow. It is also

true that you can read an electronic text in a dark room. But as magical as they might seem to be, electronic texts are nevertheless physical objects, produced by the technologies of the keyboard, the magnetized disk, and the illuminated screen. This chapter will begin to look at the physical properties of the digital scroll, particularly in so far as its materiality has forced writers to work within particular textual conditions, to adopt new formal and typographic practices, and to produce new narrative structures in response to these constraints.

2.1> THE LIMITLESS DEPTH OF EVERY SURFACE

SCREEN CAPTURE: *Hogs of Entropy* **87: "mE t0o!@#" by Mogel (1995).** When engaging with these screen captures, we need to be aware of the following: ASCII text files are written (and designed to be viewed) in a specific aspect ratio, always displaying a set number of characters per screen. While the page of the conventional codex is a vertical rectangle, the ASCII screen is the 4:3 horizontal rectangle. With a line that is long in length (80 columns) and a screen that is short in height (25 lines in height, one of which is occupied by the title bar), those who engage with it must enter into a deep immersion experience. Because of the visual limitations produced by the dimensions of the screen, ASCII reader and writer, at any given moment, can only see the small selection of text that is visible on one screen, rendering context invisible, making the document seem to be less of a whole and more of an assemblage of ranges of vision. When reading a selection of ASCII text, we are inside of a node within an intratextual network that is unknowable in its entirety, generating an intensity of the present experience for writers and readers. Fluegelman and Hewes say:

> it's helpful to think of your text as actually residing on a long scroll that is passing through your screen display. Figure 3-8 illustrates this concept. It represents in graphic form about 70 lines of text on such a scroll. The screen outline marked A indicates what you would be able to see if you scrolled to the beginning of your text. Position C shows the screen scrolled

"This t-file is lame."

What's the fucks wrong with you? What's your problem? Is this file too boring for you? Not enough talk about sex? Not enough big exciting things happening for you? Not enough vampires and big bad monsters chasing innocent people? Not enough humor? Do you only read a t-file to get a chuckle? Is that all you're here for? Is there not enough structure for you? Did I not follow enough of some ancient rules on writing? Is this too many ideas here for you to handle? Are you mad 'cause i didn't spoon feed you? Is it too much for you to read between the lines? Did I put too much sarcasm in this file? Is the irony a little too hidden for you to get?

What can I do to spice this file up for you? How can I make it exciting enough to meet your standards? What can I do? Should I add a naked virgin girl with big jiggling mountain-like breasts running through the woods horny and naked? Why don't I add a list of a thousand badly written and redundant jokes about _Star Trek_ or college life or computers? I'm sure that those will be a real hoot. Should I have included plans to build a bomb out of a taco?

Whatever happened to the value in something that made people think?

Figure 2.1-1: "mE t0o!@#"

54

to the end of the text. And position B shows the screen scrolled to display

roughly lines 30 through 54. (*Writing in the Computer Age* 56)

When using screen captures for case studies, the uniform dimensions of the screen

(a 80×24 grid, 1920 squares visible at all times) seem to depict an arbitrary

portion of text, at the same time rigidly imposed by the material conditions of the

medium. On one hand, the screen captures seem loose because they contain more

text than I intend to respond to—perhaps an extra paragraph or two. On the other

hand, they seem tight because they challenge the depiction of any large-scale

narrative issue that cannot be illustrated by means of a single screen capture. I

may select any range of text, but I cannot select an amount that is any more or less

than twenty-four lines in length. Roland Barthes deals with a similar constraint in

S/Z when chopping up "Sarrasine," but his constraint is to engage with the text in

its entirety, in segments of any length that he chooses:

> The tutor signifier will be cut up into a series of brief, contiguous
>
> fragments, which we shall call *lexias*, since they are the units in reading.
>
> This cutting up, admittedly, will be arbitrary in the extreme; it will imply
>
> no methodological responsibility, since it will bear on the signifier,
>
> whereas the proposed analysis bears solely on the signified. The lexia will
>
> be a matter of convenience: it will suffice that the lexia be the best
>
> possible space in which we can observe meanings; its dimension,
>
> empirically determined, estimated, will depend on the density of
>
> connotations, variable according to the moments of the text: all we require
>
> is that each lexia should have at most three or four meanings to be
>
> enumerated. (*S/Z* 13-14)

In this dissertation, each *lexia* will have infinite possible meanings (of which we

will seek none, though enumerating multiple significant qualities of each). These

lexias will be ruled by the dimensions of the computer screen. It is, after all,

within these constraints that these texts have been typographically arranged; this

arrangement, because it is never neutral, will be recognized here as an essential

signifying agent in ASCII textuality. As Jerome McGann says:

To read a Blake text in an original or a facsimile is to be told that "author's intentions" dominate the bibliographic signifiers in the same way that they dominate the linguistic signifiers. And while this is true, to a certain (but very limited) extent, for Blake, it is not true for most authors. Blake is unique in the history of English literature precisely because of his effort to bring every aspect of the signifying process, linguistic as well as bibliographic, under authorial control: in fact, to make the author's intention what many critics believe it is and ought to be, the ultimate and sole authority of the entire text. (*The Textual Condition* 57)

Although we are not interested in the author's intention (particularly in the form of authorized signification), it is important to note that ASCII writers are not only in control of the linguistic composition, but also in control of visual composition. In the production and dissemination of ASCII, the text isn't arranged and formatted in the same way as it is in the book industry, where typography is usually determined by a designer who is not the writer. With the ASCII text file, there is typically a 1:1 relationship between the text as it is initially inscribed and as it is finally published. In this context, typographical signification becomes particularly relevant, perhaps even more relevant than it was in the context of typewriting. As Marshall McLuhan says:

It is as if a symphony composer, instead of sending his manuscript to the printer and thence to the conductor and to the individual members of the orchestra, were to compose directly on an electronic instrument that would render each note or theme as if on the appropriate instrument. This would end at once the delegation and specialism of the symphony orchestra that makes it such a natural model of the mechanical and industrial age. The typewriter, with regard to the poet or novelist, comes very close to the promise of electronic music, insofar as it compresses or unifies the various jobs of poetic composition and publication. (*Understanding Media* 232)

We must recall that the typewriter promises its user the ability to *write in mechanical type*, to produce mechanical print without needing a letterpress (a costly and cumbersome machine). The typewriter might only allow the writer to

produce one original copy (and perhaps a limited number of carbon copies), but it also allows a writer to do something that has never before been possible: to compose a text with "the lines perfectly regular, all justified on the right side, everything coming out even visually, and without the aid of guidelines or ruled borders that often occur in manuscripts" (*Orality and Literacy* 122).

Like the typewriter, ASCII's typography is less customizable than that of the letterpress, but the trade-off is its accessibility and functionality. Where reproducibility is one of the typewriter's greatest shortcomings, it is perhaps ASCII's greatest strength; we can produce a text file, save it to disk, and copy it limitless times, each copy being identical to the original. As Michael Heim says:

> no editor intervenes; the author has hands on the final look and wording of documents without having to answer to copy editors. The liberation of the typefied, public document seems totally positive. But with the new approach comes more labor spent on controlling the look of the result; concern shifts toward technical problems; the price of freedom is greater responsibility for thinking out technical procedures. (*Electric Language* 219)

Unlike the writer of the codex, the ASCII writer hard-codes every screen of text, every 80×24 grid of 1920 squares, each square occupied by a character or by a blank space. The idea of a grid is familiar to typographers, but the ASCII grid is particularly inflexible in relation to conventional media. As Ellen Lupton says:

> A grid breaks space or time into regular units. A grid can be simple or complex, specific or generic, tightly defined or loosely interpreted. Typographic grids are all about control. They establish a system for arranging content within the space of a page, screen, or the built environment. Designed in response to the internal pressures of content (text, image, data) and the outer edge or frame (page, screen, window), an effective grid is not a rigid formula but a flexible and resilient structure, a skeleton that moves in concert with the muscular mass of information. (*Thinking With Type* 151)

But the ASCII grid provides the exact kind of rigidity that limits the text file's ability to be typographically effective. Most of the typographic elements

described by Ellen Lupton in *Thinking with Type* are only relevant to ASCII in so far as they constitute a catalogue of the impossible. For example: type size (38), typeface (46), the use of small capitals (52), mixing typefaces (54), ornamentation (60), kerning (102), tracking or letterspacing (104), line spacing (108), alignment (112), and enlarged capitals or versals (124). None of these elements can be customized in an ASCII text file. ASCII also lacks the potential for coloured text, bolding or italics, and the incorporation of images or other non-textual content. In addition to this, ASCII's typeface lacks subtlety, with every character being equal in terms of the screen space that it consumes. As James Felici says:

> instead of adapting the machine to the alphabet, typewriter manufacturers adapted the alphabet to the typewriter, and *monospaced* type was born. . . . In these monospaced types, where it was impractical to make the printed letterforms the same width, narrower ones—such as *l*, *i*, and punctuation— were given exaggerated features and side bearings so that the escapement was appropriate. Normally wider characters—*M*, *W*, *O*—had to be squeezed onto that same Procrustean bed. (*The Complete Manual of Typography* 8)

ASCII typography is so limited that it might appear to be flat, devoid of style, resistant to invention, prescriptive, utilitarian, and perhaps not as engaging as other media. This is the trade-off for being the most economical textual storage medium, with the least mark-up, the smallest file sizes, the fastest transfer rates, its free-to-use (non-proprietary) status, and the ease with which it can be ported. In order to accomplish all of this, the coding is as simplistic as possible, sacrificing customizability for functionality. But as the hacker attempts to be flexible and adaptable, perceiving codes and cracking them, ASCII writers have managed to make much of the constraints of the medium, utilizing the materials and codes in innovative and subversive ways.

CASE STUDY: *Cult of the Dead Cow* **100 (1989).** I have spent the last few pages framing ASCII text in terms of its typographic limitations, its inflexible grid and monospaced type, and its inability to incorporate multiple typefaces and sizes.

Figure 2.1-2: *cDc* 100

And yet, in the pictured example, *cDc*'s typographers have managed to render the acronym of the publication in lettering fourteen lines high and thirty-six columns wide, in a style resembling the logo of the Dead Kennedys (transcriptions of whose lyrics are reprinted in *cDc* 9, 34, and 96). They have also centred the acronym in a bold rectangular frame that dominates the opening screen of the scroll. These typographical flourishes are made possible by the unique stability of the monospaced font and the rigid textual grid—the text, framed in this particular manner, will appear the same in any 80×24 display, because the individual characters will always line up in the same way.

Although ASCII art finds its precedent in the earlier technology of typewriter art, the digital file also takes on additional constraints. For example, a typewritten page can be supplemented by a hand-drawn image, the page can be moved, characters can overstrike one another, etcetera; in ASCII, every aspect of design must be the product of the arrangement of monospaced characters on a 1920-unit grid. All visual art must be exclusively constructed of typographic characters, because that is all that the medium supports.

The "cDc" in *Cult of the Dead Cow*'s header is composed of 102 individual characters: forward slashes, back slashes, pipes, underscores, and greater-than signs. If we attempt to read the assemblage of characters as conventionally-signifying graphemes (underscore line-break pipe space backslash line-break pipe space space backslash, etc), their significance is perplexing. In order to recognize the "cDc" in the *cDc* header, we must interconnect the graphemes in an unconventional way, pushing aside each character's conventional range of signification in order to imagine it as visual material. By doing this, we can fill the gaps between the individual marks and see "cDc" in larger-than-ASCII letters, like a theatre marquee constructed of a thousand individual light bulbs. This is a microcosmic example of Roman Ingarden's vision of the gaps between depicted objects that readers must fill in order to make the text comprehensible. Typographical characters appear on the screen, but their interconnection depends on the reader's perception. By reading the *cDc* header outside of the realm of the conventional signification of the grapheme, we are participating in an activity that

subverts conventional meaning. As Johanna Drucker says, the foregrounding of typographic signification can be considered an attack on both linguistic signification and narrative transparency:

> For linguists, writing, and its subset, typography, had no distinct function. The authority of language resided in its capacity to signify . . . The threat to linguistic authority made by the manipulation of words on the page was that it returned the written language to the specific place, instance, conditions of productions—it became a highly marked text. (*The Visible Word* 46)

While the *cDc* header revitalizes the visual qualities of the grapheme, the "marking" of the text consists primarily of negative space, within which a carefully-selected arrangement of graphemes are positioned in a particular way. Although the header is assertive, the majority of the screen is actually blank. Textual gaps are particularly significant in this medium—on the 1920-unit grid, where each character is identical in size to every other character, the most elemental unit of meaning is not just the mark on the page, but also the space that frames that mark. Each character is the size of one full square of the grid, including both the presence and absence that constitute that square. For the *cDc* 100 screen capture, I have caught the blinking cursor in the upper right corner of the screen, so as to highlight the dimensions of one full square of the grid. Even a completely empty square consumes screen space and disk space—a nothing that is something. By contrast, the following case study demonstrates a different kind of nothingness, produced by a screen overburdened with graphemes.

CASE STUDY: *Cult of the Dead Cow* 7: "Slow Death" by Swamp Rat (1987).
This text is written and typographically arranged by *cDc*'s editor, two years before the previously-cited "cDc" header. In comparison to *cDc* 100, this text file is oriented more toward signifying on a linguistic level, but its typographic signification is still relevant. The text depicts a scenario in which a second-person character experiences a sequence of diverse tortures which, according to the title, will eventually end with a release from life and narrative. The game of this text is to forestall its ending, as its list of sufferings rolls on without relief and the

```
L 43    C 78    IA    563k    c:\ascii\lit\cdc-0007.txt

Creeping death, starting at your ears...they ring...and feel numb and then
fall off like you've got leprosy...you start to bleed from your ear sockets...
something unseen starts beating your nose into a pulp...then your teeth fall
out...one by one..gum disease sets in...it spreads...your jaw rots and falls
off...your shoulders get a 3rd degree sunburn...they peel...your fingers tingle
..fingernails turn black..hands turn black..arthritis sets in..can't move
hands... belly button itches...can't move hands to scratch...leech crawls into
belly button and starts sucking blood...lice inhabit your pubic hair..a large
rat starts eating away your dead genitals parts...incredible, delicious pain...
you still haven't died, lusting for death to take you away..hair on legs falls
out..toenails are ingrown..big toe starts bleeding and the toenail cuts in so
deep that it starts splitting your toe..you would scream in agony but your
tongue has rotted away..athletes foot occurs..you pray to end the torture,
but you aren't finished yet..your hip dislocates on its own..kneecaps are
shattered..an ambulance drives by slowly, the driver leans out and laughs at
you..then drives off...small children play around your dying body...they throw
pebbles at your decaying carcass..someone drops his Slurpee on your head,
another relieves his bladder on you...they leave...laughing with disgusting
playful joy as your private hell continues..the night comes..roaches crawl
into your ears..you can feel them eat your eardrums out..a racoon nibbles on
your toes..you feel the vibrations of a fast moving vehicle on the pavement
behind you, which you can't hear because of the roaches..a toad is crawling
down your throat..suddenly, your skull is smashed and blood and bits of brain
material is splatterd and streaked out all over the asphalt as a Z-28 doing
```

Figure 2.1-3: "Slow Death"

sentences roll on without full stops, and, as the text says, "you pray to end the torture, but you aren't finished yet..."

The visual density of the typography is likewise relentless, to the point where its visual opacity reduces the ability of the text to linguistically signify. Of course, transparent linguistic signification is not the only game of writing, and the compound effect of the language and typography of "Slow Death" brutalizes the reader, both through the story depicted by the text and through the physical object that is the text. "Slow Death" makes purposeful use of a kind of typography that Ellen Lupton, in *Thinking With Type*, refers to as "type crime" for the violence that it inflicts upon its reader.

The layout is defined by its overuse of ellipses, giving the impression of a screen without blank spaces. On the grid of 1920 squares, this screen capture contains 1592 printable characters—nearly 84% of the page. By contrast, the header for *cDc* 100, which is more visually impressive than "Slow Death," employs only 447 printable characters (just over 23% of the page). The aspect ratio of the ASCII text file makes the clutter even worse than it would be on the page of a printed book, because the monitor displays so many columns of text and so few lines. As Robert Bringhurst says, "Anything from 45 to 75 characters is widely regarded as a satisfactory length of line for a single-column page set in a serifed text face . . . The 66-character line (counting both letters and spaces) is widely regarded as ideal" (*Elements of Typography* 26). The ASCII screen page is 80 columns wide, creating a longer line than the codex, and yet the number of lines per screen (24) is fewer than on the page of the conventional codex.

While we could potentially imagine the typography of "Slow Death" to be the work of an auteur, as aesthetically relentless as a feature-length film consisting of a single unbroken close-up, we might also compare it to an amateur flick with poor film stock and lighting, with low contrast, where the objects on the screen become indistinguishable from one another due to a lack of definition. "Slow Death," in maintaining a single typographic tone, creates a visual flatness, demanding that the reader takes the entire text at the same level of engagement, making the whole thing equally as deep, equally as shallow. It is all equally light,

all equally shadow. Herbert Bayer explains the effect of physically processing the visual aspects of the page in relation to processing text as information:

> the more we read, the less we see. constant exposure to visual materials has dulled our sense of seeing. overfed with reading as we are, the practice of reading must be activated. a new effort is needed to recapture and retain freshness. ("on typography" 46)

To activate the process of reading, the text must give us something new to see, as opposed to simply trying to tell us something new by means of linguistic content. The lack of typographic contrast in "Slow Death" renders its linguistic content less accessible, less apparent. While this typographic clutter is not a typical convention of ASCII writing, it is a device that warrants further examination, as we will see in the case studies that take place later in this chapter.

CASE STUDY: *Anarchy Inc.*: "B00G and the art of ZEN" (1986). We have just seen an example of ASCII typography that crowds the screen, and now we will look at something sparser, both visually and spiritually. The article is inspired by Zen Buddhism in its dedication to the riddle and to silence, and to the concept of "B00G," a somewhat nonsensical word that employs K-Rad orthography and is used in diverse ways throughout the text files of *Anarchy Inc.* The title of the article, "B00G and the art of ZEN," is a play on *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974), but subverts the title's construction by placing "B00G" at the beginning of the title, pushing Zen to the end, and labelling Zen as a subordinate art. In this new formulation, B00G overtakes Zen, assuming the status and position that Zen once held—a properly absurdist revolutionary vision.

In the pictured selection of text, we see a high-contrast ASCII typography. The text features blank lines between paragraphs, which offer relief to the reader's eye, granting a way to visually distinguish between discrete units of text. In addition to the space between paragraphs, each paragraph begins with a five-space indention. By the standards of the conventional codex, the compound use of these two spacing devices might be overkill, but in ASCII text files, conventional typographical rules must be modified to suit the medium.

Now this is all well and good, but the meaning of Boog has little, if any, to do with Lite Beer. To solve this puzzle we must delve into a field entirely different from any we have previously encountered in our daily experience. Look above you. Can you see the sky or is your view impeded by the crinkly off-white of an acoustic ceiling? The frosty neutral glare of a fluorescent lightbulb? Ceramic tile? Or perhaps, you can see the stars, staring back down from a height more remote than the sun.

```
            -----        ----- 
 box.                              Box. The way of Zen, explained.
```

The Master Yao-shan, upon being asked 'What is the Way?' had answered, 'A cloud in the sky and water in the jug!' A quick drive up to San Francisco to an art gallery (or a waffle factory, for that matt er) will verify the truth of this once and for all, and how this relates to Boog can be found hanging on the wall in the Smithsonian.

Zen is the art of perceiving the world as it is without trying nor even wanting to understand it. Boog is the manifestation of this in the daily life of your average modem user. Boog doesn't make sense, it doesn't have to. All that is required is for you to perceive it.

Figure 2.1-4: "B00G and the art of ZEN"

In the 80×24 aspect ratio, vertical space is scarce and horizontal space is abundant. With a blank line between paragraphs, and an indention of the first line of the new paragraph, there is a total of one-and-one-sixteenth blank lines separating the blocks of text from one another. If one paragraph ends on less than a full line, that typographic space will further add to the gulf between blocks of text, creating the visual impression of two full diagonal lines between paragraphs (as seen in the space between the last two paragraphs depicted in this screen capture). Although this typographic gulf would be structurally and aesthetically pointless within the aspect ratio of the conventional codex, here it becomes a skilful way of dealing with the unique limitations of the ASCII page.

The ASCII page needs to produce and maintain a great deal of empty space in order to be clear, energetic, and inviting, but this empty space cannot simply be relegated to the beginnings and ends of paragraphs. The well-designed ASCII page must be considered from the beginning of the scroll to the end, insinuating itself even into the process of composition. Looking at the selection from "Slow Death," we cannot guess whether Swamp Rat's text would be aided by inserting empty lines between paragraphs, because the on-screen paragraph is over twenty-four lines in length and consumes more than the captured screen. "B00G and the art of ZEN," by contrast, is primarily constructed of paragraphs ranging between three and seven lines in length. As the reader scrolls through the document, framing the text in new sequences of twenty-four lines, the range of vision is never consumed by the flatness of a full screen of text, because multiple text blocks are visible at all times. And because the blocks are short, they are also direct and precise, they avoid rambling, and they maintain a high degree of narrative energy, beginning anew with each new section. As Ellen Lupton describes the typographic technique that contributes to this narrative effect:

> Designers provide ways into—and out of—the flood of words by breaking up text into pieces and offering shortcuts and alternate routes through masses of information. From a simple indent (signaling the entrance to a new idea) to a highlighted link (announcing a jump to another location), typography helps readers navigate the flow of content. The user could be

> searching for a specific piece of data or struggling to quickly process a
> volume of content in order to extract elements for immediate use.
>
> Although many books define the purpose of typography as enhancing the
> readability of the written word, one of design's most humane functions is,
> in actuality, to help readers *avoid reading.* (*Thinking With Type* 87)

Because the text is structured in this way, the reader is provided with numerous opportunities to refresh his or her experience of the text, engaging with each new block of text with restored enthusiasm and creativity.

The featured selection from "B00G and the art of ZEN" depicts four discrete blocks of text, each separated from the others by lines of empty space. Although the units are all part of the same text (and particularly *because* they are), the dissimilarities and disjunctions between the units readily present themselves. For example, none of the adjacent units seem to refer directly to the linguistic content of their neighbours, although units 1, 3, and 4 address the concept of B00G, and units 2 and 4 address the concept of Zen. The most disjunctive unit of text is the second, which, unlike the others, is not a paragraph, but a complex interchange of graphical information, seemingly redundant description, and aphoristic wisdom. Here are a few observations about that unit of text.

1) The box takes up five lines (one fifth of the screen), the same amount of vertical space as the paragraph that follows it, and more than the last paragraph on the screen.

2) The text within the box appears to be intentionally redundant, but this seeming redundancy is an essential part of the message—taken as a kōan, the exchange of symbols could suggest a number of things: the virtuality of the frame (*ceci n'est pas une boîte*); the entity whose sole function is to represent (or contain) itself; the relationship between the visual symbol and the linguistic symbol; none of the above; all of the above.

3) In the space to the right of the box, there is a string of text with five hyphens on either side of it. This might give the impression of a line that extends across the page, perhaps a full line of hyphens from end to

end that has subsequently been interrupted (or copied over) by the text. The line creates a strikethrough over blank space, a paradoxical gesture that accentuates emptiness while disrupting it. The phrase "Box. The way of Zen, explained." overwrites the strikethrough, adding another layer of self-contradiction to the text.

4) If the way of Zen has been explained to the narrator's satisfaction, why continue to speak about it? And yet the narrative continues, now connecting the teachings of Master Yao-shan (a real historical figure) to the text-invented concept of B00G.

5) Master Yao-shan's answer is punctuated by an exclamation mark, the same symbol that constitutes the vertical lines of the box-box. If "how this relates to B00G can be found hanging on the wall in the Smithsonian," the question is, Which wall? Which Smithsonian? Which this?

As the text is composed of many discrete textual units and diverse narrative concerns (perhaps in part due to its collaborative production), and because this arrangement creates a sensation of diversity, it becomes a sequence of textual moments, as opposed to all of the materials in the text functioning in the service of an integrated narrative as a whole. "B00G and the art of ZEN," then, produces many strata of structural interplay: the text is united as a whole within a text file, consisting of diverse textual units that clash with the larger structure. The textual units that clash with one another are stable in so far as each constitutes its own unit, but within each unit, narrative and meaning are further subverted.

2.2> THE MODULAR NARRATIVE

"B00G and the art of ZEN" provides us with an example of modular narrative: the one-two punch of short units of text and sparse typography lend themselves well to a paratactic writing that does not oblige itself to explain its own interconnections, but leaves these interconnections to be determined by the experience of the reader. Like John Thompson's ghazals, Ray Smith's compiled fiction, William Burroughs' cut-ups, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's investigations,

modular narrative resists the urge to fabricate an illusion of narrative continuity. Paratactic writing doesn't fill in the blanks for its readers, but gestures toward open spaces that can never really be filled in, but always remain open. As Madison Smartt Bell describes this form of writing:

> At the page-by-page level, the modular narrative will most probably look like a text block, separated from its fellows by space breaks. We have already seen how in linear narratives these insignificant-looking space breaks can be used to signal jump cuts from one point in a narrative forward to another, to indicate shifts in chronology, to shift scenes or to accomplish other sorts of transitions . . . From text block to text block, a modular design may change storyline, switch from character to character, switch between first-, second- or third-person narration in the treatment of the *same* character, make radical divergences in tone and voice, and in fact do almost anything you can imagine. All the shifts and rearrangements are held back from the brink of total anarchy by serving basic principles of order, symmetry, and balance. (*Narrative Design* 214)

The textual units of the modular narrative are not designed to flow into one another, but instead they are placed beside or against each other, each self-sufficient but also capable of working together with the other units, building toward some cumulative effect, such as a symbolic arc or an arc of emotional intensity. The typographic arrangement of the modular narrative suggests a heterogonous community of elements, a sort of anarchy that is also incorporated, contributing to an aesthetic of presence, existing in moments, with the past as a dream and the future an illusion. The modular narrative is particularly relevant in the age of digital textuality, because the technologies of the word processor can help to facilitate the processes that one must engage in to produce such a textual arrangement. As Jay David Bolter explains:

> A writer with a word processor spends much of her time entering words letter by letter, just as she did two decades ago at the typewriter. Revising is a different matter. With a word processor, writers can delete or replace an entire word; they can highlight phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. They

can erase a sentence with a single keystroke; they can select a paragraph,

cut it from its current location, and insert it elsewhere, even into another

document. (*Writing Space* 29)

With the word processor, more than ever before, units of text can be produced in isolation from another and rearranged in a multitude of positions, allowing the writer of the text to observe each of the textual units in a number of relationships with other textual units in order to discover which arrangements are particularly fruitful, to see which crackle and produce sparks in conjunction with one another.

While computer technology can be framed in positive terms as making modular narrative easier to produce, it has also been said that this technology is restrictive, forcing readers and writers into modular thought. Christina Haas explains why parataxis might be symptomatic of texts produced on computers:

There are few word processing programs which support and encourage an

attention to large scale issues, and in fact the limited view of one's text

offered by most word processing systems may actually discourage

attending to the whole text. Since it is difficult to see one's whole

document with word processing, writers may attend to what they can see

on the screen. ("How the Writing Medium Shapes the Writing Process:

Effects of Word Processing on Planning" 203)

Hass says: "small computer displays which show only a portion of the text at once might encourage writers to focus their attention on parts of a text within a screen rather than think about concerns that extend across screens" (185). But to frame this positively, perhaps the greatest contribution of the monitor is that it allows for such an intense focus on present moments, encouraging craft at the level of the sentence and at the level of the lexia. The particular intensity of granted to the localized range of vision in the ASCII text file might appear to come at the expense of larger-scale structural concerns, but this is not to say that the scope of the small screen necessarily impedes the production of quality literature. Even in the world of the codex, William Gass positively describes Robert Coover's attention to paragraphs and the looseness with which he interconnects them:

> Sharply drawn and brightly painted paragraphs are arranged like
> pasteboards in ascending or descending scales of alternating colors to
> compose the story, and the impression that we might scoop them all up
> and reshuffle, altering not the elements but the order or the rules of play, is
> deliberate. ("Pricksongs & Descants" 104)

The reader will shuffle, play games, and create new rules. With the modular narrative, the reader is free to make play of the text, to become an editor, to disrupt the familiar reader/writer binary, constructing and reconstructing the text at every juncture, undermining the conventional fantasy of a literature that is capable of being hypotactic, mimetic, and transparent. Writers like *Anarchy Inc.*, who deal in parataxis, bring us into the business of poststructuralism, making us assemble the text in order to produce even the most basic readings.

A good deal of the formal innovation of ASCII literature is connected to its material conditions. However, even the texts that appear to be the most accidental, the most witless and unfocused, have been known to suddenly, without warning, change style, change topic, break down. As Jay David Bolter suggests, this might also be a symptom of the general formal constraints of the scroll:

> The papyrus roll was poor at suggesting a sense of closure, and in fact
> closure does not seem to have had the significance for ancient writers and
> readers that it acquired, for example, in the industrial age of print. . . .
> Throughout the ancient period, the papyrus roll remained too short to meet
> its own culture's needs as a grand unit of expression, so that a major work
> by a philosopher, historian, or poet typically occupied several rolls. The
> papyrus roll did not contribute to any cultural sense of closure, and it is no
> coincidence that many ancient poetic and historical texts do not have
> climactic endings. They often fall silent, leaving the impression that there
> is always more to say. (*Writing Space* 77-78)

2.3> THE NARRATIVE ARC OF THE SCROLL

Unlike the technology of the analogue scroll, the rigid grid of the ASCII document demands that for every new line of text that is revealed at the bottom of

the screen, one line is eliminated from the top. Regardless of one's position within the scroll, the ASCII text file always displays twenty-four lines. The range of vision is narrow and inflexible, which makes ASCII text files particularly rigid in their linearity. As Michael Heim says:

> Scrolling text on a monotasking computer differs from a stack of manuscript pages as greatly as watching a film differs from looking through a stack of photographs. You cannot juxtapose two finished pages and read them together when you are working with screen copy. (*Electric Language* 130)

Ferris Jabr describes the digital scroll in relation to the printed codex, particularly in the degree of control that the reader has over the fixity of the text. He says:

> surveys indicate that screens . . . interfere with two other important aspects of navigating texts: serendipity and a sense of control. People report that they enjoy flipping to a previous section of a paper book when a sentence surfaces a memory of something they read earlier, for example, or quickly scanning ahead on a whim. People also like to have as much control over a text as possible—to highlight with chemical ink, easily write notes to themselves in the margins as well as deform the paper however they choose. ("The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper versus Screens")

The first point is true: the scroll is a single page, and it offers no real analogy to letting a reader casually and randomly flip through individual sheets of paper. But the second point, the mutability of the text, the ability to deform the text—this is where it is important to note that Jabr is talking about E-readers and not ASCII text files. With ASCII text files, a reader can transform the text more radically then ever before, cutting sentences and paragraphs and moving them into different locations within the text. These texts are open-source, anti-copyright, and readable by word processors, which makes them particularly easy to modify. With ASCII text files, a reader can change the text in whatever way they choose. And readers can also save these changes and share them with their friends. Michael Heim says:

A long manuscript is indeed a kind of papyrus where a feel for the distinct steps and linear stages of thought is, of necessity, marginalized. Certainly the sense of finalized sections is marginal as the transfer of portions (blocks) is always inviting. Automation of the writing element enhances the sense of unified document, in which you can, at will, search and replace any expression throughout the entire manuscript, regardless of what the written expression may denote. . . . The metaphor of scrolling takes us back centuries while propelling thought into wholly new relationships to language. (*Electric Language* 130)

In other words, the rigid linearity of the ASCII scroll is only visual. The mutability of electronic text actually liberates the document from this linearity, allowing the writer to attack the text from any angle, removing words from one location and dropping them into another. In this sense, linearity is only produced by a reader's performance. Of course, certain hackerly texts attack the conventional linear approach to reading, directly targeting the linguistic and typographic constraints that the medium imposes on the text.

CASE STUDY: *Cult of the Dead Cow* 117: "Lost Love" by Egyptian Alchemist (1989). This story begins with a sparse typography, using not just one but two blank lines to separate the units of the text from one another. These textual units alternate between very short paragraphs and sections of short-line dialogue that open up the space of the right margin. The linguistic content compliments the typographic structure, with the narrative also modulating between two kinds of discourse. These are as follows:

1) The linguistic content of the short paragraphs, which builds a generalized and abstract sense of time, place, and action.

2) The banal and vague dialogue, which gestures toward both the universality and triteness of this particular situation.

The text maintains this pattern throughout the story, moving back and forth between paragraph and dialogue, long enough to familiarize the reader with its structure, leading the reader to expect the text to continue to fulfill this structure.

```
     Joe sat down upon the bench... bored... tired... he sat... and
waited....  After a few minutes, an interesting girl walks by.  Joe stops her
and talks.

    "What's yer name?"
    "Mindy...;  And you?"
    "Joe....;"
    "Oh... hi!  So what's been up?"
    "Nothing... just being bored....."
    "Well, let's do something....."
    "Ok, sure....  Let's go!"

     Joe and Mindy walk around town for awhile holding hands and the like
and finally it's time for Mindy to get going...

    "Umm, Joe....."
    "Yea?"
    "I gotta run...."
    "K...  Wanna go out next week?"
    "Sure!  Here's my number.. 555-1212"
    "Ok...  I'll give ya a call...."
```

Figure 2.3-1: "Lost Love" (1 of 2)

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"Hi Mindy...."
"Uhh... Joe. What are you doing here?"
"Is anyone else home?"
"Umm... no....."

-The End-

Figure 2.3-2: "Lost Love" (2 of 2)

The reader, now lulled into a false sense of security, is set up to have his or her expectations disrupted by a radical disruption of the text's self-imposed structural and linguistic conventions. Linguistically, the content of the second screen capture is so brutal that it would not even be appropriate to include it in this dissertation—in fact, I have treated it with a crystallizing filter so as to render the words illegible while keeping the typography visible. Visually, it is also vulgar, breaking from the open-concept typography of the earlier paragraphs, adopting a relentless clutter similar to that of "Slow Death," filling the screen for a span of fifteen lines of text. The reader might scroll down line by line, hoping that the next line will reveal a paragraph break, like the previous paragraphs that were two or three lines in length, but there is no quick escape—the reader no longer floats, transcendent, in the light and loose narrative environment—as the text's initial structure is disrupted by its opposite, its antagonist, the reader is attacked by the text's typographic and linguistic disjunction.

Egyptian Alchemist creates a set of house rules that allows us to anticipate the formula of the game to come. Once all bets are placed, he changes the rules but refuses to let us discard our hand. He has established the rules, always intending to break them, and we, willing players, have not understood this until we have lost the game. And it is to the degree that we have had faith in the linearity and unity of the text (the degree to which we have come to believe in realism and the naturalization of discourse) that this disjunctive writing style will disrupt the central tenets of our models of thought.

In the analogy of the card game, the suits and values are defined first by the inventor of the game. Here the inventor is the writer, who designs every lexia of the text from scratch, or more accurately, from a vast system of ready-to-assemble elements (drawn from linguistic, formal, typographic, and discursive conventions). The reader, having taken possession of the game, is free to revise its rules as necessary. The convention of reading a text in linear order is only one of many potential games, but one that is often perceived of as a sort of romantic ideal. As Ron Silliman says of the commoditized text:

> In its ultimate form, the consumer of a mass market novel such as *Jaws* stares at a "blank" page (the page also of the speed-reader) while a story appears to unfold miraculously of its own free will before his or her eyes. (*The New Sentence* 13)

In his vision, conventional reading causes the materiality of the text to disappear while generating an illusion of another world. The reader disappears into the illusory world for a time, consumes the text completely, and then discards it in favour of a new product of purchase, a new illusion. Roland Barthes criticizes consumerist reading practices, suggesting rereading (and engaging in a consciously productive reading) as antidotes to the ill effects of conformity:

> Rereading, an operation contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society, which would have us "throw away" the story once it has been consumed ("devoured"), so that we can then move on to another story, buy another book, and which is only tolerated in certain marginal categories of readers (children, old people, and professors), rereading is here suggested at the outset, for it alone saves the text from repetition (those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere), multiplies it in its variety and its plurality: rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology ("this happens *before* or *after* that") and recaptures a mythic time (without *before* or *after*); it contests the claim which would have us believe that the first reading is a primary, naïve, phenomenal reading which we will only, afterwards, have to "explicate," to intellectualize (as if there were a beginning of reading, as if everything were not already read: there is no *first* reading, even if the text is concerned to give us that illusion by several operations of *suspense*, artifices more spectacular than persuasive); rereading is no longer consumption, but play (that play which is the return of the different). (*S/Z* 15-16)

It is one of our most revolutionary acts as readers to free the text from its chronology. The vision of the linearity of a text is imposed on us by external forces, which prescribe conventional methods of reading, and we subsequently impose these conventions upon our own textual practices. Texts themselves do

not force us into doing this—we only force ourselves. And so "Lost Love," while committing a violence, does so in the service of liberating us from conformist readings of text and world, challenging our belief in stable, transparent, and authoritative visions of reality promoted by realistic narratives.

The final unit of text in "Lost Love" disrupts and reverses typography and narrative yet again, this time twisting from vulgar inundation into a sparse and airy "-The End-" positioned from column 57 to column 65, given room to breathe on all sides, complete with the typographic flourish of a hyphens to buffer the phrase. In all, there is something both neat and final about the ending, which might be said to relieve the reader of the text's typographic and linguistic violence, but which is also somehow more cruel than the initial narrative and typographic shift—all of the narrative and typographic shock is now fitted with a curt finale, nullifying and also accentuating its intensity. But this also mirrors the fact that the writer, empowered by an understanding of conventional reading practices, turns these practices against any reader who has uncritically believed in them. The epiphany does not take place within the narrative, but within the reader.

CASE STUDY: "I want you so bad it's driving me mad it's driving me mad / She's so" by the Silver Ghost (1987). Here we have an example of linguistic and typographic disruption in an inverse proportion to that of "Lost Love." While Egyptian Alchemist's text conditions the reader with a light and transcendent atmosphere before overwhelming him or her with immanent violence, the Silver Ghost's text instead moves from the immanent to the transcendent, from a depicted scene in full paragraphs to a summation in verse.

The effect of this type of breaking style works in a different way than "Lost Love." The movement in "Lost Love" is rarely used in writing because, in that style, the sudden vulgarity is designed to catch its reader by surprise, finding its power in its ability to shock and offend readers who are completely unaware that they are about to be shocked and offended. The Silver Ghost's text, however, moves from immanence to transcendence, a more common move that can be found everywhere (e.g. any Hollywood film that ends with a crane shot, camera

[3]

After talking for a while, I return to my room, feeling like I've imposed upon her time. I've imposed on her time so many times before that it doesn't really matter anymore, and I refuse to pay attention to the thought, reasoning that it doesn't really matter anymore. I've got homework to do anyway, so in a sense I was imposing on my time too, which makes it all right I think.

The homework's my calculus, which is okay except I can't remember how to begin, which makes it more difficult. I have to calculate the area under the curve "x^2 + y^2 = 1^2", which I can't do because I don't know how far to integrate it, or how to make the equation in delta-something. It has to be in delta-something form, with an eff-of-eks, or it can't be done.

I collar a friend, who's also working on the same problem, and we go out into the Quad to play frisbee. It's mid-November, and very cold, but it seems to be getting warmer. We throw the frisbee violently, and shout calculus insights to each other, and after a while go back inside.

So, my friend,
where do we
go from here?

Figure 2.3-3: "...Heavy..."

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drawing up and away from the immediacy of the scene, recontextualizing the narrative within a larger world). There is nothing particularly avant-garde about the structure here, imitating the movement from full paragraphs to short-line verse established by the tradition of the haibun.

The haibun moves from the prose scene or setting to a distilled poetic moment, a statement emanating directly from the speaker (sometimes imagined to emanate from the writer), like a moral to a fable, though typically rendered in an imagistic manner drawn from the conventions of the haiku. The example from this text, visually a haiku but not imagistic or season-specific, provides a distilled transcendent moment, moving from the concrete details of the world (formula, Quad, frisbee) to a purely abstract commentary upon those details. The pure abstraction is interesting here because it would mean very little if not juxtaposed with the concrete details of the preceding scene.

We often say that, in the practice of writing, the image is the most important (and most difficult) element to incorporate into a text. The linguistic content of the Silver Ghost's verse here provides no image, speaking nearly into a void, and yet, the typography itself stands out as visual—not as the depiction of image through linguistic signification, but as the presentation of the image of the text itself. It doesn't grant the reader with direct access to the world within the text (not possible anyway), but asserts itself as a thing worthy of being seen within the world. The text, in its metadiscursivity and its visual qualities, breaks from the illusion of transparent signification, instead opting to texture the text. In other words, as Steve McCaffery says, this kind of writing doesn't inspire a reading *through* the text, but a reading *upon* the text (*North of Intention* 21).

Not all ASCII text is designed to hypermediate its own devices. In fact, there is a vast genre of ASCII literature that envisions the possibility for transparent linguistic signification and the transmission of information: the technical manual. In the chapter entitled HACK, I will look at several technical manuals, along with variations on the technical manual that are designed to hypermediate the illusion of transparent signification. But in the present chapter, I would like to look at one

ASCII technical manual in order to specifically discuss the way that it makes use of the numbered list, an important structural device in ASCII literature.

The list, in instructional manuals, gestures toward order by imposing a structural hierarchy upon textual units. In some ways, it counterbalances the small screen, helping to keep readers and writers oriented throughout the text. In other ways, it emphasizes fragmentation and depthlessness, cueing breaks and new beginnings, occasionally disrupting signification. Such cues, while working to engage the reader, also work against transparency, linearity, and hypotaxis.

CASE STUDY: *Phrack* **1.7: "Acetylene Balloon Bomb" by the Clashmaster (1985).** The text begins with the metanarrative statement: "Imagine this." Not knowing yet what "this" is, we are already asked to activate our imaginations, to become receptive to whatever scenario will follow. This is the kind of rhetoric that we wouldn't typically expect to find in a conventional instructional manual. The first words of "Acetylene Balloon Bomb" demonstrate that the text will not be a conventional how-to guide at all, but a flight of fancy, a daydream about the possibilities of making mischief.

The paragraph continues on with a joyful excess of modifiers as the narrator envisions a "great, inflated, green garbage bag slowly wafting down from a tall building." The bag and building are drawn in broad strokes, as crisply as any imagist poem. The speaker draws onlookers into his daydream, and as these onlookers gaze up into the sky at his invention, they are too impressed and astonished to say anything but "What the....?"

The bag hits ("*BOOM!!!*"), and although we never see exactly *what* it hits, the speaker describes the debris as "a thundering fireball of green bits of plastic and flame." The acetylene balloon bomb has blown up in the midst of a crowd, but it has done only that, blown up. In description, it has not blown up anything (or anyone) else.

Within the first paragraph, we see the emergence of a speaker and may note that his vision is not to cause harm to people, but to make noise and a mess. The pursuit of mischief and spectacle is not just the subject of the Clashmaster's

```
L 520    C 79    IA    475k    c:\ascii\lit\phrack\phrack-1

     Imagine this. A great, inflated, green garbage bag
slowly wafting down from a tall building. It gains some speed
as it nears the ground. People look up and say, "What the....?"
The garbage bag hits! *BOOM!!!* It explodes in a thundering
fireball of green bits of plastic and flame!
     "What is this?" you may ask. Well, this is the great
"Acetylene Balloon Bomb." And here is how to make it.

Ingredients:
=========
(1)    For a small bomb: a plastic bag. Not too big.
       For something big(ger): a green, plastic garbage bag.

(2)    Some "Fun-Snaps". A dozen should be more than enough.

(3)    Some garbage bag twisties. String would also do.

(4)    A few rocks. Not too heavy, but depends on size of
       bomb and desired velocity of balloon/bomb.

(5)    PRIME INGREDIENT: Acetylene. This is what is used in
       acetylene torches. More on this substance later.

(6)    One or more eager Anarchists.
```

Figure 2.3-4: "Acetylene Balloon Bomb"

text, but also an integral part of its structure, doing the same to the screen as he dreams of doing to a green plastic garbage bag. The narrator's goal is to gain the recognition of onlookers by means of an explosive spectacle, and the Clashmaster's goal is to do the same through the spectacle of the text.

The article features some typographic quirks that are unusual for the era. His line length is only 63 columns, even though *Phrack* formats its issues at 80 columns. Considering the relative shortness of his line (now within Robert Bringhurst's range of acceptable line lengths), his ten-space indentions are excessive, or at least venture into the realm of the aesthetic. The text blocks in his list of ingredients are arranged in lines of 53 columns each (about the line length of a John Thompson ghazal, a form also defined by its two-line stanzas, paratactic connections, and strong images). Here a list of ingredients for makeshift explosives begins to take on the qualities of modernist poetry.

And how, exactly, does the Clashmaster's numbered list impose order upon the text? Does it organize the ingredients of the acetylene balloon bomb in order of importance? Does it organize them in order of rarity, or inverse order of rarity? Does it organize them in the order in which they will be added to the mix, as in a cookbook recipe? It is our hope that close reading will reveal not only the names of the objects necessary for the construction of the acetylene balloon bomb, but also some sort of logical progression from the first item on the list to the last.

The first item on the list is the green plastic garbage bag that the Clashmaster has been obsessed with since the first paragraph. He does give the alternative option of using a "small" plastic bag (a bag that is "not too big"), but to fully realize the scenario of the Clashmaster's fantasies, one would need to acquire a "big(ger)" bag. We have accounted for the "balloon," now where is the acetylene? It is not until the fifth item that he mentions the most difficult item to acquire, which is also labelled as the "PRIME INGREDIENT," and therefore the least incidental. In this moment, several systems of order clash with one another. Acetylene is simultaneously:

      1) introduced at the highest level of structure (the first word of the title)

      2) subordinated (within a numbered list of ingredients)

3) labelled PRIME despite its position in the list.

Further complicating the interchange of systems of order is the quick treatment that the Clashmaster gives to acetylene within the list. He elaborates only by saying, "This is what is used in acetylene torches." If you don't know what an acetylene torch is (particularly the part about acetylene), the Clashmaster will reveal more details "later."

The list's sixth item is "One or more eager Anarchists," which is problematic in the sense that it difficult to believe that the Clashmaster expects us to round up a card-carrying disciple of Mikhail Bakunin, and succeeding in this, to convince them that blowing up a green garbage bag constitutes a meaningful propaganda of deed. If you can't immediately think of anyone who is interested in undertaking the construction of this device, including yourself, you probably don't need to worry about acquiring this "ingredient." It is a non-entity, a recursion, a jest, a throwaway line.

"One or more eager Anarchists" is the final item on the list. It is followed by "NOTES" that describe the nuances of acetylene as follows (line breaks mine):

Acetylene is a fairly dangerous substance. It is unstable upon contact with

oxygen (air). For this reason, and for your safety, I recommend you keep all of the acetylene AWAY from any source of

oxygen. This means don't let it get in touch with

air.

In short, the Clashmaster holds off on his description of acetylene in order to pipe in a non-sequitur, and then returns to summarize acetylene in four sentences that repeatedly iterate one point that transmits no real information.

In this text, multiple structures clash with one another, listed items appear in lists in random order, and the text ventures further into the world of

imagination than it does into legitimate technical advice. As a guide for constructing an acetylene balloon bomb it is a manifest failure. But this lack of order and reason, while failing to serve the reader with direct and unambiguous instruction, serves functions even more crucial—it turns its reader into writer and critic, creates sparks, undermines itself, becomes literature.

In the introductory paragraph, the narrator asks us to imagine a crowd of people looking up at the acetylene balloon bomb, but does not describe the position of the crowd in relation to the explosion itself. The text does not automatically fill its own ontological gaps. Likewise, by reading the text, we are not automatically compelled to build an acetylene balloon bomb. The text is never more than a script providing us with some of the basic elements necessary to produce the experience of reading, which we have no responsibility to use in any particular way. We can use this text to attempt to build an explosive device, or we can take the materials of the text and build an explosion of signification. Any writer who has spoken with his or her reader understands the general condition of the reception of the text: to the reader, skipping, skimming, and daydreaming are as much a part of the process of reading as is deep concentration and faithful contemplation. As William S. Burroughs says:

> Somebody is reading a newspaper, and his eye follows the column in the proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time. But subliminally he is reading the columns on either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him. That's a cut-up . . . a juxtaposition of what's happening outside and what you're thinking of. (*The Third Mind* 4-5)

Even though the reader does not faithfully follow a text from the first word to the last, attempting to recreate the world and vision of the author, this is no cause for lament. The text is not a supplementary world, but an object within the actual world. The success or failure of a text is not in its ability to faithfully deliver a transcendent message to its recipient, but in the experience that it provides and how this experience allows for the possibility of new perceptions, new ways of thinking, new perspectives about the relationships between objects in the world. Roland Barthes describes how a text can inspire a reader, not to think in new ways

about the world within the discourse, but to develop ideas that are not contained by the margins of the page:

> Has it never happened, as you were reading a book, that you kept stopping as you read, not because you weren't interested, but because you were: because of a flow of ideas, stimuli, associations? In a word, haven't you ever happened to *read while looking up from your book*? ("Writing Reading" 29)

&

> To be with the one I love and to think of something else: this is how I have my best ideas, how I best invent what is necessary to my work. Likewise for the text: it produces, in me, the best pleasure if it manages to make itself heard indirectly; if, reading it, I am led to look up often, to listen to something else. (*The Pleasure of the Text* 24)

Numbered lists, like paragraph breaks and headers, liberate readers to follow imaginative paths away from the page by providing them with typographically-signalled points of re-entry. The numbered sections provide readers an opportunity to refresh and reengage with the text, but this reengagement is always paratactic in nature, never a smooth transition, always providing the opportunity for sparks to fly between lexias, always gesturing to the meaning that is not linguistic, but is the moment of looking up and reading something that is connected to the text but also beyond it.

CASE STUDY: *Cult of the Dead Cow* 118: "A Moment in Time" by Obscure Images (1989). Like "Acetylene Balloon Bomb," this text makes use of numbered sections to frame its narrative. The story is written in short paragraphs, employs empty space between sections, favours paratactic over hypotactic connections, is possessed of structural self-conflict, and features a frame reminiscent of an ASCII technical manual.

Each of the sections is one paragraph in length. Eight of these paragraphs depict stock scenes or images, each of which appears to be a self-contained narrative fragment, isolated from its neighbours. Two of the story's paragraphs

0.
     Just as the scientist can see a fragment of life through a microscope, I can see random events. Endless moments in time swirling before my eyes just like so much mist. The images are real to me. I read about some of them in the newspaper. They aren't my moments, but they are part of me nonetheless. I have to think.....

1.
     The man bent down and kissed his daughter on the cheek. "I'll be back in a few days, dear, be good for your mother."
     "Goodbye daddy."

2.
     The door slammed as the man in the black trenchcoat left the small house in which he lived. The dogs barked, a cat yowled, and in a house down the street a camera clicked.

3.
     In the woods outside of a small town in Pennsylvania the leaves are rustled by a small boy running. The boy, clad only in his underwear, was

Figure 2.3-5: "A Moment in Time" (1 of 2)

4.
    The tall man watched his young daughter run back into the house before getting into his car. The fireball that erupted from his house flashed in his eyes as he drove down the street.

5.
    The camera is always watching. Liz ignored the constant clicking that came along with sex with her husband. "The sex is great, but I wish he would get rid of the whip," she thought as he put the camera down and came to bed.

6.
    The father carries the dead little boy back to the car and puts him in a garbage bag that he will throw into the furnace when he gets to work.

7.
    The man in the black trenchcoat steps off of the bus onto the busy sidewalk. He walks for 2 blocks where he enters a building, gets into the elevator, gets off at the 5th floor, walks into his office, takes off his trenchcoat, and sits down at his desk. "Delores, could you get me some coffee?"

Figure 2.3-6: "A Moment in Time" (2 of 2)

operate outside of this framework: the introductory paragraph (numbered "0."), and the concluding paragraph, (numbered "9."). These sections provide the story with an introduction and conclusion, not just because they are the first and last textual units, but also because their linguistic content provides a frame to the narrative, giving all of the fragments an overtly denoted context.

The first section is numbered "0," which might suggests that it exists in a void, that it is outside of the text, that it is nothing, that it is central, that it is neutral, that it is the origin, that it is without origin. For a numbered list to begin with "0" hypermediates the device of the numbered list, draws attention to it and the arbitrary unit with which it begins. Why this number? Why does it draw attention to itself in a way that a conventional numbering system does not?

The paragraph begins: "Just as the scientist can see a fragment of life through a microscope, I can see random events." The "0" visually resembles a microscope's lens, revealing physical nuances that cannot be seen by the naked eye. Although we can see intense detail, we must relinquish any potential for transcendence in order to do so. The numbering device, along with the promise of narrative-through-microscope, suggests that the lexias are not intended (by the narrator) to interconnect with one another, but that the assemblage will be "random," orderless, in a vortex, "swirling."

The role of the numbered list, then, is to impose a rather arbitrary order upon a collection of scraps that has already been self-described as orderless. Here the denotation of numerical order might connote the absence of such an order, but this gestures toward a grander structural paradox: although "A Moment In Time" is self-described as fragmentary, it is nevertheless undeniably unified within the structure and physical boundaries of the text.

The unities of voice and style provide further levels of interconnection between the fragments: they are all bleak, and grim, and they appear to be narrated by the same speaker, who is both deadpan and aloof. Even though the units of text do not seem to build together in a conventional way, depicting a realistic and cohesive world, each lexia develops our understanding of the narrator, his psychology and voice, what kind of details are important to him, and

which fragments he deems worthy of reporting to his audience. The setting and action within each fragment is random, and yet the selection and order of them is entirely unified under the authority of the narrator.

The eight central units of text (sections 1 through 8) consist of precisely four beginnings and four endings, each beginning paired with a specific ending (using "beginnings" and "endings" loosely, as all of these sections are actually presented *in medias res*). The numbering system introduces the possibility that the arrangement might correspond to one of many potential geometrical figures. As Madison Smartt Ball says: "In a modular narrative design, narrative elements are balanced in symmetry as shapes are balanced in a symmetrical geometric figure, or as weights balanced on a scale" (*Narrative Design* 214). Three possible geometrically-significant pairings of beginnings and endings emerge in an instant. These patterns are:

1&2, 3&4, 5&6, 7&8 (beginning and ending ×4), or

1&5, 2&6, 3&7, 4&8 (beginnings ×4, then endings ×4 in the same order), or

1&8, 2&7, 3&6, 4&5 (beginnings ×4, then endings ×4 in inverse order).

In the actual rendering of "A Moment in Time," the sections appear in a less mathematical, more disharmonious order, pairing the following lexias:

1&4, 2&7, 3&6, 5&8.

Even in this geometric disharmony, randomness is suggested but never accomplished. For example, the narrative always remains temporally linear—the beginnings come before the endings and the conventional order of time is never subverted. There is also only one juncture where the content of one pair (2&7) seems to interconnect with the content of another pair (5&8), and that is: "in a

house down the street a camera clicked," which connects section 2 to section 5: "The camera is always watching. Liz ignored the constant clicking . . ."

The title, "A Moment In Time," suggests a singular unity, temporally located in a specific place. The first section, "0," takes us into a worldless void, the laboratory of the narrative scientist. The events that he sees are "random," and yet they are arranged in a numbered sequence, running from 1 to 8. Within this hierarchy of numbers, there are textual units that connect to one another, but not placed beside one another within the list.

The story doesn't promise discontinuity and deliver discontinuity; nor does it promise discontinuity and deliver the opposite, weaving loose fibres together into a perfect karmic tapestry. Instead, the story's few interconnections come together as rare coincidences in a world otherwise devoid of transcendence. Although we can interrelate some of the symbols, these relations do not overshadow the cold disorder of the world.

"A Moment in Time" assembles a collection of text blocks, details, images. It asserts a numerical hierarchy over these materials, suggesting a kind of scientific order, but the fragments interconnect, spill out, refuse to be bound by the hierarchies imposed on them. It works very much like the ghazal, which, in John Thompson's words, "allows the imagination to move by its own nature: discovering an alien design, illogical and without sense – a chart of the disorderly, against false reason and the tacking together of poor narratives. It is a poem of contrasts, dreams, astonishing leaps" (*Collected Poems & Translations* 106).

Like nodes within a network, the relations between textual moments simultaneously exist and do not exist. They can be and are connected to one another only through the imagination of every person who engages with their materials. These connections are only possibilities, some of which are vividly realized through the process of engaging with the text, some of which hover in the periphery, and some of which are never consciously realized at all.

CASE STUDY: *Underground eXperts United* 264: "David Letterman" by Phearless (1995). Unlike most of the texts that have been featured in this chapter,

David Letterman

First time I saw him, he was standing by my desk. Apparently he had placed all my computer stuff on the floor, leaving the desk completely empty. He had a light brown costume and the same old haircut.
A quick look at my scanner told me that someone had been using it as background protection when spray painting things black. I could still see the contours of the objects painted: a pencil box, a calculator and two small loudspeakers.
I thought perhaps the scanner was still intact. When I lifted up the cover, the lens was all black striped. I told him he would have to pay for this. No response.
On the wall there was a sign, saying with big letters that if you win you could stay at a luxury hotel, or at a cheaper one with the possibility to leave it within three hours, at any time.
He went into the kitchen. When I entered it myself, he was dressed in all black, SWAT-style including a black cap. He was wearing dark glasses and currently smearing his chin and his cheeks with charcoal, to make it look like he hadn't shaved for a couple of days.

We were off to the city.

Figure 2.3-7: "David Letterman"

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"David Letterman" does not feature spaces between paragraphs, but opens up the screen in other ways: for example, there is a blank column at the left margin, running down the entire screen. Each new paragraph begins with a two-space indent, and most paragraphs end with a line that is forty-five columns or fewer in length (appearing to be mostly unfilled), giving the screen plenty of contrast, particularly considering that the entire story, and its title, can all be contained (and neatly framed) within the space of twenty-four lines of screen space. The narrative functions in a similar way: its story is small in scope, running together throughout, with details that appear to be mostly unfilled.

The person referred to in the first sentence ("he") is never named, and the title character, "David Letterman," is never explicitly referred to in the narrative. These two empty spaces (the proper noun with no referent and the character identified only by a pronoun) are never interconnected, but "he" and "David Letterman," as self-standing signifiers, are perfectly capable of fitting into one another, in terms of what they denote and what they leave absent. Yet the relationship between the two is only a gap, never directly connected, although they do connect in some way, even if only by means of the conventions of grammar. We have no reason to assume any particular relation between David Letterman and the "he," but there does appear to be one, even if its nature is wholly obscured. Again, we are faced with textual gaps, again foregrounding the reader's participation in the functionality of the text. As Wolfgang Iser says:

> The indeterminate sections, or gaps, of literary texts are in no way to be regarded as a defect; on the contrary, they are a basic element for the aesthetic response. Generally, the reader will not even be aware of them— at least so far as novels up to the end of the nineteenth century are concerned. Nevertheless, they influence his reading, for the "schematized views" are continually connected with each other by the reading process.
> This means that the reader fills in the remaining gaps. (*Prospecting* 9)

But how is the reader to fill a gap without being able to detect its edges? In "David Letterman," even the moments of presence are opaque, where we are presented with objects (or the names of objects), but not the means to

authoritatively interpret them. The narrator reports that "someone" had been using his scanner "as background projection when spray painting things black," which is sensible as a sentence, but does not resolve (or even ask) why the scanner has been used in this way, why these objects have been spray painted, who has spray painted them, or what has subsequently happened to the objects. Each statement introduces multiple new enigmas, which the text fills in the same way that "he" reacts to the replacement value of the broken scanner: "No response."

"Someone" has been using the scanner. The narrator tells the unnamed character that "he would have to pay for this." How does "he" relate to "someone?" Is "he" "someone?" Is "he" accountable for the actions of "someone?" Is "he" responsible for the scanner, regardless of who "someone" is? "No response." But Wolfgang Iser also says:

> A text that lays things out before the reader in such a way that he can either accept or reject them will lessen the degree of participation, as it allows him nothing but a yes or no. Texts with such minimal indeterminacy tend to be tedious, for it is only when the reader is given the chance to participate actively that he will regard the text, whose intention he himself has helped to compose, as real. (*Prospecting* 10)

What we are looking at, then, might be a text with maximal indeterminacy, which also requires a maximal participation in the construction of the text. But can this readerly participation possibly generate a feeling that the world within the text is real? Certainly the fictive world within the text cannot appear to be real—the gaps and contradictions appear on too many levels, even asserting their presence in the narrator's epistemological relationship with the world. In paragraph two, the narrator reports the state of his scanner after having taken "a quick look" at it. Three paragraphs later, the narrator reports that "he" adopted a new disguise "to make it look like he hadn't shaved in a couple of days," without any report of how he has obtained this knowledge. This is a narrative gap not just between objects in the world in relation to one another, but between narrator and world. So do we, as readers, fill this gap by inventing the details of the fictive world, or do we instead

recognize the narrative technique, the opacity and gaps that cannot reasonably be filled, and learn something about the codes and structures of narrative?

We might take this a step further by wondering what we have taken for granted by filling in other gaps in the text. For instance, all of the observations that I have written down so far are the product of a bias that there are certain unities to the text. For instance, that the "I" and the "he" of the narrative are the same entities from sentence to sentence, or from paragraph to paragraph. The text does not explicitly state anywhere that this is the case, but it also does not speak out against it. But the relationship between the narrative and the text might be analogous to the relationship between the 80×24 squares of the grid in relation to the text file; they might be discrete units, each independent, united only because we see them assembled in one place. We might say, regardless of how fragmentary a text might be, there is a material unity that no degree of fragmentation can rescind—in fact, the text's narrative fragmentation and disconnection only serve to hypermediate its material wholeness.

This places us in a rather agnostic position. We know that there is a unity to the text in its materiality. And yet, beyond this, we have no reason to believe that the story is anything more than an assemblage of textual materials. Is there any reason to insist that the rest of the narrative world can or should be filled in? To do so, we would need to have faith in the reality of a narrative world. Such faith is not unprecedented: a newspaper article states that a convenience store has been robbed. In our minds, we draw in the images of the aisles, the till, the slush machine, the glass doors, the refrigerated coolers, the lottery tickets under glass, etcetera, even though none of this has been reported. We believe that there is an actual world behind the narrative, and we further believe that our preconceptions of the phenomenal world can fill in the narrative gaps. We believe in it so much that sometimes we cannot conceive that narratives worlds are only simulations.

The structures and events within "David Letterman" appear to be disjunctive and inconsistent, which might fluster us or which we might slough off as the product of an unreliable narrator. But if it is a fiction, and not a depiction of reality, why shouldn't it be possible to allow for the existence of disjunction and

inconsistency? Isn't it possible, in a narrative world, for it to be simultaneously raining and not raining? It is never actually the narrator that is unreliable—the narrative itself is unreliable, even when it convinces (*especially* when it convinces). The more that one is convinced that the depicted world is a faithful depiction of reality, the less reliable that narrative is. But if belief in narrative reality ceases to be part of the game, there is no longer a reliability to begin with. It is because we have believed in the whole, the transcendent something to which the text might provide us direct access, that our relationship with the text has become an unconscious, uncritical activity. Hackerly writing, by revealing its own source code, attempts to break us out of this dream world.

CASE STUDY: *Hogs of Entropy* 293: "Yeah" by Kreid (1998). The typography of this file is more gap than text, more empty grid squares than characters, while at the same time maintaining enough typographic presence to remain legible. The text might even be said to invert the conventional ratio between a text's materiality and its linguistic content. It does bear a certain degree of linguistic significance; for example, the word "yeah" denotes some standard meaning of affirmation or agreement, but this range is merely a conventional one, and in a text as structurally aggressive as "Yeah," limiting ourselves to standard signification might obscure the most significant functions of the text—that is, the word in its typographic permutations, the lexias that enhance or complicate the word, and the arrangement of these varied lexias within the digital scroll. If we limit ourselves to the linguistic signification of words, we quickly run up against some of the problems identified by Jerome McGann:

> When we imagine texts as transmitters we are not wrong in our imagination, but we *are* narrow—and much narrower than we should be if we wish to understand how texts work. Indeed, we easily confuse investigations of textuality when we study texts as machines for carrying messages. . . . "meaning" in poetry is part of the poetical medium; it is a textual feature, like the work's phonetic patterns, or like its various visual components. (*The Textual Condition* 15)

```
L 24   C 80   IA   544k   c:\ascii\lit\hoe\hoe-0293.txt

'##:::'##::::'#####::'########: ¡VIVA LA REVOLUCION! CERDO DEL CAPITALISTA!!
 ##:::: ##::'##.. ##: ##.....:: ===============================================
 ##:::: ##:'##:::: ##: ######### THE HELOTS OF ECSTASY PRESS RELEASE #293  !!
 ##:::: ##: ########: ######:::: ZIEGO VUANTAR SHALL BE MUCH VICTORIOUS!  !!
 ##:::: ##: ##::: ##: ##::::::: ===============================================
 ##:::: ##: ##::: ##: ##::::::: "Yeah"
 ##:::: ##: ##::: ##: ########: by -> Kreid
 ..:::::..:..:::::..:.........: 11/16/98
 !!=========================================================================!!

yeah, man.

fuckin' YEAH!

YEAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH MOTHERFUCKER!!!! WOOOOO!!!!!!!

yeah!!! a-hahahahah! yeah!!!!!!!!e$!!!!!!!!ee!!!!

yeah yeah yeah yeah, yeah, yeah!!!! dig it!!! dig it!!! yeah!!!!!!!

yes, y'all.  oh yes.  yes indeed.  ohhhh yessss..... YEAAAAAAHHHHHHH....

motha-fuckah!!! yeah! yeah! yeah yeah yeah yeah!
```

Figure 2.3-8: "Yeah"

In the context of a text like "Yeah," it seems particularly strange to ask, what is it trying to say? The text does *say* something through its linguistic content (it says "yeah" a number of times, in a number of ways), but most of what the text *does* is by means of its structure and its typography, adding to (and launching off from) the linguistic content of a compulsively repeated phrase that is also its title. "Yeah" is not told but shown, and it is not a shown in an imagist sense, but by means of the arrangement of text, typographical materials, and open space distributed purposefully and aesthetically across the surface of the ASCII text file. We are not looking through the text, but at it.

It might appear that "Yeah" does not build a world. It certainly does not depict objects, persons, or places, and there is no conventional characterization. We might say that it is a monologue devoid of context, but the text is so digital, so typographic, that even "monologue" is not quite the right word. We would be better to think of it as a monologue through type, or a typologue. When we think of it as typologue, its context becomes immediately apparent: it is a story set within the hypermediated materiality of the digital computer, ASCII text, and the typographic structure of the scroll. The speaker (or "typist") of the text is a writer, writing an ASCII text file, which is not to say that the real-world writer manages to mystically inhabit an arrangement of words on the screen, but that there is a metadiscursive quality to the narrative, in which the character who propels the narrative is a not only a writer within the world of the text, but also a simulation of a writer outside of the world of the text. And really, that which is "depicted" within a text is only ever a simulation, and never a thoroughly convincing one at that—but the words of a narrator who is writing can be the most realistic, most mimetic form of writing, because they so directly simulate the process and materials by which they have been created. "Yeah" is written in the phenomenal world by Kreid, and in the fictional world by the narrator. At what level do we distinguish between the two? What we are looking at has been written by both.

As the typewritten monologue hypermediates the materiality of the keyboard, the typography of the text hypermediates the materiality of the electronic scroll. As we read "Yeah," we activate this scroll by manipulating a

framing device (the screen, a 1920-unit grid), moving up and down through the text, animating the scroll as we shift the file through our viewscreen, one line at a time. Even if we traverse the text in larger chunks (by pressing the "page down" or "page up" key) we are clearly following the course of a single unbroken document, moving along a vertical axis. Our engagement with the materials of the medium animates the text, turning it into an adventure, a mystery—there is no way to know how many blank lines there will be between one statement and the next as we drift through the sparse and typographically-charged tunnel of text. The animation of the text is under our control, as Marshall McLuhan once said of the technology of the mechanical typewriter:

> Typography bears much resemblance to cinema, just as the reading of print puts the reader in the role of the movie projector. The reader moves the series of imprinted letters before him at a speed consistent with apprehending the motions of the author's mind. (*The Gutenberg Galaxy* 143)

Although writing is not so miraculous as to grant readers direct access to the non-verbal thoughts of an author, it is easy enough in a text like "Yeah" to see how such an illusion can be produced. The markings on the screen are linguistic, but they also simulate typing—the words, in reality, are also typed, and as we travel (or seem to travel) from the top to the bottom of the document, we unavoidably realize that the markings on the screen are inscribed on a scroll. Like "Acetylene Balloon Bomb," this text might transmit information, but it also employs structural devices that retard the flow of information. Jay David Bolter says that the materials of digital media might significantly contribute to a self-referential form of discourse, particularly in comparison to print media:

> In the age of print, the ideal was in general to make a text transparent, so that the reader looked through the text to the world beyond. This was the goal of realistic painting as well as the traditional novel. In a digital rhetoric, transparency need not be the only virtue. The reader can be made to focus on the verbal patterns, on the text as a texture of elements. The text can be transparent or opaque, and it can oscillate between

transparency and opacity, between asking the reader to look through the text to the "world beyond" and asking her to look at the text itself as a formal structure. (*Writing Space* 185)

Although there might be some kind of correlation between the shift from print to digital media and the shift from transparency to opacity, neither medium prescribes that a text must take a particular position within a transparency-opacity spectrum. Linguistic opacity is as old as language and typographic opacity is as old as typography, but only in some contexts has opacity been recognized as a positive quality. Some of these contexts would include recognizable twentieth-century literary movements such as Futurism, Dada, Constructivism, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, and other works and movements that have been identified under the broader banners of Modernism and Postmodernism. As Brian McHale says of the transparency-opacity spectrum in a postmodernist codex:

> While a [hand-produced] manuscript could still be regarded as the record of an oral performance, which unfolds in time, a [mechanically-produced] book was a *thing*, and its material qualities and physical dimensions inevitably interacted with the word. Far from exploiting this interaction, however, fiction in the realist tradition has sought to suppress or neutralize it; realist fiction, says Sukenick, "tends to deny its technological reality." It does so by conventionalizing space right out of existence. Nothing must interfere with fiction's representation of reality, so the physical dimensions of the book must be rendered functionally invisible. Thus we get that "solid block of print from one margin to another running down the page from top to bottom, except for an occasional paragraph indentation" of which Sukenick speaks. So familiar and predictable is this format that it has come to seem like a "second nature"; it is, as the Prague structuralists would have said, fully "automatized." Indeed, the functional invisibility of space in prose fiction is what distinguishes prose from verse, with its conventions of the unjustified right margin and stanza breaks. *Spacing* is the sign of verse; prose, the unmarked member of the pair, is identified by its *spacelessness*. (*Postmodernist Fiction* 181)

Although this dissertation is the product of my interaction with ASCII texts, these observations are not only applicable to ASCII texts. When I talk about the hackerly, I am not just talking about digital media, but a techniques and practices that are portable and can be used in conjunction with any medium. The hack is relevant to every project that refuses to abide by tradition, that resists authority, that wages war on common sense. Common sense is, after all, only a romanticized vision of one's own indoctrination. Nothing that is coded is naturally legitimate, and every product of discourse is coded.

This is the revolution: a set of techniques and practices that subvert the ideas of transparency, naturalization, and meaning. This revolution cannot be reduced to a transparent, natural, meaningful activity. Returning to the header of *Hogs of Entropy* 293, "Yeah," we witness the simulated cry of revolution: "VIVA LA REVOLUCION! CERDO DEL CAPITALISTA!" The language suggests an insurgency emanating from the Spanish colonies, presumably against the capitalist pig. But the signification of this phrase is thickened by the title of the publication, *Hogs of Entropy*, in which the writers themselves are framed as the pigs. Is a publication a thing that Ziego Vuantar can launch a revolt against? Or is this a revolution in the Spanish colonies, a celebration of enslavement, a takedown of the capitalist pig, or an enshrinement of the hog of entropy? Or it is the cry of apolitical revolution, the revolution of a single man who is an invented character, written in all-caps, with multiple exclamation marks, with multi-line ASCII art? What, ultimately, do all of these things signify?

> If you like, they signify 'nothing'; their essence is in the process of signification, not in what they signify. (Barthes, qtd in *Structuralist Poetics* 32)

Our concerns must not only go beyond linguistic signification, but they must disrupt the institution of realism by raising awareness of the narrative devices that we have traditionally been conditioned to be unconscious of. The most revolutionary act is to refuse to adopt conformist visions of discourse, conformist

visions of signification, conformist visions of the real. Realistic discourse imposes limitations on reality itself; it says, this is what we are capable of experiencing, this is what we are capable of observing, this is our psychological range, these are our beliefs. We must revolt against practices that attempt to close the potential signification of the world, that seek to limit the function of our minds. We might strive to produce Lyn Hejinian's open text:

> The "open text" often emphasizes or foregrounds process, either the process of the original composition or of subsequent compositions by readers, and thus resists the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix material and turn it into a product; that is, it resists reduction and commodification. (*The Language of Inquiry* 43)

If we wish to stand in opposition to a particular institution, we can do so by means of authoritarian discourse. But if we wish to stand in opposition to authoritarian *practices*, our own discourse cannot be constructed in a transparent, realistic, hypotactical way. Our texts must reveal their own structures, leave gaps, invite participation, and never declare themselves to be complete, full, or true.

We must dispel our own illusions of the sanctity of the text, of meaning in language, of linearity, of verisimilitude. We must be able to shred every text, to cut it into pieces and rearrange it, to read it forward, backward, and from every angle. We won't lose our souls by refusing to cry at non-diegetic violins—we will only gain freedom by laughing at their artifice. The discourse that fools everyone does not need to fool us. Taking the materials in hand, we can find new ways to fool ourselves—propelled by the text, perhaps, but not subordinated to it. We can look at discourse for what it is instead of trying to look through it for what its narrative claims to be.

3.0> NETWORK

So you'd like dial in . . . and . . . it's it's . . . you hear the modem go . . . it gets little noises and it's whistling and stuff . . . and you're on!—damn— it's like . . . and there's no multitasking, it's like that's all your computer does, so you're like, you've got the whole screen . . . and you're there!—it feels like you're going somewhere, like it's a place, like a journey. (Swamp Rat, *BBS: The Documentary*, 2005)

The original idea was this: anybody anywhere could write a message and have it be spread far & wide, in theory. It was a strange sense of newfound power, really. I mean, before the modem, a kid couldn't do that. He'd write something, or say something to his friends. It couldn't be spread far & wide, so that some random stranger could read that, and, hopefully, say "YEAH! ME TOO!" That "me too!" effect is critical to text files. (Mogel, Interview, 1999)

Well, Dan Rather wasn't telling me which crystal to buy at Radio Shack to build a redbox so I could prank call Russia! The nice thing about textfiles was the equality factor. No matter what type of viewpoint you held, you could whip together some text and upload it somewhere. (Kilgore Trout, Interview, 2003)

You could write about anything, you could read about anything . . . well, for one thing, there were no 'publishers'. But also, you could remain anonymous in a very special sense. When people usually write, they hide the texts they produce in their desk drawer. Not because they necessarily think it's bad (otherwise they would not hide it . . . they would throw it away), but because they do not dare showing it to other people, because texts ARE personal matters . . . but in the electronic world, you need not be ashamed for what you write . . . for example, if you show a text of

yours to a friend . . . he or she will, inevitably, read it with YOU in mind; but on the net, 'you' disappear, only the text remains, and that's quite liberating. (The GNN, Interview, 2003)

The fact that I distributed the file is hardly the point. I merely obtained it from the authors of the file and distributed it to other sources, who apparently distributed it other places. If I am responsible for this file, I believe you should find a number of other authors also. It is not only this file that you have written me about that the information about the "secret" to picking Master locks is included in, but also a number of other files that have been circulating for years. It is old information, someone just re-published it. ("Phrack Inc. Vs. Master Lock Company," 1986)

3.1> BYTE ECONOMY (INFORMATION WANTS TO BE FREE)

During the era of the earliest surviving ASCII publications, the computer underground consisted of innumerable hubs of culture in the form of independently-operated, predominantly non-profit bulletin board systems (or BBSes). A BBS is a software-driven system hosted on a personal computer, which routes incoming calls into an interface that allows callers to send and receive messages, upload and download files, and play online games. Although there were some profitable multi-line BBSes, such as the WELL, which could facilitate as many as sixty-four simultaneous connections in 1989, most BBSes were small, non-profit, and featured only one telephone line.

To create a BBS, a system operator (or sysop) must dedicate a computer and phone line exclusively to the BBS, and when the BBS is up and running, the phone line and computer are dedicated entirely to that use. Furthermore, a sysop must customize the BBS, designing the theme and atmosphere that provide a framework for user interaction.

On the smallest BBSes, only one user could access a system at any given time. Calling a BBS required a certain amount of dedication, because a user could only connect to one BBS at a time, and users would have to compete with one

another to connect to the one phone line. Even though these Bulletin Boards were not directly connected with one another (with the exception of some interconnected BBS networks such as FidoNet), small boards formed a kind of network with one another, connected by means of their user bases, consisting of people who would call multiple BBSes, downloading and uploading files from board to board, acting as the meme carriers of digital culture. ASCII text files proliferated and thrived in this environment for a number of reasons:

1) the minimal file size in an era with slow transfer rates and small disk drives
2) the universal readability of ASCII files among diverse computer systems
3) the lack of cost in producing text and the ability to reproduce text endlessly
4) the ease of writing and publishing a file, requiring minimal technical expertise
5) the relative lack of policing within the computer underground
6) the need for information and culture within the BBS "world" or environment
7) the use of alias, by which writers are both anonymous and recognized
8) the rhizomatic and decentralized organization of the BBS network
9) the upload/download ratio of BBSes that gave files a byte commodity value
10) the willingness of ASCII writers to publish without copyright
11) the presence of rampant piracy, which disestablishes corporate media

There is no root to the BBS network as a whole, no node from which all of the other nodes can be accessed. For the most part, BBSes are so small and labour-intensive to seek out, and so divorced from the financial dealings of the world that its media will be the product of people with a great supply of time and energy, but limited access to conventional means of publication. This inspires a particularly grassroots media, created by BBS users who are interested in the local culture of their own pocket of the world. The rhizomatic and decentralized structure of the environment makes it a very difficult one for centralized media to penetrate, because the BBS network has no centre, no hierarchy, no organized system of interconnection. One's presence within the computer underground can only be established on a node-by-node basis. To attempt to saturate the BBS network with

corporate media would be like trying to run advertisements in the hand-made class newspapers of every elementary school in the world.

Because the BBS network, unlike other modes of communication, was not saturated by corporate media and advertising, ASCII zine publishers were able to effectively promote their own work by word of mouth and by democratizing the transmission of the text. BBSes were platforms in search of content—the success of a BBS is dependent on its activity, whether "activity" is defined by the use of its message board, its online games, or the quality and quantity of the files that the BBS makes available for upload and download—all of these are facilitated and stimulated by sysops, but largely determined by a BBS's users. A BBS user, likewise, wants to see plenty of new content every time he or she logs on to a BBS—new files are an important part of this content. Because of this mutual desire to see active uploading and downloading on BBSes, there is a mutual effort on the part of publishers, sysops, and couriers to promote independent media (by BBS users, for BBS users). Writers who might never have imagined their work in a library or book store might now see the potential of becoming a prominent author in the new world of digital culture.

The ASCII text file, unvetted by the machinery of the culture industry, does not need to consider profit among its motives. The result is a literary movement consisting of writers who publish freely (as in, without financial expense) and freely (as in, without concern for marketability). In other words, ASCII literature is a publishing movement free of a number of constraints that are basic to most other forms of writing and publishing. This model allows for writings that are minimal or maximal, and for the publication of unpolished text, which perhaps would never be published if not for free. ASCII literature can be produced with no concern for profit or loss, specifically because there is at no level any potential for either of these. In exchange for this freedom of production and distribution, all that ASCII writers must do is accept the fact that the reproduction and redistribution of their writing will be beyond their control, and that they will receive no financial compensation for their work.

As the decentralized BBS network and the rhizomatic transmission of information work in favour of the independent artist, so does the existence of rampant piracy within the computer underground. Every ASCII publisher who uploads a text file to a BBS enters into an implicit agreement: first, they will not be financially rewarded by the BBS users who download their publication. Second, they can expect those same users to copy and re-upload their files in any way they see fit. In short, ASCII writers must forego certain "rights" associated with the publishing industry, in exchange for access to the potential means for their work to proliferate from BBS to BBS, city to city, allowing for the distant (but actual) possibility to contribute to the shape of digital culture.

3.2> THE CONSCIENCE OF A COURIER

I have mentioned that there is no opportunity to make money or to lose money by publishing ASCII text files, and this is true. Major reasons for distributing ASCII text files include the building of communities and the promotion of art and culture, but this does not mean that the BBS environment is entirely without an economy—there is an economy, but one that is not driven by conventional currency. Numerous BBSes are regulated by upload/download ratios, which require users to upload a certain amount of data before being allowed to download data. This ensures that a BBS's file areas will continue to be stocked with new material and that users will contribute to the atmosphere and cultural relevance of the BBS. When a user uploads a file that is not already hosted by the BBS, the user will receive an amount of credit based on the number of bytes or the number of files that he or she has uploaded. As Th3 K0d3s1ay3r called this, in the case study from the dissertation's introductory chapter, "th3 b3auty 0f the f|13 p0|nt."

In addition to gaining byte capital, in many cases a courier of files might also expect to gain a certain amount of status by circulating sought-after files, whether distributing pirated software ("warez") or any other type of file (including ASCII). In a text file from 1987, Mr. Pez explains:

> I was very annoyed to get Phrack 11 quite soon after it came out, and was all set to start u/ling it everywhere, when I noticed Thomas Covenant did

the same. So he stole any recognition I might get from u/ling the latest

Phrack. Another thing that proves my point about the textfile world.

There's a mad race, when something new comes out, to distribute it. Much

like the "new warez" of a couple of years ago. Only, it's looked upon in

rather poor taste to add your board number and stuff to the end of a

Phrack, or an LOD/H Technical Journal, like you could once do with

games you cracked or distributed. (Speaking of the LOD/H TJ - I was very

early in getting it, and began uploading it to places quickly. This one I beat

both Thomas Covenant and Jason Scott to, since it was only out in

'packed' format for Apples. This thrills the hell out of you, I'm sure.)

Anyway, the textfiles world is pretty tough. ("Mr. Pez's Rambling about

Textfiles / which naturally leads to a discussion / about Leeching")

Pez's article demonstrates the excitement and single-mindedness of the fanatic
who is dedicated to the couriering of files. Even the members of the computer
underground who are not "producers" of text (in a conventional sense) can gain
cultural capital by being the first to upload a coveted file to a BBS. Couriers
(whether couriers of warez or ASCII) value the newness of files and the difficulty
with which these files have been acquired. This might mean uploading and
downloading to and from BBSes in distant area codes (which is most impressive
among youths, particularly in the days of expensive long distance rates—it might
even suggest that the courier is a capable phreak artist).

In the process of distributing ASCII texts throughout the computer
underground, the publisher, text, and courier engage in a symbiotic relationship
that facilitates the proliferation of files. As writers, we must accept that the
transmission and distribution of our words might not be due to their literary value,
but perhaps due to their byte value (in this sense it is like the publishing industry,
except that every courier decides independently whether or not to contribute to a
file's continued dissemination by uploading it to a BBS—also, obscurity is
valuable in a file, because it means that fewer BBSes will have the file and more
will "need" it), increasing the potential for fast-acting couriers and sysops to make
a name for themselves and their BBSes on the backs of other people's files.

John Perry Barlow says that the transmission of digital media is like wine without bottles, no longer bound by vessels such as the codex or wax cylinder. ASCII publishers, too, have used the bottle as symbol, describing their texts moving through the currents of the BBS network like messages in bottles. Living on the desert islands of our parents' basements and attics, our first concern isn't to protect the sanctity of our desperate messages, but to ensure their ability to reach somebody, anybody who might care. So we ship messages in bottles, without bottles, pouring wine directly into the stream of digital culture, watching the substance of our creation as it intermingles with its carrier. The original text is at its highest concentration at the moment before it enters the stream, diluting on contact, and blending more the further it spreads.

During the transmission of ASCII files, texts may be corrupted, either by accident or due to the intent of the file's couriers. For instance, modem transfers (which convert data to sound, transmit sound via telephone line, and convert that sound back to data), can be corrupted by line noise (imperfections in sound), which affect the file-in-transit, registering as a string of illegible characters in the text. This is particularly prevalent when a text is not directly downloaded, but viewed, copied, pasted, and saved as a new file—an imitation of the original. In a text file from 1989, the Ramsacker describes his attitude toward this phenomenon:

> What disgusts me further is that some people DO take the time to make their files look pretty, only to have some complete looze fuck it up by viewing it over shitty phone lines and then upload it to another system, thus causing a perpetuation of a corrupted file. In most cases, some of the important data gets lost or the effect of the file is shattered because you come upon a string of line noise right in the middle of an interesting section. If people would just take the time to handle the files with care, there wouldn't be many crap files around. Unless you're an asshole, you don't check a book out of a library and destroy it. Let's face it, fucked files are just that: fucked! And nobody likes a copy of a fucked file no matter

how little they care. Everyone would rather have the file in it's original

format. ("The Ramsacker's Textfile Primer")

The Ramsacker is not merely speaking on behalf of text file aficionados (the people who care the most about ASCII texts), but also on behalf of those readers who care the least. Those who care the least and have the smallest investment in reading a text file are probably the least likely to accept normative deviations such as line noise in a text. The corruption of a file not only limits the text's ability to appeal to individual readers, but it also limits the file's ability to move from BBS to BBS. The ethical courier, upon discovering that he or she has acquired a corrupted file, will be less likely to upload that file to other BBSes. Fanatics might be willing to struggle through the line noise that corrupts a text file; the majority of potential readers—those who don't care—might not.

Another problem the Ramsacker alludes to is that a corrupt file, saved under the same file name as the original, can limit the potential for the proliferation of the uncorrupted file. Disk operating systems cannot store two files of the same name in the same folder, making it impossible to upload a file to a BBS that already possesses a file bearing the exact same name. Therefore, two files of the same name are in direct competition with one another for the ability to travel to new BBSes. If the corrupt copy is the first to be uploaded to a BBS, the preceding version will not be able to overwrite it.

In addition to his discussion of the unintentional corruption of text files, the Ramsacker also talks about the intentional modification of text. The more widely text files travel, the more generations of couriers and BBSes that they travel through, the more likely they are to be corrupted, and the more severe and compounded these corruptions are likely to become. But the majority of textual corruptions are not accidental at all—they are intentional modifications inflicted upon the text by couriers. The Ramsacker is particularly concerned with the issue of typographic reformatting. He says:

Don't try to do the general modem public a favor by "editing" files. Let

sleeping dogs lie. If the author intended the file to be in all uppercase then

that's how it should stay. The same goes for 40 column textfiles. They

don't need to be stretched out to 80 columns. They still read the same

either way. ("The Ramsacker's Textfile Primer")

The argument against editing other people's files is particularly persuasive

because, contrary to what the Ramsacker says, the files *don't* read the same either

way. You will notice that he refers to "40 column textfiles." In order to

demonstrate what he is talking about, we will need to go back to a file format that

preceded the 80×24 format. Here, we will draw an example from an earlier

format, the 40×24 text file.

I have not yet mentioned 40-column files because it is impossible to

mention everything at once, but in the era preceding the text files that have been

the focus of this dissertation, there was a more archaic form of the ASCII text file.

For example, unmodified computers from the Apple-II series, but predating the

IIe (released in 1983), were only able to display 40 columns, and could only use

upper-case letters. With the Apple IIe and beyond, almost all text files were

produced in 80 columns and in mixed case. In 1989, when the Ramsacker wrote

his primer, the 40-column all-caps format would have inscribed upon a text the

significance of an artefact from a bygone era. Here we will look at "THE REAL

PIRATE'S GUIDE," one of the most influential text files of all time, which was

originally formatted in 40x24 all-caps ASCII.

**CASE STUDY: "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" compiled by RABID

RASTA (1984).** This file begins with a simulation of a typical BBS message

board. The simulation puts the reader into the position of a BBS user who has just

received a message from "JHONNY THE AVENGER," an emerging software

pirate who is interested in trading copyrighted software. This simulation is a

parody or satire of unsophisticated warez couriers, their language, their attitude,

and their sense of style. In the opinion of RABID RASTA, JHONNY's discourse

proves him to be a pirate who is not real. Here are some potentially meaningful

observations about JHONNY's discourse:

Figure 3.2-1: "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" (40-column)

1) His signal-to-noise ratio is low, with his text full of spelling and grammatical errors, including the spelling of his own name. In the context of a BBS message board, this might be annoying in the same way that the Ramsacker is annoyed by line noise in text files, but as part of a simulation, JHONNY's noise becomes part of the style of the parody, serving a purposeful aesthetic and narrative function.

2) JHONNY is indiscrete, openly referring to "THE PIRATE BOARD" and providing his home phone number to a complete stranger.

3) He is attempting to acquire the second side of "SUMMER GAMES," suggesting that he already has side one. The obvious question is: why didn't he get the second half from the same source as the first half? Here JHONNY is not only inept but unashamed of this ineptitude.

4) JHONNY claims to be affiliated with well-known software pirates Mr. Xerox and Chief Surgeon, but spells their names incorrectly.

5) According to "The Annotated Real Pirate's Guide" by Jason Scott, of the four programs that he offers in trade, two of them are over a year old ("MARS CARS" and "CHOPLIFTER"), one is a ubiquitous utility for copying disks ("DISK MUNCHER"), and one ("GRAFORTH") is a graphic-oriented interpreter for a the FORTH programming language. In other words, none of these files would appeal to an accomplished software pirate.

By contrast to these five examples, we might infer that a real pirate communicates clearly, is discrete, has dignity, does not falsify his or her credentials, and trades in current and relevant software. RABID RASTA's article proceeds to prescribe the attitudes of real pirates toward the selection of aliases, the relative quality of games, hardware preferences, leeching, posturing, and the formality of language. Each item on the list begins with the phrase "REAL PIRATES . . ." For example:

REAL PIRATES' ALIASES DON'T SOUND AS IF THEY WERE EXTRACTED FROM THE LYRICS OF AN OZZY OZBOURNE SONG (I.E. PROVISIONER OF SATAN, BLACK AVENGER, DARK PHANTOM, ETC.).

"THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" is one of the most well-read and influential texts of ASCII literature. Its influence has inspired numerous sequels (The Real Pirate's Guides II-V) and derivative works (e.g. "The Real Pyros Guide," "The Real Luzer's Guide," and "The Real User + The Unreal User"). There is even a file called "Your Guide to 'REAL PIRATE'S GUIDES'." "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" has also directly influenced the four primary publications that I am working with in this dissertation:

SCREEN CAPTURE: *Anarchy Inc.* **"Modem Geeks .&. Modem Personallities" by the Daredevil (n.d.).** In this appreciation of the "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," the Daredevil says:

> The purpose of this file is to explain, in humorous terms, the difference between "modem geeks" and "modem personallities". I give great credit to the authors of 'The Real Pirates Guide', whose excellent and unique writing style gave birth to this file.

The Daredevil's goal is to parody the character-types of the computer underground and to live up to the literary standards of RABID RASTA. Although he acknowledges "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" as his primary influence, the Daredevil does not credit the writer by name—he only credits the text, leaving RABID RASTA anonymous.

SCREEN CAPTURE: *Metal Communications / Neon Knights.* **"What Assholes Do....." by the Blade (1985).** Too irreverent to directly acknowledge RABID RASTA's influence, the Blade frames his text as an addendum to "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," claiming to be inspired by "The Real Pirate" and "The Real Pirate" file. In the first paragraph, the Blade says:

> After viewing "The Real Pirate" file I saw that a few things were missing, mosly about what 'assholes do'. If over %50 of this following file pertains to you....I wood get out of the Pirating business untill you have reserected a new personallity.

```
L 22    C 16    IA    558k    c:\ascii\lit\a-inc\geekpers.hum

Anarchy inc.  ...presents...

::::::::::::::::::::::::::
::  Modem Geeks   .&.   ::
::      Modem Personallities ::
::                      ::
::   Written by: The Daredevil ::
::::::::::::::::::::::::::

Hello, Daredevil here...
   The purpose of this file is to explain, in humorous terms, the difference
between "modem geeks" and "modem personallities". I give great credit to the
authors of 'The Real Pirates Guide', whose excellent and unique writing style
gave birth to this file.

   Modem Geeks have memorized every peek, poke, and call in the applesoft
manual. Their manuals are clean, and shiny, from the first day that they were
bought.

   Modem Personallities have their manuals, but they can't seem to find them
amist all the confusion in their rooms. They don't need to memorize memory
```

Figure 3.2-2: "Modem Geeks .&. Modem Personallities"

```
L 24    C 48    IA    552k    c:\ascii\lit\m-com\asshole1.txt
Format:40col
<><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><
<>                                    <>
<>      What Assholes Do......        <>
<>                                    <>
<>         By THE BLADE               <>
<>    A Neon Knight Presentation      <>
<>         Inspired by:               <>
<>        "The Real Pirate"           <>
<>                                    <>
<><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><
<> Dist: Metal Communications        <>
<>              &                     <>
<>        The Neon Knights            <>
<>                                    <>
<><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><><

After viewing "The Real Pirate" file
I saw that a few things were missing,
mosly about what 'assholes do'.  If
over %50 of this following file
pertains to you....I wood get out of
the Pirating business untill you have
reserected a new personallity.
```

Figure 3.2-3: "What Assholes Do....."

In this article, the Blade takes on RABID RASTA's mission to exclude and insult the uninitiated, and although the Blade's text file continues to address a particular demographic within the computer underground (pirates), the title suggests a broader application: an assessment of assholes, everywhere, of all types. Although the article might continue to speak to a cultural niche, the broadness of the title allows for even more sweeping judgements than those of RABID RASTA.

SCREEN CAPTURE: "REAL PHREAKERS GUIDE VOL. 1." by Taran King and Knight Lightning (1985). In 1985, Taran King and Knight Lightning would compile the first issue of *Phrack*, but before they started publishing one of the most successful ASCII magazines of all time, they wrote an imitation of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" entitled "REAL PHREAKERS GUIDE VOL. 1." In the file, Taran King and Knight Lightning say:

> This guide is written in the same stream as the Real Pirates Guides, but for the Real Phreak. This is basically what real phreaks do and don't do according to other real phreaks... "Written by Real Phreaks for Real Phreaks". This phile has been written with the compiled ideas of phreaks other than the two writers listed in the intro. Therefore, we have a wider view of what you should be like.

The fact that this text file is labelled as "VOL. 1" suggests that King and Lightning might be planning to write sequels to this file, each of which would presumably be designed to indoctrinate phone phreaks, continuing to tell them "what [they] should be like." This file, then, provides an interesting segue between "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" and *Phrack*, as the editors distance themselves one step further from RABID RASTA's vision, transforming their project from a series of etiquette guides into a gathering point for how-to guides, news articles, and "hacker pro-philes" produced locally and nationally.

SCREEN CAPTURE: *Cult of the Dead Cow* 200: "REAL PIRATES 1993" by Swamp Ratte' (1993). By 1993, RABID RASTA's influence is so widely recognized that Swamp Ratte' can parody the fact that the original text (once

```
-- -- -- -- -- --
*REAL PHREAKERS GUIDE VOL. 1*
-- -- -- -- -- --
*  typed and created by  *
-- -- -- -- -- --
*       Taran King       *
          and
*     Knight Lightning   *
-- -- -- -- -- --
*    Written on 6/10/85  *
-- -- -- -- -- --
```

This guide is written in the same stream as the Real Pirates Guides, but for the Real Phreak. This is basically what real phreaks do and don't do according to other real phreaks... "Written by Real Phreaks for Real Phreaks". This phile has been written with the compiled ideas of phreaks other than the two writers listed in the intro. Therefore, we have a wider view of what you should be like. Well...on with the show!!!

Phone Phreak - (as defined by Forest Ranger) In the mid- 1970's, cheating the phone company became the great national pasttime among a select group known as "Phone Phreaks". These hearty young souls knew more about the phone network

Figure 3.2-4: "REAL PHREAKERS GUIDE VOL. 1."

```
REAL PIRATES 1993
       BY
  SWAMP RATTE'

AN OFFICIAL CDC PIRATES' GUILD
         RELEASE!

CALL THE POLKA AE 806/794-4362
     PW:KILL 3/12/10MEGS!!

1. REAL APPLE II PIRATES DON'T COPY
ANY GNU WAREZ.

COROLLARY: REAL APPLE II PIRATES
DON'T COPY ANY GNU WAREZ BECAUSE
THERE AREN'T ANY GNU WAREZ.

CDCPG!CDCPG!CDCPG!CDCPG!
```

Figure 3.2-5: "REAL PIRATES 1993"

imitated by *cDc*'s main influences, *Metal Communications / Neon Knights.* and *Anarchy Inc.*) is now out of date:

1. REAL APPLE II PIRATES DON'T COPY ANY GNU WAREZ.

COROLLARY: REAL APPLE II PIRATES DON'T COPY ANY GNU WAREZ BECAUSE THERE AREN'T ANY GNU WAREZ.

If we read it phonetically, it says that there aren't any "new" warez for the Apple II, which, in 1993, is certainly true. But "GNU" also refers to Richard Stallman's GNU Project and Free Software Foundation, in which Stallman asserts that "Computer users should be free to modify programs to fit their needs, and free to share software, because helping other people is the basis of society" (*Free Software, Free Society* 18). As Trilobyte adds, "GNU software is inherently and explicitly "free" and thus not capable of being warezed . . . will your readers get that?" (Interview, 2013).

Each of these files asserts its writer's authority as a centre of digital culture. Each is directly influenced by RABID RASTA's file, even on a typographic level, to the point where each features a 40-column header. Each header is surrounded by an ASCII-art frame that is similar, but not identical, to the original. And yet, none of them directly credit RABID RASTA as a source of inspiration.

The trends in "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" that carry through into these four examples continue throughout ASCII literature, particularly in the hundreds of publications that *Anarchy Inc.*, *Metal Communications / Neon Knights*, *Phrack*, and *Cult of the Dead Cow* influenced over the next twenty years. Although "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" is influenced by other texts, both inside of ASCII literature and outside of ASCII literature (Jason Scott mentions *Real Men Don't Eat Quiche* [1982] as a precursor to electronic "real" guides), the ways in which this particular file has subsequently affected ASCII literature is surprisingly traceable, and its reflections can be seen in many the future trends of

ASCII writing: the simulation/parody of the uninitiated computer user, the self-positioning of the self as an authoritative cultural centre, the spark and vitality, the modularity of narrative structure, and the interzone that these texts occupy between signal and noise. As I have previously stated, the line noise here becomes its own signal, leading to a literature that is structured like information but behaves like poetry (the primary subject of the next chapter, entitled HACK).

RABID RASTA's text has shaped the future of ASCII literature in the sense that others have adopted and responded to its style, but this kind of imitation is not the only influence that the file has had. In addition to writing new files based on "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," BBS users have also modified RABID RASTA's file and distributed these modified versions. RABID RASTA has influenced the texts of other writers, and other writers have also influenced the text originally produced by RABID RASTA.

3.3> THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDES

I need to explain where the 40-column screen capture of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" comes from. It is a pure simulation, which I have constructed from a representation of the file that is featured in Jason Scott's "The Annotated Real Pirate's Guide," which I will now include a screen capture of.

SCREEN CAPTURE: "The Annotated Real Pirate's Guide" by Jason Scott (2002). This text file intersperses a 40-column representation of RABID RASTA's text with 80-column commentary written by Jason Scott. I cannot speak to the authenticity of the 40-column rendering of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" as it is represented here, because I have no authoritative 40-column version of the file to compare it to. The 40-column formatting featured in "The Annotated Real Pirate's Guide" might be copied from a now-missing version of the text file, or this rendering might be simulated, reformatted from 80 columns to 40 columns. Regardless, the simulated 40-column version featured in the previous case study is an in-house modification that makes no claim to authenticity.

```
L 110    C 64    IA    484k    c:\ascii\lit\rr\realpi~1.hum
The file has undergone a number of edits and changes over time, making
determination of what it originally looked like somewhat difficult, but I
believe the file being annotated in this document is the "canonical"
text, which I downloaded from a BBS around late 1984.

 _____
[N] [N] [Y] [Y] [N] [Y] [N]
[N]                             [Y]
[N]    THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE  [Y]
[N]                             [Y]
[N]         COMPILED BY         [Y]
[N]         RABID RASTA         [Y]
[Y]                             [N]
[N] [Y] [N] [N] [Y] [N] [N] [Y]

This file was originally written in 40 columns, all uppercase. Why? Because
the Apple II, one of the more popular home computers of the early 1980's,
did not originally come with the ability to do 80 columns, or lowercase.
This was later remedied, and for those who paid the money, a chip could be
installed to give older Apples these missing features.

BBS programs would often ask you how many columns you wished to see the BBS
in. This normally only came into play in the message bases, where you might
```

Figure 3.3-1: "The Annotated Real Pirate's Guide"

Although "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" might be the closest there is to a canonical ASCII text file, it cannot currently be found on the Internet in its original form. On May 19, 2012, I was able to find several distinct variations of the file, none of them "original." Although all of these files are saved with different file names and stored in different locations, the proliferation of corrupted versions seems to have suffocated the original's capability for survival. Here we will study a database of a few variant editions of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," and because each version bears the same title, we will refer to them by their file names and the websites where they are located.

SCREEN CAPTURE: "realpira.hum" (hosted on textfiles.com). There are several striking differences between the 40-column and 80-column editions of the file, particularly the amount of text that is visible within the space of a single screen, and the degree of congruity between the width of the header and the width of the body of text. Less visible is the fact that in the digital environment of the mid-to-late-1980s, a 40-column screen would register as the product of obsolete technology (like a black and white movie would seem obsolete in the 1970s). 40-column formatting retained, the visual qualities of the text inscribe it with a pastness, effectively rewriting what "REAL PIRATES DO" as what "REAL PIRATES *DID*." The language, ideas, and writing technologies of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" reflect the attitudes of 1984, not 1986 or 1989, and the line length and use of upper case also indicates this visually.

If RABID RASTA was working on an Apple II series computer that was incapable of writing in lower case or in 80 columns, we can hardly say that these constraints were intentional. But even though RABID RASTA might not have sought the constraints of 40-column text, he did choose precisely how to work with them. Here are a few of the basic differences between the 80-column and 40-column editions of the file, which demonstrate some basic differences in how their typography signifies:

1) The 80-column edition no longer bears the mark of a file that has been written on an Apple II-series computer predating the IIe. This might

```
L 24   C 79   IA   558k   c:\ascii\lit\rr\realpira.hum
[\] [\] [\] [\] [\] [\]
[\]                   [\]
[\]  THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE   [\]
[\]                   [\]
[\]       COMPILED BY       [\]
[\]        RABID RASTA      [\]
[\]                   [\]
[\] [\] [\] [\] [\] [\]

[SIMULATION]

FROM-> JHONNY THE AVENGER
DATE-> SAT AUG 4   10:21 PM

I SAW YOUR MESSAGE ON THE PIRATE BOARD ABOUT YOU HAVEING SIDE 2 OF SUMMER GAM
ES!MY CONNECTIONS MR.ZEROX AND CHEIF'S URGEN BLACK BAG ARE'NT AROUND TO MAIL IT
2 ME SO WANNA DO SOME SERIUS TRADEI NG?I HAVE GRAFORTH ,CHOPLIFTER ,MARS CARS
,DISK MUNCHER AND SOME KOOL OTHER
STUFF AND GAMES.CALL ME AT 312-323- 3741.IF YOU NEED PHREAK CODES I HAVE THEM
TO AND BOX PLANS.BYE
```

Figure 3.3-2: "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" (realpira.hum)

lead to further ambiguity about the currency of RABID RASTA's vision of contemporary pirate (and BBS) culture. The visual quality of the 40-column line might evoke the days when modems ran at 300 baud, when this file would have been transmitted 30 characters per second (at optimal speed), or 75% of a line per second. In that era, a file one thousand words in length would have taken three and a half minutes to transmit via modem. The 80-column file, by contrast, would not have a particular limit-date associated with it.

2) Because the Apple II series developed the capacity for 80-column lines and lower case text at the same time, the use of all-caps in an 80-column text file appears to be intentional rather than the product of a technological limitation. At this point, we must wonder why the text file is written in capital letters, whereas in the 40-column era this would have been a material constraint rather than an editorial decision.

3) The short line of the 40-column text file draws greater attention to each line as a unit of composition, and the fact that the first line ends with the phrase "ON THE PIRATE BOARD," brings extra weight (a finality, even) to the statement. The 40-column arrangement of the text is structured so as to foreground JHONNY's indiscretion in this instance, but the 80-column adaptation runs this line into the next, burying the particular statement in the midst of the newly-constructed line, reducing its potential to resonate.

4) Words that were once broken at the end of the 40-column line are now broken in the middle of the 80-column line. The name "CHEIF S / URGEON" becomes "CHEIF S URGEON," and "TRADEI / NG?I" becomes "TRADEI NG?I."

5) After the "[SIMULATION]" concludes, the text continues, still in capital letters, still with words still broken over lines. The conversion of RABID RASTA's own commentary from 40 to 80 columns makes it appear unsophisticated, especially in the instances where 40-column enjambments have been changed into 80-column caesuras (e.g.

"THAT'S IT...FOR NOW. SINCE LOSERS IN- VENT NEW WAYS TO BE LOSERS EVERY DAY,").

SCREEN CAPTURE: "hacker.txt" (hosted on saysomethingcryptic.com).

1) All of the graphic flourishes have been removed from the header, but the linguistic content is retained.

2) The header has been converted from all-capitals to title case. After converting the file from 40 to 80 columns (removing one archaism), the continued use of all-capitals no longer functions in the same way. The 80-column line, already too long for elegant page design, makes the continuous use of upper case more taxing on the eye and provides less empty screen space per character than does lower case.

3) The simulated message is now the only part of the file that is written entirely in capital letters. The courier who decides to change all of the text in "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" to standard case but keeps JHONNY's message in capitals specifically imposes a new range of signification upon the use of upper case in this section. The capitalization or lack of capitalization in the different sections now visually distinguishes the two styles of discourse. Whereas in the original file, both RABID RASTA and JHONNY both typed entirely in capitals, this version of the file creates an environment where computer users have the option to use capitals or not. In this world, RABID RASTA's lower case text appears elegant in contrast to JHONNY's crude and ancient letterforms.

4) The simulated message, once a parody of the style and grammar of uninitiated software pirates, has now been partially edited for style and grammar (losing a key part of the irony of earlier versions). Words that were once broken over lines are mended and the use of commas is corrected. Improper spelling and usage of periods remains.

The Real Pirate's Guide
Compiled By Rabid Rasta

[simulation]
FROM-> JHONNY THE AVENGER DATE-> SAT
AUG 4   10:21 PM

I SAW YOUR MESSAGE ON THE PIRATE BOARD ABOUT YOU HAVEING SIDE 2 OF SUMMER
GAMES! MY CONNECTIONS MR. ZEROX AND CHEIF SURGEN BLACK BAG ARE'NT AROUND TO
MAIL IT 2 ME SO WANNA DO SOME SERIUS TRADEING? I HAVE GRAFORTH, CHOPLIFTER,
MARS CARS, DISK MUNCHER AND SOME KOOL OTHER STUFF AND GAMES.CALL ME AT
312-323-3741.IF YOU NEED PHREAK CODES I HAVE THEM TO AND BOX PLANS.BYE

THE KNIGHTS OF MYSTERIOUS KEYBOARDS*!
THE AWESOMEST HACK GROUP IN TOWN

Is the author of the above message a true pirate? Since the beginning of
time there has been an implicit code of etiquette governing the actions of
software pirates, but as many of you may have noticed as of late, that code
has been knocked around a bit. Although it's not difficult to differentiate
a true pirate from one of these poor imitations, I believe that, with the
number of true pirates decreasing at such an alarming rate, this code
should be set straight. After all, although "Jhonny" is admittedly a moron,
it's not his fault that he never received proper guidance.

Figure 3.3-3: "The Real Pirate's Guide" (hacker.txt)

SCREEN CAPTURE: "rpg.001" (hosted on textfiles.com).

1) The entire text is indented ten spaces instead of being flush with the left margin. The title and credits of the text are rendered in standard case.

2) The graphic header is retained, but RABID RASTA's name is removed from it, rendering the text anonymous.

3) The number of blank lines between the header and the main body of text increases. Space breaks in the middle of words are mended. Some words are separated with two spaces instead of one. The punctuation is the same. The simulation is in capitals. RABID RASTA's essay is converted to standard case.

SCREEN CAPTURE: "rpg1.txt" (hosted on scovetta.com).

1) The noise "okokoko" appears at the top of the file.

2) The graphic header is rendered in a non-graphic format, and adds the text: "Edited for Commodore by // <<<2001>>>."

3) The file uses standard case everywhere except for in the simulation. The simulation mends broken words and corrects the use of commas.

4) Although this version is formatted in 40 columns, none of the words are broken at the end of lines. This might suggest that this copy of the file, in its lineage of transmission, was converted from an 80-column word-mending adaptation back into a 40-column version. Further suggesting that the text is a modification of an 80-column version, many of the lines extend beyond 40 columns, probably because of editorial oversight. For example, line 107 is 97 columns wide.

5) The version is "Edited for Commodore"; as it turns out, all of the names of programs have been changed by <<<2001>>>. In the last line of screen capture, we can see that "SIDE 2 OF SUMMER GAM / ES!MY" has been replaced by "ULTIMA IV!!" The revised text seems to demonstrate a sort of cluelessness about the rest of the file, in which RABID RASTA later says "REAL PIRATES DON'T BELIEVE THE MORONS / WHO SAY THEY HAVE ULTIMA IV AND POLE /

```
L 24    C 80    IA    467k    c:\asciilit\rr\rpg.001

 [\]  [\] [\] [\] [\] [\]
 [\]                  [\]
 [\]     The Real Pirate's Guide  [\]
 [\]                  [\]
 [\]  [\] [\] [\] [\] [\]


[simulation]

FROM-> JHONNY THE AVENGER
DATE-> SAT AUG 4   10:21 PM

I SAW YOUR MESSAGE ON THE PIRATE BOARD ABOUT YOU HAUEING SIDE 2
OF SUMMER GAMES! MY  CONNECTIONS MR. ZEROX AND CHEIF SURGEN BLACK
BAG ARE'NT AROUND TO MAIL IT 2 ME SO WANNA DO SOME SERIUS
TRADEING?I HAVE GRAFORTH ,CHOPLIFTER ,MARS CARS ,DISK MUNCHER AND
SOME KOOL OTHER STUFF AND GAMES.CALL ME AT 312-323-3741. IF YOU
NEED PHREAK CODES I HAVE THEM TO AND BOX PLANS.BYE
```

Figure 3.3-4: "The Real Pirate's Guide" (rpg.001)

okokoko

```
                The Real Pirate's Guide

                    Compiled By
                    Rabid Rasta

                Edited for Commodore by

                    <<<2001>>>


[simulation]

FROM-> JHONNY THE AVENGER
DATE-> SAT AUG 4   10:21 PM

I SAW YOUR MESSAGE ON THE PIRATE BOARD
ABOUT YOU HAVEING ULTIMA IV!!
```

Figure 3.3-5: "The Real Pirate's Guide" (rpg1.txt)

POSITION." If the line about Ultima IV has ever been capable of having comic potential, the doubled statement reduces this potential.

SCREEN CAPTURE: "pirategui.txt" (hosted on programmersheaven.com).
1) The file is nearly identical to "rpg1.txt," but now reads: "Compiled by / Jeff Burchell // Edited for Commodore by // Jeff Burchell."
2) The file cuts off in the middle of line 247 (of a total 310 lines in "rpg1.txt").

What is the cumulative effect of these variations? For one, they demonstrate the innate potential for multiplicity in the readings of a text. What originated as a single version of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" has become a multitude of variations, none of them identical to the original. Jerome McGann says:

> texts do not simply vary over time. Texts vary from themselves (as it were) immediately, as soon as they engage with the readers they anticipate. Two persons see "the same" movie or read "the same" book and come away with quite different understandings of what they saw or read. (*The Textual Condition* 10)

The variant editions of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" simulate what range of potential signification might arise from multiple readings of a single text, but here, we are looking at an example where every "reader" has modified the text, encoded their observations into it, and produced new and distinct textual variants in response to the original. In response to the state of the text, the Ramsacker suggests the following rule:

> Never add your say to a file or modify the original authors work just because you feel strongly about the subject. You wouldn't change Shakespear's words around in any of his works (unless you were in school and had nothing better to do). Modifying other peoples work is the sign of a true loser. I saw this done to "The Real Pirates Guide" and it totally disgusted me (you're a fucken loser for that, Dak)! ("The Ramsacker's Textfile Primer")

```
L 11    C 2    IA    267k    c:\ascii\lit\rr\piratgui.txt




                    The Real Pirate's Guide

                        Compiled By
                        Jeff Burchell


                  Edited for Commodore by

                        Jeff Burchell


[simulation]

FROM-> JHONNY THE AVENGER
DATE-> SAT AUG 4   10:21 PM

I SAW YOUR MESSAGE ON THE PIRATE BOARD
ABOUT YOU HAVEING ULTIMA IV!!
MY CONNECTIONS MR.ZEROX AND CHEIF
SURGEN BLACK BAG ARE'NT AROUND TO MAIL
IT 2 ME SO WANA DO SOME SERIUS TRADING
HAVE JUMP-MAN, CHOPLIFTER, COMMODORE
POOL, DI-SECTOR II AND SOME KOOL OTHER
STUFF AND GAMES.CALL ME AT
```

Figure 3.3-6: "The Real Pirate's Guide" (piratgui.txt)

It is understandable that any believer in the cult of the author would want to engage with the earliest possible editions of texts (which would seem to retain the most aura and to provide the best idea access points into the *vraisemblable* world depicted in the text). Richard Stallman, too, speaks out against the modification of "memoirs, essays of opinion, [and] scientific papers": in other words, "those works that tell you what somebody thinks" (*Free Software, Free Society* 144). In Stallman's vision, when dealing with those texts that are designed to explain what a person believes, the modification of such a text can only be a corruption of the original message. But really, what are couriers who modify the text doing that RABID RASTA hasn't done? They say, I too can write texts in which I locate myself (or my avatar) as an authoritative centre of digital culture. And also, by imagining, and by sharing this imagined vision, I will shape the consciousness and culture of my reading audience, to that extent making my vision real. To take up RABID RASTA's call to be a "REAL PIRATE" might not mean to follow the linguistic instructions of his etiquette guide, but to perceive and modify the structures and codes of his text. RABID RASTA's readers, too, on the periphery, can narrativize their experiences, assert their authority, compile new texts. They can even publish under the pseudonym of "RABID RASTA" if they want to. By doing this, they do what real pirates do: liberate data from its authorized constraints. We don't know if the original RABID RASTA would agree, but we can no longer afford to care. If we attempt to restrict what exists only in multiplicity, we will put an end to the actual living proliferation of the text.

Within the BBS network, there is no hierarchy of transmission. Every electronic file can be corrupted (or affected) as easily as it might corrupt (or affect) the mind of its reader. Really, it is even easier to modify a file than it is to write a new one from scratch, and yet the act might be equally as meaningful. The "original" version of the file is no more authoritative than its imitations. The original certainly has no advantage in terms of its continued distribution. If anything, the original is at the greatest disadvantage because there can be so many variants, but only one original. Now, if we had the original, could we learn more

from it than we could learn from a database of its variants? Or does this variation help us to better understand the text in its multiplicity?

It is, perhaps, only because "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" is so popular, so authoritative, so canonical, that so many of its variations and imitations exist today. It is as though everyone who has ever read a text file has *read* "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," although we do not know who has *seen* it. We have seen its networks extending in multiple directions, with variant editions, parodies and spin-offs, and popular zines that have been directly inspired by the structures and attitudes of RABID RASTA's text. And yet, what is at the centre of this network? What is the signifier that spins out all of these threads of influence? There is no one centre, but there are numerous centres, numerous equally-central nodes at which activities and transformations take place, nodes of the production and transmission of art. As the file travels through each node it is transformed, becoming something different, a smashing together of many diverse pre-existing elements to create an object that is not new in its materials but is new in its arrangement. In this network, each node can equally inscribe the texts of the computer underground, regardless of any legal or ethical authorization. Authorization be damned—we are speaking of real pirates!

3.4> THE BBS TAG

Text files were primarily transmitted by means of BBS, which means that they travelled rhizomatically and unpredictably from place to place. In this environment, there was no way for a publisher to predict where their text files would end up. If a writer published five text files, it is possible that one BBS would end up with three of these files and another BBS would end up with one. Some text file publishers (including all four of the primary imprints in this dissertation) labelled their files with the phone numbers of host BBSes that acted as authorized distribution sites (or "distros"). A distro would typically have a file area specifically dedicated to the imprint, with an authorized set of all of the text files published by that imprint. The distro was an important part of an imprint's

identity, because a reader who possessed one file also possessed the phone numbers of distro BBSes where they could download the rest.

In contrast to the BBS tag authorized by the publisher of a text file, we have the unauthorized BBS tag, which an unaffiliated sysop adds to a file in order to advertise his or her own BBS. Earlier in this chapter, I quoted from Mr. Pez, who said: "it's looked upon in rather poor taste to add your board number and stuff to the end of a Phrack, or an LOD/H Technical Journal, like you could once do with games you cracked or distributed." The topic has also been written about by the Ramsacker, who, in the tradition of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," identifies the greatest offending couriers as persons who:

> never come up with an original idea themselves, but are quick to take credit for them . . . [and] think putting their name on an unprotected ware establishes that they cracked it. ("Malformed Genitals")

What the Ramsacker calls "malformed genitals," Ezra Pound might call "dilutors." In *ABC of Reading*, Pound identifies several "classes of persons" that he associates with the production of literature. The first category is "inventors" (those who discover new processes); the second category is "masters" (who combine a number of such processes, and who use them as well as or better than the inventors); the third category is "diluters" (who come after the first two and can't do the job quite as well) (39). In ASCII literature, there are numerous inventors, very few (if any) masters, and multitudes of dilutors. We might apply this definition to the writer whose work is derivative (e.g. the four major imprints of this dissertation in response to "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE"), or the courier who dilutes the purity of literature by corrupting published texts (e.g. the variant editions of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE"), or the sysop who tags files with BBS advertisements that contribute nothing to the content of the text. Of course, these unauthorized tags might also be said to act in the service of the text, since each tag gestures toward an unauthorized distro, where a user might be able to download a somewhat-complete, somewhat-authoritative print run of an ASCII publication. And these might not be original versions of the text file, but perhaps we could think of them as originals of the text-file-plus-unauthorized-tag.

CASE STUDY: *Anarchy Inc.* **"The Anarchist's Guide to Existance" by the Daredevil (n.d.).** In classroom discussions, I encourage my students to recognize the potential signification in as many of the aspects of a text as possible, and usually, the most unpredictable sources of signification tend to provide for the most stimulating observations. But during a discussion about ASCII texts, I was surprised when some of my students began to talk about BBS tags as signifying agents in texts, as if BBS tags were an integral part of text files. When the potential signification of BBS tags was first suggested, I took a deep breath, shook my head, and explained, these tags are unauthorized!—they are in some spiritual way not a part of the text! This is the only time, I think, that I have suggested that there is anything like a spirit to the text, since at all other points I try to frame the text as a material object. So why did I abandon all of my critical faculties at this moment? It was probably only because of an uncritical worship of ASCII texts (possibly because of my own experience as an ASCII writer and publisher) that I had always assumed that a BBS tag could never be a legitimate signifying element within a text file. I hated the BBS tag so much that I tried to pretend that it wasn't there. But really, I was only allowing it to affect me on an unconscious level. Whatever the advertisement is doing, I must acknowledge that it has some function in relation to the text proper. As Roland Barthes says:

> Even were a detail to appear irretrievably insignificant, resistant to all
> functionality, it would nonetheless end up with precisely the meaning of
> absurdity or uselessness: everything has a meaning, or nothing has. To put
> it another way, one could say that art is without noise (as that term is
> employed in information theory): art is a system which is pure, no unit
> ever goes wasted, however long, however loose, however tenuous may be
> the thread connecting it to one of the levels of the story. ("Introduction to
> the Structural Analysis of Narratives" 89-90)

It might be useful to distinguish between a few different kinds of noise here. First, the kind of noise that the Ramsacker discussed earlier, where "some of the important data gets lost or the effect of the file is shattered because you come upon a string of line noise right in the middle of an interesting section." Second,

To end this chapter of "The Anarchist Guide to Existance", I'd like
to point out several things to you. One, is that this file had really no
useful purpose. Not to say that it is boring, but that it really had no
useful purpose. Two, that the word "Anarchy" stands for the lack of
laws, rules, and order. In other words, that's us. Anarchy inc.
                    I need a drink.

    Chapter two of "The Anarchist Guide to Existance" might be coming
out in the near future, but I doubt it. I really don't think I'm ever going
to be this bored again. Ah well, you're enjoying this textfile, so I don't
care.

                              -= Anarchy inc. Hotline: (408) 732-1079 =-
..The Daredevil

                             the   P>rogressive U>nderground
                                                    D>issidents
                                            3 1 3 - 4 3 3 - 3 1 6 4
                                               300/1200 Baud
                                            20 Megs of TextFiles
                                              SysOp: Mr. Pez
And as this textfile
rolls off the screen,
you realize instantly
the place to get more
    like it..

<*** End of File ***>

Figure 3.4-1: "The Anarchist's Guide to Existance"

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the kind of noise that asserts itself at a mimetic level, like the simulation from "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," where JHONNY's spelling and typography function not as an accident of the text but as a purposeful narrative device. Third, the kind of noise that is legible (not a string of random characters, as in the case of line noise), but which detracts from a narrative rather than operating as a device. The BBS tag might be considered to be an example of the third kind of noise.

I have written and subsequently deleted paragraphs that describe Mr Pez's appendix as a sort of cancerous growth that plagues the Daredevil's text, but this only recalls Michel Foucault's statement that it is precisely an authoritarian critic who tries to reduce the "cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations" in a text ("What is an Author?" 290). The truth is that a text is capable of generating potential readings in every direction, and I cannot pretend that certain readings are impossible, or I am only repressing these possibilities and prescribing that my students likewise repress these possibilities. And so, personal resistance aside, I must admit that the BBS tag is a fact of this text, much in the way that in certain anthologies the use of author's biographies makes these biographies, too, a fact of the text. As though wading into cold water, I must first think of the BBS tag as a sort of intertext (tangentially connected to the text), eventually admit that it is at least paratext (directly informing the text), and finally recognize that it is, materially, the text itself.

With the ASCII text file, there is never a moment of final closure, where after the text can no longer be amended. The generations of changes that take place in a text might be said to take place in a similar way to the construction of the renga, a poetic form where one writer composes a stanza, then passes it on to a different writer who composes the next stanza, and so on. The text might be reproduced and modified numerous times, perhaps even over the course of decades. The new writer can always see the pre-existing text to which they respond, but can never see what will come after. The fact that the Daredevil signs his name and the phone number of his authorized distro at the bottom of the file demonstrates that he has not anticipated further appendices to the text—in fact, he

has placed a sort of structural marker of closure upon the text. He has not set out to write a renga text, but the file (or, this copy of the file) has become one.

The Ramsacker says "You wouldn't change Shakespear's words around in any of his works," but really, you would *always* change Shakespeare's words around. Every copy of Shakespeare's work involves editorial considerations, such as which edition will constitute the copy-text, what to do with all of the variations produced by the printers of the codex, whether or not to standardize spellings within a text, etcetera. And Shakespeare himself was a borrower of words and plots, and his plays have subsequently been subjected to numerous stage and film productions, each rendering the "original" in different ways. In fact, if there weren't so many versions of Shakespeare's words (if they weren't so portable and adaptable), they would no longer be relevant (or even known).

Regardless of the drive that the writer of a text might have to assume authority over that text, to place a limit upon it, to solidify and bind it, there is no way that these limitations can ever be enforced by the material conditions of the text file. Here I realize that even knowing that the text has no spirit inside it, no answer behind it, no sum beneath it, I have treated it as though it does. I have lost my critical faculties, become a mark for this text, believed in its magic, placed arbitrary limitations upon how my students are allowed to discuss the it. But now, back to reality . . .

3.5> THE BERNE CONVENTION IMPLEMENTATION ACT

If we think of the practices of couriers like Mr. Pez in relation to the practices of software modification and piracy, we might ask, what kind of cracker with any instinct for self-preservation would emblazon a ware with a BBS phone number? To do so must be the shortest route to getting arrested, other than directly turning oneself in. But what about ASCII text files? In the United States, before the 1988 Berne Convention Implementation Act, most electronic texts were not covered by copyright law. As the literature of the United States Copyright Office says:

> U.S. law no longer requires the use of a copyright notice, although placing
> it on your work is often beneficial. Prior law did, however, contain such a

requirement, and the use of a notice is still relevant to the copyright status of older works. This circular describes the copyright notice provisions enacted in the 1976 Copyright Act (title 17, *U.S. Code*), which took effect January 1, 1978, and the effect of the 1988 Berne Convention Implementation Act, which amended the law to make the use of a copyright notice optional on copies of works published on and after March 1, 1989. Specifications for the proper form and placement of the notice are included. (United States Copyright Office Circular 3)

Any text published before April 30, 1989 was not automatically covered by copyright law, but had to include a written claim of copyright within the file in order to be legally recognized; the claim must include several precise details, which are described by the United States Copyright Office as follows:

The notice for visually perceptible copies should contain all three elements described below. They should all appear together or in close proximity on the copies.

1) The symbol © (letter C in a circle); the word "Copyright"; or the abbreviation "Copr."

2) The year of first publication. If the work is a derivative work or a compilation incorporating previously published material, the year date of first publication of the derivative work or compilation is sufficient. Examples of derivative works are translations or dramatizations; an example of a compilation is an anthology. The year may be omitted when a pictorial, graphic, or sculptural work, with accompanying textual matter, if any, is reproduced in or on greeting cards, postcards, stationery, jewelry, dolls, toys, or useful articles.

3) The name of the copyright owner, an abbreviation by which the name can be recognized, or a generally known alternative designation of owner. (United States Copyright Office Circular 3)

Before 1989, most ASCII publishers who attempted to copyright their work simply did it wrong. As copyright lawyer Jordan J Breslow explains in an article that was reprinted (without authorization) in the first issue of *PIRATE*:

> The copyright notice has three parts. The first can be either a c with a circle around it (c), or the word Copyright or the abbreviation Copr. The c with a circle around it is preferable, because it is recognized around the world; the others are not. That's incredibly important. Countries around the world have agreed to recognize and uphold each others' copyrights, but this world-wide protection requires the use of the c in a circle. On disk labels and program packaging, use the encircled c. Unfortunately, computers don't draw small circles well, so programmers have resorted to a c in parentheses: (c). Too bad. That has no legal meaning. When you put your notice in the code and on the screen, use Copyright or Copr. if you can't make a circle. ("Copyright Law")

I verified these details with the United States Copyright Office on August 10, 2012. According to the agent that I spoke with, a publisher can copyright a work under any name whatsoever, including, for example, *Metal Communications* or *Anarchy Inc*., but the same publisher must be one hundred percent certain to draw a full circle around the letter "c." Because of this rigidity, even some ASCII publishers who demonstrate a desire to copyright their texts have not managed to do so, because a "c" in brackets is not equal to a "c" in a circle. As publishers, this leaves them with no legal rights whatsoever.

3.6> ALL RIGHTS WORTH . . .

ASCII publishers had no rights under the law, but I am not primarily interested in their relationship with codified law. Within the computer underground, authority emanates from every node. For this reason, the ASCII publisher's relation to the use, reproduction, and modification of text files must be considered as a multiplicity of localized phenomena: specifically, the relation of each publisher or writer to the vision of their own rights, particularly as described or enacted through the text files that they produce. Here I will look at some highlights from

the four publications central to this dissertation, particularly how they describe their own nodes within the network of copyright by means of including, excluding, modifying, or parodying familiar claims to copyright.

Phrack: The first twenty-four issues of this publication (up to and including the E-911 issue) were published before the 1988 Berne Convention Implementation Act took effect (March 1, 1989). Of these first twenty-four issues, none are marked with any kind of copyright notice by *Phrack*, Knight Lightning, or Taran King. A few individual articles peppered throughout the print run include a parenthetical "c" that demonstrates the intent to claim copyright, beginning with Carrier Culprit's "Hacking the Dec-10 system" in *Phrack* 5.3. In the first twenty-four issues, the word "copyright" appears only eight times, four of which are used in actual notices of copyright, all of which are part of reprints from other media sources (to be found in *Phrack* 9.6, 11.11, 17.8, and 18.9). For *Phrack*, it would seem that copyright issues were not a major concern, but there are no instances in the early issues where they linguistically address the issue.

Anarchy Inc.: Half of the files released by this group make no reference to copyright or rights of any other kind. However, because most of the issues archived on textfiles.com have been tagged with BBS ads for Progressive Underground Dissidents (Mr. Pez) or the Works (Jason Scott), there is no way to be certain about the state in which these files were originally published.

If there are earlier versions of the files that make claim to copyright, these claims might be valid. But, because of the mutable nature of the ASCII file, it would be difficult to determine if the copyright notification had been included in an early incarnation of a file or added to a later version of that file. At any rate, if the publishers of *Anarchy Inc*. had not physically filed their texts with the United States Copyright Office, they would have a poor case for claiming copyright over this material. In some instances, *Anarchy Inc.*'s intent to copyright is fairly clear, as is demonstrated in two of the works that they are most renowned for:

"B00G and the art of ZEN":
> (c) Anarchy Inc.

"B00G][: The Final Chapter":
> (c) 1987 Anarchy Inc.

Both of these texts are collaborative works, attributed to no particular author, but to the *Anarchy Inc.* collective. Other texts written by this collective and its individual writers (particularly, it would seem, in the 1983-1985 period) employ variations on the copyright claim rather than attempting to make the claim itself:

"Matt's Day at CAMP!":
> (Ai) Anarchy inc.(tm) All Tables Reserved. Matt(tm) is a fictional / character (c) 1983-86 Anarchy inc. Any similarities between any of the / names or characters in this story is a living shame.

"HOW TO TERRORIZE MCDONALDS":
> (C) 1984 ANARCHY INC. NO RIGHTS RESERVED

"FUCK!! volume 1;revision 2.24" :
> (c) 1984 All Tables Reserved. MCMLXXXIV

"How to Tell if YOU are a Modem Geek!":
> Anarchy inc. MCMLXXXV All tables reserved.

"Bill the Cat is MY Friend!":
> (C) 1985 by Nobody in particular.

"The life of a new user":
> (C)opy freely

"Eric C. Thompson in the World of Osbert":
> (c)opy, right?..

Two text files published by *Anarchy Inc.* are particularly noteworthy because of the style with which they extend the conventional copyright claim. These files are "-HOW TO FORGE PAC*BELL CARDS-" by Havoc the Chaos and "Nothing." by the Moon Roach.

CASE STUDY: "-HOW TO FORGE PAC*BELL CARDS-" by Havoc the Chaos (n.d.). This issue of *Anarchy Inc.* is dedicated to the topic of how to escape detection while phreaking (or perhaps more accurately, since the forgeries as described in this article could never fool anyone, how to give yourself the confidence to phreak). This article is not only instructional, but it is also a narrative about exploring and experimenting when you have no expertise or savvy. It is the essential situation for all phreaking initiates, for thirteen year olds in basements, and for kids with keyboards, writing the literature and building the culture of the computer underground. He builds a fantasized vision of phreaking and the potential functionality of a cheaply forged Pacific Bell identification card:

> These come in handy if you are playing around in a bridging head, also known as AT&T cans, when some duty-minded jerk says "Hey, you kid! What the hell do you think you are doing in there!?!" You flip out your card and say, "I'm cg an investigation on a if you would move on, so as not to draw any unnecessary attention to me, thank you." If the jerk says, "Yeah, well you don't look like a telephone worker to me, where's your hat, van, and funny little blue and yellow jacket?" you tell him that if you had those, the person suspected of comitting toll fraud might see, and thus lay off for a while.

The footer of the text is tagged more gratuitously than the other examples, but in this instance it is tagged by Havoc the Chaos himself. While Havoc the Chaos credits The Anarchist for the both the "Origianal" idea and the instructions, he lists both of these on a single line, while taking one line to credit himself for modifying the text, one line to credit himself for typing it, and another to declare himself (or his pseudonym) to be the property of *Anarchy Inc*. The trebling of "Havoc the Chaos" emphasizes the importance of his identity in relation to the article, but also casts this identity aside as it is subsumed by the larger group.

The second last line, a play on "All Rights Reserved," reads: "All rights on death row." On one hand, the rights are not reserved but queued for capital punishment, in which circumstance these rights will be violated or destroyed. On the other hand, the intermixing of telecommunication crime and capital

```
L 109    C 76    IA    527k    c:\ascii\lit\a-inc\pacbellf.hum
```
```
                          ! Me Happy          !
                          ! Agent #10H2ZC69   !
                          ! Valid until 6-19-8!
                          ! X                 !
                          _____/
```
Now trace along the edges of your picture and grey piece and cut that part
off. Now take your old picture printed on kodak paper which is now cut into a
credit-card shape and spread glue all over the color side. Fit your picture,
grey piece, and information on (just like doing a jigsaw!) and wait for the
glue to dry. When it does, take your laminating stickers (which are clear
things you sandwich other flat things between and they laminate it, you can get
these at most stationary stores.) and sandwich your card in between two. Trim
this so it looks like a card and put it in your wallet, or you can buy a badge
holder from an office supply store and pin it to your chest or inside your coat
or wherever. Happy phreaking!

Origianal idea and instructions by The Anarchist
Instructions modified by Havoc the Chaos
Typed by Havoc the Chaos
 Havoc the Chaos and this text file are properties of Anarchy, Inc.
  All rights on death row.
   (C)opyfreely, I don't care.....

Figure 3.6-1: "-HOW TO FORGE PAC*BELL CARDS-"
```
                                                                    145
```

punishment might be a parody of the kind of overblown depictions of hacking and juvenile delinquency that we have seen in other texts like *The Hacker Crackdown* and *WarGames*. In this overblown vision, teenagers might be able to get away with posing as telecom investigators, but if they get caught, they might be punished with death. Such allusions to death row might be the words of a hardened criminal, but in the context of an ASCII publication they might be the words of a jokester, celebrating the irony of a situation overwrought.

The progressive indentions of the last six lines of this text emphasize the raw length of the credit sequence, allowing the reader to count them out like the beads of an abacus. Why take six lines to credit the creators of the text and make to a claim for copyright? Most of the content here is inessential, redundant, or fully ironic. This list is not about what it says, but how it says. By concluding with the phrase "(C)opyfreely, I don't care...." (with a drawn-out four-dot ellipsis), Havoc the Chaos fully relinquishes his personal attachment to the text.

CASE STUDY: "Nothing." by the Moon Roach (1984). This early issue of *Anarchy Inc.* demonstrates the kind of subversion and super-twist that would prevail throughout the print run of *Anarchy Inc.* and define its attitude toward authority. A few examples of the self-negating statement from this screen capture:

> 1) "Anarchy inc."
> 2) "…Proudly Presents… / Nothing."
> 3) "(c) 1984 All Rights Shot to Hell…"
> 4) "A complete guide to existence and the fact that it isn't there."

In the article itself, the Moon Roach takes on a project of philosophical deceit. He says, "Once you think about it, nothing can be proven," in brute ignorance of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, and he subsequently interrupts his own opportunity to rationalize the argument by saying: "Now stop arguing..it's true and you know it." Of course, there has been no interlocution from the reader, no argument posed to the Moon Roach, and this hypermediates his cheating tactic in the logic game.

```
            _____
            Anarchy inc.
            _____

                       ...Proudly Presents...

                            Nothing.

Written by: The Moon Roach of Anarchy inc.
(c) 1984 All Rights Shot to Hell...


A complete guide to existence and the fact that it isn't there.

You may be wondering one morning, after you wake up,
am I here? Is anything here? Is this all just a wet dream?
Well now here's your answer ...... yes it is.
And I will prove it thus:

  Existence today (for most, not for me) is based on proof.
Well, can anybody prove anything? Can you actually prove
that you are alive today?  Once you think about it,
nothing can be proven. Now stop arguing..it's true and you
know it.
Therefore, since nothing can be proven, nothing exists,
And people usually just generally accept that there is something
```

Figure 3.6-2: "Nothing."

In the following paragraph (with variable indentions—is it a new paragraph?—further obfuscating the flow of information), he says "Therefore, since nothing can be proven, nothing exists," equating lack of proof with disproof.

Once the speaker is convinced that he has demonstrated that "nothing" (no thing) can be proved, he extends this lack of existence to "nothing" (the state of nothingness), equivocating two meanings of the word into one. One might ask, how is it possible to believe that he has voided all words of their semantic value, and yet continued to undertake the process of writing? And does our reading of this text and our ability to derive meaning from it disprove the Moon Roach's core argument? Ultimately, like a fractal, the text features multiple self-reversing sentences and presents multiple self-reversing arguments. It is all perfectly sensible, in the same strain of sense as the phrase "*Anarchy Inc*."

It is important here to distinguish between the writer and the speaker in this text. While the speaker seems to believe in the validity of his argument, there is no reason to believe that the writer does. And so, despite the lack of a valid rationale, the article manages to demonstrate the possibility of undermining a naïve belief in the human potential to objectively understand the phenomenal world. The text, by asserting that nothing exists (and through its paradoxes and self-contradiction), demonstrates the potential for alternative ontologies, which is a valuable creative adventure. The notion that "nothing" both exists and does not exist might seem to be a logical impossibility in the real world, but to hope to invalidate the text on these grounds invites the question: who said that the text was supposed to reflect the conditions of the real world in the first place, and if that verification takes place at the level of the text, who can say with certainty whether the twists and negations are reflective of the phenomenal world or if they are only part of the narrative world?

In the context of the article, the Moon Roach's copyright claim makes more sense than ever. The modified version of the famous "All Rights Reserved" statement takes a quick 180º turn on itself, moving from the authoritative to the irreverent, from the earthly to the mythical, from the clerical to the slackerly, from the legal to the vulgar. The statement takes on an iconic quality, giving as much

shape to the style and mythos of *Anarchy Inc.* as does any other aspect of this article. The claim (or variation on a claim) that "Nothing" makes to copyright is not legally valid, but the simultaneous awareness, acknowledgement, and dismissal of the legality of copyright is exercised in a stylized way, becoming part of the article's aesthetic and ethic, providing a major example and influence for the entire run of *Anarchy Inc.* and the ASCII publications most influenced by it.

Cult of the Dead Cow: In *Cult of the Dead Cow*, the Moon Roach's phrase, "All Rights Shot to Hell," becomes an anthem of electronic publishing, even though *cDc* never uses that exact phrase. Instead, *cDc* employs variations of its own, primarily "All Rights Worth Shit." Here is a demonstration of the cumulative effect of *Cult of the Dead Cow*'s statements toward copyright over the course of their first three years and one hundred issues, in order of publication:

> All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Smeared Across The Wall / All Rights Smeared Across The Wall / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All rights reserved / All rights reserved

> / / All Rights Worth Shit / All rights reserved / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Not Very Much At All / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit - and duefully so. / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Not Very Much At All / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit

All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All
Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All
Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All
Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / / / / All Rights Worth Shit! / /
All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / / All Rights Worth Shit

All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / / All Rights Worth Not
Very Much At All, And Regrettably So / All Rights Worth Not Very
Much At All, And Regrettably So / All Rights Worth Not Very Much At
All, And Regrettably So / All Rights Worth Not Very Much At All, And
Regrettably So / All Rights Worth Not Very Much At All, And
Regrettably So / All Rights Worth Not Very Much At All, And
Regrettably So / / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Not Very
Much At All, And Regrettably So / All Rights, Of Course, Are Shit In
Their Worth / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights
Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights
Worth... eh... you know the line.... / All Rights Worth Shit

All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All
Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All
Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / / All Rights Worth Shit / All
Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All
Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All
Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All Rights Worth Shit / All
Rights Pissed Away.

Like "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE" and *Anarchy Inc*., the issues of *Cult of the
Dead Cow* (particularly the early issues) are unstable, with several issues existing
in multiple and radically differing forms. But what makes these modifications
unique is that they seem to have been undertaken by *Cult of the Dead Cow*
themselves, self-authorized and posted on their own website. Known changes to

the contents of *cDc* include minor textual variants (e.g. the spelling of Swamp Rat / Swamp Ratte' in issues two and three), and some issues—at least ten of the first hundred—where the full content (title, text, and author) has been changed from the time of their original release to their current state (now converted to HTML) in the archive at the official website, cultdeadcow.com. Earlier editions of several *cDc* issues are available on textfiles.com, and some of the rarest issues (such as 19, 20, and 23, which originally feature transcriptions of Dr. Seuss books) are now only available on certain websites, only in HTML format. The original ASCII versions of these files cannot be found, but a complete list of the contents of every issue (as of April 24, 1989) is published in *cDc*'s hundredth issue. In this sense, the imprint has refused to respect the sanctity of its own text files.

Metal Communications / Neon Knights: Of all of these publishers, perhaps it is *MC/NK* that suffers the most from their own ignorance regarding copyright law. The publication is rough and vulgar, always accosting the status quo, always trying to go beyond what is acceptable in order to bring texture to the text. When these attitudes extend into the realm of copyright notice, the intent is clear, but the technique is insufficient:

CASE STUDY: "Getting others to Commit Suicide" by the Blade (1987). This text file ends with an exemplary model of the shout-outs and distro numbers that one might see at the end of a culturally relevant ASCII publication (particularly by non-serialized imprints): the names and phone numbers of six affiliate BBSes (each an authorized distribution site for the *Neon Knights*) and five full lines crediting the friends and affiliates of the writer and his imprint. The text also provides a classic example of the botched copyright claim. Although it includes an attempted copyright symbol, a date, and the name of the publisher, the parenthetical "c" does not legally copyright the text any more than the subsequent disclaimer compels your mother to (as the Blade puts it) suck cocks in hell. But is the Blade's copyright designed to function in the way that we might classically expect copyright to function (that is, as a means to legally enforce propriety over a

```
L 223   C 79   IA   533k   c:\ascii\lit\m-com\suicide.txt

:.............................................503 538 0777  :
:    Metalland West AE/BBS/FUR/T-10 MEGS                     :
:    The Dark Side AE/BBS  35megs-12/2400.......408 245 7726 :
:    Speed Demon Private BBS-Private............415 522 3074 :
:    Upside-Down AE/BBS-20megs-1200only.........201 398 2953 :
:    DL's Data Service AE/BBS..................305 395 6906  :
:............................................................:

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Bergenfield NJ, The Metal AE for distribution, smoke, All D/T/S/SS METAL,
SLAYER, The Outland, and all members past and present of The Neon Knights.

----------------------------------------------------------------------------
Written on April 4, 1987.   (C) 1987 by The Neon Knights   All Rights Reserved
Any part of this file may be used in the News Media as long as The Blade and
The Neon (fucking) Knights are given credit.   YOURMOTHERSUCKSCOCKSINHELL!!!!!!
----------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

Figure 3.6-3: "Getting others to Commit Suicide"

text), or is it constructed to serve a specifically aesthetic function? Perhaps the copyright, like the text, is more about *how* it communicates than about its linguistic message. We might imagine the signifier (the instructional manual, which gestures toward real-world action) reframed, becoming its own signified (the art object gesturing toward itself). The importance of this manual is not whether it is realized or not. The Blade's claim to copyright, likewise, is primarily designed to affect the reader, and although it does not legally limit the potential usage of the text, it does succeed in its manifest function by aggressively and stylistically territorializing the text.

What is the cumulative effect of all of these statements that ASCII publishers make about copyright? Is it a call for piracy? Is it a rejection of textual authority? A call for writing without law? A world without law? These writers and couriers make the opening move of rejecting their own claims to authority. They violate their own codes. So who is going to convince them that the authority of law is sacrosanct? In a zone where all codification is recognized as arbitrary, we cannot expect this recognition to exclude codified law.

3.7> MODULAR NARRATIVE AND RECOMBINATION

In the previous chapter, we looked at the modular narrative, and the topic is still relevant because, in the construction of modular narratives, we can equally draw materials from previously-existing texts. Of all of the ways to do what we call bringing "the world" into our texts, there is probably nothing that we can import from the world as well as the texts that exist within it. And yet, when we accept romanticized notions of originality, we can convince ourselves that to incorporate pre-existing textual material into our own writing is unethical, illegal, uncreative, etcetera. On the contrary, I think that piracy can become a meaningful act of rebellion and a kind of personal liberation.

In creative writing classes, I encourage my students not to think of a text as a gateway to an author's mind or beliefs, but as a physical object. If a text is an object, it is constructed out of materials. I often use the brick house as a metaphor,

explaining that a text exists as a whole, but also contains smaller components (lexias), each of which must be its own aesthetically stable object as well as being capable of contributing to a larger assemblage.

The specific attention that we pay to every element within the text transforms writing into an intensive process of development that breaks us free from the model of linearity. After we have written numerous lexias, I encourage my students to arrange them in numerous diverse patterns. This process allows them to be a multiple-time visionary: first, when they create the most sparkling, crisp, and precise paragraphs that they are capable of. Second, when they recognize the beauty of these paragraphs. Third, when they move these paragraphs into a particular order and witness an awe-inspiring narrative emerge as if by magic, in a sequence that they had never imagined, but which has emerged as a collaboration between themselves and the technology of writing. Ronald Sukenick says:

> Composition, in other words, is no longer controlled by the demands of the frame, nor is it left as a dynamic collocation of fragments whose form is indeterminate, but proceeds in and through the text to the creation of formal wholes which may be strange, surprising, and should be unpredictable, even to the author. (*In Form* 47)

What writers are doing here is reading their own work while it is in flux, experiencing the potential signification in a mutable assemblage, reading and rereading, drawing signification in ways that they had not previously imagined. In this way, they are enacting Roland Barthes' championed reading process, liberating the text from its linearity:

> Rereading, an operation contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society, which would have us "throw away" the story once it has been consumed ("devoured"), so that we can then move on to another story, buy another book, and which is tolerated only in certain marginal categories of readers (children, old people, and professors), rereading is here suggested at the outset, for it alone saves the text from repetition (those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere),

multiplies it in its variety and plurality: rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology ("this happens *before* or *after* that") and recaptures a mythic time (without *before* or *after*); it contests the claim which would have us believe that the first reading is a primary, naïve, phenomenal reading which we will only, afterwards, have to "explicate," to intellectualize (as if there were a beginning of reading, as if everything were not already read: there is no *first* reading, even if the text is concerned to give us that illusion by several operations of *suspense*, artifices more spectacular than persuasive); rereading is no longer consumption, but play (the play which is the return of the different). (*S/Z* 15-16)

The process of this rearrangement, rereading, and play can become so exciting that it is hard to say goodbye to the unfixed text as we crystallize an arrangement of words, subjecting them to typographic linearization. In this moment, one stage of creative activity ends and a new stage begins; a new reader can take up the inscribed text and begin to manipulate and dismantle it in inventive new ways.

Writing is not a rote activity, it is a creative activity, as we see when we use the materials of print to manipulate the arrangement of our own lexias. It is not merely the clacking of keys that constitutes the writerly act. Even in reading a text we are participating in its writing, infusing it with so much signification. To place arbitrary limitations on where writing begins or ends is to place limitations on our own imaginative processes or to repress our understanding of these processes. So I encourage my students to undertake two specific exercises, both of which incorporate the repurposing of pre-existing textual materials:

1) Find a text with a tone that you admire, but which employs a situation and set of images that is dissimilar to that of the text that you are currently writing. Select an iconic paragraph from the text. Replicate the syntax of each sentence, overwriting each with the situations and images from your own text-in-progress.

2) Select several pages of text containing linguistically-rendered
   sensations and images that relate to the content of your own text-in-
   progress. Cut up these pages, disengaging the text from its syntax and
   linearity, and rearrange the fragments until exciting sentences or
   sentence fragments emerge. Record your findings.

Neither of these are new exercises. The first might be considered a rigourous formalist experiment, or an extension of the legend of Hunter S. Thompson typing out the entire text of *The Great Gatsby* in order to understand what it felt like to write a great novel. This exercise gets writers out of the external details of narrative (i.e. plot) and into the crafting of language. The second exercise is a direct imitation of the cut-up technique used by the practitioners of Dada, and rediscovered by Brion Gysin, who says:

> I propose to apply the painters' techniques to writing; things as simple and
> immediate as collage or montage. Cut right through the pages of any book
> or newsprint . . . lengthwise, for example, and shuffle the columns of text.
> Put them together at hazard and read the newly constituted message. Do it
> for yourself. Use any system which suggests itself to you. Take your own
> words or the words said to be "the very own words" of anyone else living
> or dead. You'll soon see that words don't belong to anyone. Words have a
> vitality of their own and you or anybody can make them gush into action.
> ("Cut-Ups Self-Explained" 132)

Both of these exercises ask students to derive materials from other texts as a means for the production of new materials. They are also moderate exercises, because if we consider a paragraph to have both form and content, each of these exercises makes use of one while radically redesigning the other. Beyond this, the labour of selecting source material, envisioning new possibilities, and on-the-fly editing make students feel as though they are, at least, the principle creators of the new product. These two exercises are easy to legitimize, because they treat direct influence as a refracted intertext, implementing source material as part of a labour-intensive process where the result resembles more of a riffing than a direct

citation. They can be further legitimized by the fact that they are legal, although I hope that the appeal to the law is not in itself enough to legitimize one's artistic practices (and that illegality is not enough to delegitimize one's artistic practices).

Now, what if I suggested that, in building the brick houses of literature, we might supplement our constructs with lexias directly appropriated from other texts, without significantly reinventing the structure or syntax of the appropriated material? I suspect that some students would be terrified of getting arrested for crimes against intellectual property. Others might hold tight to a belief that the production of literature ought to be creative, in the sense of creation myths, where worlds spontaneously appear from nothing. The most resistant students, those who most strongly resist influence, are like students of mathematics wanting to produce new equations without reading existing formulae—as romantic as their visions might be, their self-championed ignorance will compel them to produce the most basic of texts. William Burroughs and Brion Gysin say:

> Joseph Conrad did some superb descriptive passages on jungles, water, weather; why not use them verbatim as background in a novel set in the tropics? Continuity by so-and-so, description and background footage from Conrad. And of course you can kidnap someone else's characters and put them in a different set. The whole gamut of painting, writing, film, is yours to use. Take Molly Bloom's soliloquy and give it to your heroine. It happens all the time anyway, how many times have we had Romeo and Juliet served up to us, and Camille grossed forty million in *The Young Lovers*. So let's come out in the open and steal freely. ("Les Voleurs" 20)

When building a brick house, what's the difference between making one's own bricks from the common stock of phrases and language, or taking bricks from scrap yards, estate sales, the fallen walls of buildings? We might have the opportunity to bring in some of the aura of the former text (its legend and its hauntings). If we wish to describe a tree in our text, we translate the tree into words. How do we describe words? It would seem that the most effective way is to repeat them. There may be no aspect of the phenomenal world that we can

better capture than its text. Here are two examples of previously-existing textual sources, repurposed by ASCII literature.

CASE STUDY: *Cult of the Dead Cow* **9: "Society Sucks (and what to do about it)" by Psychotic Opposition (1987).** This article begins by saying: "The time has come where Anarchy is on everyones mind." The concept of "anarchy" in ASCII text files is complex, sometimes referring to acts of destruction (as in *Anarchy 'N' Explosives*), sometimes referring to acts of mischief (as in *Metal Communications / Neon Knights* and *Anarchy Inc.*), and sometimes describing an anti-authoritarian political stance. In "Society Sucks (and what to do about it)," anarchy is a call to "destroy power" by refusing to conform to authority in its numerous bodies (moralists, censors, educators). Psychotic Opposition says:

> You are not free, you are animals caged in a basket full of oppressors and conformists.

> WE'VE GOT A BIGGER PROBLEM NOW

There is no way of knowing how we have arrived in this basket-cage—was it by force, and if so, who has forced us? Is it the product of an unwitting consent? And are we the conformists, the oppressors, or both, or neither? Who are we and what are we to do about it? (The title promises such an answer.) But before we can discover how to escape from the structures that constrict us, the text drops in a huge monolithic phrase: "WE'VE GOT A BIGGER PROBLEM NOW."

The statement is centred on the page and written in all-caps, presenting itself as conceptually and typographically bigger than everything that has preceded it. Although we have just begun to understand our own position within Psychotic Opposition's world, WE'VE GOT A BIGGER PROBLEM NOW.

A first-time reader of this text might not realize it, but "We've Got a Bigger Problem Now" is the title of a song by the Dead Kennedys, and the subsequent lines in verse are the transcribed lyrics of the song. Without knowing

The time has come where Anarchy is on everyones mind. Soon, one day, we will rule, not these Nazi Punk Fucks who try to conform us into one....of their own image. Destroy Power, not people. We are but a few who are taking a stand against these moral mentality wifes who are trying to label records to protect the youth of our age. We are but a few who are taking a stand against the schools conforming us into ONE to where we will think, speak, walk, dress, and dream as one individual. That individual is of course their image by THEIR own choice. I am an individual as one and such. Nothing more...NOTHING LESS. I do not believe in your silly Government or your stupid laws. They are all lies.

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise therof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to the government for a redress of grievances.

What a crock of shit. Have these rights ever been violated? Hell yeah. Take a stand my friend and join us on the free side. You are not free, you are animals caged in a basket full of oppressors and conformists.

WE'VE GOT A BIGGER PROBLEM NOW

I am Emperor Ronald Reagan.
Born again with fascist cravings.

Figure 3.7-1: "Society Sucks (and what to do about it)"

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this, we would still recognize the song title and lyrics as *different* from the rest of the text, because of the shift from prose to verse, and because the shift in the person of the speaker as the text moves from "I do not believe in your silly Government or your stupid laws" to "I am Emperor Ronald Reagan." The prose simulates the earnest voice of the revolutionary, while the verse is a parody of the voice of the president of the United States. On multiple simultaneous levels, the text-within-text emanates from a different source, though integrated into the primary text through the editorial authority of Psychotic Opposition.

At the end of the printed song lyrics, the text-within-text is marked with the phrase "--The Dead Kennedys," attributing the lyrics to the band that wrote them. Psychotic Opposition is not merely attributing the quoted material to a neutral source, but he is also citing the name of the band itself. He is using the words of the Dead Kennedys and also their name and reputation, gesturing toward the node that they occupy within cultural and political networks. By doing this, Psychotic Opposition interconnects their potential networks with his own, in a sense undersigning the Dead Kennedys' name to his own political manifesto, and in a sense undersigning their entire fan base to the manifesto. "The time has come when anarchy is on everyones mind."

Psychotic Opposition, by incorporating the lyrics of the Dead Kennedys, might be accused of engaging in the kind of conformity that he speaks out against in his article. After all, he is using his own soapbox to present the ideas of the Dead Kennedys, parroting them word for word. But really, by placing the song lyrics into a text file, wrapped in his own in-house-produced discourse, he is not simply repeating words, but making them different. Stanley Fish says that "A reader's response to the fifth word in a line or sentence is to a large extent the product of his responses to words one, two, three, and four" (*Is There a Text in This Class?* 27), and the same can be fairly said of paragraphs or lexias in a text. The first three paragraphs in Psychotic Opposition's text predetermine much of the potential range of signification of the Dead Kennedys song lyrics, in fact transforming them from song lyrics into one constituent part of a modular

narrative. Mikhail Bakhtin says that quotations are never simple transfers, but that they radically transform those materials that they reproduce:

> The following must be kept in mind: that the speech of another, once enclosed in a text, is—no matter how accurately transmitted—always subject to certain semantic changes. The context embracing another's word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great. Given the appropriate methods for framing, one may bring about fundamental changes even in another's utterance accurately quoted. ("Discourse in the Novel" 340)

The Dead Kennedys reframe the discourse of Ronald Reagan. Psychotic Opposition reframes the discourse of the Dead Kennedys and the discourse of Ronald Reagan as filtered through the Dead Kennedys. This dissertation reframes the discourse of Psychotic Opposition, the discourse of the Dead Kennedys as filtered through Psychotic Opposition, and the discourse of Ronald Reagan as filtered through the Dead Kennedys as filtered through Psychotic Opposition. When we complicate this fairly simple sequence of filtering and reframing to include the influence of publishers, record labels, GOP party leaders, and dissertation committees, we quickly end up with a vision of networks of framing and filtering that are no longer traceable. As Roland Barthes puts it:

> We know . . . that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. ("The Death of the Author" 146)

Phrased in such a way, how can we believe in, let alone strive for, an ideal of textual production that would have us believe in geniuses who produce big-bang texts that spontaneously explode into existence, predicated by nothing that has been seen before in the world of writing. After all, a text is only recognizable as such because of the ways in which its readers can interconnect it to other texts, even at the most basic level of identifying a text as prose or poetry, or in the tradition of a particular language, or a particular alphabet, or even as markings on a page. Even the illegible is recognized because of its relation to the legible.

Recombinant writing hypermediates this fact of textuality, liberating what might be called an anti-theological activity, because it asserts that there is no pristine textual state, no text that is not indebted to networks of textuality, no discourse that is not indebted to networks of discourse. Texts like these begin to denaturalize claims to genius, originality, and even the institution of copyright, which is almost sad, because naturalization and a general public lack of critical thought is the only thing that these institutions have ever had going for them.

CASE STUDY: *Cult of the Dead Cow* **30: "The Bovine Epic of Creation" by Franken Gibe (1987).** Speaking of theology and big bangs, and visions of a pristine state, we now have a poem that extends the creation myth of Judaeo-Christian faith and also extends the legend of the Dead Cow of *Cult of the Dead Cow* mythos. In addition to extending both of these legends, "The Bovine Epic of Creation" also intermeshes them, extending the mythical network as it is filtered through *Cult of the Dead Cow* and the computer underground.

The text is prefaced by an editorial note: "The 1st Stanza is by Robert Graves, minister to Cow in spirit if not in fact." Parsing the phrase, one could imagine "The Bovine Epic of Creation" to be a collaborative project, conceived of by two writers. The header of the article, however, attributes the text solely to Franken Gibe, whereas Robert Graves is only named in the epigraph. This suggests that Robert Graves has not been included, at least, in the final editorial stages of this project, or he would not be referred to in the third person here (unless this is the conceit of the article, just as the article claims to support the existence of Eden and a Cult of the Dead Cow).

Franken Gibe's text doesn't reveal the original publishing title of Graves' poem, which is "Dead Cow Farm," a poem from Graves' early career, published in 1918 in *Fairies and Fusiliers*, 69 years before the publication of "The Bovine Epic of Creation." That the stanza "is by Robert Graves, minister to Cow in spirit if not in fact" might be taken as a gag, suggesting that this respected and canonical author actually has nothing in common with *cDc*, whose aesthetic is aggressive, vulgar, and anti-authoritarian. Or, it could be an extension of "All

The 1st Stanza is by Robert Graves, minister to Cow in spirit if not in fact.

An Ancient Saga tells us how
in the Beginning the First Cow
(for nothing living yet had birth
but elemental Cow on earth)
began to lick cold stones and mud:
Under her warm tongue flesh and blood
blossomed, a miracle to believe;
And so was born Adam, and Eve.
Here now is chaos once again,
Primeval mud, cold stones and rain.
Here flesh decays and blood drips red,
And the Cow's dead, the Old Cow's dead.

Lo! The Saga thus is told
of how the earth grew dull and cold
And how the Second Cow begot
The children of toilsome lot:
to roam the earth their single task,
to preach of Cow, and Cow the mask,

Figure 3.7-2: "The Bovine Epic of Creation"

Rights Worth Shit," forcing the two-years-dead Graves into the cult against his will—not only in life, not only in text, but in his very spirit.

The first stanza in "The Bovine Epic of Creation" can be said to be a text created by Robert Graves (the epigraph does suggest this), but it can equally be said to be written or authored by Franken Gibe. It is he, after all, and not Robert Graves, who chose these words to constitute the first stanza of "The Bovine Epic of Creation," who transcribed them, and who authorized them. If we think back to the authorial credits in "-HOW TO FORGE PAC*BELL CARDS-" we can imagine a new list, where Graves gets one line of credit for writing the first stanza and Franken Gibe receives multiple lines of credit for typing the words, assembling them, and recontextualizing them. Even the range of signification of the first stanza changes because of Franken Gibe's influence. For example, in the version authorized by Robert Graves, the poem ends on a note of finality:

> Here now is chaos once again,
>
> Primeval mud, cold stones and rain.
>
> Here flesh decays and blood drips red,
>
> And the Cow's dead, the Old Cow's dead.

"Here" is where we have ended up in Graves' version, moving from the past to the present, from Eden to cold stones and rain. The subsequent stanza, inscribed by Franken Gibe, extends the line of thought in a new direction, explaining once again, "Lo! The Saga thus is told / of how the earth grew dull and cold," simultaneously acknowledging the closure of Graves' poem and reopening it.

The next line initiates the tale of "the Second Cow," told by Franken Gibe, who follows Graves' pen, becoming the second minister to Cow. Since the first stanza has heretofore functioned as its own independent text, the new construct as it is published here might be considered a sequel to "Dead Cow Farm," or a second "Cow." We might think of the text as an appropriation, or we might think of it as an extension, in the same way that Graves' original poem is an extension of a familiar creation myth. The text of Robert Graves, once its own independent corpus, now finds itself integrated into a new textual body, in ministry to the cow. What his words were once about has now been changed, born again through the

cDc. And yet, it continues to exist in numerous other nodes in its original form, signifying in the ways in which it was originally designed to signify (which are also multiple, which are also indebted to every reader's recognition of other texts such as the Judeo-Christian creation myth, the poetic tradition, and the English language. Like *Cult of the Dead Cow*, Robert Graves' original poem demonstrates the state of the text in relation to intertextual networks:

> His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely. ("The Death of the Author" 146)

He takes myth from certain sources, line breaks, rhymes, and metre from others, archaic linguistic formulations from others, and numerous other devices and statements from multiple sources. This is how we recognize "Dead Cow Farm" to be an extension of faith, of poetry, of text, of language—through its interconnections to everything else that we have seen. "The Bovine Epic of Creation" takes up this same practice but hypermediates its own sources and structures, revealing its practices to the reader. In this regard, Franken Gibe not only extends the linguistic content of the myth, but also extends its formal dimension, providing readers with the materials necessary to begin to recognize (and eventually hack) the codes and structures of textuality.

3.8> ZEN AND THE ART OF RAMPANT PIRACY

"Society Sucks (and what to do about it)" and "The Bovine Epic of Creation" constitute recombinant works, each article being a modular construction where blatantly appropriated text blocks intermingle with "new" material (that is, material that is not directly repurposed from another text). Zooming out one level, we can envision the entire print run of *Cult of the Dead Cow* as one large, modular, paratactic art object, with its editor as artist. In the first one hundred issues of the publication, we likewise see a combination of material that is

blatantly appropriated (e.g. "Renegade Cows," "Fuck The World," and all of the issues dedicated to video game instructions and the transcription of song lyrics), intermingled with in-house-produced text. *cDc*'s one hundredth issue provides an aid for us to envision the magazine's print run as a work of recombinant art.

CASE STUDY: *Cult of the Dead Cow* **100 (1989).** A catalogue of all of the files that the group had released up to that point:

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#  Title                                            Author
_____    _____
 1. Gerbil Feed Bomb                                 Swamp Rat
 2. Wizardry Docs                                    Swamp Rat
 3. Wizardry Spells                                  Swamp Rat
 4. Rescue Raiders Docs                              Swamp Rat
 5. Renegade Cows  (dist.)                           HAL 9000
 6. Assembly Fun                                     Sid Vicious
 7. Slow Death                                       Swamp Rat
 8. Book of Cow                                      Franken Gibe
 9. Society Sucks                                    Psychotic Opposition
10. P.E.A.C.E.                                       Psychotic Opposition
11. Suicidal Tendencies-Join the Army (lyrics)       Wasted Pandemonium
12. Metallica-Master of Puppets (lyrics)             Swamp Rat
13. NPA List                                         Franken Gibe
14. UNIX Bible                                       Franken Gibe
15. Yellow Pages Vol.I                               Franken Gibe
16. A Fucked Life                                    Swamp Rat
17. Gnu Christmas Story                              Franken Gibe
18. Bunny Lust                                       Tippy Turtle
19. The Cat in the Hat                               Swamp Rat
20. Green Eggs & Ham                                 Swamp Rat
21. The Cold Truth                                   2600/S. Ratte'
22. How to Card Shit, When You Live With Your 'rents L.E. Pirate
23. How the Grinch Stole Christmas                   Swamp Rat
24. EZ Destruction                                   Dial Tone
25. Method of Destruction-USA for MOD (lyrics)       Swamp Rat
26. The Phone Sex Scandal                            L.E. Pirate
27. Frankie's Fireside Phreak Primer                 Franken Gibe
28. Yellow Pages Vol.II                              Franken Gibe
29. Cow Chronicles #1                                Franken Gibe
30. The Bovine Epic of Creation                      Franken Gibe
31. A Feature on MONEY - Today's Monster             Psychedelic Warlord
32. Dirty Rotten Imbeciles-Crossover (lyrics)        Swamp Rat
33. Fun With Traffic Lights                          Dial Tone
34. Dead Kennedys-Give Me Convenience...(lyrics)     Suicidal Amoeba
35. Scarfing                                         Suicidal Amoeba
36. On BLACK FLAG...                                 Suicidal Amoeba
37. A Few Good Songs off of Eat Your Paisley         Psychedelic Warlord
38. Area Code and Time Zone List                     Dial Tone
39. Fuck The World                                   Swamp Rat
40. Sex With Satan  (dist.)                          Psycoe
41. The Mentors-Up the Dose (lyrics)                 Mr. Drunkfux
42. Apple Shape Tables                               The Dark Static
43. Metallica-Kill 'Em All (lyrics)                  Swamp Rat
44. Mail Fraud                                       L.E. Pirate
45. Beaming Dream: a poem                            Tequila Willy
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46.  Fun With Small Animals and Other Household Pets   Sunspot
47.  Hacking Into Hell                                 The Raver
48.  Evil Poetry: Vol. I                               The Raver
49.  The Queen is Dead: a poem                         Sunspot
50.  The Song of the Cow: a poem                       Psychedelic Warlord
51.  The Day My Kid Turned Punk                        The Dark Static
52.  Cross Of Iron 1.1                                 The Raver/editor
53.  Cross Of Iron 1.2                                 The Raver/editor
54.  Cross Of Iron 1.3                                 The Raver/editor
55.  About Cross Of Iron #1                            The Raver
56.  The Prophecy of Cow                               Franken Gibe
57.  History of the Bovinomicon                        The Raver
58.  The Nameless Pasture                              The Raver
59.  Interview With Neo-Nazi 'Ausderau'                Psychedelic Warlord
60.  Megadeth-so far, so good... so what! (lyrics)     Swamp Rat
61.  Bovine Death                                      The Raver
62.  Scotty's Tale of Sex and Death                    Racer X
63.  Sesame St. Possession                             Swamp Rat
64.  Death Angel-Frolic through the park (lyrics)      Swamp Rat
65.  Agnostic Front-Liberty & Justice For...(lyrics)   Racer X
66.  Dayglo Abortions-here today guano tomorrow(lyrics) Swamp Rat
67.  Thrasher's Metallica Interview Part 1             Racer X
68.  Thrasher's Metallica Interview Part 2             Racer X
69.  Testament-The New Order (lyrics)                  Swamp Rat
70.  The cDc compilation: volume one (Apple II/2 sides) Swamp Rat/editor
71.  The *ONLY* Way To Get Telenet Thingies            Tequila Willy
72.  Toxik-World Circus (lyrics)   (dist.)             The Omen
73.  Visions From The Last Crusade                     Psychedelic Warlord
74.  The Camping Trip                                  Franken Gibe
75.  Metallica-...And Justice For All (lyrics)         Swamp Rat
76.  Institutionalized                                 Necrovore
77.  Held Captive                                      Racer X
78.  Danzig (lyrics)                                   Racer X
79.  The True Story of Cult of the Dead Cow            Psychedelic Warlord
80.  ...a Slayer kind of day...                        G.A. Ellsworth
81.  Trail of Blood                                    Sunspot
82.  Geek: The Saga Continues                          The Pusher
83.  Lyrics to Both Youth Of Today Albums              The Pusher
84.  Big Black Interview                               G.A. Ellsworth
85.  cDc core #1                                       The Pusher
86.  Screwdriver Flippin'                              Sunspot
87.  A Tale of Two Sexes                               Swamp Rat
88.  Armageddon's Coming: a poem                       Sunspot
89.  The cDc compilation: volume two (Apple II/2 sides) Swamp Rat/editor
90.  Cow-San                                           Necrovore
91.  The Reel Way                                      The Pusher
92.  "Group Revue"                                     The Pusher
93.  Las Vegas Mutantz From Hell!                      The Pusher
94.  Fighting - The Clean Way!                         The Pusher
95.  Impresario: Malcom McLaren and the British New... The Pusher
96.  Dead Kennedys-Plastic Surgery Disasters (lyrics)  Necrovore
97.  Twisted Reality                                   Necrovore
98.  On The Porch Swing                                Suzy Rust
99.  Top Gun                                           Don Howland
100. The cDc #100 BamBam File                          The cDc cultees
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The list is a reading of the collected works of the *Cult of the Dead Cow*. It includes the names of bands, the pseudonyms of writers, titles of well-known books, and multiple utterances of the word "cow." This assemblage simulates a

polyphony, drawing all of these centres of culture into one location. By reading it, we can understand something of the node that *Cult of the Dead Cow* builds and occupies within the networks of H/P/A/C, underground music, print zines, the lyrical play of Dr. Seuss, and influences and appropriations from other ASCII text files. By perusing the index, we can begin to understand the authorized vision of how *Cult of the Dead Cow* reads the world, particularly its media. *cDc* reproduces texts, appropriates them, repurposes them, and turns them into a new mimetic vision of the symbolic network they perceive as relevant to their own publication.

As the recontextualized song lyrics gesture toward music that is not audible in the issues of *Cult of the Dead Cow*, and Dr. Seuss remediations stripped of their accompanying illustrations, the *cDc* index likewise gestures toward individual issues of the magazine that are here referred to by name, but not actually present in this instance. At the same time, the index is its own object and exists independently of the other issues of *cDc*, even though its potential signification is largely dependent on the existence of these issues.

Of *Cult of the Dead Cow*'s first one hundred issues, twenty-two files are attributed to Swamp Rat. Of these, fifteen consist primarily of appropriated material. The genius of the project is not in its original textual compositions, but in Swamp Rat's capacity as an organizer, as a composer, as the creator of a large-scale modular narrative in the form of a serial publication. By selecting and disappearing into texts, his presence is everywhere, but his words are few. Or, if he is building a brick house, his bricks are imported from dozens of architectural constructs that he has demolished and reconstructed anew. As materials, words from other contexts have now become the words of *Cult of the Dead Cow*. As Kenneth Goldsmith describes the writer in relation to other texts:

> I am an amalgamation of many things: books I've read, movies I've seen, television shows I've watched, conversations I've had, songs I've sung, lovers I've loved. In fact, I'm a creation of so many people and so many ideas, to the point where I feel I've actually had few original thoughts and ideas; to think that what I consider to be "mine" was "original" would be

blindly egotistical. Sometimes, I'll think that I've had an original thought

of feeling and then, at 2 A.M., while watching an old movie on TV that I

hadn't seen in many years, the protagonist will spout something that I had

previously claimed as my own. In other words, I took his words (which, of

course, weren't really "his" words at all), internalized them, and made

them my own. (*Uncreative Writing* 83)

Cult of the Dead Cow expertly navigates intertextual networks, remediating older

forms of media as electronic text, acting as a courier of subcultural content, and

blurring the boundaries between reading and writing. By typing what they read,

they deliver obscure textual materials to their reading audience. Like the couriers

who move digital files from BBS to BBS, *Cult of the Dead Cow* delivers text that

BBS users might not otherwise be able to discover (for example, the lyrics of the

Dead Kennedys, a band that the reader might not have previously heard of, but

can now investigate the music of). This appropriation plays a major part in the

formation of the identity and aesthetic of *Cult of the Dead Cow*, and becomes a

major part of what has made the publication iconic. It is not just their rights that

are worth shit, but also the rights of other publishers—truly *all* rights.

CASE STUDY: "Phrack World News." *Phrack* has also engaged in a

substantial amount of textual appropriation, including the E-911 document and

transcriptions from *The Anarchist's Cookbook* and *The Poor Man's James Bond*.

The magazine's most substantial act of large-scale appropriation is "Phrack World

News." Knight Lightning describes PWN's origin as follows:

In Phrack issue 2 I began the ongoing series of Phrack World News. I

followed every story I could and it was fun. The first issue was sort of

lame, but eventually I learned that PWN was the most popular segment of

Phrack. The greatest thing about PWN was that it was an original concept

for a hacker newsletter -- lots of people had tried to write how-to files, but

no one had ever tried news before. Who was getting busted? What did

they do? How can I make sure it doesn't happen to me? ("Phrack Classic

Spotlight," *Phrack* 32.2)

"Phrack World News" publishes in-house-produced text and accepts submissions, but it also features materials appropriated from BBS message boards, commercial newspapers, magazines, and television broadcasts, intermixing numerous sources with minimal differentiation between them. As Douglas Thomas says:

> "Phrack World News" serves as a filter that doesn't distinguish mainstream news from events of hacker culture, and oftentimes information, reports, or news stories are reframed, titled, or retitled by hackers in order to make a particular point. In one instance, a copy of the San Diego police department's "Investigators' Follow-Up Report" titled "Damage Assessment of and Intelligence gathering on Illegal Entry (Hacking) Computer Systems and the Illegal Use of Credit Cards" was included in "Phrack World News" under the title of "Multiplexor and the Crypt Keeper Spill Guts." (*Hacker Culture* 137)

Phrack republishes these texts but also reinvents them by framing them within new contexts and presenting them to new audiences. In the following example, they go one step further, supplementing a television program with their own running commentary.

SCREEN CAPTURE: *Phrack* 9.12: "Computer Bulletin Boards" by the KTVI Channel 2 News Staff in St. Louis. Transcription and parenthetical comments by Knight Lightning (1987). In this narrative, a journalist (Russ) describes to a television audience what a BBS is, particularly in terms of its potential "stink." According to Russ, BBSes are dangerous because they can teach and compel young people to build explosives and guns. BBSes have certainly been known to be havens for illicit information—for instance, *Phrack* has published articles like "Homemade Guns" (transcribed from Kurt Saxon's *The Poor Man's James Bond*) in issue 2.3 (1986), and they have also published numerous articles on the production of explosives (including the previously-cited "Acetylene Balloon Bomb"). But beyond Russ's detailed attention to the potential harm of these guides (and potential ties between BBSes and the Aryan Nation), he has nothing particularly insightful to say about what really goes on with BBSes—

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L 2015    C 4    IA    418k    c:\ascii\lit\phrack\phrack11

Russ:    In its simplest definition, a computer bulletin board is a program or
         message that can be accessed by other computers via telephone lines.
         Anyone who has a home computer and a modem can receive and transmit to
         computer bulletin boards.   There are thousands of them nationwide, but
         some are causing quite a stink [What a profound statement Russ].

                   [Flash to a picture of a geeky looking teenager]

         Meet Jason Rebbe, he is a 16 year old computer whiz who a few months
         ago accidentally tapped into a bulletin board called Dr. Doom's Castle.
         [Sorry to break in here Russ, but why is this guy a computer whiz?
         Just because he has a computer?  Hey Russ, look a little closer, isn't
         Jason sitting in front of a Commodore-64?  I thought so.   Oh yeah one
         other thing, this BBS Dr. Doom's Castle has no known relation to Dr.
         Doom (512) or Danger Zone Private.]  Dr. Doom gives instructions on how
         to build bombs and guns [Lions and Tigers and Bears, oh my!].   Jason
         found the recipe for smoke bombs and tried to make one in his kitchen,
         it didn't work.   [Ba ha ha].

Jason:   I heard an explosion in the basement first and that's when I knew
         something was wrong.   I thought it would be really neat to just set it
         off someday when there was a lot of people around, just as a joke or a
         prank.   [Yeah, that would be K-Rad d00d!].   I didn't expect it to blow
```

Figure 3.8-1: "Computer Bulletin Boards"

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at least not enough to satisfy anyone with a degree of actual understanding about the nuances of BBS culture. The discourse of the news article is similar, in its one-sidedness, to the imagined quotations in the introductory paragraphs of "The Conscience of a Hacker," with the important difference that the KTVI story here is not just an imagined representation of mainstream discourse, but it is an actual example, complete with a full citation of its original source.

The most exciting thing about this particular "Phrack World News" item is not just the fact that Knight Lightning has transcribed and republished the text, but also that he has added his own commentary to the text, which is marked off by the use of square brackets. In each parenthetical statement, Knight Lightning interjects, briefly interrupting with an aside addressed directly to Russ, the television journalist: "Sorry to break in here Russ, but why is this guy a computer whiz? Just because he has a computer?" Knight Lightning's conversational tone accentuates the fact that Russ is not present in the text and cannot respond to the question. In this way, the article gestures toward its own artificiality by emphasizing the full authority that Knight Lightning now has over the textual material that once belonged to Russ. Although, in another incarnation, Russ might have been considered the creator of the text, all of these textual materials are now subordinated under Knight Lightning's new textual creation. Knight Lightning is now becoming the courier who both shares textual materials with others and changes it, simulating his own reading of the text.

Much of what Knight Lightning says is designed to undermine Russ's rhetorical tack. Knight Lightning makes no secret of the fact that he is doing this—in fact he hypermediates this play through the use of square brackets. When we start thinking of the play of creating a false dialogue, using another person's textual materials to produce one's own narrative, we quickly see that Knight Lightning is not the only person who is engaging in this practice. Russ himself is using material from an interview with Jason in the same way, framing and contextualising Jason's words in order to limit their range of signification in a particular way, in order to make Jason's words affirm Russ's overall message. Jason's words might have been produced by Jason, but in the context of the

television program, they are reauthorized by the journalist or the editor. They are now under the authority of the program itself.

Knight Lightning goes one step further than the television program does, creating new false dialogue and subordinating Russ's text in a new way. The *Phrack* imprint and Knight Lightning's parenthetical comments become the new frame, incorporating textual material from the televised script as part of the *Phrack* project. We might say that Knight Lightning is merely making the same move as Russ, extending Russ's discursive techniques, but Knight Lightning's move is different, particularly because of its hypermediated frame. The textual materials that were once intended to contribute to a televised exposé of the computer underground are now contributing to an exposé of KTVI's depiction of the computer underground. As Douglas Thomas says:

> "Phrack World News" was able to recode current news stories in a way
> that made recontextualization possible and also left the hacker readership
> more informed than they would have been had they read a short news
> blurb in a local paper. It was, in every way, an attempt to control the news
> for the select readership of *Phrack*. (*Hacker Culture* 138)

Phrack's use of the news story "Computer Bulletin Boards" might be said to propagandize, yes, but more importantly, its use of multiple levels of appropriation reveals the falsity of journalistic discourse at a structural level. By recognizing what Knight Lightning does up-front (in parentheses), we can also visualize the tactic that Russ has been trying to disguise. By realizing what Russ has been attempting to disguise, we recognize the artifice that Russ has been trying to naturalize. We witness the techniques of television journalism and lose our faith in its transparency. The specific linguistic content is unimportant. The medium is the message. Knight Lighting doesn't need to say anything in terms of content, in terms of linguistic signification—he is already structurally demonstrating something more important than can be strung together in a sequence of words. In a sense, the fact that the article is about BBSes is nearly irrelevant, except for the fact that Knight Lightning's use of it demonstrates, in an accessible and interesting way, how to hack the codes of discourse. And again, as

this text simulates Knight Lightning's reading of discourse, it demonstrates that the conventional division between reading and writing is arbitrary.

The texts in this chapter have demonstrated their readings of the world by repurposing the texts of the world. They say, these are our readings of what is valuable and what is interesting in text and culture, presented in new arrangements, with new meanings, in new forms and structures. The reuse of textual material allows us to build a vision of our ethos, our aesthetic, our style, our way of doing things, demonstrating our view from our own discrete nodes of our cultural networks by reproducing the texts that are most relevant to us. Marshall McLuhan recognizes that the public has been alienated from media by the age of mechanical print, and he sees a new potential for participation that is beginning to emerge in post-print culture. In McLuhan's vision, one of the technologies that brings this freedom is Xerography:

> The invention of printing did away with anonymity, fostering ideas of literary fame and the habit of considering intellectual effort as private property. Mechanical multiples of the same text created a public—a reading public. The rising consumer-oriented culture became concerned with labels of authenticity and protection against theft and piracy. The idea of copyright—"the exclusive right to reproduce, publish, and sell the matter and form of a literary or artistic work"—was born. . . . Xerography—every man's brain-picker—heralds the times of instant publishing. Anybody can now become both author and publisher. Take any books on any subject and custom-make your own book by simply xeroxing a chapter from this one, a chapter from that one—instant steal!
> (*The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*)

Xerography excites McLuhan particularly because *it allows people to steal*. I think that ASCII text files would excite him even more. By uploading files to BBSes, ASCII publishers allow their works to be shared, transferred, and read without cost to the reader, writer, or publisher. The files can be repeatedly replicated with minimal concern for material costs. If the medium is the message,

ASCII technology itself signifies a platform for a kind of communication that cannot be bounded by corporate interests or proprietary information models. There is no charge to use ASCII. It is not illegal to design a word processor that can read and write ASCII files. ASCII is one of the most essential technologies of electronic media, and yet it does not demand that tribute be paid to those who invented and developed it. ASCII publishers, likewise, risk no economic loss or gain in the publishing of text files, and can therefore remediate and repurpose textual materials from other sources without the ethical complication of being paid for someone else's writing. In these ways, ASCII text files provide a model for the liberation of the text from a number of authoritarian pressures.

Perhaps most importantly, ASCII text files distributed by means of BBS demand active participation from everyone involved with them. This is in contrast to any one-way medium with a rigid formal and legal separation between producers and consumers. In the BBS environment, those who engage with media must take personal responsibility for what they upload and download, developing an interest in niche texts, obscure texts, texts that present something markedly different from the conventional fare. Here the courier and modifier of text become artists, even though their activities might otherwise be considered acts of piracy or plagiarism. But piracy and plagiarism do not need to be primarily framed in terms of their negative connotations. As the Critical Art Ensemble says:

> The plagiarist sees all objects as equal, and thereby horizontalizes the plane of phenomena. All texts become potentially usable and reusable. Herein lies an epistemology of anarchy, according to which the plagiarist argues that if science, religion, or any other social institution precludes certainty beyond the realm of the private, then it is best to endow consciousness with as many categories of interpretation as possible. ("Utopian Plagiarism, Hypertextuality, and Electronic Cultural Production" 341-342)

ASCII and BBSes have provided an example of what happens when copyrighted and uncopyrighted material are treated alike. In an environment where we do not trade money for commoditized art, we instead become participants in the

transmission of localized art. This couriering becomes its own reward, inspired by new ways for people to communicate with one another—seeking art, sharing art, and developing new visions of the numerous potential networks of culture by means of these processes. As Jean-François Lyotard says:

> A *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent. (*The Postmodern Condition* 15)

In this vision, there is no longer a separation between production and consumption—with the removal of the industry as arbiter, every courier of media contributes to culture, every courier is an artist. The same conditions that allow for radical new configurations of culture and literature are the same conditions that prevent the institutionalization (by means of fixity, centrality, signification, etc.) of this culture and literature. That is, the couriering aesthetic refuses to privilege the culture industry by conforming to its notions of authority and copyright, instead treating all media as undifferentiated material. This undifferentiated material can be discovered, reproduced, repurposed, and shared, whether or not it is legal to do so. The law that seeks to limit this activity is an arbitrary code and cannot be perceived as relevant within the courier aesthetic. As William Burroughs and Brion Gysin say:

> Out of the closet and into the museums, libraries, architectural monuments, concert halls, bookstores, recording studios and film studios of the world. Everything belongs to the inspired and dedicated thief. All the artists of history, from cave painters to Picasso, all the poets and writers, the musicians and architects, offer their wares, importuning him like street vendors. They supplicate him from the bored minds of school children, from the prisons of uncritical veneration, from dead museums

and dusty archives. Sculptors stretch forth their limestone arms to receive the life-giving transformation of flesh as their severed limbs are grafted onto Mister America. *Mais le voleur n'est pas pressé* — the thief is in no hurry. He must assure himself of the quality of the merchandise and its suitability for his purpose before he conveys the supreme honor and benediction of his theft.

Words, colors, light, sounds, stone, wood, bronze belong to the living artist. They belong to anyone who can use them. Loot the Louvre! *A bas l'originalité*, the sterile and assertive ego that imprisons as it creates. *Vive le vol* – pure, shameless, total. We are not responsible. Steal anything in sight. ("Les Voleurs" 21)

As we have seen with ASCII texts, the circumvention of centralized distribution and the absence of corporate advertising results in a living media with a diversity of style and structure, and the proliferation of the kinds of art that we might never hear about on television or in the local newspapers. Art is everywhere, and the problem is not how to ensure that artists are allowed to restrict the use of their work, but how to provide artists with the means for their work to be discovered. Copyright, media monopolies, and corporate advertising work against the local artist's ability to be recognized, and against every person's ability to discover and engage with local media.

By local I don't mean local newspapers and television stations, but artists who produce in niches, whose work is localized and relevant. I am talking about the kind of media that a friend shares with you, not the kind that is piped in through cinema chains and basic cable packages. I am talking about media that takes the frame into consideration, which speaks to and listens to its audience, which combines the processes of writing and reading instead of relegating every action to either a production or a consumption regulated by the exchange of currency. In the pirate's vision, encoding media, seeking media, modifying media, and sharing media are all equally important artistic practices. We need to infuse reading with power, express ourselves through the words of others, engage with

textual materials more directly than ever. And the birth of these practices must be at the expense of the death of textual authority.

4.0) HACK

[Epigraph from significant theorist, relating to what thus chapter is about.]

[An extension of the symbolic network established by the epigraph, functioning as a segue between theorist's lively discourse and my own derivative discourse.]

[Statement about the conventional division between information (geared toward the transmission of ideas) and textuality (geared toward the transmission of materials). These remarks should project confidence and knowledge.]

[Note: the introduction to this chapter should further distance itself from narrativized prose while striving for a prose that hypermediates its own structures. More than ever, it should complicate its own linguistic progresses. As many square brackets as possible.]

[Explanation of how the goals of scientific discourse and poetic discourse have been described as opposites. Copious citations from numerous sources: Barthes (of course), Calvino (speaking of Barthes), McLuhan. Wittgenstein, even?]

[Polemical statement that the division between scientific and literary discourse is arbitrary, as are any other divisions and/or connections between things.]

[A promise that this chapter will demonstrate a thread of ASCII literature that hacks this opposition, blending information and poetry in order to generate hybrid textual forms.]

[A witty and/or intelligent comment to conclude segment with a note of finality.]

4.1> INFORMATION & TEXTUALITY

> The knowledgable need to teach the newbies, but must be careful about
> how they teach them. The person teaching can't just give all the answers
> away. They need to coach them towards the answers. If you are a good
> writer then type everything you've learned so that those who don't know
> can find out. The problem right now are all the newbies that enter the
> scene, read 2 or 3 docs, and think they're gods. When you meet newbies,
> don't just give them the answers, teach them. Teach them how to learn as
> well. That way, you keep the scene from becoming shallow and lame.
> When you learn something new or interesting, type it up an upload it
> someplace where it can made useful. Don't keep secrets when it comes to
> knowledge. Before you leave the scene for good, write about your
> expiriences and the things you've learned so that the next generation of
> newbies will have the chance of knowing what you knew. ("Why Educate
> the Masses?")

We have already heard of H/P/A/C techniques and H/P/A/C technical manuals,
which instruct a computer user how to hack, how to phreak, how to construct
explosives and make mischief, and how to crack software. In a niche environment
that is so specifically technological, with its own context-specific medium (ASCII
files), this technical information becomes an important part of the literature,
influencing the text files that come after it, whether or not the content of those
files are H/P/A/C-related. Bruce Sterling says the following about the
proliferation of this kind of technical manual within the computer underground:

> Forbidden knowledge . . . is the basic currency of the digital underground,
> like seashells among Trobriand Islanders. Hackers hoard this knowledge,
> and dwell upon it obsessively, and refine it, and bargain with it, and talk
> and talk about it. Many hackers even suffer from a strange obsession to
> *teach*—to spread the ethos and knowledge of the digital underground.
> They'll do this even when it gains them no particular advantage and
> presents a grave personal risk. (*The Hacker Crackdown* 56).

It is true that publishers and couriers in the computer underground are personally dedicated to the trade and transmission of ASCII text files, without any financial incentive other than cultural capital and byte value. Sterling's description could equally be applied to avant-garde poets, literary performance events, or (to use Pierre Bourdieu's examples) the poor young bohemian or the "little review." But whereas Sterling is talking about the exchange of *knowledge*, I am talking about the exchange of *text*. We must remember that the text is not knowledge embodied, although it can be used as a score for acquiring knowledge by means of linguistic content, symbolic networks, structural patterns, and the deployment and juxtaposition of popular slogans.

Although we can gain knowledge of a text and we can gain knowledge of certain concepts and structures by investigating a text, this does not mean that the text itself *is knowledge*. To equate the two ignores the experience of textuality, eliminating the reader's consciousness and autonomy from the equation. So far in this dissertation, I have attempted to treat text as undifferentiated material, which primarily *means* due to its context—that is, its intratextual context, its intertextual context, and most importantly its particular use. Is data knowledge? Is text knowledge? Is there a transcendental signified that can be unequivocally communicated through assemblages of graphemes?

We might say that Sterling would like to make these questions disappear, because the success of his project depends upon its ability to pass as "knowledge" of the computer underground. His readers must say: having read this book, I now *know* something about the computer underground. Sterling's discourse is familiar, because it advocates for the same beliefs as realism, journalism, and science, in which irreducibly complex phenomena of the real world are reduced to processable data. The data are subsequently interpreted, limiting their potential range of signification. The data and interpretations are even further reduced to simple aphorisms, which constitute the "knowledge" that they transmit to readers—slogans without substance, memes, the discourse that attempts to legitimize, naturalize, and produce a demand for its own authority.

Envisioned as "knowledge, " the content of each slogan is so reductive as to be trivial, meaningless, empty. What we know is when and how to repeat these slogans, but we don't know what they mean. As Ludwig Wittgenstein says:

> Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle". No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something quite different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*; for the box might be empty.
> (*Philosophical Investigations* 100)

The problem is not that we are unable to know what is inside everyone else's box, but that in each instance we say "beetle." It is impossible to know what "information" such a slogan might communicate to others beyond the word itself. If messages can be transmitted through words at all, it must be a very idiosyncratic process, determined more by predispositions and biases rather than any innate meaning. Even at the most elemental level, Ferdinand de Saussure observes that "The signs used in writing are arbitrary. The letter *t*, for instance, has no connexion with the sound it denotes" (*Course in General Linguistics* 117). If the connections between individual letters and the sounds that they denote is arbitrary, and all of our discourse is constructed out of these units, we cannot transmit, via linguistic signification, a stable referent that is independent of context. As we barter with hollow slogans, we infuse each with our own vision of its potential range of signification, which cannot be shared by others. As Marshall McLuhan says: "By the meaningless sign linked to the meaningless sound we have built the shape and meaning of Western man" (*The Gutenberg Galaxy* 58).

We have already talked several times now about the vision of transparent signification in a text, which is a projected goal of discourse that strives to be realistic, informative, or scientific. As Roland Barthes says:

> To resort to scientific discourse as to an instrument of thought is to postulate that a neutral state of language exists, from which would branch off, like so many gaps and ornaments, a certain number of special languages, such as the literary language or the poetic language; the neutral state would be, it is assumed, the code of reference for all the "eccentric" languages which would be only so many sub-codes; by identifying itself with this referential code, basis of all normality, scientific discourse arrogates to itself the very authority which writing must contest; the notion of "writing" implies in effect the idea that language is a vast system of which no single code is privileged—or, one may say, central—and of which the departments are in a relation of "fluctuating hierarchy." ("From Science to Literature" 8-9)

Italo Calvino expands on Barthes' text:

> For literature, language is never *transparent*, and is never merely an instrument to convey a "meaning" or a "fact" or a "thought" or a "truth"; that is, it cannot mean anything but itself. Whereas, on the other hand, the idea of language used by science is that of a neutral utensil that is used to say something else, to mean something foreign to it. This different concept of language is what distinguishes science from literature. Proceeding along these lines, Barthes gets to the point of maintaining that literature is more scientific than science, because literature knows that language is never naïve, and knows that in writing one cannot say anything extraneous to writing, or to express any truth that is not a truth having to do with the art of writing. The science of language, according to Barthes, if it wishes to remain a science, is destined to be transformed into literature, total writing, and will also lay claim to the pleasures of language, which at present are the exclusive prerogative of literature. (*The Uses of Literature* 29)

Now we distinguish between two distinct kinds of discourse, one which we might call scientific or informational, and the other which we might call literary or textual. What do these discourses strive for? Taking a cue from Ihab Hassan (in

"Toward a Concept of Postmodernism"), perhaps certain schematized differences
will provide a start:

INFORMATION	TEXTUALITY
Transparency	Opacity
Authority	Anarchy
Message	Medium
Interpretation	Experience
Reduction	Complication
Signal	Noise
Seriousness	Play
Arbour	Rhizome
Linearity	Modularity
Speed	Retardation
Convention	Experimentation

Using this distinction between the projected goals of informative writing and of
textual writing, we will look at one of the most classic ASCII technical manuals,
written by a revered writer, BIOC Agent 003, whose series of phreaking guides
seemed to create new standards for excellence in ASCII text files.

**CASE STUDY: "BIOC Agent's Course in BASIC
TELECOMMUNICATIONS Part I" by BIOC Agent 003 (1984).** This text file
is both informed and inspired by a long history of technical manuals on the topic
of phreaking, going back at least to Abbie Hoffman's *Youth International Party
Line / Technological Assistance Party* (*YIPL/TAP*), founded in 1971 (we will read
from *YIPL* 1 later in this chapter). In fact, BIOC Agent 003 once transcribed the
first issue of *YIPL* as a text file, crediting himself as its "Associate Editor." In the
introduction to the transcription, he explains that he has "had to turn back through
over 360 pages of TAPs which represent the results of over 13 years of
'subversive' work by several dozen people," giving him an uncommon degree of
expertise in phreakerly techniques, particularly in the context of ASCII
publishing, where expertise is by no means a prerequisite. As Flack O'Hara says:

```
******BIOC Agent 003's course in******
*                                    *
*        ===================         *
*        =BASIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS=  *
*        ===================         *
*               PART I               *
**************************************

Revised: 18-JUL-84

PREFACE:
_____

In this course, I plan to cover as much material as possible relating to tele-
communications.  First, in the syllabus are the long-distance services, which
is the topic of part I.  In future issues, such subjects as The Network,
colored boxes, telephone electronics, central office equipment, operators,
special #'s, and much, much more will be covered.

LONG-DISTANCE SERVICES:
_____
```

Figure 4.1-1: "Course in BASIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS Part I"

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To be a real journalist, you need to know more than your audience does about a topic. In other words, on a scale of 1-10, if I know 5 and my readers know 3, that's okay because you are still conveying new information to them. If your readership is a 5 then you had better be bringing a 7 or an 8 to the table. The thing is, back in the BBS days you could often get away with a 1 or a 2 because people were not going to go out and research whatever it was you were writing about. (qtd. in "Catching Flack for the Philez")

Far from aiming to inscribe amateur ramblings, BIOC Agent 003 promises to deliver a "course" on these systems, a lecture series, a complete and self-contained educational programme. By participating in this course, the reader will presumably learn as much as he or she would learn from any other "course." The files in this series largely live up to these claims. As Jason Scott says:

BIOC Agent 003 was one of those rare phone phreaks who could both assimilate information around him and present it in a well-written, forthright manner. Often, many of the phreaking textfiles of the time were poorly written, hastily formatted, and lacking in any perspective beyond how to break or get freebies from a computer or network. ("Jason Scott's Top 100 Textfiles")

As stated in the preface to this file, BIOC Agent 003 intends his lecture series to "cover as much material as possible relating to telecommunications." By "covering," he promises to do more than to simply describe systems or to write about them. He promises to cover, to neatly subordinate every detail beneath the overarching aims of the course. Every necessary detail will be included, and every detail will be integrated into the course, supporting the broader experience.

BIOC Agent 003's series is about using the telephone system in unauthorized ways. It informs its readers of the basic tenets of phreaking, saying, here is how to do things that you are not supposed to do: specifically, how to expertly manipulate the technologies of telecommunications. The text attempts to transmit information in the service of teaching its readership how to hack the transmission of information. In other words, it uses conventional techniques to

advocate for the disruption of convention. In this regard, the text file is a necessary step in the movement toward a production of phreakerly texts, employing the old style of discourse as a means of instructing its reader how to participate in the new style of discourse.

Although the file, as instruction, is as close to an informational text as anything that we will see in this dissertation, this does not prevent us from subjecting it to the same analyses of discourse that we have applied to previous case studies. For example, we could observe the graphic header in this file and say much of what has been said about the case study from *cDc* 100. Or we could observe the upper-case letters and 40-column box in ASCII art and say much of what has been said about "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE." Or we could observe the revision date and say much of what has been said about the print run of *Cult of the Dead Cow* as a virtual palimpsest. Or we could observe the typography of this file, its use of blank space, and its discrete modules that function independently but also work together to form a larger arc, and we could say much of what has been said about "B00G and the art of ZEN." But there is no need to do any of this here. It is enough that the text always contains further unexamined dimensions, even if it aims to transmit information by means of pure linguistic signification.

CASE STUDY: *Phrack* 1.3: "Boot Tracing Made Easy" by Cheap Shades (1985). Unlike the example from BIOC Agent 003, this technical manual will never be praised for its depth, clarity, or comprehensiveness. If this text is geared toward transparent linguistic signification, it doesn't do it well. Cheap Shades prefaces his article with a sort of disclaimer to this effect, stating "I hate learning the theory behind anything so I'm not gonna give any theory behind this." The instruction is delivered by a narrator who hates to learn—in essence, the perfect example of Flack O'Hara's low end of the information scale.

Whereas BIOC Agent 003 sought to produce an entire course on the topic of phreaking, Cheap Shades is only trying to depict a scene from the larger narrative of software cracking. This scene assumes that the reader already

Ok, first of all, ALL programs can be boot traced. The only thing is that some may not be easily converted into files. The only programs that you should try if you aren't real good at ML, are ones that load completely into memory. Also to do this you will need a cassette recorder. (don't worry the program we will save won't take too long to save, and if all goes well it will only be saved loaded once.) I hate learning the theory behind anything so I'm not gonna give any theory behind this. If you want the theory, read some other phile that does this the hard way.

First make sure your cassette recoder works by BLOADing some program and typing:

```
CALL -151
AA60.AA73
```

You'll see something that looks like this:

```
AA60-30 02 xx xx xx xx xx xx
AA68-xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx
AA70-xx xx 00 0B
```

or whatever...The 30 02 is the length ($0230 bytes). The 00 0B is the starting address ($0B00). Oh well, now you need to try and save the program. Type:

```
B00.AZFW   (AZF=$B00+$230-1)
1000<B00.AZFM
B00:00 N B01<B00.AZFM
B00.AZFR
1000<B00.AZFU
```

Figure 4.1-2: "Boot Tracing Made Easy"

understands machine language (ML) well enough that it isn't necessary to explain the specific meaning of the depicted code. For example, he says:

You'll see something that looks like this:

AA60-30 02 xx xx xx xx xx xx

AA68-xx xx xx xx xx xx xx xx

AA70-xx xx 00 08

or whatever... The 30 02 is the length ($0230 bytes). The 00 08 is the starting address ($0800). Oh well, now you need to try and save the program. Type: 800.A2FW   (A2F=$800+$230-1)

Without an understanding of machine language, but some ability to recognize patterns, I can figure out how "30 02" might become "$0230" and how "00 08" might become "$0800," but this doesn't provide me with enough information to implement the following template of code based on that information:

800.A2FW   (A2F=$800+$230-1)

1000<800.A2FM

800:00 N 801<800.A2FM

800.A2FR

1000<800.A2FV

For instance, which of the symbols in this formula are constant, and which are context-specific? Which instances of "0," "2," "3," and "8" are based on "something that looks like this . . . or whatever"? What junctures connect the symbols in the first quoted passage to the symbols in the second quoted passage? Without the inclusion of these interconnections, the result is an article that is basically incomprehensible to anybody who doesn't already know how to boot trace, and comprehensible only to those who have no need for the information to be "made easy." But it might be presumptuous to even assume that the manifest function of this article is to teach its reader how to become a better cracker. When I asked the Mentor how valuable this text file would have been in its day, he said:

I do think it helped set the idea that there would be technical articles as well as all the social stuff that *Phrack* would become famous for. (Interview, 2012.)

He doesn't identify value of this text in the information that it contains, but rather in what it represents. As Douglas Thomas says of the *Phrack* technical guides:

> Even the technical aspects that *Phrack* published were more about constructing and building the *ethos* of the author than providing cutting-edge information. In fact, the central goal of *Phrack*'s technical side seemed to be a consolidation and dissemination of information already known to the broader hacking community. What *Phrack* did differently was fly in the face of the culture of secrecy. (*Hacker Culture* 122)

In Thomas's vision, too, it is not necessarily on the level of linguistic signification that a text file like this is most valuable. Although "Boot Tracing Made Easy" might be said to transmit information or to communicate, we cannot say that this is exactly *what it does*, unless we feel comfortable in ignoring all of the text file's non-informational signifying elements. As Jerome McGann says:

> When we imagine texts as transmitters we are not wrong in our imagination, but we *are* narrow—and much narrower than we should be if we wish to understand how texts work. Indeed, we easily confuse investigations of textuality when we study texts as machines for carrying messages. In the reading of poetry—those paradigm texts—this kind of confusion typically arises in thematic studies, where the "meaning(s)" of the texts are pursued. In poems, however, "meaning" is mistakenly conceived if it is conceived as "message." Rather, "meaning" in poetry is part of the poetical medium; it is a textual feature, like the work's phonetic patterns, or like its various visual components. (*The Textual Condition* 14-15)

The electronic text file itself, as a medium, signifies a faith in the new technology of telecommunication and advances ASCII as a preferred means of communication. *Phrack* and the texts contained therein are not only about their linguistic messages, but also about *acquiring, arranging, and moving text*, activities that constitute numerous messages in themselves. And beyond all of this, we have not even begun to consider the text depicted in this screen capture as a kind of concrete poetry, a kind of ambient writing, a kind of visual arrangement that might make the initiate reader feel that they are beholding computer code

itself, that they might in fact be gazing upon some kind of hackerly art. In a 1995 issue of *Maclean's* magazine (and in the introduction to this dissertation), Joe Chidley wrote this description of the activities of the hacker:

> His fingers trip lightly over the keyboard. With the punch of a return key, a string of characters – writ in the arcane language of computers – scrolls onto the black-and-white display in front of him. "OK," he says, "I'm in." Suddenly, horizontal rows of letters and numbers scroll from left to right across the screen – meaningless to the uninitiated eye. But for the hacker, the mishmash of data contains seductive, perhaps lucrative secrets.
>
> ("Cracking the Net" 54)

Looking at "Boot Tracing Made Easy," we can see for ourselves how stylish and seductive these rows of letters and numbers can be. And in 1985, the year of its publication, if we were to download this file at 300 or 1200 bytes per second (the two rates of transfer supported by the *Phrack*'s own Metal Shop BBS), the text, scrolling across the screen at a rate of either 30 characters per second or 120 characters per second, would be animated by the screen exactly in the way described by Joe Chidley. In the *Maclean's* article, Chidley might be attempting to estrange his audience from computer technology by threatening them with written language that is self-animated by the computer, independently of the reader; Cheap Shades might likewise be attempting to dazzle the reader by visually representing a kind of mythologized code rather than trying to help the reader to understand of the actual functions of the computer.

"Boot Tracing Made Easy," although informational, is already a kind of noise, first through the use of machine language, and then through its minimalist detail. The connections remain paratactic, with long and impossible leaps in logic from point to point, to the extent that this text file is incapable of informing anybody of what they do not already know. And yet, as a pattern of symbols on the page, we can use it as a score to create new ideas, new recognitions, new textual situations, which might propel us into the production of yet further textual and conceptual structures and techniques.

4.2> √ INFORMATION × VOICE

> 'Do not forget', writes Wittgenstein, 'that a poem, even though it is
> composed in the language of information, is not used in the language game
> of giving information.' (*Structuralist Poetics* 162)

> Art is not a march set to music, but rather a walking dance to be
> experienced or, more accurately, a movement of the body, whose very
> essence it is to be experienced through the senses. (*Theory of Prose* 22)

> The object of the poetical text is to thicken the medium as much as
> possible—literally, to put the resources of the medium on full display, to
> exhibit the processes of self-reflection and self-generation which texts set
> in motion, which they *are*. (*The Textual Condition* 14)

The formulation that I'm going for with the title of this section is a text that
multiplies information by voice, and then squares the product back into a single
entity. The text does not simply add voice to information, as though both can be
fully realized within the same text. The kind of text that I'm thinking of combines
information and voice within the same space, each impeding the goals of the
other. There are endless examples of this kind of writing in ASCII literature. As
AIDS of *Hogs of Entropy* says:

> It's not like reading stereo instructions . . . there's something very personal
> about them which stereo instructions lack . . . some are literally like . . . #1
> open box . . . #2 conncet blue wire to grene wire . . . but others are more
> like mini-narratives. (Interview, 2003)

These texts retain the authoritative attitude and the desire to share knowledge of
H/P/A/C, while making play of their own discursive structures. In this section, we
will look at "anarchy" files that riff on the "how-to" genre, creating narrativized
descriptions of how to make free phone calls, wreck people's computers, get
video games for free, and make pipe bombs, while modifying and extending the

most familiar aspects of the technical manual, such as the list and the disclaimer, the granularity of detail, and the logic of order. These guides describe and enact anarchy, mixing codes and retarding the progress of information.

The first point where ASCII writing departs from conventional informational texts is this: informational texts are written in dead language. This is the kind of writing that Plato criticises in *Phaedrus*: language that operates without knowing its own context, which speaks to each person in the same way, which allows no interlocution, which does not allow its speaker to defend, modify, or retract a statement.

> And when once it is written, every composition trundles about everywhere in the same way, in the presence both of those who know about the subject and those who have nothing to do with it, and it does not know how to address those it should address and not those it should not. When it is ill treated and unjustly abused, it always needs its father to help it; for it is incapable of either defending or helping itself. (*Phaedrus* 63)

Phaedrus itself attempts to escape from this condition by simulating a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus, narrativizing and dramatizing an exchange between speaker and interlocutor, when in reality both voices emanate from the same source—the text. In the world within the text there is dialogue, but in the text itself there is no interlocutor, only a simulated interlocutor—*Phaedrus* is not written *for* Phaedrus, but to find its way into the hands of any reader, in any context, to which the text cannot adapt but must be adapted by its handler (or courier). To believe in the reality of the dialogue, the reader must make an incredible leap, envisioning words on vellum as a faithful representation of the phenomena of the real world, despite the clear reduction and arrangement of detail, the rhetorical tack taken by the text, and the arrangement of glyphs that simulate nothing of the experience of an afternoon stroll through orchards.

CASE STUDY: *Anarchy Inc.*: **"Roofiing: A Beginning Guide" by the Daredevil (n.d.).** This text promises to introduce beginners to the concept of climbing on to rooftops in the middle of the night. More importantly, it coins the

Anarchy inc.   ...presents...
_____

          -- Roofiing: A Beginning Guide --

Written by: The Daredevil
_____

Roofs? Why?
_____

    The law calls it Tresspassing. We, in our circle of friends, call it roofing. It is the art of exploring Roof-tops, and generally creating havoc, while up there. Havoc the Chaos (rip), was the one who enjoyed roofing most, but he is not here to present this file. I felt that roofing was a sport, and the high-light was not to get caught. We have been "caught" by the police, and other various peoples while exploring, but it's really been no big deal. On with some ideas...

Creative!
_____

    The first thing you have to do, although it is rather obvious, is get on top of the roof. Usually, one can climb the pipes on the side/back of the building. Some of them can be quite hot, so be careful. We have figured many creative

Figure 4.2-1: "Roofiing: A Beginning Guide"

term "roofing" (or "Roofiing") to describe this practice. The text file fits into a fairly well-known genre of expository narrative that investigates the nuances of localized and inventive subcultural practices. Within ASCII literature, it fits into a genre of instructional manuals geared toward making mischief. But the article doesn't just describe a technique as much as it invents and mythologizes one.

Having seen the name of Havoc the Chaos supplemented by the parenthetical statement "(rip)," we might wonder if this death has anything to do with roofing, and even if the death is literal or figurative. Has Havoc the Chaos *the corporeal entity* died, or Havoc the Chaos *the alias*? Or Havoc the Chaos's membership in *Anarchy Inc.*? It is a reasonable question, because in the Pac*Bell article (featured in NETWORK), Havoc the Chaos said: "Havoc the Chaos and this text file are properties of Anarchy, Inc." If the alias is casually tossed around in one instance, why not in another? The fact that Havoc the Chaos is not here "to present this file" doesn't mean that he is not still "here" in another sense.

It is still a touching detail, that the thought of roofing triggers the narrator's specific use of language, in which he remembers that he and his friends used to enjoy "generally creating havoc." The Daredevil associates his friend so intimately with the experience of roofing that the whole experience is framed by the word "havoc," which only subsequently triggers the fully conscious remembrance of Havoc the Chaos. But for all we truly know, Havoc the Chaos could be a fictionalized character, perhaps even an alternative publishing identity of the Daredevil, which would inscribe the phrase "creating havoc" with a different meaning entirely. As it goes with information, the more that we know, the more that we realize we do not know. The status of Havoc the Chaos will never present itself to us through the text, and this is not just because we are unable to confirm or deny its stated truth, but because *we are not able to determine what the stated truth is*. But is determining such a truth essential, even in an informational manual, or are we naïve to insist on such a thing?

Because of the age of mechanical print, we are used to considering texts as things that are fixed and final. The printing press is never used in the process of

composition, but only to make multiple copies of an already-finished text after the "writing" is finished. The text might be drafted and revised numerous times by hand, but when it is mechanically set, its structures are no longer flexible.

With the typewriter, it is possible to compose in a kind of lettering that resembles mechanical type. Letters are selected from a database of potential characters indicated by markings on typewriter keys. When a typist selects a character by pressing the corresponding button, a grapheme is physically impressed upon the page. And yet, although it resembles mechanical type, it lacks the mass replicability and potential typographic finesse of the industrial codex.

With electronic text, the technology of the keyboard extends into the virtual dimension, with the database of potential characters no longer connected to a mechanical device for striking marks on to pages, but rigged to produce a certain electrical stimulus, entering data on to the computer disk, which is simultaneously represented on a screen. Unlike the mechanical press, which cannot take part in the process of composition, electronic text is published by means of the same tools that are used to write it.

Basic computer coding and commands are rigid, requiring that every formulation can be parsed by a program. Electronic mail and chat, on the other hand, are loose and ephemeral forms of communication, taking on many of the idiosyncrasies of oral communication even though they are composed by means of writing. In email and chat, for example, text is context-dependent and allows for interlocution. As such, it allows for elements of shorthand and imprecise statements that can later be refined upon the request of the interlocutor. Upon developing an informal writing style through email and chat, a writer can port these techniques to other platforms, like poetic or textual writing. Because of the technological and cultural connection between BBS culture and ASCII technology, even informational files allow for a style of writing that resists the fixity of type, simulating the unfixed discourse of the computer underground.

CASE STUDY: *Neon Knights***: "Raising Hell Voulume 3" by the Blade (1986).** With digital writing, there is smaller degree of physical labour connected

AHH FUCK you... I just got bvack from a party and feel like writing a file, Budwiser fuckin sucks, that all they got so you god damn drink it, fuckin pokers awesome, won 32 bucks off the shit, olnly cheated once... fuck this bullshit

Raisng hell fucking volume 3, god knows what the hell im gonna type about..........

I got a fuckin job at this Builders place typing shit into this Digital vt 220, or what ever...   so much nice info... fuck this im off the subject.

Destory, an age old urge that everyone get to get their aggrestions out, go outside, yell at the top of yoru lungs, make everyone think yoru are fuckin crazy, then get in your car and this is the beging of.....

TERRORISM, BREAKING INTO ONE'S HOME AND SCARING THE GOD DAMN SHIT OUT OF THEM.

You gotta have fuckin guts to do this one, get all fucked up off of a bottle of Abvsoulut 100, (red label)... and get in your car (fathers, mothers, neighbors, who gives a shit just get a car) and drive 63.93 miles, find a house that is somewhat secluded, like back in the woods or no other houses are around it.   Drive up, (WHOPPS forgot the weapons list.....

Figure 4.2-2: "Raising Hell Voulume 3"

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to the process of textual production than ever before. For example, the letter "A" no longer requires three pen strokes, but the depression of a single button on the keyboard. The relative ease with which the letter is inscribed marks a significant reduction of cognitive processes. With the technology of the keyboard, we no longer scratch each letter directly on to paper, leading advocates such as Michael Heim to imagine that electronic writing is a process entirely removed from physical labour and materiality:

> The accelerated automation of word processing makes possible a new immediacy in the creation of public, typified text. Immediacy is the sense of there being no medium quod, no instrumental impediment to thinking in external symbols, only a medium quo, or pure transparent element. As I write, I can put things directly in writing. My stream of consciousness can be paralleled by the running flow of the electric element. Words dance on the screen. Sentences slide smoothly into place, make way for one another, while paragraphs ripple down the screen. Words become highlighted, vanish at the push of a button, then reappear instantly at will. Verbal life is fast-paced, easier, with something of the exhilaration of video games. For this reason, children, we are told, prefer writing on a computer to writing with a pencil and paper. (*Electric Language* 152)

In Heim's description, text appears by the sheer force of writerly will, divorced from all materiality, and free-fall writing produces a perfect stream-of-consciousness text, as if the word processor is capable of transcribing transcendent thought, the single 'theological' meaning, the 'message' of the Author-God. But the notion of an immediated stream of consciousness ignores key stages of cognition in the writing process: the structuring of narrative; the manufacture of details; the manipulation of language for aesthetic and rhetorical effect; the labour of entering data keystroke by keystroke; etcetera.

With a stream-of-conscious narrative, we do not gain access to the consciousness of the writer, but the text does simulate a stream of production— that is, a vision of keys being pressed on a keyboard in a certain order, animated by the process of reading, which is not a simulation of *consciousness* at all, but a

simulation of *typing*, which is still world-inducing, though not claiming to give us immediated access to the writer's conscious mind. We might feel that we capture glimpses of the mind through a text, but textuality is always highly mediated, never operating at the level of transparent signification.

The notion of stream-of-consciousness writing suggests that there is a writer who has produced this sequence of symbols on the page (fact) and that the person of this writer is identical to the person of the narrator (artifice). Like the world of conventional realism or non-fiction, the figure of the narrator is always a strategy, a construction. But we cannot deny that there is a real person who has inscribed the text that we are reading, and as we read, it seems as though we are simulating this same forward motion, registering each key stroke as we propel our gaze from left to right across the screen. In reading the text, we generate a sensation of the relentless forward motion of writing, even though the graphemes are static on the page, even though we know that the Blade could have revised the text if he had wanted to. The typographic blunders simulate a lunging forward, with no turning back, no time to revise. Fluegelman and Hewes say:

> you are generating a manuscript in much the same way that an artist makes a sketch; the important thing is to get the ideas down in quick, fluid strokes, and you can come back later to polish the rough edges and fill in the details. (*Writing in the Computer Age* 153)

But the Blade, or at least his narrative persona, doesn't view the technology of word processing as a means to rigourous revision. He says:

> AHH FUCK you... I just got bvack from a party and feel like writing a file, Budwiser fuckin sucks, that all they got so you god damn drink it, fuckin pokers awesome, won 32 bucks off the shit, olnly cheated once... fuck this bullshit

The Blade does not fully engage with the editorial tools of his word processor, but uses the computer as a device for writing aggressive text without reflection. As he says in "Raising Hell Volume One" (co-written by Satan): "Let us explain one thing, we do not give one flying shit about spellig, nor typographical errors, so don't get upset over something you can't control. Well enough with that bullshit,

lets go out the door and destroy the neighbourhood!" The Blade is like a practitioner of Dada, fighting against conventional aesthetics and morality, intent on creating a literature that will attack the most basic editorial conventions, a literature that might seek, as Tristan Tzara says:

> to fly into a rage and sharpen your wings to conquer and disseminate little abcs, to sign, shout, swear, to organise prose into a form of absolute and irrefutable evidence, to prove your non plus ultra and maintain that novelty resembles life just as the latest appearance of some whore proves the essence of God. ("Dada Manifesto 1918" 36)

There is something very romantic about the Blade's writing, in his desire to thrash beyond the limits of conventional discourse. It is almost as though each new word overwrites the last, as Roland Barthes says of the oral utterance:

> The whole of speech is epitomized in this expendability of words, in this froth ceaselessly swept onwards, and speech is found only where language self-evidently functions like a devouring process which swallows only the moving crest of the words. (*Writing Degree Zero* 19-20)

By letting the words trail behind him, by never turning back, the Blade also releases them from authority, madly inscribing characters and publishing them, leaving any polishing of rough edges or filling in of details to the editorial faculties of his readers. Take, for example, the following passage:

> Destory, an age old urge that everyone get to get their aggrestions out, go outside, yell at the top of yoru lungs, make everyone think yoru are fuckin crazy, then get in your car and this is the beging of….

With the very first word, "Destory," we hit a snag—it is not a conventional word in the English language. And yet, we can never really be intent to reply, like a disk operating system, "bad command or file name." We must consider the possible ways in which we could reshape it to signify something other than its own disorder. We could modify this word and other unconventionally spelled words in order to create the following sequence:

> Destroy, an age old urge that everyone get to get their aggressions out, go outside, yell at the top of your lungs, make everyone think you are fucking crazy, then get in your car and this is the beginning of….

And yet, even with standardized word spellings, the paragraph's grammar continues to impede the flow of information. Perhaps the Blade means to say:

> To destroy is an age old urge that everyone has to get their aggressions out, to go outside, to yell at the top of their lungs, to make everyone think that they are fucking crazy, then get in their car. This is the beginning of….

But in attempting to bring the writing nearer to transparent signification, it becomes clear that these edits are actually taking us further away from what the Blade is saying. At the very least, his unconventional spelling is instrumental to the signification within the text. It has to signify, in addition to everything else, *at least* its own disorder, passion, recklessness, lack of respect, and intoxication. These functions are not merely secondary to the text, but primary. It is a writing outside the law. As Roland Barthes says:

> legalized spelling keeps the *scriptor* from enjoying writing, that euphoric gesture which permits putting into the tracing of a word *a little more* than its mere intention to communicate. ("Freedom to Write" 45)

If we could convince the Blade to polish the rough edges and fill in the details, the text would lose the retardations and blockages that are the most important part of what it communicates. Computers cannot parse unconventional spelling and syntax. The human reader can. Every user of the command-line interface understands this difference: for a command prompt of this era, even a single typographic irregularity renders an entire phrase meaningless. For the human reader, it only contributes to a new order of meaning.

4.3> SIGNAL JAMMING: MINUS ONE RED APPLES

Although I had been reading *Hogs of Entropy* since 1994, it wasn't until 2000 that I first communicated with the editor, Mogel, via Internet Relay Chat. During this

conversation, he provided me with insights into certain tropes of ASCII writing, many of which I had previously understood but never articulated. For example:

> You'll find a buncha 'zines have "hacker related" jokes even if they have little actual technical information . . . there's a whole genre of hacker 'zines that are hacker-parody 'zines, which are 80% humor, 20% information. (Interview, 2000)

If the texts in 4.2 are informational manuals that become narrative, the texts in 4.3 are narratives that retain the structures of the informational manual. They parody earlier ASCII texts, certainly, but also communication in general. As Ludwig Wittgenstein enacts one such parody:

> Now think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked "five red apples". He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked "apples"; then he looks up the word "red" in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers—I assume that he knows them by heart—up to the word "five" and for each he takes an apple of the same colour out of the drawer.—It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words.—"But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word 'red' and what he is to do with the word 'five'?" (*Philosophical Investigations* 2-3)

This scene demonstrates so much about the irreducible networks of information that wrestle with one another in the play of language. "Five red apples" cannot satisfactorily be reduced into transparent meaning by the shopkeeper, and likewise, the scene itself is becomes unsatisfying when summarized by the phrase "It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words." The order for an apple becomes poetic when it cannot be reduced, and the interpretation of the investigation (its reduction to a phrase) threatens to kill that same poetry. But this is the project of information—if we attempt to consider the full and irreducible range of signification of every word, and to allow these significations to intersect at every possible juncture, we will be left with a mass of networked data so complex and boundless that we cannot not parse as much as a sentence.

Paragraphs will become meaningless, full texts incomprehensible. And so, to inform, texts must reduce. They must attempt to limit their own signification. Instead of spinning webs in all directions, information must find the fastest circuit, cutting a line through, ignoring the majority of the text's potential.

And riding in a car down the highway, I look through the window and see the edge of the road flying by very quickly, fence posts ticking past one by one, hills in the distance moving very slowly, and the clouds in the sky travelling at an almost imperceptible rate. I see a parallax effect, but how has this parallax been created? To perceive it at all, I have had to invent it through a reduction of detail. Here, by listing the road, fence posts, hills, and clouds, I have reduced the entire vista into just four elements. I can calculate the world as an interplay of fragments, but in doing so I've sped reality up, made it processable, in other words made it wrong. I have selected the unselectable and extracted the unextractible in order to produce a definitive observation about what is no longer real. What I am describing here is the primary function of realism, history, and science. This is the paradox of the speed of communication, the paradox of information. In order to communicate, we mark an end to the frame of reference, by doing so demanding a credit that can never be exchanged for currency.

What does it mean to believe that you can reach through the text into what is beyond it? Holding a sheet of paper in front of me, I push my hand through the fibres and realize that there is nothing on the other side. In what sense might we think that we can get rid of the actual text, its symbols and their arrangement, toss these aside, and yet possess everything that it signifies? For one, this would assume that there is only one thing within it, one thing that floats immaterial, like a soul. We have even heard some people refer to the *spirit* of a text, as though there is something to it other than the thing itself. Jean Baudrillard ties this belief to a kind of Christian faith, of an entity with multiple bodies:

> All Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God of course. But what if God himself can be simulated, that

is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. (*Simulacra and Simulation* 5-6)

In *The Neo-Comintern Online Magazine*, THE HiGH COG poses this riddle:

Riddle: If I had four and gave you seven, and Bill gave me two, how many would I have?

Answer: -1 apples. ("Riddle-Dee-Dum")

The final word, "apples," exposes the content of the word problem as an afterthought, demonstrating a narrative emptiness symptomatic of mathematics in general. Mathematical formulae can be best resolved when they are not complicated by real-world details—but without these details, mathematics serves no function other than its own rote labour. Beyond the frame, there is always additional information that makes mathematical understanding impossible. By including the extraneous, the world beyond the frame seems to be visible, even though it is still located within the text.

CASE STUDY: *Cult of the Dead Cow* **1: "Gerbil Feed Bomb" by Swamp Rat (1985).** My first question is this: is it actually possible to make a bomb out of gerbil feed? My second question: without looking it up, is there any way to know for sure? In 1985, for the majority of BBS users, there would be no easy way to verify the information, pushing the guide into the realm of the urban legend, almost impossible to confirm or deny.

The article, operating at a level of granularity typical of ASCII text files, doesn't explain what the chemical properties of gerbil feed are, or why mixing it with glue and gasoline might produce any particular reaction. Compare this to

Grudge against society? Seeking mass destruction & bloodshed? Look no
further... Follow these simple directions for nihilism absolute...

1. Get some Gerbil Feed, or some other type of small rodent food, available at
   most any pet store.

2. Mash up the food pellets into a fine powder (about the consistancy of
   beach sand). The best way to do this is to put the pellets in a bag, and
   then beat the hell out of those bitches (pretend like they're Nancy Reagan
   for more fun!) with a hammer. If you live near a major highway, you can
   just scatter them around, and then come by later with a shovel.

3. Put this powder into a jar (Jiff Peanut Butter jars work best, but Peter
   Pan will do just fine). Get some model glue, the kind in tubes, and squirt
   out a bunch of it into your hand. Spread it out evenly over all your
   fingers, and then stick your hands into the jar. Move your hands around
   a lot in the jar so that the glue is well mixed with the powder.
   Go into a spasm, this should shake all the glue off your hands.

4. Fill the rest of the jar up with gasoline(available at most any gas station.)
5. Put a long fuse into it. If you're brave (and a bit stupid), you can just
   drop a match into it.

Figure 4.3-1: "Gerbil Feed Bomb"

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"Boot Disk Tracing," which says: "I hate learning the theory behind anything so I'm not gonna give any theory behind this." The ASCII text file needn't explain itself, but it must intrigue its reader.

Although the theory behind the gerbil feed bomb is never made explicit, Swamp Rat is deeply attentive to other details, investing so much in certain moments that context disappears, losing the objectives of the text as a whole. This intense attention to the moment is most stylized in section three, when he says:

> Put this powder into a jar (Jiff Peanut Butter jars work best, but Peter Pan will do just fine). **Get** some **model glue,** the kind in tubes, and squirt out a bunch of it into your hand. Spread it out evenly over all your fingers, and then stick your hands into the jar. Move your hands around a lot in the jar so that the glue is well **mix**ed **with** the **powder**. Go into a spasm, this should shake all the glue off your hands.

I have bolded six words within the paragraph that convey all of the *information* relevant to the construction of the bomb. By this measure, only seven percent of the paragraph transmits information. The text refuses to err on the side of brevity when describing the process of mixing glue and powder by means of a human hand immersed in a Jiff or Peter Pan jar, but here's a question—what should be the ratio of gerbil feed powder to glue? How much gasoline should one add to this mixture? The greatest detail is given to the smallest points, while the most important are glossed over or ignored.

All of the noise, the blockage of the conventional "message," becomes its own aesthetic object. But, unlike RABID RASTA's simulation, the parody doesn't gesture toward an object (such as the non-real pirate), but only gestures away from itself, away from a specific denotation into a vast unknown of connotation. What does the text *mean*? We can come nowhere close to answering this question, a fact that is itself fundamental to how the text operates. This is not a mathematical message, but a gesture away from the mathematical message. This is not the equivalent of an apple, but of minus one red apples.

CASE STUDY: *Phrack* **13.3: "How to fuck up the world" by Thomas Covenant (1987).** Another kind of "simulation": in this instance, it is not a parody of an imaginary warez courier (JHONNY THE AVENGER), but of *Metal Communications / Neon Knights*, a group whose text files are well known throughout the computer underground, whose style has been a major influence on ASCII literature, including *Phrack*. The parody depends upon the reader's recognition of *MC/NK*, but this requirement can also be satisfied by a general recognition of the tropes and style of ASCII literature, because all of it has been so deeply influenced by *Metal Communications / Neon Knights*.

This screen capture only shows the header of the article, a typographic disaster that fills nearly an entire screen. This parody doesn't catalogue the shortcomings of *MC/NK*, but instead simulates its typography, its too-elaborate credit sequences, its relentless forward motion (as in "Raising Hell Voulume 3"), errors in spelling and grammar, and omnidirectional blurting of profanity.

The title is not properly centred or written in title case. The author credit is absent from the header. Instead, we have a barbed ASCII frame, divided into three sections: an elaborate list of shout-outs (supplemented by parenthetical commentary), a list of hated groups of people, and a statement of refusal to include a BBS tag (followed by an elaborate BBS tag). Each section is self-subverting, and each becomes progressively more over-the-top. A brief reading of the parodic qualities of each:

1) An exhaustive list of credits that includes the names of most of the *Metal Communications / Neon Knights* contributors and the names of heavy metal bands that have been referred to in past issues of *MC/NK*. The final entry on the list is Steve Wozniak, "even thouhg hes a wimp!" The additional detail declaring Wozniak's status as wimp makes the line run long, so that an additional line must be added to the end of the first section. The last line, then, includes a single word, awkwardly centred on the page. This section becomes a parody of, at least, the ill-formed typography of *MC/NK*, and their discursive practice of negation, which they favour over the process of revision.

Grudge against society? Seeking mass destruction & bloodshed?   Look no further... Follow these simple directions for nihilism absolute...

1. Get some Gerbil Feed, or some other type of small rodent food, available at most any pet store.

2. Mash up the food pellets into a fine powder (about the consistancy of beach sand).   The best way to do this is to put the pellets in a bag, and then beat the hell out of those bitches (pretend like they're Nancy Reagan for more fun!) with a hammer.   If you live near a major highway, you can just scatter them around, and then come by later with a shovel.

3. Put this powder into a jar (Jiff Peanut Butter jars work best, but Peter Pan will do just fine). Get some model glue, the kind in tubes, and squirt out a bunch of it into your hand.   Spread it out evenly over all your fingers, and then stick your hands into the jar. Move your hands around a lot in the jar so that the glue is well mixed with the powder. Go into a spasm, this should shake all the glue off your hands.

4. Fill the rest of the jar up with gasoline(available at most any gas station.)
5. Put a long fuse into it. If you're brave (and a bit stupid), you can just drop a match into it.

Figure 4.3-1: "Gerbil Feed Bomb"

2) A list of groups of people hated by the narrator of the text file. This list includes some of the familiar targets of right wingers, but concludes with a jab at "any welfare starving shit headed bastard who doesnt have an Applecat modem," a brand that has been obsolete since the early 1980s. The joke might be that *MC/NK* files are now passé (as of 1987, the group had likely ceased to publish), or perhaps the joke is that *MC/NK* files were always passé, even when the group was active.

3) The final section of the header explains that the writer is not going to include a BBS tag, but continues on to negate this statement. The froth of language sweeps ceaselessly onward, not only with a BBS tag, but also with a begging letter for BBS traffic, with an overstated claim of coolness ("cool board/cool sysop/cool wares/just all around cool!") gesturing toward a range of signification opposite of coolness. The simulated writer fails in his ability to distinguish what is cool, simultaneously displaying a personal lack of coolness.

The header's stylized frame and the content of each of the three sections riff on important ASCII tropes. Looking back to the footer from "Getting others to Commit Suicide" in NETWORK, we can see that, although the formatting is different, many of the tropes are similar. Thomas Covenent's simulation is less exaggerated than one might initially imagine, but its power comes from the trebled and intensifying subversion of the style of *MC/NK*, and also by the fact that it loads this information at the beginning of the file (making it top-heavy), whereas it merely constitutes the footer of "Getting others to Commit Suicide."

CASE STUDY: *Underground eXperts United* **164: "How to Make a Bomb!" by the GNN (1994).** Like many other instructional manuals, this text file begins with a disclaimer, explaining that the writer will not take responsibility for any actions committed by the reader of the text file. But unlike most disclaimers, "How to Make a Bomb!" slows the disclaimer down, extends it, carries it so far beyond the standard device that it becomes stylized and poetic. The presented intention of "How to Make a Bomb!" is made clear by the title (to instruct its user

```
L 43    C 8    IA    552k    c:\ascii\lit\uxu\uxu-164.txt

This file will teach you how to make a KEWL bomb that will go BOOM! and
then send THOUSANDS of small shit around which will guarantee your face to
get completely riddled! Then you will say DAAAMM! and run to the nearest
hospital! At the hospital, you will be placed in a black bag and sent back
to your parents with a note saying 'Another fool. Keep the remains as a
gift. Have a nice day'.
    Read on folks!

============================================================================
============================================================================
NOTE: This file is for informational purposes only, and not meant
to be taken serious or carried out in reality.  Underground
eXperts take no responsibility for actions taken, misuse of the
contents in this file, political chaos or lack of sexual
satisfaction.  None of the members, contributors or family
members can be held guilty for people who use the contents in
this file for personal winning, nor can we be held responsible
for revolutions, murders, killing, child molesting, that the
toilet is not flushed, that old people are loosing their hair,
that you are the ugliest person on this planet hence rejected by
your parents. It is not our fault that you are so ugly that your
parents tried to get rid of you with the help of the yellow
pages.  Are you out of gasoline?  Well then,  uXu cannot be
============================================================================
```

Figure 4.3-3: "How to Make a Bomb!"

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how to make a bomb), but the text file hypermediates the disclaimer itself, distorting the device, denaturing it, and suggesting its innate absurdity.

As I've alluded to previously, the quality of ASCII technical manuals has always been suspect. Flack O'Hara said that a person could get away with a one or two on a scale of ten when presenting information within the BBS environment, but when it comes to mixing volatile chemicals or manufacturing one's own intoxicants, a one or a two is unacceptable, *particularly* for an uninformed reader. As Jim Thomas says:

> Many of the files, especially those that describe how to manufacture home-made hallucinogens or how to make "weapons" out of strange combinations of ingredients (make explosives with soap, vinegar, and talcum powder??), are totally ineffective. Other instructions are not. However, even the most destructive instructions that we have seen are simply plagiarized or slightly edited accounts taken from licit over-the-counter literature or from other sources, such as U.S. military manuals or highschool/college chemistry classes. The difference is that creators of anarchy files alter the vocabulary and rhetoric for a young audience. The new discourse tends to reflect the social rebellion of youth rather than any serious prescription for action. ("The Ware House BBS Case Reconsidered")

Like "Boot Tracing Made Easy," or "Acetylene Balloon Bomb," much of the value of even the most earnest pyrotechnical manual can be in its appearance. Whatever value it might have in terms of demonstrating technique, it might have greater value in its style, in the fact of its grey-area legal status, in how badass it makes its reader feel by virtue of having downloaded the text file in the first place, whether or not the instructions are ever executed. In these texts, whether parodic or earnest, we can never say that the message is to be found on a primarily linguistic level. That is, these texts do not achieve their goals through their language, but through their structures. All ASCII technical manuals repeat and transform a common stock of devices, but parodies put these devices on display, demonstrating how they react when recontextualized, distorted, etcetera.

When it is time to disclaim, to legally and culturally frame the instructions, "How to Make a Bomb!" falls into precisely the depth of the moment that I have previously discussed in SCROLL. Once the disclaimer begins, the rest of the text disappears, and as we scroll down through all fifty lines of the disclaimer, we are transported into a textual world that is very much outside of the zone of the instructional manual, holding on to the original concept by a tether.

The disclaimer behaves as though submitting to the law. It does not advocate for the deployment of its devices, but requests that these devices not be deployed, and continues on to excuse itself from every legal implication imaginable, progressively moving deeper into the realm of the absurd—for example, claiming that the producers of the text file are not responsible for the incitement of political chaos, riots, gang wars, drunk drivers, pimples, AIDS, World Wars I and II, and the assassinations of JFK and Olof Palme. As the layers pile on, the simulated submission to legal protocol transforms into a mockery of legal protocol. It flaunts its illegality, running through seemingly endless irrelevant details, stimulating a desire for the relevant, stimulating a need to exchange meaninglessness for meaning. The disclaimer continues on until finally interrupted by a police raid, where officers storm the building, beat the narrator with batons, and fire bullets at him. At this point, the text becomes a string of line noise, simulating the disruption of data via modem. Then the text file regains its composure, providing its reader with the long-forestalled technical detail:

```
Contents: Black powder. A bottle. A fuse.
--------

How to do: Place the black powder and the fuse in the bottle.
---------  Light it. It will say bom. Very amusing.
```

The text file is designed to frustrate the illusion of simple information, demonstrating that nothing can be reduced, only extended. As direct as we might want our information to be, it branches out in multiple directions with no means of closure. As Leo Tolstoy said of his own writing:

If I wanted to express in words all that which I sought to express in a novel, I'd have no choice but to write the very same novel I had written in the first place. And if the critics now understand me and are able to declare in their feuilletons what it was that I had really meant to say, then I congratulate them and assure them, if I may be so bold, that they know a lot more about it than I do. (qtd. in *Theory of Prose* 45-46)

With the simulated, stylized, informational text file, there is a delay, a retardation, a blockage of the flow of information. But what is the message of this technique, of these devices? "How to Make a Bomb!" does not only jam the modes of writing that it represents, but also jams its own stylized mode. In every instance, it is too devious for any reduction to be satisfactory. As Steve McCaffery says:

Classical language is organized as the site of satisfied and satisfiable consumptions, of filled desires and foreclosed circuitries in which the multi-directional play of language is limited and fixed by the dominant categories of author, intention, message, and transmission. Conventional reading habits would demand a referential transit in the poem above to a point beyond the words themselves, thereby eluding the material pull inherent in the text. (*North of Intention* 17-18)

But this text is very material, very textual. It doesn't only gesture toward its own structures, but it establishes instructions, headers, and disclaimers *as tropes*. The text identifies these tropes not only within "How to Make a Bomb!," but in relation to these tropes as they are repeated throughout ASCII literature, and in text in general. These stylized visions and revisions do not only affect the way that we read them here, but the way that we read everywhere, even in texts that are not self-consciously stylized. There is no neutral writing, and these text files hack the codes that would attempt to convince us otherwise.

4.4> RADICAL NOISE: DISTINGUISHING THE ARBITRARY

Whether we take the signification or the signal, the language includes neither ideas nor sounds existing prior to the linguistic system, but only

conceptual and phonetic differences arising out of that system. In a sign, what matters more than any idea or sound associated with it is what other signs surround it. The proof of this lies in the fact that the value of a sign may change without affecting either meaning or sound, simply because some neighbouring sign has undergone a change. (*Course in General Linguistics* 118)

Poetry offers the best example of a series of signifiers whose signified is an empty but circumscribed space that can be filled in various ways; but the same is true of ordinary language, though this may be obscured by the fact that the sign itself serves as a name for the *signifié*. The sign *dog* has a signified which we may call the concept 'dog', but that is less of a positive determination than we might wish: its content is difficult to specify since it has a range of applications. (*Structuralist Poetics* 19)

The computer was constructed as a machine for creating and manipulating signs, which could themselves be mathematical, verbal or pictorial. Computer programming and indeed all kinds of electronic writing and arts are exercises in applied semiotics. The first lesson any programmer must learn is the difference between a sign and its reference, between the address of a location in the computer's memory and the value stored at that address. (*Writing Space* 176)

The keyboard makes us visually aware of the system of characters that we can insert into a text, and for every character that we wish to insert we must press a corresponding button, like a laboratory mouse pressing a button to activate a food dispenser. In this system, the grapheme is not merely a thing inscribed, but a value that one can select from a table of possible values. The grapheme/value correlation is not only arbitrary, but multiple and infinitely deferred. This section will describe three aspects of the digital environment that demonstrate this multiplicity, infinite deferral, and irreducibility: binary code, the pseudonym, and

the acronym. These aspects of digital culture contribute to a literature that questions the constitution of language and communication at its most basic level, challenging it right down to the grapheme.

4.4.1> BINARY CODE

With electronic writing, each character is two things at once: a symbol to be read on a screen, and also a binary number. As Fluegelman and Hewes say:

> Within the machine's memory is stored what amounts to a "super string" of characters, each one in the form of one byte. (You'll recall from Chapter 1 that a byte is a collection of eight bits, each consisting of a 1 or a 0. There are 256 eight-bit combinations possible.)

> Some of these byte values represent the letters of the alphabet according to a convention known as ASCII (the American Standard Code for Information Interchange). The ASCII (pronounced "ass-key") code for the letter "A" is 65; "B" is 66, and so on up to 90 for "Z." A lowercase "a" is ASCII 97; "z" is 122. (The value for each lowercase letter is 32 greater than its uppercase counterpart.) All the punctuation marks have ASCII values too: a comma is 44; a hyphen is 45; a period is 46. The numerals 0 through 9 are represented by ASCII 48 through 57. A blank space, which we've noted is treated just like any other character, is ASCII 32. There's no need for you to learn these values, or even to think of them while you're writing, but you might find it interesting to look at the ASCII chart in table 5-1, just to see how the letters and other characters are assigned their values.

> For each character you type at the keyboard, the byte for the corresponding ASCII code is stored in the computer's memory. Although the actual storage scheme within the computer may be complex, you could think of your text as a succession of byte values—each representing one character—as though they were in a long chain or string. If you later insert one or more characters within your text, their ASCII codes are inserted in

the existing text string. If you delete characters, the bytes representing them are deleted from the string. (*Writing in the Computer Age* 76)

Remember, this quotation is from a book designed to instruct its readers how to use a word processor. The information that it expresses isn't geared toward someone who wants a computing experience that is "user-friendly," but an experience that includes a meaningful understanding of the inner workings of the machinery that he or she is using. In other words, it is designed for people who want to be in touch with the processes that shape their work.

The alphabet, in ASCII, does not contain twenty-six letters, but fifty-two letters. "A" does not equal "a"— "A" equals a binary value of 100 0001 and a decimal value of 65, while "a" equals a binary value of 110 0001 and a decimal value of 97. The shift button transforms the entire keyboard into a new database of glyphs. If we have ever thought that writing merely simulates the oral utterance, we now see that it is something different. Binary code reveals the arbitrary nature of the way that we inscribe language; in the processing of data, every letter of the Roman alphabet is reduced/extended/simulated by digital ciphers. Likewise with all other ASCII-recognized graphemes. With multiple potential renderings of digital text, we are moving between multiple sets of code that initially appear to stand in a 1:1 relation with one another. But does it mean the same thing if I say "the SPIRIT of text," or if I say:

> 01110100011010000110010100100000010100110101000010010010101
> 00100100100101010100001000000110111101100110000100000001110100
> 0110010101111000001110100?

The first statement is intended to be parsed by the human eye. The second is the binary representation of that same text in ASCII code. But the second example, as we have just read it, is only a graphic representation of binary code. To read the above sequence of ASCII ones and zeroes, it has to be stored digitally as:

> 0011000000110001001100010011000100110000001100010011000000011
> 0000001100000011000100110001001100000011000100110000001100000
> 0011000000110000001100010011000100110000001100000011000100011
> 0000001100010011000000110000001100010011000000110000001100000

```
0011000000011000000110000001100010011000000110001001100000011
0000001100010011000100110000001100010011000000110001001100000
0011000000011000000110000001100000011000100110000001100000011
0001001100000011000000110001001100000011000100110000001100010
0011000000011000000110001001100000011000000110001001100000011
0000001100010011000000110000001100010011000000110001001100000
0011000100110000001100010011000000110000001100000011000000011
0001001100000011000000110000001100000011000000110000001100010
0011000100110000001100010011000100110001001100010011000000011
0001001100010011000000110000001100010011000100110000001100000
0011000000011000100110000001100000011000000110000001100000011
0000001100010011000100110001001100000011000100110000001100000
0011000000011000100110001001100000011000000110001001100000011
0001001100000011000100110001001100010011000100110000001100000
0011000000011000000110001001100010011000100110000001100010011
000000110000.
```

. . . and so on (the number continues to expand at eight times the size of the previous generation). Digital storage in binary code adds a massive apparatus to the text, always lurking behind it but accessible to the machine only, never directly viewable by the human reader. Even 1s and 0s are only a metaphor for binary code. A punch card registers the materiality of binary differently, as does telecommunication. Ones and zeroes are not travelling through the phone line—sound and the absence of sound (really?) are. In digital writing, everything that we read and write is present, but also includes something else that we do not have access to, complicating the relationship between ourselves and the texts that we engage with. As Roland Barthes says:

> Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely ("The Death of the Author" 146)

But one does not need to be conscious of the interrelation between ASCII code and alphabetic characters in order to see the arbitrary and multiple nature of the signifier/signified relationship. Examples are everywhere in the digital environment, such as the institutions of the pseudonym and the acronym.

4.4.2> PSEUDONYM

SCREEN CAPTURE: "Nowonkanu FCC Too Many: Journey into the Unwanted Zone" by Fritz Mertens (1985). This screen capture is from a text file in the tradition of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," which parodizes an actual BBS that ran in the 415 area code under the name of Nwonknu HQ ("unknown" spelled backward). Although the first paragraph is designed as parody, the text that follows accurately represents a typical BBS login screen of the era: that is, the BBS requires a new user to create an alias, by which he or she will be known to all other users, supplemented by personal information accessible to the sysop only. In many instances, this personal information can be faked.

There are pragmatic reasons for the use of alias within the computer underground. In a virtual environment where hundreds of strangers interact with one another, it allows users to preserve their personal anonymity among potential hackers and flamers. Beyond this, it allows them to dwell in an interzone that is both real and fictitious, loaded with overlapping and self-contradicting signification. As Mogel of *Hogs of Entropy* says:

> To be honest, I think my ill-formed kid brain thought of the various
> writers of *cDc* almost like hyper-real characters from stories themselves.
> "Swamp Rat," "Tequila Willy," "Obscure Images"—they seemed more
> like comic book superheroes, or pro-wrestlers than just dudes staring at a
> screen. (Interview, 2011).

By creating a BBS handle, a person is now recognized by multiple names. In other words, one signified is recognized by two different signifiers, and the production of one of these signifiers appears to be fully under the control of the

Welcome to my (and only mine, never forget that, it's all mine, and what's mine is mine!) system. Make sure you use the "I" command once on, or the Great God Nowonkanu will smite you down. If you have any comments/ donations/complaints/donations/ suggestions/donations/questions/ answers/DONATIONS or just want to write me, please feel free to leave "f"eedback. Also, I will be calling you (voice), so leave me a message leting (sic) me know when to call. All this information will be recorded and sent to the F.B.I, so leave correct information. Thanks!

    Please give alias below...

Please answer the following questions-

What do you wish to be called?
>JHONNY THE AVENGER

Format: [XXX-XXX-XXXX]
Enter your 'voice' phone# :415-326-4930

You are JHONNY THE AVENGER
Phone: 415-326-4930

Is this correct? Y

Figure 4.4.2-1: "Nowonkanu FCC Too Many"

signified (the person). And unlike legal names, the potential for signification in a pseudonym cannot be mistaken as incidental. As Douglas Thomas says:

> Hackers often trope on historical reference, hacker culture, or popular culture in establishing "handles" by which they will become known. These handles function as "proper names" in the sense that they are never a "pure and simple reference." Instead, the proper name functions as "more than an indication, a gesture, a finger pointed at someone, it is the equivalent of a description." (*Hacker Culture* 58).

The alias is not granted to the user by an outside force, nor is it legally recognized, nor does it typically resemble anything that fits into a standard range of legal names. It is part of an elaborate identity game, in which a BBS user or ASCII zine writer's name, along with what they say and do, becomes part of how they project themselves, helping them to establish the ways in which other members of the computer underground identify them. And this identification is dependent on other BBS users' ability to recognize the cultural sources that an alias is derived from. As Douglas Thomas says:

> There is a premium on the assignation of names, but there is also an acute awareness of both the hacker perception of such names and the public perception of them. Such troping serves a dual function. First, it signals an awareness of one's own historical origins, while at the same time perverting those origins. The message is this – "I am not what you intended, but, nonetheless, I am yours." Hackers use language, norms, and conventions in such a way as to retain their force while subverting their meaning. (*Hacker Culture* 60)

For instance, "The Blade" might evoke the image of a knife-wielder, or "Swamp Rat" might evoke the image of vermin, or "AIDS" might evoke the image of an illness, but this does not mean that we think that these persons are exactly what their names describe. We can only read the name as signifying some sort of connection to the psychology of its creator. And here we have the vision of a signifier with two signifieds: "Swamp Rat" is a scurrying creature and also a BBS user and text file publisher. This text file publisher is also known by a legal name,

which is irrelevant here except in the sense that it extends the multiple connections between signifiers and signifieds in yet further directions.

Using one's BBS handle as an author name further thickens its significance. On one hand, there is the tradition of pseudonymous publishing in print culture in which one's goal is to mask his or her identity, and on the other hand, because all identity within the computer underground is pseudonymous, the use of the handle extends a writer's local identity. The use of alias, particularly in addition to the material conditions of ASCII text, allows the writer to simultaneously invest and divest his or herself of authority and centrality. As the GNN of *underground eXperts united* says:

> If you don't know the author, he or she disappears into the background . . . the text becomes interesting. My first files were quite twisted, hopefully not because I'm a twisted person, but more because I felt that I COULD write whatever I wanted . . . about death and destruction, encouraging people to perform criminal activities, and so on . . . later on, this also let me write about personal matters. Sometimes I envy 'The GNN' because he dares to be radical, but I don't always endorse his opinions. (Interview, 2003)

4.4.3> ACRONYM

We are used to the notion of every text having a title. In ASCII publishing, a title is not enough. That is to say, a text file may or may not have a title, and it may or may not have an identified author, but there is one kind of "title" that an ASCII text file cannot go without, and that is a file name. The file name is the title by which a computer is able to recognize the existence of a file, to sort it, to copy it, etcetera. As Fluegelman and Hewes explain:

> Most word processors permit no more than 11 characters in a name, and a few allow only 8 or 9. Eleven-character filenames generally are divided into an 8-character main section and a 3-character EXTENSION; the two parts are separated by a period (or "dot" in computer vocabulary). (*Writing in the Computer Age* 111)

In every Q-Edit screen capture that has been used in this dissertation, the title bar at the top of the screen includes both the directory and the file name of the ASCII text file that is immortalized in the image. Fluegelman and Hewes say:

> No two files on the same disk may have exactly the same name (although names that differ by only a single character or symbol are all right.) (ibid.)

Anarchy Inc. didn't release serial issues and *Metal Communications / Neon Knights* only re-released their files in serial format near the end of their publishing career, so files released under these imprints were given file names according to the title of the article (Note: the exact titles of *Anarchy Inc.* and *Metal Communications / Neon Knights* files cannot be accurately cited, because these files were renamed by Jason Scott during his tenure as sysop of The Works BBS). ASCII's first serial publications, however, titled their files according to the name of the imprint. *Phrack* named and numbered its files sequentially (e.g. "PHRACK-1," with no file extension). *Cult of the Dead Cow* could not fit the full name of their imprint into an 8+3 file name, so they opted to use an acronym, "cDc," as in "cDc-0001.txt." The acronym subsequently became an important part of the identity of *Cult of the Dead Cow* (particularly as employed in the header of *cDc* 100 and all subsequent releases).

SCREEN CAPTURE: *Big Long and Hairy* 20: "The Basics of Tfile Groups" by Guido Sanchez (1992). Certain publications can even be said to lead with the acronym, such as the aforementioned *cDc* and *HoE*, along with *underground eXperts united* (*uXu*) and other publications in the tradition of *cDc*. Notable transformations of the ASCII acronym include recursive acronyms such as *Fucked Up College Kids* (*FUCK*), and imprints where the acronym seems to precede the title, such as *Big Long and Hairy* (*BLaH*) and *Mighty illicit Liquid Kollection* (*MiLK*). In some instances, the dual identity allows readers to use either the full name or the acronym, depending on preference, so that we might refer by *The Winner ANSI Team* and *Cool Losers in Trousers* by their full names, while using the more neutral *VaS* in the place of *Vaginal and Anal Secretions*.

Just think of a cool word. Any cool word. For example, penis. Now, capitalize all of the consonants, and keep the vowels in lower case <IMPORTANT!>. The result : PeNiS. Next is also a crucial step, look at an ass-key chart and find some extended ass-key equivalents of the letters of the group name. P, hmm, well nothing can be done about that. Let's just leave it the way it is. e, well, there's alt-144, that looks cool. N, there's an easy one for that. Alt-165. Try and make the letters keep the look of being capitalized and in lower case. There are tons of possibilities for i, alt-141 looks pretty cool. For the S, now this has been a topic of constant discussion among the TRULY elite circles of modemhood. Does alt-235 look like a d or an S? Chessman says it makes his name look like Cheddarman, but I see all of the kool new BBSs using ßßð. Is that a d or a S? Well, hey, if The WareHouse says it's an S, it must be. But wait! You've used NO slashes or backslashes in your group name! You could substitute Ñ for /\, but it'd be better to clear up that ð discrepancy by using slashes on it. Ok, you now have a group name. Make sure all of your members commit the ass-key sequence to MEMORY, or otherwise they should be kicked out for insubordination.

PéÑì\

Now, look at the letters and try to make it an acronym out of it. Something like

Professional Élite Ñeuromancers in CyberSpace

Figure 4.4.3-1: "The Basics of Tfile Groups"

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Like binary code and the pseudonym, the acronym is another example of a situation in which one thing has multiple names (arbitrary signifieds / arbitrary signifiers / arbitrary identities / just all around arbitrary!). The exact phrase, or word, or proper name by which we identify a thing can always be extended or complicated, producing and demonstrating an identity that is flexible and complex. Every thing has more than one name, and every name has more than one thing. K-Rad texts use the technological qualities of electronic writing to hypermediate the signifier/signified relationship, complicating the signal of information with the noise of textuality.

We have just considered three junctures within the digital environment in which these disjunctions between signifier and signified occur—aliases, acronyms, and binary code, all of which simultaneously thicken and fragment identity and naming. We have also looked at the oralized text (which infuses writing with a little more meaning than is allowed in its legalized form) and the parody (which gestures away from its stated purpose, toward an unknown). All of these forms foreground impediments in the potential flow of information, in the process becoming strains of poetry. We have discussed many possible ways to hack the illusion of transparent signification, and we will now conclude with a study of K-Rad: a system of character substitutions and unconventional spellings that likewise disrupts signification and pushes the text to its poetic extreme.

4.5> DISINFORMATION WANTS TO BE FREE

As our final set of studies, we will look at aggressive textual practices at the level of the grapheme. This style of writing originates before the first ASCII serial publications, and is referred to in numerous text files, including "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," in which RABID RASTA says:

> REAL PIRATES DON'T SAY "K-K00L", "K-AWESOME", "X10DER", "L8R0N", OR ANYTHING OF THE SORT.

> REAL PIRATES KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "F" AND "PH" (I.E."PHILES", "PHUCK", "FONE", ETC.).

REAL PIRATES DON'T SEARCH FOR NEW WAYS TO SPELL
"WARES".

REAL PIRATES ARE SATISFIED WITH ONE EXCLAMATION
POINT.

In RABID RASTA's esteem, unconventional spelling serves no purpose but to mark a pirate as not being "REAL." But this is precisely the kind of legalized attitude that seeks to limit signification in language, that seeks to strip discourse of its potential. It is a narrow authoritarian vision, to claim that someone would write "Phuck" out of ignorance or "warez" with a "z" only because they are looking for a new way to spell the word. The substitutions aren't accidental, but they are an extension of meaning, a stylizing of writing at the level of the grapheme. As with the earlier example from the Blade, this writing demonstrates *a little more* than the mere intention to communicate. This is not typographic haste, but a very specifically technologized word. As Douglas Thomas says:

> these language games present themselves as technological significations through the process of substitution. (*Hacker Culture* 56)

Writing that incorporates character substitution is not just communication through language, but a metalinguistic, metagraphemic communication. On one hand, it demonstrates a writing that is hard for the human eye to read, because it corrupts the alphabet, adding a database of numerous unfamiliar characters to the familiar ones, repurposing characters, using them in new contexts and infusing them with new meanings so as to make them strange. On the other hand, in an era of command line instruction, where computers are incapable of recognizing these visually corrupted renderings, it is *only* the human eye that can parse them. Like the word "Destory," which we cannot simply or honestly reduce to "Destroy," these renderings demand that we decipher, even though we cannot overwrite the material text through interpretation. Here, signification becomes multiple—the rendering of words might be said to gesture toward something or some things, but the text cannot be reduced to this gesture.

IMAGE: *YIPL* 1 (1971). Elements of K-Rad can be traced back at least to *Youth International Party Line* (*YIPL*), later renamed *Technological Assistance Party* (*TAP*). This Youth-International-Party-affiliated publication helped to popularize the word "phreek" and is a spiritual precursor to ASCII's alternative technical manuals (disclaimers and all), a typographic precursor to ASCII text files, and also a precursor to ASCII literature because it is produced anonymously, distributed by hand rather than through corporate channels, and encourages readers to courier the publication to their friends. In addition to this, *YIPL* is a prominent pre-ASCII example of a writing that employs unconventional spellings such as "Amerika," "kapital," and "kompany." There is a great deal of nuance to these spellings, which denaturalize the words as words, making them foreign (with the Greek/German rendering of the hard "c" signifying another place, no place, and a *here* which itself is foreign), disentangling words from the ways in which their meaning is most commonly and unconsciously reduced. They say:

> if your friends want to get in on the fun, let them read your newsletter, and
> you might want to research your own questions in your local library, and
> help to start the education of your community of the phone company's part
> in the war against the poor, the non-white, the non-conformist, and in
> general, against the people. Show your neighbors, friends and the
> representatives of your area how the Bell System and the Amerikan
> government are co-conspirators. (*YIPL* 1)

On a technological level and at the level of legalized spelling, *YIPL* promotes a resistance to the conventional transmission of information, particularly at the junctures where the content of this transmission is overdetermined by technology. In other words, in those instances when systems of communication exert a control over the messages that pass through them, this is when the system must be hacked. There may be law that opposes this kind of resistance, but, as Deth Veggie says, "If you believe that a law is unjust, you not only have a right to disobey that law, you have a responsibility" (*Disinformation*). This means dismantling old systems and developing new techniques, not just in terms of electronic technologies, but in discourse as well.

THE YOUTH INTERNATIONAL PARTY LINE'S FIRST ISSUE

June, 1971

We at YIPL would like to offer thanks to. all you phreeks out there. Most of you who are now receiving this met us in Washington on Mayday, where we distributed 10,000 promo flyers. So far we have received over 50 responses, complete with contributions, encouragement, and spirit. We may not have done well percentage-wise, but the fact that there are 50 people all over the country willing to fight back speaks for itself. We are sure that from the spirit of the response, YIPL membership will really skyrocket. However, more important than our numbers, in our opinion, is the feeling and motivation for this movement. The disappointment we feel toward Amerika has turned to hatred as we saw the futility of the movement to improve it, and to frustation as our outside efforts were repressed and forbidden. But we did not turn our backs on the movement for change. YIPL believes that education alone cannot affect the System, but education can be an invaluable tool for those willing to use it. Specifically, YIPL will show you why something must be done immediately in regard, of course, to the improper control of the communication in this country by none other than the BELL TELEPHONE COMPANY.

So if your friends want to get in on the fun, let them read your newsletter, and you might want to research your own questions in your local library, and help to start the education of your community of the phone company's part in the war against the poor, the non-white, the non-conformist, and in general, aginst the people. Show your neighbors, friends and the representatives of your area how the Bell System and the Amerikan government are co-conspirators. If your friends can't subscribe to YIPL, that; is cool, is convenient for our small staff, and is right on if they can send a buck as a donation and read your newsletter. We also need stamps, letters, and envelopes, which maybe they can get from their office at work. Because we are already sending out issues to people short on bread, we really do need this kind of help. We will report on all of our finances from time to time, and if you can dig it, we will probably need some kind of bail fund set up. If any YIPL busts happen, we'd like to ask you all in advance to work extra hard for the cause. People, thanks again. Love

THE CREDIT CARD CODE

The 1971 Credit Card system works as follows: The telephone number(7digits) of the number to be billed is followed by the secret number for the area code of the number. They are listed below for several cities. At the end of the number comes a letter that matches the sixth digit of the telephone number. Many people look up the number of a large Company in the area and use their number, cause using any old number might lead to that person refusing to pay, and the Phone Company's hasseling the person to whom the call was placed. They should say that others use that phone, and they don't know anything. Fraud is illegal, so we don't think you should make free calls. This Code has already been printed in many underground papers, as you know.

Detroit-083	Boston-001	Phila.-041	1=Q	4=H	7=R	0=Z
Washington-032	San Fran-158	Pitts.-030	2=A	5=J	8=U	
New York-021	Chicago-097		3=E	6=N	9=W	

Example- 769-1900-069-Z (I.B.M. ,Amant,N.Y.)

Figure 4.5-1: *YIPL* 1

The first issue of *YIPL* was published around the same time as the proto-L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E magazine *This* and bill bissett's *RUSH: what fukan theory*. These publications share a common interest in the disruption of convention and authority at multiple levels: political, technological, material, and linguistic, at least. Like *YIPL*, bissett connects disruptions of telecommunications, language, and authority:

> informashun th telephone main line hook up with new york electronik corp in ovr fifty countries use uv speech also wire taping radio frequency lines bomb ardid by amrikan signals langwage as message control (*RUSH: what fukan theory* 13)

This kind of writing is radical not merely because of *what* it says but *how* it says; since the relationship between signifier and signified is never at a 1:1 correspondence, linguistic content is really never anything more than slogans. Instead, the site of difference is in form, structure, and technique, whether in poetry, fiction, or critical writing. As Charles Bernstein says:

> There is no evidence that a tone of austere probity rather than tones that are ironic or raucous furthers the value of teaching or inquiry. It may be true that standard academic prose permits dissident ideas, but ideas mean little if not embodied in material practices, and, for those in the academic profession, writing is one of the most fundamental of such practices. Writing is never neutral, never an objective mechanism for the delivery of facts. Therefore the repression of writing practices is a form of suppressing dissidence—even if it is dissidence, I would add, for the sake of dissidence. (*Attack of the Difficult Poems* 22)

Institutionalized or legalized writing is that which seeks to promote conformity at the level of structure, so that the most dangerous parts of communication (where it departs from the familiar) can be reigned in or excised. But radical treatises, the avant garde, and ASCII texts can take risks, even subverting their own authority, challenging transparent signification even if only for the purpose of challenging transparent signification, even at times without a strategy beyond this play.

SCREEN CAPTURE: *HiPpIe dIpPy klub* **2: "a profoUnd EXpOSE on tHe 514 (FivEOnEFOUR) ArEA CoDe. l0ser T0wn" (1992).** The issue's "inTWodUCTiOn" explains that "!<-RaD WriTIng" is that which "onLY DA wEAL elYTes CAN WEAd." The file incorporates all of the character substitutions listed in "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," and also fluctuates between upper and lower case (a feature of K-Rad that was not possible in RABID RASTA's era of exclusively capital letters). Adding yet another layer of stylization, *HiPpIe dIpPy klub* also incorporates phoenetic renderings, particularly emphasized by means of rhotacism (an alternative pronunciation of the letter "r") that manifests itself in all of the quotations listed in this paragraph (essentially, a speech impediment rendered typographically).

The name of the imprint seems to be a sort of unsophisticated pop slang from a bygone era. The hippie precedes cyberculture, precedes hacking and phreaking, precedes *YIPL*, precedes the Youth International Party, precedes the yippies. The yippies were, after all, a repoliticization of the hippies, whose political status had been degraded by media depictions of hippies as psychedelic drug abusers, and by acts like George Carlin's Hippie Dippy Weatherman (in the 1960s), whose gimmick was as a news broadcaster whose was too stupefied to meaningfully deliver a weather report to his viewers. But this was comedy, a parody, a joy in blockage itself: in this sense, a meaningful precursor to *HDK*.

The number of times that *HiPpIe dIpPy klub* self-identifies as K-Rad or elite is reminiscent of Thomas Covenant's parody of *Metal Communications* / *Neon Knights*, in which he says "cool board/cool sysop/cool wares/just all around cool!" It is probably wise to read the statement with irony, even if irony is not the speaker's intent. But where Covenant's parody of the *MC*/*NK* header subverts its own statements in each section, there is no such subversion in this issue of *HiPpIe dIpPy klub*. Overstatement, perhaps. Repetition, posturing, a graphic style that outshines the file's linguistic content, certainly.

The name of the imprint, *HiPpIe dIpPy klub*, is rendered in a new variation of upper and lower case letters every time that it is written. K-Rad does not only alter the codes of textual inscription at the level of the grapheme, but it

- paRt WOne - AN inTWodUCTiOn:

weLcOMe to Da SeCUNd IsSue O' Da gREaTesT serIES evEr WriTTEN. BUt WHo rItes diS InCREDIBlE MastepiEcE OF LItteratuRe? WeLl if yOu're tOo stOOpId TO fiGuR' dAT oUt, THEn yOUz Don'T DeSErvE TO knOW. Now, A lOt o' YOu cOmPlaINed About dA !<-RaD WritTIng. wEIL TUFF LuCK LOseR. I gUEsS onLY DA wEAl elYTes CAN WEAd dis FILE. yOU Know, DA K-koOL chUmS who wriTE lIKE dIS eVeWWhErE On DA BOardZ. dIs IssUe woN'T coNtAIn Any HaCKS or LOSer LIstS, just plaIN OLd StowIs o' gOOD OlD 514, LOsER tOWN usa. OoPs, wE BE In KanaDA. bY DE Way, if YOU cAm'T hanDIE WAt DiS SAys, GET LOST LOSER. In dIs issue, tHE lOsER sTaTUte triO, mOre on tERRor 'N' TORMents, Da pCBoReD CwazE, anD MUCh mORE.... alSo, noTIce tHE kOOl kodING in dIs onE. 100 purCeNT QEdIT. WeAl GOOD nO?

- PaRt TOO - dA WeAl elYTes o' LOseR tOwn:

wEIl EVewY Body iN LOseR TOwN HAS bean WaiTing Fo dIs ONE. wHat? Da new K-rAD O milLiSecuNd waRezuOLf BoaRD? no! dA New KOOL flBeR OPTIc, UNtrASSaBLE pbX? nO! yOu GUEsSEd IT, Da LonG AWaITED WeleasE O' THe StatUTE, LOseR tOWNs OWN K-KOOl eLyTe MAGAZINe. YUp, 416 gOT da iNFinITY, 604 GoT puOpAgANda, sO wE gEtS twOo lOsErZ twINg tO RiTE A MaG FuR 514. YES, pr. sinIStur, And dr. cwiPpleD (OoPs, DR. CWIPPEN). WOw, a DR. and a PR.! DEese GUys musT be SMArT. wEIl WROng agaIN. DEEesE guYS Are tHE wEAl K-KOOl ElYteS O' LOSER tOWN. dEese

Figure 4.5-2: "a profoUnd EXpOSE on tHe 514"

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does so differently every time, requiring an active decipherment on the part of the reader, and never succumbing to templated symbolic interchange, because to work from a template would be to stabilize these character substitutions, and essentially to kill the style, to transform it into a dead orthography. As Douglas Thomas says, style must keep moving:

> With a premium placed on the fluidity of this style of representation, hacker subculture utilizes the more traditional notion of subcultural style as a means of resistance to incorporation. Hacker culture's ability to maintain control over a primary system of representation allows for the creation of a highly flexible and fluid process of resistance, which subverts efforts to incorporate, freeze, or integrate it. (*Hacker Culture* 149)

A lack of standardization is even flaunted in the title of this publication, where "Hippie" is spelled with an –ie suffix and "Dippy" with a –y, and yet no issue reverses the order, becoming the *Hippy Dippie Klub*. And on the more legalized level of the file name, each is labelled hdk01.txt, hdk02.txt, etcetera, but it never dares to become, for instance, hdc03.txt (transforming "klub" to "club"), which would be yet more radical, since to allow a change in acronym would result in an alphabetical missorting of the print run, and the point is to create fluctuation in the zones that allow for a creative interpretation on the part of the human reader, not the computer reader, which is incapable of such creative acts.

SCREEN CAPTURE: *Brotherhood of Warez* 4: "THe 10 CoMMaNDMeNTS oF WaReZ" by pluvius & Maelstrom (1994). The article is self-described as being "iN The SPiRiT oF TAP" (formerly *YIPL*), which they refer to as a "krad old mag." In addition to finding an antecedent in yippie culture, "The 10 CoMMaNDMeNTS oF WaReZ" is also indebted to the style of "THE REAL PIRATE'S GUIDE," in the sense that it attempts to establish a code of conduct for cracking copyright protection and distributing cracked software throughout the computer underground. While both texts agree that old warez are no warez, "The 10 CoMMaNDMeNTS oF WaReZ" departs from RABID RASTA's philosophy, demanding: "SPeAK THiNE aLWaYzZ iN KRaD."

```
L 1100   C 1    IA    426k    c:\ascii\lit\bow\bow4.txt
BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW Bo*                                    *BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW Bo
W BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW Bo* +                              + *BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW
BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW Bo!    The 10 CoMMaNDMeNTS oF WaReZ    !BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW Bo
W BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW Bo* +  -------------------------------  + *BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW
BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW Bo*        by: pluvius & Maelstrom        *BoW BoW BoW BoW BoW Bo
======================================================================

iN The SPiRiT oF TAP (krad old mag) BoW NoW BRiNGzZ U THe TeN CoMMaNDM3N+Z
oF WaReZ (T-CoW):

oN3:   THy SHaL+ NoT TRaD3 THiNE 1 DaY WaReZ, FoRe eVeN LaM3RzZ KNoW THa+
       oLD WaReZ aRE No WaReZ.
ToO:   SPeAK THiNE aLWaYzZ iN KRaD(tm), FoR iF ThoU SHaLT DeViATe THe SMaLLeST
       FRoM 0-DaY SPeAK, THiNE WaReZz SHaLL SuRelY GRoWeTH oLD.
Thre3: CaLLeTH ThoU oNLY ELL-Dee BoARDzZ FoR oNLY eLL-Dee HaTH ZeR0-DaY FoR
       YoU.
F0ur:  PoSTeTH NoT ThoU WaReZ SiTeZz oN USENET, FoR To Do S0 iZ To LeSSeN
       THy SiTeZ TiME oN THiS EaRTH.
FiU3:  JOiNeTH ThoU N0+ #WaReZZ oR #WaReZ3 FoR ThE 3l33+ ReSiDE *oNLY* oN
       #WaReZ aND RiDiCuL3 THe Pl3bZz oN THe L3SS3R CHaNNeLzZ.
SiX:   FoRGeTH ThOu NOT THiNE KRaD BoW WaReZz AckrONiMZz FOR To Do SO WiLL
       LeSSeN THOU ChANCeZ oF ACqU1RiNG AXS oN THe elle-d33 0-DaY BoARdzZ
S3UeN: PoSTeTH NoT iN MeSSaGe BaSeS, FoR THe LiFe oF a WaReZz DOOd iS
       TRaNsFeRzZ, NoT iDLE CHaTTeR.
EiGH+: CaLLeTH aLWaYzZ THy AyCh-P3e Be3 B3e EsSeS, FoR oNLY iN THiS WaY
```

Figure 4.5-3: "THe 10 CoMMaNDMeNTS oF WaReZ"

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Why should one speak always in K-Rad? The notion is ironic, first because the use of K-Rad must always be optional, since it seeks to operate *outside* of conventional writing. Second, it must be pointed out once more that it is not possible to *speak* this way, because K-Rad is so distinctly typographical as to appear to be alienated from oral speech. Even though there are exceptions to this rule (the eccentric rendering of the "R" sound in *HiPpIe dIpPy klub*), to read these texts aloud is to divest them of the orthographical signification that makes them most significant. There is something in the rendering of these texts beyond the mere reflection of oral speech. As Douglas Thomas says:

> The more earnestly technology is hidden within the dynamics of language, the more violence it does to technology itself. Hackers recover, and make explicit, the ways in which language has relied on technology. (*Hacker Culture* 58)

This can be taken as the technology of word processing, or ASCII, or of the digitization of text, or of the keyboard, or the technology of writing, or the technology of language in general. K-Rad adds extra texture at the level of the word itself, complicating the meaning of each, denaturalizing the basic elements of how we communicate. K-Rad also adds a layer of encryption to text. Data encryption, as a technology, is important when conducting illegal activities in the computer underground, at least as important as working pseudonymously and masking one's telecommunication activities. The level of encryption in K-Rad writing isn't enough to deceive any human being for long, but it might operate outside of the syntax of a computer program designed to detect and flag certain keywords, in which case one might be flagged for seeking "pirated software," but not for soliciting "p1r8 wrz." Even in literary writing, K-Rad still bears the visual markings of encryption, adding a dimension of style to the text, associating the writing with illegal activity, even if the text itself is not criminal.

Let's get back to *TAP*, the spirit of *TAP*, the publication that extended from the Yippie movement, a movement of activists who wanted to differentiate themselves from the mainstream perception of apolitical, meaningless, stupefied

"hippies," seeking a name that would define them by their attitude toward their world. Jack Kerouac had earlier been at the forefront of a "beat" generation, a generation starting out from a position of defeat. The new movement extending from the hippies wanted to inspire a new generation to cry out in joy: "Yippie!"

What is "K-Rad" in relation to "Beat" and "Yippie"? It is, perhaps, the typographic equivalent of a joyous cry, an exclamation, the word itself being a typographic modification of the word "Rad," or "Radical," as in excellent or awesome, but it can also be used with a hint of irony. The "K-" prefix can be associated with the phrase "OK," as in "Okay, that is radical," and it can also be associated with the technological prefix of "kilo-," as in "That is 2^{10}Rad," but the word's multiple potential uses suggest more possibilities than just these two. The "K-" is, at the very least, an amplification of radness, both in terms of the esteem and the irony carried by that word.

SCREEN CAPTURE: *Hogs of Entropy* **24: "tHe PHiRzT StEp!!" by (\/)[](_>|#|__ (1994).** Unlike the stream-of-consciousness style of the Blade, where words seem to fly on to the page, K-Rad insists that the writer takes a greater degree of care in the rendering of each letter (even if only deciding whether to capitalize or not). Sometimes this comes at the expense of larger scale structural issues. For example, in a text written in K-Rad, it is not uncommon for a writer to run off track in the midst of a sentence.

iFh i HAvEN'T g0T y0U t0 S+oPA rEA|>iN' YeT tHeN i FiNK 0NlY dA Pe0PlE tHAt wErE ELiTE eNUFF t0 tA/<3 iT sTaYeeD.

In K-Rad, if the text seems to falter at the sentence level, this is only because the writing style focuses primarily on the grapheme and the word, an intense close-up that blurs the shape of the sentence, the paragraph, and the text as a whole. Saussure writes about the word as being the smallest unit of meaning, but in K-Rad, the letter becomes a narrative element, turning each word into a kind of story. Each grapheme is newly-shaped—not in isolation, but within the context of a whole word. As Stanley Fish says:

```
L 232    C 3    IA    408k    c:\ascii\lit\hoe\hoe-0024.txt

    i>00dZ!  i Wi11 \x/4rN yOU RiGi-i+ /\/0\x/ tHAT ! /-/@\/3 MAZT3RE!>
tH3 GR4FiX PhOR b3iNG ELiT3!!!   i A/\ S(_)C>-< 4 SuP3R3-0R wRiT3r 0v
ArTuKULz tHaT i KAN tA1/< aB0UT AN-<T/-\iNG i WA/\/Ta!!1! 4ND i @/\ 50
31Y+3 +i-i4+ ! 3\/(_)/\/ \-/4\/3 +/~0(_)B01 (_)/\/i>3/~5+4\/\/i\/\/(_) iT!!!
iFh i HAvEN'T gOT yOU tO S+oPA rEAi>iN' YeT tHeN i FiNK 0NlY dA PeOPlE tHAT
WErE ELiTE eNUFF tO tA/\<3 iT sTaYeeD.

     (_)nPHORTuNATlY, diZ TUTOriA1 iZ PhOR thOzE \x/hO aR3 LaMerZZ!!!
thOze \x/HO aRE nEwBieZ!   i'M /\/0T tALkIn' aB0uT j(_)zT nE\x/BiEZ KuZ i mEaN
p3OP1E DaT hA\/3 !>0N'T eUuN hAU3 4 NA/\/\3 yET, dEwD! Z0 dIz teXt PHiL3 iZ
s0 ELiTE d4T DeY cAn'T rE4D uT DeN >-0(_) G0TTAH rEaD eeT tO DeM!!!1

     OkaY d4 PhiZt FinG tO ReMeMbEr AbOuT PiCkiN' aN ELi+E nA/\/\3 iZ dAT
yOU hAUeTA HaUeTA !-i4UtA mAkE 50MeTiN' dAT sKAREZ aWaY peOPle KuZ yOU wAnTA
bE rEA1 BAD!! bUT iTz A1Z0 g0TTa sH0W 0FF yEEr SkiLLz WiFF /-/4kiN' &
PHrEaKin' anD yOU G0tTA s0UNd k0o1!!   i WUd g0 iNt0 SPeCFikz WiFF yOuZ buT
i FiNK i A/\ s0 ELiTE dAT yOU w0U1Dn'T UnD3RsTAnD mY FiL0SoaPY s0 HeReZ
a RaNdOM /\/AmE cHaRT dAT iZ heRe PhOR nAmeZ!  juZt mAtCH aNy 0Ne \x/0Rd
PhRoM dA thE PhiRZT KOLuM WiFF 0Ne PhOR dAh 5ekuND KuLOM, dEwD!:


KOLuM 0Ne                                  KuLOM t\x/0
---------                                  ----------

pHAnTOM                                    hAcKEr
KiLLeR                                     PhEAkER
```

Figure 4.5-4: "tHe PHiRzT StEp!!"

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A reader's response to the fifth word in a line or sentence is to a large extent the product of his responses to words one, two, three, and four. (*Is There a Text in This Class?* 27)

With K-Rad orthography, we become aware that a reader's response to the fifth grapheme in a word is determined by graphemes one, two, three, and four. Every word requires active contextualization, active decipherment, a flow that does not merely move forward from left to right across each line, but scans in multiple directions within each arrangement of characters. To the uninitiated, the writing might present itself only as noise, like the line noise that the Ramsacker talked about in NETWORK. Even for a well-versed reader of ASCII, the reading process never becomes a purely linear one in which words travel left to right without impediment. What is communicated by K-Rad is present in the individual letter and in the word, not just at the level of the sentence or paragraph. Conventional writing also communicates at the level of the grapheme, even though conformist reading practices have trained us to ignore this kind of signification.

SCREEN CAPTURE: *Mighty illicit Liquid Kollections* **29: "Anarchy! <and shit>" by James Hetfield (1994).** This text is visually one of the most exaggerated experiments in K-Rad, but it also signals a kind of destruction of K-Rad. It is written in extended ASCII characters, which had not been available to writers in earlier eras, particularly not as far back as RABID RASTA, who was not even able to use lower case characters. These extended characters were designed to allow computer users to read and write in languages outside of the Roman alphabet, and yet there was never really one standard version of these extended codes. For example, if one attempts to read this file in a contemporary web browser, all of the extended characters will be rendered differently than they are in Q-Edit. For example, in my web browser, the first full line reads as follows:

™|<, |>™™|>S, 'œœ   ™š |-|'Vä ç™ |>™   S ç'|<ä ™¥ä ™Ÿ   ™šâ

The pipes, hyphens, angle brackets, and the letters "S" and "V" are the only characters that remain the same from platform to platform. In other words, this strain of extended ASCII puts on a good show in the right context, but sacrifices

Figure 4.5-5: "Anarchy! <and shit>"

the portability that has otherwise made ASCII such a valuable medium. No big deal, perhaps, in the mid-1990s, when people are in the process of abandoning BBSes for the Internet and ASCII text files for HTML. But because of this lack of portability, I can neither copy and paste lines as they appear in the screen capture, nor do I have the patience to transcribe them individually.

Unlike all of the previous K-Rad text files, which vary their spellings and the renderings of graphemes as much as possible (subverting any effort to freeze or integrate the style), this text file has a perfectly standardized substitution schema for all of the twenty-six letters (some of which, such as the aforementioned "S" and "V" are not substituted at all). If the perfectly standardized (we could even say "legalized") use of character substitutions is not enough to demonstrate that the orthography has been produced by a search and replace operation, the word at the end of the first line of the second full paragraph ("\/\/ÆΓÑ") substitutes an "N" for an "M," a mistake that is easy to make when typing either an "N" or an "M" (neighbours on the keyboard), but unlikely when typing CTRL-XXXX (each "X" here standing for a numeric value denoting the high-ASCII code for "Ñ") or typing pipe, backslash, slash, pipe. In short, this file might be the most K-Rad at a glance, but it is, upon further consideration, the least K-Rad. Upon yet further consideration, it may be a parody of K-Rad, and thus more K-Rad still.

Back to the topic of information, these instructions for making explosives, this fetishization of illegal content. ASCII literature has attempted to push boundaries, to present the unpresentable, to break legal codes, literary codes, linguistic and typographic codes. A lawmaker might say, isn't it outrageous that people are transmitting information about breaking all laws? This assumes that the instructions must be followed by its readers. As Craig Dworkin says:

> Lawrence Weiner's 1968 exhibition *Statements*—an exhibit taking the form, significantly, of a catalog—contained two dozen self-descriptive pieces composed of short phrases, grammatically suspended by the past participle without agent or imperative, as if they had already been realized

as soon as written (or read): "one aerosol can of enamel sprayed to conclusion directly upon the floor," "two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol can," "one quart exterior green enamel thrown on a brick wall," "one pint gloss lacquer poured directly upon the floor and allowed to dry," "an amount of bleach poured upon a rug and allowed to bleach," "one standard dye marker thrown into the sea," and so on. The grammatical form with which these phrases float free of particular agents underscores Weiner's insistence that his artworks existed as statements, fully sufficient as they were printed, and not as particular enactments or unique objects. Although—like many Fluxus scores—they have subsequently been performed, as far as Weiner was concerned, the descriptive statements never needed to take any particular material instantiation. In his "Declaration of Intent," formulated the following year, Weiner lays out this conceptual faith in three articles:

1. The artist may construct the work.

2. The work may be fabricated.

3. The work need not be built. ("The Fate of Echo" xxxiv-xxxv)

Despite the possible distinction between information and textuality, no text can force its reader to implement it in one way or another. A text might strive for discursive transparency, but this does not mean that its structures and materiality ever actually disappear. It is still physically present, still capable of boundless signification. A text might strive to inform, but even if we identify it as such, that does not mean it *must* inform.

Imagine the technical manual, at least in this instance, as an art object. Lawrence Weiner says "the work need not be built," and this is certainly true of any guide to the construction of explosives (a fact that is hypermediated, in certain instances, by means of the disclaimer). Whether or not the conceit of the text is to instruct, the instructions need not be followed—could we imagine if the instructions in "Raising Hell Voulume 3" *had* to be followed? We don't need to be this limited in our consideration of the text's potential applications, and particularly in the way that we are compelled to interact with the text as readers,

but we can acknowledge the possibility of textual experiences that diverge from the text's own stated linguistic content. As Ludwig Wittgenstein says:

> When I say that the orders "Bring me sugar" and "Bring me milk" make sense, but not the combination "Milk me sugar", that does not mean that the utterance of this combination of words has no effect. And if its effect is that the other person stares at me and gapes, I don't on that account call it the order to stare and gape, even if that was precisely the effect that I wanted to produce. (*Philosophical Investigations* 138)

"Milk me sugar" has potential beyond its stated linguistic content, but the same can be said of any text. Texts combine, they twist, they extend, and they acquire texture, an irreducible proliferation of signification that cannot be pierced. The order of "Milk me sugar" and its effect are disjunctive, but what about "Bring me sugar" and "Bring me milk?" We could begin to list what these statements signify beyond the order they demand of the receiver—we have done this with every text already—but we have yet to resolve anything by doing this—we have only torn apart what once appeared to be whole.

5.0> THE HACKERS MANIFESTOS

> I think there are a lot of people out there who have no interest at all in computers but are true hackers. The fact of the matter is there are so many things in the world to hack. A lot of it is hardware—digital, electronic, mechanical—and a lot of it is purely conceptual. The important thing is to be able to say you have the mind of a hacker. That means always thinking outside the box, questioning what others assume to be true, trying to do something in another way just to see what happens, not listening to those who tell you to stick to the rules for no reason other than they're the rules, and invariably getting into deep trouble at some point. ("Learning to Hack Other Things" 313)

EXTRALINGUISTIC SIGNIFICATION: Potential meaning emanates from every aspect of the text—its forms, its structures, its style, its techniques, its intertexts, its typography, its material conditions, its means of transmission, etcetera. By understanding this, we shatter the illusion of information exchanged by means of transparent language. Information is not passively gained by absorbing linguistic content, but actively gained by investigating the text's extralinguistic dimensions. Stanley Fish says:

> there is no direct relationship between the meaning of a sentence (paragraph, novel, poem) and what its words mean. Or, to put the matter less provocatively, the information an utterance gives, its message, is a constituent of, but certainly not to be identified with, its meaning. It is the experience of an utterance—*all* of it and not anything that could be said about it, including anything I could say—that is its meaning. (*Is There a Text in This Class?* 32)

This applies, also, to the world as text. The student who is trained to ask "what does the text mean?" will also ask "what does the world mean?" This student has not been trained to examine the nuances of the world, but only to parrot a statement of preferred meaning handed down from his or her instructor. The

hackerly is the confidence and ability to deal with text and world in their multiplicity rather than in their reduction. This means abandoning the search for an ultimate transcendental truth. Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner say:

> Perhaps most importantly, good learners do not *need* to have an absolute, final, irrevocable resolution to every problem. The sentence, "I don't know," does not depress them, and they certainly prefer it to the various forms of semantic nonsense that pass for "answers" to questions that do not as yet have any solution—or may never have one. (*Teaching as a Subversive Activity* 33)

It is not a lack of knowledge that leads one away from reducing the world or text, but a degree (however slight) of sophistication and honesty. There is so much to be thought or experienced in a text and world (irreducible in every instance) that we will never exhaust it of its potential, but only ever exhaust ourselves.

RAMPANT PIRACY: Any prescribed method for handling the text must be tossed out, regardless of whatever codes (legal or otherwise) might attempt to outlaw this abandonment. Paradox: a writer, inscriber of markings on the page, must select the order of these markings, thereby producing a kind of authoritative textual arrangement. But in the hands of the reader, this authority is transferred over. Any control that we continue to invest in the writer is merely conventional.

Categories of artists: readers, writers, couriers, disrupters, hackers, phreakers, pirates. Seizing the materials of the text, we must exert our freedom to work them over, shake them up, repurpose and reframe them, using them to fuel our own creative and intellectual projects, outside of every prescription to cut a line through the text or perform rote operations upon it. We must strive for a practice of reading and writing that steps outside of the model of consumption, taking responsibility for the active and unauthorized propagation of the art and media that excite us most. As William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin say:

> Words, colors, light, sounds, stone, wood, bronze belong to the living artist. They belong to anyone who can use them. Loot the Louvre! *A bas l'originalité*, the sterile and assertive ego that imprisons as it creates. *Vive*

le vol – pure, shameless, total. We are not responsible. Steal anything in sight. ("Les Voleurs" 21)

And this kind of attitude is revolutionary, not just in our relationship with art, but in our relationship with the world. As Marcus Boon says:

> Burroughs' real insight was that reality itself could be viewed as a film, a set of recordings, or a montage, because—posited in Platonic terms of unchanging essences, or in Burroughs' terms as endlessly replayed recordings—reality is a fabrication made by certain parties who have an interest in presenting this fabrication as "natural." "'Reality' is simply a more or less constant scanning pattern—The scanning pattern we accept as 'reality' has been imposed by the controlling power on this planet, a power primarily oriented towards control." (*In Praise of Copying* 157)

There is no world, there are only worlds, and as the text is transferred, it passes not only from hand to hand but world to world. We should not ignore this condition, but celebrate it deeply. Each experience of reading and writing should be thought of as the production of new paths, new routes of wandering, not merely through the text (to get to the other side), but throughout and within it.

NOISE: This dissertation favours the recognition of code on a structural level, discounts transparent linguistic signification, rejects any reductive interpretation of data, and insists on the acknowledgement of the frame of reference. Yet, it must also be a dissertation. There is a certain beauty to Craig Dworkin's *Reading the Illegible*, in which he says, "In short, the basic thesis of this book is ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉▉." (xviii). Later in the book, he warns that:

> Even critical and scholarly work that pays close attention to the disruptive possibilities of visual prosody runs the risk of neutralizing the very disruptive potential it identifies. Such work must try to avoid co-opting those disruptions for its own rhetorical ends, and might instead attempt to communicate noise in the way one might communicate a disease. (49)

SCROLL / NETWORK / HACK attempts to demonstrate hypermediated typography, recombinant textualilty, and signal-jamming textures, not just by

describing the texts that it cites, but also by means of the styles and structures In which it is written. But *SCROLL / NETWORK / HACK* must be a dissertation first, operating at least partially with a belief that the text can transmit a message, by means of linguistic signification, to its reading audience. In this regard, the dissertation falls in with "BIOC Agent 003's Course in BASIC TELECOMMUNICATIONS" by becoming descriptive, informative, reductive, and at times neglectful of the frame of reference, but striving, through the old style of discourse, to help readers to produce the new style of discourse.

INHABITATION: What is it that human beings can do with texts that computers cannot? We can live as artists while experiencing them. When we are not forced to cut a line through (a rote task), we can do with them as we will, developing new ways to engage with these texts, dwelling within them and moving in multiple directions without adhering to an authorized path. Reading through a text from left to right, top to bottom, in a quest to derive a clear and transparent meaning from the text: this is the *only* thing that we should not do. Roland Barthes proposes a new method of engagement:

> not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it. Let us first posit the image of a triumphant plural, unimpoverished by any constraint of representation (of imitation). In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*, they are indeterminable (meaning here is never subject to a principle of determination, unless by throwing dice); the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their meaning is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. The interpretation demanded by a specific text, in its plurality, is in no way liberal; it is not a question of conceding some meanings, of magnanimously acknowledging

that each one has its share of truth; it is a question, against all-indifference, of asserting the very existence of plurality, which is not that of the true, the probable, or even the possible. (*S/Z* 5-6)

What can we do in celebration of this plural? We can free the text of its linearity, cut-up, zigzag, move vertically and diagonally, fold-in, and disrupt. We can courier, we can modify the text and share these experiments within our communities. We can use the text as a bassline over which to perform jazz riffs, in solitude or as part of ensembles. We can take the text as a score for daydreams, reading text and world in conjunction with one another in order to produce and project an interzone that contains elements of both but is neither. We can blend and clash the symbols of the text with one another, activating delta waves, jamming it together like nightmares. We can do everything, really everything, but we should not believe there is anything we cannot do. Certainty, transparency, and direct signification are illusions that have all been dispelled. But this is not the blocking of potential—it is only the opening of every new kind of potential.

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