Detailism, Digital Texts, and the Problem of Pedantry

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Abstract

The literary academy has a long history of debates and concerns with statistical and quantitative tools for analysis. Recent trends in digital research tools and methods have tended to deemphasize the quantitative and objective character of textual study, and instead have focused on an understanding of the digital text as an intellectual model, and digital tools as ways of exploring and interpreting that model. This is true both for textual analysis tools, which have adopted a rhetoric of interpretive richness and open-ended play, and for digital editing, in which readerly enablement and editorial interpretation are at the forefront. In both domains, though, there are internal tensions: for textual analysis, the question of how the text is constituted and how far we are willing to relinquish evidentiary claims; for digital editing, the question of how to accommodate a rhetoric of "fidelity" and "accuracy" to the goals of interpretive power and readerly choice.

1. The Uneasy Place of the Detail

This is an essay about detailism and modern scholarly methods. It is an attempt to understand two things: the role that the detail plays, or ought to play, or could play, in our study of literary texts; and it is an attempt to understand why we feel the way we do about the detail, why it occupies the particular social space within our methodological framework that it does. Finally, it is an effort to consider how new developments in textual analysis methods and tools engage with these concerns.

There is a great deal at stake for the detail—across the methodological landscape—that emerges in the politics of the struggle to inflect its field of significance, its larger critical valence. Alan Liu, in "Local Transcendence: Cultural Criticism, Postmodernism, and the Romanticism of Detail", surveys the methodology of detailism that has emerged as the

hallmark of high postmodernism, showing how the rhetoric of specificity—of "particularism, localism, regionalism, relative autonomism, incommensurabilism, accidentalism (or contingency), anecdotalism, historicism" (78)—functions as the apparent substantiator for a method that emphasizes the concreteness of "discretely perceived particulars" and refuses to resolve those particulars into "a single, grounded, and knowable order". In this critical context, the agon of the detail has to do with whether and how it can be made to operate as "the very instrument of the antifoundational and antiepistemological imperative in high cultural criticism"—how it can attest to "contingent practices" and "real local beliefs"—without becoming so coherent and vivid a picture that it constitutes a kind of foundationalism by the back door. The detail, invoked however resolutely in the service of mere observation, always flirts with the possibility of a larger whole; as Liu argues, for all its investment in a critique of coherence, high postmodernism ironically "rehearses a rhetoric of immanental reality descended most famously from romanticism" (97).

In other critical domains less cautious about foundational and totalizing gestures, the stakes may be reversed: the problem may be how to invoke the detail under a scheme of coherence that has just the right amount of play. Randolph Starn, in his introduction to a special issue of *Representations* subtitled "The New Erudition", describes how, in the genealogical approach of the collection's essays, "historical inquiry would focus on particulars, especially perhaps on peculiar instances testifying to the 'normality' of contingent combinations or mutations….the overall aim and representation of the results would be morphological, with a view towards formal, transhistorical structures, as well as riveted historically to textual and material details" (2-3). The effort here, in words like "focus", "testify", "a view towards", "riveted historically", is to suggest the delicacy and nuance with which the detail is to be connected with a larger historical view, the tact with which its representational field is to be handled. Earlier in the essay Starn says approvingly that the collection's essays share

> A penchant for the arresting detail, trace, clue, sign, shard, and so on—this may overlap with but is not the same as the citation of evidence in a inductive argument or the use of particulars to produce effects of "presence"; erudite details tend to be too contextually embedded to be adduced as "mere" facts or to convey an aura of imme-

diacy. (2)

The methodological identity of the "new erudition" thus hinges in part on its use of detail—not as "mere facts" cited as evidence or used for the production of "effects of 'presence'", not as the basis for an inductive argument that surveys the phenomenological world and produces a theory thereupon, but as the contextually embedded "trace, clue, sign, shard" that carries a specifiable, signifying linkage to some historical genealogy.

Starn's distancing gestures ("mere" and the scare quotes around it, for instance) serve a familiar purpose here: they are reassuring us that the new erudition is not in league with the bad detailists. Computer-assisted literary analysis, it seems to me, is caught up right now in a methodological bind centering on precisely this issue. Historically, it has tried to take advantage of the concreteness, the scientism, the certainties and empiricism of quantifiable method, and has been willing to make certain disciplinary alliances that could support and strengthen that position. But as a literary method, it risks falling afoul of long-standing distrust of such alliances: a distrust or tension which goes deeper, and reaches back further, than even the disciplinary locations with which we are familiar and in which such debates are now conducted. Roseanne Potter expressed this perceived tension succinctly in *Literary Computing and Literary Criticism*, where she first summarizes the potential role for the computer in literary analysis:

> Verification, though not a concept new to literary criticism, certainly represents a shift in focus away from brilliance of insight and assertion toward the detailed testing of scientific experimentation. ...Objective treatments of texts frequently involve not only finding examples of features, but also counting them and comparing the results with known facts about language. Things counted produce sums; the existence of sums encourages comparison with other sums; statistical analysis follows almost inevitably. (xvii)

And then, immediately following, there is a sudden recoil:

> Only the presence of critical judgement saves the research from veering off into number juggling. ...The usual impact of numbers on texts is reductionist. All the beautiful spec-

ificity of figures of speech can get lost when each detail is represented by a number. A balance must be carefully maintained between acquired scientific methods and critical values. (xvii)

Potter calls for a balancing act whose terms are derived directly from the neoclassical aesthetic repertoire: a proper management of the relationship between reductionist detail and the coherence of a universalizing, analytic sensibility. It calls for a hero: the critic, the author, the painter, who is capable of mastering detail and bringing it into its proper relationship to theory. But it also calls for a villain, and that villain is also well attested in the annals of neoclassical aesthetics: the pedant.

In its earliest sense, a "pedant" is a schoolmaster, a word related to "pedagogue" and used apparently without contempt to refer to those who teach or oversee children. However, very quickly this usage is overtaken by the more familiar and widespread sense of "a person who overrates book-learning or technical knowledge, or displays it unduly or unseasonably; one who has mere learning untempered by practical judgement and knowledge of affairs; one who lays excessive stress upon trifling details of knowledge or upon strict adherence to formal rules" (OED, sense 2). As a bugbear of modern criticism, the pedant occupies the intellectual space suggested by Potter's recoil: one in which that "balance" between "scientific methods and critical values" has not been carefully maintained. Towards its edges, pedantry nowadays shades off into a kind of generalized failure of perspective, a nerdishness that cannot see its own enthusiasms in their proper proportion, but this failing leads us inevitably back to the imputation of reductionism and interest in textual minutiae. A few quotes suggest its field of inflections; attesting the general sense is Northrop Frye: "A person who is absorbed wholly by knowledge about something is what we ordinarily mean by a pedant." Lee Patterson observes in an article in *Speculum* that most literary critics consider medievalism to be "at best irrelevant, at worst inconsequential...a site of pedantry and antiquarianism" (87). David Shapiro guards against the imputation of pedantry in an essay on Denise Levertov, launching his first paragraph by saying "I would like to speak of the rhythmical precision of Denise Levertov, not to expose a rhythmical mania or pedantry..." (299). Jerome McGann has given this more nuanced evocation of pedantry:

The pedant, on the other hand, is a craven creature—dusty

and indoors, stooped with collations and other tedious tasks of his mean office. Yet his assumed inconsequence and drudgery may prove a great virtue when it comes to maintaining the integrity of the works we inherit. Or so we can imagine. Effaced before the original, the pedant dies so that something else—something judged better— might live. It is a modest, an ancient, a "priestlike task." Such a concern for textual integrity might well be taken for a symbol of the artist's more famous commitment to imagination. Neither pedant nor artist are licensed to their work by codes of morality. They serve other gods altogether, artisanal and crafty gods. Both are literalists of their respective imaginations. ("Canonade" 498–499)

The creature McGann is sketching—presented not only in contradistinction to the artist, but also implicitly to the critic—is familiar to us through the specific intellectual tradition of scholarly editing. And it is in the history of that tradition that we discover the Ur-pedant who, far from being a harmless drudge, proves to be a kind of symptomatic irritant that reveals the fundamental assumptions and faultlines within the discipline. Richard Bentley, a great 17th-century classicist and editor and the archetypal pedant for several generations of authors, got embroiled in a bitter dispute with Charles Boyle, William Temple, and others, by correctly asserting the spuriousness of the Epistles of Phalaris, which Boyle had edited and Temple had praised as evidence of the superiority of ancient works over modern. During the course of the debate, what established Bentley as the victor—and what upset his antagonists most—was the quality of detailed historical linguistic knowledge Bentley displayed. His expertise involved, most significantly, an understanding of linguistic change and an attention to the smallest indicators of that change—specific letterforms, grammatical inflections, details of word order—that enabled him to assess the authenticity of particular documents and to locate them in historical linguistic space. As William King described Bentley in his satirical *Dialogues of the Dead*, "He knows the Age of any Greek Word unless it be in the Greek Testament, and can tell you the time a Man liv'd in, by reading a Page of his Book.…Let Bentivoglio but get a Sentence of Greek in his Mouth, and turn it one or twice upon his Tongue, and he as well knows the growth of it, as a Vintner does Burgundy from Maderas" (41). Bentley's expertise also involved a detailed knowledge of classical history, not as the

depiction of an idealized cultural space but as an actual historical domain, in which cities were founded and populated by people with specific currencies and cultural practices. Among Bentley's many points of evidence in the Phalaris case were observations such as the fact that the document mentions cities which were not yet founded at the supposed time of writing, or referred to places by names they had not yet acquired. King's satire calls him "the most exact Man at the Original of a *Sicilian* City, that amidst never so great variety of Authors. He can tell you the Man that laid the first Stone of it. There was not a Potter in *Athens*, or a Brasier in *Corinth*, but he knows when he set up, and who took out a Statute of Bankrupt against him" (39).

This knowledge proved divisive in two significant ways. First, it marked the beginning of a shift in the study of classical languages, a move towards historicism and an attention to linguistic change and documentary specificity which implicitly destabilized the universality and timelessness of the classics, much as Biblical criticism was to do for Scripture. Simon Jarvis points out that for Bentley's antagonists, "Greek was to be thought of as essentially invariant", and its assumed stability was crucial as a basis for purifying English (30); once the classical languages were shown to be subject to linguistic evolution, their function as a cultural foundation was much less secure.

And second, the specificity and scope of his knowledge repositioned Bentley's antagonists from scholarly authorities to dilettantes whose knowledge of the classics was cursory, inaccurate, and impressionistic. It did not prove that they had less knowledge than they had imagined; it changed the status of that knowledge, removed the basis for its authoritativeness. Boyle had defended Temple's assessment of the authenticity of the Epistles by referring to Temple's experience as a man of the world; "Sir William Temple", he says, "has spent a good part of his Life in transacting Affairs of State; He has written to Kings, and They to Him: and this has qualified him to judge how Kings should write, much better than Dr. *Bentley's* Correspondence with *Foreign Professors*" (92). This defense assumes that knowledge of the classics is a social kind of knowledge: a kinship among great men, a kind of savoir-faire that assumes the transhistorical nature of class and language. Bentley's expertise in effect asserted an unbridgeable historical and linguistic gap between modern gentlemen and ancient rulers, a gap that could only be navigated, laboriously and imperfectly, by specific scholarly expertise in textual details.

The term "pedant" and the field of its meaning turns out to be the

fulcrum on which this debate pivoted. Unable, ultimately, to counter Bentley's textual claims, his antagonists had instead to suggest that his methods and conclusions were somehow flawed, unacceptable at a deeper level, and their use of the term "pedant" indicates the nature of that flaw. Sir William Temple called Bentley "such a mean, dull, unmannerly pedant" (qtd. in White, 100); Boyle noted that the mark of the pedant is "an itch of contradicting great men […] upon very slight grounds" (97), and also asserted that "Pedantry in the Pen, is what Clownishness is in Conversation; it is Written Illbreeding" (93). Swift, in *The Battle of the Books*, describing Bentley, has the figure of Scaliger address him as "Miscreant prater!... All arts of civilizing others render thee rude and intractable, courts have taught thee ill manners, and polite conversation has finished thee a pedant" (18). Bentley's meanness—his low station, his unfitness to engage with "great men"—is at the forefront of his antagonists' imagination, inextricably coupled with the nature of his scholarship. Positioning him thus serves to reassert the lost significance of class as a conduit of power: naming him a "pedant" brackets off and denatures his expertise and the facts of which he is the master, as perhaps true but certainly irrelevant to the larger question of power which, it turns out, is really at stake. About Phalaris he may be right, his antagonists in the end had to admit, but the word "pedant" marks their assertion that his correctness, achieved through such methods, changes nothing.

The depiction of Bentley—and of the scholarly pedant more generally—as a low person engrossed in textual detail plays into a familiar representation of class as a dynamic of ideality and particularity.[1] The gentleman, in terms of social structures, is assumed to have a universality of perspectival grasp that enables him to behave in a politically disinterested way and hence to be worthy of rule. The logic of this universality positions the gentleman both as a figure of wholeness over against the partiality (in both senses of the term) of others, and as a figure of ideality—the head or mind of the body politic—over against the physicality of the lower classes, the laboring "hands". This partiality also translates into a more literal dismemberment or lack, marking the physically particular as also potentially aberrant and monstrous: the particular taken to an extreme of individuation that is both lawless and deformed. Satiric descriptions of Bentley emphasize his position on the wrong side of this dichotomy; Swift, in *The Battle of the Books*, describes Bentley as the leader of the army of the Moderns, a deformed and monstrous physical presence:

in person the most deformed of all the Moderns; tall, but without shape or comeliness; large, but without strength or proportion. His armour was patched up of a thousand incoherent pieces, and the sound of it as he marched was loud and dry, like that made by the fall of a sheet of lead which an Etesian wind blows suddenly down from the roof of some steeple. His helmet was of old rusty iron, but the vizard was brass, which tainted by his breath corrupted into copperas, nor wanted gall from the same fountain; so that whenever provoked by anger or labour, an atramentous quality of most malignant nature was seen to distil from his lips. In his right hand he grasped a flail; and (that he might never be unprovided of an f weapon) a vessel full of ordure in his left. Thus completely armed he advanced with a slow and heavy pace where the Modern chiefs were holding a consult upon the sum of things; who, as he came onwards, laughed to behold his crooked leg and hump shoulder, which his boot and armour vainly endeavouring to hide, were forced to comply with and expose. (17–18)

For Swift, summing up Bentley's political essence—his class position, his scholarly identity—in this way conveys a deeply layered message: distrust on the part of a whole educated community concerning the role of the physical domain in social and textual matters. Bentley's deformity is apposite here, as a satirical jab, precisely because he has identified himself methodologically with an approach that relies on the physicality of texts: on their presence in a historical reality, on their textual and linguistic detail, and on their physical embodiment in particular witnesses. Historicism is to language, in effect, what materiality is to text: it represents contingency, particularity, individuation, and the resistance these things impose on the transmission of meaning.

Bentley's editorial practice enacted this kind of materialism in ways that go beyond the attention to linguistic and historical detail already discussed. In an era when attention to manuscript witnesses was regarded as a method of discovering possible emendations to clarify the text, Bentley insisted on careful collation of witnesses as part of the process of historical reconstruction of the text and its transmission history, an early step on the way towards the complex stemmatics of Lachmann (Jarvis 28). This atten-

tion to manuscripts, and in particular to the ways that they deviate from a true record of the author's meaning, seemed to Bentley's contemporaries to license deformity in the text, rather than attempting to correct it as an editor should.

Simon Jarvis observes that Bentley's antagonists positioned him as a tradesman among gentlemen, acting "to protect his professional interests and those of a cartel of pedants"(25). As a chapter in the early history of the professionalization of literary study, the Phalaris debate is extraordinarily illuminating, because although Bentley's approach turned out to be the foundational step in what was to become modern editorial methodology (even prefiguring debates which are still active within the discipline), he also came to stand, in a larger sense, for a devalued and self-evidently wrong approach to literary study. The paradigm of the pedant and its usefulness as a way of explaining what we—professionally speaking— do not do with details has proved quite durable. It informs the low position that textual editing and philology hold in the modern scholarly pecking order, and it has shaped the development of a professional identity for the literary scholar. A couple of centuries later, John Churton Collins invoked Bentley as a prime example of the pedant, explaining why philology is an unfit approach to the study of literature, in terms which again align management of the detail with class position:

> As an instrument of culture it [philology] ranks [...] very low indeed. It certainly contributes nothing to the cultivation of the taste. It as certainly contributes nothing to the education of the emotions. The mind it neither enlarges, stimulates, nor refines. On the contrary, it too often induces or confirms that peculiar woodenness and opacity, that singular coarseness of feeling and purblindness of moral and intellectual vision, which has in all ages been the characteristic of mere philologists, and of which we have appalling illustrations in such a work as Bentley's *Milton*. [...] Instead of encouraging communion with the nobler manifestations of human energy, it tends […]to create habits of unintelligent curiosity about trifles. It too often resembles that rustic who, after listening for several hours to Cicero's most brilliant conversation, noticed nothing and remembered nothing but the wart on the great orator's nose." (65; qtd. in Palmer, 83–84.)

Class, in the intervening centuries, had become all the more urgently at stake with the rise of the study of English. The vernacular had become important both as part of the project to bring higher education to a broader audience of working men and women not equipped for study of the classical languages, and as part of the program to establish English as a national literature worthy of a great imperial power. The question of how English should be studied and taught—whether through scientific and historical approaches such as philology, or through methods that emphasized literary meaning and cultural values—was essentially that of the role English studies was to play in class formation. Collins's critique of philology thus intervenes in this debate to assert the importance of the study of English as a matter of national identity: not only in forming a national taste free from "woodenness…opacity…coarseness of feeling…purblindness of moral and intellectual vision", but also in preserving the vernacular canon, the national literary heritage, edited in a form that cultivates appropriate mental habits in the reader. The act of literary communication—the complex transaction between author, editor, and reader—has been endowed with immense political and cultural significance, as the index of national cultural health.

We see the same terms deployed even more spectacularly in the dispute between Swinburne and the New Shakspere Society (sic), founded by Frederick Furnivall (who had also founded a number of other societies, notably the Chaucer Society and the Early English Text Society, as well as being involved in the instigation of the Oxford English Dictionary) in 1873 as a way of encouraging the study of Shakespeare and of getting reliable editions of his work published.

Interest in Shakespeare at this time was considerable; the foundational premises of the Society, however, gave it an idiosyncratic turn which set the stage for its notoriety and for the embroilments in which it almost immediately found itself. The following quote from Furnivall's opening speech at the Society's first meeting gives a sense of its intellectual commitments:

> The purpose of our Society [...] is, by a very close study of the metrical and phraseological peculiarities of Shakspere, to get his plays as nearly as possible into the order in which he wrote them; to check that order by the higher tests of imaginative power [...] and then to use that revised order for the purpose of studying the progress and mean-

ing of Shakspere's mind [...] (vi)

The Society's work in fact began with several close studies of Shakespeare's meter, with a strong emphasis on attempts to use metrical tests as a method of dating the plays, and with considerable internal debate over the nature of metrical and other quantitative tests, and their role in literary study. Frederick Gard Fleay was one of the strong proponents—considerably stronger than Furnivall—of metrical tests, and of their value in setting literary study on what he thought of as a scientific basis. Thus in one of his earliest papers for the Society he argues:

> This, however, is the great step we have to take; our analysis, which has hitherto been qualitative, must become quantitative; we must cease to be empirical, and become scientific: in criticism as in other matters, the test that decides between science and empiricism is this: "Can you say, not only of what kind, but how much? If you cannot weigh, measure, number your results, however you may be convinced yourself, you must not hope to convince others, or claim the position of an investigator; you are merely a guesser, a propounder of hypotheses." (2)

Fleay registers this difference of approach as marking the boundary between two heterogeneous undertakings, disciplines which are characterized precisely by the kind of work they do, but also wants to argue for making one more like the other: literary work, however little it may seem to be concerned with scientific values, ought to be concerned with them:

> It may seem [he says] to some ludicrous to speak even of the application of mathematics to such a subject; but it will be seen from the table that the plays assigned to the period...exactly agree with those in Meres's list [...] Now, the doctrine of chances gives us as the odds against these 10 plays being selected out of the 30 [...] more than 20 millions to one [...] To the mind accustomed to the exact sciences, this fact alone is conclusive as to the immense value of the rhyme test. (14)

The "mind accustomed to the exact sciences," he implies, is one

which is better qualified not only for science but also for the study of letters, as that study truly ought to be carried out.

The embroilment in which the New Shakspere Society found itself arose from a profound disagreement on this subject, bringing into conflict not just Furnivall's and Swinburne's personal pugnacity, but two conceptions of how literary criticism can arrive at just conclusions about its object of study. On April 1, 1876, after several articles by Fleay had appeared in literary journals propounding the "quantitative criticism" of the New Shakspere Society, Swinburne published a parody in The Examiner entitled "Report of the First Anniversary Meeting of the Newest Shakespeare Society" which presented the quantitative approach in an extremely ludicrous light. Its emphasis on tabulation of statistical results and on precise periodization of Shakespeare's plays becomes in Swinburne's hands an absurdly elaborated scheme of proof, animated by an overbearing self-assurance which is blind to the aesthetic nature of the plays:

> It was evident that the story of Othello and Desdemona
> was originally quite distinct from that part of the play in
> which Iago was a leading figure. This he was prepared to
> show at some length by means of the weak-ending test,
> the light-ending test, the double-ending test, the triple-
> ending test, the heavy-monosyllabic-eleventh-syllable of
> the double-ending test […] (381)

Swinburne's parody associates this kind of statistically based research with a literalism of "pedantry" which not only cannot comprehend the nature of metaphor and figuration, but also regards them as antique curiosities, rendered obsolete by the march of progress. Thus:

> Mr. D. then brought forward a subject of singular interest
> and importance—"The lameness of Shakespeare—was it
> moral or physical?" He would not insult their intelligence
> by dwelling on the absurd and exploded hypothesis that
> this expression was allegorical, but would at once assume
> that the infirmity in question was physical. Then arose the
> question—"In which leg?" (381)

What Swinburne's characterization of the New Shakspere Society's membership emphasizes above all, though, is the disintegrative and reduc-

tive effects of their work: the way in which their quantifying approach, as he sees it, fails to make the necessary move from the factual detail to the qualities that make the plays art. His remonstrance, expressed more fully in his introduction to A Study of Shakespeare, relies on a dichotomy which opposes "the music which will not be dissected or defined" (6) to the "purely arithmetical process" of "counting up of numbers and casting up of figures" (5), and it opposes "the singer", the sympathetic fellow artist, to the "pedant" and the "sciolast" (5) whose "horny eye and [...] callous finger" are just barely sensitive enough to perform the basic counting required by their method. Numbers here are assumed to be radically incommensurable with a representation of the kinds of patterning which make a play a work of art: numbers are merely enumerable, where the "music" of poetry contains "infinite varieties of measure" (5), "delicate and infinite subtleties" which no amount of effort can count or tabulate. The class dichotomy evident in the Bentley-Boyle dispute, and in John Churton Collins' critique, is rendered here as a subtler effect of coarseness: a deliteralization of class and a rewriting of it onto the intellectual hierarchies of the professional academy. Swinburne is writing as a poet, not as a scholar, but the terms of value he invokes are consonant with Collins': the pedant is as antithetical to the poet as to the true scholar.

Modern literary studies have a complex relationship with this history, and with the quantitative and empirical domains. While literary disciplines by and large stigmatize these domains, they do so as a form of self-identification, as part of an ongoing activity of methodological self-definition which requires that the opponent be kept in view. Jerome McGann's evocation of the pedant as the benign, indispensible drudge acknowledges a legitimate space within the modern academy for the pedant, but a space that is formally coded as distinct from, and less desirable than, the standard set of academic activities. The debate about quantitative methods is sustained as a constant testing of the boundaries, which happens at an ideological level: not as the goal of any individual methodological inquiry, but as the consolidating effect upon the profession as a whole. The arena of literary studies includes critical elements— narratology, textual criticism, the study of prosody—which in fact derive their impetus from the challenge they pose to conventional assumptions about the proper place of empirical and quantitative methods. But their location and meaning within the discipline as a whole is strongly circumscribed by the neoclassical logic which assigns them a lower place in the academic hierarchy.

2. Quantitative Methods and Digital Research

The area of research known, broadly, as humanities computing emerges from this agonistic relationship with a sense of divided identity and disciplinary mission, and with a set of questions about method in which the opposition of humanistic interpretive goals and scientific standards of evidence and proof is taken as a central conundrum. And in all of this, the role of the detail, the textual fact, is very much at stake. The field has been shaped by an early interest in how scientific methods—mobilized through the computer—could inform literary study. The rhetoric of this inquiry, as we have seen already in the material quoted from Roseanne Potter, assumes a search for balance between two approaches that are taken to be opposed yet mutually complementary, much as Victorian theories of marriage assumed a beneficial relationship between male reason and female sensibility. In this marriage, the computer is understood to preside over the transformation of text into data for purposes of computation, and the human user presides over interpretive processes which transform this data back into human insight and literary meaning. Within the computer, the text lives as a set of facts, code points, the disjointed words of Calvino's fictional novelist, to be rescued and reconstituted on output through human understanding.

Early text analysis tools like TACT, WordCruncher, and others emphasized functions consistent with this paradigm. Their basic outputs were essentially the text in a dismembered state—concordances, word frequency lists, collocations—and their analytical processing similarly showed the text remaining in a data-like form, represented in charts, histograms, distribution graphs, scatter plots, clusters. The remoteness of these representations, often generated by complex statistical processes, from "the text" as a readerly artifact underscored the sense that a great interpretive distance would have to be traversed in order to bring this data back to the realm of literary meaning. Paul Fortier, in an early essay, considers this distance an important methodological advantage that clarifies the relationship between critic and text: "I draw the distinction between facts and interpretation, and hold to the concept that interpretation must build on and integrate the facts. […] I consider [the text] the primary authoritative source of facts on which to base an interpretation […] I make constant use of two documents: a copy of the text, and a concordance to the text" (84). The facts about the text, exteriorized in the form of a concordance, constitute a valuable check on interpretive imagination; computer process-

ing "obliged me through weight of evidence to reject an erroneous original hypothesis" (90); "the use of the computer saved me from my own initial enthusiasm. […] because the machine works on the surface of the text, and is not influenced […] by the state of mind of the person examining the text, it forces the critic to examine the text on its own, not the critic's terms" (90–91). And, he concludes, as a result "we can look forward to a new structure in the academic critical establishment—one which distinguishes clearly between fact on the one hand and opinion on the other, and gives pride of place to those practitioners who best account for the former" (91).

The causal relationship between the facts of the text and the interpretations to which they give rise is not as secure as Fortier describes, not even in his own work. Embedded in the vignette through which he demonstrates how he was "saved" through the "weight of evidence" is a brief but revealing hitch in the texture of his argument. Describing his use of his concordance-based thematic analysis on Robbe-Grillet's *Jalousie*, he says "The computer system was able to produce in minutes frequency and distribution profiles for each of the important themes in the novel. But the theme profiles did not lead to an acceptable interpretation of the text. After some reflection I discovered why" (89). He goes on to explain how he adjusted the way his system worked, and uses this adjustment as illustration of how the "weight of evidence" operated to check his potential misinterpretation. But he does not elaborate on that enigmatic phrase, "an acceptable interpretation of the text". How can we understand this moment, except as a check by the human judgment on the results of the computer's analysis, at a moment when it is precisely the reverse phenomenon that we are asked to notice? The instability of the computer's role as factual substantiator is even more strongly evident in the preponderance of early studies demonstrating computer-assisted text analysis. Although the claim of these studies is that computerized methods provide solid evidence on which to base textual interpretation, in fact their rhetorical thrust typically works in reverse, to show that the computer's results are consistent with human intuitions and are therefore to be trusted—so that ironically the reader's confirmation of the pattern revealed by the text analysis tool operates to substantiate the tool, rather than the other way round.

This instability registers an anxiety at the heart of the operation: a sense that the invocation of textual fact is methodologically unassailable, and yet at the same time disciplinarily troubling. We see this anxiety throughout Roseanne Potter's introduction to *Literary Computing and*

Literary Criticism: "Fortier uses the computer to foster more objectivity in the study of fiction, but as a critic he is firmly in control of the end product through his personal judgment" (xxii); "highly sophisticated statistical analysis enables a kind of insight into structure that was not previously possible. This analysis, like all the others described in this collection, was not automated. At each stage the researcher as critic must intervene, deciding what to make of the evidence accumulated and what the tests reveal that *the researcher knows to be true* about the text […]" (xxiv, my emphasis); "only the presence of critical judgment saves the research from veering off into number juggling" (xvii).

To the extent that this research domain is noticed at all by the academy at large, it calls forth a critical response that centers on the role that the textual fact, as revealed by the computer, is being asked to play in the interpretive process. The surface narrative of this criticism emphasizes the banal self-evidence of computer-aided research, and its deployment of the facts of the text to demonstrate things we already knew, at great length and with great fanfare. A 1989 review of John Burrows' *Computation into Criticism: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels and an Experiment in Method* makes the typical gesture of bemused dismissal:

> From his pages of tables, graphs, and figures he proves that each of the characters under consideration [from Austen's novels] has his or her own idiolect […] While there seems to be no reason—or at least none that a non-statistician can see—to doubt the validity of his findings, the thought does occur as to whether five years' work […] by Professor Burrows to tell his readers this was really necessary. (La Faye, 429)

What is significant about this example is that the reviewer has misstated the point of Burrows' argument: she represents it as a (self-evident) claim about character differentiation, supported by a disproportionate deployment of factual evidence. What Burrows is actually arguing is that these obvious distinctions of idiolect are produced not, as is commonly expected, through the "significant" words with "distinctive semantic content" (Burrows 2), but rather through the "inert words" like "of" and "the"—the words which, as he observes, we usually treat as if they "were not really *there*" (1). His effort, in other words, is to prove the stylistic and semantic significance of these words, to restore them to our field of view.

Their absence from our field of view, their non-existence as facts for us, is precisely because they are so much there, so ubiquitous that they seem to make no difference. Burrows' "experiment in method" is thus an experiment in revealing what we did not know about "what we already knew": it is about testing the limits of self-evidence.

What is going on beneath the surface of this encounter is a category error, based on an assumption about the kind of research that computers must by their nature support. Burrow's "tables, graphs, and figures" signify as the markers of Lower Criticism, which as Tim Machan points out is "perhaps commonly viewed as the more factual or scientific: it provides numerical, analytical, and categorical information which is used to define historical realities" (4). The reviewer has mentally assigned Burrows' research to the low-critical category of "establishing the text": in other words, of producing a pre-interpretative textual stream upon which high criticism may operate interpretatively, a space of self-evidence which can support critical activity. Burrows' attentiveness to these details of the text—at a level which, for literary interpretation, is almost equivalent to an editorial interest in textual accidentals—can, ironically enough, be understood only as an exercise in self-evidence, because it tells us only of textual facts which were right before our eyes. The methodological invisibility of Burrows' intentions, like the invisible ubiquity of these words, registers an unwillingness on the part of the reviewer to see what Burrows is really up to: a critique of self-evidence and a disruption of our sense of what the "facts of the text" really are.

What is at stake in digital research, then, is the role that the detail may play: the management of the detail is one of the crucial points on which the methodological nature of digital tools will stand or fall. Burrows' approach, although it wears its statistics prominently, foreshadows a subtle shift in the way the computer's role vis-à-vis the detail is imagined. It foregrounds the computer not as a factual substantiator whose observations are different in kind from our own—because more trustworthy and objective—but as a device that extends the range of our perceptions to phenomena too minutely disseminated for our ordinary reading. The computer is not being asked to provide an objective check on an interpretation which has already been derived by other, humanly intuitive means: it is being asked to help the researcher perceive patterns at a finer-than-human level of granularity. These patterns are not more factual than those perceived by human eyes, as in Fortier's model, and they are not positioned as part of an agonistic tension between fact and interpretation. In this kind

of work we see the emergence of a different paradigm for textual analysis, one which treats the computer not as the empirical counterpoise to a subjective critical mind, but as a continuous part of the interpretive effort, a tool which must itself carry interpretive freight.

The recognition that the tool is implicated in the interpretive process is an—if not necessary, at least likely—outcome of the growing complexity of the data models being used for digital texts. The constitution of "the text" itself as a digital object is now a methodology in itself, subject to intense disciplinary inflection and multiple layers of interpretive work. The digital text as a research object can no more stand as "the text on its own" than the digital research tool can stand as a transparent mode of observation—but both the humanities computing community and their mainstream counterparts are coming to accept the idea that this non-transparency is a necessary and fundamental premise of scholarship, not to be evaded in either the digital or the print realm. The digital medium has helped to activate a renewed awareness of medium and mediation in the print world, which extends to the full range of scholarly artifacts: the edition, the archive, the anthology. As a result, the ontological status of the digital text within the digital scholarly economy is no longer that implied in Paul Fortier's essay quoted above: as the domain of reliable factuality about itself. Instead, it is now possible to imagine the textuality of the digital text as posing the kind of complex challenges suggested in Jerome McGann's tendentious formulation in a debate on the nature of text: "So it is that in a poetic field no unit can be assumed to be self-identical. The logic of the poem is only frameable in some kind of paradoxical articulation such as: 'a equals a if and only if a does not equal a'" ("What is Text?" 81).

Recent discussions of text analysis have taken this line of argument in several distinct but cognate directions, documented in a special section of *Literary and Linguistic Computing* on "Reconceiving Textual Analysis" (2002). The rhetorical urgency of this collection—its call to arms, as it were, on behalf of textual analysis—centers on the open-endedness of the interpretive process, and the role of the computer as an exploratory rather than an evidentiary tool. These essays seek to reconfigure the relationship between the computer's "reading" of the text and our own: the textual terrain of the concordance, as Geoffrey Rockwell argues, is no longer the terrain of objectivity, but a "hybrid" or even "monstrous" space which melds the human and computer readers in an almost collaborative interpretive effort (213). In fact, as part of our digital explorations of the

text, new texts are generated which are themselves objects of interpretation, in a process which is recursive and not terminable through any arrival at the kind of verifiable results that were so much the object of the exercise a decade or so earlier. Stephen Ramsay expresses the potential reach of this approach even more vividly in an essay on "The Algorithmic Criticism", which as he says "rejects the empiricist vision of the computer as a means by which critical interpretations may be verified, and instead seeks to locate computational processes within the rich tradition of interpretive endeavours […] which seek not to constrain meaning, but to guarantee its multiplicity" (167).

3. Digital Editing

The task of literary interpretation has always been understood as occupying a higher rank in the grand scheme of things than the editorial task of establishing the text upon which interpretation is to operate, and this dichotomy has been reproduced even within the digital realm. Ray Siemens makes this point explicitly in distinguishing between the "Lower" and "Higher" criticism (260)—the former concerned with establishing the text as an object of study through critical editing, and the latter with using the results as the basis for interpretation. The adjectives locate the two in the conceptual space we have been sketching, with the textual editors as McGann's pedants, harmless but essential drudges, and the interpreters as the high priests of meaning. The attempt to establish digital text analysis as a form of high interpretive activity depends on a reading of the digital that is applicable as well in the digital text editing realm, but it meets with different assumptions and challenges there, and the rhetorical dynamic is thus somewhat different.

Modern digital text editing began with an assumption of its own commitment to factuality, for two important reasons. First, the creators of early digital editions were strongly motivated by a sense of the difference that *digital* editing could make to the politics of editorial practice. The digital realm was taken as opening up a new domain of reader-centered editions, in which the function of the edition would be to place the facts of the text—the documents themselves and their known relationships—before the reader, to allow the reader to participate in the process of editorial decision-making. This added transparency of process was conceived as a strategy for countering the potential gender, class, disciplinary, and other biases of the editorial role: a way of liberating texts from their edito-

rial fetters, as it were. Certain authors chosen early on as test cases for this approach lent themselves particularly well to demonstrating this point: Emily Dickinson, Blake, Chaucer were all good examples of texts whose traditional edited forms often concealed more than they revealed of the textual and editorial complexity of their sources. Making those sources available to the reader as part of the digital edition would make it possible to understand the editor's rationale for decision-making—indeed, would force that rationale into the open where before it might have been implicit—and would also make it possible for readers to see other possible editorial strategies for handling textual cruxes.

The second reason for the stance of objective factuality in early digital editing was the sense that digital editions (like other digital text projects) were being created once for all time: that they represented an investment of time and effort which should not (have to) be repeated, and which thus should attempt to serve as broad a future audience as possible, by representing the textual facts and allowing future use and reuse to deploy interpretation as a set of additional layers or views. This conception of a separation of the facts from their instantiation within an editorial or interpretive scheme was reinforced by, mirrored in, an identical ideology of separation within the technology itself. SGML (later XML) was designed around the premise that content and presentation, structure and behavior, could and should be separated: that content and structure were permanent features of the text itself, while presentation and usage were contingent and temporary dimensions of publication. The digital edition could thus, in some settings, be understood more as an archive of source material with an editorial layer built on top: the one operating as the established and immutable facts of the text, and the other operating as the changing domain of human perspective and interpretation.

The stance of objectivity which these two factors encouraged brought with it certain tensions, centering particularly on the role of text encoding as a representational system. Insofar as text encoding acted, within the ecology of the editorial process, to establish and enforce a controlled vocabulary and structure for describing textual artifacts, it operated under the sign of science, and the act of encoding the text was taken as effecting a fundamental transformation of mode, about which we will hear more in a later chapter. Furthermore, the work of encoding, since it required learning a new technical skill (and often a suite of related technical skills pertaining to the use of the computer infrastructure), could be understood as disciplinarily alien to the editorial process itself: not a

job for scholars, but rather for their hired surrogates: research assistants, computer center staff, undergraduate students. The sociology of this community is significant: the typical division of labor reinforced the well-established academic hierarchies of faculty and staff, faculty and students, and made it both natural to see encoding work as a species of data entry (because scholars are not doing it) and essential to do so in order to lend authority to the finished product (because otherwise scholars would need to do it).

The anxiety surrounding this shifting dynamic focused to a large degree on the changing professional role for the editor which this new approach seemed to entail. As editors, how were we to understand the work that creates this resource? Peter Robinson, the editor of the monumental *Canterbury Tales Project*, has articulated a certain perplexity about this question:

> When we publish all this, what are we going to call it? You could call it an archive, a dossier, a resource base. But is it an edition? If an edition is something you pick up and say 'Now I have it, the text as Chaucer wrote it', then it is not an edition. I began my scholarly life as what you might call a proper editor [...] This is what I thought editors did—they presided over the text: they read, they weighed evidence, and they decided. But now, I am no such editor. I am a software compiler and developer [...] a manuscript entrepreneur; worst fate of all, a transcriber. (9)

Kathryn Sutherland has similarly asked what might be the cost of reconceiving the electronic edition as an electronic archive, and suggests that the newer term represents to some degree an abnegation of authority on the part of the editor, either from a desire to dissipate the locus of that authority altogether, or from a desire to relocate it onto the reader ("Looking and Knowing" 15). She suggests as well that the evacuation of this authority may leave a gap which we will no longer be capable of filling. As she puts it,

> Herein lies the greatest challenge posed by the electronic environment... If the computer merely displays knowledge to a post-productive society, what might this imply

about our mechanisms for generating new (as opposed to
retrieving and redeploying old) expert knowledge? How
real is the danger that the scholar-worker, whose origins
lie in a nineteenth-century conception of learning as
heroic endeavour, will be transformed into the scholar-
technician? (18)

Or, as she puts it in an earlier essay, "Do [computers], in taking
the labour and randomness out of intellectual inquiry, remove much of the
knowledge, too?" ("Challenging Assumptions" 65)

As text encoding came into broader use as a representational tech-
nology of scholarship, however, it soon became clear that it could not
be regarded as a transparent or uninterpretive process except in its very
simplest forms, and then only with the proviso that it might operate trans-
parently within the confines of a particular disciplinary community with
strongly shared assumptions. The agon for digital editing has been the
acceptance of the interpretive nature of the encoding process, and its close
resemblance to editing in this respect. In fact, the prominence of digital
editing techniques has impelled the editing profession to rediscover its
own radical interpretive role in the process of coming to grips with trans-
mediation. The field has moved away from the idea of the digital edition
as an establishment or shoring up of the factuality of the text and towards
an idea of the edition as a model of the textual universe: a convergence
between ideas of lower and higher criticism. Both text analysis and edit-
ing, in the digital sphere, see themselves moving towards a use of the digi-
tal medium that emphasizes an extension and potentiation of the human's
interpretive and analytical powers. John Bradley, in the LLC collection
cited above, describes the trajectory of textual analysis tools away from
their earlier quantitative or "deterministic" emphasis, towards a new con-
ception in which they assist the researcher in developing a "mental model"
(187) of the text which can itself be analysed and interpreted. Through
techniques of annotation, markup, and analysis, the researcher superim-
poses this model on the text itself, producing a research object which
expresses a set of analytical aims and perspectives, and which in turn can
be used as the basis for further analysis. Tools and interfaces for interact-
ing with digital editions are now moving in a similar direction, to allow the
reader to manipulate what is avowedly an intellectual model that expresses
a scholarly perspective.

4. Reading and Interpretation

The thrust of these articles is to represent the field of text analysis in an entirely new light: to overthrow the reductionistic paradigm both as a practical approach and as a spectre of bad practice, and to declare a new set of methods, tools, and critical paradigms which will be as compelling for literary scholars as they are for humanities computing specialists. Their goal is to heal the breach between the conventional English department and its digital counterpart, and erase the stigma of reductionism and pedantry that still clings to computer-aided research.

It is tempting to see a natural progression here in the evolution of text analysis and digital editing, in the same way that art historians once saw a progressive narrative in the development of techniques for representing perspective. For text analysis, that evolution brings us out of a state of awkward graphs and heavy-handed conclusions towards a greater literary sophistication, more nuanced tools, and the development of new enabling technologies: technological progress and critical sophistication working hand in hand in a mutually constitutive partnership. For text editing, progress carries us away from the establishment of the text as a pedantic focus on detail, and into a realm governed by the insights of postmodernist perspectivalism and ideology. But there is another trajectory at work here as well. It is also, I would argue, culturally necessary that the first generation of computer-assisted tools should appear to be more primitive, clumsier, like the depictions of robots in early 20th-century science fiction—their knobs and wires hanging out to remind us that these are Machines. This necessity obtains as much for the computing humanists as for their more reluctant literary colleagues. Despite the enthusiasm on the part of early computing humanists for their tools, they found methodological significance in the unbridgeable distance between computer and human, the profound difference between the realm of numbers presided over by the computer's determinism, and the realm of textuality in which the human being produced interpretations—reassuringly confirmed, but never generated, by the computer's empirical solidity.

In fact, modern text analysis tools are just as much—and just as little—"about" numbers as their predecessors. The new tools work with the same fundamentals of the text as ever: word frequencies, collocations, statistical measures of various sorts. But their interfaces now mediate this information for us, so that its *meaning* is no longer located within the numbers themselves, but in the surface produced through the interface.

What has really changed is the cultural position of the computer. It has become a mystified consumer product rather than a scientific object: a semi-disposable, plug-and-play black (pink, blue, green) box whose outputs are no longer numbers but the bandwidth of desire: iMovie, iTunes, iPhoto. The computer is not exactly a toy, but even in a research context it now mobilizes a rhetoric of pleasure and "play", a field of open-ended exploration rather than the disciplined work of hypothesis-testing. The term "digital" no longer means, connotatively, "ones and zeroes"; instead, it means "interactive", "powerful", "networked": it points to all the heightened consciousness, the added connectedness that we attribute to the digital experience.

Textual analysis (and in this term we can now include the functionality provided with digital editions) now operates under this sign, taking in textual information and representing it to us in altered forms whose alteration carries the possibility of heightened meaning, perceptual vividness, defamiliarization. While the fundamental activity is still, at some level, the aggregation of detail into pattern, the nature and use of that pattern has shifted in significant ways: the role of the interface in representing pattern, the relationship between the detail and the pattern, and the kind of meaning we attribute to what we see as a result.

In the new generation of text analysis tools, the interface itself constitutes an experiment: an experiment in visualization of the text, as well as a way of selecting items for visualization. It heightens our perceptions—even alters our perception of pattern—and increases the role that perception itself plays in the process. Some of this alteration is simply a matter of greater perspicuity, an arrangement of the same information for improved consumption. But some—the more interesting and challenging—is an attempt to synthesize the underlying textual patterns and express them in a way that is suggestive, provocative, teasing. It may even be "deformative" (McGann and Samuels 28), not just querying or sampling the text, but pushing it out of alignment, distorting it to see what a strong misreading can reveal. Such deformations might involve altering the way we *look* at the text—through spatial and/or temporal rearrangements such as TextArc (http://www.textarc.org) or the prototypes developed by Stan Ruecker and Stéfan Sinclair, which "read" dramatic texts by blocking them out positionally on the screen—or they might involve altering the text itself, through techniques of word transposition, substitution, reordering, and so forth. Simple changes of this sort will look quite familiar: the concordance, the search results page, the unique word list are

all exercises in this area. More extreme examples like the Ivanhoe Game, in which a text is successively rewritten by player/readers as they explore its field of potential meaning, look like a new beast altogether. But in both cases, this kind of radical synthesis creates a new object of study and interpretation, the "hybrid or monster" of Rockwell's account, "neither afoot nor ahorseback like the centaur Cheiron…neither the work of the original author nor that entirely of the provoker of the concordance" (213).

Rockwell uses the term "monster" to suggest the dual footing these syntheses have in the textual object and the curiosity or textual hunger of the reader, but if they seem alien to conventional readerly goals we need to remember what those goals, for literary scholars, really are. These techniques are "autopoietic" where earlier paradigms of text analysis were "allopoietic": rather than seeing a proof to its conclusion, they seek to stimulate an open-ended interpretive process which is itself generative of new meaning not only in the form of ideas about the text (the traditional close reading or critical analysis) but also in the form of new texts. In this, as McGann and Samuels argue, they follow a centuries-old path: imitation, parody, paraphrase, reworking, translation, annotation, the entire range of techniques for literary engagement through which a reader makes new sense out of the textual field. Text analysis tools of this new genre seek to provoke this entire range of activity: as Stephen Ramsay puts it, "The question these methods propose is not, 'What does the text mean?' but rather, 'How do we ensure that it keeps on meaning?'—how, in other words, can we ensure that our engagement with the text is deep, multifaceted, and prolonged?" (170).

The relationship of the detail, the textual "fact", to this kind of higher-order pattern, is very different from the relationship that obtains in the charts and tabular output of earlier text analysis tools. In a context where the role of the interface is to foster provocation rather than proof, the movement from textual detail to overall pattern is not an inductive one, in which the details taken together constitute the evidence for the pattern. The detail operates rather as one component in a process of transformation: one factor, one piece of the algorithm by which the pattern is produced. In this connection, the former stake of text analysis in the concreteness of detail—its implicit claim that in such detail lies a grasp of the real—deserves probing, given the unavoidable representedness, the mediatedness, of textual information in the digital realm. By the time textual analysis comes face to face with the text, "the text" has already been constituted through a number of processes: transcription (perhaps

including regularization of spelling, spacing, punctuation), tokenization, lemmatization, possibly structural encoding, and the like. The evidence it presents—while potentially very significant—cannot function within our epistemological economy like the raw data from scientific observation (or as that data was once taken to function). It is a reading, a text which itself requires rereading.

More than this, it is a reading conducted within a sphere in which transparency and the successful completion of a communicative circuit are not necessarily privileged. The types of meaning which we are offered through this kind of activity are of course quite different from those imagined in earlier text analysis paradigms: they derive not from correctly discovering the meaning of the text, but rather from distorting or recontextualizing the text in ways which "ensure that it keeps on meaning". The result is a shift rather than clarification of view: not a better look at what we were looking at, but a different, even distorted perspective on it, in which both the object and our angle of approach are entangled together. As noted above, one recent example of this kind of reading in action is the Ivanhoe Game, developed at the University of Virginia as a tool or framework for conducting extended, collaborative intepretive work on digital texts. Starting with an initial text, each player "moves" by altering the textual field in some way: by adding another text to the discursive and interpretive field, by altering the initial text or any of the subsequently added texts so as to suggest a new interpretive angle, by contributing an interpretation (in essence, another text) which forces the other players to adjust their perspectives on the texts in play. The conduct of the game emphasizes each player's inescapable positionality—not as an intrinsic quality but as a set of performative gestures—and the way that the entire discursive field, the "reading", emerges from the interplay of these positions and the permutations of the text which they effect.

Such tools require us to understand that the acts of reading we undertake through these interfaces constitute creation rather than discovery—or, as Liu might remind us, all of these quests for pattern and coherence are irretrievably foundational: our attempts to craft a world of significance from the detail of perception. If there is something resonantly neoclassical about the effort, in early digital text analysis, to derive a picture of wholeness from the particulars of analytical evidence, this newer mode is more Romantic, almost Coleridgean, and hence also consonant with the concerns of poststructuralism. Liu notes in passing Schor's treatment of the detail in which, as he sketches her argument, "detailism overthrew

neoclassical generalization to dominate in the age of romanticism and the realistic novel only because it was made subservient to the aesthetics of the sublime" (92). Our own modern or postmodern age, he says, "desublimates" the detail, through a process by which "the perceiver suddenly sees not reality but the simulation that Barthes calls 'the reality effect'" (Liu, "Local Transcendance", note 10). In other words, where the sublime allows the perceiver to be completely immersed in, effaced by, the totality of effect, this desublimation works to strip away not only the enabling holism that created that appearance of totality, but even the enabling realism of the constitutive details.

Sublimity is by now a cliche of the digital universe, but the idea of desublimation is less common. We might speculate that it operates as a kind of reverse engineering of the text analysis process: where text analysis, as I've described it, attempts to reveal or imagine a larger space of pattern that is limned out by the detailed results of a query, desublimation not only dismantles the pattern but also reveals the suturing process by which it came to appear as a pattern in the first place. This may at first seem to be a corrosive activity, but in fact I think we can see it as the final step in understanding text analysis and what we can use it for. In effect, we have to not only seek and value the pattern that our tools can help us to see, but we also have to be inquisitive about why these patterns seek us out, why we build tools to see them. In this gesture, we finally get past the facile accommodation of detail and universal to something more critical: a point of traction not only on the textual world but on our engagement with it.

Notes

[1] See in particular Eagleton, chapter 1.

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