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Jim Andrews Drifting to (and from) Vancouver

At the "Digital Textualities/Canadian Contexts" conference in 2016, which was presented as part of the launch of CWRC (the Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory) in Edmonton, I presented a paper on the state of Canadian Digital Poetics. During the question period for this panel, new media and interface scholar Lori Emerson asked me if I was having trouble determining which works constituted "digital poetics" and which works were "electronic literature" in the broader sense. Being able to tell a digital poem from, say, hypertext fiction was quick work. But, part of the radical potentials of electronic literature is that sub-genres blur easily. So, how does one tell a digital poem apart from other sub-genres of electronic literature? During that question period, I told Emerson that I didn't care about doing that sort of taxonomical work, and she admitted that she didn't either. Bringing her signature media-archaeological perspective to the discussion, Emerson argued that, for the most part, these generic and sub-generic designations are vestiges of print culture and print criticism and have little to offer to scholars of new media literary arts. This taxonomical work, I argue in this essay, requires the clear demarcation of various "scenes" of poetry: the scene of "digital poetics" alongside the scene of "electronic literature"; national and regional scenes in Canada and the US; scenes of interpretive and scholarly communities, and so on.

One of the pioneering works of kinetic poetry, Jim Andrews' "Seattle Drift" (1997) is about this very issue, drifting to and from the scenes of poetic production, reception, and interpretation to resist the categorical and taxonomical limitations they require. In this paper, I will look to "Seattle Drift" as metonymic and emblematic of the diverse Canadian, Vancouverite,

transnational, and transgeneric contributions to the fields of electronic literature and digital poetics. This paper tries to situate a work that "used to be poetry" but "drifted from the scene" (Andrews, "Seattle Drift") to begin to theorize the role of place (Seattle, Vancouver) and nation (US, Canada) in a digital literary scene that increasingly works to blur borders and collapse national and generic conventions alike. This poem, I argue, uses its deceptively simple language (in the content and form of the poem and its code) and relationship to place (real and imagined, physical and digital) to complicate the scholarly tendency to align authorship and poetics with locus (particularly national locus), genre, and tradition. This process of complication ultimately results in a blurring of various borders, implied and expressed by the poem's ergodic[1] engagement with its readers, its relationship to various "scenes" of poetic writing and study, and its tongue-in-cheek reference to sadomasochistic eroticism.

"Seattle Drift" is fairly representative of Andrews' animated digital poetics, what he terms "animisms" (Andrews, "Seattle Drift"). The poem has become a classic work of kinetic poetry that extends the use of language as visual medium seen in concrete poetry by using the potentials of digital technology to have the poem's words literally move across the screen. What is striking about "Seattle Drift," and what differentiates it from many other kinetic, animated poems, is that the poem itself moves at the (partial) behest of its readers,[2] who start and stop the movement by clicking hyperlinks on the page. While the poem is hosted and still accessible on Andrews' website, *Vispo.com*, "Seattle Drift" was originally distributed through the foundational journal of web art and digital writing, *Cauldron & Net*, in its first volume in 1999. Andrews wrote it in Javascript. He and Marko Niemi updated the DHTML in 2004 to make it work on PC and Mac, and in 2015 adapted it for mobile users. When a reader visits "Seattle Drift" on either Andrews' site or the *Cauldron & Net* original publication, they encounter a fairly simplistic page layout. The poem, written in white sans-serif font on a black screen, looks like a fairly traditional poem and reads:

> I'm a bad text.
> I used to be a poem
> but drifted from the scene.
> Do me.
> I just want you to do me.

This last line provokes the reader to look at the hyperlinks above the poem, provided they realize that the smaller red text at the top of the page is indeed

a set of hyperlinks (this is not an obvious assumption as the text lacks the now-standard blue text with underline that signals a hyperlink). The red text provides the reader with three link options to click at their leisure: if they choose, they can "Do the text," which results in the algorithmically randomized and erratic movement of the words to the right and bottom of the screen until no words are visible (see Figure 1); at any time during that movement, the reader can then "Stop the text," leaving the words and punctuation marks wherever they ended up; at this point the user has the option to "Discipline the text," returning the words to their "rightful" order in a traditional Western left-aligned lineation.

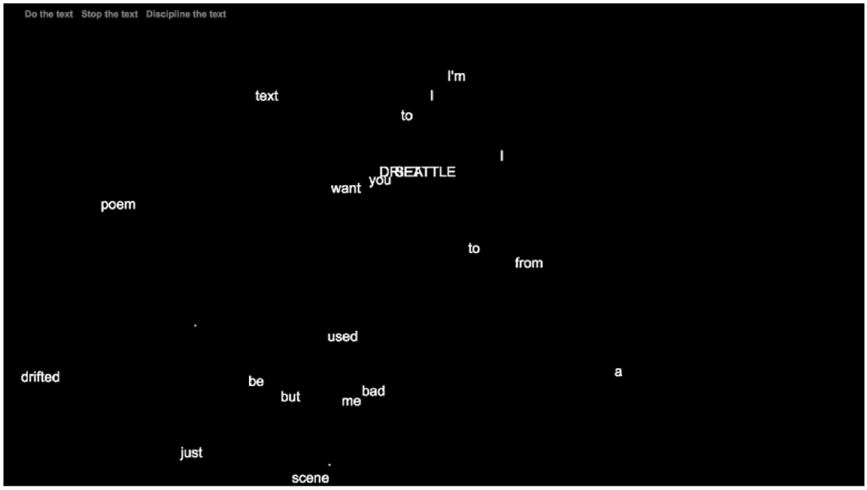

Figure 1
A screen capture from "Seattle Drift" by Jim Andrews, taken on my 17.5" monitor for PC desktop. This is the poem as published on Vispo.com, reprinted with permission from the author.

Despite the fact that those red commands are links, the reader never actually leaves this webpage. The poem has a tendency to disperse as the words spread out across the screen, but otherwise the work is fairly cohesive. It expands and constricts but the words or punctuation marks are never altered. "Seattle Drift" focuses on presenting words and punctuation marks as separate entities relating to each other but acting independently. In this poem, the words and punctuation marks move individually. In turn, much of the work of making sense of this poem relies on the way the individual pieces move; the semantic sense of their cohesion in their original format

(or even in the dispersed, undisciplined format) is largely secondary. Andrews recognizes this facet of his work, writing in "Digital Langu(im)age" that

> each object might have various properties in addition to its usual appearance and meaning and place amid other words. . . . When you click the text that says "Do the text," the words in the poem eventually drift independently off the screen. Each word has its own behavior, its own partially random path of drifting off the screen. Each word is a kind of little language widget, langwidget.

The "langwidget" neologism is humorous in the work it does bringing the understanding of the linguistic unit as an element in a field into the digital context. The poetic "field of composition" (Olson 239) takes on a radically altered definition in the digital, where those units can literally move as a part of the piece, and where readers are invited to engage on an interventionary level that Charles Olson and the Black Mountain School could not have dreamed. What is clear about the "langwidget" is that despite Andrews' own statement, the words simply do not have their "own behavior." They may move independently, but that behaviour is not the words' "own." In fact, the level of mediation required for these langwidgets to migrate across the screen is what makes this work interesting in media-specific and national contexts.

On one level, the understanding of linguistic elements as material units acting independently and on their own recalls conceptualist or "uncreative" ideas about poetry and language more than the active, interventionary readership suggested by the ergodic potentials of digital poetry. Langwidgets as material units that act on their own, that move as "stuff" without requiring or being dependent on the engagement of a user or reader, risks treating digital language as "stuff" rather than user- and hardware-contingent material. In other words, this conception of language "risks treating the Internet as a poetic plunderground without really feeding back into it," as Florian Cramer tells us is a shortcoming of uncreative writing. But, the text of "Seattle Drift" is not stuff; it requires some engagement on the ergodic level via the basic (but integral) use of hyperlinks. Andrews' language in the hyperlinks suggests a great deal of reader engagement, maintaining that the reader *does* the text rather than simply passively receiving it. Of course, the "reader" here does not do much more to the text than a print reader; the pressing of buttons that initiate and then delimit the movement of the poetry is only a small step further in engagement than the turning of a print page. We might even say that Andrews' suggestion that the words have their "own behavior" betrays the poem's explicit call for active and anti-traditional reader engagement in the opportunities to "Do" and then "Discipline" the text. But again, these words *do not* and *cannot* have their *own* behaviours.

While Andrews may have written of each word's own independence and activity, his recognition of the only partial randomness of the langwidget's path shows, however subtly, the importance of the elements of the poem's movement that are distinctly not random. The movement of the words of "Seattle Drift" across the page is designed to seem random, but it is quite clearly controlled by three primary factors: first, by the reader who starts and stops the movement; second, by Andrews who wrote the code and the algorithm for the movement and made the necessary choices of design and content (and by Niemi who helped to alter this code); and third, by a pretty straightforward algorithm governing the movement itself. A quick look at the webpage's source code unearths a pseudo-randomizing function that determines if each word will move left or right, up or down, with a heavy bias towards downward and rightward movement (see Figure 2).

```
function moveIt() {
  // This function is run upon loading the document (see the BODY statement).
  // It is always running when the document is loaded. This is done by means
  // of the setTimeout function. Essentially, there is a 15 millisecond
  // delay between calls to this function.
    moveMe(document.getElementById('SEATTLE').style, 4, 2);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('DRIFT').style, 3, 2);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('Iml').style, 4, 1);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('a2').style, 5, 3);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('bad3').style, 3, 3);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('text4').style, 2, 1);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('period5').style, 4, 4);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('I6').style, 4, 1);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('used7').style, 3, 3);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('to8').style, 4, 2);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('be9').style, 2, 3);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('a10').style, 5, 5);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('poem11').style, 1, 2);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('but12').style, 3, 3);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('drifted13').style, 1, 3);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('from14').style, 4, 2);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('the15').style, 5, 5);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('scene16').style, 2, 3);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('period17').style, 1, 4);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('Do18').style, 2, 4);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('me19').style, 3, 3);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('period20').style, 2, 2);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('I21').style, 4, 1);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('just22').style, 2, 3);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('want23').style, 3, 1);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('you24').style, 3, 1);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('to25').style, 3, 1);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('do26').style, 3, 3);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('me27').style, 4, 5);
    moveMe(document.getElementById('period28').style, 2, 3);
  setTimeout(moveIt, 15);
}
```

Figure 2
A screen capture of source code from "Seattle Drift" by Jim Andrews, published on Vispo.com and reprinted with permission of the author.

The range of movement is regulated by a function, with the numbers in parentheses determining how far, in pixels, each word will move, the first for the x-axis, the second the y-axis.

Looking at these movement ranges shows that some words, like "a" and "the," and some of the punctuation, are given much greater range of movement, causing them to recede from the text much more quickly. On the other hand, some words, like "poem," "text," and "drifted," move more slowly and remain on the screen longer: "text" is almost always the final word on the screen, moving two pixels horizontally and one pixel vertically where others, like the "a" that precedes "poem," move at five pixels in each direction. While each "doing" is different, for the most part a similar outcome is reached. The movement of "Seattle Drift" is partially randomized, partially organized, with the reader determining when and where that movement begins, ends, and begins all over again. Paola Trimarco points out that the ergodic interface of "Seattle Drift" is essentially optional; you can read and engage with the poem on a traditional level by visiting the page but not clicking the hyperlinks. The poem only drifts "if readers choose to become an active participant in the work" (89). For Trimarco, the poem literally begs an "active" readership (saying "Do me. I want you to do me") to engage ergodically with the work via the hyperlinks and their algorithms that reformat and alter the spatial and temporal properties of the poem, and this suggests a role reversal of the typical power structure of reader and poem. She writes,

> The tenor in this brief poem is informal and suggestive of a relationship between reader and text which might be interpreted as similar to parent and child or sadistically between two lovers, which in a sense reverses the power relationship between reader and poem, as the poems gives the order (in the command 'Do me') and the reader follows by clicking on the words on the screen. (89)

While reading the engagement between text and reader in "Seattle Drift" as that of parent and child recognizes one level of the text's desire for its own "Discipline," this interpretation does not fully address the erotic and sadomasochistic poetics explicit in this poem and the power dynamics therein.

"Seattle Drift" expresses a very intimate desire to move the power of the poem (its signification, its meaning, and its potential for exegesis) into the hands of a reader who controls the poem by starting it, stopping it, and disciplining it back to its original, traditional lineation. The poem desires its own abuse, desires that it be made bad (or perverse) by the reader's "abnormal" or non-traditional actions upon it. While these erotic readings

are exciting, I am most interested in the ways that they invite an intimate and close relationship between the text, its producer(s), and the readers who thus engage with the work.

In his book-length study of the visual properties of contemporary poetics, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (2007), Ian Davidson describes the movement of "Seattle Drift" as "slightly jerkily" (173). Alistair Brown draws out this phrase, not because it is inaccurate, but rather because the "slightly jerk[y]" movements of the words in "Seattle Drift" point to two issues: the relationship between the code and the tech that is used to view it, and the multiplicitous and reader-centric readings this variability suggests. On the first issue, the reader's experience of "Seattle Drift" depends on which device the reader uses to engage with it (as is the case with all digital technologies). After all, there is no software, as Friedrich Kittler reminds us. In the influential essay "There is No Software," Kittler argues that we must stop the popular and academic tendency to see software as somehow distinct from or prioritized over hardware "because software does not exist as a machine-independent faculty" (151). Instead, the theoretical separation between the physical hardware of computing and the various software we use in these computational processes allows for the copyright, commodification, and "property" status of the programming language as separate and independent from the hardware on which we use it. Rather than viewing software as separate from, or a consequence of, hardware, Kittler insists on "the virtual undecidability between software," arguing that "there are good grounds to assume the indispensability and, consequently, the priority of hardware in general" (152). So too there is no "Seattle Drift" save through the devices each reader uses to engage with the poem. On the second point, Brown remarks: "Displaying the text on a larger screen (such as my 27 inch monitor) means that there is more black space to the right and below for the poem to move into, before the words drift entirely off screen. The poem would offer a different sense if played on a mobile phone screen. . . . [T]he poem is not medium-neutral[.]" Each device and each screen presents artificial, constructed limitations to the reading of this poem. As Leonardo Flores writes in his doctoral thesis on Andrews, the words of "Seattle Drift" will continue drifting even after they leave the constraints of our screen: "[I]f allowed to drift for a long period of time, [the words] would create an enormous virtual space in the browser that would require serious exploration of that space using scrollbars to find them" (81). Because of this, any starting and stopping of the work draws artificial borders and limitations

on the "poem" no matter when its movement is started or stopped. While this fact—that our readings and interpretations place limits on a text—is true in the abstract of all texts, "Seattle Drift" and other digital poems like it make this artificiality explicit through both the visual representation of the poem in flux and the tongue-in-cheek language of the ergodic links.

"Seattle Drift" reveals its artificiality, placing it within the context of a canon of formal print-based avant-garde. This explicit artificiality also requires a rethinking of the generic and nationalist divides that make such canon formation possible. As Flores observes, "this e-poem enacts a critique of current and historical poetry scenes in order to create a space for a new e-poetry scene" ("Typing" 172). Pursuing the line of connection between digital poetics and concrete poetry is fruitful, particularly for kinetic works like this one that boasts its indebtedness to concrete as one poetic scene. Following this trajectory of influence also helps to reveal digital poetry's relationship to concrete poetry and other formalist and visual avant-garde traditions. Besides Andrews' own articulation of this connection in his work on the digital edition of Lionel Kearns' concrete poem "The Birth of God," the few existing studies of Andrews also trace this lineage. While I acknowledge this indebtedness to visual experimentation, I am much more interested in the fact that drawing such a direct, causal relationship between "Seattle Drift" and concrete poetry does not fully acknowledge how the poem works against such generic classification. Instead, the poem positions the scholarly desire to situate texts within historical, geographical, and generic classifications as the kind of "disciplining" that creates the "scenes" from which we must "drift" in order to move towards new forms of poetic and artistic practice.

By "disciplining" the text, the reader forces the poem into traditional lineation, but really, that is all. Andrews' invitation to the reader to "Do the text" signals the kind of reader engagement we might expect from a text-based computer game, but the fact that the words' movement is governed by algorithm shows that what the reader can "Do" to the text is fairly limited. The limitations placed on reader engagement turn the tables on the limiting practices of reading and interpretation; rather than an interpretation that limits the potential readings of a poem, the material, technological, and semantic elements of this poem ultimately limit what a reader can or should do, all while convincing the reader that they are more involved than they ever were. While the interventions a reader has access to in "Seattle Drift" are limited, by allowing readers the option of starting and stopping the movement and altering the positions of the visual elements in space and

time, the poem encourages readers to be aware of the ways that they are agential in their engagement of this digital poem, of digital text, and of poetic texts of all kinds.

In this way, the "scene" in question is both deSadean tableau (the term used to denote these scenes in *120 Days of Sodom*) *and* a scene of digital and electronic literature that must be differentiated from the canon of visual print poetics. The scene is also geographical. Andrews is often credited as a Vancouver-based poet, but this poem is called "Seattle Drift" and it is written, as Andrews tells us in an aside hidden in the source code, "in the spirit of Seattle" during the approximately four years that Andrews lived and wrote there. Moreover, "Seattle Drift" signals Andrews' collaboration with Joseph Keppler and the rest of the "Seattle crew" (Flores, "Typing" 111) from 1996-2000 when he produced this work and others like it (Andrews, "a few").

In email correspondence, I asked Andrews if he considered himself to be a Canadian poet, a Vancouver poet, a transnational poet, etc. Andrews' response tellingly points to the kind of border-blurring conversation "Seattle Drift" initiates: "I am a Canadian citizen. But nationalism is a blight upon the world" ("a few"). The drifting, overlapping, and obscuring movement of the words in this poem suggest another reading, recalling the visual and phonic similarities between "Seattle" and "settle," an act that Andrews' transnational collaboration and his border- and genre-blurring poetics resists; this blurring and obscuring movement also challenges Canadianness as a "settler" construct. That is, as the words continue their seemingly independent movement across the screen, they resist settling into their appropriate spaces, much like Andrews' movements throughout Canada, and into the US momentarily, similarly resist such geographic settling. Author and poem move alike, and as "Seattle Drift" drifts back and forth between Vancouver and Seattle, it interrogates the closedness of assigning geographical boundaries to poetic "scenes" (which might make texts "bad" or require "discipline"). Canadian literature here is resisted as a categorical model. "Seattle Drift" instead theorizes that any conception of a "Canadian literature" is only ever a collection of "scenes," between which we must always be drifting in order to blur the settler poetics of such a taxonomy, to reveal the arbitrariness of these lines.

Vancouver is a well-known site of many "scenes" of poetry like TISH and the Kootenay School of Writing. Known for a thriving literary scene that encourages the formation and exchange of many communities and schools of writing, Vancouver is an especially fruitful location from which to draw this

line of argument. Moreover, Vancouver's poetry "scenes" have always been in cross-scene, cross-genre, and transnational conversation. TISH, to take just one example, has close connections to many other American schools of poetry like Black Mountain College and the San Francisco Renaissance. In other words, Vancouver has long been one of several Canadian cities that scholars have painted as sites of Canada-US transnational collaboration and poetic exchange (see, for example, the entry on Canadian poetry in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*). Consider, too, the explicit internationality of the now-famous UBC summer class of 1963 that we now discuss as the "Vancouver Poetry Conference," which encouraged transnational connection and collaboration. These and many other nodes of connection between Vancouver-based poetries and poetry in the US continue, and are now facilitated even more by the communicative and collaborative potentials of networked computing. Andrews himself does not feel a particular alignment with any school of poetry, figuring that digital poets share much in terms of medium, but vary greatly in terms of the uses of that medium. In the aforementioned correspondence, Andrews wrote to me: "I don't know that I'd use the term 'school of' to describe the sorts of groups I feel aligned with. For instance, my approach to digital poetry is programmerly, multi-and-inter-medial. Hypertext poetry/fiction has never really interested me" ("a few"). Here, Andrews' concerns recall Emerson's discussion of e-literary genres at the start of this paper. For Andrews, it is not a separation of digital poetry from hypertext, but rather different artists working in similar mediums to different ends. This perspective necessarily encourages treating each digital text as independent but in conversation, not unlike the conversational drifting and occasional overlap of the distinct units of "Seattle Drift" itself.

Because of this, we can also read the movement of "Seattle Drift" as mapping or visually representing Andrews' Vancouver-based poetic concerns that literally drift toward Seattle. The words move south and east and the term "drift" suggests a movement by water to present visually, rather than simply geographically, the work as heading toward Seattle. This visual implies the movement metaphorically rather than using geo-tagging or mapping, as digital meditations on geography have tended to do. In this way, "Seattle Drift" does not simply resist category and exegesis; it makes you as a reader feel very naughty for wanting these things at all. Working against these histories and categories, the "scene" from which "Seattle Drift" drifts thus connotes subversion in light of the mainstream, as in an underground "scene" that opposes or resists popularity.

The implicit critique here of poetry scenes, including ones defined by geographic—city or national—borders means that my own desire to read the work as emblematic of a genre called "Canadian electronic literature" is difficult and problematic. What, precisely, does it mean to read the nation in digital writing? Electronic literature is marked by the kind of transnational and international conversation exemplified by Andrews' movement from Vancouver to Seattle and back again. It is also frequently defined by the collaboration suggested by Niemi's involvement in rewriting the code, as well as the intertextual and interauthorial conversations that permeate *Vispo.com*. But, these elements are obviously not exclusive to the digital. Loss Pequeño Glazier writes in his groundbreaking *Digital Poetics* (2002), "poets are making poetry with the same focus on method, visual dynamics, and materiality; what has expanded are the materials with which one can work" (1). What Glazier suggests here is that the difference between digital poetics and the procedural, visual practices of contemporary poetries are of degree rather than kind.

The "scene" of the poem also draws on meanings of the term that suggest construction. The *OED* shows that "scene" has clear connotations of theatrical performance, including the subdivisions of a larger piece, but also the literal construction of the stage. With usage in English dating back as early as 1481, the word "scene" has an early meaning as "the whole area set aside for the dramatic action, including both this background structure and the proscenium . . . where the actors stood; the stage" ("scene, n."). The term also refers to "the view presented to the audience at any time during the action of a performance by means of the scenery, lighting, etc.," suggesting that what is important in its use is not simply how the scene is set, but that it is set with the intention of being viewed by an audience in a particular way, revealing only certain parts and leaving others within the purview of the actors or producers of the performance. Andrews' use of this term draws attention to the text's performance of its "poemness," stating the fact of its being a "poem" (however bad) in its first line. The theatrical connotations of "scene" also suggest that the reader who clicks the hyperlinks carries out the action of the poem as an actor in this performance rather than as a passive member of the audience.

"Scene" also necessarily refers to the material construction of that space. As the *OED* also notes, the term has a long history of use in the phrase "behind the scenes," which is of particular use to us in discussing "Seattle Drift." The *OED* explains "behind the scenes" as the space both figuratively and literally "[b]ehind the stage or the scenery of a theatre where the public is not usually admitted; out of sight of the audience" ("scene, n."). The fact that "Seattle

Drift" presents a "scene" from which it "drifts" reveals a performance of poetry that is constructed on a material level. This is especially important in the digital realm where text is frequently understood as ephemeral and immaterial, despite the work of media theorists like Emerson, Kittler, and many others to reveal the extent to which the ephemeral metaphors of cloud storage and unstable code are grounded in the (highly politicized) materiality of the technological. Technological material is *always* connected, as Kittler reminds us, with corporations, planned obsolescence, and detrimental international labour and environmental relations. Andrews invites his readers to look behind the scenes of "Seattle Drift," and to engage with his source code, which includes intimate notes like "This is the first DHTML piece I did" at its start, and a personal dedication ("inspired by Seattle's own California girl Anne, who knows who she is") as an aside. Andrews writes a considerable amount of discussion in the source code that would not be available to readers who do not look behind the scenes.

Like an introduction, footnote, or paratextual clue that guides the reading process, the code of "Seattle Drift" contains some explanatory notes, but refuses to direct interpretation. Andrews, for example, explains the div tags (tags that group together or contain a small part of HTML code) that govern the movement of the poem, writing that "Each of the div tags holds one word of the poem," and then concedes "OK it's a poem." Rather than enforcing or explaining a certain kind of reading, Andrews' reluctant "OK" in this aside suggests a concession to an external (reader, critic) voice who insists "Yes, this IS a poem despite its first two lines." Moreover, Andrews comments in this section about how the text is written in response to questions he was thinking about regarding poetry and the digital medium, but that it is designed to encourage discussion rather than make an argument. Connecting his commentary here on the digital medium in poetry to the questions posed by abstract visual art about representation, Andrews states in the code that "[b]oth prompt, rather than raise the questions directly," placing the onus again on the reader who must ask and answer these questions on their own. These intimate, conversational suggestions throughout the code reveal an authorial persona invested in questions and collaboration rather than answers. The author revealed in this behind-the-scenes space is tentative at best. In fact, the voice in the code doesn't even know what to call the space from which it speaks: "And this neath [*sic*] text, what is it?" Looking "behind the scenes" of "Seattle Drift" reveals a space where questions are prompted and readers are invited

to engage in the very same space where the authorship makes manifest its presence and its constructedness. This "neath text," this "behind the scenes," undergirds the ergodic engagement and poetic "drifting" of the work, and here we find the poem's most clearly authorial voice. The importance of the source code in this work makes it ergodic more than the clicking of the hyperlinks that supposedly "Do" the text. This poem, then, theorizes authorship of electronic literature as an ambiguous site of authorial power; "Seattle Drift" relegates these authorial intrusions to the "neath text" to lay bare the ways in which the ergodic invites active readerly engagement, but at the same time relies heavily on the author's construction and control of the digital space. The source code here is not "the text," but it is nonetheless central to our interpretations of that text.

I do not mean to suggest that "Seattle Drift" is codework in the proper sense. Codework is most clearly defined by critic and author of electronic literature John Cayley in "The Code Is Not the Text (Unless It Is the Text)." In this essay for the *electronic book review*, Cayley defines as codework any "literature which uses, addresses, and incorporates code: as underlying language-animating or language-generating programming, as a special type of language in itself, or as an intrinsic part of the new surface language or 'interface text' . . . of writing in networked and programmable media." While this continues to be the tried-and-true definition of codework, Mark Marino points out in "Critical Code Studies" that Cayley takes issue with unexecutable codework, of which Andrews' brief, personal asides hidden in his code are one tenuous example. Marino writes that "Cayley's chief complaint is that the analyzed 'code' in many of the celebrated codeworks exists merely on the surface of the work, output." Marino observes that if we take Cayley's understanding of unexecutable code as purely aesthetic, then we must also admit that these "surface depictions of coding elements are but partial representations, presenting a fraction of code's signifying force." Rather than viewing code as meaningful only insofar as it is functional, Marino proposes instead "that we no longer speak of the code as a text in metaphorical terms, but that we begin to analyze and explicate code as a text, as a sign system with its own rhetoric, as verbal communication that possesses significance in excess of its functional utility." "Seattle Drift" is not codework, and Andrews' hidden asides do not interfere with the execution of the code, but they do constitute a "neath text," a secondary code written for human readers rather than machines that is only available to the reader who intervenes in the work, thus evoking Marino's call to read the source code of electronic

literature because it moves us beyond "surface depictions of coding elements" and into the close reading of surface and code as intrinsically linked.

Thus, if we are to follow Marino, we must consider these authorial intrusions in the source code as "unexecutable" by machines, but encouraging new and more intrusive readings by human readers. These brief glimpses into the authorship at varying points in time reveal the importance of the author in the digital poetic text, making that authorship one node in the production and reception of this work. In various versions of the work, from *Vispo*'s archive to *Cauldron & Net*'s early publication, the intrusions of the authorial voice into the source code change. Flores indicates, too, that there were shifts in these authorial commentaries in the code from the earlier Javascript versions to the updated DHTML and with the help of Niemi. So, unlike poetics essays, introductions, or other paratextual clues that use the authorial voice to guide interpretation of experimental poetry—that would otherwise be opaque or illegible without these supposed skeleton keys—Andrews' intrusions into the code reveal an authorial avatar rather than an authoritative, guiding voice. These "lines intended for humans" reveal the limitations of the authorial self in expression, but they also reveal the limitations of computing, an issue that Andrews speaks of often. By hiding these "Easter egg"-style messages in the code of this work, Andrews points out how often we as readers are seduced by the colours and movement of digital writing and image, and how little the average reader notices, cares, or understands the workings of the back end.

For Andrews, recognition of the limitations of computing is important for the new media artist. In a Vancouver interview with David "Jhave" Johnston, Andrews insists that careful thought about the affordances and the limitations of creative computing is "useful for digital artists to be cognizant of because sometimes I think the horizons for digital artists aren't broad enough" ("Jim Andrews"). Though the video was posted in 2013, Andrews' comments still ring true about the tendencies of poetic production for traditional print and digital media, where for the most part writers treat the "computer as a glorified typewriter," as Andrews says in the same interview. One of the great powers of the kinetic is to present, in Andrews' own words, "programmed thought as art." And to consider not (or not only) human thought, but the potentials of "machine thought" as well. The algorithmic drifting of the words and punctuation marks in "Seattle Drift" signifies the work done in the late 1990s to encourage the use of computing in arts as more than just word processing.

While we cannot rightfully classify Andrews' work in "Seattle Drift" as hacker, in its use of the ergodic to reveal the constructedness of the poem and its classification in genre or geography, it is clear that the work is operating in and informed by the hacker and net-art culture of the mid- to late 1990s. As Rob Schoenbeck writes in the entry on "Seattle Drift" for the Electronic Literature Organization's *Electronic Literature Directory,* Andrews' kinetic poem "has the experimental, minimalist quality that characterizes much of mid-90s net art, exploring the role of particular code functions in the construction of Web aesthetics while also playing with the code's distance from (and closeness to) the surface of the Web browser." Demonstrating, then, new levels of affiliation with 1990s net art, ASCII art, early codework, and hacker culture, the deceptively simplistic aesthetic of "Seattle Drift" reminds its readers of the slippery, tenuous, drifting nature of all of these signifiers, exemplifying the transnationality, genre- and border-blurring, and conversational elements of Vancouver's poetry scene throughout the last fifty years, and suggesting not an affiliation with any one poetry scene but rather a diverse and rhizomatic connection to multiple scenes, multiple places, and multiple poetic conversations. The diffuse nature of "Seattle Drift" reminds us at once of the futility of national literatures in an age of digital writing, and the potential usefulness of a national literature that knows that it is always already multiple.

NOTES

1 "Ergodic" is the term electronic literature scholars use to describe a work that requires substantive engagement on the part of the user/reader for the work to function. The term was adapted by Espen Aarseth in *Cybertext* (1997) from physics scholarship. In Aarseth's words, the ergodic is any work of transmedial or born-digital literary media that requires "nontrivial effort . . . to allow the reader to traverse the text" (1).

2 In this essay, I use the term "reader" to describe the audience of the works in question. Obviously, ergodic reader engagement in digital writing complicates the passive connotations of the term "reader," and some digital humanities scholars have opted for the term "user" instead, or the clunky combination of "reader/user." For my purposes, I want to situate electronic literary and digital poetic practice in terms of a literary tradition and poetic community, so I use the term "reader" to make clear the relationship between audience and text as well as the shift towards the ergodic, interactivity, and engagement.

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