

 **Cameron Barrows**

Independent scholar

HTML Texts and the Dawn of Asemic Digital Literature: Exploring Dennis Cooper's Ideas

ABSTRACT

Dennis Cooper's HTML texts which use Graphic Interchange Format (GIFs) instead of traditional glyph-based text, exhibit the extremities of our times, both thematically and structurally, through the radical temporality of the GIFs. The digital geometry of these texts is constructed through the juxtaposition of GIFs. This has allowed Cooper to construct and explore a new pictorial language predicated upon metamorphosis, flow, and flux. Cooper's HTML texts highlight the motifs of human fallibility, contingency, and finitude, culminating in a rejection of the rationalist and idealist conceptions of what a novel is. Focusing on the structural and hermeneutical aspects of the HTML texts, rather than the ephemeral content of the GIFs themselves, allows for the proposition of a new digital hermeneutics and skepticism necessary for literary exegesis in our increasing digital world. Through an examination of the theoretical implications of Cooper's HTML texts, one can trace the future frontiers of digital literature and its necessary hermeneutics.

Keywords: HTML texts, GIFs, Dennis Cooper, digital artefact, asemic digital literature.

“Our plastic possibilities are actually never-ending.”
 (Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident* 10)

INTRODUCTION

The epochal novelty of digital technologies and their insidious growth into the everyday practices of our lives has created new technological artistic productions. These conditions for neoteric artistic practices and avant-garde digital aesthetics are altering our ideas of what is sublime or an artistic object, much in the way that Dadaism did one hundred years ago. Dennis Cooper’s HTML texts, which use Graphic Interchange Format (GIFs) instead of traditional glyph-based text, exhibit the role of extremities in our times both thematically and structurally. This is accomplished through the radical temporality of GIFs, i.e. a process of continuous becoming and deforming, constructing an aesthetic of flux highlighted by the aseptic nature of these texts.

Through an analysis of the theoretical implications of Dennis Cooper’s HTML novels and short stories, I will examine the structural and hermeneutical possibilities presented in the HTML texts, through GIFs, as well as tracing the history of the wordless novel which culminates in Cooper’s radical digital work and its possible future within the burgeoning market of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs). This focus upon the structural and hermeneutical aspects of the HTML texts rather than the content of the GIFs themselves is necessary as the translation from GIF to essay diminishes their impact, allowing only for the conveying of a deformed and truncated text. Cooper’s HTML texts are *sui generis* in the realm of digital literature, and this places Cooper as not only an incredibly unique author of the digital literary avant-garde, but also a leading theorist in his commentary upon his own work. In replacing glyphs with GIFs, Cooper usurps the traditional structure of the novel and short story within digital literary forms, and his HTML texts are indicative of the new frontiers of digital literatures.

For Cooper, GIFs exist as found fragments or artefacts of digital life. Cooper’s HTML texts force us to consider the enigmatic relationship between figure and writing, the plastic and graphic. The queer, plastic qualities of the HTML texts are not in their content, but rather in their position in relation to both traditional literary formats and digital texts. This phantasmal amalgamation of GIFs Cooper constructs as texts expands our notion of digital literature by providing an orientation of the trajectory that twenty-first-century literature may take. Cooper himself writes of this digital hermeneutics in his latest novel *I Wished*: “It’s a form

of operatic laziness about the rules of composition dating back to when the Internet freed every word that has erected or been tortured over time into a jewel-like, pleading noise . . ." (19). This "freeing" is applicable to the GIFs used to compose his HTML texts. By ordering the individual GIFs, Cooper effaces their original contextualization and constructs a new intertextual digital space for his HTML novels and short stories.

Cooper's HTML texts extend the tradition of found objects as art, elevating it to the digital, and are reminiscent of the methods of collage developed by Kurt Schwitters in his Merz-pictures. The HTML texts may also be seen as an extension of the wordless novels of Frans Masereel, which are composed of black and white woodcuts in an Art Deco and German Expressionist style. Also drawing from this tradition is Otto Nüchel's wordless novel *Schicksal*, and the six wood-engraving wordless novels of Lynd Ward influenced by Masereel. In replacing glyphs and images with GIFs, Cooper constructs a new digital extreme of literature and its accompanying hermeneutics, extending the tradition of subverting conventional rhetoric. Diarmuid Hester writes in *Wrong: A Critical Biography of Dennis Cooper* that:

Cooper's HTML books may be aligned with the popular cultures of the web, but they're also curiously reminiscent of the work of the twentieth-century avant-garde. As assemblages of found GIFs, we might consider them as digital counterparts to Robert Rauschenberg's combines or Joseph Cornell's shadow boxes, which similarly juxtaposed salvaged objects in unique and complex arrangements. (253)

Hester goes on to suggest that they also follow in the tradition of early cinematic mediums writing, as "[i]n terms of their aesthetic, they recall zoetropes or kinetoscopes, which similarly featured short, silent, looping sequences of images that conveyed the impression of movement" (249). Cooper's HTML texts expand this aseptic tradition into the digital age. His digital works engage in radical interdiscursivity through the repetitive nature of the GIFs, altering the way one reads and experiences literature.

These precursors to aseptic digital texts and the avant-garde nature of these texts allow us to place Cooper's HTML texts in a tradition that both expands our theory and definition of the novel while at the same time disrupting rhetoric and the cultural, political, and, in the case of the HTML texts, economic aspects of traditional publishing and literature. The implications of these radical changes are far reaching. First, the free nature of the HTML novels and short stories places them outside the traditional economic structures of the publishing industry, allowing these texts to be accessed by anyone. This grants readers access at a global scale outside the

sphere of global capitalism. This aspect of digital works, not just literature, is crucial to understanding the potential that such open-access digital spaces have and their ability to confront and challenge the insidious monopolization of digital spaces, especially queer ones. Sadeq Rahimi comments upon this phenomenon of digital corporate encroachment suggesting “[that] our task is to grow the social spaces, the spaces that can flourish outside digital platforms formatted and owned by capitalist corporations and the military-art-complex” (92). Second, by replacing glyphs with GIFs, Cooper as both artist and theorist opens a myriad of possibilities for the future confluence of literature and our digital world, especially the phenomenology of reading digital texts and the structural implications of the HTML novels and short stories. With the proposed development of the metaverse, the proliferation of smart devices, and the further integration of our lives into the digital realm, the genres and semiotic forms of literature will evolve and expand, constructing new literary horizons.

HTML TEXTS AND RADICAL TEMPORALITY

The structure of the HTML texts is pseudo-ergodic. As the readers scroll through the text, they may pause at any moment constructing a new juxtaposition between GIFs. Espen J. Aarseth expands on this sentiment writing that “[i]t is possible to explore, get lost, and discover secret paths in these texts, not metaphorically, but through the topological structures of the textual machinery” (4). Even though they are not, strictly speaking, ergodic texts, their very topography compels the reader to be active in the construction of meaning. In his newest novel *I Wished*, Cooper comments on the topographical aspect of his writing style and his creative method stating,

What the writing did was draw a stylized map to the general location where my wishes were impregnating. I tried to make the maps clever, funny, disturbing, and erotic so the things I wrote about would seem as scary or exciting to envision as they’d been to pen, sort of like the rosy illustrations with which rides are represented in the folded maps they hand you at the entrances of amusement parks. (97)

This relationship between structure and desire, “draw[ing] a stylized map to the general location where my wishes were impregnating” is a motif found throughout Cooper’s oeuvre.

This mapping of desire through text, especially GIFs, allows for the composition of literature with moving, intersecting fragments that are drawn from the ephemera of our digital lives. Through GIFs Cooper

deconstructs the very topography of the novel or short story. Catherine Malabou comments further upon this deconstruction and alteration of digital spaces and the relationship between the topographical and writing in the foreword to *Deconstruction Machines: Writing in the Age of Cyberwar*:

This slippage occurs at a very specific place in the grammatology between topography and topology, developing the spatial logic of deconstruction: The replacement of topology with topography suggests a move from topos, meaning “place,” as logos to topos as writing and grapheme. But what is at stake between topology and topography cannot simply be the difference between logos and writing. . . . This slippage cannot simply be discovered or put into motion by deconstruction; rather, it defines a difference within deconstruction itself. It is on the shifting grounds of this multiplication of spaces that we can understand the deconstruction of the opposition between text and program that Joque develops. If space is multiple and unstable, any topological cut internal to writing is always threatened by topography and the plasticity of spatiality. It becomes impossible to maintain a distinction between text and program, between a deconstructable writing and a writing so exact that it offers nothing to be deconstructed. The connections and proximities of computer code expose it to a deconstruction that cannot be held within the bounds of philosophy or literature. (x–xi)

HTML texts themselves blur this distinction and exist on two digital planes. One, the actual HTML code behind the GIFs that functions as a digital scaffolding, and two, the GIFs themselves and the interaction between them and the reader. The demarcation between code and literature is becoming further blurred as digital works and literature expand and flourish in the twenty-first century.

This effacement between HTML codes and HTML texts is not just one that is composed of GIFs and the other code, but the very movement of the GIFs themselves. Hampus Hagman suggests that movement within GIFs functions as an “attempt to make movement strange again, to assert a power of movement all its own, liberated from the responsibility of making it mean and carry out narrative goals.” This exaltation of movement is solidified in GIFs. It grants them a certain anti-objective nature that requires multiple interpretations. Therefore, the HTML text “[s]urprises the reader, rejects a final interpretation, and challenges the reader to find their own. The HTML novel never finishes saying what it has to say. That is, it can be read again and again, providing a multitude of interpretations and meanings, each equally valid” (Barrows 8). Hagman offers a counterpoint to the argument that one may find a multitude of plots, characters and ultimately meanings in GIFs or a GIF-based text, stating that “the animated gifs that are encountered all

over the internet very seldom tell a story: on the contrary, they seize hold of those purely excessive moments that carry little to no narrative purpose.” This is remedied by Cooper through his careful collation and arranging of GIFs, thus turning digital scraps into unique avant-garde literature.

The GIFs of today are digital abstractions of the new digital human spirit. Cooper’s digital texts liberate the GIFs as a mere looped image through both their juxtaposition and the interaction between reader and text. The repetitive nature of GIFs and the way Cooper arranges them produces a syncretic tableau that prods the reader into constructing their own subjective meanings. The constant movement of the text itself alters the way one reads: “The phenomenology of [reading] the HTML novel is radically different from analog texts. One cannot hold it as one would a physical book . . . One no longer turns pages, one scrolls. The texture is not that of paper, but of plastic and glass. Pages no longer rustle, but are static. The very texturology of reading has become altered” (Barrows 7). The asemic nature of the text highlights this new phenomenology of digital reading and continues to blur the boundaries between literature and programming languages. Justin Joque writes:

What is at stake is not only the boundary between control and randomness but the possibility of the system itself as an identifiable and signifying entity. Thus even the differentiation between any system, such as the program and literature, becomes impossible, but at the same time, this impossibility creates the condition for the possibility of each. (185–86)

These new possibilities lie not only in the creation of avant-garde digital texts but also in how we read them. Cooper brings our attention to this new form of digital reading through the use of GIFs and the very action of scrolling.

The HTML texts are very successful in blurring this distinction. Cooper usurps the traditional novelistic structure and constructs new forms through the repetition of tropes and movements. The GIFs of movement are particularly focused on falling, crashing, and breakage. These motifs allow the reader to glean meaning from the pictorial language of the ordered GIFs themselves. Hester comments on the synthesis between the reading experience and the asemic nature of texts, suggesting that “Cooper is evidently still interested in bringing about an all-over reading experience where the reader’s attention is drawn away from the pursuit of a narrative to what’s happening on the surface of the text. The HTML novels seem highly successful in this regard” (252). In reading the HTML texts, a feedback loop is produced between reader and text with the reader determining if there are any protagonists, plots, or meanings.

This relationship between reader and GIF is not interactive, but imaginative in interpretation. The GIFs and their order cannot be altered by the reader; how the story is told may not be changed. This places the hermeneutics of such a text outside of what is traditionally considered ergodic literature, and the HTML novels and short stories themselves become constellations of fragments, states, and visual puzzles. The digital artefacts that Cooper writes with cannot be separated from the nature of the Internet as a whole, as they have been found, reordered, and then published within this space. This pseudo-ergodic approach is essential to understanding these texts and their place within digital literature as well as their accompanying hermeneutics. As I have argued elsewhere,

Cooper's HTML novels generate new productions of subjectivity through their structure and style. The deconstruction of plot and character and the insistence upon tropes, metaphors, and the repetition of movements define the aesthetics of the novels. Cooper's return to the same images, phrases, and movements demonstrate the aesthetic power of repetition. The repetition of images and actions changes their implications. As one watches the GIFs of the novel repeat themselves endlessly, their meaning becomes altered. (7)

Through this endless repetition the text unfolds itself, displaying new possibilities within each subsequent reading. The GIFs as looping tablets of time ultimately alter the relationship between literature and temporality, and as the twenty-first century progresses this will only become more apparent regarding digital literature and its subsequent hermeneutics.

Cooper's HTML novels and the GIFs that they are composed of cannot be separated from the temporal aspects of reading and the archiving of not just digital literature but in this case the very content of the novels themselves. As temporal relations become further predicated upon the Internet, machine learning, and digital networks in the twenty-first century and beyond, our methods of examining time and its relation to (digital) entities and artefacts must change as well. Digital archives have the potential to generate new narratives and alternative relations to time and space, radically impacting upon the ways in which we read.

Cooper's method of writing these novels and short stories is reminiscent of the archiving of digital data by government intelligence agencies (e.g., PRISM, ECHELON) and the use of cookies for predicative individual advertisements by multinational corporations. Cooper found all the GIFs used in the novels and short stories by simple keyword searches often focused on a certain motif of motion. None of the GIFs were created by Cooper but merely collected by him and collated into their present

form. In an interview Cooper describes his method as both writing and sculpting, stating:

I was making these posts that were tall stacks of GIFs organized along a thematic. I started to realize that really interesting things were happening between the GIFs—rhythmic, poetic, narrative, associative things. So I started experimenting with organizing them in a deliberate way, and then dividing them into groupings. At one point, I realized that I was trying to write fiction using them as the equivalents of sentences, phrases, paragraphs, and that I was able to do that using pretty much the exact same compositional methods I've used with my written fiction. And so I wound up writing the first GIF novel, *Zac's Haunted House*. I take the GIF fiction as seriously as I do my written fiction. I consider *Zac's Haunted House* and the new GIF novel, *Zac's Freight Elevator* to be my 10th and 11th novels. And I think the second book of short GIF works, *Zac's Control Panel*, is easily one of the best things I've ever written. (Cooper, "Dennis Cooper on Writing as Sculpture")

186

Cooper's method captures the aesthetic of the digital archive through his recycling of GIFs. His HTML texts actualize the banal temporality of the digital by mirroring the everydayness of our collective digital archives.

The use of found GIFs creates a hauntological digital text and this is reflected in the title of the first HTML novel, *Zac's Haunted House*. The cultural nostalgia depicted in many of the GIFs such as old cartoons, black and white television clips, and retro video games invokes a hypnagogic cultural memory. Cooper's HTML texts capture the pervasive contemporary cultural movement of retromania. The hypnagogic aspect of these texts cannot be divorced from the very temporality of the GIFs themselves. David Bering-Porter writes on the temporality of GIFs, suggesting that their very nature is indicative of late-stage capitalism and liberal democracy. He writes: "The looped and looping temporality of the gif and the cinemagraph reveals something important about the cultural logic of our age. This kind of temporality is without beginnings or endings but preserves and tends to the present moment—it is a system of time that is antithetical to real change" (190). The looping of the GIF reduces the pluralism of the GIFS to a monism. Through the repetition of action, one arrives at a single aesthetic and rhetorical point that everything blends into everything. This reflects Deleuze and Guattari's dictum, "pluralism=monism" (20). For Cooper, the GIFs and the HTML texts operate as an always-differentiating process, one that is always looping, re-looping, existing in a constant state of repetition.

These digital archives become specters of the hauntological, modifying the digital space into both a graveyard and as an immense digital library

storing the banal artefacts of our everyday digital existences. The vastness of these archives is almost inconceivable and the nature of them is now rooted in machine learning and AI. Rahimi suggests that these new digital spheres mirror our digital ontologies:

The emergent cyber worlds of internet and virtual reality, new forms of power relations depending less on information than on simulacra: big data sets mined by machine learning algorithms, accelerated visual and sonic impressions, deep fakes in swarming circulation, memes that become data attractors and aggregators (collecting sentiments), networks (and data storage) hosting ghosts and revenants and doubles or multiples of ourselves, beyond explainability, but knowing (nudging, seducing, enticing) ourselves better than we ourselves ever can, hidden in plain sight but coded, embedded, encrypted, and flying by in signaling beyond the capacities of human senses. (87)

These digital archives “[know] ourselves better than we ourselves ever can” because they are composed of our mostly ordinary writings, artefacts that were never meant to exist in perpetuity. E-mails, tweets, old accounts, videos, GIFs, memes, out of date information all saved, fill our digital landscapes like air, changing the value and criterion of what it means to archive an artefact in the network age. The increasingly automated collection of big data will irreversibly change how we define comprehension, hermeneutics, and meaning. These developments will change the future methodologies of academia as a whole and will revolutionize our economic, environmental, and social systems for better or worse. Regarding the analysis of digital literature, these effects are already happening with a proliferation in studies of digital arts and literature, and the interdisciplinary analysis of digital aesthetics, ethics, and politics.

Cooper’s HTML novels and short stories may be understood as a way for literature to liberate these insidious methods by turning surveillance into art. These novels and short stories already exist in an alternative economy of exchange by allowing anyone to access them for free, and reflecting the autonomous nature of the GIFs they are composed with. Graig Uhlin comments on the role of GIFs as “illustrative examples of an alternative economy of exchange enabled by digital technologies, namely the sharing economy of the internet” (518). This sharing economy will continue to grow and transform digital commerce in the twenty-first century. It will lead to new notions and definitions of copyright and digital ownership, especially with the proliferation of blockchain technology. As the world becomes further digitized and more and more human activity is computerized, logged, and ultimately preserved, the spirit of the information age is progressively transforming from anonymous privacy to a global digital panopticon. Justin

Joque comments on these phenomena and their dangers, stating that “the increasing digitization of information increasingly exposes the archive to a systemwide catastrophe and destabilization from within” (74). Cooper’s HTML novels and short stories offer a glimpse of the liberating aspect of the digital human spirit in turning the artefacts of vast digital archives into art, reclaiming and producing new meanings and styles. As both author and theorist Cooper expands what constitutes digital literature as well as the accompanying hermeneutics.

CYBER AWAKENING: THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL LITERATURE

188

The digital artefacts that Cooper writes with cannot be separated from the nature of the Internet as a whole, as they have been found, reordered, and then published within this space. The role the Internet plays in these texts is paramount, and “[t]he influence of the Internet upon the written word is irreversible and has ushered in paradigmatic change. The relations between writing and the word, and the word to the event have become obfuscated in our digital age” (Barrows 2). This process of continuous formation is integral to the temporal nature of GIFs, and with their expanding cultural prominence they are forever altering the new spaces of digital rhetoric, literature, and discourse.

As digital literature blossoms in the twenty-first century, it faces many vulnerabilities due to the incessant evolution of both current and new programming languages, applications, and web browsers. The potential phasing out of HTML or other programming languages, and the threat of new web applications that do not support HTML or other formats, are risks to digital art and literature. Due to the advancement of technologies, this is a threat to digital literature and may place the future of these works in peril, highlighting the need for an expansion of spaces for digital preservation. Preventative measures should be imposed to ensure digital literary works do not go the way of silent films, most of which have perished.

The future of works like Dennis Cooper’s HTML texts may be a Non-Fungible Token (NFT) format in which digital texts will become akin to Medieval chained books, which contain enormous value through their uniqueness. Though the owner of an NFT may share and copy the underwriting digital files, this is not obligatory. Though they do not own the copyright, they would still be able to hoard digital literature through avaricious means. HTML novels and future digital literature may also go the way of the *Cremaster Cycle* created by Matthew Barney, particularly in emulating its exclusivity and its avant-garde and pseudo-asemic nature.

Cooper's HTML texts reflect new modes of global literature, mirroring the invisible digital and informational networks and exchanges that make up our contemporary digital lifeworld. The HTML text symbolizes and reflects the vastness of the Internet, reveling in a nearly infinite number of digital artefacts and possibilities of recycling them into art.

Cooper himself may be seen as both author and theorist in his novel approach to digital literature. He has not only created completely unique digital texts, but also provided the inputs for a new hermeneutics of digital literature. By using GIFs instead of glyphs, Cooper develops a digital constellation that is "[n]ot a language of the desiring exchange of messages or objects that are transmitted in a social contract of communication and desire beyond want, but a language of want, of the fear that edges up to it and runs along its edges" (Kristeva 38). This new digital language of want and desire expressed through GIFs allows for the exploration of the relationship between humans and liminal digital artefacts, especially those that have been forgotten and lie gathering proverbial dust in the archives of our digital worlds. Kristeva continues that upon "[c]lose inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted, no matter what its sociohistorical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject" (207). Cooper explores both as author and theorist this "fragile border" of digital objects and their relationship to each other and human identities. He exposes the liminal aspect of digital objects and their ephemeral connection to our everyday lived experiences, specifically the affective nature of digital temporality.

The juxtaposition of the GIFs causes them to repel and attract each other at the same time, creating rhythms of continuity and discontinuity. This syncopation of breakages lends an extreme aesthetic to the work and, by reveling in bodily forms and movements, grants the HTML texts an abject quality. Julia Kristeva describes the role of the author of the abject as "[a] divisor of territories, languages, works, the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines—for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject—constantly questions his solidity and impel him to start afresh" (8). The cyclical temporality of the GIF is also reflected in the author of the abject through the constant questioning of temporality exhibited in the HTML texts. In his quest to dissect both the corporeal body and the traditional body of the novel, Cooper has imbued the human body as a vessel, a material *tabula rasa*, one that is essentially broken and fragmented. In the HTML texts as well as his other works, Cooper suggests that we must fill this body and plug the holes and gaps. For Cooper, the corporeal and symbolic body becomes a metaphor for the masses as seen through the eyes of scientific rationalism and global capitalism.

This notion of the body as metaphor pervades Cooper's oeuvre, but it is elevated in the HTML novels and short stories by using GIFs which highlight its explicit nature through action. By using the pictorial language of GIFs arranged by Cooper, these texts immerse the reader/viewer in the abject. The subjective nature of plot, character and meaning allows the reader or viewer to construct a multitude of readings each unique in their own truthfulness. Commenting upon Cooper's earlier novels, Earl Jackson Jr. suggests that "Cooper's texts are one such critique of the 'truth of spectacle.' In exposing that spectacle as the 'visible negation of life,' Cooper also lays the groundwork for reconceiving representation as a concrete cultural elaboration of the death drive" (190). This "critique of the 'truth of spectacle'" is also evident in his HTML works. Through the interplay of GIFs Cooper as both author and theorist critiques the spectacle of the digital and explores the liminal nature of digital texts and spaces by deconstructing the digital archive and creating a new digital visual space that functions through the pictorial language of GIFs.

Cooper's HTML novels and short stories expose how GIFS may function as a modification of the temporality of the digital. This change in narrative, space, and time is indicative of the new forms of digital literature and the extremity of its potential impact upon society. The radical structural change that is occurring due to the digitalizing of our everyday life practices will sculpt literary genres, forms, and content in unfathomable ways. This mirrors Martin Heidegger's comments on the typewriter in his *Parmenides* lectures as a machine that augments our ontology. He states: "The typewriter is a signless cloud (ἀτέκμαρτα νέφος), i.e. a withdrawing concealment in the midst of its very obtrusiveness, and through it the relation of Being to man is transformed" (85). The growth of the Internet has likewise transformed humanity's relationship with Being, writing, and literature. Don Ihde comments on this transformation of both writing and literature suggesting "[that] a still more dramatic change is currently happening with the contemporary and much more complex context of . . . humans, computers, and the wider connections of the Internet . . . With word processing, associated with Internet capabilities, writing is much more apparent as action within a system" (98). Cooper's HTML texts have furthered this connection between the Internet and writing, ushering in a paradigmatic shift and spawning new forms of literature.

With the expansion of the Internet into all spheres of our everyday lives, the threat of a real digital panopticon comes closer to fruition. The use of digital spaces as a simulacrum of human experiences and interactions allows for the total archiving of human behavior, thus constructing algorithms and machine learning software that can mimic human thought

(e.g., Google's LaMDA, ChatGPT) influencing the masses and further entrenching the commodification of everything. Cooper's HTML texts resist this digital maw of commodification through their free access and in their very structure and content. By using the artefacts of our everyday digital lives Cooper has constructed digital mosaics that force us to question: what constitutes a novel or short story? What is digital literature? And, ultimately, where does meaning lie in the nearly infinite vastness of an Internet populated by the proliferations of memes, GIFs, and emojis? These future aseptic digital texts may usher in an age of post-literacy with the formation of a universal pictorial language that operates alongside our current glyph-based ones. As digital literature continues to grow and expand in the twenty-first century these questions of aesthetics, structural forms, and hermeneutics will create new modalities of scholarship and analysis. These new fields will allow for a better examination of digital works and their intersection with our everyday digital lives. With the future expansion of digital spaces, the construction of digital metaverses, and the growth of smart technologies and machine learning, the role and forms of literature will irrevocably change. The way we write and produce literature will forever be altered by the integration of the Internet into our aesthetics, politics, and ethics.

Dedicated to Georgia Cate Byler.

WORKS CITED

- Aarseth, Espen J. *Cybertext—Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.
- Barrows, Cameron. "The Construction of a Queer Rhizomatic Hermeneutics through an Exploration of Dennis Cooper's HTML Novels." *Orbis Litterarum*, 2019, pp. 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12221>
- Bering-Porter, David. "The Automaton in All of Us: GIFs, Cinemagraphs and the Films of Martin Arnold." *Moving Image Review & Art Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2014, pp. 179–92. https://doi.org/10.1386/miraj.3.2.178_1
- Cooper, Dennis. "Dennis Cooper on Writing as Sculpture." Interview by Brandon Stosuy. *Creative Independent*, 18 Oct. 2016, <https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/dennis-cooper-on-writing-as-sculpture/>, accessed 12 Sept. 2022.
- Cooper, Dennis. *I Wished*. Soho, 2021.
- Cooper, Dennis. *Zac's Haunted House*. *Kiddiepunk*, 2015, <http://www.kiddiepunk.com/zacshauntedhouse/>, accessed 12 Sept. 2022. HTML novel.

- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi, U of Minnesota P, 1987.
- Hagman, Hampus. "The Digital Gesture: Rediscovering Cinematic Movement through Gifs." *Refractory*, 29 Dec. 2012, <https://refractoryjournal.net/hagman/>, accessed 12 Sept. 2022.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Parmenides*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer, Indiana UP, 1999.
- Hester, Diarmuid. *Wrong: A Critical Biography of Dennis Cooper*. U of Iowa P, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv10crdbz>
- Ihde, Don. *Bodies in Technology*. U of Minnesota P, 2002.
- Jackson Jr., Earl. *Strategies of Deviance: Studies in Gay Male Representation*. Indiana UP, 1995.
- Joque, Justin. *Deconstruction Machines: Writing in the Age of Cyberwar*. U of Minnesota P, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctt20vxpw5>
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1982.
- Malabou, Catherine. Foreword. *Deconstruction Machines: Writing in the Age of Cyberwar*, by Justin Joque, U of Minnesota P, 2018, pp. vii–xiv.
- Malabou, Catherine. *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*. Translated by Carolyn Shread, Wiley, 2012.
- Rahimi, Sadeq. *The Hauntology of Everyday Life*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78992-3>
- Uhlen, Graig. "Playing in the Gif(t) Economy." *Games and Culture*, vol. 9, no. 6, 2014, pp. 517–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412014549805>

Cameron Barrows is an independent scholar interested in the interrelationship between aesthetics, hermeneutics, and the history of ideas across mediums. Previous publications include: "Utopia and Biopolitics: The Need for an Ethics in Biotechnology" in *Utopia and Biopolitics*, edited by Patricia Stapleton and Andrew Beyers; "The Mystical and the Beautiful: The Construction off Plotinian Aesthetics of Film" in *Plotinus and the Moving Image*; "The Construction of a Queer Rhizomatic Hermeneutics Through an Exploration of Dennis Cooper's HTML Novels" in *Orbis Litterarum*; "Contra Torrentem: Leo Perutz's *By Night Under the Stone Bridge* and Central European Fantasy" is forthcoming in *Jewish Fantasy Worldwide: Trends in Speculative Stories from Australia to Chile*, edited by Valerie Frankel, to be released in 2023. He currently resides in Warsaw.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1507-8719>

cameronbarrows19@gmail.com