Examining Paratextual Theory and its Applications in Digital Culture

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A volume in the Advances in Human and Social Aspects of Technology (AHSAT) Book Series

Information Science REFERENCE
An Imprint of IGI Global

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Published in the United States of America by
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)
701 E. Chocolate Avenue
Hershey PA 17033
Tel: 717-533-8845
Fax: 717-533-8661
E-mail: cust@igi-global.com
Web site: http://www.igi-global.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Examining paratextual theory and its applications in digital culture / Nadine Desrochers and Daniel Apollon, editors.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4666-6002-1 (hardcover) -- ISBN 978-1-4666-6003-8 (ebook) -- ISBN 978-1-4666-6005-2 (print & perpetual access) 1. Content analysis (Communication) 2. Digital media. 3. Paratext. 4. Authorship. 5. Genette, Gérard, 1930---Influence. I. Desrochers, Nadine, 1971- editor of compilation. II. Apollon, Daniel, 1951- editor of compilation.
P93.E93 2014
401'.4--dc23

2014007795

This book is published in the IGI Global book series Advances in Human and Social Aspects of Technology (AHSAT) (ISSN: 2328-1316; eISSN: 2328-1324)

British Cataloguing in Publication Data
A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book is new, previously-unpublished material. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher.

For electronic access to this publication, please contact: eresources@igi-global.com.

Chapter 9
Bridging *The Unknown*: An Interdisciplinary Case Study of Paratext in Electronic Literature

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a dual perspective on the paratextual apparatus of a work of electronic literature, The Unknown: The Original Great American Hypertext Novel *by William Gillespie, Scott Rettberg, Dirk Stratton, and Frank Marquardt. Approaches from literature studies and information science are combined to offer qualitative content analyses and close readings of the table of contents, titular apparatus, comments hidden in the source code, and other paratextual elements, in relation to the narrative. Findings indicate that the work's paratextual content presents inconsistencies and contradictions, both in terms of the use of the paratextual structure and of the information conveyed. The paratextual elements are analyzed through the lens of Gérard Genette's theory, as outlined in* Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, in order to gauge their role and efficiency as identifiers, organizational components, and information providers, as well as their literary effect. The value of the theory as an interdisciplinary tool is also discussed.*

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the e-book format, which emulates the codex, electronic literature tends to be designed by authors for the specific context of networked media and often integrates sound, graphics, and opportunities for interaction. The labels used to designate works of this nature include "digital literature" (Bouchardon, 2011; Rustad, 2011; Simanowski, 2010), "cybertext" (Aarseth, 1997; Eskelinen, 2012), "net literature" (Gendolla & Schäfer, 2007, 2010), "writing in networked and programmable media" (Cayley, 2007; Schäfer & Gendolla, 2010), "literature in programmable media" (Howe & Soderman, 2009), and, of course, "electronic literature" (Hayles, 2007,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6002-1.ch009

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2008; Rettberg, 2012), a term popularized by the Electronic Literature Organization. Hayles (2007) has called electronic literature a "'hopeful monster' (as geneticists call adaptive mutations) composed of parts taken from diverse traditions that may not always fit neatly together," noting that it is "informed by the powerhouses of contemporary culture such as computer games, films, animations, digital arts, graphic design, and electronic visual culture."

Although there are a few commercial publishers in the field, works of electronic literature are generally freely accessible on the Web as self-publications and may be viewed online through a multiplicity of access points, including links provided by search engines or other sites. These new forms of presentation are part of how "electronic literature tests the boundaries of the literary and challenges us to re-think our assumptions of what literature can do and be" (Hayles, 2007). They also create new and original "thresholds," to borrow the term from French theorist Gérard Genette.

Genette theorized the concept of paratext, a series of elements ranging from cover pages to prefaces and notes that envelop the narrative in order to form the book and present the text to the reader (Genette, 1997b, p. 1). Genette's theory was deeply rooted in traditional book culture, and while some paratextual elements were perceived as being dictated by the constraints of the publishing realm, others were presented as more personal to the author and publisher. In electronic literature, seemingly, there are no firm paratextual policies or editorial practices; one can therefore speak of author-specific and work-specific paratext, designed by individuals or collectives for a given context. That being said, Web-specific paratextual elements are a vital part of hypertextual works, particularly if we posit that the Web's paratextuality manifests itself, specifically, in the source code of pages written in HyperText Markup Language (HTML). While some Web-specific paratextual features are freely assigned, other features are default requirements, at times generated automatically.

Co-winner of the 1998 trAce/Alt-X International Hypertext Competition, *The Unknown: The Great American Hypertext Novel* was written collaboratively by William Gillespie, Scott Rettberg, Dirk Stratton, and Frank Marquardt, along with a few guest collaborators, and published online, on a procedural basis, between 1998 and 2002. The paratext provided in the *Electronic Literature Collection, Volume 2*, where *The Unknown* was published in a second edition (2011), informs the reader that the work was technically modified and edited until 2008. These modifications assumingly also affected the work's paratext. Through numerous hyperlinks in the pages of the narrative, *The Unknown* offers a non-linear reading experience based on the adventures of characters bearing the authors' names. Its paratextual apparatus narrates and documents its own history and features many types of complementary content (e.g., photographs, transcripts, audio-recordings, comments in the HTML source code).

This chapter positions *The Unknown* as a digital object, a piece of electronic literature, an electronic structure, a repository and archive of information about its own creation and evolution, and a case study for the use of paratextual theory as an interdisciplinary framework. The research stems from the dual perspective of literature and information studies, and aims to explore whether Gérard Genette's theory of paratext, present in both fields, can serve as a bridge, common ground, and lexicon in the interdisciplinary study of a digital object.

The research questions were therefore devised in order to favour a constant dialogue between the researchers. The questions covered three main points: the architecture of the digital object, including information about the work that was inserted into the work itself, as a support for the reading experience and the study of the work; the role and reliability of the paratextual apparatus, in the light of its relationship to the

fictional content and the narrative, as well as information-sharing practices of the authors; and the assessment of paratextual theory as a tool for interdisciplinary studies in a digital context. The process used by the researchers allowed for methods to be explored, shared, and, at times, meshed, so that data and findings could be discussed and used from either or both disciplinary perspectives. The main methods were close reading and qualitative content analysis.

Analyses of the titular apparatus and the two tables of contents show various types of inconsistencies. Findings also show that the information pertaining to the genesis of the work, provided in the source code, is filled with contradictions and omissions, prompting doubts about the reliability and role of the background-related paratext from both an information-sharing and a literary perspective. The ensuing discussion assesses these findings through the lens of Genette's theory and evaluates the use of the paratextual framework for the interdisciplinary study of electronic literature.

FRAMEWORK

In his 1987 book *Seuils*, translated into English as *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Genette (1997b) stated that "the text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions" which "surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of the verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world" (p. 1). While these productions are not part of the text proper, they do convey a message (p. 4) and in electronic literature as in the book world, certain elements must be created in order for the text to be available for "'reception' and consumption" (p. 1).

Genette (1997b), building on the concepts of "fringe" and "pact" put forth by Philippe Lejeune (p. 2), defines the paratext as a "zone not only of transition"—again, the image of the threshold providing the reader with the means of "stepping inside" the text—"but also of *transaction,*" since the various paratextual elements undoubtedly have "an influence on the public" and can be perceived as part of "a pragmatics and a strategy" (p. 2). Although this can be disputed (as discussed later in the chapter), Genette's position was clear: "The author and the publisher are (legally and in other ways) the two people responsible for the text and the paratext" (1997b, p. 9) and "the sender is defined by a putative attribution and an acceptance of responsibility" (p. 8). In other words, for Genette, responsibility is intrinsically linked to authority, since the paratext is, in essence, "authorial or more or less legitimated by the author" (p. 2).

This further explains why Genette insists on the "illocutionary force" of the paratext (p. 10), granting paratextual elements the power to act as forms of "information," "intention," "interpretation," "decision," "commitment," "advice," or even "command," and to be "performative" by having the ability to "perform what they describe" (p. 11). It therefore comes as no surprise that authenticity, credibility, and reliability are crucial and define both the nature and the quality of the paratextuality-driven communication process between sender and addressee.

This research uses two main axes of the paratextual theory as framework. First, individual elements from Genette's nomenclature, such as the titular apparatus, including running heads, the table of contents, the author's name, and the note, among others, will be used as points of reference. Second, special consideration will be given to the reliability and function of the paratext and to its message to the reader.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Paratext in Electronic Literature

Paratext theory is prominent in Critical Code Studies (CCS), a field dedicated to the "interpretation of the extra-functional significance of computer source code" (Marino, 2010; see also Marino, 2006) in electronic literature. Bauer (2004) found that information hidden in the source code of literary works could be identified as paratext; Douglass (2010) has also written of the paratextual function of commentaries provided in the source code. Stewart (2010) used a case study to analyze off-site, in-site, and in-file paratext. A similar approach had previously been theorized by Rau (1999), who understood supporting and instructive materials that provide information about how to navigate hypertextual works "as an integral part of the digital text". Bauer (2011) echoes this view, along with Tyrkkö (2011), who also approaches navigational structures in hypertext narratives from a paratextual perspective. All these perspectives support the idea of apprehending the works through a constant oscillation between what is hidden in the source code and what is visible on the published page. The authorial nature of the paratext has also been discussed, for collaborative works, by van Dijk (2012) and is alluded to by e-lit scholar and artist Saemmer (2011), who goes so far as to consider "paratext as an ultimate defence against the lability of [our] digital creations" (p. 90).

Other media scholars have also applied paratextual theory to comments in computer games (Sample, 2013), gaming (Burk, 2009; Paul, 2011), film and television (Kreimeier & Stanitzek, 2004; Gray, 2010), and formats such as the DVD (Benzon, 2013); obviously, works of electronic literature published on CD-ROM or DVD provide further opportunities to discuss a work's material manifestation and packaging from a paratextual point of view (Vincler, 2010).

Paratext in Information Science

Certain paratextual elements have also captured the attention of information science scholars, even though they did not always retain—or perhaps did not consider—the Genette framework. Citations and references are widely studied. The field of bibliometrics, building on the work of Blaise Cronin, has also shown an interest for acknowledgements, namely in academic settings. Cronin's work on the topic started in the early 1990s, with various collaborators (Cronin, 1991; Cronin, McKenzie, & Rubio, 1993; Cronin, McKenzie, Rubio, & Weaver-Wozniak, 1993; Cronin, McKenzie, & Stiffler, 1992; Cronin & Weaver, 1995; Cronin & Weaver-Wozniak, 1992; Davis & Cronin, 1993) and his book *The Scholar's Courtesy*, published in 1995, is still the *sine qua non* work on the topic. However, Cronin did not use Genette's theory as a framework. A decade later, he revived his interest in acknowledgements, at times with (Cronin & Franks, 2006) or without (Cronin, Shaw, & La Barre, 2003, 2004) a clear reference to the paratextual theory of Genette, which was referenced in his 2005 book *The Hand of Science: Academic Writing and its Rewards*. Other scholars who have looked at acknowledgements in the bibliometric or sciencetometric fields without referencing Genette include Giles and Councill (2004), Wang and Shapira (2007), and Costas and van Leeuwen (2011, 2012). Salager-Meyer, Alcaraz-Ariza, Luzardo Briceno, and Jabbour (2011), however, did reference the original concept of paratext as presented by Genette (1997a) in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (first published in French in 1982).

Cronin and La Barre (2005) also referenced paratextual theory when they looked at "blurbing," a common practice in publishing consisting of an (usually laudatory) endorsement and which Genette (1997b) himself labeled as "entirely ritualistic and, as it were, automatic" in the American context (p. 111).

Connections between the paratext and library and information science can also be made through research in book culture, namely for what it can contribute to the study of information-sharing practices and the provision of information services to users. Again, use of the framework fluctuates. O'Connor and O'Connor's (1998) study of book covers and Scrivener's (2009) analysis of acknowledgements in dissertations did not use the Genettian framework, but paratextual theory has been referenced in the study of information-sharing practices (Pecoskie & Desrochers, 2013; Desrochers & Pecoskie, 2014), book covers (Matthews & Moody, 2007), classification and bibliographic records (Andersen, 2002; Paling, 2002), e-readers (McCracken, 2013), and layout and page presentation (Mak, 2011), as well as in research on intertextual semantics in information design (Marcoux & Rizkallah, 2009). Paling (2002) made a particularly strong case for paratextual theory as a means to find common grounds between what he termed the "essentially humanistic study of rhetoric" (p. 134) and information science studies in classification, namely by stating that, as shall be discussed here, paratextual elements are "thresholds of access as well as of interpretation" (p. 139). In so doing, he called for a new body of work that could help bridge the "broad gulf" (p. 134) that separates the two disciplines.

The Unknown

Researchers have studied *The Unknown* from a variety of individual foci and perspectives, including narratology (Ciccoricco, 2007; Zenner, 2005), a branch of literary studies devoted to the "study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation" (Meister, 2013). In a number of writings, the digital object has been related to the evolution of Web-based hyperfiction and compared to the book as object in print culture (Ciccoricco, 2007; Jensen, 2001; Panzani, 2012; Zenner, 2005). Zenner (2005) positions *The Unknown* as a "travelogue" with its assembly of various documentary excerpts such as audio, textual, and pictorial material, whereas Ciccoricco (2007) views the work as a "systems novel," where text occurs in the process of its own making. Other discussions take into consideration the work's metalanguage, thereby examining its self-referential purpose and treating the work as either a "meta-hypertext" (Zenner, 2005) or metafiction (Kolb, 2012). Readers of *The Unknown* may experience an uncertainty about the identity of the narrator in the various parts, due to what Jensen (2001) calls the work's "multivocality." Building on the unclear boundaries between fact and fiction, LeClair (2000) goes so far as to discuss *The Unknown*'s "false pretenses."

METHODOLOGY

The Interdisciplinary Approach

Approaching any research from an interdisciplinary perspective requires both a revision of discipline-specific processes and flexibility in the application of methods as well as in the evaluation of findings. Building on Roland Barthes' views on interdisciplinarity, Moran (2010) opposes this term to "the simple juxtaposition" of multidisciplinarity (p. 14), indicating that true "interdisciplinarity is always transformative in some way, producing new forms of knowledge in its engagement with discrete disciplines" (p. 15).

This research, situated within the realm of digital humanities, was designed to interlock the humanities and social sciences approaches. The researchers' avowed standpoint was to espouse both methodologies as equally valid and to share results and findings accordingly.

Research Questions

Each researcher conducted an overview of the published work and source code. This revealed a shared interest for the aspects outlined here:

1. How does the paratext of *The Unknown* support the reading experience and discovery of information regarding the genesis and organization of the work?
2. How is reliability established or hindered in the paratext of *The Unknown* and what effects does this have?
3. Is paratextual theory a pertinent tool for the interdisciplinary study of a piece of electronic literature such as *The Unknown*?

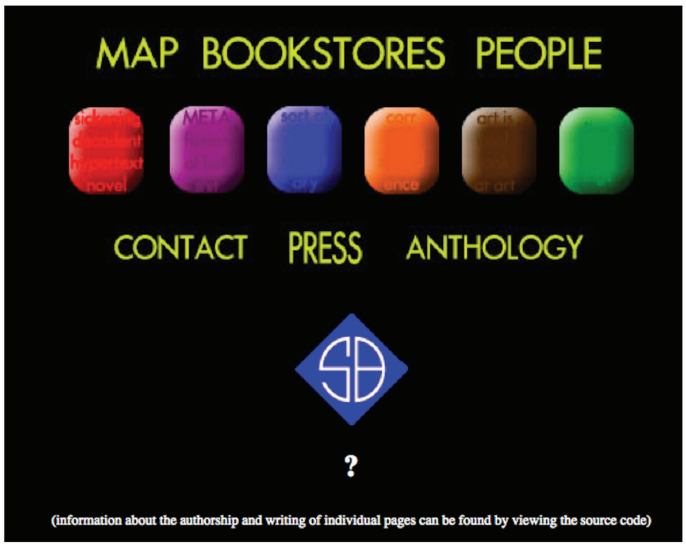
Object of Study, Versions, and Samples

Three versions of *The Unknown* were considered during the process. First, the published work *The Unknown: The Original Great American Hypertext Novel* was accessed online at http://unknownhypertext.com via two browsers, Safari and Mozilla Firefox. This yielded some differences in the data, for example in the display of the home and map pages (http://unknownhypertext.com/maps.htm).
Second, the edition of *The Unknown* published (without the original subtitle) in the *Electronic Literature Collection, Volume 2* (2011) was consulted. Finally, a set of HTML files provided by one of the authors, Scott Rettberg, was used. It should be noted that certain variations were perceived between the Rettberg files and the published work, as the file set dates from 2003. The use of each specific version in various phases of the research will be noted and explained.

A print collection of texts from the work, titled *The Unknown: An Anthology*, also exists, and this offers its own paratextual information and challenges; however, it was not used since the research focus was on the nature and use of paratext in the digital work. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning, since, in the grand scheme of things, it could supply additional metadata on authorial contributions and other information linked to the genesis of the work.

The sampling approach for this study was based on the work's navigation apparatus. The home page of *The Unknown* presents six square icons of colour (red, purple, blue, orange, brown, and green) that take the reader to the six different "lines" which form the work (see Figure 1). Rettberg (2003) has stated that the authors "loosely

Figure 1. Navigation © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.



modeled an indexing system on the Chicago Transit Authority's color-coded navigation system" (p. 82). This navigation is accessible on all the pages in the sample.

The red and purple lines contain the main narrative, while other lines take the reader to alternative types of content that supplement the narrative. While it will become clear that each line and other links on the home page all played a part in the paratextual analysis, the tables of contents accessed by clicking on the red and purple icons were treated as starting points to create the sample used to study the titular apparatus of the work. The titles listed in each of the two tables of contents were extracted manually, along with the titles furnished in the various fields used in the analysis, between May 11th and May 31st, 2013, using the Firefox browser.

The home page further presents an all-important small print which states that "(information about the authorship and writing of individual pages can be found by viewing the source code)" (see Figure 1). Starting with the Rettberg HTML file set, the researchers used the HTML editor BBEdit as a multi-file search engine to automatically extract the contents of various HTML tags and information from the source code. Other parts of the work were also studied, including excerpts from the narrative, in order to provide points of comparison as well as context.

This multi-pronged approach to purposive sampling reflects Krippendorff's (2013) view that "in qualitative research, samples may not be drawn according to statistical guidelines, but the quotes and examples that qualitative researchers present to their readers have the same function as the use of samples" (p. 85). It should further be noted that some types of paratext, such as pictures, videos, and links to external sites (except the publisher's site), and the representation of paraphernalia, for example, were not studied.

Methods of Analysis, Part 1: Hyper and Close Reading

The close reading method used here is based on selected elements of Sosnoski's (1999) concept of "hyper-reading," defined as "reader-directed, screen-based, computer-assisted reading" (p. 167). Among other strategies, it includes computer-assisted search queries, keyword filtering, and fragmenting (pp. 163-72). Hayles (2012) describes such an approach as "human-assisted computer reading" (p. 70). Her proposed method of "close, hyper, and machine reading" (p. 17) thereby builds on Sosnoski's concept.

Close reading is rooted in the assumption that certain aspects of literary texts are "more important or salient than others" (Stockwell, 2002, p. 14). In 1985, Johnson asserted that in close readings, scholars are tasked with "listing textual features that merit special attention" such as "ambiguous words," "undecidable syntax," and "incompatibilities between what a text says and what it does" (Johnson, 1985, pp. 141-42). Hayles (2012) explains the importance of interpretation to provide context to the patterns and "to connect pattern with meaning"; by putting the meaning forth, the "pattern assumes a subordinate role" (p. 74). In this study, close reading focused on emerging patterns of paratextual elements which were read along with the narrative, thereby considering the paratext and the narrative as a unified whole. Paratextual units were thus approached through the Genettian assumption that "the most essential of the paratext's properties...is functionality" and that "it is an assistant, an accessory to the text" (Genette, 2007, pp. 407, 410).

Methods of Analysis, Part 2: Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis, a prevalent approach in information science, is a "flexible methodology"

(White & Marsh, 2006) which may be performed according to quantitative measures or qualitative guidelines. While Krippendorff (2013) states that quantitative researchers "have tended to encourage greater explicitness and transparency than have qualitative scholars" (p. 90), he also writes that "using numbers instead of verbal categories or counting instead of listing quotes is merely convenient; it is not a requirement for obtaining valid answers to a research question" (p. 88). While some counts will be presented here, the reporting style will adhere to the qualitative tradition of "weaving quotes from the analyzed texts and literature about the contexts of these texts into [the] conclusions" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 89). Here, "quotes" can be understood either literally or as "typical examples" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 85). Other examples can represent "negative cases or anomalies" (Bradley, 1993, p. 447).

Two separate coding schemes were developed, one for the titular apparatus (see Appendix 1) and one for the source code sample (see Appendix 2). This stems from the fact that distinct types of information were both sought and found in each sample. In both cases, the coders engaged with the data over an extensive period of time and the codebooks were "developed in the process of close, iterative reading to identify concepts and patterns" (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 35), thereby "allowing the categories and names for categories to flow from the data" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). That being said, the presence of the paratextual framework did provide a certain directed quality to the analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). Memos were used in order to keep the codes "deeply rooted in the data" (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 36) and to ensure that the final codebook and resulting findings created the "hermeneutic loop" (Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 87-88) or "recursion (hermeneutic circle)" described by Krippendorff (2013, pp. 89-90) as the supportive process for the interpretations provided.

Note: When citing *The Unknown*, individual pages are referred to by file name only.

FINDINGS

The Unknown: An Organizational Puzzle

A search for the work's beginning on *The Unknown*'s home page, where one would assume the paratext would communicate the way into the work, leads to two paratextual elements of interest: the work's full title and the cover image (depending on its availability in the browser, as it may be substituted by an alternative text box saying "The Unknown"). These two elements link to the file unknown.htm, the only piece of narrative accessible directly from the home page (see Figure 2). While this does not unquestionably establish the page unknown.htm as the narrative's beginning, the links do act as paratextual indicators of the file's key position in the work. In addition, a "historical note" located in the source code of the unknown.htm page informs the reader that "This is the first page written collectively by The Unknown."

The situation concerning the work's end is similar. Given that there is no table of contents on the home page, there is also no indication of where the work ends. In the table of contents of the red line, however, there is a title that links to "The End" (theend.htm). Its narrative is rather short and in contrast to other pages with numerous links, it contains only one link at the bottom of the page, a form of paratextual reiteration in capital letters "THE END." This element is linked to the page search.htm, a search engine that is currently broken but that, should it work, would provide the reader with the means to search the narrative as a database (see Figure 3). Therefore, technically speaking at least, the reader has reached the narrative's end: there is neither more narrative content, nor a link to another page.

However, when "entering *The Unknown*" from the home page, the reader can forgo the links to unknown.htm and choose another page to begin reading, since other narrative pages are accessible through the lists in the second-tier navigation

Figure 2. unknown.htm © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.

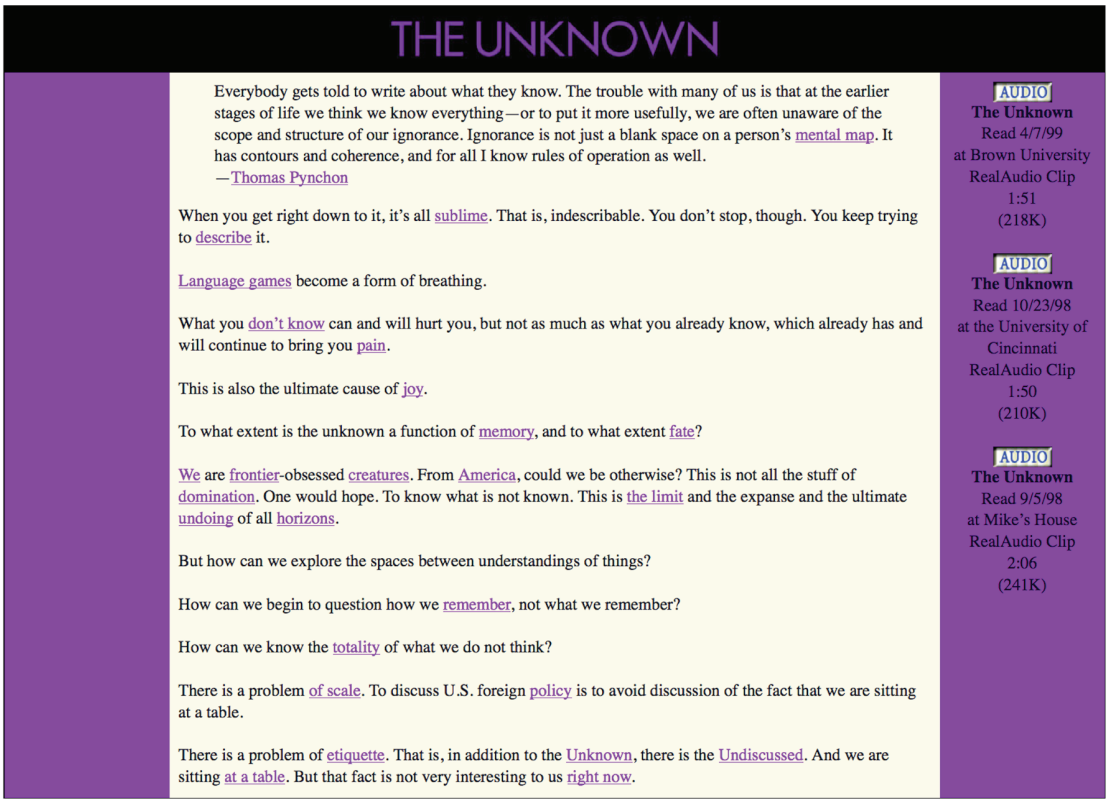


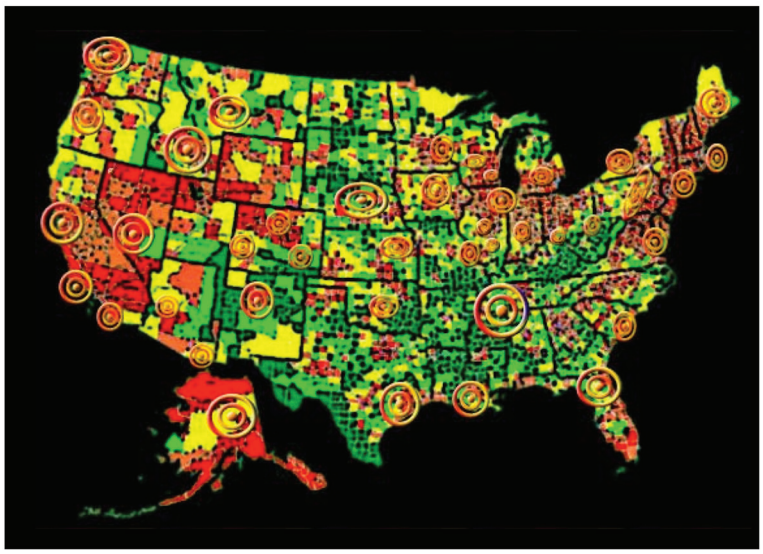
Figure 3. search.htm © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.

provided by other paratextual elements on the home page. In other words, there seems to be no definitive beginning to *The Unknown.* Furthermore, some of the links on the home page take the reader to paratextual elements (rather than to the narrative), as will be outlined below.

The "MAP" is a small collection of links projected on a hypertextual image-map of the United States. Circles indicate certain geographical locations from the narrative's setting and link out to individual pages (see Figure 4).

The "BOOKSTORES" link presents a list of stores which the authors state supported or

Figure 4. maps.htm © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.



promoted the work. Each of these names is accompanied by the geographic location of the store, again hyperlinked to parts of the narrative taking place in the same location. The "PEOPLE" link does not, as one might expect, present the contributors, but rather a list of names that are also linked to individual pages of the narrative. The "CONTACT" link takes the reader to the publisher's website; this publisher, Spineless Books, is also referenced through the "ANTHOLOGY" link, a seemingly broken link with a "404" error message located on the publisher's server. The "PRESS" link leads to an "Online Press Kit," a sort of basic bibliography in which most entries link to the listed articles.

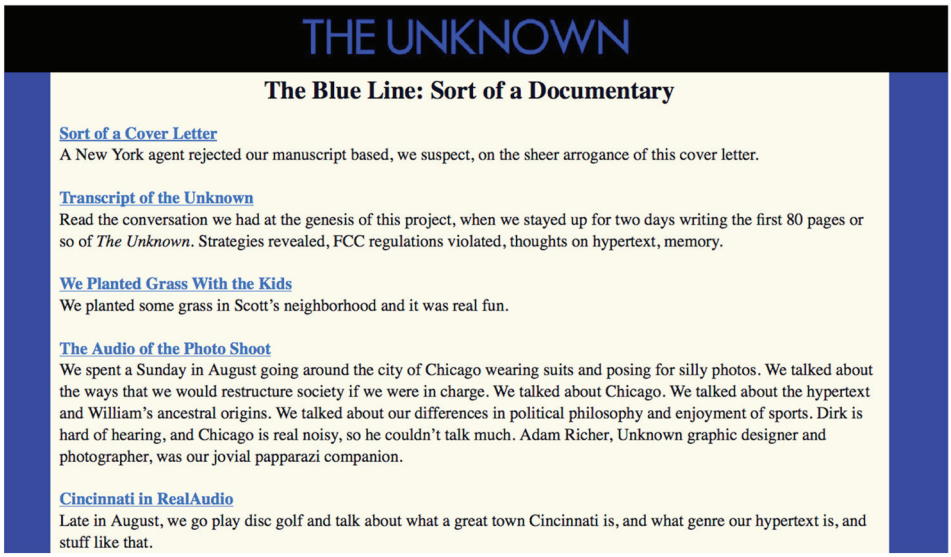
As mentioned above, there are six coloured icons representing the "lines" of the work. Two lines contain most of *The Unknown*'s narrative: "The Red Line: Parts of Their Story" and "The Purple Line: Metafictional Bullshit." The other four lines offer a wide range of what may be either extremely intricate and deliberate structural constructs or the most random amalgams of paratextual content, and which merit individual consideration.

"The Blue Line: Sort of a Documentary" (see Figure 5) is a collection of multi-format documents ranging from a cover letter that the authors claim to have once sent to an agent to a picture of a cat (with accompanying audio file). The blue line also contains the transcript of a conversation about the genesis of the work, dated June 10, 1998 (transcript1.htm).

"The Green Line: Interactive Live Readings of the Unknown" contains audio documents, as well as photographs and textual testimonies of various happenings ranging from 1998 to 2009, along with an announcement of "The Unknown Australian Tour" in the winter of 2029 (greenline.htm). Already, the reader can see that some fictional content is inserted, tongue in cheek, into this avowed documentary (and therefore supposedly reliable) content.

The other two lines are perhaps more interesting from an organization point of view because they either present as a coherent collection of digital objects or harbour such collections, integrating seemingly solid paratextual apparatuses in the form of tables of contents or indexes.

Figure 5. blueline.htm © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.



"The Brown Line: Unknown Art" contains various types of content linked from its first page. Of these links, four lead to index or index-like sub-collections showcasing the content of separate subfolders. "Unknown MP3s" (folder: /mp3) is a true index of the mp3 files ordered by number (see Figure 6).

"Katie Gilligan's Watercolor Diary" (folder: /katie) leads to a calendar-like chart of a set of works the artist produced, which also acts as an index (see Figure 7).

The "Purple Splices" (folder: /postcards), a collection of postcards authored by Dirk Stratton, are also organized into a chart, with the dual sections "Pi" and "July" numbered respectively as the (partial) numerical equivalency of the mathematical symbol π (including the punctuation mark) and 31 sequential numbers for the days of the month (see Figure 8), thereby creating a dual set of sub-indexes.

Finally, "Re: Take it or Leave it" (folder: /federman), a collection of seven pictures of Raymond Federman by Steve Murez, is accessed through a hyperlinked list reflective of the seven photographs' titles.

Ironically though, given the semantic name of its media, the collection of scanned index cards titled "Blue Cards" is not actually indexed, nor are the files grouped into a subfolder; yet the keen reader will notice that the 21 file names are sequential.

The orange line presents as an annotated and hyperlinked index of the "Correspondence of the Unknown" that apparently contains 65 incoming and outgoing e-mails listed by date and year. Some of the dates provided in the orange line differ from one titular unit to the other, with differences ranging from one day to one year. Such inconsistencies are brought to light by comparing the date listed in the index with either the date provided in the title tag of the page itself (when available) or with the file name contained in the URL, which in seven cases is constructed from numbers resembling an indexed date. For example, the e-mail listed in the index as dated "May 30, 2001" has the file name 20010530.htm but is dated in-text "Tuesday, 29 May 2001, 15:40:22(CDT)" (see Figure 9). This may be the result of a time difference between when the message was sent and when it was received; nevertheless, it creates a discrepancy.

Figure 6. mp3 Index © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.

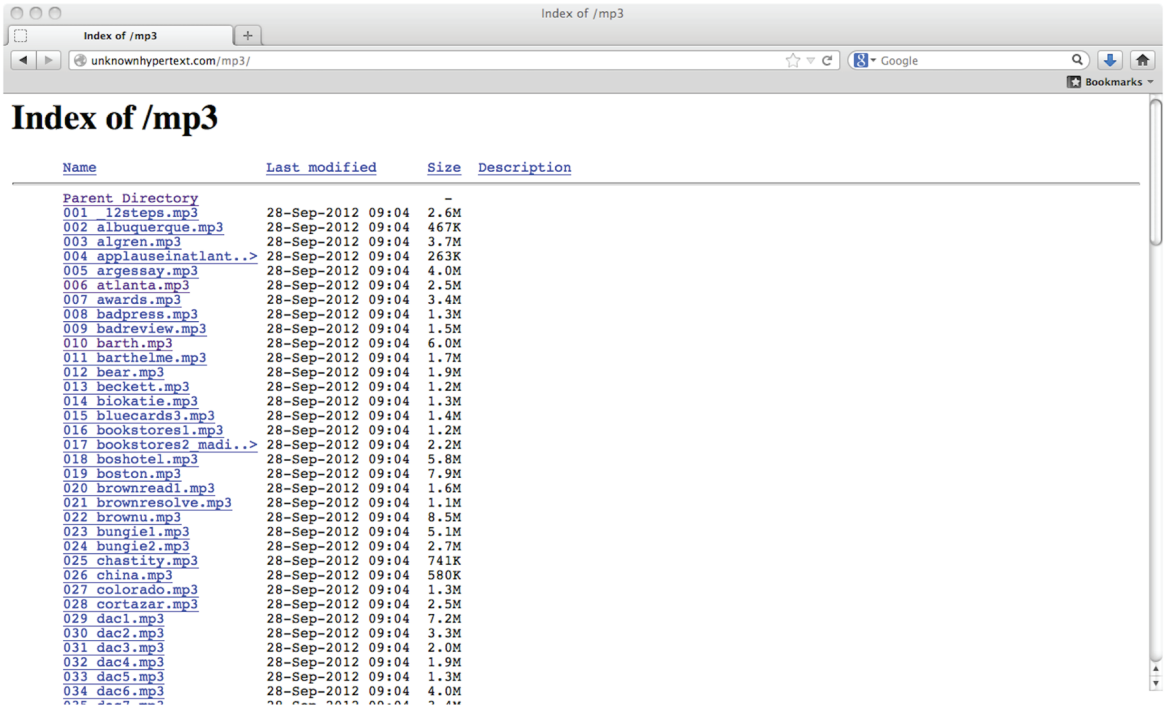


Figure 7. Katie Gilligan's Watercolor Diary Index © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.

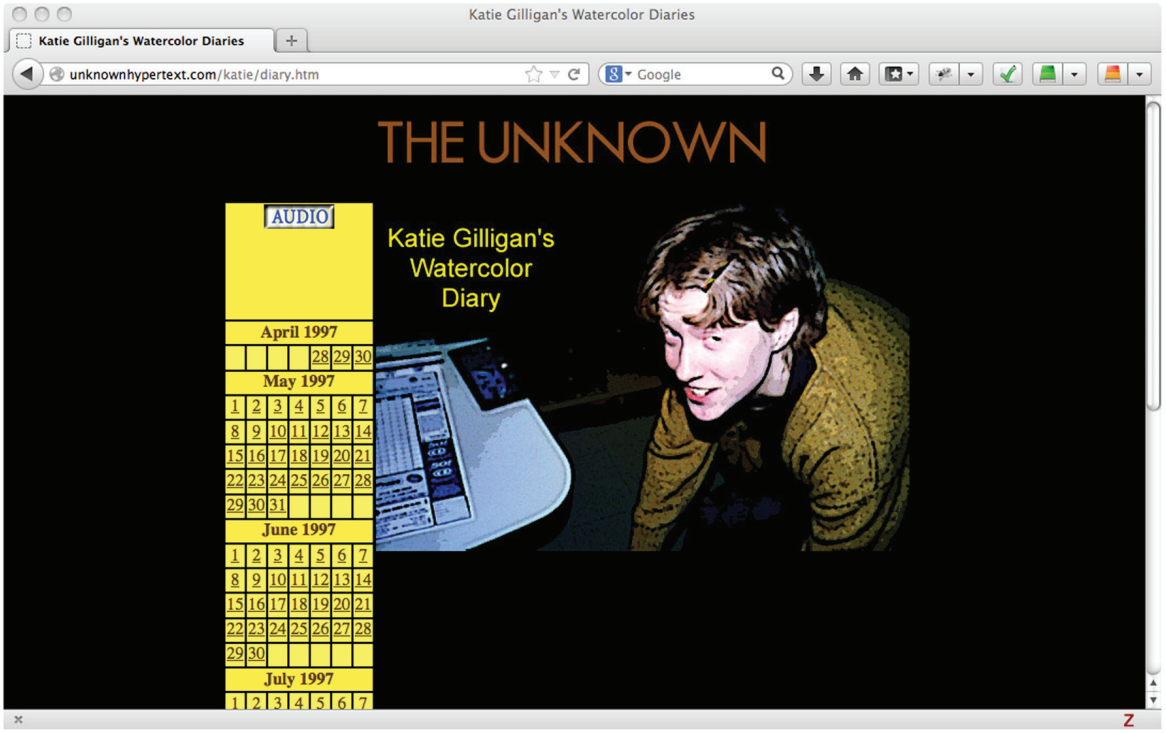


Figure 8. Purple Splices Index © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.

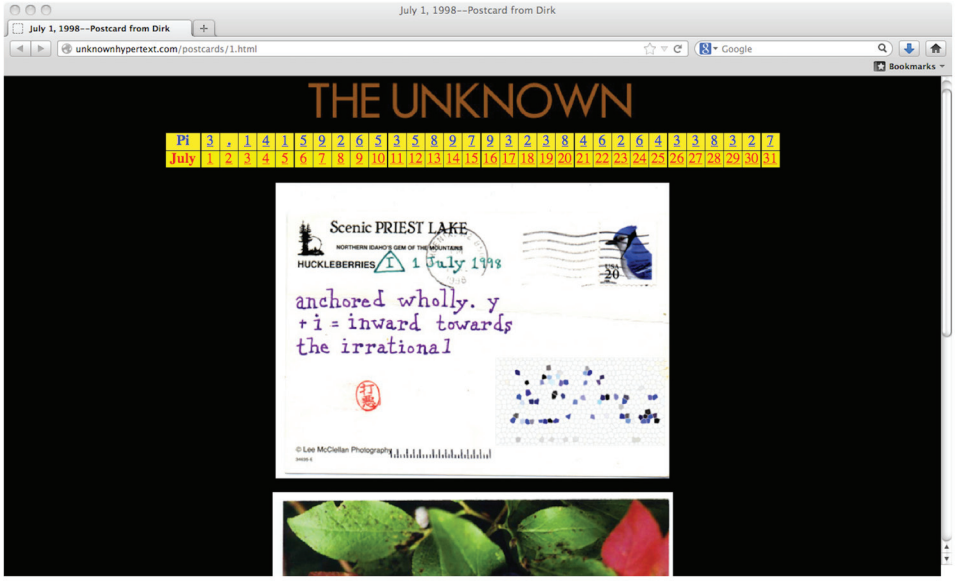


Figure 9. 20010530.htm © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.

Rarely do threads of back and forth communication take place in one and the same page, as is the case for 101698.htm or aesthetic.htm; rather, they tend to appear in two different pages, as in lettertofrank.htm and franksreply.htm. Most pages include manually created e-mail headers containing the date, names and e-mail addresses of the sender and addressee, as well as a subject line. In other cases, free-text addresses, dates, or formulae of address (such as "Dear Dirk and Scott," in secret.htm) are provided, along with the sender's signature, making the document appear more like a traditional letter than an e-mail. From a paratextual perspective, these findings create a doubt as to whether the reader should perceive these e-mails as fiction, rather than authentic correspondence.

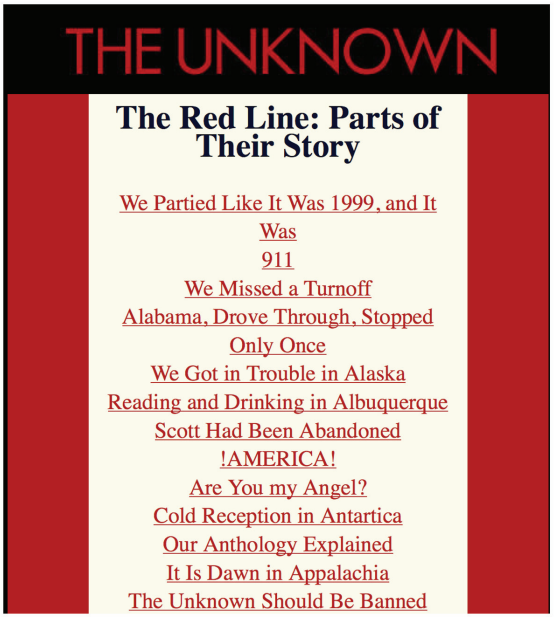
It cannot be established whether these quirks and inconsistencies were deliberate, as elements of the ever-expanding maze created by the work's hypertextuality, or are simply the result of a relaxed attitude towards the use and presentation of paratextual elements and the organization of the work in general. It does appear quite clearly, however, that the navigational and organizational paratext must be apprehended alongside the informational or genesis paratext in order to make sense of the reading experience offered by the work as a whole.

To Designate, to Navigate, to Guide: The Titular Apparatus of *The Unknown*

Genette (1997b) stated that the one obligatory function of the title of a book was to "designate" (p. 76). Intertitles, for their part, exist to designate parts of the book and are not an absolute structural requirement (p. 294). This changes, however, in the case of a work of electronic literature organized as a collection—or database—of HTML files which all require some form of identification, of individual designating paratext, at least in the form of a file name that usually becomes part of the URL. A parallel can also be made between "running heads," part of Genette's nomenclature, and the titles that appear at the top of the window when the HTML page is displayed in the browser. Here, the broad term "title" will be used to designate intertitles (since this suits Genette's definition; 1997b, p. 294), window titles, and file names, unless otherwise specified.

The following findings are taken from the analysis of the titular apparatus of the purple and red lines, the main narrative lines of *The Unknown.* In each case, the coloured icon from the home page takes the reader to a hyperlinked list of titles resembling a table of contents (see Figure 10). However, not all pages belonging to the red and purple lines are featured in their respective tables of contents; there are many more "invisible" pages nested in each line than the 106 (purple) and 287

Figure 10. Table of contents from the Red Line (excerpt, top part) © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.



(red) pages listed which were used to create the title sample.

Any listed page, depending on its content, its place in the narrative, its representation in the map, and its accompanying media, can generate up to eight different types of titles:

1. Title from the table of contents page accessed by clicking the coloured icon on the home page;
2. File name of the page, featured in the URL;
3. HTML <TITLE> tag, displayed by the browser at the top of the window;
4. <ALT> tag on the "Map" page, accessed from the source code of the page;
5. In-page title, inserted before the narrative;
6. Titles of any Real Audio (.ra) files embedded in the page;
7. Corresponding Real Audio (.ra) file names;
8. Names of any corresponding mp3 files indexed in the brown line (http://unknown-hypertext.com/mp3/).

This does not include the masthead image that reads "The Unknown" which appears on every page of our sample, albeit with changing colours.

None of the pages included in the sample actually offer all eight types of titles; however, some pages contain more than one audio file, for example, thereby creating inflated numbers of up to 10 titles per page. When examining the titles for differences, some aspects were considered not significant: punctuation, spacing, and capitalization (since file-name syntax does not allow them); and the initial articles "the," "a," or "an" (which tend not to be used when indexing titles). That being said, it was interesting to find varying uses of articles. For example, "the" is repeated in all titles for the page theend.htm (table of content, URL, <TITLE> tag), whereas for the page "The Three of US," it appears in-page, in the table of contents, and in the <TITLE> tag, but is absent from the two file names (URL and .ra).

Exact matches throughout all existing titles in one given page occur only in nine instances in the red line. Of these nine instances, three are single word titles: "Dogs," "Milwaukee," and "Rusty." A total of 114 pages show no matches at all in the various titles used. The purple line fares better, with 31 exact matches. Of these, 23 are single-word titles, including the pronouns "I" and "We," the acronym "EMT," and the first name "Fabio"; the multi-word titles include proper nouns such as "De Selby" and "Hunter S. Thompson." In this line, 13 pages offer no matches between the titles used. In both lines, the maximum number of matches found on one page was five.

Fittingly perhaps, unknown.htm—the slightly dubious "beginning" to the work—is an outlier. There are ten titles associated with the content of this page and nine are either "unknown" or "the unknown"; only the <TITLE> tag differs, as it reads "Hypertext of the Unknown."

Other pages offer a semblance of consistency through the repeated use, for example, of a date or number, location, proper noun, or common word or expression—at times with variations. However, Table 2 shows that, quite often, the reader will find instances of a thread skipping one of the titles. There are also many instances where file names, understandingly, will present as shortened versions of the thread-making term; however, this may occur in the longer-form titles as well. Some form of consistency can further be achieved by grouping titles by broad categories: for example, by isolating file names from other titles (see Table 2; see Appendix 1 for the complete codebook).

Some pages are grouped as series. For example, the red table of contents contains five titles which begin with "Halloween–" and lead to files named "halloween" 1 through 5. Other series, however, such as the "Hard_Code Theater" series, straddle different lines and are quite difficult to reassemble. The same goes for groups of files that seem linked by, again, common elements such as a location: the file names and proximity in the table of contents hint at the fact that la2Kread.htm, laaauster.htm, lapd.htm, and so forth, might belong together, but there is no clear indication that they do. And while Zenner (2005) stated that "the file-names are ordered alphabetically" in the table of contents (p. 129), there are exceptions, as shakespeare.htm follows signs.htm; eighties.htm follows endconstruction.htm; and unknownOS.htm sits between marla.htm and middleman.htm.

Table 1. Title matches in the red and purple lines

Line	Pages in Table of Contents	Pages with Matches in all Title Types	Range of Words Matched	Range of Title Types Matched	Pages with No Matches
Red	287	9 (3.1%)	1–3	3–5	114 (39.7%)
Purple	106	31 (29.2%)	1–3	3–5	13 (12.3%)

Table 2. Examples of threads in titles

Type of Thread	Table of Contents	Page File Name	HTML <TITLE> Tag	Map <ALT> Tag	In-Page Title	Audio File Title	.ra File Name	mp3 File Name
Date	We Partied Like It Was 1999, and It Was	1999. htm	1999					
Date with exception	911	911.htm	After the Recording Session					
Location	Many of Dirk's Followers Were in Maine	maine.htm	Maine	Dirk had acolytes in Maine		Maine	maine.ra	081_maine. mp3
Location with exception	Ted Turner's Chauffeur Picked Us Up in Atlanta	atlanta.htm	What Actually Happened in Atlanta	Ted invited us on a little cruise				006_ atlanta. mp3
Proper name	Krass-Mueller?	krassmueller. htm	Krass-Mueller is Welcome To Join the Unknown at any Number of Social Functions		To Krass-Mueller:			
Proper name with exception	What Is To Be Done is What We Are Discussing	cortazar.htm	Cortazar					cortazar. mp3
Variation on a proper name	Pynchon's Reading Was a Little Disappointing	pynchread.htm	Pynchon Opened For Us					102_ pynchread .mp3
Repeated word	Our Anthology Explained	anthology.htm	The Unknown Anthology			Anthology	anthology. ra	127_ unknowna nthology. mp3
Repeated word with exception	We Were Headed to Seattle	trip.htm	trip			Trip	trip.ra	124_trip. mp3
Variation on a word	Rhyming Poem of the Unknown	rhyme.htm	The Rhyming Poem of the Unknown					
Repeated Expression	Paper Topics For the Unknown	papertopics. htm	Paper Topics		Suggested Paper Topics For the Hypertext of the Unknown			
Repeated expression with exception	When We Got Out of Jail	out of jail.htm	Back to the Contagious States					
Variation on an expression	Microsoft Invents New Unknown Operating System AND Microsoft Announces New Unknown Operating System (2 occurrences)	unknownOS. htm	Microsoft Announces New Unknown Operating System		Microsoft Announces New Unknown Operating System			
Consistency in file names	Dirk's Psychic Powers Were Manifest in Dublin	tain.htm	Dirk is Cuchulainn					116_tain. mp3
Consistency in file names and consistency in other titles but not across categories	Waiting for the Unknown	godot.htm	Waiting for the Unknown		Waiting for the Unknown			051_godot. mp3

Collecting all the titles from the red and purple tables of contents therefore reveals that the intertitular apparatus of *The Unknown* answers to no clear organizational principles. While this has an obvious effect on any indexing effort, it also affects the reader's perception (as does all paratext) and, in the case of an electronic work, the reader's interaction with the piece.

Accessing the Source Code's Promised Land

The all-important small print on the home page of *The Unknown* is an information professional's dream: "(information about the authorship and writing of individual pages can be found by viewing the source code)." Using the files provided by Scott Rettberg, the content of the <META NAME="author">, <META NAME="historical note">, <META NAME="provenance">, <META NAME="subtext">, and comment tags <!--> were extracted and coded (see Appendix 2) using qualitative content analysis.

The authorship order presented on the home page seems to be confirmed by the information contained in the <META NAME="author"> tag (see Table 3).

The tag also names guest authors. However, the <META NAME="author"> tag is only present in 172 of the 590 HTML files; there is no way of knowing why these particular files were tagged or if they create a representative sample.

In fact, upon coding, one sees that the <META NAME="author">, <!-->, and other tags do indeed reveal a plethora of information, but only inasmuch as one accepts the idiosyncratic nature and presentation of the content. For example, for two of the files, the <META NAME="author"> tag also contains information about the style of the writing ("in a style copied faithfully from a tabloid"; soapopera.htm) and the borrowed nature of the content ("portions stolen from the Irish myth"; tain.htm). Similarly, the <!--> tag also contains authorship information, with varying degrees of certainty. Some assertions are firm, such as "written by William in a rental car" (dac1999c.htm) or "Dirk wrote this" (cats.htm); but others seem doubtful: "I'm guessing SR wrote this" (fame.htm) or "Only Dirk could have written this. Am I wrong? WG" (inthehospital3.htm). The promise of information is thus only partially fulfilled by the source code. Furthermore, the comments sometimes contradict each other: the file frankspeaks.htm contains a <META NAME="author"> tag which states "Frank Marquardt and Scott Rettberg"; but the following is also found in its source code: "<!--written by William Gillespie after shortly he swore again he would never write for the Unknown again -->".

This ambiguity is echoed in the genesis of the comment source code itself. Only in three instances can the reader be certain of the author of the <!--> tag—and only *if* one accepts the premise of corresponding initials as identifying the authors: "Love, Dirk" (dc1.htm), "djs" (for Dirk J. Stratton?; dirk.htm) and "WG" (Willliam Gillespie?; inthehospital3.htm). In other cases, the comments are provided by either one or many

Table 3. Authorship of The Unknown's pages, according to the <META NAME="author"> tag

Name	Pages as Sole Author	Pages as First Author	Pages as Second Author	Total Number of Pages
William Gillespie	29	3	0	32
Scott Rettberg	16	0	9	25
Dirk Stratton	15	2	2	19
Frank Marquardt	4	5	0	9

NB: These numbers may contain information contradicted by other tags, as indicated in the text.

unknown authors—pun intended—who do not self-identify but use the first person to provide information, at times timidly, as in this example from the <META NAME="subtext"> tag content: "I think I wrote this, but I'm not sure if I wrote it by myself or with Dirk. At any rate I profoundly apologize" (fabio.htm).

Levels of specificity also vary in the source code. Places of writing may be geographic ("on a seriously decadent solo road trip from Cinti through Seattle and back through Las Vegas"; gospel2.htm), venue-specific ("written by Dirk at Brown"; brownresolve.htm), or picturesque but vague ("written by Scott and William on a balcony"; dac1999g.htm). The same fluctuation applies to dates, chronological information, or versions. At times, certainty and ambiguity coexist: "[T]his was written collaboratively by Scott and William in 1998, although I have no idea where" (jobs.htm).

While some comments pertain to artistic influences, inspiration, or borrowed materials, many testify to personal views, namely in terms of the emotional toll of the collaborative process: "Of course, now I believe that the fluidity of identity that permeates *The Unknown* is one of its strengths. And, though it took a while and a little practice, I eventually came to enjoy appropriating the identities of my collaborators" (dirk3.htm). While this comment in particular provides fascinating paratext in terms of the authors' collaborative writing experience, it yet again sheds doubt on how the source code paratext might supply clear answers to the authorship question.

A few notes also provide information on the reading experience of *The Unknown*, whether by integrating genre information about certain pages, or by alluding to reactions:

I wrote this while employed as a temporary assistant, a secretary, really, at a law office...I stole much of the text for this from a really absurd typing test they used there...Interestingly enough, this is one of the most-hit pages of the Unknown, I think because a lot of people search the Internet for typing tests. Isn't that absurd? (typetest.htm)

The analysis of the source code comments truly reveals a wide variety in range, nature, and tone, making them a rich paratext to explore; however, the home page's promise, whereby "(information about the authorship and writing of individual pages can be found by viewing the source code)," is only fulfilled in part. This brings up questions pertaining to the true role of this paratext, and whether it meets the credibility and reliability criteria of Genette's authorial paratext, or whether it is another paratextual beast altogether.

DISCUSSION

The Paratext of *The Unknown* as Support for the Discovery of Information Regarding the Genesis and Organization of the Work

That *The Unknown* is paratextually fascinating is certainly true; that its many paratextual bends and turns befit the definitions of the paratextual elements it appears to exhibit is another matter altogether. The paradoxical opposition, here, is between the structural potential of the Web and the liberty afforded by it. The hypertextual nature of the work supports non-linear conceptualization and the creation of a hyperlinked maze; but this does not preclude the creation of a strong paratextual infrastructure, capable, in turn, of supporting the exploration and study of the work's organization. Calling upon Genette's theory may help us understand where the disconnect actually lies.

The list of titles accessed by clicking the red and purple icons on the home page are each reminiscent of a table of contents, which according to Genette (1997b) "is in theory no more than a device for reminding us of the titular apparatus" (p. 317).

However, he adds that "the table of contents is not always a faithful listing of the intertitular apparatus" since "it may misrepresent this apparatus by making cuts, as in some inexpensive or careless editions...or by making additions, attributing titles to chapters that *in situ* do not contain any" (p. 317). At first glance, the red and purple tables of contents provide a familiar but deceiving sense of scope and order. Here, the misrepresentation is due in part to the lack of comprehensiveness of the lists, but also to the inconsistency of the titular apparatus within the pages listed, since the title in the table of contents may not correspond to the title of the page, the name of the file, or the title of any other content accessed through the link provided.

Yet for Genette (1997b), intertitles, which abound in *The Unknown*, "are titles" (p. 294) and therefore answer to the same criteria and have the same primary function: "identification" (p. 80). While intertitles may be deemed "not absolutely required" by Genette (p. 316), file names, at the very least, are requirements of HTML programming. Andersen (2002) noted that, in the digital age, particular care should be placed in "evaluating the epistemic function of titles in retrieval in relation to other potential access points" (p. 53). Interestingly, Genette offers a way into the study of file names and <TITLE> tags in the digital object through the notion of running heads, since URLs and <TITLE> tag contents preside over the Web page just as the running head tops the printed page. Genette first positions running heads as simple "reminders," but then suggests that they can provide additional information "by surreptitiously giving a title to a chapter that is in theory untitled, or by highlighting details that change from page to page (variable running heads), or by playing a tune that differs from that of the chapter's official intertitle" (p. 316). Perhaps playfulness is, then, one way of approaching the titular apparatus of *The Unknown*.

Nevertheless, when trying to grasp the object, the seemingly randomness of the rules of play can exacerbate the information need rather than assuage it. One of the many contradictions of the work is that it presents quite a few index-like features, while defeating indexing efforts in many other places—much in the same way that the information provided in the source code both fulfills and challenges the home page's promise of information. Genette (1997b) reminds us that providing the author's name, historically, was not always a requirement (p. 37); similarly, one could argue that providing paratextual information on dates of creation, places of writing, context, or inspiration for the work is not at all necessary. Such information would, however, be extremely useful in the creation of detailed metadata for indexing the work's pages and content and certainly very helpful in the study of the work as a digital object. The question to ask, then, is whether partial or contradictory information serves a purpose other than to provide the necessary data to piece together the work's genesis. Given their numerous inconsistencies and contradictions, these data are not the information researcher's ideal tools for producing indexing and retrieval metadata, or for understanding the authors' information-sharing practices. However, they may be an intrinsic part of the maze-like reading experience.

Linking Fact and Fiction: Paratextual (Un-)Reliability in *The Unknown*

Genette (1997b) states that prefaces, for example, can be "fictional in the sense that the reader is not really, or at least not permanently, expected to take the alleged status of their sender seriously" (p. 278). While this "concerns essentially questions of attribution" (p. 287), in the case, for example, of an author claiming not to be the true author of the text (and then perhaps, later, disavowing this assertion), it could be seen as a potential avenue for the study of clashes between authorship and reliability.

Furthermore, just as it is important to ponder who sent the paratext that lingers invisibly

in the source code, it becomes essential to ask to whom it is addressed, in order to fully grasp the essence of the "transaction" and to assess the nature of the exchange. Genette posits the following:

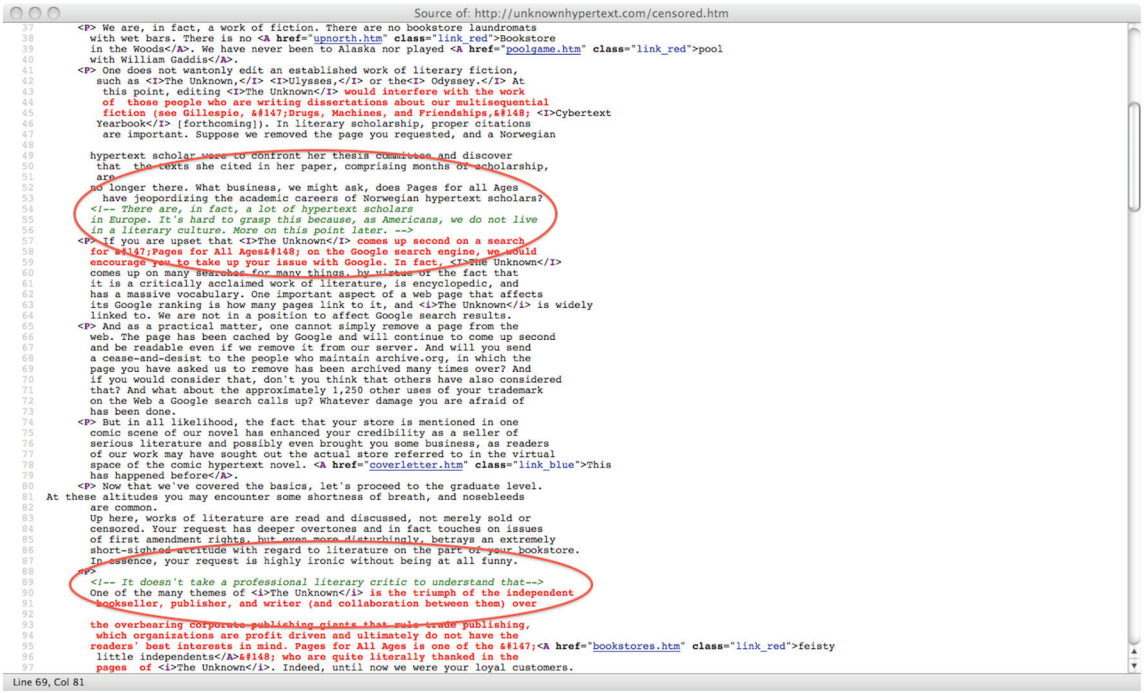
Certain paratextual elements are actually addressed to (which does not mean they reach) the public in general—that is, every Tom, Dick, and Harry. This is the case (I will come back to it) of the title or of an interview. Other paratextual elements are addressed (with the same reservation) more specifically or more restrictively only to readers of the text. This is typically the case of the preface. (Genette, 1997b, p. 9)

By informing their readers on the home page that "information about authorship can be viewed in the source code," the authors of *The Unknown* seem well aware of their readership. An example of an address to the reader can even be found in the source code of the orange-line index page, warning, "if you can read this you're too close" (orangeline.htm). Whether this comment is playful and whether it makes a statement about the confidential nature of the content of the correspondence, the index, or the source code itself is up to the reader to decide. In the case of the "Open Letter to an Independent Bookseller" (censored.htm), an addressee, "Dear Stephen Bentz of Pages for All Ages (tm)," is clearly named; but in the fashion of an open letter, the general public is also addressed.

Contrary to other information and commentaries in the programming code that usually appear outside of and before the actual body of the text, hidden commentaries in the source code of this page mingle with the actual text and interrupt the flow of the letter. Figure 11 shows the source code in which the commentary, invisible on the published Web page, is introduced with the comment tag (<!--) and embedded in the narrative.

Usually, *The Unknown*'s source code commentaries can be described as "a zone between text and off-text" (Genette, 1997b, p. 2). However, here, the embedding of the paratext within the narrative flow seems to illustrate what Genette

Figure 11. Source code of censored.htm © 2013, Spineless Books. Used with permission.



calls "a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text)" (p. 2). Given the fact that the letter itself may be fictional, the paratext's status can definitely be questioned.

To Genette, location is key. He explains that, "defining a paratextual element consists of determining its location" (Genette, 1997b, p. 4). If the source code comments of *The Unknown* can be redefined as "notes," Genette's own suspicions about the future of the note might provide a clue as to what role these paratextual elements might serve. He first explains that, "the original note is a local detour or a momentary fork in the text, and as such it belongs to the text almost as much as a simple parenthesis does," adding that "with this kind of note we are in a very undefined fringe between text and paratext" (p. 328). However, after presenting the note as mostly "documentary" in nature, Genette imagines "a more emancipated regime" where the note would be "narrative in type and would—in itself and for its own account—pursue a momentary fork in the narrative" (pp. 335-336). Given the nature, texture, and unreliability of the comments in *The Unknown*, all of which are not so dissimilar to some of the narrative's tone, one might ponder whether the source code notes are not, in fact, paratextual in location, but narrative in nature, making them a form of what could be identified as "fictional paratext." In the page alaska.htm, for example, the source code paratext indicates the following: "curiously, though dirk <sic!> was the only member of the Unknown to live in Alaska, he does not remember contributing anything to the various Alaska scenes." At the same time, in the letter to Bentz (censored.htm), it is stated that "We have never been to Alaska nor played pool with William Gaddis."

Considering such paratext as fictional puts the inconsistencies found in the paratextual apparatus of *The Unknown* in a new light. From a literary point of view, the functionality of these paratextual elements may reside in becoming stylistic devices applied to achieve effects that serve the narrative. The non-formal use of paratext in *The Unknown* thereby echoes what literary scholar and formalist Viktor Shklovysky termed "*ostranienie*" ("defamiliarization"). In his essay *Art as Technique* (1965), he states that artistic objects potentially produce a process of estrangement in the observer. To him, "the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known" (p. 12). Thus, "the technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult" (p. 12). Indeed, we do encounter unfamiliar paratextual elements and uses in *The Unknown.* A strict application of the Genettian lens may force these elements and uses to appear as misconceptions and misuses; yet Genette (1997b) makes the following assertion:

What one paratextual element gives, another paratextual element, later or simultaneous, may always take away; and here as elsewhere, the reader must put it all together and try (it's not always so simple) to figure out what the whole adds up to. And the very way in which a paratextual element gives what it gives may always imply that none of it is to be believed. (p. 183)

The "defamiliarized" paratext of *The Unknown* certainly makes it difficult to capture the "whole" of the piece from a structural or information-sharing point of view, as it constantly defeats attempts to index, label, or classify its content. However, the fact that it is perhaps not to be "believed," but rather taken as a playful, tongue-in-cheek addition to the narrative offers new and rich ways of bridging the narrative-paratext divide.

Paratextual Theory as a Tool for the Interdisciplinary Study of a Piece of Electronic Literature Such as *The Unknown*

Interdisciplinarity should, ideally, harness the best of the disciplines involved. While this may seem straightforward, issues pertaining to boundaries, the operationalization of concepts,

methods, and scholarly value do need to be resolved for the research to be truly enriched—and not hindered—by what can become either complementary or dichotomous approaches. For while interdisciplinarity may cause researchers to consider the limitations of previously trusted methods, it also cautions them against the preconceived ideas of what is considered acceptable within each field.

In this case, the paratextual framework undoubtedly provided an almost foolproof lexicon for both researchers to cite in order to define key concepts, to push the boundaries of each other's methods, and to bridge gaps in interpretation. By both relying on the theory and questioning it, the researchers could, fittingly, discover "thresholds" into the other's findings and integrate them into their own analysis. Based on this experience, it seems the framework can indeed serve as the "elegant bridge" described by Paling (2002, pp. 139-140) and help further interdisciplinary work between the humanities and information science, even beyond classification studies.

Even though Birke and Christ (2013) have claimed that the paratext's best use in digital culture may be to study how "specific forms of 'new' digital narrative really depart from the earlier paradigm of the narrative medium, the printed book" (p. 81), the researchers found that the theory offered enough malleability to situate the study of elements such as the titular apparatus, table of contents, or notes on a continuum, rather than in opposition. In fact, disagreements occurred precisely when the theory did not provide an easily transferable concept. The "home page" of one researcher was the "opening page" of the other; the idea of a "cover image" for an electronic work was also debated. Suffice it to say that these debates yielded equal victories for both parties. That being said, the limited scope of the study does not allow for a complete revision of such terms. Along the same lines, the researchers cannot use the data examined here to effectively expand the epitext/peritext divide to fit the digital narrative. McCracken (2013) proposed a model for e-books, but electronic literature is different. Furthermore, this study focused on a single work of electronic literature, albeit an important one. A comparative study of the work in its various versions, iterations, and editions might provide an interesting foray into the epitext/peritext question. A larger study of paratextual elements in electronic literature with a specific focus on the reliability factor in information-sharing practices would also be warranted. Nevertheless, the data was so rich that the work on *The Unknown* alone can certainly continue. In this sense, the methodology presented here, where pointed qualitative content analysis and close reading are entwined, can serve as a guide for further investigation of this and other works, which in turn could lead to a full expansion of Genette's theory for electronic literature… until, of course, the object of study challenges the theory again, as it absolutely should.

CONCLUSION

The interdisciplinary study of *The Unknown* shows that this work of electronic literature presents numerous and intriguing types of paratext, yet somehow also continuously defeats the definition and purpose of these elements as defined by Gérard Genette in his work *Seuils* (1987). Combined qualitative content analyses and close readings reveal a plethora of inconsistencies in the titular apparatus and other paratextual elements whose role should be to provide identifiers and references for the reader. Furthermore, comments and notes appearing in the source code seem to be both informational and misleading, as testimonies and authorship claims collide. These inconsistencies affect the study of the work's structure, its presentation as a collection of HTML pages, the researcher's understanding of the work's genesis, any indexing efforts, the narrative itself, and, of course, the reading experience it provides.

In other words, the very nature of this important, award-winning digital object seemingly makes some of the paratext non-functional as per Genette's criteria. However, Genette (1997b) did state that, "from the fact that the paratext always fulfills a function, it does not necessarily follow that the paratext always fulfills its function well" (p. 409), and the framework remains extremely powerful in highlighting precisely what the work does not provide. Therein lies the fascination: the framework helps to underline the structural issues, to question the reliability of the information provided by the authors, and to understand how the narrative may be experienced and even enhanced by the presence or absence of paratextual elements; yet these issues are best understood precisely because the paratextual elements, as they exist within the work, create an uncertainty about their very use.

In the brown line of *The Unknown* lies the most straightforward index provided, that of the mp3 files. A most amusing message to the reader accompanies this index: "Audiophile-quality recordings of individual scenes from live readings, meta-tagged according to cutting-edge ALA standards." The ALA referred to here is, most likely, the American Library Association, and the knowing reader can only smile at the—hopefully ironic—allusion since nothing, in *The Unknown*, answers to any known classification standards. Interestingly, Genette (1997b) also referred to library practices when he defined the title as "an identifying device, such as libraries' call numbers or the ISBN of modern publishing" (p. 80; this was, not surprisingly, also noted by Paling, 2002, p. 140). It seems that classification, structure, labeling, and identification are never far from the paratextual ideal—but while it may be the researcher's role to search for the perfect framework, the artist's role may well be to provide the loopholes that push the reflection just a little bit further.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researchers gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Université de Montréal (Programme de Financement des activités liées à l'internationalisation de l'Université pour 2012-2013, Volet 3: Recherche – Développements de partenariats internationaux en recherche, Direction des relations internationales; Fonds de démarrage) and of the Department of Linguistic, Literary, and Aesthetic Studies at the University of Bergen. They would also like to thank Daniel Apollon, Scott Rettberg, and the Digital Culture Research Group at the University of Bergen. Preliminary versions of this research were presented at the 41st Annual Canadian Association for Information Science Conference and at the 9th Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Book Culture in June 2013.

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APPENDIX 1: CODEBOOK FOR THE INTERTITULAR APPARATUS

Example of a repeated date or other number creating a thread
Example of a repeated date or other number creating a thread except in window title
Example of a repeated location creating a thread
Example of a repeated location creating a thread except in Map ALT tag
Example of a repeated location creating a thread except in table of contents title
Example of a repeated location creating a thread including in Map ALT tag
Example of a repeated proper noun creating a thread
Example of a repeated proper noun creating a thread except in table of contents title
Example of a repeated proper noun creating a thread except in URL
Example of a repeated proper noun creating a thread except in window title
Example of a repeated word/expression creating a thread
Example of a repeated word/expression creating a thread except in audio title
Example of a repeated word/expression creating a thread except in in-page title
Example of a repeated word/expression creating a thread except in mp3
Example of a repeated word/expression creating a thread except in .ra file name
Example of a repeated word/expression creating a thread except in table of contents title
Example of a repeated word/expression creating a thread except in URL
Example of a repeated word/expression creating a thread except in window title
Example of a variation on a proper noun creating a thread
Example of a variation on a proper noun creating a thread except in table of contents title
Example of a variation on a word/expression creating a thread
Example of a variation on a word/expression creating a thread except in in-page title
Example of a variation on a word/expression creating a thread except map ALT tag
Example of a variation on a word/expression creating a thread except in mp3
Example of a variation on a word/expression creating a thread except in URL
Example of a variation on a word/expression creating a thread except in window title
Example of consistency in a series because file names are consistent and sequential
Example of consistency in a series because file names are consistent and sequential except the first one
Example of consistency in file names and audio title
Example of consistency in file names and window title
Example of consistency in file names but not in titles
Example of consistency in titles and consistency in file names but inconsistency between titles and file names
Example of consistency over 3
Example of consistency over 4
Example of consistency over 5
Example of inconsistency caused (or in part) by a typo
Example of inconsistency in a series

Example of inconsistency in a series because of variation between table of contents and window titles but consistency in file names
Example of inconsistency in a series because series title is included in only one of the titles but file names are consistent
Example of inconsistency in mp3
Example of inconsistency in table of contents title
Example of inconsistency in URL
Example of inconsistency in window title
Example of inconsistency through some of the file names and titles
Example of inconsistency throughout the file names and titles

APPENDIX 2: CODEBOOK FOR THE SOURCE CODE COMMENTS

1. Genesis of the work
    1.1. Authorship—stated
    1.2. Authorship, hinted or guessed at
    1.3. Information about places where the work was written
    1.4. Information about dates and chronology
    1.5. Information about versions
    1.6. Inside influences
    1.7. Outside influences
    1.8. Borrowed material
    1.9. Artistic and collaborative issues
2. Description of the work
    2.1. Genre
    2.2. Comparisons with other works
3. Personal information about the authors
4. Points of view
    4.1. Comment on technology
    4.2. Point of view on society and literature as commodity
5. Genesis of the commentary
    5.1. Signed code
    5.2. Who (the heck) is speaking