Categories of Digital Poetics Practices (from the Electronic Literature Collection)

http://collection.eliterature.org/1/ (Electronic Literature Collection, Vol 1)
http://collection.eliterature.org/2/ (Electronic Literature Collection, Vol 2)

Ambient: Work that plays by itself, meant to evoke or engage intermittent attention, as a painting or scrolling feed would; in John Cayley's words, "a dynamic linguistic wall-hanging." Such work does not require or particularly invite a focused reading session.

Kinetic (Animated): Kinetic work is composed with moving images and/or text but is rarely an actual animated cartoon.

Transclusion, Mash-Up, or Appropriation: When the supply text for a piece is not composed by the authors, but rather collected or mined from online or print sources, it is appropriated. The result of appropriation may be a "mashup," a website or other piece of digital media that uses content from more than one source in a new configuration.

Audio: Any work with an audio component, including speech, music, or sound effects.

CAVE: An immersive, shared virtual reality environment created using goggles and several pairs of projectors, each pair pointing to the wall of a small room.

Chatterbot/Conversational Character: A chatterbot is a computer program designed to simulate a conversation with one or more human users, usually in text. Chatterbots sometimes seem to offer intelligent responses by matching keywords in input, using statistical methods, or building models of conversation topic and emotional state. Early systems such as Eliza and Parry demonstrated that simple programs could be effective in many ways. Chatterbots may also be referred to as talk bots, chat bots, simply "bots," or chatterboxes.

Codework: Codework is a type of creative writing which in some way references or incorporates formal computer languages (C++, Perl, etc.) within the text.

Collaboration: A work created by more than one person.

Combinatorial: Works where the permutation of possible outputs plays a key role in the composition.

Conceptual: Art in which the concepts or ideas involved are considered the real substance of the work, as opposed to the made art object. Conceptual art may produce a physical manifestation, however. The intangibility of digital creations raises the issue of whether their art is "really" the concept and/or code that creates them, and whether their visual presence online is only some form of documentation. Since the visual dimension of a work

can further vary with platform, browser, hardware, etc., these questions become acute around issues of preservation and archiving.

Constraint-Based or Procedural: Raymond Roussel and the Oulipo wrote literary works according to formal constraints based on literary features, such as homonymic puns. Beyond the fact that code itself is constraint-based, much digital work is also based on formal constraints which may be features of visual, linguistic, or software systems. Procedural programming is based on procedure calls allowing for a modular (re-use) structure. This type of structure is also used to design and code works of online literature.

Database: A database is an organized collection of data. The term originated within the computer industry, but its meaning has been broadened by popular use. Within the digital arts, ways of working with a database are often used metaphorically as ways to structure works. Some works do actually involve large relational databases. Often what would be referred to as an anthology or gathering in print may be thought of as a database online.

Documentary: By analogy with print or film, a work intending to document a life, career, or historical occurrence.

Ergodic/Interactive/Participatory: While arguably applying to most of the works in the ELO collection, these terms are more specifically used for games and interactive fiction, and in the event that the reader's bodily movement functions as a fundamental structural component of the work.

Flash: A commercial system particularly useful for vector-based animation. It was first developed and sold by Macromedia; that company has been acquired by Adobe, which currently sells Flash.

Gaming: The term "computer game" more easily allows for games which display only text or which use other methods, such as sound or vibration, as their primary feedback device. The computer enforces a certain physics of play and provides incentives such as a score or the ability to defeat opponents. In more open-ended games, or play activities (see "Wordtoy"), the player is free to pursue less directed activities in a virtual universe.

Generative: Generative art or media are sometimes referred to as the genetic code of artificial objects, working and producing in unique, unrepeatable ways. In experiencing a generative piece, the reader starts the process that results in the output, as opposed to watching a pre-prepared motion picture or selecting one of several pre-written texts to read.

Hacktivist: Indicates programming, modifying digital media, exploiting computer systems, and otherwise working with networked computing to further a political goal, by analogy with other sorts of activism. The term is meant to suggest disruptive senses of "hacking" along with activities such as civil disobedience, although particular artists labeled as hacktivists may not engage in illegal activities. Related concepts are "arts activism" and "prankstavism," which refer to works made to further social change.

HTML/DHTML: HyperText Markup Language (HTML) is a format for defining web

pages to be displayed in a web browser. HTML is used to structure information—to designate headings, paragraphs, and lists, for instance, as well as hypertextual links—and can be used to describe the appearance and semantics of a document.

Hypertext: Hypertext is a user-interface paradigm for displaying documents which, according to an early definition (Ted Nelson, 1970), "branch or perform on request." The most frequently discussed form of hypertext document contains automated cross-references, called hyperlinks, to other documents. Hypertext fiction was the earliest form of e-literature recognized as such.

Inform: Inform is a programming language and design system for interactive fiction originally created by Graham Nelson in 1993.

Installation: A freestanding work in the physical environment, similar to an art installation, that uses programming and/or digital display as critical components of its creation.

Interactive Fiction: This term describes software simulating environments in which players use text commands to control characters and influence the environment. Works in this form can be understood as literary narratives and as computer games. In common usage, the word refers to what are also called text adventures, a type of adventure game with text-based input and output.

Java: A software technology from Sun Microsystems that encompasses the Java programming language and the virtual machine on which it runs, which can run inside a web browser. Java programs are cross-platform and come in the form of "applets," if browser-based, or "applications."

JavaScript: A scripting language that has little in common with the similarly-named Java programming language. It runs on the client computer, like Java, but can be embedded throughout web pages. JavaScript is a registered trademark of Sun Microsystems, used under license for technology invented and implemented by Netscape.

Locative: Refers to works that make use of locative technologies, such as GPS, Global Positioning System, a satellite navigation system, or RFID, Radio Frequency Identifiers, as part of their processes.

Network Forms: Many works of e-literature reference, are structured like, or make use of the styles of network forms such as the personal home page, the FAQ or Frequently Asked Questions list, the blog, the listserv, the commercial website, the newsfeed, the wiki, the network, or email.

Non-Interactive: The work does not require any interaction from the user or reader beyond accessing it, running it, and perhaps exiting the program.

Performance/Performative: In performance art, the main work is the action of the artist for some interval of time. There is no art object, although performances can be documented.

Much digital writing can be seen as both performance art, when it consists of a one-time online gathering without residue; and performative, when it reflects—and reflects on—an inherent ephemerality in digitality while in fact leaving a semi-permanent cyber-object in its wake.

Place: Place is rethought in many ways in digital works. Issues of displacement, diaspora, positioning by satellite, cyberlocation, and re-understood geo-location are raised by the nature of the online network experience. Some of the work dealing with place references the mid-twentieth century Situationist movement.

Processing: An open source "programming language and integrated development environment (IDE) built for the electronic arts and visual design communities." Processing aims to teach the basics of computer programming in a visual context. It builds on the graphical side of the Java programming language, simplifying features and creating a few new ones.

QuickTime: A multimedia technology developed by Apple Computer, capable of handling various formats of digital video, sound, text, animation, music, and immersive panoramic images.

Shockwave: A cross-platform development system for interactive digital media developed by Macromedia (now Adobe). Shockwave is often used for online game development. It offers a 3D engine rather than the vector-based, scalable graphics of Flash.

Squeak: An implementation of the Smalltalk programming language. Squeak's developers include Alan Kay, who led the group that originally created the Smalltalk programming language in the early 1970s. Squeak is derived from Smalltalk-80. It may be downloaded at no cost and may be freely adapted and distributed.

Storyspace: Storyspace is a hypertext system developed by Jay David Bolter, Michael Joyce, and John B. Smith. Since 1990, the software has been published by Eastgate Systems. Storyspace is a standalone hypertext system. Most fiction published in Storyspace, including classic hypertexts such as afternoon, a story by Michael Joyce, and Patchwork Girl by Shelley Jackson, is published in Storyspace reader (standalone application) versions. Storyspace also has an export to HTML feature, which some authors have used for web hypertext development.

Stretchtext: A text that can be longer or shorter on demand, as defined by Ted Nelson. Usually mousing over the text will reveal additional interpolated text. This newly surfaced text, moused over in its turn, reveals yet more stretches of text. The user does not ever leave the current page.

TADS: Text Adventure Development System (TADS) is a programming system for creating interactive fiction games. The first version was created by Mike Roberts in 1987.

Textual Instrument: A work written and coded in such a way that it is capable, by analogy with a musical instrument, of playing numerous compositions. The reader is

invited to become an expert player of the piece, for skill at manipulating it, above and beyond familiarity with how its interface works, yields reading and viewing rewards. A closely related idea is that of the instrumental text, where an interface allows manipulations of a particular piece of writing in an interesting way.

Text Movie: This term is generally used to refer to a long flow of self-performing text, which may be "choreographed" to music or driven by some algorithm, that eschews images or most animation of the text itself. Young Hae-Chang Heavy Industries are noted for making text movies that maintain narrative flow, by contrast with "Ambient" work.

Three-Dimensional: A work, generally on a two-dimensional screen, composed to create three-dimensional effects. Three-dimensional effects, except for artists' or pop-up books, are not widely known in print literature, though they are widely used in sculpture, sound installation, and kinetic art.

Time-Based: Works in which the many possible coded timings of the piece itself are composed or manipulated elements of central interest.

Translation: Works in which the process of translation between languages, or between natural languages and code, is referenced, enacted, or otherwise important.

Viral: One of a number of themes, like surveillance, arts activism, and identity, with peculiar digital resonance, pointing as they do to network effects or practice. Viral can also refer to work generated by software emulating bio-evolutionary "Darwinian" algorithms.

Visual Poetry: A poetic or narrative work in which the visual component takes a primary role.

VRML: Virtual Reality Modeling Language (VRML, pronounced vermal) is a standard file format for representing 3D interactive vector graphics, designed particularly with the web in mind. It is rarely used now but was popular in the late 1990s.

Wordtoy: A term used to describe works in which the user is invited to play with an experimental interface in such a way that new textual creations are manufactured during the interaction. The term may also refer to works that invite playful manipulation more than reading.

Categories and definitions taken from the Electronic Literature Organization--
http://eliterature.org/
http://collection.eliterature.org/1/
http://collection.eliterature.org/2/