

The Four-Level Model of Electronic Text

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The purpose of this paper is to summarize well-known facts that are relevant to the relationship between the notions of text and the computer. When considering these facts simultaneously, several questions might be raised that, if answered from the aspect of the computer, may clarify several problems related to the increasing virtuality of technology and the particular globalization caused by the Internet. These problems are rather 'sensed' than 'known'. As for the field of textology, answering these questions enables us to utilize the computer as a model for some complex processes.

The computer, or rather the binary code representing the computer is related to text in many aspects. However, this question is too diverse and complex to investigate in the time frame for the presentation, so the paper is restricted to texts stored on or processed with the computer. These texts can be grouped into four levels, namely the following:

- a) content or 'abstract text' that lies in the background of all other types of text and is becoming increasingly independent as computers integrate together and the network is becoming more and more general;
- b) machine code: the substantial means of representing text on the computer, the 'raw material' of different manifestations of (textual) performance;
- c) different types of (textual) performance: these are the various presentation of texts, rendered for human senses, i.e. printed, displayed on screen or on a projector;

These three levels of text form a strict hierarchy and together they form the technology of computational text representation that fits among the traditional types of text representation. The fourth level in question is not meant for the 'public', however, we can suppose that it facilitates the investigation of the nature of computational text to a great extent. This textual level is

- d) the so-called 'projected' text: this means text written in mark-up languages.

This paper tries to look beyond this restricted subject. To achieve this, the author has marked points where the paper mentions a topic that requires further explanation or investigation.