15.

Re-encoding dominance: queer approaches to TEI markup

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This chapter considers the potential alignment between a rigidly structured and constraining editorial format, the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), and a strategically nebulous collection of identities and politics expressed by the designation of queer. It proposes how editorial practices with the TEI might draw from Queer of Color Critique to engage modes of resistance against dominance structures. Here, the critique of Queer Studies' capitulation to majoritarian and neoliberal politics inspires methods for reworking the structuring forces within both the TEI markup language and textual editing practices more broadly.

Textual scholarship and queer historiography

I begin with a brief reflection of my own work developing a custom TEI schema to mark up the homoerotic content that Oscar Wilde edited out of his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) (Calado 2022). In the first chapter of the manuscript, which Wilde revised heavily before sending it for publication in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* on 20 June 20 1890,[1] I focused on Wilde's suppressions of homoeroticism between the story's three main characters, Basil

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1   See Wilde and Frankel, pp. 40–54, for a more complete accounting of the preparation of the typescript for publication.

Hallward, Lord Henry Wotten and the eponymous Dorian Gray. I marked up these revisions within one of four categories, or 'tags', relevant to the text: 'intimacy', 'beauty', 'passion', and 'fatality'. These tags indicate general patterns of revision, like the stifling of emotional tension, physical affection, expressions of beauty and passion, and of the obsessive and self-destructive effects of infatuation. In addition to marking up conceptual changes to the manuscript, I also noted physical elements, like the number of Wilde's pen strokes over each span of deleted text.

For this project, I drew my encoding principles from across the disparate fields of Textual Scholarship and Queer Historiography, which, I argued, have similar debates about the role of recovery in historical work. Historically, Textual Scholarship tends to privilege the editor as a recoverer or preserver of text, with prominent editors like Ronald B. McKerrow promoting authorial intention as the dominant criterion for editorial decisions.[2] Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, this prioritisation of authorial intention, which I call the 'restorative approach', begins to shift in the wake of new tools that multiply, rather than narrow, the potential forms that editorial work might take. Here, the work of Jerome McGann, drawing from Donald F. McKenzie's 'sociology of text', which challenges the idea a single text could ever represent an 'ideal' version, explores how electronic environments open a space for representing textual variation unhindered by the limitations of the codex format. Opposed to the restorative aims of their predecessors, McKenzie and McGann's approach, or the 'productive' approach, subscribes the text to new formal configurations that can stimulate analysis. To this debate in Textual Scholarship, I compare a similar debate from the field of Queer Historiography, which concerns the applicability of 'queer' as a designation for identifying historical subjects. The productive side of debate argues that queerness in the past cannot be scrutinised

2 McKerrow's position was subsequently developed through the work of Walter W. Greg, who expanded the critic's purview beyond the single copy-text, and then to Fredson Bowers and Thomas Tanselle who proposed an eclectic editing practice that could distil authorial intention from multiple sources.

in the present without subscribing it to a teleology that effectively normalises (and therefore evacuates) its *queerness*. Heather Love, for example, proposes a critical method that, rather than attempt to pin down queerness, attends to the ways that it eludes knowability. By contrast, the restorative side maintains that queerness requires historical specificity in order to be legible, and that it ought to be traced as a historically situated phenomenon.[3]

Guided by this framework of queerness as strategically uncontainable, I set out to use the TEI to mark up information that I suspected would provoke the bounds of the tags themselves. My encoding work unearthed, as I had expected it to, a resistance to the demand for fixity in the TEI schema. The boundedness of the TEI format, which encapsulates data within a structured set of tags, struggles against the porous perimeters of text's queer themes – themes like 'intimacy', 'fatality', 'passion' and 'beauty'. My custom schema engaged the difficulty of tagging this conceptual information with the physical register of Wilde's pen strokes, which sometimes fails to map with the themes. While some of the editorial decisions for categorising revisions were straightforward, for example, the label of 'intimacy', for moments when Basil 'tak[es] hold of [Lord Henry's] hand' (Wilde 9), or when Dorian's 'cheek just brushed [Basil's] cheek' (Wilde 20), others were more difficult. Sometimes, for example, the revisions of intimacy have the attendant effect of mitigating the sense of fatality that surrounds Basil's attraction to Dorian. In one striking moment from the dialogue, where Basil struggles to impart to Lord Henry the effect of his passion for Dorian Gray, the themes are inextricable. The original line in the manuscript reads: 'Lord Henry hesitated for a moment. "And what is that?" he asked, in a low voice. "I will tell you," said Hallward, and a look of pain came over his face. "Don't if you would rather not," murmured his

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3 'For instance, Valerie Traub's argument that the term 'queer' loses its descriptive value if applied ahistorically: 'Queer's free-floating, endlessly mobile and infinitely subversive capacities may be strengths – allowing queer to accomplish strategic maneuvers that no other concept does – but its principled imprecision implies analytic limitations.' (Traub 2013: 33).

companion, looking at him' (9). In the revised version, Lord Henry 'laugh[s]' rather than 'hesistate[s]', he no longer speaks 'in a low voice', and his 'look of pain' is neutralised into 'an expression of perplexity'. These changes, which lighten a particularly tense display of 'intimacy', also work to obscure Basil's internal suffering, fitting to the label 'fatality'. Additionally, marking up the number of pen strokes reinforces the TEI's structural constraints: while the word 'look' is struck too heavily to be counted, the word 'pain' contains a single stroke. It is impossible to mark the number of strokes for each word without separating this single revision into two instances within the TEI data structure.

The TEI structure

This formal experiment, however productive in its refusal against the restorative impulse, now seems insufficient. The more that I work with the TEI, the more I come to realise that the problem with its data model goes beyond the boundedness of its elements, and towards a dominating, top-down structure that XML imposes on textual 'data'. At the root of the TEI's rigidity is its hierarchical document model that propagates implicit power relations between elements in the document, where each element within the tree structure subscribes to its parent element and dominates its subordinate ones. Within this treelike architecture, information is not only encapsulated or bound: it is also delineated by the standards of each governing tag, its syntax, model, attributes and contents.

One cannot get outside the TEI's dominance structure. Two examples, 15 years apart, serve to illustrate attempts to do so by researchers and scholars. The first occurs in 2008, when XML researcher Jeni Tennison, who 'want[s] to see if we can get away with not having hierarchy as a fundamental part of the information model', writes about developing a new markup language that distinguishes dominance from containment (Tennison 2008, 'Essential Hierarchy'). As Tennison explains, element overlap is essential for some forms of written language. For example, 'the way in which the

syntactic (sentence/phrase) structure overlaps with the prosodic (stanza/line) structure is one important way in which you can analyse a poem' (Tennison 2008, 'Overlap, Containment, and Dominance'). Within a hierarchical data model, conflicts arise from the clashing of different encoding priorities across the structural and semantic readings of the document, where the layers of structure, metre, grammar and semantics can propagate contentious claims on a single word or line of text. To resolve these conflicts, Tennison distinguishes between dominance and containment:

> When you're talking about overlapping structures, it's useful to make the distinction between structures that *contain* each other and structures that *dominate* each other. Containment is a happenstance relationship between ranges while dominance is one that has a meaningful semantic. A page may happen to contain a stanza, but a poem dominates the stanzas that it contains (Tennison 2008, 'Overlap, Containment, and Dominance'; emphasis original).

As a solution that prioritises containment while also suggesting dominance relationships, Tennison proposes a new (but now unsupported) markup language: 'The Layered Markup and Annotation Language' (LMNL). It uses a series of ranges that describe start and stop points for an element, rather than nesting elements one inside the other. In the example below, the tags are left open to accommodate additional ranges:

> [book [title [lang}en{lang]}Genesis{title]} [chapter} [section [title}The creation of the world.{title]} [para} [v}[s}[note}In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth,{note [alt}In the beginning God created heaven and earth.{alt]]{v] [v}the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss, [note}and a mighty wind that swept{note [alt}and the spirit of God hovering{alt]] over the surface of the waters.{s]{v] [v}[s}God said, [quote}[s}Let there be a light{s] {quote], and there was light;{v] [v}and God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from darkness.{s]{v] [v}

[s}He called the light day, and the darkness night. So evening came, and morning came, the first day.{s]{v] {para] ...{chapter]... {section]...{book] 'The Layered Markup and Annotation Language (LMNL)'

Tennison's data model indicates dominance relationships by layering certain markers, in which the contents of one element can flow into the next, rather than through a tree structure, where all elements must be nested. What the data structure gains in flexibility, though, it loses in legibility. The overlap of elements makes this document considerably harder to read, compared to the TEI, where elements are neatly contained within one another.

The problem with TEI, and more deeply, with its parent structure, XML, is that dominance structures are totalising. Solutions for handling this dominance can result in convolution and redundancy, as the TEI Guidelines themselves demonstrate. In one section of the Guidelines, a section on linking data, they suggest the use of pointers or 'anchors' to encode information that is nonhierarchic or nonlinear. Here, an anchor within one element may correspond to an anchor in another element, thus indicating a relationship between elements while avoiding overlap. In another section of the Guidelines, more suggestions include the 'redundant encoding of information in multiple forms', and 'the use of empty elements to delimit the boundaries of a non-nesting structure'.[4] These solutions work by severing elements into components that maintain their own internal hierarchies which can be later recombined into the dominant hierarchy. While they do address the problem of dominance, they do so by diluting it rather than eliminating it: they bureaucratise the dominance structure, creating a proliferation of hierarchies that eventually defer back into the master hierarchy.

The issue of hierarchical dominance structures emerges again at the most recent annual TEI Conference and Members Meeting in

4   See Module 16, on 'Linking, Segmentation, and Alignment', and Module 20, 'Non-hierarchical Structures', in the TEI Guidelines.

2022, where Elisa Beshero-Bondar and her team reflect on their work developing a <gender> element for the TEI guidelines. Their project proposes a new <gender> element that is careful to weigh the expressive potential for representing gender against the possible risks of reifying normative cultural biases. As other projects seeking to encode plural or multiple gender ontologies have explained,[5] gender identities may take manifold forms, some of which can be contained within a capacious enough set of tags and attributes, such as distinct <gender> and <sex> tags. Other gender identities, however, may not fit into distinct categories. In the latter case, the problem goes deeper than the name of the tag itself and runs up against the hierarchical structure of the TEI document model. Beshero-Bondar and her colleagues explain that,

> Unexpectedly, we found ourselves confronting the Guidelines' prioritization of personhood in discussion of sex, likely stemming from the conflation of sex and gender in the current version of the Guidelines. In revising the technical specifications describing sex, we introduced the term 'organism' to broaden the application of sex encoding. We leave it to our community to investigate the fluid concepts of gender and sex in their textual manifestations of personhood and biological life (Beshero-Bondar et al).

While their new proposed element, <gender>, gives the team some capacity to represent gender as distinct from sex, the tagging structure nonetheless perpetuates the notion that both 'gender' and 'sex' serve some concept of personhood. Not only that these elements are subordinate to personhood in the TEI data model, but to a kind of personhood that can only have one value for each. The proposed solutions to this problem, which include exchanging <person> for the more capacious <organism> or even <entity>, as recently proposed in the TEI documentation, keep intact the notion that 'sex'

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5   See Thain, 'Perspective: Digitizing the Diary-Experiments in Queer Encoding' and Caughie et al., 'Storm Clouds on the Horizon: Feminist Ontologies and the Problem of Gender'.

and 'gender' are things or aspects that a person contains, that is, sex as something belonging to or expressed by a notion of personhood (martindholmes 2022).

Queer of Color Critique and the archive of slavery

I now turn to exploring new models for handling and navigating structural systems of dominance in textual editing. Here, I draw from Queer of Color Critique and its influence on critical work on the archives of slavery. As Roderick A. Ferguson affirms, 'Queer of Color Critique decodes culture fields not from a position outside those fields, but from within them, as those fields account for the queer of color subject's historicity' (Ferguson 2004, 4). The *critique* of this field responds to dominating trends within Queer Studies, such as the centring of dominant racial, class and gender positions in the wake of increasing mainstream acceptance of sexuality. Resisting incorporation into heteronormative and neoliberal politics, Queer of Color Critique foregrounds the imbrication of sexuality and race. One prominent critic, José Esteban Muñoz, frames this intersectional approach as a rebuke of the 'antirelational turn' in Queer Studies, perhaps exemplified most famously by Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, and the field of Queer Negativity which it spawned. According to Muñoz, the antirelational frame of thinking exhibits a wilful blindness towards difference, particularly towards racial difference:

> [M]ost of the work with which I disagree under the provisional title of 'antirelational thesis' moves to imagine an escape of denouncement of relationality as first and foremost a distancing of queerness from what some theorists seem to think of as the contamination of race, gender or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as the singular trope of difference. In other words, antirelational approaches to queer theory are romances of the negative, wishful thinking and investments in deferring various dreams of difference (Muñoz 2009, 11).

Drawing racial and gender minority positions into conversation with sexuality, Muñoz argues, enables new forms of politically potent collectivism. For example, Muñoz poses queerness as a future-bound phenomenon to energise an intersectional politics that can resist conscription into majoritarian systems. He asserts that 'Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality ... We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it in the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality' (1). Framing queerness as utopia enables two critical moves. The first is to glimpse queerness as a guiding structure that 'renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema' (Muñoz 2009, 97). The second is to foreclose attempts of incorporation into the main-stream, 'staving off the ossifying effects of neoliberal ideology and the degradation of politics brought about by representations of queerness in popular culture' (Muñoz 2019, 22). By virtue of being 'not yet here', in other words, queer futurity can structure modes of resistance within systems of dominance.

The strategy of centring minority subject positions within majori-tarian dominance structures drives much of critical work on arguably one of the most precarious data sets in history – the archive of slavery. As Saidiya Hartman explains, this archive is constituted by recording practices that not only omit or obscure information, but also employ a language that cannot approximate experience within a discourse that dictates silence (Hartman 2008, 2). Jessica Marie Johnson takes up this archive, a collection of documents written by slave-owning men, traders and colonial officials. These sources 'often contain incomplete information' which she must 'bring together in careful and creative ways' (Johnson 2020, 5). Her readings of these documents, which include marriage and baptism records from the seventeenth century, for example, weave a complicated and nuanced picture of black women's negotiation of their own freedom practices within the circumscribed systems of the early Atlantic world. Here, Johnson resists the rigid constraints that bound her inquiry in two ways. The first way is by a strategy of narration, where Johnson pieces together fragments that, on their own, tell a story of bondage and subjection to power. Rather than reify this dominating narrative,

Johnson relates the 'ways black women sought out profane, pleasurable and erotic entanglements as practices of freedom' (Johnson 2020, 12). For example, she frames each chapter with the story of a different woman from the archive, constructing for the reader a vivid scene that foregrounds the woman's character and accomplishments. One chapter begins with a dinner party by Seignora Catti, 'a wealthy merchant in her own right', who 'had leveraged her status as the wife of a European against her commercial savvy... for her own benefit' (Johnson 2020, 16). The notes reveal that the sources for Catti's biography stem from biographical writings featuring Jean Barbot, a commercial agent for a French slaving company based in Senegal. In Johnson's narrative, Barbot functions as a supporting character, a guest at Catti's dinner party who serves to distinguish her graciousness and work as a host. Johnson's method of bringing Catti into the foreground requires more than just assembling fragments from Barbot's biographies; it requires narrating from what Johnson describes at the end of her book as 'a deeper well of women, communities, practices, strategies, failures and terrors that shaped the meaning of freedom and a faith in the possibility of emancipation' (Johnson 2020, 231). These histories, which will never be known, influence stories like the one of Seignora Catti, 'the part we are able to witness' (Johnson 2020, 231).

In addition to reading between the fragments in the record, Johnson resignifies its silences. Drawing from Hortense Spillers's theorising on the effects of slavery on gender, Johnson's project 'rejects discourses of black women as lascivious or wicked, and transmut[e] them into practices of defiance and pleasure for themselves' (Johnson 2020, 10). This work emerges most provocatively in the way that Johnson handles information that is missing from the archive, for example, a census that ignores the presence of black women and girls living in the New Orleans area in the early eighteenth century. Reading these absences as 'null values', rather than absent values or zero values,[6] Johnson reframes the absence of

6 Johnson here draws from Jacob Gaboury's work on resisting compulsory identification in social media. See Gaboury, Jacob. 'Becoming NULL: Queer Relations

information to 'resis[t] equating the missing or inapplicable information with black death' (Johnson 2020, 135). Asserting these null values allows Johnson to index where these women exceed the logics of colonial subjectification:

> It is possible to see their absence as evidence of either their perceived nonexistence or lack of importance, or inferior data-collection practices. It is also possible, however, to hear in the register's silence the ecstatic shout of black freedom practices transgressing colonial desires, black people forming maps of kin between towns and countryside, black women loving each other into free states that could not be counted by census officials, much less managed by imperial entities or recorded on manuscript pages (Johnson 2020, 143).

The histories of what could have been, which do not fit into dominant systems of quantification, include the radical seeking of 'joy and pleasure, g[iving] birth, mother[ing] spaces of care and celebration, and cultivat[ing] expressive and embodied aesthetic practices to heal from the everyday toil of their laboring lives' (Johnson 2020, 10). By virtue of not being counted, Johnson argues, these women show 'where they exceed the bounds of colonial power' based on the quantification and commodification of black life. These null values allow Johnson to frame 'blackness not as bondage... but as future possibility' (Johnson 2020, 10).

The future of editing

By way of conclusion, I will highlight two recent TEI projects that, like Johnson's work on slavery's archive, resist rigid structures of dominance. As Amy Earhart points out, editorial practices are bound by structures deeper than the TEI data format. The obstacles that prevent many text encoding projects from succeeding have to do

in the Excluded Middle'. *Women & Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory*. 28:2, 2018. pp. 143–58.

with the absence of strong institutional support and funding. Therefore, in what follows, I look at how two projects take what Earhart describes as a 'DIY approach' that defies the structural constraints of both the institution and the data format (Earhart 2010, 314).

The first project, the *Editing the Eartha M. M. White Collection*, based at the University of Florida, is an electronic archive of personal correspondence and other documents related to Eartha M. M. White (1876–1974), the founder of the Clara White Mission and a leader of Jacksonville, Florida's African-American community. Beginning in a classroom in 2016, this project continues to grow through the collaborative effort of students, faculty and staff at UNF, with recent efforts being made to expand into the Jacksonville community more broadly. To facilitate collaboration on the project, they share their TEI documents on GitHub, an online space for publishing digital work (used primarily for collaborating on open software), and offer detailed, step-by-step instructions for new editors to get started with text encoding. The introductory guide to the archive, aimed at all levels of experience, indicates that this project draws significantly from a nonspecialist and community knowledge.

The second project, *The Peter Still Papers*, based at Rutgers University, collects and publishes correspondence (1850–75) relating to former slave Peter Still's attempts to purchase freedom for his wife and children in Alabama, and includes letters by William Lloyd Garrison, Horace Greeley and Harriet Beecher Stowe. This 'Documentary Edition' makes selective use of tags based on the TEI-Lite model, with the goal of bringing out a particular narrative among the papers:

> Our intention with the markup has been to produce a rough idea of the *aboutness* of each letter, and not to count every reference to a person or a place. Consequently, the persName and placeName tags have been used selectively.... in the personography file, we have made an attempt to include only those people who were significant in Peter Still's world, namely

family, friends, and people who helped or hindered him in his mission (*The Peter Still Papers 2015–22, 'About'*).

Their minimalist tagging scheme reflects an inventive approach towards the structural limitations surrounding the creation of the archive: first, the scope of the documents themselves, none of which are written in Still's hand, reflect what editors describe as 'only one side of a conversation, punctuated by many gaps and omissions' (*The Peter Still Papers* 2015–22, 'About'). Additionally, like the *Editing the Eartha M. M. White Collection*, this project draws from a range of skillsets, specifically from nonspecialists in American history, as 'no member of the project team is a historian by training, nor expert in the period in question' (*The Peter Still Papers* 2015–22, 'About').

Both archives work within limited structures – institutional and informational structures – towards collaborative and community-oriented encoding approaches. They demonstrate that resistance is not just another formal experiment, where non-normative bodies challenge subscription into an oppressive mainstream. It is a political project that *foregrounds* that which cannot be incorporated into a mainstream identity.

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