

Seeing Punctuation

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ABSTRACT

This introduction to this special issue of *Visible Language* examines why, and in what circumstances, punctuation may become visible: when especially does it come into view and demand our attention? While punctuation marks are, of course, visible signs, when they are functioning according to our expectations (and sometimes even when defying them), they can be barely noticed. The essay begins with discussion of a passage from Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit* in which a character's punctuation is referred to. This serves as a starting point for identifying a number of questions raised by such visibility, matters that are developed further, and variously, by the essays that follow. These include: punctuation's roles in articulating grammar and suggesting orality; what punctuation may tell us about views on education and literacy; defining punctuation; its historical visibility or invisibility; its variation according to technological change; and its iconic and figurative potential.

INTRODUCTION

In Charles Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, we meet Flora Finching, the former sweetheart of Arthur Clennam who has returned from working abroad in China after almost twenty years. Flora proves not to be the woman Arthur remembers, instead the narrator tells us of his vertigo in the presence of her coquettish volubility. Flora chatters and goes on chattering: she “never once came to a full stop,” “pointing” we are told “her conversation with nothing but commas, and very few of them.”¹ In the second encounter between Arthur and Flora, when she visits his new place of business, the garrulousness has worsened, expressing something that can be read both as pain and comic petulance, occasioned by her sense of being slighted by her former love:

‘Pray say nothing in the way of apology,’ Arthur entreated. ‘You are always welcome.’

‘Very polite of you to say so Arthur — cannot remember Mr Clennam until the word is out, such is the habit of times for ever fled and so true it is that oft in the stilly night ere slumber’s chain has bound people fond memory brings the light of other days around people — very polite but more polite than true I am afraid, for to go in to the machinery business without so much as sending a line or a card to papa — I don’t say me though there was a time but that is past and stern reality has now my gracious never mind — does not look like it you must confess.’

Even Flora’s commas seemed to have fled on this occasion; she was so much more disjointed and voluble than in the preceding interview.²

The more and faster Flora speaks the more punctuation diminishes into invisibility: the depiction of her language is characterized, first, by a relative paucity of full-stops and then even her commas seem to have fled the scene. In this instance, Flora is not described as “pointing” her own speech; instead, punctuation is anthropomorphized, escaping, as poor Arthur, fixed in her presence, cannot.

Punctuation is the subject of this special issue of *Visible Language* and the central preoccupation that its essays seek to explore is the ways in which punctuation is or may become visible to us as readers. While of course, in literal terms, punctuation marks are inherently visible signs—intrinsically more visual than any breath they may represent—and yet to devote a special issue of *Visible Language* to the subject of punctuation has something of a paradox about it, because when punctuation is functioning as it should, it remains largely unnoticed: “Inconspicuousness,” as

¹ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1857), book I, chapter 13.

² Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, book I, chapter 23.

Adorno has written, “is what punctuation lives by.”³ The purpose of this special issue is to examine how, and in what circumstances, punctuation may especially come to, or demand, our attention. Through a range of analytical approaches, the contributions to this issue suggest how attention is rewardingly directed towards these (commonly) smallest of textual signs.

In this example from *Little Dorrit*, for instance, punctuation is conspicuous by its very absence: it is its failure to appear that makes it noticeable. There is, with respect to punctuation, as this example shows, a relationship between aberrant usage and awareness. First, the absence of marks of punctuation occasions their translation into verbal terms as Flora’s unusual “pointing” of her speech finds itself deserving of narratorial comment, and eventually further neglect of marks of punctuation conjures them to life (upping and leaving the text); Dickens’s narration gives them agency and volition because, paradoxically, they are not there. But this passage from *Little Dorrit* provides us with even further insights into the workings of punctuation and our apprehension of it. Dickens’s articulation of Flora’s commas here raises matters of both historical and contemporary interest that will be picked up in various ways by contributions to this special issue.

First of all, to describe Flora as the producer of her own marks of punctuation—her commas and full-stops—isn’t accurate. In suggesting this, Dickens presents us with something of the complex set of relations between spoken and written forms of language that we are encouraged to meditate upon. Flora, as a speaker, doesn’t use commas as she utters, rather to ‘point’ seems synonymous with to pause; we are asked to imagine in a visual form, as marks on the page, the aural and invisible rests in speech. As such, Dickens draws primarily on the elocutionary function of punctuation marks, to indicate where we rest and may draw breath, while at the same time emphasizing, through the very reference to commas, that this is, inevitably, a textual depiction of the spoken word. Over time, theories of punctuation have variously (or concurrently) emphasized the elocutionary or the grammatical values of punctuation,⁴ the latter being prominent, for instance, in the prescriptive grammars that began to proliferate in the eighteenth century, following which grammatical thinking became more securely established in the nineteenth century by means of John Wilson’s work *A Treatise on Grammatical Punctuation*;

³ Theodor W. Adorno, Punctuation Marks, in *Notes to Literature, volume one*, Shierry Weber Nicholsen, translator (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 96; ‘Satzzeichen’ first published in *Akzente*, 1956.

⁴ Malcolm Parkes, The impact of printing: a precarious balance between logical and rhetorical analysis, in *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992), 87–92. See also, Alan Cruttenden, Intonation and the Comma, in *Visible Language*, 25.1, (1991), 55–73.

designed for letter-writers, authors, printers, and correctors of the press; and for the use of academies and schools (1844) which became a standard guide for printers.⁵ This passage from Dickens makes vivid how intrinsically inseparable the elocutionary and the syntactical are, as punctuation articulates the syntactic relations between parts of speech, helping us to distinguish grammatical sense on the page, as well as articulating pausing in any putative oral delivery. Dickens in fact maintains a syntactic cohesiveness to Flora's speech: its written form seems to aspire to, but doesn't quite capture in a verbatim sense, the disorderliness of spoken utterances: and certainly at no point does the passage lapse into complete incomprehensibility. Nevertheless it is as disorienting, according to our expectations of written language, to read Flora, as it is apparently to Arthur to listen to her.

The imagined co-existence of speech and writing in this instance (Flora's metaphorical marks), suggests something of Dickens's own history as a journalist and parliamentary reporter. Another of his characters, David Copperfield, like Dickens himself, learns the art of transcriptive reporting by means of shorthand. Small (and large) shifts in communication practice and technology—in this case, popular developments in modes of transcribing speech for parliamentary process—can have a permeating and transforming influence. In the popular novels of Dickens, we see a new and influential aspiration towards the replication of informal and idiosyncratic dialogue. Dickens, as Steven Marcus has put it, becomes the “stenographer of his characters,”⁶ though in the case of Flora he seems outstripped by her. According to Thomas Gurney, whose manual of shorthand, *Brachygraphy*, Dickens studied, punctuation has no place in shorthand, as it would “impede” and “confuse” the writer's “dispatch,” and instead breaks in an utterance are to be marked by a “vacancy,” or gap on the page.⁷ The relative absence of punctuation marks in Flora's discourse draws attention both to spoken and transcriptional rapidity. But the shorthand writer must nevertheless translate shorthand back into longhand, and a speaker's utterance will be imagined, to some degree, or at some stage, in punctuational terms, even if this is to leave such marks out. In *Pickwick Papers*, Dickens's first full-length novel, he imagines the character Jingle as speaking according to a “system of stenography,” and Jingle's “rapid and disjointed

5 Park Honan, *Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century English Punctuation Theory*, in *English Studies* (1960), 92–102.

6 Steven Marcus, *Language into structure: Pickwick revisited*, *Dædalus*, 101 (1972), 183–202, 192. See also Ivan Kreilkamp, *Voice and the Victorian Storyteller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chapter 3.

7 *Brachygraphy: Or an easy and compendious system of shorthand*, by Thomas Gurney, improved by Joseph Gurney, and now practiced by William Brodie Gurney, short hand writer to both houses of parliament. The sixteenth edition (London, for W.B. Gurney, 1835), 10.

communication” is marked, contrary to Flora’s, by a proliferation of dashes:⁸ the vacancies prescribed in shorthand are translated into this textual sign of absence and abruptness, which in turn become a visual signature of Jingle’s elliptical self:

‘Terrible place — dangerous work — other day — five children — mother — tall lady, eating sandwiches — forgot the arch — crash — knock — children look round — mother’s head off — sandwich in her hand — no mouth to put it in — head of a family off — shocking, shocking. Looking at Whitehall, sir? — fine place —’⁹

Flora’s, like Jingle’s, failure to speak with conventionally placed full-stops and commas signals the rapidity of her utterance, but this also casts some implicit aspersions on literacy. Flora’s failure to speak decorously is presented by means of a failure of *written* judiciousness, even though she’s not writing. In *Dombey and Son*, Dickens does something similar with another female speaker, Spitfire who “made use of none but comma pauses; shooting out whatever she had to say in one sentence, and in one breath, if possible.”¹⁰ However, in the same novel Dickens identifies a corresponding male pomposity that similarly, but by means of an aspiration to inordinately lengthy classical periods, fails to reach a full-stop.¹¹ In these examples, the speakers themselves don’t *misuse* punctuation marks, but readers are asked to imagine them doing so through their speech, or, rather, failing to use them when expected. A current-day example of error facilitating visibility and comment is the misplaced apostrophe, sometimes described as the ‘greengrocer’s apostrophe’ (draft addition to *OED*, 2002, defined: ‘an apostrophe used irregularly’), which in turn makes visible the issues of class and education that still, and seemingly inevitably, govern punctuational orthodoxy. Grammatical rules and consistency of usage have quite obvious benefits for our mutual understanding, but we might also acknowledge that punctuation rules, rather than being historically absolute, evolve and change over time. The apostrophe, for instance, was originally introduced into English as a sign of elision and although in the eighteenth century it was being used to mark possession, grammarians still tended to acknowledge alone its earlier role.¹²

Commas that flee, that are attributed with human characteristics, are familiar to us today in an age where we have seen the emergence of the emoticon: the

8. Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1837), chapter 7.

9. Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, chapter 2.

10. Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1848), chapter 3.

11. Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, chapter 12.

12. Vivian Salmon, Orthography and Punctuation, in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, vol. III, 1476–1776, Roger Lass, editor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 48.

assemblage of punctuation marks that make faces at us on our pages and screens. Punctuation is not so unusual a candidate for anthropomorphism as, perhaps, we might expect.¹³ John Harris's illustrated *Punctuation Personified* of 1824 demonstrated how for children it can serve as an important mnemonic aid. Punctuation marks also provide important information about the contours of the human speaking voice. In many English grammars, especially early ones, the simple primary marks of punctuation (, ; : .) were described emphatically in terms of pausing and intonation, as well as being commonly compared with rests in music, each signaling a rest of a differing length.¹⁴ It is the exclamation mark and the question mark, however, that may suggest even more of the thought and the emotion that lie behind, and in, a speaking voice: the exclamation mark communicating, for example, "exultation, indignation, joy and burning rage" (according to Chekhov), as well as, more generally, volume and inflection.¹⁵ In 1551 John Hart personified the exclamation mark as the "wonderer";¹⁶ in 1919, George Summey, in *Modern Punctuation: Its Uses and Conventions*, described it in a crescendo of personification, as "the note of admiration, the shriek of surprise, the representation of an excited gentleman jumping skyward."¹⁷ Some punctuation marks thus act as shorthand to human emotions, bypassing laborious verbal descriptions, though usually relying upon interpretative support through context. They can provide vividly human characteristics to text that is in essence divorced from the human being who speaks and they do so in informal modes of writing especially, as we seek to imbue our texts with something of our human presence.

In 1948, the psychologist E.L. Thorndike published in the *American Journal of Psychology* a short, intriguing, article entitled, *The Psychology of Punctuation*. Thorndike was interested in examining the extent to which punctuation can provide insights into the psychology of customs, which would be of import for a range of disciplines. That is, how, by means of the history of punctuation, we are able to trace the ways in which codes of practice are initiated and perpetuated. But he also wished to gauge the extent to which punctuation may act as an index to the psychology of authors. He thus provides punctuation counts across a range

13. See for instance, in this issue, Dürrenmatt quoting Adorno on this subject. Also Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2008), 6.

14. For example, John Hart in his 1551 *The opening of the unreasonable writing of our English tongue*; see Salmon, 22.

15. Anton Chekhov, *The Exclamation Mark*, Rosamund Bartlett, translator (London: Hesperus Press Limited, 2008).

16. Salmon, *Orthography and Punctuation*, 22.

17. George Summey, *Modern Punctuation: Its Utilities and Conventions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1919), 189.

of writers, seeing punctuation marks as “symptoms”—in a sense, as Dickens does with respect to his characters—and seeking a diagnosis of authorial characteristics, though he admits that punctuation reveals little of a “total personality.”¹⁸

In the course of his punctuation surveys, Thorndike came across a mark that hadn’t previously registered on his consciousness, though clearly he had encountered it many times:

I myself read all of George Meredith’s novels and many of H.G. Wells’s without acquiring any meaning whatever for ‘...’. Nor did a wide reading of other books that I now know contained thousands of ‘...’ attach any meaning to it. Not until I found it abounding in my counts of punctuation, did I ever think anything about it.¹⁹

It is hard to know whether to weight the cause of this occurrence to the inherent unnoticability of marks that lurk in between words, because meaning is primarily attributable to verbal semantics; or whether we might say, slightly differently, that readers can suffer from a conditioned form of obliviousness to non-verbal elements of textual experience. The latter is something from which Thorndike recovers, for once ‘...’ is perceived by him, it is transformed from invisibility to excess, seen in vast quantities and occasioning some anxiety—previously unexperienced because unnoticed—due to its unorthodox and innovative nature: “Among many recent writers there has been a veritable mania for ‘...’. What they mean by it and what it means to their readers I have not been able to discover.”²⁰ Such bafflement sits oddly alongside appreciation. Furthermore, attributing the introduction of ‘...’ into high quality fiction to the English novelist George Meredith, Thorndike still fails to see a much longer and broader continental history for ‘...’ which rests behind Meredith’s predilection for the mark. In spite of Thorndike’s optimism regarding the tracing of developing codes of practice for punctuation, the history of punctuation, and of individual punctuation marks—its lines of influence, its accumulating connotations, the connection between one usage and another—can be enormously difficult to bring into view. Choosing to follow one trajectory may only obscure another.

While demonstrating so clearly how, with regard to punctuation, we may fail to see what lies before us and what lies behind its most familiar uses, Thorndike’s essay does also reveal a new twentieth-century visibility to punctuation in terms other than the prescriptive. Thorndike admired and drew on the work of George

18 E.L. Thorndike, *The Psychology of Punctuation*, *American Journal of Psychology*, 61 (1948), 222–28, 28.

19 Thorndike, *The Psychology of Punctuation*, 225.

20 Thorndike, *The Psychology of Punctuation*, 223.

Summey who desired to move away from the study of punctuation as a tyrannically rule-bound practice, governed by printers and writers of school-textbooks whose “method has been prescription”;²¹ instead he reflected on punctuation in practice in contemporary American writing. For Summey in 1919, punctuation is, as he repeats, “an art,” not a “code,” nor “a matter of mechanical correctness”²² and it serves as a conduit of cultural information. Juxtapose with this Jennifer DeVere Brody’s 2008 book *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* where such a desire to eschew “prescriptivist rules” in the analysis of punctuation is repeated.²³ Thus we see here another strong strain at work in the history of punctuation, one in which writers, critics and artists more generally, seek to liberate punctuation from contextual expectation and pedagogic dogmatism.

Brody doesn’t just see punctuation as an art, but draws our attention to punctuation as an *art form*, a performance, including even material manifestations of punctuation marks in contemporary sculpture. The concretization of punctuation displays in Brody’s terms “[p]unctuation’s increasing ability to stand on its own—without a sentence to make sense of it.”²⁴ But that’s not to say that punctuation hasn’t always had the potential for visual and figurative autonomy. In Percival Leigh’s 1840 *Comic English Grammar* the pun in punctuation is displayed, as grammatical punctiliousness is pictured as a ballerina, on her own, standing on her points, even though it is “both absurd and inconvenient” to do so.²⁵ Or, to return to the art of Dickens, we see punctuation not only escaping grammatical constraints to facilitate characterization, but Dickens also identifies its ability to exist alone as an imagined gesture, a communication of affect, an independent performance of personality. When Stephen Blackpool approaches Bounderby’s home in *Hard Times*, the door is described as having “a round brazen doorhandle underneath it like a brazen full stop.”²⁶ The imagined full-stop has no need of a sentence in its prohibitiveness, proclaiming itself brazenly as an icon of character.

In *Little Dorrit*, when Flora holds the floor with her monologue, not only do commas flee but there is also a noticeable diminishment of narratorial interjection—the narrator, like Arthur, seemingly finds it difficult to get a word in—and, therewith, any description of environment, movement or gesture. Language becomes oddly disembodied and unmediated. Brody describes punctuation as performing “somatic gestures.”²⁷ Punctuation is certainly revealed in this passage of *Little Dorrit*—again,

21. Summey, *Modern Punctuation*, 4.

22. Summey, *Modern Punctuation*, viii and 6.

23. Brody, *Punctuation*, 22.

24. Brody, *Punctuation*, 26.

25. Percival Leigh, *Comic English Grammar: a new and facetious introduction to the English*

tongue (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), 218.

26. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*. For these Times (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1854), book I, chapter II.

27. Brody, *Punctuation*, 76.

by means its absence—as a space for performance, a gap in which we may reflect on tone, in which we (and the author) may visualize the movements of the body, the momentary closing of the lips. Instead, we experience here a form of narrative stasis as Flora returns repeatedly to a past that has gone and we witness a form of somatic stasis, occasioned by such verbal excess. When imagined gesture returns in the movement of Flora's head, it is accompanied, tellingly, by more conventional, expressive punctuation, in the two instances of an exclamation mark:

'But I do deny it, Flora. I should soon have made you a friendly visit.'

'Ah!' said Flora, tossing her head. 'I dare say!' and she gave him another of the old looks'²⁸

At this point the narrative moves on, to the more interesting topic, for Arthur, of Little Dorrit.

In the eighteenth century, Thomas Sheridan was keen to promote an understanding of the paralinguistic elements of communication in his *Course of Lectures on Elocution*. In his chapter on 'gestures,' he describes our extensive range of bodily gesture—especially that of the hands and the eyes—as a “visible language” that he believed sufficient “to every purpose of social communication,”²⁹ while earlier in his lectures lamenting that “there are no visible marks to serve as guides” to the non-verbal.³⁰ He was certainly correct to point out that our written language does not by any measure match the “extensiveness” of gesture,³¹ however, that is not to say that punctuation hasn't been, and continues to be, a locus of inventiveness for notating tonal and gestural elements of communication. In comprising an issue of *Visible Language*, the essays that follow suggest some ways of thinking about punctuation in the terms of the journal's title, an expression, as we have seen, that is common to Sheridan's writing about fundamental, performative principles of communication.

This issue of *Visible Language* brings together writers working in a range of disciplines: literary criticism; linguistics; education; typography and lexicography. The majority of the essays attend, though in rather different ways, to historical moments of change within punctuation practice. In the first essay, Jacques

²⁸ With many thanks to those students with whom I have had the opportunity of discussing Flora's punctuational predicament in *Little Dorrit*.

²⁹ Thomas Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures on Elocution: together with two dissertations on language; and some other tracts relative to those subjects* (London: by W. Strahan, [1762]), 147.

³⁰ Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures*, 10.

³¹ Sheridan, *A Course of Lectures*, 148.

Dürrenmatt investigates the deployment of punctuation marks in comic books, including their emergence as isolated and autonomous signs, taking examples that range from the 1830s to the early 2000s to trace how punctuation marks can serve elocutionary, emotional and ideological purposes (without, necessarily, accompanying verbal text). The comic book's combination of the verbal with the pictorial facilitated the punctuation mark, which is both a linguistic and iconic sign, to emerge as a marker of the genre. E.L. Thorndike, when describing the "veritable mania" for '...' noticed that while it might well be popular with highbrow writers such as Meredith, "the most extreme devotion" to the mark in his experience was in *Superman* where '...' appeared with three times the frequency than in the work of H.G. Wells.³² Dürrenmatt similarly testifies to the popularity of certain marks of punctuation in the comics, with suspension points (or ellipsis), the question mark and the exclamation mark—all of which are especially useful in providing paralinguistic and emotional information—becoming prevalent often to an excessive degree.

The tendency to multiple use of particular marks of punctuation is also of interest to Naomi Baron and Rich Ling in their essay on punctuation marks as used in electronically-mediated communication, as they consider how punctuation practice is changing in, and because of, such media and in doing so they challenge some popular misconceptions about language use in an electronic age. Their primary focus is text messaging: in the first part of their study they examine whether gender has an influence on punctuation usage, concentrating on a sample of teenage users; and in the second part, they examine text messages as produced by older, university students, comparing punctuation use in this medium to more traditional forms. Their findings display some clearly defined principles at work in the punctuation choices made by these students. In both their case studies we see, among other things, the emotional and socially-interactive work to which punctuation is put: again there are noticeably popular marks used for the purposes of informal and orally-inflected exchange, but, crucially, this is not necessarily at the expense of understanding more formal expectations of pointing.

In the next essay we stay with young users of punctuation, as Nigel Hall and Sue Sing investigate children's comprehension of punctuation marks, in particular how seven and eight years olds understand and employ speech marks. Their research is positioned alongside relatively new attention given to punctuation in the English national curriculum, as schools are provided with targets in the teaching of English, including ages for the correct use of particular marks of punctuation

³² Thorndike, *The Psychology of Punctuation*, 226.

and of a designated terminology relating to these marks. To use speech marks is to identify accurately on the page the boundaries between one speaker and another, a complex matter for young children; furthermore, Hall and Sing point out the typographical range for marking speech that children are presented with in children's books, as well as the extensive range of terms that refer to marks of speech. When the children, especially the younger children, involved in this study discuss punctuation, they are clearly most responsive to terminology that stimulates a visual image. With little extended research having been done into the pedagogy of punctuation, Hall and Sing express their intention to make children's own views on punctuation visible.

Speech marks are also the subject of Nick Blackburn's essay, though he investigates early users of the mark in another sense. His interest is the emergence of 'speech marks' in print: that is, the mark [""] that evolves into the inverted commas that we now use to demarcate speech. He traces the mark from early manuscript culture in the second century BC through to the print culture of England in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, focusing on literary and dramatic composition. These marks develop their association with quotation from their early-modern usage of marking sententious comments in books: that is, aphoristic, memorable phrases of the sort that might be excerpted into a commonplace book. One of the major concerns of Blackburn's essay is the relationship between manuscript and print cultures: how marks made by a particular reader, or group of readers, are captured in the pages of printed book. It is for this reason that in printed texts, these marks can seem strangely enigmatic and devoid of context. Our encounter with such fossils is one of alienation from an original reading context and yet, on the other hand, we have a momentary insight into a particular moment of textual engagement and reflection, preserved from the past seemingly arbitrarily. By means of such textual emphasis a trace of some person's private reading experience remains visible.

Common to the essays of Blackburn and John Lennard is the writing of Sir Philip Sidney (as well as, in Lennard's words, both doing "the past the favour of understanding that it punctuated things differently"). Both authors refer to different works by Sidney that pose punctuational problems to the modern reader. Lennard's focus is Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*, as he observes that in one of the two early printed versions of the text and in at least one early manuscript the argument of the entire *Defence* is contained in a single paragraph. The edition posthumously printed in 1595 for William Ponsonby is commonly used as the copy-text for modern editions, but its 67-page single paragraph is almost invariably divided into lesser paragraphs in these

later editions. In light of this, Lennard reflects on the possible purposes of the single paragraph, as well as the assumptions of modern editors in relegating its original form to invisibility. This example follows and exemplifies a theoretical discussion of the ways in which punctuation can be understood as invisible, with Lennard suggesting throughout the means by which technology facilitates punctuation's appearance to view.

The first of Lennard's categories of 'invisibility' is 'denial,' in which he points out that standard definitions of 'punctuation' imply punctuation *marks* and thus fail to acknowledge much broader systems of punctuating, such as spatial features of the text, including the paragraph. In the final essay of this issue, we turn to the punctuation of dictionary entries, as Paul Luna investigates 'punctuation' in its more expansive, typographical forms, including, as well as graphic symbols, paragraphing, indenting and changes of font. Luna charts the history of the typography of dictionaries from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first, demonstrating an increasing complexity of typographic coding over time, largely occasioned by the demands of space. In compact dictionaries, say, the spatial means of displaying entries and their component parts, has to be minimized, making the entry more dependent upon typographic cues. Likewise, the varying kinds of information supplied in any given dictionary have to be negotiated. Technological change has occasioned such changes. The development of bold styles of type in the nineteenth century allowed greater variation within entries, while mechanical and photomechanical typesetting put economic constraints on the number of fonts that could be used at any one time, a restriction to be removed by digital text. It is fitting that Paul Luna ends his own entry to this special issue by reflecting on the new possibilities offered by online dictionaries in which "a return can be made to text articulated by space."

From voice to page, manuscript to print, print to digital and all of these translating back again to voice, we will see, throughout these essays, attention to the ways in which shifts in media impact upon punctuation and how punctuation is responsive to, and articulates, those very changes. Punctuation is notoriously vulnerable to editorial interference, yet extraordinarily resilient in maintaining its forms and functions amid long histories of orthographic and technological change. It is a tool of logic, a notation of the voice and a graphic sign that may metamorphose imaginatively before our eyes. The essays collected together in this issue present us with many ways in which punctuation articulates and visualizes: 'visible language' captures its versatility well.

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