rarity in which we conceive of texts as products of interpretative acts.

Charles Bernstein's *Veil,* first published in print form and then in electronic format, offers a useful contrast in two modes of materiality.[14] The printed *Veil* is based on a typewriter poem in which Bernstein over-printed line after line of letters. This created a scrim or screen effect that rendered the language of the text almost illegible. But this illegibility is the point of the text, the porousness of which permits scraps of meaning to surface through the dense field of letters, the fine mesh of its own self-produced screen thus veiling the linguistic transparency of language. The materiality of print form is inherent in the visual and verbal value of the work. In a dialogic synthesis, the two aspects of writing, visual and verbal, play equal parts in the production of the whole.

In transposing the work into an electronic format, Bernstein modified the text and visual production. The letters in the printed *Veil* are always fully present, each layer sitting on the next in an irrefutable maximiza-tion of information. In the electronic version, however, the letters and blocks merge. For each point on the screen a single value is assigned to the pixel (one can say the same for the printed version, a photographic reproduction of the overprinting in the original typescript, though the photograph retains some of the material information of the original). This single value averages the overlapping rather than registering several values simultaneously. Unusual effects are produced that are not present in the print artifact. Some letters lighten the dark field of overlap, rather than invariably increasing its darkness.

from Johanna Drucker, Spec Labs (U Chicago Press, 2009)

In some ways the electronic *Veil* has more transparency than the printed version, but the texts in the electronic version no longer retain any degree of autonomy. Even if they couldn't be recovered and read from the print version, the individual text layers remained evident. In the electronic version, the history of placement, displacement, and layering simply can't be discerned. The production history might be saved in any number of file formats, but in the flattened display, the material trace of the early medium is lost, a new material expression in its place. The new *Veil* is thus a screen between production and display, erasing the history of production and erasing traces of its encoding. The poem has gone from being a text-as-image-of-its-production to being a graphical display showing the end result of now absent manipulations. In the digital condition it lacks—or appears to lack—a recoverable history of its own production. The electronic text has become a configured pattern, a palimpsest both real and illusory. Is the essence of its language the inherent but unreadable semantic value or the newly configured form of visual effect? Neither, of course, and both, as well as the many other visible and invisible features of its production and reinscription in any and every reading.