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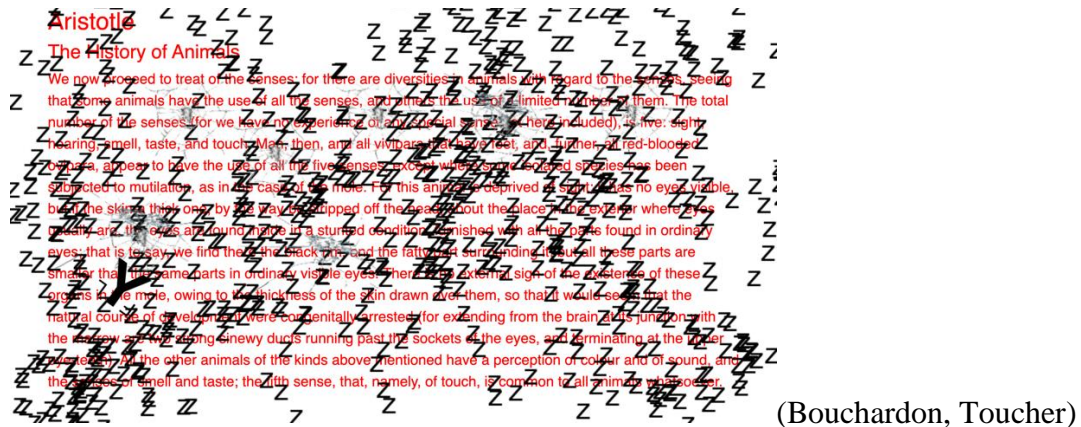
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Serge Bouchardon's Ability to Engage our Senses

Digital literature and electronic poetry allow for an individualistic experience for a reader to obtain while reading, watching, listening, and even interacting with these genres. A vast amount, not inherently all, of e-poetry, would lose its meaning if it were transferred to a piece of paper and printed. The beauty of the internet and electronics is that readers can navigate and explore these digital medias at their own pace and explore what intrigues them. Some works of electronic poetry require reader engagement and interactivity to further progress the poem and learn its hidden meanings. French poet Serge Bouchardon's poems, "Toucher," "Loss of Grasp," and "Do It," utilize a mix of digital elements, poetry, and sound to engage the reader with interactive poems and explore a select few of our senses: sight, hearing, and touch.

The sense of sight provides us with the ability to visually investigate our surroundings and new opportunities, exploring and reading poetry included. Bouchardon's poem "Toucher" relies heavily on sight as a factor that engages the reader and promotes exploration. Upon opening the poem, the reader is met with a hand facing palm-up, fingers spread apart, and fingerprints highlighted on the top of the fingers when the mouse or cursor passes over the areas. Each finger signifies a different poem, all of which vary in context and appearance. The poem linked to the thumb is titled "Move." A generated sentence appears with a few words changing throughout the poem's progression. Either running the cursor over the predetermined changing words or even having the chance to move the words around, the readjusting of the poem

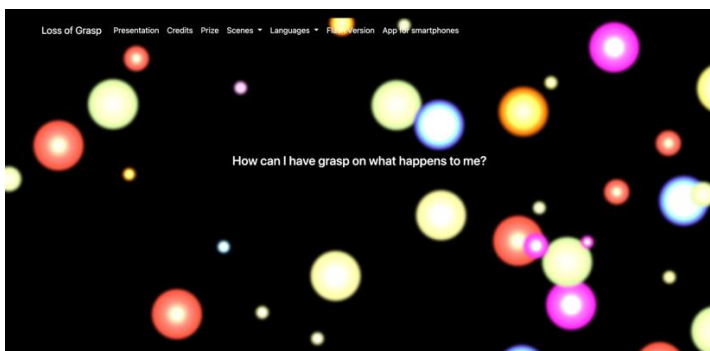
encourages switching the sentence around until it means something entirely different than its original sentence. The restructuring of the sentences is influenced and brought on by the reader. “Caress,” “Hit,” and “Spread” also heavily encourage sight as a sense to gauge the meaning behind the poem, though “Caress” really pushes the agenda. By moving the mouse or cursor across the screen, an image slowly starts to reveal itself the more the reader sweeps their mouse. The image reveals what appears to be two people lounging together in an embrace, almost caressing one another as the poem’s title suggests. The following poem juxtaposes the calmness of the previous poem when red lettering decorates the screen, talking about animals and insects, but is then quickly overtaken by a fly buzzing across the screen and leaving a trail of Zs and blinding the text



The only way to stop the fly and to reveal the text before it was covered is to “hit” the fly. Another poem that’s actions are directly related to the poem title. When clicking across the screen to kill the fly, the screen “cracks” and further makes the text even more indecipherable. The distortion of the screen forces the reader to concentrate on the objective at hand, thus losing themselves within the poem as they follow the buzzing fly and try to squish it.

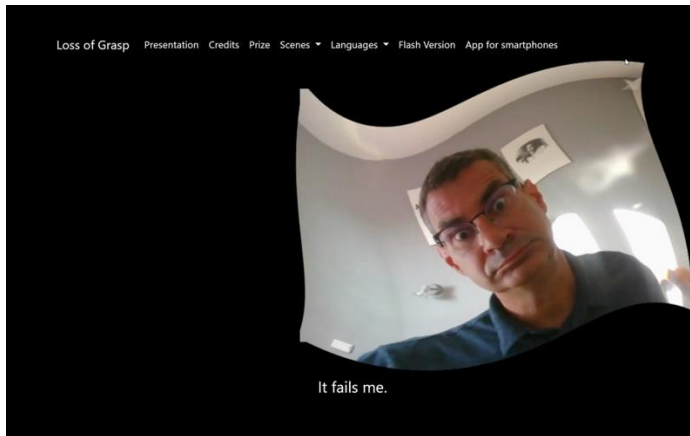
Visual effects are the most common sense to be used within digital writing and electronic poetry. Bouchardon’s poem “Loss of Grasp” is no different. The poem contains white lettering, a

black background, colorful dots, scrambled words and letters, and pictures to keep the reader's gaze fixated on the poem, connecting dots, and understanding the narrator's relation to his realities and how he begins to lose his grip. The first scene includes bright and colorful dots of various sizes that let out a high-pitched note when the mouse is dragged across the screen, or the mousepad is clicked. At this moment in the poem, the reader (and understandably the narrator) has control over their relations, but toward the end the scene, it is revealed that the narrator has "lost control"



(Bouchardon, Loss of Grasp)

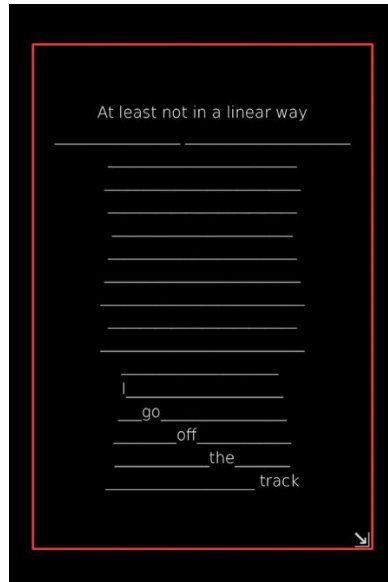
At the same time the narrator claims to have lost control, so does the reader. The reader loses control over the colorful dots, and they begin to spread and move across the screen, no longer following the viewer's cursor. There are various other instances of visuals being used to create a mix of distortion and clarity, though the narrator feels as if he is being manipulated by his wife, son, and himself. He is unable to keep a grasp on these relationships and his descent into a loss of reality is evident, but in the fifth scene we, the viewers, *really* get to see how the narrator's depiction of himself gets manipulated. Bouchardon invites us to use our device's webcam so that we may see ourselves in a distorted filter, as if to show the reader how the narrator views himself and how his reflection is "failing" to accurately present himself



(Bouchardon, Loss of Grasp)

This distorted image of the viewer (and the above image courtesy of Bouchardon) reflects the narrator’s “failing” grasp on his relationship with himself, as if he cannot recognize himself in a reflection. His failing grip on the relations he has with his wife and son has seemingly affected his own relationship with himself. His belief of being manipulated could possibly derive from his lacking relationship with his family, or it could derive from his insecurities and deception with himself. Internalized manipulation.

Through the utilization of a different approach, leaning away from websites and toward mobile phone apps, our sense of sight is challenged once again. In Bouchardon’s mobile app “Do It,” the reader is taken through a variety of pages that are all composed differently. Each page engages the reader in its own way, majority of them relying on the reader to watch words formulate or reveal themselves once actively engaging with the text. One of the first scenes depicts a red box with the words “unstable” typed within it. The white arrow at the corner of the box is the only indication the reader must tap their screen and explore. When the box is adjusted in height or width *another* message is revealed



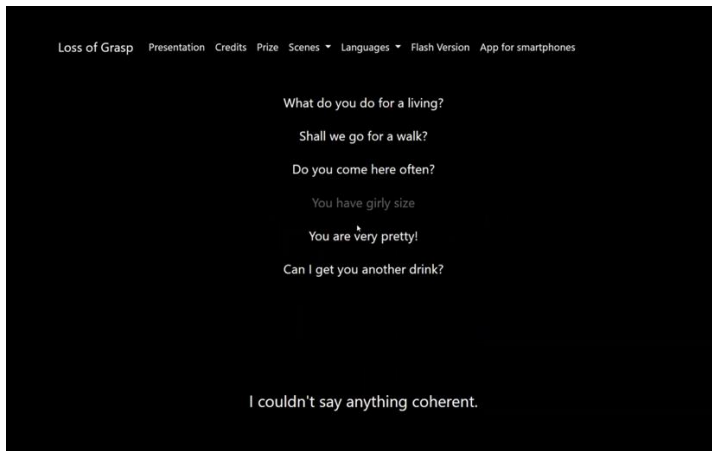
(Bouchardon, Do It)

The message is displayed clear and easy to read, and it even has a physical appearance that our eye follows. Further emphasizing its message. By formatting the sentence in a non-linear way, as the top message suggests, it allows for the reader to draw their eyes across their device and experience the exponential decay of the words. Bouchardon's ability to format the poem in such a way that it promotes the reader's gaze to follow along only further contributes to his act of tugging on the reader's senses and immersing them into his intricately crafted pieces of electronic poetry.

Although sight is heavily utilized through most of these poems, hearing has a major part to play as well. Audio is used in various types of digital media to reach target audiences or immerse video gamers into games due to the usage of ambient-related background sound or music. Bouchardon's poems also utilize this method of immersion. The poem "Spread" heavily incorporates sound into the experience of the digital poem. At minute marker [2:41](#), in Bouchardon's YouTube video of "Toucher," a short clip of what a reader can expect to experience is played. The reader is encouraged to move their cursor across the screen to "spread" colorful splotches over a black background. Accompanying the drastic shift in colors is an audio

of changing pitch and volume depending on where your cursor is on the screen. Out of the six poems, this is the one that most relies on audio as opposed to text and even arguably visuals. The audio shifts and adjusts to the reader's command, solely being guided by the reader at hand, once again fully enforcing reader involvement and engagement with the text-lacking poem. As stated earlier, audio is used in games and other digital media to immerse viewers and readers into the text they are consuming, the other poems created by Bouchardon fall into this category as well.

Our senses promote engagement with our surroundings, thus promoting reader involvement (and experience) with multimodal works. Music, white noise, background sounds, and various other types of audios can help convey an author's message and meanings within their works of digital media. In Bouchardon's "Loss of Grasp," his poem explicitly invites readers to turn on their system's audio to fully immerse themselves in the message of this poem. Out of the six scenes in this poem—not including the home page—each scene utilizes sound to further push the poem's meaning: the narrator losing his grasp on various relationships. In the first scene, the reader is welcomed by an automated voice that asks the viewer to "press the hash key" and is then congratulated, diving headfirst into the poem. The poem starts off with words and letters scrambling together before developing into coherent sentences with soft melodic music playing, dependent upon on your cursors' speed and if you click down on our trackpad. The music starts off following the reader's physical engagement with the poem before taking its lead and producing its own soft sound. The second scene contains a list of sentences that a male voice reads off, though what he says is mistranslated. Instead of saying "you have gorgeous eyes," the poem interprets the narrator's voice differently and translates the sentence to read



(Bouchardon, Loss of Grasp)

This mimics the narrator's grip on reality and how it is slowly beginning to distort and change. What we hear and what we see differ from one another and the reader must rely on their hearing to accurately follow along with the poem and what it is trying to say. Mixing the audio with the shift in the sentence causes a bit of distortion and might cause the reader to second guess what they are digesting, but it encourages the reader to remain concentrated on the poem rather than losing *their* grasp on what is happening.

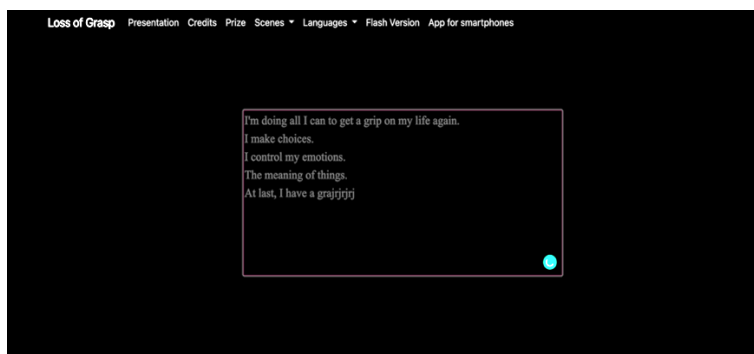
Unlike the previous two poems mentioned, the audio for the poem "Do It" is not as engaging and captivating. The music notes and sound effects do not contribute as much to the poem as the buzzing of a fly, or the mispronounced sentences did in "Toucher" and "Loss of Grasp." The volume on the reader's device does not need to be turned up super loud to pick up any sort of quiet or inaudible voices or whispers, just simply to have the volume on and get pulled further and further into the poem due to melodic violin music playing. Audios and background noises can help lure a reader's attention into *whatever* might possibly be preoccupying them in the moment. Sound effects act as a constant reminder for the viewer that they are actively working on or looking at something that requires all their attention. The music playing as the poem proceeds is calming and gives off an almost melancholic effect. It is a simple yet somewhat nostalgic sound that is easy to recognize and identify which, once again,

maintains the reader's attention as they progress through a poem utilizing all too familiar sounds to keep the reader's attention held.

The two most obvious senses that can be left out from the analysis of digital literature are taste and smell. Touch, on the other hand, differs. Although with this poem collection, a reader cannot physically touch any of the poems aside from the click of a mouse or moving of a finger on a trackpad—which could arguably be dismissed—Bouchardon's poem "Brush" challenges how e-poetry can be touched. As stated by the *RevuebleuOrange*, "Brush" encourages the reader to touch "with the eyes (or with the hand, or any other part of the body)." After allowing access to a webcam, a darkened and distorted image of the camera's view pops onto the screen. Black and white make up both the negative and positive areas of the webcam's view and moving or touching different objects shifts the negative and positive areas. Bouchardon quite literally asks the reader to touch and engage with the poem through touching with their eyes and urges the reader to physically engage with touch and how the black and white spaces respond to the reader's movements and touch. These interactive works of digital literature push and bend the boundaries of poetry and challenge it in a way that it can only be deemed as open form and would lose its meaning if not presented digitally. These interactive poems "did a great deal to bring attention to electronic literature outside of academic communities and into broader visual arts and design contexts" (Rettberg, 140). Digital literature and e-poetry continue to grow and develop, utilizing other methods to gain reader interest.

The audio and visual effects within this poem collection keeps the reader engaged and helps us discover the narrator's slipping grip on reality but asking the reader to *physically* engage with the text puts the reader into the narrator's shoes. By inviting the reader to see and touch through the narrator's lens, it helps clarify any questions that might have arisen throughout the

previous scenes. As stated by Scott Rettberg, “hypermedia... text is one of many media elements” (80). Whatever message cannot be conveyed through audios and visual aids can be completed through touch. The viewer’s mouse plays a large and important role within the poems, revealing coherent sentences, unraveling an image of a woman, and typing in a text box to disclose and almost “sign off.” The narrator expresses his desire to work on himself and his relations with his family so that he may regain his “grasp” on reality. The final scene encourages the reader to type in a text box, though whatever the reader types it is reprogrammed and rewritten to what the narrator is trying to tell us

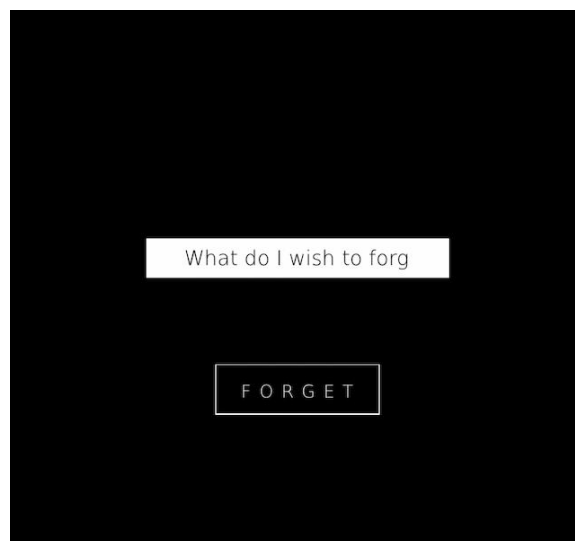


(Bouchardon, Loss of Grasp)

The narrator declares his mission to regain a grip on his life once again, altering the message the reader might be typing into the textbox. The only way to progress the poem is for the reader to directly engage with the text, typing along their keyboard and watching their words transform into a different message. This tactic allows for the readers to reveal a deeper part of the poem. With our direct engagement being altered to fit the narrative of the poem, it’s as if Bouchardon is saying “I want to communicate something to you... I have a meaning which I want you to get in some way and I have the sense that one made alone won't do it and so put modes together” (Bezemer, 0:31). His combination of physical and mental engagement reveals the message that has been slowly but surely revealed throughout the six scenes. Our sense of touch further

promotes reader engagement and involvement. Not only do we as readers get to *read* the poem and its message, but we get to *experience* it as well.

A mobile app automatically promotes physical engagement from the reader. Scrolling, tapping, shaking, typing, and even the vibration of our mobile device forces the reader to touch and interact with the poem. The story only progresses when the reader taps the screen or clicks the “next” button, though one of the last scenes does not just *ask* that the reader engage, but it *requires* engagement. A white text box with the question “what do I wish to forget” pops up on the screen. There are no other instructions on what the reader is supposed to do, which promotes curiosity and encourages the reader to click on the text box and answer the question



(Bouchardon, Do It)

The open-ended question asks the reader to think and respond with what they would like to forget. It could be something rather simple or something deep and heartfelt, whatever the reader chooses. This is the story falling directly into their hands and prompting them along. After clicking the “forget” button the reader’s chosen item, experience, or memory to forget flashes across the screen in red lettering. The only way to get through to the next scene is to click the screen of your mobile device and watch the screen repeat itself with the things you wish to forget. It is as if the poem wants you to force yourself to remember your experience before

completely eradicating it from your mind. As if taking the reader rapidly through the steps of grief before pushing the reader to “forget” and move on with their life, leaving behind the forgotten experience or memories.

The ability to interact with these poems emotionally, mentally, and physically encourages the reader to dive into the poems and their meanings that are slowly revealed as the reader progresses. By utilizing the reader’s sense of sight, hearing, and touch, Bouchardon can immerse the reader into his poems and put themselves into the same position as the narrator. This leaves room for thoughts, questions, hesitance, and uncertainties to develop and unfold — only to be answered or for a self-realization to occur toward the end of the poems. With the lack of more text-driven principles, these three pieces of e-poetry allow the reader to engage with the poems in a more “out of the box” style. Rather than following the typical formulated way of reading, left to right, up and down, readers can investigate these poems in the perfectly curated perspective that Bouchardon was crafting. Sight, hearing, and touch continue to attract reader involvement, thus allowing these poems to create a more individualistic and self-interpreted experience for the readers and viewers.

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