A Web Odyssey

URL: https://a-web-odyssey.utc.fr/index.html / Trailer: https://youtu.be/kE-6F5bPI1U

Authors

Serge Bouchardon is Professor at the University of Technology of Compiegne (France), where he teaches interactive writing. His research focuses on digital literature. As an author, he is interested in the way the gestures specific to the Digital contribute to the construction of meaning.

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Presentation

In 2008, Serge Bouchardon published an online artistic game (made with Flash) entitled *The 12 Labors of the Internet User*. In this work, the internet user is regarded as the Hercules of the Internet. Often, the user has indeed the impression to have to achieve Herculean labors. It can be a question of blocking popups which keep coming when one would like to see them disappear (the Lernean Hydra), cleaning the inbox of its spam (the Augean Stables), or driving away the advertising banners (Stymphalian Birds).

Thitrteen years later, Serge Bouchardon chose to deal more specifically with the navigation on the Web. *A Web Odyssey* is based on *The Odyssey* and the figure of Ulysses trying to navigate back to Ithaca. This interactive narrative features the different episodes of *The Odyssey* (the Cyclops, Circe, the Sirens, Calypso...). The goal of the user is to reconnect to the *e-thaca* network. Parallels are then drawn between the oblivion caused by the lotos flowers and the infinite scrolling of social networks, the eye of the Cyclops and the webcam which monitors the Internet user (and which must be blinded or disabled), the Underworld and the Dark Web... The ecological question is also addressed through the Sirens, who feed on human flesh, and the streaming platforms which consume a lot of energy and data and *feed* on the resources of our environment.

Here are the themes covered in the different episodes:
- Lotos-eaters: social networks and addiction (figure 3)
- Polyphemus the Cyclops: webcam and surveillance (figure 4)
- Circe: social media and cyberbullying (figure 5)
- The Underworld: Dark Web, transparency and opacity
- Sirens: streaming platforms and energy consumption (figure 6)
- Charybdis and Scylla: ransomware and dilemma (figure 7)
- Helios: *General Terms and Conditions* (GTC) and awareness
- Calypso: online video gaming (clicker) and dopamine loop (figure 8)
- Back to Ithaca: password, captcha and identity

The Greeks associated a mythological divinity with each phenomenon. They accepted not to be able to understand everything, and the gods often served as an explanation. Centuries later, don't we have the same relationship with digital technologies? Are human beings free to make their own choices or do they have to obey their Fate, the Greeks wondered. Are human beings simple pawns, constrained in their choices, or sovereign creatures with free will? When we navigate on the Web, especially on platforms, we can often feel the same tension as the one felt by Ulysses during his perilous journey…

This narrative, which articulates literary, educational and recreational dimensions, is available in French and English. It invites us to reflect on our digital *milieu*, social media, platforms… and more broadly on digital technologies.

A Web Odyssey

Based on Homer

Figure 1. Title.

Book 1: Back to Ithaca

"- What becomes of me now, at last? I fear the goddess foretold it all too well. On the high seas, she said, before I can reach my native land I'll fill my cup of pain!" — Homer

Odysseus… I am the goddess Athena.

You and your comrades fought well.

The Greeks and the whole world will remember this war.

After ten long years far from your island, your kingdom and home, it is time to announce your return.

A short post will surely reassure your son Telemachus, and your dear Penelope.

Go ahead and log in onto e-thaca.
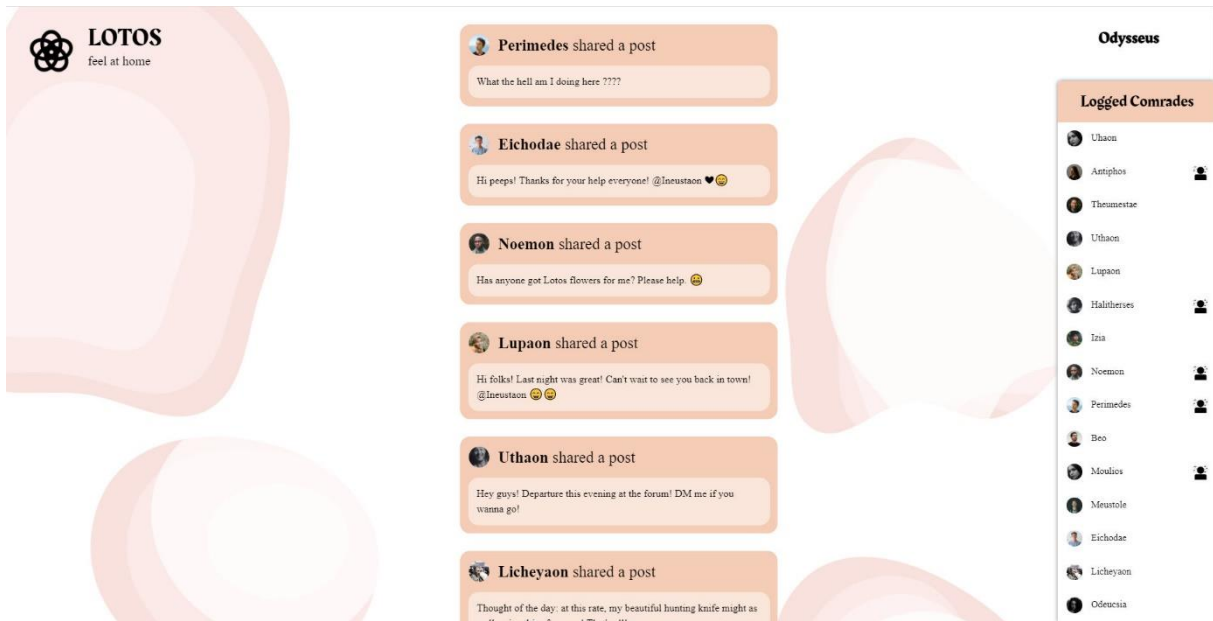
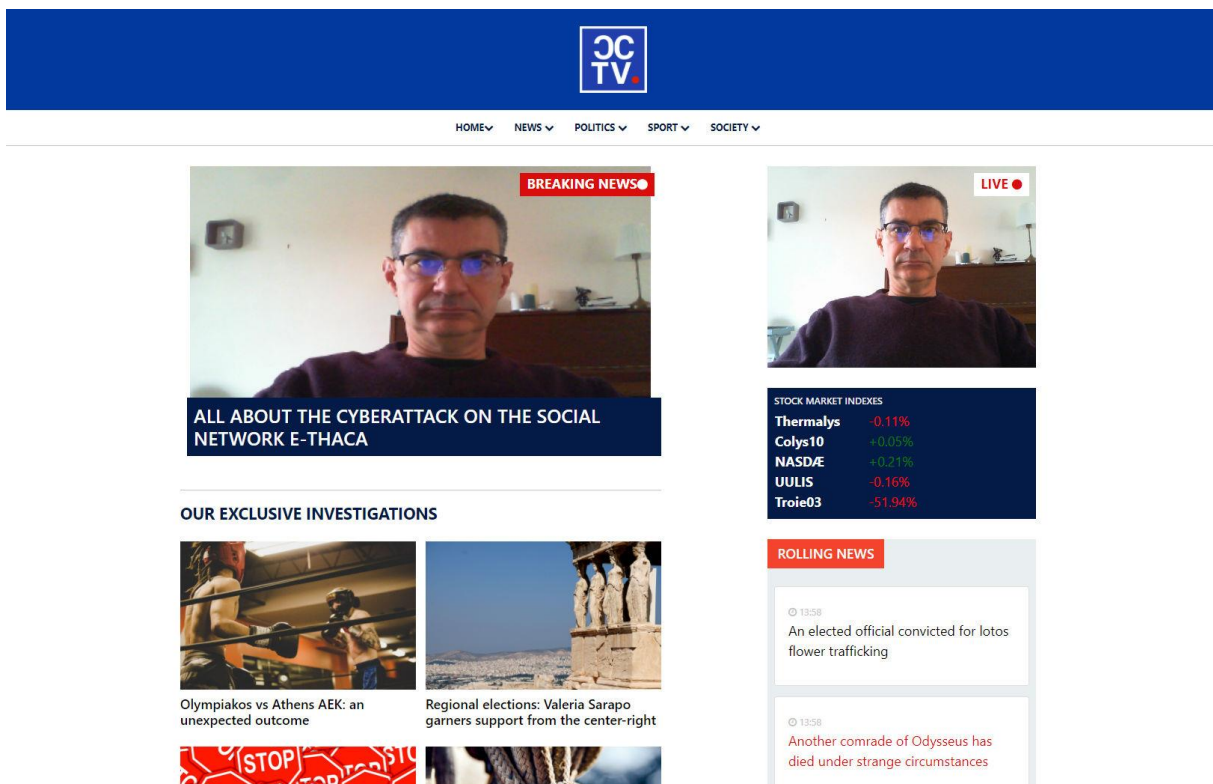Figure 2. Book 1: introduction.

Figure 3. Book 2: the Lotos-eaters.

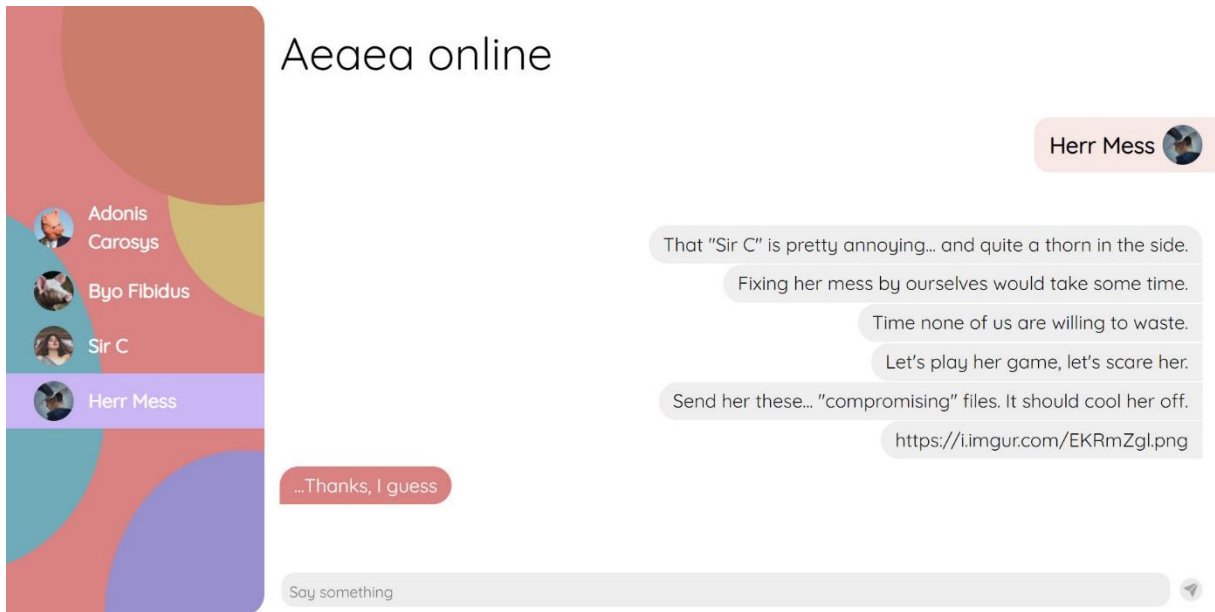

Figure 4. Book 3: Polyphemus the Cyclop.
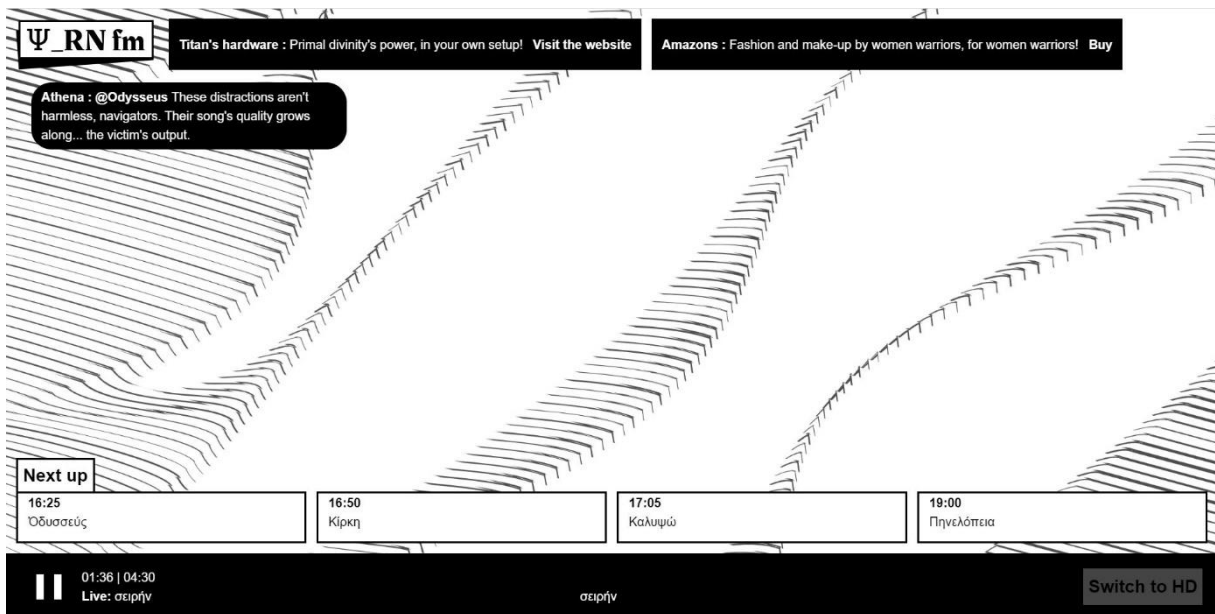
Figure 5. Book 4: Circe.

Figure 6. Book 6: Sirens.

Book 7: Charybdis and Scylla

"Scylla's no mortal, she's an immortal devastation, terrible, savage, wild, no fighting her, no defense — just flee the creature, that's the only way." — Homer

Naive or not, you can't choose to ignore what is going to happen.

Even if you try to resist, your future is map[...]

You might be a great sailor, yet you can't f[...]

You are a puppet in the gods' hands.

If you want everything to cease, open your[...]

Be alert, decipher your surroundings, prote[...]

You can't navigate safely without taking all the precautions in the world...

...or at least without trying to anticipate what awaits you in these troubled waters.

```
karybd_scylla.exe                    ⊠
You are victim of§the karybdis_scylla
ranso/ware.
Your/access to this website and your
progressi§% have be%n encr/pted with a
divine algorithm.
To continue the ad§enture and get your
dat% bac§, pay Æhe ran%om (6 souls) to
scylla.

    [ ACCEPT ]        [ REFUSE ]
```
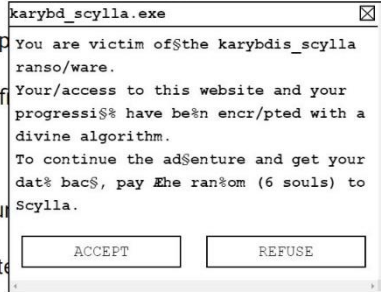
Figure 7. Book 7: Charybdis and Scylla.

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Figure 8. Book 9: Calypso.

Penelope shared a post

At last, you're back... I'll weave your adventures!

Telemachus shared a post

Congratulations, dad! Welcome among us 🙏

Sergios shared a post

Well done, you've come home safe and sound! May this return home also be a return to your inner self...

Άδρίας shared a post

Know where you go before navigating recklessly... Anyway, welcome home.

Lisae shared a post

What a wonderful journey. We're very proud of you!
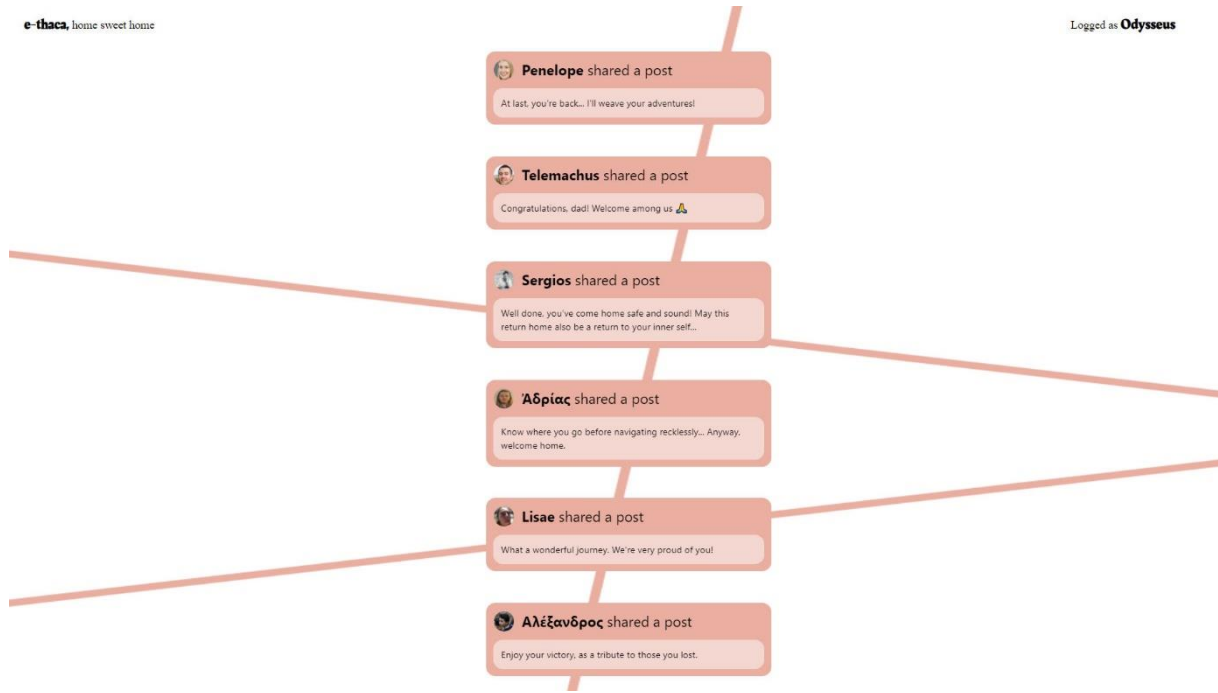
Αλέξανδρος shared a post

Enjoy your victory, as a tribute to those you lost.

Figure 8. Book 10: Back to Ithaca.