

Digital Textualities : Motile Writing

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Introduction

In recent years, numerous works on “the digital text” or “digital textuality” have been published. In French, the most recent one (2020) is an edition of the journal *Corela* edited by Ingrid Mayeur and Marie-Anne Paveau, entitled “Textuel, textiel. Repenser la textualité numérique¹”, which could perhaps be translated by “Textual, *Textware*. Rethinking digital Textuality.” These works form part of a broader analysis of the Digital and the networks, of what the Digital reactivates, amplifies, or reconfigures.

Our study should be seen as a contribution to this reflection on the role of digital media and practices. We adhere to the “TAC theory²”, which views technology as anthropologically constitutive / constituent³, and to the acceptance of “a technical constutivity of human experience.” This theory, following Jack Goody’s “graphical reason⁴”, and Bruno Bachimont’s “computational reason⁵”, claims that each new technical medium transforms our ways of thinking, knowing and acting.

This approach allows us to insist on the notion of text as a material object. If we are to accept that the presence of natural written language remains a necessary condition for the existence of text, the latter is not only language, but is also, and above all a material object open to interpretative practices. “It is therefore essential to understand the materiality of those texts which we refer to, somewhat approximately, as ‘digital’. The digital environment modifies the nature of the relationship between texts and the media on which they are inscribed⁶.” The materiality of a text is thus above all intrinsic to the medium. In the case of a multimodal⁷ creation, it is of a formal nature, and therefore visual and /or sonorous in nature.

The notion of “*milieu*” is also essential when discussing the Digital, referring as it does to both medium and environment, simultaneously designating that which lies between and around us, the *milieu* which we constitute and which constitutes us⁸, and which betters our understanding of the way in which digital literature circulates via social media.

What contributes to textual materiality in the digital *milieu*? Are we dealing with a form of textuality which differs from that of the printed text, and is it even still appropriate

¹ « Texte, textiel. Repenser la textualité numérique », *Corela*, HS-33, dirigé par I. Mayeur et M.-A. Paveau, 2020. URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/corela/11734>

² *La thèse TAC*.

³ On this subject, see Steiner, P. (2010), « Philosophie, Technologie, Cognition. État des Lieux Et Perspectives », *Intellectica*, 53, 7–40.

⁴ Goody, J. (1977), *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Cambridge University Press. French translation (1979), *La Raison graphique*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit.

⁵ B. Bachimont, (1988), « Intelligence artificielle et écriture dynamique : de la raison graphique à la raison computationnelle », in *Au nom du sens*, Petitot, J. et Fabbri, P. (éds). Paris, Grasset, p. 290-319.

⁶ « Il est donc essentiel de comprendre la matérialité du texte dit, par approximation, “numérique”. Les médias informatisés modifient la nature des relations entre les textes et leur support⁶ » Jeanneret, Y. (2004), « Le procès de numérisation de la culture, un défi pour la pensée du texte », *Protée*, vol. 32, n° 2, p. 13.

⁷ We use the term ‘multimodal’ here in the sense in which it is used in: Lacelle, N., Boutin, J.-F., Lebrun M. (2017), *La littératie médiatique multimodale appliquée en contexte numérique — LMM@. Outils conceptuels et didactiques*, Presses de l’Université du Québec.

⁸ See our previous articles : Bouchardon, S., Petit, V. (2019). « Digital writing: philosophical and pedagogical issues », *Electronic Book Review*, octobre 2019, <http://electronicbookreview.com/essay/digital-writing-philosophical-and-pedagogical-issues/> and Riguet, M. (2020), « Le numérique, milieu macranthrope », *Implications philosophiques*, « Philosophie et numérique », <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02940562>.

to speak in terms of “textuality”? Digital writing would appear to be subject to a form of tension between openness and closure, between the closure of the medium and the various ways in which meaning may be construed, between the restrictions imposed by the use of linguistic signs, and openness to other semiotic forms, and between stability and movement, the ensuing process and result of which can only exist thanks to the gestualized performance of the reader. To what extent is it heuristic to suggest the expression, “Motive Writing” when referring to digital textualities? Considering the heterogeneity of objects, inscriptions, gestures and uses covered by the term, any attempt to analyse what constitutes “digital text” is in itself a very tall order. In order to endeavour to partially answer the above questions, we have chosen in the present article to approach the notion of digital text from the angle of new literary practices, referring to a selection of creations belonging to the realm of “digital literature”⁹, with generative, hypertextual, animated or even multimodal dimensions.

Text as a weaving process

Let us first make it clear that we will not here use the notion of *text* to refer to a semiotic category as such, but in the sense suggested by Yves Jeanneret, as a “complex object to be interpreted from a semiotic point of view”¹⁰. Jeanneret reminds us of Paolo Fabbri’s stance:

*It is not a question of denying the idea that signs may be considered as elementary in some respects, nor does this mean that elementary signs are always present [...] There are merely texts, texts as objects, not texts as a gathering of words and referents, but texts as complex objects, with elements of speech, gestures, images, sounds, rhythms, etc. (Fabbri, 1998: 24-25; my translation)*¹¹.

If a text is to be viewed as a complex object, it is because it is, first and foremost from an etymological point of view, the result of a *weaving* process (from the Latin “*texere*”). The interactive creation *Fitting the pattern*¹² explores the relationship between the notions of text and textiles. In this autobiographical work on the relationship between mother and daughter, the reader is invited to adopt the gestures of the author’s mother, a seamstress. The reader is encouraged to cut, sew and weave at various stages as the reading process develops (see the screenshot below).

⁹ See S. Bouchardon (2019), Bouchardon, S. (2019). « Mind the gap! 10 gaps for digital literature? », *Electronic Book Review*, mai 2019, <http://electronicbookreview.com/essay/mind-the-gap-10-gaps-for-digital-literature/>

¹⁰ ¹⁰ Jeanneret, Y. (2004), art. cit., p. 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Christine Wilks, *Fitting the pattern*, 2008, http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/wilks_fittingthepattern.html

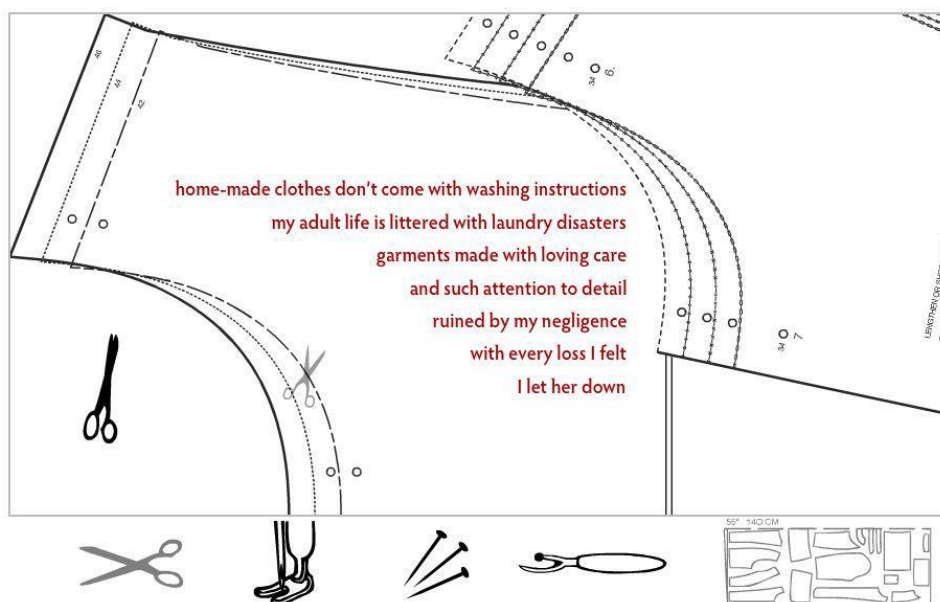


Figure 1. The interactive creation *Fitting the pattern* (2008) incites the reader to take part in a weaving process.

In which respects can a digital text be considered as the product of a weaving process? By this we of course mean a polysemiotic weaving process. The semiotic proliferation referred to above is reinforced by the digital text, which experiments with this. Paradoxically, if there exists an environment in which the word *text* is justified, it is certainly the digital one, where it appears as a multimedia *fabric*. The assembled materials are not only juxtaposed as in patchwork, an art in some ways comparable to the *copy-and-paste* practices which have existed in literature since Homer, right through to Burroughs' *cut-up*, but are rather intermeshed like moving threads, like motile elements displacing the semiotic dimension *within the framework*. Whereas text traditionally establishes its weaving pattern on the semantic level, via a combination of lexical forms, the digital text goes as far as to crossbreed signs, hybridizing heterogeneous objects (speech, multimedia content, computer code...), which, by coming into contact with one another and being altered as a result, generate their own semiotic status. This dynamic techno-polysemiotic weaving process can be observed in all aspects of the digital text, right down to the "petites formes"¹³, or "little shapes," which have emerged thanks to computer programming (search bars, links lists, or word clouds, for example), which are both signs of that which they take as their object¹⁴, and signs corresponding to the technical gestures that enable them to exist¹⁵.

This way of considering text as spun or woven material transcends the more binary written vs oral dichotomy, which can only be somewhat clumsily applied to the digital *milieu*. It facilitates our adoption of the heterogeneity of the various elements which, when brought together, constitute interpretative practices. For instance a sound which is part of digital text will take on a scriptural form in the metadata representing it and in the code into

¹³ ¹³ E. Souchier, É. Candel, G. Gomez-Mejia, V. Jeanne-Perrier (2019), *Le numérique comme écriture. Théories et méthodes d'analyse*, Paris, Armand Colin.

¹⁴ « Signes de ce qu'elles prennent pour objet ». Ibid.

¹⁵ « Signes du geste technique qui les fait exister ». Ibid.

which it is integrated, yet its most significant content will remain sonorous, or oral. In this respect we adhere to the explanations put forward by Jean-Michel Adam:

The question of what constitutes text must be extended to all forms of textuality resulting from basic mediological practices, notably oral, scriptural (both hand-written and printed texts) and digital elements. [...] To these must be added the iconic dimension, which greatly contributes to the diverse forms of textualisation of the other three dimensions.¹⁶ (My translation)

The above leads us to think of the intermeshing (again, in the sense of the weaving process) of the different textual layers of a digital work. Let us consider the audiovisual creations of poets such as Milène Tournier¹⁷ or Gracia Bejjani¹⁸. In the works of both poetesses we can find multiple forms of textuality, which constitute a coherent whole when confronted and interacting with other forms. In other words, speech arises both from the textual layers themselves (dynamic text printed over mobile images, text from voice-overs, text inscribed on filmed images) and from interaction between these, finally making up the core of the poem's textuality. In 'Que peut,' a sort of elegy to her native Lebanon, Grace Bejjani weaves together three levels of textuality —written text, a spoken voice-over and a song which can be heard murmured in the background.



Figure 2. An Extract from 'Que Peut' by Gracia Bejjani (59th second) ('My mother tongue / a vortex of cries')

This text, written in French, following the rhythm of successive video images, is instantly accessible to the reader, and as such appears to constitute the first textual layer of the poem. The voiceover, spoken by the poetess, orally restitutes the text as the viewer/reader discovers it, not only lending a voice to the poem but also producing a sort of embodiment, and giving a double dimension to the text, both organic and personal. Yet this is not all, as the oralisation of the poem also gives rise to a deviation from the text. By pronouncing the words as they appear on the screen, Gracia Bejjani perfuses the poem with its strictly oral, changeable, even improvised dimension; certain words are repeated in murmuring tones, others invisibly make their way into the intervals between images without ever being written. The text, caught up as it is in this dual written / oral flow, is both

¹⁶ ¹⁶ Adam J.-M., (2020), « Postface. Le texte est-il soluble dans le textiel ? », *Corela* [Online], HS-33 | 2020, posted 24th September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/corela/11938>

« La question du faire texte doit être étendue à l'ensemble des formes de textuality qui découlent des régimes médiologiques de base que sont l'oral, le scriptural (manuscrit et imprimé) et le numérique. [...] il faut ajouter un régime iconique qui participe largement aux diverses formes de textualisation des trois autres régimes. »

¹⁷ Milène Tournier's YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiGj9AbLGsbPr4azkCIDWfA>

¹⁸ Gracia Bejjani's YouTube channel : <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCm12jtFIXEi9ZAMsSzQCESg>

anchored and fugitive, escaping, motile, unable to take on a completely fixed form. It is precisely this dual movement, lending to the text its quality of being a *work in progress* (in a similar fashion to the way in which wood changes shape slightly in function of atmospheric conditions), which constitutes the textuality of the poem.

Added to this is an Arabic song sung very softly by Gracia Bejjani as a sort of sonorous background. Although the words are barely audible, anyone who knows it will be able to recognize the tune to *Zoroni Kol Sana Mara* by Fairuz. The notes sung by the poetess are more than a mere musical accompaniment. They become a second, watermark text, uttered in the “mother tongue,” which is the precise target of the questioning in the poem’s principle text. They open up the text at the very moment when it threatens to close up around its meaning. “Visit me once a year,” Bejjani/Fairuz chants, while on the screen one reads, “Forget Lebanon / Checkmate”. Here the Arabic imperative comes to challenge the French imperative statement. The song can be heard as a counterpoint to this farewell to the homeland.

Later in the poem Gracia Bejjani concludes, “I listen like a child / Stories of monsters / Do not concern us¹⁹.” Then the oral and written text stops, and the image blends into darkness. Only the singing/humming continues for a few seconds, taking on the tones of a lullaby surfacing from childhood. In a way, in spite of the collapse of Lebanon the poem seems to announce, the country’s internal, intimate voice continues to be heard. Thus the entire text reveals itself through the close stitching together of several textual layers, and in the profound movements which travel across them —the hammering home of the daily drama according to its external manifestations, the fugacity of a reality which is impossible to completely grasp (and therefore to process), and the emergence of an intimate, inalienable link to the mother country.

Gracia Bejjani’s poem also gives us the opportunity to turn to the final aspect of the digital text-fabric, notably the interweaving of writing by several authors. The Digital, when considered as a *milieu*, presents us with the ideal opportunity for collaboration and collective writing. With the interweaving of textual layers, a plurality of authors often take over, redistributing authorship (between increasingly diverse roles, such as writer, videographer, musician, coder, graphic designer or publisher). Hypertext, social networks, or collaborative writing and editing tools open up a collective dimension to writing, which sometimes goes as far as to disrupt or even to abolish the voice of the author.²⁰

Certain digital literary works even place collaborative writing at the heart of their project. Amongst these, we could cite *Général Instin*²¹, a work conceived in 1997 and which involved almost 200 authors. It was designed as a *work in progress*, a “body undergoing constant modification”, and “constantly operating modifications²².” The *Général Instin* corpus, through this original editorial project, forms an open, collective and heterogeneous whole, a constant weaving of writing gestures and multimodal contents. Sébastien Roger insists on the notions of “common” and “dialogue” to emphasize the generative movement involved in such a collaborative writing venture:

Concerning the writing process behind Général Instin, the Digital has been a place for experimentation relying on a principle of movement and proliferation. One of the most

¹⁹ « J’écoute comme un enfant/ histoires de monstres/ ne nous concernent pas ».

²⁰ Several studies have been devoted to the question of authorship in the digital environment. See : E. Neeman (2012), « Culture numérique et auctorialité : réflexions sur un bouleversement », *A contrario*, n° 17, p. 3-36. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/revue-a-contrario-2012-1-page-3.htm> ; and N. Sauret’s thesis, (2020), *De la revue au collectif : la conversation comme dispositif d’éditorialisation des communautés savantes en lettres et sciences humaines*, Université de Montréal (Canada) and Paris X-Nanterre (France).

²¹ S. Rongier (2017), « Le Général Instin, les vies multiples du littéraire », *Fabula / Les colloques*, Internet est un cheval de Troie, URL : <http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document4184.php>

²² « Un corps sans cesse modifié » / « sans cesse modifiant. » Ibid.

surprising effects is perhaps the production of a common object, not that of a community, even a literary one, but the production of a meeting place with an opening for artistic dialogue. It is this "common object" which creates interaction between the "real" and the "virtual" (if we are to conserve these categories and distinctions a little while longer). What is produced by *Général Instin* is infinite movement, an incessant to-and-fro between real and virtual, creating a space for interaction which abolishes the supposed frontiers.²³ (My translation).

The weaving process which produces digital text can thus be detected at different levels—the weaving of textual layers, of materials, of writing by various authors, and it is precisely this intermeshing that leads to the polysemiosis of the text.

Text as a techno-polysemiotic object

There have been numerous semiotic studies, and a material-based approach to text has long prevailed. It is our view that text is a polysemiotic object, never purely linguistic, if by that one implies a restrictive dimension of language. To what extent does the specifically intermedial nature of the Digital open up angles from which to approach the relationship between different textualities (visual, verbal, kinetic, and oral)? The idea of *text* as a polysemiotic object is not new, either on the theoretical or the artistic level. Most of the creations of experimental literature since the beginning of the twentieth century have been polysemiotic, multimedia works. At the theoretical level, D.F. McKenzie proposes a very wide definition of texts, "I define 'texts' to include verbal, visual, oral, and numerical data, in the form of maps, prints, and music, of archives of recorded sound, of films, videos, and any computer-stored information."²⁴

One way of examining the notion of text consists in analyzing works with a linguistic basis, yet without words visible on the screen. *My Google Body*, by Gérard Dalmain is such a linguistically-based work without any written words, in which we can see the representation of a human body thanks to a series of images which are renewed at regular intervals, corresponding to different parts of the body. Indeed, the program displays the results of searches sent to the Google search engine concerning the words, 'head', 'body', 'arm', 'leg', and 'foot'. The body which is reconstituted by *My Google Body* arranges and displays the images of body parts, as well as other images corresponding to words conjured up through analogy with parts of the human body, through metaphor or metonymy.

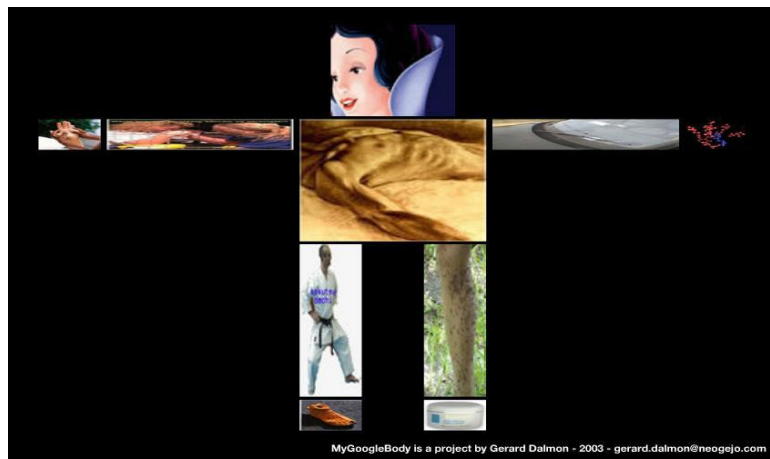
We can thus find images of a headlight, a body bag, or an armchair, for example. *My Google Body* invites us to "read" a metaphorical body of which the elements are continuously extracted from the flow of images present on the web. According to the author, the reflection behind the conception of *My Google Body* was predominantly linguistic in nature, and this work presents to us a graphic body in constant evolution, and in *text* form.²⁵

²³S. Rongier (2017), « Le *Général Instin*, les vies multiples du littéraire », *Fabula / Les colloques*, Internet est un cheval de Troie, URL : <http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document4184.php>

« Pour l'écriture du *Général Instin*, [le numérique] est un espace d'expérimentation qui repose sur un principe de mouvement et de prolifération. Un des effets les plus surprenant est peut-être la production d'un commun, non pas d'une communauté, même littéraire, mais la production d'un point de rencontre partagé ouvrant un dialogue artistique. C'est bien ce *commun* qui crée les interactions entre le *réel* et le *virtuel* (si l'on conserve encore un peu ces catégories et ces distinctions). Ce que le *Général Instin* produit, c'est un mouvement infini, un incessant va-et-vient entre réel et virtuel, créant un espace d'interactions qui abolit ces frontières supposées. »

²⁴ D. F. McKenzie (2002), "The book as an expressive form", in *The Book History Reader*, London, Routledge, 27-38.

²⁵ "This is above all a linguistic creation in which the text is a graphic body in continuous and regular evolution" Dalmon Gérard, *My Google Body*, 2003, <http://www.neogejo.com/googlebody/>



Figures 3 and 4. Screenshots from *My Google Body*, by Gérard Dalmon (2003).

While certain digital literary works offer representations directly based on reading and writing processes, *My Google Body*, which claims to present a *text*, confronts the reader with his/her own notions of what exactly constitutes text.

Moreover *My Google Body* raises questions concerning the role of language in the textualization of images. Here digital images are *tagged* with verbal descriptions, allowing the reader to search for and find them. This relationship between visual signification and verbal signification has always been an important element in the history of the theory of visual culture. Whereas we often insist on the preeminence of *visuality* in digital media, *My Google Body* would seem to direct the attention of researchers towards the role played by verbal *tagging* in the textualization of visual artefacts

The emphasis placed on the material, and particularly visual dimension of a text transports us from the semiotic system of readability which characterizes literature to a semiotic system of visibility characterizing the visual arts.

*It is visual not because it uses images, but because it adds the optical gesture of the word to its semantic meaning; as completion, expansion, or negation. The intermedial aspect is not a change of the medium or material but a change of perception, a change from the semiotic system of reading typical of literature to the semiotic system of viewing typical of visual art*²⁶.

²⁶ Simanowski, R. (2011), *Digital Art and Meaning: Reading Kinetic Poetry, Text Machines, Mapping Art, and Interactive Installations*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p. 62.

Ivan Illich's work, *In The Vineyard of the Text*, which describes the mutations underway in relation to reading and the written text in the twelfth century, records a shift from "readability to visibility". Yet in "screen texts,"²⁷ we simultaneously discover alphabetic text and non-alphabetic writing codes based on icons. The polysemiotic dimension consists not in a juxtaposition, but in the integration in the same text of different forms, based around the flow of and interplay between their different attributes.

A work such as *My Google Body* incites us to broaden our comprehension of the digital text, and to consider it as a fabric, or canvas, or rather as the result of the weaving of both verbal and non-verbal polysemiotic materials, whose meaning is determined through their contact with other elements²⁸. In the digital *milieu*, writing appears more than ever to be a composition of meanings resulting from the interplay between different forms. The composing takes place in the editing table or code editor, or on the loom, or on the operating table as defined by Didi-Huberman, which "engages each object via its function as a sign, not in its own right, of course, but according to its role in the arrangement."²⁹ (My translation).

The text-process

The notion of weaving, in the way we use it here, is even more eloquent in that it contains an anthropological dimension. In *Marcher avec les dragons*, Tim Ingold exploits this in order to propose a reversal of our relationship to the artefact.³⁰ Indeed, considering the creative process involved in a digital work as a "weaving process"³¹ tends to place the emphasis on the role of movement, an important element in the process of producing an object, rather than on the project that led to its creation. The object produced is thus reduced to its fabrication process. From this standpoint, we can consider the woven text as a process which combines not only a set of hybrid materials, but also the movement assembling them and giving them a means for expression, the writing activity which shapes them. The above-mentioned literary digital works very well illustrate these dynamic, internal forces which are constitutive of a form of textuality achieved *through movement*: abstraction in material form, tightly woven yet far-reaching words, cross-contaminated by other semiotic forms.

Samuel Archibald even claims to, "consider text as much as a process as a result, and to return to its 'technical' source, to the role invariably played by the manipulation of a material object in the emergence of a text as an object for intellectual analysis."³² (My translation). This idea of a process and 'donation' is highlighted by certain works. This is particularly true of the generative works revealing the generation process of text in real time, sometimes allowing the reader to interact with certain parameters. *Prolix* by Alexandre Petchanatz was the first *playable* generator. Such examples are interesting in that in one same movement they show us the author's fabrication process and the generation of text during the reading process.

²⁷ Y. Jeanneret, E. Souchier (1999), « Pour une poétique de "l'écrit d'écran" », *Xoana, images et sciences sociales* 6/7, éd. J.-M. Place, p. 97-107.

²⁸ In his recent article, « Qu'est-ce que l'écriture numérique ? », "What is Digital Writing ?" Marcello Vitali-Rosati also emphasizes the imbricated nature of text, referring to it as, "a limited set of scriptural elements placed in relation with one another in an organized manner, (my translation), « un ensemble limité d'éléments scripturaux mis en relation d'une manière organisée. » URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/corela/11759>. However we believe that the weaving process which "creates text" may engage elements which are *partly* scriptural, but only partly. See our development.

²⁹ ²⁹ G. Didi-Huberman (2011), *Atlas ou le Gai Savoir inquiet : L'œil de l'histoire*, 3, Paris, Minuit, p. 53.

³⁰ T. Ingold (2018), *Marcher avec les dragons*, Paris, Seuil [2013], p. 291.

³¹ S. Archibald (2009), *Le texte et la technique : la lecture à l'heure des médias numériques*, Montréal, Le Quartanier.

Thus in some ways the digital text can be construed as an event rather than as an object, and it therefore makes more sense to speak of *textuality*, and more still of *textualization*, than of *text*. Digital textuality is not *fixed*, but emanates from the reading process. In an interactive process, the reader notably has to perform certain gestures so that the textuality may take shape and appear, whether in a generative or non-generative process. We have even suggested the existence of gestural specificity in relation to digital literature.³³ The reading process can be associated with the notion of *performance*, used in the sense of the *performing arts*. To some extent, the reader interprets (like an actor or a musician) the work that he / she is *performing*. Since Brenda Laurel's work, *Computers as Theatre*,³⁴ an analogy is often made between the performance involved in reading a digital work, and theatrical performance.

*Aristotle's model creates a disciplined way of thinking about the design of a play in both constructing and debugging activities. Because of its fundamental similarities to drama, human-computer activity can be described with a similar model, with equal utility in both design and analysis.*³⁵

The passage from text to textuality automatically operates a change in perspective, inciting us to no longer consider the textual object from the exterior, according to the material and formal characteristics resulting from a given project, but rather from the interior, with the exchanges between the different materials which generate its unique form and the interactions which it sets in motion. In a way, this shift brings about the new "material-force" relationship with which Deleuze and Guattari replace the material-form correlation in *Mille Plateaux*.³⁶ Once again, this re-definition brings us back to the notion of materials, here living, biological materials, which grow, assemble and (re-)generate (themselves). The idea of a process immediately resurfaces to qualify textuality in its relationship to the living world. Tim Ingold takes the analogy even further:

Considering the fabrication process as being longitudinal, as an encounter between forces and materials, rather than as lateral, rather like a transposition from image to object, implies viewing the fabrication process as one during which form is produced, a "morphogenetic" process. This shift attenuates any distinction one might make between a living organism and an *artefact*. Indeed, just as living organisms develop and grow, so do *artefacts*³⁷. (My translation).

It is precisely this change in perspective concerning the textual object itself, henceforth considered as an open process rather than as an enclosed and defined material-form, which perhaps best qualifies the essence of digital textualities, whatever material and formal identity they might assume. Let us consider for a moment one of Milène Tournier's audiovisual poems, *A la fin les années seront des passantes comme les autres*³⁸. (In the end, the years will become passers-by like all the other travelers), my translation.

³³ S. Bouchardon (2014), *La valeur heuristique de la littérature numérique*, Paris, Hermann, collection « Cultures numériques ».

³⁴ . LAUREL, B. (1991), *Computers as Theatre*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁶ « Au couple matière-forme se substitue le couplage matériau-forces. » G. Deleuze, and F. Guattari, (1980), *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2 : Mille Plateaux*, Paris, Minuit, p. 273. "A material-force correlation replaces the material-form coupling." (My translation).

³⁷ T. Ingold (2017), « Les matériaux de la vie », *Socio-anthropologie*, 35, p. 23-43.

<https://journals.openedition.org/socio-anthropologie/2519#>

“Avoir une lecture longitudinale de la fabrication comme une rencontre de forces et de matériaux, plutôt qu’une lecture latérale – à savoir comme une transposition de l’image à l’objet –, revient à considérer la fabrication comme un processus de production de forme – un processus « morphogénétique ». Ce qui permet d’atténuer toute distinction que nous pourrions faire entre un organisme vivant et un *artefact*. Car si un organisme se développe, croît, il en va de même pour les *artefacts*.”

³⁸ URL : <https://youtu.be/DsP6TRxsZCM>



Figures 5, 6 and 7. Extracts from “à la fin les années seront des passantes comme les autres”
by Milène Tournier

Here too the poet juxtaposes a written version of the text, printed over filmed images, and an oralized version in the form of a *voiceover*. However here, the initial text is engaged in a dialogical relationship with the image, the role of which is as much iconographic as textual. (See screenshots). We are therefore dealing with three textual layers — the one carried *by* the image, the one inscribed *on* the image, and the one which is pronounced *during* the interval for which the image is displayed.

Whilst the first two textual layers are auctorially assumed by Milène Tournier, the first one appears as external, pre-existing text, already part of a public, both cultural and social reality, of which it forms a fragment. This textual configuration, which is recurrent

in Milène Tournier's work, can only be fully understood if one approaches the poem from a material-form angle, for the simple reason that the text project does not precede the image. On the contrary, the poet reveals to us the dynamics of poetry which is composed gradually as elements of reality intervene, and as it is perceived by the smartphone-eye. The appearance of an iconotextual "creative image"³⁹, born from the encounter between a contingent reality and an imaginary poetic world, between a collective textual landscape and a unique thread of expression, constructed both inside the work and around it, is retraced by the succession of video frames, one after another. In other terms, the work can not be grasped merely through one of its textual forms, nor completely through an analysis of the auctorial stance. It exists through the movement-force dynamic leading to the point of encounter, through the intertextual weaving process rendered visible in real time, and operates as a process generating its own form as the dialogism progresses.

A vital process

Digital textualities can therefore be construed as a *vital* generation and growth process. As Tim Ingold says, "movement becomes essential, whereas the stability of the form is secondary."⁴⁰ We would even go so far as to say that textual form reveals itself in its multiple and evolutive natures.

In a way, with the aid of computer science, it materializes the movement through which a whole literary tradition came into being⁴¹. Bruno Bachimont reminds us that the only means to record something is through binary code on a machine in the form of the digits 0 and 1⁴². This form of recording engenders different *views* corresponding to different forms of representation —the view of the programmer/ designer (a philologically canonical view) and *the view(s)* seen during the reading process. If we take the example of the web, a text coded in HTML (the programmer / designer's view) may give rise to a multiplicity of views perceived by the reader. We trust the decoding process, but the relationship between the different views, through the mediation of calculations, remains hidden. It is this dynamic interplay between the different views and shapes which is exploited by some authors. Thus the computer program, which constitutes a sort of invariable regulating other elements of a work, engenders digital textualites in perpetual metamorphosis.

The structural dissimulation characteristic of all computer programs which lies behind this interplay between text- code and text to be read should also be pointed out. The reader does not know what the program is doing or calculating. Is the hypertext link on which I just clicked static (i.e. if I click ten times on the same link, will I obtain the same textual fragment)? Or is dynamic (leading to a fragment which has been arbitrarily selected, or towards one text or another in function of a particular parameter, according to the texts already read by the reader, for example)? We are dealing with induced opacity, due to computer programs, all of these being forms of logical machines on which certain authors rely.

Consequently the textual movement appears to constantly snatch away elements, just as much as it causes them to appear. Or rather it places the textual object in a temporality which leads to its emergence, while at the same time affirming its moving and

³⁹ "Une image créatrice," term used by G. Bachelard (1941), *L'eau et les rêves. Essai sur l'imagination de la matière*. Paris, Librairie José Corti.

⁴⁰ T. Ingold (2018), *op. cit.*, p.148.

⁴¹ One may consider medieval literature, which, far from viewing the text as a stable and closed entity, existed through a prism of variations. ⁴¹ T. Ingold (2018), *op. cit.*, p.148.

Cf. B. Cerquiglini, *Éloge de la variante: histoire critique de la philologie*, Paris, Seuil, 1989.

⁴² B. Bachimont (1988), « Intelligence artificielle et écriture dynamique : de la raison graphique à la raison computationnelle », in *Au nom du sens*, Petitot & Fabbri éditeurs. Paris, Grasset, 290-319.

transitory nature. In this respect, digital textualities belong to the realm of the image. By image, nevertheless, we do not mean, or at least *not exclusively*, the new iconic, graphic and typographic dimension of the text in a digital environment. We use the term to refer to all aspects of this motile materialization of the textual, the appearance of an unstabilizable form, which can only express itself through the movement which constantly re-generates it. This standpoint is in some ways similar to Heidegger's definition of speech, "To speak is to show, to allow to appear, to reveal and be heard."⁴³ (My translation). Digital textualities, which are more akin to a process than to the object form, are images of appearances. They seek not so much to capture their subject through representation as to show it as it appears.

This notion of appearance brings us closer to a vital, living understanding of things. The computer program gives us the possibility to infuse the textual with that kinetic faculty which characterizes the living. If we are to take a Bergsonian approach to the image⁴⁴, we may go so far as to say that the Digital renders the text readable by the visible, in other words through its appearance. Unlike stable forms which are subjected to perception and analysis, digital textualities also rely upon, or most of all rely on the reader's intuition. They unfold as material-forces, through the interior movement animating them and allowing them to appear, rather than as captured *instants* (which one could associate by analogy with the screenshot, with the fixation of a given state, *x*, extracted from the textual movement). They offer themselves to the reader in a vital, living form. It is from a similar standpoint that Bergson calls knowledge gained through images 'intuition':

*Of life [Intelligence] only brings us a translation in inert terms, nor does it purport to do anything else. It circles all around life, taking as many external views as possible, drawing it onto its own ground, rather than attempting to penetrate it. Yet intuition transports us to the very interior of life itself.*⁴⁵ (My translation)

Digital textualities, through their affiliation with the domain of *appearance* do not merely adopt the aesthetics of movement, but also introduce a new epistemology, which, through the mediation of intuition reveals the meaning of a text through its varying forms, bringing vital movement to the literary work.

Conclusion

By categorizing digital textualities as *motile writing*, we mean to approach their materiality from the angle of the interior movement which brings them into existence, an open and evolutive process which constantly generates (and regenerates) its own form. Thus the *readable* enters the semiotic domain of the *visible*; in other words all digital texts are readable *in that they appear*. If the digital text can be read, it is first of all in the way

⁴³ "Dire, c'est montrer, laisser apparaître, donner à voir et à entendre." M. Heidegger (1981 [1976]), *Acheminement vers la parole*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 239. (*On the Way to Language*).

⁴⁴ "What I refer to as matter is the set of all images, and perceptions of matter, and the same images in relation to a certain defined image, my body." (My translation). « J'appelle matière l'ensemble des images, et perception de la matière ces mêmes images rapportées à l'action possible d'une certaine image déterminée, mon corps ». H. Bergson (2012 [1896]), *Matière et Mémoire*, (Matter and Memory), Paris, PUF, « Quadrige », p. 17. For an analysis of Bergson's theory of the image, see too G. Didi-Huberman's article, (2004), « L'image est le mouvant », *Intermédialités / Intermediality*, (3), p. 11–30. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1005466ar>.

⁴⁵ "De la vie [l'intelligence] ne nous apporte, et ne prétend d'ailleurs nous apporter, qu'une traduction en termes d'inertie. Elle tourne tout autour, prenant, du dehors, le plus grand nombre possible de vues sur cet objet qu'elle attire chez elle, au lieu d'entrer chez lui. Mais c'est à l'intérieur même de la vie que nous conduirait l'intuition." H. Bergson (2007 [1907]), *L'Évolution créatrice*, Paris, PUF, p. 178.

one sees an image, through our intuitive grasp of “what is in sight”⁴⁶, which reveals itself to the reader as a unique experience.

If one is to go by the digital literary creations of the last thirty years, it is finally not so much a question of dismissing the term *text*, or of insisting on a rupture between objects and uses, as of emphasizing the plurality of heterogeneous elements woven together by the digital text, which in turn embodies the product of the weaving process. From our standpoint, regarding digital text as a woven “textile” further justifies the use of the terms *text* and *textualities*. If in recent years several authors have indeed insisted on the real difficulties raised by this terminology⁴⁷, which the notion of *textware* should help us to clarify, it seems to us, inversely, that works of digital literature fully correspond to the implications of the notion of *text*, both semantically and anthropologically. These works help us to analyze its shift towards a polysemiotic and techno-semiotic, but also procedural and event-based, interpretation. From this standpoint, the digital text takes its place within a literary tradition that interprets text through its openness and its movement, and which is enhanced, even in a way accomplished, by the materialization of its motile nature.

As a backdrop, such a conception of textualities allows for a fresh examination of the relationship between the digital and the living. Not only does it revitalize text, as much through the gestures involved in digital writing and reading, as by the dynamic and contingency performed by the computer program, but it also places it in a digital *milieu* made up of a hybrid set of materials and practices which it helps to structure, and within which the human being never ceases to negotiate his / her eco-techno-symbolic relationship with the world⁴⁸.

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⁴⁶ In French, « ce qui est en vue ». G. Didi-Huberman defines the image in these terms in his lecture, “When Images Take Up Position, (« *Quand les images prennent position* »), delivered at the Pompidou Centre on May 6th, 2009.

⁴⁷ The term “textuality” presents two difficulties, “on the one hand its tendency to evoke a purely linguistic form, and on the other a propensity to dissociate the semiotic organization of a text from its technological substrate,” [in French, « d’une part son aptitude à évoquer plus particulièrement une formation purement linguistique, d’autre part la tendance à dissocier une organisation sémiotique de son substrat technique »], (Souchier *et alii*, (2003), *op. cit.* p. 38) ; see also the edition of the journal *Corela* previously mentioned.

⁴⁸ We here refer to the analysis of the relationship between man and his environment according to the notion of “mediance”, as defined by Augustin Berque as, “the eco-techno-symbolic relationship of humanity to the earth”. (My translation). (Berque, A. (2000 [1987]), *Écoumène. Introduction à l'étude des milieux humains*, Paris, Belin). By extension, it would seem interesting to examine the way in which the human, through an eco-techno-symbolic relationship, conceives and structures the Digital as a habitable environment.

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