

**Obfuscation/ Nonexistence**

This is a counter logic that can protect one's data or provide false data, discussed by Brunton and Nissenbaum (2011). Some examples are the 'FaceCloak', that provides the initial steps towards an elegant and selective obfuscation-based solution to the problem of Facebook profiles (Luo, et al., 2009), and 'TrackMeNot', which was designed to foil the profiling of users through their searches. Interesting examples also come from the network of the Unlike Art network, with projects investigating social media produced by Networked Media students at the Piet Zwart Institute of Rotterdam.



**Hacks of appropriation**

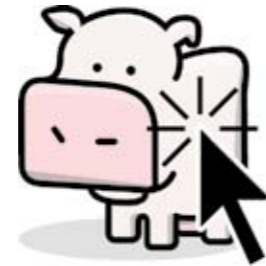
Creators have often used tactics of appropriation to oppose the system of social networking sites in a playful and ironic way. A great example is the work of the artist Tobias Leingruber. As part of his 'Facebook resistance' workshops he has designed several counter-tools and hacks, in collaboration with participants, that aim to impede the proper functioning of the system and its rules. In 2012 he also proceeded in setting up a Social ID bureau producing Facebook identity cards, playing with the idea of the new online identity and data body offered by the medium itself.

**Exposing the game mechanics**

Other projects created by artists have appropriated the game mechanics the social media use to expose their use and develop a critique. Such a case is the 'Folded In' game by Personal Cinema & the Erasers. Based on YouTube video wars, 'Folded In' highlighted the game elements used in the popular video platform and the way users are engaged by them. Or, a more recent example, is Ian Bogost's 'Cow Clicker', an application developed for Facebook, inviting people to click on a Farmville-like cow every six hours, commenting on the phenomenon of clicktivism. Other works worth mentioning are the 'Add to friends' by Nicolas Frespech, where the user clicks to add to an already excessive number of friends of the artist; or the 'Elfriendo' service, by Govcom.org, that generates MySpace user profiles along with compatibility tests and taste construction.

**Conclusion**

This paper aimed to examine the emerging phenomenon of gamification and discuss what its application means for the new social condition. As a strategy invented, encouraged and applied by the market, gamification intensifies relationships and interactions, aiming to generate value. For this reason, it marginalises opportunities for substantial social interaction but also underestimates the possibilities for critical resistance against its game-like structure.



At the same time, no matter how asymmetrical power seems to be, counter-power tactics are being developed by users, programmers or artists who seek to render control impossible, to re-appropriate content and to play with the strategy of gamification. These tactics remind users of the right of disobedience and the necessity of liberation from modes of surveillance, control and exploitation.

Instead of following the measurements of gamification, they highlight an urge for critical awareness and understanding, exposing the functioning and the purposes of a strategy that in reality has little to do with games.

Going back to Virno's positioning on the multitude's childish character, perhaps we need to re-consider: what is the 'unexpected' we are socially afraid of today? Have we left any room for it? Or have we let all social experience be captured, measured, controlled and planned by networks themselves?

**Acknowledgement:**

This research has been co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund – ESF) and Greek national funds through the Operational Program 'Education and Lifelong Learning' of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) – Research Funding Program: Heracleitus II. Investing in knowledge society through the European Social Fund.

Department of Communication and Media Studies  
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

**References**

Andrejevic, M. (2011) 'Social Networking Exploitation' in Zizi Papacharissi (ed.) *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites* New York: Routledge. pp. 82-101.

Arvidsson, A. (2007) 'Creative class or Administrative Class?' in *Advertising and the Underground in Ephemera*. vol. 7(1). pp. 8-23.

Bogost, I. (2011) 'Gamification is bullshit' in *Videogame Theory, Criticism, Design* [http://www.bogost.com/blog/gamification\\_is\\_bullshit.shtml](http://www.bogost.com/blog/gamification_is_bullshit.shtml) [accessed 2.9.2011].

Boyd, D. (2006) 'Friends, Friendsters and Top 8: Writing community into being on social networking sites' vol. 11. no.12 in *First Monday*. <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/1418/1336> [accessed 10.08.2011].

Brunton, F. & Nissenbaum, H. (2011) 'Vernacular resistance to data collection and analysis: a political theory of obfuscation' vol 16. no.5. in *First Monday*

<http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3493/2955> [accessed 10.5.12].

Butera, M. (2010) 'Gatekeeper, Moderator, Synthesizer' in E. Wittkower (ed.) pp. 201 - 212.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.

Chaplin, H. (2011) 'I Don't Want To Be a Superhero' in *Slate* [http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/gaming/2011/03/i\\_dont\\_want\\_to\\_be\\_a\\_superhero.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/gaming/2011/03/i_dont_want_to_be_a_superhero.html) [accessed 10.10.2011].

Constant (1974) 'New Babylon' in *Not bored* <http://www.notbored.org/new-babylon.html> [accessed 2.8.2011].

Cover, R. (2012) 'Performing and undoing identity online: Social networking, identity theories and the incompatibility of online profiles and friendship regimes'. vol 18. no 2. in *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, pp. 1-17.

Dean, J. (2009) *Democracy and other neoliberal fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Dockray, Sean. 2010 'Facebook Suicide (Bomb) Manifesto' in <http://spd.e-rat.org/writing/facebook-suicide-bomb-manifesto.html>, (accessed 10.8.2011)

Donath, J., & Boyd, D. (2004) 'Public displays of connection' in *BT Technology Journal* 22(4), pp. 71–82.

Goffman, E. (1956) *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh.

Ionifides, C. *Gamification: The Application of Game Design in Everyday Life*. MA thesis published as Ebook. Copenhagen 2011.

Wanying, L., Qi, X. & Hengartner, U. (2009) 'FaceCloak: An Architecture for User Privacy on Social Networking Sites' in [www.cs.uwaterloo.ca/~uhengart/publications/passat09.pdf](http://www.cs.uwaterloo.ca/~uhengart/publications/passat09.pdf) [accessed 10.5.2012].

McGonigal, J. (2011) *Reality is Broken, Why games make us better and how they can change the world*. London: The Penguin Press.

Muhr, S. L. & Pedersten, M. (2010) 'Faking it on Facebook' in Wittkower, E. *Facebook and Philosophy*.

Pearson, E. (2009) 'All the world wide web is a stage: The performance of identity in online social networks'. vol 14. no 3. in *First Monday* <http://www.firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2162/2127> [accessed 10.4.2012].

Rogers, R. (2009) 'Post-demographic Machines in Walled Gardens' Dekker, A. & Wolfsberger, A. (eds.) *Eidhoven: Lecturis*. pp. 29 – 39.

Spehr, C. (2003) *Gleicher als andere, Eine Grunlegung der freien Kooperation* Berlin: Dietz Verlag.

Turkle, S. (2011) *Alone Together, Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York: Basic Books.

Ut, S. (2010/15) 'Show me your friends and I will tell you what type of person you are: How one's profile, number of friends, and type of friends influence impression formation on social network sites' in *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*. pp. 314 - 335.

Virno, P. (2004) *The Grammar of the Multitude*. trans. by Bertoletti, I., Cascaito, J., Casson, A. Los Angeles/ New York : Semiotext(e).

Zizek, S. (1999) 'The Interpassive Subject' in [www.lacan.com/zizek-pompidou.htm](http://www.lacan.com/zizek-pompidou.htm)

**Projects mentioned**

Add to friends, <http://www.frespech.com/myspace/Elfriendo>, <http://www.elfriendo.com/>  
 FB resistance workshops, <http://fbresistance.com/>  
 Folded In, <http://www.foldedin.net/>  
 Sepukoo, <http://www.seppukoo.com/>  
 Social ID bureau, <http://socialidbureau.com/>  
 Unlike Art, <http://networkcultures.org/unlikeart/>  
 Web 2.0 Suicide Machine, <http://suicidemachine.org>

**DERIVATIVE WRITING: E-LITERATURE IN THE WORLD OF NEW SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PARADIGMS**

Janez Strehovec

This paper seeks to broaden the conceptual field of e-literary studies by exploring the social and economic context that shapes e-literature as an emerging field of textual practice in new media. It is also an attempt to analyse the current positioning of e-literature in the broader field of algorithmic culture and to explore its interactions with new media art. Our research is driven by the idea that e-literature and its institutions might also be explained by applying some key concepts taken from the social sciences (including economics). E-literary text is viewed as a social event: it needs the presence of the audience, and the process of its creation is embedded in its social context.

In the first section of this essay we draw on e-literature in terms of algorithmic culture, which is essential in bridging the gap between the culture of literary intellectuals and that of scientists (Snow 1959). Algorithmic culture presupposes the change from pure linguistic codes, as crucial for traditional print-based literary text and its theory, to extra-linguistic codes, among them the social. The second section addresses the e-literary world as a field comprised of various institutions that make up an institutional framework for e-literary production. The third section relates to the present state of global financial markets, demonstrating some properties that are shared with e-literature.

Nothing that is happening in new media art and e-literature is excluded from the social text and context, as determined by the findings of contemporary science, new media and technologies, as well as the new network-supported economy and post-political politics (Virno 2004). In an age of globalisation and its scenarios, that lead to one-dimensional globally established modes of participation and behaviour, we are the contemporaries of several cultural trends that are impacted by the novel role of technology in an individual's life as well as with paradigm shifts relating to the modes of production, reproduction and organisation of communities, networking and the economy. In the field of culture, these movements are dictated by McDonaldisation, CNNisation, Microsoftisation, Benettonisation, Googlisation and other trends imposed by transnational corporations and their brands, which interfere in the individual's *lebenswelt* and seek to profile her. Today's individual lives in a techno-culture, meaning that the human as a being-in-the-world has mutated into a *being-in-the-technology*. Such a paradigm shift implies a theoretical turn, in terms that the technological concepts deployed in analysing today's individual, and her activity, could be explained as philosophical and literary. The issues of bandwidth, plug-ins, social algorithms and protocols do not remain outside technological studies; *generation Flash* (Manovich 2002), in the field of art-making, goes hand in hand with Flash poetry and poetry generators.

This connection of the individual and technology is covered not only by the concept of techno-culture; it is also described by expressions such as interface culture, cyberculture, software culture, digital culture, new media culture and algorithmic culture. These terms do not indicate a culture based on the techniques and technologies of industrial society but rather culture and cultures that are shaped by the applications of smart devices and software as key factors in an information society. Techno-culture applies the techno principle (in terms of challenging the extreme edges of perception – such as techno music). Interface culture (Johnson 1997) focuses on the role of interfaces in an

individual's perception and functioning. Cyberculture presupposes classical cybernetics and second order cybernetics in monitoring and controlling cultural contents. Software culture focuses on software platforms (Goriunova 2011) that have a creative role in culture and art. Digital culture presupposes trans-coding from analogue to digital and the consequences it has at the level of archives and data distribution. New media culture derives from the logic of the database and processes of mixing and remixing cultural contents. Algorithmic culture includes all the features of the previously mentioned cultures and expands them throughout the area of social and cultural algorithms implemented by state-of-the-art software.

### E-Literature and its new media features

An encounter with the works presented in the online E-Literature Collections I and II, and with the performances and readings within the framework of E-Literature Organisation conferences, E-poetry festivals, and ELMCIP seminars and workshops, reveals that e-literature has outgrown its early phase of hyperfiction (and hyperpoetry) as a mainstream of e-literature in the nineties of 20th century, which left aside other experimental movements of e-literary writing (e.g. kinetic poetry), and began to articulate itself through textual practices characterised by new media specificities. In this post-hypertext generation of e-literature (from John Cayley's and Stephanie Strickland's e-poetry to Mark Amerika's, Simon Biggs', Alan Sondheim's and Serge Bouchardon's e-textual installations and performances), hypertextuality is merely one of the features co-existing with a number of other qualities, forms, and processes, including software, textual instruments, gaming, VJ-ing, mash-ups, virtual reality, special effects, social networking, virtual architecture, Second Life poetics, and locative media. We also find in these works that literariness and narrative are jeopardised, while the logic of databases and post-literary effects step into the limelight. Media poetry (Kac 2007) and new media poetry (Morris & Swiss 2006) are, in particular, the experimental fields where we can observe those transformations, which determine new media-shaped literary creativity at the very point at which it leaves the printed page.

Regarding this introductory understanding of a broader concept of e-literature, it is essential that it is placed in algorithmic culture, because this placement will show us that e-literature is a sufficiently unique field that cannot be simply explained as a continuation of literature-as-we-know-it by other means; a field which requires finding new concepts that often arise from non-literary fields (e.g. new media, cinema theory, software studies, gaming theory and social theory). Techno-culture, after the first decade of the twenty-first century, is defined by the expansion of social networks as highly algorithmic, meaning that contemporary cultural contents require an algorithmic approach. Here we are dealing with two classes of algorithmic applications: one based on the requirement that an individual user needs to know the algorithm which is the basis of a certain cultural content (e.g. video game), in order to enter and understand it. The second deals with another class, referring to the smart algorithms of networked systems, which nowadays perform (e.g. in social networking) tasks that significantly affect one's epistemological field, including literacy.

An example of the first class is the playing of video and computer games, where the gamer's success is conditioned by her knowledge or reconstruction of the (secret) algorithm that functions in the game. 'To play the game means to play the code of the game. To win means to know the system. And thus to interpret a game means to interpret its algorithm (to discover its parallel "allegorithm")' (Galloway 2006: 90-91). This issue has also been

addressed in Manovich's *The Language of New Media*: 'As the player proceeds through the game she gradually discovers the rules that operate in the universe and constructed by the game. She learns its hidden logic – in short, its algorithm'. (Manovich 2001: 222). Galloway and Manovich formed these notions when they were faced with video games; however, their statements on the algorithmic nature of video games may also be used in explaining the features of e-literature, particularly those works shaped as text-based installations. Here the user, similar to a video gamer, is in the real world, in which she is carries out a number of motor tasks in front of the screen, while at the same time she manipulates and controls a (virtual) avatar presence on the screen. She is here and there, jumping between the real and the cyber modalities, because e-literary work challenges non-trivial, problem-solving encounters with its users, requiring an algorithmic approach (e.g., Bouchardon's *Toucher*, which makes the user deploy various interfaces to enter the piece). Such encounters presuppose a basic knowledge of the software applied in e-literary pieces in terms that the reader who is familiar with the software shaping an e-literature piece can read more than the reader who has approached such a piece only on the basis of the experience shaped by the reading of print literature. 'If anything, a user without knowledge of html could be more confused by looking at the code, and might mistakenly believe some sort of generator should be present when in fact <meta name> tag simply states the name of the html editor used to create the page' (Funkhouser 2012: 191).

An example of the second class are algorithms used for organising and managing a user's participation, behaviour and way of thinking in major social networks and on the Internet in the following sense:

When I began writing about 'algorithmic culture,' I used the term mainly to describe how the sorting, classifying, hierarchizing, and curating of people, places, objects, and ideas was beginning to be given over to machine-based information processing systems. The *work* of culture, I argued, was becoming increasingly algorithmic, at least in some domains of life' (Striphas 2011).

Such algorithmic culture is at the heart of today's Internet culture and social networking, where a series of algorithms essentially defines an individual's behaviour and decision-making, perceptions and thinking, socialising and participation. It may be illustrated by Google's PageRank, as a technology that determines the importance of a webpage by looking at what other pages link to it, and Facebook's algorithm EdgeRank, which determines which of your connections is the most important to you and thus appear more frequently and which kinds of content should be prioritised.

Algorithmic culture is a culture of algorithm-organised content (normally software controlled and managed) and therefore requires algorithmic, problem-solving thinking and related organised functioning. Algorithmic thinking presupposes procedures that are formed economically and with carefully selected steps, which solve the problem and help reach the objective. This is about a culture that seeks to supersede Snow's division of 'two cultures', the cultures of natural scientists and literary intellectuals, with a third culture (Vesna 2001) that tries to overcome this traditional division and its related (social, cultural) conflicts.

Can we consider e-literature in similar terms as video and computer games, as a field of algorithmic culture *par excellence*? A number of e-literature works may be understood as sophisticated cyber tools (e.g. poetry generators), the understanding of which requires a non-trivial effort from its readers-users. They too are forced into decoding the algorithm that is in the

'background' of such a project, and its entry often requires an algorithmic approach in the sense that a user creates an efficient approach to such works in order to effectively enter into them on her own. In addition, an algorithmic approach also connects video games with e-literature, where one of the useful concepts and paradigms is not only gaming, but also textual instruments (Wardrip-Fruin's term), applying the intrinsic logic of a game.

### The E-Literary World as a Referential Framework of E-Literature

E-literature is embedded in today's reality and its fundamental social and cultural turns, which may be described as a transition

- from an industrial to a post-industrial information society;
- from labour through material production to immaterial work;
- from factory to corporation;
- from (material) product to logo;
- from an artefact economy to an economy of the performative;
- from production to prosumption (the consumer is addressed, one's feedback is considered), and to playbour;
- from an economy of products to an economy of experiences and adventures;
- from linguistic and discursive to biological and political;
- from an aesthetic culture to culture as an economy of spectacular events.

These changes are reflected with different modern sociological views, amongst which are especially significant those that also address the social condition of new media art and e-literature.

Language, signs, and images do not represent something, but rather contribute to making it happen. Images, languages and signs are constitutive of reality and not of its representation (...) The corporation does not generate the object (the commodity), but rather the world in which the object exists. Nor does it generate the subject (worker and consumer), but rather the world in which the subject exists (Lazzaratto 2003).

Signs are those which construct the 'event-like'; they actually have an advantage over material contents. Factories, in terms of (heavy) industrial units, become secondary; they appear, if at all, later, after the corporations have already established the path to corporate marketing by attacks with sign contents; they migrate, or already have, to the Third World. The former is therefore concerned only with symbolic operations and marketing strategies and with constructing a world in which the products are incorporated. When we talk about such an artificial world, we may ask ourselves whether this concept is also useful in the field, which is the topic of interest in this essay, and that is e-literature and 'the social'. The answer is affirmative. Lazzaratto's account is also of import in understanding the developments in the current creative communities of e-literature, as they are directed towards the shaping of this field, which, rather than on finished e-literary pieces, focuses more on symposia, presentations, conferences, readings, seminars, workshops and performances, where these pieces are staged.

I show that the term New Media Art is not used to describe a practice, but the art cultivated by a particular community, or better by a whole art world (...). A work of art - whether based on technology or not - is usually classed as New Media Art when it is produced, exhibited and discussed in a specific 'art world', the world of New Media Art (Quaranta 2011).

By writing about Dierk Eijbouts's *Interface #4/ TFT tennis V180*, presented at the Ars Electronica festival in 2005, Quaranta has argued that this piece 'is a typical artifact [sic] of the world of New Media Art. Outside of that world, it would not have much of a chance: the contemporary art world would disparage it as a vacuous celebration of technology, while the video games industry would file it away under unsustainable ideas.' What is essential here is that such a new media art piece doesn't fit the demands of either established art (e.g., the contemporary art world) or the trends of popular culture (e.g. the video games industry).

Is a developed concept of new media art, with its distinctions of both contemporary art and popular culture, also significant in defining the social condition of e-literature? Is e-literature also a field which cannot be adequately evaluated and classified, either by the institutions of modern literature and criticism or by the institutions of recent techno-culture? When talking about e-literature, we need to emphasise that this is an emerging field, which is in search of institutions of reproduction and dissemination, theory and criticism, so drawing on Quaranta's concept of the new media art world we can introduce the technical term of an e-literary world. Such a world might be understood on the basis of Lazzaratto's account of the construction of 'the world in which products are incorporated'. It is not only about production (of e-literary pieces, projects, performances), which would be situated in an abstract environment and randomly seek theorists and critics who are active in the field of traditional and modern printed literature, but it has its own frame of reference: a very special *world in which the e-literary content exists*.

In this particular world it is essential to be present at events such as E-literature Organisation conferences, E-poetry Festivals and relevant conferences, in specific publications (e.g. Dichtung Digital, Cybertext Yearbook, etc), national and international research projects that deal with e-literature, the ELMCIP knowledge base and visible to scholars dealing with e-literary theory and criticism. For every participant in this field, the collaboration in the e-literary world, in the economy of events, performances and experiences is essential; for them, this is the basic environment from which they get the feedback that allows them to be noticed. The e-literary world gives them an autonomous context in which their works can be produced, performed and discussed. E-literature authors do not create their pieces blindly, for the sake of history or for some future abstract reader/user, but for a community composed of individuals within institutions. Just to create an e-literary piece is not enough; it is also necessary to present it in the community, find an audience for it and critics and theorists who will refer to it. Outside of the e-literary world, many e-literary pieces do not have much of a chance.

### Toward the Spectacular Economy of Financial Markets

In the 1980s and '90s, not only in the USA and Western Europe but also in China and developing countries, we witnessed a boom in the financial markets which were 'flooded' by capital from all economic sectors. Indeed, it became clear that said markets – particularly in the short-term – allowed significantly higher yields than markets for material goods. The growth in this field can undoubtedly be attributed to technical progress, particularly in the field of software and global networking, which

allow today's spectacular events in financial markets worldwide. Soon after Wall Street closes the Far East financial markets start to open (the Tokyo stock exchange opens at 2 a.m. CET) and the staged spectacle indexed in the Dow Jones and composite NASDAQ, as well as in the European equivalents (such as the DAX and FTSE), continues with events measured by the Hang Seng, Shanghai Composite index, the Japanese Nikkei and other Asian indices.

In terms of content, we are the contemporaries of a visible transformation of an (industrial) economy focused on material production into an economy based on services and finances. To put it simply: the latter is a far more abstract economy, where the exchange of commodities is replaced by a series of new financial instruments, including derivatives; more than with stable artefacts, we deal with unstable concepts, ideas and, of course, code. In drawing attention to this paradigm shift toward the abstract, let us point out that those involved in the analysis of contemporary culture and art are no strangers to the above. If there is any field that is constantly subject to destabilization, volatility, introduction of news, hybridisation, mixing and remixing, the promotion of (exchange) value and the rapid decline of particular trends (and value), it is contemporary art (including e-literature), in which the object's dematerialisation plays a similar role to that played in the field of the economy, by the transition from a (material) production economy to an economy of (far more abstract) financial products and services.

However, contemporary art did not just passively follow the changes generated by social and economic shifts but accomplished a pioneering work itself. Just think of Marcel Duchamp and his ready-mades, that drew attention to the relevance of the author-brand (as a potential logo) in the field of contemporary art, as well as the broader effects of the institution of art as the one having the mechanisms to promote the exchange-value of certain products and push others to the margins. That artistic context, and its formation through branding, allows an ordinary object manufactured for a specific use to enter a completely new and different life; this was Duchamp's message with his 1917 'urinal project', *Fountain*. As for theory, Boris Groys' work *Über das Neue* (1992) is one of the rare ones that followed the economy of art in the sense that this field is constantly subject to valuations and devaluations as well as dynamic transitions between profanity and valuable (cultural) archives.

Flexibility in the field of contemporary art and e-literature finds it easy to follow the dynamics of the network-supported economy of financial markets, where new financial products bring dynamics into the spectacle of the global, 24-hour market mentioned earlier. Due to the fact that – at least in the short-term – financial markets allow significantly faster and larger profits, they generate new products that attract buyers and speculators. Hedge funds and derivatives (options, futures, contracts) have a special place and bring a new quality to said markets. This is particularly true for trading in derivatives, the price of which depends on the underlying asset (commodities, currencies and securities), reference rate or index they refer to. There are situations when hedge brokers try to reduce the risk whilst speculators increase it in order to maximise their profits. In short, it is a situation where we have an indisputable value basis that we use to increase our assets in the future (or secure them).

With some works of contemporary and, in particular, new media art one can notice that artists also focus on the 'artistic underlying asset' and refer to it in order to secure their interests and even make a profit. They produce derivatives in the sense that they refer to the indisputable value of the underlying reference work (taken from the high-valued artistic and literary tradition), which indirectly – through its 'branding value' – also guarantees

the branding of their derivatives; indeed, 'a question about the value of a work is a question about its relation to traditional examples and not to extracultural profanities' (Groys). Let us mention the Slovenian new media artist Marko Peljhan, who, in collaboration with Carsten Nikolai and Canon Artlab, designed the *Polar* project (2000), thus entering into a creative dialogue with Stanislaw Lem's novel *Solaris* (1961). Despite being rooted in a significantly transformed world of the information society and new stories, *Polar* strives to establish contacts with the unquestionably recognised *Solaris*.

The hedgers (brokers of so-called hedge funds) speculate (in order to secure their investments) and so do artists; they keep counting on the spectator, reader or listener who is not here yet but who will add surplus value to their product in the future. They bet on the future, they live by and in their insecurity, they speculate and bet on it; they are convinced that the course of events will add surplus value to their work. Their option contract refers to some point in the future; they reckon the situation in the market or art scene will change toward their interest. They design works oriented to the new and at the same time their basic intention refers to the institution of art, to its 'approved' works (applied as quote, remake, remix), which gives them a certain amount of security. For example, Natalie Bookchin's art project *The Intruder*, produced in the instant and insecure media of artistic video games, establishes a reference to Borges' novel *La Intrusa* in order to provide added value to an uncertain, new media work (a so-called 'mod', e.g. artistically derivative of a commercial video game).

Bookchin's work can be understood as a contribution to a broader concept of e-literature, which extends beyond hyperfiction towards different genres (from video games to performance) positioned at the intersections of e-literature and new media art. In this domain we are contemporaries of different e-writers' strategies for drawing attention to their work and inventing their own economies. Many of them decide, for example, to engage writing and programming in the sense that they refer to the indisputable value of the underlying reference work, generated by a well-known artist. Here we can mention several authors, from Simon Biggs and Neil Hennessy to Alison Clifford and J. R. Carpenter, whose e-literary pieces relate to predecessors' texts taken from the world of literature-as-we-know it. Simon Biggs' *The Great Wall of China* not only borrows Kafka's title, but appropriates the whole body of his text, taking the multiple individual building blocks that make up the story and feeding each word into a generative computer program that re-assembles them into new sentences. Hennessy's *Jabber* produces nonsense words that sound like English words, in the way that the portmanteau words from Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' sound like English words. The key reference of Jabberwocky is Carroll's nonsense verse poem from his 1871 novel *Through the Looking-Glass*, and *What Alice Found There*, while Alison Clifford in her *The Sweet Old Etcetera* relates the work to e. e. cummings' poetry, which has some poetry procedures (e.g., use of parentheses, capitalisation, and spacing on the page) that have impacted several authors of e-poetry (e.g. Komninos Zervos, Mez, et al). In J. R. Carpenter's *Along the Briny Beach* quotations from Elizabeth Bishop, Joseph Conrad, Lewis Carroll, and Charles Darwin are employed, as well as the code of another e-poetry generator (Nick Monfort's *Taroko Gorge*). Such an intrinsic link to Monfort's poetry generator contributes to an understanding of the e-literature world in terms of a field that is becoming self-referential and autopoetical.

The decision of e-literature writers to write texts that can be considered as roughly analogous with derivatives on financial markets and thus to some speculative and abstract activity, is certainly not pejorative. Rather than being considered imitation,

such an activity reflects the nature of an e-literary area that is full of uncertainty, in the sense that authors, once they begin creating such works, always find themselves facing the unknown and searching for ways to highlight in them something that will attract readers and critics. Connecting to other works, in the form of 'derivative writing', allows them to add value to their works, which often implies an entry into the valuable archives of literature and art, whose common denominator is a surplus in the field of creativity and innovation. Thus, derivative writing presupposes writing, which deploys such an underlying asset (which has a big part in the attention economy) to help the author to enter the valorised archives of the e-literary world.

#### Bibliography:

- Biggs, S. (1996) *The Great Wall of China* <http://www.littlepig.org.uk/wall/index.htm> [Accessed 19 October 2011].
- Bookchin, N. *The Intruder* [http://bookchin.net/intruder/english/html/a\\_title.html](http://bookchin.net/intruder/english/html/a_title.html) [Accessed 13 April 2012].
- Bourchardon, S. *Touch, Toucher*. [http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/bourchardon\\_toucher.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/bourchardon_toucher.html) [Accessed 13 February 2012].
- Carpenter, J. R. *Along the Briny Beach*. <http://luckysoap.com/alongthebriny-beach/alongthebrinycredits.html> [Accessed 12 February 2012].
- Clifford, A. (2006) *The Sweet Old Etcetera*. [http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/clifford\\_the\\_sweet\\_old\\_etcetera.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/clifford_the_sweet_old_etcetera.html) [Accessed 18 April 2012].
- Funkhouser, C. (2012) *New Directions in digital poetry*. London, New York: Minneapolis.
- Galloway, A. R. (2006) *Gaming: Essays on algorithmic culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Goriunova, O. (2011) 'Autocreativity and Organisational Aesthetics in Art Platforms' in *Fibreculture Journal*. 17/2011. <http://seventeen.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-115-autocreativity-and-organisational-aesthetics-in-art-platforms/> [Accessed 19 April 2012].
- Hennessy, N. (2008) 'The Jabberwocky Engine' *E-Literature Collection* vol. 2. [http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/hennessy\\_pataphysical/jabber/jabber/index.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/hennessy_pataphysical/jabber/jabber/index.html). [Accessed 9 April 2012].
- Groys, B. (1992) *Über das Neue. Versuch einer Kulturökonomie*. München, Wien: Hanser.
- Johnson, S. (1997) *Interface Culture. How new Technology transforms the Way we Create and Communicate*. New York: HarperEdge.
- Kac, E. (ed.) (2007) *Media Poetry: An International Anthology*. Bristol, Chicago: Intellect.
- Lazzarato, M. (2003) *Struggle, Event, Media*. trans. by Aileen Derieg. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1003/lazzarato/en> [Accessed 19 Dezember 2010].
- Manovich, L. (2002) 'Generation Flash'. <http://www.google.com/search?client=flock&channel=fmw&q=manovich+generation+flash&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t> [Accessed 13 May, 2012].
- Manovich, L. (2001) *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Morris, A. & Swiss, T. (eds.) (2006) *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories*. Cambridge, Mass., London: The MIT Press.
- Quaranta, D. (2011) 'The Postmedia Perspective' *Rhizome.org*. Editorial. <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2011/jan/12/the-postmedia-perspective/> [Accessed 19 March 2012].
- Snow, C. P. (1959) *Two Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Striphas, T. (2011) *Who speaks for culture?* <http://www.thelateageofprint.org/2011/09/26/who-speaks-for-culture/> [Accessed 26. September 2011].
- Vesna, V. (2001) 'Towards a Third Culture or Working in Between' in *Leonardo* 34.2 (2001):pp. 121-125.
- Virno, P. (2004) *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. trans. Isabella Bertoletti. New York: Semiotext(e).

## EVALUATING DIGITAL LITERATURE: SOCIAL NETWORKS, SELECTION PROCESSES AND CRITERIA

Alexandra Saemmer

### Introduction

The first experiments in digital literary forms started as early as the 1960s. From then, up to the mid-90's, was a period that, according to Chris Funkhouser (2007), can be considered as a 'laboratory' phase. The rise of the Internet has resulted in the proliferation of creative proposals. The first involves indexing creative works in the form of databases, sometimes giving access to hundreds of works without any hierarchical order. Since 2000, digital literature has been experiencing a new phase, marked by the creation of anthologies. Over the years, the evaluation and selection criteria have proved to be as problematic as they are necessary for these projects. The main issue of this paper is to provide a critical discussion of these criteria.

I will first compare the corpus of two founding initiatives, i.e. collections 1 and 2 edited by the Electronic Literature Association (ELO)<sup>1</sup> and the 'improved sheets' published online by the Canadian nt2 laboratory<sup>2</sup>, in order to bring out a list of works commonly considered as 'worthy' by these communities. I will then put the positions of four important players of this field into perspective: Bertrand Gervais (director of the nt2 lab), Scott Rettberg (co-editor of the first ELO collection and leader of the European ELMCIP project devoted to digital literature<sup>3</sup>), Laura Borrás (co-editor of the second ELO collection and director of the Hermeneia research group<sup>4</sup>) and Brian Kim Stefans (co-editor of the second ELO collection, and author of various works presented in the ELO collections and nt2 'improved sheets'). In spring 2011, I questioned them about their initiatives and their selection criteria. In the 'crossed corpus' of ELO and nt2 works, I will finally identify these selection criteria through a semiopragmatic methodology.

### Two anthologisation initiatives

Within the Electronic Literature Organization, the Electronic Literature Directory is responsible for the building of a corpus, which is presented on the website in the form of descriptive sheets. Everyone may participate in the project by proposing a database entry. An editorial board then decides to validate the said sheets or not. In order to facilitate the selection, a list of the main genres of digital literature is proposed on the website, which includes:

- hypertext poetry and fiction
- kinetic poetry
- computer-based art installations 'which ask viewers to read them or otherwise have literary aspects'
- chatterbots
- interactive fiction
- novels that take the form of emails, SMS or blogs
- poems and stories 'that are generated by computers', either in an interactive way or based on set parameters