

LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
**ATTENTION À LA MARCHÉ!**  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE

LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
**MIND THE GAP!**  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE

LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
**Thinking Electronic Literature in  
a Digital Culture**  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
**Penser la littérature électronique  
en culture numérique**  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE ELECTRONIC LITERATURE

---

sous la direction de / edited by  
**BERTRAND GERVAIS &  
SOPHIE MARCOTTE**

---

**LESPRESSESDEL'ÉCUREUIL**





## ÉQUIPE DE DIRECTION

BERTRAND GERVAIS, UQAM, directeur / Chair  
CAITLIN FISHER, Université York, co-directrice / Co-Chair  
JOANNE LALONDE, UQAM, direction du comité artistique / Artistic Committee Chair  
SOPHIE MARCOTTE, Université Concordia, direction du comité scientifique / Scientific Committee Chair  
MARCELLO VITALI-ROSATI, Université de Montréal, direction du comité francophone / French Committee Chair  
DENE GRIGAR, WSUV, présidente de ELO / ELO President  
ARIANE SAVOIE, UQAM, NT2, chargée de projet / Project Manager  
GINA CORTOPASSI, UQAM, NT2, coordination générale / Event Coordinator  
ÉLAINE DESPRÉS, UQAM, centre Figura, coordination générale / Event Coordinator  
MICHAËL TRAHAN, Figura-NT2-Concordia, coordination Concordia / Concordia Coordinator  
LISA TRONCA, UQAM, NT2, Exposition *Uchronia | What If?* Exhibition  
JEAN-MICHEL BERTHIAUME, UQAM, NT2, assistant à la coordination / Coordination Assistant  
ROBIN VARENAS, UQAM, NT2, équipe médiatique / Media Team  
SYLVAIN AUBÉ, UQAM, NT2, équipe médiatique / Media Team  
SOPHIE JULIEN, direction artistique / Artistic Director  
HUGO MARCHAND, coordination, direction artistique / Artistic Director Coordinator  
KEVIN NICOLAS, direction technique / Technical Director  
MARC-ANTOINE GOYETTE, assistant / Assistant  
VANESSA DUVAL, graphisme / Graphic Designer  
SARAH GRENIER-MILLETTE, BENOIT BORDELEAU, CHARLES MARSOLAIS-RICARD, UQAM, NT2

## ÉQUIPE ÉDITORIALE

BERTRAND GERVAIS et SOPHIE MARCOTTE, directeurs de la publication / Editors  
GINA CORTOPASSI, chargée de projet / Project Manager  
EMMANUELLE LESCOUËT, éditrice / Publisher  
GWÉNAËL GRAINDORGE, éditeur / Publisher  
ALEXANDRA MARTIN, réviseure et traductrice / Copy editor and Translator  
ANASTASIA LLEWELLYN, traductrice / Translator

## TECHNIQUE

EMMANUELLE LESCOUËT, édition sémantique et mise en page sous Stylo / Semantic editing and layout in Stylo  
EMMANUELLE LESCOUËT & GWÉNAËL GRAINDORGE, créations des publications numérique et papier / Creators of digital and paper publications  
Polices de caractères utilisées / fonts used: Garamond MD Std, Georgia, Roboto, Sofia, Open Dyslexic

© Les Presses de l'Écureuil – ALN/NT2, 2020

Dépôt légal : novembre 2020

ISSN : en cours – ISBN : 979-10-384-0004-7

Fonds de recherche  
Société et culture  
Québec



ALN NT2



Canada  
Research  
Chairs

Chaires  
de recherche  
du Canada

Canada

figura  
Centre de recherche  
sur le texte et l'imaginaire



Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Canada

**Attention**     **Mind**  
                  **à la**     **The**  
                  **marche!**     **Gap!**

THINKING ELECTRONIC LITERATURE  
IN A DIGITAL CULTURE

*PENSER LA LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE  
EN CULTURE NUMÉRIQUE*

sous la direction de / edited by  
BERTRAND GERVAIS  
& SOPHIE MARCOTTE

LESPRESSES DEL'ÉCUREUIL



# Table des matières

## *Table of contents*

INTRODUCTION	9
Bertrand Gervais & Sophie Marcotte	

### PARTIE 1

#### DES SONS, DES BRUITS ET DES VOIX SOUNDS, NOISES AND VOICES

Listening To Electronic Literature: Sounds At The Heart Of Works By Jeremy Hight, Stuart Moulthrop, And Mohamed Habibi	27
John F. Barber	
Speech To Text: Between The Real And The Unreal	45
Simon Biggs	
Cling-Clang-Cornelius: Digital Sound Poetry As Embodied Posthumanism	63
Christophe Collard	
Demagogic Speech And Rhetorical Emptiness	75
Verónica Paula Gómez	
Transmedia: An Improvisalization	85
Kedrick James • Ernesto Peña • Yuya Takeda and the Digital Literacy Centre	

## PARTIE 2

### LE LANGAGE COMME INTERFACE

#### LANGUAGE AS INTERFACE

- The Language That Machines Read **105**  
John Cayley
- What Natural Language Generation  
Means For Authorship And Why We Should Care **115**  
Leah Henrickson
- Spark Gap:  
Digital Language, Interstitial User **135**  
Sarah Ciston
- Balpe & Chatonsky :  
Esthétique générative, surproduction et mémoire à l'ère numérique **147**  
Paulo Silva Pereira

## PARTIE 3

### PLATEFORMES ET NARRATIONS

#### PLATFORMS AND NARRATIVES

- RPG Maker* As An E-Literature Platform **169**  
Roman Kalinovski
- for the sleepers in that quiet earth:*  
An Artbook Generated By A Deep Learning Agent **181**  
Sofian Audry
- Making Participatory Interactive Experiences (PIE):  
Closing The Gap Between Story And Experience Through Electronic  
Literature And Digital Games **203**  
Jon Saklofske

Love Letters To Strangers Cristiane Costa	<b>217</b>
Haptic Onto-Epistem-Ologies In Tendre Claw's <i>Pry</i> Abraham Avnisan • Amaranth Borsuk	<b>237</b>
Digital Deep-Sea Diving: Navigating The Narrative Depths Of E-Lit And VR Melinda M. White	<b>251</b>
Micronarrative, Virtual Reality, And Medium Specificity: <i>Circa 1948</i> As VR Installation And Mobile App Jim Bizzocchi • Reese Muntean	<b>271</b>

## PARTIE 4

### ESTHÉTIQUES NUMÉRIQUES DIGITAL AESTHETICS

TOPO – TRAJECTOIRES. 20 ans de présence en arts et littérature numériques Michel Lefebvre • Eva Quintas	<b>289</b>
<i>The Book Of Disquiet Digital Archive</i> As A Role-Playing Experiment Manuel Portela • Cecília Magalhães	<b>307</b>
Sortir de l'écran : <i>Lucette, Gare de Clichy</i> Françoise Chambefort	<b>327</b>
J'écris double mais je me soigne Boris duBoullay	<b>339</b>
Midiazine Research Performance ELO 2018/Eastern Bloc, Montreal, August 15 Chris Funkhouser	<b>355</b>
Trump's Tweets, Or The True And Authentic Electronic Literature Alan Sondheim	<b>369</b>

## PARTIE 5

### LIRE ET ÉCRIRE EN CULTURE NUMÉRIQUE READING AND WRITING IN A DIGITAL CULTURE

- Exploring Literary Gaps In *S.* By Doug Dorst And J. J. Abrams **381**  
Gabriella Colombo Machado
- From Codex To Code:  
Computational Poetics And The Emergence Of The Self-Reading Text **393**  
Andrew Klobucar
- Expand Readings:  
A Visual/motor Activity Signifiant In Textual Reality **405**  
Rolando Rodríguez • Jessica Rodríguez • Alejandro Brianza
- Swarm Reading:  
“Deformance And Interpretation” At Scale **421**  
Kyle Booten
- Secret Sharing,  
A Pedagogical Tool For E-Lit Practices **439**  
Augusto Vinicius Marquet
- ELITE-CM Project:  
Developing Enriching Interactivity In Children’s Digitized Literature And E-Lit **455**  
María Goicoechea de Jorge
- Is There A Gap In The Classroom? **477**  
Ana Maria Machado • Ana Albuquerque e Aguilar • Alice Atsuko Matsuda



## PARTIE 6

### PERSPECTIVES DIACHRONIQUES SUR LA LITTÉRATURE ÉLECTRONIQUE READING E-LIT ACROSS TIME

La littérature électronique de papier : réflexions sur la troisième génération de littérature électronique Anaïs Guilet	<b>493</b>
“Completing The Circle”? The Curious Counter-Canonical Case Of <i>The Eastgate Quarterly Review Of Hypertext</i> (1994-1995) Astrid Ensslin	<b>511</b>
Raconter l’internet : matérialité et effets Sylvain David	<b>525</b>
« Tout était vrai et donc rien n’était vrai ; tout était faux et donc rien n’était faux. » La (ré)invention des grands récits à l’ère du numérique Sophie Marcotte	<b>541</b>
Avoiding Digital Insanity: The Attachment To Constructivism In Brazilian Literature Andréa Catrópa • Gilberto Prado	<b>553</b>
Littérature numérique : 10 marches à franchir ? Serge Bouchardon	<b>563</b>
BIOGRAPHIES	<b>603</b>

BERTRAND GERVAIS  
SOPHIE MARCOTTE

## *Attention à la marche!*

Penser la littérature électronique en  
culture numérique

## *Mind The Gap!*

Thinking Electronic Literature  
in a Digital Culture

**Comme** un train entré en gare, la littérature électronique s'est arrêtée en 2018, le temps d'une escale, dans ce vaste immeuble tout neuf que représente la culture numérique. Le train avait déjà un certain âge, tandis que la gare était récente. Il apparaissait évident que la rencontre entre les deux n'était pas parfaite. À tout moment, on risquait de trébucher, surtout si on ne faisait pas attention où l'on mettait les pieds. Il y avait un écart, une faible distance, entre le marchepied et le quai. Faible, de sorte que de loin, on ne le remarquait guère, mais assez marqué pour provoquer des faux pas.

Le congrès de l'Electronic Literature Organization, *Attention à la marche!*, tenu à Montréal à la fin de l'été 2018, entendait questionner de façon explicite la place de la littérature électronique dans la culture numérique. Quelle est la nature de la relation entre les deux? Comment une forme déjà vieille de cinquante ans parvient-elle à rester pertinente dans un environnement culturel fortement marqué par le numérique? Comment une pratique d'avant-garde développée en culture du livre réussit-elle à s'ajuster aux principes d'une culture de l'écran?

Les expressions « littérature électronique » et « culture numérique » viennent d'être employées comme s'il s'agissait de pratiques ou de champs homogènes aisés à définir. Il en va évidemment tout autrement. En effet, la littérature électronique n'a pas connu un développement homogène, elle n'a pas suivi une progression linéaire; et on en serait même rendu, comme le dit Leonardo Flores (2019), à une troisième génération. Les deux premières générations, définies par N. Katherine Hayles, permettaient de distinguer, d'une part, une littérature pré-web, fondée sur des formes complexes de textualité, axées notamment sur les fonctionnalités de l'hypertextualité, mais respectant globalement les conventions de la culture de l'imprimé et du livre; et d'autre part, à partir de 1995, un ensemble de pratiques basées sur le web et intégrant le multimédia et l'interactivité (Hayles 2008). La troisième génération est celle de la littérature numérique en tant que telle, une littérature qui se sert de l'ensemble des dispositifs et des plateformes de diffusion rendus disponibles par les développements informatiques récents, notamment les développements de l'infrastructure technologique qu'est Internet. Cette dernière génération englobe les deux premières qui continuent à avoir leurs adeptes et épigones.

**Like** a train entering the station, electronic literature stopped in 2018 in the vast new building that is digital culture. The train was already a certain age, while the station was brand new. It was obvious that the meeting between the two was not perfect. At any time, there was a risk of stumbling, especially if you weren't careful where you set foot. There was a gap, a small distance, between the step and the platform. It was small, so that from a distance you could hardly notice it, but it was marked enough to cause you to stumble.

The Electronic Literature Organization's conference *Mind the Gap!*, held in Montreal in late summer 2018, was intended to explicitly question the place of electronic literature in digital culture. What is the nature of the relationship between the two? How does a form that was already fifty years old manage to remain relevant in a cultural environment strongly marked by digital technology? How does an avant-garde practice developed in the context of book culture succeed in adjusting to the principles of a culture heavily engaged in screens, networks and mobile devices.

We've just used the terms "electronic literature" and "digital culture" as if they were practices or homogeneous fields that are easy to define. This is obviously false. Indeed, electronic literature has not developed homogeneously, it has not followed a linear progression; and we are even in the presence, as Leonardo Flores (2019) says, of a third generation. The first two generations, as defined by N. Katherine Hayles, made it possible to distinguish, on the one hand, a pre-web literature based on complex forms of textuality, focusing in particular on the functionalities of hypertextuality but generally respecting the conventions of print and book culture; and on the other hand, from 1995 onwards, a set of web-based practices integrating multimedia and interactivity (Hayles 2008). The third generation is that of digital literature as such, a form that makes use of all the devices and platforms made available by recent computer developments, particularly developments in the technological infrastructure that is the Internet. This last generation encompasses the first two which continue to have their followers and epigones.

De la même façon, il n'y a pas une seule culture numérique, mais un ensemble de pratiques culturelles, artistiques et textuelles, diverses et non conventionnelles, pour ne pas dire divergentes, en marge bien souvent des institutions (quoique celles-ci cherchent de plus en plus à les intégrer), qui se servent de ces dispositifs et plateformes de diffusion ou de l'infrastructure d'Internet. Comprendre les manifestations et la logique sous-jacente des cultures numériques exige des formes de recherche et de recherche-crédation innovantes, ainsi que des approches à la croisée des disciplines, telles que l'herméneutique, l'esthétique ou l'ethnographie numériques (Miller 2011), l'archéologie des médias, les humanités numériques, etc.

Le principal objectif du congrès ELO 2018, duquel découle la publication que ce texte introduit, était d'ailleurs de chercher à multiplier les perspectives critiques sur les formes de communication et d'imbrication, mais aussi de résistance entre littérature électronique et culture numérique, en réunissant un très grand nombre de chercheurs et d'artistes préoccupés par leur développement. La rencontre a ainsi servi à favoriser le renouvellement des perspectives de recherche et de recherche-crédation en littérature électronique, à mieux définir les zones de recoupement entre cette forme littéraire et les humanités numériques, à prendre en compte les technologies mobiles, de plus en plus présentes au quotidien, dans leur impact sur les habitudes d'écriture et de lecture et à investiguer la dimension politique du numérique, dans ses liens à l'art, à la littérature et à la culture. Parmi les autres thèmes abordés, on a pu noter un intérêt accru pour les principes de réalité augmentée et de réalité virtuelle, pour les formes et enjeux de la traduction (en termes de codes, de langues ou de médias), pour les spécificités langagières et culturelles de la littérature électronique, pour les liens entre le numérique et la culture urbaine, ainsi que pour les pratiques éditoriales destinées aux jeunes (les lecteurs de demain).

\*

\* \*

Il est difficile de résumer une rencontre où une plus de cent cinquante communications et conférences ont été prononcées, un congrès accompagné d'une importante exposition de 60 œuvres numériques, ainsi que d'un festival de performances échelonné sur 3 soirées. Il est tout aussi difficile de structurer

Similarly, there is not a single digital culture, but a set of diverse and unconventional—not to say divergent—cultural, artistic and textual practices, often at the margins of institutions (although these are increasingly seeking to integrate them), which use these devices and platforms or the internet infrastructure. Understanding the manifestations and underlying logic of digital cultures requires innovative forms of research and research-creation, as well as cross-disciplinary approaches, such as hermeneutics, digital aesthetics or ethnography, media archaeology, digital humanities, etc. (Miller 2011).

The main objective of the ELO 2018 conference, the origin this publication, was moreover to multiply critical perspectives on forms of communication and interaction, but also of resistance between electronic literature and digital culture, by bringing together a large number of researchers and artists concerned about their development. The meeting thus served to encourage research and research-creation perspectives in electronic literature, to better define the intersections between this literary form and digital humanities, to take into account mobile technologies which are increasingly present in everyday life, their impact on writing and reading habits, and to investigate the political dimension of digital technology, in its links to art, literature and culture. Other themes addressed during the four days of the conference included an increased interest in the principles of augmented and virtual reality, the forms and challenges of translation (in terms of codes, languages or media), the linguistic and cultural specificities of electronic literature, the links between digital and urban culture, and editorial practices aimed at young people, that is, the readers of tomorrow.

\*

\* \*

It is difficult to summarize a meeting where some one hundred and fifty papers and conferences were delivered, a congress accompanied by a major exhibition of 60 digital works, as well as a festival of performances spread over three evenings. It is just as difficult to structure the 35 texts that have been proposed for publication and that are gathered here. The

les 35 textes qui ont été proposés pour publication et qui sont réunis ici. Le congrès ayant été bilingue, les textes publiés sont ainsi en français et en anglais. Nous n'avons pas choisi de les regrouper en fonction de la langue de rédaction, mais plutôt en regard des enjeux abordés.

L'ouvrage est composé de six sections. La première, intitulée « **Des sons, des bruits et des voix** », explore la dimension acoustique de notre relation à la littérature électronique. On ne fait pas que lire lorsque confrontés à de telles œuvres, on regarde des vidéos, on explore une architecture virtuelle et, dimension trop souvent oubliée, on écoute toute sortes de bruits et de sons. La deuxième section, « **Le langage comme interface** », suit de près cette première exploration, en portant l'attention cette fois sur la programmation et le code, dans leur capacité à structurer une expérience et à l'orienter de manière précise. Les pratiques numériques reposent sur du langage qui renouvelle notre rapport aux œuvres.

La troisième section, « **Plateformes et narrations** », examine diverses plateformes, allant des jeux vidéo aux dispositifs de Réalité Virtuelle, utilisées, voire détournées, afin de générer des œuvres inattendues, qui renouvellent notre compréhension des arts numériques. Sous le titre très large des « **Esthétiques numériques** », la quatrième section s'arrête sur quelques œuvres récentes, présentées bien souvent par les artistes qui les ont produites. Cette section permet de donner un aperçu des projets qui ont été exhibés dans le cadre du congrès et de son exposition.

La cinquième section « **Lire et écrire en culture numérique** » s'interroge sur nos stratégies de production et de réception des œuvres de littérature électronique, y compris dans les salles de classe. Cette interrogation permet de revenir de façon importante sur les enjeux pédagogiques de notre passage à la culture numérique, dimension qui devient de plus en plus importante.

Finalement, la sixième et dernière section s'arrête sur des « **Perspectives diachroniques sur la littérature électronique** ». Cette section est l'occasion d'approfondir notre connaissance des développements de la littérature numérique, depuis les 50 dernières années. L'hypothèse des trois générations de cette littérature, discutée d'entrée de jeu, y trouve un écho explicite.

conference was bilingual, thus the texts published are in French and English. We have not chosen to group them according to the language of writing, but rather according to the themes addressed.

The book is divided into six sections. The first, entitled “**Sounds, Noises and Voices,**” explores the acoustic dimension of our relationship to electronic literature. We don’t just read when confronted with such works, we watch videos, explore a virtual architecture and, a dimension too often forgotten, listen to all sorts of noises and sounds. The second section, “**Language as Interface,**” follows closely on from this first exploration, this time focusing on programming and code, in their capacity to structure an experience and orient it in a precise manner. Digital practices are based on language that renews our relationship to works.

The third section, “**Platforms and Narratives,**” examines various platforms, from video games to Virtual Reality devices, which are used, or even hijacked, to generate unexpected works that renew our understanding of digital art. Under the broad title of “**Digital Aesthetics,**” the fourth section focuses on some recent works, often presented by the artists who produced them. This section provides an overview of the projects that were exhibited at the conference and its exhibition.

The fifth section, “**Reading and Writing in Digital Culture,**” looks at the strategies used for producing and consuming electronic literature, including in the classroom. This questioning allows us to return in a significant way to the pedagogical stakes of our transition to digital culture, a dimension that is becoming increasingly important.

Finally, the sixth and last section focuses on “**Reading E-Lit across Time.**” This section is an opportunity to deepen our knowledge of developments in digital literature over the last 50 years. The hypothesis of three generations of e-Lit, mentioned earlier, is explicitly echoed here.

This diachronic view closes the loop, as it were. The sections have followed one another in a centrifugal spiral, starting as close as possible to the text and its experience, from the acoustic or coding point of view, and gradually opening up to the platforms and devices exploited, the



Ce regard diachronique vient en quelque sorte boucler la boucle. Les sections se sont enchaînées en fonction d'une spirale centrifuge, commençant au plus proche du texte et de son expérience, du point de vue acoustique ou du code, et s'ouvrant peu à peu aux plateformes et dispositifs exploités, aux principes esthétiques qui ont servi à la production et à la réception des œuvres, aux stratégies de lecture et d'écriture, abordées de façon analytique et, ultimement, aux transformations historiquement datées que cette pratique littéraire et artistique a connues.

DES SONS, DES BRUITS ET DES VOIX  
SOUNDS, NOISES AND VOICES

# Demagogic Speech And Rhetorical Emptiness

VERÓNICA PAULA GÓMEZ

## ABSTRACT

The third volume of the Electronic Literature Collection (ELC3) is home to *Radikal Karaoke* by Argentine-Spanish artist Belén Gache. This work offers a criticism of the political speech by transforming it into a karaoke and, consequently, raising the question about the decreasing “value” of this locus (Grossberg 2012). *Radikal Karaoke* is an interactive online device that displays a video in loop while the user/reader speaks/shouts using a microphone and pressing the keyboard randomly. The video shows people applauding, explosions, spectators watching a show, aliens, slaves, etc., and at the same time, the user/reader is pressing the keyboard following instructions and reading a written text that scrolls along the bottom of the screen. Depending on the volume of the voice and the use of the keyboard, the video will produce different images, colors and sounds.

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans le troisième volume de l'Electronic Literature Collection (ELC3), *Radikal Karaoke* de l'artiste argentine-espagnol Belén Gache offre une critique du discours politique en le transformant en karaoké et, par conséquent, en soulevant la question de la chute de la « valeur » de ce type de discours. *Radikal Karaoke* est un dispositif interactif en ligne qui affiche une vidéo en boucle pendant que l'utilisateur/lecteur parle ou crie dans le microphone et tape au hasard sur le clavier. La vidéo montre des individus qui applaudissent, des explosions, des spectateurs regardant une émission, des extraterrestres, des esclaves, etc.; en même temps, l'utilisateur/lecteur tape sur le clavier d'après des instructions et lit un texte qui défile au bas de l'écran. En fonction du volume de la voix et de l'usage du clavier, la vidéo présente des images, des couleurs et des sons différents. Gache se positionne clairement par rapport au besoin d'intervention de la part de ceux qui consomment

The author clearly marks a position related to the need for intervention from those who consume her technopoetic (Kozak 2015). Gache's work interrogates us about the indiscriminate consumption of nonsense political speeches and aims to implicate us as part of this parody. What is the relationship to current political practices and social reception? Regarding this question, this paper analyses the way Gache focuses on the rhetorical emptiness of hegemonic discourses renewing the debate over the relation between demagogic politics and automated society (Berardi 2014). The objective is to identify the strategic use of this device to make people take on an active role in the execution of poetry through karaoke and to denounce the political use of propaganda through an excess of linguistic nonsense and over-saturation of media space.

sa technopoétique (Kozak 2015). Son œuvre nous interroge au sujet de la consommation sans discernement du discours politique absurde et cherche à nous impliquer dans cette parodie. Quel est le rapport aux pratiques politiques actuelles et à leur réception sociale? L'article analyse la manière par laquelle Gache centre notre attention sur le vide rhétorique des discours hégémoniques, renouvelant le débat sur le rapport de la politique démagogique et de la société automatisée (Berardi 2014). L'objectif est d'identifier l'usage stratégique de ce dispositif afin d'encourager un rôle actif dans l'actualisation du texte poétique à travers le karaoké et de dénoncer la propagande politique par le biais d'un excès de non-sens linguistique et d'une saturation de l'espace médiatique.

## INTRODUCTION

The third volume of the Electronic Literature Collection (ELC3) is home to *Radikal Karaoke*<sup>1</sup> by Argentine-Spanish artist Belén Gache, originally made in 2011. This work offers a criticism of political speech by transforming it into a karaoke, consequently posing a question about the decreasing “value” of this locus (Grossberg 2012).

Radikal Karaoke is an interactive online device that displays a video in loop while the user/reader speaks/shouts using a microphone and randomly pressing the keyboard. Specifically, the video shows people applauding, explosions, spectators watching a show, aliens, slaves, etc., and at the same time, the user/reader is pressing the keyboard following some instructions and reading a written text passing along the bottom of the screen. Depending on the volume of the voice and the use of the keyboard, the video will produce different images, colors and sounds. We can observe performative aspects of the users who, when interacting with the machine, reveal “the monolingualism of the other” (Derrida 1967).

### NOTE 1

Available here: <http://belengache.net/rk/>. Also on this web page there are videos where Belén Gache performs her work herself. The work is part of the third volume of the Electronic Literature Collection (ELC). Link: <http://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=radikal-karaoke>.



Figure 1:  
*Radikal Karaoke* screenshot: Controls

The author clearly marks a position related to the need for intervention of those who consume this technopoetic (Kozak 2015). As part of an artistic program, Gache restores its specific place for political action in a world overrun by automated discourses that function mechanically as machines (Groys 2016). Gache’s work poses the question about the indiscriminate consumption of nonsensical political speeches and aims to involve us as part of this parody

(Hutcheon 1988). What is the relationship between current political practices and their social reception? Regarding this question, this paper analyses the way Gache focuses on the rhetorical emptiness of hegemonic discourses renewing the debate about the connection between demagogic politics and automated society (Berardi 2014). The objective is to identify the strategic use of this device to make people take on an active role in the execution of poetry through karaoke and to denounce the political use of propaganda through an excess of linguistic nonsense and over-saturation of media space.

### **THE CONVERSION: FROM DEMAGOGIC POLITICAL PRACTICES TO RADIKAL**

Here we will first develop what we call “the conversion” of demagogic political practices into radikal karaoke. In regard to this idea, *Radikal Karaoke* is a technopoetic (Kozak 2015) that poses a question: what does somebody do when speaking as part of the political class? The work suggests that it is all built into demagogic political practices that focus on keywords and images leading to a passive reception: “Speeches are structured on emphatic and demagogic formulae and linguistic clichés reproducing themselves as viruses” (Gache 2011). This is why the work aims to awaken the audience into a karaoke.

A karaoke is a popular form of entertainment, offered typically by bars and clubs, in which people take turns singing popular songs into a microphone over pre-recorded backing tracks. In addition, Gache expanded the functions of regular karaoke—a vintage technology that had its heyday in the entertainment industry in the 70s, although it is still reverting as a practice—using other tools of present times such as the computer itself.

Based on this reproduction device, Gache offers a Derridean idea: to reach the difference (*la différance*) in the repetition of texts—songs, discourses, poems. The fact that the author chooses to use a “k” in ‘radikal’—instead of following the regular spelling “radical” with a “c”—could be related to the dual “k” of karaoke, which seems the most visible cause for this choice. But also, this device of repetition always has moments of discourse deviation that are very productive in their excess, as we could see with the “a” introduced by Derrida (1967)—difference/différance.



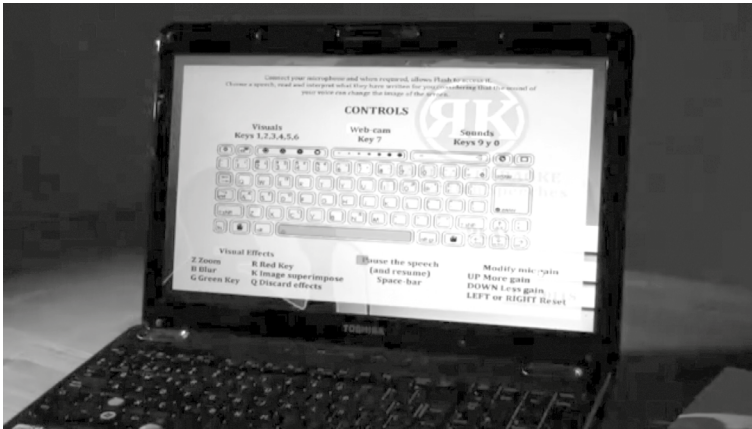
**Figure 2:**  
A user performing *Radikal Karaoke*

A deviation radically converts the political proposal by means of its stereotyped discourse: to make people drowsy with repeated demagogic “songs” that everybody seems to remember but nobody analyzes deeply. Through this operation that seeks to plunge people into drowsiness, politicians and governments satisfy their main objective: to bring about lack of sense and hinder critical thinking in the audience. That is why karaoke seems both—a way to focus on the spectacularity of politics and the device to give the opportunity to people to have a voice in this decreasing *locus*: “En la era del teleprompter el discurso político es más karaoke que teatro y por más gravitas que el andamiaje del gobierno le otorgue, sería más honesto ver este espectáculo en un bar”<sup>2</sup> (Flores 2017).

#### NOTE 2

“In a teleprompter era, the political discourse is more karaoke than theatre and no matter how much gravitas the government scaffolding, it would be more honest to watch this spectacle in a bar.” (Our translation)

Reshaping the textual past through a postmodern parody (Hutcheon 1988), which entails an ironic rupture with the awareness of that past, Gache proposes three transcriptions—in Spanish [Figure 3] or in English—that we could perform to shake off drowsiness: SPEECH 1 “We are the charming gardeners” (in English); “Ex Africa semper aliquid novi” (in Spanish). SPEECH 2: “Things that you will never see in Australia” (in English); “Mirad cómo Kate presume de su anillo” (in Spanish). SPEECH 3: “We have no past, you have no present” (in English); “Es tiempo de escuchar a los guacamayos” (in Spanish). With these speeches Gache’s work seeks to denaturalize clichés and stereotyped phrases that circulate as meaningless slogans, while being uncritically received (Gache 2014).



**Figure 3:** Three speeches to choose in Spanish, in *Radikal Karaoke* by Belén Gache

Ideally, karaoke seems to be a device that duplicates lyrics that are already known “by heart,” and when playing the song, the singer completes the melody provided by the machine with words. However, Gache shows that what is important is the translation of what we think we are repeating every time we speak. Therefore, there is no way to imitate speeches without a deviation, because the conception of language itself as a hallucination (Derrida 1967) provides a critical view of stereotypes to current political practices. Gache is minding the gap by helping us not to be robots, not to be just passive listeners.

## THE ACTION: FACING RHETORICAL EMPTINESS, INTRODUCING PERFORMANCE

### NOTE 3

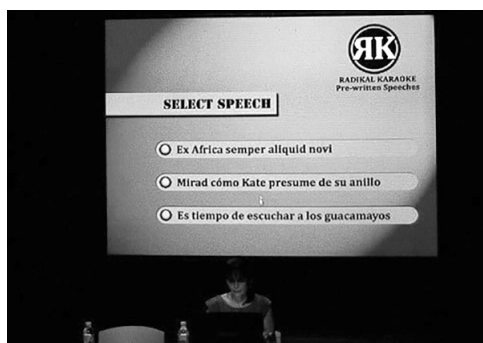
“Our political class reads trite phrases and we as a public give a fraction of our attention to see if something new or at least genuine comes out.” (Our translation)

*Radikal Karaoke* intends to elicit political speeches from its users. Gache built machinery to perform the rhetorical emptiness related to politics with different voices and bodies, and in this search, the users subversively transform the discursive hegemony. As Flores admits: “Nuestra clase política nos lee frases trilladas y nosotros como público le damos una fracción de nuestra atención a ver si sale algo nuevo o por lo menos genuino”<sup>3</sup> (Flores 2017).

For the work to exist, something stimulating has to happen, something related to our own bodies that has been repressed by the political “circus”

that entertains us. When a speaker pronounces the discourse offered by the machine, he/she performs the words that subject himself or herself to stupor and uncritical attitude. This is the way in which performance turns emptiness into alertness, using the rhetorical mechanism of politics.

Traditions, conquests, revolutions: the active voice of people who play karaoke is the way to express a criticism of emptiness. The work welcomes the performance of those who—being fragile in their monolingualism—come as guests to the *locus* of politics. And although this is just a game—just a discourse and then it is over—this language is hospitable *to the other* (Derrida 1996), making way for critical thinking regarding the lack of sense shown by politics. If we come back to the Japanese meaning of karaoke we will find, once again, the idea of emptiness in its morphemes: *kara* (empty), *oke* (orchestra). Gache seems to return to these etymological meanings, wondering why words do not matter. And in addition, Gache presents the music as a body that could be used as a score to give ideal-universal instructions to an orchestra but played each time in a different way (Gache 2014). What she tries to develop is what we listen to and what we could say when we change back these stereotypes.



**Figure 4:** Images of explosions while performing the work *Radikal Karaoke* by Belén Gache

The material of the poem (orality, writing, drawing), the performance of readers/users, the interaction, the generativity, the listening, the form acquired by the discourse point to a deconstruction of the entertainment industry used by politics. The author clearly marks a position related to the need of intervention of those who consume these speeches without playing any role but that of listeners. Karaoke forces you to say something with your own voice, using the same device you used before, when you were just a receptor. As a consequence, poetic language restores the possibility of political action through the same machinery that causes the rhetorical emptiness denounced



before. In the repetition of those three discourses of contemporary highly urbanized society, Gache recovers an organic form of language that allows the appearance of new senses and provides a place for a rebellious poetics. These speeches are pirated, showing how, once given, the giver of information loses control of the way it can be used by the performer (Errington 2008).

The body becomes a place of enunciation of the demagoguery of political *locus*. The work invites us to attend a costume party where all voices are heard and the same discourses get repeated once and again until all sense is lost. The parody consists in facing the distortions of what seems to be a “serious truth”—the political speech—by repeating common sense not only with words but also by means of images and sounds (Taylor 2017). Here Gache is minding the gap of our past, turning us into protagonists of our present through parody.

## THE PROJECTION: FROM THE DECREASING OF POLITICS TO THE INCREASING OF ART

To conclude, we describe two inversions that are very productive for expanding the use of art by means of new technology, for changing the demagogic speeches denounced by Gache.

First, what contemporary art can achieve is a reversion of the unidirectional movement of the political discourses that dominated the way of making politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e., a leader appealing to the masses through the new technologies of the time—radio and television. Now, that multitude uses the technical possibilities in the opposite way: it makes demands to politicians through an insubordinate use of art (Brea 2002).



**Figure 5:** The insubordinate use of art in *Radikal Karaoke* by Belén Gache

Second, there is an inversion of the artist as a hacker (Gradin 2015), achieved by making new contents—that have been silenced by political interests—go viral. Gache suggests using “the other side of technology” to subvert passive listening and give speeches new and unthought-of meanings that turn art into a territory to experiment upon. Drawing a parallel with the incipient growth of electronics during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Burroughs stated in the 1970s that language was a virus whose only cure was silence or literature: “‘Borren las palabras para siempre’ (...) la palabra literaria fortifica el organismo contra las formas más insidiosas del mal; las palabras de los políticos, de los militares, de los comunicadores sociales, de los médicos, los psiquiatras”<sup>4</sup> (Gamerro 1970, 26).

## NOTE 4

“Delete words for ever... the literary word fortifies the organism against the most insidious forms of evil; the words of politicians, military men, social communicators, doctors, psychiatrists” (Our translation)

In this inversion, we could find the political projection of art when interacting with machines. As Brea (2002) says, the key is how to subversively intervene in the processes of social construction of knowledge, speaking the language of the same system that produces a uniform and unique instrumentalization of the work of the people. Finally, Gache is minding the gap in machines to allow us to be heard.

---

- Berardi, Franco. 2014. *La sublevación*. Buenos Aires: Hekht Libros.
- Brea, José Luis. 2002. *La era postmedia. Acción comunicativa, prácticas (post) artísticas y dispositivos neomediales*. Salamanca: Editorial CASA.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1967. *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris: Seuil.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1996. *El monolingüismo del otro*. Buenos Aires: Manantial.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1997. *Mal de archivo. Una impresión freudiana*. Madrid: Trotta.
- Errington, Joseph. 2008. "Colonial Linguists, (Proto)-National Languages." In *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power*, 123-48. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Flores, Leonardo. 2017. "Literatura electrónica y discurso político." *80 grados*, June. Link: <http://www.80grados.net/literatura-electronica-y-discurso-politico/>.
- Gache, Belén. 2011. "Radikal Karaoke. Speech Transcripts." 2011. Accessed June 15, 2020. Link: <http://belengache.net/rk/>.
- Gache, Belén. 2014. *Instrucciones de uso: Partituras, recetas y algoritmos en la poesía y el arte contemporáneos*. Madrid. Retrieved May 17, 2018. Link: [https://www.belengache.net/pdf/InstruccionesDeUso\\_BelenGache.pdf](https://www.belengache.net/pdf/InstruccionesDeUso_BelenGache.pdf).
- Gamerro, Carlos. 1970. "Por un arte impuro." In *La revolución electrónica*, ed. by William Burroughs, 9-19. Buenos Aires: Caja Negra.
- Gradin, Charly. 2015. "Hacker." In *Tecnopoéticas argentinas. Archivo blando de arte y tecnología*, ed. by Claudia Kozak, 132-37. Buenos Aires: Caja Negra.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. 2012. *Estudios culturales en tiempo futuro. Cómo es el trabajo intelectual que requiere el mundo de hoy*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores.
- Groys, Boris. 2016. "Bajo la mirada de la teoría." In *Arte en flujo. Ensayos sobre la evanescencia del presente*, 33-54. Buenos Aires: Caja Negra.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. "Intertextuality, Parody, and the Discourses of History." In *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: London: Routledge.
- Kozak, Claudia, ed. 2015. *Tecnopoéticas argentinas. Archivo blando de arte y tecnología*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Buenos Aires: Caja Negra.
- Taylor, Claire. 2017. "Entre 'born digital' y herencia literaria: el diálogo entre formatos literarios y tecnología digital en la poética electrónica hispanoamericana." *Tropelias. Revista de teoría de la literatura y literatura comparada*, 79-90. Link: [https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs\\_tropelias/tropelias.2017271541](https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_tropelias/tropelias.2017271541).