PARAULES PIXELADES

Pixelated Words
Literature in the Digital Age

28.01–10.04.2016

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Literature in the Digital Age

Laura Borràs and Giovanna Di Rosario

The term "digital literature" refers to the digital nature of literary texts, that is, to the fact that these are texts born in the digital format, rather than being digitised texts.

The aim of the exhibition "Pixelated Words: Literature in the Digital Age", the first of its kind in large format in the world, is to provide a gateway to a literary reality that is still emerging, generated by a digital environment and by digital procedures.

Normally, when speaking of contemporary literature, practically no one mentions electronic literature. Whilst the idea of contemporary art leads us to think about a wide range of artistic expression, thoughts about contemporary literature usually call to mind only recent productions launched by traditional publishers or, at best, electronic books (e-books).

The concept of digital literature – also known as electronic literature, often abbreviated to e-lit, particularly in the United States – refers to a wide range of literary varieties that have in common their prominent, crucial use of digital technologies.

The term "digital literature" refers to the digital nature of literary texts, that is to say, to the fact that these are texts born in the digital format and which are not merely digitised texts.

Digital literature occupies an intermedial and transmedial place between literature, computing, and the visual and performance arts. The purpose of this exhibition is to indicate one of the paths that literature has taken in our information society, in this digital age.

The word and technology

The word – both oral and written – has been associated since Genesis with the verbal and with divine creation. The word and its "receptacles" are many and varied: the voice, writing, print, the typewriter, the computer... We given the name of "literature" to the creative exercise that "represents a development of certain linguistic properties", to use the definition formulated by Paul Valéry), since at least the fifteenth century. Digital literature is a form of technological literary creation that is already supported by a weighty tradition, a genre whose specificity can be explained through the various elements of complexity that it presents: physical complexity (what it is and what it is like); authorial complexity (the question of who creates it: the programmer, the machine...); receptive complexity (the logics of reading logics determined by the digital environment and the different formats used by artists); typological complexity (the variety and confusion of genres, the hybridisation of a writing that is here and now); and perceptive complexity (how we read, what devices we use to do so...).

The possibilities of writing in the digital age are many and varied and are determined by the potential of the medium used to transmit information: the digital support. A digital text is, first and foremost, a hypertext, in the sense that it is an amplified text, one intertwined with other texts, inserted into a textual ball of yarn that is generated by many very different

threads. A text made from texts that enable the written word to be linked to the image, to music, to movement, to temporality, to sensoriality...

The exhibition invites the visitor to understand the historic evolution of this literature and to "consume" it. This is a literature in which the digital support links sound to calligraphy, the word to the image, movement to meaning, and which culminates many of the dreams that the alliance of the word with the space has generated, from ancient Greek calligrams and Arabic ideographic painting to the most recent avant-gardes.

The book-object becomes significantly amplified in the digital environment. The productions of writers and artists that adopt such practices form part of an evolving field of tensions between the book printed on paper, the art-book-object and the e-book.

The main aim of "Pixelated Words", which features 57 works, is to introduce digital literature to broad audiences that, perhaps, have never heard of this genre, as well as suggesting paths to more in-depth understanding, once the spectator has become familiar with the concept, in the shaped of themed itineraries. The show comprises five large sections that suggest a narrative that is both diachronic (tracing the historic evolution of literary approaches and supports) and synchronic (discovery of canonical works by language area or by device) in order to provide the most complete possible overview of digital literature.

Analogue Experiments
and Digital Transformations
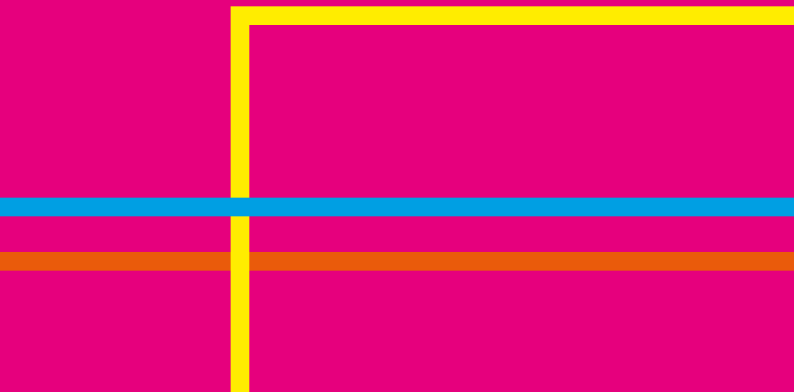
This section contains a brief overview of the historical background, highlighting certain key works (from amongst the many that we could have chosen) that marked a transformation in poetic and narrative construction. Here, the visitor is invited to discover how writing and the image have mutually contaminated each other, and to sample a brief review of the poetic tradition. This contamination (in our western culture) began in Ancient Greece with the calligrams of Simmias: in those times, western artistic culture usually reflected a more visual tradition (a characteristic generally attributed more to eastern civilisations), at least until, due to the gradual perfection of printing techniques, typography began to become standardised.
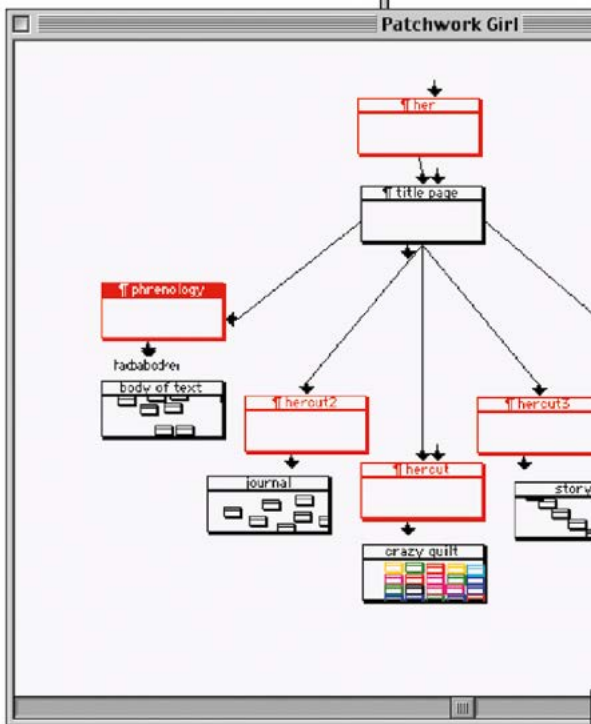
This section includes classical authors that have experimented with texts and their possibilities – Apollinaire, Borges, Cortázar, Ana María Uribe, Queneau, etc. It is important to see that these are pioneering texts due to the way in which many of them have been transferred to the digital space. We can see this, for example, in Moulthrop's digital re-writing of *The Garden of Forking Paths*, the digital version of *Hopscotch*, Queneau's *Cent mille milliard de poèmes* revisited by Eugenio Tisselli, Ester Xargay and Carles Hac-Mor, Uribe's "Anipoems" and Apollinaire's *La pluie*.
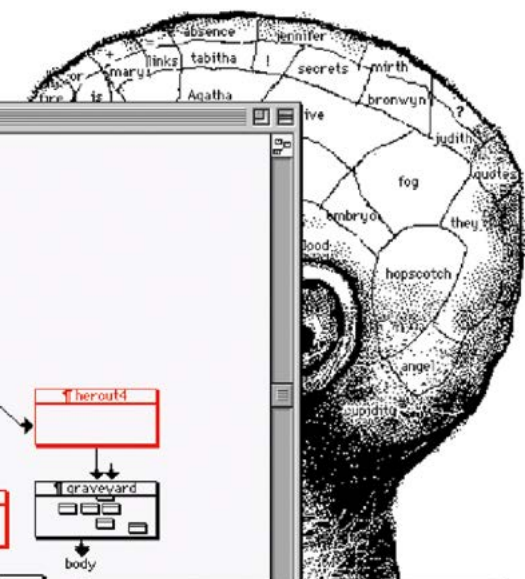
The Pioneers
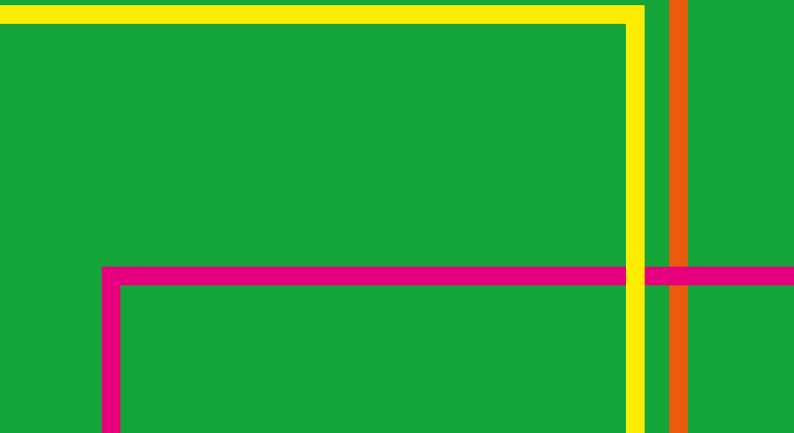
This section features some of the first works of digital literature. If we had to put a date to the birth of this genre, one would normally say that this took place in the nineteen fifties, with the first free poems generated by a machine. In Stuttgart, then part of the Federal Republic of Germany, Theo Lutz inserted sixteen chapter titles and subjects from Kafka's The Castle into a database and programmed them to recombine into phrases joined by grammatical logic to create Stochastische Texte (1959), which was published in a poetry review. However, the first text of digital literature generated by a machine was Christopher Strachey's Love letter (1952), which is on show in the exhibition. The selection also includes the first fictional hypertexts, classics like Michael Joyce's Afternoon, a Story, published in 1987 by an artist considered to be the "Homer" of digital literature, and Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl, published in 1995.

These new literary experiments attempted to modify the narrative structures of the textual forms of fiction by presenting texts with more beginnings and more endings, with different temporal constructions, more paths for reading, etc., to the point of deconstructing the text itself. Here, too, we find generative texts and poems, that is to say, works created by machines that suggest important questions about authorship and artists, such as: Who is the author of the work? What (creative) subjectivity are we talking about?

Shelley Jackson,
Patchwork Girl, 1995

absence | Jennifer
mary | tabitha | links | ! | secrets | mirth
or | is | Agatha | bronwyn | ?
fire | five | judith
| fog | quotes
embryo | they
blood
hopscotch
angel
cupidity

therout4

graveyard

body

birth

My birth takes place more than once. In
the plea of a bygone monster; from a
muddy hole by corpse-light; under the
needle, and under the pen.

   Or it took place not at all.

   But if I hope to tell a good story, I
must leapfrog out of the muddle of my
several births to the day I parted for
the last time with the author of my
being, and set out to write my own
destiny.

11
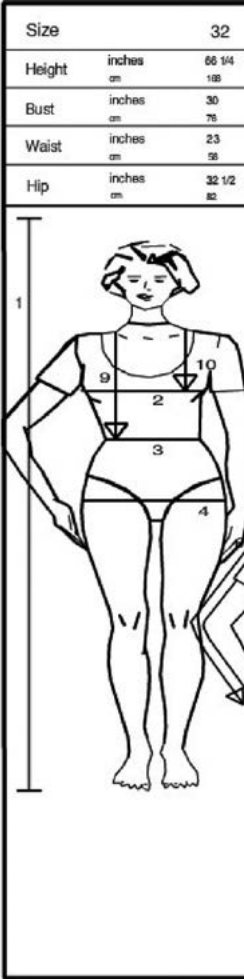
Digital Literature
Comes of Age
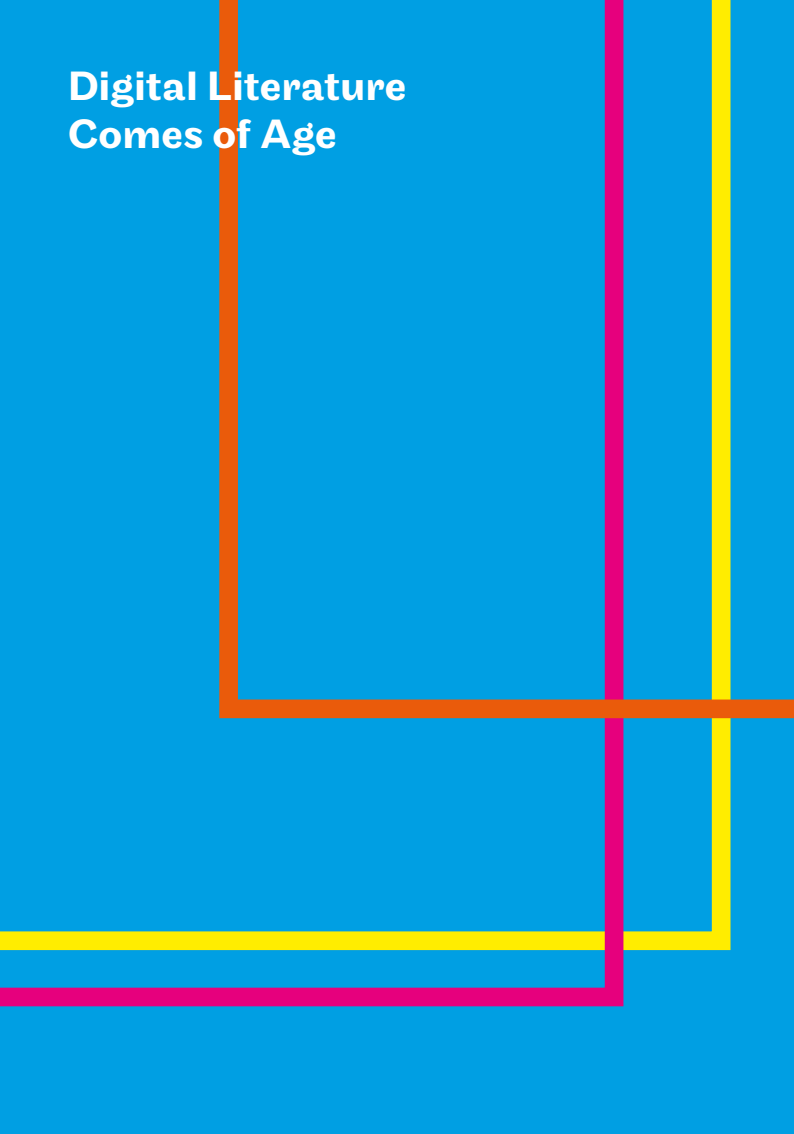
This section presents some of the works published in the second collection that the ELO (Electronic Literature Organisation) devoted to digital literature in 2011, co-curated by Talan Memmot, Rita Raley, Brian Kim-Stefans and Laura Borràs. The editorial task performed by the ELO is considered an essential landmark in the canon of digital literature and a reference work in the field.

The pieces selected, then, are texts written in various languages: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, as well as a number of translations, such as that of Serge Bourchardon and Vincent Volckaert's *Déprise* (2010), translated into Italian by Giovanna Di Rosario and included in the ELO anthology.

Some of the works presented are *remediations*, to use Bolter's description, of classical works, such as Alison Clifford's *The Sweet Old Etcetera* (2006), a digital rewriting of E. E. Cummings's famous poem *My Sweet Old Etcetera* (published in 1926), and Rui Torres' *Amor de Clarice* (2005), based on excerpts from the short story *Amor* by the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector, and *Tierra de extracción* (2000-2007), by Doménico Chiappe and Andreas Meier. The creation of this last work began in 1996, with the writing of the novel and the production of the songs, whilst the multimedia version was published in 2007, expanded for inclusion in the second volume of *ELC*.

Other works, however, were born as genuinely digital pieces. These include David Clark's *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein (to be played with the Left Hand),* which first saw the light in 2009, Christine Wilks' *Fitting the Pattern* (2008), and *Deep Surface* (2007), by Stuart Moulthrop, one of the pioneers of digital literature, as well as *Golpe de gracia,* by the Colombian artist Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez in 2006.

Size		32
Height	inches	66 1/4
	cm	168
Bust	inches	30
	cm	76
Waist	inches	23
	cm	58
Hip	inches	32 1/2
	cm	82

Christine Wilks
Fitting the Pattern, 2008

	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	50	52	54	56	58	60
	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4	66 1/4
	168	168	168	168	168	168	168	168	168	168	168	168	168	168
	31 1/2	33	34 3/4	36 1/4	37 3/4	39 1/2	41	43 1/2	45 1/4	48	50 1/2	52 3/4	55 1/4	57 1/2
	80	84	88	92	96	100	104	110	116	122	128	134	140	146
	24 1/2	26	27 3/4	29 1/4	30 3/4	32 1/2	34	36 1/4	38 3/4	41	43 1/2	45 1/2	48	50 1/2
	62	66	70	74	78	82	86	92	98	104	110	116	122	128
	34	35 1/2	37	38 3/4	40 1/4	41 3/4	43 1/2	45 1/2	48	50 1/2	52 3/4	55 1/4	57 1/2	60
	86	90	94	98	102	106	110	116	122	128	134	140	146	152

englisch
1. Height
2. Bust
3. Waist
4. Hip
5. Back length
6. Sleeve length
7. Neck width
8. Side leg length
9. Front waist length
10. Bust point
11. Upper arm circumf.

For dresses, blouses, coats and jackets select size according to bust measurement, for trousers and skirts according to hip measurement!
All burda patterns are prepared with ease allowance appropriate for style in question.

français
1. Stature
2. Tour de poitrine
3. Tour de taille
4. Tour des hanches
5. Long.du dos
6. Longueur de manche
7. Tour de cou
8. Long.côté
  pantalon
9. Long. taille devant
10. Profondeur
  de poitrine
11. Tour du bras

Robes, corsages, manteaux et vestes seront choisis d'après votre tour de poitrine les pantalons et les jupes d'après votre tour de hanches!
Tous les patrons sont établis avec l'aisance nécessaire selon le genre du modèle.

español
1. Estatura
2. Contorno busto
3. Contorno cintura
4. Contorno cadera
5. Largo espalda
6. Largo manga
7. Contorno cuello
8. Largo lateral
  del pantalón
9. Largo talle delantero
10. Altura de pecho
11. Cont. de brazo

La talla para los vestidos, blusas, abrigos y chaquetas, se determina de acuerdo con el contorno del busto. Los pantalones y las faldas, de acuerdo con el contorno de las caderas.
En el patrón–Burda se incluyen los márgenes para la holgura necesaria.
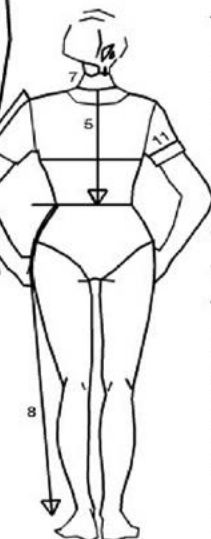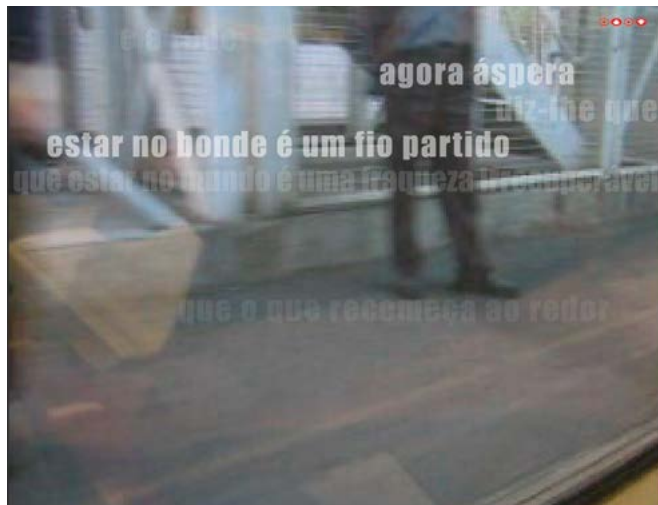
David Clark, *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein
(to be Played with the Left Hand)*, 2009

Rui Torres, *Amor de Clarice,* 2005

Sans que je m'en aperçoive, cette inconnue devenait ma femme.

Serge Bouchardon and Vincent Volckaert, *Déprise*, 2010

edible spryd
sky was cany)
in minoune sky
who ajs wje ee-p-o-p-h-c-h-s-s-a-g-r
a-mi-N-gl-y
g-re-A-mi-N-gl-y
un(bee)
when the world
un(bee)mo x n(in)un(bee) O)

Just-in Just- spring
i was considering how within night's loose sack
darkness the hungry star within will jiggle the
a star's nibbing in- sinch will e -ven tw-al -ly devours
darkness the hungry st- -inch wil e-ven tu-al -ly
dawn and be jerked into the -ry when over my head a th
between green mountains sings the flinger of th
of fair perpetual foot the sinous not the flashin
partedpetaled mouth,face delirious, indivisi
the hours rise up putting of stars an
into the street of the sky light

Let us lie here in the distur
And slowly grow together
Sucked frail by Spring, whose
This hurrying tree, an *
Hitched to time scar
Space:for the day dec
Receiving deepness,
Of He

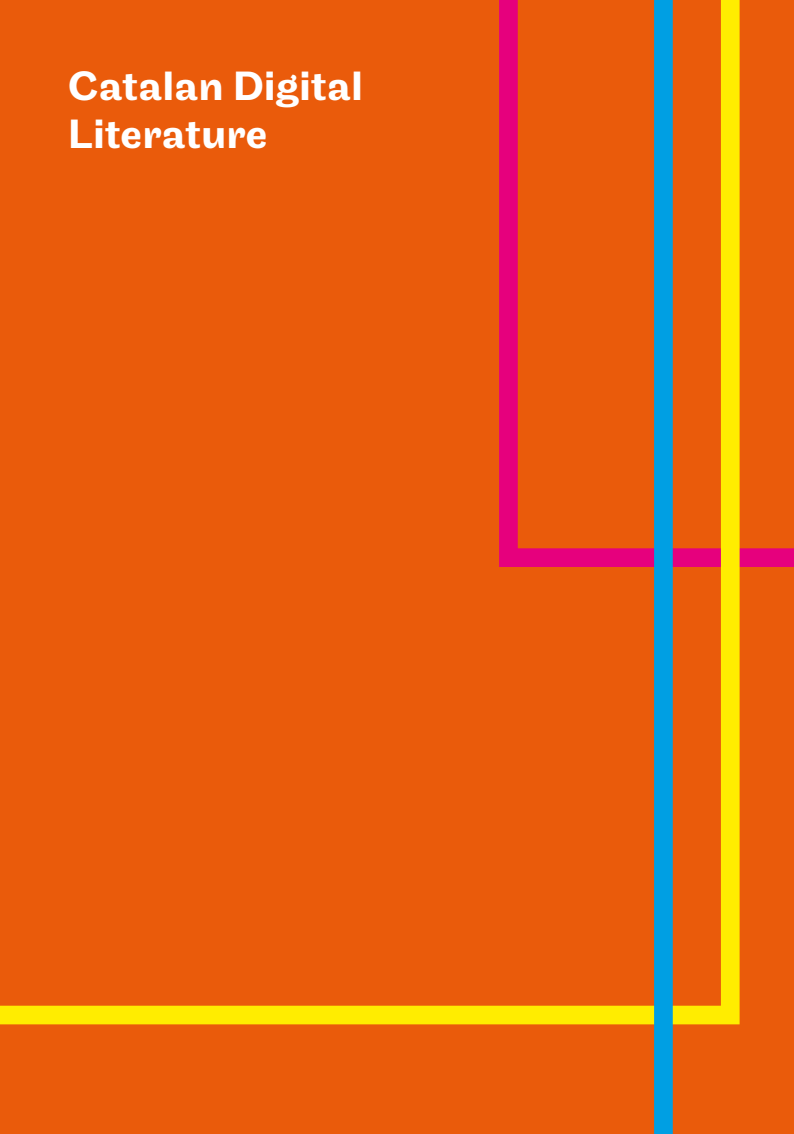Alison Clifford, *The Sweet Old Etcetera*, 2006

Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez, *Golpe de gracia*, 2006

Doménico Chiappe and Andreas Meier, *Tierra de extracción*, 2000–2007

Catalan Digital Literature

This section is devoted entirely to Catalan digital literature, presenting Catalonia's contribution to the genre. The evolution of Catalan digital literature is illustrated in various forms of literary experimentation that begin with the avant-gardes, exemplified here in the work of Salvat-Papasseit. In the first section in the exhibition, entitled "Analogue Experimentations and Digital Transformations" visitors can read *Tarot de Marsella,* by Ramon Dachs, author of the first hypertext in Catalan, *Intermínims de navegació poètica,* published in 1996. The present section features more works, including *Diari d'una absència*, by a pioneer in the field, Laura Borràs, created for a teaching environment in the field of digital literature in 2003, along with works awarded the City of Vinaròs Prize for digital literature: Ton Ferret's *Retorn a la Comallega* (2006) and Isaías Herrero's *La casa sota el temps* (2007), which features an interactive environment with the appearance of a video game. Indeed, the theme of video games is an important one in digital literature. One often speaks of contamination between video games and digital literature: of the game-like aspects of digital literature and the narrative aspects of video games.

This section also takes us back to experiments born from the transfer of analogue texts to digital formats without this being a case, exactly, of digitisation, such as Lluís Calvo's *Isopoema* (2004). The exhibition also features a videolith: Cori Pedrola's reworking of Salvat-Papasseit's

EVITA DICOTOMIA   [En 12 sg.]

ESPURNA ESPÚRIA   [E

VERB I PARAULA   [En molt temps]

TEIXIT DE CARN   [A qu

4

Els múltiples cosmos s'esplaiàven
amb energia. El món nounat vibrava
una cadència especial.

ERA GAIREBÉ PERFECTE.

...fou punt d'inflexió...

1921 work *Les formigues,* a clear example of the remediation
of works on paper. This is also the case of Jerome Fletcher's
piece *Ha perdut la veu* (2009), a rewriting of his book *Alfreda
Lost Voice – La Freda ha perdut la veu* in English and in Cata-
lan. And, finally, to close this linguistic journey, we include an
example of Catalan literature in app form, *Infinit,* by Màrius
Sampere (Ubícuo Studio).

Isaías Herrero,
La casa sota el temps, 2007

Apps
New Screens
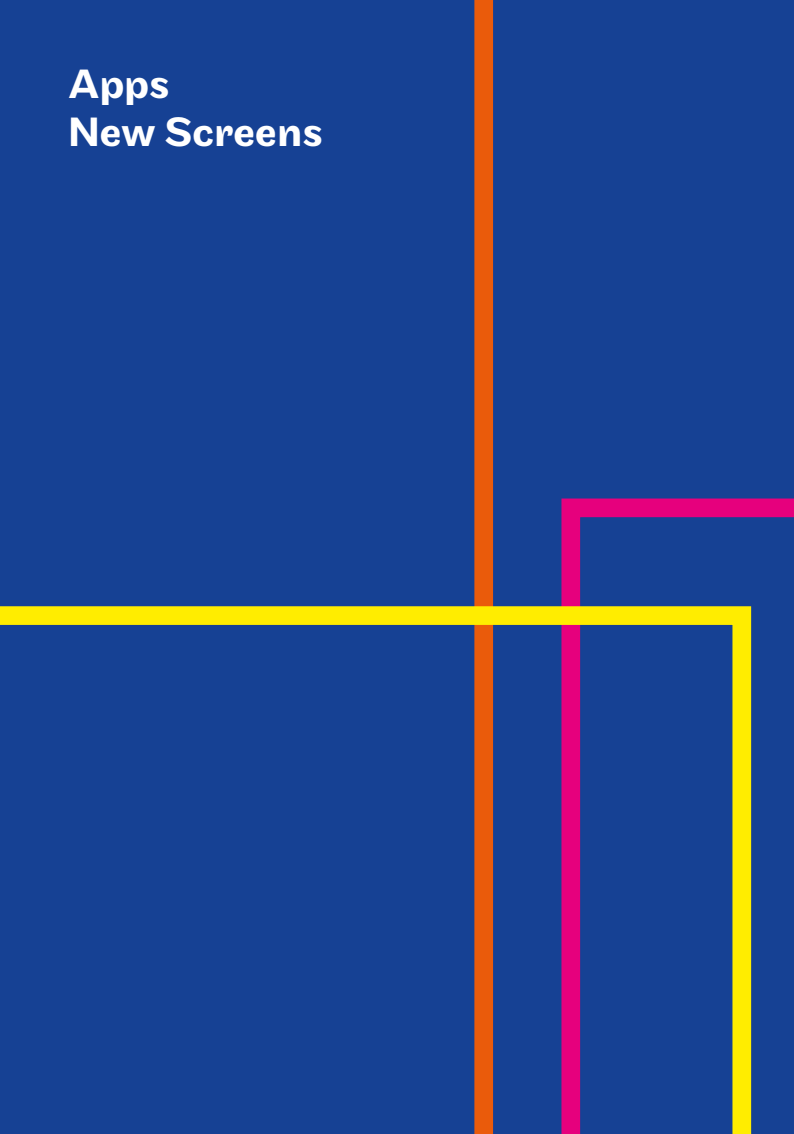
Narrative and poetic works for tablet applications (apps), that is to say, for touch screens, introduce a new dimension in text, because they require a different, sensorial form of reading, since they are read on tactile devices. In these works, to the typical aspects of digital literary creation (the union of words with sound, images, movements, the infographic aspects of texts, their playful appearance and so on), we need also to add a tactile, manual aspect, one that seems more important. This is the case with Jörg Piringer's work *abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz,* in which the reader creates the text they hear, read and touch at all times, controlling the minimum discrete units of a language, the phonemes, converted here into audio microtexts in the shape of letters that react to gravity and generate customised rhythms and sounds through the action of the performative reader. Works like *abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz* take us into the world of words, it is true, but also into the universe of sounds, movement and touch.

This leads us to ask, on the one hand, what are the elements that create the "poeticity" of works made for touch screens? In what does their literary quality reside? And, on the other, we may ask whether the poetic and narrative elements of literary works for touch screens are similar to those that operate in works for other screens, that is to say, whether or not we are seeing the appearance of a new aesthetic peculiar to these creations conceived specifically for certain devices.

The examples highlighted here include the damp, liquid narrative that is Erik Loyer's *Strange Rain* and the hypertextual narrative of *Conduit d'aération,* by Alexandra Saemmer (*et al.*), as well as a selection of specifically tactile children's literature, such as Aya Karpinsk's *Shadows never sleep*.

This section also features adaptations of classical works such as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Octavio Paz's *Blanco,* which exploit the potential of the digital by suggesting a new reading and illustrating the options open to lit–erature in the digital environment.

Noah Wardrip-Fruin, *et al., Screen*, 2003

Roderik Coover i Scott Rettberg, *Toxicity*, 20015–2016

Other paths: installations

The exhibition itinerary also includes a series of installations, which open and close each of its sections. Some are works presented in large format, such as Isaías Herrero's *5.000 palabras*, but in other cases these are interactive installations like Jason Nelson's *Surrounded by Boxes of Dangerous Creatures* (2015), which challenges the visitor to create the work in order to see and read it. This is also the case of *Cursed poems,* by Bryan Barrachina, Douglas Duteil and Cassandra Ribotti (2013), a piece that invites the visitor to play with it by moving, jumping, playing games with words in action... Yet others are videos, like Eugenio Tisselli's *La tiranía del código* (2015), and more recent installations, such as the first presentation of Scott Rettberg and Roderick Coover's piece

Stephanie Strickland (and Cynthia Lawson Jaramillo),
V: Vniverse, 2002
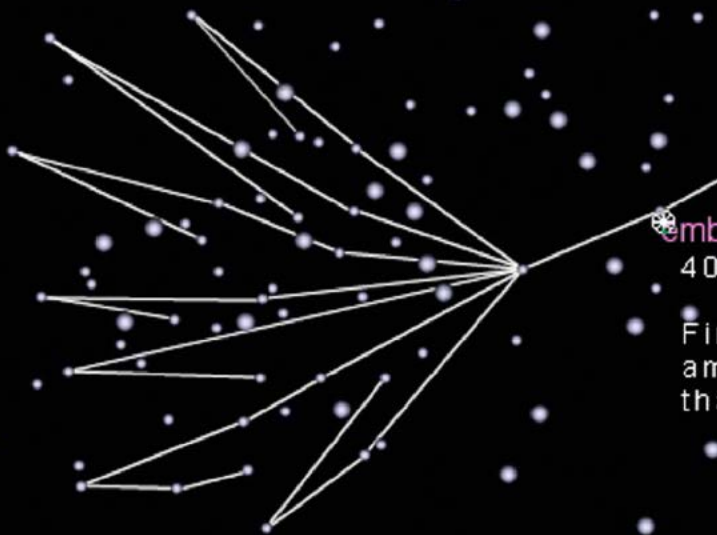
braces

n(-ger) to finger, I shiver,
n calm: the reef embraces the water
at wears it

We also find videos that directly present previous readings made by other readers. This enables readers less familiar with digital literature to discover this new practice in reading. Such works include, for example Stephanie Strickland and Cynthia Lawson Jaramillo's app, which they created to rewrite their digital work *V: Vniverse* (2002), and here we see some of the possible paths for reading this piece.

Another example, illustrating a different type of interaction with the literary digital text, is *Text Rain* (1999), by Romy Achituv and Camille Utterback. In this installation, participants stand still or move in front of a large projection screen. Like snow or rain, letters appear on the ground and on the heads and arms of these participants. The letters respond to the movements of these participants, and can be captured, held, and then dropped once more, generating new meanings, new readings.

To conclude: this exhibition is aimed at providing an open window to the new ways that exist of making literature. To this end, it proposes new paths for words: words to see, to listen to, to interact with, to play with, to gather and to throw into the air, to thread together, to discover or to hide, but, above all, words to read. Paths in which words are accompanied by images, sounds, time and silence in their journey from paper to screen, from screen to paper and to other screens.

Artists featured in the exhibition

Romy Achituv
Apollinaire
Bryan Barrachina
Jorge Luis Borges
Philippe Bootz
Laura Borràs
Serge Bouchardon
Augusto de Campos
Lluís Calvo
Josh Carroll
Doménico Chiappe
David Clark
Alison Clifford
Julio Cortázar
Ramon Dachs
Douglas Duteil
T. S. Eliot
Odile Farge
Ton Ferret
Jerome Fletcher
Loss Pequeño Glazier

Shawn Greenlee
Lucile Haute
Carles Hac-Mor
Aurélie Herbet
Isaías Herrero
Shelley Jackson
Tomek Jarolim
Michael Joyce
Aya Karpinska
Deena Larsen
Cynthia Lawson Jaramillo
Jason Lewis
Erik Loyer
Marjorie Luesebrink
Andrew McClain
Andreas Meier
María Mencía
Stuart Moulthrop
Bruno Nadeau
Jason Nelson
Julien Pænasse

Cori Pedrola
Octavio Paz
Jörg Piringer
Raymond Queneau
Scott Rettberg
Cassandra Ribotti
Jaime Alejandro Rodríguez
Berta Rubio
Alexandra Saemmer
Màrius Sampere
Ben «Sasha» Shine
Stephanie Strickland
Eugenio Tisselli
Rui Torres
Ana María Uribe
Camille Utterback
Pedro Valdeolmillos
Vincent Volckaert
Noah Wardrip-Fruin
Christine Wilks
Ester Xargay

http://www.hermeneia.net

http://www.eliterature.org

Arts Santa Mònica

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Exhibition

CURATOR: Laura Borràs, Giovanna Di Rosario. EXHIBITION DESIGN: Olga Subirós Studio. GRAPHIC DESIGN: Subirós Design. EXHIBITION ASSEMBLY: GAMI SCP. TECHNICAL CONSULTING: Isaías Herrero. TRANSLATIONS: Ampersand.

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Admission free
Tuesday to Saturday, from 11 am to 9 pm
Sundays and holidays, from 11 am to 5 pm
Mondays, closed

Guided tours without advance reservation
Saturdays at 6 pm and Sundays at 12 noon

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SANTAMÒNICA