

Afterword: *Dé-Partages*

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Abstract

A conclusion to the special issue of TEXT Technology on “Digital Humanities and the Networked Citizen.” The diversity of studies that fall under the heading of “text technology” is well illustrated by the articles making up this special issue. However, one special theme recurs throughout: familiar classifications and well-established boundaries all seem to be dissolving or shifting. In one way or another, all the articles in this issue address the question of a changing “order of things” and they help us understand what some of the implications of these shifts may be and may mean. The network image also seems to run through all of these articles because, as a concept, a network allows simultaneously to link and to separate. However, one question remains that all these articles seem silently to point to: can atomistic entities adequately essentially anchor a networked structure? The article answers in the negative and suggests that a phonemic metaphor would be far better to address the mysterious conjunction of links and nodes.

KEYWORDS: network, phoneme, technology, free software, Bourdieu, Foucault, identity

If anyone ever had any doubts about the variety of approaches that could fall within the scope of this journal, they will be laid to rest by the five articles that appear in this issue. Consider an array of texts that range from free software in India to the reshaping of citizenship in a networked world. Add to this considerations about the feminine body as a form of human(e) technology, and about the fabled monkeys typing away at Shakespeare’s works. Spice up the whole dish with an intriguing exploration of intermediatic exchanges between video games and films. *Voilà!* as some of you might be wont to say in English.

It was, therefore, with some trepidation that I began approaching this challenge, feeling very much like that equally fabled blind man who touches the tail, the trunk and other parts of the elephant, except that a tinge of envy did inhabit my soul: he, at least, knew that he was identifying

a coherent object, however weirdly shaped it may be; I had no such assurance and kept on testing, sounding, feeling and smelling these five entry points wondering whether they led to one single place or not.

Let me recount what I gleaned from each of these papers. Michael Truscello recounts the emergence of an Indian interest in free software as part of a changing relationship between India and the United States. He claims that the U.S. “hegemony” in software is waning. This point is important, especially when the growing realization that many programming centres are located outside the United States is coupled with the realization that large numbers of Indian PhD’s are trained in the United States. It points to a situation where boundaries between countries and national identities become intertwined in ways that may ultimately question the very notion of identity itself.

In such a situation, what does it mean for a country like India to embrace free software? The statement quoted from India’s president, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam is actually quite clear: new technologies structure lives of ordinary citizens in many, many ways, and if these structural consequences are but the end effect of shifting business plans decided in the board rooms of remote, foreign companies, this is simply unacceptable: it leads to dependency. The same point was unwittingly made by Microsoft when it gave a great deal of software nominally worth \$400 million to India but required that all computer training be made exclusively with Microsoft software.¹

Truscello underscores that the Hindi term used to describe “free” software is *swatantra*. The term does mean free, but with a strong “independence” connotation. Truscello might have mentioned that there is also a *Swatantra* party in India and it is not indifferent to quote the first lines of the purpose of this party as penned by its founder:

The Swatantra Party stands for the protection of the individual citizen against the increasing trespasses of the State. It is an answer to the challenge of the so-called Socialism of the Indian Congress party. It is founded on the conviction that social justice and welfare can be attained through the fostering of individual interest and individual enterprise in all fields better than through State ownership and Government control. (Rajagopalachari)

In short, the Swatantra party's platform reads like a leaf out of a book devoted to strict liberalism (in the economic sense of the word). The fact that the Indian free software community chose the same name as a political party committed to this particular brand of political economy may look puzzling to many, particularly within the walls of Microsoft, given that free software was sometimes associated with a latent form of communism around the year 2000.² But it does give a clue that we should keep in mind as we continue to read through these papers: free software advocates often speak the way Friedrich August von Hayek (usually referred to more simply as F. A. Hayek) expressed himself in books such as *The Road to Serfdom*.³ In a very ironic manner, Indian promoters of free software are borrowing the vocabulary which stands at the centre of the American business discourse, only to turn it into an expression of national identity and independence from the Americans.

The second essay of this collection has obviously influenced my own choice of title. Philip Armstrong, prodded by a theme from the annual Congress of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and the Social Sciences, found himself revisiting the notion of citizenship in this period of rapid technological and communicational upheavals. In short, the issue of citizenship has grown immensely complex: we distinguish citizenship from nationality, we may carry more than one passport, some of us may have to decide whether they are European rather than English, French or German. Countries like Switzerland offer rights of residence to rich individuals so they may avoid high taxes in their home country.

What attracts Armstrong are the "narratives" of citizenship. Michel Foucault's influence on people approaching situations through narratives will never be over-emphasized even though he would have used words such as discourses and their configurations. Armstrong sees these narratives as fragmented, displaced and even suffering from "potential disintegration." At the same time, this very situation may be "the enabling condition in which to rearticulate the concept [of citizenship] and its potentially multiple genealogies."⁴ As a result, citizenship as a concept may deal better with issues such as multi-culturalism and what the Armstrong calls "differentiated, flexible, and hybrid constitution of different groups, political identities, and subject positions." However, the concept of citizenship may not be able to get off the hook so easily: approaching the citizen's identity in a more diverse fashion may well lead to conflicting claims for wider rights, thus undermining or gravely diluting the "cohering function" of citizenship.

Questioning the nature of citizenship ultimately raises three basic questions:

1. Are we entitled to citizenship, or should we simply seek access to some citizenship?
2. If human beings can be imagined without citizenship, what can they be instead? As a possible answer, Armstrong refers us to the philosopher Giorgio Agamben who suggests meditating on the figure of the refugee .
3. Is a concept such as “global citizenship” up to the task of dealing with present-day non-citizens?

In the second part of his article Armstrong focuses on the ways in which the concept of citizenship is affected by communication and information technologies. Basing his position on a dialogue between Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, he leans on an important observation made by Derrida to the effect that all “tele-technologies”—in other words technologies that both transcend geographical space and create a virtual space of some sort—achieve a kind of “practical deconstruction” of the state and the citizen essentially by creating many forms of virtual territories that end up “deterritorializing” the geographical territory of the traditional nation-state. This is precisely the challenge faced by “homeland security”: homeland can no longer be defined by a topologically compact land mass. Even the image of the archipelago appears unequal to the task for the boundaries of virtual territories while the allegiances they may induce can work down to the infra-individual level: what else is a conversion process if not a shift of boundaries at the level of beliefs? This is what Derrida, with his punning skills, calls “topolitical.”

The dislocation of physical territories by technologies of communication and information—a process that had begun at the information level with printing, might it be added in passing—leads to both hopes and fears. On the one hand, the loss of road signs and guide posts leads many to regress to various kinds of fundamentalisms. On the other, these threats lead to pushing the limits of the political further in order to invent a future form of democracy.

How one should proceed to push the limits of the political? Derrida advances the idea that technology also gives us a “chance” to move.

However, chance here would seem to mean using the opportunities of border fluidity and displacement to open to forms of “radical *alterity*.” Such a possibility, obviously, is precluded by citizenship with its various reference to birthplace, to language and to culture.⁵

Finally comes the issue of an adequate figure to represent the intricate mixings of physical and virtual territories thanks to the constant presence of information and communication technologies. Not surprisingly, Derrida hits upon the network as the new way to think the spaces of human relations and integrations. The network, he argues, allows putting in place a new notion of “*partage*.” Armstrong correctly underscores the fact the the French word goes beyond mere sharing as a rapid translation would suggest. When objects are shared, they are also allocated to different people and therefore separated from each other. In short, the French term refers to both the sharing and the separation of the shared object. For example, when geologists speak of a “*ligne de partage des eaux*”—that is, a continental divide of waters—the accent is placed on separating. The strength of the network comes from its ability both to facilitate sharing and to create distance between individuals. Everything that a community can do, a network can do, only better, in a more fluid fashion, and without subjecting the individual necessarily to a collectivist philosophy. It provides, therefore, a strong basis to re-think very basic concepts of politics, and in particular the concept of citizenship. It also leads to the possibility of reinterpreting many of our present conflicts. It may allow us to rebuild the foundational *figurations* or myth of our political system. And it may help solve the paradoxes that accompany the present conceptions of citizenship.

In a very different vein, Sarah J. Lauro and her co-authors take us on an exploration of “Kangaroo Mother Care.” In a nutshell, it has been observed that premature infants survive better if they are in physical touch with women. A kind of co-adaptation seems to take place between the woman and the infant. For example, we are told that the temperature of breasts is higher than the rest of the body and thus can act as “organic incubators.” This phrase and others like it allow the authors to move back and forth between technology for humans and humans as technology. This particular situation is then used to challenge a number of feminist assertions about the meaning of technology as applied to the female body, and about the mechanizing vocabulary that has been used in such contexts. The general view that sees “technology as the industry of patriarchy” is thus resisted in this text, but it is resisted with a view to creating a fully feminist solution.

The solution sought rests in part on Donna Haraway's now famous "Cyborg Manifesto" first published in *the Socialist Review*. Haraway, in her essay, focuses in part on a series of distinctions which have long been operative but are breaking down nowadays. Three distinctions are particularly important: between humans and animals; between organisms and machines; and between the physical and the non-physical—and all three distinctions are fading. This result allows our authors to conclude, halfway through their study: "The practice of KMC necessarily analogizes the maternal body to the incubator, and draws comparisons to the kangaroo's pouch: the KMC body is therefore like Haraway's cyborg, human, machine and animal. Furthermore, KMC's psychological effects broach the boundary between physical and non physical." The argument then is linked to a series of debates about what it means to make the womb transparent. Two technologies are adduced here to illustrate this transparency and the forms of resistance they have elicited in some feminist circles: *in vitro* fertilization, and ultrasound imaging which reveals the foetus to our eyes, but, some say, at the cost of making the womb so transparent as to become invisible. Against these negative reactions to both technologies, the authors suggest that focusing so much on the womb or on the birth process runs the risk either of fragmenting the woman body or categorizing childless women as disabled. Without going further into these debates, let us retain the possibility that categories themselves may morph and allow us to move beyond a number of dilemmas based on too rigid a world-view.

Andrea Austin's analysis of the film/game distinction takes us to yet another horizon, entirely different from the previous ones. She looks at the narrative structure of films while paying attention to the pace or rhythm of these films. She notes that in a number of films, one can oppose narrative moments from combat scenes in a very easy way: the time structure of narration remains free in the sense that the director can manipulate it any way he/she wants to, whereas battle scenes tend to be depicted in "real time." She adds that this brings about "an exact coincidence in the passage of time for the characters and the viewers." This, she argues, threatens the very nature of fiction by making more transparent the border between the world of fiction and non-fiction.

The same viewpoint applied to video games yields equally interesting results. Like films, video games alternate combat and narrative, real-time and fabricated time. The main difference is one of quantity: video games will allow much more time for combat in real time. Moreover,

in a game, one is free to bypass much of the narrative; however the quest for immersion requires a greater identification with the character, and this requires more narrative...

The cyborg figure reappears in this paper, but perhaps in a more tangential way. Discussing the busty characteristics of Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider*, Austin equates breast and guns to support the latent presence of cyborg entities. It could be remembered, however, that this contiguity has been used with various effects, including comical ones, in much older films, and with no intimation whatsoever of a cyborg. When the heroine of Elio Petri's *Tenth Victim* (1965), impersonated by Ursula Andress, wins the right to enter the final round of a murderous challenge, it is by hiding guns in her brassiere and certainly not shooting from the hip. There is no need to remind the reader that to hide a gun in a brassiere, either the gun is very small or...⁶

In the last analysis, the real cyborgs in Austin's analysis are those entities, both living and represented, that can mix and match constructed narrative time with real time. This is precisely where the most salient innovations emerge. Games are becoming part of huge network-based collectives where narrative and combat times are interwoven. Against the notion encountered in films like *Matrix* that humans, because they are by essence individuals, must fight various forms of networks, the massive on-line gaming environments involve human gamers, along with their avatars into the networks themselves. The computing machinery and the individuals incorporated into it in effect create a new kind of world with its own physical laws, its own ethics, economy, and so on. If the cyborg philosophy of Haraway helps to dismantle all kinds of (crippling) distinctions and categories, this new playground acts as a perfect implementation of its objectives.

Finally, Austin mentions the expression *unit operations*, probably because of Ian Bogost's recent book which she quotes. It may be interesting to recall that this expression has enjoyed a history of its own that is nearly a century old. It actually began as a way to reshape the teaching of industrial chemistry and as a way to define a new profession, that of chemical engineers. A. D. Little invented the term and developed it at MIT around the time of the First World War. Interestingly, it was picked up as a metaphor by A. O. Lovejoy and his celebrated history of neoplatonism, *The Great Chain of Being* where he develops his concept of unit ideas.⁷ We now see the term reappear in Bogost's recent volume but without any reference to its true origin.⁸

The conception of unit operations is related to modular thinking and aims at providing for the flexible re-allocation of basic functions, both human or machine-based, should they be needed. In a way, unit operations are to production processes what atoms are to molecules. In a video game, modular thinking is also at work, and, from this perspective, adducing the term “unit operation” is not out of place; however, game modules translate as particular episodes or problems to solve, rather than solutions to the phase of a process. Each module of a videogame is really a maze of choices that the player must somehow navigate. Each unit operation in a process is part of a global solution implemented in steps that are designed in a strictly deterministic manner.

Terry Butler moves us to yet another dimension. This time, we stand squarely in the middle of *TEXT Technology* territory, but the issues that our late colleague handle hinge on a fundamental question which, in a sense, we have never left in the previous papers: what makes texts alike? how do they differ? The point, of course, is to guide the critical effort striving to reconstruct some authentic, original text out of the painstaking comparison of various copies and copies of copies. Butler’s text starts with the typing monkey story alluded at the beginning of this text. He locates its origin in Émile Borel’s *Éléments de la théorie des probabilités*—a work that first appeared in 1909—and walks us through a variety of texts that revive this story in one way or another, including texts from the past that could be construed as precursors of the Borel scenario. Having thus initiated us to the issue of resemblance, he moves to the issue of textual criticism and the related stemmological approach to reach the conclusion that the best we have achieved, despite some really heroic efforts, is the “rigorous eclecticism” advocated by James Thorpe in 1965.

Since 1965, Butler adds, little has been added to Thorpe if we limit ourselves to the traditional approaches to critical editions. However, in the meantime, digital texts have appeared and the similarity of texts can take on a far more precise quantitative dimension. One can, for example keep track of how many changes one has to make to morph one text into another and, furthermore, these changes can be weighted differently according to their inherent importance. The result is a tool that permits visualizing in arresting ways the resemblances and differences between two variant texts, thus helping the editor to zero in on the important points and perhaps justify his/her choices more easily. It also allows one to clarify the divergent functions of related texts such as an original compared to its digest. In the end, Butler invites us to play with the tools he has devel-

oped while telling us in a somewhat tantalizing fashion that the new digital environment may help us reach the legendary squaring of the circle that critical editors have been obsessed with ever since they began thinking seriously about such matters—in other words, since Alexandrian times.

The ultimate part of Armstrong's article offers a great deal to help us find our way through all five articles. All of them question basic unities (film versus video games, American versus Indian software industry, texts as variant of each other, female bodies versus technology, animals and spirits, citizens versus refugees) and all question the linkages between these entities. Seen from this perspective, this issue of *TEXT Technology* reveals either impatience or anxieties with well-established objects and well-defined boundaries or categories. All want to reconfigure these schemes to avoid a large number of problems and issues they associate with the dominant forms of conceptual order.

But is mingling categories and overcoming differences enough? I would suggest it is not. And the reason is that while many traditional categories have been attacked very strongly, I am not so sure the categorized entities have been touched to the same extent. To my mind, this is a point that ought to be considered very closely.

Let me explain. I often tell my students that there are only three ways to describe anything, beginning with the universe. The holistic approach starts with a foundational whole, generally a God figure, and everything individual emanates from it. The fascist state is a very good example of this mode of thinking as the citizen owes everything to the State (it is hard to avoid a capital letter here). The second approach begins at the opposite end by positing that all starts with separate entities and that anything, however complex, can be understood as the combination of a number of these entities. Atomism reflects this mode of thinking, but the liberal theory of society which stands as the basis for the American Revolution and, in part, for the French Revolution as well, rests on a clear recognition of the individual and his/her rights.⁹

Each of the preceding studies in one way or another tries to reconfigure its field of interest as if it were atomistic in nature. In other words, while our authors variously want to recategorize and redefine relationships, they leave essential elements untouched. Whatever else is said, a woman remains a woman, a film a film, and so on. They may reveal influences, they may allow themselves to be talked about in new ways that open doors to new moves and strategies. However, the essential kernel or essence of whatever is being discussed remains in a sense beyond discus-

sion. Our authors, by assembling their atoms into different molecules are trying to advance their respective chemistries or even invent new forms of chemistry, but they do not move beyond chemistry. This is the case, I believe, because they all keep close to the atomistic approach .

What then? I would suggest that the third way of explaining the universe that I present to my students may become useful: what if there were an entity that would resemble an atom and yet would also include some reflection of the whole in its essence? Can such an entity exist? The answer is yes of course and its model is the phoneme in linguistics. What is interesting in the phoneme is that, on the one hand, it appears like an atom by claiming to be something like one of the fundamental sounds of a given language. However, unlike the atom, the phoneme exists only through the ways in which it distinguishes itself from other phonemes. In other words, the phoneme needs the presence of a good number of other phonemes to ensure its own distinctiveness that founds its existence. And, from one phoneme to its distinct cousins and so on, the whole, finite, set of phonemes is finally involved so that it can be said that each individual phoneme ultimately must involve all the other phonemes in the argument that justifies its existence.

It turns out that individuals also behave this way: Bourdieu, without using the “phonemic” vocabulary, has written a whole book on the topic (*La distinction: critique sociale du jugement*). The behaviour of scientists, software programmers (particularly in the free software movement) and citizens reflect this condition. As Butler and Austin show, texts and various genres such as films and video games actually co-evolve in an interesting tension between influence and distinctiveness. In short, the phoneme which is much more recent in history than either the holistic or the atomistic approach, may well provide a very important foundational complement to the analysis of the situations described in the papers that precede.

One last thing needs to be added: the tension needed to ensure a continued distinctiveness and thus a continuing “phonemic-like” existence necessarily rests on linkages, “spaces of flux,” as Manuel Castells would say, interactions that together build the transactional space needed to cut a distinctive figure. Speaking about information, Gregory Bateson defined it as a “difference that makes a difference” (428) . A similar definition would apply to *meaning*—a term much closer to the intent of our authors than *information* is.

We are now in a position to see why the phonemic approach to existence through what might be called engaged distinctiveness elegantly allows for the introduction of a role for narratives. Narratives are not things in themselves, standing outside a given situation and representing it in words; they are part of the space of flux without which the transactions needed to establish and maintain distinctiveness cannot maintain themselves. It is not surprising, therefore, to see both the narrative and the network reappear and reappear together. Both are needed to address the issue of phonemic distinctiveness.¹⁰ Because of this, I would suggest that the preceding articles are all leading us to the beginning of truly exciting research trails. These, in fascinating ways, both echo and displace the questions that multiplied in the sixteenth century in the wake of the cultural shockwave induced by the advent of print. Perhaps post-modernism is nothing more than the modern transposition of the skeptics and “libertins érudits.” Perhaps, just perhaps, we are waiting for a new Descartes.

So, I will end with a famous statement. With its nationalistic over-tone and its infamous author, the Marquis de Sade, it will allow me to complete the *dé-partage* of our gallant authors, and do so with a wicked wink:

*Français, encore un effort...*¹¹

Notes

My deep thanks to Alan Galey and Patrick Finn for their patient and thorough editorial assistance on this article.

¹ Let us remember that on products like Windows and Office, Microsoft rakes up profits up to 85% of gross revenues. Actually, the \$400 million gift probably did not cost Microsoft more than about \$60 million.

² See, for example, the interesting piece by J. S. Kelly, “Is Free Software Communist?”

³ The best edition of this oft-republished volume is the so-called “Definitive Edition” published under the editorship of Bruce Caldwell. It is an interesting book in that it is a constant reference among conservatives, neo-conservatives, libertarians and free software advocates. Hayek shared the Economics Nobel Prize with Gunnar Myrdal in 1974. Amusingly, the two men were theoretical rivals and this led to an endless string of commentaries about the state of theory in economics.

⁴ “Genealogy” is a Nietzschean concept which Foucault did much to revive through his use of a cognate term, namely “archeology”. See Foucault’s “Nietzsche,

la généalogie, l'histoire," which originally appeared in 1971.

⁵ At this point, we are served by yet another punning move by Derrida: the dice-condition of chance (dice is "dé" in French) allows to integrate that notion in words such as dé-placement, dé-lier, etc. My title alludes to this form of argument, and also to the serendipity inherent in putting together the arguments of five articles in the bundle of a "special issue" of a journal.

⁶ Mentioning Petri's older film is not out of place if one considers the references to comic books in Austin's study. Not only is Petri's film constructed like a comic book story, but the male hero, played by Marcello Mastroianni, is found entering the ultimate round of the deadly game in a state of personal and financial disarray which forces him to separate from his comic book collection.

⁷ *The Journal of the History of Ideas* was created as a direct consequence of Lovejoy's History of Ideas Club at Johns Hopkins University.

⁸ See my own article recounting the invention of this concept: "Il progetto dell'ingegneria chimica: l'affermazione delle operazioni di base negli stati uniti."

⁹ I say "in part" because the strong affirmation, very much present in revolutionary rhetoric, that sovereignty lies in the people (le peuple) holds strong holistic connotations.

¹⁰ See Benkler.

¹¹ The whole citation is actually "Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être républicains" and is found in the fifth dialogue.

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