

A STYLO-TECHNO-SEMIOTIC READING OF DIGITAL LITERATURE AS POSTMODERNIST TEXTS

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Abstract

This study analyses *Carving in Possibilities* (2001); *Chemical Landscapes Tales* (2006); *Separation* (2002); and *Star Wars, one letter at a time* (2005), four digital literary texts which are purposively selected from Volumes 1 and 2 of Electronic Literature Organization's Electronic Literature Collection. The four texts are analysed relying on hypertextual aesthetics rhetoric and postmodernist literary theory. The analysis reveals that temporality, performativity, nonlinearity and interactivity are semiotic-rhetorical digital affordances that are experimentally negotiated in the selected texts to accomplish postmodernist experimental stances. These novel compositional strategies, accomplished through the availability and exploitation of digital affordances, direct attention to how the boundaries of philology and technology merge in digital culture and subsequently call for the reconfiguration of theoretical, methodological and rhetorical approaches to research and pedagogy in writing/composition, reading and textual studies in the digital age.

Keywords: Stylistics, Digital affordances, Digital literature, Experimental literature, Postmodernist literature

Introduction

After the emergence of Michael Joyce's *afternoon, a story* as the first digital literature in 1987, many others like Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden* (1992) and Shelly Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995) soon followed. By the early 1990s, several examples of the first generation of literature produced in the digital media space, many of which halted the

traditional notions about the text, the way it is written, and the way it is read, abounded in cyberspace. The texts demonstrate different forms of experimentation and creativity that are difficult or practically impossible to attain in print text. Michael Joyce, explaining his motivation for creating *afternoon, a story* states thus:

I wanted, quite simply, to write a novel that would change in successive readings and to make those changing versions according to the connections that I had for some time naturally discovered in the process of writing and that I wanted my readers to share. In my eyes, paragraphs on many different pages could just as well go with paragraphs on many other pages, although with different effects and for different purposes. All that kept me from doing so was the fact that, in print at least, one paragraph inevitably follows another. It seemed to me that if I, as author, could use a computer to move paragraphs about, it wouldn't take much to let readers do so according to some scheme I had predetermined (cited in Landow, 2006: 216).

Many scholars hold that digital texts brought a paradigm shift from traditional page-bound texts and demonstrate a continuum of postmodernists' experimental writing traditions. Douglas (1992: 2) submits that hyper fiction is "the most revolutionary form of hypertexts ... which most directly challenge our definitions of what the act of reading entails - provide the best fodder for defining what hypertexts *do* and, further, of what they *do* that print narratives cannot." Because of the compositional/writing and reading challenges that these new set of works pose, literary theorists and enthusiasts starts to name and theorise them either by using traditional literary and/or critical terminologies; developing new ones; or engaging old ones in new ways.

Hypertext theorists like Aarseth (1997); Bolter (1991, 2001); Bolter and Joyce (1987); Delany and Landow (1991, 1993); Landow (1991, 1994, 2006); Moulthrop (1989, 1991) amongst many others formulate the theoretical rhetoric about the experimental textuality of

hypertext and hypertext fiction. They are of the opinion that digital texts are virtual codes which are characteristically unstable, decentred, multiple, and fluid. They further hold that the experimental creativity in digital literature is a continuation of the experimental project of postmodernists. Thus, these scholars believe that critical theory can provide explanations for many of the textual experimentations taking place in the digital media space. Consequently, many of the theorists embrace Roland Barthes' notion of '*the Death of the Author*' and the '*writerly text*', Julia Kristeva's *intertextuality*, Mikhail Bakhtin's *multivocality*, Michael Foucault's *networks of power*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *rhizomatic and nomad thought*, to mention just a few, in their attempts to theorise digital texts and literature.

Bell, Ensslin and Rustad (2014: 5) argue that "It was perhaps the novelty of the digital fiction reading experience that led the first wave of digital fiction scholars to look toward poststructuralist textual models in order to understand the new forms of literature that were emerging, particularly hypertext fiction." Bell, Ensslin and Rustad (2014: 5) further explain that "Because the reader has a role in constructing the narrative, hypertext has been described as an example of Barthes's (1990 [1974]) "writerly" text; Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) concept of the "rhizome" text has been applied to the branching structure of hypertext; Derrida's (1979, 1981) theory of "deconstruction" has been used to conceptualize the multilinearity that hypertext permits".

Despite these multifarious theorisations, works that pay attention to the study and description of real examples of digital literature are few in comparison with the many theories that exist on the subject. For this reason, Bell, Ensslin, and Rustad (2014: 3) are surprised about the rarity of critical works on digital literature thus:

Indeed, we were struck by how few systematic analyses of digital fiction to be found. We realized that while authors have been experimenting with different modes and media, creating different structures and forms, and writing in different genres and styles, the scholarship surrounding

digital fiction hasn't yet caught up. We concluded that the field needs more analyses of digital fiction and more replicable approaches through which they can be methodically analysed. Research in digital fiction ...needs to return to, to hold onto, and to expand the core practice of literary studies, and that, to our minds, is the methodical *analysis* of texts.

The challenge to critics is therefore to focus on the literary analysis of digital literature and its technology. For this, Simanowski (2014: 198) argues that the engagement of semiotic-rhetorical approaches to digital literature will “show the value of approaching digital fiction using semiotic theory” which, expectedly, will reveal “the play of signs in digital fiction, as they appear in combination with other signs and sign systems and/or as they appear as a consequence of the readers’ performative action” (Bell, Ensslin and Rustad 2014: 13). Simanowski (2014: 200) further argues that

digital literature is technologically digital because it stops being print in a semiotic way. The result of this characterization is a shift from linguistic hermeneutics to a hermeneutics of intermedial, interactive, and performative signs. It is not just the meaning of a word that is at stake but also the word’s interaction with tactile, visual, and sonic signs, as well as the meaning of the performance of the word on the monitor that may be triggered by the reader’s action.

Following from the foregoing, this study undertakes a stylo-techno-semiotic approach to the analysis of the selected digital texts because it reveals how style in digital text is a result of the merger of the borders of philology (in relation to language, literature, communication and rhetoric) and technology (especially the computers) in digital texts. This does not only help the researcher in language and literary studies to rethink how technology problematises familiar literary notions and reconfigures the nature of language, but also equally helps her/him to

rethink theory and methodology for research and pedagogy in language studies, literary studies, creative writing, reading and receptive studies, and textual studies.

On the nature of postmodernist experimentations

According to the Digital Fiction International Network, digital literature is “written for and read on a computer screen [and] pursues its verbal, discursive and/or conceptual complexity through the digital medium and would lose something of its aesthetics and semiotic function if it were removed from that medium” (Bell et al 2010 cited in Bell, Ensslin and Rustad 2014: 4). That digital literature is fixed to the digital media space implies that there is a difference between a screen-bound text and a paper-bound text. Most importantly, the screen-bound nature of digital literature allows authors to experiment with digital affordances and this leads to different forms of textual experimentations which align with postmodernist experimentations. However, the distinction between pre-digital textual experimentations and digital textual experimentations is the dynamic, plastic and multimodal nature of the digital media space which makes it possible to multimodally engage textual, visual, graphic, and audio semiotic resources in the creation of the text. It is therefore not surprising to find digital texts which, for example, are programmed behave dynamically such that texts can move, bounce, dance, fade-in, fade-out, undulate, and sweep from one side of the screen to the other. So also, the codes may be manipulated to move towards or away from the reader; to emerge from a chaotic assemblage/collage; to transform an organised text into a chaotic assemblage; and to change font colour, size, and type. The possibilities are unprecedented and unpredictable.

In Koskimaa’s view (2010: 130-1) therefore,

All digital works are in a very concrete sense *experimental writings*. First of all, the authors are experimenting with the new media, trying to find out what is possible in digital textuality, what the limits are of literary expression in

programmable media. It is a question not so much of experimenting to break down established conventions, as it is of experimenting *trying to create conventions*.... Stepping into this new field means that the authors have to learn to write anew, from a novel set of premises. This holds true not only for authors, while the readers also have to learn to read in a new way not governed by the conventions of print literature. (My emphasis)

When the digital text is compared to a postmodernist text the question which props up is what exactly the postmodernist text is. Of the four distinct descriptions of the postmodernist text which Mephram (1991: 132) makes, the third one that it is a text that ‘unsettle[s] the reader’s sense of “reality” ...or unmask[s] or lay[s] bare ‘the process of world-construction’ that suits the experimental nature of digital texts. In his 1968 seminal essay (reprinted in Federman, 1981: 9-33), John Barth, using the novels of Vladimir Nabokov, Samuel Beckett, and Jorge Luis Borges as archetypes, defines postmodern fiction as “Literature of Exhaustion.” He emphasises that literature has “used up” the conventions and disguises of fictional realism. This implies that postmodernist fiction, as literature of exhaustion, searches for new possibilities and so abandons traditional elements such as character, plot, metaphor, meaning, narrative sequence and closure and moves in “an inexorable movement towards silence” (Woods, 1999: 52). Thus, many postmodernists works display no character and stable pronominal referents, appropriate objects rather than reveal subjects; play tricks on their readers, or manifest as the literature of silence which constantly journeys into nonsense and “LESSNESSness” (cf. Federman, 1981b: 301).

Digital literature also connects to Bakhtian’s term, a “carnavalesque” which is characterised by incoherence, loss of genre distinction, play, repetition, simultaneity, nonce and nonsense words, loss of narrative connectedness and sequence, loss of narrative closure,

collage, bricolage, to mention just a few. Also, Ryan (2001: 186) explains the postmodernist fiction as carnivalesque thus:

chaotic structures, creative anarchy, parody, absurdity, heteroglossia, word invention, subversion of conventional meanings (*à la* Humpty Dumpty), figural displacements, puns, disruption of syntax, *melange des genre*, misquotation, masquerade, the transgression of ontological boundaries (pictures coming to life, characters interacting with their author), the treatment of identity as a plural, changeable image – in short, the destabilization of all structures, including those created by the text itself.

Another postmodernist text feature applicable to digital text is the idea of the forking paths which McHale (1987: 106) describes as a strategy for self-erasure. With the forking paths experiment, postmodernist fiction takes fiction to its limits through “the possibility for endlessly reconstructing context as a general metaphor for the openness of all texts” (Mepham, 1991: 147). The forking path strategy is that which leads a text into a labyrinth that resists order, creates semblances of disorder and incoherency, and offers itself for orders and re-orderings. On this account, McHale (1987: 108) submits that labyrinthine narratives “violate linear sequentiality by realizing two mutually exclusive lines of narrative development at the same time”. This labyrinthine nature of forking path fictions that leads to self-erasing narratives in which contradictory turns can exist within the borders of a text. Since the forking paths force readers to create their own narratives from the multi-semiotic base of the text by rearranging narrative elements during reading processes, “undecidability of meaning [arises] from the fragmentation of pluralization of contexts” (Mepham, 1991, p. 147). In this way, labyrinthine multilinearity fosters non-ending narratives. Such narratives contain closures and readers can only arrive at only one of the contingent closures during a reading session.

The treatment of language is a key aspect of postmodernist literary theory. Postmodernists often create fictions that distract readers from the narrative world through the linguistic medium employed for the construction of the text. Culler's (cited in McHale, 1987, p. 149) idea of 'labor theory of value' passes as a distraction strategy since it underscores how "the aesthetic value of the verbal art is to be measured in terms of the amount of work that has gone into the production of the linguistic surface." The labour theory of value, in turn, aligns with Barthes' (1975:32) notion of the 'writerly' text whose principal aim is to direct attention from the world of the text to the words of the text:

The aim of such a text is not to prevent the reconstruction of a world - which, in any case, it could not do - but only to throw up obstacles to the reconstruction process, making it more difficult and thus conspicuous, more perceptible. To accomplish this, it has at its disposal a repertoire of stylistic strategies, including lexical exhibitionism, the catalogue, and "back-broke" and invertebrate sentences.

With postmodernist fictions engaging different writerly strategies, they draw the attention of readers to the construction of meaning. Such strategies make readers to be conscious of the text and their efforts at decoding its semantics.

Another postmodernist effect on language relates to the exploitation of the space of the text. McHale (1991: 182) submits that "Postmodernist texts are typically spaced-out, literally as well as figuratively. Extremely short chapters, or short paragraphs separated by wide bands of white space, have become the norm." This spatial displacement of words subsequently leads to the displacement of the conventions of fiction, the discontinuity of narrative, and the fragmentation of language. The various textual strategies deployed for postmodernist agenda in fiction all indicate that where modernist fictions propagate values of seriousness, purity, and autonomy, postmodernist literature projects and celebrates play and eclecticism. Postmodernist literature also privileges the pleasures of form and style

rather than of content and meaning. As postmodernist fiction handles language this way like a plaything, it transforms the text into a game and the reader into a player.

While in paper technology experimental writers struggle to accomplish the outlined features of postmodernist fiction, the plastic and malleable nature of the digital media space facilitates their easy accomplishments in digital texts. Where the linguistic repertoire is stylistically engaged to produce a writerly text in paper technology, the technological affordances of the screen are engaged, either with or without linguistic creativity, to produce the writerly digital texts in the digital technology. This invariably indicates that the different textual experimentations in digital texts halt traditional reading approaches and require different and more tasking approaches from the reader.

The data

The four digital texts analysed in this paper are purposively selected from the Electronic Literature Collection of the Electronic Literature Organization (see <http://collection.eliterature.org>). The works are Deena Larsen's *Carving in Possibilities* (2001) which is produced in collaboration with Matt Hasen who provided the sounds for the text; Edward Falco's *Chemical Landscapes Digital Tales* (2006) produced in collaboration with Mary Pinto (photograms) and Will Stauffer-Norris (design); Annie Abraham's *Separation* (2002); and Brian Kim Stefan's *Star Wars, one letter at a time* (2005).

The study has attempted to analyse how these texts engage temporality, nonlinearity, performativity, and interactivity as semiotics of digital technology that make meaning-processing during the reading experiences to be different from what obtains in paper technology.

Analysis

Temporal experimentations

Digital texts' experimentations with temporality have semiotic and aesthetic effects. Temporal experimentations actually emphasise a

paradigm shift between the paper-bound technology and the screen-bound technology, and between what paper and digital technologies can and/or cannot do. In experimenting with time in a digital text, the reading time for the whole or parts of the text may be controlled, or uncontrolled. Where the reading is controlled, the possibility of re-reading may be restrained, limited, or unlimited. However, the most significant effect of temporal experimentation is how it inscribes forking-path effect on the reading process such that revisiting an already traversed lexia may indicate reading something entirely different from what was previously read.

Koskimaa (2014: 135) identifies four basic temporal experimentation possibilities in the digital text: (i) limited reading time; (ii) delayed reading time; (iii) limited reading opportunities; and (iv) temporal evolution. He explains these four temporally programmed possibilities in the following ways:

1. *Limiting reading time*: Text appears on screen only for a limited period of time. The period may be long enough for a thorough, focused reading, but it may also be used to challenge the reader, force her to read on the edges of apprehension.
2. *Delaying reading time*: Whereas it is not practically possible to implement means to hinder the reader of a print book from browsing through the pages ... it is extremely simple in digital cybertext to force the reader to wait for a fixed time before it is possible to proceed from one text passage to another.
3. *Limiting the reading opportunities*: The text may only be accessible at certain times, or only for a limited period of time. ...
4. *Temporally evolving texts*: This category includes texts that evolve continuously through additions posted by the author or the readers, or both. ...

In *Chemical Landscapes Digital Tales* (henceforth *Chemical Landscapes*), temporal experimentation limits reading time. One of the lexias in the text, Plate 1 below, fades-in and fades-out in seven seconds and 53 milliseconds.

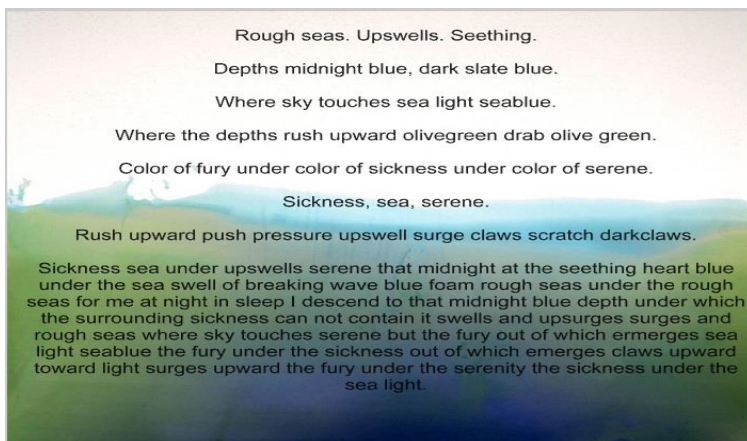


Plate 1: Screenshot of *Chemical Landscape Digital Tales* depicting the perceptual pressure placed on the reader to effect writerliness

The text in Plate 1 has 144 words in 15 lines, with the last eight lines of the text denser than the previous seven lines which are well-spaced out. This space management strategy tests the readers' perceptual ability while the short times of seven seconds and 53 milliseconds makes reading the entire passage difficult at a go. A reader may become agitated as the text to gradually fade into oblivion as illustrated in Plate 2.

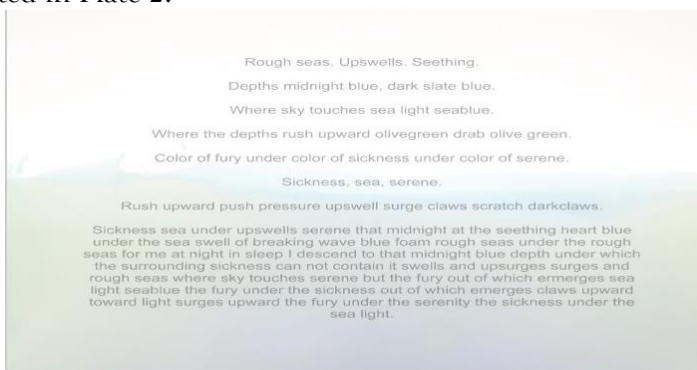


Plate 2: Rapid fade-out of one of the text in *Chemical Landscapes Digital Tales*

Falco's describes the nature of the experimentation he undertakes in the text thus:

Once you arrive at a landscape, the digital tale fades in and then out, and you may click on the screen at any point to jump back to the navigation page. **I have tried to time the fading in and out of the text so that it is almost impossible to read it all before it fades away.** My hope is that the reader will recognize the necessity of jumping around in the text, picking up pieces of the tale to read and ignoring other pieces, thereby creating a different experience with each reading. If you think of reading a traditional story as a journey with a beginning, a middle, and an end, then reading a hypertext is like walking through a field: readers begin at any one of several different starting points, wander around as long as they like, and then exit wherever and whenever they choose (my emphasis).

This strategic experimentation strategy recalls the forking-path strategy of creating postmodernist texts since reading the text is not always the same.

The temporal experimentation in *Separation* is different from that of *Chemical Landscapes*. *Separation* comes up in a slowly, presenting one word per click of the space of the text using the mouse. *Separation's* temporal nature produces carnivalesque features which disrupt syntax and destabilise structures. With the *Separation* made up of a little over 160 words, it means that the reader will have to click the text for over 160 times for the words of the poem to fully come up. If the text senses that the reader is clicking too fast, a pre-programmed text interrupts the reader and informs them that they do not have the right attitude in front of the computer (see Plate 3).

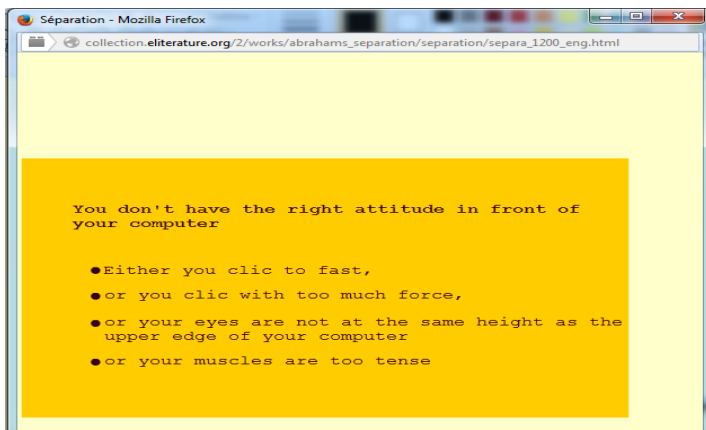


Plate 3: Screenshot of the interruptive message in *Séparation*.

Apart from the programmed slow reading of the text, every now and then, an exercise for an RSI (Repetitive Strain Injury) patient interrupts the reading. The RSI exercise text does not vanish from the reading space until the set time to carry out the exercise has lapsed (see Plate 4).

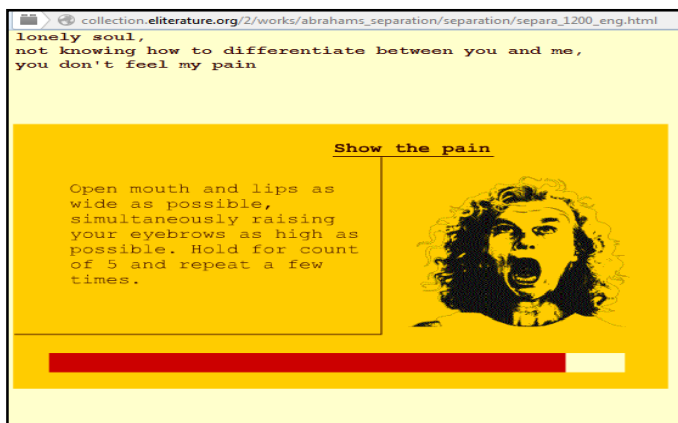


Plate 4: Screenshot an intrusive RSI exercise in *Séparation* with the red bar indicating how much time the exercise has more on the screen

The temporal experimentation in *Carving in Possibilities* (henceforth *carving*) requires the reader to slowly mouse-over the screen to discover the text hidden behind the seemingly blank screen-space. The time a reader spends in reading/traversing the text depends on how painstaking the reader mouses over the screen to discover its hidden text. A reader can spend around six minutes if they are painstaking enough. In the same vein, a reader may only be able to traverse the text for just a minute if they are not painstaking enough. *Carving's* experimentation with both limited and delayed reading time leads to forking-path effects. Where a reader delays the reading time by not mousing over the text too fast, the limited reading time is prolonged. However, where the reader fails to delay her traversal of the text, the limited reading time of the text is sped up such that they have limited exploration of the materials of the text. Invariably, what a reader reads in any given time is one possible variant of the text.

Brian Kim Stefan's *Star Wars, one letter at a time* (henceforth *Star Wars*) is probably the most temporally challenging of the four texts. As the name of the text suggests, the reader encounters the text letter-by-letter. However, because the text mimics the textual composition process of the typewriter, the speed for the appearance of each of the letters is rather very fast for any reader to string the letters together for meaning making. After many unsuccessful attempts to make meaning from the text, the reader gives up to the text's play logic. This way, *Star War* is a perfect carnivalesque text for its chaotic structures, creative anarchy, subversion of meanings, disruption of syntax, and the destabilization of all structures. By this, *Star Wars* in Mephram's (1991: 142) term is 'inconsequential babble'.

Experimenting with the aesthetics of the spectacle

Digital textuality often manifests as a spectacle since it is based on words in motion that appear as a film of words (Strehovec 2010: 214). Strehovec (2010: 214) explains further that digital texts have passed into the mainstream film mode which transforms the text into a visual

kinetic texts cape that turns ‘the hybrid reader-listener-viewer of today as a voyeur, i.e., the staring one.’ In essence, in all those instances where a reader is unable to intervene in the unfolding of the text because of its experimental nature, the text is exhibiting the aesthetic of the spectacle.

In *Separation*, the interruptive texts of the RSI exercises turn the text into a spectacle. For *Chemical Landscapes*, although it is the reader’s clicks that bring up the text, the text soon transforms into a spectacle when it fades out of view. The textual presentation in *Star Wars* also explores the aesthetic of the spectacle. The text transforms the reader into a viewer of a text-movie as they have no power to intervene in the formation of the text and its meaning. Thus, the inability of the reader to meaningfully grasp the text because of its rapid unfolding accomplishes not only the aesthetics of the spectacle, but also the aesthetics of frustration. says that the aesthetic of frustration, according to Bootz (2014: 12), is ‘the failure of traditional modes of reading’ which is a ‘consequence of the readers’ inability to adopt a way of reading that is appropriate for computers and incompatible with books.’ Invariably, a reader who approaches *Star Wars* with the notions of reading a traditional text soon experiences frustration because the traditional reading mode does not lead to deciphering the contents and meaning of the text.

Nonlinearity as forking-path experimentation

The nonlinear narrative manner of interacting with the textual materials of the digital text facilitates the actualisation of forking-path. Ensslin (2014:360) reveals that, in a nonlinear text,

documents ... are not structured in a sequential way, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Rather, their macrostructure ... assembles its composite elements (paragraphs, text chunks, or lexias) into a loosely ordered network. These networks offer readers multiple choices of traversing a document, which can facilitate specific types of

reading strategies ... and complicate others, such as reading for closure.

In essence, the possibility of reading the materials of a digital text in no order installs forking-paths in digital texts. With this, digital texts have multiple entry points and no one entrance is more important than the other.

The textuality of *Chemical Landscapes* is grounded in nonlinearity as there is no fixed order to traverse the eight nodes which make up the text. For *Carving*, the start-up page is a blank space with its text coming up when the reader mouses over the blank space. Also, the text has no specified point as its beginning, middle, or ending. This results into the disruption of the meaning since the meaning arrived at in a previous reading may be erased by the text encountered in a later reading. This self-erasing effect which is facilitated by the nonlinear nature of the text is obvious in the following pairs of texts that may be encountered during different reading sessions of *Carving*:

1. I MADE HIM TO GUARD MY FLORENCE versus I WANTED ALL OF YOU TO GUARD MY FLORENCE
2. I am everything you [know?] versus I am nothing you [know?]
3. perfections versus imperfection
4. THIS IS WHAT I WANTED ALL OF YOU TO BE versus THIS IS WHAT I WANTED HIM TO BE
5. We stood in the dry grasses waiting for our destruction versus We waited for his destruction

Apart from the self-erasing turns of the nonlinear traversal of the text, the fact that the over 120 phrases and sentences which make up the text can only be encountered in an unordered manner indicates that the text is founded on the aesthetics of the forking-path which shades into labour value. In the author's description of the work, there is an express indication that the reader is expected to '[carve out] the face of Michelangelo's David out of speculations about David, the crowd

watching David and Goliath, the sculptor, and the crowds viewing the sculpture.’

Carving’s nonlinearity is also evident from how the text is presented in six different colours (yellow, white, blue, green, red and pink); capital and lower cases; and different font types, sizes, and formats (regular and italics). This multimodal dimension presents the reader with a cumbersome effort of assigning meaning to text chunks based on which text colour, font case and font type/format represents the interpolating speculations about David; the voice of the crowd watching David and Goliath; the voice of the sculptor; and the voice of the crowds viewing the sculpture. One effect of nonlinearity on the reader is that they continue to speculate whether there are still other parts of the text that they are yet to unravel. This kind of feeling denies the reader of a sense of accomplishment and the text of the pleasure of closure.

Interactivity as experimental textuality

Bouchardon (2014: 159) describes an interactive work as that in which ‘manipulations by the reader are often required so that they can move through the work.’ As opposed to merely watching a text unfold, as the case is with *Star Wars*, an interactive text calls for the participation of the reader for its unfolding. *Chemical Landscapes*, as an interactive text, does not bring up any text on the screen until the reader interacts with the blank space of the start-up page. The same situation obtains in *Separation* where the reader must continually click the screen for the text to appear, a word at a time. Invariably, if the reader of *Separation* does not interact with the start-up blank space of the text, it equally remains blank.

Carving is the most interactive of the selected data as the materials of text which are hidden behind the blank screen will not come up until the reader uses the mouse to interact with the screen. Crucial to the reader’s interactive intervention in *Carving* is how the reader’s continuous interaction with the text sculpts the fully formed

face of Michelangelo's David. This is why, when the reading session expires, the text invites the reader to 'sculpt again' rather than to read again. Plate 5 exemplifies the unformed face of Michelangelo's David while Plate 6 is the fully formed face after the reader's interactive with the screen in Plate 5.



Plate 5: Screenshot of the start-up page of *Carving in Possibilities*



Plate 6: Screenshot of the fully realised end page of *Carving in Possibilities*

Much like other experimentations in the texts, interactivity also forces the aesthetic of labour value on digital technology, turning reading into a conscious and non-trivial work for the reader.

Conclusion

Investigating digital texts by focusing on their techno-semiotic components involves examining style in the texts as results of digital affordances and readers' performative actions. In the examination of the four selected digital texts, readers' interaction with the texts reveals the texts' experimentations with temporality, nonlinearity, performativity and interactivity which, in turn, simulate postmodernist textual experimentations in paper technology. The study thus reveals that the experimental turns of the semiotic aesthetics of the digital texts accomplish postmodernists' features such as forking paths, the carnivalesque, labour value, and writerliness. This, invariably, confirms digital textuality theorists' claim that digital texts are a continuation of postmodernist aesthetics in the digital media space.

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