



A Performance of Reality. Handwriting and Paper in Digital Literature

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Abstract: Digital literature emphasizes its own medium, and it brings to the foreground the graphic, material aspects of language. Experiments with the new medium and with the form of language are generally presented and interpreted within a framework of the historical avant-garde or the neo-avant-garde. This article aims to take a new perspective on the emerging digital materiality of language. The analysis of three works that remediate paper, the voice, the writing hand, or the physical presence of the author, leads to the conclusion that an 'absent presence' is given prominence. This paradoxical merging of presence and absence makes these forms of digital literature an expression of a specifically late postmodernist ambivalent stance regarding representation of the 'real'. Complicity with the media culture goes hand in hand with an ironic approach of the mediatedness of the world and the body.

Keywords: Materiality, Handwriting, Digital Literature, Media Culture, The Body, Presence, Complicity

Introduction

We see hand-drawn letters move on a screen to the sound of piano music. They explode or fall apart in stripes or small sticks, making room for new letters on the white screen. This digital work, 'Suicide in an airplane' (2010) by Brian Kim Stefans,¹ brings to the fore the problematic issue of materiality in a digital environment. Although the only real material aspect here is the hardware and the interface that allows us to see the work, the exploding letters on the screen seem to have a material aspect to them as well. They have been meticulously drawn by the artist copying the text from a newspaper article. Stefans's work is part of a growing body of digital art that engages hand-drawn and handwritten letters: it is this particular use of the graphic side of language that is the issue here. This is what Johanna Drucker calls configured language: '[l]anguage in documents where format, graphical organization, or other structural relations contribute substantively to textuality'.² [67]

Generally, digital works that experiment with the new medium and with the material, (typo)graphic and iconic qualities of language are interpreted in the light of avant-garde literature.³ Historical movements like Futurism and Dada are mentioned in this respect, as are the concrete and visual experiments of the neo-avant-garde from the sixties. Some consider digital works in a reverse perspective, arguing it was all 'pre-figured' by the avant-garde or by modernism. Schnierer states that texts like *The Waste Land* 'ought to have been printed as palimpsests, written as hypertexts'.⁴ They were not, though, and that is the pivotal point here. The digital age offers more than a mere technological difference between avant-garde on the

one hand and contemporary electronic literature on the other: it implies a different cultural and social context in which formal experiments have a new function. Although some digital artists may have simply re-mediated avant-garde aesthetics in the early days of the new medium, and some critics may still read digital literature in an avant-garde perspective, it is not an adequate interpretative framework for recent digital literary work.

The focus of this article will be on three digital works that use handwriting and paper. Old and new media are used to bring to the fore issues concerning the machine, the body and language. These works refer to a problematic relation between literature and the 'things of the world',⁵ answering to the postmodern critique of the conventions of representation.

After an explanation of the way in which the material quality of language is understood (part 1), this hypothesis will be tested on three examples of digital literature that engage with the look of language by employing handwriting or hand-cut paper letters (part 2). All three works, by Tonnus Oosterhoff, Shelley Jackson and Mustafa Stitou respectively, use re-mediated material from an older medium to represent language: handwriting and paper. The question is how these forms of configured language influence the production of meaning in the electronic environment.

Each work renders handwriting in different ways: Jackson uses scratchboard, drawing and HTML, Oosterhoff a digital writing pad and screencapture software (Screenflick), whilst Stitou and his co-authors use paper, audio-recording and stop-motion animation. The cases are chosen for this medial diversity and for their cultural diversity too. In both their content and context the works point to a masculine, a feminist and a multi-cultural background respectively, and to their different conventions of representation. Through the use of handwriting and paper, the works relate to questions of writing, identity, materiality and authorship.

Digital Materiality and Handwriting

Handwriting and paper in digital literature confront the reader with the substance of the language used.⁶ Rather than going directly from the sign to the referent, we [68] are made aware of the level of inscription, which Lapacherie calls the 'niveau grammatique', the grammatic level.⁷

These graphical and visual properties of language are significant and have their own meaning 'that is not separate from its linguistic content, nor exactly proper to it, but interpenetrated with the text itself as its fundamental expression', says Johanna Drucker.⁸ Configured language communicates more than just its presence; it also communicates the way it comes to us, its 'presented-ness' by means of a certain medium and the meaning of that. It is always re-mediated and thus necessarily self-reflective.

This cultural value seems to be especially strong in the case of handwriting, although the value is not stable and has altered with every new medium of language inscription.⁹ The idea of singularity of handwriting took further root with the arrival of new media. It now seems to signal authenticity and sincerity. Undoubtedly this is why we receive 'handwritten' pleas from celebrities in the mail asking for donations. The potential aura of these personal letters fades as soon as we realize that they are just copies.

Roland Barthes cleverly uses this ambivalent character of printed handwriting in his *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975). Inside the front cover, white on black, it reads in Barthes's handwriting: "Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman."¹⁰ The ambiguity of the entire 'autobiography' is represented by the very 'real' note declining any

connection to 'reality'. Before the digital era, the alleged authenticity of handwriting was thus already being deconstructed in literature.

The end of handwriting as the dominant mode of inscription did not, of course, start with computers. As Kittler notes, the loss of handwriting was much lamented when the typewriter was invented, for example by Heidegger:

The typewriter veils the essence of writing and of the script. It withdraws from man the essential rank of the hand, without man's experiencing this withdrawal appropriately and recognizing that it has transformed the relation of Being to his essence.¹¹

Nietzsche, likewise, saw a loss of agency with the loss of handwriting, which authors could use to 'bring forth their voice, soul, individuality'.¹² The cultural value of handwriting thus greatly changed in the nineteenth century, and what was lost with its decline resembles what, for Walter Benjamin, was missing in film as opposed to painting. His notion of 'aura' seems to be an adequate description of what Nietzsche calls 'soul'. The singularity of a work of art has made place for a reproducible copy that is always at a mechanical distance from the hand that created the work.

For language itself, however, there was never such a distinction between the original and the copy: reproducibility is its very nature.¹³ The emphasis that digital [69] artists put on handwriting may be interpreted as a reaction to the issues of 'iterability' of language, writing and images. Rather than the 'iterable' sign itself, it seems to reproduce the original process of writing, the event, and the digital medium that both allows and denies the readers' experience of that process. The remediation¹⁴ of handwriting and paper in a digital environment is a way to highlight the problematic relation of the sign to the referent, the language to the body, and of the machine to the human.

With such dichotomies, these examples of digital literature are part of a much larger debate on the possibility of materiality in the digital medium. The apparent threat to materiality and to the embodied subject that digital technology implied has led to a 'material turn' in many disciplines within the humanities.¹⁵ Although some critics point to the dematerialization occurring in digital media, materiality is of central interest in the field of digital literature and art. By now the hypothesis of dematerialization, persistent as it may be,¹⁶ has been refuted on many levels. Firstly, the tension between the material world and its abstract representation goes back beyond the digital or even the mechanical age. In order to 'see' the world, we have always resorted to abstract, immaterial or mediated representations. Secondly, digital media have more materiality than one might believe. Immaterial as code may be, it always needs interaction with humans and with hardware to perform; it is embedded within particular material circumstances. Finally it is in digital media that 'material' media (photography, manuscripts) are preserved and distributed. Older and seemingly more material media are remediated and thematized in the new ones and are not left 'in peace' as McLuhan famously declared.¹⁷ This influence works the other way around as well: old media are transformed by the new ones, and printed poetry has seen a rise in material devices supporting it in the digital era. This allows one to speak of 're-materialization' rather than 'dematerialization'.¹⁸

Besides re-mediating older materials, digital work may emphasize new ones, the materiality of the interface for example. Adding soundtracks or recordings of readings by the author is another way of adding 'aural' and 'oral' materiality. Finally, there is the ubiquitous emphasis on typeface, typography and handwriting in digital literature, all of which may be seen as an attempt to represent material aspects of language as it appears in handwriting and print.

One can take different viewpoints in relation to all of these levels of materiality in digital art. It is a recurring debate, since it is tied to the perspective one chooses to take on the relation between humans and machines, as Katherine Hayles points out: 'The stakes are nothing less than whether the embodied human becomes the center for humanistic inquiry within which digital media can be understood, or whether media provide the context and ground for configuring and disciplining the body.'¹⁹

Mark B. Hansen takes the 'human' perspective in this debate. Strongly opposing Kittler's famous dictum 'sense and the senses turn into eyewash', he emphasizes [70] the affective and tactile dimensions of experience. There is no information or image without the framing of human embodiment. Through various digital artworks Hansen demonstrates that they appeal to the body that filters the information and creates the images.²⁰

Hansen celebrates the digital image as something that is non-discursive, non-representational and directly perceivable by the 'affective body'. This returns the work to the domain of experience, 'liberating' it from autonomy and the romantic notion of the artwork as carrier of truth.²¹ Hansen's view on materiality may be compared to Gumbrecht's position on presence, which he places in an antithetical relation to interpretation.²² This leads some critics to take a rather optimistic view of digital materiality as bringing us in contact with 'the real'.²³

Although this article shares Hansen's emphasis on the new 'haptic' quality of digital art, his point of view of it is reductive, at least for the analysis of digital works where language is involved. One may wonder whether Hansen's position is not taking us back to exactly the kind of autonomy and romanticism that he claims to 'liberate' the work from. Without denying that digital art may need the embodied framing provided by a reader, I take the stance that it is also discursive and thus disembodied, and therefore open to interpretation.²⁴

Three Cases

Tonnus Oosterhoff – Onrust

All the aura and authenticity that handwriting may have is put into question by the poem *Onrust* ('Restlessness', 2011).²⁵ Tonnus Oosterhoff, a highly acclaimed Dutch poet, has used handwriting before in printed books of poetry, albeit only as though they were corrections and afterthoughts added to an existing typescript, but not throughout an entire poem as in *Onrust*.²⁶ The hyperlinked title on the homepage of the author activates a movie showing lines of poetry appearing against a greyish background – not only the writing, but also the empty screen is reminiscent of paper: it functions as a simulacrum of a page. The most important difference with Oosterhoff's printed work is the fact that this digital work is time-based, and plays like a movie. The text is not a finished object, it is actually being handwritten as we watch it, or so it seems to the reader. There are no images in the work and no hyperlinks. The web context is thus not activated in any way, and the 'permeability'²⁷ of reading in an electronic environment is thus reduced as much as possible.

One by one the lines of the poem appear and we follow the letters as they are being traced on the 'paper' in the natural rhythm of the writing hand.²⁸ When there is a verse of four lines (sometimes two), it disappears and, after a short pause, a new verse commences. I would urge the reader of this paper to look at [71] the work on screen before continuing – it is quite impossible to describe it without losing exactly those aspects that this article talks about. I will,

however, provide a translation of the Dutch original.²⁹ The white lines indicate the pauses in which the screen is empty:

You tell me what needs to be done.
They are still restless.
They are still restless in the back.
Listen to them carrying on!

Love, tell me what needs to be done.
You are the boss, tell me what needs to be done
for a quiet life.
I will do it.
I will carry it out.

Didn't you say that one canister was enough? They are still restless.
They are still restless in the back.
Listen to them carrying on!

It is the wind.
It is the wind in the trees.

No, it isn't the wind.
The wind in the trees, it's not.

What we see is a crossover between a poem and a digital performance: the reader watches as a poem seems to realize itself.³⁰ The presumed proximity of the author that both a performance and handwriting would convey has become ambiguous: this is spectral handwriting, the author being both absent and present at the same time.

The temporal aspect strengthens the performative aspect of the piece. We are given over to the real-time rhythm of the writing hand – more as an audience than as readers. Moreover, the dialogue which the work describes adds to its theatricality. The pauses between the lines and between the verses seem to be those of a speaker waiting for an answer. A certain threat seems to be suggested by the sounds 'in the back' and, when in line 7, it appears that there is more wrong than just unrest in the back – what is not going right for these people? It is a transition that is emphasized by the only enjambment in the text.

The restlessness of the reader who has to wait line by line to read what comes next, not knowing how long the entire thing will take, is thematized in the content of the poem by the repetition of the word 'restless'. Another meta-poetical [72] instance can be found in the line 'I will carry it out.' The Dutch original, 'uitvoeren', can also mean 'to perform'. This brings the speaking subject close to the poet who is 'performing' the act of writing. The temporal quality of the movie gives the poem not only a theatrical, but also a musical element – enforced by the repetitions that function as musical themes.

Repetition has a function on the level of the materiality of the work as well. After the last verse has faded away, there is a small hyperlink: 'again'. The reproducibility of the writing process which we have just witnessed is at the heart of the ambivalence of handwriting in digital media: in recording the event, the unique has become 'iterable'. This implies a rethinking of the

singularity of the medium of handwriting itself, a demonstration of mechanization and its 'iterability'.³¹

Although the performance of the physical process of writing is, on the one hand, a singular and authentic moment, in its repetition it problematizes the possibility of this authenticity. 'Gone is the aura' as Hutcheon concludes about postmodernism.³²

The temporal aspect is not only performative. More important is that it makes the spatiality of poetry temporal. Rather than an object, the work becomes a passage. It is the temporality which enhances the reality-effect of the work as well as the effect of imminence. This is exactly what defines the idea of presence for Jean-Luc Nancy: 'Not form and fundament, but the pace, the passage, the coming in which nothing is distinguished, and everything is unbound.'³³ Nancy, however, sees a secondary rather than a direct relation to presence: '[W]hat the painter reproduces is the reproduction of the unique presence.'³⁴ The same seems to apply to the repetitive quality of Oosterhoff's work. Nancy considers the exposure to presence as an 'intimacy': '[T]he intimacy, the exposition, the coming into presence of the thing, its reality. The real, what bears, what demands, what arrests all meaning.'³⁵

Onrust generates this sense of intimacy on three levels. Firstly, the handwriting suggests contact with the body of the author as he is writing the words down. Secondly, there is the content of the words: the poem is apostrophic, and the reader's experience of the situation is as unmediated as possible, a technique of apparent seamless mimesis that Oosterhoff uses elsewhere in his work. It is the classic poetic situation in which the reader is eavesdropping on a conversation, the protagonists being unaware of our presence. Their tone is personal and intimate. There is, however, no immediacy: the everyday experience of a conversation is being doubly mediated by writing and by the digital reproduction of it. Thirdly, and most importantly, it is the temporality of the poem that enhances its intimacy. The way the words appear and fade away suggests somebody writing just to us: the 'real' presence of another person. It suggests the original and live experience of a performance, radicalizing the linear art form, which is what literature is. [73]

This is what Carrie Noland ignores in her approach of what she calls the 'gestural' aspect of digital poetry, claiming that the computer is even more fit for bodily contact than the typewriter was, for example in interactive works in which the mouse can be used to move letters on the screen, enabling a recuperation of that 'hand-page contact that was supposedly lost'.³⁶ Even if we accept that installing a hierarchical order between the media is necessary, which I doubt, Noland might be too naive in her reading of digital works. The medium is situated between the text and the consumer of the text and we cannot ignore that fact. Rather, it is the relation between the body and the machine that a large number of digital works are foregrounding. They reflect on human interaction with technology as much as they are performed through that interaction.

'Nostalgia', as Noland calls it,³⁷ is thus not an entirely adequate description of *Onrust*. Rather than nostalgia for the writing hand, Oosterhoff's work reflects ambivalence about the new media: although technology and reproducibility seem to bring us close to authenticity and originality, we remain in fact forever removed from it. What is more, the affective and the haptic are distanced because of the digitalization of the original material.

Writing on a screen gives an idea of proximity that, for Walter Benjamin, was a characteristic of reproducible media.³⁸ In his view, the simultaneous presence of viewer and artist gave a work of art its 'aura': temporal immediacy. It is exactly this immediacy that is being both suggested and simultaneously denied in the double bind of *Onrust*. What is at stake here is

a tension between reproducibility and aura. The emphasis on the reproducibility and performativity of the work (the self-reflexive instances of it) confronts the reader with the impossibility of ever attaining the 'real' in an unmediated form. Although Nancy's intimacy and presence are an adequate description of what the poem aspires towards ('The real, what bears, what demands, what arrests all meaning'), it does not at any time claim to reach it. What we get to witness is not a mimetic rendering of reality, but a performance of reality and a performance of the presence of a writing subject.

It is an exact mimesis of the 'real' and singular process of writing the poem as it took place once. Apart from the symbolic relation that the signs bear to their signifiers, the deictic quality of the reiteration of the process of writing points to the first moment this text was written down.

Fully aware that 'real presence' in its humanist sense is out of reach, the poem emphasizes what separates us from that presence – it is a reproducible performance of writing a poem, which in itself is already a performance of the real. This mirroring means that *Onrust* functions as a simulacrum but also concerns art as a simulacrum: it is not a mirror of the real or a parody, it is 'substituting signs of the real for the real itself'.³⁹ But contrary to what Baudrillard sees in Disneyland and other instances, Oosterhoff's poem is not a question of dissimulating that 'the real is no longer real', but rather of revealing it. [74]

This means that it goes beyond what Baudrillard called the 'strategy of the real': '[A] panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, parallel to and greater than the panic of material production.'⁴⁰ *Onrust* is not an 'escalation of the true', nor is it a production of the real, it is too explicitly mediated for that. It should not be read as simple 'nostalgia' for the real writing hand or the real presence. The ironic materiality of this poem and the reproduction of handwriting seem to underline the ambivalent 'contact' that new technologies offer with the things of the world. Computers provide immediate and material access to information about the world and representations of objects from the world on the one hand. On the other, they represent the distance that has always separated us from the real. In the formal material aspects of digital literature, the postmodern awareness of that predicament is thematized and criticized, but not overcome.

Shelley Jackson – my body – a Wunderkammer

my body – a Wunderkammer (1997) is a 'semi-autobiographical hypertext'.⁴¹ It specifically explores the relationship between the real and the unreal in a work about identity, gender and the body. Similar issues were broached in *Patchwork Girl* (1995), Jackson's earlier successful hypertext.

The 'grammatical level' of language is activated on different levels, starting with the opening screen. We see a hand-drawn face in black and white on what seems to be a print or a scratchboard. This handcrafted work also shows the title of the piece in handwriting and is accompanied by the sound of breathing.⁴² Giving prominence to bodily material happens here in three different ways: the carving (or drawing) and writing of the piece that was originally done by hand, the face portrayed, rather threateningly, with the tongue sticking out, and the breathing. A hyperlink takes us from the title screen to the next one showing another drawing, of an entire female this time, writing on what seems to be a paper notebook. Her naked body is divided into squares that designate body parts indicated in handwriting: elbows, shoulders, etc. The body functions as a map of the narrative, as was the case in *Patchwork Girl*.

One can choose any body part (or parts of the face, which work as hyperlinks even though they have no name attached to them) from the opening 'bodymap' to enter the hypertext. The text elaborates, from the seemingly autobiographical description of the narrator's body, to side-tracks like swimming goggles or monsters, and a rather transgressive discourse on 'vials of pee, ejaculate and shit'. This brings us back to the title: why does the narrator conceive of her body as a 'Wunderkammer', a cabinet of curiosities? Such a Renaissance collection was considered to be a miniature reflection of the world, showing all the curiosities that might be found in it, as in the wondrous and sometimes repulsive body that is described here. In a cabinet of curiosities, there is no particular order of arrangement [75] for the parts.⁴³ Like a hypertext, the 'Wunderkammer' is 'random access' and, as Jackson's text suggests, the information is not structured logically:

But you don't approach a cabinet of wonders with an inventory in hand. You open drawers at random. You smudge the glass jar in which the two-headed piglet sleeps. You filch one of Tom Thumb's calling cards. You read page two of a letter; one and three are missing, and you leave off in the middle of a sentence.

In Jackson's text there is an absence of hierarchies and distinctions between the realistic and fantastic aspects of the represented female body, which is 'random access' like the hypertext.

The metaphor of the 'Wunderkammer' announces that there is no 'real' and complete body to be found in or beyond this work. Like bodyparts, objects in a cabinet are disjunct, manipulated, demonstrated, remediated. We only see a selective, 'preserved' and archived reflection of a body. In the text one often encounters a distance from reality: 'I have been haunted by the feeling that this world is insufficiently real'. The volatility of the everyday world is emphasized further when we see a 'phantom limb' amongst the limbs and organs, all the more spectral since nothing happens when we try to activate this hyperlink. Likewise, the 'skin' cannot be 'touched' directly by the reader – paradoxically, the outside can only be approached from inside the narrative: access revealing itself to be not so random after all.

Jackson's text is a carefully linked maze of short fragments on hips, hands, toes, teeth and fingernails, about a girl and her body, her phallic fantasies about having a tail, for example, that violates her at night. Gender and even sex distinctions are not stable: the narrator feels more like a monster or a hermaphrodite than a woman. She describes how her body is constantly manipulated, by shaving (or not shaving), tattooing, muscle-toning, etc. Like the reader making this text perform, the gendered body itself is a performance in the sense Judith Butler gives to the term, a repetition of 'gender acts'. The hypertext form of the work emphasizes that these acts are 'internally discontinuous'.⁴⁴ The personal thus becomes political, since the revelation of the performative quality of this body challenges what Butlers calls 'the category of women itself'.

The accompanying images of body parts and the handwriting in the opening screens of the work seem to herald this ambiguous relation to the physical reality of the gendered body in the rest of the work. On the one hand there is no question of immediacy: the medium of drawing emphasizes its own irreality, the 'representedness' of this body, as does the choice of the two-dimensional, black-and-white, 'flat' image of the body, in a medium of print that is itself reproducible. [76]

On the other hand it brings us close to the moment of physical inscription of the image and words by the artist/narrator. The chosen technique for the images, where body parts are highlighted by a pattern of crossed incisions, stresses this idea of inscription of the body with

visible and invisible marks. It also emphasizes the presence of the medium itself and thus the constructedness of the body that is performed here.

The material and physical quality of the opening screen is augmented by the fact that we have to touch the body parts with the cursor to make the work perform, as if stroking the body itself. In Jackson's work, paradoxically, both the haptic and material form of an entire body in the opening pages and images underline the absence of a whole, 'real' body, as does keeping the body parts in a 'Wunderkammer'.

The same may be said of the hypertextual form, in which different possibilities are activated in a dramatic situation, mirroring 'the body as not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities'.⁴⁵

The tensions between wholeness and fragmentation, physicality and spectrality, as found in the opening image, are also reflected in the hypertext as a whole. From the 'material' image of the whole body in the beginning, we link on to the fragmentation of the hypertext: 'once more, the map misleads, encourages us to assume that this conceit of the GUI holds true without ambiguity', as Harpold says about the comparable structure of *Patchwork Girl*.⁴⁶

The absence of a linear text reflects the absence of an entire, stable and 'real' body. The spatiality of the hypertext format seems to mimic this immaterial body that is a narrative and cultural construction built out of acts, acts that are interconnected only by this fictional body with which we began. In fact, the opening image gives the text a core to which the reader can return, thus reducing the rhizomatic character of hypertext. The fact that it is explicitly hand-made suggests a proximity to the writing and crafting body of the author/narrator, which is then revealed as not having any substance but as only existing in separate acts: a tension that the work would not have without the materiality of the language in the handwriting.⁴⁷

Mustafa Stitou – Smeekbede

One of the first multicultural digital poems is called *Smeekbede* ('Supplication', 2010).⁴⁸ A quite well-known figure in Dutch literature, Stitou is of Moroccan descent and his poetry frequently thematizes the specific questions that arise from a Dutch-Moroccan identity. This is the subject of *Smeekbede* as well, a poem in the form of a prayer, read aloud by the poet. This reading acts as the soundtrack to a stop-motion animation by Studio van Laar, consisting of moving images of hand-cut paper letters. [77]

The first image is the word *Smeekbede*, embodied in its three-dimensional form. The paper cut-out word imitates a body bent over in Muslim prayer. After the title, more words of the poem appear cut out in white paper against a black background, like 'Throne' or 'Kneeling'. The paper words are the initial script of the words that are spoken by the lyrical subject.

What this animation activates and circumscribes is the Islamic ban on imagery: it seems merely decorative and does not depict anything but letters. This gradually changes, as the letters slowly gain a more iconic quality and start depicting what the words of the poem are saying. This ambivalent complicity with Islam rulings reinforces and thematizes the ironically religious undertone of the poem's content, to which I will come back later. At the same time, it calls the attention to the 'old' medium for literature: paper. Whereas the poem comes to us by the even older medium of the poet's voice, the meticulously hand-cut and animated letters point to the physical act of making a text, the computer keyboard being demonstratively put aside in the 'making-of' video.⁴⁹ As was the case in the works with handwriting discussed above, the artisanal crafts and the physical process of making text are used here in combination with

the digital medium. This process is comparable to David Knoebel's work 'A fine view', the difference being that in Knoebel's poem the letters are actually forming the poem that needs to be read. In *Smeekbede*, their immediate, tactile and iconic way of generating meaning is brought to the foreground.

Although no human being features in Stitou's work, physical presence is crucial: the imitation of the kneeling, praying body through words, the suggestion of an actual hand that has crafted the letters, the three-dimensional letters, the poet's voice that comes so close, with its very specific and personal Amsterdam accent. The temporality of the video and the reading of the poem by the author reinforce the performance quality of the work and thus give the impression of being 'live' and present. As suggested by Philip Auslander in *Liveness*, the binary oppositions between 'live' on the one hand, and mediated on the other, should be destabilized. The two have become mutually dependent: 'Mediation is thus embedded within the immediate; the relation of mediation and the immediate is one of mutual dependence, not precession. Far from being encroached upon, contaminated, or threatened by mediation, live performance is always already inscribed with traces of the possibility of technical mediation (i.e., mediatization) that defines it as live'.⁵⁰ The same goes for the theatrical idea of live performance as for the media of writing: the new medium does not leave the old one 'in peace', new media incorporate the old, and vice versa.

It is this destabilizing of the opposition between 'live' and mediated that takes place in Stitou's digital performance. Firstly, in the reproducibility of this performance, which questions its singularity and the possibility of singularity in the digital age. Secondly, the voice of the author is broken up into the immateriality of code in order to subsequently rematerialize it. Thirdly, in the words that 'perform' [78] the text while the letters keep their usual symbolic distance from the signified. Performativity is at work here on more levels than just the theatrical. Literature itself is not only constative but performative as well, firstly because it always creates the state of affairs it describes, and secondly due to its context: a work of literature functions because we recognize the modalities of the genre.⁵¹ Both performative qualities are highlighted in this work. The emphasis lies on what the text *does*: the animated letters literary and iconically perform their content, for example when the paper letters 'Danaïden' fill a leaking barrel, while the voice reads about the Danaids: 'Now they are filling a barrel in the underworld. In vain, for the bottom of the thing is pierced'.

Secondly, the text is performative because of its genre, which is here both poetry and prayer. A prayer may also be called a performative speech act in that it performs the action to which it refers. Like literature, prayer is a highly ritualized text genre, which is only felicitous if the context is right. In *Smeekbede*, both the text and the context are incorrect, which makes *Smeekbede* ironic and the prayer false or infelicitous. This emphasis on mediatized live performance and on the performative qualities of language helps to deconstruct the idea of presence of an authorial voice and embodiment.

Apart from iterability in the form of genre and technology, the theme of the prayer-poem also consists of repetition: 'Lords of worldly creatures, ruler on Judgment Day, compassionate compassioner, punish me, I am begging you, punish me.' The prayer continues to ask for a 'fitting' punishment ('use your imagination', it demands), subsequently summing up existing punishments from antique mythology and the Catholic tradition. All punishments take the shape of endless repetitions, emphasizing again reproducibility and iterability.

References are made to a mix of traditions – Islam, Christian and antique religions and myths – which reinforces the ironic character of the 'prayer'. At the same time the plea seems to

be partly genuine when the lyrical subject confesses his faults: 'Never did I accept the other as he or she is, sooner or later I turned away. Scared to encounter myself I have always been on the run.' The Islamic interdiction on representing divinity is both respected and transgressed, God's punishment is both evoked and ridiculed. In the end, the narrator names this very irony as his biggest fault: 'Let me for my love of / the mug of irony bake / grimacing masks of my excrements / Lord, Ruler on Judgment Day, / Merciful Giver of Mercy, that I should devour / with bleeding maw. Forever.'

Stitou's transgressive demand to be made to eat his own faeces is a strong image of turning himself inside out, or rather outside in: his outer mask will become internalized. The impossibility to find a stable identity ('myself') leads to this fragmented prayer that refers to multiple cultural backgrounds and religions. Again, we may connect this to the use of language itself, as pointed out by Frederic Jameson: 'The very concept of expression presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of the inside and [79] outside.'⁵² It would seem that a postmodern position is both evoked and questioned in this work. The intimacy of the personal, authorial 'praying voice' suggests the proximity of subjectivity and appeals to the senses of the audience, whereas the 'authenticity' of that subject and his prayer are ironically questioned regarding form and content.

The same applies to the haptic quality of the animation and the letters that are used iconically and become illustrations of the text, in contravention of Islamic law. Again we see the dual link of the poem to both western and eastern traditions. Although the iconic 'configured' language, as used in the animation, has been a poetic technique used since antiquity, it acquires a new meaning in *Smeekbede*. Instead of being a direct icon of the signified, the signifier has become opaque due to the various re-mediations and transitional materialities:⁵³ from voice to handwriting to paper to text, from text to photo, from photo to animation: there are many media layers between signifier and signified.

The letters in the movie have yet another effect. Whereas letters on a screen are generally characterized by their 'polygraphic' nature (as opposed to the 'fixed' letters on a printed page⁵⁴), these animated letters, whilst not static, are not to be manipulated by the reader either; they counterbalance the intrinsic morphing and plural quality of writing on a screen, as does the writing in the two other works discussed above.



Figure 1: Screenshot from *Smeekbede*. Courtesy of Studio van Laar.

Stitou's and Van Laar's work thus unveils a whole range of issues concerning identity and authenticity, the singularity of performance, iconicity and language, imagery and Islam, reproducibility of art, without actually theorizing any of these explicitly. There is an ironic awareness in this work of the digital distance that separates us from the unique performance

and from the haptic quality of language. Whilst not denying the 'post-human' condition, the machine is used instead to simulate physical and emotional proximity. [80]

A Late Postmodern Framework

Experiments with the digital medium or with the materiality of language in digital literature are usually interpreted as avant-garde or 'technological avant-garde'.⁵⁵ Authors, in their texts and paratexts, and critics (usually referring to these paratexts) refer to the historical or the neo-avant-garde as intertext, influence or forebearers. This literary-historical framework is problematic. Firstly because it offers a reductive viewpoint of digital work. When emphasizing similarities with the avant-garde, the various differences between historical avant-garde literature and digital literature are generally ignored. Let us compare the work of avant-gardist Paul Van Ostaïjen to the digital work of Stitou *cum suis*. The fact that the Flemish Dadaist Paul Van Ostaïjen had extraordinary letters cut out of wood by his artist friend Oscar Jespers to print the experimental typography for *Bezette Stad* (1921) seems to have something in common with the circumstances in which *Smeekbede* was produced: collaboration between a poet and a visual artist, emphasis on form and iconic quality of the letters and on the production process. Differences happen at all levels: formally (the paper words are animated, photographed, digitalized, accompanied with the recorded voice of the author speaking), and at distribution level (*Smeekbede* is shown on the internet, on Youtube amongst other sites, whereas *Bezette Stad* only had a limited print). An important difference can be found in the institutional context and authorial intention behind these works. Assuming that an important characteristic of most historical avant-garde movements was the intention to disrupt both the state of the arts and the state of society in general,⁵⁶ we must emphasize that this intention is not a primary one among digital literary artists. While Van Ostaïjen wrote his futurist work in political exile in post-revolutionary Berlin, Stitou's work was conceived in a government-funded and institutional setting.⁵⁷ It was created in a situation of complicity with new media and mass culture rather than one of dissent, and any political implications that it may have become invisible if one looks merely at the formal experiment in a digital context.

Another example of changed intentions is when generative digital literature is compared to the *contraintes* used by, among others, the Oulipian author Georges Perec. The underlying algorithms may be comparable, the intentions are different. Perec applied constraints in the hope that his writing would thus reveal his personal, tragic and unrepresentable Holocaust experiences that were beyond it, which is not what is intended in digital generative literature. The comparison has a reductive effect on both sides of the comparison.

Finally, and most importantly, the effects are different. The comparison between digital literature and avant-garde is often made on the basis of a similar preoccupation with language, for example the graphic qualities of the signifier (in Futurism or in Concrete Poetry) or the procedural production of texts (Oulipo) [81] that have both made a comeback in digital art. I will argue that the effects of these formal experiments on the reader have changed over time.⁵⁸

The second problem with the avant-garde comparison is that it tends to take an a-historical view of the avant-garde works themselves. It is as if Futurism and Dadaism were 'meant' to turn into digital poetry, which is then read as a 'fulfillment of concrete poetry's original premise'.⁵⁹ This implies that digital art is in some way complementary to the earlier avant-garde movements. I propound that this is not the case.

Form, intentions and effects of any avant-garde movement need to be assessed in the latter's political and artistic context to do justice to them. Ambitions of the avant-garde movements have concerned for example a new relation between art and everyday life (as Hal Foster points out), the destruction of the category of art itself (as Peter Burger emphasizes) or art and mass-culture (as Andreas Huyssen states). This is difficult to argue for digital work. Even works that try to break the boundaries of what we conceive of as 'literature' or 'art', and which engage with popular culture genres like games or television soap series, cannot be called 'avant-garde', since the boundaries of the field have long been transgressed by earlier avant-garde artists. As Johanna Drucker argues in the case of contemporary fine art, academic scholarship and criticism should not still be 'mapping older art historical models onto contemporary activity'.⁶⁰ What is needed instead is a critical framework that does justice to the here and now of art.

Similar remarks have been made with respect to digital literature. Engberg and Bolter note that a certain avant-garde political-aesthetic dialectic has been resolved in recent digital work using 'playful graphics', for example by the digital artist Jason Nelson.⁶¹ Their stance is comparable to the view that interprets digital art as emphasizing form over content, spectacle over meaning. However, the critical shift from an avant-garde perspective to mere 'spectacle' or 'play' is just as unsatisfactory as the term 'nostalgia' for the interpretation of digital rendering of handwriting.

The interpretation of the works above has demonstrated that they are indeed playful, but also ambivalent, ironic, self-reflexive and that, more importantly, they offer a critical perspective on presence and identity: they have a cultural and ethical meaning in the present. The works discussed may be read as a negotiation about the kind of conception of meaning and presence that could still be viable after modernism and postmodernism. They do not merely present spectacles or sensory experiences as a game without depth. Like print literature in the last decades, digital literature has tried to re-establish contact with presence, with the historical and the material, without claiming to overcome their postmodern critique. This is why we should call the works discussed above postmodern and even late postmodern, rather than avant-garde.

How can we speak about late postmodernism if we 'hardly know what postmodernism was'?⁶² And does postmodernism not already have its own critique and [82] limits at the centre of its own project? What can possibly come after? Although the term may be 'patently absurd', as Jeremy Green puts it, and impossible to define on the unstable basis provided by the term postmodernism, it may be used to sketch a 'condition', rather than a school. It is this condition that forms a framework which can help us understand the ambiguous, ephemeral materiality of the digital works under consideration.

In my understanding, late-postmodernism is an expression of unease with the postmodern predicament and an attempt to work through it. Whereas modernism was a self-reflexive awareness of the opacity of the relation between the signifier and the signified, in postmodernism the signifier was playing freely: a full-blown crisis in representation. In this view, language offers no reflection of the world, but constitutes it: '[T]here is nothing natural about the real and there never was.'⁶³ Postmodernism acknowledges 'its own complicity with the very values upon which it seeks to comment'.⁶⁴

In late postmodern literature, we find a renewed interest in the documentary, the historical, the representational, the material, and of course the postmodernist self-reflexive and inward-directed qualities. The autonomy of literature is questioned and traded in, as some historical avant-gardist authors did, for an inquiry into the possibility of making literature and art that

touch upon the everyday world and mass culture. The important difference, however, is that contemporary works demonstrate a different conception of what 'everyday world' means; they reflect on a world that has lost reality and that appears to have been replaced by media and 'simulacra'. Rather than being an avant-garde attempt to be part of or even to influence and change the actual world, these contemporary works demonstrate the distance and mediatedness of the actual world. They are explicitly presented as *mediated attempts* at an impossible proximity, complicit with the media culture in which we live.

This is a movement that Drucker outlined for fine art too: 'Just as we can trace a shift between modern purity and contemporary complexity, so we can also see how the notion of autonomy, which was central to modernism, was displaced by contingency, and now by complicity. Postmodern critique, marked by strategies of appropriation and contingency, inscribed an arch ironic distance to both making and representing. But in the place of this diffidence and disdain, a distinct mood of engaged, expressive affectivity has come into play'.⁶⁵

Late postmodernism in literature is part of a much larger paradigm change which also allows us to understand the ethical turn and the material turn. Literature conceived within this paradigm has some characteristics that may be linked to these theories: relationality, an ethical concern for the other, subjectivity, materiality, irony (still), and a return to realism and mimesis.⁶⁶ Technology and mass culture are neither rejected nor celebrated in late postmodernism, but politically and critically used in an ongoing inquiry into their cultural possibilities and their meaning for the future of literature and art. [83]

We have seen in the three works discussed how these issues were addressed in both the material presentation of the work and the content of the texts. By highlighting the re-mediatedness of their material, they investigate and critique humanist notions like 'authorship', 'originality' and 'aura' in the age of electronic media. Since they use older media of inscription, made to perform outside the book, in a technological context, they foreground the relations between language, machines and humans.

If it is true that the media bring us closer to reality even as they distance us from the immediacy of things,⁶⁷ it is exactly this 'edge' of the media that these works are about. They think past the logic of the simulacrum and do not produce nostalgic and substituting 'signs of reality'.⁶⁸ On the contrary, in their hypermediacy they emphasize the mediatedness of any contact with 'the real': the longing for the world and its dematerialization are simultaneously present in any representation.

Concluding Remarks

After a theoretical discussion of what is considered to be 'materiality' in this paper, an analysis of three cases demonstrates how the textual, material and medial characteristics of these works function as an expression of a late postmodern paradigm.

Focusing on the remediation of handwriting has shown digital poetry to bring ethical and aesthetic issues to the fore that are at stake in contemporary literature. It is first of all an affective and bodily engagement that the material presence of the text seems to provoke, while simultaneously being ironic and postmodern. The distance that separates us from the world is expressed by means of the mediatized and digitalized environment in which the work is performed. Whilst pointing to our technological condition the works try to go beyond it, in a new materiality that is enacted between on the one hand, the presence and the body of the author and his writing hand and, on the other, the machine that re-mediate that presence.

Although suggesting proximity to the original, material moment of writing and to the author's bodily presence, these works prove such an original moment and original body to be non-existent. Every act of language is revealed as an iteration and the authentic body to be a performance itself. Only a performance of the material and original presence of the artwork is possible: a performance of the real. [84]

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Notes

1. Brian Kim Stefans, *Suicide in an Airplane* (2010), <http://www.arras.net/> [accessed 14 April 2011].
2. Johanna Drucker, *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909-1923* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 155.
3. See Hellemans, Frank, *Mediatization and Literature* (Acco: Leuven/Amersfoort, 1996), p. 188; Jay D. Bolter, *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext and the Remediation of Print* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), p. 160; Raine Koskimaa, 'Approaches to Digital Literature. Temporal Dynamic and Cyborg Authors', in *Reading Moving Letters. Digital Literature in Research and Teaching. A Handbook*, ed. by Roberto Simanowski, Jürgen Schäfer and Peter Gendolla (Transcript: Bielefeld, 2010), p. 131; Morris, Adalaide and Swiss, Thomas (eds), *New Media Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 14; Lori Emerson, 'A hyperspace poetics, or, Words in Space: Digital Poetry through Ezra Pound's Vorticism', in *Configurations*, 17, 1-2 (2009); N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), p. 20; Fransisco Ricardo and Roberto Simanowski, 'On Analytic Method in the Digital Reading', in *Dichtung Digital* (2009), <http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2009/Ricardo%26Simanowski.htm>. [accessed May 1st 2011]
4. Peter P. Schnierer, 'Modernist at Best: Poeticity and Tradition in Hyperpoetry', in *Beyond Postmodernism: Reassessments in Literature, Theory and Culture*, ed. by Klaus Stierstorfer (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), p. 99.
5. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. xv.
6. The official definition of digital literature is formulated by the Electronic Literature Organization as 'work with an important literary aspect that takes advantage of the capabilities and context provided by the stand-alone or networked computer'. (Quoted by Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, p. 3).
7. 'The signs of writing (...) have a graphic substance: they are made of inked marks, of bars, of strokes, of loops, of periods. A first level of inscription is thus delimited, that of the letter or that of the trace, that one may call, though this denomination is not truly satisfying, the grammatic level', Jean-Gérard

- Lapacherie, quoted and translated by Terry Harpold in *Ex-Foliations. Reading Machines and the Upgrade Path* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 81.
8. Johanna Drucker, 'Intimations of Immateriality: Graphical Form, Textual Sense, and the Electronic Environment', in *Reimagining Textuality, Textual Studies in the Late Age of Print*, ed. by Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux and Neil Fraistat (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p. 160.
 9. Sonja Neef, José van Dijck and Eric Ketelaar (eds), *Sign Here! Handwriting in the Age of New Media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), p. 8.
 10. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).
 11. As quoted in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 198.
 12. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, p. 210. [88]
 13. Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. by Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 381.
 14. Remediation is defined as 'the representation of one medium in another'. See Jay D. Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 45.
 15. Bill Brown, 'Materiality', in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 50.
 16. Alan Golding gives an overview of this position in new media theory in 'Language Writing, Digital Poetics, and Transitional Materialities', in *New Media Poetics*, ed. by Adalaide Morris and Thomas Swiss (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006).
 17. '[I]t never ceases to oppress the old media until it finds new shapes and positions for them.' Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 174.
 18. Brown, 'Materiality', p. 56; Drucker, 'Intimations of Immateriality', pp. 172-74.
 19. Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, p. 87.
 20. Mark B. N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), p. 11.
 21. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media*, p. 3.
 22. Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*.
 23. Richard Grusin, 'Signature Content: Handwriting in an Age of Digital Remediation', in *Sign Here!*, ed. by Sonja Neef, José van Dijck and Eric Ketelaar.
 24. As Roberto Simanowki argues in *Digital Art and Meaning*, a critical attentiveness to the senses rather than to signs, and to 'the appearance, presence and materiality of artefacts' should not prevent us from applying a hermeneutic approach in the criticism of digital art. He suggests that, in the cultural context of the society of the spectacle, interpretation is 'liberating, elucidating and necessary'. Roberto Simanowski, *Digital Art and Meaning. Reading Kinetic Poetry, Text Machines, Mapping Art and Interactive Installations* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 11-22.
 25. Onrust was online as of January 2011.

26. A similar effect is used in Oosterhoff's digital poem 'Nachtkrabbel', which reflects the process of writing by hand, correcting and then typing the final draft, the 'Truth itself' (Derrida, *Paper Machine*, p. 23).
27. Joseph Tabbi, 'The Processual Page. Materiality and consciousness in print and hypertext', in *The Future of the Page*, ed. by Peter Stoicheff and Andrew Taylor (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 215.
28. This process of writing distinguishes the work from other digital examples in which handwriting is presented statically, as on the 'title page' of *Inanimate Alice* (2005) by Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph for example. See Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph, *Inanimate Alice* (2005), http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/pullinger_babelinanimate_alice_episode_1_china.html [accessed 14 April 2011].
29. Translation by Karlien van den Beukel.
30. In the discussion of the work of Stitou I will elaborate on how I understand 'performance' in this mediatized context. See Mustafa Stitou and Jan Pieter van Laar, *Smeekbede* (2010), http://www.digidicht.nl/project_start.page?url=http://www.digidicht.nl/werken/2010/06/14/smeekbede&id=smeekbede [accessed 14 April 2011]. [89]
31. Derrida, *Paper Machine*, p. 20. Grusin points to this in 'Signature Content: Handwriting in an Age of Digital Remediation' with respect to digitalized signatures: they highlight that both writing and remediation have a character of 'iterability, citationality, and alienability'.
32. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 35.
33. In this essay, 'On Painting (and) Presence', Jean-Luc Nancy emphasizes this 'coming' of presence. He writes on a temporal sequence of fifty-two paintings, panels with six drawings each, made every day during a year. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, trans. by Brian Holmes and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 2.
34. Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 350.
35. Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*, p. 351.
36. Carry Noland, 'Digital Gestures', in *New Media Poetics*, ed. by Adalaide Morris and Thomas Swiss, p. 222.
37. Carry Noland, 'Digital Gestures', p. 118.
38. '...the desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.' Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. by Simon During (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 63.
39. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacrum and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 3.
40. Baudrillard, *Simulacrum and Simulation*, p. 7.
41. The poem was published by the Alt-X Online Network, <http://www.altx.com/thebody> [accessed 13 April 2011]. It may now also be found in the Electronic Literature Collection:

- http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/jacksonmy_body_a_wunderkammer.html [accessed 13 April 2011].
42. Like handwriting, the sound of breathing is frequently used in digital literature. Grégory Chatonsky's *Sous-terre* (2000) or Kate Pullinger's *The Breathing Wall* (2004), in which the breathing of the reader into a microphone influences the rhythm of the narrative.
 43. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, pp. 35-6.
 44. Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', in *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40 No. 4 (December 1988).
 45. Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution'.
 46. Harpold, *Ex-Foliations*.
 47. This may be illustrated with reference to another digital work, *slippingglimpse* (2007) by Stephanie Strickland and Cynthia Lawson, in which lines of poetry float by in videos. The letters are not real handwriting, as in Oosterhoff's and Jackson's work, but in a typefont: 'scriptina'. The tension between the presence of the author and his/her spectral hand, between the immediate and the secondary, is absent from this work.
 48. Mustafa Stitou and Jan Pieter van Laar, *Smeekbede* (2010), http://www.digidicht.nl/project_start.page?url=http://www.digidicht.nl/werken/2010/06/14/smeekbede&id=smeekbede [accessed 14 April 2011]. [90]
 49. The video of the 'making of' this movie can be seen on http://www.studiovanlaar.com/M_smeekbede.html.
 50. Philip Auslander, *Liveness. Performance in a mediatised culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 53.
 51. Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 97.
 52. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 11.
 53. Transitional materialities 'place different materialities on a spectrum rather than in opposition to each other'. (See Golding, 'Language Writing, Digital Poetics, and Transitional Materialities', p. 277.)
 54. Harpold, *Ex-Foliations. Reading Machines and the Upgrade Path*, p. 94.
 55. Koskimaa, 'Approaches to Digital Literature. Temporal Dynamic and Cyborg Authors', p. 131. See footnote 3 for scholars who share this view.
 56. Charles Russell, *Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries. The Literary Avant-garde from Rimbaud through Postmodernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 15.
 57. This context is a project called Poetry on the screen, which has been organized every year by the Dutch Literature Foundation and the Foundation for Visual Arts since 2005.
 58. Some scholars do emphasize that avant-garde techniques are exploited with contemporary critical objectives. See Jessica Pressman, *Digital Modernism: Making it New in New Media* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2007) or Kiene Brillenburg-Wurth, 'Intermediality and Postmediality in Contemporary Cyberpoetry', in *Frame*, 21 (2008).

59. Kenneth Goldsmith, 'The Bride Stripped Bare: Nude Media and the Dematerialization of Tony Curtis', in *New Media Poetics*, ed. by Adalaide Morris and Thomas Swiss, p. 50.
60. Johanna Drucker, *Sweet Dreams. Contemporary Art and Complicity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 24.
61. Maria Engberg and Jay David Bolter, 'Digital Literature and the Modernist Problem', in *Digital Humanities Quarterly* (forthcoming, winter 2012).
62. Ihab Hassan, 'Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust', in *Beyond Postmodernism: Reassessments in Literature, Theory and Culture*, ed. by Klaus Stierstorfer (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), p. 199.
63. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 33.
64. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 33.
65. Drucker, *Sweet Dreams*, p. 10.
66. See Thomas Vaessens and Yra van Dijk (eds), *Reconsidering the Postmodern. European Literature Beyond Relativism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011) for an elaboration on the late postmodern novel.
67. Brown, 'Materiality', pp. 54-5.
68. Baudrillard, *Simulacrum and Simulation*, p. 3.