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Overlapping Textualities:
From Literary Machine to Binary-born Texts

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Introduction to *Overlapping Textualities: From Literary Machine to Binary-born Texts*

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As well-known, *text* derives from the Latin *textus* (a tissue), which is in turn derived from *texere* (to weave). *Textus* entered European languages through Old French, where it appears as *texte* and where it has its important relation with *tissu* (a tissue) and *tisser* (to weave). The word 'textuality' has a broad definition and a long history. *Overlapping Textualities: From Literary Machine to Binary-born Texts* particularly focuses on the qualities of a work that make it suitable material for literary study in an era of emerging literacies and literatures. The different works described and analysed here are not just written texts, considering the intermedia and transmedia background they were created from. Different constitutive elements of their textualities will be deeply taken into consideration: the pluri-signification of the relation image-text, the infographic images, the (il)legibility of the elements, or the flow of the reading process in the textual rearrangement.

This issue weaves together diverse literary textualities from the original and multifaceted poetic machines in the 17th century to the recent 'binary-born' texts that exploit the possibilities of the digital environment to create literary works, offering as well approaches and experiences to read these textualities.

Digital literature [1], to which binary-born texts belong, is a form of literature that started to appear with the advent of computers and digital technology. It is a digital-oriented literature, but the reader should not confuse it with digitized print literature. Electronic literature is a new object of study that can be approached from diverse disciplines. A possible definition of electronic

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[1] The terms "electronic literature" (or its abbreviation e-lit) and "digital literature" will be used as synonymous in the space of this issue and any reference to the possible different exceptions they may have. Will not be made.

literature is offered by the ELO – the Electronic Literature Organization –: "works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer" ("What is E-lit?") [2]. Although, as noticed, this definition is quite tautological, it could be useful for what it excludes: both digitized print literature and print-like digital literature [3]. It might be useful to underline a difference between what I define as born-digital texts and binary-born texts. Born-digital texts are those textualities conceived without paper support and created in and for the digital environment. Binary-born textualities experience multimedia elements, including texts, whose primary development is based on coding and programming more than on literary productions.

Digital literature has always been attracted by combinatory and generative machines able to automatically recreate texts and especially poetry. One of the very first works of digital literature is considered "Stochastic texts" (1959) by Theo Lutz [4]. German scholar, philosopher, and poet Max Bense suggested that Lutz use a random generator to accidentally determine texts. Bense looked to establish a scientific and objective branch of aesthetics, by means of applying mathematical and information theoretical premises to the study of aesthetic texts. Lutz made a database of sixteen subjects and sixteen titles from Franz Kafka's novel *The Castle* (1926). Lutz's program randomly generated a sequence of numbers, pulled up each of the subjects/titles, and connected them using logical constants (gender, conjunction, etc.) in order to create syntax. The language of the work contained permutation – the same set of words were used over and over again, each time that the program was running.

Literature in general has always been fascinated by literary machines. An example of a creative machine appears, for instance, in the third part of the book *Gulliver's Travels* by J. Swift, in "Voyage to Laputa", with a description of a text creating machine (it was a parody about academic research) in which one is invited to visit "The Academy of Lagado". It follows with the description of how the machine works, like a "generator" animated by the students and "filtered" by the teacher:

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[2] Electronic Literature Organization, https://eliterature.org.

[3] Cfr. Markku Eskelinen and Giovanna Di Rosario, *Electronic Literature Publishing and Distribution in Europe*, University of Jyväskylä Press, 2011.

[4] See for instance Chris Funkhouser, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Forms 1959-1995*, Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press, 2007.

It was twenty Foot Square, placed in the middle of the Room. The Superficies was composed of several bits of Wood, about the bigness of a Dye, but some larger than others. They were all linked together by slender Wires. These bits of Wood were covered on every Square with Paper pasted on them, and on these Papers were written all the Words of their Language, in their several Moods, Tenses, and Declensions, but without any Order. The Professor then desired me to observe, for he was going to set his Engine at Work. The Pupils at his Command took each of them hold of an Iron Handle, whereof there were forty fixed round the Edges of the Frame, and giving them a sudden turn, the whole Disposition of the Words was entirely changed. He then commanded six and thirty of the Lads to read the several Lines softly as they appeared upon the Frame; and where they found three or four Words together that might make part of a Sentence, they dictated to the four remaining Boys who were Scribes. This Work was repeated three or four Times, and at every turn the Engine was so contrived that the Words shifted into new Places, as the Square bits of Wood moved upside down. [5]

In this issue the first article focuses exactly on this fascination that literature has always had to poetic machine. Here Ricardo Pérez Martínez describes and studies poetic machines created by Monsignor Juan Caramuel y Lobkowitz and he analyses the functioning of these poetic machines and their place in the history of baroque ideas. Those machines were not just created to automate literary creation but to multiply it. In those poetic machines we can found similarities with the contemporary poetic machines proposed by several digital poets. In the second article María Ángela Celis Sánchez moves from the analogue environment to the digital one and proposes a kind of specific theory for digital communicative spaces relevant and applicable to digital literary texts. The third and the fourth articles propose different close reading of digital literary texts, offering the reader both an analysis of some digital literary works as well providing her with a possible method to read new textualities put forward by digital literature. Both articles focus on how computer and the Internet open up new possibilities for creative writing: computers highlight the reticular nature of writing and the web space multiplies and disperses its dimensions. The third article analyses four works – *Sitting Pretty*

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[5] Swift (1726) 1996, 135. The machine of the "Academy of Lagado" is a parody of Leibniz's program (who died a little before the publication of Laputa) – and his research of a universal characteristic – oriented, like Lull's, towards the mechanization of the deductive processes, including those implicated in normal speech, more particularly those involved in literary writing.

(2004), *IntraVenus* (2005), *Fitting the Pattern* (2008) and *Underbelly* (2010) – by Christine Wilks. In this article, Oreto Doménech offers close reading of Wilks' works also reflecting on how the body of the 'Woman' is represented. Nohelia Meza and Giovanna Di Rosario, in the fourth article, use tools of digital rhetoric to describe, explore and analyse literary constructions and philosophical concept in David Clark's *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein* (2008). Stefano Calzati, in the last article, brings his personal experience as a germinal example of those literatures that transform themselves in digital objects and grassroots, going through the unfixed lines the web offers thanks to few simple tools that amplify the narrator's voice and make them available and accessible to transversal and more and more vast audiences. Calzati reflects on travelling and writing as two very complementary practices and relates his experience in practicing online travel writing. The analysis will particularly focus on some pieces of online travel writing about Australia, i.e. his travel blog.