



## Revue *Hybrid*, n° 3

### « Digital Cultures: Alternatives »

## Introduction

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## Texte intégral (format PDF)

In the context of the social movement against the reform of the Labour Law in Spring 2016 in France, a lot of graffiti has been drawn inside and outside the buildings of University Paris 8. While the majority called for resistance against the government policy and asserted that a “revolution is underway,” some graffiti declared the “end of the digital” in big letters. For the authors of the graffiti, the digital was obviously strongly colluding with capitalistic imperialism, a system which the university was supposed to oppose in order to become (once again) a hot spot for counter-culture. The movements challenging the new Labour Law, such as the collective “On Vaut Mieux que ça,” have yet resorted to digital media like CMS Wordpress and Facebook to gather the anti-establishment forces on common platforms, presented as “critical and popular multimedia relay.” The fact that certain activists probably did so to fight their enemy using their own weapons cannot solely explain this apparent contradiction.

In this third issue of the *Hybrid* journal, we wished to ponder on “digital cultures: alternatives,” trying to determine both whether alternative cultures are likely to arise in a digital environment and whether there are cultural alternatives to the digital. The graffiti announcing the end of the digital and the involvement of these same anti-establishment cultures in the field of the digital suggest that the “post-digital” era, should it become a reality, would not necessarily be characterized by the disappearance of computers: what is in question is neither computer science as a scientific field, nor the technological and cultural contributions of the decentralized transmission of data through the Internet. Whether alternatives arise in the digital environment through the appropriation of its mechanisms, or whether they result from an external contribution through the disintegration of some of its structures, the aim of the protests is rather to free connected computing from the current mercantile hold.

Therefore, alternative cultures do not criticize the IT watershed, but the digital one. While many researchers delved into the potential of the “digital” throughout the 1990s, sometimes vesting it with revolutionary values, predicting the democratization of knowledge, indiscriminate access to the public space, or even the emergence of a collective “intelligence” including the whole planet<sup>1</sup>, there are currently numerous researchers who criticize the invasive practices of tracking and predictive role big data is ascribed with<sup>2</sup>, the control exercised by GAFAM (Google Apple Facebook Amazon Microsoft) over daily uses and the social consequences of “cognitive capitalism,”<sup>3</sup> technical solutionism<sup>4</sup> and “digital labor.”<sup>5</sup>

Admittedly, we might be amused by the fact that the people responsible for the 1990s-2000s cyber-enthusiastic discourses and current data-catastrophist discourses are sometimes the same, so that we may be led to think that this is a passing fad: “And everyone is complaining all together—about the end of utopias, reigning conformism and unconditional surrender of the digital to the deadly appeal of witch TINA (*There Is No Alternative*),” notes Yves Citton, one of the authors featured in this *Hybrid* issue. The discourses castigating the processes of mercantile exploitation, observing a constant yet concealed surveillance of citizens, are sometimes distorted with a kind of hypocritical delectation by the media industries that collaborate in many ways with this new economy. However, the alarmist discourses could not be successful, resonate in society, if they did not indeed put forward convincing explanations for the disintegration of social links, for the disavowal of traditional institutions and political parties, for the progressive

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1 See for example Pierre Lévy, *Cyberculture*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1997.

2 See for example Dominique Boullier, “Vie et mort des sciences sociales avec le big data,” *Socio*, no. 4, 2015. [Online] <http://socio.revues.org/1259> [accessed 11 June 2016].

3 Yann Moulier-Boutang, *Le Capitalisme cognitif: la nouvelle grande transformation*, Paris, Éditions Amsterdam, 2008.

4 Evgeny Morozov, *Pour tout résoudre, cliquez. L'aberration du solutionnisme technologique*, Paris, Éditions FYP, 2014.

5 Trebor Scholz, *Digital Labor. The Internet as Playground and Factory*, New York, Routledge, 2013.

withdrawal of States, and if they did not generally constitute a response to a strong sense of insecurity, widespread among the middle classes.

It must obviously be noted that the discourses criticizing alienation through the digital are increasing as digital tools have finally become accessible. While in the 1990s researchers could feel like the explorers of a literally “reserved” continent, the opening of the devices up to the masses has deprived them from this privilege. Like the practice of photography and video-recording, the use of connected computers has widely spread in many countries and, as noted by Florent di Bartolo in his article, “the Web is no longer regarded as a new continent to explore by its main players.” One might be pleased to see it as a democratization and emphasize the emergence of an array of new skills, which has been supported by policies established by the French Ministry of National Education and Higher Education for several years, through various “action plans.”<sup>6</sup> The common use of connected computers is yet distinct from the utilization of the lower layers, the *hardware*, of the machine. Drawing on Friedrich Kittler’s works<sup>7</sup>, Emmanuel Guez thus reminds us in his contribution that “users would definitively start to limit themselves to a superficial level of operation of the *hardware-software* in the early 1980s, with the commercialization of Intel’s 80286 microprocessor which added a protected mode to the real mode of operation.” The end of the exclusive access to computer thus went together with a profound change in practices, in which the mediating tools, especially the *software* proposing symbolic manipulations, have played a crucial role.

Any user of a word processing software experiences this when they “create” a document: the digital page is never blank. Numerous graphic metaphors (brush, eraser, printer, file, scissors...) and ready-made verbal instructions (“save-file”) facilitate the exchange with the machine, but conceal what the machine effectively “calculates.” In his article, Florent di Bartolo proposes to consider the tools as “alienation producers,” as defined by Gilbert Simondon.<sup>8</sup> Whether these tools are proprietary or free, cultural practices such as writing, photography, filmmaking, music, the search for and sharing of information, editing and publishing must now make do with the strategies embedded in the tools, which Madeleine Akrich offers to call “action programs”<sup>9</sup>: programs that can foster creativity by freeing the user from the writer’s block; yet programs that also “program” expression, hence the mind, and often conceal the multiple issues underlying these “conditioning” strategies. According to Clément Mabi, another author featured in this *Hybrid* issue, this is why it is crucial not only to decode the

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6 See for exemple in 1997 le “Programme d’Action Gouvernemental pour la Société de l’Information” (PAGSI). [Online] [http://www.ddm.gouv.fr/article.php3?id\\_article=841](http://www.ddm.gouv.fr/article.php3?id_article=841) [accessed 26 March 2012].

7 As an introduction to Friedrich Kittler’s work, see for exemple *Mode protégé*, edited by Les Presses du réel (“Petite collection, Labex Arts-H2H”) in 2015, introduced by Emmanuel Guez.

8 Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d’existence des objets techniques* (1958), Paris, Éditions Aubier, 2012.

9 Madeleine Akrich, “Technique et médiation,” *Réseaux*, vol. 11, n° 60, 1993, p. 87-98.

“architexts” of digital tools (as proposed by Yves Jeanneret and Emmanuël Souchier<sup>10</sup>), but also to reveal the political project which they are part of.

Even if the commercial issues have intensified with the broadening of the access to connected computers, let us note that in this context the “digital” has never been neutral. The hold of technological and cultural industries on digital tools do not date back to the supremacy of Google or Microsoft, whose influence on our practices is analyzed by Natalia Calderón Beltrán in her contribution to this issue, neither to the numerous “states of emergency” that have served as a means to justify the implementation of surveillance processes on the Web since 9/11. It does not date back either to the emergence of the Web 2.0 and its questionable “ideology of participativity,”<sup>11</sup> or to the involvement of big brands and traditional “mass media” in the Internet. From the beginnings of what would become the World Wide Web, the U.S. army took an interest, in the context of the Cold War, in a “decentralized” transmission mode and has invested in its development. In 1995, while *Time* dared call the Internet a “non-proprietary”<sup>12</sup> network, Microsoft had already started to preinstall the Internet Explorer browser on all PC machines.

In short, the deep intertwining of political and economic issues in connected digital devices is no recent discovery. However, with the tools accessible to the masses, this intertwining undoubtedly occurs at a deeper level, and now affects the life of millions of users: the statistics derived from the traces left by every mouse-click, every comment, every GPS-assisted movement and all software run by the user, acquire their potentially predictive value only as they apply to large amounts of data. This data is sometimes collected without the users knowing, which is obviously problematic.

Usually, users know that that tools are free only in appearance, and that facilitating numerous cultural prices comes with the exploitation of the tracks left by individuals. However, they agree to this utilization because, in a present time perceived as “liquid,”<sup>13</sup> digital tools seem to have become vital. In her article on the school digital culture, Anne Cordier demonstrates that many adolescents are now strongly aware of the economic models governing connected computing: “They strongly contest this model while still feeling that they have to “make do with” it, in order to “fit in.” Overlooking the alternative propositions of the free software movements and Free Software Foundation (FSF) cited by Natalia Calderón Beltrán,

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10 Yves Jeanneret and Emmanuël Souchier define the architext as “the tools allowing for writings to be displayed on the screen and which, not content with representing the structure of the text, demand its execution and realization. The text results from the architext delineating its writing” (“Pour une poétique de l’écrit d’écran,” *Xoana*, no. 6, p. 97-107).

11 For example, see Philippe Bouquillion and Jacob T. Matthews, *Le Web collaboratif. Mutations des industries de la culture et de la communication*, Grenoble, Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2010.

12 *Time Magazine*, 1 March 1995.

13 The term is borrowed from Zygmunt Bauman, *Le Présent liquide: peurs sociales et obsession sécuritaire*, Paris, Seuil, 2007.

public institutions, schools, universities and local authorities have indeed—often carelessly and hastily—chosen mercantile digital tools, and incited “acculturation” with regards to these tools instead of fostering the emergence of a culture of insight, reflection and criticism.

“The tool is the enemy of emancipation,” declared Emmanuel Guez during a conference.<sup>14</sup> While most French people possess a digital tool in 2016 (at least a mobile phone) and demonstrate undeniable skills through their daily use, the digital culture has not become widespread as quickly. Nowadays, many users know how to “program,” if one understands this term as the use of text and image processing software, as well as geolocation and information-search tools following predetermined instructions. However, the absence of a “code” culture forces these programmers to adapt their expectations and intentions to the frameworks imposed by the tool. One would be mistaken to think that the “contents” of any cultural artifact—text, image, video, online chat—remain unharmed by the formatting processes.

In the same way, affirming that the artifact is therefore deprived of any cultural value is a bit of an overstatement. Apple’s current advertising campaign for the iPhone features pictures taken by users, at times strikingly beautiful. Like other formatted productions posted on Instagram, why would these pictures be denied the status of artwork? Should one draw a clear distinction between artists who are tool-users and artists who “reveal the layers of writing potentialities and ideas that permeate them”?

Not all photographers using an iPhone are “culturally ignorant,” whose reactions would only result from the dominating idolized categories.<sup>15</sup> In his article, Clément Mabi reminds us that the sociology of customs has clearly demonstrated that users have leeway with regards to the “action plan” coded in the tool. When a great number of characteristics of an artistic production are provided by this action plan, one yet has to wonder about the extent to which this work should be considered as “co-produced” by the designers/manufacturers of these tools.

Throughout the 90s, Jean-Pierre Balpe has written “Power Point poems”<sup>16</sup> with that piece of proprietary software that typically proposes a “modeled writing.”<sup>17</sup> For the past few years, he has also been using Facebook—one of the most mercantile social media—to develop the work of art *Un monde incertain*, which creates interactions between fictional characters. The status of these experiments as literary works is probably less problematic than that of pictures taken with an iPhone, since they partake in a “diversion” practice. Of course, Power Point has not been designed for a

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14 Emmanuel Guez, presentation as part of the seminar entitled “Pour une éducation critique aux médias en contexte numérique,” held by Sophie Jehel and Alexandra Saemmer in the framework of the activities of the CEMTI laboratory, 15 April 2016.

15 Theodor W. Adorno, *Le Caractère fétiche dans la musique*, Paris, Allia, 2001.

16 For example, see “Océan”. [Online] <http://www.balpe.name/Poeme-Ocean> [accessed 25 June 2016].

17 Yves Jeanneret et Cécile Tardy, *L’Écriture des médias informatisés. Espaces de pratiques*, Paris, Hermès-Lavoisier, 2007.

literary use. By making its fictional identities “exist” day to day, *Un monde incertain* thwarts the autobiographical agreement that lies at the basis of Facebook’s data collection and exploitation processes, because this data is valuable only when it allows for the computing of the real everyday life of “real people.”

Artist Jordan Crandall, several works of whom are analyzed by Anne Zeitz in her contribution to this *Hybrid* issue, even tries to consider “an alternative to the deterministic and technophobic thinking, with regards to the environments and technologies surrounding us,” by making the exchanges occurring in the public space—now characterized by the presence of surveillance, recognition and detection technologies—more tangible. In “Portrait on the Fly,” Laurent Mignonneau and Christa Sommerer have the spectator confront the literally volatile nature of “selfies.”

As noted by Emmanuel Guez, a great many digital art and literary works fall within the tradition of “tactical media” which, in the late 1990s and following Net.Art, aimed to appropriate mass media, sometimes by infiltrating them. These artistic forms provide cultural alternatives within a system, acting (to quote Michel de Certeau) as tactics, against the strategies of a structure that is yet acknowledged as dominating. Their subtlety may be their primary flaw, if one chooses to evaluate them in terms of impact—if one decides that art should lead to anti-establishment or revolutionary practices (which is problematic). Maybe the second flaw lies in the thwarting of the strategies materialized within the device, but also —though more ambiguously—in the play with the knowledge and pleasure provided by the device: as it happens, it is this knowledge or pleasure, pointed out by numerous critics of socio-technical systems (from Michel Foucault to Yves Jeanneret, including Giorgio Agamben), which drives us to give in to their hold.

Françoise Chambefort’s video work entitled “Je suis dans l’autocar, I. Chicoutimi, Québec,” published in the research and creation section of this *Hybrid* issue, has been designed thanks to the author’s agreement to be geolocated via her iPhone during a trip to Canada. However, the author meets the equally hard and troubling challenge of producing a work that never conceals the action of the digital device and the aesthetic of which are enchanting, all while questioning it from within. So let us not jump to conclusions regarding the potential *aestheticization* of the processes of data transmission and surveillance in this kind of works. Every digital art is *inevitably* an art of the device, whether it strives to reveal its strategies or, on the contrary, to hide them by stating that only the produced “content” matters; whether it breaks away from the tools by advocating an “independent” expression achieved through the code, or whether it immediately takes on certain prefigurations of the tool by setting them up as aesthetic principles (“Power Point” poetry, “Flash” poetry...). The only way to escape the “device” nature of the digital consists in not using it at all, in professing a return to the paper, pen, brush, like Yves Desrichard: “Never mind! We will selfishly stick to this “protected space” mentioned by H. Rosa, to this deliberately preserved “oasis of deceleration”—for the

“experienced world” of the eldest, the book, the paper book.”<sup>18</sup> In everyday life in general, and in cultural practices in particular, this radical alternative would be difficult to assume and deprive the subject from a great many potentialities.

The search for an alternative digital culture therefore raises the issue of the ways to explore these potentialities without giving in to a fatalistic acceptance of the device’s hold. In other words, to quote Yves Jeanneret, “the device is not so much the determinism that makes us as the obstacle against our mind and freedom react, or not.” Following the example of Gilles Deleuze, cited by Clément Mabi, let us determinedly explore the “leaks of the device.”<sup>19</sup>

Let us remember that the origins of the flagship tool of the digital, *i.e.* the World Wide Web, are not *purely* mercantile. Admittedly, the policy of the U.S. Department of Defense is behind its deployment, and the fact that the technical and cultural industries were quick to seize upon it is unquestionable. Nevertheless, the invention of connected computing also falls within the context of the anti-establishment movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Dominique Cardon has studied this appropriation of network technologies by the American autonomist movements, which have ascribed it with the opportunities to create more open and democratic lifestyles.<sup>20</sup> Since the beginning of the Internet, all kinds of “counter-cultures” have gathered on the Internet, forming an alternative public space. In 1997, Sherry Turkle showed how the accessibility of a discourse detached from the exhibition of the body, the genre, could lead to uninhibited interventions.<sup>21</sup> Donna Haraway’s cyborg lives in a “post-gender”<sup>22</sup> world which J. R. Carpenter, author of the third work contained in this issue, has been exploring for long under a deliberately genderless artist name. Dominique Cardon is right to emphasize the fact that, despite the hold of mercantile companies, the Internet “has made the tightly-controlled and held-back space of public expression accessible, by opening it up to new speakers.”<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, while the idea of the Internet as an “archive of humanity” should definitely be considered as a myth, since the availability of knowledge does not necessarily imply its understanding and the distribution

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18 Yves Desrichard, “Accélération du livre,” *BBF*, no. 5, 2011, p. 62.

19 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1986.

20 Dominique Cardon, *La Démocratie Internet – Promesses et limites*, Paris, Seuil, 2010.

21 Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1997.

22 Donna Haraway, *Manifeste cyborg (1985) et autres essais: Sciences – Fictions – Féminismes*, éd. Allard Laurence, Gardey Delphine et Magnan Nathalie, transl. Marie Héléne Dumas, Charlotte Gould and Nathalie Magnan, Paris, Éditions Exils, 2007.

23 Dominique Cardon, “Vertus démocratiques de l’Internet,” *La Vie des idées*, [Online]<[http://www.laviedesidees.fr/spip.php?page=auteur&id\\_auteur=0DominiqueCardon](http://www.laviedesidees.fr/spip.php?page=auteur&id_auteur=0DominiqueCardon)>[accessed 15 September 2011].

of the necessary “cultural capital” remains very unequal, one should yet acknowledge the existence of numerous, readily available archives. Learners no longer have to search for books in the family bookcase, as they can discover the great classics of French literature on Gallica.fr. Art lovers do not have to travel to Paris in order to contemplate the works exhibited in the Louvre, for they can take “virtual tours” provided by the museum. It is true that the cultural heritage digitalized for the Web is not always contextualized and editorialized enough to be available to everyone. However, libraries, museums and multimedia libraries make constant mediation efforts. Therefore, Félix Guattari, quoted by Yves Citton in his article for *Hybrid*, was not completely wrong when he foresaw an “entry into a post-media era consisting in a collective individual re-appropriation and interactive use of the information, communication, intelligence, art and culture mechanisms.”<sup>24</sup>

Researchers in the 1990s and 2000s had not only been thrilled by the accessibility of the cultural heritage, but also by the *structure* of this heritage, which promised an unprecedented independence with regards to writing and reading practices. In his founding book entitled *Hypertexte 2*, George P. Landow considered that the traditional outlines of narrative and argumentative text could be successfully risen above through hypertext links.<sup>25</sup> The idea, advocated by post-structuralism, of a meaning no longer imposed on but negotiated with the reader, would *literally* be embodied in a hypertextual network interconnecting an infinite number of lexies, and would give readers the right to create their own shortcuts. Some have even pushed the notion of “*wreader*” further (a cross between *writer* and *reader*, mutually “empowered”), and advocate a direct relationship between the human brain and functioning of the connected computer: in 1991, Jay David Bolter, among others, suggested that the “space” of digital writing and reading would embody the transmission of data in the neuronal system.<sup>26</sup>

Admittedly, Ted Nelson invented the hypertext link tool to make it easier to remember his association of ideas. One indeed uses the expression “network of neurons” to refer to sets of algorithms that, in broad outline, model the functioning of biological neurons. However, the programming of neuronal networks in computer science is not based on hypertext. In the same way, hypertext cannot represent the multiplicity of possible receptions, as George P. Landow once thought. Above all else, it gives tangible form to a reading path drawn by the author of the link.

While the appropriation of the poststructuralist theories of reading and writing by the American hypertext school was quickly criticized as hasty<sup>27</sup>, and while hyperlink is currently perceived as both a tool for liberation (as

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24 Félix Guattari, “Vers une ère postmédia,” *Terminal*, n° 51, October 1990, re-published in the *Chimères* journal, n° 28, Spring-Summer 1996. [Online] <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Vers-une-ere-postmedia> [accessed 25 May 2016].

25 George P. Landow, *Hypertext 2.0, The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.

26 Jay David Bolter, *Writing Space: The Computer in the History of Literacy*, Hillsdale, Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991.

27 François Cusset, *French Theory. Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze et C<sup>ie</sup> et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis*, Paris, Éditions de la Découverte, 2003.

the reader can choose to click it or not) and a tool for guidance (as it models the readings to come), the real potentialities, both narrative and argumentative, of hypertext writing remain hardly explored to this day. The standardization of practices through tools, along with the mercantile exploitation of hyperlink to induce mouse-clicks, account for this.

If nowadays hyperlink is often used to support a “circular circulation of information,”<sup>28</sup> exploited to generate monetizable interactions, some “dissident” authors, poets, researchers, publishers and journalists still continue to draw hyperlink connections between contradictory ideas, divergent hypotheses, opposite stances, hence ascribing it with the idea that truth is not individual, but rather derives from a dialogical interrelation, while still being negotiable. In spite of the obstacles created by the device, they dare explore hyperlink “against the flow”<sup>29</sup>, blocking—at least for a few moments—the supposedly free-flowing, but in reality highly constrained, traffic on the “information highways.”

These explorations seem more promising than the development of textual labyrinths carried out by other supporters of “alternative” digital writing. Throughout the 1980s to 2000s, the pioneers of digital writing were seduced by the idea, close to the 20th-century literary avant-gardes, that the hypertext had to result in the fragmentation of a text.<sup>30</sup> Opposite the *storytelling* of cultural industries, the discomfort induced by a fragmented reading could indeed seem salutary. However, one can notice that a great many cultural industries also try to capture and capitalize on the reader’s attention by offering short, fragmented texts, coding an understanding with fits and starts. By dissuading readers from sustained reading of any kind, the literary and artistic avant-garde digital writings, resolutely oriented toward the “alternative,” have paradoxically confirmed the success of a digital culture governed by mercantile values—notably because the attention of the reader is diverted from the text and image, and shifts to the functionalities of the device, with its aesthetics of enchantment.

A new digital counter-culture could then aim at the production of texts that would simultaneously be argumentative and narrative again and make the most of the potentials of computer technology (such as the hyperlink), in order to disturb—from within—any tendency towards the “circular circulation” of the same. They would allow for the assertion, against the ideological order to accelerate and fragment, of the uncertainty of any interpretation of the world, while providing access to proposed explanations. These literally “micro-political”<sup>31</sup> cultural forms would obviously require a focused, deep reading practice in return, fitting into deceleration, in a *slow digital* that would reactivate certain utopias dating back to the infancy of connected computing, from the ruins of a digital world caught out at its own game. The issue of the training to these reading modes constitutes a

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28 Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision*, Paris, Raisons d’agir, 1996.

29 See the numerous examples taken from the online press and analyzed in Alexandra Saemmer, *Rhétorique du texte numérique*, Lyon, Presses de l’Enssib, 2015.

30 For example Michael Joyce, *Afternoon a Story*, Watertown, Eastgate Systems, 1993.

31 The term is borrowed from Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Micropolitiques* [1986], Paris, Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2007, p. 43-44.

challenge, which must notably be tackled by the Ministry of National Education and Higher Education.

The same kind of counter-culture “in action,” materialized in alternative proposals, reaching beyond the decoding of tools or ideological introspection, and fitting into the market place in order to hamper, or even block its cogs, could position itself opposite to the quest for objectivity presently projected onto big data, since “when raw data seem to speak for themselves, [one] loses the opportunity to criticize,” Bernard Stiegler explains. In the same way that dialogical hypertext can prove that a piece of information is *built*, rather than it is *true*, some forms of expression must be invented to demonstrate that “in its proliferation, data is no longer data,” that it is elaborated, selected, produced through algorithms, programmed by humans.

Louise Merzeau notes that the “procedural identity” follows the users of connected devices like their shadow because it is—at least partly—calculated without their knowing, from the many prints they leave every day. If this is true, Dominique Cardon proposes to delve into these calculations, to explore their cogs and identify their “visions of the world.”<sup>32</sup> Besides, to get back to Louise Merzeau’s proposals<sup>33</sup>, one could start to consider the Internet, not as a place for management, but a place for walking, through databases transformed by our practices, a walk that will require the invention of choreographies.

The digital issue would then become the “playwright of its own traceability”<sup>34</sup> and could, through the production, management, editorialization and sharing of collections, albums, video channels, reconnect its procedural identity to the expressive identity, in the same way as François Bon who published his work “Leçon pour rajeunir en moins de 7 minutes” on Youtube. Resorting to a biological metaphor proposed by Vilém Flusser, which the reader of this *Hybrid* issue can find on the “front page,” Yves Citton does not say otherwise as he states that “We are immersed cephalopods rather than tanned sailors, we are stitches in a fabric of inter-affections and bioluminescent emissions, rather than ship’s boys handling cordages and sails.” However, he suggests that we get the upper hand by taking the “mediating objects” back on, namely Facebook account, algorithm, e-mail, web radio, MOOC, no longer as cerebral imprinting apparatuses, but as artworks.

These experimentations must not prevent us from simultaneously trying to fight for “informational self-determination”—as recognized by the German Constitutional Court as early as 1983—which would allow individuals to control the way their personal information is used by third

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32 Dominique Cardon, *À quoi rêvent les algorithmes: nos vies à l’heure des big data*, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 13.

33 Louise Merzeau, presentation as part of the seminar entitled “Pour une éducation critique aux médias en contexte numérique,” held by Sophie Jehel and Alexandra Saemmer in the framework of the activities of the CEMTI laboratory, 8 April 2016.

34 Louise Merzeau, presentation as part of the seminar entitled “Pour une éducation critique aux médias en contexte numérique,” held by Sophie Jehel and Alexandra Saemmer in the framework of the activities of the CEMTI laboratory, 8 April 2016.

parties, as Anne Cordier reminds us; or even to reflect on “technological sovereignty,” as Natalia Calderón Beltrán suggests.

To quote a recent headline of the *Socio* journal<sup>35</sup>, it would be a pity to stay stuck on the adverse consequences of the “digital turning point” without exploring the alternative cultures that, since the infancy of connected computing, have deployed—despite everything and sometimes with pugnacity—counter-hegemonic tactics. It would be brash to regard the cultural practices experimenting with the potentialities of the digital as “sold out,” to deny the Net.art, digital poetry, hyperfiction, “tactical media” or “critical media” arts, and the online political and activist movements, any kind of independence. As summarized by Natalia Calderón Beltrán, the objective is to explore “the issue of imperialism and social struggles in the field on computing, but also the possible forms of emancipation.”

Therefore, this *Hybrid* issue aims to explore the issue of “digital cultures: alternatives,” fully accepting the ambivalence of the title. Some authors summon the imaginary world of the digital as a cultural alternative and wonder how to pursue the utopias of the 1990s-2000s. This issue is particularly relevant when it comes to digital art and its potential “counter-culture” status, as tackled in several articles in the present issue. In a society that is “networked” by the digital, there can be no real cultural alternative to the digital. For all that, this assessment is not fatal, since all of the authors featured in this issue prove that the digital can result in alternative cultures, in keeping with the belief that “we must seize what seizes us,” as expressed by Emmanuel Guez.

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