

From literary digital creative writing to digital literature teaching in France: a preliminary survey

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1 Introduction and Methodology

This study is based on a survey of a few teachers who engage with digital literature or creative digital writing in their teaching. Through this investigation, I examined the teaching practices of 7 people who are taking on or have taken on these subjects in various educational contexts. Information was obtained through a questionnaire via email or semi-structured interviews. The questions asked were:

- since when have you been teaching and discussing digital literature in one of your classes? Or, over what period did you teach or discuss it if you no longer do so?
- in what context? (i.e. type of training, location, number of students, students' age, background of students)
- does/did this course focus on digital literature, or was digital literature discussed as an example within a broader context?
- what educational materials do or did you use? (portals, books, articles, websites, documents etc.)
- have you created new materials in the course of your teaching? (polys, simulations, works, etc.)
- What was the nature of the training? (workshops, lectures, etc.)
- what was the content? (e.g. historical development of digital literature, relation to artistic or literary movements such as sound poetry, combinatorial literature, gender approach, generation, hypertext, animation analysis or presentation of works)
- was there an end-of-year assessment of digital literature? if so, how was this carried out? (realisation, analysis, free or guided by a grid, etc.)
- how was the course received?

2 Main results

The analysis of these results produced some conclusions which confirm previous intuitions:

- The Department of Hypermedia at Paris 8, affiliated to the laboratory Paragraph, has played a leading role in this teaching. It was the first university department by far to implement it.
- Teaching generally started with creative writing before integrating a course on digital literature.
- Often the teaching only included digital literature or digital literary writings as part of a more general course. Only two courses of the panel focus on digital literature: mine on digital poetry and a course that Jean Clement gave between 1995 and 2008. But the teaching of digital literature tends to become autonomous.

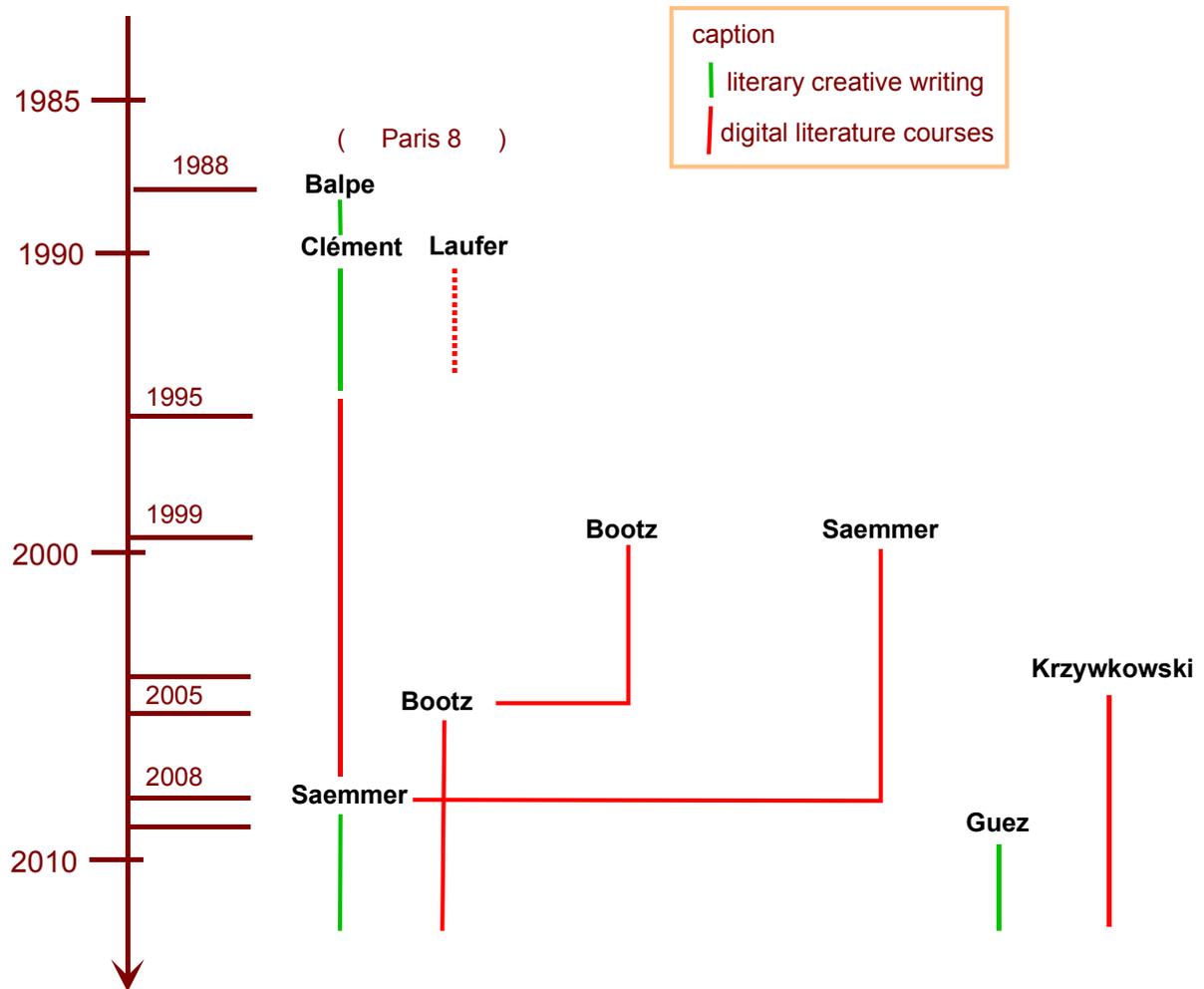
Other results are more surprising:

- The great diversity of learners involved:

- From Elementary School up to M2 including all levels
 - students following a career path in computer science, literature, arts, performing arts
- The teaching has used increasingly sophisticated analytical tools based on advances in research. It has implemented the best-known writing softwares of the time.
 - Several courses continued seminars outside the University for a number of years, or have resulted in the publication of works or have enhanced authors' careers.
 - These courses have always been massively popular with students who have always seemed to engage wholeheartedly in a completely new field.
 - The courses often led to the development of resources aimed at secondary schools or of educational products intended for the "general public".
 - The literature documenting these practices is relatively poor, educators speaking little about their experience, with the exception of Alexandra Saemmer.

3 Results of investigation

3.1 Chronology



3.2 Summary form

		Balpe	Clément	Laufer	Bootz	Saemmer	Guez	Krywkowski
dates		1988 - 1990	1990 - 2008	1990 - ?	1999 -	1999 -	2009 -	2004 -
nature of teaching		workshops	workshop / courses	courses	courses	workshop / courses	workshop / courses	courses
students	level	L1	L1 - M1 - M2	M2	L1 - M2 - CM2	L1 - L2 - M1	L1 à M1	L3 - M1
	size	?	up to 90	10 to 40	10 to 50	up to 100	about 90	40 to 60
	cursus	computing, literature	com, lit, doc, hypermedia	hypermedia	designer, hypermedia, letters	letters, doc, hypermedia	theatre	letters
domaine of teaching	digital literature only	X	X		X	X		
	larger field			digital publishing		documentation culture	digital writing	technology and literature
nature of the teaching	creative workshop	X	X			X		
	présentation / discussions		X		X		X	X
	méthodic analysis of works				X	X		
	remédiation		X			X		
	reading theoretical papers		X	X	X	X		X
principales approches	text generation	hypertext / history	hypertext	history / genres / theories	animation / hypertext	media theory	history / dispositif	
support	main support of course	[BAL 86]	landow, [BAL 88]	[LAS 92]	[BOO 07]	[SAE 07]		[KRY 10]
	creation of specific exemples			X	X	X		
	main software used	hypercard	storyspace	storyspace	director	HTML, flash, wordpress		
creation of ressources	X	X	X	X	X		X	
continuation out of teaching	seminar		séminaire cybertext		séminaire poenum	workshop on creative writing		
	publication of works		exchanges with BNF		marionnettistes de mots exhibition alire	blogs of works mandel.brot bleuOrange	twitter, facebook	

3.3 Individual results

a) Jean-Pierre Balpe

Dates: 1988 – 1990

- Students:
 - Level: L1 computing sciences option littérature (Paris 8)
- Nature of teaching: workshop of automatic generation writing – 30 to 40h
- Main resources used: [BAL 86], Hypercard

b) Roger Laufer

Dates: 1990 - ?

- Students:
 - Level: M1 (2 career paths: one focusing on digital publishing, the other to creation and use of tools for text analysis) (Paris 8)
 - Number of students par year: about 10
- Nature of teaching: lessons on digital publishing including hypertext narratives – 37 h
- Main resources used: [LAS 92]
- Specific resource created for the teaching: a narrative with hypercard

c) Jean Clément

Dates: 1990 – 1994

- Students:
 - Level: L1 computing science option literature (Paris 8)
 - Number of students par year: 60 to 90
- Nature of teaching: courses – 37 h
- Main resources used: Eastgate publications, French hypertextual narratives

Dates: 1990 – 1994

- Students:
 - Level: M2 hypermedia, digital publishing (Paris 8)
 - Number of students par year: 10 to 20
- Nature of teaching: creative writing workshops / courses ; remédiation (Céline, St Exupéry, Victor Hugo, Balzac)
- Main resources used: Eastgate publications, French hypertextual narratives - storyspace
- continuation: creation of the seminar cybertext (1992 -)

Dates: 1995 – 2007

- Students:
 - Level: M1 hypermedia, digital publishing (Paris 8)
 - Number of students par year: 40
- Nature of teaching: structured course (history, genres, techniques) – 37 h
- Main resources used: Eastgate publications, French hypertextual narratives, alire, Web sites

d) Philippe Bootz

Dates: 1999 – 2002

- Students:
 - Level: M2 digital design (ENSCI)
 - Number of students par year: 10 to 20
- Nature of teaching: courses (history, genres, theories) – 10h
- Main resources used: alire
- Specific resource created for the teaching: digital remediation of printed combinatory generators of text (Queneau – Perec)

Date: 2001

- Students:
 - Level: CM2 (elementary class, 10 years old children) Prévert school
 - Number of students par year: 20
- Nature of teaching: creative writing workshop - 70 h
- result: publication of a CDROM

Dates: 2000 – 2002

- Students:
 - Level: L1 and M1 modern letters and L1 theatre (Univ. D'Arras)
 - Number of students par year: 50 à 70
- Nature of teaching: courses (history, genres, theories) – 30 h
- Main resources used: alire

Dates: 2005 -

- Students:
 - Level: M1 digital creation and publishing, translation (Paris8)
 - Number of students par year: 8 to 20
- Nature of teaching: courses on digital poetry (history, genres, theories, works analyses) – 40 h
- Main resources used: alire, Web sites, videos
- Specific resources created for the teaching: digital experiments on works – [BOO 07]
- Continuation: seminar about digital poetry ; publishing in alire

Dates: 2008 -

- Students:
 - Level: M1 hypermedia and communication (Univ. Savoie)
 - Number of students par year: 20
- Nature of teaching: courses (theories, works analyses) – 12 h and creative writing workshop (8 h)
- Main resources used: alire, Web sites, videos

e) Alexandra Saemmer

Dates: 1999 – 2004

- Students:
 - Level: L1 and L2 modern letters (Lyon2)
 - Number of students par year: about 100
- Nature of teaching: courses (presentation of works inside a course about literary information searching) – 4 h
- Main resources used: hypertextual fictions

Dates: 2001 – 2004

- Students:
 - Level: L3 modern letters (Lyon2)
 - Number of students par year: 10 to 20
- Nature of teaching: courses (works analyse, filiations with postmodern theories) – 20 h
- Main resources used: hypertexts of fiction, paper on hypertext theory
- Specific resource created for the teaching: hypertextual graphs of works
- Continuation: each year creative writing workshop ; creation of the Web site Mandel.brot with 2 students en 2001. This Web site publish works by Alexandra and these old students

Date: 2007

- Students:
 - Level: L1 and L2 in fine arts (Univ. St Etienne)
 - Number of students par year: 40
- Nature of teaching: 1 course about hypertextual narratives, one other about digital poetry – 20 h by course ; 1 creative writing workshop of 30 h
- Main resources used: Web sites, flash
- Specific resource created for the teaching: exemples in flash

Dates: 2008 -

- Students:
 - Level: M1 digital creation and publishing, translation, modern letters (Paris 8)
 - Number of students par year: 30
- Nature of teaching: 1 course about digital textuality, creative writing workshop - 40 h
- Main resources used: Web sites, flash, wordpress
- Specific resource created for the teaching: exemples in flash
- Results and continuation: publishing in bleuOrange

This course is complementary to mine

f) Emmanuel Guez

Dates: 2009 –

- Students:
 - Level: last year of theatre study, L3 visual arts, M1 digital arts, from several institutions (Avignon, Vaucluse)
 - Number of students par year: about 90
- Nature of teaching: courses/workshop about mutations of writing and on digital writing – the number of hours depends on the career path: from 4h to 12 h
- Main resources used: Web sites
- Specific resource created for the teaching: adaptation of works for the stage
- Results and continuation: on line creation of works, collaboration with la chartreuse de Villeneuve les Avignon via a manifestation : les sondes (the probes) (<http://sondes.chartreuse.org/>)

g) Isabelle Krywkowski

Dates: 2004 –

- Students:
 - Level: L3 modern letters (Univ Reims then Grenoble3)
 - Number of students par year: 40 à 60
- Nature of teaching: cours (history) – 6 h
- Main resources used: Web sites

Dates: 2010 –

- Students:
 - Level: M1 publishing (Univ Reims then Grenoble3)
 - Number of students par year: 20
- Nature of teaching: courses (history, analyse of works using literary analysis tools) – 16 h
- Main resources used: sites – mainly digital poetry

4 Conclusion

This investigation is far from exhaustive. It would also have been useful to gather direct feedback from students who have taken these courses. It nevertheless shows that the teaching of digital literature has a great deal of potential for dissemination in the teaching of creative writing where it would be very beneficial and well received. Furthermore, it is imperative that the appropriate authorities are made aware of this, especially in the area of literary studies

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