



Luciana Barroso Gattass

Digital Literature: Theoretical and Aesthetic Reflections

Tese de Doutorado

Thesis presented to the Postgraduate Program in Letters of the Departamento de Letras do Centro de Teologia e Ciências Humanas, PUC-Rio as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doutor em Letras.

Adviser: Prof. Heidrun Friedel Krieger Olinto de Oliveira

Rio de Janeiro
September 2011



Luciana Barroso Gattass

**Digital Literature:
Theoretical and Aesthetic Reflections**

Thesis presented to the Postgraduate Program in Letters of the Departamento de Letras do Centro de Teologia e Ciências Humanas, PUC-Rio as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doutor em Letras.

Prof. Heidrun Krieger Olinto de Oliveira

Advisor

Departamento de Letras – PUC-Rio

Prof. Rejane Spitz

Departamento de Artes – PUC-Rio

Prof. Júlio Cesar Valladão Diniz

Departamento de Letras – PUC-Rio

Prof. Marcello de Oliveira Pinto

UERJ

Prof. Erick Felinto de Oliveira

UERJ

Profa. Denise Berruezo Portinari

Coordenadora Setorial do Centro de Teologia
e Ciências Humanas – PUC-Rio

Rio de Janeiro, ____/____/____.

All rights reserved.

Luciana Barroso Gattass

Luciana Gattass earned a magna cum laude BA in Film Studies from Columbia University in 1999 and an MA in Literary Theory from Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio) in 2007. In 2010 she was a recipient of the PUC-Rio/Brown University Visiting Scholar Fellowship.

Bibliographic Data

Gattass, Luciana Barroso

Digital literature: theoretical and aesthetic reflections / Luciana Barroso Gattass; adviser: Heidrun Friedel Krieger Olinto de Oliveira. – 2011.

192 f. : il. (color.) ; 30 cm

Tese (doutorado)–Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Departamento de Letras, 2011.

Inclui bibliografia

1. Letras – Teses. 2. Literatura digital. 3. Processos ergódicos. 4. Produção de presença. 5. Interatividade. 6. Intermedialidade. 7. Remediação. 8. Performance. I. Oliveira, Heidrun Friedel Krieger Olinto de. II. Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro. Departamento de Letras. III. Título.

CDD: 800

To Bernardo,
my very own listening post.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the happy result of tremendous influences from the work and guidance of my advisor, Dr. Heidrun Krieger Olinto de Oliveira. All thanks go to Heidrun, whose rare wisdom, kindness, knowledge and sheer *presence* never fail to astound those who are fortunate enough to cross her path. I would also like to thank the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) for the financial support of my research, as well as the PUC-Rio/Brown University Visiting Scholar Exchange Program – Prof. Karl Erik Schøllhammer, in particular – for a most incredible opportunity to spend a semester at Brown University. I am hugely indebted to my professor and friend, Dr. Júlio César Valladão Diniz for his steadfast support of my work. I should also like to thank the committee – Dr. Júlio Cesar Valladão Diniz, Dr. Erick Felinto de Oliveira, Dr. Marcello de Oliveira Pinto and Dr. Rejane Spitz –, whose careful and interdisciplinary reading of the text left me inspired and encouraged to take on *new new media* challenges. I extend my profound gratitude to my supervisor at Brown University, Dr. Roberto Simanowski, whose work first stirred me into academic motion, and to my professor and friend at the Digital + Media Department at RISD, Dr. Francisco J. Ricardo, who gives me more credit than I give myself. I also want to thank Dr. John Cayley at Brown University for four exceptional visits to the CAVE. Finally, a great many friends, family members and colleagues were instrumental during the protracted gestation period of this thesis. These especially include Cátia Assunção, Teresa Bastos, Stella Caymmi, Danusa Depes, Christian Dutilleux, Marcelo Gattass, Ricardo Gattass, Irene Leonardos (in memoriam), Sergio Machado, Mariana Maia, Mariano Marovatto, Mariana Newlands, Mario de Mello Santos, Cesar Olinto, Carlos Pittella, Debora Sapoznik, Peter Shepherd (in memoriam), Fátima Vasconcellos, Roberta Vieira and Bruno Távora. Their humor and friendship have certainly kept me grounded. Special thanks go to Carolyn Oliveira, Marcia Manhães at Sergio Gattáss Arquitetos Associados, Cássio Gondim at Tecgraf/PUC-Rio and Francisca “Chiquinha” Fereira de Oliveira at Departamento de Letras/PUC-Rio. Their unique blend of efficiency and kindness never ceases to amaze me. Needless to say, I would not have been able to write a single line without the love and support of my parents, Marcia Sampaio Barroso and Sergio Gattass.

Abstract

Gattass, Luciana Barroso. Heidrun Krieger Olinto. (Adviser). **Digital Literature: Theoretical and Aesthetic Reflections**. Rio de Janeiro, 2011. 192p. Ph.D. Thesis – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

The emergence of a new phenomenon – digital literature – within the field of literary studies calls for the reorganization and creation of new theoretical and analytical repertoires. Since digital literature partakes of literary tradition as well as introduces critical medial and conceptual innovations that challenge the very concept of literary frontiers and spaces, its scholarly analysis demands significant reformulations in literary studies. As models of communication change, so do the reception and production processes accompanying these changes. Within these altered scenarios, the thesis *Digital Literature: Theoretical and Aesthetic Reflections* is a response to the aesthetic and theoretical challenges brought on by computer-based literature. As a methodological strategy, the thesis articulates recent trends in the theory of digital aesthetics – remediation (BOLTER), eventilization (HAYLES), correlations of performativity, intermediality and interactivity with meaning-driven analysis (SIMANOWSKI), *Medienumbrüche* (GENDOLLA & SCHÄFER) – with theories of production of presence (GUMBRECHT), autopoietic communicative models (LUHMANN) and close-readings of digital works. By scripting a dialogue with key theorists from print literary theory as well as new media theorists and artists in the burgeoning field, the thesis offers conceptual and theoretical contributions to the formulation of a poetics of new media.

Keywords

Digital literature, ergodic aesthetics, production of presence, interactivity, intermediality, remediation, flickering signifier, materiality, embodiment, *Medienumbrüche*.

Resumo

Gattass, Luciana Barroso. Heidrun Krieger Olinto. (Orientadora). **Literatura Digital: Desafios Teóricos e Estéticos**. Rio de Janeiro, 2011. 192p. Tese de Doutorado – Departamento de Letras, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro.

A emergência de um novo fenômeno – a literatura digital – na esfera disciplinar dos estudos literários provoca a reorganização e invenção de seus instrumentos analíticos e de seus circuitos de comunicação. Concepções de literatura, historicamente instáveis e deslocando constantemente as suas fronteiras e seu horizonte de expectativa, hoje são marcadas também por travessias do espaço escritural. Neste quadro a tese, *Literatura Digital: Desafios Teóricos e Estéticos* responde aos desafios teóricos e estéticos contemporâneos elaborando novas formas de saber que permitem entender e circunscrever a literatura digital em contextos de produção e recepção alterados. Inserida simultaneamente em uma tradição e defendendo o seu lugar no cenário contemporâneo, este tipo de literatura requer assim revisões e reformulações significativas. Por enquanto ainda faltam contornos à própria literatura digital, e os processos de teorização circulam em espaços predominantemente transdisciplinares. Ao estabelecerem reciprocidade através da epistemologia da complexidade, a cultura midiática e a teoria da literatura vêm desenvolvendo alianças no campo das possibilidades analíticas das obras literárias digitais. Como estratégia metodológica, a tese alia teorias de produção de presença (GUMBRECHT), eventilização (HAYLES), remediação (BOLTER), teorias autopoieticas de comunicação (LUHMANN), análise estética do fenômeno digital – interatividade, intermedialidade e performance (SIMANOWSKI) – e *Medienumbrüche* (GENDOLLA & SCHÄFER) a um olhar sobre realizações concretas (*close-readings*). Em suma, a tese oferece um repertório conceitual inovador formulando fundamentos para uma nova poética digital.

Palavras-chave

literatura digital, processos ergódicos, produção de presença, interatividade, intermedialidade, remediação, materialidade.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	11
2. Looking Closely	18
2.1 Methodological Justifications	18
2.2 Going Overboard	29
2.3 Intermediations	33
3. Pre-Configurations and (Re)entries	42
3.1 Pre-history: The Extensions of Man & Cognitive Transitions	42
3.2 Digital Humanities: Hypertext and Beyond	55
3.3 Everyday Cartesianism and Its Discontents	76
4. Theoretical Landscapes: Towards a Definition of Digital Literature	85
4.1 The <i>Genesis</i> of New Poetic Spaces: Holopoetry and Digital Literature	85
4.2 Upheavals in Literary Theory	94
4.3 Digital Aesthetics	100
4.4 Defining Digital Literature	115
5. Concrete Digitalities	126
5.1 Finding Concreteness in Digitality: Analog and Digital Concrete Poetry Meets <i>Text Rain</i>	126
5.2 Exhibit A: <i>Text Rain</i>	134
6. Digital Proximities & Aesthetic Mediations	144
6.1 Being (in Motion): A Few Hasty Theoretical Conclusions	144
6.2 Remembering the Cave	161
6.3 The Fabric of Our Lives: Ubiquitous Computing and Literary Communication	169
6.4 Concluding Remarks: Open Endings and Statistical Virtuositities	175
7. Bibliography	181

Images

Fig 1. Shelley Jackson's <i>Patchwork Girl</i> (1995)	21
Fig. 2. <i>Overboard</i> by John Cayley	32
Fig. 3. Alex Gopher and Antoine Bardou-Jacquet's <i>The Child</i> (1999)	38
Fig. 4. Alex Gopher and Antoine Bardou-Jacquet's <i>The Child</i> (1999)	39
Fig. 5. Jeffrey Shaw's <i>Legible City</i> (1989-91)	40
Fig. 6. Facsimile of 2nd century papyrus roll of Plato's <i>Phaedrus</i>	47
Fig. 7. Facsimile of minuscule parchment	48
Fig. 8. Screen from Michael Joyce's <i>Afternoon: A Story</i> (1987)	58
Fig. 9. Marc Saporta's <i>Composition No. 1</i>	59
Fig. 10. <i>The Impermanence Agent</i> – Noah Wardrip-Fruin (2003)	69
Fig. 11. <i>HOLO/OLHO (HOLO/EYE)</i> 25 x 30 cm. Reflection holograms mounted on wood and Plexiglass (1983)	87
Fig. 12. <i>OCO</i> 30 x 30 cm. White light reflection hologram (1985)	88
Fig. 13. Eduardo Kac – <i>Interfaces</i> (1990)	90
Fig. 14. Translation of the biblical sentence into Morse code	91
Fig. 15. Noah Wardrip-Fruin's <i>Regime Change</i> (2003)	102
Fig. 16. Noah Wardrip-Fruin's <i>News Reader</i> (2004)	102
Fig. 17. Frame from <i>Web Stalker</i> by I/O/D (1997)	105
Fig. 18. Caleb Larsen's <i>A Tool to Deceive and Slaughter</i> (2009)	110
Fig. 19. Snapshot from Zachary Booth Simpson's <i>Mondrian</i> (2004)	113
Fig. 20. Electronic Literature Collection Vol. 1	115
Fig. 21. Electronic Literature Collection Vol. 2	116
Fig. 22. Décio Pinatari's <i>Terra</i> (1956)	129
Fig. 23. Ana Maria Uribe's <i>Gymnasia</i> (1998)	130
Fig. 24. <i>Text Rain</i> by Romy Achituv and Camille Utterback (1999)	138
Fig. 25. Still image from Julius Popp's <i>bit.fall</i>	160
Fig. 26. <i>Screen</i> (all walls) by Noah Wardrip-Fruin (2002)	165
Fig. 27. <i>Aphasia</i> (2010) by Claire Kwong	168
Fig. 28. Diagram of <i>Deep Walls</i> , part of Snibbe's "Screen Series"	172
Fig. 29. Image from Scott Snibbe's <i>Deep Walls</i>	173
Fig. 30 Still image from Ben Rubin and Mark Hasen's <i>Listening Post</i>	176

Think of the Turing test as a magic trick. Like all good magic tricks, the test relies on getting you to accept at an early stage assumptions that will determine how you interpret what you see later. The important intervention comes not when you try to determine which is the man, the woman, or the machine. Rather, the important intervention comes much earlier, when the test puts you into a cybernetic circuit that splices your will, desire, and perception into a distributed cognitive system in which represented bodies are joined with enacted bodies through mutating and flexible machine interfaces. As you gaze at the flickering signifiers scrolling down the computer screens, no matter what identifications you assign to the embodied entities that you cannot see, you have already become posthuman.

Katherine Hayles, 1999