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Lescouet Emmanuelle

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Notifiction: everyday literature

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Disponible également en ligne : <https://imaginarium.hypotheses.org/445>

Digital literature has taken hold of smartphones, these everyday objects that most of us own (as proven by INSEE surveys). Following Cavallo and Chartier (2001) or Hayles, we can affirm that the same work will be different depending on the medium used to experience it. Similarly, depending on the medium, literary artworks must meet different technical imperatives. To be truly relevant on these objects, they must adapt to their own syntaxes (Masure, 2017). This appropriation – this detour – is fundamental in what we call electronical native works. Electronical literature feeds off its history: the rapid evolution of media as much as of practices allows for the incorporation of acquired narrative mechanics. For example, smartfictions integrates multiple-choice navigation from interactive fictions. They enrich the narrative grammars (Aarseth, 1997).

Notifictions – as describe by Andy Fischer Wright and Servanne Monjour – in between others – are exactly in this dynamic.

The works use then the already known interfaces to facilitate the handling and the comprehension of the work. Among these interfaces, the home screen and the notification center are particularly important, as well as the possible mimicry of an email interface, for example (Lescouet, 2021). These spaces are known because they are used on a daily basis. In the case we are interested in: the reading spaces (with vertical scrolling to view the feed); the input space below, the summoning of selfies and emoticons; send buttons, etc. (Souchier, 2019). This familiarity built outside of literary works allows for the construction of habit (Citton, 2012). This habit leads to no longer noticing the particular syntax; the interface and the gestures to activate it.

Notifictions are narrative works based on this principle: they organize their content in brief fragments that follow one another, interspersing pauses between each. The reading is then cut up, to allow a discussion between the real time and the extradiegetic time. The brevity of the text mimics the syntax of messages and short communications that form the written exchanges of our daily lives. This brevity, its orality, certain abbreviated formulations, for example, feed into this sense of immediacy (of reality and minimal deviation in Ryan's (2015) sense, in particular). Immersion is a major issue in literary studies, perhaps even

more so in digital literature, on the border between video game and novel writing (Schaeffer, 1999). This immersion, through identification and the reversal of attention, lets the imaginary take the first place in the economy of the individual's attention, and forces us to think about the mechanics specific to digital media.

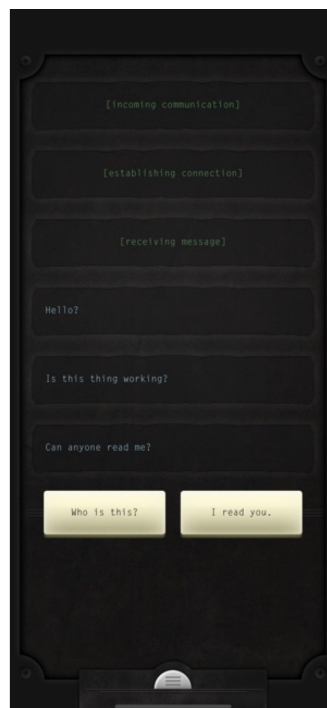
The temporality of reading, and more broadly, of aesthetic experiences, is seen as a bubble of time (Macé, 2011), an enclosed moment devoted to a particular activity. This delimitation is very close to what Huizinga (1938) theorized as the *magic circle*. This habit is broken here by the opening of smartphones sensors: time, duration, space, geolocation, movements... Notifications imply a novelty: in their common – non-literary – use, they signal a change. They often require an action: answering the received message, reading the content of a new publication, performing actions on a game, etc. These induced reactions reinforce the appeal of the work: the notification then signals a new content available, but the habit gives a form of imperative to this informative message.

As the notifications arrive according to a narrative temporality specific to the work, the reader is not necessarily present at the moment of its reception. The reading is thus imposed on his or her daily life. The non-aesthetic activities must be interrupted to "respond" to the work, to participate in the brief reading available at that moment, and to relaunch the plot.

Some works can be experienced at any time: they can be started and read over the course of days, from any day. For example, the *Lifeline* series by Dave Justus (Figures 1-4), where we embody the only terrestrial contact with an astronaut shipwrecked on the Moon, or *Bury Me My Love* (Figure 5, 6), where we accompany a young Syrian woman who has left for Europe, embarking on a voyage her companion had planned for himself; she embarks alone, however, and thus through journey seeks to embody him. Other works use this temporality to accompany particular events. For example, anniversaries of historical events such as *Hanna La Rouge* (Figure 7-9) by Anita Hugi and David Dufresne, a work celebrating the centennial of a strike in 1918 in Switzerland, but also of the feminist struggles that accompanied these social struggles. The reader follows the events day by day, even several times a day: demonstrations, arrests, and taking a stand. Through a strong polytextuality (Langlet, 2006) gathering newspaper articles, archives, notebooks and diaries, it is possible to follow a daily reconstruction of the facts.



Figure 1. *Lifeline*, by Dave Justus. Three Minutes Games, 2016.



Figures 2, 3, 4. *Lifeline* interface.



Figure 5. *Burying Me My Love*, by Pierre Corbinais, Florent Maurin, and Matthieu Godet. The Pixel Hunt, 2017.

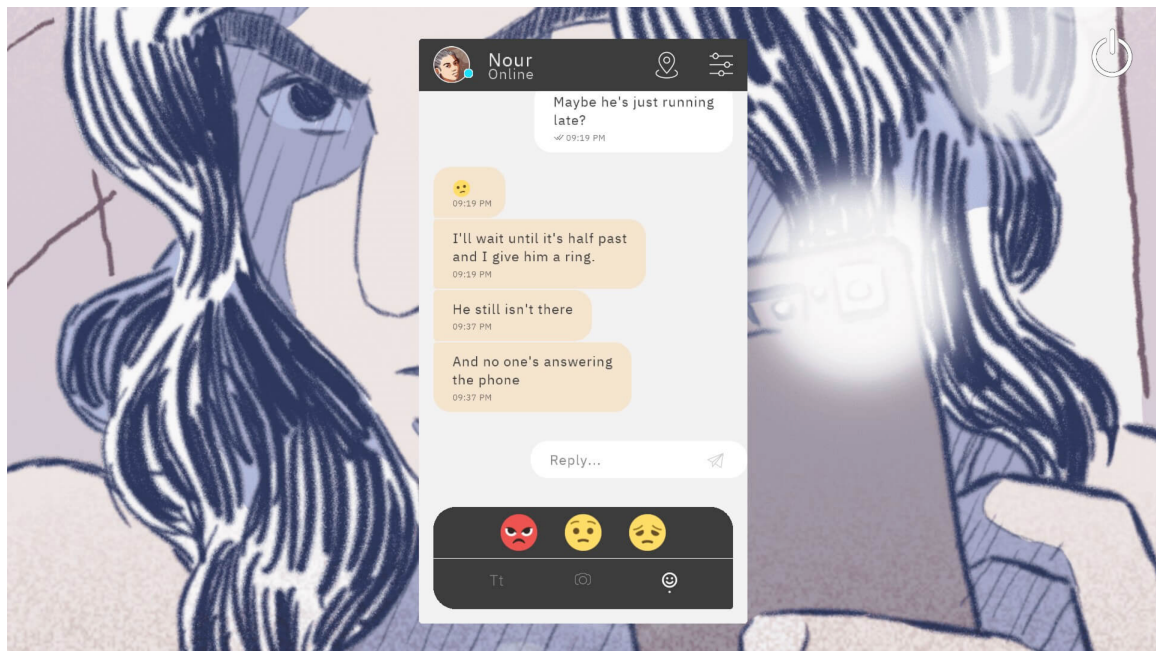


Figure 6. *Burying Me My Love* interface.



Figure 7. *Hannah la Rouge*, by Anita Hugi, David Dufresne, and Anja Kofmel. Phone Stories, 2018.

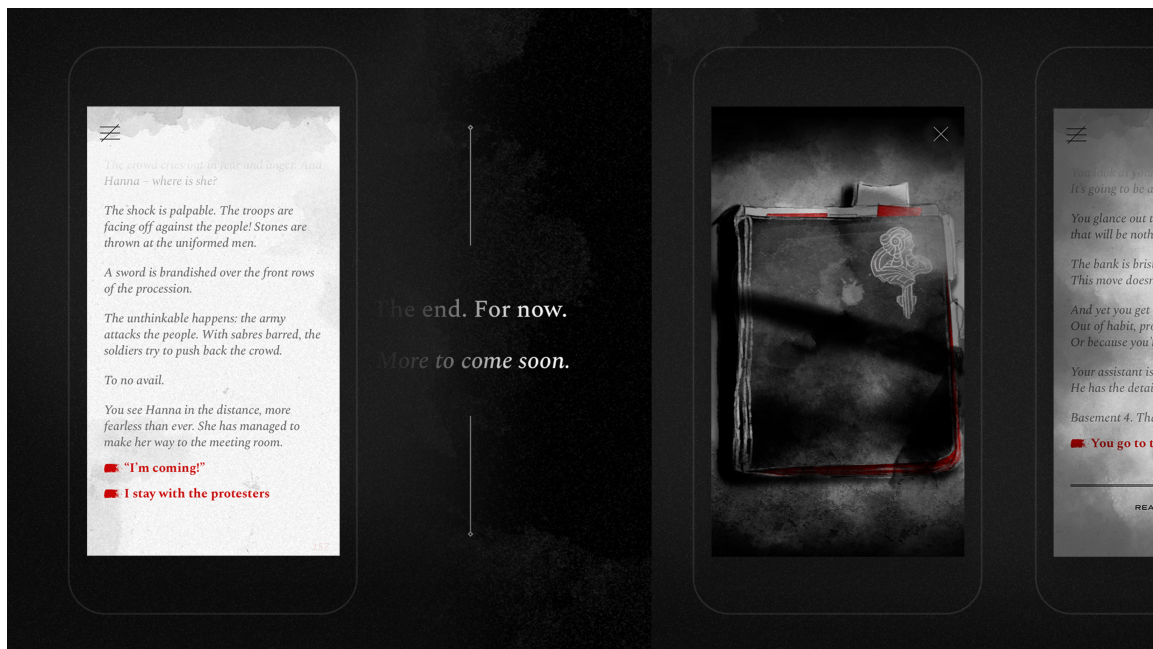


Figure 8, 9. *Hannah la Rouge* interface.

The challenge is to make the work believable through an immersive temporality: like any chat story, the narration is based on an epistolary form whose interface mimics texting or chatting interfaces (Lescouet, 2022). The reproduction of a known space, one we use in our intimate lives in contexts completely unrelated to fiction, reinforces the mechanisms of literary identification. It is much easier to want to communicate with a protagonist whose messages – the textual fragments of the work – are inscribed in the same spaces, following the same codes, as intimate correspondence.

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