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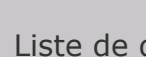
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Appels en cours



## Literary Mechanisms

### Plan



- 1) "Writing Machines"
- 2) "Literary Modeling Machines"
- 3) "Transmitter-Receiver : Interpretation Machines"



In the ere of excessive mechanization, in which the automation of tasks and the development of apparatuses aims more and more to assist and improve the human being in all aspects of its existence, it is pertinent to question the role of the machine and of the effects that extra-literary processes have had – and continue to have – on literature within the larger relationships that exist between technique and culture. In keeping with the notion of "an internal aesthetic of technical objects" put forth by Gilbert Simondon and whose ideas have been recently updated at the conference "Gilbert Simondon ou l'invention du futur" (« Gilbert Simondon or the Invention of the Future») held in Cerisy in 2013 (<http://www.cdic-cerisy.asso.fr/simondon13.html>), it is worth considering in what ways, with the advent of a technical dimension within culture, the "Mechanism" shapes and clarifies our overall conception of the literary phenomenon.

Contemporary debates that bring up the danger that the machine might represent for literature seem to share a critical space with those that, on the contrary, embrace the machine and place it at the heart of literary creation. Let us forget that rhetoric was once considered a kind of "automation" of writing, or that the expression of the most technical encyclopedism were the objects of numerous poetic appropriations. All these dates seem to confirm the ambiguous praise of the writing apparatus that we find at the beginning of Franz Kafka's novel "In the Penal Colony", which offers two readings, each of which is problematic: on the one hand, the objectivity of the autonomous machine that engraves sentences on the backs of the condemned, and on the other, the horrifying perspective of the "human" being overtaken by its own creation. Questioning the intervention of the *mechanical* in the literary would therefore be a way of questioning the literary dimension of writing, the definition of literature as well as its reach, without neglecting the series of risks and obstacles that come with it.

Beyond the question of mechanism, which we find at the heart of Oulipian poetics, it is pertinent to study the way in which the consideration of literary works is regenerated and reactivated, with the evolution of mechanisms of composition and/or of content diffusion, for example, on a technical or data processing level, as it was broached by the ALGORITM<sup>1</sup> seminars whose aim was to study the central role of the machine in the processes of literary creation and reception. Our reflection on the evolution of the relationship between machines and literature is nonetheless not limited to modern times, which are dominated by questions surrounding the digital. This subject invites us to embrace a wide historical period, from print to automated-writing and to word-inventing machines like Harsdörffer's Denkring (thought-ring) in the 17th century<sup>2</sup>.

This call for paper proposes to consider the mechanism and the machine as technologies that influence the literary practice. We invite contributors to study not the *theme* of the machine in literature (robots, technological progress related to travel – trains, cars, planes...), but the role that the machine takes on as a *medium*, in other words, as an agent of textual production, transformation and reception. For the role of the machine is that of generating transformation: it affects writing in its material and symbolic dimensions. Consequently, we invite contributors to explore the effects that writing by way of machine might have on our approach to literature, according to the following axes, which are in no way exhaustive:

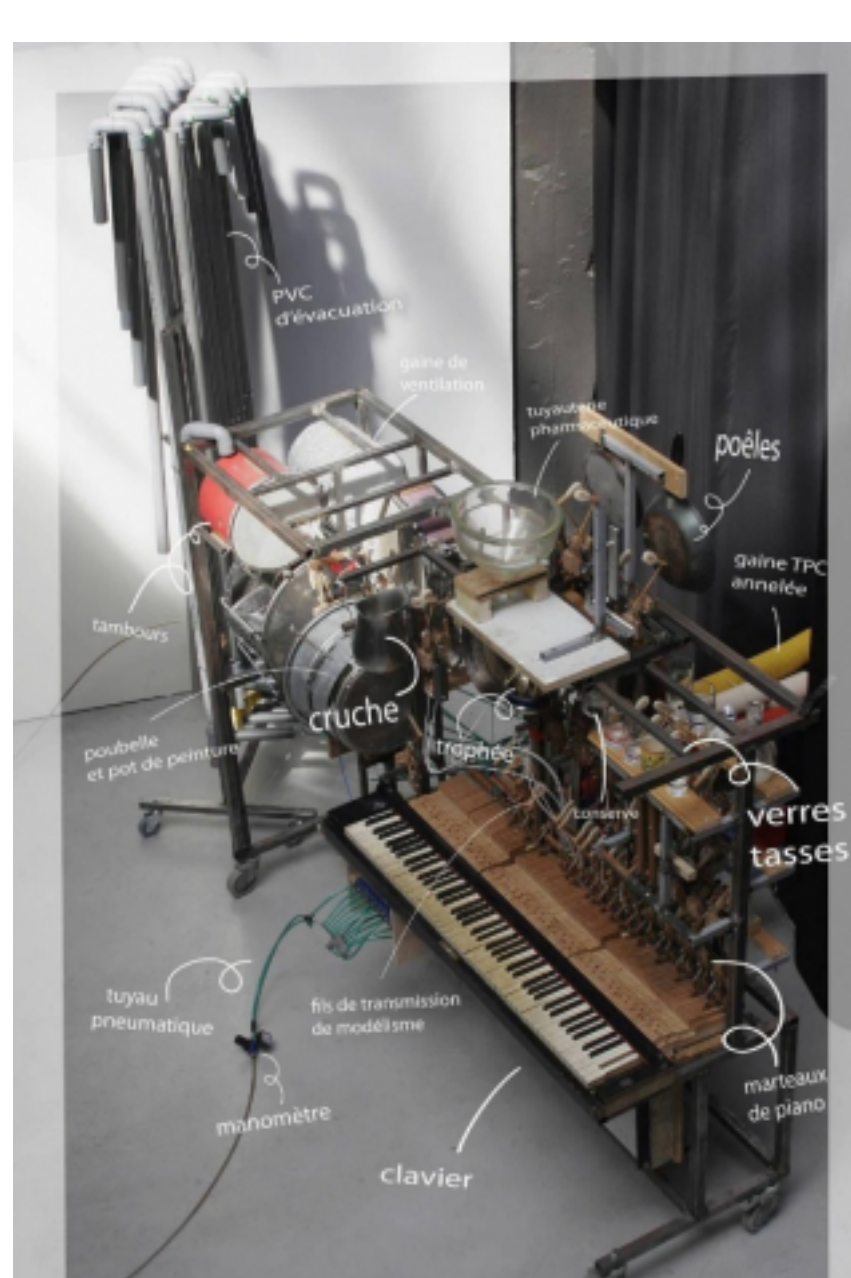
### 1) "Writing Machines"

It would first be interesting to consider the forms that technology takes on when it is put to the service of literary creation. In particular, it seems necessary to consider the materiality of "reading machines" as well as the machines that produce text through an "intermediary", like the typewriter (a "writing machine"), or by "delegation", through algorithms. The case of Nanni Balestrini's poem *Tape Mark I* (1961) generated through an IBM 7070<sup>3</sup> concretely poses the question of the limits of a work: is the work limited to the production of the computer or does it include the algorithm that spawned it?

On a larger scale, we can consider the questions raised by the publication, the reproduction or the transfer of this type of work onto machines or other more recent support systems. The question of automatic text production could also be studied taking into consideration both the role it creates for itself, and the role it entrusts to the human agent. For example, digital poetry could be taken into account, and of course, the case of automatic translation software, which raises the question of the status of the translator-author within this configuration.

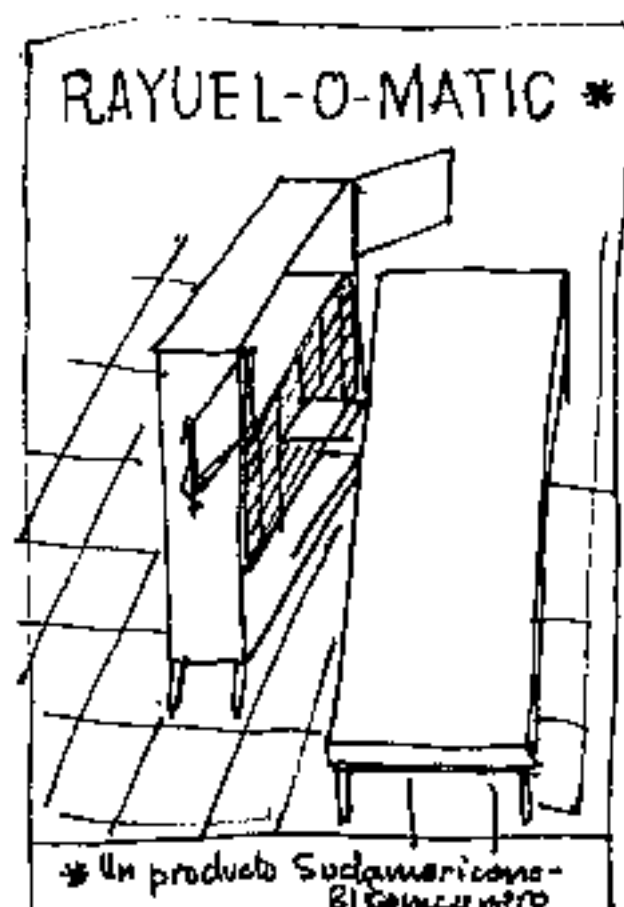
### 2) "Literary Modeling Machines"

This call for papers also suggests the need to consider the integration of mechanisms of creation and of dissemination in literary practices that emerge as ideal or model modalities of creation imposed from the outside. We might consider the uses of the mechanical metaphor in literary criticism and theory, starting with Calvino's *Literary Machine*, or more specifically the vocabulary used for theory and for the analysis of literary processes. In order to evaluate the effects of mechanical literature on reading, we could also consider the creations that can be made out of literature, that is to say, objects that borrow a process or a narrative element from the structure of a text, following the example of the Piancocktail drinking machine imagined by Boris Vian in *Froth on the Daydream*:



<https://balises.bpi.fr/musique/le-piancocktail>

We could also consider the example of the reading machine RAYUEL-O-MATIC, apparatus created by Juan Esteban Fassio based on the Julio Cortázar's novel *Hopscotch*:



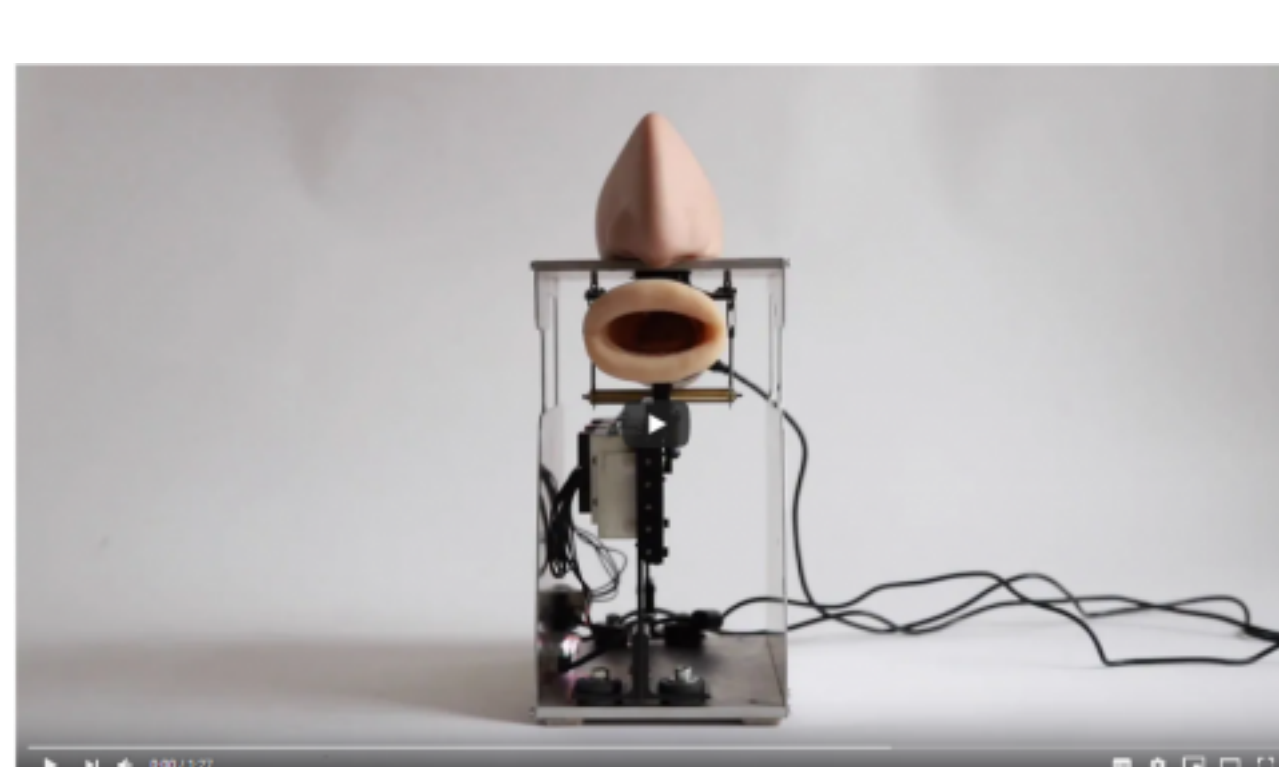
<http://www.enriquevilamatas.com/escritores/img/CortazarImg003.gif>

If the interference between the *mechanical* and the literary can clearly be situated in current debates over the evolution of the status of the author and the role of subjectivity in the creative process, which has become more and more mechanical, this interference should also be considered from the point of view of material support systems and the interactions with texts that they can incite. To put it differently, we could ask what relationships writing and/or reading by way of machine intervention nurtures or maintains with the world.

### 3) "Transmitter-Receiver : Interpretation Machines"

We could then also consider the ways in which digital supports shape reception, whether it be through the digital book, distribution platforms or textual formatting that modifies readability such as Twitter or Snapchat. We could also consider new modalities of reading, including interactivity and more broadly the new modalities of attention that have developed in reaction to mechanized cultural objects, discussed by N. Katherine Hayles in *How We Think : Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* and Yves Citton in *The Ecology of Attention*.

To the extent that the machine puts the literary text in action and creates a framework for circumstantial reception that goes beyond orality and the visual, we could also reflect on the role of the machine in performance – often linked to other means of artistic expression. For not only does the machine modify the modalities of literary production and reception, it also intervenes in the dissemination and circulation of texts in the public space, as can be seen in the example of certain works of art such as *The Prayer* by Diemut Strebe:



<https://theprayer.diemutstrebe.com/public/videos/video-1.mp4>

This piece exposed at the Pompidou Center functions with an algorithm that allows it to recite "prayers" taken from a corpus of religious texts, which are then recombined and recreated automatically. The public nature of these attempts invites us to consider the political implications of such forms of transmission as well as the dissemination of texts by way of machine.

Proposals (3000 characters), accompanied by a brief bibliography (**titles only**), must be submitted by **December 2<sup>d</sup> 2020** at the latest in .DOC or .RTF format to the address [lgcrevue@gmail.com](mailto:lgcrevue@gmail.com). **In a separate file, the sender should send a brief presentation of him/herself.** The articles selected should be sent by **February 28<sup>th</sup> 2021**. We remind you that the journal of general and comparative literature **TRANS- accepts articles written in French, English, Spanish and Italian.** The Committee evaluates proposals with the following criteria: **pertinence to the call for papers, originality** of the corpus, quality of the **comparative approach** or quality of the **theoretical reflection** on the proposed theme. Articles **having already been published** (as articles, books, or book chapters), including in another language, **will not be selected.**

## Notes



<sup>1</sup> The seminars of the Literary Archives of the group Oulipo : digital (re)creations, techniques and mathematics (ALGORITM) were animated by Hélène Caignagnolle-Catel and Camille Bloomfield at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3 within the framework of « Différences de potentiel », <https://difepeo.hypotheses.org/424>.

<sup>2</sup> Denkring by Harsdörffer, 1651. Creation in 2013 for the exhibition *Erlebniswelt Deutsche Sprache* : [https://www.wochenspiegel-web.de/autothumb/620x400/Erlebniswelt\\_Sprache398.Jpg](https://www.wochenspiegel-web.de/autothumb/620x400/Erlebniswelt_Sprache398.Jpg).

<sup>3</sup> <https://zk.m.de/en/tape-mark-1-by-nanni-balestrini-research-and-historical-reconstruction>.

