Hybrid

Revue des arts et médiations humaines

7 | 2021

Le réseau créatif des langu.ages

Welcome to the facebook Colony

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Translator: Saskia Brown

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/hybrid/680>

DOI: 10.4000/hybrid.680

ISSN: 2276-3538

This article is a translation of:

Bienvenue dans la Colonie facebook - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/hybrid/675> [fr]

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Vincennes

Electronic reference

Alexandra Saemmer, "Welcome to the facebook Colony", *Hybrid* [Online], 7 | 2021, Online since 08 April 2021, connection on 15 April 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/hybrid/680> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/hybrid.680>

This text was automatically generated on 15 April 2022.

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Welcome to the facebook Colony

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

N.B. The propaganda posters of the Colony appearing in this article were created by the fictional profile Pavel Karandash.

Fig. 1

The facebook profile of Anna-Maria Wegekrez, the initiator of *Nouvelles de la Colonie* [News from the Colony], a collaborative dystopia on facebook.

- 1 The Colony¹ is our platform. We are its public officials. My name is Anna-Maria Wegekrez, and for the last year and a half I have had the role of community manager in one of the most populous Colonies in the world, facebook. The community of News from the Colony was initially linked to the activities of Jean-Pierre Balpe's fictional profiles, but it eventually became independent. This was no easy task, however. In April 2017, the Colony's surveillance unit disabled my original profile, Anna Wegekrez. One explanation for this is that, in posting archival documents, Anna had pointed out once too often the "omissions" in her birthplace's narrative of its Nazi past. For the artificial neural networks which facebook uses to assess the degree of "violence" of images posted are trained to detect Nazi insignia. Yet understanding supposes interpretation, and context fundamentally influences the construction of meaning. Neural networks alone are incapable of interpreting an image. All they can do is to identify its content. Another explanation for the disabling of Anna Wegekrez's account could be that for some years the platform has been making periodic efforts to track down fake profiles. Whatever the reason, this incident demonstrates that we are not the owners of this Colony for which we work by giving it daily news of our existence.

Fig. 2

The original profile of Anna-Maria Wegekrez was disabled, overnight and without warning, and without it being possible for the author to retrieve her data.

Fig. 3

Illustration for *News from the Colony* by Pavel Karandash.

- 2 To recap: *News from the Colony* is a collaborative dystopia on facebook² created to describe the platform's "conditions of acceptability," in the light of Marie-José Mondzain's statement that "colonialism has become a figure that is imposed globally, in the sly form of a pseudo-culture of universality in which the communication industries deftly combine terrors and pleasures."³ The Colony's "civil servants" drive this colonial machine through their own actions, as though inescapably. At the same

time, through their imaginative powers, they attempt to “undermine the real, appropriate its malleability, and introduce the category of the possible and the force of the indeterminate into words, images and gestures.”⁴

Fig. 4

The profile of Rachel Charlus, who participates in Jean-Pierre Balpe's *Un monde incertain* [An Uncertain World], a work partly created on facebook.

- 3 *News from the Colony* is inspired by an older community called *Un monde incertain* [An Uncertain World] made up of some twenty fictional profiles on facebook managed by Jean-Pierre Balpe.⁵ Thanks to facebook's tools, these profiles, for example Rachel Charlus, can simulate real daily lives, while also engaging in in-depth reflection on digital memory and how it is handled by the apparatus [dispositif].
- 4 This article is a practical demonstration from the inside of the experimental processes of *News from the Colony*, by Anna-Maria Wegekneuz, from the viewpoint of a fictional profile managed by its female author, an academic lecturer.

Facebook's architexts

- 5 What characterises the apparatus facebook, and those like it, is that the rules of behaviour imposed on users are mediated by technologies that the user can appropriate without any apparent financial contribution in return.⁶ The technological know-how is mobilised in the editorial organisation of moments of lived experience which can be shared with others, whether friends in real life, or strangers.
- 6 Most of those participating in the story of *News from the Colony* met on facebook thanks to the algorithms that organise individuals into communities. Some of these individuals have never met “in real life,” despite two intense years of writing. The creation of profiles under pseudonyms permits a liberatory play with identity markers. *News from*

the Colony, just like *An Uncertain World*, also gestures suggestively towards the genre of auto-fiction. There was much speculation about the authors' real identities. Over a long period, Ivan Arcelov presumed that Anna-Maria Wegekrez and Brice Quarante were created by one and the same female author, whereas Nathalie Bri Ran believed that Brice Quarante was Jean-Pierre Balpe, and that Ivan Arcelov's profile was the male counterpart of Anna-Maria Wegekrez.

- 7 *News from the Colony* and *An Uncertain World* are emerging fictions, directly linked to passing time. Of course, Rachel Charlus's identity is not consigned in the local record office of Quimperlé, Brittany, her stated place of residence on facebook, but the choice of this place nonetheless anchors the character in the reality of its author, Jean-Pierre Balpe, who actually lived there. Moreover, facebook inserts a link to the official website of the town mentioned in one's personal details. When one creates a facebook account, one has to fill in a long form, which organises one's personal data bureaucratically, so that it can be associated with other entities, and linguistic, geographical, professional, political and confessional communities.
- 8 The metaleptic effects of the news feeds of fictional profiles are sometimes amusing, at other times troubling, as for example when fictional profiles replied to facebook's Safety Check following the terrorist attacks which took place in Paris in November 2015. When carried out by a fictional character, the actual, physical manipulation in real time of facebook's Safety Check tool, while encouraging readers to do likewise, exceeds the reality effect⁷ so dear to nineteenth-century Realists. Jorge Luis Borges explains how unsettling metalepsis can be for a reader: "These inventions suggest that if the characters of a fiction can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictional characters."⁸
- 9 Yves Jeanneret and Emmanuël Souchier call the standardised structures, the prescriptions and injunctions guiding the user's expression on digital platforms "architexts".⁹ The bureaucratic organisation of signs makes it easier for the individual user's profile to be established, and helps communities sharing similar tastes and preferences to be formed. The data collected on users can be exploited for commercial ends by the culture industries, the media, and other businesses. However, these processes rely on the user's profile being *true*. One of the basic pledges the user makes to facebook is that he or she will respect the contract of autobiography. Facebook was not set up for writing fiction: when users adopt pseudonyms, they are playing cat and mouse with an enterprise for which only the *real* traces of *real* people count.

Express yourself!

- 10 Digital social media are full of prescriptions directing users' expressive practices. Thus, until recently, French users of facebook were encouraged to post with the exhortation "*Exprimez-vous*" ["Express yourself"]. On reading this injunction, how can one not think of the libertarian utopias of the beginnings of Internet, where everyone would at last be able to express themselves freely thanks to technology? Maud Bonenfant sees in the exhortation "Express Yourself" the age-old practice of the examination of conscience, as it was practised in Catholicism. To free the soul, a specific place and an expert ear are required: "The truth about one's acts and thoughts is not just produced by the subject, but by an authoritative interpreter (a judge, a priest, a psychologist), who is

part of the system of institutional control, and who consequently instates a relation of power with the subject.”¹⁰ Architexts encode models of the world and systems of value.

- 11 What made facebook change its wording in 2020 to “*Que voulez-vous dire?*” [“What’s on your mind?,” literally, “What do you want to say?”]? The verb “to want,” in its brutality, has replaced the imperative. It perhaps signals the need to be careful, since the user does not control the interpretation of what he or she wants to express. We are here in the aftermath of the controversies around sexist and racist language, and hate speech, which led facebook, as a result of public pressure, to introduce procedures for reporting and censoring these transgressions, thus burying the utopia of free expression. The question “What do you want to say?” also evokes Yann Le Cun, a researcher and engineer at facebook, who states that “Determining intention is indispensable for treating information searches.”¹¹
- 12 The tab “Activity,” just below the space where posts are published, has options like “Reading,” “Listening to,” which link to productions, activities, places and media. There is also an option “Memorialization.” Anna-Maria Wegekraud, whose facebook page is configured in French, is encouraged to remember “a very special person,” “all the moments of happiness we lived together,” “long-standing friends,” and “soldiers fallen in battle.” Her godmother, Marga Bamberger, who uses the German version of facebook, has the surprising option of remembering “the king.” These variations reveal what facebook knows about its users and their linguistic community, and the personal tastes and preferences expressed by their profile to date. Invitations also steer users towards popular products in their community: the newspaper *Le Monde*, Oreo biscuits, and so forth.

Fig. 5

The tab for posting on facebook, with a drop-down menu of predetermined suggestions below it.

- Fig. 6

- The first layer of the neural network transforms each word, represented by its index in the lexicon, into a vector of embedding by means of a linear layer LUT (lock-up table). After practising on millions of texts, these vectors represent all the useful information relating to the entry words. Closely related words such as “dog” or “cat” are represented by similar vectors.¹²

- The machine is presented with a piece of text where certain words are masked, and it is trained to find the missing words. The system learns to represent the text's sense and structure simply through prediction of the missing words.¹³

- 16 Facebook's translator has been trained on open-source databases such as the debates in the European Parliament.¹⁴ It also calls on users to improve the machine's performance by grading its output and suggesting alternative translations. Frederic Kaplan has observed that a new form of "grammatisation" is gaining ground due to these tools.¹⁵ In order to analyse this development, one can apply Pierce's semiotics to the process, as Warren Sack has done.¹⁶
- 17 For Charles Sanders Peirce,¹⁷ the relation between the sign (for example the word "ear") and the object designated (the organ ear) is mediated by a third instance, called the "interpretant". The "interpretant" is the attitude that the sign elicits in the receiver. The process is orientated by the material contours of the sign, for example the outline of the word "ear," but also by existing models, instituted knowledge, and systems of belonging and belief that the human subject mobilises when he or she perceives and interprets something. The interpretant therefore introduces variations into the social construction of meaning. In tools such as facebook's machine translator, the mediation is carried out by the "neural networks" which are actually mathematical functions. The social dimension is not neglected, because the most successful translation is produced by calculations that are based on real language use. However, there remains the question of the language use implied in the choice of certain databases of texts: to what extent does Anna-Maria Wegekneuz speak like a Member of the European Parliament in her posts, as translated by facebook? More generally, the neuroscientific world view, the models of perception and cognition that lie behind recent developments in machine learning, are themselves questionable. Yann Le Cun pinpoints this when discussing one of the systems used in this field, "which was trained using many sentences such as 'the milk is on the table,' but never 'the car is on the table.'"¹⁸
- 18 By way of illustration: when Anna-Maria Wegekneuz complained of all the pressures she was under in the Colony, the profile Marga Bamberger reassured her, in 2018, that "*Je te suis corps et âme.*" The sentence has a double meaning in French because the word "suis" is a form of the verb "to be" [*être – je suis, I am*], but also, equally, of the verb "to follow" [*suivre – je suis, I follow*]. Facebook's English translation excludes the second possibility ("I follow you with my body and soul"), and displays only the first one ("I'm your body and soul"):

Fig. 7

Facebook's machine translation of the sentence "*Je te suis corps et âme,*" in 2018.

- 19 In 2020, the translation was different, closer to the second sense – but the first sense had disappeared. How to explain this change? To answer this question, one would need to examine the databases of texts on which the translation tool had been training for two years. This is obviously impossible.

Fig. 8

Facebook's machine translation of the sentence "*Je te suis corps et âme*," in 2020.

- 20 The salient point for Frederic Kaplan and Warren Sack, however, is that in providing machine translation and a generator of micro-texts, facebook (like other major digital technology companies) is promoting a kind of pidgin language whose "syntax and vocabulary are linked to the linguistic possibilities of a machine."¹⁹ The help received by users to express themselves relies on certain models – a model of perception and understanding, and a model of the world – which are encoded in algorithms and channelled by a choice of databases. These prior decisions, whose main objective is to create a controlled linguistic market, are not disclosed to users.
- 21 Indeed, if users' communication is to be exploitable and profitable, it must be standardised, and correctly expressed, avoiding spelling and grammar mistakes, misplaced punctuation, metaphors, irony, and so forth. The less the user transgresses the preset structures, the stronger the link that can be made between his or her tastes, and the commercial, media, or political recommendations offered by the apparatus. Facebook's text generator and translator are just two of the many tools that prefigure the already widespread rationalisation and standardisation of the activity of writing, as shown also in Google's or Grammarly's auto-complete tools, which anticipate what the human being wishes to express as author, and replace him or her. In the future, the user faced with the question "*What do you want to say?*" might simply formulate an intention, and the machine will carry out its actual expression.
- 22 Anna-Maria Wegekrez, Ivan Arcelov, Olga Limitrova and Pavel Karandash, from *News from the Colony*, delve into the tools facebook provides in order to find out what controls them on the platform. By exploiting these tools for their own works, they get to the bottom of how they operate, while never forgetting that they too are piloted by the convictions, beliefs and economic interests of the owner of this apparatus called, metaphorically, Ear.
- 23 In *An Uncertain World*, by contrast, Rachel Charlus and Germaine Proust use their own tools, developed by their author, Jean-Pierre Balpe. The maxims, aphorisms and tales they publish on facebook are machine-generated, but not on facebook's servers, and they obey different principles from those of the platform.

Connivence, simulation and pretence

- 24 Jean-Pierre Balpe's experiments with automatic text generators, which he started in the 1980s, were originally designed to combat the ideology of "the literary," of genius and inspiration.²⁰ Computer-generated texts would, he maintained, provide a salutary

challenge to the status of the author: “At last we can leave behind the linear, pre-formatted novel whose author-god claims to master everything.” The realisation that machines can produce texts that *simulate* meaning challenges the conception of the literary text as the materialisation of a “creative genius.”

- 25 Instead of writing the final text, the author of a standard text generator invents dictionaries of scripts, knowledge graphs, modes of expression and categories of terms, as Jean-Pierre Balpe explains: “the generating machine produces only surface works, consisting of the results of pre-defined pathways through certain data sets.”²¹ The challenge is to develop a general conceptual description of how a particular language functions, before generating any texts. Jean-Pierre Balpe’s model is structuralist: the link between signifier and signified is essentially arbitrary. This arbitrary nature can, he maintains, release words from the obligation to signify. As Franco Berardi comments, “So the word and the senses started to invent a new world of their own, rather than reflect or reproduce existing reality.”²² In Jean-Pierre Balpe’s view, an automatically generated narrative, such as the philosophical maxims of Rachel Charlus,²³ does not reflect the world as it is, but aims at “simulating a sufficiently credible linguistic functioning for the reader to accept it as true.”²⁴
- 26 However, we know there are many variations in the social construction of sense – and I come back to Pierce’s semiotic model mentioned above. Unlike traditional text generators, facebook’s version seems to take some variations into account. It computes the social uses of language enacted on its platform, and its rules are designed to evolve, such that it becomes “self-organising.” The results are still consensual, but that is not how they are presented. The idea is not to expose the conventional character of textual production, as in the novel or the maxim, but rather to make it acceptable.
- 27 Every attempt to fix meaning is a strategy of domination. Whereas Jean-Pierre Balpe restricts the expressive potential of his fictional profiles in order to point to their artificiality, facebook’s goal is to regulate the expressivity of human beings in order to make them bow to its model of the world.

Gouvernance by consensus

- 28 “All people want to connect.” Mark Zuckerberg maintains that only a community can give meaning to individuals’ lives because it suggests that they are part of a larger design that stretches beyond them.²⁵ For many years he refused to relinquish the idea that users would automatically come together around positive values if the platform offered them a sophisticated, user-friendly and ‘smart’ networking tool. He wanted to bring humanity together in a shared space to counter the divisions and polarisations which, he felt, were negative, whatever their cause. This space would be one from which hatred, violence, and more generally any form of conflict would not exactly be banned, but would be *made invisible*.
- 29 Recently, however, the company decided to take some deliberate action to achieve this goal. A “moral economy of screens”²⁶ is how Gustavo Gomez-Mejia describes the many processes introduced to persuade users to exclude even the slightest hint of dysphoria from their Wall. Users are exhorted to delete uncomfortable commentaries, to report, block, and ban bullies and trolls – but also those simply not in agreement with them. Indeed, many elements of the current architext seem to imply that marginal

viewpoints will give way before the consensus of the crowd. The democratic claims of these tools require a mode of governance that is apparently “soft,” in which users are guided in their practice without it appearing that any values are being imposed top down.

- 30 Manufacturing consensus is evidently in the interests of facebook’s commercial goals. By creating communities, it can generate collective infatuation for literally *mainstream* products such as Oreo biscuits, which I, Anna-Maria Wegekrenz, am supposed to eat if I adhere to the Activities preconceived for me by the platform. However, there are other reasons for manufacturing consensus, which emerge from Mark Zuckerberg’s speeches. His sworn enemies are not only extremists, exhibitionists, and producers of fake news, but anyone who cultivates uncertainty or creates disagreement. The values of the facebook community are promoted in almost messianic tones, which makes me think that the company is not a platform for publishing, sharing and exploiting data, but that it is one figure of the colonialism identified by Marie-José Mondzain, as quoted earlier. The algorithmic regulation of human linguistic expression, which the company has invested in massively in recent years, is one step further towards this colonialist goal.
- 31 So what can a politically aware literature, or a political art of language, do to confront the colonialist tools of standardisation and rationalisation?

Acts of revolt

- 32 As a first step, literature can test out the limits, the potential, and the flaws in facebook’s governmentality. Fictional profiles experiment with inventing identities on the platform, despite the restrictive conditions for use, which are sometimes applied without the user having any possible recourse. Thanks to the Ear’s techno-knowledge, several profiles can write together, simultaneously, and react in real time to the events that affect their society, sometimes so strongly that the episode changes course, they are always writing to each other, and can be questioned by readers during and after the story being narrated.
- 33 When, in *An Uncertain World*, Rachel Charlus used one of those famous “oracle” apps to calculate what she would look like in a few decades, her artificially aged looks make one smile initially, because this aging person is, paradoxically, a fictional character. And since the goal of these “oracles” on facebook is to extract the personal data of the profile, the reader may wonder how the tastes and preferences of this character will be incorporated into the statistics that the creators of this type of application produce from the profile’s tracks. Moreover, the image of the aging person is striking because the oracle has automatically converted a portrait that acknowledges its status as representation (see image below) into a seemingly “unmediated” photograph. The network of fictional profiles in *An Uncertain World* constantly enriches the themes of, precisely, aging and death, as though the author, who was 77 in 2020, were trying to anticipate and also ward off these facts by producing an abundance of traces.

Fig. 9

Rachel Charlus, a fictional profile, takes one of the many “tests” proposed by facebook’s partners. Some of these call themselves “oracles,” and ask the user’s permission to access his or her personal data.

- 34 In *News from the Colony*, the Ear promises users eternity in exchange for recording their tracks. Yet these idealistic motives, which we attributed to the inventor of the Colony, do not contradict the primacy of its financial objectives. The Ear is dominated by the hardware companies behind the platform. The Colony’s civil servants – Anna-Maria Wegekruetz, Ivan Arcelov, Pavel Karandash and Olga Limitrova – are in no doubt as to the fate of their tracks after their death. What interests them, however, is identifying the grey areas and the flaws in the system, by reverse engineering. They try to understand the worldview that underpins the tools, their algorithmic organisation, and the structure of the databases that train the neural networks in the deep structure of facebook.
- 35 *An Uncertain World* is a utopia where the author’s hope to live on in her traces, after her death, is stronger than the fear of their exploitation and commercialisation. Indeed, the economic power of the company thrives on its users’ desire for eternity. *News from the Colony*, by contrast, is a dystopia. There, the platform acts like an “anti-memory without forgetting,”²⁷ which decontextualises personal traces, and leaves nothing but incidental meanings. The logical and temporal sequences of narratives are broken up by their organisation on the news feed, which is governed by the logics “of the industry’s profitability, and the appropriation of surplus value.”²⁸
- 36 Of course, the civil servants of the Colony attempt to hijack the colonial rules once they have cracked them. The ideal user behaves like an operator for the Ear, he or she uses the tools of linguistic governmentality in ways that do not trigger the surveillance mechanisms, nor hinder the automatic exploitation of the tracks left. The writing of Anna-Maria and Brice, on the other hand, has typos, slips and glitches – a double

exclamation mark here, an extra space there, letters repeated, and so forth. Like other activists on social media, the authors try out crypto-languages²⁹ to undermine the normative expression imposed by the platform. Some of these practices leave traces in the code, slow down the performance of tasks, or make the text untranslatable, and thus useless for the Ear's Departments. Clearly, the Ear's powers are limited. Just like neural networks, which can perceive but not interpret, the Ear is prevented by its model of the world from understanding any non-standard expression.

- 37 So the Colony's civil servants try to dodge the platform's governmentality by using the tactics of the weak. The limitations imposed by the architext and the algorithmic structure of facebook leave little room for manoeuvre, but what room there is harbours acts of micro-resistance, "furtive" linguistic creations liable to unsettle linguistic standardisation and rationalisation.³⁰
- 38 The sequel to *News from the Colony* could be the utopia of a life disconnected outside, but it has not yet been written.

Weighing up the criteria (extract from *News from the Colony*)
Published by Anna-Maria Wegekruz | 16 March 2018

Fig. 10

So the time had come again for the individual Report. With a pounding heart I set about filling in the Introspection form on the Reflection Tool.

The procedure was complex. Evaluating the Criteria was first done by hand, by affective proletarians working from the Tower's basement, then the results were sent to the Propaganda Department to be sorted automatically, whereupon an initial recommendation concerning the candidate's level of adherence to the Generalised Optimism Plan decreed by the Ear could be issued. The Reflection Tool that had been placed in all the cells of the non award-winning users, including my own, also sent a report concerning observance of the three Rules whose weighting the Ear alone knew. Then the candidate received a first provisional report, to which he had to reply on his Reflection Tool immediately upon reception, by showing his feelings with total spontaneity. The degree of correspondence between the objective evaluation by the system and the subjective evaluation by the candidate was transmitted to the Ear. Even if the personal interview with the Ear in the confession cubicle was the critical stage, one still had to concentrate from the very start, with faith and determination, as one filled out the Report. I took a Colonium, as a precautionary measure. My heart rate immediately decreased.

I typed into the box for Higher Structuring Tasks: "Head of the right Fraction of the Tower since January. Elaboration of the Great Doubt: in progress." I pressed the Save key. The system came back with an error message: "Exact date required: 00/00." "Head of the right Fraction of the Tower since 14/01. Elaboration of the Great Doubt: in progress," I corrected. I pressed the Save key. The system came back with an error message: "The word Doubt is not known. Begin again and choose a word from the drop-down menu." "Head of the right Fraction of the Tower since January. Development of the Great Sinusoidal: in progress." I pressed Save. I saw that the private Introspection Screen on my bedside table lit up. Birds were scattering across the sky, a palm tree was bent low. Copok, the secret agent with whom I had been corresponding secretly for months, passed by in the darkness without showing his face. But I knew it was him. I also knew that it was not the moment to commune with him.

I returned to the Reflection Tool. "Rate your level of responsibility in this task." Without the slightest hesitation I chose "very high." I pressed the Save button. "You have overestimated the importance of the task," the system replied, "Start again." Had it calculated the same reply for the Supreme Guide who, the previous year, had been awarded a prize by the Ear for the management of the Tower? Or were different criteria applied for this prize? I stared straight at the form on the screen, aware that my every eye movement was being recorded. I applied myself, as indicated in the instructions, and completed my self-evaluation. I selected "average" as my level of responsibility this time. I pressed the Save button. As soon as the message "Sent" appeared, I regretted my choice. But any detected sign of hesitation would have done me more harm than the bad choice I had now sent off.

"A message will be sent to your Affiliates to assess their level of satisfaction," the system displayed. Again, I was cut to the quick: I should have convened my Affiliates beforehand, made them promises, distributed goodies! I was beginning to understand how the Supreme Guide won his award.

"You must disappear" said the message sent by the private Introspection screen which had lit up again on my bedside table. "Who are you to talk to me like that?!" I asked Copok. I already knew the reply. I thought of the conversation I had had with Ivan Arcelov the previous week. He too had understood who it really was who had been talking to me for months in secret. "There must be some alternative to disappearing," I muttered. In reply, the secret agent sent me a sequence of figures and letters. He was taking precautions. "Fill in your specific tracking indicators," the system on the Reflection Tool ordered. A spreadsheet opened, which I had to fill in with figures which, I realised to my dismay, I had not collected. "Pollination Index of your Structuring Tasks at the level of the site?" At a guess, I selected "100%." "Any index over 50% must be justified through the proof apparatus," the system replied.

"Psycho-social Connectedness Index," the system displayed. I immediately typed "50%," knowing that any subsequent correction would leave a compromising trace in the system. Unfortunately, it was only after pressing the save button that I discovered the note underneath the box: "Left entirely to the candidate's discretion, and requiring no additional justification through the proof apparatus."

"?Ereht uoy era?" I asked the private Introspection screen, which was still lit up, but on which the images of Brice Copok no longer appeared. ".ruehnb iav el eerc iuq ec tse noitanimreted al," the screen replied. "gniylper era ohw uoy ton si ti," I replied anxiously. Again the screen responded in the crypto-language which I had agreed on with the secret agent, to escape the Ear's surveillance. ".sirpmocni retser a iot-eraperp siaM .etsilaedi erte'd neib tse'c." "Idiot!," I yelled, feeling cornered. If Copok was still there, he would surely understand and come flying to my aid.

Instead, the Reflection Tool rebooted. The Ear appeared in person: "The word Doubt does not exist," it proclaimed. After a moment's silence, it continued: "But you, on the other hand, you can choose to disappear, and you should know that Brice Copok has already done so." Then, for the first time since I had been in the Colony, I heard the Ear's mocking laughter.

Petrified, I watched my happiness-level as it plummeted in real time on the Reflection Tool. "Entry time: exceeded. State of the Report: incomplete." "Confirmed: by default." I was done for. Outside in the courtyard, Al' was sweeping up dead leaves. I set off for the Villa Shekinah.

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NOTES

1. A version of this text was presented at the University of Lancaster's conference "Multilingual digital authorship," 8 March 2018, organised by Erika Fülöp; also at the Colloque de Cerisy "Art, littérature et réseaux sociaux," at the Centre culturel international de Cerisy, 21 May 2018.

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2. [Online] <https://www.facebook.com/NouvellesDeLaColonie/> [accessed 24 March 2020]. The archives of the Colony can be consulted on <https://www.facebook.com/anna.wegekreuz/> [accessed 24 March 2020].
 3. Marie-José Mondzain, *K comme Kolonie. Kafka et la décolonisation de l'imaginaire*, Paris, La fabrique, 2020, p. 12.
 4. Marie-José Mondzain, *K comme Kolonie. Kafka et la décolonisation de l'imaginaire*, Paris, La fabrique, 2020, p. 16.
 5. [Online] <http://www.balpe.name/Philosophie-de-Rachel-Charlus/> [accessed 24 mars 2020].
 6. The term “dispositif” [apparatus] is used in this article in the sense defined by Michel Foucault in his *Dits et écrits III* ([1976-1979], Paris, Gallimard, 1994).
 7. Roland Barthes, “L’effet de réel,” *Communications*, no. 11, 1968, p. 84-89.
 8. Jorge Luis Borges, *Enquêtes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, p. 85; Yves Jeanneret et Emmanuël Souchier, “L’énonciation éditoriale dans les écrits d’écran,” *Communication et langages*, no. 145, 2005, p. 3-15.
 9. Yves Jeanneret et Emmanuël Souchier, “L’énonciation éditoriale dans les écrits d’écran,” *Communication et langages*, no. 145, 2005, p. 3-15.
 10. Maud Bonenfant, “Qu’est-ce que la critique foucaldienne?,” in France Aubin et Julien Rueff (eds), *Perspectives critiques en communication*, Québec, Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2016, p. 55-74.
 11. Yann Le Cun, *Quand la machine apprend. La révolution des neurones artificiels et de l’apprentissage profond*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2019, p. 236.
 12. Yann Le Cun, *Quand la machine apprend. La révolution des neurones artificiels et de l’apprentissage profond*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2019, p. 236.
 13. Yann Le Cun, *Quand la machine apprend. La révolution des neurones artificiels et de l’apprentissage profond*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2019, p. 311.
 14. For further details, see Yann Le Cun, *Quand la machine apprend. La révolution des neurones artificiels et de l’apprentissage profond*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2019, p. 277: “To improve our translation algorithm, we use, among others, the European Parliament’s database, which contains all the parliamentary sessions in the different languages of the EU.”
 15. Frédéric Kaplan, “Nos langues à l’heure du capitalisme linguistique,” 12 April 2012. [Online] <https://fkaplan.wordpress.com/tag/capitalisme-linguistique/> [accessed 24 March 2020].
 16. Warren Sack, “Une machine à raconter des histoires: Propp et les software studies,” *Les Temps modernes*, vol. 676, no. 5, 2013, p. 216-243.
 17. Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers* [1931-1958], Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
 18. Yann Le Cun, *Quand la machine apprend. La révolution des neurones artificiels et de l’apprentissage profond*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2019, p. 238.
 19. Frédéric Kaplan, “Nos langues à l’heure du capitalisme linguistique,” 12 April 2012. [Online] <https://fkaplan.wordpress.com/tag/capitalisme-linguistique/> [accessed 24 March 2020].
 20. Jean-Pierre Balpe, “Du parcours hypertexte à la génération automatique.” [Online] <http://articlesdejpbalpe.blogspot.fr/2013/03/du-parcours-hypertexte-la-generation.html> [accessed 24 March 2020].
 21. Jean-Pierre Balpe, post on facebook, 6 March 2017.
 22. Franco Berardi, *The Uprising. On poetry and finance*, South Pasadena, semiotext(e), 2013, p. 28.
 23. [Online] <http://www.balpe.name/Philosophie-de-Rachel-Charlus> [accessed 24 March 2020].
 24. Jean-Pierre Balpe, “Du parcours hypertexte à la génération automatique.” [Online] <http://articlesdejpbalpe.blogspot.fr/2013/03/du-parcours-hypertexte-la-generation.html> [accessed 24 March 2020].
 25. “We all get meaning from our communities. Whether our communities are houses or sports teams, churches or music groups, they give us that sense we are part of something bigger, that

we are not alone; they give us the strength to expand our horizons,” speech by Mark Zuckerberg at the University of Harvard, May 2017. [Online] <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/05/mark-zuckerbergs-speech-as-written-for-harvards-class-of-2017/> [accessed 24 March 2020]; post by Mark Zuckerberg on facebook, on 19 January 2018: “There’s too much sensationalism, misinformation and polarization in the world today. That’s why it’s important that News Feed promotes high quality news that helps build a sense of common ground.” [Online] <https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104445245963251> [accessed 24 March 2020].

26. Gustavo Gomez-Mejia, *Les Fabriques de soi? Identité et industrie sur le web*, Paris, Mkf, 2016, p. 78.

27. Louise Merzeau, “L’intelligence des traces,” *Intellectica – La revue de l’Association pour la recherche sur les sciences de la cognition (ARCo)*, vol. 1, no. 59, 2013, p. 115-135. [Online] <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01071211/file/Merzeau-Intellectica-intelligence-des-traces.pdf> [accessed 15 July 2020].

28. Emmanuël Souchier, Étienne Candel and Gustavo Gomez-Mejia (with Valérie Jeanne-Perrier), *Le Numérique comme écriture*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2019, p. 104.

29. See Alexandra Saemmer, “Le parler français des Gilles et John. Enquête sur les cryptolangages militants au sein des plateformes,” *Hermès*, no. 84, 2019, p. 131-137; “De l’architecte au computexte. Poétiques du texte numérique, face à l’évolution des dispositifs,” *Communication et langages*, no. 203, 2020, p. 97-112.

30. I use the concept of “furtiveness” in the poetic sense that Alain Damasio gives it in his novel *Les Furtifs* [*The Furtive Ones*], Paris, La Volte, 2019.

ABSTRACTS

News from the Colony is a dystopian story on facebook that tells the “conditions of acceptability” of this platform. The “officials” of the Colony, five “fictional” profiles created as part of this project and maintained on the platform for a year by their authors at an almost daily rate, made the industrial cogs of the platform work at through them, like a fatality; at the same time, by the very force of their imagination, they tried to avoid, at least occasionally, to this fatality, to appropriate this reality. This article is a practical testimonial by Anna-Maria Wegekruetz, who tries to unfold the experimental process of the project from the inside, from the point of view of a fictional profile animated by its author.

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Keywords: digital, social network, facebook, dystopia, colonialism, fiction

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