A la recherche du temps perdu

KH Jeron and Valie Djordjevic 2005

‘For a long time I would to go to bed early. Sometimes, the candle barely out, my eyes closed so quickly that I did not have the time to tell myself: “I'm falling asleep.”’

Marcel Proust, In Search of Lost Time

Concept

It is a commonplace: electronic data processing becomes more and more important in the contemporary society. We work, learn and play in front of the computer. The PC stores knowledge and time in the shape of texts and pictures. It is an instrument of memory. As memory, however, it is untrustworthy: the treasures are soon lost in the depths of the digital data mines and have to be unearthed with care.

Our work materializes in the process of performing the novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* by Marcel Proust.

"Art is the other of society. Everything one has lost in the latter – time, memory, truth, oneself – can be retrieved in the former, provided one has the discipline to devote oneself totally to it. The meaning of art is the last and highest goal in life."
Ulrike Sprenger, Proust ABC
Original: „Sie [die Kunst] ist das Jenseits der Gesellschaft. Alles was man in dieser verloren hat – Zeit, Erinnerung, die Wahrheit, sich selbst –, kann man in jener wiederfinden, so man denn Disziplin besitzt, sich ihr ganz zu widmen. Die Bedeutung der Kunst ist das letzte und höchste Ziel des Lebens."
Ulrike Sprenger, Proust ABC

We take the code literally and read Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* in its machine-coded embodiment. During the real-time experience of the coding, moments of beauty emerge.

Proust shows in his novel how even the most mundane and trivial act is full of beauty. Time – lavished and experienced in full – is transformed through work into art. This transformation is made visible while the text of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is translated from the analogue to the digital and back again. Digitalizing here is not used as a means of efficiency and acceleration but as an instrument of the most intense deceleration.

The performance

Our concept employs two distinct artistic instruments: installation and performance. At the same time we adopt procedures of information processing. Their significance changes completely when the context in which they are utilized shifts from technology to art. Here, the computer is not a machine but is enacted by human beings. Four actors portray a simplified version of data processing acting the parts of True, False, CPU and Display.

Practically, this happens as follows: an ASCII-version (a common format for digital texts) of Marcel Proust's novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* is recoded into its underlying zeros and ones. During the performance True and False read these coded lists of the text. True reads the ones and False the zeros. Eight zeros and eight ones are combined and form a character – for example the sequence "01000001" refers to the letter A.

The third person, CPU, interprets the 0/1-code using an ASCII allocation table, cuts out the corresponding letter out of the prepared sheets and hands it over to Display, the fourth actor. Display sticks the letter onto a wall panel where the previous text is collected. Mistakes made by the actors are not to be corrected as they form an integral part of the performance.

To read out one page of the novel takes about seven performance day - provided the duration of the performance is about 7 to 8 hours. The whole novel cycle has more than 4000 pages (depending on the edition). That means that an end of the performance is not very likely during our life-time.

Time is the most important constituent of performance: the art work emerges in the course of a slow and continuous process.

Realization

All characters wear white lab coats with name tags on their left breast pocket, indicating their function: True, False, CPU and Display.

Further material:
- Three simple tables and chairs for True, False and CPU.
- One chair for Display.
- The respective scripts and a pencil (to cross out the finished character blocks) lie on the two tables for True and False.
- The table for CPU has a pencil and white paper, the ASCII allocation table, scissors and sheets with the printed-out letters.
- Display needs glue (about one bottle of household glue per 7 hours performance).
- The size of the wall panels, where the letters are stuck on, is width 100 cm and height 140 cm

All lists and tables have to be printed out beforehand in the quantity shown in the headers.

The scripts and letter lists appended to this document are sufficient for about one hour of performance.
Because of the amount of data the complete lists are available only on request. If you are interested send an email to proust@khjeron.de.

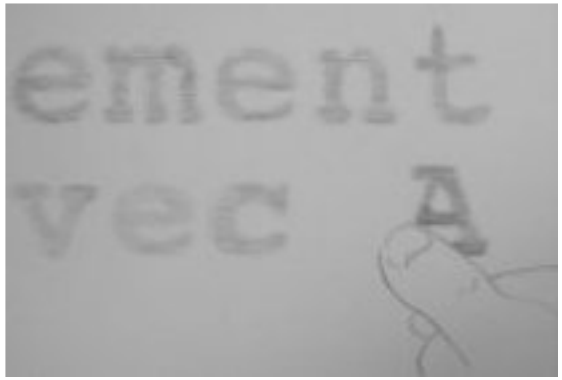
Illustrations

True and False alternately read out the zeros and ones of the novel text.

CPU interprets zeros and ones.

CPU cuts out the corresponding letter.

Display receives the letter.



Display pastes an A on the wall panel.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DU TEMPS PERDU