Introduction to "Interweaving voices: creating and sharing electronic literature"

Often challenging traditional notions of reading, writing, authorship, text, and literature, electronic literature uses digital technology to raise awareness about global issues that pose numerous challenges to society. At the risk of excluding many other important contributions to the field, we would like to begin our introduction to this issue of MATLIT by offering some examples[1] of electronic literature's commitment to societal and environmental causes. *Regime Change* (2003), created by Noah Wardrip-Fruin, David Durand, Brion Moss, and Elaine Froehlich, is a textual instrument that offers a perspective over the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In *Flight Paths* (2007), Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph tell the fictive story of Yacub, a Pakistani stowaway that, like many migrants, risks his life in the hope to overcome Europe's borders. *Fitting the Pattern* (2008), authored by Christine Wilks, is a game-like piece that engages the reader in a subversive game during which gender stereotypes are challenged. Illya Szilak's *Queerskins* (2012) is a multimedia novel about a young gay physician who dies from AIDS at the beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The VR work *Le Lac* (2019), authored by Nyasha Kandandara, tells the story of Lake Chad, which used to provide 45 million people with freshwater, but has lost 90% of its former surface due to severe droughts caused by climate change. These works voice multiple concerns about societal and environmental issues that caused multiple divisions among people. Some of these issues were discussed during the ELO Conference 2023 "Overcoming Divides: Electronic Literature and Social Change," which took place between the 12th and 15th of July 2023 in Coimbra. The present issue of MATLIT introduces some of the debates raised during this conference.

In 2021, when we started planning ELO Conference 2023, we felt the moment was right to address several divides between people and to understand how these were represented by electronic literature. At the time, the dramatic impact of COVID-19 on economy and society had begun to take shape. During the pandemic, the deserted streets and highways, no longer poisoned by exhaust fumes, seemed to have been returned to

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1 These works were extracted from ELO Collection's four volumes which can be accessed at the following link: https://collection.eliterature.org/. Some of them were or are in the process of being restored, and therefore, rescued from obsolescence/oblivion.

nature, thus revealing a dimension of reality unknown to us. An overbearing silence took hold of people's lives. Circumscribed to their homes, people were forced to forget the world outside their windows and had to find new ways to establish contact and work together. Humbled by this surreal and life-changing event, people were forced to put things under perspective and to let go of many of the disputes that had driven them apart. After being coerced to remain physically distant, people were now longing for human contact and were finding new ways to bridge gaps between them. However, in 2022, when our proposal to organize ELO2023 in Coimbra was accepted by ELO's Board of Directors, trenches were being dug at the border between Russia and Ukraine. The invaluable lessons taught by the pandemic were easily forgotten, thus reinforcing the importance and timeliness of ELO2023's theme.

During this conference, artists and scholars were invited to submit proposals addressing multiple subjects, some of them covered by this issue, such as digital humanities and memory preservation (archive); the impact of climate change; language barriers, translation and linguistic diversity; the role of literature in social change; collaborative platforms and activist software; digital literacy and societal transformation; gender divide and identity diversity; hybridity, recombination and multilinearity as aesthetics of subversion. In this issue, exclusively dedicated to the creative process, artists describe how they responded to several societal and environmental challenges through their work. The current issue is linked to a second issue of MATLIT titled "Spreading the word: preserving and analysing electronic literature" (MATLIT, 11.2), which will be released in 2025. Instead of artists writing about their own work, the next issue of MATLIT will include analysis of creative works as well as several perspectives on the field of electronic literature. In the next few lines of this introduction, we will make a summary of each article which we hope will entice the reader to explore the content of the current issue. Most of the works described in this issue were displayed at the *Arborescent || Resistance* exhibition, which took place at the Convento São Francisco in Coimbra during the ELO Conference 2023.

The present issue of MATLIT begins with a keynote speech, "Language for the Fluid, Multiple, Unified Self," given by Amira Hanafi at the ELO Conference 2023 on the 15th of July. Focusing on her own work, more specifically on *A dictionary of the revolution* and the project *Minced English*, the author highlights the need to adopt a non-violent language, a language that does not assign people to categories, and that refuses to be co-opted by governments and media. To liberate language from the shackles of prejudice and oppression, Amira rejects the repressive stability of texts and creates tools that aim to endow language with characteristics such as polyvocality, multimodality, and fluidity. Instead of presenting fixed texts, Hanafi

provides readers with tools that present "language as a site where displays of power are continuously produced and contested."

In "This is (not) a CAPTCHA Poem@": On Language, Algorithm and Representation in the Time of Pandemic," Tina Escaja writes about her project "Mar y virus/Virus and the Sea" and explains how digital technology can be used not only to shorten the distance between people by providing new forms of collaboration and connection, but also to evaluate the consequences of the Anthropocene. Escaja presents several technotexts that she authored during the pandemic, including Poem@ CAPTCHA, which asks the user to reflect upon what it can mean to be human.

Adopting a feminist perspective over the process of ageing, Terhi Marttila writes about her work, *Gray hairs*, in "I pluck - contemplating dyeing and ageing through *Gray hairs*." This work presents the decision of not dyeing gray hairs as an act of resistance against discrimination towards women and describes how digital technology can be used to include readers in a fight against prejudice.

The text "What the Body Remembers: VR as Site of Preservation in *Memory Eternal* | Вічная Пам'ят," authored by Jolene Armstrong, Monique Tschofen, Izabella Pruska-Oldenhof, Kari Maaren and Angela Joosse, addresses the war in Ukraine by introducing to the reader a work that invokes a Ukrainian Orthodox prayer for the dead. *Memory Eternal: Book of Mourning* is a work that focuses on topics such as war and the pandemic. In this article, the authors explain the collaborative and artistic methods used to complete this piece, which is portrayed as a site of remembrance and healing.

In "Fulldome Immersive Modalities and Materiality: Toward A Poetics of the Firmament," a text dedicated to the loving memory of the fulldome artist Millie Young (1966c.-2023), Craig Saper and Lynn Tomlinson present fulldome projections as a new electronic literature genre. The works discussed in this article address issues such as climate change, linguistic diversity, and human exploitation. Besides providing a pre-history of "dome modality" and suggesting the emergence of a "poetics of the firmament," the authors share with the reader some ideas about the teaching of fulldome projections.

Serge Bouchardon, Isabelle Cros, Erika Fülöp and Simon Renaud describe their creative practice-based project in "Electronic Literature and Biocultural Diversity: BⱯBEL RЁVOLU ┤ ION, a Heterolingual Research-Creation Project." In this article, the authors explain how this project, dedicated to biodiversity and linguistic diversity, allowed the creation of a participatory work that delves into sociolinguistics and environmentalism. Furthermore, they demonstrate how "contributory narrative" can reinforce interspecies and intercultural communication.

Also reflecting upon interspecies translation, in *Digital Zoopoetics*, Alinta Krauth establishes a link between recent works of zoopoetry and the work of e. e. cummings and Laura Jean McKay. The author then explains how digital technology provides new authorial tools and new forms of interspecies signal interpretation. Krauth identifies the presence of a digital zoopoetics through the description of two of her works: *The (m)Otherhood of Meep* (2023) and *The Songbird Speaks* (2024-ongoing).

In "*To be the wind for the tree*: an experience of an interspecies translation," Natalia Fedorova describes the process of creating a poetry generator that translates the physiological parameters of trees into poems, thus introducing another example of interspecies communication. Fedorova's text describes the development of her piece, *To be the wind for the tree*, from prototype to site-specific installation.

In "Data and Process in Information-Centered Creative Practice," the pioneering artist Judy Malloy addresses an important subject related to the use of online data and data visualization software by creators of electronic literature. To make her point, Malloy offers an overview of the field of information art, from Fluxus to electronic literature, and identifies several obstacles faced by artists when making use of commercial databases or traditional sources of information.

We finish this issue of MATLIT with the description of a collective experiment described by Celeste Pedro and Terhi Marttila in "What ELO23 taught us about *hacking the good life* — observations on the *Know Thyself* role-playing prototype." In this article, the authors describe the results of a workshop about João de Barro's pedagogical device, a sixteenth-century book-game on moral virtues. During this workshop, participants had the opportunity to create digitally rotating *volvelles*, thus joining the authors in a creative experiment.

The editors

Daniela Côrtes Maduro
Universidade de Coimbra
ORCID: 0000-0002-0864-6063

Paulo Silva Pereira
Universidade de Coimbra
ORCID: 0000-0001-9995-4063