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On the premise that the younger generations feel increasingly distanced from the First World War, the Meaux World War Museum (Musée de la Grande Guerre de Meaux, northeast Paris in France) chose spring 2013 to raise awareness of this conflict among young people by creating a Facebook page for the virtual World War 1 soldier Léon Vivien, thereby putting their skills and media-centered knowledge into practice. This page now counts more than 60,000 "likes". Relayed by the media, it constitutes a unique experience of civic and historical education.

Given its proven worldwide success, (1.19 billion users in the world according to the company's latest figures), it is of no surprise that Facebook has become researchers' "new exciting arena of social behavior" (Wilson, Golsing & Graham, 2012, quoted in McAndrew *et al.*, 2012: 2359) Our study is also situated in this social perspective: we follow Knobel and Lankshear when they remind us that "understanding participation in social networking sites in terms of digital literacy practices involves considering some of the socially recognized ways in which people go about generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of digitally encoded texts of various kinds in contexts where they interact as members of Discourses." (2008: 259) The purpose of our research is to explore the literacy practices of this Facebook page's members and to identify how they participate in this "affinity space" (Gee, 2005). As Léon Vivien's page aims at historical-civic education, we also wish to study how and what learning is stimulated through online participation. In other words, how is it developed to create a collaborative learning environment?

Our study is based on a socio-linguistic approach to language. Indeed, beyond its function of conveying information, we focus on two other fundamental functions: "to scaffold the performance of social activities (whether play or work) and to scaffold human affiliation within cultures and social groups and institutions." (Gee, 1999: 1) Through an analysis of the

languages Léon Vivien's fans used in their comments about Léon's daily posts, we wish to gain fruitful insights into the activities that these languages help constitute. To do so, we analyzed the 6,669 comments written by 2,461 different fans.¹

1. Léon Vivien's Great War

Over an imaginary period stretching from 18th June 1914 to 25th May 1915, Léon Vivien posted messages, images and documents nearly every day on his Facebook timeline. As we will now see, Léon's page can be considered as a hybrid form, between fact and fiction.

The studies on docudramas and other hybrid forms often invalidate their historical significance, like Brian McConnell's opinion: "Docudrama does not represent historic fact, or history, or journalism, but crusading entertainment with facts carefully tailored to sustain a neat storyline and to suit a particular social, political or religious point of view." (2000: 54)

The Léon Vivien Facebook page isn't concerned with these questions inasmuch as it proposes to follow the daily experience of a called-up primary teacher and doesn't offer any political treatment of the conflict. Its point of view is only human size, which makes its uniqueness and pedagogical interest. The proceedings of the war aren't mentioned, neither as any spatial indication: we don't know the name of his training camp, of the trenches where he is fighting, of the name of the villages the soldiers cross, etc. The action evolves in a space-time that is indeterminate, totally fictionalized. The web surfer doesn't get any temporal indications either. Vivien's posts are dated but these dates don't refer to dates of real events that happened during the war.

1.1. The Great War through narrativisation

¹ While Léon's page's content is no longer supplied, the page is still a little visited and comments are nearly not written anymore. Our research scope was enclosed at the end of January 2014.

To analyze this page, we chose to examine Léon's story in the lens of scriptwriting techniques, as they spread through popular culture and thus implicitly belong to Léon's fans' "common ground". In the findings, we could draw a parallel between the fictionalization of this infantryman and some scriptwriting techniques of popular movies. Let us mention some of them.

First, we can observe **a rising dramatic line**, leading to a strong climax. It is interesting to notice that the building of the story, which indeed aims at a dramatic climax, can be divided according to Aristotle's three acts theory, which the famous consultant in scenarios Linda Seger (1992) advises. Here, the division sticks with the necessary balance between the acts: the first one lasts three months and a half; it serves to introduce the context and then the beginnings of the conflicts from an external point of view, as Vivien has not been called up yet. The second act is the longest (five months and a half) as it primarily serves to recall the everyday life in the training camps and in the reserves, while the third act is the shortest one (one month and a half) and the most dramatically intense: Vivien tells the horror of the battlefield by evoking in details many particularly violent events.

Second, Léon Vivien is at the center of a network of **sympathetic and univocal main characters**: his wife Madeleine, his mother Hortense (minor character), his friends Anatole Lessert and Jules Derème, as well as his regiment comrades Eugène Lignan, Bourrelier, Lulu L'andouille and L'Cabot Germain.

Third, the Léon Vivien experience Léon Vivien is centered on **the human before the soldier**. Many posts evoke the details of the soldiers' daily experience, outside of military operations, or pick up personal anecdotes or precious and moving moments; one of the most moving moments being his son's birth. Significantly, the post that was the most "liked" (nearly 3000 likes) is the one of their newborn's picture. The family also received many messages of congratulations.

Many other posts mention the physical sensations felt by the soldiers, whose body is put through mill. Descriptions in details of the sensations felt by the five senses offer a particularly precise sight of the ordeal endured by the soldiers.

A tension between the common and the dreadful is developed. About twenty messages either tell both the horror of the war and the daily life of the civilians or of the soldiers, either one post tells about one of the two and is directly followed by a message talking about the other one. For example, on the 22nd of October 1914, Vivien announces that Madeleine is pregnant. His directly following message indicates he is called up by the military doctor. Two crucial posts succeed each other, and, by doing so, associate the private and military registers, which highlights even more its intensity. Indeed, joy quickly gives way to fear.

Fourth, we observe a focus on **sensational and emotional dimensions of the conflict**. Léon's fans are really invited to thrill with the character. Other posts make use of the sensation strategy, mixed with emotion, by providing in details crude information: the story of a sergeant who tries to hold his entrails, etc. The reader's sensitivity is then put to severe testing.

The structure and the elements of the story as well as the strategies implemented to evoke the soldier's humanity as closely as possible obey the fundamentals of fiction, according to which the story must invite the reader to live a genuine experience. For Truby,

Good storytelling doesn't just tell audiences what happened in life. It gives them the experience of that life. It is the essential life, just the crucial thoughts and events, but it is conveyed with such freshness and newness that it feels part of the audience's essential life too. (2007: 6)

Facebook is a great device to create such freshness and liveliness.

1.2. Léon Vivien's war through images

A real work on images has been produced for this Facebook operation. Generally, the docudrama's hybridity lies in its articulation between real events and their audiovisual re-

creation. Steven Lipkin highlights how the docudramas imply a specific suspension of disbelief from the spectators: “We are asked to accept that in this case, re-creation, is a necessary mode of presentation.” (1999: 68)

In Léon Vivien’s case, the aim of authenticity is not mainly produced by that re-creation of events. The impression of truth is above all based on the plentiful use of the Museum’s rich collection of visual documents. Hundred images have been integrated into the story. These are authentic documents that have been fictionalized. The story is thus not based on real facts, but on documents that were integrated and adapted to the story. At least five methods were used to that purpose: the personalization of blank documents, the contextualization of photographed objects (the objects are photographed in a narrativized space, which replaces the museum’s neutral frame), the suppression of the pictures’ caption, particular plastic dimension (colors, etc.) and context, face personalization of some pictures, and the modification of original documents. Indeed, some documents have been modified in order to “stick” more with the story. One picture that is quite known has been modified so that it is no longer identifiable and not in an awkward position with the story.

These five techniques show how the goal consists in making the images talk in the fiction, making their content alive and human. Far from a political treatment of the war, this use invites us to follow day by day “slices of life” which are more *likely* than true. They are more like *symbolizations* than representations, according to Trouche’s words (2010: 200).

This important use of images raises several questions. In his analysis of the documentary series *Apocalypse*, broadcast on a French channel in 2009, Thierry Bonzon denounces the omission of the sources, which tends to derealize the event by transforming it into fiction. Such as reproach can’t be made against the Leon Vivien experience, as it is presented as fiction, and thus precisely derealizes the documents in use.

But we have seen that the promise refers both to the authentic and the fictional categories. At no time, the producers mention the methods of construction of the fiction. Without any interpretative frame, the power of truth inherent to images tends to give a status of authenticity to the Facebook page – authenticity that it doesn’t claim but doesn’t refute either.

Bonzon reminds us of André Bazin's warning: "The spectator has the illusion he observes a visual demonstration while in reality it is a succession of equivocal facts which hold together only thanks to the cement that goes along with them." (Bazin, 1975 quoted in Bonzon, 2010: 176)

The absence of information about the treatment of the documents provokes a real risk of interpretative misunderstandings concerning the value of images as demonstration. Some comments written by followers let us think that they sometimes forget the fictional treatment of the documents and approach them as a proof of reality. Here, the mediation typical of the "interpretative museum type" (Casey, 2003: 78-95) is not really visible.

Consequently, in order to become a real pedagogical device, the Léon Vivien experience should go along with a reflection on the production and on the modes of diffusion of historical knowledge, and in particular on the complexity of images and their use as trace; it is necessary to show how it is here a question of a real deliberately constructed. In those years when education curriculums focus on critical analysis of historical sources, this Facebook experience as such as well as its analysis in class will then become unique and exciting pedagogical activities.

2. Facebook as an online host for affinity spaces

Our study aims to analyze the digital literacy practices, the forms of participation and the performances of identity in the learning process that Leon Vivien's page stimulated. We chose to approach this Facebook page as an "affinity space", which Gee posits as an alternative to the concept of a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998 quoted in Gee, 2005: 10) to focus on the *space* of interaction, instead of on *membership* in a community. Indeed, the latter would tend to label and attach people to groups with problematic criteria of affiliation.

For Boyd and Ellison, the rise of social networking sites provoked a "shift in the organization of online communities" (2007: 10 quoted in Knobel and Lankshear, 2008: 251): whereas the

first online communities were dedicated to common interests, the social networking sites which are now dominant are organized around people, no longer around interests. One aspect of Léon Vivien's page's specificity lies in the fact that this affinity space mingles some conventions from both types of online community.

Contrary to most online communities built around a common interest, Facebook is a "nonymous" environment (Zhao *et al.*, 2008: 1818): the individuals (are supposed to) interact with the other members of the website via their real name, which can obviously have consequences for the nature of the interaction and the performance of identity. For Zhao *et al.*, the nonymous online world emerges as a third type of environment, between totally anonymous websites and nonymous offline worlds. In nonymous online environments,

"People may tend to express what has been called the 'hoped-for possible selves' (Yurchisim *et al.*, 2005). [...] Hoped-for possible selves are socially desirable identities an individual would like to establish and believes that they can be established given the right conditions. [...] They are 'socially desirable' or norm-confirming, but that does not necessarily mean that they are not true selves: even though they are not yet fully actualized offline, they can have a real impact on the individuals." (Zhao *et al.*, 2008: 1818-1832)

McAndrew *et al.*'s findings, among others, meet Zhao *et al.*'s hypothesis, as they consider that "Facebook usage is heavily driven by a desire for social interaction" (2012: 2360) rather than for impression management. As a result, the performance of identities tends to show accurate reflections of their personality rather than idealized selves.

Facebook's nonymity is quite specific, as some members prefer using a pseudonym instead of their real name, for obvious privacy reasons. Among the 2,461 different fans who wrote at least one comment in reaction to Léon's posts, we found out that at least 12% used a pseudonym, which is to say a name which didn't include ID information (a first and a last name). However, these figures must be used with extreme caution, as some Facebook users

might of course use a realistic pseudonym to avoid Facebook’s pseudonym restrictions. Given the absence of official statistics about the number of pseudonyms on Facebook, it is for now impossible to compare these figures and define their significance. We suppose, however, that these figures might be lower than the average number of pseudonyms, given the Facebook company’s judicial war against such fake names and the rather high rate of fake profiles. Be that as it may, an average Facebook user is never totally anonymous: while the Facebook company (and its commercial partners) may not know who he really is, his or her friends do know, and are aware of his or her Facebook activities, notably via the news feed. Total social impunity is thus not a common feature of Facebook, which may influence the nature of the interactions we are about to analyze.

3. Léon Vivien’s fans’s comments: a discourse analysis

Before starting with our discourse analysis, let’s mention some facts about Vivien’s Facebook page. Among his 60,000 fans, 2,461 wrote at least one comment in reaction to one of his posts, namely 4.1% of them. The average number of comments is 2.70, but, as the following diagram shows, this figure isn’t significant, as most comments were written by a limited number of fans.

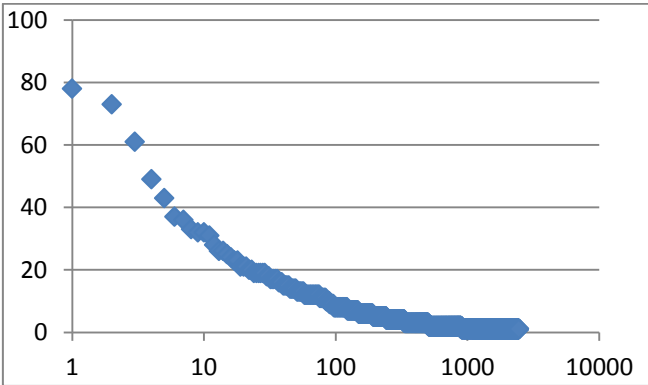


Fig. 1: number of comments per fan
 (Abscissa: number of fans who wrote comments; ordinate: number of comments per fan)

In comparison, one person wrote 78 messages while 1563 people only wrote one message.

According to the page's official insights, the group with which Vivien was most popular ranges from 25 to 34 years old.

Specific to Vivien's affinity space is the absence of moderators. Vivien's page borrows its logic from a common friend's page; you follow his adventures like you would follow those of one of your friends. This page is thus deprived of "moderator-created norming texts" (Lammers, 2011: 48), which would normalize the interactions. The (small) number of silly messages that are neither regulated nor deleted act as evidence of this. The shared norms and practices are thus implicit and constructed intuitively by the page's followers.

Another characteristic of this affinity space is the absence of interaction between Léon Vivien (and the other characters) and the fans. Notably, for obvious practical reasons, they never reply to any comment posted by fans.

Our analysis of Léon Vivien's fans' comments is based on Gee's key notion of "social language", defined as a style of language enacted and recognizable in a specific setting, related to *situated* identities and meanings. The digital literacies we aim to decipher are thus approached as situated social practices. Our hypothesis that Vivien's page is a collaborative learning environment is based on Gee's three aspects of his definition of affinity spaces, which provides eleven features in total (Gee, 2005: 226-228). Firstly, affinity spaces encourage intensive (specialized) and extensive (broader) knowledge. Second, they permit different forms and routes to participation. Gee focuses here on the range between peripheral and central participation; we also include the relationship with the characters and the other fans in this feature. Third, different routes to status are possible. For Gee, status can be related to the user's skills or reputation. We also associate status with the performance of identity and its possible symbolic power.

We primarily based our quantitative discourse analysis model on Fairclough's distinction between three major types of text meaning (2003: 27), namely Representation (related to discourses), Action (related to genres) and Identification (related to styles). These three interconnected levels of meaning can respectively be related to the relationship with the

thing, with the other(s) and with oneself.² We believe that our three hypotheses about Vivien's affinity space can also be connected to these three levels: "Representation" is about the nature of knowledge (intensive, extensive); "Action" can concern the routes to participation, and "Identification" can be linked with status. We focused on these first two levels in this paper, leaving identification for further research.

As the following diagram shows, we then articulated these levels with the nature of the fans' stance on the fiction:

- Adhesion : through his suspension of disbelief, the fan approaches the fiction from an inside position and communicates with Léon and the other characters as a friend, or even, in some rare cases, as a character he created himself. The fan "lives" the fiction in the present.
- Distance: the fan maintains his disbelief and follows the fiction from an external point of view. The fiction is seen as an opportunity for historical learning; instead of an experience in the present, he comments on the fiction and the war in the past tense.
- Doubt: this intermediary position refers to the less frequent comments that question the real nature of the fiction. Such comments are *metacomments* about the creation of the story.

The choice of one approach invalidates the other two modes: if the fan approaches Vivien's page by adhesion, he excludes distance and doubt. That said, whereas most comments obey this separation, others mix two approaches. For example, the following comment written by "Alexandre" mainly illustrates a distant point of view, one century after the conflict, but it ends with a wish for Léon, and thus shows some adhesion to the fiction as well: "In these November days, [...] I went to the Triumphal Arch and I took off my hat in front of the flame, in the middle of the indifferent touristic populace. Rest in peace Léon." In such cases,

² Fairclough draws a parallel upon his triadic model and Foucault's "three broad areas : relation of control over things, relations of action upon others, relation with oneself. [...] We have three axes whose specificity and whose interconnections have to be analyzed: the axis of knowledge, the axis of power, the axis of ethics..." (Foucault, 1994: 318) quoted in Fairclough, 2003: 28)

the comments are considered as primarily distant (as they see WWI as past), and are classified in this category.

	Representation (discourses)	Action (genres)	Identification (styles)
	Representation of the thing	Social relation	Commitment, judgment, evaluation
	Nature of (intensive and extensive) knowledge : narrative (relational or not) or non-narrative	Routes to participation	Routes to status
Adhesion			
Distance			
Doubt			

Fig. 2 : our quantitative discourse analysis frame based on Fairclough 2003, Gee 1999 and Georgakopoulou *et al.* 1997

As the diagram shows, the nature of knowledge can be split between narrative and non-narrative (paradigmatic) knowledge exchange (Georgakopoulou *et al.*, 1997: 42-54). These researchers approach narrativity from a broad perspective: beyond literal stories, “the ‘narrative mode’ is a way of knowing human reality, experiences, beliefs, doubts and emotions”, while the “‘paradigmatic mode’ deals with natural (physical) reality, truth, observation, analysis, proof and rationality.” (Bruner 1986, 1990 in Georgakopoulou *et al.*, 1997: 39)

As we have seen, Vivien’s narrativisation of the Great War is central and aims to provoke emotions (empathy, etc.) by following the war through his eyes. We then venture the hypothesis that such narrativisation particularly stimulates (relational) narrative comments. Relational meanings would be a subset of narrative knowledge, mainly expressing solidarity, affinity, etc. instead of primarily conveying information. Although relational meaning is nothing new under the sun, the variety of relational contents on social networking sites is such that it requires specific attention in research about digital practices (Lankhears *et al.*, 2008: 271). We distinguish three mutually exclusive categories of knowledge: relational narrative, non-relational narrative and non-narrative. However, as Georgakopoulou *et al.*

(1997: 135) mention, following Chafe (1982), involvement and detachment, which underpin narrative and non-narrative knowledge, need to be considered as a continuum rather than as the two poles of a strict prototypical dichotomy. As was the case with the distinction between adhesion and distance, some comments may belong to both categories (narrative and non-narrative.) For example, in his comment, “Jean-Pierre” mainly expresses his opinion about our times and about Vivien’s Facebook page, but also recalls his memories of his grandfather. “Would we be able to redo what they did? I’m wondering. Very good to show us our ancestor’s slice of life thanks to this initiative. That makes me even closer to my grandfather. I’m a fan.” Such comments are categorized according to the predominance of narrative or non-narrative contents, which give a dominant color to the comment.

The third column of our diagram refers to the actions illustrated in the comments, which imply specific social relations. Contrary to the nature of knowledge, the different social relations aren’t mutually exclusive; comments can combine various actions: a comment can express the fan’s opinion about the war, as well as encourage the characters, for instance. We chose to mention all the relevant actions instead of classifying the comments according to the most relevant one. This explains notably why 23.8% of the comments are considered as relational narrative ones, while 25.3% of the comments encourage, support or express wishes for the characters; it means that 1.5 % of the comments are not considered as mostly relational narratives, but contain nonetheless relational narrative social actions (in a limited degree compared to the other actions contained in the comment).

Our quantitative findings are presented in the following diagram:

	Representation (discourses)	Action (genres)		
Adhesion (internal point of view) : 58,2% of the comments	Narrative relational knowledge 23,8%	Encourage, support, advises the characters		25.3%
		Thank the characters for their war effort		1.4%
	Narrative non-relational knowledge 11%	Supply the story, by asking question or by creating his/her own character		4.1%
		Express emotion		8.5%
	Non-narrative knowledge 23,7%	Judge the characters positively or negatively		1%
		Express an opinion about the post		15.5%

		Express an opinion about the war	3.7%
		Write a little humor	1.5%
		Express an opinion about the images	0.9%
		Inform via “truths”	0.4%
Distance (external point of view) : 36,7% of the comments	Narrative relational knowledge	Inapplicable	/
	Narrative non-relational knowledge 6,1%	Recall a (family) memory or a personal experience	5.4%
		Express emotion	1.9%
		Mention new learning (ex.: “I didn’t know that!”)	0.9%
	Non-narrative knowledge 30,4%	Express an opinion about the post	4.4%
		Express an opinion about the ware	6.5%
		Write a little humor	0.7%
		Judge our contemporary time	2.4%
		Express an opinion about the images and/or the page	2.9%
		Inform via quotes or references (distributed knowledge)	5.1%
		Inform via “truths”	2.2%
		Ask a question for information	0.7%
		Judge the other fans	1.3%
Doubt : 0,1% of the comments	Non-narrative knowledge 0,1%	Express an opinion about the images and/or the page	0.1%
Irrelevant comments : 4,8%			
Total number of comments: 6669 (100%)			

Fig. 3 : our quantitative analysis discourse frame applied to Léon Vivien’s Facebook page’s comments

First, we can observe that 58.2 % of the comments show their author’s adhesion to the fiction: the majority of the fans followed Vivien’s story respecting his timeline, as any other Facebook friend’s page. In 36.7% of the comments, the fans approach his story from a past stance. Very few comments explicitly indicate doubts about Vivien’s truthfulness (only 0.1%).

Second, given Vivien’s “narrativisation” of the Great War, as shown in the first part of the paper, we predicted that this Facebook page would particularly stimulate (relational) narrative comments. The distribution between narrative and non-narrative comments is quite balanced: in total, 40.9 % of them are narrative, while 54.2 % are non-narrative.

Third, following Gee’s theory on affinity spaces, we ventured the hypothesis that such a Facebook page would encourage intensive and extensive knowledge, as well as permit different forms and routes to participation. We identified eighteen forms of participation. Noticeably, the page didn’t primarily stimulate exchanges of information: only 9.3% of the

comments can be classified in this category. Vivien's fans didn't use this page to show their knowledge: only 2.6% of the comments contain "truths" without sources, while 5.1% of the comments mention quotes or "distributed knowledge" (Gee, 2005: 226-227) which can be discovered other than on the Internet page (mostly books, movies and other websites).

Facebook's social mechanisms also characterize Vivien's affinity space: like other Facebook pages, it mainly appears as a conveyor for social interactions: his fans first used it to express an empathetic relationship with the characters (25.3% of the comments), by encouraging, supporting or advising them. Léon's fans also wrote comments to give their opinion about Léon's posts (19.8%), about the war in general (10.2%) or, more rarely, about our contemporary time (2.4%). The sharing of emotions was also a common reason for writing a comment (10.4%).

Conclusion

With more than 60,000 people who liked Vivien's page and 2,641 fans writing a least one comment, this affinity space is an encounter space for a multitude of cultures. Following Jones and Hafner (2012) and Scollon and Scollon (2012), we favor the definition of cultures as *systems of discourses* rather than as conventional practices linked with specific groups.

As Jones and Hafner have highlighted (2012: 116-117), in spite of the participants' diversity of backgrounds, online spaces "often develop their own 'cultures' or 'discourse systems' which include shared ways of thinking, interacting, and getting things done." (2012: 117)

As we have seen, Vivien's page essentially stimulated horizontal exchanges, between the fan and the characters, as well as among fans, especially when they expressed their point of view about war in general. Indeed, such comments show convergence towards common beliefs and values, towards "Discourses with a big D" (Gee, 1999: 7). Noticeably, a large number of comments about the horror of war followed one another, showing the importance of expressing and sharing a point of view, rather than of bringing (new) information through comments.

With a mix of fact and fiction leading to comments expressing emotions, points of view, testimonies, distributed knowledge or “truths”, Léon Vivien’s Facebook page exemplifies how diverse backgrounds can enter into intercultural dialogue and hopefully stimulate historical education.

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