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BAUDELAIRE FOR NET SURFERS: FRENCH STUDIES AND THE INTERNET TONY McNEILL and CHARLIE MANSFIELD, Sunderland

Much has been made of the educational potential of the Internet, but, at least in terms of French studies, little has been realised. At the University of Sunderland we have successfully integrated Internet-based study materials into the teaching and learning strategies of our French studies modules. Like many French departments we have produced our own Web page (<http://www.sunderland.ac.uk/~usOcma/comm.html>) with information about the teaching team, modules available and links to other relevant web sites. More recently we went a step further by making study materials in the form of lecture notes, assignment titles and bibliographies on Roland Barthes, Claude Duneton, Annie Ernaux, and Christiane Rochefort available on the Internet. This proved a success with students who found both the material and their introduction to the Internet and the skills needed to navigate it useful. However, we felt that the materials we had developed didn't involve enough interaction and we actively began to consider more stimulating ways of presenting Internet-based courseware. This led to a teaching and learning project we called *Les Chemins du savoir* for a nineteenth-century French literature module currently available to students at Level 2.

p.10 [63]

Les Chemins du savoir consists of over one hundred short texts or 'textemes' arranged in separate Web pages. These textemes cover different aspects of Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. Some of the textemes consist of extracts from key critical works (e.g. 'Lukács on the Balzacian Hero' which features an extract from *Studies in European Realism*) whereas others have been adapted from our own lecture notes and cover different aspects of the set texts (e.g. 'Baudelaire: The Poet as Rag-picker'). The level of commentary is generally reduced to a minimum as the aim of each texteme is to designate pathways for the learner to explore on their own. Learners are encouraged to develop the skeletal insights that have been offered, following up the bibliographical references which are included at the end of every texteme.

These textemes are not accessible through a conventional index or menu. There is a gap at the heart of *Les Chemins du savoir* which must be filled by users typing in their own keywords or else choosing one from our own list. An easy-to-use search engine was specifically designed to allow learners to carve pathways through the material available. When the user clicks on the *Chemins du savoir* Web page they first encounter a simple form which enables them to enter a keyword for which they wish to search. The search engine scans all the textemes, finds matches, and then presents the results of the search in the form of a list of clickable HyperLinks. These HyperLinks reference the documents in which the keyword was found and include, in parenthesis, the number of occurrences of the keyword in each texteme. Having read a texteme, users can return to the list of HyperLinks and select another texteme to read or else return to the original search form in order to perform another search.

A key aim of the design of both search engine and textemes was to encourage learners to see the learning process as about making connections. Each texteme has been written to stand on its own and to make sense without reference to any other. When learners input a keyword, the search engine brings together a number of these autonomous textemes but it is left up to the learner to discover the complex relationships between them. To take one example, a texteme featuring an extract from the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and another on 'Baudelaire, Poetry and Social Experience' both occur in the search engine's results for the keyword 'modernity'. Learners must think through and make explicit the connections that otherwise remain unstated.

Learners are encouraged to see the study materials available as a necessary continuation of and preparation for lectures and seminars. During lectures learners are asked to take down not more than one or two A4 sides of notes. These notes could consist of nothing more than a list of the main issues and questions raised or of important keywords. The function of the lectures is to provide a more general survey of the territory plotted out in greater detail by the textemes. Learners can explore the materials available by using the search engine to search the keywords they have gleaned from the lectures. Once learners have found relevant textemes they may exploit them in a number of ways. Firstly, they may simply read the textemes and jot down the occasional note. This is a bit like a conventional lecture but with learners taking down written notes from an electronic source. Alternatively, learners may print the texteme they are reading for inclusion in their file. Finally, and more ambitiously, learners may copy and paste the texteme, or a section of it, onto their own disk or into a unix server account. This final option leads to learners producing their own *cahier télématique* onto which they store

materials quarried from the various textemes. The information learners download becomes an ongoing personal learning resource which they can supplement at any time and which can form the basis of their written assignments.

A HyperLink to the module guide is available on the same Web page as the search form and learners can copy and paste written assignment titles from it onto their *cahier télématique*. Learners can think through a question and brainstorm ideas with help from the search engine. They can confirm if they are on the right track by typing certain keywords into the search engine and checking to see if they have found a rich seam or not. Once they have constructed an argument they can return to the search engine to help organize evidence to support it.

We think that transforming teaching materials and practices into more interactive and innovative learning environments offers one way of supporting students and encouraging autonomy whilst retaining the intellectual integrity of traditional French studies courses. We would be interested in hearing comments from any colleagues interested in our materials and methods and we can be e-mailed on charlie.mansfield@ed.ac.uk