
The Textual Identity of the Web

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1. Introduction

The study of text has a very long tradition. Especially, as Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979) wrote, in the period of the so-called “incunabulum”, all human knowledge was revised and re-organized in the name of consistency. For this reason the famous “Hermetic writings” should not be ascribed to Hermes Trismegistos “Hermes the Thrice-Greatest”, for example. Today, for the study of text in the domain of literary studies, we may recognize three different approaches.

First of all, we may take text as medium: this type of textual studies puts a great emphasis on the materiality of texts and aims to clarify its specificities. A number of studies in recent years adopt this perspective on various types of text: Walter J. Ong’s (1982) *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the Word* includes general reflections on the oral text; Eisenstein’s studies on the birth and the development of the printing press in Western Europe shows the important influences of technological evolution on texts; and Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) *Understanding Media* and David J. Bolter’s (1990) *Writing Space* clarify the effects of the advent of a new type of texts, that is the web text¹.

The second perspective considers text as an internal system: French literary critics and philosophers started around the 1960s to work intensively to establish a theory which makes it possible to explain human activities by the concept of “structure” inspired from the dichotomized categories of Saussurian (1916) linguistics: *signifying / signified*, *paradigm / syntagm*, for example. Thus, for those who adopt this perspective, textual studies consist of finding the structure of texts as an internal system and describing it. All the studies of stylistics or narratology pursue this strategy, and Umberto Eco (1976) tries to theorize in philosophical terms about the concept of textual structure.

Lastly, there are scholars who consider text as phenomenon: you can replace the word “phenomenon” with “context”. Various schools in various academic domains take this approach; in the domain of linguistics, we should mention pragmatics or the speech act theory of J.L. Austin (1962); in the domain of literary or philosophical studies, German scholars, such as Wolfgang Iser (1972 [1964]) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1979) developed their own theories of text following a German philosophical tradition of “hermeneutics” or phenomenology. These studies have no

¹ I use the term “web text” to mean a text rendered onto the web browser window(s) we see on a computer screen or on other devices.

apparent influences on each other, but share the same idea that the study of a text requires that its context be taken into account.

Among these various approaches to text, textual studies take traditionally a great interest in textual identification. Eisenstein (1979) points out that the introduction of the printing press into the world of text gave a new power of preservation, which means numerous copied and identifiable texts could spread throughout the world²; she supports Michael B. Kline's claim that the idea of authorship or copyright for a text began to play a role only after the printing press had arrived³.

We should recognize here that the technological evolution of texts gave birth to the problem of textual identification. In the domain of narratology, whose concern focuses on textual structure, the idea of 'point of view' or 'focalization', if we follow the term Gérard Genette (1972) coined in his *Figures*, becomes central⁴. Genette divides the "grammar" of narratology into three parts termed Tense, Mood and Voice; and the concept of 'focalization' constitutes one of two parts of his Mood theory, which distinguishes between "(a) modes of presenting action, speech and thought [...] and (b) modes of selection and restriction of the information conveyed by a narrative" (Jahn, 2005: 173). As the mode (b), "[f]ocalization denotes the perspectival restriction and orientation of narrative information relative to somebody's (usually, a character's) perception, imagination, knowledge, or point of view" (Jahn, 2005: 173). In other words, focalization connects directly to the question of agents who perceive and identify a narrative world.

The protagonists of 'text as context' are exemplified by Paul Ricœur. In his *Temps et Récit*, on his way to developing the theory of temporality, Ricœur (1983) surveys Saint Augustine's *Confessions* to establish the concept of "la structure discordante-concordante du temps" (the discordant-concordant structure of time). Another structure is introduced into his account, but the concept of structure is not limited to the internal coherency of a text. Ricœur's theory of text goes so far as to assume a communicative structure of *mimesis*, inspired from Aristotle's theory of tragedy. The *mimesis* structure is considered to be on three levels: *mimesis* I for the pre-figurational stage of textual communication, *mimesis* II for the configurational, and *mimesis* III for re-figurational⁵. He describes pre-figuration as implying the generative contexts of a text, and re-figuration of its interpretative contexts. Thus, we learn that his theory involves two subjectivities and the configurational level becomes a place where the two subjectivities of author and of reader (re)confirm the identity of a text (Ricœur, 1983: 85-129). Unlike the structuralists who see identity as involving only the internal coherence of a text, Ricœur takes account of subjectivities external to the text in order to attack the issue of textual identification.

We have taken a retrospective look at earlier studies of text up to this point. However, to understand textual identification today, especially in the period where the web text penetrates our society, we must advance a more synthesizing study of text than ever, including the web text and combining three different approaches. In this respect, I start to mark out different approaches to textual identity by taking the example of a medieval French literary work, after reviewing a

2 "Of all the new features introduced by the duplicative powers of print, preservation is possibly the most important. To appreciate its importance, we need to recall the conditions that prevailed before texts could be set in type. No manuscript, however useful as reference guide, could be preserved for long without undergoing corruption by copyists, and even this sort of 'preservation' rested precariously on the shifting demands of local elites and a fluctuating incidence of trained scribal labor." (Eisenstein, 1979: 113-114)

3 "Competition over the right to publish a given text also introduced controversy over new issues involving monopoly and piracy. Printing forced a legal definition of what belonged in the public domain. A literary 'Common' became subject to 'enclosure movements' and possessive individualism began to characterize the attitude of writers to their work. The 'terms plagiarism and copyright did not exist for the minstrel. It was only after printing that they began to hold significance for the author.' (Eisenstein, 1979: 120-121)

4 We acknowledge that later studies found fault with the genettean model of 'focalization', beginning from Mieke Bal's *Narratologie*.

5 "Je me propose de les désimpliquer de l'acte de configuration textuelle et de montrer le rôle médiateur de ce temps de la mise en intrigue entre les aspects temporels préfigurés dans le champ pratique et la refiguration de notre expérience temporelle par ce temps construit. *Nous suivons donc le destin d'un temps préfiguré à un temps refiguré par la médiation d'un temps configuré.*" (Ricœur, 1983: 87)

scheme proposed by Michel Foucault (1969a, 1969b), in order to present a hypothesis about textual identification by examining some examples of web texts.

2. Textual Identity without the Author: Semantic and Formal Aspects

While confirming that textual identity remains a central problem for the study of text, we still need to demarcate the concept with more precise analysis, because the examples we saw in the last part of our introduction cover a number of different levels. In considering textual identity, we may empirically distinguish two approaches: the first one tries to know why two texts can be the same, the other to know how two texts can be different in order to see the specificity of each text. Historically speaking, the former approach had been dominant before printing press technology was invented, because texts were copied manually and no single transcription was made without containing differences. The latter approach is possible only through comparison, and that is why we had to wait for the invention of the printing press, which enabled texts to be disseminated and compared. Thus, it is after Gutenberg that people became aware that so-called identical texts might contain differences.

However, these two attitudes can coexist even today, at least in the domain of philology. We will take an example from French literature of the Middle Ages of the *Roman de Renart* (*The Tale of Reynard the Fox*), which contains about 30 branches⁶ focusing on a fox named Reynard or Renart. The work is estimated to have been written from around the fourth quarter of the 12th century to the first quarter of the 13th century by different authors: Pierre de Saint-Cloud, Richard de Lison and other unknown authors. It enjoyed enormous popularity in Western Europe, so that Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14th century used the material in his *Canterbury Tales* (“The Nun’s Priest’s Tale”). Even in the 19th century one of the greatest German writers, Wolfgang von Goethe, rewrote it under the title of *Reineke Fuchs* (1846).

As far as the French versions of the tale are concerned, we know 14 almost full manuscripts of the work, and 16 fragments today. Edgard Martin, a French specialist in Renardien studies, has numbered the 14 manuscripts in capital letters from *A* to *O* and assigned to the fragments the small letters *a* to *q*. German philologists have regrouped them in three “families” according to the numbers of branches: α , β , and γ . The manuscripts that were not regrouped in three families were called “composite”. This regrouping is fully accepted today as the basis of their study, and each family has its critical edition.

Now, I want to draw your attention to the fact that the ultimate objective of a philological study consists of unifying the manuscripts and the fragments ultimately into a single text, adjusting the differences that each text contains. The α edition classifies the manuscripts composed of 18 branches; for the β edition, 21 or 22 branches have reference value, and 23 for the γ edition. Thus, the regrouping was one step ahead for the philological objective. As far as the textual identity is concerned, scholars observe both differences and similarities of the texts to identify the Reynard’s tales. But how do they identify the texts? Remember that they tried to identify the text by numbers of branches. This means that in a philological study of Reynard, the textual identity is established by numbers of branches, that is the formal aspect of the text. If each manuscript is held in a volume, they should have a thematic and stylistic homogeneity. This means, on the other hand, that the textual identity is also established by their content. Then we know that both formal aspect and content of text take an active role in establishing the textual identity of the work, rather than the

6 The renardien studies traditionally call “branch” to speak of a chapter.

similarity or difference, because the philologists rely mainly on the formal aspect of the text, while they are conscious of the similarity and the difference of each text.

For this reason, we substitute the formal aspect and the semantic aspect for our empirical distinction. The formal aspect includes the appearance of the text, whereas the semantic aspect the content of the text.

3. Identity as Function: Michel Foucault's View

Even if the *Tale of Reynard the Fox* has no identified authors, each of its three editions claims a single identity; and we do accept the claim, because we may be satisfied with any of three editions when we want to read the tale. However, our experience tells us that the author is also an important factor, when we think of the identity of text(s). This is what Michel Foucault (1969a) has in mind in his lecture entitled "What is an author?"⁷

After making a comment on the parallelism between the way the literary critics define the author and the way the Christian tradition justified the texts⁸, Foucault introduces a theory proposed by Saint Jerome of Stridonium in the fourth century. In his *De viris illustribus (On Illustrious Men)*, Saint Jerome presents four criteria to follow: a) the author as a certain invariable level of value⁹, b) the author as a certain field of conceptual or theoretical coherence¹⁰, c) the author as a stylistic unity¹¹, d) the author as a historically definite moment and as encountering point of numerous events¹². After the introduction of this apologist's theory, Foucault concludes that a text has no need to possess an author, but it should hold internally a certain type of subjectivity. He names this type of subjectivity "the author as function (la fonction-auteur)". The function is relative to the juridical and institutional system of the discursive or textual universe, and it happens and works simultaneously for different selves or subjectivities¹³. The point, which Foucault wants to insist on in this lecture, is to look for the possibility of establishing a typology of texts on the basis of their existential modes, without depending on the concept of an author. Therefore, explaining the criteria, Foucault compares them to the modern attitude of literary criticism, which tends to consider the concept of author as the principle of a certain unity of writing and as an agent who is able to dissolve the textual contradictions.

In this respect, he also develops his scheme with more precision in his book entitled *The Archaeology of Knowledge*¹⁴. In the book, he proposes two levels for consideration: statement ('énoncé') and discourse ('discours'). The statement means the oral or written utterance, which is not yet situated in the whole system of discourse, while the discourse constitutes a networked

7 For a more precise discussion on Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* as developed in this chapter, see Shigemi (2007).

8 "Il me paraît, par exemple, que la manière dont la critique littéraire a, pendant longtemps, défini l'auteur — ou plutôt construit la forme-auteur à partir des textes et des discours existants — est assez directement dérivée de la manière dont la tradition chrétienne a authentifié (ou au contraire rejeté) les textes dont elle disposait." (Foucault, 1969a: 829)

9 "l'auteur est alors défini comme un certain niveau constant de valeur". (Foucault, 1969a: 829)

10 "l'auteur est alors défini comme un certain champ de cohérence conceptuelle ou théorique". (Foucault, 1969a: 829)

11 "c'est l'auteur comme unité stylistique". (Foucault, 1969a: 829–830)

12 "l'auteur est alors moment historique défini et point de rencontre d'un certain nombre d'événements". (Foucault, 1969a: 830)

13 "La fonction-auteur est liée au système juridique et institutionnel qui enserme, détermine, articule l'univers des discours; elle ne s'exerce pas uniformément et de la même façon sur tous les discours, à toutes les époques et dans toutes les formes de civilisation; elle n'est pas définie par l'attribution spontanée d'un discours à son producteur, mais par une série d'opérations spécifiques et complexes; elle ne renvoie pas purement et simplement à un individu réel, elle peut donner lieu simultanément à plusieurs ego, à plusieurs positions-sujets que des classes différentes d'individus peuvent venir occuper." (Foucault, 1969a: 832)

14 In fact, the lecture entitled "What is an author?" serves as preamble for *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and he explains what he wrote in the book: "Alors, me direz-vous, pourquoi avoir utilisé, dans *les Mots et les Choses*, des noms d'auteurs? Il fallait, ou bien n'en utiliser aucun, ou bien définir la manière dont vous vous en servez. Cette objection-là est, je crois, parfaitement justifiée: j'ai essayé d'en mesurer les implications et les conséquences dans un texte qui va paraître bientôt; [...]. Voilà le premier volet d'un travail entrepris il y a quelques années, et qui est achevé maintenant." (Foucault, 1969a: 819–820)

system, in which different statements can hold their place with functions. It is at the level of the statement where the consideration on the textual subjectivity is deployed. Besides, he fleshes out the idea of textual subjectivity with three other “functions”, following his terminology: a) the referential, which means that a text has a specific referential-like Saussurian *signifying / signified* (which some might prefer to call referring/referred)¹⁵, b) the subjectivity, which means that a text supposes a certain subjectivity¹⁶, c) the context or the network, which means that a text should not be understood by itself, but by its context in which a text is located or by the network to which a text considered to belong¹⁷, d) the materiality, which means that a text is always supported by a material and the material forces various kinds of restriction to the text when the text is represented¹⁸.

It must be said that the four functions defined in the *Archaeology* do not correspond at all to what is presented in the lecture we traced earlier in this paper. Foucault (1969b) insisted in his lecture that the textual subjectivity could be different from the author of a text, and that the textual subjectivity could be an internal function for the text. Thus, what he pronounced in the lecture only concerns the second function in his book, which is the subjectivity of text. Three other functions have been added for the *Archaeology*.

We confirm that Foucault insists on the textual materiality of all functions. At the end of the chapter, which describes the textual functions, he concludes:

This repeatable materiality that characterizes the enunciative function reveals the statement as a specific and paradoxical object, but also as one of those objects that men produce, manipulate, use, transform, exchange, combine, decompose and recombine, and possibly destroy. [...] the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced. (Foucault, 1972: 105)

The materiality of text guarantees a text will be copied and repeated in the real world in Foucault’s view; it also enables a text to form a network with other texts where the textual identity is established (or effaced). In other words, we cannot give a sense of identity to a single text, but the established relation between texts can only hold an identity to be recognized or interpreted. It is in this manner of relation that we may talk of a so-called textual identity. As he puts an emphasis on the materiality, the existential pluralism of text, forming a textual network, has significance in the process of textual identification. Thus, we may indeed be right to abstract the concept of textual “spatiality” from that of textual identity from Foucault’s considerations. If the identity is established and maintained not by a single text but numerous texts, and if the texts form a network, then it should mean the texts are spread in a certain field, which would form a kind of space.

15 “[A statement] is linked rather to a ‘referential’ that is made up not of ‘things’, ‘facts’, ‘realities’, or ‘beings’, but of laws of possibility, rules of existence for the objects that are named, designated, or described within it, and for the relations that are affirmed or denied in it.” (Foucault, 1972: 91)

16 “[the subject of statement] is a particular vacant place that may in fact be filled by different individuals; but, instead of being defined once and for all, and maintaining itself as such throughout a text, a book, or an *œuvre*, this place varies—or rather it is variable enough to be able either to persevere, unchanging, through several sentences, or to alter with each one. It is a dimension that characterizes as whole formulation *qua* statement.” (Foucault, 1972: 95)

17 “Every statement is specified in this way: there is no statement in general, no free, neutral, independent statement; but a statement always belongs to a series or a whole, always plays a role among other statements, deriving support from them and distinguishing itself from them: it is always part of a network of statements, in which it has a role, however minimal it may be, to play.” (Foucault, 1972: 99)

18 “Lastly, for a sequence of linguistic elements to be regarded and analysed as a statement, it must fulfil a fourth condition: it must have a material existence.” (Foucault, 1972: 100)

4. The Identity of Web Texts

In the first section, taking an example of philological study, we confirmed that textual identity without an author might be established in terms of the consistency both of the formal aspect of a text and of its content. Foucault, however, criticizing the traditional idea of textual identity, developed his own idea of textual identity. Thus, through the redefinition of the concept of text as a whole comprising numerous texts, a textual identity may be established relatively to other texts in that whole. His concept requires no author outside the text, but enables us to seize a text in a textual space. This textual plurality remains invisible for printed or oral texts; we may call it ‘invisible’, because a relationship to other texts may be present in one’s mind, only imaging other texts at the time of reading a text; thus it should be readers who affirm a textual space, and it would be different depending on who reads it. However, we know today another type of text, which enables us to visualize the textual relation easily: hypertext or web text.

The hypertext is composed of numerous types of text with a single material by nature, as we may confirm in Figure 1. It represents a good example for us to understand what Foucault had in mind in his *Archaeology*.¹⁹ A computerized system, as shown in Figure 2, supports the existence of hypertext. It is composed of web servers, of client computers (including computers, mobile phones or other devices) and of hub devices linked to each other with cables (the Ethernet cable or others) or radio waves (the Wi-Fi or other mobile systems), which transmit encoded electronic signals. Daemon software, such as Apache, gathers, on demand from client computers, texts in local storage from right across the network and sends them back. We take a simple example of the Google²⁰ portal page to see how the web text is composed, as shown in Figure 3 where we see both a browser-window rendering a web text and another smaller window showing all the texts in relation to the web page.

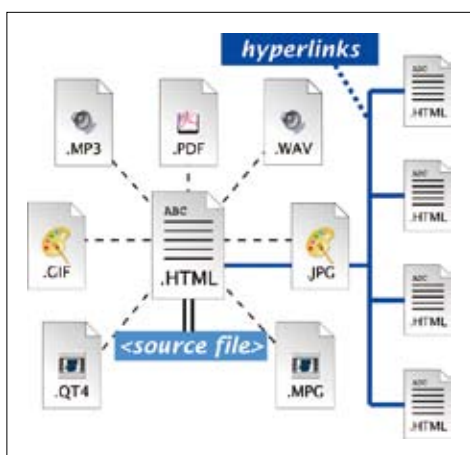


Fig. 1

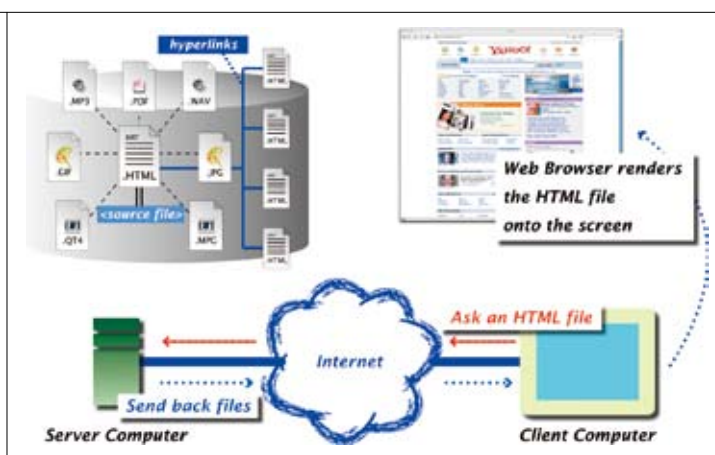


Fig. 2

As for the identity of web texts, we have in mind recent frauds reported almost everyday, i.e. phishing. The phishing site is a web site, which duplicates the appearance of an authentic web site

¹⁹ Of course, as we confirmed in the previous section, Foucault proposed four functions in the level of statements and attached great importance to materiality above all. We have to admit that taking web texts as an example implies a fundamental change of the textual materiality; the change may require a further study on the effects caused by differences between materials. This is so because during Foucault’s time there were no web texts or hypertexts. Thus, our main concern in this paper is to know how we can establish an identity for a text as a statement which is composed of numerous texts. In other words, Foucault’s four functions analyzed at the level of statement may serve as valid criteria to establish a textual identity even on the level of discourse, where various texts in context gather together. In this perspective, the change of materiality provides a good opportunity to test the validity of his thinking.

²⁰ Google: www.google.com; accessed on Oct. 24th, 2008.

(usually commercial or financial) to trick visitors and steal their money or credit card information (number, assigned password or security code). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines this scam as follows:

Phishing and spoofing are somewhat synonymous in that they refer to forged or faked electronic documents. Spoofing generally refers to the dissemination of email which is forged to appear as though it was sent by someone other than the actual source. Phishing, often utilized in conjunction with a spoofed email, is the act of sending an email falsely claiming to be an established legitimate business in an attempt to dupe the unsuspecting recipient into divulging personal, sensitive information such as passwords, credit card numbers, and bank account information after *directing the user to visit a specified website. The website, however, is not genuine and was set up only as an attempt to steal the user's information.*²¹

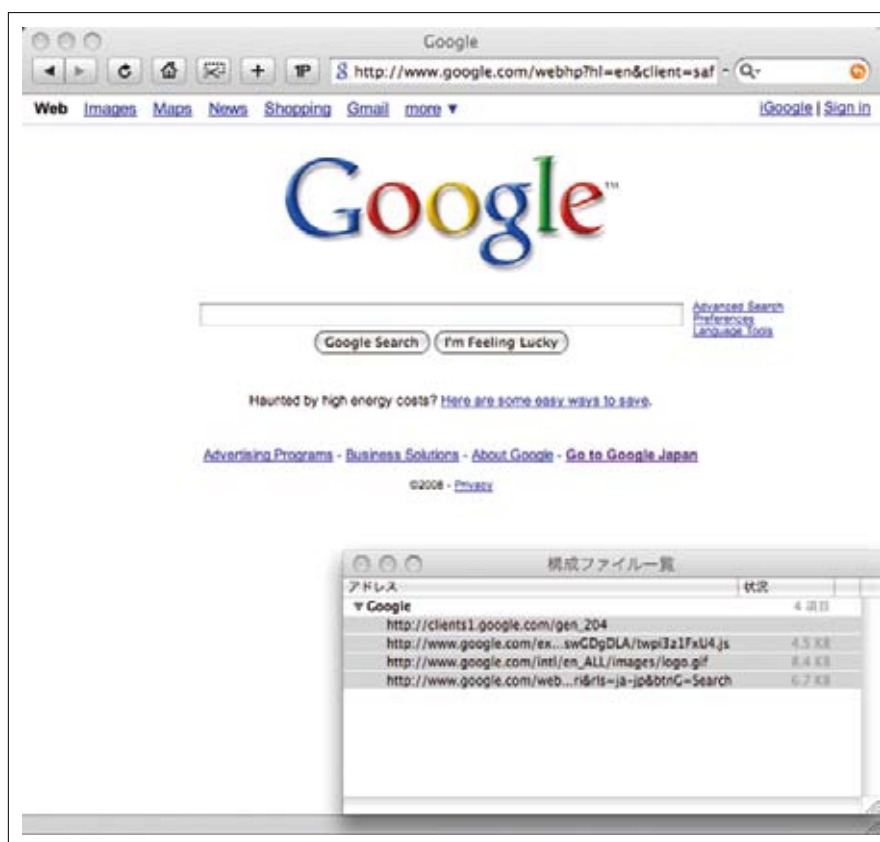


Fig. 3

All six images of Figures 4a-b, Figures 5a-b and Figures 6a-b give us a general idea of what the phishing site is. Figure 4a shows a screenshot of the page which prompts the user to log on to the bank-account of Lloyds Bank in the United Kingdom, while Figure 4b is a reported screenshot (submission number #535742) to PhishTank (www.phishtank.com), collaborative website to archive and distribute information on phishing. Another screen shot (Figure 5a) represents a genuine PayPal site, which provides the service of alternate processing of sending and receiving money, and one of the forged sites reported to PhishTank.

²¹ Definition described on the Internet Crime Complaint Center, cooperative center between the FBI, the National White Collar Crime Center (NW3C), and the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). <http://www.ic3.gov/crimeschemes.aspx#item-14> (Author's emphasis). Internet Crime Complaint Center: www.ic3.gov; accessed on Oct. 24th, 2008.



Fig. 4a



Fig. 4b



Fig. 5a



Fig. 5b



Fig. 6a



Fig. 6b

On the other hand, some cases may offer counter examples with respect to textual identity on the web. Take, for example, the YAHOO! website in its Japanese version, whose URL is “www.yahoo.co.jp”. When we type the URL into a proper place in the browser running on our personal computer, the result will be like in Figure 7a. However, the same URL gives us another representation or “page” if we consult the site with a different mobile device than a personal computer. We see a screenshot of the website browsing with Apple’s iPod touch (Figure 7b). In fact, when we get access to the website with an iPod, a program redirects us to another web page “ipn.yahoo.co.jp”. Then, for verification, we have another screenshot (Figure 7c), which represents a web page of “ipn.yahoo.co.jp” browsed through the computer browser.



Fig. 7a



Fig. 7b



Fig. 7c

Table 1 Text Identity Grid for Websites

		formal	semantic	subjectivity	identity
YAHOO! Japan	“www.yahoo.co.jp” with Safari browser	-	-	+	+
	“ipn.yahoo.co.jp” with iPod touch				
	“ipn.yahoo.co.jp” with Safari browser				
Phishing websites	genuine websites	+	+	-	-
	forged websites				

From the analysis of these examples of web texts, we may put the result into a matrix (Table 1). The grid represents whether each example of web texts meets four criteria: the formal aspect, the semantic aspect, subjectivity, and identity. The idea of four criteria comes from reflecting on what we examined in the previous sections; the formal aspect and semantic aspect of a web text are both considered relevant to the establishment of identity in our first section. Another aspect of textual identity on which Foucault put emphasis is the subjectivity or the author considered in our second section.

This grid reconfirms what we have looked at in this paper; even if both the formal aspect and the semantic aspect of a web text are identical, as with the cases of phishing websites, identity remains in flux; on the other hand, the occasional coincidence of both aspects, as in the cases of YAHOO!²², doesn't always provide or establish identity. Another piece of evidence we may learn from this matrix is that we tend to recognize texts as identical when the subjectivity of web texts indicates the same subject. This is why we can distinguish a genuine website from a disguised website; but we still have to remember that the distinction will be made on the basis of the spatial information of the URL. Of course, the observation of other YAHOO! pages may refute the evidence. However, as the URL of “ipn.yahoo.co.jp” is the redirected result of “www.yahoo.co.jp” for iPod touch, we could take the former URL as identical to the latter.

5. Conclusion

We started this paper with a brief consideration of the traditional conception of text identity based on examples of philological study in the domain of literature, where both the formal and semantic aspects of texts are involved in the establishment of textual identity. We then went on to consider Foucault's reorganization of the concept in his *Archaeology* with respect to statements and discourses, where the idea of textual spatiality came to be recognized. In the final section, textual spatiality takes an important part in establishing identity for web texts.

The observations in this paper still remain at the ontological level of our understanding of text. However, our experience tells us that the ontological mode of text doesn't explain all the aspects of our textual interpretation. Furthermore, textual spatiality alone does not constitute the whole of text; in fact, Foucault in the same work proposes two other components relevant to the ontological mode of text: materiality and temporality. As we should be very cautious about accepting all these propositions made by a theorist, these components will remain to be evaluated in future studies.

Textual spatiality appears to have been underestimated in the tradition of textual studies. At the very least we would claim that the dissemination of web texts comes to highlight this aspect of text. This paper does not provide detailed reflections on the ontological mode of text about which future studies would provide accounts.

²² YAHOO! Japan: www.yahoo.co.jp, ipn.yahoo.co.jp; accessed on Oct. 24th, 2008.

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