



Journal *Hybrid*, no. 5 “Literature and media dissemination”

Madeleines & tweets

The *Madeleine Project* by Clara Beaudoux

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Abstract

Clara Beaudoux finds in the cellar of her new apartment the former tenant of the place's possessions, Madeleine's. For a week, on Twitter, she will conduct her inquiry with tenderness and modesty: a few words, images, the portrait of Madeleine as well as her time are emerging. Through its performance on the social networks and in a process close to narrative journalism, Madeleine's archives are constituted: an “[...] archiving, as a laying bare,”¹ which enables to interrogate memories, especially traces, which here appear to be poetic. *The Madeleine Project* then is resolutely Proustian, it proceeds from this reminiscence as nostalgic as contemporary which, within the framework of the project, develops first through social networks to lead to a book published in 2016. At the end, Beaudoux, just like Marcel, has become a writer.

Keywords

archive, memory, narrative journalism, narrativity, performance, social network

Published: 18 décembre 2018

Full text (PDF file)

Clara Beaudoux is a journalist at Radio France and director of a number of web-documentaries. She lives in Paris, and on moving into a new apartment, she came across things belonging to Madeleine, the previous tenant, in the cellar. She investigated with heart and discretion, and for a week in November 2015, on Twitter,² she told the woman's life

1. Herman Parret, “Vestige, archive et trace. Présences du temps passé,” *Protée*, no. 322, 2004, p. 43. (Notre traduction.)
2. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*. [Online] <https://twitter.com/clarabdx> [accessed 12 January 2018].

story, who was almost 100 years old: in a few words, with a few pictures, she slowly created a portrait of Madeleine, and of a bygone era. Variouslly dubbed a “2.0 soap opera” or a “tweet documentary,”³ the *Madeleine Project* tells the story of a life, tweet after tweet, like an open box or letter. The reader/ follower got to know Madeleine, an exceptional character, and her era in two ways. Either they followed the tweets as they were tweeted during the four seasons of transmedia, narrative writing orchestrated by Clara Beaudoux, with increasing acuity. Or the reader followed the *Madeleine Project* separately from this performance period through other sources such as the project’s website,⁴ Storify,⁵ a book that covered the two first seasons published by Editions sous-sol in 2016, and then a paperback edition in 2017 of the complete four seasons. The objects and archives that Madeleine kept in meticulously labelled boxes form the departure point for Beaudoux’s narrative. As such, the cellar’s contents correspond exactly to what Herman Parret said of archives, that, for him,

[...] are about the unsaid, that they rip through the fabric of the everyday and reach for the unexpected. Is it naive to think that by deciphering an archive, one tears a veil, crossing through the opacity of knowledge to the essential of beings and things?⁶

“[...] Archiving, as a way of laying bare,”⁷ given the ethical dilemma Beaudoux found herself in, allows us to examine memory, but above all the trace, that here, becomes poetic. In *Temps et récit 3*, Paul Ricœur evoked the symbol of absence of our ancestors and our descendants, and saw traces as a blend and even a connector between physical time and experienced time that is disassociated in Heideggerian phenomenology. The mark left by something, by someone, a perceptible clue of a past presence, an emanation of the referent, the trace comes from that “which was there” outlined by Roland Barthes in *La Chambre claire*.⁸ Traces are what every document presupposes and as such, every archive, they are traced⁹ in the framework of the *Madeleine Project*, a journey that sets off Madeleine’s anamneses and in doing so, because the two are intrinsically linked, provokes the narrative. Memory and narrative fit together in the *Madeleine Project* in two ways: first, there is Madeleine’s memory, rebuilt by Beaudoux through the narrative of the discovery of her archive on social media; but there is also the very memory of the performance of the *Madeleine Project*. This duality is an opportunity to examine the trace in its physical and digital state, as both are the subjects of narratives, as the representation of an event, and a re-mediatization. As Sybille Kramer puts it:

Traces only appear when an existing form is rubbed out and reconfigured in a rewrite. [...] The semantics of the trace exist only within a narrative, in which the trace gets its own “narrative place” [...]. Traces are where mute things “start talking” thanks to our intuition.¹⁰

3. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*, Paris, Éditions du sous-sol, 2016, p. 7.

4. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*. [Online] <http://madeleineproject.fr> [accessed 12 January 2018].

5. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*. [Online] <https://storify.com/clarabdx/madeleineproject> [accessed 12 January 2018].

6. Herman Parret, “Vestige, archive et trace. Présences du temps passé,” *Protée*, no. 322, 2004, p. 43.

7. Herman Parret, “Vestige, archive et trace. Présences du temps passé,” *Protée*, no. 322, 2004, p. 43.

8. Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1980.

9. Herman Parret, “Vestige, archive et trace. Présences du temps passé,” *Protée*, no. 322, 2004, p. 43.

10. Sybille Krämer, “Qu’est-ce donc qu’une trace, et quelle est sa fonction épistémologique ? État des lieux,” *Trivium*, no. 10, 2012.

Performance and traces

Beaudoux's editorial project

Jean Baudrillard¹¹ and Paul Virilio¹² showed us how, since the Gulf War, television and now, the Internet, have totally changed the way we relate the world due to their capacity to report on every event in real time, as it happens. Working backwards from this “temporal compression,”¹³ Beaudoux the reporter, takes an interest in the events of a life that has already happened. But she does so in the form of a writing performance that takes place on the micro-blogging, social-media platform Twitter, using 140 characters at a time, photographs, hyperlinks to songs or videos, thus creating an artistic happening and a journalistic-literary event in the form of a transmedia series. The *Madeleine Project* on Twitter is a performance. Without getting into the definitions of the variety of practices that make up a performance, or the wide range of disciplines that are covered by the term, we will use the term “performance” to designate any artistic event that produces gestures, acts, that take place mostly in public, and whose temporal occurrence constitutes the piece itself. The performance may be improvised to a greater or lesser extent, but each occurrence is unique. The presence of the performer (physically or through a medium) is, for the most part, key. Getting beyond the essential ambiguity of the term performance and referencing the ground-breaking essays by Roselee Goldberg, Cynthia Carr or Arnaud Label-Rojoux,¹⁴ we will concentrate on the way in which Beaudoux practices it in acts, or, more precisely in tweets.

Even though Beaudoux repeatedly declared in the press that nothing was premeditated and that her initial approach was entirely separate from her work as a journalist, and that she wasn't intending to create a literary piece, the fact remains that the premise of *Madeleine Project* is a desire for a narrative: the inaugural tweet on Clara Beaudoux's Twitter account clearly shows this, she is telling a story: “I've wanted to tell this story for two years. So, I'm going to try to do so this week.”¹⁵ This story unfolds as a work in progress, for the reader as for Beaudoux. During the first week of tweets, Beaudoux's editorial plan took shape. During the morning of the first day (11:30) the #madeleineProject hashtag appeared, and started trending soon after (11:52). Then, on the last day, the writer seems to come to the realisation that the inquiry should continue and promises a second round of tweets. She then began to talk about season 1, like a popular television series, to describe her series of posts dedicated to Madeleine's personal archive, that ran from November 2nd to 6th 2015. Season 2 premiered on February 8 2016, and saw Beaudoux leave her cellar to go and actually meet people who knew Madeleine: her godson, a couple of old neighbours, a shopkeeper. Season 3 ran from June 27th to July 1st 2016, and covered Madeleine's working life, Beaudoux's trip to Bourges, the old lady's birthplace, and a deeper investigation into Loulou, her fiancé who died during the war. Season 4 described Madeleine's life as a school teacher and attempted to find some of her ex-pupils.

A communal narrative

During each season, Beaudoux posted at times, over twenty tweets daily. The first season included 265 tweets in total. She posted them one after the other, in general, around midday, only a few seconds apart. As a performance, the seasons had a limited life-span, and the fact that they were on a public social media account meant that they also integrated the comments and reactions of other twitter users, which allowed Beaudoux to gauge the level of interest and adapt to it. The use of a hashtag optimised coverage for *Madeleine Project* tweets, that otherwise would have been lost in the flow of users, showing Beaudoux's desire to share

11. Jean Baudrillard, *La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu*, Paris, Galilée, 1991.

12. Paul Virilio, *L'Écran du désert. Chroniques de guerre*, Paris, Galilée, 1991.

13. Paul Virilio, *L'Administration de la peur*, Paris, Textuel, 2010, p. 8.

14. Cf. Roselee Goldberg, *Performances. L'art en action*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1999; Roselee Goldberg, *La Performance, du futurisme à nos jours* [1979], London, Thames & Hudson, 2001; Cynthia Carr, *On Edge. Performance at the End of the 20th Century* [1993], Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2008; Arnaud Label-Rojoux [1989], *Acte pour l'art*, Paris, Al Dante, 2007.

15. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*, Paris, Éditions du sous-sol, 2016, p. 9.

and her learning curve on the platform. The hashtag could then be used by readers of the *Madeleine Project* who then “liked,” retweeted and commented on the posts.

In addition to the “buzz” it garnered, the community side of the project and its collective edification, are key, in as much as they contribute to the very universality and poetry of Madeleine’s story, a mix of documentary, first-hand accounts and fiction. Seasons 3 and 4 worked with the CM2 pupils of the Jean Macé primary school in Aubervilliers, where Madeleine was a teacher, in an attempt to locate some of her old pupils, a great example of the way the *Madeleine Project* works as a collective investigation, a sort of social media version of *Serial*. *Serial* is an American podcast that began in 2014 and went global. It is an investigation into a real murder that occurred in 1999, told like a television series. Some listeners were so passionate about *Serial*, that they began their own investigations, just like the *Madeleine Project*. Web users contacted Beaudoux to help in identifying the unusual objects she found in her cellar, sent photos of the places Madeleine mentioned in her letters, or requested and used her recipes.

Archiving a performance

For those who did not follow the tweets in real time, as they were posted, traces of the performance are available in two aggregated forms: Storify on the Internet and two books. The website only provides a list of links to Storify for each season. Storify is an application that allows people to tell their stories, as is evident from the story. It provides a multimedia timeline of all of the social media posts and other sources in chronological order, as Twitter works backwards from the present. The narration includes hyperlinks to web pages, to images on Instagram or Flickr, to YouTube videos, and to content from other social media sites or websites. Storify is thus a tool for curating web content and a *storytelling* app.¹⁶

The book was published by the éditions du sous-sol in May 2016, and in a nutshell, can be considered to be a printed homothetic version of the first two seasons of the *Madeleine Project*, based on what was on Storify. It is a process of remediation that goes against the tide of digitalisation: printing the Internet. The book is also presented on the back of the title page as an official printed version of “an adaptation of the hashtag #*MadeleineProject*.” The book shows two to four tweets per page and reproduces the images tweeted. The tweets are categorised by performance date, and not in chapters, which highlights their temporality. They are printed in context, as if they were screen grabs, and have a white border. In fact, the screen grabs are retouched to make the Twitter logo apparent as it owns the rights to the posts—which also explains the copyright on the colophon page, and to mask the handles of all retweeters. The only handle that remains is Beaudoux’s, the precise date and time of the post, and the number of likes and retweets when it was published.

So, the book constructs a Twitter “effect,”¹⁷ that only works on the surface. The links, videos, SoundCloud clips are only there as figures of the story’s digital past as they are no longer clickable: they are just a trace, a manifestation of the absence of the original digital media. So, on page 42 of the book, we come across a link and a video to the song “Garde ton cœur Madeleine,” that is mentioned by the old lady in one of her notebooks, where she had written the lyrics. These effects are a way for Beaudoux and the publisher, to “retain the specific nature of the media, of the tweets, of the photo-report where the text works as a legend, rather than obliging the new format to adapt to the old one which would be misplaced, an anachronism that would misrepresent the initial project.”¹⁸ These effects underline the remediation of the *Madeleine Project*, and its narrative-media archaeology—as archaeology itself is defined as “a paradigm from the hint to the work.”¹⁹ The book, in fact, is there to leave a trace of the story told on Storify, that reconstituted the story told on Twitter, that itself created the portrait of Madeleine from her own archive. Any reading of the *Madeleine*

16. Christian Salmon, *Storytelling. La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits*, Paris, La Découverte, 2007.

17. Anaïs Guilet, *Pour une littérature cyborg : l’hybridation médiatique du texte littéraire*, doctoral thesis, Poitiers, Université de Poitiers/Université du Québec à Montréal, 28 March 2013.

18. Clara Beaudoux, “Préface éditoriale,” *Madeleine Project*, Paris, Éditions du sous-sol, 2016, p. 7.

19. Christoph Kümmel, “Wie weit trägt ein Indizienbeweis? Zur archäologischen Überführung von Grabräubern,” in Ulrich Veit (dir.), *Spuren und Botschaften. Interpretationen materieller Kultur*, Münster, Waxmann, 2003, p. 143.

Project involves this back-and-forth between media, and this makes it a work of transmedia. It builds its poetry on the trace of the de-contextualization/re-contextualization of the piece on several levels (thematic, narrative and media) and, as Bruno Bachimont tells us:

It is very clear that the de-contextualization of content is inherent to the very act of its inscription. To the immanence of communication in the here and now, in its actual context, inscription gives rise to content fixed in a medium and is the de-contextualisation of that content relative to the initial event or interaction it recounts, the recording, consignment, inscription. The minutes of a trial are not the trial; the text of a speech does not allow one to relive the speech as it was given, etc. This incapacity is not a fault, but the quality looked for, because through this de-contextualization, a future re-contextualisation is made possible, in the context of a reading or consultation to come, that is different from the context in which it was produced. Inscriptions are in general carried out for this reason, to allow us to reuse the trace, to use it anew, and, of course, interpret it.²⁰

This is what the *Madeleine Project* is all about: refreshing Madeleine's trace, and the different media stages of Beaudoux's in a constant battle against forgetting. The writer is, in fact, clear about the reasons for publishing a book, making them part of the imperative to tell the story:

Was it a battle against oblivion? Why print all these tweets that already existed on immaterial paper? Was it to keep your memory alive, Madeleine? To keep a trace? What will remain of the two of us?²¹

Memory and storytelling

From a cellar as from a teacup

Madeleine's name is particularly apt, as she is the subject of a real remembrance—given that Beaudoux cannot have any real memories, this is a work of memory from which the breadth of the story can spread. As such, the *Madeleine Project* is absolutely Proustian. And while the connection might seem a little facile, it remains on point when we read that

[...] But, when nothing subsists of an old past, after the death of people, after the destruction of things, alone, frailer but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, smell and taste still remain for a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, on the ruin of all the rest, bearing without giving way, on their almost impalpable droplet, the immense edifice of memory.²²

Everything Beaudoux does in her cellar, from the open suitcases, to the photos posted, to the tweets, are as trivial as they are transcendent in as much as they reveal and entire personality, an era, in the same way that Combray came, “town and gardens,” from the teacup of the narrator of Remembrance of Things Past. Journalistic, historical and fictional narratives, all rely on the same time configuration thanks to the act of narration.²³ Beaudoux's work harks back to the quasi-anthropological dimension of the narrative as a category of

20. Bruno Bachimont, “Préface de Bruno Bachimont,” in Matteo Treleani (dir.), *Mémoires audiovisuelles*, Montréal, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2014, p. 9-13. [Online] <http://books.openedition.org/pum/2109> [accessed 12 January 2018].

21. Page de présentation du *Madeleine Project* sur le site des Éditions du sous-sol. [Online] <http://www.editions-du-sous-sol.com/publication/madeleine-Project/> [accessed 12 January 2018].

22. Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann* [1913], Paris, Flammarion, 1987, p. 140-145.

23. Cf. Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit 2*, Paris, Seuil, 1984.

the way humans grasp the world. This doesn't mean that it doesn't also have to obey the definitions proposed by textual linguistics or narratology: all of the strictly structural criteria are present and correct: closure; a beginning, middle and end; unity of action and intention; causality and narrative necessity; congruent conclusion, etc.²⁴

A mythologizing plot

So, the *Madeleine Project* plays out like a real investigation, with a plot filled with twists and dramatic reveals. The narrative was, in fact, organised in advance by Beaudoux, who carefully sorted through what she wished to reveal or not and, in that way, manage its progression. While, like a lot of Sophie Calle's work²⁵ from the early eighties—that Beaudoux often refers to in interviews, The *Madeleine Project* is about the poetry of the trace, Beaudoux wants to remain discreet as an artist. She protected Madeleine's anonymity and that of her family, and chose, not to say censored, much of what she found in order to protect their privacy. As part of this attention to the narrative, in season one, she made efforts to outline Madeleine's identity, she draws the character: what she looks like, then she gave information about her family, her parents. Season 1 ended with the discovery of a suitcase in which she found all of the documents relative to Loulou, mainly letters and photographs, and we find out as the tweets are posted that he was Madeleine's fiancé, and that he died in the war. He was 31 years old. The story of Loulou and Madeleine, like all of the *Madeleine Project* is, like the title page of the book tells us, the “moving proof of the inventiveness of the real and the romance inherent in any life, even the most anonymous.”²⁶ This romantic relationship with Loulou, brings a dramatic dimension, adding to the narrative tension, not only in the plot of season 1, but also between season 1 and 2. This narrative tension resolutely establishes the succession of tweets as a real plot. For Baroni, it is

[...] what happens when the reader is encouraged to wait for the dénouement, a wait coloured with anticipation and uncertainty that add passion to the reception of the story. Narrative can thus be considered as a poetic effect that structures the narrative and in which we recognise the strength of what we refer to as a plot.²⁷

Season 1 ends on the last letter Madeleine ever wrote to Loulou, that never arrives. It is dated June 6 1940. Madeleine mentions their first time and Beaudoux chooses not to. For reasons of discretion of course, but also to manage the interstices into which the reader's imagination can dive, to make room for the identification process. The comments prove the effectiveness of this strategy as one commenter tells us that his grandmother is also called Madeleine, another that he had a neighbour that was very like her. Love, death, war, victims and heroes: all of the ingredients for a mythologizing scenario are present and correct, allowing the story to gain universality while at the same time sending every reader to their own cellar or attic. This brings us back to the importance of the *muthos* or plot, that, ever since Aristotle, is the mimesis of an action, not a simple imitation but the representation, the arrangement of facts in a system, an active imitation, that creates human actions and, in doing so, personal experiences that cannot be dissociated from temporality.

Under the aegis of Mnemosyne

Loulou died at the age of 31, the age Beaudoux was when she made her discovery, as she tells us.²⁸ Thus, we feel the presence of the narrator as the portrait of Madeleine is being drawn. The *Madeleine Project* doubles up the biographical side with an underlying

24. See Annick Dubied's definition of narrative. A summary in 10 criteria: beginning, middle and end; appropriate length; narrative causality; narrative necessity; theme; human interest; an unpredictable, appropriate conclusion; a conclusion that allows for retrospection; the inversion of the effect of actions; actualisation. In Annick Dubied, “Le récit médiatique. Un objet complexe en quête de définition,” *Communication*, Université Laval, vol. 19, 1999.

25. An example would be *L'Hôtel* (1981) or *Le Carnet d'adresse* (1983).

26. Clara Beaudoux, “Préface éditoriale,” *Madeleine Project*, Paris, Éditions du sous-sol, 2016, p. 7.

27. Raphaël Baroni, *La Tension narrative. Suspense, curiosité et surprise*, Paris, Seuil, 2007.

28. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*, Paris, Éditions du sous-sol, 2016, p. 118.

autobiographical thread, showing, yet again, in a very Proustian manner, the role of narration in the quest and constitution of identity. Clara Beaudoux, gets more and more involved as the tweets go on, and begins to reveal information about herself, often in brackets, as a sort of sidebar: like Madeleine, she loves to go ice-skating²⁹ and has a weakness for little notebooks.³⁰ This proximity, not to say intimacy, between the two women is also felt in the dialogue that Beaudoux starts with Madeleine. From the second day of the first season,³¹ tweets appear in the second-person singular, at the same time as the first-person singular starts to feature more prominently. Beaudoux declares that, “thanks to the *Madeleine Project* I finally started saying I.”³² She literally slides into Madeleine’s life, and it seems to fit her like a glove. In one of her posts, she actually puts on the old lady’s gloves and takes a photo of her hand with a direct tweet to Madeleine: “A funny turning point in terms of my physical commitment to the project, Madeleine :)”³³ Beaudoux’s writing thus links back to *Mnemosyne*. *Mnemosyne is Memory*, the Goddess mother of the nine muses, who presides over high poetry. Poetry and memory are so closely linked for Homer that, to write verse was to remember:

Memory is always at the beginning, it is the matrix of invention for all human arts, of all human making, including the making of ideas; it memorably encapsulates an assumption that memory and invention, or what we now call “creativity.”³⁴

In Aristotle, remembrance is *investigatio*, a tracking process, of bringing memory “marks” up to date, that necessarily involved an interpretation, that in its wake leads to “all of the rhetoric of invention and mobilises the imagination’s creative faculties.”³⁵

The story Beaudoux proposes relies on a memory exercise, on reading through an archive, on an investigation and the creation of a narrative, and a transfer to a media: a truly creative process. Madeleine becomes a character, who through her anonymous contours, and Beaudoux’s mythologizing narrative, is more like a witness, in this case a historical witness, that narrative journalism is so fond of. She is both anchored in reality and a marker for the imagination. The *Madeleine Project*, in book form, is identified as “a report by Clara Beaudoux,” and on the title page is labelled “Series/ Non-Fiction.”³⁶ It is published by the éditions du sous-sol, a publishing house that specialises in documentary writing and non-fiction. It is, in fact, a hybrid narrative, on the border between journalism and literature. As such, it is very much part of the current trend for narrative journalism,³⁷ or in a broader sense, of the 21st century’s marked predilection for the document. As Philippe Daros, Alexandre Gefen and Alexandre Prstojevic tell us in their call for papers for a conference on non-fiction,

While previous centuries saw the novel reaching its pinnacle, 21st century literature begins with the triumph of the document: travel writing, investigations, legal and ethnological enquiries, autobiographies, factographies, factions, literary reports and recordings, and other forms of narrative that refuse to be called novels have taken over our bookshops.³⁸

To this, we must add newspapers and networks. Beaudoux’s piece of transmedia non-fiction thus contributes to this blurring of genres, discourse and disciplines. The very history

29. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*, Paris, Éditions du sous-sol, 2016, p. 47.

30. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*, Paris, Éditions du sous-sol, 2016, p. 63.

31. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*, Paris, Éditions du sous-sol, 2016, p. 30.

32. Clara Beaudoux and Emmanuelle Hirschauer, “Entretien – grâce au Madeleine Project je me suis mise à dire je,” *bibliobs*, 28 May 2016. [Online] <https://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/web-side-stories/20160527.OBS1387/grace-au-madeleine-project-je-me-suis-mise-a-dire-je.html> 20160527.OBS1387/grace-au-madeleine-Project-je-me-suis-mise-a-dire-je.html [accessed 18 May 2017].

33. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*, Paris, Éditions du sous-sol, 2016, p. 5.

34. Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought Meditation, rhetoric, and the making of images, 400±1200* [1998], Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 7.

35. Herman Parret, “Vestige, archive et trace. Présences du temps passé,” *Protée*, no. 322, 2004, p. 40.

36. Clara Beaudoux, *Madeleine Project*, Paris, Éditions du sous-sol, 2016.

37. Narrative journalism itself follows on from French “grand reportage” as practiced by Albert Londres.

38. Philippe Daros, Alexandre Gefen and Alexandre Prstojevic, “Territoires de la non-fiction,” *Fabula*, 15 June 2017. [Online] https://www.fabula.org/actualites/territoires-de-la-non-fiction_79215.php [accessed 12 January 2018].

of literary journalism comes from this very blurry place, as retraced by Marc Lits “since Tom Wolfe’s seminal articles and Truman Capote’s ‘true novel’ *In Cold Blood* (1966), via the Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Polish writer Ryszard Kapuscinski or the French writer Jonathan Littell.”³⁹ Indeed, the *Madeleine Project* corresponds perfectly to the characteristics of literary journalism as outlined by Norman Sims:⁴⁰ immersion of the reporter, access to and connection with the subject, close attention to ordinary lives, factual accuracy and at the same time, the importance of having a voice, a style, a complex story construction and finally, paying attention to the story’s symbolic value. Alain Lallemand sums narrative journalism up in a few words: “action, proximity, involvement, with a certain critical distance; reliability, significant voice and structure,”⁴¹ what Lallemand means by involvement is that it is important that the journalist to be in the field, but also to take part in the action, to experience it—something that Beaudoux does, especially through the performance nature of her narrative. What Lallemand means by significant structure is the idea that the narrative leads to a “life lesson,”⁴² that it must have a social dimension, make a connection with society.⁴³ It is here that the story and the history connect, that documentation and literary narration intertwine.

In the *Madeleine Project*, narrative journalism—according to Lallemand’s definition at least—is very much in line with Paul Ricœur; in as much as it expresses, “a visceral, tragic experience of our temporality”⁴⁴ as the philosopher outlines in *Time and Narrative*, and a narrative activity that is fundamentally hermeneutic. Time can only be grasped through the narratives, stories and myths we tell:

time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.⁴⁵

We read or tell stories, fictional or not, just like Madeleine’s, because they give meaning to the intrigue of our lives. As Ricœur declares in *Time and Narrative 3*, “Our life is a story that does not just need, but deserves to be told.”⁴⁶ Madeleine, who has no tomb, no child to preserve her memory, deserves to have her story told—“here, writing means remembrance” as Jean Grondin⁴⁷ said in his analysis of Ricœur. Beaudoux forms a barrier against “oblivion and forgetting,”⁴⁸ despite the fact that critics on the Internet felt she had invaded Madeleine’s privacy. On the opposite end of the “broken line”⁴⁹ that comes from “oblivion and forgetting” there is the happy memory, the happiness that comes when a scrap of the past is snatched from the jaws of oblivion.⁵⁰ This is what *Madeleine Project* does. The story of this school teacher sheds light on our understanding of ourselves, of our identity, it brings what Ricœur called our narrative identity to life. “[...] To answer the question ‘who?’ is to tell the story of a life,”⁵¹ and that is what Clara Beaudoux did, one tweet after another.

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40. Norman Sims, *True Stories. A Century of Literary Journalism*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2008.

41. Alain Lallemand, *Journalisme narratif en pratique*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2011, p. 23.

42. Alain Lallemand, *Journalisme narratif en pratique*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2011, p. 23.

43. Cf. Marc Lits, *Du récit au récit médiatique*, Bruxelles, De Boeck, 2008.

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45. Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit 1*, Paris, Seuil, 1983, p. 17.

46. Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit 3*, Paris, Seuil, 1991, p. 115.

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