

THE DATUM DOES NOT WAIT

*A Short Manifesto for
Another Way of Thinking about Data*

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Tried by the Flow — A Processual Ontology of the Datum, entry volume
The Datum Does Not Wait — A Short Manifesto for Another Way of Thinking about Data

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The full text of this volume and of the whole corpus is freely available at <https://artisanat-de-la-donnee.fr>

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Table of Contents

The Datum Does Not Wait	1
<i>A Short Manifesto for Another Way of Thinking about Data</i> . . .	1
Opening — The Reversal of Outlook	1
I — Being Born: The Spring	4
II — Travelling: The Movement	7
III — Being Read: The Trace or the Datum	8
Closing — Why This Engages Us	11
Translation choices	13

The Datum Does Not Wait

A Short Manifesto for Another Way of Thinking about Data

David Bories — Work in Progress, 2026

Note on the translation — This translation re-fixes the source text without displacing its substance. A few terms of the corpus have no obvious equivalent in English; the choices made, and how they are to be read, are set out in the section “Translation choices” at the end of the volume. This translation is not frozen: it will evolve with readers’ feedback and with the improvement of the means of translation. The French version is authoritative.

“You cannot step twice into the same river.”

— Heraclitus, fragment 91

Opening — The Reversal of Outlook

We say *my data* as we would say *my belongings*. Somewhere — on a phone, in a server, in the vaults of a company we will never see — things that belong to us are said to be stored, piled up, sometimes stolen. We have been taught to worry about them, to protect them, to claim them back. We have been told over and over that they are worth a great deal: the “new oil”, as people have been saying for twenty years. We dig lakes to pour them into and keep them there, convinced that one day we will know what to do with them.

This image is everywhere. It is in the newspapers, in the laws, in the mouths of leaders as in our anxious conversations. It structures our law, our economy, even our fears. And it rests on an intuition so obvious that hardly anyone takes the trouble to state it: a datum is supposed to be a *thing*. A stable object, existing in itself, that can be owned, stored, resold —

a grain of informational matter waiting, somewhere, for someone to come and pick it up.

This little book starts from a suspicion. What if this image were false? Not inaccurate in its details, but false at the root — false to the point of making us think wrongly about almost everything we do with data.

What Everyone Has Already Experienced

Let us start again from things everyone has lived through.

The position your phone displays is right at the instant it calculates it. Five minutes later, you have turned the corner, and that point on the map no longer says where you are: it says where you were. The balance your bank displayed this morning was accurate this morning; at noon, a direct debit inscribed a different one. The photograph on the mantelpiece fixes a face at an age it has already left; the child smiling in it is an adult today.

In none of these cases has the datum changed. The point on the map has stayed the same, so has the displayed balance, and the photograph has not gained a single wrinkle. What has changed is the world. The datum has stayed still while the real it described carried on without it.

There is the flaw. If a datum were really a stable thing, it would stay true. But it does not stay true. It starts lying about the present from the instant it is fixed — not because it becomes corrupted, but because the world does not stop for it. A datum does not wait. And a thing that starts lying all by itself, without anyone touching it, is not quite a thing.

The Missing Word

Between the datum and us, a word is missing. That word is *flow*.

We do not live surrounded by data. We live surrounded by a real that flows — a world in motion, indifferent, which always exceeds what we cut out of it and never pauses to let itself be counted. This is what we shall call the **flow of the real**. It is not a complicated theory: it is only the observation that the world, before any measurement, is already passing.

In this flow, there are no data. There is a heartbeat, a street being crossed, a price going up, a word exchanged between two friends. None of this is a datum as long as no one has inscribed anything. These events simply *are* — neither given nor there for the taking. The heart beats whether or not anyone counts its beats.

The datum is born of a gesture. Someone, for a reason, at a precise instant, detaches a fragment from the flow and inscribes it: a figure, a line, an image. It is this gesture — this **drawing** — that makes the datum exist. Before it, there was no datum waiting patiently to be collected. There was the river. The datum is the fish one pulls out of it; and the fish does not exist as a fish as long as it is still swimming. Not all data are born in

this way from an observation: some are born of an act that institutes — a marriage that is registered, a vote that is counted —, others are calculated from existing data, like an average. But none is born without a gesture, and it is above all the route of observation that this book will follow.

Let us therefore reverse the opening image. One does not *collect* data as one would gather fruit fallen at the foot of a tree. One *draws* them: one chooses a place in the flow, an instant, a way of measuring, and fixes an inscription of it. The gesture is not neutral. It carries an intention, criteria, a point of view. Two people drawing from the same world at the same moment, but not looking for the same thing, do not get the same data from it: the doctor will retain a fever where the poet will retain the pallor of a face. The datum is not the real: it is what we have chosen to retain of it.

Why This Changes Everything

Once this shift has been made, everything else follows, almost mechanically.

If the datum is a dated drawing, then it *goes stale*. At the instant it is inscribed, the flow carries on, and the gap between what it says and what is grows with every second. Its **freshness** — its proximity to the present of the world — is never acquired once and for all, and cannot be recovered: one does not rejuvenate a datum; one can only draw again, alongside, and start over.

If the datum is a drawing, then its value does not lie in its quantity. A warehouse full of ten-year-old data may be worth less, for deciding today, than a single measurement taken this morning, because the one still touches the flow while the other speaks only of the past — which remains precious for history. The “new oil” is the wrong image: oil keeps and improves with time; the datum that claims to speak of the present loses its scent like a perfume left open.

And if the datum is a drawing made on a flow that belongs to no one, then the question of ownership shifts. One can own a file, a medium, an inscription. One does not own the flow of the real, which carries on, indifferent, for everyone at once — just as no one owns the river from which everyone draws: what one person draws from it takes nothing away from what another can draw. This observation does not, by itself, say what the law should decide. But the question is perhaps not only *who owns the data*; it is also *who decides what is drawn*, and *who can still access the flow*.

None of this is gratuitous, nor hopeless. If so many data go stale, it is because we must draw again, endlessly — and that is precisely what we do, without even thinking about it. We do not undergo the flow: we dig canals in it, series of regulated drawings that capture from it, drop by drop, what is useful to us. To think the datum from the flow is therefore not to

give up mastering it. It is to stop believing that owning it is enough, so as at last to understand what we do with it.

The Itinerary of This Book

This manifesto does not demonstrate; it shows. It follows the datum as one would follow a watercourse, from its birth to its end, in three phases.

First, **being born**: how the datum is dug in the flow of the real, fixed at an instant, and why it immediately begins to age.

Next, **travelling**: how it circulates, is copied without being divided, passes from hand to hand — and on what condition this journey is truly accomplished.

Finally, **being read**: for a datum that no one receives, that no one understands, speaks to no one. It remains, not yet read, or mute for whoever sees it pass by; it falls back to the state of mere trace only on the day when no eye, anywhere, can decipher it any longer.

At the end of these three phases, you will not be holding a method or a toolbox. You will be holding an outlook — another way of seeing what you thought you knew. If this outlook catches your interest, know that it extends a much vaster work, of which this book is only the door. But a door is enough to enter.

Let us begin with the spring.

I — Being Born: The Spring

Imagine a thermometer set in a river. At noon, it shows twelve degrees. Someone on the bank writes in a notebook: “12 °C, noon”. This entry is now fixed; it will not move again. But the river has not stopped flowing. At five past twelve, the water has already warmed by a tenth of a degree, or cooled by as much. The entry remains true *of noon*; it immediately begins to become false *of the present*.

Everything is there, in this tiny scene. The datum is born of an encounter between a gesture that fixes and a world that never holds still.

The Gesture That Gives Birth

Before the entry, there was no datum in the river. There was water at a certain temperature — a fact of the world, neither written nor there for the taking. The datum begins with the **act of inscription**: the moment when someone perceives, distinguishes, interprets, aims at a fragment of the real, and inscribes it on a medium. It is a human gesture, intentional and situated. One chooses *what* to measure, *when*, *how*, and — without even

thinking of it — *what one neglects*. An infinity of things were happening in that river: the current, the fish, the light on the water, the sediment drifting down. The entry retained only one of them, the temperature, and let all the rest flow away. To inscribe is always to retain one thing and let a thousand slip by.

That is why a datum is never the real itself, only a *partial replica*, faithful to the criteria that brought it into being. The thermometer is faithful to the temperature and mute about everything else. Change the instrument, the intention, the moment: you get another datum from the same river. The datum carries the mark of the hand that drew it, as a photograph carries the framing of the one who aimed. There is no datum without a point of view, as there is no photograph without a frame.

The Two Times of the Datum

There remains a paradox to be dissolved, for it keeps coming back, and as long as it holds, the whole edifice wavers. We say of a datum that it is *frozen*: “12 °C at noon” will remain so for ever, engraved, final. And we say at the same time that it *goes stale*, that it ages. How can a frozen thing age? An inscribed number does not rot.

The answer fits in one sentence: the datum does not have one time, it has two. In the one, it is eternal; in the other, it ages; and these two times do not contradict each other, because they do not measure the same thing. A datum is in fact born of two distinct gestures: an **act**, which brings it into being at an instant and fixes it for ever; a **medium** — the notebook, the file, a machine’s memory — which makes it last. The content does not change: “12 °C at noon” will always be “12 °C at noon”. What changes is the gap between this motionless content and a real that moves away. The datum does not age because it is modified. It ages because the world has carried on without it.

This is what is called **lapse**. The word sounds stern; the idea is simple. Take the river entry again. It does not deteriorate: in a year, it will still say exactly “12 °C at noon”. It is not the entry that changes — it is the river, which at five past twelve was already a little different, and tomorrow entirely different. Lapse, then, is not the datum spoiling like an apple forgotten in a drawer. It is the gap that grows between the datum, which has stayed still, and the world, which has carried on. A datum, moreover, is never stale in itself, only for a use: the noon entry no longer says anything about this evening’s water, and it remains accurate for anyone retracing the history of the river.

And this gap does not grow at the same speed for everything. The price of a share on the stock exchange goes stale in a few seconds: barely displayed, already false. The height of Mont Blanc goes stale over thousands of years: one can rely on it for a whole lifetime without risk. In both cases, the datum has nothing to do with it. What sets the speed is the piece of the world that has been drawn — according to whether it moves fast or slowly.

Some data even seem never to age: the grammar of a language, the cycle of the moon, a theorem of geometry. It is an illusion, but a useful one. The real they describe is moving away too — only so slowly that, on the scale of a human life, the drift is imperceptible. These *stable sources* are the firm ground on which one can build: one consults them today as yesterday, one leans on them without fear. On one condition only: never forget that their solidity is a long duration, and not an eternity. The ground itself eventually moves; it just moves too slowly for us to feel it.

From Bucket to Canal

If so many data go stale, is drawing not in danger of being futile? One would scoop buckets of water from the river, and they would evaporate as fast as one set them down on the bank. What would be the point?

This is where humans do better than scoop. They **dig canals**. Instead of an isolated entry, soon stale, they make a regulated, cadenced series of them: they measure the temperature of the river every hour, day after day, season after season. This series of drawings — what we shall call a **flow of observation** — restores, in small touches, the movement of the fragment of the real they have chosen to follow. Where a bucket gave only an instant, the canal gives back a current.

The canal is infinitely poorer than the river: it contains only what its course has been willing to admit, the water of temperature and nothing else. But the canal is something humans master. They can follow it with their eyes, go back up it to its spring, replay it, connect it to other canals, entrust it to a neighbour who needs it, fill it in when they no longer have any use for it. The lapse of each drop is thus offset by the cadence of the whole: one does not recover an aged datum, one draws a fresh one, and the canal keeps flowing.

The whole relation to the datum tips over. We thought we were losing it — the flow escapes us, every measurement ages. We discover that we can rebuild it, patiently, by digging canals that capture from the flow what is useful to us. And it is a double lesson. A lesson in modesty, first: beyond all the canals, there will always remain the river, immeasurable, indifferent, owned by no one. But a lesson in freedom, straight away: since the river cannot be owned, no one can claim to own it in our place. There are only canals, dug by intentions, which anyone can learn to lay out. Humans will never be the owners of the waters. They can be the builders, lucid and responsible, of their canals.

The datum is born. It is fixed, dated, already ageing. It remains to be seen what becomes of it when it leaves its spring and sets off travelling.

II — Travelling: The Movement

A datum almost never stays where it was born. The notebook entry goes off to a spreadsheet, the spreadsheet is sent by email, the email lands with ten recipients, one of whom forwards it to ten others. The datum travels, constantly, and ever faster. This journey seems trivial — one clicks, and off it goes. Yet it obeys laws that no one suspects, and which change a great deal.

Two Journeys in One

When a datum moves, it in fact makes two trips at once.

The first is visible, and intended: the medium that carries it changes place. The file goes from one computer to another, from one continent to another. This is **spatial navigation** — the one we master, decide, direct. We choose to send this here rather than there.

The second is invisible, and undergone: while the datum travels, the real from which it was drawn keeps moving away. This is **temporal navigation**. Not a movement of the datum — it stays motionless in its content —, but the world turning around it as it makes its way. A measurement of air quality sent from one city to another arrives accurate on its medium, and yet already older: the air, back where it came from, has kept changing during the trip. The two journeys add up. To transport a datum is always, in addition to moving it, to let it age a little.

From this comes a question that is almost always neglected: did the datum remain *faithful*, on the way, to what it said on departure? Did the medium hold up? Did the format survive the journey? Was the meaning transmitted intact, with what was needed to understand it? The **fidelity** of transport is never guaranteed in advance. A datum may arrive corrupted, truncated — or, more insidiously, perfectly intact but detached from the context that made it legible. It then arrives whole, and yet illegible, like a letter whose first page has been lost.

Shared Without Being Divided

Then comes the strangest property of the datum, the one that sets it apart from every material object. If I give you an apple, I no longer have it. If I give you a datum, I still have it.

To transmit a datum, most of the time, is not to move it from one place to another; it is to **copy** it. The original stays with me, a replica appears with you. And yet the datum has not multiplied: there is still *one* datum, the same content, the same fact. It is its carriers that have multiplied. There are now two of us holding it, and there could be a thousand without it changing. The datum is shared as a fact is shared: without impoverishing the one who gives it. Telling you the time does not deprive me of the time; telling you a piece of news does not make me forget it.

This property has two faces, and they are exactly the same. Because a datum is copied without being divided, it can nourish shared knowledge, libraries open to all, commons from which everyone draws without taking anything from others: that is the bright part. But for the same reason, once let loose, it can no longer be caught back. The photograph one regrets, the rumour, the secret that has escaped are copied from one person to the next, and no hand can recall them one by one: that is the dark part. The gesture that decides to share sets off a diffusion whose outcome it no longer controls. Generosity and the leak are not two different laws; they are the same law, seen from two sides.

From Brook to Torrent

Multiply the canals, the copies, the speeds, the recipients — and the quiet brook becomes a **torrent**. We are there. Never have data circulated in such numbers, so fast, towards so many people at once. Everyone feels it without always naming it: the inbox spilling over, the feed that never runs out, the feeling of never being up to date. This is **over-throughput**: infinitely more data pass before each of us than any of us will ever be able to receive.

It is time to state a truth that abundance conceals. A datum that circulates is not, for all that, a datum that has been read. It has been produced, transported, copied, deposited within reach — the journey has made it available; but as long as no one has *truly* received it, it is just more water passing by. The journey is brought to its end only if the receiver's share is made practicable: if the receiver has the time, the means and the code to do something with it. Pouring a thousand raw data onto someone who cannot decipher them is not transmitting them to that person — it is making them file past that person. A mail carrier who slips a letter under a closed door has not delivered the mail, only moved it.

The whole movement of the datum thus stumbles against a narrow point, the only one that the torrent, however furious, cannot force: reading. It is there, at this narrow passage, that the last phase is played out — and by far the most decisive one.

III — Being Read: The Trace or the Datum

An old hard drive found at the back of an attic. It has kept its files perfectly: not one bit has moved in twenty years. But the software that opened them no longer exists, the format is forgotten, and no one knows how to read them any more. The data are there, intact, and yet as good as dead. What do they lack, since they lack nothing? They lack a reader.

Here is the last truth, the least obvious and perhaps the most important. A datum exists as soon as it has been inscribed; but it speaks only at the

moment when someone reads it: neither the medium nor the journey is enough, there must be the encounter with a reader. Without reading, it does not disappear: it remains, not yet read, or mute for whoever cannot decipher it. It falls back to the state of **trace** — a mere mark on a medium, deprived of the interpretation that made it a datum — only if no one, anywhere, can read it any longer.

Reading Is Not from Nowhere

We readily imagine reading as a neutral, transparent operation: the datum would be there, all one would have to do is pick it with one's eyes, and anyone would get the same thing from it. That is false. Whoever reads is always a **situated reader**. Such a reader reads from a body, from an attention that tires, from a store of knowledge that allows them to decipher this and not that. The doctor reads an X-ray where I see only a grey haze; the sailor reads in the sky a storm I do not see coming; the musician hears a wrong note where I hear only a song. The same inscription does not yield the same thing to everyone. No reading is from nowhere. The universal reader, who would read everything from no point of view, does not exist — it is a contradiction in terms.

Every reader therefore reads through a **window**: a bounded portion of what files past, cut out by their body, their attention, their knowledge. One might be tempted to see it as an infirmity, a prison. It is exactly the reverse. The window does not shut the reader in: it makes reading possible. A window without edges is no longer a window — it is a knocked-down wall, which gives onto nothing because it frames nothing. It is because it cuts out that it shows. A reader who read *everything* at once would read nothing at all, for to read is to distinguish this from that, and to distinguish everything at the same time amounts to no longer distinguishing anything — as a spotlight that lit every direction would cease to light anything at all. The instruments that widen the window — the magnifying glass, the filter, the automatic summary — never abolish it: they move it, and every move opens new blind spots. One sees further; one always sees from a single place.

Mute Is Not Dead

An unread datum does not always meet the same fate, and the nuance is worth dwelling on, because the cases are confused all the time.

The code that runs an application is illegible to me, and perfectly clear to the person who wrote it. This datum is **mute**: it does have an interpretation — a key that deciphers it exists —, but this particular reader does not possess it. Muteness is not a death; it is simply a relation between a datum and a given reader. Let a competent reader come along, and the mute datum is a speaking one again. The state is relative, and reversible: mute for me today, legible for another, or for myself tomorrow, once I have learned.

Quite different is the **dead** datum: the extreme case where no reader, anywhere in the world, can interpret it any longer. The deciphering key has died out with the last people who held it. All that remains then is the bare inscription on its medium — like our files in the attic, like a language whose last speaker has died. The datum has disappeared; only the trace remains. If one day someone takes hold of it, this will not be a reading but a new gesture of inscription, which will make it a datum of an entirely new kind: no longer the message it carried, but “regular marks on a disk, dated to such-and-such a period”.

The torrent, passing before us faster than we can read, mass-produces data that are simply unread, a little mute data; and, in the long run, very little dead data, which settles at the bottom for want of the slightest reader. The real drama of abundance is not so much that it produces the unread, muteness and death — it is that it ends up making us lose the capacity to distinguish what deserved to be read from what could, without harm, be left.

Not All Unread Data Are Failures

Why, exactly, is a datum not read? There are three reasons, and confusing them would be a mistake, for they call for quite different responses.

The first is **incapacity**: the reader *cannot* read — the code, the means or the access is lacking. The datum is mute for this reader, alive perhaps for another. This is the case of the tourist facing a sign in a language they do not know. This lack can be repaired: one learns, or one turns to someone who can read in one's place.

The second is **disinterest**: the reader *could* read — they have the code, the means, the access, everything needed — but does not. The flood distracts them; the datum passes before their eyes and they see it without reading it, as one runs one's eyes over a poster for the hundredth time without seeing it. Here, no means is lacking: what is at stake is the attention one grants or refuses.

The third is **rapid lapse**: the datum simply did not *wait* to be read. Its freshness was so brief that, past the first instant, reading it was already of no use — think of a platform announcement at a railway station once the train has left. It went stale for its use before anyone even thought of taking hold of it — without ceasing, for all that, to be a datum, which another use could still take up.

From this distinction comes an idea that brings relief. **Not all unread data are failures.** Rapid lapse is the normal fate of an immense part of what is produced every day; wanting to read everything would be as futile as it is exhausting, and most often useless. The first task of the overwhelmed reader is therefore not to read everything — it is to discern what is worth reading. Otherwise, they will commit one of the two twin

errors: letting slip what absolutely had to be read, or wearing themselves out on what could, in peace, have stayed unread.

Before the torrent, however, the reader is not helpless. Three gestures are open to them. They can **frame**: deliberately choose what they look at and what they let pass, as one turns a window towards the landscape one wants to see. They can **delegate**: entrust their reading to another — a colleague, a specialist, a machine —, on condition of knowing that they then inherit that other's window, choices and blind spots. Finally, they can **accept**: consent, in full lucidity, to a part escaping them for ever, because one cannot frame everything nor delegate everything. These three gestures are not mutually exclusive; we mix them every day. And their dosage engages what one might call the *reader's probity*: the honesty of someone who knows what they read, what they do not read, and what they have placed in another's hands.

Thus the cycle closes. The datum is born of a gesture that draws from the real and fixes it; and from then on it ages. It circulates through a gesture that sets it in motion and copies it without dividing it; and this movement deposits it everywhere at once. It speaks in a last gesture that reads it; and failing that gesture, it remains, not yet read — it falls back into trace, where it had come from, only on the day when no one, anywhere, can read it any longer.

Closing — Why This Engages Us

At the end of this journey, the opening image has been turned inside out like a glove. The datum is not an object one owns and piles up; it is the result of a gesture — for the observational datum, a dated drawing, made on a real that never stops —, often called upon to travel, and which speaks only at the instant when a reader receives it. This simple shift of outlook has consequences that reach far beyond technology, and touch on matters that concern us all.

Three Unsettling Consequences

On artificial intelligence, first. These machines that answer everything learned from a world frozen at a given date: they are, by construction, a *backup*. Ask them a question about what has happened since, and the gap shows itself — the gap between the datum frozen within them and the flow which has carried on. All the efforts to “plug” them into current events, to feed them live from fresh sources, are nothing other than attempts to plug them back into the flow. They say, by their very existence, what our outlook at last allows us to name: left to itself, such a machine is a backup that drifts a little further from the present with every passing day.

On law, next. The whole edifice that protects our data — the consent we

give, the access we claim, rectification, erasure — assumes that the datum is a stable object, firmly attached to a person, which can be corrected or deleted as one strikes out a line. On this point, it is not wrong: once inscribed, the datum is indeed stable. Where it assumes too much is in taking the datum to stand in for what it is drawn from: if the datum is a drawing from the flow of my behaviour, correcting this drawing changes nothing in the flow, which has already run further on. Erasing a datum concerning me is removing a bucket of water; it is not stopping the river. The “right to be forgotten”, taken literally, is a right over drawings — not a power over the river.

On power, finally. As long as the datum is held to be an object, the political question fits in three words: *who owns it?* As soon as it is held to be a drawing, the question shifts, and multiplies: *who decides what is drawn? who defines its criteria? who keeps control over access to the flow?* This shift is anything but neutral. It moves mastery of the datum from the side of accumulation — piling up as much as possible — to that of intention — choosing what is worth capturing. And at the same stroke, it gives back to each person a responsibility that the idea of possession had made them forget.

An Admission That Belongs to the Subject

A word, to finish, on the making of this book. It was conceived and directed by a human, but written with the help of a generative artificial intelligence. This particularity is not a note slipped in at the foot of the page out of scruple: it belongs to the subject. A book that asks what becomes of knowledge when a machine interposes itself between humans and the real could not honestly conceal that a machine interposed itself in its own writing. The verisimilar datum that such a tool produces was not, here, only an object of study; it was also an instrument of writing. In this, the book does what it says.

The Door Is Open

This manifesto has demonstrated nothing in detail, and that was intended. It sought to show an outlook, not to exhaust a thesis. Each idea we have passed through — drawing, fixation, freshness and lapse, the canal, the fidelity of transport, the copy that does not divide, the situated reader, the window, the trace — has only been touched on. Each one unfolds, gains nuance, is tried against cases and crafts, in a much vaster work: the corpus *Tried by the Flow — A Processual Ontology of the Datum*.

In it are found the trilogy that sets out its substance — *The River and the Canal, From Spring to Torrent, The Trace or the Datum* — and continuity volumes that derive its concrete applications, from the craft to the tools. This little book is only its threshold. If it has given you the wish to enter, the rest awaits you on the other side of the door.

The river does not wait. But one can learn to dig canals in it.

Translation choices

These notes say how to read the English words that render the terms of the corpus. They are fixed for the whole English translation by the *Translation Charter of the Corpus*.

- **datum / data.** The corpus treats the datum as an individual: it is born, it can travel, it goes stale for a use. English *data* tends to blur this into a mass, so the translation says *datum* in the singular — unusual but exact, the Latin for “what is given” — and *data* as its plural, construed as a plural (“Not all unread data are failures”). The subtitle keeps the everyday “Thinking about Data”.
- **drawing / to draw** (*prélèvement, prélever*). The gesture of drawing from the flow, as one draws water from a river or blood from a vein: situated, and carrying an intention. *Sampling* is avoided: it would shift the meaning towards statistics. The bank’s *prélèvement* in the opening is a direct debit, not a drawing.
- **lapse; stale; to go stale** (*péremption; périmée; se périmer*). Lapse is a relation, not a decay: the gap that widens between a datum that stays still and a world that carries on, as a right lapses with time. A datum goes stale *for a use*, never in itself. *Expiry* is kept for regulatory contexts.
- **canal.** The canal dug in the river, for irrigation; never a communication *channel*. One digs it, lays out its **course** (*tracé*), replays it, fills it in.
- **spring** (*source*). The spring where the datum is born (Part I), and the title of Tome 2, *From Spring to Torrent*; never a *data source*. “Source” keeps its ordinary sense elsewhere (“fresh sources”).
- **river** (*fleuve*), the flow of the real. The French text also says *rivière* for the river of the thermometer; English has one word for both.
- **verisimilar datum.** A datum guaranteed by a model, not by the real; *plausible* would weaken it.
- **over-throughput** (*sur-débit*). Arrivals that exceed the capacity to read; neither an overload nor an overflow.
- **medium** (*support*), plural *media*: what carries the inscription and makes it last. **Carrier** (*porteur*): what holds an occurrence of the datum; copying multiplies carriers, the datum remains one.
- **gesture** (*geste*) is kept distinct from **act** (*acte*): the act of inscription is one of the founding gestures.
- **the three phases** (*les trois temps*: being born, travelling, being read) are distinct from **the two times of the datum**: the time of inscription, in which it is fixed, and the time of the real, in which it ages.
- **frame / delegate / accept:** the reader’s three gestures before the torrent. *Frame* keeps the root of the photograph’s framing in Part I.
- **backup** (*sauvegarde*): a language model trained on a frozen corpus is a backup that drifts from the present.

- **entry** (*relevé*): the thermometer's inscribed measurement. The word *reading* is kept for the act of reading.
- **outlook** (*regard*): the way of seeing the manifesto proposes. **Reversal** (*renversement*) is the corpus word for overturning the image of the datum as a thing.
- **processual ontology**: never *procedural*, nor *process-based*. **Tried by the Flow**: the datum put to the test of the flow.
- In the wider corpus, **actualized** (*actualisée*) always means the act of reading, never the updating of a file; the **datum of origin** is what the act of inscription brings into being, whatever the number of its copies.
- Heraclitus, fragment 91: the epigraph gives the received English rendering of the Greek, which says *river*, the word that translates *fleuve* throughout.

“What is a datum, anyway?”

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— someone once asked me.

From that innocuous question came a whole body of work which, one thing leading to another, built up a portrait of the datum in a dense corpus.

Too dense for the ordinary reader, who has no wish to spend ages reading several volumes to grasp its principle.

So I condensed the essence of the reflection into a small book, a manifesto that is easy to read and lets anyone who wishes to carry the reflection further through the corpus “Tried by the Flow – A Processual Ontology of the Datum”.

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What if the datum were not a thing one owns, but the result of a gesture — for the observational datum, a drawing made on a real that never stops? This little book follows the datum as one follows a watercourse: how it is born of a gesture that fixes it and at once dooms it to age; how it travels and is copied without ever being divided; why it speaks only at the instant when a reader receives it — failing which it remains, not yet read, and falls back into trace only if no one is left who can read it.

Without jargon or scholarly apparatus, it does not demonstrate: it shows. At the end of the journey, not a method, but an outlook — another way of seeing what one thought one knew.

This manifesto says what a datum is when taken as a process; and, for anyone who wants to go further, it is the front door to the corpus Tried by the Flow — A Processual Ontology of the Datum.