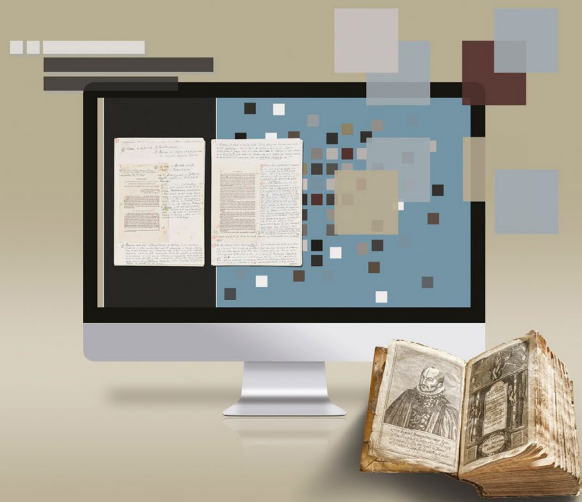


## Jean Starobinski. *Critical Relationships* Experimental Digital Exhibition to Celebrate the Centenary of Jean Starobinski



Jean Starobinski. *Critical Relationships*  
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**For 18 months, the project has brought together literary expertise, museum research, design, engineering and psychology, under the leadership of the Swiss National Library and the EPFL+ECAL Lab. Its objective is to highlight major writers and their contributions to thought, from the collections deposited with the Swiss Literary Archives. On 26 November, the opening of the digital exhibition *Jean Starobinski. Critical Relationships*, unveils this partnership's first achievement. It demonstrates the current relevance of the contributions by this world-renowned Geneva writer and critic.**

We all critique on a daily basis: at work, in education, in politics, in our private conversations. Critique is at the heart of professional practices as diverse as art and science. But do we know how to define critique? Do we have any idea of its evolution, its meaning, its impact, its practices? Criticism constitutes an essential bulwark against the disinformation which invades public debates. It is essential to the collective construction of meaning. Thinkers have explored these questions, contributed their scientific knowledge, written essays on the issue. Sharing their contribution is essential to our society. For the development of thought, but also for our daily lives.

The critical stance of Jean Starobinski (1920-2019) makes it possible to rise to the challenge. At the end of 2020, we are celebrating the centenary of this Geneva writer, who marked reflections on critique around the world. His work certainly addresses literary critique, but also touches on his other favourite disciplines such as medicine, the history of ideas, music and the fine arts. His writings stand out for their relevance and international impact, but also for their accessibility. You can read *La Relation critique* without being an expert in the field. Jean Starobinski has deposited his archives at the Swiss National Library: an exceptional heritage comprising manuscripts, correspondence, documentation and more than 40,000 books. How to extract from this mass of writings a choice of documents to offer an experience accessible to all, yet able to express his works, his background and his personality?

The Swiss Literary Archives (Swiss National Library) thus proposed to the EPFL+ECAL Lab (EPFL Design Research

Centre) to launch an experimental project aimed at imagining a new digital platform capable of meeting this challenge. This project relies on the skills of both institutions. It combines research work, which explores the principles of design, curation and reproduction of documents, with the development of a digital exhibition accessible to the public. The development of this exhibition has led to the involvement of a third player: the company Apptitude, created by EPFL alumni, an expert in the production of complex sites and interactions.

The first version of this digital exhibition, opening on 26 November 2020, experiments with several key concepts to be discovered online. For example, one of them consists in offering the public a main route, made up of thematic islands representative of the author. According to their wishes, visitors can decide to look at an object from a new perspective: the theme disappears and the object is placed in a historical or typological context, – as if the rooms in a museum could be reconfigured and the contents rearrange themselves accordingly. Visitors can thus trace their path according to their expectations and discoveries, changing perspectives and contexts. They may either follow a main narrative or delve into in-depth readings.

The National Library copying services participated in the project, which also explores principles to heighten the perception and credibility of the documents on display. The work involved, in particular, tests on shooting techniques, research on movements and interactions with these documents, and the composition of environments with several objects.

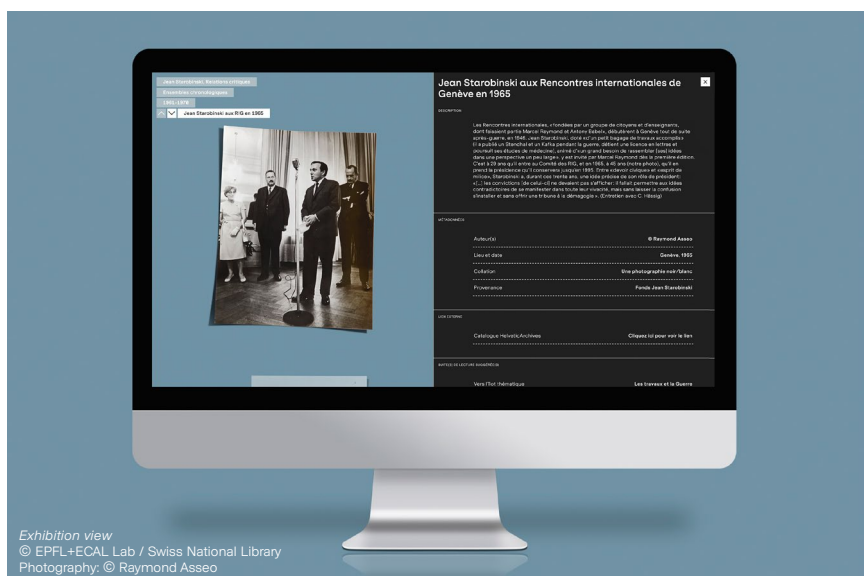
In this project, design research puts technology at the service of content: "It is the author's work and his thinking that is at the heart of our efforts. Launching such a project for the centenary of Jean Starobinski is an exceptional opportunity. He was a scholar, perhaps the greatest critic of the twentieth century, but always anxious to address everyone, to be understood. There was elegance and courtesy in his erudition" says Stéphanie Cudré-Mauroux, Deputy Head of the Swiss Literary Archives. "The mission of design research is not a race for digital effects, but the desire to imagine how to produce meaning with the possibilities

offered by contemporary technology. We create, we develop, but we also observe the impact in detail," says Nicolas Henchoz, Director of the EPFL+ECAL Lab.

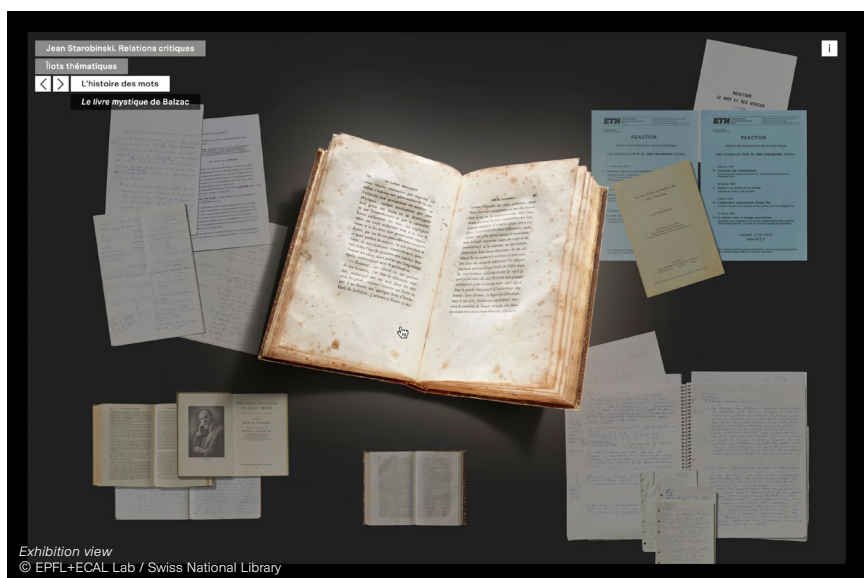
Collaboration with the company Apptitude makes it possible to transform research efforts into an operational exhibition, to confront ideas with the realities of development. In return, this reality is making progress, opening up new prospects for the production of online services. "Since our creation, we have been close to research labs. But this initiative is taking a step forward, by integrating expertise on content, technology, design and user perception into the research itself," considers Axel Pasqualini, co-founder of Apptitude.

**Jean Starobinski. Critical Relationships will be online and accessible to the general public following its opening to take place on 26 November at 5:30 pm. The coming months will allow us to assess its impact, and to better understand how to share the treasures of literary archives through digital means.**

**The digital exhibition *Jean Starobinski. Critical Relationship* will be open to the public as of Thursday, 26 November at 6:30 pm on [www.expo-starobinski.ch](http://www.expo-starobinski.ch)**



Exhibition view  
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Exhibition view  
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