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POETICS AS MEDIUM

Poetics is the message, to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, being transmitted in our time from all media of literature.

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Poetics as Medium

The literature of recent decades has opened up new perspectives for poetics. Writing has spontaneously moved in unison with cultural transformations in the direction of increasing multimediality, digitalization, and virtualization. Barrett Watten, in an important article written several years ago, described the way the field of poetics is expanding to encompass new dimensions in works of e-literature. But beside the newest types of electronic literary works, we have also seen a renewal of forms of spoken poetry; new genres are developing on the Internet, the creators of video games frequently speak of their works' affinities with literature, and it is even possible to encounter such views as that of Sandy Baldwin, that everything written online presents a chance to recreate what literature is.

Poetics undoubtedly bears witness to and engages with this literary revolution in new media. And as in every literary upheaval, this new literature draws, with a greater or lesser degree of transparency, on a knowledge of previous literature, but simultaneously poses questions to its predecessor that otherwise would never have arisen. In point of fact, both literary worlds, that of more traditional media and that of new media, often coexist in joyful harmony and learn much from and about each other through these intimate relationships. Knowledge about the poetics of works in traditional media (including those produced in the contemporary era) functions in this case in constant confrontation with knowledge about the poetics of works that participate in new media contexts. By the same token, the most important contemporary task of poetics is mediation between the two spheres. Poetics has become a medium that brings together, in dialogue, literature from different media and types of knowledge about literature that intersect across those media.

The authors of the articles in this issue of Forum of Poetics *attempt to describe the extraordinarily fascinating and wide range of contemporary poetics as a medium. Mariusz Pisarski relates the process by which today's poetics have managed, with relative quickness and ease, to assimilate hypertext works, and reveals the more difficult tasks and more uncomfortable questions posed to poetics by recent works of e-literature understood as programming processes. Poetics here become*

interwoven in an astonishingly compelling fashion with the world of video games, allowing for the unexpected fruition of the metaphor of interactivity; alongside the well-known phenomenon of audience immersion, Piotr Kubiński observes its opposite – emersion, and Tomasz Z. Majkowski notes the expansion of narratology's field of study. For the study of genres, the criteria by which original literary genres are established become a new cognitive puzzle, particularly since some of them postulate the study of historical themes in a new media context and use conventions of older literary forms in the process (Barbara Kulesza-Gulczyńska). Some genres of internet literature have, despite their young age, developed so extensively that their analysis already constitutes a separate branch of poetological study, as demonstrated here by the case of fan fiction (Tomasz Umerle). At the same time, there is a heightened need for a revival of oral poetry, reminiscent of the former dominance of the vocal medium in poetic expression; poetry is now often presented as a kind of performance, where orality and theatricality are joined with a poetry that observes hitherto unknown rules (Aleksandra Szymił). This leads unavoidably, as I mentioned earlier, to a revised reading of literature published in traditional book or poem form, as an interpretation of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki's poetry as a form of new media literature shows (Maja Staśko). It therefore is not surprising that there is a need to discuss the relevance of Edward Balcerzan's proposal for a multimedia theory of genres, as it has more to say with each passing year (Dariusz Pawelec). The approach to teaching poetics at universities is also undergoing changes (Wiktoria Tuńska). Sandy Baldwin, with his fervently discussed concept of the literariness of the entire Internet, arrives at the most radical conclusions regarding the transformations referred to above (Elżbieta Winiecka, Tomasz Mizerkiewicz).

Observing the flow of poetological knowledge among different spheres of literary and paraliterary creation, varying wildly in terms of the media they use, leads us to define the new condition of poetics as that of a medium. Poetics is the message, to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, being transmitted in our time from all media of literature.

Poetics in Action.
Time and Code in the Poetry of John Cayley and the Poets of *Rozdzielczość Chleba*

Mariusz Pisarski

Appeals for an expanded poetics, heard in the past decade in discussions of contemporary textuality, always promising a renaissance for poetics and its preoccupations, are quick to find a sympathetic response. Who among literary scholars, a privileged crew in the 20th century due to the position of language and textual problems at the centre of cultural studies, would not wish to hold onto that strong hand in the 21st, after the performative[1] and digital "turns"?[2] Should we not ask, however, which poetics we are expanding? For Barrett Watten, poetics is a writing genre;[3] in the Polish and European contexts, it is treated as a discipline. Between these two poles there is a middle way, whose adepts find poetics in each method and every possible feature of language adaptable for rhetorical or aesthetic purposes. In this article, I will argue that we should also consider the act of programming a literary work for aesthetic, cognitive and meta-reflexive purposes to be a form of poetics.

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[1] E. Domańska, "Zwrot performatywny we współczesnej humanistyce" (The Performative Turn in the Contemporary Humanities), *Teksty Drugie* 2007, no. 5, 48-61.

[2] M. Meryl, "F5: Odświeżanie filologii" (F5: The Renewal of Philology), *Teksty Drugie* 2014, no. 2, 9-20.

[3] B. Watten, "Poetics in the Expanded Field: Textual, Visual, Digital . . .," in: *New Media Poetics. Contexts, Technotexts and Theories*, ed. A. Morris, T. Swiss, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

From the perspective of the theory and practice of electronic literature, disciplines which developed as cultural consequences of the computer and internet revolution,[4] the first point of view – of poetics as a kind of writing treating as its object the methods and means of artistic production – does not require expansion or amplification, since it is doing well. Almost every utterance in the work "born digital" is marked by self-reflexivity. A revealing allegory for that self-reflexivity is the popular message "Hello World!" at the beginning of lessons in programming languages. That joyous greeting by the layman entering the path of IT initiation is – at the same time – an invitation into the double ontology of digital text being text and code simultaneously, being both written and programmed. Traces of self-reflexivity and metatextuality featured in the classic hypertext novels of Michael Joyce, Shelley Jackson, and Stuart Moulthrop. When e-literature began to break free of the closed publishing framework and conquer the Internet, that tendency only grew stronger, as proven by Mark Amerika's *Grammaron* and *Hypertextual Consciousness* (1999) or Talan Memmot's *Lexia from Perplexia* (2002).

But while poetics as a genre is thriving in the field of e-literature and claiming its own historical analysis (which would examine, for example, the reasons for generic transitions over recent decades from hypertextual prose through e-poetry to game applications with animation and film elements), poetics as a discipline, if it is seriously going to encompass literary practice in the programming medium in its interests, must not only expand its horizon to include those developments, but also deepen its methods to include a "heremeneutics of interactivity" and a "hermeneutics of code."[5]

It seems that the latter hermeneutics, that is, the close reading, analysis and interpretation of the code substratum of "techsts," has been most neglected. Despite the fact that 10 years have passed since the publication of the book *New Media Poetics*,[6] in which important literary scholars and comparativists, as well as practitioners and theorists of e-literature, built the foundations for a poetics of hybrid, expanded forms, that expansion, potentially deeply transformative, for poetics itself remains a zone into which critics prefer not to venture, no doubt for fear of overstepping their interdisciplinary credentials.[7] So the voices of scholars with credentials in poetry, literary scholarship and computer programming are highly valued in this context. "Programmatology" (John Cayley), "expressive processing" (Nick Montfort, Noah Wardrip-Fruin), "digital text archaeology" (Matthew Kirschenbaum), "critical code studies" (Mark Marino) and

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[4] On electronic literature as an artistic and theoretical field, see, among others, K. N. Hayles, "Electronic Literature: What Is It?" at https://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html; Scott Rettberg, "Communitizng Electronic Literature," http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/3/2/000046/000046.html (last accessed 30.03.2016).

[5] R. Simanowski, *Interfictions: von Schreiben im Netz,* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002, 121, 139.

[6] In Poland, there has also been considerable discussion over the last decade of the need to expand poetics to include media and digital literary forms; contributions to the discussion include the work of Ewa Szczęsna, Seweryna Wysłouch, Urszula Pawlicka, Piotr Marecki, Monika Górska-Olesińska, Piotr Kubiński, and the author of the present work.

[7] In 2011, when the publisher Ha!art issued Michael Joyce's hypertext fiction work "Afternoon, a story" (I produced the Polish version) a respected Polish weekly sought to review it. When we sent the CD-rom to their culture department, an editor called us to request a PDF copy, so that he could read the novel in a manner better-suited to reviewing, i.e., traditional, non-fragmented, and non-interactive.

"platform studies" (Nick Montfort, Ian Bogost)[8] are areas in the theory and practice of litera-ture of new media that go beyond metaphors of codec bandwith. In light of thorough analyses of the influence of code on the semantics, rhetoric and poetics of digital forms, the loud "code works" of net.artu, often merely non-interactive mixtures of code and natural language, at the visual and verbal level bespeak a superficial fascination with secondary languages which is nothing new in culture. In 2016, digital poetry created according to that tired recipe has no justification for its existence; at the same time, the potential for creative manipulation of the text through code remains unexplored.

I therefore propose to return to basic, previously existing distinctions, but base them on newer examples, including some Polish ones. The proposal seems all the more apt since the poetic and programming practice of the creator of my typology has effectively strengthened it in successive years. John Cayley, a Canadian poet, lecturer at Brown University, pioneer of electronic poetry, and the author of mobile, programmable poems, was published in *New Media Poetics* alongside Warren Batten[9] with an appeal for a more complete understanding of the layer of code in digital art, expanding then-prevalent concepts of "codework" promul-gated by Rita Raley and the understanding of the role of code in digital literature put forward by N. Katherine Hayles together with the category of the "flickering signifier."[10] In the first instance, reflection on code was focused, in Cayley's view, mainly on the surface of the text, influenced by code in its capacity of visual-linguistic artefact. In the second instance, the "flickering" of the "techst" relates to internal processes connected with the physical origin of the message sent, fundamentally unimportant for the reader. In neither situation does the role of code influence either the processes of meaning creation on the work's "stage" or in its event field, or make any particular contribution to digital poetics as such.

The Anatomy of Code

Cybertexts and ergodic works, those whose content and trajectory are variable, have in-troduced the event field into literary communication.[11] Located in between the sender and receiver, it makes a work into a kind of dramatic game, a performance, the result of which is dependent on several factors and is determined by the tentative guidelines the author puts into the program that sets its course. The result certainly does not lie in the reader's hands. He or she can, of course, modify certain aspects of the text on its interface or paratextual surface, but the *modus operandi* of contemporary digital poetic forms privileges the details

[8] These disciplines were outlined in the following works: J. Cayley, "The code is not the text (unless it is the text)," *Electronic Book Review* 2002, online: http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/literal; N. Wardrip-Fruin, *Expressive processing. Digital fictions, Computer games, and software studies*, Cambridge: MIT Press 2010; M. G. Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms new media and the forensic imagination*, Cambridge: MIT Press 2008; M. Marino, "Critical Code Studies," *Electronic Book Review* 2006, online: http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/codology/, N. Montfort, I. Bogost, *Racing the Beam The Atari Video Computer System*, Cambridge: MIT Press 2009.

[9] J. Cayley, "Time Code Language: New Media Poetics and Programmed Signification," in: *New Media Poetics*, 307–334.

[10] See R. Raley, "Interferences: [Net.Writing] and the practice of codework," *Electronic Book Review* 2002, online. http://www.electronicbookreview.com/v3/servlet/ebr?command =view_essay&essay_id=rayleyele; N. Katherine Hayles, "Print is flat, code is deep: the importance of media-specific analysis," *Poetics Today* 2004, volume 25, 67-90.

[11] E. Aarseth, "Nonlinearity and literary theory," in: *The New Media Reader*, eds. N. Montfort and N. Wardrip-Fruin, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press 2002, 762–780.

packed into the scenario over readerly freedom of choice. In writing as *performance of writing*, which is how John Cayley understands his work, there is no place for the latter option. The reader as an active participant can initiate codework, prompt its direction or enter the material to be worked on, but the freedom to seriously transform the material does not feature here. This is especially true in the case of works whose result cannot be predicted even by the author, since they involve the use of either randomly generated algorithms or externally-based scripts.[12]

1. Code as a Language

The first kind of "code writing" that Cayley discusses is code as seen through the eyes of professionals. In this view, it appears as a special kind of language that can be looked at, read and interpreted. In the case of Leszek Onak's poem "bletka z balustrady" (joint from the balustrade, 2014) or Piotr Puldzian Płucienniczak's generator "Booms" (2016), the language is the script language javascript, understood and interpreted by internet browsers displaying websites that connect with java scripts. The syntax of that language is subject to strict rules, but its usage varies with each use and is submitted to evaluation by other programmers. In "Booms," the text's mechanics are controlled by four javascript files. One of them, booms.js, when opened in the editing program,, proves to be written in 28 lines. Between lines 10 and 12 the function "podstawRzeczy" (basiThing) is defined.

```
function podstawRzeczy(n) {
  $(".v1").html(rzeczy[n][0]);
  $(".v3").html(rzeczy[n][1]);
```

["Rzecz" meaning "thing" and "podstaw" being the root or genitive plural of "podstawa," meaning "base, fundament."] As the built-in error message tells us, in line 11 the dollar sign is used without prior definition. A programmer reviewing code or tasked with testing it must draw certain practical conclusions from such a message, but to a literary scholar, the code read on the page like this does not have any particular value. The reception of code as language does not tell us anything about the poetics or rhetoric of a work, though it can confirm observations made at the surface level of the text. For example, the name of the function "podstawRzeczy" is a programming proof of the work's variability.

2. Code as Language Modulator (Language Operates, Not Code)

If, in the first version, we read code under the surface of the text as the material out of which it is constructed, in the second part, code as language is drawn outward to enter into semantic relationships with natural language. Cayley adds that code in this case ceases to function (as code) in order to become part of a linguistic message. In the example of Leszek Onak and Łukasz Podgórny's poem "<h1>Depresja</h1>" (<h1>Depression</h1>) from the book *wgraa* (instaall, 2012):

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[12]I will illustrate the five-degree stratification of layers of code presented and the ways it has been understood by critics using works by Leszek Onak, Piotr Puldzian Płucienniczak, and Łukasz Podgórny from the Kraków poetry group *Rozdzielczość Chleba*. I will then examine poetic programs from John Cayley and Daniel C. Howe's series *Readers' Project*.

```
<h1>depresja</h1>

<?php

include("personal.conf");

$tresc_zapytania = "SELECT gęstość FROM spacja
        WHERE ciasteczka = 'zablokowane'";

$zapytanie = mysql_query($tresc_zapytania);

while ($row = mysql_fetch_assoc($zapytanie)) {

$unique = $row['gęstość'];

$wynik = str_replace("","<br>", $unique);

echo $wynik;

?>
```

Illustration no. 1. Poem *<h1>depresja</h1>* by Leszek Onak and Łukasz Podgórny

The syntax of the php language, used to build dynamic web pages in their interaction with servers and databases, is broken up in this poem and mixed with Polish so as to build semantic tension and encourage the reader to look for new contexts for both orders. The strategy applied by Podgórny and Onak treats code as an idiom, as a foreign linguistic element, which, when it encrusts a poem, is joined to the poetic object, putting into question the previous understanding of what poeticism means and expanding the horizons of verbal art to encompass new, unexplored territory. This is the most normal thing in the world, according to Cayley. And in fact, what is the difference between including in a poem elements of local dialect or folklore, as the Romantics did, or elements of new media (film, radio), as the Futurists did, and enhancing poetry with elements of code? The problem is that code in this case does not function as code, since when woven into the fabric of language it has lost its operational, performative power. A computer will not read it, and its event field is static and constricted to the visual/linguistic surface. That is why Cayley looks disapprovingly on the code works of Australian net.art writer Mez Breeze,[13] despite the recognition she has obtained from critics of e-literature.

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[13]Mez Breeze's work, especially her "mezagnegele" technique of mixing code language and natural language, was praised in superlative terms by critics including K. Hayles, Florian Krammer, R. Raley. See e.g. N. K. Hayles, "Deeper Into the Machine: Learning to Speak Digital," *Computers and Composition* 2002, no. 19, 4, 371-386.

From a point of view that takes into account the contexts of the subcodes cited, Cayley's view can be challenged. Code is not merely an ornament or element in the visual play of concrete poetry, but, like folklore in the case of the Romantics, which brought with it clear prosodic and rhythmic preferences, constituting a distinguishing feature of Romantic poetics, or like film montage and photographic collage, which provided direct inspiration for the techniques of the pre-war avant-garde, a linguistic subcode relating to and used for reading a computer program has rhetorical and stylistic potential. Part of Onak and Podgórny's most important poem "inherits" its length from the length of a single php declaration and fits directly into that declaration's framework, which is delimited by the opening and closing marks of a programming function („<?php ?>). If a book were based on a similar principle, we could talk about active participation by the conventions of code in the creation of a single text, inasmuch as it here becomes the matrix of poetic convention.

3. Code as Readable and Performative Text (Code Functions, Not Language)

The title of Onak and Podgórny's poem "<h1>depresja</h1>" is simultaneously the name of an html language—a functioning one! If we enter it into an html file, our web browser will display the word "depresja" (depression) in large bold letters. The manoeuvre is not only activated by code, but is itself a particle (the simplest possible one) of active code. This kind of presence of code in a literary work is placed by Cayley into a third category, less popular than the preceding one and represented by, for example, perl poetry – i.e., poetry written using short commands in the perl language, which, since English is the constructive material of programming subcodes, produces poems that can be performed on the computer as well as read. The latter activity, however, confronts the reader with some transgressions against grammar, sentence structure, and segment coherence.

4. Code as Coding

Reading code with an emphasis on its transformative potential in the sphere of the digital text's material substratum belongs to the fourth category and is represented in Katherine N. Hayles's understanding of code, among others. Code here performs the fundamental work of transforming signals from one system of signification into another, beginning with the physical sequence of breaks in the passage of current and ending with the codification of the alphabet of the language of communication in such a way that appropriate diacritical marks are displayed on the screen. Code thus grasped points us toward the ontology of the digital utterance, but simultaneously, like code as language, is situated in a register not essential for the reader. We might call this register the bandwidth of a new digital triviality, referring to Espen Aarseth's old distinction between trivial and non-trivial reading procedures, where in reading a book, turning the pages is a trivial procedure.[14]

5. Code as Programming

None of the views of code mentioned above raises it to the rank of a truly active causative subject, affecting the act of communication itself (displaying text, interaction) or the invocation

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[14]Cayley writes: "Although we can be made aware that the codes of digital media make the words we read on screen flicker beneath it, we do not really care – for the purposes of interpretation – whether the text we read is encoded as extended ASCII or Unicode." J. Cayley, "Time Code Language," 314.

of sociocultural contexts (code as invoked convention or the convention of invoking). That is only accomplished by a fifth view, presenting code as primarily programming, a set of methods that play out in time and create a text in keeping with rules defined "at the outset" by the author, and which allow the reader to observe the results of such programming as poetic effects. It is through these aspects of Cayley's work, and also that of the poets of *Rozdzielczość Chleba*, that computer code becomes a tool of active engagement with the text, a motor of exploration of the boundaries of the utterance in a new medium, in other words – poetics in action.

In Piotr Puldzian Płucienniczak's "Booms," the role of code is relatively simple: at regular time intervals, it displays new content in the poem's lines, based on an alternation of words taken from designated word groups in a set poem-sentence structure. Code also makes the title display the number of uses the generator has undergone in a given reading session.

> **boom #2037**
> grałem w minecrafta, kiedy pierwszy samobójca
> wysadzał się przed meczetem w chanakin.
> grałem w minecrafta, kiedy drugi samobójca
> wysadzał się przed meczetem w chanakin.
> budowałem portal, żeby wejść do piekła.

(i was playing minecraft, when the first suicide bomber / blew himself up in front of the mosque in khanaqin. / i was playing minecraft, when the second suicide bomber / blew himself up in front of the mosque in khanaqin. / i was building a portal so i could enter hell.)

Płucienniczak's poem plays out in time. The stage of the text, as Cayley calls it, is not complex, and code performs its function according to a simple scenario. Nonetheless, it is code that introduces into the poem its crucial temporal aspect, the poetic result of which cannot (effectively) be reproduced in the paper version. The poem needs to be read as a series. In the form of a single-use copy, printed in a book or sent as an e-mail attachment, "Booms" becomes an ordinary poem criticizing the consumerism of the "digital lifestyle" in the face of global terrorism. The lyrical persona appears to be an individual unable, unwilling, and powerless to prevent the situations described in the background. The temporalization permitted by code, however, radically changes the accent of the whole poem. After 10 minutes spent in front of the screen, the reader observes that there is truly no end to the possible variants of the poem being generated. What is more, each of them is counted, and that number appears in the title. After an hour or two, the bombs in the poem are still exploding. Whereas the chips-munching, game-loving narrator shifts to a myriad of other banal activities, the titular number begins to reach dizzying heights. Its specific weight rises above some undefined critical mass, perhaps different for each individual reader, and begins to tip the scale of the whole poem from nihilism toward a cry of despair and empathy. The reader's only escape, paradoxically, is to close the browser window, so as to stop seeing this grimly rising number which translates, in the real, extratextual world, into the number of bomb victims.

Leszek Onak's "Sonet niezachodzący" (Never Setting Sonnet) uses temporality with similar force and on a scale transcending its particular individual author. Written in php, the poem's

script searches the headlines of Polish news sites and then arranges them into the fourteen lines of a sonnet. When the reader clicks on "Generate New Sonnet," the program re-sends its query and the poem becomes updated with new content in its lines and title.[15] The results of the code work are not only visible at the local level, however. If Płucienniczak's poem cited above can be imagined in traditional print form, as a multi-volume printout of all possible combinations that the generator can produce, Onak's work could not possibly be subjected to any such kind of obscurantist retromediation. The time that elapses on the stage of the text becomes even more closely fused with real time as experienced by the reader. The poem changes with every minute that passes, depending on what information the news portals are relaying.

Fundamental to Onak's poem is the way his program engages with other external programs, inviting them to a kind of "live" online collaboration. The subjects participating in this active collaboration are not actual people, however, but computers connected through the web and the programs operating in them, whose task is to supply content to RSS information channels. Our experience of this sonnet is thus imbued with causative forces of a decidedly post-human character. The author's role is reduced to that of planner and curator of the event field. Should the RSS technology fail, or the selected portals that provide the phrases and sentences used cease to exist, the indefatigability of the sonnet's re-production will either be suspended indefinitely or will acquire another layer of meaning: this kind of poem and this kind of code require constant care from the poet, who becomes like a gardener looking after his plants.

Perigram as Generative, Internet, and Post-Human Text

As Watten points out, poetics feeds off of experimental, radical texts. As a practitioner (a publisher and producer) of electronic literature, I have not encountered a more complex and radical work in recent years than the series of poetic programs prepared by John Cayley and Daniel C. Howe that constitute the cycle *The Readers Project* (2010–2016).[16] Individual instalments of this long-term project contain the whole gamut of complexity that code in its proper function brings to poetry and poetics: the programmable function of transforming a poem's content, style, rhetoric, and context.

The word "Readers" in the title of the project is a bit misleading. It refers not to those who read, nor to tools for reading (conveyors of texts), but to particular algorithms that carefully scan the source text and generate a secondary text derived from it.[17] The rules that govern this robotic reading are based on the cellular automaton *The Game of Life* devised by the British mathematician John Conway,[18] with the difference that in Howe and Cayley's "game of reading," the role of cells is taken over by words, and the game plays out not in an infinite orthogonal grid, but on the surface of a virtual page of a book, and thus an area conditioned by the

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[15]Urszula Pawlicka highlights the work's temporal aspect thus: "we should observe that any particular generated sonnet at the cited link immediately retreats into obsolescence, since each time the link directs us to a new work, basing it on the latest news […]." U. Pawlicka, *Polska poezja cybernetyczna* (Polish Cybernetic Poetry), Kraków 2012, 115.

[16]See *The Readers Project* online: http://thereadersproject.org.

[17]For a broader discussion of the project by both authors, see: J. Cayley, D. C Howe, "*The Readers Project*: Procedural Agents and Literary Vectors," *Leonardo* 2011, vol. 1, 43, 317–324.

[18]See for example, P. Coveney and R. Highfield, *Frontiers of Complexity: The Search for Order in a Chaotic World*, New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1996, 94-96.

conventions of reading. [19] The space of the matrix is filled by a source text. The programmed reader runs through the text, activates a "live" verbal cell, and leaves behind it a "dead" one. As in *The Game of Life*, where an active cell has its neighbours, the active area of a verbal cell, its typographic vicinity, potentially consists of eight surrounding words, or a smaller number if the words at the edges (directions: N-E, S-E, N-W, S-W) do not graphically infect the active word in the middle. The reader that Cayley and Howe use to demonstrate their system is called a **perigram**. It runs from left to right, but its reading is not entirely linear, since the program adopts as its goal not a neighbouring word from the same line, but the word in the upper or lower right corner. It thus moves forward but can switch course on the up-down axis and within an area extending to about 20 words. The rules of movement for the perigram are defined as follows:

> As the Perigram Reader moves through a text, it remembers each previously read word and checks its NE and SE neighbors as potential next words. If it finds that a combination of these three words (previous, current, and potential next, in order) constitutes a phrase with a frequency above a certain threshold (i.e., it has been used previously in natural language to some extent) then its reading path may diverge, effectively also generating an alternative text that is, as it were, perigrammatic [...].[20]

The system of the text's reading/generation becomes increasingly interesting. In fact the perigram's code not only controls its movement over the surface of the source text (which is sometimes a text by Samuel Beckett and sometimes poetic prose by Cayley). It also sends inquiries to internet browsers with a query whose contents consist of a potential phrase assembled "on the wing" by the perigram. If it generates a long list of search results, the perigram chooses an alternate phrase with a lower frequency on the lists of search results at Google, Bing and Yahoo. Cayley and Howe, or more precisely, the Rita program designed by Howe, thus check the poetic originality of verbal sequences to be displayed by the perigram. This test of originality takes place within the largest possible global storehouse, represented by the contents of the Internet and the inquiries of browser users inscribed in the search window.[21] The "commons," as Cayley calls it, is a gigantic, dynamic dictionary, increasing its resources minute by minute and hour by hour. As a result, the perigram can change its flow of reading/writing from day to day, as documented by the authors during exhibitions at which perigrams were able to generate different text even when the phrase initiating their work (written by visitors to the exhibition, upon request) was the same and the source text remained unchanged. This happened, not because the English-language internet's millions of users suddenly began using rare, poetic combinations of words, but because of the Google algorithm's auto-correct function, which in the course of

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[19]Cayley and Howe remind us of the arbitrary nature of such a choice, and its connection with prevailing convention in Europe and the US.

[20]J. Cayley and D. C. Howe, "The Readers Project: Procedural Agents and Literary Vectors," 319–320.

[21]The use of the word prompts of the type that Google and other search engines present to users "on the fly" while they are typing in search forms the basis of another side-project of The Readers Project: the conceptual book *How It Is In Common Tongues*, which involves the rewriting of the content of Beckett's novel How It Is by means of (manually) filtering it through the reserves available to internet search engines. Cayley and Howe would write in 3-4 successive words from Beckett into the browser and choose the results with the longest series of words not found in a quotation from Beckett's text on the internet but from original utterances found on websites. Next, each phrase found this way in the commons was placed in the new book with a footnote giving the source of the cited passage. See J. Cayley and D.C Howe, *How It Is in Common Tongues (The Readers Project: Common Tongues)*, Providence 2012.

a repeat run through the same text encountered its own phrase as a search result (a phrase Cayley had planted in the internet, and which had already been indexed by search robots!).

swimming back alone to the bathing rock, head under, he reaches out to grasp the familiar ledge, a fold in the rose-tinged granite **just above** the surface of the waist-deep water at its edge, **by the** stone which he can see clearly though unfocused **through the** lake water. but he has not reached it yet. his **expectant hand** breaks the surface, down through 'empty' water and his knuckles graze the rock. his face will not rise up, dripping and gasping, out of the water. instead, it 'falls' forward and, momentarily, down, into the shallows, stumbles, breathes a choking mouthful, which he

Illustration no. 2. Perigram reader in action

The question then arises, who is the author of the poem that takes shape before our eyes? Is it the poet, the programmer, the author of the source text, the internet search engine, or the million active internet users? Each of these players has a part in producing the work. What status in the field of communication do we assign to the digital reader? The ontology of this reading robot is already subject to multiplication, since in reading the text, the program simultaneously creates it. We should observe at the same time a significant gap between the "active reader," the beloved figure of 1990s critics enthusiastic about new media, from the "active digital reader." *The Readers Project* asks another important question – about the condition of the modernist *episteme* in the digital context. Linguistic innovation and poetic rebellion in the form of writing that is, in short, taken from Google but against Google, the search for originality in the global store of English language material, is more a continuation than a negation of modernism. The texts do not even feature postmodern riffs on hackneyed chords in the style of Talan Memmot's "Lexia to Perplexia." Something is not quite right here.

Michael Joyce, the pioneer in literary hypertext, defines himself as an "ultramodernist." Jessica Pressman even speaks of a broader tendency, a whole current of "digital modernism," born on the wave of the technological electrification of the text.[22] Cayley and Howe are adding their own chapter to that movement, simultaneously situating themselves in the avant-garde of contemporary scholarly methodology in the humanities. In *The Readers Project* and in the perigram reader itself we find elements of operations relating to *big data*, elements of data-mining and crowdsourcing – digital tools of the humanities. At the same time, however, Johna Cayley reminds us that his work on this project is nothing other than "the visualization of poetics" and "visual poetics."

The Surface and Depths of the Digital Work

In galleries and conference presentations by Cayley, the perigram reader and its reading/writing are presented as a form of palimpsest, where the visually harmonized matrix of the source text is the field of events activated by the perigram. In some presentations, the work takes on the form of an attractive, dynamic acrostic. Behind the aesthetically impressive, mobile map of letters, words, and phrases chosen by the computer in astonishing but evidently monitored sequences of words[23] is hidden a highly organized cybertext. Poetics expanded to the extent of merely including visual, film, or sound elements, or even causative activity from the reader, would not encompass it. Unless deepened to include a hermeneutics of code, here only mentioned, poetics would at best be capable of analysing works not fundamentally different from– for example– richly illustrated children's books with interactive features (such as *lift-the-flap* books) or sound (buttons, keys, the ability to produce or record sound). The programmable aspect, essential to Cayley and Howe's work, would, observed through the lens of a poetics not geared toward code, be little more than an invisible substratum of the remediation of the various orders with which the perigram at the surface level of its text engages in dialogue (animation, visuality, books), where certain features of these orders are amplified, multiplied or expanded.

The programmatology represented by Cayley and manifested in the Polish context by Rozdzielczość Chleba, a direction in poetic reflection exploring the active participation of code written by the author in the production of a work's meanings, represents a poetics of new media in a more consistent and representative form than many works hailed as groundbreaking.[24]

Perigram, Hypertext and the Future of Digital Poetics

Compared with the challenges posed to traditional poetics by Cayley and Howe's programmable reader and its interface with the commons, hypertext – at the center of critics' and authors' attention in the 1990s, when the digital revolution conquered educational centers

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[22]J. Pressman, *Digital Modernism*, Oxford 2014.

[23]Since a perigram moves through a surface of about 20 words from the active word at a given moment, a clear semantic relation is preserved with the words that constitute the resulting phrases in the derivative text.

[24]Talan Memmott's "Lexia to Perplexia," discussed by Barret Watten in the book *New Media Poetics*, is a parody of hypertext and cyberculture discourse, typical for the period in which it was written (2002), when authors of second-generation digital literature took a critical stance toward the authors of the first generation. Its status as a breakthrough work is accorded mainly for historical reasons. For new media poetics, however, John Cayley's work has had much greater significance.

in the rich countries of the West, appears a fairly conventional form of writing, maintaining as it does strong links to the book paradigm.[25] From today's perspective, we must say that as a form of text that branches out and functions on command, hypertext constituted not so much a break with as a remediation of print. The stories of Michael Joyce (*afternoon, a story*; *Twilight, a symphony*), which came closest to fulfilling the demand, voiced in manifestoes, for the creation of a work that would change each time we read it – not in the sense of the text's interpretation, but in the sense of the very substance, quantity, and sequence of the narrative material's appearance on the screen in successive reading sessions – compared to the generative and web-based poetics of the perigram, looks amazingly static. Even when enhanced with a system of conditional links, that stasis, engaging as it is for the reader, is still deprived of significant programming, which puts hypertext in the same group as the earlier-mentioned hybrid, interactive children's books, since its text remains fixed and final in its definition and is not in a position to expand or contract. The strategies of critical reflection hitherto applied to digital works, formulated in the Polish context in frequent attempts to outline the poetics of new media, are somewhat inadequate and must be expanded and deepened.

The deepening process must also concern the code and web aspects of the text. For if we agree that the electronic text is formed from several equally important and interconnected layers (material, code, text, and operation), then perigrams, redefine the scope of the layer of code, differentiate various segments of the material domain (hardware, platforms, distribution systems) and revolutionize the very concept of text, because textual and programmatological phenomena that are taking place on its surface originate neither from the author, nor the reader, nor from the text itself.

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[25]This is the condition diagnosed by the authors of recent studies on the subject. See Alice Bell, *The Possible Worlds of Hypertext Fiction*, London 2010; J. Baetens, F. Truyen, "Hypertext revisited," *Leonardo* 2013, vol. 46, no. 5.

KEYWORDS

generative poetics

Hypertext

code poetry

Abstract:

The purpose of the article is to broaden readers' understanding of how code is used in digital literary forms. Although digital poetics in the Polish context seems relatively established, the code aspect of works, particularly when we consider works in which a computer program becomes an active, causative subject beyond the full control of author and reader, requires some additional clarification. Using examples from Polish electronic literature, the article re-capitulates the typology of code formulated by John Cayley, a pioneer in digital poetry; next, it examines a series of works by Cayley and Howe in which programmed "readers" – supplied with a source text and linguistic resources indexed by Google – are sent on a special mission in search of poetic originality. Three main theses are formulated: programming is a new kind of poetics in action; code in temporal or internet texts attains the status of an autonomo-us actor, situated in between text, author, and reader, and maintaining contact with other programs on the web; hypertext as a primary paradigm of digital textuality turns out to be a transitional form, from the point of view of the practices of Cayley and Polish cybernetic poets, much closer to the print paradigm, that was originally acknowledged.

d i g i t a l   s e m i o t i c s

e-literature

poetic generators

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Mariusz Pisarski is a scholar and publisher of electronic literature. He is the author of the book *Xanadu. Hipertekstowe przemiany prozy* (Xanadu, Hypertext Transformations of Prose, Kraków 2013), editor of the magazine *Techsty* and the multimedia department of the publisher *Ha!art*. A translator of digital poetry and prose, he has written hypertext adaptations of literary classics (*Rękopisu znalezionego w Saragossie* [The Saragossa Manuscript], 2012; an internet adaptation of Bruno Schulz's short stories entitled *Bałwochwał* [Idolater], 2013). In 2011, he was nominated for the Ted Nelson Award by the American IT association ACM (Hypertext 2011). His doctoral thesis on hypertext (defended at UAM, under Prof. Bogusław Bakuła) received First Place in a National Cultural Center contest. He is a member of the Electronic Literature Organization and the recipient of the SAIA stipend from the Institute of World Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. He is an associate of the Laboratory of Intersemiotic and Intermedia Research at the Institution of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw.

Toward a Poetics of Video Games

Piotr Kubiński

The poetics of contemporary texts devoted to poetics – if one may use such a description – stipulate that in the first paragraphs, the author should report on the current situation of the discipline. Such regular self-referentiality (typical as well for other disciplines subject to permanent suspicions of crisis, of which contemporary comparative literature may serve as a good example[1]) should not be particularly surprising to anyone. The scholarly practices of recent years have culminated in a considerable expansion of both the area of poetics' inquiry, and the repertoire of terms it employs. That particular kind of self-reflexivity in works within the discipline of poetics seems particularly justified in a situation where the tools of poetics – genetically related in an obvious way to the field of literary scholarship – are used to study non-literary or even non-linguistic texts. From the sea of examples illustrating this practice of expansion – already known to readers interested in the problem under discussion – I will cite only the work of Ewa Szczęsna (*Poetyka reklamy* [The Poetics of Advertisement] and *Poetyka mediów* [The Poetics of Media])[2] and Ryszard Nycz (*Poetyka doświadczenia* [The Poetics of Experience]),[3] in whose footsteps I followed in my previous work on the poetics of video games.[4]

[1] See, for example, M. Kuziak, Komparatystyka na rozdrożu? ("Comparativism at the Crossroads?"), *Porównania* (Comparisons), no. 4/2007.

[2] E. Szczęsna, *Poetyka reklamy* (The Poetics of Advertisement), Warszawa 2001; Szczęsna, *Poetyka mediów. Polisemiotyczność, digitalizacja, reklama* (The Poetics of Media. Polysemioticity, Digitalization, Advertisement), Warszawa 2007.

[3] R. Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria – nowoczesność – literatura* (The Poetics of Experience. Theory, Modernity, Literature), Kraków 2012.

[4] P. Kubiński, *Gry wideo – zarys poetyki* (Video Games—Outline of a Poetics), Kraków 2016 [in press].

This last statement is also a declaration that relieves the present work of the needless – and, more importantly, false – façade of distance or neutrality. I take the position that the form of thought typical for poetics can bring much of value to understanding video games. This position nevertheless demands justification, since one can hear voices suggesting a negative answer to the question whether games are truly open to a poetological reading. A recent issue of *Teksty Drugie* (3/2015) contained Scott Rettberg's article "Communitizing Electronic Literature."[5] Rettberg, the co-founder of the Electronic Literature Organization and a leading light for e-literature, there advances the thesis that in the contemporary world, we function

> [...] in a culture of simulations, and many of the most popular forms of entertainment contemporary digital culture has to offer, computer games in particular, do not involve their participants in the sort of imaginative or interpretive experience we associate with literary texts, but instead with the activity of playing and adjusting variables in a simulation. I would not argue that playing a role in a simulation is any less intrinsically valuable than reading a good novel, simply that it is a different type of activity. Planning a city's zoning and traffic patterns (as a player of SimCity) or leading a raiding party on a dragon's lair (as a player of World of Warcraft) is a different order of activity from literary reading. While reading is an activity focused on interiority, on building one's own senses of metaphor, of language, of character, of a world from the materials presented on the page, interacting with a simulation is largely about exteriority, about acting and doing within a world that already has been visualized and imagined by others.[6]

I naturally do not intend to prove that the acts of reading and game-playing are identical– or that both amount to what Rettberg calls interacting with a simulation. The lines quoted above (though not central to his text) deserve close attention, however, since they to some extent appear to represent the views of those who criticize video games in general as a worthless medium. The controversial nature of this statement is particularly visible from the perspective of poetics. I will overlook the fact that Rettberg, by describing the world of games as "already visualized and imagined by others," seems, perhaps not entirely consciously, to refuse interpretative potential to painting, film, graphic novels and other works of culture of a visual (or audiovisual) type in which the world is clearly presented to the audience in some concrete form.

The problem with the view that emerges from the quoted passage (which, I would like to stress, is only an example here; it interests me as a representation of a certain attitude toward digital media and particularly games) has to do primarily with the illegitimate reduction it performs. The game player's activity need not be limited to developing strategies, which Rettberg opposes dichotomously to the effort made in reading, which is "primarily imaginative."[7] A thesis thus formulated proves difficult to defend, chiefly because video games are a very heterogeneous phenomenon, characterized by their enormous range of genres. To a considerable degree, this lack of uniformity hinders – though it does not preclude – making categorical

[5] S. Rettberg, "Communitizing Electronic Literature," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 3/2015. Originally published in Digital Humanities Quarterly, 2009, Volume 3, Number 2. http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/3/2/000046/000046.html (last accessed: 25.03.2016).

[6] S. Rettberg, "Communitizing Electronic Literature."

[7] S. Rettberg, "Communitizing Electronic Literature."

general analyses that can be applied to the entire corpus of games that has arisen. To reduce games to this one dimension – performing operations calculated to obtain the best result while moving through the digital realm – is reminiscent of the arguments used by some participants in the dispute over ludics vs. narratology. Without going into the details of that debate – though the debate itself contributed in important ways to the formation of contemporary studies of games and transmedial narratology[8] – we should remember that some participants in it refused to concede that games are narrative forms. Aside from the fact that the disagreement was largely due to a lack of terminological coordination, the problem also had to do with formulating general conclusions based on particular examples that could hardly be deemed representative.

Video games, on the other hand – particularly contemporary video games, but this is also true of those from previous decades – are diversiform. On the one hand we might consider such games as *Microsoft Solitaire*[9] or *Noughts and Crosses*[10] – digital iterations of solitaire and tic-tac-toe. The player's activities here do not even involve navigation in space; merely completing some basic operations according to strictly defined rules. On the other hand, many video games would best be defined as hybrid cultural texts; in addition to navigation and manipulation of objects within reach, they also afford possibilities for reading or dialogue with another human being. The fact that video games do not leave their users classically understood places of indefinition that are then made concrete by the recipient (which is the gist, I believe, of the accusation that the world of games is "already visualized and imagined by others") does not mean that they cannot open themselves up to understanding or that they do not demand interpretation. If only for the sake of order, it should be noted that such a hypothesis would go against those philosophical positions that perceive in the act of interpretation the fundamental structure of understanding and an indivisible part of being-in-the-world (as Ryszard Nycz presents that view: "Interpretation in this sense is an inescapable aspect of our ways of making contact with the world"[11]). However, even without referring to how interpretation is understood in the context of Heidegger or Gadamer's thought, we can name numerous video games that invite complex, sometimes astonishing interpretations.

As an example, we might name the *Dark Souls* series[12] – almost innumerable articles and internet discussions have been devoted to the question "What exactly is *Dark Souls* about?"[13] At the start of play, players are given some very meager hints about the plot background, the time and space coordinates in which the action takes place, and the specific goal the game is placing before them – all of which, together with the complex mythology of the *Dark Souls* world,

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[8] On the subject of this dispute and its importance in the development of those disciplines, see for example P. Kubiński, "Gry wideo w świetle narratologii transmedialnej oraz koncepcji światoopowieści (storyworld)" (Video Games in the Light of Transmedial Narratology and the Concept of Storyworld), *Tekstualia. Palimpsesty Literackie Artystyczne Naukowe* (Textualia. Scholarly Artistic Literary Palimpsests), no. 4/2015.

[9] *Microsoft Solitaire*, Wes Cherry, Microsoft Corporation Inc., 1990.

[10] *Noughts and Crosses*, Alexander S. Douglas, 1952.

[11] R. Nycz, *Tekstowy świat. Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze* (Textual World. Poststructuralism and Literary Scholarship), Kraków 2000, 84.

[12] *Dark Souls* (series), From Software, 2011–.

[13] See, for example, C. Dahlen, "What 'Dark Souls' Is Really All About," *Kotaku*, 9 stycznia 2012 r., http://kotaku.com/5874599/what-dark-souls-is-really-all-about, [this and all other internet materials were accessed: 30 January 2016.].

becomes the object of the player's investigation, if he feels like investing some interpretative effort in the game. The plot background is not presented straightforwardly in *Dark Souls* – the player can interpret it based on three kinds of information: conversations with other characters, (linguistic) descriptions of found objects, or a visual map of the game's world.[14] Obviously the player can simply try pushing ahead without trying to grasp the meaning of the storyworld;[15] however, attentive, precise reading of textual signals can deliver remarkably rich results and open up for the player a whole spectrum of meanings that were not immediately apparent (in this sense the player's reading is comparable to an investigation based on clues scattered around the world of the game).

A completely different type of example would be the *Wiedźmin* (Warlock) series,[16] which is deeply immersed in textual material (not only) because its original source material was a book. This game opens up to interpretation due to its singularly intense saturation with intertextuality, discoverable in each of the three installments of the series released to date. As I noted in my articles on these games, intertextual references represent a typical element of such importance in the series that the game's interpretation as a whole loses a crucial dimension if a whole network of intertexts therein are not taken into consideration.[17] At the same time, we should note that these references are cloaked with varying degrees of camouflage – sometimes demanding an advanced level of reading competency from the player. This is because the authors of *Wiedźmin* reference a variety of hypotexts – from references to texts of mass culture such as popular songs or films to allusions to high-grade literary registers (e.g. to the works of Poe and Nabokov). Obviously it would be going too far to state that the intertextual dimension represents the most important or dominant aspect of the game. It would also be a mistake, however, to overlook this element and its contribution to the experience of playing the game.

In the context of the quotation from Rettberg cited above, I think an example of a different kind is relevant here. The digital literature scholar refers to metaphor, and thus to one of the oldest and most basic categories of poetics understood as "the aggregate of tools serving to distinguish among and categorize recurring models of literary structures, elements within works or relations between particular elements (names of terms and their definitions)."[18] No one nowadays needs to be convinced of the fact that besides linguistic metaphors, there can also be audial or visual metaphors, or of the fact that metaphors can operate within non-artistic texts as well. As Szczęsna writes: "Metaphors declare an openness to all kinds of signs:

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[14]See, for example, T. Battey, "Narrative Design in Dark Souls," *Gamasutra*, 25 April 2014, http://www.gamasutra.com/blogs/TomBattey/20140425/216262/Narrative_Design_in_Dark_Souls.php.

[15]"Storyworld" is a key term for contemporary transmedial narratology. For more on the subject in Polish, see P. Kubiński, "Gry wideo w świetle narratologii transmedialnej," *Tekstualia*, no. 4/2015.

[16]*Wiedźmin* (series), CD Projekt RED, 2007–.

[17]I have written on the subject in the following articles: "Dystans ironiczny w grach 'Wiedźmin' i 'Wiedźmin 2: Zabójcy królów'" (Ironic Distance in the Games *Wiedźmin* and *Wiedźmin 2: Zabójcy królów* [The King-Killers]) in *Wiedźmin – bohater masowej wyobraźni* (Wiedźmin – Hero of the Mass Imagination), ed. R. Dudziński, A. Flamma, K. Kowalczyk, J. Płoszaj, Wrocław 2015; and "Co wyczytasz pod skórą Wiedźmina 3?" (What Do You Read Under the Skin of *Wiedźmin* 3?), *Ha!art*, no. 3/2015.

[18]E. Balcerzan, "'Narodowość' poetyki – dylematy typologiczne" (The "Nationality" of Poetics — Typological Dilemmas), *Forum Poetyki* (Forum of Poetics), no. 2/2015. See also M. Głowiński, "Poetyka wobec tekstów nieliterackich" (Poetics and Non-literary Texts), in Głowiński, *Poetyka i okolice*, Warszawa 1992.

linguistic, iconographic, aural, or kinetic."[19] In the context of video games, it makes sense to ask whether the polysemiotic catalogue indicated by Szczęsna might not need to include an **interactive factor** – activity on the part of the user that does not fall within the categories of reception or the act of interpretation. This idea is usefully illustrated by the game *Flower*.[20] I am using this particular example because *Flower* is one game in which linguistic signs do not figure at all (except for a small number of non-diegetic panels in which the game's logo is presented or some lapidary user instructions on how to play – not actually part of the game's universe). I believe that will allow us to productively examine the specifics of how **metaphorical discourse can express itself separately from the medium of language**.

Illustration no. 1. *Flower*, Thatgamecompany, 2009

Flower presents two diegetic planes – the game's action plays out in two spaces. The first is an apartment in the city. In the centre of the image we see plants in flowerpots (at first one, while another appears as the action unfolds) placed by a window. At the beginning of play the plant is the only element featuring vivid colours; the apartment itself – like the view through the broken window pane – maintains a dark, depressing colour scheme. This contrast is naturally significant for interpreting the work as a whole.

[19]E. Szczęsna, *Poetyka mediów*, 85.
[20]*Flower*, Thatgamecompany, 2009.

When the player chooses one of the plants and focuses attention on it by pressing the control button for a longer time (causing the frame to zoom in on the object), the screen slowly begins to go dark, and next the player is transferred to a different narrative space, which can most concisely be described as **the realm of nature** – the action here begins in a meadow. The frame again displays a plant – either the one the player chose, or a very similar one. One petal breaks off and its movements begin to be controlled by the player. The meadow where the action is taking place may at first appear unbounded, but if the player moves too far in one direction, gusts of wind will force him back to the previous area in space.
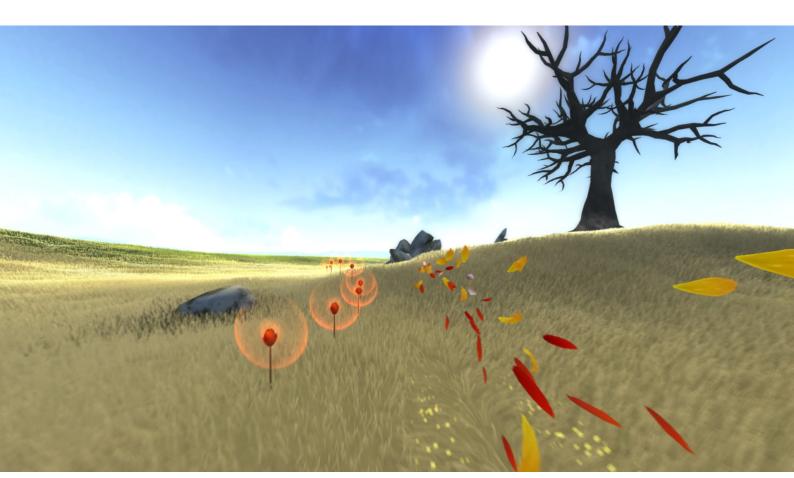

Illustration no. 2. *Flower*, Thatgamecompany, 2009

Although instructions are not directly given, but rather communicated through the interface, the player quickly becomes aware that his task is to approach other flowers growing in the vicinity. Each plant thus visited loses one petal, which then becomes joined to the one being steered by the player. At times an additional effect accompanies the process – the nearby surroundings of the flowers visited take on vivid colours, as if the life force had awakened there. After a short while, the player is steering an entire, systematically growing cloud – or rather: herd – of colourful petals. Each stage in the game places a concrete task before the player – in the first level, she must reach an ancient, withering tree located at the top of a hill. When all of the flowers around the tree have been visited, the colourful cloud driven by the

player begins to whirl around and hits the ground in a dense torrent right near the tree's desiccated trunk. Then a flower grows there (just like the one at the beginning of this stage), and the whole hill becomes covered with vibrantly coloured plants, while the tree instantly grows green and comes to life.

Illustration no. 3. *Flower*, Thatgamecompany, 2009

The game sequences presented above give us grounds to ask a few questions. Most importantly, what is the relationship between the two areas (the city and the realm of nature) where the action takes place? Does the sequence in the meadow express a certain potential lying within the plant growing in the flowerpot (or in every plant)? Is it a representation of the plant's dreams (if we agree to pursue an anthropomorphic interpretative path)? Or does the similarity between the two flowers (the one in the flowerpot and the first flower in the meadow) perhaps indicate less identity between individuals than their belonging to the same species? In that case we are dealing not with an individual plant character, but with a reading on a more metaphorical level, referring to the power of nature in general. The answers to these questions become more important when we consider that what happens in the meadow influences the urban space presented in the game. Both the inside of the room and the city itself become more orderly, brighter, and more colourful after each completed stage. This movement from darkness and chaos in the direction of light and order (harmony) seems to point the way to forming at least one possible interpretation of our metaphorical

image. In this interpretative approach, the player is embodied – if we can truly speak here of identification – as nothing other than *élan vital*. A crucial element in this interpretation of the metaphor is the **interactive factor** (the fact that it is the player steering the life force). If we can talk about a rhetorical message here in praise of nature, the metaphor resonates more powerfully because of the player's engagement on the side of the realm of nature rather than civilization. The active behaviour of the player *Flower* confirms in a sense that the voice of nature and the order it creates are a positive value, in contrast with the more poorly viewed development of the world of technology, civilization, and, therefore, human beings. This contrast is not a strict binary, however. The world of culture is not removed or destroyed here; it simply undergoes a metamorphosis, changing under the influence of nature's healing power. In the final scenes of *Flower*, however, we see that the city has acquired more colour and life through the victory of nature's energy – just as the tree became healed in the first stage of the game.[21] We can therefore state that the global meaning of this metaphor resides in the notion that civilization subordinating nature to its needs without regard for her rules leads to disintegration and degeneration. The rhetorical thrust of this metaphor is particularly evident due to its positioning in the interactive context: the player's actions (which result from decisions governing the way the game is designed) come to confirm the wisdom of the metaphor.[22]

Of course there are other possible interpretations of the action presented in *Flower* – the constant movement of the multicoloured petals could doubtless be interpreted as, for example, representing artistic creativity or human imagination, which in such a reading would be revealed as the invigorating creative force capable of radically changing the quality of human existence. The variety of possible interpretations remains, naturally, a result of the fact that what we have here is, as Szczęsna would put it, a real **trans-semiotic metaphor** (as opposed to a lexicalized metaphor – with enduring, i.e., conventionalized, meaning), typified by "originality, openness to interpretation, multiple meanings."[23]

In an article published in the magazine *Forum Poetyki* (Forum of Poetics), Tomasz Mizerkiewicz writes that: "It is not entirely reasonable to expect traditional poetics to be able to cope with the tasks connected with [the study of digital texts], but we can expect that its lexicon will quickly become more complex, will to some extent be replaced, and will be challenged."[24]

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[21]This can also be perceived in the game's audio component. While making the first choice of flower, in the urban setting dominated by dark colours, a quiet, monotonous and rather unpleasant noise of electric appliances can be heard. In the final scenes, when harmony has returned, the background consists of very distinct sounds – cries of children playing, bird voices, an echo of music. All three of those elements (children, animals, and improvised music) also indicate that with the return of nature to her rightful place, the energy of life has returned to the city.

[22]On the subject of the persuasive dimension of video games and their mechanisms, see, among others, I. Bogost, *Persuasive Games. The Expressive Power of Videogames*, Cambridge Mass.–London 2010.

[23]E. Szczęsna, *Poetyka mediów*, 92. In this context, it is interesting to remember the words of Ewa Rewers, who notes that "The attributes of Hermes, the patron of hermeneutics and translation, worshiped at crossroads, were resourcefulness and speed, not order and coherence. [...] Ruses, traps, turns and deviations – understood literally and metaphorically, practiced and analyzed, play a prominent role in the myth of the origins of interpretation." E. Rewers, "Interpretacja jako lustro, różnica i rama" (Interpretation as Mirror, Difference and Frame) in *Filozofia i etyka interpretacji* (Philosophy and the Ethics of Interpretation), ed. A. Kola, A. Szahaj, Kraków 2007.

[24]T. Mizerkiewicz, "Nowe sytuacje poetyki" (New Situations of Poetics), *Forum Poetyki*, no. 1/2015, 22.

The example provided by the game *Flower* appears to confirm this (uncontroversial) thesis. It enables us to ask an important question about the need to expand and update the tools of traditional poetics. If we wish to use them to analyze video games, we must give consideration to the medium's specific properties and adapt the tools to the context of new textual (or techstual) realities. In this case, the question concerns the category of metaphor and calls for examining interactivity within the range of factors shaping metaphors. Obviously, the purpose of this article is primarily to signal the possibility of approaching the problem using a theoretical apparatus that takes into account the **interactive dimension of metaphor**, rather than proposing unambiguous conclusions. In the context of future research, however, the interpretation explored above seems promising.

As well as updating previously existing terms, contemporary poetics in its exploration of video games should also develop (and is developing) completely new tools that serve to precisely describe and better understand these digital objects of study. One example of such an innovative category is **emergence**. In my previous work, I have suggested using this term to designate the effect of shaking the player from the state, typical for video games (and digital communication more generally) of being under the illusion of participating directly in the events shown on the screen.[25] The illusion itself of unmediated participation in the digital fiction is sometimes called **immersion** – this term (though debatable) is strongly grounded in the current research on games and digital media (and even non-digital kinds of texts).[26] In proposing the category of emergence, I refer simultaneously to the Latin root of immersion (*immergo*, *immergere* – to be submerged). If we agree to the comparison of the illusion of participation in a fiction with being "submerged" in it (and that is precisely what the etymology of immersion refers to), then emergence (from the Latin *emergo*, *emergere*) would refer to the process of destroying that illusion – to a kind of *release* from the world of fiction. Importantly, emergence factors (aside from those that occur incidentally, as a result of mechanical or design errors) can be intentionally introduced into a game. A deliberate operation of that type can result in a new, digital version of the strategy of self-reference or meta-fictionality. A clear example of this mechanism of emergence (which can also be read in terms of the Verfremdung **effect**) is provided by a scene in the game *Batman: Arkham Asylum.* The **device of technical distancing or dis-illusionment** presented there is based on the introduction of an effect that resembles a technical glitch but in reality is an innovative form of depicting the protagonist's perception. Analyzing that device through the prism of immersion and emergence allows us to understand it not only in comparison with analogous devices we have seen in film and literature, but also through its position in the specific context of the digital medium.[27]

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[25]I proposed using this term in my article "Emersja – antyiluzyjny wymiar gier wideo" (Emergence—the Anti-Illusionary Dimension in Video Games), *Nowe Media* no. 1(5)/2014 [available online: http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/NM.2014.007].

[26]See for example M. L. Ryan, "Immersion vs. Interactivity: Virtual Reality and Literary Theory," *Postmodern Culture*, no. 1/1994; G. Calleja, *In-Game: From Immersion to Incorporation*, Cambridge–London 2011.

[27]I have offered a detailed analysis of this scene in my article "Bergman vs. Batman. Chwyt technicznej deziluzji w grach wideo na tle praktyk literackich i filmowych" (Bergman vs. Batman. The Technical Device of Dis-llusionment in Video Games in the Context of Literary and Cinematic Practices), in *Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication*, no. 1/2015.

I here present emergence as a broad, general category, because I do not wish to repeat myself from previous analyses, but rather to illustrate in an abbreviated fashion how poetics can fruitfully expand its catalogue of concepts to include new tools applied to the specific aspects of the digital medium and not ripped from previous scholarly tradition. Though we must agree with Rettberg when he refers to the clear non-identity of the act of reading and the act of playing, we must simultaneously note that the two processes are not mutually exclusive but can form a complementary whole. The complicated relations between these two, or among these and other factors meriting attention in future research can be seen as a strong feature distinguishing contemporary games and their poetics. From this perspective, to cross out games from poetics' field of inquiry would be both reductive and unwarranted.

KEYWORDS

interpretation

metaphor

Digital Text

Abstract:

The article shows how video games fit into the spectrum of poetic inquiry and tackles the question of how the tools of traditional poetological studies can be expanded in the context of digital texts. The author considers the interpretative potential that can be discovered in video games. He also points to the specific problems involved in manifesting metaphorical discourse in games without recourse to the medium of language.

poetics

literary theory

video games

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The Literariness
on the Net,
and the Functioning
of Literariness Online.
Perspectives for Research

Elżbieta Winiecka

Methodological or terminological troubles absorb a sizable part of the attention of literary scholars entangled in studying new forms of internet communication. The word "entangled" here means that literary scholarship, although it has never been impartial, is finally losing, in digital space, its status as objective knowledge [knowledge of an object], becoming a cultural practice. In other words, it is impossible to study literariness online without accepting the rules dictated by the medium.[1] You cannot observe how social media work without opening an account, you cannot learn the specifics of online role-playing games (narrative story games in which the players embody fictional characters and act out a planned scenario) and understand them as literary and cultural phenomena without becoming one of the players, devising your own character and entering fully into the role. We cannot understand what *Second Life* is until we create our avatar and enter the imaginary digital arcade, allowing our digital alter ego to live and communicate with other creatures from other people's imaginations. We all use e-mail, we are registered and can log in to various sites: our bank, the library, internet stores. We come up with our login and our password, we pass a CAPTCHA (*Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart*) test, proving to a machine that we are people and can be trusted. Sometimes we even write comments on blogs we read. Since all of this is true, it means that you cannot simply be a reader and observer on the Internet,

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[1] Obviously, each medium imposes rules and limits on writing practices. In the case of print literature, the role of its medium, which from the time of the printing press's invention was the codex, was overlooked in studies of literariness by literary scholars for a long time. The material nature of the work acquired greater attention with 20th century liberature experiments. Only the appearance of new technological possibilities brought about significant growth in scholars' interest in questions dealing with the medium through which literature is transmitted.

a Barthesian myth-hunter, alienated from the life of his community. Using the Internet forces us to participate. And even if we use false information, setting up an inbox for a fake identity, we still do not remain outside the virtual world. We may protect our privacy, or at least want to believe that we do so, but we cannot fail to involve our body, our intellect and our imagination, as soon as we take concrete steps toward interaction. That is the essence of entanglement in the net. The problems, however, do not stop there.

What exactly is this entity we are looking for, literariness online? Do we mean literary works as traditionally defined, transmitted through the medium of the Internet? Or do we perhaps mean electronic literature, the kind that not only uses the new medium as its vehicle, but which was created and can be read only through the use of digital technology? Works of e-literature cannot simply be transferred to an analog medium; they truly exist only in a digital context, and the computer is the *sine qua non* of their existence. In this respect, they differ from digitized literature. They are literary artifacts that are only available in digital form on the Internet. A portion of them cannot be transferred to any other vehicle (such as a CD or DVD); these are interactive, i.e., their operation depends on decisions made by the user in real time, in interacting with the artifact. The user nevertheless always chooses a path for reading from among the options offered by the author. The reader's freedom and the work's openness are thus deceptive: their actual sphere of operations is bounded by the technical capabilities of the equipment and the concept of their author/designer, who precisely anticipates the user's every possible move in accordance with the governing algorithm.

But what would happen if, going beyond artifacts of e-literature and websites devoted to literary works, we considered the literariness of the entire Internet? If we tried describing its literary potential? Of course, the web not only mediates between and among users, but itself has something to say. From this perspective, the self-referential, self-reflexive potential of the Internet can serve as an object of reflection, not only in its capacity as a tool that brings a turn in culture, structures of perception and interpersonal relations, but as a medium which itself generates aesthetic surplus.

The problems dealt with by scholars of digital writing[2] relate to cultural change that affects the essence of how we function in the world, including our sensitivity, needs, and the ways we fulfill them.

European culture developed through the written word. The invention of print in the fifteenth century caused a model of literary culture to form in which those who could read and write were ascribed the social function of intellectual elites. Initially this definition applied to Renaissance men of letters, i.e., *literati*. Literacy gave people access to knowledge and wisdom,

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[2] We must here mention Ewa Szczęsna and her team of collaborators. This scholar has worked on digital poetics for years, elucidating the social, cultural, and aesthetic consequences of the digital turn for Polish readers. Among Polish literary scholars who have dealt with these problems, we should note at least the following names: Piotr Marecki, Katrzyna Bazarnik, Zenon Fajfer, Mariusz Pisarski, Urszula Pawlicką, and Maciej Maryla. At the same time, we must underscore the foundational work performed by scholars from whom the new medium demanded a radical redefining of their object of study and the development of new descriptive tools. Their invaluable joint initiatives with scholars of culture and media made it possible to look at literature in the context of its technological conditions, and see literary practices, broadly understood, as a form of activity closely linked with its cultural context.

enabling the lettered to exert influence on mass opinion. Writing and reading thus constituted basic cultural competencies. In the early 1990s, a new term was coined: *digerati*, a contamination of *digital literati*. *Digerati* is a kind of cyber-elite, about which Vilém Flusser has written: "the new elite thinks in numbers, forms, colors, sounds, but to a lesser and lesser extent in words [...]."[3] This elite is a group of people who actively participate in creating a new type of culture, based on the generation, transmission, and management of information.[4] Thus before our very eyes the traditional model of the well-educated humanist scholar is fading into oblivion. This (fortunately) does not mean that knowledge of literary culture is now superfluous. Such knowledge is, however, insufficient, and increasingly requires fusion with new media literacy. A literary scholar hoping to know and understand the specific nature of new writing must be well-versed in more than just writing and reading. Both skills are undergoing a profound metamorphosis in the new media environment. The means of communication, which until now for literature was print, is no longer merely a conveyor of content. Nowadays, when we observe new writing practices taking shape online, in an ethereal, virtual and interactive digital environment, we need to rethink the ontological, aesthetic, political, and social properties of what we have been accustomed to give the enigmatic and circumspect appellations of literature and literariness.

Differences in how we approach new developments originate to a great extent in changes that are social, including generational changes, rather than methodological. Those who remember the time of analogue culture evaluate the new forms of writing differently from those who (because of when they were born) have always lived in a world with an expanded ontology. The reality of the latter group consists of a material reality enlarged by a virtual one, but both constitute indivisible dimensions of a single life and experience. This generational change is also visible in the different ways people use cultural assets.[5] Such change must also be reckoned with by scholars of the digital word. But literary scholars themselves are not in agreement as to the value and importance of the phenomena they encounter on the Internet. Their approach spans from deep skepticism based on an attachment to older findings regarding the specific nature of literary communication, to a belief in the irreversibility of change that demands the discovery of new methods for describing the dynamic metamorphosis literature is going through in the age of technological culture. In the past, all scholarly methodologies adopted for analyzing textual structures were literature-centric in nature, oriented toward a critical analysis of textual phenomena. The experience of far-reaching reflectiveness in relation to contact over longer periods of time with static, two-dimensional, invariable literary

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[3] V. Flusser, "Alphanumerischerische Gesellschaft. Die Zukunft des Buchstabenlesens" (Alphanumeric Society: The Future of Reading) in Flusser, *Die Revolution der Bilder: der Flusser-Reader zu Kommunikation, Medien und Design* (The Revolution of Images: the Flusser Reader on Communication, Media, and Design), Mannheim: Bollmann, 1995, 38-58.

[4] In the contemporary world, this group of educated intellectuals who have created the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of cyberculture, are being displaced by the netocracy, a caste who have replaced the ideals honored by the *digerati*, i.e., the growth and democratic community of the Internet, with "above all, a philosophy of profit and increasing their power and the territory under their control." P. Zawojski, *Cyberkultura. Syntopia szuki, nauki i technologii* (Cyberculture. The Syntopia of Art, Science and Technology), Katowice: Poltext, 2010, 36. My data on the formation of media elites are also taken from that book. 7-37.

[5] Sociologists and cultural and media studies scholars have described the phenomenon of this change exhaustively. The position of Piotr Zawojski, who in his penetrating description of the communicative breakthrough connected with the rise of the internet community refers outright to a new cultural paradigm, has something to be said for it. See P. Zawojski, *Cyberkultura*.

texts has formed the model approach to interpretative penetration of texts. The 20th-century humanities, the same body of knowledge that questioned the stability of meanings and transferred the responsibility for their appearance on the horizon of reading to the reader, still privileged the text despite all of its reservations regarding reading. The text was the bit between the reader's teeth, curtailing her freedom of imagination. The text-centered approach also had repercussions for the way other phenomena were defined, since the belief in the textual nature of the world made the act of interpretation the foundation for understanding being in the world. Cognitive activity was linked to the strenuous reading of signs.

Today, however, it is no longer one methodology or another that has a decisive influence on the formation of differences in reception, on what we see and what we understand when we observe the mechanisms of internet communication. Among the participants in cyberculture, one can observe a retreat from theory toward the study of the cultural practices that constitute evidence of understanding. What I have in mind are both communicative strategies conditioned by the medium of the Internet and the ontology of internet texts, which are often not only multimedia artifacts but also a multilayered space of collision and rearrangement of works, genres, forms, discourses in general. We can doubtless speak of a new phenomenology of perception, connected with changes in perception conditioned by the media.[6] Besides the body and speech, fundamental media of experience, communicative technologies, whether understood in McLuhan's terms as "extensions of man"[7] or as a dimension of the post-humanist experience of the diffusion and cyborgization of the subject, a dimension that is both a component and condition of articulation, are becoming an indispensable element in the process of perception and comprehension.

In internet communication, what matters are multimediality, spatiality, and the dynamics of cultural artifacts, increasingly embodied by complex forms of animation. The new media situation does not liberate the user from the work of searching for meanings; on the contrary, it demands much greater intellectual effort, since it is much harder for the reader to get through to the semantic layer of the text, stripping away its media tissue. One-directional reading is being replaced by interactivity, making it possible for reading to be fused with creative writing. From a literature-centric view this dynamic situation is referred to as the re-writing of culture,[8] but neither reading nor writing can exhaust the richness of works created by users. What does this mean for literary scholars?

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[6] Neurobiologists studying the structures of the brain and its functioning and cognitive scientists analyzing cognition processes have accordingly observed changes in the areas of brain activity connected with the transition from the domination of the typographic medium to the multimedia environment. See N. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011. Psychologists and sociologists also link the development of certain cognitive processes and social practices to the specific nature of techniques and tools that mediate between the subject and its environment. (P. Gärdenfors, P. Johannson, eds., *Cognition, Education and Communication Technology*, London: Routledge, 2005). Katherine N. Hayles writes on the influence of new media on thought from a perspective of literary scholarship in *How We Think. Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

[7] See M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994.

[8] I have in mind here the national conference organized in 2014 by the Institute of Polish Culture of Łódź University entitled "Re-writing Literature," whose participants' interest focused on "creative parasitism on the texts of others." See *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* (Problems of Literary Genres) 2014, no. 2. "Literatura prze-pisana" (Re-writing Literature) and "Literatura prze-pisana. Od Hamleta do slashu" (Re-Writing Literature, From Hamlet to Slash), ed. A. Izdebska, D. Szajnert, Łódź: Łódzkie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2015.

Ewa *Szczęsna*, who has studied the transformations of literariness in the digital context for many years, underscores the fact that what is happening in digital space is a "reading re-writing of culture," and that "we must recognize either that the ontic nature of reading is being remodeled or, if we stick to the traditional definition of reading, that it does not represent the only possible way of experiencing literariness [...]."[9] This last statement seems crucial to understanding the cultural change that has taken place over the last quarter century. In the sphere of digital communication, due to the dematerialization of codes that made possible the fusion into one whole of discourses previously belonging to separate genres of art, we observe the interpenetration of entities previously ascribed to different forms of media. The visual layer, enhanced by effects of two or three-dimensional animation, is joined by musical compositions and enhances hypertext narratives. Literature is increasingly prone to use devices developed by film, computer games, or videos. At the same time, we can observe the ubiquity of literary structures in new multimedia projects (as for example in the role-playing games mentioned above, which, thanks to digital technology, allow players to bring literary fiction to life in the virtual world). The virtual world is a great conglomerate of represented worlds, with their literary characters, plots, and narratives that can best be described using the language of literary theory. It is hard to claim that the lexicon of descriptive poetics has exhausted the cultural and textual possibilities for processes based – in keeping with Szczęsna's diagnosis – "on the experimental intersection of discursively varied forms, transposing into certain discourses features from others."[10]

From the reader's perspective, all of these phenomena, as they multiply, transform, and paraphrase existing cultural codes, call for a new approach, transcending the previously existing intellectual and perceptual operations performed by readers in the sphere of meaning creation. To a much greater extent than in reading a codex, the somatic is engaged in the interactive process of involvement with a digital artifact. In the case of many multimedia projects, the somatic directly influences the work, not only at the level of interpreting its meanings, which took place in traditional literature, but in the structural and technical layer of the text, what Ewa Szczęsna calls the texture.[11] At the same time, the reader experiences the work as an object that not only affects her body but is dependent on that bodily aspect. An excellent example would be the work *Andromeda* by Cailine Fisher.[12] This work is a dramatization of the act of reading a spatial book for children, dealing with the interdependence of people and machines, whose cooperation makes the existence of the book possible. The user shows a book to a camera attached to a computer, which scans the book, translating the text into a language understandable to a human. The content is displayed on the screen and is read out loud by the computer. The encoded work is unreadable to the user without the help of the machine. In order to collaborate with a person, the machine requires certain behavior from that person. Thus a two-sided dependency us created which is also a metacommentary on the new communication situation.

[9] E. Szczęsna, "Cyfrowe parafrazy. O niedokładnym przepisywaniu kultury" (Digital Paraphrases. On Inexact Rewriting of Culture), in: "Literatura prze-pisana," 15.

[10]E. Szczęsna, "Cyfrowe parafrazy. O niedokładnym przepisywaniu kultury," 13.

[11]E. Szczęsna, "Znak digitalny. U podstaw nowej semiotyki tekstu" (The Digital Sign. The Foundations for the New Semiotics of the Text), in *Przekaz digitalny. Z zagadnień semiotyki, semantyki i komunikacji cyfrowej* (The Digital Utterance. Problems of Semiotics, Semantics, and Digital Communication), ed. Ewa Szczęsna, Kraków: Universitas, 2015.

[12]http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/fisher_andromeda.html (last accessed: 30.01.2016).

Most interactive works use literary discourse as a component in multimedia installations, or – in a particularly interesting twist – as a kind of metanarrative about the status of art, the condition of the human being and the potential of cyberculture. These are often experimental works that test new technological possibilities, self-referentially addressing their own texture. We thus have every reason to believe that despite additional difficulties that complicate the reception situation and demand from the user knowledge of technical procedures and the rules governing the digital construction of such works, the core of the literary experience remains unchanged. The demand for heightened reflection, attention, concentration on the utterance, still figures in every instance of contact with linguistic utterances classified as literary. These works are called e-literature, meaning works created with the participation of computers and requiring the use of those same machines for their reading or performance to take place. A representative aggregate of examples of electronic literature is stored in successive collections published by the Electronic Literature Organization (2006, 2011).[13]

The phenomenon of e-literature represents only a part of the wealth of literary practices and problems relating to their status in relation to the internet. Furthermore, according to Sandy Baldwin, author of the book *Internet Unconscious*,[14] a refreshing contribution to the discussion of digital literature problems, the digital works or objects gathered in collections have little in common with real literature. To understand why the author dismisses what has attracted attention from most scholars of digital literature, we should examine his theoretical proposition.

Baldwin describes the Internet as a written space. It is constituted in three dimensions, and yet, as he demonstrates, on a daily basis we are barely conscious of even two. The results of this state of affairs are truly far-reaching, since exposing the hidden, unacknowledged dimension makes it possible to present a new concept of online literariness. To grasp it through another set of symbols, the structure of the Net, created by the users who write it, like the psyche of the Freudian subject, is composed of what amounts to its *superego*, the technological layer; its *ego* is the sphere of activity of those writers who act in accordance with the rules of the logic of transparency, openness, and rationality and the rules governing communication; and finally, there is the layer of unconscious desires, the *id*, which seek out their fulfillment in the world of the Internet.

We are thus able to see the Internet as a network of loosely connected transcriptions, beginning with the basic structure of communicative codes and ending with the operating principles of the CAPTCHA test, ASCII code, or chmod (change mode) 777 commands, responsible for changing the access permissions to files and directories, i.e. permitting each user to write freely. It also anchors the hypertext structures of social media such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Baldwin thus draws our attention to the importance of the technical layer of internet writing, which radically limits the freedom of users, who are forced to submit

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[13]http://collection.eliterature.org/. See: N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2008.

[14]S. Baldwin, *The Internet Unconscious On the Subject of Electronic Literature*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2015.

to technology's demands. The automatic functioning of the www system has advanced to the point where most users have no idea how their access to the Internet actually works. In reality, websites are received from servers via browsers and displayed on the screens of our devices. Their appearance is preceded by a complex process of communication between the browser and the www server, which sends the browser a series of questions, after which the site is gradually formed as a series of files received. This communication occurs in a manner determined by HTML, CSS or other script language code. What we see on the screen is thus a purely external, culturally shaped layer, whose fundamental digital level is inaccessible and incomprehensible to the average user. What is more, the act of putting yourself in the hands of technology, which we do when we enter the Internet, does not stir any hesitation in us. We behave as if everything were neatly fixed and clear. As if we were in touch with the entity that imposes rules of conduct on us, as if the decision to entrust ourselves to a nameless system were of our own free will. That "as if" best conveys the state of our fantasies about the Internet as a creation of local community, as an aggregate of stories about life in the great web of being.

That is precisely the second dimension of the written Internet space described by Baldwin, treated as a clear and universally accessible sphere of discursive activities and practices forming themselves into texts. This is where the practices of reading, writing, and archivization of documents take place. This is also where electronic literature takes shape as an institution accessible in the form of closed, ready-to-read works. We will return to this question once more in a moment.

Finally, the third dimension of this written space is the project that results from the actions of embodied writing subjects. This is where Baldwin places the problem of literariness, comprehensively showing how writing is conditioned by technology, as well as the consequences of acknowledging the Internet's level of unconsciousness, in terms of the unusual bond created between the body of the writer, with her concomitant machine, and the longed-for others to whom whatever we write is always addressed. In this sense, the core of the writing experience online is the imaginative status of the existence of the net, the other, and literature.

The Internet – this global system connecting all users with each other – appears to be a literary phenomenon in its very essence. The thesis is not self-evident, but it allows us to look at communicative activity online as a form of activity motivated by a certain predisposition toward creating elaborate meanings.

Baldwin tries to prove that the essence of online communication is our tendency to change what is literal into something literary. Following the path of 20th century literary theory, which transferred the semantic burden of the text to the reader, he also shows that in reality it is not electronic literature, created with the thought of using digital technologies toward aesthetic ends, that constitutes the original element in our literary experience of the Internet (and simultaneously our experience of the Internet's literariness). E-literature is run by administrative logic, is produced by a group of digital artist-writers and followed by an even larger group of its admirers and aficionados, who eagerly institutionalize their interest, organizing

congresses, conferences, and associations.[15] They nonetheless constitute essentially an anonymous crowd gathered around an ideologized institution called Literature on the Internet.

The poetics of communication online represents a cornucopia of new developments on the borderline between literary and social questions. The tools of literary scholarship, with their sensitivity to multiple levels of meaning, complexity, and the ambiguity of sender and receiver roles, seem splendidly suited to describing this new situation. They are reinvigorating and at the same time further complicating problems that have absorbed scholars of literary communication for years. These are revealed to be that much more important in that they cannot be closed off within the autonomous area of literary studies. That is why the phenomenological description of the new literariness and online communication can serve to improve our understanding of the cultural transformation in which we are participating.

Thinking not about real operations but hypostasizing all potential events that might become realities within online communication, we can put together a catalogue of various rhetorical figures which lend their operating and semasiological principles to these intertwining discourses, and also – at different levels – to structural elements such as pages, accounts, and particular words (i.e., tags).

Nicholas C. Burbules observed that links have an effect on the understanding of hypertext, of which hyperlinks constitute a fundamental structural element.[16] Links vary greatly: some establish a range of associations, others define access to information.[17] And, let us add, links also create a rhetorical network that weakens the referential power of content in favor of the aesthetic and persuasive properties of structure. Links become a tool of rhetoric that creates meaning by taking the user from one point to another. Burbules lists the tropes that define the different types of links: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, antistasis, identity, cause and effect, catachresis. The essence of this mechanism is its seeming automatism ("any

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[15]The most famous of these is the Electronic Literature Organization, which operates within Massachusetts Institute of Technology (ELO). Established in order to support and facilitate the writing, publishing, and reading of literature in electronic media, it has contributed to the dissemination of the understanding of electronic literature as consisting of projects that in some way perpetuate the traditional view of literature as verbal art transposed into the area of new technologies.

[16]Here, we should consider several differences between the system of footnotes used in traditional texts and links in hypertext. Firstly, footnotes do not constitute a part of the text on equal footing with the work, but present a commentary on it. Links, on the contrary, connect nodes whose positions are equal to each other. Secondly, links transform a work's linear structure into a web. Each successive node to which the hyperlinks transfer the reader is, at least hypothetically, equivalent to the previous portion of the text. Thirdly, links render the course of reading unpredictable. Each link breaks up the narrative flow of events, taking the reader from the time and space of the represented world. The reader also has no control over where the hyperlink takes her: nor does she know what to expect after clicking on it. That introduces disorientation into each act of reading, disrupts narrative cohesion, taking the reader's attention from the level of the represented world to the level of its representation. Fourthly, a link physicalizes (renders unambiguous) all intertextual references. They thereby become something *other* than blatant intertextuality, however: an additional structural dimension that transforms the nature of the text. Intertextuality is a dimension of hypertext which is actualized, as in analogue literature, as a system of allusions, echoes, and references at the semantic level, dependent on the reader's ability. Intertetextuality thus relates to the semantics of hypertextuality, the ontology of the work. Fifthly, the system of hyperlinks renders each text an inescapably metatextual utterance, demonstrating simultaneously its textual and technological dimension.

[17]N. C. Burbules, "Rhetorics of the Web: Hyperreading and Critical Literacy," in *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy Into the Electronic Era*, I. Snyder, ed., New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1997. Available online: http://faculty.education.illinois.edu/burbules/papers/rhetorics.html (last accessed: 06.04.2016).

two things can be linked" by the click of a button[18]), allowing the persuasive function to sneak in. When surfing the Net, it is easy to notice that links lead us via free association in such a way as to allow us to repeatedly experience associative freedom and astonishing juxtapositions. This is particularly true of advertisements, which use the surface identity of words to connect completely disparate thematic areas. According to Nicholas Burbules, "the dynamics of the World Wide Web are essentially hyperbolic [...]."[19] This can be seen both in the term "world wide web" itself and in the qualities ascribed to that entity: panoptic omnipotence and universalism. This is how Jakub Z. Lichański describes the phenomenon in relation to contemporary culture:

> When we are producing something that is supposed to persuade somebody else about something or toward something (including works of architecture, music, painting, sculpture, film, radio or TV programs, advertising text, web pages, etc.)– in such cases we are always dealing with rhetoric.[20]

Thus not only word and image, but all codes used in discursive forms, including those subject to the rules of simplified communication, such as the sonic (whether using natural or synthetic sounds) or kinaesthetic code, observe the same rhetorical rules. Whatever is rhetorical is simultaneously political, however, and subject to rules of oversight and control. Is rhetoric, thus defined, not the opposite of literariness? If we consider literature a field of total freedom, as the author of *Internet Unconscious* would have it, including freedom from pragmatic goals imposed from the outset, then we must essentially consider the Internet to be a space of political activity, for which rhetoric is a ubiquitous and universal tool. Sandy Baldwin has undertaken a dizzying attempt to grasp the unacknowledged and unconscious dimension of the Internet, which is constituted *outside* the rules of the rhetorical system: in a system imagined elsewhere, pulsing with a secret, vagabond, subcutaneous literariness that acts on the imagination, stirring emotions, desire, and love.

Writing on the screen, we write ourselves, and at the same time, we are written. Or perhaps rather: the system writes us and writes in our name. That is the essence of the new experience of writing. I also have a screen before me, my fingers are striking a keyboard. On the screen, a series of words are displayed. Every so often, the spellcheck program underscores them with a red line, signifying that I have made a mistake. The machine, using its database, monitors me constantly. I search for the right word in my head. I come up with a neologism. I write it down. The computer's reaction is immediate. It underscores my new word in red. Some words it automatically corrects. I drag the cursor back and correct it to make the text accord with my intention rather than the machine's lexical stock. In vain. Again it corrects me. I am stubborn. I drag the cursor back and write my word in. I don't know why it doesn't care for the words "cybertext" and "semasiological." It underscored them. I throw up my hands. [I wave.] But after a moment I add the words to the computer's dictionary. On the other hand, when I write "worlds" instead of "words," spellcheck has no reaction. To the program, both words

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[18]N. C. Burbules, "Rhetorics of the Web."

[19]N. C. Burbules, "Rhetorics of the Web."

[20]"Wyzwania kultury współczesnej a retoryka" (Rhetoric and the Challenge of Contemporary Culture), here: J. Z. Lichański, *Forum Artis Rhetoricae* 2011, no. 2, 28, http://www.retoryka.edu.pl/files/far2_art2.pdf (last accessed: 30.01.2016)

and worlds represent merely numeric combinations which it transforms into familiar letters for my benefit. I tolerate its indifference because the number of improvements spellcheck offers my work outweighs the number of flaws in it.

My emotions, intentions, and desires must nevertheless submit to the computer's technical demands. My fingers type out on the keyboard the words I want to write, but I adapt the level of pressure to its requirements. Otherwise, mistakes appear. I am therefore not free. That is why, in Baldwin's powerful argument, there is no literature in digital writing, because a fundamental condition of literature is the absolute freedom to write anything whatever. Whereas I am agreeing to submit to the hard rules of digital codes.

Sandy Baldwin goes still further, however: he writes about the fact that the body immobilized by the computer changes into a weapon that carries out the machine's orders. A body paired with a keyboard is a biopolitical body, imprisoned and subjected to repression. He also observes that writing on a computer screen connected to the web is writing outside the world, in some strange other place. Writing with a pen, a pencil, or a quill on paper is a concrete material thing. One's hand moves a writerly instrument. The force of pressure finds its reflection in the thickness of the line set down. Paper registers every stumble: deletions, corrections, insertions. It constitutes a record of presence and embodiment. But when I want to touch the words written on the screen, I come up against the shell of the screen, separating my world from that other one. That world, the world of letters, words, messages, is deeper, but inaccessible, unattainable. Communication entrusted to the Net becomes the hypostasis of impossible literariness. Impossible because the fundamental condition of literature is absolute freedom, yet that freedom is realized only in the sphere of the imagination.

The real dynamism of the technological layer of the text read from the screen is heightened by the vocabulary used to describe the mental disposition of the user, suggesting that we perform actual physical activities when we are immobilized before the computer screen. We *enter* the net, we read on after the *jump*, we *surf*, we *go* shopping. But *write*? If I am playing a computer game online, a practically unlimited scope of possible activities is available to me. Here at least, my participation in virtual reality becomes unambiguous: I can say (as the author of a novel might say about its first-person narrator) that I am delegating my avatar, the digital representative who performs successive tasks in my name, to the world of fiction. It is not so obvious, however, when I use the services of an advisor at the website of a shop. In our exchange of remarks, I have no idea whether I am communicating with a person or a computer program developed for customer service purposes. One thing is sure: when I log in to any page or portal, I suspend the principle of reality and materiality and rush into an abyss of indeterminacy. The level of my uncertainty as to the content I find or its providers leads to thoughts of both ontological and epistemological incertitude.

I do not know the ontic condition of the subjects with which I communicate. Am I definitely conversing with a person, or am I treating information automatically generated by a computer program as governed by intentionality? Considering the increasingly popular technology project Semantic Web, which standardizes information on the Internet so that particular data are sought out and conveyed intelligently, i.e., in a form that allows direct connections to be made

with other information and with appropriate context, we might suppose that soon the problem of the personalization of human-machine relations will become even more complicated. Until now, connections between particular documents and sites depended on the decisions of the person who provided them with tags (keywords), allowing the user to access desired content. Now that task is to be taken over by computers. Semantic Web technology enables computers to search rationally (reckoning with the meaning of words) for the information they need. The basic building material for the web may become not files, but meaning. At the same time, however, we may find that we lose the ability to tell a human being from a machine, and we will also witness exchanges of information between machines that take place without any human participation. The relativization of the reading and reception of each text on the Internet is caused by the nature of the medium itself, which allows for the possibility of sending bizarre and incomprehensible content such as spam, and never fully guarantees the legitimacy of the source of a message. We take a risk any time we trust it to be authentic.

On the Internet, the question remains undecidable regarding what amid the available content is true, and what is false; whether the person I converse with is who they say they are or rather a self-creation, a kind of literary character creating a fictional narrative about themselves? Although in the latter case I do not, as happens when reading a literary text, take the whole situation in parentheses, as a phenomenon representing an example of literary transitional objects or meta-realia. A person (probably) is writing to me in the first person, a person who wants me to believe what they are saying about themselves. Why do they do so, how do they want to influence what is in fact my real life? We find ourselves at the boundaries of classical two-way logic. Not, however, because someone is very skilfully tricking us, but because simple solutions are not possible here.

For this reason, Baldwin focuses more on what "literature" means online than on the existing canon of electronic literature. His proposal entails a kind of new phenomenology of perception according to which the boundaries and understanding of the object of study are decided primarily by the reading subject. He thus does not deal with literary texts as traditionally understood, but rather with processes of written communication online. He examines the relations between the immobilized body and the computer screen, between the desire to encounter the other that motivates our actions and the complicated IT mechanisms that only appear to act as an innocent intermediary.

Baldwin claims that the digital codes (ASCII, Unicode) in which all signs are written in the form of binary sequences represent the Internet's unconscious. Exactly as in Lacan's formulation, this unconscious is structured by language and constitutes the foundation of the symbolization process. And, as in Lacan, we are unable to reach this unconscious, though it is what decides what is written. At the same time, what is truly essential cannot be written: that is the relationship to the Other (the addressee), imagined in the course of writing, a relationship that arises and exists only in the writing subject's imagination. That is how the literariness of alphanumeric codes is born. It is not identical with literature as a written artefact, but is an imagined inscription that leaves no trace, the very possibility of an uncontrolled utterance which – let us once again underscore – is purely imaginative in character. All of us share and exchange codes, not bodies. We feel pleasure and suffering sharing with code, not with

another person. At the same time, we dream of another work, in which intimacy and secrets are possible. And that is where we take ourselves in our imagination.

This is why writing online is, in Baldwin's view, primarily a foray into the world of the imagination. Beginning with the fact that we have to imagine what the web itself is, through imagining ourselves as a writing subject, all the way to imagining the Other to whom we are directing our message. The Internet – a post-medium[21] deprived of materiality – is above all a work of the imagination. The status of writing on the web cannot be separated from the web as a hypertextual structure and as an event. The question as to what the Internet represents as an imagined space of communication provokes another regarding the poetics of writing on the web and the literariness of that online writing.

Immobilized before the computer screen, we weave fantasies about the Other to whom we direct the words we type out on the keyboard. But this mediation is pernicious.[22] The distorted and falsified desire in writing online is altogether virtual and mechanical.[23] Baldwin shows the connection that binds together two people communicating via the Internet, how this imagined web is created. Not at the level of technology, but in the sphere of fantasy, beyond the screen. When I want to send someone a message, part of my writing originates in expectation of the answer. When I send an e-mail, my imagination begins to work: I try to imagine the addressee, experiencing an ersatz form of their presence and our encounter. To write to someone who desires to say something really important means to love the Other, to give oneself to the Other, and simultaneously: to give all of that to an absolutely indifferent screen. This is what the literariness of the Internet consists of, according to Baldwin. The dream of each act of writing is to save traces of presence, a transfer of voice, the continuation of existence in the technology of writing. Reading online, we search for transitiveness and translational motion. We desire something we can brush up against onscreen. We desire for the screen to be a face. We desire real contact, a real body, the real face of the Other. The concept of literariness used by Baldwin explodes cultural norms and systems, placing it on the screen as an impossible phenomenon, though one repeated many times in the sphere of the writing/reading subject's desires. When we look at works of electronic literature, we find this persistence of affect there, but only as a fiction, only as literature.

[21] On the Internet as a post-medium that unifies in binary code all other media, which thus become forms of existence of the digital technocultural universe, see: P. Celiński, *Postmedia. Cyfrowy kod i bazy danych* (Postmedia. Digital Code and Databases), Lublin: UMCS, 2013.

[22] On problems of writing mediated through technology, especially those relating to the practice and theory of screen writing, see: *Ekrany piśmienności. O przyjemnościach tekstu w epoce nowych mediów* (Screens of Writing. On the Pleasures of the Text in the Age of New Media), ed. A. Gwóźdź, Warszawa: WAiP, 2008.

[23] Andrzej Gwóźdź writes concerning the experience of writing on a screen: "It's something different from carving on paper by means of pen and ink, more a kind of simultaneous thought and writing, thought that is equal to the act of writing itself. […] In the time of electronic production and reproduction, we no longer associate the letters of the alphabet with the physicality of writing, since that physicality is simply not there […]. All that remains is a sterile, immaterial infographic of letters that aren't letters, more graphics of letters, since the processor doesn't know what it's doing; for it, a word is a less complicated matrix of an image, a function of an algorithm, no longer a form of writing. And we, writing [on the computer], are only simulating writing, in fact activating the binary structures of the processor. And we are playing on this stage of writing that isn't writing, putting on a play of writing, which is not writing at all, but rather constant management of digital code inspired by the idea of a text, designation of virtuality, so that it can finally simulate the order of alphanumeric signs arranged in a line of writing." (A. Gwóźdź, Afterword in *Ekrany piśmienności*, 338-339.)

Baldwin reaches the paradoxical conclusion that from a political and philosophical standpoint, electronic literature does not exist, because at the point where literalization of the effects of the activity of the imagination takes place, in which we manage well-constructed texts subjected to mechanisms of oversight and the logic of management, there is no intimacy of experience, and hence no literariness. He therefore distinguishes between two categories of online writers. One consists of literary society, which is everywhere. Whole crowds of electronic writers exist who have nothing in common. These masses gather around new technologies. The members of this group use programs and applications. A crowd of admirers also encircles another crowd, i.e. that of artists, the creators of the digital humanities. That crowd is constituted purely by writing on the surface of media, which at the same time is disembodied and dispassionate. Electronic writers do not reveal their bodies, but merely seek out technological tools. They join organizations that support their creative activity. The crowd of electronic writers is well-formed and is organized, but is not a community.

The second category consists of those who do not create institutionalized associations, but a community. In a community, a real connection is possible, with understanding and friendship.

We usually look at a computer hooked up to the internet from a sober, distanced vantage point. We see its interface, we mechanically use the programming as it operates with the cold, mathematical discipline of codes and protocols. We treat every component of the process as perfectly formed and logical. Baldwin has no illusions, however: that secure position of the subject online does not exist. Our gaze into the computer screen connected to the web pushes us immediately to the extreme margins of philosophical logic, where subjectivity is torn out of the symbolic order and objects appear cracked, ontologically impossible. The web is the materialization of impossibility. Here everything is fluid, everything is invented.

In Baldwin's phenomenologico-psychoanalytical reading, the Internet is an imaginative and phantasmatic structure upheld by our commitment to reading and writing. To read the writing on the screen of a computer hooked up to the internet means to repeatedly simulate an encounter with otherness and externality, with someone's inner life which never actually happens and remains an unfulfillable desire. To deal with literature and what is literary online is either to repeat that experience, or to read a work of that repetition, which never touches on the real truth of existence, and is never an encounter with the desired Other, but an act of reading what the Other has left behind. Therefore, when we follow someone's activity on Facebook, when we build up an illusory sense of encountering someone's real life, a living human being, we are trying to do an impossible thing. Because in social media, privacy and intimacy are settings, possible selections among the options for preserving and sharing data. Sharing privacy means sharing files, which provide only a semblance of intimacy and secrets. As we exchange information, we dream about real contact. It is through the work of the imagination that the web exists and is maintained as a space of encounter.

My freedom is an illusion, however, because the Internet has been taken over by hackers, Internet con men, data and identity thieves, as well as merchants, service companies, and state institutions, for whom information is merely merchandise. A computer online is thus like

a life-draining zombie, and bodies connected to the Internet are zombified bodies. Such is the biopolitical position of the subject constituted by the life-sucking screen.

Sandy Baldwin's theory reveals the threat faced by a society of technoculture readers.[24] He also shows that blind faith in technology serves not so much the convergence of literary forms as the destruction of the essence of literariness. But Baldwin also paints an ecstatic picture of the saving, sabotaging omnipotence of technology based on building communication in new media using the oldest rule in the world: the freedom to write and the sincere belief that somebody has something worthwhile to tell me.

That is why, according to Baldwin, everything on the Internet becomes something literary. This applies to every activity involving time spent online: looking into the computer screen, sending and receiving e-mails, logging in, even passing CAPTCHA tests. Each confrontation with digital writing leads to a "double play" of literalization and overinvestment of imagination. The literariness of online writing is situated in this double play. From the lonely explosion of hope and desperation and the hysterical need for manifest contact with the Other to the works that write (weave) the web, that join together Others as friends, lovers, and community.

Baldwin, in his poetic defence strategy against whatever deprives writing of freedom, quote's Claude Shannon's famous cryptographic maxim: "The enemy knows the system." If, therefore, we want to send a message, we need not change the system, but should come up with a code that has a single-use key, and then change the units of open text with coded units. Baldwin finds applications for this rule in internet communication. If we want to make a connection with others, which can give rise to the literariness of our writing, we must trust the addressee and send open text right before the enemy's eyes. If the addressee is our friend, he knows the code. Friendship means the possibility of reading someone's message. That is the intimacy inside me, the habitation we share, brotherhood, familiarity, connection, community.

Where the enemy knows the system, perfect security is defined by the literary secret of the open text. Mystery is the adhesive binding together the community of writers and readers, the guarantee of literature's intimacy. On the Internet, this holds true for permissions, the use of the files we share, providing logins and passwords, receiving spam, sharing files, as well as with piracy and free programs circulated online. The secret is open. Here is the risk: to read messages as literature means to take the risk that they come from friends. That is the only way to become a lover of literature: risking that we might get cheated.

There is such a thing as literary society, whose members share the intimacy of literature. To read and write literature is to enter a secret community of lovers who are capable of sharing reading and writing but are not able to *explain* the secret that brought them together. Because

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[24]One weak spot in this theory is the fact that it overlooks the possibility of using a mobile Internet in a cellular phone or other portable device. Baldwin refers to the paralysis of the body in front of the computer screen as an essential aspect of technology's oppressiveness. He underscores that it is precisely the captivity of the body that liberates the imagination online. Since mobile forms of Internet nevertheless give writers back their freedom, allowing them free movement even when they are spending time online, we should consider whether the mobile Internet also exerts influence on the imagination of a PC user and on the emergence of the literary.

the nature of the secret is that it cannot be grasped. If it could, it would cease to be a secret. All lovers of literature who write the web are like the protagonist of Robert Frost's two-line poem "The Secret":

> We dance round in a ring and suppose,
> But the *Secret* sits in the middle and knows.

Sandy Baldwin's book marvellously illustrates the *entanglement* of literary scholarship in the problems it attempts to draw into the open. In doing so, it testifies to the phantasm of online literariness as a dramatization of the desire for an encounter with the Other. Through his use of psychoanalysis, Baldwin manages to show the invaluable and unappreciated dimension of the Internet: as a sphere of imaginative activity it fulfils a function analogous to that of the work of literature in Freud's theory. Phantasm, as a digital simulacrum, becomes reality for the fantasizers. Hence the deep existential meaning of writing on the Internet: it brings a kind of substitutional satisfaction of desires of which the same medium at first deprived us.

Baldwin's book shows great theoretical and poetic inventiveness, convincingly defining the literariness of the Internet, drawing it out of the unconscious and perhaps even calling it into existence. It is an intriguing proposal for thinking about problems of literature in digital media. Scholarly reflection that treats electronic writing on the Internet as literature has only just begun to develop. We already know with certainty, however, that creating catalogues of the genres of the new literature does not amount to understanding its condition. , Literature must be a problem, or it is not worth creating and studying. The ontic complexity and ambiguity of online literature is the very thing that draws literary scholars into its web.

Keywords | Abstract | Note on the Author ● ● ●

KEYWORDS

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Sandy Baldwin

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Abstract:

The author of the article presents the current situation and perspectives for future development of literary scholarship relating to the changing media environment and the development of new forms of writing activity on the Internet. She looks for answers to the question of where the borders of literariness online lie and how it is defined. The author further presents the current state of literary scholarship on the subject of the transformation of literature under the influence of digital media and related problems. The author cites a concept developed by Sandy Baldwin, who in the book *Internet Unconsious* (2015) shows new potential areas of study relating to these phenomena, demonstrating conclusively that this new interactive medium not only poses no threat to literature, but constitutes a natural area for its expansion. This calls for readiness on the part of literary scholars to embrace new theoretical and technological solutions.

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Facetiae on Facebook
– A Case Study

Barbara Kulesza-Gulczyńska

On Facetiae

Social media such as the popular site Facebook were originally designed primarily to help people find their friends online, stay in contact with them, and make new friends. They allow people to exchange short messages in real time with a community that includes both close friends and casual acquaintances, concerning events of a private (or even intimate) nature, as well as thoughts and opinions on current events in the sociopolitical sphere, and to exchange interesting content via hyperlinks. The ability to receive feedback instantly, which forms the basis for how such media function (in Facebook's case, by clicking the "Like" button [giving someone a "like" (n.)] or leaving a comment under someone's post), the concise and multi-media nature of the content transmitted, and the growing popularity of these pursuits have transformed social media from sites that help people stay in touch into tools used for marketing, disseminating ideas, political rivalry, and organizing social activism. These sites, particularly Twitter and Facebook, have also become platforms for various types of artistic or critical activity, including literary activity.[1] The presence of literature on Twitter has already been the subject of many critical studies, particularly in English[2] (the site apparently continues to be less popular than Facebook in Poland and to be viewed as primarily an IT tool[3]). In view of the brevity the platform imposes on utterances (each post can contain no more than 140

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[1] The problem of how various literary and paraliterary forms function within social media is a very complex one, which furthermore, in view of the specific nature of the medium, can probably never be studied "in full." The above remarks thus cannot be deemed even a contribution to a general description of the phenomenon – they constitute only an attempt at a very abbreviated outline of the context of the phenomenon, to be discussed in the remainder of the present work.

[2] See M. Rudin, *From Hemingway to Twitterature: The Short and Shorter of It, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jep/33364 51.0014.213?view=text;rgn=main* (dostęp: 28.01.2016).

[3] See http://www.gemius.pl/reklamodawcy-aktualnosci/media-spolecznosciowe-jako-kanaly-komunikacji-charakterystyka-uzytkownikow.html (last accessed: 28.01.2016).

characters), some scholars have even spoken of a new literary genre – so-called *twitterature*. *Twitterature* is not only a term that defines the phenomenon of literature in social media, but also the title of a book published by Penguin Books in which 60 literary works from the canon of world literature were "rewritten" in a maximum of 20 140-character tweets. Therefore, not only is literature present in new media – new media, it turns out, are also "present" in literature, as a result of which the two phenomena interweave, allowing some intriguing forms of paraliterary games and diversions to take shape.

The principle behind the content published on the fanpage[4] I am particularly interested in, Facecje (Facetiae), active on Facebook since the end of November 2012, recalls to some extent the strategy of the creators of the book *Twitterature*. Patryk Bryliński and Maciej Kaczyński, the page's creators and administrators, have designed, in their own words: "a Facebook profile where conversations among historical and literary figures can be found, taking place in very contemporary contexts. Seventeenth-century still-life masters discuss instagram pictures of what somebody had for lunch; a drunk Romeo texts Julia from under her balcony at 4:00 AM; and [...] Mickiewicz, naturally, is bitter with Słowacki over some internet comments the latter has made [...]."[5] The page, now active for over 3 years (a relatively long time, if we take into consideration the ephemerality of internet content and the "flood of information" as well as the fact that little-known pages with few visitors or commenters simply disappear from the web), has 49,890 fans.[6] The most popular posts on the page can get as many as 5,000 likes and several hundred shares.[7] It is noteworthy and typical that the work of Facecje's creators extends well beyond this one page, and the realm of Facebook. Bryliński and Kaczyński also maintain a blog ("Zmemłani"[8]) and another fanpage – "Antkowi znów nie wyszło" (Antek Messed Up Again).[9] The Facecje page also has its own YouTube channel,[10] and has given rise to a print publication – *Facecje. #HistoriaCoachemŻycia* (Facetiae. #HistoryLife'sCoach).[11] All of these media can be accessed directly via the Facecje page – links are available in the Information section. Due to limitations on volume and the unfathomable array of interconnected associations that one faces when attempting to get to the bottom of any of these authors' communication platforms, I will constrain myself in this article to an analysis of certain aspects of the Facecje phenomenon, and only those present on Facebook, only occasionally referring to

[4] A fanpage, unlike a personal profile on Facebook, is a web page devoted to promoting a brand, idea, position, etc.

[5] P. Bryliński, M. Kaczyński, *Facecje. #HistoriaCoachemŻycia,* Kraków 2015, 12.

[6] Figure given for 28 January 2016. For comparison, For comparison, the similarly-focused but relatively new (active since August 2014) site *Nowe wiersze sławnych poetów* (https://www.facebook.com/Nowe-wiersze-s%C5%82awnych-poet%C3%B3w-1537027053184427/?fref=ts) has over 25,000 fans, while "Sztuczne fiołki" (Artificial Violets, https://www.facebook.com/SztuczneFiolki/?fref=ts)*,* which also appeared about 5 years ago – have nearly 150,000. The comparison is somewhat superficial, since each of these sites, similar in their erudition, collage techniques combining classical works with current events and contemporary cultural phenomena, has its own specific approach, and, by the same token, a distinct, different audience of readers.

[7] "Sharing" content on Facebook causes it to appear on the user's "wall," together with other content published by that person. Sharing is understood in the Facebook community to convey "ownership" of the content thus published to a higher degree than mere liking.

[8] http://zmemlani.pl/

[9] https://www.facebook.com/Antkowi-znowu-nie-wysz%C5%82o-111292382357281/ - this fanpage is less popular than Facecje (it has over 13,000 likes); the content published is satirical in nature, directed at hipsterism, which it mocks, in keeping with the "rules" of the new medium, using mainly memes.

[10] https://www.youtube.com/facecje

[11] P. Bryliński, M. Kaczyński, *Facecje.*

their printed form (the very problem of "transfers" of literary or paraliterary forms onto the pages of "code-books" is a phenomenon in itself deserving of in-depth discussion, in view of the number and complexity of changes that the change of interface in this case brings about). It should be noted, however, that authors who are primarily linked with new media are very often found to be present in different forums online (for example, the Grzegor Udański, the author of *Nowych wierszy sławnych poetów* [New Poems by Famous Poets], uses a similar strategy; he also disseminates his work on YouTube and through traditional media, reading his work, for example, on the TVN show *Szkło kontaktowe* [Contact Lenses]), enabling them to achieve greater popularity and also engage in a wide variety of multimedia activity.

Brylński and Kaczyński's internet Facetiae represent a fascinating entity even if considered purely from a perspective of formal considerations. The content the authors publish is a kind of multimedia collage which reveals multiple metatextual and metamedial layers. The verbal and visual compositions they present take the form of screenshots (shots capturing the display on a computer screen) with captured text message dialogues or, more often, Facebook interactions. Such content, whether comprised of real captured communications or those staged for humoristic purposes, is often disseminated on the internet via "vanity sites"[12] and social media. In the case of Facecje, the inauthenticity or artificiality of these conversations is obvious and constitutes an essential element in the game, in many cases being a basic source of their humor. As is clear from the self-description I cited earlier, the activities of the authors of Facecje are a kind of fantasia on the theme of how historical or literary-historical events and the figures involved might look transposed into the language of social media. We thus have, for example, Mary informing her social circle about the birth of Jesus using the function offered by Facebook of announcing important life events;[13] or the use of the Facebook questionnaire function to choose the most beautiful among the goddesses of ancient Greece;[14] or Filippides using the application Endomondo;[15] or Poland changing its "relationship status," on Independence Day, from "it's complicated" to "single" [in Polish, "wolna" = single/free—TDW].[16] This particular formula of telling history in a new way, replacing narrative threads with signs thoroughly familiar to contemporary internet users, fulfills primarily a ludic function. It enables us to refer to the classical definition of comedy as the combination of two mutually distant or incompatible orders. The surprise effect thus achieved is further intensified by the fact that the creators of Facecje move very comfortably through the space both of history and literary history on the one hand and that of the internet and new media on the other, building communication that can be interpreted on many levels, depending on the recipient's inventory of knowledge or their desire to expand it.

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[12]This is the term applied by Magdalena Kamińska (*Niecne memy. Dwanaście wykładów o kulturze internetu* [Ignominious Memes. Twelve Lectures on Internet Culture], Poznań 2011, 65) to internet platforms whose main or exclusive purpose is providing entertainment to their users through the presentation of series of humorous images, or, as they are usually calles, "internet memes."

[13]https://www.facebook.com/Facecje/photos/pb.298816166891398.-2207520000.1454021298./313850278721320/?type=3&theater (last accessed: 27.01.2016).

[14]https://www.facebook.com/Facecje/photos/pb.298816166891398.-2207520000.1454021298./340103172762697/?type=3&theater (last accessed: 27.01.2016).

[15]https://www.facebook.com/Facecje/photos/pb.298816166891398.-2207520000.1454021298./373785972727750/?type=3&theater (last accessed: 27.01.2016).

[16]https://www.facebook.com/Facecje/photos/pb.298816166891398.-2207520000.1454021298./299874933452188/?type=3&theater (last accessed: 27.01.2016).

In discussing the form of Facecje, there is no way to avoid referring to the name of the site, which is simultaneously a play on words and a conscious form of play with genre convention. The first segment of the name, "face," is obviously identical with the first segment of the name of the web portal, Facebook, thus anchoring this form of artistic creativity firmly in the new medium, both in terms of its range of distribution and its material and essential themes. We also cannot overlook, however, the deceptive but direct reference to the traditional genre form of facetiae. The authors invoke that source for the name on one of the first pages of their book, citing the definition of the word from the PWN dictionary of Polish language. Their play with genre form is thus to a large extent a conscious process, at the onomastic level, in some measure pushing together the new (i.e. the name's [superficial in terms of etymology] overlap with the name Facebook) and the old, the traditional (full overlap with traditional genre designation), and thereby in a sense announcing the specific thrust of the page, but not only that. In defining the principles that guide the creation of facetiae, Łukasz Górnicki, whose reasoning is extensively cited by the author of the relevant entry in the dictionary of literary genres and types published by Universitas,[17] "the essence of their comic aspect appears to be found in the astonishment elicited by revealing the 'orderliness' of things seemingly 'disorderly.'" What is more, facetiae originally constituted an oral form, being simply a kind of anecdote with an amusing punch-line told in a social setting. The genre represented an important element of social life, and the art of telling facetiae was reckoned among skills to be desired. The apparent absence of a connection between this traditional form and the "invention" of Bryliński and Kaczyński, or rather, their loose connection at best, though presented as such by satirico-comic intention, should not be taken at face value. The ability to tell an engrossing, amusing story that not only wins the listener's rapt attention but also proves interesting enough to be repeated, passed on, and recreated, was historically very important, particularly during the heyday of aristocratic culture. Similarly, in our era, the creation of new content, meaningful from the perspective of the community of social media users, allowing the creation of an entourage of fans or faithful readers, who not only express their approval but also **pass the content along** using the "Share" function or tagging friends by name in the comments and so recommending it to them, may be recognized as equally important socially. The ability to create funny, riveting communicative utterances is crucial to life on the internet. As Anna Wileczek notes: "Humor is one of the most essential elements in communication among young users. Together with the phatic function of communication, it takes part in establishing a non-hierarchical (because ludic) community, intensifying both its human and social aspects. It provides access to a world of excitement, pleasure, and meaning, where constant creation occurs, or rather mixing of words, symbols, and images."[18] Moreover, the facetiae of earlier times likewise constituted important material for *silva rerum* texts, which, according to some scholars,[19] were to some degree equivalent to the "walls" of social media users, as the latter become the repositories of quotations and diverse kinds of content.

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[17] *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich,* ed. G. Gazda and S. Tynecka-Makowska, Kraków 2006.

[18] A. Wileczek, "Mowa pisana. Pismo mówione... O 'konwergencji' (internetowej) młodomowy" (Written Speech. Spoken Writing... On the 'Convergence' of (Internet) Youth Speech), in: *Problemy konwergencji mediów* (Problems of Media Convergence), ed. M. Kaczmarczyk and D. Rott, Sosnowiec-Praga 2013, 173.

[19] See M. Kaźmierczak, "Użytkownik, nadawca i odbiorca w Web 2.0. Uwagi o różnych sposobach odnoszenia się do literatury w serwisie Twitter" (User, Sender and Receiver in Web 2.0. Notes on Various Ways of Treating Literature on Twitter), *Teksty Drugie* 2012, no. 6, 277 and passim.

The ludic and lighthearted intention that the authors of Facecje themselves indicate to be decisive in the introduction to their publication in book form ("Why and what for? Above all for the fun of putting together these little stories, which due to the characters who appear in them can take on a wide variety of meanings and shades of meaning…"[20]) is nonetheless not the only one. The quoted passage, after all, is followed by this one: "…As well as for the pleasure of feeding our idols and conducting them into a new, strange [for us too!] world, in which everything happens so quickly and chaotically."[21] The metacultural or metamedial intent is noticeable here – an attempt to master the "new, strange" world and tell some kind of narrative about it, through astounding juxtapositions, bringing into relief not only certain aspects of events from the past, but also, and perhaps more importantly, essential features of the new medium, which here, as I mentioned earlier, provides not just the vehicle for transmitting content, but also the artistic material and theme. The creators of the site also perceive changes in the scope of how social media and the internet in general function. As Kaczyński underscores in an interview for the portal *naTemat* (on the subject): "… people's relationship to content on the internet has changed. Sitting on the internet every day, we all have had enough of triviality and shallowness, we're looking for interesting, intriguing things. And there are more and more such things. I myself thought, a couple years back, that the internet was dull, because it's the internet. Well—I was wrong."[22]

This statement can be understood, up to a point, as ironic; there is no denying, however, that "decoding" and "interpreting" Facecje requires skills that might appear at first glance rarely to coexist. Because on the one hand, individual Facecje posts[23] demand genuine historical or literary-historical knowledge (not always easily acquired using internet sources), on the other hand – the humour and comedy of these forms is chiefly a result of their use of new medial tools which, in order to achieve the desired effect of "supplementing" some forms of content or "crashing together" others, demands a working knowledge of the communicative conventions in force on Facebook (not only the mechanisms of how "likes" work, but also hashtags, messages concerning important events, questionnaires, and more). The mixtures, collages and other activity located within the postmodern aesthetic whose aim is to allow interpenetration of different registers and erasure of the borders between them here still remain, despite their popular medium of distribution, to some extent elitist materials, through their sometimes multilayered intertextuality, intermediality, and metacultural potential, representing an interesting object of interpretation not only for specialists in the study of new media, but also for literary scholars.

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[20]http://natemat.pl/39201,zmemlani-tworcy-jbm-antkowi-znowu-nie-wyszlo-i-facecje-o-polsce-mozna-cos-powiedziec-na-luzie-i-z-usmiechem (last accessed: 27.01.2016).

[21]http://natemat.pl/39201,zmemlani-tworcy-jbm-antkowi-znowu-nie-wyszlo-i-facecje-o-polsce-mozna-cos-powiedziec-na-luzie-i-z-usmiechem.

[22]http://natemat.pl/39201,zmemlani-tworcy-jbm-antkowi-znowu-nie-wyszlo-i-facecje-o-polsce-mozna-cos-powiedziec-na-luzie-i-z-usmiechem.

[23]I use the names that the authors themselves gave their works, capitalizing the titles; it is difficult to unambiguously classify this form, whether in terms of type, genre, or even affiliation with a particular artistic discipline. The term that perhaps comes closest to describing them would be "image-text collage"; however, that also fails to convey the entirety of the complicated intertextual and intermedial relations that exist in certain Facecje posts.

Due to limited space, I have chosen to illustrate the Facecje phenomenon by making an attempt to interpret a relatively recent post (30.10.2015) by Bryliński and Kaczyński, which I find to be relevant in that it not only fully demonstrates the "poetics" of their facetiae that I outlined above, but also undertakes a critical and courageous, though humorous, dialogue with Polish national mythology.

"Wawel Crypts (closed group)"

One of the most typical elements of the formula for Facecje that I have described is the collision of orders that generates surprise or hilarity – classic literary characters (meaning not only characters from cultural texts that, assuming the legitimacy of such a division, we could assign to high literature – the site has also featured characters from George R.R. Martin's Game of Thrones and George Lucas's *Star Wars*) or important historical figures express themselves in a form typical for internet discussions on social media. The more the character is identified with the high style, the greater the effect of surprise. This strategy fits into the general strategy for internet humour as acutely described by Limor Shifman, based on his own close observation:[24] "Internet humor is based on visual collages of incongruous elements. The use of collage technique is self-conscious, as if the creators want to ensure that 'the process of "cut and paste"' underlying the joke remains evident." Among the characters who figure in this context on the Facecje page, Polish writers are especially popular, with the bards and virtuosos of the Romantic era standing out in particular. Bryliński and Kaczyński delight in referencing, for example, the famous dispute between Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki. To give a good example, one of the first Facecje posts published on Facebook was an attempt to transpose into internet realia not only the publication of *Pan Tadeusz*, but also the historical discussion of that work (which, in its "contemporary" version, ended with the following comment from Słowacki: "Go be a bard somewhere else, bra." – a direct reference to the popular series of mems circulating on the internet of the type: "Go be fat somewhere else."[25]).

In the collage that I wish to examine more closely, the participants in the discussion are members of a "closed group" called "Wawel Crypts." Here we see a particularly clear manifestation of the specific type of humor and language play that the authors employ in almost every post. Groups on Facebook represent places where individuals who share certain interests or some common feature (e.g. the group "Poznań Mothers" or the group "I Will Read 52 Books in 2016) can exchange notes and opinions on that subject, look for assistance from others with similar problems, or simply meet new people. A very widespread practice is the creation of Facebook groups for, for example, particular student associations, classmates, or members of the same profession. Such groups are often "closed," meaning that

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[24]L. Shifman, "Humor in the Age of Digital Reproduction," *International Journal Of Communication* 2007, no. 1. This article is relatively old, given the specific nature of the object of research, but it seems to me that regardless of changes in the scope and popularity of the platforms Shifman studied, certain general conclusions can still be valid and provide an interesting foundation for further research.

[25]In a process typical for the development of internet memes, penetratingly described by Anna Gumkowska in the text "Mem - nowa forma gatunkowo-komunikacyjna w sieci" (The Meme, a New Genre / Communicative Form on the Web, *Teksty Drugie* 2015, no. 6), this meme was remade many times over, with the undesirable trait of excess fat being replaced by others valued negatively in a given context, e.g. "Go be a pinko somewhere else" or "Go rain somewhere else." The "meme" (like many others) is also often accompanied by a corresponding image.

they can only be joined by a new user pending the administrator's approval of his or her request. The authors of Facecje thus avail themselves of this practice, familiar to Facebook users (maintaining, crucially, the typical form of interface and graphic arrangement, which not only heightens the impression of "apparent authenticity" but also allows the discussion to be placed in a concrete context) to tell about an event from a completely different order – the transfer of Słowacki's ashes to the Wawel crypts. This is not, of course, the only way in which they use formulas typical for Facebook's interface and communication norms. Kamińska, writing about language on the Net, cites the findings of Jan Grzenia, author of *Komunikacja językowa w internecie* (Linguistic Communication on the Internet) with regard to its most typical components. In the web page under analysis, it is not hard to find many elements that demonstrate a kind of stylization of discussion participants' communication toward internet language. This involves more than formal gestures such as providing a visual form that evokes particular associations. We observe, for example, what Kamińska, quoting Grzenia, calls "written notation of nonverbal reactions" – "hehe," "haha," "bwahaha," "mua-haha," the use of emoticons and other icons (not only the most easily recognizable ones, but also those that are harder to decipher, such as "xD"), whose "power" is multiplied by repetition of the sign (for example, "xDDD" instead of "xD"), as well as "hybrid forms joining text and graphics, such as signatures, avatars, electronic addresses or screen names"[26] – each participant in the discussion uses (typical of Facebook) not only their first and last name, but also a profile picture (the creators of Facecje notably use classical sources when finding "profile pictures" for their personae, using well-known, recognizable portraits. This could be interpreted as a way of simplifying interpretation for readers, but also as a particular kind of metatextuality or rather "metamediality" – the profile picture being what we consider in some way most representative of us, our visiting card or the foundation on which our identity is constructed – and after all, we "recognize" most historical figures from their most famous and widely reproduced portraits). The personae also use hashtags – category names, designated with the sign "#," which theoretically are supposed to simplify content selection in a given medium (mainly Twitter), and function as the vehicle for many jokes and satirical conceits (by clicking on the hashtag #media, which punctuates a post, the user gains access to all posts with the same hashtag. The jokes users engage in mainly involve creating highly complicated and elaborate hashtags which obviously do not serve the purpose of such categorization, but rather underscore that the originality and singularity of the post in question); their use of punctuation is casual, not to say careless (as is typical in quick communication on the internet, periods and capital letters are not used), and the language tends to be very informal: "Honeybunches, I would totally rot with you" (Mordeczki, totalnie pogniłbym z Wami).

The communication in these posts is seemingly slapdash, because many of them are based on linguistic play relating to the situation they present. The use of the phrase "closed group" itself can also refer to the space of a crypt, to which (as in the group) only a select few have access. The proposal to "liven up this dead atmosphere" or to "throw a bone to the faithful

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[26]M. Kamińska, *Niecne memy*, 46.

followers," the phrase "EAT DIRT,"[27] the word "cryptocommercial" and the exhortation to "stretch out comfortably" are all clear linguistic references to "last things," more precisely: death, dying, and decomposition. It is, however, worthwhile to consider not only jokes based on the device (very widespread in culture) of domesticating cultural taboos through laughter, which are easily understandable to most readers, but also more complicated, intertextual jokes and literary or paraliterary references. For example, the members of the "closed group" include, instead of Cyprian Kamil Norwid, "Earth from Norwid's grave." This is because that particular bard, rather than being buried in the Wawel crypts, lies in a collective grave in Paris, but there is an urn in the Wawel with earth taken from that collective grave. In an intriguing twist, one follower of the Facecje page, a writer active on Facebook named Jacek Dehnel, posted a comment reproaching the creators of the page for a lapse in historical exactitude: "Hey you guys, I like Facecje [...] but I also like my nonsense to be based on historical accuracy. Julek [is noted on the page as having] joined the closed group in 1927, when the earth from Norwid's grave could only dream of doing so."[28] The earlier-mentioned member, "Earth from Norwid's grave," in a comment referring to the poet's most famous poem, writes "that friend will fall here like Chopin's piano," and Fryderyk Chopin himself "left [his] heart in Warsaw" (referring to the burial place of the composer's heart). He ends his post with the hashtag #Suchot, a play on words in Polish with a cultural dimension, combining the word "suchar" (literally, biscuit or cracker; a slang word for a hackneyed, unfunny joke) and the archaic term for tuberculosis ("suchoty," a more archaic equivalent of "consumption"). We should note that the language used by the personae on Facecje does not in fact contain a lot of archaisms (while the use in online humour of words deemed to belong to a high or archaic style is very frequently encountered elsewhere, i.e. in the meme cycle "Zaiste, zacny suchar, milordzie" [Forsooth, a most noble cracker, milord]) – it therefore seems that what is being pastiched or parodied here is not the writers or other persons buried in the Wawel crypts, but rather the specific style of communication peculiar to social media.

The final comment, whose "author" is Jan III Sobieski, is also symptomatic: "Welcome to the company of the great and dead! Stretch out comfortably and watch what those upstairs do with your image and who will put you on their banner. You'll be rolling over with laughter! xDDD." The comment concludes with an emoticon that signifies tremendous mirth, though it seems to also carry a more serious undertone. In the context of the frequent controversies over the burial places of prominent Poles and who should be considered "worthy" or "unworthy" of inclusion in the Wawel's "closed group," we may read this comment as satirical social criticism. As the writers themselves observe in their interview for *naTemat*: "...people are kind of sick of those [weak] jokes and want a bit more. A joke on a high enough level that it can say

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[27]Simultaneously exemplifying the use of capital letters to represent raising one's voice, also mentioned by Grzenia (see M. Kamińska, *Niecne memy*, 46). [I have translated some of the jokes fairly freely to preserve some of the humor – TDW.]

[28]https://www.facebook.com/Facecje/photos/a.298817113557970.58639.298816166891398/753 031404803203/?type=3&theater, In their reply, the authors of Facecje admit: "The one thing we were not sure of but did not check due to lack of time. We can only lower our heads in shame and admit our mistake. As penance, we will spend the weekend poring over books instead of going out to clubs." Curiously, one commenter, developing the thread, refers back to the wordplay in the main text, writing "They'll remember that lesson 'til their grave!"

something clever in between the lines [...] you can say something about Poland or Mickiewicz in front of people and with a smile." Facecje is thus not merely a satirical page; its authors also want to "say something about Poland" and comment not only on events from the past while unmasking the communicative techniques used in new media by using them in parodic forms of literary work, but also to react to current events and weave more or less readable references to them into these works, making Facecje a multi-layered verbal-visual-interface collage open to a wide range of readings.

Interpreting Facecje thus requires not only some level of competency in the ability to grasp linguistic or intertextual play (without which it would be difficult to understand most of the jokes), but also the ability to recognize the communicative conventions in force on Facebook (as part of the phenomenon of "cyber-writing" broadly understood – "communicative competency in things electronic"[29]) and awareness of the current socio-political situation. Thus the immediate addressees of this type of text, those who find such images amusing, are to some extent a limited group. Such humour is directed primarily at people who are young but also well-educated, for whom the two orders are not foreign, so that their combination elicits laughter or reflection rather than confusion or indignation. The acceptance and popularity of this kind of creative work has, on the one hand, been brought about by the rise of Lessingian **remix culture**,[30] a phenomenon rooted in both new media as such and in the moods and thought of postmodernism. On the other hand, the current phase in the development of social media is also relevant here: no longer a fascinating novelty, these media have already begun to elicit impatience and a sense of information overload, as well as fatigue from continual repetition of the same content. From that perspective, as Wileczek stresses, "emotional, creative productions take precedence [...] In this connection, strategies are employed which aim to make written forms less bookish or book-centred, to make them a code of shared participation and thus inter-relatedness [...]. Other linguistic registers (such as artistic style) or languages are treated as resources for free linguistic creation."[31] The point is to create something new, something creative, which is perhaps somewhat more demanding, but also – attracts attention. The poetics of free, unconstrained play with conventions, elements, patterns, and figures seems to offer in some sense unlimited possibilities, while punchlines and juxtapositions based on the classical understanding of humour ensure that the Facecje emerges from various perspectives as a phenomenon of more than passing interest.

The presence of literature on Facebook, if only in the form of intertextual and intermedial play, is an important development and demands further consideration and more thorough study. As Kaźmierczak correctly noted, through its entry into the space of social media, literature is becoming "part of the fabric of everyday experience" – the images created by the authors of Facecje, the collages by the creators of "Sztuczne Fiołki" or "Nowe wiersze sławnych poetów," appear on the "walls" of Facebook users beside content of a personal nature (photos or news about happy relationships or failed exams), as well as IT, practical, or

[29]M. Kamińska, *Niecne memy*, 50.

[30]L. Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*, London 2008.

[31]A. Wileczek, "Mowa pisana," 172.

purely recreational material (memes, clips), marketing announcements, and so on. Not only each individual post (or "facetus"), but also the wall on which the posts appear, is a kind of textual conglomerate that calls for a different, non-traditional code of reading and reception. On the one hand, this form of reading demands more active work, and is interactive up to a point (with its likes, comments, shares, recommendations, and so on). On the other hand, it differs in many other respects from the reading that the traditional code demands. The situation can be evaluated in diverse ways, but it is hard to miss the changes that are taking place. Maciej Maryl was apt in his summing-up of the phenomenon when he noted that "Literature today is not the main instrument of socialization and acculturation, though to continues to fulfil important functions in society. It is precisely defining and studying this peculiarity of literary culture next to other media systems (film, television, internet, computer games...) that would seem to be the most urgent task facing scholars of literary culture [...]."[32]

[32]M. Maryl, "Literatura i e-społeczeństwo" (Literature and E-society)*, Teksty Drugie* 2012, no. 6, 9.

Keywords | Abstract | Note on the Author ● ● ●

KEYWORDS

Literature on Facebook

Abstract:

Beyond being a tool for maintaining interpersonal contact, social media have now become a platform for the dissemination of literature, as well as a topic of literature itself. Among the class of texts that use new media not only as a vehicle for transmission but also as material and subject matter, the Facecje (Facetiae) page on Facebook, published since November 2012, cannot be overlooked. The site offers a kind of verbal-visual collages, which "rewrite" important historical events or literary works in the language of new media, using them as the substructure for cycles of comments (in graphics that perfectly duplicate the real Facebook interface) or text message dialogues. To interpret these facetiae, not only historical knowledge and competency are needed, but also knowledge of "cyber-writing" and awareness of the specific nature and context of the medium. Though positioned as satire, the humour of Facecje also conveys reflection on how social media function. The site also offers a more demanding alternative for internet users who are bored with the low level of many jokes circulating on the internet.

social media

Facecje

literature and new media

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

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From the XCOM Archive: How to defeat the Aliens and Stay Sane

Tomasz Z. Majkowski

An aphorism from English science-fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke flashes in the darkness: "Two possibilities exist: Either we are alone in the Universe or we are not. Both are equally terrifying." The tremulous blue letters resemble a hologram displayed in the night sky, cut across by a falling star. Surrounded by a ring of fire, it falls into the centre of a European city, and curious passersby begin to congregate around the crater. From the falling smoke, there slowly emerges the metallic shape of the probe, apparently of extraterrestrial origin. Suddenly, a green gas begins to escape from the holes in its hull, thickening into a kind of spider's web, which grabs the nearest onlookers and begins to pull them in the direction of the capsule. At that point, panic breaks out.

The sequence described above, which opens the video game entitled *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*,[1] references a classic *topos* of science fiction: an unprovoked and undeserved invasion from outer space. It repeats almost word for word the scene of the first encounter with a strange civilization from H. G. Wells's classic *War of the Worlds*:[2] the curious crowd gathered around the meteorite crater only to fall victim to sudden and incomprehensible aggression. It is true that the scale is much smaller, and the cylinder that falls from the stars does not blaze with deadly heat or carry passengers, but the analogy still seems quite apparent. Soon, the scene will be supplemented with further information– the purpose of the attack is not to murder but to abduct people, and the aliens are circling above in flying saucers. Thus, Wells's classic plot is complemented by the equally established pop culture *topos* of alleged meetings with aliens, said to have taken place in the mid- and late 20th century in the US, from encounters

[1] Firaxis Games: *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*, Novato: 2K Games, 2012.
[2] H. G. Wells: *War of the Worlds*, London: Plain Label Books, 1898.

between flying saucers and American aviation to the Roswell crash and reports of people being abducted, subjected to bizarre probes, and then released.[3]

These two threads quickly become interwoven. The player's task is not to unravel the mystery of where the mysterious spacecraft come from (as Roland Barthes observes, they could have come from the Soviet Union[4]), but to grab a weapon in order to stop the kidnappings, and then the attempted conquest of earth by an alien civilization. This is a Wellsian narrative, but transformed to such an extent as to make possible active resistance and victory by the forces who the player controls – the game will not have the British army helpless; the soldiers of XCOM are impeccably trained, and it is to them, not to an intervention by nature (or God?), that humanity will owe its salvation. There are also a few acting in secret to stop a global panic from occurring – this is another ingredient borrowed from the tradition of UFO stories, invariably accompanied by the certainty that the truth is being hidden by the United States government, set forth most elaborately in the TV series *The X Files*.[5] That association is anything but unwarranted, since this game is a new edition of *UFO: Enemy Unknown*,[6] a 1994 release, a year younger than that American TV show and even if not directly inspired by it, a product of the same era, adapted, nearly twenty years on, to the sensibility and expectations of the contemporary gamer.

The *XCOM* experience is heterogeneous– in keeping with the poetics of the genre (of strategy games with a strong narrative component[7]) it does not offer the monochrome vision of the fictional world typical for story games,[8] with an individual avatar through whose perspective we follow the entire plot progression. Instead, it offers three different ways of interacting with the story as it develops throughout play: film sequences in which successive events crucial to the plot take place, sequences dealing with managing the XCOM base, and tactical sequences, in which the player directly controls four, five, or six soldiers during a skirmish with hostile aliens. Though each sequence has a different level of interactivity, form of presentation of content, visual perspective and method of control, they together form a whole game-playing experience, so that any effort at interpretation must take into account not only the sequence in which they occur, but also the relationship between them.

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[3] The history of hysteria relating to flying saucers is summarized in brief by Wiktor Stoczkowski in *Des hommes, des dieux et des extraterrestres: éthnologie d'une croyance moderne*, Paris: Flammarion, 1999.

[4] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 2012, 38-40.

[5] *The X Files*, dir. Chris Carter, FOX 1993-2002.

[6] Mythos Games: *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, Hunt Valley: Microprose, 1994.

[7] Jan Stasieńko has discussed the popular study of genres in video games; see J. Stasieńko: *Alien vs. Predator?, Gry komputerowe a badania literackie* (Alien vs. Predator? Computer Games and Literary Studies), Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe DSWE, 2005. It results from, on the one hand, early work in non-academic video game criticism, and on the other hand, effective marketing strategies by game producers. It focuses primarily on dividing games in terms of how material is presented as well as the dominant form of interaction – for example, the *FPS* (*First Person Shooter*) genre differs in terms of the perspective in which the world of the game is presented (the camera mimics the protagonist's gaze) and the dominant model of interaction, i.e., shooting at his opponents. *HOPA* (*Hidden Object Puzzle Adventure*) games offer a series of enigmas and sequences in which the player must find selected objects within a jumbled screen. Successfully solving those unblocks the next part. With its conventional nature and lack of coherent criteria, that "popular study of genres" can be a useful tool in non-academic game criticism; its scholarly usefulness is limited at best.

[8] A term introduced by Mary Ann Buckles, pioneering scholar of video games, to signify games with a clear tendency toward plot and differentiate the from computerized imitations of classic games (such as computer chess). See A. Ensslin, *Literary Gaming*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014.

The tension between the three ways of conveying the story I have mentioned is only one of two important dissonances present in the game. The second spatial incoherence is the relationship between the narrative-aesthetic component of the game, here the narrative of the battle with the aliens, and the interactive-algorithmic ingredient, meaning the rules and the ways the reader exerts influence on the game. This problem was, for a long time, central to reflection and study of games and remains one of the key dilemmas in the discipline. I do not aim to summarize two decades of disputes over the place of narrative in the study of video games and their literariness,[9] but it suffices to observe that a game offers a series of tools that facilitate independent generation of sequences of events with prefabricated plot points prepared by the designers,[10] and a game's interpretation can begin with an analysis of the rules of combination,[11] analyze their power of persuasion and the devices by which the mechanism of the game attempts to imitate processes that take place in reality[12] or interaction between the dynamics of the situation in a game and the process of understanding.[13] There is, however, universal agreement that reducing a game to its narrative-aesthetic layer or concentrating on the text formed by finishing the game, the result of having consummated certain possibilities offered by it and skipped many others, is a scholarly error. Curiously, the opposite approach, putting aside the story in the interest of analyzing the rules and processes of the game, stirs no controversy, and has often been seen as a method with much to recommend it,[14] particularly in the early phase of the development of game studies. It is founded on the feeling that all forms of culture called "video games" share certain common features, and narrative or aesthetic distinctions are superficial and complicate the discovery of these forms' essential properties – they should thus be rejected in the name of intellectual sincerity. I, however, feel that meaningful as such a gesture may be in the course of attempts at constructing definitions, it in effect prohibits analyses of particular cases, which should take the aesthetic perspective into account as well as algorithms, and should pay particular attention to their interaction, especially where potential contradictions become evident.

The gamer's position within the world of *XCOM* is ambiguous. On the one hand, there are clear narrative circumstances that allow the player to be identified with the leader of the XCOM organization: the game issues a series of verbal messages directly to the person playing, in which he is addressed by that title. Megaphones are also heard in the underground base, repeatedly summoning the leader to a particular room – that is how the game guides the player's attention. Some of the film sequences also suggest that the person playing is one of the heroes, as they simulate a first-person perspective. The game uses these sequences to present key personnel in charge of the XCOM project: the liaison officer, the head of research, and the chief engineer. The three films that introduce them suggest meetings between each of them with an unseen, silent figure located more or less exactly where the player seated

[9] Piotr Sterczewski provides a partial summary in "Game studies, tutorial: wprowadzenie do multidyscypliny" (Game Studies Tutorial: Introduction to the Multi-disciplinary), *Czas Kultury* 185 (2/2015), 84-90.

[10] E. Aarseth, *Cybertext. Perspectives on Ergotic Literature*, Baltimore: JHU Press, 1997.

[11] A. R. Galloway, *Gaming. Essays of Algorithmic Culture*, Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007.

[12] I. Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2006.

[13] J. Arjoranta: *Real-Time Hermeneutics: Meaning-Making in Ludonarrative Digital Games,* Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2015. http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-6164-0, (last accessed: 11.02.2016).

[14] J. Juul, "Games Telling Stories? -A brief note on games and narratives," *Game Studies* 1 (1/2001), online: http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/,(last accessed: 11.02.2016).

before the monitor is. This is a classic device in video games, which often and eagerly resort to point-of-view shots, suggesting that the player and the hero occupy the same place in space. In this particular case, however, such suggestions are incidental and inconsequential. The sequences depicting how the base is run present a transversal cross-section of it, disturbingly reminiscent of an anthill, and the movement from place to place involves a series of approaching and distancing shots that make no attempt to present a semblance of one individual's movement. Likewise, the film sequences are inconsistent: some use the point-of-view device, while some give no intimation that the XCOM leader is present at the site of what is taking place, and several even suggest outright that he is elsewhere. This is how the action proceeds in the long film in which his three subordinates discuss possible actions to be taken by the organization and decide to push for one of them; the liaison officer commits to relaying their choice to the leader (i.e. the player) and convincing him to pursue that course. Similarly, the tactical sequences in which the player leads several soldiers in a direct attack, reveal no evidence of the leader's physical presence; and while the player has complete control over the commandos as long as they keep their wits about them – he loses it when they succumb to panic.

It is not difficult to understand the reluctance to include an avatar representing the player in a game of this type[15] – the absence of one allows the player direct access to information as well as other capabilities that no particular person could possess (for example, he controls what happens on a battlefield). Many games involving the management of resources for the purpose of level-headedly developing some structure, usually a city, address the player using a title that fits the game's aesthetic and conceit: he is the mayor, when building a metropolis in the *Sim City* series, or "el Presidente" in *Tropico*, where he possesses dictatorial powers over a fictional Caribbean island. What stands out as unusual here is the use of point-of-view shots in the film sequences – it seems intended to heighten the player's emotional engagement and sense of personal responsibility for the course of events.

That course of events proceeds as follows: XCOM is an elite military unit financed in secret by 16 countries around the world. Its clandestine mission is protecting the Earth from possible aggression from outer space, and it therefore springs into action when the first phase of the invasion begins. Initially, the aliens' activity is limited to abducting humans, but after they soon begin committing massacres against civilians on a regular basis in order to spread panic throughout the world. The organization run by the player attempts to secretly eliminate the invaders and keep information about the cosmic invasion from reaching the public. It conducts scientific experiments on the aliens' technology, and in the process, discovers that their purpose is the incorporation of Earth in a conglomerate of planets conquered by a mysterious older race of beings who lack material bodies. Members of that race are waiting on an enormous space ship orbiting the planet, undetectable to the human eye. Having established the ship's position, XCOM sends an elite team into space to eliminate the threat using firearms and their psionic powers. The Earth is saved!

[15]"Avatar" is now the accepted term for a video game protagonist who is simultaneously the tool of the player's causative will and his vehicle in the game's represented world. See Rune Klevjer. *What Is the Avatar? Fiction and Embodiment in Avatar-Based Singleplayer Computer Games*, doctoral thesis, University of Bergen, 2006.

At the level of game-playing, this progression presents itself in the following fashion: the player begins with an introductory tactical mission, during which he commands four soldiers and himself follows orders exactly as instructed, having no freedom of choice. In the course of the mission, as a result of some ill-considered commands, three of the four subordinates are killed, but it concludes with the successful elimination of a group of aliens. There follows a strategic sequence in which the player watches a series of films introducing the main characters, and makes decisions about the course of scientific research and investments in engineering. Next, he begins discreetly keeping vigil over the world, watching a hologram of the earth's globe on which threats are shown. Finally, there is another conflict with the aliens, who attack three places at once – he must choose which of them he will rush to help. This leads to another tactical sequence, in which he commands a group of soldiers without outside guidance. At the end of the action, some of his subordinates are promoted: the leader decides what their new skills will be, reviews the scientific research and investments, and then returns to monitoring the globe. The sequences alternate with fragments of film that introduce important plot elements and a monthly debriefing at which the nations comprising XCOM award further subsidies or, if the level of panic among the population is too high, withdraw from participation. If eight nations leave the council of the organization, the player has lost. He wins, on the other hand, when scientific research leads him to the hidden spaceship and he achieves victory in a difficult tactical mission that constitutes the last act of the game.

Even this degree of generality allows us to venture a few interpretative observations. Firstly, both at the level of plot and at that of play, there is an essential opposition between cool, rational reason and blind panic. To achieve success, the player must have a great deal of information at his command and constantly compare various relevant factors. He must calculate the level of panic in various countries, measured numerically, and the time remaining until the monthly debriefing – his awareness of the situation allows him to reduce that level before a terror-stricken country withdraws funding for the organization. Significantly, the most important way of calming the citizenry is increasing the availability of information obtained using surveillance satellites placed by XCOM over the territory of the country in question. In terms of the trajectory of play, this move leads to a reduction in the factor of fear and an increase in the financial support given by that country. Furthermore, attaining satellite coverage of all the countries of a given continent earns a special prize. At the level of plot, this fact is commented on in the following way: thanks to its satellites, XCOM is able to track a UFO in the air and stop it from abducting people. The fact that citizens are unaware of the conflict taking place receives no commentary.

Another important component of the metaphor of rationality is the need to conduct scientific research. The research is embodied by a young woman with a German accent whom the leader assigns successive projects and who reports on their conclusion. The mechanics of each project are analogous: finishing it takes a certain amount of time and results in the display of a report and unblocking of new possibilities, primarily in engineering. There are two important exceptions– some experiments do not increase the options available to the player but push the plot forward. They then culminate in a film that introduces the new plot thread. The other exceptional kind of research is the autopsy on a new kind of alien, which is announced by a sequence presenting the body on the autopsy table, accompanied by a short description of the distinguishing characteristics of this species. The result resembles technological research in that it creates possibilities

for producing new equipment. A typical feature of the procedure is its 100% effectiveness – if you give a group of researchers enough time, they always get results – and the exclusivity of the empirical method. The lead researcher does not formulate hypotheses but only conducts analyses of the objects and bodies found. She is, furthermore, marked by a certain coolness – not only does she dispassionately slice up the bodies of the alien visitors, she repeatedly argues that the life of a soldier has significantly less value than scientific research. Progress requires sacrifices.

In the tactical sequences, the problem of access to information and the need for rational decision-making are very plainly presented. The field of battle, to be sure, is presented in isometric graphics, but also only in broad outline – the areas outside the soldiers' vision are obscured. The basic task of XCOM commandos is to find the enemy, who is hiding in various nooks and crannies. The relevant moment is always announced: a message is displayed on the screen, and sometimes the flow of action is interrupted by animation showing the enemy. The player loses control for a moment and is forced to observe as his newly discovered antagonists escape to a defendable position. At the same time, enemies who are not discovered remain inactive and do not pose a threat. That mechanism rewards careful behaviour, protective and defensive, calculated to gradually and methodically get rid of the enemy. It has another valuable aspect as well: because the number of battlefields is limited, and the appearance of aliens a repeated occurrence, a thorough advance knowledge of the map where the action plays out gives the player a real advantage. Using lessons learned from previous experience, he can easily optimize his strategy and avoid being surprised.

Two motifs underscore the primacy of rational reasoning. The first of these is the panic present at all levels of the game. In its filmic layer, the panic is relatively less in evidence, with the leaders of XCOM keeping cool, though they look with anxiety at the transmission of the slaughter of an innocent city that precedes the first "panic mission" – an assignment involving the protection of the murdered population, in which, in contrast to later tactical episodes, we see citizens of the metropolis under attack, helplessly crouched in sundry hiding-places and waiting for one of two possible fates: either an XCOM soldier will come close enough to give them the order to flee, or they will perish at the hands of the aliens, since fear deprives them of their initiative. The commandos controlled by the player are also susceptible to that emotion when they are badly wounded, witness a comrade's death, or encounter a particularly terrifying creature from space. Panic manifests itself in a cry of horror and a quickened pulse as well as, in the gaming layer, the loss of control over the soldier, who acts randomly and thus not only exposes himself to the risk of death, but also makes the player's task more difficult, making him poorer by one pawn. In fact, whole countries fall into a panic, when the aliens wreak a certain degree of havoc in them. Nations seized with fear withdraw from the joint defence project – thus behaving irrationally and, like those soldiers, depriving the player of the ability to control events.

Besides fear, the game contains a thread about control of weak minds by the reason of the strong. Some of the aliens manage to take control of the player's soldiers during a tactical mission and turn them temporarily into enemies. At the level of plot, this motif is singularly meaningful since that is precisely the method used by the cruel master race of aliens in its conquests. Rational behaviour, on the other hand, demands subordination of one's own will to the collective will of XCOM, embodied by the player: the soldiers are deprived of their status as subjects and causative

agents beyond the subjectivity and agency they manifest in brief moments of panic. At the same time, however, another interpretation of total control appears, depicting it as sinister, because imposed by the evil strangers from outer space. To soften the ironic accent of this thread, the game introduces a clear distinction, in that a commando controlled by an alien behaves thoughtlessly. His new master does not tend to his servant's welfare. At the level of the game, he exposes him to danger: a soldier whose mind is taken over by his opponent, behaves irrationally and foolhardily, does not take cover and walks straight into the sights of enemy guns. At the level of plot, the game offers a commentary on such behaviour during the final mission, as the player receives abundant information about the iniquities committed by the victorious invaders against other worlds, whose enslaved and transfigured inhabitants are dying from the bullets of earthly commandos.

That leads us to the second important theme of the game: caring. Notwithstanding the exaltation of instrumental reason and harangues about the need to make sacrifices for the sake of progress, *XCOM* employs a series of techniques to heighten the leader/player's concern for the state of the world and the good of his own soldiers. That end is served by the suggestions in the film sequences that the player is not in the position of a detached, impersonal puppeteer, but embodies a particular person, in whose hands the fate of the world has been placed, as he is constantly reminded by helpful advisors and the XCOM council. For that reason, also, the game takes considerable pains to individualize the soldiers. XCOM commandos can be men and women of different skin colour, from any one of several dozen countries of the world, with their nationality signalled by a flag insignia on the nape of their neck. Each one has a unique name and surname and a combination of facial features and hairstyle that distinguish him or her from the others. Once they acquire enough experience killing aliens in a series of missions, they are given pseudonyms – the game's way of underscoring their increased familiarity and ease with firearms.

This very simple mechanism is intended to elicit the player's solicitude for the fates of his subordinates, intensified at the gaming level by the mechanism of experience. The successful completion of multiple missions not only allows the player to choose specializations for each commando, but also ensure the acquisition of new skills. By managing to keep his charges alive, the player increases both the value of each soldier and the bond between soldier and player. The surnames of the fallen appear on a list displayed to the accompaniment of funereal music. This emotional relationship to the pawns is exploited in two ways. Firstly, in that a positive ending depends upon the sacrifice of one soldier, who gives his life after having been carefully saved by the player throughout the game, in order for Earth to be safe, raising the emotional temperature of the finale. Secondly, the game can be played in a mode that prohibits previous plays from being read, in which case the soldier's death becomes irreversible. That version of play is intended, or at least declared to be, for particularly ardent and skilful players.

In spite of its undoubted effectiveness, the mechanism of building up the player's emotional attachment to XCOM soldiers reveals yet another important paradox: the differentiation among soldiers occurs only at the aesthetic level. In terms of deeper concerns, gender, vocal timbre, skin colour and nationality are relatively unimportant, and in fact all of the soldiers begin the game equipped with an identical set of properties. Some of them become differentiated later on through the acquisition of experience, but that is a simple matter of professional development, a rational, intentional process, presenting the same metaphor of growth through

the attainment of knowledge that we saw in the thread of scientific research. Otherwise, the differentiation of the member states on XCOM's council is similarly superficial; they offer different amounts of money, but follow the same political rules, confined to the theme of growing panic. Their common voice is represented by a bald white man whose face is always in shadow.

The alien invaders show a much higher degree of differentiation from each other, both at the aesthetic level and at those of plot and game mechanics. The scientific officer even sighs, upon seeing one of the many species, that the existence of such a strange life form rules out hope for ever establishing any kind of pattern of shared traits among such invaders. Most of these cosmic strangers are hybrids – beings that look like crosses between people and reptiles, part bio-mechanical, part cybernetic, and part animal. Each of them has unique abilities expressed in the language of their behavioural norms as well: some control minds, others spit acid or are marked by particular forms of movement. In connection with this fact, the player must correctly recognize the properties of each new alien race and then adjust his tactical decisions accordingly. Learning to distinguish among them obviously depends on the trajectory of the game; as the action develops, it must offer the player new thrills and higher levels of difficulty. The process of differentiation is commented on at the aesthetic level, which underscores the grotesque variety among aliens, and the plot, whose development eventually explains the mystery of how there came to be such a heterogeneous group of invaders. They are in fact the product of experiments by the villainous rulers of outer space, who have unscrupulously transformed whole races of beings.

Here we can once again see a parallel between the actions of these antagonists and the opportunities presented to players by the game. After all, the player influences the path of each soldier's development and adapts their potential abilities to suit his own needs. Moreover, though the player has no control over the soldiers' nationality or gender, he can use an editing function to remake the algorithmically set appearance of each soldier, changing the face, voice, hairstyle, or skin colour. In later phases of the game, he can also transform some of his subordinates into telepaths – though they must have the proper predispositions, as determined by the game's algorithm at random. Exactly like the races of aliens, among whom only some have psionic powers that the race of overlords in charge of the invasion is able to use to their advantage.

XCOM thus deals with a conflict between two equal opponents using more or less similar methods. Both sides act in secrecy, following the dictates of faceless superiors; the leaders of the invaders hide behind masks, while the XCOM project is run by the council's mysterious, shadowy spokesman and the player-leader, whose character never appears on the screen. Both sides strive for technological superiority, guaranteed by empirical science, and use the results of their discoveries to reshape their subordinate soldiers, who are deprived of their own will. In both cases, military success means the triumph of rationality. Despite the similarity in their methods of operation, the game also allows a clear distinction to be made beyond the simple dichotomy of evil aggressors and noble defenders. Firstly, *XCOM* noticeably suggests that the leader-player cares about his subordinates and tries to keep them alive, while his opponent sends successive underlings to their deaths. Secondly, though both opponents are agents of unity, they show different understandings of that concept. For the aliens, the price of unification is submission: various races have been harnessed and incorporated into a cosmic empire of evil. The people of Earth cooperate because that solution is dictated by reason, and

they abandon cooperation when brute fear gets the better of them. This kind of cooperation is made possible by the fact that the differences between groups of human are truly cosmetic and do not affect their fundamental identity, to use the language of the principles of the game. At the same time, the aliens are differentiated at every possible level, making it impossible for them to understand each other, let alone the inhabitants of Earth. What appears to be a union of many cultures is in fact only a manifestation of violence perpetrated by ruthless power.

In constructing its narrative about security, *XCOM* retains the themes, but reverses the metaphor of its two source narratives. Absent here are the desperate and doomed struggles with the technologically superior antagonist whose motivations remain murky, and the thread of miraculous salvation, from Wells's *War of the Worlds*; thus the game avoids touching on the topic of colonialism and retreats from metaphysical questions to a safe position in favour of instrumental reason, though in the process it raises the disturbing question of the role of free will and the need to submit to an all-powerful supreme authority. It does so in passing, however, somewhat half-heartedly, suggesting that as long as the overseers' goals are noble, their subjects should submit completely to them. This is related to the game's reversal of the preoccupation, found in its second key intertext, *The X Files*, with suspicion. Here, the conspiracy in which the governments of the world have colluded springs from the most pure-hearted motives possible. The authorities' intentions are innocent, and though they struggle with organizational problems and sometimes suffer minor defeats, they are the only guarantors of safety. Surveillance and obedience are in the citizen's best interest. Differences between cultures are merely superficial and can be overcome through the rule of reason. Suffering – the death of individual soldiers or the surrender of one of the countries to sheer fear – has meaning, since it brings us closer to the final victory over the forces of evil, which can be defeated since their varied surface is merely a front for the evil will of their absolute overlords.

In other words, UFOs are once again coming over from the Evil Empire.

KEYWORDS

security

U F O

ludohermeneutics

VIDEO GAMES

Abstract:

XCOM: Enemy Unknown, a 2012 video game (actually a reboot of a game released nearly two decades earlier), presents players with a relatively stereotypical task – they must defeat cosmic invaders. It also proposes a clear, linearly-presented plot and an intriguing mechanism of concern for the individual soldiers who are fighting the ignoble aliens. An analysis of the relationship between the rules and procedures of the game and its narrative-aesthetic layer allows for an interpretation of its central themes, chiefly, the problem of guaranteeing security, the dilemmas faced by a multicultural society, and instrumental reason as a tool in ruling over others. Dealing with these issues by means of typical videogame techniques, *XCOM* becomes an important link in the chain of narratives about invasions from outer space initiated by *War of the Worlds*, a critique of colonial institutions written by H. G. Wells in 1898. A description of the methods by which these classic problems are adapted to the needs of the contemporary audience of popular culture enables me to demonstrate the analytical tools used in interpreting video games.

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Dycio Generator.

On the Variational Tendencies of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki's Poetry

Maja Staśko

Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki is not a new media poet. All attempts at conversion, convergence, or interpretation notwithstanding, Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki is not a new media poet. The aesthetics of error, glitch poetry, noises, clusters, strings, and, of course, cybernetic aesthetic categories, all find some justification here. But in this case it is the interpreter who is new media, not Dycki himself. Because Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki is not a new media poet.

Now that this statement has been repeated three times, at least three proofs are called for. And so, consider a question of primary importance: Dycki does not publish books of poetry within the space of the new media. His works are paper-based, and the pages arranged in a linear order, just as the poems are ordered with Roman numerals. Associative connections that subliminally imply a hyperlink structure inscribe themselves in a network of repetitions and differences typical of modern poetry in general – features mentioned by Bartmiński as hypertextual (ephemerality, spatial arrangement, emerging meaning, attention to language, a decentralized structure, local coherence, reading as aimless wandering, tinkering with heterogeneity, analogic thought, chaos [a self-organizing system], polyphony and dialogism, skips and discontinuity, parallelisms) can in fact be trans-scribed as features of poetry and counterpointed to the "textual" qualities of prose (durability, linear arrangement, definite meaning, attention focused on the represented world, a centripetal structure, global coherence, purpose-directed reading, a systematic approach, logical thought, order, monologism, continuity, sequentiality[1]). The publication context thus does not argue strongly for placing the poet in the category of new media.

Likewise, the language of his poems is heterogeneous and varied from beginning to end, drawing from diverse spaces within socioliterary communication – beginning with Old Polish, through the graphomaniacal *poetae minores* and kitschy hack writing, all the way to contemporary slang, pregnant with colloquialisms and vulgarisms. New media slang does not belong in the realm

[1] M. L. Ryan, quoted in: J. Bartmiński, S. Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, *Tekstologia*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2009, 69.

of colloquial speech; however, we find no references here to "pieseł" (the Polish equivalent of "doge") or haters, or other popular Internet expressions and tropes (e.g. "taka sytuacja" – perhaps roughly equivalent to "that's how I roll"); the (after-)images of memory do not mean that the poet wants to "save the moment to his hard drive […]."[2] His polyphonic language thus does not absorb the no-less polyphonic language of new media, it bypasses it completely. For the poet to translate "taka sytuacja" into his usual manipulation of the mostly substandard forms of language typical of marginalized, excluded groups and graphomaniacal texts would be all but indefensible – the slang of new media constitutes the "common" language that dominates internet space, but like Dycki's language, is composed of a network of excluded, minority languages stuck together, taking aim at the centralized norms of official language. And in this sense, attempting to prove the new media nature of the poet's work would present a thankless task.

Finally, there is a third argument: the lack of thematic material taken from new media. This absence is, furthermore, sealed by the abundance of props representing older forms of (once-new) media, among which pride of place undoubtedly belongs – ahead of print journalism, TV shows, or advertising – to photography; it stands out in the structure of the book itself as well, as Ewa Bieńczycka noted by calling the book a "poetry album of old photographs."[3] Dycki's reality thus appears exceptionally resistant to the influence of new media and to annexation of or by such media. There is no Internet here, there are no laptops, not even e-book readers. A computer appears once, in parentheses, in the poem "CCLV. Piosenka z okolic Lubaczowa" (CCLV. Song from the Lubaczow Vicinity):

> nie znajdziesz we mnie śmierci choć wszystko inne
> znajdziesz kości jak szkło na swoim miejscu w starym
> kredensie (na którym teraz ustawiłem komputer)
> nie znajdziesz we mnie oczu oj nie znajdziesz
>
> choć niewątpliwie natkniesz się na kieliszki
> pełne zapomnianych guzików ojej zapomnianych
> choćbyś wypatrzył we mnie parę lśniących oczu
> zamienię się z tobą na ten wielki guzik rogowy
>
> którym Dycka zapinała się pod samą szyję by przetrwać
> po latach na fotografii jaką trzymam w ręku
> zwiedziony właśnie w ciemność ojej ojejku zwiedziony
> nic dziwnego był to najlepszy fotograf w miasteczku
> (1 VII 1988)[4]

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[2] S. Shuty, *Dziewięćdziesiąte* (The '90s), Kraków: Ha!art, 2013, 116.

[3] "From the muddled lines of portraits and pictures we get the fragments defining people who have gone, who are passing, staying in the author's consciousness, but we do not know what to do with this poetry album of old photographs" (E. Bieńczycka, *Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki „Piosenka o zależnościach i uzależnieniach" Nominowani NIKE 2009* [Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, "Song of Dependencies and Addictions," NIKE Nominees 2009), not yet printed [blog; 12 September 2009], http://bienczycka.com/blog/?p=1506).

[4] E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, *Oddam wiersze w dobre ręce (1988-2010)* (I Will Leave My Poems in Good Hands, 1988-2010), Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2010, 290. All quotations from poems by Tkaczyszyn-Dycki (except "Imienia i znamienia" [Names and Characteristics]) are from this edition.

(you won't find death in me though everything else / you will find bones like glass in their place in the old / cupboard [where I have now put the computer] / you won't find eyes in me oh no you won't find / though you will doubtless bump into glasses / full of forgotten buttons oh no forgotten / though you strained a pair of shining eyes in me / I will trade them with you for that great button made from horn / with which Dycka buttoned up all the way to survive / after years in the photograph I hold in my hand / visited into darkness oh no oh dear visited / no surprise it was the best photographer in town / [1 July 1988])

The computer is separated from the space of the poem by its two parentheses, parentheses always encompassing the space "between" radically different elements; they may even be life and death, as Andrzej Sosnowski has observed.[5] In the poem above, they appear to delineate existential "being" and photographic "existence," between the two of which is located the computer as a kind of interactive machine that operates in real time (life, being, fantasy) and a simulated[6] space of previously constructed representation (death, existence, film[7]). The phrase that begins the poem, "you won't find death in me," then takes on a double meaning – you won't find death in the poet, because he is located in the parentheses "between" one limit (birth) and the other (death), he is the absence constituting the presence "in between"; but neither will you find the end in the computer, because its "in between" contains "everything else" – *everything*, which does not include the radical NOTHING of the parenthetical boundaries in their nothingness (neither one thing nor the other), *everything* possible only with the exclusion of the limit's destructive power, with its release into the space of absence.

Hence the "in between" of the computer's parentheses can also relate to "everything else" in its concrete materiality: bones, glass, the cupboard, eyes, glasses, buttons, photographs. This seemingly unrelated prop chest of antiques and trifles situates the computer in a very concrete space. The degrees of space are drawn hierarchically: first there is "me," in which every-

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[5] "Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki is a poet of elementary narration and multifaceted reflection. The elementary aspect consists in the fact that what the poet is telling – in colourful episodes, scenes, segments, and variants – happens in constant connection to the facts of birth and the gravestone. Dycki's poems regularly tilt toward the inevitable end or return toward the lost beginning, they are illuminated almost nonstop by the elementary light of these two utmost points. That illumination gives them an aura of the old poetry of simple and final things, a medieval or baroque resonance. The events of the beginning and the end establish two parenthetical curves – inside the parentheses there is a bit of place for the 'debauchery' of the temporary. Space limited in this way somewhat forces the claustrophobic repetitiveness of life's hurly-burly inside" (A. Sosnowski, "Liryzm Dyckiego" [Dycki's Lyricism], in: Sosnowski, *"Najryzykowniej"* ["The Riskiest"], Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2007, 10).

[6] Here is Baudrillard's understanding of simulation: "To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending: 'Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms' (Littré). Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary.'" (J. Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. S.F. Glaser, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, 3). But that needs to be supplemented with Lambert Wiesing's work, which draws attention to the mechanism of how simulated realities (in defiance of entropy) generate their own rules (not necessarily in keeping with known laws of logic and physics) (L. Wiesing, *Artificial Presence: Philosophical Studies in Image Theory*, trans. N. F. Schott, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

[7] Lambert Wiesing formulates virtual reality as a combination of film perception (advance programming) and fantasy (construction of events) in the chapter "Virtual Reality: The Assimilation of the Image to the Imagination" in *Artificial Presence*.

thing else can be found (everything not-death); one of the elements of "everything else" consists of bones (a subset of "me"), bones are reminiscent of glass (a metaphor for bones), which can be found in the old cupboard (a superset of glass), on top of which stands the computer (a subset of the cupboard). Within the superset of the cupboard, the computer corresponds to glass, but with metaphoric displacement becomes the equivalent of bones, a subset of "me." In both the former and the latter cases, the computer represents an element of "everything else," and thus not-death.

The next line, the line that follows the parenthetical computer interpolation and is agitated by it, nonetheless brings a trade of death for eyes within the same sentence: "you won't find eyes in me"; "everything else" is eliminated, since the element of "everything else" (eyes are not-death) can be ejected from "everything else" in order to be replaced by the single-element set of "everything else" (death establishes "everything else" as not-death; within "everything else" applied to eyes [not-eyes], death finds itself a place), then "everything else" can be absolutely everything as the reverse of any particular element within "everything else." The boundary between what cannot be found in "me," and what *is* found (you find it) in "me" washes away – each object can be found both here and there. No set has priority; it is unclear whether death creates not-death, or "everything else" expelled death from itself, in the process leaving bones as its element and – in so doing – subliminally indicating the construction of only an elementary hierarchy (why are bones not-death? who sets the boundary of death?).

Together with this maximal expansion of "in between" space, an expansion that eliminates limits, since any other element can replace them and establish new limits, further props are freed from hierarchic dependencies as extensions of the material foundations from the first stanza. The drinking glasses thus make glass present in a concrete physical form, and similarly, the button made from horn represents a functional extension of bone (horn becomes "externalized," laid-bare bone), while the elements to which the computer corresponded in the first stanza evolve into practical concretizations. Their seemingly stable hierarchy (the buttons are located inside the glasses, and thus represent a subset of them) – as a victory over the equality among subsets in the first stanza – quickly becomes disrupted by the removal of one button (the one made from horn) from a glass and its placement in a new space, and thus in a new subset – the subset of a "living" situation (in fantasy) and a motionless photograph (film not brought to life), in which this concrete button exists; a removal which vividly reminds us of the removal of an element from the "everything else" which formed the whole set. The reality of this poem thus consists of entrances and exits, insertions and removals.

The strong (non-)boundaries of the hierarchy are finally obliterated together with the collision with potentially (non-)existing eyes as a synthesis, a metaphor (for example in Peiper's formulation[8]) of two subordinately placed "computer" elements – the glasses (glass) and buttons (bone). From their interdependency arises a pair of eyes, shining like glasses and

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[8] For more on the subject, see: J. Grądziel-Wójcik, *"Drugie oko" Tadeusza Peipera. Projekt poezji nowoczesnej* (Tadeusz Peiper's "Second Eye." A Project of Modern Poetry), Poznań: Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza, 2010.

rounded like buttons, which are neither glasses nor buttons but something "in between" them, following the axiom of the metaphor: "deszcz ognia a to / nie to samo co deszcz i ogień z osobna" (fiery rain is / not the same as fire or rain alone).[9] The eyes – in terms of their absent-present ontological status (because first "you won't find eyes in me," but then "though you strained a pair of shining eyes in me") – exist always in potentiality; in a potentiality that can only be realized by putting another space into the self-propelling mechanism – the space of "you," the Other ("though you strained"). Virtual (i.e., in Pierre Lévy's understanding, as potential[10]) and phenomenologically underdefined eyes can only be made concrete through a context in which they could begin to "really" function. In other words, we can see our own face only through the gaze of the Other (mirror, reflection, person):

"But I never looked like that!" - How do you know? What is the "you" you might or might not look like? Where do you find it - by which morphological or expressive calibration? Where is your authentic body? You are the only one who can never see yourself except as an image; you never see your eyes unless they are dulled by the gaze they rest upon the mirror or the lens (I am interested in seeing my eyes only when they look at you): even and especially for your own body, you are condemned to the repertoire of its images.[11]

Thus we can only see (with shining eyes) our own face (as an object) through the gaze of the Other('s shining eyes), i.e., in an interface which from my face (an object) and the face of the Other (algorithm, database), rejects a "common," contextual result; through the power of metaphor: rain enters fire (the algorithm) and from their collision arises fiery rain. In this context, the "mirroring," reflective character of the poem's props (glass, glasses, buttons, eyes, a photograph, a computer) becomes understandable; these props appropriate for themselves what is reflected. The "me"-object before becoming concrete is purely potential – it exists independently ("you won't find death in me"), but the set of its features ("everything else") awaits being entered into a concrete algorithm, in which it will become "something else," but no longer everything else. In every algorithm this "something else" is something else, hence the virtual object is always a network of objects, a variety of objects,[12] like the character (interchangeable with a Cleverbot) Samantha in Spike Jonze's film *Her*, who communicates with several thousand individuals simultaneously, but with each one on a personal, intimate level. In other words, simultaneously authentically (for real) and inauthentically (artifically, virtually); in such a way as to convince each of them that he possesses her exclusively, as his own.

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[9] E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, "CLXV," 194.

[10] " [...] a *word* is a virtual 'thing.' The word 'tree' is always spoken in a particular place, on a particular day at a particular time. The speaking of this lexical element is its actualization. But the general concept, though expressed or actualized somewhere when the word is used, is torn away from concretization. Virtuality is real, though it cannot be assigned any space-time coordinate. A word really exists. *Virtuality exists, though it is not present here.* Let us add that ways of actualizing this same virtual 'thing' that actuality is never predetermined in virtuality. Therefore, from an acoustic point of view, as on the semantic plane, no one actualization of the word overlaps exactly with another actualization of it. An unexpected accent can always appear (the appearance of new voices) or an unexpected meaning (invention of new sentences). Virtuality is an infinite source of actualization" (Pierre Lévy, "Essai sur la cyberculture," http://hypermedia.univ-paris8.fr/pierre/cyberculture/cyberculture.html (last accessed: 11.04.2016).

[11] R. Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. R. Howard, London: Macmillan, 1977, 36.

[12] "A new media object is not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions."" (L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001, 36).

At the same time, "me" as an algorithm has its own independent existence, but awaits the insertion of concrete, idiomatic features in its operations – it waits for interlocutors who are always alone, even if there are several thousand of them at a time. Accordingly, the "me"-data (glass, bones, buttons) and the "me"-algorithm (cupboard, glasses, eyes) in isolation represent only virtual elements. The gaze with "shining eyes" and their insertion into the interface enable their activation.

The virtual status of the props as elements to be set in motion in particular interfaces, independent elements (as lexias[13]) with precise output data, and variational capability allows them to be freely put into any space. Only because of that freedom is replacing "death" with "eyes" possible, only because of that – after straining the reflecting eyes – can Dycki propose: "I will trade them with you for that great button made of horn" or better still, "zamienię siebie na ciebie / i ciebie na siebie niczego wszak / nie obiecując i nie osiągając" (I will trade myself for yourself / and yourself for myself nothing whatever / promising or attaining).[14] Thus the conclusion reached by Krzysztof Hoffmann in his analysis:

> A comparative analysis of the changes introduced into the texts in revisions distinctly shows that words which would appear to be exceptionally freighted with meaning, such as "skeleton," "sun," "mortuary," "matter," "mouth," "bones," "dream," "body," even "putrefaction" are either mutually interchangeable or may be omitted […] [15]

shows itself to be a splendid diagnosis of the linguistic space of Dycki's poetry, in which each element – as an equal, non-hierarchical set of signs or data – is interchangeable with every other in the "great" algorithm of "me" (Dycki's poetry), and the element that is not activated (because it is omitted) does not disturb the fluid movement of meanings.[16] That is what makes possible the subversive change in "Zaplecze," ending with demystification: "Ilnicki to Dycki,

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[13]"A lexia (or node) is the basic unit of hypertext. […] A lexia differs from a classically understood fragment. It must be characterized by coherence and more than relative autonomy. Authors of hypertexts must take into account that fragments of their works will be read in varied contexts that will change during the process of reading (through the placing of different lexias than the ones currently displayed. These contexts change not only as a result of the reader's interaction with the text. Changes to them can also be elicited by a mechanism inscribed in the text, controlled by a computer program. […] Lexias must therefore be coherent enough as self-contained wholes of text to keep the flow of reading from being disrupted together with the flow of narrative. A good model for this type of function is the Deleuzian rhizome, with its principle of meaningless disconnection" ("Leksja" (Lexia), in: "Techsty – Literatura i Nowe Media" [Techsty – Literature and New Media], http://techsty.art.pl/warsztaty/lexia.htm (last accessed: 12.04.2016).

[14]E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, "I. Dosłownie wszędzie spadają na nas pociski śmierci" (I. Missiles Will Fall Down on Us Literally Everywhere), *Inter-. Literatura-Krytyka-Kultura* 2014, no. 1 (3), 39.

[15]K. Hoffmann, "Rekorekcje" (Recorrections), in: *Pokarmy. Szkice o twórczości Eugeniusza Tkaczyszyna-Dyckiego* (Victuals. Essays on the Work of Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki), ed. P. Śliwiński, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Wojewódzkiej Biblioteki Publicznej i Centrum Animacji Kultury, 2012, 151.

[16]A new, foreign, or even obsolete word does not activate operations between words– "nieczynne słowo nie wstrzymuje procesu zrastania się widzeń" (an obsolete word does not hold back the process of rising visions)--T. Peiper, "Komizm, dowcip, metafora" (Comedy, Joke, Metaphor), in: T. Peiper, *Tędy. Nowe usta* (Then. New Words), Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1972, 300. Similarly, in *Le spleen de Paris* Baudelaire writes: "Take away one vertebra and the two ends of this tortuous fantasy come together again without pain. Chop it into numerous pieces and you will see that each one can get along alone" (C. Baudelaire, *Paris* Spleen, trans. L. Varèse, New York: New Directions, 1970, ix.) This phenomenon marks the modular nature of new media: "If a particular module of a computer program is deleted, the program will not run. In contrast, as with traditional media, deleting parts of a new media object does not render it meaningless. In fact, the modular structure of new media makes such deletion and substitution of parts particularly easy" (Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 31).

Dycki to Ilnicki" (Ilnicki is Dycki, Dycki is Ilnicki)[17]; this is what allows the presentation of "wilgoć w miejsce języka // oczu myśli" (moisture in place of language // eyes of thought)[18]; that is why "tak tak" (yes yes) so easily changes into (or is replaced by) "nie nie" (no no) ("a my tam i z powrotem tak tak / tam i z powrotem nie nie" [and we go there and back yes yes / there and back no no][19]). Similarly, the phrase from an (authentic) Old Polish source, "nie narażaj się śmierci" (don't get infected by death) develops into the derivative, multiplied admonition "nie narażaj się śmierci słońcu ciemności wodzie" (don't get infected by the death of the sun of the darkness [in] water), "czyli każdej rzeczy którą masz w zasięgu ręki albo ci się wydaje że możesz ją posiąść gdy zaciśniesz pięści" (or each thing you have within reach of your hand or it seems to you you might have it when you make a fist).[20] Into the mathematical formula "don't get infected with x" each and every (virtual, modular / sign) element may be entered, as in the algorithm of absence "you won't find in me x" (death / eyes). Everything connects with everything else,[21] regardless of the features of particular objects and algorithmic processes – absence is equal to presence, and virtuality can be made concrete at any moment. Nothing is excluded from these processes – "no matter who attacks Dycio"[22] within IT commands and combinations.

And thus all elements within the space of language become equal in value – none are more predisposed to be entered into concrete contexts than others, since changing a few letters or numbers suffices to turn each object into an utterly new object. In the virtual realm, everything is "everything else" – each object is different from every other (has different features), yet all of them are identical and co-exist in their ontological structure. In the space of language "jedno i drugie znaczy tyle samo" (one and the other mean the same amount) – they have equal value and importance, although it is not true that "jedno i drugie znaczy to samo"[23] (one and the other mean the same thing), since they have different meanings; each object is a different object, though equal (alternate) in substance to each other through their shared modular-numeric / sign, discrete (non-continuous)[24] structure. Here the hyperreality of language, the universality[25] of simulated, single-use elements which are always Other, comes into play.

[17]E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, *Zaplecze*, Legnica: Biuro Literackie 2002, 140.

[18]E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, *XXI*, 30.

[19]E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, *CCCLXVII*, 407.

[20]E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, *CCCLXXI*, 411.

[21]"(…) everything is interconnected, and we are all caught in a web of various correspondences" (O. Tokarczuk, *Prowadź swój pług przez kości umarłych* [Drive Your Plow Through the Bones of the Dead], Warszawa 2009, 252). Peiper's concept of metaphor functions similarly, based as it is on the principle: "there are no two words that cannot find themselves in a situation that would justify their combination through metaphor" (T. Peiper, *Komizm, dowcip, metafora*, 294).

[22]E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, *CCL. Płaszcz przeciwdeszczowy* (Raincoat), 285.

[23]E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, *CLXXVI*, 207.

[24]"A human language is discrete on most scales: We speak in sentences; a sentence is made form words; a word consists of morphemes, and so on" (L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 31).

[25]"Cyberculture is a manifestation of the creation of a new universality. It differs from previous forms of culture in that it uses the indefinite nature of any kind of general meaning. Really, the more cyberculture spreads and becomes 'universal,' the harder it becomes to totally capture the world of information. Universality deprived of totality is the paradoxical essence of cyberculture" (Pierre Lévy, "Essai sur la cyuberculture").

Those who participate in communication also belong to the sphere of poetic hyperreality. The reader receives a text generated individually for him, and from it – within an interface which is also always individual – can choose which elements to activate, which to strain toward ("though you strained a pair of shining eyes in me"), which to find ("though everything else / you will find"). The poem's direct address using the informal second person singular "ty" implies the need for a constant renewal of engagement with the relationship: the insertion of the object (the text) into new receiving algorithms. A single-use text is formed, like a hypertext – the connecting of elements and their sequence of succession cannot be repeated; it is idiomatic each time. Among these idiomatic instances, none is better than another; each is equally (diversely) dependent on the network sequence of interpretative activities performed on selected elements:

> Every hypertext reader gets her own version of the complete text by selecting a particular path through it. Similarly, every user of an interactive installation gets her own version of the work. And so on. In this way new media technology acts as the most perfect realization of the utopia of an ideal society composed of unique individuals. New media objects assure users that their choices – and therefore, their underlying thoughts and desires – are unqiue rather than preprogrammed and shared with others.[26]

The source text – the datum – goes through various transformations and transpositions in particular interfaces (free, random – "no matter who attacks Dycio"), so that it becomes a variation on its co-texts or inter-texts, which are different each time. The reader (co-)operates as author and the author as reader: "I will trade myself for yourself and yourself for myself [...]." A new composition develops from the collision of interfaces – the user, the prosumer (producer + consumer) who neutralizes the superiority (of the author, of the reader) and the inferiority (of the author, of the reader) through interchangeability, co-existence. The new media reader cannot be detached from the author, who is equally a creature of the new media; cybernetic categories (the aesthetics of error, glitch poetry, noises, clusters, strings) are categories developed by them working together. The text is created in the interface, the text belongs to the community (communicative and resulting from communication), variational, repeated and always single-use.

The poetic hyperreality thus outlined excludes all exclusions – since each is interchangeable with every other and can function in its place (though always differently, unrepeatably) within an indistinguishable greater category (such as form,[27] being,[28] sign), all possible

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[26]Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 42.

[27]"Everything in the world is alive and everything has its value. What is not alive does not exist, and what does not exist has neither form, nor color" (T. Czyżewski, "Tytus Czyżewski o 'Zielonym oku' i o swoim malarstwie (autokrytyka – autoreklama)" (Tytus Czyżewski on 'The Green Eye' and on His Painting [Self-criticism – Self-advertisement]), from the book *Noc – dzień. Mechaniczny instynkt elektryczny* (Night-Day. The Mechanical Electric Instinct), 1922, quoted in: Czyżewski, *Wiersze i utwory teatralne* (Poems and Theatrical Works), introduction by J. Kryszak, ed. J. Kryszak, A. K. Waśkiewicz, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo, 2009, 112).

[28]The category of "being" neutralizes the distinction between human and animal beings and absorbs all creatures into its area.

evaluative distinctions, all possible hierarchies[29] lose their reason for existing. In Dycki's linguistic space all props and flying ("no matter who attacks Dycio") accretions thus become weightless (as word-stars, toward which systems are oriented – according to Barthes' concept in *S/Z*[30]), and thus equally, identically important or unimportant, incorporated on equal footing into metaphorical relationships.[31] All "great" divisions, evaluations, delimitations lose their justification – *Sekrety białogłowskie* (Secrets of the Fairer Sex)[32] are as good and bad as Nałkowska's *Medaliony* (Medallions); poetry is equal to prose, photography, a fine-feathered country-fair cock,[33] a necrologist, a reality show, a street or a computer; a quotation from an academic study is not basically different from a "splendid," "lengthy"[34] quotation from Wikipedia. Białoszewski's "double vision"[35] absorbs everything overheard,

[29]"But in the case of hyperlinking as implemented by HTML and earlier by Hypercard, no such relationship of hierarchy is assumed. The two sources connected through a hyperlink have equal weight; neither one dominates the other. Thus the acceptance of hyperlinking in the 1980s can be correlated with contemporary culture's suspicion of all hierarchies, and preference for the aesthetics of collage in which radically different sources are brought together within a singular cultural object." Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 76.

[30]Barthes R., *S/Z*, trans. R. Miller, New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.

[31]"(…) today's metaphor is most often a wrecking of the emotional hierarchy that a person has so far transferred to particular areas of the world. Great things are reduced to small, small things are raised to the great. Ceremonial or sacred things are juxtaposed with common everyday things move in between solemn and sanctified things. Objects reluctantly seen, coming from those areas of the world and life from which the aesthetic sensitivity of the average person turns away, are amalgamated with objects with emotional resonances, based deep inside the human being" (T. Peiper, "Metafora teraźniejszości" (Metaphor of the Present), in: *Tędy. Nowe usta*, 57).

[32]And other – old and recent, mostly not particularly excellent, even graphomaniacal – books discussed by Dycki in *Zaplecze* (for example *Matka świętych polska albo żywoty dla zbudowania żyjących i potomnych, dla pociechy duchownej swoich krewnych* [The Polish Mother of Saints or Lives of the Saints for the Edification of the Living and their Descendants, for the Spiritual Comfort of Their Relations], by F. J. Jaroszewicz; *Ondyn nad Niemnem* [Ondine on the Niemen], by Jadwiga Badowska; *Paniątko* [Little Miss Lady], by Z. Sawicka; *Onanizm, czyli roztrząśniecie chorób pochodzących z samogwałtu, przez Pana Tyssota sławnego doktora po francusku napisane, a na polski język przełożone [...]* [Onanism, or a Discussion of Diseases Caused by Self-Rape, by Lord Tyssot, the Celebrated Doctor, Written in French and Translated into the Polish (…); *Dzień bogomyślny* [God-fearing Day], by Leon Pyżalski).

[33]E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, *Piosenka o jarmarcznym kogutku* (Song about a Country-fair Cock), 121.

[34]Terms used in *Zaplecze*. In *Zaplecze* Dycki revealed thinking in quotations as a governing principle of literary (co)existence, distinguishing his poetry as well (and perhaps above all); the project of writing as reading or collating.

[35]T. Sobolewski, *Człowiek Miron* (Miron the Man), Kraków 2012. Igor Piotrowski produced an interesting description of the phenomenon: "One might say that Białoszewski was interested in the manifold consequences of 'the flight of a place through the centuries': psychological, social and artistic, hence also the approximations and comparisons whose purpose is to strengthen the context of the image of the street. In theory 'Maratończyk' [Marathon Man] serves this purpose just as well as the Bible, and Jan Matejko's 'Gallery of Polish Kings' lends itself to such operations to the same degree as baroque oratorios or vespers heard in church. This is Białoszewski's particular method, underscored by many observers (Tadeusz Sobolewski, in his book 'Miron the Man' calls it 'double vision') – it is the way his creative *imaginarium functions, based on associations of separate layers of cultural traditions with ordinary banalities, seeing everyday life through the prism of internalized content*: literature, art, etc. This type of metaphor becomes the principle of how his world functions and he draws out of it deep dramaturgical consequences, multiplying associations or building new narratives along that parallel. Białoszewski cannot stop playing with associations, which sometimes cause an avalanche, creating a self-propelling mechanism (Jacek Kopciński wrote in 'Grammar and Mysticism' of the 'scheme of associative autoplay'). Białoszewski has absorbed literature, films, painting, and music, and now goes about the world and interprets everyday life based on what he has read, watched, and heard. We all do that, but not all of us do it so persistently and not all of us transform it into literature." (I. Piotrowski, *Alef. Ulica Chłodna jako pustka i złudzenie* [The Aleph. Chłodna Street as Emptiness and Illusion], *Dwutygodnik* [Bi-weekly] 2014, no. 124, http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/4973-alef-ulica-chlodna-jako-pustka-i-zludzenie.html). In the quoted passage, in place of "Białoszewski" – according to the principle of verbal exchangeability – we could, with some validity, read "Dycki."

and consists of a series of accidental[36] ("each thing you have within reach of your hand") foresights and mishearings:

> This Polish writer who, according to Wikipedia, and according to me as well, deserves to be defined, is someone who undoubtedly has issues with identification and identity, with linguistic identity if nothing else, someone who constantly seeks confirmation for his identity in the use of Polish language, whether in language or in whatever Polish book falls into his lap. That is how it was with me, that I reached for whatever Polish book I could find. I always had a problem with worseness, I told myself that I am a great big Polish man, but that worse one, because my Polish language, undoubtedly that worse Polish, appeared in my use of Polish in about 1978.[37]

Yet by the same token, any worseness in his language is neutralized precisely because it becomes a universal worseness – there is no element that cannot become Other (idiomatic, non-normative, unrepeatable, erroneous – from the perspective of the hierarchy of "betterness"), so that everyone is equally worse – and better. The second flood is the flood of infinities of communicating arks and always innovative combinations of selected beings, objects, elements in their spheres, in their (data)bases[38] – a flood of variations (deviations) in a boundless range of endless repetitions, with differences in the repetitions that neutralize themselves and each other. Everything is Other, the Other is everything – "everything else" propels the poetic hyperspace, which

> assembles all heresies helter-skelter. It performs a thorough mixing-up of citizens and barbarians, supposed ignoramuses and the learned. In contrast to classical universalism, its boundaries are unclear, mobile, and temporary. But the trend toward contact that characterizes the current universalism is based on inclusion.[39]

Hyperreality is possible precisely because it constructs its own space within a separate interface using hypo- features, idiosyncratic and irrational (even insane), transgressive of norms (as potentialities). Dycki's linguistic algorithm, the Dycio Generator, receives everything (you will find everything else in it) and everywhere, creating unrepeatable and constantly newly repeated metaphorical communities, stylistic constructions. It is the hyperspace of hypospace, in which each Otherness is equal to every other Otherness, and their coexistence is organized by an idiomatic creation in the interface. All ontological distinctions lose their

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[36]Accidental by virtue of having been formed by the randomness of "reality" ("akurat tego, a nie innego dnia"[exactly that day, and not another]), in which the text was overheard, but also the randomness of the combinations of these overheard fragments with fragments of "torn-out" text: "I must tear out, with irritation, individual sentences, meanings, images, glue them together with something that was said exactly that day, and not another day" (E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, *Pójście za Norwidem* [Following Norwid]).

[37]E. Tlaczyszyn-Dycki, "Piosenka o zależnościach i uzależnieniach," Przystań! (Stop!) [21 May 2010], http://portliteracki.pl/przystan/teksty/piosenka-o-zaleznosciach-i-uzaleznieniach-2/.

[38]"The ark of the first flood was singular, hermetic, closed, totalizing. The arks of the second flood sail together. They exchange signals and animals. They impregnate each other. They contain small wholes, they make no claim to universalism. Only the flood is universal. But there is no way to grasp it as a composite unity" (P. Lévy, "Essai sur la cyberculture").

[39]P. Lévy, "Essai sur la cyberculture."

justification[40] – a human being is just as "worse" as an animal, a machine, or an object, and death can be replaced with eyes. Limits, or death, are neutralized ("you won't find death in me"), since they are subject to not being found to the same extent as anything else is ("you won't find eyes in me"). The indistinguishable "in between" autonomous and contextually engrafted elements stretches out "as far as the eye can see."[41]

Computer parentheses thus move the autotelic hyperreality of mutually interchangeable, equally valued signs "in between" their limits. With sampling and quantumization, however, parentheses can also variationally be replaced by words or numbers and neutralize their own limit function. That is how Dycki's poetry works – within the cybernetic generator, it absorbs everything as "everything else" and thus does not consent to sign hierarchies that would establish strong boundaries or limits.

That is why Dycki's poetry is new media poetry through and through, and that is why you will not find elements from new media spaces in it, because it creates (absorbs) them itself, equally good ones and worse ones, in its own realm, semiotically and stylistically impossible to counterfeit, of the simulated hyperspace of "me"; an ingenious, unrepeatable, idiomatic hyperspace, but one that also exchanges (communicates) with every other and can be exchanged for every other (for example the space of new media) in a particular context (of publication). Thus the features of hypertext mentioned by Bartmiński are not only features of Dycki's poetry, but also features of poetry in general, and thus of each particular poetic "ark" – features always executed in a different way, but shared, non-evaluative; the heterogeneity of language is not only the single-use heterogeneity of Dycki's poetry, but also the heterogeneity of all languages, and thus of every particular language – a heterogeneity always executed differently, but shared and non-evaluative. Only then, only in this utopia (of simulation) is a reality without disconnects or exclusions possible, and thus without worseness or violence of language; only then is the exchangeability of *kuban* and puddle, *zhmeni* and fist, *kiczki* and thatched roof possible:

> To see the world in its shapes, in its shape, I would propose giving up on any kind of aggression, or from any kind of relation with an aggressive meaning. Let us not say I am better because I speak Polish very well, let us not say: he is worse, he doesn't know the Polish word for fist. Or he doesn't know the Polish word for thatched roof, or he doesn't know the Polish word for jasmine, or he doesn't know the Polish word for puddle. I learned those words as a fifteen year-old, and it was a deathly blow for me, a deathly stroke, because I believed in my own worseness,

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[40]"All divisions have been canceled by virtual internet life as it leaves its imprint on real life. The world filtered through a network of cultural texts appears as a database from which we can select elements in order to deform and mix them. What is more, it is a digitalized world – in the Internet, Mickiewicz and the neighbor from your apartment building who puts his own videos on YouTube are equals" (U. Pawlicka, *(Polska) poezja cybernetyczna. Konteksty i charakterystyka* [(Polish) Cybernetic Poetry. Contexts and Characteristics], Kraków: Ha!art, 2012, 211).

[41]   E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, *CCCLXVI*, 406. In Polish, Derrida's famous statement that "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte" (There is no outside-text or There is nothing outside the text) was translated as "Tekst jak okiem sięgnąć" ([There is] text as far as the eye can see). See Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967, 227. See also Bogdan Banasiak, *Filozofia „końca filozofii". Dekonstrukcja Jacquesa Derridy* (The Philosophy of the "End of Philosophy." Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction), Warszawa: SPACJA 1997, 111.

I didn't know that *kuban* is a puddle, that *zhmeni* is a fist. I didn't know that *kiczki* is a thatched roof, and I was told, you Dycio are worse, because you don't talk like us. You don't want to talk the way we talk.[42]

And so, Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki is not a new media poet, because he does not want to talk the way we talk. Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki is not a new media poet, because he is a poet of limits. Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki is not a new media poet because he is – equally (variously) different, equally (variously) important, equally (variously) language-oriented and simulated, but always Other – like *everything else*.

[42]E. Tkaczyszyn-Dycki, "Piosenka o zależnościach i uzależnieniach."

KEYWORDS

h y p e r r e a l i s m

algorithm

Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki

Abstract:

The article, beginning with an interpretation of the poem "CCCLXXI" from *Piosenki o zależ-nościach i uzależnieniach* (Songs about Dependences and Addictions), presents the new media, variational structure of Tkaczyszyn-Dycki's poetry, in which each word can be replaced with any other word within its linguistic algorithm. Sign equivalence (the sign code proper to each form) constitutes, in the framework of Dycki's poetry, a hyperreal space of identity (corresponding to a new media numerical representation) that is always Other (single-use, in a concrete interface and concrete hypertextual operations). The virtual space thus outlined operates as an autotelic surface with weak, even non-existent, (non)boundaries and differences (amounting to non-entities), and thus without ontological exclusions – a utopia.

the Other

IDENTITY

v a r i a t i o n a l   t e n d e n c i e s

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What Do We Do
with Poetics?
– A Student's Perspective

Wiktoria Tuńska

Poetics class was always one of my favorite subjects in my college studies – I must admit it, loud and clear, since few of my classmates shared my opinion. My interest in that subject was probably due to the fact that I had become familiar with the foundations of poetics earlier on – and nothing helps as much as a good foundation. Poetics (the university subject) gave me what I was looking for, allowing me to read further chapters of Michał Głowiński's *Zarys teorii literatury* (Outline of Literary Theory), Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska, Janusz Sławiński, and *Poetyka stosowana* (Applied Poetics) by Bożena Chrząstowska and Seweryna Wysłouch. Thus, I received what I was expecting, and what would later prove to be insufficient. Please don't misunderstand me – it was no fault of the textbooks, which provide a great foundation for learning about literature, and which equip young adepts of Polish studies with the tools they need better than any other books possibly could. I value very highly what I learned from reading those books – but it was nonetheless inadequate for analyzing works involving new media, or the conditions in which such media operate.

The definition of poetics proposed in *Zarys teorii literatury* (familiar to everyone in the field) went as follows: "Poetics, as we wish to grasp it here, examines primarily the way the literary work exists as a linguistic production with a particular character of its own, defined by the 'needs' of the aesthetic function."[1] That simple and convenient definition has, over time, revealed itself to be inadequate, because although it is still true today, several decades after that definition was formulated, that literary texts remain linguistic productions, a number of them attempt to cross beyond that dimension, eluding structuralist definitions, their authors strive to expand their texts to include visual, musical, digital, and other dimensions. Though the linguistic dimension appears, naturally enough, to remain dominant (it is difficult to imagine a literary text without a linguistic text), it is enhanced by these other dimensions, frequently becoming a multimedia work. This tendency toward the creation of multimedia lit-

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[1] M. Głowiński, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Zarys teorii literatury*, fourth edition, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne 1975, 6.

erary works, though evident in the twentieth century, really became manifest in the twenty-first century, in connection with the ongoing technological revolution (widespread access to the Internet, and so on).[2]

Structuralist definitions, created several decades ago, have revealed themselves to be of little use in dealing with texts that belong to e-literature, because, as Marshall McLuhan showed many times, "[e]ach form of transport not only carries, but translates and transforms […] the message."[3] Techsts seem to require the creation of a new, or perhaps rather the implementation of a revised and updated, language and arsenal of scholarly tools.[4] It is also worthwhile to consider not only what the emergence of e-literature means for poetics as a scholarly discipline, but also for poetics as a subject taught within Polish philology programs, which probably are also faced with new tasks. I believe that in this situation, we need to assess how poetics classes can prepare students for reading and attempting to describe e-literature.

Techst On Techst

In order to learn more about what we call techsts, it is best to approach their usual context, the Internet. The main source of knowledge available on the subject of cybernetic literature is the web portal www.techsty.art.pl, maintained and edited by Mariusz Pisarski, author of a monograph on literary hypertexts published in 2013 by the Ha!art Corporation, entitled *Xanadu. Hipertekstowe przemiany prozy* (Xanadu. Hypertext Transformations of Prose). One of the definitions of hypertext contained in the book declares: "A hypertext is a work that branches out and operates on demand."[5] Mariusz Pisarski, in discussing that definition, clarifies that "branching out" signifies not so much changes affecting a work's interpretation as changes in the plot (bifurcations and divarications in the hypertext occur at the level of the represented world and the narrative thread).[6] Espen Aarseth has also defined hypertext as a subcategory of "cybertext," a machine for producing various kinds of utterances.[7] In his work, Mariusz Pisarski also cites the definition provided by Ted Nelson (creator of the concept of Xanadu), who described hypertext as a digital "form of non-sequential writing."[8] Nonetheless, we should stress the fact that hypertext eagerly simulates traditional texts (according to a specific kind of mimetism)[9] and, among all the forms of new media works, remains closest to the traditional object of literary scholarship.[10]

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[2] See Mariusz Pisarski, *Xanadu. Hipertekstowe przemiany prozy*, Kraków: Ha!art, 2013, 15. All further references to the work are to this edition.

[3] M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994, 90.

[4] This does not, however, represent a complete and utter rejection of the arsenal of tools previously developed – works of e-literature are still, prefix aside, works of literature.

[5] M. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 11.
   This definition is a hybrid of those formulated by Nelson and Wardrip-Fruin.

[6] M. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 11.

[7] M. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 12.

[8] M. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 9.
   Here, it should be noted that the term "hypertext" refers not only to works of literature but also to the method of their creation. Moreover, one scholar of new media, Noah Wardrip-Fruin, has risked the thesis that hypertext is not a tool, but a medium of communication.
   See M. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 11.

[9] M. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 13.

[10] See M. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 14.

The rich literary tradition behind hypertext, whose roots can be traced back to the Torah (some scholars look still farther), needs to be remembered. One work considered to be a classic of the genre *avant la letter*, or proto-hypertext, is Laurence Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristam Shandy, Gentleman*, and such authors as Julio Cortazar, Italo Calvino, and Milorad Pavic are seen as continuators of that tradition.[11] The first hypertexts in the proper sense of the term appeared in the 1980s; worthy of mention are Robert Arellano's *Sunshine '69*, Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*, and *afternoon a story* by Michael Joyce.[12]

What differentiates these first hypertexts from their precursors? Surprisingly, not chiefly their place of publication (the Internet): the attribute of being web-based is in fact not the (only) determining factor in a hypertext, as Mariusz Pisarski accurately states; often texts published on the Internet could, without major losses, have been published as paper books.[13] The main difference appears to be the departure from the reader's habit of reading in a linear fashion. Hypertext aims to shift away from the centre toward Deleuzian rhizomes, a more relaxed, diffuse compositional structure. A similar idea appeared even earlier in the works of Michel Foucault and Jorge Luis Borges.[14] As Pisarski writes:

> Hypertekst, in its most Utopian version, throwing literature from the print form onto the electronic screen, promises to fulfil the myth that has long tormented humanity of an ideal book, available to everyone, every era's library of Babel, the myth of the book of books, the act of whose reading never ends, the Coleridgean myth of Xanadu. At the same time, however, this myth is undermined by hypertext, particularly in that aspect of it that indicates a closing, a definite beginning and definitive end (…).[15]

Thus hypertext, in Seweryna Wysłouch's poetic phrase, "feeds on" literature, not only using its tradition, but also borrowing its ideals and desires.[16]

Lost in Transmission

This short introduction to the idea of hypertext seems essential in the context of what I was discussing above; a student often finds coming to grips with a postmodernist work to be a tremendous challenge. Let us consider even such a well-established work as Italo Calvino's

[11]M. Pisarski, *Historia hipertekstu* (The History of Hypertext), online version: http://techsty.art.pl/hipertekst/historia.htm, (last accessed: 20.01.2016).

[12]M. Pisarski, *Klasyka powieści hipertekstowej* (Classics of the Hypertext Novel), online version: http://techsty.art.pl/hipertekst/hiperfikcja/

klasyka.htm, (last accessed: 20.01.2016).

[13]M. Pisarski, *Powieść hipertekstowa* (The Hypertext Novel), online version: http://techsty.art.pl/hipertekst/hiperfikcja.htm, (last accessed: 20.01.2016).

[14]M. Pisarski, *Hipertekst, książka i druk* (Hypertext, Book and Print), online version: http://techsty.art.pl/hipertekst/ksiazka.htm, (last accessed: 20.01.2016).

[15]M. Pisarski, *Hipertekst, książka i druk*. Spelling as in the original.

[16]S. Wysłouch, "Literackość i medialność pierwszej polskiej powieści internetowej ('Blok' Sławomira Shutego)" (The Literariness and Mediality of the First Polish Internet Novel [Sławomir Shuty's *Blok* (The Apartment Block)]), *Techsty* 2014, no. 9 (1), online version: http://techsty.art.pl/m9/s_wyslouch_blok.html, (last accessed: 20.01.2016).

If on a Winter's Night a Traveler; for beginning philologists, it will most likely present a certain amount of difficulty (reading or describing it) if nothing else because of its non-linear narration.[17] The work is not an easy one to interpret, though it falls within the bounds of traditionally understood literariness. Let us move further (a lot of time has passed since 1979) and confront what we know about hypertext with some passages from Ziemowit Szczerek's recently published *Siódemka* (Lucky Seven):[18]

> "No, OK, I give up no," you said loudly, in a tone of resignation. "Those elixirs are some kind of a joke. That's taking it a bit too far. Mieszko the First? (…)."
>
> You took out your revolver, fired, and with one shot, put a bullet in the head of the man who converted the Polish nation to Christianity and took him down (…). You wondered, how much ammunition did you have left? Well, you thought, at first you had five cartridges in the five chambers of the barrel, plus three magazines with five each. A total of 20. The first cartridge fired was there, on the slope, next to the car. That made 19. The second in the dragon. 18. Now the third. 17. Suddenly in the upper right corner of your field of vision something like four icons presenting four magazines appeared, and next to it the word AMMO. One of them only had two full chambers left (…)[19].
>
> And he had made (WT: Bolesław Chrobry) a deft attack, and hit you right in the forehead with the coronation sword of the kings of Poland (…). In the upper left corner of your field of vision there appeared a red line and the word LIFE. And it immediately became a bit shorter.[20]

The short description cited here of the protagonist's fight with the rulers of Poland presents an interesting object for analysis. *Siódemka*, in no way a hypertext, since it was published in paper form, adopts a convention taken from computer games, while at the same time having nothing in common with "book-games."[21] The choice of this convention evokes not only themes relating to cybernetic literature, but also problems of the boundaries or kinship between literature and computer games. Obviously, as Mariusz Pisarski has noted, one of the most important differences between them is the interactive nature of the latter, and also the opposition between the stasis of literature and the dynamism (and simulation) of computer games.[22] Nobody doubts that Ziemowit Szczerek's novel is literature, not a game; nonetheless, through his references to the structure of computer games, the book somehow steps outside the boundaries of classical narrative art. The narrator in the novel does not simply perform the function of describing events; he is also their guiding force and coordinator. These functions have long been present in literature, but Szczerek takes them slightly further – the

[17]Mariusz Pisarski devotes considerable space to non-linearity in texts and hypertexts in one chapter of *Xanadu*. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 96-103.

[18]The novel was also published by the Ha!art Corporation, which notably is the main center (perhaps excepting techsty.art.pl) of reflection on cybernetic literaure.

[19]Z. Szczerek, *Siódemka*, Kraków: Ha!art, 2014, 118-119.

[20]Z. Szczerek, *Siódemka*, 120.

[21]I have in mind here books constructed on the model of computer games, such as the Choose Your Own Adventure series, in which, depending on what steps the player takes, the persona can "win" or "lose." Their structure tends to feature a block of text, with two options underneath it – the reader/player is directed to a different page depending on which option he or she selects, etc.

[22]Pisarski, *Gry i opowiadania – różnice* (Games and Stories – Differences), online version: http://techsty.art.pl/gry/opowiadanie_roznice.html, (last accessed: 20.01.2016).

narrator not only directs the protagonist of his story, but in some measure interferes in the protagonist's world, transforming it into a virtual world. Of course in the novel that intervention is justified by the use of the "elixirs" given to Paweł by Wiedźmin (another reference to cybernetic culture). Nevertheless, it is difficult not to notice that a kind of rupture takes place, since the narrator not only has insight into his protagonist's experience, but also is able to transfer him from reality to the virtual world; Paweł feels like the main protagonist of a computer game (who decides for himself what actions to take), yet doesn't know that he is really controlled like a puppet. And is precisely that transformation of reality into a computer game that seems particularly significant here.[23]

This task represents a difficult one for poetics (and, as a result, for neophytes in the discipline). The passages cited above could obviously be summarized in terms of computer-game conventions, but it seems that something else is going on in the novel as well (if nothing else, the protagonist's transformation into a "web" protagonist). In reality, it is only the beginning, an attempt to describe hypertext proves even more difficult, as due to its multimedia nature, it eludes all known categories.

What This Means for Poetics – and Criticism

The multimedia nature of e-literature is not the only thing that can lead to trouble for poetics. The question of this multimedia aspect could be dealt with in terms of concepts already familiar to poetics,[24] such as intertextuality,[25] or intersemiotic translation,[26] referencing the hybrid character of e-literature (I have in mind the expansion of textuality to include visual, audio, and other dimensions, and so forth). There is also another important element linked to the multimedial aspect: the non-linearity of the hypertext work. By its interactivity, hypertext encourages (or even forces) us to take a non-linear approach to reading – not only through the many stimuli it offers, but also through constant departures from inside the text. Works of this type are based on hyperlinks, which means that their center is washed away; instead of concentrated reading, the reader is faced with the task of constant movement from one association to another.[27] That unfathomable number of connections, reminiscent of the Deleuzian rhizome mentioned earlier, determines the hybrid character of the hypertext, its ungraspable nature.

[23]The creation of this web protagonist represents not only a departure from classical narrative structure, but seems to be something entirely new in narratology (even though *Siódemka* appears to have little in common with most works of literature that we might consider representative of postmodernism).

[24]One writer who has addressed this is Bożena Witosz. Mariusz Pisarski adds, however, that "old theories" cannot always encompass in their scope everything that is happening in the new media. Furthermore, "new theories" can prove to be useful in working not only on old, but also on new texts. Pisarski does not propose abandoning known methods entirely, but rather focusing on analysis "sensitive to the medium." See Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 73-76, 260-263.

[25]Pisarski writes more broadly on the problem of intertextuality in relation to hypertext in a chapter of *Xanadu*. There, he elucidates the difference between intertextuality and hypertext, which can often be "intratextual." Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 42-44.

[26]Perhaps it would be better to speak of an "intersemiotic work" – a hypertext composed of many semiotics systems, beginning with text and going on to include sound, illustrations, etc.

[27]M. Pisarski, *Hipertekst – definicje* (Hypertext—Definitions), online version: http://techsty.art.pl/hipertekst/definicje.htm, (last accessed: 20.01.2016). It should be obvious that I am simplifying things here somewhat. The problem of different kinds of hypertext has been extensively described by Mariusz Pisarski in his monograph *Xanadu*; among other distinctions, he distinguishes among axial, arborescent, and web (true) hypertexts. See Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 39-41.

This fundamental variability seems to be the main problem that poetics must address if it is to develop any kind of classification framework for e-literature. That variability is the result of the essential anatomy of the cybernetic world and culture – the extemporaneity, speed, and eternal, ceaseless change that constitute it. The world of the Internet possessing unusual dynamism, mobility, and apparently unlimited possibilities for creating new data, naturally influences newly arising forms of cybernetic literature which, combining literariness and the traits just referred to, produce a hybrid culture text impossible to classify.[28]

The nature of web-based works (which would include e-literature) can be gleaned quite splendidly through the example of the meme, the poetics of which are perhaps impossible to narrowly define. Naturally, almost every web user would be able intuitively to answer the question, "What is a meme?"; but delimiting any kind of boundaries appears a pointless task. One of the main features, the one that in some sense is the basic unit of Internet communication, seems to be suppleness in the midst of change, readiness to respond to the spontaneously arising needs of users.

The hybrid character of hypertext is not, however, based solely on its complex multimedia nature, but also on its interactiveness, which is a result of (among other factors) the hyperlinks authors use. The reader of e-literature should be prepared to come into contact not with a finished text perfectly formed by the author, but rather a kind of literary possibility. It is the reader who decides how the text will look, and who furthermore often becomes a co-author of the work; the accent previously placed on the author's role in the creative process dissolves, his central role disappears, making the reader share responsibility for the shape of the text.[29]

The concepts we know from poetics must be redefined in dealing with e-literature. That task seems difficult to the extent that, as I have mentioned, hypertext strives to make its boundaries fluid. How to classify what by its very nature aims to break down all forms of classification? The premise is evidently a Utopian one – cybernetic texts, as has already been noted, feed eagerly on literature, so it is not difficult to find points of contiguity, and what is more, total fluidity of genre boundaries is an unachievable goal. Nonetheless, the extemporaneous and mutable nature of cybernetic works would appear to provide literary criticism with more opportunities to shine than poetics, where describing e-literature is concerned.

In dealing with e-literature, the aces in criticism's hand are its spontaneity (in response to ongoing developments and vital, pressing literary problems) and its greater freedom in the form of its utterances. What I have in mind here are, for example, the lack of linguistic or stylistic limitations (in contrast to poetics, which tries to maintain its scholarly complexion), and, therefore, a certain elasticity that manifests itself in the possibility of using form to reference the form of the work under analysis.[30] That seems particularly important in the case

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[28]To be clear, this does not exhaust all the features of hypertext that result from its medium; Mariusz Pisarski enumerates the following properties of digital media: they are numeric, web-based, modular, multi-channel, and dynamic. M. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 30-33.

[29]M. Pisarski, *Powieść hipertekstowa*.

[30]Naturally this does not mean that criticism of poetry appears in the form of a poem, but the critic in his discourse can invoke the typical features of the work being discussed.

of internet works, whose authors devote a lot of attention precisely to the text's formal layer. Furthermore, in the case of e-literature, criticism can take place in that literature's natural environment – the Internet. Additionally, it can take one of the forms typical for web discourse, for example, the meme, referred to above, which often corresponds better to a cybernetic work than would a classical (critical or poetological) text. Of course works dealing with poetics can also be released in digital form, but even then, they retain their (strictly) textual character.

Not every manifestation of literary criticism published on the Internet has to use the medium I mentioned above, but it does seem that for understanding and attempting a critical description of the phenomenon of cybernetic literature, being conversant in the language of the Internet is crucial (if for no other reason than that it forms the basis of digital works' diction). An inscription from the website techsty.art.pl may serve as an example:

> Rozdzielczość Chleba's long-awaited cybertramp "Nośnik" (Conveyor) has finally seen the light of day (…). Łukasz Podgórni, Leszek Onak and Piotr Puldzian Płucienniczak together announce the celebration of the "bummer" that the digital era provided them with – "after a pretty decent binge." And they invite other authors, including Kinga Raab and Weronika Piła (two hemispheres of the cybertramp world) to celebrate with them. The authors declare:
>
> *Don't misunderstand us, we are not converts to offline; we are not pushing you to "log out and start living" (eww), though offline paradoxically gains from being online. Partying with the net and computers was fucking awesome, worth almost anything, but now we feel very, very bad, though in an alternative system we could still go on partying. Meanwhile, on the desktop – the landscape screensaver has helpfully been replaced by a screensaver announcing: We have to get high on internet (…).*
>
> "Nośnik" was divisible into a few separate: Quarter-Internets, jpgs, Tumblr vs. Vkontakte, the section $(beer).click(function() and [Photos]. The fullest container, Crumbs of Life Under the Keyboard, contains "narratives, statuses, epistles and evidence of persecution sponsored by the producers of appliances equipped with a screen and modem."
>
> We encourage you to read it! "Nośnik" is digital culture in a live, rebellious, linguistically and artistically progressive, state, courageously, even on a bummer, carrying the torch of our avant-garde great-great-grandfathers' fathers.[31]

The passages in the above text only announce the contents to be presented in "Nośnik" (edited by Łukasz Podgórni) published by Rozdzielczość Chleba (www.ść-ch.pl). With cybernetic or post-cybernetic literature, the border between criticism and literature itself is obliterated, since both forms of art, using the same medium (the Internet), readily take advantage of its potential, not only the technical possibilities it presents, but above all the language it has created. The text cited above is only comprehensible to active Internet users (and not all of those, but exclusively those among them interested in literature). Inscribed in the hybrid nature of

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[31]M. Pisarski, *Zwał cyberżula | ćpanie internetu, czyli poezja cybernetyczna na zakręcie* (The Cybertramp's Bummer / Internet Junkies, or Cybernetic Poetry at the Turning), online version: http://techsty.art.pl/?p=1808, (last accessed: 20.01.2016).

e-literature, it seems, is the search for a new language of expression, and accordingly, eager use of the language of contemporary technologies; hence one of the sections of "Nośnika" is called "$(beer).click(function()" referencing the language of programming. The language of criticism is thus applied to the language of the object being described – perhaps that is the only way to approach the phenomenon of (post-) digital literature, which willingly replaces reality with a (post-) cybernetic world.

It is hard to imagine how poetics, if it desires to maintain its scholarly orientation (without giving up the set of tools it has created), could reference Internet language so prominently; for that reason, well-aimed and, more importantly, up-to-date description of e-literature has presented no small challenge for poetics.[32] That does not, obviously, mean that poetics should simply give up on the study of cybernetic literature, but it does mean that poetics will probably have to accept the fact that being a less extemporaneous form, it will remain, at least for a time (until the moment when its arsenal gets an update), one step behind the literature of the Internet.[33]

In Closing

In that case – what about poetics taught in universities? Perhaps the first step of consequence would be familiarizing students with articles presenting not a poetics of e-literature, but criticism about it. It is criticism, after all, which presents the first "filter" in mass reception of literature of the (post-) digital and (post-) cybernetic era. Moreover, reading criticism of e-literature seems a good place to start learning how to read multimedia works of literature.

We find, then, that poetics as a university subject is tasked with a new assignment: preparing young scholars of Polish philology not only for reading e-literature (which most of them in fact are being prepared for by using the Internet on a daily basis),[34] but also for attempting to describe it, and providing them with the critical tools to engage in discussion and further study of techsts.

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[32]It seems that when we talk about the description of cybernetic literature, poetics (alongside the accusation of overgeneralizing) is exposed to the accusation of becoming obsolete or being out of touch with regard to the fast transformations occurring in the internet context.

[33]Mariusz Pisarski advances a similar proposal – in his book, he does not propose to utterly discard "old" theories, but to adapt them to the conditions of new media. Thus the idea arises of the "multiple-phase critical procedure." He claims that the analysis of hypertexts should begin with structural analysis, followed by polysemiotic (numbering the channels in the work), before proceeding to examine the mechanics of the hypertext and look for hypertext patterns, including narrative regularity. M. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 262.

[34]In any case, net users constantly encounter hypertext, since "ht" (which stands for hypertext) is also the beginning of "http" and "html." See M. Pisarski, *Xanadu*, 9.

KEYWORDS

Xanadu

Poetics

hypertext

Abstract:

The purpose of the article is to consider to what degree the changes that have taken place in literature (the turn toward cybernetic literature) have directly influenced both literary criticism and poetics understood as a scholarly discipline and academic subject. Based on various examples, I reflect on whether the Polish philology students of today are equipped with tools for studying "techsts," and also whether the creation of new tools is needed. The student perspective adopted here is meant to permit an analysis "from below" of the influence of new media on culture, and the question of how literary works are experienced by their audience in the (post-) digital age.

cybernetic poetics

e-literature

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Wiktoria Tuńska (b.1993) completed her undergraduate studies in Polish philology at Mickiewicz University. Her senior thesis examined the traumatic image of the death of the mother in the poetry of Tadeusz Różewicz and Eugeniusz Tkaczyszyn-Dycki; she is interested in 20th and 21st century literature, and particularly in studying the dimension of affect in literature. |

Fan-Fiction

Fan fiction is defined by Lidia Gąsowska, the author of a book on the subject in Polish (and of many other related works), as a "form of pop culture disseminated via the mass media, consisting primarily of written works based on popular books, films, TV shows, comic books, and cartoons; they are created by fans of these works."[1]

This definition contains three basic elements that tend to appear in other descriptions of the phenomenon. It designates the place of this creative practice in culture (its connection with mass or pop culture), indicates its dependence on previous, popular works in a culture, and identifies the creators as fans of such popular works.

Broadly speaking, the topic of fandom is the subject of a branch of scholarship called *fan studies*,[2] encompassing issues from the areas of cultural studies, sociology, and psychology.[3]

Origins of the Phenomenon | The origins of the phenomenon of literary
works written by fans remain unclear – various accounts of this artistic perspective present different perspectives. Abigail Derecho notes two hypotheses that are frequently put forward in the literature on the subject: "1) fan fiction originated several millennia ago, with myth stories, and continues today, encompassing works both by authors who identify themselves as fans and those who do not write from within fandoms [...] 2) fan fiction should be understood as a product of fan cultures, which began in either the late 1960s, with *Star Trek* fanzines, or at the earliest, in the 1920s, with Austen and Holmes societies [...]."[4] We should also add that besides myth stories, apocrypha or the pre-Romantic culture of literary imitation (as opposed to the Romantic cult of originality) have also been recognized as having much in common with fan fiction,[5] while in terms of associations with phenomena of the more recent past, scholars have pointed to connections with intertextuality[6] or the poetics of postmodernism.[7]

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[1] L. Gąsowska, *Fan fiction. Nowe formy opowieści* (Fan Fiction. New Forms of the Story), Kraków: ha!art, 2015, 298.

[2] See A. Kobus, "Fanfiction a funkcjonowanie literatury popularnej. Zarys perspektywy historycznej" (Fan Fiction and the Functioning of Popular Literature. An Outline of the Historical Perspective), *Kultura Popularna* (Popular Culture) 2013, 3, 147-148.

[3] On the academic history of defining the phenomenon of fandom, see M. Hills, *Fan Cultures*, London: Routledge, 2002.

[4] A. Derecho, "Archontic Literature. A Definition, a History and Several Theories of Fan Fiction," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of Internet. New Essays*, ed. K. Hellekson and K. Busse, Jefferson: McFarland, 2006, 62.

[5] See A. Włodarczyk, M. Tymińska, "*Fan fiction* a literacka rewolucja fanowska. Próba charakterystyki zjawiska" (Fan Fiction and the Fans' Literary Revolution. An Attempt at Description of the Phenomenon), *Panoptikum* 2012, 11, 92-93.

[6] See Włodarczyk and Tymińska, "*Fan fiction* a literacka rewolucja fanowska," 96-100.

[7] See L. Gąsowska, "Od Borgesa do Manovicha. O kilku znanych metaforach" (From Borges to Manovich. On a Few Well-known Metaphors), *Panoptikum* 2012, 11, 22-34.

In the case of the second hypothesis mentioned by Derecho, linking fan fiction specifically to the development of fan cultures, the culture of cyberspace has played a particular role in that regard. Kulesza-Gulczyńska writes about four main aspects of the changes connected with the development of the internet that have influenced the form of fan-created works: "the way of publishing the text," "the status of the text," "the status of the author or the problem of authorship," and "the functioning of the creators' communities (and the appearance within them of new literary and paraliterary forms)."[8] Literary fan fiction, seen from the perspective of literary cyber-culture (the "liternet," to use an attractive but rarely used term from an earlier phase in the scholarly study of the phenomenon[9]) leads us to renew our inquiry into the role of the medium in literary communication and ask questions analogous to those pondered by students of e-literature: do internet forms of literary creation constitute a truly new phenomenon, or a continuation of older situations, already present in culture before and now revealed to have "long shelf lives"?

In dealing with the close connection between literary fan fiction and fan communities, as well as sociological approaches to this issue, cultural studies and media studies can provide particularly helpful insights.[10] Fan culture is connected with popular and mass culture (leaving aside for a moment the terminological problems relating to these terms – we will give them some further consideration later on), with the shrinking space of culture.[11] The literary fan fiction that we know today is made possible by an acceleration in communication among people, first (in the 19th century) enabling texts to reach their audiences with unprecedented speed, and next their free exchange (the democratization of writing, the wide dissemination of "cheap texts"[12]). Finally, this communicative freedom is leading nowadays, according to many people, to a transition from the era of the "ubiquity" of communication (typical for mass culture) to an era dominated by the ephemeral nature of communication, symbolized by, among other things, live broadcasts.[13]

Fan Fiction and Literary Studies | In studies of literary fan fiction, academic literary scholarship has particularly been used in textual analyses of these works with a view to determining their typological status. Such an approach represents, up to the present time, the scholarly *topos* of inquiries into fan literature. One of the most well-known was proposed by Henry Jenkins. According to Jenkins, authors of fan fiction use the following types of approach (not mutually exclusive) to the original works: recontextualization (minor additions, clarification of plot threads); expansion of the time frame of a narrative series, "refocalizations" (focusing on characters who were attributed less importance in the originals); moral re-

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[8] B. Kulesza-Gulczyńska, *Znaczenie internetu w rozwoju fan fiction, czyli twórczość fanowska i nowe media* (The Meaning of the Internet for the Development of Fan Fiction, or Fan Works and New Media), ed. K. Pokorna-Ignatowicz, J. Bierówka, Kraków 2014.

[9] *Liternet. Literatura i internet* (Liternet. Literature and the Internet), ed. P. Marecki, Kraków 2002.

[10] On "literature-centered" and "culture-centered" approaches to this topic, see for example: Adam Mazurkiewicz, "Nowe formy quasi-literackie w kulturze popularnej. Rekonesans" (New Quasi-Literary Forms in Popular Culture: A Reconnaissance), *Literatura i Kultura Popularna*, vol. XV, 43.

[11] See P. Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: Towards a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, trans. W. Hoban, John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

[12] V. Flusser, *Toward a Philosophy of Photography*, Göttingen: European Photography, 1984, 13-14.

[13] R. Debray, *Introduction à la médiologie*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000, 200.

alignments (radical refocalization transforming "bad characters" into positive heroes); changes of genre; cross-over (configuring elements from various texts); transference of characters (for example, assigning characters new identities); personalization (for example, making the details of the original resemble the authors' own experiences); emotional intensification (for example, concentration on crucial, emotionally loaded elements of the plot); and eroticization.[14]

Among more recent conceptions, we should consider one proposed by Anna Perzyńska, who also begins by defining fan fiction as "literature of the second degree" and considers the relationship to the canonical work to be the decisive typological criterion. She places particular stress, however, on the idea that particular, distinct categories should not "overlap": "I propose to divide fan fiction into **canonical** stories (which do not change the source works) and **alternative** ones (that permit themselves to make greater or lesser changes). Further, in terms of temporal perspective, we should distinguish among: **prequels** (presenting the earlier fates of characters), **sequels** (presenting the later fates of characters) and **parallel stories** (presenting events taking place parallel in time to the action of the source text). In terms of plot content, however, we should also refer to: **additions** (connected with the main plot – filling in gaps in the narrative of the main story and presenting the fates of the main characters), spin-offs (not connected with the main plot – filling in gaps in the narratives of subplots, presenting the fates of secondary or episodic characters), **changes of perspective** (presenting the main story from a different narrative perspective) and **alternate time lines** (proposing alternate versions of the main events of the plot, respecting the canon only up to a certain point)."[15]

We can also speak of forms of fan fiction linked not so much by the form of their relationship to the original (though that aspect is in some measure related), but by their shared subject matter,[16] as in the case of, for example, fan fiction belonging to the subcategories of slash, mpreg, fluff, mary sue, and R/T (*Rape/Torture*).[17]

Sheenaugh Pugh offers some interesting reflections regarding distinctions made within the poetics of fan fiction in her book *The Democratic Genre. Fan Fiction in a Literary Context*. Pugh considers, among other things, how the length of works of fan fiction affects the introduction of original (non-canonical) characters into such works – works in series form are more likely to allow this, she finds, than shorter forms.[18] Short forms in fan fiction, on the other hand, may not be marked by any indefinite elements – they may even contain complex plot interventions or interpretations – since familiarity with the canon relieves the authors of any obligation to acquaint the reader with the basic background of the story being told.[19]

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[14]H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers. Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, New York: Routledge, 2005, 165-182.

[15]A. Perzyńska, "Literackie zabawy w środowiskach fanowskich. Studium przypadku" (Literary Games in Fan Circles. A Case Study), *Teksty Drugie* 2015, 3, 149.

[16]See D. Jankowiak, "Fanfikcja jako przykład instrumentalizacji literatury" (Fan Fiction as an Example of the Instrumentalization of Literature), *Litteraria Copernicana* 2013, 2, 108.

[17]Many other concepts and categories are important in the study of literary fan fiction. Interested readers should consult *Słownik fanowskich pojęć* (A Dictionary of Fan Concepts) and "Najczęstsze oznaczenia fanfików pojawiające się na stronach z fikcją fanowską" (The Most Frequent Designations of Fan Fiction on Fan Fiction Sites), part of Lidia Gąsowska's text mentioned above ("Od Borgesa do Manovicha," 298-300).

[18]S. Pugh, *The Democratic Genre. Fan fiction in a Literary Context*, Bridgend: Seren, 2005, 182.

[19]Pugh, *The Democratic Genre*, 172-173.

Fan Fiction, Literariness, and the Literary Approach to Social Organization | Both fandom itself and scholars who study it (sometimes themselves having emerged from fan culture) use concepts typical for literary studies, particularly the definitions, proper to poetics, of genres, subgenres, and textual mechanisms. Less attention is given, however, to interpretative practices.[20]

The frequent use of terminology taken from poetics is a consequence of the nature of fan fiction works – primarily of their dependence on source works and the authorial rules that comprise the fanon (a set of accepted authorial behaviours developed over considerable time by the fan community). Fans' literary production exploits the plot, narrative, and thematic potential of texts from popular culture, in the process becoming an attractive object of study for poetics.

It is important to stress that this dependence on texts from popular culture brings with it limitations imposed and agreed upon by the fan milieu. As Stein and Busse state, fan fiction is "limit play": it involves playing with those limitations.[21] In different fan cultures, different forms of creative control and critical reflection operate[22] – from commentators and fan-created beta-reader institutions to specialized analyses and meta-fan works. Certain scholars consider this to be a trait that links fandom with literary life: "We might say that works are created [in fan cultures with mechanisms for quality control in the materials they publish[23]] in a spontaneous way, without specialized institutions or formal dependence, a literary scene representing to a considerable extent an imitation of the one we know outside the web."[24]

Literary fan fiction is by nature a social, community-oriented activity – now concentrated around the internet, which makes possible instant communication with readers and authors who share one's relationship to the canon and share one's addiction to the fanon. This, then, is "liternet" *par excellence*, based on relationships that differ significantly from the literary model developed in print or book culture. Its context is a specific version of literary life – less institutionalized, more privatized. In the literary scholarly tradition, we learn about such literary activity most frequently from biographical works, reminiscences, letters or literary sketches, rather than interpretative texts... The degree to which artistic (literary) facts are connected with social relations or everyday cultural life in the world of fan fiction is comparable to the way literature is perceived through precisely such texts.

[20]See D. Kaplan, "Construction of Fan Fiction Character Through Narrative," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities*, 134-152.

[21]See K. Busse, L. Stein, "Limit Play, Fan Authorship between Source Text, Intertext, and Context," *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture* 2009, 4; See also P. D. Jankowiak, S. Krawczyk, "Granice kreatywności. Dyskurs dotyczący postaci typu „mary sue" w amatorskiej twórczości liteackiej a reguły funkcjonowania społeczności fanowskich"(The Boundaries of Creativity. Discourse on *mary sue* Characters in Amateur Literary Works and the Rules for the Functioning of Fan Communities), *Kultura i Edukacja* (Culture and Education) 2003, 2; L. Gąsowska, "Praktyka pisania fan fiction. Tutorial fanfikowca" (The Practice of Writing Fan Fiction. A Fanfic Tutorial), *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* (The Problem of Types of Literature), 2013, 2.

[22]See O. Dawidowicz-Chymkowska, "Fan fiction. O życiu literackim w internecie" (Fan Fiction. On Literary Life in the Internet), in *Tekst (w) sieci 2. Literatura. Społeczeństwo. Komunikacja* (Text [in the] Net 2. Literature, Society, Communication), ed. A. Gumkowska, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profejonalne, 2009, 64-68.

[23]All remarks, addenda, and emphases in brackets belong to the quoted author unless otherwise attributed.

[24]O. Dawidowicz-Chymkowska, "Fan fiction," 68.

In this sense, literary fan fiction can be counted among literary practices of everyday life (in the meaning attributed to everyday life, speaking very generally, by such scholars as, for instance, Michel de Certeau), and thus artistic practices that must be described both as a form of participation in the social field and in the field of art.

We should also add that although the study of fans' literary works requires study of artistic practices, fandom consists to a notable extent of audience members, readers, consumers,…[25] and co-creators constitute a milieu often not vocally represented (a fact confirmed by the sizable numerical preponderance of readers of internet content over its creators). Furthermore, I am here passing over a phenomenon akin to fan fiction – fans' literary criticism, whose position in relation to the field of knowledge (the discipline of literary scholarship) is arguably analogous to that of the fan fiction literary community.[26]

Fan Fiction as an Inspiration for the Theory of Amateur Literary Creation

Fans' literary work is, to an enormous extent, amateur work (though there have been cases of professional writers undertaking to write such works[27]). The contemporary status of an "amateur" is, of course, problematic. Leaving aside the material factors conditioning writerly "professionalism,"[28] I would like to give some consideration to the aesthetic aspects of the problem.

Jacques Rancière, writing in the context of cinema, used the phrase *la politique de l'amateur*.[29] He used the category of the amateur to signify identifying with the figure of the enthusiast, the admirer, the cinephile – and his political position emerges from the democratic potential of "watching": the amateur is "a traveler, a mental cartographer whose imagination and memory draw psycho-geographical maps that coordinate knowledge and the forces of attraction that shape events comprising **intimate** and **common** experiences."[30] Rancière identifies the moment in the history of art when amateurs were able to "raise" their own emotions and beliefs against the forces of discourses of knowledge, since those were not yet established (to address new forms of art): "Cinephilia linked the cult of art to the democracy of entertain-

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[25]See. D. Jankowska, "Pogoń za opowieścią – analiza motywacji czytelnictwa amatorskiej twórczości fanfikcyjnej" (The Pursuit of Story—An Analysis of What Motivates the Readership of Amateur Fan Fiction), *Studia Medioznawcze* (Mediological Studies) 2013, 1; S. Krawczyk, "Prosumpcja polskich miłośników literatury fantastycznej" (The Prosumption of Polish Fantasy Literature Fans), *WN Katedra* 2014, 175-210.

[26]The internet, Olga Dawidowicz-Chymkowska claims (in her article "'Wynaturzone' Forum Fanów Małgorzaty Musierowicz jako interakcyjna maszyna interpretacyjna: studium przypadku" (The "Degenerate" Forum of Małgorzata Musierowicz Fans as an Interactive Interpretative Machine: A Case Study), *Teksty Drugie* 2012, 6, 297), has brought about the obsolescence of the distinction proposed over two decades ago by Erazm Kuźma between interpreter-members of the literary scholarly community and readers, differentiated by the scope of expression given to their opinions (critics expressing theirs publicly and readers privately).

[27]S. Pugh, "Across the Borderline. Fanfic and Profic," in Pugh, *The Democratic Genre*, 143-168.

[28]See, for example, L. Stetkiewicz, "Dla niektórego literata jest taka zapłata…, czyli dochody z literatury; Styl życia z konieczności i z wyboru" (Some Literati Don't Work Gratis, or Making Money from Literature; Lifestyle By Necsssity or By Choice) in Stetkiewicz, *Szkice z „ziemi niczyjej" czyli z socjologii literatury* (Sketches from "No Man's Land," or Studies in the Sociology of Literature), Toruń 2009, 121-189; J. Sowa, "Habitus pisarzy i pisarek" (The Habitus of Writers), in: *Literatura polska po 1989 roku w świetle teorii Pierre'a Bourdieu. Raport z badań* (Polish Literature After 1989 in the Light of the Theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Research Report), Kraków 2014, 163-235.

[29]See *Rancière Now. Current Perspectives on Jacques Rancière*, ed. O. Davis, Cambridge 2013, 137 and passim.

[30]See *Rancière Now*, 149. Emphasis added.

ment and emotions by challenging the criteria for the induction of cinema into high culture. It asserted that cinema's greatness did not lie in the metaphysical loftiness of its subject matter nor in the visibility of its plastic effects, but in the imperceptible difference in the way it puts traditional stories and emotions into images. Cinephiles named this difference mise-en-scène without really knowing what it meant. Not knowing what you love and why you love it is, so they say, the distinctive feature of passion."[31]

That is one side of the story of amateurs – written from the perspective of an amateur-admirer who becomes an innovator, not necessarily consciously. There is also a different version of the amateur story. Many contemporary aesthetic practices and theories strive to question the domination of "discourses of knowledge" by "viewer emancipation." At the horizon of this aesthetic path is located art that aims at breaking established aesthetic "divisions" and roles by ascribing viewers and readers the role of creators: "Twentieth-century art is often described in terms of the modernist paradigm that identifies the modern artistic revolution with the concentration of each art form on its own medium and opposes this concentration to the forms of market aestheticisation of life. We then witness the collapse in the 1960s of this modernity under the combined blows of political doubts about artistic autonomy and the invasion of market and advertisement forms."

The French thinker underscores: "The story of the defeat of modernist purity by the postmodernist attitude of 'anything goes' passes over the fact that in other places, like the cinema, this blurring of [art's] borders occurred in a more complex manner. Cinephilia has called into question the categories of artistic modernity, not by deriding high art, but by returning to a more intimate, more obscure interconnection between the marks of art, the emotions of the story and the discovery of the splendor that even the most ordinary spectacle could display on the bright screen in a dark cinema [...]. Thus it initiated a positive understanding, neither ironic nor disenchanted, of the impurity of art."[32]

The French scholar thus puts forward two theories of the contemporary "impurity of art" that posit the use of amateur work – its neo-avant-garde emancipation (transmission by current artists of their voice as well as their artistic practices to amateurs, negation of aesthetic hierarchies) and the practices of fans who combine what is common and what is intimate (also, we should add, what is traditional and what is innovative), inhabiting the border between art and everyday life.

Fan Fiction and the Culture of Everyday Life | This second way of understanding "amateur-ness" tends to perceive fan fiction as a literary practice belonging to the culture of everyday life. The complex interdependence of the intimate and the common, the aesthetic and the social in practices engaged in by creators of literary fan fiction demonstrate that view.

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[31] J. Rancière, "The Gaps of Cinema," trans. Walter van der Star, *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies, 2012, 1. Available online:* http://www.necsus-ejms.org/the-gaps-of-cinema-by-jacques-Rancière. The original French essay was the introduction to Rancière's book *Les Écarts du cinéma*.

[32] J. Rancière, "The Gaps of Cinema."

In this kind of literary practice, we observe the mechanism of the **experimental** transformation of literature (and art, generally) into something "ordinary" or "everyday." It becomes drawn out of its designated, defined, autonomous place into the space of the practices of the community of active reader-authors. On the other hand, the texts thus written become an element in the creation of social relations in fandom and a manifestation of personal artistic involvement, the exploitation of artistic communication for one's own ends. At the same time, situating them thus means that models of creating everyday life – literary practices of everyday life – are presented by authors whose works' status is unclear, works in essence partially linked to the domain of art (related to discourses of knowledge and official culture) and partially with private life and the non-artistic social practices of their authors. Let us keep in mind, however, that none of these mechanisms excludes the possibility of writers using fan practices in order to pursue their own economic goals.

Admirers of art (its amateur – "spectators") and amateur-creators have ambiguous relations with dominant conceptions and aesthetic orders. On the one hand, their active participation in spheres not fully defined by discourses of knowledge can create a counterbalance to the indifferent or exhausted voices of "professionals." On the other hand, fans of art and amateur-creators often – consciously or unconsciously – reveal traditional aesthetic attitudes or invoke dominant forms (deriving from mass or popular culture) of creative expression. Participating in popular culture, creating and co-creating content at the margins, in collaboration with or against institutions of the culture industry, authors of fan fiction constantly find themselves at the centre of disputes dealing with contemporary popular culture.

Fans and the Culture Industry | One of the most important topics in "fan studies" is the role of fans in the contemporary culture industry. This makes sense, since fans to a large extent assemble around works of popular culture that contribute to forming that industry. The industrial aspect referred to relates to both cultural production (relationships between fans and institutional mass communication) and economic relations. The terms consumption and presumption play a prominent role in studies devoted to the economic conditioning of fan culture. In the case of the latter term, the object of study is often the degree to which participants in culture become dependent on the economic interests of the purveyors of mass culture content.[33] Another important issue is the question of copyright in the context of the use of source material by authors of fan fiction.[34]

Questions concerning fan participation in the practices of global media institutions re-ignite the debate on the nature of contemporary popular culture. Certain scholars accentuate the mechanism of how mass communication is transformed by its audience: "Popular texts are inadequate in themselves—they are never self-sufficient structures of meanings [...] they are provokers of meaning and pleasure, they are completed only when taken up by people and in-

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[33]See J. Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in Lisa A. Lewis, ed., *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, London: Routledge, 2002, 30-49; S. Krawczyk, "Prosumpcja," 175-210; P. Siuda, Kultury prosumpcji. *O niemożności powstania globalnych i ponadpaństwowych społeczności fanów* (Cultures of Prosumption. On the Impossibility of the Emergence of Global or Supranational Fan Communities), Warszawa 2012.

[34]See D. Jankowiak, "*Fan fiction* – wolność czy samowola?" (Fan Fiction—Freedom or Lawlessness?); A. Czaplińska, P. Siuda, *Fandomy jako element ruchu społecznego „wolnej kultury", czyli prawo autorskie a produktywność fanów* (Fandoms as an Element of the "Free Culture" Movement, or Copyright and Fan Productivity).

serted into their everyday culture. The people make popular culture at the interface between everyday life and the consumption of the products of the cultural industries. The aim of this productivity is, therefore, to produce meanings that are relevant to everyday life."[35] To the extent that we can test whether "popular" meanings uphold the economic relations of power, or carry some kind of resistance, we cannot, according to Fiske, prove that the audiences that create popular culture are completely passive and powerless masses.

In *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins, referring to Michel de Certeau's concept of everyday life, wrote of how fans poach on the territory of popular culture. Fans oppose their everyday life tactics to the grand strategies of media consortia.

Lev Manovich has gone back to de Certeau's writings in order to bring them up to date with the realities of new media. In Manovich's *The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life* we read that the everyday life "invented" by de Certeau has undergone a profound transformation due to the development of the "Web 2.0" paradigm: "during the time since the publication *The Practice of Everyday Life*, companies have developed new kinds of strategies. These strategies mimic people's tactics of bricolage, re-assembly and remix. In other words: the logic of tactics has now become the logic of strategies. (…) Since [the] 1980s, however, consumer and culture industries have started to systematically turn every subculture (particularly every youth subculture) into products. In short, the cultural tactics evolved by people were turned into strategies now sold to them. If you want to 'oppose the mainstream,' you now had plenty of lifestyles available – with every subculture aspect, from music and visual styles to cloves and slang – available for purchase."[36].

Of course some scholars feel that the mechanism of commodification of amateur, audience or fan participation in culture operates throughout all of popular culture, not only its "Web 2.0" version. That is the gist of the narratives put forward by McGuinon[37] (and Fiske himself draws similar arguments from the Althusserian category of ideology or Gramsci's concept of hegemony[38]), who declares that the production of symbolic meanings, constituting individual cultural resistance against mass ideologies, is, in a broader reckoning, of very little use. In the global (globalizing) system of late capitalism, what matters above all is control of the means of consumption, and thus of economic relations.

<div align="right">Tomasz Umerle</div>

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[35] J. Fiske, *Reading the Popular*, London: Routledge, 2005, 6.

[36] L. Manovich, *The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life*. Available online at Manovich's website: http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/059-the-practice-of-everyday-media-life/56_article_2008.pdf. (last accessed: 15.03.2016).

[37] See J. Storey, "The politics of the Popular," in Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction*, Harlow, 2009, 213-246.

[38] See J. Fiske, *Reading the Popular*, 174 and passim.

KEYWORDS

fan fiction

FANS

ABSTRACT:

This keyword presents fan-produced literary work in the context of poetics, amateur literary production, and selected topics of cultural and media studies.

cyberculture

amateur literature

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Spoken-word poetry

In the Anglo-American tradition spoken word poetry is a specific kind of poetry intended for public performance or reading on stage. This outwardly simple English term is difficult to define (or translate), as it can be understood two ways – more broadly, as spoken poetry in general, which would include all oral poetic forms – performative, experimental and jazz poetry, but also – and perhaps primarily – hip hop; and more narrowly – as a particular contemporary poetry subgenre of American provenance, closely linked to poetry slams[1] – poetry performed for an audience, usually without accessories, musical or dance accompaniment.

Spoken word poetry in the narrower sense has gained popularity in the West since the second half of the 1980s, while in Poland it remains relatively unknown to this day. Curiously, the widespread popularity of spoken word has not translated into a proliferation of scholarly work on the subject.[2] That is because, as I will clarify later on, spoken word poetry is by nature, in its very roots and principles, an egalitarian, highly democratic and anti-academic phenomenon, not to say anti-intellectual, and at the same time, a phenomenon of pop culture, if not mass culture. Polish writers have yet to address the subject of spoken word poetry in the contemporary sense in which it is understood here.

When spoken word poetry has appeared in academic works, it has usually been in one of two contexts. The first consists of pedagogic works and school textbooks; according to scholars interested in the subject, such as Amy Borovoy, spoken word "can be a fantastic way to engage [our classes], to bring text alive, and to encourage student voice."[3] Shiv Raj Desai and Marsh Tyson express a similar belief in the possibilities for self-knowledge and self-expression offered by the study of spoken word poetry.[4] Spoken word poetry's functional value in education is also a theme of Maisha T. Fisher's *Writing in Rhythm: Spoken-word Poetry in Urban Classrooms* and Scott Herndon and Jen Weiss's *Brave New Voice: The YOUTH SPEAKS Guide to Teaching Spoken-word Poetry*. Reflections on the subject of spoken word poetry also figure in studies of orality in a literary context by scholars such as Dana Gioia, following in the footsteps of thinkers including Walter J. Ong. Gregory Nagy, on the other hand, writes about slam with reference to the traditions of antiquity.

Susan Somers-Willett notes the performative nature of spoken word poetry, which distinguishes it from straightforward oral communication. She writes that such poetry's reception involves not only hearing but, in fact, all of the senses, with the poem's enactment becoming

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[1] A poetry slam is a type of poetry contest. In the US the terms spoken word poetry and slam poetry are used interchangeably.

[2] More publications can be found on slam poetry, such as: *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and the Performance of Popular Verse in America* by Susan B. A. Somers-Willett or *Poetry Slam: The Competitive Art of Performance Poetry* by Gary Mex Glazner. In the Polish context, probably the most thorough study is the book *Najlepszy poeta nigdy nie wygrywa. Historia slamu w Polsce 2003-2012* (The Best Poet Never Wins. A History of Slam in Poland 2003-2012), edited by Agata Kołodziej.

[3] A. Borovoy, *Five-Minute Film Festival: The Power of Spoken Word Poetry*, Edutopia: What Works in Education. The George Lucas Educational Foundation, 11 April 2014.

[4] S.R. Desai, M. Tyson, "Weaving Multiple Dialects in the Classroom Discourse: Poetry and Spoken Word as a Critical Teaching Tool", *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education* 9.2 (2005), 71-90.

more important than its recitation.[5] Somers-Willett takes the position that spoken word poetry functions both in writing and on stage. Mark Otuteye likewise argues that spoken word goes beyond its verbal-textual layer: "With spoken word […]all that lives on the page are the lyrics. The music of the poem lives in the performer."

Putting aside references to its clear origin in antiquity,[6] some scholars also see certain beginnings of modern spoken word poetry in the 19th century, when public recitation of poems by performers other than the author enjoyed widespread popularity.[7] But the most important movements that advanced the development of spoken word poetry were the Harlem Renaissance and the Beat Generation. As H. Bernard Hall writes, "[w]hile each of these movements emerged from its own historical context, both transformed popular understandings of poetry […]."[8]

Beginnings | Harlem Renaissance is the name given to a sociocultural efflorescence of Afro-American culture (especially literature) that took place in the Harlem section of New York City in the 1920s. The Harlem Renaissance, also called the New Negro Renaissance, drew inspiration primarily from music developed by black musicians, i.e., jazz and blues, and from the culture and beliefs of Afro-Americans. The Harlem Renaissance period represented the beginning of the creation of a separate, independent identity among American blacks, beyond the discourse of slavery and discrimination. The possibility of telling one's experience out loud presented an opportunity for communicating personal, individual stories. In 1922, James Weldon Johnson was responsible for the release of *The Book of American Negro Poetry,* and in 1935 *The New Negro*, an anthology edited by Alain Locke, was published: its various texts included both essays and poetry, promoting equality and resistance to social injustice.

The Beat poets, for their part, "brought the 'fine arts' out of the 'Ivory Tower' and into coffeehouses, bars, and other underground venues."[9] The poets of the Beat Generation lay the foundations for a movement that would question white middle-class culture. They also spread the practice of reading poetry out loud. October 7, 1955 became an important day in literary history when the Six Gallery Reading was held in San Francisco: an evening poetry reading considered to be the first public appearance of the Beats (called "beatniks" by detractors, the suffix by implication slurring them as Communist sympathizers). There, beside such authors as Philip Lamantia and Michael McClure, Allen Ginsberg made his debut with the poem "Howl."

In the 1960s a new movement was born, called Black Art, christened thus by a poet linked to the Beat Generation, Amiri Baraka (originally published as LeRoi Jonesa); like the Harlem Renaissance, but considerably more radical, the Black Art Movement had deep roots in the struggle for civil rights for black Americans.

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[5] S. B. A. Somers-Willett, *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and the Performance of Popular Verse in America*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

[6] See M. K. Smith, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Slam Poetry,* New York: Alpha Books, 2004.

[7] L. Wheeler, *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008, 6.

[8] H. B Hall, *Origins of Spoken-word Poetry*, http://www.lessonpaths.com/learn/mmHosted/416178, (last accessed: 01.03.2016).

[9] H. B. Hall, *Origins of Spoken-word Poetry*, http://www.lessonpaths.com/learn/mmHosted/416178, (last accessed: 01.03.2016).

> This movement is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. [...] the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology. The Black Arts and the Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for selfdetermination and nationhood.[10]

This transformation of poetry and its form and the introduction of new themes had the purpose of reclaiming not only black poets' identity, but also Afro-American experience more generally, including through the use of their particular idiom and by evoking black culture and history and expanding the boundaries of black art beyond music, as well as connecting poetry with ideology. At stake was the power of self-expression, in voices other than those offered by so-called high culture, identified with the culture of the white majority. At the same time, the poetry of Afro-American authors became somehow more mainstream and accessible to a wider public. Despite developments in technology, performances in cafés continued to dominate, since publishers were reluctant to publish the work of poets affiliated with Black Arts due to their scandalous reputation or simply because their work was not recognized as a genuine form of art. Performers of that period such as Gil Scott-Heron or the collective of The Last Poets would later inspire the work of the first rappers.

The next turning-point came in approximately the mid-1980s, when the Chicago poet Marc Kelly Smith, a blue-collar worker by trade, organized the first poetry slam in the Green Mill Cocktail Lounge jazz club. A second slam was quick to follow, this time in New York at the Nuyorican Poets Café, which over time would become the most prestigious slam in the country and in the whole world. New York was then followed by San Francisco and other American cities. In 1990, Gary Mex Glazner organized the first-ever slam championships in the US, in San Francisco. In the 1990s, slam achieved increasing popularity, overseas as well.[11] At that point an important shift in engagement took place, as in addition to black poets, other marginalized minorities also made their poetic voices heard.

The first poetry slams were notable for their strong emphasis on social discontent and criticism of the existing situation. Voices of opposition to the current reality dominated as poets frequently expressed anger in their poems. The thematic range of poetry performed at slams in recent memory is broader, with poets often resorting to grotesque or comic subjects.

Slam in Poland, or "Come Shout at Some Poets!" | Slam made its way to Poland through the efforts of Bohdan Piasecki, who as a student of English had become aware of the phenomenon at London's Farrago Poetry Café, which had its own cult following. The first poetry slam in Poland took place on 15 March 2003 in Warsaw at the Stara ProchOFFnia. Among the poets who participated were Wojciech Cichoń, Konrad Lewandowski, Piotr Bonisławski, Anna Bartosiewicz and Jan Kapela, who was finally selected as the winner. Later, further slam evenings were organized elsewhere, in such places as Galeria Off, Fabryka Trzciny or, eventually, Plan Be. Slam quickly spread to other cities as well. With the growth of

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[10]L. Neal, "The Black Arts Movement", *The Drama Review* 1968, vol. 12, no. 4, 29.

[11]It is generally accepted that the first poetry slam in Europe was held in London in 1994 at the initiative of John Paul O'Neill.

slam's popularity, its conventions were treated with increasing playfulness, as anti-slams, for example, were organized, at which the worst poems won. In 2005 the festival Spoke'N'Word was launched, drawing the best spoken word poets from around the country and abroad. It is now one of the largest events of that type in Europe.

Though poetry slams were relatively slow to come to Poland, and arrived as a borrowing – via Great Britain – from American culture, the institution was not simply transferred whole cloth to Polish soil. Polish slam does not function in some kind of void apart from other culture. As Joanna Jastrzębska has written, slam in its Polish hypostasis draws abundantly from local literary tradition.

> [C]ontemporary slam is built from elements that are familiar parts of Polish literary life. Among these, in my view, we could list the eighteenth-century contests for the best poem, the improvisations performed by poets in literary salons, cabaret artistic productions, café gatherings of literary bohemia, and also public performances by members of literary circles in the interwar years. In that context, slam can be perceived as a successive link in the development of literature-related performative activity.[12]

In the eyes of Justyna Orzeł, on the other hand, Polish slam is distinguished not so much by the focus on rivalry or the figure of a particular "slamer" (Polish slang for a slam champion), as the creation of a "temporary community." Orzeł therefore states that "Polish slam puts into practice the idea of the democratization of poetry and opens that space for contexts outside literature."[13]

Slam has given rise to a wide range of emotions, some mutually contradictory, in Poland as elsewhere.[14] As early as 2004, an enthusiastic article appeared in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, written by Igor Stokfiszewski, in which he wrote:

> Slam poetry presents a chance to prove that poetry can function in the Polish reality of the early twenty-first century as an equal partner to television, print weeklies, and computer consoles, without losing its role in the creation of culture.[15]

Jerzy Jarniewicz wrote an article in response to Stokfiszewski, expressing a much higher degree of skepticism; Jarniewicz reproached slam for a lack of innovation ("it has all been done long ago and much better"), commercialism, and a free-market mentality; he compared slam to boxing, where the pleasure of victory is "not so much the satisfaction of public recognition as the joy of knocking out your opponent." He went on to add: "Slam is the quintessence of

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[12]J. Jastrzębska, "(R)ewolucja performatywna zjawisk scenicznych. Od salonu do slamu" (The Performative [R] evolution in Stage Presentations. From Salon to Slam), in *Najlepszy poeta nigdy nie wygrywa. Historia slamu w Polsce 2003-2012* (The Best Poet Never Wins. A History of Slam in Poland 2003-2012), ed. A. Kołodziej, Kraków: Rozdzielczość Chleba, 2013, 195.

[13]J. Orzeł, "Współzależności i uzależnienia. Slam, czyli...?" (Co-dependences and Addictions. Slam, or...?), in: *Najlepszy poeta nigdy nie wygrywa*, 240.

[14]Harold Bloom pronounced slam to be "the death of art." Lawrence Ferlinghetti (one of the original Beats) spoke in a similar tone of how slam was "killing poetry."

[15]I. Stokfiszewski, "Poetry slams zdobywają coraz większą popularność" (Poetry Slams Gain Increasing Popularity), in *Najlepszy poeta nigdy nie wygrywa*, 19.

the culture of impatience, in which I perceive a need for [...] clear, unambiguous hierarchies." Jarniewicz's critique concluded with the statement that "slam, the poetry of instant gratification, is an escape from time. That brings it dangerously close to such spectacles of contemporary culture as karaoke, botox, boy bands, or bio-renewal laboratories."[16]

Poetics | It is fairly obvious that spoken word poetry incorporates elements of theater. Because of that, the audience and their interaction with the poet is more important than the poet himself. At the same time, poetry slams are highly democratic – in the sense that the audience members perform the function of judges, so that slams are self-regulating, subject to internal control (although naturally a whole list of external rules are also applied, and in recent years special institutions have arisen whose purpose is to formalize slam procedures). The interaction with the audience becomes all the more important for that reason.

Spoken word poems typically possess certain traits as a result of the specific nature of this kind of poetry. Firstly, a certain length is essential – during poetry slams, poets must comply with an exact maximum limitation of three and a half minutes. Since a spoken word poem in a certain sense takes place only in the "here and now," its form must fit into a certain unit of time, a unit bearable for the audience. The poem's rhythm, and a certain kind of "flow," are also important elements, although free verse, with a narrative thrust, is the prevalent form.

Spoken word poems typically have short stanzas. Among its stylistic features, metaphor dominates, and spoken word poets also tend to employ alliteration, wordplay, repetition, and shouting; there can also be singing, homophony, onomatopoeia, etc.; rhyme is used relatively rarely.

The egalitarian nature of spoken word poetry dictates that it must be relatively simple and account for the average listener's competencies. Spoken word poems should be understandable the first time they are listened to or watched. For that reason, the subject matter of spoken word poetry is often focused on a single image or experience. Another crucial feature of spoken word poetry is that these poems often deal with important contemporary events, commenting on the existing current social reality, of pressing importance to their particular audience. The temporal aspect of these poems, their grounding in the now, appears to be one of the most significant features of spoken word poetry, setting it apart from other genres.

It is important to remember that the winning poems are those the public can identify with. Poet and educator Sarah Kay underscores the role of spoken word poetry in providing at least the opportunity to express the writer's individual experience and speaking to the listeners' or spectators' experience as well.[17] Spoken word poetry typically involves a specific kind of closeness between author and lyrical persona, spoken word poems are written in the first person, most often about personal life experiences from the perspective of the "I" who is the performer. A confessional mode or aspect is thus a dominant feature, as well as themes of equality, discrimination, hate, social injustice, and so on.

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[16] J. Jarniewicz, "Slam, czyli wiersze na ringu" (Slam, or Poems in the Ring), in *Najlepszy poeta nigdy nie wygrywa*, 26.

[17] TED talk, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0snNB1yS3IE, (last accessed: 01.03.2016).

As poets strive to establish their authenticity, the manner of expression used plays an important role – they rely on colloquial language, often using profanity, and the use of dialect, slang or a particular accent is also important in underscoring their sense of identity and affiliation. Spoken word poems are often marked by a certain kind of drama, a tone of protest and opposition, not to say rage, less frequently met in other kinds of poetry. Each performance by the poet is an emotional enactment on stage rather than a passive recital. At the same time, the poets never use props, which are forbidden in poetry slams. Among those listening to spoken word poetry, recognition is awarded for directness of communication and spontaneity in delivery. Yet the poet is always addressing an imagined, hypothetical audience as well.[18]

As was mentioned earlier, spoken word poetry, due to its strong links with Afro-American culture, constituted a political act from its beginnings: a form of preserving identity through narrative. Thus, poems enjoy great acclaim when they present the authentic, believable identity of the performer. Most often, the identity of the marginalized is perceived as "real": in the American context, Afro-American identity has for years represented a marginalized category. In recent times, discourses of marginalization have expanded to include the subject of gender, sexual orientation, sexuality more generally, feminist voices, and themes of mental illness and the stigma associated with it.

Media Presence | In the years 2002-2007, HBO transmitted a program devoted to spoken word poetry called *Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry*, in which the best-known poets of the genre performed, as well as pioneers such as The Last Poets or Amir Baraka, both mentioned above.[19] On the program, slam poets also made guest appearances, and spoken word poets who have distanced themselves, or kept their distance, from slam.

The Internet has exerted a significant influence on the rise in the popularity of spoken word poetry. There are currently many websites devoted to publishing spoken word poetry in the form of video recordings. Many poems are also published on YouTube via channels specially dedicated to that purpose. One of the most well-known is Button Poetry, where many excerpts of poems presented at various poetry slams are available to watch. The number of hits (over eleven million) on the recording of Neil Hilborn's poem OCD, the most popular video on that channel, testifies to the medium's reach. Other platforms such as TED talks have also repeatedly promoted some poet-performers. A talk given by Sarah Kay, whom I mentioned above, on the subject of writing and teaching spoken word poetry, followed by her performance of the poem "If I Should Have a Daughter," garnered three million clicks on YouTube alone. Channels belonging to particular poets have also enjoyed great popularity. These are particularly interesting in that they present both classic readings of poems, i.e. by the authors on stage, and transformations of poetic works into animated films with graphics and music, a striking example of which is the film of Shane Koyczan's poem "To This Day," recipient of eighteen million hits to this date.

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[18]Somers-Willett observes that paradoxically, while diversity reigns among poets, the audience of spoken word poetry is, generally speaking, mostly white, which can lead to a kind of fetishization of the poet as a person and the transformation of his/her performance, in the consciousness of that audience, into a kind of circus act.

[19]The program itself has received mixed reviews from poets. Marc Kelly Smith accused it of commercializing poetry slams, among other things.

Spoken word is poetry which has abandoned the area of private reading. It is important to note that orality has often been identified with the primitive, and thought to be in some way second-rate compared to writing, hence the depreciation of the role of spoken word. We should observe that in many people's experience – including literature scholars – reading poetry out loud is perceived as flattening it, reducing it to one dimension. Spoken word poetry has moved poetry from the pages of books or the groves of academe to the coffeehouse stage, the pub, the bar, as well as TV and audio or video recording. The spoken word genre questions the existing order. Furthermore, it has a strictly communitarian nature, it is poetry of the downtrodden, returning their voice to those who have been deprived of it. Spoken word poetry also constitutes a fascinating literary phenomenon because it is pluralistic, inclusive, and intersectional in character. Moreover, it raises the meaning of poetry as poetry, endowing it with a new relevance as it becomes a vehicle for expressing **regular** people's experience (i.e. the experience of each and every person), particularly insofar as the flourishing of this form and the birth of poetry slams took place at a moment of the crisis and death – at least officially – of genres and related institutions in literary studies. Spoken word poetry revitalizes the question of whether poetry *per se* exists at the ontological level, on the one hand giving poetry back its seemingly forgotten public aspect (furthermore, slam harkens back to the tradition of poetic rivalries), on the other transcending classical views of poetry as an elite and hermetic art form, designated for reading in an intimate setting, instead bringing it into the multimedia, multisensorial system of reception. But is that, perhaps, exactly what intimacy looks like in our time?

Aleksandra Szymił

Keywords | Abstract | Note on the Author ● ● ●

KEYWORDS

oral poetry

s p o k e n   w o r d   p o e t r y

slam

Abstract:

The purpose of the article is to describe the contemporary phenomenon of "spoken word poetry" for a Polish audience. The first part presents the origins of this type of poetry, showing the influence of such movements as the Harlem Renaissance, the Beat Generation, and Black Art, as well as the role and development of poetry slams in the US and Poland. The second part deals with the specific nature of spoken word poetry as a genre, revealing its typical features: its performative aspect, structure, themes, and function. The third part of the paper provides an analysis of the forms of this poetry's media presence, whether on television or the Internet, and elsewhere.

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Edward Balcerzan's Multimedia Theory of Genres

Its Conditions and Perspective

Dariusz Pawelec

Edward Balcerzan announced his "multimedia theory of genres" project in September 1999, during the Twenty-Ninth Literary Theory Conference in Cieszyn. A paper that took the form of an outline for the project appeared in print in 2000, and was then included in Balcerzan's book *Literackość* (Literariness) in 2013. The name for the proposed new discipline would, Balcerzan announced, be "a metaphor for the present," but he also called it "a certain branch of semiotics", "analyzing and systematizing the consequences for genre studies of the existence of many different media in the space of culture."[1] The present-time of the metaphor is here of course evoked by the concept of multimedia tools, differentiated by Balcerzan from media "identified with institutions of mass communication."[2] In his understanding, the meaning of the proposed term refers to binding language custom ("today's expansive, freighted word"):

> People talk nowadays about educational multimedia tools, such as computer textbooks and encyclopedias (of the universe, of history, of nature), which in the course of opening up virtual reality communicate with the written word, illustrations, photographs, reproductions, quotations from documentary or feature films, still and animated images, speak with a human or animal voice or that of instrumental music, or the roar of the big bang.[3]

Multimedia productions, Balcerzan adds, citing the definition from the *Dictionary of Literary Terms*, "have been called artistic works *par excellence*," including as they do "presentations that simultaneously use means from various artistic disciplines and diverse forms of communication; combining music, poetry, theater, and the plastic arts, and making use of techniques and technologies from film and television; slides; sound, light and electronic equipment; me-

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chanical appliances; mobile figures, mirrors, and screens; cranes; trapdoors; and more.)"[4] In the same year that Edward Balcerzan's outline appeared, an expanded edition of Władysław Kopaliński's *Dictionary of Foreign Words* was published which linked multimedia phenomena strictly with computers. In its formulation, multimedia would refer to: "the use of a various number of various means of relaying information by means of a computer equipped with appropriate peripheral devices (speakers and an optical disk reader)." Like Balcerzan, Kopaliński gives the example of a multimedia encyclopedia which "allows the user simultaneously to listen to a composer's music while watching the screen display photographs of him, the musical score being played or the orchestra performing, or reading his biography."[5]

Adhering to these definitions, which quickly become obsolete, especially in terms of the technical aspects they refer to, would not permit us to grasp the essence of Balcerzan's concept. A powerful "metaphor for the present" is more important than the precision of the scholarly term incorporated within it. So what lies at the root of the term? Above all, the historical poetics of the author of *Literackość*, understood as "the story of a search for new neighboring countries"[6] for the borders of literature. Balcerzan in fact professes to believe in these "borders of literature." Nevertheless, he knows that to believe in the possibility of demarcating these boundaries in language would be a mistake: "purely linguistic criteria turn out to be inadequate, and that is due to the double affiliation of literature: with language, but also with the world of the arts."[7] Thus, just as the "material distinctions" among various semiotic orders are obvious, as determined by the suggestiveness of the "energy of the material" out of which "signs are made," so "their particular functions demand theory and interpretation – always contentious."[8] Already earlier in his influential "situational" genre studies project, Balcerzan pointed out the limits on linguistic models of genre as a factor in the creation of forms:

Sometimes, as anthropological analyses of surviving primitive cultures show, the poetic text itself, seen in relation to natural language, has no meaning; it is composed from meaningless words, from foreign borrowings, contains compound constructions that are, so to speak, unrecognizable in the system of colloquial speech – and yet its meaning can be 'understood,' because we can understand a situation in which it is acceptable to speak that way, to use precisely that form of utterance.[9]

The perception of meaning is thus dependent on a comprehension of the situation in which a work arises, rather than comprehension of its words. The situational origin of genres, demonstrated by Balcerzan with the example of genre transformations in interwar poetry, simultaneously creates

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[4] Ibid. The passage quotes the definition of "multimedia" from the third edition of the dictionary, edited by Janusz Sławiński and published in 1998.

[5] W. Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych*, Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 2000, 339.

[6] E. Balcerzan, "Granice literatury, granice historii, granice granic" (Borders of Literature, Borders of History, Borders of Borders), in: *Polonistyka w przebudowie* (Polish Studies Under Reconstruction), vol. 1, ed. M. Czermińska. Kraków 2005, 319.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] E. Balcerzan, "Systemy i przemiany gatunkowe w polskiej liryce lat 1918-1928" (Genre Systems and Transformations in Polish Poetry 1918-1928), in: *Problemy literatury polskiej lat 1890-1939* (Problems of Polish Literature in the Period 1890-1939), ed. H. Kirchner, M. R. Pragłowska, Z. Żabicki. 2nd Series. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974, 154.

an advantageous perspective for examining the newest developments in literature. The "situation-al theory of genres," open to "new verbal situations" (newspaper, radio, film) and to the need for "studying the connections between different genres of communicative systems,"[10] undoubtedly constitutes the starting point for understanding the concept of a New Theory of Genres called multimedial. Its designer intended for it to be "a theory and simultaneously an art of interpret-ing three basic intentions that are present in the inexhaustible abundance of written forms: the reportorial intention, the essayistic intention, and the feuilletonistic intention."[11] The genres thus constituted (reportage, essay, feuilleton) are treated as models designating the range of properties in which diverse artistic utterances take part. In developing this idea, Edward Balcerzan acknowl-edged that the generic paradigms he differentiated "go beyond the monomedial borders of writing (or speech) and can be treated as having pursuing parallel development within other codes and media."[12] Because the constitutive traits of the multimedia quasi-genres named " are present not only in texts that fit into the genres of reportage, essay, or feuilleton,"[13] but the energies that form them also operate in music, painting, architecture, and so on. These energies are both "construc-tive particularities, as well as implied content, comprising the image of the subject, or defining (each time in a dramatically different way) the relationship of the 'I' within the text to the world, the cultural code, and finally, to the audience."[14]

Balcerzan distinguishes the features that decide whether a cultural text is dominated by "feuil-letonistic ambition," "reportorial direction," or "essayistic impetus." He finds that: "the basic form of a text that matches the reportorial intention is the bulletin [...] informing about the factual state of affairs";[15] "the essence of the essayistic intention" is defined, for its part, with a quotation from Szymborska: "questions posed to oneself," whereas the embryonic form of texts with an essayistic bent is the aphorism;[16] "the element of the genre called the feuilleton is language as a storehouse of stereotypes," and the substance of texts belonging to the feuil-letonistic paradigm consists "of cultural customs and the common creeds contained therein," "the simplest form here is the language joke" and other kinds of humour.[17] The reportorial intention can most easily be grasped in the many different manifestations of veristic, natural-istic, and realistic art (for example painted portraiture or historical scenes), or more generally in all struggles with mimesis, whereas it is hardest to recognize in music (Balcerzan here gives the examples of "roots music," "musique concrète," and "reportage from the phonosphere")[18] He sees the essayistic intention carried out "both in expository prose, dramas, or novels full of 'essential conversations' in Witkacy's words," as well as in the films of Federico Fellini and the paintings of Edvard Munch, Pablo Picasso, and Jerzy Nowosielski.[19] In the feuilleton category,

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[10]E. Balcerzan: "W stronę genologii multimedialnej", 86.

[11]E. Balcerzan: "Nowe formy w pisarstwie i wynikające stąd porozumienia" (New Forms in Writing and the Resulting Understanding) in: *Humanistyka przełomu wieków* (The Humanities at the Turn of the Century), ed. J. Kozielecki. Warszawa: Żak, 1999, 376-377.

[12]Ibid, 97.

[13]Ibid, 98.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid, 99.

[16]Ibid, 99-100.

[17]Ibid, 101.

[18]Ibid, 99.

[19]Ibid, 100.

the author names, among other things, graphic jokes, caricatures, film gags, burlesques, and all types of parody, whether in the plastic arts, theatre, film, music, or forms of advertising.[20]

Edward Balcerzan poses a rhetorical question in the field of genre studies: "Will this multi-medial triad of quasi-genres encompass all cultural forms and texts, without exception?"[21] In their encounter with empiria, he observes, certain texts "fall outside" the system, and "force us to multiply exceptions from the rule, to set aside problematic forms of existence."[22] In reflecting on the completeness of Balcerzan's proposal, it would be worthwhile, I think, to raise a question concerning the place of traditional generic paradigms in his program for a New Theory of Genres.[23] The main question is whether the "multimedial triad" is intended to replace the traditional triad entirely, or is merely a supplement to it; or perhaps they intersect? Or whether one of the chosen traditional literary genres, treated again as a "model," cannot be seen to complete the set of intentions he designates (reportorial, feuilletonistic, essayistic)? In my view, poetry would have the most to offer in this regard, as it designs "particularities of construction, and implied content," seemingly barely present in Balcerzan's multimedial triad. An argument in favour of such a solution can be found in, for example, the work of Seweryna Wysłouch, who examines the influence of multimedia phenomena on literature from a perspective somewhat opposite to Balcerzan's. His perspective suggests that we "not resign from the traditional generic triad, but de-historicize it," in view of the multimedia sphere's attack on literary genres. Wysłouch illustrates the "erosion of genres under the influence of multimedia" using the example of the drama, which "crumbled" first, presaging in some measure the fate of the epic. "It seems," she continues "that poetry got the least painful treatment from the [new] media."[24] Looking in the other direction, from a point of view concurring with that presented in *Literackość*, poeticism or "lyricism" remains the clear ambition, intention, and driving force of many nonverbal cultural texts. To illustrate, I will cite a phrase often used in musical criticism: "lyricism in its purest form." The lyrical nature of Chopin's music, for example, is unquestioned and indisputable. Similarly, we often speak of encountering lyricism in painting or photography. No one is surprised to see a feature film called a "lyrical story."

In considering perspectives on Edward Balcerzan's multimedial genre theory, we should also refer to his concept of "transmutation" or "intersemiotic translation," which posits that "a text formed within the boundaries of one system (e.g. painting) and reconstructed in the material of another system (e.g. poetry) loses specifically painterly and acquires specifically poetic properties."[25] On the one hand, we have a "linguification of experiences" from other forms of art in the literary work (for example in the form of ekphrasis), on the other – a de-verbalization of,

[20]Ibid, 101.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid.

[23]I raise some questions here that I have previously asked in relation to Balcerzan's proposal in another piece. See D. Pawelec, "Sytuacja gatunku – genologia sytuacyjna" (The Situation of the Genre—Situational Genre Theory), in: *Od tematu do rematu. Przechadzki z Balcerzanem* (From Theme to Rheme. Strolls with Balcerzan), ed. T. Mizerkiewicz, A. Stankowska. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2007, 513.

[24]See S. Wysłouch, "Nowa genologia – rewizje i reinterpretacje" (New Theory of Genres – Revisions and Reinterpretations), in: *Polonistyka w przebudowie*, 105-107.

[25]E. Balcerzan, "Poezja jako semiotyka sztuki" (Poetics as a Semiotics of Art), in: *Pogranicza i korespondencje sztuk* (Boundaries and Correspondences Between the Arts), ed. T. Cieślikowska, J. Sławiński, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1980, 28.

for example, poetry in the language of painting or music. An excellent example of the complexity of such an intersemiotic relationship is the "attempt at impossible music" in Witold Wirpsza's *Don Juan*, cited by Balcerzan; its poetic construction is governed by hidden musical models: "what is more, these were models both of sound structures and graphic images", "translation of sound into a graphic chart" and "of a graphic chart into a configuration of words and sentences."[26]

Many works' design aspire to more than merely being a translation between sign systems and using language as an intermediary. From ancient times, we have merely to think of the tradition of *technopaegnia* and *carmen figuratum*, continued with the development of concrete poetry. As we can see in the map of genres in, for example, "Podróż zimowa" (Winter Journey) by Stanisław Barańczak, which coexists with the eponymous Schubert melody that inspired it (the initial musical notation is placed above each corresponding poetic fragment); did not the author himself suggest that "readers will get the most out of the poem if, before or while reading it, they listen to one of the available recordings of *Winterreise*"[27]? Where would Witold Wirpsza's "Komentarze do fotografii The Family of Man" (Commentaries to the Family of Man Photographs), in which poetic documentation does not limit itself to ekphrasis and the accompanying photograph does not present a convenient "reading scenario" but rather creates a coherent whole with the poem, fit into the traditional theory of genres? These examples come from very traditional cycles and "transmissions." A separate and enormous problem is presented in this regard by works created using computers and the internet, including, obviously, games. That is why the challenge facing multimedial genre theory consists not only in studying "mechanisms of transmutation" (in both directions, in the relationship between literature and the other arts) or witnessing the intersection of genre forms from various planets of the semiosphere, but also in understanding works of literature and the multi-textured, heterogeneous "hermenutical phenomena" they represent.

[26]E. Balcerzan, *Poezja polska w latach 1939-1965.* (Polish Poetry in the Years 1939-1965), Part 2, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagnew bne, 1988, 201.

[27]S. Barańczak, "Od Autora" (Author's Note), in: *Podróż zimowa* (Winter Journey), Poznań: a5, 1994, 7.

KEYWORDS | ABSTRACT | NOTE ON THE AUTHOR ● ● ●

KEYWORDS

Edward Balcerzan

LITERARY GENRES

quasi-types

multimedia theory of genres

Abstract:

This article discusses Edward Balcerzan's concept of a "multimedia theory of genres," intended by him to function as a "metaphor for the present," representing a division of semiotics that would analyze and systematize the consequences for the study of genres of many different forms of expression in cultural space. The concept of "multimedia" is given consideration in the context of this proposed application. The author of the essay presents Balcerzan's concept in the context of his earlier proposals within the sphere of genre theory and correspondences between or among the arts, at the same time contemplating some possible approaches to supplementing and further developing this theoretical concept.

Note on the Author:

Dariusz Pawelec is a Professor at the Institute of Polish Literature at Silesian University. His published books include: *Poezja Stanisława Barańczaka. Reguły i konteksty* (The Poetry of Stanisław Barańczak. Rules and Contexts, 1992), *Lingwiści i inni. Przewodnik po interpretacjach wierszy współczesnych* (Linguists and Others. A Guide to Interpreting Contemporary Poetry, 1994), *Czytając Barańczaka* (Reading Barańczak, 1995), *Debiuty i powroty. Czytanie w czas przełomu* (Débuts and Returns. Reading in a Time of Change, 1998), *Świat jako Ty. Poezja polska wobec adresata w drugiej połowie XX wieku* (The World as You. Polish Poetry and the Addressee in the Second Half of the 20th Century, 2003), *Od kołysanki do trenów. Z hermeneutyki form poetyckich* (2006), *Wirpsza wielokrotnie* (From Lullaby to Lamentations. Studies in Hermeneutics of Poetic Forms, 2013). He is the editor of the anthologies: *Powiedz prawdę. Antologia poezji pokolenia `68* (Tell the Truth. An Anthology of the Poetry of the Generation of '68, 1990), *Martwe punkty. Antologia poezji „Na Dziko"* (1994-2003) (Standstills. An Anthology of Poetry "In the Wild" [1994-2003], 2004, also published in Czesch and Slovak translations). He edited the following books of Witold Wirpsza's poetry: *Sonata i inne wiersze do roku 1956* (Sonata and Other Poems for the Year 1956, 2014) and *Listy z oflagu* (Letters from an Officer's POW Camp, 2015).

Tomasz Mizerkiewicz

Sandy Baldwin's
The Internet Unconscious
and Theories of the Unconscious in Electronic Writing

The title of Sandy Baldwin's book *The Internet Unconscious. On the Subject of Electronic Literature*,[1] published last year, suggests that reflections on writers of e-literature and hypertext or algorithmic works are in store for the reader. Such works have a growing circle of close readers who use a remarkably specialized metalanguage, joining terms from poetics with numerous concepts created solely to fit this newly emergent artistic domain, as well as extremely abundant terminology from programming and computer technology. This unavoidable linguistic conglomeration, requiring staggering qualifications, sometimes gives the impression of an exclusive coterie jargon for the initiated, but as we quickly learn upon opening the book, Baldwin has spared readers much of the annoyance relating to such jargon; his book does not deal with electronic literature as described above, but with the writing performed by each and every Internet user. He pronounces the script activity deployed by all e-mailing, tweeting or in-logging subjects to be

a new kind of writerly practice, out of which new forms of literature are issuing or can issue. The title's promise of illuminating online script practices through psychoanalytic theory, offering a chance for new knowledge of the unconscious to accrue from electronic writing, makes Baldwin's project that much more attractive.

The book's egalitarian vision of electronic writing invites readers to learn about certain elements of the computer and IT engineering that participate in the literature developing via Internet user activity. The point is to become acquainted with the apparatus hidden beneath the carefully cultivated impression that using the net is a natural or intuitive process. Thanks to his very accessible scientific description, electronic "lovers of literature," as Baldwin calls them, can learn, for example, how their online activity and electronic communication are mediated by the program Ping, which checks the quality of internet connections (Baldwin even writes of "Ping poetics"). Readers will likewise learn about the command that changes access permissions to Chmod-777 files, plaintext, and leetspeak, an alternative alphabet used

[1] S. Baldwin, *The Internet Unconscious. On the Subject of Electronic Literature*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2015.

to sneak past internet prohibitions (for example against vulgarisms) which is evolving at lightning speed to keep up with the hacker vernacular.

Its propaedeutic value is merely a fringe benefit of the tale Baldwin has to tell; his primary task is to define the subject of electronic literature in two ways at the same time, both of which relate differently to the question of the unconscious. Firstly, there is the subject of ecstatic writing, who is revealed through the love of literature that is exploding with new and unexpected force in our time. Baldwin observes that the emergence, in relation to this subject, of a literariness still not fully mastered attracts attention from all web users and constitutes a conscious or, more often, unconscious impulse toward electronic writing. Secondly, however, the same subject, who belongs to the circle of "lovers of literature," is simultaneously seized by the mechanisms of technological control referred to above; his activity is constantly subject to regulations of programs, protocols, files, tests, rendering him a Foucaultian subject located in a particular place and hired to perform activities that bring profits to someone else. Seen from this perspective, the "lover of literature," due to his imaginative overinvestment relating to the hope he sees in online writing, propels forward – consciously or unconsciously – the various business interests of managers and system administrators. His body should be seen as a "zombie shell" passively adapting to the demands and commands of electronic devices, since in fact it only does what particular monitoring programs permit. In this tangle of new hopes and new traps, we find the literariness of electronic writing, which Baldwin is trying to define more precisely.

The first sentence of the book heralds the problem of ecstatic writing: "As if I wrote the Internet […]." A similar hallucination reveals the power of the illusions that lead to the overexcitability of contemporary writers on the web. The ease and accessibility of writing, and of sending or publishing what we write, has opened the gates to a gargantuan rise in scripting. The hordes of writers whose collective behavior Baldwin describes feel themselves to be creators of the text of the Internet, and are turning the Internet into their literary work. Baldwin's emphasis on this singular relationship between online writers and the Internet is one of the book's main assets. Steeped in their passion for writing, these practitioners of cyberscript daily reach a level of intensity in their writing process that was previously known chiefly to those professionally engaged in producing verbal art. That leads to questions, provoked by the nature of the interface, about the presence or absence of the addressee, to whom the text is directed. The imagination of these writers is activated by the image of the Great Beyond that lies just beyond the surface of the screen. Yet Baldwin here for some unknown reason overlooks the psychoanalytical discourse on the uncanny, which would clearly be helpful in defining the situation he has been examining and its ramifications for the subject. The uncanny is involved when, as Baldwin notes, the words appearing in front of the web script user on the screen are simultaneously elsewhere, are sort of his but also someone else's, and also when our own "somewhere" and our own "otherness" are sending messages "everywhere."

Moreover, the work that materializes in this "somewhere" is subject to the deconstructive work of de-semination. Baldwin elucidates the main parameters of the electronic literature written by each ordinary Internet user by means of Derridean categories. Towards the end of the book he clearly states that the activity of those who write, who are losing their right to the text, to its singularity, to sign it with their names, possesses a few modest traits that elude the distorting processes of their dispossession from literature. Above all, they play according to the principles of the Derridean secret – they co-create literature understood as a secret, they acknowledge the secrecy that makes written literature possible, but because they themselves do not know that secret (for then it would be none), nobody can ultimately disinherit them of their right to its mystery. The secret circulates freely in their writing. Baldwin says the same thing, *mutatis mutandis*, with regard to the reclamation of intimacy by those logged in to *Second Life*, and the situation is very similar when it comes to thinking about the Internet as a literary work, since that work is rescued by the logic, familiar from Derrida's essay on Jabès, of the advent of a book outside the book.

Up to a point. Actually, the little *ex anima* deconstructionist salvation of the writers of internet literature produced

at the ending reveals the weakness of Baldwin's project more than any of its strengths. I would define my main reservation about his proposal in the following terms: the project is too deconstructionist, and not psychoanalytical enough. An ill-disposed reader might even complain that *The Internet Unconscious* contains a lot of fairly obvious assertions about the subject who logs into programs, sends electronic letters, passes CAPTCHA tests, together with loose essayistic remarks in the manner of De Man or Derrida's writings. In fact, the book does not take us far beyond the horizon demarcated by post-Structuralism with Foucault's critique of systemic power and the panopticon, with the distorting concepts of all kinds of essentializing illusions about the subject and writing and the hopes, typical for late Deconstructionism, invested in plans for literature as secret, friendship and hospitality. Perhaps in the end some reflections that extracted more radical conclusions from the writings of Derrida would allow the book to get past this all-too-familiar and today strikingly inert and stale paradigm.

The critical analysis promised in the title of the unconscious of electronic literature's subject boils down to some eclectic use of selected psychoanalytical concepts. They pop up extemporaneously as references to Freud's work on mourning and melancholia, Bellmer's extravagant (and fascinating) ideas on the unconscious of the body, Kristeva's *chora* and her concept of the abject, Lacan's belief that the unconscious is (structured) "like a language." Furthermore, the subject of the "Internet Unconscious" mentioned in the title is a paraphrase of a term from a well-known work by Rosalind Krauss, who wrote of the "optical unconscious" of the modernist artist. Something unexpected has occurred, then – the book's crucial question of the subject of the "Internet Unconscious" managed to get discussed without any reference or response whatsoever to the many existing theories of the unconscious as it operates in the subject functioning in cyberspace. And the truth is that it is something of a commonplace in today's humanities classes that the subject of online activity is enmeshed in specially structured desires, fantasies, virtualities or identity masks (avatars), in descriptions of which various forms of psychoanalytical thought and their terminologies occupy a privileged place.

To clarify the consequences of this astonishing omission, let us consider one of the oldest books to analyze the unconscious of the active (again, writing) subject online. In *The Plague of Fantasies*,[2] published in 1997, Slavoj Žižek perversely remarks that the subject overinvesting his existence in cyberspace is usually not tormented by anxieties of being too phantom (or "zombie" in Baldwin's terms), but rather of not being phantom enough. This means that the web not only sweeps us toward a virtual state, but introduces new rules by which a newly intensified conflict is played out between the mechanisms of fantasy and confrontations with non-virtual experience, which disrupt these mechanisms. Other psychoanalytic theorists of cyberspace cited by Žižek underscore that the difference between the virtual and "real" worlds is not nearly as important as the tension – more difficult to grasp but singularly alive in the experience of online subjectivity – between phenomena and semblances of them. A semblance, which is a form of virtuality, is submerged in an illusory self-contained presence in the worlds depicted, whereas a phenomenon represents a reflection of something, whose extraction from it requires at least a minimum amount of thought, requiring us to maintain a modicum of distance from it and be prepared to engage it critically. This approach also proves useful for thinking about the subject of electronic literature, which may not necessarily always imaginatively overinvest in its writing, but is sometimes not so much absorbed by the online semblance of simulated worlds, as attentively observing how the an internet phenomenon can provoke writing which remains intense but also be simultaneously critical, revelatory, and creatively formulate subjective existence in an electronic context.

Žižek's further reflections are also instructive. He reformulates Wittgenstein's maxim "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" as "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must write." The writing of electronic literature is revealed in this perspective as an opportunity not only to express matters that are too intimate or too painful, but to relay them to the addressee in a conversation. Žižek has in mind primarily the relationship of the person writing to his most internalized

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[2] Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London: Verso, 1997. See in particular the sections "Cyberspace, Or, the Unbearable Closure of Being," 127-171.

and unconscious prohibitions and limitations. They possess a fundamental fantasy, which makes it impossible to perceive even that which appears to us to be the subject's natural environment, constructed by sensory receptors; this remains inaccessible and foreign to him. The most shocking thing of all may be accepting that an irremovable discrepancy exists between what appears to us to be the milieu of our existence and what it is in reality; for this reason, the subject must time and time again perceive itself as an uncanny object of incomprehensible operations, which it undergoes without any control or knowledge thereof. By the same token, through writing in cyberspace we can dare to confront Lacan's famous Real, the startling and traumogenic truth about the subject, and thereby acquire a kind of self-knowledge enabling effective joint decision-making about the forms of activity we engage in as subjects online. I will summarize these problems succinctly, because they prove that many years before Baldwin's book, there were already psychoanalyses of the subject in the web, which indicated that the binary division between the internet "lover of literature" and the Foucaultian person put in place by the devices of power can frequently be discovered through the creation of electronic literature. The subject of this self-knowledge need not escape into Derridean games of the secrets of writing, but can fairly clearly recognize his dissociation, fraught as it is with uncanniness, and work on reorganizing the entire field in which his electronic writing practices take place.

Baldwin reminds the reader of the political and legal circumstances in which successive regulations on electronic writing were instituted, for example, relating to ASCII and Unicode protocols, and others. We must add, however, that electronic writing is sometimes connected with a sharpened sensitivity to political and legal circumstances, to the whole infrastructure of power and economics, seen as imposing various re-orientations of the Internet's parameters. This is precisely why writers of electronic literature (in Baldwin's sense of those terms) took part in an effective street and internet protest campaign against the proposed ACTA regulation in 2011 and 2012. However much we demonize the dependency on mechanical protocols and directives of myriad system administrators, the subject who writes the Internet is

able to learn and break codes, to work without remuneration on destroying administrative structures and disseminating coded data for the use of all. The examples of Wiki Leaks or Football Leaks place the writers of electronic literature beside past authors of banned books. The tireless negotiations on open access to certain data and the contravention of related norms sometimes considered to be harmful and unjustified result from the fact that the subjects writing electronic literature are able, in communities with greater or lesser degrees of transparency, to illuminate all the dimensions of their online presence. The constant threat that results from, for example, the enormous pressure by IT companies on Internet subjects has led those subjects, in the years since Žižek's book was published, to become braver and more radically aware of their own fundamental fantasies, more inclined to dwell in the Reality of their internet entanglements and through their disentanglement attempting to claim the right to be lovers of literature often less than fully legal, if not simply illegal.

Žižek's book, invoked here as an example, has allowed me to demonstrate that Baldwin's failure to include the stage of confronting his view of the unconscious of the subject of electronic writing with other works of psychoanalytic theory on the subject led him to overlook the activist dimension of the electronic literature he undertook to analyze. A dialogue with other works exploring theory of this type would no doubt have shed light on other omissions in his work. As a result, it appears that *The Internet Unconscious*, though it very boldly and affectionately calls every Internet user a writer, finally abandons that user amid some rather anachronistic imaginings on the flight of his unconscious into electronic writing.

Keywords | Abstract | Note on the Author ● ● ●

KEYWORDS

Slavoj Žižek

the Unconscious of the online subject

Abstract:

The article discusses Sandy Baldwin's book *The Internet Unconscious. On the Subject of Electronic Literature*. The author takes note of the numerous deconstructionist threads in Baldwin's work on the subject of electronic literature, and at the same time points to the absence of scrupulous discussion of previously developed concepts of the unconscious of the subject of online writing. One example of such a work is Slavoj Žižek's *The Plague of Fantasies*, which the author uses to show some of Baldwin's theoretical oversights and finally present the thesis that *The Internet Unconscious* is hindered by an anachronistic conceptual framework.

electronic literature

Sandy Baldwin

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Tomasz Mizerkiewicz is an historian and theorist of literature and a literary critic, employed at the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He recently published the books *Po tamtej stronie tekstu. Literatura polska a nowoczesna kultura obecności* (Beyond the Text. Polish Literature and the Modern Culture of Presence, Poznań 2013) and *Literatura obecna. Szkice o najnowszej prozie i krytyce* (Present Literature. Essays on Recent Prose and Criticism, Kraków 2013), in which he presents interpretations of literature that work with, among other contexts, the works of German-American critic Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. Mizerkiewicz is Editor-in-Chief of the magazine "Forum Poetyki" (Forum of Poetics). |