

Interpoetics of Correspondence: Figures for Constructing Presence, Fictionalization, and Disruptions of Presence Technologies

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Why do correspondents inform each other about the circumstances surrounding the process of writing and reading each other's letters, describe the act of closing the envelope and sticking the post stamp, mention the agitated waiting for the mailman, the moment of putting the letter into the mailbox, and absorbing the traces of someone's ink, kissing the envelope, unwrapping the package – so frequently and in such great detail? Why – through using the formula “when you will be reading these words” – do they predict and imagine their own and somebody else's future? Why do they describe how they imagine themselves and how they “hear” themselves? Or, to the contrary, they refer to the timeless, spaceless “here and now” of the exchange of pure thought, going beyond the physical barriers of the unchanging relationship? In the light of *Nowa teoria listu* by Anita Całek¹, such writing practices are located in the very center of reflection upon the letter, because they touch upon the key question “of the letter as a unique form of expression, both constructing a dialogue and focused on the sender, who creates some communicative space through their monologue, creating themselves

¹ Anita Całek, *Nowa teoria listu* (Cracow: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2019).

and the addressee within it?”². Therefore, they are related to the issue of auto-creation and auto-presentation of the correspondents and their relationality, the interactivity of correspondence. They belong to the whole range of strategies of constructing the presence typical for correspondence, to the set of basic epistolary gestures³ and key correspondence figures, as discussed by Esther Milne in *Letters, postcards, email. Technologies of presence*⁴. Here I characterize the interpoetics of such practices.

This interpoetics is especially clear in the moments of disruption of the practice of constructing presence in a letter by the technology of presence of a different kind; in the 20th century, it was predominantly a phone call. In the epistolary poetics structure, this often disrupts the narration aimed at the absent, imagined (reminisced or projected) addressee, and is often related to some material trace, such as using ink of a different color, a change in the size of the handwriting, or introducing small capitals. The meaning of the interventions: the sound of a ringing phone, a voice, auditory sensations, a conversation, which is described in the seemingly “mute” and yet evoking the memory or an impression of a “voice”, tangible correspondence, should be juxtaposed with typical epistolary figures of constructing presence. The letter – understood as a medium that is paradoxical, transfer, fantasizing about its own *primum mobile* – reaches the peak of its power precisely in the practices of constructing the presence of the addressee and self through writing⁵. What is more, a lion’s share of correspondence is devoted to – or rather based on – exactly this fantasy.

The term *interpoetics* is far more adequate than *intertextuality* for the needs of correspondence conceptualization. Whether it is about letters, postcards, parcels, or visiting cards, they always have an intermedia character (print and handwriting, a drawing and a reproduction, paper and cardboard, etc.), textual and non-textual (a written message and a dried flower, a specifically selected post stamp or stamps arranged into some shape, a hand-made postcard: a collage, a photo, a newspaper clipping, etc.). Correspondence is not only read, but also touched (kissed, crumpled, torn), smelled, and even tasted – it can engage all the senses, mostly sight and touch. Its phonic quality stems from the fact that each written message is a recording of some voice⁶, and it is especially significant when the correspondents know each other’s voices. Correspondence is easier to capture at the moment when it is based on “writing out loud”⁷ than literature, when it is in the state of a dialogue or semi-dialogue – in line with how former theories of letter defined epistolography. Thus, it approaches verbal communication based on a direct exchange, oscillating between orality and literateness⁸. However, the extent of this phenomenon is not as strong as promised by correspondence. The textual/correspondence will never substitute for the material and the oral.

² Całek, 173 [translation mine, PZ]

³ Całek, 9, 82, 195-198.

⁴ Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email. Technologies of Presence* (New York–London, Routledge 2010).

⁵ CONS See also the genesis of the letter according to Joanna Correia de Magalhães, quoted by Całek, 9.

⁶ Andrzej Hejmej, “W kulturze dźwięku. Słuchanie literatury”, *Teksty Drugie* 155, No 5 (2015): 88-102.

⁷ Roland Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, translated by Ariadna Lewańska (Warsaw: KR 1997): 97-98.

⁸ Agata Sikora, *List w Od aforyzmu do zinu. Gatunki twórczości słownej*, edited by Grzegorz Godlewski, Marta Rakoczy, Paweł Rodak (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2014): 247-252; Stefania Skwarczyńska, *Teoria listu*. Edition based on the Lviv original by Elżbieta Feliksiak (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku 2006): 32-52.

This rule works both ways; correspondence is a unique way of communication. One of the essential ways of creating the effect of presence is fictionalization, especially of the addressee⁹. Apart from materiality, it has the biggest influence on creating the effect of presence in correspondence. The coupled paradox of correspondence, i.e. the traditional theory of Stefania Skwarczyńska, is based on the materiality and virtuality co-creating this effect. Fictionalization is obviously not about detaching the correspondents from reality or discrediting the referentiality of their written (auto)creations, nor is it a way of incorporating epistolography into the literary work understood as fiction, although it does create such a possibility¹⁰. Fictionalization in correspondence means that the correspondents place each other in some “virtual reality”¹¹, “imagined meeting space”, “culturally-created reality”¹² or “another reality”¹³, i.e. every discourse. This is the reason why interrupting the process of writing a letter, i.e. the process of creating some virtual reality by a phone call from the addressee – that is hearing the real (if distorted) voice inspires ambivalent feelings in the correspondents.

The heterogeneity of correspondence (and not just the letter as a genre, life writing) is strongly related not only to intermedia and the various discourse practices which it employs, but also to the complex materiality of epistolography. Thinking of correspondence as a purely written medium (also encouraged by edited volumes of letters) reduces its meanings. The value of the material, visual, and written aspect of correspondence is always the same. This is fully taken advantage of by artists representing Mail Art, a trend in modern art which uses the medium of anything sent through the postal service (parcels, letters, postcards) and the communicative character of the post as an institution¹⁴. The practice of sending art whose main material is wrapping paper securing a parcel of an irregular shape (such as the human body), or a canvas painting with post stamps arranged so that they become a part of it, stems from the twentieth-century movement of democratizing art, striving towards transgressing the utilitarian/high art purposes, recycling and creating artistic communities that go beyond political and national divisions¹⁵. In the 21st century, the global online network is an additional reference point: although virtual, it allows people to contact others quickly (*call for art works*, exchange of e-mail addresses) and to share a photograph showing the act of putting a letter/postcard in a mailbox (the *postcrossing* movement¹⁶). The international Mail Art movement has its earlier incarnations, related to the tendency to “personalize” letters and postcards by common users, in the 19th century, when mail communication developed

⁹ Walter Jackson Ong, “Autor zawsze fikcjonalizuje odbiorcę”, in *Osoba, świadomość, komunikacja*. Antologia. Translated by J. Japola (Warsaw 2010: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego), 54-8; Józef Japola, “Między retoryką a głosem: Walter J. Ong a problemy komunikacji literackiej”, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1997, z. 3, p. 152.

¹⁰ See also Vincent Kaufmann, quoted in Całek, 38-39.

¹¹ Joseph Hillis Miller, *On literature*, translated by Krzysztof Hoffman, Poznań: Wydawnictwo UAM.

¹² Całek, 82.

¹³ See Całek 99-110 and Michael Fleischer, “Podstawy konstruktywistycznej i systemowej teorii kultury”, in *Język w komunikacji* Vol. 1. Edited by Grażyna Habrajska. Łódź: WSHE 2001: 83-104.

¹⁴ Grażyna Bobilewicz, “Poszukiwania form komunikacji – sztuka poczty”. *Studia z Filologii Polskiej i Słowiańskiej*, [T.] 41 (2006), p. 225-237; Piotr Rypson, *Mail Art czyli sztuka poczty*, Warsaw: Akademia Ruchu 1985.

¹⁵ The last international exhibition of Mail Art was organized at the New York MoMa between 1/10 and 10/12.2012. “Sieć analogowa. Mail Art. 1960-1999: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1482>

¹⁶ See <https://www.postcrossing.com>

a communications network and it became affordable for people beyond the richest elites of European communities¹⁷.

There is one more argument in favor of interpoetics: a gradable, sometimes fine and blurred line between utility and literariness of a letter/postcard, a peculiar tendency of a letter to absorb other media and genres (short story, joke, anecdote), and to generate new genres (epistolary novel, poetic letter), and at the same time to adjust to the new media (e-mail, virtual postcard). It is especially clear from some distance: the letter has always been a mobile medium – on the one hand, an element of everyday life, and means of communication dictated by long distance, on the other, a part of literacy (e.g. biblical epistles, public announcements) – and finally, literature. The basic form of the letter – addressing someone who is physically absent¹⁸ – has been taken advantage of on different grounds and circles of culture: from *Dangerous Liaisons* or *The Sorrows of Young Werther* to the cardboard record and rock ballad by PJ Harvey.

Closeness in enclosure

Such collections of correspondence as the one between Wisława Szymborska and her partner, Kornel Filipowicz¹⁹ (they became a couple in 1967 and stayed together until Filipowicz's death in 1990) or Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and her third husband, Stefan Jerzy Jasnorzewski²⁰ (they were married from 1931 until the poet's death in 1945) allow an insight into the intermedia and inter-genre movements of the letter. It is possible to a limited extent: printed collections of correspondence are deprived of the illustrative material (completely, in the case of the Jasnorzewscy, and only partially in the case of Szymborska and Filipowicz). Editorial descriptions, such as “put in a box” or “a postcard with a bird's eye view of Łódź, next to the words «all rights reserved» with a note «for you»” – help to imagine something, but will not be a substitute for contact with the letters, envelopes and sheets of paper. Editorial preparation for print takes away the most important part of correspondence: the signature of a person marked by their handwriting²¹. A scan is only a flat picture, which deprives the object of its three-dimensionality and changes its proportions. What is more, the contents of parcels: food, clothes, money, and other gifts which are often the focus of the correspondence are affected by the passing time, and as such can be used up. This “deprivation of materiality” of correspondence is then related not only to the logics of print and editorial practice, but also to the nature of the matter and everyday practice, the most important environment for intimate

¹⁷See the history of decorated and “personalized” letters of the Tolhurst family, housed at the British Postal Museum: <https://postalheritage.wordpress.com/2014/12/04/the-mystery-of-the-tolhurst-envelopes/> and <https://postalheritage.wordpress.com/2015/06/29/the-mystery-of-the-tolhurst-envelope-case-closed/>

¹⁸Całek 9, Skwarczyńska 50-51, Sikora 247-251.

¹⁹Wisława Szymborska, Kornel Filipowicz, *Najlepiej w życiu ma Twój kot*, edited by T. Fiałkowski, S. Kudas, Kraków 2016. Henceforth “Najlepiej” and page number.

²⁰*Z Tobą jednym: listy Marii Pawlikowskiej-Jasnorzewskiej i Stefana Jasnorzewskiego*, edited by E. Hurnikowa, Warszawa 2015. Henceforth “Z Tobą” and page number. See also Maria z Kossaków Jasnorzewska, *Listy do przyjaciół i korespondencja z mężem (1928-1945)*, edited by K. Olszański, Cracow 1998.

²¹Hence apologies for typing a letter, for example because of a disease, illegible handwriting or hurry, as well as attaching great weight to placing a handwritten signature. For example, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, who was blind, used a stamp with a facsimile of her signature to sign the letters that she dictated.

correspondence, in which parcels have a pragmatic goal, and words maintain this relationship. In both cases enclosures are of equal status to the written message. They go beyond textual figures of constructing presence and embodiment due to their materiality: when Filipowicz sends Szymborska raisins, and Jasnorzeski sends some coffee to his wife, those are real gifts rather than fantasies about gifts or visions of having dinner together. They do not substitute for the physical presence; they help (i.e. make easier, make nicer) everyday functioning, but their materiality goes beyond the written metonymy or metaphor, especially when it comes to food or clothes in short supply.

It is difficult to overestimate the meaning of the parcels which Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and Stefan Jerzy Jasnorzewski sent to each other during the World War II food restrictions. They were separated by a seemingly short distance, and yet relatively long for the years 1940-45 – several dozen miles from Blackpool (Great Britain), where the poet lived, and the frequently changed air bases where Jasnorzewski was stationed as a liaison officer of the Polish air force. The couple could not meet often, but they remained in touch via post. Out of the whole collection, only a handful of letters are not devoted to matters such as mutual provisioning, news from their family, financial and emotional support. Those include: the issues of Jasnorzewski's censorship regarding the war-time poetry of his wife and Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's developing cancer. According to Mitelle Bossis, the topic of health/physicality belongs to the fundamental figures of correspondence²². In this case, the poet tended rather to hide her real state from her husband, which was related to ill-information, the taboo surrounding illnesses, and – as suggested by the editor – her denial of the news of a fatal disease.

The materiality of the correspondence between Wisława Szymborska and Kornel Filipowicz is related to the provision enclosures. Mostly the couple sent each other illustrative drawings (especially Filipowicz: a view of a room, camping spot, a portrait of a cat), carefully selected and marking vintage postcards, which they both collected. Szymborska would insert newspaper clippings and various other small objects (such as a ribbon secured with a patch as a name day gift) into her letters, and she would also bestow upon Filipowicz hand-made collages or "scrap books"²³. Actually, it is difficult to tell her collages from letters with newspaper clippings, if one thinks about them from the perspective of a significant medium, since they are an inseparable whole. For instance, one letter contains an inserted illustration with a bed, and the letter itself opens with the following words: "Kornel! Do not change this bed for a double one before I arrive!" (Najlepiej, 161-162). In another, similarly composed letter, Szymborska writes next to a newspaper clipping of a woman's leg in a stocking: "This is my first leg, which I am setting towards home. When I send you the second one, this will mean that I will be unconditionally coming back!" (Najlepiej, 135-136). Without the illustrations, the contents of the message are deprived of a mixture of tenderness and absurd humor, which is reinforced – apart from the hyperbole – by deictic pronouns referring to specific pictures.

²²Mirelle Bossis, *Methodological Journeys Through Correspondences*. Translated by K. McPherson. "Yale French Studies" 1986, nr 71.

²³Szymborska's "Scrapbooks" were also sent to her friends and have become the subject of study and international exhibitions. See Ryszard Matuszewski, *Wisława Szymborskiej dary przyjaźni i dowcipu. Teksty i wyklejanki poetki z kolekcji Ryszarda Matuszewskiego* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Auriga 2008); W. Szymborska, *Kolaże/Collages* (Cracow: MOCAK 2014).

Nonfiction and metafiction of correspondence

The interpoetics of correspondence is expressed not only in the combination of the material and the textual, but also in epistolary social- and word-games. There are fictional characters in the letters of Szymborska and Filipowicz, who have their own voices; for instance, anonymous tipsters making spelling and grammar mistakes while informing the correspondents about their faults and flaws, or Gienia, a stubborn rival of Szymborska fighting with her over Filipowicz's feelings. However, the most important fictional characters are Countess Heloiza Lanckorońska and her proxy, Eustachy Pobóg-Tulczyński, the past "incarnations" of the couple. Their dialogue, written over a longer period of time, styled to resemble the language of the Polish aristocracy from the beginning of the 20th century, "tells about" the adventures of the Countess, who is staying abroad, and her proxy, who is condemned to her whims while being responsible for her estate. In hindsight, this correspondence, while read in print, is not just a testament to Szymborska and Filipowicz's ingeniousness, but also "an epistolary novel printed as a collection of correspondence", an intimate *mise en abyme* of the correspondence of two people fully aware of the creative role of the letter, as well as epistolary and literary conventions. The performativity of the letter is combined rather than argues with the self-reflexivity of epistolary conventions and fictionality: each message is an invitation to the next round, which can be – but does not have to be – continued.

However, fictionalization is not a variant of correspondence as much as it is its key condition. The case of Szymborska and Filipowicz only highlights its mechanism of action due to using it as a part of a meta-epistolary game, self-aware in terms of its own rules and limits. Ong – and after him, Japola – explained the necessary fictionalization of recipients of any message in order to explain the effectiveness of communication in conditions which they later dubbed as "virtual reality", i.e. while writing a letter, we evoke and address not only a real person, but also their fictional persona, our fantasy of this person, reinforced by memory, but modified by various factors such as the distance separating us, the length of separation, mood, etc. Fictionalization is expressed in constructing a specific mood of a letter: from the initial form, which never sounds like a regular, verbal greeting; to the way in which we assign the addressee a place in our monologue²⁴. The "virtual reality" of a letter works in a similar way to any other, such as literature, when it creates situations and imitates emotional states through words. Fictional addressees of the correspondence between Szymborska and Filipowicz are brought to life not only with names, and not only through stylization, but also through constructing the whole emotional landscape, inadequate for the real senders of the situation. Still, even without strictly fictional characters, the couple's correspondence creates a "virtual reality", in which the correspondents are both physically real persons who write material letters, as well as "virtual" (Ong would say "fictional") personas that exist as textual creations, and their origins are complex and heterogeneous, because it originates as a result of the layering and interactions between auto-presentation and auto-creation of the sender and projecting their fantasies on the addressee.

²⁴Ong 54-85, Japola 152.

Szyborska and Zbigniew Herbert used the same fictionalization code in their correspondence²⁵. If the authors' signatures were to be removed, their correspondence might be read as a collection of curious love letters incrustated with graphomaniac poems by one Frąckowiak. However, the exchange of letters makes it clear that the addressees adjusted themselves to their roles assigned by the senders, and it did not get in their way in dealing with some organizational matters. When Herbert donated one such letter to the Ossolineum library in 1984, he added a comment that "they should not be regarded in a different way than a friendly affection" [Jacyś złośliwi, 64]. A comment for outsiders might feel over the top, but humor and irony can be such well camouflaged codes that Herbert deemed it necessary to make sure that the letters would be understood well. Thus, the poet addresses the "third recipient" of correspondence, established by the tradition of letter studies – the editor, publisher, biographer, and finally reader – and highlighted the multidimensional character of the epistolary relationship [Całek199-204], which was already extended with the presence of fictional characters in the original "dyad" between the correspondents.

There are many traces of similar epistolary-literary games. The postcards sent from Mrzeżyn from Stanisław Barańczak to his friend Lech Dymarski²⁶ every day of his three-week holiday in August 1975 create a valuable collection. The recto of all the postcards is the same: a colorful photograph of a Baltic sunset. However, each card is written as if it was the first and the only one, with an explanation why sending the card sooner was impossible as their common motif. A comical effect results from the incoherence of those two messages. But not only. Variations regarding the necessity of sending greetings from Baltic holidays are combined with "stylistic exercises", parallel to the famous collection of linguistic mutations of Raymond Queneau. What happens here is a modification of the form of description, as well as the sender and the addressee of the postcard. We are dealing with a double addressee and a double sender. The meta-epistolographic code is aimed at real persons, who will recognize the convention of writing holiday postcards. Their repertoire includes: a report card, solemn, oral-colloquial, boasting, telegraphic, etc., together with postcard clichés ("lovely weather", Mrzeżyno – the pearl of the Polish seaside", "the sea is wonderful", "we are coming back tomorrow"). The typical senders and addressees of holiday postcards which the real sender "personates" (for example writing "for" the son who is writing "for the father", resourceful scout girls, a "benevolent" informer, a tasteless joker) and the roles that he/she assigns to the addressee (a comrade, "my man", a culture expert) are subject to variation. Fictionalization (of second degree) of the correspondents is also revealed in apostrophes and signatures. We can find such pairs as: "Beloved Leszek – your aggrieved St.", "So Leszek – the Barańczaks", "Dear L., cher ami – Stanisław de B. avec sa famille"; or „Lech! Buddy – Stachu with wife, together with the Walczaks and Fela with mom and Zdzych". The existence of such specific textual (fictional or not) "avatars" of senders and addressees is essential for creating the effect of presence. Clichés become alive in the meta-epistolographic game of poets-friends also because they belong to real individuals. They are inconsistent with their everyday demeanor and typical forms of

²⁵Zbigniew Herbert, Wisława Szymborska, *Jacyś złośliwi bogowie zakpili z nas okrutnie. Korespondencja 1955-1996*, edited by Ryszard Krynicki (Kraków: a5 2018). Henceforth: *Jacyś złośliwi* and page number.

²⁶A collection of postcards from the private archive of Lech Dymarski. In 2014 the collection was exhibited in Wielkopolskie Muzeum Niepodległości in Poznań, and in 2015 at the AMU Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology.

communication, but at the same time, they are completely consistent with the tendency for linguistic games characteristic for poets.

The series of postcards which Barańczak sent to Dymarski corresponds with Georges Perec's experiment *Two hundred and forty-four postcards in real colors*, dedicated to Italo Calvino²⁷. This coincidental convergence reveals a community of writers who are suspicious of language and have a tendency for combinatorial linguistic games. This time the game has only a literary character, and it is deprived of the material layer: postcards and handwriting, but also – significantly – the greetings do not have concrete senders and addressees. Perec's essay juggles cliché holiday greetings, although in this case each postcard is sent from a different location (i.e. holiday resorts and tourist attractions from all over the world). Seen as a whole, the contents of each postcard sound trite and predictable: information on the location or hotel in the first sentence, information on the planned return date, "warm greetings" or "hugs", information on various forms of spending time, sunbathing, food. There is no room for other content on holiday postcards. This variation of repetitions can be interpreted as an ironic comment: this is how humanity passes free time and informs about its customs. The "meaning" of the postcards sent from Barańczak to Dymarski is different, although it uses a similar glossary and stylization skills: it is an expression of devotion and affection. Postcards from Mrzeżyno are not only a literary game, as each one of them passes an additional message between the lines: "I am thinking about you every day", or maybe also: "I am bored". In the case of Perec, the weight of dedication is important – even fabricated holiday postcards are dedicated – and as such, metaphorically sent, to a specific person.

The Jasnorzewscy's correspondence is also based on the fictionalization of the sender and the addressee, often on the meta-level: the two correspondents are partners aware of the convention; they manage textual personae and epistolographic "avatars". This is related to the family tradition of the Kossaks of inventing affectionate, peculiar, and sometimes even bizarre nicknames for closer and more distant friends, and a peculiar family idiolect. The tradition is carried by the couple as a symbol of intimacy; it creates an atmosphere of affection, longing, closeness of their "virtual reality". When Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska writes to her husband: "Dear Loteczek – Kisses from your wife (for once she can be named as such). (...) Robaczkiewicz you v[ery] mine, thinking of you gives me solace. You understand me" [Z Tobą 115], or when Jasnorzewski writes to his wife: „Dear Person!” [Z Tobą 130] or „Why doesn't my Bajbeczka write to me?" [Z Tobą 150], the very act of naming the partner and oneself, using third person instead of first and second has both a performative and a fictionalizing dimension. It creates the sender and the addressee to the same degree as it expresses emotions. What is significant here is the interchangeability of names and nicknames related to gender roles. Jasnorzewska is sometimes referred to as male ("Panek"), and her husband as female ("Miss Bajbak"); however, this practice is only present in initial forms. The signatures are typically variations of the couple's names, i.e. Lilka and Lotek, as if the signature was supposed to be a guarantee of norm and constant identity. The

²⁷George Perec, *242 postcards in real colors*, translated by Jacek Olczyk, in G. Perec, *Essays*, translated by Jan Gondowicz, Ewelina Kuniec, Monika Ławniczak, Michał Paweł Markowski, Anna Olczyk, Jacek Olczyk, Tadeusz Pióro, Agata Rębkowska, Ewa Wieleżyńska, Adam Zdrodowski. Edited by: Jacek Olczyk, Cracow: Wydawnictwo Lokator . 2012, s. 119-125.

mechanism of fictionalizing the addressee-sender in correspondence allows for such games with initial forms: no meta-knowledge is required here. It is enough to obey the rules of the “virtual reality” of correspondence, whereas the meta-epistolographic awareness allows for correct reading of letters-games.

Long distance intimacy

Although reading couples’ intimate correspondence evokes intense sensations²⁸, a mixture of a voyeuristic impression that one deals with “the naked truth” and “genuine” material with the non-reducible machine of “narrativization” of letters to make them similar to epistolary novels, neither collection generates the couples’ biography in a nutshell or offers the gist of the complex, years-long relationships, nor are they works of literary fiction.

Both pairs of correspondents: Szyborska and Filipowicz and Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and Jasnorzewski shared close relationships, and the time span of their correspondence were of marginal importance in relation to the everyday closeness, even it is did not mean living together (as in the case of Szyborska and Filipowicz). In their case, fantasies of creating presence and forms of personifying the correspondent had strong fundamentals of past experiences and hopes for seeing each other soon. Milne analyzes somewhat different situations in his book; he typically describes correspondence relations which were not realized in reality, or an attempt at realizing them was unsuccessful (such as romantic epistolary friendships) or they are not realized at the moment (for example mailing lists or internet forum friendships). The physical distance – a necessary condition for starting an epistolary relation – is of temporary and special character in the analyzed collections of correspondence.

Due to the character of the relationship of the correspondents, the collections of letters are not huge, proportionally to the periods of time spent separately. Likewise, most letters are devoted to current, everyday matters, or the relations between couples. Their role is mainly to help keep in touch and not to allow the relationship to grow weak. For those reasons, the letters are short. Contents characteristic for the letter of permanently separated correspondents, whose relationship is based mostly on the epistolary contact or those who engage in an epistolary relation after years of separation will not be found here: detailed biographical descriptions (of the correspondents and their loved ones), ideological declarations, intellectual musings, descriptions of workshops and topics of artistic work, etc²⁹. In the discussed cases, the correspondents that send to each other letters, parcels and postcards know each other well and so do not need to characterize each other. They report to each other in detail about what is different in the changed (by the departure) surroundings and highlight their constant

²⁸See Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman. Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes*. Translated by Mira Michałowska. (Poznań: Zysk1998).

²⁹There are numerous functions of letter-writing. In the case of artists and writers correspondence allows for an intellectual exchange (advise, admiration and criticism, comments on work, informing each other about books, writers, cultural events), dealing with professional and organizational matters (editorial, scholarships, translations).

feelings. In other words, the letters of Szymborska and Filipowicz do not tell us anything new about their everyday life in Cracow, habits, mutual inspirations and work, but rather reveal ways in which they kept in touch in the short periods of separation; they described the conditions of their temporary dwelling and the customs of a sanatorium or resort, their companions and friends. Likewise, the Jasnorzewscy's correspondence shows the couple during the extraordinary wartime separation.

I highlight the heterogeneity of correspondence and its non-reducible materiality because such an approach enriches the understanding of figures of constructing presence and embodying the subjects of an epistolographic discourse. A characteristic of the intimate affection of both pairs in the "extra-epistolary" dimension is also necessary in order to properly show the similarities and differences in my way of conceptualizing the strategies of constructing presence and Milne's proposal to – in spite of all reservations – show that in the deepest layer, the "technologies of presence" work beyond the rule of effectiveness and performativity, and despite the physically measurable reality.

Correspondence is based on the fundamental *belief* that there is an addressee out there, but in order to start a relation with this addressee, a fantasy supported by all forms of sensual and physical closeness is necessary. They evoke a sense of directness, intimacy, and presence³⁰. In her monograph, Milne claims that all (popular and common) epistolary strategies of embodiment in fact work towards disembodying the correspondents³¹: both bringing the topic of body to the fore (which creates an effect of directness, as in the closing formula: "I am kissing the hands and feet of my beloved Lady"), and metonymic treatment of the physical aspects of the letter as the body of the correspondent (which is included in the practice of kissing, crying over and hugging letters). According to Milne, paradoxically, the closer to the body, the further away from it. What is more, the conviction that epistolary communication is more authentic and intimate than face to face communication and that it provides a stronger sense of presence is the primary fantasy of the epistolographic discourse³². Although this idea is rooted in the romantic vision of a direct meeting of two souls, its power has survived both modernist doubts and postmodernist deconstructions of the subject. Modern electronic correspondence, just like romantic letters, is based on similar assumptions and longings for creating intimacy, closeness and relations; despite the physical separation and absence, it employs similar formulae and strategies of constructing presence, and it gives the same empty promise that the presence of two writing people will fulfill the fantasies worked out during correspondence³³. At the same time, Milne distances herself from hierarchization of epistolary and physical closeness. For her (and for Erving Goffman), performative gestures of creating "self" in "live" contact with others are comparable to written practices.

³⁰Milne, 14. „a sense of immediacy, intimacy and presence”

³¹Milne, 2, 8-17: „The term disembodyment refers to two distinct but related desires: the desire to escape the corporeal human body and to eclipse the material technology of communication (...) The dream of transcending the corporeal body is informed by the dichotomy of mind/body; while the desire to eclipse or see through a particular technology of communication is underpinned by the binary of information/medium” Milne, 9-13.

³²Milne, 16.

³³Milne, 17.

By focusing on the lasting, years-long correspondence of the English romanticists, „uninterrupted” by rare face-to-face meetings, but at the same time filled with fantasies regarding the meeting of souls and keeping in touch through the materiality of the letter, Milne in some ways shares their belief that correspondence as a method of maintaining relationships is parallel to the physical (material) one, endangered by failure to the same degree as it has a chance to succeed and bring satisfaction to both sides³⁴. In fact, many years-long epistolary relationships – not only from Romanticism – lasted in spite of (or even thanks to) rare face-to-face meetings. However, Milne stops halfway through, interpreting cases of failed epistolary friendships and romances, and likewise, she leaves an unfinished thought that the tension between the real, physical body of the correspondents and the personae that they fabricate for the purpose of the correspondence is necessary for achieving the effect of intimacy and presence in correspondence. My proposal is to take a broader look: the tension is eased through real, physical contact, because it does not allow one to maintain the fantasy regarding the “bodies of the correspondents”. And because those fantasies are typically idealized, closeness “beyond letters” does not work. The most commonly quoted example is the failed “epistolary romance” between Franz Kafka and Milena Jesenska. However, the collections of letters of the two couples that I analyze are equally strong proof. In these letters, the figures of constructing presence and embodiment are very frequent and intense, exactly because (or despite the fact that) the couples generally function in reality rather than through correspondence. Here, fantasies and visions have less to do with images that would be difficult to realize, and more with memory (longing) and realistic expectations. Moreover, in their correspondence, the aspect of constructing presence/embodiment of the epistolary “you” dominates over reports “from life” and various forms of problematizing the epistolary “I”.

The very fact that the sense of intimacy and authenticity of correspondence is based on various forms of „constructing the presence” and „embodiment” of the correspondents testifies rather to the primacy of fantasizing of contact which only the physical, bodily closeness can offer. It is rare for interlocutors who meet face to face to dream about corresponding with each other. And at the same time, exactly because of the fact that in the case of epistolary relationships fantasies of physical contact is only wishful thinking, such a relationship can last despite crossing the boundaries of *savoir vivre* of a given epoch. Its performativity is simply weak. The fantasy can be (but does not have to be) ignored without any consequences. It can be seen on the example of the correspondence of Mary Midford and William Elford interpreted by Milne³⁵. The researcher describes in great detail the ambivalent feelings of the writer caused by a fantasy of her friend – 40 years her senior – in which, thanks to a magic talisman, he would transport into her room, where, while invisible, he would watch her: thinking, reading, writing. For Milne, the ambiguity of a dream is first and foremost a proof of intimacy which the correspondents created in spite of “intuitive” interpretation that would explain that it is a signal of the lack of physical contact, longing for it³⁶. I agree with Milne, but I also understand the reasons for this state of affairs: precisely because of the fact that the intimacy of correspondents who do not have a parallel, “physical” relationship belongs to the discourse,

³⁴Milne 51-90.

³⁵Milne, 74-90.

³⁶Milne, 82-87.

their fantasies expressed in writing do not have the power of strong performative acts and they do not significantly affect the real life of the correspondents. For intimacy is created in a relationship, whereas one can fantasize alone, and the physical presence of another person can both make them stronger and disrupt or even destroy them. The power of fantasy lies – among other things – in ignoring all those elements that may interrupt fantasies. When Milne quotes the declarations of the users of an internet forum who derive satisfaction from the friendships that they made there because they offer them a purely intellectual relationship, beyond the limitations of the body (such as ethnicity, skin color, sex), to my mind they indicate those factors that can make it impossible to establish closer relationships (due to discriminatory relationships). Internet forums, discussion groups, fandoms, player communities etc. offer such an opportunity not only due to producing the technologies of presence, but also thanks to the rudimentary machine of fictionalization of the sender and the addressee of correspondence and other “virtual worlds”. Physical absence allows to freely fictionalize and fantasize. However, one should not belittle congresses, conventions, and meetings of virtual groups, as well as various surprises (and failures) related to live meetings.

Extreme situations, such as the correspondence of two political prisoners, Zofia and Kazimierz Moczarscy³⁷, are the best testament to this phenomenon. The couple kept in touch via letters for the period of 10 years of separation, out of which six were spent in prison. Their letters – written in an extreme situation, read by the prison censorship officers, and rationed depending on the prisoners’ behavior – also contain formulae of constructing presence, mostly based on memories. To some extent, this is similar to the relations described by Milne, but in this case, direct contact was impossible for reasons independent from the correspondents. Reading those prison letters is a shocking experience, although they are monotonous – they repeat the same memories (meeting for the first time, wedding, holidays) and declarations of mutual devotion and the strength of the relationship. Monotony suggests not only a hibernation of feelings and memories, but also the presence of censorship and physical immobility. This is why their letters change abruptly when Moczarska is released from prison and the spouses can see each other during visitations. The confrontation of those devastated, tortured (physically and psychologically) people who had not seen each other in years modifies the subjects of the letters, and it introduces another tone and mood, distant from the metaphysical “connection of souls”. The fact that the couple managed to sustain the relationship and continue it after both were set free is a remarkable phenomenon.

However, less extreme situations can also be telling. The letters of both couples continue to discuss the subject of meetings and longing for past physical presence. In one of his letters, Pawlikowski writes: “(...) I was very sorry to leave you, Miss. The farther I went, the more this sorrow grew, as well as a restlessness of a sort whether you, Miss, are happy and content with me” [Z Tobą 122]. Filipowicz to Szyborska, from a holiday camp: “(...) after your premature leave we are all very sad, especially the lodger of tent 4a. In the tent everything is as it used to: rabbit foot, broken mirror, mints, your read shoes are in the hall – only you are missing” [Najlepiej 313]. Szyborska to Filipowicz: “Dear Kornel! Tomorrow Adam is arriving and only then will I have

³⁷Zofia and Kazimierz Moczarscy, *Życie tak nas głupio rozłącza... Listy więzienne 1946-1956*. Edited by Anna Machcewicz (Warsaw: Biblioteka „Więzi” 2015).

some news from you. Those three days without your letters nor the possibility to listen to your voice seem to me especially unpleasant and long” [Najlepiej 150]. Longing for physical presence and the fear of considering a meeting a failure in the situation of a longer separation is related to the situation of distance. The lack of connection enhances fantasies surrounding walking out on or causing disappointment. Obviously, it is very hard to tell to what extent they were present in the everyday life of the couples; however, the descriptions of such states occur more frequently in the correspondence when the separation is disrupted and the couples meet for a short time. Being used to separation works here – a constant feature of purely epistolary or virtual relations.

The most commonly used figures of constructing presence

Despite obvious differences between the correspondence of people who form intimate relations based on presence and purely epistolary relations, similarities in evoking textual “constructions of presence” that Milne writes about seem the most interesting. They appear in spite of “context”, “time”, “space”, the level of mutual affection of the correspondents. Obviously, all those factors influence the shape of the vision, but it does not explain the very occurrence of the figure of constructing presence or embodying. I would call them *topoi* and figures of correspondence. *Topoi* relate to continuously repeated pictures, topics, and motifs, such as: health, living conditions, weather, food. Figures relate to concrete, repeated formulae describing the act of reading, writing and sending letters, often related to imagining the sender/addressee and hypotheses regarding the functioning of post.

The practices of constructing presence rely on the transposition of writing of a person, as in one of the letters sent from Kazimiera Iłakowiczówna to her sister, Barbara Czerwijowska: “Your letters are so nice – as if you were here with me!”³⁸. At the same time, such aspects as the quality of the writing paper, envelope, or the choice of illustration on the postcard are thematized. Those are material traces (handwriting, fingertips), as well as evidence of affection or attention. Extensive descriptions of preparations for reading the letter or opening the parcel are figures of presence. Szymborska jokingly writes to Filipowicz: “I know that you won’t open this letter immediately – you will wait until afternoon, while lying on the sofa, with Kizia next to you, having read Echa and listened to afternoon news on the radio. Am I right?” [Najlepiej 387]. Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska describes the ceremony of opening a parcel from her husband in great detail:

My lovely Worm! The parcel arrived this morning. It was brought in by Ann, Mary’s sister, so delighted as if the parcel had been for her. It’s moving how kind-hearted those two Irish sisters are! Before opening, which is always connected to a sense of remorse that I am destroying the work of the skillful paws of Mr Worm, I kissed the dark blue seal. I can see that Bajbaczka likes me for he put so much effort into making me happy. I was very happy indeed. [Z Toba, 176]

Here the dark blue seal is a metonymy of the sender, even if kissing the parcel was just a fantasy. The account of subsequent stages of the ceremony, tightly connected to senses:

³⁸K. Iłakowiczówna, *Listy do siostry Barbary Czerwijowskiej z lat 1946– 1958*. Edited by L. Marzec. Poznań 2014, p. 257.

first watching the parcel being brought in by a friend, and then unpacking and touching, is more important. The sophisticated (or maybe just neat) packaging of the parcel is understood by the poet as a gesture of concern for her mood and an attempt at sustaining her affection. Opening the parcel – tearing the packaging) - is more than just a way of getting to the contents. The description of all the activities accompanying the reception of the parcel means “correct” understanding of the emotional code: affectionate words for affectionate gestures.

The same figure can be found in the letters sent from Wisława Szymborska to Kornel Filipowicz. For example, in the letter, written in a sanatorium in 1968 (in small caps, in order to highlight the significance of the message):

Kornel! Thank you for the nuts and sardines.

When i opened the parcel i felt warmth inside me. I hereby declare that your letters and everything you send to me is charged and it gives me comfort, and generally it feels as if you were here with me, my love. [Najlepiej, 105]

A detailed description of sensual impressions related to opening the parcel are a metonymy of physical closeness of the addressee. The tangibility of nuts and sardines (it is no coincidence that those are physical, food products) refers to the desired presence of Filipowicz.

Evoking an image of the correspondent and employing other senses (smell, touch, hearing) in an epistolary meeting is the most common strategy for creating an effect of presence in correspondence. Its romanticist version takes a form similar to the one found in the letter sent by the classic of romanticist correspondence, Zygmunt Krasiński to Konstanty Gaszczyński:

While I was reading your words yesterday I suddenly saw you with my heart's eyes in front of me, pale, bitter, morose in the face, and on the other hand and at the same time I saw another you, young, fresh, spirited and happy. It was you from the pipe era. And I was standing between the two of you, shaking hands with you and crying. And when this vision passed, I thought of God and I prayed for you, my dear. I prayed for remorse and longing to become a creative force, some fervor for intellectual work, for your torn soul. And for faith and trust that the one who leaves neither a bird nor a water lily will not leave us either in this loneliness of heart and spirit³⁹.

An excerpt from Szymborska's letter to Filipowicz (sent while he was away fishing with his friends) offers a more modern example:

„Kornel! I think of you during various times of the day. I can see you at the water in this hat of yours! (...) Kisses! I press my cheek against your back! And I am not cheating on you at all, can you imagine? Wisława (Najlepiej, 249).

³⁹Z. Krasiński, *Listy do Konstantego Gaszczyńskiego*, edited by Z. Sudolski, Warszawa 1971, s. 285-286.

The two visions are significantly different from each other, yet there are some similarities between them. Krasiński imagines two Gaszyńskis with a flourish: a happy one, known from memories, and a present one, older, bitter, and he writes about this in terms of a *vision*, a fantasy. God is the point of reference in this sentence: a source of religious visions, the addressee of wishes for a better fate for Gaszyński. This “great absent person”, “perfect recipient” to whom one dedicates poems, prayers and letters (as well as letter-poems, such as Barańczak’s *Widokówki z tego świata*) never answers them, which, however, does not discourage the efforts of subsequent generations from writing and sending letters to him (the subject is undertaken by Marcel Łoziński’s documentary *Poste restante* from 2008 on the Department of Undelivered Letters sent via Poczta Polska). One would think that Szymborska, known for her mistrust of any metaphysical systems, would not be keen on visions of closeness and extrasensory contact, and yet the way in which she evokes an image of Filipowicz is similar to how Krasiński imagined his friend. The two visions are written in obviously different styles: pompous and solemn in the case of Krasiński, ironic and humorous in the case of Szymborska. Still, even Szymborska writes about a “vision” evoked by Filipowicz’s description of the camping spot and physical contact, impossible due to the physical separation, yet still desired. Images and fantasies strive towards visions of making them true through sensual contact.

Descriptions of the process of writing letters and plans concerning sending them – an auto-comment of a sort, which becomes the only message, and so both an “insufficiency” and a “surplus” of the letter – are also important in creating the effect of presence. From Jasnorzewski’s letter to his wife: “I finished writing that letter about the whole story (...), and now just a few words. I am not sure whether I will send this letter today, because I need to find an adequate envelope. But it will rather be sent tomorrow morning. Meanwhile lots of kisses, greetings and hugs (...) (Z Tobą 159). From Jasnorzewska to her husband: “I am writing to you although it has only been three hours since you left” [Z Tobą 196]. Szymborska to Filipowicz: “I am writing now, i.e. at noon, still before breakfast, but having already been to a second-hand bookshop” [Najlepiej 15]. Filipowicz to Szymborska: “I am writing still today, before the arrival of the letter that you announced, to which I will be able to reply only tomorrow evening” [Najlepiej 33]. They are often related to asking for letters and signs of anticipation (“I am waiting for your letter”, “Write to me”, “Please reply”, “Write often”), as well as highlighting the circumstances surrounding sending the letters. The amount of details of those descriptions is characteristic, often accompanied by descriptions of conditions in which the letter was written (location, weather, time).

The functioning of post as an institution is an important point of reference, especially when it does not work as smoothly and efficiently as the correspondents would like it to. This allows us to extract an elementary (next to absence) quality of correspondence: the incompatibility of the time of writing and the time of reading. Filipowicz to Szymborska: “At Wieprz, near Łysobyki (this is a genuine name!). God knows where and when this postcard will be posted” [Najlepiej 26]. Szymborska to Filipowicz: “I am writing from Chochołowska Val.[ley] and I am about to throw this postcard into a mailbox, which looks as if it was emptied only at the end of the year. So maybe I should wish you a Happy New Year?” [Najlepiej 219]. Time references which have a real meaning for the sender, typically referring to the future (“in a moment”, “tomorrow”) are outdated when the letter is delivered, and for the addressee they are traces of the past. For a per-

son writing a letter, the “here and now” of writing is important, when he or she always leans out towards the future and the epistolary you: “when you will be reading those words”.

Stefan (Lotek) Jasnorzewski was a master of “the technology of presence”. He wrote on “Thursday, 12.30, 17-18 IV 1942” to his wife:

Dear Miss Bajbas! And what is this squeaking supposed to mean. Who was supposed to write every day? Who? Who received academic droppings for squeaking, me or you? What for, what for? I am asking bitterly.

I wanted to write to you this afternoon, but I was too sleepy – although I feel very well, last night I could not sleep at all. I went back to work at 5 o'clock and I had a nap, and later I order a phone call to you, but you did not answer, so I told them not to call you at 12.00 for fear of waking you up and scaring you at night.

I am writing this letter lying comfortably in my bed, I will post it tomorrow. (...)

I haven't got my uniform yet, but I got the registered letter and its contents. Thank you for already and for more, and please write as much as possible. Even just for practice, maybe eventually you will learn and become a writer (...) [Z Tobą 98]

The whole letter consists of formulae of constructing the wife's presence and embodying self: apart from demanding more letters, descriptions of writing to Lilka, an account of attempting to contact her by phone and thanks for the parcel, there is “nothing” here. Exactly this “nothing” allows for and legitimizes all the strategies for constructing the presence of and embodying the correspondent, which Jasnorzewski takes advantage of. For this “nothing” is their extra-epistolary contact – years of living together and sharing experiences to which the husband refers, phone calls and face-to-face meetings, unrecorded and as such, lost to us. Their absence highlights the relation character of correspondence and its strong relationship with everyday life, including a complete lack of care for creating a complete (in terms of narration, facts, descriptions) of a relationship and self⁴⁰. The Jasnorzewscy's idiolect (squeak – write; academic droppings – i.e. Złoty Wawrzyn Akademii Literatury, Golden Laur of the Academy for Literature, an award which Jasnorzewska received in 1935) breaks down fossilized compositional formulae of the letter and stereotypical phrases. However, this idiolect was not created for the purpose of correspondence; it reflects the everyday language of the couple and their loved ones.

Disruptions of fantasies of constructing presence: phone ring

The meaning of correspondence is produced over the course of the relationship between the two correspondents, but the figures for constructing presence are produced while one is

⁴⁰Obviously this is not the only model of correspondence. See also O. Szmidt, *Korespondent Witkacy*, Cracow 2014.

alone, through daydreaming and writing. The act of writing takes place in a concrete, real moment of time, although it refers to both “the time of correspondence”, past and future. This is also why disrupting the process of writing with a phone call (especially when the caller is the addressee) creates a sense of incredibility. This complex situation, in which two means of communication over a distance overlap was expressed by Adam Zahajewski in his poem *List. Oda do wielości*:⁴¹

Twój telefon przerwał mi pisanie listu do ciebie.
 Nie przeszkadzaj mi, gdy
 z tobą rozmawiam. Dwie
 nieobecności krzyżują się,
 jedna miłość rozdziera się
 jak bandaż.

Translating the poem into the situation of writing a letter would be more or less as follows: the disorientation of the lyrical “I” results from being interrupted during the process of fictionalizing the addressee and fantasizing about her by direct contact (phone call), i.e. two ways of keeping in touch in the situation of physical absence. When one is interrupted by another, it creates a cognitive dissonance. Why does it mean to be lost in love to the lyrical I? This opens the field for interpretation.

In the Jasnorzewscy correspondence, the subject of phone calls is rare, which resulted from the war and living conditions of the couple. The already quoted letter about a failed attempt at a phone call is an exception. However, for Szymborska and Filipowicz, this is an important, recurring subject, best evidenced by the following excerpt from Filipowicz’s letter:

You invented a kind of emotion, to which I am (always have been) especially sensitive, but I think that such emotions are wasted on me **then a phone rang and I heard your voice. I am absolutely confident it was your voice, but recorded on a tape (foreign, obviously). There are truly no limits to human imagination! Soon we will be able to have a date via TV. But I prefer with you in a more conventional way, and I am looking forward to the moment when it will be possible.** [Najlepiej 142; color changed by Filipowicz, and later by the editor].

This case could confuse the writer far more than a phone call, for he was listening to a recording, i.e. a voice recorded at a different moment than when he listened to it. At the same time, he was unable to answer the message; the contact was as “one-direction” and based on absence as writing a letter. This is why Filipowicz described this experience using a different color. Highlighting is necessary for distinguishing the moment when Szymborska’s voice “disrupted” the process of writing a letter to her. From the point of view of the composition, it would not be required. After all, one can finish a letter as if the situation never took place and then maybe describe it or tell about it during a face-to-face meeting. However, the experience

⁴¹Letter. Ode to multiplicity. Your phone call interrupted me while writing a letter to you // Don’t interrupt me when // I am talking to you. Two // absences overlap, // one love tears // like a Band-Aid [translation mine, PZ]

of “overlapping absences” is too strong to be ignored. Filipowicz’s letter recreates the event almost in real time, during which he was distracted from the act of constructing presence and fictionalizing the correspondent.

Usually, mentions of phone calls do not have such an incredible aura. First, they explain why phone contact was not fully satisfactory, first and foremost because of the lack of intimacy. For example, when Szymborska was in the common room at the sanatorium (“Kornel! My love! I can’t tell you on the phone how sad and empty it is here without you” [Najlepiej 238]), and Filipowicz had guests over (“Dear Wisława! Forgive me that during our last phone conversation (two hours ago) I didn’t tell you anything nice – but St.[anisław] R[óżewicz] was here (...)” [Najlepiej 269]). A phone call can be a failure to a far greater extent than correspondence; among other things, because it does not allow for unlimited fantasizing and it limits fictionalization. Being confronted with a voice can be disappointing or worrying, as can be concluded from Szymborska’s letter to Filipowicz: “It’s been two hours since our phone conversation and I came to the conclusion that I still want to talk a bit. If only because I don’t want you to ask me why my voice was somewhat different and if anything changed. Whereas the only thing that changes is the fact that I am more and more missing you!” [Najlepiej, 137]. If writing is an extension of talking, then it refers to the verbal communication and dialogue, but only as their image. It takes the form of a monologue about what could happen if the correspondents could continue the interrupted phone conversation. The imagined and fictionalized Filipowicz is given the role of an adversary, to whose potential accusations Szymborska replies. This is the language of longing characteristic of a love letter [Barthes *Fragments* 227]. In response to this letter, Filipowicz writes, indicating another disruption in the process: “In this place I got a phone call from you. This time your voice was very nice, causing no suspicions or doubts...” [Najlepiej 139]. It is impossible to tell whether Filipowicz listened to a voice recording, or whether he actually talked to Szymborska. The next letter from Szymborska demands – jokingly – confessions: “I wanted to ask you over the phone, but decided it would be better to get a written response” [Najlepiej 140]: as if some matters (next to timbre and sound of the voice, expressing emotions, also open declarations) were possible to thematize only through a specific medium, handwriting and letter. It would seem that a phone conversation is more direct than letters, because the physical separation is reduced by the opportunity to talk and refer to each other directly. However, it turns out that voice properties, deprived of the context of other non-verbal properties of “body language” such as gestures and facial expressions, together with the conditions surrounding the conversation, as well as the very situation of “incomplete” communication, cause the directness to multiply together with “the overlapping of absences”.

The completeness and the ideal to which Szymborska and Filipowicz, Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and her husband refer is supposed to be provided by the physical presence of the interlocutors. And yet the awareness of closeness and realizing this ideal rarely stops the correspondents from writing, especially writing about writing, writing about phone calls, and writing about meeting: “My love! This card is water under the bridge again, because it will reach you on Monday, and on Saturday I will allow myself the pleasure of talking to you” [Najlepiej, 169]. “Kornel! Prince! I am writing on Saturday, so just before my Sunday call to you and that is why I am not asking how you are, because I shall know soon” [Najlepiej 189]. Justifying

the seemingly pointless letters, greetings and questions is both paradoxical and necessary. It inherently accompanies letter writing as an act of establishing a correspondence situation and fictionalizing the addressee/sender. In the figures of epistolary construction of presence, the very act of constructing presence, not performative, aimed at action and future result, but rather related to the necessary fantasizing about the correspondent and producing the chronotopic “here and now” of the person writing a letter. Constructing presence is a requirement for writing letters, the same as the physical absence of the correspondents.

Summary

My goal was to present three fundamental and inseparable aspects of correspondence: 1) the material tangibility of letter and the weight of various enclosures: parcels with food, clothes, collages, scrapbooks and others, means of co-creating the message and medium; 2) fictionalizing the addressee in the “virtual reality” of epistolary discourse and related meta-epistolary games; 3) textual figures and topoi of constructing the presence of the correspondents and the way in which they can be disrupted. The starting point, and the conclusion, was the conviction of the primacy of fantasy about physical contact between the correspondents, which generates all strategies of constructing presence is a by-product of the situation of absence, key to correspondence, and at the same time a requirement for generating presence figures which function in the time and space of letter writing specific for correspondence.

translated by Agnieszka Kocznur

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KEYWORDS

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MATERIALITY

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ABSTRACT:

The paper discusses the benefits of conceptualizing correspondence as an interpoetic medium. It presents an analysis of textual and visual ways of constructing the presence of the addressee and the sender in letters, and the disruption of constructing this presence caused by interrupting the writing process by a phone call. The paper indicates the fictionalizing role of the addressee and the sender as the condition for creating the “virtual reality” of a letter. It presents basic figures and topoi for acknowledging the presence in correspondence based on the collections of correspondence between: Wisława Szymborska and Kornel Filipowicz, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and Stefan Jasnorzewski, Stanisław Barańczak and Lech Dymarski, and Zofia and Kazimierz Moczarscy.

STANISŁAW BARAŃCZAK

KORNEL FILIPOWICZ

Wisława Szymborska

meta-epistolography

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