Elżbieta Winiecka

Scaling Imagination: The Language Machine and Poetry

ABSTRACT. Elżbieta Winiecka, *Scaling Imagination: The Language Machine and Poetry*. "Przestrzenie Teorii" special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 247–268. ISSN 1644-6763. https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.12

The article focuses on the specificity and functions of metaphors in the poetry of Radosław Jurczak, and more broadly in the work of the youngest poets, for whom life in the world of digital media and the prospect of the development of artificial intelligence is an important part of their formative experience. The paper uses the terms introduced by Mark Fisher for this purpose: the weird and the eerie. The analysis compares poetic devices in Jurczak's poems with the concept of poetic language of the first avant-garde, pointing out the changes occurring in the poetics and aesthetics of the works, also focusing on figures relating to the technological sphere of modernity. The paper polemizes with the view expressed by Jerzy Jarzębski, who considers the phrase "artificial intelligence" to be a fashionable and harmful oxymoron that defines the pragmatic, reductionist worldview of its users. The article argues that the incorporation of terms that have the status of catachreses and over-lexicalized metaphors in everyday language into the language of poetry allows their creative potential and ambiguity to be recovered. Finally, the paper considers scaling as a characteristic feature of the new poetic imagination, which also requires readers to take a new approach to the language of the new poetry.

KEYWORDS: avant-garde, metaphor, imagination, artificial intelligence, weird, eerie, contemporary poetry

AI has gained some remarkable abilities to manipulate and generate language (…).
What we are talking about is potentially the end of human history.
Not the end of history, just the end of its human-dominated part.
Yuval Noah Harari[1]

A hundred years ago, the representatives of the first avant-garde entered Polish literary life, ending Young Poland's lyricism based on direct emotionality and aura. In 1922 Tadeusz Peiper wrote in "Zwrotnica" that

[1] Y.N. Harari, *Yuval Noah Harari Argues that AI Has Hacked the Operating System of Human Civilization*, "The Economist", April 28, 2023, https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2023/04/28/yuval-noah-harari-argues-that-ai-has-hacked-the-operating-system-of-human-civilisation (accessed: 16.06.2024).

"perhaps it is the nature of a poet's metaphors that best characterizes them."[2] His highly figurative statement was apt in the context of works mostly founded on surprising phrases, which were supposed to inspire readers' imaginations to perceive the dynamically changing reality, exploding with inventions, in a new way. The accurately observed relationship between man-made tools and human sensitivity and imagination became one of the foundations of the avant-garde aesthetics based on linguistic inventiveness. Moreover, Peiper also stated (exaggerating somewhat) that he was able to say more about an author based on three metaphors appearing next to each other in a poem than their biographer.

Authors associated with "Zwrotnica" repeatedly argued that a poem is made of words, replacing direct expressions of feelings with equivalencing, i.e. finding their image equivalents constructed in language. In avant-garde aesthetics, language deprived of metaphors, periphrases, ambiguous games based on words or rhythm, was simply prose. However, the linguistic character of poetry did not cut poems off from extra-linguistic reality. On the contrary, metaphors which were difficult to conceptualize, as well as other stylistic devices, were a means for extracting the hidden energy of objects, in addition to being a tool for world-creation, interfering with its shape and meaning. As Edward Balcerzan put it when characterizing Przyboś's attitude in his early poetry: "The reality exists and it does not exist; the intensity of being depends on a person, their activity of seeing, hearing, and feeling. Przyboś will later say that 'the world-is-and-is-not'."[3]

Avant-garde poetry is characterized by its strong subject. The poet is not only a craftsman of words, but also someone who is able to affect reality via language. The whole society benefits from civilizational conveniences, but poets have a special imagination, and they are able to extract energy – a property of all matter – from their surroundings, and lock it in a poem. To put it figuratively, the poetic metaphor absorbs and transforms this energy, becoming a place where it accumulates, and then explodes.[4]

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[2] T. Peiper, *Metafora teraźniejszości* [The Metaphor of the Present Day], "Zwrotnica" 1922, no. 3, p. 51.

[3] E. Balcerzan, *Fragmenty o Przybosiu* [On Przyboś], "Akcent" 1987, no. 1, p. 8.

[4] Artur Sandauer wrote about an "explosive figure" in Przyboś's poetry (A. Sandauer, *Zebrane pisma krytyczne* [Collected Critical Essays], Warszawa 1981, vol. 1, p. 214), Jerzy Kwiatkowski – about "the concept of explosive existence" (J. Kwiatkowski, *Świat poetycki Juliana Przybosia* [The Poetic World of Julian Przyboś], Warszawa 1972, p. 95), Ryszard Nycz – about the concept of a piece of art as a firework (R. Nycz, *Wiersz jest "jak raca". Juliana Przybosia poetyka oświecenia a estetyka nowoczesna* [A Poem Is like a Firework. Julian Przyboś's Poetics of Enlightement and Modern Aesthetics], [in:] *idem*, *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości. Poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* [Literature as a Trope of Reality: Epiphany Poetics in the Modern Polish Literature], Kraków 2012).

In Issue 12 of "Zwrotnica", dating from 1927, Przyboś wrote: "The feeling of poetry is a product of poetic craft,"[5] and: "By organizing language, creating new phrases, building concise poetic structures, poetry serves society as a sensitive tool for thinking."[6]

The avant-garde's optimism, connected with the conviction of poetry's performative power, which, together with the present day, is able to reshape reality, was soon replaced with catastrophism (in the case of Przyboś – "cheerful catastrophism"[7]). However, the remaining postulates of the avant-garde, such as indirectness of expression and the related shame of feelings, anti-realism and formal innovativeness, were recurring themes in twentieth-century poetry. Some of the poetic avant-garde's ideas remain topical, from its close relationship with modernity to its attitude to language as a material, to linguistic experiments – a laboratory where new ways of imaging are invented, finding names for new experiences which are impossible to discuss directly due to the lack of suitable words. On the other hand, the very possibility of avant-garde thinking is questioned by the loss of faith in language's ability to reshape reality, and consequently, the conviction of poetic language's superiority in terms of the effectiveness of action. When the world is on the brink of destruction, there is no future – this also applies to art. Such apocalyptic tendencies are connected with climate change, extinction of species, air pollution, and up until recently, rapid technological advancements, especially of AI systems.

For the twentieth-century avant-garde, technological advancements and the resulting accelerated life pace constituted a formative experience; urbanization attracting masses of new city-dwellers, the invention or popularization of the light bulb, telephone, radio, cinematograph, car, plane. A century later, technology remains the biggest influence on the social imagination; however, nowadays it is no longer founded on the laws of mechanics, but on quantum physics, electronics and IT, which form the basis of the digital revolution. Digital technology organizes our way of thinking about the present, and it also shapes our language, but first and foremost – our life: communication, perception, imagination and memory, at first assisted by, but increasingly more often prosthetically replaced with external memory.

Metaphors and catachreses naming this new reality have entered everyday language and undergone lexicalization, losing their figurative character. According to the principle that "An adequately selected metaphor not only names a notion, but also – through focusing – allows to get to know

[5] J. Przyboś, *Idea rygoru* [The Idea of Rigor], "Zwrotnica" 1927, no. 12, p. 252.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 253.

[7] See E. Balcerzan, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–18.

it better,"[8] countless catachreses have entered our language: windows (Windows), bin, desktop, pocket, mouse, face book (Facebook), camera eye, twitting (Twitter), saving (on a digital medium), surfing (the Internet), scrolling (a website on the screen), as well as some charming metaphors: external memory, language machine, machine learning, artificial intelligence, thinking machine, or (a somewhat outdated) electronic brain. Moreover, the family of smart beings is also unusually large: both a house and its equipment can be intelligent – TV set, phone, car, as well as systems for smart home automation, lights, heating, watering… To describe the state of modern digital society (another metaphor), we talk about social networks, hives, swarms, nexuses, hubs, nodes created by people and invisible technologies. All those expressions – borrowed from botany, zoology, human anatomy and traditional (non-digital) lifestyles – figuratively mirror the status of the present subject and the character of social relationships. As observed by Jerzy Jarzębski, the use of many of these words, and especially the word "intelligence," mirrors "a selective, instrumental, pragmatic, technical attitude (…) characteristic for our contemporary civilization, and at the same time distant from tradition inscribed in history and the origin of language."[9] Referring to the philosophical etymology and history of the word *intelligentia* – from Heraclitus to Anaxagoras to Aristotle to Plotinus – Jarzębski argued that:

> in every case it was about attributes collectively constituting the fundamental mystery of humanity, or even deity – or it was different names for the same, metaphysical reality. A reality which significantly differs semantically from that to which the English adjective *smart* – overused, also in spoken and written Polish – refers.[10]

For a scholar, this process is a dangerous example of knowledge democratization as metaphorization of the language of science, which often confuses instead of explaining. However, modern science cannot escape metaphors, because "it is impossible to present unobservable objects with the use of experimental terminology, as they are beyond all possible experience."[11] Used in everyday communication, they lost their figurative meaning a long time ago, and today – contrary to metaphors in the avant-garde poetry – they are

[8] J. Mazurkiewicz-Sułkowska, *Słowiańska terminologia techniczna (na materiale polskim, rosyjskim i bułgarskim)* [Slavic Technical Terminology on Polish, Russian and Bulgarian Materials], Łódź 2014, p. 99.

[9] J. Jarzębski, *Sztuczna inteligencja jako metafora* [Artificial Intelligence as a Metaphor], "Naukowy Przegląd Dziennikarski" 2020, no. 4, p. 11.

[10] *Ibidem*, pp. 11–12.

[11] M. Czarnocka, M. Mazurek, *Metafory w nauce* [Metaphors in Science], "Zagadnienia Naukoznawstwa" 2012, no. 1, p. 16.

used to make visible what lies beyond empirical experience. Astrophysicists talk about black holes, white, brown, and red dwarves; physicists about sound waves, wave theory of light, Laplace's demon, Schrödinger's cat; AI specialists refer to John Searle's Chinese room argument,[12] and Chat GPT calls itself a language machine.

Chat GPT-4, one of many large language machines available, has been firing users' imagination, inspiring questions about our future in the world where AI is able to generate text much faster than humans. However, so far its creativity and independence have proved overrated. Already in January of 2023, Sam Altman, OpenAI president, said that users expect far more from GPT-4 than the company can offer. Users expected a revolution, but instead got mere functional assistance with working with and on texts, as the new invention works on an AI language model. Alman admitted that "We don't have an actual AGI and that's sort of what's expected of us."[13] Additionally, with time, the creators started to add limitations to their product, which resulted in Chat GPT refusing to cooperate with users rather than becoming more functional.

It is true that AI is becoming increasingly more precise in terms of generating content, but when it comes to non-schematic, creative thinking, or multi-faceted interpersonal communication, it cannot match humans. A linguistic simulation of a masterpiece is not that masterpiece because it does not contain any non-linguistic background of human experience from which all linguistic creation stems.

This brings us back to the question: what is literature made of? If the answer is words, then bots will soon be able to produce it. However, if literature is always connected with an individual, unique entirety of an author's personality, AI will never replace writers. After all, a literary work is a product of many varied factors which formed the author's imagination, such as their intellect, sensitivity, spirituality and experiences, psychophysical state, as well as individual and collective experiences, rooted in memory, consciousness and subconsciousness. Although all these factors are expressed in language, their nature goes beyond it. Meanwhile, AI-generated texts are logical, but they do not refer to any extralinguistic reality. They are a construct made exclusively of words.

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[12] J. Searle, *Minds, Brains & Science: The 1984 Reith Lectures*, London 1984; *idem*, *Can Computers Think?*, [in:] *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, ed. D.J. Chalmers, Oxford 2002, pp. 669–675.

[13] J. Vincent, *OpenAI CEO Sam Altman on GPT-4: 'people are begging to be disappointed and they will be'*, "The Verge", January 18, 2023, https://www.theverge.com/23560328/openai-gpt-4-rumor-release-date-sam-altman-interview (accessed: 26.08.2024).

AI simulates human behavior in a conversation, without any awareness or self-awareness, however. Its similarity to humans is based on a honed illusion of dealing with human behaviors and competences. When it comes to the former, the latest large language models are quickly learning how to talk and write like humans, and they can generate photorealistic images and videos. Their efficiency has already surpassed human possibilities in many areas of human activity.

However, this does not make them more human. The groundbreaking character of this new group of algorithms (including Chat GPT-4) is based on their unimaginably huge scale rather than on any novel reasoning. The superhuman speed and amount of processed information of modern technologies make it possible for algorithms to replace humans, and when they are mistaken for humans, it is because they use their non-human, mathematical nature to this end. The fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult for us to tell human activity from AI-generated content is due to our imperfect nature and cognitive limitations rather than AI's infallibility. This is not intentional: there is a simple auto-fill mechanism based on multiplication and adding billions of numbers, whose large algorithms are learning from online resources. Honing their properties is based on feeding them huge amounts of already generated data, based on which the algorithm learns how to recognize and understand them better, analyzing complex sentences and transferring skills from one environment to another.

Figuratively speaking, if AI is learning how to write based on fiction, it is able to produce stylistically beautiful sentences, but if it is fed unverified content, or content resulting from specific (often negative) attitudes and ideas, it mimics unwanted behavioral patterns (e.g. sexist or racist). This is why scientists working on AI, as well as philosophers who study its development (such as Noah Harari), observe that it constitutes an actual threat to our culture and to humanity in general. How so? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to differentiate between weak AI and strong AI. The latter is supposed to be on par with humans in every domain. Therefore, this is not just about intelligence, but also about other aspects of the human mind, such as morality and emotions. Is it possible for strong AI to have awareness and self-awareness, as well as sensitivity or the ability to experience emotions? According to some scientists, it is only a matter of time.

Sadly, completing this process is not a necessary condition for AI to threaten humanity. Algorithms will likely emulate people's negative traits, and due to the scale they operate on, they will magnify their effect. With time, this process will escalate, especially given that people are unable to control how algorithms work, and even scientists are unable to predict the

direction of AI's future development once it become independent enough not to require human support. Pessimists believe that technology will almost certainly be used by authoritarian regimes and corporations for intensifying conflicts, which will be won by algorithms – without human support – able to learn from their own mistakes, deprived of emotions, and as such, far more efficient than humans. Such a dystopian vision is not just literary fiction: more and more people are arguing that we should brace ourselves for a possible posthuman future. What has so far been treated as a metaphor should therefore be taken seriously as a scenario for the evolution of our world – catastrophic, but highly likely. Hence, many scientists who, having taken the mental step towards a post-human reality and lacking ethical reservations in terms of artificial general intelligence (AGI), do not fully feel as *homo sapiens*, and believe that the AI metaphor is not a metaphor of the present day which best reflects our current situation, but rather a project which will soon become our reality.

Jerzy Jarzębski, already cited here, criticized the term "artificial intelligence" in 2020. He observed that the overuse of this once living, mind-opening metaphor in colloquial language, journalism, and literature, as well as in science has transformed it into a literally treated catachresis, "which leads to erasing differences between people and machines, object and subject."[14] "Artificial intelligence" has thus become a disorienting neologism contributing to "spreading disinformation and mystifying reality."[15]

Jarzębski transferred the dispute about the metaphor to the level of world view, stressing its cultural and civilizational conditions, explaining the term's popularity with changes in modern lifestyles and ways of thinking, which are related to new visions of the world and humanity. "It is founded on confronting spiritual traditions of the European civilization and materialistic modernism,"[16] he observed, focusing mostly on anthropological, philosophical, psychological, sociological, and neuro-scientific aspects of the definition of intelligence, which tie this question with the ultimate question about who man is. Jarzębski's paper was published in 2020, before Chat GPT-4's surge in popularity (although its earlier versions were already known then), and it was written from the perspective of a humanities scholar defending the traditional, anthropocentric discourse. By attributing the power to project a technological, monistic image of reality, which, although not true, was treated as real, to metaphors such as "artificial intelligence", Jarzębski accused AI (or rather contemporary popularizers of the AI dis-

[14] J. Jarzębski, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–29.
[15] *Ibidem*, p. 29.
[16] *Ibidem*, p. 32.

course) of reductionism and "ontological degradation of the human essence and condition"[17] in the name of the cult of new technologies.

Meanwhile, the fascinating peculiarity of the mysterious and incomprehensible (for most people) effectiveness of algorithms and language models owes this, among other things, to its very name. The term "artificial intelligence" does not take away uniqueness from people, but rather makes us aware of the fact – still new to humanity – that a set of features characterizing a person, such as awareness, sensitivity, emotionality, lose their meaning in the face of the speed and effectiveness of algorithms, which are beating humans in many spheres requiring a fast analysis of huge data sets. The oxymoronic combination of intelligence and artificiality determines the aptness of this metaphor, which, although already lexicalized, concisely names what is internally contradictory, and therefore still has the potential to impact imagination.

Machines – a fetish of the avant-garde – have become a terrifying monstrosity breaking free from human control. In the 21st century, the machine – a mechanical construction with an engine – was replaced by artificial intelligence, i.e. complex IT procedures based on a set of techniques and methods such as neural networks, machine learning, genetic algorithms, thanks to which increasingly complex systems can be made, able to learn, adapt to their environment, and complete highly complicated tasks. The next step towards the future is imagining the world without people, or at least people understood as sovereign entities controlling the world – a post-human world devised by AI working autonomously, equipped with features surpassing what is attainable for humans.

Radosław Jurczak, author of two striking books of poems – *Pamięć zewnętrzna*[18] [External Memory] and *Zakłady holenderskie*[19] [Dutch Book] – is among those poets who project such possible worlds, who at the same time use poetic language for this in an intriguing and surprising way. Both his books function as a type of precisely designed space-time, where the reader can (or at least try to) experience their own death as an intelligent, sensitive, thinking entity, in laboratory conditions.

His debut, *Pamięć zewnętrzna*, constructed a model of a technicized world, also focusing on social and political issues from the global perspective, which was facilitated by the development of digital technologies. The poem *Europa* [Europe] – clearly referring to Czesław Miłosz's poetry (like many other poems from that book), his *Native Realm*, and the concept of Eastern-Europeanness – showcases its character. It attempts to define

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 33.

[18] R. Jurczak, *Pamięć zewnętrzna*, Łódź 2016. Hereafter also as *Pz*.

[19] *Idem*, *Zakłady holenderskie*, Stronie Śląskie 2020. Hereafter also as *Zh*.

the current state of the awareness of Europeans, fed with classical literature and "choking" in the face of today's world's unsolved problems: the refugee crisis, the cruelty of capitalism, the expansion of communication technologies: "One sometimes prefers to be external memory/ perfect memory: a small black pen drive/ the simplest Daimonion says zero one." The protagonist of those poems does not have their own identity; immersed in virtual reality, they are lost and devoid of distinguishing qualities, e.g. in *GoogleGlass*: "you are transparent like the Internet \ like a search engine clear like glass," "you are lost among mirrors \ so do not multiply your reflections for how do you know which one will blink." "The system's epiphany: look how many icons" is the only possible revelation. In *Głupi wiersz do tańczenia* [Stupid Poem for Dancing] the technicization of life is reflected on every level of its organization:

> (there are no Manichaeans because there are firewalls
> there is no oscillation in the medium because gnothi seauton
> and inside there is no phrase there is a clatter of algorithms
> there is flow and flow remains and then there are languages
> and then I transform into a very short sentence
> and then I transform into a very huge pixel
> and there are no Manichaeans because there is no longer poetry
> and no Chinese room because gnothi seauton
> and inside there is no phrase there is a mechanical accent
> so let's Manicheism because there is no more poetry
> and here and there peace to people of free will
> and one can dance because one can always dance
> there are no Manichaeans because there are firewalls)[20]

The structure of this poem initially resembles a propositional calculus of sentences in which the relationship between the truthfulness of complex sentences and the truthfulness of simple sentences (or Wittgenstein's elementary propositions used for describing the world[21]) is analyzed. In the opening, each verse consists of two simple sentences. There is no semantic relationship between "there are no Manichaeans" and "there are firewalls" (in IT, a firewall is a system which protects an internal, secured network from an external, unsecured network). Whether those two premises are true or false is irrelevant for the status of the whole assumption produced by the conjunction "because," suggesting a causal connection between them. The second verse refers to physics terminology describing oscillation motion and to a Delphic maxim: "Know thyself." Once again, the conjunction

[20] R. Jurczak, *Głupi wiersz do tańczenia*, [in:] *idem*, *Pamięć zewnętrzna…*

[21] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, trans. B. Wolniewicz, Warszawa 1970.

"because" suggests (and produces) a cause-and-effect relationship between the two sentences. However, using prepositional calculus as the poem's framework does not last for long. In the subsequent parts, the propositions change their length, they freely flow between the verses, in accordance with the poem's contents. In the lines that follow, the clashes of semantically distant word pairs (unimaginable like in the avant-garde metaphor) are repeated several times, creating a striking and unsettling effect of zero-one automation: "there is a clatter of algorithms," "there are languages," "and then I transform into a very short sentence," "and then I transform into a very huge pixel," "there is a mechanical accent," "there is no more poetry." It is difficult to even define a position from which this bizarre montage of images should be watched: the inside and outside, marked by parentheses (the whole poem is parenthetical) and the adverb "inside", constitute only empty signs between or beyond which "here and there" is additionally located.

Radical instability and questioning the status of reality in the poem, and setting in motion both the meaning of words and the enigmatic subject, who seamlessly transforms their state, and ultimately dissolves in dance movement (so – human after all?), becomes the effect of this game of what is there and what is not. And yet this poem is dominated by the posthuman perspective of the functioning of the language machine. The Chinese room argument, which proves that a computer simulating intelligent action in a locked room does not equal intelligence, is often cited in disputes between supporters and opponents of the general theory of AI, which is supposed to possess the human ability to think. The poem does not settle those doubts, but it outlines a new horizon of ontological, anthropological, and aesthetic considerations, delineated by programming languages and algorithms.

The second and third decade of the 21st century has been a singular time; the (un)reality of the world permeated by technology is singular. Singularity has many meanings in science. The term first appeared in Einstein's *General Relativity* in 1915, defining the center of black holes – points whose properties physics is still unable to answer. Singularity escapes cognition. Humanity reached a similar situation in terms of technological advancements. Technological singularity, still defined in reference to the future, is a hypothetical moment when its further development will irreversibly get out of human control. This particularly concerns the development of AI, which would then be able to achieve and surpass the level of human capabilities, gaining awareness in the process. Singularity would become our reality. And although general AI that would threaten humanity does not yet exist, the potentiality of its existence and agency makes singularity a threat looming somewhere beyond, which simultaneously exists and does not exist, breaking the tissue of tamable phenomena (via imagination, language, narrative).

Mark Fisher, the British theoretician of culture, wrote his book *The Weird and the Eerie*, in which he describes fascinating examples of what is weird and eerie in our culture, what has usually been associated with horror and science fiction, but is now going beyond the limitations of all genres and is located at the center of modern experience. Fisher put forward the categories of the weird and the eerie, inspired by Derrida's hauntology (*hantologie*),[22] juxtaposing them with Freud's uncanny (*das Unheimliche*). The latter, which Freud associated with doppelgangers, machines imitating humans and prosthetics, is a category based on repetition, doubling a phenomenon. The uncanny is located inside what is known, but what causes anxiety because it makes familiar phenomena comprise some unfamiliar entity. Fisher observed that this *unheimlisch* focuses attention on a crisis and the lack of what is internal, and it is a manifestation of "a secular retreat from the outside,"[23] whereas the weird and the eerie "allow us to see the inside from the perspective of the outside."[24] "The weird is that which does not belong,"[25] what is added to the familiar, but it does not match it. Montage – especially surrealist montage – is an example of the weird; many avant-garde metaphors can be considered weird, whose elements, although in grammatical agreement, are weird on the visual and imaginative level. Therefore, they extended the limits of what is conceivable and possible to be said. A similar thing happens in Radosław Jurczak's poetry:

You will never learn about yourselves,
    as much as nothing knows about you, small infrared states
with not that prehensile borders; to know this much about oneself

as nothing knows about you, small infrared states,
    tiny differentiable animals on an invisible orbit,
you would never want. How much the network knows about you

and unasked does not say, petted with a thousand sensors
    tiny differentiable animals on calculated orbits,
you will never be able to remember. The network remembers and dreams:

[22] J. Derrida, *Widma Marksa. Stan długu, praca żałoby i nowa Międzynarodówka* [Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International], trans. T. Załuski, Warszawa 2016. The French term "hantologie" is a neologism which consists of "hanter" (to haunt) and "ontologie" (ontology), which sound very similar in French. The term refers to the paradoxical state of being in which something is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive. Fisher's category of the weird has a similar ontological status.

[23] M. Fischer, *The Weird and the Eeerie*, New York 2016, p. 10.

[24] *Ibidem*.

[25] *Ibidem*.

(about which, tiny measurable animals, you shall never know;
tiny non-random animals lulled into a swarm)[26]

When it comes to the eerie, Fisher explains it as something which is also associated with the outside and that accompanies experiencing an abandoned space, open and partially desert. Eeriness – and this is a key moment for us – is also associated with agency. It begs the question who made things happen the way they happened, and whether there actually is anyone behind it. Fisher referred to capital in the capitalist society, which – controlling everything – remains something inconceivable that functions from the outside, as eerie. Likewise, inanimate forces, objects, and quasi-entities that affect us are also eerie. Today, technology is the most singular (non)entity. Non-human agency of algorithms, language machines, which – invisible, absent, located outside or even beyond the human world – permeate our world, impacting the scale, and inspiring horror mixed with fascination, should be placed on par with inconceivable forces of nature. Listening to non-human voices is also eerie, and so is chatting with Chat GPT:

People say overstudy, people say: overlifting;
Introduce yourself, language, tell us what you saw.[27]

In his review of Radosław Jurczak's poetry, Jakub Skurys aptly captured the essence of this vision of the present, which both exists and does not exist, because the sense of certainty, functionality of past differentiations and categorizations has been evaporating imperceptibly, and we have long been living in a reality that escapes familiar, human organization:

the idea of humanism has been dead for a long time, our idea of life – extremely meagre, and post-anthropocentrism does not necessarily imply emancipation to a multicultural, better, and more open community. At least today nothing suggests this.[28]

The similarity between Jurczak's experiments with the ontological status of the textual world, which eludes settlement, and Przyboś's "the world-is-and-is-not" is only apparent – in fact, there is a fundamental difference in the ontological status of reality between those two poets. In the aesthetics

[26] R. Jurczak, *[6] W koloniach wprowadzony zostaje powszechny system monitorowania behawioralnego. Mówi moduł centralny* [A Common System of Behavioral Monitoring Is Introduced in the Colonies. This Is the Central Module Speaking], [in:] *idem*, *Zakłady holenderskie*…

[27] R. Jurczak, */k/* [neural network GPT-2 is ironic], [in:] *idem*, *Zakłady holenderskie*…

[28] J. Skurys, *Przyszłość jest chmurą, przyszłość jest chwytem* [The Future Is a Cloud, the Future Is a Literary Device], Biblioteka. Magazyn literacki, https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/recenzje/przyszlosc-jest-chmura-przyszlosc-jest-chwytem/ (accessed: 10.12.2023).

of the 20th-century avant-garde, the existence of the world depended on the creative subject's creative power, who resonated with it tenderly; however, the poem did not question their physical realness. From Jurczak's poetry's catastrophic perspective, the former foundation disintegrates: the conviction of the stability of self, of the existence of some – even if fragile and uncertain – tangible and experiential surface of reality, available to anyone, as well as faith in a shared tradition (understood not only as a collection of texts, but first and foremost, of ideas and values), providing support and a point of reference. The world disintegrated in the most literal way, it got out of hand, and even if some rules are in place, they are beyond human reach. One could say that such a world is-and-is-not – but in a way in which Mark Fisher writes about experiencing its singularity, rather than Julian Przyboś.

As recently as 20 years ago, in the early 2000s, papers were written on the similarities between cybernetic poets, deeply rooted in the context of digital technologies, such as Łukasz Podgórni, Roman Bromboszcz, Maciej Taranek, with futurists. The relationship between the new man with the development of cybernetics, IT, and digital media brought about works – manifestos and provocations – in which the subject presents themself as a cyborg, simultaneously a product and a victim of the system. Today, those poets have given way to the younger generation of digital natives. Gen-Z, also known as generation C (connected to the Internet), i.e. people born between 1995 and 2012, are attracting a lot of attention. Those teenagers and young adults will determine new directions for the development of the poetic/linguistic imagination; imagination stimulated by the non-linguistic (or rather non-verbal): the experience of blurring the lines between the multiplicity of equally available/unavailable worlds, dissipated perception, the multiplication (annihilation?) of identity. Today, this is not a matter of the impossibility of determining the ontological line between life and a game; between a computer simulation and actual experience, but rather an overwhelming sense of the irrelevance of such differentiations.

However, what makes Gen-Z coherent and homogenous to an outside observer, for them is completely irrelevant. Being digital natives, the digital world they live in is transparent, like the air we breathe. What makes twenty-year-olds seem like a homogenous group in the eyes of older people, for them is no common ground:

> (we were the first live stream from every atom in the world
> the shortest remix of everything We surely were not
> a generation yet we were playing a game a game was playing us)[29]

[29] R. Jurczak, *Ta sama elegia napisana trzy razy* [The Same Eulogy Written Three Times], [in:] *idem*, *Pamięć zewnętzna…*

Young people feel no nostalgia for the analog world because they do not know it, they do not share their parents' values, who are lamenting the loss of a well-known, familiar world. Radosław Jurczak writes about it:

(1)
I did not cry for Atari nor for the two towers
(2)
I did not cry for patriarchy for film tape
I am not a generation I have a thousand possible replacements
(3)
I am a generation I have a thousand possible replacements[30]

Although the omnipresence of technology throughout this book of poems is striking, it is dominated by a perspective available to human eyes: interfaces, organizing the space-time of human cognition and life, transforming into a game of simulation and dissimulation ("I am a thousand touchscreens/ some of those screens have already learned to play fetch" *#Hume*, *Pz*), elegiac and post-ironic, as it eludes unequivocal assessment of the subject's intentions, the perspective of saying farewell to the world eulogized by classics ("I see and debug because I miss you," *Nowa teoria widzenia* [New Theory of Seeing], *Pz*), and a prediction that a reality subservient to AI will come ("The deeper the brighter and then you go blind (the tree of messages/ grows from a self-feeding algorithm)", *#introduction_to_cognitive_science (2)*, *Pz*).

A vision of a world subordinated to a super-precise, soulless, binary logic is straight from the Chinese room experiment: "and inside there is no phrase there is a mechanical accent/ so let's Manicheism because there is no more poetry." A situation described in such a way defines a generational experience: "I am not a generation I have a thousand possible replacements/ I am a generation I have a thousand possible replacements" (*pokoleniowy*, *Pz*). The story about lost identity, about the feeling of community based on the rule of interchangeability of experience in the virtual world as the only thing given to everyone, becomes a perverse story of Gen-Z, whose childhood and formative years are registered exclusively by external memory. The self-deprecating *Skowyt* [Howl] of Gen-Z ("I have seen/ the best/ minds/ of my generation in hipster cafés") is also an attempt at an irreverent manifestation of how useless the languages of literary tradition are, as Miłosz, Mickiewicz, and the great modernists all sound endearingly old-fashioned and anachronistic in the world of free-living algorithms.

Instead of Peiper's blizzard of metaphors, we have a blizzard of distorted quotes (Kochanowski, Whitman, Auden, Ginsberg, and even Szymborska –

[30] R. Jurczak, *#generational*, [in:] *idem*, *Pamięć zewnętrzna*…

"to know this much about oneself/ as nothing knows about you" (*W koloniach wprowadzony zostaje powszechny system monitorowania behawioralnego. Mówi moduł centralny*, *Zh*) and word games. "Game" – next to "statistics," "network," "screen" and a whole range of technical terms – is a word which best conveys the status of Jurczak's poetic world. They constitute a futurological fusion as well as a proposal to look at the world from a perspective other than human.

Jurczak consequently rescales the poetic imagination,[31] forcing readers to do the same. The reader constantly clashes with what is unimaginable due to being invisible, unavailable via senses, or simply too far away, alien, unknown. Jurczak constantly modifies the scale and proportions between the elements of his poems, using macro- and micro-conceptualizations in such a way as to make the overlapping languages and meta-languages describing the physical reality the main poetic device in his poetry in place of metaphors, continuously shifting between them. In accordance with Niels Bohr's formula – the motto of *Zakłady holenderskie* – radical discontinuity is best represented by remnants of continuity, which remain "the eulogy of finished pleasure: / searching for banknotes in the sky, for planets in your pockets" (*[2] Elon Musk umiera na Ziemi* [Elon Musk Is Dying on Earth], *Zh*).

Jurczak constructs an unusual time-space in which entities and places presented in different scales and perspectives meet, determined by mathematics, statistics, and theoretical physics. Technologies gain autonomy, animated and treated as new, full-fledged social actors, and a game replaces stating, creating, naming. A game is a type of entertainment, but also a lifestyle. A game is a type of a model arrangement of situations which could take place, and whose course and effects can be tested via thought experiments. However, in contrast to models (e.g. mathematical), poems do not imitate situations which already took place: they are a type of experiments, plays, or an infinite game that does not lead to conclusions, taglines, solutions; they only arrange an imagined process. However, the problem is

[31] Scaling is a term that has many meanings. In mathematics, scaling refers to the multiplication of each dimension of a real-life object by a scale factor (a constant used as a multiplier) to obtain the dimensions of a different representation of that object. In graphic design, it refers to changing the dimensions of a text, design or drawing, which allows to adjust the data to the space on a screen or a piece of paper. In research using measuring instruments, scaling is a technical term referring to adjusting the device's parameters to the working conditions (i.e. calibrating the measuring devices). In reference to physical exercise, whose goal is to improve fitness and stamina levels, scaling refers to adjusting the weight and type of exercise to individual needs and possibilities. Scaling is also a technique used in cognitive-behavioral therapy, used for determining the intensity of emotions, cognitive biases, their modification and monitoring the course of changes taking place within therapy. Using this term, to some extent, I refer to all of those meanings.

that the originator (Who are they? Do they even exist?) only seems to have control over this process because the world is governed by coincidences, resembling a dice game at best: "Playing games like playing billiards" (*[2] Imitation game*, *Zh*), "Bitcoin exchange rate, lost memory cell, what desires carry you, what hand pushes you forward? (*Dziewięć hymnów dla smutnych żab* [Nine Hymns for Sad Frogs], *Zh*).

Zakłady holenderskie – Jurczak's second book of poems from 2020 – sets the bar for his readers even higher, requiring solid knowledge of cognitive neuroscience and machine learning, probability theory, as well as general knowledge of theoretical and mathematical physics, as it is based on those fields' image of the world. This knowledge impacts the construction of the book, the poet's lexicon of scientific terms influences the perception and understanding of phenomena inaccessible to laymen. Readers cannot simply browse the Internet to understand those complex processes, phenomena, and the theories explaining them. In the case of most poems, the reader has to be content with experiencing the suggested depth and complication of scientific references, which only magnify the sense of alienation and uncanniness.

What happens when an extraordinary, professional, unhuman (from the perspective of amateurs) perspective is forced into the rules of poetic communication, when not only epistemological considerations are encoded in a poem, but also a precise knowledge of mathematics? Words not only mean what they mean, but they are also part of another infrastructure – being unfamiliar with it makes the message highly hermetic. And this is Jurczak's plan: he tries to incorporate an intimate experience of being immersed in a reality transformed not only by digital media (understood as a means of communication and interaction with the world), but also a highly organized, complex, transparent technology, which functions in a way that is elusive for the human actor into the framework of a poem, which will carry the weight and novelty of the project. A project is devised as avant-garde, as it is supposed to renew the Polish verse. However, at the same time, it is ambiguous as a literary project, or rather post-ironic, blurring meanings, obscuring intentions, or even suggesting a lack of intentionality. This is because such poems are based on communicative distortions rather than striving towards the clarity of the message, making an element of our reality out of multiple codes and communicative layers – a reality saturated with helpless ambiguity which paralyzes the possibility to be serious and trust any language.[32]

[32] This is like being a hipster, who uses irony and pastiche as their way of manifesting their attitude to the world, who clashes with consumer society. Their gestures are imme-

Jurczak paraphrases Kochanowski's poems (as a eulogist of the world's harmony, but also a father mourning his dead daughter), alludes to Miłosz's concept of rescuing poetry, and refers to characteristic contemporary idioms (Maciej Taranek, Anna Adamowicz, Szczepan Kopyt, Tomasz Pułka) as ironic comments on his (or an AI-generated) futurological vision. His poetry resembles Andrzej Sosnowski's works, who generously uses melodic phrases of languages of traditions, accumulating verses which enchant with their sound, often losing their references. There is also a connection, albeit less obvious, to Tymoteusz Karpowicz's maximalist poetic project, who sought to contain the whole current knowledge about the world and humanity in his poems, at the cost of lyrical quality and communicativeness:

> The first fully Aryan mayfly,
> painless double helix knot
> what molds do you come from, what dream do you go away to?
>
> Painless double helix knot,
> what pain will you tell us about, what meaning will you tell us about?
> If your memory serves you right, you little overplastic tissue,
>
> What hand expresses you and what myth glues you together?
> What mechanism enlaces you, you shapely replaceable particle,
> what pain will you tell us about[33]

Therefore, Jurczak's book of poems is, on the one hand, an elegiac farewell to the familiar world: living on earth, breathing oxygen, access to drinking water, experiencing emotions, death as the irreversible conclusion to life. On the other, it is an ironic-ecstatic, futurological and, at the same time, a catastrophic vision of life in the world of Laplace's demon –

> An intellect which at any given moment knew all of the forces that animate nature and the mutual positions of the beings that compose it, if this intellect were vast enough to submit the data to analysis, could condense into a single formula the movement of the greatest bodies of the universe and that of the lightest atom; for such an intellect nothing could be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes:[34]

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diately taken over and incorporated by the mainstream. The force of ironic contestation is thus annihilated.

[33] R. Jurczak, *[4] W koloniach rodzi się pierwsze dziecko w całości zaprojektowane przez inżynierów* [In the Colonies a First Child Completely Designed by Engineers Is Born], [in:] *idem*, *Zakłady holenderskie*…

[34] See https://physics.weber.edu/carroll/honors/Laplace.htm (accessed: 1.09.2023).

(planets are lamenting elliptic curves,
    planets are lamenting circumferences of ellipses,
dead radiolocation is not lamenting)

(stars are lamenting in fires of ellipses,
    Kepler's laws are lamenting in fires of ellipses,
dead radiolocation is not lamenting)

(the first derivative of time is lamenting
    the second derivative of time is lamenting,
dead radiolocation is not lamenting,

black holes are lamenting from the outside)[35]

This deterministic and fatalist vision of the universe colonized by some new, non-human form of life, where new generations of computers learn how to speak in accordance with algorithms once created by people, is a reality where truth does not exist, and where probability is subjective. But who is this subjective mind determining the possibilities and risks? It clearly is not man, but an autonomous, thinking machine. It also lives on Mars, which has been colonized by Elon Musk in the near future and taken over by AI.

This world is bizarre, unimaginable, incredible, and yet – as subsequent poems show us – quite probable. The titular Dutch book is a term from logic and probability theory, which refers to a cognitive illusion on which people base their convictions. A Dutch book is a sum of bets in which the calculus of probability suggests a gain, whereas it actually ensures a loss, as the result of a game only seems to be predictable – in reality, the loss is guaranteed.

Zakłady holenderskie, whose poetics were associated by critics with how AI functions, is an example of a cognitive and linguistic experiment in which the perspective is handed over to something that we would call a non-human consciousness: being able to see more, differently, in accordance with mathematical rules, and first and foremost – without emotions or sensations. Jakub Skurys concluded that the poems were generated rather than written – their language creates a reality according to complex rules inaccessible to man, in which the information available is processed in a self-referential (autotelic) way, so that the reader has an impression of moving through some space that is perfectly autonomous, technicized, and free from human weaknesses (if emotions can be considered a weakness), rather than trying to emulate and represent some reality. These poems feel

[35] R. Jurczak, *nad ranem umrze Steven Hawking; Voyager 2 ogląda się wstecz na heliosferę* [Steven Hawking Is Going to Die at Dawn; Voyager 2 Is Looking Back at the Heliosphere], [in:] *idem*, *Zakłady holenderskie*…

weird, alien, eerie, not because they are rooted in transcendence, but in the inconceivable, beyond human, what comes from the outside, from beyond the anthropo-mimetic world which we are able to familiarize ourselves with and explain. It should be mentioned here that Jurczak is a professional dealing with machine learning and neurolinguistic programing. Machine learning is teaching computers how to learn from data and develop their skills with experience; this process is supposed to replace traditional programing. Computers are supposed to identify patterns and correlations in huge data sets in order to make the best decisions and prognoses. Neurolinguistic programming is a communication technique focusing on the relationship between the functioning of a human neural network, linguistic aspects and the ways of behaving that result from them, as well as modifying the ways in which people behave and experience (i.e. programing), as well as influencing our behavior and modifying patterns of perception and thinking. This search for common ground between machines and people is also a characteristic aspect of Jurczak's poetry, who, on the one hand, projects a vision of a post-human world, and on the other, constantly experiments with the image of machines as something antihuman. The search for poetics, i.e. a way of writing which would equal to the vision of the present, which is not exclusively about projecting catastrophic visions, but rather those that can contain a different conceptualization of aesthetics and existence, is a major challenge for readers, who are forced to go beyond themselves and open up to the weird and the eerie as something inevitable.

Therefore, a poem describing reality is not a place for epiphany or a sensitive instrument which allows us to participate in transforming the world. It is unable to accumulate energy in order to strike, enchant and move the reader with the force of an original metaphor. Its engagement in the present day more often resembles the functioning of the resonator – a device that exhibits resonance under the influence of a sound, electric impulse, or some other form of energy, oscillating with a greater amplitude, which allows a stronger, more stable signal to be obtained. Resonators are common in everyday life and technology – from music, to electronics, to telecommunication, to medicine. A poem – if we think of it as a sensitive instrument – collects, transforms, and through even oscillation across the whole poem, reinforces external signals, which blend together, combine into new entities, offering a cacophony representing the world's tumult and howl rather than a harmonious melody. If it inspires people to think, it is not due to sophisticated intellectualism of linguistic devices, but down to an accumulation of numerous different props, languages (including those saturated with complex terminology and IT jargon), topics and issues whose impact depends on their numbers rather than their novelty. This resonance

with the world is nothing like the functioning of the resonator – however, there is a similarity in their soulless, procedural functioning: no selection, withdrawal of the subject as the sense-making instance, and automated functioning, as in the poem *[2] Imitation game* which contains a quote from Alan Turing, the creator of AI:

> *The new form of the problem can be described in terms of a game which we call the 'imitation game'. […] it will be assumed that the best strategy is to try to provide answers that would naturally be given by a man.*[36]

Playing games like playing billiards and you don't know that this is a technical term,
You have triple checked if it is locked with the key.
The router's diode.

The monitor away from the window and the drive ready for formatting like an animal vigilant
to a rustle.
What do you want from us, Lord, for VPN and e-mail aliases.
Going to work

without a clear reason, having a guise shapely and bouncy like a fruit
of a completely unknown type, having nights vibrating with diodes
locked up with a key,

days like billiards:[37]

As can be seen, even lexicalized metaphors; catachreses and technical terms which are worn out and trivialized by everyday use get a new life in a poem based on devices that make the ordinary extraordinary. Jurczak constantly gives us imagined – still futurological – scenarios, which force us to imagine a world without people, or a world in which people have the status of beings heretofore subordinate to man, and soon – perhaps – autonomous AI. And the poem that tells us about it – in accordance with its nature – regains its lost ambiguity of notions, playing with two orders of meaning: literal and metaphorical.

Translated by Paulina Zagórska

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[36] A.M. Turing, *I.—Computing Machinery And Intelligence*, "Mind" 1950, vol. 59, iss. 236, pp. 433–460, https://academic.oup.com/mind/article/LIX/236/433/986238 (accessed: 2.09.2024).

[37] R. Jurczak, *[2] Imitation game*, [in:] *idem*, *Zakłady holenderskie…*

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Elżbieta Winiecka – professor, literary scholar at the Department of Modern Literature and Culture, Adam Mickiewicz University. Her research interests include Polish literature of the 20th and 21st centuries, especially avant-garde poetry, as well as electronic literature. She is head of the Electronic Literature Research Center at the Faculty of Polish and Classical Philology of the Adam Mickiewicz University, and director of the Institute of Polish Philology AMU, as well as a member of the editorial team of „Poznan Polonological Studies. Literary Series." Author of books: *Białoszewski sylleptyczny* [Białoszewski Sylleptic] (Poznan 2006), *Z wnętrza dystansu : Leśmian – Karpowicz – Białoszewski – Miłobędzka* [From inside the Distance: Leśmian – Karpowicz – Białoszewski – Miłobędzka] (Poznań 2012), *Poszerzanie pola literackiego. Studia o literackości w Internecie* [Expanding the Literary Field: Studies on Literariness on the Internet] (Kraków 2020). She recently published *Wpływologia. Międzywojenne dyskusje wokół "Pana Tadeusza" i futuryzmu jako elementy sporu o wpływy, zależności i plagiaty* [Influology: Interwar Discussions around "Pan Tadeusz" and Futurism as Elements of the Dispute over Influences, Dependencies and Plagiarism] (Poznań 2023). ORCID: 0000-0002-8267-2219. E-mail address: <elwin@amu.edu.pl>.