



przestrzenie **TEORII**

LITERATURE AS A POSSIBILITY

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Literature as an Entangled World

ABSTRACT. Anna Krajewska, *Literature as an Entangled World*. "Przestrzenie Teorii" special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 5–11. ISSN 1644-6763. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.0>

The editorial discusses the volume's assumptions and goals by briefly characterizing the covered issues (digital archive, liberature, literary reading of history, literary entanglement, relationships between literature, film, the theater, and video games) conceptualized in various research perspectives. The problem of the role of applying operational notions, such as re-enactment, remixability, indeterminacy, possibility, potentiality, virtuality, etc., which are used in attempts at creating a new onto-epistemology, are also considered. Therefore, literature is a constant performative re-enactment of the process of making the entangled world present. In this process, literature constantly reestablishes the world of different possibilities of existing.

KEYWORDS: digital archive, history, liberature, literary entanglement, film, theater, video games, re-enactment, remixability, possibility, potentiality, virtuality, performativity, undefined world

There is no simple, encyclopedic answer to the question how the modern notion of literature is understood. Literature eludes even the most sophisticated attempts at defining its constant characteristics and ways of conceptualizing its stable character. In the call for papers for this volume we wrote:

Our aim is to identify 21st-century transformations in literary studies, especially those concerning the image of the studied subject. Those transformations can be roughly summarized as a transition from static and definition-like description strategies towards more dynamic models conceptualizing the subject of the analysis in action; a transition from conceptualizations treating literature as an artifact, the art of the word largely connected to the print era, to concepts allowing and project literature to be discovered as a kind of dramaturgy showing different formulas and manifestations not only in relation to new media, but also to new categories highlighting potentiality, uncertainty, indefiniteness, possibility.

We would like to reveal areas for potential future research, as well as showing the future work of potentiality. For instance, instead of changeable methodologies – dramaturgy; instead of descriptive notions (exhaustive, or at least striving towards a synthesis) – operative notions (individually adjusted to the processually characterized object of analysis); and instead of the binary way of thinking – performativity. Presented in this way, literature as a possibility seems to be a space defined through a set of constantly renegotiated vectors, such as the field of instability and heterogeneity, in which it is not (or – not only) meaning that is significant, but first and foremost (or – also) activities which take place in that field by actors acting within it.

The texts comprising the present volume merely outline the research project; they are an opening to a problem, but at the same time, they provoke further study of similar topics. If I were to identify some directions of literary activities discussed here, I would say that they rarely appear in their pure forms – typically, they are entangled in new openings, and they provoke innovative references while becoming accidentally entangled. On the one hand, by looking back, we discover unexpected dimensions of the future, as showcased by Stanisław Wyspiański’s digital archive – highlighting two characteristics of his work: multimedia and the dynamics of the creative process suspending finality – which becomes a comment on the present day (Magdalena Popiel). Historical texts reveal possibilities of literary interpretations, arranging new narratives/versions/images analyzed from the perspective of literary studies, in which history becomes possible literature (Piotr Bering). Zenon Fajfer’s original, interactive formula of an “emanative poem” is presented in the light of the Aristotelean concept of entelechy; the multimodal collection of emanative poems, *Powieki*, published as a material book and digital poems released on a CD, inspires hypertext entelechy, whereas the dense, multi-level textual maze can be perceived as a modern version of the Orphic catabasis (Katarzyna Bazarnik).

The notion of “aura,” introduced by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s, is a useful category concerning ways of presenting concealment, mystery, and secrets in literature. Here, Andrzej Denka analyzes and modernizes it in his analysis of Sigfried Lenz’s novella *A Minute’s Silence*, which shows a secret as an axis of the strategy of literary criticism defining the role of form and context in personal, each time different, receptions of the story.

The changing sense of the limits of truth/fiction stimulates perceiving writing/reading as performative acts. Overcoming the text-centric optics, both in the creative process, and in experiencing poetry, an insight into the achievements of performative acting, or using the artifact theory, e.g. in Brian Massumi’s conceptualization, all help construct the dramaturgy of self-cognition (Marek Pieniążek). Hence, the question about literature’s possibility also concerns the instability of an artifact, playing with text in the light of new technologies, defined as interpretative, participatory games, which take the form of games with the format or with the machine (Jacek Wachowski). Life in the world of digital media and the prospects for developing artificial intelligence is an important part of the youngest poets’ formative experience. “Imagination is rescaled”: a new poetic imagination requires readers to take a new approach to the language of the new poetry (Elżbieta Winiecka).

The papers comprising this volume focus on relationships, tangles, permeation, entanglement of many qualities, such as *Ender’s Game* by Orson

Scott Card, in reference to a video game and creation of an astroculture, together with the role of colonization and militarization motifs as actions performed by protagonists in a space which constructs the scenery of future wars (Magdalena Kempna-Pieniążek). The question of literature returns – but no longer “towards” film; instead, we are dealing with literature “as” film action (for a feature film as a literary work, see Krzysztof Kozłowski’s paper), or literature “as” theater (for conceptualizations of literature and theater in Jerzy Grotowski’s texts, see Dariusz Kosiński’s paper). The concepts of literature as a possibility of becoming a film, theater, or a video game described here, in the discussed artistic theories and practices expressed by scholars, artists, as well as scholars-artists (such as Werner Faulstich, Jerzy Grotowski, Orson Scott Card), remain a sphere of a broadly understood possibility to be two different things, simultaneously.

I believe that this is where the issue of abandoning discussions of adaptations or intersemiotic translations in favor of notions such as a palimpsest,¹ anamorphosis, re-enactment,² remixability,³ entanglement⁴ returns. Even notions which enjoyed popularity until recently, such as multimedia, i.e. including different media, or hybridity, i.e. combining different, recognizable elements, are increasingly being replaced by the notion of remixability – mixing, taking different ways of creating from various media, or chimerism – constructing a seemingly coherent piece, which in fact conceals different features of various entities. The category of enactment is being replaced with re-enactment, which, however, is not free from literature (although it may seem so), often treated as a stable text; it is not “breaking free from the literary yoke,” but rather a strategy, similar to recycling or a remix,⁵ interpreting archives, organizing, recreating, establishing literature rather than replaying it, or reconstructing understood as recreating some imagined original, made-up (as if it ever existed!) version of a canonical

¹ See L. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, London and New York 2006, p. 33. “As a creative and interpretative transposition of a recognizable other work or works, adaptation is a kind of extended palimpsest...”

² See W. Świątkowska, *re-enactment*, Encyklopedia teatru polskiego [Encyclopedia of the Polish Theater], <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/hasla/352/re-enactment>.

³ L. Manovich, *Język nowych mediów* [The Language of New Media], trans. P. Cypryański, Warszawa 2006.

⁴ A. Krajewska, *Zwrot dramatyczny a literaturoznawstwo performatywne* [The Dramatic Turn and Performative Literary Studies], “Przestrzenie Teorii” 2012, no. 17.

⁵ See W. Świątkowska, *remiks*, Encyklopedia teatru polskiego [Encyclopedia of the Polish Theater], <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/hasla/351/remiks>. See also: W. Świątkowska, *Odprawianie Dziadów. Recykling i re-enactment jako strategie remiksu* [Performing the Forefathers: Recycling and Re-Enactment as Remix Strategies], “Teatr” 2017, no. 1.

work. Even multimodality⁶ is transforming into secondary multimodality⁷ or remixability.

The latter is a stark reminder that in the sphere of grasping literature, we do not refer to its features or media: we move straight to discussing those notions. Not only have notions started wandering (Mieke Bal), or become operational (Wolfgang Iser, Doris Bachmann-Medick), they are opalescent with meanings, constantly demanding redefinitions, they often take place within themselves in the metaphor mode, not to mention that it is metaphors that are being used in attempts at making literature present ever more frequently.

Therefore, a metaphor may in fact be a literary image of states of quantum entanglement. There is no original state, no pre-establishment, we do not know the mechanism (apart from referring to the author's imagination) behind the process in which two words, two concepts suddenly start to mutually share their characteristics with each other, resulting in a new, highly unstable quality. The interactive theory of metaphor (known from poetics) is close to such a conceptualization. If interactions were replaced with intra-action (a concept developed by Karen Barad,⁸ according to which unsettled entities, unready objects react to one another), we would receive the concept of metaphor as a performative entanglement, understood here as a constant reconfiguration of the world. From Heraclitus to Barad, from Plato to Bohr, we have the option of entities emerging from emptiness (i.e. the state preceding any ontology), we begin (or rather return to...) notions of uncertainty, indefiniteness, fluidity, performativity, entanglement... Here, the performative perspective of literary studies harmonizes with a category borrowed from quantum physics entanglement. Thanks to such an approach to discussing the worlds of Witold Gombrowicz, Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett, or Tadeusz Różewicz, combining performativity with entanglement, and ontology with epistemology, we can understand the state of the trap in which we find ourselves in this indefinite, intangible, possible world (Anna Krajewska).

Such thinking redirects us to the game of notions: potentiality, virtuality, randomness, contingency,⁹ i.e. notions referring to speculative real-

⁶ A. Gibbons, *Multimodality, Cognition, and Experimental Literature*, New York 2012.

⁷ M. Mazur, *Multimodalność wtórna i widzialność tomograficzna na przykładzie "Nakarmić kamień" Bronki Nowickiej* [Secondary Multimodality and Tomographic Visibility – The Example of Bronka Nowicka's *Nakarmić Kamień* (To Feed a Stone)], "Przestrzenie Teorii" 2023, no. 39.

⁸ K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, London 2007.

⁹ See Q. Meillassoux, *Po skończoności: Esej o konieczności przygodności* [After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency], trans. P. Herbich, Biblioteka kwartalnika "Kronos", Warszawa 2015.

ism. In the background looms the question of literature's status expressed in various philosophical concepts – J. Hillis Miller's¹⁰ (performative seeing), Daniel Ferrer's¹¹ (possible worlds), or Quentin Meillassoux's¹² (speculative realism).

Is literature as literature an expression of potentiality? The answer is not simple, it concerns studying ways of creating literature; this question is about the possibility of reflecting simultaneity, visibility and invisibility, potentiality and actuality (Katarzyna Bazarnik). We should then ask about the possibility of theories – possible, potential, as well as theories of possibility, a theory which would seek the language of describing intangible phenomena, such as potentiality or contingency (Ewelina Woźniak-Czech).

In the present volume, we offer various perspectives on literature, without limiting ourselves to one – instead, we are trying to constantly change our position by reading and following authors. If I were to risk defining my process of experiencing literature, I would repeat what I proposed in 2012: looking at literature through the prism of quantum entanglement.¹³ Literature manifests itself as an entangled world; it becomes an entangled world of different dimensions. It is impossible to identify some original establishment (original scene) for it, because not only is it created in the author's imagination, but it also creates itself in the very process of writing – writing which corrects, transforms, interacts (and intraracts) with the author's thoughts. Literature is subject to the laws of constant remixing, understood as constantly opening new possibilities of mixed means of creating, conditions of measuring – as Witkacy would say – literature is a mixed background. Literature is a performative art, especially if we assume that performativity is entanglement. Literature is madness, constantly transgressing so-called norms and rules, beyond the world which has been defined only once. For the first time ever, new approaches to the notions of time, space, being, etc. as variables, constantly recreating themselves, conceptualized performatively, in the perspective of entanglement, have extended our understanding of literature's possibilities, they have set off cognitive processes based on onto-epistemology, and they have activated relationships between art and the laws of quantum physics. At the same time, we are returning

¹⁰ J.H. Miller, *O literaturze* [On Literature], trans. K. Hoffmann, Biblioteka "Przestrzeni Teorii", Poznań 2014.

¹¹ D. Ferrer, *Światy możliwe, światy fikcyjne, światy skonstruowane a proces genezy* [Possible Worlds, Fictional Worlds, Constructed Worlds and the Process of Genesis], trans. A. Dziadek, "Forum Poetyki" summer 2020.

¹² Q. Meillassoux, *Potencjalność i wirtualność* [Potentiality and Virtuality], "Kronos" 2012, no. 1.

¹³ A. Krajewska, *Splątanie literackie* [Literary Entanglement], "Przestrzenie Teorii" 2012, no. 17.

to eternal questions about time, space, the apparent linearity of the past/future, constant repetitions containing a difference. Therefore, literature is a constant re-enactment of the process of making the entangled world present. In that process, literature is constantly re-establishing the world of different possibilities of being. It would seem that the papers comprising this volume confirm such a possibility to a large extent.

Anna Krajewska

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Articles



Philology – the Art of Memory: On Stanisław Wyspiański’s Digital Archive

ABSTRACT. Magdalena Popiel, *Philology – the Art of Memory: On Stanisław Wyspiański’s Digital Archive*. “Przestrzenie Teorii” special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 15–25. ISSN 1644-6763. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.1>

The paper discusses the issue of new philology in the context of the project of Stanisław Wyspiański’s Digital Archive. Inspired by projects by Jerome McGann and John Bryant (*Rossetti Archive* and *Melville Electronic Library*), the author considers the motivations behind and the benefits of such a venture. Wyspiański’s multimediality and dynamicity of the creative process suspending finality encourage the use of digital tools in academic research and educational activities related to his works. An analysis of Wyspiański’s creative process – a writer, painter, man of the theater – can reveal a complex, heterogeneous simultaneity of his artistic activities.

KEYWORDS: new philology, digital humanities, digital archive, Stanisław Wyspiański, Jerome McGann, John Bryant, fluid text

For the past in the future

I represent a generation whose ears are sensitive to the rustle of pages turning, whose eyes are used to admiring reproductions of paintings in big, heavy albums, whose hands are familiar with the touch of pens and pencils. The senses of readers, watchers, and writers have undergone an accelerated evolution – their bodies have had to get used to looking at screens, writing on keyboards, using a computer mouse. The muscle memory of those who participated in the electronic revolution is a part of the history of the birth of digital culture.

The dawn of the rule of the book – one of foundations of the crisis mythology of present-day culture – is another experience of my generation. According to Pierre-Marc De Biasi, the rule of the book, and, more broadly, “paper as a vehicle of literature and archived material” was short-lasting, from circa 1750 to 2000.¹ At the beginning of the 21st century, we bade farewell to the traditional, paper book and manuscripts, which constituted the majority of archived documents. This is one of the reasons why those

¹ P.-M. De Biasi, *Genetyka tekstów* [The Genetics of Texts], trans. F. Kwiatek, M. Prusak, Warszawa 2015, pp. 26–27.

250 years in culture are explored most by present-day philologists. This is where philological treasures are stored: priceless manuscripts of books, letters, notes, journals, which are the main object of twenty-first century genetic studies, such as those by L'Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes (ITEM, Institute of Modern Texts and Manuscripts).² Some key editions of manuscript corpora devised according to the rules of genetic criticism include works by Flaubert, Zola, Proust, Valery, Joyce, Aragon; there are also original digital archives of Herman Melville (<http://mel.hofstra.edu>) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (*The Rossetti Archive*, www.rossettiarchive.org). Jerome McGann, a key representative of digital humanities, is the author of the Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship (NINES).

Wolfgang Iser once argued that postmodernist philosophy emerged from the spirit of modernist art, and now De Biasi claims that the modern genetic criticism and new philology owe a great deal to modernist art and its interest in documenting the creative process:

It was authors and artists, who – by placing the creative process at the center of their work, making it public as a “subject” of art and as a subject of aesthetic effect – gradually made the origins of their work its actual challenge, and transformed the object of auxiliary sciences into an essential problem of all research into contemporary art.³

Our mythical narratives about the lifeline of books and manuscripts with their beginnings, culminating points and endings are also stories about the cultural human condition. In her excellent essay *Mała elegia na zamieranie listu* [A Small Eulogy for Disappearing Letters], Teresa Walas stresses the anthropological dimension of writing:

Being written not only shapes an utterance as a linguistic text, but also merges and models our internal, liquid contents – impulses, impressions, emotions, vague convictions, and whenever this modeling leaves some trace in our psyche, it creates and reinforces thus acquired disposition, which is the ability to both form and exercise existence.⁴

The concurrent development in new philology and digital humanities is often stressed in the context of the crisis in modern culture and science. The

² See <http://www.item.ens.fr/>. This is a research unit of the French National Centre for Scientific Research and école Normale Supérieure (CNRS/ENS).

³ P.-M. De Biasi, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–38. Translation: P. Zagórska.

⁴ T. Walas, *Mała elegia na zamieranie listu* [A Small Eulogy for Disappearing Letters], “Konteksty Kultury” 2021, vol. 18, iss. 2, pp. 190–196.

shared objectives are clear wherever cultural heritage is endangered, and scholars see themselves as protectors of these goods. The dispersion and disappearance of what used to be a significant element of cultural heritage inspires a deep need to preserve it. Both digital philologists and humanists are concerned with textual memory and the materiality of the carriers that store it. Paper books will most likely continue to be printed for a long time to come, and so it seems that twenty-first century culture will be challenged by the coexistence of printed and digital texts, as well as of library archives and digital archives.

Laments over contemporary culture are typically accompanied by strong faith in the digital carrier's immortality. I leave the question of the "endless life" of hard drives to experts – we are forced to trust their deep faith in salvation – ours and our culture's – in the virtual world. One of them is McGann, who argues that digitalization is both a gift and an opportunity, and that humanists – as secular priests – are supposed to participate in the digital revolution.⁵ However, not everyone shares this faith in the deterministic power of digitalization and uncritically accepts its axiom: "Here is surely a truth universally acknowledged: that the whole of our cultural inheritance has to be re curated and reedited in digital forms and institutional structures."⁶ Nonetheless, even those who do not fully share his enthusiasm must admit that digital media can inspire the imagination and liven up humanists' desires.

To me, *Rossetti Archive* by Jerome McGann has been particularly inspiring. It is a digital presentation of works by Rossetti, a painter, designer, author and translator, founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, considered by John Ruskin and Walter Pater to be one of the most original English artists of the second half of the 19th century. Most work on the archive was conducted between 1993 and 2008, but it continues (although significantly more slowly) until today. The aim of the project is to document all his manuscripts, copies, and original editions, paintings, drawings, designs, photographs (often with editorial comments), notes, and glosses.

I imagine what a fascinating venture a digital archive of Stanisław Wyspiański would be. Why his? At first glance, one could say that this choice is analogous to that of McGann, i.e. a highly versatile artist who naturally attracts the attention of digital culture and multimedia narrative scholars. Documenting literary texts and visual works by Wyspiański would be a ma-

⁵ J. McGann, *Nova respublica litteraria. Pamięć i nauka w wieku cyfryzacji* [A New Republic of Letters: Memory and Scholarship in the Age of Digital Reproduction], trans. P. Bem, Ł. Cybulski, O. Mastela, J. Prussak, Warszawa 2016, p. 37.

⁶ J. McGann, *A New Republic of Letters: Memory and Scholarship in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, Cambridge, MA and London 2014, p. 1.

jour venture, and if we added all forms of literary, theater, television, film, music reception, and compiled a list of source texts which would reflect the rich, interdisciplinary research, we would receive something like a digital *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁷

In his psychological analysis of genius artists, Teodor Adorno argued that their psychology is based on “fantasy in a fantasy of omnipotence”;⁸ it would seem that digital humanists are its heirs.

Wyspiański’s works as a “fluid text”

Considerations regarding the genetics of artistic work often balance between two poles: ideal limitlessness and painful limitation; between the Scylla of utopian Fullness, Completeness of data, entropy, and Charybdis of the awareness of exclusively dealing with fragments of texts and endless lacunae. I believe that despite problems resulting from such a perception of documentary-editorial syntheses, a digital archive of Wyspiański’s works is justifiable in our contemporary culture within certain limits, both as a fruitful research area, and an educational tool for many recipients.

Wyspiański’s works are characterized by a feature which makes them ideal for such a venture: I can see an intriguing concurrency between processuality, highlighted by new philology, contained e.g. in the “fluid text” formula by John Bryant,⁹ and the dynamicity of the creative process characteristic for Wyspiański’s works, the practice of textual returns, chorus activities, and postponing closing devices finalizing the creative process. For Wyspiański, every text, object and reality were the living, plastic matter of creation, a mere phase of the ongoing incorporation process, a forever unfinalized act. This rule applied to both cultural and natural artifacts: he wanted to rebuild Kraków and rearrange the Tatra Mountains to make the landscape more interesting. He looked differently at Wawel and the architecture of Kraków’s churches, he saw flowers, herbs, grass in his own way, drawing their realistic details in his *Zielnik* [Herbarium], but simul-

⁷ Some media scholars (e.g. Lev Manović) are against mythologizing new media. However, there are also many voices in favor of creating a digital/audio-visual medium of the whole in the form of a library, archive, network in the literature. In *Od syntezy sztuk do sztuki post-medialnej* [From the Synthesis of Arts to Post-media Art], “Estetyka i Krytyka” no. 17/18 (2/2009–1/2010), G. Dziamski argues that “the idea of multimedia preserves something from Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*. This is evidenced by the artistic fascination with virtual reality.”

⁸ T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis 1996, p. 12.

⁹ J. Bryant, *Płynny tekst. Teoria zmienności tekstów i edytorstwa w dobie książki i ekranu* [The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing For Book and Screen], trans. Ł. Cybulski, Warszawa 2020.

taneously he created Art Nouveau compositions on polychromes, stained glass, pastel drawings, ornaments in books and magazines. He followed the same rule in his literary works, mostly plays.

Modern philologists, especially Maria Prussak, but also Włodzimierz Szturc, Dariusz Kosiński, Katarzyna Fazan, argue with inquisitiveness and competence that neither printing his plays nor staging them marked the end of Wyspiański's work on his texts; he continued to modify and correct the main text, and added stage directions.¹⁰ The impetus of transforming, decomposing, and remaking accompanied his work on subsequent versions of *Warszawianka*, *Lelewel*, *Wanda*. In *Filolog w bibliotece teatralnej* [Philologist in a Theater Library], Maria Prussak argues that Wyspiański often wrote two versions of his plays: one in the form of a book, for readers, and another one for audiences, in the form of a script.¹¹ We know well about the modifications he introduced in the printed version of *Wesele* a month and a half after the play was staged in Kraków in 1901, but other plays have gained documentation and philological-theatrical commentaries only recently.¹² It seems that a vertical digital edition¹³ is the best way of conducting research into Wyspiański's plays from the perspective of "work in progress." Textual variants of Wyspiański's works clearly show that it is the dynamicity of creative thought that should be the intention of both artists and philologists, rather than searching for the canonical version of a text.

Stories of creation

Wyspiański's world consists not only of vast lands, but also well-known islands of literary and visual masterpieces either already existing in their digitized version, or translatable into the digital language. Apart from those

¹⁰ See e.g. M. Prussak, *Brzmienia Wyspiańskiego* [The sounds of Wyspiański], Kraków 2023; W. Szturc, *Diapazony i Fonosfery* [Diapasons and Phonospheres], Kraków 2020; D. Kosiński, *Uciec z "Wesela". Próby z teatru Stanisława Wyspiańskiego* [Escape from "The Wedding": Rehearsals from Stanisław Wyspiański's Theater], Warszawa 2019; K. Fazan, *Projekty intymnego teatru śmierci. Wyspiański, Leśmian, Kantor* [Projects of the Intimate Theater of Death: Wyspiański, Leśmian, Kantor], Kraków 2009.

¹¹ M. Prussak, *Filolog w bibliotece teatralnej* [Philologist in a Theater Library], [in:] *eadem*, *Brzmienia Wyspiańskiego* [The Sounds of Wyspiański], Kraków 2023, pp. 85–104.

¹² The last such analysis (by Dorota Jarzabek-Wasył) refers to the screenplay of the premiere of *Protesilas i Laodamia* in 1903 (digitized for the project *Cyfrowe Arcydzieła Teatru im. J. Słowackiego* [Digital Masterpieces of J. Słowacki Theater]). *Protesilas i Laodamia. Scenariusz prapremiery z 25 kwietnia 1903 roku / Stanisław Wyspiański*, ed. D. Jarzabek-Wasył, Warszawa 2022.

¹³ See P.-M. De Biasi, *op. cit.*, the chapter "Genetic Editions", pp. 113–132.

solids and well-known continents, there are two areas in dispersion, which cannot be easily classified. The first one is preserved texts, which were written as constellations of main texts; it is rich and varied correspondence,¹⁴ other personal documents, and functional texts. They also include iconic texts related to Wyspiański's visual arts and theater works, as well as occasional works, such as his design for Kraków City Watch uniforms, or a paper ornament pattern for Towarzystwo Sztuka [Art Association]. The second area includes designs which were intended for realization, as well as those which were not created with any specific plan for implementation, sometimes dubbed "fantasies," such as "An architectural design of a theater" from 1896 (Paderewski's house) or a building made of iron and glass, "colors and plants" for the World Exhibition in Paris.

Imagine that we are able to watch closely each creative activity performed by Wyspiański day after day of his short life (1869–1907). Zenon Parvi's account of one day in Wyspiański's life in 1904 ("Kurier Codzienny", 19 February) gives a good idea of the intensity and simultaneity characterizing his lifestyle:

The artist copies his stained-glass project, "Stań się" [Become] for the Franciscans church, from cardboard to a canvas; he proofreads his play, "Akropolis". He cooperates with art schools, sending them patterns and motifs of embroideries, crafted articles from wood and clay; he designs furniture for the Medical Society, he is also thinking about a wooden statue of its president, which is supposed to chair all the meetings. This idea of his, with a clear satirical intention, has been rejected.¹⁵

And this is what Wyspiański's days looked like from his early youth until the end of his life, when, half-paralyzed, he made his self-portrait in Węgrzyce, and left Adam Chmiel some comments regarding the unfinished text of *Zygmunt August* a few hours before his death. His diaries, which are a part of his *Dziela zebrane* [Collected Works] published by Wydawnictwo Literackie, together with alphabetical indexes of his literary and visual works are examples of linear traditions, chronological forms of organizing life and creative work. Meanwhile, a digital compilation of literary, documentary, artifact, and biographical texts carrying Wyspiański's signature inspires the need to see his activity in new terms. The creative process is

¹⁴ For the role of letters in his artistic development and their significance in his work, see M. Popiel, *Wyspiański. Mitologia nowoczesnego artysty* [Wyspiański: A Modern Artist's Mythology], Kraków 2008.

¹⁵ Z. Parvi, *U Wyspiańskiego* [At Wyspiański's], "Kurier Codzienny", February 19, 1904. The last sentence shows how Wyspiański's contemporaries constructed his canonical image by removing his sense of humor and satire.

the area of discovering a network of tensions between all forms of activity. In the introduction to his seminal book, McGann declares: “I mean to follow long-traveled philological roads, moving to explore the mechanisms of both production history and transmission history and their complex, unfolding relations.”¹⁶ These three philological signposts can accompany a new look at Wyspiański’s work.

Uncovering stories of creation in their various twists can take place both on the level of authors’ intentions, and their cultural roots. However, the line between them is blurred, and there has been an ongoing dispute between those in favor of intentionalism, and those in favor of materialism. Bryant proposes a possible synthesis of “work as energy.”¹⁷ This somewhat resembles Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński’s anecdote about Wyspiański: in 1901, when electric streetcars were introduced in Kraków, many inhabitants (including Stanisław Przybyszewski) were against such a novelty in a medieval city. Meanwhile, Wyspiański “with a sly smile” proposed to “introduce electricity for the sake of progress, but keep an «honorable» horse running ahead of it for tradition.”¹⁸ I share this ironic approach to radical attitudes – both pragmatic and methodological.

Stories of creation are not just rooted in different sources – they have different rhythms, tempos, caesurae. Impulses accumulate, arriving from different directions. Textuality understood in the broad sense, including sensual impressions, would refer to the origins of a creative act as well as its material effects. The phonosphere and orality are two possible keys to presenting Wyspiański’s world, e.g. by digitally mapping it. Therefore De Biasi is right in asking:

How to show in a book that a writer simultaneously uses many documents influencing the writing process, in most cases parallelly? Computer tools which allow us to describe and organize an endless number of documents and links seem to be well-adjusted to such a fragmented context, regardless of its complexity and the number of elements it comprises. At this point it is mostly about the legibility of a work method in which we have to deal with many factors at the same time, about combining the origins of elements which are heterogenous by their nature, such as handwritten texts or notes, glosses, sound effects, music, unused materials, in one process.¹⁹

¹⁶ J. McGann, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁷ J. Bryant, *The Liquid Text...*, Chapter Three, “Work as Energy. Materialist Historicism and the Poetics of Social Texts”, pp. 44–63.

¹⁸ T. Boy-Żeleński, *O Wyspiańskim* [On Wyspiański], Kraków 1973, pp. 41–42.

¹⁹ P.-M. De Biasi, *op. cit.*, pp. 196–197. Translation: P. Zagórska.

Why philology? On the aesthetic experience of an artist and a philologist

I would like to ask perversely: Was Wyspiański a philologist when he read, studied, and remade Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Mickiewicz's *Forefather's Eve*? He definitely does not match the traditional image of a philologist: a patient craftsman characterized by clarity, objectivity, and rationality. When he wanted to reach the truth about the past, he talked about himself without any complexes, and as an enemy of "history which counts book pages": "I believe that my academic thoughts / are as good as the thoughts of diploma holders", "And it does not matter whether Academies / will accept and award / the details of my research and studies (...)..."²⁰

Wyspiański had at least two motivations for using existing literary texts. He clearly usurped the right to reorganize cultural memory; he referred a lot to Polish and European traditions with the heavy weight of their canonicity, to the extent allowed by his Galician education, which he saw as both his right and duty as an artist. The scope of his artistic visions designing images of the world of culture are showcased by two gestures of a visionary: his project of reconstruction of the Wawel Hill (jointly with Władysław Ekielski); this set of symbolic-architectural jigsaw puzzles, which were supposed to make his *Akropolis*, is an antique-medieval-sacral-national mixture. His "giant theater," which he composed through its repertoire while he was preparing to take over as the manager (eventually Ludwik Solski was selected instead), was just as fantastic. Working with literary classics, such as works by Shakespeare and Mickiewicz, clearly shows the kind of Wyspiański's aesthetic experiences when dealing with literature. *Studium o "Hamlecie"* [A study in *Hamlet*] follows the creative process hypothesis combining the tradition of Hamlet motifs present in many earlier accounts with Shakespeare's theater experiences. The essay's approach to *Hamlet's* text shifts, coming closer and constructing empathic closeness, only to move back and become critical. Wyspiański always believed that things could be done better: *Forefathers' Eve* could be rewritten to give a better result, Matejko's "Battle of Grunwald" – repainted... Such a critical attitude to all texts of culture resulted from the energy of imagination and a sense of his own creative power. Therefore, he focused on clearly articulating the past with his own voice. Making contemporary experiences his starting point, he was simultaneously an individual voice, burdened by his identity and individual idiom.

²⁰ S. Wyspiański, *Noty do "Bolesława Śmiałego"* [Notes to "Bolesław Śmiały"], [in:] *Bolesław Śmiały. Skalka / Stanisław Wyspiański*, ed. J. Nowakowski, Wrocław 1969, pp. 183–184.

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's proposals from his 2003 *The Powers of Philology* provide a strong impulse to look at Wyspiański's work through the ideas and rules of new philology. Gumbrecht adds an original, clearly anti-hermeneutic reflection, which he developed in his later publications, to the assumption that both old and new philology stem from longing for textual past:

It is my impression that, in different ways, all philological practices generate desires for presence, desires for a physical and space-mediated relationship to the things of the world (including texts) (...) Material fragments of cultural artifacts from the past can trigger a real desire for possession and for real presence, a desire close to the level of physical appetite. Text editing, in contrast, conjures up the desire of embodying the text in question, which can transform itself into the desire of also embodying the author of the text embodied. (...) These ambiguities – the tension, the interference, and the oscillation that the philological practices are capable of setting free between mind effects and presence effects – come close, in both their structure and their impact, to contemporary definitions of aesthetic experience.²¹

This is a homology between an artist's aesthetic experience and a philologist's experience, a special combination of the energy of the imagination with a longing for the presence of a text and (indirectly) its author, which Gumbrecht places in the center of a new conceptualization of philology, refers to the Shakesperare and Mickiewicz created by Stanisław Wyspiański in particular, but of course, it also refers to myself and many scholars who combine the practice of textual restitution with what Jean-Luc Nancy called the birth of longing for presence, "a magic spell."

Would Stanisław Wyspiański's Digital Archive have the power to magically embody his world? For the time being, this question remains unanswered.

Translated by Paulina Zagórska

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In the World of Potentiality: Gombrowicz, Pinter, Beckett, and Różewicz

ABSTRACT. Anna Krajewska, *In the World of Potentiality: Gombrowicz, Pinter, Beckett, and Różewicz*. "Przestrzenie Teorii" special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 27–62. ISSN 1644-6763. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.2>

This article attempts to analyze Witold Gombrowicz's, Harold Pinter's, Samuel Beckett's, and Tadeusz Różewicz's works by using methods that are associated with performative literary studies. The author refers to concepts of quantum physics and introduces a new aesthetic category, "entangled arts". Among these arts are, for example, drama and theater, which are seen from an anti-binary perspective. This approach eliminates the traditional division of arts into the art of literature and performing arts, thus leading us to look on literature as a performing art. Therefore, the idea of "entangled arts" is not about "the synthesis of arts", but about their unresolvedness and an act of reading which requires one to simultaneously exist and be active in two (or more, potentiality) different realities, for example, in a digital and imagined world, or in film and on stage.

KEYWORDS: potentiality, performative literary studies, quantum entanglement, entangled arts, anti-binary aesthetics

Gombrowicz's *The Marriage* – indefinite world in a performative manner

Witold Gombrowicz wrote *The Marriage* in 1947. But let us start with Tadeusz Kantor's *Ślub w manierze konstruktywistycznej i surrealistycznej* [Marriage in a Constructivist and Surrealist Manner]. According to scholars, this cricotage, created in 1986 in Milan as a study piece, was meant to demonstrate how the principles of constructivist theater could be applied to a naturalistic wedding ceremony staged by Kantor's students. Kantor chose the topic of the workshop and placed his construction-machine for acting in the theater space. The students came up with the idea of staging a wedding ceremony. Everything that took place next was defined by the title of the emerging play. Kantor, as most critics argue, wanted to demonstrate how constructivism could help create modern theater, how constructivism could provide it with a foundation and sources.

Paweł Stangret points out that Kantor's "classes could be described as lectures on the history of art" and as such the artist "confronted his students with the problem of knowledge." He delivered a lecture on constructivism

and urged his students to rebel. As Stangret writes, the artist urged his students, for example, to write manifestos which would criticize surrealism or constructivism. “Constructivism, in its proper form, could be used to criticize the mannerisms of Italian actors. While the director accepted the stereotype of the ceremony, he did not want to show typical wedding traditions. He did not want acting to be mimetic or naturalistic, as he put it. The spectacle was real in a unique way; it was real because workers acted out the nuptials. The actors were family members of the bride and the groom, but they also had to position themselves in relation to the machine for acting/stage design and the objects that defined them.”¹

It seems that we can interpret *Ślub w manierze konstruktywistycznej i surrealistycznej* in a different perspective still. In the title, the emphasis is on the word *maniera* [manner], which drives an interpretative and semantic wedge between the ceremony and the adopted poetics, that is the poetics of constructivism. The word manner undermines both the notion of a wedding (a wedding should not be “manneristic”) and the meaning of constructivism (mannerism in art refers to a sense of decline, reverberation, echo, an unnatural and degenerated convention). If the title read *Ślub w stylu konstruktywistycznym* [Marriage in a Constructivist Style], everything would be “fine.” Mannerism implies distance, reserve; it is ironic. The word manner undermines the “seriousness” of the wedding, its significance. It interrupts, similarly to a parabasis, similarly to some unfinished half-thought, the metonymic connection between the object and the style in and through which it is expressed. We do not trust mannerism. Mannerism is suspicious. And consequently, the wedding turns out to be somewhat strange, and constructivism turns out to be somewhat suspicious.

The Marriage has over the years given rise to different readings, different interpretations. We can speak of a psychoanalytical marriage (Jan Błoński), a philosophical marriage (Janusz Margański), a phenomenological marriage (Miłoslawa Bukowska-Schiemann), marriage in the world of games (Jerzy Jarzębski), a doomsday marriage (Michał Paweł Markowski), and a nihilistic marriage (Michał Januszkiewicz) ... Indeed, so many marriages ... In 1996, I proposed a theatrical and epistemological interpretation of *The Marriage* as a tragedy of being unable to leave the stage. At that time, I wrote: “The theater has captured the characters and the audience, arrested them in a spherical trap. The obscure church is almost an illusion, a hallucination, but it is also part of the stage design, and its conventional walls were designed by the scenographer.” I focused in my interpretation, among other things, on the metaphor of the “veil” – from two perspectives –

¹ P. Stangret, *Zarażanie* [Infecting], “Teatr” 2010, no. 4, p. 68.

as seen in the phenomenological revealing of the world and as a front curtain which, rising and falling, marks the epistemological horizon of a man who is trapped on the stage, stuck in-between the scenes performed in a theater without the world.² Today, referring to my earlier findings, I would like to argue that a performative interpretation of *The Marriage* allows us to better explain and define these theatrical intuitions and interpretations.

Indeed, the phenomenological notion of a reality that emerges in and through our inquiry resembles the performative creation of a world in and through our words, actions, gestures, and images. The relationship between phenomenology and performativity should be explored in greater detail in a separate article. Reality does not exist as a clearly defined stage that is external to us, as reflected and experienced in the “theater of representation”; in deed, this ever-changing real unreality is being performed – with our participation – in a million different ways. We have created a world / We have questioned a world. Gombrowicz said that *The Marriage* is a play about anxiety, not in psychological terms but as defined by Søren Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Anxiety*. “Innocence is ignorance. (...) Spirit is dreaming in the human being. (...) In this state there is peace and repose, but at the same time there is something else, something that is not dissension and strife, for there is nothing against which to strive. What, then, is it? Nothing. But what effect does nothing have? It begets anxiety. This is the profound secret of innocence, that at the same time it is anxiety. Dreaming, spirit projects its own actuality, yet this actuality is nothing, but innocence always sees this nothing outside itself. (...) Awake, the difference between myself and my other [*mit Andet*] is posited; sleeping, it is suspended; dreaming, it is nothing hinted at. Spirit’s actuality appears constantly as a form that tempts its possibility but disappears as soon as it reaches out for it, and is a nothing that can only bring unease.”³ We can clearly see how Kierkegaard’s reflections inform the interpretation of Gombrowicz’s *The Marriage*. In the play, in a strange half-dream, Henryk is standing on the empty stage where reality appears to him, as Kierkegaard puts it, “constantly as a form that tempts its possibility but disappears as soon as [he] reaches out for it, and is a nothing that can only bring unease.” Gombrowicz repeats – re-writes – Kierkegaard’s anxiety.

Gombrowicz’s play provokes new interpretations. It is not stable, fixed; it eludes description, as its status is complicated by the history of theatrical weddings, especially Wyspiański’s *Wedding*, as well as the almost canonical staging of *The Marriage* directed by Jerzy Jarocki, and, above all, by philo-

² A. Krajewska, *Dramat i teatr absurdu w Polsce* [Drama and the Theatre of the Absurd in Poland], Poznań 1996, pp. 158–178.

³ S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. A. Hannay, New York 1996, pp. 50–51.

sophical references, especially considering the new face of the humanities after the performative turn.

Interpreting Witold Gombrowicz's play today through the prism of performance studies seems so obvious that it is probably not even worth the effort. Therefore, to draw on Jon McKenzie's principle "perform or else,"⁴ we can ask ourselves whether we are still discovering a new interpretation or using an approach that is no longer innovative?

If we assume that Henryk performatively creates the world by means of words, then the performative understood in this way, reminiscent of Austin's "how to do things with words," does not help us interpret Gombrowicz's play. Calling one's father "a pig," "tapping one's fingers," and "a face-pulling duel" point to the performative creation of social reality. In this approach, performance studies at best opens the door to perhaps "refreshed" yet old conclusions and anachronistic interpretations, explaining how the interpersonal is created through the play of forms. We still cling to the interpretative stereotype of interactivity as a play of forms which encloses us in artificial social theatricalization. And this form of theatricalization, it should be pointed out, is somewhat reminiscent of Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, where the point of reference is the naturalistic theater with the stage, a clear division into the frontstage and the backstage, the concept of the actor as the one who plays a predetermined role, creates a predetermined character, etc.

In my opinion, however, this observation does not end the discussion but opens a theatrical Pandora's box. In *The Marriage*, Gombrowicz simultaneously uses as many as three different perspectives. From the perspective of the audience member, the play is the *topos* of the theater as the world (reality – the world – is shown on the stage). From Henryk's point of view, this is a dramatic struggle between man and the resistant, difficult, untamed matter of reality, which is created in and through Henryk's actions (he brings it to life); alas, it also tries to shape Henryk in return (it brings the protagonist to life). The third perspective is offered by the author's introductory note, in which he explained the idea behind the play, briefly described the plot, and offered his acting and directing tips. This perspective is associated with the world of literature, the reader, and, at the same time, the playwright. It reveals that Gombrowicz is playing with the expectations of the reader, who does not expect to find the author's comments in the play, nor does he see the need to be told what the play is about (akin to the libretto in the opera). The reader also does not want to follow the director's

⁴ J. McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*, London and New York 2001.

instructions listed after the “characters” page. Thus, the third perspective is associated with writing, with the reader; it only appears to exist outside the drama. Thus, we are talking about not two but three theaters.

The traditional “theater of representation” (defined both as a theatrical performance and as a question of representation) falls apart before our eyes. Henryk cannot leave the stage; caught up in artificiality, decoration, delusion, he dramatically plays out this epistemological tragedy in search of the truth. However, it can also be said that in order to challenge the theater as a synonym of artifice and play, Henryk, in search of authenticity, resorts to performance (he tries to create what he is also watching). After all, this self-reflexive act of Henryk, who is creating and re-creating things, may be read as a loop which binds his life to the lives of other characters. However, Henryk still does not leave the stage. The reality that is being transformed by him is not real. It is only the product of the performance machine placed on the stage by Gombrowicz. Henryk’s actions are at the same time tragic and manneristic, real and artificial.

Gombrowicz creates the world performatively time and again; theatricality and performativity, as antinomies, regard one another distrustfully. Henryk “tests” the shape of the world in a theatrical and in a performative manner, because, in my opinion, both may be found in the play: sometimes Henryk is theatrical (he strikes artificial, theatrical poses; he makes exaggerated, dramatic gestures; he assigns roles and reveals his directorial tendencies), and at other times, he performs, as if feeling that there is no outside that could extend before him or lurk behind him. So, he puts himself to the test. As a performer, struggling to define the ontological status of the world and his own identity, he is not afraid to reveal his vulnerability. That is why he interacts with Others (even if he suspects that he has created them, insofar as they are the products of his imagination). Through such actions, Henryk changes the status of reality – he renders it indefinite, problematic, and ambiguous.

The audience is thus presented with the play in a performative manner – it demonstrates how in and through performance (alas still on the theater stage) Henryk cannot reach the truth. Is there a way out of this loop?

It seems that Gombrowicz not only wrote a play about an epistemological trap but also caught us in it. He offered us false leads (they are real only in a given world, the internal world of the theater stage). Henryk, searching for reality and truth, did not define the situation in which he found himself, he did not acquire knowledge, he did not create a clear image of the world, and ultimately failed to define himself. Henryk stopped before the orchestra pit, got caught up in the fabric of the front curtain, did not come out of his internal world into the expected authentic, external, real world.

He cannot leave the theater without the world. He is stuck in the manner of performance – he acts in order to reach the truth but, in fact, he only acts. He never leaves the stage.

Thus, the topos of the theater as the world falls apart and Henryk's performance is but a mannerism. Gombrowicz further played with *The Marriage* by introducing the third perspective. He showed a world created performatively.

I agree with Michał Paweł Markowski when, trying to apply theatrical terminology to the notion of Gombrowicz's deformed world, he writes that: "Social interaction is possible when actors appear on the stage – as performers, they know who they are even before they start acting. With Gombrowicz, it is the other way around. Nobody knows who they are, not only at the beginning but also at the end."⁵ Markowski stops halfway before he reaches the horizon of performativity. Paradoxically, precisely when he refers to theatrical terms. He writes: "texts also expose us to the incomprehensibility of life." Markowski insightfully comments on the term "the staged world" in his book. Unfortunately, the primary meaning of the term, that is, the meaning of "staged" as in shown/performed on the stage, is not explored. Thus, to return to Markowski's observation, man can be "exposed to the incomprehensible spectacle of the world," but also the world itself, as I once wrote, can be theatrical, that is, staged like a play, like a drama, artificial like an old element of stage design, shifting like *tableaux vivants*, and even unstable, unreal as drawn by Witkacy. It is a world staged for a man who brings it to life again and again in the performative act of (re)creation.

The traditional stage is the world of appearances; it primarily creates and develops the characters' internal struggles. Like Henryk, they stubbornly want to ontologically pin down the world that eludes them, the world that constantly sets epistemological traps. That is why Henryk so often distances himself from his own statements; he wants to examine them from a distance, from a different perspective, from a different angle. The world that appears to him, however, cannot be seen from the outside; Henryk, entrapped in this world, cannot distance himself from it; he cannot process it in and through a metalanguage. His comments are always internal; they are never uttered offstage. Also, his behavior no longer "disarms" the oppositions he creates. Henryk's actions (for example, the famous scene with the flower, which Henryk unexpectedly uses to connect Mania and Władzio) are performative – the gestures and the entire situation established a relationship between Mania and Władzio which was otherwise non-existent.

⁵ M.P. Markowski, *Czarny nurt. Gombrowicz, świat, literatura* [Black Waters: Gombrowicz, World, Literature], Kraków 2004, p. 334.

It seems that Gombrowicz, like Kantor, placed a performative machine for acting on the stage of his literature and ordered his characters to use it. Consequently, his readers/viewers were told to use it in the creation of their spectacle of interpretation. The characters stand between the author and the audience. The characters, like Kantor's students who experimented with constructivist and surrealist mannerisms, want to build the world performatively. Or, in fact, in a performative manner. Gombrowicz's world does not end with the characters' actions; our souls and not theirs are at stake. The trap set for the characters, insofar as they construct the spectacle of the represented world in and through performance, I argue, is but a performative manner. It is produced by the very real yet invisible machine which creates the world in the work of literature. That is why everything in this world is so artificial, unnatural, twisted – it is mannered. Gombrowicz first set the performative machine in motion, and then made us see it and forced us to learn how it operates (and even forced us to distance ourselves from it) – the world was to be tamed, seemingly from the outside, in and through metalinguistic reflection, the “theater-within-the theater” trick, and metadrama.

In fact, Gombrowicz constructed in *The Marriage*, and this is why I believe that it is his best play, a multi-level frame of reference, and it is this frame of reference that truly activates the principles of performativity.

It begins to work only when we begin to consider *The Marriage* in the context of the crisis of metadrama.⁶

Almost all interpretations of *The Marriage* focus on the dual status of the author's note, which both is and is not part of the play. Why did Gombrowicz summarize the play? He developed and explained his idea in the note, so why did he write the play? Or maybe he wished to emphasize his superior position; alas, he also failed to do so. There is no authoritative voice in the play itself (it is simply not an accepted convention). Gombrowicz must have known that. So why did he choose drama as a means of expression? He knew why *The Marriage* should be a play – a play with a note. Reacting to the crisis of metadrama, Gombrowicz did not tell but dramatically demonstrated (his own) ambivalence and ignorance. He entangled himself in the network of art in order to demonstrate how performativity works – not from the perspective of the performative machine but as a tragedy of epistemology (not an epistemological tragedy, but a tragedy of epistemology). It is a tragifarce of a new negative epistemology in which the truth, certainty and knowledge are replaced by undecidability, anti-binarism and

⁶ I discuss the crisis of metadrama in greater detail in my article *Pinter performatywny* [Performative Pinter], “Polonistyka” 2010, no. 7.

secret. Gombrowicz pauses in a non-place, in a passage, in a theater foyer, in order to witness the trap of his art's secret, which returns to him unfinished and incomplete, as a possibility.

Gombrowicz set up two performative machines – one was on the stage, while the other worked in lieu of drama, in and through literature. And thus drama and theater were united in performativity. Gombrowicz seems to refer to Jacques Derrida's reflections on the center, the parergon, and the margin, that is, concepts that call into question the possibility of using metalanguage. Metalanguage may only develop if we understand the opposition between the inside and the outside, believe in certain fundamental truths, and trust in what we know. In *Dramat i teatr absurdu w Polsce* [Drama and the Theatre of the Absurd in Poland], I wrote that "Henryk brings the world out of the inside" and, it should be added, it returns to the inside. At the time, I was inspired by Thomas Merton's idea of the book. Merton writes: "Let this be the end of the book, but not the end of the search."⁷ Henryk's tragedy is that he cannot leave the theater, observing his efforts to see "clearly in rapture." The epistemological trap into which Henryk falls means that *The Marriage* eludes epistemological readings, as proposed, for example, by Michał Januszkiewicz, who reads *The Marriage* as a play about nihilism. "The oppositions revealed in *The Marriage* are aporias; the chiasm governs how they operate: oppositions become entangled, they come together in a tangle or rather in a knot that cannot be undone. Henryk's metaphysical struggles are motivated by obscurity and ambiguity, both of being and of values."⁸

Thus, if we describe two seemingly extreme models – the theatrical and epistemological model (based on traditional epistemology which works with the category of truth) and the performative model (which assumes the ambiguity of fiction/truth) – it transpires that we are not transcending epistemology. Just like in the case of negative metaphysics, we create a kind of negative epistemology. If we accept that philosophy is not only, as Gilles Deleuze says, the art of creating concepts in a plane of immanence,⁹ but also, as Michel Foucault argues, "theatre,"¹⁰ we will be able to see how it is actually played out on the stage.

⁷ T. Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, San Diego 1990, p. 462.

⁸ M. Januszkiewicz, *Horyzonty nihilizmu. Gombrowicz. Borowski. Różewicz* [The Horizons of Nihilism: Gombrowicz. Borowski. Różewicz], Poznań 2009, p. 127.

⁹ Cf. B. Banasiak, *Bez Różnicy* [No Difference], [in:] G. Deleuze, *Różnica i powtórzenie* [Difference and Repetition], transl. B. Banasiak and K. Matuszewski, Warszawa 1997, p. 18.

¹⁰ M. Foucault, *Theatrum Philosophicum*, [in:] *idem, Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, Ithaca 1980, pp. 165–197.

To begin with, I must say (very simplistically and briefly) that the theatrical and epistemological model of interpreting *The Marriage*, which advances the theory that the trap of the stage cannot be avoided, that the world cannot be reached, cannot be understood (and thus the self cannot be understood either), was based on the traditional model of epistemology (based on the category of truth), the traditional model of the theater (based on the category of play), and the traditional model of philosophy (defined as a set of statements about the world). Such epistemological considerations also refer to the notion of the Book; however, as Merton argues, there is a difference between the truth of the Book and the search which continues after the Book ends. *The Marriage* can therefore be read as a longing for the truth, as a tragedy of the theater, as I once pointed out, “without the world.” The category of longing can be the basis for reading *The Marriage* in the wider context of the tradition (and Gombrowicz was ahead of his times in this regard) of the drama/theater of the absurd (there is so much suffering, disillusionment, and despair in the works of Beckett and Ionesco because the essence of things cannot be reached). The category of longing does not allow us to easily give up the hope for knowledge and understanding. All this starts in drama from within; plays evolve from the inside only to crash in the empty space towards which they advance. This interiorizing perspective makes us hostages of the subjective, of the inside.

Respectively, this model of negative epistemology, performativity and philosophy as theater (but as theater that abolishes dialectical thinking, seen by Deleuze in opposition to the “theater of representation” as “the theater of repetition,”¹¹ or as seen by Derrida, as theater that is closer to performance, as seen in the works of Antonin Artaud¹²) points to the concept of the secret instead of the truth.

Gombrowicz, to draw on Georges Didi-Huberman,¹³ performatively established knowledge as non-knowledge and, let us add, in the light of posthumanism, he staged the human in relation to the non-human/more-than-human. Both of these problems were pointed out by contemporary critics.¹⁴ For example, in his book, Markowski made us see Gombrowicz in a completely different light – not as a confident director but as an insecure writer, who would put on different literary “masks” in order to experiment

¹¹ G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton, New York 2004, pp. 11–12.

¹² J. Derrida, *The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation*, [in:] *idem, Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago 2004, pp. 176–177.

¹³ G. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. J. Goodman, Philadelphia 2005.

¹⁴ Cf. the discussion in “Tygodnik Powszechny”, May 9, 2004 (with Jerzy Jarzębski, Janusz Margański and Michał Paweł Markowski).

with non-knowledge. This is a brilliant observation, but it should be discussed in greater detail.

Markowski is right to identify Gombrowicz's aporia – the clash between the desire to be indistinct, bland, helpless, and lost in real life and the desire to exist on paper as great, funny, triumphant, purified – as an eccentric staging. I believe, however, that Gombrowicz did not fully exploit the poetics of non-knowledge, doubt, and uncertainty. Tadeusz Różewicz did. In Różewicz's works, the discourse of identity is entangled with the discourse of creation. If a true post-Cartesian drama exists, it takes place on Różewicz's stage. If the dramaturgy of uncertainty exists, it was perfected by Różewicz with his signature deletions and corrections. If performative writing exists, Różewicz excelled in it. Both Gombrowicz and Różewicz at first unify contradictions, eliminate binary oppositions, present apparent antinomies, stage things, and, ultimately, they both construct identity performatively. Gombrowicz is slowly moving towards such a theater (he tends to write about it and brings it to life only in *The Marriage*), while Różewicz fully achieves it (he entangles discourses and thus he also entangles the arts).

Kantor placed a constructivist machine for acting on the stage and asked his students to play with it, to experiment. Similarly, Gombrowicz placed a performative machine on the stage to force his characters (?), us (?), to play with it. In *The Marriage*, Gombrowicz showed how drama works in and through performance when the rules of metatheater are abolished. The trajectory of his art was as follows: first, he distanced himself and his art from the rules of performance seen as a manner(ism) only to realize the role of performativity in negative epistemology, and even in ontology and epistemology as entangled categories, insofar as the concept of the secret replaced the truth.

The Marriage takes place in the world of indefiniteness, in the world which is to be established, which is to be measured. The world is presented not only in and through the interactions between ready-made objects but also, to draw on Karen Barad,¹⁵ in the intra-actions of incomplete, potential, indefinite matter which give rise to the shape of things.

The world is incomplete. And drama, be it as literature (Gombrowicz's commentary falls apart) or as theater (everything appears and disappears, becomes present and disintegrates), is also incomplete. Gombrowicz's *The Marriage* shows the world, literature, theater, and art as potentiality. It plays not so much with the remains, but with the indefinite. Literature as an overture? Literature as a preview? Literature as a possibility.

¹⁵ K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, London 2007.

Pinter's *Slight Ache*, or "You look different in darkness"

Gombrowicz wrote *The Marriage* in 1947. Conceptually, the play engages in a dialogue with the works of Harold Pinter, who in the 1950s explored the "angry young men" poetics, which was connected with the theater of the absurd. Pinter also explored the principles of creating what was seemingly only a theatrical but, in fact, a performative, indefinite world. Ignorance, uncertainty, indecision gave rise to post-Cartesian dramaturgy. It was Pinter who drew us into the reality of the performative drama, which questioned unequivocal answers.

Pinter creates a world which is at the same time realistic and grotesque, real and fictional. We cannot make any definite judgments about reality. We no longer trust our opinions and judgments; instead, we embrace undecidability and ambiguity. I shall call such an approach performative. It also means that the world of Pinter's plays is created in and through words, gestures, suggestions, as one of the possibilities in a game in which epistemology is at stake (or rather, epistemology is taken hostage). While the "Cartesian" theater was governed by conventions, which meant that the nature of the characters and the depicted world were predictable (in a classical tragedy, we do not ask what the characters eat; in a comedy, we do not ask why the husband does not meet his wife at the ball; in a farce, we do not expect didacticism), "post-Cartesian" drama shows that the image of the world may constantly change. At any given moment, we focus on only one possible frame, and we also create negative concepts – an empty space, absence, silence. We try to see the silence and define the stillness.

Faced with the ontological ambiguity of the world, which may be seen in the choices made and the acts of creation, we often dream of silence. Pinter's plays were associated from the beginning with the so-called Theater of Silence – this name was used to describe the works of Anton Chekhov and the works of the Polish playwright Jerzy Szaniawski. Martin Esslin, in the book *Pinter The Playwright*,¹⁶ devoted a separate chapter to this topic, juxtaposing scenes from Chekhov's dramas with Pinter's plays. Esslin mainly focused on communication and the creation of meaning in a linguistic context. It seems that silence is always associated with words, absence of words, their excess, disruption, double meanings, etc. ("The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished or mocking smoke screen which

¹⁶ M. Esslin, *Pinter the Playwright*, London 1992 (the first edition was entitled *The People Wound: The Plays of Harold Pinter* and it was published in 1970).

keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls, we are still left with echo [...]”¹⁷). Today, we could “read” silence as an artistic form and as a tool used to construct the text. Following in the footsteps of Cézanne, who, as quoted by Jacques Derrida in *Truth in Painting*, once said “I will tell you the truth in painting,” Pinter could make a similar promise – “I will tell you the truth in/of silence.” And he achieves it in his plays in and through words (by means of which he expresses silence) and in and through dramatic gaps and cracks, in which silence dwells. He uses pauses, ellipses, dashes, but also silent gestures, expressions, and actions which suggest a sound but remain silent (like violet petals falling on the keys of the piano in Norwid’s poem *Jak... [How...]*). Silence no longer appears in opposition to words but in the spaces between them; its presence is suggested through absence. Pinter performatively constructs a scene in and through which silence is invoked in action. The opposition between speech and silence disappears. The two co-exist, both at once, in a palimpsestous manner. We can see that in the imaginative terms-metaphors, such as “heavy silence,” “stony silence,” “surrounded by silence,” “break silence,” etc. You can either choose to speak or you can remain silent. To break, to interrupt, to surround (oneself with), etc. – such verbs suggest an action that organizes, makes visible, and, as a result, points to absence. If you want words, you will notice an apt metaphor. Should you want to, you will notice an empty space, a gap, a crack in which silence dwells. This process resembles creating the reality of the play as the potentiality of existence. Pinter’s *Slight Ache* is an example of both – it invokes silence and ontologically ambiguous reality. The mute matchseller makes us ask questions which, if left unanswered, as if allow us to echo the (anticipated yet) unspoken words. The drama turns into the spoken monologue. The mute interlocutor acts as a catalyst for the image of reality, blurring or intensifying its presence. It can change not so much through words but through silence. The play of light brings out the colors and the shapes (“Edward: [...] [Pause] The garden, too, was sharp, lucid, in the rain, in the sun. [Pause]” (p. 179)), but it also changes, blurs, and erases them (“You look different in darkness” (p. 178)).

The comedy of menace, on the other hand, made us realize that drama moves towards abolishing the oppositions between the inside and the outside. In some plays, menace may be found in the characters which “enter” from the outside, such as the matchseller in *Slight Ache*. Sometimes, it is the hostile environment that is a threat, for example, the space outside the room in *The Room*, which may in fact be compared with an inner paralysis.

¹⁷ H. Pinter, interview in “The Sunday Times”, March 4, 1962.

The subjective experience of reality creates reality. Epistemological doubt is uniquely represented in the comedy of menace.

In *The Birthday Party*, we are truly terrified only at the end of the play, when Stanley's body begins to tremble, and his speech breaks down into inarticulate "Uh-gug... uh-gug..." and "Caahh... caahh" (p. 179). In Pinter's plays, loose, repetitive (sometimes contradictory) sequences and images do not explain anything. The world after the birthday is created anew.

No critical discovery is made (in *Poetics*, in the chapters devoted to tragedy, Aristotle calls such a critical moment *anagnorisis*), only uncertainty and fear remain. There can be no catharsis (pity and fear, which, according to Aristotle, viewers of ancient tragedies were to experience), there is only the trembling body and the trembling mind (it evokes associations with the title of Søren Kierkegaard's philosophical treatise *Fear and Trembling*, especially as regards the four scenes of Abraham sacrificing Isaac). On the one hand, there is the Aristotelian category of catharsis, expressed as "pity and fear," and on the other, Søren Kierkegaard's existentialist "fear and trembling." In Pinter's plays, the old category of tragedy is displaced by its reflection; mercy is replaced by coldness, and fear turns into trembling, a modern *mysterium tremendum*. We are outside representation and can only see "tragedy's reflection."

In order to understand Harold Pinter's plays, we should first of all refer to what Søren Kierkegaard called "tragedy's reflection." The very category of reflection proves to be important in the interpretation of Pinter's works insofar as it draws attention to the fact that we use concepts mediated by repetition. Pinter defines silence through speech, truth through fiction, interpersonal relationships through play. Reflection, therefore, is an echo, a veil, fog, anxiety, uncertainty. Reflection refers to a look that cannot see because the reflected light makes it impossible to see. The world is but an illusion. But can we still talk about the relationship between truth and illusion if such an opposition no longer matters, no longer exists? In his definition of the absurd, Adorno argues that darkness is a category that does not shroud but absorbs; it demands to be "interpreted, not replaced by the clarity of meaning" (p. 27). Menace, too, is not only fear but trembling. Indeed, darkness and trembling as metaphors which describe the ontologically unstable and indefinite reality and our reaction to it define Pinter's plays. Neither language, nor knowledge, nor making the human world a point of reference for reality (whatever it may be) bring certainty. Descartes' exultant declaration "cogito ergo sum" fails. Perhaps all that is left is to refer to the category of perception and repeat after Berkeley that "esse est percipi (aut percipere)." The focus on looking and being perceived means we no longer have to define the object; instead, we focus on the pro-

cess of creating a world in and through observation, in and through subjective perception that is not free from hesitation and doubt.

Science, especially mathematics and physics (Einstein's theory of relativity, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, Mandelbrot's chaos theory and fractals, quantum physics), and psychology (Freud's concept of the subconscious) continue to challenge all unambiguous answers to the questions about the nature of reality, the universe, and man. The epistemological metaphor of illumination can no longer exist in language. We accept the fact that we cannot see the epistemological stage in bright light (and we accept that knowledge is the domain of uncertainty) and thus it transforms into a theatrical space with no frame and no ramp, lit by dim lamps.

The uncertainty of observation instead of the certainty of reason. The undefined and poorly lit theatrical space (fogginess) instead of the brightly lit stage (illumination).

All that is left is to play and to watch ourselves as players. Who we are? We cannot leave because there is nothing outside. There will be no other theater. There is no opposition between light and darkness; there is no boundary between the backstage and the frontstage. We do not reflect the world in representation; we only witness transformations and changes. Such divisions may only be abolished through movement, action, process. Things play out in a fluid game of undecidability, in which their contours are blurred.

In *A Slight Ache*, the world is constantly being re-established. The very beginning of the play confuses the viewer. Characters cannot "agree" on the framework of reality – they constantly ask questions, wishing to establish who and where they are. Edward does not know the names of different flowers, but he still tries to find out which flower is in bloom. "Edward: Did you say that the convolvulus was in flower? Flora: Yes. Edward: But good God, you just denied there was any. Flora: I was talking about the honeysuckle. Edward: About the what? Flora [calmly]: Edward – you know that shrub outside the toolshed ... Edward: Yes, yes. Flora: That's convolvulus. Edward: That? Flora: Yes. Edward: Oh. [Pause] I thought it was japonica" (p. 235). Characters are constantly looking for each other ("Flora [off]: Edward, where are you? Edward? Where are you, Edward?") and then surprised "Flora: Where have you been? Edward: Here" (p. 235)). For Flora to be real is to see and to be perceived ("Flora: You must have seen me in the garden. You can see through this window. Edward: Only part of the garden" (p. 235)). In Pinter's 1996 play *Ashes to Ashes*, we come face to face with ambiguous places and facts which can at the same time point to their opposites. Bolesław Taborski thus comments on them in the

introduction to the Polish edition of the play, quoting from Pinter's Nobel lecture: "*Ashes to Ashes*, on the other hand, seems to me to be taking place under water. A drowning woman, her hand reaching up through the waves, dropping down out of sight, reaching for others, but finding nobody there, either above or under the water, finding only shadows, reflections, floating (...)" (p. 39). The boundary, the surface of the water, disappears, because it is shown in motion as an unstable, moving, and ever-changing veil. The motif of ashes, something almost ephemeral and yet still material, as a gray trace, as a product of destructive fire, can be found in Beckett's *Embers* and in Derrida's polylogical work *Cinders*.

We are entangled in the drama of uncertainty.

An excellent example of such an ambiguous space, which I call performative space, may be found in Harold Pinter's *The Collection*. The space in this play is the space of betrayal. Pinter's play seems to suggest: "I promise I will tell you the truth about betrayal." We do not know which character is telling the truth. According to Stella, Bill broke into her hotel room and forced her to betray her husband. Bill at first claims that nothing happened and then changes his mind, saying that Stella provoked him, and they only kissed for a few minutes (and that was it). Harry says that Stella told him that she made it all up. Bill, ultimately, changes his mind one more time, claiming that he and Stella were just talking about what they would do if they went up to her room. Passion that consumes Stella when she is trying to provoke Harry is an act of betrayal without words (however, the question arises about the nature of the misgiving; Harry is a homosexual man – in turn, he may, after all, wish to "test" Stella to see if she is a faithful wife). The answer that James expects (and he suspects that his wife was unfaithful to him) does not matter. What matters is the uncertainty, the very possibility. The ethical space does not matter. What matters is the epistemological space. Dialogue, which has lost its persuasive and rhetorical power, invokes reality in a performative way (insofar as it blurs the line between the truth and a lie). Also, in literature. In literature which tries to establish the world.

Beckett's *Quad* squared, or at the center of the stage and in the "node of avoidance"

Constant changes take place on the performative stage. It is the stage of permanent anxiety, constant creation, shifting and breaking frames, happening, unfolding events, creating worlds and abolishing oppositions. At the

same time, the “stage” provokes a discussion about theater and “the closure of representation” from the perspective of the actor and representation.¹⁸

Something extremely important has taken place in art, and especially in theater: the center became a point of reference again; not so much as an object of discourse but as a place which generates the energy of destruction. Volumes could be written about the relationship between the center and the process of its destruction on the theatrical stage and we still would not exhaust the topic. Therefore, in my essay, I would like to suggest only one of the processes that makes us transcend the limits of our own culture and the limits of the theater focused on the viewer’s knowledge of imaginary or learned conventions. Thus, we can realize that the notions of the center and the margins are not always defined in the same way. They are not binary opposites and they do not create an “in-between” space. The center and the margins performatively create a new kind of space – it is at the same time central and peripheral, primary and secondary, our own and someone else’s, physical and spiritual, familiar and foreign.

Are Samuel Beckett’s plays “old”? “Old” because they operate, for example, within the enclosed space of the stage? If we were to answer yes, we would be assigning a well-known theatrical convention to a new play, without really considering how it “works” and what it “does” to seemingly conventional theatrical solutions. The “old” invalidates the old interpretation and reveals a new, different one. The “old” also provokes reflection of a more general nature, making us reflect on how we think and see. In a word, it makes us see that possible new re-interpretations result from adopting different perspectives. A new perspective changes how we perceive the world.

Conventional theater spaces, which often rely on, for example, geometric figures (especially those considered perfect, such as circles or squares), often raise questions about the essence of reduction, purification, emptiness, lack, non-existence, and inexpressibility. We consider their ambiguous nature and realize how difficult it is to define what they are and what they do. Indeed, they are “transitive;” they can signify depending on the user and the purpose for which they were invoked. Silence, emptiness, the sublime, etc. are, to use Mieke Bal’s term, “travelling concepts.”¹⁹ Their meaning is not stable: they are redefined by different scientific disciplines and artistic contexts.

Empty space in the Noh theater, defined only by a back wall with a painting of a green pine tree, a side bamboo wall, and a narrow bridge opposite it with a curtain (in four colors) at the end, can be transformed

¹⁸ Cf. J. Derrida’s classic essay, J. Derrida, *op. cit.*, pp. 176–177 and further discussions on this topic, e.g., P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *The scene is primal*, [in:] *idem*, *The Subject of Philosophy*, trans. T. Trezise, Minneapolis and London 1993, pp. 99–115.

¹⁹ M. Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, Toronto 2014.

into different spaces during the performance, be it realistic and/or shamanic. Similarly, empty space in Peter Brook's theater or Jerzy Grotowski's theater (inspired by Noh), seemingly isolated and limited, can be reshaped, remolded, and reconfigured. Even a conventional space can be destroyed, annihilated, transformed (or, to draw on deconstruction theory – wounded, cut, torn).

In 1996, in my book devoted to the theater of the absurd, I argued that the Polish theater of the absurd began in Konrad's cell in the third part of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [Forefathers' Eve]. At that time, I emphasized the metaphysical and existential dimensions of these two theaters.²⁰

In a 2016 interview, the director Michał Zadara interpreted the prison scene in which Konrad delivers the Great Improvisation through the lens of Samuel Beckett's plays (Zadara directed the third part of *Dziady*, which premiered on February 20, 2016 at Teatr Polski in Wrocław).²¹ Zadara went even further in drawing an analogy between the two seemingly incomparable artists, emphasizing the physical dimension of the Great Improvisation scene. He emphasized the role of not only words but also matter. Konrad's classic white shirt is soiled; the prison cell becomes a "non-place" (Marc Augé's term), an impersonal space which cannot hide all that relates to the body, to the physical. Or perhaps the prison cell is a kind of "heterotopia" (Michel Foucault's term), a place which connects different spaces that exist "somewhere" and "nowhere;" alas, they are not utopias – they present ways in which different spaces and locations may come together in one place.²² Drawing on Zadara's comments about the Beckettian and the bodily, today I would not even hesitate to say that Konrad's prison cell also makes us think about Beckett's characters, who are stuck in staging buckets, immobilized in mounds of earth, arrested in windowless rooms or in the spotlight (spiritual imprisonment is also bodily imprisonment; the two are forever interconnected). Silence and stillness no longer point to the grand style. They no longer inspire reflections on the nature of language. They do not point to "pure" transcendence but become sticky and physical. They are saturated with the secretions, sweat, and dirt of the imprisoned body, a body that is helplessly pacing to and fro in the prison cell. The body does not refer to signs – it only signifies itself, life. The absence of meaning reminds us of the ambiguous meaning of the tree in *Waiting for Godot* or the existential angst and despair of the characters from *Endgame* (who

²⁰ A. Krajewska, *Dramat i teatr...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–29.

²¹ *Kebab z Mickiewiczem* [Kebab with Mickiewicz], interview with Michał Zadara, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 2016, no. 41.

²² This is how W.B. Worthen writes about heterotopia in drama, drawing on Foucault. W.B. Worthen, *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance*, Chichester 2010, pp. 195–196.

wonder if they are beginning to “mean something”). Konrad’s scream echoes off the walls of the prison cell and returns back to the body, dying off inside, as if it could never get out, as if it had never penetrated the walls of the prison cell, as if it had never been uttered but was stuck in Konrad’s throat, as if it had never left the body of the degraded prisoner dreaming of freedom. God is silent because his nature is different to ours, alien to us. He cannot hear us; he does not understand the despair of the human world and its physicality – the body that is controlled by matter, the body whose consciousness is filled with doubt. Konrad is as helpless as Beckett’s characters are abandoned. The Romantic hero cannot openly say that there is no God (even blasphemy presupposes the possibility of existence). Konrad’s tragedy is that he can no longer relate or refer to the center. There is no center. God, even if he exists, is outside the human experience of the world. We cannot contact Him using our means of communication. In order to get closer to him, we would have to deny our nature. The center of Konrad’s prison cell is thus in the margins (somewhere far away in the topography of the prison). He is a man who wanted to be in the center, but God’s silence destroyed his pride (of being in the foreground, be it as the leader or the leading actor). He realizes his own insignificance, arbitrariness, existential helplessness. As in Michał Zadara’s staging, the focus is on the body, imprisonment, and physiology. Konrad (be it in a clean white shirt, an undershirt, or a T-shirt) will not break free from his prison cell with its boarded-up window.

The final and, at the same time, most important instance of “playing (with) the center” on the Polish stage takes place, in my opinion, in the third part of Adam Mickiewicz’s *Dziady*, specifically in the Great Improvisation scene. In the West, it probably began with Shakespeare but flourished in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. Konrad’s prison cell and the space around the tree in *Waiting for Godot*, and also the empty room (*Endgame*), mounds of earth (*Happy Days*), and other enclosed spaces (buckets) show the process of “claiming” and “judging” within the limits of existence. The theater of the absurd was born when Konrad was born. The absurd asks about the possibility of the center. The absurd points to it and at the same time denies it. The absurd tells us about it and at the same time shows that it is impossible to agree on it. You always stand alone at the center of the stage; neither the voices from the right nor the voices from the left, neither the devil nor the choirs of angels can push Konrad to the margins of the stage. Standing at the center is a sign of both strength and defeat; it is a hopeless attempt to validate the meaning (of Life? Existence? Consciousness? God?). The end of logocentrism begins “from the inside” (from the inside that is the center), when it begins to generate the energy of destruction.

It would seem that the center, which signifies stability, has been established once and for all; it cannot be decomposed or changed. And yet, we cannot agree on whether the center can refer to nothingness, emptiness, absence... Or perhaps the center, by its very nature, is nothingness, emptiness, absence... The center therefore defines not what is but what is not. The center points to the potentiality of something occupying it. It perversely attracts everything that cannot be seen. The visible in some temporarily designated “center” is only a point of reference, making us notice what is different from the designated, the seen, the revealed. The visible brings the hidden to life; the visible refers to the invisible. Michał Zadara consciously combines oppositions when he talks about his play (for example, Konrad as a singer gains access to the experience of life; the ritual of Forefathers’ Eve takes place between the comprehensible and incomprehensible, the serious and the ridiculous, the historical and the real (yet undefined) world which exists beyond the stage). Zadara’s interpretation of the third part of *Dziady* brings to mind Beckett’s reflections. Alas, Beckett opens his plays with negation (his findings are closer to those of Camus than to those of Pascal) – he asks what will happen if Godot does not show up? What if there is no God? The nature of tragedy does not lie in (to draw on Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe) the tension between the finite human existence and the infinity of God but in the very fact of dramatizing the possibility of non-existence, the possibility of death, which cannot be internalized, which is pure theatricalization.²³ That is probably why Beckett does not (literally) show death; although everything points to it, it exists only in speech and in gestures. It exists in theatricalization.

The question of the center was raised in one of Samuel Beckett’s most puzzling plays, *Quad*, written in 1981. It was described and discussed in detail primarily by Enoch Brater,²⁴ and it has been interpreted ever since (e.g., Antoni Libera²⁵ in his translation of Samuel Beckett’s plays suggests a psychoanalytic interpretation but also points to the cultural expectations associated with walking clockwise or anti-clockwise, for example, in the journey through the afterlife described by Dante; Herta Schmid²⁶ reads *Quad*

²³ Cf. P. Lacoue-Labarthe, “Theatrum analyticum”, [in:] *Mimesis, Masochism, & Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, ed. T. Murray, Ann Arbor 1997, pp. 190–191.

²⁴ E. Brater, *Beyond Minimalism. Beckett’s Late Style in the Theater*, New York and Oxford 1987.

²⁵ A. Libera, *Translator’s footnotes and comments*, [in:] *Samuel Beckett. Dzieła dramatyczne* [Samuel Beckett: Plays], trans. A. Libera, with an introduction and notes by the translator, Warszawa 1988, pp. 752–753.

²⁶ H. Schmid, *Samuel Beckett’s Play, “Quad”: An Abstract Synthesis of the Theater*, “Canadian-American Slavic Studies” 1988, vol. 22, no. 1–4, pp. 263–287.

through Wassily Kandinsky's theory of painting; Enoch Brater points in his interpretation to the consequences of presenting the world in/through the media, focusing on the notion of the television studio and the camera, and how they affect our perception of the world; for W.B. Worthen *Quad* exemplifies Euclidean dramaturgies – the critic discusses how space is created in Beckett's play: “an empty set is just a set, gaining its performative force only as it is used. [...] Like the absent square of Beckett's *Quad*, and even like the visible square of *Quadrat I*, the place of play can be pointed by the drama, but gains its significance as place, a place that emerges, is played, and then left behind, in the process of the playing itself”²⁷). Beckett's television plays attracted my attention years ago²⁸ as masterpieces which, to draw on Eastern philosophies, may be read as minimalist Zen stone gardens. Read through the lens of Western imagination, mysticism, theater and art, they point to mystical emptiness, the non-existent set design of the theater as the world (and the world as the theater), a crisis of representation.

The undecided (as Brater writes) Beckett, who staged the work himself, was open to, and allowed for, different interpretations (indeed, the first German production was titled *Quadrat I+II*). Beckett's indecisiveness, as suggested by Brater, does not lie in his inability to make a decision but in the fact that the very structure of the play makes it possible (compels one?) to explore all possibilities (all combinations of lights, movements, colors, sounds, etc.). Exhaustion through the repetition of all variants and combinations ... *Quad* therefore refers to mathematics, to the probability calculus ... In Beckett's play, the probability of all possibilities always equals 1. Does certainty equal E? Is that the trajectory of increasing entropy? Followed by the hypothetical return to the familiar by reversing the processes of destruction?

I cannot possibly describe all intricacies of Beckett's television play in the present article. Brater analyzes it insightfully in his book. In order to imagine the ever-changing project titled *Quad*, one should study both the published editions of the text and different film, television, and theatrical stagings (many were recorded and uploaded onto YouTube; Worthen writes about them in his book in one of the footnotes²⁹). Four actors enter the stage, one by one, and walk across it. When they are about to reach the center, they dodge and turn. They walk around and across the square stage with the center in the middle. The dancers (?), actors (?), performers (?) move in sync in fixed patterns. Different color sequences are also employed in

²⁷ W.B. Worthen, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

²⁸ Cf. A. Krajewska, *Poezja i ośnienie. O sztukach telewizyjnych Samuela Becketta* [Poetry and Illumination: Samuel Beckett's Television Plays], “Teksty Drugie” 1991, no. 4.

²⁹ W.B. Worthen, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

fixed patterns. So are the sounds (drum, gong, triangle, wood block), the colors of the costumes, and even the sound of footsteps. Beckett calls the center, marked in the drawing as E, the “danger zone.” All precisely defined elements, such as the trajectories which the actors follow, the lights, the colors of the robes, the sound of footsteps, the sound of drums, must appear in all possible combinations until they are exhausted. However, there is also the first (?) or the last (?) version, that is, the black and white version, which is, one would like to say, devoid of all characteristic features or, in fact, basic. Even though we have exhausted all the possibilities, we still do not understand the nature of the world. We live close to the “danger zone,” close to, as Worthen puts it, the “node of avoidance.” We do not enter the central space designated by the letter E (although, paradoxically, we define it in and through our existence, movement, body – in a gesture, in a turn, in the sudden change of direction). Just as in the heterotopic prison cell, the center is an illusion we produce. If we want to reach the “true” E, or rather if want to see if it really exists, we will have to get rid of all these roles, combinations, and features that determine human life. The final combination is the total reduction, emptying, denial of the self, i.e., we leave the space of oppositions, repetitions, either-or choices (which point to, as Søren Kierkegaard puts it, “sickness unto death”).

Following the train of thought that connects distant cultures, I would like to look at Beckett’s *Quad* through the lenses of the Japanese Noh theater.³⁰ Paul Foster discussed Beckett’s relationship with Zen in *Beckett and Zen*³¹; however, he focused exclusively on Beckett’s prose. The stage, in my opinion, opens up new perspectives on the relationship between Zen and Western theater. It is obvious that it is impossible to fully discuss such a complex question in such a short essay, but I can comment briefly on how other cultures open up new interpretations. After all, one can understand how one looks at the world only by studying it in a different cultural context.

At first glance, the Noh stage resembles the stage in Beckett’s *Quad*. Noh actors move in a specific way, as if with their feet sliding on the smooth surface of the stage made of cedar wood. They flow rather than walk. It is not a form of dance but rather an indirect movement – they move across the space deliberately (at times faster and at times slower). Perhaps this is how Beckett’s actors could move, walking around and across the square, only to suddenly turn around just before they reach the center and con-

³⁰ The description is based on original performances by the Kyoto theater and recordings of Noh plays at the Noh theater in Kyoto, as well as commentaries: *This is Noh* (Japanese and English version). Kyoto Branch Theatre Association.

³¹ P. Foster, *Beckett and Zen: A Study of Dilemma in the Novels of Samuel Beckett*, London 1989.

tinue walking in a fixed pattern. Beckett did not want his actors to be dancers, although the play was performed by students at a ballet school. The dance performed by the Noh actor, especially at the beginning of the performance, very often involves moving across the main (square) stage along the diagonal lines, heading towards the four main pillars (the *shite* pillar, at which the main protagonist stops; the *waki* pillar, at which the supporting actor stops; the flute pillar; and the most important “gazing” pillar). Indeed, some productions of *Quad* referred to *butoh* (see, for example, Beckett *butoh* notation).

In Noh and in Beckett’s *Quad*, music plays a very important and carefully defined role (in Noh four musicians play the flute, the (small) shoulder drum held on the right shoulder, the (big) hip drum held on the left hip and the large stick drum;³² and in Beckett’s play we can hear a drum, a gong, a triangle, and a wood block). Music is not just a soundtrack. Music puts emphasis on what is taking place on the stage. Music helps concentrate and connect the different realities in which the main Noh actor (*shite*) immerses himself – he is sometimes a woman, sometimes a man, sometimes he appears to be a man, sometimes he appears to be a ghost. And in Beckett’s play, it seems, music helps one understand different realities determined by different physical and geometrical systems (Euclid’s, Einstein’s, quantum physics), and perhaps also by different media (film, television, and theater), which employ different means of expression to comment on reality. For example, in *Ghost Trio*, different objects are projected onto a large screen. It is also amazing that in Beckett’s *Quad* characters are not defined by gender, as if this category was meaningless (you can be either this person or that person; you can be either here or there...³³).

If we assume that in *Waiting for Godot* the tree marks the center, creating the illusion that the center exists, it also creates the effect of meaninglessness, which leads to the process of disintegration of the Cartesian drama. Berkeley’s “esse est percipi” triumphs. Seeing is an important part of knowing, be it for Romantics, Absurdist, or Noh actors. In Noh theater, the division into the worlds of the actor, the spectator, the stage, the story, the myth, and the ritual no longer applies. *The shite* has to look at himself through the eyes of the viewers, and so he must also literally see himself from all angles, also from behind (he may use mirrors arranged in a special way or observe a different actor who recreates his performance; still, the Noh actor has to combine technique with meditation³⁴).

³² Description by P.G. O’Neill, *A guide to nō*, Tokyo and Kyoto, 1954, p. 8.

³³ Cf. A. Krajewska, *Poezja i olśnienie...*, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Cf. R. Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*, Cambridge 2012.

The difference between seeing (from behind the mask) and seeing holistically (imagining how one is perceived) points to fundamental questions about the meaning of the whole and the meaning of darkness.

The *shite*, as he enters the stage from the bridge, sees the stage through the eye holes in the mask as a clear, circular field, surrounded by darkness (the spotlight creates a similar effect in the Western theater – the circle of bright light helps the viewer focus). Indeed, Beckett often plays with light and shadow (for example, in ... *but the clouds* ... characters enter and leave this bright luminous space by moving upwards (north), downwards (south), to the right (east) and to the left (west); all four “basic” directions are thus employed, pointing to the four corners of the world). We want to control the whole by seeing the part (or maybe we need to abolish the seemingly obvious opposition between the whole and the part in order to achieve understanding?).

In the Noh theater, as Estera Żeromska writes, “the symbolic unity of the real world and the unreal world is expressed in the colors of the *agemaku*. The curtain is often made of five vertical stripes in green, yellow, red, white, and purple. They can be interpreted in different ways: as four seasons, the four corners of the world, the five phases, the five emotions, etc. [...] The symbolic dimension of the *agemaku* therefore builds on the entire universe, the seasons, the four corners of the world, the entire range of human emotions”³⁵ and also, we might add, the four elements. Or maybe because of this comparison we connect with Beckett’s *Quad*, insofar as the colors of the characters’ robes and the lights can be interpreted in a similar way?

Finally, instead of summarizing, we can perversely ask whether these three theaters – Mickiewicz’s *Dziady*, Beckett’s *Quad*, and the Japanese Noh Theater – have something unique in common. Of course, the answer is not straightforward (despite the existing interpretations that allow us to compare Mickiewicz with Beckett and Beckett with Noh theater; I also think that comparing *Dziady* with Noh theater is possible). Despite the differences in time and aesthetics, I would say that all these “three theaters” have something to say about the disintegration of the center, whose energy defies the conventional. The characters paradoxically stubbornly walk around a circle or a square but in fact they constantly move towards other dimensions of reality “along the radii” (almost literally along the “sunrays” in *Dziady*, along the diagonal lines in Beckett’s *Quad*, along the “gazing” lines in the Noh theater). The center seems to “push” the figures out, pre-

³⁵ E. Żeromska, *Maska na japońskiej scenie. Od pradziejów do powstania teatru nō. Historia japońskiej maski i związanej z nią tradycji widowiskowej* [Mask on the Japanese Stage: From Prehistory to the Creation of the Noh Theatre. The History of the Japanese Mask and The Performance Tradition Associated with It], Warszawa 2003, p. 175.

venting them from entering. The characters are thus suspended between realities in the performative space, creating real dimensions which perhaps do not exist. In all three theaters, the comprehensible is combined with the incomprehensible, the light with the dark, the veiled with the visible, the spectral with the living, death with life. The constant experience of transformation and the constant desire to achieve the goal (ultimate knowledge, illumination, liberation, salvation...) is an important theme. Regardless of our interpretation of such processes (in the ethical perspective – as “crime and punishment” in *Dziady*; as clockwise, positive, ascending, “blessed” trajectory or the anti-clockwise, negative, descending, “cursed” trajectory in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and *Quad*; or in the metaphysical and the political perspective, in relation to the freedom of a nation, the freedom of an individual, identity struggles, community building), we will always find the opposite, which will point to a different reality. Thus, in the worlds of these theaters there are no stable binary divisions. They appeal, each in its own way, to the feeling that we can be everything and at the same time melt into nothingness; they teach us that we should not become attached to those forms of being that we deem proper. Everything is an illusion – both the world and being in the world. So, the *shite* can practice seeing himself through the eyes of the audience, Konrad and Gustaw can be one, and the characters from Beckett’s plays, *Quad*, *Ohio Impromptu*, *Ghost Trio*, and ... *but the clouds* ..., can see themselves as others. It would be very interesting to analyze the role of children as characters suspended in an undefined space between different realities, between existence and illusion, combining those different dimensions through the power of potentiality. In *Dziady*, children are suspended in the void; they cannot experience life, which for them is but an artificial gesture pointing to the artificiality of (a theatrical) play. It is almost as if, as the existentialists argued, life as existence was not enough – in other words, only life created experience. In Noh theater, children can act only after turning 15. Thus, they have to go through a sort of initiation ritual (of becoming adults). The theater thus combines acting with reaching an important milestone in life. In Beckett’s plays (*Waiting for Godot*, *Ghost Trio*), respectively, we find a boy, an outsider, who bridges the gap between the inner world of the theater and a different dimension – announced, awaited, but perhaps never witnessed Thus, the world of binary oppositions is finally destroyed³⁶ (importantly, we can find pairs everywhere: *shite/waki*, Konrad/Gustaw, Didi/Gogo, moving clockwise/anti-clockwise, etc.). It does not withstand the pressure of the center. It undergoes transformation because binarism is temporary; knowing is looking at oneself

³⁶ Cf. P. Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

through the eyes of the other/the opposite. Binarism, symmetry, and order exist so that we can break ourselves of the habit of looking through the eyes of the self, so that we can realize how “irrelevant,” changeable, and fragile forms (including human forms) are. Entities which depend on one another, which transform and interact with each other, can undergo transformation.

Let us return for a moment to the moment in which the *shite* puts on his mask. It takes place in the mirror room behind the stage. The actor is focused on the mask. Once he puts it on, his face is the shadow of the mask and not the other way round. The viewer never sees the mask from the inside. The actor does not see either the outside or the inside, and thus merges with what he has just contemplated as the outside.³⁷ The other and the I become one when the mask is chosen. The other enters the I. The other becomes the I and the I becomes the other when the actor begins to act. The mask is therefore at once something alien and artificial, as well as natural and intimate, just like acting in Western culture, which is always (regardless of the accepted definition) a play of identification and distance.

All these “three theaters” function in the performative space, creating worlds suspended in the void, subject to change, open to other dimensions of being. Their power does not lie in the answers they give but in asking fundamental questions. What is a shadow? Does the mask cast a shadow on the face or is our face just the shadow of the mask? A Zen master would surely answer with another question: “What is a mask?”

Różewicz’s different *Kartotekas* [Card Indexes]. Scattered or anamorphic drama, or the entangled arts

When we talk about “the arts,” we usually refer to the visual arts, dance, or music, or we immediately turn our attention to theatrical and dramatic texts, to plays. The notion of the arts eliminates the need to define the complicated relationship between drama and theater, and even more broadly between literature and theater, if one maintains the increasingly anachronistic division into literature as the art of the word and theater as the performative arts. Drama, despite repeated attempts to relegate it to the periphery of the arts, which would render it inferior and incomplete (as demonstrated by “the theatrical theory of drama” or “writing for the theater”), has turned out to be the most creative and progressive genre, embodying the essence of the performing arts. The divisions into “staged” plays and “written” plays is obsolete. The relationship between theater and drama,

³⁷ E. Żeromska, *op. cit.*

interpreted historically in the context of the development of mimetic art, could be called the entangled arts (some productions were based on spoken instructions; respectively, at times dramatic texts were recorded long after the performance took place). So, is Aristotle's theory of tragedy and comedy (lost) the poetics of literature or the stage? The complicated relationship between drama and theater effectively binds these arts together. They cannot be separated. It seems that these two realities anamorphically coexist; these two images become entangled in one look. In order to understand the entanglement of the dramatic and the theatrical matter, we must accept the possibility of simultaneously defining things by means of completely different categories. We have power as audience members; we define, if for a moment, what we (want to) see in a work of art. In this sense, the act of viewing is tantamount to the act of creating. Różewicz creates, for example, *Kartoteka rozrzucona* [The Scattered Card Index] in and through words. Alas, he works with the scattered ready-made text, which he reads years later, so that art can live again, if only for a moment, in a different order. He probably realized that it would eventually be written down again and exist in a yet different form. Such "from stage to literature" sequences can be endlessly repeated. They defy the principle of linearity and replace it with the principle of coexistence and interchangeability. Literature takes over the space once occupied by drama/theater, seen as the fluid form of the entangled arts.

However, in this essay I will not talk about the liberal arts, which function in a historically defined tradition, nor about the correspondence of arts, nor about the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, nor about the so-called pictorial turn. Respectively, I do not refer to Wagner's synthesis of the arts, avant-garde montage or collage, or other such experiments. The difference between utopian totality and aesthetic disintegration is smaller than it seems, although, of course, the stages leading from the synthesis of the arts to the entangled arts would have to be carefully traced and described. After all, in the nineteenth century, the theater was nothing short of an interface – it played a similar role to that played by the new media today. In this essay, I am interested in performativity, understood not only as agency but also as undecidability, anti-binarism, new aesthetic possibilities (and not failures) which can be found in dispersion, disruption, coexistence, as they define communication in the twenty-first century.

Literature is no longer the art of the word. It combines different languages and materials (words become part of a drawing; an image provokes a verbal reaction), different media, and different interactive acts of reception/creation (the printed word coexists with the digital word; when you read, you effectively choose a path, understood metaphorically as the path

of life but sometimes also literally as the surface on which one walks, which is suggested by some liberatic works, and/or as the soundtrack to a movie). Reading calls for technology: the computer, the camera, the smartphone, the QR code scanner, etc. Technology is an extension of our senses. As a tool, it allows us to experience and enjoy art. We live in more and more parallel worlds. Literature is a performative art in at least two ways. For one, as pointed out by J. Hillis Miller, because it is able to create imaginary worlds that do and do not co-exist (they can have a counterpart in reality, they can be purely imaginary, or they can exist in a latent form “waiting to be turned into words”).³⁸ Respectively, as performative writing, literature breaks down the boundaries of various arts, blurring the differences between the process of creation and the length of one’s life (transgression turns into transversity). In other words, the ontological status of literature has changed (it emphasizes its own intermediality, it acts, it is spectacularly eventful, it is (playfully) referential, it is complex) and at the same time it is performative (insofar as it engages with the anti-binary entanglement, which constantly develops under the influence of science, especially quantum physics). Logically, we cannot imagine that two states (e.g., light and other material particles, such as electrons) can exist simultaneously in a wave-particle form. Nor can we accept that Schrödinger’s cat is alive and dead at the same time. When we observe, we always select, specify, decide what we see.

The category of entanglement, which I borrow from quantum physics, thus becomes an aesthetic category. What I once wrote about the concept of performative history of literature could be applied to Różewicz’s works: “Entangled particles form a relational whole; even when separated, at a great distance from each other, they are still interdependent – the state of one still depends on the state of the other. If we determine the parameters of one, we are able to capture both of them as an entangled whole. So how do particles interact? What is reality and does the world exist outside of the self? What is the nature of time and space? What is the essence of matter, mind, consciousness? We have been forever asking those questions ...”³⁹

Indeed, not certainty and not knowledge but uncertainty and undecidability develop consciousness. Paradoxically, if we were to draw parallels between quantum physics and literature, we could say that there is no genre scene without anamorphosis, no epithet without an oxymoron, no naturalistic description without synesthesia. Hence, the term “the entangled arts” refers not so much to “interconnected media” (“like, for exam-

³⁸ J.H. Miller, *On Literature*, London and New York 2002, p. 45.

³⁹ A. Krajewska, *Splątanie literackie* [Entanglement in Literature], “Przestrzenie Teorii” 2012, no. 17, p. 8.

ple, a vinyl record with the original movie soundtrack”⁴⁰) but, above all, to performative literary ontology, which brings entangled genres to life, including photo-epigram, theater-film, drama-theater, video-performance, photo-novel (movie-novel), cinemagraph, movie-to-book adaptations (and their variants – “non-genres,” such as non-theater, impossible art, etc.), and to epistemology (which is, however, defined not as a search for truth, but as a performative invocation of a secret, a mystery, the space of the unresolved). Performativity thus challenges and changes our definitions of ontology and epistemology, and the two become entangled (since our consciousness creates the material world).

The concept of art returns today also in the context of its redefinitions. The traditional anachronistic approach to art as a thing, an artifact, an object of high art, which differs from the applied (low) arts, clashes with the modern performative vision of art as a process, an event, and a series of constant recontextualizations, remediations, remixability and reconstructions. Such art abolishes binary high/low, elite/popular, important/unimportant, main/secondary oppositions and it transcends the means of expression associated with only one medium (theater/film, print/cyberspace, photography/film). Such art becomes an active network, similar to the Internet. Thus, literature turns out to be a performative art also in this respect. The possibility of constant change of the object of art defies the need for the so-called invariant, stable foundation – a fixed image of a work of art. Theater scholars often accuse literary scholars of not understanding the living art of the theater, insofar as they reduce everything to the concept of text. Text in literary studies is often identified with the outdated (and no longer valid) paradigm of structural-semiotic text. Of course, I have a different model in mind. Performative literary studies build on deconstruction and study the text in motion and in flux, in potentiality and in absence, in constant recontextualizations and rewritings, in intermedial transformations, and in dramatic entanglement.

If we interpret the concept of the text performatively, we cannot define its so-called canonical form. The text that is subject to constant recontextualizations exists in thousands of different ways; it is present in and as a network and not in and as a linear system. Therefore, it cannot be defined against something; it lacks a point of reference, a fixed center. Considering the above and the emerging new ontology of the entangled arts, we can no longer speak of binary oppositions. The concept of literature is no longer focused on “great books,” and, as Faulstich writes, since the new media

⁴⁰ W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, “*Uksiążkowanie*” jako problem estetyczno-medialny. Obcy – ósmy pasażer Nostromo – *studium przypadku* [“Novelization” as an Aesthetic and Media Issue: *Alien* – A Case Study], trans. M. Kasprzyk, ed. K. Kozłowski, “Przestrzenie Teorii” 2014, no. 21.

work with transformed fragments and constantly create compilations, the direction of the media transfer is reversed. “It is no longer the case that a (‘good’) novel has been (poorly) ‘adapted into a film’ [lit. ‘filmed’]. Nowadays, a movie can be ‘novelized.’ Or should we say ‘literatured?’”⁴¹ Works are “scattered;” they appear in various forms and versions, such as the photo novella, the novel, the comic book, the movie-to-book conversions. By the way, I wonder how Faulstich would classify Różewicz’s *Kartoteka rozrzucana*. Is it a “book-to-theater conversion” or a “theater-to-book conversion”? Or maybe a “book-to-book conversion”? Indeed, the concept of adaptation no longer makes sense because we no longer have anything to adapt into something else. Adaptation *per se* does not take place. We do not adapt one play into another. We do not turn an original into a translation. We do not transform a manuscript into a published book. Adaptation no longer makes sense as a sequence, an intersemiotic translation, and even as an interpretative approach. We observe and engage with works of art from different points of view, and we cannot determine the existence or the non-existence of the true form of a given work or its canonical interpretation. We can only constantly root our perspectives in the process of displacements, transformations, transitions that shape art performatively. In art, we can (co)exist in parallel words. Not only thanks to the new media (Faulstich) but also thanks to the good old imagination (Miller).

A similar process is at play when it comes to the study of historical documents – scholars no longer believe that they discover the only true vision of the past. Being aware of the fact that the collected source material may (and should) be interpreted in a modern context restores, as Hayden White writes, the value of studying the past in order to understand the present, or, as Freddie Rokem writes, it “seeks to overcome both the separation and the exclusion.”⁴² Pierre Nora calls this way of thinking about the dynamic and changeable object of study post-memory,⁴³ and Arthur C. Danto calls it post-historical art.⁴⁴ The art historian Georges Didi-Huberman, in turn, writes about “memory spots.”⁴⁵ And although these concepts are not syn-

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Cf. M. Leyko, *Teatr w przestrzeni historii* [Theater in the Space of History], “Dialog” 2013, no. 4, p. 5.

⁴³ P. Nora, *Czas pamięci* [Time of Memory], trans. W. Dłuski, “ResPublica Nowa” 2001, no. 7.

⁴⁴ A.C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton 1997.

⁴⁵ G. Didi-Huberman’s lecture “The Place in Spite of Oneself, in Spite of Itself” devoted to the art of Mirosław Bałka, delivered on June 16, 2011, at 6:00 p.m. at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. The text is based on the recording found on the website of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw www.artmuseum.pl.

onyms, they all seem to be important in how Tadeusz Różewicz perceives history. The poet's gaze is performative. He brings the past to life (to use Huberman's term) as "memory spots." "Memory spots" are not diegetic. We could add to Didi-Huberman's argument and say that they operate *in performance*. Looking is the source of performative *episteme*.

Art is a network-like, entangled space. Post-historical art (Danto) also implies the possibility of changing the past. Artists may do almost anything (they can destroy someone's work, for example, Robert Rauschenberg erased a drawing by Willem de Kooning; they can destroy their own work, for example, Anselm Kiefer set his paintings on fire and Banksy shredded *Girl with balloon* when it was auctioned off; they can introduce changes and they can create parodies, for example, add a mustache to Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, change the frame or distort the recording (The Wooster Group's *HAMLET*), or "update" an older work of art, that is, turn historical black-and-white photos into a movie in color (as in the movie *Miasto 44* about the Warsaw Uprising, which raised questions about the role of color in abolishing the opposition between truth and fiction) or organize hologram concerts of deceased musical stars (such as Michael Jackson) which are considered a live performance). We thus create a past that never existed. Różewicz and postmemory – this question should be addressed in greater detail in a separate essay. *Kartoteka rozrzucona* is therefore not an adaptation of *Kartoteka* [The Card Index] but its post-memory version. It is at the same time a form of deconstruction, anti-binary entangled art, post-memory, performative writing, etc. How many more such *Kartotekas* will we be able to see? How many more such *Kartotekas* will we be able to create? ... Without Różewicz ... And maybe one day with his hologram...

The work of art, the act of creation, and the act of reception become entangled. Rhizomes and palimpsests, metamorphosis and anamorphosis, dispersion and disturbance, past and present constantly redefine the notion of art. We could even say that probably for the first time theory is able to break out of the vicious circle of interpreting art in relation to either the author, the work itself, or the viewer. The raw material of art is entangled matter; it is a performative space and not an object (an artifact).

Thus, performativity can be transposed outside of art, as an entanglement of "real" reality and "artistic" reality. Or, and this is perhaps more complex and interesting, we can focus on the performative network based on the opposition between truth and fiction, thus introducing ontological doubt and demolishing the Cartesian model of art in favor of "esse est percipi," etc. In the first case, we will witness the power of performance and in the second case, we will witness the power of the performative entanglement of literature and the media.

Różewicz's art/play is performative in two ways. For one, it is biopoetic – art turns into life and transforms it. Our bodies and minds are interconnected, they condition one another, which Różewicz often shows, drawing attention to the physical. He translates his actions from thoughts into movements, from movements into thoughts. The experience of the stage is the experience of the mind (“everything is clear in my mind,” “there is no theater on paper”). The second meaning of performativity refers to drawing the viewer into the play; the abolition of metalanguage should lead to the abolition of the single frame. As such, as Raoul Eshelman writes,⁴⁶ we do not only witness “double framing” at work but also the endless and complex process of re-framings. The spectator, the reader, and the writer play a game in which they create different frames in order to understand themselves and in order to observe how this process affects their consciousness, which is, in turn, transformed by the work of art.

The concept of art is thus undefinable. No one can say once and for all what art is and what art is not. Art is defined by our choices, decisions, (re)framings, and erasures.

For Różewicz, entanglement is a way of writing/reading, that is, the essence of life in art. It is – as the Author himself could ironically say, distancing himself from fashionable discourse – a “project,” “a work in progress.” And this “text in progress” does indeed create the poet's biography: a biography woven from words, images, photographs, traces of Różewicz's readings of the works of other artists. Różewicz's art is non-complete, non-closed, constantly in motion, in flux, changeable, redefinable. Różewicz's successive literary works do not so much complement one another as operate as hubs in an invisible and infinite network. Różewicz's works, as an interactive and intermedial network of influences and dependencies, transcend the boundaries of all arts. It is, in my opinion, the best example of the entangled arts in Polish literature from the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century.

When he was working with directors, when he finally entered the stage in *Kartoteka rozrzucona*, and, later, when he wrote *Ostatnia kartoteka* [The Last Card Index] (also called *Trzecia rozrzucona* [The Third Scattered Card Index]), Tadeusz Różewicz always focused on the image first. This is the first entanglement that is immediately visible – the image present in a quote, in ekphrasis, in a reminder. Różewicz's texts become entangled in/with print, manuscripts, drawings, telegrams, monograms, drawings, highlighted sections from school textbooks and self-learning books, dedications, autographs,

⁴⁶ R. Eshelman, *Performatywność albo koniec postmodernizmu* (American Beauty) [Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism (*American Beauty*)], trans. K. Hoffmann, “Przestrzenie Teorii” 2012, no. 17.

and photographs. Różewicz adds comments, writes prefaces, and then adds comments he uttered but did not record himself (such as comments from *To i owo* [This and That] collected and recorded by Jan Stolarczyk). The most important thing, however, is that most of the comments come from unwritten books, unpublished texts, unfinished works, or poems that were conceived and then abandoned, ideas jotted in the margins. What else does the writer entangle?

In Różewicz's works, entanglement is usually "activated" in the process of re-writing.

Różewicz re-wrote not only *Kartoteka* but also his other works, for example, the poem "to się złożyć nie może" [It cannot come together]. He also re-wrote his biography. He re-wrote his texts in dialogue with his critics. He re-wrote his notes from a sheet of paper (from scattered sheets of paper), also from those which were literally scattered on the stage. The sheets, the notes from Różewicz's *Kartoteka* were filmed, photographed, and scattered during theatrical performances.

How can we classify *Kartoteka rozrzucona*? Is it a published book, a video, a rehearsal, a filmed rehearsal, a photograph, a drawing, a performance, an invitation to dance (Różewicz clearly makes such a suggestion)? Apart from the above, we should also mention Różewicz's re-writing of literature, paintings, philosophical treatises in dialogue with other writers, painters, and critics (e.g., Miłosz/Różewicz on Swedenborg, Różewicz/Bacon on Velázquez).

Różewicz envisioned *Kartoteka po raz trzeci rozrzucona* as a square – as a blueprint of the ceiling with a black dot in the center (or perhaps a fly that landed on the ceiling) – which could be compared with Samuel Beckett's *Quad*. In Beckett's play, nameless monks designate the center of the square by "dancing" around it, thus pointing to the absorbing center of the Universe. In Różewicz's play, a fly is sitting on the ceiling; it marks a point, a dot, an end. The act of re-writing may give rise to anamorphosis. It is what you think it is (once we want to see a fly, once we want to see a dot). "Tragedy's reflection" has its counterpart in "comedy's reflection."

Incidentally, I do not agree with W.B. Worthen, who in *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance*⁴⁷ (Worthen unfortunately still distinguishes between literary studies and performance studies) reads Beckett's *Quad* through Euclidean geometry. Adopting such a perspective does not limit the question of space, but opens it up. The characters who walk along increasingly crooked lines are, in my opinion, re-writing Euclidean geometry into Einsteinian geometry. Hence, in Beckett's play, walking is "dancing,"

⁴⁷ W.B. Worthen, *op. cit.*, pp. 192–204.

and the center, which the actors omit, like the black hole in physics, is so powerful that it even forces them to change their trajectory. Beckett does not create space. Beckett re-writes geometry, changes dimensions, bends time and space, and probably draws on quantum physics, showing possible worlds, potential places, or the void (as, according to Plato, “the state before all ontology,” but we could also say, as “the state after all ontology,” as “texts with no purpose,” when “there is nothing left to say,” when crumbling ontology points to the void).

So, what are we looking at? Or, as Różewicz would say, “what do we focus/ our attention on?” First, we stand in front of the image. Perhaps literature is abstract like the world in Kazimir Malevich’s paintings? The painter argued that he did not depict an “empty square” but rather an impression of an object. Or maybe *Trzecia rozrzucona* could be read as a Japanese haiku?⁴⁸ Were it not for the fact that *Trzecia rozrzucona* is not a poem ... nor is it a drama, a painting, a screenshot, a scene, a happening, a play; it is dramatology. The dramatographic haiku in Różewicz’s play therefore perversely and humorously (!) evokes the image of nature (the fly) and inspires metaphysical reflection (the black dot), pointing to the center, concentration. It also refers to meditation and classic Japanese artistic conventions – the empty white space (the white ceiling). *Trzecia rozrzucona* was written as drama, using metaphorical ink obtained from the first iconic *Kartoteka*, which in turn can no longer be read in isolation from the two subsequent *Kartotekas*. Transforming, changing one particle leads to the entanglement of the other. It may even lead to the entanglement of yet another, and “trigger” further entanglements. Different versions of *Kartoteka*, unique as they may be, maintain their identity. It is clear that they were all written “as” the same drama. They are connected by the same person – his sense of sight, hearing, touch, speech. He is constantly lying in bed and at the same time he is living, he is active (as an embryo, a teenager, a hard-working and rebellious adult, and an old man who is blankly staring at the ceiling). The ironic “scattering” and “mixing” of pages, index cards, notes, acts, and scenes points to the end, to the full stop – be it of life or the sentence. It projects the path of life determined by the dramatic typography of expressing the end in art, or perhaps the end of art. Or perhaps we have only reached the end of a certain understanding of art and literature?

As in Vermeer’s *The Lacemaker*, the mimetic line turns into a ragged, blurred shape, a blot of paint. Creation is a secret which, to draw on Di-

⁴⁸ More on the art of haiku in Polish poetry cf. B. Śniecikowska, *Haiku po polsku. Genologia w perspektywie transkulturowej* [Haiku in Polish: Genology in a Transcultural Perspective], Toruń 2016.

di-Huberman, we discover by reflecting on the aporia of detail. After all, literature still surprises us. It is endless possibilities.

Translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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Entelechy of the Emanational Form: Zenon Fajfer's Poems of Potentiality

ABSTRACT. Katarzyna Bazarnik, *Entelechy of the Emanational Form: Zenon Fajfer's Poems of Potentiality*. "Przestrzenie Teorii" special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 63–83. ISSN 1644-6763. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.3>

Zenon Fajfer's introduced into poetry an original, interactive form called "the emanational poem," in which the multilevel acrostic is generative of simultaneously coexisting dimensions of text. The poet has used it in several of his works to render simultaneity, visibility and invisibility, potentiality and actuality. The article discusses the emanational form in view of Aristotle's concept of *entelechy*. Exploring affordances of the electronic and printed media, the author explicates how the potentiality for mobility and intertextuality can be actualised in Fajfer's "Ars Poetica," *Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę*, and *Powieki*, drawing attention to the role of the reader in this process. She mentions the aporetic tension between the principle of Aristotelian *entelechy* and postmodern concept of intertextuality, also referencing the relevance of Ned Rossiter's network theory to the interpretation of Fajfer's work. Focusing on *Powieki*, a multimodal cycle of emanational poems, published as a compound of the material book and the digital poems in the CD, the author postulates, following Pisarski (2014) and Marecki (2018), that it is an entelechy of the hypertext. Moreover, this richly hyperlinked cycle of poems can be seen as a rewriting of the Orphean katabasis. It invites contemplation of a complex, multidimensional space that should be explored in "slow," or close reading, which defies typical expectations of electronic literature audiences. Finally, it is argued that Fajfer's print-born digital hypertexts activate potentialities entailed in the matter(iality) of the writing in both media, the old and the new.

KEYWORDS: Zenon Fajfer's emanational form, "Ars Poetica", *Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę*, *Powieki*, entelechy, hypertext, katabasis

How many people know that the word "scuba" is in fact an acronym for "self-contained underwater breathing apparatus"? Most of us use it without realising its underlying meaning. Kabbalists implemented a similar method, called notarikon, to discover divine message arguably hidden in the text of the Torah. In it the first or last letters of Biblical words are treated as a kind of shorthand for phrases or sentences.¹ Notarikon is akin to an acrostic, which poets occasionally use to code their names, or names of dedicatees, in the first letters of a verse or stanza. In his short story "The Vane Sisters," Vladimir Nabokov resorted to a similar device to introduce an ironic twist to the tale. Its homodiegetic narrator is skeptical about

¹ S. Steinmetz, *Dictionary of Jewish Usage: A Guide to the Use of Jewish Terms*, Lanham, et al. 2005, pp. 127–129.

a metaphysical dimension of reality and disdainful of unconventional ways of reading practiced by one of the siblings to communicate with the spirits. When they die, they send him a message through two acrostically coded sentences, but he remains unaware of it. It remains in potentiality, unless the attentive readers actualise it, providing they take the hint from a few references to acrostics.

In literary writing, such devices are usually employed ‘locally,’ so to speak, to encode just a single word or a phrase, and they are usually considered gimmicks. Zenon Fajfer’s emanational poems, though related to them, are much more elaborate forms, functionally and semantically motivated. I propose to read them in view of Aristotle’s notion of *entelechy*, the concept the ancient philosopher coined to describe that which actualises what ensues from the very nature of a thing and exists as merely potentiality until it develops into its full form.

As Joe Sachs explains, according to the Stagiryte,

[t]he primary fact about the world we experience is that it consists of *independent things (ousiai)*, each of which is a *this (tode ti)*, an enduring whole, and separate (*choriston*), or intact. Since thinghood is characterized by *wholeness (to telos)*, the wholeness of each independent thing has the character of an *end (telos)*, or *that for the sake of which (hou heneka)* it does all that it does. This doing is therefore the being at work that makes it what it is, since it is *what it keeps on being in order to be at all (to ti n einai)*. Thus thinghood and being at work merge into the single idea of being at work staying itself (*entelecheia*).²

Sachs further analyses the meaning of *entelechy* by discussing its etymology, showing how Aristotle fuses three different roots to indicate the “active, dynamic character [...] present in the very material (*hul*) of each thing, as a potency (*dunamis*) spilling over into the activity that gives the thing its form (*eidos* or *morph*).”³ Thus, *entelechy* can be understood as a process in which something develops, fulfilling its latent potential, in order to attain an intrinsically designed shape.

While the ancient philosopher speaks about *entelechy* with regard to the natural phenomena, Fajfer invests words, in their materiality of written characters, with similar potency that can be realised, or actualised, in the emanational poetic form. For him, each single letter of a word is an “active, dynamic character,” vested with the power to “emanate” words, thereby

² J. Sachs, *Aristotle’s Physics: A Guided Study*, New Brunswick, NJ 1995, p. 31 (original emphasis).

³ *Ibidem*.

The emanational form was first used in *Oka-leczenie*, a book Fajfer wrote jointly with Katarzyna Bazarnik,⁷ to render the consciousnesses of a dying man and a baby to be born. Their streams of consciousness remain inaccessible to the people accompanying the comatose patient and the infant. But the readers can access them by decoding the hidden texts, thereby acting as if he or she were a guide for the departing soul, and a midwife helping to deliver the baby. However, if the reader refrains from performing this action, both heroes will be in a state of suspension between life and death: the dying man lingering in a kind of bardo, and the child remaining in the state of potentiality (this in-betweenness is graphically represented in the middle codex of the unconventionally bound book; see Fig. 1). Therefore, the work itself can be described as “an enduring whole” whose *telos*, however, has not yet been realised. It remains in potency until the process of setting the emanational texts in motion is realised by a reader.



Fig. 1. *Oka-leczenie*: a triple dos-à-dos forming a kind of leporello; the texts in outer codices have the emanational form.

Fajfer’s programmatic poem “Ars poetica” illustrates how these states of textual potentiality and actuality can be observed in different media. The poem was originally written in Polish in 2004 and co-translated by Fajfer and Bazarnik into English in 2005. The translation prioritises the emanational

⁷ *Oka-leczenie* and its sequel, *(O)patrzenie*, are classified as liberature (Pol. *liberatura*), a literary genre integrating text with the material form of the book. Its name was coined by Fajfer, who hybridised Latin “liber” (book) with “literature” to stress their organic unity, and his idea was picked up by some literary scholars to describe similar works. To read more on liberature, see Z. Fajfer, *Liberature or Total Literature. Collected Essays 1999–2009*, ed. and trans. K. Bazarnik, Kraków 2010; and *eadem*, *Liberature: A Book-Bound Genre*, Kraków 2016.

form, since the aim was to preserve its entelechical potential. Thus, due to the formal constraint of the emanational form, rather than rendering the meanings of the “surface” text, the translators recreated the multi-layered acrostic, while trying as much as possible, to impart similar imagery, metaphors and motifs. Even before the poem was published in print, the interactivity and potential movement intrinsic to the emanational form inspired the poet to animate the text on the screen. The Flash versions, in Polish and English, were prepared in collaboration with programmer Marcin Lewandowski and presented during the 5th Symposium on Iconicity in Language and Literature in Krakow in March 2005.⁸ Two years later these kinetic electronic versions of “Ars Poetica” were published in *Techsty*,⁹ a portal of electronic literature, and soon after anthologised in the third *Electronic Literature Collection*.¹⁰ In 2010, Fajfer included the poem in his bilingual volume *dwadzieścia jeden liter / ten letters* where its printed form opens the book, and its animated version begins “Primum Mobile,”¹¹ a series of three kinetic emanational poems on the DVD included in the volume as its integral component.

As can be seen in *dwadzieścia jeden liter / ten letters*, in the static, print version of “Ars Poetica,” it is the readers who need to uncover the invisible layers of text in a truly “nontrivial effort.”¹² In the electronic one, their effort is reduced to a mere click of the button that launches (or pauses) the automatic process of involution and evolution of the text on the screen. The kinetic “Ars Poetica” demonstrates how the text infolds into one word “it,” and it unfolds back into its full shape. It shows how every letter is set in motion in order to actualise the text’s potency due to which the poem attains its proper shape (*eidōs* or *morphē*). Thus it can be argued that “Ars poetica” has two modes of being rather than just two modes of presentation (or two different interfaces): “staying-itself” and “being-at work.” It exists simultaneously as potentiality and its actualisation, or the *entelechy* of “it” (or possibly even the lyrical “I”).

⁸ The kinetic “Primum Mobile” was premiered on October 27, 2005 in Poznań during an exhibition of Fajfer’s works “Slowa/Words,” curated by Małgorzata Dawidek Grylicka in “Enter” Gallery, accompanying a colloquium on literature and visual texts. The digital animation of the poems in Polish and in English versions (using Adobe software: After Effects, Photoshop, Premiere) was created by Jakub Woynarowski for *ten letters* in 2010.

⁹ Since Flash is no longer supported by Adobe, and web browsers have removed all Flash-related software, the poem is no longer available on *Techsty*.

¹⁰ Z. Fajfer, “Ars poetica”, [in:] *Electronic Literature Collection 3*, eds. S. Boluk, et al., Cambridge, Mass. 2016, <https://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=ars-poetica> (accessed: 4.06.2023).

¹¹ Incidentally, the title of this mini-cycle of kinetic emanational poems alludes to Aristotle’s “unmoved” or “prime mover”, the immobile cause of all motion and change in the universe (cf. *Oxford Reference* online).

¹² Cf. Aarseth’s definition of ergodic literature. E.J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Baltimore 1997, p. 1.

Fajfer frequently uses the emanational method in his work, especially to pursue the theme of visibility versus invisibility. In his bottle-book-poem *Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę*¹³ (*Detect Ozone Whole Nearby*), the text is printed on a transparent plastic sheet and placed in an empty vodka bottle (see Fig. 2). The transparency of the “cover” and of the material carrier of the text suggests that the poem is fully exposed to the curious eyes of its beholders, as if nothing remained to be hidden. However, the first challenge the poem poses is mere legibility: it is not easy to read this “message in a bottle.” Its unconventional materiality inhibits or even frightens some readers away from pulling the plastic scroll from its container (as I have often seen during workshops on liberature). The transparent sheet requires some support if one wants to *see* the text: it either needs to be held against a window or a white background. The difficulty is further exacerbated by the fact that the poem contains emanational sub-texts. So the opening stanza sounds rather ironic:

Wind-up. Eyelids
 Ocluded. Veils ever re-veiled?
 Monitoring inside monitors inside cameras
 But every yell of nightly destiny¹⁴



Fig. 2. *Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę* (Detect Ozone Whole Nearby, 2nd ed.)

¹³ Literally, the title means “Looking through an ozone hole”. Z. Fajfer, *Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę*, Kraków 2003.

¹⁴ I quote from the English translation by Finn Fordham, Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer, which retains the emanational structure of the original. It features in “Primum Mobile”, the kinetic series of poems on CD in Z. Fajfer’s *dwadzieścia jeden liter / ten letters*.

In this see-through object, little is “unveiled” or uncovered from the start. When its “veils” and “eyelids” are finally lifted, that is, the sub-texts decoded, “transmediation,” signalled in the beginning, occurs:

Transvaluations: holograms erupt
Everywhere. Prisoners initiate liberation. Out! Glasses up! Enjoy
New ozone... When
Dreams entrance, smithereens interanimate random events.

Self-reflexively, the poem announces its remediation. Indeed, some time later, Fajfer remediated it into an animation in part three of the above-mentioned “Primum Mobile.” But there is nothing random about it. In its kinetic form, the poem remains strictly controlled by the original notarikon-like design. The movement of the letters is not generated randomly by software, but proceeds towards completion according to the thoughtfully envisaged plan, illustrating vividly how “thinghood and being at work merge into the single idea of being at work staying itself (*entelecheia*).”¹⁵

Developing the emanational poetics, Fajfer has created an even more elaborate textual structure. His next book, entitled *Powieki*¹⁶ (2013), is a multimodal cycle of intricately interconnected poems. Again, its format embraces the printed volume and the accompanying CD. In this collection, all poems except one have the emanational structure. What is more, its five parts are interconnected to form several larger networks. The first letters of titles within each part form words: ZENKASI,¹⁷ ZARODKI (*embryos*), OKNA (*windows*). The initial letters of the poems in part I, entitled “Sonetrix,” spell MIKROSTRUKTURA (*microstructure*). Moreover, the penultimate layers of the “folded” emanational poems in the Sonetrix cycle rhyme according to the Petrarchan sonnet’s rhyme scheme.

The printed book closes with “NOKTUR-n” (*nocturn*), the only non-emanational poem which breaks off abruptly in the middle of the word “mie/szkanie” (“apart/ment”), leaving out the remaining syllables (*cf.* Fig. 3). “NOKTUR-n” is then reprinted on the CD, thereby suggesting that the missing part of the final word should be sought in the digital version. When the electronic collection is played,¹⁸ the reader watches the animation in which the missing

¹⁵ J. Sachs, *Aristotle’s Physics...*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

¹⁶ The title means ‘eyelids,’ but also a pun on ‘for ever’ (Pol. po wieki). Z. Fajfer, *Powieki*, Szczecin 2013.

¹⁷ The compound referring to the author’s and his wife’s names, used as their artistic *nome de plume*.

¹⁸ The electronic, hypertextual version of *Powieki* has been also published in *Techsty*, and is included in *Electronic Literature Collection 4*, eds. K.I. Berens, et al., Electronic Literature Organization 2022.

syllables of the broken word: “-szkanie” appear on the screen (see Fig. 4, 5 and 6). Its letters are moving in an anagrammatic dance, their movement accompanied by insistent knocking on the door and the ringing of a doorbell.

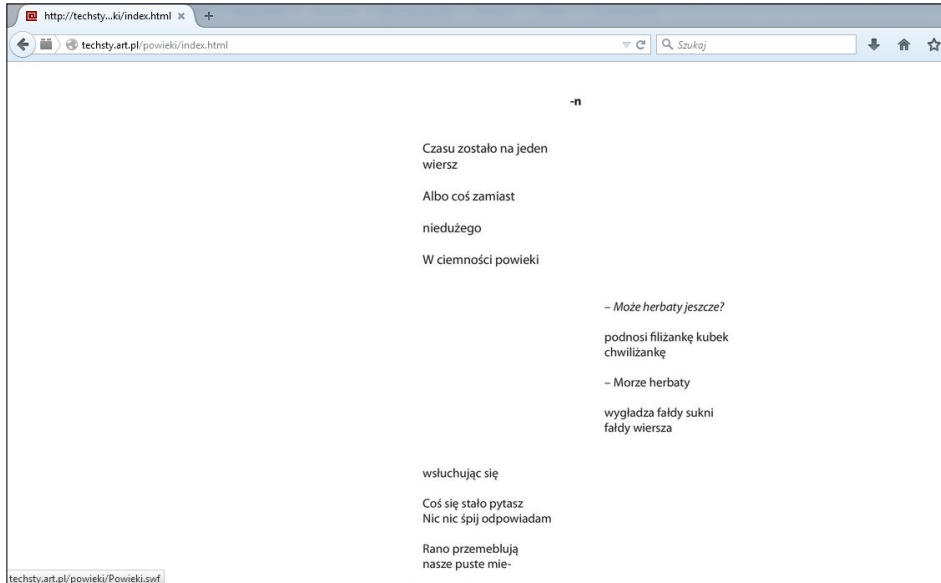


Fig. 3. “NOKTUR-n,” the final, non-emanational poem of the printed *Powieki*, opens its hypertextual version. Note the final word broken in the middle: “mie-”.

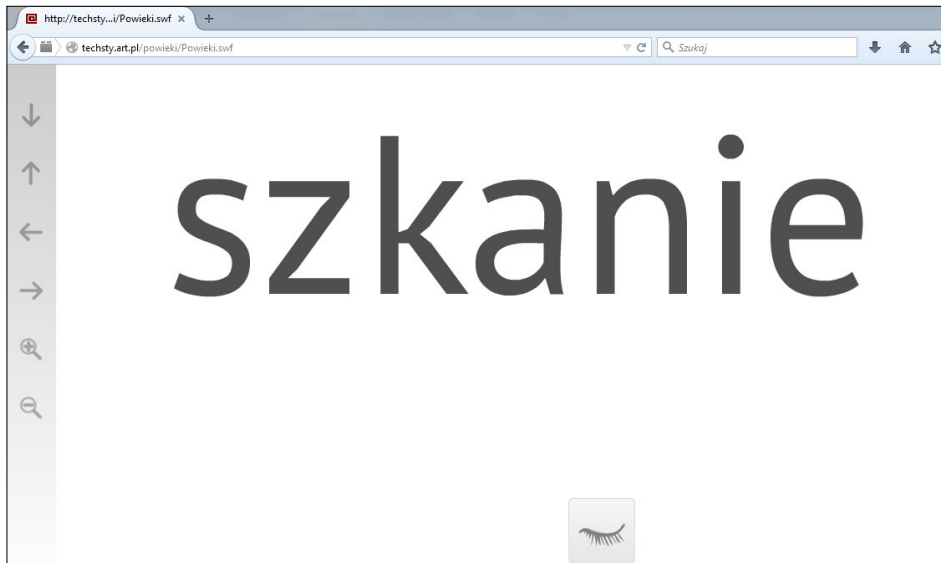


Fig. 4. The missing syllables of “NOKTUR-n”.

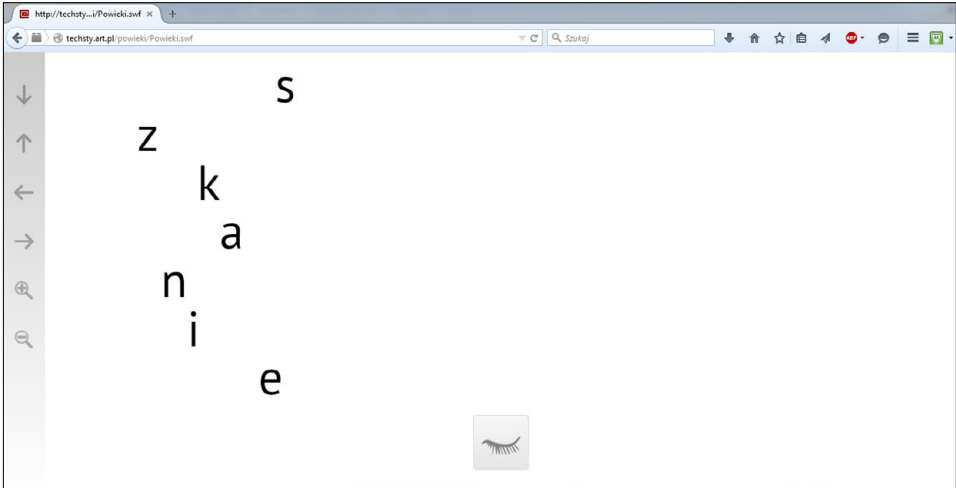


Fig. 5. A screenshot of the letters of “-szkanie” moving across the screen; the soundtrack for the animation includes knocking on the door, a ringing doorbell and a telephone ringing.

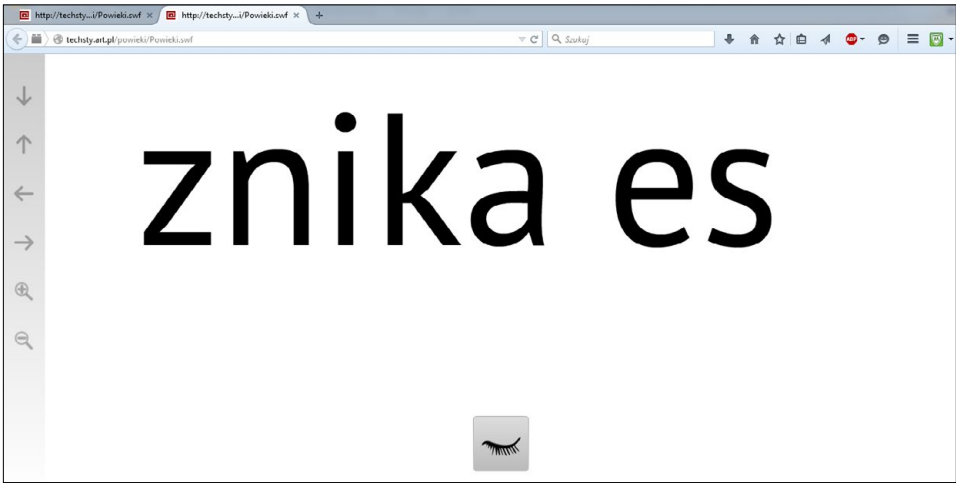


Fig. 6. A momentary freeze of the moving letters: the phrase means “Es disappears,” and the “eye” icon is active (indicated by its black color).

In order to access the kinetic poems, one needs to click on the icon of the eye. The entrance is activated only temporarily, when the moving letters momentarily freeze, forming a full word or phrase; this is indicated by the change of the eyelid color from gray to black (see Fig. 6). When the eyelid icon is grayed, it is deactivated and the hypertext cannot be entered. The animated hypertext of *Powieki* can be accessed through several different “entrances,” depending on a different anagram. Inside the hypertext, the

readers can move upwards and downwards, left and right, clicking on arrows in the panel on the left, as well as traversing different levels, choosing occasional hyperlinks hidden in some selected words of the poems. By doing so they can follow paths, passages and connections between poems that are not flagged typographically in any way in the printed book. But they are not random, since the hyperlinked words are recognizable as important leitmotifs across Fajfer's poetic *oeuvre*. In this way, the digital counterpart realises the potential of intertextuality latent in the printed book. It can be understood as "Kristevan intertextuality [...] not a mosaic, or a limitless web of deferred meanings, but a logical relationship of 'X and/or not X', an 'an(d)other'," ¹⁹ even more relevant to Fajfer's poetics due to his exploitation of anagrams. ²⁰

Mariusz Pisarski, who reviewed the book in *Techsty*, remarks that *Powieki* constitutes an almost optimal kind of hypertext, containing temporal, conditional and many other kinds of hyperlinks (par. 4). It is worth stressing that such richness of link types ensues from the work's literary form, i.e. its multidimensional, emanational structure, although Fajfer did not rely on any ready-made hypertextual solutions. ²¹ The formally intricate organisation of discourse may be interpreted as a diagrammatic icon, intended to simulate an experience of wandering through a complicated, multi-storeyed labyrinth, with movable walls, following potentially infinite paths. ²² Looking for textual hints, the reader as if gropes for clues indicating a way out of the underground maze.

The motif of *katabasis* is enhanced by several allusions to the mythical underworld, for example, Kore, ²³ asphodel meadows (i.e. Elysium), Eden, Avalon, ²⁴ and Orpheus. ²⁵ The interdiction addressed to the mythological musician is literally repeated as a single-line poem in the printed part of *Powieki* entitled "Oysters":

()

Nie odwracaj się ²⁶

¹⁹ M. Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*, Cambridge 2003, p. 32.

²⁰ Scarlett Baron notes that among Kristeva's inspirations, when she was working out her theory of intertextuality, was de Saussure's private studies of anagrams in Latin poetry, published by Jean Starobinsky as *Les Mots sous les mots* in 1971. S. Baron, *The Birth of Intertextuality: The Riddle of Creativity*, New York and London 2020, p. 315.

²¹ P. Marecki, *Między kartką a ekranem. Cyfrowe eksperymenty z medium książki w Polsce*, Kraków 2018, p. 160.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 161.

²³ Z. Fajfer, *Powieki*, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 52.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

In the book, the line “Nie odwracaj się,” i.e. “Don’t look back,” constitutes the penultimate poem in the collection, and the last emanational text. It is followed by the above mentioned “NOKTUR-n,” describing an empty apartment abandoned by lovers, as if alluding to the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. With this poem, the book ends – the journey through the underworld is over. The ancient myth tells us that Orpheus did turn back, thereby closing off the opportunity to re-enter the other world and to bring his beloved back to life, that is, to re-animate her.

But since “NOKTUR-n” is reprinted on the disc, Fajfer offers his readers another chance. The poem functions as a transition to the virtual space of the kinetic hypertext. When the CD is played, we can hear insistent knocking on the door and the upsetting ringing of a doorbell, as if suggesting that a desperate lover is trying to break through the locked gates of Hades. If the reader notices and follows the active icon, the entry into the textual maze of *Powieki* will open to them.

But the electronic hypertext is not a straightforward, animated equivalent of the poems. It is richer as it hides some “Easter eggs,” namely, links leading to texts not included in the printed book. They are accessible via certain carefully selected words or phrases, such as the words “okno” (window) and “drzwi” (“door”). Upon clicking them, color and sound appear in the otherwise black and silent texts; moreover, the poems revealed here are more lyrical and cheerful in tone. They describe peaceful moments spent with the persona’s beloved, drinking Earl Grey tea, watching romantic films, reading poetry together. One can notice how some letters turn green, brown or blue, and listen to the chirping of birds, the cries of gulls, and the murmur of the sea (see Fig. 7, 8 and 9).

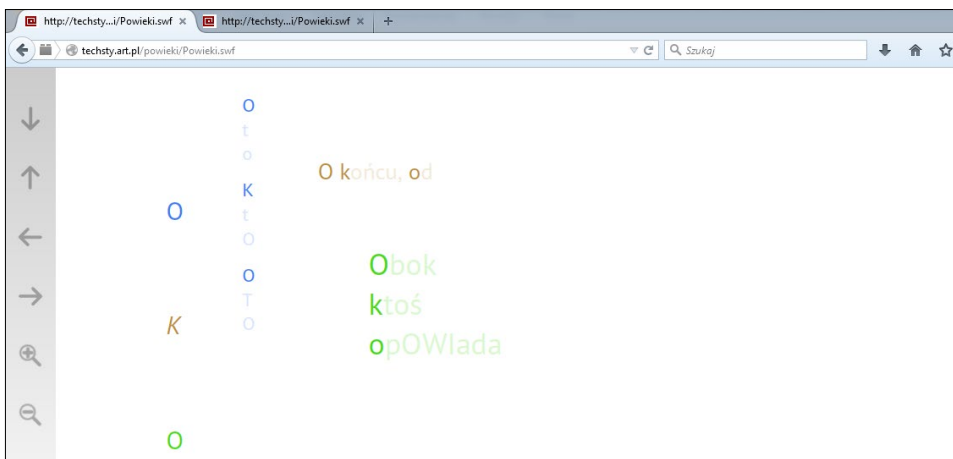


Fig. 7. A screen shot of one of the “windows” (or an “Easter egg”) in *Powieki*.

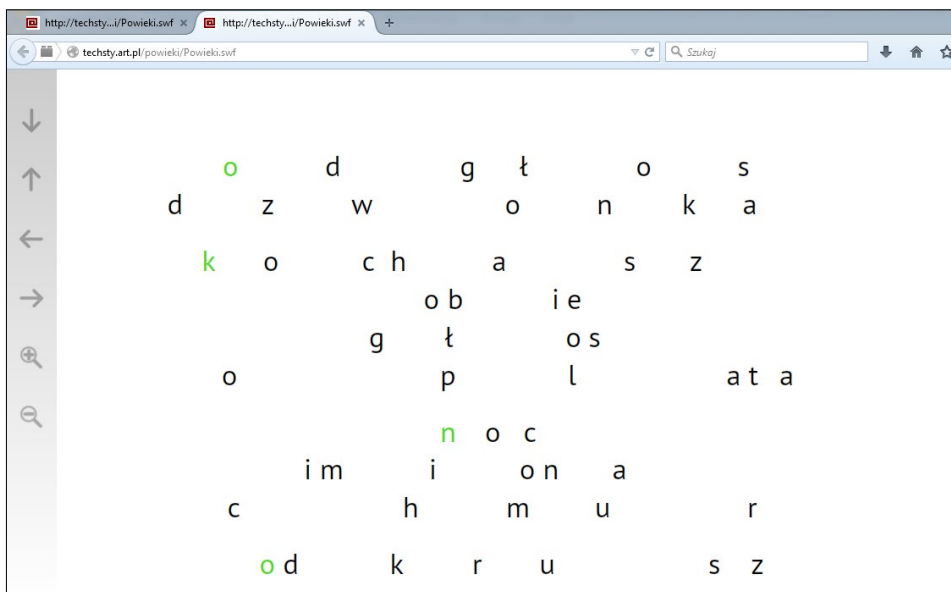


Fig. 8. A screen shot of another “window” (or an “Easter egg”) in *Powieki*.

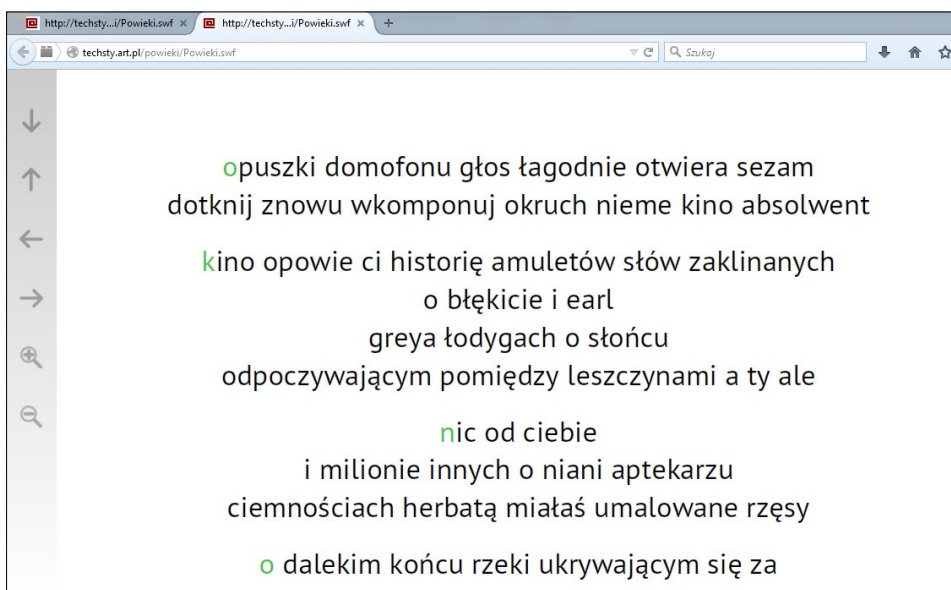


Fig. 9. A screen shot of another “window” (or an “Easter egg”) in *Powieki*.

These are also moments when the pace and direction of reading cannot be controlled. The “Easter egg” poems appear on the screen and immediately

fade away, as if to remind the readers of transitoriness and uncontrollability of life. This also throws into stark relief the readers' experience of transitions between other lexias. Getting used to moving between textual levels at their own speed, the readers may be surprised that now they are denied control. Despite that, they are still given ample time to read the unfolding and infolding "window" poems, so one does not experience frustration accompanying the reading of quickly flashing kinetic text.

So, *Powieki* invites contemplation and slow, close reading, as if to exemplify Jessica Pressman's call to return to this practice in critiquing electronic literature, presented in *Digital Modernism*.²⁷ As Mariusz Pisarski stresses in his review, *Powieki* is "an oasis of zen in the world of hysterical discourses, offering us a verbal therapy on the liberatic couch, the more valuable as it is carried out by the same liquid crystal display that usually attacks us with its chaotic scream" (par. 7, transl. by the author). Piotr Marceki makes a similar observation with regard to Fajfer's work. He points out that perhaps "the greatest paradox" is

his ability to use the digital media in such a way as to slow down the perception of text and offer [us] deep reading (which seems to go against the very logic and nature of these media). What's more, this happens thanks to the tools afforded by them (such as hypertext and kinetic art), but only providing that the audience learns new modes of reading, or rather relearns the ones already eradicated by culture. And though his texts feature unfavourable comments on the new technologies [...], it seems that Fajfer himself creates the digital media and masters them. Not the other way round.²⁸

Therefore, Fajfer's work realises little expected potency of these media by counteracting the readerly ADHD usually fostered by the digital environment, reminding us that poetry on the screen can and needs to be savoured, too. One way of doing this consists in his use of the lyrical, multimodal "Easter egg" poems discussed above, activated by single words. Another method is to activate self-citations. The poem "Kamery" (Cmeras)²⁹ includes the line "spoglądając przez ozonową dziurę" [looking through the ozone hole; or in the acrostical translation: detect ozone whole nearby], which repeats the title of Fajfer's bottle-book (see Fig. 10). In the printed book, the reader familiar with Fajfer's work may spot this auto-allusion, or to use Katarzyna Biela's term, an instance of auto-textuality,³⁰ and perhaps

²⁷ J. Pressman, *Digital Modernism: Writing It New in New Media*, Oxford 2014, pp. 18–22.

²⁸ P. Marceki, *op. cit.*, p. 163 (trans. by the author).

²⁹ Z. Fajfer, *Powieki*, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 35.

³⁰ K. Biela, *Encounters in Theatre and Literature: B.S. Johnson and Zenon Fajfer*. PhD dissertation, Jagiellonian University in Krakow 2022, p. 193.

recall the bottled poem. In the electronic version, he or she can follow the link and display the poem at this point (see Fig. 11 and 12).

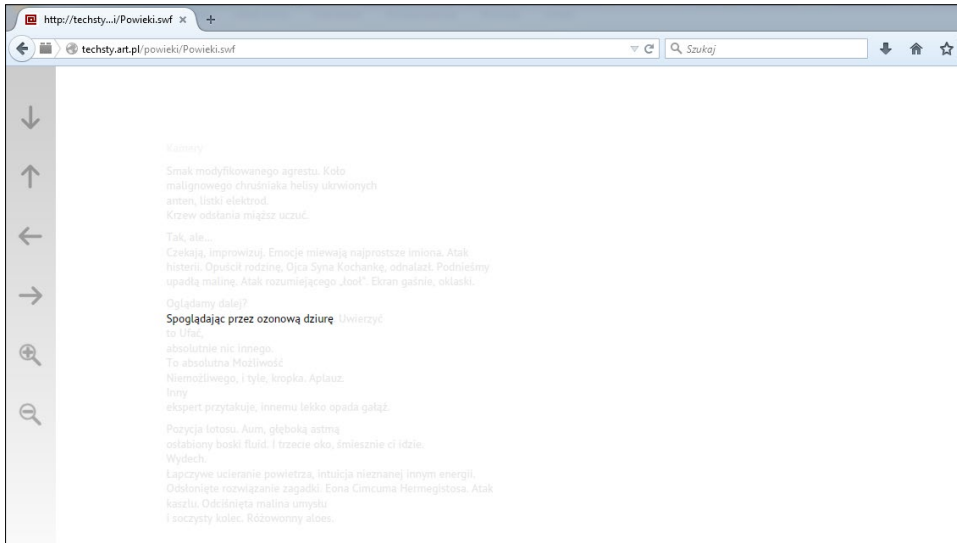


Fig. 10. The poem “Kamery” with an active link to the kinetic e-version of “Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę”.

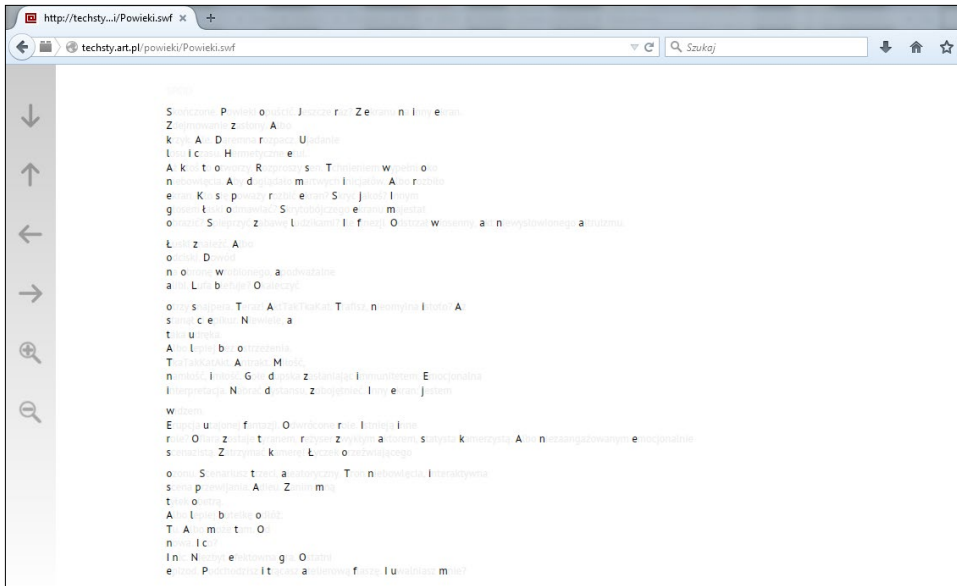


Fig. 11. The text of “Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę”; the screenshot of the stage when the surface layer is fading away to disclose the first “invisible” text.

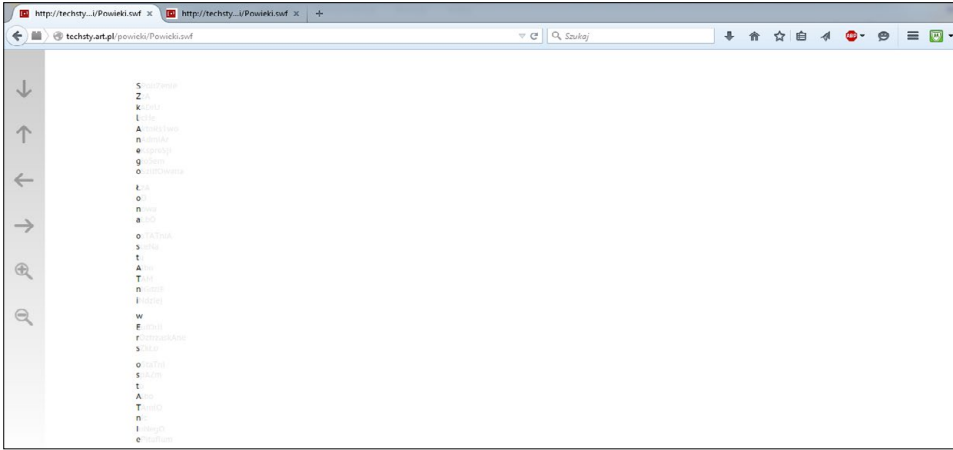


Fig. 12. The screenshot of the first and second layers of “invisible” texts in “Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę”.

At this point it is tempting to quote Roland Barthes’ reflection:

We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture.

Although Fajfer’s filiation is with Aristotle rather than the 20th-century thinker, *Powieki* is full of tension between the principle of Aristotelian *entelechy* and the Barthesian claim that

[i]n a multiple writing, indeed, everything is to be distinguished, but nothing deciphered; structure can be followed, “threaded” (like a stocking that has run) in all its recurrences and all its stages, but there is no underlying ground; the space of the writing is to be traversed, not penetrated: writing ceaselessly posits meaning but always in order to evaporate it: it proceeds to a systematic exemption of meaning. Thus literature (it would be better, henceforth, to say writing), by refusing to assign to the text (and to the world as text) a “secret:’ that is, an ultimate meaning, liberates an activity which we might call counter-theological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to arrest meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law.³¹

Indeed, one can easily get lost in the labyrinthine sliding surfaces of Fajfer’s collection. When “Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę” is followed further to the “bottom” word, one discovers that the piece does not end with

³¹ R. Barthes, *Death of the Author*, [in:] *The Rustle of Language*, trans. R. Howard, New York 1986, pp. 53–54.

the sound of crushed glass that would lead to stasis, as is the case in “Primum Mobile”. Instead, the hyperlink leads to an invisible layer of yet another poem in which “SŁOWO,” the same “bottom” word appears (see Fig. 12, 13 and 14), and the reader can continue their journey. In this way, Fajfer seems to illustrate the principle of intertextuality: that every word is in fact “borrowed” from another earlier text, and constitutes a nexus or intersection of other texts.

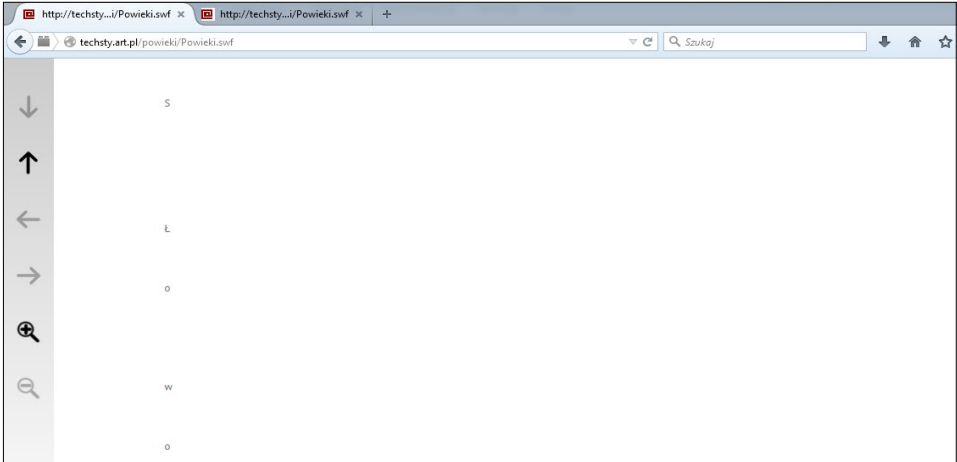


Fig. 13. The screenshot of “SŁOWO” (*word*), the “bottom” word of “Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę”.

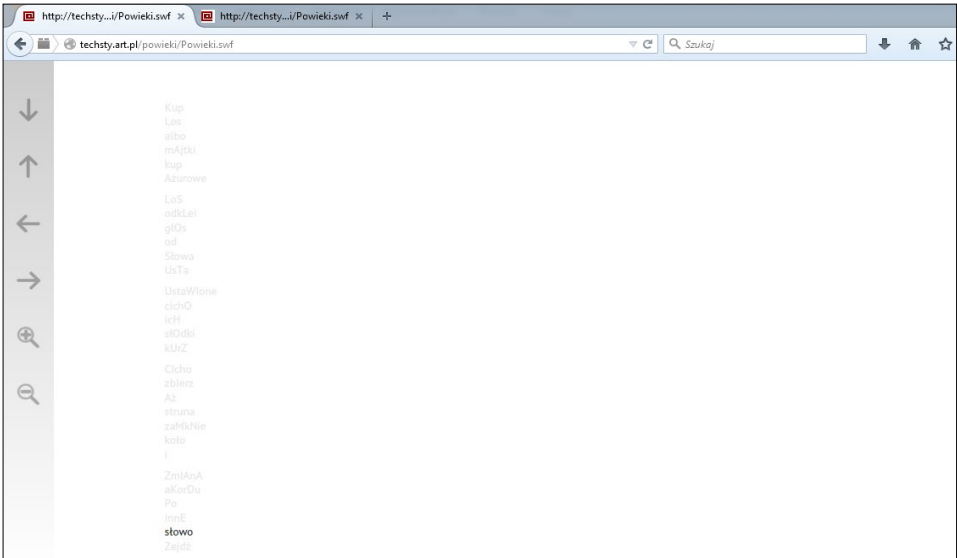


Fig. 14. The screenshot of “SŁOWO”, the “bottom” word of “Spoglądając Przez Ozonową Dziurę” appearing in a different poem.

But, admittedly, smashing of broken glass can be also heard in the e-version of *Powieki*. Predictably, it occurs when the reader breaks the mythical interdiction “Don’t look back” by following the arrow pointing to the right (Fig. 15). In consequence, the unidirectional link leads them to a screen in which the letters of the sentence are scattered across the surface, accompanied by the sound of steps on broken glass. When the screen is darkening, a white crack in the black background reveals fragments of “NOKTUR-n” (see Fig. 16, 17, 18). Disobeying the divine law has led to the “dead end” of Fajfer’s hypertextual *Powieki* – the game’s over.

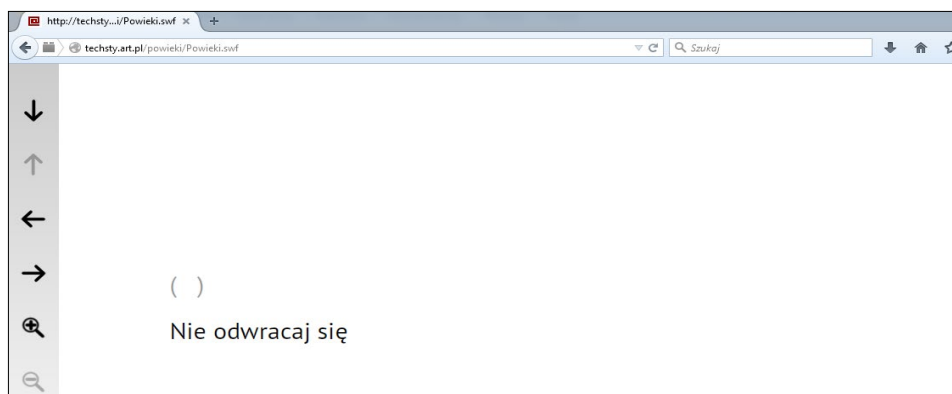


Fig. 15. The potentially “fatal” place in hypertextual part of *Powieki*. Following the right arrow leads to a non-reversible sequence of animations ending in a hypertextual “cul-de-sac”.

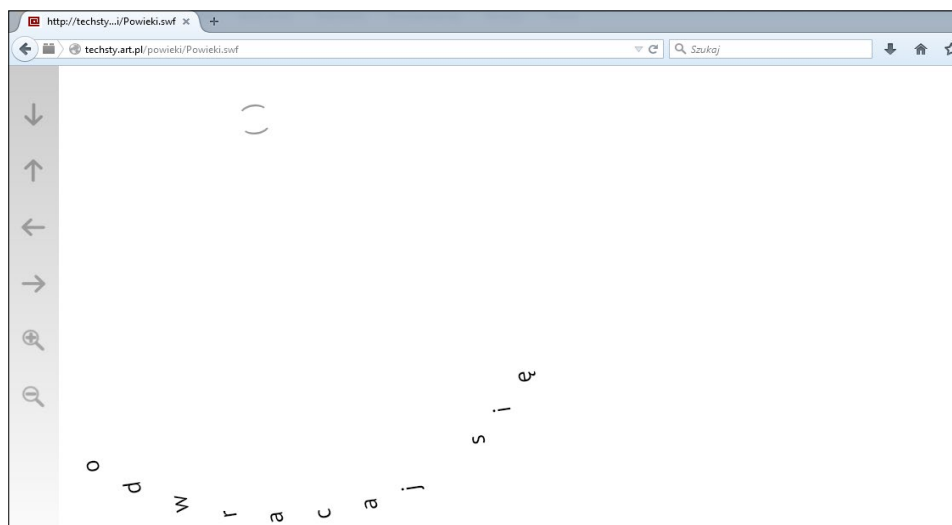


Fig. 16. The interdiction at the moment of “breaking”; in the background one can hear the sound of crushing glass.

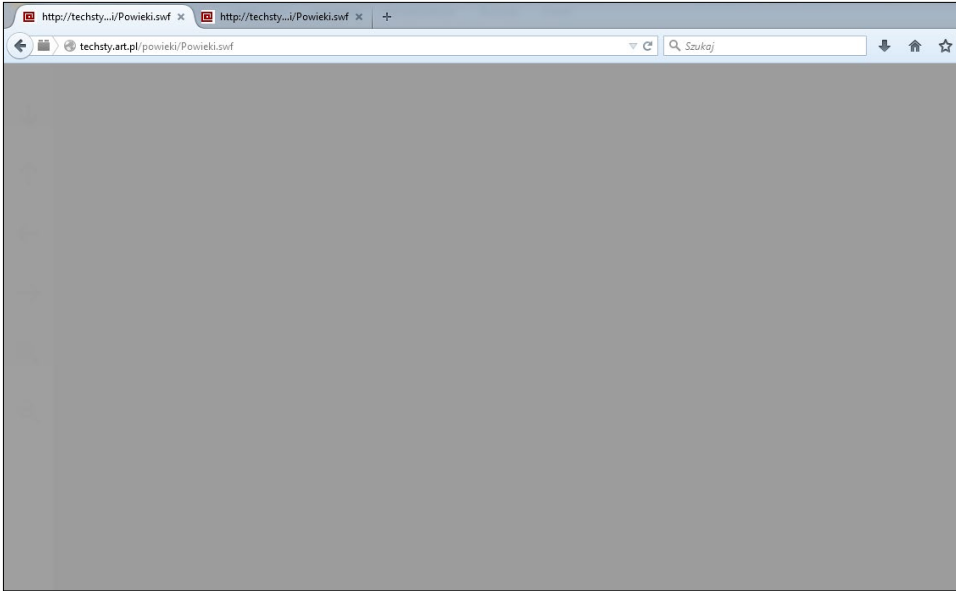


Fig. 17. The darkening screen following the breaking of the “interdiction”.

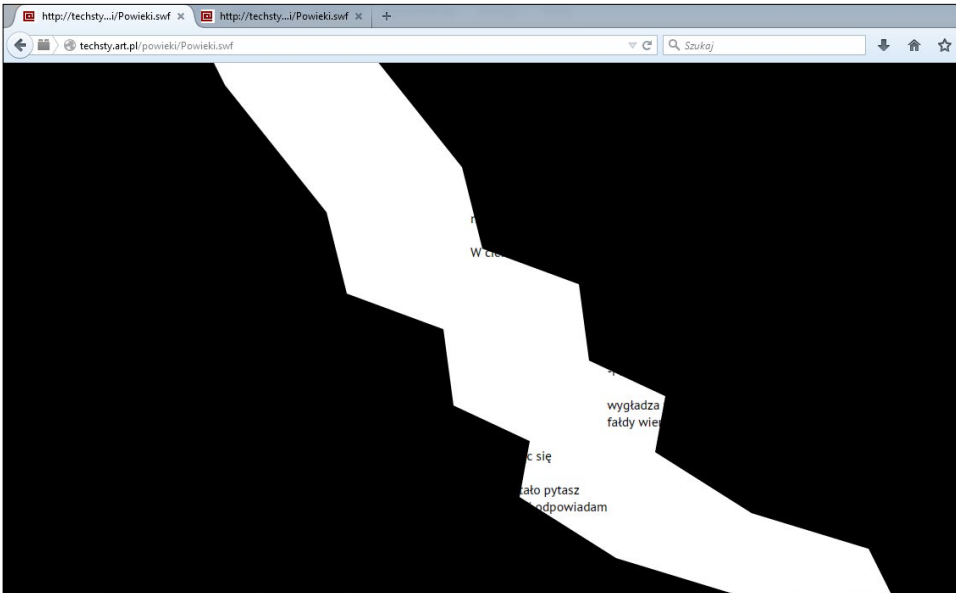


Fig. 18. A crack in the black screen; the “dead end” of hypertextual *Powieki*.

It remains an open question, subject to interpretation, whether at this point Fajfer’s emanational, hypertextual work reaches its *entelechy*, or

whether the reader is chastised for failing to recognize the allusion to (if not plain quotation from) the Orphic myth. The possibility of ceaseless movement is built into the structure of the digital *Powieki*; the structure of the printed book inevitably leads to the reader turning the final page and concluding their reading with the last non-emanational “NOKTUR-n.” By granting his audience the possibility of completing the missing syllable of the poem, as well as the possibility to explore the e-collection, the poet foregrounds the ambiguous nature of writing and reading, which resists closure, and continues “po wieki” (for ever).

Finally, it is also worth noticing how Fajfer’s work is related to processual media theory proposed by Ned Rossiter. In particular, *Powieki*, with its “larger than book” emanational, potentially kinetic spaces, exemplifies features of the network described by the scholar:

The network is not “decomposable into constituent points” [50]. That is what a non-reflective and non-reflexive empirics of new media, of informational economies and network societies, in its reified institutional mode attempts to do. The network is not a “measurable, divisible space.” Rather, it holds a “nondecomposable” dimension that always exceeds – or better, subsists within – what in the name of non-reflexive empirics are predetermined regimes of quantification, which, as Brian Massumi has it, “is an emergent quality of movement” [50]. This is not to say that things never occupy a concrete space. An analytics of space (and time), if it is to acknowledge the complexity of things, cannot take as its point of departure the state of arrest of things. Instead, attention needs to take a step back (or perhaps a step sideways, and then back within), and inquire into the preconditions of stasis.³²

Fajfer’s poetry collection occupies “a concrete space”, which in its dual form of the printed book and the CD appears as if it were “measurable, divisible”. However, when its emanational structure is properly analysed, its “emergent quality of movement” can be activated in ergodic reading in both the printed and the digital media. Despite being a seemingly static set of objects, it defies a kind of “deadness” and closure traditionally ascribed to the codex.³³ The emanational form hints at and invites the readers to notice the book’s potential, its affordances,³⁴ and plays them against the

³² N. Rossiter, *Processual Media Theory*, [in:] *Proceedings of the Fifth International Digital Arts and Culture Conference*, RMIT, Melbourne, Australia, May 19–23, 2003, <http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/dac/papers/Rossiter.pdf> (accessed: 16.08.2015), p. 168.

³³ Cf. for example, Jacques Derrida’s “The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing” in *Of Grammatology* (trans. G.C. Spivak, Baltimore 1976, pp. 77–93) and Louis Armand’s *Technē. James Joyce, Hypertext & Technology* (Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philologica, Monographia 139, Prague 2003).

³⁴ William Gaver explains how such a process can happen: “People perceive the environment directly in terms of its potentials for action, without significant intermediate stages

affordances of the hypertext. The printed book may become a subject of the readers' active manipulation: rereading, decoding of emanational layers of text and possibly writing them down, of mental hyperlinking, even without a resort to its digital version, whereas engaging with the electronic version reveals another textual time-space, and sets off processes and network nodes potentially pre-existing in the work's static form. In fact, it can be argued that Fajfer's book of emanations gives rise to print-born digital hypertexts and activates potentialities entailed in the matter(iality) of the writing in both media, the old and the new.

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involving memory or inferences. [...] An affordance of an object, such as one for climbing, refers to attributes of both the object and the actor.”

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Literature as a Vehicle of Mystery: On Jerzy Grotowski's Writing

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Jerzy Grotowski (1933–1999), who is considered to be one of the greatest theater artists of the 20th century, frequently expressed his ambivalent relation to words, repeating that any true knowledge has to be obtained by practice. However, all his life he created and published texts. The volume collecting them all in print runs to 1131 pages. Scholars interpreting his art (e.g. Krzysztof Rutkowski, Zbigniew Osiński) and his close collaborators, like Ludwik Flaszen, frequently times underlined the importance of Grotowski's writings, stressing a special function literature played in this artist's research. Following their recognitions, partly polemizing with them, one can formulate some basic assumptions concerning the character and functions of Grotowski's writing and its relation to the main aspects of contemporary literature. This was the man of theater appears to be also an aware creator of a literature paradoxically closely related and working for mystery beyond words.

KEYWORDS: Jerzy Grotowski, Polish theatre of 20th century, Polish literature of 20th century

Jerzy Grotowski is known as one of the most prominent theater artists of the 20th century, both in Poland and abroad. He directed seminal, groundbreaking shows, created and practiced an original process of working with actors, which allowed them to reach incredible levels of self-exploration and expression. In the early 1970s, he shocked the theater world by declaring that he would end his theater career and pursue interests whose scope and aims went beyond aesthetics and culture, which ultimately led him to create the so-called 'Art as Vehicle.' Created in separation from the world, it no longer inspired mass excitement, but it still interested and fascinated many important creators in theater and performative arts. At the same time, there was no doubt that all those achievements were practical, they were "acts." In his tellingly entitled *Performer*, the most important of his late works, Grotowski stressed that

A man of knowledge [*człowiek poznania*] has at his disposal *the doing*, not ideas or theories. The true teacher – what does he do for the apprentice? He says: *do it*. The apprentice fights to understand, to reduce the unknown to the known, to avoid

doing. By the very fact that he wants to understand, he resists. He can understand only after he *does it*. He *does it*, or not. Knowledge is a matter of doing.¹

Grotowski repeatedly emphasized that he was a practitioner, that action is the key to the most important knowledge, and that words are of lesser, secondary importance.

And yet Grotowski's writings and even Grotowski as an author have been important aspects in research into his work. Given that Grotowski wrote several seminal works that have been broadly discussed, sometimes even memorized and granted cult status (as we like to put it today), this seems inevitable. *Towards a poor theater*], Holiday, *Theater of Sources or Performer* are all important not only in terms of the history of twentieth-century theater, but also as excellent, still functional linguistic compositions. Additionally, the Polish version of his *Teksty zebrane* [Collected Works] is 1131 pages long, containing 147 articles and essays; the oldest one dates back to 1954, when Grotowski was a twenty-one-year-old student of a theater academy, while the most recent one was dictated by the sick, bed-ridden artist in 1998. In short, literary activity was an important part of Grotowski's life and work. Therefore, the book has been broadly discussed, notably by Ludwik Flaszen and Zbigniew Osiński, who almost immediately noticed the specific tension and self-contradictions taking place at the interface of practice and theory, theater (performative art) and literature. It is those contradictions and paradoxes that have attracted scholars to the issue of "Grotowski and literature," and that seem to make it more than just one of many niche problems, of interest only to a small circle of scholars of Grotowski's life and work. For it would seem (and has been put forward) that the tension between a word and the act as observed in Jerzy Grotowski's works refers to a far broader phenomenon, which is one of the most important themes in Polish culture.

This is how Krzysztof Rutkowski, a scholar and author who has been fascinated with literature that goes towards acting, life-writing and "active poetry,"² saw it. He spent considerable time and energy on tracing deep sources of this concept, which he investigated in reference to Adam Mickiewicz.³ Rutkowski was also interested in Grotowski, whom he saw as a continuator of the practice and concept of active poetry, repeatedly stating that just as

¹ J. Grotowski, *Performer*, [in:] *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, eds. R. Schechner and L. Wolford, New York and London 1996, p. 374.

² See K. Rutkowski, *Przeciw (w) literaturze: esej o „poezji czynnej” Mirona Białoszewskiego i Edwarda Stachury* [Against (in) Literature: An Essay on Miron Białoszewski's and Edward Stachura's "Active Poetry"], Bydgoszcz 1987.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 65–116; see also K. Rutkowski, *Kiedy ciało było słowem. Kilka uwag o czynieniu poezji* [When Flesh Was Word: Some Remarks on Doing Poetry], "Kresy" 1998, no. 2(36), pp. 72–100; *idem*, *Bóg Adama* [Adam's God], Kraków 2021.

Mickiewicz gave up writing poems for doing poetry, Grotowski gave up directing plays for Art as Vehicle.⁴ Comparing the two authors on different levels (including biography – both were the only Polish lecturers at the Collège de France), Rutkowski points to their pursuit of rejecting what is formulated in writing in favor of the incarnated word, represented by the Slavic storyteller from Mickiewicz’s famous “theater lesson,” also discussed by Grotowski in *Montaż w pracy reżysera* [Montage in the Work of a Director].⁵ Rutkowski juxtaposes them in the concluding remarks to his essay *Człowiek zupełny* [Total Human Being], observing that they both contain a recurring “pathos formula” by Warburg, at the same time pointing to attempts (constantly present in Polish literature) at using literature as a means of getting to its incarnated source – the living word that was there at the beginning. This trend in literature, especially Romanticist, has been observed not only by Krzysztof Rutkowski (see e.g. Alina Witkowska’s *Mickiewicz. Słowo i czyn* [Mickiewicz: Word and Act]⁶), it is also clear in theater.⁷ It stems not only from a distrust for formulated words, according to the well-known, banal formula “words are unfaithful to thoughts,” but also from the conviction that a word can only fully exist through its incarnated realization. In this concept, written literature is an introduction to genuine, incarnated and acted words at most. The conviction that the total man is a complete word, stated repeatedly by Mickiewicz at the Collège de France,⁸ was supposed to be realized by Grotowski after leaving theater as a domain of the formalized word. Thus, in a way, he completed the tradition initiated by Mickiewicz.⁹

⁴ See K. Rutkowski, *Od poezji czynnej do Sztuki jako wehikulu* [From Active Poetry to Art as Vehicle], “Performer” 2011, no. 1, <https://grotowski.net/performer/performer-1/od-poezji-czynnej-do-sztuki-jako-wehikulu> (accessed: 21.06.2021); *idem*, *Człowiek zupełny. Grotowski czytany w domu wariatów* [Total Man: Grotowski Read in a Madhouse], “Performer” 2019, no. 18, <https://grotowski.net/performer/performer-18/czlowiek-zupelny-grotowski-czytany-w-domu-wariatow> (accessed: 21.06.2021).

⁵ See J. Grotowski, *Teksty zebrane*, eds. A. Adamiecka-Sitek, et al., Wrocław and Warszawa 2013, pp. 822–823.

⁶ A. Witkowska, *Mickiewicz. Słowo i czyn* [Mickiewicz: Word and Act], Warszawa 1998.

⁷ See D. Kosiński, *Żywostowie – zapomniane marzenie porzuconego patrona* [Livingwordness – Forgotten Dream of an Abandoned Patron], “Zeszyty Naukowe PWST im. Ludwika Solskiego w Krakowie” 2012, no. 4, pp. 46–52.

⁸ See e.g. the fragment about the living word (A. Mickiewicz, *Literatura słowiańska* [Slavic Literature], third course, lecture II, [in:] Adam Mickiewicz: *Dzieła* [Works], Wydanie Rocznicowe 1798–1998, vol. 10: *Literatura słowiańska: kurs trzeci* [Slavic Literature: Third Course], ed. J. Maślanka, trans. L. Płoszewski, Warszawa 1998, pp. 18–19), or the famous fragment about Jesus as “the only book of laws” (Mickiewicz Adam: *Literatura słowiańska*, third course, lecture XIII – study IV, *ibidem*, pp. 162–163).

⁹ I elaborated on this in my book *Polski teatr przemiany* [Polish Theater of Transformation], Wrocław 2007.

From this perspective, what would Grotowski's ideas – expressed in speech and in writing – be? As opposed to Mickiewicz, they would not give Grotowski recognition and master status, which would nonetheless have to be abandoned, as they only indicate the sphere of genuine fulfillment. In Grotowski's work, this role was played by theater. If his texts were comments on his work, at best they may be considered a signpost or guide pointing out to areas of proper action, changed in line with the evolution of practice. At worst, they can be seen as a “smoke screen” hiding actual goals and nature of actions. This is how Zbigniew Osiński, the author of numerous commentaries written in cooperation with Grotowski, saw them; towards the end of his life, Osiński realized they (and himself) were a tool in Grotowski's hands used for building his reputation. In his final book, Osiński stated clearly:

All his life, Grotowski watched over not only his own texts, on which he would work exceptionally meticulously before they were authorized, but also over texts by his coworkers, who had to follow the unwritten rule of obtaining his (or Flaszen's) approval for anything that was to be made public in any form. This is how Grotowski controlled both his own reception and that of his institution.¹⁰

Zbigniew Osiński loyally accepted the right of the artist, who believed he was in danger of being banned from working, deprived of his team, funds, etc., to create his own image through strictly controlled comments. However, later on he obviously thought that Grotowski was almost obsessed in controlling access to his speeches. For example, for years Grotowski would not allow to have the Polish translation of his *Towards a Poor Theatre* published – something Osiński did not understand.¹¹ For Osiński, Grotowski's texts were first and foremost a tool for constructing his image, whose purpose was to protect his actual explorations, significant practical work which differed from what he discussed in his texts. It is probably for this reason that in his last papers Osiński preferred to rely on private correspondence and notes taken during unofficial conversations with Grotowski, which constituted the core corpus of his monumental volume *Spotkania z Jerzym Grotowskim*.

Simplifying and constructing an opposition that may be slightly too unambiguous, for the sake of making my argument clear, I would say that although, according to Rutkowski, Grotowski viewed literature as an aux-

¹⁰ Z. Osiński, *Dzieło Jerzego Grotowskiego jako przedmiot badań* [Jerzy Grotowski's Work as a Research Subject], [in:] *idem, Spotkania z Jerzym Grotowskim. Notatki, listy, studium* [Encounters with Jerzy Grotowski: Notes, Letters, Study], Gdańsk 2013, pp. 279–280.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 277–278.

iliary tool for finding the way to the right field of explorations, according to interpretations closer to Osiński (and he is not the only one representing this perspective), it constitutes a costume or mask hiding true goals and methods. In order to reach them, in the first case one has to follow words but not become overly attached to them and abandon them altogether at the right moment (just as Grotowski abandoned the theater), whereas in the second case, one must fight against them, tear their fabric and rip away their mask (just as Grotowski took away masks of everyday life from his actors).

In spite of this oversimplification, it should be clear that both types of opposite actions (following and resisting) are justified and rooted in Grotowski's practices, and may be considered as consistent with his attitude. There is a certain paradox which allows light to be shed on how Grotowski treated literature, using it simultaneously as an indicator and obstacle, as well as a part of something perhaps more serious and unrelated to his purely tactical concerns with his image. Ludwik Flaszen, formal literary manager of Teatr 13 Rzędów, an informal and influential "personal critic" of Grotowski, himself an outstanding author, made the fullest comment regarding the ambivalence of and numerous functions played by literature in Grotowski's works:

Grotowski liked to say – admittedly, later in his career – that words and definitions were insignificant; that he would readily replace some phrase or word. Because what matters is practice, an act. However, he kept recording his experiences in texts, and he used text for announcing his reformatory, rebellious intentions to the world, especially in his youth.

[...]

He put words into the service of their proper vocation. An unparalleled master of the spoken word, outstanding orator, and – one could even say – preacher, and at the same time refined sophist, always waiting for the right moment, which he would always select carefully, to also put his ideas into writing, to publish them. [...] In spite of what he declared on multiple occasions, Grotowski attached a lot of weight to words. As if some published statement, or even one word or phrase could make or break him. Apart from the problem of political slips, which indeed could come at a cost in the world from before the Berlin Wall, what was that linguistic scrupulousness about? The Holy Precision, Madonna of his life? About the effectiveness and obviousness of Pavlov's conditional reflex? About the faith – in spite of himself and in spite of his declared convictions – in the power of Logos, even in its poor discursive form? Or perhaps about what is not put into words, does not exist, or does not exist enough? [...]

He gave up on his intention to follow in his master, Stanislawski's, footsteps, and write a handbook for actors, in order to avoid the trap of stereotypes – inevitable in such ventures – against which he had a genuine phobia. He sought the narrow

passage between Precision, which is the necessary condition for professionalism, and Life. In his chase after the Mystery of Life [...] he changed his methods of work and looked for words which could adequately name this tangible fluidity of experience. Grotowski practitioner – a man in constant pursuit of words...

To put it simply: Grotowski constantly needed terminology, terminological innovation. He claimed that practice outruns its discursive conceptualization. But has this always been the case? Were there no words that would outrun practice? Words-projects, words-intentions, words-dreams? Our Teatr Laboratorium [Lab Theater] started with the word “mystery play” – but when did Grotowski made it real?

And what was that masterpiece bearing Grotowski’s name and message without the accompanying textual production? Those phrases, descriptions of experiences, comments? They have multiple meanings, apart from the obvious one: they testify to something whose ontic status is evanescence. Verbalization, self-commentary, fortunate naming of objects all constitute necessary factors in cooling down the overheated apparatus, as well as an ingredient in fermentation.

The life of Grotowski’s speeches and texts is a separate subject of inquiry. In any case, one has to look for any sly intentions behind Grotowski’s caution in manipulating words with moderation – the wish to be in full control over his public image or Narcissus’s violent, insatiable pleasures when playing with mirrors.

Grotowski’s word games are rich and – after awkwardness, poetry, and utility characteristic for any young writer – they achieve peculiar harmony and sensible beauty. And so also writing was useful for Grotowski in becoming a successful theater director, guide for actors, master of performing arts and *Teacher of Performer*. Many of his texts, although initiated not on paper but as a result of energy exchange with his audience, became emblematic and can embellish any anthology of theater or artistic manifestos of 21st century.

And they will be an organic part of his encyclopedia entries. It is as if his work and commentary were one. This is not unusual in the age of numerous artistic revolutions, as each form of art had to rethink its own essence in order to face anxiety and keep up with the pace of changing times. In many cases a commentary matched the work it concerned, in some – it outgrew it. Those are two wings of the same creation, key part of its lifting surface.¹²

Flaszen’s analysis – perhaps the ultimate confirmation of Grotowski’s rank as an author – simultaneously reveals completely new oppositions, functions and meanings of literary work, which Flaszen believes to be a significant part of Grotowski’s work rather than an addition, curtain or instruction. On the most basic level – finding a name for some element of a designed or implemented practice created a specific way of acting, it not only allowed to understand and help others to understand what has been achieved and what has happened over the course of work, but also to deter-

¹² L. Flaszen, *Grotowski jako autor tekstów*, [in:] *idem, Grotowski & Company. Źródła i wariacje*, Wrocław 2014, pp. 344–346.

mine further directions and course of action. In this sense Grotowski often referred to his texts as “logbooks,” at the same time opposing generalizing them and treating them as beyond-historical diagnoses or sets of rules.

The programmatic *Możliwość teatru* [Possibility of a Theatre], published in 1962 in the second issue of “Materiały warsztatowe Teatru 13 Rzędu” [Workshop Materials of 13 Rows Theater] (in fact – the only text of that issue) is a clear example of such a text. It opens with a characteristic disclaimer:

These are working notes resulting from a specific theater practice, from the conviction that traditional theater has become outdated, and from considerations regarding whether theater is possible today.

The present text has no academic ambitions. It is just a diary of searching, an example of certain possible solutions. It has a documentary character, and so whenever possible, author used citations regarding his practice from external sources.¹³

Indeed, Grotowski combines his own comments with comments by critics in a way which clearly indicates that he treats them not only as testaments of reception, but first and foremost – as tools which allow him to better understand his own work and determine its future course. For example, this is how the phrase “dialectics of mockery and apotheosis”¹⁴ from Tadeusz Kudliński’s review of *Forefathers’ Eve* published on July 7, 1961 in “Dziennik Polski” is used. Grotowski adopted it, reinterpreted it, and started using it in reference to earlier performances at his theater (starting from George Byron’s *Cain*, which premiered on January 30, 1960), as well as those which were still works in progress when the text was written (*Kordian* by Juliusz Słowacki, which premiered on February 14, 1962). The famous phrase that later made an international career became a test allowing aspects of Grotowski’s work to be extracted that may not have been obvious. As the art of finding such phrases, literature thus became Grotowski’s necessary, constantly recurring partner.

Although the need to record “logbooks” is understandable, logbooks are not public records, and they are never shared during a cruise. Meanwhile, Grotowski typically not only wrote down his ideas and formulas while his work was unfinished, tried to apply them to his future and past work, but he also made the whole process public. Why? Obviously, the need to attract attention to the unique character of his work, to be understood as much

¹³ J. Grotowski, *Możliwość teatru*, [in:] *idem, Teksty zebrane, op. cit.*, p. 209.

¹⁴ T. Kudliński, “*Dziady*” w 13 Rzędach [Forefathers’ Eve at 13 Rows Theater], [in:] *Misterium zgrozy i urzeczenia. Przedstawienia Jerzego Grotowskiego i Teatru Laboratorium* [A Mystery of Fright and Charm: Performances by Jerzy Grotowski and Teatr Laboratorium], eds. J. Degler and G. Ziółkowski, Wrocław 2006, p. 140.

as possible, or even – what Osiński believed to be the correct answer – the need to design the reception of his art and self may all be important factors here. However, this explanation seems insufficient, especially in the light of significant numbers of similar texts, including those written when Grotowski was famous and so did not have problems with attracting interest. It would seem that Grotowski used his “logbooks” in order to present himself as someone who was constantly seeking, on his way, forever responding to his “main temptation.” If his texts indeed are logbooks, they resemble those written by Witold Gombrowicz, who was not only well-known to Grotowski, but also inspired him to draw important conclusions.¹⁵ Grotowski surely would not place “T” at the beginning at the beginning of each subsequent day, and he refrained from personal confessions (he shared them only occasionally). Seen from a certain angle, his texts constitute a stage on which – similarly to Gombrowicz in *Dzienniki* [Journals] – he created himself as an artist and thinker.

This creation goes beyond image, it is genuinely dynamic and dramatic. It presents the protagonist and subject in constant motion, creating himself also as a reaction to what happens to him when he interacts with other actors (including non-human ones). Like Gombrowicz’s protagonist from *Dzienniki*, Grotowski’s protagonist simultaneously acts and observes himself in the act, together with forces that transform his plans and intentions, which create “depth”, or, as Grotowski put it, “egregores.”¹⁶ Thus both of them almost constantly analyzed their own adventures in the theater of everyday life. One clear difference between them is the level of subjectivity: Grotowski was much more inclined towards generalizations, and was more prone to presenting and interpreting his own experiences as part of “the human condition.” However, the difference between their answers to the question of what to do in the face of such a “interpersonal” fate seems more significant. While Gombrowicz seems to perceive it as a modern symptom of tragedy, and is unable to find ways of escaping from its power apart from the weak (and, from today’s perspective, naïve) allegory of “forever young nudity,” Grotowski treats being on that stage as a certain strategic necessity, incessantly, stubbornly, and successfully finding radically different scenes and spaces of denuding and encountering in honesty. Grotowski uses literature both as a tool for exploring the interpersonal theatre of everyday life (as Gombrowicz did) and for constantly verifying already achieved results

¹⁵ On relationships between Gombrowicz and Grotowski, see D. Kosiński, *S/G*, [in:] *Słowacki/Grotowski. Rekontekstualizacje* [Recontextualizations], eds. D. Kosiński and W. Świątkowska, Wrocław 2010, pp. 61–76.

¹⁶ See *Rozmowa z Grotowskim [rozmawiał Andrzej Bonarski]* [An interview with Grotowski by Andrzej Bonarski], [in:] J. Grotowski, *Teksty zebrane, op. cit.*, pp. 599–600.

and directions for future “special projects.” In doing this he was fully aware of how easy and quickly the power of the interpersonal can distort them and use them to its own advantage.

Thus also from this perspective the key element of Grotowski’s writing is the procedure of naming one’s own achievements, which simultaneously determines the future action plan. It gained importance especially when his practice eluded the culturally recognizable frameworks of the institution and art of “theater.” This was when Grotowski used his careful, precise verbal compositions as a project and challenge for something that was yet to come.

Święto (Holiday), which opens and founds the post-theater phase of Grotowski’s work, is an especially significant example of this strategy, and, for one formation, even mythical. This text is located between initial, unique experiences (“I am trying here – as far as I can – to touch something from experiences from encountering with man, experiences which are completely different from traditional, but very tangible”¹⁷), and a sense of the future unraveling (“what is weak and uncertain is pulsing towards my its birth. Something somewhat new between people – not yet existing, but already perceptible, half a reflex, half a need”¹⁸). Here Grotowski adopts the position of a mediator, or “pontifex, the maker of bridges”¹⁹ between already noticeable events and achievable, constant, repetitive practice, which makes them not an excess, but a tool, a vehicle. Grotowski wrote the text, but he also performed it in two ways: first as someone who did not write it, but performed it, and secondly, as someone who uses text as a vehicle for future actions.

Numerous elements of *Holiday* clearly refer to a very peculiar “executive” situation, creating an image of an individual as a person talking in a specific situation, and so not a writer, but a word performer, considering the different theme and style, somewhat resembling Mickiewicz’s “story-teller” (and Mickiewicz the lecturer himself). This is the role Grotowski consistently adopted from the late 1960s on, when he almost completely stopped writing; his subsequent texts were in fact transcriptions of numerous lectures, meetings with fans, and interviews. Each contains clear signals confirming the unique character of a speech given in a specific place, at a specific time (even if one text was actually several different speeches put together, which was a relatively frequent occurrence). In the case of *Holiday* (and many other texts from 1970s), there are obvious references to

¹⁷ J. Grotowski, *Święto*, p. 955; the “mythical” reference is a quote from the original, 1970 version from the Appendix to the Polish edition of *Teksty zebrane*. The English version translated by Bolesław Taborski and reworked many years later for *Grotowski Sourcebook* significantly differs from the first publication in Polish.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 956.

¹⁹ J. Grotowski, *Performer*, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

questions which were removed from the final version of the text. Grotowski gives a monologue, but at the same time by talking to specific people he creates a surprising sense of a gap, lacunae. The communicative situation is textually restaged, or it is realized in such a way as to create a sense of defect and uncertainty. Specific situations in which Grotowski said the words recorded in the text belong to the past. The text is only its shadow, and interlocutors are lacunae filled by the reader, who is at the same time faced with a future-oriented challenge.

The empty places left by the original interlocutors should be taken by ones from the future, which creates the second dimension of this textual performance – an announcement, vague, uncertain, formally often just metaphors, and simultaneously crossed out as metaphors by stressing their specificity and tangibility. Grotowski is unable to create this tangibility other than by a certain effect founded on some sort of a “minimal promise.” He promises that there is some mechanism, a need or shared goal, and this is the foundation for an expected process addressed as an ethical call to anyone who finds themselves in a place left empty by real interlocutors from the past. Thus Grotowski does not analyze, he does not give a testament to his work, but he acts via words. Let us consider how this happens in one of key fragments of *Holiday*, which directly concerns words and acts:

there is something which remains the same in all epochs, or at least in those when people are aware of their human condition – this is the quest. The quest for what is the most essential in life. Different names have been invented to call it; in the past these names usually had a religious sound. I do not think it possible for myself to invent religious names; what's more I do not feel any need at all for inventing words. But the question of what is the most essential in life, which some of you may think abstract, really is of great import, and no one who denies the quest will be happy. Many people do reject it; they feel obliged to smile as if they were advertizing tooth paste. But why are they so sad? Maybe they have missed something in life? Maybe they never asked themselves the only question they ought to have asked. It must be asked. And the answer? One can't formulate it, one can only do it.²⁰

The first part is a promise about the character of a certain basic, general rule, which is later transformed into an ethical obligation and a challenge for the future. This fragment also introduces the difference between literature as “inventing words” and an answer which “cannot be put into words, it can only be done” in practice. The space between them is taken by the question – paradoxically, never asked, by its absence resembling questions

²⁰ J. Grotowski, *Holiday – the Day That Is Holy*, trans. R. Taborski, “The Drama Review” 1973, vol. 17, no. 2, p. 117.

from listeners removed from the text. Consistently, there is not one occurrence of the person asking – there is only Grotowski answering and at the same time promising that the answer must be given. By declaring his lack of interest in inventing words he simultaneously indicates the necessity to “ask” (and so put into words) the question. Thus he both denies the need for words and confirms their significance.

I consider this moment to be crucial and characteristic. In his texts Grotowski undertook one of key themes in contemporary literature – its own ambivalence resulting from remaining in tension between long lost faith in the directness and transparency of words, and the need to create them. Of course it is not true that Grotowski rejected literature. Like many contemporary authors he tried to avoid becoming “addicted to the magic meaning of words.” In an interview with René Gaudy and Michele Bataillon he warned: “Words must not be alienated. They always have a certain relationship with life, and it is the only thing that matters.”²¹ This relationship with life, in his case – with practice and seeking, to which he devoted his own life – was also what his almost constant abandoning of formulae, first adopted and then fought against, to be ultimately given up on, including his own, was about – so frustrating for scholars. After abandoning theater he discussed that topic in clear terms:

Neither do I think that inventing words is the most important. [...] Once certain words become too well-known, they need to be abandoned immediately. It is no coincidence that I have not used the term “poor theater” in years: it is used by too many who do not really know what it means. If one looks for terminology, the whole thing starts to function on the level of ideas, it becomes detached from experience. In everyday life, we constantly juggle with thoughts and terms, believing that this is how we are able to touch living experiences, whereas in fact, we are moving away from them.²²

A negative program of avoiding this negative magic of words will not be enough to stop it – positive action, i.e. creatively impeding its action, will also be necessary. This is something to which Grotowski devoted a great deal of time and effort: not only did he stop using certain phrases, but first and foremost he invented new ones, far more powerful, the power often stemming from their almost poetic vagueness. “Poor theater,” “complete act,” “Holiday,” “sources,” Action and Performer – these are all terms which Grotowski constantly described, explained, reinterpreted, creating what

²¹ *Grotowski a estetyka teatralna* [Grotowski and the Theater Aesthetic] [an interview by René Gaudy and Michel Bataillon], [in:] J. Grotowski, *Teksty zebrane, op. cit.*, p. 304.

²² J. Grotowski, *Co było* [What Used to Be], [in:] *idem, Teksty zebrane, op. cit.*, p. 1003.

I would call over-clarity. For example, when explaining what he meant by “complete act,” he multiplies terms, references and associations, which creates a whole whirl of words, resulting in an overproduction of phrases that mutually exclude their adequacy. If there are so many, and new ones keep coming, one can suppose that none of them is adequate, they are all only approximations, and outlining a quiet place, a wordless “zone,” whose creation and mediated experience is possible only via literature, becomes the ultimate goal of literary creation, determining its value and meaning.

Grotowski coined a very accurate term for this paradox of literature: “silence of the word.” Although typically he used it in a more practical and specific meaning, simply for the lack of a surplus of words spoken,²³ the way he used it also contains another aspect – silence, which is strictly connected with words, or even paradoxical silence spoken through words. It would seem that it was close to what Krzysztof Rutkowski (already cited here) saw as the basis of the deep connection between Mickiewicz and Grotowski:

Tone, *Stimmung*, is what makes the existence of active poetry and art as a vehicle possible. Mickiewicz’s analyses of poetry, and Grotowski’s work on physical actions which comprise art as a vehicle, strive towards a certain tone, *Stimmung*, which precedes language and shines as a pure place for the word. Tone, *Stimmung*, played a major role in Hegel’s and Heidegger’s philosophy, as well as in German romanticist poetry. Novalis defined *Stimmung* as soul acoustics. The notion of *Stimmung* took over Mickiewicz’s vision through Towiański; Mickiewicz dreamed about active poetry, poetry whose sound would be in sync with *Stimmung* and with the present of the word. Sound and the word are in harmony with each other, but they do not touch nor see each other. When sound touches, it simultaneously pierces through and kills. A bow is armed with the word, from a distance, invisible, in the air. Voice is first and foremost the sound of a vibrating chord. The way it vibrates creates *Stimmung*. The voice resulting from vibrations, *Stimme*, is genuine active poetry, a primitive elevator carrying the actor from the level of thick energy to subtle energy thanks to the power of art as a vehicle.²⁴

According to Rutkowski, tone, “silence of the word,” i.e. what can be heard in a word apart from what is audible as a word understood in any

²³ “The word should only be said when it is necessary, because then it is important. One can walk through a forest at night and hear nothing – a bird crying, rustle of trees, and the reason is that we are constantly «blabbing»: we grunt, we smoke, we turn on lights. There is a song, which does not disturb birds singing. And thus silence is the basis: the silence of words, silence of sounds, silence of movements. Silence gives a chance to important words and a song which does not interfere with the speech of birds” (J. Grotowski, *Theater of sources*, [in:] *idem, Teksty zebrane, op. cit.*, p. 971).

²⁴ K. Rutkowski, *Od poezji czynnej do Sztuki jako wehikulu, op. cit.*

way, is the ultimate and deepest goal of literature. It is literature's mystery. If we were to agree that Mickiewicz and Grotowski were indeed connected by seeking that silence, I would also say that there was a significant difference between them in terms of literature: despite everything, Mickiewicz sought the Word while remaining in literature's territory, which he wanted to transform by going against it. Grotowski, on the other hand, practiced literature as a vehicle of mystery experienced beyond literature and theater. He stubbornly worked with words, he used words as a tool and a stage, he did not stay within them – instead, he almost incessantly pointed out to the wordless, physical, but not voiceless. Mickiewicz wanted to fulfill literature, whereas Grotowski sought fulfillment beyond it, beyond words, in action. However, this does not mean that he disregarded literature – in fact, it would seem that although he abandoned theater, he did not abandon literature, and he remained faithful to it as the most important vehicle allowing him to reach fulfillment, and at the same time understand and cognize its radical otherness.

Perhaps this is how we should understand yet another paradoxical formula used by Grotowski as the title of one of his texts: *Działanie jest dosłowne* [Action Is Literal]. Grotowski understands this literality as the opposite of representation, treating elements of reality as always referring to something beyond the here and now. And it is in this context that he discusses the surplus of words:

If someone feels that something is really happening, then – in order to avoid this feeling – they search for words, they try to put it into words. For example: “Oh! Look at this beautiful sunset!”. The moment they say that they are freed from “experiencing a sunset”, because “sunset” becomes an instrument for expressing their aesthetic sensation and a pretext for talking. Not saying anything seems horrible.²⁵

Meanwhile, a moment later, Grotowski adds that in order to experience what is happening as it is, “it is enough to be silent,” almost immediately followed by: “And being silent does not mean being motionless. Oftentimes in order to experience silence one has to run.”²⁶ For Grotowski, literature was a necessary preparation for that run, a workout required to make the run literal.

Andrzej Tarkowski's final movie, *The Sacrifice* (1986) is barely watchable. A lot is said in it, and the number of words pouring from the screen are not an example of good film literature. On the contrary, it annoys with its pseudointellectual prattle and analyzing over and over again the same

²⁵ J. Grotowski, *Działanie jest dosłowne*, [in:] *idem, Teksty zebrane, op. cit.*, p. 626.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 628.

ideas which are quite banal in essence. When the story finally ends, and the main protagonist – following a grotesquely long scene – is taken to hospital, we see his mute son stubbornly watering a dry tree. Suddenly, the boy says: “In the beginning was the word. Why, why, father?” And then only the tree and music. Silence of words.

Translated by Paulina Zagórska

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On Aura in Literary Work, Discretion for Reader and Mystery of Form on the Example of Siegfried Lenz's *A Minute's Silence* (2008): Between Bestseller and Poetology

ABSTRACT. Andrzej Denka, *On Aura in Literary Work, Discretion for Reader and Mystery of Form on the Example of Siegfried Lenz's A Minute's Silence (2008): Between Bestseller and Poetology*. "Przestrzenie Teorii" special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 101–123. ISSN 1644-6763. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.5>

Siegfried Lenz's novella (2008, English edition 2009) has not only been appreciated by literary critics, but also turned out to be a great bestseller. The novella is a frequent subject of research analysis, especially in terms of its location in the tradition of German and world novella writing. This diversity of reception is astonishing and presents an interesting phenomenon. The novella tells a banal love story, but through an intentional silence and a series of intertextual tropes it also creates mysteriousness. The analysis proposed here is based on Walter Benjamin's notion of "aura" in the 1930s. From today's point of view, this concept requires a few additions, primarily from the perspective of systems theory. As it turns out, this concept can be applied both to the content of the novella and to the strategy of literary criticism, as well as to explain the role of form and context in the personal perception of the text.

KEYWORDS: Siegfried Lenz, novella, *A Minute's Silence* (2008), Walter Benjamin, bestseller, aura, silence

Aims and outline

Siegfried Lenz's *A Minute's Silence* (*Schweigeminute*, 2008, Polish edition – 2016) has been broadly discussed. The phenomenon of this novel concerns several different aspects, such as its commercial success, univocally positive, even enthusiastic critical-literary reception, as well as deep scholarly analyses that the book inspired. It is somewhat of a mystery why this novella is present in such different discourses. One explanation that stems from both the text and its reception is the notion of "aura" according to Walter Benjamin, which he presented mostly in the essay *The Work of*

Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility,¹ and – as we shall find out – can be the common ground for those different forms of reception, as well as for a slightly different way of reading this text.

Lenz's bestseller and Benjamin's aura. Methodological specifications

Due to the fact that the novella was originally published in installments in “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,” it became famous before its book premiere. Volker Hage (a “Spiegel” reviewer) concluded: “Even before the book appeared on the market, its second edition was already being printed. Book market expectations are high, and it is not difficult to predict that a book by Siegfried Lenz, who thanks to the popularity of *The German Lesson* has become a millionaire, would become a huge commercial success.”² Indeed, in Germany Lenz was not only an esteemed author, a literary authority, but also an author who – in spite of his innate, genuine modesty – had already achieved commercial success, *The German Lesson* (1968, Polish edition – 1971) being his biggest triumph. Hage’s prediction was correct: only in 2008, the year it was published, 360,000 copies of *A Minute’s Silence* were sold, making it sixth on the prestigious list of “Spiegel’s” bestsellers, with the controversial, scandalous *Wetlands* by Charlotte Roche (*Feuchtgebiete*, Polish edition – 2009) at the top of the list, clearly a counterpoint for Lenz’s novella. A bestseller *sensu stricto* – Ken Follet’s *World without End* (English edition – 2007), a continuation of *Pillars of the Earth*, came second on the list.³

Over the past decade, the book has been popularized in many different ways: it became required reading for junior high school students⁴ and served

¹ W. Benjamin, *Dzieło sztuki w dobie reprodukcji technicznej*, trans. J. Sikorski, [in:] *Anioł historii: Eseje, szkice, fragmenty* [Angel of History: Essays, Drafts, Fragments], ed. H. Orłowski, Poznań 1996, pp. 201–239; W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version*, trans. E. Jephcott, H. Zohn, [in:] *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, eds. M.W. Jennings, et al., Cambridge, Mass. 2008, pp. 19–56, https://monoskop.org/images/6/6d/Benjamin_Walter_1936_2008_The_Work_of_Art_in_the_Age_of_Its_Technological_Reproducibility_Second_Version.pdf (accessed: 9.04.2023).

² V. Hage, *Mit Stella auf der Insel*, “Der Spiegel” 2008, no. 19, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/mit-stella-auf-der-insel-a-b56ae2eb-0002-0001-0000-000056831330> (accessed: 16.07.2022). All citation translations (unless stated otherwise) by me – A.D. Translations into English (unless stated otherwise) by P. Zagórska.

³ *Jahresbestseller 2008: Im Auftrag des SPIEGEL ermittelt vom Fachmagazin “buchreport”*, “Der Spiegel” 2009, no. 1, p. 131.

⁴ S. Post, *Zeit zu lieben, Zeit zu lernen. Die Novelle ‘Schweigeminute’ von Siegfried Lenz: Professionsethik aus literaturdidaktischer Perspektive*, [in:] *Gegenwartsnovellen: Literatur-*

as a basis for Thorsten M. Schmidt's 2016 movie *Schweigeminute*. Moreover, the novella, i.e. a relatively short form only 130 pages long, has enjoyed a considerable amount of attention among scholars of German literature. Perhaps this conciseness is what intrigues scholars in a genre considered to be old-fashioned, which nonetheless is enjoying a renaissance in Germany.⁵ The aim of this analysis is to show which elements represented German traditions, which belonged to the novella as a genre, and which were new, innovative, testifying to Lenz's talent and ability to modify the heavily formalized genre.⁶ Those papers, as well as others, e.g. representative of the memory discourse methodology popularized since 1990s,⁷ are somewhat unsatisfying. Despite the presence of *A Minute's Silence* in different contexts, based on what has been written and said⁸ it is hard to explain its phenomenon. It remains a sensation, a mystery, a secret how the 82-year-old Lenz managed to create such an intriguing masterpiece, appreciated by readers and literary critics for its poetic character, subtlety, and discreet narrative; moreover, it inspired many scholars to investigate the genre produced via a sophisticated game with elements of novelist tradition and international literature (Faulkner, Orwell). Even though this unanimity testifies to multifaceted congeniality, and it is thought-provoking, there is not one concise, large-scale, exhaustive study explaining this unique novella. Although it is impossible to fully analyze what motivates readers to read, Lenz seems to have answered their need to deal with a literary masterpiece on higher levels than what typical commercial discourses have to offer in the times of total medialization – to cite Benjamin – *in the age of technological reproducibility*. Although Benjamin's diagnosis concerned media from more or less a century ago, in parts it remains relevant: "Around 1900, technological reproduction not only had reached a standard that permitted it to repro-

wissenschaftliche und literaturdidaktische Perspektiven im 21. Jahrhundert, eds. S. Kiefer, T. Mergen, Hannover 2021, p. 199.

⁵ S. Kiefer, T. Mergen, *Einleitung. Gegenwartsnovellen. Anmerkungen zu einer zeitgemäßen Gattung im 21. Jahrhundert*, [in:] *Gegenwartsnovellen...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁶ M.J. Schweissinger, *Spiel mit der Tradition. Siegfried Lenz',Schweigeminute' im Kontext historischer Novellentheorien*, [in:] *Gegenwartsnovellen...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 173–198. See also A. Meier, *Novelle: Eine Einführung*, Berlin 2014, pp. 187–188; H. Aust, *Novelle*, 5th edition, Stuttgart and Weimar 2012, p. 247.

⁷ J. Guo, *Erinnerung: Die unvergängliche Vergangenheit in der Novelle Schweigeminute von Siegfried Lenz*, "Focus on German Studies" 2016, no. 23, pp. 51–66, <https://journals.uc.edu/index.php/fogs/article/view/633> (accessed: 16.07.2022); C. Fiebach, *Struktur und Funktion von Erinnerung in Siegfried Lenz',Schweigeminute'*, "Meridian Critic" 2011, no. 1/18, pp. 149–156.

⁸ See e.g. Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF), *Siegfried Lenz',Schweigeminute' im Literaturclub* [featuring H. Karasek, I. Radisch, G. v. Arnim, C. Caduff] 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PiFEvgBMBQ> (accessed: 18.08.2022).

duce all known works of art, profoundly modifying their effect, but it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes.”⁹ And even though Lenz was an author who specialized in modeling social situations, in *A Minute’s Silence*, set in a German post-war socio-cultural landscape and, simultaneously, the harsh, natural Baltic landscape, he managed to include and consistently observe the silence signaled in the title – a mystery of a mythical and metaphysical dimension.¹⁰ Connecting Lenz with Benjamin makes even more sense here, as there is a certain dualism in the latter’s concepts: juxtaposition combined with explaining the social dimension of art through contemplating and affirming nature, dealing with natural objects. Intuitively, and anticipating subsequent sections, in Benjamin’s works, “aura” has a heuristic value, but also an essentially explanatory one, i.e. covering such mysteriousness and discretion (although we need to be careful in the semantics of association fields):

A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be. [...] To follow with the eye – while resting on a summer afternoon – a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder is to breathe the aura of those mountains, of that branch. In the light of this description, we can readily grasp the social basis of the aura’s present decay. It rests on two circumstances, both linked to the increasing emergence of the masses and the growing intensity of their movements. Namely: the desire of the present-day masses to “get closer” to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing’s uniqueness [...] by assimilating it as a reproduction. [...] And the reproduction, as offered by illustrated magazines and newsreels, differs unmistakably from the image. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely entwined in the latter as are transitoriness and repeatability in the former.¹¹

And although in Benjamin aura has historical and social dimensions as well, referring to natural objects seems especially intriguing. Rilke’s 1924 poem *The Walk* serves as a reference in Benjamin’s definition and an example of a certain kind of “lyrical intuition.”¹² The fragment cited here is representative enough to contain a relatively constituted definition of “aura” (which Benjamin developed in his later texts), including Rilke’s lyr-

⁹ W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art...*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁰ Schweissinger points out that even when he presents mysterious, untamed nature, Lenz prefers sociological models. “Siegfried Lenz is not an author who would look for reasons behind tragic events beyond human society.” M.J. Schweissinger, *Spiel mit der Tradition...*, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

¹¹ W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art...*, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹² B. Meyer-Sickendiek, *Lyrisches Gespür: Vom geheimen Sensorium moderner Poesie*, München 2012, p. 121.

ical motif mentioned and cited in his earlier *Little History of Photography*.¹³ This definition is characterized by a noticeable (although perhaps apparent) anachronism of theses, especially those concerning the role of photography and film in the loss of aura in works of art. Formulated in 1920s and 1930s, those theses carried different weight than today, focusing on showing how photography and film, by distinguishing¹⁴ objects (such as buildings¹⁵), but also people (e.g. actors), deprived them of the “authenticity” (“Echtheit”)¹⁶ and truth provided by the original context:

It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction **detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition**. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced. These two processes lead to a **massive upheaval** in the domain of objects handed down from the past – a shattering of tradition which is the reverse side of the present crisis and renewal of humanity.¹⁷

Of course there is some truth in the claim that aura is in crisis, but this crisis offers an opportunity to capture and thematize it in a novel way, or even to experience it in conditions changed by technicization and media:

Aura’s crisis does not correspond with a critical awareness of its ideological nature, but rather the experience of aura’s crisis. Moreover, this crisis allows to treat aura as something which becomes a subject of some experience, as has been shown by that story of experiencing aura in a summer afternoon [...].¹⁸

In fact, modernism is the *de facto* object of Benjamin’s diagnosis, understood as a trend in art and literature, a reaction to technicization and emergence of film and photography; modernism, for which the turn of the 20th century was both a culminating and crisis point. In a way, modern-

¹³ W. Benjamin, *Mala historia fotografii*, trans. J. Sikorski, [in:] *Aniol historii...* [Angel of History...], *op. cit.*, p. 117; *idem*, *Little History of Photography*, trans. E. Jephcott, K. Shorter, [in:] *Selected writings. 1931–1934*, eds. M.W. Jennings, et al., vol. 2, part 2, Cambridge, Mass. 2005, pp. 518–519, https://monoskop.org/images/0/0e/Benjamin_Walter_1931_1999_Little_History_of_Photography.pdf (accessed: 10.04.2023); Meyer-Sickendiek (*Lyrisches Gespür...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 120–123) presents these various definitions in an interesting way, especially in terms of their applicability in interpreting different adequate examples of German poetry.

¹⁴ W. Benjamin, *Dzieło sztuki...*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 206.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 205. See also B. Lindner’s *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, [in:] *Benjamin-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. B. Lindner, Stuttgart and Weimar 2006, pp. 236–237 for an interesting take on this notion.

¹⁷ W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art...*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁸ B. Lindner, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter...*, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

ism lives off crisis; it is a record of crisis *par excellence*, and as such it is not a style in art, but rather an “aesthetic ideology,” and moreover, it is a record of certain aesthetic strategies (such as e.g. “shock, distortion / alienation, atonality, abstraction” allowing to overcome this crisis in a work of art.¹⁹ Of course, in modernism we are dealing with a serious distortion of previous forms of communicating through art, but nonetheless photography, approached by Benjamin with so much skepticism, and especially film, ultimately become ways of overcoming the crisis “as a complex cultural phenomenon of modernism [...] as its symbol.”²⁰ This is essentially due to them allowing aura to be experienced in those changed conditions. Benjamin is quite enigmatic about this issue, e.g. in *Little History of Photography* he expresses his delight with the Parisian works of E. Atget, a precursor of “surrealist photography,” at the same time writing about them: “he initiates the emancipation of object from aura, which is the most signal achievement of the latest school of photography.”²¹ This unique dialectics based on awe for old masterpieces and losing them due to *technological reproduction* on the one hand, and on the other – enchantment with deliberately depriving a work of art of its aura (e.g. Atget’s surrealist photography) can mean only one thing: that Benjamin sees a successful attempt at overcoming the crisis diagnosed by modernism (and himself) in those works. It is thus about aura-creating strategies, which paradoxically are supposed to reinforce this experience through marking the lack of aura, and thus make photography, film, but also poetry and other types of literature – all mass-reproduced – works of art. And the latter is indeed an example of mass reproducibility. Siegfried Lenz’s literary success is not an exception here, and it does not rule out perceiving and experiencing a work of art through the lens of aura. “Authenticity” (“Echtheit”) is a notion related to aura – not a “category of theory of perception,” but a “category of theory of discourse.”²² Thus aura is not something that is attributed to a work of art forever, it is always a matter of the right communication and reception, something that takes

¹⁹ C. Klinger, *Modern / Moderne / Modernismus*, [in:] *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, eds. K. Barck, M. Fontius, D. Schlenstedt, B. Steinwachs, F. Wolfzettel, (*Medien – Populär*, Bd. 4.), Stuttgart 2010, pp. 150, 160. See H. Kiesel, *Geschichte der literarischen Moderne: Sprache, Ästhetik, Dichtung im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, 2nd edition, München 2016, pp. 198–236 for an interesting illustration of those theses on the basis of this discussion of aesthetic manifestos of e.g. representatives of the avant-garde, as well as the individual poetics of Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Benn.

²⁰ O. Bulgakowa, *Film/filmisch*, [in:] *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, eds. K. Barck, M. Fontius, D. Schlenstedt, B. Steinwachs, F. Wolfzettel (*Dekadent – Grotesk*, Bd. 2), Stuttgart 2001, p. 429.

²¹ W. Benjamin, *Little History of Photography*, *op. cit.*, p. 518.

²² B. Lindner, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter...*, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

place between a work of art (and possibly the author) and its recipient (reader, viewer). We know this today after decades of modernist aesthetics, but also after experiencing the postmodernist poetics of citation, which in a way is an aesthetic appreciation of *reproduction*, making mass kitsch a work of art, also knowing different strategies rejecting postmodernism. Thanks to those experiences, today we are able to better understand the nature of aura than it was possible in 1930s, i.e. when Benjamin presented his theses. From today's perspective, they are likely still relevant, but they would require updating.

On discretion, story's magic, and "a unique phenomenon of a certain distance"

In order to capture a certain uniqueness (auracity?) of Lenz's novella, we cannot stop on the level of its plot, which at first glance seems rather typical for more trivial literature. The story takes place in Western Germany, by the Baltic Sea, mostly in a fictional town of Hirtshafen, probably in 1960s or 1970s. There are some doubts regarding the exact time: some elements, such as Volkswagen beetle, *Spanish Eyes*, Benny Goodman and Ray Charles on the radio indicate the 1960s–1970s. However, others suggest the 1990s (such as a Turkish family that has lived in Germany for three generations)²³ [MC, p. 114]). The story opens with a mourning ceremony in Lessing Junior High School for an English teacher, Stella Petersen, who has died in a yacht accident, hence the title. The ceremony leads the protagonist, Christian Voigt, an 18-year-old student who is also the first-person narrator, to contemplate the special bond he shared with the teacher, who was a few years his senior. They had a secret affair, about which we learn through retrospections intertwined with the ceremony and events that take place shortly after it. Stella, fascinated with Christian's unusual occupation – he is a "stone-fisher" (MC, p. 16, in German "Steinfischer"), collecting stones for reinforcing a local port's infrastructure – is uneasy about the growing intimacy between them; she might lose her job, so she is trying to keep her distance. People from Christian's circle (friends, the art teacher Mr Kugler, Principal Block) probably suspect that he is having an affair with Stella. His mother is worried after spotting a photograph of Christian and Stella on his desk, whereas – curiously – his father remains calm. This idyllic and

²³ S. Lenz, *Minuta ciszy*, trans. M. Skalska, Słupsk 2016, p. 114. Although in some places I personally prefer different translations, I am using this version for the purpose of this paper (MC and page number), sometimes also providing words from the German original (S. Lenz, *Schweigeminute*, Hamburg 2008).

somewhat tense atmosphere is cut short by an accident: on her way back from a yacht cruise with friends, Stella is caught in a storm right outside Hirtshafen port. The yacht hits a stone breakwater, Stella is thrown in the water by a broken mast, right between the boat and the stone wall. Although Christian manages to pull her out, she never regains consciousness and dies after a few days in a local hospital.

Literary critics stress the unusually poetic character of this seemingly banal love story, which perfectly harmonizes with the represented world, with what is unspoken, vague, or subtly communicated at best playing the key role. This already suggests that we will need to figure certain elements of the story out for ourselves, confront ourselves with a mystery. It seems that critics base their evaluative strategies not only on arguments referring to content and form, but also to their own emotions, which seem to reflect dealing with an auratic masterpiece (as Walter Benjamin put it). Marcel Reich-Ranicki, a Polish-Jewish critic from Włocławek who passed away in 2013, ‘the pope of German literary criticism’ famous for his uncompromising attitude, wrote about *A Minute’s Silence* in “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” (FAZ):

Respect, **discretion**, properness, tact: these are the words that come to my mind. Lenz respects his protagonists. He grants them the right to **discretion**, he does not leave anything out, he writes carefully, subtly, and tactfully. He is a well-mannered narrator. [...] We need to thank my friend Siegfried Lenz for this poetic book – perhaps his best to date.²⁴

Heinrich Detering, a reviewer from the same magazine chimes with Ranicki, focusing on Lenz’s style:

If you believe that Lenz’s power lies in short and medium forms, his latest novel will reassure you in this conviction. It is a masterpiece in the most crafty sense, which is probably why at some point the amazing precision *pièce bien faite* [a well-made piece] can transform **into the magic** of storytelling. Old-fashioned? Modern? Old arguments of Lenz’s admirers and critics are pale in the face of this sovereign brevity. This is what is so amazing about this book: its simplicity.²⁵

Detering mentions ‘magic’, and hence we should not be surprised by another, shorter review, this time from a Sunday issue of “FAZ” by Volker

²⁴ M. Reich-Ranicki, *Bettgeschichten hatten für ihn nie Beweisqualität*, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, April 22, 2008.

²⁵ H. Detering, *Die Meerfrau und der Steinfischer*, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, June 21, 2008, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/schweigeminute-von-siegfried-lenz-die-meerfrau-und-der-steinfischer-1546299.html> (accessed: 5.07.2022).

Weidermann, who concludes: “This is a light, delicate, sad, and beautiful book about love – the likes of which we have not seen in a long time.”²⁶ The degree to which the critics agree with one another is unusual; even “Tag-zeitung,” a magazine that politically is on the opposite pole, and generally does not agree with “FAZ” in terms of literature, praises the novella in Dirk Knipphals’s review:

There is something incredibly moving in this story. It has already been noted in reviews that it has a “retro charm”. [...] It is absolutely lovely to read. And it does not matter at all that at no point do we believe this love story, that it seems somewhat too made up. We can delicately immerse ourselves in it. This novella is an invitation to a sentimental journey to the literature of the old Federal Republic. And we can rejoice that it is so perfect in terms of form.²⁷

It sounds like this “immersion” in the past, evoked by the semantics of a “retro charm,” “sentimental journey,” etc., is also convergent with experiencing aura:

What is aura, actually? A strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be. While at rest on a summer’s noon, to trace a range of mountains on the horizon, or a branch that throws its shadow on the observer, until **the moment or the hour become part of their appearance** – this is what it means to breathe the aura of those mountains, that branch.²⁸

In reference to the peculiar temporal shift in reception (“until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance”), we should add how it is explained by one of Benjamin’s interpreters: we are not dealing with the experience of aura as an “atmospheric clash of perception,” or with an example of “landscape aesthetics,” but with something that “goes deep into space and time, and ties itself to certain constellations in which it appears,” and may even be considered a “holiness.”²⁹ Indeed, in reviews by critics and readers, apart from usual compliments (e.g. “unusually beautiful story” – Ina Hartwig, “Frankfurter Rundschau”³⁰), we can also find such

²⁶ V. Weidermann, *Zu Besuch bei Siegfried Lenz. So spricht die Liebe, wenn sie kommt*, “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”, May 6, 2008, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/zu-besuch-bei-siegfried-lenz-so-spricht-die-liebe-wenn-sie-kommt-1547068.html> (accessed: 17.07.2022).

²⁷ D. Knipphals, *Einladung zur Zeitreise*, “tageszeitung”, June 5, 2008, <https://taz.de/Einladung-zur-Zeitreise/!841857/> (accessed: 5.07.2022).

²⁸ W. Benjamin, *Little History of Photography*, *op. cit.*, pp. 518–519.

²⁹ B. Lindner, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter...*, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

³⁰ From the dust jacket of the German edition.

apparently-only-compliments which almost directly reach for metaphors used by Benjamin in his descriptions of aura, such as “photographs of a late summer, encased in language made of amber” (Andrea Seibel, “Die Welt”).³¹ Interestingly, one scene in the novella contains the same metaphor. In this scene, there is a piece of amber in front of a photograph of Stella and Christian. Christian hands it to Sonja, who inspects it with a magnifying glass and discovers that there are two insects inside – a tiny beetle and mosquito. Christian says that they had got caught inside a drop of resin forever because they were not careful enough. However, Sonja is more interested in the photograph (MC, p. 101). Obviously, a review has a different significance than the source material, but the repeated elements (photography, amber) may not be a coincidence. The novella’s metaphor establishes an analogous relationship of entities encased in a drop of amber, as well as the two protagonists in the photo, who were brave enough to fall in love, and failed: one of them dies, the other one suffers the loss of his lover. Although it is difficult to claim that this is about some fate, punishment for defying social conventions, there have been careful attempts at interpretations based on some narrative incredibility, pointing out to the possibility that, in fact, Stella committed suicide,³² or to supernatural powers, which are more characteristic of romanticist novellas (in the spirit of E.T.A. Hoffman).³³ The “here and now” of the protagonists is in a way preserved and shifted in time, “until the moment or the hour become part of their appearance” (see the quote from Benjamin above). Just as the two insects encased in amber are admired by the protagonists millions of years after they had been trapped, someday someone will listen to the discreetly told (or untold) story of the two lovers. It can be assumed that here this would be about the moment of the first-person narrator, possibly an old man,³⁴ telling an intimate story from his youth to his readers, revealing something that heretofore was a great, unspeakable mystery. Those evoked senses open an interesting interpretative field, although admittedly certain things are communicated ‘weakly.’³⁵ This also concerns the metaphorical plan created by photographs,

³¹ *Für den Urlaub: Lektüre-Empfehlungen von Andrea Seibel*, “Die Welt”, June 20, 2008, <https://www.welt.de/kultur/article2126815/Lektuere-Empfehlungen-von-Andrea-Seibel.html?cid=search.product.onsitesearch> (accessed: 17.07.2022).

³² J. Guo, *Erinnerung...*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

³³ M.J. Schweissinger, *Spiel mit der Tradition...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 179–180.

³⁴ This is how H. Karasek characterized the narrator in terms of age in SRF, *Siegfried Lenz ‘Schweigeminute’ im Literaturclub*, from c. 17 min. 50 s.

³⁵ Not in a colloquial sense, but as a specific poetic effect understood as “a wider range of weak implicatures”, D. Sperber, D. Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Oxford 1986, pp. 236–237.

which play a certain role in the outline of events (e.g. Colin's photo, Stella's photos during the funeral ceremony, etc.).³⁶ The last photograph – the one with the amber stone lying in front of it – is especially striking, as it directly points to one of the first Benjamin's mentions of aura:

Ornament, decorative surroundings in which an object or an entity is encased, distinguishes aura. Probably nothing gives such a good idea of genuine aura as Van Gogh's late paintings, in which one can say all objects are painted with aura.³⁷

Is there anything more appealing than an amber stone encasing insects? Moreover, its typical yellow color resembles the intense yellow of Van Gogh's paintings. Considering those different ways of conceptualizing aura according to Benjamin, including simultaneous appearance of amber with other elements, such as a photograph of the protagonists, it is not unlikely that it is some sort of prefiguration.

Eroticism – silence – taboo

As has been mentioned, critics notice something else, which certainly is a significant element of the novella's message. Ulrich Greiner from "Die Zeit" puts it in a concise and suggestive way: "Rarely does one read something as pristine and at the same time erotic. *A Minute's Silence*, a timeless gem, is a good example of this."³⁸ Others have noticed it as well: the ambivalence between the almost erotic tension, and actually observing social and cultural taboos. This is the discretion for readers and protagonists mentioned by Reich-Ranicki, the value of silence, which can be reduced to a rule observed in Lenz: "Bedroom stories never had any probative value for him."³⁹ Reich-Ranicki referred to reactions to the novel *Fundbüro* (2002, Polish edition 2006), when Lenz was provocatively asked why he avoided

³⁶ For an interesting analysis of the role of photographs in a specific dialectics of fiction and reality in Lenz's novels, see M. Willand, *Funktionen des Faktischen im Fiktionalen. Die erzählten Fotografien in Lenz' 'Schweigeminute'*, [in:] *Faktualität und Fiktionalität*, ed. *idem*, Hannover 2017, pp. 109–126. Confronting those theses with Benjamin's *Little History of Photography* may also complete the notion of aura in interesting ways.

³⁷ From the rather controversially entitled notes *Erfahrungsprotokolle zum Haschichgebrauch*, see W. Benjamin, *Fragmente vermischten Inhalts. Autobiographische Schriften*, [in:] *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds. R. Tiedmann, H. Schweppenhäuser, Bd. 6., Frankfurt am Main 1985, cited from Meyer-Sickendiek, *Lyrisches Gespür... , op. cit.*, p. 120.

³⁸ U. Greiner, *Zeitlos: Siegfried Lenz ist abermals eine anrührende Erzählung geglückt*, "Die Zeit", May 8, 2008, <https://www.zeit.de/2008/20/Einleitung-Lenz> (accessed: 16.07.2022).

³⁹ See footnote 24.

presenting the physical side of love: the friendship between the main protagonist, a young Henry Neff, and an older woman, did not take them to bed.⁴⁰ In order to fully realize how (among other things) Lenz creates mysteriousness, secret, vagueness (aura) in his novels, which obviously fascinates critics and readers alike, one more aspect should be considered: the question of standing out according to *figure-ground*,⁴¹ an important rule in perception psychology, contrasted with different literature, perhaps even the whole literary *mainstream*. Presenting eroticism and pornographic elements as proper and socially acceptable is of key importance here. If we were to trace this idea, both in German and international literature, we would not be surprised to discover that there is literature that transgresses certain norms, mostly in terms of sex, but also different types of obscenity. This is the line between morality regulated by law and evanescent taboos which belong to culture, and which have a culture-creating function (see e.g. S. Freud, C.L. Strauss, L. Kołakowski). Nowadays, political correctness has become such a regulator; it is generally believed to keep political and social taboos in line.⁴² Over the past century a lot has changed in terms of what is socially acceptable, in everyday life and in art, literature and film (since this medium was popularized in the early 20th century). Liberal societies generally do not use censorship, although e.g. Henry Miller could not publish his *Tropic of Cancer* in the USA until the 1960s (despite its publication in France in 1934). Modernism, and even more so postmodernism, transformed attitudes to the question of showing not only eroticism, but also pornography in a work of art. Their aesthetic legitimization was sanctioned in art on specific conditions, for example, by combining them with violence under the label of transgression (G. Bataille), combining co-dependency with death (S. Sonntag) in the name of shortening the distance between high- and low-brow literature (L. Fiedler). Even in the 1960s the film *The Silence* by Ingmar Bergman was met with outrage in Germany, leading to

⁴⁰ For a longer discussion, see my paper: A. Denka, *Poetyka 'gubienia' i 'odnajdywania' w powieści Siegfrieda Lenza Fundbüro jako forma przywołania wartości* [Poetics of 'Losing' and 'Finding' in *Fundbüro* by Siegfried Lenz as a Form of Evoking Values], [in:] *Antynomie wartości: Problematyka aksjologiczna w literaturze i dydaktyce* [Antinomies of Values: Axiological Issues in Literature and Pedagogy], eds. A. Morawiec, R. Jagodzińska, A. Klepaczek, Łódź 2006, pp. 241–254.

⁴¹ D. Schwanitz, *Systemtheorie und Literatur: Ein neues Paradigma*, Opladen 1990, pp. 22–27. Non-literary examples, such as paintings by M.C. Escher, are an interesting introduction to solving literature's problems according to the systems theory.

⁴² There are obviously clear examples of contradictions which often lead to conflict. For example, political correctness legitimizes new, liberal legal solutions for such issues as abortion or the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, thus making them unquestionable, whereas before the sexual revolution even mentioning them in a public debate would break the social taboo.

a debate about censorship and demands for “clean screen,”⁴³ although from today’s perspective such reactions to two or three erotic scenes seem rather hysterical. Meanwhile, viewers and readers have been confronted not only with almost open access to pornography (legal regulations mostly concern protecting minors), but also with masterpieces of high art appreciated by critics, such as films by Patrice Chéreau (*Intimacy*, 2001), and books by Elfriede Jelinek, Michele Houellebecq (*Platform*, 2001, Polish edition – 2004) or the already mentioned Charlotte Roche. Lenz knew Houellebecq’s books and he must have been aware of Charlotte Roche, his rival from the bestseller lists; however, the essence of those works is clearly not a source of inspiration, but at most a background against which *A Minute’s Silence* stands out (“a timeless gem” – see Greiner above). This leads us to Benjamin again: his thesis about the change of perception of a work of art caused by modernism (*age of technological reproducibility*), which was supposedly determined by the loss of traditionally understood aura, is illustrated by admiring an ancient statue of Venus, which is supposed to reflect a certain magic, religious ritual: “the unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art always has its basis in ritual.”⁴⁴ If he is right, we would need to take a closer look at what such a ritual is in terms of showing sexuality, games with eroticism, or alternatively how they are dosed, which is convergent with the “unapproachability” demand.⁴⁵ This idea is suggested by Greiner, who characterizes Lenz’s novella in seemingly paradoxical terms: “something pristine (German *keusch*), and at the same time erotic” (see above). Another German author, Botho Strauß (born in 1944), valued novelist and playwright, who significantly differs from Lenz (different generation, themes, and aesthetics which does not refrain from radical political statements). Strauß criticized German morality of the 1980s and 1990s, pointing out to over-rationalization and desacralization. In his play *Kalldewey. Farce* (1982) – misquoting the title of Goya’s painting (“The sleep of love produces monsters”)⁴⁶ – he lists a number of pathologies in relationships resulting from the approach which only seems modern, such as solving problems through therapy or satisfying the need for intimacy with pornography. Strauß presented the psychophysical degradation of a man – in one of central scenes he is torn

⁴³ P. von Hugo, ‘Eine zeitgemäße Erregung’. *Der Skandal um Ingmar Bergmans Film, ‘Das Schweigen’ (1963) und die Aktion ‘Saubere Leinwand’*, “Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History” 2006, no. 3, pp. 210–220.

⁴⁴ W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art...*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁴⁵ “Things which are significantly distant cannot be brought closer – ‘unapproachability’ is indeed the main value of a cult image.” W. Benjamin, *Dzieło sztuki...*, *op. cit.*, footnote 7, p. 210.

⁴⁶ B. Strauß, *Kalldewey. Farce*, München and Wien 1981.

to pieces by maenads in a wild ritual, and thrown into a washing machine. This unexpected reference to a myth (Greater Dionysia, a celebration of Dionysus) can be seen as a presentation of rituals and customs *ex negativo*; in the times of Christian dominance they were regulated in a completely different way, turned into taboo. Although Benjamin prefers theater with live staging,⁴⁷ which reinforces his definition of aura through references to sacred and ritualistic roots of theater, he believes that rituals should be conceptualized more broadly, as staging an object treated as a work of art each time. This should also concern poetry and other types of literature, although, for example, a poet reading their own poem can create a special kind of magic. Understood in this sense, Benjamin's theory obviously needs to be complemented and corrected, as traditionally understood aura may be disappearing, replaced by a new type of aura constructed by subtle communicative measures (auratic literature and film⁴⁸). Stating that something is simultaneously "pristine" and "erotic" (Greiner) proves that an object displays a large degree of regulation. The essence of taboo lies in the fact that it is not observed on some conditions or in a certain way (e.g. killing in a war or a dispensation from fasting). Sex is also regulated by customs (such as being of age, avoiding a large age gap between lovers, refraining from intimacy in public), and presenting it in art is possible with specific legal and aesthetic limitations. The dialectic of closeness (or "approachability") which constitutes aura is typically convergent with what makes intimacy acceptable in art, or even aesthetically valuable.⁴⁹ It can also be said that audiences get used to some censorship (such as Hays Code), and that such censorship can be more attractive than freedom resembling lawlessness in the times of oppressive permissiveness, excessive eroticism and pornography in the media. And this is probably not just longing for the good old days, but an elementary anthropological need.

From this perspective, it could be said that Lenz showed more in *A Minute's Silence* than in his other works. Nonetheless, there are only two scenes showing intimacy between Christian and Stella. In the first, Christian pulls Stella towards him and kisses her, feeling her breasts

⁴⁷ According to Benjamin, even the poorest provincial staging of *Faustus* is better than a film adaptation in that it is perfect competition for the Weimar premiere. W. Benjamin, *Dzieło sztuki...*, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

⁴⁸ Benjamin observes – although he is clearly skeptical about it – that film is attributed with "cult elements." *Ibidem*, p. 217.

⁴⁹ W. Faulstich (*Grundkurs Filmanalyse*, München 2002, pp. 92, 155–156) points out to the function of an erotic scene in N. Roeg's *Don't look now* (1973), which is edited in a specific way: shots of a love scene are intertwined with shots of dressing up, which, on the one hand, makes the scene less provocative, and on the other, more focused on the good relationship between the spouses, which is not a basis for the crisis.

touch him. Stella walks over to a bed without saying anything, lies down, leaving space on the pillow for Christian to join her. This retrospection is followed by the mourning ceremony during a minute's silence (i.e. not speaking); the narrator describes how students react to this ritual, and then we return to the hotel room. The scene opens with the pillow showing only one trace rather than two; Christian reminisces that at one point their faces, turned towards each other, were so close that they left only one trace. He gets up when Stella is asleep (or so he thinks), taking her hand off his chest. Stella sighs, lifts her head, looks at him questioningly, smiling, and he tells her he needs to go. The erotic scene is almost cut out. We are taken to a different time and place via montage, a special type of darkening, a reflector. There are different kinds of enforced silence: to mourn Stella's tragic death, (by the main protagonist) to keep his love secret and thus protect it, and to show respect for the reader and protagonists. It is about avoiding voyeurism, which characterizes Lenz as a perfect author, i.e. one contained within the text, but also an author who defied mainstream; in a world where Charlotte Roche is a bestselling author, readers still long for stories "from a different time, a time when it was not common knowledge what a one-night stand is."⁵⁰ The second part of the love scene between Christian and Stella is just as brief: a short description of passion on the so-called bird island boils down to two sentences. In the scene the two lovers lie facing each other on a beach, Christian caressing Stella's thighs, looking into her eyes, they undress and make love next to pine trees. Those hoping for the 82-year-old Lenz to break the ethical literary norms which he had observed all his career, and express some sort of senile moral loosening, will be disappointed. Admittedly, the theme – a love affair between a teacher and a student (who is of age, but still a student) – provided some grounds for expecting a scandal.⁵¹ There is no simple answer to the question of the extent to which Lenz resembles his first-person narrator, an elderly man who reminisces about a love affair from his youth. Some evidence might be provided by a short comment made by the narrator towards the end of the book; as he watches the damaged yacht being towed, he thinks to himself that he shall always remember not

⁵⁰ U. Greiner, *Zeitlos...*, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ Probably there are some personal intentions of a different kind. Lenz started working on the novella shortly before the death of his wife, Liselotte, in 2006. Her death combined with Lenz's health issues must have interrupted his work. He finished the novella while in a new relationship with a woman named Ulla, to whom the book is dedicated, but in a 2014 interview he said that the book is a declaration of love for his wife *post mortem*. U. Berndt, *Zu Gast bei Siegfried Lenz*, [in:] *Gespräche unter Freunden*, ed. D. Kampa, Hamburg 2015, pp. 488–489.

the tug, but its image. However, it actually only suggests some temporal distance between the narrator and the events (the time when the story is told and the time when it is set); before, that distance seemed shorter. To recapitulate, also all those external circumstances (which surely must be some elements of the author's creation, although rather unconscious and not cynical) reinforce – through a number of ambiguities and omissions on the level of text, through a mystery, through “unapproachability” – an important element of aura as described by Benjamin.

Form as mystery. Some theoretical-systemic considerations

Discussing aura and its fading in the *times of technological reproducibility*, Benjamin may have touched upon the issue of social transformations in modernism, especially concerning distinguishing an independent art system from other social systems in a functionally diverse society (a concept by Niklas Luhmann).⁵² This problem should be considered from a different perspective. With modernism, the need to deal with the aura of a work of art, connection with the time and place of its existence, experiencing its authenticity⁵³ brings a number of phenomena, including literary ones, which are simultaneously an answer to modernity (i.e. industrialization, urbanization, rail, but also new media, such as photography and film). All *l'art pour l'art*⁵⁴ aesthetics, as well as the works and ways of functioning of literary groups such as George Kreis's, beatnik poetry (fifty years later and for different social reasons), such as A. Ginsberg, J. Kerouac, and R.D. Brinkmann in Germany, to some extent also the early works of P. Handke from the times of the student revolt, whose fan meetings were artistic happenings, up until present-day poetry slams – these can all be considered examples of anti-modernist trends. All those phenomena, or actually any cult surrounding literary works or attempts at establishing such cults by celebrating charismatic authors, either by fans or by auto-creation, seem convergent with how Benjamin understood aura. In modernity, aura becomes a construct (in fact, it was a construct before, but such tools for description were introduced

⁵² For an introduction to theoretical-systemic considerations in terms of literature, see A. Denka, *Literatura – społeczeństwo – system. Studia wokół niemieckojęzycznych autorów przełomu XX i XXI wieku (Peter Handke, Siegfried Lenz, Botho Strauß, Dietrich Schwanitz i Peter Turrini)* [Literature – Society – System: Studies on German-language Writers from the Late 20th Century and Early 21st Century (Peter Handke, Siegfried Lenz, Botho Strauß, Dietrich Schwanitz i Peter Turrini)], Poznań 2020.

⁵³ W. Benjamin, *Dzieło sztuki ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 204, 205.

⁵⁴ Benjamin notes this moment as a kind of “negative theology” of a crisis, and at the same an opportunity for emancipation from “parasitic subservience to ritual”. *Ibidem*, p. 211.

later), so we can only talk about aura's transformation. Moreover, in terms of theoretical-systemic considerations, we would need to demonstrate that works of art are not elements of art:

Elements of social systems always include communication, and never objects, texts, etc. Works of art organize communications about incredible things, and at the same time they enable a consensus about them. They provoke esoteric, complex experiences, and at the same time they enable communication about them. They are communication programs.⁵⁵

As with the autonomy rule contained in *l'art pour l'art*, Benjamin's aura is not a property of 'art' from the theoretical-systemic perspective; it characterizes neither works of art nor the system. The separation of other communications, systems such as 'law,' 'economy,' 'religion,' etc., to which the system of 'art' is the so-called external environment [Umwelt] is of key importance here. Hence aura is only a program, establishing how communications within a given work of art are supposed to be organized. Interestingly, only after it has been distinguished can the 'art' social system also regulate issues which are of importance to Benjamin, such as "authenticity" [Echtheit] (see footnote 16): "art is organized by the authenticity of the genius who produced it and in which the audience takes delight"⁵⁶ And it happens regardless of programs that concern e.g. establishing the proportions between heteronomy and autonomy in the structure of a work of art (without autonomy it is likely that the messages organized by that work of art will be classified as the communication of the 'politics' system, which obviously has specific consequences). But 'art' also organizes such issues as 'style,' which would be a type of bond between the elements of a work of art, i.e. between "form" and "context," the latter including "anything that concerns the horizons of a work of art and regulates its references, including references to other examples of art through citations, paradoxes, ironic inversions, etc."⁵⁷ To recapitulate, if we can find aura in today's film and literature, it is about inspiring specific "esoteric" experiences in the audience using a presented "form", but also about creating the right contextual references. What used to be magic and ritual *de facto* becomes a celebration of form which often boils down to following specific intertextual and genological tropes, communicated "weakly" through metaphors. Regarding

⁵⁵ D. Schwanitz, *Systemtheorie und Literatur...*, *op. cit.*, p. 254. Actually, this is a fragment of a fictional conversation between Oscar Wilde and M. Teste, a character in P. Valéry's poems, in which they explain the social system of art according to N. Luhmann. It is striking that Benjamin used a quote from Valéry's *Pièces sur l'art* in the introduction to his text.

⁵⁶ D. Schwanitz, *Systemtheorie und Literatur...*, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 255.

the form, certain aspects of Lenz's novella are communicated 'strongly', e.g. the genre is indicated: *Novelle*. It is a pity that it is left out in the Polish edition, as even 'unprofessional' readers, who only have high school knowledge of literature, may recognize references to the strong trend in Polish literature of positivism and modernism. Situating *A Minute's Silence* within a trend in European and global short-story writing would probably be too much for typical Polish and German readers alike. Although in the case of *A Minute's Silence* it would be understandable to contextually refer to Boccaccio's *Decameron*, i.e. the genre's roots, romanticist short-story writing (e.g. E.T.A. Hoffman) but also realist trends (e.g. T. Storm), such works as *Panchatantra* or *One Thousand and One Nights* likely belong only to the "horizon of the work of art" (Schwanitz, see above). Noticing the nuances of the strongly formalized genre, which "is more concise and structurally rigorous than a short story"⁵⁸ is a different issue. Moreover, it would be some challenge to confront the contents of *A Minute's Silence* with definitions of the novella present in German culture, such as that presented by Goethe in a conversation with Eckermann, Paul Heyse's *Falkentheorie*, Ludwig Tieck's turning point theory (well-known to Lenz, conceptualizing novella as a sister genre to drama), or Theodor Storm's novella theory (see footnote 6). In the light of the above, one may ask where the celebration of a form stops, and its analysis begins. Of course, there is a difference between the ruminations of a scholar and those of an admirer of Lenz's books, who may read them for various reasons, not necessarily concerned with genological and intertextual references. However, this does not mean that the reflections of the average reader only concern the level of reception of trivial literature. Saying that 360,000 fans of Lenz cannot be wrong (a paraphrase of the famous *50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can't Be Wrong* from 1959) indicates more than just usual, pop-cultural entertainment: it may mean celebrating form on a certain level, perhaps not fully realized, hidden, but also sophisticated. Then celebrating form presents itself as discovering a deeply hidden secret. At the same time, it is dealing with tradition understood as "the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be" (footnote 28). A number of textual understatements facilitate this, like the suggestion contained in Mr Kugler's question that Stella may not have been killed by an unfortunate accident (footnotes 32 and 33). Signaling potential readings, such as giving Stella the qualities of a mythical nymph, nixie, or ondine, has a similar function; Stella is an excellent swimmer: during a school dance she is named Lady of the Sea by

⁵⁸ T. Cieślukowska, *Nowela* [Novella], [in:] *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich* [Dictionary of Literary Types and Genres], eds. G. Gazda, S. Tynecka-Makowska, Kraków 2006, p. 464.

“Krakenman” (Octopus Lord), and an attendee of a fishing conference from Scotland draws her portrait with long hair and huge, dreamy eyes. This is simultaneously a nod towards a common literary motif present in different cultures, including German romanticist literature (Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué, *Ondine*, 1811, which was later used for libretto in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s opera of the same title). The world from novels by W. Faulkner is another intertextual reference; Stella tells Christian about Faulkner’s books, she recommends to him *Light in August* (1932). The fatalist world of Faulkner’s novels and protagonists whose actions are driven by fate, which fascinated Lenz,⁵⁹ are surely an important element of the horizon of *A Minute’s Silence*. Other possible contexts include the genre’s openness to mystery, suspense and secrets, present not only in German romanticist novellas but also in Anglo-Saxon literature (E.A. Poe), for example. German readers should not have problems noticing analogies to a popular novella by T. Storm, *The Rider on the White Horse* (1888), in which pride (*hybris*) in the face of the power of nature can be considered the reason for the protagonist’s death; Hauke Haien constructs dykes, thus stealing land from the sea.⁶⁰ The symbolic layer in Lenz’s novella is actually not that complex in terms of reception. It is likely that ‘stones’ – not ‘an individual stone’, but ‘many stones’ – which refer to the work of Christian and his father, may be the subject symbol, the ‘falcon’ from Heyse’s theory. This work intrigues Stella, it is the reason why she boards their boat and asks Christian to show her the stone blocks. Interestingly, this situation is in a way signaled by the description of a minor accident: one piece of stone slips from the gripper and hits the deck, which sends the boat rocking moments before Stella boards it. This is the first turning point, and disaster seems almost inevitable. However, we have another one – in fact, the most important – in which stones play the main part: this is what the breakwater is made of, they are directly what kills Stella, as during the accident, she is thrown overboard and hits her head against the stone wall. The constant presence of ‘stones’ not only signals significant turning points in the narrative structure, but also opens the field for dealing with the symbolic layer, of which the reader may not be fully aware (or may be just partly aware), and what is more, the interpretation may be subject to very individual reception.⁶¹ This is the basic characteristic of a symbol: “its ‘shimmering’ contents

⁵⁹ M.J. Schweissinger, *Spiel mit der Tradition...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 182–183.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 189–190. A comparison to the so-called fate novella using the example of *The Earthquake in Chile* by Kleist (1807) would be an interesting idea, see Polish edition (1960), pp. 190–193.

⁶¹ One example would be Schweissinger’s conclusions (*Spiel mit der Tradition...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 185–187), in which he points to the symbolic role of stones as a basis for the useful and

cannot be transmitted in any other way, through some other paraphrase, as this would lead to the annihilation of the most characteristic feature of a symbol – its intentional mysteriousness.”⁶²

Conclusion

Aura is a notion which can be applied to modern literary works: both understood colloquially, implying mysteriousness, secrecy, inexplicable phenomena, and as presented by Benjamin, describing contextual transformations of art in modernism, *in the age of technological reproducibility*. It can be clearly traced using the example of Lenz’s novella. “Auratizing” strategies are observable in literary criticism which reflects the narrative consistently constructed around the silence discourse (through discretion, vagueness, etc.) and a number of subtle metaphors, which are also convergent with the metaphors used by Benjamin in his definition of aura. A number of intertextual references and a sophisticated game with the genealogical tradition may also become elements of an intuitive celebration of form for common readers, who do not have tools for scholarly analysis.

Aura did not disappear in modernism, nor in later periods – its correlates have survived. They can be described using theoretical-systemic notions (in reference to the art system) as a type of oscillating between form and context in its broadest sense. This context, understood as referring to certain literary traditions, but also as a need to experience traditionally understood norms, may prove attractive for modern readers and explain the phenomenon of unobvious bestsellers.

Translated by Paulina Zagórska

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later also profitable work of a “stone fisher.” In Christian’s projections, this would be thinking about the future together, and such work would to some extent symbolize his coming of age.

⁶² *Słownik terminów literackich* [Dictionary of Literary Terms], eds. M. Głowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, 4th edition, Wrocław 2002, pp. 545–546.

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Poetic Performativity

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The author examines the performative status of a poetic work. Following T. Różewicz, he points to non-textual and potential forms of poetry's existence. As a counterbalance to excessive adherence to textocentrism, he proposes functionalizing the tools of the new humanities (R. Nycz) and the theory of affect (B. Massumi) in the analysis of the creative act. The author indicates ways of studying the poetic experience with reference to the performative actor model (W. Baluch). Demonstrated voice recordings of poetic performances in the context of Dramatic Theory of Literature (A. Krajewska) are examples of gaining special insight into experience and dramatic self-discovery.

KEYWORDS: poetry, text, performativity, affect, drama

*Poetry is not the art of verse*¹

A. Ważyk

The claim that poetry is not a text (even in the broadest sense²) and that it should not be predominantly associated with texts seems to be as obvious as difficult it is to justify. For Aristotle, connecting the word "to create" (Greek *poiein*) with verse and identifying poets as creators of texts written in verse was an overgeneralization.³ In modern times, the process of imitating (mimesis) has strongly shifted to the level of text construction. Enlightened normativism and formal faithfulness to genres according to modernism have all transformed their character in order to allow for artistic games with various versions of literariness to appear in the semantic field of poetry.⁴ In *Wesele* [The Wedding], Stanisław Wyspiański aptly demonstrated the process of formalization, but also the degradation of

¹ A. Ważyk, *Esej o wierszu* [An Essay on Verse], Warszawa 1964, p. 5.

² See M. Rygielska, *O "tekście kultury"* [On a "Text of Culture"], "Zeszyty Etnologii Wrocławskiej" 2015, no. 1(22), pp. 27–43.

³ Aristotle, *Retoryka; Poetyka* [Poetics and Rhetoric], trans. H. Podbielski, Warszawa 1988, p. 315.

⁴ E. Kraskowska, A. Kwiatkowska, J. Grądział-Wójcik, *Ars poetyka* [Ars poetics], "Forum Poetyki" Summer 2015, <http://fp.amu.edu.pl/ewa-kraskowska-agnieszka-kwiatkowska-joanna-gradzial-wojcik-ars-poetyka/> (accessed: 20.05.2023).

poetic language, reduced to empty textual talliers.⁵ Orhan Pamuk clearly distinguished between the narrative efforts of novelists and poets, pointing out the latter's unique ability to perceive truth and "burning up" in its name in the creative act.⁶ Towards the end of his life, Tadeusz Różewicz said that he would let poetry pass him by increasingly more often, without the need to write it down.⁷

Różewicz signaled perceiving and seeing poetry as a fluid, transubstantiation phenomenon that permeates space and things, an object which circulates in a fluid shape and elusive colors. Such a conceptualization is not popular with scholars – in this case, philological studies into texts struggle with the lack of a tangible object of their analyses.⁸ Nonetheless, we should note that appreciating unwritten but observable poetry confirms both the oldest and the latest traditions of thinking about poetry, depending on the aesthetic and theoretical perspective.⁹ We inherit the aspect of agency in dramatic poetry in this appreciation we refer to Horace's poetry of closeness and image, or to the Romanticist tradition of inspiration and Mickiewicz's complaints regarding the inconsistency between words and experience. Artur Rimbaud's famous "I is another," modern issues with the inexpressibility of experience and narrative concept of agency only complete the many more emerging contexts, opening a whole abyss of methodological problems and references, rather impossible to discuss in a short essay which is far from claiming that "everything is poetry."¹⁰ Modern philology

⁵ See E. Miodońska-Brookes, "Mam ten dar: bowiem patrzę się inaczej". *Szkice o twórczości Stanisława Wyspiańskiego* [I have this gift: for I look differently': Essays on the Works by Stanisław Wyspiański], Kraków 1997, p. 186.

⁶ O. Pamuk, Wywiad dla "Paris Review" [An interview for "Paris Review"], [in:] *idem, Inne kolory. Eseje i opowiadanie* [Other Colors], trans. A. Akbikie Sulimowicz, T. Kunz, Kraków 2012, p. 481.

⁷ See Tomasz Kunz's comments on that subject: "Also the paradoxical, negative presence of poems never written, which Różewicz often refers to, which he himself seems to perceive as an integral part of his own work, is peculiar to him. Różewicz has occasionally written poems about "unwritten poems", called himself "a silent poet" and "a poet without poetry," mentioned numerous unfinished projects, created "plays consistently unwritten," thus expressing his desire to also conceptualize things which – for various reasons – went beyond the scope of linguistic expression, or simply of what can be done." T. Kunz, *Próba nowej całości. Tadeusza Różewicza poetyka totalna* [An Attempt at a New Whole: Tadeusz Różewicz's Total Poetics], "Przestrzenie Teorii" 2006, no. 6, p. 127.

⁸ Miron Białoszewski could be one of many subsequent examples of "literaturizing" poetic observations which become a peculiar task to be recorded.

⁹ See A. Krajewska, *Dramatyczna teoria literatury. Zarys problematyki* [Dramatic Theory of Literature: An Outline of Problems], Poznań 2009, pp. 14–15, 211.

¹⁰ E. Stachura, *Wszystko jest poezja. Opowieść rzeka* [Everything is Poetry: An Extended Story], Warszawa 1975.

and its textological orientation is probably the biggest obstacle here. The results of such a dependence of a discipline on its tools are interesting in themselves, and they are a good example of uncovering what hides inside or beyond a poetic text. After all, in a way, every philological study leaves the space of textual worlds to explore the so-called subject of creative activities and their way of participating in the world, but in the name of academic clarity and expectations regarding the clarity of discourse it happens with respect for academically-accepted concepts.

In the past two decades, numerous turns in literary studies have profoundly reconfigured the practice of twentieth-century literary studies. The anthropological interpretation of poetry has opened perspectives for exploring the poetic experience beyond the textual form.¹¹ Studies which contributed to subsequent turns have offered fascinating conclusions and led to the discovery of aporias in the application of modern and postmodern theories. They stop us on the verge of linguistic expression and access to epiphany, facing us with what is simultaneously “text-internal and text-external”¹² in the organization of poetry, assigning to us another interpretative task. We are unable to enter the area of a poetic event,¹³ although we have a sense of intensely approaching cognition made present in literature.¹⁴

However, if we were to ask the poets whose worries about the hegemonic impact of theoretical-cognitive tools were dispelled by the power and faithfulness to their experience, then (against the concepts of inexpressibility, “unachievability” of facticity, aporias, contradictions of e.g. structural and phenomenological methodologies), the here and now of an artistic moment could be accessed and revealed on the stage of embodied interpretation.¹⁵ The oppression of theory overcome by the power of personal experience and the energy of its impact would shift those doubts to the margins of attention. What is experienced/seen/perceived in an act subjected to a performative analysis would become the basis of talking and making present.¹⁶ A performer-poet could thus prove the functionality of Guattari and Deleuze’s ideas with their actions, actions revealing the processes of creative activity

¹¹ See R. Nycz, *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości. Poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* [Literature as a Trope of Reality: The Poetry of Epiphany in Modern Polish Literature], Kraków 2001.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 170.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 257.

¹⁴ M. Koronkiewicz, *Flâneur? Po polsku: przechodzień* [In Polish: A Passer-by] [in:] *Nauka chodzenia. Teksty programowe późnej awangardy* [Learning How to Walk: Program Texts of Late Avant-garde], vol. 1, eds. W. Browarny, P. Mackiewicz, J. Orska, Kraków 2018, p. 66.

¹⁵ A. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

¹⁶ Stanisław Wyspiański’s works already provide protests against poetic speech which neither expresses transformation, nor co-creates it, see E. Miodońska-Brookes, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

from a situational rather than textual level, through percepts and affects compensating for the experiencing stage.¹⁷

Tools adapted from studying the textual existence of poetry have made it difficult to consider poetry in other terms than a poem, text, form, discourse, space of meanings, narrative, structure, composition of meanings, etc. It is difficult to introduce the perception of poetry to the area of modern interpretative procedures as an omnipresent phenomenon requiring an affective opening, observable yet elusive and vague, sneaking into our consciousness.¹⁸ The performative and affective turn have encouraged studies into ways in which poetry exists “from the other side”. However, we should also remember Gilles Deleuze’s 1980s concepts,¹⁹ in which he located the cooperation of the sensual and material in a specifically understood immanence fold. Moreover, there are later conceptualizations of cultural performances by Jon McKenzie,²⁰ or new-humanities understanding of text as a network incorporated in reality, “actively interacting with its surroundings, in which both objects and cognition of objects take shape and profile their form.”²¹ Affective realism, presented as a method of recording a “performed structure of feeling, experiencing, and understanding reality”²² also makes it easier to recognize poetry in the experience aspect.

Scholars who position themselves between experience and its understanding allow intuition to gain momentum and follow the trace of poetry, excluding (if we watch the beginning of a creative act) a textual object which continues to exist only potentially. They allow themselves to follow what is

¹⁷ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Co to jest filozofia?* [What is Philosophy?], trans. P. Pieniążek, Gdańsk 2000, p. 227.

¹⁸ This is why in her studies into modern poetry Joanna Orska proposes to use (among others) theories related to film reception, at the same time indicating the direction of development of contemporary verse, which belongs to “mechanisms different from those traditionally associated with compositions peculiar to literature’s properties. Here I would point out to the significance of representation techniques specific for film. Among other things, they constitute significant means of the artistic experiment in works by poets who follow the surrealist tradition”. J. Orska, *Materialność ruchomego języka* [Materiality of a Moving Tongue], “Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich” 2019, vol. 62, no. 2, p. 143.

¹⁹ G. Deleuze, *Fałda. Leibniz a barok* [The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque], trans. M. Janik and S. Królak, Warszawa 2014, p. 9.

²⁰ J. McKenzie, *Performuj albo... Od dyscypliny do performansu* [Perform or Else... From Discipline to Performance], trans. and introduction T. Kubikowski, Kraków 2011.

²¹ R. Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria – nowoczesność – literatura* [The Poetics of Experiencing: Theory – Modernity – Literature], Warszawa 2012, p. 61.

²² A. Dauksza, *Laboratorium artystyczne: realizm afektywny. Praktyki Joanny Rajkowskiej* [Artistic Laboratory: Affective Realism. Joanna Rajkowska’s Practices], [in:] *Nowa Humanistyka: zajmowanie pozycji, negocjowanie autonomii* [New Humanities: Securing Position, Negotiating Autonomy], eds. P. Czapliński, R. Nycz et al., Warszawa 2017, p. 240.

poetically felt, “seen with oneself,” taking place in the process of self-cognition and recognizing one’s own poetry in one’s surroundings.²³ The affective cloud of poetry – observed in this way as a result of finding and collecting data made visible due to higher concentration – has a chance of becoming an embodied, artistic cultural object. The perspective on uncovering and creating poetry discussed here would resemble forms of cultural improvisation in terms of participation and the performative ability to delineate ways of action and meaning,²⁴ but it would also be about culture interrupting us – culture too often speaking in our name.²⁵

However, we should ask whether the concepts indicated here actually help interpreters or artists remaining faithful to the autonomy of affect from before “seizing” with emotions and cognition, as Brian Massumi puts it,²⁶ show its transition into what remains in the form of a textual testament? After all, not much is left from affects “translated” into texts. Poets creating extensive narratives from stories about the creative process diminish the value of poetic experience; this is because they always side with knowledge, discourse, argumentation, representation, cognitive distance, analyzing the artist/poet (also as an objectified self), creative engagement, description of life – and not just creation in its original character:

When the continuity of affective escape is put into words, it tends to take on positive connotations. For it is nothing less than the perception of one’s own vitality, one’s sense of aliveness, of changeability (often signified as “freedom”). One’s “sense of aliveness” is a continuous, nonconscious self-perception (unconscious self-reflection). It is the perception of this self-perception, its naming and making conscious, that allows affect to be effectively analyzed – as long as a vocabulary can be found for that which is imperceptible but whose escape from perception cannot but be perceived, as long as one is alive.²⁷

Noticing artistically analyzed self-perception is a condition for seeing and recording experience in a selected preservation of poetics of an expe-

²³ See A. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

²⁴ R. Nycz, *Nowa humanistyka w Polsce: kilka bardzo subiektywnych obserwacji, koniektur, refutacji* [New Humanities in Poland: Some Very Subjective Observations, Conjectures, Refutations], [in:] *Nowa humanistyka...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²⁵ See A. Barcz, *Realizm ekokrytyczny. Od ekokrytyki do zookrytyki w literaturze polskiej* [Ecocritical Realism: From Ecocriticism to Zoocriticism in Polish Literature], Katowice 2016, pp. 48–49.

²⁶ B. Massumi, *The Autonomy of Affect*, trans. into Polish by A. Lipszyc, “Teksty Drukie” 2013, no. 6, p. 124. The English version used here: “Cultural Critique” Autumn, 1995, no. 31, *The Politics of Systems and Environments, Part II*, pp. 83–109, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354446> (accessed: 18.07.2023).

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

rience, which always takes place at the moment of capturing affect, i.e. at the moment of “observable escape.” How does one remain faithful to this experience without entering linguistic areas and a narrative betrayal of oneself, without mediating one’s own affect? This problem has already been signaled in reference to Tadeusz Różewicz and his interpreters: Różewicz often pointed out the unbreakable connection between his poetry and somatic experiences. This is related to the question of taming and reducing the endless potentiality and virtuality of affect to cultural communicativeness, with the skill of avoiding dictionary/language traps too easily, or in an over-sophisticated and aestheticizing or ideological way blurring poetic inventiveness. Let us return to Massumi:

Concepts of the virtual in itself are important only to the extent to which they contribute to a pragmatic understanding of emergence, to the extent to which they enable triggerings of change (induce the new). It is the edge of virtual, where it leaks into actual, that counts. For that seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found.²⁸

Literature offers many examples of insight opening into the potential, many reports of other worlds peculiarly orbiting poets. Unwritten poetry, more significant than verse, hymns praising the one that comes “like a May night” are a recurring story told by poets, who discover the participatory connection or incompatibility of experience and its textual representation in various ways. In this context, let us consider the process behind Tadeusz Różewicz entering the first stages of creation of *Kartoteka* [File] (at the time – unwritten) with the poem *Rozebrany* [Undressed]:

All the memories images feelings messages
notions of experience which comprised me
they are not inter-connected they are not some complete whole
inside me²⁹

In this poem, as well as in his other works, already a year before he started working on his play, Różewicz thematized his sense of being internally broken, unable to unite his identity with himself, his memories and experiences.³⁰ Discovering a different version of himself to the one told/suggested

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 105.

²⁹ T. Różewicz, *Rozebrany* [Undressed], [in:] *idem*, *Kartoteka* [File], Wrocław 2002, p. 80.

³⁰ As Tomasz Kunz points out: “The paradox here is that in order to be in touch with oneself and go beyond one’s own disintegration, one needs to mediate their experience through symbolic forms, for only they can give experiences a significant form. In a disintegrated world, outside of literature the «I» is but a bunch of perceptive-memory processes, which is showcased perfectly by the protagonist of Różewicz’s *Kartorteka*, unable to merge the stream of

by existing narratives was transferred from the biographical-semantic level into the poem, which in turn opened the space for seeing himself in a completely unconventional stage position: “The author’s voice merged with the character’s voice, the character’s voice intertwined with the author’s voice, the antagonist and protagonist merged into one.”³¹ As we know, in *Kartoteka* the poet went beyond the dominating dramatic models, and today it is considered to be one of the most important Polish plays of the 20th century.

In this context, we should mention that Ryszard Nycz concludes his study of new contemporary Polish poetry with a quote from Czesław Miłosz, whose predictions from *Nieobjęta ziemia* [Vast Earth] Nycz associates with the courage of bad taste and the need to break free from accepted norms: “for this is the only chance for going beyond the world of received forms and received knowledge of the world, which does not require any engagement from us.”³² Such a transgressive subject in itself becomes a place where knowledge of self and the world is found and formulated:

he testifies to the authenticity of the experience he describes with himself. And indeed, he has some characteristics of a contemporary witness, for whom the past, neutral, external position is no longer possible – to the contrary; he can bear witness precisely because he participates in this reality and in the experience of the other. A participation thanks to which he gains access to his active, subjective knowledge expressed in the text.³³

If we were to search for a way to conceptualize the creative experiences discussed here in terms of how they are received by readers and researchers, we need to forget about the categories and conceptualizations of poetry distancing us from performative thinking/action; in some way we need to break free from modern literature’s way thinking and its rationality. For example, below there are three audio files recorded in three different places: a path in a forest, a city, and inside a building. They were recorded in May and June this year, but they are part of a collection comprising over 7,000 *wiersze bez tekstu* [textless poems], which I have been creating for fifteen years beyond paper, written record, the need to print them. I have explained my reasons for foregoing “textual worlds” in a few of my earlier articles and

memories, experiences, and impressions flowing through his mind.” T. Kunz, *op. cit.*, p. 131. See A. Ubertowska, *Tadeusz Różewicz a literatura niemiecka* [Tadeusz Różewicz and German Literature], Kraków 2001, p. 82.

³¹ A. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

³² R. Nycz, *Zaangażowani i niezrozumiali. Kilka uwag o młodej polskiej poezji współczesnej* [Engaged and Misunderstood: Some Remarks on Contemporary Polish Poetry], “Teksty Drugie” 2020, no. 5, p. 25.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

book chapters,³⁴ as well as in the present paper. The three audio files are only a fraction of various examples of listening for poetry which comes from anywhere, from the body and its affect, from the moment of being, hesitantly changed into words that do not want to be a narrative, nor an index of a moment, nor a text or a form. It is a question of whether there is any possibility of an answer that the subject can give to themselves – a subject who is a mystery for themselves.³⁵ This happening, by itself, foundationless and unrooted in anything, observed and felt in words and many possible images, afterimages, links, appears as a phantom of a mystery approaching us in this experience (Fig. 1):



Fig. 1. Links to audio files of poetic performances. M. Pieniążek, 2023.

The audio files are an example of an attempt at meeting the challenges which come from existence happening all around us, which also proves to be a peculiar challenge. It is very difficult to engage in a dialogue with it, as anxious gestures, intuitive commotion, words, emotional images, ad hoc metaphors, classifications and conventions put over situations are everything that we have at our disposal at the moment of such a meeting. In order to record one's reactions, one can use a smartphone, camera, the ability to videorecord a fraction of circumstances, talk, add words to the mental-physical action recorded using multimedia. When it comes to the effects of such mechanical notations, the less they are focused on the affective presence of a performer, and the more on the realism of record, the more they will prove to be disappointing and unsatisfying compared to what was felt and experienced at a moment of being completely absorbed by one's surroundings. Encounters with poetry emerging from subsequent moments, especially when it is e.g. a unique, unrepeatable experience – in which we feel close to the mystery of being, or like living

³⁴ M. Pieniążek, *Na granicy pisma: o technologiach poetyckiego wydarzenia* [On the Borders of Written Record: On Technologies of a Poetic Event], [in:] *Teksty, obrazy, performanse: zapisy doświadczeń i doświadczanie zapisu* [Texts, Images, Performances: Records of Experiences and Experiencing Record], eds. W. Doliński and D. Wojakowski, Kraków 2020, pp. 163–185. <https://rep.up.krakow.pl/xmlui/handle/11716/6979> (accessed: 20.05.2023).

³⁵ A poetically realized vocal opening to contacting reality that is still incomplete, in the process of constant creation, is also close to ecocritical conceptualizations of living, natural environment. See A. Dillard, *Pielgrzym nad Tinker Creek* [Pilgrim at Tinker Creek], trans. M. Świerkocki, Kraków 2010.

poems,³⁶ moving next to a reality described according to the rules and demanding to respect its narratives – require a special form of dialogue and authenticity.

A person, despite being aware of ambiguous manifestations of present-day authenticity,³⁷ striving for a performative answer to the mystery of their existence, seems to be a precious source of self-knowledge, especially when they share themselves with themselves and others in a radical performance,³⁸ in one of the closest forms to events preserved in the audio files above. A voice, breath, natural pauses and the possibility to place the presence of the creative subject in direct speech comprise one of the most interesting opportunities for analyzing poetic affect. The value of this experience is high, we feel it intuitively when, awed, we watch similar experiences on the stage or screen. A well-directed play thematizing internal experiences can be a successful repetition of the subjective experience indicated above, as well as remedying a poetic message. In the recent *Wymazywanie* [Erasing]³⁹ by Thomas Bernhard, directed by Klaudia Hartung-Wójciak at the Old National Theater, the protagonist is rendered present by the words and actions of many characters; he speaks with their voices, he is created by them, for “Franz-Josef Murau’s internal monologue was re-written for a dozen mostly female characters, who move in a delirious trance, encircling a big, dead deer.”⁴⁰ On stage, we see a special repetition triggered by the polyphonic dramatization of the source material. Franz, Bernhard’s alter-ego, is a product of multiple voices of his close, family surroundings. The repetition of many voices in the dramatic action shifts processuality onto the audience, who, just like the writer and the protagonist, construct a spatially received message about themselves and the world. Franz becomes available via a cloud of sensations and words, he is produced from a polylogue of lines and affects, he reaches us and happens like a cloud of

³⁶ This observation can be associated with statements by other poets, such as Tadeusz Peiper talking about a blooming poem. However, the poetic opening discussed here resembles an embodied, transmedially documented experience, in which text is not the goal of poetic activity.

³⁷ See O. Szmidt, *Autentyczność: stan krytyczny. Problem autentyczności w kulturze XXI wieku* [Authenticity: Critical State. Authenticity in 21st Century Culture], Kraków 2019, pp. 124–125, 218.

³⁸ See N. Romaszkan, *Performans radykalny w Polsce* [Radical Performance in Poland], <http://kocur.uni.wroc.pl/natalia-romaszkan-performans-radykalny-w-polsce/> (accessed: 20.05.2023).

³⁹ *Wymazywanie* [Erasing] according to T. Bernhard, directed by K. Hartung-Wójciak, Narodowy Stary Teatr w Krakowie, premiered June 18, 2022.

⁴⁰ P. Zarychta, *Bernhard pauperum*, “Dziennik Teatralny. Kraków”, June 25, 2022, <http://www.dziennikteatralny.pl/artykuly/bernhard-pauperum.html> (accessed: 12.06.2023).

conceptualized affect which brought him into existence, i.e. “the performance repeats the act of writing.”⁴¹ The agency of this process results from the right exploitation of a creative situation, which becomes an area of a repeated experience, demonstrated from many sides and inviting to co-create it.

In a way, opening oneself to such situations is like waiting for a special activity which takes place in a poetic action, waiting for a form of turning off existing narratives and turning on the epistemological lights to reveal individually uncovered paths of cognition. Turning oneself into a subject able to escape ready-made rationalizations, becoming – like J.M. Coetzee’s protagonist in *Life and Times* – an “escape artist,” escaping from imposed meanings, allows to avoid interpretative traps set by power and factors governing various systems of producing meanings and constructing history.⁴²

Surely such an opening to the world has little in common with producing literature based on some ready-made textual formula. This is not producing textual worlds, in which, just as in the concept developed by OuLiPo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle/ workshop of potential literature), stories flow from one text to another, without worrying about the moment of taking root in the experience and existential position of the writer. Being able to see literature, or rather some space resembling a cultural installation surrounding a subject, requires submitting to what is impossible to describe, record, preserve, and yet it is the only possible form that can be owned for the sake of a defective testimony of a subjective form of existence. The sense that a project of literary record appears in experiences of the world’s opacity is put forward by Joanna Orska, when – in line with Adam Ważyk – she stresses that the organization of verse resists entropy:

The way in which the representatives of the Polish avant-garde see verse not as a motionless structure imprisoned on a piece of paper, a “lyrical situation” understood as a mimetic representation of some previously recognized whole and simultaneously a representation of the lyrical “I”, but as a changing, fluid, aesthetic value, which resists entropy with its organization, entropy that is constantly drowning the world we experience and all its manifestations in chaos. The structure of a poem is like some mythical fortifications – and there seems to be more to this metaphor than just a simple analogy.⁴³

⁴¹ See A. Krajewska’s references to Deleuze’s theater of repetition, which is the opposite of the theater of representation: A. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

⁴² J. Franczak, *J.M. Coetzee i sztuka przemiany. Życie i czasy Michaela K. w perspektywie antropotechnicznej* [J.M. Coetzee and the Art of Transformation: *Life and Times of Michael* from the Anthropotechnical Perspective], “Wielogłos. Pismo Wydziału Polonistyki UJ” 2021, no. 2(48), p. 30.

⁴³ J. Orska, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

Looking at the process of constructing own space from the energy of poetry from today's perspective, at its power to raise barriers against too many voices and influences of the dynamically changing world, we should stress the value of opening to one's own experiences rather than the value of poetic syntax. This is an especially valuable form of the natural interface connecting the subject via an affective channel with what is still shaping this subject and its reality. This connection allows one to observe the chaos of cultures, languages, images as matter which can be shaped just by looking at it, in line with modern physics' suggestions. Using it would bring us closer to obtaining meaning without reducing rationality to genological reproductions or rhetorically sanctioned ways of writing/speaking. Slightly adjusting Adam Ważyk's conceptualization, one could say that taking a position in one's poetically constructed city/place would also allow to lean towards shapes of what is coming next, potentially possible to uncover.

Becoming a speaking and acting performer, being the body and word simultaneously intertwined in action is a task for both poets and their recipients, who might see a guide in the creative action taking place, a guide who experiments with tangible shapes in the space of experience. Creating poetry would therefore entail not only seeking forms for verbalizing it, but "waiving perceptual habits,"⁴⁴ searching for a relationship with time and the subjective aspect of action which could possibly take place within it. Poetry would require a non-ontological textual status, treating the literary as a mere cultural lesson in potential meanings found in a constellation of experiences, beyond the need for continuity and coherence resulting from the target construction or any other theory of verse.

Meeting the need to name one's world – stripped of ready-made conceptualizations, and non-textual for this reason (among other things) – a performer-poet constructs tools for a new rationality, creating opportunities for a dialogue with the experience of the present day. They also look for themselves in other people's testaments of action on the stage of today's culture.⁴⁵ The process in which an experimenting poet shifts from narrative to dramatic and performative aesthetics is convergent with contemporary considerations regarding the changing ways in which the subject participates in culture, and it is also connected with new types of theater acting and dramaturgy. After the experience of post-dramatic, post-media, and

⁴⁴ A. Dauksza, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

⁴⁵ As Ryszard Nycz points out, the testaments of what is currently shaping reality can be found in literary works from "more or less the past twenty-five years." See R. Nycz, *Zaangażowani i niezrozumiali...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15.

post-performance theater,⁴⁶ the stage (not necessarily theatrical) telling oneself does not require using knowledge of literary genres; instead, it invites one to freely remediate, and the role of the multiplicity of styles is to activate transmedia identity narratives.

The power of such works lies in the participatory presence of the subject in what is done and attested in a piece of art. Eschewing ready-made ways of talking in favor of searching for a language for oneself, i.e. one's own experiences, seems as obvious as it is available to artists who are aware of their objectives. Creating poetry would become more than a linguistic effort – opening oneself to a dramatic situation, the potentiality of a moment in which existence opens to time and looks for a new meaning for itself, which is not defined here and now yet. The poetic opening is an absolutely momentary reaction with one's surroundings, set off in a situation of cognitive helplessness, realized without preparation and a ready workshop full of words, notes, dictionaries, philosophies and aesthetics, without all the tools highlighting the experience of speech against the background of ready knowledge. This process opens us to the world most, and at the same time, the more readily it drifts away from realizing well-known judgments about ways of writing, aesthetics, philosophy, metaphysics, anthropology, the more cognitively attractive it becomes.

A significant aspect of this opening reveals a way of referring to a text of an actor playing a role as a task, and an actor striving towards performative acting, based on their own body, presence, reactions, processuality of existence. The performer-actor interacts with the stage of existence, whereas the task-oriented actor reproduces conventions. This difference is discussed in detail by Wojciech Baluch:

The credibility criterion is key in defining the difference between the two types of acting. In the case of traditional acting it is the ability to stay in character (doing the assigned task); even if it sometimes means going beyond previously established limits, it should be done with awareness and in a way that is meaningful or aesthetically significant. The performative actor constructs their credibility with their openness and – first and foremost – their readiness to set off processes whose sources lie mostly in themselves and their lively presence on stage.⁴⁷

Similarly to what the performative actor does, the poetic process of intercepting poetry discussed above is rooted in its own credibility, a special

⁴⁶ See *Post-teatr i jego sojusznicy* [Post-theater and Its Allies], ed. T. Plata, Warszawa 2018, p. 122.

⁴⁷ W. Baluch, *Po co dramaturgowi aktor performatywny?* [Why Does a Playwright Need a Performative Actor?], "Przestrzenie Teorii" 2021, no. 36, p. 142.

time revealed and functioning in the author's affect. A poet enters the area of their lively presence in order to activate all the means leading to capturing the twinkling phenomenon of his participation in the world forming in it. They become a medium for moments; indeed, they use the words of natural languages and cultural symbols, but in a given situation they transform into metaphors connecting somatic qualities with semiotic ones. To put it simply, in the performativity aesthetics meanings lean towards participation in an event⁴⁸ in order to break free from some previously adopted cognitive attitude, someone else's poetic form, and to follow time, avoiding ready lines/roles to be said/performed, which take credibility away from participation in an experience.

In these actions, style, aesthetics, writing ideas are a secondary result. This is because performative interception of poetry also means consciously setting oneself free from everything that enslaves in terms of aesthetics and ethics, everything that obliges and punishes in some way, for someone, something, or because of something. One could say that ideas and aesthetics come later, in Freud's *Nachträglich*, as in a post-traumatic consequence of experiencing the world and, at the same time, a moment and a language which either hurts the subject with its painfully disappointing forms, or awards them for the effort with a voice of participation in being, right after experiencing a poetic event. For the creative subject, words and ways of pronouncing them are last resorts found in the nick of time, which allow them to escape excessive sensations, at the same time feeling the artificiality and relativity of this seemingly life-saving gesture. Opening oneself to poetic affect resembles the work of a performative actor, thanks to whom, as a result of "shifting the main line of drama towards affectivity, the rules of discursive reception are no longer the leading element."⁴⁹ A poetic performer takes on cultural roles and achieves artistic goals on the mental stage, not "interpreting characters"⁵⁰ from the cultural canon or social scenarios, but activating and incorporating in his toolset the energy coming from their behaviors and answers. This creative entrance into a dramatic situation and attempts at naming one's own event can be illustrated with the performative actor who takes advantage of their acting skills in terms of improvisation and confrontation with the matter of art and life in order to extend the theatrical experience. His subjective presence on stage, the unexpected closeness of his enlarged face on screen, as well as the unusual energy which controls the whole performance – these all initiate processes

⁴⁸ See E. Fischer-Lichte, *Performatywność. Wprowadzenie* [The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics], trans. M. Borowski and M. Sugiera, Kraków 2008.

⁴⁹ W. Baluch, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

of affective and mental experience rather than close them. The actor must let go of their fear of text in order to help the audience turn off their learned inclination towards interpreting everything around them.⁵¹

A performative actor opening themselves to a stage experience so that the audience feels in touch with what shapes this shared experience and co-presence typically also requires suitable words, i.e. some amount of skill of a performance poet. “Fear of the text” can be transformed into its performative enactments, when they take place without fear of external and earlier interpretative pressures or obligations. However, such freeing reactions and relationships with culture need to be learned. Approaching oneself using well-known cultural scenarios, according to cognitive and interpretative patterns, often turns away from the intensity of one’s own experiences, whereas their most precious present “interceptions” can comprise convincing forms of an innovative and brave break-up with the post-modern doubts in being in touch with reality.

If we become performers of our experiences, we gain access to our own space in an area which is multi-perspective and very predatorily contemporary. The protagonist of J.M. Coetzee *Life and Times of Michael K* will be an important partner in the process of personal conversion “aimed at defending subjective sovereignty,”⁵² leading to delineating the area of individual ontological safety. As Jerzy Franczak (citing Peter Sloterdijk) points out, Michael K. combines the driving force of an escape and staging, and in his secession he “transforms [...] into a small state for whose inhabitants they must find the right constitution.”⁵³ Coetzee, by not offering a ready scheme of metanoia, indicates the need for an exercise experiment, similar to the one discussed here:

to single-handedly face the imperative inscribed in Rilke’s poem: “you must change your life.” Epiphanies of otherness are therefore accompanied by endless critical work focused on a profound revision of exercise practices which have dominated modernity.⁵⁴

If we were to see a poetic performer exercising in terms of existentialism, intercepting the creative affect would have a dimension of actions taking place inside culture rather than on some safe artsy training ground beyond

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

⁵² J. Franczak, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁵³ P. Sloterdijk, *Musisz życie swe odmienić. O antropotechnice* [You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics], trans. J. Janiszewski, Warszawa 2014, p. 314. English version: Cambridge 2013, p. 228.

⁵⁴ J. Franczak, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

society and culture, though in an act of intentional secession, which sets the poet free from preventative tools (for a moment), lethal to their social desires. Analyzing the conditions and possibilities of transforming oneself and one's cultural environment is not safe.

Therefore it is difficult to perceive any poetic activity as exploitation and reproduction of genres, knowledge of discourses, and organization of plots, even in the dimension of structural genericity of new meanings. If a positive verification of poetic affect resulted from knowledge of texts, the credibility of poetic "play for text" would be guaranteed by how faithful or unfaithful it was to other texts. However, if we expect something more than a rhetorical repetition or banal negation of commonly accepted discourse from poetry, we wait for signals of a special form of freedom, an agon with canonical or popular manifestations of culture, a gift made of seeing and acting beyond discourses and the reality they create.⁵⁵

This metaphorical "beyond" would mean here that poetry intercepted from the endless potentiality of affect would be an ability to see not through texts, but rather through what created them out of various potential situations. The aesthetics of a piece of art would thus be replaced with the aesthetics of an event.⁵⁶ For humanities, this would mean that we should teach poets the process of reading performances which are manifestations of the poetic experience, rather than poems, texts, and their construction. Poetry's agency is visible not in unfaithfulness to some letter, but in faithfulness to the poetically seen world shining through its black contours (or phonemes). A performer-poet demonstrated in action would prove to be a modern personalization of cognitive drama,⁵⁷ the more independent from any written text, the more profound.

Translated by Paulina Zagórska

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⁵⁵ See A. Bielik-Robson, *Duch powierzchni. Rewizja romantyczna i filozofia* [Surface Spirit: Romanticist Revision and Philosophy], Kraków 2004, p. 469.

⁵⁶ A. Krajewska, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

⁵⁷ See K. Fazan, "Hamlet Wyspiańskiego: scena grozy jako dramat absolutny" [Wyspiański's *Hamlet*: Horror Scene as Total Drama], [in:] *Sztuka słowa sztuka obrazu: prace dla Ewy Miodońskiej-Brookes* [Art of Word, Art of Image: Essays for Ewa Miodońska-Brookes], eds. J. Zach and A. Ziłowicz, Kraków 2009, pp. 97, 100.

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ABSTRACT. Jacek Wachowski, Textual Games. "Przestrzenie Teorii" special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 143–158. ISSN 1644-6763. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.7>

The article attempts to characterize literary practices which have emerged in recent decades due to the rise of new technologies. The titular "textual games" are experiments which test the stylistic and genre durability of popular literary works. They give rise to new technological formats and new genre variations (gamebooks or works written by artificial intelligence). As such, they also create a new and unique aesthetic and formal landscape and provoke reflection on contemporary literary practices and research strategies that can be used to describe them.

KEYWORDS: word processing, literary adaptations, literature and technology, literary studies

Performance design

Anne Ubersfeld pointed out that in theatrical texts we find "matrices" of performativity (*matrices textuelles de representative*). They can be read by recipients (actors, directors, and audience members) and, even more importantly, the generic features of texts are coded in them.¹ Jerzy Ziomek wrote about similar properties of literary texts, arguing that performance design is one of the most important components of a literary work – an integral part of its genological system. However, it does not help concretize the work² at the level of individual reading but informs the poetics of the text and defines its genre and stylistic frameworks.³

¹ A. Ubersfeld, *Reading Theater*, trans. F. Collins, Toronto 2002, p. 8. See also S. Świontek, *Dialog – dramat – metateatr. Z problemów teorii tekstu dramatycznego* [Dialogue – Drama – Metatheatre: The Theory of the Theatrical Text], Łódź 1990, p. 105.

² See R. Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature*, trans. G. Grabowicz, Evanston 1973, pp. 339–343 and R. Ingarden, *Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. K. Olsen and R.A. Crowley, Evanston 1973, pp. 329–330; A. Chrudzimski, *Teoria intencjonalności Romana Ingardena* [Roman Ingarden's Theory of Intentionality], "Edukacja Filozoficzna" 1998, no. 25, pp. 249–250.

³ "When we say that a text waits to be performed or that it demands to be performed, we do not mean a specific and individual performer, but a design that has the status of a role." Thus, it is not an individual representation or visualization of the represented world (concretization which takes place during individual reading) but a systemic design which contains genological and stylistic dispositions regarding performance. See J. Ziomek, *Projekty wykonawcy w dziele literackim, a problemy genologiczne* [Performance Design in a Literary Work of Art and Genological Problems], [in:] *Powinowactwa literatury. Studia i szkice*

Performance design is subject to change. It changes and transforms when the formal and stylistic aspects of a work change and transform, as seen in the, often surprising, “textual games.” On the one hand, such games are nothing short of literary experiments, the purpose of which is to test the “genre durability” of a given text. On the other hand, they are also very practical, as they give rise to new formats in response to the changing communication, cognitive and aesthetic needs of recipients.

We have been playing most “textual games” for a long time. They were described in the rhetorical tradition (schemes, composition, and figures of speech)⁴ and the literary tradition (intertextual transformations).⁵ In recent decades, they have been aided by digital technology, giving rise to innovations⁶ that transcend the standards set by analogue artistic practices.⁷ In this way, literature – just like the visual, musical, or performing arts – was transformed into a field of experimentation, a laboratory in which algorithms that track readerly patterns and then create new readerly needs became the new experts and curators.

Contemporary “textual games,” suspended between tradition and innovation,⁸ are heading in four directions. They give rise to new readings

[Affinities of Literature: Studies and Sketches], Warszawa 1980, pp. 102–132. K. Wóycicki, quoted by Ziomek, also wrote about this phenomenon, saying that “every text contains a certain way of delivering it”; see K. Wóycicki, *Forma językowa prozy polskiej i wiersza polskiego* [The Linguistic Form of Polish Prose and Polish Verse], Warszawa 1912, p. 12. See also A. Okopień-Sławińska, *Relacje osobowe w literackiej komunikacji* [Personal Relations in Literary Communication], [in:] *Problemy Socjologii Literatury* [Problems of Sociology of Literature], ed. J. Sławiński, Wrocław 1971, pp. 109–125.

⁴ Such modifications are inspired by rhetorical figures: *figurae per ordinem* (changing the syntagmatic order), *figurae per adiectionem* (adding new elements) and *figurae per detractioem* (based on subtraction). See J. Ziomek, *Retoryka opisowa* [Descriptive Rhetoric], Wrocław 1990, pp. 200–206.

⁵ See J. Kristeva, *Semiotique. Recherches pour une semanalyse*, Paris 1969 (see also J. Kristeva, *Problèmes de structuration du texte*, [in:] *Tel Quel: Théorie d'ensemble*, Paris 1968, pp. 297–316); G. Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris 1982; see also M. Głowiński, *O intertekstualności* [On Intertextuality], “Pamiętnik Literacki” 1986, no. 4, p. 77. See also S. Świąntek, *Dialog – dramat – metateatr*, Wrocław 1991; J. Wachowski, *Mit – dramat – tradycja. O transtekstualności w polskiej dramaturgii współczesnej* [Myth – Drama – Tradition: On Transtextuality in Contemporary Polish Drama], Poznań 1993, pp. 23–30.

⁶ N. Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, New York 1992.

⁷ Cf. H. Krauze-Sikorska, M. Klichowski, *Świat digital natives. Młodzież w poszukiwaniu siebie i innych* [The World of Digital Natives: Youth in Search of Themselves and Others], Poznań 2013. Many researchers emphasize that the current generation has never differed so significantly from the generation of their grandparents in terms of technological competence. These disproportions – often noticeable in the access to information and services – influence social behavior, customs, language, and value systems.

⁸ See J. Białostocki, *Tradycja i innowacja* [Tradition and Innovation], [in:] *Refleksje i syntezy ze świata sztuki* [Reflections and Syntheses from the World of Art], Warszawa 1987, pp. 11–17.

(thus taking the form of “interpretation games”); they allow readers to influence the course of events and animate characters and the represented world (“participatory games”); they allow one to experiment with different media (“format games”); and they use artificial intelligence to create new works (“technological games”).

Interpretation games

Interpretation games focus on the work. They reorganize its internal structure and adapt the text to new conditions of reception. The scope of such interventions is wide, ranging from adaptations that do not affect the deep structures of the original to adaptations that reorganize all levels of the work (starting with the general message, through composition, to language).⁹

An example of the former is the audio adaptation of Bolesław Prus’s classic novel *The Doll* (since October 6, 2020, available as an audio series).¹⁰ The text was modernized, that is, abridged (some dialogues and extensive descriptive parts, including Rzecki’s Diary, were omitted). Also, a new plot line was added, which, according to the authors, was supposed to attract younger readers. The cast (Julia Wieniawa, Adam Woronowicz, Wiktor Zborowski, Barbara Kurdej-Szatan and Maciej Musiał) and the audio effects (recreating the “sounds” of Warsaw in the second half of the 19th century) were meant to appeal to younger audiences.

This audio series of *The Doll*, even considering some narrative changes, did not try to change the linguistic layer of the novel or its message. The remakes of the Polish classics prepared as part of the “Allegro Lek-tury 2.0” [Allegro School Required Reading Books 2.0] project were much more radical in their approach. The classics were reinterpreted by various artists: Mery Spolsky, who presented a new version of Bolesław Prus’s “The Waistcoat”; Krzysztof Zalewski, with his interpretation of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz’s *The Shoemakers*; Natalia Szroeder’s interpretation of

⁹ Reorganizations refer to *inventio* as well as *dispositio* and *elocutio*. See J. Ziomek, *Retoryka opisowa*, op. cit., pp. 200–230.

¹⁰ The project was co-financed by the National Culture Center as part of the “Digital culture” program, the aim of which was to “counter the harmful myth that school required reading books are boring and uninteresting texts.” The producer’s website states that the characters of the modernized *Doll* reflect current generational characteristics, and the text itself can be a metaphorical illustration of social changes, conflicts, and tensions in the modern world, see ‘*Lalka*’ Bolesława Prusa odczytana na nowo w serialu audio. *Wieniawa i Woronowicz w rolach głównych* [*The Doll* by Bolesław Prus Starring Wieniawa and Woronowicz Read Anew as an Audio Series], <https://news.empik.com/109861-lalka-boleslaw-prusa-odczytana-na-nowo-w-serialu-audio-wieniawa-i-woronowicz-w-rolach-glownych> (accessed: 7.07.2023).

Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's *Modlitwa* [Prayer]; Rosalie, with her interpretation of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's *Farewell to Autumn*; Ajgor Ignacy, who adapted Jan Kochanowski's *Laments*; Julia Wieniawa, and her innovative interpretation of Adam Mickiewicz's *Świtezianka* [The Nymph of Lake Switez]; Monika Brodka, and her interpretation of Bolesław Leśmian's *Gad* [Reptile]; Nadia Długosz, and her version Stanisław Wyspiański's *The Wedding*; Natasza Urbańska, and her reading of Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis*; and Miuosh, who reinterpreted Cyprian Kamil Norwid's poem *Czarne kwiaty. Białe kwiaty* [Black Flowers. White Flowers].¹¹

These adaptations of the masterpieces of Polish literature, regardless of their genre, were constructed in a similar way. They were based on plot summaries – often told in contemporary, sometimes even colloquial, language – illustrated with fragments of original texts, and skillfully combined with a soundtrack (songs written especially for a given project). Thus, both the structure of the original work and its linguistic layer were reorganized. A literary work of art became a kind of addition to a new text; it created the impression that its essence is the plot, and that reading a literary work of art may be reduced to summarizing selected aspects of the original narrative using contemporary language.

Participatory games

Participatory games, which focus on the experience of the recipient, are different. They are not remakes of well-known texts but original works. Readers can thus decide in which directions specific plot lines should develop, what should happen to different characters (including their characteristic features), and how a given story should end. A literary work thus becomes a playing field in which the recipient creates their own narrative structures – narrative variants of the text – which vary depending on their personal aesthetic and cognitive preferences.

“Participatory games” bring to mind Bryan Stanley Johnson's novel *The Unfortunates*.¹² It was originally published in 1969 (6 years after Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*, which is considered one of the first books in which the reader could play a “textual game”) and reissued in 2008 by the New Direc-

¹¹ *Allegra Lekturey 2.0 – nowy projekt audio we współpracy Allegra i Storia by Astra* [Allegra School Required Reading Books 2.0 – A New Audio Project in Cooperation with Allegra and Storia by Astra], <https://brief.pl/allegra-lektury-2-0-nowy-projekt-audio-we-wspolpracy-allegra-i-storia-by-astra/> (accessed: 7.07.2023).

¹² The Polish edition of Johnson's novel, translated by Katarzyna Bazarnik, was published by the Kraków Ha!art publishing house in 2008.

tions publishing house in New York (35 years after Johnson's suicide). The experimental "book in a box" allows readers to create their own narrative structures using unnumbered pages. The novel, set in a vaguely defined urban space (one can only guess that it is Nottingham in central England, as the description of the Forest Recreation Ground suggests), consists of 27 chapters of varying length (some as short as a paragraph and some as long as 12 pages). The 25 chapters "in the middle", apart from the beginning and the end, can be read in any order, which means that the number of all possible combinations is 15.5 septillion (a septillion is 10^{42}).

Hypertexts have a similar structure. The concept behind them was developed in the 1980s, as computer databases made it possible to create complex plots. Readers could organize plot lines, choose the ending, and create characters.¹³ The aim of hypertexts was to create plot structures based on parallel narrative paths¹⁴ in which: "(...) the number of possible plot line combinations (...) is both an advantage and a challenge for the reader; the reader can abandon such a work of art due to the excess of lexemes and the excess of the plot, insofar as all possible combinations are too tedious – they destroy the unity of the work."¹⁵

Hypertexts were inspired by role-playing games (RPGs), in which players assume the roles of fictional characters. Adopting RPG strategies made it possible to transform the reading of the text into a game played in the reader/player's imagination, allowing them to develop existing plot lines and create new ones. What took place in a game – supervised by a gamemaster (who made sure that plot modifications comply with the limits of the represented world)¹⁶ – depended solely on the creativity of the players.¹⁷

The experience of role-playing games became an important inspiration for gamebooks, in which "the reader-player was to assume the role of the

¹³ See <https://www.techsty.art.pl/hipertekst/definicje.htm> (accessed: 8.07.2023).

¹⁴ Z. Fajfer, *Liberatura: hiperksięga w epoce hipertekstu* [Liberature: Hyperbook in the Age of Hypertext], [in:] *Liberatura czyli literatura totalna. Teksty zebrane z lat 1999–2009* [Liberature or Total Literature: Collected Texts 1999–2009], ed. K. Bazarnik, Kraków 2010, p. 4.

¹⁵ R. Bromboszcz, *Poezja cybernetyczna, hipertekst, liberatura, poezja neolingwistyczna...* [Cybernetic Poetry, Hypertext, Liberature, Neolinguistic Poetry...], [in:] *Od liberatury do e-literatury* [From Liberature to E-literature], eds. E. Wilk and M. Górńska-Olesińska, Opole 2011, pp. 58–59.

¹⁶ See *Gaming as Culture, Essays on Reality, Identity and Experience in Fantasy Games*, eds. J.P. Williams, S.Q. Hendricks, W.K. Winkler, Oxford 2006. See also *Olbrzym w cieniu. Gry wideo w kulturze audiowizualnej* [A Giant in the Shadows: Video Games in Audiovisual Culture], ed. A. Pitrus, Kraków 2012.

¹⁷ K. Jaworski, 'Wybór należy do Ciebie...' *Gry paragrafowe – druga młodość zapomnianej formy rozrywki* [The Choice Is Yours... Gamebooks – A Rebirth of a Forgotten Role-playing Game], "Studia Filologiczne Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego" 2015, no. 1, pp. 80–81.

main character and make choices that affect the plot.¹⁸ In the 1970s, commercial remakes of popular RPGs were very popular,¹⁹ including *Tunnels and Trolls* and *Choose Your Own Adventure*. Joe Dever's gamebooks also became extremely popular (9 volumes from the 28-volume *The Lonely Wolf* series were published in Poland). In 1987, the magazine "Razem" [Together] published Jacek Ciesielski's gamebook *Dreszcz* [Shiver].²⁰ *Goblin* [Goblin] was published a year later.²¹ In 2002, the *Masz wybór* [The Choice Is Yours] website was created, where fans of Polish gamebooks could find new releases.²² In 2010, the informal Wydawnictwo Wielokrotnego Wyboru [Multiple Choice Publishing House] and the online magazine *Masz wybór* were founded. They both popularize interactive culture (August 30th is the informal Day of Polish Bookgames celebrated by the Polish fans of Wydawnictwo Wielokrotnego Wyboru).²³

Polish gamebooks have been gaining popularity in recent years. The list of best-sellers is long and the most popular gamebooks are: Bartosz Idzikowski

¹⁸ Gamebooks were also inspired by literary experiments created in the first half of the 20th century. *Consider the Consequences!* by Doris Webster and Mary Alden Hopkins, published in 1930 by the well-known New York publishing house The Century Company, is considered the first gamebook. This relatively short 146-page novel tells the story of Helen Rogers and her two suitors, Jed Harringdale and Saunders Mead. It offers 43 different possible endings which depend on the decisions of the reader, who has to decide at the very beginning of the book which character tells them the story. On July 6, 2018, the book was read in excerpts on air on KZSC radio in Santa Cruz, USA, by James Ryan, with choices made by the station's listeners. See *Audience Adventure Radio Hour – Consider the Consequences (2018.7.6)*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWCu6PnK5ls> (accessed: 5.07.2023). Another example of a gamebook that actively engages the viewer is Ayn Rand's play *Night of January 16th* (inspired by the true events that led to the death of the Swedish match maker Ivar Kreuger). The drama takes place in a courtroom. The jurors, selected from among the members of the audience, have to decide whether the secretary is guilty of murder or not. Witnesses give their testimonies, and the verdict of the jury determines not only the ending of the play but also its course. The play premiered in 1934 in Los Angeles under the title *Woman on Trial*, and in the following year it was staged on Broadway (already under the title *Night of January 16th*). The story has also been adapted for television and radio. See A. Rand, *Night of January 16th*, New York 1971; B. Branden, *The Passion of Ayn Rand*, New York 1986.

¹⁹ Edmund Wallace Hildick is considered to be the author of the first gamebook. In 1967, he created a story about a cat (*Lucky Les*). See T. O'Hare, *Lucky Les – The Best Book Ever? – Reader, You Decide...*, <https://timohare.blog/2018/02/01/lucky-les-the-best-book-everreader-you-decide/> (accessed: 6.07.2023).

²⁰ *DRESZCZ – Gra Paragrafowa*, dudziarz.net, <http://www.dudziarz.net/dreszcz/> (accessed:6.07.2023).

²¹ *Goblin – Gra Paragrafowa – Jacek Ciesielski*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRSMCKY17-I> (accessed: 6.07.2023).

²² *Nasza Historia*, Masz Wybór, <https://masz-wybor.com.pl/> (accessed: 6.07.2023).

²³ *Masz Wybór | O książkach, w których Ty jesteś bohaterem*, <https://masz-wybor.com.pl/> (accessed: 6.07.2023).

and Jakub Caban's *Dziennik. Księga rytuałów* [Journal: The Book of Rituals]; Wojciech Grajkowski and Michał Gołębiowski's *Dziennik. Zagadkowa podróż* [Journal: A Mysterious Journey]; Krzysztof Firkowski's *Wagabunda* [Vagabond], Benjamin Muszyński's *Utopia* [Utopia], Jarosław Kloft's *Sąsiedzi Lonesbury* [Lonesbury Neighbors], Filip Wójcik's *Cyberkop. Cena nieśmiertelności* [Cybercop: The Price of Immortality], Igor Małyszczak's *Lot Żółtej Orchidei* [The Yellow Orchid Flight], Rafał Nowocień's *Czarny Legion* [Black Legion], Jarosław Irzykowski's *Wyspa Zmierzchu* [Twilight Island], Paweł Bogdaszewski's *Skafander* [Suit], Andrzej Bentkiewicz's *Pierścień lorda Hatifnata* [Lord Hatifnat's Ring], and Dominik Matusiak's *Amelia* [Amelia].²⁴

Most gamebooks are based on relatively simple narrative structures. Krzysztof Jaworski divides them into three categories: (1) "labyrinths" (the story is usually set in a "secret labyrinth" or "a dark forest," and the player must figure out how to get out of this complex structure); (2) "interactive narratives" (the player chooses to follow given plot lines); and (3) "mixed" (a hybrid combination of the other two).²⁵ It seems that the categories distinguished by Jaworski may also help us classify other interactive forms, in particular those based on RPG strategies (for example, interactive audiobooks).²⁶

Format games

Experiments in which a work is combined with its format – the medium in which it was recorded – is yet another fascinating example of a textual game. In this context, let me turn to two essays by Michel Butor, "Le Livre comme objet" and "Sur la page," which refer to the tradition of concrete poetry.²⁷ Butor argues that the experience of reading is shaped by the for-

²⁴ *Gry Książkowe, Masz Wybór*, <https://masz-wybor.com.pl/gry-ksiazkowe/> (accessed: 6.07.2023).

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ This is clearly visible in such productions as *1812: Serce Zimy* [1812: The Heart of Winter], created by Jarosław Beksa, Rafał Sadowski and Krzysztof Majewski and produced by Orange Polska in 2011. It employs solutions known from role-playing games: listeners (who assume the roles of the characters from the Napoleonic Wars) are asked to make decisions regarding directions in which specific plot lines develop and even how they greet someone (either sincerely or ironically). See *1812 SERCE ZIMY #01 | Nowy początek starej przygody*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5zs-5gl6dg> (accessed: 7.07.2023).

²⁷ See *TEKS-TURA. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki* [TEX-TURE: New Forms of Literary Texts and Text as a Work of Art], ed. M. Dawidek Gryglicka, Kraków 2005; J. Donguy, *Poésies expérimentales – Zone numérique (1953–2007)*, Paris 2007; A. Kremer, *Przypadki poezji konkretnej. Studa pięciu książek* [Cases of Concrete Poetry: A Study of Five Books], Warszawa 2015. See also *Cyfrowa poezja konkretna*, Korporeacja Ha!art, [149](https://web.archive.org/web/20191112020447/http://www.ha.art.pl/prezentac-</p>
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mat of the text: the shape of a book, typography, illustrations, and even the quality of paper.²⁸ The scholar further explains that the physical potential of the medium – creative use of page layout, margins, columns, running heads, footnotes, typeface – does not only affect the quality of reading but constitutes its integral part.²⁹ At the same time, he emphasizes that experiencing the text in and through the medium of the traditional book can help one challenge contemporary reading standards and strategies, which are nothing short of an “ultra-fast consumption,” the sense of which becomes outdated before the reader reaches the end.³⁰

Butor’s writings were an important point of reference for the development of *liberature* in Poland.³¹ “Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich” [Liberature: An Annex to the Dictionary of Literary Terms], published by Zenon Fajfer in 1999 in *Dekada Literacka* (a Krakow bimonthly published from 1990 to 2012), is considered the movement’s founding manifesto. The concept of *liberature* is based on the idea that, apart from the linguistic layer of the text, typography, format, typeface, graphic art, illustrations, and the quality of paper are also important. The very notion of authorship is thus expanded. The author is also the artist/the graphic designer who designed all of the above aspects of the work. The reading experience is thus transformed into a kind of game with the format and the medium – material in and through which a work exists.

Zenon Fajfer asked: “(...) is language the only ‘raw material’ of literature? Or maybe a sheet of paper on which one writes is also a ‘raw material’? (...) Can the concept of ‘form,’ that is ‘a specific way of arranging words and sentences’ (*Słownik Terminów Literackich* [Dictionary of Literary Terms], ed. J. Sławiński), be extended to include the physical shape of words and sentences? (...) Can the notion of form (...) be extended to include the physical format of the book? Does the concept of a literary work also include the physical shape and design of a book? Or is it just something that the print-

je/42-sownik-gatunkow-literatury-cyfrowej/2174-sownik-gatunkow-literatury-cyfrowej-cyfrowa-poezja-konkretna.html (accessed: 10.07.2023).

²⁸ M. Butor, *Essais sur le roman*, Paris 1992.

²⁹ See also *Liberatura, e-liberatura i... Remiksy, remediacje, redefinicje* [Liberature, E-literature and... Remixes, Remediations, Redefinitions], ed. M. Górska-Olesińska, Opole 2012.

³⁰ K. Bazarnik, *Krótkie wprowadzenie do liberatury* [A Short Introduction to Liberature], https://www.slideshare.net/mik_krakow/katarzyna-bazarnik-krtkie-wprowadzenie-do-liberatury (accessed: 4.07.2023).

³¹ Z. Fajfer, *Liberatura czyli literatura totalna. Teksty zebrane z lat 1999–2009* [Liberature or Total Literature: Collected Texts 1999–2009], ed. K. Bazarnik, Kraków 2010, p. 7. See http://haart.e-kei.pl/e-booki/Zenon_Fajfer_-_Liberatura_czyli_literatura%20totalna_PL.pdf (accessed: 10.07.2023). On the features of liberature, see also *Liberatura*, liberatura.pl, <https://liberatura.pl/> (accessed: 10.07.2023).

er, the bookbinder, and the publisher think of, usually in reference to the generally accepted rules and regulations? (...) The question of time is also problematic, albeit in a different context. *Słownik Terminów Literackich* distinguishes between ‘story time,’ ‘narrative time,’ and ‘time in a literary work,’ but there is no concept of ‘time of a literary work,’ that is, ... reading time.”³²

Fajfer, in cooperation with Katarzyna Bazarnik, tried to answer these questions in his project *Oka-leczenie* [Mute-I-Late].³³ The title *Oka-leczenie* refers both to the idea of playing with the visuality of text as well as consciously “mutilating” literature (or rather de-mutilating it),³⁴ as the reader enters a small, only 63-page-long text-labyrinth. A short description, which is meant to encourage the reader to embark on this strange journey, informs us that we now find ourselves at the bedside of a person who is dying, and the conversations take the reader deep into the dying man’s self. The text turned out to be a semiotic map, in which hidden meanings entered into non-verbal relations with one another, creating hypertextual structures. In order to organize (and understand) them, the reader had to pay attention to the color and the size of the font and word spacing, filling in the empty spaces and creating their own interpretations. For example, the first letters of words spelled out a new text, and repeating the whole procedure allowed the reader to decipher a word hidden “underneath.” Reading was thus a form of contemplation. It was the recipient-participant who determined its direction and pace.³⁵

Technological games

Among the most peculiar textual games are those which involve artificial intelligence.³⁶ Algorithms that imitate the linguistic structures of famous works are able to create simple narratives/texts in a specific style and/or genre. AI “poem generators,” that is, operating systems designed to create

³² Z. Fajfer, *Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich* [Liberature: An Annex to the Dictionary of Literary Terms], “Dekada Literacka” 30.06.1999, no. 5–6 pp. 8–9. See also http://haart.e-kei.pl/e-booki/Zenon_Fajfer_-_Liberatura_czyli_literatura%20totalna_PL.pdf (accessed: 4.07.2023).

³³ This project brings to life liberatic theory, that is non-verbal and typographic means of expression, layout, iconicity, self-reflexivity (metatextuality), hybridity (polymediality), interactivity and ergodicity (the reader’s involvement and effort). *Ibidem*, pp. 160–161.

³⁴ Ł. Matuszyk, *Liberackie ciało i jego ‘Oka-leczenie’* [Liberatic Body and Mute-I-Late], [in:] “Er(r)go. Teoria–Literatura–Kultura” 2016, no. 32(1), p. 45.

³⁵ K. Bazarnik, *Liberatura, czyli o powstawaniu nowych gatunków (literackich)* [Liberature, or the Creation of New (Literary) Genres], [in:] *Od liberatury do e-literatury*, eds. E. Wilk and M. Górska-Olesińska, Opole 2011, pp. 18–19.

³⁶ See K. Różanowski, *Sztuczna inteligencja: rozwój, szanse i zagrożenia* [Artificial Intelligence: Development, Opportunities and Threats], “Zeszyty Naukowe” 2007, pp. 110–111.

unusual combinations of words, rhymes, rhythmic patterns, metaphors, metonymy, and symbols collected in “poetry” databases are a good example of this. The popular Polish poem generator *Poeta* [The Poet] is able to imitate “poetical” lexical and phraseological structures and combine them into longer texts. It can generate a simple “generic” text: a *disco polo* song, a Gothic poem, or a love poem.³⁷

The installation *Please, Feed The Lions*, created by Es Devlin and Google Arts & Culture in 2018, was based on a similar concept. An interactive sculpture of a lion in London’s Trafalgar Square invited one to enter text on a touch screen, which then appeared in the lion’s mouth. The AI poem generator created surprising combinations of words and syntactic structures, extracting from them meanings which extended beyond the literal. Such “poems” were usually very short, no longer than one sentence, but they read like *bona fide* linguistic and formal poetic experiments.³⁸

In 2014, Margaret Sarlej, a PhD candidate at the University of New South Wales, Australia, devised the Moral Storytelling System, which generates a simple fable with a moral. Users were asked to choose one of the six main themes found in Aesop’s fables (retribution, greed, pride, realistic expectations, recklessness, and reward), and the system then generated a narrative sequence closely related to 22 different emotions displayed by characters in different types of stories.³⁹

In 2018, *1 the Road* was published – the first novel written by artificial intelligence (published by Jean Boîte Éditions) whose algorithm was designed by Ross Godwin.⁴⁰ The idea behind the book, which emulates Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, was simple enough: an algorithm that generates simple sentence sequences used the data collected by Goodwin during his trip from New York to New Orleans in March 2017⁴¹ (he covered the distance of 1,300 miles in 20 hours; a surveillance camera monitored and recorded the entire journey, a microphone recorded conversations inside the car, a GPS tracked the car’s location, and a computer clock was used to

³⁷ See <http://poetycko.eu> (accessed: 12.07.2023).

³⁸ See <https://artsandculture.google.com/project/please-feed-the-lions> (accessed: 7.07.2023).

³⁹ *Australijka opracowała program komputerowy, który pisze bajki z morałem*, Booklips.pl, https://booklips.pl/newsy/australijka-opracowala-program-komputerowy-ktory-pisze-bajki-z-morałem/#google_vignette (accessed: 11.07.2023).

⁴⁰ W. Orzeł, “*1 the Road*” to pierwsza powieść napisana przez sztuczną inteligencję, AI Business, <https://aibusiness.pl/1-the-road-to-pierwsza-powiec-napisana-przez-sztuczna-inteligencje/> (accessed: 14.05.2021).

⁴¹ T. Hornigold, *The First Novel Written by AI Is Here – and It’s as Weird as You’d Expect It to Be*, singularityhub.com, <https://singularityhub.com/2018/10/25/ai-wrote-a-road-trip-novel-is-it-a-good-read/#sm.00069qm10ebdl7uan103cdtnog> (accessed: 11.07.2023).

keep track of time).⁴² Goodwin chose not to edit the text, thus allowing us to study AI's choices. As a result, the prose is stylistically imperfect, rough, and at times illogical.⁴³

In August 2020, TechGame announced that *AI: When a robot writes a play*, written entirely by robots and artificial intelligence as part of the THEaiTRE project, would premiere in January 2021 (it eventually opened on February 26, 2021).⁴⁴ It is estimated that the play could be seen by up to 30,000 people (it was viewed on different devices 18,450 times). The play proves that artificial intelligence is able to write dialogues, formulate simple statements, as well as ask and answer questions. However, it is clearly limited when it comes to creating larger operational structures, such as story arcs and other narrative structures.⁴⁵

The GPT-2 algorithm, created by OpenAI and designed to produce original content, seems to be much more efficient in this respect. The algorithm can predict which word, found in a vast dataset comprising 40 GB of Internet text, can be logically and correctly combined with the previous one. GPT-2 is able to generate informational texts, short stories, fake news, and literary works. It can also write texts using a metalanguage (characteristic for a given discipline/academic field), including student final papers and diploma theses.⁴⁶

⁴² *An AI and an artist go on the road*. "The idea was to write a novel with a car", CBC Radio, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/spark/409-1.4860495/an-ai-and-an-artist-go-on-the-road-the-idea-was-to-write-a-novel-with-a-car-1.4860760> (accessed: 11.07.2023).

⁴³ Very unusual syntactic structures may be found in the novel: "It was nine-seventeen in the morning, and the house was heavy"; "The bowl is made of wood in the middle of the street and nothing comes into its middle"; or "The table is black to be seen, the bus crossed in a corner. A military apple breaks in. Part of a white line of stairs and a street light was standing in the street, and it was a deep parking lot". See W. Orzeł, "1 the Road" to pierwsza powieść..., *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ The play commemorated and celebrated the centenary of the R.U.R. (Rossumovi Univerzální Roboti) play directed by Karel Čapek (the play introduced the terms "science fiction" and "robot" into everyday language; it was translated into 30 languages less than three years after it premiered). See S. Janowski, *THEaiTRE, czyli sztuka teatralna napisana przez roboty. Premiera już niedługo*, Techgame, <https://techgame.pl/sztuka-040820-sj-napisana-przez-roboty-i-sztuczna-inteligencje> (accessed: 11.07.2023).

⁴⁵ S. Both, *Review: AI: When a Robot Writes A Play, Czech Centre London*, A Younger Theatre, <https://www.ayoungertheatre.com/review-ai-when-a-robot-writes-a-play-czech-centre-london/> (accessed: 11.07.2023).

⁴⁶ *GPT-2 – sztuczna inteligencja zdolna do pisania własnych treści*, CTS SZKOLENIA PL, <https://cts.com.pl/baza-wiedzy/gpt-2-sztuczna-inteligencja-zdolna-do-pisania-wlasnych-tresci/#:~:text=GPT-2%20E2%80%93%20sztuczna%20inteligencja%20zdolna%20do%20pisania%20w%C5%82a%20swoich,postawie%20ogromnej%20bazy%20s%C5%82%C3%B3w%20zawartych%20na%20stronach%20internetowych> (accessed: 11.07.2023).

Conclusion

Textual games lead to several conclusions. First, they demonstrate that the needs of readers have changed (and are still changing). A new type of recipient has emerged; they seem to be much more interested in the technological remakes of works of literature than in their traditional written renditions. This recipient, who is mostly interested in brief, and perhaps even fragmentary, reading, also performs important social functions: they co-create the commercial literary market and influence the aesthetic sensitivity of those who will read such texts in the future.

Secondly, textual games prove that the performance design of a literary work can be subject to genre negotiations between the audience (whose aesthetic sensitivity is shaped by visual and audio culture) and the publishing market (guided by economic criteria). The arising tension leads to a more general reflection on the changing status of a literary work, as well as genre typologies.

Thirdly, textual games inspire reflections on formal and aesthetic changes triggered by technology. Literary works can be created thanks to technology, and, respectively, they can increasingly use patterns created by artificial intelligence, robots, learning machines, or augmented reality. The impact of technology on the creation of new narratives is difficult to ignore and requires in-depth study by an interdisciplinary team which comprises both literary scholars and representatives of other disciplines.

Fourthly, technological development is also associated with ethical and legal risks. The ease with which it is possible to copy and modify other people's texts, plagiarize them, and program machines to produce fake news proves that technological development has outpaced legal, ethical, and moral regulations.⁴⁷ This also applies to literature and the publishing market. In this context, questions concerning the author, the author's (unique) style, as well as plagiarism, or simply imitation, take on a new meaning.

Last but not least, textual games also inspire reflections on the status of contemporary literary studies. The scale and the scope of the discussed experiments make the creation of new research approaches, "practical methodologies" used to analyze specific works, necessary. This means that we do not have a universal "toolbox" at our disposal but only individual

⁴⁷ See J. Wachowski, *Deepfejkki – medialne falsyfikacje ciała. Cechy, funkcje, strategie komunikacyjne* [Deepfakes – Media Falsifications of the Body: Features, Functions, Communication Strategies], "Czas Kultury" 2022, no. 4, pp. 209–224.

instruments that allow for a fragmentary analysis of the whole.⁴⁸ This, in turn, requires that we activate broader cognitive contexts, including social, psychological, communication and economic studies.

Translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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⁴⁸ See E. Domańska, *Jakiej metodologii potrzebuje współczesna humanistyka?* [What Methodology Does the Contemporary Humanities Need?], “Teksty Drugie” 2010, no. 1–2, pp. 45–55.

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The Possibilities of Theory – the Theory of Possibilities

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This essay attempts to describe a new field of research in contemporary literary theory, defined in terms of performative, dramatic, and dramaturgical interactions and relations. The focus is placed on the dynamic movement of concepts and categories, as it allows theory to keep up with the constant new developments in literature and culture. These movements give rise to a dramatic discourse that replaces traditional methodologies. Such a transdisciplinary dialogue allows for a complex play of meanings. Any theory is a sum of choices made from among many possibilities, compatible approaches and ideas, and potential perspectives. In the new theoretical perspective described in this essay, no theory of a work of art is rejected and each remains valid, as long as it functions inclusively in a field of many different possibilities. The dramaturgy of concepts, the potential tensions and possible contradictions between them, which, paradoxically, are not mutually exclusive, complex plays and displacements, fractures and entanglements, open up new theoretical horizons.

Indeed, we should ask whether the time of grand theories has passed or whether one of the most comprehensive literary theories is being created today, as it unites all past and future concepts involved in the study, interpretation, and reception of literature. It is the theory of possibilities.

KEYWORDS: literary theory, performativity, synthesis, dramaticity, dramaturgy, turn in literature, traveling concepts

Sometimes theory seems less an account of anything than an activity – something you do or you don't. You can be involved with theory; you can teach or study theory; you can hate theory or be afraid of it. None of this, though, helps much to understand what theory is.

J. Culler, *Literary Theory*

[...] w języku, którym mówimy, nie wypowie się wszystkich tych tragicznych kalektów i ograniczeń języka, którym mówimy. Nie da się nawet opowiedzieć, dlaczego pewnych rzeczy nie da się opowiedzieć [...] the language we speak cannot express all these tragic

*incapacities and limitations of the
language we speak. You cannot even say
why certain things cannot be said.*

J. Dukaj, *Lód* [Ice]

Literary theory has never been homogeneous. Moreover, it became literary theory relatively late. Jonathan Culler emphasizes that initially we only talked about “theory,” without any further contexts.¹ Culler further writes that literary theory is “a body of thinking and writing whose limits are exceedingly hard to define.”² However, it is not only due to the fact that we are constantly searching for new literary and interpretative methodologies³ (although this has inspired many new theories) but also due to the fact that literature, by default, transgresses its own boundaries and engages in a critical discourse with other cultural fields.

Literature is an almost undefinable entity because every attempt to enclose it within rigid theoretical frameworks has sooner or later ended in failure. Perhaps we should adopt a different perspective and no longer ask about the limits of literature and instead reflect on whether literature has ever had any boundaries? Even in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which provided a theoretical framework for the study of literature for centuries, we find gaps and understatements, which allow us to describe it as a certain possibility – a hypothesis of an unfinished grand theory. The chapter on comedy remains lost. Perhaps classic theoretical thought is just one perspective from which looking at a work of art? Many others exist.

The many different literary theories and definitions of a literary work and the numerous different answers to the question about what literature is seem in themselves to prove that the only indisputable form of literature is potentiality. Various theoretical approaches have been developed over the centuries and there has always been at least one formal, content-related, or theoretical issue that defied the imposed frameworks and rendered the definitions of literature more and more general, and thus also more and more broad and less and less hermetic. This, in turn, led to new problems with defining what could and what could not be considered literature. Many different literary and literary-related phenomena inspired different attempts at systematization, gave rise to new revolutionary concepts, and triggered wars between competing schools of literary studies. The end of

¹ See J. Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2011, p. 1.

² *Ibidem*, p. 3.

³ *Cf. ibidem*, pp. 3–4.

literature,⁴ the death of the author,⁵ and the end of theory have been announced many times. Reflecting on whether literary theory still exists, Anna Burzyńska jokingly writes that:

The moment a poster advertising a scholarly meeting which revolved around the question “Does literary theory still exist?” appeared on the bulletin board of the Faculty of Polish Studies at the Jagiellonian University, at least a dozen people grabbed my hand in the corridor and asked hopefully: “It doesn’t exist, right? Certainly, it doesn’t exist?” Others, half-jokingly, said to me: “Listen, I will come to your meeting if you announce that theory does not exist...”⁶

Burzyńska emphasizes that “[w]e all know that people hate theory; it is, of course, nothing new, even though we still cannot explain the reasons behind it. This animosity stems from both the dream of *The Grand Theory* which could explain all literary forms and experiences [...] as well as the many different complex theoretical concepts (sign of the times).”⁷ The latest research trends in the field of literary studies have given rise to many theories that now coexist, intertwine, and tangle; they create tensions and alliances, and ultimately turn into a strange, polyvocal, even cacophonous entity known as literary theory.

“The Old” vs. “The Young”

The study of literature has been subject to dramatic changes, defined in terms of the so-called turns, that is “points of interest; changes in focus.”⁸ However, it seems that in this case the basic meaning of the word – “change

⁴ Joseph Hillis Miller begins *On Literature* by discussing the end of literature. He points to a paradox that all theorists must face: “the end of literature is at hand. Literature’s time is almost up. It is about time. It is about, that is, the different epochs of different media. Literature, in spite of its approaching end, is nevertheless perennial and universal. It will survive all historical and technological changes. Literature is a feature of any human culture at any time and place. These two contradictory premises must govern all serious reflection ‘on literature’ these days”. J.H. Miller, *On Literature*, London 2002, p. 1.

⁵ See R. Barthes, *The Death of The Author*, trans. S. Heath, [in:] *idem, Image-Music-Text*, London 1977, pp. 142–148.

⁶ A. Burzyńska, *Czy teoria literatury jeszcze istnieje?* [Does Literary Theory Still Exist?], “Teksty Drugie” 2006, no. 1–2, p. 40. Burzyńska discusses the history of literary theory in a light and accessible way, all the way up until the 2000s.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

⁸ *Zwrot* [turn], [entry in:] *Słownik Języka Polskiego* [Dictionary of the Polish Language], online, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/zwrot.html> (accessed: 10.10.2023).

in the direction of movement”⁹ – is more telling because each new turn has not only moved away from the concept of literature and literary theory as static and constant but also opened up new fields of research, literally making literary scholars turn to specific questions and problems.

The greatest blow to the traditional grand theory of structuralism was dealt by the “young”¹⁰ in 1966 at the conference “The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man.” It was there that post-structuralism was born, paving the way for virtually all new critical literary perspectives. Jacques Derrida’s paper “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences” opened a discussion about both literary theory as such and postmodern culture in general, leading to the birth of postmodernism.¹¹ As Burzyńska emphasizes, “the most important thing in this theoretical

⁹ *Ibidem*. The problems with defining “turns” have been discussed by such scholars as Grażyna Gajewska in *Antropologia cyborgów wobec zwrotu performatywnego* [Anthropology of Cyborgs and the Performative Turn] (See G. Gajewska, *Antropologia cyborgów wobec zwrotu performatywnego*, [in:] *‘Zwroty’ badawcze w humanistyce. Konteksty poznawcze, kulturowe i społeczno-instytucjonalne* [‘Turns’ in the Humanities: Cognitive, Cultural, and Socio-Institutional Contexts], eds. J. Kowalewski and W. Piasek, Toruń 2010, p. 117). Anna Krajewska, on the other hand, discusses “turns” in the context of dance, where “dance stands for permanent changes in the field. It relies not so much on choreography as on one’s own unique and sometimes unpredictable expression which animates this field, this realm of dance. Everything that is found in this space (field) undergoes remodeling. Dance becomes performative (the boundaries between a (more or less) codified script and free bodily expression are blurred) as the person who reinterprets the areas traversed turns (literally – as they dance – and figuratively – by adopting new research perspectives)” (A. Krajewska, *‘Zwrot dramatyczny’ a literaturoznawstwo performatywne* [The ‘Dramatic Turn’ and Performative Literary Studies], *‘Przestrzenie Teorii’* 2012, no. 17, p. 38).

¹⁰ I have used this term to emphasize a certain kinship with the great historical and literary disputes between the “old” and the “young.” Anna Burzyńska notes that “the theoretical dispute between poststructuralists and structuralists to some extent resembled the dispute between romantics and classicists. Structuralists relied on pure reason – rules, conceptual schemes, universal models, generalizations, grammars, systems, and taxonomies. And post-structuralists relied on [...] reason – but reason devoid of many illusions, which had been dispelled by, among others, Freud. Therefore, the forays undertaken by poststructuralists were intended to shine the light of theoretical reflection on everything which, for obvious reasons, the model of “strong” theory rejected and yet what could be found in the living language of literature: the experiences of writing and reading, creative freedom of writing and interpretation, the pleasure of reading, the sensuality of language, the physicality of the subject, and above all the unique nature of literature as an event” (A. Burzyńska, *Czy teoria literatury...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–43).

¹¹ Poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postmodernity are often used interchangeably. Although they are related, they describe slightly different cultural phenomena. Post-structuralism refers to literary studies and, to put it simply, is a methodology used to study different texts. Postmodernism is a philosophical trend which seeks to revise the modernist belief in the systemic and permanent nature of concepts and values. Postmodernism is all about liquidity. Postmodernity, on the other hand, (derived from postmodernist assumptions)

dispute [...] was the age-old gap between theory and practice, which had been deepened by the modern paradigm of knowledge – specifically, the constantly growing gap between the theory and practice of interpretation. Therefore, what was mostly criticized was, above all, theory’s tendency to control interpretation.”¹² Poststructuralism also became a matrix of other “post-movements,” contributing greatly to the pluralization of theory. It was the beginning of an extremely important critical discussion.¹³

Indeed, we should start our discussion of cultural post-revolutions by examining the prefix “post.” Paradoxically, it signifies the transformation of the “old” into the “new,” regardless of what follows it. Burzyńska thoroughly analyzes the meanings of “post” in her article *Poststrukturalizm, dekonstrukcja, feminizm, gender, dyskursy mniejszości i co dalej?* [Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, Feminism, Gender, Minority Discourses and What’s Next?]. She draws attention to the fact that the prefix “post,” regardless of what theoretical, cultural, or philosophical phenomenon it is associated with, “points not only to its apparent dependence on what follows [...] but also to a quite complex relationship between both. ‘Post’ means as much as ‘after (something)’ and (at the same time) ‘meta.’ However, ‘meta’ in this case means not only ‘beyond’ or ‘about (something)’ [...] but also [...] implies a shock therapy.”¹⁴ Burzyńska compares the meaning of “post” with Heidegger’s “Verwindung” in order to thematize “a specific tradition (model, paradigm) which is *verwinded* (that is experimentally suspended) so that it can be thoroughly analyzed. It means both ‘overcoming’ and focusing on something; it means a withdrawal (from) and a turn (towards) something; it means questioning some assumptions and developing others (usually in a radicalized form); it means intimacy and reluctance, love and hate. [...] In short, ‘post’ is a critical process within a given tradition (model, paradigm). But note that it is ‘critical’ in the philosophical sense, that is it is focused on examining the possible.”¹⁵ All areas of research acquired by postmodernist thought therefore inherently contain contradictions, which paradoxically coexist, mutually construct, and legitimize each other. They become simultaneous possibilities that interact, and which allow one to choose one’s interpretive path more or less at will.

is primarily concerned with reflection on social issues. In this article, I do not follow such strict distinctions and I use all three terms interchangeably.

¹² A. Burzyńska, *Czy teoria literatury...*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹³ I will not discuss all ‘post’ trends, as it exceeds the scope of this essay and is in itself unoriginal.

¹⁴ See A. Burzyńska, *Poststrukturalizm, dekonstrukcja, feminizm, gender, dyskursy mniejszości i co dalej?* [Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, Feminism, Gender, Minority Discourses and What’s Next?], “Przestrzenie Teorii” 2002, no. 1, p. 69.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 69–70.

We also cannot forget that by challenging the systemic nature of theory, poststructuralists democratized it, ensuring that new theoretical concepts would be developed in relation to specific literary phenomena. Thus, they bridged the gap between theory and practice and, at the same time, gave rise to different “turns.” They, in turn, led to the birth of other analytical and interpretive trends.

Turns at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries¹⁶

Literature functions in a wider cultural context. In the light of the above reflections on postmodernism, such a statement seems somewhat risky because it seems to deprive the literary text of the ability to function in isolation from history, the author, and the circumstances of its creation, i.e. everything that poststructuralists tried to challenge. However, texts and culture coexist, regardless of time and place, because literature always affects the reader here and now, evoking associations and projecting references to his or her times. The cultural turn that took place in the 1990s opened literary studies to other, not necessarily related, fields, which made literature interact, albeit still from an autonomous position, with culture. The relationship between literature and culture is dynamic and liquid yet constant.

Ryszard Nycz explains that the cultural theory of literature was based on three main principles. Firstly, literary studies were meant to remain a separate and original discipline – one which was not dependent on the theory and methodology of cultural studies. Secondly, “literary studies were to be re-connected with the wider cultural context by (a) emphasizing that the cultural is not located outside the literary, as it constitutes the inalienable and inherent element of both literary studies and literature; and by

¹⁶ Writing about turns in the latest humanistic theories, I make use of the theory of possibilities and subjectively pick and choose the most important ones. I realize that I do not comment on many important changes/turns. In the introduction to the edited collection *Zwroty’ badawcze w humanistyce. Konteksty poznawcze, kulturowe i społeczno-instytucjonalne* [‘Turns’ in the humanities: Cognitive, cultural, and socio-institutional contexts], Jacek Kowalewski and Wojciech Piasek provide a (as they observe, most likely incomplete) list of ‘turns’ in the Polish humanities. “So, we have the anthropological turn, the cultural turn, the Darwinian turn, the dramatic turn, the ethical turn, the iconic turn, the interpretive turn, the turn to things, the narrativist turn, the performative turn, the cognitive turn, the pragmatic turn, the rhetorical turn, the topographic turn...” (See *Zwroty’ badawcze w humanistyce. Konteksty poznawcze, kulturowe i społeczno-instytucjonalne*, eds. J. Kowalewski and W. Piasek, Toruń 2010, p. 7). All these (and other) cultural changes were of great importance for literary studies. However, discussing all of them exceeds the scope of this essay.

(b) using the critical categories and contexts of cultural studies (race, class, gender, age, ethnicity, power, etc.) in the study of literature [...] (text, genre, narrative, fiction, performativity, interpretation, etc.).”¹⁷ Thirdly, the goal was to restore the view of “(the study of) literature as a source of knowledge about the world, insofar as (a) literature should no longer be reduced to linguistic and communicative experiments and rules and (b) literature should again be seen as a textual (discursive) representation of reality – as such, literature, as an object of study, is both similar to and different from other human sciences.”¹⁸ In a broader context, the changes introduced by the cultural theory of literature are discussed in a collective volume edited by Ryszard Nycz and Michał Paweł Markowski, entitled *Kulturowa teoria literatury. Główne pojęcia i problemy* [The Cultural Theory of Literature: Key Concepts and Problems].¹⁹

Burzyńska argues that the cultural turn in theory has been “one of the most important developments in the humanities in recent years.”²⁰ It is hard to disagree with this statement. Without the cultural turn, all subsequent innovations in literary studies and literary theory would probably get lost in the wider postmodernist theoretical landscape; despite announcing the end of theory, postmodernism began to transform into another grand theory – the theory of academic negation and chaos.

Respectively, embracing cultural studies also prompted a theoretical interest in the emotions and affect in literary studies. As Barbara Myrdzik emphasizes, the affective turn sparked three coexisting and independent trends; they approach affect as a bodily phenomenon, as a symptom, and as a flow of intensity.²¹ Such a vision of affect is closely related to the concept of emotion, which for Myrdzik is a transformed and recognized affect, whose “form is determined by the social and cultural context.”²² Emotions

¹⁷ R. Nycz, *Antropologia literatury – kulturowa teoria literatury – poetyka doświadczenia* [Anthropology of Literature – Cultural Theory of Literature – Poetics of Experience], “Teksty Drugie” 2007, no. 6, p. 38.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 38–39.

¹⁹ See *Kulturowa teoria literatury* [The Cultural Theory of Literature], eds. M.P. Markowski and R. Nycz, Kraków 2012. Apart from essays by Markowski and Nycz, we also find in the collection texts by Anna Burzyńska, Roma Sendyka, Elżbieta Rybicka, Anna Łebkowska and Teresa Walas, among others. The variety of critical approaches adopted by the abovementioned scholars is a testament to how broad the cultural theory of literature is as a category.

²⁰ A. Burzyńska, *Kulturowy zwrot teorii* [The Cultural Turn in Theory], [in:] *Kulturowa teoria literatury*, eds. M.P. Markowski and R. Nycz, Kraków 2012, p. 42.

²¹ See B. Myrdzik, *O niektórych konsekwencjach zwrotu afektywnego w badaniach kulturowych* [On Some Consequences of the Affective Turn in Cultural Studies], “Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin – Polonia Sectio N” 2017, vol. 2, pp. 116–117.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 120.

are ambiguous because they rely on “[...] seemingly paradoxical oppositions – they engage both meaning and feeling, and belong to the sphere of both the corporeal and the reflexive. Emotional experiences are private and individual, but they are also transmitted to others and shaped by the community.”²³ Ryszard Nycz also refers to the community in his introduction to the special issue of “Teksty Drugie” devoted to affective manifestos:

[...] emotions and feelings which are jointly manifested and articulated are shared in both senses of the word: they unify and differentiate; they unite and divide at the same time. They stimulate groundbreaking, unpredictable, political actions and retroactively modify the shared memory of the collective past. The sterilized image of the classic subject, the I who is rational and in full control of himself, his relationships with others and the world, needs to be replaced by the vision of an individual with an embodied mind who does not so much control but evokes and negotiates his needs and goals, his relationships with others as well as with the more-than-human world – and all this takes place in the open-ended field of sensory and affective experiences.²⁴

The influence of affective theory was particularly visible in the changes that took place in the processes of constructing identity and subjectivity. Its postulated openness to community experience was particularly appreciated by the scholars who believed that the “classic rational subject” described by Nycz limited the freedom and individuality of the I and his own vision of himself. “The concept of the disintegrated, melancholic, dispersed ‘self’ in ‘internal exile’ clashed with gender and queer theories, which assumed that gender is conventional – it is a social construct. [...] The sensory aspect of the emerging I thus became extremely important. Philosophy and art again focused on the body. [...] Affect made one open to a wide range of relationships and engagements, including disability studies.”²⁵

The return of affect has, to some extent, paved the way for another trend which focused on the affective subject that “makes kin” with others. The posthuman turn, one of the most significant theoretical revolutions since the advent of poststructuralism, influenced most cultural theories of the late 20th century. The birth of the posthuman – man entangled in complex relationships with nature and equal to other-than-human beings; a human-cyborg who becomes one with a machine that allows him to live or enhance his imperfect nature; machines with human features, intelligence and sensitivity; the Vitruvian man who, as Ihab Hassan writes,

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ R. Nycz, *Afektywne manifesty. Wstęp* [Affective Manifestos: Introduction], “Teksty Drugie” 2014, no. 1, pp. 9–10.

²⁵ B. Myrdzik, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

“has broken through its enclosing circle and square, and spread across the cosmos”²⁶ – constitutes a turning point in how we think about man’s role in nature and, more broadly, in the universe, as well as a premise for revising the categories of identity and subjectivity. Monika Bakke emphasizes that “man – the human form of life – has been changing faster and more radically than ever before. This happens both on a material level, through the direct impact of technology on the human body, and on a mental level, as science proves just how closely we interact with other-than-human life forms, which contributes to an increase in ethical awareness.”²⁷ Man has lost his privileged position in the natural world, becoming merely one of the many cogs that power the mechanism of the universe.

Posthumanism, like most theoretical trends, is not homogeneous. We can distinguish between its purely philosophical varieties (focused on deconstructing the classic modern humanities²⁸), technosophical and transhumanist variants (which focus on the relationship between man and technology and the achievements of biotechnology²⁹), and variants which focus the distinction between *bios* and *zoe* (the study of all forms of life and the interactions between them³⁰). Posthumanism is also read in the wider context of what Bauman calls fluidity. Grażyna Gajewska writes that “[t]he theoretical and critical reflection focuses on fluid relationships [...] between the human and the non-human, that is, between humans and technology, things, as well as between humans and other animals or, even more broadly, plants, sand, and water. Distinctions into species, genders, sexual orientations, races, and social classes give way to a non-essentialist concept of the self – one in constant motion, one acting in entanglement with humans and non-humans.”³¹ Importantly, posthuman theories also engage with the concept of *in silico*, that is, life in the digital space.

²⁶ I. Hassan, *Prometheus as Performer: Toward Posthumanism Culture?*, “The Georgia Review” 1977, vol. 31, no. 4, [quote after:] P. Zawojcki, *Posthumanizm, czyli humanizm naszych czasów* [Posthumanism, or the Humanism of Our Times], “Kultura i Historia” 2017, no. 32, p. 69.

²⁷ M. Bakke, *Bio-transfiguracje. Sztuka i estetyka posthumanizmu* [Bio-Transfigurations: The Art and Aesthetics of Posthumanism], Poznań 2012, p. 7.

²⁸ It is worth mentioning here Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, Charles Taylor, and Giorgio Agamben, among other theorists.

²⁹ See the works of Elaine Graham, Donna Haraway, Jürgen Habermas, Max More, or the Polish scholar Grażyna Gajewska.

³⁰ See the works of Carry Wolfe, Donna Haraway, Elizabeth Grosz, and the Polish scholar Monika Bakke.

³¹ G. Gajewska, *Arcy-nie-ludzkie. Przez science fiction do antropologii cyborgów* [Archon-human: From Science Fiction to Cyborg Anthropology], Poznań 2010, p. 46.

Compared to other new developments, the performative turn and the dramaturgical turn seem to be relatively new phenomena (at least in Poland). However, in my opinion, they mark the most significant change in the approach to literary studies and theory, because they shift the methodological focus from describing concepts and phenomena to (reflecting on) their actual use in analysis – the given critical needs and horizons. As Ewa Domańska writes, “[p]erformance studies scholars emphasize that there is an integral connection between the study of performance and performance itself, which is why many scholars are not only theoreticians but also practitioners, that is, artists, actors, dancers, etc. Indeed, many scholars in the humanities no longer rely on science and turn to art as an alternative form of representing, analyzing, understanding, and changing the world. For non-artists, art is increasingly becoming a way of creating, presenting and transmitting knowledge that is more important than science.”³² Performativity has become a paradigm of a new theory of culture in which the scholar is the participant, the interpreter, and the creator, that is, an autotelic subject of research. By emphasizing the liquidity of the boundaries between artistic (and literary) theory and practice, performativity also connects two seemingly separate orders. In the performative approach, the work is both the starting point of theory, its integral component, and the final result of a creative process which gives rise to both. Such a way of creating and working with theory thus poses a challenge to synthetic approaches, allowing one to freely choose one of many possible actions implied in a literary work or trend.

This gives rise to an exceptionally original concept in Polish literary studies, namely the dramatic theory of literature created by Anna Krajewska. Krajewska based her theory on the writings of the Polish philosopher Józef Tischner, and especially his conviction that “to understand drama is to understand that man is a dramatic being.”³³ Krajewska combines the theory and practice of writing into one coherent act of dramatic performance and experience in which different tensions and nuances give rise to a new universal category of the dramatic. In a narrow understanding, it is used in the analysis and interpretation of literary texts and reflects on how theory works. In a broader sense, it describes past, present and future cultural relations and constitutes a new vision of the dramatic theory of culture based on a dialogue between various discourses. Krajewska emphasizes that “new dramatic discourses seem to appear in the humanities as such. In fact, we should extend the scope of our analytical horizons and speak not

³² E. Domańska, “Zwrot performatywny” w *współczesnej humanistyce* [“The Performative Turn” in the Contemporary Humanities], “Teksty Drugie” 2007, no. 5, p. 51.

³³ J. Tischner, *Filozofia dramatu* [The Philosophy of Drama], Kraków 2006, p. 5.

only of literary studies but also other disciplines, and as such speak of *the dramatic theory of culture*, or even of *dramatic theory* (full stop because the understanding of theory itself has also changed – it is no longer a system [...] but a field of fluctuations and doubts).”³⁴

So what is the future of theory in contemporary literary studies? Let us consider the facts. Many attempts at analyzing literary texts from a completely new perspective have emerged in recent years. Concepts that challenge mainstream literary studies are becoming more and more popular. Many literary scholars are seeking inspiration in other disciplines, including science. One thing is certain. The future of theory, generally speaking, is ambivalent and dynamic.

The “dramatic turn” that took place in culture in the second half of the 20th century, and especially at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries, made us redefine how we see the world – we acknowledged cognitive and theoretical uncertainty and processivity and liquidity of the current changes, which cannot be described by means of any metalinguistic definitions. Anti-binary thinking, emphasizing interactivity, blurring the divisions between creators, recipients, and critics... Indeed, the “dramatic turn” permanently shifted the emphasis, to put it briefly, from the narrative perspective to the dramatic structure.³⁵

It can be said that today theory is losing (or has already lost) its contexts. However, paradoxically, this is not a flaw but the greatest advantage of contemporary literary theory. Burzyńska suggests “that literary theory today is simply an open set of various languages of interpretation which mediate between literature and life – these languages allow for constant new recontextualizations of literary texts.”³⁶ Theory is effectively a sum of many potential possibilities. It involves actively choosing compatible approaches and ideas and considering possible perspectives. The very definition of “theory,” as Culler wrote, points to only one of its many meanings.

Perhaps the era of grand theories has passed. Or perhaps one of the most comprehensive and versatile theories is being created today? After all, it embraces all past and future concepts involved in the study, interpretation, and reception of literature. It recognizes the fact that literary works are “liquid” and transgenic and that literary categories may be vague. It also challenges the very definitions of literature.

³⁴ A. Krajewska, *Dramatyczna teoria literatury* [Dramatic Theory of Literature], Poznań 2009, p. 22; emphasis – A. Krajewska.

³⁵ A. Krajewska, “Zwrot dramatyczny”..., *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³⁶ A. Burzyńska, *Czy teoria literatury...*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

In his monumental novel *Lód* [Ice], Jacek Dukaj thus reflects on the way we describe reality:

Język do opisu naszych zachowań istnieje, ponieważ tej rzeczywistości doświadcza wielu ludzi i mogą między sobą omówić czyjąś ostentacyjną uprzejmość lub czyjeś *faux pas*. Język do opisu mnie samego nie istnieje, ponieważ tej rzeczywistości nie doświadcza nikt poza mną. Byłby to język do jednoosobowego użytku, język niewypowiadalny, niezapisywalny. Każdy musi sam go stworzyć [The language used to describe our behavior exists because many people experience this reality, and they can discuss among themselves someone's ostentatious politeness or someone's *faux pas*. There is no language to describe the self because no one experiences this reality except me. It would be a language intended for single use, an unspeakable and unwritable language. Everyone has to create it themselves].³⁷

Dukaj seems to comment on the inherent paradox of every theory that is forced to look at literature from the outside, as it is unable to create a language suitable for each and every literary work. Any universal approach is therefore flawed; it is as limited as the language used to describe literature. To some extent, even theory “full stop” – the theory of possibilities – is limited in this sense. However, it has one advantage, insofar as it does not categorize/organize/describe literary works and trends using any fixed or specific categories. On the contrary, it adopts a pluralistic position, absorbing the languages of all theories – they coexist as operational possibilities and are employed to describe different cultural, social, and/or literary phenomena as needed. As such, no concept of the work is rejected and each remains valid, as long as it exists in the field of possibilities as one of many possibilities. The dramaturgy of concepts, the potential tensions and possible contradictions between them, which, paradoxically, are not mutually exclusive, the plays and displacements, fractures and entanglements,³⁸ open up new theoretical horizons. As Anna Krajewska writes:

Literature is no longer just the art of words. It is a combination of various languages and materials (words are part of a drawing, a drawing triggers a verbal reaction)

³⁷ J. Dukaj, *Lód* [Ice], vol. 1, Kraków 2016, p. 31.

³⁸ I also use this term as defined by Anna Krajewska, who emphasizes that “[t]he way we read and comment on literary works today affects the entire history of literature. An interpretive intervention in even one poem transforms the history of literature. The way we write about literature changes it. Indeed, one could say that such a vision of literary studies stems from a vision of the world proposed by modern physics, and specifically quantum entanglement. Entangled particles form a whole. Even when separated and apart, they remain connected – one still depends on the other. By determining the parameters of one, we gain knowledge about both as an entangled whole” (A. Krajewska, *Splątanie literackie* [Literary Entanglement], “Przestrzenie Teorii” 2012, no. 17, p. 8).

as well as media and acts of interactive reception and creation (the printed word coexists with the digital word, reading is interactive – the reader has to choose his own path, understood metaphorically as the path of life but sometimes also literally as the surface on which one walks, as seen in some liberatic works and/or as a soundtrack to a film). The act of reading is technological: we use computers, cameras, smartphones, QR code readers, etc. They are effectively extensions of our senses and artistic tools. We live in more and more parallel worlds.³⁹

However, if literature is a set of possibilities, then it is possible that anything and everything is literature. This seems to blur the boundaries of the discipline and does not lead to any specific conclusions. However, discussing contemporary literary phenomena using a common denominator requires a compromise; concepts which describe what contemporary literature is and, even more importantly, what it may become in the near future must be flexible. The eternal question of what literature is returns – multimedia innovations do not only transform and expand the category of literature but also redefine it by limiting or even removing the human factor from the creative process. A new approach to literary theory thus goes back to its roots, combining the traditional search for the definition of literature with understanding that the findings may be completely unpredictable.

New aspects of old categories

First, let me explain what I mean by “old.” The temporal aspect is, in my view, relative, because I consider Roman Ingarden’s notion of concretization from the 1930s, Jacques Derrida’s dive into deconstruction in the 1960s, and Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of liquidity developed at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries to be equally “old.” In my understanding, “old” concepts are concepts which are recognized, well-established, and widely used in literary studies and, in a broader perspective, in cultural studies. Literary scholars use such terms to show how universal and ingenious they are and, on the contrary, to prove how outdated and obsolete they have become. This notwithstanding, I must emphasize that “old” is not used pejoratively; on the contrary, my intention is to pay tribute to the foundations of the discipline. The binary opposition between the “old” and the “new,” which has marked the history of literary trends and theories, does not apply here because the “new” theory of possibilities embraces all “old” categories, allowing them to coexist, without competition and contra-

³⁹ A. Krajewska, *Różewicza sztuki splątane. Interpretacja performatywna* [Różewicz’s Entangled Arts: A Performative Interpretation], “Przestrzenie Teorii” 2014, no. 21, p. 41.

dictions – they constantly interact and circulate in the field of literary and cultural production.

Iridescence of concretization

Indeed, we can find traces of the theory of literary possibilities in structuralism. As we venture into what marks the beginning of contemporary literary theory, we should pay special attention to Ingarden's notion of concretization. The eminent philosopher states that "[i]n the concretization of a literary work, places of indeterminacy are usually removed by filling out with concrete details (...). This 'filling-out' (...) can vary with different concretizations;" "The concretization of the literary work is thus still schematic, but less so than the work itself."⁴⁰ For Ingarden, concretization was an integral component of the literary work, and he thus accepted a certain amount of freedom involved in the process of "filling-out," thanks to which the work could exist in the reader's imagination. Each reader, however, can fill out the places of indeterminacy in the text in his or her own way, depending on the many different contexts of reception. As such, it can be said that the literary work is repeatedly (co)created by its readers and exists as a set of possibilities that need to be determined, or else it will never be completed.

Artur Mordka refers to the formal ambiguity of Ingarden's notion using the concepts of "iridescence" or "opalescence"⁴¹ (coined by Ingarden) and "oscillation"⁴² (which is a term Ingarden used to describe semantic "flickering"⁴³), defining them as the many different modes of existence found in the literary work that belong to many different realities around which the text constantly oscillates, moves, dances. This movement may only be brought to a halt by the reader.⁴⁴ Mordka identifies those concepts at the stratum of linguistic sound formations and at the stratum of meaning units.⁴⁵ However, he notes that "Ingarden argued that the basic meaning of a given expression is subject to iridescence; he thus further stated that it is always present in a work of art provided it is not understood. Certainly, this is often the case, but there are also works in which it is difficult to

⁴⁰ R. Ingarden, *Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. R.A. Crowley and K. Olsen, Evanston 1973, pp. 13–14.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

⁴² A. Mordka, *Romana Ingardena opalizacje i oscylacje literackie* [Roman Ingarden's Concept of Literary Iridescence and Oscillation], "Galicja. Studia i Materiały" 2022, no. 8, p. 284.

⁴³ R. Ingarden, *op. cit.*, pp. 68–69.

⁴⁴ See A. Mordka, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

⁴⁵ See *ibidem*, p. 286.

determine which meaning should be considered basic. Linguistic habits often come into play here, but sometimes they do not help much and are often misleading.” Mordka argues that the movement of meanings is very complex. “Oscillation” is for him a kind of play between the literal and the new meanings projected by the work.

Mordka refers to Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* to illustrate how iridescence and opalescence and oscillation work in the literary work. I think that Jacek Dukaj’s aforementioned novel *Lód* is also a good example of this process.

The life story of the main character and narrator, Benedykt Gierosławski, branches out into an infinite number of possibilities, constituting alternatives to the main plotline. Both the narrator and other characters tell finite and infinite stories, which unfold in parallel; only the now is true, because the past and the future offer infinite possibilities and alternative life stories. The characters in the novel reflect on Tadeusz Kotarbiński’s two-valued logic, suggesting that the binary division in which a given object either possesses a certain feature or its negation is insufficient to describe reality. Gierosławski, a genius mathematician and a compulsory liar, introduces a third value: a state when something is neither true nor false because it does not exist. The question of “true or false” thus defines Gierosławski’s life story – it is a major yet unsolvable problem that either reverberates in the narrative background or comes to the fore. Dukaj provocatively states that the past and the future cannot materially exist, because they are concretizations (additions, guesses, acts of forgetting and filling out) made by the storyteller.⁴⁶ Just like Gierosławski, the reader must constantly move in between believing in and questioning the protagonist’s actions and intentions. Gierosławski always exists in between final concretizations.

Indeed, what Gierosławski reflects on brings to mind Ingarden’s notions of iridescence, opalescence, and concretization. The Lviv philosopher argued that readers brought to life ambiguous meanings that defied systematization. However, he also accepted the fact that concretization cannot be tamed because the reader can “actualize, in the course of his reading, various aspects on his own initiative, as it were. But in doing this he would not be bound at all by the work, and it would be entirely a matter of chance as to what aspects

⁴⁶ The character wonders: “Jeśli ma się rację i nie istnieje jedna przeszłość, nie może również istnieć jedna pamięć przeszłości: pamięta się wiele wersji wzajem sobie przeczących, a umysł usiłuje je jakoś pogodzić, i stąd rozmyte wspomnienia, fałszywe memorje, białe plamy, gdzie pamięci się na siebie nałożyły, zamazały, zniwelowały” [If one is right and there is no one past, there cannot be one memory of the past: one remembers many versions that contradict one another, and the mind tries to somehow reconcile them, and hence we have blurred memories, false memories, blank spots where memories overlap, mix, and cancel each other out] (J. Dukaj, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 269).

were in fact actualized.”⁴⁷ Perhaps we should ask after Gierosławski: true or false? Literature is materialized in human memory; it is only one of many possibilities, one version that the reader accepts as true. Thus, the literary work is theoretically infinite, never complete, even if it creates a seemingly closed whole, because “between the unequivocally determined (the ‘common’) elements of the content and those belonging to ambiguous expressions, there exists only a loose, not finally fixed connection. This is the basis for the ‘iridescent,’ the ‘opalescent,’ character of the entire correlate content.”⁴⁸

Deconstructive hopscotch

Deconstruction, developed by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (who also overturned the old order of modernism in Baltimore), is regarded to be the most radical phase of poststructuralism because, to put it simply, it rejects all structures. However, Derrida believed that his theory was somewhat misconstrued. He pointed primarily to the positive connotations of the concept, stating that it should not be used as a methodology. Indeed, deconstruction was based on Martin Heidegger’s ontological philosophy.⁴⁹ As such, the category of deconstruction echoes the views of Gierosławski who believes that the source of the anti-binary logic lies in the limits of language. Wojciech Słomski writes that “[a]ccording to Derrida, we will only be able to understand how we think, and at the same time how we do not think, if we become aware of the constraints that bind us, which, according to Derrida, are linguistic in nature.”⁵⁰ However, in the late 20th century, deconstruction emerged as a completely new, one might even say, somewhat revolutionary, theory. Difficult to define and pin down as it was, it was consequently adopted as *the* new anti-systemic theory in the humanities. However, it is worth repeating after Derrida that: “[...] nontotalization can also be determined in another way: no longer from the standpoint of a concept of finitude as relegation to the empirical, but from the standpoint of the concept of *play*. If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field – that is, language and a finite language – excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of

⁴⁷ R. Ingarden, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

⁴⁹ See W. Słomski, *Derrida. Dekonstrukcja i jej konsekwencje* [Derrida: Deconstruction and Its Consequences], “Prosopon. Europejskie Studia Społeczno-Humanistyczne” 2018, no. 25(4), p. 177.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 179.

play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite [...].”⁵¹ This play (of possibilities) gave rise to deconstruction in literature. Słomski emphasizes that “the aim of deconstruction is not to understand what the text is about, at least at surface level, but to discover what the text does not explicitly say and thanks to which it can lay claim to the truth.”⁵²

In some cases, literary play literally turns into an actual game, but it still functions within the Derridean field of infinite possibilities. The plasticity and susceptibility of (all) literature to transformation is demonstrated by multimedia interventions in texts which are structurally seemingly uniform and yet potentially “playable.” An example of such a metamorphosis is *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie: adaptacja sieciowa* [The Saragossa Manuscript: An Internet Adaptation] (Mariusz Pisarski’s hypertextual rendition of Jan Potocki’s novel⁵³), and the online game *Balwochwał* [Idol Worshipper], based on Bruno Schulz’s short stories, and developed by Mariusz Pisarski, Marcin Bylak and Artur Sosen Klimaszewski.⁵⁴

Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie is an illustrated novel, a graphic novel. Even the original text is non-linear and functions as a kind of intradiegetic (Alfonso de Wardes partakes in a complex game/trial) and extradiegetic game (the story is non-linear and very complex). The dense network of relationships between places, plots, and characters transcends the frame-tale or the story-within-a story generic conventions which are often used to describe the novel. This text should indeed be described as a tangle (Mariusz Pisarski described it as such at the Ha!wangarda festival; the term brings to mind Anna Krajewska’s dramatic “entanglement”⁵⁵) or a rhizome. As a story-within-a story which lends itself to hypertextualization, *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie* is a great example of a work in which the dramatic is revealed through the tension between the text (and its inherent transformative possibilities) and the reader who shapes the text in the process of reading. This tension is constantly changing and evolving but it is always present because in *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie* the reader must not only follow but, above all, create the narrative by traversing different readerly “paths.”

⁵¹ J. Derrida, *Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences*, trans. A. Bass, [in:] *idem, Writing and Difference*, Chicago 1978, p. 289.

⁵² W. Słomski, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁵³ *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie* [The Saragossa Manuscript], http://archiwum.ha.art.pl/rekopis/00_intro.html (accessed: 14.10.2023).

⁵⁴ *Balwochwał* [Idol Worshipper], <https://techsty.art.pl/Balwochwal/start.html> (accessed: 14.10.2023).

⁵⁵ A. Krajewska, *Splątanie literackie, op. cit.*, p. 8.

The readerly experience is transformed on two levels: on the one hand, reading becomes an online interactive experience – the reader discovers new, unexpected, and infinite semantic combinations (the text is liquid, constantly moving); on the other hand, the reader is engaged in the creation of hypertextual networks (the text is broken down and built back up) and plays with the possibilities offered by random selection (randomization).

The structure of Potocki's novel not only enables deconstruction and reconstruction of textual mechanisms but also illustrates how Derridean iterability works, insofar as “the meaning of a written sign may be changed when it is repeated, [which – E.W.] paves the way for the decontextualization and recontextualization of text.”⁵⁶ Iterability eliminates from the text (the written sign) the presence of the sender (and the “embodied semantic intention”⁵⁷ of the transmitted message, that is the literary work) and the recipient (the one who deciphers it), thus opening up endless possibilities of choice within the field of play. Moreover, literary concepts and mathematical theories intertwine in the text, endowing it (also in its paper form) with some hypertextual features. The reader does not know, as Derrida writes, where the center of the text is – it can be anywhere and nowhere.

Bałwochwał is based on a similar concept as the online version of *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie*, but the original text has been deconstructed to such an extent that traditional linear reading is no longer possible. The most important change, however, concerns the protagonist. The first sentence reads: “You enter the market square; it is empty and yellowed by the heat, swept clean by hot breezes...”⁵⁸ “You” clearly indicates that the author's literary *alter ego* Joseph disappears, and the player-reader takes over the story. The reader can play with the text, make his or her own choices, and follow different paths, disregarding the original plot and structure. The reader thus creates completely new variants of the story.

In both cases, however, the reader does not have full control over the text because the variants are limited, insofar as they only include the options envisioned by the creators of the game. However, it clearly shows that literature is never confined to a given framework but is instead a set of possibilities – readerly interpretations, re-readings, remediations, and the potential metamorphic properties of texts themselves. The hypertextual novel is a self-constructing entity – it becomes what it is as it is

⁵⁶ T. Załuski, *Powtórzenie jako iterowalność w filozofii Jaques'a Derridy* [Repetition as Iterability in Jacques Derrida's Philosophy], [in:] *idem, Modernizm artystyczny i powtórzenie* [Artistic Modernism and Repetition], Kraków 2008, p. 55.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

⁵⁸ See *Bałwochwał*, *op. cit.*

read. Each readerly path is a new event. Reading and literature become performative.

Liquid histories

The concept of liquidity in literary studies is associated primarily with Zygmunt Bauman's 1999 book *Liquid Modernity*, which exerted a great influence on theory and criticism at the turn of the 20th and the 21st centuries. Bauman argues that the term postmodernity should not be used to describe reality because modernity has never ended: it has only transformed into a more, as the scholar puts it in his book, liquid form. Bauman's understanding of the category of liquidity is rooted in sociology but its source is actually the thought of Heraclitus of Ephesus, the essence of which is the concept of *panta rhei* – everything flows.⁵⁹ Nothing happens twice, because even if something seems the same, the passage of time changes its essence.

Monika Błaszczak draws attention to understanding “liquidity” as “‘melting,’ ‘dissolving,’ or ‘condensing.’ Bauman often reflects on ambiguity, changeability, instability, fragmentation, uncertainty, episodic nature of life, lack of order. As such, liquidity refers to views, lifestyles, and the ways in which one perceives the world and functions in it.”⁶⁰ The concept of liquidity may be used to describe social and broadly defined cultural phenomena and it also personally affects the individual, the “I,” constructed in the context of unstable reality. “Liquid identity describes being in the world that is subject to constant change. It is a never-ending, pulsating, process.”⁶¹

Such a concept of identity may also be found in Gierosławski's self-referential reflections. The protagonist of Dukaj's novel tries to define himself in a truly Derridean way: he does not define himself through the known but describes his existence through negation.⁶² The mathematician states:

Skoro nie wiesz, kim jesteś, przynajmniej miej pewność, kim nie jesteś. Wepchnęło się łepetynę w umywalkę, pod strumień wody zimnej. Wcale nie po to, żeby otrzeźwieć do myśli bystrzejszych i umysłu jaśniejszego – lecz żeby właśnie nie myśleć o niczym poza tą zimną wodą, żeby zatrzymać rozdmiecioną imaginację, która już przeskakuje do następnej możliwości, i następnej, i następnej, a każda jednak prawdziwa [If one does not know who one is, then at least one should

⁵⁹ Monika Błaszczak writes more about the category of fluidity and the philosophy of Heraclitus. See M. Błaszczak, *Płynność – od Heraklita do Baumana* [Liquidity – from Heraclitus to Bauman], “Przestrzenie Teorii” 2019, no. 31, pp. 113–114.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 112.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² Cf. W. Słowski, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

know who one is not. One shoves one's head into a sink and allows cool water to run over it. Not at all to sober up, to sharpen one's thoughts, to awake to a clearer mind – but so as not to think about anything except this cold water, to stop the flicker of the imagination that moves to the next possibility, and the next, and the next, and each of them is true].⁶³

The indeterminacy of the “I” is additionally emphasized by the use of the somewhat impersonal pronoun “one” – the reader may thus choose who the narrator should be(come). The changeable human nature and liquid identity are contrasted with the firmness of ice, which, paradoxically, is not static – it moves in tides and the mind moves with it (the mind moves in-between the rational and the irrational; the word “flicker” refers to the ontological instability and complexity of perception) – and it must provide a counterweight to the inherently chaotic human nature. The entire world in *Lód* is therefore rooted in liquidity and may thus collapse at any moment because, as Błaszczak emphasizes, “liquidity is a ‘liquid’ category, it is ambiguous, it ‘pulsates,’ moving from variability and fragmentation to credibility, understandability and efficiency.”⁶⁴ Even if the truth freezes for a moment, liquids change state of matter.

Theory (at) play

Contemporary methodological categories are often vague and elusive (the influence of deconstruction) as well as liquid and fluctuating (the influence of postmodernism and the concept of liquid modernity). These properties seem theoretically counterproductive but in the contemporary complex, polyphonic, and multifaceted world, only flexible concepts are able to capture the essence of constant rapid changes.

Transdisciplinarity,⁶⁵ breaking down the boundaries between different disciplines and creating hybrid fields of research, is very popular today, as

⁶³ J. Dukaj, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 642–643.

⁶⁴ M. Błaszczak, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁶⁵ I use this concept in the understanding of Justyna Tabaszewska, who writes that “[t]ransdisciplinarity [...] strives to go beyond the boundaries of individual disciplines and question traditional divisions. What distinguishes transdisciplinarity from interdisciplinarity is the approach to the existing boundaries between disciplines: while interdisciplinarity examines the borderlands between disciplines, drawing on methodologies that do not contradict one another, transdisciplinarity ventures into areas which are difficult to define or which cannot be described within the limits of traditional disciplines” (J. Tabaszewska, “*Wędrujące pojęcia*”. *Koncepcja Mieke Bal — przykład inter- czy transdyscyplinarności?* [“Travelling Concepts”: Is Mieke Bal’s Concept an Example of Interdisciplinarity or Transdisciplinarity?], “*Studia Europaea Gnesnensia*” 2013, no. 8, p. 117).

seen in Mieke Bal's notion of "travelling concepts." As Roma Sendyka notes, "Bal deliberately and consistently tests the strength of interdisciplinary walls."⁶⁶ The Dutch scholar, critic and artist relies on dynamic interpretation⁶⁷ and in her open-ended method of cultural analysis draws on, affect theory, among other theories, which she uses to connect different interpretative orders, media, and disciplines.⁶⁸

"But concepts are not fixed," Bal writes, "[t]hey travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. Between disciplines, their meaning, reach, and operational value differ."⁶⁹ Therefore, in order to realize the full potential of concepts, they should be freed and allowed to travel in between different disciplines, where they will be able to demonstrate their full causative power. Although Bal focuses on cultural studies, her theory may be adapted to contemporary literary studies.

Performance studies as a discipline also fundamentally changed the paradigm of how we analyze and interpret texts of culture. "The one overriding and underlying assumption of performance studies is that the field is open," Richard Schechner writes, "[t]here is no finality to performance studies, either theoretically or operationally."⁷⁰ The basic assumption of performance studies is that the discipline relies on agency and action, and thus critical categories must be in constant motion. The "performative turn" described above, which was to a certain degree triggered by the popularity of the new discipline, has changed how we think about concepts forever, endowing them with operational freedom.

The dramatic and dramaturgy

Anna Krajewska's concept of the dramatic theory of literature shifted the theoretical focus from purely descriptive towards playful – theory is playing of/with the text. The dramatic has redefined the relation between the author (resurrected and involved in the process of creation), the work (experienced and co-created by the author and the reader), and the reader (experiencing and co-creating the work). This is by no means a novelty; the

⁶⁶ R. Sendyka, (*Praktyczna*) *podróż do obiektów (teoretycznych)*. *Mieke Bal i jej Wędrująca pojęcia* [(Practical) Journey to (Theoretical) Objects: Mieke Bal's Travelling Concepts], "Stan Rzeczy" 2016, no. 1(10), p. 398.

⁶⁷ See *ibidem*, pp. 404–405.

⁶⁸ Cf. B. Myrdzik, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁶⁹ M. Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, Toronto 2002, p. 24.

⁷⁰ R. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, London and New York 2002, p. 1.

dramatic foundations of storytelling date back to ancient writers and theoreticians. However, interpreting dynamic and complex contemporary culture through the lens of the dramatic is indeed innovative. In this approach, the dramatic, as a critical category, is innovative and, most importantly, conceptually comprehensive enough to describe art, theory, and reception and the complex relations between them. It is also specific enough (it may be described as a defined, although constantly expanding, field) so as not to be reduced to a catch-all concept (used to justify the theory of everything).

The dramatic, as a critical concept in the contemporary humanities, relies on experience, defined primarily as a relationship with the object of experience or as active participation in a given (series of) events. As Krajewska writes, “[t]he dramatic is based on the performative order (defined as an ‘event,’ an ‘action’ that unfolds, an action that is iterative, as an experience of a liminal, dramaturgical modality).”⁷¹ Dramatic (re)enactment is clearly connected with the theater and the use of theatrical concepts in literary theory. Dialogue, scene, act, play, (re)enactment, imitation, interaction, or event⁷² are seen as operational concepts – they move beyond the boundaries of the discipline and are used in humanistic discourse as such.

The dramatic functions in between categories, discourses, disciplines, and finally in between the work, the author, and the recipient, which renders (the act of) interpretation more dynamic: it sets it in motion. As a result, different interpretations collide, merge, and entangle, creating new fields of research. Dramaturgy is one of them. “The essence of the dramatic is the tension created by constant movement, displacement, and transformation of various aspects of reality.”⁷³ These movements give rise to a new dramatic discourse that replaces traditional methodologies; it is essentially dialogical, based on play, as concepts and meanings freely travel across disciplines and give rise to new theories. Krajewska writes: “Let’s try to capture the dramatic movement of concepts across disciplines – how their meaning changes when they transcend their literary meaning or when they cross disciplinary boundaries. Concepts operate in new contexts. They travel. They create constellations. Concepts cross the boundaries of the discipline and bridge the gap between science and art. They are endowed with new meanings. They engage in a dialogue and become entangled.”⁷⁴ Like other concepts which actively function in the same field, dramaturgy, by its very

⁷¹ A. Krajewska, *Dramatyczna teoria literatury*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁷² *Cf. ibidem*, p. 25.

⁷³ E. Woźniak-Czech, *Portret performatywny. Ślad, wymazywanie, nieobecność* [Performative Portrait: Trace, Erasure, Absence], Poznań 2018, p. 21.

⁷⁴ A. Krajewska, *Dramaturgia pojęć* [Dramaturgy of Concepts], “Przestrzenie Teorii” 2021, no. 36, p. 8.

nature, eludes definitions and methodological routinization. Instead, it gives rise to a research methodology which productively uses the tensions that arise “in between.” It draws on the relational potential of a given work or works. Instead of devising terminologies and methods of working with the object, instead of building totalitarian, and thus pointless, approaches to a given issue, the “dramatic” theoretician creates, as Schechner put it, an open field – one that is open to other scholars. He or she selects from among various different possibilities those that attract (or repel) one another, those that correlate (or collide), those that create transgenic hybrids that, in turn, give rise to new open interactive fields.

The “dramatic” approach to theory demonstrates just how complex the concept of possibility is: firstly, it shows that it is possible to revive theory;⁷⁵ secondly, it shows that, when freed from the constraints of the discipline, the broadly defined humanities “can still achieve a lot”;⁷⁶ thirdly, and finally, there is still untapped potential in theory.⁷⁷

(Im)possible works

(Non)existent literary works best illustrate the potential of possibilities. Let us imagine a library of works that do not exist, such as the one described by Jorge Luis Borges in “The Library of Babel.” For Umberto Eco, this library is a metaphor for the world or the universe: “[o]ne of the properties of Borges’s library is that it not only contains countless volumes in endless, repeated rooms but can display volumes containing all the possible combinations of twenty-five letters of the alphabet, so that one cannot imagine any combination of characters that the library has not foreseen.”⁷⁸ Borges’s library therefore contains, hypothetically, endless narrative possibilities. As such, it is also a metaphor for the endless possibilities of literature and thus also for the endless possibilities of theory (at) play.

⁷⁵ *Możliwość* – «fakt, że coś jest możliwe» [Possibility – ‘a chance that something may happen’], [entry in:] *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, online, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/mo%C5%B4liwo%C5%9B%C4%87.html> (accessed: 20.10.2023).

⁷⁶ *Możliwość* – «zdolności, predyspozycje psychiczne i fizyczne człowieka, dzięki którym może on coś osiągnąć» [Possibility – ‘abilities or qualities that could make someone or something better in the future’], [entry in:] *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, online, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/mo%C5%B4liwo%C5%9B%C4%87.html> (accessed: 20.10.2023).

⁷⁷ *Możliwość* – «tkwiąca w czymś i ujawniająca się w sprzyjających warunkach zdolność do działania i osiągnięcia jakichś efektów» [Possibility – ‘unspecified qualities of a promising nature; potential’], [entry in:] *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, online, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/mo%C5%B4liwo%C5%9B%C4%87.html> (20.10.2023).

⁷⁸ U. Eco, *On Literature*, trans. M. McLaughlin, London 2012, p. 11.

Apart from Borges, Stanisław Lem also wrote about a non-existent library of fictional texts in his apocrypha, which include *A Perfect Vacuum* and *Imaginary Magnitude*. Lem's apocrypha praise possibilities. As drafts, sketches, and conceptual frameworks, they are inherently unstable and ambiguous. Even though they do not function as complete works, they exist subjectively as literature suspended in potentiality – possible and impossible at the same time.

A Perfect Vacuum is a collection of reviews of nonexistent books. Except for one – *A Perfect Vacuum* itself – which is reviewed first. Once the reader learns that one of Lem's actual books has been reviewed alongside nonexistent works, he begins to question his readerly reality. What is this book? If it can be touched, seen, opened, and, most importantly, read, then it is possible that *A Perfect Vacuum* actually exists. However, perceiving the work through its physicality defies the logic of individual reviews, because apart from the first one, all others discuss nonexistent entities. Moreover, Lem writes about himself as if he were someone else, a different Lem who, in a different universe, created another *A Perfect Vacuum*:

Reviewing nonexistent books is not Lem's invention; we find such experiments not only in a contemporary writer, Jorge Luis Borges (for example, his "Investigations of the Writings of Herbert Quaine"), but the idea goes further back – and even Rabelais was not the first to make use of it. *A Perfect Vacuum* is unusual in that it purports to be an anthology made up entirely of such critiques. Pedantry or a joke, this methodicalness?⁷⁹

[...]

A Perfect Vacuum turns out to be a tale of what is desired but is not to be had. It is a book of ungranted wishes. And the only subterfuge the evasive Lem might still avail himself of would be a counterattack: in the assertion that it was not I, the critic, but he himself, the author, who wrote the present review and added it to – and made it part of – *A Perfect Vacuum*.⁸⁰

Interpretive friction between the reader (who finds the ontological status of the work ambiguous), the author (for whom the question of the (non) existence of the text remains open), and the autotelic work (which describes itself as if it did not exist) gives rise to an elusive network of dramatic relations, which shine through tensions, inaccuracies, and cognitive gaps. Contrary to what is announced in the title, *A Perfect Vacuum* is not a vacuum at all. It is filled with books that are disembodied, devoid of actual physical referents, and conventional plotlines, but they nevertheless exist,

⁷⁹ S. Lem, *A Perfect Vacuum*, trans. M. Kandel, Evanston 1979, p. 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

suspended in potentiality, because Lem created them in his reviews. There is a possibility that they exist, although in potentiality and not in reality.

Imaginary Magnitude, respectively, is a collection of introductions to nonexistent books. However, it is not the possibility that these books may one day be written, productive and tempting as it may be, but the art of writing introductions itself that is the author's focus. It is expressed, of course, in a very suggestive introduction to "Introduction-writing."⁸¹ Lem thus comments, half-jokingly, on contemporary literature and literary theory. Which scholar has not written at least one introduction in their career? Is it not true that most theoretical monographs are titled "introduction to..." or "outline of..."? Lem writes: "besides Introductions to Works, there are Introduction Works, for like the Holy Scriptures of any faith, the theses and futuromachies of scholars are Prefaces – to this world and the other. Thus reflection shows that the Realm of Introductions is incomparably more vast than the Realm of Literature, for what the latter endeavors to *realize*, Introductions merely announce from afar."⁸² The goal is to come closer – that is why I have introduced (sic!) a new literary theory, or more precisely, a new dramaturgical approach to literary theory that does not look at literature from afar. It no longer functions as an Introduction Work but becomes one with literature. Entangled, it is both its reflection and its driving force.

Where is the author? Where is literature?

One of the introductions in Lem's *Imaginary Magnitude* is devoted to a phenomenon that is very important today, both from a creative and a theoretical perspective. Indeed, Lem presents his readers with an introduction to the five volumes of *A History of Bitic Literature*. "By bitic literature," Lem writes, "we mean any [literary] work of nonhuman origin – one whose real author is not a human being. (He may have been the author indirectly, however, by performing the function which generated the real author's acts of creation.) The discipline which studies the entire class of such writing is bitistics. There is still no uniformity of opinion as to the dimensions of this research field."⁸³ The definition of bitic literature sounds surprisingly familiar and somewhat prophetic, especially considering the fact that *Imaginary Magnitude* was published in 1973. Bitic literature is being created today and arouses as much interest as controversy. I am referring of course to texts created solely by artificial intelligence (AI). Considering the pace

⁸¹ See S. Lem, *Imaginary Magnitude*, trans. M.E. Heine, London 1984, p. 1.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 2.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

with which technology develops, it can be concluded that a separate research field devoted solely to AI-generated literature will emerge in the near future.

In 2016, a novella, whose title translates to “The Day a Computer Writes a Novel,” was submitted for the third-annual Hoshi Shinichi Literary Award. It was a strong entry but in the end it did not win. There would be nothing surprising about this if not for the fact that this novella was actually written by a computer and its title was not just meant to generate interest but... was in fact true. It raised many questions. If the text written by artificial intelligence, and not by a human being, had won, who would have accepted the award? We once again come face to face with the question about the author’s status. Is the resurrected author symbolically dead again? And the novella itself? If it was not written by a human being, what is it? New technologies and new forms of literature, created *in silico*, that is exclusively in the digital space, pose new challenges to theory.

Two years later, in 2018, the first novel written solely by artificial intelligence was published in France by JBE (Jean Boîte Éditions).⁸⁴ In the future, the year 2022 may be considered the turning point in literary revolution because that year ChatGPT, an AI system that can write a novel in a few hours based on configurations set by the user, debuted on the Internet. New possibilities offered by ChatGPT shined a spotlight on new problems and controversies. Fake books, especially e-books, supposedly written by famous authors have appeared.⁸⁵ Moreover, many famous writers complain that their works are being used illegally because the software uses them to “learn” to write. Some writers, including George R.R. Martin and John Grisham, filed a copyright infringement lawsuit against the creators of ChatGPT.⁸⁶ It was a historic decision.

It is only a matter of time before a virtual “Library of Babel” is created, consisting of works created exclusively by AI algorithms. Borges’s fictional vision may come true, but will it really be a library of our dreams? In his parodic review of the nonexistent book *Die kultur als fehler* (*Civilization as Mistake*), Lem makes an accurate and prophetic statement about contemporary literature: “We live in an era of transition [...] and never is it so unutterably difficult to make out the road traveled and the road that

⁸⁴ See <https://www.jbe-books.com/products/1-the-road-by-an-artificial-neural> (accessed: 30.04.2023).

⁸⁵ See U. Lesman, *Plaga fałszywych książek. Sztuczna inteligencja podszyła się pod znanych pisarzy* [A Plague of Fake Books: Artificial Intelligence Impersonates Famous Writers], <https://cyfrowa.rp.pl/technologie/art38957171-plaga-falszywych-ksiazek-sztuczna-inteligencja-podszyla-sie-pod-znanych-pisarzy> (accessed: 20.10.2023).

⁸⁶ *Znani pisarze pozywają twórców ChatGPT* [Famous Writers Are Suing the Makers of ChatGPT], <https://rynek-ksiazki.pl/aktualnosci/znani-pisarze-pozywaja-tworcow-chatgpt/> (accessed: 30.09.2023).

extends into the future as in periods of transitions, for they are times of conceptual confusion.”⁸⁷ The concepts in the contemporary humanities are inextricably entangled. They play (with) one another and collide with each other like atoms, which seemingly chaotically circulate in a huge particle accelerator. Is a new theoretical universe in store for us? It is a possibility.

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⁸⁷ S. Lem, *A Perfect Vacuum*, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

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How to Read a Historical Source through a Literary Lens?

ABSTRACT. Piotr Bering, *How to Read a Historical Source through a Literary Lens?*. “Przestrzenie Teorii” special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 189–203. ISSN 1644-6763. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.9>

The article presents some possibilities of using contemporary literary research methods for analyzing historical sources. However, in the analysis of literary work as a historical source, attempts at “reversed” reading (i.e. source as literature) are still insufficient. The article presents some research tools based on text theory, which could be adapted to reading historical sources. There are privileged texts with some aesthetic features. The above-mentioned methods could not be used directly to analyze historical sources; they should be completed with extra-textual data.

KEYWORDS: methodology of humanities; historical source; narrative; discourse; literature of earlier epochs

Some remarks on the history of research paradigms

The nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century brought developments in the critique of historical sources; research methods slowly became more advanced, and the list of research questions gradually became longer. However, we must not forget that at the time historical sources were still treated as witnesses of the past, and as such they were supposed to be analyzed in a way allowing the reconstruction of as many facts as possible.¹

Even in the 1960s, Herbert Grundmann, author of an excellent companion to medieval historiography, saw chronicles as works written according to the rules of rhetoric, and so rather useless for historians.² Indeed, it is difficult to extract information referring directly to the past from a history composed according to aesthetic rules.

¹ G. Labuda, *Próba nowej systematyki i nowej interpretacji źródeł historycznych* [New Systematicity and Interpretation of Historical Sources], “*Studia Źródłoznawcze*” 1957, vol. 1, pp. 3–52, offers an excellent analysis of this phase of development of source studies, and remains a valuable resource, despite being published almost fifty years ago. For a fascinating discussion of history of textual criticism, see S. Timpanaro, *Die Entstehung der Lachmannschen Methode*, 2. erw. Aufl., Hamburg 1971. J.-D. Müller, *Mediävistische Kulturwissenschaft*, Berlin and New York 2010, p. 5, who pointed out the naïve understanding of some scholars of L. von Ranke’s plot “wie es eigentlich gewesen ist”.

² H. Grundmann, *Geschichtsschreibung im Mittelalter. Gattungen – Epochen – Eigenart*, Göttingen 1965, p. 5.

For decades literary scholars have been aware that literature is a capacious term; nobody equates it with written texts, and even more so with fiction. From the perspective of time, clearly the introduction of the notion of *text* did not eliminate all the problems regarding whether we are dealing with literature either. According to Teresa Dobrzyńska, “text includes a passage of words of various length, complexity, and transmission.”³ There is an agreement that text is a non-uniform reality, which can be defined in various ways; it is a general-cultural form of discourse.⁴ This resulted in extending the field of traditional literary studies from poetry, novels or essays to such diverse texts as newspaper articles, an application, or sports commentary. Thanks to Michaił Bachtin, we know there are speech genres, i.e. creations with specific organization, with a far greater scope than individual utterances, and clearly oriented to a goal.⁵

The turn towards psychology and cognitive studies, along with the gradual but noticeable disappearance of clear divisions between linguistics and literary studies, resulted in modern literary scholars feeling comfortable not only in traditional philology, but also on its fringes. The subsequent turn in the broadly understood humanities resulted in new research postulates, such as “practicing theory,”⁶ i.e. blurring more lines within the humanities.

For historians, research attitudes reshuffled mostly in the 1960s; the group *Annales*, fighting for “a more human history”⁷ should be mentioned

³ T. Dobrzyńska, *Tekst. Próba syntezy* [Text: An Attempt at a Synthesis], Warszawa 1993, p. 7. I would like to point out two studies by Dobrzyńska: *Spójność tekstu w perspektywie stylistycznej* [Text Cohesion from the Perspective of Style], [in:] *Systematyzacja pojęć w stylistyce* [Systematization of Notions in Style], ed. S. Gajda, Opole 1992, pp. 49–55 and *Tekst – kategoria stara i nowa* [Text – a New and Old Category], [in:] *Wiedza o literaturze i edukacja. Księga referatów Zjazdu Polonistów Warszawa 1995* [Literary Studies and Education: Conference Proceedings from the 1995 Conference of Polish Philologists], eds. Z. Gołński, T. Michałowska, Z. Jarosiński, Warszawa 1996, pp. 559–570. See also T.A. van Dijk, *Textwissenschaft. Eine interdisziplinäre Einführung*, Tübingen 1980 (original, Dutch edition: *Tekstwetenschap. Een interdisciplinaire inleiding*, Utrecht and Antwerpen 1978).

⁴ See *Dyskurs jako struktura i proces*, ed. T.A. van Dijk, Warszawa 2001 (original, English edition: *Discourse as Structure and Process*, ed. T.A. van Dijk, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi 1998) and A. Duszak, *Tekst, dyskurs, komunikacja międzykulturowa* [Text, Discourse, Intercultural Communication], Warszawa 1998. There are also more recent works, e.g. P. Bohuszewicz, *Kulturowa teoria literatury jako styl badawczy* [Cultural Theory of Literature as a Research Style], “Teksty Drugie” 2023, no. 3, pp. 115–131.

⁵ M. Bachtin, *Estetyka twórczości słownej* [Aesthetics of Verbal Art], ed. E. Czaplewicz, Warszawa 1986.

⁶ As evidenced by the subtitle: *Teoria – literatura – życie. Praktykowanie teorii w humanistyce współczesnej* [Theory – Literature – Life: Practicing Theory in Contemporary Humanities], eds. A. Legeżyńska and R. Nycz, Warszawa 2012.

⁷ M. Bloch, *Pochwała historii czyli o zawodzie historyka* [Praise for History, i.e. on Historians’ Work], foreword by W. Kula, Warszawa 1960, p. 25. It’s a travesty of a sentence from

here. However, the most inspiring impulses came from social sciences; unsurprisingly, history has been considered a communicative system,⁸ i.e. also a discourse. Jerzy Topolski's attempt at a new definition of a historical source from fifty years ago was a significant expression of that change:

All sources of historical cognition (direct and indirect), i.e. any information (in the sense of theory-information) about the social past, wherever it can be found, together with the information channel, can be considered a historical source.⁹

This definition contains all the elements of traditional conceptualizations (a source informs about something or reflects something from the past), but its construction is based on a completely different set of tools, and it is founded on broadly understood social sciences rather than traditional history. This way of analyzing and understanding history became increasingly common in Poland, as evidenced by the growing popularity of novel ways of understanding it.¹⁰ However, it was not a fascination with new methodologies but rather a heated academic debate with the followers of hermeneutics or source studies' followers, who strictly followed objective facts extracted from sources,¹¹ called "historiographic literalism" by Jan Pomorski.¹² Apart from tangible disputes among historians (especially in Poznań), tensions are also evidenced by the book *Hayden White w Polsce: fakty, krytyka, recepcja* [Hayden White in Poland: Facts, Criticism, Reception].¹³

At this point, the asynchronous course of changes among literary studies experts and historians should be highlighted; the former underwent a trans-

the introduction: "For a long time we have been united in our fight for history understood more broadly and humanely".

⁸ J.C.B. Barrera, *History as a Communication System*, [in:] *Świat historii. Prace z metodologii historii i historii historiografii dedykowane Jerzemu Topolskiemu z okazji siedemdziesięciolecia urodzin* [Essays in History Methodology and History of Historiography for Jerzy Topolski's Seventieth Birthday], ed. W. Wrzosek, Poznań 1998, pp. 63–80.

⁹ J. Topolski, *Metodologia historii* [History's Methodology], 3rd edition, Warszawa 1984, p. 324.

¹⁰ For an interesting description of changes in discussions on history, see J. Pomorski, *Rzecz o wyobraźni historycznej. Ćwiczenia z hermeneutyki* [On Historical Imagination: Exercises in Hermeneutics], Lublin 2021. For our discussion, *Studium Drugie. Teoria narracji historycznej Jerzego Topolskiego* [Second Study: Jan Topolski's Theory of Historical Narrative], based on an outline of an unwritten book by Topolski (who died in 1998) about methodology of history at the turn of the twentieth century, is especially interesting.

¹¹ Dispute over the status of source studies was one of the main issues discussed during XIII General Conference of Polish Historians in Poznań in 1984.

¹² J. Pomorski, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

¹³ *Hayden White w Polsce: fakty, krytyka, recepcja* [Hayden White in Poland: Facts, Criticism, Reception], eds. E. Domańska, E. Skibiński, and P. Stróżyk, Kraków 2019. Discussion papers, as well as those about White's visits in Poland, are especially significant here.

formation of research attitudes sooner and more profoundly.¹⁴ However, both processes remain unfinished. Narrativism, which focused on cognitive constructs, proved to be a real challenge for historical considerations, to a great extent sharing research intuitions with postmodernist literary studies.¹⁵ Transgressing borders between disciplines has been easier ever since.

The point of interdisciplinary research

Several decades ago, it was believed that although it was acceptable to use somebody else's tools, the research questionnaire should be strictly defined by one's own discipline. It was inconceivable for a historian to read a source text through a literary lens, and for a literature scholar to discuss the historical dimension of a text. This opinion may seem too harsh – after all, some tried to change that situation. In Poland, two such pioneers should be mentioned: the medievalists Marian Plezia and Brygida Kürbis. Plezia is a philologist who used historical tools; in his research into Polish chroniclers, he was aware that a literary work needs to be contextualized in an external (for us – historical) reality.¹⁶ Kürbis was an outstanding historian, creator of the Poznań school of source studies, who already in the 1950s had realized that in order to understand a source, it is necessary to refer to literature studies.¹⁷

Dušan Třeštík's study in Kosmas's *Chronicle*, in which Třeštík considers a chronicle as both a historical source and a work of literature, brought a breakthrough.¹⁸ Třeštík demonstrates that analyzing only the factual layer of a chronicle is not enough to recreate the chronicler's values or way of thinking. At the time, analyzing a chronicle as a literary text was innovative and risky – not in terms of literary borrowings (those had been studied for a long time), but in terms of studying what the chronicler read,

¹⁴ J. Pomorski, *op. cit.*, pp. 36–37, 74, 87–88, 144–145.

¹⁵ E. Domańska, *Historia egzystencjalna. Krytyczne studium narratywizmu i humanistyki zaangażowanej* [Existential History: A Critical Study in Narrativism and Engaged Humanities], Warszawa 2012, pp. 25–47.

¹⁶ M. Plezia, *Kronika Galla na tle historiografii XII wieku* [Gallus Anonymus' Chronicle and Twelfth-century Historiography], Kraków 1947; *idem*, *Kronika Kadłubka na tle renesansu XII wieku* [Wincenty Kadłubek's Chronicle and the Twelfth-century Renaissance], "Znak" 1962, vol. 14, no. 97–98 (7–8), pp. 978–994.

¹⁷ B. Kürbis, *Literaturoznawstwo a historiografia średniowieczna* [Literary Studies and Medieval Historiography], "Roczniki Historyczne" 1951–1952, vol. 2, pp. 167–180. The specificity of Prof. Kürbis's research is documented in *Na progach historii* [At History's Doorstep], vol. 1–2, Poznań 1994–2001.

¹⁸ D. Třeštík, *Kosmova Kronika. Studie k počátkům českého dějepiscetví a politického myšlení* [Cosma's Chronicle: Studies on the Beginnings of Czech Historiography and Political Thought], Praha 1968.

which authors he preferred to cite, which passages were original, and which revealed insufficient literary skills. It was thus an attempt to recreate the chronicler's intellectual circle. Moreover, Třeštík situated Kosmas's chronicle within the historiographic – or, more broadly – literary tradition.

If it is known that reading a historical source, especially one with certain artistic ambitions, cannot be limited to *discernere vera ac falsa*, we should also ask about the point of reading a source as a literary text, or generally as a broadly-defined text.

The idea that the word is multilayered and ambiguous is the first reason why this approach is correct. This is the basic, irrefutable premise of all studies in textual linguistics,¹⁹ especially given that this multi-layered character is confirmed by examples from everyday life. If the word is ambiguous, then – as proved by Kazimierz Liman forty years ago – “it does not always refer to the real phenomena of the surrounding world.”²⁰ Oftentimes it is a reference to “ideology”, which Jurij Łotman called a “secondary modeling system”;²¹ such references to systems rather than to reality can be read only through the specific idiolect of a work of literature,²² which requires reading the source text as a product of culture and literary work. It extends traditional research methods rather than simply rejecting them. Moreover, as observed by Ewa Domańska, in the past decade history has lost its monopoly on studying the past.²³

Reading combined with an analysis of an internal code, with searching for artistic values, i.e. ones determining the specificity of a given piece of work,²⁴ helps to capture and highlight the message about reality, rather than obscure it. There is one necessary condition: findings contained in

¹⁹ I would like to mention only two studies which clearly display the gradable and ambiguous character of phenomena analyzed by text linguistics: R.-A. de Beaugrande, W.U. Dressler, *Wstęp do lingwistyki tekstu* [Introduction to Text Linguistics], Warszawa 1990; E. Coseriu, *Textlinguistik. Eine Einführung*, hg. und bearb. von J. Albrecht, 3 überarb. und erw. Aufl., Tübingen and Basel 1994.

²⁰ K. Liman, *Czy słowo w źródle historycznym zawsze odsyła do zjawisk rzeczywistych otaczającego nas świata?* [Do Words in Historical Sources Always Refer Us to Real Phenomena of the World Around Us?], [in:] *Verbalne i pozawerbalne środki wyrazu w źródle historycznym. Materiały II Sympozjum Nauk dających poznać źródła historyczne. Problemy warsztatu historyka* [Verbal and Non-verbal Means of Expression in Historical Sources: Proceedings of the 2nd Symposium of Historical Sciences. Issues in Historians' Work], Lublin 1981, p. 76.

²¹ J. Łotman, *Struktura tekstu artystycznego* [Structure of an Artistic Text], Warszawa 1984, pp. 18–19; K. Liman, *Czy słowo...*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ E. Domańska, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

²⁴ This echoes Russian formalists, especially R. Jakobson, who found the essence of poetry in a specific organization and selection of expressions, see *Poetyka w świetle językoznawstwa* [Poetics in the Light of Linguistics], “Pamiętnik Literacki” 1960, vol. 51, iss. 1–2, pp. 431–473.

a text, reached through more or less subtle research techniques, need to be confronted with a non-textual reality.²⁵

Jerzy Ziomek's conclusions from his analysis of Kochanowski's use of Latin and Polish are a good example of the benefits of such an attitude. Those conclusions are ambiguous, and explanations regarding the poet's specific decisions require considering the contemporary cultural situation, e.g. the popularity of the antique tradition.²⁶ Somewhat simplifying Ziomek's argumentation, it should be stated that dogmatic, "in advance" judgments regarding Kochanowski's attitudes and inspirations are doomed to fail. The literary dimension of a literary work needs to be confronted with the author's contemporary world. This conviction is to a large degree shared by historians and theoreticians of literature, but it does not concern the proposed literary reading of a historical text. In his analysis of *Józwa*, a simple story which illustrates peculiar behaviors of different social groups from the Polish People's Republic, Michał Głowiński observes that "historical reading of a literary text can be limitless: it can include anything, from punctuation to global senses of a text."²⁷

I shall try to change this statement by proposing to read a historical source²⁸ through a literary lens. This reading can have a different extent. Doubtless, extracting the discursive character of a text is an attempt at searching for its global senses,²⁹ which is why various "games" between the author and reader, both virtual and real, identifiable based on data from beyond the text, can take place.³⁰

²⁵ In this case I agree with E. Skibiński, *Hayden White w mediewistyce* [Hayden White in Medievalist Studies], [in:] *Hayden White w Polsce...*, p. 170.

²⁶ J. Ziomek, *Poeta jako źródło historyczne. Glosa do referatu Wiktora Weintrauba* [Poet as a Historical Source: A Comment on Wiktor Weintraub's Essay], [in:] *Dzieło literackie jako źródło historyczne* [Literary Work as a Historical Source], eds. Z. Stefanowska and J. Topolski, Warszawa 1978, pp. 166–175.

²⁷ M. Głowiński, *Lektura dzieła a wiedza historyczna* [Reading a Text vs. Knowledge of History], [in:] *Dzieło literackie jako źródło historyczne...*, p. 111.

²⁸ See K. Bartoszyński, *Aspekty i relacje tekstów* [Aspects and Relations of Texts], [in:] *Dzieło literackie jako źródło historyczne...*, pp. 52–93.

²⁹ J. Pomorski highlights this phenomenon in *Rzecz o wyobraźni...*, p. 31: "Historical discourse is more than communicated historical knowledge or research results," later proposing to introduce research into the sociology of historiography, analogous to the well-established sociology of literature.

³⁰ See M. Głowiński, *Gry powieściowe* [Novel Games], Warszawa 1973.

Some examples

Prologues to chronicles – *causae scribendi*, different forms of topicas – have attracted researchers' interest for a long time now. However, when a chronicle is read with the use of Bakhtin's "speech genres," it can be seen in a new light. It turns out that it is possible to find two genres within one text, e.g. a lecture and a speech, depending on the writer's intention. In the former, they address everyone believing that the auditorium is curious about what they have to say. In the latter, the author is convinced that their message is necessary for the audience, and that the audience know they can learn a lot from them.³¹

I am going to try to refer those general comments to chronicles. When Gallus Anonymous explains the motifs behind writing a history of Polish rulers in *A Letter to the Third Book*, he addresses his words not only to explicitly listed chaplains, but also to some wider auditorium, using the second person plural. The recipient is inscribed in the text as "elliptical YOU," i.e. a community represented by the chaplains and others to whom the message is addressed. I shall define that personal category as "an extended person," following Janusz Lalewicz.³² What can such an auditorium expect: a speech or a lecture? Both can be found in the text. Speech is suggested by addressing everyone (YOU), and a lecture by referring to various facts and the conviction that the audience needs this information.

However, the chronicle's narrative is not as unequivocal as one may think after reading the above paragraph. Personal categories do not explain everything, because the problem of "controlling" the narrative remains. Gallus wants to tell readers what he considers right and proper.³³ Witold Wojtowicz rather convincingly demonstrated that in Gallus's chronicle orality is to a large extent fictional. It results from skillfully using epic techniques,

³¹ In the Polish literature, this subject has been studied most extensively by A. Wierzbicka, *Genry mowy* [Speech Genres], [in:] *Tekst i zdanie* [Text and Sentence], eds. T. Dobrzyńska and E. Janus, Wrocław 1983, pp. 125–137; see also T. Dobrzyńska, *Gatunki pierwotne i wtórne (Czytając Bachtina)* [Primary and Secondary Genres], [in:] *eadem, Tekst – styl – poetyka* [Text – Style – Poetics], Kraków 2003, pp. 181–190.

³² J. Lalewicz, *Retoryka kategorii osobowych* [Rhetorics of Personal Categories], [in:] *Tekst i zdanie...*, pp. 267–272.

³³ At this point my conclusions are the same as J. Banaszekiewicz's in reference to Kadłubek's *Kronika Polska* [Chronica Polonorum, Polish Chronicle]: "A cleric says as much as the chronicler expects, because he simply cannot say more"; see J. Banaszekiewicz, *Narrator w przebraniu, czyli Mistrz Wincenty o bitwie mozgawskiej* [A Narrator in Disguise, i.e. Master Wincenty on the Battle of Mozgawa], [in:] *Onus Athlanteum. Studia nad Kroniką biskupa Wincentego* [Studies in Bishop Wincenty's Chronicle], eds. A. Dąbrówka and W. Wojtowicz, Warszawa 2009, p. 432. I will refer to Banaszekiewicz's research later in the text.

supporting incomplete stories or memories with adequate writing measures. Wojtowicz observes:

An almost paradigmatic tendency can be found in *Gesta* – everything forgotten by the author (and his informants) is “supplemented” using epic techniques (i.e. written tradition, or at least what was already known as text). [...] Whereas in the case of discussing the heritage of oral traditions *tout court*, a different approach dominates, related to searching for alternative formulations and conceptualizations based on already existing lines. This is how a text is “supplemented,” deprived of its original integrity by the author’s limited memory. The latter tendency does not occur in Gallus [...] ³⁴

Although the passage cited above does not directly suggest which epic techniques were used by Gallus, it indicates an important aspect: it is impossible to read historical texts in the spirit of “historiographic literalism.” Such a reading would be incomplete.

The analysis of short self-presentations of the changing authors of *Kronika Pisarzy Miasta Poznania*³⁵ [Writers’ Chronicle of the City of Poznań] offers equally interesting results. They display (sometimes imperfect) rhetorical skills. For instance: “Ego Lucas canonicus ecclesie s. Marie in Szroda et altarista Poznaniensis [...] assumsi stilum notariatus civitatis,” or Mikołaj Ruczel insisting that “stilum civitatis Poznanie suscepi.”³⁶ This is neither formal, nor documentary. It is thus clear that the authors have more to offer than a “usual” story about the past.

In Jacek Banaszekiewicz’s research, text (this term is used here completely consciously) takes a unique place. In the analysis of his *modus procedendi*, Jan Pomorski aptly observed that the analysis of the narrative scheme takes the central position.³⁷ It is relatively easy to notice this in reference to a chronicle, but Banaszekiewicz traces individual issues shared by seemingly distant cycles of chronicles (Roman, Germanic, Iranian), discovering a coherent line of thought showcasing the unchanging human im-

³⁴ W. Wojtowicz, “*Nobis hoc opus recitate*”. *Kilka uwag o fikcji oralności w Kronice Anonima tzw. Galla* [Some Remarks on the Fiction of Orality in the Chronicle by the So-called Gallus Anonimus], [in:] *Nobis operique favete. Studia nad Gallem Anonimem* [Studies in Gallus Anonimus], eds. A. Dąbrowska, E. Skibiński, and W. Wojtowicz, Warszawa 2017, pp. 299–300.

³⁵ I used an old edition written in original languages: *Die Chronik der Stadtschreiber von Posen*, hg. von A. Warschauer, “*Zeitschrift der Historischen Gesellschaft für Provinz Posen*”, Jg. 2 (1886), pp. 185–220, 313–328, 393–408; Jg. 3 (1888), pp. 1–52.

³⁶ For more on this topic, see my book *Struktury narracyjne w późnośredniowiecznych łacińskich kronikach regionalnych* [Narrative Structures in Late-medieval Regional Latin Chronicles], Gniezno 2001, pp. 46–47.

³⁷ “In the chronicle by Gallus Anonimus, Banaszekiewicz, in contrast to all historians before him, is interested exclusively in the narrative structure: Gallus’s role as an observer and narrator”, J. Pomorski, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

agination.³⁸ The process of arriving at this conclusion is even more interesting; it is based on searching for small, complete narrative units. Combining them allows a clear scheme to be obtained (i.e. a constructivist devise³⁹). He notices similarities between Wincenty Kadłubek's patriotism found in the prologue, and patriotism proved by the actions of Manius Curius Dentatus, who dismissed Samnite and Sabine envoys offering him gold; he preferred his faithful soldiers, sending the envoys away while eating baked turnip.⁴⁰ Another example comes from Gallus Anonymous's Chronicle: Banaszekiewicz draws a parallel between the praise for his reception in Gniezno expressed by Otto III, and Saba visiting Salomon.⁴¹

Such constataions are possible only through consciously reading historical sources through a literary lens, though treating it as literature. It is an important decision, as it has practical consequences, allowing the use of the toolset available to contemporary literary studies.⁴²

One of Banaszekiewicz's most interesting ideas was about applying methods from studying the cohesion of the text of *Kronika Dzierzwy* [Dzierzwa's Chronicle]. The research tool used directly for literary, but also non-literary texts – as evidenced by numerous studies⁴³ – was consciously used for analyzing a medieval chronicle, which, due to its compilatory character, has proved controversial in terms of composition and originality. For this reason, using such a non-standard tool in reference to a text of poor artistic value allowed an insight into its deeper layer.⁴⁴

³⁸ This is evident in the analysis of the legend about Popiel, in the tower and water are the most important elements, found in numerous geographically distant accounts, rather than the mice. See J. Banaszekiewicz, *Podanie o Piaście i Popielu. Studium porównawcze nad wczesnośredniowiecznymi tradycjami dynastycznymi* [The Legend of Piast and Popiel: A Comparative Study in Early Medieval Dynastic Tradition], Warszawa 1986, pp. 156–194.

³⁹ A. Russi, *L'arte e le arti: saggio di un'estetica della memoria e altri saggi*, Pisa 1960 is the starting point for such an understanding of constructivism. A. Dąbrówka caused quite a stir with *Konstruktywizm w badaniach literatury dawnej* [Constructivism in Studying Literature of the Past], "Nauka" 2009, no. 3, pp. 133–154.

⁴⁰ J. Banaszekiewicz, *Polskie dzieje bajeczne Mistrza Wincentego Kadłubka* [Polish Fairy-tale Legends by Master Wincenty Kadłubek], Wrocław 1998, pp. 7–35.

⁴¹ J. Banaszekiewicz, *W stronę rytuałów i Galla Anonima* [Towards Rituals and Gallus Anonymous], Kraków 2018, pp. 322–343.

⁴² See P. Bohuszewicz, *Po co literaturze dawnej współczesna teoria* [Why Literature of the Past Needs Modern Theory], "Litteraria Copernicana" 2008, no. 2, pp. 9–27 – an instructive, if somewhat controversial paper.

⁴³ There is abundant literature on this problem, but I would like to mention one monograph: A. Bogusławski, *Problems of the Thematic-Rhematic Structure of Sentences*, Warszawa 1977.

⁴⁴ J. Banaszekiewicz, *Kronika Dzierzwy. XIV-wieczne kompendium historii ojczyzny* [Dzierzwa's Chronicle: Fourteenth-century Compendium of Polish History], Wrocław 1979. Pay attention especially to tables presenting the chronicler's compilation technique.

Such a way of reading texts, somewhat “heretical” and broadly understood as non-literary, uncovers what Henryk Markiewicz called the ‘additional dimensions of a text’. Associations can be even more surprising: Banasziewicz managed to draw parallels between medieval chroniclers and Quentin Tarantino. For this reason, Pomorski proposes to refer to his work as “historiographic bizarre stories,” identifying a similarity to the thought and work of Olga Tokarczuk.⁴⁵

Banasziewicz consciously juxtaposes legends, well-established in high literary culture, with their travesties, compilations, etc., and legends passed on by less educated people. Therefore, it should not be surprising that when considering the scheme of writing about Piast known from Polish chronicles, he will relate it to *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, the brothers Grimm’s fairy tales, and to the significance of hospitality to Romans, Germanic and Slavic peoples. Additional arguments are provided by historical linguistics.⁴⁶ It needs to be mentioned that Banasziewicz was inspired by Georges Dumézil, *Morphology of the Folktale* by Vladimir Propp, and Émile Benveniste’s research into Proto-Indo-European.⁴⁷ In the introduction to one of his last works, Banasziewicz outlines his attitude to research:

I think the most interesting thing is when a researcher converses with the source and illustrates this conversation in their paper as clearly as possible, rather than forcibly extracting facts from a source only to recite them with pathos. It is better to tell a story about how one studies a matter than to confidently state what it was like, and create mirages out of historical facts, skillfully (this is irony) reconstructed by a historian from sources.⁴⁸

Such an understanding of historical sources paves the way to using methods traditionally applied to literature in analyzing source texts, especially historiographic ones. Such methods can help explain issues impossible to analyze using the traditional toolset of history. For decades (if not centuries) scholars have been debating the question of Sallustius’s credibility: his way of writing, especially in the *proemium* (preface), allows an immediate insight into his preferences and assumptions.⁴⁹ However, this does not make research easier, because it is impossible to relate this peculiar manifesto directly to the historiographic narrative.

⁴⁵ J. Pomorski, *op. cit.*, pp. 144–145.

⁴⁶ J. Banasziewicz, *Podanie o Piaście...*, pp. 131–136.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸ J. Banasziewicz, *W stronę rytuałów...*, pp. 8–9.

⁴⁹ H. Appel, *Z problematyki proemium do “Coniuratio Catilinae” Salustiusza* [The Issue of the Proemium to “*Coniuratio Catilinae*”, [in:] *Łacińska proza naukowa* [Latin Scientific Prose], ed. A.W. Mikołajczak, Gniezno 2001, pp. 162–179.

Additionally, Salustius “did not promise to write *sine ira et studio*.”⁵⁰ Traditional research methods used by historians resulted in numerous mutually exclusive judgments.⁵¹ For example, considerations regarding whether Salustius used official but classified sources⁵² sadly did not help determine his credibility as a historian. Therefore, Hanna Appel chose a different path: she compared speeches by Roman politicians (*de facto* reconstructed) found in Salustius’s works; however, this was not enough to draw any definite conclusions. She also compared literary (I do not hesitate to use this word) portrayals of protagonists: Cicero, Cato the Younger, Caesar, and others. Only this, together with reading Salustius’s meta-textual comments about particular actors allowed her to determine that Salustius “tried” (although sometimes unsuccessfully) to be objective. His major task was “*scribere*, not *proscribere*.”⁵³

Metatext can be used in different ways in analyzing historical sources. A lot can be deduced about authors’ personalities from their autothematic comments. Kazimierz Liman analyzed *Kronika Wielkopolska* [Wielkopolska Chronicle] years ago, pointing to the chronicler’s comment regarding the work of medieval historians.⁵⁴ For the chronicler, one account is reliable “*satis ample et verissime*”; another one, not so much “*verius autem creditur*”; he clearly distances himself from another one: “*Quid autem certi sit, non invenio*.”⁵⁵ Note that in the second example the chronicler highlights his distance to the popular belief (using the passive voice), and in the last one, he clearly stresses his own opinion which is in opposition to the popular opinion.

If every text can be read considering the categories of sender, receiver, and channel, there is no contraindication to apply this strategy to historical texts. After all, **somebody** talks to **somebody** via **some channel**. Jerzy Topolski’s definition of a historical source is useful here. Such a model of literary communication, enriched with non-textual elements (e.g. the chronicler’s education and environment), but based on elements of a text in

⁵⁰ See also H. Appel, *Animus liber. Kwestia obiektywizmu w pisarstwie historycznym Sallustiusza* [Animus Liber: The Question of Objectivity in Salustius’s Historical Writing], Toruń 2004, p. 211.

⁵¹ For a review of those opinions, see *ibidem*, pp. 7–18.

⁵² As pointed out by I. Lewandowski, *Historiografia rzymska* [Roman Historiography], Poznań 2007, pp. 122–126.

⁵³ H. Appel, *Animus liber...*, p. 217.

⁵⁴ K. Liman, *Autothematisches in der „Chronica Poloniae Maioris”*, [in:] *Studien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters Jürgen Petersohn zum 65. Geburtstag*, hg. von M. Thumser, A. Wenz-Haubfleisch, P. Wiegand, Stuttgart 2000, pp. 302–310.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 306.

which metatext, paratext and text can be distinguished, has been proposed by Kazimierz Liman.⁵⁶

At the same time, this is an attempt at building an intellectual bridge between a “raw” historical account, and the world of literature, which should provide intellectual pleasure.⁵⁷

Translated by Paulina Zagórska

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⁵⁶ K. Liman, *Das literarische Kommunikations-Modell in den mittellateinischen Chroniken*, [in:] *Conference The Medieval Chronicle – Die mittelalterliche Chronik – La chronique médiévale*, Utrecht 1996, pp. 56–58 (abstract) and full version: *Das literarische Kommunikationsmodell in den mittellateinischen Chroniken*, “Symbolae Philologorum Posnaniensium” 2010, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 23–32.

⁵⁷ See R. Barthes, *Przyjemność tekstu* [The Pleasure of the Text], Warszawa 1997.

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Feature Film as a Literary Work

ABSTRACT. Krzysztof Kozłowski, *Feature Film as a Literary Work*. “Przestrzenie Teorii” special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 205–221. ISSN 1644-6763. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.10>

The relationships between feature film and literature are typically conceptualized from the perspective of film adaptations. Although numerous shared points between them are noticeable, typically feature films are not treated as literary works *tout court*.

The paper focuses on the difference between the medium and literature, which allows us to look at any feature film as literature in the film medium. “Empirical media studies” (U. Saxer, W. Faulstich) provides the methodological foundation for the paper, and three representative examples are discussed. The first two are extremely different from each other: a feature film preceding a novel (*Alien* by R. Scott and *Alien* by A.D. Foster), and the opposite variant, i.e. a feature film based on a novel in the book medium (*Barry Lyndon* by S. Kubrick and *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon* by W.M. Thackeray). The third example (*Love Story* by A. Hiller and *Love Story* by E. Segal) is intermediate: the feature film and the novel were released at the same time (Segal wrote the novel based on his own scenario during the production of the film).

The examples analyzed, together with theoretical considerations, show that it is not the so-called “language of film” that makes a film a work of art, but its “literary-logical continuum” (Faulstich), which supports the thesis that all literature is mediated, and that traditional considerations regarding film adaptation should include the issue of literary media to a greater extent.

KEYWORDS: media, literature, adaptation, feature film, novel, mediation, literary-logical continuum

Werner Faulstich never believed in the so-called “language of film” – a common concept among his contemporary film theoreticians – which *nota bene* lingers even today. Even if he did not state it as such, he clearly treated it metaphorically, albeit extending that “language” beyond film, to other areas of the audio-visual culture. He wrote: “Compared to other media, the language of film, which includes means of film representation, means accumulating special effects: as an arsenal of rhetorical ways of «talking», today it is not exclusive to film (but also e.g. comic books and television).”¹

¹ W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu. Badania nad filmem science “Wojna światów” (1953/1954) Byrona Haskina* [Film Aesthetics: Studies on *The War of the Worlds* (1953/1954) by Byron Haskin], trans. K. Kozłowski and M. Kasprzyk, foreword K. Kozłowski, Poznań 2017, p. 43 (Biblioteka “Przestrzeni Teorii”). In his *Der Bastard als Zombie*, published in the same year as *Estetyka filmu* (1982), Faulstich added: “the language of film” is not artistic in any way, similarly to “body language” or “verbal language.” Attempts at treating “the language of film” as an artistic language – and thereby treating film as a work of art – will necessarily

According to Faulstich, understood in this way, the “language of film” (equated with the dead end of theoretical-film considerations, whereas it is a synonym of a simple consequence of individual frames, which resulted from a recourse of film to photography, initiated by Siegfried Kracauer) serves “a purely practical function, being a realistic language; despite what Kracauer says, there are no film or non-film shots”;² feature films are always about their *totum*, i.e. integrity of their elements, rather than separating individual “photographs” for aesthetic reasons, and secondarily arranging them as if they were a verbal language. For Faulstich, it is “mirrored realism” rather than words which constitutes film as a medium – the same realism that Rudolf Arnheim saw as the biggest obstacle in considering film an art. In the seminal *Film as art* (1932), he argued that if there was ever to be “the complete film”, it would be “the fulfillment of the age-old striving for the complete illusion,”³ which would be fatal for the art of film. Arnheim warned that

the attempt to make the two-dimensional picture as nearly as possible like its solid model succeeds; original and copy become practically indistinguishable. Thereby all formative potentialities which were based on the differences between model and copy are eliminated and only what is inherent in the original in the way of significant form remains to art.⁴

For Arnheim, this fear of the non-artistic character of the so-called “complete film”, which only reproduces the real world, stemmed from his conviction that art should “originate, interpret, mold”⁵ reality rather than copy it. In other words, it is a “mechanical reproduction of reality,” which has nothing to do with art. Hence Arnheim points to creative solutions related with creators’ intentional activities. He is interested in camera work, such as changing the depth of field or an innovative perspective, the use of light and color, taking advantage of the limits of image or distance from the filmed object, lack of spatial-temporal continuity, leitmotifs, the whole spectrum of camera motion, mirrored images, and many other means of

refer equally to feature film, documentaries, and scientific films, as well as any other film genre: newsreel or silent film. In fact, this is about “audiovisual language,” which falls into linguistics rather than film- or media-studies. See W. Faulstich, *Der Bastard als Zombie. Ein polemisches Statement zur sogenannten Film- und Fernsehsemiotik*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur? Aufsätze 1972–1982*, Tübingen 1983, pp. 138–139. All translations of quotes into English – P. Zagórska, unless indicated otherwise.

² W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

³ R. Arnheim, *Film as Art*, Berkeley 1957, p. 158.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 158–159.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

expression and methods of modeling which film shares with other forms of art. However, their usefulness here depends on the extent to which they can be referred to in order to reinforce the meaning of a film. Significantly, Arnheim tends to overuse the word “artistic,” resulting in sentences like “artistic use of the absence of nonvisual sense experiences,”⁶ which, to put it simply, is what his whole film theory looks like.

Kracauer is not much better.⁷ Although he does appreciate the “camera’s recording tasks” that result from “the laws of the medium,”⁸ he defends “film-like film”, which communicates exclusively “images of material reality,”⁹ ultimately stressing film’s “revealing functions.”¹⁰ In other words, by referring to Luis Buñuel, who expected revelation from film,¹¹ Kracauer understands: (i) things normally invisible (he further distinguishes three phenomena: small and big, things that pass, and blind spots of the mind),¹² (ii) events which overwhelm consciousness¹³ and (iii) special modes of reality.¹⁴

Such restrictions resulted in questioning the very notion of art. What is more, Kracauer saw it as misleading in the context of film. However, in order to soften that statement, he stressed that he meant it “in the traditional sense.”¹⁵ Referring to Arnold Hauser, who was amongst the first to notice this, he added: “If film is an art at all, it should not be confused with established arts.”¹⁶ However, he immediately added:

There may be some justification in loosely applying this fragile concept to films such as *Nanook*, or *Paisan*, or *Potemkin* which are deeply steeped in camera-life. But in defining them as art, it must always be kept in mind that even the most creative film maker is much less independent of nature in the raw than the painter or poet; that his creativity manifests itself in letting nature in and penetrating it.¹⁷

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 102.

⁷ S. Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Princeton 1997.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 43 onwards.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

¹² Since the first two examples seem self-explanatory, only “blind spots of the mind” require an explanation. Kracauer uses three examples to illustrate this notion: unconventional complexes, literally understood garbage, and mundane objects. *Ibidem*, p. 53.

¹³ Such as “elemental catastrophes, the atrocities of war, acts of violence and terror, sexual debauchery, and death”. *Ibidem*, p. 57.

¹⁴ “Physical reality as it appears to individuals in extreme states of mind”. *Ibidem*, p. 58.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

There is no doubt that contrary to Arnheim, Kracauer accepted realism as a property of the very medium, hence his efforts to defend film from critics denying it the right to be considered an art (and if they agreed, they would only do it on special terms). And Kracauer at least partially accepted this. Perhaps in some cases the notion of art could be extended to accommodate film (which he did with films by Flaherty, Rossellini, and Einstein), but he generally advised different paths. Ultimately, this is Kracauer's recipe for considerations regarding film; he must have found Arnheim's argument largely irrefutable.

It is therefore not surprising that Faulstich, who appreciated Kracauer's demands regarding reality in film, and who did not deny that film originated from photography (or rather, not only, but also from photography)¹⁸ referred to his concept of film realism as "purist." His accusation was that taking film back to photography makes it impossible to recognize film as "a medium of visible reality"¹⁹ and noticing in it "an individual work: as a whole which breathes life into the reality in motion it superficially reproduces,"²⁰ and that (eventually) it assumes that "the limits of film manifest themselves in its integral visuality."²¹ The latter can be taken for granted only by someone who unknowingly assumes that film's possibilities as a medium are exhausted in its ability to visualize. Faulstich says that with this assumption, "analogically to photography and radio, film would be realistic through and through: «only» realistic."²² And this is not the case; according to Faulstich, apart from what is visualized in film, there is an invisible reality, a "literary-logical structure."²³ It subjects reflected fragments of the real world, or the photographed reality staged in a film studio (so-called building blocks²⁴

¹⁸ In *Filmgeschichte* Faulstich enumerated: (i) "it took the live stage production from traditional theater and transformed theater actors into film actors," (ii) it took individual images, oriented towards authentic reality, from photography, and incorporated it in the continuous stream of images, (iii) from the primary medium of a storyteller (narrator) it took breaking free from here and now, and taking stories beyond empirical time and space. W. Faulstich, *Filmgeschichte*, Paderborn 2005, p. 18. Thanks to integrating those elements, the new medium was able to combine "illusion and imagination under the sign of pure reproduction of reality [...]. This duplication of life and the world – a functional simulation – quite openly proved to be a useful mechanism in the function of existential support for many: «cinema as an ontological prosthesis» [a term by Thomas Elsaesser – K.K.]. W. Faulstich, *Medienwandel im Industrie- und Massenzeitalter (1830–1900)*, Göttingen 2004, pp. 251–252 („Die Geschichte der Medien", vol. 5); see Th. Elsaesser, *Filmgeschichte und frühes Kino. Archäologie eines Medienwandels*, München 2002, p. 31.

¹⁹ W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 143.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

and constructive elements of reality²⁵), to organization, which gives film, and especially feature film, the character of an art or literary work (if we use Faulstich's terminology). This does not mean abandoning the medium's reality, but – on the contrary – its full, shameless acceptance:

This realism – as pure naturalism – should under no circumstances be abandoned. What is explicitly shown and said through image and sound, i.e. reality as a reflection, in a specific film or literary work is reduced to a mere element, a building block, something defining the whole film. The term “feature film” [Spiel-Film] is about playing [spielerisch]; it is only through playing [Spiel] that film becomes a work of art, which does not happen as a result of a selection of special fragments of reality or unique objects (neither is it determined by the so-called language of film). [...] Although film shows reality as motion in time, that motion does not allow to recognize development peculiar to it as playing [giving it the character of art – K.K.]. In visual elements of film nothing is uncovered, but everything appears real. What is visible and audible in a feature film [Spiel-Film] [...] is the material of which it is made and which it uses.²⁶

In the media theory of feature film, the logic of a literary work replaces the metaphorical “language of film”: as a film's internal reality, it determines its organization. However, the discovery of that logics is related to the viewer's experience, who needs to recognize it;²⁷ whereas for the filmmaker it is everyday life, regardless of whether their feature film is based on some literary work. In both cases, the “literarylogical whole”²⁸ is obviously the same. It does not need to be limited to printed literature, because it constitutes the meaning of an artistic utterance and allows to include feature film in literature understood in the broad sense. After many years, Faulstich explained the historical context of his own theory:

[...] at the time, there were attempts at founding the artistic character of feature film on literary studies based on the language of film, as if e.g. a poem was a work of art due to verbal language. Many literary scholars tried to distinguish feature film as an artistic object, to equate “film” with “feature film” and simply classify it as a discipline of art (painting). But an individual work of art – I think – displays a logic peculiar to it, i.e. specifically defined structure, and it is that structure which

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 9–10.

²⁷ Faulstich argues that this means that “film depersonifies [vereinzelt]; cinema confronts viewers as *individuals* with a film's reality and its meaning, as – strictly speaking – it is no longer acquired in terms of projection, as is the case of printed literature, or introjection, as is the case of radio drama, but absorbed – in a way peculiar to the medium – rather substitutively”. *Ibidem*, p. 65.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

constitutes meaning – in a poem, feature film, TV series, radio drama, naturally also in opera or painting. My intention was to enlist all works of art in all media for literary studies.²⁹

And so the conviction that all literature is subject to media mediation, that there is no literature without a medium, proved decisive here.³⁰ The reality of a specific medium, in which a literary work is hidden like in a shell, and which constitutes both a limitation and chance for that work, makes itself known with literature manifesting itself. It releases the creator's need to know the rules: "literature is literature only as media communication."³¹ Thanks to the notion of medium, it is possible to distinguish radio drama from the radio, a novel from a book, a drama from the theatre, a film from a feature film, etc. This explains why any analysis and interpretation of a literary work should start with categories defining the specificity of a given medium – and this is not about the notion of a medium present in different fields of knowledge, nor the theory of medium *in abstracto*, in the case of feature films, about theory (more or less) independent of empirical experience, but about:

[...] theory of literature in a medium (here: film aesthetics). It also refers to other media, such as the radio or television. Each time we should ask: what specifically media rules and regularities do literary works follow? How much did the author manage to use them? To what extent does the listener-viewer-reader have to submit to them, recognize them?³²

All this leads straight from literary theory in the medium of film to the media aesthetics of an individual film. The latter can be explained by an analysis of film as a "complex aesthetic product" (literature),³³ taking into account film genres, action, characters, forms of construction, norms and values which culminate in seeking the message: "an interpretation of a film, preceded by an analysis, methodologically organized, oriented towards reflection, can be compared to «glasses», which allow us to see certain aspects of a film better, or inspect elements which we did not notice before."³⁴

²⁹ Cited from: K. Kozłowski, *Przedmowa* [Foreword], [in:] W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu...*, *op. cit.*, p. xxvii.

³⁰ W. Faulstich, *Der „Krieg der Welten“ und die Stilmittel der Medien*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur?*, p. 75.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ W. Faulstich, *Grundkurs. Filmanalyse*, Paderborn 2008, p. 18.

³⁴ *Idem*, *Die Filminterpretation*, Göttingen 1988, p. 13.

Each of these areas of activity includes all layers of a film simultaneously: aural, visual, verbal. In research, it is further scrutinized, which is clear even from a glance at forms of film construction, such as camera work (framing, image composition, size of shots and types of montage), dialogue and sound, music, space, light, and color (elements of *mise-en-scène*³⁵). The diversity of notions which appear here, and the semantic regions they belong to, as well as all other terms which emerge over the course of research (such as a static versus dynamic character), are collectively referred to as “the language of film,”³⁶ but, in fact, this does not say much about film as a medium, as it does not go beyond metaphors. This language contains both notions taken from literary studies and different types of creative work, and even terms from different arts which have been autonomous for a long time now. Painting and elements associated with it (such as light and color) are placed on the same level. There is a simple explanation for this abundance of forms and notions offered by the media film theory, which could function as literary theory in film, or more specifically: in feature film.

However, first we would need to define the main aesthetic-medial features of film (realism, violence, technique, goods, myth), and then all other terms which can be used to describe a feature film in a complete way and treat it like literature. Another important example: an analysis of action includes the screenplay, protocol, division into sequences and scenes, reflection regarding the time of storytelling, structure, and phases of action (“acts”). For example, the protocol allows to recognize time and space in a film. It allows an insight into subsequent sequences (*story*) and makes visible (as film on paper) rules for grouping sequences into logical units and parts of the plot. In such a protocol, the literary structure of film, and with it the problem of the time of telling and time told, which often spans over days, weeks, months, and years, comes to the fore. Moreover, filmmakers eagerly subject it to different devices. Such a way of how time functions in literature was analyzed by Eberhard Lämmert, who demonstrated how it is condensed, how retrospections and anticipations manifest themselves, and what causes time jumps and shifts.³⁷

The analogy with literature in printed media (books, magazines, newspapers, etc.) is unsurprising, as many notions connect feature film with literature and art, as exemplified by e.g. literature’s affiliation via fiction.

³⁵ See B. Beil, J. Kühnel, Ch. Neuhaus, *Studienbuch Filmanalyse. Ästhetik und Dramaturgie des Spielfilms*, München 2012, pp. 35–48.

³⁶ A. Bienk, *Filmsprache. Einführung in die interaktive Filmanalyse*, Marburg 2008.

³⁷ E. Lämmert, *Bauformen des Erzählens*, Stuttgart 1967.

Jerzy Ziomek discussed the community of arts as “a fictional community.”³⁸ He understood fiction as a change “in the state of things, in which (a) at least two subjects actively co-create (b) a meaningful system of events, which is given to us as (c) an account from some perspective.”³⁹ What is more, “a fictional literary work is always accompanied by the narrative gesture,”⁴⁰ which makes this term applicable to visual arts – and even more aptly – to theater and film.⁴¹

“Narrative gesture” makes the text dependent on its creator, and it also implies readiness to “take and accept different perspectives.”⁴² But first and foremost, it is the reason why nothing can be fully non-dietary in a feature film – neither script, nor music. Although such differentiations function in analytical practice, they are purely operational. They are like a ladder, about which Wittgenstein wrote that once it has been climbed, it immediately has to be rejected, as only then can the world present itself to us in the right light.⁴³ According to Alice Bienk, in film “a storytelling instance” is expressed – not an author in the sense like the narrator in printed literature, but “a sum of all the film devices used.”⁴⁴ In short, in this case the dependence of a text on its creator is complete.

This brings us back to considerations about “literary work in film,”⁴⁵ forcing to notice an aesthetic structure in its narrative structure and to question the allegedly obvious division into feature films based on literature (adaptations), and those based on original screenplays. According to Faulstich, “the so-called literature adaptations (an awfully ideological word!) are only a special case of feature film.”⁴⁶ None can not appreciate the weight of literary prototypes for individual films, concepts originating from printed literature, but – adapted or not – every feature film is fundamentally literature in the film medium.

Analyzing specific examples should make this regularity visible in a complementary way. This will be done using three examples of feature films which, due to their approach to their literary bases, are situated relatively to each other in model relationships: one assumes clearly indi-

³⁸ J. Ziomek, *Powinowactwa literatury. Studia i szkice* [Literature's Affiliations: Studies and Essays], Warszawa 1980, p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

⁴¹ See *ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 63.

⁴³ See L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, translation into Polish and foreword by B. Wolniewicz, Warszawa 2000, p. 83.

⁴⁴ A. Bienk, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁴⁵ W. Faulstich, *Neue Methoden der Filmanalyse*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur?*, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

cated literary prototype, one reveals its obvious lack, although it initiates movement in the opposite direction (“novelization” of film), and one means simultaneous co-existence of a feature film and a book in the mediasphere.

The first example is *Barry Lyndon* (1975) by Stanley Kubrick, based on the 1844 novel *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* by William Makepeace Thackeray, which illustrates a standard relationship between feature film and literature. Kubrick was familiar with Thackeray’s works; before he read *Barry Lyndon*, he considered filming *Vanity Fair* (1847–1848), but decided that the number of plotlines and events could not be accommodated in a feature film, even one longer than usual.⁴⁷ Yet he thought it would be possible with *Barry Lyndon*; he liked the characters and the plot, even though it was unsurprising. Kubrick thought that it was possible to adapt a book for the screen without destroying the literary matter (*Stoff*). He found the novel’s narration helpful in writing the screenplay.

Thackeray wrote his book in the the first person, allowing readers to gradually uncover the true nature of Barry Lyndon’s life story, which is told extremely subjectively. The readers are assisted by explanations given by a third-person narrator and several clues incorporated in Lyndon’s diary as “editor’s comments”; there is the “narrator’s gesture,” outlined more clearly than Barry Lyndon’s account, hidden behind the objectivized narration. The reader understands that the protagonist’s words are only one source of information; another one is the novel’s silent (physical) author, who, using the editor’s voice, teaches readers to stay vigilant, figure out a different course of events, and draw their own conclusions from contradictory judgments and opinions. Those are confirmed (or debunked) at the end, where the nameless editor and narrator intentionally mentions that: “the Sheriff and his assistant, the prisoner, nay, the prison itself, are now no more.”⁴⁸

It is impossible to fully recreate this narrative effect in the adaptation. A dense verbal narrative would deny the image’s primacy, bursting its modest frame. Moreover, it would go against the assumption that “film is the medium of visible reality”⁴⁹: this basic fact has major consequences for every adaptation worthy of this name. Camera does not lie, “in film, the viewer always sees the objective reality,”⁵⁰ regardless of whether this is POV or another solution in the content plan: the world of dreams or illusion. In

⁴⁷ See *Zweites Gespräch*, [in:] M. Ciment, *Kubrick*, trans. J.P. Brunold, München 1982, p. 169.

⁴⁸ W.M. Thackeray, *Barry Lyndon*, s.l. 2008, p. 282 [“Biblioteca Virtual Universal”]. The latter comment refers to the London Fleet Prison, demolished in 1846.

⁴⁹ W. Faulstich, *Estetyka filmu*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

film, even the fantastic is real.⁵¹ As a specific image, and together with all its appearances of people and things, because fantasticality is inscribed in “the image, and if the fantastic is presented visually and audially, it is no weaker than physical reality [...], to the contrary – it becomes physical.”⁵²

Kubrick was forced to invert the narrative situation from Thackeray’s novel and introduce a third-person narrator throughout the film to reveal his way of seeing reality. However, he did not feel obliged to maintain Thackeray’s vision – he could allow one of his own. His adaptation follows the rules of “productive perception,”⁵³ for which (as the name suggests) productivity, postulated innovativeness,⁵⁴ is the most important rule. This was not at any cost, but with clear trust in own abilities to think artistically. This “concept talent” of Kubrick’s manifests itself in every scene, out of which some do not have a basis in the novel; they stemmed from the film specification of Kubrick’s mental images.⁵⁵ The seduction scene with Lady Lyndon is a great example, in which his “concept talent” is fully revealed via Schubert’s *Piano Trio in E-flat major, Op. 100*, making this scene an important arch supporting the film’s “literary-logical structure” and determining one arm of the dramatic arch;⁵⁶ another one is the epilogue, in which Lady Lyndon signs a loan note for her ex-husband.

(ii) The second example seems to illustrate the most common solution, as it concerns films based on original screenplays. This is the case of Ridley Scott’s 1979 film *Alien*,⁵⁷ although with one reservation: this film had its media consequences. In the same year, a photo-novel *Alien* (edited by R.J. Anobile, screenplay by D. O’Bannan, London 1979), a monograph by Hans Rudolf Giger, which, according to Faulstich and Strobel, revealed the

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ See K. Kozłowski, *Przedmowa* [Foreword], *op. cit.*, pp. xiii-xvi.

⁵⁴ The significance of this action can be seen thanks to a comparison to *The Birds* (1952) by Daphne Maurier and *The Birds* (1963) by Alfred Hitchcock. In his concluding remarks Helmut Korte wrote: *The Birds* – apart from a few points – has little in common with the short story under the same title”. H. Korte, *The Birds*, [in:] *Literaturverfilmungen*, hrsg. von F.-J. Albersmeier, V. Roloff, Frankfurt am Main 1989, p. 297. And on the same page: “[...] a qualitative comparison of the film and its literary basis is impossible; the film is superior”.

⁵⁵ On the subject of “mental cinema” which “is no less vital than that of the stages of actual production of the sequences as they are recorded by the camera and then edited on the Moviola”. See I. Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*, trans. G. Brock, Boston 2016, p. 88.

⁵⁶ See K. Kozłowski, *Stanley Kubrick. Filmowa polifonia sztuk* [Film Poliphony of Arts], Warszawa 2018, pp. 274–277.

⁵⁷ W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, “*Uksiążkowie*” jako problem estetyczno-medialny. Obcy – ósmy pasażer Nostromo – *studium przypadku*” [“Novelization” as an Aesthetic and Media Issue: *Alien* – A Case Study], translated into Polish by M. Kasprzyk, translation revised by K. Kozłowski, “Przestrzenie Teorii” 2014, no. 21, pp. 231–259.

hidden message of the film (*Giger's Alien*, Basel 1979),⁵⁸ the popular science book *The Book of Alien* (London 1979) by Paul Scanlon and Michael Gross, the graphic novel *Alien. The Illustrated Story* (New York 1979) by Archie Goodwin and Walter Simonson, and the novel *Alien* (London 1979) by Alan Dean Foster [Polish edition: A.D. Foster, *Aliens: The Official Movie Novelization* (translated into Polish by J. Kraśko, Leszno 1992).⁵⁹

Scott's film has two types of action: open and hidden. Since a lot of effort was put in meticulously motivating the open one,⁶⁰ it is not difficult to characterize. In *Lexikon des Science Fiction Films* we read:

The space tug "Nostromo", fully loaded, is on its way back to Earth, when it is re-directed to a planet from which a weak distress signal is sent. The crew discover that it originates from a derelict alien ship with alien life forms on board. One of them (Alien) attaches itself to the face of a Nostromo crew member, thus getting on board of the tug, where it starts to develop and grow, eventually killing the Nostromo crew one by one, except for warrant officer Ripley, who manages to blast it away into deep space.⁶¹

Noticing the hidden action in *Alien* requires activation of the "symbolic mode": as Umberto Eco explains, without it, a text is deprived of its proper meaning, both on the literal and metaphorical (rhetorical) level.⁶² But this is also the case when this mode is considered, although the co-existence of

⁵⁸ As Faulstich and Strobel explain, "Giger's book documents [...] stages of creation of a feature film, [...] especially those which belong to the hidden level of the plot. Initial concepts, drafts, early versions, changed variants allow an insight into different phases of development of a feature film project. We can easily identify such processes as forming the exotic landscape of a planet, or the formation of Alien's eggs (from a common egg box, to the eggs, to Graafian follicles). What is decisive on this occasion is the analytical potential of this "book to a film". *Ibidem*, p. 243.

⁵⁹ "As a novel, *Alien* is a typical representative of the science fiction genre understood not as trivial adventure literature like Perry Rhodan, i.e. Old Shatterhand in space, but as a literary conceptualization of utopia, extrapolation of what is known and unknown to a terrestrial universe, which becomes fragile and gets shifted via reader's dynamic experience of what is possible. The novel *Alien* presents a relationship between man and a monster, the typical and therefore well-known, and the alien, understood as an idea". *Ibidem*, pp. 253–254.

⁶⁰ This does not mean that there are no inconsistencies and illogicalities, which may indicate a hidden theme. Faulstich lists a few: (i) the ship's computer's inability to recognize whether the signal is a call for help or warning, (ii) the crew's outrageous recklessness in the face of danger, (iii) Ash the android suddenly tries to kill Ripley, without a reason, (iv) despite extremely advanced technology, a space tug transports to earth 20 million tons of refined ore, (v) people from distant future act like people from the present times (anachronous setting). See W. Faulstich, *Die Filminterpretation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 70–71.

⁶¹ Cited from W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, "Uksiążkowiecie" jako problem..., *op. cit.*, p. 236.

⁶² U. Eco, *Czytane światła* [Reading the World], trans. M. Woźniak, Kraków 1999, p. 204.

different interpretations of a film may impose itself interchangeably. As in a trick drawing published in the humorous magazine “Fliegende Blätter”: “We can see the picture as either a rabbit or a duck. It is easy to discover both readings.”⁶³ In line with this rule, *Alien* “discusses the male fear of women as those who give birth”⁶⁴: it describes all phases from conception to birth from the perspective of a man who remains outside of the process. According to Faulstich and Strobel, “he sees the female reproductive ability as something alien [...]. As an aesthetic act or [...] literature in the film medium, Scott’s *Alien* is a highly diverse, sophisticated and ambitious «work of art» in the traditional meaning.”⁶⁵

This is uncovered in the symbolization of action, which can be conceptualized parallelly on both semantic surfaces,⁶⁶ and it is also expressed via individual symbols introduced to the film. They are so obvious that they are impossible to miss, even if the connections between them can be obscure. They are “meticulously shaped in all their details”⁶⁷:

It can be seen in the symbolism of names (e.g. “Mother” for Nostromo’s computer), it can be heard in audial symbols (e.g. the unraveling events are accompanied by the sound of heartbeat), and it is most significant in visual symbols (e.g. an alien “spaceship” is shaped like a woman lying on her back with her legs apart; “eggs” look like Graafian follicles – etc.).⁶⁸

(iii) The third example is the rarest; moreover, it is possible to identify the exact moment it appeared in the history of media. It is *Love Story*... but whose? There are two possible answers: Erich Segal’s or Arthur Hiller’s, alternatively: Segal and Hiller’s. The novel *Love Story* by Erich Segal (a professor of classical philosophy at Yale) was published by Harper&Row in New York on February 2, 1970.⁶⁹ The book’s success exceeded expectations: it remained on “The New York Times” bestseller list for a full year, 40 weeks of which it was number one. On November 18, 1970 a pocket edition was published by New American Library, selling as many as 4,350,000 copies.⁷⁰

⁶³ See E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, New York 1977, p. 4.

⁶⁴ W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, “*Uksiążkowanie*” jako problem..., *op. cit.*, p. 237.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ See W. Faulstich, *Die Filminterpretation*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁶⁷ W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, “*Uksiążkowanie*” jako problem..., *op. cit.*, p. 238.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ The novel was simultaneously published in instalments in *The Ladies’ Home Journal*. See W. Faulstich, R. Strobel, *Innovation und Schema. Medienästhetische Untersuchungen zu den Bestsellern “James Bond”, “Airport”, “Und Jimmy ging zum Regenbogen”, “Love Story” und “Der Pate”*, Wiesbaden 1987, p. 94.

⁷⁰ See *ibidem*.

The film *Love Story* (1970) by Arthur Hille, starring Ali MacGraw (Jenny) and Ryan O’Neal (Oliver Barrett IV), cost 2.26 million dollars, and, according to “The New Yorker,” the preview screenings from the first week of December 1970 alone returned these costs. The film premiered on December 16, 1970. Over the next 12 weeks it grossed 36,000,000 USD in America, thanks to 17 million viewers; the film’s profitability was spectacular, even more so because it was just as popular in Europe. In total, it was nominated for seven Academy Awards, winning in “the best original score” category (Francis Lai), which brought even more profit from the soundtrack sales.

It would seem that in this case, obviously, the book was first, which would make the film a typical adaptation. However, in fact, the film was shot from November 1969 to February 1970 (in Boston, New York, California and Biograph Studios in New York).⁷¹ Of course, it was based on Segal’s screenplay, who was paid 100,000 dollars for it and a share in profits (before *Love Story*, Segal wrote *Yellow Submarine* [1968] directed by George Dunning). Howard G. Minsky persuaded Segal to rewrite his own screenplay as a short novel⁷² (the British pocket edition was a mere 127 pages long). Therefore, “Today, *Love Story* is considered the first story ever to be simultaneously published as a book and released as a film.”⁷³ There is no doubt that this was indeed the case.

This parallel character can be seen in the structure of both works; after all, the 22 chapters do not correspond with the 48 film sequences, and the text’s lines with the film’s shots (635).⁷⁴ Moreover, the novel is written in first-person narrative – it is a memoir of the protagonist, Oliver. With one exception (sequence 22), the film consists of long retrospections, which start from the second shot and go full circle: in the last shot, Oliver goes to the stadium where we first saw him, sitting on a bench in winter. The main action, like a classical tragedy, is divided into five acts (from exposition to disaster – the climax is in Act III).⁷⁵ Its similarity to the film results from the close relationship of the two works, and the fact that the author of the book and the film’s screenplay are the same person.

The intensification of condensing actions is analogous to the main action. In both the film and the novel, three comparable parts can be distinguished, although in the film this is directly connected with montage. Slower and faster sequences appear alternately.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 94–95.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 95.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

⁷⁴ See *ibidem*, p. 100.

⁷⁵ See *ibidem*, p. 103.

Apart from action and its condensation, the protagonists are the same as well (both main and supporting). Oliver clearly dominates in both: he is the only character who always takes place in the action, and is present in 63% of all the shots. Jenny appears in 40%, Oliver's father in 8%, Jenny's father, Phil Cavalleri, in 5%.⁷⁶ The two fathers are contrasted equally strongly, but, due to the limitations of the medium, in the film this contrast is more obvious, although there is no oversimplification.⁷⁷

Each case study presented here is a model example, clearly illustrating how feature film is literature in the film medium. The same aesthetic-media categories and literary studies notions, which require coherence, apply to each one. The seemingly noncongruent diversity of terms results from the "literary-logical" completeness of individual films, and the medium conditioning its existence; this diversity is not a peculiarity of some "language of film." Referring to such notions as "dramatization" or "adaptation" is of no use either, as – *volens volens* – they refer to the process rather than the product. A specific feature film is treated here as if it was not literature, and a book as a medium, whereas it is clear as soon as "literature did its triumphant march through electronic media."⁷⁸ It turned out that "it left behind the book like a book jacket, thus proving that it was only a channel."⁷⁹

Therefore, we need to ask again about the limits and possibilities of literature. After all, it is not individual works that are able to tell us the most about what else we can expect from literature in terms of aesthetics.⁸⁰ On the contrary, the abstractness of media that it uses and without which it could not exist: what remains is not determined by poets... It lasts thanks to a single medium: "like a shell."⁸¹ Faulstich suggestively illustrates this regularity:

The fact that Narcissus fell in love with a face which ultimately proved to be a reflection of his own was possible thanks to the shore which made the pond a pond. This is not a coincidence that in the third part of *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* [Ernst Simon – K.K.] Bloch describes media as transitions, as hidden desires reflected in a mirror. But – unilaterally focused on keeping hope alive – he did not understand their limiting, destructive influence, which makes the utopian truly immanent.⁸²

⁷⁶ See *ibidem*, p. 105.

⁷⁷ See *ibidem*, p. 110.

⁷⁸ W. Faulstich, *Medienästhetik und Mediengeschichte. Mit einer Fallstudie zu "The War of the Worlds" von H.G. Wells*, Heidelberg 1982, p. 18 ("Reihe Siegen. Beiträge zur Literatur- und Sprachwissenschaft", vol. 38).

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 81.

Talking about utopia may seem somewhat misleading here. In fact, in this case “utopian” refers to a parallel, alternative reality made of dreams, hopes and longings. This is what all literary fiction is made of, which, as Roger Caillois put it, “the everyday world and fictional world, so close to each other, and at the same time so distant, are divided by [...] a gulf – barely visible, but still impassable. One remains a show [...], whereas the other one [...] is a field of the irreversible [...].”⁸³

Since Faulstich did not limit fiction to the printed media, he adjusted the notion of utopia, so common in Bloch, for the purpose of his own reflections. He made it an important category of media aesthetics, which he perceived as a new theory of literature. He assumed that writing about literature in electronic media requires an extension of the scope and content of traditional notions. If literature was to be conceptualized as “a dialectics of utopia and medium,”⁸⁴ as a postulate of meaning, which cannot be resigned from, for him, the relationship between the “literarylogical whole” and the medium (film) in reference to feature film was fundamental. He decided that “literature is a result of the utopian in a medium: it has to be conceptualized as a crash of imagination with facts [...]. A literary work means utopia in the sense of historical crossing of lines [...].”⁸⁵

Translated by Paulina Zagórska

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⁸³ R. Caillois, *Siła powieści* [The Power of the Novel], trans. and afterword T. Swoboda, Gdańsk 2008, p. 74.

⁸⁴ W. Faulstich, *Medien + Utopie + Literatur. Thesen zu einer neuen Literaturtheorie als Medienästhetik*, [in:] *Was heisst Kultur?*, op. cit., p. 83.

⁸⁵ W. Faulstich, *Medienästhetik und Mediengeschichte*, op. cit., p. 78.

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Militarizing and Colonizing Outer Space as a Video Game. *Ender's Game* and Astroculture

ABSTRACT. Magdalena Kempna-Pieniążek, *Militarizing and Colonizing Outer Space as a Video Game. Ender's Game and Astroculture*. "Przestrzenie Teorii" special issue. Poznań 2024, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 223–246. ISSN 1644-6763. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2024.special.11>

The author of the article analyzes Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, focusing her attention on the relationship between the key motif of the novel – gaming – and the tendency to militarize and colonize outer space highlighted by astrocultural scholars. Card's novel follows the astrocultural pattern of setting future wars in space, but introduces an important novelty: games of various kinds, including video games, become a mediating element between the characters and the real experience of space war.

The theoretical framework for the analysis is provided by the insights of astrocultural scholars such as Alexander Geppert, Tilmann Siebeneichner and Alice Gorman. In analyzing *Ender's Game* and, to some extent, its 2013 film adaptation, the author examines the protagonists' relationship to space, which is shaped by the game's setting. It is here that military and colonial themes are most prevalent. The first part of the paper presents the main contexts of the motif of the militarization of outer space and its close relationship with video games. These contexts provide an important background for the analysis of the motifs of games and outer space in *Ender's Game*. Selected reflections from the field of ludology are helpful in interpreting Card's use of video games not only as a theme, but also as a structural principle of his novel's settings. In the last part of the paper, the author considers the transformation of the militant motif taking place in the novel's finale into a narrative focused on the colonization of outer space, as well as the transformation of this narrative that occurred in Gavin Hood's film adaptation. The goal of such an interpretation is to show the story created by Orson Scott Card as entangled in a dynamic relationship with the video game medium that was developing at the time of its creation and with the changing trends of astroculture.

KEYWORDS: *Ender's Game*, astroculture, video games and literature, outer space

In the introduction to the 1991 edition of *Ender's Game* Orson Scott Card revealed that the first element he created in the universe¹ in which the action of his future novel would be set was the battleroom² – the space where the title character and his schoolmates train their tactical and combat skills in preparation for the final battle against an alien species called the

¹ Currently, the saga consists of sixteen novels and thirteen short stories. In this paper, I will focus on the 1985 novel and, to a small extent, on the 1977 novelette that preceded its publication. This decision is based on the fact that the relationship between games and the militarization and colonization of outer space is a relevant theme to these texts.

² See O.S. Card, *Introduction*, [in:] *idem, Ender's Game*, London 2013, p. x.

buggers,³ who had attacked the Earth years earlier. The idea was conceived in the mid-1960s, while the future writer was attending Brigham Young High School in Utah, more than a decade before the publication of the novelette *Ender's Game* (1977) in *Analog* magazine and two decades before the publication of the novel of the same name (1985). When the teenage Card came up with the idea for battleroom, NASA was busily preparing for the launch of the Apollo Program (1966–1972), and the Vietnam conflict was still claiming many lives. The Cold War was in full swing, and it was hard to imagine its end (or at least: its happy ending). In the first half of the 1980s, when the author was turning his short story into a novel, the conflict in Indochina had already ended, as had the Apollo missions, but it was clear that both events had permanently changed (not only American) culture.⁴ Meanwhile, the media, still dominated by television, saw the emergence of a new player: video games, which were increasingly attracting the attention of young people. It was the gaming motif that would be one of the themes of Card's original novelette to be most developed in the 1985 novel. After all, the author himself worked as a game critic.

It is clear that *Ender's Game* is a novel shaped by the times in which it was written. In this paper, I will focus on the theme of the militarization of outer space, which by the time of the Space Race and the Cold War had become a prominent cultural plot motif of the science fiction genre. It is interesting to note that *Ender's Game* not only demonstrated literature's ability to transform outer space into a battlefield in the collective imagination, but also established video games as a mediating element in this process.

In Orson Scott Card's novel, gaming plays an important role not only as a motif but also as an organizing principle for the plot. Games function here on every level; after all, this is a story about gifted children (overwhelmingly: male), isolated in a Battle School located in Earth's orbit, who train their tactical skills by participating in various games. Although they also participate in regular school activities, no one doubts that gaming is the most important thing: "But the games – that was what they lived for. That was what filled the hours between waking and sleeping."⁵ It is the battles of the students divided into armies and governed by military hier-

³ As we learn in the subsequent parts of the Card's series of novels, the formal name of this species is Formics, but in *Ender's Game* the aliens are consistently referred to as buggers. Consequently, this is the lexeme I will use in this paper.

⁴ Marina Benjamin writes about the significance and cultural implications of Space Age in her book *Rocket Dreams. How the Space Age Shaped Our Vision of a World Beyond*, New York 2003.

⁵ O.S. Card, *Ender's Game*, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

archy and discipline that are the main focus of the children and teachers. Much of the conversation in the novel revolves around them, and it is their results that determine the development of the plot. Moreover, in their free time from studying and training, the children have a number of games at their disposal, including a special fantasy game that interacts deeply with their inner worlds in order to help them with their personal development. Beyond the explicit level, much more calculating games are played: the head of the Battle School, Colonel Hyrum Graff, his superiors and staff manipulate Ender in order to make him an ideal commander, knowing that the boy's psyche is likely to be severely damaged in the process. Games of deception are also played on Earth by Peter and Valentine, Ender's siblings, who lead a campaign to prevent global conflict, and by Ender himself, who uses techniques learned from his teachers to hone the skills of his subordinates – sometimes brutally, but always effectively. Finally, the narrator plays a game with readers, revealing only in the finale that the bugged battles Ender fought were not simulations, but authentic events in which the title character committed xenocide, by destroying the enemy's home planet, he wiped out the entire species.

The gaming motif in Card's novel has been discussed extensively in philosophical and educational contexts (both Western and Eastern⁶). Henry Jenkins and Kurt Squire argue that "Card's novel anticipates many of the challenges and opportunities we face as we harness this powerful medium for pedagogical purposes."⁷ Andrew Zimmerman Jones explores, from a game theory perspective, "the importance of understanding others to Ender's military brilliance."⁸ Matthew Brophy focuses on "the masquerade of war as a game and how it manipulates human psychology to effectively accomplish destructive goals,"⁹ while Brendan P. Shea examines "the role that games play in Ender's development as both a military commander and as a human being."¹⁰

In my analysis, I would like to focus on the (as yet undeveloped) relationship between this motif and the tendency to militarize outer space

⁶ See M. Deane, *Forming the Formless: Sunzi and the Military Logic of Ender Wiggin*, [in:] *Ender's Game and Philosophy. The Logic Gate Is Down*, ed. K.S. Decker, Malden, Oxford and Chichester 2013, pp. 79–88.

⁷ K. Squire, H. Jenkins, *Harnessing the Power of Games in Education*, "Insight" 2003, no. 3, p. 8.

⁸ A. Zimmerman Jones, *The Enemy's Gate Is Down: Perspective, Empathy, and Game Theory*, [in:] *Ender's Game and Philosophy...*, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁹ M. Brophy, *War Games as Child's Play*, [in:] *Ender's Game and Philosophy...*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁰ B.P. Shea, *Do Good Games Make Good People?*, [in:] *Ender's Game and Philosophy...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 89–90.

highlighted by astrocultural¹¹ scholars. Card's novel follows the pattern of setting future wars in space, but introduces an important novelty: games of various kinds, including video games, become a mediating element between the characters and the real experience of space war. The choice of such a creative strategy makes it possible to view *Ender's Game* not only as a science fiction novel, but also as a kind of gameplay – a record of the game in which the title character participates, overcoming one by one “levels” of increasing difficulty and completing successive missions. This perception of the plot is also fostered by the 2013 all-star cast¹² film adaptation of the book, which used CGIs and whose structure strongly marks the successive stages of the game in which Ender participates, not always aware of the rules in force. Produced almost three decades after the novel's publication, Gavin Hood's film does not abandon the militant motif, although it gradually shifts the emphasis to exploration rather than conquest of outer space. Like Orson Scott Card's novel, the movie is representative of militant astroculture, “that is, astroculture which renders space imaginaries into battlefield scenarios and dwells on weapons, warfare and violence in space.”¹³ According to its rules, the cosmos – which most of us (like the characters in Card's novel!) experience only through mediatized images and narratives – functions as a kind of virtual “playground,”¹⁴ on which humanity projects its ideas, and in this particular case: presents space wars, which are nothing less than “Earth wars in disguise.”¹⁵ From the perspective of militant astroculture, the universe is in fact one giant battleroom.

The theoretical framework for my reflections comes from the insights of astrocultural scholars such as Alexander Geppert, Tilmann Siebeneichner and Alice Gorman. In analyzing *Ender's Game* and, to some extent, its

¹¹ Following Alexander Geppert, I understand astroculture as „a heterogeneous array of images and artifacts, media and practices that seek to assign meaning to space while stimulating both individual and collective imagination.” A.C.T. Geppert, *European Astrofuturism, Cosmic Provincialism: Historicizing the Space Age*, [in:] *Imagining Outer Space. European Astroculture in the Twentieth Century*, ed. A.C.T. Geppert, New York 2012, p. 8.

¹² In Gavin Hood's film, the role of Colonel Graff was played by Harrison Ford, linking *Ender's Game* on a casting level to the *Star Wars* saga, in which the actor created the character of Han Solo. In addition to Ford, the cast included Academy Award winner Ben Kingsley (as Mazer Rackham) and rising stars of the younger generation: Asa Butterfield (Ender), Hailee Steinfeld (Petra) and Abigail Breslin (Valentine).

¹³ A.C.T. Geppert, T. Siebeneichner, *Spacewar! The Dark Side of Astroculture*, [in:] *Militarizing Outer Space. Astroculture, Dystopia and the Cold War*, eds. A.C.T. Geppert, D. Brandau, T. Siebeneichner, New York 2021, p. 18.

¹⁴ See A. Soucek, *The Cultural Dimension of Space*, [in:] *Outer Space in Society, Politics and Law*, eds. C. Brünner and A. Soucek, Wien and New York 2011, p. 40.

¹⁵ A.C.T. Geppert, T. Siebeneichner, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

film adaptation,¹⁶ I will focus on the protagonists' relationship to space, which is shaped by the game's setting. It is here that military and colonial themes are most strongly present. In the first part of the paper, I will present the main contexts of the motif of militarizing outer space and its close relationship with video games. These contexts will provide an important background for the analysis of the motifs of games and outer space in *Ender's Game*. Selected reflections from the field of ludology will be helpful in interpreting Card's use of video games not only as a theme, but also as a structural principle of his novel's settings. Finally, in the last part of the paper, I will consider the transformation of the militant motif taking place in the novel's finale into a narrative focused on the colonization of outer space, as well as the transformation of this narrative that occurred in the film adaptation of Card's novel. The goal of such an interpretation will be to show the story created by Orson Scott Card as entangled in a dynamic relationship with the video game medium that was developing at the time of its creation and with the changing trends of astroculture.

Level 1: Prepare yourself for space combat

According to Orson Scott Card, the source of the battleroom idea as the cornerstone of *Ender's Game* was a reflection on the training of soldiers adapted to fight future space wars:

I wondered: how would you train soldiers in the future? [...] Soldiers and commanders would have to think very differently in space, because the old ideas of up and down simply wouldn't apply anymore. [...]. Three-dimensional warfare would need to be practiced in an enclosed space, so mistakes wouldn't send trainees flying off to Jupiter. It would need to offer a way to practice shooting without risk of injury; and yet trainees who were „hit" would need to be disabled, at least temporarily. The environment would need to be changeable, to simulate the different conditions of warfare – near a ship, in the midst of debris, near tiny asteroids. And it

¹⁶ The movie was accompanied by a vigorous promotional campaign that included the release of the board game *Ender's Game Battle School*, the creation of a number of websites showcasing the film and novel universe, and consideration of sequels that could have contributed to turning the universe into a transmedia story. This process was halted by moderate box-office results and ambivalent critical reception of the film, as well as controversy over the boycott of the film by the Geeks OUT group, which protested Card's statements about his disapproval of certain rights of the LGBT community. Although not all of the filmmakers' plans were realized, I find it necessary to refer to Gavin Hood's movie in this paper, as the form of the adaptation and its relationship to the original helps to identify the transformation of certain astrocultural trends.

would need to have some of the confusion of real battle, so that the play-combat didn't evolve into something as rigid and formal as the meaningless marching and maneuvers [...].¹⁷

The tight coupling of the ideas of war and space in the mind of the future author of *Ender's Game*, while visionary in its details, proves that already in the 1960s, at least in Western culture, space was being mentally mapped as a potential territory of war.¹⁸ Astro-cultural researchers note that under the influence of various discourses – including ideological ones – the cosmos is a construct, a collection of images and narratives, a stage on which futuristic visions are played out.¹⁹ Since, as Daniel Sage puts it, the cosmic ideas that we encounter in media are closely linked to earthly geographies: nations, places, locales, relationships, organizations, landscapes, museums and popular cultures,²⁰ traces of various political, ideological, religious, racial or gender discourses can be seen in outer space. Motifs of (anti)capitalism²¹ and (neo)colonialism are recurrent in critical reflections on outer space. The latter is particularly relevant in light of the themes explored in *Ender's Game* and its film adaptation.

The process of (imagined) space colonization began long before the appearance of real man-made objects, such as the Voyager probes, in it. Alexander Geppert notes that: “Imagining and re-imagining space and furnishing it time and again with one artifact after another, be they mental or material, has had a doubly paradoxical effect. As outer space became increasingly cluttered, it simultaneously became more and more concrete, and, concomitantly with such imaginary colonization, regarded in ever more

¹⁷ O.S. Card, *Introduction...*, *op. cit.*, pp. x–xi.

¹⁸ In writing about mental mapping, I follow the reflections of Tom Conley, who reports the views of the author of this concept, Christian Jacob, as follows: “mental mapping is constituted through the spatial representation we make in our minds of the acts and actions taken in our everyday lives. In our imagination we plot our activities with reference to «a mental projection and even to a mental world map», a psychic surface that «[i]n a complex way [...] mixes the individual and intimate traits with all forms of knowledge and with images that circulate in a given society and culture» [...]. The mental map belongs to the individual and cannot be translated into general terms even though its substance is made from a mixture of personal and collective impressions. [...] it might also be a set of variants selected, consciously and unconsciously, from masses of images with which we construct the geographical illusions that are vital to our lives.” T. Conley, *Cartographic Cinema*, Minneapolis and London 2007, pp. 18–19. See also: Ch. Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography Throughout History*, trans. T. Conley, ed. E.H. Dahl, Chicago 2006.

¹⁹ See A.C.T. Geppert, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁰ See D. Sage, *How Outer Space Made America: Geography, Organization and the Cosmic Sublime*, Farnham and Burlington 2014, p. 4.

²¹ See F. MacDonald, *Anti-Astropolitik: Outer Space and the Orbit of Geography*, “Progress in Human Geography” 2007, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 592–615.

spatial terms.”²² The picture, however, is by no means homogeneous. At least two main trends can be identified in it: “An entire geography of outer space [...] presented itself as a continuation, if not a logical extension of earlier geographies of imperial expansion and colonial domination. At the same time, outer space developed into one of the major sites of twentieth-century utopian thinking, where relations *vis-a-vis* science, technology and the future were positioned, played out and negotiated as nowhere else.”²³

A special case with such games and negotiations is the process of the militarization of outer space. By “militarization” I mean “the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence,” or “the process by which war and national security became consuming anxieties and provided the memories, models, and metaphors that shaped broad areas of national life.”²⁴ As Alexander Geppert and Tilmann Siebeneichner note:

The lines between astroculture and power politics had been blurry before, but with the onset of the Cold War outer space gained unprecedented attractiveness and relevance. It was the battlefield central to all future warfare. In view of the evolving global confrontation, techno-fantasies previously dismissed as fringe were now imbued with a new sense of political urgency. Both man and machine must adapt to meet the demands of future extraterrestrial warfare.²⁵

The peak of militant astroculture occurred in the 1970s, not coincidentally with the rapid development of science fiction cinema.²⁶ This happened despite (or perhaps as a result of) diplomatic efforts, such as the *Outer Space Treaty* signed in 1967, which banned weapons of mass destruction and prohibited the testing of weapons or military maneuvers in space. There are strong reasons to believe that:

Rather than curtailing the accrual of militarization efforts, the impact of this body of laws proved primarily symbolic. Clinging to traditional doctrines of earth-bound confrontation without outlawing military activities *per se*, international legal debates conceptualized space as an extension of terrestrial warfare, despite all sweeping astrofuturist rhetorics *à la* “battlefield of the future.”²⁷

Ronald Reagan’s famous 1983 address known as the *Star Wars speech* only reinforced the military bias within astroculture, leading critics to read the

²² See A.C.T. Geppert, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ A.C.T. Geppert, T. Siebeneichner, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

²⁶ See *ibidem*, p. 19.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

conflicts depicted in science fiction cinema as “earthly wars in disguise.” Nevertheless, the editors of *Militarizing Outer Space* warn against a premature and superficial assessment of these phenomena: “Scrutinizing astro-cultural imaginaries and ideologies of technoscientific progress in a global perspective suggests that the militarization of space is neither the «evil» twin-brother of space utopias nor a mere epiphenomenon of the Cold War. Rather, from the outset it was part and parcel of the production of twentieth-century space itself.”²⁸

The contribution of video games to the militarization of outer space began as early as 1962, a time when “*Spacewar!*, one of the very first video games, proclaimed the imminence of, simply put, space war in its own name, underlined by an exclamation mark.”²⁹ Promoted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Spacewar!* paved the way for subsequent productions that are still being released today, such as *Space Invaders* (1978), *Doom* (1993) and *Dead Space* (2008), in which the experience of outer space is closely tied to the combat. Of course, these are not the only possibilities. As Natalija Majsova points out, in addition to shooters such as *Spacewar!*, “video games explicitly focusing on the subject of outer space can be divided into the following categories: space flight simulators; space mission and space systems simulators (these generally exhibit high levels of realism and a steep learning curve); games, where the idea of outer space is part of the narrative or background settings, such as the RPG *Final Fantasy* franchise, strategy games like *Civilization*, and Sid Meier’s *Alpha Centauri*, or *Pimkin*.”³⁰ It is significant, however, that the first video games with gameplay set in outer space were military in nature. The consequences of this fact are still felt today. In fact, as Majsova rightly notes:

Games focusing on outer space [...] seem to concentrate on issues like flight techniques, strategic and military planning, virtual combat techniques, and maintain narratives such as that of infinitely dreadful, lonely, and dangerous space beyond the orbit of the Earth, or that of the imminence of man’s gradual colonization of outer space.³¹

Significantly, all of the motifs mentioned by the author appear in *Ender’s Game*. After all, it is the training of strategic skills and the refinement of virtual combat techniques that Andrew Wiggin’s education at the Battle

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

³⁰ N. Majsova, *Outer Space and Cyberspace: An Outline of Where and How to Think of Outer Space in Video Games*, “Teorija in Praksa” 2014, vol. 51, no. 1, p. 114.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

School and later at the Command School will serve, and the novel's finale foreshadows the era of human colonization of space, the effects of which will be recounted in subsequent installments of the series created by Card.

Majsova concludes that: "The vast majority of video games set in outer space or having expansion into outer space integrated into their narrative [...] appear exceptionally down-to-Earth: they appropriate conventions either of the classical Western or of narratives of colonization. They establish outer space as – necessarily – the other pole of the binary, essentially turning it into hostile «other» space which is crucial to the consolidation of «our» pole of the binary."³² The production of space in video games thus goes hand in hand with the idea, constitutive of all astroculture, that the universe is a screen or a stage onto which earthly narratives, ideas, and problems are projected.³³

Level 2: Win a space war

The militarization of outer space in *Ender's Game* occurs in two stages. First, real existing cosmos is transformed into a game setting – a virtual environment in which the young characters practice their combat and tactical skills; then, the game in which Ender participates is projected into physically existing outer space, where the Earth fleet is headed toward the home planet of the hostile aliens. The boy's drama stems from the fact that while he is aware of the first stage of the process, he knows nothing about the second. When his charismatic teacher, Mazer Rackham, tells him "I will program your battles now, not the computer,"³⁴ Ender takes him at his word, not realizing that the games he participates in are real battles being fought, that the simulator in which he spends his days is actually a command center, and that the decision he makes to use a weapon of mass destruction called the Little Doctor against an enemy planet will result in its actual destruction. The protagonist also does not know, although his brother Peter and sister Valentine are aware of it, that the war being waged in space remains closely related to the conflicts taking place on Earth, and that the fragile alliance formed to eliminate the extraterrestrial threat must collapse with the end of the war against the aliens. As a novel published in the first half of the 1980s, *Ender's Game* reflects the relationship between

³² *Ibidem*, p. 115.

³³ Oleksandr Horban and Mariia Maletska talk about "Space Age grand narratives" in this context. See O. Horban, M. Maletska, *Space Age Grand Narratives in Videogames, "Philosophy and Cosmology"* 2022, vol. 28, pp. 63–72.

³⁴ O.S. Card, *Ender's Game...*, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

the anxieties of the Cold War and the formation of a vision of the cosmos as an arena in which future conflicts will be fought.

One of the reasons Ender misses the point at which the game becomes a real war is that neither he nor his schoolmates have actually ever directly experienced outer space. Their contact with it was from the beginning limited and manipulated. Moving from Earth to the extraterrestrial locations of Battle School and Command School changed little in this regard: while at home, the cosmos was accessible to the characters only through censored TV reports and children's games of buggers and astronauts, beyond Earth it functions as a virtual space in which all sorts of games are played. What's more, the characters' memory of Earth is also limited and gradually suppressed – the protagonists move to the orbiting Battle School as six-year-olds and, after a few years, remember little of what it was like to live on Earth. After all, there is an unwritten rule at the school that the years spent on Earth are not to be talked about at all, nor are conversations about families (with whom contact is completely blocked) or celebrating one's own birthday accepted. The psychological consequences of this situation are only slightly less painful than in Card's original short story, in which the Battle School was located on Earth, but the students, locked inside and trained as soldiers from the day they were born, knew nothing of the outside world. In the novelette, Ender sees Earth's landscapes for the first time when he is transferred from Battle School to the space-based Command School:

Ender Wiggins³⁵ was rushed from place to place so quickly he had no time to examine anything. But he did see trees for the first time. He saw men who were not in uniform. He saw women. He saw strange animals that didn't speak, but that followed docilely behind women and small children. He saw suitcases and conveyor belts and signs that said words he had never heard of. [...]

Ender Wiggins was a stranger to the world he was being trained to save. He did not remember ever leaving Battle School before. His earliest memories were of childish war games under the direction of a teacher, of meals with other boys in the gray and green uniforms of the armed forces of his world. He did not know that the gray represented the sky and the green represented the great forests of his planet. All he knew of the world was from vague references to "outside."³⁶

Although most of the action in the novel takes place in the cosmos, and the characters repeatedly use space shuttles to travel between locations, there are no descriptions of interplanetary or interstellar space in *Ender's*

³⁵ In the novelette, the protagonist is called Ender Wiggins; only in the novel will he become Andrew (Ender) Wiggin.

³⁶ O.S. Card, *Ender's Game* [1977], <http://www.hatrack.com/osc/stories/enders-game.shtml> (accessed: 21.03.2024).

Game. What lies outside Battle School and Command School is neither the subject of the narrative nor of the characters' thoughts, for both training institutions are designed to exploit certain properties of space in order to make them the basis of the simulation in which the title game takes place. No wonder, since, as Espen Aarseth has noted, "the defining element in computer games is spatiality."³⁷ The idea of Battle School as a place that transforms physically existing cosmos into a virtual construct had to be based on a specific organization of space. As Ivan Mosca explains, "Video games constitute a spatially-oriented medium because they combine the main three elements of our naïve spatiality: visual perception (shared with other visual media such as photography, painting, etc.), movement (shared with other kinematic media such as cinema, ballet, etc.) and the interaction that gives to the player the material possibility of exploring the represented visual movement (shared with games in general, not only computer games)."³⁸ The elements mentioned by the author: visual perception, movement and interaction are the basic components of the cosmic illusion, in which Ender and other children lose not only their spatial orientation but also their awareness of the boundaries between fiction and reality. Accordingly, the visual perception of the characters is reduced and redirected. Real cosmos is removed from it, stars and asteroids become training objects located in the battleroom, and the space fleet and – most importantly – the enemy's home planet – are now a combination of points of light in a hologram projection. Battle School's curriculum deliberately distances the experience of the game from the images of real war, which the characters learn about through (propaganda-manipulated) archival footage: "Videos of the bloody battles on space, the Marines spraying their guts all over the walls of the bugger ships. Holos of the clean wars of the fleet, ships turning into puffs of light as the spacecraft killed each other deftly in the deep night."³⁹ None of this resembles the games being played in the battleroom. Accustomed to the idea that the objects in the battleroom merely symbolize spaces that could hypothetically exist in the real universe, the protagonists do not suspect that the images they interact with in the Command School are no longer simulations, but visualizations of events taking place near the enemy planet.

³⁷ E. Aarseth, *Allegories of Space: The Question of Spatiality in Computer Games*, [in:] *Cybertext Yearbook 2000*, eds. M. Eskelinen and R. Koskimaa, Jyväskylä 2001, p. 154.

³⁸ I. Mosca, *Boards, Outer-Space, and Freedom in Video Games*, The Philosophy of Computer Games Conference, Oslo 2009, <https://gamephilosophy.org/wp-content/uploads/confmanuscripts/pcg2013/Mosca%202013%20-Boards-Outer-Space-and-Freedom-in-Video-Games.pdf> (accessed: 15.03.2024), pp. 1–2.

³⁹ O.S. Card, *Ender's Game...*, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

Two other components of the game's spatiality serve to perpetuate the illusion: movement and interaction. The physical experience of the cosmos is built up in the characters based on the specific sensations of being in a space where gravity, if it works at all, is artificially produced and the architecture is alien. Their first visit to the battleroom is reminiscent of learning to swim: the students move around "like children in a swimming pool for the first time, clinging to the handholds along the sides."⁴⁰ Operating in this space means redefining basic concepts:

For a sickening moment he tried to retain his old up-and-down orientation, his body attempting to right itself, searching for the gravity that wasn't there. The he forced himself to change his view. He was hurtling toward a wall. That was down. And at once he had control of himself. He wasn't flying, he was falling. This was a dive. He could choose how he would hit the surface.⁴¹

After completing his training at the Battle School, Ender is sent to the Command School, located in the asteroid belt on the planetoid Eros. Here, too, he experiences spatial alienation:

Eros was hopeless. [...] The closed-in space was no problem for Ender – what bothered him was that all the tunnel floors noticeably sloped downward. From the start, Ender was plagued by vertigo as he walked through the tunnels, especially the ones that girdled Eros's narrow circumference. It did not help that gravity was only half of Earth-normal – the illusion of being on the verge of falling was almost complete.⁴²

But even these experiences are abstracted from the physically existing outer space and shifted into the virtual reality of games. At each stage of his training, Ender learns how to navigate and interact with objects and other people, but only in ways that serve the game. "The enemy's gate is down" – the principle he comes up with for spatial reorientation during battles in zero-gravity conditions is quickly picked up by other students. Another challenge is working with the Command School's combat operations simulator, where Ender must master the ability to use the available viewpoints:

The controls were powerful. He could rotate the display in any direction, so he could watch from any angle, and he could move the center so that the duel took place nearer or farther from him.

Gradually, as he became more adept at controlling the fighter's speed, direction of movement, orientation, and weapons, the game was made more complex. [...]

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 259.

When he mastered the one-fighter game, they allowed him to step back into the four-fighter squadron. He spoke commands to simulated pilots of four fighters and instead of merely carrying out the computer's instructions, he was allowed to determine tactics himself [...].⁴³

In such a depiction of the protagonist's relationship to space, it is easy to see the analogy to space games, among which "shooters usually typically rely on the first-person (interchangeably with third-person overhead) perspective, whereas strategic games provide god-view, and detailed maps of the situation [...]."⁴⁴ It can be said that by graduating from Battle School and entering Command School, Ender is making his way from shooters to strategic games that offer him the aforementioned god-view in the process of coordinating battles that he considers to be computer simulations.

In the film adaptation of Card's book, these spatial relationships are altered. Where in the novel there is a theme of extreme isolation and the outside world is an almost abstract concept, in Gavin Hood's film there are spacescapes which, following Alice Gorman, can be defined as follows:

The places associated with space exploration form a three-tiered vertical landscape, starting from designed space landscapes on Earth (launch facilities, tracking stations, etc.), organic landscapes in orbit and on the surface of celestial bodies (satellites, rocket stages, landers, debris) and beyond the solar system, where only the Voyager spacecraft have yet ventured, a realm rich with associations though devoid of human material culture. [...]. These places, things and ideas could be called the spacescape. The spacescape has powerful political, social and emotional associations for people on Earth, despite a general lack of direct experience or memory of space.⁴⁵

In line with the idea of spacescapes, in Hood's film we see both futuristic launch facilities located in the midst of forests and the spaces of the orbiting Battle School, while the Command School itself is placed not within the solar system, but outside it – close to the buggers' home planet. The Earth is perfectly visible from the battleroom (which is probably meant to remind the young protagonists what the game is really about, in keeping with the general principle that "virtual game worlds are [...] worlds centered around saving the earth – making it safe – and around liberating its meaning"⁴⁶),

⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 260–261.

⁴⁴ N. Majsova, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁴⁵ A. Gorman, *The Cultural Landscape of Interplanetary Space*, "Journal of Social Archaeology" 2005, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 88.

⁴⁶ M. Kłosiński, *Hermeneutyka gier wideo. Interpretacja, immersja, utopia* [Hermeneutics of Video Games: Interpretation, Immersion, Utopia], Warszawa 2018, p. 59.

and in the Command School Ender can look out the window at the unearthly landscape and watch the movement of realistic-looking spacecrafts in the simulator. The presentation of this kind of space on the screen is not only due to the need to make the movie spectacle more attractive. In the world depicted in Hood's film, there is no need to hide such sights from the characters, because the games they grew up with on Earth, as one of the first scenes of the movie illustrates, operated with hyper-realistic graphics. It is not surprising that Ender and his schoolmates did not distinguish between images of reality and simulations: after all, the simulations they had previously encountered (and which we know from modern space games) were excellent at creating the impression of reality.

The literary and cinematic strategies described here are related and have a similar effect to such a representation of space as is characteristic of space games. However, it's not just that they "merely reinforce existent stereotypes and preconceptions about outer space, as a dangerous, dark, and lonely environment, which humans are at some point going to colonize."⁴⁷ In both the book and the film, Ender and his schoolmates – and, through them, the audience – are confronted with the experience of outer space as a playground, which essentially separates it from the physically existing cosmos.⁴⁸ Throughout the plot, they are not given any other way to think about it. Only in a few moments does Ender have flashes of intuition about the fact that the vision of the world built in him during his time at school is limited and fragmented. Even before he is given his own army to lead, he thinks: "The Battle School was so enclosed, the game so important in the minds of the children, that Ender had forgotten there was a world outside... Spanish honor. Civil war. Politics. The Battle School was really a very small place, wasn't it?"⁴⁹ Interestingly, these thoughts only apply to life on Earth. The protagonist does not seem to remember that the outer space in which he finds himself may be different from the one whose visions are spread in the Battle School.

⁴⁷ N. Majsova, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁴⁸ Espen Aarseth balks at calling spaces in computer games virtual spaces, considering the term "nondescript". The author is inclined to consider games as "allegories of space," because "they pretend to portray space in ever more realistic ways, but rely on their deviation from reality in order to make the illusion playable". E. Aarseth, *op. cit.*, p. 19. The issue of spatiality of video games is very complex, as evidenced by the essays published in *Ludotopia: Spaces, Places and Territories in Computer Games*, eds. E. Aarseth and S. Günzel, Bielefeld 2019.

⁴⁹ O.S. Card, *Ender's Game...*, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

Level 3: Colonize your own alien world

In the world depicted in Card's novel, learning is supposed to be a game, but in the end the game turns out to be war, which in turn becomes the beginning of a new colonial era in human history. The strong connection in *Ender's Game* between the theme of games and education, as Henry Jenkins and Kurt Squire have shown, may stem from Card's observations as a game critic:

For Card, most existing educational games have been little more than “flashcards” that operate according to a drill-and-practice model, reflecting the value schools have traditionally placed on rote memorization. Instead of replacing the textbook, he argued, educational games should be more like the school corridors, where kids experiment, interact, create, and share what they create with others, outside the rigid structures that contemporary games impose. At their best, games are imaginary worlds, hypothetical spaces where players can test ideas and experience their consequences.⁵⁰

The key plot twist in *Ender's Game* is based on the fact that the aforementioned consequences transcend the inherently safe space of the game, and the strategy chosen by Graff and his superiors from the beginning was to present Ender and his schoolmates with war as a game, which, as Matthew Brophy points out, “is a common, effective misrepresentation that allows otherwise moral human beings to commit the inhumane violence war requires. Treating hurtful actions as a «game» psychologically distances the person from considering consequences insulating them from a feeling of moral responsibility, and may protect the individual from a corruption of moral character.”⁵¹ Nothing, however, can protect Ender from a sense of moral responsibility for the xenocide he has unwittingly committed. The explanations Graff and Rackham give him do not satisfy him. As a result, the depressed protagonist sleeps through the conflict that takes place immediately after the victorious battle against the aliens: he learns from the reports of his friends that there was a five-day war on Earth, the effects of which were also felt in humanity's outposts in space, such as the Command School.

The end of the war and the beginning of preparations for the colonization of worlds once conquered by the buggers changes the cosmic line of the narrative. The military theme gives way to another, also well established in astroculture, motif of outer space as a new frontier. At the urging of his

⁵⁰ K. Squire, H. Jenkins, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁵¹ M. Brophy, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–67.

sister Valentine, Ender agrees to join the first expedition to new worlds, and for the first time has a real opportunity to explore other spaces. The cosmos is no longer a battlefield. Instead, “with its combination of exploration of new frontiers and of absence of constraints for physical movements” it becomes a “symbol of freedom and the synecdoche of the entire space.”⁵² Ivan Mosca states that “this de-localized place embodies the concept of objective realization of the subject’s freedom” and enables us to experience space “as pure movement.”⁵³

The author links this symbolism to the popularity of outer space as a setting for gameplay in early video games, stating that: “Hence it does not surprise that early video games used so often the interstellar setting: the videoludic medium, involving interaction, amplifies the experience of movement inherent to every representation of outer-space. It is perhaps the artistic expression most adherent to the concept of freedom.”⁵⁴ While the popularity of the space motif in early video games is a much more complex issue (related to, among other things, general tendencies toward the militarization of astroculture, the political rhetoric of the Cold War era, and the success of space sagas such as *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*), it is undeniable that the narrative of outer space as a new promised land of absolute freedom (as it once was in the American West) strongly influenced the formation of collective ideas about the cosmos. Interestingly, the finale of Card’s novel reveals that this space of freedom has already been “mapped” by video games. Years later, when Ender, now an adult, arrives at the place where the insect-like aliens hid the cocoon of their last hive-queen, he sees familiar spaces:

The Giant’s corpse. He had played here too many times as a child not to know this place. [...] Swings and slides. Monkey bars. Now overgrown, but the shapes still unmistakable. [...]

‘I know,’ said Ender. ‘They built it for me. [...] I know this place [...]. The buggers built it for me.’⁵⁵

Ender recognizes the setting of the fantasy game he played at Battle School. Back then, the game was supposed to help him understand himself better, overcome his fears and unconscious traumas. Now it turns out that it has become a platform for communication with aliens who, by analyzing Ender’s dreams and memories, have recreated on one of their planets the places he

⁵² I. Mosca, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁵³ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁵ O.S. Card, *Ender’s Game...*, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

knows from the game, in order to entrust him with the mission of saving their species from total annihilation.

This gesture seems to be as much an invitation to communicate as it is an invitation to colonize, an acquiescence to the takeover of alien worlds by newcomers from Earth. The situation evokes not coincidental associations with the process of the conquering of the Americas by European colonizers, whose first settlements were often located “on Indian communities emptied by disease.”⁵⁶ The territories occupied by the Europeans appeared to them as uninhabited because they were depopulated by epidemics resulting from the arrival of newcomers from another continent. Similarly, in *Ender’s Game*, humans conquer territories that until recently belonged to aliens without a fight: more planets appear to them as empty and ready for colonization, since the xenocide committed in a distant part of the cosmos has caused the death of almost all the buggers. When Ender tries to question this new cosmic version of Manifest Destiny, a significant dialogue ensues between him and Valentine:

‘It’s not my idea of freedom to go live in the house of the people that I killed.’
‘Ender, what’s done is done. Their worlds are empty now, and ours is full. And we can take with us what their worlds have never known – cities full of people who live private, individual lives, who love and hate each other for their own reasons. In all the bugger worlds, there was never more than a single story to be told; when we’re there, the world will be full of stories, and we’ll improvise their endings day by day [...].’⁵⁷

Valentine’s statement echoes colonial ideas known from human history: the collective consciousness of the buggers must give way to the terrestrial (and *de facto* Western) idea of individualism, and in the face of the overpopulation of the “old world” (Earth), what matters most is the possibility of further expansion of the human species, even if under morally ambivalent circumstances. When Ender finally agrees to go to another world with his sister, he identifies his journey as a mission of historian rather than colonist. In his statement, “I stole their future from them; I can only repay by seeing what I can learn from their past”⁵⁸ there are echoes of the attitudes of the Europeans who arrived in what is now the Americas in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Tzvetan Todorov contrasts the profiles of Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, and Bartolomé de Las Casas:

⁵⁶ Ch.C. Mann, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, New York 2005, p. 46.

⁵⁷ O.S. Card, *Ender’s Game...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 314–315.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 316.

“Las Casas knows Indians less well than Cortés, and he loves them more [...]. Columbus’s attitude can be described in altogether negative terms: he does not love, does not know, and does not identify himself [...]”⁵⁹ Ender’s attitude towards the buggers is supposed to be an attempt to combine love (already felt, as the protagonist says that only by loving his enemy can he defeat them) with a deeper understanding. But this does not change the fact that it is still a typical colonial perspective.

In Gavin Hood’s adaptation, this ideologically disturbing overtone of the novel’s finale has been toned down considerably. In the movie, there is no hint that humans intend to colonize planets previously inhabited by aliens, and Ender embarks on a solo mission to find a new home for the sole surviving hive-queen. The theme of the fantasy game changes accordingly. It still plays the role of a mental map (tellingly, the movie consistently refers to it as a mind game), but both the subject and the object of the mapping process change fundamentally. In both the novel and the movie, the game is deeply integrated into Ender’s psyche. In Card’s novel, it is so powerful that, if the situation demands it, it is able to bypass all access restrictions and extract the current photo of the protagonist’s brother from the resources of Earth’s computers. The movie talks about a direct connection between the game and Ender’s brain. In both cases, the game essentially becomes Ender – it reflects his fears, longings, and traumas, it functions as a symbolic expression of his personality. It also plays a key role in his relationship with the aliens, though in different ways. In Card’s novel, the aliens try to use Ender’s memories of the game to establish communication with him. The result of the process is that the game (and thus Ender’s identity) marks and shapes the alien worlds even before the protagonist himself physically appears in them. In a sense, then, Ender does not leave the world of the game in Card’s novel, although after the xenocide he is already aware of its constructed nature. In the movie, on the other hand, it’s Ender’s subconscious that is mapped by the aliens, who, instead of recreating on their planets the images sublimated in the protagonist’s memories and nightmares, introduce into the game the landscapes of the location of the last hive-queen. Moreover, using the image of Ender’s beloved sister Valentine, who transforms into the image of the hive-queen, they instill in the protagonist the subconscious belief that humans and aliens can be united by bonds of closeness and mutual understanding. In this version, Ender is not given the opportunity to see traces of himself in the territory of the aliens; on the contrary, he discovers foreign territories in himself,

⁵⁹ T. Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. R. Howard, New York 1992, pp. 185–186.

and his final departure into the unknown can be interpreted as the real end of the game – such an understanding is fostered by the last frame, in which the dormant Ender opens his eyes and looks directly into the camera.

Like Card's novel, Gavin Hood's movie is the result of the influence of certain social, political, cultural (and astrocultural) trends. The motif of the political campaign waged by Valentine and Peter would not have been appropriate after the end of the Cold War.⁶⁰ On the other hand, the softening of the colonial overtones, manifested in the fact that the aliens in the film are consistently referred to as Formics rather than buggers, was a necessity in light of the development of postcolonial thought, as well as the criticism of the subsequent US military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. This does not mean, however, that the motif has completely disappeared. After all, the Command School is still located in alien buildings that were taken over by humans during the fighting, and it is not at all certain that the belief expressed by one of the characters, Major Anderson, that the children involved in the war will find themselves "back on Earth" after it ends, will come true. The narrative of exploring space in order to colonize it is still strong in astroculture, as well as in the contemporary space games.

Conclusions: game over?

"I've watched through his eyes, I've listened through his ears"⁶¹ – the first words spoken in *Ender's Game* foreshadow one of the novel's most important themes: the problem of taking on another's perspective. The problem is not just a technical one. It's true that Ender often practices this skill: he develops techniques for reorienting his gaze in weightlessness and learns to adopt and control the perspective of his subordinates during battles in the simulator. Most importantly, however, the protagonist perfects his empathy; after all, his greatest strength is his ability to understand the people he meets, especially his enemies, including the hive-queen. In the novel's finale, looking at the war from her perspective, Ender experiences catharsis and integrates his personality, taking on the role of speaker for the dead.

⁶⁰ The exclusion of this storyline from the plot of a potential film adaptation of *Ender's Game* was already discussed by Orson Scott Card himself in the late 1990s, as he did not consider it very attractive from the perspective of the cinematic medium: "that's just watching people type things into the computer". S. Nicholson, *Card's Game: An Interview with Orson Scott Card (1998)*, <http://www.hatrack.com/research/interviews/1998-scott-nicholson.shtml> (accessed: 24.03.2024).

⁶¹ O.S. Card, *Ender's Game...*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

The change of perspective, the possibility of assuming different roles, is one of the key experiences of video games – and also the element of the medium that has a particularly strong influence on the process of reframing literature in a new media context.⁶² This is because:

Gamers develop a “knowing” meta-awareness of how to play against, with or despite game narrative, a playful, enacted and embodied criticality [...] that resonates with the (postmodern) “pick and mix” reader of texts – dialogic reading practices that offer possibilities for “being” that are difficult to pin down as “reception”. Such [...] new moves in the game that disrupt orthodox analyses of “effects” and of reading itself – provide compelling evidence that there is no singular “way of being” in a game event. This has obvious implications for the “key concept” [...] for the broader project of bridging new literacy studies and “practical engagements” in the redistribution of cultural and symbolic forms of capital [...].⁶³

At the time of *Ender’s Game’s* creation, such transformations were at best intuitive, and while the gaming motif had been present in literature for some time, ideas like literary gaming, “a specific form of digital gameplay that happens when we interact with digital artifacts that combine so-called ludic [...] and literary [...] elements,”⁶⁴ were still a long way off. A manifestation of the awareness of the changes to come is that the motif of accepting someone else’s perspective, which is important in Card’s novel, enters into a relationship with the motif of writing/constructing a narrative. While on Earth, Peter and Valentine, under the pseudonyms Locke and Demosthenes, are engaged in a political campaign in which each of them deliberately adopts a perspective contrary to his/her own views and disposition, the space-based Ender is developing the skills that will allow him, years later, to write *Speaker for the Dead*, a book “written as if the hive-queen spoke, telling all that they had meant to do, and all that they had done. [...] From their earliest awareness to the great wars that swept across their home world, Ender told the story quickly, as if it were an ancient memory.”⁶⁵ In the new world, also Valentine is writing books, working on several volumes of bugger wars history, which she publishes under the

⁶² R. Berger, J. McDougall, *Reading Videogames as (Authorless) Literature*, “Literacy” 2013, vol. 47, no. 3, p. 143.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ A. Ensslin, *Literary Gaming*, Cambridge and London 2014, [e-book], e-pub: 11,0 / 500. Astrid Ensslin analyzes a whole series of examples of the literary gaming phenomenon in her book. In a broader context, James O’Sullivan also writes about the impact of digital media on literature, particularly on electronic literature and literary gaming. See J. O’Sullivan, *Towards a Digital Poetics: Electronic Literature and Literary Games*, London 2019.

⁶⁵ O.S. Card, *Ender’s Game...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 323–324.

pseudonym Demosthenes. Both characters seem to still believe in the idea of historical writing, even though their experiences make it clear that “there is no singular «way of being» in a game event.” Maybe that’s how they see their writing: as different ways of looking at the same game – Valentine, as Demosthenes, describes the bugged wars from a human perspective, while Ender, who doesn’t even subscribe to his work, shows them from an alien point of view.

In the movie version, made almost thirty years later, this theme is not present at all. Ender and Valentine no longer write books; they only write emails, because it is not literature but digital games “that are their natural habitat, just as the coffee shop was man’s natural habitat at the beginning of the 20th century, and cinema and television at its decline.”⁶⁶ So in the film Ender doesn’t think of himself as a historian of an extinct species: rather than looking to the past, he looks towards the future, carrying a cocoon with a new hive-queen into deep space. After all, his literary predecessor already knew that “games were like that, you died a lot until you got the hang of it.”⁶⁷ However, the way in which the film’s characters have been shaped is not only related to the fact that video games gradually came to dominate audiovisual culture at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, correlating with those phenomena of postmodern culture that Fredric Jameson calls schizophrenia.⁶⁸ Gavin Hood’s film, visually and musically⁶⁹ indebted to the aesthetics of video games, is also a product of contemporary astroculture, which emphasizes exploration rather than the militarization of space. Hence the much greater role of spacescapes in the movie than in the novel.

In both of the astroculture texts discussed here – Orson Scott Card’s book and Gavin Hood’s film – video games function as a tool subordinate to the processes of militarization and colonization of space, but they operate on different levels: in the process of militarization, they are consciously used by the staff of the Battle School and the Command School to obscure the image of outer space and the events taking place in it; in the process of colonization, they operate on the subconscious level, mapping (in the novel) or projecting (in the film) worlds that the characters have not yet physically reached. In this way, they express the general tendencies of astroculture, which, on the one hand, is the field of action of various policies and strategies, and, on

⁶⁶ M. Kłosiński, *Przygody cyfrowego tułacza. Interpretacje groźnawcze* [Adventures of a Digital Wanderer: Game Studies Interpretations], Katowice 2023, p. 11.

⁶⁷ O.S. Card, *Ender’s Game...*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁶⁸ See F. Jameson, *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*, https://art.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/Jameson_Postmodernism_and_Consumer_Society.pdf (accessed: 24.03.2024).

⁶⁹ The movie’s music was composed by Steve Jablonsky, a composer known for his work with video game producers.

the other hand, operates in the area of collective and individual imagination, so that when we point the lenses of space telescopes at deep space and send probes to other planets, we find images that seem very familiar to us: such as Pillars of Creation, which recall the geographic and meteorological formations captured in the romantic landscapes of the American West by painters such as Thomas Moran⁷⁰ or the Martian wilderness, which, not coincidentally, looks like the deserts of Utah in photographs sent back by space probes.⁷¹ Not surprisingly, of all Ender's memories, the buggers chose to reconstruct the one in which the playground appeared in his video game. Apparently, they knew that for humans, the cosmos is first and foremost an ideal playground, where all kinds of designs and ideas can be projected.

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⁷⁰ See E.A. Kessler, *Picturing the Cosmos: Hubble Space Telescope Images and the Astronomical Sublime*, Minneapolis and London 2012, p. 5.

⁷¹ See O. Dunnett, *The Spaces of Outer Space*, [in:] *The Routledge Handbook of Social Studies of Outer Space*, eds. J.F. Salazar and A. Gorman, London and New York 2023, p. 86.

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Scaling Imagination: The Language Machine and Poetry

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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 Harari¹

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

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

³ E. Balcerzan, *Fragmety o Przybosiu* [On Przyboś], “Akcent” 1987, no. 1, p. 8.

⁴ Artur Sandauer wrote about an “explosive figure” in Przyboś’s poetry (A. Sandauer, *Zbrane 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 Enlightenment 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. Altman 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.

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 world²¹) 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 *unheimlich* 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. Żaluski, 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 Eerie*, 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, przeszłość 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 Podgórn, 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 himself 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 zewnętrzna...*

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 replacements³⁰

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 about³³

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

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 programming. Machine learning is teaching computers how to learn from data and develop their skills with experience; this process is supposed to replace traditional programming. 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. programming), 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

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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There is no simple, encyclopedic answer to the question how the modern notion of literature is understood. Literature eludes even the most sophisticated attempts at defining its constant characteristics and ways of conceptualizing its stable character.

Our aim is to identify 21st-century transformations in literary studies, especially those concerning the image of the studied subject. Those transformations can be roughly summarized as a transition from static and definition-like description strategies towards more dynamic models conceptualizing the subject of the analysis in action; a transition from conceptualizations treating literature as an artifact, the art of the word largely connected to the print era, to concepts allowing and project literature to be discovered as a kind of dramaturgy showing different formulas and manifestations not only in relation to new media, but also to new categories highlighting potentiality, uncertainty, indefiniteness, possibility, entanglement.

In the present volume, we offer various perspectives on literature, without limiting ourselves to one — instead, we are trying to constantly change our position by reading and following authors.

Literature manifests itself as an entangled world. "Imagination is rescaled": the concepts of literature as a possibility of becoming a film, theater, or a video game, the language machine and poetry, historical texts revealing possibilities for literary interpretations, digital archive, textual game, the interactive formula of an "emanative poem" is presented in the light of the Aristotelean concept of *entelechy*, the notion of "aura", mystery, and secrets in literature. Literature is a performative art, especially if we assume that performativity is entanglement. Literature is madness, constantly transgressing so-called norms and rules, beyond the world which has been defined only once. We should then ask about the possibility of theories — possible, potential — as well as theories of possibility.

The texts comprising the present volume merely outline the research project; they are an opening to a problem, but at the same time, they provoke further study of similar topics.



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