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The New Humanities

INVESTIGATIONS

Foreword

Jakub Momro

The Hegemony of Novelty

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I

Antonio Gramsci states in one of his best-known remarks that the most important historical events take place in a strange state of suspension and confusion; that they emerge from among the unclear outlines of time and from the dark influence of forces alienating humanity in its entirety: "[…] the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass."[1] Gramsci further observes that the present is not ontologically but rather empirically privileged: the important things are those that are perceived here and now, in a single frame of time and space; those which broaden the sensory field, but which can also be bound by that very present into a narrow band of subjective impressions and emotions. As a communist, Gramsci knows perfectly well that the emancipatory path, pioneered by Karl Marx, leads towards a more free reality, where existence lives out its life without atavistic fear, experiencing a reciprocal relationship with the Other. Nonetheless, a present shaped in such a manner is not the means towards some ecstatic, supposedly fully embodied experience of wholeness, because this present never "is," in the strictest sense; or, in other words, it

1 Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 33.

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cannot become a point of reference. And if it is so, then the modalities of time cannot order the state of the world along a constant ontological axis. A world defined by such a heterogeneous form of temporality conjoins irreducible, and sometimes outrightly contradictory elements or phenomena: the human and the inhuman, the intellectual and the practical, personal and interpersonal, intimate and public, self-centered and socially committed.

Marx was therefore right in pointing to time as being fundamental for history. Though it is a history understood in a specific way, one that is more anachronistic than presentist. From this point of view it can be seen as interweaving events and structures from different temporal orders: archaic and contemporary. In consequence of this, history has little in common with the cliché of progress as the unstoppable march of history (supposedly derived from Hegelian idealism), or with the idiosyncratic reading of Friedrich Nietzsche, who wished to destroy the antique shop of facts and in a gesture of creative nihilism intended to rid humanity of the burden of tradition. Turning to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, a work as discursively lush as the experimental prose of James Joyce, Robert Musil, or Virginia Woolf, and the most intense form of speculation that is *Science of Logic*, Marx performs a double appropriation. First, he treats the materiality of the world in the broadest possible sense, creating a new, non-Kantian, critical philosophy, that is, political economy. In this sense temporality proves to be the superior principle, overshadowing even the principle of production, because the deregulation of temporal modes of alienated life leads towards the unmasking of inequality. Still, time in its presentness is nothing more than a formally vacant object, which allows the observation – from a birds eye view, synoptically, as well as in microscopic detail – of the most diverse forms of enslavement, injustice, violence, and lawlessness. Second, the strong program of Marx's anthropology lays bare the fundamental principle of modern criticism. If we are thrown into time, then its historical form, structured in various ways, prevents us from turning to some metaphysical instance; any attempt to enter some "other scene" – one not human, but also not yet divine – is pure phantasy. The material, bodily, or civilizational reality cannot be conceived in the confines of isolated subjectivity which, akin to a founder or a CEO, directs time that is perfectly coherent and organized for the incessant increase of monetary value or, similarly, non-material gains: cultural prestige, achievement of desired position in the social hierarchy, and finally, transforming the unreflective personal autonomy into the ruling principle.

Marx, following Georg W. F. Hegel, proposes a different method of thinking in the framework of time, which is neither momentary ecstasy nor oppressive narrative. The latter, in a more or less fortunate way, masks the perfect mechanism of creating an ideological veil, which most often obscures the obscenity of power. Time is synonymous with money – a translucent principle of modern equivalence, according to which social, political, and economic conflicts incessantly fuel subsequent catastrophes of capitalism. Capitalism, of course, is also the spirit of the time and

of the times, which becomes an ever greater monstrosity. Akin to some anthropological machine it produces ever more nuanced differentiations, and thus manages to escape unscathed from yet another, seemingly final, defeat. What is more, each time it seems to grow only stronger; thwarting, as if incidentally, successive efforts directed at creating the experience of social solidarity. Unquestionably, this is why the 2008 crisis reflected so strongly in the actions of people who were left on their own, and who were shown by the financial elite, deriving from the "too big to fail" institutions, the regressive or, otherwise, the vegetative face of that fiscal-mortgage catastrophe. Those deprived of the roof over their heads and of the means of making a living, were left to subsist in immanent time, in no man's land, in temporary shelters that were constructed to last an eternity.

That is why revolution is necessary; it is not some utopia or a futuristic outline of a better life. This proleptic, suggested, "expanding," or projecting life will not be able to socially harmonize its existence with other forms of life. The time of financial randomness, rightly called "precariousness," requires not only varied forms of socialization, but most of all the liberation from the necessities of the overly forceful visons of the future. They themselves perfectly exemplify that pre-ordained emancipation cannot succeed; even more so – that it brings about opposing results, destroying social forms wherever there emerge examples of emancipated life or – to borrow a term from Jean-Luc Nancy – of "being singular plural." It is easier to imagine a complicated scenario of a better future than a subtle realignment within the alienating here and now. Suffice to look at primarily dystopian and post-apocalyptic contemporary phantasies relating to the future, which permeate popular culture. Needless to say, they play a compensatory role, but they are first and foremost a collective symptom of uncertainty, or even of epistemological horror that lurks – to turn to Frederic Jameson's still highly relevant notion – in the "political unconscious."

Hence, what are we to do? The lesson taught by Marx seems as valid today as it ever was. From ideology, ever better recognized by enlightened cynical subjects, all the more important is history understood as history of truth, in contrast to the hysterical (in the literal sense) Nietzsche, who spoke of truth as the "history of a certain error." What is spoken of here is, of course, not logical or substantial truth, but the dialectical power of truth, which remains, just as absolute spirit or revolution do, an idea facilitating the search for and finding of truth – everywhere. It would be fitting, it seems, to return to the Marxist maxim, which states that arriving at truth is as important as the journey that leads to it. Though in this regard our methods of understanding and organizing time reveal with full force something more. History and time, consistent narrative and historical coherence of dates, halt our epistemological endeavors time and time again, only to lift – without shunning the present – in some, even very limited, extent the veil of Isis, which obscures our future.

There is one other consequence of this. The perspective offered, broadly speaking, by critical theory problematizes the notion of novelty as something that could

be equated with the future. Novelty is, so to speak, an as yet unresolved form of the future; that is, one untested by different modalities of time and one unfiltered by individual and collective conceptualizations of the world. It is noteworthy that in this dialectic perspective novelty is oftentimes the highest form of fetishism. Though not only of the mercantile, nor not even anthropological, but rather of the cultural kind, and, as it seems, today of mostly cognitive, mental, and digital variety. It is startling to what extent most distant fields of critical theory converge at this single point, and how even the staunchest enemies talk of the same thing, though from different positions, of course. Theodor W. Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory*, György Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, in a less polemical tone Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe with Judith Butler, who theorize the empty signifier as an organizing principle. In turn, Slavoj Žižek with Erik Santner reposition the discussion to the level of materialism of desire and logic of recognition, developed into social theory, reminiscent of Axel Honneth... Clearly, this robust, though certainly open list of filiations and reflections of the problem of fetishism leads into still another realm. Is it not so that fetishism, being a complex structure, finally remains a mere symptom, manufacturing subsequent phantasies and needs? In this sense novelty, understood chronologically, turns out to be merely a formula of subjective disenfranchisement in the world of production, on various levels, and the phantasmal subjugation of competition and rivalry. If it truly is so, then the dialectical path, spoken of by Marx, should save novelty from itself, but it also should awaken the players in the game of society to the fact that just as there is no source, no beginning beyond our biological finitude, so the world of our experience is available to us only in variously mediated forms.

It seems that reality is fundamentally conflicted or divided. We perceive it with varying intensity, and therefore no final goal exists, not so much in the philosophical but rather in the anthropological sense. In this light neither tradition, memory, and the past, nor novelty provide any solutions, at least not from the standpoint of theory or research, but also not in the existential key. All these ways of framing time lack explanatory power when it comes to problems of contemporary humanities, which are familiar to us as researchers or readers; that is, the state of alienation, oftentimes experienced in its acute, everyday form, as well as the reification of our work and the disruption of intersubjective relationship that this entails. Gramsci used a single, precise, and invariably timely notion to characterize these two formulas, namely, hegemony; and he placed it within the sphere of culture – it is where our desire is supposed to crystalize, which, by the way, is never straightforward, but also not necessarily doomed to a permanent struggle for its survival. Desire requires acknowledgement, not annihilation. "The old is not dead yet, the new is not yet born..." Gramsci turns to this spectral motif not without reason. What should therefore be done with that which is neither new nor old, with that which we cannot remember, and which does not take direct form as hope for change or the horizon of a better future alternative

reality? Dialectic reasoning is not a shortcut and, therefore, the stake in this line of thinking is not only the recognition of novelty as fetish, but the movement of thought, which occurs at an instant, in practice. The world changes already in our intellectual processes, which are not confined neither to naturalistically motivated positive science, nor can they be ascribed to successive, institutionally proclaimed, "studies on" or "turns." The stake in this game for our desires and recognition, understanding and emancipation, is exactly the recognition of the hegemony of novelty.

II

This problem can be approached from the direction of desire understood in the literal sense, that is associated with the libidinal economy. Alongside critical theory, psychoanalysis is one of the better examples of reflection on the issue of novelty, this time, though, not in the theoretical key (or maybe to a certain extent), but primarily in the anthropological and ontological perspectives. Through the famous, and extensively discussed in the field of humanities, case of the patient nicknamed "Wolf Man," Sigmund Freud shows how he unwraps, step by step, the thickened and initially obscure elements of a dream. The patient suffers from depression, which is seemingly induced by dreams of wolfs sitting upon a tree that he experiences. In the course of a detailed analysis, Freud performs a rather classical symbolic interpretation, in fact overlooking the morphological and formal aspects of dream riddles. Nonetheless, symbolic analysis ceases to work when the patient encounters a scene, which – as he assumes – he once inhabited. This senso-motoric, visual, and audial scene of parental intercourse, *coitus a tergo*, caused such horror because the patient, then in the infantile stage, equated sex with pure violence, aggression, and finally with uninhibited fear. Freud is faced here with a riddle of temporality and the possibility of therapeutic intervention. What is to be done with a trauma resulting from actual events and with trauma which returns in the present with the force of the ungraspable unconscious, leaving their mark through recurring psychopathological structures? Are we dealing here with a singular, intensified trauma, or maybe rather with its two forms, manifesting in two different timeframes? "Wolf Man" visited Freud in a state of severe anxious depression, which presented with nightmares and somatic symptoms such as insomnia. The session was therefore an unveiling of a traumatic scene in the case of an adult patient. Still, both Freud's theory and practice went much further, as if the father of psychoanalysis saw himself playing the part of an archaeologist in a psychological archive (this is also how Jacques Derrida saw him in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*).

From a Freudian perspective the time of present trauma was as significant (but also structurally similar) as the time of the primary subjective configuration around the silent trauma. In this way a retrospective labeling arises (*après-coup*), a kind of interferential and dialectical logic of times, resembling the counterpoint in music

– a detailed analysis of symptoms leads to their source, though that space is governed – according to Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis – by three equitable orders: "of the primary phantasm, the phantasm of primacy, and the sources of phantasy." Within the structure of the family romance characteristic for neurotic individuals, the situation seems quite clear – the libidinal tension of the patient stems from oedipal fixations. Nonetheless, the scene itself is of nearly hypnotic quality. Something occurs here, a universe arises where the ruling principles are ellipsis, abbreviation, augmentation; people are seen and heard, but it is impossible to determine what exactly is going on. If Freud points to a necessity of turning inside, towards the deepest layers of the psyche, the residues, and the phantasms laying at the base of repression, then psychoanalysis, as a paradigm of knowledge and as part of the medical sciences, not so much unveils as constructs a world wherein emancipation – which arises in the subject and not some external norm of a supposedly real life – can take place. In this sense psychoanalysis is not only a conversion of the anxious affect into a rugged, internally unresolved, and antithetical life, but it is a shift within the cultural and epistemic dominant: "the future of a certain illusion" is substituted with "the future of a certain life."

This does not change the fact that during therapy the patient encounters a primary scene or, otherwise, an invisible scene, where the traumatic core of existence – unnamable and unhealable – is revealed. Freud, and afterwards Jacques Lacan with his political disciples of the Slovenian School, point out the need for differentiating certain intensities and structures of the traumatic experience. Therefore, as far as every subject is scarred at the outset, then not all types of trauma are equal, their symptoms are not similarly strong or weak, and, finally, not all of them conform with clinical classifications. In one of the early theoretical works on the subject of hysteria, which touched upon the scope, possibilities, and the future of psychoanalysis, Freud asserts that trauma – like the budding of life, the embryo of meaning forming the omphalos of dream, the entanglement of image and feeling – should safeguard the clinical and critical aspect of therapy and therefore alleviate misery, which means its ultimate transformation into common human unhappiness.[2] Little wonder then that the continuations of psychoanalysis in their radical versions, as, for example, those developed by Wilfried R. Bion or Jacques Lacan, have either led in the direction of diagnosing the most extreme cases of break with reality, namely psychoses, or in the direction of searching for the place of trauma in the topical or typological order of the psyche; a place that would not only be meaningful but also fundamental. Can Lacanian ethics of the Real, rooted in a certain fidelity to a greater cause, too great and weighty for any single person, truly provide sufficient grounds to ponder a new form of ethics – one more interactive and transgressive than

2 Cf. Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. and introd. A. A. Brill (New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1936), 230–232.

normative, more engaged and revolutionary than inter-subjectively negotiable? If contemporary humanities still require psychoanalysis (and as I see it, it is very much so), then its tripartite model of determination should be extolled, and therefore it ought to be framed as an anthropological, medical, and critical formula of a dynamic, economic, and topical life.

In this sense psychoanalysis can truly serve as the paradigm of the antinomic *modernitas*; it itself, in all of its complexity, constitutes the primal scene for what is yet to happen, of what will arrive not only as trauma, but also as the deliverance – if only momentary – from it. The future of psychoanalysis is not dependent upon the fetish of novelty, because, as Freud assumed, the path it marks out is winding and uncharted. The principle of the mind's cunningness is also at work here, causing us to recognize only in hindsight that today's novelty is merely a leftover of the things we have once done and spoken of. Freud has shown in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that life is in fact possible only when we acquiesce to our own death, but also to the fact that death shatters our fantasies of a stable identity and of life led in accordance with established symbolic patterns. If it is so indeed, then individual existence, assenting to the reality principle, should always act in a similar fashion: it should strive to meet the end of its life on its own terms, and therefore… live according to its desires and libido, the two constants without which there is no mature subjectivity forgetful of the inborn human expression of narcissism. Love, desire, and death constitute the triad of that future where novelty is something that occurs serendipitously rather than being the overt purpose of human striving.

III

If "new humanities" have, by definition, a critical and not descriptive or normative value, then the impulses flowing towards the humanities from ideational sciences – or, even more so, those coming from natural or, more broadly, experimental sciences – merit reconsideration. It is well known that previous encounters between these two worlds have never brought about satisfying results. Contemporary circumstances in certain respects resemble the olden, well-structured world, which ordered knowledge alongside the fault line between "literary culture" and "scientific culture." It might seem that almost everything has changed since, though – as I argue – unfortunately very little truly did. Firstly, and this might be seen as a minor thing but it is in no way inconsequential: literature no longer plays a paradigmatic role in the discourses that derive from it. Secondly, the economic-institutional rift between the abovementioned branches of knowledge already seems too vast to bridge in any satisfying way. Thirdly, mutual ignorance is a serious problem which – as is often the case in such situations – fuels narcissistically motivated arrogance. Fourthly, there was a fundamental split in the understanding of theory and epistemology, which has either faded as discourse in experimental sciences, or was

constricted to research methodology. In the case of new humanities, new critical methods, which are oftentimes highly advanced, vanish in the murky universe of subjective impressions or are subsumed within the application of some previously devised method.

This pessimistic outlook opens, paradoxically, the possibility of conceiving such a world where novelty will be the factor binding different practices of knowledge. A great example of such varying degrees of mutual influence is the revision of deconstruction performed by Catherine Malabou, as well as the return and critique of systematic thinking under the guise of speculative realism – perhaps the strongest program of the philosophy of new materialism. Nonetheless, we are confronted here with two novel theories rooted in a particular strand of knowledge. The first one (I will focus on it here) is about rethinking the teachings of deconstruction, which were centered on culture, mainly in its linguistic and textual dimension, and reframing it as something much more embodied and associated with material objects. The strategy adopted by Malabou is quite consistent in this regard. Her theory is built around the notion of plasticity, identified in Hegel's philosophical oeuvre, which was the subject of her first book. Taking into account the mediatory structure of reality, what changes is the very nature of mediation, which is no longer dependent upon ontological hierarchies, as Derrida argued, but on a morphologically pliable notion, which might not be solid but which also is not abstract. In fact, it is rather a discursive and actual disposition towards twisting and testing of that which can be said about reality through the application of different languages, images, and senses. Plasticity is therefore the movement of ideas in a very Hegelian manner, but it is also something that restitutes the possibility of conceiving dialectic categories as sensual phenomenology, as something close to every each and one of us, as a future-oriented experience of consciousness that is familiar and novel at the same time. Her book on the future of Hegel[3] presents the author of *The Science of Logic* as a truly grounded thinker, one focused as much on the system (what is evident) as on the peculiarities of our everyday, sensual experience and on our relations with others, wherein our struggle for recognition strives against the sensuality of desire.

From this point forward, Malabou guides us in another direction. The philosopher turns her study towards neuroscience and the medical research of trauma, memory, neurological dysfunctionalities and possibilities of their clinical restoration, and epigenesis. This is a risky move and, in fact, Malabou finds it hard to deal equally well with all of the correlations present within these paradigms. Nonetheless, it is worth taking a closer look at the conclusions she arrives at when pondering the notion of deformation and the various forms of traces. The former term is problematic because it is not clear what kind of deformed matter is being talked about: is this

3 Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel. Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth During (London: Routledge, 2005).

a naturalistically understood body, or body as a material object, or, finally, an object in the physical or even sub-atomic sense – an ontological approximation. Through the analysis of Oliver Sack's work – both as a neurologist and as himself: an organism afflicted with a chronic neurodegenerative disorder – Malabou brings to light the consequences of multi-directional plasticity which may, but in no way need to, be associated with a traumatic disturbance of the economy of life. Therefore, the philosopher speaks of epigenesis derived from Kantian critical philosophy, where the Enlightenment problem of a priori knowledge turns into the question of the material basis of subjectivity. Rationality no longer appears as something asserted by a system of speculative deduction, but it materializes through the fundamental – for us as living communities – ability of transforming both the biological and the intellectual domains. Biological and evolutionary sentience is not something detached from the intellectual order, though they are comparable not on the level of substance or epistemic procedures but rather on that neutral field where our knowledge of bodies and objects is shaped. Hence, the object of experience and the way we experience it precede any work of conceptualization – akin to some pliable deformation, like a traumatic explosion leaving behind wounds and scars – creating a map of connections and fractures that are not only neuronal and imaginative, in the strong sense of the term, but also encompassing the ability of creating images of the world and experience. In this framework Malabou proposes a third element, which unquestionably is a theoretical novelty, namely, a new kind of medium within contemporary dialectics of naturalism and constructivism. Her thinking touches at the same time upon reflection on "new wounds" in contemporary, post-traumatic times and on the critical state the world finds itself in "on the cusp of tomorrow," and – last but not least – it reveals itself as intentional speculation on the future of thinking, contained in dialectical tension, existential and political freedom.

Traces are another thing altogether. Derrida conceived of them as spanning from traces of memory that are remnants of dreams or daily experience (in line with Freud's early thinking), to their post-teleological, messianic understanding as something that is yet to materialize – as debris and textual remains from which a weak expression of the inevitable future could be gleaned, of some new world or even New International, where certain aspects of a better individual life would correspond with a more just world of egalitarian emancipation. Malabou, unlike most of the more or less subtle critics of Derrida, abandons the latter formulation in order to broaden the understanding of the former. Similarly to Martin Hägglund, she treats the trace as morphologically pliable matter. It is the same with notions and language. They cease to perform transcendental and metaphorical functions (being neither things in themselves, nor relations between differences within linguistic systems), building instead uncountable configurations and tensions in the space of our tangled, mostly unresolved identifications. A trace is not merely a sign – it is proof of the concreteness of a "particular" life.

IV

It might be that all three traditions within the humanities – critical theory, psychoanalysis, and deconstructive speculation – speak of roughly the same thing. Ultimately, this finite world in which we are forced to live in requires certain literalness. This literalness is not some tautological absurdity, but rather it manifests as critical work that allows us to see the thing that is otherwise obscured by discourses that reign as if they were political hegemonies. Though this thing seems infinitely distant and unreachable, it is actually situated "close by." Both the specter and the trace are capable of holding these two modalities of being within them, because they are two of the many manifestations of contemporary hylomorphism. Traces are reminiscent of fossils in the sense that they are no longer ours, though their discovery and dating is possible through science (which, for now, remains superhuman), and the specters though they seem like cultural metaphors, constitute the immanent order of our sensitivities and brittle ontologies. And if it is so, then novelty is not only objective but also realistic, not merely non-linguistic but also speculative. The capability of confronting these properties is a challenge to our anthropologies, but it also is a recipe for liberation not so much from the hegemony of the old discourses, but from the old hegemony of discourse. And it might as well be the only way of imaginative thinking that is still available to us.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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The Hegemony of Novelty

An introduction to the new (2023) special issue of "Teksty Drugie" on New Humanities.

Keywords

history, time, new, Marks, Hegel, psychoanalysis

Essays

Agata Bielik-Robson

The Culture of the End: Tarrying with the Apocalypse

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> Nur um der Hoffnungslosen willen ist uns die Hoffnung gegeben.
>
> Walter Benjamin, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*.[1]

In *The Political Theology of Paul*, Jacob Taubes famously states: "I can imagine as an apocalyptic: let it go down. I have no spiritual investment in the world as it is."[2] This declaration appears in the middle of Taubes's critical discussion of Carl Schmitt:

> He is a clerk, and he understands his task to be not to establish the law but to interpret the law. Schmitt's interest was in only one thing: that the party, that the chaos not rise to the top, that the state remain. No matter what the price. This is difficult for theologians and philosophers to follow, but as far as the jurist is concerned, as long as it is possible

1 "Hope is given to us only for the sake of the hopeless." In Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 201.

2 Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 103.

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> to find one juridical form, by whatever hairsplitting ingenuity, this must absolutely be done, for otherwise chaos reigns. This is what he later calls *katechon*: The retainer [*der Aufhalter*] that holds down the chaos that pushes us from below. That isn't my worldview, that isn't my experience. *I can imagine as an apocalyptic*: let it go down. I have no spiritual investment in the world as it is. But I understand that someone else is invested in this world and sees in the apocalypse, whatever its form, the adversary and does everything to keep it subjugated and suppressed, because from there forces can be unleashed that we are in no position to control.[3]

Taubes draws a contrast between his own position of the apocalyptic messianism and Schmitt's katechonic investment in this world, which accepts the world as it is, "no matter what the price."[4] Taubes's investment in messianic justice is immediately reflected in his divestment from the world, according to the sentence: *fiat iustitia, pereat mundus*. If justice demands that chaos rise and swallow the whole world in the apocalyptic flood – so be it, "let it go down." Schmitt's standpoint is the exact opposite. His investment in the world is at the cost of his investment in justice which he wants to replace by one, solid and strongly procosmic, "juridical form" that would be able to withstand the surge of chaos with, as Walter Benjamin called it, "law-preserving violence": *fiat mundus, pereat iustitia*. To side with the world, therefore, is to abandon the messianic ideal. To take the procosmic stance means to betray the only thing truly worth of existence: justice.

Taubes utters his famous phrase originally in German mixed with English: "Ich kann mir vorstellen als Apokalyptiker: soll sie zugrunde gehn. I have

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3 Ibid., 103; emphasis added.

4 The term *katechon* (in Martin Luther's translation *der Aufhalter*, "the restrainer") derives from Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians (2:3–2:8): "and you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed"; *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson, Bruce Manning Metzger and Roland Edmund Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). In *Nomos of the Earth*, Carl Schmitt creates a whole new political theology based on the concept of the *katechon* as the one who withholds the advent of the Antichrist representing the forces of lawlessness and disorder and as such is a true fulfillment of Christian religion; see in particular the chapter "The Christian Empire as a Restrainer of the Antichrist (*Katechon*)," in *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 1999), where Schmitt says: "I do not believe that any historical concept other than *katechon* would have been possible for the original Christian faith" (ibid., 61).

no spiritual investment in the world as it is."[5] This is a curious combination. The most obvious reason behind the use of English would be the quote from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Act 3, Scene 3, where the three murderers conspire to slay Banquo: they sneak to the palace at the dusk – "The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day" – and when the unsuspecting Banquo says, "It will be rain to-night," the first murderer answers: "Let it come down." Taubes, sharing a keen interest in Shakespeare with Schmitt (see the latter's *Hamlet or Hecuba*), could have read this scene as an allegory of the decaying and darkening Occident, losing the last "streaks of day," but still not able to recognize the state of crisis: just as Banquo, who is about to die, the West too misdiagnoses the encroaching chaos, which will take its "breath," for a passing storm. But the Shakespearean "let it come down," although hovering in the background, is not said by Taubes in English: he also does not quote it in Christoph Martin Wieland's classical translation of *Macbeth*, where *let it come down* is rendered as *Laß ihn nur fallen*, referring directly to the approaching rain. Instead, Taubes produces a peculiar mix of the Shakespearean imperative form with the Goethean constative use of the verb *zugrundegehen*, which emerges in the crucial monologue of Mephisto from the first part of *Faust*: *denn alles was entsteht / ist wert, dass es zugrunde geht*.[6] By combining the two, Taubes's *soll sie [die Welt] zugrunde gehn* transposes Mephisto's damning diagnosis of this world into a command: since this world is only worthy of being destroyed, because nothing of worth – the absolute justice – can ever exist in it, so l e t i t c o m e d o w n. The German formula *soll sie* is rare: it is stronger, more normatively charged than the less committed *lassen*, which usually translates the English *let*. S h o u l d t h e w o r l d (*s o l l s i e*) c o m e d o w n, Taubes the Apocalyptic would not mind. But is this really a commanding imperative? Although l e t is indeed commanding – as in the exhortative l e t ' s d o i t! – the i t c o m e d o w n implies a subjunctive, which usually refers to what is commonly known as wishful thinking, and i t, the lack of specified agency, implies a passive form. Taubes, therefore, only i m a g i n e s the world as coming down: he wishes for it to dissolve, but he will not make himself the active agent of chaos, joyfully announcing l e t ' s d o i t! He will rather wait for the non-specified chaos to encroach and swallow the world, the left hand of God dealing the apocalyptic blow to the unjust spectacle of worldly being. Unlike Schmitt, he will not lift a finger to stop it (*aufhalten*). Let it come down

5 Jacob Taubes, *Die politische Theologie des Paulus* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2003), 139.

6 "For whate'er to light is brought / Deserves again to be reduced to naught; / Then better 'twere that naught should be / Thus all the elements which ye / Destruction, Sin, or briefly, Evil, name / As my peculiar element I claim." Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust, Part I*, trans. Anna Swanwick (New York: Dover, 1994), 42.

– the sooner, the better. Taubes's apocalyptic mood, therefore, is that of the transpassive spectator of the coming doom: while reluctant to openly join the forces of destruction, he nonetheless cheers their arrival as the advent of a long-due justice that will punish the world for its inequities. And, to be specific, not just this world as it is: what he truly implies by *die Welt* is *die Verweltlichung*, the secular age of the "turn toward the worldly" which was supposed to inaugurate the epoch of enlightenment, progress, and universal freedom, but ended up in the violent explosion of wars and revolutions. Looking with scorn at the high hopes of mankind engaged in the formation of the whole Anthropocene culminating in Western modernity, Taubes cannot but withdraw his spiritual investment in this affair: let it come down, *soll sie zugrunde gehen*, for it alone deserves to be punished.

Today, almost three decades after Taubes's (in)famous self-declaration, we are repeatedly told to live in an epoch of the end, which demands of us all an analogical readiness to definitive avowals: to be or not to be in the human world, to cheer or to retain its approaching end, to hasten the doom, by siding with the accusation of the Anthropocene is unworthy of existence, or to slow its demise, by trying to find solutions to the threat of the "eco-apocalypse." The idea of living in the end times has today become so hegemonic and widespread that it has begun to generate a new universal "existential mood" or *Stimmung*, to borrow Martin Heidegger's term. Living in the end times is no longer a matter of individual experience, as it still was with Taubes, who spoke just for himself "as an apocalyptic." It determines the present cultural context as a whole, forcing today's humanities to enter the *depeche mode* style of thinking under the sign of extreme urgency.[7] We all live in a "culture of the end" and we must all declare how we stand toward it.

Yet, as Taubes's reflections on the apocalypse and the *katechon* well attest, the concept of the end is not new at all: what is new is the sense of urgency, of the "time is nigh" and the final endgame that demands of us to take stand. In fact, we have always lived in the end times. The idea of the end has shaped a large part of continental philosophical tradition, stretching from the biblical motifs of apocalypse to Hegel's idea of the End of History, where it was meant as an apex of the progress of freedom. According to Hegel, the End of History is not a violent finale of the world finally going *zugrunde*, but a *telos*: a desired goal of historical development. The last representative of Hegelian optimism, Francis Fukuyama, spurned by the 1989 fall of communism, urged us to greet "the end of history" – the global victory of liberal democracy – as the most welcome event that would stabilize world politics and let

7 See *Depeche Mode. Jacob Taubes Between Politics, Philosophy, and Religion*, ed. Hartmut von Sass and Herbert Kopp-Obersterbrink (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

it flourish, by preventing new revolutionary ideas from coming to the fore. Just as in the original apocalyptic discourse, also here, in Fukuyama's late variant of Hegelianism, all political ideas would have become fully revealed in the end and global mankind would stand "face to face" with the highest truth of democracy as its final and unsurpassable condition. But this type of metaphysical-historical optimism, so characteristic of the last decade of the second millennium, quite suddenly waned: the narrative of the desired telos gave way to that of the imminent end as a threat to the world's existence. The evocation of the apocalypse due to climate change and the fatal inevitability of war and destruction marks a stark contrast between the past-optimistic and contemporary-pessimistic narratives of the end, the most paradigmatic of which was Taubes's apocalyptic declaration, uttered in 1987. We may thus wonder: when did this change occur, and why?

From the beginning of the Western eschatological tradition, the concept of the "end" involved a radically ambiguous sense of a "loving devastation": it meant both the limit and the goal, both catastrophe and utopia, both despair and hope, both radical anxiety and freedom to a new creation or, less religiously, a future development.[8] Contrary to this, late modernity shows a tendency of gradual disambiguation of the end-concept: we are more and more surrounded by what Ernesto de Martino calls "psychopathological apocalypse," the negative *Stimmung* of despair and anxiety which is based upon the irreversible "loss of the world," without any promise of a new beginning.[9] The original ambiguity of the "end" is thus resolved in a unilateral sense of the irrevocable limit, rather than the desired goal which entails the promise of something new and better. Rather than the dialectics of despair and hope, of anxiety and freedom, of catastrophe and utopia, we are witnessing today a radical disjunction between negative and positive elements, with a strong advantage given to the former. The new existential mood is decidedly pessimistic and, because of its all-pervasive negativity, demobilizing, akin to Taubes's position, transpassive: the "psychopathological apocalypse" can only be awaited, either eagerly or reluctantly, because there is no hope of preventing it. This new "rising of the apocalyptic tone in philosophy" was first spotted by Jacques Derrida who, as early as 1984, wrote

8 The British Christian theologian John Webster defines the "eschatological" as the adjective of "that single, perfect reality which is the basis and end of all realities, that absolute which, as the origin of all that is, is pure, free, ungraspable, approachable only by virtue of its own prior approach to us in a kind of l o v i n g d e v a s t a t i o n." John Webster, *The Culture of Theology*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Alden C. McCray (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 53; emphasis added.

9 See Ernesto de Martino, *La fine del mondo: Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* (Torino: Einaudi, 2019).

a critical essay on the "hasteners of the Apocalypse," as if anticipating Taubes's declaration.[10] Since then, the tone has indeed only risen. In his blog-essay "Sulla fine del mondo," posted on November 18, 2019, Giorgio Agamben too noticed the link between the language of the Jewish and Christian prophets of doom and the contemporary, only seemingly secular, discourse of the eco-apocalypse, which now merely "reoccupies" the same position towards the world, seen from the perspective of its end:

> The theme of the end of the world has appeared repeatedly in the history of Christianity. Prophets emerged in all periods announcing that the end is nigh. What is singular today is that this eschatological function, long abandoned by the church, has been assumed by scientists who increasingly present themselves as prophets, describing and predicting with absolute certainty the climate catastrophes that they say will lead to the end of life on earth. It is singular but perhaps not surprising, if we consider that in modernity science has replaced faith and assumed a properly religious function. Science is, indeed, the religion of our time: it is that which men believe in. At the very least, it is that which they believe that they believe in. Like any religion, the religion of science requires an eschatology. That is to say, it needs an apparatus to keep the faithful afraid, and so strengthen their faith, while also keeping a priestly class in power. Apparitions like Greta Thunberg are symptomatic of this situation. Greta blindly believes in the prophecies, and so she awaits the end of the world in 2030, just like the millennialists in the Middle Ages who believed in the imminent return of Christ to judge the world. No less symptomatic is a figure like that of the inventor of Gaia, a scientist who, concentrating his apocalyptic diagnoses on a single factor (the percentage of CO2 in the atmosphere) declares with astonishing naïveté that the salvation of humanity lies in nuclear energy. In both cases, the stakes are religious and utterly non-scientific in nature, and this is betrayed by the fact that salvation plays such a central role. This phenomenon is especially disturbing because science has never before counted eschatology among its tasks. […] It ought to be clear that these reflections are not taking a position on the reality of pollution or on the harmful changes wrought by successive industrial revolutions on the material and spiritual conditions of living beings. To the contrary, by warning against the confusion of religion with scientific truth, against the confusion of the prophetic with the lucid, the point is to avoid having interested parties dictating choices and views that, in the final analysis, cannot but be political.[11]

10 Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," trans. John P. Leavey Jr., *Oxford Literary Review* 6 (2) (1984).

11 See https://d-dean.medium.com/on-the-end-of-the-world-giorgio-agamben-538c0f7a1c85, in the translation of Alan Dean, accessed on August 25, 2023.

Agamben's warning against the "confusion of the prophetic with the lucid" falls in line with De Martino's diagnosis of the "psychopathological apocalypse" as referring precisely to the crisis of modern rationalism installed by the Enlightenment, which separated science from eschatology, by not allowing the former to step in the shoes of the latter's great expectations – or, in the idiom of Hans Blumenberg, by blocking the mechanism of "reoccupation" (*Umbesetzung*) that would make of science a modern substitute of the religious mode of thinking. According to Agamben, the pact of the Enlightenment – the new era of modernity defined by a ratio explicitly avoiding eschatological grand narratives – is now broken: science does precisely what it was n o t supposed to do, that is, "reoccupies" the prophecy of the doom, by "describing and predicting with absolute certainty the climate catastrophes that they say will lead to the end of life on earth." This, however, although "singular" – characteristic only of Western late modernity, weakened by the waning paradigm of the Enlightenment – is not at all "surprising": "science is, indeed, the religion of our time" and the logic of replacement has been active in our culture for the last two centuries. The Taubesian apocalyptic divestment from the world appears no longer as a purely "spiritual" position; it is secretly backed by science stepping into the eschatological role which was forbidden by the rational pact of the Enlightenment, now no longer valid. The scientific disenchantment of the world, therefore, transforms into a new spiritual "enchantment": a new religion with its own Book of Revelation prophesying the imminent apocalypse of nature – and with it, the end of the whole livable world, both natural and human. Greta Thunberg and the Gaia apologist are the new prophets of doom, motivated by exactly the same intense expectations that accompanied the frenzied millenarists at the onset of modernity: a vengeful death wish for the "sinnful" Anthropocene, the demise of which, bringing down the whole world, they will watch with a transpassive sense of satisfaction. As then, also now this *Schadenfreude* is mixed with an irrational hope that, as the spectators of the apocalypse, they will somehow miraculously survive the "rapture" and see the world renewed, according to St. John's formula referring to the Savior-Lamb: "Lo, I make all things new!"

As early as the 1940s, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, profoundly aware of the crisis of Western rationalism, see the first harbingers of science self-apotheosizing into a new religion that would turn disenchantment into a new bleak charm: a dark cult of the forces representing inhuman nature against everything human, known today under the collective banner of the "Anthropocene." Unlike Taubes, who clearly participates in the vengeful mood against "failed" modern civilization, they openly declare strong "spiritual investment" in the human world: they wish to defend the Enlightenment against its own detrimental aspects, that is,

defend it as a form of dialectical *ratio*, in which despair and hope are locked in one rational paradigm, against the "religion of disenchantment" which, following the scientific practice of universal *Entzauberung*, blackens the view of the world irreversibly, eventually offering nothing but "Apocalypse Now." While disenchantment, which questions the apparent self-evident truths of the "natural attitude" and, with its expert knowledge, destroys the magical "happy life-world" of the premodern epochs, is a legitimate scientific method, it should not be treated with a new form of religious piety that would deprive us of hope on all other fronts, most of all ethical and political. Adorno's and Horkheimer's critique of Western modernity as sliding into a pseudo-scientific religion of cosmic pessimism focuses on the intricate relationship between hope and despair and proves that the one cannot be thought without the other: hope can only come to the fore in the background of darkest despair, and vice versa – despair can only be understood as a loss of hope, which, by its very nature, is never irreversible. By rejecting Hegelian metaphysical optimism as no longer tenable in the conditions of late modernity, the Frankfurt duo wishes to reclaim the idea of despair for the messianic idiom of progress, which too often feels uneasy about it, wrongly convinced that it cannot let in a sense of hopelessness. On the contrary, they claim, the messianic discourse, which historically had arisen as a companion, but not always an obvious ally of the apocalyptic one, from the beginning dealt with despair and built its notion of hope in close relation to it. While they witness the dramatic passage from the uniformly optimistic *telos*-oriented hope to the equally uniformly pessimistic end-awaiting desolation, Adorno and Horkheimer want to consider a dialectical possibility of a new hope arising directly out of despair without invalidating the latter: a new positive attitude/*Stimmung* which could shake the transpassive mood of universal doom and once again begin to motivate our actions.

The Psychotheology of Exodus

Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a crucial reference here, because it combines in the paradigmatic manner the most promising approaches to the analysis of the culture of the end: philosophical, psychoanalytic, and post-secular. The main idea of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is to replace the pervading mood of "Apocalypse Now" with a new one, which can be called accordingly: "Exodus Now." Adorno and Horkheimer's psychotheological insight reveals the crucial economy of the messianic affects: hope and its inevitable shadow, fear and despair. In their account, Exodus, imagined as an archetype of radical social change, is a complex endeavor: the individual is encouraged to exit the safe realm of natural law and enter the risky desert with

no preestablished model to repeat or imitate, which causes an immediate increase of anxiety. The sole compensation for this anxious surge of incertitude is a new affective quality: hope. According to Søren Kierkegaard, it is precisely the discovery of hope that determines the eternal difference between Athens and Jerusalem. On the one side of this great divide, Greeks cultivate the "tragic sense of life," which condemns every individual will to break free from the fateful arrangement of being as *hubris*. Hence Aristotle's conviction that hope is one of the plagues unleashed from Pandora's Box: to harbor a hope in the change of the ontological status quo of the eternal cycle of *genesis kai phthora* (becoming and perishing) means to be delusional and pose a danger to the divine order of things.[12] Contrary to this diagnosis, Jews (and Christians after them) challenge the natural order precisely in the name of hope, which only then becomes an "ontological category": not a subjective/delusional state of mind led by the vice of *hubris*, but an objective feature of the worldly reality as open to radical change. Horkheimer and Adorno's definition of the archaic world of myth stresses the importance of the new category of ontological hope which was unknown in it: "for in its figures mythology captured the essence of the status quo: cycle, fate, and domination of the world reflected as the truth and deprived of hope."[13] On the one hand, therefore, Exodus brings a promise and a hope – yet, on the other, it also involves a serious risk: the deferment of the realization of the promise once again increases the anxiety which now attaches itself to disappointment and the demotivating sense of hopelessness. The resulting loss of hope is then a far more pessimistic affect than the preestablished lack of hope, which the Greek tragic wisdom assumed in its mythological logic of the eternal cycle. Hope and fear thus go hand in hand. According to Kierkegaard's calculus: the more you are hopeful, the stronger the sense of anxiety, but also vice versa: it is precisely the power of faith that can alchemically transform the gray of anxiety into a shiny coin of hope. Yet, the more one invests in hope, the greater the danger that the state of the world will eventually seem hopeless: not just "deprived of hope," as in the mythological thought which bars hope in advance ("it cannot even

12 "The Greeks did not have the concept of the eternal; so neither did they have the concept of the future. Therefore Greek life cannot be reproached for being lost in the moment, or more correctly, it cannot even be said that it was lost, for temporality was conceived by the Greeks just as naively as sensuousness, because they lacked the category of spirit." Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety. A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 89.

13 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 27.

be said that it was lost"[14]), but as the depressing opposite of hopefulness, the ultimate failure of the "spiritual investment" in the project of Exodus and the total collapse of the edifice of faith. For Hegel, such radical loss, meaning both defeat and forfeiture, constitutes something unthinkable – the denial of the metaphysically active "objective tendency" shaping the progressive evolution of history – that should and shall never happen. For Kierkegaard, on the other hand, the ever-looming possibility of loss is the gist of faith as an existential gamble of credit and investment in the ever elusive category of hope.

Written as a testimony to the late-modern loss of hope, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is precursory to the *Stimmung* of doom, which characterizes our culture of the end. But it is also precursory to all pursuits of the affirmative ways-out (or, precisely, "exoduses now") that could save us from the calamitous sense of an ending. While it accuses Western modernity as the self-professed "age of hope" of making false promises of universal emancipation, it nonetheless defends the Enlightenment, but only as it still could be, against the Enlightenment in its actual status quo. For although the Enlightenment, in theory, was based on Kant's definition that was grounded in the metaphor of Exodus (*der Ausgang aus der selbstverschuldigten Unmündigkeit*), in reality it did not move away from the mythic pre-history. While it challenged the power of archaic mythology, it did not succeed in fully realizing the project of Exodus: the myth has returned. Its reappearance manifests itself in the tenacity of the mythological logic of the cycle, which has the same effect now as in ancient times: it presents the world as "deprived of hope." The disenchanted scientific worldview might have chased away all the mythic fables, but it did not free itself from the cyclical idea of nature, based on the eternal repetition of the same:

> But the more the illusion of magic vanishes, the more implacably repetition, in the guise of regularity, imprisons human beings in the cycle now objectified in the laws of nature, to which they believe they owe their security as free subjects. The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, which enlightenment upholds against mythical imagination, is that of myth itself. The arid wisdom which acknowledges nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces in the meaningless game have been played o lit, all the great thoughts have been thought, all possible discoveries can be construed in advance, and human beings are defined by self-preservation through adaptation-this barren wisdom merely reproduces the fantastic doctrine it rejects: the sanction of fate which, through retribution, incessantly reinstates what always was. Whatever might be different is made the same. That is the verdict which critically sets the boundaries to possible experience. The identity of everything

14 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 89.

> with everything is bought at the cost that nothing can at the same time be identical to itself. Enlightenment dissolves away the injustice of the old inequality of unmediated mastery, but at the same time perpetuates it in universal mediation, by relating every existing thing to every other.[15]

By forcing upon us a vision of the self-repeating world without exits, modernity betrayed the exodic promise which made it possible in the first place. This is the reason why today "enlightenment with every step becomes more deeply engulfed in mythology."[16]

Yet the hopelessness of Horkheimer's and Adorno's tone, implying that we had hit rock bottom of all that could possibly go wrong in modernity, comes with a twist: a twist which the messianic tradition calls the antinomian inversion. For them, the late-modern intense hopelessness is merely one side of the Möbius strip: the other is a still possible hope which they desperately try to reach, not knowing exactly how to flip the sides. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno writes: "so, when we are hoping for rescue, a voice tells us that hope is in vain, yet it is powerless hope alone that allows us to draw a single breath."[17] *Die machtlose Hoffnung*, a powerless hope, is a twin sister of hopelessness at the peak of the Kierkegaardian anxiety, no longer disciplined and appeased by faith, which always consoles the believer that, in the Hegelian manner, "all shall be well." Today, if hope is to be rekindled, Adorno and Horkheimer imply, it is only out of the dark spirit of the loss of hope. The loss – and the despairing horror of it – must be thought thoroughly to the end, until no fake consolation clouds our affects, and we face the traumatic Gorgon of the hopeless Real, which only then can be properly diagnosed and worked-through. What the Frankfurt duo, therefore, are paradoxically hoping for is the repetition of the psychotheological matrix of the original Exodus in the conditions of late modernity. Similarly to Walter Benjamin, who in *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* attempted a radical *Umkehr* (turn) of the ultimately nihilized world into a positive sign of revelation, they also invest in the deepening of the sense of crisis that would make us crave again for the cure of Exodus in a world seemingly "without exits."[18] In the midst of the Apocalypse Now, this ancient narrative should once again reverberate with all its original urgency: *Exodus Now!*

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15 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 8.

16 Ibid., 12.

17 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 121.

18 For Benjamin, the secret of this reversal lies in the nature of allegory which denies the world experience its illusory richness and dries it up to the bone as its disenchanted

What Adorno and Horkheimer reveal (and what is missing in Hegel, the paradigmatic metaphysical optimist) is the intimate symbiosis of hope and hopelessness: the bi-polar oscillation of the messianic affects which can never settle in any unshakable certitude, a constant tension between the joys of hope and the horrors of its loss that can never disassociate from one another. The goal of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is thus to rescue the notion of hopelessness and despair from the archives of the conservative-catastrophic narratives of the Fall in order to reclaim it for the messianic story. It takes as its motto Walter Benjamin's famous sentence: "hope is given to us only for the sake of the hopeless." For, as Horkheimer and Adorno firmly believe, the loss of hope is never irreversible: there is always some way out of the world seemingly without exits.

Hope in the Dying Universe: The Metaphysics of Entropy

According to the Frankfurt duo, the scientific view of the world as a disenchanted cycle of becoming and perishing and the "eternal repetition of the same" is one of the reasons why the progressive narratives of modernity, staking on social change, lost in confrontation with modern science's "arid wisdom," surreptitiously transformed into an authoritative "new religion." But what they still fail to take into their account, which perceives the scientific worldview as a modern reemergence of the mythic cycle concerned solely with the reproduction of the worldly status quo, is the discovery of entropy, which broke with the idea of the cycle and instead introduced a vision of an irreversible decline of physical reality – or what Walter Benjamin aptly called a "permanent catastrophe."[19]

Indeed, it was Benjamin who was one of the first modern philosophers to react to the discovery of entropy, interpreting it as decisive for the difference between nature and history. In his 1923 letter to Christian Florian Rang, Benjamin introduces the concept of *die gerettete Nacht*, the "night preserved," in order to denote the world of nature as a closed system of immanence, which should be saved precisely as such – *verschlossen*, hermetic and isolated.[20]

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terrible truth, yet "the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection [...] Subjectivity, like an angel falling into the depths, is brought back by allegories, and is held fast in heaven, in God, by *ponderacion mysteriosa*." Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 233; 235; emphasis added.

19 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 356.

20 Walter Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910–1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 224.

Agamben's reading of Benjamin's "night preserved" in *The Open* brings forward the stark contrast between nature, immersed in the entropic night or "eternal fall," and history as based on the notion of Exodus out of nature:

> Here nature, as the world of closedness (*Verschlossenheit*) and of the night, is opposed to history as the sphere of revelation (*Offenbarung*) […]. The "saved night" is the name of this nature that has been given back to itself, whose character is transience.[21]

For Agamben – unlike for Horkheimer and Adorno – the choice between the closed immanence of nature and the open futurity of history should be decided for the sake of the former: human beings must give up on the "interminable errancy – history"[22] as the false adventure of "messianic hope" and instead choose the immanence of nature, that is, come to terms with its essentially irreparable – entropic – tendency. No Exodus is possible out of the "night of the world," so, even if rejecting the doom prophesies of science masquerading as a "new religion," they themselves are not immune to its findings: the discovery of entropy indeed constitutes a major challenge to all narrative of progress, always ultimately based on the exodic canvas.

In this manner, Benjamin and Agamben attempt to adjust their philosophical speculations to the newly discovered law of entropy as the energetic deterioration of a closed physical system that would eventually lead to the thermal death of the universe: the silent apocalypse of nature, brought about by nature itself. The key to this new sense of doom is precisely the notion of "closedness," *Verschlossenheit*, also reverberating in Karl Barth's famous description of the world as "the completely closed circle from which we have no means of escape,"[23] as well as in Taubes's Weberian portrayal of the modern disenchanted universe as an "iron cage," thus reverting to the second-century Gnostic image of the world as the oppressive *cellula creatoris*, which originally gave rise to the apocalyptic mode: the conviction that the world as a "prison cell" cannot be redeemed, only destroyed.[24] From the second half of

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21 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open. Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 81-82.

22 Giorgio Agamben, *The Use of Bodies. Homo Sacer IV, 2*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 272.

23 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 187.

24 See Jacob Taubes, "The Iron Cage and the Exodus from It, or the Dispute over Marcion, Then and Now": "In the cosmos atheos of the modern age, there is no point of escape

the nineteenth century onwards, Western thought stands in the shadow of this new terrifying principle, which only thickens the already long shadow thrown onto it by Arthur Schopenhauer, the first anti-Hegelian critic of historical progress: from the seed planted by Carnot, Clausius, Kelvin, and Helmholtz, there grows a dark vision prophesying a final doom to the whole material universe. If the cosmos is not infinite, but finite, then perhaps the same rule of the degenerating isolated system applies to the totality of being which, some day in the remote future, will also grow cold and dissipate, thus extinguishing all more complex energetic systems – most of all, life.[25]

Nietzsche claimed that the "death of God" constitutes a traumatic event which will reverberate in mankind's confused reaction to it for centuries, before it is finally worked through and fully realized. We can easily substitute for this event the discovery of entropy, in which God and all that is linked to his concept – the providential order and teleology of the universe, fostering life and consciousness – abruptly vanishes from our sight. Eduard von

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'beyond' the world. Therefore, neither can there be any Gnostic exodus from the world in the modern age." Jacob Taubes, *From Cult to Culture: Fragments Towards a Critique of Historical Reason*, ed. Aleida Assmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2009), 138. The connection between the Marcionite Gnostic doctrine of the Alien God and the scientific climate of late modernity, marked by Rudolf Clausius's discovery of the law of entropy in 1865, was made by Harnack himself in the 1920 "Foreword to the First Edition" of his book on Marcion: "the new life of faith and freedom was for him something so 'alien' as over against the world that he based its emergence upon the same doubtful/daring hypothesis by which Helmholtz proposed to explain the emergence of organisms on the earth." Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion. The Gospel of the Alien God*, trans. John E. Steely and Lyle D. Bierma (Jamestown, NY: Labyrinth Press, 1990), ix. In 1884, Hermann von Helmholtz proposed a cosmozoic theory according to which life did not arise spontaneously on Earth, but came from outer space in the form of micro-organisms traveling with meteorites and comets. Since matter throughout the universe is generally hostile to the anti-entropic process of life, life constitutes an absolute exception: it was born accidentally and only once on an alien distant planet and propagates itself against the cosmic odds.

25 Kelvin himself was not at all convinced that Carnot's law of the increase of entropy in the isolated system can so easily be extrapolated to the whole of the universe, because the limits of this alleged whole could not be theoretically comprehended: "the result would inevitably be a state of universal rest and death, if the universe were finite and left to obey existing laws. But it is impossible to conceive a limit to the extent of matter in the universe; and therefore science points rather to an endless progress, through an endless space, of action involving the transformation of potential energy into palpable motion and hence into heat, than to a single finite mechanism, running down like a clock, and stopping for ever." William Thomson, "On the Age of the Sun's Heat," *Macmillan's Magazine* 5 (1862): 288–93. It was only later, with Hermann von Helmholtz and William Rankine, that this extrapolating leap was done, thus inaugurating a new era of modern disenchantment.

Hartmann, the German philosopher associated with the deeply pessimistic line of *Lebensphilosophie* (which, more properly speaking, should rather be called *Todesphilosophie*), extrapolated the rule of entropy in all realms of existence – material and cultural – by introducing the principle of dysteleology: not just ateleology, which would merely suggest an open process, but anti-teleology, which openly replaces the "good" or life-affirming purpose of the universe with the "evil," life-negating one. Just as dystopia is not just the lack of utopia, but its direct reverse, so is the actual aim of the whole enterprise of being the very opposite of success: failure, downfall, the tragic *untergehen* of all, the massive thwarting of any purposefulness that is inscribed in the process of life. The universe destined for death mercilessly exposes life as an instant failure, error, anomaly: a little counter-eddy in the stream rushing blindly *zum Tode*, with no power to resist it. What Horkheimer and Adorno feared about the scientific disenchantment as a powerful tool of cosmic pessimism fulfills itself in the discovery of entropy as radical dysteleology, which naturally fuels the apocalyptic mood: the whole universe is on its way towards extinction from the moment of its inception. There is no *telos* to existence; there is only the e n d: one universal *Sein-zum-Tode*.

In his essay "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense," written in 1873, a few years after Robert Clausius's discovery of the law of entropy, Nietzsche gives us a taste of the loss of hope which was soon to follow the entropic vision of the universal doom:

> In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of world history – yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.[26]

This is precisely the Nietzschean "truth that kills": the final verdict, combining "telling the truth" (*veri-dictio*) with the irreversible "sentence," which immediately reduces the whole time of existence to the negligeable instant – "only a minute." In order to withstand this mortifying and paralyzing truth, life must resort to a lie. Aware of being nothing but a short-lived blunder in the arrangement of the universe, life must turn itself into a "willing error," that is a deliberate lie and falsehood and, as such, the very opposite of a truth-seeking argument: "that lies should be necessary to life is part

26 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, ed. and trans. Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair and David J. Parent (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 246.

and parcel of the terrible and questionable character of life [...]. Life is no argument."[27]

Nietzsche himself is at a crossroads, not sure how he should proceed further. For, if he goes for the lethal truth, nothing will separate him from his teacher Schopenhauer, who had incorporated the entropic vision *avant la lettre* in his philosophy of the futility of life and its nirvanic *Auslöschung* or the return to state of zero-energy – but if he goes for life, nothing will save him from being simply a liar: tragic and self-conscious, but still, a liar, falsely investing in the "purposeful" enterprise of life. Far from being resolved, the agon between Schopenhauer the truth-sayer and Nietzsche the life/lie-affirmer is the one which organizes the whole of late-modern thought. And, despite all the life-affirming rhetoric coming from the post-Nietzschean side, it is nonetheless Schopenhauer who inevitably wins with his powerful entropic vision. It is precisely due to the mesmerizing force of this new enigmatic signifier, *entropia* – which insinuates itself in the place of the universal principle, as a paradoxical anti-*arche*, or even anti-God – that the finite life has begun to see itself as an error on its path to be resolved only by death; as a mistake that can be corrected solely by self-extinction. That too is a significant factor that adds to the late-modern "rising of the apocalyptic tone": beneath the sense of urgency addressing the imminent threat of the eco-apocalypse, there reverberates a deep *basso continuo* of despair reacting to the apocalyptic tendency of nature itself, heading "dystelelogically" towards its own undoing. The new feeling of the world as a fragile and self-deteriorating "closed system," very different from the Greek perception of nature as an eternal cycle (still present in Horkheimer and Adorno), only intensifies the current apocalyptic anxiety which constantly floods us with the images of the "loss of the world." If nature felt as solid as it did to the Greek physiocrats, believing in the indestructibility of *genesis kain phthora*, our eco-fears would be far less intense. It is the new entropic *Stimmung*, according to which nature is no longer seen as perfectly self-sufficient and resilient, that fuels the late-modern sense of despair.

Can any hope be wrenched from this new kind of desolation? The answer to this too comes from Benjamin, the bearer of the entropic message. In *The Messianic Reduction*, Peter Fenves claims that, similarly to Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin was also very attentive to the scientific discoveries of his time and

27 See aphorism no. 121 of *The Gay Science*, titled "Life no Argument," where Nietzsche dismisses the liveable arrangement of the world as nothing but a necessary vital lie: "we have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live – by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith nobody now could endure life. But that does not prove them. Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 180.

reacted to them in lively fashion in his writings. Fenves emphasizes the importance of the discovery of the second law of thermodynamics, by focusing on Benjamin's notion of transience (*die Vergängnis*) as the first "metaphysics of entropy."[28] The term – *die Metaphysik der Entropie* – has been applied recently to a thinker who most likely influenced Benjamin's intuitions, namely Philipp Mainländer: an avid reader of Schopenhauer, he was probably the first theologian to reflect on – and eagerly embrace – Helmholtz's hypothesis of the thermal death of the universe.[29] According to Mainländer (whose *Wille zum Tode* is also regarded as the precursor of the Freudian concept of the death drive), the transience which runs through the whole of nature should not be resisted, but apocalyptically hastened, since it is an expression of the passage of God himself moving from the error of being to the perfection of nothingness as the "state of zero excitation." Once this passage is complete and the sacred entropy runs its course, the world and God alike will have found their redemption – *Erlösung*, also to be read as "dissolution" – in being liberated from the *lapsus* of becoming. In Mainländer's *Philosophie der Erlösung* (1876), the lesson of history is a negative knowledge-*gnosis* about the futility of all human efforts to improve the condition of being, which remains inherently beyond repair. History conceived as a hopeful progress or an Exodus from nature is nothing but an illusion: an ephemeral bubble created within the "closed system of nature" which is destined to fall and expire. Both Mainländer and Benjamin thus propose an alternative political philosophy, based not on the idea of progress, but on the recognition and acknowledgment of the constant entropic decline inherent in the very process of natural being: "to strive after such passing […] is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism."[30]

There is practically no thinker who has not commented, openly or implicitly, on what immediately became dubbed as *Naturdämmerung*: "the twilight of nature," revealing the benighted condition of all material being. Ernst Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia* (1918) is a paradigmatic response to the anti-spirit of *entropia* in its passionate defense of the "messianic hope" and its need for a history of progress breaking with the doomed world of nature. When narrating about the Janus-faced modernity, torn between the horrors of the entropic Real and the messianic hope for an Exodus out of the

28 Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction. Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 12-3.

29 Philipp Mainländer, *Philosophie der Erlösung*, ed. Ulrich Horstmann (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1989), 20.

30 Walter Benjamin, "The Theological-Political Fragment," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 306.

iron cage of the closed physical system destined to die, Bloch insists on keeping "a different order of wisdom than the one that describes a cycle of universal cooling, a new flare-up, and another phase of cooling – a carousel of entropy and anti-entropy from which mechanical philosophy draws its final conclusion."[31] For Bloch, there is still hope, even if born in the midst of the entropic despair: the "different order of wisdom," not giving in to the "arid wisdom" of the "mechanical philosophy," still stakes on the possibility of a human history as differing from the order of nature, which speaks the "language of doom".[32] For Benjamin, however, this is a wrong answer which merely perpetuates the Niezschean "web of lies" that life builds around itself in order to preserve the sense of its own purposefulness and thus hope. Benjamin does not want to lie against the entropic tendency of nature itself; he wants to embrace it and deprive it of the apocalyptic violence, by instead assuming "the quietest approach."

Political Nihilism: "The Quietest Approach"

The idea of nihilism as a new world politics originates in Walter Benjamin's "Theological-Political Fragment," written in response to Ernst Bloch's 1918 first edition of *Geist der Utopie*. It is partly a praise and partly a disguised polemic with Bloch, who is first openly credited with having proved the impossibility of a utopian theocracy (a compliment not at all obvious in regard to Bloch), and then tacitly trashed for his investment in the messianic "principle of hope," staking on the gradual raising of the world to the spiritual level. Spurned by the discovery of entropy, Benjamin elaborates on the concept of transience, which leads him to the corresponding notion of a hope in reverse. Bloch approaches his "principle of hope" – soon to become a title of his *opus magnum* – in a traditional manner of Jewish messianism, filtered through his appropriation of Hegel and Marx, according to which the world has an objective tendency to press towards the redemptive *telos* when spirit and matter will have found perfect reconciliation. Benjamin, on the contrary, sees the "messianic intensity" of thinkers like Bloch as the source of misfortune and unhappiness, merely perpetuating the lies of life. Thus, paraphrasing Kafka, if there is a hope, it is not for "us," if we imagine ourselves as the messianic agents pressing for the redemptive goal of history, the Omega-point as the imaginary fulfillment and perfection of

31 Ernst Bloch, *Literary Essays*, trans. Andrew Joron (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 313.

32 Ibid.

our current state of existence.[33] It is rather a hope in reverse, realizing itself not in the Blochian progress of the world towards the "humanization of nature"[34] but in the reverse downward movement of the "eternal Fall," in which matter resists and counteracts the messianic agency of the spirit. According to Benjamin, nihilism as the new world politics replacing the grand narrative of progress is the only logical response to the entropic phenomenon of transience:

> Messianic intensity of the heart, of the inner man in isolation, passes through misfortune, as suffering. To the spiritual *restitutio in integrum*, which introduces immortality, corresponds a worldly restitution that leads to the eternity of downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality, the rhythm of Messianic nature, is happiness. For nature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away. To strive after such passing, even for those stages of man that are nature, is the task of world politics, whose method must be called nihilism.[35]

While these two metaphysical orders of restitution – of the natural world, on the one hand, and of the divine immortal pleroma, on the other – never collide, there is nonetheless a third element that insinuates itself in between the two: history. History arises as an attempt to mediate between the transcendent immortal God and the immanent passing Nature, but does so in vain: after all, "nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic."[36] In Benjamin's reading, the error of history, which hoped to build a bridge between the eternal and the transient, is to be overcome by the politics of global nihilism, which would undo the errance of history and revert it back to the rhythm of transience as the natural form of time that is not destined to accumulate, construct, and reform, but simply to "decompose."[37] Nature as the "total passing away" is not to be sublated into accumulative history and subordinated to its human *telos* set on the ideal of permanence (*Dauer*) as reflecting the transcendent order of eternity. On the contrary, history must recognize itself as an

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33 Benjamin quotes Kafka's *dictum* – "there is plenty of hope, an infinite amount of hope – but not for us" – in his essay on Kafka: Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 798.

34 See Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity*, trans. J. T. Swann (London: Verso, 2009), 232.

35 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 305–306.

36 Ibid., 305.

37 Compare Benjamin's fragment from a similar period, "World and Time": "in the revelation of the divine, the world – the theater of history – is subjected to a great process of decomposition." Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 226.

error of impossible mediation and peacefully dissolve into entropic nature, so it can now serve the metaphysical purpose of the "worldly restitution" or the world recognizing its true essence not in progress, but in the downfall. Benjamin's response to the anti-spirit of entropia (as opposed to the Blochian spirit of utopia), therefore, is a total revolution of the late-modern worldview, coupled with a new revolutionary politics the goal of which is the "nihilistic" attunement to the "rhythm of transience": no more high hopes and great expectations in the dying universe, which offers its inhabitants nothing but a short passing material existence. According to Benjamin, however, this is not a call to despair, as it is in Bloch, Horkheimer, and Adorno, still longing for an idea of progress – Exodus. By reversing the notion of hope, now attuned to the needs of transient matter, world politics can become happily nihilistic – and thus pave way to the strictly materialistic biopolitical paradigm of taking care of the fragile life in the conditions of radical finitude.

This biopolitical attunement to the entropic transience is designed by Benjamin to disarm the apocalyptic mood that rose with the sense of doom implied by the idea of final *Naturdämmerung*: "nature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away," which means that it should be accepted that way, deeply affirmed and taken care of as transient. While the "apocalyptic tone" is catastrophic and unforgiving, throwing a negative verdict over the world doomed to die, the nihilistic politics finds a new home in the "permanent catastrophe," precisely because it is permanent. According to Benjamin, therefore, we can live in the dying universe without hoping either for eternal progress or for the hasty demise of the miserable physical world as, in the paradigmatically apocalyptic formulation of Goethe's Mephisto, *nur wert, dass es zugrunde geht*. Thus, in yet another piece from 1921, "The Meaning of Time in the Moral Universe," Benjamin tries to build an alternative understanding of time, not as the Rilkean force of destruction (*die Zeit, die zerstörende*), but as the force that helps and assists the *vergeben/vergehen* of the world's entropic self-obliteration: "time helps, in ways that are wholly mysterious, to complete the process of forgiveness, though never of reconciliation."[38] The key to this enigmatic assistance lies in the prefix *ver*, ringing with the old-Saxon *forth* as "away with": *Vergängnis, Vergebung, Vernichtung*. This "doing away with" is the proper work of time: the element which enables transience and self-erasure of the world before the apocalyptic manifestation of God's Judgment in the immediately destructive divine violence. The "crimson thread of negation," therefore, would thus appear in two distinct yet related forms: *in the world*, as the time which delays the final blow and constitutes the essence of the "nature passing away," on the one hand – and out of the world, as

38 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 287.

the apocalyptic annihilation that strikes in a timeless now, because it cannot tolerate the misery of the transient material existence, on the other. While the former immanent negation gives the world its structure (even if ultimately grounded in "passing away") and thus perpetuates its being (even if in the "permanent catastrophe"), the latter transcendent negation strikes from the beyond as the Gnostic revenge against the scandal of material creation:

> Retribution (*Vergeltung*) is fundamentally indifferent to the passage of time, since it remains in force for centuries w i t h o u t d i l u t i o n, and even today what is actually at bottom, a heathen conception still pictures the Last Judgment along these lines.[39]

In the first case, time as the delayed divine violence destroys the world in the manner of what would later be known as the Derridean *différance*. It "dilutes" – differs and defers – the apocalyptic force, by patiently working through the world's inner self-erasure, and because of that is "forgiving" (*vergebend*): time annihilates the world in a "gentle" manner which does its work of "doing away with" *before* the violent intervention of the Last Judgment. Paradoxically, therefore, the self-obliteration of the world in time saves the world from the violent end – and that is, for Benjamin, the ultimate forgiveness (*Vergebung*), taking the form of "the quietest approach," *das leisteste Nahen*, as opposed to the apocalyptic bang: "as the purifying hurricane speeds ahead of the thunder and lightning, God's fury roars through history in the storm of forgiveness, in order to sweep away everything that would be consumed forever in the lightning bolts of divine wrath".[40] The storm – *der Sturm der Vergebung* – is thus to save us from fire: drenched by the rivers of time, the world keeps at bay the *ekpyrosis* that can be brought on it any time and in no time by the divine violence and its sudden fiery strike. When translated into a more secular idiom of our age, Benjamin's doubling of the concept of time would be an attempt to keep the apocalyptic discourse at bay, in this manner similar to that of Derrida. N o t a p o c a l y p s e, n o t n o w – the world is still worth preserving (*wert, dass sie nicht zugrunde geht*), even if passing and thus offending human longings for eternity and immortality.[41] For, despite the demise of the religious faith and its "messianic intensity," the retributive rage against finitude – the Nietzschean "revenge against time" – still

39 Ibid., 286; emphasis added.

40 Ibid., 287.

41 See Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)," trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, *Diacritics* 14 (2) (1984): 20–31.

persists in even the seemingly most secularized scientific discourses and the penchant for the "apocalyptic tone." This is also the point made by Agamben in his blog entry: the new "religion of science" inherits not only the form of the prophetic discourse, but also its violent negation of the finite fragile being as essentially unworthy of existence. In this manner, the traditional puritan contempt for the sphere of *privatio boni* as the sinful way of all flesh wanders into the contemporary vengeful images of the materialist apocalypse, usually unaware of their theological component, which comes particularly strongly to the fore in Taubes's scornful phrase: "I have no spiritual investment in the world as it is" – that is, "a world of chaos and turmoil, without stability, a world of death without eternal life [...] where the good things pass away and aspirations do not come to fruition."[42]

Benjamin's biopolitical apology of a "happy life," which should be forgiven its finitude – "a world of death without eternal life" – is at once a polemic against the spiritual investment in eternity, characteristic of the Abrahamic messianic religions, and the heroic thanatopolitics of the nascent fascism, which utilized the apocalyptic sense of historical urgency.[43] It creates a *tertium* – a praise of the ordinary finite life – where the messianic imperative of *ubaharta ba'hayim* (choose to live) does not lead to the esoteric doctrine of immortal life, but accepts life with all its limitations and as it is: finite, transient, always already dying. Going against the Jewish-messianic line of human *theosis* as the final denouement of the "messianic intensity," which can still be detected in Bloch despite all his declared materialism, Benjamin boldly invests in its opposite: nihilism understood as the embracement of the *nihil* which inherently pervades the world as always-already and irreparably non-existent, grounded in the entropic principle of passing away. This, for him, is the true *gnosis* of the age of entropy, the final knowledge that brings redemption as *Erlösung* or "dissolution" – not the higher knowledge leading to "becoming like gods," but the recognition of the constitutive negation running like a "crimson thread" and a gently commanding "rhythm of transience"

42 Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. David Ratmoko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 29.

43 On the latter, see most of all Hans-Urs von Balthasar, *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele. Studie zu einer Lehre von den letzten Dingen*, vol. 1 and 2 (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998), where the very concept of the Third Reich is derived from the concept of the Millennium, appearing in the Book of Revelation. This motif is also elaborated by Karl Löwith in his *Meaning of History*, where the image of the Third Millennial Kingdom travels from St. John, through Joachim da Fiore and the Millennarists, to Hegel and then the Hegelian Right, instrumental in creating the intellectual milieu of German fascism. See Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

through the whole natural domain. Benjamin is thus also, in a way, an apocalyptic, but his "quietest approach" to the apocalypsis of nature is very different from those prophesying either a triumphant New Creation, in which all of transient nature will have become spiritualized and eternalized, or a universal doom. Paraphrasing Taubes, Benjamin has no spiritual investment in the world as it is and wants to let it go down – but with two very strong provisos that radically transform the meaning of the Taubesian phrase: he does invest in the world, but materially, not spiritually – and indeed lets it go down, yet not in a climactic bang, full of trumpets and noises, but rather in an Eliotian ending with a little whimper: in fact, a sigh of pleasure in the transic dance to the rhythm of transience, the happy trance of transience.[44] The world is not a solid construction that needs a demolition ball to bring it down; being is so pervaded by nothing that it only needs a gentle reminder about its metaphysical destiny. It already has its "nihilistic" form: the "shape of time" engaged in the "great process of decomposition."

With Benjamin, therefore, biopolitics – the new science of those dark "transformations taking place in that great flowing stream of human physicality"[45] – acquires its own political theology. Very different from the original Schmittian theological justification of political sovereignty and its later avatar in the concept of the *katechon* as the restrainer of the apocalypse, it also goes against the grain of the messianic theopolitics of such thinkers as Bloch and Taubes. Neither an apocalypse from above, nor an apocalypse from below, Benjamin's "quietest approach" brings a vision of an end as always already inscribed in the world's "eternal downfall," pervaded by the entropic "crimson thread of negation." The goal of the new "nihilistic world politics" is thus nothing but happiness, or rather, nothing a s happiness: a blissful transic fall into the "rhythm of transience," which gives up any hope for the messianic improvement of being, but does not end up hopeless. His story may thus be a *Verfallsgeschichte*, a "history of the Fall," but with a spin. Contrary to the widespread metaphysical pessimism of the Weimar era, emerging out of the first reaction to the entropic vision of the dying universe, Benjamin finds a h o p e i n r e v e r s e in the very narrative of the Fall. This is yet another answer to the dialectics of hope and despair, very much alive today, especially in the affirmative biopolitics of Giorgio Agamben, equally attuned to the "quietest approach" of the apocalyptic all-demise.

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44 "This is the way the world ends: not with a bang but a whimper." Thomas Stearns Eliot, *The Hollow Men*, in *The Waste Land, Prufrock, The Hollow Men and Other Poems* (New York: Dover Publications, 2022), 51.

45 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 230.

Conclusion

The purpose of my little intervention was to demonstrate that the language of doom is not a new invention, coming from the angle of what is nowadays called "the environmental apocalypse": the prophecy of the impending ecological catastrophe.[46] It has a whole history of the West behind it, which was predominantly a s t o r y, a narrative that begins – and ends. The grand finale was always a matter of the dialectical tension between despair and hope, from the first Jewish and Christian apocalypses to Hegel's teleological elaboration of the End of History. This dialectic – for the last time awakened in Horkheimer and Adorno's attempt to keep the motif of Exodus alive – broke under the impact of the discovery of entropy, which tipped the balance towards metaphysical pessimism. Due to this epochal change, the concept of the end lost its ambivalent hue: the dysteleological tendency of *Naturdämmerung* overshadowed the positive image of the *telos* as the Omega-point of fulfillment. Yet it did not put the traditional apocalyptic discourses out of operation. On the contrary, they continue to be present e v e r y w h e r e, albeit in a new materialist guise, merely thinly veiling their non-secular matrix. Whereas the "religion of science" raises the apocalyptic tone in the context of climate change, which violently demands of us, the benefactors of the Anthropocene, to reckon with our "sins" – the late-modern politics proceeds the way of biopolitical "nihilism" which, as my analysis of Benjamin has shown, took "the quietest approach" to the apocalyptic vision of the universal ending of all things and continues the Anthropocene, but without the vision of progress. Both eco-apocalyptic prophesies and biopolitics are concerned with the preservation of fragile finite life that cannot escape the verdict *zum Tode*. They may differ in their respective defenses of life – the non-human nature versus the human world – but they share a sense of pure despair in the face of the entropic "night of nature," irrevocably dying and "without exits."

No religious or philosophical "tricks" trying to rekindle hope out of despair seem to work anymore; perhaps with the sole exception of the "hope in reverse" which was devised by Benjamin in order to create a new "nihilistic" political subject, perfectly attuned to the "rhythm of transience" and not desiring anything else. But if we still wish an Exodus from the universe reduced to *cellula entropiae*, we must boldly plunge into this despair and "tarry with the apocalypse"

46 On the topic of eco-apocalypse in the post-secular approach, see *The Environmental Apocalypse. Interdisciplinary Reflections on the Climate Crisis*, ed. Jakub Kowalewski (London: Routledge, 2022); for a scientific approach, see Paul Halpern, *Countdown to Apocalypse. A Scientific Exploration of the End of the World* (Cambridge MA: Perseus Publishing, 1998); and for a critical political approach, see Michael Shellenberger, *Apocalypse, Never: Why Environmental Alarmism Hurts Us All* (New York: Harper Collins, 2021) and Pascal Bruckner, *Le fanaticisme de l'Apocalypse* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2011).

until, one day, a new language of hope arises that will restore the sense of purpose: not a grand *telos* secured by the Hegelian laws of progress, but a small sober one that we can still believe in despite the trauma of finitude.[47]

Abstract

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The Culture of the End: Tarrying with the Apocalypse

Today, we apparently live in an epoch of the end. The idea of living in the end times became today so hegemonic that it began to generate a new universal "existential mood." We live in a "culture of the end", and this can be observed in all social fields, from art to politics, from science to popular humour. Yet, in the history of Western thought, the concept of the end is not new at all. To some extent, we might even say that we have always lived in the end times. In fact, the idea of the end has shaped a large part of continental philosophical tradition, stretching from Biblical motifs of apocalypse and the end time to Hegel's idea of the end of history, where it is meant as an apex of the progress of freedom. According to Hegel, the End of History is not a violent finale of the world, as well as our lives in it, but a *telos*: a desired goal of the historical development. The last representative of the Hegelian optimism was Francis Fukuyama who, spurned by the 1989 fall of communism, urged us to greet "the end of history" – the global victory of liberal democracy – as the most welcome event that would stabilize the world politics and let it flourish, by preventing alternative revolutionary ideas to come to the fore. Yet, this type of metaphysical-historical optimism, so characteristic for the last decade of the second millennium, quite suddenly waned: the narrative of the desired goal gave way to the narrative of the imminent end as a threat to the world's existence. The evocation of the apocalypse due to climate change and natural catastrophe to convictions about fatal inevitability of war and destruction of both mankind and the whole planet marks a stark contrast between the past-optimistic and contemporary-pessimistic narrations of the end. The essay attempts to elucidate the reasons why this sudden change occurred.

Keywords

Apocalypse, end of history, ecological crisis, Adorno, Benjamin, Agamben

47 On some modest attempts to overcome the traumatic impact of the entropic radical finitude, see my *Another Finitude. Messianic Vitalism and Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

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What Kind of Environmental Writing?

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Ecology is a matter of human experience.[1]

Environmental Writing Goes to University

For several years now, new majors have been developing at American and European universities to train future writers, poets, playwrights, critics and journalists practicing environmental writing, nature writing, or the writing of place in the wider culture. In the programs of such universities as Santa Barbara, Iowa State MFA, Oregon State University, the University of Utah, Western Colorado University, Princeton, Palo Alto, Montana, New York, Toronto, Stockholm, Oslo, Munich, Warwick and many others, degree programs combining environmental education with creative writing courses and art projects have been established. At the same time, from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences to arts there are new thematic areas of courses and workshops recurring in the

1 Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 12.

curricula of other universities as well, tailored both to the interests of the students and to the new writing practices emerging at the forefront of publications in various types of academic and commercial publishers. The most capacious name for these practices is "green studies."[2]

Descriptions of these thematic areas revolve around such phenomena as environmental disasters, the effects of climate change, global warming, endemic environmental dysfunction, collapse of biodiversity, place, and the broader sense of the term "vital," and so on. These are accompanied by new types and genres of apocalyptic, dystopian and utopian narratives that combine the fate of the natural and human world into a multi-threaded, fragmented, often assemblage-type story about the socio-environmental future. Nonfiction texts, images, and videos about ecology, the environment, nature, wilderness, and sustainability are thus analyzed in detail. The new majors offer students the opportunity to develop their writing skills and interests in ways that promote and demonstrate environmental concerns, awareness, and sensitivities. It is worth noting, however, that the skill of writing texts is often accompanied by the refinement of combining linguistic expressions with other narrative forms such as films and photo-reportages.

The results of these studies are primarily thesis projects as either a book in progress, prototypes for books, or a series of related nonfiction creative works. In a further turn, however, they are also works of environmental literature, both as creators and as critics. The subject of research and study, and in many cases also the result thereof, become works of fiction, essays, memoirs, literary journalism, science fiction, poetry, and film interrogating the human relationship with nature, wilderness, climate change, and racial justice. Students can choose to write analytical or creative texts, resulting from the exploration of how people imagine and write about the natural world and a greener future for our culture. They may analyze the consequences of such writing as well. All universities promise the possibility of publishing the resulting work in both student journals and university publications. The boundaries between scientific knowledge, journalism, literature and other types of art are consciously blurred here, although it is typical of these studies to pay attention to the relationship between fiction and nonfiction narratives. The repeated distinction between fiction and nonfiction in the analyses by ecofiction researchers is generally reduced to the statement that "a primary distinction between nonfiction and fiction is the degree to which imagination is invoked."[3]

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2 Laurence Coupe, ed., *The Green Studies Reader. From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2000).

3 Jim Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2010), 7.

The problem is that imagination, along with responsibility and conservation, is also one of the basic terms used in works on ecology written by the representatives of various sciences and publicists. Particular importance is attributed to it by Jedediah Purdy, for example, who calls for the creation of a contemporary intellectual history of the natural world from ideas and practices. "The concept that unifies these themes is environmental imagination. […] It is an implicit, everyday metaphysics, the bold speculations buried in our ordinary lives."[4] Purdy also lists four versions of environmental imagination, which are described at the center of *After Nature*, that is, providential version, Romantic vision, utilitarian picture, and an ecological view of the world.[5] This division can be debated, but it is above all the seemingly chronological arrangement within the versions mentioned that deserves attention. For in the public consciousness, the formation of which is supposed to be the task of environmental writing, they function today in parallel. The term "imagination" can, therefore, refer to both fiction and nonfiction narratives, fostering an academic understanding of environmental writing. This major mixes liberal arts with environmental crunchiness and combines the cultural with the natural to develop understanding of how humans continue to conceive, construct, and fulfill their relationships with the natural world. The following section of the paper will consider the ambiguous role of the term "imagination" as a criterion used to distinguish between various types of environmental writing.

Terms used repeatedly in published study curricula are environmental imagination, environmental humanities, "green teaching," environmental communication, cultural and natural landscape and environmental fieldwork experience. The last of these will be given special attention later in this text. The main idea of the studies is very well presented by the motto of the Undergraduate Certificate in Environmental Writing at the University of Illinois: "turning data into narrative." This means combining learning about the latest scientific research on the environment with knowledge of how to communicate this research effectively to the public. The written stories find their structure in geology and geography, in biology and chemistry, and in the complex and rapidly changing transdisciplinary research. The certificate is a joint venture of the Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Environment, the School for Earth, Society, and Environment, and the English Department. It is easy to find more examples of similar cooperation.

4 Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature. A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 6–7.

5 Ibid., 8.

Particularly noteworthy is the practice of inviting prominent representatives of environmental writing – who are not difficult to find, especially in the USA – to teach courses, as well as artists (especially photographers) representing environmental art. The competencies of future graduates cover a wide range of issues, from environmental law and environmental humanities, to a variety of environmentally focused careers in business, education, government, industry, advertising, public policy, community planning, nature therapy, or the non-profit sector.

The simplest definition of the field covered by the new majors is: "environmental writing is writing that focuses on environmental topics." The subject matter of the texts being produced or selected for the analysis, therefore, rather than specific writing styles and genres of expression, determines the scope of environmental writing. It is also assumed that these are texts aimed at different types of audiences, both those interested in ecology and environmental studies and those encountering such content by chance in the products of popular culture or in direct experience resulting from everyday life. Environmental writers also practice a particular type of writing, such as news articles, magazine articles, or press releases, which form a regular repertoire of journals published around the world. Recently in Poland, it has become difficult to imagine an issue of a good weekly magazine without an up-to-date commentary on some aspect of environmental events. The range of topics covered also remains undefined, bringing together researchers who are interested in the wilderness or wildlife with proponents of green or blue architecture and design into a large family seeking changes in the understanding of the meaning of technology, economics and politics in the world threatened by global warming.

It is difficult to draw a line between environmental writing, nature writing and writing of place, although writers such as Rick Bass and Anne LaBastille are mentioned as representatives of nature writing. Wallace Stegner, Annie Dillard, and Edward Abbey, on the other hand, would open the list of writers identified with environmental writing. To a reader of books published by these authors, however, it is difficult to resist the impression that the line has been drawn not so much intuitively as arbitrarily and could well have been sketched differently. This is probably because in all these areas, the authors are able to cultivate writing closely linked to scientific research, disseminate scientific results and create nonfiction accounts of travelling or living in special places (primarily linked to wilderness exploration). They combine descriptions of the natural world with fiction, photographic reportage, poetic descriptions of nature, and reconstruction of animal myths, bringing to the fore personal experience of the phenomena and places described.

Immediate Environmental Experience Matters

It is not surprising, then, that the traditions of this scriptural production seem to encompass the whole of world literature, beginning with the myths and stories of Native Americans, Australian Aboriginal, Pagan, Celtic, Taoist and many other cosmologies and their associated oral and written literature and philosophy.[6] Clearly rooted in traditional pastoralism and transcendentalism, environmentally oriented literature, from Homer's *Odyssey* to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* to Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*, and so on, provides inspiration for environmental writing today. Every national literature could be rewritten by showing how the authors of novels, poetry, dramas, and other works include lengthy descriptions of nature, reflections on nature, or plots involving environmental issues. In recent years, there has been no shortage of such attempts, going back mainly to Romanticism and the nineteenth century, with a particular appreciation, irrespective of the region of the world and era, of literary travelogues. Immediate experience, for which journeys – whether further beyond the boundaries of the immediate environment or not – are an intrinsic condition, derives from immersion in new naturecultures. They authenticate literary and journalistic accounts, linking them to the material world in a way that cannot be fully replicated in the reading experience. They might, however, be reproduced and verified personally. This is the beginning of a profound collective environmental experience.

Contemporary readings of travelogues published in the second half of the nineteenth century by Hippolyte Taine are an excellent example of this.[7] Today anachronistic-sounding attempts to link landscape, climate and nature with the differences between, for example, Italian and Dutch painting, do not take away the value of the descriptions of landscapes in the countries visited by Taine. This is all the more so because his concept of the *milieu* as a complex socio-natural-aesthetic structure was, after all, an attempt to deal philosophically and critically with the naturecultural relationships he had encountered during his journeys. The personal experience of places is of great importance here. In the field of environmental writing, it is precisely this experience that is successfully combined and interwoven with the knowledge of data concerning the state of the environment described. However, it is not necessary to reach for experiences so distant in time and extensive accounts of foreign journeys. In *The Ecological Thought*, Timothy Morton writes:

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6 Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are*, 9.

7 Hippolyte Taine, *Voyage aux Pyrénées* (Pau: Monhelios Edition, 2002); Hippolyte Taine, *Voyage en Allemagne, (1870)* (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2017); Hippolyte Taine, *Voyages en Italie* (Paris: Bartillat, 2018).

> Before I went to Tibet, I wondered whether indigenous people actually did an "authentic," non-Western experience of place. I returned less sure than ever. When you camp in Tibet, as I did for about two weeks, you sleep under outer space – as directly below it as you can without flying.[8]

Of course, Morton has more than once misled readers by suggesting a personal, direct engagement with the landscape and then dismissed it by showing how easy it is to create such literary constructs.[9] The boundary between fiction and nonfiction lends itself so easily to narrative strategies that there is always a shadow of uncertainty as to which side of actual reality the author is on and which side the reader is on. He did not correct this passage, however, and so we can conclude that immediate experience became the canvas for his reflections on the differences in the apprehension and understanding of space in Western culture and in the culture of Tibetans living in constant proximity to outer space.

If one were to rewrite the history of the world's literatures according to the key provided by environmental writing projects, a new worldview would emerge in which space – not time – determines the construction of stories. Just as Edward Hall distinguished between high- context cultures and low-context cultures,[10] all the same, referring to Morton, we could distinguish space-based cultures from time-based cultures. Polish culture (literature) would probably belong to the latter realm, just as Tibetan culture could be called a space culture rather than a time culture. Immediate experience of space and places is, to a large extent, repeatable (Morton encourages this). Immediate experience of past time is impossible. Of course, this "otherness" of cultures is in line with the radical deep ecology that regards the Earth as the supreme value, which often leads to a nature-centric attitude, as opposed to the anthropocentric attitudes underpinning literary stories, which regard the human subject – including its temporality – as the supreme value. Although environmental writing does not demand to reverse any anthropocentric order, it gives the actions of human subjects a limited role in forming images of the world. A storyteller, along with their non-human and human characters, belongs to a space of which they are a part, not just a commentator. It is often a local space, an ecological niche, a fragment of a fragment of global nature. Roger Scruton is therefore wrong when he accuses the radical environmental

8 Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 26.

9 Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature, Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 29.

10 Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1976), 111.

movement of "neglect of *Heimatlichkeit* in the environmentalist literature,"[11] but he correctly reads the neglected concern with time (mostly past) in ecological manifestos.

Scruton's accusation certainly cannot be applied to environmental writing, which, by giving special importance to personal experience, forces one to select the material gathered, to choose the voices of co-narrators, to define the places and environments of the events described. More often than not, these are precisely the places best known to the authors: their cities and the animals that inhabit them, mountain ranges, forests, parks, urban wastelands, and mountain valleys. The relationship between personal and collective experience is established both in the reading of the texts and in the events and phenomena that precede it. For climate change, in the popular imagination, is a phenomenon that affects the existence of individual human and non-human subjects, but crosses the boundary of individual experience. Linking these scales – the local and the global, the individual and the social – is, therefore, considered the most important task of environmental writing. Hence, it is not the originality of experiences that is at stake here, but their connectivity, the initiation of encounters between them, for it is the course of these encounters that determines the value of environmentally oriented literature.

The experience that appears most frequently in both environmental writing and eco fiction in a narrow sense is the experience of loss. The loss of smells of plants that disappear from the immediate environment as a result of climate change, the loss of voices of birds that used to hover over fields and gardens, the loss of rustling of leaves in cleared avenues, and so on, bring to life nostalgic poems and rebellious manifestos on the borderline between science, art and environmental activism. It is also the experience of sadness, which could be described as the sadness manifested by inhabitants of disappearing environments: disappearing lakes, drying up, poisoned rivers, uprooted forests, ploughed-up balks and dirt roads. Finally, the fear, felt with varying intensity but increasingly egalitarian, of losing the known world, any world, demands new forms of expression, including new narrative forms. Arguably, the sense of loss, sadness, fear would be more aptly called affects, but their materialization in specific environments and facts leads to the crystallization of a collective experience demanding to be uttered. The experience of loss is thus accompanied by a specific linguistic experience: the need to name anew the wounded and dying environments, to preserve and understand the

11 Roger Scruton, *Zielona filozofia. Jak poważnie myśleć o naszej planecie* [Green philosophy: How to think seriously about the planet], trans. Justyna Grzegorczyk and Rafał P. Wierzchosławski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2017), 225.

names of extinct species that are no longer applicable to the description of direct experience. The museum of disappearing nature relentlessly proliferates both in the languages becoming extinct with the inhabitants of endangered environments who use them and in the expansive languages of global communication. The effort to collect, explain and make public this linguistic, conservationist "exhibition" is far from the "neglect of *Heimatlichkeit*" of which Scruton wrote.

It is not without reason that, in the context of environmental change, the need to take into account the extended spatial scale of the climate disaster unfolding before our eyes is pointed out. Anthropocene researchers focus on the global, planetary pole, using data collected over centuries in different regions of the world and placing them on maps. In writing about the Anthropocene, Timothy Clark shows why it is necessary to move between a perspective based on individual actions and one built from those practices that can only be observed on a planetary scale. If even climate change can be primarily manifested as "innumerable possible hairline cracks in an individual life,"[12] environmental writing aims to collect and produce accounts that are understandable on the basis of the common, not only human world, but that refer to individual experiences. "Natural sciences only deliver raw facts," while narrative formulations can foreground climate change as a social phenomenon.[13] This binary approach is questioned by many environmental writing researchers and authors, such as Le Guin.[14] The examples that will appear in this article will sustain the main arguments cited in this critique. The fundamental issue then becomes the dissimilarity of recounted experiences, which is obscured by the neoliberal discourse on climate change. The differences in experiencing, for example, the sixth great extinction of species, conditioned by the geographical location, colonial history, gender, wealth, and so on, of its observers, mean that both scientific research and environmental writing oscillate constantly between the concrete and the abstract, the highly voluminous and the limited, the local and the global, the generalizing and the specific. Thus, the Anthropocene becomes both a very appealing and a difficult subject to grasp for eco fiction, environmental writing in the broadest sense, and scientific publications.

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12 Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 13.

13 Annika Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling: Narratives and Cultural Meaning in Environmental Communication* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 38.

14 Ursula K. Le Guin, "Deep in Admiration," in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, ed. Anna Tsing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 16.

What Is Included in Environmental Writing and What Is Left Behind?

Two issues deserve to be highlighted in this context: 1. the spatiality of the environ-mental experience (and local naturecultures that emerge from it); 2. the materiality of the environmental experience entangled with the corporeal materiality of the experiencing subjects. It is difficult to imagine today an alternative poetics and literary theory focusing on multi-vectoral spatial relations. How would we study narrative if we assumed its adjacency, first to landscapes and places, and second only to sequences of events? How would the construction of the narrator radically change in relation to the world presented by the dispersed – human and non-human – subjectivities? Are we ready to accept an account of their (the abstract subject's) bodily location? If we talk today about the importance and distinctiveness of situated knowledge requiring the researcher to give an account of his or her own socio-cultural-spatial belonging, then the transfer of the same expectations to the author/narrator/speaking subject in eco fiction raises concerns and objections. From the assumptions made in this text, it follows that, while eco fiction is a branch of literature, it can also be located in the wider context created by environmental writing. Its multifaceted nature and long history are part of not only the curricula of new studies, but also the search for the most effective attempts to penetrate the natural world through the social infrastructures of language and text production. In this way, both eco fiction and other kinds of texts fall within the scope of interest of environmental humanities. It is not without reason, however, that the search continues for new forms of environmental writing that transcend the limitations of eco fiction.

Are there any conditions that might allow for the creation of coherent naturecultural worlds constructed from stories and arranged in a comprehensible literary-worldview structure? How can one collect, store and sustain the meanings of these stories corrected by the knowledge provided by environmental studies, ecology, and so on? These are simple questions not so much about the possibility of creating "different" literature and "different" writing than the one we know, but about the rejection of internalized and institutionalized expectations of writing and language by science and education. Some of these questions have found their way into the repertoire of the environmental literary criticism movement that has been developing since the 1960s. If we agree that "environmental critics explore how nature and the natural world are imagined through literary text,"[15] however, we are not explicitly asking how theoretical reflection on literature is changing. Nor are we asking about the ontology of worlds – experienced and imagined. Instead,

15 Ken Hiltner "General Introduction," in *Ecocriticism. The Essential Reader*, ed. Ken Hiltner (London: Routledge, 2015), xiii.

we remain in the area delimited by theories of imagination, representation, influences (e.g. the influence of Thoreau's *Walden* on Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*), perception (e.g. forests and mountains), and "drawing attention to the worsening condition of the earth."[16] As a consequence, description dominates as the most essential writing method.

To a large extent, this can be seen as a consequence of the formulations in William Rueckert's foundational essay on ecocriticism, published in 1978 and containing a very general program for his proposed critical activity, in which issues of experimentation and relevance came to the fore. Rueckert wrote:

> Specifically, I am going to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for a human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in of anything that I have studied in recent years.[17]

Literary criticism's adoption of concepts from the natural sciences is, of course, possible (and applied), but they only function on the surface of the emerging texts, without intervening more deeply in the writing practices themselves. Making them into original critical tools would require a more complex process of adaptation and cooperation between the two disciplines. Rueckert, however, did not envisage this, and the role of experimentation, in which we would have pined our's hopes, was supposed to be very limited.[18] It is much easier, then, for critics, pointing to the spatiality and materiality of environmental experiences, to reach for examples of analyses of environmental activism, often linked to artistic activities, as is easily seen in the practice of eco-critics.[19]

Analyzing the new forms of environmental writing, Timothy C. Baker attempts to address the relationship between a text and the world by looking at current practices in the context of three possible strategies: fragmenting,

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16 Hiltner, "General Introduction," xvi.

17 William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (London: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 107.

18 It is described by Bedika Bhattacharjee, "The Environmental Turn in Literary Theory and Criticism and the 'Truth of Ecology': Understanding Ecocriticism," in *Sambalpur Studies in Literatures and Cultures* (Sambalpur: Sambalpur University, 2019), 124.

19 "The most commonly understood meaning or synonym for ecocriticism has been 'nature,' and ecocriticism involves a good amount of commitment in its way to protect the environment or nature taking the field of study from critical analysis to activism." Bhattacharjee, "The Environmental Turn," 128.

gleaning and assembling.[20] The first derives from the observation that, for most authors, what remain available are fragments of the natural world. We do not experience the world as a whole, but its scattered, incidentally revealing parts, which results in a limitation of the narrative and forces changes in its structure. The fragment is both an object of experience and a form of storytelling. Both the storyteller and the world to which he or she refers, therefore, remain mostly covered and unknown. This applies to eco fiction as much as to academic works and essays. Awareness of this diffuse, gap-filled multidisciplinary perspective accompanies writers and readers, which Baker links to immediate experience, to immersion in the immediate environment, to participation in processes and phenomena that are exposed to everyday observation. In the study of urban environments, no one needs to be convinced of this. Research schools take their names from the cities in which they work and which are the subject of their analyses (e.g. Chicago School, New York School, Baltimore School). However, their impact transcends the geographical and administrative boundaries of the cities mentioned, which raises many epistemological questions. Nevertheless, if "an encounter with the text cannot be separated from an encounter with the environment,"[21] a fragment is transformed into an aesthetic and writing category, whose long tradition Baker recalls. For, as in the writings of Walter Benjamin, the fragment "handles" the allegory of ruin well – except that in environmental writing it is transferred to the natural world.

Fragmentary storytelling consequently refers to two further strategies for dealing with the incomplete, provisional as a sketch and refined as a collection (archive) of details of the ecological disaster image. Baker's original proposal consists in gleaning, which he favors over assembling. "Gleaning is a process of collecting what has been abandoned, repurposing it, as a way of turning attention to the momentary encounter between self and world."[22] Understood in this way, it stands at the opposite pole of the archive also constructed from fragments and often reflecting individual attitudes to the world. The difference between the archive and the catalogue on the one hand and gleaning on the other consists in the possibility (or lack thereof) of creating constellations originating in the movement and experiences of material subjects, human and non-human. Environmental experience, standing at its origin, guarantees the perception of the natural world not as abstraction, but as a subject with

20 Timothy C. Baker, *New Forms of Environmental Writing. Gleaning and Fragmentation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

21 Ibid., 24.

22 Ibid., XV.

and about which the writer is in dialogue. Gleaning, therefore, aims not so much to conserve fragments of the world found (its natural ruins), but to learn how to navigate a complex naturecultural reality. In this way, it refer not only to the past, as a reference to Benjamin's concept of ruins would suggest, but also to the future. This property makes it useful for environmental writing, which, in its academic and journalistic version, combines romantic environmental imagination with the ecological view of the world that Purdy wrote about. It encourages the creation of dystopia and utopia at the same time.

Baker proposes cultivating fragmentary narratives and the accompanying strategy of gleaning as a form of resistance to the official language of archive and catalogue.[23] The world seen and experienced as constellations composed of fragments is a counter-proposal to the systemic analyses provided by Anthropocene scholars using a planetary perspective. It also makes it possible, as Baker writes, to see climate change not as something external that happens to us, but as something that directs attention to our immediate environment in which we are immersed. "Storytelling as gleaning, as a way of looking at the peripheral and the fragmentary, provides a path to recognizing our entanglement with the world, and creating company."[24] Baker cites numerous examples that situate a narrative in relation to the natural world, in this way using the resources of his home library. Indeed, the moment when he wrote *New Forms…* was a special one. Cut off by the COVID-19 pandemic from the libraries and collections assembled in his university office, he could only rely on those pieces of the vast literature on the subject that he had selected in advance and collected in his home. Gleaning was, therefore, an accessible strategy that he used when writing his own book.

Perhaps this is also why he treated the assemblage concepts of Gilles Deleuze and Rosi Braidotti very inaccurately and briefly by concentrating on the multiple relations between acting actors and textual glosses. What he did not see in assemblage was a form that bursts the narrative binding between immediate experience and the world. Recalling Deleuze's concept, he only used his *Dialogues II*, written with Claire Parnet,[25] while overlooking what distinguishes this proposal from many other assembling concepts developed in the twenty-first century,[26] that is, its causal, active mechanistic character.

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23 Ibid., 191–192.

24 Ibid., 193.

25 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjan (London: Continuum, 2002).

26 Latour (ANT, reassembling), McFarlane (learning assemblage), agency (Deleuze, Guattari), DeLanda (assemblage theory), Hardt and Negri (assembling of multiple voices), etc.

Assembling not only distinguishes parts of reality and establishes relations between them, as Deleuze wrote, but above all, it acts. At the simplest level, we can see it as an attempt to build a new type of archive based on assemblage documentation of minority histories using excerpts from documentaries, film essays and radio interviews. In the background, there is a surprising cartography on whose basis dominant political geographies can be revised. This means, above all, experimenting with new accounts that create "emancipatory assemblages,"[27] on which "assemblage geographies" are founded.[28] Academic environmental writing programs are closer to such approaches than to the nostalgic concept of Baker's gleaning, showing this strategy as the main way to deal with the complexity of phenomena grounded in immediate environmental experience.

Settling Environmental Writing in the New Humanities

From the 1970s, environmental writing became a practice characteristic of the new humanities. Originally called ecological humanities, and nowadays rather environmental humanities, the new discipline "early began to cultivate new ways of understanding humanity's linkages to nature."[29] Its inspirations are wide-ranging, reaching back to the Western humanities of the preceding decades, postcolonial studies, indigenous studies, history, cultural geography, gender studies, anthropology and the broad spectrum of the natural sciences. The trigger for this international, spontaneous movement combining research and critical attitudes was, as with environmental writing, global warming. The progression of the new discipline entering more universities resembles the explosion of environmental writing as a new direction in university curricula, described at the beginning of this text. The same universities and regions of the world are often mentioned as the sites of these pioneering practices. The key terms with which the discussion surrounding environmental writing and environmental humanities takes place are in principle not much different. They contain the following notions: place, wilderness, sustainable cities, radical environmentalism, biodiversity, the Anthropocene, dark visions of planetary collapse, apocalyptic narratives, imagination, and so on. Emmett

27 Steve Hinchliffe, *Geographies of Nature: Societies, Environments, Ecologies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2007).

28 Paul Robbins and Brian Marks, "Assemblage Geographies," in *The Sage Handbook of Social Geographies*, ed. S. J. Smith, Rachel Pain, J. P. Jones and Sallie Marston (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009), 176-194.

29 Robert S. Emmett and David E. Nye, *The Environmental Humanities. A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 175.

and Nye's *A Critical Introduction*, in which they reconstruct the main themes developed in environmental humanities, reiterates key intuitions that had already emerged in an anthology of texts entitled *The New Humanities Reader*, edited by Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer and published in 2012. One part of this anthology, entitled "The Future of the Environment,"[30] gathered texts written from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (human geography, human psychology, archaeology, etc.), relating more or less directly to the links between the natural environment and cultural change. *The Environmental Humanities*, however, makes an important clarification in the rather incoherent field of research of the new discipline.

> Transdisciplinary projects in the environmental humanities have involved storytelling, semi-structured interviews, and visual ethnography to develop usable models for directing energy development, agricultural practices, land use, and water management. [...] Initiatives in the environmental humanities are often inspired by artists, filmmakers, playwrights, and specialists in digital media.[31]

The prevailing assumption, however, is that environmental humanities primarily provide interpretations for selected data drawn from science-based research and produce environmental solutions.

This is just one way of integrating humanities involved in transforming the relationship between an individual and his or her natural environment, cultural changes and climate change. Nevertheless, environmental writing, whose inherent dimension is environmental humanities, also encompasses other projects, including those whose intrinsic element is the immediate environmental experience anchored in the professional practices of authors dealing practically with issues of environmental change influenced by global warming and new forms of cultural activity. More significantly, works from this area have not always been written by representatives of the humanities. Their authors include biologists, landscape architects, geographers, and sociologists, who have chosen ways of writing about the naturocultural world that are innovative for their disciplines. The combination of specialist knowledge concerning, for example, urban wastelands with the use of narrative forms that characterize the humanities locates their publications on the intersection of science, practice, literature and educational activity. In this way, environmental humanities – and this is the thesis of this article – are the result of

30 *The New Humanities Reader*, ed. Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer (International Edition: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012), 110.

31 Emmett and Nye, *The Environmental Humanities*, 7.

writing practices moving in two directions: from humanities to environmental studies and from sciences to humanities. This latter direction, which is extremely interesting, is still poorly recognized. Meanwhile, a very significant expansion of the meaning of the term "humanities" is taking place here by including new, often difficult to classify, forms of environmental writing.

I would like to give a few examples for consideration which legitimize this statement. I will bring two manifestos to the fore: *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* by Donna Haraway,[32] and *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage* by Gilles Clément.[33] There are several significant similarities and equally significant differences between them. The first one was written by a researcher who combines an evolutionary biology perspective with feminist theory. It should be read in the context of *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway's first manifesto, published in 1985, and her concept of situated knowledges. For in this one, Haraway declares that *The Companion Species Manifesto* is a personal document, a scholarly foray into half-known territories inhabited by dogs, and other companion species, peoples, cyborgs, and texts. The immediate environment of the author's manifesto is reminiscent of Taine's *milieu* rather than the natural environment described by environmentalists. Immediate environmental experience, therefore, according to Haraway's well-known terminological proposal, has a naturecultural character. "I offer dog-eaten props and half-trained arguments to reshape some stories I care about a great deal, as a scholar and as a person in my time and place,"[34] Haraway writes. She chooses the form of manifesto because, although the concept of companion species is a record of conversations with dog owners and texts about dogs, cyborgs and other companion species, it is primarily a political act. Like any manifesto, it was written as a proclamation, a plea to rethink the relationship between the dogs, humans and cyborgs that make up our immediate environment.

Clément's primary activity, as a botanist and entomologist, is garden design. His concepts of "moving garden" and "planetary garden" in particular have brought him wide recognition. Clément designs gardens and, at the same time, writes books about gardens that go far beyond the workshop of a biologist. In recent years, however, his concept of the third landscape developed in the form of a manifesto has become the most popular, also in Poland. Its direct source was observation of the Limousin region. "What the bird perceives – what our gaze embraces from a summit – is a carpet woven of dark rough

32 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

33 Gilles Clément, *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage* (Rennes: Editions du commun, 2020).

34 Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 5.

forms: the forests; and well-defined light surfaces: the pastures,"[35] Clément writes. In his manifesto, however, he demands that we turn our gaze away from this industrial landscape and see other spaces, seemingly devoid of economic and political functions and located on the fringes of what is planned and exploited. He looks for places seemingly abandoned by culture – wastelands – which he sees as an opposition to organized areas. Such places, dispersed and marginal, form what he calls the third landscape. He finds them everywhere – in rural spaces and cities, whose development is marked by a process of abandoning what is already economically and socially non-functional. This third landscape becomes, in contrast to agricultural and garden monocultures, a habitat for diversity. Therefore, he writes, the preservation of the third landscape is a challenge for both the collective environmental consciousness that is taking shape today and concrete social practices. The defense of biological diversity takes on a political character in this manifesto. The manifesto concludes with specific demands directed at Western culture, which should turn to other cultures to renew its understanding of the relationship between man and nature. It takes the form of an assemblage made up of descriptions, demands, sketches and the accompanying legend.

Both manifestos have a very fruitful impact on the contemporary environmental writing developed in Poland. The former, for example, is at the core of *ZOEpolis. Budując wspólnotę ludzko-nie-ludzką* [ZOEpolis. Building human and non-human community], a book that is innovative on many levels and whose "threads were woven together" by Małgorzata Gurowska, Monika Rosińska and Agata Szydłowska. The publication was preceded by exhibitions extending companion species to incorporate other animal and plant species. "Non-human inhabitants, such as the porcellio scaber and the common pigeon, were invited to co-design, far outnumbering the human team."[36] The editors of the Krakow-based *Self-Portrait* devoted the entire issue 3 (2019) to wasteland, starting with a translation of Clément's *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage*. The program of the Fourth Congress of the Polish Cultural Studies Society included a session on wilderness, the core of which were papers on wasteland exploring the implications of the assumptions formulated in Clément's manifesto. Many more examples could be cited. Environmental humanities are losing their disciplinary clarity as a consequence of this movement, but

35 Gilles Clément, *Manifesto of the Third Landscape*, trans. Michele Bee and Raphaël Fèvre (Trans Europe Halle, the.net), 5.

36 *ZOEpolis. Budując wspólnotę ludzko-nie-ludzką* [ZOEpolis. Building human and non-human community]; the threads were woven by Małgorzata Gurowska, Monika Rosińska and Agata Szydlowska (Warszawa: Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, 2020), 8.

are undoubtedly becoming an area of experimentation and multidisciplinary collaboration.

I would like to present two more instances to exemplify the formation of such a non-obvious experimental-critical-research community, this time choosing forms of writing other than a manifesto. The first example comes from Peter S. Alagona's book *The Accidental Ecosystem*, written under the influence of research published in recent years by American urban ecologists. Alagona is a professor of environmental studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, specializing in nature-culture geography, but his book resembles a mythology of charismatic urban wildlife rather than a scientific argument. It can be regarded as an intriguing example of environmental writing arguing that cities are increasingly filled with wildlife. Urban wildlife mythology consists of tales of coyotes, black bears, grey squirrels, deer, bald eagles, pumas, skunks, sea lions, possums and other vertebrate wildlife that, driven out of their natural habitats by expansive agriculture and logging, migrate to cities.[37] In social terms, they can be described as unexpected immigrants spontaneously infiltrating the urban fabric and sharing many problems with human climate refugees in the world constructed by humans, but not for all living beings. They encounter indigenous species in cities, with which they come into conflict (the white-tailed eagle devours small street kittens in front of onlookers watching its nest) and their behavior stimulates interspecies xenophobia and interspecies solidarity simultaneously.

Alagona focuses on a few American cities, but one can imagine a global mythology of charismatic wild animals entering (and returning to) cities more and more boldly, mainly their suburbs, parks and campuses, cemeteries, urban forests, botanical gardens in search of better or simply more tolerable living conditions. Under these new conditions, they form multispecies ecological communities, enriching and transforming the perception of urban ecosystems gaining biodiversity as a result of species migration. They are distinguished by their high degree of adaptation and their mediality – they are fast becoming inhabitants of the mass imagination, media darlings. The history of the American philosophy of wilderness, which was constituted in the nineteenth century, was based primarily on literature (Thoreau, John Muir). Alagona's main focus is on film and media coverage, which not only accompanies wild animals in the city, traces them, and provokes reactions from the inhabitants, but also plays a role difficult to overestimate in facilitating or hindering their settlement in urban spaces.

37 Peter S. Alagona, *The Accidental Ecosystem. People and Wildlife in American Cities* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).

This cultural shift from literature and philosophy to popular culture has been very well represented by the history and reception of the film *Bambi*, produced by Disney and screened in 1942, opening the door, as Alagona writes, to the success of a new genre of films with animals as their subjects. They transformed not only America's founding wilderness myths, but also the consciousness of suburban dwellers. They changed the ideas associated with wilderness. While they took away its mystical dimension, they also equipped it with attributes of the human world. Alagona describes what urban dwellers perceive in their immediate surroundings, but he cultivates a kind of persuasion that is alien to manifestos. He refers to the collective immediate experience.

The last example of environmental writing I want to mention is the books by Peter Wohlleben, which have also recently been published in Poland. The author is a forester who uses the latest research and his own experience of interacting with nature to encourage readers to reject the barriers between humans and nature erected by Western philosophy and natural science. He argues that the human and non-human worlds are not only subject to the same rules, but above all are inseparable. *Das geheime Band zwischen Mensch und Natur* is a praise of the immediate environmental experience and the precognitive abilities of humans that go far beyond cognitive perception. The first-person narrative, incorporating themes and events from the author's life into the story and depicting his actions (e.g. the creation of the first cemetery forests in Germany to protect beech forests), is full of emotion (e.g. I thought my heart would burst). Constructed from fragments, multi-thematic and multi-threaded, it meanders around the relationship between human and non-human sensory cognition relating to the immediate environment and the policies of nature that he rejects and proposes to replace with others.

Describing the spiritual life of animals, the secret life of trees, the unknown bonds of nature, he does so by explaining and arguing for his vision of a naturecultural world. This vision is neither utopian nor dystopian – it attempts to collect answers to the most common questions about nature formulated by those who, unexpectedly also to themselves, open their eyes and discover the touch and smells of nature. On a first impulse, this type of writing can be called popular science, but its starting point is not scientific discoveries, but the author's personal discoveries. On a second impulse, one may be repulsed by the undisguised didacticism of this writing, but it is not based on any particular ethics other than interspecies understanding. On a third impulse, one may wonder whether the pleasure of reading does not come at the cost of infantilization of the reader, but he gives very professional answers to simply formulated questions. Baker would regard

Wohlleben's books as examples of fragmentary storytelling exposing personal immediate experience.

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All the examples, doubts and remarks formulated in this article represent only a fragment of the growing field of environmental writing. Any classifications I have found that attempt to capture it as a whole generate more objections than recognition. Perhaps it is too early to reach mature conclusions, but it seems more likely that thematic, genre and narrative dispersion are inherent features of this writing activity. After all, its mission is to build a picture of the human-nature relationship from scratch, to integrate existing stories into a new network of connections and reading needs. The relationships between environmental writing, eco fiction, eco criticism, environmental humanities and new humanities are no less convoluted. Their exact reconstruction exceeds the limits of this text.

Abstract

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What Kind of Environmental Writing?

The starting point for this paper is the growing popularity of environmental writing as a scholarly, journalistic, literary practice. Four issues are analyzed: 1) the presence of environmental writing in university curricula and the problems of establishing its subject matter; 2) the rationale for the popularity of fragmentary storytelling and its two accompanying strategies: gleaning and assembling; 3) the role that environmental writing has played in recent years in the new humanities; 4) the expansion of the notion of environmental humanities by narrative forms introduced by authors professionally engaged in practices in the field of natural-cultural geography. In this way, environmental humanities are the product of writing practices running in two directions: from humanities to environmental studies and from sciences to humanities, which is the thesis of this paper.

Keywords

environmental writing, fragmentary storytelling, gleaming, assembling, new humanities

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Literary Studies as a Science: New Opportunities, Old Hazards

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I

In the *Politics of Nature* Bruno Latour observes that if his analyses seem inaccessible, it is only so because they are banal.[1] What I will attempt to say here might leave a similar impression. Perhaps, it is even this impression that should be considered the main subject of my interest. At least to the extent to which it might seem unavoidable.

II

It is also warranted to say that what I have in mind is the relativization – or maybe rather radicalization – of the standpoint expressed in the title. Radicalized it would read the following way: our thinking about our own discipline as science opens up only opportunities and does not carry any threats; maybe except one – it will, in all probability, not succeed.

1 "Like all results that we shall try to obtain, this one is extravagant only in appearance. Only its banality makes it difficult." Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature. How to Bring the Sciences Into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004), 50.

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The threat of failure is a direct consequence of the circumstances we currently find ourselves in. This is how they can be described in the broadest of terms: degradation of literary theory within the discipline of philology, dismissal of literary studies within the humanities, expulsion of the humanities from the field of science. And further: ignoring literature in the life of societies, of universities in economic policy, and of science in building financial systems. Still, this is putting things mildly. Someone less even-tempered would point to the fact that we are dealing here with something worse than degradation, that is, with growing indifference or failure to remember, or, to be precise: with forgetting what exactly was forgotten. This is the fruit not of ignorance but of deliberate political choice, which would rather minimize the consequences of the ongoing neglect in administering certain spheres by "reforming" whole other, "easier," areas (those politically less risky), then try to get at the root of the problem. In the Polish case the lack of reform of the labor market – to give one example, because this is not a singular interdependency – results in the "reforms" of the system of higher education.

So, how should we respond to this? Usually we repeat the same old mantra (though in new wording), for example after Martha C. Nussbaum, that the humanities are indispensable, because "searching critical thought, daring imagination, empathetic understanding of human experiences of many different kinds, and understanding of the complexity of the world we live in," are their very core.[2] It is evident that what we are dealing with here is at best a form of self-consolation, that is, using the language of the humanities to convince the representatives of the humanities about the vitality of the humanities, or, in the language of those more inclined towards hard science: a general theory of the essentiality of the nonessential.[3]

Another of our responses comes in the form of pathos-filled disputes on the responsibility towards the work of art, its privileged position, the need for unconditional openness, and so forth. And all would be well and good, if it were not for the context. When it becomes clear, it unmasks those arguments as a quite desperate attempt to compensate or repress the dawning realization of the loss of influence on the functioning of art in the public sphere – and of our own presence within it.

Still another response is the opposite of the above, and therefore it performs the same function: we respond to the loss of influence with a powerful

2 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2016), 7.

3 Nussbaum choses, nonetheless, the prudent and reasoned approach: she does not confront the two types of science with each other, but rather attempts to soften the differences between them.

need of engagement and belonging, which brings short-lived satisfaction and long-lasting disenchantment as in this case – just as in the previous two – it soon becomes apparent that the role we aspire to is better and more effectively played by someone else: either the therapeutic industry, religious organizations, or political activists. But let us consider this: in each case we are dealing with the instrumentalization of our own endeavors but still we resist thinking about ourselves as scientists; though – in my opinion – this kind of thinking would be much more adaptive and effective in the current surroundings than any of the three mentioned above.

Even so, the most striking thing is something entirely different: encouragement to describe ourselves as scientist is viewed as the hallmark of conservatism and an unfortunate attempt to return to something long-compromised. This is a curious change, because if my description of our response to the crisis of humanities holds true, then it is undoubtedly this response itself, in each of its three embodiments, that is truly conservative or even old-fashioned. It is so because it does not offer the chance of emancipation by turning our actions into responses to events that are taking place elsewhere. Nonetheless, such a chance presents itself, at least when we view as socially relevant the difference between acknowledging the humanities as non-science and rising from this position against the progress of technical science, and considering the humanities as the inheritor of what could be named non-positivist scientific tradition – and defending from this position oneself, the university, and knowledge as such against neoliberal ideology. In this optimistic strain, it would truly be worthwhile – as the tile of this paper suggests – to discuss the opportunities and threats of framing literary studies as science. Though, from a realist perspective, the self-definition of literary scholar as scientist will probably not become an appealing proposition for one simple reason: we need immediate salvation, and therefore we will not even try to rescue ourselves.

In short, this is a tale of how the banal becomes the immensely difficult.

III

The story of how the difficult becomes banal, is much more complicated. In essence, it is a long history of all that has happened during the positivist turn and after it. From a certain point of view – from the point of view of the stance of the humanities towards science – this turn is still ongoing, or maybe even it still lies before us, even though it seemingly already occurred (another meaningful regressively-progressive distortion). A lot will of course hinge upon our understanding of this turn. Whether as a defensive action, and in this sense conservative, because it rejects positivism in its entirety; as an attempt to work out disciplinary independence on the basis of some non-positivist

scientific model (Wilhelm Dilthey, but also of course Edmund Husserl, would belong here); or as a project of abolishing the unbearable division into two separate worlds, two sciences, and two methods – that is, as a search for an all-encompassing language. Commenting upon this distinction, I would summarize it this way: the first leads nowhere; the second, if it is to escape changing into positivism, must turn into the third; and the third must encompass the second, because otherwise it will unnoticeably become the first.

The anti-positivist turn as quest for an all-encompassing language, and the division of reality into that which corresponds with science and that corresponding with the humanities as the deepest of grievances… This way of thinking starts with Dilthey and runs to Latour (both of whom assiduously battle duality). In saying so, I somewhat follow Andrew Bowie, who in his book on German philosophy from Romanticism to Critical Theory notices (after Karl-Otto Apel) that Dilthey's enduring achievement is not limited to the introduction of the distinction between understanding and explanation, but also encompasses the comprehension that "both natural sciences and *Geisteswissenschaften* depend upon 'the unity of the claim to truth and the possibility of its realization in argumentative discourse,' and not, therefore, upon one particular kind of assumption about the objects of science, or one kind of method."[4] Of course, for a contemporary reader of the *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*, Dilthey's very strong desire for emancipation obscures such fragments as the one from the fourth chapter of the first volume ("Die Übersichten über die Geisteswissenschaften"), where Dilthey calls the sciences of the mind the other (it would perhaps be better if he would have said – the second) side of the "intellectual globe" (*andere Hälfte des globus intellectualis*).[5] Because he clearly refers here to its completeness. Of course, opponents of understanding literary studies as science (and therefore oftentimes also foes of science as such) underline the futility of Dilthey's attempts, but from the point of view of the current argument an accurate understanding of his ambitions is more important that the dissection of his failures.

It is no different with Wilhelm Windelband. The motive for his rejection of the Diltheyan classification of sciences and for replacing it with the *Gesetzeswissenschaften–Ereigniswissenschaften* division, was the safeguarding of the unity of the human experience (the nomothetic–idiographic distinction is a formal and not material one, nonetheless). In his distinguished lecture from 1894, Windelband turns to the example of explosion to illustrate his point: it

4 See Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory. The Philosophy of German Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), 152.

5 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften. Versuch einer Grundlegung für das Studium der Gesellschaft und ihrer Geschichte* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1990), vol. 1, 21.

belongs to our one common universe and not to one of two worlds – still it can be, and oftentimes is, researched through two different methods.[6]

There is still Heinrich Rickert to consider. In *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft*, in the foreword to the sixth and seventh printing of his book (1926), he reminds the reader that – contrary to numerous opinions – he does not set two different worlds against each other. The division into generalizing and individuating methods, which he uses, is not the "absolute contradiction but a relative distinction." The heart of the matter is that "all scientific work lies somewhere between the two. Those who do not see this, do not understand my argument," says Rickert.[7] Anton C. Zijderveld goes on to add: "Rickert would not have been in favor of the idea of 'two cultures' as was pictured in the famous, often quoted (and wrongly applied) essay by C. P. Snow. Dilthey, and maybe also Windelband, would in all probability have less problems with this dichotomy."[8] I would add that these are still merely differences of degree.

All in all, it is certainly worthwhile to recall C. P. Snow at this time, as the debate that he initiated nearly sixty years ago is still alive today.[9] It can be thought of as a continuation of the quarrels from the era of the anti-positivist breakthrough. It might also be understood – more so in the British context – as the extension of the conflict between Romanticism and utilitarianism. Still, the best way to think of it is probably as a discussion about the cultural consequences of modernization, with which the controversy over that which Snow called the "scientific revolution" and what he dubbed as "traditional culture" is entangled.[10] On the base of this differentiation, Snow has accused

6 Wilhelm Windelband, *Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft* (Strasburg: J. H. Ed. Heitz [Heitz & Mündel], 1904), 24–25. He goes on to add that even though the two methods of investigation are legitimate, they in no way justify each other.

7 And he emphasizes this by spacing out the words. See *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft. Sechste un siebente durchgesehene und ergänzte Auflage* (Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1926), viii. Here he comments upon his previous book *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung, Eine logische Einleitung in die historischen Wissenschaften* (Freiburg: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1896), where he argues that he is required to seek a course between the Charybdis of the careless noises produced by those who shun philosophy and the Scylla of the expanding specialist class of industrial workers.

8 I am quoting his very interesting book: Anton C. Zijderveld, *Rickert's Relevance. The Ontological Nature and Epistemological Functions of Values* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 251.

9 See Guy Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).

10 Many commentators pointed out that this opposition is, to put it mildly, improperly scaled – and it is so on both sides. That the scientific revolution spoken of here is in fact

the proponents of the latter position of refusing to participate in the great work undertaken by the proponents of the former, calling them "spontaneous luddites."[11] It was this very accusation that has sparked the heated and once prominent denunciation of Snow by F. R. Leavis.[12] Nevertheless, as Stefan Collini points out in the introduction to Snow's book, the dispute around the relationship of science and literature ought not treat both these realities as calcified in some final form at one point of their existence, or as unalterable substances – which is a snub directed at Snow's preconceptions – but it also shows us (and this seems more important) that "'science' is merely one set of cultural activities among others,"[13] and that we should not fool ourselves that there is any position that we could take, which would allow us to remain beyond its reach. In turn, when commenting upon Leavis's lectures, Collini adds that despite common opinion we will not find here a discussion of "science versus the humanities, or of the priority of one over the other." Here the point of departure is rather the question of Luddism as the method used to "castigate anyone who appears to express the slightest reservation about economic growth as a self-sufficient social ideal."[14] In short, instead of pitting the two cultures against each other, we should be more focused on understanding

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a technocratic revolution and a market-orientated commercialization of science, and not science as such – and that traditional culture is merely a derogatory label given to those remnants that oppose, cannot be, or are simply not worth being priced. David Edgerton writes interestingly about the significance of Snow's work in the article "C. P. Snow as Anti-historian of British Science: Revisiting the Technocratic Moment, 1959– 1964." He notes that Snow is, according to Levis, "a vulgar technocrat." See Edgerton, "C. P. Snow as Anti-historian of British Science: Revisiting the Technocratic Moment, 1959–1964," *History of Science: An Annual Review of Literature, Research and Teaching* 43 (2) (2005): 191.

11 "If we forget the scientific culture, then the rest of the western intellectuals have never tried, wanted, or been able to understand the industrial revolution, much less accept it. Intellectuals, in particular literary intellectuals, are natural Luddites." – C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures*, introd. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 22. As Collini points out – let us make this clear – to better understand this quarrel we need to turn to H. G. Wells and to his belief in the promise of civilizational and cultural transformation through science: Snow revered Wells and Leavis detested him.

12 F. R. Leavis, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow*, introd. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013).

13 Snow, *The Two Cultures?*, xlix.

14 Leavis, *Two Cultures?*, 33. Ian MacKillop says something similar, as he considers it a mistake to depict the conflict between Snow and Leavis as a conflict between science and literature. For him it was a dispute over history, which Leavis became increasingly interested in during the1960s. See Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 325.

science as a form of culture. It is not upholding or negating of the higher epistemological status of science, but closing the divide, rejecting it, abolishing it through search for common ground, or by expanding the number of intersecting categories – this is where our interests lie, that is, the interests of culture and society subjected to neoliberal oppression. Nonetheless, as it turns out, it is still possible to look at things from a different standpoint, and in the discussions centering on the "Snowian disjunction," to borrow Pynchon's term, such ideas as these often surface: culture is a fluctuating form of life and science is a struggle for universal knowledge, and therefore for something unchangeable. This directly results in placing science beyond the realm of culture.

Let us now take a leap (if a leap it is) into quite contemporary times. Michał P. Markowski repeatedly declared himself in the 2013 book *Polityka wrażliwości* [Politics of sensitivity] an enemy not only of understanding of literary studies as science, but of science as such. Painting the scientist as an anti-humanist is the fundamental device of his rhetoric. Markowski said that: "the anti-humanist […] wants to strip human understanding of what is most human – that is, uncertainty, wandering, ephemerality – and substitute it with the inhuman: certainty, obviousness, irreversibility."[15] In a review of Markowski's work, Adam Lipszyc expressed his agreement with "the praise of the humanities as a completely unscientific, but absolutely indispensable space for the development of human sensitivity both on the individual and social level."[16] All, or nearly all, of the remaining arguments that Markowski makes, he criticizes severely. The consensus of these two, truly formidable, scholars on the topic of science, when they disagree on all other matters, is truly puzzling. It seems to say something important about contemporary Polish literary studies.[17]

IV

The observation made by Latour, which opens this essay, might be seen as a form of discursive violence – and not without reason: different things seem banal to different people, and professing banality can be an all too easy scheme for gaining some advantage. Hence, let me quickly explain that what

15 Michał Paweł Markowski, *Polityka wrażliwości Wprowadzenie do humanistyki* [Politics of sensitivity: An introduction to humanities] (Kraków: Universitas, 2013), 92.

16 Adam Lipszyc, "Dekonstrukcja uniwersytetu" [Deconstruction of the university], accessed February 14, 2017, http://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/5026-dekonstrukcja-uniwersytetu.html.

17 For more, see my review of Markowski's book: Andrzej Skrendo, "Wyprowadzenie z humanistyki" [An exit from the humanities], *Wielogłos*, 1 (2014): 91–101.

I am saying here is a proposition of a certain self-description in the sense given to this notion by Niklas Luhmann (two seminal books by Luhman, *Art as a Social System* and *Theory of Society*, end with a chapter of that name). The idea of self-description is the ultimate consequence in the process of thinking about what I have called the all-encompassing language or the language of unity: it is, all in all, a unity of difference.

Old European philosophy, as Luhmann calls it, relied upon two-valued logic – Luhmann, in turn, relies on the concept of autology. As he sees it, every system constitutes itself through the differentiation between the system and the environment. It is, nonetheless, a differentiation of the system itself: systems are operationally closed and autopoietic. Each system operates like a brain, within a network of recursive references (Luhmann does not draw a distinction between the macro and micro levels). As a whole, society is unobservable and any differentiation is merely coincidental. Knowledge is the outcome of the observation of observers, that is of introducing difference into differentiation according to the *re-entry* mechanism borrowed by Luhmann from Spencer Brown. This mechanism was characterised by Detlef Krause as: "reuse/repetition of differentiation within differentiation, or: another entry of differentiation into itself, or: self-enabling of differentiation as differentiation, or: another entry of form into form. In any case, as a form of paradox."[18] A paradox, we read further on, is not some *Nebenmeinung*, but "a general notion for something that simultaneously is and is not binding. In a more logically inclined language: paradox is something truthful because / even though it is not true. To be more precise: a system asserts its own existence, or: a system is itself, which means: A because A. Something is true because it is true."[19] And, of course, the other way around. In *Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft* Luhmann himself asserts that: "an observation of observations ought to attach special significance to the kinds of differentiations made by the observing observer. It is a question of what he sees through his differentiations and what is obscured by them. This is about paying attention to the blind spot of the used differentiation, to the unity of difference as a condition of the possibility for its own observation."[20]

This, of course, in no way entails that the world does not exist, but only points to the fact that to observe difference one requires some preceding

18 Detlef Krause, *Luhmann Lexikon: Eine Einführung in das Gesamtwerk von Niklas Luhmann* (Stuttgart: Lucius and Lucius, 2001), 191.

19 Ibid., 183.

20 Niklas Luhmann, *Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992), 718.

differentiation; that is, that an observation must be supplemented by another observation – it is to observe observers observing those who observe (which I currently attempt to do).[21]

More or less the same ideas could be rendered in the language of Ludwik Fleck, Thomas S. Kuhn, or Humberto Maturana (who understands science as an adaptive biological behaviour of the human organism). Expressed by Kuhn it would sound like this: science is performed in a paradigmatic way, that is by scientists who share common characteristics because they are connected to one another. They solve serious problems – that is those which they can solve, considering other ones to be non-questions. A paradigm does not delineate the field of research, but the method of its conduct; we apprehend it not as systematic knowledge, but as practice. Therefore, to be a scientist is to "acquire theory, methods, and standards together, usually in an inextricable mixture"[22]; though it should be added that there are many more elements within that mixture (values, convictions, interests, emotions) that cannot be easily filtered from it.[23]

What are (or can be) the consequences of all of this for us? I will enumerate them below:

1. Science is a form of social practice; science is not beyond culture. Excluding science from culture excludes only the one professing

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21 Niklas Luhmann explains in *Art as a Social System* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 302: "observation and description presuppose a difference between the observer/describer and his object, whereas the intent of *self-description* is to negate precisely this difference." In another context ("The Cognitive Program of Constructivism and a Reality that Remains Unknown," in *Selforganization. Portrait of a Scientific Revolution*, ed. Wolfgang Krohn, Günter Küppers and Helga Nowotny [Dordrecht: Springer-Science+Business Media, 1990], 67), he will add that what occurs here is a de-ontologization of reality, which "does not mean that the external world is being called into question but only the simple distinction being / non-being which ontology had applied to it." All this could also be simply restated this way: "there is indeed an external reality, but there is really no need to make a big fuss about it." (Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 38).

22 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 109.

23 James A. Marcum (in the book *Thomas Kuhn's Revolution. An Historical Philosophy of Science* [London: Continuum, 2005], 57) describes the quintessence of Kuhn's revolution in simple terms: production instead of the product; not the work, but the process; a verb in place of the noun. It is from this series of transpositions that, to use Luhmann's idiom, autology emerges as a peculiar method of legitimizing scientific inquiry. By the way, if we agree that a similar discovery (a similar series of transpositions) was made by twentieth-century art, which is nowadays a widely accepted view, then we will notice a compelling affinity between art and science – one with consequences whose magnitude should not be underappreciated.

the exclusion. We can assume, after Knorr-Cetina, that contemporary culture is epistemic in character, that it is a knowledge-related culture. It consists of "amalgams of arrangements and mechanisms – bonded through affinity, necessity, and historical coincidence – which, in a given field, make up how we know that we know. Epistemic cultures are cultures that create and warrant knowledge, and the premier knowledge institution throughout the world is, still, science."[24] It is on the grounds of culture, I would add, that we should discuss science – as well as their interrelations. Moreover, we should do so not only with the awareness of the fact that we have our own objections to overcome in this regard (rooted in the repetition of certain Heideggerian clichés such as "science does not think"), but most of all the objections of the representatives of the so-called hard sciences.

2. Branches of science are distributed across a uniform epistemological space, transitions between them are seamless, and there are no differences between them based on their stance towards so-called reality or their assigned spheres of study. There is no unified science nor a single theoretical language, but a multitude of them – as well as the kinships and affinities within the bounds of this multitude. Science is not a hierarchical system of knowledge but rather consists of nodes of practices, interests, beliefs, and so forth. At the same time, we must realize that the benefits of multilingualism are not absolute but relative – namely, they are limited by the possibility of translation and comparability of the results achieved within individual scientific idioms.
3. It is necessary to resist – on one's own terms and grounds – the advancement of technoscience and neoliberal ideology, which became the bedrock of government policy directed at science and the institutions of higher learning. It is not the defence of humanities from science, but the safeguarding of science from the neoliberal agenda at universities and from technoscience – whose measure is not the freedom of scientific research, but immediate applicability that is forced by market competition – that are endeavours truly worth participating in.

In short, it is as it has always been: the fight must be carried out on two fronts. First, against certain forms of the familiar tradition (or merely ways of understanding it), which drag us down, and, second, against adverse developmental

24 Karin Knorr Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999), 1.

tendencies in the socio-economic sphere (which knock us off our course). These are, clearly, not the only sources of malaise, but I will not venture beyond them in this essay.

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I have previously said that I encourage a certain form of self-description. Though I might as well say, after Ludwik Fleck, that my hope is for us to become a "thought collective." It comes to life, as Fleck says, "wherever two or more people are actually exchanging thoughts. […] a stimulating conversation between two persons soon creates a condition in which each utters thoughts he would not been able to produce either by himself or in a different company. A special mood arises, which could not otherwise affect either partner of the conversation but almost always returns whenever these persons meet again."[25] In the meantime – the end.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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Literary Studies as a Science: New Opportunities, Old Hazards

Skrendo explores the scientific status of research in the humanities. Looking at the problem from a historical perspective, he reaches back to the anti-positivist turn and argues that the transformation that began at that time was about finding a common ground for all sciences. From a theoretical perspective, Skrendo's argument draws on constructivist approaches, broadly understood, from Fleck and Kuhn to Luhmann and Latour. These researchers help us develop non-positivist approaches to the humanities' scientific assumptions and goals.

Keywords

science, anti-positivist turn, constructivism

25 Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, ed. Thaddeus J. Trenn and Robert K. Merton, trans. Fred Bradley and Thaddeus J. Trenn, introd. Thomas S. Kuhn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 44.

Małgorzata Sugiera

Rethinking Posthumanism in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Paradoxically, during the long months of the COVID-19 pandemic many people hoped for a return to normalcy and believed that what they are enduring belongs to those one-of-a-kind experiences, which at the same time should deeply change our way of living. Today, without having undergone those hoped-for radical changes, everyone, historians of infectious diseases included, seem to have come back to business as usual. A case in point is Richard Conniff's *Ending Epidemics* that narrates the struggle against contagion across three centuries, premised on a growing understanding of the human body as a habitat that has to be defended against external pathogens.[1] Although written recently, with good reason the narrated story finishes with the unprecedented eradication of smallpox in 1978. As the author acknowledges, he decided not to include more recent pandemics like HIV, SARS or COVID-19 in the storyline because his aim in depicting only successful battles with pathogens was to establish a powerful model for what humanity can still

1 Richard Conniff, *Ending Epidemics: A History of Escape from Contagion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023).

achieve in a unified global effort to fight successfully the upcoming contagion. Nonetheless, while calling for training and supporting multinational teams of virus hunters to prevent emergent spillovers, Conniff seems to be fully aware of the fact that in our times, when epidemics overlap and mutually influence each other not just human species will need to be protected but the world itself.

Indeed, the Coronavirus has turned out to be not an epidemiological singularity but rather a globally noticed origin of new pandemic threats, one of many which emerge nearly annually.[2] These threats are caused not only by a wide variety of pathogens, representing different taxa, source hosts, modes of transmission and clinical courses as well as global webs of travel and trade which help once local spillovers become new epidemics. Increasingly often the reduction and disruption of tightly entangled and complex ecologies have also spurred the emergence and evolution of new pathogenic strains. Although from 2010 onwards many scientists and science journalists have been writing about and warning against what they often called "a New Pandemic Age,"[3] it eventually became common knowledge and a widely recognized threat only after the last pandemic. For instance, in *Dead Epidemiologists*, a collection of articles written during the last outbreak, Rob Wallace, an evolutionary biologist and public health phylogeographer, focuses on the capital-led agricultural production and trade as one of the major reasons for the COVID-19 pandemic.[4] He convincingly demonstrates the damaging effects of turning living organisms into commodities and entire production chains within more and more capitalized landscapes. By replacing ecologies that are more natural, today's agriculture promotes invasive species and alternate xenospecific relationships, which, in turn, disrupt long-term ecosystemic function. Therefore, Wallace recommends that "we err on the side of viewing disease causality and intervention beyond the medical or even ecohealth object and out into the field of

2 More on this subject: Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Chronopolitics of the Anthropocene: The Pandemic and Our Sense of Time," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 55 (3) (2021): 324–348; Barney Jeffries, *The Loss of Nature and the Rise of Pandemics: Protecting Human and Planetary Health* (Gland, Switzerland: Word Wide Fund for Nature, 2020); David M. Morens and Anthony S. Fauci, "Emergining Pandemic Diseases: How We Got To COVID-19," *Cell* 182 (2) (2020): 1077–1092.

3 Nathan Wolfe, *The Viral Storm: Dawn of a New Pandemic Age* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2011); David Quammen, *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Human Pandemic* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012).

4 Rob Wallace, *Dead Epidemiologists: On the Origins of the COVID-19* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020). Kindle.

eco-social relationships."[5] Despite his narrow focus on agriculture, Wallace's recommendation seems to me of utmost importance in our time of epidemics cropping up in the wake of detrimental global environmental damage of anthropogenic origin, interwoven with other economic and social crises.

Admittedly, after the last pandemic many researchers have been – or, at least, tried to be – more optimistic than Wallace. One of them is Conniff who recalled and brought to the fore the first (and actually the only one) humanity's success in fighting smallpox and attaining temporary global immunity. Suffice it to recall Roberto Esposito's recent update of his rather utopian concept of affirmative biopolitics, "one in which, for the first time in history, we can glimpse the unprecedented silhouette of a c o m m o n i m m u n i t y."[6] However, I would rather side with a more pessimistic Wallace who in *Dead Epidemiologists* warns that viruses "may easily evolve out from underneath the population's immune blanket."[7] For the challenge is not so much to control and manage the global problem of pandemic threats any more but to face the paradox highlighted in the edited volume *Endemic* already a few years before the last outbreak. As the editors of the volume point out in their introduction, what urgently needs to be reflected upon is "the persistence of contagious rhetoric and logic in a society that has ideologically construed itself as impervious to infectious disease."[8] Contrary to this, the last pandemic clearly proved that we are not impervious to infectious diseases, in particular of viral origin, and moreover notably unprepared to track and quarantine asymptomatic and minimally symptomatic cases due to specific biomolecular characteristics of viruses and their still relatively unknown place in the pathogen's evolutionary web. Therefore, after the COVID-19 pandemic it is definitely important that also humanities use new microbiological and cultural findings on viruses and multispecies relations, which habitually surface during infectious diseases to rethink the pre-pandemic foundations of the posthumanism. Obviously, it is too ambitious a task to accomplish in an article of a limited scope. In what follows, however, I would like to tentatively demonstrate why a closer look at viruses and the reciprocal capture of scientific-cultural performances

5 Wallace, *Dead Epidemiologists*, chap. "Notes on Novel Coronavirus," sec. "Structural Causes of Disease."

6 Roberto Esposito, *Common Immunity: Biopolitics in the Age of the Pandemic*, trans. Zakiya Hanafi (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023), 5 (emphasis in original).

7 Wallace, *Dead Epidemiologists*, Interview "Agribusiness Would Risk Millions of Deaths."

8 Lorenzo Sevitje and Kari Nixon, "The Making of a Modern Endemic: An Introduction," in *Endemic: Essays in Contagious Theory*, ed. Lorenzo Servitje and Kari Nixon (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 4.

out of which they emerge as epistemic, technical-aesthetic objects compels a recalibration of multispecies relations and politics on which posthumanist theories are based. I will do it through rethinking the concept of Gaia as a main framework of posthumanism as well as the interrelated idea of planetary immunity. For as the American social philosopher William Irwin Thompson put it concisely: "Gaia, in essence, is the immune system of our planet."[9]

Immunitary Gaia?

Despite the posthuman turn in academia in the late twentieth century that deeply questioned human exceptionalism while trying to apprehend complex entanglements and necessary disentanglements in the more-than-human world,[10] humanities have been increasingly haunted by the concept of the Anthropos as a key-figure of universal humanity. That is why already in its subtitle, the recently published edited volume *Life in the Posthuman Condition* spotlights the fact that the new conceptualizations of the eponymous life in the posthuman condition gathered there propose closer examinations of and critical responses to the Anthropocene.[11] Hence, the editors of the volume rightly point out in their introduction: "it is as if the danger and urgency to react to the climate emergency pushed back all theoretical efforts in post-colonial, decolonial and feminist discourses and created the conditions to rehabilitate a new type of hyper-humanism."[12] Therefore, to confront this rather unexpected comeback of rehabilitated humanism adequately, they argue for a reconceptualization of research methodologies, together with the whole apparatus of thinking about our entanglements in much larger biological, geological and technological systems. Although it is not the one and only example of a renewed discussion about posthumanism in the context of the increasingly popular new geological epoch named after the human,[13] I focus

9 William Irwin Thompson, "Introduction: The Imagination of a New Science and the Emergence of a Planetary Culture," in *Gaia 2: Emergence – The New Science of Becoming*, ed. William Irwin Thompson (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1991), 11–29, 24.

10 For the second see particularly Eva Haifa Giraud, *What Comes after Entanglement?: Activism, Anthropocentrism, and an Ethics of Exclusion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

11 S. E. Wilmer and Audroné Žukauskaité, eds., *Life in the Posthuman Condition: Critical Responses to the Anthropocene* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

12 Audroné Žukauskaité and S.E. Wilmer, "Forms of Life in the Posthuman Condition: An Introduction," in *Life in the Postuman Condition*, 3.

13 What is in stake in this discussion, in a concise way expresses Bruce Clarke, an expert of what he calls "Gaian science": "naming a new geological epoch after the human or some

precisely on the volume *Life in the Posthuman Condition* because of its Gaian context and perspective, clearly flagged in Bruce Clarke's opening chapter "Anthropocene Desperation in Gaian Context."[14]

As Clarke rightly recalls, thanks to the originator of the idea of Gaia, independent British scientist and inventor James Lovelock and his close cooperation with the American evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis, Gaian science brought the climate crisis into focus decades before the official acknowledgment of the Anthropocene as the newest epoch in Earth history. Since then Gaia has been conceptualized in many ways – as an autopoietic system of a single cell, a kind of organism, or rather an emergent, recursive form of self-production and self-maintenance in which the biosphere interpenetrates dynamically with the geosphere and technosphere. Irrespective of all differences in its conceptualization, Gaia was consistently depicted as run by microbes, fully dependent on the ongoing evolution of bacteria, that is single-celled organisms or their colonies. A short time ago, Dorian Sagan, who together with Lynn Margulis coauthored several books on planetary biology and evolution through symbiosis, confirmed this depiction in the context of the Anthropocene by saying that Gaia "is essentially a microbe-based system… and appears to be able to take care of itself through complex feedbacks."[15] While Clarke quotes his words to give a glimpse of hope in the dark time of apocalyptic desperation in the Anthropocene, I recall them rather to demonstrate that Gaian science still marginalizes viruses as apparently abiotic entities, 100–500 times smaller than bacteria. Even though a year later, during COP26 in Glasgow to which Lovelock was not invited, he wrote about viruses in *The Guardian*, he clearly did it, taking an epidemiologist's perspective. For he concluded that unless humans learn to live in partnership with the Earth, it will move "to a new state in which humans may no longer be welcome. The virus, Covid-19, may well have been

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subset thereof as a geological force on a par with life altogether looks to me like a defensive crouch in response to the advent of the posthuman. Relative to this particular human-centered neologism Gaia is the better concept to confront Western modernity in particular with its others and its unintended effects, including an account of humanity's minor part in Earth's geostory." Bruce Clarke, *Gaian Systems: Lynn Margulis, Neocybernetics, and the End of the Anthropocene* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 256–257.

14 Bruce Clarke, "Anthropocene Desperation in Gaian Context," in *Life in the Posthuman Condition*, 15–32.

15 Dorion Sagan, "Gaia Versus the Anthropocene: Untimely Thoughts on the Current Eco-catastrophe," *Ecocene: Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities* 1 (1) (2020): 137–146, 144.

one negative feedback. Gaia will try harder next time with something even nastier."[16]

Hence, in his short commentary in *The Guardian* Lovelock defines the virus causing COVID-19 – and supposedly all viruses – as an epidemiological threat and exterminable target(s). His position could be, however, better understood when taking a closer look at those earlier conceptualizations of Gaia which I have already pointed at in this section. Modelled on the discrete integrity and autopoietic closure of a living cell, they clearly emphasize Gaia's status as a thin planetary membrane, responsible for its identity and immunity. However, the more recent ecological depictions of the immune system as a communal construction have already gone beyond the earlier ontologies of the self-referential, immune self. In "Planetary Immunity," a chapter of his book *Gaian Systems*, Clarke sumps up, for instance, the current and widely accepted view on Gaia according to which "the science of Gaia now recognizes that neither life nor its planetary medium is so fundamental that either can be said to control the other."[17] As he further explains, "geobiological history has thoroughly churned them all together into a planetary holobiont that maintains and defends its components to an appreciable degree against cosmological as well as ecological insult."[18] Nonetheless, this bounded envelope as an implication of Gaia's systemic identity still functions as the planet's frontline immunizing organ, producing and maintaining a delimited zone of habitability. In other words, even Gaia conceptualized as holding together the many selves of the symbiotic ecology, remains a bounded, closed system, and its main role comes down to immunizing the entire planetary life, in particular by the fending of all threats and dangers, viruses included.

Contrary to those imaginaries of immunitary Gaia, premised on the epidemiological concept of pathogens, their transmission and ways of spreading, today's scientists more and more often define contagion, especially of viral nature, not only as a deadly threat but also as an open-ended system that enables a jump cut to something qualitatively new. Therefore, it is the right time we imagined Gaia anew – as a virus-based system rather than microbe-based one.[19] This, in turn, may bring along significant changes in the way we

16 James Lovelock, "Beware: Gaia May Destroy Humans Before We Destroy the Earth," *The Guardian*, November 2, 2021, accessed October 9, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/02/beware-gaia-theory-climate-crisis-earth.

17 Clarke, *Gaian Systems*, 239.

18 Ibid., 239.

19 Referring to works by Karen Weynberg, the Australian expert on bacteriophages and synthetic biology, Astrid Schrader demonstrates that although until recently viruses were

apprehend not only our entanglement in/as the environment but also our knowing/doing practices and life as such. Before that, however, a closer look at how viruses have been conceptualized, depicted and technologically materialized predominantly as pathogens in both popular and medical imaginaries would be well advised.

Explanatory Tropes of Viruses

The best example of how little we know about viruses, even though they are the most diverse life-form in the world, and how much our knowledge is limited to a pathogenic part of a more differentiated virosphere and human virome is undoubtedly the shifting image of what has caused the recent outbreak. The very name of the COVID-19 pandemic encourages us to think that is has been caused by an emergent zoonotic virus. However, the latest studies show that for at least several decades SARS-CoV had been circulating undetected, most probably causing local epidemics in Asia and maybe elsewhere, although it did not spread globally. Viruses not only still exist at the edge of our technical capacity to enhance sight, they are also in flux – they proliferate in quickly mutating swarms, forming clouds of particles with a fluid genetic make-up.[20] Mainly for this reason, their material worlds are still accessible to us only through indices and symptoms in a similar manner as they did when microbiologists discovered the first traces of viruses at the turn of the twentieth century.[21] However, contrary to the latest findings of viral relational agency and pluripotency, we still imagine viruses as self-contained particulars with clear boundaries and stable inherent properties along the lines of a neoliberal agenda, according to which genetic information could become a patented and traded commodity. As Caitlin Berrigan rightly points out, "viruses, fathomable only by means of scaffolds of metaphors, are evacuated of their

studied mainly as disease-causing agents, the survival of our species may nonetheless depend on them. In particular, Schrader focuses on marine viruses and their role in the global carbon circle wherein they take decisive part in regulating and manipulating the conversion between organic and inorganic carbon as well as in enabling and contributing to the storage of carbon in the ocean. Astrid Schrader, "Elemental Ghosts, Haunted Carbon Imaginaries, and Living Matter at the Edge of Life," in *Reactivating Elements: Chemistry, Ecology, Practice*, ed. Dimitris Papadopoulos, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa and Natasha Myers (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 108–130.

20 See *E-flux Journal* 130 (October 2022), Special Issue "Viral Theory", accessed October 11, 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/130/.

21 See Carlo Caduff, *The Pandemic Perhaps: Dramatic Events in a Public Culture* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

material relations and come to operate as the metaphor itself."[22] Therefore, it is not surprising that theorists and politicians alike have often deployed the pathologized virus as a figure that stands in for foreign agents or invaders.[23]

The well-known example of how a metaphorized virus might and has been politically deployed is Elizabeth Povinelli's set of three figures of geontopower in her *Geontologies*, one of which is the Virus, the main token of which is the Terrorist.[24] The author defines both the Virus and the Terrorist as an ultimate threat to the capitalist system but demonstrates that at the same time the two figures serve as considerable sources of profit. Significantly, Povinelli came back to her figure of the Virus just after the second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, in November 2020. In "The Virus: Figure and Infrastructure" she shows how the Virus-as-Terrorist effectively blocks a vital understanding of the current pandemic as yet another form of structural violence, a manifestation of the ancestral catastrophes of colonialism and slavery.[25] Therefore, as she emphasizes, the only way to see that the current pandemic is yet another form of toxicity that colonialism has seeded, bringing along also the Anthropocene, is to differentiate the actual virus from the Virus. However, Povinelli focuses on the difference between the real pathogen and the figure of virus in the recent cultural and political discourses. That is why she does not even mention how deeply the ordering principles, genres and narrative devices of medical epistemologies have always already informed our cultural imagery. For the rhetoric of scientific visualization and explanation is also dependent on a historically informed and distinct cultural tropology. This has recently been demonstrated by Hannah Landecker, a sociologist from the University of California working at the intersection of anthropology and history of biotechnology and life science.

In her article "Viruses are more like Cone Snails" Landecker looks closely at how microbial studies have domesticated viral agencies and actions to

22 Caitlin Berrigan, "Kinship Is Anarchy," *E-flux Journal* 130 (October 2022), accessed October 11, 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/130/491388/kinship-is-anarchy/.

23 The tendency to imagine anticolonial rebellion, Muslim insurgency specifically, as a virulent form of social contagion reveals Raza Kolb's recent study that assembles a diverse archive from colonial India and imperial Britain to the neoimperial United States. Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb, *Epidemic Empire: Colonialism, Contagion, and Terror, 1817–2020* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

24 Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), Kindle. Chapt. "Three Figures of Geontology."

25 Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "The Virus: Figure and Infrastructure," *E-flux Journal* 113 (November 2020), accessed October 11, 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/sick-architecture/352870/the-virus-figure-and-infrastructure/.

the human scale.[26] One of several telling examples to which she refers is the figuration of the virus as hijacker of the early twentieth century. Landecker points out: "as with many apparently innocuous explanatory tropes, this figure of the viral hijacker perhaps hides as much as it reveals."[27] Indeed, the virus conceptualized as a foreign agent that infects by forcibly taking over the "cellular machinery" in a kind of illicit raiding operation because it does not possess its own metabolism supported the fundamental ideas of newly founded epidemiology and its policies. Moreover, in this frame of reference, we may reasonably situate also Povinelli's figure of the Virus-as-Terrorist as a successor of this older figuration, which emerged out of cultural mobility between popular imagination and the way viruses were materialized in scientific discourses by epidemiologists and microbiologists. This time, however, it is a medical understanding of viral contagious agency that has infected cultural and political discourses of late liberalism, underpinning their racist, neocolonial policies which Povinelli lays bare in her already mentioned *Geontologies*. However, what Landecker calls domestication, denotes not only metaphorization of viral agencies and actions but also the conceptualization of viruses. A case in point is the modern definition of the virus, understood as "a DNA or RNA core contained in a protective package transmittable across time and space between and within susceptible hosts."[28] It was introduced in the early 1930s, roughly at the time of the expansion of international networks and modes of shipping people, valuables, and factory-produced commodities around the globe. Hence, at that time the increasingly expanding international networks of trade and communication did not only facilitate transmission and global spread of contagious diseases. They also decisively influenced the way in which viruses were visualized and materialized in both cultural and scientific/medical imaginaries.

Mindful of the historical taproots of both seemingly innocuous explanatory tropes referred to above, in her article Landecker offers also a kind of speculative exercise, inviting the reader to imagine viruses in terms of predatory sea snails. For instance, one species of the group, *Conus geographus*, uses an insulin overdose to disorient and disable its fish prey, releasing the toxin into water. Importantly, because the toxic overdose mimics fish insulin, it does not affect the snail itself. A similar kind of a predatory metabolic convergence,

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26 Hannah Landecker, "Viruses are More Like Cone Snails," *E-flux Journal* 130 (October 2022), accessed October 11, 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/130/491398/viruses-are-more-like-cone-snails-than-hijackers/.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

in the mid-1960s called "molecular mimicry," allows some viruses to mimic their host's cell cycle and metabolic processes. In other words, this speculative exercise makes clear that not all viruses are pathogenic agents, which kill their host cell to replicate. Some replicate and continue their existence within their host's cell as symbionts, provided they know how to mimic its metabolism, to become its protein kin. Such viruses – a horde much bigger than the one already identified as dangerous for humans – have been marginalized, or even made invisible when the virus was conceptualized as hijacker or terrorist. Therefore, it indeed matters "what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions"[29] to use Donna Haraway's phrasing.

Redefining Viruses, Redefining Life

Researching how microbial figurations have domesticated viral agencies and actions, and in so doing have also decisively influenced the way we apprehend viruses as deadly pathogens, Landecker focuses mostly on discursive metaphors. However, to take a closer look at how a depiction of Gaia run by viruses, which this article would like to roughly outline, may initiate a new posthumanist turn through a redefinition of life, we need to realize that it also matters how viruses as such have been scientific-technologically materialized as a subject of microbial experiments and studies. This has recently been demonstrated by Bishnupriya Ghosh in *The Virus Touch*[30] in which the author discusses viruses as such submicroscopic particles that can be made perceptible and materialized only through technical mediation. Significantly, Ghosh refers mostly to the HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics which in her perspective fruitfully unsettle one another and have very much shaped her as both a researcher and a person. Within this framework she presents new and ecologically influenced research on microbiome, in which humans have already been recognized as *Homo microbis*, that is multispecies "superorganisms." She juxtaposes these concepts with epidemiological findings on pathogenic microbes which usually surface during infectious disease emergencies presented as malevolent antagonists to give a stronger impression of controlling their transmission. Mindful of this paradox, Ghosh devotes her

29 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 12.

30 Bishnupriya Ghosh, *The Virus Touch: Theorizing Epidemic Media* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023). For a more larger picture of how microbes and viruses are materialized by computer animation technologies and how molecular animations produce new regimes of seeing and knowing see Adam Nocek, *Molecular Capture: The Animation of Biology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021).

book to the topic crucial also for my argument in this article, namely "how the extreme situation of a global viral pandemic compels a recalibration of multispecies politics."[31] The last recalibration of this kind, as she explains, took place recently when global contagion has been recast as a manifestation of an unfolding ecological disturbance. Contrary to Povinelli and Landecker, who dwell on viral tropology in different kinds of discourses, Gosh focuses on the scientific-technological mediation of "life" which by materializing pathogens targets scientific/medical intervention into dynamic, fluctuating more-than-human assemblies. The way we see and understand viruses and witness their effects depends largely on how epidemic media enact epistemic cuts in those assemblies to inscribe, store, and transmit their relations as stable and, therefore, knowable and manageable configurations. In so doing, Ghosh demonstrates how it is possible that facing species extinction in a near future of the Anthropocene we would rather have microbes as infectious germs exterminated despite knowledge of our ever-swarming, multispecies biobodies.

Looking closely at different forms of media across the current epistemic setting – from laboratories to clinics to forests, from scientific theories to clinical instructions to public health policies – Ghosh demonstrates in *The Virus Touch* "how epidemic media actualize multispecies relations as to measure, assess, and locate harms."[32] Although the last contagious disease outbreaks have already been reconfigured as unfolding ecological disturbances, epidemic media still institute infection as fluctuating relations between two discrete entities – viruses and their hosts. It is out of these relations, of intra-active biotechnical performances that isolated pathogens appear as exterminable targets. Nonetheless, Ghosh notes, "inquiries into making/doing/enacting epidemic media habitually disclose the entangled materiality of living processes and relations."[33] Thus, premised on her insights, Ghosh insists on another kind of knowledge, which we need to activate to cope in the current situation of multipronged crises: a sensuous apprehension of multispecies entanglements that implode all organismic boundaries. However, before we start to think/know/do and live otherwise, humanities need another posthuman turn, which would analogously focus on how differential human, animal, plant, and machinic agencies other than viruses have been materialized through similar processes of mediation, instituted and rendered in their objectivized differential relations as epistemic objects (and facts).

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31 Ghosh, *The Virus Touch*, 2.

32 Ibid., 2.

33 Ibid., 200.

It is for a reason that Ghosh has chosen the time-space of HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 outbreaks, which she calls the current epidemic episteme, to reflect not only on viruses as products of scientific-technological mediation but also on a much broader topic of multispecies entanglements. As she explains: "epidemics are intense experiences that collapse from the epistemic object; one is hyperaware of being viscerally entangled 'in' the very media environment one studies."[34] In a sense, this article follows in her footsteps, engaging critically with viral tropology which is so tightly entangled in much larger cultural imaginaries that each change in the way we conceptualize viruses would certainly entail consequences for how various spheres of life are envisioned and understood and how we conceptualize life as such. Assuming that a critical reading of Gaia as an incorporation of bacteria-based evolution will influence also how posthumanism is defined, the article invites rethinking together the immunitarian conceptualizations of Gaia and new understandings of and findings on viruses. According to their novel materializations they are not only proliferating in quickly mutating swarms but also a vital resource of life on Earth. This confirms that it is, indeed, crucial how we think about and with viruses.

Abstract

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Rethinking Posthumanism in the Aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The article analyzes how the coronavirus pandemic changed the definition of posthumanism. The starting point of the article is the observation that the Coronavirus has turned out to be not an epidemiological singularity but rather a globally noticed origin of new pandemic threats, one of many which emerge nearly annually. Although from 2010 onwards many scientists and science journalists have been writing about and warning against what they often called "a New Pandemic Age," it eventually became common knowledge and a widely recognized threat only after the last pandemic. The author of the article analyzes the effects of the pandemic on the development of posthumanities research, referring, among others, to research by S. E. Wilmer and Audroné Žukauskaité; as well as to the thesis of Bruce Clarke and Dorion Sagan.

Keywords

science, posthumanism, pandemic, Gaia, biopolitics, COVID-19

34 Ibid., 204.

Ewa Szczęsna

The Humanities in the World of New Technologies (and Vice Versa). Toward Digital Philology

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The Humanities and Technology: The Question of Their Essence and Mutual Relationships

The humanities are singular, albeit diverse and evolving with the development of civilization itself. They are a dynamic singularity, the unchangeable nature of which is located in their being a space for autonomous thought, while their changeability – in the sphere of methods of thought and objects of interpretation. The humanities deal with understanding/creating text (even as they declare different goals). This is their main objective – the task pertaining to the shaping of the faculty of thought, of interpreting/creating text, regardless of whether we are dealing with a literary text typical of philology (or better still, philologically oriented humanities – philological humanities) or a text stemming from other arts (visual, performative, audiovisual, musical) or discourses (philosophy, journalism, sociology, politics, economy, physics, mathematics and so many others), makes them, in their essential dimension, a necessary tool for any discipline – their basic existential. By drawing upon this category, we have marked our human mode of being, separated ourselves from other non-human entities, all the while

declaring an attitude of respect therefor (and in the case of posthumanism – dialogue therewith). The humanities are a necessary tool and a condition for inventiveness and discoverability in all areas of human activity. Those who speak of the humanities as useless for the economy and technology, devoid of technological-innovative potential, fail to understand their essence. Those who work toward their marginalization hinder the development of fields, in the name of which this marginalization is undertaken to begin with – and simply harm them.

At the same time, the humanities are necessarily changeable, as change also pertains to: the objects of their study – texts, which are in a state of constant evolution; the aesthetics, ideas, and ideologies which inspire them; the technologies of their production and distribution; and last but not least, the state of knowledge and the sociohistorical reality. Changes to the contextual factors co-creating a text and, in effect, their mutual interactions, result in changes in the sphere of the understanding of the text. This necessitates the creation of new tools of its description and the modification of existing tools, the extraction from objects of interpretations of theories and methodologies, the creation of successive cognitive perspectives, and the reinterpretation of existing ones. These changes form the sphere of instability, or the incessant evolution of the humanities, which are described as new when successive remodellings (changes) in their sphere emerge. However, one characteristic feature of the humanities is that their changeability continually strengthens the space of unchangeability. The dynamics of change, diversity in the sphere of studying textual phenomena, the development of polemic discourse, the creation of new perspectives from which we perceive things, different methods of focalization, of knowing stabilize and confirm the unchangeability of interpretation as the essence of the humanities.

Concern over the understanding of text is in particular the main preoccupation of philological humanities, mostly interested in verbal art, either when it deals with specific works, their collections, or textual genres, or when it discusses theories, methodologies – methods of reading texts, or when it ponders upon the essence of interpretation and attempts to define it. One illustration of this unchangeable connection between the essence of the humanities and interpretation (though understood in various ways) are two passages by Maria Janion and Michał Paweł Markowski, written forty years apart:

> The school of humanistic thought is interpretation, or the understanding of human objects of creation and behaviors. Interpretation is an art of artists and scholars alike, but also the fundamental skill of the thinking person as such. Without this skill, the worlds of culture and science are closed therefrom. In effect, there is the constant necessity of learning understanding and choice, or the humanistic

> interpretation of human works and the selection of those values which are deemed to be the highest.[1]

> When I say that [the humanities – E. S.] should be a space of the formation of sensitivity, I also say that it is a discipline associated with interpretation. […] The humanities are an exercise for the mind, which teaches us or strengthens our belief in the fact that people compose the world in different ways from the available meanings, albeit they do so in a shared space, the same one in which we are now laboring.[2]

In effect, as they invariably deal with interpretation, philological humanities have the tendency to model their mode of being – shape new theories, tools, and methods of interpretation, as well as broaden the area of actions, in effect of which definitions of text are loosened.[3] The latter leads us outside of the text of a specific discursive (literature) and media (print) form toward other discourses (e.g. artistic, social, journalistic, academic texts) and media (audiovisual, interactive).

In effect, philological humanities renew themselves each time when they change the interpretative filter, when they begin to be interested in new forms of texts and turn them into a lens, through which they look at a traditional object of their study. At present they for example gladly draw upon the cognitive perspectives of STEM sciences, ecological discourse, and climate discourse, which they adopt to study literary and, broadly speaking, textual phenomena. They also study digital texts.

Digital technology considerably modifies the matter and the structure of the sign. A digital sign is a diffused sign – it has its representation on the level of programming code and the end-user level, albeit different modes of its existence enter into metonymic relationships with one another. The sign combines the function of meaning, of defining the mode of its own existence, and the operating function – of directing to other signs and manipulating them. Its matter (electromagnetic waves) and notation (01) are shared among different ways in which the sign manifests itself on the end-user level – by

1 Maria Janion, *Humanistyka: poznanie i terapia* [The humanities: cognition and therapy] (Warszawa: PIW, 1982), 109–110.

2 Michał Paweł Markowski, "Wrażliwość, interpretacja, literatura" [Sensitivity, interpretation, literature], *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2010): 112, 113, 122.

3 For instance, speaking of a text as a: strategy, which establishes a universe of its own interpretations (Umberto Eco), as something that can be read (Michał Paweł Markowski), a node in a network of relationships, which permeate the social, historical, and cultural environments and transform them (Ryszard Nycz).

analogy to moving or unmoving images or sound, which enable the sign to be easily combined and modified. The new organization of the textual sign determines a new onticity, superimposed over the sign of the text. In turn, the new mode of the existence of the text necessitates changes in the sphere of its description. The need arises to modify existing research tools, to create new ones, and finally to derive from the studied texts theories which would name new textual and discursive phenomena with a view to facilitating their understanding. In effect, digital technology changes the humanities – it leads to the development of digital humanities, dealing in particular with the creation of digital tools for the study of texts, but also interfering in philological humanities by broadening their scope to encompass digital philology.

The thesis on the relationship between technology and the humanities in fact pertains not only to digital technology, but the broadly understood *techne*, which, as Martin Heidegger underlined, as a means of discovery is something poietic, not just a means in and of itself.[4] A good example thereof is that of the technologies of print, which freed the textual form from performing a mnemonic function – searching for and using textual structures facilitating memorization. Instead, the textual form could to a considerably larger degree perform the aesthetic function – the development of the literary form was guaranteed not by the topics broached, but by formal measures, original solutions in the sphere of irregular, experimental forms, the literary use of punctuation, graphical representations (e.g. illustrated book). The development of storage technologies, of communication inspired the development of textual forms, which in turn, by becoming objects of study, stimulated the development of humanistic philology.

The quite common view which juxtaposes technology with the humanities, proclaiming the devaluation of the latter, or its displacement by the achievements of the former, is therefore absurd on its face. Technologies take part in the creation of artistic texts, in the shaping of the humanities to the same degree as social, political, and economic changes themselves – in short, as all cultural changes.[5] They are one of the ever-present variables in a network of relationships between the factors comprising a text. They result in all texts being sociocultural constructs, embedded in specific discursive, medial, and

4 Martin Heidegger, *Die Technik und die Kehre* (Stuttgart: Verlag Günther Neske, 1962).

5 The thesis on the influence of the medium on the text and its meaning, as well as on literature as a mediated experience and modelled by the media is formulated and justified by Peter Gendolla and Jörgen Schäfer, "Playing With Signs. Towards an Aesthetic Theory of Net Literature," in *The Aesthetics of Net Literature. Writing, Reading and Playing in Programmable Media*, ed. Gendolla and Schäfer (Piscataway, NJ: Bielefeld, Transcript, 2007), 17–36.

semiotic orders, and are responsible for their coherence.[6] All forms of technological revolution and evolution lead to changes in the way of the existence of text – in its meaning-making, communicative aspects.

For example, digital technologies provide access to tools for the semiotic unification of texts, the legitimization of their relationships, as well as the facilitation of their use. The effect of semiotic synchronization, which influences the meaning of the text established by the recipient, the hierarchy of the content, is achieved by the mediation of the specific color palette on the computer screen, by tying together textual elements, but also by thematically and discursively diverse text with the same rhythm (repetition of movement, sound, color). Other unifying factors include linking and the designed possibility of manipulating text, which allow the user to construct text in accordance with their own idea of a coherent text[7] and control its reception through the semiotic elements of the message. In the case of fiction, for instance, the forms allow for the selection of those textual elements, which, as the user expects, will allow them to build sequences of events and arrive at a coherent whole, which can be made sense of. As such, hypertext does tell stories itself as such, as it stimulates the user into telling them.

Text-creation Strategies in Digital Literature

Digital storage is a technology which modifies the onticity of the literary word to a much larger degree than previous storage technologies. Literature remains a written art, but not only that of the semantics of the word as a conventional sign. Other aspects of the word are now repurposed for the benefit of literariness itself – primarily its layer of representations, but also its intertextual agency (the possibility to be a tool of textual actions), which co-create the meaning of the text. The word is undergoing secondary, mediated, and aesthetically modelled ionization, kinetization, and sonorification. A good example thereof is Robert Kendall's digital poem *Faith*,[8] in which semantic value rests in the changing colors of the words, of singular letters, as well as in their movement – shape deformations, repositioning, and appearance and

6 Theo Van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 181–267.

7 The issue of changes in the functioning of the coherence of the hypertext in comparison with the coherence of analogue narrative text is taken up by Marie-Laure Ryan. See Marie-Laure Ryan, "Can Coherence Be Saved?," in Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality. Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 242–270.

8 Robert Kendall, *Faith*, accessed September 4, 2023, http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/kendall__faith.html.

disappearance, connoting events and situations from the human world. Letters, words, and parts of the alphabetical text, by moving, changing shapes, and being sounded out before the eyes of the recipient, gain corporeality. They connote vitality. The moving, changing texture displaces unmoving, unchanging texture characteristic of traditional print literature. The literary word is no longer glued to the page, entrapped in the form of print. Instead, it is revitalized – biological, often even anthropomorphized. It can be projected as a word with the attributes of human personality, it can speak about interpersonal behaviors and relationships, triggering interactions between the interpretative meanings denoted – arbitrarily – and connoted by the movement and change in the shape of the text (as in the case of Dan Waber's *Strings*[9]). It can also become spatialized – gain the third dimension on the computer screen or be projected into the space of the recipient – enter into interactions with them – as is the case with interactive installations (e.g. Noah Wardrip-Fruin's *Screen*[10]). Such an existing literary word gains the features of spatial art (architecture, sculpture) or audio-visual art (movies), tying together century-old meanings arrived at in the course of the development of these arts.

Furthermore, the introduction of digital programming into literary discourse results in the literary word and the literary work of art being able to be individualized.

Digital literature contains discursively and medially transformed non-literary discourses (including those of animation, games, movies), but it also textualizes data on the user of a given work. Elements of the plot include the corporeal actions of the users and the dimension of textual expression (its kinetization, sonorification, and musicalization). In Semyon Polyakovskii's novel *Maginary*,[11] blowing on the screen – the page with text – results in wind blowing in the literary world (interactive metonymy); the movement of letters, their color, light, and sound create the audio-visual representation of the world of literary fiction. Present world literature engages literariness in augmented and virtual reality, the use in the literary work of information on the specific user, their surroundings (e.g. views), extracted by way of their phone (e.g. photographs uploaded by the user). One example here would be

9 Dan Waber, *Strings,* accessed September 4, 2023, http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/waber__strings.html (currently not available); *Strings* by Dan Waber – YouTube.

10 Noah Wardrip-Fruin, *Screen*, accessed September 4, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOwF5KD5BV4.

11 Semyon Polyakovskii, *Maginary* (2019), accessed September 4, 2023, https://medium.com/@semyonpolyakovskiy/maginary-animated-immersive-book-for-ios-3aec8f5136bc; https://www.maginary.app/.

the ambient novel *Breathe*[12] by Kate Pullinger, in which data on the reader and their immediate surroundings become part of the plot and in which digital representations of the world of the reader and the reader himself undergo textualization. The story becomes tied to the place and time of the individual user, who is located at the center of events. The context becomes an integral component of the work. Not only does it differentiate its meaning, but also its semiotic tissue – which means it has agency. Different data on each of the users of the work result in different versions of the plot. The ambient novel creates a new form of narration – dynamic narration, which reacts to the direct, changing data on the social environment of the user and which incorporates these elements into the plot and the game played with the user.

The alternativeness, variability of the plot of ambient narrations is determined through the specificity of data tied to the reader. The flow of events becomes dependent on the actions of the user in the real world, as well as the virtual world of the smartphone, which engages the reader both viscerally and emotionally, as well as intellectually and aesthetically.[13] The recipient may experience words as if they were avatars, gaining the value of three-dimensional entities – human and non-human alike (animated, anthropomorphized, personified, reified). The hybridization of the world of the literary text as happening in the interaction between the real and the virtual worlds becomes strengthened thanks to the use of the body of works of traditional literature. Digital literature does not abstract from print literature. On the contrary, it creatively modifies its narrative strategies, artistic procedures (compositional, stylistic). It constitutes its own literariness on the path of the digital adaptation of existing literariness, which it sets into aesthetic interactions with new ways of the existence of literariness, discovered by digital technologies. This is discovery, which embodies in literature the aforementioned Heideggerian understanding of technology as a means of extracting, freeing, reshaping, acting out *poiesis*.

In effect, digital technologies give us grounds for developing philological and literary studies – in particular from the areas of poetological and

12 Kate Pullinger, *Breathe* (2019), accessed September 4, 2023, www.breathe-story.com. See also Tom Abba, Jonathan Dovey and Kate Pullinger, eds., *Ambient Literature. Towards a New Poetics of Situated Writing and Reading Practices* (London: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2021).

13 Jim Bizzocchi, "Ambient Art and Electronic Literature," in *Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities. Contexts, Forms, and Practices*, ed. Dene Grigar and James O'Sullivan (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 113, accessed September 4, 2023, https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/electronic-literature-as-digital-humanities-contexts-forms-practices/ch8-ambient-art-and-electronic-literature.

comparative studies,[14] going toward agential semiopoetics – researching ambient works, which engage with the actions of the user, their data and data on the immediate physical world, and cultural practices in such a way, that they become a necessary and active meaning-making component of the text – that is, they undergo textualization themselves. Furthermore, of interest from the perspective of poetological studies is the fact that applications which take note of the location of the user enable, on the one hand, the narrativization of the surroundings – the creation and development of mobile forms of narration,[15] forms of locative narration,[16] and on the other, importing the surroundings to the narrative of the novel – or the creation of an ambient novel.[17] Such crucial changes in the mode of existence of the literary work lead to the necessity of investing in the development of digital philology.

Digital literature makes use of the culturally developed ways of the existence of the word. However – what is characteristic thereof – it also modifies, clashes, remediates.[18] Literary meaning is created in the interaction of the digitally modelled: written and printed word (which, when having undergone kinetization, metamorphoses with regard to their shape and color, also become words-images), but also the spoken word. In the creation of meanings, the digital alphabetical text draws upon the body of oral culture and the connection between literature and music (digitally modified: speech, visual effects, music), written culture (fonts imitating handwriting, letters "drawn up" on screen, decorating, stylizing letters) and print (the multiplication of the forms of print fonts developed in the course of the development of culture itself and the forms of the graphization of the word – painting with the word). Making the object of remediation the century-old body of works of the culture

14 John David Zuern, "Reading Screens: Comparative Perspectives on Computational Poetics," in *Comparative Textual Media. Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*, ed. N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

15 Adraina de Souza e Silva, "Mobile Narratives: Reading and Writing Urban Space with Location-Based Technologies," in *Comparative Textual Media*, 33–52, accessed September 4, 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289947594_Mobile_Narratives_Reading_and_Writing_Urban_Space_with_Location-Based_Technologies.

16 See Jeremy Hight, "Locative Narrative," in *Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities*, 297–304, accessed September 4, 2023, https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/electronic-literature-as-digital-humanities-contexts-forms-practices/ch26-locative-narrative.

17 Abba, Dovey and Pullinger, eds., *Ambient Literature.*

18 Jay D. Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT, 2000).

of print, and in particular, the developed forms of the printed book, is something that Jay David Bolter considers to be an important feature of hypertext.[19]

Furthermore, the creation of textual meanings sees the participation of mediated graphical, photographic, auditory, and audio-visual representations accompanying the textual layer, which appear as background, illustration, or integral elements of the text and represent different discourses (in the aforementioned *Strings*, these are: rhetoric, the textual dimension of the movement of the body, a sports discipline, a word puzzle, elements of a game; in Konrad Polak's *Schemat* [Diagram][20] – an instruction manual, in Stuart Moulthrop's *Victory Garden*[21] – a graph depicting the possible sequences of reading).

The study of digital literary forms leads to the development of philological humanities – its enrichment with the achievements of digital philology (here in particular, digital literature studies), which develops tools for the study of digital literature, as well as schools of thought thereabout. The textual procedures working in favor of the creation of an expanded philology aiding development are: presence in the description of the text of interactive and semiotic figures,[22] including kinetic figures (adiection, detraction, permutation, transformation), which form the basis of e.g. Zenon Fajfer's *Ars Poetica*[23] and *Powieki* [Eyelids],[24] figures of manipulation and animation,[25] hyperlepsis,[26]

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19 Jay D. Bolter, *Writing Space. Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 45.

20 Konrad Polak, *Schemat* [Diagram], accessed September 4, 2023, http://haart.e-kei.pl/hiperteksty/schemat/.

21 Stuart Moulthrop, *Victory Garden*, accessed September 4, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TN02_RqyXgo.

22 Ewa Szczęsna, *Cyfrowa semiopoetyka* [Digital semiopoetics] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2018), 188–245.

23 Zenon Fajfer, *Ars Poetica*, accessed September 4, 2023, http://www.techsty.art.pl/magazyn3/fajfer/Ars_poetica_polish.html.

24 Zenon Fajfer, *Powieki* [Eyelids] (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Forma, 2013).

25 Alexandra Saemmer, "Digital Literature – A Question of Style," in *Reading Moving Letters. Digital Literature in Research and Teaching*, ed. Roberto Simanowski, Jörgen Schäfer and Peter Gendolla (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007), 163–182.

26 The figure named and described by Mariusz Pisarski in the habilitation thesis *Figury obecności w cyfrowych mediach. Od hipertekstu do sztucznej inteligencji* [Figures of presence in digital media. From hypertext to artificial intelligence] ([Kraków: Universitas, 2024], 83–89), the scholar defines hyperlepsis as a motive, a given meaning expressed at different levels of the work – code, semantic, semiotic, operative – with the help of the means specific to a given level.

syllepsis,[27] and metalepsis,[28] kinepoeia,[29] interpretative and alternative (multivariate) narration, remodelling in the mode of existence of the literary world, and in particular, its "extraction" to the surface of the texture – the presence of elements of the plot at the level of representation, the creation of textual meanings in the interaction between the semantics of the word as a graphic sign and the semantics of the word as a conventional sign (e.g. in Susan Gibb's *Blueberries*,[30] Radosław Nowakowski's *Koniec świata według Emeryka* [The end of the world according to Emeric],[31] and James Barret's and Selley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*[32]).

Being programmable also allows digital literature for the discursive – that is, in this case, the artistic use of metatextual elements or program tools. One example here is the interface, which in literary works does not only have the function of a mediator between the user and the texture, but itself becomes textualized (e.g. the request "please click ESC or click here in order to reach old age" in Leszek Onak's *Młodość 1861 liter później* [Youth 1861 letters later][33] is both a tool which operates on the text, as well as an integral part of its semantics). In a similar fashion, the literary use of technical communication is

27 To read further on the means of the existence of this figure in digital works, see Mariusz Pisarski, *Figury obecności w cyfrowych mediach*.

28 Astrid Ensslin and Alice Bell, *Digital Fiction and the Unnatural. Transmedial Narrative Theory, Method, and Analysis* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2021); Marie-Laurie Ryan, "Impossible Worlds," in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. Joe Bray et al. (London: Routledge, 2012).

29 "Kinepoeia – or movement suggested by the textual or pictorial representation of the word – is drawn from the term onomatopeia, the rhetorical strategy that associates sound with textual representation (e.g., bam/bam) but unlike onomatopeia, kinepoeia is indigenous to the digital medium." Dene Grigar, "Kinepoeia in Animated Poetry," in *Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities*, 206, Bloomsbury Collections – Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities, accessed September 4, 2023.

30 Susan Gibb, *Blueberries*, accessed September 4, 2023, http://www.cddc.vt.edu/journals/newriver/09Fall/gibb/blueberries/titlec.html; transl. Mariusz Pisarski, *Czarne jagody*. See http://haart.e-kei.pl/hiperteksty/czarne_jagody/czarne_jagody.html, accessed September 4, 2023.

31 Radosław Nowakowski, *Koniec świata według Emeryka* [The end of the world according to Emeric], accessed September 4, 2023, http://www.liberatorium.com/emeryk/brzask.html.

32 James Barret and Selley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*, accessed September 4, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXFEqyXrbqU.

33 Leszek Onak, *Młodość 1861 liter później* [Youth 1861 letters later], accessed September 4, 2023, http://techsty.art.pl/m10/mlodosc_1861_liter_pozniej/.

present in Marta Dzido's hypernovel *Matrioszka* [Russian nested doll],[34] where the user's each choice of the link urging the character to listen to their suicidal thoughts leads to the depiction of a box with the words u n e x p e c t e d e r r o r. Just as if the system itself blocks the suicide of the main heroine, secures the work from the main plot being cut short and the action running to a halt.

Crucial shifts in the sphere of the modes of existence of literature also include changes in the sphere of communicative relationships. In the digital world, traditional readerly interpretation becomes strengthened by the user experiencing the text in the act of their operational agency, that is, their corporeal, sensory, and mental participation in the creation of the work. User participation in operations on the texture, supporting the multiplication of the forms and meanings of the work, transauthorship, or the creation of works through the cooperation of multiple people – both users and co-creators – are factors which participate in the creation of digital literariness.

One challenge for modern literature studies is undoubtedly the large scope of the creation of transsemiotic, transmedial, trandsdiscursive works, which declare a literary character. Furthermore, the interaction between different semiospheres, media, discourses within a single work (intertextual transmediality and transdiscursivity) also finds its counterpart at the level over the singular text. An interesting phenomenon is the creation of macrotexts – messages which are not limited to digital forms of art themselves, but engage different medial forms. Macrotexts are multitext (encompassing at least two texts) and multiauthor constructs, which enter into semantic relations and give rise to additional, emergent meanings. Macrotexts are governed by the principle of the transtextual creation of meanings. Therefore, while intertextuality maintains the dominance of the written text, in which the present intertextual signals are meant to model textual meanings,[35] and the references themselves (appealing to the reader's memory) create the interpretative context, in the case of transtextuality, meaning is created through the semantic interaction of all texts comprising the maxrotext. Particular texts from the maxtotext may exist independently and usually do so, but by creating the macrotext, they enter into a dialogue, which results in the emergence of additional meanings. This dialogue is the result of the fact that transtextual signals go both ways – they are not one-directional, but bidirectional, as in the case of traditional intertextuality. A good example of such a macrotext is the relationship which Camille Utterback's and Romy Achituv's installation

34 Marta Dzido, *Matrioszka* [Russian nested doll], accessed September 4, 2023, http://haart.e-kei.pl/matrioszka/start.html.

35 An example of an intertext action in the space of a hypertext is the work *Victory Garden* by Stuart Moulthrop, which references Jorge Luis Borge's *The Garden of Forking Paths*.

Text Rain enters into with Apollinaire's calligram "Il pleut" and Evan Zimroch's poem "Talk, You," which was used in the installation. Apollinaire's poem – rain painted with letters of words about raining; the interactive installation, in which the falling letters of the poem present on screen may only be held back by the body of the recipient; Zimroth's poem, in which glances, gestures, corporeality, connect two people more so and more truthfully than the distancing words, by entering into an interaction, become a story about different aspects of the body and the word, about the capability and futility of communication, of expressing meanings. Roberto Simanowski underlines that just as in Zimroth's poem, conversation turns out to be vapid and futile, in *Text Rain*, the corporeal contact of the user with the words seems equally aimless and semantically empty.[36]

Clear traces and different forms of presence in multiple semiotic systems, media, and discourses in digital works lead us to pose the question of whether we are still dealing with literature at all. It would seem that literature in the digital environment can be spoken of in all instances when the dominant, initializing function in the creation of the work is held by meaning derived from the word as an arbitrary sign, but also from the word as an iconic, acoustic, moving, interactive, artistically modelled sign. Here, the art of the word is realized to the fullest degree. However, digital literature would differ from print literature in the multiplicity of forms on the level of representations and its kinetic onticity, as well as in the strengthening of the kinetic and acoustic role of the texture in the shaping of literary meanings. The source of the meaning-making impulse rests in the interactions between the semantics of the layer of representations, the semantics of the word as an arbitrary sign, and the semantics of the actions engaging the body of the user, their data, and their surroundings. It is in this interaction between the aforementioned aspects that literary figures, as well as narration itself are shaped.

Another essential feature is the design of the form or representation, which presupposes that the work manifests itself in many different ways – or the creation of plots determined by potential narrative orders by way of linking. As a result, multivariate plots are shaped in which we are dealing with alternative narration, but also (as Marie-Laurie Ryan calls it) participatory narration, or one in which already at the perceptive level has multiple equally valid sequences and in which it is the recipient who decides on a specific order of events.

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36 Roberto Simanowski, *Digital Art and Meaning. Reading Kinetic Poetry, Text Machines, Mapping Art, and Interactive Installations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 38. See also Francisco J. Ricardo, "Reading the Discursive Spaces of Text Rain," in *Literary Art in Digital Performance. Case Studies in New Media Art and Criticism*, ed. Ricardo (New York: Continuum, 2009), 61–63.

As a result, the multiplicity of possible interpretations of the literary work becomes multiplied by the multiplicity of the possible forms of its depiction. By substituting a set, unchangeable texture with one which unveils itself in front of the recipient, one whose textual elements are being transformed, reveal themselves, or disappear on screen or in space and are dependent on the actions of the user, their data, and their surroundings, we are dealing with a digital literary text which already at the level of representation is a process and an action. It gains an agential, performative dimension. This last aspect is revealed particularly in the case of electronic holograms, installations,[37] where the textual-iconic work as a spectacle mediates and textualizes actual space.

The Tasks of Digital Humanities (Including Digital Philology)

Studies on digital literature, understood as an artistic form which could not be achieved beyond the digital medium, require broadly understood humanistic skills, requiring us to go outside traditional literature studies. This requires what Simanowski calls digital hermeneutics,[38] and which leads to the creation of categories, descriptive tools in the free interaction between the theories of the literary text, visual, acoustic, audio-visual art and programmable forms of messaging. It also requires flexibility of thought, the freedom to make associations, but also boldness in creating descriptive tools, recovering signals of theories from analyses of digital texts[39] and turning them into theories in confrontation with newest theories from different artistic fields, other discourses, and other media.

The present state of culture requires us to shape the skill of thinking about a text from multiple states of consciousness (different cognitive/academic perspectives). It requires us to develop a digital philology in strict connection with philological and digital humanities. Combining, entering into mutual relationships in the space of a literary work of hypertext, playability, augmented

37 Examples thereof are the installations created in 1999: *Screen* (Noah Wardrip-Fruin), *Frames* (Grahame Weinbren), *Text Rain* (Camille Utterback, Romy Achituv), or in 2008 *Typographic Synesthesia* (Rachel Stomel). See also Bruce Wands, "Digital Installation and Virtual Reality," in Bruce Wands, *Art of the Digital Age* (London: Thames &Hudson, 2006), 98–121.

38 Roberto Simanowski, "What Is and Toward What End Do We Read Digital Literature?," in *Literary Art in Digital Performance*, 13–15.

39 The necessity to strive to "generate local theoretical proposals stemming from analysis of one's own research material" and not limited thereto is underlined by Ewa Domańska, "Jakiej teorii potrzebuje współczesna humanistyka?" [What sort of methodology do the humanities of today actually need?], *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2010): 54.

and virtual reality, generators, hapticity, localization, individualization, binary sound, and new quality, undiscovered thus far, albeit thanks to the dynamic development of digital technologies, coming in a short while in literature, leads and will lead to the emergence of increasingly complex literary forms, requiring philological insight drawing upon knowledge on the digital world. Changing literature requires the development of adequate descriptive tools and cognitive perspectives, allowing for the discovery of aspects which thus far remain undiscovered – both in their digital and print interpretations. The evolution of culture, the tying together of all of its elements lead us to the presumption that just as electronic literature makes use of the achievements of print literature, so will print literature created in the digital age be inspired by the textual achievements of digital art.

Critical consideration is also required with respect to the digital methods of researching literature (including in digitalized form). On the one hand, quantitative methods, algorithmically proposed by digital humanities, allow us to quickly search through textual resources, compare, and hierarchize them – allow us to save time and objectivize our research actions; on the other, they run the risk of automation and simplification; of subtracting cognitive individualism with mere statistics. Roberto Simanowski notices that without theoretical reflection, delight in statistics, algorithmic analytical methods, quantitative methods also present in digital humanities, may lead to the illusion of truth, populism, and the aesthetics of a spectacle. Hence the necessity for philological-philosophical reflection on the epistemological consequences of changing tools and cognitive methods,[40] the influence of digital methods on the object of study and research conclusions and, more broadly, on our thinking,[41] worldview, identity, and the human condition. This reflection falls firmly in the mutuality of ethical implication, as discussed by N. Katherine Hayles:

> In my view, an essential component of coming to terms with the ethical implications of intelligent machines is recognizing the mutuality of our interactions with them, the complex dynamics through which they create us even as we create them,[42]

40 Roberto Simanowski, *Data Love. The Seduction and Betrayal of Digital Technologies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 80–82.

41 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think. Digital Media and Contemporary Technologies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

42 N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer. Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 243.

but also the question of humanity, posed from different research perspectives (e.g. posthuman[43]).

Meanwhile, an important task for digital humanities is concern for the archiving of works, the publication and distribution of digital literature,[44] the recovery of digital works tied to outdated, discontinued software, rewriting them in active programs (so that the largest risk to digital art does not come from the very technologies which birthed them). Of importance is also concern for digital, critical editions of manuscripts, printed works, the creation of editions drawing upon digital tools for cognitive reasons (e.g. the reconstruction of the creative process, as in the case of the digital edition of the philosophical thought of Jacques Derrida[45]). Last but not least, a crucial task of modern humanities is reflection on the onticity of the virtual universe (the metaverse).

The development of modern humanities is in fact inspired by the need for the description of the textual and discursive nature of not only the products of digital technologies, but also of STEM sciences, biological sciences, and manifestations of social behaviors. In fact, this new nature is both a need and a norm in the context of traditional humanities. The changing textual, discursive, medial situation requires both description and reflection. That which is new in the textual sphere requires adequate, agential humanities and forces their modernization. In effect, the consequence of broadening the research field, of changes in the sphere of texts and discourses, which undergo academic reflection, is the immanent reorganization of the humanities.

For the humanities and digital philology, neither technology nor the structure of the medium are transparent – these are factors which co-create the text, are engaged in literariness, and as such are objects of their study. Digital humanities, including digital philology and within it – digital literature

43 Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge-Medford: Polity Press, 2019), 1–4.

44 Dene Grigar, "Challenges to Archiving and Documenting Born-Digital Literature: What Scholars, Archivists, and Librarians Need to Know," in *Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities*, 237–244, accessed September 4, 2023, https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/electronic-literature-as-digital-humanities-contexts-forms-practices/ch20-challenges-to-archiving-and-documenting-born-digital-literature-what-scholars-archivists-and-librarians-need-to-know; James O'Sullivan, "Publishing Electronic Literature," in *Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities*, 255–266, accessed September 4, 20203, https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/electronic-literature-as-digital-humanities-contexts-forms-practices/ch22-publishing-electronic-literature.

45 Projekt Item: *Derrida Hexadecimal*, accessed September 4, http://www.item.ens.fr/derrida-hexadecimal/.

studies (created in the works of such scholars[46] as: Jay David Bolter, Roberto Simanowski, Jörgen Schäfer, Peter Gendolla, Marie-Laure Ryan, Kairn Wenz, N. Katherine Hayles, Markku Eskelinen, Francisco J. Ricardo, Stuart Moulthrop, Dene Grigar, Scott Rettberg, Astrid Ensslin, Alice Bell, Jonathan Dovey, Tom Abba, Kate Pullinger, Alexandra Saemmer, Roberto Simanowski, Michael Marcinowski; and in Poland: Mariusz Pisarski, Urszula Pawlicka, Piotr Marecki, Monika Górska-Olesińska, Emilia Branny, Elżbieta Winiecka, Agnieszka Przybyszewska, Ewa Wójtowicz, Bogusława Bodzioch-Bryła, Maciej Maryl), extending and modifying the field of humanistic reflection is a natural consequence of social, economic, and civilizational phenomena.

In conclusion, digitality changes the humanities, participates in their shaping to the same degree as social, political, and economic changes – in short, all cultural changes.[47] It is one of the ever-present variables in a network

46 See for example Jörgen Schäfer and Peter Gendolla, eds., *Reading Moving Letters; Beyond the Screen. Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces and Genres* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010); Roberto Simanowski, ed., *Digital Humanities and Digital Media. Conversations on Politics, Culture, Aesthetics, and Literacy* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2016); Markku Eskelinen, *Cybertext Poetics. The Critical Landscape of New Media Literary Theory* (London: Continuum, 2012); Chris T. Funkhouser, *New Directions in Digital Poetry* (New York: Continuum, 2012); Peter Gendolla and Jörgen Schäfer, eds., *The Aesthetics of Net Literature. Writing, Reading and Playing in Programmable Media* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007); Roberto Simanowski, *Data Love. The Seduction and Betrayal of Digital Technologies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 80–86; Scott Rettberg, *Electronic Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019); Tom Abba, Jonathan Dovey and Kate Pullinger, eds., *Ambient Literature. Towards a New Poetics of Situated Writing and Reading Practices* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); Mariusz Pisarski, *Xanadu. Hipertekstowe przemiany prozy* [Xanadu. Hypertext transformations of prose] (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2013); Urszula Pawlicka, *(Polska) poezja cybernetyczna. Konteksty i charakterystyka* [(Polish) cybernetic poetry. Contexts and characteristics] (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2012); Urszula Pawlicka, *Literatura cyfrowa. W stronę podejścia procesualnego* [Digital literature. Towards a processual approach] (Gdańsk: Katedra, 2017); Ewa Szczęsna, ed., *Przekaz digitalny. Z zagadnień semiotyki, semantyki i komunikacji cyfrowej* [Digital text. On issues of semiotics, semantics and digital communication] (Kraków: Universitas, 2015); Elżbieta Winiecka, *Poszerzanie pola literackiego. Studia o literackości w internecie* [Broadening the literary field. Studies on literariness on the Internet] (Kraków: Universitas, 2020); Ewa Szczęsna, *Cyfrowa semiopoetyka* [Digital semiopoetics] (Warszawa: IBL, 2018); Bogusława Bodzich-Bryła, *Sploty: przepływy, architek(s)tury, hybrydy. Polska e-poezja w dobie procesualności i konwergencji* [Weavings: flows, archite(x)tures, hybrids. Polish e-poetry in an age of processing and convergence] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum w Krakowie, 2019); Maciej Maryl, *Życie literackie w sieci. Pisarze, instytucje i odbiorcy wobec przemian technologicznych* [Literary life on the web. Writers, institutions and recipients facing technological changes] (Warszawa: IBL, 2016).

47 The thesis on the influence of the digital medium on the text and its meaning, as well as on literature as a mediated experience and modelled by the media is formulated and justified by Gendolla and Schäfer, "Playing With Signs," 17–36.

of relationships between the factors comprising a text as a social construct embedded in specific discursive, medial, and semiotic orders.[48]

Abstract

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The Humanities in the World of New Technologies (and Vice Versa). Toward Digital Philology

The article presents the mutual relations between the humanities and technology, especially today, in the era of dynamic development of digital technologies. It describes strategies for shaping artistic meanings in electronic literature, which enrich the literariness (poetics of literary texts) with new forms of representation. These include in particular: the semantics of the moving and sounding semiotic tissue of the work and the user's actions; creating semiotic (especially kinetic) and interactive (causative) figures, alternative narrative; fictionalization of the semiotic layer of the work and data about the reader; creating text meanings in the interaction of the semantics of a word as a graphic-sound sign and as an conventional sign; engaging data about the reader's space and himself in shaping literary meanings (ambient, personalization); creating macrotexts. These strategies (also affecting the latest printed literature) initiate the development of digital philology, in particular semiopoetics, which recognizes the role of the semiotic layer of the text and the user's actions in shaping the meanings of a literary work. The article formulates the tasks of the digital humanities and digital philology.

Translated by Krzysztof Kietzman

Keywords

electronic literature, digital humanities, digital philology, rhetorical figures, semiotics, poetics, semiopoetics

48 See Theo van Leeuwen, *Introducing Social Semiotics* (London: Routledge, 2005), 181–267.

New Perspectives

Roma Sendyka

New Humanities in Holocaust Studies: Bystanders in the Cadre of Visual Culture

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1. New Humanities, Visual Culture and Predicaments of Bystander Studies

"Look at him. Tell them over there. You saw it. Don't forget."[1] The call comes from the extended account that Jan Karski gave to Claude Lanzmann in 1978. It explains the source of the urgent obligation experienced in 1942 by someone who saw the inside of the ghetto and the camp, and was tasked to carry the message to the world. It also defines the nature of the further, postwar, efforts of the former Polish courier. The verbs "look," "tell," "see" and "don't forget" are bound together into pairs of actions, inextricable and sequential. The sentence illustrates the vital importance and plurality of visual acts in the process of wartime witnessing: registering and recounting the events. Later on, the "era of the witness"[2]

1 A passage from Jan Karski's account in Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah. An Oral History of the Holocaust. The Complete Text of the Film* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 174.

2 See Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, trans. Jared Stark (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

linked memory to narrative and, by privileging written text and the spoken word, led to obscuring the original experience, repeatedly brought up in testimonies. Recurring references to the acts of seeing are particularly typical of accounts left by those who were part of violent events from a certain distance. I would like to take a closer look at the strategies of registering the Holocaust persecutions and deaths within the "large and heterogeneous collection of subjects who enable and benefit from traumatic violence without taking part in it directly,"[3] that is "bystanders."

Historical and critical research on the Holocaust at large and dealing with the diversity of the "third group" in particular offers little variety when it comes to specific terms, often treating "observers," "spectators," or "gawkers" as synonyms. Meanwhile, over the past thirty years of their development, visual culture studies have made a strong enough mark on cultural research to warrant a serious discussion of the concept of g a z e and the many varieties of l o o k i n g developed within that interdisciplinary field.[4] The sublimation of terminology used to describe the eye contacts and visual relationships between individual actors might, in my view, explain many of the questions concerning the degree of subjectivity, agency, cognitive capacity, and communication capabilities of the group displaying bystanding behavior.[5] It prompts more diverse diagnoses, increasingly necessary as knowledge of the actions of bystanders throughout Second World War grows in scope and nuance.[6]

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3 See Michael Rothberg, "Trauma Theory, Implicated Subjects, and the Question of Israel/Palestine," accessed January 20, 2018, https://profession.mla.org/trauma-theory-implicated-subjects-and-the-question-of-israel-palestine/. Also Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford University Press, 2019).

4 See for instance Chapter 4 on "The Gaze" and Part Two on "Types of Seeing" in James Elkins and Erna Fiorentini, *Visual Worlds: Looking, Images, Visual Disciplines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); for an overview see *The Handbook of Visual Culture*, ed. Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell (London: Berg Publishers, 2011).

5 In this article, I reserve the term "witness" for those members of the "community complementing the scene of violence," who undertake the effort of testifying. My reasons are explained in "Od świadków do postronnych. Kategoria bystanders i analiza 'podmiotów uwikłanych'" [From witnesses to bystanders. The category of bystanders and the analysis of 'entangled entities'] published in the volume *Świadek: jak się staje, czym jest?*, based on a conference that took place in Krakow on January 11–12, 2018 (Kraków: Wydział Polonistyki UJ, 2018). On "bystanding behavior" see Mary Fulbrook, "Bystanders: Catchall Concept, Alluring Alibi, or Crucial Clue," in *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History*, ed. Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvw04hm8.5.

6 For an overview see Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs, eds., *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018).

Linking traditional historiography with the interdisciplinary cultural analysis focused on visual culture may help Holocaust studies to dissect certain under-researched or untapped issues with more precision. In this way, the transplantation of new tools fashioned within the intellectual current called sometimes "New Humanities"[7] may substantially support the furtherment of the Holocaust, genocide and violence research.

When Raul Hilberg first turned the spotlight on the category of bystanders in the language of Holocaust studies, he identified within it h e l p e r s, b e n e f i c i a r i e s, and, indeed, o b s e r v e r s[8] (some of the translations of his book followed that path and replaced the loaded "observers" with "onlookers").[9] Perhaps the clearest argument for the serious treatment of scopic terms came from Paul A. Levine, who in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies* described, in the section dealing with "protagonists," this deeply problematic category, which he termed o n l o o k e r s. Despite problems with the size of the group (Hilberg believed it to be the biggest of all he identified), its diversity (it was made up of individuals, social groups, and even institutions and entire states), and motivations (helpers, informers, beneficiaries, enablers, etc.), "scholars have made considerable progress in this field of Holocaust studies in recent decades," writes Levine, continuing: "this research reveals the need for new terminology. Now that historians have demonstrated the degree to which persecution, plunder, deportation, and murder of the Jews was knowable, indeed in many respects public, the term 'on-looker' seems more precise than 'bystander' to designate those who did not prevent or intervene against those events. 'On-looker' underscores the act and proximity of witnessing and suggests greater responsibility for outcomes, even perhaps a greater emotional range of available responses to them and a greater implicit reinforcement to the perpetrators, than does the more neutral-sounding 'bystander'."[10]

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7 See the concept of "new humanities" explained in Ryszard Nycz, *Culture as Verb: Probes into the New Humanities* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2023); see also Ryszard Nycz and Przemysław Czapliński, *Nowa Humanistyka: Zajmowanie pozycji, negocjowanie autonomii* [New humanities: Taking positions, negotiating autonomy] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2018). Nycz relates to Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer, *The New Humanities Reader* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Custom Printing, 2000).

8 See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

9 See, for example, Raul Hilberg, *Pachatelé, oběti, diváci. Židovská katastrofa 1923–1945*, trans. Margarita Troševa (Praha: Argo, 2002).

10 Paul A. Levine, "On-lookers," in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, ed. Peter Hayes and John K. Roth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 158. The term "on-

2. Onlooker, Spectator, Observer, Gawker

As far as it is understandable that historical research remains indifferent to the plurality of meanings behind scopic terms, it is surprising that visual culture itself has so far failed to appreciate the potential of its own tools applied to Holocaust studies.[11] Conversely, quite a lot is known about the weight of vision within the sensory economy of Nazism – from its aestheticization of the body and personal dress, through the spectacle of the public performance of power, up to harnessing cutting-edge visual technologies in the service of ideology.[12] No other human sense found itself as obsessively controlled throughout the Holocaust as vision. "During the stages of concentration, deportations, and killings, the perpetrators tried to isolate the victims from public view"; "Voyeurs were not welcomed either. Such watching, especially by Germans, was considered an indecency"; "But regardless of whether the spectacles repelled or attracted the viewer, any rumors and stories [...] were an irritant"; "the German administrators would order the Polish population to stay indoors and keep the windows closed with blinds drawn"; "a German army inspector complained that soldiers had become inadvertent witnesses of an operation"; "Often enough the onlookers could not be barred"; "on the island of Corfu they gathered to watch from street corners and balconies"; in Hungary, when "Jews were marched, flanked by Hungarian gendarmes, to the train one morning in 1944, people stood in the street and laughed"; in Zhitomir, the execution of two Jews "was watched by a crowd of soldiers from rooftops."[13]

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lookers" also appears in Henrik Edgren's 2012 analysis, inspired by Levine's call: Henrik Edgren, ed., *Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Causes and Consequences of Passivity* (Stockholm: Forum för levande historia, 2012), 21.

11 In the introduction to *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), one of the visual culture movement's leading theorists, Nicholas Mirzoeff, openly admits that the field has problems addressing difficult history and heritage.

12 All these topics can be found in Jan Borowicz, *Nagość i mundur. Ciało w filmie Trzeciej Rzeszy* [Nudity and uniform. The body in the film of the Third Reich] (Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2015) or his [to be published] Jan Borowicz, *Perverse Memory and the Holocaust: A Psychoanalytic Understanding of Polish Bystanders* (London: Routledge, 2024). The fascinations of Nazi with photography (evinced by the decision to introduce photography classes to *Hitlerjugend* school curriculums) is explored by German curator Petra Bopp. See Petra Bopp, *Fremde im Visier. Fotoalben aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2009).

13 Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, 215–216.

One notable exception to this omission is Ernst van Alphen's 1997 book *Caught by History*,[14] as well as his 2005 follow-up *Art in Mind*,[15] which analyzes the depictions and visual afterimages of the Holocaust, but neither book deals with the diverse forms of subjectivity generated by alternative scopic acts. In this context, Elżbieta Janicka's *Pamięć przyswojona* [Assimilated memory], which incorporates into its analysis of the relationship between victims and bystanders some essential concepts from visual culture, including "gaze," "observer," and "panopticon," could be considered a pioneering effort,[16] and the turn toward visual research it suggests is, in my opinion, worth exploring further.[17] Consequently, I would like to discuss whether we can equate looking at the Holocaust and seeing its horrors. Are observers and gawkers looking in a similar manner? In other words, the following deliberations are an attempt at calibrating the terminology used to describe bystanders and a proposal for a broader application of already available cultural studies methodologies to deepen sociohistorical and Holocaust research.

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14 See Ernst van Alphen, *Caught by History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

15 Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). See also Bal's study: Mieke Bal, *Of What One Cannot Speak. Doris Salcedo's Political Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), in which the critic examines the work of Doris Salcedo, drawing on the concept of the witness and visual analysis tools.

16 Elżbieta Janicka, "Pamięć przyswojona. Koncepcja polskiego doświadczenia zagłady Żydów jako traumy zbiorowej w świetle rewizji kategorii świadka" [Memory acquired. The conception of the Polish experience of the Holocaust as collective trauma in the light of a revision of the concept of bystander], *Studia Litteraria Historica* 3/4 (2014–2015).

17 Janicka's analysis from the "Pamięć nieprzyswojona. Dekonstrukcja" [Memory acquired. Deconstruction] chapter warrants a discussion. The idea to examine social relations in Poland during World War II using the concept of the panopticon and the "panoptic society" theoretically conceptualizes the scenes constituting the specific Holocaust literature trope described, among other places, in Michał Głowiński's famed text: using eyes and visual metaphors to produce a sense of dread experienced by ghetto escapees (Michał Głowiński, "Oczy donosiciela" [Eyes of an informer] *Zagłada Żydów* 2 (2006): 854–855). My reservations concern the extrapolation of "panoptic visual violence" into an essential attribute of wartime society, an "oppressive" interpretation of the right to look (*droit de regard*), to draw on Bourdieu (Pierre Bourdieu, *La domination masculine* (Paris: Seuil, 1998)), *sans* the emancipatory meanings proposed in an earlier text by Derrida, who is widely believed to have authored the term (see: Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Droit de regard* (Paris: Editions du Minuit, 1985); see also the comments in Mirzoeff's *The Right to Look*). Janicka exploits the violent character of the gaze (as used by Sartre, Lacan, and other early visual culture theorists), which has been repeatedly challenged since its development and replaced with more nuanced concepts.

a) Looking, Seeing

> Claude Lanzmann: Ask Mr. Gawkowski why he looks so sad.
> Henryk Gawkowski: Because I saw men marching to their death.[18]

The basic meaning of the verb "to look,"[19] which first appeared in Polish dictionaries in the fifteenth century, is "to exercise the power of vision upon." Meanwhile, "to see"[20] means "to perceive or detect as if by sight." At first glance, both verbs describe the same basic function of the visual organs. But there is a significant difference between them. The saying "you're looking, but you're not seeing" is a clear illustration of the meanings subconsciously connoted by language users. "Looking" – or *patrzeć* in Polish, a word with a rather unclear etymology – suggests a passive, purely physiological visual perception, stripped of any cognitive disposition: with the eyes taking in a scene, noting its constituent elements, but higher cognitive functions switched off, not processing any of the input visual data. The "poor Christian looking at the ghetto" cannot be a witness – he can only, as Miłosz aptly diagnosed, dread the coming judgment and having nothing to say. And he cannot s a y anything, because he did not k n o w – he did not s e e.

The one who sees (and in Polish, the verb for "seeing" predates "looking" by a century) perceives or detects "as if by sight." The Polish word for "to see," *widzieć*, is the root of the adjective *widomy*, or "visible" (and then *wiadomy*, which is "known" or "apparent" in English: like in many other languages,[21] seeing is related to knowing). The seeing person recognizes and understands what they are looking at. The Polish words for "apparition" and "seer" – *widziadło* and *jasnowidz*, respectively; also note "the Seer of Lublin" – suggest something more: that seeing might transcend material vision, gazing into the hidden heart of things, beyond the empirical order.

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18 Lanzmann, *Shoah*, 37. I am using this source of the transcript of the documentary. I am, however, critical of the omission the publication makes in relating the bystanders' enunciations. See Roma Sendyka, "Naturellement: Speech Variants of Holocaust Bystanders in Claude Lanzmann's Shoah," *Przekładaniec* 2019: Translation and Memory (December 11, 2019): 7–25, accessed June 2, 2024, https://doi.org/10.4467/16891864ePC.19.009.11384.

19 English definitions of all terms used herein come from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary: *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s. v. "Look," accessed October 3, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/look

20 *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "See," accessed October 3, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/see

21 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 2.

b) Viewing, Glancing, Peeking

> Claude Lanzmann: But they could work a field a hundred yards from the camp?
> Barbara Janicka: They could. So occasionally he could steal a glance if the Ukrainians weren't looking.
> Claude Lanzmann: He worked with his eyes lowered?
> Barbara Janicka: Yes.[22]

In Polish, the verb "to glance,"[23] *spoglądać*, meaning "to take a quick look at something," emerged in the eighteenth century from the older, fifteenth-century *oglądać* – "to view." A person engaged in viewing looks from different angles, surveying almost; they have time and the opportunity to approach the object (they possess greater mobility than any other modes of looking we will discuss here). Their actions suggest a cognitive disposition, which comes in useful in legal contexts (where the Polish term for performing a visual examination is the phrase *dokonywać oględzin*, the latter word being a noun formed from the verb). From a person engaged in "viewing," we might expect a detailed, methodical report or an exhaustive description – but not necessarily including any diagnoses or conclusions, as that is not their job. The verb itself comes from the pre-Slavic *ględati, a multiplicative of the stative verb *ględěti, "to look." The sight of the viewer glides across the surface of objects in a manner similar to the eyes of a person that is l o o k i n g, but not s e e i n g. Viewing, however, at least generates some tangible data.

A person engaged in peeking, meanwhile, casting only furtive glances, wishing to remain invisible, and violating the privacy of the object of their actions, adds into the amalgam of counter-cognitive attributes a surfeit of violence (casting a glance conceived as t a r g e t e d) and a connotation of delight, sexual satisfaction, transgression, pleasure drawn from a sight not-for-me, an image captured without permission. The thrust of the voyeur's will is beyond doubt, but his subjective existence is incomplete as he is forced to remain hidden and take care not to make his presence known.

Glancing and peeking are both brief, implying lack of time. To glance is to cast "a quick look" and its Polish version involves a suggestion of physical contact between the object and the eye, aligning with ancient beliefs in the eye's capacity for extramission (which conceived the eye as a single point able to

22 Lanzmann, *Shoah*, 26.

23 *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s. v. "Glance," accessed October 3, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/glance.

emit a quasi-ray touching reality). If those looking are subjects lacking some degree of agency, lacking higher cognitive function, resembling a non-human camera in which the shutter never snaps shut, then those viewing are akin to a mobile recording machine. Those peeking, meanwhile, are a hidden camera, registering only what it is aimed at. The images they produce are not intended to be subjected to reason – only to satisfy a libidinal urge.

c) Spectator

> Claude Lanzmann: He lived at this very spot?
> Czesław Borowy: Right here.
> Claude Lanzmann: Then he had a front-row seat for what happened?
> Czesław Borowy: Naturally.[24]

The Polish public, sitting in "front-row seats" in the theater of the Holocaust, could be considered a combined pool of spectators. This idea organizes Grzegorz Niziołek's discussion of Polish postwar theater – which could also be read as an original prelude to a visual analysis of the Holocaust. Niziołek builds on Hilberg's idea of the Holocaust being fully, even "excessively," visible,[25] to draw a radical conclusion that bystanders could be defined as spectators, for whom "Jewish suffering becomes nothing more than spectacle."[26] In Polish, the word for "spectator," *widz*, has the same etymology as the verb "to see," which implies that the spectator has some capacity to recognize and understand what they are seeing. The term also has an institutional connotation – in East Slavic languages, the term appeared in legal contexts, to denote a court agent, an assessor, tasked with examining the witness. Today, however, it is predominantly used for its meanings associated with theater and performance.

The Latin *spectator* derives from the verb *spectare* and denotes a person watching a public event. All previously offered meanings linking spectators with institutions conceive the former as a person participating in undertakings designed by some higher subject. The spectator, according to the word's nineteenth-century connotations, is passive, motivated by pleasure, concealed in the darkness of the theater auditorium (bringing him closer to the peeking), inattentive, prone to offense, and susceptible to actions directed

24 Lanzmann, *Shoah*, 24.

25 Grzegorz Niziolek, *The Polish Theatre of the Holocaust*, trans. Ursula Phillips (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 7.

26 Ibid., 17.

by others, isolated from the center of events, and stripped – again – of full agency;[27] in the twentieth century, Guy Debord added obedient consumerism to this sweeping set of attributes.[28] In Jacques Rancière's telling, "there is no theater without a spectator […]. But according to the accusers, being a spectator is a bad thing for two reasons. First, viewing is the opposite of knowing: the spectator is held before an appearance in a state of ignorance about the process of production of this appearance and about the reality it conceals. Second, it is the opposite of acting."[29] A spectator, therefore, is incorporated into the designs of an institution that imposes upon him its own guidelines for performance, a script of action or renunciation thereof. Niziołek proves that adopting the principle of theatricality makes the witness no longer a witness, but a spectator, not under any obligation to take action.

To summarize, a spectator is not capable of providing the personal, objective testimony that a witness is morally compelled to provide: involved in actions designed by someone else, he is trained to be passive and mimic other participants, while the infusion of affects precludes objectivity (while enabling, importantly, self-identification with anyone posted on the stage). This is also the first term of all those mentioned that is a noun in Polish, rather than an active participle; an aside – while the previous terms have their proper gendered forms, the word "spectator" in Polish does not have a female variant.[30] Seen through that lens, a spectator becomes more of a function that cannot simply subsume a specific subject with its particular attributes. As such, a spectator is an ontological fiction insofar as it is only a construct of the institution that projects it.

d) Gawker

> Abraham Bomba: maybe it's not nice to say, but I will say it. Most of the people, not only the majority, but ninety-nine percent of the Polish people

27 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 3.

28 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

29 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso Books, 2009), 2.

30 Interestingly enough, English had a female version of the noun, "spectatress," or the more correct version "spectatrix," a term that had been used since the seventeenth century. Today, however, the male "spectator" is dominant. See http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=spectator, accessed January 20, 2018.

> when they saw the train going through – really like animals in that wagon, just our eyes looked outside – they were laughing, they had a joy.[31]

"Gawker" might just be the most puzzling term for a scopic subject: its particular otherness in Polish derives from the atrophy (or at least decline) of the singular form of the noun. In other words, while the plural, *gapie*, raises no eyebrows, the singular "gap" seems artificial, especially in the nominative. Likewise acceptable is a related form, the noun "gapa," denoting someone who absentmindedly failed to notice something. The singular was used in centuries past to denote "a fool, a dope, a naif" – a character in a comedy, and derived from a word used for "crow." The Polish plural "gapie" first emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century as an import from German, where the verb "gaffen" means "to stare." The negative connotation here is clear – few would ever willingly call themselves a naive dope, which means that this subjectivity is rarely ever considered for self-identification.

The inadequacy of the singular form of the noun suggests that you cannot be a gawker alone: gawking is something you do with others, when we become a part of a crowd, mindlessly staring. Gawkers assemble spontaneously, around an unexpected public event, motivated by curiosity and pleasure derived from observing a unique, often graphic incident. The affective load is at its peak here, while subjective individuation is lowest (as only a collective self-identification is possible) and the need to be understood is nominal; libidinal motivations are dominant, with pleasure-seeking as the primary objective, and the thrill of being in proximity to danger thinned only by the fact that it affects the other.

This variant of the scopic subject within the frame of the Holocaust illustrates well the ideas, developed today by Michael Rothberg and Mary Fulbrook,[32] among others, about the sudden, situational, and contextual becoming of the subjects in scenes of violence. A gawker is different from a spectator, although they are both watching a public event from within a collective. The former is swept up by the incident and his agency is limited; he can be subsumed by the crowd. The latter, meanwhile, makes a sovereign decision to adopt the position of spectator. Consequently, we cannot unreservedly call societies tangled up with scenes of violence "spectators" of the Holocaust: a different noun would be more suitable. Niziołek's analysis, while confirming the operability of theater metaphors, apparently

31 Lanzmann, *Shoah*, 31.

32 Rothberg, "Trauma Theory." See also Mary Fulbrook, "Bystanders: Catchall Concept, Alluring Alibi or Crucial Clue?," in *Probing the Limits of Categorization*, 15–35.

requires additional discussion over the distribution of terms defining the overall frame of the project, seeded by the author himself when he pondered whether "Polish postwar culture is a culture of 'witnesses,' 'observers' or 'gawkers'."[33]

In the case of Holocaust violence, the crowd of gawkers is bound not by a "higher institution" (the "director," the "scene" of the incident) as much as by the object observed by the mob: once the condition of the object no longer holds sway over the affects of the assembled, the crowd will disperse. It also differs from a traditional theater performance in that the situation has no pre-approved script and unfolds along unpredictable lines. In this sense, a gawker is potentially open to danger (if the violence focused on the object anchoring all the attention suddenly changes its vector), whereas a spectator operates in safe conditions. And while the previously discussed variants of actors at the scene of the crime suggested someone remote from the observed object, the term "gawker" connotes physical proximity and explicit visual contact. Consequently, labeling bystanders "gawkers" defines a collective subject, constituted situationally and only for a brief moment, incapable of more structured undertakings and stripped of any agency beyond taking simple actions (looking, yelling, gesturing); still capable of feeling (pleasure and fear), but not of analysis or testimony. There is no doubt that the gawker looks and absolves himself, by way of affective resonance with the crowd, of any obligation to see.

e) Observer

> Abraham Bomba: On the other side of the tracks, more trains standing there. And I was watching through about eighteen, twenty, maybe more, wagons going away. And after about an hour or so the wagons coming back but without the people.[34]

The term comes from the Latin *observare* – to watch or to note (*observātiō* – watching, observing). An observer undertakes to perceive, carefully and in granular detail, he or she watches something, for a longer time. Definitions frame them as detached, rational, with an analytical, academic disposition: a scholar investigating a given event in a highly planned manner, patiently, systematically, and over an extended period of time. They record changes, attempting to interpret the collected data. This particular position entails the highest

33 Niziołek, *Polski teatr Zagłady*, 53.

34 Lanzmann, *Shoah*, 32.

degree of subjectivization so far: an observer has agency, extensive cognitive competencies, and is trustworthy. The scientist approach precludes affective involvement. Consequently, when labeling bystanders in the Holocaust as "observers," we mean those who saw, who understood what they were seeing, and could record and interpret these events, at the price of detaching emotionally from the objects of their observation and tempering of any notions of empathy.

It would seem that the observer is the sole variant of the scopic subject granted autonomy and the full extent of cognitive capacity. But even here, it turns out, we must tread carefully: in his exhaustive analysis of the position of the nineteenth-century observer, Jonathan Crary mentions that the Latin *observare* also "means 'to conform one's action, to comply with,' as in observing rules, codes, regulations, and practices."[35] The observer follows protocol, submits to imposed norms in what just might be the unwritten rule of separating oneself from the fate suffered by the Jews, of "uninvolvement," of "disengagement," one that ultimately enables and assists the perpetrators and their helpers. It seems that the term could potentially be applied to specific situational descriptions of bystander behaviors in wartime Poland.

"An observer," Crary continues, "is more importantly one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations," and whose capabilities are predefined by the laboratory apparatus required for observation or, more broadly, a "heterogeneous system of discursive, social, technological, and institutional relations."[36] Consequently, despite the analytical capacities, the observer might ultimately prove inadequate in the face of events transcending the norm or somehow inconceivable. If we therefore assume that the Holocaust obliterated all the "systems of relations" that preceded it, a radical interpretation could argue that, paradoxically, the Holocaust is an event "without observers," just as Dori Laub called it "an event without a witness."[37]

3. Bystanders in the Critical Lenses of Visual Culture Studies

Converting labels into visual culture concepts applicable to the social field of the Holocaust permits us to define more precisely a variety of relationships: looking at the Holocaust, seeing the Holocaust, being its spectator, peeking at

35 Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 5–6.

36 Ibid., 6.

37 See Dori Laub, "An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony, and Survival," in *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 75–92.

it, observing it, and gawking at it all mean something different. The semantic differences introduced by these categories are so significant that using them as synonyms can only be counterproductive, particularly if we embrace the idea of scopic overdetermination (in the sense of controlling or, on the contrary, hyperbolizing visual stimuli) of the Holocaust. A more detailed analysis of the nouns describing individual variants of the scopic subject also makes clear the functional character of the visual exchange. Here, looking can have a variety of properties, extending beyond just disciplining and objectifying its targets, and producing a rich multitude of effects (far broader than what I managed to present here; the analysis above may be continued, especially by investigating the visual strategies of both victims and perpetrators, as well as the multidirectional web of exchange between potential positions within the scene of violence and the situational transitivity of scopic subjectivities – by which I mean the fluidity of the positions themselves, which can be occupied by perpetrators, victims, and even bystanders).

In the context of further research into the scene of the Holocaust, genocide in general, and, even more broadly, any violation of the right to live, the possibility to cross-fertilize Holocaust studies with new currents in humanities opens new and promising perspectives. Using the concepts explored above may allow us to more precisely define the variants of bystander subjectivity and actions – dependent, as it is now evident, on their personal decisions, emotional identification, type of cognitive processes, ability to undertake volitional acts, and affective investment but also structured by complex external institutional, social, discursive, and technological relations, and temporal and spatial circumstances, including object proximity.

Bystanders always end up on some side. Never neutral, "even with their backs turned and their minds otherwise occupied,"[38] they become active actors on the scene of violence, which thus transforms into a field of visibility – the size, variants, and properties of which are still open to description. Observing scopic relations enables a different and novel interpretation of the distribution of individual roles in the area. Bystanders, as characters moving within its confines, are not fully autonomous subjects – the weakness of their sovereignty also comes in many variants and intensities, and visual analysis permits more precise estimates of its decline. Only those who saw can be witnesses. They saw people marched to their deaths. They looked at them. They told others what they saw. They did not forget.

Translated by Jan Szelągiewicz

38 Jan T. Gross, "Sprawcy, ofiary i inni" [Perpetrator, victims, and others], *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 10 (2014): 885.

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Abstract

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New Humanities in Holocaust Studies: Bystanders in the Cadre of Visual Culture

In this essay, bystanders are analysed not through the lens of topography (i.e. geographical closeness to the events expressed in the term "by-stander"), but as visual subjects. Concerning those who witnessed the Holocaust, bystanders are linked with various types of scopic activities, especially negative ones: they are often generalized as passive onlookers, as "those who stare" with libidinal pleasure [Polish: gapie; French: badauds; German: Schaulustige]. It is surprising, however, that the frequent use of scopic vocabulary is not necessarily associated with developed theoretical concerns. The recent visual (iconic) turn, co-constitutive for newer approaches in humanities, however, has provided a refined and varied set of tools for analysing the faculty of seeing. Therefore, it is no longer plausible to discuss the processes of seeing without precise conceptualizations. Instead of employing visual terms merely as synonyms, this essay challenges and restructures available categorizations for bystanders as those acquiring knowledge through the sense of sight.

Keywords

bystander, witness, onlooker, visual subject, viewer, observer, gawker, Holocaust, bystading behavior

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A Stroll Through Literature of Tomorrow: A Brief (Futurological) Speculation[1]

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Frío, frío, pero al mismo tiempo caliente, caliente.[2]
Roberto Bolaño, *Comedia del horror de Francia*

The more deeply one delves into the analysis of contemporary literature, exploring how it evolves and comparing it to its predecessors, the more challenging it becomes to resist the occasional urge to view it from the vantage point of a potential future, when it will be seen as recent history. This perspective can stimulate one to give some thought to the evolving landscape of (possible)

1 I am deeply thankful to Professor Piotr Śliwiński from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań for extending an invitation to me some time ago to deliver a lecture on this very topic, which served as the catalyst for me to revisit and consolidate some thoughts stemming from an earlier postgraduate university seminar I held.

2 Roberto Bolaño, *Comedia del horror de Francia*, in Bolaño, *Sepulcros de vaqueros* (Barcelona: Alfaguara, 2017), 192. Cf. "Cold, cold, but also hot, hot." Roberto Bolaño, *French Comedy of Horrors*, in Bolaño, *Cowboy Graves*, trans. Natasha Wimmer (New York: Penguin Press, 2021), 106.

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literature of the future. Not all too distant future – for we must exercise caution, as two hundred years from now, there may be no humans left on Earth, let alone literature – but the immediate one, say, a few decades from now.

Scholars, for understandable reasons, seldom get absorbed into this particular subject, they might at most briefly touch upon it.[3] It is a temptation that has mostly beckoned to writers themselves. Jorge Luis Borges, Elias Canetti, Italo Calvino, Stanisław Lem, Ricardo Piglia, Vladimir Sorokin, Zadie Smith or Enrique Vila-Matas are among the not so many contemporary authors which have succumbed to the allure of deciphering the elusive signs of present evolution. They have bequeathed us with occasionally astute, if not consistently remarkable, insights on this matter. Yet, it was arguably Virginia Woolf who presented the concept of such speculative contemplation most persuasively:

> Far the greater number of critics turn their backs upon the present and gaze steadily into the past. Wisely, no doubt, they make no comment upon what is being actually written at the moment; they leave that duty to the race of reviewers whose very title seems to imply transiency in themselves and in the objects they survey. But one has sometimes asked oneself, must the duty of a critic always be to the past, must his gaze always be fixed backward? Could he not sometimes turn round and, shading his eyes in the manner of Robinson Crusoe on the desert island, look into the future and trace on its mist the faint lines of the land which some day perhaps we may reach? The truth of such speculations can never be proved, of course, but in an age like ours there is a great temptation to indulge in them. For it is an age clearly when we are not fast anchored where we are; things are moving round us; we are moving ourselves. Is it not the critic's duty to tell us, or to guess at least, where we are going?[4]

Woolf posed this encouraging question almost a century ago in 1927, and if we now embrace it, we are immediately prepared to embark on a stroll through literature of tomorrow.

So, where are we going? Right ahead, let us take a stroll beneath the ever-changing sky – now clear, then veiled by clouds. Following Roland Barthes,

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3 For instance, the stimulating and informative book *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction*, as indicated in its blurb, is deemed "essential reading for anyone interested in the past, present, and future of contemporary literature". Nonetheless, the last section can be extrapolated from the previous ones, rather than being treated separately in a chapter. Cf. Robert Eaglestone and Daniel O'Gormon, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

4 Virginia Woolf, *Poetry, Fiction and the Future*, in Virginia Woolf, *Selected Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), 74.

we can envision literature as a whole as comparable "to a sky, at once flat and smooth, deep, without edges and without landmarks; like the soothsayer drawing on it with the tip of his staff an imaginary rectangle wherein to consult, according to certain principles, the flight of birds, the commentator traces through the text certain zones of reading, in order to observe therein the migration of meanings, the outcropping of codes, the passage of citations."[5] Barthes' analogy, especially the concept (at first a little odd) of the "imaginary rectangle," strikes me as particularly insightful. Let us draw our own imaginary rectangle while examining the vast landscape of contemporary literature. Within this frame, there is an inside and an outside. While its exact boundaries (or "certain zones of reading") may seem somewhat arbitrary, tentatively drawing the lines remains indispensable. Contemplating the rectangle, the commentator, much like a soothsayer, can aid us in foreseeing certain tendencies in literary evolution.

By the way, you may notice that I occasionally tread on the stilts of expressive images. Because you can see further from on high, it is true, but also, I am inclined to believe that metaphor often represents "the higher form of the concept."[6] But while I largely agree with this perspective, I also bear in mind Roberto Bolaño's caution, from whom I have likely learned the most (though it is still very little, almost nothing) regarding the subject of deciphering fuzzy signs from the future. I recall the words of an insightful philosophy professor in Bolaño's last tremendous novel – the one that catapulted him into the posthumous future: "a metaphor is like a life jacket. And remember, there are life jackets that float and others that sink to the bottom like lead. Best not to forget it."[7] I will do my best to keep it in mind.

While the outside of my imaginary rectangle might not hold particular interest for me, it significantly shapes the conditions inside, which, after all, do not exist in isolation. Firstly, this imaginary rectangle is situated within a certain space, what we used to refer to as the world – in our case, the Earth. During our walk, I will not attempt to predict how the natural and social environment, which will serve as the lifeworld for people also in the time to come, will transform. However, this transformation will have a bearing on whether speculations like mine possess any substantial foundation, irrespective

5 Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (1973), trans. Richard Miller (London: Blackwell, 2002), 14. Indeed, Barthes wrote about the text rather than literature as a whole, but he might not object to this minor recontextualization.

6 Peter Sloterdijk, *What Happened in the Twentieth Century? Towards a Critique of Extremist Reason*, trans. Christoper Turner (Cambridge: Wiley, 2018), 11.

7 Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, trans. Natasha Wimmer (London: Picador, 2009), 254.

of their factual accuracy. It is entirely possible that they might not. For we need not be anxious about the future of literature – it will endure as long as someone requires it. However, the future of our world is something we have reasons to be anxious about because there will not be another one, not just for literature, but for all of us. Hence, the uncertain future of the world as we know it remains the central issue that I set aside in my contemplation of the future of literature.

I also will leave aside the four outer sides of my imaginary rectangle, but not before I define them and justify my lack of interest in them. The first outer side is defined by literature created in the future by non-human intelligent machines. The second side encompasses popular literature of low artistic value, a vast spectrum ranging from commercialism to kitsch. The third side represents valuable literature, though already outdated at the time of its release, making it belong to the past from an evolutionary perspective. Lastly, the fourth side comprises literature produced in the future, influenced by new media that do not yet exist and about which we know very little. So here is my starting rectangle, the assumed outside and the not as yet distinguished inside. There is of course nothing per se obvious in the lines that have been drawn. Somebody else might consider my virtual outside as a proper inside, arguing that just within one of those excluded areas a real revolution is already taking place or will soon take place. It may be true but I have to admit quite frankly I doubt it very much. And I will explain the reasons why.

Firstly, I am not particularly interested in literature created – or rather, generated – by non-human authors, even though I acknowledge it will likely become a significant part of literary production. These creations may primarily fall into two categories: popular literature and exclusive experimental literature. However, I believe neither will directly influence the evolution of literature. Mass literature already relies on pre-fabricated elements (structures, plots, dialogues, vocabulary, etc.), even when developed by human authors. And while experimental avant-garde e-literature can be intriguing, the initial fascination might ultimately lead to disappointment (just as – and the comparison may be quite eccentric, but not arbitrary – at first fascinating and finally disappointing were the attempts to teach sign language to apes[8]). Debates will certainly arise about algorithm-generated literature, and it will find devoted admirers, including scholars. However, critics of this form will point to the original sin – the lack of intentionality. While machine-generated literature may resemble human-created works, it does not possess any artistic

8 Cf. Herbert S. Terrace, *Why Chimpanzees Can't Learn Language and Only Humans Can* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

intuition, intention, and personal experience. And if not based on these, what are the essential components of quality art? Replacing these elements with a set of instructions undermines the credibility of the synthesis.[9] And as in mass literature credibility is often less crucial, so the absence of intentionality might not significantly impact it. However, this is not true for more ambitious literary endeavors.

Furthermore, I am uninterested in literature of low artistic value, which, despite increasing competition, will likely continue to be produced by humans in the coming decades. This disinterest is not a result of elitism, real or imagined, but rather because we possess adequate knowledge about the future of low-value popular literature. Let us examine the mass-market popular literature of a hundred years ago and today. Although there are some differences (and let us set aside certain aspects of social didacticism), they are akin to the distinctions between a hammer from a century ago and a modern hammer. For basic tools, substantial changes are challenging (and therefore unlikely) – a hammer remains a hammer, a practical and handy tool with limited room for development, much like a knife or a stool, simple utilitarian objects. The low-value popular literature of the next decades will remain a familiar hammer, albeit with a better-profiled handle and a lighter shank. This means that we might find in it some elements (or some devices) characteristic of literature with more creative and intellectual aspirations, just as contemporary popular bestsellers sometimes incorporate structural solutions that would have been groundbreaking a century ago. I am convinced that this type of literature – typically schematic, lacking innovation, adhering to familiar forms, not requiring much from itself or its readers, and fulfilling the need for accessible simplicity – serves a societal purpose. It provides relaxation and occasional subtle moral as well as other lessons. It is also valuable for sociological research as it reflects societal and individual desires and requirements. However, it is unlikely to significantly influence the trajectory of literary evolution, neither today nor in the future.

I have no expectations of popular literature, and I am also not interested in literature of artistic value that merely replicates outdated structural patterns or "models already obsolete a hundred years ago."[10] I have just dis-

9 Cf. Arkadiusz Żychliński, *Woraus wird die Literatur von morgen gemacht? Künstliche Kreativität in der (nicht nur österreichischen) Gegenwartsprosa*, in *Trajektorien der österreichischen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. Beate Sommerfeld (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2023), 249–266.

10 Cf. Enrique Vila-Matas, *The Future*, trans. Thomas Bunstead, accessed July 23, 2023, http://www.enriquevilamatas.com/textos/textdiscursoTheFuture.html. It is originally author's

cussed literature of diverse value, and now I would like to introduce the idea of modernisms of various – looking for an apt term I would ultimately say – generations. If we would call modernist most generally a literature whose main feature becomes diversification, the planned making of differences, then instead of labeling its subsequent phases as premodernism, modernism and the later problematic post-, post-post-, hyper-, meta-, etc., -modernisms, I prefer to speak of modernism in the first, second, and subsequent generations, much like successive generations in technology development. Within these modernisms, we find bands or directional ranges. For instance, literary realism, a prevalent creative disposition in modern literature, presents itself slightly differently in the modernism of each generation, as do other isms. It is important to note that while generations follow each other in an evolutionary sense, they coexist synchronically. In the twentieth century, we still encounter literature rooted in the spirit of the nineteenth century. Javier Cercas once aptly referred to such literature as "a nineteenth-century novel written in the twentieth."[11] However, I am not concerned with nineteenth- or twentieth-century literature written in the twenty-first century because it does not align with contemporary modernity and tends to lose relevance within its time. While this literature may retain value – one can continue to use their pocket mobile phone until it falls apart, while everyone around them has long since upgraded to smartphones – it has often ceased to be a driving force for change from an evolutionary perspective. Its time as a beacon of innovation has usually passed (though not necessarily irreversibly).

Lastly, I am not particularly interested (again, only here and now) in literature of the future that merely emerges as a utilitarian consequence of inevitable technological change. This aspect represents the most porous side of my rectangle. To be more precise, I am uninterested in one aspect of this literature, while another dimension is indeed of the utmost importance, as I will discuss shortly. Undeniably, the impact of technological advancements on literature, though at times imperceptible, has been immense. Without printing, the widespread dissemination of books would not have occurred. The advent of the daily press facilitated the modern serialization of stories. The development of photography played a role in the rise of literary realism

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acceptance speech after awarded the FIL Literary Award in Romance Languages in Guadalajara in 2015.

11 Cf. Javier Cercas, *Even the Darkest Night*, trans. by Anne McLean (New York: MacLehose Press, 2022), 220. Incidentally, the crime novel by Cercas is itself an excellent example of the mentioned "nineteenth-century novel written in the twentieth" (or, to be precise, twenty-first).

in the mid-nineteenth century. The late-twentieth century "murder of reality" has fueled the hunger for the very reality in literature.[12] And so on. Hence, it is evident that the literature of the second half of the twenty-first century will also be shaped by the technologies and media of the era. Literature is primarily composed of words, although not exclusively, and these words can be presented to the audience in various formats: on traditional sheets of paper, on e-readers that replicate the printed page, on screens through various applications, or even in auditory form after conversion into speech, among others. These shifts might undoubtedly impact the economic models of the book market, but do they fundamentally alter literature? In most instances, they continue to primarily impact mass literature.[13]

However, the exponential pace of technological transformation leaves us with limited knowledge today, except that future changes will likely further divide and connect societies and intensify immersion, immersing people more deeply in virtuality. As we contemplate the (probable) future, it is reasonable to assume that our understanding of real presence will evolve. How will our thinking about it change when, instead of sending voice and image into the ether, we start traversing space as holographic avatars? When, at even a second glance, it will be difficult to distinguish whether we have before us a flesh-and-blood human being or rather one but without flesh and blood, though actually no less real after all? This is poised to accelerate the ongoing corrosion of reality.[14] And for those deeply immersed in virtual reality – they will become more and more numerous – it may be increasingly challenging to find compelling reasons to disconnect from it. Future literature, without a near expiration date, will likely hold limited appeal to those socialized in an environment of immediate reactions and an absolute present. So what can we say with confidence about the deeper implications of future technological changes? They will likely render high-art literature even more niche, diminishing its relevance and impact. While many may hope for the spread of affordable and effective tools for self-development and societal empowerment, the Enlightenment's assumption about the inherent allure of self-knowledge and higher consciousness seems overly optimistic. We observe a daily retreat not just from freedom (sometimes ironically in the name of freedom, this

12 Cf. Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime* (1996), trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso Books, 2008), xi and David Shields, *Reality Hunger* (New York: Knopf, 2010).

13 Cf. Mark McGurl, *Everything and Less: The Novel in the Age of Amazon* (London: Verso Books, 2021).

14 Cf. David Chalmers, *Reality +: Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2022).

time freedom from social solidarity) but also from knowledge, often under the banner of alternative knowledge, for example serving Q-drops little by little in the inner circles of networked insiders.[15] The ongoing use of technological progress in the service of societal decline will continue to preoccupy the small republics of scholars. This issue is pertinent to our considerations insofar, as societies plagued by demagoguery and irrationalism may not nurture a large audience for slightly more demanding literature.

I conclude this discussion of future literature outside the hazy rectangle and shift my focus to the literature of particular interest within it. This literature may be quantitatively limited, but it plays a pivotal role in shaping the literary landscape. It is far-reaching, with primarily artistic and non-commercial aspirations. It effectively engages with the branches of the canonical tree (i.e., literature from the past) as well as our evolving cognitive abilities. It genuinely broadens our capacity for perception and understanding of our world, including literature itself. This form of literature is relatively independent of the medium, mode of presentation, or formal institutionalization. Its ontological status remains consistent before and after being made available to the public. The overall evaluation of this literature hinges on several threshold categories. I could perhaps compare this literature to a Swiss pocket knife, which, while its fundamental functions persist, continually evolves, incorporating new tools and discarding obsolete ones. The driving force behind this literature remains the creating of space for non-trivial responses to questions about the beings we are.[16] (As Deborah Eisenberg succinctly put it: "I think of fiction as a kind of inquiry into what it is to be a human and what it is to be a human now."[17]) To date, no other entities, whether living or inanimate, have created anything comparable for self-exploration. However, the framework within which these questions are posed is constantly evolving and expanding by inclusion.[18] I am optimistic that an audience large enough to sustain this literature will persist even half a century from now, thanks in part to changes

15 Cf. Mike Rothschild, *The Storm is Upon Us: How QAnon Became a Movement, Cult, and Conspiracy Theory of Everything* (London: Melville House, 2022).

16 Cf. Arkadiusz Żychliński, *Laboratorium antropofikcji. Dociekania filologiczne* [Anthropofiction laboratory. Philological investigations] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN, 2014).

17 Deborah Eisenberg, *The Art of Fiction No. 218*, accessed July 23, 2023, https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6203/the-art-of-fiction-no-218-deborah-eisenberg.

18 Furthermore, the only change in the content and themes of future literature that can be predicted with some certainty is the continued and progressive inclusion of subjects and entities, including those that are presently socially excluded for various reasons.

in the social sphere around literature, which facilitates the gathering of scattered readers. It will likely continue to develop, albeit within a niche. But can we predict, at this moment, the potential directions of its development?

If literature not only changes but also develops, we can perceive this development as guided by the principles of literary evolution.[19] In the process of creative "descent with modification"[20] – in this case it is a slightly more technical description of openness to and fear of influence – the authors and their works strive to align with the changing spirit of their times, encompassing both societal and artistic aspects. In fortunate cases, this adaptation leads to progress, defined operationally by introducing formal innovation with cognitive implications.[21] While novelty without consequences can be intriguing, it will not be our focus here. On the other hand, the absence of novelty leads to stagnation, which, though there may occasionally be exceptions to this rule, rarely propels art forward. It is important to note that evolution need not always correlate with progress, as it can also entail regressive development. However, I will exclude that aspect from our discussion. The literary evolution I have in mind does not primarily emphasize progress as acceleration or exaltation but as expansion – extending the space of writing and, consequently, the possibilities of expression.

As I survey the literature of the last half century, I discern an evolutionary moment characterized by – I would venture to simplify it this way – four closely intertwined principles. I will refer to them as the principle of indeterminacy, the principle of unexpectedness, the principle of semi-avant-gardism, and the principle of transitivity. I cautiously anticipate that these principles will also persist in shaping the literature of the near future. In the next part of my stroll of exploration, I will delve further into these ideas.

Let us commence with the principle of indeterminacy. It posits that literature has intentionally grown more indeterminate in its genealogical sense since the first wave of modernism. While we still rely on established classifications to divide the literary landscape into genres and subgenres, their practical utility has increasingly come into question. A century ago, Virginia Woolf

19 One of the pioneering scholars to consider the progression of literature in the context of evolutionary development was Yuri Tynianov. Cf. *On Literary Evolution* (1927), in Yuri Tynianov, *Permanent Evolution: Selected Essays on Literature, Theory and Film*, trans. Ainsley Morse and Philp Redko (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2019), 267–282.

20 I deliberately employ the Darwinian framework to summarize the evolutionary process. Cf. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (1859), ed. Gillian Beer (New York, Oxford University Press, 2008), 243.

21 Cf. Arkadiusz Żychliński, *Zwrot przez współczesną. Pryzmaty* [A turn by contemporary. Prisms] (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2020), 81.

keenly envisioned a "further panorama in the course of evolution,"[22] when she speculated about the literature of the future. She noted that it "will be written in prose, but in prose which has many of the characteristics of poetry. It will have something of the exaltation of poetry, but much of the ordinariness of prose. It will be dramatic, and yet not a play. It will be read, not acted. By what name we are to call it is not a matter of very great importance."[23] The subsequent century has not only upheld these speculations but also intensified this process significantly. Therefore, it is not surprising that we can reiterate these ideas with some modifications today, recognizing that these are ongoing processes occurring over extended periods. It is reasonable to assume that the valuable literature of the future will be even more intentionally indefinite, blending familiar genres from the past with elements yet unknown to us today. The end result will be a literature so diverse that attempting to label it would be a futile exercise. Despite this, traditional literary models will continue to persist. Even in the second half of the twenty-first century, we may still encounter works resembling most ordinary poetry and prose from the twentieth and ninetieth centuries. However, these conservative enclaves will likely resemble the gatherings of hobbyists, akin to friendly philatelists' clubs, rather than serving as the catalysts for broader artistic transformations.

The principle of indeterminacy aligns with the principle of unexpectedness, which posits that new and influential artistic forms emerge in the most unexpected places.[24] Consider, for instance, what Virginia Woolf, despite her remarkable insight, could not have foreseen: that literature would progressively become more visual in the literal sense, with text increasingly intertwined with images as an integral component. The most noteworthy development, of course, was the rise of strip cartoons and graphic novels. Who could have predicted in the first half of the twentieth century that this form of drawn literature, once associated with superficial, low-value stories, would evolve into one of the most captivating, rapidly expanding, and innovative literary realms, starting no later than the late 1980s? In their introduction to the graphic novel in 2015, Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey noted that, "if awarding

22 In his thought-provoking comments on future literature, Enrique Vila-Matas cites certain writers who perceived "el panorama más allá en la evolución." He specifically mentioned Franz Kafka, but it's evident that Virginia Woolf also belongs to this rare breed of writers. Cf. Enrique Vila-Matas, *Perder teorías* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2010), 47.

23 Woolf, *Poetry, Fiction and the Future*, 80.

24 Cf. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Theaterprobleme*, in Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *Theater: Essays und Reden* (Zürich: Verlag der Arche, 1980), 72. Dürrenmatt discusses in his essay how he, as an author, stumbled upon the crime novel in the 1950s. During that period, almost no one anticipated that it could also serve as a platform for high-art fiction.

a 'Special' Pulitzer Prize to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* in 1992 had been controversial at the time, for many reasons one can quietly state today that giving the Nobel Prize for Literature to Chris Ware in 2016, announced in advance here as a scoop by the authors of this book, will no longer be received as a subject of comparable surprise."[25] Despite the fact that, as we know, the Nobel Prize for Literature was ultimately awarded to Bob Dylan in 2016, this does not undermine the accuracy of Baetens and Frey's observation. It is worth noting, though, that the Nobel Prize for Literature tends to lag behind the spirit of the times by a couple of decades. So, the recognition of Chris Ware (or his artistic successors and peers) may still be on the horizon.

The case of the graphic novel vividly illustrates Viktor Shklovsky's assertion: "new forms of art are created by the canonization of low forms of art."[26] However, identifying which contemporary low art might potentially gain significance through creative treatment in the coming half-century is challenging, not only for obvious reasons but also because the concept of low art has lost its meaning. In today's expansive literary landscape, it is difficult to pinpoint art of little value solely based on its origin. I, for one, struggle to find such branch of art within the broader literary context. However, it might be functionally valuable to differentiate between established literature, which has been legitimized by a long evolutionary tradition, and literature in the early stages of development, such as electronic literature.[27] This newly opened space is undoubtedly vast, but it still predominantly serves as a testing ground for emerging and advanced authors, as well as a playground for aspiring artists, rather than being the primary venue for creating or presenting the literature of the future. This genre's situation might parallel that of graphic literature during its initial phase. So, despite my reservations, is this form of literature poised to surprise us in the second half of the twenty-first century? I do not believe so. But I may have taken my skepticism a bit too far because ongoing technological changes are also expanding the literary landscape and according to the principle of unexpectedness, it is precisely the as-yet-unexpected form that will leave future readers in awe and wonder.

The principle of semi-avant-gardism suggests that the era of extreme or radical transformations in literature has largely passed, giving way to a period

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25 Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2.

26 Viktor Shklovsky, *A Reader*, ed. and trans. Alexandra Berlina (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 150. The remark comes originally from the book *Sentimental Journey: Memoirs 1917-1922* (1923).

27 Cf. Philipp Schönthaler, *Die Automatisierung des Schreibens & Gegenprogramme der Literatur* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz Berlin, 2022).

of continuous modulation that will persist indefinitely. Early modernist authors fervently manipulated the cranks and switches of the literary machine, drastically altering its settings and even venturing into entirely uncharted territories. These great innovators pioneered new paths in literary development, making significant breakthroughs. However, contemporary masters of the craft, equally gifted, now fine-tune literary instruments in different scales. They engage in regulation, modulation, and nuanced adjustments, recognizing that the extremes have already been explored, and the era of the first literary explorers has drawn to a close. The time has come for innovators working within narrower ranges, contributing no less vital developments to literature. Their discoveries and innovations, while profound, may be less immediately apparent in their originality compared to the groundbreaking inventions of earlier pioneers. The most intriguing developments in contemporary literature, which are likely to exert significant influence on its future, often occur not within the realm of radical experiments or conventional continuity. Instead, they unfold along a third path, which does not merely bridge the gap between the two but rather runs parallel to them. This path emphasizes comprehensible originality. While contemporary authors continue to seek new and uncharted literary territories, they are less inclined to demand that readers suspend their desire for comprehensibility. Innovative contemporary literature tends to be less hermetic and demanding than its counterparts from a century or even half a century ago. It is literature that holds the potential to captivate a broader audience, even if ultimately only a minority within the majority. This is the trajectory that much of the unconventional and fresh literature from the early decades of the twenty-first century seems to be following. I believe this observation will hold true for literature emerging in the coming decades as well.

The final principle, the principle of transitivity, underscores the growing permeability between different spheres. It involves intentionally breaking down boundaries, particularly the one that separates the diegesis (the reality portrayed in literature) and the non-diegesis (the actual reality beyond literature). This trend has given rise to a clear effect: the rise of literature that conceals its fictitious nature, adopting various techniques, ranging from the straightforward to the sophisticated, to present itself as a "true story" based on facts. Consequently, literature has at times drawn remarkably close to participatory journalism, and, conversely, journalism has adopted a notably literary character. Another indicator of this trend is the thriving popularity of autofiction, characterized by the presumption that the narrator is (almost) identical to the author.[28]

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28 Cf. Arkadiusz Żychliński, *Autozapis. Z historii najnowszej (literackiego) pisania o sobie* [Autosave. From the classic (literary) history of writing about yourself], in Mateusz Falkowski,

The principle of transitivity is both a result of the crisis surrounding ideas of truthfulness, credibility, and authenticity and a reflection of the liquid nature of contemporary daily life. It is in this environment that previously tightly sealed boundaries, at least in our perception, have started to become permeable. (It is essential to recognize, though, that our approach to this permeability is selective. While some solid boundaries seem indeed to melt into air, others are being continually established, both in our imagination and in reality.)[29]

I have previously touched on genre transitivity in the context of the principle of indeterminacy. Now I will briefly mention media transitivity. It is likely that the literature of the near future will more extensively integrate various media, a trend that is already underway. Literary works with a discreetly modular approach, combining text, images, and sound in a disjointed manner, as well as literary installations striving to transcend or expand beyond literature, will become increasingly common.[30] What is noteworthy is that these developments will largely originate from within literature itself rather than being imposed from external sources. This evolution represents the flip side of the ongoing technical changes that include other literary forms that are gaining importance. Therefore, we should expect to see literature interwoven with cinematic imagery and other interactive forms of engagement. This multifaceted realm of fiction will not simply replicate one medium in another but will strive to offer intriguing complementary experiences.[31] J. Hillis Miller once

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Piotr Graczyk, Cezary Woźniak, eds., *Estetyka/inestetyka. Współczesne teorie działań artystycznych* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Universytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2020), 89–105.

29 Cf. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), and Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2000).

30 An instructive example from contemporary Polish literature is the work *Inni ludzie* [Other people] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2018) by Dorota Masłowska. The book itself takes the form of a compact disc and contains text and graphic modules. The digital edition partially omits the graphic module, suggesting it is an optional feature. Additionally, there is an audiobook with its own audio module. While these modules can be experienced separately, they are clearly designed to complement each other. Engaging with all three aspects results in a more rewarding and enduring reading experience. In 2022, a film adaptation directed by Aleksandra Terpińska was released, but it doesn't quite fit as a fourth module; it's more of a film version of the book.

31 One might consider the expansive universe of Margaret Atwood's handmaids as an example. It began with the book *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), which, while highly influential, is by no means an easy read. It then evolved into an mediocre ongoing television series (2017–) for which Atwood serves as a consulting producer. This adaptation eventually led the author to write the sequel novel, *The Testaments* (2019), which is penned in a wholly different, very accessible style. What's particularly intriguing, from my perspective, is

suggested that if "Shakespeare were resurrected today, he might be creating video games or ad spots, not writing plays."[32] While I hold the American critic in the highest regard, I do not find this remark particularly convincing: the Shakespeares of the future would create literature augmented by new media rather than abandoning it in favor of those media.

Certainly, it is evident that these individual principles partially overlap, staying closely intertwined as I previously mentioned. This interconnectedness might be attributed to the fact that they are simply the four inner sides of the same imaginary rectangle. And this interwoven interplay serves in essence as the overarching metaprinciple. The guiding motto of modernity itself underscores an unspoken directive to unite elements that have traditionally been kept distinct.[33] When viewed from the perspective of literary evolution, this assembling leads to a somewhat paradoxical outcome: it involves both a simultaneous narrowing (or the illusion of narrowing) and an expansion (sometimes genuine and sometimes only apparent) of the literary space.[34]

I am heading towards the end, and I have left out so much unspoken. Like a program of delayed self-updating inscribed in certain works, causing them to become suddenly relevant, regardless of – or with – the passage of time. "It is from the notebooks of the present that the masterpieces of the future are made,"[35] as Virginia Woolf astutely observed. Yet, the notebooks of the present can be read distinctively both in the present and in the future. Some works seem untimely, requiring patience to find their moment: the literature of tomorrow will partly consist of the newly read literature of yesterday.[36] Jorge Luis Borges, in an essay, aptly noted:

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how the first book, the series, and the second book intentionally overlap. To fully grasp the intricate web of plots, one can't avoid experiencing all three. While such expansive universes have been popular in mass culture for some time, there are still relatively few examples of them in high-art literature.

32 J. Hillis Miller, *Literature Matters Today* (2012), in *An Innocent Abroad: Lectures in China* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 267.

33 One could, perhaps somewhat exaggeratedly, summarize the formula of modern literary evolution as "merge," akin to Chomsky's basic operation in the Minimalist Program.

34 The narrowing happens because, for instance, genres lose their significance, and the expansion occurs as literature incorporates new forms of expression, such as graphic ones.

35 Virginia Woolf, *How it Strikes a Contemporary*, in *Selected Essays*, 30.

36 To illustrate this point, consider the curious case of Tove Ditlevsen. Her autofictional novels were somewhat ill-timed when they emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, they have become remarkably relevant and timely on a global scale, particularly in the Western world, by the end of the 2020s and the beginning of the 2030s.

> Literature is not exhaustible, for the sufficient and simple reason that no single book is. A book is not an isolated being: it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable relationships. One literature differs from another, prior or posterior, less because of the text than because of the way in which it is read: if I were granted the possibility of reading any present-day page – this one, for example – as it will be read in the year two thousand, I would know what the literature of the year two thousand will be like.[37]

We are unable to predict the new genealogies that the not-too-distant future will craft or the precursors that the posterity of writers will identify for themselves. We also cannot foresee which events and authors will compel our descendants to view our contemporaries through a different lens, recognizing in their works what may seem less pertinent to us today.

That much – very little, almost nothing – I was able to discern on my stroll through literature of tomorrow. In conclusion, I will echo Italo Calvino's succinctly apt words from over three decades ago: "my faith in the future of literature rests on the knowledge that there are things that only literature, with its particular capacities, can give us."[38] One could attempt to expound upon that remark, or one could engage in discourse with it. I endorse it with confidence, looking ahead to the century to come. We need not fret about the literature of the future. Let us take care of the world of ours and literature will take care of itself. It will likely unfold, as anticipated, into something markedly different from what we envision today. My modest and vague speculations during this walk have revolved around how we might contemplate the trajectories of its impending development, and the principles that steer its evolution, transforming it before our very eyes. May the reader continue to ponder these thoughts on their own stroll.

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37 Jorge Luis Borges, *For Bernard Shaw* (1951), trans. James East Irby, in Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 213f.

38 Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1988), trans. Geoffrey Brock (Boston: Penguin Books, 2016), 1.

Abstract

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A Stroll Through Literature of Tomorrow: A Brief (Futurological) Speculation

This article offers some modest speculations on the possible literature of the not-too-distant future. It is based on the observation that literature not only changes but also evolves, and this evolution can be seen as guided by certain principles. Such four closely intertwined contemporary principles that may continue to shape the literature of the near future are the principle of indeterminacy, the principle of unexpectedness, the principle of semi-avant-gardism, and the principle of transitivity. The article explores these principles and also discusses potential dead ends in current literary development.

Keywords

comparative literature, contemporary fiction, literary evolution, future of literature

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1. Introduction

The discipline of literary studies,[1] in common with others within the broad field of the humanities, has not had a good press lately, and each year it faces even more difficult challenges. An attempt to diagnose what literary studies is, and – even more importantly – what it should be, has recently led to a more dramatic question: is literary studies of any kind capable of validating one's existence, creating – or recreating – a position strong enough to survive in the modern world and not become an obsolete field of science, cultivated only from time to time and only out of obligation?

The gravity of this question is even stronger when we realize that, when a similar problem was raised in the early 2000s (as evidenced by, among others, the anthology *Sporne i bezsporne problemy współczesnej wiedzy*

1 In this article I consistently use the term "literary studies," whose quasi-plural form emphasizes the inherent complexity of the discipline.

o literaturze[2] [Disputed and indisputable problems of contemporary literary studies]), it took the form of a question regarding what to do with the dynamically developing and changing field of literary studies. These doubts therefore concerned the directions of the development of the discipline, not its survival.

The challenges that literary studies is now facing are no longer limited to determining whether it should remain relatively autonomous and methodologically coherent. Instead, two types of problems have emerged: the first, which could be categorized as internal, concerns the identity of literary research in the situation of the increasing expansion of new scientific subdisciplines, focused on a broad understanding of cultural studies and the need to form alliances with diverse academic disciplines, including those that are not even part of the humanities in a broad sense. The second, which can be described as external, stems from the problems of the humanities as such, which are increasingly criticized for being incompatible with the currently preferred model of science. Both these types of challenges are a direct outcome of the changes taking place in the system of academic research in Poland (especially regarding finances). At first, the reform replacing a subsidy system with a grant-based one was advertised by the government to the academic community as more effective and just: funds were supposed to be transferred to the "most deserving" recipients in each discipline. Soon, however, it became clear that this would not be the case: competition indeed took place, but rather than being between individual researchers, it was between diverse disciplines of science.

2. The Challenges of the Humanities as the Problems of Literary Studies

The current criticism of the humanities resembles the well-known positivist objections to everything that does not fit into a clear model of the functioning of science viewed in a narrow perspective, but would like to be treated as such. In the nineteenth century, an effective form of self-defense against accusations of being not-scientific-enough was the anti-positivist breakthrough, with its strong message about the value of all research that is not necessarily repeatable and not always intersubjectively communicable, but still provides an irreplaceable insight on ourselves and the world around us. However, Wilhelm Windelband's idea, supported and continued by Heinrich Rickert, which boiled down to separating the nomothetic and

2 Ryszard Nycz and Włodzimierz Bolecki, eds., *Sporne i bezsporne problemy współczesnej wiedzy o literaturze* [Disputed and indisputable problems of contemporary literary studies] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2002).

idiographic sciences while valuing the latter, only worked for some time. Just as it was only for some time that the concepts of Wilhelm Dilthey or Henri Bergson validated the foundations of the anti-positivist turn and provided arguments for a holistic understanding of the functions of the humanities and their individual disciplines. The anti-positivist breakthrough was also just a short pause in the era of domination of something that, for lack of a better term, can be called "pure science." This short breakthrough came with a price in the late twentieth century: from then on, humanities, as especially concerned with our experience as humans and as parts of society, began to have "social responsibilities."

Over time, this change, initially quite beneficial for the humanities, became a burden. Any science, in order to gain approval and financing, is now simultaneously held accountable for its – understood in various, mostly not coherent ways – scientificity and usefulness (and the fact that these two features do not have to be related is quite often simply lost in public discussions). This means that, paradoxically, on the one hand the situation used to be easier: individual fields or disciplines were held accountable solely for their scientific nature, so each field of the humanities with a well-established methodology and a clearly defined subject of research had at least basic tools to defend its good name. On the other hand, this type of attempt to justify the scientific usefulness of literary studies in Poland contributed to the field's progressive closure in the time before numerous breakthroughs (especially cultural ones). Excessive protection of the unity and uniqueness of literary studies was dangerous, because at first it blocked the gradual evolution of the scope and the methods of the discipline, and – after years of closure – provoked a revolutionary reaction. Since then, the field has been "revolutionized" by particular methodological fashions dozens of times, and the boundaries between individual disciplines have been loosened. In turn, literary studies – at first almost imperceptibly – began to corrode and dissolve in subsequent discourses.

In this respect, literary studies paid the same high price for an attempt to find its way in the new, modern science as the humanities (which are now required to be not only scientific, but also "useful"). In this situation, literary studies, which is somehow "by nature" more distant from the social sciences than sociology or psychology, is in a particularly difficult position. Questions that have arisen are: how can we today justify the desire to maintain a scientific discipline whose main goal is to interpret texts, even in the broadest sense? How can we find a place for literary studies in the increasingly endangered humanities, and how should we orient the field towards other sciences? Is it better to fight for autonomy or to negotiate alliances?

3. Between Theories

To try to answer these questions we should slightly reformulate the thesis about the crisis of the humanities. As Paul Jay stated in his book *The Humanities "Crisis" and The Future of Literary Studies*,[3] the challenges facing the humanities are not in fact urgent or new; on the contrary, they are recurrent and easy to predict, as accusations – almost identical ones – against the humanities have been recurring for decades. According to Jay, the question about the practical usefulness of achievements, as well as the conflict between "pure science," valued solely for its development of knowledge, and "practical science," valued due to its economic potential, are more or less constant. This redefinition of the phenomenon known as the "crisis" of the humanities into ongoing debate and critique forces us to look at the challenges of literary studies differently. For example, it undermines the suggestion that the current situation results from the fact that "real" science is developing dynamically, while the humanities are stagnant.

Nevertheless – as indicated by Jay, among others – literary studies still faces at least two great needs and challenges that must to be reconciled if the discipline is to thrive: on the one hand, the need to think about literature as part of a broader cultural and social reality is becoming more and more visible, but on the other hand, the need to maintain the autonomy of literary research is also becoming increasingly visible. Even more importantly, in recent years literary studies had been slowly losing its privileged position among the humanities: for decades, literary studies had been in the methodological avant-garde. Until the 1970s, it was in an exceptionally favorable situation: even when new discourses or research disciplines were created, either they were based on research tools developed within the field of literary studies (such as in the case of narratology), or literary studies was able to adapt, broaden and transfer further theories coined in different disciplines of humanities. Literary studies was therefore a field of dynamic exchange of theories, categories and concepts, one through which different concepts travelled between diverse scientific disciplines. This phenomenon, which is well described by Mieke Bal's[4] metaphor of traveling concepts, brought both positive and negative effects: on the one hand, it enabled a common space to be created within the humanities in which conducting inter- and later transdisciplinary research was possible, but on the other hand it also contributed to the gradual dissolution of the boundaries between individual disciplines and methodologies.

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3 Paul Jay, *The Humanities "Crisis" and The Future of Literary Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 7–33.

4 Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities. A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002)..

Therefore, the privileged theoretical position enjoyed by literary studies among the humanities is now in the past. Instead, the field is now negotiating both its scope and autonomy, and is being faced with many questions regarding its self-identity. More and more often, scholars tend to recognize that literature should be, to a point, treated as an autonomous field of enquiry, but at the same time it should be considered as part of a broader cultural phenomenon. In turn, literary studies is expected to stay both autonomous and open to new methodologies. This ambiguity and the need to study literature as a field that is entangled in multi-layered relationships with the non-literary and non-textual world are both promising and threatening. Promising, because they often allow us to say more than was previously possible, and threatening, because it might lead to an interpretation of literature in which it becomes not an independent subject of study, but only a secondary example of a certain thesis. This danger was also pointed out by Ryszard Nycz, known for his rather positive attitude towards opening literary research to the challenges typical of cultural studies, who pointed out that the text itself should always be the center of our interest as literary scholars, not necessarily a specific theory, and definitely not methodological fashion:

> Working on a text – this crowning competition of the literary profession – means at the same time working with the text and working by the text. This last activity is crucial and, in my opinion, specific to how humanities operate. […] In humanistic work, the text is at the same time an object, a partner and a guide…[5]

In this respect, the new challenge (in the positive sense of the word) for literary studies is problem-oriented methodologies (such as memory studies, ecocriticism, research on affect, trauma, experience, etc.). These are – as Jay, among others, has noted – an example of opening the discipline to satisfy the need for a specifically understood involvement and commitment, in which particular theories and methodologies derived from the humanities also serve to analyze non-textual problems. Such use satisfies both the demand for the autonomy of a specific field of research and its involvement. Moreover, as Jay claims, this type of involvement of the humanities is nothing new, nor is it something that would limit the possibilities of its development or eliminate texts from the first line of interest of literary studies. Jay's theses, which I mentioned earlier, are an important voice in the discussion about engaged humanities, one that seems now to be more than important. In the next part of this article, I will try to show that the ever-recurring conflict between

5 Ryszard Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria – nowoczesność – literatura* [Poetics of experience. Theory – modernity – literature] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2012), 10.

autonomous and engaged humanities may be – for example for literary studies – not destructive, but, on the contrary, useful and refreshing.

4. Humanities – Involved or Autonomous?

An important and necessary discussion for the Polish humanities, especially literary and cultural studies, took place not so long ago regarding Michał Paweł Markowski's book *Polityka wrażliwości. Wprowadzenie do humanistyki* [Politics of sensitivity. Introduction to the humanities].[6] This was another example of a book by a widely known Polish academic and philosopher being criticized, on this occasion by Jan Sowa, a researcher with an equally good reputation. Sowa, in his article published in *Teksty Drugie*, made it clear that the vision of the humanities proposed by Markowski did not suit him at all, to put it mildly.

Disputes between academics, especially if they involve both a slight generational and political conflict, as well as methodological differences, are nothing unusual, even when – as with this one – they take the form of quite fierce polemics. The conflict itself is therefore not that interesting, but such a polarization of the stances taken by well-known researchers is quite unusual. Markowski and Sowa occupy two different, extremely distant positions: the first could roughly be described as support for autonomous humanities, and the second for engaged humanities. While far from the first instance of these visions clashing in Polish discussions on the future of the humanities, this clash was exceptionally dynamic.

To better understand what I mean when I write about the dynamic nature of this conflict, I will quote an excerpt from Sowa's polemic, published – together with Markowski's reply, which will be analyzed later on – in *Teksty Drugie* in 2014:

> The problem with Markowski's book is rather that the world has changed over the last twenty years, and with it the humanities, while Michał Paweł Markowski once again repeats the diagnosis he has already made many times and which has not changed fundamentally since the books on Derrida and Nietzsche. It can be reduced to the postulate of expanding the interpretation of the world – and with it the interpretation of literature and life – by multiplying contexts, dimensions and theoretical perspectives, supposedly guaranteeing a better grasp of the meaning of both our own life experience and the cultural reality surrounding us. This is what this "discursive sensitivity" is essentially about.[7]

6 Michał Paweł Markowski, *Polityka wrażliwości. Wprowadzenie do humanistyki* [Politics of sensitivity. Introduction to the humanities] (Kraków: Universitas, 2013).

7 Jan Sowa, "Humanistyka płaskiego *świata*" [Humanities of a flat world], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2014): 193–194.

Sowa criticizes Markowski's book for several independent reasons. The invariability of his ideas and concepts is only one of them. The second, more important one is that the former master speaks now to his former student in a language that the latter no longer accepts. It is because this language is – I am simplifying a lot here for the sake of the clarity of the argument – a language that is not focused on contact. It is rather the language of art:

> In this way, Markowski […] articulates his program, which is basically an idea for practicing art, not for creating knowledge. […] The whole point and value of practicing theory/philosophy/humanities is that it is irreducible neither to the exact sciences nor to artistic creativity.[8]

Jan Sowa, by opposing Markowski's proposal, is also – in his own understanding – defending the autonomy of the humanities. This autonomy, however, is not defined as liberation from social obligations, but as maintaining the separateness and distinctiveness of the humanities as a science with the potential for social influence. Sowa's protest against equating the humanities and art is, of course, understandable. It is difficult to disagree with the call to distinguish the specific tasks of the humanities. However, when a researcher presents what could be described as a positive agenda, things get a little more complicated:

> The task that the humanities have to fulfill today, and the reason for their existence, is to ensure that the movement of the dialectical screw can complete its full turn, that is, that the alienated effects of human activity cease to have power over him and instead become the means of his (and her!) emancipation.[9]

Of course, when describing the task facing contemporary humanities, Sowa uses a specific language whose metaphors are entangled in the traditions of critical philosophy. However, what bothers me personally is not the metaphorical nature of this passage, but its lack of specificity. The belief that critical theory can change the social practice, and specific activities undertaken through academic work will in turn lead to positive social effects, may be right, but Sowa's statement does not say much about the actual objectives of the humanities. In other words, he describes what should be done, but not how it may be accomplished.

8 Ibid., 204.

9 Ibid., 205.

Similar doubts also served as a starting point for Markowski's polemic against Sowa's criticism. The author of *Politics of Sensitivity* responded to the accusation leveled against his theory by making the strongest possible argument, namely by accusing his fellow researcher of naivety or cynicism:

> This is what the humanities, unlike the sciences, are all about: that we argue personally, because certain issues are important issues for us, not for science *per se*. Let's make no mistake: no one but us cares about these things. Because we do not perform science, unlike physicists and oncologists, we just tell our own stories, hoping that someone will be interested in them.[10]

The visions of the humanities presented by both researchers are so far from each other not because they define the goals of the humanities differently, but – even more importantly in this dispute – because they approach the problem of the goals of the humanities differently in general. Sowa claims that the humanities have a clearly defined, although of course temporarily variable, goal, which means that a) this goal can be clearly determined at any time; b) it will always be possible to check how far are we from accomplishing it. In his view, therefore, what defines the humanities is not so much their methodology or the subject of study, but its purpose. For Markowski, meanwhile, the humanities always appear as a highly complex, divided activity,[11] responding to different individual and social needs. The second difference between Sowa and Markowski that cannot be overlooked is the different emphasis on whom the humanities are addressed to. Markowski, by stating that "no one else cares about these things," narrows down the circle of people interested in the humanities to a very limited group, somewhat like in George Dickie's institutional theory of art and Arthur Danto's concept of the artworld.[12] This world is, in Sowa's opinion, much too small: the humanities have obligations not so much to those who work within it, but to those who are excluded from it.

The discussion between Markowski and Sowa is, in fact, a radical dispute about the involvement of the humanities and the scope of their responsibilities and dependencies. In my opinion, the scholars' arguments highlighted

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10 Michał Paweł Markowski, "Lewica akademicka: między hipokryzją i iluzją" [The academic left: Between hypocrisy and illusion], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2014): 209.

11 See Markowski, "Lewica akademicka," 209: "The humanities [...] are permanently divided, they are guided by different interests, different languages and different goals, and promoting the illusion that they will ever unite and give meaning to human life as such [...] is extremely naive."

12 Cf. Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *The Journal of Philosophy* LXI (1964): 571–584.

in the heat of the discussion[13] allow us to see the essence of this dispute very clearly and provoke us to risk creating a middle path by forming the category of servile literary studies.

5. Servile Literary Studies

By introducing the concept of servitude, I do not want to simply multiply theories or concepts, but to describe one intuition that comes to mind when one wants to keep a balance between the need to maintain literary studies' autonomy and the urge for its involvement. The concept of servitude, strongly rooted in the Polish language, also refers to a well-known legal concept. A "servitude" is a specific right that encumbers a given property in order to increase the usefulness of another property or – as in the case of a personal servitude – to provide a specific right to a specific person.[14] In other words, establishing a servitude burdens a specific object with certain obligations that are not easy to get rid of and continue even if the object changes its owner. Therefore, the servitude determines the functions of a certain object by meeting the needs not only of the owners of the object, but also other people.

Approaching this concept a little more metaphorically, we can state that servitude is associated with specific obligations, but not with complete subordination: as long as the object that is burdened with the servitude fulfills certain obligations, it can be used in any other way. If we looked at literary studies, and more broadly at the humanities, as a field of academic research that carries with it specific social obligations, the concept of servitude could explain their nature and, above all, their limits quite well. The harshest criticism of the humanities is based on pointing out that everything that is not useful, everything that cannot be easily translated into the language of profit or at least social benefits, does not deserve support and should not exist. And yet exactly the opposite should be true: as long as the humanities in general, and literary studies in particular, fulfill specific social functions, there are no grounds to question their usefulness in general. Certain servitudes are inalienable, but they do not limit the field of the humanities, just as the possibility of practical application of specific discoveries does not limit the field of research in the traditionally understood sciences.

The possibilities of servile literary studies as a project, which – if we look at the declarations of scholars both from Poland and from abroad – has in fact

13 In presenting the dispute between Markowski and Sowa, I specifically referred to articles, because this form forces one to formulate one's own judgments more sharply and transparently than a book.

14 See Kodeks cywilny [Civil code], art. 285–305.

been cultivated for some time now,[15] can also become a threat. The increasing opening of literary studies to new, social and cultural needs and the modification of its language in such a way that it can be used not only to interpret literature, but also the world to which literature refers, may also have negative consequences. What worries me personally about these mostly positive changes is a certain tendency towards fragmentation (i.e. the visible domination of the field by analyses of isolated case studies).

Literary studies, like all fields of the humanities, can maintain (or regain, if we consider that it has already lost it) an important place in the modern world if it not only studies texts and not only creates theories, but a l s o diagnoses important social and cultural problems. So when I write about servile literature, I consider this social and cultural dimension to be a servitude, rightly expected and imposed by society. Of course, defining the scope of the servitude in this way may seem not very radical, as for example the possibilities of solving social problems by literary studies are usually limited to noticing and describing them by those researchers who mostly work at a theoretical level. Implementation of certain solutions is therefore usually beyond the scope of literary studies. Furthermore, although this analytical goal of literary studies is extremely important, it is only one of its objectives. Diagnosing social problems or teaching how to notice and approach them must remain only one of the many goals of the discipline. Literary studies' servitude, both towards society and towards other research disciplines, cannot limit its scope: like any research discipline that is not obsolete, literary studies must look for new paths of development and at the same time cultivate its roots by working with the text, on the text and through the text – as Ryszard Nycz would say – by telling one's own stories – as Michał Paweł Markowski suggested – as well as through methodological experiments, and finally – as Jan Sowa urged us – through a commitment to engage in and change the non-textual world.

The project of servile humanities and literary studies, as I would like to imagine it, would probably not appeal fully to either Markowski or Sowa. For both, this would probably be a rotten compromise between literary studies' autonomy, understood as liberation from social obligations, and the justification for its existence derived from social utility. This rotten compromise, however, would have at least one strength: it would leave enough space for both researchers, respecting both the autonomy of literature and its responsibilities. Servitude, in the understanding I want to adopt here, is neither full subordination to external needs nor consent to recognize the complete

15 Research on cultural and social memory, as well as studies on trauma, are usually justified by social usefulness and the possibility of using the knowledge acquired within them to better not only understand, but also design of the social life.

autotelic nature of this field of academic inquiry. It is the middle ground that many of us occupy, regardless of whether we are closer to the views espoused by Sowa or those favored by Markowski.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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Servile Literary Studies

Tabaszewska presents the concept of ancillary literary studies within the context of debates on the humanities' function and goals. She proposes to view literary scholarship, and the humanities more broadly, as a sphere in which the autonomy of research projects does not preclude their social engagement. Accordingly, the task of ancillary literary studies would be not only to study texts and create theories, but also to diagnose problems that are relevant to society.

Keywords

engaged humanities, goals of literary studies, New Humanities, crisis of the humanities

Investigations

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Standing Still in Feminist Protest: Single Body and Freedom of Not Moving

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Introduction

The solitary, standing-still protest is an interesting figure – a political act on behalf of the group and at the same time a particular type of non-mobility that is a role reversal, a testimony to the "power of the powerless." Standing in a public space, with a few exceptions, is unusual, a counterpoint to the everyday hustle and bustle. The evocation of the meditating person would be proper here: the protesting person presents herself or himself as respectable, consciously refusing to be chased into the ranks of everyday life. This situation is therefore worth analyzing – both in the field of literary and sociological studies.

In this paper, we aim to investigate solitary protest political phenomenon in the context of cultural research on im/mobility. The case we describe involves two modes of political action: (1) non-movement – a performative practice present in protest tactics such as sit-in and die-in protests,[1] and (2) single-person protest – a solo variant

1 See Susanne Foellmer, "Choreography as a Medium of Protest," *Dance Research Journal* 48 (3) (2016): 58–69; Christopher

of such protest tactics as a hunger strike, street demonstration, political prayer, political art, and self-harming.[2] Both are interesting as a contradiction of the essence of political protests, that is, the dynamics of collective action.

We analyze a stand-alone protest in the Polish small town of Gryfice on March 23, 2018, held by Beata Katkowska, a female activist involved in various movements against the populist right-wing government in Poland after 2015. In 2016, spontaneous protests against the tightening of the anti-abortion law began to function as the Women's Strike. The consistent use of the term "strike," previously reserved for labor movements, is significant. Researchers of women's social movements Julia Kubisa and Katarzyna Rakowska note a conceptual shift in the movement, where the struggle for reproductive rights became equivalent to the struggle for rights in the sphere of labor and production.[3]

In 2018, Beata Katkowska protested alone in the main square of Gryfice against the #StopAbortion legislative initiative filed in the Sejm by Catholic activist Kaja Godek. The initiative, launched in 2017, eventually led to a ban on abortions carried out on embryopathological grounds. Many of the participants of the protests emphasized the importance of collective action (e.g. using the slogan "you will never walk alone") but also articulated the individual, inner conviction that they were speaking out on their most pressing and intimate issue.

The theme of the protest and its small-town location are also significant. We witness the experience of a woman who spoke out on behalf of the collective, but also for herself. Polish women like her, often for the first time in their lives, publicly expressed their own opinion, crossing the barrier of disengagement. This is much easier in the big city, where it can even be a part of a certain lifestyle but in a small town, it is associated with the risk of publicly revealing subversive opinions on women's rights and the intimate sphere that, in Poland, is largely controlled by Catholic discourse. Her photo became one of the icons of the protest and was reproduced in the local, national, and foreign

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W. Schmidt, *The Sit-ins: Protest and Legal Change in the Civil Rights Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); Jesse A. Goldberg, "Scenes of Resurrection: Black Lives Matter, Die-ins, and the Here and Now of Queer Futurity," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 30 (2) (2020): 127–139.

2 Cf. Alan Schussman and Sarah A. Soule, "Process and Protest: Accounting for Individual Protest Participation," *Social Forces* 84 (2) (2005): 1083–1108; Jacquelien Van Stekelenburg, "The Political Psychology of Protest," *European Psychologist* 18 (4) (2013): 224–234.

3 Julia Kubisa and Katarzyna Rakowska, "Was it a Strike? Notes on the Polish Women's Strike and the Strike of Parents of Persons with Disabilities," *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 30 (4) (2019): 15–50.

press. She was also one of the protagonists of a documentary presented in a Watchdocs series.[4]

The campaign of protests against successive regulations tightening the right to abortion in Poland had its climaxes in 2016, 2018 and 2020. Solutions triggering a de facto total ban on abortion in Poland led to protests across the country.[5] The protests were held simultaneously across the country, including small towns and small and medium-sized cities.[6] Gryfice, where Katkowska protested, has a population of sixteen thousand.

The aesthetics of standing alone in public is associated with a particular spatial context and subversion of constraints in favor of contemplation and conscious disruption of dominant rhythms. Standing alone in public is unsettling and unusual, a counterpoint to the mobility enforced by the forces of order. Solitary protesters are not ghosts but rather monuments to moments of defiance.

In our understanding, a single-person protest allows us to transcend binary oppositions of active vs. passive, but also agentic vs. marginalized. As we argue, in the history of women in the public space, resistance in stillness is about breaking the association with exposing a passive self, showing oneself as a living mannequin. Here, stillness is fully controlled and thus invalidates the stereotype of a lack of agency, of being an object of consumption.

Alone: In the Act of Protest

The Latin roots of the word protest (*prōtestātiō*), meaning declaration, solemn statement, calling, confessing, testifying to something, and bearing witness to something,[7] indicate the public nature of protest, an act targeting institutions of power or a collective. The term does not pertain only to organized

4 *In the street*, 2019, 47', dir. Robert Kowalski. See more https://watchdocs.pl/en/festiwal-objazdowy/filmy/film-mauris-lorem-vel-fermentum-sem-porttitor, accessed June 3, 2024.

5 Jennifer Ramme, "De/Constructing a Polish Nation. On the Entanglements of Gender, Sexuality, Family and Nationalism in Right-Wing Sexual Politics in Poland," *AG About Gender-International Journal of Gender Studies* 11 (21) (2022): 35–67.

6 On other cases of small-town protests in this campaign see Karolina Gembara, "Małe miasta protestują. Obraz prowincji na fotografiach Archiwum Protestów Publicznych" [Small towns are protesting. The image of the province in the photographs of the Public Protest Archive], in *Władza sądzenia* 19 (2020): 146–173; Magdalena Muszel and Grzegorz Piotrowski, "Women's Protests in Small Polish Towns," *Ethnologia Polona* 43 (2022): 83–100.

7 Marian Plezi, *Słownik łaciński-polski. Tom IV* [Polish-Latin dictionary, vol. 4] (Warszawa: PWN. 1974).

groups – individuals can also protest without the presence of others, using a variety of protest tactics, such as taking part in consumer boycotts or signing petitions. However, in these cases, separate individual actions function in an organized manner as a collective behavior.

The number of people participating in a protest is included, among others, in Charles Tilly's concept of the strength of social movements, referred to as WUNC (an acronym for worthiness, unity, numbers, commitment).[8] According to Tilly, this strength is determined by actions exhibiting the social value (worthiness) of the protest and protesters (worthiness), their unity, numbers, and commitment (willingness to sacrifice). If any of these values in the social assessment falls to zero, the strength of the movement also falls to zero, and the protest loses credibility. However, high values of one of WUNC components can compensate for low values of another. Thus, a protest demonstrating an individual personal sacrifice or high personal cost for a single person can have a force comparable to the action of a large number of consumers carrying out a consumer boycott in a loosely coordinated manner.

According to Mario Diani and Donatella Della Porta,[9] the choice of forms of protest is always defined by a certain kind of framework for action, defined as: (1) the logic of numbers, that is, the logic of seeking and manifesting a majority – a numerical and visible advantage; (2) the logic of damage, which involves the use of disruptive and destructive actions; (3) the logic of bearing witness, which involves the demonstration of personal and emotional commitment and actions associated with personal costs. A lone protest fits primarily into the logic of bearing witness, although some protest actions by individuals are disruptive or associated with self-inflicted violence (as in a hunger strike). A protest tactic that combines a dramatic gesture with the logic of self-harm is self-immolation. Some of the best-known self-immolating protesters are Jan Palach and Ryszard Siwiec who burned themselves in protest against the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia.[10] Acts of self-harm, although radical and dramatic, are a much rarer tactic than other forms of solitary protest.

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8 Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

9 Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1999).

10 Sabine Stach, "An Ordinary Man, a National Hero, a Polish Palach? Some Thoughts on the Memorialization of Ryszard Siwiec in the Czech-Polish Context," *Acta Poloniae Historica* 113 (2016): 295–313.

Researchers use various terms for solo protesters: lone, single, individual or one-person/man/woman protest.[11] Its essence is to intentionally perform an independent, individual act of protest. Such protesters often remain anonymous, but may also become iconic figures, such as Rosa Parks[12] or Greta Thunberg.[13] In the context of single-person protests, it is also significant that activists are most often not covered by the public assembly law and its resulting restrictions, but also by legal protections.[14] As researchers suggest, in authoritarian political contexts they may be a safer option, as testified by a significant number of single-person protests in Russia between March 2006 and December 2017 (369 single-person protests in Russia, carried out by 287 different protesters[15]).

The protest of a single person is most often reinforced with an additional element, such as a banner held in the hands, an information board, certain attire, and music. Such artifacts of protest completely change the nature of the single-person protest, by displaying certain demands in a public space.[16] Equally important is the spatial context and associated expectations with regard to publicly visible behaviors. As Susanne Foellmer puts it, "acts visible to the public that are organized in a physical, spatial, time-conscious way may be understood as a protest that, in particular, momentarily uses locations of power for alternative purposes and reformulates them."[17]

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11 Mattias Wahlström and Magnus Wennerhag, "Alone in the Crowd: Lone Protesters in Western European Demonstrations," *International Sociology* 29 (6) (2014): 565–583; Polina Malkova and Olga Kudinova, "Exploring the Interplay Between Freedom of Assembly and Freedom of Expression: The Case of Russian Solo Pickets," *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 38 (3) (2020): 191–205.

12 Virginia Parks, "Rosa Parks Redux: Racial Mobility Projects on the Journey to Work," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106 (2) (2018): 292–299.

13 Thomas Olesen, "Greta Thunberg's Iconicity: Performance and Co-performance in the Social Media Ecology," *New Media & Society* 24 (6) (2022): 1325–1342.

14 Michael Hamilton, "The Meaning and Scope of 'Assembly' in International Human Rights Law," *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 69 (3) (2020): 521–556.

15 Marie Dewaegenaere, 'You're Not Standing Alone': Singleperson Protest in Russia (2006––2017) (unpublished Master's thesis, Ghent University, 2018).

16 Joshua Sbicca and Robert Todd Perdue, "Protest Through Presence: Spatial Citizenship and Identity Formation in Contestations of Neoliberal Crises," *Social Movement Studies* 13 (3) (2014): 309–327.

17 Susanne Foellmer, "Choreography as a Medium of Protest," *Dance Research Journal* 48 (3) (2016): 68.

As has been repeatedly pointed out, protest arises and is realized in a specific space; tactics of resistance, such as demonstrations, occupations of space, and marches, are overwhelmingly spatial tools.[18] The significance of protest as a political tool lies in the fact that its effect is not only to express certain claims, but also to reconstruct identifications and symbolic spheres, including the transformation of spatial meanings. Much of the spatial tactics of protest involves disrupting functionality – traffic blockades, picketing, sit-ins, and protest marches exert pressure by impeding the use of urban infrastructure. In this context, standing alone as a form of protest is ambiguous – after all, it is not a physical blockade, but a symbolic figure that forces other passersby to stop.

Therefore, it is not always the space or the crowd that is crucial in interpreting the political meaning of a protest. Pieter Verstraete in his work *The Standing Man Effect* analyzes various instances of lone protesters being motionless. The title refers to popularized images of a man standing alone in an act of protest for about eight hours in Taksim Square, in Istanbul, Turkey. Significantly, this type of standing still attracted the attention of passersby and the police that tried to prevent the lone protest.[19] The symbolism of that standstill, according to Verstraete, is crucial – so let us take a closer look at immobility in public space.

In urban practices, stopping alone is routine, although not very common. We can stop to wait for another person, to look around, to rest, to think briefly about some important matter. Urban space has specific places where stopping is understandable, but even then, a person waiting too long in stillness can be perceived as suspicious. Standing is a disruption of the "familiar scene of urban public space."[20] There are exceptions1 to stopping alone in the public space, those linked to festive and religious practices.

Krzysztof Konecki gives the example of soldiers serving as official guards and people praying.[21] In these cases, standing still is a sign of dignity. Apart from these rituals, standing still in public also has a purpose and in the case

18 Maciej Kowalewski and Marek Ostrowski, "Projektowanie protestu: przestrzeń publiczna (nie) przyjazna demonstracjom ulicznym" [Protest design: public space (un)friendly to street demonstrations], *Journal of Urban Ethnology* 21 (2023): 137–148.

19 Pieter Verstraete, "The Standing Man Effect," *IPC-Mercator Policy Brief* (2013).

20 Steven Stanley, Robin James Smith, Eleanor Ford and Joshua Jones, "Making Something Out of Nothing: Breaching Everyday Life by Standing Still in a Public Place," *The Sociological Review* 68 (6) (2020): 1252.

21 Krzysztof T. Konecki, "Standing in Public Places: An Ethno-Zenic Experiment Aimed at Developing the Sociological Imagination and More Besides...," *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review* 53 (6) (2017): 881–902.

of protest it is a departure from expected situations, from rituals accepted in public space. It is a transfer of an activity to the public – it is the passersby who must react in some way. The motionless person is "in the service" of a specific cause, perceived by them as momentous, similar to how Konecki's example of soldiers standing on guard duty seems.

The standing protest we are describing here took place within the framework of the Women's Strike – which is also the name of both a registered NGO, the Polish Women's Strike Foundation, a social movement, as well as a sequence of many events that were part of the original, loose assumptions of the strike. The choice of the word "strike" was not accidental. It was about alluding to the long-standing discussion about the absence of women in the narrative of political change in Poland after the fall of communism in 1989. The abortion ban is seen as a consequence of an unwritten agreement between the Catholic Church and Solidarity activists on the division of power and the organization of the state after the communists were removed from power. Calling a public protest a strike implicitly implies a departure from the social machine that functions without the consent of some social actors, namely women.

"Standing still," as Paul Harrison writes, is not simply "not moving"[22] just as meditation is not simply not-thinking. Invoking the figure of the meditating person is right on target here: the protesting person presents themselves as respectable, consciously refusing the rigors of everyday life. Therefore, Konecki proposes to incorporate the category of "being mindful" and Zen meditation into the understanding of standing in public spaces.[23] If we adopt this point of view, the act of protest involving the stopping of a single person is a form of eloquent and perhaps even desperate action. We would add here that it is associated with personal risk and presenting the actual state of affairs that politicians and part of the public refuse to notice.[24]

Fragile Single Body and Freedom of Not Moving

Theories of political resistance, derived from the writings of Hannah Arendt, focus on the question of the alliance of fragile bodies and visibility, understood

22 Paul Harrison, "Making Sense: Embodiment and the Sensibilities of the Everyday," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18 (4) (2000): 497–517.

23 Krzysztof T. Konecki, *The Meaning of Contemplation for Social Qualitative Research: Applications and Examples* (London: Routledge, 2021).

24 Sophia Dingli, "We Need to Talk About Silence: Re-examining Silence in International Relations Theory," *European Journal of International Relations* 21 (4) (2015): 721–742.

as a postulate and the beginning of the construction of political agency.[25] Fragility is an inalienable feature of the human condition, experienced universally, regardless of the new conditions of the media age that have revolutionized the concept of "visibility."

In accounts of the protests, there is a repeated indication of the price paid not only by the social persona but by the biologically determined individual. This is occasionally praised by poetry. Several generations of Polish schoolchildren memorized Władysław Broniewski's Elegy on the Death of Ludwik Waryński. The stanza describing dying alone in prison elevates the physical decay that does not tame the spirit of the activist and his will to act: "The gums eaten through by scurvy, / legs swollen and lifeless, / it's the end, the lungs spewed out already / – but the open eyes are burning."[26]

Since the 1980s, the personal and long-term effects of political involvement have been described in terms of emotional labor, ethics, and the economies of care. At the same time, a personal example has become a tool of political struggle, democratizing the earlier need for leadership – nowadays everyone knows how politics imprints itself on her/his body and biography, and summarizes the impact of her/his activity on all spheres of life.[27] It may involve pain, injuries sustained, but also fatigue, injury, freezing, dehydration, getting wet, cold, somatic and psychosomatic illnesses, burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, troubles at work, and family problems. This variety of fragility is related to the biological nature of human beings, but also, it seems, to the long cultural memory of violence, especially unspoken violence, pushed from the horizon of perception, controlled by socially constructed shame, can be exposed or protected through an alliance with another person or with others.

The long persistence of the rituals of violence that founded the Polish and Central European experience was pointed out by Kacper Poblocki in his book *Chamstwo*. The author ponders on the consequences of the use of ritualized violence for centuries, positing that its remnant is a uniquely enduring patriarchy.[28] He recognizes that the description of patriarchy through the history of the female body – and thus in terms of biopolitics – appeared in the poems of Anna Świrszczyńska, above all in the series *Jestem baba*, which was translated

25 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

26 Władysław Broniewski, *Elegia o śmierci Ludwika Waryńskiego* [Elegy on the death of Ludwik Waryński] (Warszawa: Wyd. Iskry, 1982), 6. Translated into English by Michał Biel.

27 Lance W. Bennett, "The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 644 (1) (2012): 20–39.

28 Kacper Pobłocki, *Chamstwo* [Rabble] (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2021).

into English and interpreted by Czesław Miłosz. On the other hand, Pobłocki abrogates the belief present in Polish historiosophy that peasant revolts in Poland were incidental and the modernization of the country came from outside with little to do with the actions of those treated as a formless mass of subjects denied any influence on history. As an aside, there is an important difference between the history of the Polish peasants written in the communist People's Republic and books published in the twenty-first century. In the former, economic merit and historical injustice were brought to the fore. In the latter, peasant culture is reconstructed and its agency examined – issues extremely interesting from the point of view of emancipation movements. They raise analogies with important questions for second-wave feminism about correlations between race, class and gender, and between colonialism and patriarchy. Is gender like serfdom, one might ask?

With violence being the most common experience of the working class and peasants in Polish history, protection against it seems an essential element of any social protest. Simply put – by taking to the streets, people exercise their rights of assembly and expression obtained in the twentieth century. But despite having these rights, each protester suddenly finds themselves in a long history of fear of violence, acutely aware of the fragility of one's body and the need for its protection.

The political contexts in which the discourse of resistance is placed can and should reach beyond a purely culturalist perspective, that is, the perspective in which we abstract from the local, individual experience of the protesters to emphasize the dynamics and peculiar choreography of protest, involving the performance of bodies being empowered through coexistence with other people that demand agency and then through media broadcasts, including those controlled by the public authorities and the seemingly private, for example on YouTube, Twitter, or Telegram.

Studies on the theory and practice of protest/strike, without abandoning the notion of "fragility" to which we will come back later, develop the question of the underlying invisibility and sensitivity of those who are placed outside the political scene but nevertheless fall within the public sphere as outlined by Arendt. It goes first and foremost to the question of gender, which Judith Butler draws attention to when she shows the inadequacy of the division between the dark, domestic, and biological sphere of life and going above and beyond it in protest, bringing bodies (implicitly: male bodies) into politics. Butler, in her article *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street*, on the "alliance of visible bodies" (at the expense of those that remain in the dark private sphere), refers to the reflections of Adriana Cavarero, who often uses examples of ancient narratives to show the paradoxical difference between the legitimacy of the male voice and the scandal of the female counter-narrative where "male"

activity evokes death and female "passivity" evokes life.[29] The source story of this distinction would be the story of Antigone, a tale of solitary protest, initiating the birth of an active agent with its own history. An agent at risk of execution/death.

The history of violence, which we may subconsciously shy away from, reinforces a sense of fragility and has more than just general, "culturalist" conditions. It has been extensively described in Ewa Majewska's comparative analysis where she analyzes strategies of "weak resistance," building counterpublics against violent policies.[30]

The strategies and spontaneous actions of groups/people without clear agency (and visibility) are rooted in the need to exhibit pride and subjectivity, as well as a "personal narrative," but also in a deep-seated tradition of violence. This is true for the descendants of slaves and serf peasants, but also women, non-normative people, and working-class people unrepresented in the capitalist system, especially those not protected by labor contracts such as migrants, and those employed illegally. None of these groups can gain visibility/agency and become the subject of politics or the disposer of their own narrative if they do not risk exposing their biological, symbolic, social and economic fragility not only to the public eye but also to possible violence from the authorities.

The circumstances of a lone protest/strike like that of Antigone are complicated. On one hand, it involves giving up the "alliance of fragile bodies," and on the other, it invokes a whole range of associations, from subliminal individualism and messianizm, to seizing the power of the gaze and playing with risk. Although often a single "exposure" in an act of intervention and resistance has a practical rationale (as when a group cannot be assembled in a small city as part of the Women's Strike), the performative media effect is created at the intersection of established symbolism and is always contextualized.

So, first of all, if the "alliance of fragile bodies" exposes its claims to the gaze, and thus makes the demands visible and object to a political game, a solitary and often silent protest, although it does not block the city or permanently stop the production machine, nonetheless potentially attracts attention for it marks risk, recklessness, and even bravado. It is worth mentioning here that the actual stoppage of work, that is the cancellation of lessons,

29 Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," in *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of Nongovernmental Activism*, ed. Meg McLagan and Yates McKee (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 117–137.

30 Ewa Majewska, "Słaby opór. Obraz, wspólnota i utopia poza paradygmatem heroicznym" [Weak resistance. Image, community and utopia beyond the heroic paradigm], *Praktyka teoretyczna* 32 (2019): 7–20.

school activities, and the wearing of Women's Strike emblems has in recent years become a reason for initiating disciplinary hearings or lawsuits. This is another argument for the relevance of the word "strike" in the case of the women's movement in Poland. During the Women's Strike, the slogans "all of us can't be locked up" and "you will never walk alone" were used, building confidence in crossing a critical mass, forcing change, constructing a political representation of the pro-choice movement and its allies. In this situation, individuality seems to be networked, de facto included in the greater whole, and yet constitutes a separate act of intervention in public space.

Second, violence which always threatens protesters, can be amplified or weakened if it were to be used against an individual. In either case, the effect is spectacular – sending the police to an ostentatiously defenseless person is always impressive. A lack of police intervention does not invalidate the performance, as long as it is broadcast. A lone protest is a spectacle of resistance despite evident fragility.

Third, the lone protester does not multiply (herself), but at the same time she does not enjoy the protection afforded by being in a crowd – a potential political argument and a literal physical argument, a kind of cordon.

Women's presence in public spaces has been well recounted in feminist philosophy. Adding sociological, literary and activist perspectives, we see the possibility of juxtaposing "solitary protest" with the eminence of figures such as the imprisoned but still disobeying Antigone, or Lot's wife. Becoming numb from pain (and punishment) may seem extremely distant from stepping out in front of a magistrate with a piece of paper containing a slogan, and yet in both cases the figure focusing attention on herself silently expresses the drama of breaking the narrative, breaking the continuity of her biography.

A closer context is provided by the modernist visibility of women as consumers in the space of the modern city – mannequins, exhibitions, display cases, and eventually in photography and film as a result of their objectification. In this discourse, a silent presence is not capitulation but rather a refusal to play the game. This premeditated visibility of women, not as a political subject but as a visible object, can be found in the conceptual feminist art of the 1970s and 1980s. Ewa Partum's (Polish performance artist) *Self-Identification* series literally showed the fragility of the female body in public space, as well as the limits of visibility and invisibility, related to the sexualization of the gaze. Partum produced photographic collages, assembling her own nudes and street situations typical of the era, such as queuing in front of a grocery store and crossing the street. During the opening, she mingled with a wedding procession, casually standing next to the gallery. The most famous photo in the series shows the artist facing a policewoman directing traffic. Partum's goal was to draw attention to the inequality of men and women in art, yet

the meaning of the works, those manipulated with and those created during a performance confronting a naked woman, gallery audience and outsiders in a real space, goes beyond an artistic manifesto. The naked woman facing a policewoman in a uniform becomes an iconic representation of the difference between a fragile body and power. Partum has captured the moment when the eponymous self-identification occurs – by demonstrating the hypocritical manipulation, and methods of silencing and invalidating women.

Protests against the tightening of anti-abortion laws often used the costume of the handmaids – characters created in Margaret Atwood's novel, popularized by the TV series. An interesting compilation of specific series choreography, mythological and fairy-tale motifs constituted the performance *The Empress's Silent Clothes.*

> "At 5.30 pm about 30 women gathered on the Defilade Square in front of the Palace of Culture and Science [in Warsaw – I. I.]. They were all dressed in white robes, with garlands on their heads. The event was not accompanied by any sounds or speeches, the title of the performance – The Empress' Silent Clothes – was meant to speak for itself. The women walked in a fixed formation for several minutes and then doused themselves in red paint. In this way, women from different social groups oppose the assault on their freedom and objectification by the Polish government, while demanding absolute respect for full human rights" – the organizers reported.[31]

The performed muteness – like the nude act in Partum's work – exposes and undermines prohibitions, unspoken premises, stereotypes, and systemic, camouflaged violence. The empress is not naked – like the emperor in Andersen's fairy tale – her robes are bloodstained, screaming, but the authorities prefer to pretend that illegal dangerous abortions do not happen. The silence of the performers is all the more telling because the motif of "reclaiming the voice" is an important part of the tradition of feminist art, also influencing the poetics of poems, novels, and dramas. We will only mention two examples here: *The Chorus of Women*, a theatre directed by Marta Górnicka, and *The Witches' Choir* according to the idea of Ewa Łowżył and the text of Malina Prześluga. Both of these ensembles scrutinize the issue of women's presence and voice, producing an extraordinary amount of sounds, resorting to historical, mythological, and religious associations, on the edge of what a traditional

31 Kacper Sułowski, "Niecodzienny performance na pl. Defilad. Kobiety w zakrwawionych białych szatach" [An unusual performance on the square. Parades. Women in bloody white robes], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November, 10, 2020, accessed June 3, 2024, https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,26499547,niecodzienny-performance-na-pl-defilad-kobiety-w-zakrwawionych.html.

choir is, and what it can become when it declares war on disciplinary norms and descends deeper, to screaming, echolalia, and rage. The expansive and corporeal stage presence in both of these ensembles derives, of course, from the reinvention of theater, including ancient theater, especially comedies that mock the aspirations of women. Here, however, we are concerned with juxtaposing these high-profile bodily presences on stage with Partum's tacit nudity, with the hand-me-down costumes appearing during the protests of recent years, either in red dresses or in white dresses stained with intense paint. The powerful means used in both examples utilize the found symbolism of suppression, objectification, and taking away voice and agency.

Conclusions. The Aesthetics and Political Nature of Non-movement

Ambiguous, deconstructed in political discourses and artistic practices, the silent, solitary exposure – a desperate strategy, yet producing the effect of an almost mimetic unity of demands and means. A lack of rights makes an individual body offensive and it is sufficient to show oneself to the authority to make a stand. By showing the consequences of a broken democracy, one makes a personal attempt to restore contact between the government and the people.

Table 1. What is a single standing-still protest?

Single standing-still is:	Single standing-still protest is not:
Disclosure (exposure)	Being in a crowd (anonymous)
Keeping guard	Passively looking on
Acting on behalf of others	Standing by (as a spectator)
Performance that arouses curiosity	Pause (from performance)
„Living" monument	Only an artistic activity
Bearing witness	Strength of numbers
The power of the powerless (exposure/play with vulnerability)	A threat to public order (like a mob)
Creates the potential for establishing relationships	Separation/distinctness/abandonment
Proof of presence, persistent insistence on one's dignity	Hiding
An act of determination	A mechanical, ritualistic practice

Source: own study.

Our interpretations of a standing-still protest are presented in Table 1. All these meanings of single "standing for a cause" protesters make a gesture as if holding a board, a banner, or simply a piece of paper. There are no letters, no words, no slogans. What is left is a defenseless body, but even that can signal a political struggle. Standing in the rain in the market square of a small Polish town, a woman wearing a T-shirt with the word *Constitution* on it addresses the authorities and those who do not join in. One can, of course, see affinities in this action with the strategy of Greta Thunberg and the Climate Strike, but one can also place the protester in a wider sequence of events – violence, patriarchy, reclaiming one's voice, suppression, and nullification. She gains strength because she is visible, thanks to the media broadcasting her single strike.

A single-person protest is a break from political rules, right-to-move and not-to-move, and regimes of im/mobility.[32] It accomplishes a reversal of police surveillance tactics, in which the cry of "Don't move!" is the primary tool of discipline, security and control. Early demonstrations at the turn of the twentieth century were met with responses from law enforcement, who shouted to the demonstrators "silence!." "quiet!".[33] The subordination of movement in public space to the rules of discipline is read as a desire to maintain order, symbolic and real power over space, but above all to prevent the spread of revolution, to maintain bourgeois expectations of behavior in public space, and to maintain the state's monopoly on violence. In her act of protest, Katkowska reverses this police call to stop, performing a subversion. We read her solitary act of stopping in motion as a subversion of discipline and expected behavior in public space.

Her protest in a small town brought together organization, politics, and the local community in a single space, originally designated for ceremonial and ritual practices. At the time, protests often appeared in such places for the first time; unlike in cities with large populations, this was political activity at home, blurring the line between private space and public.

32 Nina Glick Schiller and Noel B. Salazar, "Regimes of Mobility Across the Globe," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39 (2) (2013): 183–200.

33 Joachim Albrecht and Bernd Jürgen Warneken, *"Als die Deutschen demonstrieren lernten: das Kulturmuster friedliche Straßendemonstration" im preußischen Wahlrechtskampf 1908–1910: Begleitband zur Ausstellung im Haspelturm des Tübinger Schlosses vom 24. Januar bis 9. März 1986* (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 1986).

Abstract

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Standing Still in Feminist Protest: Single Body and Freedom of Not Moving

A protest by an individual standing still in a public space is a departure from the framework of a collective street demonstration; that is, movement in space and bodily interaction with others. We investigated aesthetics of this gesture in the context of cultural studies on immobility and individual protests. Our point of reference is the solo protest against the restriction of abortion rights held by female activist Beata Katkowska in the square of the small Polish town of Gryfice, on March 23, 2018. We argue that the aesthetics of standing alone in the public are associated with its spatial context and subversion of constraints in favor of contemplation and conscious disruption of dominant rhythms. Although a single-person protest is usually undertaken in response to systemic violence, one's decision to stay immobilized is voluntary, evoking the figure of a meditator – an honorable individual consciously defying the rules of everyday life.

Keywords

feminism, protests, abortion, standing still, body

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Faster and Faster Quills: Innovation in Scholarly Writing

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Something is Coming to an End

"Does writing have a future?" (*Hat Schreiben Zukunft?*); this was of concern to Vilém Flusser, a philosopher and media theorist, in his 1987 book that examined the transition in writing from media-technological contexts towards the digital age. The volume comprises a series of essays that dissect particular components of writing to assess whether other media could replace this fundamental practice:

> Writing, in the sense of placing letters and other marks one after another, appears to have little or no future. Information is now more effectively transmitted by codes other than those of written signs. What was once written can now be conveyed more effectively on tapes, records, films, videotapes, videodisks, or computer disks; and a great deal that could not be written until now can be noted down in these new codes.[1]

1 Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing Have a Future?,* trans. Nancy Ann Roth, introd. Mark Poster (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 3.

Writing is, thus, the act of transmitting specific messages. However, it also plays a vital role in thinking, allowing our thoughts to be verbalized. As Flusser observes, writing "is a gesture of setting up and ordering written signs. And written signs are, directly or indirectly, signs for ideas. So, writing is a gesture that aligns and arranges ideas. Anyone who writes must first have thought. And written signs are the quotation marks of right thinking."[2] Written signs, poetically compared to quotation marks, serve as containers of thought, putting some structure and boundaries on ideas to make them communicable.

This connection between what Flusser calls inscription technologies and human thought is thoroughly considered in the works of such scholars as Marshall McLuhan,[3] Eric Havelock,[4] William Goody,[5] Walter Ong,[6] and Friedrich Kittler,[7] so we will limit this discussion to some basic observations. In oral cultures, thought is closely connected to the subject and the context of utterance. Handwriting allowed for the externalization of one's experience and introduced temporality beyond the spectrum of one's immediate experience. It made history possible by allowing events to be noted in sequential order: "before writing was invented, nothing happened; rather things merely occurred. For something to happen, it has to be noticed and conceived as an event (process) by some consciousness."[8] The moving type of the printing press allowed for a kind of thought that is typographic, or "typifying" as Flusser calls it.[9] It introduced the notion of objectivity, as facts

2 Ibid., 6.

3 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1962).

4 Eric Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write. Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

5 William Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

6 Walter J. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

7 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999)

8 Flusser, *Does Writing Have a Future?,* 8.

9 Ibid., 53.

could now be printed without the intervention of a copyist as was the case with manuscripts. Each time, the technology offered a more fluid way of thought inscription, providing newer tools to facilitate the process: "everything becomes structurally more complex, to become functionally simpler. […] After the goose quill came faster and faster writing instruments: [the– M. M.] ballpoint pen, typewriter, and word processor – faster and faster quills."[10] Finally, the advent of digital technologies has once more reshaped the way we think and communicate by "breaking with print consciousness":

> The new signs that appear on computer or television screens are no longer traces engraved in objects; they are no longer "typographic." The kind of thought that is producing the new information is no longer typographic, typifying kind of thought. […] It is fairly clear what will be lost in the transition from Gutenbergian to electromagnetic culture, namely everything we treasure in the Western legacy. On the other hand, we do not see what we have to gain. If we could do that, we would already have reached the first step toward the new way of thinking.[11]

"A medium is a medium is a medium," wrote Friedrich Kittler in his paraphrase of Gertrude Stein's take on a rose, meaning that a medium "cannot be translated. To transfer messages from one medium to another always involves reshaping them to conform to new standards and materials."[12] Thus, every change in communication technology brings about the reconfiguration of the broader scene, which Kittler calls a "discourse network" (*Aufschreibesystem*). He distinguished two main networks: 1800 (based on print and the book) and 1900 (the breaking of the typographic monopoly thanks to audio and audiovisual media); in addition, the upcoming network of the "total media link on a digital base [which– M. M.] will erase the very concept of medium."[13] However, as Kittler observes, "before the end, something is coming to an end."[14] That is, we are currently living in the age between the audiovisual system and the fully digital one, whereby "the general digitization of channels and information erases the differences among individual media. Sound and image, voice and text, are reduced to surface effects, known to consumers as interface."[15]

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10 Ibid., 18.

11 Ibid., 52–53.

12 Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, 264.

13 Kitler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 2.

14 Ibid., 1.

15 Ibid.

Something is coming to an end. We are currently in a dynamic, transitory phase, which could by no means be considered final. It could only be compared with the age of incunabula, the half-century in which the rapid development of print technology and associated practices coexisted with the most prolific period for manuscripts in history. It took some time before the characteristics of the printed codex were codified, which eventually flipped the script on the once unrivalled manuscript. To remember how rapidly things evolve and to what extent the features of current technology confine our thinking, we need to understand how the actors of those transformative times perceive the future of writing, where the inertia of established forms constantly clashes with the novelty of the emerging formats.

Now, watching how some objects on the communication scene, like a printed monograph, are resisting coming to an end, it makes sense to pose yet another question on whether such formats have become zombies. Kathleen Fitzpatrick's question, not mine, and she posed it in the introduction to her 2011 book *Planned Obsolescence*, which – who might have guessed – is a printed monograph. In other words, she asked whether the old forms of academic publishing are exhausted and artificially kept alive and, as such, should not be replaced by the new ones. Fitzpatrick's monograph interestingly resonates with earlier debates on the role of writing and the word in the digital age, captured in the 1996 volume *Future of the Book*. In his afterword, Umberto Eco remained somewhat optimistic about the future of writing, foregrounding the evolution and similarities with print culture rather than the ruptures. Eco perceived computers as vehicles to enhance or amplify some characteristics of print and as a means of better diffusing printed, not digital-born, documents. Perhaps more stress was put on visual materials and hypertextual narratives, which he conceived as already prolific in non-digital culture. Eco saw the future of writing mainly in visual terms, but not audiovisual or aural, which testifies to the supremacy of specific means of storage, compression, and transmission in his day, technologies that handled images better than sounds. Available technology often limits the horizon of those future innovations one can imagine. Interestingly, the institutional dimension of the change has already been noted, as "people can communicate directly without the intermediation of publishing houses."[16] However, in this context, Eco recalled Landow's remark in the same volume that "we are entering a new samizdat era,"[17] underlining that digital circulation is conceived of as a different means of text distribution, less formally established or controlled by gatekeepers.

16 Umberto Eco, *The Future of the Book*, ed. Geoffrey Nunberg (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), 301.

17 Ibid.

Fitzpatrick's book is less of visionary speculation than an assessment of where those first decades of digital innovation had led us. And it turns out that the journey was not far. The author herself denies the zombie hypothesis by asserting: "if the monograph were genuinely dead, we'd be forced to find other forms in which to publish."[18] Some crucial formats of communication like a scholarly monograph or a journal article still seem to prevail as the default mode of academic dissemination. Fitzpatrick observes that print formats "are so deeply ingrained in the ways we think that it becomes hard to imagine alternatives to them."[19] That is why our thinking about electronic formats for scholarly communications remains framed by the book, what she calls a "trap of digital textuality."[20] We find similar observations in the *Academic Book of the Future* report by Marilyn Deegan.[21] Even though digital technologies loosen free the texts from the bonds of print and we can imagine a variety of textual forms, she points out, they still seem to revolve around the concept of the book.[22] Fitzpatrick considers this focus on attempting to reproduce the printed page on digital screens a trap of digital textuality.[23]

Such technological inertia is nothing new. One example is incunabula, the early printed books that mimicked the style and appearance of manuscripts. But there is much more to unpack here regarding the interaction of technological affordances, needs and prestige, namely how some forms are valued as better and more prestigious than others. In their analysis of the interaction between academic tradition and innovation in academic publishing, Adriaan Van der Weel and Fleur Praal observe "implicit assumptions about the connection between the scholarly importance of a text and the properties of print."[24] This inertia of ascribing value to the format itself becomes puzzling

18 Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 5.

19 Ibid., 94.

20 Ibid., 93.

21 Marilyn Deegan, *Academic Book of the Future Project Report (A Report to the AHRC & the British Library, 2017)*, accessed June 1, 2024, https://academicbookfuture.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/project-report_academic-book-of-the-future_deegan3.pdf.

22 Ibid., 31.

23 Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence*, 93.

24 Adriaan Van Der Weel and Fleur Praal, "Publishing in the Digital Humanities: The Treacle of the Academic Tradition," in *Digital Technology and the Practices of Humanities Research*, ed. Jennifer Edmond (Open Book Publishers, 2022), 22, https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0192.02.

as, in Jennifer Edmond's words, the border between informal communication and validated scholarship has become blurred, and new forms ("from the tweet to the blog post, to the listserv contribution, to the enhanced finding aid, as well as the public distribution and peer response inherent in many of these formats") increasingly pose the challenge to what should be considered (and valued) as scholarship.[25] This fluid border is even more of an issue now in the humanities, where digital methods reshaped some of the traditional outputs, which are now "often communicated through databases, websites, datasets, software tools, online collections, and other informal means of making results public."[26] Moreover, the authors observe that diverse genres may be better suited to different scholarly uses: "at certain stages of the research process, it is often not as important to produce an in-depth scholarly summation so much as to provide short snapshots of an experiment's current developments (as in the hard sciences), or an analysis of a source (in the humanities). This is a situation where it may be more appropriate for a scholar to write small reports in the form of blog entries and publicize them on various social networks."[27] So, innovation responds to particular communication needs.

This abundance of novel formats highlights the diversity and multiplicity of innovative forms, which led Deegan to the conclusion that we should envision different futures for different kinds of books: "some of these are infrastructural and hold out promise of sustainable models; others are individual and experimental, and may point to some new and interesting possibilities."[28] This abundance of forms is both "a blessing and a curse," as Burton and others[29] note in their landscape analysis of non-traditional scholarly objects (NTSO), as we see many exciting forms that defy academic norms at the same time: "they are less prestigious, more difficult to find, and more likely to suffer neglect than their printable counterparts. The stages of and roles involved in an NTSO's life are ill-defined and contentious."[30] This tension between technology, a form of academic writing, technology and validation

25 Jennifer Edmond, "Introduction: Power, Practices, and the Gatekeepers of Humanistic Research in the Digital Age," in *Digital Technology*, 3–4.

26 van der Weel and Praal, "Publishing in the Digital Humanities," 22.

27 Ibid., 65.

28 Deegan, *Academic Book of the Future Project Report*, 71.

29 Matt Burton, Matthew Lavin, Jessica Otis and Scott B. Weingart, "Digits: Two Reports on New Units of Scholarly Publication," *Journal of Electronic Publishing* 22 (1) (2019), https://doi.org/10.3998/3336451.0022.105.

30 Ibid.

will be central to this paper, which explores different understandings of innovative scholarly writing.

This article discusses the notion of innovation in scholarly writing based on semi-structured interviews conducted by the international research team in the Horizon 2020 project OPERAS-P. The study explored the experiences and perspectives of individuals involved in various aspects of scholarly communication. The interview scenario was developed iteratively, drawing on a literature review and pilot interviews, and was informed by the methodology of episodic interviews, aiming to capture both episodic and semantic knowledge of the participants, that is, their judgments as well as practical experiences.[31] Thus, the material presented here provides a snapshot of how actors in scholarly communication understand the innovation in academic writing and see the ways forward.

The research sample consisted of 33 interviewees, diverse in terms of gender, career stage, country of origin, and academic discipline. This diversity ensured a broad representation of perspectives within the scholarly communication landscape. Participants held various roles, including researchers, editors, publishers, reviewers, and librarians, reflecting the multifaceted nature of scholarly communication. The interviews were conducted in 2020 primarily online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, transcribed, and then coded and analyzed in MaxQDA software. This process involved provisional coding, descriptive coding, and the development of a final coding scheme to identify and categorize key themes and patterns in the data. Full methodology, along with the analyses of other aspects of the interviews and an earlier version of those findings, could be found in the study report.[32]

What is Innovation in Scholarly Communication?

When asked to define innovation in scholarly communication, our interviewees pictured it as the activity of experimenting to find a better way of doing

31 Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (New York: Sage, 2009).

32 Maciej Maryl, Marta Błaszczyńska, Agnieszka Szulińska, Anna Buchner, Piotr Wciślik, Iva M. Zlodi, Jadranka Stojanovski, Elisa Nury, Claire Clivaz, Bartłomiej Szleszyński, Kajetan Mojsak and Mateusz Franczak, *OPERAS-P Deliverable D6.5: Report on the Future of Scholarly Writing in SSH*, Zenodo (2021), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4922512. All citations from interviews in the article are marked with an interviewee code in brackets, e.g. (OP01). The original wording is preserved to the maximum possible extent, with some small edits for clarity. The list of codes with basic data about the interviewees is available in Annex 1 to this report. Those interview transcripts that were approved for publication by the interviewees are available in the Nakala repository (https://operas-p.nakala.fr).

something: "the point of an innovative publication is that it's not been done before, so there are no guidelines! There's a trial and error aspect" (OP21). In other words: "innovation means trying something new, and sometimes it might not work" (OP28). In general, innovation is seen as a chance to improve the sharing of ideas with audiences thanks to novel technology, as in the case of an information studies scholar who thinks that "innovation is something that sort of unsettles the way that we have always done things" (OP10). Not only does innovation unsettle the way things have been, but it also provides much-needed room for improvement and novelty. As a Czech science studies scholar put it: "it's much easier to share things now and so I think that innovation basically means catching up with opportunities that technology offers" (OP16).

Interestingly, this respondent saw innovation as a means of reconnecting with the roots of scholarly communication, as current norms and traditions of scholarly communication tend to be incompatible with what is currently possible due to technology:

> I think now it's clear that we should change the norms and change the traditions to catch the original intent of scholarly communication, which I think is to publish your results and share the results of your work. (OP16)

In a similar spirit, a French PhD student reported his turning towards innovation, namely, publishing a blog, because of dissatisfaction with how his writing was displayed on publishing platforms (OP17). Hence, he chose innovation because publishers did not support features he considered better for communication. "Innovation can be disruptive", he concludes, "all the tools that I'm using and promoting can be very challenging to use for some people who are not used at all to that system and who see them as a threat to the efficiency of their process" (OP17).

Innovation was related to the creation of outputs and the seamlessness of using scholarly content, removing unnecessary obstacles from the vantage point of current technology. A philosophy professor valued easy access to articles online. Hence, he used Sci-Hub, a shadow library, rather than his own institutional access, so he did not have to "think about which window, where to click, which database to connect to" (OP13). Innovation is also understood to align scholarly publishing and modern communication practices, creating an environment to capture readers' attention (OP14). Perhaps this American professor captures the general attitude most accurately:

> I think that innovation comes in a number of ways. One is innovation and access, so moving beyond the model of the paywall or moving beyond the model of

> subscriptions to get scholarship out there […]. Two, there is innovation in terms of modes of scholarly output, incorporating images incorporating websites, etc., into scholarly output. (OP24)

One could risk the hypothesis that what scholars consider innovative depends on the horizon of possibilities they see thanks to their experience, needs, and the types of sources they deal with in their research. Researchers more engaged with digital methods tend to consider innovation in three dimensions. Firstly, in terms of facilitating access to digital resources. Secondly, regarding form, as new technological affordances for scholarly expression. Thirdly, in reaching out to new audiences through popular formats. Let us discuss them in greater detail.

Access

First of all, the innovation is considered in terms of providing access to more traditional types of outputs. According to interviewees, this is the most tangible form of innovation because it responds to a more basic scholarly need to access content regardless of its form or features. In the words of a Croatian professor:

> I see that most innovation has been done in the area of the distribution of scholarly work and sharing scholarly work, either between people or between machines. That part is actually pretty innovative compared to previous phases or stages of scholarly communication. (OP32)

In principle, open access means "peer-reviewed academic research work that is free to read online and that anybody may redistribute and reuse, with some restrictions."[33] The *Academic Book of the Future* project arrived at similar conclusions – "it is true that scholars (indeed all writers) write to be read and to that extent welcome wide dissemination and access for their work is an enormous benefit to research, and to broader communities, including the developing world."[34]

Interestingly, this form of innovation is usually described in "negative" terms, that is as removing some of the obstacles rather than providing new value: "moving beyond the model of the paywall or moving beyond the model

33 Martin Paul Eve, *Open Access and the Humanities: Contexts, Controversies and The Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

34 Deegan, *Academic Book of the Future Project Report*, 45.

of subscriptions to get scholarship out there. I think that's innovative" (OP24). The innovation lies in platforms providing seamless, non-paywalled access to scholarly content, be it ResearchGate (OP11), Sci-hub (OP13), or an institutional repository: "you can just browse the journal and look at those articles. And this is not the most visited one. So there are a couple of thousand, a few thousand visits, a few thousand readers. And this is the enormous advantage of open access online scholarly publications – that they can find readers" (OP19). Using citation metrics and usage statistics is also considered innovative, as they allow for quality assessment and the measurement impact of the scholar's work.

Almost all of our interviewees unreservedly supported open access to scientific publications. The researchers highlighted several benefits, including ease of finding publications, free access, savings for the institution, and improved visibility, readability, and citability. An information science professor claims that open access "should be standard nowadays. It is a commodity; we as researchers expect to have access to research publications, so I wouldn't connect it with prestige – it's a prerequisite" (OP32). Thus, as this French historian put it, openness is viewed as a systemic factor, "which should improve the current scholarly communication system: That everything would be accessible for free" (OP27).

Respondent supported the changes that have occurred due to the pandemic, during which they have had significantly more open content available, but also expressed concerns about going back to the old "normal," that is, paywalls and closed access. As one British literary scholar observed:

> ou know, that's the world I dream of: [it – M. M.] is just one where there's, you know, some piece of scholarly research and I can just get it without it being a problem, without having to encounter paywalls, without having to go through a billion and one hoops to get my university to purchase it. (OP03)

Some respondents highlighted the vital role of scholars in changing the system of scholarly communication and the fact that only scholars have the power to influence change. Examples of institutional initiatives show how scientists, in collaboration with funders and editors, can build a modern publishing platform to avoid paying the high open access fees to large publishing houses. Still, some scholars are very conservative when it comes to prestige, which has a massive impact on publishing choices. Although researchers can shape the publishing landscape, "it is still controlled by the publishers" (OP06). Scholars' conservative perception of prestige and reliance on it in assessing the quality of outputs still has enormous influence, but this is not what is moving publishing forward (OP04).

Many authors will prefer a closed approach or even a printed version of their publication if they could publish with a prestigious book publisher or in a prestigious journal. Prestige paired with research assessment criteria seems to be blocking this form of innovation, which is neatly summed up by a professor in Education studies: "I would very much like if all my work was openly available, and I would very much like to be able to prefer and submit only to such journals, but there are not many in my fields that are recognized as very valuable journals" (OP30). The long operational history of a publisher is perceived as a confirmation of quality and the basis for an undeniable reputation within the scientific community, despite the often very conservative ways of publishing, which do not take advantage of digital technologies or ensure effective distribution of content. Hence, engaging with innovative access approaches is a form of a trade-off, as an English studies professor describes it:

> I mean, for me personally, I think open access is absolutely crucial. But I recognize that there are scholars out there who still believe that open access publications can't have the same prestige […] But because of those ingrained ideas, I think for many scholars, the prestige of open access publications is still lower than that of the closed-access, traditional journal that's been around for one hundred years. (OP04)

So, while new publishers are emerging in scientific publishing, with modern approaches to publishing high-quality content and innovative business models that ensure low prices or free open-access publishing, such venues are often not considered prestigious enough. Even when scholars want to publish with them, they fear that this could impair their chances of employment, diminish the value of their CV, or reduce their career prospects. Open-access publications offer endless possibilities for connecting open content and taking full advantage of hypertext and web technologies.

Form

Apart from innovation in providing access, another kind is the innovation of form. Interviewees saw formal innovations as more than mere digital recreations of traditional genres: "an e-book is not automatically different from an ordinary book. Or the database handbook is not different from the handbook itself – content-wise" (OP23). Innovation is thus part of the general process of the slow evolution of communication forms, as one historian stressed:

> Each field has its article model, and these models evolve over several decades. That is to say that today, in the humanities and social sciences, it is not quite the same

> texts as 50 years ago, 100 years ago, but it is an unconscious, collective, and very slow evolution that is not the subject of specific deliberation. (OP25)

Importantly, this is viewed as an evolutionary process that does not replace older forms but opens new "niches" (OP30). So, every change needs to address the values and traditions of the field to become accepted "and [to – M. M.] show that these can still be met in this new format" (OP24). Innovation, in fact, does not need new technologies as it can be played out in traditional formats. One of the interviewees gave Punctum publications as an example of such works; these are written in conventional form and published as PDFs but retain innovative potential: "often it's still a contained book format, but it can still be radical" (OP03). However, in most cases, our interviewees referred to the technological aspects of innovation.

Innovation allows for new types of interaction with the text. Fitzpatrick coins the term "database-driven scholarship" to describe formats which escape the limitations of the mere representation of the genres, as described above.[35] In this proposition, the "database" is a platform allowing for linking various materials and engaging users. But first and foremost, it leads to a change in our perception of what constitutes a text. In this case, it is not only about the features of scholarly writing (i.e. what makes writing scholarly), but rather a more general understanding of what the text could be. Creating hypertextual connections to other texts and materials seems to be a primary innovative feature that is recognized by researchers, turning the text into a gateway to different materials: "your text could actually be a kind of reading guide across the digital space on the issue you were addressing" (OP25). However, the digital medium has a greater potential for the radical disruption of this understanding. This conclusion was shared by many other interviewees, namely, that contemporary scholarly text goes beyond simple verbal expression, incorporating different, new types of content.

The following quote from a digital humanities professor is lengthy but vital in conveying the gradual sense of innovation in writing. It starts by linking the text and data and then suggests an even more radical mode in which the text becomes executable, allowing for dynamic interaction with its content.

> But let's say that most people regard what you see on the screen or what you read on the page as the text, you know, it's those characters in those sentences. That's the text. But now imagine if we can convince people that something like code, programming code, is also a text. On a philosophical level, people never have any problems with acknowledging that. Yes, that looks like a text, and it's sort of the same thing as text.

35 Fritzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence*, 100.

> So, yes, it's a text. [if this is agreed, can we then read a text that is code? – M. M.]. Then you get two types of people: you get the ones that say, no, that's not a scholarly article; [it – M. M.] is simply not because it doesn't have the form and format that we as scholars expect as the hallmark of how we do things – how this whole scholarly process works and how we report about it. So, that's not a scholarly text. And then, on the other hand, there are the people, obviously like me, that say no; that's an interesting innovation of how text could also be a mechanism of reporting your research. So why not accept a text that can actually execute itself as a scholarly text? And if you go in that direction, we haven't even produced anything innovative because all the things that we produce until now are still basically those things that we just read; they are on a screen. And sometimes they are supported by some data repository or a code repository, but we don't have anything that executes, you know, that creates itself by you executing or running the text, as it were. (OP08)

Based on this perspective, we may distinguish three kinds of formal innovation emerging from our interviews, which resonate with some remarks made by Sari Kivistö and Sami Pihlström in their essay accompanying an exhibition on the monograph.[36] First, there is an essential move beyond the mere written word, that is, accepting expression in other media forms as valid scholarly outputs. They note that digital monographs can become non-linear databases encompassing extensive supplementary material and consisting of diverse non-textual elements like illustrations, audio files, music, video clips, film clips, data sets, databases, entire libraries of secondary reference and archival material, related essays, critiques, reviews, and even search tools for that content:[37]

> Everything that moves away from text, other media – it is innovative to consider them as a possible way to transmit a scholarly reflection. For instance, video, sound, podcast […] Everything that is moving away from traditional writing processes. (OP21)

This multimodality may also entail the very loose understanding of scientific text as a transmedia practice for delivering content through a range of various utterances in different media. Greta Thunberg's activities were recalled in this context:

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36 Sari Kivistö and Sami Pihlström, *The Monograph. An Old-fashioned Publication Forum or an Ultimate Scholarly Achievement?* (University of Helsinki, 2015), retrieved March 8, 2023, from https://silo.tips/download/the-monograph-an-old-fashioned-publication-forum-or-an-ultimate-scholarly-achiev#.

37 Ibid., 17.

> She is innovative because she is multi-channel. And she communicates through many channels. But she wants to acknowledge the scientific truth, right? I mean, her main message is: you don't listen to me, and you don't listen to scientists. (OP14)

Second, the text can be linked to data that allows access to the source material of a given study, be it data or code. As Sari Kivistö and Sami Pihlström argue, following Fitzpatrick's ideas, "a computer-generated or born-digital monograph can become a database, which can incorporate vast bodies of (supplementary) material and consist of a variety of texts rather than of a single text."[38]

> [In our team – M. M.] we are discussing exactly that: how do we publish something that is telling a story so there is a narrative, but then also include how the researchers got to the story, the analytic part, and then what dataset they used to do that? So that's a three-way approach to the whole thing, and that's not easy. (OP23)

Multimodality means acknowledging that scholarly writing should allow access to the underlying content for validation, replication, or further interaction.

> I think the vast majority of scholarly texts in my field are still text, right; they're still sort of paper-shaped; they come out in PDF, or they still pretend to be printed on paper even when they're not. But I think there are more and more options and more ways in which publications and the kinds of scholarly texts that I rely on are starting to break those boundaries. (OP04)

Finally, the third dimension could be treated as an enhancement of the previous one. If we connect text and data, we should also consider providing a novel level of interaction, which is impossible in static texts. It is frequently noted that "the new reading audience which has grown in the digital age is no longer used to the linear, text-based reading associated with the monograph, but prefers browsing visual and multimodal contents."[39] As this archaeology scholar mentioned:

> I'd like to see more powerful and intelligent ways of connecting research findings and research claims with evidence, […] [allowing – M. M.] people to construct research artefacts, online publications that are more dynamic. (OP15)

38 Ibid., 17.

39 Ibid., 18.

Such outputs may range from dynamic visualizations to the generative text envisaged earlier in this section. This type of innovation also changes the way we think about scholarly argument and its authorship. One interviewee discussed how experimentation undermines

> the history of the last 50 years of [a – M. M.] kind of liberal, humanist, Western thought, which is you write a text that's yours. […] And obviously, that's bad for a number of reasons, that it ingrains certain ways of thinking, certain kinds of linear, rational ways of thinking [about] that kind of work against the other ways. (OP10)

If the knowledge becomes generative and interconnected, how should we measure contribution: "if you post something online and I write something that relates to what you said but creates a new idea, how can I claim this as part of my scholarly output? I cannot connect it with other things that I produced" (OP15).

If we were to propose some systematization here, Janneke Adema, Toby Steiner and Simone Bowie[40] provide an extended typology of innovative writing genres, together with relevant examples. As we are focusing here on less experimental outputs, we will survey the field along a three-element typology of non-print books proposed by Deegan: ebooks, enhanced ebooks, and enhanced monographs, which correspond with the level of innovative (non-print) features. An ebook "is a digital version of print, delivered in a standard publishing format (PDF, ePub, etc.)," which doesn't have any advanced functionalities beyond searchability or links.[41] Enhanced ebook has more features like "maps, diagrams, narration, multimedia," and sometimes featured through a book app.[42] Finally, according to the Mellon Foundation definition applied by the author, the enhanced monograph should be fully interactive and searchable online with primary sources.

These non-print formats correspond to what was earlier dubbed as an enhanced ebook (a traditional post-print format with some added features. In our interviews respondents tend to mix various innovative features that Adema, Steiner and Bowie tend to understand as defining features of separate genres: (a) computational book, which "include or incorporate code as part of their critical content or that execute or run code as part of their knowledge production or publication process"[43]; (b) enhanced book, that is, standard

40 Janneke Adema, Toby Steiner and Simon Bowie, *A Typology of Experimental Books* (PubPub, 2021), https://doi.org/10.21428/785a6451.cd58a48e.

41 Deegan, *Academic Book of the Future Project Report*, 72.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 3.

codex format "that have been enriched with additional information, including open, online available data sets, resources, and other multimodal and interactive content (e.g., audio and video)"[44]; (c) database book "where a database of resources forms the central element (i.e., not as an enhancement to a text-based book) around which the book is formed. These can be non-linear, with multiple access points."[45]

Our interviewees, lacking more specialized terminology in this regard, often spoke about more advanced forms of linking data and text within a publication, going beyond the mere depositing discussed in the earlier section on access. This idea opens the book to be connected to other outputs like data, code, or supplemental materials. A website is the main format mentioned by our interviewees in the context of innovation due to its flexibility in handling different genres. Here is how a post-doc in biblical studies describes her involvement in a web book creation:

> It was thought of as a book publication, but only for [the] Internet. It is not like an e-book, which can be both paper and e-book, and its purpose is not to imitate a printed book but only to have HTML pages. […] The idea is to keep it light and easily manageable. It can be a sub-type of a website. But the idea is still to make a book, to keep [it as – M. M.] a long text. It was our conviction that we should still be able to carry out long-term research and reflection. It's an added value in humanities research compared to other scholarly texts. (OP21)

Thus, a web book seems to remediate the book by preserving the long scholarly argument on the one hand and opening it to use by different media on the other. Some interviewees discussed a similar concept, which we distil here as a computational essay, an article, or a book that focuses on linking the text with underlying data:

> So you've written some research in a programming notebook, and not only have you done that, but you provide it in a format that also leverages that functionality. So, for example, people can see that there's a parameter in an experiment that's been used to produce a graph, and they have a little checkbox that they can use to make the parameter vary and see the graph update. That sort of thing for me is innovative, not in terms of technology, because it's quite old, actually […]. It's just that publishing systems don't use it. (OP17)

44 Ibid., 4.

45 Ibid., 9.

It is important to note that it is not only about providing the data but rather linking them with the outputs in a dynamic, interactive way, allowing readers to engage with the scholarship at a deeper level. This archaeology professor compares such a publication to discovery research "in which the relationship between the claims that are made and the warrants for these claims – typically data used as evidence – would be clearer. […] Instead of just being given a diagram, I might be given a pivot table that I can sort of play with and see how they came to that conclusion" (OP15). These functionalities provide readers with new means of interacting with the content, offering new ways of understanding the data: "It is one thing for me to write a paragraph that talks about the conclusions of the data, but it's quite another thing for the reader to actually get into the data. So I think the digital format allows that greater flexibility" (OP24).

The computational essay also leverages the web format to establish links with external materials and sources: "delivering a text through HTML on the Web allows you to create links instead of citations, and think about the embedding of images, or charts, or of other kinds of media forms within the frame of that text. So I think that the text, the notion of the scholarly text, is starting to open up a bit" (OP04). Computational essays stem from the tension between the traditional writing genre and novel methods that demand different forms of engagement with underlying data.

Audiences

Finally, thinking of innovation in terms of audiences bridges the aspects of form and access we discussed earlier. Innovation may improve the communication of research findings by broadening the readership and, thus, the perception of research in society.

> And I do think that […] scientific publishing should go in the direction of using more blog-like things and that we should be publishing and speaking of our research ideas, our research progress, research intermediate results, and our research failures. We should speak more frequently, timely and openly in order to speed up [and – M. M.] improve scientific work worldwide in any way. We don't exchange enough information and not well enough, and that's wrong. (OP30)

Unconventional formats allow for reaching new audiences and help reconnect research and society, showing the importance of the work being done in academia and how the taxpayers' money is spent. According to a cultural studies post-do, "the more people understand that academics are not in an ivory tower, then the more likely you are going to see funding for the

humanities, funding for research is not a waste of time and money" (OP01). Thus, innovation allows us to communicate with audiences attractively, attuned to the contemporary media landscape. In other words, thanks to innovation, research speaks the same language as the public, he adds, "these are non-conventional academic texts that are being read by the public, and they're much more accessible than your standard research paper" (OP01).

However, finding a suitable language accessible to various audience types is challenging. A history scholar working on the innovative dissemination of her project results through an interactive website describes the issue of navigating between the level of scholarly detail and accessibility for wider audiences. Hence, the aim "is to speak in a general way that the public can understand, but also [in a way that – M. M.] academic people will be interested in it. But it's not too dumbed down for the academics, but not too, kind, of highbrow for the general audience" (OP28).

Reaching new audiences means making scholarly content available to countries and communities in which traditional forms of scholarly communication, which are closely bound to the market, are inaccessible for economic reasons.

> When you start to take the book out of the marketplace or take scholarship out of the marketplace, then you realize that the audience can be whoever you want it to be. And that's simply because you're no longer writing for [a – M. M.] financial kind of gain, or for the publishers to gain financially, or for the book to look like it [is – M. M.], sort of, a commodity. (OP10)

Hence, new modes of publishing may increase the readership and societal impact of scholarly outputs.

Blogs are frequently considered an innovation that allows ideas to reach wider audiences, as they do not try to remediate scientific articles or monographs but rather serve as a vehicle for lighter and shorter texts. As Fitzpatrick observes, "what made blogs so immediately popular, both with readers and with writers, was the very fact that they changed and developed over time, existing not as a static, complete text but rather as an ongoing series of updates, additions, and revisions."[46] They may be used as an entry point to research or, also, to other disciplines. A folklore and digital humanities scholar observes:

> I also like very much reading blog posts and not so much from my narrow field of research but from other fields that are not too familiar to me, which explain things to me in a bit more [of a – M. M.] popular way; so for me to see if it works for me

46 Fritzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence*, 68.

> or not, or what directions I should go to find some connection with my research and so on. (OP18)

In this context, blogs serve as popular abstracts of more complicated works. As a psychology postdoc put it plainly:

> That's why you have things like blogs and portals and scientific outlets […] They take the scientific [paper – M. M.], which has twenty pages of tables and graphs and data and stuff like that, and they boil it down to two. (OP29)

Apart from making research more accessible, blogs may serve as a place to communicate early thoughts and to work on ideas. A postdoc in information studies, interestingly, treated his blog as a humanities equivalent of an open notebook: "I keep this kind of open notebook, in which I'm just sort of sharing my thoughts regularly about my research and eventually the book that I'm writing will be based on all of these different snippets. But none of the actual blog posts will be in the book – I quite like just releasing my thoughts as I have them" (OP10).

Audio and audiovisual materials perform a similar function. They are also treated as lighter versions of traditional scholarship but require a particular talent and competence, as indicated by a sociology professor:

> I look with interest at such forms as short podcasts and short video forms, which are terribly difficult for scientists. Because scientists generally don't know how to express themselves in such an engaging, relatively light way – that is a rare talent. […] This alone would also require investment on the part of the institutions, and not just on the shoulders of the scientists themselves – as usual – to learn these different speaking techniques, just as politicians can be taught. (OP12)

Videos were also mentioned as providing a supplement to one's work. For instance, a PhD candidate in digital humanities produced a documentary based on her research (OP06). A professor of information processing mentioned, in this context, short talks on one's own research that may serve as TED-talk-like trailers: "twenty or thirty seconds video, like a commercial, as a marketing tool, explaining to you what you could find in this paper, maybe something to be considered. […] a real person can make you interested in a paper much more than abstract" (OP30).

Podcasts are generally thought to serve a similar role, as this sociology professor remarked: "presenting it in such a concise way, a cool way, if it's just

for a short podcast, but a really short one, a quarter of an hour at the most. In fact it's probably five minutes, as a teaser […]" (OP12). The production of scholarly podcasts may have intensified during the pandemic. As a French PhD student in information science noted, many of his colleagues had "started to record not only lectures but sometimes a review of an article or a book. One of my colleagues started – it was just, like, a side project. And he's actually in his 12th or 13th episode" (OP17). This format is described as particularly engaging because listening does not seem to require one's full attention or much screen time and allows for other activities in the meantime: "I probably would also use podcasts, just listening and not even looking at the picture, but just listening to the voice" (OP18).

Finally, the use of social media was reported in the context of audience outreach. Scholars inform others about their work on social media and often use it to communicate their talks, which they later turn into blogs or articles. So, we see an interesting communication loop here, in which the thought is discussed and elaborated continuously with peers and a wider audience. A postdoc in linguistics described her use of these channels, pointing out that they often allowed her to reach different audiences:

> I'm trying to make blog posts out of my Twitter threads. Sometimes referring to the tweet, but […] I feel like a lot of content gets lost, and I really like Twitter. And I also know that people who actually follow me on Twitter and read my stuff don't go on my blog so they don't read my blog. (OP02)

A specific innovation on the intersection regarding engagement with audiences is the living book, which allows for the fluidity of the text and versioning on the one hand and user interaction on the other. As this postdoc in biblical studies pointed out:

> The idea is that we keep track of variations and make this information visible. As for the difference between a book and a web book [WB – M. M.], the idea is to keep a regular publication rhythm. I publish as soon as I have written a chapter. The peer review will come at the end of the process after the WB is published online. And the WB will be modified following the peer-review comments, and thanks to the versioning, the modifications will be visible. (OP21)

Living books change the approach to publication from something finished and closed to an output that makes the changes transparent and accessible to readers. Living books spark community discussion, allowing for comments and replies.

Challenges

The disruptive potential of innovation opens up new possibilities but also appears challenging on many levels. The actual uptake of novel communication forms is impeded by various factors, among which quality assessment, prestige, competencies, and the lack of established standards for referencing novel forms are critical.

In their report on the new units of scholarly communication, Burton et al. highlight that we often mistake complex sociotechnical challenges for purely technical hurdles. In other words, it is not only about the availability of the tools and platforms but also about institutions that would back and sustain them.[47] The main problem with innovation is that there are novel communication services, but not many quality-assessment mechanisms have been built upon them. Traditional assessment forms often seem incompatible with innovative outputs' needs and challenges.

The lack of recognition of innovative forms as scholarly texts impedes innovation. "If you're doing something so new and different, there is, by definition, no audience to say: 'yes, this is a good thing to do,' or 'no, this is not a good thing to do'" (OP24). So, the question boils down to assessing whether a publication is scholarly or not. As one interviewee put it:

> The barrier comes with the question: what is recognized as scholarly writing in academia, and lets you obtain a position? Until recently (but maybe it is changing) the digital, and especially what is not peer-reviewed, does not count as scholarly writing, at least not for career advancement. (OP22)

One feature frequently pointed out in the interviews is the need to provide a scholarly apparatus to correspond with the established conventions of academic writing, like "citing your peers, knowing the state of the art", and adding "footnotes, references, data, which are, as far as possible the most accessible, so that one can dive into the text" (OP25). As this digital humanities researcher in biblical studies put it bluntly: "my innovative publications will be taken seriously only if they are accompanied by a traditional bibliography" (OP21). The same goes for integrating "a form of scientific validation" (OP21) into the innovative publication. As Samuel Moore and Janneke Adema observe that experimental and multimodal forms are not always taken into equal consideration as traditional outputs by such important bodies as "hiring, tenure, and promotion committees."[48]

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47 Ibid.

48 Samuel Moore and Janneke Adema, *COPIM Experimental Publishing Workshop – Part 1: Inhibitions Towards Experimental Book Publishing* [Blog, 2020], https://copim.pubpub.org/pub/experimental-publishing-workshop-part-1/release/2.

The prestige attached to traditional forms tends to have a cooling effect on innovation, as this postdoc puts it: "our reward structures are so embedded in us that I have to write a book that looks like a book" (OP10). A professor of English studies adds: "many scholars tend to be conservative in going where they see prestige, and, so, that reliance on prestige is still of enormous influence" (OP04). This prestige economy leads to a peculiar situation in which the format of the work influences the assessment of the quality of its content. One interviewee observes that "it could be cutting edge work with amazing results, amazing data, and it's completely relevant. But they might not be cited because it's just a thesis" (OP06). That, in turn, creates a vicious circle in which scholars are afraid to experiment because they want to publish in prestigious venues, resulting in fewer innovative works and low prestige. There is also the issue of competencies required to engage with such formats, which many scholars may not possess (OP12) or even be reluctant to invest the time in gaining such competencies: "I don't think of myself as a particularly digitally literate person. And I think I know, and I am familiar, and I work with things that are probably already quite established" (OP19). On the other hand, researchers invested in innovation cannot understand why some scholars refuse to use innovations that could facilitate their work: "despite my presentation of Zotero, despite it becoming pretty much universal and students using it, many of my colleagues don't. They do things by hand […]" (OP30). Competencies are closely linked to the need for infrastructure, as a lack of relevant technology may block innovation.

Finally, researchers grapple with the need for established standards for referencing novel sources like tweets, blog posts, and YouTube videos in scholarly work (OP03, OP06). Generally speaking, the issue of how novel sources should be included in an academic text is one of the challenges of twenty-first-century scholarly writing. While citing novel forms as primary sources, for example datasets does not raise many concerns, the academic acceptance for referencing scholarly arguments in such formats seems lower (OP18, OP29). While blog posts resembling academic papers are generally accepted as citable, social media posts are viewed with more skepticism (OP18). The need for referencing software and tools arises to ensure proper credit for scholarly code developers while also recognizing the contribution of research infrastructure (OP16, OP24).

The challenges of novel forms push scholars toward some stopgap practices that allow researchers to have their cake and eat it, too; that is, to take advantage of innovation while retaining some signs of prestige. We call these practices double referencing and double publication, that is using a traditional format instead of an innovative one to retain the prestige of the conventional form. These can be considered harmful for innovation or, more positively, as

supporting the transition – as stopgap practices during the transformation phase. Double referencing means that one feels pressure to find and use traditional forms of publication for referencing, even if they consulted the innovative version for their research: "if you cite something innovative (a video, a recording of a talk), we still feel that we have to cite another traditional publication" (OP21). The same interviewee prepared a digital edition of their thesis, which had to be presented in a traditional form (OP21). One advantage of double publication is that authors have the best of both worlds – the prestige of the publication but also faster delivery and the content better.

To conclude, Flusser, quoted in the introduction to this paper, viewed innovation as "faster and faster quills," that is improved tools for better communication of thought and ideas. In this paper, I tried to sketch how scholars understand innovation, referring to seamless access, formal features, and new means of contacting audiences. All this innovation is not happening in vain, as it needs both infrastructural support and systemic recognition in academia, which seems to be the critical obstacle slowing down our quills.

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Abstract

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Faster and Faster Quills: Innovation in Scholarly Writing

This paper investigates the multifaceted concept of innovation in scholarly writing, drawing upon qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 33 participants representing diverse roles within the scholarly communication landscape. The study, part of the Horizon 2020 OPERAS-P project, explores how stakeholders perceive and experience innovation in their respective domains. Findings reveal that innovation in scholarly writing is not limited to technological advancements but encompasses a complex interplay of factors, including seamless access to research outputs, evolving formal features of scholarly texts, and new avenues for engaging with diverse audiences. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of infrastructural support and systemic recognition within academia to foster and sustain a culture of innovation in scholarly communication. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the changing nature of scholarly writing in the digital age and provides valuable insights for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers involved in shaping the future of scholarly communication.

Keywords

innovation, scholarly writing, digital humanities, qualitative data

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Central European Tilt. The Analysis of Cultural-Political Functions and Effects of Polish Europe-related Literary Prizes

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ELPs Definition and Scope of the Paper

What was achieved in 2007 with the Treaty of Lisbon, namely the establishment of "Europe" as a political and legal entity capable of action, is still far less developed on a cultural level. The lack of a collective cultural identity is supposed to be remedied by art and culture following the model of the formation of nation-states in the nineteenth century.[1] The European flag and the European anthem developed in 1985 and 1986 can be interpreted as smaller pieces of a larger endeavor towards European unity. The goal is quite clear: Europe should be perceived more positively by its citizens.[2] What fundamentally distinguishes

1 Alessandra Goggio, "Alter Kontinent, Auszeichnungen: Literaturpreise im Zeitalter der Europäisierung," in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontexte*, ed. Christoph Von Jürgensen and Antonius Weixler (Berlin: Metzler 2021), 321.

2 Anna Schoon. "Europäische Integration, Legitimation und Literaturpreise – Grenzen und Potenziale 'europäischer' Literaturpreise," in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte, Theorie und Praxis*, ed. Dennis

"Europeanisation" from the processes of nation-state building, however, is the diversity of Europe in cultural and linguistic terms, hence the difficulty of establishing clear and systematic forms of cultural representation.

Literary prizes can also be identified as a part of such a cultural legitimation process that accompanies legal and political initiatives. In this paper, we focus on what we call Europe-related literary prizes (ELPs), that is, prizes which are referring in their official documents to European culture, history, and values and are sponsored either by European Union institutions, EU's member states and their organizations, or cultural institutions, foundations, associations, companies, publishers or private individuals. ELPs are awarded preferably to the authors from the whole of Europe, alternatively to a subset of European nationalities. Finally, ELPs are to be defined here by the fact that they are awarded (even if not exclusively) to writers. To sum up, ELPs have four dimensions: 1) topical: they are awarding a relation between literary creation and European culture, values, and so on; 2) disciplinary: they are awarding literary creation, including writers; 3) geocultural: they are recognizing European writers; 4) organizational: they are funded and organized by European institutions.

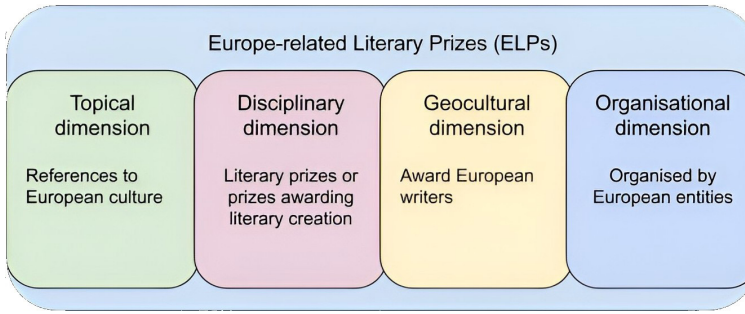

Figure 1. Dimensions of ELPs.

ELPs are awarded throughout Europe, and their nuanced analysis provides a good indication of the contributions made by national cultural institutions to the intensification of transnational cultural exchange relations and the structural development of a European literary field.[3] The analysis also contributes

von Borghardt, Sarah Maaß and Alexandra Pontzen (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2020), 26.

3 As an example, in the German-speaking world alone, more than 40 Europe-related literary prizes can be identified (cf. Schoon, "Europäische Integration," 188), among them prestigious prizes such as the Würth Prize for European Literature, the Leipzig Book Prize for Eu-

to the assessment of how much the member states are concerned with raising European awareness among creative artists and the general public.

Research Review and Research Question

In this paper, we will examine the ELPs landscape in Poland. This topic has hardly been discussed so far, which does not seem surprising, since this specific type of prize is still relatively young on the Polish literary prize scene. Since Polish ELPs respond to two different cultural environments – Polish and European – at the same time with their specific orientation, the connection to two different fields of research is correspondingly necessary for this study.

On the one hand, newly founded literary prizes with a European program have an impact on the European cultural landscape and literary prize scene. Since the European Union as well as the member states and their cultural institutions use literary prizes to promote their own visions of Europe, their valorization practices are often in competition with each other. Depending on the image of Europe that these prizes convey aesthetically and politically through their practices of consecration, they also intervene in the long term in institutional processes about what a future Europe should look like.

In addition to the numerous studies that examine the literary prize scene of individual countries from literary-aesthetic, cultural-political, gender-specific, and economic perspectives, mostly drawing on the conceptual vocabulary of Pierre Bourdieu's[4] sociology of culture, his field and capital theory,[5] the recent years have shown an awakening of interest in the growing

ropean Understanding, or the Austrian State Prize for European Literature. However, only about half of the German ELPs are awarded to people from all European states, because numerous prizes – as will be discussed here later – are aimed at authors from one's own country, language area, or at individual transculturally connected regions within Europe. In addition to the prizes with a European dimension, there are about another 140 prizes in Germany with an international, i.e. in this case: trans-European orientation, which, however, do not necessarily exclusively award prizes for literature. Whether European or trans-European in orientation, a substantial proportion of internationally oriented literary prizes in Germany can also be assigned to the category of translation prizes. Cf. Sarah Maaß and Dennis Borghardt, *Der Wert der Preise: Valorisierungsdynamik in der deutschen Literaturpreislandschaft 1990–2019* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2022), 24.

4 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

5 One exception is the DFG-funded project "Literary Prizes in the German-Speaking World since 1990: Functions and Effects," led by Alexandra Pontzen, which has developed the praxeological concept of valorization developed in Valuation Studies (Michael Hutter, "Infinite Surprises. On the Stabilization of Value in the Creative Industries," in *The Worth*

field of transnationally oriented literary and cultural prizes.[6] This includes the comprehensive volume edited by Susan Leckey, *The Europa Directory of Literary Awards and Prizes*,[7] a rich collection of literary prizes in Europe (both European and non-European), which is, however, already out of date and, moreover, only available in an expensive print edition. Scholarly comparative studies of exemplary ELPs as well as individual studies, for example of the European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL), have recently been published by Anna Schoon and Alexandra Goggio.[8] Schoon examines the literary prizes according to their functions and effects and comes to the conclusion that literary prizes play a major role in the context of the Europeanization of the literary field, but that they are less suitable as an instrument for the production of a supranational European identity.[9]

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of Goods. Valuation and Pricing in the Economy, ed. Jens Beckert and Patrik Aspers [Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2011], 201–220) into a method for literary prize research (cf. Dennis Borghardt, Sarah Maaß and Alexandra Pontzen, eds., *Literaturpreise. Geschichte, Theorie und Praxis* [Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2020]; Borghardt and Maaß, *Der Wert der Preise*, 2022).

6 Studies of the Spanish, English, German and French markets for literary prizes include Sally Ann Perret, *The National Award in Narrative Literature and the Role of Art in Democratic Spain (1977–2011)* (Urbana, Illinois, 2012); Sharon Norris, "The Booker Prize: A Bourdieusian Perspective," *Journal for Cultural Research* 10 (2) (2006): 139–158; Claire Squires, "Fiction and Literary Prizes in Great Britain," in *Fiction and Literary Prizes in Great Britain*, ed. Wolfgang Gortschacher, Holger Klein and Claire Squires (Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2006), accessed June3, 2024, http://www.praesens.at/praesens2013/?p=1790; Stevie L. Marsden, "Why Women Don't Win Literary Awards: The Saltire Society Literary Awards and Implicit Stereotyping," *Women: A Cultural Review* 30 (1) (2019): 43–65, accessed June 2, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2018.1561047; Borghardt, Maaß and Pontzen, *Literaturpreise. Geschichte*; Borghardt and Maaß, *Der Wert der Preise;* Christoph Jürgensen and Antonius Weixler, eds., *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontext* (Stuttgart, 2021); Burckhard Dücker, "Literaturpreise als Forschungsgegenstand der Literaturwissenschaft," in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontexte*, ed. Christoph von Jürgensen and Antonius Weixler (Berlin: Metzler, 2021), 31–52; Sylvie Ducas, *La littérature à quel(s) prix? Histoire des prix littéraires* (La Decouverte, 2013); Nikol Dziub and Augustin Voegele, *Le prix Nobel de littérature et l'Europe / The Nobel Prize for Literature and Europe* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).

7 Susan Leckey, ed., *The Europa Directory of Literary Awards and Prizes* (London: Europa Publ., 2002).

8 Schoon, "Europäische Integration"; Anna Schoon, "Wie 'europäisch' ist der Literaturpreis der Europäischen Union?," in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontexte*, ed. Christoph von Jürgensen and Antonius Weixler (Berlin: Metzler, 2021) and Alexandra Goggio, "Alter Kontinent."

9 Schoon, "Europäische Integration," 195; 199–202.

Drawing on Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production*,[10] sociology of literature, book market research, and translation studies have dealt with transnational literary prize events from the perspective of global translation flows,[11] and from the standpoint of linguistic diversity.[12] Desiderium, however, remains a comparative study of ELPs based on large-scale, systematic, Europe-wide data collection.

ELPs on the other hand have an impact on the (in many cases) tradition-rich national literary prize scene by strengthening new (mostly Europhile) values and value patterns. Put simply, they add a transnational component to the national literary scene and thus sometimes provoke contentious controversies over political identity in the context of one's own national or cultural self-image. For example, they trigger discussion on the extent to which international actors both economically and symbolically should also be favored by the national funding system.

The fact that these discussions have been less intense in Poland is perhaps also due to the low prestige and low resonance that Polish ELPs have experienced so far. According to Grzegorz Jankowicz (who selected the ten most important Polish literary prizes for the purpose of his study), none of the three international literary prizes awarded in Poland – neither the "Angelus"[13] and "European Poet of Freedom" nor the "Herbert Award" – has so far equaled the prestige of prizes established for Polish literature (Nike, Gdynia, Paszport *Polityki*). Following James F. English, Jankowicz emphasizes that establish-

10 Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*.

11 Johan Heilbron, "Towards A Sociology of Translation," *European Journal of Social Theory* 2 (4) (1999): 429–444; Pascale Casanova, "European Literature. Simply a Higher Degree of Universality?," *European Review* 17 (2009); Marc Verboord, Giselinde Kuipers and Susanne Janssen, "Institutional Recognition in the Transnational Literary Field, 1955–2005," *Cultural Sociology*, online first April 6, 2015; Gisèle Sapiro, "The Metamorphosis of Modes of Consecration in the Literary Field: Academies, Literary Prizes, Festivals," *Poetics* 59 (2016): 121–132, accessed March 3, 2024, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0304422X160001032016).

12 Franca Sinopoli, "Literature for Europe?," *Orbis Litterarum* 66 (2) (2011); Barbara Siller and Sandra Vlasta, eds., *Literarische (Mehr)Sprachreflexionen* (Wien: Praesens Verlag, 2020).

13 The prestige of "Angelus" is the highest among the Polish transnational literary prizes, as noted by both Grzegorz Jankowicz, "Piękni wygrani. Wpływ nagród na strukturę pola literackiego" [Beautiful winners. The influence of awards on the structure of the literary field], in *Literatura polska po 1989 roku w świetle teorii Pierre'a Bourdieu. Podręcznik*, ed. Grzegorz Jankowicz (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2015), 137 and Przemysław Czaplinski, "A gdyby nagród literackich nie było?" [What if there were no literary awards?], in *Festiwal Fabuły, 17–21.11.2020, Poznań* [*Książka festiwalowa*] (Poznań: Centrum Kultury Zamek, 2020), 72.

ing a prize with a transnational character is "hard and risky but extremely profitable."[14] Of course, such prizes would open up "new possibilities of conferring prestige"[15]; on the other hand, prize donors who want to ensure the sustainable success of their international literary prizes have considerable hurdles to overcome (in this context, Jankowicz analyses the case of the limited scope of the European Prize for Literature awarded by the EU and its corresponding ineffectiveness).[16]

When looking at opinions on the reception of literary prizes awarded in Poland, one can notice a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, there is the conviction that prizes (while noting the various flaws in the system of awarding them) are an important phenomenon on which much depends: the popularity of the author, the resonance of the readership, the sales of the book, and finally the historical-literary discourse,[17] as well as the possibility of translating or filming the awarded works. As Agnieszka Budnik writes: "they [prizes – PCL's note] function as an institution that manages the flow of authorial prestige, the activities of publishing houses, the tastes of readers (including critics and jurors), and even the shape of the community (thanks to their influence on the creation of the literary canon)."[18] An important ambition of – at least some – literary prizes is precisely to create movement, to break down existing hierarchies, to intensify discussion, because "conversation complicates and undermines simple relations of dependence, sows ferment […]."[19] On the other hand, however, there is also a conviction among some critics and researchers that the impact of awards is limited or surface-

14 Jankowicz, "Piękni wygrani," 137.

15 Ibid., 137.

16 Ibid., 137–140.

17 See Adrian Gleń, *Do-prawdy? Studia i szkice o literaturze najnowszej* [To the truth. Studies and sketches on modern literature] (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2012), 21–22.

18 Agnieszka Budnik, "Tomasz Bąk. Jego nagrody" [Tomasz Bąk. His rewards], *Śląskie Studia Polonistyczne* 2 (2021): 1, accessed June 3, 2024, https://www.journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/SSP/article/view/12208/9548.

19 Piotr Śliwiński, "Cztery ryzyka i bankiet" [Four Risks and a Banquet], in Piotr Śliwiński, *Horror poeticus* (Biuro Literackie: Wrocław, 2012), 63. Piotr Śliwiński, then a jury member of the award, wrote the following about the goals of the Gdynia Prize: "to raise the level of risk in dealing with literature, […] to stand on the side of open perspectives, of discussion rather than conclusion, of uncertainty rather than proclamation, […] to amplify voices that are interesting but suppressed, mainly by routine and indifference." (Śliwiński, "Cztery ryzyka i bankiet," 63).

level: they produce only short-lived consequences (mainly amplified by the media[20]), often "consecrate" existing hierarchies, and, moreover, the reception of the awarded books is limited to dispersed voices, notes or reports – with no increase in deep (close) readings.[21] Czapliński sums up this ambivalence remarkably well: "we are not a society that is capable of valuing literature without awards, and we are not a society that gets particularly emotional about literature because of awards."[22]

The same is true of academic research on literary prizes. Almost every one of the few scholars exploring this topic notes that it is (not only in Poland) extremely under-researched[23] – both from the side of contemporary literary history and from the theoretical side. Budnik observes that "the vast majority of the writing on literary prizes, however, consists mainly of reviews and critical and journalistic texts that appear on the occasion of successive announcements of lists of winners of competitions and plebiscites. These articles are mainly maintained in an emotional tone or in the form of rankings of works based on unclear criteria. To an even lesser extent, the small number of critical studies captures the aspect of cultural economics and social transformation."[24]

Based on previous research on the topic, the study attempts to provide answers to the following questions: how has the Polish literary prize scene changed since Poland joined the EU? How many prizes, which are in the wider European context (including so-called "Euregios," i.e. bilateral literary prizes), have been launched since 2004? What values and value patterns in the context of European integration are these prizes trying to popularize? What kind of Europe do these prizes represent and which self-image of Poland (its function and role within the EU) can be deduced from the political and aesthetic orientation of the prizes (looking at statutes and programs of the prizes, laudations, and acceptance speeches as well as the lineup of the laureates)?

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20 Adela Kobelska, "Co media masowe robią z nagrodą literacką? Nagroda Nike w odbiorze prasowym (1997–2005)" [What do the mass media do with the literary prize? Nike Award in press reception (1997–2005)], *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 3 (2009) and followed by Gleń, *Do-prawdy?* do not include the online environment, which would be an interesting research challenge.

21 Kobelska, "Co media masowe robią z nagrodą literacką?," 102–103; Gleń, *Do-prawdy?*, 24.

22 Czapliński, "A gdyby nagród literackich nie było?," 9.

23 Jankowicz, Piękni wygrani"; Budnik, "Tomasz Bąk. Jego nagrody"; James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige. Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

24 Budnik, "Tomasz Bąk. Jego nagrody," 40.

List of Polish Europe-Related Literary Prizes

Based on our understanding of what constitutes ELPs, we identify thirteen such prizes in Poland. In the following table we present them through four dimensions:

1. topical – this indicates how important is the reference to European culture in relation to the ELP's overall message,
2. disciplinary – this indicates whether a prize is strictly literary or has a broader range,
3. geocultural – this indicates the geographic and cultural scope of the prize, especially whether it is open for participation for all European nationalities or is somehow limited (e.g. can only be obtained by writers representing a European region),
4. organizational – this defines the organizational entity behind a prize.

	Prize name	**Topical dimension (importance of reference to Europe)**	**Disciplinary dimension**	**Geocultural scope (awardees criteria)**	**Organizational dimension**
1	European Poet of Freedom	primary reference (awarding creation which embodies a new vision to European community)	literary (poetry)	whole Europe	public (city; Gdansk)
2	Central European Literary Award Angelus [Angelus]	primary reference (awarding literary creation which reflects on Central Europe)	literary (prose)	23 countries from Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe	public (city; Wroclaw)
3	Krakow City Council Award Stanisław Vincenz (previously: New Culture of New Europe) [Vincenz award]	strong reference (awarding contributions which reflect on Central-Eastern Europe	political (awarding among others personalities of political and cultural life)	Central and Eastern Europe	public (city; Krakow)
4	International Bridge Award (der Internationale Brückepreis) / Nagroda Mostu Europa-Miasta [Bridge award]	strong reference: recognizes contributions that reflect on Europe as a place of intercultural dialogue, cultural exchange	political (awarding among others personalities of political and cultural life)	international (so far, the majority of winners have been European)	association (Society for the Award of the International Bridge Prize of Europe Cities Zgorzelec/ Görlitz)

5	Jerzy Giedroyc Literary Award [Giedroyc award]	weak reference: awards Belarusian writers whose work contributes towards neighborly relations amongst Central-European nations	literary (any work)	Belarusians	public (state: Embassy of Poland in Belarus; Polish Institute in Minsk) and associations (Belarusian PEN Centre, and the Union of Belarusian Writers)
6	Joseph Conrad-Korzeniowski Literary Award [Conrad-Korzeniowski award]	weak reference: awards Ukrainian writers whose work resembles Conrad's work (Conrad-Korzeniowski as a "paneuropean" symbol)	literary (prose)	Ukrainians	public (state: Polish Institute in Kiev)
7	Identitas Award	strong reference: awards creation which contributes to understanding of community embedded in Western, European values	award for contributions to culture: literary (any work), scientific, and popular publications (i. a. historical monographs and works in the field of humanities)	Poles	association (Identitas Foundation)
8	Man of Borderland (title, program, no award)	weak reference: awards contributions that reflect on Europe as a source of values; award for creators of culture from Central Europe, which popularize an idea and ethos of borderland	political (awarding among others per sonalities of political and cultural life)	Europe (with clear focus on Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic States)	association (Center Borderland - of arts, cultures, nations)
9	*Rzeczpospolita* Award	strong reference: awarded to authors who see themselves ideologically in the tradition of Jerzy Giedroyc. One of the author's concerns was "strengthening	political (awarding among others personalities of political and cultural life)	international (so far, the majority of winners have been Poles)	newspaper *(Rzeczpospolita)*

		Poland's position in Europe and maintaining good relations with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe."			
10	Leopold Staff Literary Award [Staff award]	weak reference to European cultural memory; the award recognizes the engagement with Italian art	award for contributions to culture: entire spectrum of literary production and practices (translators, publishers, literary critics; rarely: literature), scientific and popular publications (i. a. historical monographs and works in the field of humanities)	Poles	newspaper (Lente magazine) and private/company (Antich' Caffè)
11	Zbigniew Herbert International Literary Award [Herbert Award]	weak reference: awards contributions that reflect on Europe as a source of values (values such as freedom are explicitly described here as universal)	literary (poetry)	international (so far, the majority of winners have been European)	association (Herbert Foundation)
12	Trakl competition	weak reference: The prize awards literary works that relate to the atmosphere of the Georg Trakl's poetry, an Austrian author whose literary works are strongly influenced by the First World War	literary (poetry); since 2015 a competition for amateurs	Poles	public (state: Consulate General of the Republic of Austria in Krakow) and association (Foundation for the Promotion of Culture "Urwany Film")
13	New Europe Ambassador	primary reference: awards "books that boldly and uncompromisingly	award for contributions to culture: entire spectrum of literary production	international (so far, the majority of winners have been European; clear focus on	association (European Solidarity Center in Gdansk, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański

		destroy existing stereotypes and clichés that define Europe and its inhabitants and seek answers to what Europe is today."	and practices (translators, publishers, literary critics), scientific and popular publications (i.a. historical monographs and works in the field of humanities), literary (multiple genres, i.a. comics)	Central and Eastern Europe)	College of Eastern Europe in Wroclaw)

Table 1. List of Polish ELPs.

Topical Dimension of ELPs

A look at the prizes' documentation (their agendas and respective epi- and peritexts such as jury decisions, lists of prizewinners, laudations, acceptance speeches) makes it clear that the prizes differ not only in terms of the values they seek to convey, but also in how strongly the respective reference to Europe is expressed. The fact that Europe is the central point of reference is clearly evident in all those ELPs that leave no doubt from the title alone that they pursue a political program, such as the European Poet of Freedom, the Central European Literary Award Angelus or the Ambassador of New Europe (we call this a "primary reference" to Europe). A strong reference, on the other hand, can be established for those prizes that inform in their statues that the prize is located in the context of the discussion about Europe, European values, the European literary canon, and the cultural heritage of Europe (Vincenz Award, Bridge Award, Identitas Award, Rzeczpospolita Award). On the other hand, the reference is described as weak if Europe is mentioned neither in the title nor in the epi- and peritexts of the prize, but the self-description reveals references to a transnational (sometimes European) debate about values, identity, politics, and aesthetics (Trakl Competition, Man of Borderland, Herbert Award, Giedroyc Award and Conrad-Korzeniowski Award).

In many cases, prizes affirm a certain heteronomy and functionalize literature for the sake of non-literary values. In order to be able to analyze the specific role that prizes play in the process of European identity formation and integration, it is necessary to clarify which axiological values prize donors adopt in order to develop their own vision of Europe.[25] In order to

25 According to Jankowicz, this constitutes a major motivation for prize donors: "the establishment of a prize is sought by institutions (private as well as state) in order to increase their dominance in the process of cultural value production, i.e. to somehow bring an area of the social field under control." (Jankowicz, "Piękni wygrani," 122).

better understand Polish ELPs' topical dimension (as we call it in this paper), we identified – in the prizes' agendas and their documentation – the following four categories of values and value patterns: 1) Europe as a pan-European community; 2) Europe as a source of values (inter alia peace, freedom and tolerance); 3) as a place of intercultural dialogue, transnational understanding and the preservation of cultural diversity; 4) as a place with a rich cultural heritage. Admittedly, a classification according to such criteria is not quite easy to accomplish, as the categories overlap in some aspects and the self-descriptions of the awards are sometimes very general.

1) The only award that can be assigned to this category (in the strictest sense) is the European Poet of Freedom. The prize donors remain very vague in their definition of Europe, but at the same time, make it clear that they see the cultural-political function of the prize in European community building, cultural-political integration, and European identity building, as can be seen from the prize's self-description published online: "the adjective [European – authors' note] obviously refers to geography, which, however, can prove to be complex, especially in the present day. Europe, to which the Poet of Freedom refers, is not just a territory [sic – authors' note]; it is a project of community. The community, particularly in the context of modern-day Europe, cannot be discussed in isolation from politics, although not the politics understood as local tentative interests of one group or another. The politics of the 'European Poet of Freedom' is aimed at creating and shaping new ways of coexistence for millions of people"[26] (PP/EPF). By pointing out that authors are honored for their courage to "oppose existing forms in language and politics,"[27] the prize committee makes it clear, on the one hand, that the community – according to its conception – should not only be preserved, but actively shaped with the means of art. Interestingly, this perspective makes it necessary for the prize to bring into play not only ideological but also aesthetic criteria of valorization.

2) Regardless of whether the reference to Europe is primary, strong or weak, the awards often paint a picture of Europe as the source and preserver of core values (such as peace, human rights, democracy, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for other cultures and religions, respect for nature and the environment). The evaluation criteria for the Herbert Award are also undoubtedly ideological in nature, when the prize committee highlights the namesake

26 The abbreviations of the names of the awards given in parentheses refer to the official websites of the literary awards from which the quoted fragments come. The list of websites together with the list of abbreviations can be found in the appendix to the article "Appendix: Prize Profiles (online)."

27 Ibid.

(Polish poet, essayist, and moralist Zbigniew Herbert) above all as a mediator of moral values such as "tolerance." With emphatic undertones and an unmistakably time- and culture-critical perspective on today's world – "seemingly sinking ever deeper into a marasmic state of ethical and metaphysical chaos" – the founders of the Herbert Award invoke literature as a place of healing that facilitates the "exchange of ideas, values, and contemporary experiences." Literature – understood here in its broadest sense as "artistic creation" – is seen as a "tool of compassion" that should open readers' eyes to "other people, other languages, other sufferings…" (PP/HA).

3) One of the central values which the prizes' agendas refer to or imply is Europe as a place of intercultural dialogue, cultural exchange, and intellectual networking (such as the Angelus, the Vincenz Prize, and the Conrad-Korzeniowski Award). Angelus, according to the statutes, "is directly connected with the centuries-long tradition of Breslau as a city of encounter and dialogue. Because of its history and location, Wroclaw has always been a place where different nations, cultures, and intellectual currents have intersected." The award, therefore, honors authors "whose works address current issues, provoke thought, and expand knowledge about other cultures" (PP/A).

As is evident in some cases, the ideological orientation is also realized in concrete initiatives. In the case of the Identitas Award, winning the prize is also linked to participation in a workshop on the Arctic island of Uloya. The Man of Borderland provides the winner with the prospect of popularizing his or her work and thus also contributes to the transcultural transmission of literature and values.[28] Consequently, intercultural dialogue is in many cases not only a value to be defended, but it is linked to concrete cultural-political and literary initiatives and measures, as shown, for example, by the Giedroyc Award and the Conrad-Korzeniowski Award,[29] which contribute to the popularization of Belarusian and Ukrainian literature. In the longer term,

28 On the award website it says: "the awarding of such a title does not constitute a reward in any material form. It means an effort to popularize his work by publishing books, organizing exhibitions, meetings with authors and other artistic presentations. The culminating event of this project during the year will be a three-day international meeting dedicated to a selected artist, with the participation of people who will come to present various aspects of the life and work of the 'Man of Borderland,' or present their own artistic works dedicated to him" (PP/MOB).

29 With regard to the Conrad-Korzeniowski Prize, it is also interesting to see how prizes try to generate attention for themselves and their laureates by choosing a namesake with European appeal. The prize's homepage says: "we also want to draw attention to Polish artists who, like Józef Conrad-Korzeniowski, were born in what is now Ukraine and who, although they have an impact on world culture, are not associated with either Poland or Ukraine" (PP/CKA).

these initiatives contribute to a dynamisation of the development of a more integrated European literary field – they can also be understood as part of that process which Anna Schoon subsumes under "Europeanization."[30]

4) Some awards conceptualize Europe as a high culture of artistic creation (Staff, Trakl) and as a place of rich cultural heritage to be preserved and productively expanded with new, innovative literature and art. One example is the Staff Award, which is given under the patronage of Leopold Staff, a Polish poet and translator whose work is strongly influenced by Mediterranean culture, for "outstanding academic, translational and popularizing achievements related to Italian culture." Especially the prizes that bear a namesake in the title can be assigned to this category (see PP/SA), such as the Trakl Competition, which refers by name to the Austrian expressionist Georg Trakl, whose work is permeated by the topoi of death and decay, destruction and the experience of the First World War.

Disciplinary Dimension of ELPs

One of ELPs' core characteristics is their 1) disciplinary focus on awarding literature, which means in the most common sense the author's lifetime achievements (such as the Herbert Award) or one specific work (such as Angelus or European Poet of Freedom, etc.). Polish ELPs are awarded for literary works of a certain genre (Angelus awards prizes for prose), and in some cases the prize program even goes hand in hand with a re-evaluation of certain literary forms and subgenres that were previously considered only marginally literary. For example, the winners of the New Europe Ambassador include comic book authors. It seems significant, however, that the prizes with the widest reach – the "Poet of Freedom" and the Herbert Prize (see geocultural dimension) – both focus on the genre of poetry. This is interesting in that literary prizes that overtly bring extra-literary value criteria into play (see topical dimension) often award prose and generally tend to qualify literature according to social relevance and socio-critical seriousness, thus narrowing it to a "leading medium of the discourse on social values."[31] The two prizes illustrate that this rule cannot be claimed

30 Anna Schoon subsumes under "Europeanization" (Schoon, "Europäische Integration," 350).

31 Christoph Jürgensen, "Würdige Popularität? Überlegungen zur Konsekrationsinstanz 'Literaturpreis' im gegenwärtigen literarischen Feld," in *Poetiken der Gegenwart. Deutschsprachige Romane nach 2000*, ed. Silke Horstkotte and Leonhard Herrmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 297; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 228–249; Heribert Tommek, "Die internationale Ökonomie der 'besten Romane des Jahres': Der Deutsche Buchpreis im Beziehungsgeflecht mit dem Prix Goncourt und dem

for the Polish ELP scene. Topical and disciplinary dimensions are closely linked here, when the Poet of Freedom connects the marginalized role of poetry[32] – at least between the lines – with the call for more diversity.[33]

2) Awards for contributions to culture: even a quick glance at the Polish ELPs shows that the umbrella term "literature" refers to the entire spectrum of literary production and practices, as prizes are also awarded to other key players in the literary world, as can be seen from the Staff Award, which also honors publishers (such as Tatarak Publishing House in 2022), scientists and scientific organizations (ItaliAMO in 2021), and literary institutions (Dramatic Theater of the Capital City of Warsaw in 2020).[34]

Booker Prize," in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontexte*, ed. Christoph von Jürgensen and Antonius Weixler (Berlin: Metzler, 2021), 159–161.

32 Poetry in Poland is marginal in the sense that after 1989 it became a more niche, low-circulation phenomenon, overwhelmed as much by prose as by mass culture in general. Despite this, it is possible to speak of a belief in the high rank of poetry and its irreplaceability by other discourses. This is reinforced both by the prestigious prizes for poetry awarded in Poland (apart from the EPW – Silesius, Gdynia) and the important literary initiatives promoting it. As the curator of the Poznań of the Poets Festival puts it, the essence of this contradictory status: "poetry thus already seems completely unnecessary, and yet it remains important because it digs into that delightful hammock [the cult of pleasure – authors' note] of ours in which we happily recline." "*Wiersze wywracają grilla*. Rozmowa z Piotrem Śliwińskim," Sebastian Gabryel, *Kultura u Podstaw. Wielkopolska*, accessed March 2, 2024, https://kulturaupodstaw.pl/piotr-sliwinski-wiersze-wywracaja-grilla/.

33 "At the very foundation of the European Poet of Freedom Literary Award lies the idea of connecting and popularizing various communities, languages and literary visions of our world" (see PP/EPF).

34 Significant in this context is that translators have lately been awarded with literary prizes, which have led in recent years to a greater public awareness of translators' work as part of an artistic-aesthetic practice. The work of translators is, as the organizers of the European Poet of Freedom state, "of great significance since we tend to forget about those without whom we would be locked within the restricting borders of our mother tongues" (PP/EPF). Accordingly, the prize sponsors distribute PLN 20,000 to the translators of the main prize-winning work, which corresponds to about twenty percent of the total sum. Translator prizes not only promote the re-evaluation of an art form that is often marginalized in the context of the evaluation of literariness, they also draw attention to the often overlooked agents of a highly transculturally oriented literary practice, and thus incidentally create awareness of formal asymmetries within the European literary and literary prize landscape (Sapiro, "The Metamorphosis of Modes," 139–140; Tommek, "Die internationale Ökonomie," 198f.). We have decided not to include prizes intended exclusively for literary translators in the group analyzed here, for several reasons. Firstly, they are not, in the strict sense of the word, literary prizes and they are, as it were, international by definition, and not including the criterion of Europeanness in any of them would be a kind of

In the context of this article prizes which are awarded not (only) to authors, but for achievements in the field of literature, are referred to as "awards for contributions to culture." This category shall also include (for the sake of simplicity) those prizes that honor artists and scholars in the fields of visual and performing arts, music, architecture, design, film, and photography, as well as authors of historical monographs and works in the field of the humanities. Of the thirteen prizes examined, three (the aforementioned Staff Award, Identitas and the New Europe Ambassador[35]) fall into this category, which (to reiterate) is distinguished by the fact that it not only honors literary works, but also rewards artistic and cultural achievements and contributions that go beyond them.

3) Even more fundamental for the area of Polish ELPs seems to be the mechanism, characteristic of valorization processes, whereby literary or aesthetic and extra-literary (e.g. moral) value regimes mix with each other, e.g. literary works are evaluated according to criteria that have extra-literary – that is, social or socio-cultural – significance and "place literature in the context of cultural values and goals."[36] These valorization practices are reflected precisely in the prizes awarded to public figures (Politicians and political activists, diplomats, journalists, etc.) for their political and social achievements like the Bridge Award, whose winners include, for example, the Luxembourgian EU politician Jean-Claude Juncker (2014) or the Ukrainian professional boxer and politician Vitali Kliczko (2014). Often, however, they are awarded to writers[37] – for the importance of themes addressed in literature, but also for extra-literary statements, ideological or political commitment – or at least: to people associated with literature. Next to the Bridge Award, the Vincenz Award, Man of Borderland and the Rzeczpospolita Award can be assigned to this category.

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narrowing down. However, it is worth noting that such translation prizes as the Literatura na Świecie Prize (1973–2023) or the Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński Translation Prize (2013–2023, every 2 years) enjoy considerable prestige. Sometimes the prizes for translators are also parts of "bigger" prizes (including European ones): in the case of the Gdynia Prize (as well as the Staff Prize), translation is one of the categories honored; in the case of Angelus and EPW, a prize is also given to the translator of an awarded non-Polish book.

35 Launched in 2011, the Ambassador of New Europe awards a publisher and author (mostly in the field of cultural history or biography) at the same time.

36 Alexandra Pontzen, Dennis Borghardt and Sarah Maaß, "Zu viel des Guten? Ein neuer Forschungsansatz zu Vielzahl und Vielfalt deutscher Literaturpreise," in *Literaturpreise. Geschichte und Kontexte*, 70.

37 On the question of the contemporary significance of the author as a political-public persona, see Śliwiński, "Cztery ryzyka i bankiet," 64.

Geocultural Dimensions of ELPs

Polish ELPs differ significantly in their geocultural understanding of Europe. Ideally, Europe-related literary prizes engage in a trans-national consecration practice, that is they are usually addressed to authors from the whole of Europe, although of course the interpretation of which entity is meant by "Europe" varies greatly. Do the prizes refer to Europe in its institutional-bureaucratic form, or does it mean a geographically conceived continental Europe or, for instance, a European "cultural area?"

1) In the context of the Polish ELP scene, only the European Poet of Freedom has a pan-European scope. If one were to apply the criteria of the European Union Prize for Literature (EUPL), the only literary prize sponsored and fully financed by the European Commission (with high authority in the question of what can be seen as Europe), then since the conception of the European Poet of Freedom in 2010, the prize has been awarded four times to writers from one of the member states of the European Union (Germany, Croatia, Romania, Northern Ireland[38]), once to a writer from an EEA country (Iceland), twice to writers from (potential) candidate countries for accession (Albania and Ukraine), and to a writer from Belarus, a country excluded by the EUPL on the basis of its political conception of Europe – but which belongs to Europe culturally, geographically or geologically, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA). The perspective on Europe as a "community project" also gives the prize donors of the European Poet of Freedom the corresponding scope to define this European community itself territorially and to constitute it through their specific prize practice.

What is true to a much greater extent for the prizes in the next category, but can be observed in the line-up of prize winners of the European Poet of Freedom, is that despite its pan-European orientation, the prize has a strong Central and Eastern European tilt.

2) An important geocultural limitation of the European dimension of Polish prizes is the functionalization of literary prizes to deepen Poland's intercultural relations with a neighboring country. This category includes the Giedroyc Prize and the Conrad-Korzeniowski Prize, which are aimed only at authors in Belarus and Ukraine, respectively. In addition, there are prizes that have a clear focus on authors from a – in each case differently defined and scaled – larger cluster of Central and Eastern European countries. Besides, the Angelus which explicitly labels this in its title, this applies above all to

38 In 2020, when the prize was awarded to the Northern Irish poet Sinéad Morrissey, Northern Ireland was still part of the European Union. In 2014, when the prize was awarded to Croatian author Dorta Jagić, Croatia had been part of the European Union for one year.

Vincenz Award. In connection with these geocultural restrictions, a pattern can be discerned which we call Central Eastern European tilt and which we will discuss later.

3) The definition of ELPs also allows to consider prizes with a broader geocultural range as European, but still even for these theoretically broader prizes most of the winners have been from Europe (or, as can be seen in the example of the Man of Borderland and the New Europe Ambassador, authors mainly from Central and Eastern Europe). This pertains to the Bridge Award as well as to the Herbert Award, which in its ten-year history has been awarded six times to European authors, three times to US authors and once to a South African-French author (2017 – Breyten Breytenbach). By stating that the award is intended to "promote Poland's cultural contribution – especially in the field of poetry – to the development of world literature, manifested in the exchange of ideas, values, and contemporary experiences" (PP/HA), the statutes make it clear that the award sees itself as an instrument to elevate Polish literature and literary scene to an international stage.

4) In some cases ELPs exclusively honor authors from the country of the awarding institution, which of course only partially does justice to the European idea. In these cases, prizes, donors, and juries award authors who, in their "own" country or in the territory of the national language, have contributed to the dissemination of ideological or aesthetic discourses that are situated in a European frame of reference. In Poland, this applies to the Trakl Competition, Staff Award and Identitas Award. The latter honors authors who – according to the statutes – "critically address the issues of the persistence, preservation, construction or dismantling of collective identities in the modern world," which have developed "primarily thanks to the foundation of European culture, that is, Western culture in the broadest sense of the word" (PP/IA). However, the prize is aimed exclusively at Polish authors.

Organizational Dimensions of ELPs

Patterns can also be discerned with regard to the institutional anchoring of the prizes, which are significant in terms of their content and geocultural references to Europe. Basically, literary prizes with a European program can be roughly divided into the following three categories: 1) prizes donated by EU institutions (including, in the narrowest sense, only the European Union Prize for Literature, which was launched by the European Commission in 2009 as part of the European cultural funding program Creative Europe); 2) prizes sponsored by European (member) states and their (state and city) organizations, and 3) those that are donated by various cultural institutions, foundations, associations, companies, publishers or private individuals.

As for the Polish literary award landscape, six prizes with a European focus are awarded by the public sector, including three prizes that are donated by state institutions and three by City Council organizations. What is striking with regard to the prizes sponsored by state institutions is that all can be seen as a cultural policy activity seeking an impact on the cultural and literary landscapes of neighboring states. This is particularly evident in the case of the Giedroyc Award and Conrad-Korzeniowski Award, which are (co-)financed and (co-)organized by significant state institutions of Poland (the Embassy of Poland in Belarus along with the Polish Institute in Minsk, and the Polish Institute in Kyiv, respectively). With the Trakl Competition, founded in 1992 and discontinued five years later, it was the Austrian state, more precisely the Austrian Consul General in Krakow under Emil Brix, that became culturally involved in Poland's cultural scene and founded the country's first European Literature Prize there. In 2015, the prize, endowed with 1200 Zloty, was revived and awarded for three years in cooperation with the Polish "Urwany Film" Foundation as part of the Austria Days in Krakow. The reasons for seeking cooperation with explicitly non-governmental cultural institutions for the Trakl Competition – similar to the Giedroyc Award, in which the Belarusian PEN Centre and the Union of Belarusian Writers are involved – can be found in the fact that the organization of the literary prizes (the actual handling, appointment of the jury, press work, etc.) is dependent on the help of organizations that are better anchored in the literary and cultural field and operate far more effectively. Furthermore, they might have intended to cushion the accusation that they were interfering in the cultural affairs of foreign states in the case of Polish-Belarusian relations.

The founders of the other awards examined in this study are mainly foundations with a cultural-political impetus (such as the Society for the Award of the International Bridge Prize of the European Cities of Zgorzelec/Görlitz and Identitas Foundation, both of which were founded specifically to establish a literary award, Center Borderland – of Arts, Cultures, Nations, Foundation for Zbigniew Herbert, Europejskie Centrum Solidarności Gdańsk, Kolegium Europy Wschodniej im. Jana Nowaka Jeziorańskiego, Wrocław), newspapers (such as *Rzeczpospolita* and *Lente magazine*) and a coffee house (Café Lente).

Diachronic Development of European-Related Prizes in Poland

Did Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 accelerate the unfolding of the ELP landscape? A diachronic view of the development of the prize landscape discussed here shows how strongly the institutional and cultural measures for Poland's integration into the EU intertwine. The fact that nine out of thirteen of the prizes examined were launched after Poland's accession

to the EU can be read as a clear indication that Poland's membership has brought about an intensification of the debate on the literary space of Europe at the level of cultural policy.

The development of Polish ELPs can be divided into three main periods: first, the period before Poland's accession to the EU (1989–2003); second, the immediate years after accession (2004–2009); and third, the period from 2010 to 2015.

First phase: out of the thirteen prizes that are the subject of this analysis, only four were established before Poland's accession to the European Union, namely the Trakl Competition in 1992 and the Bridge Prize in 1993, and a few years later the Man of Borderland (1999) and the Rzeczpospolita Award. Regarding the first two prize foundations, it is striking that the initiative did not come (or did not come alone) from Polish institutions, but rather from political actors and associations of the surrounding countries, Austria (the Austrian Consul General in Krakow Emil Brix) and Germany (Society for the Award of the International Bridge Prize of the European Cities of Zgorzelec/Görlitz).

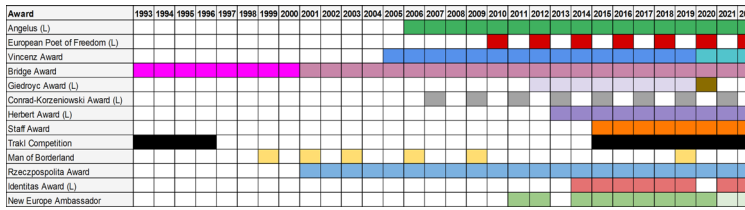

Table 2. Diachronic distribution of Polish literary prizes.

Second phase: in each of the three years following Poland's accession to the EU, an ELP was launched in Poland – the Vincenz Prize in 2005, the Angelus in 2006, and the Conrad Korzeniowski Prize in 2007. In the first two cases, the cities of Wroclaw and Krakow (and a few years later, with the European Poet of Freedom, Gdansk) used the literature prize as an instrument to propagate Europe as a cultural-political value. The cities also have in common their proximity to the border and their historically strong roots in Central and Western European (especially Prussian and Austrian) culture. In terms of their topical dimension (Europe as a place of intercultural exchange and peacekeeping) and their geocultural transnational orientation (albeit with an unmistakable focus on Eastern Europe), the ELPs donated by municipal institutions share a comparatively strong references to Europe.

It should not be forgotten that not only Europe benefits from the cultural-political popularization measures of the cities by means of literary prizes, but conversely also the cities from the label Europe – it is not for nothing that the city prizes presented here already bear or bore the label Europe in

their names,[39] in contrast to all other prizes, with the exception of the Bridge Award. The establishment of prizes of this format can also be justified by the fact that transnational cultural practices represent an essential part of a city's self-presentation as a cosmopolitan metropolis, which can also be exploited for tourism.[40]

Third phase: in the period from 2010 to 2015, when there was a literary award foundation almost every year except for 2012, it was mainly cultural foundations that became active: Vincenz Award (2010), Giedroyc Award and New Europe Ambassador (2011), Herbert Award (2013), Identitas Award (2014), Leopold Staff Award (2015). In addition, the Trakl Award was re-established in 2015 after an interruption of almost nineteen years.

The reason why after 2015 no more awards were given, can only be speculated. Given the growth dynamics of Polish literary prizes with an EU focus, the increase in prizes of this format since EU accession may have given the impression that the market is saturated. From the perspective that the literary prize scene should also be thought of as a network in which the literary prizes are also in a competitive relationship for attention, it should not be disregarded that ELPs also have to assert their uniqueness first and thus their "raison d'être."[41]

However, we could argue that the market is far from saturation in terms of pan-European prizes as only European Poet of Freedom (a prize limited to poetry) occupies this space. If this hypothesis were to hold ground, it would mean that the Polish literary market is incredibly shallow.

The fact that no prizes with a pan-European appeal were established by the state may not be surprising, since the right-wing conservative party PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) [Law and justice], which won the elections in 2015 and 2019, does not hide its skepticism about Europe and European Union. It is not surprising that the Polish state does not aim to increase awareness about the EU or does not prioritize cultural relations with Western Europe. The lack of prizes is still noteworthy as a cultural policy, as we could imagine other policies being implemented (e.g. pan-European prizes with a conservative spin, etc.). However, PiS foreign policy was far more oriented toward exchanges with Eastern European countries, and since – as will be shown below – the Polish landscape of ELPs seemed saturated with awards focused on Eastern Europe, hence the establishment of new ones with similar agenda did not seem necessary.

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39 European Poet of Freedom, Central European Literary Award Angelus, Award of the Krakow City Council Stanisława Vincenz (previously: New Culture of New Europe).

40 Borghardt and Maaß, *Der Wert der Preise*.

41 Borghardt, Maaß and Pontzen, *Literaturpreise. Geschichte, Theorie und Praxis*, 74.

Understanding the Central-Eastern European Tilt

The geocultural limitation of the European dimension of prizes exhibits a pattern that we call the Central-Eastern European tilt. The data collection carried out as part of this work has shown that all the prizes considered here are situated (to varying extents) in a Central and/or Eastern European context, whether in terms of their topical, geocultural or organizational dimension.

Both the bilaterally oriented prizes (Bridge Award, Trakl Competition, Giedroyc Award and Conrad-Korzeniowski Award) and the prizes that are not radically pan-European but have a scope encompassing several European countries (Angelus, Vincenz Award, Man of Borderland Award and New Europe Ambassador Award) show a conspicuous centering on Central and Eastern Europe in their award practice, and that, regardless of how strong their European reference is on a topical level.

The picture thickens when we look at the percentage distribution of countries from which the winners of Polish ELPs come. If all literary prizes within the scope of analysis are taken together, then a total of 37,3 percent of the laureates are from Poland itself. The majority of laureates come from the neighboring country Ukraine (20.3 percent), 18.3 percent from Belarus, and 2.0 percent from three countries: Germany, Czechia and Austria, the first two of which are Poland's neighbors. Noteworthy is the presence of the USA (1.3 percent), as the only country outside Europe.

Figure 3. Nationality of winners of Polish ELPs.

In order to test the thesis stating that even the prizes that have a transnational (in a sense European) orientation ultimately have a strong Central or Eastern European orientation, it seems useful to disregard for a moment the five prizes that are aimed exclusively at authors from a single country such as Conrad-Korzeniowski Award (Ukraine), Giedroyc Award (Belarus), Trakl Award, Identitas Award, and the Staff Prize (all Poland). In this case, the picture is as follows.

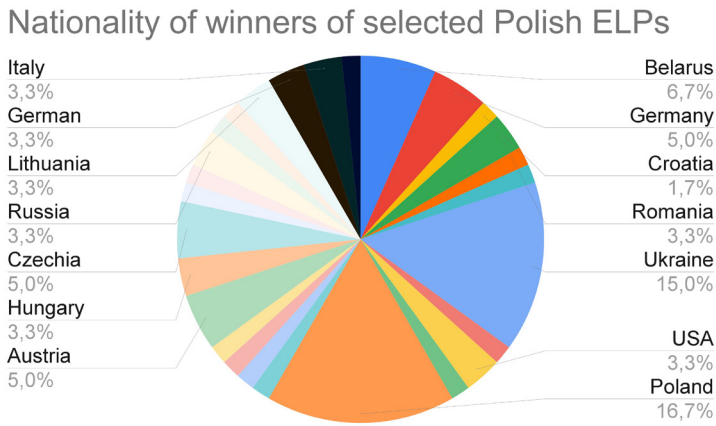

Figure 4. Nationality of winners of selected Polish ELPs.

The strong focus primarily on Eastern European awards correlates with the almost complete absence of award winners from Western, Southwestern, and Northern Europe. In the history of Polish ELPs since 1994, there are no prize winners from Spain, Portugal, France, Ireland, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, and Belgium; only one author each was awarded a prize from Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, and Sweden; there are four prize winners from Austria (three times Martin Pollack), three from Great Britain (once Northern Ireland), and nine from Germany (twice Durs Grünbein).[42]

However, if one asks how Central and Eastern Europe (culturally or territorially) is defined in the prize profiles, a partly unclear picture emerges, as can be seen for example in the context of the Angelus. If one follows the

42 Apart from the Staff Award, which is dedicated to the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean, Italian culture, there are no other awards dedicated to the intercultural exploration of the countries, cultures, languages and traditions of Western, Southwestern and Northern Europe.

proposal of the Standing Committee for Geographical Names (StAGN), a Frankfurt-based expert body responsible for the standardization of geographical names in German-speaking countries, whose proposals are not legally binding, only eleven of the twenty-two countries nominated for the Angelus Award would be assigned to Central Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, and Belarus would be assigned to Eastern and Southern Europe. The geopolitical definition of Central Europe that the prize donors make here might aim at anchoring Poland's eastern and southern neighbors even more firmly as a "central" part of Europe, its identity, and its culture of memory. Moreover, the Angelus Award donors accentuate a self-image of Poland as a mediating authority within Central Europe as well as in the more eastern regions of the then constituent republics of the USSR.[43]

The chronology of the Angelus Award winners shows how ELPs function as a political instrument, this is evident when ethical criteria in the jury's decision-making process take precedence over aesthetic ones. Only one country besides Hungary (the prize went to Hungarian authors twice) has produced several laureates, namely Ukraine with no less than four laureates. The awards given to Ukrainian authors are to be read as direct reflections on events in the country's recent history: on the Orange Revolution of 2004, on the Euromaidan, that is the protests that lasted from November 2013 to February 2014 following the announcement by the Ukrainian government that it did not want to sign the planned association agreement with the European Union, or on the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and finally a reflection on Putin's incipient provocations in the run-up to the Russian invasion of February 2022. With Yuri Andrukhovych (first edition in 2006), Oksana Stefanivna Zabuzhko (2013) and Kharkiv-based Serhiy Zhadan (2015), Angelus has been awarded not only to renowned Ukrainian writers who have repeatedly addressed Russia's cultural chauvinist attitude towards the emancipation movements of the former Soviet republics in their works. It is worth noting that these aforementioned writers were intensively involved in the events of 2004 and 2013/2014 both as activists and reporters (for international media).

43 The valorisation of literary works according to the criterion of how they illustrate or strengthen Poland's importance in Europe and its diplomatic position in Central and Eastern Europe is also evident in the Rzeczpospolita Prize, when the statutes state: "the award is given to people or institutions who follow Jerzy Giedroyc's principles, show selfless concern for public affairs, strengthen Poland's position in Europe and cultivate good relations with the nations of Central and Eastern Europe" (PP/RA).

Categories of Europeanness and Central Europeanness are not only relevant in the context of ELPs, but are also vigorously discussed in Polish literature and in the humanities as a whole. Current discussions on the specificity of Central and Eastern Europe are preceded by a long history, which includes, among other things, an intensified interest in this subject in the post-war period[44] (in Poland, this is particularly the case of Czesław Miłosz's essays[45]) and reflections already in the twenty-first century supported by the tools of postcolonial studies with roots going back to Enlightenment.[46] It is also impossible not to see the connection of this discussion and Poland's location as a borderland area, belonging to Central and Eastern Europe, but right on the border with the West, or perhaps: between the West and the East. As such, Poland combines the experience of the poor, grey decades behind the Iron Curtain, the heritage of Enlightenment universalism, and the homeliness and richness of the imagination of the 'uncanny Slavs'[47] (Maria Janion's term). Such a dual valorization of the East (Middle East) of Europe as, on the one hand, inferior (underdeveloped, poorer, dragging behind it the baggage of political enslavement) and, on the other hand,

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44 As Magdalena Brodacka reports: "there were many years of lively discussions about Central and Eastern European identity in émigré Polish periodicals." See Magdalena Brodacka, "W lustrze literatury – czesko-polski mit środkowoeuropejski i jego przeobrażenia" [In the mirror of literature – Czech-Polish Central European myth and its transformations], *Konteksty Kultury* 6 (2019).

45 For Czesław Miłosz European identity was such an acute subject, that it is often already found in the title of a work: the essays *Rodzinna Europa* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1959) (the title's literal translation is "Family Europe", but English and German translations are non-literal: *Native Realm*, *West und Östliches Gelände*) and *O naszej Europie* [On our Europe] (1986), or the well-known poem *Dziecię Europy* [Child of Europe] (1946). And already in the first of these texts the non-obvious relations between the European and Central (Eastern) European identity of the Polish resident and the issues of inferiority and privilege of Central and Eastern Europe come to the fore. See Małgorzata Zemła, "Jedność Europy. Kilka uwag o relacjach Wschód–Zachód w *Rodzinnej Europie* Czesława Miłosza" [Unity of Europe. A few remarks on East-West relations in Czesław Miłosz's *Familiy Europe*], *Konteksty Kultury* 6 (2019).

46 As Kostkiewiczowa notes, referring to L. Wolff's thesis: "it was the Enlightenment that introduced the concept of Eastern Europe opposed to the West, deepening – paradoxically – the idea of division and differentiation." See Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, *Polski wiek świateł. Obszary swoistości* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2002), 30; Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 5.

47 Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury* [Uncanny Slavdom. Phantasms] of literature (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2007).

better (undiscovered, therefore more interesting, richer,[48] more authentic, less unified and globalized than the West), impacts the "direction" of transnational awards and the flow of ideas.

The relevance of this discussion is demonstrated by Krzysztof Czyżewski – creator of the Man of the Borderland project and currently head juror of the European Poet of Freedom award: "on the one hand, I understand Central Europeanism as an attempt to enter places and spaces that we still do not fully cultivate. This is for various reasons, not least because the history of these places has been largely silent, hypocritical or peripheral. One that was a little ashamed, one that was easy to escape and leave. It is about developing a place that encompasses everything that has been rejected, misrepresented, everything that hurts, that is not the same as elsewhere, does not shine like pop culture, or does not look like it does in the West. It's about seeing the treasure in that, which has spiritual potential and mystery."[49]

The dominance of topics related to Central- and Eastern Europe should not be conceived as an oppositional stance towards the vision of a common and united Europe, it is rather a reflection of the creative tension between those two visions which has a rich tradition in Polish literary and humanities intellectual history. There are numerous examples of this tradition, from Milosz's *Family Europe*, to important essays from the last two decades, such as Maria Janion: *Do Europy tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* (2000),[50] Aleksander Fiut: *Być (albo nie być) Środkowoeuropejczykiem* (1999),[51] Yuri Andrukhovych and Andrzej Stasiuk: *Moja Europa. Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową* (2018).[52] This also brings to mind other non-obviousness, for instance: the

48 In Miłosz's statements, the sense of backwardness is outweighed by "the privilege of coming from improbable lands, where it is difficult to escape history, but where supernatural forces, devilish and angelic, are also present in a way that my Western colleagues find difficult to comprehend." See Czesław Miłosz, "Z poezją polską przeciw światu" [With Polish poetry against the world], in *Życie na wyspach* (Kraków: Znak, 1998), 129.

49 "*Środkowoeuropejskość mierzy się z jądrem ciemności.* Z Krzysztofem Czyżewskim rozmawia Magdalena Brodacka," Konteksty Kultury 16 (2) (2019): 261.

50 Maria Janion, *Do Europy tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* [To Europe - yes, but together with our dead] (Warszawa: Sic!, 2000).

51 Aleksander Fiut, *Być (albo nie być) Środkowoeuropejczykiem* [To be (or not ot be) a Central European] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999).

52 Jurij Andruchowycz and Andrzej Stasiuk, *Moja Europa. Dwa eseje o Europie zwanej Środkową* [My Europe. Two essays on a Europe called Central] (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2000).

multiplicity of attempts to delimit the midpoint of Europe,[53] the fuzziness of the borders of Central Europe – for example the question of whether Austria[54] belongs to it according to the creators of the Angelus award, as well as the diversity of identities of individual nations.

In addition to demonstrating the potential of (Central) European literatures, the literary prizes awarded in Poland sometimes bring out unexpectedly important considerations of their own, referred to by Czyżewski as "security considerations," related to the need to discuss painful matters, to unmask history, and to protect against nationalism.[55] This ethical dimension of Polish ELPs has become apparent during the last two years due to the war in Ukraine and the dissolution of Belarusian institutions which impacted both the Conrad-Korzeniowski and Giedroyc prizes. Victoria Amelina, the last winner of the Conrad-Korzeniowski Prize, died due to wounds sustained during the Russian attack on Kramatorsk and the organizing body of the Giedroyc Award on the Belarusian side has been dismantled. And, unexpectedly, these events also confirm the vision of Central European identity postulated by the patron of the Polish-Belarusian award with the need to "widen the middle to include the East – specifically Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus" and the need to renew "the gesture of support for the emancipation efforts of our neighbors."[56]

Central-Eastern European Tilt and the Polish Book Market?

Unsurprisingly, the geocultural focus of Polish ELPs on the Central and Eastern European region coincides with the focus of scholarly research in the field of literature. As far as secondary publications appearing on the Polish book market are concerned, the focus is on the study of Austrian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian literature, as the graph shows (see Figure 5). Interestingly, the Central-Eastern European tilt of the Polish ELP scene is clearly at odds with the disposition of the Polish book market as far as fiction literature is concerned, and thus one might conclude, with the reading interests and habits of Poles. The Polish book market has been dominated

53 On the multiplicity of geographical midpoints of Europe on the basis of their monuments, as well as the different variants of Central Europe (Habsburg, anti-Soviet) as an imagined community – see Brodacka, "W lustrze literatury."

54 On the post-war change in the status of Prague in relation to Vienna (located further east of Prague, but more western by being outside the Soviet sphere of influence), see ibid.

55 Brodacka, "W lustrze literatury," 261.

56 Ibid.

– since the beginning of the study period in 1989 – by American book publications by a wide margin, with French and German literature fighting for second place.

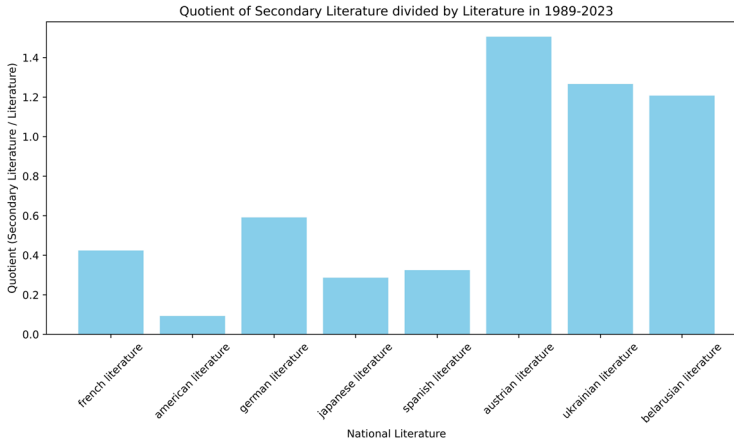

Figure 5. Quotient indicates the relation between primary literature from certain countries vs. secondary literature (publication on certain literature), i.e. the higher the quotient, the more secondary literature there is on certain literature in relation to creative works published in Poland.

According to Pascale Casanova, this can be explained by the fact that the international exchange of books is determined by the logic of the symbolic economy of markets, which determines the transnational success or failure of literary works. The power that decides whether a work is included in worldwide translation flows and thus succeeds in other markets is attributed to those language and cultural areas whose literatures have a high prestige.[57] In Europe, besides German and French, this is first and foremost the English language, which accounts for 80–90% of the translations available in Europe (European Commission / Culture and Creativity) and now – in a post-Brexit paradox – seems to be stabilizing as a *lingua franca* in the field of literature as well.[58] In many cases, moreover, a translation into English has proven to be a door opener for translations into other literary languages.[59]

57 Pascale Casanova, "European Literature. Simply a Higher Degree of Universality?," *European Review* 17 (2009): 240.

58 Schoon, "Europäische Integration," 198f.

59 Sapiro, "The Metamorphosis of Modes," 139–140.

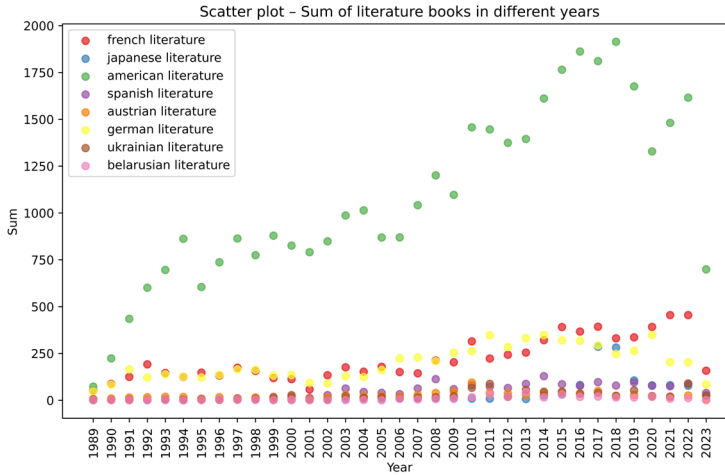

Figure 6. Number of creative works (primary literature) published in Poland.

Ukrainian book publications (to give just one example) play a marginal role on the Polish book market – with the exception of the politically precarious year 2022, when Poland's neighboring country became the focus of international reporting due to Russia's invasion. The focus on Central and Eastern Europe is, to repeat, a deliberate (cultural) political decision by decision-makers, on the one hand, to promote those literary fields that are not already the focus of international attention, and, on the other hand, to draw an alternative vision of the community – to the traditional image of Europe – via the instrument of the "literary prize."

Conclusion

Although Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 gave a decisive impulse to the development of the Europe-related prize landscape in the country, the literary prizes show that the cultural-political concept of Europe in Poland remains limited to the neighboring Central and Eastern European states, quite independently of the European Commission's efforts to create a pan-European cultural identity. This makes clear, first, that culturally grown neighborly relations undermine those concepts of identity that are brought in from the outside – for example, through integration initiatives of the European Commission (i.a. through Europe-wide funding measures such as the Creative Europe program, which ultimately also has a community-building function). Moreover, the case of Polish ELPs shows that the label "Europe" proves to be extremely flexible and autonomous in geocultural terms.

The Polish Literary Awards contribute to the literary popularization of Central and Eastern European literature, develop economic capital for Eastern European authors, and contribute to the strengthening of European awareness in Eastern European countries. Since literary prizes prove to be a literary instrument for challenging or expanding the established literary canon, the establishment of literary prizes in Poland with the label "Europe" can be seen as a central measure for anchoring Polish literature, as well as the Eastern European literary figures who are given priority in the prizes, more firmly in a "European canon" à la longue.[60] Since the literary prizes endow authors not only with symbolic and cultural capital, but in eleven out of thirteen cases also with economic one, the Polish ELPs also play a role as economic "insecurity absorbers,"[61] especially for authors from Central and Eastern Europe.[62] Therefore, they have a stabilizing effect – at least to a certain extent – on the cultural life of the respective countries. The fact that the award winners (and also the nominated authors) see their literary work placed more strongly in a European promotion and marketing context and in the framework of a European community of values can also have a retrospective identity-forming effect for them and their interested reading public. Although they generally affect only an educational class with an affinity for literature, literary prizes with a European program have an integrative and identity-forming significance in Eastern European countries.

Appendix: Prize Profiles (online)

Angelus [PP/A] – Literacka Nagroda Europy Środkowej Angelus,http://angelus.com.pl/english/.

Bridge Award [PP/BA] – Międzynarodowa Nagroda Mostu, https://zgorzelec.eu/zgorzelec-2/miasto/laureaci-nagrody-mostu/.

60 The extent to which the Polish literary awards landscape (and the Polish literary and translation market in general) plays a role in the placement of Eastern European authors in Western European markets and in the United States would require a separate study.

61 Carolin Amlinger, "Schreiben. Eine Soziologie literarischer Arbeit," *Soziopolis* (2016): 27, accessed March 3, 2024, https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-82230-8.

62 For the German-language literary prize sector, Maaß and Boghardt have worked out that the endowment of the international prizes – compared to the national prizes – is at a higher level. The share of ELP in literary prizes in the segment between more than 10,000 and 20,000 euros is above average (Maaß and Borghardt, *Der Wert der Preise*, 218). A respective study for the Polish literary prize landscape is still pending.

Conrad-Korzeniowski Award [PP/CKA] – Nagroda Literacka imienia Josepha Conrada-Korzeniowskiego, http://www.polinst.kyiv.ua/storage/regulamin_nagrody_konrada_2019-2.pdf.

Europe Poet of Freedom [PP/EPF] – Nagroda Literacka Miasta Gdańska Europejski Poeta Wolności, https://europejskipoetawolnosci.pl/o-nagrodzie/?lang=en.

Giedroyc Award [PP/GA] – Nagrodę im. Jerzego Giedroycia, https://www.nck.pl/projekty-kulturalne/projekty/nagroda-im-jerzego-giedroycia/o-nagrodzie-im-jerzego-giedroycia.

Herbert Award [PP/HA] – Nagrodzie im. Zbigniewa Herberta, https://fundacjaherberta.com/en/the-herbert-prize/about-the-zbigniew-herbert-prize/.

Identitas Award [PP/IA] – Nagroda Identitas, https://identitas.pl/bez-maski-warsztaty-w-arktyce/.

Man of Borderland [PP/MOF] – Człowiek Pogranicza, https://www.pogranicze.sejny.pl/programy-wyspa/czowiek-pogranicza/.

New Europe Ambassador [PP/NEA] – Ambasador Nowej Europy, https://ecs.gda.pl/ambasador-nowej-europy/?fbclid=IwAR2GSeRzS39iiJx8U3ptzsuOAXlopcCMAx_Zj9nRZb56kQR7NoNDWi2ahUY.

Rzeczpospolita Award [PP/RA] – Nagroda „Rzeczpospolitej" im. Jerzego Giedroycia,https://kulturaparyska.com/pl/article/history/innenagrody/nagroda-rzeczpospolitej-im-jerzego-giedroycia.

Staff Award [PP/SA] – Nagroda Literacka im. Leopolda Staffa, http://nagrodaliterackastaffa.pl/o-nagrodzie/.

Trakl Competition [PP/TC] – Ogólnopolski Konkurs Poetycki im. Georga Trakla, http://fundacjaurwanyfilm.pl/dzialamy/trakl-tat/.

Vincenz Award [PP/VA] – Nagroda Rady Miasta Krakowa im. Stanisława Vincenza, https://www.bip.krakow.pl/?dok_id=132926.

Abstract

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Central European Tilt. The Analysis of Cultural-Political Functions and Effects of Polish Europe-related Literary Prizes

The aim of this paper is to examine Europe-related literary prizes (ELPs) in Poland through empirical analysis. Polish ELPs are those prizes which are organized by Polish entities or addressed to Polish society and have a European agenda. A list of 13 such prizes has been created and analyzed along four axes: 1) the importance of its reference to Europe and European culture, 2) the role of literature in its scope, 3) its geocultural reach, and 4) its organizational setting. The analysis revealed that 1) the growth of the ELPs scene in Poland increased significantly with the country's accession to the European Union in 2004, 2) the prizes – although following a European program – are primarily aimed at authors from Central and Eastern Europe and that this geocultural tilt 3) does not correspond with the orientation of the Polish book market (and thus with the reading preferences of Poles).

Keywords

literary prizes, Central and Eastern Europe, digital humanities, book market, literature

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