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New trends in English Studies for the 2020s

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Edited by
Julia Siepak, Edyta Lorek-Jezińska, Nelly Strehlau, Dorota Watkowska &
Bernadetta Jankowska

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Editor-in-Chief: Edyta Lorek-Jezińska with Nelly Strehlau

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Editor-in-chief

Edyta Lorek-Jezińska with Nelly Strehlau

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CURRENTS

The sixth issue editors

CURRENTS EDITORIAL
NEW TRENDS IN ENGLISH STUDIES FOR THE 2020s

**Julia Siepak, Paula Budzyńska, Bernadetta Jankowska, Dorota
Watkowska & Edyta Lorek-Jezińska**

Nicolaus Copernicus University

**NEW TRENDS IN ENGLISH STUDIES FOR THE 2020S:
AN INTRODUCTION**

Keywords: English studies, new trends, the 2020s

It is our great pleasure to deliver the sixth issue of *CURRENTS. A Journal of Young English Philology Thought and Review*, edited by members of the Academic Association for Doctoral Studies of English at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Revisiting the theme of the first issue of the journal published in 2015, this issue aims to explore existing and new trends in the interdisciplinary field of English studies that prove to be an important point of reference for Anglophone linguistics, literary and cultural studies in the coming years.

As George Bernard Shaw once stated, “science never solves a problem without creating ten more,” which demonstrates its never-ending evolution. New trends emerge as the old ones are amended or abandoned, frequently owing to the fact that they are no longer suitable for the changing world.

Particularly at the beginning of a new decade, this exchange and traffic in ideas appears to be worth examining. New trends are comprehended hereby as these that have lately developed or are just being introduced to the field in question, including currently examined topics, applied methods, recently advanced theories and formulated concepts, as well as potential directions in which English studies could further expand.

These new currents transgress the boundaries between the humanities and the sciences, as well as dominant and peripheral worldviews. Responding to the

current social and cultural issues, research within different areas of humanities, including English studies, attempts to analyze and, potentially, transform our globalized realities. Referring back to the first issue of the journal, this volume reiterates its aspiration to provide space for the discussion of new trends, opening up the opportunity to observe transitions in what is considered new currents at the beginning of the 2020s.

Trends in linguistics

The section devoted to the exploration of current trends in linguistics starts with an article written by **Aleksandra Ewa Poniewierska**, *Accent and trust: a perception experiment with Polish users of English*, which aims at proving the hypothesis that there is a significant correlation between accents and trust level. After providing the theoretical background crucial for the subject matter of the study, the author describes the experiment, the goal of which is to test whether a Polish speaker (who moved to or visited the United Kingdom) would be prone to trust more a native or a non-native speaker of English. As a concluding remark, the author indicates that accents may affect the perception of others and the level of trust people have and emphasizes the need for further studies on this topic.

The second article in this section, *A contrastive study of theme-based instruction and grammar-translation method in teaching English to young learners* by **Umut Alintas**, is dedicated to the comparison of two well-known methods of teaching English with a view to offering a reference point to the main objective of this study, i.e., the analysis of students' attitude towards the aforementioned approaches. Based on the questionnaires conducted among Turkish students, the results allow for stating that the Grammar-Translation Method, apart from having its advantages, is not considered a suitable teaching procedure for young learners.

Trends in literary studies

The literary section of the sixth issue of *CURRENTS* opens with **Robert McParland's** *Victorian popular science and the sensation novel*, which explores the Victorian fascination with the sensational. Referring to a variety of texts circulating at the time, McParland outlines the growing popularity of sensation stories and their progression alongside popular science in the second half of the nineteenth century. The article provides a comprehensive overview of the genre, highlighting the intersections between the development of scientific thought and cultural production.

In his article entitled *The physical revenge of the book: the role of physicality in literature*, **Riccardo Cipollari** reevaluates the status of the book as a medium in times of rapid technological advancement. Cipollari approaches the validity of the book as a medium, presenting ways in which its physicality affects storytelling. The article discusses works of fiction that experiment with form, transgressing traditional physical boundaries of the book as a medium.

Katarzyna Stępień in her *'Be kind to strangers, they are your entanglement': interconnections, trans-corporeality, multiplicity, and hominid ecologies in Anne Waldman's poetry* examines Waldman's verse from the perspective of recent theories developed in the fields of ecocriticism and posthumanism. Stępień explores the poet's strategies of decentering the human subject. The reflection focuses on the transgression of traditional boundaries between the human and the non-human in Waldman's poetry, which proposes an alternative ecology based on interconnectedness.

The final article in the literary section—*The philosophy behind the addictive sports routines in David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest* by **Paweł Oleksak**—discusses similarities in the presentation of sport and addiction in Wallace's novel. The discussion is placed within the theoretical context of William James's, Søren Kierkegaard's and Pierre Janet's theories throwing light on Wallace's reflection on self-improvement and choice-making.

Trends in cultural studies

The cultural studies section opens with **Dawid Smyk**'s article *Afro-Surrealism—a new language for discussing the Black Experience? An exploration of the trend in recent films, TV series, and music videos*, which examines the concept of Afro-Surrealism developed alongside the Black Lives Matter movement in American popular culture (TV series, films and video clips). The author implements different features of Afro-Surrealism in his analysis of selected, current works by African American authors in order to discuss how they connect the social critique with their entertaining function.

Agnieszka Staszak in *Representation of trauma and PTSD in the Netflix Series BoJack Horseman: the case of Gina Cazador* analyses the phenomena of traumatic experiences and post-traumatic stress disorder on the basis of one of the characters of *BoJack Horseman* animated series, Gina Cazador. By including various concepts of trauma theory and memory, the author explores the changes in Cazador's behaviour that might have resulted from repressed painful emotions.

In *Approaching the sublime in Chernobyl (2019)*, **Barbara Pawlak** analyses the concept of sublime on the basis of HBO mini-series *Chernobyl*. The article introduces some key aspects connected with the sublime (among others David Nye's definition and Kant's division into the mathematical and the dynamic sublime). Then, the author discusses selected images connected with nuclear power and Chernobyl catastrophe shown in the series to represent it as the "dynamic sublime," both frightening and delighting its spectators.

Natalia Anna Bracikowska in *Environmental storytelling—the liminal space between embedded and emergent narrative* discusses the connection between game environment and narrative based on environmental storytelling. The author introduces other theories referring to environmental storytelling as well as the three-level conceptual model and analyses particular features of games in order to present environmental storytelling as set between the emergent and embedded narrative.

Book reviews

This year's issue of *CURRENTS* features a review written by **Bernadetta Jankowska**—*Irish identity and trauma: a review of Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture by Melania Terrazas-Gallego (ed.)*. The reviewed book, published in 2020, testifies to the continuing relevance of trauma research in cultural studies.

Conference reports

This section contains two reports from international online conferences organised by doctoral and MA students from our faculty. The first report, written by **Julia Siepak**, presents the participants and main concerns of the International Emerging Scholars Conference “Global—Local—Glocal in Anglophone Literature, Culture, and Linguistics,” which took place on the 26th and 27th of March 2021 and gathered more than thirty young scholars from Polish universities and abroad (e.g. Spain, Brazil, Italy, Germany). The second report, written by **Katarzyna Stępień**, describes the students' conference “(Im)perfect women in (im)perfect worlds: Dystopias, utopias, and feminism at the beginning of the 21st century,” organised on the 14th and 15th of May 2021.

Students' corner

This section presents three short stories written by international students as part of their course in Polish retro-style crime fiction, which they attended at our faculty in 2019. Introduced by the tutor—**Dariusz Pniewski**, the stories by **Yann Stephan**, **Julien Geffroy**, and **Kadir Azlak** take the readers on an intriguing journey into the past.

**TRENDS
IN LINGUISTICS**

Aleksandra Ewa Poniewierska

Nicolaus Copernicus University

**ACCENT AND TRUST:
A PERCEPTION EXPERIMENT WITH POLISH USERS OF ENGLISH**

Keywords: accent, trust, perception experiment, sociolinguistics

Introduction

Nowadays, in times of such rapid progression of globalisation, in which English is established as a global language, there is a rising interest in the studies concerning the effects of different variations of this language on listeners. It has been proved by a number of studies (Kinzler et al. 2011, Bryla-Cruz 2016, Baus et al. 2019) that accent has an impact on the perception of another person or the reception of information that they are trying to convey. When a person meets someone for the very first time, they assess and judge them, sometimes unconsciously. They pay attention to how others look, how they behave, and how they speak; however, nothing speaks louder to some than an accent. In English, an accent is a source of all kinds of information. It can be inferred whether a person is from Newcastle or Birmingham and one can make an educated guess as to which social class they belong. As a consequence, there are many prejudices and associations that people may have with a given accent. For example, in a study by Kinzler et al. (2011), the results show that even pre-school children prefer and trust native speakers to a greater extent. However, is it the same with different accents? Are adults subjected to the same bias?

This study also assesses the impact that, in this case, Polish and RP accents in English might have on the level of trust and perceived competence of a speaker for a Polish person. There has been a study on the perception of a

Polish accent by native English speakers (Bryla-Cruz 2016) but little is known about the effect of such an accent on a fellow Polish speaker. To check this, one has to ground it in academic research and find a basis for such a study. To this purpose, the article has been divided into two parts.

In the first part, the theoretical background of the research is provided. The key concepts are presented and explained to show the reference point for this study. The second part is concerned with the methods that were employed in conducting this study. It begins with an explanation of the choice of design, the characterisation of the sample, which is followed by the description of the limitations of the study. Then, in the continuation of the second part, the results of the study and the possible implications they may have are presented. The hypothesis is that Polish people may find a person who is speaking English with a Polish accent less trustworthy and may be inclined to invest less money than when faced with the same offer proposed by a person with the RP accent. The results have shown that this hypothesis is true, as the participants tended to invest more after listening to the RP accent speaker.

Previous Research and the Importance of Variation

Language variation may be described as a consistent difference in one language that exists because of extralinguistic circumstances. Variation in pronunciation has a large impact on our perception of others which was proven by numerous researchers (Kinzler et al. 2011, Bryla-Cruz 2016, Baus et al. 2019).

Several studies have been devoted to variation and its impact on our everyday lives. For this work, the most important are the ones that are concerned with how accent influences our perception of others, how it may affect our lives and how we form judgments about other people based on their speech.

Usually, the research conducted on this subject is concerned with the feelings of a native speaker who is listening to a non-native accent and the effect it has on him. For example, in the article by Russo et al. (2017: 508), we

can find information that, in a workplace, a non-native speaker is likely to face judgement for his accent—he may be thought to be less competent and face a colder approach by his supervisors. Thus, the non-native speaker's interactions with others can be limited and lead to a feeling of underappreciation.

Another example of a study conducted in the United States by Kinzler et al. (201: 107–108) has proved that preschool children trust native speakers more when it comes to receiving non-linguistic information. In two experiments, bilingual Spanish and English speakers were engaged. After showing a brief film in which one of them speaks with a native accent and the other with a Spanish accent, they had to silently present the function of some novel objects. Then children were asked which person they would prefer to ask about the function of an object and which person was right in their use of it. Both verbal and non-verbal responses were accepted. The results showed a tendency to ask and believe a native speaker more than a non-native speaker. This meant that children were already selective as to whom they would trust and they largely preferred the native speaker with a familiar accent. It stands in opposition to my hypothesis, but, in this case, American children were studied and their perception and mindset are not the same as those of an adult, Polish speaker. Different nationality of the participants places the research in a distinct historical and cultural context in which trust has to be studied. However, more importantly, different ages mean that there is a higher potential for an already existing bias that comes from experience.

Finally, a study by Baus et al. (2019) proves that people form the impression of others very quickly and they tend to be consistent across different cultures. In this study, native speakers of Spanish and English were asked to evaluate the character and trustworthiness of a person after hearing them say “hola/hello”. The other character trait was chosen randomly. In this study, a 9-point Likert scale was used. The results show that after hearing one word we are already getting some impressions about another person and that those impressions are not exclusive to only one nation. It is clear then that the interaction between

two speakers does not have to be long—even a short exchange is enough to form a judgement about another person’s character.

Ingroup and Outgroup

The subject of groups that one belongs to is not often breached in everyday life. However, when a person is faced with another unknown group of people, they are acutely aware of the differences between ‘me’ and ‘them’. Sometimes, what triggers the recognition of those differences is language, ethnicity, social group, gender, or age. It can be the use of slang, the identifiable foreign accent, or someone’s appearance: whatever it is, it creates an instant division. In this study, accent provides a clear distinction for the participants and allows them to judge whether a speaker is a member of their ingroup or not.

The term outgroup can be described as a social group that one does not belong to or does not feel a part of. Those individuals are often regarded with less trust than the members of someone’s ingroup (Crystal 2005).

An ingroup is a social group to which an individual belongs. It can also be a group with which a person identifies themselves, even if it is just in mind (Crystal 2005). People tend to show a preference for their own group and that phenomenon is often called ‘ingroup favouritism’. The aforementioned favouritism can be seen in many aspects of one’s life. A person may be more inclined to help, support, or believe someone from the ingroup. Language can serve as the means of identifying a person from outside of the group. However, this identification may lead to the discrimination of individuals from outgroups based on their language and this phenomenon is known as linguistic discrimination or xenophobia.

The Notion of Prestige

Prestige in a language is a phenomenon used to describe the fact that some language varieties are regarded more positively than others. It is connected to many factors. Usually, a standard variation of a language is more prestigious

than regional accents or non-native ones. For example, since the 19th century, Received Pronunciation was perceived as highly prestigious and was associated with high social status, affluence, and good education. It still remains so, although according to David Crystal (2005), in the late 1990s, the attitudes towards it slightly changed—it was regarded as more distant and posh.

On the other hand, sometimes non-native accents can be judged favourably or even more favourably than native accents. In a study by Hosoda and Stone-Romero (2009), the French-accented job applicants were viewed as good and sometimes even better than Standard American English-accented speakers.

Social Identity and its Implications

Ochs (424) says that “[s]ocial identity encompasses participant roles, positions, relationships, reputations, and other dimensions of social personae, which are conventionally linked to epistemic and affective stances.” We do not have one social identity; on the contrary, there are many of them. Things like our gender, age, nationality, religion or affluence shape our personalities and experiences. All of these factors also influence how we perceive ourselves and others. However, some of our identities are not always relevant. Hall (2011: 33) gives an example of a person visiting another country. It is obvious that our age or social class will not play as important a role as our nationality. We will be rather viewed as tourists—Polish, French, Spanish, or German. In the context of this study, the most relevant social identity for the people who will take part in it will be the one of a fellow Polish speaker or just a Polish speaker in England.

Introduction to the Study

This study aims to contribute to the research about accents and group perception. Its originality lies in placing the emphasis on the ‘interaction’ of the two speakers from the same group (native speakers of Polish) but the common denominator is the usage of English. Most of the studies to date have been focused on the interactions between native English speakers and foreign and

native-accented people. However, there is a need to explore the interactions between people of the same nationality that is mediated through English. Although the studies focused on the reactions of native English speakers to both native and non-native-accented speakers suggested that there is greater trust between people with a native accent, the relations between Polish people abroad and the stereotypes about them seem to suggest an opposite tendency. This study is meant to clarify whether a hypothetical Polish speaker who moved to or visited the United Kingdom would trust more a person with a familiar Polish accent or a native speaker. The conversation would have to take place in an official setting where trust between people is crucial as there is something at stake—for this purpose investing money at the bank was the chosen event.

The Recordings

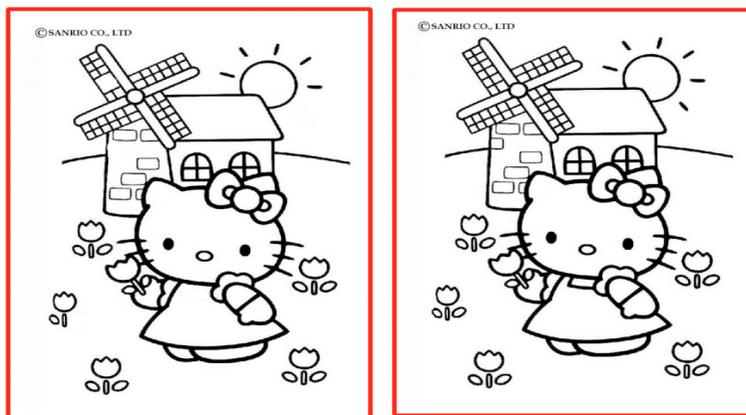
Two recordings were used in this study. Both had the same content and they were adapted from a Youtube advert of Barclays direct investing service—*Introducing Barclays direct investing service | Barclays*. The name of the bank was changed to NTBC to avoid the possible influence of the participants' associations with the bank on the results. Moreover, the text was slightly changed by the author of the paper: some sentences were cut out and some were added in different places. As the original text was taken from an advertisement for the bank's new investing service, the purpose of this video was to convince people to use this service rather than to invest money. This is why the text had to be adjusted to fit the purpose of the study. Here is the full text used for the recording:

You know, I used to glaze over at the point when in the news they were talking about stock market and investing. I mean, unless you work with money who has the time to get their head around things like that? Just the amount of options can seem bewildering... Funds, shares, ETFs, gilts and bonds... The list goes on. The reality is, though, investing can help you make the most of those all-important life moments. Whether it's investing in your children's future, planning for retirement or just wanting to make your money work harder. And the good news is you

don't have to be a financial whizz to get started. Whether you're new to investing or just want to develop your existing portfolio, NTBC direct investing service is the easy way to plan and manage your investments—all in one place, with your NTBC online banking accounts. NTBC's direct investing service is today's cutting edge investment tool—it's easy to use and designed for people just like you and me. You'll learn all about the principles of investing and all about the types of investments available. Build a tailored life plan, focus on your personal goals and invest! All with super simple fees and no hidden charges. Simple, yet brilliant. Planning for the future and investing can seem daunting but with NTBC's direct investing service you'll find support through easy to use tools and information. NTBC is revolutionising investing, for all of us... So take control of your life plan and open an account today. You have to remember that the value of your investment can fall as well as rise and you may get back less than you initially invested. Also, investing should be considered a long-term activity, typically at least five years. (youtube.com)

Both versions of the text were recorded for the purpose of this study by a middle-aged, Polish male, fluent in English and with a background in languages and accents. The recordings were ca. 2 minutes long. The rhythm and intonation were similar to avoid the additional factor that could influence the results. Between the two recordings, there was a task to find five differences in the following pictures:

Figure 1. "Spot the differences" task.



The Method and Data Collection

As the main way of collecting information, I chose an online questionnaire which was created and put on the Google Forms platform. There were seven questions in Polish about:

- sex of the participant;
- the education level of the participant;
- the level of proficiency in English of the participant;
- whether or not the participant visited Britain;
- if so, how much time they spend there;
- the amount of money the participant is willing to invest after listening to the recording (one question after each recording).

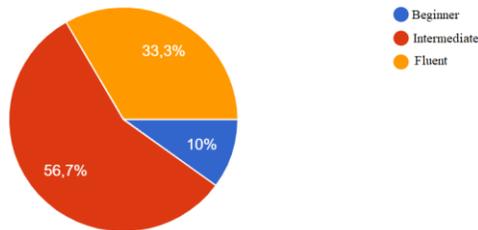
The participants were asked to imagine they had £20 000 and could choose to invest as much as they wanted. The questionnaire then was sent to various people and put online on several online forums. The data was collected from April 2019 to May 2019.

The Results of the Study and their Analysis

The total number of participants was thirty-four; however, four of the answers provided were not relevant to the question and so they were not taken into account. The number of answers that were analysed was thirty. Eleven out of thirty participants were female and twenty of the participants have never been to England. Seventeen people declared their level of proficiency in English to be intermediate, ten out of thirty have chosen the answer “fluent” and only three claimed to be only beginners in English:

Figure 2. The pie chart with answers to the question about the level of proficiency in English.

What is your level of proficiency in English?



After making a dependent sample t-test, the results have shown that the participants were more willing to invest money after hearing an RP accent speaker. A Wilcoxon Signed-ranks test indicated that investment after hearing the native-accented recording was significantly bigger (Mdn = 3750) than investment after hearing the Polish-accented recording (Mdn = 1250), $Z = -2.05$, $p < 0.5$. It is shown in the following table:

Figure 3. Statistical information about the results.

		Statistics	
		ENG invest	PL invest
N	Valid	30	30
	Missing	0	0
Mean		5528.33	4223.43
Median		3750.00	1250.00
Std. Deviation		6048.506	5369.609
Minimum		0	0
Maximum		20000	18000

The specific amount of money invested (with the set maximum of £20 000) depending on the accent in the recording is presented in the following bar charts. The amount of money invested after listening to a recording with the speaker with an RP accent, although less evenly distributed, was bigger than in the recording with a Polish-accented speaker. Many of the participants decided to invest various amounts of money there, which made the statistical results weaker.

Figure 4. The amount of money invested after listening to the native-accented recording.

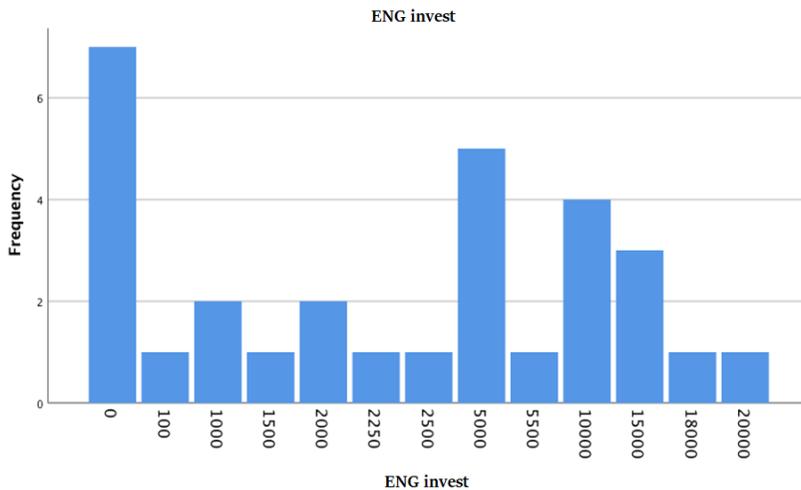
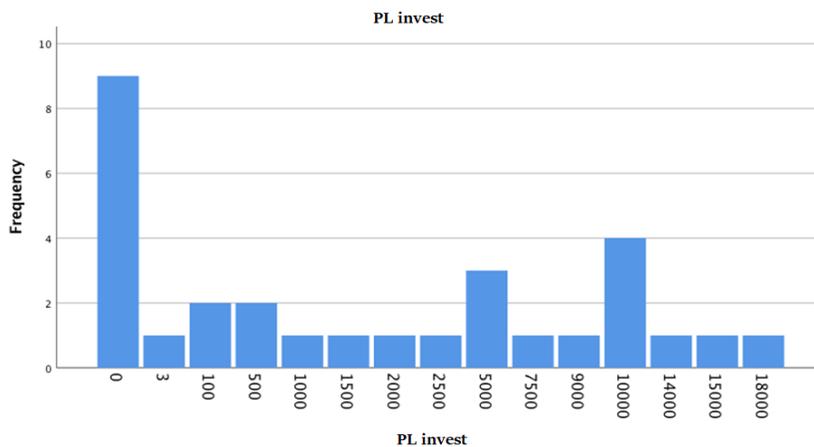


Figure 5. The amount of money invested after listening to the Polish-accented recording.



Discussion

As the results have shown, there is a significant difference in the amount of money the participants were willing to invest, depending on the accent used in the recordings. This stands in opposition to what other studies, mentioned in the first part, have shown—usually people trust their fellow countrymen more than people from other countries (when it is evident in their accent). Furthermore, the ingroup and outgroup perception would also play a role in this situation and run contrary to the hypothesis and the results. Still, one cannot dismiss the factors that may have contributed to such results. The native-accented person may appear more competent as one would assume they have innate knowledge about the inner workings of their country and the institutions in it. Moreover, one has to take into account the animosities and competition between Polish people that live and work in the United Kingdom. Sometimes, people act on the basis of stereotypes and hearsay, even about their fellow countrymen, and are not willing to trust them. The scale of this phenomenon is unknown; however, when thinking about the implications, one cannot dismiss the possibility that it affects the everyday life of Poles who live in Great Britain significantly. What is also unknown is whether this effect carries onto different languages but also different nationalities. This opens up the possibility of further research into this subject. It is important to study this phenomenon as the concept of trust as a whole is fundamental not only in society but in the lives of individuals too.

Limitations of the Study:

The Number of Participants

The number of participants in this study is relatively low. The data was collected in the span of one and a half months. Moreover, the people who were asked to fill the questionnaire were not always eager to do so without any incentive in the form of money or any other reward. Despite the fact that the study of this phenomenon would require a larger sample should be obtained, it

is not liable to question the validity of the results. While it is true that a bigger number of participants could provide a clearer and possibly statistically stronger result, the sample was large enough to point to the existence of the researched phenomenon which was the aim of this study.

The Phrasing of the Questions

After analysing the data that was collected, a few answers had to be deleted because of their content. The question about the amount of money a participant would invest was phrased as follows: “After hearing this offer, what amount of money would you be willing to invest if, for this purpose, you had £20 000?” (my translation). Some participants did not write any amount of money in the space provided but responded that there was, for example, no information about the risks. It can be inferred that the insufficient amount of information in the recordings, as well as people’s reluctance to invest even a hypothetical amount of money, contributed to this problem.

The Number of the Recordings

As mentioned before, there were two recordings with the same content and the same person was reading them. It creates a problem of credibility as the general attitude towards an accent cannot be measured when a person is provided with only one sample. The solution to that problem would be to provide several recordings in which people of different age and sex groups read the offer. It would make the study more credible and the diversification would prevent the participants from assessing both of these recordings as the same—as they were identical in content and read by the same person. Although the distractor was provided, one cannot dismiss the possibility of such an occurrence.

Using a Dependent Sample

In this study, the sample was dependent and this choice was made because of several reasons. Firstly, the time constraints made collecting the data difficult. To separate the two recordings and to send them to different people would prolong the process of collecting information. Secondly, as people were not willing to fill the questionnaire, finding twice as many willing participants would be a serious obstacle. Even though for this study an independent sample would be preferable, it was not possible due to the previously mentioned constraints.

Only One Native Accent Used

As mentioned in the theoretical part of this article, RP, although it still enjoys some prestige in the United Kingdom and is associated with the more affluent members of the society, is also regarded as distant and posh (Crystal 2005). Moreover, there are not a lot of people who speak with this accent so it is not as probable to meet a person using RP in the banking sector as a person with another “natural” native accent. To make this study more significant, apart from adding recordings from people of different age and sex groups, another accent would have to appear. It would give a more relevant result than using only one British accent.

Conclusion

This study was meant to explore the connections between accents and trust in English while used by non-native speakers. In the first part, the theoretical background for this work was provided. Definitions of several important terms such as ingroup/outgroup, accent prestige and social identity were established and several other papers on the way the accent affects people (Kinzler et al. 2011, Bryla-Cruz 2016, Baus et al. 2019) were discussed. This provided both a theoretical background for the study and a contrast to the hypothesis that runs contrary to the results of the other studies.

Part two was concerned with the study, the methods, the sample and the results, and contained the discussion on the results. It was shown that the accent affects the listener and proved that Polish people are less likely to trust a Polish-accented person than a person speaking with the Received Pronunciation. The source of this distrust is still largely unknown but it is possible that stereotypes and previous negative experiences play part in the outcome of the study. There were several limitations of the study, the most important one being the size of the sample. There was also only one person that was recorded and no additional accent was provided, which may make it seem that Polish people trust a person with an RP accent more than with a Polish accent. What is more, the dependent sample t-test, in this case, is inferior to the independent sample. After the data was collected, there were several problems that were not previously anticipated – the people filling the questionnaire were not always answering with numbers when the question about the amount of money to invest was posed.

As a concluding remark, it can be said that, although the study may suggest the accent may affect our perception of other people and the level of trust a person has for them, the subject should be explored further, with more time and resources at hand. Moreover, the fact that the results of the previous studies have shown that in English people tend to trust the information provided by the native-accented people (Kinzler et al. 2011, Bryla-Cruz 2016, Baus et al. 2019), we cannot dismiss the fact that it can be the other way round, as this study has proven.

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Abstract

This article aims to prove that there is a correlation between accents and trust levels and the fact that Polish people are more willing to hypothetically invest money after listening to a person with an RP accent rather than a Polish accent. This article contains the specific details of the study that was meant to explore the relationship between accent and trust. The limitations of the study and the analysis of the results are also provided. This experiment was limited by the time constraints, the number of participants, and the number of recordings available. The results show that Polish people are more willing to trust a person speaking English with an RP accent rather than Polish and confirm the hypothesis that there is a significant connection between accents and trust.

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**A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF THEME-BASED INSTRUCTION AND
GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG
LEARNERS**

Keywords: theme-based instruction, syllabus design, grammar-translation method

Introduction

The Grammar-Translation Method is an approach to language teaching/learning in which the main focus is on the literature and grammar of the target language. The Grammar-Translation Method facilitates learning through translation from a mother tongue to a target language. It, thus, emphasizes mastery of grammatical rules and knowledge of vocabulary. However, hardly any attention is paid to the content and communication in the aforementioned approach. The lessons are teacher-centred and students lack an active role in the classroom. Therefore, one may assert that the Grammar-Translation Method, which is predominantly text-based, is an efficient way of learning vocabulary and grammatical structures. In most cases, the teacher gives instructions and grammatical explanations in a student's native language. Additionally, there is little or no attempt to teach pronunciation. Theme-based instruction, however, is an approach to language teaching/learning in which various curriculum areas are connected and integrated within a theme. Theme-based instruction aims to prepare students to learn a language while using the context of any subject matter. Furthermore, the contents and grammatical structures are placed in order around the chosen topic and the lessons demand performing tasks on particular themes in the classroom. Therefore, theme-

based instruction aims to implement a diversity of skills and content by compounding curriculum areas around a topic.

At the same time, theme-based instruction provides an extensive repertory of sources, exercises for pupils of all levels, including pair and group work. Topic work is a way of organizing children's language learning around topics or themes of interest to the children (Moon 118). Implementing theme-based instruction assists young learners to acquire grammatical and functional structures in context. A topic-based/task-based approach is founded on the simple fact that it is the learner who organizes the process of learning and the teacher's role is only to facilitate this process (Bourke 8). Theme-based instruction allows for making lessons contextualized and making the learning process more straightforward. In such a way, the teacher can create meaningful contexts, which enable pupils to acquire different skills and practice in various discourse types.

As Brown (236) argues, the major principles underlying theme-based learning are:

- automaticity,
- meaningful learning,
- intrinsic motivation,
- communicative competence.

As opposed to Theme-Based Instruction, the Grammar-Translation Method is descriptive and normative. The major criticism of the practice is that language development is dependent on rote memory rather than perceptual advancement. However, language rules are often complex to interpret without understanding the processes by which the rules are formed.

Theme-Based Instruction and Grammar Translation Method in EFL Classes

Implementing theme-based teaching provides authentic and motivating uses of the English language and fosters critical thinking among young learners.

Moreover, it is seen as crucial to students' development in English since it offers a professional organization, including a long list of activities related to all areas of the curriculum under one theme. By way of explanation, themes integrate listening, reading, speaking and writing and provide content, context and purpose. Predominantly, themes help students be more active in the classroom on the grounds that it seems interesting and students become more willing to participate in the activities or discussions. As Mumford states,

this method of teaching links curriculum strands and capitalizes on children's interests, creating a sense of purpose and community in the classroom. By building on their interests and life experiences, young people's attitudes, skills and knowledge are developed in meaningful ways. Inquiry and communication are activated by a desire to know more, resulting in enthusiastic participation in the learning process. (4)

Even though reading and writing are the central pragmatic objectives; little, if any, systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening skills. Richards and Rodgers (3–4) summarize the principal characteristics of the Grammar-Translation Method as follows:

- The goal of foreign language study is to learn a language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from the foreign-language study. It hence views language learning as consisting of little more than memorizing rules and facts in order to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the foreign language.
- Reading and writing are the major focus; little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening.
- A vocabulary section is based solely on the reading texts used and words are taught through bilingual word lists, dictionary study and memorization.
- The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice. Much of the lesson is devoted to translating sentences into and out of the target language and it is this focus on the sentence that is a distinctive feature of the method.
- Accuracy is emphasized.
- Grammar is taught deductively—that is, by presentation and study of grammar rules, which are then practiced through translation exercises.
- The student's native language is the medium of instruction

The student's native language is maintained as a reference frame for the acquisition of a second language. Language learners are inactive in language

learning; hence, they cannot improve their English skills properly. Compared to Theme-Based Instruction, the Grammar-Translation Method focuses on translation from the target language and memorizing new vocabularies. Even though the Grammar-Translation Method was the principal method in Europe in the 19th century and is seen as outdated at the moment, it is still commonly used in many EFL settings. Eastern European countries, Asian countries, African and Middle Eastern countries use the Grammar-Translation Method a lot in their classrooms. One of the Asian countries, which use the Grammar-Translation Method a lot in EFL settings, is Japan. Kirkwood explicitly summarizes the reason why the Grammar-Translation Method is still quite prominent in Japanese EFL settings as follows:

Historical factors have played a major role in why grammar-translation is still so prevalent in the Japanese education system, but history is not the only reason for this method's continued popularity. Some of the advantages of the GTM make it especially useful in the context of a Japanese classroom. For example, Japanese class sizes tend to be large meaning that logistically, communicative group or pair activities are more difficult to set-up and to facilitate. Also, traditionally, Japanese teachers' instruction style is very much like a formal 'lecture' where the teacher stands at the front of the class and simply presents the information to be studied. (5)

One may find similar results in the People's Republic of China where the Grammar-Translation Method has been widely used in EFL settings. The classes are teacher-centred, students cannot be autonomous and lessons are devoted to reading and vocabulary activities. The role of Chinese teachers is to explain reading texts word by word and sentence by sentence. Consequently, students are supposed to understand grammar in detail with the help of reading activities. Furthermore, students are required to recite relevant grammar rules and memorize their meanings. Since the classes are focused on the Grammar-Translation-Method, no context is created for the acquisition of the vocabulary activities. Students are not able to practice the recently-learned vocabularies and improve their speaking skills. This problem is caused due to not only the Grammar-Translation-Method but also the number of pupils in the classrooms.

The Difference between Theme-Based Instruction and Grammar-Translation Method in Terms of Coursebooks

Young learners are in the stage of cognitive development which indicates that they acquire through hands-on activities. The teacher's role is to make pupils active rather than passive. In other words, they need to be engaged in activities and use language to accomplish the tasks. Accordingly, coursebooks used in EFL settings are crucial to the development of students. On the one hand, theme-based teaching enables contextual support in the classroom and coursebooks designed according to the outcomes of theme-based instruction provide authentic contexts through which students learn effectively. On the other hand, the Grammar-Translation Method is more helpful to increase reading and vocabulary skills. Considering the fact that the classes are conducted in a mother tongue, coursebooks may not match up in different cultures. One of the disadvantageous outcomes of teaching the lessons in L1 is that students do not have the possibility to familiarize themselves with the target language in terms of culture and traditions, even though learning about culture is crucial to learning a language. The Grammar-Translation Method and similar methods fail to meet this criterion. Some coursebooks have both L1 and L2 sentences but even if coursebooks are solely in English, the teacher is the one who translates them into the target language. They also include long, elaborate explanations of the intricacy of grammar, which sets out rules for putting words together, and instructions often focus on the form and inflection of words. In various coursebooks used to implement the Grammar-Translation Method, little attention is paid to the content of texts. Furthermore, they are generally treated as grammatical exercises. In addition, they are not related to real-life contexts. Often the only exercises are to translate disconnected sentences from a target language into a mother tongue. One of the drawbacks of implementing the Grammar-Translation Method is that it requires extensive memorization. Students are required to memorize words and learn about the

grammar rules in the target language. On the other hand, in theme-based instruction, students are supported by their teacher throughout the learning process and students learn from one another and assist their classmates throughout the learning process. Seeing the acquisition as a discovery process, young learners should be allowed to figure out how the language works. In comparison to the Grammar-Translation Method, theme-based teaching encourages mistakes in the classroom. Pupils are free to make errors and they are the ones who will restructure their emerging language system.

Consequently, in order to summarize the positive outcomes of implementing Theme-Based Instruction one might check the following what offered by (Moon 132):

- Create a real need and desire to use English
- Provide exposure to varied and meaningful input with a focus on communication
- Create a friendly atmosphere in which pupils can take risks and enjoy their learning
- Provide opportunities for children to experiment with their new language
- Provide plenty of opportunities to practice and use the language in different contexts
- Provide feedback on learning
- Help children notice the underlying pattern in language

Methodology

This study aims to investigate the response of students to theme-based instruction and the Grammar-Translation Method. The English curriculum in Turkish public schools is chiefly composed of grammar-related activities. Hence, one may say that the curriculum is focused on the Grammar-Translation Method. The students who study at public schools cannot improve their listening and speaking skills properly. Moreover, the lessons are teacher-centred; therefore, students cannot be autonomous and improve their social skills. At the same time, private language schools have their own curricula, lesson plans and activities prepared by headteachers. Furthermore, language

schools are more flexible in relation to the choice of a teaching/learning approach for young learners.

Participants

The questionnaires are filled out by twenty-five fifth-grade students. All of the participants are studying at Turkish public schools and attending a private language school in Turkey. These students are carefully selected, as all of their English proficiency is A1 according to the CEFR (Common European Framework). They learn English with the Grammar-Translation Method in the public school with the same coursebook, i.e., *Happy English*. The coursebook with which lessons are taught in the language school is *English Know-It-All*, designed in accordance with Theme-Based Instruction. *English Know-It-All*, which is the main coursebook, is the principal reference book used in the classes. Additionally, headteachers and other teachers prepare their activities to support the coursebook. On the other hand, the coursebook used in Turkish public schools, which is *Happy English*, is supported by numerous reading and vocabulary activities. No additional materials are required for use in Turkish public schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study adopts a quantitative approach. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the students are asked to participate in both questionnaires online. The initial questionnaire gathers data relating to the students' learning experience through the Grammar-Translation Method and Theme-Based Instruction. The following questionnaire intends to collect further information regarding their perceptions of the different coursebooks participants use in public schools and the private language school. Both questionnaires aim to encourage students to reflect on their feelings towards the two different learning approaches. Appropriately formulated questions prompted them to broaden their views on this learning experience.

A five-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) is used to assess the participants' reactions to the study (see Table 1 and 2 in Results and Discussion section). Students' responses match their perceptions of their learning experience and their motivation to learn through Theme-Based Instruction.

Results and Discussion

Students' Perceptions of their Learning Experience

The results of the first questionnaire indicate that the Grammar-Translation Method is demotivating in the learning process. As far as the participants are concerned, the units should have a relevant theme and they hold the belief that they are more engaged in learning when they are familiar with the context. In addition, participants feel that the use of L1 in EFL settings is not beneficial. The results of the questionnaire clearly show that English should be used actively in classes. A significant number of participants hold that adequate attention is not paid to listening and speaking activities in Turkish public schools. The lack of speaking and listening activities prevents participants from practicing recently-learned vocabularies. However, at the language school, they communicate in L2, as the lessons are contextualized and have real-life themes. As far as the participants are concerned, the lessons are teacher-centred in public schools; thus, students cannot be autonomous and they are not given enough chance to be active during classes. Learning vocabulary traditionally is not suitable for young learners and students deem that the memorization method is not beneficial for them. Nevertheless, theme-based instruction provides relevant themes in which students can practice and reinforce these new vocabularies through listening activities. According to the participants' perception, lessons and the syllabus at public schools are exam-focused. Teachers provide lexical items that are asked in the exams but most of these vocabularies are not relevant on a daily basis. However, the classes participants

have at the language school, the syllabus of which is designed according to the theme-based instruction, presents them real-life contexts.

Table 1. The results of the first questionnaire.

Statement	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
1. Classes are more pleasant when supported by a theme.	4.6	5	0.69
2. Coursebooks we use at the public school are beneficial. They are essential to learning English.	2.44	3	1.16
3. I am more motivated when the teacher does not speak in my mother tongue. It is more useful to listen and speak in English in the classroom all the time.	4.16	4	0.67
4. Learning grammar in traditional ways is not helpful. I prefer to learn grammar and vocabulary in a context/theme.	4.04	4	1.03
5. Themes are relevant to my daily life. These themes help me to remember the recently learned vocabulary. Moreover, it gives me the chance to practice them in speaking activities.	4.44	5	0.75
6. Learning grammatical functions and memorizing vocabularies in the lessons are crucial for my skill development.	2.24	2	1.03
7. Classes at the public school are teacher-centred, and we do not get the chance to speak. Lessons are chiefly vocabulary and grammar-focused.	4.6	5	0.48
8. The EFL education I receive at the public school is exam-focused; hence, the teacher prepares us for the upcoming exam(s), which are related to grammar and vocabulary.	4.32	5	0.83
9. The EFL education I receive from the language school is real-life-focused. We can connect vocabulary and themes with real-life situations.	4.44	4	0.63

Happy English is the main coursebook used in EFL settings in Turkish public schools. It is designed by the Basaran Publishing for implementing to the 5th-grade students. After careful examination of the units and the possible outcomes of the coursebook, one may assert that it is the coursebook focused on the Grammar-Translation Method. The teacher's manual does not provide enough activities for a teacher to involve students in lessons. Even though the coursebook is designed in accordance with the Common European Framework, the activities and units are not relevant to the students' level of English. In addition, teachers use L1 during lessons and students cannot get acquainted with L2; therefore, they cannot hear and acquire the correct pronunciation of lexical subjects. On the other hand, *English Know It All*, the content of which is highly appropriate for Theme-Based Instruction, has themes and relevant tasks in each unit. Furthermore, *English Know It All* provides speaking and listening activities, with which students can both practice their listening skills and learn the correct pronunciation of the target words. *English Know It All* fosters the active participation of students; thus, they can become autonomous.

Table 2. The results of the second questionnaire.

Statement	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
1. <i>Happy English</i> provides numerous vocabulary activities but it does not provide speaking and listening activities through which we can practice what we acquired.	4.4	5	0.69
2. <i>Happy English</i> focuses much on memorization but it does not help us pronounce those words with listening activities.	4.16	4	0.78
3. Units of <i>Happy English</i> are not coherent, and they do not blend. We cannot connect the vocabularies from one unit to the other.	3.96	4	0.77
4. <i>English Know It All</i> is a favourable coursebook. The themes and activities are motivating me.	4.28	5	0.87

5. <i>English Know It All</i> helps me to enhance my listening and speaking skills. Themes are quite helpful to learn vocabulary and to practice them in speaking.	4.24	4	0.81
6. <i>English Know It All</i> does not provide direct grammar. First, it enables us to get familiar with the themes. Then, while doing listening and speaking activities, we practice grammar. Grammar is supported by listening and speaking activities	4.32	4	0.73

Conclusion

This article concludes with the observation that the Grammar-Translation Method is not considered to be a suitable learning method for young learners. Participants deem that memorization and translation from English into a mother tongue are not helpful to their learning process. Moreover, participants believe that it is more suitable to learn vocabulary in a theme in which they can practice new words along with speaking and listening activities. As stated in the article, even though the Grammar-Translation Method is outdated, it is still quite prevalent in numerous EFL settings. In particular, Asian and Middle Eastern countries still teach English with the Grammar Translation Method. Those students have challenges with the pronunciation of recently learned vocabulary and struggle to use them in sentences. Moreover, enough attention is not paid to speaking activities and students fail to practice four skills of English. However, when lessons are designed according to Theme Based Instruction, students are able to learn in a selected context. The coursebooks used in Turkish public schools are based on the learning outcomes of the Grammar-Translation Method. Thus, the activities are focused on vocabulary and reading. The EFL settings are chiefly teacher-centred and students do not have the chance to be active in the classroom.

On the one hand, the syllabus designed with the Grammar-Translation Method prepares students for the upcoming exams through rote learning, not

acquisition. On the other hand, Theme Based Instruction provides real-life contexts in which students learn grammar, vocabulary and improve their speaking and listening skills in selected themes. From the participants' point of view, *English Know It All* makes the learning process more straightforward and efficient. Furthermore, *English Know It All* links the recently learned themes with the previous ones.

One may assert that the Grammar-Translation Method should not be used with young learners of English. Providing grammar in a context is considered more advantageous and suitable for the needs of modern EFL settings. Topic-based language teaching stimulates inquiry and communication by the desire for learning, which results in enthusiastic participation in the learning process. In short, one can say that theme-based learning is in accordance with the pupils' natural way of learning and provides meaningful and motivational use of language for students. Ultimately, theme-based instruction facilitates learning vocabulary in a context. It enables language learning through expanding communication and it assists pupils to learn discourse skills as well.

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Abstract

Theme-based instruction indicates acquiring language, along with language skills, in a precise context. To the greatest extent, theme-based instruction approaches make learning considerably distinctive from traditional teaching approaches, e.g., the Grammar-Translation Method, since it implements a real-world application in which learning takes place. Therefore, pupils are able to use their experience to make real-life developments and obtain knowledge in a given context. This paper aims to compare the

aforementioned approaches in terms of language acquisition, the development of both listening and speaking skills and the students' autonomy. It also provides a brief overview of the Grammar-Translation Method and Theme-Based Instruction and demonstrates examples of the implementation of the Grammar-Translation Method in Asian countries. Furthermore, this article reports the results of two questionnaires conducted in Turkey concerning the Grammar-Translation Method and the Theme-Based Instruction.

**TRENDS
IN LITERARY STUDIES**

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VICTORIAN POPULAR SCIENCE AND THE SENSATION NOVEL

Keywords: sensation novel, Victorian science, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, Charles Darwin

Sensation novels and the sensational appeals of popular science provided a focus for the tensions that were taking place in English culture in the 1860s. Audiences for popular science and the sensation novel were exposed to the same spectacles and they shared the same stories and similar anxieties about the changes wrought by modernity. To trace the intersections of popular science and the sensation novel the novels of Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins will be consulted here with reference to the fiction and readership of Charles Dickens and the Victorian audience for science exhibitions. This audience encountered the impact of Darwinism, an impact that persisted in the work of writers like Thomas Hardy who began his career with a novel of sensation and then, as the sensation novel waned in the 1870s, abandoned the form. Throughout these years Victorian audiences sought wonder in facts and as Gillian Beer has pointed out the study of fact was “an exploration of the fantastic” (74-75). Audiences were fascinated by public displays of science and spectacular exhibits. Curious phenomena were staged with theatrical precision and creatures from exotic locales were prepared by the taxidermist’s hand. The literature of the time shows that these audiences were drawn to the sensational. The signs of the coincidence of sensation fiction and scientific report are everywhere visible in the periodical press of the 1860s. A decade earlier, in 1850, crowds gathered around the spectacles, not the

educational exhibits, Jeffrey A. Auerbach has observed (104-108). The phenomenon was not different in the 1860s: when Victorian science popularizers staged their exhibits, viewers preferred the spectacular to the studied and methodical portrayals of patterns in nature.

This was the period in which sensation novels gave reading audiences the charge of nervous excitement mentally and physically. Sensation fiction brought to the public “extremes of behavior” (Terry 74). There were “ruined heiresses, impossible wills, damning letters, skeletons in the cupboard, misappropriated legacies” (Terry 74). When H.L. Mansel warned that sensation novels were “electrifying the nerves of the reader” and moving past “the rational and moral faculties” (488-489), he was theorizing the experience of reading as an embodied act. While his criticism issued from Victorian moral concern, the supernaturalism in the novels he criticized was not removed from contemporary scientific knowledge. A kind of shock or terror could now be linked to human physiology. From the 1860s through the end of the century physiology began to develop as a specific discipline. There were cautious attempts to develop a psychological approach to phenomena. In the 1870s and 1880s, “medico-scientific discourses contributed to the somatic emphasis of Gothic fiction,” notes Samuel Alberti (390-391). Nicholas Dames has observed that as critics blurred the boundaries of experimental science and literary journalism, this rendered normal “occasional readerly shock” (13). Laurie Garrison contends that the appearance of numerous articles on physiology during the Victorian era suggests that physiology held more sway on sensation fiction than the psychological factors that Sally Shuttleworth, Andrew Mangham, and Jenny Bourne Taylor have emphasized (xii)¹.

Victorian audiences were curious about science, while superstitious, and they liked to be stirred. There was what Reginald C. Terry calls “a taste for the factual” in Victorian fiction of this period (55) but also an inclination toward suspense and melodrama. A main concern was entropy. The tabloid press offered Robert H. Patterson’s quasi-scientific article, “Is the Sun Dying?” In

1867, an article by T.L. Phipson appeared asking about “Inhabited Planets.” Meanwhile, the periodical press included stories of realism and psychological investigation. Sensation included crime dramas and mystery novels that were serialized in magazines before becoming triple-deckers.

There has been much comment on how Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) provoked anxiety in Victorian culture but less on how the novel of sensation coincided with this. Indeed, Darwin, like Charles Dickens, both pleased and disturbed readers, as Gillian Beer has recognized (35). The same period that reacted to Darwin’s theory of natural selection, and to the entropy and heat death suggested by the second law of thermodynamics, was the period which saw the rise of suspense fiction and the ratiocination of the detective novel. The first installment of *Woman in White* was two days after the November 26 appearance of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. Soon, G.H. Lewes was writing, “Mr. Darwin’s book is... at present exciting very great attention” (1860: 95). T.H. Huxley called it “a decidedly dangerous book” (295). In 1860, Dickens’s *All the Year Round* placed under the Collins story articles on “Species” (177) on June 2 and “Natural Selection” (293) on July 7, Darwin cast a blow to the optimism of the Victorian age. “Progress” had been its watchword and its Great Exhibition and Crystal Palace in 1850 featured the stunning accomplishments of industrial technology. It was difficult to hold to meliorism and optimism in the face of this process conceived of as blind chance. Victorians wished for things to be meaningful and moral. When Darwin presented a vision of human life as the product of random variation, the only hope seemed to be the virtues and powers of human consciousness.

Darwin’s book compelled guarded responses while the sensation novel aroused fear among conservative critics like H.L. Mansel and Margaret Oliphant, who recognized “a changed world” (Mansel 481). Mansel remarked that the sensation novel was “usually a tale of our own times” (Nadel and Fredeman 357). That tale was one of a time of science, modernity, and precipitous change. Sensation novels provided a focus for the tensions that

were taking place in English literary culture and society. Conservatives branded sensation novels “brash, vulgar, and subversive” (Hughes 6). For such critics, sensation novels were a threat to society, or at least to the sensibilities of the reader. H.L. Mansel called the sensation novel “preaching to the nerves instead of the judgment” (Nadel & Fredeman 357). He referred to “the pale young lady” (Nadel & Fredeman 358) in what was surely a reference to Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*. Recalling Collins’s *The Woman in White*, Margaret Oliphant had called the “startling” touch of Anne Catherick on Walter Hartwright’s sleeve a “spell” cast also upon the reader (566). In Collins’s *The Moonstone*, we read of the nervous tension of a narrator who ponders the disappearance of Rosanna Spearman: “A dreadful dumb trembling crawled over me all of a sudden” (1976: 196). Kate Flint has considered such somatic responses to reading as “mobilizing our sympathetic nervous system” (291). Such responses are what Alison Winter has described as “physiologically charged terrors,” or “involuntary reactions and excited state of mind” that some readers reported (324). D.A. Miller has claimed that reading these works can foster a nervous condition in the reader; they are “theaters of neurasthenia” that address the sympathetic nervous system (146-147). Laurie Garrison, likewise, moves toward physiology in her readings (xii), citing the articles by Oliphant and Mansel of the 1860s and G.H. Lewes book of 1859. These views hold that there were physiological effects in reading novels. In sensation novels there were disguises, heroines in danger, aristocratic villains, romantic triangles, all “giving shocks to the nervous system” (Garrison xi). Sensation fiction depicted insanity, hysteria, mental disability—people at their wits end. Views of degeneration were set against ideas of evolution. Installment parts used “closings,” or the exclamation point of an exciting scene to grab and sustain interest for the next installment to come, much in the way that serial television drama uses this device today.

Charles Dickens’s serialized fiction seems only tangentially related to the sensation novel. Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861) was associated with the

sensation novel by Margaret Oliphant in her 1862 *Blackwood's* article. There she claimed that Dickens had written a failed sensation novel. The novel begins with Pip's experience of being shaken upside down by Magwitch: an experience that suggests the sensation novel. Later, the story is marked by Estella's cold lack of sensation, as Laurie Garrison points out (124). Oliphant asserted that Dickens's friend and sometime collaborator Wilkie Collins had written a stronger sensation novel with *Woman in White* and praised it for the "delicacy of its sensation incidents" (564). Collins was quite aware of the mystery of the hidden interconnections of the characters in Dickens's novels and he began to produce similar mysteries. *The Woman in White* began on a shadowy road and it offered obscure possibilities that began with one shocking touch on Walter Hartwright's sleeve by a woman in white. In Chapter Four, one reads: "every drop of my blood was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me" (Collins 1999: 23).

A sense of relation, or interconnection, and the scientific quest to understand it appeared in the work of Charles Darwin, who was a reader of Charles Dickens. Gillian Beer has suggested that Darwin gravitated to Dickens's sense of "the energy of concealed interconnection," (105) or his "sense of relationships" (40) and "that everything is connected" (42). She sees the scientist, Darwin, seeking to uncover these connections. Dickens's plots often rely upon the gradual disclosure of these hidden relationships. The emergence of these relationships is also an essential part of sensation fiction. It is the essence of the narrative quest for discovery in Collins's *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*.

Darwin, meanwhile, also drew from Dickens's profusion, observes Beer. *The Origin of Species*, Darwin's text, she points out, is multivalent; it is generative of metaphors of "profusion and extension" (7). In Dickens's social panoramas and rush of language, Beer believes that Darwin saw an "apparently unruly superfluity of material gradually and retrospectively revealing itself as order" through relations (6). Beer relates this profusion in Dickens to Darwin's plots:

“variability, struggle, the power of generation and of generations” (42). One of Darwin’s passages in the *Origin of Species* is linked with Dickens’s world of *Bleak House*: “the broken and failing groups of organic beings” (*Origin* 435; Beer 42). Dickens will disclose the obscured, hidden relationships of *Bleak House* and Darwin will reveal those of the natural world.

In the sensation novel, as in both Dickens’s fiction and Darwin’s science, there is a romantic materiality, observes Beer, a “drive toward confirming experience by appeal to the physical and the material, changing language into physical process” (41). For Darwin, a “fact” may be a wonder (*Origin* 170-71, 259). Unlike the “facts” of Dickens’s Mr. Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, which shut out wonder, the attention to scientific fact in Darwin realizes discovery (Beer 76). A reader of Dickens’s unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, or of Collins’s *The Woman in White* enters a kind of pursuit for the facts of the matter that will solve a mystery. Similarly, a visitor to a museum of natural history will venture into a curious array of displays and encounter facts presented by science that will offer that visitor a sense of the mystery of life.

The chill of mystery touched science museum audiences, who were oriented toward spectacle. In the 1860s and 1870s, imagination regarding a mysterious past was stimulated by museum exhibits of scientific discovery and speculation. As Robert Mighall has pointed out, visitors to museums used the language of the Gothic and sensation novel to describe their encounter with geological, medical, or other scientific artifacts in the museum (191). The exhibition of museum artifacts prompted a sense of the awful and corresponded with sensation fiction’s inclination toward expressing themes of “racial degeneration, atavism, deviant sexualities, and monstrosity” (Alberti 391). Museum audiences expanded in the mid-nineteenth century to include people from the working class. Aileen Fyfe points out, “it was more difficult for writers and curators to presume any background knowledge” (197).

Exhibitions drew upon the techniques of creating stage sets and provided landscapes with realism and specimens that were “prepared like life itself”

(Peverell in Carroll 286). Visitor's responses could be different from "how owners intended their collections to be perceived" (Carroll 295). Science had contributed to cultural insecurity by unsettling previously held notions of order and coherence. Changes in scientific education and the growth of new audiences for science was part of this trend (Fyfe and Lightman 2007b: 5). Popularizers sought the extension of science throughout the culture to a wider public.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, science was a gentleman's profession learned through apprenticeship and it was not taught in the schools. Nineteenth century science worked within a Newtonian conception of the universe. It knew the beginnings of cell theory, and was aware of developments in geology, physics, chemistry, anthropology, and archaeology, and yet the word "scientist," coined in the 1830s, had not yet come into wide use. Evolution had already been considered for years when Charles Darwin began to explore it. His grandfather Erasmus Darwin had developed an evolutionary view. Robert Chambers's *The Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* had appeared in the 1830s. The periodical press for specialists in science was already thriving at that time. James Wald observes, "Already in 1826, Michael Faraday found the output of scientific periodical literature overwhelming" (426). Now, in the years immediately following Darwin's *Origin of Species*, expansion of the reading public for science coincided with the growth of literacy and technologies that made periodical production less expensive. Technological developments led to an increased availability of reading materials and a larger reading public (Secord 30). It has been estimated that by 1870, 81 percent of men and 73 percent of women in England and Wales could read (Eliot 293). The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) and mechanics institutes supported the development of popular science along with the notion of reading for self-improvement. While specialists were convening in disciplinary societies, science expanded as an area of curiosity among general readers or non-scientists. *Mechanics Magazine* was started by Benthamite

Thomas Hodgskin as a threepenny weekly. It became a forum for artisan's contributions which were scientific or technical and this led to the formation of a mechanics institute. Mudie's circulating library of the 1850s was followed by W.H. Smith in the 1860s. Science articles appeared in general circulation periodicals next to sensational stories that were offered to the public via serialization. Their readership included families in which books and periodicals were exchanged, or often read aloud.

The intertextual relations between articles on science and sensation fiction were manifold. Periodical articles dwelled within a "furious critical debate" about sensation fiction, as Barbara Onslow has pointed out (Onslow 2000: 161, 168). Sensation fiction and science met in Charles Dickens's *All the Year Round*, where we see responses to Darwin's ideas of human transformation in "Natural Selection" (July 7, 1860) and "Species" (August 1860). The periodical *Belgravia* set sensation fiction alongside articles on geology, astronomy, and zoology, popularizing science. *The Cornhill Magazine* published in 1862 "A Vision of Animal Existences" concerning a man at London's Zoological Gardens who meets a woman who is reading *Origin of Species* in a "green covered book" (Dixon 312). Here a world of "necessity and change" in the future will be all that will remain. The woman who is reading holds up the words "Natural Selection" and we learn that the woman's son is named "Struggle for Life." In 1863, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* was serialized in *The Sixpenny Magazine*, beginning in February alongside a section called "Literature, Science and Art." Robert H. Patterson's 'science' articles then began to appear next to Braddon's fiction. When the *Southern Literary Messenger* reported in 1863 that they had received a copy of *Lady Audley's Secret* through S. H. Goetzel of Mobile, they described it as belonging to "the sensation, murder, and moonlight school of fiction" (319). In November 1866, Braddon's story, *Birds of Prey*, with its evolutionary theme, was serialized in *Belgravia*, where it was juxtaposed with popular science.

Lady Audley's Secret, meanwhile, drew attention to psychology and argued against the contemporary perspective on female madness as representing a lack of control. One reads: "All mental distress is, with some show of reason, associated in our minds with loose, disordered garments and hair dishabilled, and an appearance in every way the reverse of my lady's" (Braddon 223). For Lady Audley, heredity insanity was her "secret which is the key to life" (165). E.S. Dallas saw in the sensation novel an emphasis on plot and an attention to human psychology, or "the hidden soul," and "the region of the mind that stretches out of consciousness" (55). In his essay "The Cant of Modern Criticism" George Augustus Sala defended sensation against Oliphant's "Sensation Novels." He called her essay "a sermon on novels" (Sala 1867: 48). Sala asserted that *Jane Eyre* and *Adam Bede* were "clearly sensational" novels in which the protagonists are quite human and not monstrous. They are, he wrote, "like dwellers in the actual breathing world in which we live" (1867: 52-53). Later, he asserted that "Mr. Darwin is a sensational philosopher" (1868: 457). Sala attributed the rise of the sensation novel to Dickens (1868: 455) and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. However, to argue that Dickens was involved in creating the form, one would have to look, instead, at earlier motifs in *Bleak House*.

In 1852, Dickens responded to the condition of England, with the Megalosaurus image in his first chapter of *Bleak House* suggesting regression and calamity. Dickens wrote of the fog of the British legal system, the choking 'facts' of the educational system in the industrial north, and the circumlocutions of bureaucracies. In that year William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), following the German Rudolph Clausius, advanced the second law of thermodynamics, which identified entropy. England's poet laureate Tennyson wrote *In Memoriam*, a poem aching with mid-century doubt prompted by mortality and wrestling with hope for an afterlife. At mid-century, G.H. Lewes, a literary critic and philosopher, who was more Lamarckian than Darwinian, believed in consciously directed evolution and this was not entirely available in Darwin.

Lewes agreed with the notion of natural selection but in his view, evolution was not merely random. He considered variation and inexplicable mutations. He rejected Darwin's statement in *The Descent of Man* (1871) that there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher animals in their mental faculties" (1879: 126).

Lewes's studies of physiology held an important role in the debate about sensation fiction, as Laurie Garrison points out (xii). His concern with aesthetics as a literary critic coincided with his scientific and epistemological inquiries. Lewes held that symbols condition belief. It is the power of thinking by means of symbols "which demarcates man from the animals [...]" (1879: 494). Lewes ventured a "reversal the rationalist psychology of his empiricist predecessors in scientific psychology," Peter Allan Dale points out (74). Lewes wrote: "All cognition is primarily emotion... No phenomena is interesting until it is illuminated by emotion" (1877: 42). Turning to the thought of German physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz on perception, Lewes sought to "gain a clear vision of the fundamental process in man" of mental operations (1879: v-vi). Lewes challenged the epistemology of "the sensational school" and their empiricist notion of the mind as *tabula rasa*. Working his way through Darwin's writings and those of Kant, Helmholtz, and Comte, Lewes suggested a biological structure of mind. He held that people are born with laws of consciousness which have "evolved through successive modification" (Dale 105).

The intersection of the novel and concerns about Darwinian evolution persisted. Some of the bleakest responses to Darwin appear in the writing of the Victorian novelist Thomas Hardy. His early novel *Desperate Remedies* (1871) bears all the marks of a sensation novel. By the time Hardy began writing this novel his confidence in science had broken down. There is in his fictional scheme no providential interpretation of life, as once appeared in a Dickens or Brontë novel. The pessimism that James Sully (1877) called a feature of the times overtook Hardy's initial appeal to sensation fiction (Dale 233). As the sensation novel began to wane, Hardy's fiction remained linked

with a rather pessimistic view of natural selection. While writers like Robert Louis Stevenson wrote fiction that still carried echoes of the sensation novel and Gothic fiction, Hardy had, by the mid-1870s, moved well beyond the era of the sensation novel. The Darwinism that had so unsettled Victorian society and had given rise to the sensation novel in the 1860s had, in Hardy, become a somber fact.

In *The Descent of Man* (1871) Charles Darwin mentioned love ninety-five times, according to the Darwin Project (2020). However, for Hardy love also brings struggle. Love is central for Hardy as a point of human interest and his novels are, in a sense, love stories. However, his perspective is worlds away from that of Victorian belief for there is no God at the center of Hardy's fictional world. For Hardy, our loves are forever disrupted and are a source of suffering. Our loves may matter little in the cosmic scope of things, but they are deeply valuable to us. It is only love that moves us within the indifferent universe. As his character Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* says, "There's more for us to think about in [the]... hungry heart than in all the stars of the sky" (1999 [1895]: 169). Yet, the heart often remains hungry and the yearning leads not only to mutual counterparts in relationship but to pain. Several of Hardy's characters are marked by heredity. In *Tess d'Urbervilles* a girl is torn between lovers. In *Jude the Obscure* (1896), a relationship between cousins results in disaster. Tess is from an "exhausted ancient line" (Hardy 2009 [1891]: 28) and Jude Fawley is flawed and falling. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Michael Henchard is deluded and following his grave mistakes his life goes in a circle.

The Victorian Hardy is pessimistic and links his worldview to Darwin. In *Two on a Tower* (1882), St. Cleeve, the young scientist insists, "Until a person has sought out the stars and their interspaces, he has hardly leant that there are things much more terrible than monsters of shape, namely, monsters of magnitude without known shape" (Hardy 1999 [1882]: 28) Lady Constantine answers by asserting that the study of astronomy "makes [one] feel human insignificance too plainly" (Hardy 1999 [1882]: 28). The scientific realization

that “nothing is made for man” (Hardy 1999 [1882]: 28) stuns the will into quandary before the unintelligible universe. In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Henry Knight clings to the sheer face of a rocky mountainside, acutely aware that he could easily fall to his death. As he looks up at the rocks, he is overwhelmed by a sense of geological time and that nature—indifferent, inexorable, and brutal—is oblivious to his situation (Hardy 2009 [1873]). He survives but not without a renewed appreciation of his puniness and insignificance before vistas of time.

By the end of the century when Hardy had abandoned the novel form for poetry, realism and naturalism held sway in literary representation. The popular trend of the sensation novel had vanished, but the forms of mystery and detective fiction would resume their life as the popular suspense novel in the twentieth century. Meanwhile, public exhibitions of science still drew thousands of visitors and were “a very common way for the public at large to experience natural history alongside books, periodicals and firsthand experience” (Alberti 377). The rational recreation of science museum visiting would ever be associated with sight and auditory sensation. In museums and in concert halls, “the noisy bustle of the audience” (Alberti 382) would only gradually settle into the ideal that these public spaces would become sites for contemplation.

In Britain, new cultural tensions emerged in the final decades of the Nineteenth Century. The novel of sensation was swept aside by a passion for adventure novels, a celebration of Queen Victoria and Britain’s global reach, and an expanding literary market that George Gissing called “new Grub Street.” Science, as a matter of British competition with continental science, was increasingly introduced into the university curriculum, beginning with the ‘brick’ institutions of the North. Science, growing ever more specialized, underscored realism, positivism, naturalism. The enormous popularity of the sensation novel was now only a memory. Yet, its merger with science remains an unforgettable and significant aspect of literary history.

Endnotes:

1. There are numerous works by these three authors that refer to the psychological factors. For example: Gowan Dawson et al. (2020), *Science Periodicals in Nineteenth Century Britain*, Andrew Mangham (2007), *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction*, Jenny Bourne Taylor (1988), *In the Secret Theatre of Home, Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narratives and Nineteenth-Century Psychology*. Gowan Dawson is the chief editor for *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction* (2013). He has written about a half a dozen other books in this area of research as well as many articles. Jenny Bourne Taylor has written several articles and co-edited volumes with Andrew Mangham and Sally Shuttleworth. The psychological approach is one that these three authors share.

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Abstract

Victorian audiences were curious about science, while superstitious, and they liked to be stirred. They had an interest in the factual but also an inclination toward suspense and melodrama. Audiences for popular science and the sensation novel of the 1860s were intertwined, treated to new spectacles and stories, while sharing similar anxieties about the changes wrought by modernity. These audiences sought wonder in facts. Audience reception of public displays of science gravitated around spectacular exhibits. In such science exhibits were curious phenomena, staged with theatrical precision, creatures from exotic locales prepared the taxidermist's hand. Audiences were drawn to the sensational and to the sensation novel.

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**THE PHYSICAL REVENGE OF THE BOOK:
THE ROLE OF PHYSICALITY IN LITERATURE**

Keywords: liberature, metafiction, gestalt psychology, narratology

Introduction: The Revenge of the Analog

Back in 2016, a book entitled *The Revenge of Analog: Real Things and Why They Matter* by a Canadian journalist, David Sax, reached bookshop shelves, achieving moderate success (and receiving mixed reviews). By no means exceptional, Sax's text has the merit of casting light upon a contentious and fascinating aspect of contemporary society, mainly, the resurgence of older analog forms of media, such as vinyl, celluloid film, and print, in a world that for the past twenty years seemed determined to move away from analog in favour of its digital counterparts. Largely inspired by the ideas of Marshall McLuhan, Sax's text attempts to restore the dynamic role of the medium in the mainstream discussion. For example, the Canadian journalist describes in great detail the sense of pride and attachment that the consumer has toward their meticulously built vinyl collection and the extent of their engagement and emotional connection with a board game, especially when compared to videogames. Streaming services and ebooks might be cheaper and efficient, but the exact same content seems to gain an intrinsic value when stored in a tangible medium—in a form that can be touched, weighed, shown to and shared with friends. The recent resurgence of this sensibility reveals more about the consumer than the media, as it unveils a deeper complexity that exists between different forms of media and their users. This connection cannot

simply be reduced to ownership and current consumer culture, but rather demonstrates a necessity for touch, smell, and other sensorial stimuli that traditional media promote by underlining their absence in the screen-dominated world.

However, there are some contentious points in Sax's theory, namely, approaching the analog in terms of revenge. While reading *The Revenge of Analog* one might be misled into thinking that the phenomenon is just a recent and unprecedented affair, the result of dualistic contraposition between digital and analog. But this cannot be further from the truth. There is, in fact, a long and vast tradition of literary experimentation that has been aware of the inherent communicative possibilities offered by the choice of a medium. For example, the term *metafiction*, popularized by Patricia Waugh in the 1980s as a way to describe the conscious emphasis of texts towards their fictive nature as a narrative strategy (Waugh 2), often pays attention to the employment of paratextual elements such as book covers, layouts, fonts and so forth as valid communicative strategies. Another interesting perspective is offered by the Polish word *liberatura* (Eng. *liberature*), proposed by Zenon Fajfer in the late 1990s, where paratextual awareness is not something optional, but rather mandatory both during production and fruition (Fajfer 8). In Fajfer's perspective, the physicality of the book becomes a stylistic choice in its own right—a choice that, due to the omnipresence of the material, can be overlooked, but not evaded. Thus, the traditional form becomes a choice within a plethora of choices.

The care for paratextuality is as ancient as human literacy: whether to emphasize the constructed-ness of a literary work or as a stylistic choice to incorporate the object in the narration. This is not to say that Sax's position is completely incorrect, as his book is a concrete proof of the (re)emerging awareness for the role of the physicality of the media in general. Yet, there is a more complex and dynamic relationship between analog and digital that should be explored. In any case, the intention is not to dismiss Sax's work for its

shortcomings, but rather to use *The Revenge of Analog* as a starting point to further discussion of what has been a (re)emerging trend both in literary production and literary studies in the last few years.

The Role of the Book in Storytelling

The awareness of the paratextual elements of the book has steadily increased in recent years. Fostered by the transformative force of digital media, many writers have started to rediscover a peculiar sensibility for the physical and typographical organization of their books and the role these parts can play in narration. Novels such as Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007), Adam Thirlwell's *Kapow!* (2012), or Jedediah Berry's *The Family Arcana* (2015) hint at an awareness that is only increasing as time goes by. However, despite a long literary tradition of experimentations with paratextuality and a few recent powerful voices such as Aarseth's perspectives on *ergodic literature* (1997), Zenon Fajfer's concept of *liberature* (1999), Hayles' book *Writing Machines* (2002), Alison Gibbons's (2014) research on fictionality, Barton's investigations on visual devices in contemporary prose fiction (2016), and Côme's attention toward the topic of *shuffle literature* (2017), the most widespread perception of those unfamiliar with the world of literary theory and media studies still tends to propose the archaic dualistic dichotomy between content and form. This particular perspective tends to reduce media to mere vessels containing messages, envelopes that at best have no meaning and at worst gain arbitrary value.

In this sense, Sax's book is guilty of this mainstream problem, namely, of reducing the discussion to a mere conflictual division between analog and digital, as if the digital was solely content, detached from the physical media used to access the web, and analog a mere container that only has value for its price or personal reasons. This sterile dualism quickly loses its steam when confronted with novels like Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2007) or graphic novels such as Chris Ware's *Building Stories* (2012) that showcase a thriving

awareness of physicality in literature that has been present through the entire history of human literacy. Examples of this practice can be found in Hellenic calligrams, in the medieval *Carmina Figurata*, the emblematic literature of the renaissance and baroque periods, and then, since Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767), it has been a growing trend in the Western literary production, rising towards its peak in the 19th century with Mallarmé and later in the 20th century with Joyce. Peculiarly, the last two literary figures will later inspire legions of writers, further propelling these experimental tendencies. Raymond Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (1961), Saporta's *Composition n°1* (1962), Italo Calvino's *Il castello dei destini incrociati* (1969 and 1973), B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969), Georges Perec's *La vie mode d'emploi* (1978), and Milorad Pavić's *Hazarski rečnik* (1987) prove to exhibit a particular kind of attention for this topic both in the post-war avantgarde of the 1960s and onwards.

Another enthralling example of the ongoing trend for the material and spatial awareness of the book is the aforementioned concept of liberature. Coined by the Polish poet Zenon Fajfer in 1999 as an influential concept in his literary manifesto *Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich*, the term plays with the Latin polysemy of the word *liber*, which may mean both book and free (Fajfer 9). Inspired by Mallarmé's and Joyce's literary production, Fajfer revendicates the inseparability of literature from the category of space both in its physical and visual form. This claim has proven productive, especially when confronting Fajfer's theoretical position with his literary output. For instance, *Oka-leczenie* (2009) written in collaboration with Katarzyna Bazarnik—who published extensively on the subject of liberature (Bazarnik, 2016)—is a fascinating example. Starting with its accordion shaped structure (Figure 1), the book effectively unites its form with the presented content as the two external parts (black text on white) contain two different conversations: one of a family surrounding a dying father and another of a couple that is having a baby. The central part (white words on a black

background) simulates the heart rate and perhaps represents the consciousness of both the dying man and the baby. The third part is not in plain sight but rather hidden to the reader, which is probably the most enrapturing aspect of *Oka-leczenie*. This hidden layer of text is hinted at by the instructions that can be found on the front (in Polish) and back (in English) pastedowns of the book:

This book contains two kinds of texts: a visible and an invisible one. The visible one takes on several various shapes: from commonly objectionable words to words-objects. No optical device is necessary to read most of them. The invisible text can emerge only after the first letters of all the visible words printed on the white pages have been put together. The same procedure should be followed to recover further layers of invisible texts until one has reached the lowest/highest layers consisting of a single word. This word emanates new texts. Alternatively one can read all these layers simultaneously, if one is capable of that, of course. The number of invisible words (321+40+321) constitutes approximately one-sixth of the whole text and is inversely proportional to the number of invisible layers. The words printed on the black pages are governed by a different kind of physics. (Fajfer and Bazarnik 2009)

The invisible text can only be accessed through the active participation of the reader, who must arm themselves with a pen, piece of paper, and patience, as the constant variations of fonts, the alteration between black and white, and the disposition of text further enriches the reading experience on a sensorial level.

A possible interpretation of the text looks at the extremes of the book as representing the opposing ends of human life. These two intense moments are divided by the nature of their emotions and, at the same time, indissolubly connected both conceptually and physically by the architecture of the book – an architecture that offers multiple access and exit points and showcases dynamics that can only be grasped through the communicative potential of the analog medium.

Thinking about the book as a medium in terms proposed by Fajfer and Bazarnik inevitably paves the way for a reconsideration of paratextuality: not a space on which literature can be done, but rather the space of literature, where form and content are directed towards the same goal. This awareness scales

back the “revenge” proclaimed by Sax’s title, delineating a more complex, long, and dynamic relationship not only between literature and the book as a medium, but also between analog and digital media. After all, if something never really goes away, how can it then come back for revenge?



Figure. Fajfer & Bazarnik, *Oka-leczenie* (photo: R. Cipollari)

Cognitive Prototypes and Conceptualization in Literature

If the relationship between older and newer media is not so clear-cut as the binary opposition might lead one to believe, a more sensible approach to the subject might be a holistic one, where both forms of media are conceptualized as being part of the same ecosystem. Perhaps, an interesting starting point for this type of perspective could be Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding Media* (1994), where the Canadian scholar states that “a new medium is never an addition to an old one, nor does it leave the old one in peace. It never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them”

(174). Thus, the introduction of new media forces individuals to filter older media, highlighting attributes that were latent but might now be employed in order to keep them relevant. Mobile phones are a perfect example that helps to illustrate this as they have been reshaped into a form that has made the phone function secondary. Yet they are still generally perceived as the same thing—people might now refer to them as smartphones, but the change of the name has not really shifted the categorization of the object—while the people’s interaction has drastically changed with its introduction. This phenomenon finds its explication within the principles of *Gestalt theory* (*Gestaltpsychologie*)—a theory in the field of psychology which emphasizes that perception is never singular and independent from sensory stimuli, but rather holistic and indivisible (Hornbostel 85).

In the case of literary production, the introduction of digital media such as ebook readers and other reading devices has had a radical effect on older paper media. With almost unlimited memory and lightness (carrying around a paper copy of *War and Peace* is not a small endeavour), digital devices have claimed the primary function of the book medium, namely, the ability to store and carry information efficiently. This inevitably forced a recontextualization of the book as a medium, shifting from being an abstract *container* to a more concrete and meaningful object both in terms of practicality and aesthetics. The digital is not only cheaper, but it also has an instantaneous reach that paper cannot match. This poses the question of why people use paper at all. Well, although it might seem trivial, the paper is still good at what it does (which makes it economically valuable) and offers a sensorial experience of touch and spatiality that is still precluded from the digital. This realization has reinvigorated the latent physical properties of the medium into something that can be experimented with for both artistic and economic reasons.

Interestingly, some more recent paratextual works (both prose and poetry) tend to employ their physicality as a *reactive* impulse towards the digital. A revindication of space and style in spite of digital dominance can be observed,

for example, in Chris Ware's works, which are critical of digital technologies both in the larger social context and, particularly, in the way comics are now produced (Roeder 74). This clashes with the experimentations of the modernist period, such as Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, or the avant-gardes of the 1960s, like Raymond Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* or Marc Saporta's *Composition n°1*, where experimentation was more preoccupied with formal innovation connected with an *emergent* awareness for the object.

A possible explanation for this shift towards a reactive attitude towards digital media can be tied to the process of *recategorization* which started due to the progressive dissemination of digital texts and e-readers. Eleanor Rosch describes recategorization as the mechanism where the human mind understands objects by categorizing them into *cognitive prototypes* which define our *Perceived World Structure* (Rosch 29). This process aims to provide the maximum amount of information with the least cognitive effort. Cognitive prototypes, according to Rosch's experiments, are the results of the categorization process that define objects and group them through empirical observation. For example, small flying singing birds, like sparrows and robins, are *prototypical birds* because they share common features that North American speakers tend to associate with *birdiness*. Penguins, chickens, and ostriches are still considered birds as they share some key bird features, but nonetheless, they are non-prototypical. Of course, the same process applies to objects as their functions are inevitably tied to the prototypical understanding people associate with them (Rosch 30-34). This process of recategorization of the book medium offers a sensible explanation for the increasing interest in paratextuality in recent literary production. It involves the recognition of such an object as an *organizational principle* within the structure of the work of art (Shklovsky 15). Snatched from the rigid patterns of efficient production the book has rediscovered the plurality of its forms, turning what was once understood as a simple container into a key component of literary production.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this newfound sensibility is not necessarily the result of breaking away from artistic traditions, as it happened during the 1960s, but rather the recognition of its unique existence as a direct answer to the transformations brought about by digital media. In this sense, similarly to the mobile phone that turned into the smartphone, the book too has adapted, shifting its goals and functions to the paratext as a way to keep its relevance.

The Materiality of Media and Its Architectonic Role in Narration

According to Bakhtin, formal elements of a literary work achieve aesthetic relevance only when they are axiologically ordered in a precise structure (or architecture) that fulfils its aesthetic ambition (15). Physical attributes of the book can be employed with the same aesthetic function. Thus, an alteration of the form can exert a significant influence over both the content it carries and its users. Such a process results in a dynamic structure carefully constructed to highlight some features rather than others. This can be done with multiple purposes in mind: it can be performed in order to estrange the reader and force them to recognize the fictionality and the arbitrary structure of the object they are holding. By altering the form of the book or the layout of the page, the author can provoke their audience's creative way of reading these changes, questioning the writer's own ability to exert control over their craft and turning the conventional into the unconventional.

The texts mentioned so far try to work in this direction, employing and altering their form to reinforce the unity between form and content. Therefore, the form of the literary work should be understood and analysed as an architecture that is constructed for the content it is presenting, and where the various techniques employed by the artist are there to actually construct such structure (Bakhtin 51). These perspectives shed light on Sax's biggest shortcomings, namely, the validation of analog media just for being analog. The discussed literary panorama demonstrates that the analog media have more to do with the principle of organization for the overall experience of the content

rather than being intrinsically valuable as an escapist outlet from the digital. The analog becomes valuable because it requires a different kind of participation, a relationship that not only depends on the understanding of the message but also on its form, a material that can be actively manipulated by a creator for their communicative goals.

Theory in Practice: B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*

A compelling example that further illustrates the theoretical intervention presented above is B.S. Johnson's 1969 book, *The Unfortunates* (Figure 2).

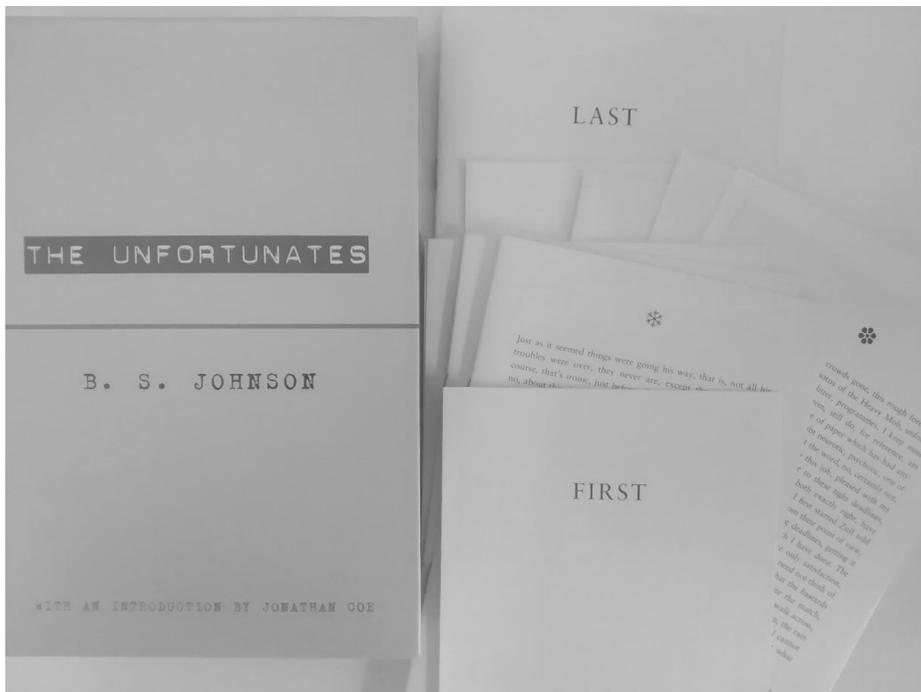


Figure 2: B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (photo: R. Cipollari)

The novel is composed of twenty-seven loose chapters, which span in their length from a single paragraph to twelve pages. Leaving aside the two sections labelled "FIRST" and "LAST," the other twenty-five are unnamed and can be read in any order. Every single one of these twenty-five chapters can be

perceived as an individual memory emerging from the narrator's mind. All of them are related to Tony, one of Johnson's friends who died of cancer. Each memory constitutes a separate chapter, marked with a distinctive symbol that the reader can rearrange in any order. The interesting aspect of this book is that it relies on the creative use of its physicality. Johnson's objective is to simulate the chaotic nature of mnemonic processing with paper, turning each chapter into a single memory that has neither order, nor relevancy.

By consciously disrupting the traditional form of the book, Johnson deconstructs the prototypical expectations most readers have of the object, incentivizing the creation of a new cognitive prototype and new metaphorical associations. In other words, the British writer estranges and defamiliarizes the reader from the very object he or she is holding in favour of his own metaphorical vision. This use of the metaphoric association between book and mind arises from the overlapping of the same *structural metaphor* (Lakoff & Johnson 30) that, in the case of Johnson's book, can be related to the designation of the book as a container that overlaps with the perception of the mind in the same metaphorical terms. In short, according to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, structural metaphors are "structuring one kind of thing or experience in terms of another kind, but the same natural dimension of experience is used in both" (15). The sharing of metaphorical understanding between the book and the mind can be showcased by the following sentences, e.g. "I can't *get* her *out* of my mind" or "I wrote it *in* my book." Both examples demonstrate how books and minds are often conceptualized as containers where ideas and words can be inserted or removed. Of course, objects are rarely described by one single metaphor, but in *The Unfortunates* the overlap between the mind and the book is evident.

Moreover, Johnson's estrangement goes beyond this. The British writer also follows Joyce and Proust by using the stream of consciousness technique to create the illusion of a mnemonic act as it can be seen in the following passages:

Again the house at the end of a bus-route (Johnson, "Again the house" 1)

Southwell, the Chapter House, the delicate, convoluted carving on the capital, foliage is it, yes, leaves the book *The Leaves of Southwell*, now I think of it (Johnson, "Southwell, the Chapter House" 1)

Cast parapet, pierced rondel design, the canal oiling its way under, under, and the great letters on the end wall of a warehouse BRITISH WATERWAYS, weathered flanking, the midland red brick sound it appears, the red strong enough to come through that amount of blackening, of discoloration, and the buses, I remember (Johnson, "Cast parapet" 1)

Away from the ground, the crowds gone, this rough forecourt littered now, not with the photos of the Heavy Mob, unfortunately, I look, but just with litter, programmes, I keep mine, still, I always used to keep mine. (Johnson, "Away from the ground" 1)

By focusing on the house at the end of a bus-route or the British Waterway's sign, Johnson intentionally connects his memories to what can be defined as a *triggering* effect that functions like Proust's *petites madeleines*. These recurring elements act as entry points in the protagonist's memories and create an additional fictive level in the novel that further promotes the illusion of mnemonic simulation.

Lastly, another fascinating tool that Johnson employs in his mnemonic simulation through the means of paper is the recurrent use of *textual gaps*. Textual gaps, as Barton points out, "often represent pauses in thought in the internal monologues of the character" (30). Regarding the use of textual gaps in *The Unfortunates*, Barton himself gives a captivating analysis of the following passage:

I know this city! How did I not realize when he said, Go and do City this week, that it was this city? Tony. His cheeks sallowed and collapsed round the insinuated bones, the gums shrivelled, was it, or shrunken, his teeth now standing free of each other in the unnatural half yawn of his mouth (...) because of what the treatment had done to his saliva glands, how it had finished them. Him (Johnson, FIRST)

According to Barton, the reader notes the extended blank spaces as a way to give relevance to the introduction of the subject, that is, Tony. His name stands out thanks to the blank spaces that surround it. At the same time, these very same blanks simulate the natural pauses in thought, hinting at the fact that the entire page is indeed a part of the reading experience (Barton 37).

Linking textual gaps with pauses in thinking confirms the proposed theory of imitation of the mind's mnemonic process through the physical reorganization of the book. The reading process is intentionally made more difficult and bothersome in order to generate active participation from the user. Johnson wants his chapters shuffled and read in a random order to force estrangement upon his reader, to transmit a peculiar aesthetic perspective that will prove his point, or as he would put it:

I want my ideas to be expressed so precisely that the very minimum of room for interpretation is left. Indeed, I would go further and say that to the extent that a reader can impose his own imagination on my words, then that piece of writing is a failure. I want him to see my (vision), not something conjured out of his own imagination. (...) If he wants to impose his imagination, let him write his own books. (Johnson in Tew & White 60)

This implies a particular relation with the reader: one where the reader actively participates in the functioning of the work of art. Functioning being the keyword here as Johnson does not care for the reader's perspective in *The Unfortunates*, but rather aims to *prove* to his readers how original and effective his artistic creation is. To simulate the mnemonic process on paper, Johnson demonstrates how creative writing can transcend its reliance solely on words and creatively reshape not only the book but also its role in the overall reading process.

Conclusion: The Analog Pastiche

As stated so far, metafiction is not something new in literature. Nevertheless, awareness of the physical nature of the medium has only recently been given attention by the mainstream media thanks to the digital revolution of the early

2000s. By losing their efficiency, paper and other analog media have gained an emotional, if not luxurious, aura, as Sax noted in his analysis:

Meanwhile, the previous disadvantages of vinyl record now became attractive. Records are large and heavy; require money, effort, and taste to create and buy and play; and cry out to be thumbed over and examined. Because consumers spend money to acquire them, they gain a genuine sense of ownership over the music, which translates into pride. (16)

And in the case of printed material, his statement becomes even more relevant for the discussion of literary texts:

Reading on paper is highly functional and almost second nature for us. It engages those same five senses that Maria Sebregondi spoke about when explaining the appeal of a Moleskine notebook. Even though the content of an article in the print edition of *The Economist* is the exact same one I can read on the publication's website or app, the digital experience lacks the smell of the ink, the sound of the page crinkling, the texture of the paper on my fingers. These may seem irrelevant to the way the article is consumed, but they aren't. Read on an iPad, every article looks and feels the same. The haptic variation from one printed page to another helps stem the feeling of information overload. (Sax 111)

As people get used to objects and their common properties in a certain way, they start to categorize them as cognitive prototypes. The object that stands in front of them is conceptualized, canonized, and crystallized as an immutable entity. Despite the fact that they are facing it, people cannot see the object anymore, only the conceptualized version of it with its conventional attributes. New media and art remove objects from the grasp of automatised perception by firstly turning the familiar into strange and, subsequently, forcing their users to reconsider in the process the object itself. In *The Revenge of Analog*, Sax, taking notes from McLuhan, comments on the latter part of the process. However, Sax seems to forget the former, reducing the digital to only its trivial and easily replaceable contents—as if the keyboard and the device attached to it were somehow less physical than a typewriter. What is to be expected as the fate of all objects is that once people get used to them, they are recognized by their main characteristics, their silhouettes, which implies the disappearance of unimportant attributes and, ultimately, even their original essence (like in the

smartphone example). Language is a treacherous ally of these processes as the preposition *on* fosters the dualistic misconception over digital media. Phrases like “I read it *on* my phone/ *on* my PC/ *on* the internet” offer the illusion of detachment between content and media that is purely ephemeral. The preposition *in* functioned (and still functions) in the same way for paper. Yet various research fields of the twentieth century observed this incongruity and rejected it. In the field of literary theory, this gave rise to the structuralist movement which, despite its limitations, produced fruitful results. In this sense, Sax’s book re-proposes the old dualistic separation between content and form. This is unfortunate and slightly ironic, as his book aims to underline how relevant form has become. Nonetheless, Sax correctly points out the reactive nature of the current resurgence of the analog:

The Revenge of Analog is occurring now precisely *because* digital technology has become so damn good. Digital computing has been with us for the better part of the past half century, personal computing for the past three decades, the Internet for two decades, and smartphones for one. Today, a digital solution is almost always the default: the most efficient, widely used, cheapest, and obvious tool to get the job done. (xvi, italics in the original)

The digital has become the dominant force due to its efficiency and cheapness. Digital books, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, are overall better storage devices than paper ones. Consequently, contemporary writers need justifiable reasons to use paper media rather than digital ones. This does explain the shift towards liberatic texts and the focus on metafictional aspects of literature as a way to generate estrangement in readers. The book, thus, becomes something relevant and integral both for the narrative and for the reading experience.

An amalgam of past traditions and new awareness results in the maintenance of a medium that should have been obsolete but still retains relevance despite the passing of time. Metafictional texts, such as *Kapow!*, *The Unfortunates*, *House of Leaves*, *The Raw Shark Text*, *Composition n° 1*, and *Building Stories*, are re-experienced not merely as objects, but rather as

events/performances. They try to reflect on the nature of contemporary society, creating universes that often leave the coordinates of space and time with the reader, who can twist and turn the object in order to create a unique experience. This peculiar use of the object often follows the postmodern tradition of the *pastiche*, where the very possibility of objective interpretation is questioned. Writers turn the book into a Rubik's cube where content and medium inevitably influence each other, challenging the trustworthiness of both entities. This combinatory game where the form of the medium plays an active role in communication satirises the mesmerizing passivity that screens now impose on us.

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Abstract

In recent years, analog media, such as vinyl, film, and board games, seem to have been experiencing a resurgence in popularity despite the overwhelming advances of their digital counterparts. The phenomenon emerges as so widespread that even mainstream media have started to notice it. An interesting example of this increasing awareness is David Sax's book *The Revenge of Analog: Real Things and Why They Matter*. Inspired by similar publications, this paper explores a topic omitted by Sax, mainly, the resurgence of the awareness of the physical characteristics of the book as a medium and its communicative force in storytelling. By looking at various examples such as B.S Johnson's *The Unfortunates*, Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik's *Oka-leczenie* and other texts, this article tries to shed some light on a long tradition of literary production aware of the role of materiality in storytelling—a trend that predates the recent interest that the mainstream media have developed for the analog forms.

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**‘BE KIND TO STRANGERS, THEY ARE YOUR ENTANGLEMENT’:
INTERCONNECTIONS, TRANS-CORPOREALITY, MULTIPLICITY, AND
HOMINID ECOLOGIES IN ANNE WALDMAN’S POETRY**

Keywords: trans-corporeality, Stacy Alaimo, interchanges, interconnections, influence, multiplicity, Anne Waldman, Beat Generation, Lucretius

Introduction

Anne Waldman was born in 1945 in Millville, New Jersey, when the whole world was trying to rebuild its foundations after the Second World War. She was, in a way, shaped by the surroundings that had been already influenced by the Beat Generation, post-war politics and the general mood of revolution. As she stated in her *Fast Speaking Woman*: “I’m the raised-on-jazz woman” (Waldman 1996: 21). Inspired by the Beat’s spontaneity and jazzy stylistics, from the beginning, she knew that her path would be connected with poetry. In addition to the publication of over forty books of poems, plenty of articles, and even more performances of her poetry, she has a lot of other artistic achievements. To name only a few, in 1974, along with Chögyam Trungpa, Allen Ginsberg, and Diane di Parma, she co-created the Naropa Institute; with her son, she established Fast Speaking Music, an independent label predominantly preoccupied with jazz, the literary and performance art, and connected with movements such as the Beat Generation, Conceptual Poetics and Conceptual Art, New American Poetry, Nuyorican Poetry, Black Arts Movement, Dematerialised Art, and New York School; since the 1960s, she has been an active member of the Outrider experiment poetry community. Throughout her

life, she has been interested in exploring the topics of feminism, ecology, art, and spirituality related to Buddhism. This article aims to interpret her poems, considering the concept of trans-corporeality introduced by Stacy Alaimo, as well as the idea of multiplicity and hominid ecologies depicted by Levi R. Bryant. These concepts challenge the scrupulous anthropocentric perspective of human/nonhuman relations. In the article, I argue that—although not directly associated with ecopoetry or ecological artistic movements—Anne Waldman embraces ecology as a significant aspect of humanity and challenges the fixed boundaries that people tend to impose on the nature/non-nature distinction. In the analyses of “Battery,” “Manatee/Humanity,” “Holy 21st century,” and “entanglement” I will try to demonstrate that in her poems Waldman emphasises, similarly to Karen Barad, that we are “a part of that nature that we seek to understand” (Barad 67).

Trans-corporeality

The concept of trans-corporeality, which I would like to address in this section, was introduced by Stacy Alaimo in her *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010). In her opinion, the social aspects of life, such as culture or gender, being heavily linked to material networks, create interdependence between the environment, bodies, and nature, and generate a physical interrelation between human substantiality and nonhuman nature. Thus, trans-corporeality, according to Stacy Alaimo, proves the existence of “the interchanges and interconnections” that link different compounds of bodily matter (Alaimo 2). Also, according to Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, the authors of *Introducing the New Materialisms* (2010), trans-corporeality implements the idea of human/nonhuman organisms as actors in the bioethical context of the infinite games of power relations. It has been stated that any entity that exists has a “body” and is composed of units. What is important to notice is that a body is an entity, regardless of functions that those cells/units perform (Coole and Frost 11-12). Thus, a cell in a human body might have

different purposes than human genes or the human body as a whole. This claim may sound counterintuitive at first but is valid, given the findings of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that state: “90% of cells in the human body are bacterial, fungal, or otherwise non-human” (www.mpkb.org). During the last decades an increasing number of scholars have been concerned with the idea of human bodies’ porosity. As commented on by Levi R. Bryant, “[e]verybody is a heterogeneous and complex network of entities that is itself an entity or unit” (1). According to Sernella Iovino, “existing as humans means, literally, going past the boundaries of human ‘nature’” (4). In Jane Bennett’s opinion, in human body’s complexity and foreign aspects of its nature

one can invoke bacteria colonies in human elbows to show how human subjects are themselves nonhuman, alien, outside vital materiality. One can note that the human immune system depends on parasitic helminth worms for its proper functioning or cite other instances of our cyborgization to show how human agency is always an assemblage of microbes, animals, plants, metals, chemicals, word-sounds, and the like. (121)

Thus, human bodies, which, at first, might be perceived as finite, singular entities, are an intricate dovetailing of various components. As Bennett states, humans themselves are “alien” in a typical understanding of this word as something foreign. Therefore, as it is “an assemblage of microbes, animals, plants, metals, chemicals, word-sounds, and the like” (Bennett 121), some parts of our bodies will always be something from the outside, something unfamiliar and foreign.

The concept of porosity of bodies, discussed in the previous paragraph, was used as early as in the first century BC in a didactic poem *De Rerum Natura* by Lucretius. The poem explores Epicurean concepts related to atomism, nature and soul, and the world’s development along with its phenomena. Lucretius wrote that “all things are not held close pressed on every side by the nature of body; for there is void in things” (38). Bodies in a void are not comatose substances, but active matter “at times quite undetermined and at undetermined spots,” (72) which:

push a little from their path: yet only just so much as you could call a change of trend. But if they were not used to swerve, all things would fall downwards through the deep void like drops of rain, nor could collision come to be, nor a blow brought to pass for the first-beginnings: so nature would never have brought aught to being. (72)

Lucretius's first-beginnings would be nowadays called atoms or particles, however, the idea remains the same. What determines a body is that it is not a lifeless matter, a static entity, but a creation of convergence and progress, always moving and evolving. Jane Bennett comments on Lucretius in her *Vibrant Matter* by referring to the statement of Louis Althusser, who addressed this phenomenon as "materialism of the encounter" (Althusser in Bennett 18). Bennett also argues that:

[a] primordial swerve says that the world is not determined, that an element of chanciness resides at the heart of things, but it also affirms that so-called inanimate things have a life, that deep within is an inexplicable vitality or energy, a moment of independence from and resistance to us and other bodies: a kind of thing-power. (Bennett 18)

Bennett's "primordial swerve," despite being "the smallest constituent parts of being" (18), have their own aims and incentives for existence that are independent of the more complex configurations they create.

Multiplicity in Trans-corporeality

The complexity of the human body and the influence that every cell has on others might be discussed in all its nuance when considering the idea of multiplicity. This philosophical concept was developed around the end of the nineteenth century by Edmund Husserl and Henri Bergson, drawing from Riemann's mathematical concept of multiplicity. Later, the concept of multiplicity inspired two philosophical schools of the Twentieth Century: phenomenology and Bergsonism (Deleuze 1991: 115–118). Edmund Husserl, one of the most important representatives of phenomenology, presented his idea of phenomenology and unity in his habilitation thesis in 1887 *On the Concept of Number* (German: *Über den Begriff der Zahl*) on the example of a rose. He claimed that:

[i]n order to note the uniting relations in such a whole, analysis is necessary. If, for example, we are dealing with the representational whole which we call 'a rose,' we get at its various parts successively, by means of analysis: the leaves, the stem. Each part is thrown into relief by a distinct act of noticing, and is steadily held together with those parts already segregated. (Husserl in Roy 14)

Husserl understands multiplicity as a strictly psychological process, which comes from the activity of perception and combining of various components into one entity. The second philosopher concerned with multiplicity, Henri Bergson, presented his ideas in 1889 in his doctoral thesis *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (French: *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*). As the title suggests, Bergson focuses more on the concept of free will and the "immediate data of consciousness" (1), which may be named also a direct/immediate experience. Bergson's idea came from an experience of a thing and reflection on whether we consider it a single entity or a construct made up of smaller parts.

The idea of multiplicity developed throughout the twentieth century and influenced many philosophers, including Gilles Deleuze, particularly in his works written in collaboration with Felix Guattari—*Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972; 1980). In 1993, commenting on Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's philosophy, he stated that matter "offers an infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous texture without emptiness, caverns endlessly contained in other caverns: no matter how small, each body contains a world pierced with irregular passages" (Deleuze 1993: 5). Four years later, his opponent, Alain Badiou, expounded in his study of Deleuze's works, *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being* (1997), that the problem with multiplicity is immanently related to an approach to the multiple as having a lesser value than the One. Badiou claimed that "it is not enough to think the univocity of being via simulacra to overcome the philosophy of the One" (Beaulieu 2014: 140), and that Deleuze tended to treat "the multiple in terms of 'impurity' by invariably submitting the ensembles to the law of the univocity of being" (Beaulieu 2014: 140). Treating multiplicity as "impurity" would be a wrong assumption considering the fact

that everything, as I have mentioned earlier, is created of smaller parts/units. Thus, there is no such thing as the One that is compatible with its own self. The relation between different “multiplicity of multiplicities” (Bryant 1) is related to matter-energy flows discussed by Alaimo. In her *Bodily Natures*, she states that “[b]y emphasizing the movement across bodies, trans-corporeality reveals the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures” (Alaimo 2). She remarks that the environment is not an “inert, empty space or (...) a resource for human use” (Alaimo 2), how some people might perceive it. It is a world full of other endless individuals with their own components, pronouncements, needs, and characteristics. Therefore, it is possible to say that nature is a complex, incomprehensible entity inseparable from the human.

Hominid Ecologies

To emphasise that humans are a part of nature and “organisms among other organisms” (Bryant 1), and to move from the strictly anthropocentric perspective on human/nonhuman, where nature is something unimportant and foreign, Levi R. Bryant proposes the term ‘hominid ecologies.’ Replacing the terms ‘human’ with ‘hominid’ and ‘culture,’ or ‘society’ with ‘ecologies’ indicates that society is just another type of an ecosystem, much as a pack of wolves, a forest, or a coral reef. As he points out in his article “Stacy Alaimo: Porous Bodies and Trans-Corporeality,” an introduction of a new term “helps us to move beyond the anthropocentric privilege of humanism and helps to remind us that we too are animals embedded in a world that isn’t entirely of our own making” (Bryant 1). Putting nature in a distant, separate position, where it “is always over there, outside of our social dealings” (Bryant 1), naturally creates a distinction in people’s minds. Moreover, Bryant refers to Alaimo’s statement:

[i]magine human corporeality (...) as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from “the environment.” It makes it difficult to pose nature as mere background (...) for the exploits of the human since “nature” is always as close as one’s own skin— perhaps even closer. (Alaimo 2)

Nature emerges not as something “over there,” unrelated to humanity and people’s actions, but as a whole organism, which we are merely a part of, and also in a peculiar, intermingled way it is a part of us. As Jagodzinski and Wallin stated in their *Arts-Based Research: A Critique and a Proposal*: “[i]ntelligibility is a relational structure, and relations in-themselves are simply multiplicities that have ‘neither subject nor object’” (32). Hominid ecology that we live in “shapes and is shaped by the materiality of ‘things’ as they intercommunicate between each other by means that is beyond our comprehension” (Jagodzinski and Wallin 32). Jagodzinski and Wallin point out the importance of the dialogue between humans and nature, which is still beyond our comprehension. The problem with this type of communication comes from the limited and sometimes solipsistic anthropocentric perspective, which we automatically apply, as it is our anthropomorphic assumptions that impede understanding.

Trans-corporeality, Multiplicity, and Hominid Ecologies in Anne Waldman’s Poetry

Anne Waldman, in her poems, often refers to the influence that the surrounding world exerts on her and the fact that she is only a part of the larger ecosystem. In her *Fast Speaking Woman, Manatee/Humanity*, or “Holy 21st century,” and many other books and poems, human experience is connected with the rest of nature. As a matter of fact, considering the perspective of Alaimo’s and Bryant’s theories, everything she creates is already nature by itself. One of her biggest inspirations, in the context of interconnections, was Chatral Rinpoche, whom she has met in India in 1973. Waldman said that she “learned most from Chatral observing him in his environments in Ghoom and also in Parphing in Nepal. (...) He was modest himself. Dharma seemed natural in him” (Clay 2009). He did not differentiate between people, and everyone was equal in his understanding of the world. Waldman acquired his ideology and approach towards people quite naturally. She continues: “He seemed close to the land, to the animal realm, to the mountains, rocks, trees. A rock himself, weathered and strong” (Clay 2009).

The way Waldman presents Chatral Rinpoche, as she emphasises his close relation to nature, is a reflection of trans-corporeality. Many of her poems contain a similar theme and focus on the relation between matter, energy, the world and its inhabitants. In my analysis, I will point to the entanglement and influence of nature on humans and their entanglement, the responsibility we have for the environment and other species, the multiplicity of human beings, and the relatively minor role that we play in the universe.

“Battery”

“Battery,” which originally came from Waldman’s collection *Fast Speaking Woman*, was published also, after its earlier publications, in 2017 as a part of her album *Recorded Live In Amsterdam 6.2.91*, released on the occasion of the National Poetry Month organised by poets.org. As a response to her performance, Waldman received many positive letters claiming that this particular poem is the most beautiful celebration of life one can ever imagine and that its rhythm expresses the world’s musicality. Simple opinions like: “I hope one day I, myself, will be able to truly live your words and be a battery,” (Carissa 2017) “I like the way you used many different types of imagery to make the poem realistic and come to life” (Kirstin 2017) are mixed with complex comments of gratitude for inspiration she gave them. “Battery” is a poem that shows there are connections between everything in life and that humans are simply a part of nature:

we will never agree the world contains
so much phenomena we’ll put on glasses
abstract it give it structure make a frame
inversely proportional to the square of
two distances apart
make us a family of celestial bodies that we
be one we ellipse about a warming sun
love that sun
dual nature of electrons heal us o heal us
(Waldman1996: 62)

Not only does she present the relations between different aspects of life (“make us a family of celestial bodies that we be one”), but also points out its uniqueness (“we will never agree the world contains so much phenomena”). Moreover, as in Deleuze’s philosophy quoted above, where “each body contains a world pierced with irregular passages” (1993: 5), she acknowledges also that we are creating this world, being in fact a world on our own. This duality of human bodies—to be a part of something bigger, and respectively also a final result of many different components—is very similar to what she proposes in the poem as “dual nature of electrons.” Waldman comments on the beauty of those minuscule elements of life also in one of her responses to the letters she received:

Ultimately I wanted to write an inspired passionate positive poem for the world! and include the natural world and also appreciate of the smaller things—the “minute particulars” of our existence—the modest grasses, “watercress so good to eat” ... and I wanted to capture the energy, the force of a battery, of a symphony. I wanted it to be a spoken- poem- that was important too. And that it could extend around the room, and beyond. (Waldman 2017)

Waldman wrote “Battery” to share a simple glimpse of appreciation for her surroundings and to teach her readers how to value the simplicity of the world which we partly create, and with which we are connected. The next passage from the poem focuses more on our relation to this world and the so-called home:

I would come back not hide be in motion
I would attach myself to home again
I would be sister mother lover brother
I would be father I would be infant animal awesome
I would be he I would be she I would be they
I would suffer & become extinct again
(Waldman 1996: 62)

In the above lines, Waldman presents her reflections on people’s nature and points out that we are all equal in relation to the world and to each other. By listing diverse relationships she shares with other people: “I would be sister mother lover brother,” she refers also to the multiplicity of every single person,

and the idea of universal love (Waldman 2017). Additionally, the constant repetition of “I would...” at the beginning of every line, gives the impression that the poem is a mantra. In Buddhism, a repetition of sound structures in mantras is used to focus on something bigger and beyond strict borders of the anthropocentric perspective (in the same way as in Waldman’s comment quoted above: “I wanted it to (...) extend around the room, and beyond” [Waldman 2017]). As repetitions are important for the anticipation of what sound sequences will come next, they build the rhythm and help to focus on the more general structure. Mantra is a sound of the surroundings in itself, it echoes in the universe, and is “meant to release the mind from all the anxieties of material life” (Dudeja 1). By repeating the phrase, the poet shows her attachment to the universe, fixing readers’ attention on a sound of the repetition itself. Anne Waldman commented on this poem also by saying that: “I wanted the poem to be a ‘Battery’ for others. A way to plug into the language (logopoeia), sound (melopoeia), and image (phanopoeia). This impulse leads to a much later and longer book/poem: *Manatee/Humanity*, where the endangered sea creature—the manatee—is a kind of battery” (Waldman 2017).

Manatee/Humanity

Published for the first time in 2009 as a book, the above-mentioned *Manatee/Humanity* explores new aspects of interspecies communication, the relation with nature, and genuinely magical and spiritual connection between two different representatives of mammals (humans and manatees). The poet herself commented, after the performance of this poem as a part of the Academy of American Poets’ educational project, Poet-to-Poet, created for the National Poetry Month in 2014, that she wanted to depict an amazing connection with one of the manatees she had seen months before. She indicated that her main concerns are centred around the question “what it is to be a human, what it is to be in a relation with this slow-moving creature” (Waldman 2014). The relation between the manatee and humanity is visible

not only in mantra-like structures that those names create. In terms of trans-corporeality, the connection comes from interspecies communication based on empathy and non-verbal will to understand each other's needs. Waldman calls her readers to focus on the endangered part of nature and to notice that humans are also at risk. Even though the threats people cause to the world are mostly small in scale (sometimes relatively minimal in relation to the whole world), the ecological crisis is the humongous danger that eventually might affect every living organism. However, despite its universality, only humans bear the responsibility and have the opportunity to reverse the effect:

man who makes no concession to manatee
nor cares of manatee life manatee fortune
the manatee dies in collision with watercraft
man who does not protect the manatee
what steward of the earth is this unnatural man
man who makes no concession to manatee
the manatee dies with the ingestion of fishhooks
man who unnaturally makes no concession to manatee
the manatee dies from litter & monofilament lines
(Waldman 2009: 92)

The poem alludes to human compassion and subtleties of interspecies connectedness. If a human being ceases to protect its aquatic, herbivorous, and somehow powerless cousin, it will die. The manatee's death will not be a result of some alien predator, or some external power, by an effect of the pollution and damage done to the Earth by human beings. Anne Waldman's poem functions as a wake-up call for humanity to realise the tremendous impact our species has on the planet. Additionally, the aforementioned mantra-like structure of this poem not only emphasises the reaction between a manatee and humanity, but lifts this majestic herbivorous mammal to a unique, god-like level:

mean world: humanity
dream world: manatee
secret world: *om mani padme manatee hum*
om mani humanity padme hum

the center of reference becomes movement in this ritual
(Waldman 2009: 106)

Writing this poem, Waldman was highly inspired by the Kalachakra initiation, which she went through a few years earlier. Because of the practice involved in *Manatee/Humanity*, a manatee becomes some kind of a divine creature. She commented that her projects are very similar to mantra-like practices and that “it is also an archive and a conglomeration of seed syllables” (Clay 2009). In this poem, by presenting it in a mantra-like sound “*om mani padme manatee hum/ om mani humanity padme hum,*” she tries to capture the irreplaceable notion of sounds and inner rhythms. Her “om mani padme manatee hum/ om mani humanity padme hum” relates also to the most popular Buddhist mantra: “om mani padme hum,” the six-syllabled Sanskrit mantra of compassion that “generates positive energies within the body through mystical vibrations and frequencies when chanted repeatedly.” (Pereira 761). In *Manatee/Humanity* she depicts different living beings that seem particularly threatened by people’s exploitation of natural environment. By pointing out those threats she emphasises the connections of different living organisms. The poem’s structure with its litanies to animals, especially manatee, is created as both a plea to the society that neglects the natural world and a praise for every living creature.

“Holy 21st Century”

Written in 2012, “Holy 21st Century” with its structure similar to Allen Ginsberg’s footnote to “Howl,” works not only as a tribute to his work but also as a reminder that everything is connected, and every event is at the same time a result and a cause of some other occurrences. While Ginsberg’s poem refers mainly to the simplest affirmation of life, and as Stephen D. Edington points out “he affirms the essential holiness of life; holiness that is contained within horror” (Edington 32), Waldman, in turn, focuses on people’s interaction with the surrounding world. Everything that is happening in life, every place and every person that we come across, has an influence on our existence:

Knocking on tenement doors get a fresh martyr for!
Holy Creeley! Holy Lucia Berlin! Holy Jackson MacLow!

Holy Brakhage! Holy Carl Rakosi! Holy Philip Lamantia!
Holy Steve Lacy, blowing his saxophone in heaven!
(Waldman 2012)

Referring to her personal experience, she recalls Robert Creeley, Lucia Berlin, Carl Rakosi, and other poets or writers, who had an influence on her life and work. Additionally, in her poem she focuses on the idea of multiplicity. The so-called unholiness is not an entity in itself, but rather an embroilment of events and occurrences that create the final entity of “unholy.” Every single component listed in her poem cannot be perceived as the One, an unambiguous manifestation. By emphasising the communication between disparate components (here: between various events and people), “trans-corporeality reveals the interchanges and interconnections” (Alaimo 2). This connection and the mutual interdependence of each other proves that nature, and everything that this nature creates (thus also people and man-made events), is a very intricate and complex structure:

Holy impermanence! Holy the inter-connectedness of all beings!
Karma of atrocities holy and un-holy!
Is 21st century endless continuation of 20th century war holy?
Environmental degradation continuation
Of 20th century environmental degradation holy.
(Waldman 2012)

She emphasises the “Environmental degradation continuation” and points out that what connects people are not only the fortunate but also, and probably primarily, the unfortunate events we experience. Out of the examples presented in her poem, Waldman refers both to the environmental and social degradation as the result of our ancestor’s activities. She indicates that an event seemingly without any effect on our immediate reality has an enormous impact on our daily life, because everything connects and creates a closely related dependency grid. Times of unrest and uncertainties from the past construct the feeling of ubiquitous anxiety, which results in the substandard quality of human lives in mental and spiritual terms:

Holy Baghdad! Holy Dharamsala! Holy Columbine!
Holy Kabul! Holy Israel/Palestine! Holy Bosnia! Holy Rwanda!

Holy Manahatta Isle! Holy Trade Center! Holy East Timor!
Holy Justice! Holy forgiveness! Holy Truth! Holy Accountability!
Baghram holy? Guantánamo holy? Abu Ghraib unholy!
All hooded torture un-holy! All bodily sadistic harm un-holy!
All the hate un-holy! Big lies unholy! All the rape un-holy!
Unholy! Unholy! Unholy! Unholy! Unholy! Unholy!
Holy rap! Holy hip hop! Holy klezmer! Holy Afro-pop!
Holy jazz! Holy gamelan!
(Waldman 2012)

Waldman draws her readers' attention to the interconnectedness and the relation between the "holy" and "unholy" events from the past and the aftermath of those events in the twenty-first century. What she depicts as "holy" is pleasurable and inspiring: holy and beautiful places, the concepts of justice, forgiveness, truth, accountability, music, et cetera. Everything that is related to the beauty of life and to what created this planet a safe and enjoyable place. This state of "holiness" is compared with the "unholiness" of war conflicts and the practices of dehumanisation, such as tortures or rapes. Each of the listed places is a centre for an "unholiness." In her poem Waldman alludes to particular political events, such as an unholiness of East Timor struggles for independence (from Portugal [1769-1975] and neighbouring Indonesia [1975-2002]), the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict ongoing from the mid-twentieth century, and Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse from the early stages of the Iraq War.

Furthermore, the constant repetition of "holy" and "unholy" makes the structure of this poem similar to those analysed above. Its matra-like structure is additionally exposed by religious connotations of the two adjectives. The repetitions come rapidly in a dynamic sequence that imitates chanting. The purpose of such a proceeding is to detach the reader/listener from his or her surroundings and allow them to transfer the concentration into something above their own physicality. Thus, as the rhythm of "Holy 21st century" is meant to copy patterns of religious chants or mantras, it might be perceived through its spiritual aspect as a hymn for those who suffered as a result of other

people's choices. This dependency on others and their decisions is an example of the world's "inter-connectedness of all beings," which she depicted as "holy."

"entanglement"

Created in 2018 as a part of her (probably) most revolutionary book, *Trickster Feminism*, "entanglement" works on many different levels as a noticeably unique poem. It is a very personal confession, made about the world, humanity, and herself as a part of both. What is worth noticing in the analysis of this poem is that the term "entanglement" comes from quantum physics, where it means "a mechanical phenomenon in which the physical states of the subatomic particles that form matter, after having been joined and spatially separated, can become intertwined, interacting despite physical distance" (Catanzano 2019). In other words, it "occurs when two particles become inextricably linked, and whatever happens to one immediately affects the other, regardless of how far apart they are" (McDonald 2019). By choosing this title for her poem, Waldman refers to the "inter-connectedness" of all life aspects (the expression she has used in "Holy 21st century"). She also emphasises her deep connection with the surrounding and the effect this "entanglement" has on her life:

Entanglement is my ransom
Entanglement imagines when we shed our skins
Skins keep talking
And shed our sex the sexes keep talking
(Waldman 2018: 115)

Entanglement never rests
But rest now from circumambulation *Om Con Be Gone*
(118)

How not become our own volcano? Visit a ring of fire
Volcanoes were entangled
Act as mirror into my lower atmosphere Entanglement eschews boundaries
Politics of sonorities
All the organs collapse
(123)

Entanglement: spellbind phenomena
Be kind to strangers, they are your entanglement
(124)

In the theory of entanglement, disparate particles can influence each other no matter how far apart they are. In her poem, Waldman points out that entanglement indeed “eschews boundaries” and is a “spellbind phenomena” that connects various components into one unity that “never rests.” Every living creature and every part of nature is equal in the huge plexus of life. Moreover, a fragment where she calls to her readers “Be kind to strangers, they are your entanglement” reflects on her belief in a special bond between all living beings. In Husserl’s understanding, a society would be a system of separate parts “held *together with* those parts already segregated” (Husserl in Roy 14). In the same way, as in Husserl’s interpretation of multiplicity, we interpret a rose as an entity, we tend to look at the concept of a society. However, only when “we get at its various parts successively” (Husserl in Roy 14), we start to realise that this supposed entity is not an individual in itself. A rose, in Husserl’s example, is not a univocal object but consists of various components such as a stem, sepals, petals, a peduncle, thorns, et cetera. In the same way, we may interpret society. It is never a finite, singular unit but rather a network of families, communities, organisations, and individuals. Those individuals, sometimes mere strangers, are in fact, at least according to Waldman’s poem, connected to us.

In addition, throughout the poem she encodes some names of ubiquitously known feminists who inspired her on different levels of life and/or work: “Auld tray lured” (Audre Lorde), “Barb a guest” (Barbara Guest), “Loud her back” (Ann Lauterbach), “May may bur sin brooch” (Mei Mei Berssenbrugge), “Claw din rank kin” (Claudia Rankine) (Durand 2018). This list makes her poem not only a reflection of her views about the world but a very private testimony about her liaisons. She presents herself a sum of different entanglements and connections gathered during her life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Anne Waldman, in her poetry, shows that humanity is a part of nature and that everything around us creates a net of relations, to which we also belong. The fact that the world is created of many different components, and nothing can exist as a separate entity, is what makes nature so exceptionally personal and vivid. The interconnections of life create equality between its participants and components. Dated back to the times of *De Rerum Natura* by Lucretius, through Stacy Alaimo's research on trans-corporeality published in 2010, the idea of life as a convoluted web of smaller and very complex units was present in people's minds for centuries. Despite the assumed singularity of human bodies, every individual is entangled in an intricate mesh of different components. The poems I have analysed above bring together the concepts of the porosity of humans and the minor part we play in the universe, which the poet juxtaposes with the major influence humans have over the world and other organisms. In "Battery" Waldman presents herself as a porous, undefined, and not unified part of the world, in which, as she also points out, beauty and simplicity should be more appreciated. In *Manatee/Humanity* she emphasises the influence that different organisms exert on each other, whereas in "Holy 21st century" she comments on the "inter-connectedness," which glued together events of our history and our nowadays reality. Last but not least, in "entanglement" not only does she present the connections of all life aspects through the medium of quantum physics but also gives a very personal statement on her own entanglements and inspirations. Waldman's poetry reaches beyond fixed borders of human/nonhuman distinction and provides examples of how various components of life are interconnected. In her poems, she proves that understanding this entanglement and relationships, which we create with other organisms and nature, are the key to comprehend humanity itself.

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Abstract

In this article, I present Anne Waldman's poetry from the perspective of trans-corporeality, introduced by Stacy Alaimo (2010), as well as the ideas of multiplicity in trans-corporeality and hominid ecologies that challenge the scrupulous anthropocentric approach to human/nonhuman relations. I analyse some of Waldman's well-known poems, "Battery" from *Fast Speaking Woman* (1996), fragments of her book *Manatee/Humanity* (2009), "Holy 21st Century" (2012), and "entanglement" from *Trickster Feminism* (2018). Moreover, I demonstrate that although not directly associated with ecopoetry or ecological artistic movements—Anne Waldman is highly

inspired by the surrounding world and identifies ecology as a significant aspect of humanity. Her poetry, by challenging the fixed boundaries that people tend to impose on the nature/non-nature distinction, explores the relations between human and nonhuman in order to reflect on the interchanges and interconnections that exist in the universe.

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THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE ADDICTIVE SPORTS ROUTINES IN DAVID FOSTER WALLACE'S *INFINITE JEST*

Keywords: David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, psychological automatism, addiction, modern sport

Introduction

This article¹ examines the themes of sport and addiction in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. Its aim is to show how by juxtaposing these topics the author discusses philosophical issues. The author was one of the most popular American writers of the turn of the twenty-first century. The themes of his works "ranged from the ethics of boiling live lobsters to John McCain's 2000 presidential primary" (King 2), which include the issues of sport. The exploration of his point of view on philosophy as well as psychological and sociological research attempts to unravel the reasoning behind the novel's preoccupation with these two, at first sight, distant themes. Wallace often blurs the boundaries between the positive and negative aspects of sport. Particularly in the novel *Infinite Jest*, he engages in a philosophical reflection concerning the ambiguity of the frail boundaries separating sports and addiction. As a writer and ex-practitioner of tennis, he offers unique "interpretations of particular athletes, sports, and events" (King 2) which powerfully impacts the readers. In order to find the relation between sports and addiction in Wallace's novel, the concepts of pragmatism, the three spheres of existence, and psychological automatism are discussed. These terms are associated with philosophy and the

early research on the unconscious which by the idea of self-improvement bind together the discussed themes.

Philosophical Background

In *Infinite Jest*, the main threads are intertwined with a discussion of the two characters, Marathe and Steeply, about the mentality of American society. The characters create the philosophical background for the whole novel. Especially, their debates over choices in life (Wallace 1996: 318) and the delayed gratification (428) resonate with a wide spectrum of pragmatist and existential theories. The two names that recur in the research conducted by other scholars² on the philosophical context of *Infinite Jest* are James and Søren Kierkegaard. A brief analysis of these two philosophers' main thought will allow us to notice the common points with *Infinite Jest's* sections about tennis as they share the same element of spiritual self-improvement.

William James, in his discourse, posits that only the things that are definable, in terms of being drawn from experience, should be the subject of the philosophical inquiry (Copleston 1965: 331). For James, pragmatism is not merely a method of determining otherwise indeterminable disputes but also a theory of truth (James 1909: 196). If the practical consequences of two theories are the same then the theories, he assumes, are one and the same theory, different only on a verbal level. Thus, James is focused on practical consequences but only from the perspective of the relation between what precedes and what follows. Pragmatism emerges also as a theory of truth, even though the truth, in his opinion, is a feature of beliefs, not things. Therefore, the logical validity is assigned only to propositions, not things or facts themselves, i.e. only the proposition articulating certain facts can be true or false. Thus, "truth is a relation between one part of the experience and another" (Copleston 1965: 336), which means that the truth of an idea is the process of validation. For example, if following a plan validates it, the process of verification establishes the truth of the idea. James is aware that most of the truths we live

by are unverified, though potentially they are still verifiable. He calls them truths "*in posse*" (James 1909: 205), i.e. in the process of potential becoming. Therefore, even timeless truths that precede any verification are merely pragmatic truths *in posse* which rest on the basis of verified truths. In this context, the problem of delayed gratification discussed in *Infinite Jest* resembles *in posse* approach when the choice is assessed by postponed results.

Søren Kierkegaard's fundamental premise is that there is no direct analogy between people's behavior as a group and as individuals (Copleston 1963: 340). The group is sunk in the common consciousness and emotions, performing actions its members would never perform as individuals. For this reason, Kierkegaard criticizes the traditional approach to philosophy, which generalizes human experience, approaching people collectively as humankind. In his opinion, a crowd, is fundamentally the untruth, because it renders the individual irresponsible. Kierkegaard in his philosophy presents three spheres of life (Kierkegaard 1942: 448). The first one is described as the aesthetic. Its main feature is operating on the level of intuition, emotion, and impulse. However, it should not be exclusively linked to the primitive. For example, artists operate in the same realm of romantic play of emotions. What makes this sphere so distinguishable is the absence of universal, fixed moral standards, and the presence of a desire to enjoy a limitless sensual experience. The aesthetic man can discriminate only on an aesthetic basis. His goal is to strive after the absence of all limitations other than imposed by his own taste. He despises everything that limits his range of choice, never giving definite form to his life. However, over time, he becomes more and more conscious that he is something more than an organism with the capacity for sensual enjoyment. The longer he lives in this state, the more despair he feels, knowing there is no alternative in the sphere he operates (Kierkegaard 1992: 203). At this point, he faces two choices: he can either remain in despair or, by the act of choice, commit himself. What differentiates this philosophy from others is the explicit requirement of continuous acts, not mere thinking, to maintain one's

choice. Kierkegaard names it “the act of existing” (Kierkegaard 1942: 84), suggesting that the true existence resembles more being an actor than a spectator (Copleston 1963: 347). The second sphere presented by Kierkegaard is the ethical one. Accepting moral standards and obligations gives a form of consistency in the ethical man’s life. This makes him what Kierkegaard calls “the tragic hero” (Kierkegaard 1939: 109). The heroes deny themselves to express the universal, just like Antigone, who gave up her life in defense of the unwritten natural law. The ethical man, however, does not understand sin. He is able to identify the weakness but thinks it can be overcome by the power of will. In that sense, he thinks that he is morally self-sufficient. Eventually, he may realize his inability to fulfill the moral law. In consequence, he becomes aware of guilt and sin. Overcoming this state is only possible by the act of faith, by relating oneself to God (Copleston 1963: 347). According to Kierkegaard, there are two types of “existence” but only one type of a truly “existing individual” (Copleston 1963: 348). To achieve this a person needs to affirm oneself as a spirit. Kierkegaard notes that “[e]xistence is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, and the existing individual is both infinite and finite” (Kierkegaard 1942: 84). He states that the true form of existence requires pursuing active living, directing his life by deciding between alternatives. In essence, “[a]n existing individual is himself in process of becoming” (Kierkegaard 1942: 368). This bottom line resonates with the major theme of *Infinite Jest* which is “the significance of making a voluntary choice rather than following an involuntary compulsion” (Carlisle 89).

In *Infinite Jest*, Steeply in a Jamesian manner defines the cravings of the American society (James 1979: 201), saying “our whole system is founded on your individual’s freedom to pursue his own individual desires” (Wallace 1996: 423). This example presents a consumer attitude towards life which is oriented to gain as efficiently as possible and to collect the largest profits with minimum efforts and inconvenience. William James in his writings regards individual happiness as a condition to the well-being of the whole society. The

philosopher states that “the best simply imaginary world would be one in which every demand was gratified as soon as made” (James 1979: 201). However, he leaves room for the future re-evaluation of the choice that might assume that the initial decision has been incorrect. To sum up, his theory is concerned with short-sighted behavior that prioritizes immediate gratification and not paying much attention to the social aspect of human life. In this context, it is interesting to consider an aspiring athlete in the light of James’s philosophy. The outcome of daunting routines cannot be known in advance but they are the only valid way to have a chance of success. Therefore, training routines seen as the only right path to achieve success, are being pragmatically justified, as *in posse*. However, due to the delayed verification, the years of practice for the vast majority of young athletes who do not succeed turn out to be in vain. Thus, what was seen as pragmatic at first becomes unpragmatic. Such narration can potentially bring spiritual destruction for young unfulfilled apprentices.

Compared to this, Kierkegaard provides a more comforting approach. According to his philosophy, a never-ending stream of choices, for which one needs to take responsibility, improves one’s ethical behavior. The sports drills are, in this context, the tools for “becoming” in the Kierkegaardian sense. Whereas James is concerned with the provability of the choice’s correctness, Kierkegaard regards it as irrelevant. According to Kierkegaard’s philosophy, *Infinite Jest*’s drug addicts are essentially aesthetes. Most of them are caught in the moment of depression. Players in the tennis academy can also be seen as aesthetes who pursue aesthetic benefits of entering professional tennis. However, the trial they endure to do so confronts them with their choice and its consequences on a daily basis. One approach is to adhere to the rules and believe in a higher power (i.e. coaches, the system, parents), whereas the other is to isolate in self-consciousness.

In *Infinite Jest*, the process of transformation of an aesthetic man into an ethicist is presented through Don Gately’s experience. Initially, Gately is

the aesthete who remains passive in the situations of choices and potential commitments. He turns into a criminal who gradually becomes addicted to substances. However, in a drug and alcohol recovery facility, Gately becomes a full-fledged ethicist. He is ready for commitment and each day confirms the choice he has made. Following the addiction recovery program teaches him responsibility. Working as a warden in the facility proves to be another step to become a responsible person.

Wallace tries to extend the notion of constantly repeated self-commitment because he does not notice any hint on how to choose. He finds the solution to this lack of advice in a series of clichés (Wallace 1996: 320). Some of them are the need for guidance from a loving father or the need for sincerity (Carlisle 199). In a less convoluted way, Wallace also explains the significance of the banal in his commencement speech “This Is Water” (Wallace 2009), where he explains how he wishes people to make conscious choices through their daily existence. According to him, “banal platitudes can have a life or death importance” (Wallace 2009: 9) but it is difficult to notice because of the default self-centeredness of one’s mind. By a conscious act of choosing the stance towards daily situations, people can avoid frustrating misery (Wallace 2009). However, human nature is vulnerable to compulsions and resistant to change. It is easier to ridicule the wisdom of clichés rather than follow them. Focusing on practicalities and personal gains leads people back to themselves, leaving them in physical and spiritual isolation, but it only intensifies the lonely character of these pursuits (Carlisle 486). Wallace identifies these problems and promotes choosing awareness over denial. He advises effort over passivity, emphasizing the significance of becoming vulnerable through connection with other people (Wallace 2009).

The Functions of the Unconscious and Pierre Janet

Discussion about addiction in relation to sports in *Infinite Jest* requires introducing the notion of psychological automatism to enable further

argumentation. The term comes from the early research on the unconscious, conducted by French psychologist, Pierre Janet. In his time, the four aspects of the unconscious were demonstrated: the creative, conservative, mythopoetic, and dissolutive (Ellenberger 317). The creative function serves as the matrix of new ideas. The conservative function stores a great number of memories, often inaccessible to voluntary recall. The mythopoetic function is the subliminal region of the self where narratives and fantasies that appear mythic or religious in nature are perpetually constructed. In this function, the unconscious is continually occupied with creating myths and fictions, which can appear in dreams. Sometimes it takes a form of exceptional occurrences like daydreams that develop spontaneously in the background of the mind, or even more uncommonly sleepwalking and hysteria. The dissolutive functions of the unconscious include two sets of phenomena. One is made up of actions that in the past were enacted consciously but have become automatic, for example, habits. The other consists of the disjointed parts of one's personality, which may lead to "parasitic existence" and collide with normal processes (Ellenberger 318). The dissolutive functions were the starting point for Janet's extensive occupation with autonomous elements of the subconscious mind (Ellenberger 318). The manifestations of this psychological phenomenon, automatism, were classified into two groups: total automatism (Janet 1889a) and partial automatism (Janet 1889b). Total automatism extends to the subject as a whole, whereas partial automatism suggests that a fragment of the personality is detached from the conscious awareness and leads to autonomous, subconscious development (Janet 1889b: 151-152). It can modify the manifestations of normal thought but cannot oppose it (Janet 1889b: 151). The same psychological mechanism gradually brings about the complete dissolution of the mind (Janet 1889b: 152). Janet generally devoted the rest of his work to various forms of partial psychological automatism.

Analyzing actions of *Infinite Jest's* characters in accordance with Janet's theory of psychological automatism, we can assume that the dissolutive

function of the unconscious binds the ideas of athletic training's and rehab's impact on spiritual self-improvement. In both cases, the participants take advantage of the subconscious mind as a means to reach their goals. As this function means that practicing and repeating certain actions leads to developing habits, it is important to note that the dissolutive function of the unconscious suggests that once developed, the habit cannot be easily abandoned (Ellenberger 318). This is precisely the approach that tennis players are supposed to rigidly hone at *Infinite Jest's* tennis academy by continuously repeating elements of their game. They want to make certain actions automatic, releasing extra space of awareness. As a consequence, the actions become neurologically embedded and under unconscious control. This is also the exact opposite of the residents of what *Infinite Jest's* drug and alcohol recovery facility are working on. They are taught to admit no control over addiction and they need to learn a whole new routine, mode of operating, to go through their lives without relying on substances. However, the omnipresent parasitic existence of the habit is what makes it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to overcome.

***Infinite Jest* and the Addictive Character of Sports**

It is possible to say that addiction is closely tied to participation in, either professional or amateur, competitive sports as they both require devotion and sacrifice. Different kinds of sports involve a spectrum of drills performed on a regular basis in order to achieve satisfactory results. Many sports, including tennis, aside from its technical aspects require also physical endurance. As Abel Nogueira et al. state in the review entitled: "Exercise Addiction in Practitioners of Endurance Sports," the excessive practice of endurance activities "can lead to adverse physical and psychological effects seriously prejudicial to health, to the extent that individuals are unable to control this behavior" (1). The research mentioned in the paper "confirmed that excessive practice could encourage the appearance of addictive behaviors and health problems" (1). Although the

observations of these behaviors were specifically centered on running and endurance sports, the general “obsessive passion and dedication to sports activities may be predictors for addiction to exercise” (1) in terms of other sports as well. Noteworthy is the fact that “owing to terminological confusion and the variety of tools used to measure addiction, figures for prevalence differ widely among studies” (1). This proves that there are still no clear universal methods to measure addiction, which leads to problems in defining and diagnosing such pathologies. Methodological vagueness and blurred boundaries between addiction and exercise contribute to the fact that abusing sports activities is not yet acknowledged as a behavioral disorder.

Nogueira et al. explain that the original meaning of the term ‘addiction’ referred to the excessive and uncontrollable consumption of psychotropic substances. It was a gradual process of applying it to a larger group of ‘behavioral addictions’ (1). According to Federica Pinna, addiction is not based solely on taking substances (Pinna et al. 380). She gives an example of gambling, which involves risky behavior and falls into the category of impulse control disorders. Nogueira et al. state that “[a]lthough addiction to exercise is not recognized as such, different authors consider that it could fall into the category of behavioral addictions” (1). They also refer to a few different sources to identify the problems of methodologies regarding addictions. Amongst others, they mention approaching addiction to physical exercise as “a multidimensional maladaptive pattern that leads to a disability or a clinically significant affliction” (1) and a sub-category of potentially addictive behaviors. They continue by stressing the analogical stages characteristic of all other common types of addiction, namely the “inability of controlling their behavior because of the pleasure that undertaking this activity brings them, regardless of any negative consequences” (2). What makes it difficult to consider it as addiction is the social acceptance of sport as an activity beneficial for health, even for people prone to addictions.

As far as *Infinite Jest* is concerned, Wallace never overtly calls any form of sport an addiction. However, his descriptions of tennis present ideas which resonate heavily with Pierre Janet's research. Gerhardt Schtitt, the coach in *Infinite Jest*, assumes the need of overcoming omnipresent desires with discipline. According to Greg Carlisle's analysis, "Schtitt regards both tennis and life as a tragic cycle of vanquishing and transcending limits" (Carlisle 77). This cycle represents Kierkegaardian thought in the way sport is presented in the novel. As Carlisle notes, Schtitt knew that "the beauty and art of match-play tennis is found not in reducing chaos to pattern but in expansion" (76), which confirms the constant need for transcending boundaries.

Infinite Jest enumerates regular day-to-day activities of the tennis academy students: "am drills, shower, eat, class, lab, class, class, eat, exam, lab/class, conditioning run, pm drills, play challenge match, play challenge match, upper-body circuits in weight room, sauna, shower" (Wallace 1996: 95). Thus, the considerable amount of effort that every single student puts into their daily routine is undeniable. The students undergo this mental and physical conditioning to develop a focus on the game and enabling their bodies to work automatically (1996: 117-118). Moreover, the athletes should not get distracted and overshadowed by press and public's expectations (1996: 661). If they become recognizable players they are bound to be under heavy psychological pressure with the very next failure. After this, without prior mental preparation, it is impossible to recover from the shock; therefore, the tennis academy attempts to protect "players from the dangers of being seen as entertainers" (Carlisle 337). Schtitt tries to teach students to "forget everything but the game" (Wallace 1996: 661). His suggestion includes drills that may be seen as an embodiment of what Pierre Janet calls psychological automatism. This mechanism in Janet's theory functions in an analogical way to addiction, i.e. unconscious force pushing a person to do something. It implies a lack of conscious choice, which due to Kierkegaard's thought is seen as something negative. *Infinite Jest* is also concerned with the automatism of rehearsed

movements. Expressions such as “sheer mindless repeated motions,” “[u]ntil you can do it without thinking about it, play,” “sinks the movements themselves down under your like consciousness into the more nether regions,” and “these are autonomical” (1996: 117–118) seem to confirm that the novel and Janet present the same potentially hazardous consequences of extensively repetitive routines.

At one point, the students in the academy are given a motivational speech about repetitive routines:

It's repetitive movements and motions for their own sake, over and over until the accretive weight of the reps sinks the movements themselves down under like consciousness into more nether regions, through repetition they sink and soak into the hardware. (Wallace 1996: 11)

At a young age, athletes are taught to play to eventually perform motions without thinking: “[w]ait until it soaks (...) This frees the head in the remarkablest ways” (118). However, the drills are compulsory; hence, due to being imposed externally, they are not addictive *per se*. The mechanism shown by Janet justifies positioning drills within the scope of the addiction due to the difficulties with being eradicated. It is the kind of susceptibility to behavioral dependency that lives its own life in the subconscious. Analogically, the recovery program for addicts does not eradicate the need for stimuli. It rather forces patients to admit their helplessness over the existence of the higher power and to make conscious choices for the rest of their lives.

The Philosophy behind the Addictive Sports Routines

In *Infinite Jest* Marathe and Steeply philosophically discuss the issue of choice. The existential context allows for a wider discussion about lifelong consequences of taking certain paths in life. Both sport and drug abuse have potentially critical long-term results. Both of them are also a result of extensively repeated activities and can potentially cause states of no control. Addiction, including that to sports, may be regarded as an urge to take shortcuts to an instant injection of happiness. When a person does not devote

enough effort to advance into the ethical sphere, according to Kierkegaard, the increasing awareness of that fact causes the growing feeling of despair (Copleston 1963: 342). He describes it as:

the moment his anxious soul thinks it sees daylight appearing, it proves to be a new entrance, and like startled game, pursued by despair, he is thus constantly seeking an exit and forever finding an entrance through which he returns into himself. (Kierkegaard 1992: 203)

Subconsciously, the mind may rebel and seek other ways to avoid this by numbing the conscious mind. Therefore, such a person is vulnerable to addiction. The character of this addiction does not necessarily need to involve substances. It may concern something more abstract, like television, sport, or entertainment in general. Addiction determines and reprioritizes everything else. Hence, the suspension of conscious control becomes gradually more visible in daily life. This lack of control, according to Kierkegaard's theory, is wrong, as it impedes people's conscious choices and limits their freedom.

Depending on the approach, athletic drills can be regarded as either acquiring a new addiction by inducing psychological automatism or a submission to a higher power. To some degree, the players seem to be caught in a vicious circle, because the automatism may cause addiction, and then the first step of addiction recovery program is to admit powerlessness. The situation proves to be the same with regard to the rehab program for addicts, which, paradoxically, is not designed to overcome the addiction. The goal of the program is to make addicted persons more in control of their urges. Therefore, analogically, it resembles a never-ending cycle of admitting powerlessness to regain control, only to be constantly reminded of the dependence that continually confirms one's identity as an addict.

This would imply further that the treatment does not erase psychological automatism. Therefore, the temptation remains imprinted in the human nature. *Infinite Jest* also presents issues regarding this struggle by introducing the group called 'crocodiles.' They are Alcoholics Anonymous members who remain clean for an extensive period of time and provide mental and material

assistance to the younger members. Their existence is in tune with Kierkegaard's philosophy, i.e. they constantly recur to make conscious choices in order to abstain from alcohol. This could be called the infinite process of becoming but never really achieving pure 'cleanliness.' It resonates with the Kierkegaardian statement that "the striving is infinite" (Kierkegaard 1942: 84). The achieving is continuously approached but "cannot be accomplished once and for all: it has to take the form of a constantly repeated self-commitment" (Copleston 1963: 348). Nevertheless, even when someone is already on the wrong path in life, Wallace presents a character like Don Gately as a role model to follow. Gately becomes successful in his struggle for self-improvement. Even though a series of bad decisions makes him a felon, the novel shows that, with the guidance of right people, there is always hope for redemption and going back to the right path in life.

Conclusion

The above research suggests that sport shows many psychological and social analogies to addiction. By presenting the characters' attitude to sports and addictions in *Infinite Jest*, David Foster Wallace discusses philosophical issues. The never-ending urge for self-improvement is characteristic both of athletes and recovering drug addicts. The philosophies of William James and Søren Kierkegaard are applicable to trace the relations between the characters' beliefs and their progress in the novel. The constant struggle to make right choices and taking responsibility in order to reach perfection seem to be closer to Kierkegaard's philosophy. However, aspiring athletes dangerously oscillate on the brink of compulsive disorder. As a result, they go in the opposite direction to the desired improvement. The novel shows that sport and the process of recovering from addiction share the element of spiritual self-improvement. Both can possibly end in failure, but their chances to overcome obstacles are correlated with one's effort. Therefore, they accurately illustrate the practical applications of Kierkegaardian philosophy. However, at the same

time, according to Jamesian *in posse* assumption, one can never be sure of the correctness of choices unless their long-term consequences become clear. Until then, one can have only hope and good intentions to justify decisions, including these about athletic training.

Endnotes

1. This article is based on the author's MA thesis entitled "Philosophical Aspects of Addictive Sports Routines in the Literature of David Foster Wallace."
2. See, for example, Ballantyne (2015), Campora (2014), Clare (2018), Dulk (2014), Evans (2013), Hasker (2015), Sher (2015).

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Abstract

This article addresses the themes of contemporary sport and addiction as seen through the prism of David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. Its purpose is to examine how by juxtaposing these topics the author discusses philosophical issues. The theoretical part briefly describes the philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard and William James, as well as Pierre Janet's pioneering research on the subconscious. These theories are used in the analysis of the relationship between the beliefs of the novel's characters and their personal development. In the analytical part, the author tries to show the addictive traits of sport as represented in *Infinite Jest*, relying on the research in sociology and psychology. The analysis of this research shows a common socio-psychological basis of sport and addictions as they share the same element of spiritual self-improvement.

**TRENDS
IN CULTURAL STUDIES**

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**AFRO-SURREALISM—A NEW LANGUAGE FOR DISCUSSING THE BLACK
EXPERIENCE? AN EXPLORATION OF THE TREND IN RECENT FILMS, TV
SERIES, AND MUSIC VIDEOS**

Keywords: Afro-Surrealism, systemic racism, hip-hop, Black Lives Matter

Introduction

The Black Lives Matter movement, and the tragic events that put it into motion, sparked a new wave of discussion about not only police brutality, but also other manifestations of corruption, bias, and injustice, which still shape American society on a structural level, bringing the myth of a post-racial America into question. This discussion also extended into media and popular culture in significant ways, with the Hollywood industry being pushed for more and better representations of minorities (the #OscarsSoWhite backlash of 2015 and beyond), and hip-hop music becoming increasingly more socially conscious and involved. In the case of the Academy Awards the success is debatable, because of their apparent tendency to honor comforting “racial reconciliation fantasies,” like Peter Farrelly’s *Green Book* (Morris), rather than more ambitious, thematically challenging and artistically innovative works of black filmmakers. However, the rise in stature of hip-hop music as a respected art form is unequivocal—culminating with the success of Kendrick Lamar, whose song “Alright” was often chanted at protests as a kind of unofficial anthem for the BLM movement (Gillette). Lamar ultimately received the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2018, making him the first artist outside of jazz and classical music to be honored with this award. Creative and often multi-talented African American artists have been gaining more prominence and recognition than

ever before, which results in creating more space and opportunities for experimentation, inventing new styles and trends, or transplanting the already existing ones to the mainstream. Afro-Surrealism is one of the most interesting and vibrant examples of these projects.

The term 'Afro-Surrealism' was coined in 1974 by Amiri Baraka in his introduction to the poet Henry Dumas's book *Ark of Bones and Other Stories*. He used it to describe the writer's "skill at creating an entirely different world organically connected to this one... the Black aesthetic in its actual contemporary and lived life" (as cited in Miller, para. 6). Writer, visual artist and curator D. Scot Miller, with Baraka's permission, borrowed and expanded the term in his "Afrosurreal Manifesto," originally published in the San Francisco Bay Guardian in 2009. The text was, of course, inspired by the original surrealist manifestoes, most famously those by André Breton. Influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud on the interpretation of dreams, Breton saw surrealism as a form of rebellion against the dictate of reason and logic in modern society, suggesting that "[t]he imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights" (10). Furthermore, he defined surrealism as a form of expression of "the actual functioning of thought" in the manner of "psychic automatism," which functions outside traditional aesthetic and moral categories (26).

Breton was the pioneer and one of the most recognizable figures of surrealism, but the movement itself was far from monolithic, and did not follow any precise artistic program. The term "surreal" over the years was watered down and became shorthand for anything vaguely odd or dreamlike, often connected to unusual juxtapositions. Early surrealism was also not, as it is often believed, a strictly European movement made up of Caucasian men. Politically involved poets, such as Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon Damas, founded the *Négritude* movement in the early 1930s, which is seen by many as a continuation of surrealism in the African diaspora (Césaire was also a close friend of Breton). In his manifesto, Miller cites Senghor as allegedly having said:

“European surrealism is empirical. African surrealism is mystical and metaphorical” (Miller, para. 8). He also points to Jean-Paul Sartre, who had similar ideas about distinctive and unique features of *Négritude* poetry as surreal works. The writer enthusiastically advocated for the movement’s distinctiveness and significance in his famous essay “Black Orpheus.” In it, he defines the surrealistic method, similarly to Breton’s understanding of surrealism, as a form of automatic writing, akin to mysticism in that it requires a degree of discipline and practice to delve beyond “the superficial crust of reality” and “touch the very bottom of the soul and awaken the timeless forces of desire” (309). Sartre differentiates the tradition of white Surrealism, which he sees as largely universalistic and apolitical (“beyond race and condition, beyond class, behind the fire of language—dazzling silent darknesses which are no longer opposed to anything”), from *Négritude* poetry, filled with strong emotions of resentment towards Europe, colonization and white culture, expressing “the revolutionary aspirations of the oppressed Negro”—an *engaged* and *directed* application of automatic writing (311).

Miller’s ideas about Afro-Surrealism are even bolder. In his manifesto he states, following Frida Kahlo’s famous quote (paraphrased therein as “I’m not a surrealist, I just paint what I see”), that the very fact that a work depicts the subjective experience of a member of a marginalized minority is what makes it surreal—“all ‘others’ who create from their actual, lived experience are surrealist” (para. 8) presumably because they present an experience so alien to most. The manifesto proper provides ten “resolutions,” which seem more like a loose series of inspirations about what Afro-Surreal art can be. Among others, they include tactics such as: subversion through excess and hybridization, exploring fluidity and ambiguity of identity (concerning ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and the intersectional issues connected with them), expressing a full range of emotions not to be found e.g. in 50 Cent’s “cold monotone” (“We want to feel something! We want to weep on record,” para. 22), appropriating symbols connected with slavery and colonialism, and reintroducing elements of

magical beliefs to uncover another world beyond the visible one. Miller is also very liberal about his choice of artists and works he picks as sources of inspiration for Afro-Surrealism, disregarding traditional divisions between high and low art—he mentions renowned writer and scholar Toni Morrison, and rapper Ghostface Killah of Wu-Tang Clan fame in the same sentence, describing their style as rococo: “the beautiful, the sensuous, and the whimsical” (para. 23).

Afro-Surrealism in Mainstream Media

Until recently, Afro-Surrealism was a term circulating mostly in museum and gallery spaces, explored thoroughly in contemporary forms of visual arts, such as video installations: Arthur Jafa’s *Love Is the Message, The Message Is Death* effectively combined documentary footage of everyday struggles of Black America with popular culture (Urbańska 2019: 64). Jafa can also be seen as a pioneer of Afro-Surrealism in film, with his sensual cinematography for Julie Dash’s critically acclaimed *Daughters of the Dust* (1991). But the term Afro-Surrealism was never used on a larger scale in the context of films, TV series, or other popular forms of visual media. That is, not until Lanre Bakare’s article “From Beyoncé to Sorry to Bother You: the new age of Afro-Surrealism,” published in *The Guardian* in 2018. In the article, the author notes how the success of films such as Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* (2017), which mixed genre thrills (a peculiar blend of dark comedy and horror) with social commentary, and also contained a memorably unconventional hallucinatory sequence, paved the way for bolder and more uncanny stylistic experimentations in the mainstream. He sees it as a revival of a style “in which strangeness and blackness not only co-exist but are impossible to separate” (Bakare). This vague idea of strangeness and surreality as inescapable features of the Black Experience is difficult to specify, and it certainly does not help that the author brings up so many diverse examples of modern Afro-Surreal art, ranging from the relatively understated, independent films such as Estrada’s *Blindspotting*

(2018), to the baroque excess of the music video for Beyoncé and Jay-Z's "APES**T."

This is the reason why I decided to attempt to produce my own classification of features that many recent Afro-Surrealist works share, which might be seen as a draft for further research on the subject. In my analysis, I will go into the most detail about two works. The first is FX's TV series *Atlanta* (2016—), notable for having an all-black writing staff (extremely uncommon in American television), created by actor and musician (under the nickname Childish Gambino) Donald Glover, who famously pitched the premise of the show as "Twin Peaks with rappers" (see e.g. Cwik). The second is the film *Sorry to Bother You* (2018), a genre-bending satire on capitalism directed by a rapper and activist Boots Riley. However, to broaden the scope of analysis, I will also reference other Afro-Surreal works, including: the aforementioned *Get Out*, as well as Peele's following horror-comedy *Us* (2019); Carlos López Estrada's dramedy *Blindspotting*, concerning police violence and gentrification; HBO's series *Random Acts of Flyness* (2018), a Monty Pythonesque experimental sketch show created by Terence Nance; as well as a selection of music videos, mostly those inspired by the music of Flying Lotus and Childish Gambino, with some examples from the unambiguous mainstream.

What is worth noting at this point is that many of these films, shows and music videos already have a lot in common on the level of the creative process. First of all, many of these artists have a background in comedy and/or hip-hop, and some of the same figures reappear in multiple Afro-Surrealist works, already strongly associated with the style: Donald Glover AKA Childish Gambino, actor and rapper Lakeith Stanfield (leading or prominent roles in *Atlanta*, *Sorry to Bother You* and *Get Out*) and director Hiro Murai (14 episodes of *Atlanta* and clips for Childish Gambino and Flying Lotus), just to name a few. Interestingly, the presence of a distinct personality such as Lakeith Stanfield can itself serve as foreshadowing of a certain degree of oddness and unconventionality, but in this particular outline I will focus on more general

stylistic and thematic aspects of modern Afro-Surrealism. Below, I present a list of the most common characteristics, all of which I will elaborate on further:

- bouts of the dreamlike, hallucinatory, and the fantastical passing into a generally realistic setting;
- an atmosphere of unease and paranoia, often supported by tonal dissonances, ambivalence of the genre and features of the grotesque;
- an experimental, eclectic form;
- elements of satire and parody;
- a significant role of hip-hop;
- a specific kind of intertextuality, often referencing staples of Black popular culture and history;
- anti-capitalist and anti-institutional messages;
- a complex exploration of Black identity and subversion of its traditional archetypes.

Genre and Tone

Afro-Surrealist films will often begin as relatively mundane stories, grounded in reality, not unlike the 1990's subgenre of hood films (sometimes referred to as New Black Realism, see e.g. Bausch). These films showed the everyday hardships of working-class African Americans living in poor and violent neighborhoods, who "struggled (often for naught) for better lives and to simply live," presenting "Hobbesian renderings of inner-city black life as short, poor, nihilistic, and unforgiving" (Bradley 143). The grimness and self-seriousness of these films were later subdued by a more light-hearted and parodistic spin on the genre, for instance that of the *Friday* films featuring Ice Cube. The modern Afro-Surrealist films combine elements of both the tradition of the hood film and its comedic counterparts (Urbańska 2020: 75). They feature unassuming protagonists who work ordinary and unspectacular jobs (telemarketing in *Sorry to Bother You*, house moving in *Blindspotting*, airport kiosk retail at the start of *Atlanta*) and deal with their day-to-day economic and relationship

problems. The abnormal events which eventually happen to them (often with a certain degree of uncertainty whether they are actually supernatural or are only projections of the characters' inner psyches) are thrust upon their world suddenly, often without any explanation. A model example of that would be a sketch from the first episode of *Random Acts of Flyness* in which Nance, the show's creator and its de facto host, is stopped by a white police officer while riding his bike. He continues to film the unpleasant encounter (which can be easily mistaken for documentary footage) before abruptly flying away and hovering high above the cityscape in a literal "random act of flyness."

In *Blindspotting*, Collin's (Daveed Diggs) witnessing of a police shooting triggers bizarre nightmares that involve a torturous courthouse setting with officer Molina (Ethan Embry), who shot an unarmed black man in the back, acting as a literal judge, jury, and executioner. These dark visions ultimately follow the protagonist into the daytime—while jogging through a cemetery, he sees several black men, most probably also victims of police violence, standing still next to their gravestones. Resurrection is also a recurring motif in the works of Flying Lotus, often containing "esoteric imaginings about death" ("Afrosurrealism: Binaural Blackness"). The young man shot dead in the street in the short film for "Until the Quiet Comes" and the two children at their own funeral in "Never Catch Me," both rise from their resting places and fall into an ethereal dance, seemingly at peace with their bodies and surroundings, while staying invisible to the bystanders.

In films such as *Get Out* or *Sorry to Bother You*, unambiguously supernatural or science fiction elements are usually introduced very late in the narrative and often with a shocking twist. The liberal elites and the house servants in *Get Out* certainly present odd mannerisms and suspicious behavior. There is an abundance of warning signs and bad omens for the protagonist, and, of course, the already mentioned hypnosis-induced hallucination sequence. Nevertheless, the film does not really transform into explicit horror until its final act, with the reveal of twisted experiments, conducted by the Armitage clan, which involve

transplanting their own brains into the bodies of strong, athletic black men, potentially granting themselves immortality. *Sorry to Bother You* has a very similar structure, with most of the narrative in its first half focusing on Cassius (Lakeith Stanfield) working his monotone job as a telemarketer and occasionally attending his girlfriend's art exhibitions, with the most abnormal element being him finding his inner "white man's voice," a superpower which helps him excel at his job and advance his way up the corporate ladder. The world of the wealthy elites is filled with twisted personalities and artificial gestures, but it is not until near the end of the story when Cassius discovers their darkest secret—a genetically modified race of 'Equisapiens,' horse-human hybrids used as slave labor. This sci-fi concept becomes a major plot element and the Equisapiens ultimately function as an organic part of the film's reality, brushed off by many of the characters as not all that shocking, especially in a world where employee rights are routinely violated.

In the series *Atlanta*, on the other hand, purely fantastical elements are not that common in the characters' lives. One notable exception is the invisible car in the episode "The Club." It is seen for the first time as a piece of novelty tech the fictional NBA star Marcus Miles brags about on his social media, of which Alfred, alias "Paper Boi" (Brian Tyree Henry) is very skeptical ("That shit ain't real"). After it actually 'appears' (only the driver is seen, hovering above the ground), at the end of the episode during a drive-by shooting, neither the characters nor the TV news report covering the event, mention the unusual car. This is common in *Atlanta*—strange events occur suddenly and are never brought up again. The very first episode, "The Big Bang," was already not shy about puzzling the viewers with various idiosyncrasies in between ordinary situations—from the suggestion that Darius (Lakeith Stanfield) has some kind of clairvoyant powers, to the reappearing ominous dog with a Texas-shaped spot on his bottom, to the old man on the bus who orders Earn (Donald Glover) to bite his Nutella sandwich.

Oddities like this, while not inherently implausible, bring a surreal edge to everyday hijinks of the characters in *Atlanta*, disturbing the familiar conventions of a hood movie. Some of the more exemplary encounters include: an old-timer gangster who owns a pet alligator in “Alligator Man,” the re-imagining of pop star Justin Bieber as a black teenager in “Nobody Beats the Biebs,” or the moody, pale-skinned hermit evocative of Michael Jackson in “Teddy Perkins” (see Philips). One of the more common formulas of an episode of *Atlanta* is an ordinary, slightly comedic situation turned into a nightmarish scenario, which continues to get worse. In “The Jacket,” Earn’s quest for the eponymous item of clothing, which he lost during a night of heavy drinking, culminates in a police shooting, with the jacket ending up on a corpse of a drug dealer.

This is also an example of a drastic tonal shift, which is another characteristic of Afro-Surreal films. Scenes turn from comedic to tragic or even to pure horror, often in a matter of seconds. This is especially apparent in the films of Jordan Peele, which I have already described as daring genre hybrids. In *Us*, for example, very similar situations of home invasions are played out in two completely different emotional registers. When the main characters are attacked by their doppelgangers (“The Tethered”), there is a tense confrontation. The villains, whose motivations remain unclear at this point, are introduced as terrifying and appalling figures, characterized by their dead-eyed faces, intimidating outfits and weapons, as well as Red’s (Lupita Nyong’o) distorted, raspy voice. However, when another group of the Tethered breaks into the mansion of a snobbish, upper-middle class Tyler family, it is darkly comical: from the oblivious behavior of all family members, to their off-color references to O.J. Simpson and the ultimate punch line—when Kitty (Elisabeth Moss) tries to get the family’s home A.I. system Ophelia to “call the police,” the machine ‘mishears’ her command and proceeds to play the song “Fuck tha Police” by the N.W.A., which continues throughout the graphic massacre. In an

act of tragic irony, the classic protest song of the Compton 'ghetto' comes back to taunt the privileged white family.

A lot of Childish Gambino's music is similarly moody, rapidly switching from light-hearted and whimsical to dark and existential. The videos produced for it reflect that. Both the song "3005" and the video associated with it, appear deceptively innocent—images of Gambino riding a ferris wheel with a teddy bear complement the upbeat love song. However, if one is to observe the relatively uneventful scene closer, the morbid details are clearly visible: the teddy not only appears to be alive (turning its head by itself), but it also 'ages,' becoming more worn down over time, while Gambino mouths the lyrics with a fixed apathetic expression on his face, reflecting the feelings of loneliness and alienation which are also present in the lyrics (see Tardio). The song "This Is America" constantly changes from cheerfully silly to dark and foreboding, not unlike Gambino's careless dancing (though uncannily reminiscent of Jim Crow caricatures) presented in stark contrast with the violence and mayhem around him in the clip. This striking combination of images and music has been often interpreted as a commentary on how popular culture distracts with 'song and dance' from the horrors that lie at the core of American society (see e.g. Menzies).

These tonal shifts often contribute to an atmosphere of uncertainty and paranoia. *Blindspotting* may appear generally comedic, but there are nearly always visual reminders of the threat of police violence and of going back to prison for violating parole, looming over the protagonist. These feelings of unease can be effectively enhanced by film techniques. In the *Atlanta* episode "Woods," after Alfred is mugged and then followed through the woods by a homeless man, who berates him for not making more of his life, a combination of handheld camera shots, rapid cutting and disorienting racks of focus, creates a feeling of instability and dread. The oppressive, paranoid atmosphere is sustained by the unclear topography of the area and the recurring images of irregular patterns of numbers, found throughout the episode.

But a lot of the time, what produces this unease are the narrative choices themselves, such as a simple act of taking the main character out of their element and putting them in a series of uncomfortable situations. This happens in *Get Out* and *Sorry to Bother You*, with black protagonists surrounded by the liberal bourgeois who often patronize them and make cluelessly inappropriate remarks. It is also the premise of multiple episodes of *Atlanta*—the eponymous “Juneteenth” celebration held in what looks like a plantation home, the German festivity Fastnacht (involving a blackface performance), which Earn has to attend with his girlfriend in “Helen,” or the gang getting lost on a college campus and stumbling into a Confederate-themed frat party in “North of the Border.”

This strategy of “inserting black people into a space they are not usually found in” can bring about horrifying and uncanny results, but it can also be turned into something subversive or even empowering. In Beyoncé and Jay-Z’s “APES**T,” dark-skinned bodies fill up the empty halls of the Louvre after hours, symbolically colonizing a space historically associated with European elites and the ‘old masters,’ with the two performers dressed in extravagant garments, ostentatiously posing in front of fine art masterpieces. This provocative video showcases the success, excessive glamour, and limitless wealth of the stars, who are able to proudly and audaciously rent out the Louvre, dress like Cleopatra, and frame themselves next to Mona Lisa, with disregard for any criticism. Yet the music, the high-contrast cinematography, and the images evoking colonialism and slavery (the brief glimpses of bound hands, and the inclusion of Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa*) also bring a darker, more sinister, even confrontational vibe to the piece, as if it was a slightly threatening message by the enormously successful black performers stating “There is nothing you can do to stop us now.”

All of the described tonal shifts, genre transformations and ambivalences can be ultimately connected to the aesthetic of the grotesque. In one of the oldest and most influential studies on the subject, Bakhtin defined

exaggeration, hyperbolism, and excessiveness as key features of this category (303), but also pointed to its essential embracing of the “contradictory and double-faced fullness of life” (62), where birth and death, creation and destruction, laughter and terror, and other such oppositions can intertwine and influence one another. According to Rémi Astruc, although the understanding of the grotesque evolved over centuries, three elements have always been at its core: doubleness, hybridity and metamorphosis (2). All three can be successfully applied to the different strategies of Afro-Surrealist film depicted in the previous paragraphs. They are tonally metamorphic genre hybrids, which also often feature images of doubleness and duality, sometimes as their main theme—*Us* is a horror about doppelgangers which is nearly obsessed with images of doubleness (elaborated upon in Smyk), and the clip for Childish Gambino’s “Sweatpants” features a diner continuously filled up with differently dressed Gambino doppelgangers.

Experimental Form

Afro-Surreal works are often stylistically adventurous and eclectic. A film like *Sorry to Bother You* constantly finds novel ways to spice up and enhance its storytelling. Even scenes as simple and seemingly monotone as those concerning work in telemarketing are presented in creative and unconventional ways. Instead of cross-cutting images of talking heads or using split screen techniques, the scenes of phone conversations are presented as if Cassius was materializing with his desk in the personal homes of his potential customers. This is both visually interesting and contributes to the film’s ever-present aura of strangeness. Another interesting example is the introduction of the Equisapiens, presented by means of stop-motion clay animation, in place of a standard expository monologue by the villain.

The show *Random Acts of Flyness* is even more unrestrained with its formal eclecticism, being a series of sketches loosely connected by the technique of free association. The range of the sketches presented is massive: more

traditional narrative skits, mockumentaries, musical performances, fake ads and news reports, interviews (e.g. with artists or black queer people), video-essays (as the one discussing the “white devil” trope in episode 5), subliminal messages, as well as an abundance of different animation techniques, often with an unsettling, psychedelic edge added to them. Animation in general provides a limitless potential for Afro-Surreal artists to bring their darkest and most outlandish visions to life. Flying Lotus, for example, worked with different animators over the years, all of whom had very diverse styles. From the more traditional 2D animation of the hallucinatory “Zodiac Shit,” depicting the Chinese zodiac animals seamlessly transforming into one another, to the crude and twisted computer-generated corporeal monstrosities created by David Firth in “Ready Err Not.” Another heavily discussed video was the black and white animated clip for Jay-Z’s “The Story of O.J.,” heavily inspired by racist caricatures and other striking imagery of America’s dark history.

Surreal aesthetics and enthusiasm for experimentation have found their way into the mainstream hip-hop video in general. The clips made for the music of Travis Scott (e.g. “BUTTERFLY EFFECT,” “SICKO MODE,” “STOP TRYING TO BE GOD”) are full of strange filters, offbeat transitions, different After Effects, distortions, and fantastical imagery, all contributing to their hallucinatory, dreamlike distinctiveness. The recent clip for Kanye West’s “Wash Us In The Blood,” directed by the renowned Afro-Surrealist Arthur Jafa, combines the footage of black COVID-19 patients, police brutality, gospel singers, street riots, cars doing donuts, the video game *Grand Theft Auto V*, computer-generated images of West, the rapper’s daughter at a Sunday service, and many more. All of these devices create a disturbing collage, which might be interpreted as a reflection of the rapper’s fragile mental state amidst the chaos of the year 2020, and his desperate need for spiritual guidance. All these examples prove that elements of Afro-Surrealism now have a significant presence in contemporary African American popular culture.

Intertextual Strategies

Afro-Surrealists often turn to satire and parody, and the target of their mockery is usually white America and its culture. It can be as simple as poking fun at the ignorance or moral panic of individuals, as in the case of the opening scene of the *Atlanta* episode “Money Bag Shawty,” which reimagines a popular viral video of a religious suburban mother brought to tears by the vulgarity of rap lyrics (originally Vince Staples’ “Norf Norf,” and a Paper Boi song in the parody). The video for Jay-Z’s “Moonlight” features a recreation of an episode of the popular series *Friends* with an all-black cast, which is also an example of a very direct and specific parody. Other times, satire can be used for more nuanced commentary on white mainstream media and representation. An extended sketch from episode 5 of *Random Acts of Flyness* follows the production process of a major Hollywood film, which concerns an unspecified African war involving child soldiers, but told through the lens of a heroic white man (the ‘white savior’ or ‘white angel’ trope). The casting professionals also treat black child actors instrumentally throughout, seeing them as living props whose purpose is to evoke strong emotions in the viewers. The sketch is played in a straight-faced manner, but the satire on ongoing trends and narrative biases in film is apparent, “playing with ideas of Hollywood’s self-satisfaction, exploitation of black suffering and virtue signaling” (Bakare).

Random Acts of Flyness also features other satirical oddities like fake news reports, such as the one discussing whether white babies are born racist in episode 6, and advertisements for nonexistent products and services: in episode 1, actor Jon Hamm endorses “White Be Gone,” an ointment for easing “white thoughts” (ranging from ones of extreme bigotry to “I read Chomsky, I can’t be racist”); and in episode 3, Nance announces his project “Bitch Better Have My Money,” which can be described as a dating app for securing reparations for slavery from white families who acquired their wealth in unjust means. The *Atlanta* episode “B.A.N.” (short for Black American Network), has a similar premise of parodying daytime television, combining bizarre humor with

signaling unresolved social issues. It features a talk show “Montague” in which Alfred AKA Paper Boi is berated for a tweet interpreted as transphobic, which extends to a general condemnation of rap music as regressive by the show’s hosts; the “Transracial” segment, which is a human interest story on a black teenager who identifies himself as a 35-year old white man, while rejecting his original ethnic identity and the African American community; as well as a number of parodies of advertisements, most notably for the cereal “Coconut Crunchos”—the clichéd formula of a cartoon wolf stealing cereal from children takes a dark turn in a scene of police brutality, with the officer kneeling on the wolf’s neck (note that this episode was produced four years before the George Floyd incident) and the children begging the policeman to stop, willing to give up their cereal.

Another common aspect of the modern Afro-Surrealist media is a strong connection to hip-hop culture. As already mentioned, many of the creatives behind these films and shows have a background in rap, most notably Glover/Gambino and Boots Riley. Occasionally, the main characters are also associated with the music industry—in *Atlanta*, Earn is learning to manage his cousin Alfred’s career as small-time rapper Paper Boi, and plots of many episodes focus on their struggle for success and day-to-day dealings with fans, rivals and studio executives. Hip-hop music features prominently on soundtracks to practically every Afro-Surrealist film, the characters routinely reference rappers and rap lyrics in dialogue, famous artists appear in cameos (e.g. the Migos trio as drug dealers in the *Atlanta* episode “Go for Broke”), and the films are often set in places with historical significance for the development of hip-hop (*Atlanta* in its namesake show, the San Francisco Bay Area in *Blindspotting* and *Sorry to Bother You*).

Rapping can also be seen as an alternative form of self-expression and a kind of universal language of minority communities. *Blindspotting* explores this by delivering a lot of its dialogue in a nearly theatrical manner, with characters constantly speaking in a kind of an *a cappella* recitative, prone to monologues

and long-winded, free-flowing utterances. Collin's ultimate confrontation with the racist killer cop Molina is a resentment-fuelled freestyle soliloquy, in which he remarks "I say it while I'm rapping, ni—a, 'cause everyone conditioned to listen to a rapping ni—a," expressing how rap is often the only medium through which Black voices are heard and acknowledged on a larger scale.

African American men are also stereotypically expected to be naturally talented rappers, which is obviously not always the case. In *Sorry to Bother You*, Cassius is pushed by the corporate elites to perform for them, despite him insisting he is an embarrassingly bad rapper. After a few unsuccessful verses of trivial rhymes, the protagonist settles on rhythmically repeating the words "ni—a" and "shit" in various combinations. The nearly all-white crowd cheers him on and chants the improvised lyrics right back, embracing the banality, while being troublingly comfortable with shouting the n-word.

Afro-Surrealist films are full of intertextual references and this is not limited to just hip-hop, other works of popular culture, or celebrities. They often bring up historical figures, events and iconography, which the viewer is required to be familiar with in order to grasp all of the given text's meanings. Clips such as the aforementioned "The Story of O.J." or "This Is America" bring back images of slavery, segregation and later instances of systemic discrimination and violence (a reenactment of the 2015 Charleston church shooting in Gambino's video is worth noting), 'weaponizing' them in order to comment on how the issues of racism are far from resolved in contemporary society—Jay-Z laments in the chorus of "O.J." that no matter how rich and successful he becomes, internally he feels he is still subjected to discrimination, just with different labels added to the n-word. Also notable are the historical allusions in Jordan Peele's films, which often enhance the eery, oppressive atmosphere of the scenes—a grisly parody of a slave auction in *Get Out* or the numerous images referring back to the dark realities of the Ronald Reagan era in *Us* (see Marcotte), to name a few.

To present how this specific intertextuality, often strongly associated with Black culture and history, can be a crucial element of the narrative, one may

also look at the dialogue in *Atlanta*. Below I present a piece of a dialogue from the very first episode—this is a scene in which Earn, desperate for money, visits his cousin Alfred with an offer of working as his manager. It also serves as an introduction of the major characters to viewers:

Earn: I don't want a handout. I want to manage you.

Alfred: Manage me? You know where the word "manage" come from?

Earn: "Manus," Latin for hand.

Alfred: Probably, but I'm gonna say no for the purpose of my argument. "Manage" come from the word "man," and, uh, that ain't really your lane.

Earn: My lane?

Alfred: Yeah, man, I need Malcolm. You too Martin. You know what they did to him? They killed him.

Earn: Didn't they kill Malcolm too?

Darius: Oh, no, no, no, they say that. But ain't nobody seen the body since the funeral.

Earn: That's how funerals work. Alfred, you already Malcolm, okay? You have that already. What you really need is a silent wild card, somebody who's about the money, the opportunity, who can play both sides if needed.

Darius: Oh, like Don Lemon. (1.1: The Big Bang)

This short, quick-witted exchange requires the viewer to have some basic knowledge about who Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were, as well as strong connotations with what their names represent. The off-color reference to liberal journalist Don Lemon made by Darius seems like a minor stab at the figure's controversial centrist views, however it is not as significant here. The major purpose these references serve is establishing character. Earn is labeled as the 'Martin' of the group, meaning the more pacifist, good-natured intellectual (also proven by his knowledge of the exact etymology of the word "manager"). Alfred establishes himself as a strong believer in traditional, aggressive masculinity; therefore, he is the 'Malcolm.' Finally, Darius' otherworldly comments and doubts about whether Malcolm X is actually dead, establish him as the oddball 'conspiracy nut' of the gang. This is just one example of *Atlanta's* continuous use of intertextuality as an inseparable part of its storytelling, which extends to other Afro-Surrealist texts.

The Politics of Afro-Surrealism

Both Afro-Surrealist films and the Black Lives Matter movement running parallel to their increasing popularity are often very critical of American capitalism and expose how much of it is built upon discriminatory politics. Of course not all artists associated with Afro-Surrealism up to this point are avid revolutionaries, seeing that Jay-Z, for instance, is a billionaire who in “The Story of O.J.” criticizes the injustices of capitalism, while also endorsing the spirit of entrepreneurship and seeing the strategic exploitation of the free market as the only means of breaking the cycle of hardships for African Americans.

Generally, the themes of poverty, class struggle and criminalization are ever-present in Afro-Surrealism, as already suggested by their association with hood films. Much of *Atlanta*, especially the first season, focuses on Earn’s economic precarity. He is a college dropout who struggles to hold a job, cannot afford to support his girlfriend and child, so he continues to live in a storage unit; a single dinner date can put him on the edge of bankruptcy (the episode “Go for Broke”), and later he also has ongoing parole obligations, such as expensive classes and drug tests. This situation appears inescapable, a prime example of a “glass ceiling” determining the social position of a huge portion of African Americans (Urbańska 2019: 64), which is effectively summed up in the episode “The Streisand Effect.” After failing to pawn his cellphone, Earn is manipulated by Darius into joining an elaborate dog breeding venture, which promises returns in a matter of months. Earn responds to this long-term plan in simple and honest words: “Poor people don’t have time for investments, because poor people are too busy trying not to be poor.”

However, the most explicit anti-capitalist statement of Afro-Surrealism is by far *Sorry to Bother You*. This is expected for those familiar with the film’s director. Boots Riley is an outspoken communist, whose parents were social justice activists, he himself joined the Marxist-Leninist Progressive Labor Party at the age of 15, and he founded the very political rap group, The Coup (with hit singles and albums such as “Kill My Landlord,” “5 Million Ways to Kill A CEO,”

or “The Guillotine”). He stated in multiple interviews that he expects his debut film to inspire unionizing and revolutionary attitudes (see e.g. *Democracy Now!*). *Sorry to Bother You*, yet again, features a protagonist in a bad financial situation (Cassius lives in a garage at the start of the film) and working a menial job. Telemarketing as presented in the film can be seen as a typical job of late capitalism, since it involves the coercion of incidental people into buying products and services they would probably not even think about otherwise, disguised behind false corporate politeness—the titular phrase “sorry to bother you.” The employees must follow one rule: “Stick To The Script.” This “script” can also be understood in a metaphorical sense as the fixed determinism of the system—by using his “white man’s voice,” Cassius manages to break the script of capitalism and access the higher social strata. The world of the wealthy elites is presented as ugly and appalling, defined by drug abuse, sexual orgies and, of course, exploitation of workers taken to the extreme by the invention of the dehumanized Equisapiens slaves. Disillusioned with the vices of the capitalist world, Cassius decides to go back to his unionizing friends, which he rejected before, saving his soul by joining the revolution, whatever the cost may be for him.

Interestingly, this revolutionary dimension of Afro-Surrealism could also be connected to Bakhtin’s commentary on the political underpinnings of carnival, which were inseparable from the previously discussed grotesque aesthetics. The scholar saw the medieval carnival as a form of social resistance: a bustle of lively folk culture running in opposition to the dominant narratives, hierarchies and decorum of the ‘old order’ represented by the aristocracy, nobles and the clergy (Bakhtin 154). It used excessive, corporeal imagery of gluttony and wastefulness in order to, for example, lampoon the rituals of the ruling classes, with laughter and folly seen as challenges to “the monolith of the Christian cult and ideology” (74–75). It is not hard to see Afro-Surrealism as possibly a new incarnation of the carnivalesque—defiant, unapologetic works of popular culture which serve both as boundless entertainment and a challenge to an

unjust system built on a dangerous marriage of capitalism and white supremacy.

Anti-capitalism is often intersectional with a distrust towards state institutions such as the police. The Black Lives Matter movement openly advocates for defunding American police forces, which is understandable, knowing their history of racist violence and the overpolicing of minority neighborhoods during controversial programs, such as “the war on drugs” of the Reagan era. The primary function of police, since its inception, has been protecting private property, the state’s interests and monopolies. As Kropotkin put it:

Magistrature, police, army, public institution, finance, all serve one God—capital; all have but one object—to facilitate the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist. (Kropotkin 16)

Afro-Surrealist films never present the police in a positive light. They are either nowhere to be found in situations of need, bring discomfort or a threat of violence and death, or are a depersonalized mob which breaks up peaceful protests, as in *Sorry to Bother You*. The only slightly developed character of a police officer is Molina from *Blindspotting*, who initially appears as a bit of a caricature, obsessed with his job, which he treats as an identity (his garage is full of police-related memorabilia), but his discernible look of terror at the prospect of death during the confrontation with Collin may be seen as humanizing.

Last but not least, Afro-Surrealist films often explore the complexities of Black identity and challenge orthodox ideas about what it means to be Black. Whether it is by the criticism of toxic masculinity found in the tradition of gangsta rap, to which *Atlanta*’s Earn falls victim when attempting to prove himself as up to the standards of the violent world of hip-hop (episodes “The Club” and “North of the Border”), while also being complicit in this toxicity; or by the inclusion of black queer and female voices, most notably in many sketches of *Random Acts of Flyness*. *Atlanta* also discussed how ethnic identity can be erased and never reclaimed (“Juneteenth”), how Blackness can be in fact

chosen (the conversation on biraciality between Vanessa and Christina in “Helen”), and how intersectional issues complicate matters of injustice even further, since all minority groups cannot automatically be allies just based on their experience of discrimination (accusations of transphobia, homophobia and misogyny thrown at Alfred in “B.A.N”). The intricacies of identity politics in Afro-Surrealist works could warrant a separate analysis.

Conclusions

The trend of Afro-Surrealism is a refreshing development in the context of African American popular culture, which has been dominated by stark realism, pathos and martyrdom for many years. Following D. Scot Miller’s ideas about the Black Experience being surreal in and of itself, these works definitely succeed in emphasizing this surreality, with their flair for bold stylistic experimentation, dark humor, visual inventiveness, unpredictable storytelling, thematic complexity and creative ways of tackling issues of social relevance. They may not all be spectacular in terms of popularity—*Random Acts of Flyness*, for instance, was cancelled after only six episodes, which is unsurprising, due to its unorthodox form, elaborate intertextuality, and challenging themes and ideas, which may have alienated many non-black viewers (see Narcisse). But the success of Jordan Peele’s horror-comedies, the prevalence of Afro-Surreal elements in music videos, and the renewal of *Atlanta* for at least two more seasons, enable high expectations for more developments in the style. There are certainly still other aspects of the Black Experience that need to be addressed, calling for similarly complex artistic representation. The analyzed works may be just the beginning of a larger phenomenon, which will create even more space for unrestrained expression of marginalized voices, who will be more widely heard and acknowledged. Afro-Surrealism appears primarily as works made by black people for black people, but with their aesthetic uniqueness and effectively communicated ideas and emotions, they have

potential to reach diverse audiences and help build empathy for experiences that might be vastly different from their own.

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Abstract

In the article, I analyse the implementation of Afro-Surrealist stylistic elements in mainstream American media, such as films, TV shows, and music videos. This phenomenon runs parallel to the Black Lives Matter movement, the emergence of new discourses on identity politics, and a general flair for experimentation among African American artists in popular culture. I begin by tracing the history of ideas on African counterparts to Surrealism, from poets of the *Négritude* movement to D. Scot's Miller 2009 "Afrosurreal Manifesto" (which popularized the term), and the developments that followed. I then proceed to produce a set of methodological categories, which can be used to analyze contemporary forms of Afro-Surrealism in media. These categories include: the grotesque, intergenericity, intertextuality, and anti-capitalist themes. I explore these ideas in confrontation with many examples, noting the different ways these strategies are applied in recent works of African American artists (such as Donald Glover's TV series *Atlanta* and Boots Riley's film *Sorry to Bother You*), in particular the unique ways in which they combine entertainment with social commentary.

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REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA AND PTSD IN THE NETFLIX SERIES

BOJACK HORSEMAN: THE CASE OF GINA CAZADOR

Keywords: trauma, PTSD, representation, popular culture, BoJack Horseman

Introduction

The importance of talking about difficult events one has gone through might seem to be a crucial part of human experience. However, there are certain events, or even series of events, that are not only nearly impossible to describe in words, but also not fully comprehended by the person who is supposedly the only one capable of remembering them vividly. Such an inability might be oftentimes associated with a traumatized person's experiences. In her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth claims that "[t]o be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (4–5). How, then, could someone trapped in such a situation properly express it, and eventually, escape it? Furthermore, in what way can such an event be presented to a viewer, and still be recognized as one stemming from a traumatic encounter?

Although the discussion on trauma, along with its related symptoms and possible cures, was initiated in the 19th century—the time of modernity and industrialization (Kaplan 24), to this day it remains a relevant element of academic inquiry and finds its way into popular culture. It could be, thus, assumed that despite certain challenges in representing the unrepresentable, there still exists a need for continuing such debate.

This article focuses on the elements of trauma represented in the Netflix animated series, *BoJack Horseman*. The series revolves around the life of BoJack Horseman, introduced as a has-been actor whose career peaked in the 1990s and who is willing to get his life back on track. Although *BoJack Horseman* is an animated series for adults, it touches upon various issues connected to the psyche of the characters, even those who appear merely in a few episodes. The creator of *BoJack Horseman*—Raphael Bob-Waksberg—tried to explain the complexity of characters during a master class entitled *I am Smart and Everyone Else is Wrong*:

[It] always come[s] from: what are our characters experiencing, and can we be truthful and honest about their experience? (...) We do want our characters to be likable, but likable doesn't always mean that they're admirable. I think that what makes characters likable is if they're relatable, and what makes them relatable is if they're vulnerable.¹

Throughout the series the viewer gets to dive deeper into various aspects of BoJack's life, exploring, *inter alia*, how dysfunctional his character is, and what might have been the cause for it. The six-season-long series manages to include numerous characters and explore plot lines that lead to creating an image of the rise and fall of the traumatized main character who traumatizes others.

As in the series trauma constantly recurs in various contexts, for the purpose of this article I will focus on Gina Cazador, a guest character of the fifth and sixth season of the series. I have chosen this character as she is the one who exhibits various symptoms of trauma; some of these symptoms can be traced directly to traumatic events while others seem disconnected and ambiguous. In addition, as trauma is often associated with significant (and difficult) historical events (e.g. the Holocaust or 9/11), and not necessarily with individual experiences, it seems to be an opportunity to, as if, juxtapose the usual expectations with reality, as the series focuses mainly on personal trauma. The case of Gina Cazador is particularly interesting because she is a guest character whose trauma gets represented not only in detail, but also in such a manner that viewers get to see three stages she goes through: before trauma, experiencing the traumatic event and what comes after it.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that discussion on trauma “has been so prominent in a number of contemporary Western discourses (...) that scholars describe the contemporary North American society as ‘wound culture’” (Wald 93). As a result, the fascination with psyche and its malfunction finds its way into popular culture. Thus, by including characters who show symptoms of trauma, it contributes in approachable ways to raising awareness.

The Events Leading up to Traumatization

In order to recognize and analyze the traumatization of the character and the changes she eventually goes through, it is crucial to provide a detailed description of the events that precede the traumatic event. Gina Cazador is a guest character who first appears in the episode entitled “The Light Bulb Scene.” She is a co-star of *Philbert*—a show represented in the series, which, according to the writer of the said show, Flip McVicker, tells the story of the “Detective John Philbert, a man from another time. But now he finds himself in a new time. He finds himself in a time he doesn’t understand. A time in which he is alone. Perhaps, all this time, he’s been alone” (*BoJack* 4.12). Even though the writer vaguely describes the show, he emphasizes that it is about detectives, one of whom is played by Gina. In the represented show, Cazador plays the role of Internal Affairs Director, Sassy Malone, who becomes the main love interest of the titular character—Philbert. What ought to be mentioned is the recurring theme of choking, as Philbert is haunted by the memories of his ex-partner strangling his (Philbert’s) wife.

One of the areas affected by trauma is the characters’ attitude to their profession. When the viewer is first introduced to Gina, she is a cynical but focused actress who still awaits her career to properly start. When she is asked by BoJack whether she feels that some changes should be introduced in the script, she simply says, “[l]ook, I do one of these shows every year. And I keep getting hired because I show up, do the work, and keep my head down” (*BoJack* 5.1). It is particularly important to refer to her outlook and general approach

she takes to work, as it changes drastically after her traumatic encounter. What can be, thus, assumed from such a short phrasing is that Gina does not necessarily care much about her roles, but remains focused on what she is told to do, even if it includes sudden changes. It seems as though her character is constructed in such a manner as to clearly show that traumatization leads to significant changes in various aspects of life.

Throughout the 5th season, the relationship between Gina and BoJack grows, to the point that they end up spending time together both on set and outside of it. This bond leads to blurring of the boundary between the private and the professional sphere, and supposedly later on makes it feasible for the traumatic encounter to actually happen. During the official premiere of the first season of the show, Gina finally gets critically acclaimed and becomes recognizable for the press, which was something she aspired to achieve. In the meantime, BoJack is reminded about his past dysfunctional and harmful behaviors, which leads him to dive deeper into his opioid addiction, as he tries to numb his self-hatred. His addiction eventually leads to a drastic traumatization of Gina.

In the episode entitled "The Showstopper," the viewer is faced with two realities intertwining. Particularly worth noticing is the fact that in both of them Gina and Sassy maintain a close relationship with BoJack/Philbert. The episode is constructed in such a way to show BoJack's difficulties with differentiating between what is real and what is fictional (as at this point the filming of the second season of *Philbert* starts). BoJack begins to highly depend on opioids, and thus, is not able to distinguish between what happens in his real life and what happens in the life of the character he portrays. As a result, he becomes paranoid and convinces himself, and everyone around him, that there is someone plotting to end his career. In both realities he gets confronted by Gina/Sassy. When it comes to Gina, she tries to take away his pills; Sassy, in turn, tries to convince him to turn himself in. When both Gina and Sassy refuse to stop their efforts, BoJack/Philbert starts strangling them. As it eventually

turns out, the act of choking is a part of the filmed scene. However, BoJack continues to aggressively strangle Gina, even after the director tells him to stop—he does not seem to fully comprehend his own behavior. The blurred boundary between the professional and personal life leads to fictional events finding their way into real life. Fellow cast members are the ones who eventually pull BoJack away from Gina, whose eyes are filled with tears, as she is almost throttled to death by not only the co-star of the show she is the part of, but also her partner, who was one of the very few people she trusted. Interestingly enough, the episode entitled “BoJack the Feminist” as if foreshadows the aforementioned event: BoJack ends up in the show called *The Squawk* in which he is praised “for taking a stand against [his] co-star” (*BoJack* 5.4) who choked his wife. The irony of this foreshadowing scene is revealed when BoJack, encouraged by the hosts and the audience of the talk-show, says: “how about we don’t choke *any* women?” (*BoJack* 5.4).

The Aftermath of Trauma: Representation of PTSD

In the episode following the one featuring the choking scene, possibly most viewers would expect the character of Gina Cazador to exhibit at least some symptoms of trauma, as she faced a near-death experience. However, trauma, and specifically its aftermath in the form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is, according to Cathy Caruth:

a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (4)

What is evident in this brief definition of PTSD and specifically applicable to Gina’s situation is the fact that a traumatic experience is not processed automatically and, thus, the response does not have to follow right after it. Gina does not seem to exhibit any symptoms of trauma, which may suggest that the event described above, albeit drastic and terrifying, might have simply not affected her. However, it is important to note that, as it is stated in Caruth’s

definition, someone who encounters a traumatic experience themselves might (un)consciously “numb” the very occurrence of it, which is a form of self-defense against the overwhelming feeling trauma can bring. Gina is well aware of what happened, yet she seems to avoid labeling it as something that is traumatic in its nature.

The central part of the episode revolves around the strangling scene, as cast-members leak the videos of BoJack choking Gina. Interestingly enough, BoJack is not aware of what he did to his partner; he still sobers up after his opioid spree. After agreeing to take part in an interview that is supposed to provide some space to explain the situation, he is shown the video and finally realizes the harm he has done to Gina. His immediate reaction is to make the public aware of what he did, but Gina is the one who talks him out of it. As she explains,

It was assault. You physically overpowered me, and if there was any justice, you would be in jail right now. But my career after so many failed attempts is finally starting to take off. I am getting offers, and fan mail, and magazine columns about what a good actor I am. People know me because of my acting. And all that goes away if I'm just the girl who got choked by BoJack Horseman. (*BoJack* 5.12)

Although Gina seems to remain aware of what happened, as she is able to verbalize her fears of this event being known by the public, this might also be interpreted as an early onset of trauma. According to Julia Golier, Rachel Yahuda and Steven Southwick in “Memory and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” “[i]n order to meet criteria for PTSD, the individual must experience a host of symptoms from the three symptom clusters: re-experiencing, avoidance, and arousal” (226). Gina exhibits symptoms of fear of being stigmatized because of her traumatic experience and, hence, reacts with avoidance. On the one hand, she is aware of the life-threatening event; on the other hand, she insists on it never being discussed in terms of trauma. Consequently, she puts effort into convincing the public that the videos they might have seen are nothing more than an acted scene. It appears that she is simultaneously able to talk about the traumatic event and to avoid attributing any association with trauma to it.

The point of the interview is to debunk the accusations of any form of abuse happening on set. Interestingly enough, the viewers and the host of the interview are still convinced that Gina and BoJack are a couple, and to appear authentic the actors agree to kiss each other. Gina and BoJack confirm the questions concerning the status of their relationship, which leads the TV hostess to jokingly suggest: "I'll bet sometimes, though, you wanna strangle each other, right?" (*BoJack* 5.12). Subsequently Gina stands up and pretends she is choking BoJack so as to try to convince the world that she is not his victim, and that all of it was a joke. It could be assumed that recreating such a traumatic event roughly a few hours after it happened would evoke strong emotions, such as disgust or embarrassment. Although subtle, the facial expression of Gina, after jokingly pretending to choke BoJack, seems to reveal uneasiness, or even shame about the whole situation. In *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Malady or Myth?*, Chris Brewin points to the fact that victims of trauma oftentimes feel shame which

reflects undesired *thoughts, impulses, actions, or characteristics* that are experienced as inferior or unworthy and that must be concealed in order to forestall rejection by others. (...) The trauma is experienced as a personal failure and acts as a prompt that reinstates the undesired self and causes victims to ruminate on other perceived deficiencies. (78)

Gina, precisely, seems to be afraid of suddenly being remembered as "the girl who got choked by BoJack Horseman" (*BoJack* 5.12). She experiences shame of being a victim of trauma and, thus, puts effort into never being recognized as such. In the end, the show *Philbert* gets cancelled and Gina is able to avoid BoJack, possibly for the rest of her life.

As a guest character, Gina does not appear regularly in the sixth, and final, season of the series; however, her appearance in episode eight serves as the basis for further discussion of the development of her PTSD. As it turns out, she never stopped working as an actress and in the episode the viewer gets to see her working on a new film. In the scene she reacts with anger to being given new pages of the script. When the producer of the film visits her in her trailer

and asks her about the problem with new pages, she tries to explain her irritation by saying: “[t]he content of the pages is not the issue (...) Why are you throwing new things at me?” (*BoJack* 6.8). In addition, she points to the fact that the producer entered her trailer unexpectedly, which only added to her frustration. The producer of the film reassures Gina of the safety of the new scenes, involving a stunt, “we are taking every precaution and we are not gonna shoot until you are one hundred percent comfortable” (*BoJack* 6.8). Only after making sure the scene is going to be safe for her, she is able to calm down. Gina’s need for order and irritation resulting from changes in the script are yet another sign of unprocessed trauma. In addition to that, throughout the scene, she, most possibly involuntarily, keeps touching her neck. Touching one’s neck might be a sign of stress or discomfort, but in her case it happens quite automatically when she is faced with changes that disrupt the order she tries to maintain while working in a setting full of potentially triggering objects. Gina links experiences that disrupt the order with her traumatic experience. She unwillingly touches her neck, as if being ready to react the same way she would have if she had known she was about to be choked. Her behavior does not, however, stem from her attitude; she, in fact, exhibits another symptom of PTSD: “hyperarousal” (Golier et al. 226). Hyperarousal can be observed in a situation in which

[t]he individual chronically appears to be living with a “memory” of threat or danger that persists often outside of the individual’s conscious awareness. The mind and body seem to respond as if a threat or danger is still present even years after having survived. (Golier et al. 229–230)

It is clearly visible in Gina’s behavior that she is constantly haunted by the traumatic experience. Her need for certain order to be kept and her irritation, or even fear of sudden action, is precisely what could be associated with hyperarousal, as she recognizes the possible dangers that might await her in a particular setting.

The final scene featuring Gina is possibly the one that represents her trauma most vividly. The viewer gets to see her on set, about to film a rehearsed dance

scene. While filming the scene, her co-star decides not to follow the script, and so he dips her and holds her by her neck. She freezes for a second but then suddenly tries to release herself from his hands. Her reaction is sudden and unexpected if one considers the perspective of a random viewer, but it seems appropriate if one is aware of her traumatic experience. It seems that emotionally she is not able to distinguish between BoJack's almost choking her to death and an innocent neck holding by another actor. It could also be assumed that the context in which it happened might have caused such an instantaneous reaction. Yet again her behavior could be characterized as exhibiting symptoms of PTSD, specifically that of re-experiencing trauma:

[T]he clarity and certainty that accompany reliving experiences [are] qualities which contribute to their being perceived as current reality. Visual images often predominate in flashbacks, but smells, sounds, and tastes can be incorporated as well. An array of emotions present during the initial traumatization may accompany the images, including fear, rage, excitement, or helplessness. During a flashback a patient may not only feel but also act as if the event were recurring. He or she may duck for cover or act violently in perceived self-defense. (Golier et al. 227)

Gina goes through a range of emotions, from obvious fear to anger caused by the disruption of order. When she tries to express the impact the sudden change had on her, she is told to cool down, to which she responds: "Do not tell me to cool down like I'm the crazy person here. I'm just trying to have a safe workplace environment" (*BoJack* 6.8). After experiencing an intense trauma symptom, Gina decides to quit the movie. Nevertheless, the viewer is able to see a poster of her new movie in the series finale, which might hint that she continued to work as an actress. The question whether she dealt with her PTSD, however, remains unanswered.

Conclusions

Throughout *BoJack Horseman*, the viewer is presented with various realizations of trauma, even when it comes to background and guest characters. Trauma is often associated with its inherent unrepresentability, and thus demands to be approached in different ways, as noted in *Violence and the Cultural Politics of*

Trauma by Jane Kilby:

it remains permanently outside the power of language. Or perhaps more accurately, trauma resists the grasp of language—and with it the grasp of the subject—not because it remains in some space or indeed time outside of discourse but because it has no meaning to offer language. (122)

It could be, then, concluded that representing trauma via image, rather than language, might make the experience more approachable and graspable.² As Anne Whitehead notices in *Memory*, “[t]he ‘memory’ of trauma is thus not subject to the usual narrative or verbal mechanisms of recall, but is instead organized as bodily sensations, behavioural reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks” (115). Therefore, the audio-visual narrative, rather than merely verbal and language-based, enables such behavior to be effectively represented on screen and to be recognized as directly stemming from trauma. Trauma is closely related to pain, and historically, wounding, and this characteristic oftentimes contributes to one’s inability to translate the pain into words, as it introduces disorder and illogical turns that are difficult to express in a verbal narrative.

In the case of the character discussed in this article, the viewer gets to observe almost the entire story and progression of trauma: from the traumatic event to experiencing symptoms of PTSD. The way in which the creators of the series decided not only to include the event itself, but also to present the aftermath of it, may lead to thinking that it is, indeed, possible to represent the unrepresentable. Although certain elements of the initial traumatic response (such as the demand for order, or hypervigilance) can go unnoticed by a passive viewer who does not know enough about symptoms of trauma, the creators of the series made sure to include more visual aspects that are immediately recognized as the symptoms of PTSD, e.g. the scene in which the co-star Gina works with unexpectedly dips her and holds her by her neck, which, as if automatically, makes her relive the traumatic experience.

An effective representation of trauma may contribute to further reflection on it, making it a more graspable subject for someone who is not yet familiar

with the mechanisms of trauma. One could, however, pose a question: what is the point of representing horrifying events on screen? Does it merely add dramatism to the series, or could it serve some other purpose? I propose that a well-executed representation may serve to spread awareness about trauma and its symptoms. It could also prove beneficial for the people who share similar experiences to be represented in mainstream programs and shown that trauma should not be something one has to be ashamed of. Carl Plantinga in *Moving Viewers* comments on the possible reason why the viewers can be drawn to works which represent dramatic and/or traumatic events:

When spectators empathize with a character, they may or may not feel something similar to what she or he feels, but it is rarely the same affect, and it is always tempered by the implicit awareness of the institutions of fiction and the viewing situation. (Plantinga 33)

Undoubtedly, it is possible for a viewer to hold a connection to a character in a fictional work and show compassion towards their situation and feelings, despite being aware of their inherent fictionality. In that manner, a well-executed representation could be, as if, a point of reference for those who might recognize similarities to their own situation. Moreover, as “[e]motions are intimately tied to our cognition, inferences, evaluation, and all of the other mental activities that accompany the viewing experience” (Plantinga 6), it could be, thus, concluded that a properly represented trauma could possibly contribute to the viewer’s understanding of the (lack of) logic in a traumatic encounter and its aftermath.

By representing problematic or difficult aspects of life, the series gives space for those people who do not necessarily know how to talk about what happened to them. The creator of *BoJack Horseman* managed to precisely describe the effect the series has had on the audience during his masterclass:

It’s really very powerful to me to see how emotionally touched fans are, and specifically the way that it’s helped them (...) like people saying ‘oh, you gave me a language to talk to my therapist’, or even the inspiration to go to a therapist (...) I can explain to my parents, or my spouse, or my partner how I feel about things.³

If one takes into consideration the fact that a traumatized person is often simply not ready, or even unable to talk about their trauma, the series might serve as a starting point for such a discussion, and the responses from the fans seem to prove that.⁴

Endnotes

1. Raphael Bob-Waksberg, master class *I am Smart and Everyone Else is Wrong*, organized by the Gershan Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival. It was part of the Fall Fest 2020. The master class took place on November 15th, 2020 via Zoom.
2. The visual, rather than solely language-based representation of trauma and the process of working it through has been discussed in various works, e.g. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, in which Marianne Hirsch presents examples of the Holocaust survivors' children approaching their inherited trauma(s) by using the means of visual arts.
3. Raphael Bob-Waksberg, master class *I am Smart and Everyone Else is Wrong*.
4. The fans of *BoJack Horseman* gather in various groups on social media not only to discuss their favorite characters or episodes, but also to share their personal struggles and the ways in which the series has helped them to deal with those problems. Noticeably, in groups such as BoJack Horseman Sadposting (Facebook) *BoJack* fans try to bring each other comfort and give each other advice, oftentimes using the show as their point of reference.

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TV series

BoJack Horseman. 2014–2020. Created by R. Bob-Waksberg:

- 4.12: What Time Is It Right Now
- 5.1: The Light Bulb Scene
- 5.4: BoJack the Feminist
- 5.9: Ancient History
- 5.11: The Showstopper
- 5.12: The Stopped Show
- 6.8: A Quick One While He's Away

Abstract

The aim of this article is to conduct an analysis of trauma and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) as represented by Gina Cazador, a character in the Netflix animated series *BoJack Horseman*. In the article, I try to analyze not only how a traumatic experience is shown on screen, but also the events leading to it, and the aftermath of it. By referring to the theory of trauma, I try to prove that after encountering a life-threatening situation the character goes through many changes, majority of which are reflected in her behavior, and that these changes stem from unprocessed trauma.

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APPROACHING THE SUBLIME IN *CHERNOBYL* (2019)

Keywords: the sublime, Chernobyl, nuclear power, atomic disasters, TV series

On the 6th of August, 1945, the city of Hiroshima ceased to exist; on the 9th, Nagasaki met the same fate. In the span of a few seconds they were vaporized by an explosion that left in its wake an enormous and eerie mushroom-shaped cloud. As Deudney reminds us, these two events marked the end of one of the most devastating wars in history, and the beginning of a new era, in which superpowers could easily destroy one another with the use of their nuclear arsenals. During the Cold War, the concept was appropriately called MAD, i.e. Mutual Assured Destruction (Deudney 32-33). This meant that conflicts could be resolved not by sending thousands of soldiers to their deaths and preparing detailed plans of invasions, but, instead, with one submarine, one bomber plane, or one missile. The hypothetical global conflict would be over in a few seconds. The power of the atomic bomb made the world seem suddenly fragile and unstable.

Significantly, the results went beyond the inventors' expectations: what they had created escaped their own comprehension and complicated their emotional response. From an aesthetic point of view, the sight was remarkable. J. Robert Oppenheimer famously quoted the Hindu scriptures to describe what he felt after witnessing the detonation: "I am become Death, destroyer of worlds" (in Rhodes 672).

Physical manifestations of nuclear power are among the most striking examples of the sublime in man-made objects. The perplexing nature of this

force has drawn the attention of researchers, writers, and filmmakers. As I claim in this article, one of the recent examples is the HBO mini-series *Chernobyl* (2019), written by Craig Mazin and directed by Johan Renck, outlining the April 26, 1986 disaster at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. Due to the critical flaw in the design of the RBMK reactor and the operators' mismanagement of it, Reactor Number Four exploded. The radioactive material released from the facility contaminated the area near Chernobyl and Pripyat, after which the smoke cloud created in the explosion spread the radiation across the continent (Higginbotham 2019b: ch. 10). Undoubtedly, in its various ramifications, it was a disaster on a global scale (Belarus, Ministry for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus 6). While the Chernobyl catastrophe is possibly the most well-known, it is—as Kate Brown argues in *Plutopia*—far from the only example of severe consequences of mismanaging nuclear power (2013: Introduction). What the HBO series provides is a dramatized version of the events, focused on the tremendous effort to contain the spread of the radioactive material; another important aspect here is uncovering the true causes of the explosion, despite the Soviet regime's determination to conceal them.

This article is part of a larger project, devoted to representations of nuclear power and their relationship to sublime poetics. This paper's specific goal, however, is to demonstrate how the *Chernobyl* series engages the sublime to address the visual aspects of the disaster. For this purpose, images such as the pillar of ionized air or the burning reactor core, often interspersed with shots of stunned onlookers, will be discussed. The chosen images are strictly connected to the crucial point of the disaster, which is the explosion of Reactor Number Four. Only two episodes refer directly to the explosion and its immediate aftermath, while the rest of the series deals with other aspects of the disaster, such as the effects of Acute Radiation Poisoning (*Open Wide, O Earth*) or the work of the Liquidators in the Exclusion Zone (*The Happiness of All Mankind*).

Theoretical Aspects of the Sublime

In *American Technological Sublime*, David Nye defines this key term as a sensation of “repeated experiences of awe and wonder, often tinged with an element of terror” (XVI). More broadly, he describes the encounter in the following way:

An object, natural or man-made, disrupts ordinary perception and astonishes the senses, forcing the observer to grapple mentally with its immensity and power. This amazement occurs most easily when the observer is not prepared for it; however, like religious conversion at a camp meeting, it can also occur over a period of days as internal resistance melts away. Kant distinguished between the mathematical and the dynamic sublime. In either case he expected that in the aftermath of the immediate experience the individual would become conscious of ‘our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us.’ (Nye 15-16)

According to this description, what is needed for the sublime to occur is a specific object (broadly understood) possessing qualities that will shake the observer to their very core. For a long time, the sublime was associated mostly with awe-inspiring natural objects or phenomena. Immanuel Kant, one of the theory’s founders, offers the following examples:

[B]old, overhanging and, as it were threatening cliffs, thunderclouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, volcanoes, with all their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river. (in Nye 7)

The objects in question share certain qualities such as vastness, grandeur and—in some cases—destructive capabilities. Edmund Burke, who wrote one of the most influential works on the subject, i.e. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), lists qualities such as obscurity, power, magnitude, light, and silence or, conversely, loud sounds (73-122). Thus, the volcano is a perfect example of a natural object that engenders the sublime. The eruption is a grand spectacle of devastating power, accompanied by a deafening roar, when enormous amounts of smoke, debris and lava are shot into the sky. However, even sheer magnitude is capable of

producing the experience, for example massive cliffs that dwarf a person in size.

However, man-made objects can also become a source of the sensation. Thus, spectacular feats of engineering might be as sublime as a natural object. Nye offers the example of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, opened in 1937, which used to gather admiring crowds, because, as he describes it, “this magnificent piece of civil engineering cannot be comprehended through words and images alone. When visited, it outstrips expectations” (XI). What produced the effect was the vastness, coupled with the unimaginable level of human ingenuity needed to construct such an object. Other examples include the Erie Canal, a structure stretching for over 300 miles from Albany to Buffalo (Nye 32-33), and—of course—nuclear power manifested in the atomic bomb.

Another important division, apart from the natural / man-made dichotomy, is Kant’s differentiation between the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime. The first category refers to objects or phenomena that are vast and incomparably massive, such as the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls. The dynamic sublime, on the other hand, covers phenomena that are inherently terrifying, but, because of the distance from the danger, can be safely appreciated. A volcanic eruption or a thunderstorm would fall into this category. In his book Nye also considers the atomic bomb as an example of the dynamic sublime (225).

Whether it derives from natural or man-made objects, the sublime is an unusual mixture of wonder and terror. As already suggested above, in this paper I focus on physical manifestations of nuclear power, the context for which is usually planned destruction (as with the atomic bomb), or else a malfunctioning of devices designed to harness such power (as with the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant). While I discuss these as evoking the dynamic sublime, I am nevertheless aware that, due to the sheer vastness of the disaster and its consequences (e.g. radiation levels), it could also be considered as an example of the mathematical sublime.

It is interesting to consider the actual reactions to the effects of the atomic bomb, which will serve as a point of reference for the explosion at the Chernobyl. One of the witnesses to the detonation of the atomic bomb, General Leslie Groves, describes his feelings as follows:

The effects could well be called unprecedented, magnificent, beautiful, stupendous and terrifying. No manmade phenomenon of such tremendous power had ever occurred before. The lighting effects begged description. The whole country was lighted by a searing light with the intensity many times that of the midday sun. It was golden, purple, violet, gray and blue. It lighted every peak, crevasse, and ridge of the nearby mountain range with a clarity and beauty that cannot be described but must be seen to be imagined. It was that beauty the great poets dream about but describe most poorly and inadequately. Thirty seconds after the explosion came first, the air blast pressing hard against the people and things, to be followed almost immediately by the strong, sustained, awesome roar which warned of doomsday and made us feel that we puny things were blasphemous to dare tamper with the forces heretofore reserved to The Almighty. Words are inadequate. . . . It had to be witnessed to be realized. (in Feis 380)

Groves focuses on colors, which, according to Burke (110-115) are among the possible sources of the sublime, especially when light and darkness are contrasted. The flash of the explosion overpowers the reasoning faculties to the extent that the experience verges on the religious: Groves finishes his account by comparing the force of the atomic explosion to that held by God. According to Renata Gambino and Grazia Pulvirenti, “the dynamic sublime evokes feelings of limits and nothingness in the viewer” (6) and this seems to be the case with Groves. He purposefully uses the phrase “puny things” to emphasize the insignificance of himself and his companions when faced with the tremendous power of the atomic bomb. It is, therefore, unimaginable that such force stored in Reactor Number Four could have been harnessed by humans.

The reaction to the explosion described above is relevant to the *Chernobyl*, because it perfectly captures one of the central ideas in the series. Accompanied by many images depicting unleashed nuclear power, the prevalent theme is that of an inability—or, quite simply, unwillingness—to comprehend the scale of the disaster. The characters are often left speechless by the manifestations of

atomic power. According to Nye, more generally, “[t]he amazement occurs most easily when the observer is not prepared for it” (15). Naturally, no one present at the Chernobyl site was even remotely prepared to face the event, from the massive atomic bomb-like explosion, through the unnatural air glow, to the rapid transformation of the natural environment. The shock came both from the sheer power unleashed by the explosion that ripped apart the building and created a spectacular phenomenon, and from the magnitude of national and global consequences. After all, the heightened levels of radiation were first detected in Sweden (Higginbotham 2019b: ch. 12).

Valery Legasov—one of the main characters in the show, based on the actual chemist and investigator of the Chernobyl disaster—adequately summarizes the situation: “You are dealing with something that has never occurred on this planet before” (*Please Remain Calm*). While it is true that no similarly spectacular or disastrous nuclear accident had occurred previously, many others had still proven incredibly dangerous on the local and sometimes continental level, such as the 1957 accidents at Windscale (Higginbotham 2019b: ch. 2) and the Maiak Plutonium Plant (Brown 2013). However, it is Chernobyl that has found its way into the popular consciousness, possibly due to many documented, unique phenomena resulting from high levels of radiation.

Towards the Sublime in *Chernobyl*

One of the first images in *Chernobyl* that can be analyzed in the context of the sublime is the shining pillar of ionized air. Due to Cherenkov radiation, the tremendous levels of charged particles speeding through the air caused it to glow with a faint blue light (Jorgensen 422). In *Midnight in Chernobyl*, a book detailing the actual events, we come across the following reaction from one of the engineers, Alexander Yuvchenko (as paraphrased by author Adam Higginbotham):

a shimmering pillar of ethereal blue-white light, reaching straight up into the night sky, disappearing into infinity. Delicate and strange and

encircled by a flickering spectrum of colors conjured by flames from within the burning building and superheated chunks of metal and machinery, the beautiful phosphorescence transfixed Yuvchenko for a few seconds. (Higginbotham 2019b: ch. 6)

The sight was clearly mesmerizing enough to put a knowledgeable technician into stupor. As Brown observes, the engineer himself remembered thinking about the sight as “beautiful” (in Brown 2019). The miniseries depicts many similar reactions to what Higginbotham calls a “shimmering pillar of the ethereal blue-white light” (2019b: ch. 6). In fact, one of the opening scenes in the first episode, titled *1:23:45*, presents Lyudmila and Vasyli Ignatenko looking through the window at the unusual phenomenon. The camera focuses on their astonished expressions as they approach the window, enchanted with the eerie sight. The scene is almost completely silent, except for a subdued background noise. The dramatic irony here consists in the characters’ complete unawareness of the extent of the danger, which is, however, perfectly apparent to the viewer. Yet its scale and unexpectedness are enough to make them fall into quiet observation. In Burkean terms (97-99, 115-116), the magnitude of the sight and the accompanying silence can be said to summon the feeling of the sublime.

Another scene worth investigating in this context occurs at the so-called Bridge of Death. According to Higginbotham, this is one of the urban legends that arose around the Chernobyl disaster. Supposedly, a group of people observed the fires at the nuclear power plant from a nearby bridge and subsequently all died of radiation sickness (Higginbotham 2019a). A mere tale, it still found its way into the series alongside factual events—likely because of the scene’s dramatic potential. Let us investigate it more closely.

We see a group of people from Pripjat, enraptured by the sight of the burning power plant and the pillar of ionized air. One of the awestruck observers even calls the sight “beautiful” (*1:23:45*). This may in fact point towards the Kantian dynamic sublime, in which, as already stated, the key factor is distance from the dangerous phenomenon and the consequent ability

to appreciate it in safety. Soon, ash starts falling from the sky and the scene takes on a darker tone as the camera, in slow-motion, shows the crowd reacting to the ashfall, reaching to the sky to catch it with their bare hands, while children are seen playing in it. Obviously, the onlookers consider all this an unusual but innocuous phenomenon. The result—the silent night, the sudden ashfall—makes for an enchanting scene. Nevertheless, because of its inherent dramatic irony, the viewer cannot receive it as such, knowing that those depicted here will soon feel the effects of acute radiation poisoning. The horror is amplified by the scene’s overwhelming silence. As the ash begins to fall, diegetic sounds disappear, leaving the visuals accompanied only by quiet, foreboding background music with mechanic, industrial overtones. Silence is one of the qualities mentioned by Burke; the scene’s serenity, or even beauty, is laced with horror, leading to the creation of a sublime experience.



Figure 1. The burning Reactor Number Four (1:23:45).

Other images crucial to the context of sublimity are the shots of the burning reactor core from the same episode. In the first one, a group of technicians, having entered the ruined room, are struck dumb at the precipice of the

inferno. As Katerina Deligiorgi explains in her more general comments on sublimity, it has the power to bypass our reasoning faculties. She claims that “the object we seek to judge eludes and overwhelms us” (Deligiorgi 31). Thus, only after a few seconds do the engineers regain their senses enough to escape from the reactor room. However, once again, it is actually the viewer who is able to fully appreciate the (dynamic) sublime quality of nuclear power, at a safe distance. Comments that have appeared under this scene when excerpted on YouTube point in this direction. By no means scientific, these are thoughts of casual viewers, who struggle for words to express their sensation. The striking image of the burning reactor core has often elicited religious metaphors and similes, for example: “they were looking at hell itself,” or “I don’t think I’ve ever seen a more perfect depiction of staring into the Heart of Hell itself” (“*Chernobyl* [2019] Reactor Core Meltdown Scene”). This religious discourse, intermixing terror and awe, seems not unlike that of the creators of the atomic bomb, whom I quoted earlier.



Figure 2. The igniting Reactor Number Four (*Vichnaya Pamyat*).

Another image, closely connected with the previous, is presented in the last episode, titled *Vichnaya Pamyat* [Russian for 'eternal memory'], outlining how Reactor Number Four exploded. In the sequence, the steel lid covering the reactor, weighing more than a thousand tons, is thrown off to the side. Against the dark, gloomy interior, the inside of the core lights up, and the rising fire ignites the remains of the cooling rods. Slow motion allows the viewer to absorb the haunting image of a man-made volcano about to erupt. The tremendous unleashed power is emphasized once again by an eerie, machine-like wail which indeed resembles, as quoted in Higginbotham, "the protest of a giant beast in anguish" (2019b: ch. 5). Significantly, sounds that imitate cries of men or animals are among the specific qualities listed by Burke as possibly leading to an experience of the sublime (118-119).

The grandeur is heightened by the contrast between the dark silhouette of the shattered lid and the rising fire, in keeping with Burke's notion that the sublime may be linked to color, specifically to the contrast between light and darkness (110-112). Playing against the horror of the spectacle is the continually present aspect of awe: that such tremendous power had been harnessed by humans and contained in a machine. Therefore, apart from emphasizing a mismanagement of immense proportions, the image speaks to the ingenuity of scientists, engineers and technicians, and their ability to tame nature. Once again, the viewer can absorb and appreciate the image in the safety of their home. It is the screen and the fictional representation that creates the necessary distance which allows the viewer to appreciate the bizarre, terrifying shot of the tangled cooling rods and the igniting core. Thus, horror and awe meet in the described image, and produce a sense of the dynamic sublime.



Figure 3. The creation of the Red Forest (1:23:45).

The last image that I shall discuss in my paper is a shot of the radioactive smoke cloud floating towards Pripyat. This, as Brown explains, is how the “Red Forest” was created after being struck with one of the largest levels of radiation in the days after the accident (2019: ch. The Swamp Dweller). As the cloud passes over the forest, within just a few seconds we see the trees turn copper red. The contrast between the massive, black cloud, the Red Forest beneath, and the city of Pripyat in the distance, produces the effect of sublimity. Once again the visual aspect—in this case an almost otherworldly, nebulous mass, even more toxic than a cloud of volcanic gases—is emphasized by a strong contrast between the cloud (black) and the trees (red and green), as well as the near-absence of background music. Here, as Nicole Hall describes it, “we can be conscious of nature’s powerful and violent forces only from a position of distance and safety that enables us to constitute our capacity for judging nature without fear” (9). The result of seeing the site up close is different, as attested by Kate Brown, who visited the Red Forest in 2016. Witnessing the unusual effects of high radiation, such as the lack of decomposition, she writes in

Manual for Survival, "I should have been happy to find a place where time had nearly stopped. Instead it filled me with dread" (2019: ch. The Swamp Dweller).

Without question, the Chernobyl disaster was a horrific event of global consequences, leading to the suffering and death of multitudes. What I have undertaken to describe in this paper is how the 2019 mini-series resorts to categories of the sublime to represent nuclear power. As Nye observes, the sublime can be engendered both by natural phenomena and man-made creations, and nuclear power can be analyzed under the rubric of the dynamic sublime. The characters in *Chernobyl* experience awe and terror when met with the physical manifestations of atomic power. The same could be said about the viewers, who are in a position to be also capable of acknowledging the sublime quality in the images on the screen. Moreover, they might have better chances of experiencing it, due to a vast temporal and spatial distance from the presented events. This power is a peculiar one; a source of terror due to its sheer destructive potential, it is simultaneously awe-inspiring, magnificent, and aesthetically captivating. The creators of the *Chernobyl* mini-series certainly realized this, and put this to creative use.

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Abstract

In *American Technological Sublime*, David Nye defines the main critical term as "repeated experiences of awe and wonder, often tinged with an element of terror." This sensation may be evoked by confrontations with astonishing sights, man-made as well as natural. Thus, both the Golden Gate Bridge and a vast volcanic eruption may be considered in these terms, that is, respectively, as examples of the mathematical sublime and the dynamic sublime. While the former of these categories, described by Kant in *Critique of Judgement*, concerns encounters with massive structures or phenomena, the latter refers to terrifying scenes viewed from a safe distance. An example of a sublime phenomenon is nuclear power in its physical manifestations. Although years of research have gone into grasping its characteristics, it still evades the reasoning of the mind. Its perplexing nature has drawn researchers, writers and filmmakers. One of the recent examples—and the focus of my article—is the HBO mini-series *Chernobyl* (2019), written by Craig Mazin and directed by Johan Renck, which outlines the consequences of losing control over nuclear power. I intend to demonstrate how the sublime is evoked in *Chernobyl* (2019). For this purpose, I will focus on images such as the pillar of ionized air or the burning reactor core, often

interspersed with shots of stunned onlookers. The analysis speaks to a broader point, namely that after decades of supposedly becoming accustomed to the presence of nuclear technology, it remains beyond words and comprehension: a sure sign of the sublime.

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ENVIRONMENTAL STORY-TELLING—THE LIMINAL SPACE BETWEEN EMBEDDED AND EMERGENT NARRATIVE

Keywords: environmental storytelling, game environments, gamespaces, storytelling, video games

Introduction¹

Game studies, a formal study of games, is a relatively young academic field attracting scholars from various disciplines, including literary theory, media studies, cultural studies, psychology, sociology, and computer science. Frans Mäyrä notes that the “highly interdisciplinary character of game studies can partly be seen to be born out of necessity” (313), since the history of the field has been rather brief and heavily reliant on approaches rooted in other academic fields. More recently, game studies has grown rapidly as a discipline in its own right, closely paralleled by the increased sophistication of video games² and their growing cultural influence. As such, video games constitute texts worthy of academic study, especially in the humanities where they remain vastly underexplored in comparison to other media forms.

Drawing from the fields of computer science, graphic design, and creative writing, game environment design is intrinsically linked to the narrative aspect of contemporary video games and ought to be taken into consideration for a nuanced analysis of games as cultural texts. After a brief introduction of video games as a narrative medium, the paper focuses on the examination of selected aspects of the interrelation between the game environment and narrative within the context of *environmental storytelling*—a technique of telling a story through details in the environment. The paper later argues that environmental storytelling exists in a liminal space between embedded and emergent

narrative, as the former emerges only through the player's active involvement in its (re)construction.

Video Games as a Narrative Medium

Although at this juncture the narrative potential of video games is virtually non-debatable, the question of whether they can be perceived as fully-fledged narratives has been highly contested since the inception of the field (Mukherjee 1–2). While the story tends to be one of the central elements in the majority of video games, not every game is designed to tell a story—and when it is, some theorists argue, its narrative “operates at a fundamentally different level [...] than it does in other media” (Pearce 144). Moreover, the importance of story in story-driven games “varies across genres as well as from player to player, since different player types focus on different kinds of experience when playing” (Thon 105). Given the novelty of the medium and the divergent theoretical approaches to the study of games, it is hardly surprising that the game studies' discourse centered, for a while, around the relationship between narrative and play³. However, as much as the attempts to create new research methods were well-grounded, the same cannot be said for the dismissal of the narrative-centered method of analysis of video games and, subsequently, their narrative potential.

In line with the main assumptions of transmedial narratology—applied to the study of video games already at its formative stage as a distinct discipline—stories possess a universal quality of capturing and examining themes relevant to the human experience, but “the choice of medium makes a difference as to what stories can be told, how they are told, and why they are told” (Ryan 25). Piotr Kubiński explains that contrary to the traditional approach to narrative, which viewed it as an act of storytelling inherently linked to language, transmedial narratology considers narrative a mental construct that emerges in response to a text, rather than being manifested solely through linguistic expression (23). In order to effectively talk about game environments and

environmental storytelling, it is essential to outline the aspects that distinguish video games from other narrative media, and analyze the affordances of these medium-specific features in terms of the structure and experience they offer.

Scholars point to *interactivity*, or *interaction*, as one of the defining elements of digital media (e.g., Crawford 1984, Aarseth 1997, Nitsche 2008). Arguably, one of the core reasons for the immense success of story-driven video games is their ability to provide players with agency, situating them as active participants in rather than observers of the unfolding events. Dovey and Kennedy write that “a text was [originally] said to be ‘interactive’ when an individual could directly intervene in and *change* the images and texts that he or she sees” (6, original emphasis). Scholars have since argued, however, that other media texts may also be considered interactive, since any act of media consumption is essentially an active process (e.g., Fiske 1987, Jenkins 1992).

In order to solve the problem of the overgeneralization of interactive texts, Sebastian Domsch proposes a useful tool for categorizing media in terms of their *nodality*. His model builds on Christoph Bode and Rainer Deitrich’s concept of a *node*, which denotes “a situation that allows for more than one continuation” (Domsch vii). The first differentiation specifies that both types of media are governed by a fixed set of rules, but only actively-nodal media produce alternative results based on the user’s input (6). The second differentiation identifies media that depend on the user for temporality and movement, and those that do not—the former referred to as “static,” and the latter “dynamic” (6–7). Most video games operate on the branching narrative model and depend on the user for story progression, at the same time allowing their existents (such as non-player characters and enemies) to act independently from the player. Applying Domsch’s terminology, video games fall into the category of dynamic actively-nodal media, as the perceptible form can be transformed through the player’s input, but the medium itself changes in real-time and independently of the player.

Another feature characteristic of video games is their *spatiotemporality*. Every game is essentially bound within a certain demarcated space governed by its own laws, logic, and time. This idea is directly linked to the concept of the magic circle⁴, first defined for the purpose of games by Salen and Zimmerman as an artificial space separate from reality, in which all the rules of the outside world are overridden by the rules of the gameworld⁵ (95). This, naturally, does not mean that the player's behavior and choices outside of this space have no effect on what happens within it—and vice versa. On the contrary, some players claim that their real-life experiences often determine the kind of choices they make, some maintain that certain games have had a lasting impact on their lives, and others point to the social aspect of games and gaming culture as such⁶. It should therefore be stressed that the boundary delineating the gamespace⁵ is not unbreakable, as the line between virtual worlds and the real world has become increasingly blurred.

Apart from the magic circle, the inseparability of time and space is very much apparent in the way in which video games structure and convey stories. Instead of a purely temporal sequence, it is worthwhile to view video game narrative as a blend of the temporal and the spatial; for David Herman, “narrative enables spatial and temporal information to be woven together into spacetime coordinates defining successively encountered places and events in narrated worlds” (2000). In consequence, various narrative elements of a game become conceptually mapped and stored in the player's memory in the form of spacetime coordinates, which can be readily recalled and rearranged as new elements come to light⁷.

Discourse on Environmental Storytelling

Environmental storytelling is the most commonly used term denoting the practice of utilizing the game environment as a means of world-building and storytelling. Although definitions vary, two major applications of this phenomenon emerge on the basis of various approaches: first, the narrative

aspect is reflected in the environment design, and the movement through the designed space generates the story; second, the player reconstructs the story by interpreting different objects, scenes, and events embedded in the game environment (Fernández-Vara 3). Environmental storytelling is, however, not entirely specific to video games. Originating in the theater and later adopted by film scholars, the French term *mise-en-scène* (literally “putting on stage”) is used in reference to the arrangement of components involved in the staging of a scene in a play or film production. These include set design, props, costume, lighting, actors, and other elements required to stage a particular event for the audience or camera (Bordwell and Thompson 169–189). Despite the fact that *mise-en-scène* has its roots in theater and film theory, it is frequently brought up in relation to virtual environments because of a number of similarities between set dressing and game environment design. As will be shown in this section, a number of game scholars and game designers have already drawn a connection between these two concepts.

Environmental storytelling was first defined by Don Carson, a former theme park designer for Walt Disney Imagineering, with reference to the idea that physical spaces can evoke stories. Carson argues that in themed environments “the story element is infused into the physical space a guest walks or rides through” (1)—a concept closely related to video games on account of their reliance on space and movement. Carson saw potential in establishing a dialogue between theme park and game designers, as the rapid evolution of computer technology at the turn of the century allowed for the creation of increasingly believable representations of real and imagined worlds. Thus, a major part of his article offers practical advice on the creation of more detailed and story-saturated game worlds, such as the importance of establishing the player’s relationship to the fictional world through the environment, the use of cause and effect vignettes that shape the player’s understanding of past events, the use of reference points that allow the player to anchor themselves to something familiar in an otherwise alien environment, and the use of contrast

and asymmetry to create accurate and engaging representations of the world (1–4).

Game scholars continue to discuss environmental storytelling in the light of Carson’s contribution. The next influential work on the concept came from Henry Jenkins at the height of the “story versus play” debate in game studies—2004. Jenkins acknowledges that “a discussion of the narrative potential of games need not imply a privileging of story over all the other possible things games can do,” as the experience of playing games should not be reduced to their narrative component (120). He posits, however, that a majority of contemporary digital games *do* tell stories, and therefore it is indispensable to develop a solid understanding of the relationship between narrative and games (121). Positioning games within a much older tradition of spatial stories, he argues that

[e]nvironmental storytelling creates the preconditions for an immersive narrative experience in at least one of four ways: spatial stories can evoke pre-existing narrative associations; they can provide a staging ground where narrative events are enacted; they may embed narrative information within their mise-en-scene; or they provide resources for emergent narratives. (123)

Jenkins’s narrative architecture explicates the relationship between the game environment and narrative by pointing to the various ways in which the former can support video game narratives. According to this architecture, *evoked narratives* are based on the pre-existing familiarity with a genre tradition, story, or franchise (123). Indeed, apart from being stand-alone texts, video games often embrace broadly shared genre traditions or exist in a dialogue with a larger narrative system—a storyworld. Environmental storytelling can be used in such a scenario to facilitate meaning-making by appealing to the player’s knowledge or memory of relevant themes and events from other texts. Enacted narratives depend on “broadly defined goals and conflicts pushed forward by the character’s movement across the map” (124) and micronarratives, or memorable moments, meant to appeal to the player’s emotions (124). Such a narrative includes a combination of pre-determined narrative sequences, cut-

scenes, and gameplay proper, with environmental storytelling facilitating “the protagonist’s forward movement towards resolution” (124–125). In *embedded narratives*, the “story is less a temporal structure than a body of information (...), presented across a range of spaces and artifacts” (126). The virtual environment becomes a kind of information space, with the story element embedded in the *mise-en-scène* and awaiting discovery. In contrast, *emergent narratives* are generated through gameplay in game environments that are “designed to be rich with narrative potential, enabling the story-constructing activity of players” (129). This arrangement highlights the unconstrained player agency typical of most sandbox, life simulation, and strategy games, where the narrative is largely authored by the player.

The interrelation of space and narrative remains prevalent in discussions among game studies scholars. Michael Nitsche proposes the term *evocative narrative elements*, meaning the elements in the environment which support the player’s understanding of the gameworld and their relationship to it (37). Even though he does not explicitly refer to environmental storytelling, his account on the integration of the story element within the gamespace corresponds to other theories on this concept. Nitsche approaches narrative in video games from a cognitive perspective, arguing that it is produced through the player’s continuous effort to make sense of the gameworld and “evoked and directed by evocative narrative elements, formed by encounters or situations in the game that prime some form of comprehension” (44). Such elements are intentionally dispersed or arranged in certain ways to “trigger reactions in players in order to help them create their own interpretations” (44). The player can then assign meaning to each element and contextualize it in relationship to others.

Building upon Nitsche’s contribution, Clara Fernández-Vara coined the term *indexical storytelling*, illustrating how environmental storytelling can be—and often is—practically implemented in video games. She defines it as “generating stories through traces, both on the part of the designer and on the player” (4),

and, applying the concept of indices from Charles Peirce's semiotic theory, argues that video game environments contain a full array of indexical clues, which the player is encouraged to interpret (4–5). Apart from being suggestive markers that guide the player through the gameworld, these traces often play a world-building role, pointing to past and/or current events of the embedded narrative (4–5). The resulting vagueness and uncertainty create room for multiple interpretations within the constraints of the conveyed story (4–5). Examples of indexical storytelling can be as simple as a blood trail, or as intricate as a body of clues that delineates the socio-political landscape of a given gameworld. What indices and evocative narrative elements have in common is a semiotic approach to the study of gamespaces and reliance on the player's involvement in meaning-making. In both cases, Fernández-Vara aptly notes, "storytelling becomes a game of *story-building*" (1, original emphasis), since "the story is not told in a traditional sense, but rather put together through different pieces" (5).

The growing interest in environmental storytelling is observable not only in game studies, but also in the game industry. In the last decade, the concept has gained prominence as a result of the emphasis placed on fitting narrative in a player-focused interactive experience (Campbell, polygon.com). The 2010 GDC (Game Developers Conference) in San Francisco saw at least two presentations devoted to the examination of the ability of game environments to communicate stories. Game designers Harvey Smith and Matthias Worch offered the following definition of environmental storytelling: "staging player-space with environmental properties that can be interpreted as a meaningful whole, furthering the narrative of the game" (16, in a presentation). These environmental properties operate on the level of subtext, which encourages the player to infuse potentially meaningless scenes with meaning (17), but they can also be employed to facilitate navigating a particular area, warn the player of imminent danger, or signal specific qualities of the environment (30–33). More importantly, Smith and Worch understand environmental storytelling as a

design tool for providing narrative context and reinforcing the player's identity without the need for conventional exposition, which is typically realized through dialogue-heavy cut-scenes that—if longer than necessary—might reduce engagement and risk breaking immersion. Not unlike Fernández-Vara, they posit that environmental storytelling “relies on the player to associate disparate elements” and “invites interpretation of situations and meaning according to player's views and experience” (34).

The other presentation given by game designer Richard Rouse III used an alternative term, *environmental narrative*, understood as “the little stories told through the world itself” (5, in a presentation) and “as if the player was not there” (8)—something that games excel at in comparison with other media. Rouse emphasizes the importance of intentionality in world design, which helps players become immersed in the story and contributes to the overall quality of the narrative. With the help of cinematic techniques, such as lighting and camera movements, game designers can focus the player's attention on important environmental details that would otherwise be easily omitted (33). Various design techniques, including “embedded story elements” (signs, graffiti, in-world audio, and ambient life), puzzles, retracing steps, and collecting resources often serve to complement the overarching story and expose the player to situations, which enable them to learn about the game world as they traverse it (23–50). Rouse stresses that a designer must also ensure that the player is given enough time to explore the game environment, since “without downtime, [they] may charge blindly ahead, missing all the environmental storytelling you have carefully set up” (38).

Video Game Environments as Narrative Spaces

The technological advancement of computer technology lends itself to a greater creative freedom and the creation of increasingly engaging game environments, enabling game designers to reduce overt exposition through cut-scenes⁸ and textual prompts in favor of subtle environmental clues. Narrative in video

games can be broadly divided into two categories: *embedded narrative*, which constitutes “pre-generated content that exists prior to the player’s interaction with the game” (Salen and Zimmerman 383) and provides “motivation for the events and actions of the game” (383), and *emergent narrative*, which is linked directly to gameplay and arises from a meaningful interaction with the gameworld (384). In order to bring the gameworld to life, writers, environmental artists, and level designers work closely together to ensure that all elements of the game environment reflect the atmosphere of the overarching story and support the narrative emergent through gameplay. As a storytelling technique, environmental storytelling exists in a liminal space between embedded and emergent narrative because it engages the player as an active participant in the (re)construction of a game’s embedded narrative. In other words, environmental storytelling serves as a channel through which such pre-authored, narrative-infused elements are conveyed, but they do not emerge as part of a coherent narrative save for the player’s active involvement.

Nitsche writes that “gamespaces can evoke narratives because the player is making sense of them in order to engage with them,” generating meaning “through a comprehension of signs and interaction” (3). Environmental storytelling is a productive concept for story-driven video games, because it specifies their reliance on space not only for story progression in the traditional sense, but also in less linear world-building. The following figure represents the three mutually inclusive levels in which environmental storytelling can contribute to a game’s embedded narrative:

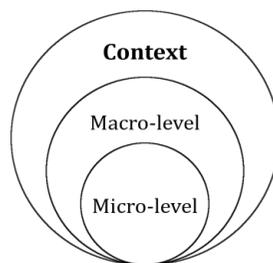


Figure 1. A visual representation of the three levels at which environmental storytelling can contribute to a game’s embedded narrative (N. Bracikowska).

On the level of *context*, the game environment communicates to the player the overall setting, serving as a backdrop for both embedded and emergent narrative. Corresponding to the accounts on environmental storytelling discussed above, the design of the game environment may appeal to the player's knowledge of the preconceived notions of genre norms and conventions in order to contextualize the events of the game and build certain expectations with regard to the plot, often in order to subvert them later on. On the *macro-level*, the game environment consists of world-building scenes, scenarios, and objects that are embedded in the *mise-en-scène* and contribute to the player's understanding of the gameworld. Finally, the *micro-level* is confined to localized incidents in which the gamespace is replete with objects, scenes, and situations, carefully arranged to tell self-contained stories. A vast majority of contemporary video games utilize environmental storytelling in this way to create detailed and authentic worlds that feel lived-in regardless of the player character's presence. Due to the obvious spatial limitations of this paper, the following examples taken from *Dark Souls* (2011) and *Dark Souls III* (2016) are meant to illustrate how environmental storytelling can be used to flesh out a game's embedded narrative without conventional exposition, and are merely representative of numerous other instances of this strategy in the entire trilogy.

The *Dark Souls* trilogy (2011–2016) remains one of the most influential and widely discussed game series of this decade (Hussain, gamespot.com). Having come from an underdog Japanese studio (FromSoftware), the games received mainstream recognition only in the years following the release of *Dark Souls* in 2011, and since then spawned a myriad of articles praising their exceptional game design and intricate story. Apart from a common universe, the games share an unconventional approach to storytelling, which has become a staple in the so-called "Soulsborne" genre—the three primary ways in which the embedded narrative can be accessed being minimal exposition through dialogue, descriptions of items found in the nooks and crannies of the world, and, of primary importance to this paper, the environment of the game itself.

Fernández-Vara aptly points out that certain games “revolve around discovering the history of the game world, [or] what has happened before the player enters the space” (6). The games in the *Dark Souls* series are certainly a good example of this interdependence; even though unearthing their “history” (more commonly referred to as lore⁹) is not obligatory for their successful completion, it is nonetheless of great interest for the kind of players who wish to make their in-game encounters and interactions more meaningful.

Dark Souls and its sequels are set in a world governed by the cycles of a life-sustaining flame. Each begins, rather conventionally, with a cinematic opening, which constitutes the only instance of narrative exposition delivered by an extra-diegetic narrator. These concise retellings mark some of the crucial events of the embedded narrative and become a set of temporal reference points meant to support the games’ minimalist approach to storytelling. What follows is a long journey through an inhospitable, dark fantasy world, where each location makes for a distinct tone piece evoking different emotions and hinting at a story that will never be told in greater detail. When the player first arrives in Lordran, the setting of *Dark Souls*, and sets to ring the two Bells of Awakening, it quickly becomes obvious that the once vibrant civilization has fallen into ruin. Apart from that, most inhabitants seem to be ghosts of their former selves, as they have visibly deteriorated both physically and mentally. It is only a matter of time before the player realizes that other human-looking non-player characters and even their own avatars are subject to the same curse of “hollowing.” Most areas of Lordran are veiled in mystery from the start, and it is only through exploration, and at times backtracking, that particular sights or encounters begin to make sense. As a case in point, the moment the player sets foot in the New Londo Ruins, they are met with a rather unusual scene: the typically hostile hollows are completely oblivious to the player character’s presence, some of them walk around aimlessly, some appear visibly disturbed, while others stare blankly into space. Moreover, the location is almost completely submerged, and, when the player ventures further, turns out to be

plagued by ghosts. The sight may trigger both questions and plausible stories in the player's mind: "Why was the city flooded," "Was it a natural disaster or was someone responsible for it," "Are the ghosts the former residents of the city," "What was the city like before," and so forth. Although most of these questions are never explicitly answered, the game employs the environment to stimulate the player's imagination and encourage them to form their own assumptions and interpretations. Lowering the water level in the course of the game reveals remnants of the city of New Londo, now populated by hostile darkwraiths, guarding the gateway to the Abyss. Near the city's floodgates, a towering pile of drowned bodies serves as a grim reminder of New Londo's past. These environmental clues point to an atrocity or a natural disaster, which caused the entire population of New Londo to perish under water, but it is through other elements that the player can learn why it happened or who was responsible for it. These include dialogue with non-player characters and flavor text¹⁰.

In Lordran, sites once bustling with life have been slowly reclaimed by nature. In the course of the game, the player learns that Lord Gwyn, one of the four Lords of Cinder, sacrificed his soul and became kindling for the First Flame to prolong the current era called the Age of Fire. Albeit overrun by undead, a by-product of Lord Gwyn's effort to artificially sustain the Flame, the world of *Dark Souls* does not yet seem to have been significantly affected by the disruption of the natural order of things. In *Dark Souls III*, however, chasms, ravines, and the omnipresent wither become recurring images, delineating a reality struggling to maintain its physical shape. The ruined kingdom of Lothric comes to represent a world on the brink of collapse—both in the literal and metaphorical sense. Not unlike in the example above, the environmental qualities prompt the player to infuse the elements of the gameworld with significance to make the experience of it more meaningful. The trilogy culminates in the image of an abnormal disfigurement of the world, with all the lands and kingdoms converging in one place. Each subsequent sacrifice to save the fading flame would see a new king erect a new great kingdom, built on top

of the remnants of those that had fallen. While everything manmade has been preserved in some form, nature has become malformed and distorted. It would seem as if each iteration of the cycle caused the depicted world to deteriorate until the time and space themselves became convoluted, triggering the lands to move and amalgamate into one twisted whole. At no point, however, is the player offered a clear explanation of what had caused the world to crumble. Instead, the game uses subtle, yet meaningful, environmental clues to convey that even the world struggles to go on and perpetuating the cycle means delaying the inevitable end. Although not exhaustive of the subject matter, the examples above illustrate that the *Dark Souls* trilogy relies heavily on environmental storytelling at all three levels (context, macro, and micro) to convey the story, and support the argument that this storytelling method lies at the threshold of the embedded and emergent narrative.

Conclusion

The overview of the pertinent discourse in game studies demonstrates that environmental storytelling is a nebulous concept, susceptible to varying interpretations and involving a wide range of design techniques. Environmental storytelling perfectly embodies the subtle interplay between the narrative and ludic aspects of a game by integrating the elements of story with the interactive character of the medium. Unlike other forms of video game storytelling, it does not interrupt gameplay and engages the player as an active participant in the (re)construction of the embedded narrative. However, environmental storytelling has one major limitation: it can rarely be used to tell a whole, coherent story. While certain video games *do* make exclusive use of environmental storytelling and gameplay (e.g., *Journey* 2012), most employ it as a method supporting other forms of storytelling, including exposition in cut-scenes, dialogues, recordings, and flavor text. When used skillfully, environmental storytelling can add a significant amount of depth to the gamespace and create an immersive narrative experience unique to this

medium. Further study on the interrelation between game environments and narrative is needed, as environmental storytelling is illustrative, but certainly not exhaustive of this phenomenon.

Endnotes

1. This paper expands on selected aspects explored in the BA thesis *Game environments and environmental storytelling in Dark Souls and Dark Souls III*, written under the supervision of dr Katarzyna Marak at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.
2. Thereafter also referred to as “games.”
3. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a division within the formalist group of game studies, later dubbed as “the ludology versus narratology debate,” sparked by the need to differentiate games from other media. The so-called narratologists approached video games as vehicles for narratives, applying the existing methodology within the field of literary theory. The ludologists, on the other hand, argued for a more game-centered perspective and a departure from the narrative paradigm in analyzing games, whose influence they deemed “colonialist” and severely impeding the understanding of the medium. Whether or not the debate has been truly resolved, it has necessitated the understanding of video games as cultural artifacts operating on the “nuanced interplay between mechanics and narrative” (Filipowich 71–72).
4. The concept of the magic circle originates in Johan Huizinga’s seminal work *Homo Ludens* originally published in 1983, in which he discusses the importance of play in the generation of culture. The term is used as a metaphor for a physical boundary or imaginary space in which play—rather than a game—occurs.
5. Understood here as the virtual space within which the play of the game takes place.
6. For players’ opinions on the social aspect of gaming and gaming culture, see: www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/9t7dl3/gamers_of_reddit_how_did_video_games_affect_your.
7. Due to spatial limitations, the paper does not engage with positioning video games within the discourse on cognitive narrative theory. For a comprehensive overview of this subject, see: Krzysztof M. Maj’s “Słowo gra znaczy świat. Przestrzeń gry wideo w kognitywnej teorii narracji.”
8. A cut-scene is “any non-interactive storytelling or scene-setting element of a game” (Hancock 1). Pre-rendered cut-scenes, also referred to as cinematic cut-scenes, are among the most common storytelling techniques presently encountered in video games. Cut-scenes appear at various points in video games and are, as Rune Klevjer has it, “an efficient tool for conveying story, being more visually interesting than purely verbal narration, and more uncomplicated than disturbing the necessary information through scripted events” (196–196). However, as Jesper Juul points out, “[pre-rendered] cut-scenes are often considered problematic because they prevent the player from doing anything and are in a sense a non-game element in a game” (135).

9. The game's lore refers to the details about its universe and history outside the main plot.
10. Originating in descriptions of playing cards of certain card games, such as *Magic: The Gathering*, flavor text refers to snippets of text providing additional information about the fictional world of the game. Examples include item descriptions, bestiaries, or text displayed on the loading screen.

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Ludography

Dark Souls. 2011. Namco Bandai Games.

Dark Souls III. 2016. Namco Bandai Games.

Abstract

Though stories take different forms, they possess a universal quality of capturing and examining themes relevant to the human experience—a truism indeed, but also one of the driving forces behind various forms of storytelling. This paper examines the interplay between the game environment and narrative within the context of environmental storytelling, a technique of telling a story through details in the environment. A review of the various perspectives on the concept is preceded by a brief discussion on the nature of video games as a storytelling medium, with particular emphasis on the issues of interactivity and spatiotemporality as two characteristic

features of this media form. The paper draws upon the existing theories on environmental storytelling and introduces a conceptual model to represent the three levels (context, macro, and micro) at which the game environment contributes to the game's narrative. The paper further argues that environmental storytelling exists in a liminal space between the embedded and emergent narrative. Selected aspects of cited game texts are analyzed with the purpose of illustrating this interdependence. The paper concludes by identifying environmental storytelling as a successful yet frequently insufficient storytelling device and shows the need for further research on the relationship between game environments and narrative.

BOOK REVIEWS

Bernadetta Jankowska

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**IRISH IDENTITY AND TRAUMA:
A REVIEW OF *TRAUMA AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH CULTURE*
BY MELANIA TERRAZAS-GALLEGRO (ED.)**

Author: Melania Terrazas-Gallego (ed.)

Title: *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture*

Publisher: Peter Lang, 2020

Pages: 302

Keywords: identity, trauma, Irish literature, Irish culture

Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture (2020) edited by Melania Terrazas is a recent publication of the Reimagining Ireland series that “interrogates Ireland’s past and present and suggests possibilities for the future by looking at Ireland’s literature, culture and history and subjecting them to the most up-to-date critical appraisals associated with sociology, literary theory, historiography, political science and theology” (<https://www.peterlang.com/view/serial/REIR>). The theme of the 94th issue is the representation of the concepts of trauma and identity in contemporary Irish culture. The volume is divided into five sections: literature and film (with articles by Asier Altuna-García, María Amor Barros-del Río and Ruth Barton), memory and digital archives (contributions made by Lorraine Dennis and Patrick J. Mahoney), history (papers by Síobhra Aiken and Eunan O’Halpin), music (Fintan Vallely and David Clare) and creative writing (by Emer Martin, Pat Boran and Melania Terrazas).

In “From Undoing: Silence and the Challenge of Individual Trauma in John Boyne’s *The Heart’s Invisible Furies* (2017)” Asier Altuna-García de Salazar analyses the concept of individual trauma experienced by the novel’s main character, Cyril Avery, “an adopted gay” who was born in 1945 (15). The author makes reference to the power structures (mainly the Catholic Church) that shaped the social and political life in Ireland through the twentieth century. Considering that, any behaviours that deviated from the ideological norm were regarded as “shameful” and had to be silenced. The article is an analysis of the process of identifying and overcoming different kinds of trauma as well as finding a way to speak about painful events. The main character is a figure that is a “representative of the experiences of many Irish people who suffered the oppressive discourses of silencing power structures” (32).

The focal point of “Trauma and Irish Female Migration through Literature and Ethnography” by María Amor Barros-del Río is trauma experienced by female migrants in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. As the author indicates in the first part of her paper, women left their mother country mostly because of the lack of perspectives (e.g. mass unemployment). The analysis then focuses on the interpretation of selected materials from the Questionnaire on Emigration to America as well as excerpts from the novels that illustrate the problem of trauma connected with an unwanted migration to a foreign country. The author concludes that “the intersection of literature and ethnography as complementary disciplines for the study of this phenomenon sheds light on crucial aspects that would otherwise have gone unnoticed and offers a broader horizon for the understanding of Irish female migration” (55).

In “Avenging the Famine: Lance Daly’s *Black ’47*, Genre and History,” Ruth Barton discusses Daly’s film with reference to the Western tradition, particularly, as an example of a “revenge Western” (59). The author approaches the Famine as one of the most traumatic events in the history of Ireland (68) and examines the way it was represented in culture. With reference to that, the

main character of *Black '47*, Feeney, is portrayed as “a fantasy avenger”, who does not agree to be victimised by the circumstances and takes a revenge on the oppressors for the death of his relatives. The fact that the film “relegates the lived trauma of the Famine to an unknowable past” (75) may have contributed, according to the author, to its favourable perception in Ireland.

“Reflection of Trauma in the Prisons Memory Archive: How Information Literacy, Human Experience and Place Are Impacted by Conflict” by Lorraine Dennis provides the analysis of prisoners’ recorded memories connected with the period of Northern Ireland’s *Troubles*. At the beginning of the paper, the author offers the readers fundamental insight into the turbulent times in Northern Ireland’s recent history. The author then discusses the way of using the prisoners’ memories of the Troubles, recorded in the form of interviews, in documentary films: *We Were There* (2014) by Cahal McLaughlin and *Armagh Stories: Voices from the Gaol* (2015) by McLaughlin and Laura Aguiar (7). The PMA projects give the former prisoners a chance to deal with their traumatic past and also “provide an invaluable opportunity to see and hear people’s stories and offer opportunities for growth and reconciliation in the north of Ireland and beyond” (98).

The role of social media in healing the emotional psychic wounds is discussed by Patrick J. Mahoney in his paper “From the Maze to Social Media: Articulating the Trauma of ‘the Blanket Protest’ in the Digital Space.” The specific example provided by the author is a Facebook group devoted to the prisoners’ memories of the Northern Irish “Blanket” and “No Wash” protests from 1976 to 1981. Despite the original intention of the group owners to be rather a local initiative, it quickly gained popularity and became a place for sharing various memories and painful experiences by the ex-prisoners and their relatives. The author proves that the social media can play a therapeutic role in trauma recovery as well as they can reconnect and rebuild the ex-prisoners community (7, 125).

Síobhra Aiken in “‘The Women Who Had Been Straining Every Nerve’: Gender-Specific Medical Management of Trauma in the Irish Revolution (1916–1923)” analyses the concept of trauma in relation to the treatment of the female military activists involved in the process of forming the independent state of Ireland. It is worth noticing that at that time the means of treatment provided to women were strictly connected with the perception of mental disturbances as the result of female anatomy and menstrual cycle. Thus, the basic aim of the female-oriented psychiatric treatment was to restore women into their socially accepted roles (7-8). The article is an analysis of the situation of the Irish female patients, as well as the inadequacy of treatment supported by the patriarchal ideology, in the first half of the twentieth century.

In “Personal Loss and the ‘Trauma of Internal War’: The Cases of W. T. Cosgrave and Seán Lemass,” Eunan O’Halpin discusses the impact of traumatic experiences on further lives of those prominent politicians. The analysis is closely connected with the concept of “the trauma of internal war” coined by Charles Townshend. Both of them were to some extent affected by the turbulent events of the Irish revolution 1916-1923. The author points out that they were perceived “as effective rather than charismatic politicians, disinclined to grand gestures, and rather reserved individuals” (159). In his paper, O’Halpin uses recently revealed sources, such as the Bureau of Military History, Military Service Pensions and Medals Collections, to discuss Cosgrave and Lemass’s service to independent Ireland. Neither of them made any public statements about their traumatic memories (178). Therefore, the author states that the precise determination to what extent the painful experiences influenced the politicians’ lives is almost impossible (179).

The connections between the traditional, Irish folk music and the traumatic history of the state are highlighted in Fintan Vallely’s essay. “Di-rum-ditherum-dan-dee: Trauma and Prejudice, Conflict and Change as Reflections of Societal Transformation in the Modern-Day Consolidation of Irish Traditional Music” is the discussion about how some instruments typically associated with Irish

culture (such as harp and uilleann pipes) were connected with painful historical events, mostly the British colonisation of the island. However, Vallely indicates that in recent years, the revival of traditional Irish music could be noticed. It is particularly visible in the emergence of the new folk bands and the teaching how to play the traditional instruments. Also, there is a significant change as for the appearance of female musicians in an area previously dominated by men.

David Clare in “Traumatic Childhood Memories and the Adult Political Visions of Sinéad O’Connor, Bono and Phil Lynott” analyses the concept of personal trauma in the songs of the above mentioned artists. Those painful childhood experiences and their future impact on O’Connor’s and Bono’s lives took the form of artistic protests against the role of the Catholic Church in social life (O’Connor) or in political affairs (Bono). In the case of Lynott, however, the music was the means of expressing the voice of the Black Irish people. Clare points out that by commenting on social problems, artistic activities serve not only to handle the trauma of individuals, but also to shape the future generations of Irish people (239).

In “Hungry Ghosts: Trauma and Addiction in Irish Literature,” Emer Martin discusses the relations between addiction and the characters’ traumatic experiences on the basis of her novels: *Breakfast in Babylon*, *The Cruelty Men* and *Hardwreck*. In the analysis, she uses the concept of the Phantom, slightly modified by the Buddhist “hungry ghosts” to comment on the motif of transgenerational trauma of colonised nations. Her two latest books are connected with the impact of trauma in post-colonial Ireland, with the addictions as the means of coping with painful personal experiences (10). The author points out that “[her] characters (...) who struggle with addiction and compulsive behaviour often exists as spectral figures” (262), and their voice needs to be heard in order to break the vicious circle.

“Trauma and Identity in Pat Boran’s Work: An Interview” by Melania Terrazas is a written record of the author’s conversation with the Irish poet. The interview was made during the conference “Irish Itinerary 2018 (EFACIS):

Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Literature and Culture,” which took place at the University of La Roja, Spain. Boran reflected among others on his creative writing process, the exploration of identity in contemporary Ireland and gender issues. Referring to the concept of trauma in Irish society, the poet pointed out that “the changes in Irish society (...) have caused huge hurt and trauma and disappointment” (272) and the role of art in general is to find a way to describe different phenomena indirectly (272).

To conclude, *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture* is an interesting work that offers a deep academic insight into the issue of trauma in contemporary Irish society and the way it is represented in culture. Five different sections: Literature and Film, Memory and Digital Archives, History, Music and Creative Writing offer a multiplicity of approaches to the concept of trauma—from individual to collective. The impact of power structures, such as the Catholic Church or turbulent political events—the Irish revolution 1916-1923 or Northern Ireland’s *Troubles*—have left their marks not only on individuals directly involved in particular events, but also on the whole Irish nation. That is the reason why the witnesses have had to speak in order to heal their wounds and to shape the future generations. The book is invaluable for readers interested in trauma studies and for everyone who wants to study Irish history and culture.

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

THE INTERNATIONAL EMERGING SCHOLARS CONFERENCE
GLOBAL—LOCAL—GLOCAL IN ANGLOPHONE LITERATURE, CULTURE, AND
LINGUISTICS

Organized by: The Academic Association for Doctoral Students of English at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

Conducted in: English

Took place on: 26-27 March 2021

Took place in: Toruń (online)

Report by: Julia Siepak

The International Emerging Scholars Conference “Global—Local—Glocal in Anglophone Literature, Culture, and Linguistics” took place on 26th and 27th March 2021. Due to the restrictive measures taken by the university authorities in order to limit the transmission of COVID-19, the event was organized in an online format. Continuing the tradition of the series of young scholars’ conferences organized by the Academic Association for Doctoral Students of English at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, this year’s event responded to the need to consider the categories of the local and the global, their intersections, as well as tensions emerging at their crossroads, for a better understanding of past and present and planning for more sustainable and equal futures. This edition of the conference was organized under the auspices of the Institute of Literary Studies at NCU Toruń, as well as the Department of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Comparative Studies and Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics at NCU Toruń.

Two acknowledged scholars in their fields: Professor Martin Butler from the University of Oldenburg (cultural studies) and Dr. Katarzyna Piątkowska from NCU Toruń (linguistics) delivered fascinating keynote lectures responding meaningfully to the conference’s central theme. Professor Butler’s talk entitled

“Between (Local) Identity Politics and (Global) Commodity Culture: On the Mobility and Hybridity of US-American Tattooing” addressed the cultural complexity of the practices of tattooing in the United States and inspired an insightful discussion in the Q&A session. Dr. Piątkowska’s lecture “Global and Local Interpretations of Culture, Competence and Intercultural Competence in Intercultural Discourse” presented an overview of the problems connected to intercultural competence from various perspectives, including social and cognitive, that kindled a considerable interest in the audience. The participants had also the opportunity to listen to the conference special guest, Mark Tardi from the University of Łódź, who shared his reflections on the experience of teaching theatre in Oman in the talk entitled “Scorpions are Good Mothers: On Developing English-Language Theatre in Central Oman.” The meeting with Mark Tardi was well-attended both by the conference participants and guests, sparking a stimulating conversation on the cultural and ethical underpinnings of his project.

The conference gathered thirty young scholars affiliated with ten universities across Poland, as well as young academics from different corners of the world, including Spain, Italy, Iraq, and Brazil. Nine thematically divided panels featured a variety of papers representing different areas of the interdisciplinary field of English studies. The first session of the conference explored the motifs of specters and manifestations in TV series *Chernobyl* (Barbara Pawlak, University of Łódź), the End SARS Movement in Nigeria (Patrycja Koziół, Polish Academy of Sciences), and Deborah Levy’s novel *The Man Who Saw Everything* (Joanna Antoniak, NCU Toruń). It was followed by a panel dedicated to different aspects of English as a global language that explored ESL and ELF in the context of language acquisition among Brazilians (Ana Carolina Andre, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin), bilingualism and the organization of grammatical tenses (Anna Skałba, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), redundancy in contact languages (Dorota Watkowska, NCU Toruń), and British Council’s initiatives in Poland during the

Cold War (Ewelina Gdaniec, University of Economy in Bydgoszcz). The presenters in the third session of the conference addressed the minority experiences in glocal contexts, delivering talks on Gypsy women's experiences during the pandemic (Melissa Cicchetti, University of Oviedo), nativism in Chinua Achebe's novel, "Man of the People" (Izabela Poręba, University of Wrocław), and the inclusion of Arab perspectives in local comic books (Hafsa Alkhudairi, independent scholar). The evening sessions of the first day of the conference centered on linguistic expressions of identity and critical discourse analysis of current issues. The talks undertook such topics as linguistic expressions of Hispanic-American identities (Hanna Twardowska, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), Egyptian English (Lucia La Causa, University of Catania), sign languages (Wiktor Eźlakowski, Jagiellonian University in Kraków), tabloid press discourse on Brexit (Albert Guziak, University of Warsaw), the EU official discourse on the COVID-19 pandemic (Svetlana Kucheriavaia, University of Łódź), and the American press' representation of the conflict in Armenia (Lidia Shahbazyan, University of Economy in Bydgoszcz).

The second day of the conference opened with a session concerning linguistic intersectionality, including papers on multiple negations (Natalia Rzonsowska, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), raven-linguistics in Polish and Anglophone literature (Dominika Zawadzka, University of Rzeszów), and linguistic marketing strategies of famous Italian brands (Magdalena Księcikowska, University of Rzeszów). It was followed by the panel dedicated to the concepts of the Anthropocene and Ecocene in Indigenous futurism (Julia Siepak, NCU Toruń), artistic projects involving tree planting (Magdalena Krzosek-Hołody, University of Warsaw), and Anne Bishop's *Others* (Katarzyna Szyszka, University of Warsaw). The next session explored the issues of gender in global and local perspectives as represented in Afrikaans war movies (Robert Cnotalski, University of Łódź), the theory of Solarpunk (Katarzyna Stępień, NCU Toruń), alternative histories (Magdalena Dziurzyńska, University of Wrocław),

and Raymond Carver's fiction (Agata Rupińska, NCU Toruń). The closing panel addressed the questions connected to the changing world, touching upon the emergence of Solarpunk (Aleksandra Sieradzka, NCU Toruń), the revisiting of William Faulkner's *Light in August* (Sergio Schargel, São Paulo University & Brenda Rocha, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro), the utopian/dystopian character of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (Paweł Oleksak, NCU Toruń), and the critical reading of the contemporary fiction on the pilgrimage to Santiago (Ángela López Pereira, independent scholar).

The International Emerging Scholars Conference "Global—Local—Glocal in Anglophone Literature, Culture, and Linguistics" proved to be a venue for young scholars' fruitful and stimulating discussions. This edition of the conference was particularly well-attended, which points to the urgency of the issues regarding the global and local realities in contemporary scholarship. The event provided a platform for the exchange of ideas among young academics from Poland and beyond, creating opportunities for establishing friendly professional relationships. Despite the online format of this year's conference, it was certainly a successful and memorable event.

(IM)PERFECT WOMEN IN (IM)PERFECT WORLDS: DYSTOPIAS, UTOPIAS, AND FEMINISM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Organized by: Student Feminist Society and Faculty of Humanities at Nicolaus Copernicus University

Conducted in: English

Took place on: 14-15 May 2021

Took place in: Toruń (online)

Report by: Katarzyna Stępień

“(Im)perfect women in (im)perfect worlds: Dystopias, utopias, and feminism at the beginning of the 21st century,” a conference for students, young scholars, independent researchers, and literature enthusiasts, took place on 14th and 15th May 2021. Due to the restrictions caused by the ongoing pandemic, the conference was organised remotely, which contributed to its international character.

The conference began with a keynote lecture by acclaimed scholar Dr Adam Stock from York St John University. His presentation, entitled “A past imperfect and transient presence: migration and the dystopian experience of border spaces,” outlined some dystopian aspects of immigration and sparked a lively discussion during the Q&A session. Our second keynote speaker, Dr Nelly Strehlau from Nicolaus Copernicus University, closed the conference with a paper devoted to representation of COVID-19 pandemic in the American media, entitled “Precarious Lives during the Pandemic: An Introduction to a Discussion.”

The conference gathered nearly twenty aspiring scholars from different corners of the world and inspired all the participants to engage in discussions

and share their perspectives on the conference themes. Presentations were divided into six thematic panels: “Cultural narratives and women,” “Visions of diversity and sameness,” “Crossing boundaries,” “Contemporary concerns,” “Women in time,” and “Gendering science and media.”

The first session comprised papers that described narratives about female characters in realist and non-realist dystopian societies. The papers used this perspective to comment on women’s experience as depicted in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* and Ayobami Adebayo’s *Stay With Me* (Noah Oladele from Obafemi Awolowo University), as well as in three dystopian video games: *BioShock Infinite*, *The Last of Us*, and *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (Dagmara Solska from the University of Gdańsk); the third paper focused on the depiction of trauma in the popular young adult book series *The Hunger Games* (Agnieszka Staszak from Nicolaus Copernicus University). The second session centred around the notion of rebellion against oppressive standardisation of behaviour and appearance. It began with a paper that characterised the utopian “You-Niverses” in Africanfuturist young adult novels by Nigerian and Nigerian-American Afrofeminists: Nnedi Okorafor’s *Who Fears Death*, Tomi Adeyemi’s *Children of Blood and Bone*, and Akwaeke Emezi’s *Pet* (Funmilayo Akinpelu from Central European University). The session continued with an analysis of silencing intimacy in Japanese culture based on Yasunari Kawabata *Thousand Cranes* and Fumiko Enchi’s *The Waiting Years* (Katarzyna Stępień from Nicolaus Copernicus University), and finally, drew attention to the impact of beauty standards on women, based on Frances Cha’s *If I Had Your Face* and Mika Ninagawa’s *Helter Skelter* (Agata Rupińska from Nicolaus Copernicus University). The last panel on Friday featured only one presenter (Aleksandra Sieradzka from Nicolaus Copernicus University), who discussed the film *Jennifer’s Body* through the lens of subversive potential of the female body as a site of monstrosity in cinema.

The second day started with a session devoted to contemporary social and ecological problems, consecutively describing the environmental turn in

dystopian fiction and the presentation of Omar El Akkad's *American War* and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* as eco-dystopias (Natalia Bracikowska from Nicolaus Copernicus University), the Black experience, and anti-capitalist critique in political hip hop and movies by Boots Riley (Dawid Smyk from Nicolaus Copernicus University), and taking on narratives of post-binary future constructed by the anti-gender movements in Latvia. The next session comprised papers which focused on the representation of women in dystopian literature. It began with a presentation dedicated to the redefinition of traditional gender categories in selected contemporary feminist dystopian novels (Aleksandra Pogońska-Baranowska from the University of Warsaw), followed by an analysis of Elizabeth Bear's novel *Carnival* as an example of a dystopian matriarchy in the 21st century (Magdalena Dziurzyńska from the University of Wrocław), and a discussion of the imbalanced representation of women and men in Cixin Liu's *Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy (Paweł Oleksak from Nicolaus Copernicus University). The last session of the conference comprised presentations related to stereotypes in science and medicine. The first paper described the somatisation of femininity and presented psychiatry as a means of reinforcing the status quo of scapegoating (Alex Lubiński from Nicolaus Copernicus University), the second paper analysed neurosexism and how science is used to justify gender stereotypes (Martyna Kopeć from Nicolaus Copernicus University), and the last paper addressed the seemingly utopian and idealised image of women promoted by the social media based on the study of the phenomenon of the "Instagram face" (Paulina Szczepaniak from Nicolaus Copernicus University).

The international conference "(Im)perfect women in (im)perfect worlds: Dystopias, utopias, and feminism at the beginning of the 21st century" aimed to create a space for young scholars to exchange ideas and explore the aforementioned topics. The inspirations we have found during those two days will undoubtedly have an immense impact on our future research. The organisers hope that the conference succeeded in bringing attention to a wide

range of subjects, showcasing the continuing relevance of the notion of dystopia.

STUDENTS' CORNER

TORUŃ'S RETRO-STYLE CRIME FICTION WRITTEN BY YOUNG AUTHORS FROM ABROAD

Polish retro-style crime fiction was the topic of one of the courses conducted for international students at the Faculty of Humanities in 2019 (the Faculty of Languages at the time). The 21 people who attended the course came from China, France, Spain, Turkey. The students started with only a general knowledge of Polish culture and history so the topic aimed to familiarize them with a new, rich current of Polish literature. Retro-style crime fiction works are both entertaining and informative. Therefore, the works selected for reading and discussion consisted of not only the most popular novels of that style, but also novels whose plots revolve around Toruń's past. The analyses were supported by presentations of facts and events from the history of Toruń at the turn of the 20th-century and viewings of artefacts and buildings which are still in existence in the city. Following the lecturer's input, the students took over the narration about life in Toruń in earlier times. Examples of the outcome of the course are presented to readers—the three best short stories from the bundle of high quality pieces of writing prepared by the students. What links them is not only a structure of the genre and the subject but also their authors' efforts to recreate Toruń's convoluted history. The authors' visions, infused with their emotions, seem to me worthy of appreciation.

Dariusz Pniewski

(Nicolaus Copernicus University)

Yann Stephan

AN OLD TOWN TALE

September 1897, Wola Zamkowa street, Toruń.

Hans Götze started his morning observation of the street by watching closely the first women going out for grocery shopping. The reason why he had to keep his eyes wide open was the fact that Hans was a German soldier serving his duty for Toruń's governing body. After a year of political rumble between the German and Polish factions of the city, the Deutsche Heer was strongly reinforcing its authority over the local population. In other words, Hans had to act tough.

The women would come out of their homes in the morning sun. The men, husbands for the most part, had already set out for work before sunrise. One of them was Salomon Rosenthal, a 34-year-old Jewish jeweller and also a widower after the death of Tereza Hannemann, who passed away three years ago in mysterious conditions. He opened a jewellery store on Wola Zamkowa Street nine months ago and despite a relatively low number of shoppers, he was still earning a large and prosperous income. Both the Poles and Germans were always contemplating his store in a dubious way, as if wondering how rich Salomon was and if that was the case, how he made so much money with so few customers. Such questions also troubled a Pole named Pawel Obraniak, a 42-year-old stonemason originally from Czernikowo, a small village on the outskirts of Toruń. Pawel had moved to Toruń twelve years ago in pursuit of a better life and had managed to do so. However, Pawel was not quite the average stonemason from around the corner. Despite possessing strong hands and a healthy body, he was also in possession of smart brain. Pawel was a polyglot, able to speak four languages fluently without a taint of an accent. On top of his

native Polish, he was able to speak German, Yiddish and Ukrainian. These qualities will prove to be very useful in the near future.

On that bright morning Pawel was working by the Vistula River on the Bulwar Filadelfijski. With four co-workers, he was sharpening stones for the reconstruction of the wall circling Toruń's Old Town. After sweating for two hours, Pawel reached for some water and marked a pause in his duty. While watching the street ahead of him, he glanced at a graceful silhouette gliding along the red-bricked pavement. In fact, he was observing Anna Zubrowka, the only real Anna in town. Miss Zubrowka was a 21-year-old Polish student and daughter of an aristocratic family from Toruń. She was walking towards Wola Zamkowa street with a grocery bag, and Pawel was observing her with the same enamored eyes as on the first day. Nevertheless, despite an open fire burning inside him, he was well aware of the fact that she was on her way to Tsirung Place, the shop owned by Salomon Rosenthal. Anna would visit Salomon every morning but Pawel had so far not been able to figure out the reason of her visit. As a result, upon seeing her silhouette disappearing in the distance, his physical attraction to her turned into deep anger and repulsion, and he resumed his stone sharpening duty unhappy and ashamed of himself.

In fact, Anna was simply paying a visit to Salomon's young daughter Ella, a 10-year-old bright young girl who saw Anna as the mother she was missing so much. Such daily visit was always a pleasure for the father and daughter. Anna, as per usual, came with some fruits and vegetables from the market and in that way contributed to the healthy feeding of the young girl. Salomon, however, tended to see Anna as the wife he was missing so much.

Living on the outskirts of the city because of his religion and the passing of his wife had impacted him enormously. After the usual morning greetings, Anna sat on a chair behind the desk and Salomon brought a book from the storage room. He was teaching the Hebrew language to Anna, who was fond of anything regarding Jewish culture. Such passion was also kept secret from her family as they held strong opinions regarding the Jews in their city. Her language skills

were in fact fairly poor but it was the chance for her to stare and listen to Salomon for at least half an hour. Since there were almost no customers looking for jewels in the morning, Salomon had all the time in the world to practice such activities with Anna. Ella brought them tea with sugar and some Jewish biscuits before retiring to the storage room to play with her toys. Once the Hebrew lesson was finished, Anna stood up and as Salomon was walking her out of the shop she stopped, stared at him and kissed the man, unable to restrain herself from her inner feelings. Salomon was not so surprised; he knew such a situation was awaiting them and for the first time in three years he blushed and felt loved. They kissed again and said goodbye with Anna unsure of how to act after revealing her feelings towards him so openly.

The next day, Anna went out as usual but without stopping at Salomon's place. Instead, she bumped into Hans, the German soldier, who was patrolling Wola Zamkowa Street. He greeted her with a smile, a rather unusual trait as smiling was to be forgotten at all costs towards the local population. Anna tried to avoid eye-contact with the Deutsche Heer soldier. Whenever she looked at his eyes, she remembered that night in July when she found herself trapped in the basement of his home on Fryderyka Chopina Street, raped and beaten up until morning. Hans abused her again and again until exhaustion. The soldier turned into some form of a wild animal, cracking a whip leaving on her waist marks still visible on her skin. The young lady was, therefore, in panic at the mere shadow of Hans lingering about. The soldier was well aware of the fact that she could have told the entire city about what took place in his home two months ago. But deep down, he knew she did not, and that she dared not to since the German faction of Toruń was in such a powerful position that almost all crimes committed by their members were, if not unnoticed, absolved almost instantly. The Poles, however, were walking on thin ice and had to be extremely cautious about their actions, and so were the Jews.

Pawel Obraniak, the stonemason, was always using his language skills to get out of uneasy situations. He met Hans for the first time a few months ago, as he

was sitting inside one of the numerous city taverns. Pawel was overhearing a conversation between Hans and some of his Deutsche Heer colleagues. One of the German soldiers was bragging about how one day he broke the arm of a Pole who was allegedly trying to break into a German bakery shop. They were all laughing like maniacs on hearing such a sad but realistic account of daily life in Toruń. Pawel then got up, briefly glanced at the table where the soldiers were sitting, and stepped out of the tavern to light up a cigarette. He was smoking illegal tobacco from Ukraine that he obtained each month from a small ship stopping only for a few hours on the bank of the Vistula River, on the opposite side of the Old Town. The ship's crew only spoke Ukrainian and since Pawel mastered the language, it was easy for him to interact with them. As he was about to throw his cigarette butt on the ground, Hans reached for him and asked "*Was passiert Steinmetz? Alles klar für dich?*". Pawel was startled at the idea that Hans was aware of his profession and therefore replied after what appeared to be a long silence for him. He replied in German, saying that everything was fine and offered Hans a cigarette. The soldier declined, declaring health concerns and quickly rushed back inside the tavern. Pawel then lit up another cigarette and tiptoed his way back home, only stopping from time to time to watch behind his back.

Salomon Rosenthal had not seen Anna for three days. As he was closing his jewellery store before heading home, he noticed how unusually busy the street was. Some people were either rushing their way home or running in any possible direction. He firmly held his daughter's hand and reassured her, "Let's go home *kleyne meyd!*" and as they were trying to escape from the disorientated throng, Salomon heard someone shouting in Polish "German soldier murdered, German soldier dead!". Such news came as a huge shock for the local population. Any non-German person could potentially be accused of murdering Hans Götze, the 42-year-old soldier originally from Rostock in northern Germany. His body was discovered and retrieved from the Vistula River, floating, indicating that the murder had happened minutes before the finding.

His eyes had been removed in what appeared to have been a gruesome torture act. Hans's limbs had also been amputated, his right arm missing, the one that was always carrying his machine gun. Furthermore, after the three Polish wood workers who retrieved the body analyzed it, they found that his tongue had also been removed. It was the act of a madman, as everyone thought. But a German soldier? Why? Salomon was in a state of shock as he quickly realised that he could be a potential murderer according to the German authorities. There was no time for him to ponder on the situation standing still in the middle of the street, so he and Ella quickly disappeared into the horizon, towards home.

A knock on the door, then a loud bang in Tsirung Place. Salomon knew who was asking and showed no emotions when he was handcuffed by two German soldiers taking him to the Rathaus for questioning. He had spent the previous evening praying, over and over again, for the Lord to have mercy on him, in vain. He believed there was neither a Lord nor angels for the Germans. As a Jew, Salomon had to face discrimination on a daily basis and take it like a man, as any form of protest would have most probably been welcomed with a rope around his neck on Toruń's main square. En route to the Rathaus, he remembered the few occasions he had encountered Hans Götze. The German soldier came to the jewellery store every afternoon, asking the same annoying questions. "How much have you been selling today? Why are you rich? Are you trafficking something?". In fact, the basement of Tsirung Place consisted of a large area with a round table in which at weekends the Jews would gather and bet on any possible sport or activity. The German authorities knew nothing about that. When the soldiers watched the congregation of Jews entering the jewellery store on Saturday evenings, they were persuaded that the gathering was intended for religious celebrations as that was the day of Shabbat. No Germans ever wished to enter and check it out, since the mere thought of being among a crowd of Jews was a disgusting notion for them. As a result, Salomon was going to the Rathaus for a reason that could have been legitimate, but

instead was transported on the grounds of a different matter. Not for betting, but for murder.

Nevertheless, Salomon always had something against Hans that was not related to the daily irruption in his store. He would see him on mornings and catch his attitude towards Anna. He could not prevent himself from thinking that there was a history between the two. Those thoughts tore his heart out. However, they were cut short by a bullet fired through his brain. Salomon had been shot while being transported by the German forces and was now lying dead in the middle of Szeroka Street, a couple of feet away from the Rathaus. A German officer had shot him, as a way to show the local population that the killing of Hans Götze was a serious matter.

In less than ten days, the Germans had killed around 200 people, mainly Jews, as a retaliation for the soldier's murder. Anna had heard the news of Salomon's deliberate assassination and she was unable to leave her room, let alone her home. She could not be mourning in peace as she was in a state of pure wonder. "How did we get there?" she sometimes asked herself, looking through her window and observing the excessive number of German soldiers parading about. Among the army men she noticed a familiar shape.

Pawel Obraniak was on his way to Bulwar Filadelfijski for work. Anna suddenly remembered that every morning, upon reaching the Bulwar, she felt observed. Additionally, she noticed how Pawel was using his eyes in a furtive way, always on the lookout, as if uncomfortable.

Her observation of the Pole was cut short by her father's voice asking Anna to come down for breakfast. She kept on staring at the window before gingerly turning back and heading for the stairs. That vision had left her in wonder. Amidst all the bloody and violent context, he was the one acting the most fearsome. Anna then realised her answer was perhaps in the question. Was Pawel acting in this way so as to leave suspicions aside?

The next day, Anna was resuming her daily walks in Toruń's Old Town. She had changed her usual path though, and upon passing the Rathaus she saw a

poster advertising the public hanging of a young man going by the name of Adam Bednarek, a 21-year-old Pole and a Greek philosophy student. Such hanging would, in fact, mark the end of the mass killings as the culprit for the murder of Hans Götze had now been found and convicted. But there was something running deep down Anna's mind that made her still unconvinced of Adam's guilty crime. Although most Poles and Jews were somehow relieved of such finding, nobody was in fact quite sure whether the Germans got hold of the actual culprit.

Doubt was everywhere. And Pawel Obraniak was aware of this. Pawel had actually found out about Anna having been raped by Hans. A few weeks ago, as he was working on another construction site on Rabianska Street, he recalled a conversation with a Ukrainian acquaintance, a plumber, Sasha, who had told Pawel of loud shouts coming from his neighbour's house. At first, he thought it was another argument between his neighbours but he was surprised to see Anna leaving the house the next day and realised that probably the German soldier was involved in some unsavoury sex act. Hans Götze unfortunately was infamous for his sexual activities in Toruń and his taste for Polish ladies. Anna was not the first and most probably not the last of his preys. Pawel felt repulsed and started to grow profound hatred towards the man and the entire Deutsche Heer. How could anyone force a woman to engage in sexual intercourse? Besides, how could anyone force such a voluptuous woman as Anna?

Unable to sleep, his brain paralysed with visions of Anna and Hans in bed together, Pawel Obraniak went for a late-night brew on Fryderyka Chopina Street. That talk with Sasha had disturbed him so much. He went to drink on the street where Hans Götze lived and there was a bar there selling quality German draught beers. Pawel ordered a large glass of Bitburger, his favourite beer. The bar, "Dom Chopina", attracted a large number of young Poles, students for the most part. On the stool next to his sat Adam Bednarek. Pawel recognized his face but was unable to put a name to it. He waved at the young man, introduced himself, then shook his hand. Adam was a bright young fellow, however very

opinionated and a tough man to talk politics with. Pawel was simply engaging in conversation, when a group of young men surrounded them and greeted Adam with smiles. Those were Adam's classmates, as he told Pawel he was a Greek philosophy student. The conversation turned more engaging and serious in tone. The group of students and the stonemason then quickly changed topics and were now talking about their own accounts of the Deutsche Heer. Pawel, the eldest, thought there was no harm in asking the group who had already met or seen Hans Götze. Most of the young students' faces nodded positively before Pawel simply asked why. Adam then took the lead and explained that a few female acquaintances had some unfortunate tales to tell. Pawel needed no more explanations. He then went on to explain how he heard a similar story involving a woman he claimed he did not know personally, but whom the students were quick to realise he was fond of. The young students were in fact gathering twice a week in Dom Chopina. The previous meetings had been held in order to set a plan to trap Hans Götze, to catch him red-handed. It was a difficult task as the German soldier was in fact the nephew of Toruń's mayor, Wilhelm Friedrich Götze. But the students had now a new ally and counted on his participation. After three hours of intense planning and more than a few more beers, everyone agreed on sending the soldier a letter explaining that a woman would beg him to come and meet her on the other side of the Vistula River for a romantic dinner. They had no idea as to whether or not Hans would fall for the clever trap, but they sent the letter to his house anyway. The gang agreed to meet on the other bank of the Vistula River at 7 o'clock in the evening the next day.

Everyone gathered where the boat coming from Ukraine with illegally imported products moored. Such a plan was in fact a big risk, if Hans came and the plan failed, he could not only continue his rape rampage, but he could also reveal the location of the boat to the Deutsche Heer. Pawel was nervous, his right arm was shaking anxiously. To their amazement, Hans Götze made the trip and appeared on the horizon, his army silhouette reinforcing their loathe of

the man, and he was carrying a machine gun on his right arm. Hans had no idea that he was onto his final journey. Before he started wondering where that woman was, a rope was tied around his neck and the crew drew him closer to them. Then the questions started. As Paweł Obraniak spoke flawless German, he was in charge of dealing with Hans face-to-face and ask all possible questions. The soldier was resisting and said nothing before Adam Bednarek joined Paweł and started punching his face. Adam broke the soldier's nose. He was still resisting. A mad spirit started to grip around the place and Adam used his knife to take one of the soldier's eyes. Hans screamed and was bleeding intensely. Paweł was still asking questions but the soldier could not prevent the screaming, so Adam then cut the soldier's tongue. Hans fell to the ground unconscious, he had fainted as the pain was impossible to bear. Paweł asked Adam to step away from the soldier but the young philosophy student was unstoppable. He removed both eyes from Hans and his tongue. Another member of the gang then used an axe to amputate his right arm. Paweł could not believe the scene he was witnessing.

Hans died within minutes and the students then gathered again, unable to plan their next move as the events unfolded in a very unexpected way. They were looking at each other as if calling for help, but no help came. Adam, as if waking up from a bad nightmare, then took hold of the soldier's body and threw it in the Vistula River. The gang then contemplated the river, speechless, mesmerised by their own actions.

Adam's arrest had put the city at rest from the mass killings by the Deutsche Heer. Paweł Obraniak was not able to resume work, and pretended to suffer from a condition that would keep him out of work for a few months at least. In fact, Paweł was waiting for the Ukrainian boat to come to Toruń and escape from the city. He planned to move to Warszawa and rebuild his life over there. Additionally, Adam had not yet been killed and Paweł was afraid that the Germans would torture the man to see whether he acted alone or not. As he was sorting all his belongings and choosing what he would take with him, he

heard a knock on the door. It was Anna. Taken by surprise, Pawel opened the door and ushered her in. They spent the first few minutes staring at each other, with Pawel aware that Anna knew about what happened on the bank of the Vistula River. He told her nothing regarding his involvement in the murder of Hans Götze, but Anna then revealed that she was extremely sad for Salomon Rosenthal's death, accused of a crime he did not commit. Pawel did not actually know about the Jewish man's death. He then felt guilty and confessed to Anna, his confession bringing tears to the woman's eyes. They were both crying. The stonemason cried as he realised that Anna was in fact in love with the innocent Jew who paid the highest price for his own crime. Anna, her heart in pain, left Pawel's apartment and the man quickly packed his bag before heading towards the Vistula River. He made a terrible mistake in confessing to the crime. Anna, despite being in his dreams, was also a complete stranger who could just as well tell anyone about the murder. As he was walking in a rather fast pace, getting closer to the river, he felt a hand reaching his back. A man sliced his throat with a knife and Pawel fell on his knees, his neck spitting blood like a fountain. He died while Adam Bednarek's neck was broken by a rope on the main square in front of a large crowd. It was over.

Julien Geffroy

**POLISH CRIME FICTION:
FROM TORUN WITH LOVE LETTERS**

I will always remember when I first came to the lovely city of Torun in the middle of Poland. At that time I was a 25-year-old student looking for new adventures in a foreign country. I was studying history and wanted to enroll for a Master's degree at the Nicolaus Copernicus University. One day, while I was decorating what was going to be my flat for the next two years in Warszawska street, I found an old box hidden behind a decrepit cupboard in the ceiling. This box contained several love letters from various persons but all addressed to a certain Anna Dietl. As I was writing at this time my thesis about the history of Torun and its different mayors, I recognized that Dietl was the name of Torun's mayor during the years 1921-1922. I have thus decided that it was a good idea to dig further into those letters to discover what mysteries were hidden behind them.

After long hours of research at the university library, I finally found a record of an unsolved case opened in 1921 and related to Anna Dietl. Anna Dietl was indeed a daughter of the current mayor of Torun at that time. In 1921, Anna was a young woman of 26 years. She was beautiful and really praised by most of the men in Torun. She had a lot of powerful and rich friends among the upper-class. She loved to flirt with boys and knew how to control them to get what she wanted. What connected the letters and the case was the fact that she had three main suitors. The first one, Hans, was a 43-year-old German, who was overprotective towards her and had a lot of influence in the society. The second one was Piotr (32 years old), a famous Polish violinist, who was totally in awe with Anna's charm. He wanted to earn her favors so much that he was ready to

do whatever it took to be by her side. Finally, the last one was Jacob, a 28-year-old Jew and the owner of a jewelry shop. He was one of the wealthiest men in town and the only one whose letters to Anna were answered. I thus guessed that he was the one of the three for whom Anna probably had feelings. The most obvious link between those men was Anna. However, Piotr and Jacob were both students in the same violin school and played concerts together. The case I discovered concerned the murder of Jacob. His body was found near a Teutonic monument at the junction of Aleja Solidarnosci and Waly Generala Wladyslawa Sikorskiego at the northern entrance to the city which doesn't exist nowadays. According to the files, the murder of Jacob had been committed by Hans. The motives were simple, it was an act of jealousy and hatred toward his rival. It was also mentioned that Hans was a descendant of a long lineage of a secret fascist group from the 19th century. Hans was then sentenced to a lifelong incarceration. One particular thing caught my attention though—another case was linked to this one. It was a file about the mysterious and still unsolved disappearance of Piotr. However, since there was no information about this case, I decided to write a paper about this story with the help of the letters I had found before giving them to the authorities.

A few months later, I was at a Juwenalia party when I received a call from one of my friends saying that he was stuck in an abandoned house with one of his legs broken. When I arrived at the location he sent me, which was Fort sw. Jakuba, I found him down a hole. While we were waiting for the ambulance, we got scared by the view of a skeleton lying a few meters from us. A few weeks after this incident, the police communicated to the press that it was in fact Piotr's body. When I heard the news, I rushed to the police station taking my letters with me. The case had been reopened and I became a kind of consultant for the police since I had a good knowledge of the letters and focused on this story in my studies. The forensic scientist stated that the body had been mutilated with an incredible fierceness. The traces found on the skeleton but also the ones found near to it revealed that the body had been torn apart with

pieces of the body spread everywhere in the room. Moreover, the head had been cut off and his heart torn off his body. Surely, the murderer's hatred of this man must have been enormous. However, the forensic scientist made it clear that he didn't die from all of these injuries but from strangulation. What is more, a string coming from a violin bow was found not so far from the body with Piotr's DNA on it.

After three months of struggling with this case the police finally made some new discoveries. Indeed, my flat turned out to be the one of Jacob and further investigations revealed that the one next to mine was owned by the Dietl family. Thus, Jacob and Anna probably had a secret love affair. In Anna's flat some more letters were found which brought new light to the case. They revealed that Piotr, since he became a close friend to Jacob, was told that Anna and him had a relationship. The police also discovered that Piotr was, in fact, a former assassin working for the Polish government and consequently had access to a lot of hidden information. He thus killed Jacob and trapped Hans. Indeed, he knew the inglorious past of Hans's family and it was easy for him to make Hans carry the can for Jacob's murder. Finally, Piotr's murder remained a mystery until the police discovered Jacob's violin bow hanging on the wall with one of its strings missing in the old Dietl's family house, in Anna's room...

Kadir Azlak
THE STRANGER GOD

It has already been four months since I came to this city, full of strange things such as trade hustles, strong horses, rivermen, trade guilds, cobblestone roads, narrow alleys which smell of gingerbread, a great watchtower—similar to nothing I'd seen before—and workers who have dirt in their hands from the hard work they do all day. Those were the first things to strike my eyes. Yet I wouldn't forget the first day I arrived in Torun, as I made my way surrounded by curious eyes towards a man addressing the crowd in the square where Nicolaus Copernicus statue was located. There I met the detective, my beloved friend Piotrek, who had just solved a mystery murder that was bothering the town for almost a week by the time I saw him. He was trying to ease the crowd's panic. A village girl had been found with her neck broken. After chasing the murderer for some time, Piotrek finally caught him eating grass in the field almost a mile away. It was a dark horse and the girl was the owner. I never told Piotrek I was in Torun before and I knew the girl who died in this terrible accident. She was the girl of one of my former workers named Wiktor. He was a good hardworking man just like anyone else in the town and I needed to see him but it took me three days to travel along the Vistula river to reach my destination.

Piotrek looked like any other man except for his eyes: he had the fiery blue eyes of a giant which can see through a man's soul. Later I would learn that he was a good detective and a skilled interrogator, but that was yet to come. He quickly realized that I was an outsider, and he offered to help me to my destination which was written on a small piece of paper I was holding in my hand. I felt a strange connection to that man as I saw him as my equal, as a

gentleman. He knew every stranger who came to the city and those who left it but for the first time he was surprised that one of them wanted to stay in a long abandoned house in the middle of the most problematic neighbourhood. I had the money to restore my old house and start a new business—a tavern which serves the traditional wine of Ephesus. I couldn't make the wine as I lacked the main ingredient, that is, grapes from the mild weather of Ephesus of the west coast of Ottoman Empire, populated by Greeks and Turks but I could definitely sell it thanks to the good trade routes helping my wine come to me. The trade policy for foreigners was excellent and Torun was thriving with wealth because it was a free town allowing many foreign investments. I believe this city was treated differently, which was a huge help. After my success in the wine-selling business, Piotr would call me Bacchus—the Greek God of wine and spiritual ecstasy. Bacchus was a stranger god and he was also known as Dionysos; he would bring his dizzy wisdom upon people of the city he travelled to and punish those who reject his spiritual guidance. I was surprised that a man far away from my home knew such a thing. I guess he had the opportunity to read, a luxury for the times we were in. Piotrek was a successful private detective by the time we met but the city was under Prussian rule and they didn't like him as much as I did for they thought that formal detectives and the town guards were more than enough to keep the peace. That's why they tried to insult him for sticking his nose in their business by deliberately giving him the horse murderer job. It was an official offer which couldn't be rejected by a simple private detective, so he took it and managed his way through it. The town was very relieved after he explained that there was actually no murderer. According to Piotr, the horse was innocent—a beautiful dark horse who loved his owner. The whole situation was merely an accident. 'Horses have innocent eyes, they deserve better after we put them through all this misery, yet they still help us and are kind enough to love their owners after all,' he said once. 'They are messengers of the blowing wind, they have the boots of Hermes. They ordered the hanging of the horse by the neck, you know? They hanged the horse! Can

you believe? I still dream of the day: I take the horse for a final walk through the woods, then they take it from me when we arrive to the court; they find him guilty and take him to the executioner. The executioner puts a rope around his neck and two horses pull the car the rope is bound to. They kill the dark horse, using two more horses—just like humans kill each other, they kill each other. The horse neighs for the last time but he doesn't stop, letting bubbles out of his big mouth, looking down to people underneath the shadows of the comfortable buildings. It took him hours before he stopped moving that day. Most people couldn't bear to watch and left after ten minutes. The story of the murderer horse shadowed the city for days, but you already know that, don't you? Luckily, you arrived the day after it happened, my friend,' he stared depressingly into my face. There it was. The look of the giant, it wasn't questioning this time. His eyes were as sad as sad they can get. Those were the eyes of the dark horse; I saw it through his eyes. 'They hanged the horse to prove that we, humans, are the ultimate law makers but I think there is a bigger force than us and we don't make laws, we just imitate our brutal nature, that is the wildness of our predecessors.' Funny that he brought up such an argument. I was a Turkish businessman and my father often told me stories about our ancestors and how they valued their ancestors who lived before them. Maybe he didn't know about my shamanic roots. In the steppes the most valuable animals were horses and killing them was punishable by death. My ancestors valued their ancestor's souls and the horses' lives at the same time. Why wouldn't people do that here? ***It was arrangeable.***

My business was getting better day by day. My best customers were priests and foreign workers along with some locals. Especially Mr. Tang's workers were always in my tavern when they didn't work. I even got a couple of complaints from the greatest Asian tradesman regarding this. He was also the leading guy in construction business. I ignored his teasings because quarrels were never good for business. I'd always call him with his first name which made him often more angry. He told me that it was disrespectful to call

someone like that when you were not a member of their family or a close friend. Zi Xuan would be angry with me anyway, he believed I led his good men to the evil of the Drunk God, making them unproductive during the day. He had a point, but that was my business after all.

The first time I saw it, I knew that it would be a bad thing for the business... It was just after closing time and I was taking the side alley home. Suddenly, my eyes caught a glimmering light in the distance. There was a shady figure at the end of the alley. The closer I got, the clearer it became. It was the priest of the Church of the Holy Spirit, sitting cross-legged on the ground surrounded by candles which were lined in a circular fashion. His head in his palms, he faced the bonfire and watched the night through its sparks. His tongue was missing, a lot of blood spilling from his mouth on the ground and from his neck on his robe, leaving red wine-colored blood stains. There was so much blood on the floor that it would dry the veins of Ephesus and I couldn't fail to notice that as a wine trader. The bonfire stayed lit until the morning while Piotrek and several officers looked for the priest's tongue all night. I lost a good customer and when the rumour of the murder was spread, my reputation as a businessman suffered a lot. Some customers stopped coming, my prices dropped low, it became hard to sustain deliveries. I decided to consult Piotrek about this matter, he assured me that when he found the murderer my business would be in good shape again. Then he promised he would manage that in the shortest time possible. I offered my best to help him as an eyewitness. Mr. and Mrs. Tang were happy due to the bad incident. Their workers were better at their job without me and this made their profit double over a week. Piotrek followed the suspicion and before he knew it, Zi Xuan was being questioned by both the officer responsible for investigation and Piotr. They decided to let him go because there was not any proof that indicated his involvement in the crime.

It became stranger three days later when people started to complain about seeing the dead priest at night carrying his covered bloody head in one hand and holding a candle in the other. The town went crazy for days because of the

rumours of the ghost priest. They believed that he was a sinner, that he lost his path in the misguiding claws of the devil, that the Lord punished him with half resurrection and he had to find the true path to his grave every night. All this nonsense made it harder to find a credible eyewitness that would validate Piotr's theory on the incident. The killer was using the naivete of the common folk to manipulate the crowd, making the investigation harder and harder. The detective thought that there was a motive behind all of the killer's actions, he just couldn't quite uncover it yet. To him, it meant only one thing: a bloody head meant another murder.

Some lumberjacks informed the watchers at the gate of barracks that they found a body in the woods, missing a head along with genitals, later identified as male. No one was missing in town but there was a place that no one would look if someone who lived there went missing. The place was called 'The Burglar's Den', a wooden house that was built by criminals deep into the woods. Everyone knew that they were there, but no one took action until somehow Piotr managed to persuade one of the officers to arrange a small unit to go on a raid against the criminals. After some time through several interrogations, they told the detective everything, including the information that three members of their community went missing. They identified one of them as the victim, based on what he was wearing at the time he disappeared. Nobody looked for him, they were criminals after all, they thought he had been on a job since then. None of them expected any murder. At least Piotrek got rid of the ghost rumours. There WAS a second murder and the victim was a rapist as far as he (Piotrek) heard from his (victim's) 'colleagues'. No one knew his real name, they called him '*Bestia*'.

Again, a week later, another body was found in front of the church closer to the gingerbread factory where Zi Xuan ran his business. She was well covered by a nun's dress and crucified. Well we thought so until some soldiers realized that her body was not actually there. The victim was a prostitute, everyone knew that, including the deceased priest, but nobody was talking about it. Now

she was just arms, legs and a head sewn to a sack full of lamb's wool on the crucifix and the head was missing eyes. One could easily see the bigger problem, though: how did the murderer carry a crucifix big enough to crash a horse under its weight and put it in front of the church without being noticed by anyone? Piotrek understood the logic of the second act of the murderer. It worked perfectly for this mission. Even if the rumours of the ghost priest were gone, no one dared to walk in the streets after midnight. There were only workers in the area at late night that day, going back home from the exhausting work. They saw nothing unusual and nobody left the workplace before their time. All of this happened near the post office. They took what was left from the body off the crucifix before the crowd started their day. There was only a pool of blood on a Sunday morning.

Everyone was in terror because they knew that someone was punishing the sinners but why kill the priest in the first place? He was the holy guide of the people and no one was sure whether he was a sinner after all. Little did they know that the one who kept silent in the face of a sin would also be responsible for the deed. I had never been a believer and I had always believed in reason and intellect for they would enable us to surpass even the creative power that was meant for God. Here we were witnessing someone finally taking God's place to punish the evil. As I also didn't believe in evil, I thought that people should be kept in line but was this really how it was supposed to be? Killing and terrorizing people to gain advance to a higher moral code might not have been the best way to replace God's mysterious ways. Wouldn't it be just taking the same way as the way of the punished? Maybe it wasn't for me to decide, but sometime later my business was in order again. Every citizen of Torun drifted in a disturbed peaceful sea of illusions. They refused to see who was behind all these murders—the murderer might be their next-door neighbour. Most men wanted to drink and forget about what was happening around them to calm their anxiety.

The next two weeks were so quiet that it almost drove Piotrek into madness. There were no clues. How did the murderer carry the crucifix? How could it be possible to fake that one had no head? Why was the tongue of the priest missing? Where were the eyes of the prostitute? Nothing matched any pattern after all. The first murder was represented as a shamanic soul-connecting ritual through a path to the other side; it had nothing to do with Christianity after all. The second murder was broadly inspired by the Hammurabi code, an eye for an eye. The third one was trying to say that Christ was wrong to forgive those who had sinned. All the murders were intercultural theatre scenes, but they seemed absurd when you tried to find any connection between them. They looked like three different murderers' doings, yet it was clear that one triggered the other. Murderers wouldn't possibly come together and start a cult. Piotrek remembered that eyewitnesses who saw the priest walk at night told him that he looked taller than usual. He was sure that it had to be the first murderer who had taken Bestia's head and walked around, yet there were two more burglars missing. Someone must have informed them before the raid. There was a snitch among the chain of command. He could not trust the officials anymore. A month later Piotrek got a letter from the murderer himself.

He gave him the address to the last murder and demanded that he would come alone—if he did so, the murderer would reveal his identity, meaning his surrender and an end to all. I was with him that night after he got the letter which had been tossed under his door in the morning hours. I knew he wouldn't trust anyone related to the case; he would go there alone. He wanted me to keep silent and stay at his home. I followed him to the Nicolaus Copernicus Statue, he didn't notice but there was only the murder but no murderer. He saw a kid, *Tang's youngest son*, lying in front of the statue, his chest cut open. The heart was missing but one could notice the heart the boy had grabbed. It looked as if it would fly with the slightest loose of his grasp. Piotr was furious when he kneeled in front of the body. It was **his** lack of skill that caused so much loss and his lack of attention. If only he had been more

Careful and smarter! It was devastating for him as I could read it from his face. He was alone but there was no sign of the killer, he looked for a clue a bit and then he returned to his former position, silently crying. It was the first time that an innocent person was murdered. The murderer crossed the line... When he was silently crying he felt footsteps behind his back but it was too late for him to react as he raised his head he had already got hit by a wooden club at the back of his neck.

He tried to get up but staggered and fell back to the ground. He didn't know where he was, why we were there. After a stunned period, he looked at me demanding for an answer. He needed an explanation about the boy... 'He was innocent. All your murders have to do with some kind of sin but what did he do? This is evil even for you! You damned monster! Why did you do it? How did you murder others? HOW? I thought of you as my friend and accepted you as my intellectual companion trusted you with all my feelings about the job I do. Explain this thoroughly and then maybe your death will be an easy one depending on what you have to say about all this!' He was struggling to get rid of the ropes, shouting at me while I was slowly pushing a thin pointy blade through his heart, his struggle stopped. There was silence and wine. I gave him no explanation.

I could tell *Piotrek* that I killed the priest because he was supposed to warn people against sins but he stood there when they hanged an animal that **she** was supposed to protect, the beloved Goddess of mine, **Diana**. Who could believe such nonsense that an animal under the mercy of her would do such an act? The priest knew it wasn't her horse that broke **her** neck, he heard it from the prostitute but kept his silence. I took his tongue for he didn't need it. I could tell *him* that I killed the prostitute because she saw what happened but only feared for her body. I hired two criminals to carry her crucifix at night and I silenced them, threatening that they would have a bloody meal in their throats. I took the prostitute's eyes and body for she had no right to carry the burden. And... I could tell *him* that Bestia raped **her** and broke **her** neck and **HE**, the

glorious detective was nothing more than a stupid man to let this slip out of his understanding, occupied by small things such as insults from the officials. I could at least tell *him* that the boy was the only innocent. I killed the boy to punish myself and Piotr for the misdoings we had done, ***for there is no justice.***

I killed *him* without a word, for he could never understand, and he never would.

ABSTRAKTY

Umut Alintas

A contrastive study of theme-based instruction and grammar-translation method in teaching English to young learners

Program tematyczny (nauka języka w obrębie jednego tematu) oznacza nabywanie i rozwijanie umiejętności językowych w danym kontekście. Podejście to w największym stopniu różni się od tradycyjnych metod, tj. metod gramatyczno-tłumaczeniowych, gdyż zakłada ono naukę w oparciu o polecenia, które pozwalają na naukę języka w rzeczywistych sytuacjach, wymagających kompetencji w zakresie języka obcego. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie i porównanie wyżej wspomnianych podejść pod względem przyswajania języka, rozwoju umiejętności słuchania i mówienia oraz autonomii uczniów. Praca ta skupia się również na omówieniu realizacji metody gramatyczno-tłumaczeniowej w krajach azjatyckich oraz opisanu wyników dwóch ankiet przeprowadzonych w Turcji dotyczących dwóch metod opisanych w artykule.

Natalia Anna Bracikowska

Environmental story-telling—the liminal space between embedded and emergent narrative

W artykule analizowana jest współzależność pomiędzy środowiskiem gry (game environment) a narracją w kontekście narracji środowiskowej (environmental storytelling). Rozważania teoretyczne na temat tego pojęcia zostały poprzedzone krótkim omówieniem narracyjnego aspektu gier cyfrowych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem zagadnień interaktywności i czasoprzestrzenności jako dwóch charakterystycznych cech dla tego medium. Artykuł czerpie z już istniejących teorii odnoszących się do narracji środowiskowej i przedstawia model konceptualny, reprezentujący trzy poziomy (kontekstu, makro i mikro), na których środowisko gry współtworzy narrację. W artykule stwierdzono również, że narracja środowiskowa istnieje na granicy narracji osadzonej (embedded narrative), a narracji wyłaniającej się

w momencie gry (emergent narrative). W celu przedstawienia tej współzależności przeanalizowano wybrane aspekty przytoczonych gier. Zakończenie artykułu skupia się na narracji środowiskowej, określając ją jako skuteczne, aczkolwiek niewystarczające narzędzie narracji, a także wzywa do dalszych badań nad związkiem pomiędzy środowiskiem gry a narracją.

Riccardo Cipollari

The physical revenge of the book: the role of physicality in literature

W ostatnich latach media analogowe, takie jak winyl, film, gry planszowe, zyskują ponownie na popularności pomimo przytłaczającego rozwoju ich cyfrowych odpowiedników. Zjawisko to jest na tyle znaczące, iż nawet mainstreamowe media zdają się je zauważać. Interesującym przykładem wzrastającej świadomości w tym zakresie jest książka Davida Saxa *The Revenge of Analog: Real Things and Why They Matter*. Zainspirowany publikacjami zwracającymi uwagę na materialność książki, niniejszy artykuł zgłębia kwestie pominięte przez Saxa, a mianowicie odrodzenie się świadomości dotyczącej fizycznych aspektów książki jako środka przekazu oraz ich wpływu na narrację. Odwołując się do utworów literackich, takich jak *The Unfortunates* B.S. Johnsona oraz *Oka-leczenie* Zenona Fajfera i Katarzyny Bazarnik, niniejszy artykuł stanowi próbę ukazania długiej tradycji literatury zainteresowanej znaczeniem materialnego charakteru książki dla konstrukcji narracji—trendu, który wyprzedza aktualne fascynacje współczesnych mediów analogowymi formami przekazu.

Robert McParland

Victorian popular science and the sensation novel

Publiczność w epoce wiktoriańskiej, choć przesądna, była ciekawa nauki i żądna sensacji. Interesowała się faktami, ale miała także słabość do melodramatyzmu i suspensu. Odbiorcami w przypadku nauki popularnej i powieści sensacyjnej lat sześćdziesiątych XIX-go wieku byli często ci sami ludzie, którym oferowano nowe spektakle i historie, a których łączyło poczucie obawy wobec zmian, jakie przyniosła nowoczesność. Doszukiwali się oni cudu w faktach. Uwaga widzów w czasie pokazów naukowych skupiała się na eksponatach widowiskowych. W tego typu nauce okazami były osobliwe zjawiska, zainscenizowane z teatralną precyzją, egzotyczne stworzenia

spreparowane przez taksydermistę. Publiczność przyciągała zarówno sensacja, jak i powieść sensacyjna.

Paweł Oleksak

The philosophy behind the addictive sports routines in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*

Niniejszy artykuł zestawia zagadnienia współczesnego sportu oraz uzależnień ukazane w powieści *Infinite Jest* Davida Fostera Wallace'a. Jego celem jest zbadanie jak przy pomocy tych pojęć autor omawia problemy filozoficzne. Część teoretyczna składa się z sekcji dostarczających narzędzi do zrozumienia dalszej argumentacji. Opisują one filozofie Williama Jamesa i Sørensa Kierkegaarda, jak również pionierskie badania Pierre'a Janeta nad podświadomością. Teorie te znajdują zastosowanie w analizie relacji między przekonaniami bohaterów powieści i ich rozwojem osobistym. W części analitycznej, autor próbuje wskazać uzależniające cechy treningów sportowych przedstawionych w *Infinite Jest*, opierając się na badaniach z zakresu socjologii i psychologii. Analiza badań wykazuje wspólne podłoże socjo-psychologiczne sportu i uzależnień, gdyż zawierają one ten sam element duchowego samodoskonalenia.

Barbara Pawlak

Approaching the sublime in *Chernobyl* (2019)

W książce *American Technological Sublime* David Nye definiuje główny termin krytyczny jako "powtarzające się doświadczenie zachwyty i podziwu, często z domieszką trwogi". Uczucie to wywołać może zetknięcie ze zdumiewającym zjawiskiem, zarówno naturalnym, jak i będącym wytworem człowieka. Dlatego też most Golden Gate rozpatrywać można jako przykład wzniosłości matematycznej, a potężną erupcję wulkanu – wzniosłości dynamicznej. O ile pierwsza z kategorii, opisywana przez Kanta w *Krytyce władzy sądzienia*, dotyczy obcowania z konstrukcjami lub zjawiskami o olbrzymiej skali, druga odnosi się do przerażających scen, oglądanych z bezpiecznej odległości.

Przykładem zjawiska wzbudzającego uczucie wzniosłości jest także energia jądrowa w jej fizycznej formie. Choć jej działaniu poświęcono lata badań, wciąż wymyka się naszej możliwości pojmowania. Osobliwa natura energii jądrowej od lat fascynuje badaczy, pisarzy i filmowców. Jednym z najnowszych przykładów tej fascynacji –

stanowiącym oś artykułu – jest mini-serial HBO *Czarnobyl* (2019), wyreżyserowany przez Johana Rencka na podstawie scenariusza Craiga Mazina. Przedstawia on konsekwencje utraty kontroli nad energią jądrową.

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie, w jaki sposób w serialu *Czarnobyl* wywołuje się uczucie wzniosłości. W tym celu analizie poddano kadry przedstawiające słup zjonizowanego powietrza czy też płonący rdzeń reaktora, przeplatane ujęciami wstrząśniętych świadków. Analiza jest częścią szerszego rozpoznania: jedynie z pozoru zdołaliśmy przyzwyczać się do obecności technologii jądrowej, nadal wymyka się ona jednak ludzkiej zdolności pojmowania. To zaś jest niezawodną oznaką wzniosłości.

Aleksandra Ewa Poniewierska

Accent and trust: a perception experiment with Polish users of English

Niniejsza praca potwierdza, że istnieje zależność między poziomem zaufania a akcentem, a także fakt, że Polacy chętniej inwestują pieniądze w banku po usłyszeniu osoby mówiącej po angielsku z akcentem RP raczej niż polskim. W artykule zawarte są szczegółowe informacje o badaniu, które miało na celu zbadanie zależności między akcentem a zaufaniem, a także analiza wyników przeprowadzonego eksperymentu. Uczestnicy zostali zapytani w ankiecie online jaką kwotę byliby w stanie zainwestować w banku. Zrobili to na podstawie dwóch nagrań o takiej samej treści, które różniły się jedynie akcentem osoby mówiącej—w jednym wypadku był to polski akcent, w drugim RP. Badanie to było ograniczone przez ilość czasu, liczbę uczestników, a także ilość nagrań jakie były dostępne. Wyniki wskazują, że Polacy są skłonni ufać bardziej osobie z akcentem RP a nie, jak można by podejrzewać, polskim akcentem. Ilość zainwestowanych pieniędzy po usłyszeniu oferty reklamowanej przez osobę z akcentem RP była statystycznie większa (Mdn = 3750) niż ta po usłyszeniu nagrania z osobą o polskim akcencie (Mdn = 1250).

Dawid Smyk

Afrosurrealism—a new language for discussing the black experience: an exploration of the trend in recent films, TV series and music videos

W artykule omawiam strategię wprowadzania elementów stylu nazywanego „Afro-Surrealizmem” w tekstach amerykańskiej kultury popularnej, takich jak filmy, seriale telewizyjne oraz wideoklipy. Fenomen rozwinął się równoległe z ruchem Black Lives

Matter, powstaniem nowych dyskursów na temat tożsamości i ogólnej tendencji do eksperymentów stylistycznych, zauważalnej wśród wielu afroamerykańskich artystów. Artykuł rozpoczynam przestudiowaniem historii pojęcia Afro-Surrealizmu, poczynając od ruchu *Négritude*, uważanego czasem za afrykański odpowiednik surrealizmu, po „Afrosurreal Manifesto” D. Scota Millera z 2009 roku i jego wpływ na popularyzację pojęcia oraz późniejszą jego interpretację w sztuce. Następnie sporządzam zestaw kategorii użytecznych w analizie współczesnych reprezentacji Afro-Surrealizmu. Do tych kategorii należą m.in. groteska, międzygatunkowość, intertekstualność oraz obecność problematyki anty-kapitalistycznej. Konfrontuję te kategorie z licznymi przykładami, opisując różnorakie zastosowanie tych strategii w najnowszych pracach afroamerykańskich artystów (m.in. serial *Atlanta* Donalda Glovera i film *Przepraszam, że przeszkadzam* Bootsa Riley’a), zwracając szczególną uwagę na sposoby, jakimi łączą rozrywkę z problematyką społeczną.

Agnieszka Staszak

Representation of trauma and PTSD in the Netflix series *BoJack Horseman*: the case of Gina Cazador

Celem tego artykułu jest przeprowadzenie analizy traumy i PTSD (zespołu stresu pourazowego) na przykładzie gościnniej postaci animowanego serialu *BoJack Horseman*—Giny Cazador. W tym artykule podejmuję próbę zarówno zaprezentowania i opisanego samego traumatycznego przeżycia, jak i sytuacji, które się do niego przyczyniły. Ponadto poprzez odniesienie się do teorii traumy staram się pokazać i udowodnić, że zmiany w zachowaniu analizowanej postaci mogą być rezultatem nieprzepracowanej traumy po doświadczeniu zagrażającej życiu sytuacji.

Katarzyna Stępień

‘Be kind to strangers, they are your entanglement’: interconnections, trans-corporeality, multiplicity, and hominid ecologies in Anne Waldman’s poetry

W niniejszym artykule przedstawiam poezję Anne Waldman z perspektywy teorii trans-cieleśności, zaproponowanej przez Stacy Alaimo (2010), idei mnogości rozwiniętej w ramach tej teorii oraz ekologii hominidalnych, które kwestionują antropocentryczne podejście do relacji pomiędzy ludźmi i innymi istotami. Analizuję kilka z wielu dobrze znanych wierszy Waldman, takie jak “Battery” z *Fast Speaking Woman* (1996),

fragmenty jej książki *Manatee/Humanity* (2009), oraz wiersze “Holy 21st Century” (2012) i “entanglement” z *Trickster Feminism* (2018). Ponadto, pokazuję, że pomimo iż Waldman nie jest bezpośrednio łączona z ekopoezją czy ekologicznymi ruchami artystycznymi, to w swej twórczości inspirowana jest otaczającym ją światem i identyfikuje ekologię jako istotny aspekt działalności człowieka. Poprzez kwestionowanie sztywnych granic, które ludzie zwykli nakładać na rozgraniczenie między naturą a nie-naturą, jej poezja bada relację pomiędzy człowiekiem i innymi istotami, aby zastanowić się nad wzajemnymi powiązaniem jakie istnieją we wszechświecie.

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