Ewa Szczęsna*
University of Warsaw

POETICS IN THE AGE OF CONVERGENCE¹

Abstract

The aim of the study is to present changes in the structure of text (its structure and ways of creation, figures in particular) in digital discourse. The identity of digital communication is supported by existing signs, texts, and discourses; and how it develops in the process of their adaptation and reinterpretation. The Internet seems to be a really good space in which different discourses become alike. This process results in the creation of new poetics of text and discourse. Digital media modifies rhetorical figures (especially the ontology and functions of those figures), it cancel figures existing in traditional texts (for example, inversion is invalidated because no determined way of reading the text exists), and it creates new ones.

In digital discourse words and icons have a multifunctional nature (meaning-making, linking, acting, marking, and signalling the sender's emotions). Traditional textual forms, which differ semiotically and medially, are combined and transformed, so that the boundaries between forms of expression are blurred.

Key words: digital poetics, convergence, interactive figures, hypertext, link

New, yet old, or the term in the context of modernity

The term *convergence* in the field of literary studies is applied to phenomena which have long been discussed within other categories in the humanities, such as hybridisation or homogenisation, especially in reference to the mass media (Horkheimer, Adorno 1969; Macdonald 1959; Eco 1968;

^{*} Faculty of Polish Studies, Univeristy of Warsaw, ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28, 00-927 Warsaw, e-mail: e.k.szczesna@uw.edu.pl

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Kłoskowska 1983). The very term is not new, either, as convergence has been well established in the realm of biology, medicine, linguistics, historiography, anthropology, political science, and media studies.

As a matter of fact, the emergence of convergence within humanistic discourse and, more specifically, in literary studies, defines and actualises the phenomenon covered by the term: assimilation, or the occurrence of analogous processes in diverse fields and at times distant domains. The assimilation of texts, their structures, and genres, results in the similarity of terminology.

The wandering of categories and the application of terms from certain disciplines to others are phenomena discussed by theoreticians coming from diverse schools and fields of cultural studies, such as Roman Jakobson² (Jakobson 1971; 1989), Mieke Bal (Bal 2002), or Clifford Geertz (Geertz 1983). These phenomena reflect what is happening in textuality itself and in the space of cultural discourses, which organise social life and - as Michel Foucault would have said - exercise power over it (Foucault 2002). After Geertzian blurred genres and mixed ways of speaking, come blurred discourses. The democratisation of social life and thinking about texts, processes of globalisation, and the development of digital technologies lead to the obliteration of boundaries between political, scientific, religious, or artistic discourses, or rather - informative, persuasive, aesthetic, or ideological ones. This in turn leads to their convergence. Art is taking part in politics (Cerny), provocation (Kozyra, Libera); it is metatextual (Susid, the Spatialists, ready-mades), and metacritical. Messages which in their generic principle should be informative (TV news, history textbooks) are persuasive and evidently filtered through and biased by a certain ideology. Moreover, these filters and influences increasingly often apply not to the thematic layer of what is being directly stated, but to the semiotic layer of how it is declared. The usage of a particular composition, hierarchisation, shooting angle, tonality of colours, sounds, the choice of represented elements – in short, a certain cognitive perspective - modifies the subject, constitutes its sense, and initiates a specific understanding.

² Jakobson, while determining the place of linguistics among other branches of science, pointed to the analogy of processes, and the similarity of phenomena which were studied by distinct domains. According to the scholar, those analogies allow mutual borrowings of categories, e.g., the cooperation of linguists and biologists created an interest in the biological notion of mimetism on the linguists' part, and an interest on the biologists' part in the linguistic communication acts; the notion of redundancy was borrowed by information theory from linguistic research. (Jakobson 1989: 437, 460).

Texts almost exclusively refer to texts themselves. They are metatexts, whereas culture becomes metaculture (even Umberto Eco many years ago wrote in his *Postscript to The Name of the Rose* about the self-recognition of culture). The concept of reality as autonomous from text is fading away, which means that determining the relation of text to reality loses its *raison d'etre*. Such notions as the city, or human and social behaviour, are considered to be texts, which results in our living entirely in the world of text, or rather, of discourse, since our status of recipients of culture changes into users of culture, individuals who actively co-produce it.

Convergence, spoiling (ascribing different meanings to messages), sampling, meta-connectionism (associating everything with everything else), immersion, recombinant culture, flow, recycling, subversion³, hybridisation – these are the terms used to describe contemporary culture. Their multiplicity and accumulation make an impression of acceleration within cultural changes. However, it is necessary to examine the range of meanings and terms more closely in order to see the name changes which are inscribed in permanent cultural processes. It is possible that such a plurality of descriptive categories is a form of dramatizing the scientific discourse. If so, it would reflect contemporary media practice, in which dramatisation prevails over the progress of action and which – as Eriksen commented in reference to contemporary TV series – is a drama standing in one place with a dizzy speed (Eriksen 2001).

The aforementioned categories name the textual operations and strategies, which are inscribed in the process of establishing the identity of text (and, as a consequence, the identity of culture). They illustrate that this identity is determined not by processes of creating something new, but by processes of using something already existent, in the process of content

According to Łukasz Ronduda, subversion is a form of artistic appropriation, "(...) physical (technical) operations on a subject; the operations of criticism, reversal, transformation, the destruction of appropriated and ready-made material, (...) the strategy of constructing the artistic work based on the decontextualising and recontextualising operations of montage of "ready-made" visual materials (images), taken from the sphere of art and other forms of visual culture (Ronduda 2006: 9). According to Grzegorz Dziamski, on the other hand, subversion is strictly connected with imitation, and it is based on identification with the object of criticism and on shifts in meanings. As such, subversion refers to "the secret understanding with the viewers", who should continue constructing the meaning of work by themselves (Dziamski 2001). It is worth mentioning that the artistic avant-garde relied heavily on the use of subversion in techniques such as collage, decalcomania, assemblage, ready-made, photomontage, video scratch, and montage.

circulation and form replication, as well as the effects of those processes. Kazimierz Krzysztofek, in reference to Greg Urban's concept of metaculture⁴, writes that this culture of repetition, cyclicity, seriality, "circulation within a closed circuit" (Krzysztofek 2012; 23), might be also called a, postfabricated product of culture, ready-made for consumption (Krzysztofek 2010: 22).

At present, the **interpretative** processes are responsible for determining this identity. Everything that already exists is later joined, reworked, recontextualised, and in effect reinterpreted. An element of differentiation can be achieved as a side effect of these processes. Assembling, locating in different environments, and permeating bring about an assimilation of elements, which lies at the basis of differentiation. In consequence culture, by reusing itself, is engaged in continuous self-reinterpretation. Culture, therefore, is metacultural in its essence.

The new is achieved in the process of using the old; in transferring structures and terms characteristic of one discourse to the space of another; or from one discipline to the terrain of others. This results in the creation of texts for which other texts are the frame of reference. Conversions of discourses are often based on the content of one discourse being filtered through structures of another discourse. An adequate example is provided by contemporary scientific or educational discourse at the academic level. To both of them the structure of economic (business) discourse is applied, as quality is measured in terms of quantity – points are given for the place of publication, or for the number of subjects taught (ECTS points). Ordering everything in charts with numbers and expected results, so typical of business planning, replaces the idea of truth in science or ideas of freedom, openness, and dialogicity of Academia, which illustrates the rule of convergence at the level of discourse.

The development of **digital technologies** is of fundamental importance for the processes of convergence. The common immaterial matter of a digital sign enables it to assemble various textual information (regardless of their semiotic or medial organization); whereas hyperlinks enable us to shift from one text to another, regardless of their adherence to a certain discipline or discourse. As such, they create a fertile ground for convergence, which then modifies the sphere of the poetics of a text.

⁴ Kaziemierz Krzysztofek writes that according to what Greg Urban claims in his book Metaculture: How Culture Moves through the World (Urban 2002), metaculture is the commenting of consecutive levels of its own expansion. It is a self-copying creation, but also a deformation of already created products (Krzysztofek 2010: 21).

Digital culture (signs, texts, and discourses) has a recombined character. It is constituted as the result of reinterpretation of already existing signs, texts, and discourses, upon which new structures are built. In reference to Barthes' words, who defined myth as language-robbery, one could say that digital content robs the already existing text. The word "robbery", however, has a pejorative character – it refers to the appropriation of something belonging to someone else, without the owner's consent or awareness. Digital culture, which is being constituted at the moment, is both a component and a stage in the development of culture (in its total existence and all emanations). It is created in the process of continual metamorphoses and associations. If culture "robs", it robs itself, thus initialising its own development. Hence, a better word then "a robbery", would be "the usage". Anyhow, a certain type of textual and discursive strategy is meant here. It is based on using that which is already existent and inscribing it into one's own structures of meaning within an interpretative position. Such an inscription is always and inevitably tied to some alteration or deformation. Barthes characterises this process in reference to myth, perceived as a structure which does not cause a loss of meaning, but its transformation (Barthes 1957).

On the other hand, however, these migrations of terms, which occur together with migrations of the characteristics of genres and discourses, are not simple, neutral borrowings or repetitions dressed up in a new mask. It is also not the case that these new categories, whose meaning ranges hitherto functioned under other names; do not bring about anything new. There is no place in culture for an absolute void, omnipresent stagnation, or a perfect copy. An analogy can never be an identity; recurring elements take on a new form and reappear in a changed context, different conditionings, with a new hierarchy of constituent elements.

Convergence in the textual world is especially likely to occur wherever boundaries are being obliterated – not only genre boundaries, but semiotic and medial ones as well. To such spaces belong the Internet and, in a broader perspective, the space of digital communication, where the same immaterial matter of a sign facilitates affiliations, influences, inspirations, migrations, permeations, and the overlapping of textual forms.

Digital technologies are tools of transmuting textual forms and structures thus far implemented in separate discourses or media. They provide both a tool and a space for the **restructuring** of text and discourse – creating recombined textual, generic, and discursive forms. Computer Role Playing Games, which adapt literary and film narrative structures, might serve as a good example here. The assimilation of texts and digital

discourses to already existing ones (e.g. a website which implies the continuation of a traditional paper book, the introduction of animation which imitates turning pages, the website design of digital libraries which iconically alludes to traditional libraries) function as a familiarisation of the new medium, an attenuation of conversion from one technology to another – from the technology of print to digital technology. Above all, however, they semanticise the message, they take part in creating meanings. As such, they are an example of the new approach to text organisation, in which meanings are co-created not only in a polisemiotic or interactive way, but most importantly, in a multi-discursive manner, where a textualisation of media tools takes place, as was the case with the text-creating function of the interface.

These modifications prove that Heidegger's stance. That technology is not only a means, but also a manner of experiencing and extracting, and as such has a creative character (Heidegger 1994) which is true and somehow prophetic.

Shifts in the sphere of figures: interactive figures, the atrophy of certain figures, and the creation of others

Poetics in the age of convergence (and in the age of digital media development, in whose space convergence is especially visible) is announcing its triumph, as it is interested in the universal and the common. Poetics (particularly in its theoretic branch) is concerned with constructing models (Markowski 2001: 54), with establishing what is the principle of a text. As such, it determines and assigns the logic of meaning, and it is directly connected with the text as a construct, in which it finds the rules of structurisation. One might risk a claim that convergence lies at the basis of poetics and is understood in such a way that it enables it to exist. Without the iteration of assimilated forms, it would be impossible to differentiate between genres, textual forms, and structures, as well as figures.

The assimilation of various textual forms and discursive orders, so characteristic of the age of convergence, results in the generation of polisemiotic, multimedial and **interactive** figures. The prevalence of polisemiotic textual structures shows that polisemiotic figures are not an aberration of verbal figurativeness, they are not something exceptional, something created aside, but rather, they are a broadly understood principle of textuality. It also displays that figurativeness is first and foremost **a product**

of thinking, whereas its sign constitution is not limited to verbum, but can be freely making use of various systems of signs, their connections, relations they enter in the process of meaning formation and communication. For instance, computer icons are a representation of specific actions performed on the text, which can be described with words, but they also are those very actions. As such, they create intersemiotic and at the same time interactive metonymies, synecdoches, or more broadly – metaphors. It has to be emphasised that the relations between an icon, a meaning, and an action fit into the framework of catachresis, or a metaphor that has become lexicalised, as opposed to the metaphor that is living and open for interpretation. The unambiguity of an assigned meaning and performed function quickly endows this relation with a quality of a lexeme. The figure in such a case is not a tool of the stylistics of a text, nor its rhetoric. It is a technical operation, or rather, it is similar to what Yuri Lotman has called empirical modelling, as opposed to rhetoric modelling (Lotman 2007). Digital communication does not clash together with various semiotic languages or mutually untranslatable codes within the frame of one structure, but rather, it coordinates them.

Thus, a question emerges: how is it that in Internet discourse it is so easy to coordinate messages which are not only stylistically and semiotically diverse, but also differ in terms of discourse. What was considered to be a deviation from a norm, which professed a separation of domains or stylistic levels and considered linking, or worse, mixing them as a sign of incompetence (repeated questioning of the credibility of bordering and interdisciplinary research) or a violation of the ancient *decorum* in the pre-digital culture, becomes a rule in digital communication. The technological aspect – the possibility of joining and processing all kinds of information by digital technologies – is not the only answer to this question, although undoubtedly it is a stimulating factor, as it fosters interactions between semiotic and medial systems.

Another very important factor is basing linking on figurative actions. Rhizomes and links actualize the rule of zeugma – a figure which Ziomek defines as "(...) subordinating many syntactic parts to the main part, most often a verbal phrase, which is not repeated" (Ziomek 2000: 216). As an example of zeugma the researcher recalls the first two verses of Jan Kochanowski's Song XXV "What wishest Thou for all the lavish gifts of Thine?

What for Thy benefactions boundless and divine?" in which the word "wishest" is omitted in the second verse. However, the ellipsis here seems to be natural and obvious (on the contrary, not to apply the ellipsis would

result in a feeling of excess and redundancy. Syllepsis is a kind of zeugma, which Ziomek describes with the following words:

When zeugma joins with one word two separate parts, to which the word indeed refers, but does so in a tricky way, because the word is in fact a homonym which covers two meanings, then we can call this figure syllepsis. (...) Due to the interplay between grammatical correctness and semantic inaccuracy, syllepsis can very easily become a domain of humour, as it either equates and approaches the parts which refer to the superior part, or uncovers and emphasizes the ambiguity of the main part through an incoherent reference. (Ziomek 2000: 217–218).

A clear and humorous example of syllepsis can be found in a saying about a certain femme fatale: "She aroused suspicion and men".

The structure of the Internet continuously uses zeugma, or rather, syllepsis. They are activated when the user performs some action – they have an interactive character. Rhizomes are the superior parts, which are joined by links with many parallel elements. They function here as homonyms, which bind different elements from various, often distant domains of social life. At the same time, however, they suggest some kind of correspondence, resemblance, since the superior part is always the same and each of the linked elements stays in a logical relation with the rhizome. The common rhizome for many elements, a justified linking of the rhizome with each separate element, has the effect of the propinquity of linked elements. Consequently, it makes the recipient accept the coexistence of relations which are, in fact, distinct, unrelated, coming from remote domains, and which create diverse senses. For example, the user quickly consents to parallel relations between the word "pearl," which functions as a rhizome (superior part), and other links (elements): references to a mineral product of a shelled mollusc; images representing various types of pearls; a female name and all famous people who had it, addresses to guesthouses and boarding houses which have the word "pearl" in their names; the title of Janis Joplin's fourth album, information about the symbol of innocence and the material of the gates to Heaven according to the New Testament, the programming language PEARL, or information about the novel Girl with a Pearl Earring by Tracey Chavelier, and many others.

The syllepsis here does not have the effect of a pun or word play, because it is deprived of the rhetoric aspect. Its function is not a stylistic or rhetoric modelling, but an empirical one – the syllepsis is subordinated to a superior goal, i.e., the maximisation of the range of information, which enables the user to reach some specific information in the easiest possible way without having to know about it in detail (the website address or

the ability to assign it to a specific domain). In predigital communication, in order to reach certain information, it was necessary to know to which domain it belongs in order to search for it. It was crucial to be acquainted with the way in which information was organised, with the net of connections it formed with other information, as well as with the means of its distribution. Digital communication, thanks to the empirical usage of syllepsis, does not require this kind of knowledge. However, it makes the user accustomed to free associations on the basis of homonymy of information belonging to separate domains, which in turn fosters the dissolution of boundaries between disciplines.

Shifts in the sphere of figures refer to the way in which the figures are handled, or rather, used. Their usage is subordinated to the pragmatic function of digital discourse. The functionalisation of the way in which figures are used leads to seemingly contradictory actions (seemingly, as in fact they are teleologically justified). It happens so, because on the one hand, digital discourse uses shortenings and refers to the economy of elliptic thinking (or wider detraction), examples of which were the abovementioned sylleptic constructions. On the other hand, however, it makes free use of adjunction, as it is visible in intersemiotic repetitions or versions of the same information in various codes. Digital communication is charactierized as having multiple code doublets, which function as palimpsests, where the existence of various versions of representations is revealed only after selecting a given element. One action (e.g. changing the font size, underlining, or using subscript and superscript in Microsoft Word editor) may be attributed with a choice of forms – versions of a sign (icon, alphanumeric symbols, verbal description).

Using multiple code doublets, syllepsis, or ellipsis is not directed rhetorically or stylistically, but it is driven by communication pragmatics (a user who is acquainted with the program will automatically use the iconic sign, as opposed to a beginner, who will direct the arrow pointer to the sign in order to reveal a full description of possible actions).

Using zeugma (which employs the figure of ellipsis), syllepsis (which employs homonymy), or metonymy in linking construction of the digital discourse is inscribed in widely understood metaphorical thinking. In *Media Poetics* (Szczęsna 2007: 103–104 a division of metaphors was proposed with respect to their dominating function. Cognitive metaphors (nominal, directed at naming the unnameable), aesthetic metaphors (which model the text stylistically), and persuasive metaphors (or broader rhetoric metaphors, directed at manipulating the recipient) were distinguished. Metaphoric actions with which we deal while linking, would be a pragmatic action, directed at functionality and usefulness of discourse (and of communication).

Similarly, a pragmatic character is to be found in questions which refer to actions undertaken by the user. They belong to the qualities which characterise digital communication. Repeated questions about confirming or cancelling a given action, questions about running an operation beneficial for the system (e.g. updating antivirus software) now or later; they are all not a part of the text, but of digital discourse. They have a technical character – they are generated automatically. The choice of an option, i.e., the action undertaken by the user, enables the flow of discourse to continue. As such, these questions also have a pragmatic character. At the same time, however, since they are technical elements, they contain an element of poesis – they take part in creating the poetics of digital discourse, they co-organise its structure. What is more, they also have a rhetorical function (or even a persuasive one). Questions which appear on the screen give the effect of initialising a dialogue, they play an apostrophic function. The act of responding (choosing one of the suggested answers or even closing the pop-up window with a question) engages the user in the discourse, it makes him a side of the dialogue.

The user is indeed aware that such questions and commands come from the system and that they have been previously programmed. However, when taking part in digital discourse, this consciousness is very often veiled by the suspension of disbelief. The structure of questions and commands is similar in characteristics to interpersonal relations. This in turn conduces the antropomorphisation of the system – and reacting to the system as if it were a living creature (Reeves, Nass 1996).

In hypertext, **inversion** becomes a problematic issue. Traditionally the term is used to name a violation of a prescribed (according to certain rules and established norms) order of elements in a text, a disturbance of hierarchy of elements (grammatical inversion, temporal inversion, axiological inversion). The presence of links prevents inversion at the level of discourse (but it can still be preserved at the level of a singular text). Since the user can shape the discourse freely by choosing links without any restraints and by returning to previous websites, and since it is the rule of digital communication, it means that there is no single order which could be violated. Each order is equally justifiable, as linking establishes many potential discourses.

It has to be emphasised here that cancelling inversion is equal to undermining the act of accepting one order of discourse as obligatory, as setting the norm. What is more, the category of inversion does not apply to our perception. This is possible because we always perceive the elements of each message as a sequence – in a linear way (it is also true for visual representations, whose elements are perceived by the eye in a sequence,

not simultaneously). This aspect was pointed out by Wojciech Jerzy Burszta, who accentuated a specific conservatism of a book and the consistency of the reading practice. As the scholar writes, the book "is unchangeable; it is impossible to modernise it, as it is impossible to modernise the very practice of reading. Thus, it is a conservative action, which goes against the tide of mainstream consumerism" (Burszta 2007: 139).

Cancelling inversion in digital discourse also means that categories of proper composition, abiding to certain rules, are nullified. It is worth mentioning that rhetoric theory distinguishes two kinds of discursive orders: the natural order of discourse (lat. *ordo naturalis*) and the artificial order of discourse (lat. *ordo artificialis*). The latter was used in artistic works, which modified the natural order (ascribed to the rhetoric composition) by shifting, reshaping or omitting strictly defined components of the natural composition. An introduction, a presentation of the topic, argumentation, a rebuttal of the counter arguments, and a conclusion are still elements which organise many utterances. In digital discourse, however, the natural order is in fact characterised by the lack of established composition. The arrangement of discursive elements is set each time by users and by the goal they want to achieve.

Definitions of hypertext mostly highlight the non-linearity of reading. According to them, hypertext disturbs the linear order of the text and privileges the associating mode. Since the possibility of passing from one text to another had been designed and inscribed in the structure of hypertext, it seems that this passing by means of links does not disturb the pre-established order, but it actualises it. By clicking a link, the user does not break into another text, but uses the predesigned possibility of opening it. The solution to this apparent aporia is to perceive the discrepancy between text and discourse. In traditional communication, discourse somehow respected the order of reading determined by the text. For example, in journalistic discourse, the order of reception was determined by the order of the text. The situation is different in digital discourse, which adapts the text by subordinating it to its own specificity. And this specificity means that it is possible to pass from one text to another via links. In digital journalistic discourse, therefore, the order of reading is determined by digital discourse, which enables both the reception of the text according to the textual order and according to the order determined by discourse (possibility of passing to another text via links). Thus, it is possible for **the order** of text and the order of discourse to split. It is also possible for discourse not to respect the order determined by text. The split between the two orders emphasises in turn the difference between text and discourse.

Linking, which determines the specificity of the digital discourse, does not only cancel inversion, but also takes over the function of textual figures and strategies responsible for supplementation, extension, explanation, citation, or reference. What I mean here are first and foremost strategies present in the sphere of discourse, such as digression or allusion, which are introduced into the text by parenthetical utterances (in brackets), interpolations, subnections (complementation of the main thought with an aside thought), endnotes, or annexes. Linking might also take over the function of suspense, retardation, or even rhetorical comparison. This happens because linking enables a specific lag or even a stop of the action (discontinuation of the thematic line) in order to introduce additional content, which perform various functions: supplementary, explanatory, or persuasive. On the one hand, this multi-functionality and specific linking capacity in terms of performed functions in the discourse organisation points to the economisation of discourse. On the other hand, however, it implies a simplification and homogenisation, obliterating variety and diversification of forms (e.g. the difference between a digression and an allusion), or even impoverishment of digital discourse.

In effect with linking, another figure (textual form) is formed. A suitable term could be accumulation. It is based on ascribing a variety of functions to one sign, word, or expression. A linked fragment of a text might be a hybrid of two various functions. On one hand it performs a semantic function within the linear text which it co-creates (lexeme function). On the other hand, it has a function of a sign which marks access to another text – it is a specific transporter (or a medium), which creates a passage to another site, when activated. The accumulation here refers to functions, which the textual item performs (accumulation of functions); it is, however, possible to have accumulation in the sphere of meaning (semantic accumulation) or representation (semiotic accumulation). In predigital culture, the figure of semantic accumulation could have been found, for example, in the poetry of Stanisław Barańczak. His poem "Co jest grane" ("What's going on?") is based on it. The verses of the poem accumulate literal and metaphorical meanings of the phrase in the title, activating mutual reinterpretations. Thus, a style full of allusions, irony, and understatements, so characteristic of the prison poetry, is initialised.⁵

Accumulation is different from lexical polysemy (as a linguistic phenomenon which is accounted for in dictionaries) in the fact that the first

⁵ The ambiguity of the phrase is associated with allusive references to the experience of Polish society living under the communist system.

one is a deliberate textual procedure, an intentional use of polysemy, an intended play with meanings. It is not a collection, but a choice of meanings, which provide a new stylistic and semantic quality when confronted against each other. In accumulation the importance is put on the simultaneity or coexistence of meanings and functions assigned to a textual item. This last characteristic (but also the intentionality of textual strategy) is what differentiates accumulation from homonymy.

Semantic accumulation – similarly to other rhetorical figures – can be also present in non-verbal texts. An example can be provided by Salvador Dali's "The Image Vanishes", where one representation evokes two different images – meanings (semiotic-semantic accumulation).

Semiotic accumulation is visible in polymorphic textual structures in computer communication. The best example is provided by icons in toolbars – selecting one with the arrow pointer reveals a multiplicity of representational forms which refer to one action (a kind of semiotic **redundancy**), e.g. the scissors icon, the word "cut", the periphrases, and the "Ctrl+X" combination of keys. (In language we encounter the phenomenon of doublet, names in various languages for the same object.) It is worth emphasising that the meaning of words / icons is subordinated to the function of generating actions within a text (the function of action is superior to the meaning, which only facilitates the action). The relation between iconic representation and meaning is a task for the new semiotics, which pursues connections between the means of representation (signs) and the associative processes, which play a fundamental role in the case of textual space organisation in computer communication.

The abovementioned examples of various types of accumulation present convergence in its second dimension – the same or analogous textual processes can take place in various media environments, in traditionally separate fields. Digital culture and globalisation undoubtedly promote convergence in the textual world. Nevertheless, they are not a condition sine qua non.

The new onticity (tissue) of text and discourse

A new recognition is needed for determinants of onticity, or of the formal status of text – especially **the role of the interface** to determine and also create genres has to be discussed here. The text is simultaneously a sign and a super-sign (because of its complexity) of meaningful entity with

a specified ontic status. Both the meaning and the status of the text are constituted (actualised) in a communicative situation, in the usage, and therefore in discourse, whose essence is to mediate (White 1978: 1–25). Thus, this means that discourse has an interpretative character, and all changes within its existence bear an effect on the understanding and the ontic status of text.

In the case of digital messages, the method of representation is very important; it has a contentual (textual) or generic character. The elements of representation, the tools for text organisation (e.g. interface) **determine the form of the utterance**. They all play a decisive part in the meanings, genres, discursive possibilities (possible ways of dealing with the text). The site's organisation (before we even reach the content) is a carrier of information for the user: whether it is a portal, an internet service, a browser, an e-mail account, a text file. It establishes genre characteristics of discourse and text. Text undergoes a restructuring. Links play the function of **suspense**, which can lead the user into additional suspense by shattering and cancelling out the normative order (the freedom to choose an order by the user is the norm here). Links render it impossible to talk about the main discourse (or text).

The structure of websites, which are an access point to many parallel discourses, is governed by the rule of **hierarchisation**. It applies both to the position in which a given site is located (website positioning – SEO – is governed usually by the rules of commerce) and to every element on the webpage. The size and colour of an icon or of the font, the place it uses on the screen (quick visibility of the upper left corner and the middle of the webpage), and the movement of elements are all ways of graphic hierarchisation of the content, but also they are means of controlling the recipient's attention.

The relations between text and **context** are modified, too, as well as the onticity of those relations. Questions of text and context and analogically questions of representation plans: the foreground and the background are inscribed in the general problem of **composition**, which defines the arrangement of elements and the relations between them. Traditionally, when composition is discussed, one would talk about the compositional dominant, which organises the whole, or about the hierarchy of elements. Hypertext abolishes the stability of roles: text – context, foreground – background. In turn, hypertext substitutes it with relations and freedom of exchange due to the changing moment of reference. Linked texts which in a given moment constitute the context, a second later can become the main text. In the process of reading, the main tread or the central character

in a hypertext novel can give way to other threads or a different character simply because of the reader's choice. The relations between text and context are determined by the recipient and the assumed order of reading. The interchangeability of these relations is, however, intentionally designed; it is inscribed in the onticity of hypertext.

Linking is also connected with shifts in the sphere of categories such as the beginning and the end. Linear texts which are placed in digital discourse retain their traditional, conventional and culture-specific marks for beginnings and endings of words, sentences, or longer passages of text. In our cultural sphere those would be: the direction of reading from left to right, which determines the beginnings and the endings of words and sentences; the use of spaces between words, the use of dots, capital letters, and paragraphs. However, linking used in words or longer units of linear text leads to disturbances of this order. Linking activates the **digressive** mode – linked words become a pretext (they encourage) to abandon the **actual (present) order of discourse**. When talking about abandoning the order of discourse, I use the word "actual" and not e.g. "main" on purpose. In digital discourse, which is based on the choice of links, passing from one part of the webpage to another, or from one website to another, it does not make any sense to talk about the main discourse.

On a webpage which we accessed through a link, other links can be found, which "invite" us to find new information (open successive pages). It is easy, therefore, to replace the linear order of so far dominating discourse with the associative one, which becomes a dominating discourse and which determines the specificity of digital communication. This last characteristic differentiates it from the way in which it is actualised in a linear text, where, if it appears, it is determined by the linear order which defines its limits.

A link as a constant element of discourse changes the characteristics of communication's limits. The beginning and the end of discourse are not determined once and for all by the sender's intentions, but they are moveable – each time they are different, defined by the user.

The openness of discourse range at the level of usage can be juxtaposed to the rigorous use of delimitation tags in a text on the level of programming. In a HTML document the greatest part of elements which define the content, the composition, the outline of the webpage (headline, main text, images) has some tags of opening and closing, e.g. <u> </u> (the beginning and the end of underline), (the beginning and the end of a position in an ordered list); <u> </u> (the beginning and the end of an ordered list). In the language of HTML 4.01, however, there exist tags

which do not have their closing counterpart (e.g. the tag which marks the end of a paragraph
br>)6. Such tagging is visible at the user's level in a layout to which the user is culturally accustomed to. A script at the level of programming is a condition of receiving a desired form of text at the user's level. The obviousness and the transparency of signs which delimit texts, sanctioned by cultural recurrence (e.g. signs for the beginning and end of a sentence, locating the beginning of a text in the upper left corner of a page) are blurred at the level of programming. The lack of tagging, e.g. an unclosed tag, would result in the disintegration of the text, even when the capital letter and the full stop are preserved.

A start tag and an end tag at the level of programming are components of many commands. They do not mark the end of a fragment or of a whole text, as a full stop marks the end on a sentence. Rather, they guarantee that texts and images have a definite visual form.

Hypertext is intentionally open text, devoid of confines. Of course, one can and should talk about the confines of separate textual units (e.g. a press article on the Internet). However, locating a link within a textual unit blurs the confines of the text. It enables the user to create text outside of the traditional framework and to designate a new framework, which in turn leads to their multiplication. Setting the confines of text and appointing methods of meaning creation is in fact establishing the sense of text. In other words, the usage is the dominant factor of meaning creation. Thus, a question emerges – what happens to the text and what is the text here. Is it the initial text created by the author, or is the text generated by the user in the process of linking? Does it still make sense to talk about authorial intent in view of the ontically linked structure of hypertext? And finally, what is the relation between text and discourse, and what form of activity (textual or discursive) are the user's operations? If we consider text in the communicative situation as discourse, then those operations would be participation in discourse. Recognising those operations as the realisation of a pre-designed discursive activity undoubtedly protects the identity and integrity of text.

Hypertext proves that text which at a given moment is outside of our perception is a potentiality, a collection of data whose sense is being constituted only in the process of reading. As such, it is a product of participation in discourse. A pre-designed freedom (variantivity) to choose elements of content is inscribed in hypertext. This possibility of choice signifies that e.g. in a hypertext novel, the same units of content may have

⁶ In HTML 1.0 all tags are closed, so the tag for the end of a paragraph is written as </br>

various functions: a narrative one (the element of plot), or a descriptive one (the element of background), depending on the way in which text is read. This stands in opposition to traditional texts, in which only one intentional arrangement of units and one order of reception exist. Whereas in traditional text "the usage" is present only at the level of interpretation, in hypertext it functions on two levels: the primary level of perception and the expanded level of interpretation.

The possibility to pass freely from one text to another and to connect semantic units of diverse complexity and semiotic organisation by links, leads to textual convergence in the sphere of expressiveness and the functionality of text. Texts become a mixture of already existent forms. They join narrative elements with non-narrative ones (Ryan 2005), textual forms hitherto reserved for other genres of texts and discourses. As Markku Eskelinen writes, "It is hard to deny that texts are both thematically and formally heterogeneous" (Eskelinen 2012: 109).

Assimilation focuses here on the multifunctionality of signs and of textual elements. The hitherto prevailing functions of text: informative (cognitive), expressive, impressive (persuasive), poetic (aesthetic), communicative, phatic, performative, magical, and metatextual, are being joined by the **functions of activity and mediation**. Hyperlinks employ icons, but they also employ words. Linked words gain an ontically different status. While retaining their previous function of meaning creation (cognitive, expressive or other function), they acquire the function of **mediators** – transporters to other texts. Usually, a linked word (or expression) is connected with the text it leads to on a basis of synecdochic and/ or metonymic relation.

Two issues are important here: what is specific about the function of activity as opposed to the previous functions and what happens with the initial text (what changes occur in the structure of text).

The function of activity joins aspects of functions that a word or an expression already had and, without duplicating them, creates a new quality. A common element with the expressive function is the indication to the sender and their preferences, ideas, and inclinations visible in the choice of linked elements. The influence on the user (encouragement to click on a link, information about the possibility of finding more about a given semantic unit) is an element common to the persuasive and the informative functions. However, while traditionally these functions are realised by the semantics of the word, here they are realised also by graphic organisation. The element of the cognitive function is always the same – information that we can find out more by clicking on a given word. Analogically,

the persuasive element is the same – an invitation to click on a link. Thus, these functions are realised in a minimal and ephemeral way. Moreover, whereas the cognitive and the persuasive functions refer to context and go beyond text itself, the function of activity refers to the very text. This last point is a common element with the metatextual function, which positions the function of activity among the aforementioned tendencies to create discourse of culture from the elements already existent in culture in the processes of recycling, meta-connectionism, subversion, and in effect – in the process of convergence.

Poetics, and in a broader perspective, literary theory, are challenged by specific research issues when faced with convergence and its consequences in the space of digital communication. Questions to solve by literary theory might include the new functions of text in the process of communication, but also relations between hypertext and linking in comparison with allusion, digression, parenthesis, suspense, and retardation. Links might be described within the categories of extensions, or additions to the main text; whereas divergence from the main text to the linked parts can by analysed within the categories of suspension, or delay of the main argument. What is happening in the sphere of the semiotic tissue of texts, figures, or personal (and non-personal) relations in digital communication (reinterpretation of the sender-recipient roles) is of equal importance. The reconciliation of contradictions in contemporary medial text is another significant issue. It is so, because on the one hand we encounter redundancy – an excess of texts in relation to data (information) – a multiplication of texts which give the same information, recycling, converting, which produces a plethora of texts. On the other hand, a diminution of language is pointed to. It can be observed in the context of the growing importance of images in meaning creation and in influencing the recipient, or in view of abbreviations such as 'OMG' ('oh my God'), 'IMO' ('in my opinion'), 'BRB' ('be right back'), or emoticons which replace verbalisation to express emotions.

Undoubtedly, the aforementioned issues and processes, which take place in contemporary culture, especially convergence, are tempting literary scholars (and especially theoreticians of literature) to broaden their scope of interest, to go beyond literary texts in the direction of broadly understood textuality of various media and various discourses, but also to confront the way of thinking characteristically about literary studies as compared with that of media studies, psychology, and sociology. Perhaps it is not only a temptation, but also a methodological necessity, without which literary studies might be in peril of stagnation.

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