

E-Literature, New Media Art, and E-Literary Criticism

Janez Strehovec  
Ljubljana

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [Reading and Language Commons](#), [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#), [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), [Television Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

### Recommended Citation

Strehovec, Janez. "E-Literature, New Media Art, and E-Literary Criticism." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 16.5 (2014): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2486>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2486)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 16 Issue 5 (December 2014) Article 3**  
**Janez Strehovec,**  
**"E-Literature, New Media Art, and E-Literary Criticism"**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol16/iss5/3>>

---

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 16.5 (2014)**  
Special Issue **New Work on Electronic Literature and Cyberculture**  
**Ed. Maya Zalbidea, Mark C. Marino, and Asunción López-Varela**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol16/iss5/>>

---

**Abstract:** In his article "E-Literature, New Media Art, and E-Literary Criticism" Janez Strehovec explores the commonalities between electronic literature and new media art. Rather than deploying the traditional conceptual apparatus of e-literary criticism directed first and foremost to the new media elements of e-literature, Strehovec takes into account approaches from current theories in the social sciences and humanities. In doing so, he draws upon examples of new media art as a practice in which the novel's social paradigms change the way of art-making and challenge the very function of art. Close-readings of some new media art projects including Bookchin's *Mass Ornament*, EDT's *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, and Jodi's *ZYX* demonstrate that new media art is questioning the very ontological status of the field in terms of abandoning aesthetic and artistic functions in favor of their functions of use. In contrast, e-literature's interactions with society challenge the intrinsic possibilities of this field, especially in terms of blurring the boundaries between forms and revolutionizing e-literature's means of expression.

## Janez STREHOVEC

### E-Literature, New Media Art, and E-Literary Criticism

Rather than a continuation of print-based literature, electronic literature is a practice shaped by digital textuality that foregrounds new media's specificity and new approaches to the issue of writing in programmable media. E-literature has many features in common with new media art as a striking example of creativity that contributes to our understanding of new media literacy. When discussing new media art, it is important to highlight the following features essential for this practice: database logic (the components of new media artworks are considered as a list of non-hierarchically structured items, ordered beyond the cause-and-effect trajectory), its process-like nature, software, algorithms, interactivity, playfulness, the use of interfaces (according to Lev Manovich, creating a narrative work in new media can be understood as "the construction of an interface to a database" [226]), and customization. Along with elements specific to new media (for example, e-literary texts are displayed on screens, stored in digital storage devices, controlled by software, and disseminated via networks), e-literary texts are also embedded in the social realm in a way that demonstrates some of the key features of present social paradigms.

Hyperfiction was the first popular movement in the history of e-literature and it was a synonym for e-literature in 1990s (exemplified by the works of Judy Malloy, Michael Joyce, Stuart Moulthrop, and Shelley Jackson, among others). It stimulated hypertext theory, which draws upon the specificity of linking, multilinearity, logics of labyrinths and mazes, textual immersion, and plot destabilization (see, e.g., Landow). In the 2010s, we have seen a variety of approaches to e-literary criticism, which increasingly take into account the (new) media specificity of e-literary practices and their interactions with several new media contents such as video games. The e-literary field associated with the new movements in digital culture (including mobile and locative media and software art) has provoked novel, let us say posthypertextual, e-literary criticism that addresses first and foremost the new media specificity of such contents and practices. For some of John Cayley's, Philippe Bootz's, Nick Monfort's, and Stephanie Strickland's e-poetry pieces, as well as Mark Amerika's, Simon Biggs's, Alan Sondheim's, and Serge Bouchardon's e-textual installations and performances, hypertextuality is merely one of the features co-existing with a number of other qualities, forms, and processes, including software, textual instruments, gaming, remixing, VJ-ing, mash-ups, virtual reality, special effects, social networking, virtual architecture, Second Life poetics, and mobile and locative media.

The most compelling and innovative projects of post-hypertext e-literature share the goal of calling into question the very specificity of literature as we know it; they also destabilize common ideas about digital writing and the smooth functioning of technological advances. They do so by opening new methods of textual organization, by reflecting on how software conditions our basic understanding of on-line textuality with literary scripts, and by pointing to the changes caused by the present algorithmic culture (see Cheney-Lippold 164-81; Strehovec, "Algorithmic"; Striphas <<http://www.thelateageofprint.org/2011/09/26/who-speaks-for-culture/>>). Whereas hyperfiction addresses issues of narrative and storytelling in digital culture first and foremost, post-hypertext e-literature is more conceptual and open to various cultural, philosophical, and social paradigms. Amerika's *Filmtext 2.0* and Talan Memmott's *Lexia to Perplexia* are good examples of work in which fiction and non-fiction are intertwined and where textual units are formed as commentaries and theoretical reflections.

The post-hypertext generation of e-literature as an emerging field of experimental e-writing at the intersection of creative writing in new media and the new media art (many of such e-literary pieces are found in the *E-Literature Collection* <<http://collection.eliterature.org/2/>> and in the *Anthology of European Electronic Literature* <<http://anthology.elmcip.net/>> [Engberg, Memmott, Prater]) occurs in the world of new paradigm shifts, including those in the fields of social sciences and humanities. Today we are witnessing the linguistic, the discursive, and the cyberpunk movements whose contents give way to the issues and topics addressed in the theories of bare life, corporeal sensation, techno-enhanced perception, biological and bio-political phenomena, and gender. The cyberpunk paradigm understood in terms of William Gibson's main character in *Neuromancer* does not fit well within the context of the most recent movements in today's philosophy. The new generation of e-literary texts can also stimulate the reader who is not familiar with printed fiction, but is familiar with video games, VJing (see, for example, Amy Alexander's text based performance *CyberSpaceLand*

<<http://amy-alexander.com/live-performance/cyberspaceland.html>>), hacker culture, and clubbing. E-literature also challenges theoreticians from disciplines and fields not strictly bound to literary theory and criticism, but deal with new media art theory, mobile culture studies, software studies, the epistemology of new media, digital literacy, and new media aesthetics. On the other hand, e-literary criticism has gained much from the recent paradigm of ubiquitous and persuasive computing as the e-literary is turned from stationary computers to mobile screen devices and deploys data from locative mobile networks. Today, the convergence of global and local networks, online databases, and new tools for location-based mapping (from GPS to RFID) provokes a strong interest among artists dealing with locative art and locative e-literature.

Such a shift in practice implies an aftermath in theories of e-literature owing to the intimate and corporeal link between the user and recent cultural, artistic, and literary contents. Susan Kozel considers ubiquitous computing "as relational and corporeal. It is temporal and intercorporeal. Embedded in our lives, it is touched, seen, lived in, or with" (338). Referring to the convergence between the artistic and daily performance, Kozel coined the term "ubiquitous corporeality," because "bodies are ubiquitous, they may be digital, distanced, or distracted, but they are present" (339). "Ubicorp" can be considered as a counterbalance to "ubicom", as it is a precondition of the latter. This aspect is also crucial to our basic concept of e-literary criticism as a discipline open to various social theories, sociolinguistics, biopolitics, theories of mobile communication, media, and cinema studies. Along with new media specificity, theoreticians also need to call attention to born social and born corporeal ("ubicorp") criteria. In the moment when new media specificity as the crucial criterion of the e-literary is not a central one, but is addressed along with the social and corporeal, e-literary criticism gains bigger attention within the humanities and social sciences due to the broadening of the topics of e-literary research to include fields that intersect several state-of-the-art disciplines. Suddenly, alongside the e-literary, criticism also addresses issues of the fate of the letter, word, text, and literacy, and is involved in current discussions concerning embodiment, biopolitics, gender, tactical media, activism, feminism, and economics.

E-literary contents (similar to new media ones) are becoming increasingly contextualized, performative, and embodied, which means that today's matters of importance are taking place in a field that is abandoning the classical cyberpunk and posthuman perspective shaped by Cartesianism and cyberplatonism in a form that can be found in the notion that the posthuman condition blurs the borders between corporeal existence and the cybernetic tools, between biological life and simulation. These viewpoints were also the theoretical background of the literary cyberpunk, as well as several science fiction films from *The Lawnmower Man* to the *Matrix*. These perspectives are in fact beyond the movements of today's performance art, which increasingly explores the body brutally exposed in barely imaginable situations (of particular note are the works of feminist performers including Marina Abramović, Carolee Schneemann, Valie Export, and Ann Liv Young).

In the humanities and social sciences new directions in theory building there are often references to a post-object world in which emphasis is put first and foremost on software-like things and events and performances. According to Brian Massumi, "the world is not an aggregate of objects ... To 'not believe in things' is to believe that objects are derivatives of process and their emergence is the passing result of specific modes of abstractive activity. This means that objects' reality does not exhaust the range of the real" (6). The post-object world is based on the coexistence of a new generation of entities, events, and movements generated by smart technologies and controlled by software. In this world the movement of visual and touchable objects goes hand in hand with the invisible stream of data which are navigable by electromagnetic waves. Nigel Thrift argues that "entities that are able to be touched will correspondingly expand; all manner of entities will be produced with an expanded sensory range" (598). Thrift calls attention to the hand as a bridging organ, which is faced with the new kind of objects/data presence. Suddenly, the user's hand finds itself in the world consisted of the classes of entities of various sources: along with those from given, physical reality there are also immaterial entities (e.g., data) open to more subtle, touchable manipulation and navigation. In similar vein, Matthew Fuller posits that "things become more like software, more algorithmic, and computability in turns mutates in different ways as it comes in combination with other kinds of material, numerous kinds of processes of thinking and sensing of different kinds of understanding, creating, sorting and deleting" (xxi). Software-like things demonstrate novel forms of presence which take place in new spaces, and deploy novel tactual perception, which is directed toward the digital tangible (see Strehovec, "E-

Literary").

The shift of basic ontological, cultural, and social paradigms is not alien to the movements in today's electronic literature as a field in which literary artifacts give way to e-literary applications, processes, events, actions, and performances shaped in a way that strikingly addresses the role of the reader as a co-performer. Additionally, the concepts of textual instruments and instrumental texts (see Eskelinen) speak for the performative nature of post-hypertext e-literary projects. While I am addressing performance (in terms of art, genre, and e-literary practice), I emphasize that this form also has a striking significance to contemporary social sciences, even in defining today's general modes of production. When explaining the specificities of immaterial labor, Paolo Virno uses the example of so-called reproductive artists as follows: "Let us consider carefully what defines the activity of virtuosos, of performing artists. First of all, theirs is an activity which finds its own fulfillment (that is, its own purpose) in itself, without objectifying itself into an end product, without settling into a "finished product", or into an object which would survive the performance. Secondly, it is an activity which requires the presence of others, which exists only in the presence of an audience. An activity without an end product: the performance of a pianist or of a dancer does not leave us with a defined object distinguishable from the performance itself, capable of continuing after the performance has ended. An activity which requires the presence of others: the performance makes sense only if it is seen or heard" (Virno 52).

We can observe a noticeable increase in activities which leave nothing material behind, especially so-called material products. On the contrary, it seems that everything essential and definitive is determined by the activities embedded in the event and process, which, however, must be public: it requires the presence of others who see and hear it. A number of such activities are taking place in new media art and e-literature, which are emphatically post-objective; the key events in both fields happen at the level of performance, acting, enacting, and software. The new philosophical picture of the world implies new forms of perception and cognition that are shaped and augmented by several technological and social tools. When we are talking about the new movements in e-literature, we need to be aware that such a textual and post-textual practice articulated with linguistic and non-linguistic signifiers is embedded in the present culture shaped by the software (in terms of mind- and perception shifter), ubiquitous computing, Internet language (textism, netspeak), web remixability, and the repurposing of various cultural platforms and contents. Today the user of cultural contents is being faced with changes, shifts, and turns steadily increasing in pace and degree; her basic condition could be described in terms of the deceptive axis between an invisible up and down, front and behind, left and right. Stable viewing points are difficult to find, and hard and fast lines between different fields are being pushed aside. In terms of perception we are commonly facing an individual who lacks the ability to concentrate needed for the reading of longer textual passages, and is instead used to very short, direct, and functional messages, bulletted website organization, music videos, YouTube videos, elevator pitches, sms, and breaking news bulletins. She has lost the sense for more sophisticated language, ambiguity, and imagination. Our ability to perceive things at a distance is also at stake, as we have become used to various tasks that we need to execute within a very short temporal intervals, which has a profound impact on the way we form and create within the realm of "cyberlanguage."

Owing to the pace of life in such an instant culture of speed of light, based on augmented and mixed reality, our attention spans are getting shorter and shorter, which has been significantly expressed in the following post to the iDC mailing list: "I really think hyperlinking has changed the way I read and my concentration span. I'd like to be able to stick to one thing, but I seemed to be easily distracted, so each email has about 1-3 seconds to grab my attention" (O'Donnel <<https://lists.thing.net/pipermail/idc/2007-September/002811.html>>). The crucial point in this statement is the mention of a very short temporal interval, in which the current e-mail receiver is in the position to accept or reject the message, meaning that her attention is being limited by the very reality of the mobilization that she is exposed to in her real time activity. According to Tom Sherman, "our observational skills have suffered as we have mastered multitasking. We now commonly send messages while we are in the act of receiving information" (<<http://permlink.gmane.org/gmane.culture.internet.nettime/3617>>). Such an alert (and nervous) condition impacts several aspects of current social life, meaning that the most common communicational and cultural contents need to be adapted to the demands of the shorter attention span of today's individual.

Calling attention to the specificity of an e-literary project considered as a performance, event,

procedure, program, application, ride (see Strehovec, "Digital"), and textual instruments direct us to its materiality, which is a socially and historically variable category. Modernist requirements for full autonomy of the literary as excluded from the social, have passed; after all, software is also a cultural and social tool. There is a striking interplay of some key theoretical notions about issues of the social at the present time, and as well as their application in the field of e-literature and new media art. When the e-literary text is integrated into a broader social context by means of recent social networks, globalization, and software culture, we may begin to understand (and explain) its specificity also by concepts, which are not strictly related to e-literary theory and e-criticism, but also extend into other fields, especially the economic, new media-theoretical, sociological, and political. And such a turn towards the life, body, politics, and gender has not been alien also to some authors of e-literature and their pieces (for example, in Alan Sondheim's practice of "wryting," in Francesca Da Rimini's *Dollspace*, and Natalie Bookchin's *The Intruder*, to list a few). *The Intruder* is a historical example of video gaming shaped e-literature piece that deploys the gaming paradigm in order to design a textual content which fits well to basic direction of present culture and digital literacy (<<http://bookchin.net/intruder/>>). On the other hand, Bookchin is also the author of *Mass Ornament* a striking piece of present new media art, which is very close to the basic understanding of paradigm's shift in the today's social (<<http://vimeo.com/5403546>>). In an interview with Carolyn Kane (<<http://rhizome.org/editorial/2009/may/27/dancing-machines/>>), she drew precisely upon the theoretical foundations of that art project that related to the world of immaterial and post-Fordist labor. In doing so, she also highlighted her relationship to Siegfried Kracauer's seminal text on mass ornament as one of the key references of her "YouTube" piece. Both the spectacular dance of the Tiller Girls in the stadium (which Kracauer refers to in his *The Mass Ornament* [77]), and the private dance of the YouTube dancers in front of webcams internalize foundational paradigms of contemporary society. The former deals with references to mega-events, large-scale serial factory production, the logic of machines, and the conveyor belt, while the latter confronts us with much more flexible and individualized action, which frequently takes place in the home and whose machinery is no longer mechanical but increasingly digital. The video included in Bookchin's project has lost its autonomy and only appears as part of a social and cultural context that overdetermines the choreography of bodies and their media-proliferated practices. Bookchin's installation deploys the technological basis of the YouTube, which enables links from one video to other, presentation of similar videos (these appear off to the right of the screen) and thus relates to the recent culture of video distribution where one piece can trigger a chain reaction of numerous procedures (mixes, remixes, copies, variations, modifications, etc). Bookchin's project is shaped by the culture of social networks and their media advances, and tries to critically discuss the numerous phenomena and antagonisms that accompany the poetics of "post-Fordist" mass ornament, which resembles with their loops the very abstractness of financial capitalism.

Now I turn to Kracauer's *The Mass Ornament* from the field of critical cultural theory. Kracauer argued that "the hands in the factory correspond to the legs of the Tiller Girls" (79). Rather than discussing the very aesthetics of ornamental movements as well as the dancing and working routine in the stadium and behind factory conveyor belts, Kracauer addressed the deeper links between the cultural phenomena (dancing mass ornament) and the dominant mode of production in Fordist capitalism considered as an abstract machine which does not leave anything behind its ornamental, let us say as the roller coaster loops shaped circulation. Such a machine influences cultural contents and enables a smooth transition between dancers and workers, between the Fordist labor organization and the composition of moving cinematic images (see Beller 9). Bookchin's piece is a striking example of recent new media art, which addresses the body through various approaches. Along with performance art, the corporeal features are strikingly deployed in locative art as one of the most significant movements in recent new media art. Jodi (the common name for two Dutch and Belgian net artists), who have been pioneering Internet art since the 1990s, launched the project ZYX in 2012 (<<http://www.zyx-app.com/>>). It was formed as an iPhone and iPod Touch application, which guides the user through a series of gestures from jumping, pushing, turning, and shaking. The user of this app is transformed into a performer, who is situated in a mixed reality co-formed with her choreography. ZYX is a striking example of ubiquitous and persuasive computing (see Ekman) as a new paradigm in contemporary mobile and interface culture. This app demonstrates that cyberspace and virtually-reality shaped data steadily enter a given physical reality and modify it, causing the smooth co-existence of both modes of reality. Such a form of computing, shaped by new, very mobile interfaces effects the individual's nature, modifies

it, and profiles his/her real time gestures.

Whereas such new media art projects are defining the horizon of post-hypertext e-literature, in new media art its social (and political) implications are even more radicalized. The comparison between e-literature and new media art reveals that e-literature is less engaged with the very social issues of today's individual. The very ontological structure of e-literature projects is not questioning in such a radical form as that carried out by new media art practitioners. In their projects we are facing the very abandonment of artistic functions as we know them in favor of their use functions—even as an practical, tactical, and political intervention in life itself. Such a shift away from the aesthetics toward the operational reality is found in the practice of the so-called device art and in particular in project as radical as the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* with the aim of repurposing widely available technology to be used as a form of humanitarian aid

(<<http://vimeo.com/27222287>>). The tool is simple as possible, consisted of a cell phone, with a GPS chip, and a custom piece of software. The program will help the immigrants (equipped with non-expensive mobile phones) and lost in the desert area near to the USA/Mexico border to direct toward the nearest aid site, be that water, first aid or law enforcement, along with other contextual navigational information. The *Transborder Immigrant Tool* software deploys a Java based application written by Brett Stalbaum, which accesses the phone's ability to receive GPS information without needing to send out data which may allow the user to be located and without needing phone service. This project is considered as part of a larger in the present actual turn from tactical media to tactical biopolitics. The artists and programmers joined in the EDT 2.0 are challenged with the political potential opened up by technologies (including medical technologies and safety devices such as GPS tools) which can intervene in people's lives directly and try to improve it.

By contrasting such new media art endeavors with big social engagements, e-literature in its extreme forms revolutionizes mostly the language itself, redefines narrative, establishes a laboratory for the experiencing of the letter and the word under new media conditions (for example, the practice of e-poetry generators), and challenges reading by focusing on arrangements of words in a mode of illegibility. A striking example of a piece that expands the area of e-literature to the field of mobile and locative media, is René Bauer's and Beat Suter's road poem *AndOrDada*

(<<http://elmcip.net/creative-work/andordada-0>>), which is based on an Android application for mobile phones, formed with the intention of generating an endless poetic text, which changes lively depending on the user's strolling and riding the locations. It seems that it works here the situationist psycho-geography, because the philosophy of this piece deploys the hidden logic of urban space, its language, sub-consciousness, and pedestrian's or rider's tactics. The application produces the text as an flexible poetry tool with locative levels, depending on the user's path (strolling, riding), namely when the input captured by Wlan waves at a certain location converts such waves into poetic objects and modifies them. In short, this road poem expands the area of e-literature by opening itself up to direct influences from the (mobile, social) environment, but it does not question the field itself in relation to the social reality as radically as the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* does. *AndOrDada* revolutionizes the medium of mobile communication and strives to bring closer e-literature and locative media, however it does not abandon the very poetic, artistic, and textual.

The above-mentioned examples of new media art and e-literature demonstrate that such an art is certainly a field that helps in the understanding of some of new directions in e-literature, particularly those that are expanding the area of hypertext to new areas of textuality, shaped by the new media and influenced by new social and cultural movements and lifestyle (e.g. club, techno, and software cultures). Discussions of the fundamental paradigms of new media art demonstrate that their tendencies and movements are leading towards alternative politics, activism, hacktivism, and even an alternative organization of life. Rather than by intrinsic events in the autopoietic system of contemporary art, changes in this field are influenced by science, new technologies, new concepts of politics, lifestyle, popular culture and activism. In addition to the previously mentioned project *The Transborder Immigrant Tool*, I also mention Critical Art Ensemble's project *Free Range Grain* (2003-2004), which was created as a live, performative act that used basic molecular biology techniques to test for genetically modified food available worldwide in the global food trade. In Critical Art Ensemble collaboration with Beatriz da Costa and Shyh-shiun Shyu resulted in a portable, public laboratory to test food which others deemed suspicious of "contamination" caused by genetic modifications. Members of the audience were invited to bring in the gallery the pieces of foods that they found suspect for whatever reason, and artists tested them

over a 72-hour period to see if their suspicions were justified. The point of the project is that the science should not be left fully to scientists and that by using an artistic apparatus and artistic non-profit driven approach one can set up more responsible research; this is similar to *Transborder Immigrant Tool's* intention that this device, which had been developed in an artistic context, would perform a role that corrects politics and those national institutions that are expected to protect the integrity of the individual. In the field of new media art we are also contemporaries of a number of practices that are critical of broader social issues and of most recent technological advances; an important direction within it is precisely the demonstration of the malfunctioning of high-tech. Such a direction, in terms of bigger social critique, is much less noticeable in the case of e-literature; a more important role in this context is held only by feminist hypertext and a few rare pieces that deal with the critique of high tech advances (especially of their promises) and with their malfunctioning (e.g., Eugenio Tisselli's *Degenerative*). A glimpse into *Electronic Literature Collection* and the *Anthology of European Electronic Literature* reveals also the finding of e-literature as directed first and foremost toward the revolutionizing its means of expression (e.g., for its autopoietic system innovative features).

Here the issue is raised what is the most challenging in e-literature, although if we consider it only with regard to the new media specificity, which means that we address the e-literary in a narrow sense? What is in it of importance due to its unique features that cannot be found in other fields of creativity? By answering this question we need to draw upon e-literature's ability of pushing the textual to its limits, in provoking its most hidden possibilities, in arranging text in a way that it starts to generate and replicate itself. Whereas the significant movement in new media art (e.g., in net art) deploys glitches, crashes, malfunctioning of high-tech (see Jodi's play with the browser's crash in *oss* project) the e-literature gets attention to the vanishing text and the text transformations toward its unreadable mode which put the reader under the risk of rejection. E-literature writer and scholar Strickland argues that "Some works, such as Geniwate's *Concatenation* require a patient, exploratory reader who builds up experience with the piece over a number of readings, because it is a generative work. In a generative work, the reader starts a process that results in an unpredictable output that neither author nor reader can preview. A piece of code, like the genetic code, is let loose on a lot of variables. No one knows what the specific output will be—they can only know the rules that constrain it"

(<<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/182942>>).

The user/reader of e-literature is often not in charge (see Bouchardon's *Touch*), she is not the master of the piece and also the author's grasp over her project is diminished (see Torres). In spite of the specificity of each field, there are many common features essential for e-literature and new media art and need to be addressed in the following findings: new media art and e-literature are connected by smart technologies, software advances, new ways of presentation (beyond the gallery's white cube and printed book, and thus, for example, in clubs and at festivals), new dissemination possibilities (the web, mobile and locative media). Both place the research value in the foreground (and not the cult, aesthetic or exhibition one); while e-literature focuses on the fate of the letter, word and narrative in the age of new media, various new media art genres free the movement and image from representative functions and focus it to pure movement and the composition of vision. Both fields are closely associated with theory, participation between the artists and theoreticians is essential; a good statement, which an author attaches to a project, is *conditio sine qua non* for successfully addressing an audience; consequently one of the conditions for the artists is that they are familiar with the contemporary theoretical paradigms that define their fields. In both fields, festivals and conferences alike are platforms at which theoreticians, critics, and creators (artists, e-writers) meet (see Strehovec, "Derivative").

Both fields are focused more on performances and artistic services, than on finished works (see Strehovec, "New Media"). Essential for the production in both fields are artistic and e-literary platforms and cooperation, based on networking; the concept of artist as genius has definitely been surpassed. Furthermore, in this field the criterion of national literatures functions only to a limited extent. Particularly in the case of projects with collective authorship one can come across artists/e-writers from different countries. English as the *lingua franca* of the globalized world has a prevailing role also in e-literature: only in countries with a rich e-literature tradition (e.g., Brazil and France) do national languages hold an important role.

Projects in new media art and e-literature are also useful for educating people about new media (digital) literacy, as one's ability to orientate herself in the world of new media shaped contents



as they expand our knowledge of the media and its behavior outside of the routine of everyday practice-shaped situations. An essential role in the reception and perception of e-literature is given to the hybrid spectator-reader-listener who is challenged with the very nature of e-literary projects and performances. Due to a schematic, open structure of e-literary pieces (programs, apps, instalations) she is expected to perform her individualized concretizations / playing. The most competent users of e-literature are in fact the experts (including programmers), who have a certain surplus of knowledge compared to the traditional artistic and literary audience. Both fields are not safe and put the author and the critic into risk of rejection. E-literary projects are often very hybrid structure, they blur the boundaries of an individual field, and the authors are forced to invent new genres and to redefine the scope of their research. It make sense in mentioning that neither field has developed critique in the form that we are familiar with in printed literature and in modern and contemporary art. Critique in terms of evaluation of printed literature pieces is being replaced by thoroughly written statements with some instructions and hints for the reader user, or these projects function as examples of a broader theoretical analysis that is focused on the conceptualization of key cultural and artistic paradigms that define the horizon (and context) of the e-literary.

The controlling and manipulation of digital words-images-virtual bodies in e-literary pieces belong to the service activity as crucial form of production in postindustrial society. The service is based on knowledge and incorporates the basic features of algorithmic activity in terms of problem solving that is arranged with the procedure, which is shaped by economically organized steps. The author of e-literature, as one whose basic deal is in such controlling and manipulating of digital words (and organizing them in new wholes, in textscape organized according to spatial and temporal grammar), is ever faced with problems, and her creativity is in finding answers and smart steps for their solving. Such an algorithmic approach places e-literature in the very closeness of logical, problem-solving thinking, which is a basic feature of algorithmic culture and cyberculture as opposed to the culture of traditional literary intellectuals (see Strehovec, "Algorithmic"). Rather than describing and representing by means of new media shaped textuality, the e-literature makes the thoroughly prepared event in a cyberlanguage itself that diverges from the common use of language within the on-line communication. Such activities are embedded in a present condition of immaterial production that privileged the (intellectual) and innovation based services at the expense of finished material artifact. In trying to explain the specificity of most recent works of e-literature, Brian Kim Stefans writes on "task-based interactive art in that the user is given a set of goals to achieve while navigating the work"

(<<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/gameplay>>). Such an art is embedded in the present algorithmic culture, which presupposes a shift away from traditional mode of reader's experience based first and foremost on meaning decoding and symbolic concerns toward users who are striving intensities of rich problem-solving activities shaped by sophisticated procedures that resemble gaming of video games. It is no coincidence that gaming paradigm has entered also the e-literary criticism (e.g., Aarseth's notion on cybertext). Rather than foregrounding the "artwork" nature of their projects, e-literature and the new media art are about processes and events, applications, interventions, and services. A big stress is laid on the user's role not just in navigating the digital text, but in her/his experiencing of it. The textscape is followed by textperience (Alexander's term). A good example is Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema* in which the author's attention is directed to issues of life, experience, process, and synesthesia. Analyzing Michael Snow's experimental film *Wavelength*, Youngblood argues that "like all truly modern art, *Wavelength* is pure drama of confrontation. It has no "meaning" in the conventional sense. Its meaning is the relationship between film and viewer. We are interested more in what it does than what it is as an icon. The confrontation of art and spectator, and the spectator's resultant self-perception, is an experience rather than a meaning" (126). Youngblood privileges experience at the expense of meaning. Semantics in the narrow linguistic sense give way to a more complex process of meaning-making, as it includes various mental and physical procedures as well as activities of direct sensual stimulation. Such an agency includes several kinesthetic and motor activities that deploy the user's subtle sense of the digital tangible (see Strehovec, "E-Literary"). Mouseovers, clicks and drags, pinch-outs, and zooms are also at play here.

In conclusion, e-literature functions in a meta-critical and self-reflexive way. It relates to new media-generated textuality, new media paratexts, narrative, and literacy in a manner that demonstrates self-reflexively what is happening with the letter, word, and text in knowledge production

and popular culture. E-literature as practice is one thing, while e-literary criticism is another. Theory produces its own subject of knowledge, which is not identical with the "artistic/literary object." E-literary criticism behaves self-reflexively. While being steadily reinvented, finds life in this risky endeavor, which is triggered by new cultural paradigm and emerging technocultural practices. The idea of a rectangle is itself not rectangular; the knowledge-making object of e-literary criticism is not identical with the empirical projects of the e-literary world.

### Works Cited

- Aarseth, Espen, J. *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.
- Alexander, Amy. *CyberSpaceLand* (2003-): <<http://amy-alexander.com/live-performance/cyberspaceland.html>>.
- Amerika, Mark. *Filmtext* (2002): <<http://www.markamerika.com/filmtext/>>.
- Beller, Jonathan. *The Cinematic Mode of Production*. Hanover: Dartmouth College P, 2006.
- Bookchin, Natalia. *Mass Ornament* (2009): <<http://vimeo.com/5403546>>.
- Cheney-Lippold, John. "A New Algorithmic Identity: Soft Biopolitics and the Modulation of Control." *Theory, Culture & Society* 28.6 (2011): 164-81.
- Engberg, Maria, Talan Memmott, and David Prater David, eds. *Anthology of European Electronic Literature*. (2012): <<http://anthology.elmcp.net/>>.
- Ekman, Ulrik, ed. *Throughout: Art and Culture Emerging with Ubiquitous Computing*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2013.
- Eskelinen, Markku. *Cybertext Poetics: The Critical Landscape of New Media Literary Theory*. London: Continuum, 2012.
- Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace, 1986.
- Fuller, Matthew. "Foreword." *Throughout: Art and Culture Emerging with Ubiquitous Computing*. Ed. Ulrik Ekman. Cambridge: MIT P, 2013. xi-xxxiv.
- Jackson Shelly. *Patchwork Girl*. Cambridge: Eastgate Systems, 1996.
- Jodi. ZYX (2012): <<http://www.zyx-app.com/>>.
- Joyce Michael. *afternoon, a story*. Cambridge: Eastgate Systems, 1990.
- Joyce, Michael. *Of Two Minds: Hypertext Pedagogy and Poetics*. Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1995.
- Kane, Carolyn. "Dancing Machines: An Interview with Natalie Bookchin." *rhizome.org* (27 May 2009): <<http://rhizome.org/editorial/2009/may/27/dancing-machines/>>.
- Kozel, Susan. "Sinews of Ubiquity: A Corporeal Ethics for Ubiquitous Computing." *Throughout: Art and Culture Emerging with Ubiquitous Computing*. Ed. Ulrik Ekman. Cambridge: MIT P, 2013. 337-49.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *The Mass Ornament*. Ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.
- Landow, George P. *Hypertext 3.0*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 2006.
- Malloy, Judy. *Its Name was Penelope*. Cambridge: Eastgate Systems, 1990.
- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2002.
- Massumi, Brian. *Semblance and Event*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2011.
- Memmott, Talan. *Lexia to Perplexia* (2000): <[http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/memmott\\_lexia\\_to\\_perplexia.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/memmott_lexia_to_perplexia.html)>.
- Monfort, Nick. "ppg256-1." *Electronic Literature Collection* (2008): <[http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/montfort\\_ppg256.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/montfort_ppg256.html)>.
- Moulthrop, Stuart. *Victory Garden*. Cambridge: Eastgate Systems, 1995.
- O'Donnell, Kath. "Silence, Infomania." *lists.thing.net* (8 September 2007): <<https://lists.thing.net/pipermail/idc/2007-September/002811.html>>.
- Sherman, Tom. "Vernacular Video." *Nettime: Mailing List for Networked Cultures, Politics, and Tactics* (2008): <<http://permalink.gmane.org/gmane.culture.internet.nettime/3617>>.
- Stefans, Brian Kim. "Language as Gameplay: Toward a Vocabulary for Describing Works of Electronic Literature." *Electronic Book Review* (3 September 2012): <<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/gameplay>>.
- Strehovec, Janez. "Algorithmic Culture and E-literary Text Semiotics." *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology* 10.2 (2013): 141-56.
- Strehovec, Janez. "Derivative Writing: E-Literature in the World of New Social and Economic Paradigms." *Remediating the Social*. Ed. Simon Biggs. Bergen: ELMCIP, 2012. 79-83.
- Strehovec, Janez. "Digital Poetry beyond the Methaphysics of Projective Saying." *Regards Croises: Perspectives on Digital Literature*. Ed. Philippe Bootz and Charles Baldwin. Morgantown: West Virginia UP, 2010. 63-83.
- Strehovec, Janez. "E-Literary Text in Nomadic Cockpit." *Electronic Book Review* (2014): <<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/cockpit>>.
- Strehovec, Janez. "New Media Art As Research: Art-making Beyond the Autonomy of Art and Aesthetics." *Tecnoetic Arts* 6.3 (2008): 233-50.
- Strehovec, Janez. "Digital Literary Text as a Play and a Ride." *Officina di letteratura elettronica*. Ed. Lello Masucci and Giovanna Di Rosario. Napoli: Atelier Multimediale, 2011. 381-93.
- Strickland, Stephanie. "Born Digital." *poetryfoundation.org* (13 February 2009): <<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/article/182942>>.
- Striphas, Ted. "Who Speaks for Culture?" *thelateageofprint.org* (26 September 2011): <<http://www.thelateageofprint.org/2011/09/26/who-speaks-for-culture/>>.
- Thrift, Nigel. "Movement-space: The Changing Domain of Thinking Resulting from the Development of New Kinds of Spatial Awareness." *Economy and Society* 33.4 (2004): 582-604.
- Torres, Rui. "Poemas no meio do caminho." *Electronic Literature Collection* (2008): <[http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/torres\\_poemas\\_caminho.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/torres_poemas_caminho.html)>.
- Transborder Immigrant Tool* (2007-2008): <<http://vimeo.com/27222287>>.
- Virno, Paolo. *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*. Trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson. New York: Semiotext(e), 2004.
- Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1970.

Author's Profile: Janez Strehovec conducts research in new media art and electronic literature as an independent scholar in Ljubljana. His interests in scholarship include mobile and locative media, the perception and cognition of electronic literature, the social implications of new media art, and digital literacy. His recent publications include "E-Literary Text and New Media Paratexts," *Examining Paratextual Theory and its Applications in Digital Culture* (Ed. Nadine Desrocher and Daniel Apollon, 2014) and "The E-Literary Text as an Instrument and a Ride," *New Literary Hybrids in the Age of Multimedia Expression* (Ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope, 2014).  
E-mail: <[janez.strehovec@guest.arnes.si](mailto:janez.strehovec@guest.arnes.si)>