ATTITUDES ON THE MOVE
On the Perception of Digital Poetry Objects

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Digital poetry objects form a genre of their own that is influenced by the poetry avant-garde and neo-avant-garde, visual and concrete poetry, text-based electronic installation art, conceptual art, Net art and software art. It includes kinetic and animated poetry, ergodic and visual digital poetry pieces, e-sound poetry, interactive poetry (with collaborative authorship), digital video poetry, digital film poetry, hyperpoetry, code poetry as well as digital textscapes with poetic features. It is of importance that this genre applies an expanded concept of language based on the interactions of Netspeak and programming languages. In other words the language of zeros and ones and ASCII and HTML characters is involved in new poetic structures with striking visual, animated and tactile features. Web poetry objects is a new medium, one that enables the user to go into the poem, which can serve as a soft interface and even as an instrument that demands very active and sophisticated perceptual procedures.

How can one approach the specificity of this medium; how can one find a proper way to decode such digital literary pieces which are influenced also with the software art by Jodi, Olia Lialina and Alan Sondheim? First of all, one needs to take into account a very nature of the digital word itself by analyzing its appearance within the new media, from music video and computer games to Web pages, e-mail and SMS.

In the Web computer game *Trigger Happy* (1998)[1] users are encountering highly unusual situations, which are challenging and provocative to common forms of cultural communication of the Western world. This game, which is based on the format of the *shoot-'em-up* classic, *Space Invaders*, does not use as its shooting objects hostile newcomers from outer space or other armed zombies; the role of the moving target is assumed by

the text, not just any text, but a fragment from Michael Foucault's essay "What is an author," in which Foucault has far-reachingly deconstructed the institution of the author in a modern sense. To succeed in this game, which brings a successful player into the Web environment of a known search engine, one must break up text and destroy words, which puts authors in an undoubtedly awkward position. *Trigger Happy*, however, is by no means the only computer game in which the text of a well-known author is used as the "spiritual background," and the object of interaction at the same time. An important place among Web computer games is also occupied by Natalia Bookchin's project *The Intruder*[2], which is based on the text of the same title by Jorge Louis Borges. When playing this game, which poses, in a subtle way, questions of gender and aggression in the world today, the user is also interfering in the text, catching words and stopping them. A moving Borges text is running in the background while individual words are "raining" across the screen, and after they have been successfully captured in a "pot" by a user-player, they trigger the sound part of this object – the reading aloud of individual words.

The question arising here is what is the nature of the word that is entering an environment that is, nowadays, so profound as well as trendy, such as the world of computer games, the "New Hollywood," rapidly becoming one of the leading entertainment industries in the developed world.[3] What is the word like when it is being shot at, or intercepted, or being used as a material for creating digital textual objects, objects which form the basis of the new Internet medium appropriate for digital literature? This question is being posed in this essay, in which our point of interest is the connection between the trendy sensitivity of today, and the creating of e-poetry, which is trying to get as close in nature as possible to the digital medium, and to abandon the norms of poetry-as-we-know-it at the same time.

The soft(ware) word

The role of the moving target can be assumed by a word, which is an object, meaning that it is an independent entity with as many perceptual as well as quantifiable features as possible. It is not defined only by its semantic, and signifying qualities; nor is a sentence, word combination, or a message its immediately superior syntactic unit. It is an entity with visual, tactile, energetic, and kinetic qualities: an independent and complex signi-

fier. The digital word as a new media object is also a soft signifier that can be modified by software because the digital word in its very nature is based on the numerical code. Such a word-object can be used as a material in new procedures for creating textscapes as well as for various manipulations within computer games. A word-object can be monitored, and modified (digitally morphed), and by means of feedback even modifications themselves can be modified. It can be set into motion, and even its intervals of coming and going are programmable. The application of a word-object, that is of a word with a virtual body, to computer games is no degradation or depreciation; quite the contrary, a word as a moving target is showing us the new nature of the digital word, which presents excellent material for creating trendy digital, and even literary-coded textuality.[4]

A digital word-body is not encountered only in already traditional hypertext fiction (the pioneer of which is Michael Joyce with his *Afternoon, a story*, from 1990); it is also gaining importance in the new generation of digital poetry objects created by means of state-of-the-art software (JavaScript, Shockwave, Flash, VRLM) designed also for kinetic text applications, where motion, with its vectors, accelerations, and intervals is becoming one of their more important features. Examples of such literary practice are the poems of John Cayley, which are full of subtle intervals, verses that circle at the back of the visible/legible field, and poems of other important authors that belong to the field of digital kinetic and animated poetry, such as Loss Pequeño Glazier, MiekalAnd, Komninos Zervos and Brian Kim Stefans. Word-objects are encountered also in more complex digital textscapes, such as *Fidget*, a Web piece by Goldsmith and Paulsen (Goldsmith 2000), *The Great Wall of China* by Simon Biggs (2000), and projects like *The Jabberwocky Engine*, an evolving literal environment where letters are joined into letter compounds, proto-words and word-compounds (Hennessy 2000).

The term "word–compound" sounds somewhat unusual; however, it is exactly the *Jabber* project that establishes an analogy between word formation, and chemical compounds. As this projects emphasizes atoms are the smallest components of chemical compounds, and letters the smallest indivisible word units, so such work leads us into the world of lexical genesis of a unique kind. We come across the alphabetical proto-cloud, wherein *Jabber* is producing words by combining letters according to lexical rules and probability theory. When letters encounter one another in a "pre-soup" of letters, their bonding is determined by a probabilistic calculation: "When

two letters collide, a random number between 0 and 1 is generated, and if the number is less than or equal to the conditional probability for the two letter combination, the letters bond" (Hennessy 2000). So it should be stressed here that the semantic criterion is quite irrelevant for the bonding of letters and word parts; word parts bond into forms according to the rules of English word formation. It is important that these words can be articulated, and sound like the words we know, although their meaning is indefinable, just like the meaning of Kurt Schwitter's poem *Ursonate.*

A relevant environment for experiencing digital words-virtual bodies is also the *Electro Magnetic Poetry* project[5], which enables the reader-user to pick up words, and compose/create a poem from the words, which the user experiences as if they were bricks, a tactile raw material. This interactive environment provides the user with a subtle sense of touching a word, which, however, is not written down, but transferred, inserted, or placed in a particular spot. Its virtual bodily existence and independence are felt in a far greater manner on screen than on paper. While writing on paper (either with a pencil or typewriter), words are being written down in a spontaneous fashion (words come to mind, we write them down, and there is always the concept of wholeness "dangling" over them), but while moving them, or otherwise manipulating them by means of devices (such as a computer mouse), one can, metaphorically speaking, feel their weight, autonomy, and a series of their other qualities. In such a poem, a word presents a syntactical Lego brick, and while creating poetic units linguistic syntax as well as syntax of spatial relations will be taken into account.

Digital poetry objects are displayed on the computer screen as their very proper medium, and subjected to a user/reader controlled movement based on vertical, sometimes even horizontal, scrolling and on moving the mouse arrow around the screen. Digital poetry objects are set on the Web and also distributed within both physical and programming constraints of the Web page design – in other words, there is also large quantities of non-linear text and images which disturb any process of reading as-we-know-it.

In *The Language of New Media* Lev Manovich writes that

> "the printed word tradition that initially dominated the language of cultural interfaces is becoming less important, while the part played by cinematic elements is becoming progressively stronger. This is consistent with a general trend in modern society toward presenting more and more information in the form of time-based audiovisual moving image sequences, rather than as text." (2001, 78)

Within the genre of animated and kinetic digital poetry objects, a reconciliation of the word medium with time-based cinematic elements occurs, and the moving, multimedia designed words are also a striking part of a trendy movement toward a cinematic manner of representation. For example, in Claire Dinsmore's piece *The Dazzle as Question* the reader-listener-viewer is challenged by film-like suspense based on her creative uncertainty due to the film of words that runs into the visual field from different parts of the screen. Such a user is not safe and needs to take into account the text that is hidden in the moment of its decoding.

Edmond Jabès and the desert of the blank

The digital poetry objects form a genre of their own but the understanding of such programmable pieces also depends on the knowledge of tradition, from historical avant-garde art to visual and concrete poetry. The poetic and philosophic world of Edmond Jabès (author of *The Book of Questions*) is one of the gateways into the world of poetry that stresses the visual part of the signifier can be mentioned. It is characteristic of his texts that the word is constantly being reflected against the background, the whiteness, and the blank page margins and looking at it one must perceive each individual letter, spaces between letters, and punctuation. As Jabès explains, "The written word is made of void. In order to be able to read a word, the space of void is needed, the silence between one word and others. Were there not the space of void, the written could not be read, and the fragment of silence between the spoken words enables them to be heard." (1995, 104.) In *Le Parcours* (1985) Jabès evocatively says: "The book breathes through its letters as does the skin through its pores." (1993a, 29) In *The Book of Margins* he puts it this way: "Letters are the chance of the word, as they are also the legible trace of ruined words." (1993b, 59.) "We are bound by the white of the sign's whiteness and the black of the sign, become legible at its whitest [sic]." (ibid., 79.) In his preface to the book, Mark C. Taylor comments: "...silence is the white space whose withdrawal marks the emergence of the black space of the created wor(l)d." (ibid., XIV.)

Jabès' thoughts, written in a language which is neither precisely poetry nor philosophy, but a new genre of textscape enabled by applying links to various texts and authors, should be placed in a broader context of Kabba-

lah and in the understanding of the world, the major units of which are God, the Book, the desert, and the word. However, what is of importance to our approach to the visual aspect of poetry is Jabès' dialectics of the written and the absent, of signified and void, of letters and whiteness. Jabès viewed each word from an analytical perspective; he saw the word as decomposed to letters and voids – whitenesses between letters that are of crucial importance.

But what is happening to the whiteness and voids now, in the paradigm of new media and computers? Whiteness is no longer the whiteness of a page in a book, it has come to life in pixels, and the margins, too, have become sort of lively and marked. Whiteness has gained depth and voids are no longer as empty. Possibilities are opening up, metaphorically speaking, of falling into the screen, of twisting words and placing the reader's view behind the word itself, on its "darker side". Web poetry objects challenge the eye to abandon reading the text in linear fashion (reading from left to right and then skipping to a new line on the left); they destabilize the eye's position and displace it. They send it up and seconds later down the screen, direct it towards the imaginary point in the background and then force it to follow the graphic image as a synchronous journey of a word stream. Again at other times the eye is challenged to abandon reading and to try and capture the whole screen, where words in motion are functioning as image-movement, with one glance. We are now witnessing what Fredric Jameson described in the case of Nam June Paik's video installations: "The postmodernist viewer, however, is called upon to do the impossible, namely to see all the screens at once, in their radical and random difference" (2000, 214).

And what is the very nature of the letter now, when it functions as a key unit of Web poetry objects placed on the screen? The letter is being transformed into the *letter-image-body* on the move, which can be understood as a "standing reserve" (Heidegger's term) and a raw material for possible poetry generators and processes of digital morphing which reshape the letter by combining the dissolving and the warping of its visual appearance. Neither a verse nor a word but a (moving) letter is an atomistic departure point for recent digital poetry as demonstrated in a striking fashion by Mez, Komninos Zervos, and Brian Kim Stefans.

Reading digital poetry objects the user/reader is not faced just with a certain "more," with a kind of surplus on the level of kinetic perception that engages all the senses and uses the new media aesthetics in a creative way, but her efforts on the level of perception are often accompanied

by some "less." The user of such a moving object (here we mean exclusively kinetic Web poetry objects) must decode the events on the screen quickly (she does not have much time – in fact, she does not have all the time that the reader of traditional, book bound poetry has at her disposal), and that is why her participation in the worlds of imagination created by semantic properties of text is relatively limited. Kinetic digital poetry objects come to life during motion time and require to be appreciated within a relatively limited period of perceptual time. The reader's encounter with a film-text screen differs from her encounter with a book, making her follow a different kind of aesthetics which takes little notice of the reader's experience of the worlds of imagination created by texts and directs the reader as the user into the textscape as an event space of the textual practices. A digital poetry object is not the starting point of an imaginary journey elsewhere nor is it the text-as-we-know it, it is itself a text-playground-event. It does not serve as a means of reference, it directs towards itself, towards its media suppositions, implying that not interactivity but both total immersion and participation are key devices for approaching this medium.

Attitudes on the Move

The new digital medium's emphasis upon the word as object is also demonstrated in the project, *Cubo,* of two Brazilian authors, Alckmar Luiz Dos Santos and Gilbert Prado[6]. Their piece, *Cubo,* tested within the framework of user options that are supported by the Cortona plug-in, gives the user the possibility of encountering cube-like structured textual environments. This is a poem, in which all cube planes are fulfilled, inviting the reader-user to not only to rotate the textual cube, zoom in, or zoom out, but to immerse in it, and enjoy her telepresence in the midst of the object. Her virtual eye takes up a virtual place in the center of the cube, now reading the text above herself, the next moment under herself, beside her, or at the back of the cube. By rotating the textual cube, and through other forms of its manipulation, she is sharpening up her subtle virtual sense for telepresence in the environment of a textscape set in the depth of the screen. For practical purposes as well as for the theory of digital textuality an important development here is the opening up of mobile, and highly complex, reception, which is based on combining and complementing different ap-

proaches to digital poetry objects. We are witnessing attitudes on the move, for when encountering such textual objects the user not only occupies the position of reader, but switches to a mode typical of computer gaming in the subsequent textual intervals, or soon afterwards occupies the position of a viewer of digital images.

Digital poetry objects require from the user (defined as a hybrid reader-viewer-listener) an activity as intense and sophisticated as possible, which is based on a fluent switching between the following attitudes and modes of perception:

1) linear reading, as successive decoding of the words' meanings;
2) jumpy reading, full of forward glimpses and backward glances;
3) viewing words as visual 3–D objects;
4) tracking the movement of textual units (considering their intervals and anticipation of word-images that are still outside the visual field on a given moment);
5) touching, zooming and entering 3–D textual objects through interfaces;
6) "mouse reading" in a sense that clicking on the word can open a link or activate a computer program;
7) reading-viewing as program decoding due to the programmable nature of the Web poetry object (the reader/user needs to take into account the software applied);
8) perception of the whole mosaic-like screen in one quick snapshot;
9) listening to the audio soundscape of the multimedia designed objects;
10) navigating the spatial patterns of word-objects, images, and animated objects;
11) aesthetic attitude to textscape as an object that stimulates the senses.

Such a sophisticated perception requires the abandoning of traditional reading styles and therefore also of traditional reading procedures, as discussed by Roman Ingarden in his phenomenological aesthetics of the literary work of art. Attitudes on the move also require certain "cyber-reduction" in the sense of the reader-user's shift from the usual practice of textscape mean-

ing decoding. A digital poetry object user needs to stay also at the visual, tactile and aural aspect of the text, at the graphic/digital image itself, and not to use this image purely as a means to something entirely different, to literary worlds, which was the topic of Roman Ingarden's notion in his *The Cognition of Literary Work of Art*:

> There is the question of the degree to which we really sensibly perceive and must perceive the individual paper and the individual flecks of ink themselves in the concrete reading of a printed book. Are we not rather immediately disposed to apprehend the typical forms of the printed "words" or the typical verbal sounds, without bringing to consciousness what the individual written signs look like? (1973, 177)

It is quite important that such switching of attitudes (perceptual modes) does not pose any bigger problems to the e-poetry user; she actually does it as part of her daily routine, which is defined by the co-existence of ontologically and modally distinct realities. At one moment she is living in a world defined by Euclid's geometry and Newton's physics, and in the next moment, without any special effort, she has to switch to a cyberspace mode, where there are no metric units, and only topological laws apply. In cyberspace mode the only thing of any significance is online connection; at one moment the reader is active here and now, moving physical objects with a quantifiable weight, while later she is already telepresent in the depth of the screen identified with the cursor. The constant change of interests – directing attention from practical goals to goals of subtle aesthetic contemplation, switching into the game-mode, or switching out of the moving-physical-objects mode – consists of actions that usually follow each other in a rapid manner, and do not cause psychological checks in the user's life.

In the sign of digital morph and animation

A digital word-image-virtual body is also an object of digital morphing. What years ago was digital image as a "material" for computer-graphical transformations and manipulations (we see them on a daily basis when watching MTV music videos), is today the digital word, and even digital letter. Digital morphing is functioning as a basis for the animated anagram

VILEVILIVE created by Jim Johnson, and it is characteristic of its basic form that it is evolving as a transformation of the words "vile," "evil," and "live"[7]. This minimalist piece exhibits a process distinctive to digital poetry objects by Komninos Zervos and Mez (Mary Ann Breeze). Digital transformation (or isolation) of an individual letter, or a syllable of a word, brings dynamics into that word, which is set into the depth of the screen. Words divide into two pieces, or into syllables, which have meanings other than that of the base word. Narrative effects are now being achieved by contrasting meanings of entities that were created either as a result of digital morphing effects, or by the associative reading of a series of words, which are pouring onto the screen, and essential to which is spatial and temporal syntax, necessitating the reading of paratextual characteristics, such as up-down, center-margin, sooner-later, etc. The word-image-virtual bodies in digital textscapes are mostly nouns, sometimes verbs; adjectives are quite unnecessary, for they are being replaced primarily by accentuated visual effects, defining their color, arrangement, form, sound, and motion. We are bearing witness to the birth of words that were created in and as multimedia, words that are abandoning linguistic syntax and using the effects of new media devices as well as characters taken from programming languages.

This essay deals only with the visual manipulation of the graphical image of the word in digital poetry objects, but the digital morph can also play an important role in the sound dimension of the text, as is clearly evident from Mark Amerika's project *Phon: e: me*, in which emphasis is laid on "sound writing," and the pictorial dimension of the text is only touched upon[8]. By listening to this e-text, in which fiction and non-fiction are intertwined, one can see that sound syntax is here in service of clearly spatial articulations (of placing and transferring) of sound entities. Words are heard as sound-bodies in a dynamic space, which they themselves co-create.

Digital poetry objects constitute a genre that has been created by merging and combining avant-garde poetics, visual and concrete poetry, new media technologies, Net art, software art and (electronic) text-based installation art. However, they represent more than just the sum of these influences, for they form a genre with its own, specific organization and features, appropriate to modern technologies. The genre is in no way a mere continuation of visual and concrete poetry by other means. This is a medium that has been adjusted to clicking and connecting sensitivity, to the logic of computer games, and to devices of total immersion; it is a medium

that requires a virtual sense for telepresence in the depth of the screen, and a virtual sense of displaced viewing. The authentic user of such e-poetry is the trendy individual of today, whose intellectual stimulation is in need less of fiction (with its plots and closures), and more of (computer and video) gaming with its unique dynamics, and possibilities for active participation in its worlds. While playing games the user may consider their fictional nature, gaining a sense of reality in the modes *as-if*, *not-yet*, and *unreal*. In her communication she uses of a new language with simplified syntax (and often, as for example in SMS messaging, language that is based on words without vowels, and numerous abbreviations), in combination with pictorial and sound elements; a multimedia and hypertext message (for example, an e-mail with a photograph, and a link to a Web page, or a Web camera) is the kind of message that really counts. *Cybercogito* – "I link, therefore I am" (Mark Amerika's rubric) – is gaining ground with individuals active in the on-line world; reality itself is becoming hypertextual. Arguments are being made on the basis of hypertextual links, and e-literature is a medium that responds from the specifics of this new era.

Clicking and the hypertextual sensibilities developed while working with devices – keyboards, mice, joysticks, and consoles – also encourage manual actions in online communication. The trendy new media culture is highly tactile, and this tactility is a feature which accompanies the reception of digital literary objects. We are witnessing situations similar to those of computer games. A computer game is a medium that requires full engagement of the senses; the body participates in the game through the use of the hand, which has to be properly trained to handle the demanding devices (e.g., joystick and console) successfully. In *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts*, Claude Gandelman points out the active, even tactile role of the eye, and different historical views on the relationship between viewing and touching (Gandelman 1991). The author also touches upon the figurative interpretation of this relationship in the emblematics of the sixteenth century, drawing attention to Julius Wilhelm Zincgref's Renaissance emblem *Emblematicum Ethico – Politorum*, which depicts an eye that is laid into an open palm and appears to be watching the world from this vantage point. In this example, we witnessing a unique displacement of the eye in the form of its insertion into a palm, which symbolizes the hand's active and arbitrary role in creating objects. On this subject Gandelman elaborates: "In the emblem the eye is merely a pilot guiding the hand toward its objectives; in the Egyptian hieroglyph, on the contrary, the eye-sun rules

over the hand in an absolute manner, just as the pharaoh ruled over Egypt" (Gandelman 1991, 3–4).

This image is cited as a typical example of the historical tension between sight and touch, which, in the Western world's ocularcentric paradigm, has led to a dominance of sight over touch. Sight and its ideological interpretation is the real master. This is a tradition that today is culminating in video surveillance mechanisms, video wars with smart bombs, and in the use of satellite, orbital views (of, let us say, cameras – the "eyes of weather satellites"). However, with computer games, which are undoubtedly a genre of new media based visual culture, and which produce trendy iconography (influencing fashion, life-styles, and film), we bear witness to an affirmation of the hand, realized in its functions of touching, holding, and pressing on devices. The aforementioned image from Gandelman's book seems to be an emblem of this new situation; the player can only be successful when her eye is, metaphorically speaking, in her palm, directing her as skillfully as possible. The eye has to co-operate with the hand, to go hand-in-hand with it; only in perfect accord can they achieve the optimal effect when one is playing a computer game, which without a shadow of a doubt is also a highly tactile activity.

The unstable poem-process

The co-operation of the eye and hand is a very complex activity, turning the observer into a user, for whom it is highly relevant to be able to interfere actively in the environment. This characteristic also applies to the reader of digital poetry objects, who is far more active that the traditional reader. This type of user is addressed by the Slovenian author of electronic poetry Jaka •eleznikar, whose poetics is based on integrating the reader into the process of creating digital poetry. This integration can be found in his earliest work, *Interactivalia* (1997), where one encounters co-written texts – texts that are written simultaneously by the author and the reader, with the author, naturally, in the role of the programmer-creator of the interactive writing system. •eleznikar's e-projects involving typing, from *Type!* through *Typescape!* to *Typescape.2*, represent this kind of philosophy, pertinent to a very particular view of the future of art and literature, and are intended especially for the reader in the role of a co-author-user of e-writing spaces[9]. Here, we have in mind the arts intended for the

trendy user of tomorrow, about which Brian Eno, a musician, in his interview with Kevin Kelly for *Wired* magazine in May of 1995 had this to say:

> What people are going to be selling more of in the future is not pieces of music, but systems by which people can customize listening experiences for themselves. Change some of the parameters and see what you get. So, in that sense, musicians would be offering unfinished pieces of music – pieces of raw material, but highly evolved raw material, that has a strong flavor to it already. I can also feel something evolving on the cusp between "music," "game," and "demonstration" – I imagine a musical experience equivalent to watching John Conway's computer game of *Life* or playing *SimEarth*, for example. (Eno & Kelly 1995)

Eno is concerned with the music of the future, but his point of view certainly has far-reaching consequences also for other arts, implying their switching to open systems, which are configured by their users according to their preferences.

Typescape.2 is a system for creating a textual environment in co-operation between the user and the author-programmer, who enables the user to feel a letter-body as a unit of e-textuality in an analytical, atomic manner. By pressing a key on a keyboard the user not only produces a letter, but also hears one; the letter is spoken out loud, and simultaneously visualized in an enlarged three-dimensional form. It is a word-body that has been animated to spin around its axis in different directions, or participate in the "dance" of the letters in front of, or behind, the written text. The user is given the possibility of changing the letters' features, their colors, and their sound accompaniment (the user can choose the nostalgic sound of a mechanical typewriter instead of the spoken word), and she is also offered the alternative to send the work she has written by electronic mail, meaning that the text immediately becomes part of the cyberspace communication. *Typescape.2* produces two types of textscapes: the first one is composed of linear words, and the second one features animated letters-bodies intended for non-linear decoding.

We are directed to crucial shifts in the field of art and perception by *Typescape.2*: the reader in the role of the user, and poetry piece as a process and open structure. After the postmodernist subject destabilization (its deconstruction into a fractal subject, or multiple ego within the cyberculture) we have become contemporaries of object destabilization, in particular of objects in a persistent material form; we are the contempo-

raries of a shift to open, unstable structures. Emphasis has been shifted from artifact to event; objects with sharp edges are being replaced by processes; and the pleasure of having completed a work is replaced by dynamic, flexible experience. "Art becomes an experience rather than a physical object" (Napier & Baumgaertel 2001), as Marc Napier, a Web artist, describes this shift.

Netspeak-based digital poetry objects?

Today we are being provided with new, provocative, and challenging forms for testing experience with digital literary objects as a new genre with its own specificity, a medium that cannot be perceived as a mere continuation of visual and concrete poetry, but can only be understood through an analysis of new media, and new perception, which originate in interface culture. The problem arising here lies in the poetics of digital poetry objects: traditional devices of literary theory, even where developed through the works of literary avant-garde, and neo-avant-garde of the twentieth century, are often less successful in describing and explaining e-poetry phenomena than theoretical devices of the new media aesthetics and poetic theory. The application of structuralist, and post-structuralist literary theory (Roland Barthes is a very frequently cited author among theoreticians of hypertext fiction) is also questionable in this field, for authors such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, and Michael Riffaterre were not, in their analyses, concerned with e-textuality nor with Web literary objects. Hence, in a previous article, "The Moving Word" (Strehovec 2001), I introduced concepts that were developed within the new media aesthetics, as follows: techno suspense, techno surprise, displaced viewing, and text as virtual reality. Besides the far greater activity of the reader-user of digital, coded textuality, we are encountering a series of other problems concerning the genesis of e-textuality, with a computer as a smart machine participating in text generation. The key to creating digital textuality is machine generation through code, and this is why authors often stress the "machinic" characteristics of their work (e.g. as poetry generators, poetry engines, word machines).

When we are questioning the poetics of e-poetry, this presupposes the destabilization of verse through the application of non-linear distributed non-verbal components. We need to stress that the poetry occurs both in

the use of innovative language and in the creation of poetic (even lyric) atmospheres and processes by means of new media effects.

A fleeting look at the nature of computer programs reveals that traditional alphabet based e-textuality is not only a matter of digital literature; we are also concerned with texts made from commands and machine-readable, the material of which is composed of zeroes and ones. These are also "an alphabet which can be translated forth and back between other alphabets without information loss. It does, in my point of view, make no sense to limit the definition of the alphabet in general to that of the Roman alphabet in particular when we can encode the same textual information in this very alphabet, as Morse code, flag signs or transliterated into zeros and ones" (Cramer 2001).

Algorithmic matrices their texts that lie behind the screen have long intrigued Web artists, such as the Jodi couple, who wrote of their involvement as follows:

> We learned from our first web mistakes, that an error can be most interesting. If you forget a little HTML code tag, for example; the bracket " > " then the text surface mixes with code and becomes liquid, it flows all over the screen. This type of dynamic, tactile text is different from hard copy. We can't accept that print design rules define also the layout on a computer screen. Most websites still look like print. The possibilities of code and text exchange are not used, because its confusing, it is not readable. But these are the medium specific, digital material, new things. (Jodi & Baumgaertel 2001)

In his book about language and the Internet David Crystal writes about Netspeak as a novel medium combining spoken, written and electronic properties because "electronic texts, of whatever kind, are simply not the same as other kinds of texts" (2001, 48). And it is important that Netspeak is not just a language of surfaces, but also contains underlying programming language with excellent performative properties. As Net artist Jodi has done by applying the dark language of code in the field of net art, "netwurker" Mez has made a similar gesture by inventing her new poetic language that she calls "mezangelle." Mez uses a broad spectrum of procedures and textual devices such as ASCII characters, punctuation, interjection, abbreviation, and mathematical symbols in order to introduce a new "dialectics" into her multimedia poetry installations: investigations of meanings that arise from artificial juxtapositions and interjections. By us-

ing interjected words set off in brackets she also tries to demonstrate numerous new associations. Mez's parenthetic splitting of words changes the way the reader first reads a word; the reader must go on to read new combinations of syllables *within* the word. Her language – in her linguistic software art – thus incorporates programming, and other code languages to create a new poetic language.

The trendy digital word-virtual body which enters digital poetry objects through new media syntax raises more general questions concerning verbal media, and their mutation in the era of new media communication. It is no coincidence that this essay set out by mentioning the use of words in the genre of Web computer games, for verbal media are being integrated into all cybercultural genres. The problem and danger posed here is none other than the MTV-ization, and Mcdonaldization of the verbal, reducing the word to a "fancy signifier," designed by means of new media special effects. The task and challenge for e-authors is thus to deconstruct such textuality, and shift the attention to the language of its code, which, however, can often seem obscure and dark, turning the computer screen into an unpleasant, even dangerous environment. This quality is apparent in some of Jodi's Web projects. Despite the tendency to simplify verbal communication (for example, in SMS messaging, and e-mails), and in spite of attractive visualizations, e-authors are still challenged by the semantic treasures of the word, which would be a shame to sacrifice to new media special effects. E-authors are also challenged by the new way of writing in an expanded sense, using DJ techniques, applied in the new literary textuality as the sampling, cutting and mixing of signification. New cultural associations are being created.

NOTES

1. *Trigger Happy*. Available: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/slide/th/title.html.
2. *The Intruder*. Available: http://calarts.edu/~bookchin/intruder.
3. The word, in its confrontation with the medium of image, is the user's basic weapon in a successful commercial computer game, *The Typing of the Dead*, in which survival is dependent on the speed of typing words as a means of destroying hostile zombies. The user only has one alternative, either "type or die." In the United States profits from computer games have already surpassed those of the Hollywood film industry, placing computer games industry, right behind pop music, in the field of entertainment industry.
4. *The Intruder* and *Trigger Happy* are patches to commercial computer games and this type of intervention is becoming a genre of Net art. Artists are able to insert a different kind of ideology into the framework of commercial gaming, changing characters' genders, or even creating different scenarios and iconography.
5. *Electro Magnetic Poetry*, http://www.prominence.com/java/poetry/
6. *Cubo*, http://www.cce.ufsc.br/~nupill/hiper/cubo.wrl
7. *VILEVILIVE*, http://spot.colorado.edu/~johnsoja/Vile.dcr
8. *Phon:e:me*, http://www.walkerart.org/hlframe.html
9. *Typescape*, http://www.jaka.org/2001/typescape2/index.html