GERMAN NET LITERATURE: IN THE EXILE OF INVISIBILITY[1]

Patricia Tomaszek

1. Net Literature as a "Literary System"

At an early stage when the Internet became a platform for artistic experiments in the 90s, net literature in Germany attracted the attention of many and was embedded in an infrastructure that made net literature publicly visible. Devoted to the "Empirical Study of Literature" (ESL)[2], Siegfried J. Schmidt et al. developed criteria to analyze literature as a literary system in which post-processing plays a crucial role for mediation and public awareness. It seems like German net literature in its very beginnings had strong post-processing-mechanisms.

After a period of four years however, net literature became publicly invisible[3] and described as a phenomenon without future. In an article published 1998 in the paper *Die Zeit* journalist Christian Benne contemplated "warum der Internet-Literatur, in welcher Form auch immer, kein Erfolg beschieden sein kann" ('why internet-literature won't, in any form, be acknowledged success', my translation). Benne gave an answer to his reasoning and stated: "Noch viel weniger als das Buch wird sie in der Lage sein, eine moderne literarische Öffentlichkeit zu schaffen." ('. . . it won't be able to establish a modern literary public'). This is one of the points this paper investigates in: the relationship between the community, the public, and its post-processing mechanisms.

While one of the first widely registered hypertextual creations written in German *Die imaginäre Bibliothek* (*The Imaginary Library*) by Heiko Idensen and Matthias Krohn dates back to 1989. A first obituary for net literature "Fluchtlinie" ("Line of Escape") was written by Swiss scholar Beat Suter only ten years later.[4] The short essay was published in the sixth issue of the online journal *Dichtung Digital*, founded by German literary scholar Roberto Simanowski in 1999. Interestingly, this was in the same year of the magazine's release that— from its beginnings—provided an academic platform for publications of close readings and theoretical debates on net literature, digital art, and technology.

The dates of one of the first works of German net literature (*Die imaginäre Bibliothek*) and its farewell letter have interesting correlations with incidences in the communities public: Idensen and Krohn inititally created its hypertextual library as an installation *for* the international symposium on digital art *Ars Electronica* (a web-version of the work was released in 1994). Suter wrote his paper shortly *after* the era of competitions that called for net literature in Germany was about to terminate. It is interesting to note when and how German works of net literature became known to a broader public.

Seen from a historical perspective, one might look back and call into mind the general conditions under which the rise of the novel took place. A cursory survey reveals how its evolution was bound to social, economical, and political progressions which are not comparable with today's state of the art – especially when talking about objects mediated through networked environments. However, the interrelationship between the rise of the novel and its socio-political infrastructure is striking. German philosopher and linguist Siegfried J. Schmidt and his associates have tried to make the rise of the novel traceable with a theoretical framework developed for the objective at hand. In his "Empirical Study of Literature" (ESL), Schmidt proposed to analyze literature in terms of a social phenomenon that comes into being in a productive "literary system". According to Schmidt, the literary system is comprised by mutual interactions in four domains of activities: 1) the production, 2) the distribution, 3) the reception, and 4) mediation and the post-processing of literary texts ("Literary Studies from Hermeneutics to Media Culture Studies" 4).

---

[2] In this theoretical framework, literature was regarded as a social phenomenon and was developed in Germany since the 60s.

[3] As indicated in the title of this article, I consciously speak of public invisibility as opposed of the death of German net literature.

[4] In "Fluchtline" Suter also illustrated the communities progressive development in an ephemeral sphere of technological progress. All essays by Suter served as a main source for the article at hand.

To each of these four components of the literary system, Schmidt assigned (social) entities and activities that assure the operability of what he regards as an institutionalized self-organizing system:

production: authors
distribution: entities of the capitalistic book market (editors, printing/binding, sales, marketing)
reception: (readers, the anonymous mass-public)
mediation/post-production: criticism, reviews, literary studies

Schmidt related these entities to the literary system of the eighteenth century and made evident that changes in one segment cause transformations in the other which in turn has an impact on the overall literary system's stability. In his words, post-processing means "referring to literary texts in terms of other media offers" which in turn means that "the literary text is necessarily embedded in social processes operating under social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of the respective society. In other words, literary phenomena are embedded in literary systems" (3).

If it is true that a literary system's stability is dependent from its interrelated functionality of the above formulated four entities, one might argue that its operability is lacking when a system's component experiences disturbance. Obviously, the literary system of net literature differs on various levels from the literary system of the eigthteenth century. Over the course of this study however, I want to explore the source of disorder responsible for the invisibility of German net literature and therefore take a closer look at the significance of post-processing. It is remarkable that net literature in Germany has been more visible when its post-processing mechanisms were active; when juries from magazines called for submissions for an award in net literature. Here, I regard awards as a form of "pre-processing" that encouraged creation of net literature that was later post-processed. In Germany, first prizes for works (of net literature) were awarded between 1996 and 1998 ("Pegasus") and 1999 ("Ettlinger Prize for Literature")[5]. Later, occasional calls for works within a competitive infrastructure were processed. Even though interesting works have been submitted and awarded[6], these competitions did not become institutionalized events (like the Catalan Vinaròs Prize for digital literature since 2005) and were not continued in the long run ("arte-them@" (2000); "literatur.digital" (2001-2003); ("Bachelors Prize for Net Literature" (2005)).

2. Terminology-Talk

Before discussing the (early) post-processing structures of net literature in Germany, I will first discuss the subject's terminology at hand. The use of accurate terminologies and a common ground on taxonomies is crucial in all scholarly disciplines. In our field however, manifold terminologies and definitions exist. To my mind, this dispersity in terminologies and definitions partly results from the various international traditions in which net literature developed independently from its beginnings. At the Electronic Literature Communities Seminar in Bergen (2010), Serge Bouchardon discussed the prospect of "A French School of Digital Literature". Taken from a national perspective, one might also talk of a German

---

[5] After the termination of sponsorship for the Pegasus-Award, community-member and author Oliver Gassner designed and organized a prize together with the City of Ettlingen in 1999.

[6] Due to the focus on post-processing, awarded works won't be discussed in this paper. Many of these works aren't accessible anymore, close readings are published in German on *Dichtung Digital* and in the monograph *Interfictions* by Roberto Simanowski.

School which in turn speaks about "Net Literature"[7]. A comparative (closer) look at early French and German works might reveal that different developments are at play which in turn lead to different definitions. Philippe Bootz for instance talks about "digital literatures"[8] and in a recent publication, Joseph Tabbi examines electronic literature even as world literature[9] that emerges "only after the infrastructure is complete" (28).[10] The infrastructure of the literary system of net literature is, by no means, complete. This is also due to the fact that the field is approached by scholars coming from a diversity of disciplines (e. g. literary studies, computer science, creative writing), and artists that define their involvement in net literature according to their individual artistic practices and vocabularies. As a consequence, e-lit scholar Talan Memmott speaks of different poetic systems (instead of genres): "Because digital poetry cannot be reduced to a genre of poetry, we must begin to consider the *applied poetics* of the individual practitioner" (294).

This short discussion reveals that the literary system of net literature is problematic at its very core: it lacks a terminological consensus. A no-go for the theoreticians of the ESL, who have regarded exact terminology "to be the very basis of teaching and learning literary studies" (Schmidt, "Literary Studies from Hermeneutics" 4) that is, in this discussion: also the post-processing of net literature. On the other hand, it seems like there are (minimal) nation-wide agreements in the usage of terminology—even though we might keep in mind the variety of applied terminologies by individual scholars. From a systemic point of view, all national traditions might be viewed as sub-systems that contribute to the literary system of net literature. In the end, we all speak of the same: literary artifacts in networked programmable media.

3. Post-Processing Net Literature and Community-Building: A Schematic Comparison between Germany and the USA

Within the framework of Schmidt's social system of literature, the entity of post-processing is realized by professional actors elegible to process a work as a critic, scholar or teacher. Within the system of communicators, Schmidt defines a literary mediator as the person that "translates" "eine bereits vorliegende sprachliche Kommunikationsbasis in eine anders medialisierte Kommunikationsbasis [ueberfuehrt], um sie als Literarisches Kommunikat an andere Kommunikationsteilnehmer weiterzuleiten ('an already existing linguistic communication base in another mediated communication base in order to transfer it as a literary object to other communication participants' ("Grundriss" 377, my translation).

While in traditional literature post-processing activities are merely mediated through teaching literary studies, book-publishers -and sellers, journals, and newspapers, mediators in

---

[7] Based at the University of Siegen/Germany, Peter Gendolla and Jörgen Schäfer develop a theoretical framework for literary communication in computer-based, i.e. programmable, and networked media that is largely informed by Actor-Network-Theory. Their research focuses on questions regarding aesthetic difference, the literary, and literariness. Jörgen Schäfer discusses these notions in an article titled "Reassembling the Literary".

[8] For defining "digital literatures", Bootz usually refers to literary practices and analyzes the various forms in which a work is presented.

[9] In his contribution, Tabbi does not strive to describe a new genre. Rather, he understands electronic literature in terms of "potential" literature that is in the process of shaping its profile in what he considers to be a collaborative (constrained) writing space in new media. Tabbi links this writing space to the concept of a "collective workplace" identified in Oulipean constrained writing practices (10).

[10] As the director of the Electronic Literature Directory, Tabbi also pushes forward a concept for peer-review and post-processing electronic literature (cf. the "Electronic Literature Directory: Postproduction").

the world of net literature are rather rare. To date, only a limited number of publishers or online accessible, independent mediators in form of journals exist, or have stopped its service.[11] Instead, mediation of works of net literature in first instance takes place on the websites of its creators as well as on conferences, festivals, blogs, and in books (merely conference proceedings and paper gatherings).

While it is noticable that the entity of post-processing and the production of works of net literature in the United States developed soon after hypertextual writing[12] was made possible with the Storyspace-Software Eastgate Systems Inc. has provided on Diskettes and later CDs[13], the production of net literature in Germany developed under different conditions:

Instead of writing within a technological framework, namely a software that provides a writing environment under a set of settings that define – to a certain extent—the aesthetics of a work, German artists have undertaken literary experiments that were tied to the aesthetics of the evolving medium Internet and the possibilities it provided (cf. Suter "Multi User Dungeons"). Another decisive factor in the history of the popularization of net literature in the USA lies in the degree of scholarly post-processing that has accompanied the process of production of works from its very beginnings: the theorization of the evolving hypertextual works that were presented at the first ACM Hypertext conference series launched already in 1987. To date, the U.S. is also the place where most of the authors and works are evolving from – even though we should keep in mind histories of other countries whose popularization of born-digital literature did not reach the international audience—probably due to a weaker post-processing mechanism, which might have been also caused through language barriers.

From what will follow, it is easy to conclude that the United States has, over the years, developed a well-established institutionalized system for post-processing net literature[14]. I identify six levels of post-processing that I propose and discuss below:

1. writing tools[15]
2. post-processing through conferences and festivals: socially driven post-processing that entails community-building;
3. post-processing through journals and platforms that present works and criticism on net literature
4. post-processing through academia: teaching theory and creative writing
5. Archiving
6. post-processing through awards

Almost impalpably, these processes developed on various levels: ideas for writing tools, that is, environments for writing in programmable media, evolved as early as in the 60s, when Andries van Dam together with Ted Nelson and students from Brown University started to develop a series of systems that based on their concept of the Hypertext Editing System (HES)[16]. Apple's Hypercard (1980/1990) was of certain influence as well and later

---

[11] With "independet" I want to point to the fact that in the world of net literature the role of authors and mediators in many cases merge.

[12] Storypace was created by Michael Joyce et al. to make "afternoon, a story".

[13] Eastgate published works of net literature since 1987.

[14] Most of the findings below are based on "A Subjective Chronology of Cybertext, Hypertext, and Net Writing" by Stuart Moulthrop, a presentation on "Hypertext Fiction in the 1980s and 1990s" held by Jill Walker Rettberg at the ELMCIP-Seminar in Bergen 2010, and information found on the Electronic Literature Directory.

[15] In the ELMCIP-Seminar on creative communities, Serge Bouchardon makes a remark that communities often build around a shared origin (like for instance a writing tool). Nick Montfort acknowledges this observation and adds that this notion was even stronger in the community of Interactive Fiction.

[16] Cf. Keynote address by Andries van Dam at the first Hypertext Conference 1987 <http://www.cs.brown.edu/memex/HT_87_Keynote_Address.html#Introduction>.

Storyspace was the writing environment to write Hypertexts and Eastgate the place to publish them. Additionally, theoretical discussions (by authors who created works *and* theoretical frameworks) and presentations of net literature on conferences and festivals were of big influence on the scene (i.e. the performance-oriented "e-poetry festival" founded by Loss P. Glazier in 2001). Since the 90s, classes on "electronic writing" were taught at Brown University and soon, journals presented works of and theories on net literature:

ALT-X published by Mark Amerika and the *electronic book review* (Joseph Tabbi) is online since 1993/94. At the same time, the *Electronic Poetry Center* was founded and is still maintained by Loss P. Glazier. *BeeHive* launched in 1998 and was edited by Talan Memmott until 2002, another literary journal, namely *Poems that Go* under the editorship of Megan Sapner and Ingrid Ankerson showcased works between 2000 and 2004. Today however, *The Iowa Review Web* (edited by Jon Winet since 1999, last issue released in 2008) and *Hyperrhiz: New Media Cultures* (edited by Helen J. Burgess since 2005, last issue released in 2011) is one of the few journals that echoes literature in programmable media, along with some other journals such as the *New River*.[17]

Another milestone in institutionalizing the field of net literature marked the foundation of the Electronic Literature Organization (ELO) by Scott Rettberg, Robert Coover, and Jeff Ballowe in 1999[18]. Two years after the ELO's foundation, in two consecutive years, prizes were awarded by the ELO for works of net literature. Interestingly, a prize for a work of electronic literature was already awarded as part of the Hypertext Conference in 1996.[19]

This is noticeable in so far as early prizes for works of net literature were awarded in Germany in exactly the same year. It seems however, like the impact of these calls for works and its winning-projects did not have the same impact on building a community in the United States[20]. In the U.S., a community already existed, in Germany, these prizes and its ceremonies were the beginning for community-building (Suter, "Initialzündung"): the events offered a coming-together where most of the artists met for the first time. Many ideas that later formed the German community on net literature evolved from these social gatherings: magazines and aggregated link-lists (a so-called "Webring") that presented websites and everything relevant to net literature, as well as the "Mailingliste Netzliteratur" that was founded by Sven Stillich along with the first competition on net literature in 1996. According to Suter, at an early stage, the mailinglist generated an email-exchange of 500 messages a month ("Inititalzuendung"). At the beginning, much of the one-to-many discussions were framed around definitions and reflective discussions on what net literature might be, this changed with time and was analyzed in a very specific study by Florian Hartling[21]. Beat

---

[17] In this list, I am only taking journals as a means of "objective" post-processing into account and do not consider blogs where works are mediated by authors themselves. Please browse a list of current journals in the Knowledge Base on Electronic Literature.

[18] Since then, many ELO activities contributed to a liveley post-processing mechanism: the Electronic Literature Collection volumes one and two (released on CD and on the Web in 2006 and 2011), as well as the old and new Electronic Literature Directory and an archiving project maintained in cooperation with the Library of Congress (since 2007). Also please consult an article by Scott Rettberg on "Developing an Identity for the Field of Electronic Literature: Reflections on the Electronic Literature Organization Archives" in Dichtung Digital 41.

[19] According to Stuart Moulthrop's "A Subjective Chronology of Cybertext, Hypertext, and Electronic Writing".

[20] It could be interesting to trace activities in post-processing by analyzing where and to what extent award-winning projects were discussed.

[21] Florian Hartling examined if Mailinglist-contributions could be understood as means of post-processing and made the Mailingslist a subject of his study on canonization processes. Based on a broad set of parameters, a content – and topic-analysis on four Mailinglists ("Netzliteratur"; "rohrpost"; "nettime", and "rhizome") however revealed that the post-processing on the analyzed Mailinglists were of no use for generating

Suter, who has been an active academic observer, artist, and publisher from the very beginnings of the emerging field has accompanied the overall processes in many academic contributions, participated in early workshops, conferences, and social gatherings. In 1999, together with Michael Boehler, he chaired the Symposium "Digitaler Diskurs" (and follow-ups between 2000 and 2003) in Romainmôtier/Switzerland. It's conference proceedings *'Hyperfiction' ein hyperliterarisches Lesebuch* along with a CD that offers a compilation of German net literature was published in 1999[22]. In an article that discusses the reception of Hyperfiction in various media (magazines, newspapers and on the Web), he enumerates a couple of what I identify as post-processing mechanisms around 2000 and concludes that the physical meetings of "Netzliteraturexponenten" (exponents of net literature) were of fundamental importance for all developments that took place and from which many projects evolved in a strong community of activists in Germany between 1996 and 2000.

If we take into account the six mentioned post-processing and community-building characteristics I coined (1. writing tools, 2. socially driven post-processing 3. post-processing through journals 4. post-processing through academia 5. archiving 6. post-processing through awards) and apply those to today's "literary system of net literature" in Germany, we quickly can draw a brief conclusion:

1. there are and never existed any writing tools that initiated a similar outreach like Storyspace[23]

2. one of the last conferences "Beyond the Screen: Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces, and Genres" was of a highly theoretical focus and without performances and screenings (at the University of Siegen/Germany in 2008). Festivals with performances and presentations of works took place in the 90s (the first (international) *p0es1s*-festival curated by Friedrich W. Block and André Vallias in 1992 had certainly a big impact on the scene (festivals take place until to date (the last in 2009) and are bilingually documented). Generally, festivals are rare nowadays: in 2005, 2008, and 2009 however, "The House of Literature" ('Literaturhaus') in Stuttgart organized the events series "Literatur und Strom" ('Literature and Stream') with performances and work presentations curated by Johannes Auer (2009, curated with Florian Höllerer).[24]

3. There are platforms where lists to works and articles are being provided[25]: A collection of theoretical articles on net literature and works by German artists can be found here at netzliteratur.net; and a collection of the most important works of net literature gathered by artist Johannes Auer; a list of works gathered between 1995 and 1998 by Beat Suter is available at http://www.cyberfiction.ch/beluga/hypfic.htm; a list with works from 1999 and 2003 at http://www.nic-las.com/cyberfiction/liste.asp

4. Post-processing through academia. At some universities net literature as a subject of literary studies is being taught (i.e. at the University of Siegen/Germany). Unfortunately,

---

means for canonization. Reasons therefore lie in the conceptualization and the user's use of Mailingslists: for information-processing and announcements, instead for reflective reviews and discussions ("dass hier kaum").

[22] Beat Suter has written his dissertation on "Hyperfiktion und interaktive Narration: Im frühen Entwicklungsstadium zu einem Genre" (2000). Many of his articles were published in various magazines on the Web and on *Dichtung Digital*.

[23] It should be however acknowledged that René Bauer und Joachim Maier are developing „nic-las" (nowledge integrating communication-based labelling and access system), an autopietic collaborative groupware and knowledge system since 1998. While a follow-up tool named "Textmachina" evolved in 2003 and is in use at a number of universities, the developers also continue work on the current version of nic-las 3.0.

[24] A fourth event is taken under consideration.

[25] Apart from *Dichtung Digital* that was founded by German theoretician Roberto Simanowski that nowadays very much concentrates on works outside Germany.

these are usually not courses that belong to the ongoing curriculum.[26] It should be also noted, that, to my knowledge there existed at no time any creative writing courses which taught "electronic writing" in Germany.

5. Archiving: the contributions to the first Pegasus-Award were taken offline by the competition-organizer ("Die Zeit"), most of the works are not accessible anymore; some works are reachable through the webarchive. Theoretical debates on archiving were published in two collections of articles in 2010: *Archiving Electronic Literature and Poetry: Problems, Tendencies, Perspectives* (Hartling and Suter) and *Digitale Literaturvermittlung: Praxis, Forschung und Archivierung* (Giacomuzzi, Stefan Neuhaus, and Christiane Zintzen). Archiving net literature is also being discussed in a section of *Beyond the Screen* edited by Gendolla and Schäfer).

6. Post-processing through awards: awards in Germany are not institutionalized in the long-run, the last calls were made in "arte-them@" (2000, initiated by the international cultural television channel arte, sponsored by Siemens); "Literatur.digital" (2001-2003, inititated by the German paperback-publisher "Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag (DTV)" and T-Online);

"Bachelors Prize for Net Literature" (2005), organized by the "House of Literature" in Stuttgart.

What becomes clear from this list is that net literature is still a topic being post-processed in academia (though not focused on German creative works). Most of the post-processing activities are devoted to the analysis of USAnian works (i.e. at the University of Siegen) which is also due to the fact that new German works are rarely produced. To my knowledge, there exists no community of net literature in Germany anymore. There are only a few individual authors that still create works but from what is outlined above, it becomes clear, that the lack of contemporary post-processing activities through journals makes net literature nowadays publicly invisible. In what follows, I take a closer look at the competitions from the 90s that provided a platform to present works for peer-review in Germany.

4. Post-Processing Award-Winning Projects of Net Literature: Awards as Catalysts for Post-Processing

Calls for awards are instruments for pre-processing what will be post-processed. Calls for awards are of suggestive character, organized arrangements of a group of social enities (jury members, sponsors) responsible for the appointment of criteria that constitute what will be submitted, selected, and post-processed. To a certain extent, these criteria (dependent on their openess) delineate and frame the expected. While criteria for submissions are indispensable constituents of any competitions, these points of reference not only serve as a basis for the juries judgements but also layer out the horizon for what will be produced for a competition (if not created earlier and coincidentally fitting the pattern for submission). Later, award-winning objects are regarded as new proto-types of the objects in search, marking the lineup of a Zeitgeist. Once submitted, once judged, once announced, award-winning objects (and some other submissions) automatically get into the cycle of post-processing, criticism, and presentation. This way, (because of an appointed juries judgements), competitions turn into (putative) reliable mediators. In Germany, the first calls for competition-submissions were of

---

[26] In a collection of articles titled *Reading Moving Letters*, an international overview on teaching "digital literature" is presented. An essay by Jörgen Schäfer, Peter Gendolla and the author of this article focuses on the German scene in particular.

exactly the above described significance: the criteria layered out influenced what was later called (but also critically discussed as) "net literature" and initiated the overall post-processing machinery. While the competions served as catalysts for post-processing with the mentioned positive side-effects on community-building and theoretical debates, down-sides with a negative impact on publicity might have influenced the public reception of net literature in Germany up until to date.

5. Public Reception of Net Literature in Germany: The first Competitions and its "Stillbirth"

When the first competition was launched in 1996, the jury (mostly feuilleton-journalists and literary critics; in other words: no experts in net literature that was new at that time) invited *everyone* interested in creating a work "zum Spiel mit den Grenzen zwischen Schrift, Datensatz, Bild und Graphik" ('to play with the borders between scripture/writing, datasets, images, and graphics') by creatively using the technological possibilities provided by computer-networks.[27] The only requirement was to submit works that still might be called literature (without restrictions to a particular genre and without indicating what kind of literature the jury was looking for).[28] Instead, restrictions were bound to technological specifities: the submitted files were not allowed to extend 60kb; film, sound, and Java-based works were prohibited. Additionally, the amount of text (20kb), graphics (40kb) and 8kb of html-code was limited.[29]

The first competition supported by the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* and IBM was called "Pegasus" and was held in 1996. Unfortunately, the organizers of the competition and the jury were disappointed by the literary quality of the works submitted (184 submissions; winner: Martina Kieninger *Der Schrank. Die Schranke*). In 1997 (163 submissions), the jury did not even handed out a first prize but honored two artists with 5000 DM (2.500€/$3.000): Susanne Berkenheger *Zeit fuer die Bombe* and Peter Berlich's *CORE* (acronym for "Cybernetical Oration Research Entity"). Since the works submitted in earlier competitions were more of something like multi-media art and the "literary" a hopeless criterium, the award was re-named and turned into an "Internet competition" in 1998[30]. Interestingly, the cash-prize raised to 10.000 DM (5.000€/$6.000). The submission *Die Aaleskorte der Oelig* by Dirk Guenther and Frank Kloetgen won the prize, followed by Juergen Daiber and Jochen Metzger's *Der Trost der Bilder*.

It goes without saying that these events triggered lots of criticism on both sides: the jury criticized the submissions for bearing no literary quality, concluding that the "Online-Ulysses" hasn't yet arrived (Rotermund, 1997). On the other hand, artists blamed the jury for the technological restrictions[31] and for their misunderstanding of what net literature is, or

---

[27] At this time, no community of artists existed, so the competition did not address a specific target group. This was different in the U.S. where calls reached a community of artists that was already at work creating net literature. Those who submitted to the German competitions were potential future artists of net literature.

[28] cf. http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/Simanowski/28-Mai-99-2/kritik_pegasus.htm

[29] cf. http://www.berlinerzimmer.de/.../Nicole Alef Digitale Literatur.pdf These constraints were also due to the limited transfer-rates of the World Wide Web in the 90s.

[30] It is interesting to note that the TrAce/Alt-X competitions' title "Hypertext Competition" (1998) was re-named as well and turned into a "Competition for New Media Writing" in 2000

(information found in *Interfictions* (Simanowski 21)). These changes illustrate how the artistic field is in an ongoing state of flux. Re-adjustments to the creations will be required also in the future. An explanation on the reason for the titles change can be found at http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk/newmedia/overview.cfm

[31] According to Rotermund, the restriction to files not bigger than 60kb based on the expectation to receive rather plain-text-files.

might be. In other words, two mis-conceptions lead to the public dispute: 1. The call with no addressee and a lack of guidance in the call itself that factually generated many works that were actually of no literary quality. 2. The incompetence of the jury that did not know by which criteria the submissions were ought to judge.

In the end however, this was the starting point for many discussions on various platforms on- and offline. At the same time, net literature also reached academia: at the University of Siegen, a research group formed and was funded by the German Research Foundation. In 1997, Michael Boehler and Beat Suter initiated a working-group that discussed "Internet and Literature" without any funding at the University of Zurich in Switzerland. Additionally, along with a couple of proceedings and special journal editions, between 1999 and 2002 two M.A.-thesis papers and six dissertations were published on net literature[32]. It was also in 1999, when Roberto Simanowski founded the online journal *Dichtung Digital* that in its beginnings was very much focused on the German scene (which however changed later). Net literature also became a subject in a number of conferences and reached publicity through debates held in German newspapers. It was a debate on terminologies and definitions, authorship, media -and reception theory. In the newspapers, much of the discussions were bound to the shift from traditional (book) literature and literature in networked media. "Die Suche nach dem Neuen in den Netzen leidet immer noch darunter, dass viele, die ihr nachgehen, Ausschau halten nach dem, was sie kennen und in dem neuen Medium und im Gewand der neuen Technik wieder erkennen können. Sie suchen also in Wirklichkeit nach etwas Altem." (Michael Charlier in: Alef 68). The quote above is coming from a paper given by one of the Pegasus-organizers at the symposium that accompanied the competition ceremony in 1998. He pinpoints the problem at hand: 'The search for the new in networks is weakend by the fact that those who are in search, are looking for something they know and which they can re-discover "au courant" in the new medium. Factually, they search for something old' (Charlier, my translation). This observation was affirmed by jury-member Hermann Rotermund who admitted that the criteria for evaluation of works were "imported" from book culture—other criteria evolved with the analysis of the submissions.[33]

The third Pegasus-Award in 1998 was the last competiton in this first initial era that honored works of net literature: the interests of its sponsors clashed, the submissions of the first Pegasus-prize were taken offline by the newspaper[34] and it appears, that it were mainly the literary critics from the feuilletons who had no understanding for the new evolving cultural form and therefore started to proclaim the end of net literature without giving its audience a chance to recognize it as such. Journalist Christian Benne from the sponsor's newspaper characterized net literature even as a "stillbirth". In the end, Roberto Simanowski concluded that the reading-experience of German recipients at this time was simply insufficient to judge net literature accordingly" (in: Petersen and Salzwedel).[35]

An emerging field needs time to develop. In Germany, no time for progress was given to emerge in public. Additionally, there was a fear that all new developments from the evolving technologies and the Internet would endanger the future of the book (Suter, private E-Mail exchange). Consequently, net literature was hushed up in the public and therefore moved to the exile of invisibility. It is interesting to note that Robert Coover's article on "The

---

[32] Hautzinger (1999; M.A.); Beat Suter (2000); Porombka (2001); Boehler (2001); Heibach (2000); Ortmann (M.A. 2001); Rau (2001); Kamphusmann (2002). (list of references taken from: Hartling "Der digitale Autor", 13).

[33] Laudatio held at the second Pegasus-award ceremony in 1998 http://www.netzliteratur.net/rotermund/laudatio_2internetliteraturpreis.html.

[34] cf. Charlier in "Der Pegasus": http://www.berlinerzimmer.de/eliteratur/pegasus_softmoderne.htm.

[35] This became also true in the mis-reading and unqualified judgement by the jury of the above mentioned awards.

End of Books" was published in the *New York Times* a couple of years before this fear became prevalent in the German literary system (1992).

6. Net Literature: A Subject of Complexity

Certainly, net literature is complex and demanding to both the creator and its reader. Net literature is a complex convolut of codes and literary artifacts written by its author that often demands its readers to make the text become into being by interacting with the presented object either mentally or practically by navigating through a (usually) non-linear techno-poetical system. Because it is full of literary history and theory, net literature bears complexity in extracting meaning from the artwork. To approach and understand net literature, an informed reader is required—one that takes into account all the complexities that constitute a work of net literature: its content, context, and form (code, theoretical context, and the literary). Critics are tasked with not only understanding a work of net literature but also with contextualizing, explaining, and critically discussing it. In Germany, critics failed in giving an appropriate account to the new emerging field.[36]

Nowadays, only occasionally competitions take place. The honored works are of quality but the impact of these competitions is low and does not reach many recipients. Additionally, there is (almost) no post-processing devoted to works of German net literature anymore. In fact, net literature in Germany became as invisible as its community.[37]

The aim of this paper was to give an account on the historical developments of the German net literature community; as this paper originates from a conference presentation limited in time, I only focus on a short period in history. In its early stage, works of German net literature were popularized and distributed through literary competitions. Based on the empirical study of literature (ESL), I have perspectivized competitions as a means of post-processing and sketched-out the development of the first three awards that were of crucial importance both for the debate on German net literature, but also with devastating after-effects that could serve as an explanation for today's non-interest in and invisibility of net literature.[38]

While the international community is strenghend by post-processing activities carried out through i.e. the bi-annual festival "e-poetry", the international Vinaròs Prize for digital literature, and the endeavours by the Electronic Literature Organization, it would be worth to discuss how communities might receive support in remaining or becoming publicly visible in their own countries. Based at the University of Bergen, Norway, European communities, formations, and interactions are subject of research in the collaborative research program "Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice" (directed by Scott Rettberg).[39] In the future, the program's research results might reveal the visibility of European communities.[40] In the meantime, we might consider how post-processing

---

[36] see also Hanns-Josef Ortheil in: Suter Hyperfiction im Spiegel der Medien <http://www.literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=951>.

[37] Beat Suter holds a different position and claims that net literature is still flourishing in its niches. Private E-Mail.

[38] Luckily, two works written in German or by a German author were selected to the Electronic Literature Collection II: *Senghor on the Rocks* by Austrian author Christoph and Bubble Bath by Susanne Berkenheger.

[39] Please consult the special issues of Dichtung Digital 41 and 42 that present Electronic Literature Communities from different national and international perspectives.

[40] As part of the ELMCIP research program, several conferences at partner institutions were organized between 2010 and 2013. Partners include the: Edinburgh College of Art, Scotland; Blekinge Institute of Technology, Sweden; University of Amsterdam, Netherlands; University of Ljubljana, Slovenia; University of Jyväskylä, Finland, and the University College Falmouth at Dartington. The ELMCIP Anthology of European

mechanisms like new concepts for peer-review and publication of works could be stabilized in our literary system.

References

- Alef, Nicole. *Digitale Literatur: Produktion, Rezeption, Distribution*. "Berliner Zimmer: Der Salon im Netz." 2001. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.berlinerzimmer.de/eliteratur/Nicole20Alef20Digitale Literatur.pdf

- *Alt-X*. Mark Amerika. 1993- present. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.altx.com/

- "arte-them@." Competition arte. 2001. 1 Nov 2010
- http://archives.arte.tv/them@/dtext/wettbewerb/lit_wett/lit_wett_fs.html

- Auer, Johannes, Heibach, Christiane, and Beat Suter. "Netzliteratur // Internetliteratur // Netzkunst." n.d.- present. 1 Nov 2010
- http://netzliteratur.net/

- Auer, Johannes. "Netzliteratur//Hyperfiction." n.d.- present. 1 Nov. 2010 http://auer.netzliteratur.net/netzliteraturprojekte.htm

- Benne, Christian. "Lesen, nicht klicken." 3 Sept. 1998. 1 Nov. 2010
- http://www.zeit.de/1998/37/199837.c_handy-hoerspie.xml

- Bootz, Philippe. "From ALAMO to Transitoire Observable: Evolution of the French Digital Literature." Electronic Literature Communities Seminar. Bergen, Norway 20-21 Sept. 2010. Video Presentation. 1 Nov. 2010
- http://vimeo.com/15532880

- Bouchardon, Serge. "A French School of Digital Literature." Electronic Literature Communities Seminar. Bergen, Norway 20-21 Sept. 2010. Video Presentation. 1 Nov. 2010 http://vimeo.com/15458665

- Dam, Andries van. Keynote Address. Hypertext Conference 1987. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.cs.brown.edu/memex/HT_87_Keynote_Address.html - Introduction

- Coover, Robert. "The End of Books." 1992. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/09/27/specials/coover-end.html

- *Dichtung Digital*. Roberto Simanowski (ed.). 1999- present. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.dichtung-digital.org

Electronic Literature and teaching material is forthcoming. Another outcome of the project is a cross-referenced "Knowledge Base" that aggregates data useful for further empirical research.

- *electronic book review*. Joseph Tabbi, ed. 1994. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.electronicbookreview.com

- *Electronic Literature Directory*. 2010 –present. 1 Nov. 2010 http://directory.eliterature.org/

- "Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice." 2010-2014. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.elmcip.net/

- *Electronic Poetry Center*. Loss P. Glazier. 1995. 1 Nov. 2010 http://epc.buffalo.edu/

- *e-poetry*. Festival Archive. 2001 -present. 1 Nov. 2010 http://epc.buffalo.edu/e-poetry/archive/

- Gendolla, Peter, and Schäfer, Jörgen. *Beyond the Screen: Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces and Genres*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010.

- Gendolla, Peter, and Jörgen Schäfer. "Reading (in) the Net. Aesthetic Experience in Computer-Based Media." *Reading Moving Letters*. Roberto Simanowski, Peter Gendolla, and Jörgen Schäfer (eds.). Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010. 81-109.

- Giacomuzzi, Renate, Neuhaus, Stefan, and Christiane Zintzen, eds. *Digitale Literaturvermittlung Praxis - Forschung – Archivierung*. Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2010.

- Hartling, Florian, and Beat Suter. *Archivierung von digitaler Literatur: Probleme - Tendenzen - Perspektiven / Archiving Electronic Literature and Poetry: Problems – Tendencies - Perspectives.* "Siegener Periodicum zur Internationalen Empirischen Literaturwissenschaft." 29.1+2. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2010.

- Hartling, Florian. *Der digitale Autor. Autorschaft im Zeitalter des Internets*.
- Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009.

- ———. "dass hier kaum mehr von Netzliteratur die Rede ist."
- 2002. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.netzliteratur.net/hartling/ml/mailinglisten.pdf

- Idensen, Heiko, and Matthias Krohn. *Die imaginaere Bibliothek*. 1989/1994. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.hyperdis.de/pool/index.html

- *Hyperrhiz: New Media Cultures*. Helen J. Burgess, ed. 2005 –present. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.hyperrhiz.net

- Memmott, Talan. "Beyond Taxonomy: Digital Poetics and the Problem of Reading." *New Media Poetics:* Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories.
- Adalaide Morris and Thoms Swiss (eds.). Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 2006. 293-307.

- *BeeHive*. Talan Memmott, ed. 1998-2002. 1 Nov. 2010. http://beehive.temporalimage.com/archive/index.html

- Moulthrop, Stuart. "A Subjective Chronology of Cybertext, Hypertext, and Electronic Writing." 2006. 1 Nov. 2010 http://iat.ubalt.edu/moulthrop/chrono.html

- *nic-las*. "nowledge integrating communication-based labelling and access system." René Bauer and Joachim Maier. 1998- present. 1 Nov. 2010
- http://www.nic-las.com

- Petersen, Anne, and Johannes Saltzwedel. "Absturz der Netz-Poeten" 2002. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-25940401.html

- *Poems that Go*. Megan Sapner, and Ingrid Ankerson. 2000-2004. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.poemsthatgo.com/

- *p0es1s*. Friedrich W. Block. 1992- present. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.p0es1s.net/

- Rettberg, Scott. "Developing an Identity for the Field of Electronic Literature: Reflections on the Electronic Literature Organization Archives." Special Issue on Electronic Literature Communities. *Dichtung Digital* 41 (2012) 10 Oct. 2012 http://elmcip.net/critical-writing/developing-identity-field-electronic-literature-reflections-electronic-literature

- Rotermund, Hermann. Laudatio, 29.10.1997. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.netzliteratur.net/rotermund/laudatio_2internetliteraturpreis.html

- Schäfer, Jörgen. "Reassembling the Literary." *Beyond the Screen: Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces and Genres*. Peter Gendolla, and Jörgen Schäfer (eds.). Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010. 25-71.

- Schmidt, Siegfried J. "Literary Studies from Hermeneutics to Media Culture Studies." *Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.1 (2010) docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1569&context=clcweb

- ———. Die Selbstorganisation des Sozialsystems. Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989.

- ———. Schmidt. Grundriss der empirischen Literaturwissenschaft. 1980. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991.

- Simanowski, Roberto. *Interfictions.* Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2001.

- ———. "Pegasus-Wettbewerb." 1999. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/Simanowski/28-Mai-99-2/kritik_pegasus.htm

- Stilich, Sven. "Mailingliste Netzliteratur." 1996. 1 Nov. 2010
- http://netzliteratur.de/

- Suter, Beat. Private E-Mail-Exchange. 2010.

- ———. *Hyperfiktion und interaktive Narration: Im frühen Entwicklungsstadium zu einem Genre*. Zuerich: update, 2000.

- ———. "Initialzündung World Wide Web: Hyperfiction im Spiegel der Medien."
- literaturkritik.de. 4 (2000). 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=951

- ———. "Multi User Dungeons: Die Anfänge deutschsprachiger Hyperfiction." literaturkritik.de. 4 (2000). 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=878

- Suter, Beat, and Michael Boehler. *'Hyperfiction' ein hyperliterarisches Lesebuch*. Frankfurt a.M.: Stroemfeld, 1999.

- Suter, Beat. "Fluchtlinie." *Dichtung Digital* 1.6 (1999). 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/Autoren/Suter/26-Nov-99/index.htm

- ———. "Hyperfiktion." Database. 1995-1998. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.cyberfiction.ch/beluga/hypfic.htm

- ———. "Cyberfiction." Database. 1999-2003. 1 Nov. 2010 http://www.nic-las.com/cyberfiction/liste.asp

- Tabbi, Joseph. "Electronic Literature as World Literature;
- or, The Universality of Writing under Constraint." *Poetics Today* 31.1 (2010).

- ———. "Electronic Literature Directory: Postproduction." 2010. 1 Nov. 2010 http://directory.eliterature.org/node/198

- *The Iowa Review Web*. Jon Windet, ed. 1999- present. 1 Nov. 2010 http://iowareview.uiowa.edu/TIRW/

Tomaszek, Patricia, Peter Gendolla, and Jörgen Schäfer. "Net Literature in the Classroom: Teaching Practice at the University of Siegen." *Reading Moving Letters*. Roberto Simanowski, Peter Gendolla, and Jörgen Schäfer (eds.). Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010. 273-91.