POETICS IN DIGITAL COMMUNITIES AND IN DIGITAL LITERATURE

YRA VAN DIJK

Every new work of digital literature creates its own new genre, claimed digital poet Brain Kim Stefans.[16] This may be so, but not every work in the hybrid new art form creates and invents its own poetics, too. Artists, communities, and individual works are positioned within, between, and opposed to existing art worlds, histories, and concepts. In this project we have explored the ambivalent position of the new, which has to find a place for itself in the old. Like authors who work in print, authors of e-literature need an institutional and artistic context in which their works can be credentialed and valued, economically and symbolically.

Three different approaches were used to consider the question of digital poetics: institutional, ethnographic, and textual. The conclusions that were drawn are presented in the first four sections of this chapter. The first two sections are centered around institutional questions: what is it that builds and binds communities of digital artists? Do artists collaborate, and how do they reflect on these collaborations? Can we say that communities are bound by a common poetics? Sections three and four concentrate on works from a textual angle. Emergent in the course of the project was a clear image of a fast developing art form that is characterized by a tendency towards affect and embodiment. On the other hand, the question of poetics led to a critical engagement with the works. Conclusions will be presented in the fifth and last section.

THE INSTITUTIONAL POSITION OF DIGITAL LITERATURE

Contrary to what one might think, institutions play an important role in the production, preservation, and funding of electronic literature. Digital literature is rarely "sold" like print literature, and its producers have to find alternative funding to be able to produce work. Due to the absence of traditional gate-watch-

16 In a presentation on "Writing Becomes Eclectric: A Symposium on Electronic Literature," UCSD, January 27th 2011.

ers like publishers and newspaper critics, the function of selection, distribution, and reception of this work has been taken over partly by anthologies, reviews, and criticism, often produced in an academic climate (see Saemmer 2012, 83). Artists need the necessary channels for preservation, distribution, and critical evaluation of the work, channels that have the power to create "cultural capital." Even the production of work often takes place in an academic or institutional setting. Literary festivals, conferences, and workshops form temporary communities in which planned collaboration takes place. This section presents conclusions about issues of institutionalized and planned collaboration and its effects on the production, the presentation, and the content of digital literature. How do we get knowledge of the collaboration; what were the original intentions; and what is the intended or unintended result?

The focus of the project was on institutionally funded projects based on collaboration. Although digital arts may seem so experimental that artists operate far from traditional institutions, they are partly dependent on academia and on government-funded projects. In these instances, the community of artists that produces a work has come into being in an institutional context (a festival, a workshop, a project). Although a book-project on collaboration (*Collaborative Futures*) stresses the importance of "autonomy," collaboration in digital art is not necessarily produced in autonomy from governmental or other institutions ("Field of Cultural Production" 2010).

This seems to be a rather paradoxical situation, since collaborations in twentieth century art and literature were mostly born from a discontent with mainstream and canonical art and its institutions (Green 2001, x). The general conception of collaboration is strongly connected with political action or even anarchy (Lind 2007, 183). In digital literature we find some political collaborations, like the literary community "Circulars" that was formed with the explicit intention to protest the invasion of Iraq in 2003, stating that "poets, artists and critics respond to the U.S. Global policy." The supposed political quality of collaborations is generally less obvious in most literary digital communities (van Dijk 2012b).

Not only on an institutional or political level, transformations seem to have occurred in the cultural value of collaboration: the idea of authorship has altered, too. In visual arts of the twentieth century, collaboration was a "strategic but almost terminal means of shedding traditional signs of unwanted artistic per-

sonality" (Green 2001, xiii). This, too, seems to have changed in the field of digital literature: collaborative authorship is no longer an expression of the rejection of traditional "artistic personality."

A first effect we see of collaboration is on the paratext (van Dijk 2014, unpublished), the frame that presents a work, in which the circumstances of collaboration are described (Genette 1997, 1). The analysis of both text and paratext, and the ways in which they merge, has told us more about the intended and unintended effects of collaboration. Firstly, the analysis of paratexts of digital literature has demonstrated a strong focus on appropriation of the work by author(s). The authors' influence on paratexts has grown considerably as compared to print literature (van Dijk 2014, unpublished). Although critics point out that the "romantic" author, the inspired genius, has been replaced by new models of authorship in new media (Manovich 2002), the author seems to be re-entering through the back door. More than in print work, he, she, or they frame their own work. Often the author is the "publisher" of her/his own work, maintaining a personal website on which value-enhancing descriptions of the work are to be found, sometimes written by the author "autographically." He/She performs as her/his own agent as well, "selling" the work on blogs, in personal correspondences, conferences, and in performances (van Dijk 2014, unpublished). The digital author, in short, is her/his own editor, publisher, and agent, taking care of framing, publicity, and canonization.

Another transformation in digital paratexts is to be found on the level of changed quantity and quality. As far as quantity goes, it is not that the *amount* of paratexts has grown in digital literature, but the availability and the closeness to the text has been augmented. In the print era there were physical steps to be taken between reading a text and reading the library catalog description of that text, for example. Digitally, these paratexts are only a few mouse clicks away—like the source code, which gives information on authorial intention and may be incorporated into the category of "paratexts." The Internet has partly taken over the role that social spaces and institutions play in print literature. A further consequence of this proximity of text and paratext is that a merging seems to be taking place between the two, as Lunenfeld (1999, 14) argued and as Stewart (2010, 72) argued with respect to the digital work *Inanimate Alice*.

As far as institutional collaborations go, the consequence of this visibility of the paratext is that the circumstances of the production of a collaborative work are very conspicuous. In terms of institutional collaboration, this may

add “symbolic capital” to a text and establish a hierarchy within the domain of digital texts. As has been pointed out by Simon Biggs (2010, 345), funding institutions have “the potential to directly impact on how this work is produced, maintained and disseminated.” This also confirms what Baetens and Van Looy (2008) remarked on e-poetry specifically, that, though delocalized, it has rapidly developed a closed canon with a relatively small number of gatekeepers: “. . . in the age of globalization, it seems that the mechanisms of power, i.e. of selection, promotion, and exclusion, are strengthened rather than weakened.”

A third and final influence of the mode of production is on the content of the work. Collaboration in modern and postmodern art could be presented as the work of art itself (Green 2001, xii): the event of the collaboration takes the place of the object produced. Similarly, institutional collaborative authorship, which is part of the creative process, ends up becoming an important part of the work. In the case of *Collaborative Futures*, for example, not only the paratext emphasized collaboration, but the text itself was about collaboration. This implies that the text is its own paratext—it describes what it is and in which tradition of digital and non-digital cooperation it operates. It is extremely self-reflexive, and the authors are aware of it. The authors of *Collaborative Futures*, which is a book publication, too, warn against idealization of collaboration: “Online communities are not organized as democracies” (“Field of Cultural Production” 2010, 44). Hierarchies are organized along the lines of contribution: who works hardest is the most important. An important issue the authors tackle is the risk of “process fetishism”: “there is a risk of making a fetish of process over product, of the act of collaboration over the artifact that results from it” (“Field of Cultural Production” 2010, 45).

This critical stance is taken up by the curators of the NY exhibition, quoted in the book: they want to analyze the idealization of participation and demonstrate that power does not necessarily always come from above. We have to be aware that we have not deconstructed power but have only relocalized it. Participation, therefore, can turn into a vector for dominant ideologies as easily as it can liberate: “participation plagues us” (“Field of Cultural Production” 2010, 48): governments and “cultural entrepreneurs” can’t get enough of it. The authors also reflect on the dubious nature of “autonomy.” It is worthwhile to be suspicious of those people and projects who claim to be autonomous (“Field of Cultural Production” 2010, 135), but the authors do not reflect on the irony that digital

collaboration ends up in a printed, and even reprinted, book: the product seems to be as important as the event.

A second case, the Dutch project *Poetry on the Screen*, taught us that collaboration funded by arts councils may be successful: some of the work produced there is "canonized" (van Dijk 2012b). Another conclusion is that labor in collaboration is often strictly divided between different disciplines, like literary writing and new media design (see Hayles, "Time of Digital Poetry"). The work *Smeekbede*, for example, is an animation of paper cuttings, on the rhythm of a poem performed by the author's voice. However pretty the result is, the styles of the poet and the designers stay separate, and the video is presented as a supplement to the text: emphasis is on craftsmanship, technical mastery, and not so much on individual expression.

During the ELMCIP Amsterdam seminar "Digital Poetics in the Present" (2011), the collaborative work "Welcome Stranger" by K. Michel and Dirk Vis was performed. As the authors explained, their intention was to design a work for Schiphol Airport, which has since then indeed shown it. The work is an animation in which letters in white circles dance around, forming words in two rows in the middle, then changing to form new words. The text consists of the names for the game "musical chairs" in different languages: German (journey to Jerusalem), Polish (hot chairs), French (dancing chairs), etc. Obviously, the work is iconic; the words perform the game themselves. It has some edge to it since there is always too little room in this game, and one person is "left out"—which is exactly what was happening to strangers under the Dutch right-wing government in the 2010s.

Collaboration in visual art affected the content of the artwork and led to alternative authorial identities. Here, on the contrary, we do not seem to encounter a displacement of stable, autonomous subjects. In this kind of institutionally initiated collaboration, we should take into account that it is not necessarily an interdisciplinary collaboration. Professionals from different disciplines may work separately on a text, much as in the manuscript era or in visual arts, where "master craftsmen" (Green 2001, xv) may be needed to assist in the creation of the actual work. The difference is that there is less of a hierarchy between "art" and "craft" in the digital literary creations under scrutiny here.

The overall conclusion was that the goals and the creative energies of the community are, to an important extent, concerned with the description, the establishment, and the rules of the community itself. The function of digital

collaboration therefore resembles what Jakobson in his communication theory called the "phatic" function—which performs primarily a social task: the confirmation that communication is in progress. I would propose to create an analogous category for this self-reflexive collaboration: phatic collaboration. "Phatic" is Greek for "spoken," or, "I speak," so "phatic collaboration" would mean collaboration that we talk about.

Not all collaborative works are phatic, obviously. What we did see, however, is that the content of many collaborative works is often indirectly concerned with polyphony, interdiscursivity, or interculturality. Secondly, again contrary to some of the earlier experiments in the 1960s and 70s with collaboration in visual art, emphasis often was on the material result of the collaboration, rather than on the process alone. A third conclusion is that contemporary collaboration is not always a political or poetical choice: the necessity to cooperate may be a consequence of the software used, which demands a technological knowhow in addition to literary knowhow: often authors and new media artists/engineers need to join forces to make a work. In that respect, contemporary online literary collaboration resembles medieval collaboration in book-making. This technically "forced" collaboration has always been present in visual arts, where artists collaborate with craftsmen. From this follows the fact that collaboration in digital literature generally implies interdisciplinarity.

The last and most important inference is that, contrary to modernist art and literature, in digital literature, collaboration is not necessarily marginal. It is rather institutional and canonical even at the moment of conception. Indirectly, all the cases here are made possible by government or academic funding. Parallel to the absence of anarchy, we do not see an explicit desire to shed the artist as a central figure. Generally, the avant-garde framework that is used to analyze collaboration in visual arts in the twentieth century does not seem to apply.

After this analysis of top-down organized collaborations, we next analyzed a bottom-up community of digital authors, in order to see whether similar transformations have taken place there.

A COMMUNITY OF DIGITAL LITERATURE

While there is a wealth of research material on large social networking websites like Facebook, the function of small creative communities on the Internet largely remains to be analyzed. How do these communities form and interact?

We might expect similarities with the way communities of print authors were constituted. They tended to form around an institution, often a journal, or a bookstore, or a publisher, and were often characterized by a common poetics, understood here as a shared set of norms on what the form and content of their work should be. The function of this shared idea on literature had, apart from a creative effect, also a strategic and partly economical effect: it was a joint effort to prepare the readers and critics for a new kind of literature, to attract attention and thus to sell work.

How are these functions performed in a digital community that produces digital literature? What is produced in such a community seems to be more than only creative works: there is a production of an institutional framework, too. Since editors, bookstores, and professional critics are largely absent in this field, the Internet community seems to have taken over the functions that in print were performed by institutions like academic criticism, literary venues, circles and societies, editors and journals, or bookstores. Digital authors have to criticize, judge, and sell their own work in the absence of people to do it for them (Rettberg 2009). Apart from the social function of such networks, and the importance of the production of works, an important function appears to be the production of a critical and institutional framework within the community.

We have focused on the exchanges in a specific international digital community over a determined period of time: interactive fiction (IF) writers between 2001 and 2004, who communicated intensively on the discussion list *rec.arts.int-fiction*. Additionally, the way in which the contributors have archived their own discussions was considered telling self-descriptive metadata. In archiving different strata of the discussion, the contributors have mapped some of the discourse space. This implicit self-presentation is combined with explicit self-description in some of the discussion strands.

A multidisciplinary approach was used, since we wanted to know how in *sociological terms* this digital authors' community or rather "network" functions and how it related to other *literary* communities and their production of conceptions, works, ideas, or exchanges. This is why the data, the archive of online

exchanges between members of the network, were also analyzed on the level of self-definition and meta-statements.

For the definition of a community, Latour's actor-network theory was used, thus talking about a network rather than a community. This actor-network theory emphasizes the dynamic character of the network—it is more a process than a product: "groupings have constantly to be made, or remade, and during this creation or recreation the group-makers leave behind many traces that can be used as data by the informer" (Latour 2005, 34-35). The "traces," in this case, are the statements made by individuals on the online discussion list and the archives of this list. Statements are a way to discover the connections that together make up the network. They perform the social in all practical ways and form the source of what it means to be in a society (Latour 2005, 232).

Barrett Watten (2006, 335-370) has been one of the many scholars to point out that the character of authorship is different in online communities. Authorship is distributed here, and the system itself may have agency. The computer and the discussion list, and the Internet on which it appears, are not neutral intermediaries, but *mediators* (Latour 2005, 39).

Collective ideals are no longer a condition for a virtual community, and there is no fixed communal identity. Instead, "the spirit of community" itself is crucial (Ward 1999, 98).

This community constructed not only itself but a new genre, too. DiMaggio (1987, 441) argued in his *Classification in Art* that new artistic genres are partly based on "social relations among producers." Genres, therefore, are socially constructed. "Creativity" was understood to work three ways here: both the outlines of a genre and specific works are created, as are the connections that establish the network itself. "Taste then, is a form of ritual identification and a means of constructing social relations" (DiMaggio 1987, 441). What is foregrounded is not only artistic production but sociability, itself, that has taken the place of family—and geographical social structures.

Community and networks of literary artists traditionally formed in specific ways. Centered around mostly institutional nodes (a salon, a journal, a university), authors have tried to establish common conceptions of literature (van Rees and Dorleijn 2001, 340). Common ground for author networks, centered around institutions, was found in rebellion against prevailing poetics and in the collective development of new poetic notions. Studies on authorship and group

constitution tend to focus on “strategic routes that serve to claim and legitimize a position in the literary (or in the scholarly) field” (Dorleijn et al 2010, ix). The question posed was whether the network of IF authors shows a similar shared interest in claiming a place for the new genre or in the professionalization of its authors. New “players” in the field tend to defend a new position for their work, starting at the periphery.

Firstly, in this digital community, the role of the *institutional or poetical* center seems to have made place for a *software and genre-based* center: discussion lists tend to be distinguished rather by questions of format than questions of aesthetics. In digital literature the writing technology is a crucial part of the strategy of signification: the ways in which a work can have meaning are determined by the choice of software and hardware. Poetics in digital media may be found in “its conceptualization and facilitation” (Memmott 2006, 300). A large part of the exchanges focused on technical issues. So, code libraries may perform as a vector of poetic effects. Different media formats (e.g. animation, hypertext, interactive fiction) seem to be decisive in electronic literature’s crucial interventions into our globalizing communication networks.

Secondly, in online networks, the participants themselves “take the lead role in establishing the reality, status and principles of their group,” and membership of the group is unconditional (Biggs and Travlou 2012). Next, a blending of roles in this network occurs as in most digital literature: practitioners, scholars, and consumers of digital literature tend to be the same persons performing different roles. The network of IF authors indeed seems to take over some of the institutional functions that were traditionally divided over different institutions. Works are written, read, and evaluated by the actors of the network. Prizes are awarded to the best work in different categories,[17] resulting in a “canon” of works of interactive fiction.

One of the traditional functions of subnetworks in the print literary field was exactly this: to find a way to a specific audience and even to *create* and educate such an audience. In print, this obviously implied creating a market for the work in question. This does not seem to be the primary function in e-literature communities, however; after Infocom, and apart from a single editor like Eastgate for hyperfiction, no attempts have been made at creating a market. Rettberg

17 <http://www.ifcomp.org/> and <xyzzyawards.org>.

(2009) compares the e-lit community to the subnetwork of print poetry since both are "an other-than-mass-market."

In terms of the cultural sociology of Bourdieu, this is the field in which producers produce for each other: the autonomous field. Since most actors in the IF network seem not very interested in "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1993, 47), we should draw another comparison: the networks of digital authors seem to share characteristics with nineteenth century literary and cultural societies as they thrived in Europe and in the United States. Unlike the eighteenth century "salons," these societies were not organized around a single person or a small group. They were larger, democratically structured, and more explicitly humanist in their goals. Emphasis was on rhetorical excellence as a means of civilization and education, and writing competitions were organized around a theme. Like in digital literature, there was no clear-cut division between amateur and professional authors—this came to an end when professionalization of literary authorship began around 1900. Many differences are to be found as well: the lack of face-to-face contact, the lack of humanist ideals, but, mostly, the fact that the new networks have to find a place for themselves within a literary world that is organized around the distinction between amateur and professional and between "popular" and "high art." The book publications on interactive fiction confirm this (van Dijk 2014, unpublished).

Thirdly, the explicit intention is thus to focus the creativity of the community on the formation and definition of a *genre*. This implies that discussions within the newsgroup have to be well-organized and limited to specific subjects, as the text of the FAQ shows. Newcomers to the list are assisted by this six-part reader but are simultaneously instructed as to the "rules" of the list itself, which are stricter than one would expect in the free zone of the Internet. Here, one learns what posts may be about (and whatnot). Apart from the basic rules of a civilized debate, there are rules that are specific to the condition for a network to come into existence: the obligation to communicate (van Dijk 2014, unpublished).

Fourth, contrary to what new media scholars tend to believe, the question of authorship seems to be not entirely unimportant in digital creativity. Generally, actors do not operate anonymously and act surprisingly similar as to how one would in "real" social situations. That is, questions are answered, identities are revealed, and rules of conduct respected. This confirms what *Collaborative*

Futures states on collaboration, that "rules for participation, established guidelines for attribution, organizational structure and leadership, and clear goals are necessary for participation" ("Field of Cultural Production" 2010, 4). The same goes for the newsgroup, which may be approached and described as a collaboration. Leadership, for example, is not organized explicitly, but a hierarchy seems to be based on the frequency of posts. Although authorship is not as "distributed" as one might expect in the new media age, there is generous exchange of free code on the list (although it is generally posted on the archive, not on the newsgroup).

The actors do not agree on their own cultural status as either "amateurs" or "professionals." This is the source of numerous discussion threads which deal with criticism, commerciality, and audience. This canonizing and historical force of the network is significant and surprising and seems to be modeled on literary history and art history. A term like "influence," for example, is borrowed from artistic discourse.

Although the network is not hierarchically organized, the system of evaluation and canonization is strong and well-established. This does not mean, however, that the roles of author and reader are distinct, and the actors in the community are well aware of their double role. Criteria for the evaluation and canonization of work are discussed explicitly: the actors in this network are authors, players, and critics of each other's work. These discussion strands point towards a high level of self-reflection and analysis of the community (aspects that in communities of "print-authors" we would see performed by critics, newspapers, and other institutions). The network of IF authors has a high state of self-sufficiency and self-reflexivity. The exchanges perform institutional functions: criticism, canonization, the writing of the "history" of the genre, and the influences it underwent, distribution, etc. This community in the periphery of professional authors is thus indeed built up like the nineteenth century societies of amateur writers or artists, which were their own institutions. As in those societies, emphasis is on craft and technique, and on production.

Meizoz (2010, 83) argued, however, that this emphasis is also a specific artistic pose since Rousseau's distinction between the "craftsman" and "man of letters." His "posture" has been copied by authors who want to express an "anti-establishment lifestyle": "the modest craftsman who was independent from the powerful." This may be an explanation for why the question of whether IF is literature (or art) does not attract much attention on the newsgroup. The rheto-

ric of the craftsman demands no obligation to break with the ancestors or with the established institutions. The literary compulsion to break with existing "established" poetics seems absent. Instead, communities center around previous, existing cultural genres like SF or detective stories. Rather than a poetics of the break, IF seems to be based on what we could call "a poetics of recycling." A possible explanation could be that the innovation of *medium* in digital work is so strong that the obligation to "make it new" is fulfilled on another level than on the level of ideas about form and function of literature. A second explanation might be that the authors do not consider themselves "artists" in the traditional sense, but craftsmen.

Finally, in many respects the creativity of the community of IF developers is to be found in the exchanges themselves, which have creative "agency" (Biggs 2010). Since the community (in the timeframe studied) had no other material or immaterial mode of existence other than the exchanges, they are of crucial importance. What is created is collective knowledge of and experience with IF that has been built up in the conversations. The well-archived exchanges function as a reservoir of critical, technical, and poetical theory. This implies a form of collaboration with a "product," which is however not to be measured in any pragmatic or economical sense of the word.

The individual members of the community of IF developers produce works of IF, which are—again—not to be measured in commercial or economic value but in pleasure and creativity on the part of the producer and the consumers.

If in digital communities, we see a return to face-to-face contact, then in the content of digital art, we witness a similar "affective turn."

POETICS: AFFECT AND EMBODIMENT IN DIGITAL LITERATURE

At the seminar on "Digital Poetics in the Present" (University of Amsterdam, December 2011), many scholars signaled a return to affect, embodiment, and materiality in digital literature. Rita Raley used the work of David Jhave Johnston to reflect on the "central themes and formal features of digital poetry as it evolved over the course of the last decade." In her keynote, "'Living Letterforms': The Ecological Turn in Contemporary Digital Poetics," her contention was that in its "articulation of an ecological matrix of natural spaces and built environments and a diversity of life forms," Jhave's work is paradigmatic of work in the field of digital poetry after 2000, work that has "turned toward ecological matrices that are at once mediated

and lively" and to "an ecological system, an embedding of humans and computational media within a larger assemblage." Like Simanowski, Raley offered a turn to practices like "close reading and interpretation," suggesting that "the range of expression in digital poetics warrants the critical attention to linguistic form and aesthetic practice that has historically been given to print genres." She discussed the difficulty of extracting meaning from a text like Jhave's *Sooth* in which the relations among "text, video, and audio" are so complex. Embracing the techniques of deformative criticism articulated by Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels (1999), Professor Raley nonetheless offered detailed readings of Jhave in an attempt to get at what is at stake in the shifts she finds in digital poetics of the last ten years. For Raley, Jhave's work "expresses a distinctive ecological sensibility, one that embraces relationality and animism, or the vitality of nonhuman beings, including textual forms."

Eric Dean Rasmussen pursued a comparable line of argument, claiming that much recent work in contemporary literature, especially within the subfield that studies "experimental" or "innovative" "technotexts," assumes that the humanities have neglected the lived human body. Literary critics should overhaul outdated hermeneutic approaches that tend to *overlook* bodily sensations (with the emphasis on ocular tropes that privilege looking as providing the means of understanding) and that tend to disregard the integral role of sensory experience in any sense-making process, including reading. From the perspective of various new materialisms, which emphasize the ubiquity of data to be extracted from dynamic objects that are constantly in formation, the age of information multiplicity demands an expanded sense of reading, one that posits reading as a fully embodied activity, an affective encounter with potentially transformative materials. Rasmussen emphasized that these materials include literary artifacts and insisted on the instability of textual systems and how texts interact with and mutually affect other objects, both human and nonhuman, in their material environments. By taking such an approach, he contended, literary studies would participate in a larger "affective turn" that's been taking place across the social sciences and humanities.

Next, Rasmussen sketched what a turn to affect might entail for literary studies: a greater receptivity to literature's affective dimension, to the ways writing can move readers—to tears, to laughter, etc.—and impact their bodies, viscerally, making their heads spin and stomachs knot. But engaging with affect is a challenging project. How can literary critics coherently convey their visceral read-

ing responses and provide intelligent analyses of aesthetically induced affective states? Engaging the materiality of language is where things get challenging, even risky, for those committed to literary interpretation. It's along this line of inquiry that some recent technotexts (Marc McGurl, N. Katherine Hayles) appear well-positioned to make significant interventions in debates concerning the potential gains and losses of embracing a materialist aesthetic.

Rasmussen claimed that this aesthetic works by transforming linguistic signs into raw marks, texts into physical objects, and intentional communications into affective transmissions. And such a transformation, recent technotexts demonstrate, is but one of the many affordances provided by word-processing and computational technologies. Taken to its limit, however, this transformation can lead to the idea of the text's meaning, and the hermeneutic project of interpreting that meaning, being replaced by physiological accounts of readers' affective experiences. At a moment when interpretive skills are alleged to be eroding, this presents something of a worst-case scenario for literary studies. Rasmussen suggested that a focus on the replacement of hermeneutic reading by affective communications as a literary theme suggests that contemporary writers of technotexts are sensitive to changing notions of literacy wrought by new technologies, and, on the other hand, that an analysis of non-linguistic modalities in print and digital technotexts encourage the development of affective hermeneutics for literary studies. Ultimately, this focus is designed to contribute to a larger argument on behalf of affective or erotic (Roberto Simanowski, Susan Sontag) hermeneutics.

A possible example of a reading that is at once hermeneutic and attentive to affect and a "materialist aesthetic" was the contribution to the Amsterdam seminar by Yra van Dijk (2011, later published in the *Journal of Dutch Literature*). She analyzed an instance of remediated handwriting in digital literature ("Unrest," a poem by Tonnus Oosterhoff, translated for the occasion). She concluded that the remediation of handwriting shows that digital poetry brings ethical and aesthetical issues to the fore that are at stake in contemporary literature. It is first of all an affective and bodily engagement that the material presence of the text seems to provoke, while simultaneously being ironic and postmodern. The distance that separates us from the world is expressed by means of the mediatized and digitized environment in which the work is performed. Whilst pointing to our technological condition, the works try to go beyond it in a new materiality that is enacted between, on the one hand, the presence and

the body of the author and her/his writing hand and, on the other, the machine that remediates that presence. Although suggesting proximity to the original, material moment of writing and to the author's bodily presence, these works prove such an original moment and original body to be nonexistent. Every act of language is revealed as an iteration and the authentic body to be a performance itself. Van Dijk thus problematized the possibility, discussed by Raley and Rasmussen, of animism and affect in the digital. She claimed that only a *performance* of the material and original presence of the artwork is possible: a performance of the real. This critical stance was heard in more contributions to the Amsterdam Seminar, which may be said to have demonstrated a "critical turn," too.

RESISTANCE AND CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Professor Roberto Simanowski opened the Amsterdam seminar with the lecture "Warfare and Conventionality: How Avant-garde Computer Generated Text Can Be." Firstly, he pointed out that computer generated text has been considered warfare carried out against conventionality and was accordingly tagged "cybernetic Dadaism," which seems to be obvious given that most computer generated text is nonsensical. Simanowski contended, however, that there are attempts to have the machine generate meaningful text ideally indistinguishable from text by a human (for example, Michael Mateas' and Andrew Stern's interactive drama *Façade*).

The question that Simanowski posed is the following: "if a machine aims to be as good as a human writer, can it still afford to do what a human writer may aim at: writing like a machine?" Wouldn't any idiosyncratic style—which might in conventionally generated literature be understood as avant-garde—be perceived as a failure of the program? Simanowski concluded that literature cannot be avant-garde in both its way of meaning and in its style.

A similarly critical note was heard in the third keynote, by the Belgian professor Jan Baetens. He re-evaluated the claim to originality that is often made for digital literature, comparing it to earlier installment literature and criticizing the teleological stance that is taken with respect to the digital.

Baetens stated that in the debates on digital culture, medium-specificity is not currently a priority. For many critics and artists, it is no longer even relevant. This rejection of medium-specificity occurs both at the level of the object (today, the digital work is considered "essentially" hybrid and intermedial, and it is situ-

ated in an expanded cultural field whose main feature is that of cross-medial convergence) and at the level of the disciplinary approach (which has now become, by definition, interdisciplinary). Baetens argued, however, that even in the age of interdisciplinary readings of cross-medial hybrid objects, medium-specificity is far from dead. Authors such as N. Katherine Hayles or Lev Manovich continue to make a strong plea for a focus on specificity at the object level. And the renewed interest in "transdisciplinarity" (see the Plymouth group) also makes room for specificity at the methodological level.

The case that Baetens analyzed was a dialogue between print culture and digital culture in which medium-specificity was also far from absent. If digital culture is seen as a remediation of print culture, print culture's reaction to digital culture obeys not only the rule of repurposing (which is a kind of inverse remediation) but also that of medium-specificity: books and print are becoming "more" books and print than before.

Baetens' example of the complex dialogue between print and digital culture was the notion of hypertext. Although hypertext is often presented as "print + something," i.e. as something that print cannot achieve by itself, this interpretive scheme is techno-determinist and teleological, according to Baetens:

> The renewed, more self-reflexive approach of print culture makes clear that the association of print culture and sequentiality does ignore the history and cultural multilayered-ness of print, which has always been open to many forms of non-sequentiality.

He addressed the inscription of serialized texts in a precise historical context and a social context (e.g. the links of serialized literature with popular culture and informal ways of culture industries). Baetens focused on some new aspects of "periodization/serialization" in print culture, which he claimed are being prompted by contemporary digital culture and which in turn might be a source of inspiration for electronic writing. Thus, he concluded on a mix of continuity and discontinuity, and he signaled new forms of fragmentation and of multiple publication formats in analogue literature.

Kiene Brillenburg-Wurth's contribution to the seminar took a similar starting point. She contended that although one sees much influence of paper culture on print, the reverse is true as well. After analyzing two examples of such influences, she concluded that print literature is being radically altered by the digital surroundings in which it is produced and read. Digital "methods" like hyper-

textual structures are to be found in analogue literature, too, where they function as self-reflexive moments. The materiality of texts is foregrounded: "Because the recurrence of signifiers in different contexts and positions is made visible through a constantly changing graphic materiality (font, style, size, etc.), we now see what we normally pass over." In the cut-and-paste texts that she discussed, authorship is questioned, too: "they point to a felt loss of authorial intention, the inevitable gap between sender and message, message and reader, sender and reader."

The reflexivity of electronic literature was also the subject of a fourth lecture, by Scott Rettberg. Starting, like Brillenburg-Wurth, Baetens, and van Dijk, from the question of the affiliations between the old media and the new, between print literature poetics and electronic literature poetics, he explored mutual influences between print and digital. After addressing the issue of authorship in an exploration of the meaning of the speaking "I," the "narrator," and the "author," Rettberg presented a talk that was a deconstruction of the limits between personal, artistic, and scholarly work. One of the conclusions we may draw is that creativity may just as well be found in a scholarly community as in a conference.

Searching for thematic concerns and formal characteristics that informed the practice of hypertext, Rettberg stated that electronic literature is moving away from fiction in the last decade and posed the main question: "What forms do the connections take between the work of the American metafictionists in the 70s and the work of the electronic literature authors from the 90s onward?" The speaker assumed that "the more interesting aspects of literary postmodernism [...] could more deeply and productively be explored by e-lit authors, particularly those working in narrative forms."

The comparison between literary postmodernism and electronic literature is found in an impulse towards reflexivity, Rettberg argued. Four types of reflexivity were discussed: the reflexivity of the real or postulated author, intertextual reflexivity, formal or generic reflexivity, and medial reflexivity (testing the boundaries of media specificity). For all of these forms, Rettberg gave examples from both print literature and from electronic literature by Shelley Jackson.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions may be drawn on all three levels on which poetics of digital literature were explored. Institutionally, the analysis of paratexts of digital literature has demonstrated a strong focus on appropriation of the work by author(s). The authors' influence on paratexts has grown considerably as compared to print literature (van Dijk 2014, unpublished). Digitally, these paratexts are only a few mouse clicks away—like the source code, which gives information on authorial intention and that we may incorporate into the category of "paratexts." Another new paratext is the World Wide Web itself, which has partly taken over the role that social spaces and institutions play in the field of print literature.

Similarly, institutional collaborative authorship, which is part of the creative process, ends up becoming an important part of the work. The goals and the creative energies of a collaborative community are to an important extent concerned with the description, the establishment, and the rules of the community itself. The function of digital collaboration therefore resembles what Jakobson in his communication theory called the "phatic" function—which performs primarily a social task: the confirmation that communication is in progress. I would propose to create an analogous category for this self-reflexive collaboration: phatic collaboration. "Phatic" is Greek for "spoken" or "I speak," so "phatic collaboration" would mean collaboration that we talk about.

This implies that the text is its own paratext—it describes what it is and in which tradition of digital and non-digital cooperation it operates. It is extremely self-reflexive, and the authors are aware of it.

Not all collaborative works are phatic, obviously. What we did see, however, is that the content of many collaborative works is often indirectly concerned with polyphony, interdiscursivity, or interculturality. And, contrary to some of the earlier experiments in the 1960s and 70s with collaboration in visual art, emphasis often was on the material result of the collaboration, rather than on the process alone. Another conclusion is that contemporary collaboration is not always a political or poetical choice: the necessity to cooperate may be a consequence of the software used, which demands a technological knowhow in addition to literary knowhow: often authors and new media artists/engineers need to join forces to make a work. In that respect, contemporary online literary collaboration resembles medieval collaboration in book making. This technically "forced" collaboration has always been present in visual arts, where artists collaborate with

craftsmen. From this follows the fact that collaboration in digital literature generally implies interdisciplinarity.

The last and most important inference is that, contrary to modernist art and literature, in digital literature, collaboration is not necessarily marginal. It is rather institutional and canonical even at the moment of conception. Indirectly, all the cases that were researched were made possible by government or academic funding. Parallel to the absence of anarchy, we do not see an explicit desire to shed the artist as a central figure. Generally, the avant-garde framework that is used to analyze collaboration in visual arts in the twentieth century does not seem to apply.

In addition to these top-down collaborations, we focused on bottom-up collaboration: an international online community of authors of interactive fiction. Firstly, in this digital community, the role of the *institutional or poetical* center seems to have made place for a *software and genre-based* center: discussion lists tend to be distinguished rather by questions of format than questions of aesthetics.

Secondly, in online networks, the participants themselves take the lead role in creating and structuring the group, which is characterized by a blending of roles: practitioners, scholars, and consumers of digital literature tend to be the same persons performing different functions. The network of IF authors indeed seems to take over some of the institutional functions that were traditionally divided over different institutions.

The explicit intention is to focus the creativity of the community on the formation and definition of a *genre*. Contrary to what new media scholars tend to believe, the question of authorship is not entirely unimportant in digital creativity. Generally, actors do not operate anonymously, and they act surprisingly similar as to how one would in "real" social situations.

The symbolic value of the genre is negotiated constantly in the community: the actors do not agree on their own cultural status as either "amateurs" or "professionals." This is the source of numerous discussion threads which deal with criticism, commerciality, and audience. This canonizing and historical force of the network is significant and surprising and seems to be modeled on literary history and art history. A term like "influence," for example, is borrowed from artistic discourse. The exchanges perform institutional functions: criticism, canonization, the writing of the "history" of the genre and the influences it underwent, distribution, etc. This community in the periphery of professional authors is built up like the nineteenth century societies of amateur writers or artists, which were

their own institutions. As in those societies, emphasis is on craft and technique but also on the community itself. The creativity of the community of IF developers is to be found in the exchanges themselves, which have themselves creative "agency" (Biggs 2010). Since the community (in the timeframe studied) had no other material or immaterial mode of existence other than the exchanges, they are of crucial importance.

Finally, on the textual level, several conclusions may be drawn about digital poetics. Important trends in recent digital literature are the turn towards the ecological: "an embedding of humans and computational media within a larger assemblage" (Raley 2011). A new emphasis is found, in theory and practice of electronic literature, on *affect*: a sense of reading that posits reading as a fully embodied activity, creating a crucial role for materiality of old and new media and of the ways in which these are combined. Reflexivity of this materiality and of the medium (Rettberg 2009) is a recurring characteristic, which leads to an exploration of issues of authorship, presence, and embodiment (van Dijk 2012a). The media-awareness of the digital genres has led to a renewed interest in the medium-specificity and the history of the materiality of print literature, too.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baetens, Jan. 2011. "Hypertext revisited: The issue of 'non-sequentiality' in print and digital literature." Keynote Lecture at "Digital Poetics in the Present," University of Amsterdam.

Baetens, Jan, and Jan Van Looy. 2008. "E-poetry between Image and Performance: A Cultural Analysis." *Journal of E-media Studies* 1, no. 1. <http://journals.dartmouth.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Journals.woa/2/xmlpage/4/article/288>.

Biggs, Simon. 2010. "Authorship and Agency in Networked Environments." <www.littlepig.org.uk/texts/authoragency.pdf>.

Biggs, Simon, and Penny Travlou. 2012. "Distributed Authorship and Creative Communities." *Dichtung Digital* 41. <www.littlepig.org.uk/texts/authorship_community.pdf>.

Bouchardon, Serge. 2012. "Digital Literature in France." *Dichtung Digital* 41. Accessed September 25, 2012. <http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2012/41/bouchardon.htm>.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1993. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Brillenburg-Wurth, Kiene. 2011. "Writing as Erasure: Book Art, Memory, and Forgetting in the Digital Age." Paper presented at "Digital Poetics in the Present," University of Amsterdam.

DiMaggio, Paul. 1987. "Classification in Art." *American Sociological Review* 52, no. 4: 440-45.

Dickie, George. 1974. *Art and the Aesthetic. An Institutional Analysis*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. 19-52; 30.

Dorleijn Gilles J., Ralf Gruttemeijer, and Liesbeth Korthals Altes. 2010. *Authorship Revisited. Conceptions of Authorship around 1900 and 2000*. Leuven: Peeters.

van Dijk, Yra. 2014. "Digital paratexts." Unpublished.

———. Forthcoming 2014. "'Don't Lurk Too Long': The New Institutional Character of an Online Literary Community." *Art at the Crossroads.* Special Issue of *Poetics.*

———. 2013. "European Digital Literature and the Archive." In *Literature and Multimedia in late 20th and 21st Century Europe*, edited by Marcel Cornis-Pope. John Benjamins Press.

———. 2012a. "A Performance of Reality: Handwriting and Paper in Digital Literature." *Journal of Dutch Literature* 2, no. 2. <http://journalofdutchliterature.org/jdl/vol02/nr02/art04>.

———. 2012b. "Topdown Digital Literature: The Effects of Institutional Collaborations and Communities." *Dichtung Digital* 42. <http://www.dichtung-digital.de/en/journal/aktuelle-nummer/?postID=830>.

———. 2011. "A Performance of Reality: Handwriting and Paper in Digital Literature." Paper presented at "Digital Poetics in the Present," University of Amsterdam.

"Field of Cultural Production, The." 2010. *Collaborative Futures. A Book About the Future of Collaboration, Written Collaboratively*. Accessed September 25, 2012. <http://collaborative-futures.org>.

Genette, Gerard. 1997. *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.

Green, Charles. 2001. *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Griswold, Wendy. 1993. "Recent Moves in the Sociology of Literature." *Annual Review Sociology* 19: 455-67.

Hayles, N. Katherine. 2008. *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary.* University of Notre Dame Press.

———. 2006. "Time of Digital Poetry: From Object to Event, The." In *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories*, edited by Adalaide K. Morris and Thomas Swiss. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 182-210.

———. 2002. *Writing Machines*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Hendry, Joy. 2003. "An Ethnographer in the Global Arena: Globography Perhaps?" *Global Networks* 3: 497-512.

Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lind, Maria. 2007. "The Collaborative Turn." In *Taking The Matter Into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices*, edited by Johanna Billing, Maria Lind, and Lars Nilsson. London: Black Dog Publishing. 15-31.

Lunenfeld, Peter, ed. 1999. "Unfinished Business." *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 6-22.

Manovich, Lev. 2002. "Who is the Author? Sampling / Remixing / Open Source." Accessed September 25 2012. <http://www.manovich.net/DOCS/models_of_authorship.doc>.

McGann, Jerome and Lisa Samuels. 1999. "Deformance and Interpretation." *New Literary History* 30 (Winter): 25-56.

Meizoz, Jerome. 2010. "Modern Posterities of Posture: Jean-Jacques Rousseau." In *Authorship revisited. Conceptions of authorship around 1900 and 2000*, edited by Gilles J. Dorleijn, Ralf Grüttemeijer, and Liesbeth Korthals-Altes. Leuven: Peeters.

Memmott, Talan. 2006. "Beyond Taxonomy: Digital Poetics and the Problem of Reading." In *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories*, edited by Adalaide K. Morris and Thomas Swiss. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 293-306.

Montfort, Nick. 2003. *Twisty little passages. An approach to interactive fiction.* MIT Press.

van Rees, Cees and Gilles Dorleijn. 2001. "The Eighteenth-Century Literary Field in Western Europe: The Interdependence of Material and Symbolic Production and Consumption." In *Poetics* 28, no. 5/6, 331-348.

———. 2006. "Het Nederlandse literaire veld 1800-2000." In *De productie van literatuur. Het literaire veld in Nederland 1800-2000*, edited by Cees van Rees and Gilles Dorleijn. Nijmegen: Vantilt. 15-37.

Raley, Rita. 2011. "'Living Letterforms': The Ecological Turn in Contemporary Digital Poetics." Keynote Lecture at "Digital Poetics in the Present," University of Amsterdam.

Rasmussen, Eric Dean. 2011."Significant Affects in Digital Literature." Paper presented at "Digital Poetics in the Present," University of Amsterdam.

Rettberg, Scott. 2011. "Revisiting Reflexivity: American Metafiction and Hypertext Narratives." Paper presented at "Digital Poetics in the Present," University of Amsterdam.

———. 2009. "Communitizing Electronic Literature." *DHQ* 3, no. 2. <http://digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/3/2/000046/000046.html>.

Saemmer, Alexandra. 2012. "Evaluating Digital Literature: Social Networks, Selection Processes and Criteria." In *Remediating the Social*, edited by Simon Biggs. Edinburgh.

Schaffer, Anna, and Andrew Roberts. 2006. "Rhetorics of Surface and Depth in Digital Poetry." *RiLUnE* 5: 37-48.

Simanowski, Roberto. 2011. "Warfare and Conventionality: How Avant-garde Computer Generated Text Can Be." Keynote Lecture at "Digital Poetics in the Present," University of Amsterdam.

Sontag, Susan. 1961. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Stanitzek, Georg. 2005. "Texts and Paratexts in Media." *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 1: 27-42.

Stefans, Brian K. 2003. *Fashionable Noise: On Digital Poetics*. Berkeley, CA: Atelos.

Stewart, Gavin. 2010. "The Paratexts of Inanimate Alice. Thresholds, Genre Expectations and Status." *Convergence* 16, no. 1: 57-74.

Ward, Katie J. 1999. "Cyber-Ethnography and the Emergence of the Virtually New Community." *Journal of Information Technology* 14: 95-105.

Watten, Barrett. 2006. "Poetics in the Expanded Field: Textual, Visual, Digital." In *New Media Poetics. Contexts, Technotexts and Theories*, edited by Adalaide Morris and Thomas Swiss. Cambridge: MIT Press. 335-370.