Nick Montfort's *World Clock* and its Polish translation – a case study

An Experiment in Translating and Publishing Highly Computational Literature
Introducing a Story Generator into the Polish Literary Field

World Clock (English)

Zegar światowy (Polish)

#Subversive #Materiality #HighlyComputational #ElectronicLiterature #Print #DerivativeWriting

1983, Berlin → **1984, Kraków** → **1986, San Diego** → **1986, San Diego** → **2013, Boston** → **2013, Cambridge, MA** → **2013, Cambridge, MA** → **2014, Cambridge, MA** → **2014 , Kraków** → **2014, Kraków** → **2014–2015, Poland** → **2016, Kraków**

Stanisław Lem writes a review of the nonexistent book *Jedna minuta*, which describes all the things that happen around the world during one minute.

Wydawnictwo Literackie publishes the book *Prowokacja* with Lem's faux reviews, including *Jedna minuta.*

Harvest Book publishes the English translation of Lem's book under the title *One Human Minute.*

On January 2nd Harry Matthews writes *The Chronogram* for 1998, which is published in *Jacket 3* in April.

Darius Kazemi proposes to celebrate November as NaNoGenMo – the National Novel Generation Month.

November 27th, Nick Montfort writes a generative novel titled *World Clock* in python. It is inspired by Stanislaw Lem's *One Human Minute* and Harry Mathews' *The Chronogram for 1998.*

December, *World Clock* becomes available in print. Lem's idea becomes reality.

Piotr Marecki, a visiting scholar at MIT, translates Nick Montfort's generator into Polish as *Zegar światowy.*

Aleksandra Małecka, Katarzyna Bazarnik and Adam Ladziński edit and proofread the code of the translation.

Korporacja Ha!art becomes the first Polish publishing house to launch a computer generated novel. *Zegar światowy* premieres during the Ha!wangarda festival (November 2–4, 2014).

15 reviews of *Zegar światowy* are published, some in traditional press, including *Gazeta Wyborcza*, some on reviewers' blogs.

In July Piotr Marecki & Aleksandra Małecka present a poster about the project at the Digital Humanities Conference. It is designed by Maja Starakiewicz.

IDEA

GENERATOR

GENERATOR

PRINT

PRINT

COMPARISON

language of programming	python	python	Translating a highly computational work means translating the program, not the final output.
chapters	24	24	The program automatically divides the text into 24 chapters (0-23), which is the same as the number of timezones.
stories	1440	1440	The program generates the same number of short stories in both language versions. They are randomly assigned to different cities in different timezones.
lines of code	165	229	The Polish version needed more code in order to accommodate for the gender inflection of nouns and adjectives.
names	202	209	The translator enriched the generator with a few names, like Ziemowit, Kaja or Wawrzyniec.
pytz	yes	yes	The Polish version of the book uses the English-language timezone database. Hence, the structure of the first sentence of the generated stories is changed so that the name of the location is not inflected.
translation of chosen elements of the code		yes	All elements of the code that could be translated into Polish were translated. For instance the variable *reading_matter turned into obiekt_czytany_zenski* (for objects with feminine gender) and *obiekt_czytany_meski (masculine).*
ISBN	no	yes	The Polish code also includes the ISBN (International Standard Book Number) of the book

CONTEXT OF RECEPTION

self–published – by Nick Montfort's press Bad Quarto	an established publishing house with regular distribution and PR (the book was sent to reviewers and bloggers like any other piece of literature)
well–established niche, specialized audience (ELO community, NaNoGenMo participants)	e–lit community less developed in Poland – the book was reviewed by literary critics from outside the e–lit field
mentioned in e–lit databases, tweets and comments, as well as general articles about NaNoGenMo (also internationally) – but no reviews from literary critics	promoted as a work inspired by Stanisław Lem – a celebrated Polish writer, with many fans
	translation = legitimization of the book as literature (must have been worthy of translation) + afterword from the translator
	publication in the Liberatura series (alongside Queneau, Perec, Joyce...)

ANALYSIS OF REVIEWS

15 reviews

2 in print media

the largest Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the weekly *Przegląd*

13 in digital media

9 sites devoted to culture and literature, 2 sites devoted to lifestyle and computer culture, and 2 reviewer's blogs.

The "Polish context" – Stanisław Lem

The connection to Lem is underlined in all the reviews (while Harry Mathews is mentioned only in one). It seems that what Janez Strehovec calls derivative writing is a double edged sword. The link to the famous author helped promote the work, but four reviewers criticized the publication for not being entirely faithful to Lem's idea.

Recognizing the experimental character of the book

None of the reviewers failed to notice that the work was computer-generated. Twelve used the word "experiment", the majority also mentioned the author's background (MIT). Three reviewers explained that the work was produced as part of NaNoGenMo, the same number of reviews included references to other experimental writers (Queneau, Mathews, Joyce, Perec, Danielewski).

Six reviews mention the fact that the book was published in the Liberatura series (which is recognized for books with important material aspects).

What is said about the materiality of the book?

main approaches

waste

I am surprised that there is money for such niche publications, while there are so many authors of good books who cannot find a publisher.

valuable experiment

I have to say that the combination of digital literature with the traditional printed medium can be the source of valuable experience. Even if World Clock is not a page turner, it is worthy to spend some time on a book that gives you a new perspective, both on writing and on reading.

Several descriptions of the reading experience

sddgfhghghjgjhjmjmjhmjmhmnfnvgvbhvbgbgbgbgbbcfbcc bcfbgb cgvbngbncvbvbcbvbvbnbnbn jshhgsgsgsghadnx sdbdhgsdg jhdgsjddfghsg djsjhd

Is interpretation undertaken?

10/15 reviewers attempt some sort of interpretation. Most talk about the banality of everyday life and its repetitiveness (this interpretation might have been suggested by the publisher in the press package), 2 reviewers comment on the value of time (and what one can do in a minute). There were also some reflections about the future of literature and the "human" aspect the reviewers viewed as necessary in literature.

The impact of the translator / the issues of translation

6 reviewers say something about the translator – they comment on the fact that the translator translated the code rather than the book (4) and/or quote from the translator's afterword (4).

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