

– Interpreting Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries' Flash Poem *Dakota*

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Abstract: In this paper I discuss Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries' digital poem *Dakota*. I discuss how the poem controls the reader's experience and how this control affects its possible interpretations. The control is mostly executed by limiting the reader's freedom over reading. Reading *time*, *direction* and *duration* are determined by the poem. It is only possible to start the poem, but not rewind, stop or fast-forward it. Furthermore, the manipulation of speed affects reading in many ways. In the fast extreme the effect is illegibility, but more subtly used speed creates varieties of emphasis and de-emphasis. The effect of emphasis of this kind, I argue, creates different layers of readings and invites re-reading. These different readings require different cognitive *modes*, which, according to N. Katherine Hayles (2007, 2012), mirrors our contemporary reading habits. Not being in control of the reading process also leads to a scattered sense of unity, one of postmodernism's essential traits. While reading the poem I also question why I read as I do, and by doing so I hope to present more general traits of how to approach digital literature.

Prologue: What Am I Reading When I Read Digital Literature?

I say: "I read digital literature", and I realize I have to define every word in that sentence separately. Let us start in the beginning. The "I" is me, an empirical, physical being with a set of skills and some communicative power. Two questions follow: 1. What is my goal? And 2. Where am I? First answer: my goal is to make an interpretation of YHCHI's poem *Dakota* and communicate it to other people who are interested in the same area of knowledge. How do I intend to achieve this goal? I decide to use vocabulary and tools which I think my intended readers will recognize. They do not have to *agree* with me on this set of tools, and even if they do, they can disagree on the usage of the tools. To make my case as strong as possible, I will try to keep my tools transparent and open to evaluation. Second answer: I am looking at the poem on a stand-alone computer through the YHCHI website, online. I could be looking at it in an art

gallery or on my tablet in a metro coach with head phones on, but that would produce a different kind of reading. The *context*¹ in which the poem is encountered is of importance.

What is reading, then, in this case? *Dakota* contains music and flashing screens with text. In the traditional sense, I am “reading” the flickering words. But my reading is heavily affected by the music, which creates unity to seemingly shattered pieces of textual information. Also the flashes control my “reading” by limiting the time I can spend reading the words, but they also remind me of music videos and advertisements that use speedy cuts and a hasty pace. Since I am reading on this laptop connected to the internet and I just click the poem to start I have no idea how long it is going to take and there is no control bar giving me that information. I have roughly two options: to pay attention, or to do something else. But since my goal is to make an interpretation and communicate it to you, I decide to pay attention. Still, it is frustrating not to know if the poem takes an hour – or five minutes and fifty six seconds.

Two questions follow: 1. What is it that I am “reading”? And 2. What is it that I am doing when I “read”? First answer: the information I am reading simultaneously consists of conventional organized signs (words), organized sound (jazz), and something less clear, a meaning created through the combination of movement and flashes of text. Second answer: “Reading” this poem requires the intake of multiple information streams and a tolerance for the lack of control and lack of time to grasp let alone digest the meaning of the words. Reading towards my goal also necessitates re-reading.

How about “digital”? A brief look at any collection of essays on digital literature reveals that everyone has their own definition². “Digital” is also not the only option available³, but despite its inaccuracy, seems to be the best. Most of the theorist’s agree that in order to something be called digital it has to employ the digital platform in an essential way.⁴ This means that the work could not be presented in any other form without significant changes to its operations. This definition is good, but creates a problem for me, since for example Roberto Simanowski explicitly excludes YHCHI’s work from the realm of the digital (2011, 33), because it could be presented as film, which does not use the digital platform in an essential way. What I would like to bring in to this conversation is a further qualification of the reading situation. If you see it as film in a movie

¹ I am borrowing Noah Wardrip-Fruins terminology from his „Five Elements of Digital Literature“. In addition to context I use *data*, *processes*, and *surface*. The remaining element is *interaction*, which I do not need in this reading..

² c.f. Roberto Simanowski, Jörgen Schäfer, Peter Gendolla (eds.) 2010: *Reading Moving Letters*

³ Electronic, E-literature, Ergodic, Net Literature etc.

⁴ See again *Reading Moving Letters* 2010, but also Simanowski 2011

theatre, it is not digital literature. But if you read it on a stand-alone computer through a website in an online environment, as I do here, I would certainly argue that it is digital and the means to present the poem are essentially digital. This doesn't aim to solve the problem of what "digital" should entail but the variation in what Wardrip-Fruin (2010) calls the *surface*⁵ (from analogue film to computer screen), and the physical situation, the context where the poem is encountered (from movie theatre to private desk) has to be taken into consideration.

Defining "literature" is the easiest part. The only question here is the question of different art forms – whether something is literature or web- or maybe video art. An elegant solution is again that it is literature if it uses text in its operations and promotes reading in an essential way (cf. Simanowski 2011, 39). *Dakota* certainly does. In addition, it depends on the goal of the reader whether it is productive to treat a work as literature and not something else.

In the following I will present YHCHI's work, then describe the content of *Dakota's* different information streams, and dig in deeper to the ways in which the processes of the poem controls the *pace* of reading and creates multiple layers that require different cognitive modes such as *hyper attention* and *deep attention*. I will also discuss the effect of the poem's *inexorability* in relation to what Fredric Jameson calls schizophrenic writing (1991). In the end of the paper I will combine the elements for a tentative interpretation of the poem's meaning(s).

1. YHCHI

Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries (YHCHI) is the artist collaboration between Young-Hae Chang and Marc Voge. The duo found their distinct style in the end of 1990's, and have continued with very little change to this day. This style consists of text and music presented in the Flash platform. The text is always in simple Monaco font, usually black text on white or red screen (and also once a fireplace), paced in sync with jazzy music. In the beginning of their career they used mostly music by canonized – if marginal – jazz musicians such as Art Blakey, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie and so on, but later started to compose their own original scores to accompany the text. They write in English, French, and Korean, but translations can be found in up to 20 languages.

⁵ The surface could also be called the „technical medium“. This term is thoroughly and effectively defined by Lars Elleström (2010).

YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES

Young-Hae Chang identifies the simple aesthetic style as an explicit act of defiance: "In my work there is no interactivity; no graphics or graphic design; no photos; no banners; no millions-of-colors; no playful fonts; no pyrotechnics. I have a special dislike for interactivity." Collectively they have said that they will not help the reader to locate their art. Instead, they welcome homelessness, anonymity and distance. (Pressmann, 303-4.) The dislike for interactivity is clear since the reader is helpless with the poems' unstoppable pace. Interactivity in the sense of reader-involvement in either making choices or giving (intentional or unintentional⁶) input to the work is one of the main features of digital literature – here painfully absent, but their work demands engagement in other ways explained below. Moreover, any control the reader is used to have with print texts or many digital works is absent in YHCHI poems.⁷ It could hardly be said that there is no graphic design involved, since already selecting the style of the font and the size of the letters would count as graphic design. However, the claim for simplicity is visible.

Anonymity is something the authors cherish not only with locating their art but also as artists behind the art. The website of YHCHI is strictly to the point: a simple layout with only poems. Even the credits and contact information is presented in the same style as the poems. No pictures of the authors, no links to interviews, no social media. In fact, apart from few interviews, it is difficult to find information about YHCHI at all. My image search resulted in one old photo of Young-Hae Chang and no photos of Marc Voge. When they gave a lecture in the Penny W. Stamps distinguished speaker series in Michigan (2012), the lecture was an hour-long poem on screen. Furthermore, on the video recording of the lecture the authors' faces are blurred. The

⁶ Unintentional input would be e.g. a browser history that the work consults (c.f. Impermanence Agent, Wardrip-Fruin).

⁷ According to Espen Aarseth's (1996) typology of textual communication, a codex (e.g. Moby Dick) is accessible in any way and not controlled, since it is physically possible to read it from any point. Also many digital works offer control to the reader in the forms of different paths to follow, to pause the reading, or to simply take all the time the reader needs. All of these are absent in Dakota in which the reader is left in control of only his own attention.

absence of the authors can be seen as a comment on how to read the works: all necessary elements are there, already in the work.

Themes that YHCHI most often visit are gender politics (or just sex), ideologies (totalitarianism, economy), and art. For example “Cunnilingus in North Korea” pretends to be commissioned by “The Dear Leader” and “Artist’s Statement no. 45.730.944” talks about making boring web art, North Korea, and sex. The YHCHI are located in Seoul, South Korea, and they say the “Heavy Industries” in the name is a tribute to the big corporations, which the South Koreans so cherish.

2. “DATA”: Dying Young, Contemporary Bleakness and Pound’s *The Cantos*

Because I want to communicate my interpretation as transparently as possible, I need to present the *data* on which my interpretation is built on. The data can consist of text, images, sound files, specifications of story grammars, declarative information about fictional worlds, tables of statistics about word frequencies, and paratexts, such as instructions to the reader (Wardrip-Fruin 2010, 45). *Dakota*’s data consists of text and music, as presented below. Perhaps it is noteworthy to stress that the following description is already a product of multiple reads.

Dakota begins with a blank screen with music in the background. A count-down starts from 10 to 1 (although we have to imagine the numbers from 3 to 1) as in movies of the first half of the 20th century. A drum roll accompanies the count down. After announcing the author and the title of the poem, the text comes in with an ostentious “FUCKING” accentuated by drums. This sets an arrogant mood. The speaker tells us how they “WALTZED” out to the car ready to hit the road. They cruise cross country with beer cases in the trunk and the sun high above their heads. Later it becomes clear that the “we” the speaker uses consists of him, Cindy, Peppy and Ed. At first the poem’s pace is quite steady and legible and the mood stays cheerful until they park in a parking lot of a “dead” motel near a black foot reservation. We get a further description of the area as a “FACTORY TOWN – BATHED IN A BROWN MIST SO THICK” that nothing can pierce “THE MYSTERY OF THIS BADLAND.” The ominous tones that set in are in contrast with the careless mood of the beginning. The mood changes as they start to drink.

PUT BEER CASES IN HER TRUNK,

There's a "gassy" speech about dying young, talk of lost souls of lost youth, insulting mothers, cursing a boss whose wife the speaker "fucked at least" and other lines of the same variety:

"PULLED—ØUT—MY—DØNG, —TRIED—AND FAILED—TØ SHØØT—A—BIG— WAD—TØ/ PRØVE— MY/
DISGUST—WITH—ALL." We also get a glimpse of Elvis. The tempo of the poem alternates and these alternations contribute to the unsteady feel of this part.

Then appears a character named Elie, who is dead. The speaker converses with Elie, who complains about dying young and laments the speaker's indifference towards his death. Elie alludes to his death by "I DIDN'T EVEN HAVE THE GUN BUT I TOOK THE BULLET". After Elie the speaker's mom shows up and we get another appearance by Elvis. A name, Ellman, a year, 1973, and a place, New York, flashes by. They allude to the Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry that Richard Ellman co-edited. In the poem this part goes so fast that it is almost impossible to notice. Finally, before moving to the second part of the poem, Norma Jean (Marilyn Monroe) gets a mention: "WHAT A PIECE OF ASS".

The beginning of the second part of the poem is marked by a jump to a meta-level. The speaker suddenly addresses the soundtrack. We hear shouts to which the poem alludes by "WHAT THE?" The musician, Art Blakey, is mentioned along with a studio-photo taken of him. Then, the speaker appears to identify the location where he or she⁸ is recounting these lines: "BUT—RIGHT— HERE! — I — MEAN— HØNESTLY, —IN PALPAN-/DØNG" and proceeds to give a description of something that could be a view to the street from a window. Palpandong is a street in Seoul, South-Korea (where, perhaps uncoincidentally, YHCHI is located). The poem proceeds with a description of a steady stream of cars (Nissan knock-offs) chauffeuring executives, who get a nasty treatment by the speaker; the only friend of an executive is a Giseing, a Korean Geisha

⁸ The speaker in the first part is evidently male, but the speaker in the second part is more undefined.

(also explained in the poem). The wives of the executives are at the same time “dozing in front of TV’s”.

Dakota leans towards its end with a detailed description of late night drivers delivering winter heating oil or a Chinese fast-food that is described to be unnameable and undefinable in taste. The absolute end gives a description of eating this food with disposable chopsticks and tilting “your” head left “if you’re a righty”. The speed, intensity and tempo of both text and music increase towards the end, and the “wolfing down” of the fast food could be seen as a comment for the reader who tries to “wolf” the text down. If the first part paints a sad landscape, so does the second. The only exception here is Art Blakey and music, which, as I will show, are the only positively described aspects in the poem’s world.

Dakota has a significant subtext, which is *The Cantos* I & II by Ezra Pound. At first look it is not clear at all that *Dakota* is an actual re-writing of *The Cantos* – it is quite possible to read the poem without this knowledge whatsoever. The hint to Pound is buried in one of the fast episodes in the unmistakable style of YHCHI: “FUCK—YØU, — ELLMANN, — THAT’S RIGHT— RICHARD— ELLMAN—NØRTØN—NEW YØRK, — 1973, —ØN— PØUND.” This refers to a passage in Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, where Ellman talks about Pound and also *The Cantos*. Ellman writes: “For Pound, Odysseus is the type of enterprising, imaginative man, and this voyage represents in some sense a symbol or analogy of the poet’s own voyage into the darker aspects of his civilization or the buried places of the mind.”⁹ Given the violent eruption of “FUCK YOU” it seems that either the poem’s speaker or – since the line steps out so significantly – a meta-speaker is not satisfied with Ellman’s interpretation. According to Jessica Pressman it is exactly Ellman’s easy equating of the poet and the text, and even text and meaning that YHCHI and the speed of *Dakota* tries to refute (2008, 319.)¹⁰ Be as it may, it is an important clue to the poem’s intertexts.

By comparing the two works carefully it is possible to see an abundance of connections.¹¹

The first part and the beginning of the second part are a re-appropriation of *Canto I* and the beginning of *Canto II* respectively. Furthermore, the *Cantos I&II* are a re-appropriation of

⁹ quoted through Pressman 2008, 319

¹⁰ The problem with this interpretation, however, is that based on the text it is not clear what is objected to. Is it this passage, or maybe some other? This would seem plausible, but it is also quite easy. Also, in Pound, the corresponding line goes: “Lie quiet, Divus. I mean, that is Andreas Divus, / In Officina Wecheli, 1538, out of Homer.” As Pound was acknowledging his source as the latin translation by Divus, as is the YHCHI acknowledging theirs. Only “Lie quiet” is “FUCK YOU”.

¹¹ Pressman makes this connection in her article “The Strategy of Digital Modernism: Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries’ *Dakota*” (2008). Also the authors have mentioned the connection in an interview.

Homer's *Odyssey Book XI*, which is known as the nekuaia-episode. In this episode Ulysses leaves Circe's (Cindy in *Dakota*) house and descends to the Underworld to consult the seer Tiresias (Elvis in *Dakota*) in search for guidance on how to get back home to Ithaca. In the Underworld he meets not only his mother and one of his dead men, Elpenor (Elie in *Dakota*), but also a string of famous heroes such as Achilles and a string of famous and fatal women.

Canto II begins with a reference to Robert Browning and his dramatic monologue and the Italian poet Sordello. This is supposedly Pound's own manifest of his worth and of what he is trying to achieve. He considered Browning his ancestor in poetry¹², and by the same analogy also Sordello, an Italian poet from circa 1180-1255 who was given castles by Charles I of Anjou, but who refused the gift by saying that his poetry makes him richer than castles. The beginning could thus be read as a manifest for the worth of the endeavor that the *Cantos* is. This evocation is mirrored in *Dakota* with Art Blakey.

For someone well acquainted with Homer and/or Pound, the appearance of the character's mother and a dead friend Elie could be giveaway clues to the intertexts. The most important clue is the explicit mention of Pound, which is buried in a speedy passage and could go unnoticed.

Above is the data that I deem important in interpreting this poem. It contains a certain amount of interpretation in choosing what to portray, and how to describe it, but still very little actual conclusions. Generally, if we accept the premise that our language is roughly intersubjective, the data should be accessible and agreeable to all to whom I want to communicate my interpretation. If it is not, I have failed in the description. Next I will turn to describe HOW the work is presented. This contains an explanation of what Wardrip-Fruin calls the "processes" (2010).

3. Processes: Pace, Reading Habits, Inexorability

There are three points I would like to discuss concerning *Dakota's* process. The first: how *pace* works as a tool to emphasize and de-emphasize. The second: how this pace is related to contemporary reading habits between hyper reading and close reading. The third: how the inexorable pace exerts control over the reading experience and creates a shattered sense of unity. In the first part I establish the terminology and in the second I discuss Katherine Hayles' (2012) concepts of hyper and deep attention. The third point employs Fredric Jameson's concept of schizophrenic writing.

¹² Terrell, 1980.

3.1 Pace as Emphasis

There are also three different aspects regarding movement in *Dakota*. They are *tempo*, *speed*, and *pace*.

With *tempo* I simply refer to the tempo of the music. As said, tempo in *Dakota* remains more or less the same throughout its course, but the beats and splashes vary. In the second part they become more accentuated and powerful and in the very end the tempo increases along with the pace of the text.¹³

Speed, in kinematics, is the function of time and distance. Speed in reading, however, is the function of time and the amount of text covered. *Dakota* has two kinds of speeds. The first is the amount of screens presented within a given time (lets say a minute). The other is the amount of text presented in one screen. These two combined we have the “local” reading speed at any given moment of the poem. Detailed measurement of the speed and making acceleration charts would perhaps be interesting but fortunately out of the scope of this paper.¹⁴

In *Dakota*, both the amount of screens per minute and the amount of words per screen fluctuate. Sometimes a screen stays visible up to a few seconds, sometimes it is visible for only a blink of an eye. Sometimes one word in big letterhead is presented on screen for up to few seconds, sometimes there are six words in one screen just for the blink of another eye. This fluctuation in amount of screens per minute and the amount of words per screen is what I generally call *pace*. To wrap it up: local reading speed is the function of screens per minute and the amount of words per screen. *Pace* is a more general term I use to describe the fluctuation of local reading speeds covering more than just one given instant.

How does the pace affect reading *Dakota*?

On the one extreme, pace controls legibility. The speed of text can exceed the cognitive limits of an empirical reader, as it does in several points of the poem. On the other extreme, pace can test

¹³ We could argue that it could also be the other way around: the text aligns with music.

¹⁴ *Dakota* has 1037 words and its duration is 5.56 minutes. This makes an average of 174 words per minute, which corresponds to a learning pace (100-200 wpm), which is quite slow. The first part is even slower, an approximate of 144 wpm. The second part speeds up and results in average rate of 276 wpm. In a linear page this pace would still be in the lower parts of reading for comprehension (200-400 wpm). Why is it that we struggle with getting all the words in *Dakota*, then? Because of “local” speed, acceleration and deceleration.

the reader's patience by being too slow. Theoretically, reading a work can take more than a lifetime, but this extreme *Dakota* does not approach. Furthermore, the effect of these fluctuations in pace creates *emphasis* and *de-emphasis*. The more time to read and the bigger the letters are the more emphasis the part gets. The opposite applies, too. Other means of emphasis in *Dakota* include the aforementioned beats of drums and cymbals, the changing size of the letters and repetition (frequency).¹⁵

Emphasis in *Dakota* serves different roles. As is natural, an emphasized part is deemed more important, and even more so with a poem that is only re-readable from start to finish. The emphasized parts are also the most likely ones to stick with the reader on a first reading. Another role is to throw something interesting in very quickly, so that it arouses curiosity by giving something seemingly important less weight. In theory, *Dakota* can be reread an unlimited amount of times¹⁶. Some browsers also offer the possibility to stop the text¹⁷, but that operation is not part of the inner logic of the poem.

The result of this kind of pace makes the poem's reading layered in the sense that a first reading only leaves one with an impression and a few lines that stick. For example the iconic figures of Elvis and Norma Jean are probable to leave a mark¹⁸. Elvis appears a few times in the poem and for the first time the name flickers for several moments (and ten times). But then, if one happens to get some of the half-hidden lines about Richard Ellman, one might wonder about the speaker's attitude. To be able to return to that point, one must watch the poem again. And maybe again once more. The point is that the poem controls its layers of information, and the only way to get to that information is to reread. The invitation to reread is done by hiding relevant passages also in fast de-emphasized parts for the close reader to uncover. One level of reading is thus the level of skimming and the other is the level of re-reading. Skimming and re-reading are characteristic of cognitive modes of hyper attention and deep attention, to which I will now turn.

3.2 Contemporary Reading Habits

¹⁵ For a discussion on how digital literature modifies Gerard Genette's (1988) narrative categories on time, see Eskelinen 2012, chapter 8 on "tense", p. 133-163. See also Koskimaa 2010.

¹⁶ *Dakota*'s system does not limit the amount of readings; its *access* is unlimited.

¹⁷ Right click on mouse over the poem and choose.

¹⁸ According to my unscientific questionnaires to seminar groups discussing this poem, what a reader most usually remembers is the first word „FUCKING“, the last word „RIGHTY“, drinking beer, Elvis and Norma Jean. What most report also is frustration and anxiety, with one exception. She reported not being able to read poetry in any other way.

”There’s a tendency to read quickly on the Internet. Speed is everything, and densely written texts, be they creative or critical, seem to make the reader anxious.” Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries¹⁹

“Networked and programmable media are part of a rapidly developing mediascape transforming how citizens of developed countries do business, conduct their social lives, communicate with one another, and – perhaps most significant – think.” (Hayles, 2007, 187)

We use different portable, programmable, and networked media in our everyday communication. We text, chat, mail, and make video calls. We also use these devices for information (from suitable restaurants to optimized walking routes), entertainment (from social media to news sites), and shopping. These everyday practices change not only our environment and habits, but also the ways we think. The change in thinking does not only involve forgetting the address of the restaurant midway there because it is possible to look it up anytime. It involves a change in brain structure. Indeed, N. Katherine Hayles proposes a generational shift in *cognitive styles* that can best be seen in the contrast between *deep attention* and *hyper attention* (2007, 187). Also the ways we read are affected.

These changes result in different ways of dealing with information. Deep attention, characterized by “concentrating on a single object for long periods [of time] (say, a novel by Charles Dickens), ignoring outside stimuli while so engaged, preferring a single information stream, and having a high tolerance for long focus times”, is increasingly rare. Hyper attention, which is characterized by “switching focus rapidly among different tasks, preferring multiple information streams, seeking a high level of stimulation, and having a low tolerance for boredom,” (2007, 187) seems to be more suitable for the contemporary environment.

Hyper attention and deep attention correspond to *hyper reading* and *close reading*. Hyper reading is akin to skimming and scanning, it involves grasping quickly the gist of a given text, and/or looking for keywords or phrases. Close reading, as we know, takes more time and multiple reads, pays more attention to detail and makes overall conclusions of the entirety of the text. Hyper reading is faster but more superficial. Close reading is slower but involves taking up the challenge of complexity. Both have their advantages.²⁰

¹⁹ http://iowareview.uiowa.edu/TIRW/TIRW_Archive/tirweb/feature/younghae/interview.html

²⁰ I’m currently trying to figure out the advantages and goals of hyper reading. Hayles proposes qualities such as juxtaposing different elements, handling different types of information at the same time and switching rapidly between different channels of information. But there can also be difference in the purpose of reading. Hyper reading can aim to be more entertaining, and stress the *archival* role of the reader, who collects bits of information to suit her own needs. Readings produced as such are more collections (bricolage) than interpretations and maybe serve more personal than communicative goals.

Historically, hyper attention developed first. Our environment was such that it was necessary to be alert for danger, and deep attention, which means closing out outside stimuli (at least to some degree), could have been lethal. Deep attention and close reading are the results of centuries and even millennia of practice, of more secure conditions where humans have not had to be as alert. (Hayles 2007, 188.) Now, as it is easy to testify, our environment is changing to increasingly favor speedy intake of different stimuli and multiple information streams. To this our brains seem to be more than apt. Take the Facebook environment. It is the quintessential platform for hyper attention to thrive. There we have multiple information streams (video, hyperlinks, pictures, text), even more if music is listened to at the same time (according to research, many young people do (Hayles 2007, 189)). One skims through the front page looking for stimuli, a brief glimpse at a video, a comment on someone's status, the first few sentences of an article someone shared and so on. Interaction, rapid change of focus. Nicholas Carr (2010) has discussed the different ways of how the internet molds our brains, and as he states, our brains love these kinds of environments. The new environment and the change in cognitive style do not leave literature untouched.

So what does this have to do with *Dakota*?

First a curious detail. With a hint of imagination, *Dakota*'s form resembles that of *skimming*. In a study conducted by Jacob Nielson (2006) the readers' eye movements were tracked in order to investigate what parts of a screen people are used to read. The pattern of reading a screen was in the form of the letter F. One reads the top of the page more carefully than later parts. The area of attention is diminished the farther down the page we go. *Dakota* performs the letter F with its speed. It begins with a moderate pace and speeds up towards the end. There is fluctuation during the poem, it is not a steady acceleration, but still the overall pattern resembles that of skimming.

However, as I argued in the previous part, *Dakota* is not only a poem to be skimmed, or: to be *hyper read*. It is a negotiation between hyper and close reading. It is both. Its surface presentation corresponds to that of the new cognitive style – the online environment with flashy text and music. The pace corresponds to that of skimming and scanning: first one pays more attention, then less and less, skipping a part here and there. But having “scanned” the poem I only have an impression. Scanning *Dakota*, at least for a reader like me, is not enough. I have to know more. It feeds punch-line like phrases such as “a gassy speech about dying young” and rouses curiosity

with the presence of iconic, essentially dead, pop stars. What is this poem about, I ask. So, I have to reread. That involves taking up the reserve of deep attention.

Dakota does not fit perfectly to hyper attentive reading. Granted, it offers a lot of stimuli and if music is taken as a separate information stream, also multiple information streams. But it does not contain changes in tasks, hyperlinks, or interactivity of any kind. Moreover, it *denies* interactivity and makes the reader pay attention to a single information stream (or two constant ones) – if she is to get what is said in the poem.

We arrive at the same double logic as with speed: *Dakota* is partly fashioned after the new mode of grasping, the hyper attentive mode. On the one hand, it strives to hold the reader's attention with a hasty pace, on the other it sometimes goes too fast and denies control over the reading. But shouldn't we have decades of experience on receiving images and music simultaneously? We are accustomed to seeing and reading *images* thus, but not text. Still, reading most of the poem is not difficult. In some parts it is a little uncomfortable, and the very end is arguably too fast even for the extreme end of the hyper attentioned. Curiously, we can envisage a future where the words are read easily since readers get more and more quick in recognizing images.²¹ Films grow faster and faster as they try to hold our attention. The increase in speed does not, unfortunately, pile up as better understanding. And as *Dakota* shows, the case is different with reading *words*.

The other end of the logic appears in *Dakota's* invitation for deep attention. This invitation is extended by not showing all cards at once, and giving hints of a rewarding closer look. It can be viewed as an exemplary experiment of the fruits of hyper and deep reading practices. In the best scenario, it gives an impression of something interesting when scanned through, while also containing clues that give rise to suspicion: there is something else, something worth investigating, worth a closer look. And as I argue in part 4, the closer look is indeed rewarding.

²¹ Grounded on Hollywood and TV producer Alexander Singer's word Hayles makes a claim that the time to recognize an image has reduced from 20 seconds to 2-3 seconds in 50 years. She does not repeat the claim made in 2007 in her book in 2012. That figure seems incredible indeed, although the general direction is entirely believable. To have some idea of the change, I compared Budweiser advertisements (the most commercial media, and thus – I figured – most on the edge of time) from 1956 and 2013. In the 1min 5 sec. commercial from 1956 there was 20 different images (or screens), and in the same length 2013 version there was almost 50 images. The amount has more than doubled in little under 60 years. This comparison is of course an individual instance. During the first minute and five seconds of *Dakota* there is approx. 44 screens. Bud 1956: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zpo1uGO28aM>, and Bud 2013: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=Z43WNg76OYk>

Still, as the deeper attention is grasped, it resists reading, for the poem bears no tools for examining the text in detail²².

Hayles formulates the problem of the two different modes as follows: “[H]ow to convert the increased digital reading into increased reading ability, and how to make effective bridges between digital reading and the literacy traditionally associated with print.” (2012, 56.) Some fear that the loss of deeper attention leads to less intelligent people, and some, as Mark Bauerlein (2009) for example, believe that the dumbest generation of all time is already here.²³

Before making conclusions on whether *Dakota* celebrates hyper attention or rewards deep attention, and on what is particular in its interplay of data and process, there remains one aspect of process I want to bring to the fore. It is less a technical one and something that is more difficult to grasp. It has to do with the *feeling* of reading *Dakota*.

3.3 Inexorability and Lost Unity

As we have seen, *Dakota*’s pace is inexorable. Reading at one’s own pace is not an option. I am reading at *its* own pace, and sometimes that pace is so fast that reading is more akin to skimming or just glancing. Losing control over reading can lead to frustration and agony. But why? We are used to moving images and we are used to moving text, such as subtitles. We do not ask: what is this? From a technical point of view, *Dakota* is temporally controlled conventional organized verbal communication mixed with flashing screens and organized sound. The elements are familiar, but the combination of the elements, and that the pace exceeds our ability to read, is unusual. The uneasiness is furthered by the sense of the text being fed to us along flashes and splashes. How to grasp this discomfort?

In reference to postmodernism, Fredric Jameson talks about *schizophrenic writing*. One of the aspects is the breakdown of the signifying chain and thus presenting a succession of *presents* that are cut out of their connection to each other.

“If we are unable to unify the past, present and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown

²² Firefox offers a solution to this, though. The browser allows to stop the flash feed, albeit clumsily. Youtube is a better navigational tool. This of course, is not an integral part of the poem.

²³ On a sidenote, works like *Dakota* might be useful in trying to bridge the gap between hyper and close reading. That would require an educative model with links to the two ostensive intertexts, and a tool with which to scroll the text at a more moderate pace.

of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents of time.” (1991, 27.)

He gives a simple example of a print poem by Bob Perelman (*China*), where the temporal and contextual connections between consecutive stanzas are confusing. I argue that the same happens even more forcefully in *Dakota*, since with the lack of control the reader is virtually trapped in the present. Furthermore, the reader struggles to form a *unity* which would consist of an understanding of the past, present and the future of the text. Let us explore this idea further.

What is the past in *Dakota*? It is what the reader remembers to have happened. But it is not possible to grasp the past since the poem presents new material all the time. There is not enough time to process the fairly rapid stream of information. I, the reader, am trapped in the present and the present is in the move. What is future, then? Future is unknown. I do not know how long it will last, and I do not have the means to make it cohere with the present or with the past. Furthermore, the speedier parts break the “signifying chain” and create gaps in the assumed narration. In addition to not being able to grasp the past or the future, I also realize that I don’t have access to all of the relevant information. So what I experience is a succession of presents that are difficult to make into a coherent story. Why do I assume that there is a story? At least two aspects. One is that the poem begins like a story; we are set up for a road trip, a narrative topos is activated. The other unifying element is music. Music stays the same throughout the poem. It does not lure with melody but it is very recognizable and most importantly, it is clearly the same song throughout the poem. Furthermore, music and words (or word-images) are in sync. They enforce rather than contradict each other.

Dakota promises a story that may well make sense, but denies access to it on a first reading, and thus invites or even forces further readings. In the worst case it only frustrates the reader, in a better case it also invokes interest. Further readings reward the reader and lessen the unease; there indeed exists more layers to uncover. In the next part I explore the different layers and the possibilities of combining data and process to form a tentative interpretation of the poem.

4 Interpretation: False Ideologies and Solace in Art

4.01 Interpreting Process

To include both process and data to the interpretation, I must ask why is this work presented in this manner. Since *Dakota's* form is not unique, but concerns all of YHCHI's work, let us talk about the reasons behind the general form first. One reason to this form is what is well described by Grusin and Bolter as *hypermediacy*. Hypermedia strives for the "real" by trying to present the viewer/reader/listener with "the rich sensorium of human experience" (Bolter & Grusin 1998, 34). This is a double logic, since on the one hand it strives for immediacy by aspiring to be close to the "human experience" of our time (hyper attention, online environment), but by way of doing that it draws attention to its medium, its interface.

In *Dakota* the striving for the "rich sensorium" is visible. As said above, hyper readers usually enjoy multiple information streams such as listening to music while completing another task. *Dakota* moves a textual story to, in principle, more accessible video-format and presents music along as well. The attempt to update an existing basic medium²⁴, text, to a more contemporary form is evident. But it does not stop there. It manipulates the interface to *exceed* the "real" and go faster than it is possible for the reader to follow. If a single information stream consumed at one's own pace is "boring"²⁵, *Dakota's* two main information streams and the form, text, music and controlled pace, is *too much*. It draws attention to its medium by going beyond the new "real" environment.

By exceeding the limits we are able to recognize the limits. *Dakota* makes us aware of our capacity to consume this kind of information and it also makes us aware of our will to control the consumption itself and the quantity of information thus consumed. And for readers like me, ones with an interpretive goal, the poem also might trigger a need for coherence, a need to know what happens, and why does it so happen.

4.1. Combining Data and Process: Dying Young and Digital Modernism

The above is a general condition of all of these types of works, and though it is possible to interpret only a process, it does not satisfy my need for an interpretation of this *particular* work.

²⁴ Elleström (2010) divides „medium“ to *basic* and *qualified*. Basic and qualified media are abstract categories; "moving images" would be an instance of a basic medium as "cinema" would be an instance of qualified media. Qualified media can be qualified in two ways. The first is contextual, which means the cultural, historical and social circumstances. The second is an operational qualifying aspect, which qualifies the aesthetic from the functional. For example, dance is a qualified medium with an aesthetic function, whereas sign language is a qualified medium with a communicative function. Both of them use "organized movement" as their basic medium.

²⁵ As for example Mark Fisher recounts his students to report (2009, 23).

To combine the data with the process I have to first look closer at the data and then see how it works together with the processes.

By controlling the access to information the poem creates different layers of reading. The first is that of a hyper reader, a glimpse of what it could be: an arrogant “FUCKING”, a road trip, an Elvis here, a Norma Jean there, dying young, drinking and the last word, “RIGHTY”, all in sync with rhythmical jazz and some shouts. The additional readings reveal the intertext to Pound by explicit reference to Pound’s commentator. A careful comparison with Pound’s *Cantos* I & II reveal that the first part is actually a meticulous rewriting of the first *Canto*. Why rewrite *The Cantos*? Two helpful concepts: Jessica Pressman’s “Digital Modernism” (2008), and Linda parody’s potential for both a “disdainful laugh” and a “knowing smile” (Hutcheon 1998).

Digital modernism is defined as follows:

[A]n identifiable organizing principle for a subset of electronic literature that shares a common, conscious modus operandi: these works use central aspects of modernism to highlight their literariness, authorize their experiments, and situate electronic literature at the center of a contemporary digital culture that privileges images, navigation, and interactivity over narrative, reading, and textuality. (Pressman 2008, 303)

Pressman further argues that using the digital platform to convey “modernist” texts with “post-modernist” elements *Dakota* makes a claim of poetry’s capability of “making it new” – again – in a digital environment. By doing so *Dakota* would make a value statement about literature and try to establish itself and its style inside the realm of digital literature. As stated in chapter 2, *Canto II* begins with evoking the poet Robert Browning and the Italian poet Sordello. This could be seen as Pound’s own manifest of the effort he is embarking on, the epic that *The Canto’s* were supposed to come. This is mirrored in *Dakota*, which could be seen as a manifest of the worth of YHCHI’s project, which was to become the YHCHI website.

Digital modernism answers the question of why *Dakota* is a rewriting of *Canto* I & II in this manner. But that is still only a partial answer, since a further comparison reveals that the second part is not a rewriting anymore – with the exception of the few lines in the beginning – but something very different. Two questions remain: 1. How is the rewriting done, and what does that mean? And 2. How the first and the second part relate to each other?

First answer: The rewriting of part I is an obvious *parody* which is both respectful and disdainful. It respects the target of its parody by having the same goal (the case of digital modernism above)

but it disrespects its target by saying that the *Cantos* is hopelessly obsolete. This change is visible with the addition of the musical and visual elements, but also in language. *Dakota*'s language is far from the eloquence of Pound's. It is colloquial, arrogant, and blunt. To be able to determine it further, let us take a closer look at part I of *Dakota*.

If we look at what is emphasized in part I, we see that the speaker is possessed by the idea of dying young and being a "lost soul of lost youth". The character's unwillingness to confront dead Elie is also emphasized. Instead of confronting Elie he wants to feel sorry for himself and not think about anything else. To understand Elie's importance we have to know who he is.

Elie in *Dakota* is Elpenor in the *Odyssey* and faithfully in *Canto* I. In the subtexts the unfortunate Elpenor falls down a ladder after waking up in a drunken slumber on Circe's roof. On the fall, he breaks his neck and dies. Unwitting of the accident, Ulysses leaves Elpenor unburied, and does not return for him after learning that he is missing. Being left unburied as a nobody, in the ancient tradition, for a young man and a warrior was the most terrible thing to happen.

Ulysses meets Elpenor in the Underworld, where Elpenor pleads for Ulysses' return to his unburied corpse. He pleads for a proper burial so that he could rest in peace. Elpenor also laments his untimely death – mainly because he died without much of heroic acts to attach to his name. Ulysses does not abide to Elpenor's plead.

In *Dakota* the speaker meets dead Elie "WHINY AS EVER" and tries to shrug him off. He describes Elie as "A CUNT, A GUY FROM THE OLD GANG SHOT DEAD / A GANG BANG AND A BREAK IN ALL OF IT COMING DOWN ON ME." A moment later in a quick passage Elie says blamingly: "YØU—WERE— SUPPØSED —TØ— WATCH — ØUT—FØR—ME. / DIDN'T EVEN HAVE THE GUN BUT I TOOK THE BULLET AND NOW I'M IN HELL". This blame that Elie appoints to the speaker *does not* exist neither in Pound nor in Homer. In the original, Elpenor's death is pure accident (propelled by haste and drunkennes). In *Dakota* Elie blames the speaker and the speaker feels the guilt.

On the surface the idea of living fast and dying young is prominent. It is foregrounded with the images of Elvis and Marilyn Monroe, who both famously followed that particular prescription. Elie, however, is the only one from the gang who actually died young, and he knows that there is nothing glorious about it. He says: DØ YØU/ KNØW — WHAT/ IT IS — TØ DIE/ YØUNG, — A — NØBØDY— LIKE —ME, — AND —ALREADY— FØRGØTTEN? —

NEVER/ EVEN— GØT/ LAID— JUST—A— HAND —JØB— BUT — A — GØØD— ØNE”. Aside from the pleasures of physical existence it would be important to have a name, to be remembered.

Elie has the same centennial lament Elpenor has in the *Odyssey*. Elpenor’s worry is that he did not have the opportunity to have *kleos*, which in Greek means glory, honor and renown or fame. *Kleos* for men was inseparable from a glorious death as a young warrior.²⁶ Elpenor did go to war, but his death was less honorable, and without someone making the proper burial rites he will not be remembered. The glory of accomplishing oneself at war is in *Dakota* contrasted with getting laid, maybe so suggesting that the *kleos* for contemporary men is tied more to the success in conquering not nations but sexual partners.

This *kleos* can be contrasted to Achilles, whom Ulysses also meets in the respective part in the Underworld. Achilles’ *kleos* is undeniable; he is the emblem of a famous hero died young. Both a hero in the epics and a hero in stories and proverbs. But how does Achilles respond to Ulysses’ praise? That he would “rather be a servant of a poor man on the earth than ruler of all the dead below”. So death, even with *kleos*, is not seen to be better than life. Elie and Elpenor replay Achilles’ wish. In this light, *Dakota* could be seen as ridiculing the ideology of dying young and famous²⁷. Furthermore, the false ideology of dying young can be seen as an escape mechanism for the speaker, who doesn’t want to accept responsibility for his friend’s death. It is a psychological cover for not feeling guilty.

Answer to the question (on page 17) of how the two parts relate to each other is found in fakeness. Contemporary existence is bleak also in the second part, where almost everything is fake. The executives cheat on their wives with prostitutes, who pretend to listen to their boring stories. The wives doze in front of TV’s in a slumber. Even the cars are knock offs and food is

²⁶ For the traditional use of *kleos*, see e.g. *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (2007, 36). Interestingly, *kleos* is not only immortal fame achieved by great acts in war, but could also be a medium, as with the poet Pindar, who explicitly names himself as the maker of *kleos* (ibid. 48). Furthermore, there are other ways of making *kleos* that are reserved not only to men, such as weaving a material artefacts. This was done by Helen in the *Iliad*, as Melissa Mueller argues (*Helios*, Volume 37, Number 1, Spring 2010, pp. 1-21, Texas Tech University Press).

²⁷ Many people suggest that Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) would serve as an excellent reference to *Dakota*. This reference, aside from the quintessential “road trip” theme in the first part of the poem, does not go very far. Yes, Sal and Dean are young, but they are not sad as everything in *Dakota* is. They are the opposite of being cynical. They are active whereas in *Dakota* the speaker is passive. They embrace everything they see, in *Dakota* the speaker is literally disgusted by all. The word “beating” is mentioned in *Dakota*, but by Elvis who says that the speaker should take a break and stop his buddies from “beating” the living daylights from each other. I do not see *On the Road* as a fruitful reference to *Dakota*, but if anyone sees a profitable connection, please tell me.

fast food, “unnameable and undefinable”. This contrast of contemporary Seoul to the rewriting of an ancient myth in the landscape of the state of Northern Dakota in the US gives a cross cut of societies burdened by fakeness. The pursuit to fame is seen as empty and the feelings of the speaker as a symptom of this empty pursuit. To further the image *Dakota* is not only an area of two states (North- and South) and a native American tribe, but also a building in New York. The building is famous for accommodating celebrities, most famous of which was ex-beatle John Lennon, shot in front of the building by Marc Chapman, who claimed J. D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* as his motive. Curiously, the novel’s protagonist Holden Caulfield sees almost everything as “phony”. The false ideology can further be seen as inexorably fed to us as is the poem, leading to shattered sense of unity and frustration.

The contemporary landscape suggested by the poem is bleak. Luckily the poem does not only offer a bleak picture, but also an alternative. This is found in Art Blakey, who is presented as a pioneer: NØ MIND/ HEARD— ‘Ø’ TINDE’/ ØR—DINGA/ DINGA’— BEFØRE/ YØURS DID, — WHICH/ MAKES YØU— ART/BLAKEY, — I MEAN/ MØRE— THAN ART/ BLAKEY: — IT MAKES/ YØU THE/—ØNLY ART/ BLAKEY. The only thing presented in an almost uniquely positive light is the music and the musician. Everything else from literature to countries to culture is useless and offers no solace for the disappointed. Music is treated as the most genuine fabric of life, and although the speaker only has access to it indirectly (the speaker listens to a recording and looks at photos of recordings) it is at the same time *present in the moment*: “NØT IN/ DETRØIT — ØR IN A/ RECØRDING/ STUDIØ— IN NEW/ JERSEY— BUT—RIGHT— HERE! — I — MEAN— HØNESTLY, —IN PALPAN-/DØNG!” The music happens there and then and it exists for the listeners only: “WE — BLARE— THE — TUNES— TØ— RØUSE—NØ —ØNE— BUT — ØURSELVES”. No need to be famous, no need to pretend. The poem ultimately performs the same with its form: it presents a succession of present moments.

I have argued that *Dakota* invites reading in layers. The first layer is that of a hyper reader. It resembles a music video or an advertisement that foregrounds popular ideology of being famous and dying young. It is a celebration of speed, surface and the superficial, a cavalcade of “iconic” presents with colloquial language, cynical attitude and pop-icons. Anything disturbing goes past so fast that there is no need nor time to pay attention to it. At first reading a deeper look is denied. But then a closer reading, that necessitate multiple re-readings, reveal additional and (to continue the metaphor) deeper layers of meaning, which gradually flip the ideology upside down, and the celebrated is seen as miserable. It is miserable because it is not genuine. The form of the

poem suggests that it is in fact fed to us, and if we do not look closer, we end up wolfing it down unchewed.

Two things are offered instead. The first is authenticity, to need be genuine, in which an age old plea of art for art's sake is also visible: to "BLARE THE TUNES" to one self only, but also to become a pioneer like Art Blakey. In the celebration of the "only Art Blakey" the poem replays the ideology of being "the only" in something, but albeit it resembles the need to be famous, it is more complex, since what is celebrated is not the aspiration to be famous (Art Blakey is no Elvis), but the pursuit of excellence in craft of choice. The second way out from the bleakness is suggested by the poem's form. Through layering its information to reward deeper attention it also promotes close reading – as if to say that to get to the bottom of things the surface is not enough. One has to pay a little more attention.

5. Epilogue

What is the relationship between reading and interpretation? In this paper I have talked about different modes and layers of reading. Every reading naturally involves a certain amount of interpretation, but *an interpretation* of a given work means something different. I claim to make an interpretation in this paper. The interpretation and the attempt to communicate it consist of answers to four interrelated questions. First: What is the data of the work? Second: How is the data presented in the work i.e. what are its processes? Third: Why this particular data is presented via these particular processes? After answering this question there remains only one further question, the fourth: what does it mean that this particular data is presented via this particular process? This answers what the work is about.

Along with everything above, I, the reader who wants to communicate his interpretation, offer the suggested four aspects of interpretation to you, also a reader, under investigation and evaluation.

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