Janez Strehovec: **E-Literary Text in Nomadic Cockpit**

(E-Literature, New Media Art and Locative Media)

New mobile technologies shape the way, in which people communicate and perceive the reality. Our basic position is the *nomadic cockpit* (expression coined by the author of this paper) in terms of one being armed with many of navigating and controlling mobile screenic devices (from cell phones and tablets to consoles, cameras, and various players). When we move around in our surroundings armed with such devices we steady perceive the data shown on the screen of such a device, which means that both the visual and aural interfaces are integrated in our experience of walking or riding through environment. Virtual data approaching from the remote context on the screen are related to and coordinated with our basic, non-mediated perception from the physical here and now. Such a digital technology, provoking one's hands on controls activity becomes incorporated in the experience and understanding of our being-on-the-move.

The focus on mobility and the corporeality addressed by it is close to the cultural shift in contemporary philosophy, where the linguistic, discursive and textual give way to the material, biological, life, event-driven and post-political (Negri, 2011; Agamben, 1998; Virno, 2004; Thacker, 2011). By shifting the focus on life, biopolitics and the body, the political issues that concern movement, feelings, affects and broader perception issues are also highlighted, particularly with regard to the art and (new) media (Hansen, 2003; Massumi, 2011). When we are addressing the philosophical issues on one's mobility, also De Certeau (1984) regards on pedestrian's tactics should be taken into account.

It is characteristic of recent communication with mobile screenic devices that the latter introduce users into situations based on the virtualization of space, for they smoothly incorporate remote data into the user's current position and the "text" connected with it. Such devices, which presuppose the disappearance of hard and fast boundaries between physical reality and virtual worlds, are changing the way we perceive geographical space and encouraging new forms, not only of communication, but also of behavior, movement and participation. The body is stimulated to behave in a special way, one required for mobile phone conversations, which would come off as artificial and unnatural when compared with its ordinary posture and movements. We encounter a series of specific responses of the body to the mobile screenic device; taking a call often requires that we stop, move away from the chosen path, stop and start walking in a new direction. Likewise specific is the way

individuals turn away from their physical interlocutors in such moments, the way they cover their mouths and search for, let's say, a closed-off privacy, needed for a calm conversation with a distant caller.

In the present, it can be seen that an individual's path is a function of data being received in real time via mobile screenic devices, included in the individual's *nomadic cockpit*, mentioned in the opening paragraph. On the path from point A to point B the individual has an incoming call, which she directs to point C. And when she reaches that point there is no guarantee that she will then direct herself to the original destination (point B), but might keep going (based on a received call or other crucial information, for instance, about the road and weather conditions, which she looked up on the mobile screenic device) towards point D. The individual's path is a journey, constantly interrupted and modified by different pieces of information and feedback loops. Such a trajectory is non-linear, the contingent, the speeded-up by means of technological advances that occur in networks, in which the flow of data is too fast for the cause-and-effect way of behavior and thinking.

From physical mobility to the e-text on the move

Similar uncertainty, arising from mobility, and stops in intermediary positions, defined by the before and after, the not-yet and not-anymore, also accompanies electronic literary text (as one of the topic of this paper), which is a variable, uncertain entity that seems very nervous to a static observer; let's call it a textscape on the move. It is displayed on desktops and laptops and is even more conspicuous on tablets and mobile phones, on which digital literary texts are also starting to be placed, i.e. projects of current electronic literature, which places increasing importance on new media specificity and integration into an algorithmic culture as the principal culture of the present. (Strehovec, 2012).

This direction is not held by e-writers alone; in the present we are contemporaries to a number of projects in new media art that likewise use such devices, especially in connection with mobile, locative and tactical media. Along with this practice there are also attempts in generating projects on locative literature, which is in fact disseminated by locative media, however such a practice should not be strictly speaking considered as electronic literature. In describing one of such a project, Anders Sundnes Løvlie writes: "The most important outcome of the *flâneur* game, then, is not in the literary texts as they appear on screen, but in the exploration of a new way of perceiving and interacting with the urban environment. Thereby, the texts take on a certain documentary quality – in that they are produced from raw

materials that are found in the urban environment." (2013) In contrary to such movements in locative literature, which is first and foremost born mobile and locative, the electronic locative literature is bound to the screen and deploys the new media specificity as well as the mobility and the speed issues (say, it is born digital as well as mobile and locative).

When discussing e-literature on mobile screenic devices, we must also draw a line between projects that merely use such a device as a medium for e-literary projects that could also be viewed on stationary computer screens (for instance, desktops and monitors in installations, placed in galleries, and on e-book readers) and between projects made exclusively for mobile screenic devices (mobile phones in particular), which are adapted to the experience of new modes of mobility. One of the projects that make good use of the advantages of mobility and locative networks is *AndOrDada* (2008) by Bauer and Suter, which is based on an application prepared for the Android operating system.

This piece (subtitled by the road poem), which has also significant audio feature (the live changeable text is read aloud) is prepared with the intention of generating text depending on the user's passing through locations. The application produces text-under-transformation, depending on the user's path (walking, driving), when the input captured by wide local area network communications at a certain location influences the flow of the text and modifies it. In short, this project expands the area of e-literature by opening itself up to direct influences from the environment. Rather than being a means through which the (urban) spatiality is formed, the mobility as bodily situated practice generates in a case of *AndOrDada* also by new media technologies shaped textual event.

Such an event based on mobile and locative experience occurs in a world whose main quality is speed, which implies a special constellation, defined by greater or smaller speed, acceleration, riding, and racing. Without being familiar with the hardware and software that generates contemporary textuality, William S. Burroughs wrote in *The Invisible Generation*: "Take any text speed it up slow it down run it backwards inch it and you will hear words that were not in the original recording new words made by the machine different people will scan out different words of course but some of the words are quite clearly there and anyone can hear them words which were not in the original tape but which are in many cases relevant to the original text as if the words themselves had been interrogated and forced to reveal their hidden meanings."(218).

Burroughs was fascinated with the capabilities of the tape recorder, whose functions he applied to textual material. His essay, from which this quote was taken, dates from 1962 (when he made experiments with type recorder) and everything in it focuses on the technical

manipulability of text, which experienced an actual bloom only with the new generation of technologies, namely those that are based on computers and digitization. In any case Burroughs's reference to speed and the acceleration as a generator of new mode by which the modern textuality operates is important even with regard to e-literature as a practice based on the placing the textual components into the dry run condition.

Speed is what brings things to clarity, to an experimental and accelerated state, which make them to the motion in the sense of riding as an as much as possible intensive, (in the popular culture, e. g. in theme park attractions) often by the loops shaped experience. Such a mobility implies even the condition of being endangered, which the German expression *Erfahrung* used by Walter Benjamin alludes to etymologically; the expression contains both *Fahrt* (ride) and *Gefahr* (danger). In a certain way both of these components are also involved in the English term 'experience', since, when one experiences something, one moves around it and if one goes (too) far, one becomes endangered. Speed is also experienced in e-literary texts (for example in electronic animated poetry and poetry generators), when one "rides" the tapes of words-images-in-motion, yet at the same time with regard to text/film one tries to capture and perceive that which has not yet been included in the ride, is not accelerated and is outside the field of vision, but is also important for the understanding of such a screenic text (Strehovec, 2010).

AndOrDada as a piece of locative textual art presupposes both, the motion and *Erfahrung*, because "in locative media representation becomes secondary in comparison to the sensorial experience" (San Cornelio, Ardevol), which relates in a same time to textual and physical ride. What is still essential for, let's say, the philosophy of *AndOrDada* and other pieces of locative e-literature (e. g. *Strange Rain* by Erik Loyer)? First of all it should be mentioned that it concerns an application accessible to a broad circle of users of mobile phones with this OS. The reader/user of the application is by no means not only one familiar with e-literature (and with mobile and locative media); this application can address an ordinary user as well, for whom this project presents the first, perhaps completely accidental encounter with e-literature, which means that such practice has a highly democratic nature. What is crucial for the understanding of e-literary projects for mobile and locative media is primarily that which comes from the new phenomenology of mobility and location crossing, which means that we are no longer dealing with static forms of reading, but with, for instance, two readings/ riding; namely, one that defines the very journey into artificial e-literary worlds

and one that derives from the various physical movements of the reader, i.e. the reading/riding in a physical space.

Suddenly, both rides are important, as well as their interactions (including intervals between them in terms of in-between) which creates a new experience of e-literary space; one that is more complex than interactivity, as seen in opposition to immersive effects. Now the text comes to life during a ride in the physical space, because the user is constantly stimulated by the adventure of the ride, as several crossings (and feedback loops between both rides, the textual and the user's) provide richer perception and experience of e-literary text (which is the case of *AndOrDada*).

In relating to this "road poem" we can talk upon the expanded textuality as a result of stable textual scheme overlaid with mobile informational texts considered as a derivative of writing on the move. Such an expanded textuality that is flexible and nervous to a greater extent is a result of our ability to "move physically/spatially and virtual/informational at the same time" (Lemos, 2010b: 404-405). We are facing a new mode of textual experience in terms of relational text, which is increasingly experienced as shifting, variable and contingent. Such a text is an outcome of our traversing of the relational space, which is generated at the intersection of various practices, discourses, tactics and (bio)politics. *AndOrDada* also demonstrates that it is no longer point in addressing the e-literary text as being only generated by author, on contrary, such a textuality merges into a hybrid one, where one meets both the author's text and the platform text shaped with the networks and transmitted by GSM, GPS, CCTV, UMTS, WIFI and RFID. We live in mixed and augmented reality and as such is also the text, which consists of author's text and by the components of algorithmic culture generated and contextualised textual components.

In the world of reading/riding

In such e-literary projects it is the very integration of mobility (ride) in the physical world that distinguishes the perception and reading of these projects from the reading of traditional texts on mobile phones and e-book readers (e. g. kindle); the philosophy of the latter manner of reading characteristically employs new technology to continue the reading-as-we-know-it; the only change being that it takes place in new locations with the use of new devices; its aim is the transfer (e. g. the mental ride) of the reader into fictitious worlds, which is adapted to new locations only. As a special example of e-literary work for mobile phones, let us mention the project *Shadows Never Sleep* (2008) by Aya Karpinska, which inventively uses the specificity

of Apple multi-touch displays (on iPhone, iPod touch and iPad), which the author expressed with the syntagms "zoom narrative" and "read by zooming", however, this app does not make use of the effects of mobility and mobile networks.

On the other hand, e-literature in projects such as *AndOrDada* takes into account the context (including the new media paratexts, and other nonverbal metadata) the specificity of the location and the networking junctures, and introduces this experience into the very concept of e-literary work, which lives off the contents and stimuli received in real time in a specific location, to which it directs the algorithm that is integrated into such a piece. "Through the emphasis on relationality found in such projects, an understanding of context as something open and constantly shifting rather than static emerges, an understanding similarly suggested by socially-oriented locative media projects where what is at stake is not just placing data or locating objects but a dynamic relationality that occurs through the overlapping of different kinds of mapping - geographical, social network, etc - within social interfaces to places (locative.org)." (Hemment, 2004). Also characteristic of the philosophy of such a piece is that in the age of new media we are encountering an expanded concept of authorship, defined as an art platform (Goriunova, 2012). The today's pluriverse of texts contains both authorial texts, written in natural and artificial languages and texts that are machine generated or a hybrid of the two, as are the poetry generators.

In the case of *AndOrDada* we encounter an expanded concept of reading/riding, which denotes corporeal experiencing of texts beyond the traditional reading in the sense of meaning decoding and linguistic comprehension (Hoover and Gouch, 1990). The reader is a *flaneur*, who integrates the perception of location in a real standpoint as well as the data she receives from various networks via smart screenic devices that are included in her nomadic cockpit, into her mobile experience. The reader gains "more" from the ride or walk by completing her experiencing of the real location with the data contents that are being generated in that location and distributed via networks. If the reader enters into the dispositif of reading an e-text such as *AndOrDada*, it makes sense for her to open up to such multi-modal textuality and follow the moving road poem on the screen, the algorithm of which enables the entry of new textual units into the basic poem structure. The reader must also possess prior knowledge in order to experience and read such an e-text, meaning that she must start by obtaining as much data as possible on the piece (e. g. reviews, documentation, metadata and statements considered as new forms of paratexts), becoming acquainted with the new media art of mobile and locative media, with e-literature and with similar projects in particular. In order to read, understand and experience such a piece properly one must also possess new media literacy (as

an ability to navigate the new media contents), and abandon the established horizon of expectations on textual specificity (Jauss's term) defined with the print based literature.

Today we are witnessing the closeness of the newer generation of e-literature with new media art, so now let us devote our attention to a typical new media work of art in the field of mobile and locative media, namely the project *The Transborder Immigrant Tool*, created by the Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0. This piece aims to re-appropriate widely available technologies to be used as a form of humanitarian aid. Such an artistic 'tool' consists of an inexpensive GPS cell phone and custom software. The software directs the user of the phone toward the nearest aid site, be that water, first aid or law enforcement, along with other contextual navigational information. This is accomplished by a Java based application, written by Brett Stalbaum, which accesses the phone's ability to receive GPS information without needing to send out data, that might allow the user to be located, or network connectivity. The Transborder Immigrant Tool can be seen as part of a larger shift from tactical media to tactical bio-politics. The EDT seeks to engage the political potential opened up by technologies which can serve to improve people's lives directly, including medical technologies and systems such as GPS.

On the other hand, if we take a look at e-literature, we can find out that this field in its extreme forms, primarily revolutionizes language itself, redefining narrative in terms of replacing its linear forms with the more abbreviated and multi-medial storytelling, establishing a laboratory for the experiencing of the letter and the word under new media conditions (for example, the practice of e-poetry generators and John Cayley's "Writing to be found" with Google). E-literature also challenges reading by focusing on arrangements of words in a mode of illegibility (e.g. Jim Rosenberg's Diagrams series). However, with regard to experiencing new forms of social engagement, it is less radical than the new media art.

Furthermore, e-literature and new media art are faced with the challenge of significant shifts in their functionality, as both are expanding the area of activities and aims far away from the canon and the functions of art and literature, as we know them. E-literary projects are becoming increasingly post-literary in the sense that they are abandoning literariness, narrative, metaphysical qualities and evoking lyrical atmospheres, and are placing other qualities and tasks to the fore, including those that e-literature has in common with the new media art. What is essential for the latter is that it is post-aesthetic and post-artistic, meaning that it no longer places aesthetic and artistic values in the foreground, nor the aspirations to exhibit in the traditional places (and institutions) of art that are connected with them.

Since the origins of new media art we have been contemporaries of a strong tendency towards a spectacle, produced with high-tech, towards the surface, towards the play of attractive signifiers, stimulating the senses (at the beginning of the 1990s, the Ars Electronica festivals promoted first and foremost such pieces); yet today it seems that an artistic performance of a pure event and of "intensities of direct sensual stimulation" (Darley, 3) no longer suffices. It is expected from this practice to contribute some surpluses in outlining the alternative politics (hactivism), alternative approaches to scientific research, as well as on the level of the social organization of life itself and ethics (i.e. helping people in need, spreading literacy). E-literature has a strong presence in this, especially when it concerns education for new media (e. g. digital) literacy and for the critique of metaphysics, connected with the traditionalist literary pedagogy and with the role of the author-genius.

Toward the digital tangible

By the new media shaped texts are intended for screenic presentation, which is why we always read them on a very specific technological platform that (over)determines the accessibility of the text, its manipulability, and its ways of reading. The crossing over from the text's physical presence to its digital expanse on the screen presents theorists of reading with certain problems.

"The reading process and experience of a digital text are greatly affected by the fact that we click and scroll, in contrast to tactilely richer experience when flipping through the pages of a print book. When reading digital texts, our haptic interaction with the text is experienced as taking place at an indeterminate distance from the actual text, whereas when reading print text we are physically and phenomenologically (and literally) in touch with the material substrate of the text itself." (Mangen, 2008: 405)

It fact, in the process of reading we are not in direct physical relation with the e-literary text (we do not touch the pages of printed text, nor turn them), yet this is by no means a drawback; on the contrary, e-text is there in a very subtle interface-shaped dispositif, so that we are in a certain sense closer to it than we are on the printed textual platform, which presupposes merely a sort of rudimentary turning of the pages. Let us note here that turning the pages, touching the paper, and even sensing its scent undoubtedly signals the presence of a text in the reader's physical proximity; however these activities are accompanied by the reader's

powerlessness to simply reach into the text and manipulate it. With an e-text, however, we encounter the subtle, interface-based presence of the reader/user in the text itself in terms of her identification with the cursor as a moving avatar, which marks the reader's position in the textscape. In the digital text the reader is in fact where the cursor is, while the latter is in near proximity to the word itself and to its atomic units – letters. Furthermore, the cursor is not there as a coincidental ornament but is an active factor that can erase a letter, add a new one, or insert a punctuation mark, that is to say, alter the text from the inside in such a way that its operations can be concealed (it is impossible to do this with a printed text). Rather than being a simple opposition, the digital and the tangible are linked by new media technologies that enable subtle forms of, let us say, the digital tangible. Such a tangible is not something concrete: we are not dealing with visible operations, but with very subtle ones; the touch (sense) at work with the digital tangible is a "sense theoretician", since it is a sense that does not grab in a rough physical relation but functions precisely through its avatar in the textscape. Term "sense theoretician" was coined by Karl Marx in the following context:

"The *forming* of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present. The *sense* caught up in crude practical need has only a *restricted* sense. For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract existence as food.(…) The care-burdened, poverty-stricken man has no *sense* for the finest play; the dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value but not the beauty and the specific character of the mineral: he has no mineralogical sense. (…) The eye has become a *human* eye, just as its *object* has become a social, human object – an object made by man for man. The *senses* have therefore become directly in their practice *theoreticians.* They relate themselves to the thing for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man." (Marx, 1844)

What is crucial in this Marx's notion on human senses is the very historical (e.g. changeable) attitude to them. They are mutated across the history, and this point is of significance also in a moment, when we draw upon the senses engaged within the present interface culture, and their deployment in the cognition of digital literature.

We have seen in the previous sections of this paper that the mobile and locative media presuppose one's mobility and her feedback with regard to the current location, in which the user enters the network. For the art and e-literary projects in locative media is significant that they also deploy the sense of touch, which is stimulated by the very nature of tactile interfaces

(e.g. touch screens). By referring to mobile and geolocative pieces Kathi Inman Berens argues that "touch became more than navigation; it was also a way to engage the characters". The touch that contributes to the storytelling itself is not a vernacular one, because it causes the event to happen. Therefore, it could be named a touch theoretician even in terms of afore-mentioned Marxian theory of senses theoreticians. The touch theoretician is self-learning touch, which makes progress over the ages of its experiencing.

One of the significant works in the field of e-literature, which stages the material/immaterial problem as well as the subtle issue of touching within the interface culture is Serge Bouchardon's *Toucher* (2009). Touching ever means exploring, there is a certain curiosity, which generates the touch as a sense of proximity and of movement (the touching hand gets more information, when it moves around the object). In the *Toucher* is thoroughly demonstrated the shift from immediate touching to the interface mediated and driven one; the touching requires in this piece an interface mediation by the mouse, microphone and webcam. Such a subtle touching experience reveals a lot about the way we touch a multimedia content on screen, as well as of the reading of e-literary contents; we enter them by interfaces, reading mutated to interface reading (e. g. the mouse reading). The reader of this piece is actually the user, provoked to access the text by means of sophisticated interface shaped procedures that include various modalities of touching.This piece demonstrates that its reading is first and foremost by the interface shaped sophisticated experience, which stimulates various senses and put the reader-user into the riding adventure as an event that stimulates several senses and provokes reader/user's corporeal and kinesthetic participation.

New generations of digital devices most assuredly provoke new forms of perception and action. With a stylus or touch pad we can come into very direct, although virtual contact with the word, contact that is much more immediate than using a typewriter, which means that these devices once again establish an immediate relation between the body (in fact, the hand) and the word. This is why they are not subject to Heidegger's critique intended for the fate of the word in a time of the typewriter.

"The hand is, together with the word, the essential distinction of man...Man does not `have' hands, but the hand holds the essence of man, because the word as the essential realm of the hand is the ground of the essence of man...The typewriter tears writing from the essential realm of the hand, i.e. the realm of the word. The word itself turns into something "typed" '. (Heidegger, 1992: 80) Heidegger was unsettled by the fact that the typist uses a keyboard set in front of her, that she touches only the keys while the text that is created is

over "there" and is separated from direct contact with the hand so that the individual letters that constitute it are not physically touched. The directness between the hand and the text may be lost with the typewriter, but in the opinion of the author of this text, mobile digital screenic devices once again enable the proximity of the hand and the text. This proximity now takes place in more subtle and virtual, often just tele-forms, for example in touching the virtual keyboard on tablets (e. g. iPad), digital phones and PDAs (deploying the stylus), or in the touch of an individual letter through a word processor with the use of a cursor. Physical tangibility has been replaced with the digital, and with mixes of both. Real and digital modes have become intertwined, tele-labour and long-distance sensation enrich our activities as-we-know-them.

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