

# The On-Line Exhibition *A Throw of the Dice: Slovenian Poetry in New Media* (Foreword)

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Parallel to the theoretical papers presented at the colloquium, the on-line exhibition *A Throw of the Dice: Slovenian Poetry in New Media*<sup>1</sup> examined connections between moving images and literature in a more applied manner. Alongside hybrids and links between literature, film, and cinema, as well as texts produced by algorithmic machines, the World Wide Web is another major domain where literature meets a changing two-dimensional surface, thus becoming a transformable textual landscape that is still the main communication channel of this medium, although it is enriched by visual and audio signs. The title of the exhibition refers to Mallarmé's groundbreaking 1897 poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance) and the 1969 artist's book of the same title by the Belgian conceptual artist Marcel Broodthaers. Broodthaers is the main figure in the "institutional critique" and he replaced the words in the poem with horizontal black rectangles. This reference focuses on the problem of visual signs in written language (Mallarmé's typographic revolution) and the role of chance (one of his main topics), which inevitably takes place with the automatization of the production and functioning of an artwork. Ergodic literature, as defined by Espen J. Aarseth in his book *Cybertext* (1997)—albeit with not much response in terminological terms, but with great conceptual influence—already takes place with the reader's doubt about where the line of text begins, and is even more strongly manifested in texts that seem to change by themselves.

The selection presents prominent Slovenian new media authors as well as younger artists, some new works, and those that are already classics. Vuk Ćosić is of course a world-renowned new media artist, and a selection of works from his ASCII art period are presented. These are ironic experiments with image production by means of printing letters as was done with early computer printers, and before this on teleprinters and typewriters. However, Ćosić's work cannot be interpreted as an actual attempt to produce images with typographic signs. As an important *net.art*

author, he is interested in how to grasp communication on the internet in the context of society as a whole. In the background of all his projects, irony is evident—playing with elements of banality and vulgarity in the mass media, in the cultural canon, and so on—and the relation to traditions of the avant-garde. The consequence of such poetics is a radical dematerialization of the works; they are not about the material carriers received by the addressee, but instead about communicative models in the society that the addressee is part of. From this point of view, Čosić's move to become an online communications guru and a figure in daily politics becomes understandable.

In his *Metamorphosis of Language* (2007), Srečo Dragan translates the material basis of the artwork into the reader's thought processes. First, the reader is required to determine an opposition with two one-word concepts—or to accept the author's love-hate opposition—and then an unreadable animated flux of words (that are in separate regions of the textual surface and are documented as connected singular syntagms in language) appears before the reader's eyes, which acquires meaning only in the stream of consciousness of this very user, who has determined the initial tension between the position and the opposition (it is, of course, possible for somebody else to watch the interaction of the first user and imagine what is going on in his or her consciousness). The interaction with the web interface thus triggers the thought "apparatus" outside the computer, whereas the web system can only record the outward manifestations of cognitive processes in the user (such archiving is insufficient and ineffective—merely "symbolic").

In his works, Teo Spiller focuses on the medium, not in terms of mass media, but more as an exploration of the principles of how media function technically and at the level of content. For example, *News Sonnets* (2009) takes titles from daily newspapers as building blocks for new texts. This author's works spread from the web to other media, such as the artist's book or woodcuts created by computer printers.

The website *Poem for* 莫海伦 [Mo Hailun] (December 2007 – January 2008) by Jaka Železnikar is an extension for the Firefox browser (versions 2.0 and 3.0.0.\*).<sup>2</sup> Any website equipped with this extension and activated literally fades out. However, the user does not face an irritating faulty website, but instead experiences a pleasant feeling of softness, which is highly unusual for web pages. Železnikar's *oeuvre* is an attempt to blend together poetry and *net.art* through a lyrical style and visual, sound, and concrete poetry.

Vanja Mervič presents the on-line version of his project *DADAMantra* here for the first time. It is a case of mixing of religious texts in dada style (i.e., mostly randomly). The empty space between words is emphasized,

similar to his project *CunC* (2008; read as “see un-see”), where the user writes a message into an empty input field, which is then carried away in the unknown.<sup>3</sup> Does this reveal the mystic realms of the web?

*i-poet* (2005) by Boštjan Kavčič, an interactive mobile application for smart phones, functions as a creative conclusion of Slovenian poet Srečko Kosovel’s (1904–1926) attempt at a constructivist visual enrichment of poems. Edited by the founding father of Slovenian comparative literature studies Anton Ocvirk in 1967, and with a graphic design by Jože Brumen, Kosovel’s *Integrals’ 26* has been released. These are powerful poems, termed “konsel” (a neologism from *constructions*), that appear in a book with a square format and prominent graphic design and encourage the reader to connect words and their visual appearance. Kavčič invites the user of his *i-poet* to draw a pictogram. Next, the system suggests a Kosovel-style word out of its database (whereupon the user sees the pictogram in the context of Kosovel’s language), which can be accepted by the user or changed for another word or syntagm from Kosovel’s poems, or for one of the user’s own choosing. *i-poet* translates the literary tradition into new media.

The selection *A Throw of the Dice* also includes a selection of “video translations” of poems by the contemporary Slovenian poet Tomaž Šalamun from the collection *A Ballad for Metka Krašovec* (1981), created by the video students Marko Česnik, Nina Jančič, Luka Kravanja, Nataša Nedić, Naja Puhan, Karmen Sulcer, Denis Šmid, and Miha Zagozda (under the supervision of Aleš Vaupotič between 2010 and 2012 at the Faculty of Design in Ljubljana). Video translations are records of readings, which might be even better than the textual recordings. This is because the readings of these poems are realizations of textual images with strong visual components because the poet is an art historian and the female character from the title is one of the most important Slovenian painters.

The selection *A Throw of the Dice* is also defined by absent elements: the starting point for the selection was not a search for cases of literature that has dynamic visual characteristics, but instead a specific behavior of texts when they appear in the paradigm of new media objects (as defined by Manovich). The selection also does not entail “classic” hypertexts, such as *Afternoon, a Story* by Michael Joyce (1990), constructed of textual fragments that are connected with “words which yield.” In Slovenia the *net.art* movement was very strong, which resulted in hypertexts that were subverted with strong media auto-reflection. The selection does not involve works with a pronounced audio or musical component; this aspect will be focused on at the Slovenian comparative literature association’s colloquium in 2014.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Curated by Narvika Bovcon and Aleš Vaupotič; the online exhibition platform was designed and carried out by Pedro Damian Kostelec and Blaž Kostanjšek, students at the Faculty of Computer and Information Science, University of Ljubljana, supervisors Narvika Bovcon, and assistant Tadej Zupančič, <<http://black.fri.uni-lj.si/metkock>> (10 June 2014). Screen images of the website *A Throw of the Dice* and of the individual projects are in the Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.jaka.org/2007/pzhm>>. The selection includes another work, *Asciidarij 2*; the majority of Železnikar's works are accessible at his web archive <<http://jaka.org>> (4 January 2014).

<sup>3</sup> <[black.fri.uni-lj.si/cunc](http://black.fri.uni-lj.si/cunc)> (9 June 2014).