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## FROM “SHIFTBOOKS” TO “SHIFTLITERATURE”: CATEGORIES OF LITERARY INTERFACES AND LIBERACY IN CHARACTERIZING LITERATURE OF TRANSMEDIAL TIMES

**Abstract:** In this paper, the theory of “liberacy” is understood in the context of various other theories that might fall under the umbrella term of “textual materialism.” At the same time, Porczak’s concept of shiftart is tested to characterize this specific kind of literature. Firstly, Przybyszewska shows that, in this context, the concept of shiftart is useful because it grabs and vividly depicts a shift in literary communication which is underlined by all theorists of textual materialism. Thus, liberacy work is described in the paper along with the synonymous term shiftbook. The second part of the article turns to the works of Milorad Pavić. Some other examples are used to examine how the material (shift)book can function as an interface for non-linear writing; something that works even better than any electronic interface. The last part of the paper develops this question in a broader context: it concentrates on the problem of untranslatable material literary interfaces and the differences between electronic and material versions of (shifted) books.

**Keywords:** shiftbook, textual materialism, liberacy, Milorad Pavić, nonlinear literature, literary interfaces

### Shiftart, shiftbooks and liberacy: on textual materialism and the interfacial turn in literary studies

In 2008, Antoni Porczak published the article *Sztuka przesunięta. Shiftart* in which he characterized the category used in the title as “the art of interface and digital matrix” designed according to a “new paradigm”;<sup>1</sup> that is, the art of actual time, one that uses all modern media and technology possibilities and is highly open to users’ active participation. The term focuses on art that oversteps the accepted and custom-

<sup>1</sup> A. Porczak, “Sztuka przesunięta. Shiftart”, in: M. Juda (ed.), *Akademia 2007+*, Katowice: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych, 2009, p. 279. In this case, and others if not mentioned differently, all quotes from Polish in my translation.

ary vision of what art can be, and deals with the shift in our thinking about art when confronted with modern artistic experiences. In this paper, I borrow Porczak's term to talk about literature (both paper and electronic variants); in particular about the role that the "shifted" book form plays in literary communication. This concept, focused on interface, is extremely useful for re-examining some of the current theoretical discussions in the field of textual materialism.<sup>2</sup>

*Textual materialism* is an umbrella term spanning various theories that deal with "embodied texts."<sup>3</sup> These concepts abandon the vision of literary communication where the text is seen as a message constructed in only one, verbal code and can be poured like a liquid from one container (i.e. form or medium) into another. Research by Johanna Drucker, N. Katherine Hayles, Jessica Pressman, Alexander Starre, Glyn White, Simon Barton, Grzegorz Maziarczyk or Katarzyna Bazarnik is a good example here.

Using the term "shiftbook", we can grab and depict important common points in many concepts of textual materialism—even ones that hardly seem close to each other. This notion of the book being shifted emphasizes that, in some works, the "container" becomes the "body" of the text, and is inseparable from it. Thus, the container does not have to be only invisible and utilitarian. This forces us to re-think the whole definition of the book (and reading) and is the primary concern of many theories discussed in this paper.

The history of the book shows how it improved through the ages until it became the perfect, comfortable, and invisible technology for any text. Throughout multiple "revolutions"<sup>4</sup> it was transformed into a "container" that is a magic portal for words, one that really disappears in the recipients' hands while reading. Literary theorists such as Georges Poulet and Joseph Hillis Miller have pointed out this "magic", and Jeff Bezos mentioned it while introducing the Kindle Reader in 2007. Bezos called the material, paper book an "incredible device". He was very conscious of the fact that any e-device designed for reading must reconstruct or "project" this "aura of bookishness."<sup>5</sup> Pressman writes about "bookishness" in a totally opposite way. For her, "bookishness" is a crucial aspect of "embodied texts" and does not equal the invisibility of the material form of a literary work. Compared to Bezos' vision, Pressman's concept is "shifted" bookishness.

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<sup>2</sup> This can also be characterized as a part of an on-going *interfacial turn* in literary studies. I gave a broader description of the latter in a paper "O domniemanym zwrocie interfejsologicznym w literaturoznawstwie (kilka wstępnych rozpoznań)", in: E. Szczęśna (ed.), *Między dyskursami, sztukami, mediami. Komparatystyka jutra*, Kraków: Universitas, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> A. Starre, *Metamedia: American Book Fictions and Literary Print Culture after Digitalization*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Quoting Robert Escarpit's work.

<sup>5</sup> S. Levy, *Amazon: Reinventing the Book*, <http://europe.newsweek.com/amazon-reinventing-book-96909?rm=eu> [accessed 2015-09-11]. And let us remember that first e-readers, like Rocket e-Book or SoftBook Reader—both from 1998, were equally cumbersome as first books; not only were they large and heavy, but could hold no more than a handful of books (despite being advertised as movable and "living" libraries).

Invisibility and usability are not the only aspects of a book that are evolving. The current publishing market comprises: bestsellers that don't even look as standard books used to (as in the works of Mark Danielewski<sup>6</sup>); publishing houses specializing in "strange" books (such as Siglio Press and Visual Editions); or whole series dedicated to "not normal" books, such as the Polish *Liberatura* series. This shows that progress can include the carnal, material aspects of a book, as well. As if in response to the presaged "death of the book", defamiliarization and estrangement saved it.<sup>7</sup> These defamiliarized books, shifted from their neutrality and incorporeal nature, can confuse their readers about how to use them and how to read. While "normal" books do not need any instructions in order to be used,<sup>8</sup> shifted ones are often a challenge for their readers.

It is logical that many theories were born to describe this shift in literary communication (although not in all of them the communicative aspect was underlined). These focused not just on material, paper literature. For many researchers who started with examining analogue books, it became obvious that a connection exists with the current digital literary production. Thus, Starre and Pressman<sup>9</sup> examined important examples for their research in the context of digitalization or e-literature. However, some researchers who started with research on electronic literature, such as Hayles, discovered that paper literature is not more limited in its formal possibilities. In this way, from a reflection on the artistic book as a context for hypertexts, the *technotext* theory was eventually born and the term *interface* was applied to literary humanities in the context of both analogue and electronic literature. Many researchers, such as Johanna Drucker,<sup>10</sup> frequently use the term in this way.<sup>11</sup> All theories of textual materialism have a focus on the book as an any-media interface of literary communication in common, even if they do not use the term directly. This focus often forces us to shift our general idea of the book itself.

<sup>6</sup> Danielewski is mentioned in every publication on textual materialism and in 2011, a monograph was dedicated to him (J. Bray, A. Gibbons (eds.), *Mark Z. Danielewski*, Manchester–New York: Manchester University Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Similarly to defamiliarization and estrangement saving literature in formalist theory. I develop this statement in the quoted article, paper titled "Lit(b)erariness between the book, the page and the screen – on "Between Page and Screen" by Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse" [in print in *Cherchere le texte*, ed. S. Baldwin] and in my book *Liberackość dzieła literackiego* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> However, this only speaks to the force of habit, convention: let recall Saint Augustine being surprised by tacit reading. And let us ponder whether the modern reader would know how to read quipu, also called talking-knots, which also were devices for transmitting a text (message), "books" from a different time and culture.

<sup>9</sup> And recently, in some aspects, also Bazarnik.

<sup>10</sup> She began research years ago on artistic books and avant-garde poetics, and today has joined the discussion on electronic textuality.

<sup>11</sup> In the context of Danielewski's novels the term was used by Mark B.N. Hansen ("Print Interface to Time: Only Revolutions at the Crossroads of Narrative and History", in: J. Bray, A. Gibbons (eds.), *Mark Z. Danielewski*, op. cit.).

Why did the interface, substituting the “old” medium, become so useful in the humanities, starting with the cultural interface interpretation in the works of Alexander Galloway or Steven Johnson, then applied to literary-oriented reflection? In times when it seems impossible to talk about communication without the category of interface,<sup>12</sup> it is logical that no analysis of literary communication is possible without it. Every text needs a technology in order to be transmitted.<sup>13</sup> Piotr Celiński notes that when the message is integrated (equated) with the medium, as is typical for analogue media, the interface focuses on that which is “between”<sup>14</sup> and remains imperceptible and irrelevant.<sup>15</sup> It becomes useful when the text’s technology becomes its visible or even tangible “body”. Then, being more oriented towards interaction, it better suits modern multimodal works of a performative, dynamic character. Apollonian and, classic texts did not need this.<sup>16</sup> This is why “interface” as a term is useful in talking about current literary works, in whatever media they are constructed. It also suits the textuality of the convergence culture when the text, even a literary one, does not have to be limited to one platform or medium, and is open to reader participation. This trans-media quality of the interface perspective seems very promising in times when our notion of literature and the literary should also be “shifted”.

As the concept of the “rescuing” defamiliarization was nothing new, neither was the “re-freshment” of the book form, that is, the embodiment of text. As Drucker (and others) showed years ago, the tradition of a “marked text” that had its visible, tangible “body” has long existed. There were always interesting literary interfaces to be “read”. Neither bibliographical reflection nor literary theory were blind to them; however, they were never mainstream. Given the character of the majority of literary book forms, those interested in this field remained tacit voices and rather unpopular exceptions, as Hayles described it.<sup>17</sup> Polish book theorists such as Karol Głombiowski or Krzysztof Migoń, as well as Jerome McGann or Joseph Frank, are examples of researchers not blind to this kind of literary communication. For them, “all elements of the ‘physic’ of the book”<sup>18</sup> were an unquestionable and highly semantic part of

<sup>12</sup> P. Celiński, *Interfejsy. Cyfrowe technologie w komunikowaniu*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2010, pp. 72-73.

<sup>13</sup> This statement was crucial e.g. in Aarseth’s *cybertext and ergodic literature* concepts.

<sup>14</sup> Meaning: the way the mediation is done.

<sup>15</sup> See: P. Celiński, *Interfejsy...*, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> This change of dominants also permits an escape from the trap of “pure” media divisions (as Lev Manovich did with his vision of *post-media aesthetic*) that can no longer function in the current times when the way the text works defines it better than its media structure.

<sup>17</sup> That’s why, completely agreeing with Lori Emerson, I am at the same time sure that her statements about “a definitive shift in nature and definition of literature” should be softened (L. Emerson, *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound*, Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014, p. xiv). This “turn”, “shift” is not so drastic, it grows out of tradition and—interpreting old interfaces (e.g. Dickinson’s case)—Emerson proves it as well.

<sup>18</sup> K. Głombiowski, *Książka w procesie komunikacji społecznej*, Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1980, p. 139.

the message. The same can be said of literary theory researchers such as Stefania Skwarczyńska, Stanisław Balbus or Grzegorz Gazda. They and others were aware of the material aspects of literary communication many years before the interfacial turn was acclaimed. All of them knew that technology used in literature is not only a “container” and that the medium, the interface itself, “is a massage,” as McLuhan explained.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it can be not only useful, but also meaningful. However, to appreciate this, one has to shift one’s habits, abandon conventions and well-taught schemes, and sometimes feel free to read in a way he or she has never done before.

So we do need theories and categories to describe those new literary works, works which, as Hayles and others stressed, seldom remain classic “artefacts”, but come closer to being “events”. We need to deal with those “strange” books, both paper and electronic; although they are not the only form of modern literature, they grow in popularity every day. We are also faced with an abundance of existing terms and concepts (*technotexts*, *cybertexts*, *liberature*, *metamedia*, *bookishness*, “novels as a book”, “the book-bound genre”, “reading the graphic surface”, “textual gaps” and “textual gestures” and others).<sup>20</sup> We need one that can serve as an umbrella concept for all of them; they are useful, but often synonymous. I used to think *liberacy*<sup>21</sup> and *interfacial turn* were terms that can achieve this goal, particularly because of their trans-media character; they clearly mark the role of the interface in literary communication. Moreover, these two terms are focused on neither novels nor fiction, unlike a majority of the other terms quoted above.<sup>22</sup> The strength of borrowing Porczak’s concept for literary studies also lies with this broader perspective. His catchy metaphor of “shift” escapes tricky distinctions in terminology such as the one between a “medium” and an “interface” (a debate that cannot be analysed here). Instead, it cleverly and vividly encompasses what all theories mentioned in this paper have in common, focusing on the communicative and semantic role of the book seen as a technology of literary communication, and extracts the core of the problem.

Most of Porczak’s statements on *shiftart* remain valid in the context of modern, interface-oriented literature. First, Porczak mentions changes such as a perceptual

<sup>19</sup> McLuhan can and should be named the patron saint of textual materialism.

<sup>20</sup> Recent years establish the actuality and importance of the problem with a growing amount of conferences and monographs dedicated to the theme (the latest *Visual devices in contemporary prose fiction: gaps, gestures, images* by Simon Barton or Bazarnik’s upcoming book on liberature being selected of examples).

<sup>21</sup> In my research by this term, derived from original *liberature* proposed by Fajfer in 1999, I describe a crucial aspect of all text which authors do not treat a book as invisible and semantically not important container for the text. Adjectival character of the term (frequently used even as an adjective: *liberary*; that form should, of course, evolve “literary”) makes it (in contrast to *liberature* and others) gradable and more functional in describing diversified literary works. For more see: A. Przybyszewska, *Liberackość dzieła literackiego*, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> This tendency (accompanied by reflection focusing on modern American fiction and marked even in the titles of the publications) is seen not only in Pressman’s, Maziarczyk’s or Starre’s works. Let us recall Glyn White’s *Reading the Graphic Surface: The Presence of the Book in Prose Fiction* from 2005 (re-published in 2014).

and operational shift, with its stress on active participation of the recipients, and engaging their touch or other senses; these are really close to what is characterized in literary studies (in the context of interactive art) as being typical for “new hermeneutics” (described by Roberto Simanowski) and postulated new poetics (which, according to Serge Bouchardon, should also incorporate *figures of gestural manipulation*). Second, the same reasons can be given for excluding shifted books from literature as for excluding *shiftart* from art: the acquired literacy skills, which are strongly attached to tradition and conventions, do not permit perceiving as art (or as a book) that which does not suit the conventions. Finally, *shiftbook*, as well as *shiftart*, does not propose a total revolution or a drastic turn, but only a slight renewal, re-thinking or refreshment of existing concepts. Modern embodiments of literary text grew from tradition as well, but it was the “other tradition” to use Piotr Rypson’s term; that is, those rare exceptions about which Hayles was thinking. To conclude, *shiftbook* is a term that “smuggles” a vision of the book as a principal literary technology or interface. It emphasizes that it is high time to change our habits and open our minds to new literary interfaces that still remain a book: a not-always-invisible container for literary stories that have come back to life in modern, very *liberary* times.

## Against linearity, or about shifted reading (the case of Milorad Pavić and some other stories)

Why are modern books so often “shifted” ones? Where does it start? I believe that the shift should be inspired by the story. This means that the shift in literary communication should start with the concept of the work, i.e. the message that may require a non-invisible body. It does not matter whether the book is an electronic or a paper one. In other words, the de-automatization of the act of reading, in the case of shifted liberary works, serves the story, not only adorning it to make it more attractive. This de-automatization can have a meaning. Although there are many aspects of the concepts of a book and of reading that can undergo a shift, this paper will focus in depth on one: linearity.

Linearity counts among the most fundamental aspects of the conventional perception of writing and reading, and the book is seen as their technology. There are many examples of breaking with the normative Aristotelian idea of giving the beginning, the expansion, and the ending in exactly that order and no other (with the additional constraint of there being only one, fixed version of the story). Analogue, paper, codex-form gamebooks are one example, in spite of the popular belief only the advent of computers and new media possibilities liberated literature from a linear order. These gamebooks give the reader the option and responsibility for choosing a “path” of the story by having them choose the reading order after every paragraph.<sup>23</sup> Elec-

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<sup>23</sup> Various strategies can be employed here—the choices can depend on the reader’s close reading of the text (when one can choose a good or a wrong way, as in Carlo Frabetti’s children gamebooks or

tronic versions of these works are also examples of breaking with the norm, as are hyper-textual and on-demand electronic literature. Further examples include: book-bound literary machines such as *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* by Queneau and “shuffle literature”. The last term, coined by Zuzana Husárová and Nick Montfort,<sup>24</sup> describes printed books whose material form demands that the reader “shuffle”, arrange, and compose the story. *The Unfortunates* by B.S. Johnson and *Composition No. 1* by Mark Saporta are iconic for this kind of work, as well as Robert Coover’s *Heart Suite* (which is printed in the form of real cards).<sup>25</sup> Similar texts are made of real scraps<sup>26</sup> that fall apart in the reader’s hands, thus decomposing themselves. In the case of these books, trying to “rescue” a story and piece it together becomes an important reading strategy, so that the unconventional form is used for more than merely provoking the “wow effect”. Examples of this type of book include *S.* by J.J. Abrams and Doug Dorst, and *Cathy’s Book* (and its sequels) by Sean Steward and Jordan Weisman. These books do not consist only of a “simply” linear codex-form story<sup>27</sup>, but they also have unbound and rather disorganized materials (notes, photos, postcards or others) that must be organized and interpreted as a part of the story, in order for the reader to get its meaning.<sup>28</sup> From a completely different point of view, and abandoning any classic concept of book forms, locative literary narratives should be remembered. In many cases non-linearity is a less important concern of these works, which typically rely on having the reader experience the story space in a physical manner; they often incorporate interacting with this space as part of the reading

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*The Money Spider* by Robin Waterfield and Wilfried Davies) or ones that depend only on the reader’s curiosity and desires (as in Raymond Queneau’s children-addressed little gamebook *A Story as You Like It*).

- <sup>24</sup> Z. Husárová, N. Montfort, *Shuffle Literature and the Hand of Fate*, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/shuffled> [accessed 2016-05-30].
- <sup>25</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, these kinds of works can also be interpreted in the context of the Oulipian *Cartes noires*, “a set of 36 modified playing-cards which allow the player to construct complex plots for detective fiction in only a few hours” (H. Mathews, A. Brotchie (eds.), *Oulipo Compendium*, London: Atlas Press, 2005, p. 261).
- <sup>26</sup> This kind of text clearly can be seen as a part of the so-called *fiction of scraps*, seen also in the context of *silvae rerum* (see also: J. Armstrong, “Anti-Novels Built from Scraps”, in: idem, *Experimental Fiction: An Introduction for Readers and Writers*, London–New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).
- <sup>27</sup> It should be, however, mentioned that neither in the case of *S.* nor in *Cathy’s book* is the codex story (seen as a part of a larger whole) really a linear one. A significant part of Abrams and Doust’s book (and its plot) is composed of colourful notes on the margin (made by the story’s protagonists) which readers can arrange in any sequence they like as they break the “regular”, linear story structure; in the case of *Cathy*, margin doodles and notes also comment on the main, linear story, thus distorting the purity of its structure. Regarding *S.*, one should also remember that the material book whose margins are filled with the notes is *The Ship of Theseus* by V.M. Straka, a fictional book which the protagonists of *S.* are reading, not *S.* itself, which complicates the case even more.
- <sup>28</sup> The fact that both examples (with their own websites and other media “extensions”) enter the fields of trans-media storytelling and convergence culture is beyond the scope of this discussion, although it introduces another level of non-linearity.

strategy. However, such forms do abandon the concept of linear reading and allow the reader to choose a concrete path through the story, which inscribes its plot in the real, physical space.<sup>29</sup> Thus, more or less conventional book forms can serve as a device for non-linear storytelling whenever the stories need such unconventional “embodiments”. If we think of a book as a shifted one, the electronic (e.g. hyper-textual) form is no longer a *conditio sine qua non* for nonlinearity.

Within this context, I would like to focus on the works of Milorad Pavić, which provide further examples of the codex book form as an interface for non-linear stories. Pavić’s works go well beyond his most well known work, *Dictionary of the Khazars*, which is often mentioned as one of the most important proto-hypertextual works. Leaving this text aside, I would like to explore Pavić’s use of the book’s form as a device for non-linear or not-evidently-linear stories in some of his subsequent novels.<sup>30</sup> Pavić’s work is interesting when compared with “spectacular” examples of liberatic books that receive more frequent analysis<sup>31</sup>; Pavić does not do anything as extreme. He regards the form of the book as a part of the story, its “body”, and as an important device. In many cases, his works remain rather classic codices; yet with little innovation in form, the books themselves become devices and interfaces the author uses to tell a story in a very specific and unconventional way. The story is created, projected, and realized in the book’s form that becomes an integral part of the message. Thus, Pavić’s literary output is slightly, but significantly liberatic. The term “shiftbook”, used here as synonymous to “liberary book”, vividly describes his works.

In one of his theoretical papers, Pavić distinguishes “reversible” and “non-reversible” arts, including literature in the latter group. “Non-reversible arts” were described as “one-way roads on which everything moves from the beginning to the end, from birth to death”,<sup>32</sup> in contrast to “reversible” arts such as architecture, which “enable the recipient to approach the work from various sides, or even to go around it and have a good look at it changing the spot, the perspective and the direction of his looking at it according to his own preference.”<sup>33</sup> For years, Pavić’s dream and goal was to create a reversible literary work that could be seen from different sides; this was the way he explained the non-linear structure of his works. This dream and the permanent quest for reversibility started with simple questions: “Must the novel have an end? And what in fact is the end of a novel, of a literary work? And is it unavoid-

<sup>29</sup> Thus in many cases the story itself does not have one, stable order and can be arranged differently every time as different paths can be selected.

<sup>30</sup> It should be stressed that this is only a short description and analysis as I am profoundly convinced that the liberary aspects of Pavić’s works and his strategies for using books as storytelling interfaces need more profound research and interpretation and deserve a separate paper or even a book.

<sup>31</sup> Such as Mark Danielewski’s or Jonathan Safran Foer’s novels or other examples mentioned before in this paper.

<sup>32</sup> M. Pavić, *Beginning and the End of the Novel*, <http://www.khazars.com/en/biografija-milorad-pavic/pocetak-i-kraj-romana> [accessed 2016-01-07].

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

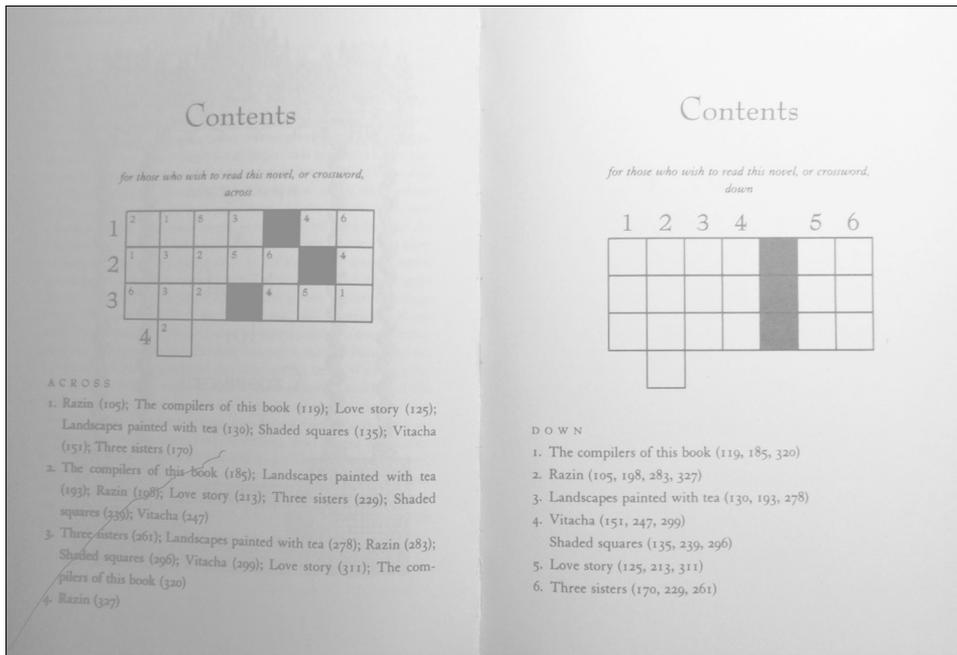


Photo 1: Crosswords in M. Pavić's *Landscape Painted with Tea*

ably the only one? How many ends can a novel or a theater play have?"<sup>34</sup> In Pavić's case, research on non-linear writings led to thinking about the structure of a book and its liberatic form. As is shown with his *quasi*-normal codex-books, thinking about a "story looking for its form" produces the shifted form of the book because the latter is always created according to a certain story's needs. Thus, the innovation in the codex starts with a rethinking of our way of reading, i.e. with a "de-automatization" of the act of reading.

*Dictionary...*, is a nonlinear, order-chosen-by-the-reader book that has different endings in different translations and in its male and female versions. After this, Pavić published *Predo slikan čajem. Roman za ljubiteljke ukrštenij reči (Landscape Painted with Tea or Novel for Crossword Puzzle Lovers, 1988)*<sup>35</sup>, inspired by the crossword form.<sup>36</sup> Two crosswords are incorporated into this literary

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup> This novel, according to Pavić's vision, really has no traditionally understood ending (there is no solution of the plot) and—as *Dictionary...*—is slightly different for female and male readers.

<sup>36</sup> Reading this novel is, in a way, like reading a crossword. The narrator of the story explains it with the main protagonist's love for crosswords and their role in his life: notebooks of the architect Razin are full of collected crosswords and, as it is summed up, his "entire life can be viewed as one enormous crossword" (M. Pavić, *Landscape Painted with Tea*, transl. Ch. Pribičević-Zorić, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990, p. 188).

work.<sup>37</sup> They are involved in the story, not as graphic elements, but as keys to the rejuvenation of reading and of the structure of a book. Opening *Book Two*, the actual *Novel for Crossword Fans*, the crosswords function as tables of contents. Instead of typical crossword answers, they provide an ordering of the chapters, with page numbers as in real tables of contents (see: photo 1). Just as there are two crosswords, so there are two ways of choosing to read the novel: across and down.<sup>38</sup> Both are characterized in the middle of the novel, in an explication of how to read the book. (No instructions for reading are given at the beginning.) It is possible to do a traditional reading, going linearly from page to page in the order they are bound (reading “across”).<sup>39</sup> In this case, the reader gets a somewhat disordered story, because a linear reading presents the plot without the “denouement”. Reading “down” does not offer the “denouement” either, but this less conventional way of reading orders the novel a little more, as each character’s story is given separately. (When read vertically, the heroes’ portraits seem more important than the whole story). Thus, although the story is imprisoned in the classic paper codex, it is projected to be read according to the reader’s desire.<sup>40</sup> By not providing a rewarding ending, the book form encourages a re-reading of the whole book, so the reading projected by the author is not only non-linear, but also cyclic, reiterative and a really close one.<sup>41</sup>

Three years later (in 1991), another story *Unutrašnja strana vetra ili roman o Henri i Leandru (Inner Side of the Wind or a Novel of Hero and Leander)* was offered to Pavić’s readers. This time it was enclosed in a little more “strange”, or “shift” book form, described by the author himself as a “klepsydra novel.”<sup>42</sup> In one codex, it spans two stories: *Leander* (his-story) and *Hero* (her-story), printed back-to-back. *Hero* starts from the beginning and *Leander* from the end—which, however, looks no different from the beginning when the book is turned over, as the cover is the same on both sides.<sup>43</sup> Thus, a love story set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century meets a similar one from the 19<sup>th</sup>, both resembling that of the mythological Hero and Leander. The pro-

<sup>37</sup> It is worth recalling here that the introduction of the *Dictionary...* proposes different forms of plays or games that can inspire the literary storytelling (as e.g. Rubik’s cube, dominoes, cards) and “a crossword puzzle” is one of them. In his subsequent works Pavić uses some of the other inspirations mentioned.

<sup>38</sup> Later, chapter titles (such as “1 DOWN” or “3 ACROSS”) refer to this structure.

<sup>39</sup> Described as opting “for the old way of reading, for the one-way street” (p. 188).

<sup>40</sup> In this book the writer is described as a “tailor” that should be able to prepare a suit (a book) that fits everybody, “covers up the shortcoming and defects” (p. 187). Probably that is why there are many ways of reading the story.

<sup>41</sup> Of course, although it will not be analyzed here, there is also a game of sorts inscribed into the form of this book, as reading can also mean doing the crossword(s). This is why I point out that Pavić’s work needs a deeper interpretation than the fragmentary and one-way-oriented one presented here. For more, see: M. Hardin, “Drag Writing/Drag Reading: The Slippery Pen(is) of Milorad Pavić”, in: idem, *Playing the Reader: The Homoerotics of Self-Reflexive Fiction*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> M. Pavić, *Beginning and the End...*, op. cit.

<sup>43</sup> Only the ISBN signature makes a slight, almost imperceptible, difference. And every story has its own page numbers, so even though the codex itself has almost 200 pages, neither book has more than

tagonists have many things in common and there are many similar plots; the whole concept of the book is based on constantly emphasizing plot similarities, and on telling every story separately while leaving the reader with the impression that they are crisscrossing each other. The stories are so similar and hard to distinguish from one another that it is as if they were two versions of the same story set in two different centuries. Finally, the stories themselves “meet” each other literally in the middle of the volume. Their meeting point is the material book, while the end of the linear stories is in the middle of the book. Thus, the book’s form serves as an interface to tell the same, but at the same time different stories, revealing and underlining their similarities or parallels. The material book is a device used to create a material space for those likenesses and simultaneities while emphasizing them. This is also the case for the Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s *Dunes* (a much more revolutionary work), B.S. Johnson’s *House Mother Normal*, Stanisław Czycz’s *Arw*, Salvador Plascencia’s *The People of Paper* and many other examples where the space of the codex is used to achieve that goal.

*The Inner Side...* is not the only book Pavić constructed in such way. In 2003, the author published a children’s two-side story *Nevidljivo ogledalo—Šareni hleb (roman za decu i ostale) (Invisible Mirror—Multicolored Bread (novel for children and others))*.<sup>44</sup> In this story, a short story of a boy trying to find his toy soldiers, read from one side of the volume, combines and ties in with the story of a girl and her rose-friend looking for a particular mirror (read from the other side). In this case too, it eventually turns out that the stories are somehow related, and that, in fact, both can be seen as one story, told from two different points and perspectives. Again, the single but two-sided volume is the perfect interface for those particular stories.

The year 1994 brought another unconventional Pavić book: *Poslednja ljubav u Carigradu. Priručnik za gatanje (Last Love in Constantinople. A Tarot Novel for Divination)*. As a medium for storytelling, this one uses not only words enclosed in a book, but also a Tarot deck. This consists of 22 cards of Major Arcana printed on the last pages of the book, to be cut out and used.<sup>45</sup> However, the cards do not serve to introduce visual narration into the story; rather, they once again break its linear structure. Every chapter is an independent whole titled with the name of one of the cards. Readers, reminded of the history of Tarot, are informed that they can read the novel in sequence, but also in an alternative order, i.e. by choosing one of three patterns used in Tarot<sup>46</sup>

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100: in the English edition published by Alfred A. Knopf Inc. in New York in 1993 (transl. Christina Pribičević-Zorić) the Hero’s story is 77 and Leander’s one – 97 pages long.

<sup>44</sup> The book (not published in English) has a Polish translation from 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Here (although a full discussion is beyond the scope of this paper), another Oulipo-inspired romance of tarot cards and literary storytelling can be recalled: the evidently less interactive and playable *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* by Italo Calvino.

<sup>46</sup> Patterns are described and demonstrated in *Appendix 1. Appendix 2* gives interpretation keys for all cards.

and letting fortune organize the story.<sup>47</sup> So, according to reader choices, this linear codex becomes a piece of shuffle literature.<sup>48</sup>

Pavić also applies library aspects beyond fiction,<sup>49</sup> as seen in his work *For ever and a day: A theatre menu*. Pavić constructs this literary drama in a very specific way,<sup>50</sup> explicated also in a visual form.<sup>51</sup> The whole work is composed as a labelled “menu”; it is a score of sorts. The readers or directors are left to provide a final organization for it, and to compose it just as the perfect dinner is composed according to a chef’s suggestions left in the menu. (While the concept and execution of a meal lies with the chef, there are choices to be made by consumers that give a dinner its final tint). The play has three introductions or “starters” to be chosen, each with different heroes, and so on;<sup>52</sup> one “main course;”<sup>53</sup> and three interchangeable “desserts”<sup>54</sup> to finish the play. With this kind of composition, the author wanted “to give the audience, directors and theatre companies greater independence from the writer and more of a say in creating the play itself.”<sup>55</sup> As a result, there can be nine different combinations of the story, although the central part is always the same. Pavić notes that this also has other consequences:

<sup>47</sup> There is also an explanation of how to use the cards (and the book) to read the readers’ (not the story protagonists’!) future.

<sup>48</sup> The indicated focus of this paper on the material book interface should explain why *The Glass Snail* (an electronic novel by Pavić, very simple in its structure) is not mentioned here. Serbian-speaking readers of Pavić know that before the internet version of the story (published in 2003 by Word Circuits, thanks to the support of Robert Kendall, Marjorie Luesebrink and Rob Swigart) in 1998 Dereta published the 154-page long paper book titled *Stakleni puž. Priče sa Interneta (The Glass Snail. Short stories for the Internet)*; and *Stakleni puž (Glass Snail)* was also the title of one of the interactive dramas in its Serbian editions in 2002 and 2003. These examples will not be analyzed in this paper; let us though, by this enigmatic, open-ended reflection, underline once more that Pavić’s work still needs an interface-oriented analysis and that he should not be remembered only as a figure of the (material) literature history or as the author of the proto-hypertextual *Dictionary*...

<sup>49</sup> And an interface-oriented reflection so widely developed in recent years is strictly oriented towards fiction and novel (see: Pressman, Starre, Maziarczyk, Bazarnik et al.). Other fields still need more research.

<sup>50</sup> The concept resembles, to a degree, one described in Jorge Luis Borges’ short story *An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain* (from *Fictions*): the structure of the (of course not existing) *April March* by Quain. This Pavić’s work can also (and should) be examined in the context of some of the interactive plays by OULIPO, such as *A Theater Tree: A Combinatory Play* by Paul Fournel and Jean-Pierre Énard.

<sup>51</sup> M. Pavić, *For Ever and a Day: A Theatre Menu*, transl. Ch. Pribičević-Zorić, Beograd: Dereta, 1997, p. 6. Here Dick Higgins’ visual essay on intermedia can be invoked.

<sup>52</sup> *Butterflies pannés, tarttar sauce, Eggs à la Khazar, and Fish in antler salt.*

<sup>53</sup> The story of love between a woman and non-human set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and titled (after the main protagonists) *Petkumin and Kalina*.

<sup>54</sup> *Candied flowers, Bitter coffee and Apples.*

<sup>55</sup> M. Pavić, *For Ever and a Day*..., op. cit., p. 9.

Hence, the love story of Petkunin and Kalina can have one director and a happy end in one theatre, a different director and a tragic ending in another theatre, and a third version with a third director and cast in a third theatre.<sup>56</sup>

Thanks to the non-linear structure of the drama, the reader or viewer can see the main story, or “main course”, from multiple different points of view. Every one of the nine versions presents the others in a different light.<sup>57</sup>

With this work, Pavić again showed that the “normal” book could hold highly non-linear stories. The author does not play with the codex form here, but he does play with the idea that a book is only designed for linear content. He plays with conventions and with our reading habits and opens the field for further experiments with the form of the book coming from this “other” kind of thinking about storytelling, and seeking the form for literature as a reversible art. Such experimentation does not need to lead to a digital form; it can also refresh the possibilities given by the material books. With these kinds of works, the omnipotence of the paper book has been reborn.

One can often feel a kind of insatiability while reading Pavić’s works because they seem to be great concepts enclosed in imperfect books, too reserved and constrained in form. These stories really need more “shifted” books. However, I am looking at Pavić’s texts from a very specific point of view as a reader accustomed to “strange” books, because I live in the time of bookishness and liberacy. The growth of modern interest in the book form, and the semantic values and the potential of codex, and every other literary interface, has part of its roots in artistic experiments such as Pavić’s ones. His theoretical texts show him to be a very liberary author; thus, he said: “Each novel should select its specific form, each story can search for, and find, its adequate body...”<sup>58</sup> He also “lost from his sight the difference between the house and the book”<sup>59</sup> and thought of the latter in an architectural way, similar to Fajfer, who often defined liberature as the architecture of a book. Pavić was fascinated by the hypertext and impact of new technologies on the literary field; he was sure that the form of the book must be reinvented and refreshed. Statements he made in the context of non-linear storytelling also remain current in the broader sense in the context of the whole literary book form:

[...] we are rather at the termination of one manner of reading. It is the crisis of our way of reading the novel, and not the novel itself—he convinced.—The novel—one-way road is in a crisis. Something else is in a crisis as well. It is the graphic sight of the novel. This is to say: the book

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem. Pavić’s “hyperplay”, as Jasmina Mihajlović called it, was also performed on stage, e.g. by the Moscow Theatre “MHAT”. For an archive of all performances, see: <http://khazars.com/en/dela-milorada-Pavića/milorad-Pavić-u-pozoristu>.

<sup>57</sup> This is why Pavić also had an idea of a one-day theater festival consisting only of performances of this one “hyperplay” (M. Pavić, *For Ever and a Day...*, op. cit., p. 11).

<sup>58</sup> M. Pavić, *Beginning and the End...*, op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem.

is in a crisis. Hyperfiction is teaching us a novel can move as our mind moves, in all directions at once. And to be interactive.<sup>60</sup>

For Pavić, the problem was strictly related to the proposal of a new, different, more attractive and less conventional way of reading, abandoning the old “one-way road”. In *Landscape Painted with Tea*, in the second part of the chapter “1 DOWN”, the narrator gives a “simple”<sup>61</sup> answer to the reason for introducing a “new way of reading”: it is necessary because it “is a futile but honest effort to resist this inexorability of one’s fate, in literature at least, if not in reality.”<sup>62</sup> Pavić is sure that with a reversible form of literature, and with the de-automatization (as formalists described it) of the act of reading, new possibilities should open and literature itself should be refreshed. So, he says:

why, then, must the reader always be like a police inspector, why must he always walk in his predecessor’s every footstep? Why not let him at least zigzag somewhere? Not to mention the heroes and heroines of the book! Perhaps they, too, would like to show a different profile sometimes, to stretch their arms out to the other side. They must be tired of always seeing readers in the same formation, like a flock of geese flying south or trotters in a horse race. Perhaps these heroes in the book would like to pick a reader out of his gray procession, if for no other reason than to bet on one of us now and then.<sup>63</sup>

This begins the story of the book as an interface for these kinds of stories.

## The omnipotent interface, or the book that can do anything in any media

We live among electronic and analogue books. When we think about the former, it is natural that our concept of the book is shifted and broadened. One of goals of this paper is to show that, as Hayles underlines in her theory of the *technotext*, paper books are not “worse”. Sometimes they are even better for a number of reasons; sometimes the story needs the material, book-bounded “body”. It is good when a story can be told in the way that is more suitable for it. The consequence of this literary media-specificity is that sometimes it can be very difficult or even impossible to change the medium of the story. The book itself could be seen as a specific kind of a medium, although I prefer the use of the term *interface* in this case. We assume it is impossible in the majority of case to “translate” e-literature into a paper format. If we consider this process in the other direction, we are used to thinking that it should not be problematic. But is this true in the case of shifted books? Shifted books with their

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<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>61</sup> M. Pavić, *Landscape Painted with Tea...*, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem. The echoes of Laurence Sterne’s narrator from *Tristram Shandy* can be discerned in this fragment.

interfaces as full of potential as electronic ones, and the stories they embody, can also be “untranslatable.”<sup>64</sup>

As happens to most modern printed books, Abrams and Dorst’s novel, *S.*, has a Kindle edition.<sup>65</sup> This should be rather strange and surprising for anyone familiar with the work and its interface. The story is based on its material aspects so strongly that, when reading it, the fact of having a material, though fictional, book in hand is crucial. The book is partly composed of “scraps” inserted between pages and pouring out from the codex; it is a work that evidently crosses all concepts of a book. How, then, is it possible for *S.* to have an electronic representation?<sup>66</sup> It is not surprising that, upon beginning the electronic version, one encounters a note that reads:

PLEASE NOTE: A fundamental part of the experience for the characters in *S.* is that of holding, reading, and sharing a physical book. Their experience of reading books—of reading *this* book—is a tactile one, one where they jot notes in the margin and can begin to communicate, back and forth, upon the pages themselves. There is a world of found items, clues, pieces of ephemera, and the intimacy of handwriting on paper. The physical version of *S.* offers its readers all of this in precisely the way that the characters offer it to each other.

The Kindle Fire version attempts to work with platform limitations to replicate the experience of the physical book. Every handwritten note is here, as are the images of the other items throughout. But **please know that the experience of looking at the digital reproductions of these items is decidedly different from that of reading and holding the physical book of *S.***; of flipping through the novel within it; of holding and examining the ephemeral clues through-

<sup>64</sup> It should be marked that this part of my paper can be seen in the context of prolific discussions about remediation and re-editing, not only in media-oriented discourse (Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin), but also in a bibliological one, especially in the last decades when the problem of electronic editions has started to be frequently discussed (see e.g. Jerome McGann’s or Peter Shillingsburg’s research). The problem of an author’s intention (the one that will be important in subsequent pages) is often mentioned by researchers, as well in context of electronic re-editions of literary works as when discussing about right paper books edition (meaning: adequate to author concept of literary communication and message of the book assumed by him), especially those of textual materialism (see also: George Bornstein, Thomas G. Tanselle). From Polish context Bazarnik’s concept of “destroyed space” (of the book) can be quoted, as well as previous bibliological researchers’ statements about author’s role in book designing (e.g. Głombiowski’s research, already quoted in this paper).

<sup>65</sup> The kindle edition is available for purchase only on the British, not American, Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/S-J-Abrams-ebook/dp/B00G99SIO6/ref=tmm\\_kin\\_swatch\\_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1470763931&sr=8-1-fkml#reader\\_B00G99SIO6](https://www.amazon.co.uk/S-J-Abrams-ebook/dp/B00G99SIO6/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1470763931&sr=8-1-fkml#reader_B00G99SIO6)). The Italian translation also has a Kindle Fire edition, although it does not include the note cited in the subsequent part of this paper ([https://www.amazon.com/S-nave-di-Teseo-Italian-ebook/dp/B00PIXUT0U/ref=sr\\_1\\_14?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1470766693&sr=1-14&keywords=s+jj+abrams](https://www.amazon.com/S-nave-di-Teseo-Italian-ebook/dp/B00PIXUT0U/ref=sr_1_14?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1470766693&sr=1-14&keywords=s+jj+abrams)). The German, Portugal and Taiwanese Chinese editions do not have Kindle versions at all.

<sup>66</sup> What is more, a Kindle representation, an ideally media-transparent one (because we are not talking here about a technology using interactive illustrations etc.) some e-book formats (such as the *step-in-book*, which uses VR) could perhaps offer the chance to remediate this story, but I am convinced that *S.* is rather projected as a story in a book form and cannot be changed to any other media form, any different interface.

hout it. While the Kindle Fire experience of *S.* isn't identical to the physical book, we hope you enjoy **this version of the adventure**.<sup>67</sup>

Nick Bantock's works provide more examples of these "small" differences between the "original" and electronic versions of books that were designed as "shifted" books using their material interfaces. Bantock is famous for his *Griffin & Sabine* series.<sup>68</sup> In the 90's, this work had its "new media adventure" when the author (in co-operation with Peter Gabriel's *Real World* studio) developed a BAFTA-awarded game,<sup>69</sup> or playable new-media story,<sup>70</sup> called *Ceremony of Innocence* based on the literary work.<sup>71</sup> Bantock also started experiments with what he called "other magic", i.e. touchscreens.<sup>72</sup> In co-operation with Bound Press, he is developing a set of books for the iPad since, as he sees it, "[with] the advent of e-books and iPad apps a new potential for storytelling and electronic gameplay has emerged."<sup>73</sup> The first (and so far only) book published in this project<sup>74</sup> is *The Venetian*, an iPad version of the book *The Venetian's Wife: A Strangely Sensual Tale of a Renaissance Explorer, a Computer, and Metamorphosis*, first published in 1996.

This app, released in 2011, seems equally different from the material book as the Kindle version of *S.* was from the real book by Abrams and Dorst; it is a little worse, poorer than the material book. The app offers music and animated illustrations that come to life when the reader interacts with them, but it is nothing more than a sim-

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<sup>67</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>68</sup> These books can be called shifted epistolary novels. They are material books that are full of reprints of the correspondence between the two main (title) protagonists. Some of them are postcards (both sides of which can be seen), and others take the form of classic letters which the reader needs to pull out of envelopes in which they are enclosed (the envelopes themselves being attached to the book). Reading becomes a very tactile, material and intimate act as the story unrolls only in this private correspondence and only through spying on the handwritten correspondence of the protagonist can the reader get it. After the success of the trilogy of *Griffin & Sabine*, Bantock continued the series, publishing subsequent volumes that develop the same story. In his other books, Bantock sometimes uses a similar implementation of pictures and attached insets.

<sup>69</sup> The work has won a multitude of other awards: the INVISION gold medal, best of show at the EURO PRIX, New York Festival gold medal, EMMA (European Multimedia Award), Australia's gold ATOM and AIMIA Awards, plus Canada's Atlantic Digital Media Award (<https://vimeo.com/6743011>).

<sup>70</sup> It can be emphasized here that *Ceremony of Innocence* was also presented at the NOT GAMES FEST in 2011. It is similar to what happened to *Pry* (by Samantha Gorman and Danny Cannizzaro)—one of the newest texts that transgresses the boundaries between media (literature, visual arts, film and games)—which was also presented at literary, game and film festivals at the same time.

<sup>71</sup> See: J.C. Herz, "GAME THEORY. Bringing Extra Passion to a Fine Romance", *New York Times*, 20.08.1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/20/technology/game-theory-bringing-extra-passion-to-a-fine-romance.html>.

<sup>72</sup> "Magic" seems to be one of the most frequently used adjectives for characterizing the iPad: it is described this way e.g. by Lori Emerson or Anastasia Salter, among others.

<sup>73</sup> See: <http://nickbantock.com/apps.php>.

<sup>74</sup> I won't describe here *Sage*, co-authored with Shannon Wray, as it is generative remediation of an ancient Turkish oracle.

ple interactive e-book. In comparison with the previous printed works of Bantock, especially the *Griffin & Sabine* series, which were so strongly based on the role of the tactile aspects of the reading experience, *Venetian's Wife* looks a little limited, and so does the iPad *Venetian*. However, Bound Press is also working on a new-media adventure based on the series *Griffin & Sabine*.<sup>75</sup> It is said to immerse the reader more deeply into the story world as it is “reimagined”<sup>76</sup> for touch-screens. This “digital adaptation”<sup>77</sup> of Bantock’s shifted epistolary novels (liberary and material ones) is reported to be released soon.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps this project will return to the greatness that critics saw in the *Ceremony of Innocence*.<sup>79</sup> However, it should be stressed that what was viewed as “genuinely sophisticated”, unique and crossing every border in the 90s (*Ceremony of Innocence* was said to “surpass its printed source”<sup>80</sup>), would definitely seem less innovative today, with twenty years of development in digital storytelling, e-publishing and e-literature occurring in between. I agree with the admiration for the technical level of the work on *Ceremony of Innocence*, but I do not view it as “surpassing” the material book. I believe that, as in the case of *S.*, this work is just a “different adventure.” Even though it offers many exciting possibilities that a printed book cannot achieve, reading the latter, pulling the letters out of envelopes, and so on is another kind of experience. *Ceremony of Innocence* is, “technically impressive”<sup>81</sup>, particularly for its time, but the “old” media is certainly not the one with less potential, or the one offering a poorer reading adventure.

Bantock was asked in an interview where he would place his own books in a bookstore, in terms of genre. Explaining that they are fiction, but not exactly novels, he finally responded, “They are just a different genre.”<sup>82</sup> Bantock’s books are problematic because we cannot read “just the text,” as the book is also composed of other elements, and the story is told in different codes. The whole act of reading is significant because the interface of the story is not limited to verbal code. These stories are embedded in the forms of the very specific books. These kinds of analogue, printed liberary works can certainly compete with digital stories; they offer reading adventures that are as interesting, or in some cases, more interesting.

Pavić’s work provides interesting examples of this point, as well. In 2010, just after the author’s death in 2009, his readers gained the opportunity to buy an English Kindle (re?)-edition of Pavić’s *Unique item. A delta novel with 100 endings*. Its first translation

<sup>75</sup> See: <http://boundpress.com/portfolio/griffinandSabine/>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>78</sup> A demo for the Oculus Rift virtual reality headset is available from the studio upon request.

<sup>79</sup> See J.C. Herz, “GAME THEORY...”, op. cit.

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>81</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>82</sup> See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDA1Fn\\_fPPA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDA1Fn_fPPA). This is how Bazarnik defined liberature: she saw it as a different literary genre. Her book expanding this theory (*Liberature, a Book-bound Genre*) is yet to come at the time of this article writing.

into English was published in paper under the same title shortly before this, in 2005 (under the same title, which will become important in a little while).<sup>83</sup> This work, another of Pavić's "experiments", is a love and detective story enclosed in a rather classic, "normal" book form. It is conventionally divided into 4 chapters plus a two-part appendix, and into two parts. The first part is titled *Unique item*. The second part, *The Blue Book*, consists of an initial section that continues the story from *Unique item*.<sup>84</sup> It also contains 100 different endings—or even 101, since the last ending is in the form of empty pages left for the reader to fill according to his or her imagination and desire<sup>85</sup>—and an invitation to feel free to choose any of them to create "one's own story," a "unique item". The novel opens with instructions (*How to read this book?*) which inform the reader of the fact that "this novel" (as said in the text) has 100 endings.

However readers of the Kindle edition may be surprised to learn that, in order to read the 100 endings and to have the option to choose one of them they have to buy another Kindle e-book. The Kindle version of *Unique item* concludes with a *Warning*,<sup>86</sup> ending with the words: "Make your choice! Read the *Blue Book!*"<sup>87</sup> and giving a link to the Amazon page where the latter can be purchased. Furthermore, the electronic version diverges from the original in the subtitles of the two parts. First, there are the ones which exist in the paper book (*Delta novel with hundred endings* and *A hundred endings of "Unique item"*). However, the *Blue Book* is *Unique item 2* (it is also called "a sequel with all 100 endings of the *Unique item*"<sup>88</sup>) and seems to be strictly related to the chosen publishing model.

Unlike readers who have the traditional paper codex in their hands, Kindle readers of Pavić's work do not receive the book promised in the introduction for *Unique item*. The whole concept of the work, i.e. the idea of giving all readers theoretically

<sup>83</sup> This paper edition was also re-edited in 2015.

<sup>84</sup> In fact, this leads to the point in the plot where the narrator says: "Finally, permit us to set forth the following hundred notes made by the late Chief Inspector Eugene Stross in his *Blue Book*. These notes are also the promised endings of this novel. Each reader can choose his own and thus receive a[n] unique item" (M. Pavić, *Unique item, Delta novel with a hundred endings*, transl. D. Rajkov, Belgrade: Dereta, 2005, p. 159). It simply explains that the subsequent *Blue Book* is in fact a material quotation (a library one), just as parts of the *Report* were previously invoked in the *Appendix*. At the same time, it clearly institutes the *Blue Book* as an integral part of *Unique item*.

<sup>85</sup> The Kindle edition does not have these pages. In the paper edition I used, after the introduction on page 251 (which reads: "The following pages are for those with their own solution to this story"), two pages were left to the readers.

<sup>86</sup> Against reading all the endings instead of choosing one. In the printed book, this part of text appears after the title and subtitle of the subsequent part (*Epilogue or the Blue Book: Catalogue of all hundred endings of this novel*).

<sup>87</sup> Only the first part of this sentence exists in the original, material book, but still—in the different place in the story: it ends the introductory part of *Blue Book* (in the edition I was working with, it appears on page 159, while the epilogue starts at page 147).

<sup>88</sup> The Kindle introduction also reads: "on **buying this book**, you receive all hundred endings **instead of one**" (emphasis mine). It is quite interesting because without buying the second book one gets no ending at all.

the same book which, in the very act of reading, becomes a unique one, seems to have been lost. Even the title, underlining the material aspect of the “unique” work,<sup>89</sup> vanishes in the remediation process.

All of these concerns might lead to the conclusion that Pavić’s work was intended as a novel in the form of a material book,<sup>90</sup> and that the posthumous Kindle edition distorted the author’s idea. However, the original Serbian edition of *Unique item* was also first published in two volumes: the *Plava sveska* accompanied the *Unikat* and both were offered for sale at the same time by the same publishing house (by Dereta, in Belgrade, in 2004). Thus, it seems that, thanks to the Kindle edition, some English-speaking readers were in fact offered a reading experience closest to what Pavić had in mind.

Questions occur concerning Pavić’s actual intent. The situation is complicated even more by information about his work given on the official website ([www.khazars.com](http://www.khazars.com)). This states that the publisher chooses how to publish Pavić’s work, whether in one or two volumes,<sup>91</sup> as if it were not important to the author what form the published work would take. But shouldn’t it be important to him? Was it really not? There seems to be no evidence to support an answer to these questions, but this might not be the point. The book itself shows that the concrete reading experience was certainly and unquestionably important to Pavić. As I noted, the story was clearly seen as a whole, of which the *Blue Book*—existing also in the fictional world and being “quoted” as a whole book in the main plot—is an integral part.

As a reader who has experienced the work in both one- and two-volume editions, I would assert that the former suits the concept of the work better. However, it is not important whether Pavić himself “spoiled” the idea of *Unique item* by not fighting for a specific edition<sup>92</sup> because two other considerations are crucial. The first consideration is the whole concept of a reading experience precisely created by Pavić. The second consideration is that the examples of *Unique item* and *S.* show that a story’s interface can be very important even in simple factors such as the form in which it is presented to readers. The interface can change, and sometimes even spoil, the whole reading experience.

*Unique item* also illustrates what Peter Frank calls a “neo-Benjaminian aura.”<sup>93</sup> In recent times, the vision of media’s potential (even paper books) to tell marvellous stories has been refreshed by new-media advances and new storytelling interfaces. Book

<sup>89</sup> This is even more evident in the translation, but is also present in the original title (*Unikat*).

<sup>90</sup> I refer here to the theoretical research of Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer (especially to the definition of literature proposed by them) or Grzegorz Maziarczyk (as signalled even by the title of his book).

<sup>91</sup> See: <http://www.khazars.com/en/catalog/unique-item> [accessed 2016-06-30].

<sup>92</sup> One can recall here the case of one of the non-English editions of B.S. Johnson’s *The Unfortunates*. Publishing the novel in the form of loose pages put in a box was impossible, so the author decided to publish it as a classic book with an introduction that explained how to change it into an interactive one more suited to his vision.

<sup>93</sup> P. Frank, “Concrete Conquest: Eviva Visiva”, in: C. Hill, N. Vassilakis (eds.), *The Last Vispo Anthology: Visual Poetry 1998-2008*, Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2012, p. 144.

was never just a transparent device used to transfer the story, although for centuries the mainstream has seen and described it as such. Pressman's theory of bookishness and Fajfer's theory of liberature, both with emphasis on the fetishization of the material codex, are concepts naturally born in the current cultural media configuration, and they clearly underline this fact. The book itself regains its magical status and can be unique, like *Unique item*, even if it is mass-produced. As Frank asserts:

The computer will not kill the book, but liberate it.<sup>94</sup> By relieving the book of its lexical responsibility, the computer will do for the book what photography did for painting two centuries ago: allow it to become a self-reflexive discipline, an investigation of medium and format and content and history whose resonance deepens and complectifies, spawning experiments and arguments, contradictions and unanticipated pathways to entirely new artistic possibilities.<sup>95</sup>

Alexander Starre is another scholar who underlines that digitalization does not have to lead to thinking about a text as a liquid that is easily poured from one container (meaning its form, medium or interface) into another.<sup>96</sup> In his words:

[...] the literary dialectic of digitalization may stimulate a resurgence of the book. In this resurgence, however, the book may no longer figure as transparent carrier of information, but as an aesthetic agent within material network of communication.<sup>97</sup>

There are numerous examples that show how original reading experiences are attained in both analogue and electronic media, from paper books to the CAVE technology. Comparisons of such works as the *Screen* project with B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* or Stanisław Dróżdź's *Między* (which had been done numerous times) emphasize that it is not only electronic media that can offer readers such weird, untypical reading experiences; refreshed classic media of storytelling, including the "shifted" paper codex, are equally good devices for it.<sup>98</sup> Regarding the poetics of reader gestures,<sup>99</sup> it would seem logical to argue that only new media, with their tactile aspects, permit such a strong and deep immersion into the story world; but if one looks for examples that debunk this belief, they will be found.

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<sup>94</sup> It should be noted that this kind of liberty was also analyzed as liberacy already in early manifests of Fajfer.

<sup>95</sup> P. Frank, "Concrete Conquest...", op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>96</sup> As is the case with concepts that describe print (and therefore, the whole printed book as well) as an invisible goblet, such as Beatrice Warde's theory. This point (with frequent references to Coleridge) was frequently mentioned in all literary interface-oriented theories (e.g. in Fajfer's papers or—in the context of e-literature—by Loss Pequeño Glazier).

<sup>97</sup> A. Starre, *Metamedia...*, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>98</sup> One of the announced topics of the annual ELO conference coming in 2017 in Porto (*Electronic literature is trans-temporal. It has an untold history*) also shows that this important e-lit conference will (again) tackle this problem.

<sup>99</sup> S. Bouchardon, "Figures of Gestural Manipulation in Digital Fictions", in: A. Bell, A. Ensslin, H.K. Rustad (eds.), *Analyzing Digital Fiction*, New York: Routledge, 2014.

Serge Bouchardon postulated including the figures of gestural manipulation into the new poetics; in *Loss of Grasp*, published in 2010, he integrated a mirror image of the reader, created through use of the computer's camera, into the work. It would be natural to conclude that only the new media technology and the electronic form of the work permits this, especially since the image is used as-is, but is also processed (the reader's face is transformed in accordance with the story). However, not very long ago, in 1991, Robert Antoni published a paper book titled *Divina Trace*, in which the same concept was used. This almost classic codex includes pictures integrated with the story along with an additional mirror-like page inserted between pages 202 and 205.<sup>100</sup> Made of a specific kind of aluminium foil, it shows a transformed image of the reader, so it functions exactly as in Bouchardon's electronic work. The picture is even integrated with the plot in a similar way; the subsequent page contains a paragraph about the reader seeing their transformed image in the book.<sup>101</sup> Thus, it is possible to realize this concept in analogue literary media, as the "shifted" book is a really powerful literary storytelling interface and modern authors can choose it just as well as a digital one. As Fajfer demanded years ago in his first manifestos, this decision should be strongly considered; as Starre claims, printed paper is today not a "medium of necessity" but a "medium of choice."<sup>102</sup>

Whether there are readers interested in these kinds of books is a further question. Pressman and Maziarczyk<sup>103</sup> emphasize the current tendency towards a fetishization of material aspects of literary communication in modern prose, and they are not the only ones who notice it. But the facts that document this trend are its strongest arguments. They include the popularity of "weird" "shift books", awards given to them, and so on. What happened with the Brady Whitney's puzzle book project on the crowdfunding portal kickstarter.com is one example.<sup>104</sup> *Codex Silenda: The Book of Puzzles* is a short story designed as a book presented to the reader as an enigma to solve. In order to reach every one of its five pages and read the story, the reader must unlock them by unlocking the bolts and solving the interactive puzzle. The project was launched on August 2, 2016 and surpassed its funding goal of \$30,000.00 within

<sup>100</sup> Page numbering (similarly to the omitted chapter in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*) clearly shows that the mirror image and the blank pages (the backside of the mirror page) are the "missing" ones (203 and 204).

<sup>101</sup> R. Antoni, *Divina Trace*, London: Robin Clark, 1991, p. 205.

<sup>102</sup> A. Starre, *Metamedia...*, op. cit., p. 263. In another part of his books, Starre claims: "Literature never naturally adhered to the book. The bond between the two is not a given. If it seemed like this for a long time, it is because dissemination of literary communication was not practical through other media. [...] As literary autopoiesis becomes imaginable without printed paper, the precarious structural coupling between text and page—which had been latent all along—comes to the fore" (p. 43).

<sup>103</sup> Strongly inspired by her research.

<sup>104</sup> See: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/2119414279/codex-silenda-the-book-of-puzzles>.

a few days, with over two hundred thousand dollars pledged.<sup>105</sup> There is even a waiting list for those who missed the opportunity to order the book.<sup>106</sup>

It is impossible to predict who the future readers-players of this work are, nor should we try to predict this; but I am sure that their number includes at least some book lovers. Today the embodied book has many different faces; we can appreciate reading conventional paper codices as well as the many other forms a book can take. The whole concept of reading has changed and is still evolving. Generally, modern books offer many pleasures in addition to intellectual ones, as emphasized by concepts of reading as a ride in Janec Strehovec's thought.<sup>107</sup> They are even more defamiliarized than *Young Lady's Illustrated Primer: a Propaedeutic Enchiridion* from Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age*, a fictional material book of the future which uses personalized smart paper. Book "production" of today is, in many cases, a process designed by the authors of the stories; both electronic and analogue productions shows us how far we have to shift from a conventional vision of the book learned from the traditional mainstream. We live among normal books and shifted ones alike. And that is why we need such concepts as liberacy, literary interfacial turn and others to deal with this reality. Not only the book, but also literature is no longer what it used to be. At least a part of it is also the "shifted" one: one which is not only the art of words.

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<sup>105</sup> The funding limit of \$200,000.00 dollars was reached by August 12.

<sup>106</sup> See: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/2119414279/codex-silenda-the-book-of-puzzles> [accessed 2016-08-12].

<sup>107</sup> J. Strehovec, "The E-Literary Text as an Instrument and Ride: Novel Forms of Digital Literature and the Expanded Concept of Reading", in: M. Cornis-Pope (ed.), *New Literary Hybrids in the Age of Multimedia Expression: Crossing Borders, Crossing Genres*, Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2014.

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