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AN ESSAY ON ELECTRONIC LITERATURE AS PLATFORM

Abstract: Electronic literature has expanded its limits, going beyond issues of definition, genre, and poetics, and developing into something more than literature. The goal of this paper is to address problems related to the discussion and meaning of electronic literature, something that elides a precise definition and clear-cut boundaries. Pawlicka’s article is based on the conviction that electronic literature has developed from a field that was institutionalized by the Electronic Literature Organization into a set of practices. The first part reflects upon changes in electronic literature, changes that compel researchers towards new considerations. This section refers to questions posed by N. Katherine Hayles and Dene Grigar and leads to a vital question, “Electronic Literature: How Is It?”. The question of “how” suggests a shift towards the idea of process; a fresh perspective is implied, one that is related to notions of action, practice, and application. This paper therefore introduces an innovative approach to researching electronic literature, namely a processual approach that is open to changes, revisions, and explorations. It in turn goes far beyond seeing electronic literature as simply a narrow field of literature within digital culture. Instead of that, it offers a new perspective on electronic literature, which is considered as a platform for digital research, textuality, art, and other forms of expression. These ideas are covered in the last part, which presents electronic literature as a platform for textual, artistic, and technological experiments, undertaken by writers, artists, designers, and programmers. This incorporates digital creative writing and creative programming, as well as trans/interdisciplinary research.

Keywords: electronic literature, platform, process, processual approach, definition of literature, history of literature

The problem of defining electronic literature and literature in general has never been more complex than it is today. It will suffice to mention at this juncture a number of tricky examples: the curation of electronic literature within the space of the art gallery, the status of literature created by programmers, or abstract literary projects that do not contain any written words. Last but not least, we might consider the awarding of the Nobel Prize for literature to a singer-songwriter.¹ Questions re-

¹ *The Nobel Prize in Literature 2016*, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2016/ [accessed 2016-11-15].

garding the factors that determine and frame the category of literature have intrigued me for a long time.² Every time I sit down at the computer to write an article about electronic literature, something bothers me for the next few hours: How can I describe something when its scope is not specified? How is it possible to capture new forms of electronic literature while still referring to the same old definitions and theoretical frameworks? How can we explain the inclusion of new projects into the category of electronic literature when these projects are viewed as non-literary? These things puzzle me and lead me to take up the questions again, to offer a new perspective on electronic literature seen as something more than literature.

My thoughts are a response to the latest *Electronic Literature Collection* anthology (volume 3, hereafter abbreviated as *ELC III*) which is quite different to the previous collections.³ This is the result of the emergence of new digital forms (e.g. Netprov and bot) and the broadening of the definition of electronic literature. My concerns, however, are related to the value of new digital genres and therefore the quality of electronic literature in general. For the future of electronic literature, *ELC III* is significant for many reasons: firstly, it introduces new digital forms; secondly, it offers a new definition of digital literature; and thirdly, for the first time, it divides projects according to their country of origin.

These reasons alone should be enough to prompt scholars to critically examine the anthology. Nevertheless, electronic literature suffers from a lack of literary criticism, the sort of analysis which would go beyond the merely descriptive towards a critical analysis of the value of electronic literature. Most of the works included in *ELC III* are worthy of attention not because of their literary quality, but because they determine the future of electronic literature. For instance, the only literary value presented by ‘bot projects’ is the fact that they present a new tool for artistic expression. Electronic literature might then have expanded its boundaries, but how can this be achieved without losing the value of literature? Do we seek to define digital literature, or resist its definition? Set boundaries or avoid them? Do we talk about the transformation of electronic literature or focus on the advent of totally new forms of expression?

I do not hide the fact that my position may seem contradictory. My theoretical background in literary studies pushes me in certain directions: towards the detection of differences between literature and other forms of expression, towards an understanding of the historical development of electronic literature, and towards the

² U. Pawlicka, “Towards a History of Electronic Literature”, *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2014, vol. 16, iss. 5, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2619>; U. Pawlicka, “Is There a Literature in This Class?”, *Kultura Popularna* 2014, iss. 4(38), <http://kulturapopularna-online.pl/resources/html/article/details?id=12311>; U. Pawlicka, “Ślady tekstu w cyberkulturze. Wstęp do cybersemiotyki”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2013, iss. 4, pp. 63-72.

³ S. Boluk, L. Flores, J. Garbe, A. Salter (eds.), *The Electronic Literature Collection vol. 3*, Cambridge, MA: Electronic Literature Organization, 2016, <http://collection.eliterature.org/3/about.html> [accessed 2016-11-15].

critical analysis of new literary forms. Because of this, I find myself in a paradoxical situation: as an advocate and opponent of electronic literature; as a researcher who would like to analyze the literariness of electronic literature, and as a researcher who would like to say aloud that electronic literature has nothing to do with literature; as a literary critic who would like to encourage the consumption of digital literature, and as a literary critic who would like to say that, unfortunately, many electronic literature projects are not high-quality. It would be easier to simply criticize electronic literature. But empty criticisms without constructive arguments lead nowhere.

Therefore, I would like to look at electronic literature not as literature but as a platform for various forms of expression. My notion of *electronic literature as platform* is close to Serge Bouchardon's view of digital literature, which is captured by the term 'tension'. In order to reveal the complexities of such a description, Bouchardon introduces a 'tension-based definition of digital literature.'⁴ I also refer to the relationship between literariness and technological components; however, my goal is not to present an account of electronic literature that reconciles these tensions, but rather to go a little bit further than that. To that end, I will reflect upon the changes in electronic literature that compel us to seek new artistic visions. I will then introduce my new research approach towards electronic literature. Eventually, I will propose a new view of electronic literature that looks beyond definitions and boundaries.

The Need for a New Research Perspective

The conviction that the digital humanities has impacted the way in which we currently consider electronic literature is the point of departure for my research. To a certain extent, the digital humanities and electronic literature have started to overlap with each other, triggering the need for critical reflections upon their mutual relationships. Certain events have already affected this mutual relationship: for example, a workshop on electronic literature was incorporated into the program of the Digital Humanities Summer Institute and universities such as Sapienza in Rome now offer courses on "Digital Humanities and Electronic Literature". The consequence is that the practice of electronic literature is brought into line with the making practices of the digital humanities.⁵ The relocation of electronic literature from departments of English or literature to centers for the Digital Humanities (or laboratories) has not

⁴ S. Bouchardon, "Towards a Tension-Based Definition of Digital Literature", *Journal of Creative Writing Studies* 2016, vol. 2, iss. 1, <http://scholarworks.rit.edu/jcws/vol2/iss1/6/>.

⁵ More: S. Schreibman, R. Siemens, J. Unsworth (eds.), *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004; M.K. Gold (ed.), *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012; A. Burdick (et al.) (ed.), *Digital Humanities*, Cambridge-London: MIT Press, 2012; S. Schreibman, R. Siemens, J. Unsworth (eds.), *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016; M.K. Gold, L.F. Klein (eds.), *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

been without consequences: an emphasis on the practical aspect of electronic literature is seen in theoretical reflections,⁶ in new forms of digital literature (e.g. generative poetry), and in academic courses focused on the production of such literature (e.g. “Electronic Literature: A Critical Writing & Making Course” at the University of California, Berkeley).

Like electronic literature, the digital humanities elide a precise definition. As Scott Rettberg claims:

Both “electronic literature” and “digital humanities” are loosely defined not by their attachment to a historic period or genre but by a general exploratory engagement with the contemporary technological apparatus. Electronic literature is a field that explores the effects and affordances of computational devices and the network on literary practice, while the digital humanities is a broader area primarily focused on research derived from digital methods within established areas of study in literature, history, and other humanistic disciplines.⁷

The juxtaposition of the relatively short histories of both electronic literature and the digital humanities is helpful for capturing the tendencies associated with the two disciplines. By observing the expansion of the digital humanities, we can say that it has developed from a “set of practices” and a “research approach” into a “discipline in its own right.”⁸ Initially, it was not so much an academic field as a set of digital methods used in humanities research. As time went on, however, the digital humanities expanded to become an independent field with its own methodology and infrastructure.

Electronic literature emerged in turn as a field that was institutionalized by the Electronic Literature Organization, an organization that gave it shape and supported its development.⁹ At the outset, electronic literature was understood to be concerned with born-digital literature, a field of literature with its own theory and methodology. The field has however shifted, and electronic literature is currently defined as “the artistic engagement of digital media and language,”¹⁰ something that covers various

⁶ N. Wardrip-Fruin, *Expressive Processing: On the Process-Intensive Literature and Digital Media*, Providence: Brown University, 2006; M.G. Kirschenbaum, *Mechanism: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*, Cambridge–London: MIT Press, 2008; J. Pressman, M.C. Marino, J. Douglass (eds.), *Reading Project: A Collaborative Analysis of William Poundstone’s Project for Tachistoscope {Bottomless Pit}*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015; N. Montfort, *Exploratory Programming for the Arts and Humanities*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016.

⁷ S. Rettberg, “Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities”, in: S. Schreibman, R. Siemens, J. Unsworth (eds.), *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016, [e-book], loc. 4976.

⁸ “Preface”, in: S. Schreibman, R. Siemens, J. Unsworth (eds.), *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, op. cit., loc. 1028.

⁹ L. Emerson, *On “e-literature” as a field*, 2011, <http://loriemerson.net/2011/10/12/on-e-literature-as-a-field/> [accessed 2016-11-15]; J.W. Rettberg, “Electronic Literature Seen from a Distance: The Beginnings of a Field”, *Dichtung Digital* 2012, iss. 41, <http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2012/41/walker-rettberg/walker-rettberg.htm> [accessed 2016-11-15].

¹⁰ S. Boluk, L. Flores, J. Garbe, A. Salter (eds.), *The Electronic Literature Collection vol. 3*, op. cit.

digital forms of expression. In the theoretical sphere too, electronic literature has started to deal with issues far-removed from literary studies: media archaeology, code studies, and preservation studies, to name just a few. Electronic literature has become more concerned with creative programming and software studies than digital poetics and literary linguistics. Hence, in terms of its theory, electronic literature has shifted from a semiotic tendency (focused on textual and structural interpretation) to an interdisciplinary approach (referring to different disciplines and methods, such as new media theory, mobile culture studies, code studies, and media art theory). Viewed in this way, in contrast to the digital humanities, electronic literature has developed from being considered as a distinct field towards being understood as a set of practices. Because of the expansion of its theoretical and artistic borders, electronic literature can now be understood as platform that offers various research perspectives, digital methods, and creative forms.

As mentioned above, to grasp the idea of electronic literature as a platform, it is beneficial to investigate shifts in the history of electronic literature. I have considered the history of electronic literature elsewhere.¹¹ Therefore it will suffice in this paper to briefly point to the most significant changes that have contributed to the new research approach.

Electronic literature is fueled by new technologies that give rise to new digital forms. In short, new technologies mean new forms of electronic literature. As Rettberg rightly claims: “It has become difficult to speak of genre in electronic literature, in part because it seems as if nearly every new piece is producing its own new genre.”¹² Consequently, the rapid development of new digital technologies means that it is almost impossible to divide works according to genre and to determine digital poetics (such an approach was characteristic of the second wave of electronic literature, known for its ‘cyberstructuralism’).¹³ It is equally difficult to draw the line between electronic literature and art.¹⁴ Artists and researchers have openly departed

¹¹ U. Pawlicka, “Visualizing Electronic Literature Collections”, *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2016, vol. 18, iss. 1, <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cleweb/vol18/iss1/3/>; U. Pawlicka, “Towards a History of Electronic Literature”, op. cit.

¹² S. Rettberg, “Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities”, op. cit., loc. 5014.

¹³ L. Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001; L.P. Glazier, *Digital Poetics: The Making of E-Poetries*, Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002; A. Morris, T. Swiss (eds.), *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006; E. Kac (ed.), *Media Poetry: An International Anthology*, Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007; Ch.T. Funkhouser, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Forms, 1959-1995*, Tuscaloosa: The University Alabama Press, 2007; N.K. Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008; M. Kinder, T. McPherson (eds.), *Transmedia Frictions: The Digital, the Arts, and the Humanities*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2014.

¹⁴ R. Simanowski, “What Is and Toward What End Do We Read Digital Literature?”, in: F.J. Ricardo (ed.), *Literary Art in Digital Performance: Case Studies in New Media Art and Criticism*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009.

from such divisions; they talk “against digital poetics”¹⁵ and turn towards “dissonant genres,”¹⁶ ambiguously referring to works as an “art form”,¹⁷ “text-based art”,¹⁸ and “e-literature as a public art.”¹⁹ The list of genres of electronic literature is constantly updated and canceled at the same time. A few examples of this will suffice: old pieces of digital work have been redefined (e.g. GIFs replace the category of digital concrete poetry²⁰), genres like Flash poetry have become extinct, and certain new forms have not yet been included as digital genres, such as bots, Twine games and Netprov.

At the same time, post-digital writing serves to undermine the argument that electronic literature is “born-digital literature”. Following Cramer: “«digital» has become a meaningless attribute because almost all media are electronic and based on digital information processing.”²¹ Digital technologies are no longer the determining factor for electronic literature; this is because, in the age of the “post-digital”, the language of digital technologies and networks is taken for granted.²² This means that we will have to reconsider the real meaning of electronic literature.

A characteristic of the ‘third wave’, the weakening of theoretical discussion devoted to the semiotics and poetics of electronic literature has led to a shift in interest that points towards the *production* of electronic literature. Both digital works and theoretical reflections are distinguished by their interest in digital production and procedures: new ways of writing and reading, mediated by an operating system. Without a doubt, this field was promising, particularly at a time when code studies, platform studies, and media archaeology were blossoming. A focus on the operations of the work led to a growing number of conceptual electronic literature projects. Conceptual works, such as generative poetry, are attractive only if authors can present new artistic methods by exploring the possibilities of technologies. Conceptual projects may therefore contribute to the expansion of horizons.

¹⁵ S. Baldwin, “Against Digital Poetics”, *Electronic Book Review* 2009, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/absorbant> [accessed 2016-11-15].

¹⁶ A. Salter, “Convergent Devices, Dissonant Genres: Tracking the «Future» of Electronic Literature on the iPad”, *Electronic Book Review* 2015, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/convergent> [accessed 2016-11-15].

¹⁷ D. Grigar, *On Evolving and Emerging Literary Forms: A Curatorial Statement for ‘Electronic Literature & Its Emerging Forms’*, <http://dtc-wsuv.org/elit/elit-loc/denes-curatorial-statement/> [accessed 2016-11-15].

¹⁸ J. Pressman, *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 2.

¹⁹ K. Inman Berens, “E-Literature as Public Art: ELO 2015’s Five Gallery Shows”, *Hyperrhiz* 2016, iss. 14, <http://hyperrhiz.io/hyperrhiz14/commentary/1-berens-five-shows.html> [accessed 2016-11-15].

²⁰ A.M. Uribe, “Tipoemas Y Anipoemas”, 1997, in: S. Boluk, L. Flores, J. Garbe, A. Salter (eds.), *The Electronic Literature Collection vol. 3*, op. cit.

²¹ F. Cramer, “Post-Digital Writing”, *Electronic Book Review* 2012, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/author/florian-cramer> [accessed 2016-11-15].

²² More: P. Christine, “Genealogies of the Digital: A Post-Critique”, in: E. Ertan (ed.), *Histories of the Post Digital*, Istanbul: Amber Platform, 2016, pp. 121-130.

All the same, it is hard to discuss literature without referring to text and its meaning: the concept should be the starting point for the discussion, not the end point. Unfortunately, in the case of many works, “concept leads to concept,” and electronic literature is pushed towards the realm of the avant-garde. This is not however to say that we should overlook the role of technology, the means of production; the reduction of electronic literature to simply “text” would mean removing any distinction between digital and print literature. The future development of electronic literature requires a combined focus on both textuality and the mode of production. Such an approach will need to defend the quality of electronic work and prevent “coding-for-coding’s sake”.

The shift towards a concern with the production and mechanization of electronic literature has led to a growing number of collective projects created by people involved in digital media and beyond, such as writers, artists, media scholars, designers, programmers, etc. More and more works of electronic literature are made by people for whom the electronic aspect is more significant than the literary dimension. The first generation of digital literature, and the beginning of the second generation, was characterized by simple digital forms; works were prepared by individuals with a literary background and digital technology had not yet been sufficiently developed. By contrast, the third generation (or third wave) is distinguished by a relatively high level of production, but unfortunately this has come at the expense of content. This is a result of the belief that you can create electronic literature by simply possessing sufficient programming or design skills. Nothing could be further from the truth. Electronic literature should be propelled by collective projects created by individuals from various disciplines. But these individuals should care about good quality production *and* content.

The extension of theoretical contexts for the study of digital literature has caused electronic literature to begin to lose its own stable place within the academy. While the first wave of electronic literature did not raise doubts about the academic field to which it belonged (e.g. comparative literature), the “post-hypertext e-literature”²³ is subject to equivocal qualifications: philology, comparative literature, media studies, cultural studies, or art. The problem therefore concerns the position of electronic literature inside of the university. The problem might seem trivial, since being an interdisciplinary (or even transdisciplinary) field sounds attractive; however, the boundaries between different subject areas do impact the theoretical and practical development of electronic literature. Electronic literature seems to fit into the broad area of the digital humanities, which emphasizes practice or ‘making things’. Digital creative writing is the basis for the development of valuable electronic literature in which text, operation, and production are taken together. Merging these two aspects (theory and practice) should be the principle of electronic literature. In this light, it

²³ J. Strehovec, “E-Literature, New Media Art, and E-Literary Criticism”, *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2014, vol. 16, iss. 5, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2486>, p. 2.

seems clear that electronic literature cannot develop without collaboration between programmers (in the realm of the electronic) and theorists and writers (in the realm of literature).

How we position electronic literature inside and outside the academy is more than a choice about the language that we use to discuss it, be this the language of the new media, the new phenomenology, or programming language. Rather, it is an attempt to reflect on how we want to talk about electronic literature and how we want it to develop. At this point, we can see how electronic literature avoids clear-cut boundaries in several respects: definition, genre, theoretical framework, place within the academy, and much more. The expansion of the limits of electronic literature—theoretical, technological, and artistic—means that questions of “what” and “where” are no longer possible.

Electronic Literature: *How Is It?*

In her highly significant 2007 work *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*,²⁴ N. Katherine Hayles included her article “Electronic Literature: What Is It?”. Therein, she summarized the most important previous theories about and inquiries into the question. At the same time, in 2008, Andrew Gallix released his pungent *Guardian* article “Is e-literature just one big anti-climax?”, which initiated a fervent discussion about the future of electronic literature and the fact that it might be gradually absorbed by digital art. In response to the *Guardian* article, Dene Grigar’s “Electronic Literature: Where Is It?”²⁵ was carried by the *Electronic Book Review*. The piece’s meaningful title deliberately gestured towards Hayles’s above-mentioned essay, directing attention towards issues that had not been previously undertaken—issues that triggered a critical discussion in the style of Gallix. In his article, Grigar demonstratively asked questions that were less about the content of electronic literature and more about its place in the academic community and, more broadly speaking, its place within contemporary literary culture and the humanities.

In 2014 I participated in a seminar about electronic literature at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute at the University of Victoria, Canada. During the course of the seminar, I realized that maybe only a quarter of people knew exactly what the term electronic literature meant. In 2014, starting a discussion with the question “What is electronic literature?” triggered an odd feeling. However, it turned out that the goal of the seminar was not to define electronic literature at all; instead, the aim was to provide methodological tools for the discussion of such literature. While the questions posed by Hayles and Grigar still seemed relevant, getting clear answers to

²⁴ N.K. Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons...*, op. cit.

²⁵ D. Grigar, “Electronic Literature: Where Is It?”, *Electronic Book Review* 2008, <http://www.electronic-bookreview.com/thread/technocapitalism/invigorating> [accessed 2016-11-15].

them was no longer possible. The third wave of electronic literature is characterized by a lack of one language or perspective. This is the time for the question of “how”.

While the pronoun “what” is related to theory, textuality, and product, the pronoun “how” implies practice, experience, and process. Following the ideas of Burdick et al.:

[the pronoun] “how” requires attention to design, format, medium, materiality, platform, dissemination, authorship, and audience, things that are all taken for granted or assumed to be implicit, value-neutral, secondary, or even irrelevant when scholars turn over their manuscripts to a university press.²⁶

Such questions might focus on the operation of the work in the spirit of Aarseth’s theory. However, they also address the action of electronic literature within the humanities and culture at large. Therefore, the question of “how” is also a challenge that, via a developmental strategy, seeks answers to the following questions: How can we expand the borders of electronic literature without the loss of its literariness? How can we strengthen cooperation between different fields in order to develop high-quality electronic literature? How can we show that electronic literature is/can be specific research material for examining changes in literature and the humanities? How can electronic literature work within an academy without specifying its own definition? How can we develop electronic literature when grants are allocated for the development of mainstream fields?

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the future of electronic literature. It is, therefore, not hard to grasp the fact that my question “How is electronic literature?” denotes a broad issue. It refers to both the condition of contemporary literature and the humanities in general.

Towards a Processual Approach

The underlying assumption of the question of “how” is a shift towards process: action, practice, and application. As Hayles notes: “Electronic text is more processual than print; it is performative by its very nature.”²⁷ This means that any effort to capture the whole may be doomed to fail. The departure point for any article devoted to electronic literature is therefore a recognition of its instability, dynamism, and unpredictability. What is today a feature of electronic literature will tomorrow become part of its history. A question then arises: How can we grasp this variable object as a process, rather than attempting to describe it as a solid thing? In answer, I propose a new research approach: a processual approach.

²⁶ A. Burdick (et al.) (ed.), *Digital Humanities*, op. cit., p. 76.

²⁷ N.K. Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 101.

Based on the *Thinkmap: Visual Thesaurus* tool,²⁸ let's look at the meanings and associations of the word "process". The term "process" is represented by the following categories: "action", "work", "procedure", "operation", "manage", and so on. Hence, the processual approach towards electronic literature means accepting its instability. Electronic literature needs to be described in the context of ongoing action and production, as something that is unfinished and non-permanent.

The processual approach is characterized by the following features. Firstly, the researcher becomes a 'mover' or 'shifter', focused on changes and turns; he or she will flag both change and continuity. Secondly, there is an openness to revision—the uncovering of new facts, of projects created in the past, will compel researchers to rewrite the history of electronic literature and to usher in the development of an alternative history. Previous theoretical models are not, however, considered to be false, but rather it is acknowledged that these works were carried out at a particular moment of technological development. Thirdly, certain case studies might be considered as transdisciplinary objects, allowing for an open exploration of various research contexts, rather than limiting the analysis to the framework of a single discipline. Fourthly and finally, there is a focus on action, practice and agency. Researchers will investigate data (prefabricated elements, such as text, image, sound, etc.) and the processes that determine how that data is manipulated. Viewed from a processual perspective, agency is in turn associated with both the human and non-human actors who take part in the production of electronic literature. Knowledge is curated by collective groups of humanists, designers, programmers, etc., who model knowledge rather than structuring it.

The processual approach towards electronic literature is open to factors like change, revision, exploration, and collaboration. It goes far beyond seeing electronic literature as a field of literature within digital culture, instead offering a new perspective. Electronic literature becomes a platform for digital research, textuality, art and other forms of expression.

Electronic Literature as a Platform

Before turning to my main point, let's think for a moment about the word "platform". The term calls to mind platform studies, as introduced by Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort in 2009 and defined as follows: "Platform Studies investigates the relationships between the hardware and software design of computing systems and the creative works produced on those systems."²⁹ Viewed in this way, the word "platform" refers to devices, programs, tools, and computing systems (etc.); briefly, it covers anything that is "the foundation of computational expression". This commonly used definition is, unsurprisingly then, the perspective that is most popular with research-

²⁸ Thinkmap: Visual Thesaurus, <https://www.visualthesaurus.com/app/view> [accessed 2016-11-15].

²⁹ I. Bogost, N. Montfort, *Platform Studies*, <http://platformstudies.com/> [accessed 2016-11-15].

ers. In this light, it is worth recalling Rettberg's opinions about "exclusive" platforms for electronic literature (e.g. Storyspace), which he calls "e-lit platforms."³⁰ But let's go a little further.

Based again on *Thinkmap*, we can see that the term "platform" is in some ways broad. Yes it can mean "operating system", "computer system", "computing machine", "data processor" and so on. But it can also refer to the kind of "program" that is not related to computing. In a political sense, the building of a "political program" or "platform" means bringing together people with similar ideas, perspectives, and expectations. In this way, the term "platform" goes beyond the categories of hardware and software; it also defines various actions, practices, and expressions that are connected by one vision. By looking beyond a narrow definition of the field, electronic literature becomes a platform for different textual, technological, and artistic activities.

Electronic literature is understood as a platform in the following ways:

- it is a platform for textual, technological, artistic, and scientific experiments and therefore functions as a testing area. As Rettberg puts it: "Electronic literature projects are forms of creative expression, but they are also often experiments in the scientific sense."³¹ A good example is Mark Sample's twitterbot *Station 51000*,³² which is concerned with the Internet of Things.³³
- it is a platform for digital tools, programs, programming languages, and practical solutions. Electronic literature tests, develops and suggests the programs used to create digital works, such as HTML, Twitter, Twine, Kinect, the Unity 3D engine, and so on.
- it is a platform for practice-based research. Theoretical knowledge about digital works can be obtained via the practical exploration and design of digital projects.
- it is a learning platform. Electronic literature offers learning in practice via programs, digital tools, creative programming, and creative digital writing.³⁴ For example, the following digital projects teach us to use different tools and languages: Sample's *House of Leaves of Grass*³⁵ uses N-Gram Tools, Voyant Tools, and the Stanford Named Entity Recognizer; Alexandra Saemmer's

³⁰ S. Rettberg, "Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities", op. cit., loc. 5119.

³¹ Ibidem, loc. 5009.

³² M. Sample, "Station 51000", 2014, in: S. Boluk, L. Flores, J. Garbe, A. Salter (eds.), *The Electronic Literature Collection vol. 3*, op. cit., <http://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=station-51000> [accessed 2016-11-15].

³³ F.A. Jørgensen, "The Internet of Things", in: S. Schreibman, R. Siemens, J. Unsworth (eds.), *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, op. cit., loc. 2614.

³⁴ M. Dean Clark, T. Hergenrader, J. Rein (eds.), *Creative Writing in the Digital Age*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

³⁵ M. Sample, *House of Leaves of Grass*, <http://fugitivetexts.net/houseleavesgrass/reading.html> [accessed 2016-11-15].

*Böhmische Dörfer*³⁶ uses Prezi; Anna Anthropy's *The Hunt for the Gay Planet*³⁷ uses Twine; and Zuzana Husárová and Lubomír Panák's *Enter:in' Wodies*³⁸ is programmed in Processing and controlled by the Kinect Sensor.

- it is a platform that facilitates the creation of further works. Electronic literature includes phenomena such as the “poetry generator”, “poetry engine”, or “poetry application”, which allow us to create new works based on someone else's source code. The best examples are Sample's *House of Leaves of Grass*, which used the platform developed by Nick Montfort and Stephanie Strickland in *Sea and Spar Between*,³⁹ and Montfort's *Taroko Gorge*⁴⁰ “poetry engine”,⁴¹ which has been remixed by a number of other writers.
- it is a research platform for critical studies, offering different research perspectives and methodological tools. Electronic literature covers the following: media history, the history of social media, media archaeology, art history, new media studies, platform studies, code studies, software studies, preservation studies, archive studies, curatorial studies, and much more besides. Electronic literature offers theoretical reflections. It also provides research material in the form of digital works.
- it is a community platform. The Electronic Literature Organization built a specific form of electronic literature community,⁴² which expanded by incorporating members from different fields and communities, such as the digital humanities community. One result of the expansion of the electronic literature community was the organization of the ELO Conference “Next Horizons 2016”⁴³ at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute.

In conclusion, it is not the “end”⁴⁴ of electronic literature that calls for new questions and reflections, but rather the “new horizons” that are opening up. This is the

³⁶ A. Saemmer, “Böhmische Dörfer”, 2011, in: S. Schreibman, R. Siemens, J. Unsworth (eds.), *The Electronic Literature Collection vol. 3*, op. cit., <http://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=bohmische-dorfer> [accessed 2016-11-15].

³⁷ A. Anthropy, “The Hunt for the Gay Planet”, 2013, in: ibidem, <http://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=hunt-for-the-gay-planet> [accessed 2016-11-15].

³⁸ Z. Husárová, L. Panák's, “Enter:in' Wodies”, 2011, [in:] ibidem, <http://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=enter-in-wodies> [accessed 2016-11-15].

³⁹ N. Montfort, S. Strickland, “Sea and Spar Between”, 2010, in: ibidem, <http://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=sea-and-spar-between> [accessed 2016-11-15].

⁴⁰ N. Montfort, “Taroko Gorge”, 2009, in: ibidem, <http://collection.eliterature.org/3/work.html?work=taroko-gorge> [accessed 2016-11-15].

⁴¹ J.J. Brown, Jr., “Writing with Machines: Data and Process in Taroko Gorge”, in: M. Dean Clark, T. Hergenrader, J. Rein (eds.), *Creative Writing in the Digital Age*, op. cit., [e-book], loc. 2807.

⁴² S. Rettberg, P. Tomaszek, S. Baldwin (eds.), *Electronic Literature Communities*, Morgantown: The Center for Literary Computing and ELMCIP, 2015.

⁴³ Next Horizons 2016, Electronic Literature Organization Conference & Media Arts Festival, Victoria, 2016, <http://elo2016.com/> [accessed 2016-11-15].

⁴⁴ The End(s) of Electronic Literature, Electronic Literature Organization Conference, Bergen, 2015, <http://eliterature.org/news/conference/> [accessed 2016-11-15].

time for us to investigate how to expand these horizons, how to build a new vision of electronic literature. The processual approach offers a new research perspective focused on the changes, shifts, and operations of digital literature. Furthermore, electronic literature expands its limits, going beyond issues of definition, structure, and poetics, and developing into something more than literature. Thus electronic literature becomes a platform of and for textual, artistic, and technological experiments and expressions. This is characterised by the different actions of writers, artists, designers, and programmers (etc.). It includes digital creative writing and creative programming, hardware and software, and various trans/interdisciplinary research.

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