

Teksty Drugie 2016, 2, s. 223-241  
Special Issue – English Edition



# **Sociological Contexts of Liberature**

Katarzyna Bazarnik

# New Phenomena of Literary Culture

---

Katarzyna Bazarnik

---

## Sociological Contexts of Liberature

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2016.en.2.15

This project was funded  
by the National Science  
Centre (grant number  
DEC2011/01/D/HS2/05129).

The struggles over definition (or classification) have *boundaries* at stake (between genres and disciplines, or between modes of production inside the same genre) and, therefore, hierarchies. To define boundaries, defend them and control entries is to defend the established order in the field.

Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*

The following article is an attempt to critically describe and self-analyze liberature, a phenomenon whose emergence I have contributed to, first as the co-author of two books — *Oka-leczenie* [*Mute-I-Late* or *Eyes-ore*]<sup>1</sup> and *(O)patrzenie* [*Ga(u)ze*]<sup>2</sup> — to which the label is applied, and later as a researcher who laid the academic groundwork for the theoretical postulates formulated by Zenon Fajfer. In an essay published in *Dekada Literacka* in 1999, the author proposed the term *liberature* (from the Latin *liber*, meaning book) to be used in reference to a separate genre that would include works of literature in which the writer or poet takes deliberate advantage of the space and structure of the book as well as the visual qualities of the printed word as an extra-verbal means of expression, one

---

**Katarzyna Bazarnik**  
– Assistant  
Professor at the  
Institute of English  
Studies, Jagiellonian  
University. She is the  
editor of “Liberature”  
series at the Ha!art  
Corporation,  
co-founder of the  
Kraków-based  
Liberature Reading  
Room, co-author  
of liberary books,  
translator, and  
a James Joyce  
scholar. She recently  
published the book  
*Liberature. A Book-  
bound Genre*. E-mail:  
k.bazarnik@uj.edu.pl

---

1 Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik, *Oka-leczenie* (Kraków: prototype edition, 2000; Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2009).

2 Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer, *(O)patrzenie* (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2003).

that constitutes a nonverbal semantic code that harmonizes with the verbal code. This proposal was made in the concluding section of the article provocatively titled *Liberature: An Appendix to a Dictionary of Literary Terms*,<sup>3</sup> which bore the features of an artistic manifesto and which, in hindsight, was interpreted as such by researchers as well as the authors who came to identify with the theses contained therein. The piece was published to accompany the *Exhibition of Unconventional Books* we hosted at the Jagiellonian Library as part of Bloomsday, a series of events commemorating the date on which Joyce's *Ulysses* takes place.

Fajfer at the time postulated that the writer's medium ought to include, beside language, the visual and material aspects of books and the printed word, such as the color and form of the typeface, the typography of the page (*mise-en-page*), the architecture of the volume, and even the paper or other material on which the text is printed. He encouraged other writers to make deliberate and active use of these features, seeing such poetics as a "way of saving hardcopy books from obliteration by electronic media," and concluding that "this fourth, still officially unacknowledged, mode will infuse new life into literature. This genre may be the future of literature."<sup>4</sup> In later articles, he also referred to tradition, pointing out a number of acclaimed writers who had employed such devices, deliberately molding the physical space of their works and subversively revealing the opaqueness of materialized language.

This theoretical postulate, which the artist provocatively presented as an "appendix to a dictionary of literary terms," may be perceived as a classic form of intervention in the consecrated field of literature with the purpose of shifting its borders and changing its internal hierarchy. As Bourdieu observes, "to produce effects is already to exist in a field, even if these effects are mere reactions of resistance or exclusion."<sup>5</sup> Fajfer's manifesto – this autonomy-giving voice advocating the independence and purity of literature, addressing writers and theoreticians alike – initially struck a chord with literary scholars and, in time, with artists as well,<sup>6</sup> perhaps owing to the fact that earlier

3 Zenon Fajfer, "Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich," *Dekada Literacka* 5–6 (1999): 8–9; reprinted in *Liberatura czyli literatura totalna. Teksty zebrane z lat 1999–2010* [*Liberature or Total Literature*], ed. and trans. Katarzyna Bazarnik (Kraków: Korpocja Ha!art, 2010), 23–28. Subsequent citations refer to the more readily available reprint.

4 Fajfer, *Liberatura*, 28.

5 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: The Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 225–226.

6 It should be noted that Radosław Nowakowski, one of the curators of the "Booksday" exhibition at the Jagiellonian Library, previously a self-described "bookmaker," immedi-

suggestions, intuitions, and proposals for the inclusion of (typo)graphical and material qualities of the written word<sup>7</sup> within the scope of literary analysis had already paved the way, to a certain degree, for ideas of this type in the academic field. His proposal also fell onto a fertile sociocultural ground, drawing interest from a group of young, aspiring critics and editors, students, and alumni of Jagiellonian University's Polish Studies department in Kraków, all of whom were associated with *Ha!art*, a newly-founded interdisciplinary magazine devoted to new culture. These postulates found their practical implementation in the above-mentioned book *Oka-leczenie*, which took the form of three codices joined at the covers, written in the 1990s. In 2000, we printed a mini-edition of nine copies at a digital print shop as a prototype that could be presented to potential publishers. The manifesto precipitated other actions, not all of which were artistic in nature: in 2002 we founded the Liberature Reading Room at the Małopolska Institute of Culture, and one year later we launched the "Liberatura" book series with our second title, *(O)patrznie*, at the Krakowska Alternatywa (later renamed *Ha!art*) publishing house, which also publishes the aforementioned magazine *Ha!art*. The idea for the series emerged in response to a proposal from the editor-in-chief and head of the publishing house, Piotr Marecki, who was preparing a special issue<sup>8</sup> devoted entirely to our artistic and cultural work, while offering to publish *(O)patrznie*.

I will revisit these practical aspects of liberature at the end of this article; I merely describe them in short at this point in order to outline the context of the phenomenon and to point out to a few crucial factors shaping liberature as a contemporary cultural phenomenon. One the one hand, it can be described

---

ately declared his association with liberature, and subsequent declarations were made by other authors as more titles were published in the series.

- 7 See Stefania Skwarczyńska, "Problem ekspresywności czynników pozajęzykowych na gruncie wypowiedzenia ustnego i pisemnego," in *Wstęp do nauki o literaturze*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: PAX, 1954); Henryk Markiewicz, "Sposób istnienia i budowa dzieła literackiego," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (1962): 331–352; Markiewicz, "Jeszcze o budowie dzieła literackiego w związku z artykułem prof. R. Ingardena," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2 (1964): 429–434; Carl Darryl Malmgren, *Fictional Spaces in the Modernist and Postmodernist American Novel* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1985); Jerzy Kutnik, *The Novel as Performance. The Fiction of Ronald Sukenick and Raymond Federman* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986); Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Donald F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and the concept of technotext, which emerged at the same time, unbeknownst to us: Katherine N. Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2002).

- 8 *Ha!art* 2 (15), (2003).

as a literary genre or a hybrid genre,<sup>9</sup> or the category of liberariness that characterises certain literary works,<sup>10</sup> while on the other hand, its very existence is often questioned, or it is pointed out that liberature is merely a trend in new Polish literature, a cultural institution,<sup>11</sup> or — in more practical terms — a publishing series featuring unconventional books. It seems that Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the literary field and the contemporary, functional/rhetorical and sociolinguistic approaches to the genre may shed important light on the situation and encompass its heterogeneity within a theoretical framework.

Let us start, however, at the beginning, that is at the conclusion of the manifesto, where a generic proposal is made, one that is developed in subsequent essays by Fajfer<sup>12</sup> and myself.<sup>13</sup> While the examples of works employing the “rhetoric of materiality” provided in the article could be classified either as lyric (Mallarmé's *A Throw of the Dice*) or epic (Joyce's novel), and *Oka-leczenie* itself could equally well belong to both categories, perhaps even that of the dramatic, Fajfer's first intuition was to define the phenomenon at hand as a “literary mode.” (This almost offhand proposal at the end of his essay was emphasized in a subsequent article, symbolically titled *lyric, epic, dramatie,*

9 Wojciech Kalaga, “Tekst hybrydyczny. Polifonie i aporie doświadczenia wizualnego,” in *Kulturowe wizualizacje doświadczenia*, ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki and Adam Dziadek (Warszawa: IBL and “Centrum Międzynarodowych Badań Polonistycznych,” 2010).

10 Agnieszka Przybyszewska, *Liberackość dzieła literackiego* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo UŁ, 2015), Grzegorz Maziarczyk, *The Novel as Book: Textual Materiality in Contemporary Fiction in English* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013).

11 See the syllabuses listed in footnote 49 below.

12 These articles have been compiled and presented in chronological order in the aforementioned bilingual book by Zenon Fajfer, *Liberatura czyli literatura totalna. Teksty zebrane z lat 1999-2010*. [*Liberature or Total Literature*], specially published for a panel devoted to the subject of liberature at the IAWIS (International Association of Word and Image Studies) Focus Conference (*Displaying Word and Image*), held at the University of Ulster in Belfast, in June, 2010.

13 See Katarzyna Bazarnik, “Liberature: A New Literary Genre?,” in *Insistent Images. Iconicity in Language and Literature*, ed. Elżbieta Tabakowska et al. (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007); Bazarnik, “Liberatura, czyli o powstawaniu gatunków (literackich),” in *Od liberatury do e-literatury*, ed. Eugeniusz Wilk and Monika Górską-Olesińska (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2011) (also published in English); and Bazarnik, 『リベラトゥラ——テキストと書物の形を統合する新しい文学ジャンル (久山宏一訳)』 [“Liberature: A Literary Genre that Integrates the Text and Form of a Book”], trans. Koichi Kuyama, 『れにくさ』, *Renya. PEHIKKA* [Journal of the Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo] 3 (2012). See also Bazarnik *Liberature. A Book-Bound Genre* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2016).

*liberature*<sup>14</sup>). Interestingly, Fajfer does not limit himself to merely aesthetic categories when describing its features; his comments on the typeface, typographic layout, and the texture and color of the paper reveal a significant awareness of the sociocultural context of a literary statement modeled in this fashion. Notice the arguments he employs when discussing the semantic aspect of print:

A simple experiment of printing, for example, a Shakespeare sonnet in a loud type used in advertising, would prove how important these matters are — the dissonance would be obvious. But one could easily think of an artistically more fruitful use of a particular typeface; for example, the Polish national anthem printed in Polish, but with Gothic type and the Cyrillic alphabet — a device that would arouse strong emotions and provoke a response from every Polish reader.<sup>15</sup>

His idea to print the Polish national anthem using a Gothic font and the Cyrillic alphabet would be incomprehensible without considering the nature of the hypothetical audience of such a message. The choice of a typeface charged with negative cultural associations would “provoke a response” as a socially significant act only from a specific group of readers; those in other cultures would find the gesture either completely unintelligible or merely aesthetic in nature, hinting, for example, at a nostalgia for “historical,” “beautiful,” or “stylized” typefaces. Such an argument, on the one hand, exhibits an awareness of the historical and cultural context in which the author and reader always operate; on the other hand, it points to the social determinants of the bibliographical code,<sup>16</sup> which is typically left to the publisher, and for which, as Fajfer postulates, the author himself should now take responsibility. In *liberature*, this aspect of the book, which is ostensibly irrelevant from the point of view of the literary scholar, would be determined by the author of the text himself. In effect, such a text would be a work of “*auteur* literature” (as paradoxical as that may sound), analogous to *auteur* cinema or theater, a comparison that Fajfer himself makes.<sup>17</sup>

14 Fajfer, “liryka, epika, dramat, liberatura,” in *Od Joyce’a do liberatury. Szkice o architekturze słowa*, ed. Katarzyna Bazarnik (Kraków: Universitas, 2002), 233–239. Reprinted in English as “lyric, epic, dramatic, liberature” in Fajfer, *Liberatura*, 43–49.

15 Fajfer, “Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich,” 25.

16 I have borrowed this term from the works of Jerome McGann, among others *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

17 He compares such “*auteur*” books to performances staged by Tadeusz Kantor’s Cricot 2 theater and Jerzy Grotowski’s Theater of 13 Rows; see Fajfer, “Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich,” 26.

Otherwise, recognizing the semantic value of the bibliographical code and its effect on the reception of the work, one would have to accept that the message forged by a series of agents that are heteronomous to the work is not fully autonomous; yet creative autonomy, the freedom to create unbridled by external factors, is precisely what the author of *Spoglądając przez ozonową dziurę* [*Detect Ozone Whole Nearby*] seeks to achieve. Further analysis of liberature's founding manifesto and its author's subsequent statements reveals a distinct emphasis placed on the autonomy of the writer as the one true author of the work, postulating his or her independence from economic factors, the market, tastes, and historical conditions, and focusing on his or her creative freedom. Zenon Fajfer discussed this issue in one of his essays:

As a practicing writer, I am much more fascinated with artistic prospects: first of all, a vision of creating a fully autonomous work in which the author would be responsible for its every constituent, just as sometimes happens in the theatre when the author of the play is also the stage designer and director.

Total work, the total artist. Craig's and Wyspiański's dream transferred onto a page? Even if it were so, one should not forget that long before them, Blake and Mallarmé had seen their "monumental theatres," and after them Joyce put that into more or less successful practice.<sup>18</sup>

His diagnosis of the semantics governing the visual design of literary works resembles, to a certain extent, the descriptions of the meaning and function of the bibliographical code proffered by D. F. McKenzie and Jerome McGann. This subject had thus far been a focus of attention and analysis primarily for historians, bibliographers, and textual scholars as McKenzie and McGann themselves were. Such a study of the materiality of the book involved the dating of texts, determining their authenticity, characterizing the institutions by which they were published and distributed, and the types of audiences for whom they were intended. However, these activities were never – or hardly ever – carried out with an interpretative intention.<sup>19</sup> McKenzie's *Bibliography and Sociology of Texts* and McGann's *The Textual Condition* and *The Black Riders* were breakthroughs in their fields, ones that redefined bibliography as the sociology of texts. Their authors claimed that one cannot properly study, describe, understand, and interpret the meaning of texts without considering

18 Fajfer, "lyric, epic, dramatic, liberature," 47.

19 Donald F. McKenzie, "The Book as an Expressive Form," in *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9–30.

the sociological dimension inscribed into their material form, while each edition of “the same work” is an interpretation thereof. From this perspective, the visual design of the book is regarded as a message in itself, one typically sent by the publisher, while the content of this message serves promotional and commercial purposes, described by Bourdieu as forces heteronomous to the literary field. Thus, paradoxically, the first “word” which the reader encounters comes not from the author of the text, but rather is an institutional message, one subject more to the rules of economy than those of art. The concept of a fully *auteur* work postulated in liberature changes that relationship, placing that first “word” back in the hands of authors. Even if the writers do not design the entire book themselves, by participating in preparing the prototype or design of the cover in close cooperation with the graphic designer and the editor, they become the primary agent in the process of its production.

It is precisely bibliographers and textual scholars such as John Kidd, D.F. McKenzie, and Jerome McGann who posited that the bibliographical code of *Ulysses* and the volumes of poetry published by Joyce in the 1930s were not utilitarian in nature, but rather constituted a semiotic code that was closely linked to the text and deliberately shaped by the author himself. These observations coincided with our readings of the “words on the page,” or rather pages, of *Finnegans Wake*, which suggested that the fictional space of this experimental narrative is materially bound to the physical space of the book.<sup>20</sup> This bibliographical description of Joyce’s writing confirmed our intuition that we were dealing with a highly autonomous author, one who occupied a dominant position in the network of relations among editors, publishers, printers, and distributors, allowing him to influence the physical form of the published books, or at least their first editions. The final conclusions presented in the work of McKenzie and McGann allowed me not just to ascribe liberary intentions to Joyce’s writing, but also to verify the theses through the methods of genetic criticism, the fruit of which is the book *Joyce and Liberature*.<sup>21</sup>

Joyce is also an interesting example from the perspective of these considerations because the modernist autonomy-giving practices described by Bourdieu in the context of French literature, and in the context of English language literature by the aforementioned McGann, as well as Hugh Kenner in *The Pound Era*, or more recently by Sean Latham in “*Am I a Snob?*” *Modernism and the Novel*, find their partial reflection in the manner in which liberature functions in society. It is often associated with an initially marginal journal

20 Similar associations regarding *Ulysses* had already been proposed by Hugh Kenner, *Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 34–35.

21 Katarzyna Bazarnik, *Joyce and Liberature* (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2011).

devoted to promoting “new, young” literature, published by an institution founded solely for that purpose, and the involvement of its main representative in efforts to interpret, explain, and promote his books. It is, however, apparent that Fajfer has gradually withdrawn from such activities, motivated by a desire to focus exclusively on his own artistic work.<sup>22</sup> Interesting commentary on these similarities has been proposed by the Italian scholar of Polish literature Emiliano Ranocchi, who observes that by describing liberature as “total literature” in which everything is or — by the author’s intention — can be relevant, the poet places it in opposition to the “formal aleatoricism and philosophical nihilism” that is typical of “a significant portion of contemporary artistic output.”

All of the above postulates explain Fajfer’s withdrawal from pop, a withdrawal that [...] is essentially a result of his disavowal of the anthropology of postmodernism: the mixing of high and low culture, the interchangeability of the sender and the recipient, the aesthetic of pastiche, open form, the end of Grand Narratives. Fajfer places all of this in opposition to a clearly-defined separation of the roles of the artist and the recipient, the requirement for originality and homogeneity of language (i.e. style), a peculiarly closed form in which the recipient is permitted a more or less broad space of action in the sense that he may — or even must — cooperate in the creation of meaning (but wasn’t that always somewhat true of traditional literature?), but within the confines of a game whose rules have been meticulously laid out by the author; finally, he places this in opposition to the teleology of art, or the return of Grand Narratives. What else is the idea of liberature if not yet another Grand Narrative, which, according to Lyotard and Jameson, were supposed to disappear forever in the age of postmodernism? After all, this narrative is founded on the idea of the upward path of artistic achievement, and is thus built on the Oedipal structure that was a characteristic feature of the Narrative of Great Avant-Garde. Upon closer examination, liberature is a label that aspires to serve as a neutral description of a certain attitude towards the physicality of the artistic medium, yet in reality, as a Narrative, it manages to convey much more than just a handy generic term (I leave open the question of how suitable it is), namely, an authentic and bold stance on contemporary aesthetics. While possibly outdated, this stance is undoubtedly fiercely polemical against other postmodern Grand-Narratives-Against-Grand-Narrative. In this sense liberature (at least as Fajfer

---

<sup>22</sup> One might describe this as another Bourdieusian polarization of the mini-field in the Bazarnik-Fajfer duo into distinct, artistic and academic, poles.

understands it) constitutes an astounding phenomenon of the endurance of modernist thought at the very heart of postmodernism.<sup>23</sup>

In Ranocchi's view, by establishing their ties to modernism, Fajfer and literature place themselves in clear opposition to movements, like cyberpoetry and certain manifestations of generative literature, that present themselves as "innovative," "modern," or "experimental."<sup>24</sup> Such an approach is congruent with the strategy — described by the French sociologist — employed by artists fighting for the greatest possible degree of autonomy, one characteristic of a subfield of restricted production, intended primarily for other artists.<sup>25</sup> What is at stake, Bourdieu observes, "is the monopoly of literary legitimacy, that is, among other things, the monopoly of the power to say with authority who is authorized to call himself a writer (etc.) or even to say who is a writer and who has the authority to say who is a writer; or, if you prefer, the monopoly of the power of consecration of producers and products."<sup>26</sup> It is no wonder then that "the struggle [...] is organized around the opposition between autonomy and heteronomy."<sup>27</sup> In this context, it is all the more apparent why Zenon Fajfer would criticize with such ferocity the legitimacy of *ciemniste diody* [thorny diodes],<sup>28</sup> a project by Leszek Onak in which the author remixes the prose of Bruno Schulz with the Fiat 125p user's manual.<sup>29</sup> In the case of the

23 Emiliano Ranocchi, "Liberatura między awangarda a tradycją. Bilans pierwszego dziesięciolecia," in *Od liberatury do e-literatury*, ed. Monika Górńska-Olesińska (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2012), 33–34.

24 However, Fajfer would disagree with the last label. He claims that it is theory, rather than art, that is experimental; see Fajfer, "Od kombinatoryki do liberatury. O nieporozumieniach związanych z tzw. 'literaturą eksperymentalną,'" in Raymond Queneau, *Sto tysięcy miliardów wierszy*, trans. Jan Gondowicz (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2008).

25 Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 217.

26 *Ibid.*, 224.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Leszek Onak, "ciemniste diody," *Techsty* (2014), accessed February 1, 2015, [http://techsty.art.pl/ciemniste\\_diody/index.html](http://techsty.art.pl/ciemniste_diody/index.html)

29 See the discussion on the Korporacja Ha!art website: Zenon Fajfer, "Ciernisty idiotyzm," <http://www.ha.art.pl/projekty/felietony/4066-ciernisty-idiotyzm>; and "Cybernotaur," <http://www.ha.art.pl/projekty/felietony/4103-cybernotaur>; Onak, "Nie ma żadnych świętych plików. Odpowiedź Zenonowi Fajferowi" (Fundacja Korporacja Ha!art); <http://www.ha.art.pl/projekty/felietony/4073-nie-ma-zadnych-swietych-plikow-odpowiedz-zenonowi-fajferowi>; accessed February 1, 2015. As Zenon Fajfer states, his outrage was motivated not by Onak's digital project itself, but by the circumstances of its recep-

digital avant-garde, however, this strategy results in the paradoxical situation in which the rejection of all institutions associated with the literary field, including the very idea of the author and the literary work (not to mention economic factors, which both sides of the debate equally ignore) – typical of the “pure art” stance – can lead to the disappearance of the field altogether.<sup>30</sup> After all, on the one hand, if anyone who writes a bit of code to generate any string of characters is an artist, then we find ourselves ensnared in a familiar trap: “Everything is art,” with one caveat: “if the artist says it is”; but if there is no artist, then there is no art. On the other hand, this raises the following question: how is the uninformed recipient supposed to know whether they have stumbled upon “something that is to be read/interpreted as art,” and not some

### critica<sup>1</sup> S#stem êrror?<sup>31</sup>

In this situation, it is the notion of genre that comes to the rescue. Contemporary descriptions of this category clearly accommodate its sociological dimension, presenting genre as conventionalised types of social action that are carried out with the help of language in specific types of situations, as described by Carolyn Miller<sup>32</sup> and Charles Bazerman.<sup>33</sup> This is most apparent in linguistics, which has seen the dynamic development of the rhetorical, pragmatic, and functional concepts of genre.<sup>34</sup> Bazerman thus defines genre

---

tion: the reaction of the genuinely amused audience at the presentation held at the Ha!wangarda Festival in October, 2014. Fajfer’s arguments, however, also concern the value of digital recycling or remixing of this type.

- 30 This stance may also stem from the general weakness of the field of literary production in Poland, as described by Grzegorz Jankowicz et al., in *Literatura polska po 1989 w świetle teorii Pierre’a Bourdieu. Raport z badań* (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2014). Artists, consciously or subconsciously sensing the circumstances, would thus subversively refuse to participate in a game that was rigged against them from the very start.
- 31 Zenon Fajfer, “Ars numerandi,” in *ten letters/ dwadzieścia jeden liter* (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010).
- 32 Carolyn Miller, “Genre as Social Action,” in *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, ed. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994; e-book 2005).
- 33 Charles Bazerman, “Systems of Genres and the Enactment of Social Intentions,” in *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, ed. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994; e-book 2005), 67-85.
- 34 The so-called Systemic Functional, or Australian School of researchers could even be described as a sociological one, as the fundamental framework they use to define the concept is based on the manner in which genre functions in specific situations.

as a frame for socially significant intentional action, a “location within which meaning is constructed and which shapes the thoughts we form and the communications by which we interact,” or a type of matrix that allows us to examine the unknown.<sup>35</sup> In other words, it is genre that determines the horizon of the recipient’s expectations, also in the literary work, which is how Michał Głowiński understands it. When selecting a piece of literature, the reader performs a cursory appraisal, assigning it to a specific genre and treating the perceived genre signals as hints for its interpretation. In other words, a certain horizon of expectations opens up before the reader, within the limits of which they can understand and interpret that work of literature. As the Polish researcher observes, “in a way, genre tells the reader what to expect in a given message, projecting, as it were, their behavior as a recipient of literature.”<sup>36</sup> Summarizing his thoughts on genre from the historical perspective, he proposes that:

...the literary genre established within a given culture is a semantic unit of sorts, and thus it implies to the reader what meanings he or she may expect when encountering a work of literature belonging to a particular genre. These meanings conceptualize the genre in very general terms, thus signaling to the reader certain types of meanings, so to speak, rather than specific meanings, and thus encourages them to notice the general direction of the statement; by doing so, it determines – in the final instance – the reader’s stance.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, a reader who remains oblivious to the existence of a genre will not only fail to understand the work, but will fail to even perceive it: they will not recognize a joke unless they are aware of the conventions governing it; they will close a website if they do not figure out that it is a work of

---

A review of the successive shifts in the study of genres can be found in the aforementioned *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, see also John Swales, *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Thomas O. Beebee, *The Ideology of Genre. A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); and John Frow, *Genre* (London-New York: Routledge, 2014).

35 Charles Bazerman quoted in Bawarshi, “The Ecology of Genre,” 70. See also Bazerman, “Systems of Genres and the Enactment of Social Intentions,” 69, 75, 82–83.

36 Michał Głowiński, “Gatunek literacki i problemy poetyki historycznej,” in *Polska genologia literacka*, ed. Danuta Ostaszewska and Romuald Cudak (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2007), 82.

37 *Ibid.*, 81.

digital literature; they will shrug their shoulders at the sight of a bottle-book if they do not know that literature can also be found in such unconventional forms. It is thus crucial, in the case of liberature, to signal to the recipient that they are dealing with a literary work in order to enable them to read it in the first place. Such practices are nothing out of the ordinary in literature. Stanisław Balbus lists a series of instances in which the authors themselves provided hints regarding a genre classification of their works: Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, which bears the subtitle "a poem," or Witkacy's *Insatiability* and *Farewell to Autumn*, both described by the author as novels. According to Balbus, these are "traces of authorial instructions" indicating the context in which, according to the author's intentions, these works are to be interpreted (this is also relevant in the case of irony or pastiche). The aim is to create a certain "hermeneutical space" in which they can enter into "semantic correlations, coincidences, or even collisions" with genre conventions (and thus with a certain horizon of knowledge and expectations on the part of the readers).<sup>38</sup> If the reader understands and masters the rules governing a given work (and a genre), then the interpretation of that piece of literature is fuller, richer, more satisfying, and more thorough. At the same time, the name of the genre indicates which tradition the writer is dialogically engaging with and what norms are being referred to, or even being modified, or transgressed.

In his essay *Intertextual Irony and Levels of Reading*, Umberto Eco points out a number of ways in which meanings can be encoded, mentioning in passing that the familiarity with genre rules applies not only to literature, but also to the fine arts and architecture. He lists at least two types of readers: the so-called common, naive, or semantic reader, who interprets the work at the most basic level of its content, and the semiotic (or aesthetic) reader, who is better educated, aware of various levels and types of semantic codes, and conscious of the existence of a web of subtle references to other cultural texts within a work.<sup>39</sup> However, in the case of liberature, even such a seasoned reader could overlook this additional, non-verbal semantic code, particularly if they have been taught to ignore messages of this type in works of literature. The proposal to distinguish a separate genre that also employs a bibliographical code (to continue using the terms coined by the above-mentioned textual scholars) offers these readers the possibility of an even richer reading, one

38 Stanisław Balbus, "Zagłada gatunków," in *Polska genologia literacka*, ed. Danuta Ostaszewska and Romuald Cudak (Warszawa: PWN, 2007), 164.

39 Umberto Eco, "Intertextual Irony and Levels of Reading," in *On Literature*, trans. Martin McLaughlin (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 222–223. I wish to thank the anonymous reviewer for bringing this essay to my attention.

that nevertheless respects the *intentio operis* and *intentio auctoris*, which the Italian semiotician also references in his essay.

But what is at stake here is more than just the individual incomprehension or the enrichment of the reading. Unfamiliarity with genre rules may pose an obstacle to the proper response in certain social situations. The literal reading of mass-mailed sweepstakes letters claiming that the addressee's name had been selected to win valuable prizes that could be claimed by paying a minor deposit made many people oblivious of the junk mail genre to fall victim to their own naivety. The unfamiliarity with genre rules can also be an effective mechanism of exclusion.<sup>40</sup> This also applies to cultural participation. The incomprehension of frameworks in which newly-formed genres of literature and art operate — such as liberature, cyberpoetry, and hypertext — cuts recipients off from a certain sphere of social experiences, contacts, and contexts that are relevant to the contemporary world. Perhaps it deprives them of the opportunity to stimulate their creativity, to foster unconventional ways of thinking, and explore fresh perspectives on an ostensibly familiar reality: in a word, that which Shklovsky describes as “remov[ing] objects from the automatism of perception.”<sup>41</sup>

If Anis Bawarshi defines genres as “the sites in which communicants rhetorically reproduce the very environments to which they in turn respond — the habits and habitats for acting in language,”<sup>42</sup> then, in the case of literature, particularly such forms that are described as experimental or exploratory, we observe the augmentation, discovery, or definition of other, new, and untypical linguistic actions, and perhaps even the demarcation of new sites and types of literary communication.<sup>43</sup> In the conclusion of the article

<sup>40</sup> This aspect is emphasized by rhetorically inclined scholars of genre. Unsurprisingly, they are closely involved with language didactics, while their rhetorical and functional models of genre are most widely used in the teaching of English as a foreign language (i.e., English for Special Purposes and Academic English).

<sup>41</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 13.

<sup>42</sup> Anis Bawarshi, “The Ecology of Genre,” in *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches*, ed. Sydney I. Dobrin and Christian R. Weissner (Albany: State University of NY Press, 2001), 71.

<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the hybridity and polymediality of liberature, or the employment of various semantic codes, requires readerly competences that are different from those involved in the reading of exclusively word-based literary works. This point is raised by the Belgian scholars Kris de Tollenaere and Jeanine Eerdreken in their discussion of the results of an artistic and sociological experiment they conducted: see Kris de Tollenaere and Jeanine Eerdreken, “The Hybrid Book Genre of Word & Image Narratives: Results of an Artistic

that defines genre as an ecosystem, Bawarshi states that the act of “writing is not only about learning to adapt, socially and rhetorically, to various contexts,” but also about repeating and enacting that occurs within genres.<sup>44</sup> In the case of literary genres, which are likely the most open, hybrid, and fluid, or in the Bakhtinian sense, polyphonic types of texts, this action thus involves a meaningful modification of existing contexts, which is a manifestation of their dominant, creative aspect. This entails a change of habits and, subsequently, the habitus of the reader, as there must be, by extension, a change in the modes of perception, action, appraisal, and interpretation of a text that is presented in this manner.

This is certainly the case with liberature. As a genre that emphasizes its literary status, it opens up new opportunities for expression that are absent from mainstream literature, or only marginally present, and often regarded as a frivolous prank, provocation, or experimentation. Even the less radical examples of liberature, ones that take the form of the traditional codex, encourage the recipient to modify their readerly habits, directing their attention to the material qualities of the literary work, which are usually glossed over in reading: a peculiar numbering of the pages or chapters (B.S. Johnson’s *House Mother Normal*, Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*), semantically varied typography, figurative text, visual elements, illustrations, and the color and type of paper (the aforementioned *Tristram Shandy*, B.S. Johnson’s *Albert Angelo*, Stéphane Mallarmé’s *A Throw of the Dice*, Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*, Adam Thirlwell’s *Kapow!*, Steven Hall’s *The Raw Shark Texts*, Raymond Federman’s *Double or Nothing*). Bawarshi even remarks in an endnote that, in the case of genre, “reproduction” always involves some sort of modification, because a genre always requires reading, which is always already an interpretation, and thus one of many possible variations.<sup>45</sup> Bawarshi cites Marilyn Cooper, who emphasizes that writing has a social dimension not just because it takes place in a specific context, but because the very act of writing actively shapes that context.<sup>46</sup> Therefore the author – the writer or poet – actively affects the conditions of their art, even if that effect

---

Research Project,” in *Incarnations of Textual Materiality: From Modernism to Liberature*, Katarzyna Bazarnik and Izabela Curyłło-Klag (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2014). See also Kalaga, “Tekst hybrydyczny. Polifonie i aporie doświadczenia wizualnego.” The issue of readerly competences is also explored in the previously cited essay by Eco, “Intertextual Irony and Levels of Reading.”

44 Bawarshi, “The Ecology of Genre,” 78.

45 *Ibid.*, 79.

46 *Ibid.*, 70.

involves the unconditional acceptance of the rules imposed by the publishing house. From this standpoint, our efforts, which have included the launch of a publishing series, the creation of the Liberature Reading Room, organizing author appearances and events devoted to books published by “Liberature,” lend further support to the rhetorical-ecological model proposed by the above researchers.

These efforts also include our active participation in a variety of popularization activities (curatorial work on liberature exhibitions and workshops at libraries, cultural centers, and festivals) and academic events (conferences, seminars, and guest lectures), while the fact that many of these events took place on the initiative of the people and institutions who invited us testifies, in our view, to the rapid emergence of a milieu of liberature readers expecting this type of interaction. They perceive the distinctiveness of liberature from other cultural texts and apparently desire to explore more substantially the conventions of the genre.

Therefore, it appears that sixteen years after the term was coined, liberature has secured a respectable position in the field of cultural and literary production. To use Bourdieu’s terminology, it has almost been consecrated: the latest edition of *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich* PWN [*Dictionary of Literary Genres*], edited by Grzegorz Gazda, devotes a separate, lengthy entry to the term;<sup>47</sup> its author is Agnieszka Przybyszewska, a researcher who has consistently studied this phenomenon almost since its inception.<sup>48</sup> Liberature is appearing in school and university textbooks,<sup>49</sup> and the liberary style has been listed among the artistic styles of the modern Polish

47 Agnieszka Przybyszewska, “Liberatura/Literatura totalna,” in *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich*, ed. Grzegorz Gazda (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2012), 521–526.

48 This issue is the subject of part of her Master’s thesis, titled *(Nie tylko) liberackie modele do składania: liberatura, e-liberatura i hipertekst na gruncie polskim* [(Not Just) Liberary Models to be Assembled: Liberature, e-Liberature, and Hypertext in the Polish Context], awarded first prize in the Czesław Zgorzelski Competition in 2006 for the best thesis in Polish Studies, which can also be interpreted as a form of consecration of the phenomenon itself. Her Ph.D. dissertation, titled *Liberackość dzieła literackiego* [*The Liberariness of the Literary Work*], was devoted to the same topic.

49 See Lucyna Adrańska-Pacula et al., *Po polsku. Literatura, język, komunikacja. Podręcznik do języka polskiego dla gimnazjum, kl. III* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne PWN, 2011); Dorota Korwin-Piotrowska, *Poetyka. Przewodnik po świecie tekstów* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2011); see also *Polonistyka 2* (2009), devoted to “important and influential poems by Sommer, Sosnowski, Zadura, Świetlicki, Fajfer, Mueller, Kossakowski, Różyccki, and Gutorow.”

language.<sup>50</sup> The Łódź-based milieu of theoreticians to which Gazda and Przybyszewska belong expressed early interest in the liberature manifesto, while a more academic framework for that general proposal articulated by the artistic pole of the Zenkasi duo, and further refined by myself, has emerged in part as a result of conversations and debates held with the author of the dictionary entry. As further confirmation of this interest, we received an invitation to appear at a conference titled *Future/ism: a Century Later*, held in May of 2010 by the Institute of the Theory of Literature at the University of Łódź, and to prepare an accompanying exhibition at the M2 Museum of Contemporary Art, featuring the collections housed at the Liberature Reading Room.

The further honing of this concept was encouraged by a series of conferences, guest lectures, and exhibitions in Poland and abroad. These events are too numerous to list here, but I wish to mention a few of the most important among them in order to outline the spread of the idea in critical and academic circles – and, to some extent, in artistic circles – which, according to Bourdieu, hold the power of consecration in the literary field. The first presentation of liberature at an international forum took place at the *5th Symposium on Iconicity in Language and Literature* in Kraków; along with a lecture on this subject, we prepared an English-language booklet containing, among other texts, my translation of Fajfer's founding essay and our jointly-authored "A Brief History of Liberature."<sup>51</sup> That same year, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań, Małgorzata Dawidek Gryglicka held an exhibition of the work of Fajfer and an academic conference titled *Construction via Deconstruction: on the New Forms of Literary Text and the Text as Artwork*. The result of this conference was the volume *Tekst-tura [Text-ture]*, which includes another essay by Fajfer in which he continues his efforts to define liberature as a literary mode, while pointing out its "unclean,' hybrid' nature,"<sup>52</sup> as well as my article, in which I describe liberature as one of the types of iconic literary texts anticipated in the model posited by the American researcher C.D. Malmgren.<sup>53</sup> In 2009 we were invited

50 *Style współczesnej polszczyzny. Przewodnik po stylistyce polskiej*, ed. Ewa Malinowska et al. (Kraków: Universitas, 2013). It should be added that the style is associated in practice with the emanational form invented and developed by Zenon Fajfer.

51 Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer, *Liberature* (Kraków: Artpartner, 2005).

52 Zenon Fajfer, "Liberum veto? Odautorski komentarz do tekstu *Liberatura. Aneks do słownika terminów literackich*," in *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki*, ed. Małgorzata Gryglicka (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2005).

53 Katarzyna Bazarnik, "Liberatura: ikoniczne oka-leczenie literatury," in *Tekst-tura. Wokół nowych form tekstu literackiego i tekstu jako dzieła sztuki*, ed. Małgorzata Gryglicka (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2005), 31–33. See Malmgren, *Fictional Spaces in the Modernist and Postmodernist American Novel*, 60.

to present liberature as a distinct phenomenon at the conference *Traditional and Emerging Formats of Artists' Books: Where Do We Go from Here?* at the University of the West of England in Bristol, a key moment in that it marked the articulation of the difference between liberature and the artistic book, with which the former is sometimes associated. That same year Monika Górska-Olesińska, a researcher from the University of Opole, held the first of two conferences titled *From Liberature to e-Literature*, which resulted in subsequent publications that contrasted works of liberature with artworks created using new electronic media; meanwhile, the triple book *Oka-leczenie* saw its first full-scale release as part of our Liberatura series. From this moment on, the concept clearly began to spread throughout the world: in 2011 we showcased liberature at a number of events, including the European Culture Congress in Wrocław, at festivals and universities in the US (including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Oakland), at the 10th Taipei Poetry Festival and the University of Tokyo, at separate panels held as part of the IAWIS Focus Conference (*Displaying Word and Image*, University of Ulster in Belfast, June 2010), and at the 3rd European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies Conference (University of Kent in the United Kingdom, September 2012), and, most recently, at literary festivals in Italy, Bulgaria, and Romania.

This brief list clearly demonstrates that, over the past decade and a half, liberature – both as a theoretical concept and a contemporary Polish literary phenomenon – has managed to occupy a certain area of the literary field, gaining a foothold in key institutions. The Liberature Reading Room has been incorporated into the Arteteka branch of the Public Voivodeship Library in Kraków, a place visited regularly by organized groups of students majoring in Polish Studies, Comparative Literature, Editing, and Cultural Studies. It is worth mentioning that liberature is now part of the syllabi of practically every Polish Studies department and is taught in such courses as literature, contemporary culture, contemporary literary life, and cultural semiotics, chiefly in the context of the contemporary avant-garde as well as liminal and hybrid phenomena in literature.<sup>54</sup> The concept has been employed by foreign scholars of

54 See for example, Tomasz Cieślak-Sokołowski, Jagiellonian University, Syllabus for the course "Pogranicza literatury – alternatywa, nowe media" ["Borderlands of literature: alternatives, new media"], accessed January 30, 2015,

Polish literature, including Kris van Heuckelom, Emiliano Ranocchi, and Ariko Kato. The “Liberature” series now numbers over twenty titles, which include significant works belonging to the international literary canon: Stéphane Mallarmé’s *A Throw of the Dice*, Raymond Queneau’s *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*, Georges Perec’s *Life A User’s Manual*, Herta Müller’s *Der Wächter Nimmt Seinen Kamm* [*The Guard Takes His Comb*], and James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, as well as literary works by the Bazarnik-Fajfer duo, along with books by several Polish authors associated with this poetics, including Robert Szczerbowski, Dariusz Orszulewski, and Paweł Dunajko. It has thus become one of the most distinct and recognizable series published by Ha!art. It therefore appears that we are witnessing a significant autonomization within the literary field, or even the broader cultural field, which “occurs when artistic factors dominate over political and economic factors, which translates into the hierarchy of rules governing a given area, and enhances the readiness to uphold the faith in the relevance of a given practice, a specific social game....”<sup>55</sup> The philosophy of liberature, or, more broadly, the vision of the writer-poet-artist posited by its chief representative, constantly emphasizes the aesthetic, artistic, and compositional grounds for stylistic choices, the search for new forms (the unconventional structure of books, emanational poetry, kinetic poetry), and the ostentatious disregard for economic factors, which is also apparent in the choice of subsequent titles published as part of the series, as these require significant expenses due to the technical challenges posed by the books. This is facilitated by the similar philosophy of the Ha!art publishing house, which refers to itself ironically as a “corporation” and operates under the motto “Everything that’s unprofitable.” As Jankowicz explains, such autonomy is possible only when the actors and institutions participating in the literary field are able to “translate the external forces into a given field’s corresponding logic, to harness them without reformulating the goals of their own actions.”<sup>56</sup> The

---

2014, [http://anthology.elmcp.net/materials/syllabi/GorskaOlesinska-2012-PL.pdf](https://usosweb.uni.lodz.pl/kontroler.php?_action=actionx:katalog2/przedmioty/pokazPrzedmiot%28prz_kod:0100-KBL050%29; Monika Górska-Olesińska, University of Opole, Syllabus for the course “Literatura elektroniczna” [“Electronic literature”], accessed December 27, 2014, <a href=); Olga Szadkowska, University of Warsaw, Syllabus for the course “Historia edycji polskiej literatury pięknej” [“The history of the editing of Polish literature”], accessed January 30, 2015, [https://usosweb.uw.edu.pl/kontroler.php?\\_action=actionx:katalog2/przedmioty/pokazZajecia%28zaj\\_cyk\\_id:259193;gr\\_nr:4%29](https://usosweb.uw.edu.pl/kontroler.php?_action=actionx:katalog2/przedmioty/pokazZajecia%28zaj_cyk_id:259193;gr_nr:4%29)

55 Grzegorz Jankowicz, “Formy heteronomii. Polskie pole literackie po 1989 roku i jego relacje z innymi polami społecznymi,” in Grzegorz Jankowicz et al., *Literatura polska po 1989 roku w świetle teorii Pierre’a Bourdieua*, 19.

56 Ibid., 19.

milieu and institutions within which the phenomenon exists seem to have risen to this challenge. Perhaps it is even true — as the authors of the cited report on the state of post-1989 Polish literature observe — that the field of literary production is practically non-existent, however, the field of liberature appears to be a rather fertile enclave in this barren land.

*Translation: Arthur Barys*