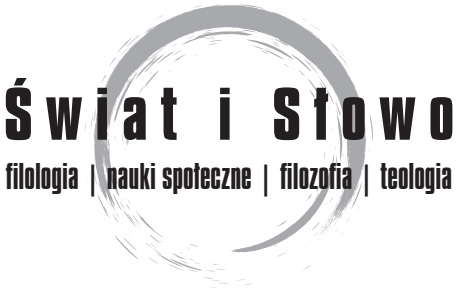
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Mind the Brain!

At academic conferences and in various publications that explore the links between neuroscience and culture, the following statement is repeated like a mantra: George W. Bush proclaimed the 1990s the Decade of the Brain, and ever since interest in this enigmatic organ has been soaring.[1] Nowadays, we can observe many different developments brought about by this curiosity about the functioning of the grey matter. As Alva Noë observes, the excitement about the findings of neuroscience is equalled only by the enthusiasm about the gene research.[2] The neuroscientific research has permeated into the academic world of humanities, where it has successfully converged with many disciplines that have willingly taken on the prefix neuro- to demonstrate their allegiance to the brain science. Popular culture has not remained unaffected – countless novels, films and works of art use neuroscientific models and theories to construct their imaginary realms.

[1] But as many critics point out, the intense interest in brain functions, both among researchers and artists, can be traced at least to the nineteenth century and the development of phrenology (for details, see for instance Francisco Ortega, "Toward a Genealogy of Neuroasceis," in: *Neurocultures: Glimpses into an Expanding Universe*, eds. Fernando Vidal and Francisco Ortega (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), pp.31-48.

[2] Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from Biology of Consciousness* (New York: Hill and Wang), p. xi.

On the one hand, there is an increased optimism about the potential of neuroscience to provide answers to the most fascinating questions concerning human consciousness, cognition, and memory that have puzzled scientists and philosophers for centuries. This optimism is reflected in the ever-growing number of research projects which make use of the latest technological advancements (in particular neuroimaging) to show us the workings of the brain. These findings are then presented in a more accessible way through various media outlets so that we can be repeatedly mesmerised by colourful images that allegedly explain what is happening inside our heads. On the other hand, many critics, especially with background in humanities or social sciences, question research methods employed by neuroscientists, together with their ways of data interpreting, and raise an alarm reminding us that human beings are too often reduced to their brains.[3] They point out sceptically that, despite many years of research devoted to the brain, we still know very little, and demonstrate the dire consequences of regarding people in terms of their neuronal activity at the expense of individual differences and social contexts.

The essays included in this collection demonstrate how differently scholars approach the relatively recent – and in many ways problematic – convergence between humanities and neuroscience. While some academics incorporate neuroscientific concepts into their analyses of literary or cinematic works, or even employ them to cast light on how the properties and functions of the brain can influence the lives and creations of individuals, others take a more critical stance, demonstrating the pitfalls of applying knowledge from one field to another in an indiscriminating manner.

Interestingly, almost all the essays in this volume fall into two categories, i.e. neuroscientific considerations that take either science fiction or (auto)biography as their research material. The authors whose essays are included at the beginning have chosen to refer to science fiction as the most suitable conceptual testing ground with which to explore the potential redefinitions of the possibilities and conceptualisations of the relationship between the mind and the brain, or between the brain and the self. The approach adopted in the articles gathered in the second section of this volume is a diametrically different stance on the topic. Rather than search in the imaginary realms of science fiction for the boundaries of how our brains – or minds – make us what we are, these scholars turn to the most immediate, direct, personal experience. Focusing on biographical and autobiographi-

[3] For details see for example Fernando Vidal and Francisco Ortega's works, including their latest book *Being Brains: Making the Cerebral Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), which critically investigates the consequences of the neural turn.

cal works, or the relations between the authors' life experience and their artistic output, these texts show that the questions of personal identity and their link with the cerebral constitute a timeless and profoundly intimate concern.

The volume opens with Sonia Front's investigation into the most recent cinematic representations of human consciousness within the sci-fi genre. The author grounds her analysis in the observation that, if they derive from the philosophical-scientific discourse on time and temporality, these representations can be interpreted as commentaries on the relationship between the conceptualisation of time and identity, and on how these notions are grounded in our corporeality. Using Duncan Jones's *Source Code* as her example, Front argues for a redefinition of the notion of personal identity. The need for redefinition is also the *spiritus movens* of the following article. Michał Różycki's reading of *Blinsight* suggests that Peter Watt's text is a disquisition on the idea that human brain/consciousness might be viewed as a modifiable body part – one that can be tailored to the need of situation. Whether such redefinition is beneficial for humanity is the point under consideration in Różycki's article, which – in a circumlocutory manner – seems to be warning against capitalism's tendency to commodify everything, consciousness included.

The idea concatenating the next two articles is that the state of one's mind eventuates from the way one interacts with his or her environment. In Piotr Czerwiński's text, the argument is that the contemporary man's immersion in the technological environment might generate a situation in which it is the cyberspace that becomes the greatest shaping power of being. To substantiate his thesis, the author works with Nikesh Shukla's *Meatspace* as well as the theories of the extended mind and the technological unconscious. Damian Podleśny puts forwards a thesis that is the reverse of Czerwiński's argument. In his reading of two novels by Philip K. Dick, i.e. *Martian Time-Slip* and *A Scanner Darkly*, it is the social-physical space that transpires to be the prime mover of one's existence.

The article by Katarzyna Szmigiero opens the second part of the collection and offers a review of the takes on mental disorders that can be found in the so called pathographies. According to the taxonomy the author proposes, three discernible trends can be identified in these. A number of patients disagree with the reductionist view of mental diseases as brain diseases. Some of them veer towards the biomedical model. And there are also those who see their own mental problems as results of both biological and socio-cultural conditions. Whatever stance they adopt, the authors of

illness narratives seem to find in their writing a chance "to fill the gap between the incomprehensible medical discourse and individual experience of being ill," as Szmigiero puts it.

Su Meck's memoir, analysed by Anita Jarczok in the next essay, is a representative of the tradition of pathographies because Meck, who has suffered from amnesia, tries to make sense of her mental condition on the pages of her narrative. The primary purpose of Jarczok's text is to demonstrate how one's sense of self is affected by memory limitations and failures. Furthermore, Jarczok uses her analysis to comment on the blurred boundaries of life writing genres and on the overemphasising of the role of memory in self-definition. The working of memory and its representation in writing is also the focus of Katarzyna Biela's reading of *The Unfortunates*. Biela considers the way the author of the book, B. S. Johnson, conceptualises the processes of recalling the past and thinking about the present, and how these are represented through the literary techniques he employs. Referring to a set of theories, Biela uses, i.a., the notions of flashbulb memories, mental control processes, the stream of consciousness technique, as well as memory, material and conceptual metaphors, to address the issue.

The next essay shows how mental disorders can affect a writer's life and works. For Aleksandra Fortuna-Nieć, the likeness that Emily Dickinson's and Halina Poświatowska's "poetic representations of the mental processes connected with illness and suffering" evince is palpable not only at their most overtly lexical level. As Fortuna-Nieć observes, both poets convey in their writings the idea that an individual suffering from a mental problem is like a prisoner locked in the cage of his or her "thoughts and feelings." The author demonstrates how the approach of Dickinson and Poświatowska is informed by their intense self-scrutiny of the experience of their afflictions.

The closing essay by Donna Jung steps beyond the division into science fiction and (auto)biography and delves into the interdependencies of neurosciences and humanities in the exploration of human identity. The author takes a much more abstract approach in her very thought-provoking meditation on the limitations of the application of neuroscientific concepts to other disciplines. Jung points to the neuroestheticians' non-interdisciplinary attempts at experimental testing of beauty. In her text, she argues against the neuro-centred perspectives which ignore the aesthetic facet(s) of the investigated objects. In Jung's view, the idea of beauty can be illuminated with interdisciplinary perspectives in a more insightful way.

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STUDIA I SZKICE

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Hacking the Brain: Duncan Jones's *Source Code*

Digital cinema has reworked the geographies of time and temporality and has repeatedly effected new representations of human consciousness. These interests have been informed by scientific and technological developments, one of which is digital cinema's divorce from the photographic base, which has problematized the notion of reality and increased cinema's potential to manipulate space and time and to produce virtual worlds. Many of those virtual worlds are situated literally in the protagonist's mind. The character's mental space is presented as a navigable terrain that can be mapped, controlled, reinscribed and manipulated. This emphasis on consciousness in film, which has been called "the neuro-image" (Pisters) or "the mind-game film" (Elsaesser),[1] attests to the shift in digital culture that blurs the boundary between the virtual and the actual worlds as "the brain has become our world and … the world has become a brain-city, a brain-world."[2] Simultaneously, such a portrayal of the human mind serves to forefront temporality "as a separate dimension of consciousness and identity,"[3] and time as intrinsic to human experience.

[1] See Patricia Pisters, *The Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012) and Thomas Elsaesser, "The Mind-Game Film," in: *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Warren Buckland (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 13–41.

[2] Ibid., p. 33.

[3] Ibid., p. 21.

The new representations of consciousness in film resonate with philosophical and scientific notions of time and temporality as well as with the discoveries of neuroscience, made particularly during the Decade of the Brain (1990–2000).[4] Sometimes neuroscience is combined with quantum physics to propose quantum theories of consciousness.[5] Furthermore, attempting to respond to the technological revolution, contemporary film cogitates about the influence of technology upon human life and the human mind. In many films various technological developments, often supported by bogus theories of quantum mechanics, permit the enactment of scenarios that for decades have been discussed only in philosophical texts on personal identity, in which their authors cut brains in half, teleport human replicas to Mars and make bodies swap their minds. These thought experiments have allowed the philosophers and filmmakers to raise questions about the nature of personal identity, its persistence over time and through change, and the significance of the body to personal identity.

With contemporary culture's fixation on the cerebral and the institution of digital technologies as the main mode of communication, these technologies offer the possibility of release from the limitations of the physical body. Striving to reflect that, contemporary film is populated with disembodied characters separated from their own minds or consciousnesses and / or physical reality. Treating the traditional Cartesian dualism as a point of departure, the digital age proposes its own revision of the mind / body split, and with it new definitions of the human that contradict the bodily-continuity theory. The theory that personal identity is tantamount to identity of body over time is irrelevant in the digital age as it is unable to deal with scenarios in which somebody's consciousness enters another person's body, as it does, for instance, in Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (1999), Tarsem Singh's *Self / less* (2015), Joss Whedon's TV series *Dollhouse* (2009–2010) and Rand Ravich's TV series *Second Chance* (2016), or scenarios in which technological interfaces of subjectivity that do not depend on corporeality are created, for example, in *ExistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999), *The Thirteenth Floor* (Josef Rusnak, 1999), *The Matrix Trilogy* (Lilly and Lana Wachowski, 1999-2003), *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009), *Surrogates* (Jonathan Mostow, 2009), *Source Code* (Duncan Jones, 2011) and *Eternity* (Alex Galvin, 2013). While in these films the human

[4] For a list of films see Eric P. Wiertelak, "And the Winner Is: Inviting Hollywood into the Neuroscience Classroom," *The Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2002), pp. 4–17.

[5] For an introduction to the subject see Harald Atmanspacher, "Quantum Approaches to Consciousness," in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed May 15, 2017, http://plato.stanford.edu/ archives/sum2011/entries/qt-consciousness/.

body is jacked into a computer to immerse itself in virtual reality, in other films, such as *Transcendence* (Wally Pister, 2014) and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (Anthony and Joe Russo, 2014), human consciousness is uploaded into a computer to function without the body or the organic brain. The bodily-continuity theory cannot be applied to these cases because it depends upon the classical notion of linear time, while technoculture has instigated a radical reformulation of space and time that inevitably impinges on the understanding of human identity. This essay is going to focus on Duncan Jones's *Source Code*, which does not completely reject the body but treats it merely as a host for consciousness, and thereby suggests that identity resides in consciousness.

In *Source Code* Colter Stevens (Jake Gyllenhaal) awakes on a Chicago commuter train trapped in another man's body, not knowing how he got there. A few minutes later the train explodes and Colter reawakens in a capsule that appears to be the cockpit of a wrecked helicopter. Via a videolink he gradually learns from Captain Coleen Goodwin[6] (Vera Farmiga) and Dr Rutledge (Jeffrey Wright) that he was a helicopter pilot in Afghanistan, where he died. Now he is in a military facility where his brain activity is being artificially supported to make it possible for him to participate in an experiment called Source Code, whose purpose is to inhabit an eight-minute window of Sean Fentress's life, captured in his memory and accessed via post-mortem activity of his brain. Colter's mind and Sean's body are hooked up together by a computer interface in a version of the "brain in a vat" experiment. While Colter repeatedly navigates the eight-minute period of the afterimage of Sean's brain, Sean's consciousness is already gone. Colter's mission is to gather more information about the terrorists who are planning to detonate another bomb later that day in downtown Chicago. The technology used to transfer Colter's consciousness into Sean's body is a computer programme which works by means of a bogus "quantum mechanics parabolic calculus":

> When a light bulb turns off, there's an afterglow, a lingering halo-like effect. … The brain is like that. Its electromagnetic field remains charged, just briefly, even after death. Circuits remain open. Now, there's another peculiarity about the brain. It contains a short term memory track that's approximately eight minutes long. Like uh…a convenience store security camera that only records the last portion of the day's activity on its hard drive. Now in combining these two phenomena, circuitry that remain viable post-mor-

[6] Goodwin might be a reference to Mary Shelley's maiden name, Mary Godwin. Mary Goodwin is also the name of a character in *Second Chance*, who, together with her brother, develops a project of transferring a dead man's consciousness into another man's body.

> tem, and a memory bank that goes back eight minutes, Source Code enables us to capitalize on the overlap. Sean Fentress died on that train. Of all the passengers aboard, he was your possible link. You two share compatibility in terms of gender, body size and your synaptic maps.[7]

Colter's mission can be accomplished by the new technology enabling "time reassignment," that is, using knowledge of the past to affect the future. The creator of the experiment, Dr Rutledge, explains that Source Code allows access to the past of the same reality which cannot be changed, yet he claims that it "gives us access to a parallel reality"[8] simultaneously, which seems to contradict the previous explication. In fact, Source Code exceeds Routledge's expectations. Although inside Source Code Colter is supposed to inhabit only Sean's memory, this is only partly the case. First, if it were a memory, Colter would remember everything that Sean remembers, but in fact Colter has no idea who Sean is and tells Christina (Michelle Monaghan), a girl Sean is travelling with, that he is a helicopter pilot in Afghanistan: "Look, I can see that you think you know me. But I don't know who you are. My name is Captain Colter Stevens. I fly helicopters for the US army in Afghanistan," "I don't know what's goin' on!," "I don't know who Sean is and I don't know who you are!"[9] Second, each time Colter's consciousness is catapulted into Sean's body, his agency surpasses what has happened on the train and what is a part of Sean's memory. He revisits the whole eight-minute slice of space-time where he does not have to endlessly repeat Sean's actions. Rather than being a passive observer of what has already happened, Colter is an agent who brings new events, and with them new worlds, into existence. Each time he enters the Source Code, he creates a new alternative reality which continues its existence without Colter / Sean after the explosion. Third, the activity in the virtual realm affects the actual realm. This final recognition is formulated in the text message that Colter sends Goodwin: "You thought you were creating eight minutes of a past event but you're not. You've created a whole new world."[10] The message is received by an alternate Goodwin in the universe where the explosion was prevented, the Source Code has not been used yet and alternate Colter is waiting in the laboratory for a crisis. In that reality Colter is in a non-conscious state while his parallel reality counterpart's consciousness permanently occupies Sean's body.

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[7] Duncan Jones, dir., *Source Code* (Vendome Pictures, The Mark Gordon Company, 2011).
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

The film employs a number of metaphors by which it promotes the parallel universe interpretation. The branching lines appearing briefly next to the title of the film during the opening credits foreshadow the subject of the film. Another metaphor is that of a track when, for instance, the protagonist expresses concern about being "on the right track." He notes the non-identicality of the alternate realities when with each repeated visit to the train he observes, "It's the same train, but it's different."[11] After the freeze-frame, when Colter is unplugged from the life-support system and leaves his body behind to inhabit Sean's body, his second birth is represented by a high angle of the train redirected to a different track. Alternate realities and the contingency of the future are also symbolized by Cloud Gate, Anish Kapoor's sculpture in Chicago, which reflects and refracts images from a variety of perspectives. Each trip into Sean's memory ends with a blurry flash-forward to Cloud Gate which heralds contingent future(s) and symbolizes the multiplicity of selves that Colter splinters into in the process of mediation through technology.

The slice of space-time locked in Source Code and reconfigured by the new technology functions in the film as what Samuel Delany has called paraspace, a space that exists parallel to ordinary space; "an alternate space, sometimes largely mental, but always materially manifested, that sits beside the real worlds," where the conflicts of the ordinary world are worked out.[12] Scott Bukatman has described paraspace as equivalent to what Brian McHale has called the Zone, a kind of heterotopian space, that is, space "capable of accommodating so many incommensurable and mutually exclusive worlds."[13] The Zone, characterized by "a large number of fragmentary possible worlds [that] coexist in an impossible space,"[14] allows for a clash of worlds and of distinct ontological states, becoming in this manner the locale of ontological shifts.[15] The eight-minute paraspace of Sean's memory is a past chunk of space-time turned into a permanent present, "a discontinuous, multiplicitous, and thickened "now" that is intimately linked to both past and future, but which nonetheless takes shape in the present, where it resists localization."[16] This thickened "now," where ontological shifts take place in the fragmentary worlds, constitutes a node from

[11] Ibid.

[12] Samuel R. Delany, "Is Cyberpunk a Good Thing or a Bad Thing?" *Mississippi Review*, No. 47/48 (1988), p. 31.

[13] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 44.

[14] Ibid., p. 45.

[15] Ibid., p. 60.

[16] Pepita Hesselberth, *Cinematic Chronotopes: Here, Now, Me* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 121.

which new timelines spring into existence, instigated mentally through technological mediation. In this node of paraspace, Colter splits into a kaleidoscope of selves, "the same but different"; he is and is not his other selves, to confirm Bukatman's statement that cyberspace does not suture the subject to any stable point of identification.[17] Colter's dislocation takes place by a movement through this intensely technological, decentering spatiality, and his locus of origin is shifted from his psychology to the modus operandi of cybernetic culture.[18] In cyberspace he is, phenomenologically and rhetorically, "*broken down* in the zones of cyberspatial simulation, there to await its reconstitution amidst these fields of data."[19]

With its reformulation of space and time, *Source Code* seems to recognize the need to expand the notion of reality in the information age to accommodate not only the physical but also the mental realm, because it can likewise trigger actual events. The new definition of reality needs to encompass subjective time. The paraspace of virtual reality problematizes the traditional distinction between objective time (clock time) and subjective time (the time of experience), and the assumption that mechanical time – though a cultural construct – is "real" while subjective time is impressionistic and therefore secondary.[20] The division into subjective and objective modes was generated by the loss of presence in the world, initiated by the scientific discovery of the earth rotating around the sun, which discredited human subjective experience of the sun revolving around the earth.[21] As a result, subjective temporality in which the sun moves across the sky has become disconnected from reality and deprived of its presence. We accept the told story as true and allow it to supersede the lived story, losing the distinction between them.[22] If, as is widely accepted, it is narrative that gives meaning to our experience, and narrative relies on the told story that has replaced the lived experience, our lives are emptied of meaning and we are absent from our lives.[23] Following mechanical time in all aspects of our lives, and the consequent division of temporality into subjective and objective modes, we withdraw our presence from the world, isolated in our

[17] Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity. The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 180.

[18] Ibid., p. 226.

[19] Ibid., p. 180. Emphasis original.

[20] Jack Petranker, "The Presence of Others. Network Experience as an Antidote to the Subjectivity of Time," in: *24/7: Time and Temporality in the Network Society*, eds. Robert Hassan, Ronald E. Purser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 177.

[21] Ibid., p. 178.

[22] Ibid., p. 179.

[23] Ibid., pp. 179–180.

subjective experience of reality. Mechanical time also presides over our private lives and the inner realm of the self so we "live out a temporality that leaves us always already isolated from our own being," and the self becomes "a mechanistic abstraction" itself.[24] Additionally, as Paul Virilio argues, this presence to our experience is sabotaged by the temporality of the network alienated from the present moment.[25] *Source Code*, along with other "neuro-images," subverts this distinction between subjective and objective time by envisioning the protagonist's mental worlds and allowing the viewer to inhabit those worlds. The twist of revealing the state of Colter's body in the lab at the end of the film, rather than earlier, testifies that, as Pisters argues, "contemporary culture has moved from considering images as 'illusions of reality' to considering them as 'realities of illusion' that operate directly on our brains and therefore as real agents in the world."[26] In this way, displaying an individual's life of the mind, contemporary media culture and its brain-screens manifest themselves as "machines of the invisible."[27] Through this, they rehabilitate subjective temporality and reinstate its "real" status in the world. Colter's experience is narrated directly as it is lived and thus the viewer is given access to his "real" subjective temporality.

The redefinition of space and time has paramount consequences for the conceptualization of human identity, as it requires a redefined subject that would inscribe himself into that space-time. Bukatman has called this new techno-identity established by electronic technologies "terminal identity," and has defined it as a "potentially subversive reconception of the subject that situates the human and technological as coextensive, codependent, and mutually defining."[28] If for phenomenologists the body is a primary medium for being in space, cyberspace – with its profoundly reworked notions of space and time – cuts off the ties between space and the body and thus demands a renegotiation of corporeality and its significance to identity. In *Source Code* this reconfiguration takes place in connection with an intricate web of spatio-temporal relations that explode the distinctions between real / imaginary, actual / virtual, present / absent, subjective / objective and past / present / future. The film continually switches between two space-times: the military facility where allegedly "the clocks only move in one direction" and "[t]here is only one continuum … and

[24] Ibid. pp. 179, 180.
[25] See Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose (London: Verso, 1997).
[26] Pisters, *The Neuro-Image*, p. 6.
[27] Ibid., p. 20.
[28] Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, p. 22.

it cannot be unsettled,"[29] and Sean's memory module of malleable "technologized time,"[30] where the "events are continually re-wound, re-lived, fast-forwarded, altered, or frozen, while characters break up into pixel-like glitches, produce uncanny mirror-images, or die a dozen deaths."[31] The clear distinction between the ontological status of the two space-times – the actual facility and the imaginary virtualities of the Source Code – is expressed by Goodwin and Rutledge who reinforce the distinction by the spatial coordinates of "out here," "on this end," in "real life," versus, by inference, in there, in the Source Code, in your mind. The train sequences are said to be unreal: they are a memory accessed via the post-mortem activity of Sean's brain, "a shadow. … an afterimage of a victim on the train."[32] Goodwin insists that Christina has survived "only inside the Source Code," that it does not enable time travel, and that she doesn't believe in the existence of parallel realities in which she "took a different fork in the road," because, as she determinedly states, "This is real life here."[33]

However, once established, the clear-cut dichotomies are repeatedly undermined. Goodwin hides from Colter, and the viewer, his own death in a helicopter crash and the actual state of his body that appears to be a mutilated torso which cannot sustain a biological life; he is "quite literally, a body without organs: a brain in a head, with only half a trunk, held in a container on life support and physically connected to Source Code via a number of tubes, wires and data streams."[34] The camera and microphone are not employed to transfer Goodwin's image and voice to Colter, as we are led to believe, but to "transcod[e] an optic signal, paired with an audial track, intended for strictly neural recognition"[35] of his brain activity, manifested as text on the computer screen. Colter's body in the capsule and on the train is just an imaginary projection of his consciousness. The free-floating disconnected images of his future arrival at Cloud Gate at the end of each replay, crystallizing with each repetition, also contribute to the confusion in spatial and temporal consistency. The (un)reality of the train sequences is further complicated by war images that emerge from the pro-

[29] Jones, dir., *Source Code*.

[30] Petranker, "The Presence of Others," p. 174.

[31] Pepita Hesselberth, "From Subject-Effect to Presence-effect: A Deictic Approach to the Cinematic," *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2012), accessed May 17, 2017, http://www.necsus-ejms.org/from-subject-effect-to-presence-effect-a-deictic-approach-to-the-cinematic/.

[32] Jones, dir., *Source Code*.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Hesselberth, *Cinematic Chronotopes*, p. 123.

[35] Garrett Stewart, "Fourth Dimensions, Seventh Senses: The Work of Mind-Gaming in the Age of Electronic Reproduction," in: *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Buckland, p. 176.

tagonist's memory, an instance of the real appearing in the midst of the virtual / imaginary. Additionally, from the allegedly virtual realm Colter is able to phone his father. The unstable boundary between the real and virtual is further violated when the imaginary revisitings of the memory lead to an actual redrawing of the space-time continuum and the creation of a real parallel universe from which the up-till-then "real" world of the military facility can be contacted. Even Goodwin changes her mind when in the "real life here," she is "talking to a dead helicopter pilot,"[36] as Colter makes her aware, and consequently, to her, the interactions with Colter become more real than the science of Rutledge. It is only when the knowledge of Colter's "true" situation hits him that the differentiation between the two space-times crumbles, revealing "a crack in the Source Code," which is manifested by Christina's face beginning "to blur in a way reminiscent of a digital graphics error."[37] At this point, the protagonist realizes that he is a disembodied consciousness floating in the digital netherworld, and consequently he becomes aware of the power of his mind. He "frees his mind" and starts to truly transcend the limitations of the embodied world and engineer his own agency. It is at this moment that he decides to reroute the past and undo the explosion.

In Colter's case it is not only cyberspace but also quantum mechanics and its ontological indeterminism that contribute to the ontological crisis of subjectivity since he exists in two, and then more, continuums simultaneously. He is neither alive nor dead, and yet he still dies many deaths in the Source Code, and another one in "reality" when he is unplugged and his neural fusion with the electronics is broken, and his existence continues on a different plane in an equally "real" world, validated by the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics. In this way, the death of the subject is staged continually in the film and results in "a rebirth on another plane, producing a strengthened continuity."[38] Contrary to other films featuring virtual reality, Colter's experience in cyberspace is not purely kinetic and perceptive. During the iterated trips to the Source Code, his consciousness is disconnected from the body to plunge into cyberspace but then it becomes permanently fused with another body to exist in a parallel reality without the prosthesis of technology. While in other VR films new technology constitutes an extension of the subject's body and can only be put into

[36] Stewart, "Fourth Dimensions, Seventh Senses," p. 176.

[37] Daniel Müller, "Narrations of Trauma in Mainstream Cinema: Forgetting Death in Duncan Jones' Source Code (2011)," in: *The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema: Violence Void Visualization*, eds. Michael Elm, Kobi Kabalek, Julia B. Köhne (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p. 117.

[38] Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, p. 281.

action with the participation of his body, in *Source Code*, in Colter's new life in Sean's body, the technology of Source Code is no longer needed. Colter goes from virtuality back to materiality and it is virtuality that becomes the means of this re-embodiment, legitimized by quantum physics. Death in the alternate reality entails the return to the actual world, while death in the "real" world as a result of disconnecting the interface allows for the separation of worlds and selves.

The conceptualization of identity in *Source Code* constitutes a thorough reinscription of the Cartesian mind / body split. If for Descartes the mind can be differentiated from the body, they are inseparable from birth to death. In contrast, in *Source Code* consciousness can be separated from the body to inhabit another one; it is not connected with one unique body. The film thus endorses a clear split between mind and body, yet does not completely dispose of the body. The duality between mind and body goes further in *Source Code* because here the protagonist almost does not have a body; it is the duality between mind and the brain in the head. It is therefore particularly true in his case that "Cyberspace is a celebration of spirit, as the disembodied consciousness leaps and dances with unparalleled freedom. It is a realm in which the mind is freed from bodily limitations, a place for the return of *the omnipotence of thoughts*."[39]

Although the film does not take up any of the existing quantum approaches to consciousness, it does attempt to provoke a philosophical reflection on the new cyberidentities. It prompts us to ask whether Colter's personhood is continued after the transfer of consciousness. One group of philosophers who write on personal identity support the view that the criterion of identity over time is the possession of the same brain and body. According to a less strict version of this view, the whole body is not necessary, but a sufficient amount of "the brain to be the brain of a living person."[40] If we were to apply this physical criterion view to Colter's situation in *Source Code*, the person in the lab is the same person as the helicopter pilot in spite of his mutilated body. Yet when it comes to the Colter in the lab, the Colter on the train and the one in Chicago, there is no continuity of the body or the brain as his consciousness occupies Sean's brain and body.

The most popular view of personal identity, however, is the psychological continuity theory of personal identity. One kind of psychological criterion is experience-memory, suggested by Locke and contested by some philosophers who claim that identity is preserved in the absence of episodic

[39] Ibid., pp. 208-209. Emphasis original.
[40] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 204.

memory, for instance, in amnesia. The concept of the continuity of memory as a criterion of personal identity has been problematized in many films, for example, in *Total Recall* (Paul Verhoeven, 1990) and *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000). Derek Parfit has revised Locke's view to claim that the psychological criteria of personal identity include not only continuity of memory but also other psychological connections, such as an intention and the later act, and continuity of psychological features and personality traits.[41] There is psychological continuity if there are "overlapping chains of strong connectedness," which is "the holding of particular direct psychological connections"; psychological continuity has the right kind of cause, and there is no other person psychologically continuous with the given person.[42] Psychological connection should have its "normal cause" which is the continuity of the brain (on the narrow version of this criterion, this condition is necessary but not sufficient), and no other person has the sufficient amount of that person's brain. Parfit notes that if "psychological continuity does not have its normal cause, some may claim that it is *not* true psychological continuity."[43]

Colter Stevens in *Source Code* suffers from partial amnesia at the beginning of the film; nevertheless, later he regains access to his past. He retains psychological continuity and connectedness but they do not have their normal cause. In his case, then, according to some philosophers, the psychological continuity is not the "true" one. Parfit, however, when discussing the case of teleportation in which an identical copy of a person's body and brain is created, claims that "this kind of continuity is *just as good as* ordinary continuity."[44] In the case of teleportation, the identical replica of a person would not be that person on the physical criterion and on the narrow psychological criterion, while the replica would be the original person on the wide criteria (according to which memory and other psychological connections have any cause). Similarly, in *Source Code*, Colter does not satisfy the physical criterion or the narrow psychological criterion, but he does satisfy the wide criteria. His psychological continuity is so strong that he is not even aware that a transfer to another body has occurred; he only realizes that when he sees the reflection of his "new" body in the mirror and the train window. Yet there is one problem here: one of Parfit's conditions of psychological continuity, as specified above, is that there is no other person psychologically continuous with the discussed person. In Colter's

[41] Ibid., p. 205.
[42] Ibid., pp. 207–208.
[43] Ibid., p. 209. Emphasis original.
[44] Ibid., p. 209. Emphasis original.

case, there is at least one copy of him in a parallel universe and it shares his past up to a point.[45]

The ontological shift connected with the interface of technology with the human subject as well as the radical reformulation of space and time thereby involve a redefinition of what it is to be human and indicate "the limits of the existing paradigms," rather than "*annihilation* of subjectivity."[46] *Source Code* implies that traditional approaches to the problem of consciousness and identity, such as the bodily-continuity theory or psychological continuity theory, are inadequate for describing identity in the digital era. The film challenges the definitions of the human that depend on embodiment, reevaluates the existing theories of personal identity and proposes its own definition, applicable to the information age. *Source Code* proposes that identity resides in consciousness and experience-memory, in the continued sense of self, while the continuity of the body and brain do not matter. It is the continuity of memory that is a guarantor of identity in the film as "[i]n an era of bodily transformation, change, and dissolution, the mere (and ahistorical) *fact* of physical existence is no longer a guarantor of truth or selfhood"[47] (Sean Fentress exists physically but his consciousness is gone). *Source Code* therefore redefines the notion of the human by rejecting the biological element as its essential constituent. The body is necessary but not essential – it functions merely as an interchangeable vessel for consciousness (although it must be compatible in terms of "gender, body size and your synaptic maps").

The continuity of Colter's consciousness enacted by the narrative structure of the film makes the viewer believe that the Colter in the capsule, the Colter on the train, the Colter in front of Cloud Gate and the Colter in the lab are the same person. This conviction is supported by the way in which the character's sense of self is presented to the viewer: thanks to subjective camera movement, we share his point of view and witness his mind's peregrinations. To the spectator, the life of Colter's mind and the events on the train are shown as "real" events, and it is only at the end of the film that they are exposed as his "brain-world"[48] or the "mindscreen," that is, in Bruce Kawin's formulation, a "personalized world, one that both incorporates the emphases and distortions of its organizing intelligence and ex-

[45] The problem of the integrity of personal identity in parallel universes is very complex. See my discussion in *Shapes of Time in British Twenty-First Century Quantum Fiction* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 2015), pp. 47–64.

[46] Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, pp. 175, 180. Emphasis original.

[47] Ibid., p. 249.

[48] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: The Athlone Press, 1989), p. 210.

presses the mind's relation to its materials."[49] Although Colter's conversations with Goodwin are only possible thanks to the direct neural interface, to him, all the experiences are embodied: he inhabits his "previous" body, he talks, feels cold, sees Goodwin on the screen and hears her talk. Virtual reality is thus not only a pure mental realm but also sensory data. The transitions between the "actual" and virtual realities are seamless, corroborating Katherine Hayles's statement that "[i]n the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals."[50] Colter, as a new subject, appears as "a terminal of multiple networks,"[51] all of which he experiences as real. Yet although he is psychologically bound to his body, it appears interchangeable, a superfluous negligible constituent of his identity that he eventually does not mind trading for Sean's body, accepting, "It's the new me,"[52] if it is the only means to ensure the continuity of his existence.

Simultaneously, the film voices anxieties about the potentially dangerous consequences of the digital for human corporeality and identity. On the one hand, the dematerializing power of technology serves as a release from the burden of the physical body; on the other hand, however, it might be a source of manipulation and commodification that disregards the human body. As Vivian Sobchack points out, "The argument is that electronic space reembodies rather than 'disembodies' us. Although, to a certain extent, this is true, the dominant cultural logic of the electronic tends to elide or devalue the bodies that we are in physical space – not only as they suffer in their flesh and mortality, but also as they ground such fantasies of reembodiment."[53] One of the effects of this omission or devaluation of the body can be the "loss of moral gravity."[54] Accordingly, Dr Rutledge does not have any ethical qualms about the project. He uses Colter's mutilated body without his or his family's agreement for the "greater good" of the war on terrorism in which, Hayles predicts, conflicts will be solved by "'neocorti-

[49] Bruce F. Kawin, *Mindscreen. Bergman, Godard, and First-Person Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 84.

[50] Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 3.

[51] Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. Bernard Schutze, Caroline Schutze (New York: Semiotext(e), 1988), p. 16.

[52] Jones, dir., *Source Code*.

[53] Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 158 n. 43.

[54] Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 158.

cal warfare' waged through the techno-sciences of information."[55] As "a hand on the clock" which is supposed to have a "memory wipe"[56] after the first mission, Colter's body becomes, in Bukatman's words, "a site of almost endless dissolution" while "the subject is simulated, morphed, modified, retooled … and even dissolved."[57] This commodification of an individual in the context of political processes that exploit people as instruments in the war on terrorism, in which every sacrifice is justified, works towards the reshaping of the significance of ageing, suffering, abasement and mortality that digital technologies demand. Technology that valorizes Colter's existence does so only because it values information more than human dignity. Colter's body, which enables the transfer of his consciousness, becomes a vessel for information, to confirm Hayles's anxiety: "The great dream and promise of information is that it can be freed from the material constraints that govern the mortal world."[58] With his mind separated from the body, Colter repeatedly plunges into another man's memory which is not a repository of experience-memories that would constitute a component of Colter's or Sean's identity but an artificial and ephemeral memory created through repetition.[59] This, originally human, memory is now mere digital information, accessed directly by mental circuitry and communicated via a computer.

However, the protagonist manages to turn the degrading effects of digital technologies to his advantage, by which the film suggests the possibility that digitization allows for the reinvention of identity. Although initially trapped in the permanent present of Sean's memory and the morbidity of his post-mortem life, governed by the "meta-logic" of the network which mirrors socio-economic relations in which it is grounded, Colter seizes "a potential for diversity, for the creation of innumerable original 'contextually situated' spaces" offered by the "asynchronous times of the network."[60] He discovers the liberating aspect of the dematerializing power of the digital and modifies a definition of degradation and mortality. He regains his agency and reinvents his identity in the body of another man, no longer a victim of commodification and manipulations connected with advanced technologies.

[55] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 13, 20.

[56] Jones, dir., *Source Code*.

[57] Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, p. 244.

[58] Hayles, How We Became Posthuman, pp. 13, 20.

[59] Allan Cameron and Richard Misek, "Modular Spacetime in the 'Intelligent' Blockbuster: *Inception* and *Source Code*," in: *Hollywood Puzzle Films*, ed. Warren Buckland (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), p. 119.

[60] Robert Hassan, "Network Time and the New Knowledge Epoch," *Time&Society*, Vol. 12, No. 2-3 (2003), pp. 235–236.

The film indulges a fantasy, in Hayles's words, "that because we are essentially information, we can do away with the body," springing from the assumption that materiality and information can be separated.[61] The conception of the subject for whom the body is necessary but not essential adds yet another character to the assemblage of the posthuman. The posthuman, in Hayles's understanding, is a "collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction."[62] Fusing neuroscience with new technology and quantum mechanics, *Source Code* unsettles the ontological underpinnings of what is included in the category of the human and proposes a new model of subjectivity in which the boundaries of an autonomous subject are fluent and in which purely biological grounds cannot serve to decide about the continuity of the subject.

[61] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 12.
[62] Ibid., p. 3.

Sonia Front

Hacking the Brain: Duncan Jones's *Source Code*

The paper concentrates on the new representations of human consciousness in digital cinema which reflect contemporary culture's fixation on the cerebral. As digital cinema's divorce from the photographic base has allowed to produce virtual worlds, many of them are situated literally in the protagonist's mind. The new representations of consciousness in film tap into philosophical and scientific notions of time and temporality as well as into the discoveries of neuroscience and quantum physics. Some of these discoveries represented in film offer the possibility of release from the restrictions of the physical body, which can be exemplified by Duncan Jones's *Source Code* (2011). In the film the protagonist's consciousness is repeatedly transferred to another man's body locked in the past segment of space-time, in which he splits into a multiplicity of selves. This provokes the question: is the protagonist's personhood continued after the transfer of consciousness? To answer that, one needs to take into account the bodily-continuity theory and the psychological continuity theory of personal identity, yet they can only partly be applied to *Source Code* because they rely on the classical notion of linear time. As technoculture has triggered a radical redefinition of space and time, what follows is the need for a reformulation of the understanding of human identity. The essay explores the film's designation of personal identity, applicable to the information age.

Keywords: *Source Code*, consciousness, the digital, time, personal identity, parallel universe

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The Consciousness of the Posthuman in Peter Watts' *Blindsight*

When, in 1997, the Russian chess master Gary Kasparov was defeated by the IBM-created computer Deep Blue, many took it as yet another sign that machines, and most specifically so-called Artificial Intelligence (AI), will soon supersede humanity. Such neo-luddite sentiments could have easily been voiced again twenty years later, when AlphaGo, a program developed to play Go, a game supposedly far more complex than chess, secretly defeated over fifty of the best go players in the world. One of them, the Chinese player Ke Jie commented on his loss by claiming that "[h]umans have evolved in games in thousands of years – but computers now tell us humans are all wrong. I think no one is even close to know the basics of Go."[1]

Such, rather dreary, predictions, seem to imply that even if AIs are not superior, they are on equal footing with humans, particularly when it comes to systems with finite variables. That which, supposedly, makes us human, consciousness and creativity, seems superfluous in the contexts in which operations on data are crucial, contexts which start to become more frequent in the current economic landscape.

A text which explores such notions, within the genre of science fiction, is Peter Watts' *Blindsight* (2006), later republished combined with its sequel, *Echopraxia* (2014) as *Firefall* (2014). Such explorations are, of course,

[1] Zheping Huang, "Google's AlphaGo AI secretively won more than 50 straight games against the world's top Go players," *Quartz*, last modified January 4, 2017, accessed January 16, 2017, https://qz.com/877721/the-ai-master-bested-the-worlds-top-go-players-and-then-revealed-itself-as-googles-alphago-in-disguise/.

a longstanding component of the genre. Since the advent of neuroscience in the second half of the 20th century, manipulations of the brain became one of the staples of science fiction. From memory alteration of Philip K. Dick's "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale,"[2] to minds-as-storage banks of "Johnny Mnemonic" by William Gibson,[3] authors of the genre seem to ponder the possibilities and consequences brought about by manipulating the human nervous system.

Following this theme, the purpose of the paper will be to analyse what seems to be one of the main themes of *Blindsight* – the treatment of the human brain and consciousness as a resource to be used, not something to be celebrated. To explore this point, the paper will briefly characterize the themes of mind alteration present in science fiction, whose main point seems to be that the human brain is not unlike a machine, and thus, can be treated as one. What will follow, will be a critique of such posthuman, or transhuman, notions, exemplified through the article "Empty Brain" by Robert Epstein, originally published on the website *Aeon.co*.[4] In it, Epstein argues that the likening of the workings of the human brain to those of a computer is merely a metaphor that has little to do with the real inner workings of the brain. In the final part, the paper will focus on an analysis of *Blindsight*, particularly those aspects of the novel which deal with human brain and alterations of consciousness.

It will claim that, through the description of the bleeding edge[5] in posthuman technologies, Watts' novel provides a critique of a profit-driven, capitalistic approach, in which human cognition is just another resource to be enhanced to maximize its efficiency, with all the unnecessary parts to be remade or removed; thus, the brain becomes reduced to a mere computational engine. This final point seems to be emphasized by Watts' characterization of the extraterrestrials – star-faring, resilient and super intelligent, but lacking any sort of individuality or consciousness. Having, or being, a "self" is, it would seem, more of a flaw than a positive trait.

Ultimately, in Watts' novel, consciousness is presented as a hindrance, a useless evolutionary artefact that limits our processing abilities. The self is not the commodity, what is commodified are brainpower and processing

[2] Philip K. Dick, "We Can Remember It for you Wholesale," in: *We Can Remember It for you Wholesale and Other Classic Stories* (New York: Citadel, 2017).

[3] William Gibson, "Johnny Mnemonic," in: *Burning Chrome* (New York: Harper Voyager, 2003), MOBI File.

[4] Robert Epstein, "The empty brain," *Aeon*, last modified May 18, 2016, accessed January 16, 2017, https://aeon.co/essays/your-brain-does-not-process-information-and-it-is-not-a-computer.

[5] The concept of the "bleeding edge," as per the Merriam-Webster definition, implies "the newest and most advanced part or position especially in technology," but also the experimental and untested nature of the technology. *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, s.v. "bleeding edge."

abilities. The mind is limited by the self; thus, the requirement of becoming a productive and effective posthuman being is to lose the self.

The Posthuman Subject

Alteration of the human body, including the nervous system, has long been a staple of science fiction, and especially of cyberpunk. The genre-defining works of the aforementioned William Gibson are populated by characters who, to remain competitive on the job market, alter their bodies. This includes the eponymous protagonist of "Johnny Mnemonic," who, at one point in the movie adaptation of the short story, claims: "I can carry nearly eighty gigs of data in my head. [...] I had to dump chunk of long term memory: my childhood."[6] The protagonists of Gibson's *Neuromancer* suffer the same fate, willingly or otherwise, with the starkest example being the famous computer hacker "Dixie Flatline" whose skills and consciousness were preserved digitally, only to be awoken when they are needed.[7]

One of the main implications of such themes is the fact that human bodies, and indeed brains, are compatible with machines, including computers. This premise is the bedrock of the notion of posthumanism, as presented by N. Kathrine Hayles:

> [T]he posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals.[8]

However, as strongly present as the concept of mind-machine interfaces is in popular culture, it has been criticized. One such critique, presented in Robert Epstein's article "The empty brain," considers the view that the human brain works like a machine as nothing more than a metaphor, one that has little grounding. As Epstein claims: "Our shoddy thinking about the brain has deep historical roots, but the invention of computers in the 1940s got us especially confused."[9] In this case, he follows *In Our Own Image* (2015), a work by George Zarkadakis, which, as Epstein recounts, "describes six different metaphors people have employed over the past 2,000

[6] Robert Longo, dir., *Johnny Mnemonic* (TriStar Pictures, 1995).

[7] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984).

[8] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 3.

[9] Epstein, "The empty brain."

years to try to explain human intelligence," all of which, per Zarkadakis, were based on the dominant technology of the time. Thus, early cultures that metaphorised the mind through clay infused with spirit (with spirit accounting for intelligence); through the rise of automata in the early enlightenment (with Descartes famously claiming that humans are complex machines); to the contemporary computer metaphor propagated by scientists and futurists (including John von Neumann and Ray Kurtzweil, which present humans as information processors). For Epstein, the invention of the computer provided a seemingly attractive, yet ultimately false, way of talking about the brain:

> The faulty logic of the [information processing] metaphor is easy enough to state. It is based on a faulty syllogism – one with two reasonable premises and a faulty conclusion. Reasonable premise #1: all computers are capable of behaving intelligently. Reasonable premise #2: all computers are information processors. Faulty conclusion: all entities that are capable of behaving intelligently are information processors.[10]

Another crucial factor of the Information Processing (IP) metaphor considers memory as data retrieval. As Epstein claims, "computers, quite literally, process information – numbers, letters, words, formulas, images." To do so, they consist of drives with stored data that allow them to operate. Everything that a computer does is based upon these stored, malleable data that literally tell the computer what to do, which includes the retrieval of information stored physically on its hard drive. Humans however, as Epstein argues, are born with "senses, reflexes and learning mechanisms"; what we both lack and do not ever develop, he continues, is the capacity to store memories physically somewhere inside our brain cells.

The views presented in "Empty Brain" do not necessarily run counter to the notions of posthumanity as presented by Hayles, above. She, among other critics, posits that our reliance on technology for everyday activities is enough to consider contemporary humanity cyberorganisms. Epstein's article does directly shatter the cyberpunk dream of digital habitats: "[W]e will never have to worry about a human mind going amok in cyberspace; alas, we will also never achieve immortality through downloading." The reason for that lies in the fact that memory is not stored within brain cells, and that, as Epstein claims, human memory is a context-dependent process:

> even if we had the ability to take a snapshot of all of the brain's 86 billion neurons and then to simulate the state of those neurons in a computer, that

[10] Ibid.

vast pattern would mean nothing outside the body of the brain that produced it.[11]

The crew of the *Theseus*

It is only fitting, therefore, that the opening event of *Blindsight* is the sudden appearance of a staggering number of small, extraterrestrial ships in Earth's orbit, which proceed to take a snapshot of the planet. The novel, starting out in 2082, describes humanity's first contact with extraterrestrial technology, and the subsequent mission to the Oort Cloud to investigate an alien signal. The story follows members of the expedition and their encounter with visitors from another star system. The focus is, however, on the posthuman explorers themselves, and the fact that their minds have become modified to a specific purpose, and their selves seem an unnecessary baggage.

The notion of a precarious self, along with a strong doubt about the primacy of consciousness in our lives appears, as Peter Watts himself admits in "Notes and References" concluding the book, one of the novels' main themes. Watts cites claims that "the book is strongly inspired by Thomas Metzinger's *Being No One,*"[12] a neuroscientific work whose author, in his own words, sets to "try to convince [us] that there is no such thing as self,"[13] and that humanity is unable to study the philosophical concept of consciousness without acknowledging "that to the best of our knowledge there is no thing, no indivisible entity, that is *us*, neither in the brain nor in some metaphysical realm beyond this world."[14] This belief, which can be summarized by the claim that consciousness, the self, and memory, are a process rather than a collection of stored data, is what connects the claims of Metzinger and Epstein, and which creates the background for the interpretation of *Blindsight* as a work that critiques the information processing metaphor in the context of brain's processing power as a commodity.

In Watts' novel, the second half of the twenty-first century has fully embraced the practice of human body modification, which includes the use of neural technology as well as advanced virtual realities. In search for greater technological and scientific achievements, humanity rushed into modifying itself without answering the most basic questions: "After four

[11] Ibid.

[12] Peter Watts, *Firefall* (London: Head of Zeus, 2014), MOBI file, location 10600.

[13] Thomas Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010), MOBI file, location 69.

[14] Ibid., location 69. Emphasis original.

thousand years we can't even prove that reality exists beyond the mind of the first-person dreamer. We have such need of intellects greater than our own." The results of this need are highly advanced computers and artificial intelligences, that are almost incomprehensible to so-called "baseline," unmodified humans. As the novel's narrator, Siri Keeton, himself far from the baseline humanity, observes:

> [W]e're not very good at building them. The forced matings of minds and electrons succeed and fail with equal spectacle. Our hybrids become as brilliant as savants, and as autistic. […] Computers bootstrap their own offspring, grow so wise and incomprehensible that their communiqués assume the hallmarks of dementia: unfocused and irrelevant to the barely-intelligent creatures left behind.[15]

Those who are left behind, and are unwilling to change themselves, often flee reality into Heaven, a complex virtual reality environment whose inhabitants can create any fantasy they deem fit, without being bothered by the environmentally decaying, posthuman-populated outside world. Such an opening premise pictures a late capitalist paradox – a world that is highly advanced technologically, but with precious few who can benefit from this fact, let alone understand its own creations. The price for this dubious progress is, as mentioned above, the commodification of minds and bodies. At one point, Siri daydreams about the possibility that even the inhabitants of Heaven may be made more effective by having their unnecessary limbs and organs removed.

There are also those, however, who take part in the posthuman rat-race, including the crew of the *Theseus*, a ship sent to find potential extraterrestrial visitors. All of them form the bleeding edge of human modification, who were endowed with a set of skills both through modification and mutilation. Some, like the expedition's leader Jukka Sarasti, were created through gene therapy. Sarasti is what scientists call a "vampire" – a once-extinct offshoot of the *homo sapiens*, a cannibalistic predator that, along with its murderous instincts, possesses a savant-like level of intelligence. Most of the other members, however, have asked for their enhancements. These include major Amanda Bates, a cyborgized soldier equipped with a considerable number of slaved drones; Isaac Szpindel,[16] a biologist modi-

[15] Watts, *Firefall*, location 511.

[16] Szpindel dies during the novel, only to be replaced by Robert Cunningham, also a biologist, who seamlessly fits into his place. All members of the expedition have a "backup" stored on the *Theseus*, waiting to be awakened in case of an emergency. This detail further underlines the point that utility is far more important that individuality.

fied to "synesthetically perceive output from their lab equipment,"[17] and able to perceive more wavelengths than unmodified humans; and Susan James, a linguist consisting of four distinct, cooperating personalities sharing one body. James, most interestingly, exemplifies the mentality that has led to the creation of such posthumans. On the one hand, it is acknowledged that to house the four personalities in her body, her brain matter had to be physically partitioned into four distinct parts. On the other hand, Sascha, one of James' component personalities, criticized the twentieth-century approach to multiple personalities:

> People were fucking barbarians about multicores back then – called it a disorder, treated it like some kind of disease. And their idea of a cure was to keep one of the cores and murder all the others. Not that they called it murder, of course. They called it integration or some shit.[18]

Even the approach of the *Theseus*'s crew to themselves seems both superficially contradictory and grimly self-conscious. There is a feeling of superiority, underlined with knowledge that something has to be given up in return. "[I]t's not so much that the bleeding edge lacks social skills; it's just that once you get past a certain point, formal speech is too damn slow."[19] Likewise, Cunningham is called at one point "another prototype," whose face lacks any expression, for "the wetware that ran those muscles had been press-ganged into other pursuits."[20] Siri Keeton, whose role is, as will be expanded below, that of a translator between the baseline and posthuman, notices that:

> [B]eneath Szpindel's gruff camaraderie, beneath James's patient explanations – there was no real respect. How could there be? These people were the bleeding edge, the incandescent apex of hominid achievement. They were trusted with the fate of the world.[21]

However, this path is not a choice, but a necessity. This is especially true of Robert Cunningham, who seems to treat his modification "[a]s though he'd upgraded his wardrobe instead of ripping out his senses and grafting new ones into the wounds."[22] When asked by Keeton why he had installed his various enhancements, Cunningham remarks that:

[17] Ibid., location 10708.
[18] Ibid., location 1936.
[19] Ibid., location 2636.
[20] Ibid., location 2566
[21] Ibid., location 3166.
[22] Ibid., location 3328

> "It's vital to keep current," he said. "If you don't reconfigure you can't retrain. If you don't retrain you're obsolete inside a month, and then you're not much good for anything except Heaven or dictation."[23]

Siri Keeton's role, finally, is also quite indicative of the paradoxes of the novel's reality. As mentioned above, his role is to send reports back to Earth, to translate the actions of the posthuman crew of the *Theseus* to the far less intelligent decision makers. Keeton is necessary in the scenario "when your surpassing creations find the answers you asked for, [when] you can't understand their analysis and you can't verify their answers."[24] This, more than anything, seems to demonstrate the futility and the ultimate consequences of unchecked, rapid technological development of human cognition and processing power. At some point, any data acquired by the enhanced minority will be so complex that it will become useless to the baseline majority; either not comprehensible or simplified so much, that the way of its acquisition becomes unnecessary

> use information theory to flatten it for you, to squash the tesseract into two dimensions and the Klein bottle into three, to simplify reality and pray to whatever Gods survived the millennium that your honorable twisting of the truth hasn't ruptured any of its load-bearing pylons.[25]

The problem, it would seem, is the notion of the self and of conscious information processing. Watts, taking his inspiration from Metzinger, seems to imply that the self is an unnecessary evolutionary baggage that does not imply, nor is needed for, intelligence in any way. This becomes apparent when the crew of the *Theseus* encounter the extraterrestrial space ship and its inhabitants, who while seemingly able to instantly process vast amounts of data, possess no self or consciousness.

The Scramblers

The alien ship, which does seem to communicate, and calls itself *Rorschach*, influences the posthuman crew from the moment they encounter it. Those influences, a result of both the aliens' activities as well as the ship's dangerous environment, are inspired by the examples of various disorders Metzinger provides in his book to demonstrate the doubtful use and power of consciousness.

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[23] Ibid., location 3329.
[24] Ibid., location 512.
[25] Ibid., location 515.

The most interesting aspect of *Rorschach* is the creatures that inhabit it. Dubbed the "scramblers," the aliens can achieve feats of information processing unheard of by humans. Their very name comes from their ability to remain "invisible" to human sight by constantly moving between the saccade movements of the human eye, when, for a number of milliseconds, the conscious brain does not register auditory stimuli. This ability, as well as the fact that captured scramblers learn very quickly how to solve complex mathematical problems, leads some of the crew of the *Theseus* to question their seeming lack of a complex neural system. After Cunningham asserts that "scrambler is an absolute miracle of evolutionary engineering […] [but i]t's also dumb as a stick,"[26] Susan James argues with him about the nature of intelligence:

> "This is all just crunching," Cunningham said. "Millions of computer programs do it without ever waking up."
> "They're intelligent, Robert. They're smarter than us. Maybe they're smarter than Jukka. And we're – why can't you just admit it?"[27]

Their disagreement demonstrates their wider approach to intelligence of the world they inhabit. While they seem fundamentally in disagreement, they both seem to project their hopes on the scramblers. Both, perhaps unconsciously, notice that humanity could very well reshape itself into scrambler-like creatures. Yet, while Susan James seems to hope, perhaps naively, that processing power can equal intelligence, the sentiment is not shared by Cunningham. The final point seems to be, however, in the claim that the "smarter [the] animal, [the] less self-awareness,"[28] and in the theory Sacha James presents at the end of the novel, in which she theorizes that the non-sentient scramblers, upon receiving a radio signal coming from Earth, interpret it as malignant:

> The only explanation is that something has coded nonsense in a way that poses as a useful message; only after wasting time and effort does the deception become apparent. The signal functions to consume the resources of a recipient for zero payoff and reduced fitness. The signal is a virus. Viruses do not arise from kin, symbionts, or other allies. The signal is an attack.[29]

This theory, while not necessarily true, is to some degree validated by Watts himself in the final remarks accompanying the novel. In these, he

[26] Ibid., location 2949.
[27] Ibid., location 3481.
[28] Ibid., location 4113.
[29] Ibid., location 4316.

directly states that there is a logic to the scramblers' reaction to such radio signals, full of art and rhetoric: "Aesthetics. Sentience. Extinction. And that brings us to the final question, lurking way down in the anoxic zone: the question of what consciousness costs. Compared to nonconscious processing, self-awareness is slow and expensive."[30] Of course, the next question to ask is why humans are even conscious then, the question to which the author of *Blindsight* provides no answer, stating only that he hopes that consciousness is a positive trait, and that his novel is a "thought experiment, a game of *Just suppose* and *What if*. Nothing more."[31] Even as such, however, when read in the wider context of contemporary neuroscientific approaches, it provides a stark critique of the IP metaphor, and demonstrates its possible dangers.

Conclusion

At one point in *Blindsight*, the narrator remarks that "people have an unfortunate habit of assuming they understand reality just because they understood the analogy."[32] This sentence is a fitting commentary to the aspect of Watts' book which, while still operating from within the confines of the IP metaphor so prevalent in science fiction, tries to portray a world in which this metaphor is taken to an extreme. In less speculative contexts, it can be found in the quest to build computers that can beat humans at games such as go or chess, ones that have become synonymous with advanced intellect. However, as Robert Epstein argued in his "Empty Brain," likening the brain to a computer has little to do with reality, and is potentially damaging to our understanding of the human brain, both scientifically and economically.[33]

The crew of the Theseus were all, willingly or not, enhanced to remain competitive in an economy that treats the processing power of the brain as a mere commodity. However, a consequence is that such increasingly specialized posthumans became incomprehensible to most of their species, rendering the blind race for superior intelligence moot. At the same time, the extraterrestrial beings they encounter show a possible result of the path humanity is on within the novel. While both highly intelligent and able to travel to different star systems, they possess no consciousness. Thus, Watts' description of the Scramblers, an ultimate information processing

[30] Ibid., location 10653.
[31] Ibid., location 10671.
[32] Ibid., location 5552.
[33] Epstein, "The empty brain."

life form, can be read as a critique of the IP metaphor, a demonstration that such a view is both reductionist and potentially dangerous.

In the wider context of speculative fiction, one aspect of the brains-as-computers metaphor, as presented in Watts' *Blindsight*, is the already stated fact that "post-" or "transhumanity" seems synonymous with technology. Such a statement may, however, reveal a particular bias. The merging of different biological elements, the existence of gut bacteria or the hybridity of man and animal or plant or fungi is just hybridity, something that has been explored by Jeff VanderMeer in his *Southern Reach Trilogy*. The man-machine hybrids remain a separate category, possibly due to a bias towards machines being synonymous with progress, while the focus on biology could be read as synonymous with regress towards agriculture. However, novelists like VanderMeer or China Mieville slowly break this dichotomy, allowing the notion of post- or transhumanity to go beyond the realm of the digital and the mechanical. Even more importantly, narratives about such biological transhumans can more easily escape the focus on economy and commodification, so present in Watts and the novelists before him.

Michał Różycki

The Consciousness of the Posthuman in Peter Watts' *Blindsight*

The purpose of the paper is to analyze what seems to be one of the main themes of *Blindsight* – the treatment of the human brain and consciousness as yet another part of the body that can be enhanced to maximize its efficiency, with all the unnecessary parts to be remade or removed. This point seems to be emphasized by Watts's characterization of the extraterrestrials – star faring, resilient and super intelligent, but lacking any sort of individuality or consciousness. Having, or being, a "self" is, it would seem, more of a flaw than a positive trait.

Keywords: transhumanism, posthumanisim, science fiction, Peter Watts, *Blindsight*, artificial intelligence, futurism.

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"The mind is the effect, not the cause" – exploring consciousness in Nikesh Shukla's *Meatspace*

The main character of Nikesh Shukla's latest novel, *Meatspace*, is a novice novelist experiencing a crisis in his professional and personal life. At the same time, he is becoming more and more immersed in cyberspace, to the extent that the meatspace – the physical world, as opposed to cyberspace – seems to become of secondary importance. The virtual existence seems to be as natural for the character as his existence in the meatspace. Consequently, the narrative of the novel can be construed as a good illustration of the concept of the extended phenotype, in which the consciousness and the mind are results of an interaction between a self and its environment, mediated by "the technological unconscious."[1]

As Daniel C. Dennett puts it: "Human consciousness is about the last surviving mystery."[2] Several theories of consciousness have been developed over the years, however, the question of what constitutes consciousness is far from being answered. Dennett claims that consciousness is an outcome of an interrelationship between a self and its surrounding. Dennett's model derives both from the phenomenal and cognitive consciousness models. First of all, he rejects the idea of what he calls the "Cartesian theatre,"[3] i.e.

[1] Nigel Thrift, "Remembering the technological unconscious by foregrounding knowledges of position," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* Vol. 22, (2004), p. 175.

[2] Daniel C. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (New York: Back Bay Books / Little, Brown and Company, 1991), p. 21.

[3] Ibid., p. 17.

the idea that consciousness is a stream which is broadcast to some kind of an internal viewer located in the brain. Dennett claims that since the brain has no central governing body, which has been shown in research, the existence of consciousness as a kind of play staged continuously in the brain's theatre is impossible. Different parts of the brain process different kinds of information and are responsible for different tasks, cooperating only when necessary for execution of certain tasks. At no stage is there a place or moment where all these processes are combined to create conscious experience, understood here as being aware of an external object or something within oneself. As he points out:

> The pineal gland is not only not the fax machine to the Soul, it is also not the Oval Office of the brain, and neither are any of the other portions of the brain. The brain is Headquarters, the place where the ultimate observer is, but there is no reason to believe that the brain itself has any deeper headquarters, any inner sanctum, arrival at which is the necessary or sufficient condition for conscious experience. In short, there is no observer inside the brain.[4]

Dennett strongly opposes any views which do not stand on scientific grounds, hence the rejection of the dualist theories which consist in claiming that there is a supernatural or unexplainable element in consciousness. According to Dennett, such theories replace one mystery with another one and do not really offer any explanation of what constitutes consciousness or what conscious experience is. Instead, Dennett proposes his Multiple Drafts model, which he perceives as crucial to explaining the phenomenon of consciousness. As he points out:

> According to the Multiple Drafts model, all varieties of perception – indeed, all varieties of thought or mental activity – are accomplished in the brain by parallel, multitrack processes of interpretation and elaboration of sensory inputs. Information entering the nervous system is under continuous "editorial revision." For instance, since your head moves a bit and your eyes move a lot, the images on your retinas swim about constantly, rather like the images of home movies taken by people who can't keep the camera from jiggling. But that is not how it seems to us. People are often surprised to learn that under normal conditions, their eyes dart about in rapid saccades, about five quick fixations a second, and that this motion, like the motion of their heads, is edited out early in the processing from eyeball to… consciousness.[5]

[4] Ibid., p. 106.
[5] Ibid., p. 111.

Since, according to Dennett, there is no such a thing as the Cartesian theatre, no screen to display the information on, there is no reason to represent data after they have already been processed. Dennett says that:

> [T]he brain doesn't actually have to go to the trouble of "filling in" anything with "construction"– for no one is looking. As the Multiple Drafts model makes explicit, once a discrimination has been made, it does not have to be made again; the brain just adjusts to the conclusion that is drawn, making the new interpretation of the information available for the modulation of subsequent behavior.[6]

In his model, Dennett takes the view that, for a given event, there is a variety of sensory inputs and also a number of interpretations of these inputs. On reaching the brain, the sensory inputs are interpreted at different times. Consequently, a given event can result in a succession of discriminations, hence creating a counterpart of multiple drafts of a story. The moment each discrimination is finished, it is at the brain's beck and call to induce behavior, without any prior presentation at the Cartesian theatre. In other words, not every draft becomes the final version of the script. Similarly to many other theories of consciousness, according to Dennett's Multiple Drafts model, conscious experience takes time to happen. Consequently, perceptual experiences take time to appear in the mind in their full opulence. The difference between Dennett's model and other theories consists in the fact that Dennett rejects any clear-cut boundary dividing conscious experience from data processing. Dennett claims that consciousness is generated in the flow of information from one place to another. There is no central place which generates consciousness. Consequently, there is no centre deciding about approving or disapproving of any of the many drafts. Different sections of the neural processing have more or less control at different times. Consciousness, in this view, can be defined as a part of the neural processing which has enough power to influence action. It constitutes a part of the self-organising network of neural processes. Dennett claims that human brain, which plays an essential role in creating consciousness, works like a computer or a virtual machine made of organic tissue rather than silicon, processing many different kinds of distributed processes and, whenever necessary, combining them together to execute an operation required at a given moment. Dennett continues by saying that what makes human consciousness different from animal behaviour is that the basic skills, such as grasping, face-recognizing, throwing, etc., are used

[6] Ibid., p. 126.

to augment new kinds of processes, characteristic only for humans, such as reading or writing. Thus, so constructed consciousness becomes a part of the human mind.

Andy Clark also looks into the nature of the human mind and consciousness and builds upon the ideas propounded by Dennett. He wonders how it is possible for a material being to be able to process information and create and understand ideas and concepts, and, finally, how it is possible for those physical beings to create consciousness. According to Clark, answers to those crucial questions can be found at the intersection of neuroscience, psychology, artificial intelligence, and robotics. The central point Clark makes by discussing theories from these fields is that our minds work in a way which makes them prediction machines. This means that the mind is able to anticipate a stream of incoming sensory stimulation before it actually arrives. Based on those predictions, the mind is able to perform actions that structure our worlds. Clark looks into the self-structuring of the environment which determines "the predictive brain."[7] Clark perceives the brain as the key element of the system which allows us to navigate through the waves of sensory stimulation, but, at the same time, his theories undermine the classical computational models of consciousness. According to the computational model of the mind, the brain is an information processing system and thinking is a form of computing. It is a process of creating, storing and updating internal representations of the world. These representations create the basis on which other processes and actions may take place. Representations are updated to correspond with an environment consistent with the goal or function of the system at any given time. According to this model, an action is the result of the process which determines the most optimal way to achieve the goal on the basis of current representations.

The main criticism that Clark puts forward against the computational model is that if we were to accept it, the cognitive process would be impeded by an information bottleneck, since, in order to determine appropriate actions, the mind would have to constantly construct detailed inner representations of the constantly changing external world. Consequently, the demands on the mental system would almost certainly hinder any action taking place. Instead, Clark proposes his idea of the predictive brain model which lies at the heart of a two-way cascade of cortical processing underlying perception, action, and learning. The cascade consists in top-down predictions by means of which attempts to anticipate correctly the bottom-

[7] Andy Clark, *Surfing Uncertainty: Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 3.

-up sensory information are made in a recurrent and hierarchical way. Because the predictions made by the brain will differ from the sensory information, the functioning of this system is possible due to the correction of what Clark calls "prediction error."[8] The differences between the expected signal and the actual signal, namely the prediction error, are sent upward to help fine-tune the accuracy of future predictions. Interactions between forward stream of error and backward stream of prediction are dynamic, with the crucial role of attention, which balances the relative influence of both streams at each level of the cascade.

Another factor which Clark mentions as playing an important role in the model is action or action-oriented predictive processing, which can reduce the prediction error by directly influencing the environment. According to Clark, what follows is that our thinking does not occur only in our heads, but that "certain forms of human cognizing include inextricable tangles of feedback, feed-forward and feed-around loops: loops that promiscuously criss-cross the boundaries of brain, body and world."[9] Clark calls this model "the extended mind."[10] It offers an idea of the mind which is not "brainbound,"[11] but extends beyond the brain, into the environment. If we assume the model of the mind which Clark proposes, then the consequences for understanding our existence and functioning in the environment might be profound. If the mind incorporates aspects of social and physical environments, then the sorts of social and physical environments created by us can alter our minds and our capability for thought and reason in the constant flow of top-down and bottom-up feedback loops. Hence, an essential thought behind Clark's theory is that human beings, with their extended minds, are entities who are entangled in the web of connections with the surrounding world. As he puts it: "As our worlds become smarter and get to know us better and better, it becomes harder and harder to say where the world stops and the person begins."[12] Still, Clark's key argument is that the surrounding environments are not only the factors that we, as humans, use to boost our performance as the species, but that the relation between humans and their environments is a two-way process. Clark writes that: "We create these supportive environments, but they create us too.

[8] Andy Clark, "Whatever next? Predictive brains, situated agents, and the future of cognitive science," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences,* Vol. 36, 2013, p. 181.

[9] Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind. Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xviii.

[10] Ibid., p. xvi.

[11] Ibid., p. 28.

[12] Ibid., p. 12.

We exist, as the thinking things we are, only thanks to a baffling dance of brains, bodies, and cultural and technological scaffolding."[13] What transpires is that a human self is, and has always been, a construct consisting of biological and non-biological constituents. The human self utilizes the elements it creates in order to boost its own creativeness and effectiveness. As a result, the mind is not, or has never been, only a biological concept conceived in the brain. In fact, the selling point of a human being is the fact that it can utilise its surrounding environment to boost the conditions in which it lives. Consequently, according to Clark, humans can all be called cyborgs, because our brains are designed to cooperate with the external environment and incorporate the props we need in order to maximize the effectiveness of our functioning.

The term cyborg dates back to 1960, when Clynes and Klyne contemplated the possible ways the human being could be better equipped for space travel. They came to the conclusion that

> [a]ltering man's bodily functions to meet the requirements of extraterrestrial environments would be more logical than providing an earthly environment for him in space… Artifact-organism systems which would extend man's unconscious, self-regulatory controls are one possibility. [...] For the exogenously extended organizational complex functioning as an integrated homeostatic system unconsciously, we propose the term "Cyborg." The Cyborg deliberately incorporates exogenous components extending the self-regulatory control function of the organism in order to adapt it to new environments.[14]

Since that time the cyborg has penetrated many different areas of human activity, from bio-technology, through literature, visual arts, to social science and many definitions have been adopted. What they seem to have in common is that the cyborg is a physical, penetrative merger of a biological organism and non-biological technological prosthesis. What is important, as Clynes and Kline point out, the application and using of the prosthesis must be unconscious, which does not necessarily imply that the agent must be unaware of possessing the prosthesis. However, the cyborg theory may go beyond the purely physical fusion of the biological and the technological. In her "A Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway takes the cyborg theory to the next level and uses it in a socio-political context. She defies the rigid boundaries between human and animal and between human and machine. Haraway's cyborg theory rejects the concept of essentialism, offering in-

[13] Ibid., p. 16.

[14] Manfred E. Clynes, Nathan S. Kline, "Cyborgs and Space", *Astronautics*, September, 1960, p. 27

stead a world of fusions between animal and machine. She points out that: "The dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically."[15] While Haraway deals with a wider socio-political context, Clark focuses on the interdependence of an individual mind and technology. What their theories have in common is the claim that, in order for a cyborg to come into existence, the merger does not have to be physical. Clark defines the phenomenon as the so called nonpenetrative technology:

> Nonpenetrative cyborg technology is all around us and is poised on the very brink of a revolution. By nonpenetrative cyborg technology I mean all the technological tricks and electronic aids that, as hinted earlier, are already transforming our lives, our projects, and our sense of our own capacities.[16]

What Clark emphasises is that it is not so much the method of the integration of the human and the technological that matters, but the result it brings. The result should be achieved in a smooth unconscious manner, so that the human attention does not have to be involved in the process. This, according to Clark, can be achieved by means of what he calls "transparent technology." As he writes:

> A transparent technology is a technology that is so well fitted to, and integrated with, our own lives, biological capacities, and projects as to become (as Mark Weiser and Donald Norman have both stressed) almost invisible in use.[17]

To illustrate this, he provides an example of a wristwatch:

> According to one diagnosis, then, you are telling the literal truth when you answer "yes" to the innocent-sounding question "Do you know the time?" For you do know the time. It is just that the "you" that knows the time is no longer the bare biological organism but the hybrid biotechnological system that now includes the wristwatch as a proper part.[18]

The wristwatch, an example of transparent technology, is an illustration of the way humans get and store information about the surrounding

[15] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in: *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 164.

[16] Andy Clark, *Natural Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 37.

[17] Ibid., pp. 37–38.

[18] Ibid., p. 42.

world. While it might seem to us that what we know about the world is stored in our brains, the mind might, in fact, employ a different method. According to Clark, humans require relatively little information about the world to act effectively upon it. We are susceptible to the illusion that all the details of the world are created or processed in our brains, while, in fact, we only need the minimal environmental information. Our impressions of a richly detailed world obscure a reality of minimal environmental information to reconstruct the details of the surrounding world, as this world is the best model of itself from which we can retrieve information in a just-in-time manner. Clark claims that the dynamic loops of mind-world interaction are not only instrumental. The loops consist of activities running from brain through body to the world and back. Such dynamic loops constitute cognition. Hence, the mind is not limited to the biological organism, but extends into that organism's environment. The cognitive process presented above is, according to Clark and Chalmers, characteristic of the conception of "the extended mind."[19] As they put it:

> [T]he human organism is linked with an external entity in a two-way interaction, creating a *coupled system* that can be seen as a cognitive system in its own right. All the components in the system play an active causal role, and they jointly govern behavior in the same sort of way that cognition usually does. If we remove the external component, the system's behavioral competence will drop, just as it would if we removed part of its brain. Our thesis is that this sort of coupled process counts equally well as a cognitive process, whether or not it is wholly in the head.[20]

They insist that the purely biological boundary of the mind is arbitrary and cognitively meaningless. The location of data and cognitive processes, it seems, is irrelevant as long as they work towards the common goal. The common goal in the cognitive process seems to be creating the most efficient mind possible and the brain's role is to function as a kind of a coordinator or manager of different distributed processes, not necessarily taking place solely in the brain. The ingenuity of the human mind, it seems, consists in the fact that the brain functions as the control centre for different external prostheses, streamlining and fine-tuning them in such a way so that they create a smoothly operating system. The result, or possibly a side effect, is that, to the mind itself, the system seems to be self-contained and operating solely in the brain.

[19] Ibid., p. 222.
[20] Ibid., p. 222.

At this stage, we come back to the question of transparent technology. Clark and Chalmers suggest that, provided certain conditions are met, there should be no difference in considering the relations between the brain and different parts of human body and between the brain and external technology. If we were to use technical terminology, the brain can be compared to the CPU managing the operation of the human machine, using both organic elements, like nerves or tendons, and non-organic elements, like fibre-optic cables, as actuators to extend and optimize the functioning of the system. As long as the actuators are effective, their nature (biological or inorganic) does not matter for the mind. As they put it:

> It is the two-way flow of influence between brain, body, and world that matters, and on the basis of which we construct (and constantly re-reconstruct) our sense of self, potential, and presence. The biological skin-bag has no special significance here. It is the flow that counts.[21]

In order to understand how the aforementioned flow is possible and how the transparent technology might become a part of the mind, unconscious to the self, it is necessary to consider what Nigel Thrift calls the technological unconscious. Thrift investigates how the technological unconscious works at the intersection of humans and their environment. Thrifts points out that "environments of which we are a part gradually come to be accepted as the only way to be because, each and every day, they show up more or less as expected."[22] He continues by claiming that the constituents of technological unconscious "do not belong to 'us' or to the environment. Rather, they have been coevolved, and so refuse a neat distinction between organic and inorganic life or between person and environment."[23] He argues that the technological unconscious will work increasingly through information technology. As he writes:

> This is the advent of 'ubiquitous,' 'pervasive,' or 'everywhere' computing. It follows that 'computing' will become more and more context dependent. This means that devices will become both more location aware, knowing where they are in relation to users and other devices, and able to interact, dialogue, and adapt to users and other devices. In other words, computing understood as a network of devices will increasingly be able to be appropriate to the situation.[24]

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[21] Ibid., p.114.
[22] Thrift, "Remembering the technological unconscious by foregrounding knowledges of position," p. 175.
[23] Ibid., p. 176.
[24] Ibid., p. 183.

David Beer builds upon the concept of the technological unconscious in the context of virtuality. He refers to Thrift, defining the technological unconscious as "the operation of powerful and unknowable information technologies that come to 'produce' everyday life."[25] For Beer, what engenders the powerful and unknowable information technologies is Web 2.0, the version of the internet which allows the users to both receive and create content. Beer writes about

> a vision of dynamic interfaces and virtual spaces of engagement where users are involved in acts of invention or *content creation* (both actively creating content and passively generating informational traces as they got about daily routines). The issue of content creation is clearly a crucial point as we consider the ongoing emergence and mainstreaming of user-generated online content in the form of rating and reviews, blogs, posts, tags, friending and so on – content creation in this sense is compatible with Bauman's (2007) recent descriptions of what he terms a 'confessional society.'[26]

For Steve Mann, the phenomenon presented by Beer will be accelerated by the wearable technology. Mann notes that

> [o]ver an extended period of time, the wearable computer begins to function as a true extension of the mind and body, and no longer feels as if it is a separate entity. In fact, the user will adapt to the apparatus in the same way that we adapt to shoes and clothing to such a degree that being without them would make most of us feel extremely uncomfortable.[27]

According to the aforementioned ideas, the virtual space is becoming an integral part of the contemporary individuals' environments. And these environments, according to Thrift, are unconsciously taken for granted.

All of the ideas presented above seem to be reflected in Nikesh Shukla's *Meatspace*. The main character, Kit, is totally immersed in the virtual reality and tries to project his public image through the social media. At the same time, he neglects his emotional life in what we can call the material world, the eponymous meatspace. His attachment to social media, with the use of the wearable computer and his smart-phone, verges on addiction. At one point of the novel, when using his smartphone, he says: "All this takes up to 10% of my battery, which is a currency in modern life. Without

[25] David Beer, "Power through the algorithm? Participatory web cultures and the technological unconscious," *New Media Society,* Vol. 11 (2009), p. 988.

[26] Ibid., p. 992.

[27] Steve Mann, *Cyborg: Digital Destiny and Human Possibility in the Age of the Wearable Computer* (Toronto: Doubleday of Canada, 2001), p. 7.

battery, you can't tell anyone where you are or what you're eating."[28] However, what may look like addiction may as well be construed as an exemplification of the aforementioned concept of an extended mind in which the transparent technology plays a crucial role. The transparent technology is the wearable computer which enables constant access to the virtual world, to the extent that the virtuality becomes a part of the extended mind and Kitab can be construed as an exemplification of a cyborg – to use Clarke's aforementioned idea. Since the virtual constituent has become an integral part of the extended mind of the cyborg, Kit feels the irresistible need for his virtual presence. When trying not to answer the phone, he reflects: "My phone rings. It's Rach's number. I ignore it. She calls again. I let it ring in my pocket. Undeterred, she calls me again. This time, my impulses can't let a ringing phone go unanswered. Must connect. I answer."[29] The virtual presence achieved by means of the wearable computer comes as a natural and integral part of the mind, or, to use Mann's words, "a true extension of the mind and body."[30] It is an extension fully integrated into the system. It is no longer one of the factors influencing the mind, but it is its essential part, to such an extent that being unable to connect becomes as uncomfortable as being unable to use any other part of the cognitive system. The blurring divide between the constituents of the extended mind of the cyborg is reflected in the passage describing Kitab's anxiety during his tube journey:

> I check my phone, knowing there's no signal in these tunnels. I scroll the screen down to refresh, like a tic, knowing that there's no reception. I need to be plugged in. I need to know what's going on. I wonder how our brains function in these short bursts of signal outage. How do the commuting masses cope when their 3G signal drops in and out and they have to either read or listen to music or converse. I'm trembling, desperate to check my Twitter.[31]

On the face of it, the wearable computer which enables connectivity with the virtual world is anything but transparent. Kitab is painfully aware of the signal drop and feels uncomfortable with that. However, it is the very opacity of the technology when it fails, which confirms its transparency when it works properly. Just as we do not think constantly about how glasses help us see better, until we break or drop them, the wearable computer, and

[28] Nikesh Shukla, *Meatspace* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014), p. 162.
[29] Ibid., p. 64.
[30] Mann, *Cyborg*, p. 7.
[31] Shukla, *Meatspace*, p. 136.

the opportunities it offers, is transparent until it fails. Andy Clark provides an example of transparent technology from the literary world:

> The accomplished writer, armed with pen and paper, usually pays no heed to the pen and paper tools while attempting to create an essay or a poem. They have become transparent equipment, tools whose use and functioning have become so deeply dovetailed to the biological system that there is a very real sense in which – while they are up and running – the problem solving system just is the composite of the biological system and these non-biological tools.[32]

As long as the transparent technologies work properly, they are "invisible-in-use."[33] It is at the times they fail that we notice their presence. What is more, it is not a case of mere influence of the technology on the human mind, but an instance of an external prompt which becomes an integral part of the system constituting mind. The cognitive processes take part in different parts of this extended system. As mentioned before, it does not really matter where particular cognitive processes are realised, as long as the system runs smoothly. As Clark puts it:

> But the more these [technical] drawbacks are overcome, the less it seems to matter (scientifically or philosophically) exactly where various processes and data stores are physically located, and whether they are neurally or technologically realized. The opportunistic biological brain doesn't care. Nor – for many purposes – should we.[34]

For Kitab's mind, his virtual presence is as important as his physicality, and that is why being unable to connect results in him in anxiety. What transpires is that the wearable computer and the virtual space are becoming a part of the extended cognitive system and a temporary failure of the mobile network is as painful as damage to any part of the nervous system would be. This extended cognitive system is mediated by the technological unconscious. As Thrift puts it, the technological unconscious is

> the bending of bodies with environments to a specific set of addresses without the benefit of any cognitive inputs, a prepersonal substrate of guaranteed correlations, assured encounters, and therefore unconsidered anticipations.[35]

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[32] Clark, *Natural Born Cyborgs,* p. 38.
[33] Ibid., p. 29.
[34] Ibid., p. 69.
[35] Thrift, "Remembering the technological unconscious," p. 177.

In other words, Kitab takes the ubiquitous computing and the virtual reality for granted. He expects it to be there, all the time. To use Thrift's words, the omnipresent computing comes for Kitab as "the only way to be."[36] Still, as with any new technology, there is a transitional period. While some individuals have already incorporated the new elements into their cognitive systems, others have not, and others seem to be somehow stuck in the transitory stage. This results in tensions between individuals. When Kitab reflects on the relationship with his former girlfriend, he says: "Rach once said, after reading through my Twitter stream, that she couldn't believe I'd had all these thoughts and opinions and never thought to share them with her." It seems that Kitab does not feel the need to share the thoughts with his girlfriend in the non-virtual world, since he has already incorporated the virtual component into his mind and, in the manner suggested by the theories of technological unconscious and the extended mind, does not perceive the way he interacts with others as unnatural. That is why he does not perceive himself as detached from reality. For him, being in the physical world and living a virtual life at the same is not contradictory. In fact, the two comprise his reality. When Rach accuses Kitab of being detached from reality, she says: "You don't go out. You don't do anything. And yet you are living this life that's not real. It's not real. None of it is real."[37] Kitab, however, disagrees. He replies: "It is real."[38] The conversation reflects the ontological dilemma of individuals in the age of the rapidly developing reality of ubiquitous computing. The human mind incorporates external prosthesis in the form of portable computers, trying to use ubiquitous computing to its own advantage; and it seems there is no way back. As Clark puts it:

> The process continues, and it is picking up speed. Some of our best new tools adapt to individual brains during use, thus speeding up the process of mutual accommodation beyond measure. Human thought is biologically and technologically poised to explore cognitive spaces that would remain forever beyond the reach of non-cyborg animals. Our technologically enhanced minds are barely, if at all, tethered to the ancestral realm.[39]

What Clark fails to consider, however, is the fact that, in the process, the transition stage causes tensions in individuals. Being unable to define reality, to differentiate between the organic and the non-organic, the real

[36] Ibid., p. 175.
[37] Shukla, *Meatspace*, p. 278.
[38] Ibid., p. 278.
[39] Clark, *Natural Born Cyborgs,* p. 197.

and the virtual, results in emotional distress. In the age of omnipresent computing, the way we manage our emotional life has also changed. But not all individuals keep up with the change and others, like Kitab's girlfriend, oppose it. Even Kitab feels uneasy with his hybrid reality. Both Kitab and his brother Aziz have their doppelgangers, and the realisation of that fact is possible only due to the existence of the Internet. While Aziz is enthusiastic about meeting his other self and sets out to America to meet him, Kitab is met by his alter ego in London and is reluctant to have anything to do with him. Kitab 2, as he's called in the novel, on the other hand, is enthusiastic about meeting his doppelganger and takes their friendship in the meatspace for granted, even though he is disappointed with Kitab for not accepting his add request on Facebook. He seems to take virtual friendships for granted. For him, making friends in the virtual world equals making friends in the real world. It only takes a click. For Kitab it does not seem so obvious. Thus, the encounter in the meatspace seems to be disappointing for both of them, though for different reasons:

> "So," I say quietly. "What are you doing here, man? Were you just passing through this part of the city and thought you'd say high? I mean, how? How did you find me?" "I messaged you and asked where you were a whole lot of times, dude," he says anxiously, nodding his head with worry. "You didn't accept my add request." "I didn't understand why you kept doing that. We-'ve never met. Why would I tell you where I was?" "So I could come and find you" [...] "No, but seriously, Kitab. Were you just passing through? What are you doing here, man?" My brain is scrolling, I have itchy feet, I want to get up and leave. "No, but your website and Twitter said you would be here tonight. So I wanted to say hello. Why didn't you accept my add request?"[40]

The passage can be construed as a confirmation of Thrist's claim that, for the posthuman individuals, the ubiquitous computing and virtual reality are becoming a natural part of their environments and are a part of their extended cognition. The emotions expressed or desired via the Internet are taken for granted, and so is the information provided by it. For that reason, the social, emotional and intellectual life in cyberspace seems to be on a par with the meatspace, because it has become a part of the cognitive system in the extended phenotype of human mind.

However, the best commentary on the human condition in the advent of ubiquitous computing, and as a part of the extended cognition, seem to be the words of one of Kitab's friend, who says: "We're all just avatars,

[40] Shukla, *Meatspace*, p. 82.

Kit."[41] The organic world and the physicality of individuals are only material representations of the identity created by historically and technologically specific workings of the technological unconscious. What transpires is that this posthuman view considers the material embodiment to be purely accidental, thus, perceiving informational pattern rather than materiality as central to being. With the words quoted above comes realisation that individual identity is largely out of control of the individual and is shaped and conditioned actively by the historically and technologically dependent factors.

For centuries, literary works have reflected the contemporary human condition. Katherine N. Hayles writes that:

> when people begin using their bodies in significantly different ways, either because of technological innovations or other cultural shifts, changing experiences of embodiment bubble up into language, affecting the metaphoric networks at play within the culture. At the same time, discursive constructions affect how bodies move through space and time, influence what technologies are developed, and help to structure the interfaces between bodies and technologies.[42]

It seems that Shukla's *Meatspace* is no exception to that rule. It appears that the novel may be a good illustration of the fact that the technological surrounding, especially in the age of ubiquitous computing, does not merely influence the individual's mind, but is a part of it, and takes active part in creating one's consciousness. That is why Daniel C. Dennett claims that "the mind is the effect, not the cause"[43]; it is the effect of "the inextricable tangles of feedback, feed-forward and feed-around loops: loops that promiscuously criss-cross the boundaries of brain, body and world."[44] While we create technology, at the same time, it seems to constitute an integral part of our mind.

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[41] Ibid., p. 150.

[42] Katheryne N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 206–7.

[43] Carole Jahme, "Daniel Dennett: 'I don't like the theory of mind' – interview," *The Guardian*, March 22, 2013, accessed June 22, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2013/mar/22/daniel-dennett-theory-of-mind-interview.

[44] Clark, *Supersizing the Mind,* p. xviii.

Piotr Czerwiński

"The mind is the effect, not the cause" – exploring consciousness in Nikesh Shukla's *Meatspace*

In *Meatspace*, Nikesh Shukla depicts an individual totally immersed in the virtual space to the extent that the meatspace – the physical world, as opposed to the cyberspace – becomes of secondary importance. Consequently, the physical world interweaves with the virtual reality, which reflects the posthuman condition of the contemporary individuals. The posthuman view considers the material embodiment to be purely accidental, thus perceiving informational pattern rather than materiality as central to being. By discussing the concepts of the extended mind and the technological unconscious, this paper looks at how the narrative of the novel reflects the contemporary mind construed as a product of interaction between the individuals and their technological environments, exemplified by the technology of ubiquitous computing.

Keywords: consciousness, mind, technological unconscious, cyberspace, cyborg

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Representation of mental oddity in two novels by Philip K. Dick

Philip K. Dick's fiction, which is mostly labelled as science-fiction, approaches the issue of mental otherness or oddity quite frequently. Suffering from serious mental problems, including schizophrenia, the writer had a first-hand experience of what it means to live in an alternative world of one's own mind. Throughout his career, Dick made frequent use of characters suffering from various forms of mental disorders. And it is mental illness that constitutes one of the recurring motifs, shaping the reality for both the characters and the readers, be it in his science fiction or mainstream realistic fiction.

The paper discusses two novels featuring examples of Dick's characters who experience mental incapacities, breakdowns or suffer from serious mental states, i.e. *Martian Time-Slip* and *A Scanner Darkly*. The altered state of perception is, on the one hand, a curse for the characters involved, but, in a broader perspective, it enables them to go beyond the superficial borders of perception, as they are commonly delineated. The motif recurs in other novels dealing with reality breakdowns – e.g., *Time Out of Joint*,[1] *We Can Build You*,[2] *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*[3] – all of which feature characters who suffer from various forms of mental conditions. The

[1] Philip K. Dick, *Time Out of Joint* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2012).

[2] Philip K. Dick, *We Can Build You* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2012).

[3] Philip K. Dick, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2011).

novels investigated in this article, however, focus on the mental state itself; and the reality breakdown is just an end result of the characters' condition. Both novels put the distorted individual perception of reality against the apparently sane and rational society.

In *Martian Time-Slip* (1964), the writer makes use of the possibilities of the space-opera setting to create a dramatic narrative featuring two people whose comprehension of the surrounding reality differs from that of the "normal" characters. The novel focuses on the social incongruity of those who are considered mentally ill, and their struggle to overcome society's conformity and ignorance when it comes to accepting such people in society. The two focal characters are Manfred Steiner and Jack Bohlen; the former is an autistic child and the latter suffers from a latent form of schizophrenia. Both of them struggle to survive in the grim and oppressive environment of human colonies on Mars.[4] In a much later novel, *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), Dick explores the process of gradual disintegration of human mind resulting from excessive use of drugs. Bob Arctor, a local junkie, who is, in fact, an under-cover government agent, infiltrates the community of drug users. His cover forces him to take drugs, which leads him to a serious brain damage resulting in schizophrenic fits and imminent mental disintegration.[5]

Martian Time-Slip

Martian Time-Slip belongs to the rich tradition of novels set on the "red planet." It is sometimes viewed as one "that condemns discrimination of human beings in general,"[6] but I believe it focuses more on the social incongruity of those who are considered mentally ill, and their struggle to overcome society's conformity and ignorance. If, as Carlo Pagetti notes, "all the characters [… of the novel] are implacably impelled towards neurosis, madness, homicide, suicide, adultery,"[7] its focus is mental disability of the those who form the microcosmic Martian society.

Both main characters – Steiner and Jack Bohlen – struggle to survive in this harsh microcosmic society. They are involuntarily working for the only "power" on the planet – Arnie Kott, a trade union leader, who has become a feudal baron and has control over the most precious Martian commod-

[4] Philip K. Dick, *Martian Time-Slip* (London: Gollancz, 1999).

[5] Philip K. Dick, *A Scanner Darkly* (London: Voyager, 1996).

[6] Leila Kucukalic, *Philip K. Dick, Canonical Writer of the Digital Age* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 47.

[7] Carlo Paggeti, "Dick and Meta Science Fiction," in: *On Philip K. Dick: 40 Articles from Science Fiction Studies*, eds. R. D. Mullen and Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. (Terre Haute and Greencastle: SF-TH Inc., 1992), p. 183.

ity – water. Many critics agree that, first, the fact that Mars is destitute of water serves as a metaphor for the inequities of power and resources; and, second, that the way its people spend and withhold water indicate their moral character; and, third, that therefore, the struggle dramatised in the novel is a moral one.[8] Thus, the principal background of the novel is the issue of ownership, but not just ownership of resources – first and foremost, it is the ownership of people and their lives.

Each individual is flawed in some way, but the novel shows degrees of evil and intention, which mark the boundary between the good and the bad. Moral choices and their results are best expressed in the way Arnie Kott acts. The local overlord manipulates people he employs with impunity; not only does he hire people's labour but also usurps to own their fate. This strengthens the colonists' helplessness and vulnerability to the institutional, but also to the individual power on both Mars and Earth. We encounter Kott early in the novel, when he refuses to share water with the indigenous Martians (a nearly extinct tribe called the Bleekmen); and, later, when he shows off his wasteful use of water during a lavish steam bath he and his "court" enjoy. Kott meets Bohlen during a rescue operation and becomes Jack's patron by having bought his contract from the previous employer. This is not an act of kindness. Kott is driven by the fact that Bohlen might be able to help him in communicating with the schizophrenic Manfred and make use of the boy's apparent skill to see into the future. Kott's ultimate goal is to find out which plots of land on Mars will be most valuable, and purchase them before the predicted boom starts. This becomes the basis for the moral and psychological struggle on which the three characters embark.

Interestingly, both Jack's and Manfred's "disorienting" perception of reality cannot be easily discredited, even though it practically isolates them from the community. When Jack perceives people as machines, the narrative, as Kucukalic sees it, "establishes his perceptions as belonging to absolute reality or an aspect of eternity."[9] The experience of seeing the world in a different way is both frightening and utterly exhausting for Jack; yet it is not presented as a mere delusion. What is more, another character observes that "maybe there's something in your vision, however distorted and garbled it's become."[10] Manfred, on the other hand, seems to be completely isolated, as he is unable to communicate effectively at all. He is presented

[8] Andrew M. Butler, "Water, Entropy and the Million-Year Dream: Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time-Slip*," *Foundation*, No. 68 (Autumn 1996), p. 76.

[9] Kucukalic, *Philip K. Dick*, p. 49.

[10] Dick, *Martian Time-Slip*, p. 111.

as an alienated being with "dark, enormous, luminous eyes," who looks like "a despairing creature from some other world […,] divine and yet dreadful place."[11] This description puts him in opposition to the "normal" colonists. However, as the novel develops, Manfred's visions are far from being marginal or insignificant; they serve as an important focal point and become central to the world of other characters, as he is able to exert his visions on other people and alter their perception of reality.

Making use of the characters suffering from autism and schizophrenia, both of which are characterised by a certain level of cognitive estrangement, the author seems to tackle the philosophical and cognitive problem of the way in which an individual is connected to or disconnected from a "normally" perceived reality. Thus, the novel can be treated as a psychological or psycho-social text examining the relationship between the inner and outer worlds of an individual.

At the same time, the representation of the condition of the two protagonists and the incorporation of their perception of reality into the narrative serve the purpose of metaphorical transformation of the alien into the human. Such understanding is aided by the use of Mars as the setting, which is being steadily transformed into an Earth-like planet. Placing the condition of mental otherness in the microcosmic society of the colonists serves also as a means of discussion about the place that individuals with a mental condition have in society.

Another interesting aspect of the novel is the multiplicity of the viewpoints from which the mental disturbances are observed. On the one hand, they are shown as religious phenomena; Manfred is presented several times as having divine attributes and exerting demiurgical power in his own isolated universe. On the other hand, we may understand this as a purely science fictional concept of Manfred and Jack inhabiting alternative time continua. It is also possible to view the narrative from a purely emotional perspective, as both characters not only suffer from their "ailments," but also experience, in most cases, total lack of compassion and empathy from other members of their society. Dick voices his view upon this issue in an interview with Paul Williams, in which he uses strong words, e.g., "a bunch of bullshit," to describe his attitude to the notion that it is impossible to empathise with a schizophrenic. He opposes the idea that schizophrenia "is a concrete entity that stands in opposition to us,"[12] and, consequently,

[11] Ibid., p. 119.

[12] Gregg Rickman, *Philip K. Dick: In His Own Words* (Long Beach: Fragments West/Valentine Press, 1998), pp. 206–207.

rejects the arbitrariness of people's judgements of behaviour and motives of others.

The view of the ordinary man as a mere toy in the play of external forces is emphasised by another element that drives the ruthless economy of the colony, i.e. real estate. Huge condominiums are to be erected on Mars in order to encourage even more colonists to arrive. Consequently, a race to get hold of the most valuable plots of land follows. This competition influences the fates of the central characters of the novel. Jack's father, Leo, who is a rich businessman on Earth, speculates on the plots on Mars where the AM-WEB estates are to be built. At the same time, Arnie Kott becomes obsessed with the plan to wreck Leo's schemes and acquire the land beforehand in order to secure the profits for himself. Manfred has continually occurring visions of giant buildings as ruins, and of a home for senior citizens, in which he is bedridden, helpless and voiceless. Jack, who apparently suffered from a severe mental breakdown in a similar condominium on Earth, is transferred to Kott's service in order to help Kott reach Manfred's time-altering skills, and, in this way, provide the union leader with the information he requires. Dick is highly ironical when introducing the populist slogan for the AM-WEB: *Alle Menschen werden Bruder*.[13] The novel makes it absolutely clear that all people are no brothers whatsoever.

The characters with mental conditions are constantly exploited and marginalised. This applies not only to Manfred and Jack, but also to local Martians – the telepathic Bleekmen. Brian Aldiss, an outstanding British science fiction writer and critic, offers an interesting interpretation of the name AM-WEB in the light of the mental mind-sets of the characters. He understands the word "web" as a metaphor for three important subjects:

> [W]eb of civilization stretched thin over utter desolation. There is no guaranteeing that it can be maintained. […] [B]ehind this web exists another, even more tenuous: the web of human relationships. Men, women, children, old men, Bleekmen […] all depend, however reluctantly, on one another. […] Behind these webs lies a third, revealed only indirectly. This is the web connecting all the good and bad things in the universe. […] These three webs integrate at various coordinate points […].[14]

Aldiss goes on to identify mental illness as the ultimate enemy in the novel; the power that creates the "maledictory web" that captures everyone

[13] Dick, *Martian Time-Slip*, p. 144.

[14] Brian Aldiss, "Dick's Maledictory Web: About and Around *Martian Time-Slip*," in: *On Philip K. Dick*, p. 37.

– "the maledictory circle within which Dick's beings move and from which they have to escape."[15]

However, it seems that calling mental problems "maledictory" does not correlate with the overall message of the novel. Both Jack and Manfred are vulnerable in their disorders. The reader sympathises with Jack's condition, as he exhibits basic human decency and goodness. Manfred, by the same token, is but an innocent victim of the sinister plot devised by Arnie Kott. Additionally, the experience of his visions of himself as an old man strapped to a hospital bed and unable to communicate evokes pity and sympathy. Madness cannot be perceived as a state of wrongness or otherness, and the book insists upon the idea that "non-standard or dysfunctional human psychology has more complexity and portent, and in some cases more meaning, than society customarily allows."[16]

Throughout *Martian Time-Slip*, an individual is placed against a collectively perceived objective reality, and the interconnections between sensory perception, individual consciousness and nature are continually investigated. The boy is represented through the stream-of-consciousness narration, which uncovers the hostile, nightmarish inner world inhabited by carnivorous birds and worms, in which everything is subject to entropy and decay. Manfred perceives the nature of the outside world in the same categories, he sees the entropic force of the universe in the people and events around him. Via Manfred's mind we can see the environment going apart to the point at which he sees only "a cavity, dark, cold, full of wood so rotten that it lay in damp powder, destroyed by gubbish-rot."[17]

Manfred's inability to communicate evokes tension in other characters' relationships with him. Combined with the colonists' failure to establish a functioning community, the situation leads to the questioning of the interaction between the individual and the collective. Manfred is placed in an institution for anomalous children, i.e. a place for "any child who differed from the norm either physically and psychologically."[18] Manfred's condition evokes various reactions. In many cases, these reactions result from incomprehension of the boy's condition. His father is mostly embarrassed to visit him, and, unable to see what the real problem is, mistakes it for apathy, believing that "the boy does not give a damn."[19] Kott calls him "a little

[15] Ibid., p. 39.
[16] Kucukalic, *Philip K. Dick*, p. 76. Punctuation original.
[17] Dick, *Martian Time-Slip*, p. 129.
[18] Ibid., p. 29.
[19] Ibid., p. 44.

schizo fellow,"[20] and is interested only in the boy's ability to predict the future. Jack is different in his approach to Manfred – maybe thanks to his own condition – and becomes a surrogate father after Manfred's father commits suicide. Jack makes an effort to understand the boy and his visions. When surveying the land his father purchased, Jack looks at a drawing Manfred has just completed – it foresees the sad end to the AM-WEB complex of condominiums, as decay and rubble dominate the huge ruins. While Leo is absolutely appalled by this, Jack meditates about the burden Manfred carries: "How can he live from one day to the next, having to face reality as he does?"[21] This sentence illustrates a simple but humane understanding of Manfred's state. Empathy, again, comes to the forefront of human relationships and interactions.

The novel explores yet another subject to which Dick returned very often: the relationship between subjective and objective worlds. Dick shapes his view on the Heraclitean formulation of the universe as consisting of the private *idios kosmos* and the collective *koinos kosmos*, the spheres determining our existential place in the world:

> no person can tell which parts of his total worldview is *idios kosmos* and which is *koinos kosmos*, except by the achievement of strong empathic rapport with other people. [...] In [...] my books, [...] the protagonist is suffering from a breakdown of his *idios kosmos* – at least we *hope* that's what's breaking down, not the *koinos kosmos* [...].[22]

In the case of a schizophrenic, it is always the private world that breaks down, and, in the novel, these are pressures of civilisation and materialism that provoke the unbearable tension of the internal and external experience. Jack suffers from a mental breakdown inside a huge condominium, an impersonal housing estate squeezed into one humungous building, where people live without any social interaction; obviously, his attack is procured by the vastness of the building itself and the sense of isolation it evokes. Later, Jack experiences yet another nervous breakdown, already on Mars, when he confronts simulacra school teachers. Even though Manfred's visions of ruin and despair are far more intense, they are representations of his reality. As Dick himself states:

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[20] Ibid., p. 136.

[21] Ibid., p. 145.

[22] Gillespie, Bruce ed. *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* (Melbourne: Norstrilia Press, 1975), p. 263. Emphasis original.

> it is entropy at work, decay of the meaningful (form) into the meaningless (entropic formlessness). This force, intruding itself is objectively real; *this* is not the hallucination – and much of what in my books is regarded as hallucinations are actually aspects of the entropy-laden *koinos* world breaking through.[23]

An interesting reading of the ways of communication with Manfred is suggested by Kucukalic, who sees the following three channels of communication: through a ritual, telepathy, and the text of the novel.[24] Indeed, the first channel is best illustrated by Kott allowing his mind to be taken over by Manfred through a Bleekmen ritual that is supposed to enable the communication. This leads to Kott's utter disorientation – both ontological and epistemological – as he begins to see the world as a rotting and malicious place. The fusion with the boy's mind leaves a strong and lasting impression on Kott's mind so that he is unable to tell whether he is still in the "fusion" or back in reality. This, eventually, causes his death, as he believes he is still within the illusory world, caught within Manfred's subjective reality long after the "ritual" took place. The second channel enables Manfred to communicate with the Bleekmen. He is able to connect himself telepathically to the Bleekmen and, in this way, he finds peace through the communication with the exploited autochthonic people.

The third way enables the reader to "communicate" with Manfred's consciousness, and, in this way, perceive him as a "tangible human being" as well as understand and accept his otherness.[25] Dick utilises an experimental technique in which he uses the text as a means of communication with the reader. Jack's and Manfred's characters are strongly intertwined, and Jack's view of reality is influenced by Manfred's in a number of "time-slips," which constitute depictions of reality affected by a character's subjective point of view. It is achieved via bringing together two lines of narration: one conventional and representational with the omniscient narrator describing the event, and the other one which is the repetitive decay-laden version of the same events filtered through Manfred's mind.

In the second time-slip, which is the turning point in the plot, Manfred is taken to the sacred Bleekmen rock, where Kott resorts to the already mentioned ritual in order to access Manfred's mind and go back in time, which will enable him to purchase the valuable land. The process enables Manfred to take sovereignty over Kott's mind. Kott wakes up in his bath

[23] Ibid., p. 270. Emphasis original.
[24] Kucukalic, *Philip K. Dick*, p. 55.
[25] Ibid., p. 55.

and experiences a steady decay of the life he used to have three weeks before. Everything is devolving, even newspapers contain nothing but the word "gubble" repeated endlessly. Manfred's "gift" leaves Kott perplexed and horrified with the dark aspect of reality he has never experienced. However, his moral stance does not change: he is still vengeful and cruel, and still seeks material profit by whatever means.

Kott dies absolutely incognisant of which world is actually real, but his death is not brought about by Manfred's action or the gradual decay and entropy of his world. He is killed by a black market trader, Otto Zitte, who takes revenge after Kott deprived him of his meagre business. Kott pays for his disregard of other people, lack of empathy and complete arrogance.

Manfred is finally released from the nightmarish visions when he finds comfort with the Bleekmen, the only individuals with which he can communicate. The sympathetic portrayal of the autistic boy, as well as the marginalised Martian autochthonous community, conveys the message that the collective reality is able to endorse an isolated individual; and imposing exclusion on others inevitably brings about a false, unreal, and illusory reality, just as in the case of Arnie Kott.

The textual representation of mental otherness transpires to be one of the main subjects of the novel. The time-slips allow us to see beyond the commonly accepted reality. Employing, on his own terms, the philosophy of Heraclitus, the author explores the possibilities of the objective reality being warped by the subjective and vice versa. Manfred's ability to influence Jack's and Kott's realities during the time-slips is an illustration of mental otherness, thanks to which people might assume a different angle when reflecting on mental illness.

A Scanner Darkly

A Scanner Darkly is one of the most important works in Dick's entire oeuvre, and beside *Confessions of a Crap Artist* and the *VALIS* series, it is his most autobiographical novel. It was published in 1977 and is set in 1994, thus it might be called a novel of the near future. Its yet another idiosyncrasy is that it is deprived of the incredible reality distortions of Dick's far-future science fiction.

The main character, Bob Arctor, plays a double role in the novel – he is a member of a small group of junkies, as well as an undercover antinarcotics agent, known as Fred. His task is to infiltrate the world of drug addicts and dealers in order to reach out to the producers of a deadly drug. The interesting detail is that Arctor/Fred needs to hide his identity from both

his housemates and the police, as full anonymity of the agents is a *sine qua non* of the antinarcotics division. This far-fetched conspiracy is to prevent any form of corruption, which turns out to be one of the pivotal elements of the plot. Arctor, as a result of his actions, becomes gradually addicted to the drug called Substance D (for Death), which is an extremely powerful psycho-active substance, and is produced from an innocent-looking, small, fragile blue flower, called *Mors Ontologica*.

Arctor, whose schizophrenic double role and overpowering addiction to Substance D result in a gradual but imminent recalibration of his perception of the world, is set to reach to the source of the drug in question, through Donna, his direct supplier. His regular contact with the substance results in a brain disorder, as the two hemispheres of his brain start to function independently from each other. His superiors decide he is no longer able to fulfil his duties and send him for a therapy at a New-Path rehab centre. As it turns out, the rehab centre is just a cover for a plant producing Substance D, and, despite the absolute dysfunction of his brain, Arctor's role is to infiltrate the centre and its staff, and find sufficient evidence the drug is produced there. As a part of the therapy, Bob/Fred takes on yet another name – Bruce. The novel finishes with Bruce finding a small blue flower and hiding it in his shoe, with the aim to pass the flower on to his colleague detectives.[26] In this way, sacrificing his sanity Arctor succeeds in his role as a double agent.

One of the most difficult challenges the author faced was to translate the realistic events he experienced many times into the language of the conventions of science fiction because, as Dick claims, publishing a mainstream novel would be difficult. He introduced a number of typically SF elements into the otherwise realistic world of the novel.

An interesting solution is the already mentioned need for the absolute anonymity of the agent. The writer comes up with the so called "scramble suit," a costume that prevents identification of the agent, but, at the same time, symbolically cuts the agent off from the outside world, and, in a sense, stigmatises him. Making him anonymous, the suit deprives Bob/Fred of his identity, which dissolves, and is ultimately lost. The blur of the different faces it projects corresponds to the growing blur and murk of his mind:

> The scramble suit was an invention of the Bell Laboratories, conjured up by accident […]. [Its] design consisted of a multifaced quartz lens hooked to a miniaturized computer whose memory banks held up to a million and a half physiognomic fraction-representations of various people […] with

[26] Dick, *A Scanner Darkly*, p. 182.

> every variant encoded and then projected outward in all directions equally onto a superthin shroudlike membrane large enough to fit around an average human.[27]

The suit strengthens the gradually growing schizophrenia of Bob/Fred, which is clearly visible through his words and actions. He appears increasingly to have lost track of his real identity; his sense of identity is blurred, and finally totally disintegrated:

> *How many Bob Arctors are there?* A weird and fucked-up thought. Two that I can think of, he thought. The one called Fred, who will be watching the other one, called Bob. The same person. Or is it? Is Fred actually the same as Bob? Does anybody know? I would know, if anyone did, because I'm the only person in the world that knows that Fred is Bob Arctor. *But,* he thought, *who am I? Which one is me?*[28]

Another element exacerbating the mental disintegration of the main character is the utilisation of surveillance cameras (the Scanner from the title) to invigilate the communities suspected of drug trafficking. In the house Arctor shares with his junkie friends, a system of cameras is installed. SA Fred, as part of his duties, has to watch the recordings at a police station, which creates a surreal, grotesque, and obviously schizophrenic situation, in which Fred invigilates himself, and, in order to avoid identification, reports on himself. This becomes the source of a continuous clash between the two identities within one person. "Man is not truly one, but truly two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. […] I learned to recognize the thorough and primitive duality of man,"[29] says Dr Jekyll in his suicide note, which aptly encapsulates the Arctor-Fred relationship. The composite nature of the main character is closely connected with the notion of *Doppelgänger* or double; a literary motif deeply rooted in the Scandinavian and German mythologies, which was formalised by German Romanticists. Jean Paul Richter used the term *Doppelgänger* for the first time in his novel *Sibenkäs*,[30] and, since that time, the motif of *Doppelgänger* has been used in both literature and visual arts.

Dick relates to this notion by using different digressions and allusions to works exploring the problem. In the final chapter of the novel, he includes the first stanza of Heinrich Heine's "Heart in my body breaking":

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[27] Dick, *A Scanner Darkly*, p. 23.

[28] Ibid., p. 90. Emphasis original.

[29] Robert Lewis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (New York: Bantam, 1982), p. 87.

[30] Jean Paul Richter, "Sibenkäs," *Spiegel Online*, accessed August 12, 2017, http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/siebenkas-3215/1.

Ich unglücksel'ger Atlas! Eine Welt,
Die ganze Welt der Schmerzen muss ich tragen,
Ich trage Unerträgliches, und brechen
Will mir das Herz im Liebe.[31]

This poem is a part of "Die Heimkehr" (1823–1824), a section of Heine's poetry collection called *Buch der Lieder* (1872), which presents what seems to be one of the central elements in Heine's poetry, namely the image of *doppelganger*. One of the earlier poems in this section appears to be the key poem in the whole collection. The final stanza reads (in translation):

You double of mine, you pallid other!
Why do you mimic my love's wild woe
Which tortured me, your wretched brother,
So many a night here long ago?[32]

The *doppelganger* figure in Heine's poem is a pervasive and foreboding symbol of the second self, mocking the pretence of the first. Similarly, in *A Scanner Darkly*, the *doppelganger* bears what "can't be borne," as suggested in the four lines cited by Dick. Bob/Fred's drug induced schizophrenia makes him infinitely wretched. He has also become a pervasive and foreboding symbol of the schizophrenic reality, the reality which is virtually impossible to bear. The final, utter split of personality is indicated by the narrator saying: "They, inside the scramble suit, the nebulous blur, shut their eyes to wait."[33]

Together with other novels dealing with the issue of mental problems (e.g., schizophrenia in *We Can Build You*), *Martian Time-Slip* and *A Scanner Darkly* help to approach the definition of the human from a different angle than the man/android game shown in Dick's typical science fiction. In both cases, the focus of the narrative is not on widespread institutional policies, it is rather on the individual dramas of characters. In whatever condition

[31] Dick, *A Scanner Darkly,* p. 239. Frank Bertrand, "Digressions and Allusions in Philip K Dick's *A Scanner Darkly*," *Philip K. Dick Fan Site*, accessed April 24, 2017, http://www.philipkdickfans.com/literary-criticism/frank-views-archive/digressions-on-allusions-in-p-k-dicks-a-scanner-darkly/:

I most unfortunate Atlas! For a world,
The entire world of suffering I must carry,
I bear what can't be borne, and feel the
Heart in my body breaking.

[32] Bertrand, "Digressions and Allusions."

[33] Dick, *A Scanner Darkly*, p. 211.

they find themselves (turned into androids, mentally ill, mutated), their destinies are rendered with a powerful load of "pathos and compassion."[34]

Further features that are easily noticed in the novels in question, but also in several other of Dick's novels and in numerous short stories, are the prevalence of decay and the inevitability of entropy. In this way, Dick expresses his concern, but also irony, about the condition of modern society, which, as it is illustrated, drives itself to inescapable annihilation. Both novels focus on psychologically unstable characters, analysing their relations and conflicts with the surrounding reality. In *Martian Time-Slip*, Dick seems to be exploring the implication of the human-alien relationship and interdependence, and considers both the scientific and emotional aspects of this situation. Although he might not always delve deep into his characters' minds, or explore the character profiles exhaustively, he reflects carefully on the predicament of how humans are related to their environment, be it natural or mechanical. *A Scanner Darkly* is a novel about death. *Mors Ontologica* – the death of being – seems to be the clue to the meaning of the novel. For Dick, to exist means to think,[35] the novel, then, might be read as one about the death of the human mind. Reality exists thanks to the fact that it is the human mind that constructs it, and, when the mind is annihilated, it ceases to exist. Substance D is significantly the drug of death, as it possesses the power to destroy the brain.

[34] Kucukalic, *Philip K. Dick*, p. 77.

[35] Patricia Warrick, *Mind in Motion: The Fiction of Philip K. Dick* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987), p. 161.

Damian Podleśny

Representation of mental oddity in two novels by Philip K. Dick

The paper focuses on two novels featuring several examples of Dick's characters who experience mental incapacities, breakdowns or suffer from serious mental states. In one of his novels, *Martian Time-Slip* (1964), the writer makes use of the possibilities of the "space-opera" setting to create a dramatic narrative featuring two people whose comprehension of the surrounding reality differs from that of the "normal" characters. The novel discusses the social incongruity of those who are considered mentally ill, and their struggle to overcome society's conformity and ignorance, when it comes to accepting such people in society. The two focal characters are Manfred Steiner and Jack Bohlen; the former is an autistic child and the latter suffers from a latent form of schizophrenia. Both of them struggle to survive in the grim and oppressive environment of human colonies on Mars. In a much later novel, *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), Dick explores the process of gradual disintegration of human mind, resulting from excessive use of drugs. Bob Arctor, a local junkie, who is, in fact, an under-cover government agent, infiltrates the community of drug users. However, his cover forces him to take drugs, which leads him to serious brain damage resulting in schizophrenic fits and imminent mental disintegration.

Key words: Philip K. Dick, *A Scanner Darkly*, *Martian Time-Slip*, schizophrenia, drug abuse

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"No amount of serotonin will bring Darcy to the door."[1] Understanding mental illness in contemporary autobiographical writing in English

No other branch of medicine is so much present in public imagination and popular culture, so much widely disputed and questioned, as psychiatry. Moreover, opinions about it vary dramatically. Graham Thronicroft calls the language employed in this dispute "a terminological power struggle," as the words used reflect standpoints and assumptions about health, agency and the very essence of humanity.[2] The decision how to call psychiatric conditions and the people diagnosed with them is far from simple. On the one end of the spectrum are the neuropsychiatrists who claim all the so-called mental disorders are nothing more but brain diseases; on the other end are the anti-psychiatrists who believe mental illness is a social construct and doubt its existence. In the middle, there is the least vocal group of people admitting psychiatry is a branch of medicine, yet is it unlike any other medical practice. Psychiatry, for them, deals not only with the brain, but also with gender, spirituality, economy, ethnicity… They humbly observe that everything that happens to a human is processed by the brain and may affect its functioning; but many things that happen to us come from a cultural and social, not merely biological, sphere.

Doubting the existence of mental illnesses was a favourite strategy of anti-psychiatrists. These concerns were first openly voiced in Thomas

[1] Lisa Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad and Sad. Women and the Mind Doctors* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), p. 4.

[2] Graham Thornicroft, *Shunned. Discrimination against People with Mental Illness* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. xv.

Szasz's *The Myth of Mental Illness*, published in 1961. He criticised the term mental illness since the mind, unlike the brain, is not a physical organ that can be ill. Using imprecise terminology, psychiatry has no credit as an objective branch of medicine. The mind refers to cognitive and emotional functioning of consciousness which cannot be a subject of scientific studies. Mental illness is thus a metaphorical expression, a "useful concept in the nineteenth century; today it is scientifically worthless and socially harmful."[3] For Szasz, what people complain about when they talk about mental disorders is "problems with living" – they might be unhappy, have difficult relationships with others or find it impossible to fulfil their needs.[4]

If it could be proven that what is called mental illness is caused by faulty brain functioning, mental illness would become brain disease. Then, psychiatry would completely lose its *raison d'être* becoming neurology. This is exactly what happened to General Paralysis of the Insane (GPI), or late-stage syphilis. Individuals suffering from GPI used to constitute a large part of the population of the nineteenth-century mental asylums but the discovery of penicillin virtually prevented syphilis from reaching its final stage. Likewise, Alzheimer's disease; although it is a brain disease the symptoms of which include mood swings and behavioural changes, is not treated by psychiatrists. As Szasz argues:

> The fact that atomic energy is used in warfare does not make international conflicts problems in physics; likewise, the fact that the brain is used in human behaviour does not make moral and personal conflicts problems in medicine.[5]

Following Szasz's line of thought, other anti-psychiatrists of the 1960, most notably R. D. Laing and Joseph Berke, always used inverted comas referring to a name of any mental disorder. "Schizophrenia" was for them a mere medical label, absolutely conventional and devoid of any real existence.[6] Undoubtedly, they were correct in arguing many mental health problems are assessed and named in an arbitrary fashion. What degree of misery becomes clinical depression, which delusions are pathological and which are culturally acceptable, or even encouraged? Yet similar arguments can be directed against obesity or hypertension. At which point being overweight changes into being obese, and when does morbid obesity begin?

[3] Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1975), p. 13.

[4] Ibid., p. 12.

[5] Ibid., p. 44.

[6] See, for instance Mary Barnes and Joseph Berke, *Mary Barnes: Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), p. 78-79.

Szasz's arguments, though superficially impressive, raise more questions than they try to answer. First of all, he criticises the scientific character of mid-twentieth century American psychiatry, which relied heavily on psychoanalysis. It, indeed, had no scientific credentials. Thus, many of his observations cannot be applied to modern psychiatry, which, at least in theory, tries to be evidence-based. Likewise, he mostly gives examples of neurotic disorders, especially hysteria, and does not mention more disturbing illnesses, such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. Delusions and hallucinations cannot be so easily dismissed as mere problems with living. Furthermore, many people who receive psychiatric diagnoses do perceive themselves as unwell, different from their usual selves, while others, who have objective organic diseases which can be tested and measured (like hyperglycaemia), do not accept the medical judgement and oppose treatment. Finally, our understanding of what constitutes legitimate illnesses and what their aetiology is are historically changeable. Fifty years ago few people wanted to accept the suggestion that smoking causes cancer, forty years ago the idea that peptic ulcers are caused by bacteria known know as helicobacter was seen as outrageous.[7] There are some hypotheses that even leukaemia might be a result of viral infection.[8] What used to be seen as shocking immorality and perversion is now psychopathy and medical and psychological experiments prove that psychopaths' brains are indeed different.[9] History of progress – and terrible blunders in medicine – should teach us great humility in expressing any knowledge with absolute certainty. The mind may be to the brain what the womb is to the uterus – both refer to the same organ but within different discourse. And though womb is poetic and medically imprecise, no one would question the validity and usefulness of gynaecology.

Furthermore, questioning the legitimacy of psychiatry does not make mental problems, some debilitating for life, disappear. The closing of mental asylums, which was partly caused by the invention of more efficient medication and partly by the impact of anti-psychiatry, only transferred the inmates of institutions to prisons, shelters for the homeless and optimistically called community care, which is rather community neglect in most cases. The number of people who either permanently live with a psychiatric illness or experience episodes of, for example, psychosis or depression, is on the rise. Paradoxically, this prognosis is much worse in the

[7] James Le Fanu, *The Rise and Fall of Modern Medicine* (London: Abacus, 2014), pp. 40–83, 202–212.
[8] Ibid., pp. 408–413.
[9] Jon Ronson, *The Psychopath Test* (London: Picador, 2011), passim.

Western, wealthy countries than in the developing ones.[10] It all suggests that psychiatry should remain a branch of medicine, but should develop much closer links with non-medical sciences, too.

Though many ideas of anti-psychiatry have long been discredited, it still remains a shameful fact that "there is no biologically based test that can distinguish a person diagnosed with mental illness from one who has no such diagnosis."[11] Despite a myriad of theories about the causes of psychiatric complaints, the results of research remain inconclusive. Most doctors assume that malfunctioning brain biochemistry is responsible for many illnesses; consequently, neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin have become household names, just like some drugs, notably Valium and Prozac. In *Against Depression* (2005), a passionate book questioning positive associations surrounding melancholy and defending its organic character, Peter Kramer writes that "depression involves abnormalities in brain anatomy."[12] Allegedly, some irregularities were observed in the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex of the depressed subjects. Yet, first of all, the great majority of these subjects were rodents, whose consciousness, in all likelihood, is less complex than that of the human, if existent at all. Second, it is impossible to decide whether these abnormalities precede, accompany, or result from the illness. Undoubtedly, depression causes real havoc in the bodies of sufferers: they age quickly, have more frequent heart failure and tend to die prematurely. Anxiety, unhappiness, fear and guilt manifest themselves through bodily symptoms but attributing them solely to chemical or anatomical or genetic causes does not answer any questions. In fact, everything is chemical, as Andrew Solomon argues. "'I'm depressed but it's just chemical' is a sentence equivalent to 'I'm murderous but it's just chemical' or 'I'm intelligent but it's just chemical.'"[13] Love and mystical experiences, appreciation of works of art are all chemical because human beings, just like any other substance in the universe, are composed of chemical elements. Likewise, everything we experience changes our brains irrevocably. Apparently, the hippocampus of London taxi drivers grows bigger as they perform their jobs day by day yet no one would venture saying driving a cab is a mental disorder.[14]

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[10] https://in2mentalhealth.com/2014/10/05/the-better-prognosis-hypothesis-for-schizophrenia-in-poor-countries-is-it-the-medication/

[11] Thornicroft, *Shunned*, p. xii.

[12] Peter Kramer, *Against Depression* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 115.

[13] Andrew Solomon, *Noonday Demon. An Anatomy of Depression* (London: Vintage Books, 2002), p. 22.

[14] Tom Burns, *Our Necessary Shadow. The Nature and Future of Psychiatry* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p. 6.

All these debates have found their repercussions in autobiographical writing authored by people who experienced mental health problems. In the last few decades, patographies, or illness narratives, have become a popular genre in English-language life-writing. More and more people want to share their experience of living with an illness or looking after an ill friend, partner or family member. Rita Charon, a doctor, literary critic and unquestioned authority on narrative medicine, has observed that the rapid development of modern medicine has not made most people confident in their encounters with medical care:

> [t]he price for a technologically sophisticated medicine seems to be impersonal, calculating treatment from a revolving set of specialists who, because they are consumed with the scientific elements in health care, seem divided from the ordinary human experiences that surround pain, suffering and dying.[15]

Undeniably, medical care tends to dehumanise patients and medicalise nearly all aspects of human life. That could explain the phenomenon of illness narratives, which attempt to fill the gap between the incomprehensible medical discourse and individual experience of being ill. Nevertheless, simultaneously, it has to be admitted that the length of life of most people in the West has dramatically improved and its quality increased in the last two centuries. The only branch of medicine which cannot boast such an impressive progress is psychiatry. Objective tests do not prove that psychotropic medication does wonders, as Big Pharma advertisements say while some individuals are stubbornly resistant to drugs. Also, sometimes nonconventional approaches, like taking regular walks, work better than antidepressants. Even when some methods (like electroconvulsive therapy) or drugs do what is expected, it remains unclear why. Some methods in which a lot of trust was put a mere few decades ago, such as lobotomy or insulin-induced coma, are now quoted as examples of psychiatric abuse. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the bible of psychiatrists worldwide, is constantly rewritten while disorders appear, change names, and disappear for no apparent reason.[16]

Taking the controversies surrounding psychiatry into consideration, it is not surprising that madness narratives enjoy such unyielding popularity. Many such texts, both autobiographical novels and memoirs, have become

[15] Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine. Honoring the Stories of Illness* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 6.

[16] James Davies, *Cracked. Why Psychiatry is Doing More Harm Than Good* (London: Icon, 2014), passim, Burns, *Our Necessary Shadow*, passim, and Richard Bentall, *Doctoring the Mind. Why Psychiatric Treatments Fail* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), passim.

classics. It is sufficient to mention Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* (1993) or William Styron's *Darkness Visible* (1990). Curiously enough, despite the enormous impact of anti-psychiatry (notably the works of Michel Foucault and R. D. Laing) on humanities and arts, very few writers who have received psychiatric diagnoses, doubt the reality of their illness. The tormenting emotional pain they experienced, threatening hallucinations or inexplicable mood shifts cannot be dismissed as a mere social construct. They might criticise the treatment they were offered, at best ineffective, at worse inhumanly brutal, or the social stigma with which they had to cope, but not the illness itself. Even if they point to cultural factors, such as oppressive gender roles, or traumatic past, as contributing to their state of health, they never question that their experience was of a medical character.

The majority of authors of madness narratives who doubt the existence of mental illness experienced encounters with mental health care in 1950s and 1960s. One the one hand, it was a period when the psychoanalytical approach to psychiatry dominated in the USA and combined with lack of effective medication. On the other hand, gender roles and class expectations were particularly oppressive then. Little wonder that individuals who found themselves in asylums during that period might have found psychiatric treatment bogus. In the case of Janet Frame, her loneliness and stress reaction to unbearable social pressures on an ambitious but poor working-class woman were interpreted as schizophrenia. She wrote several accounts of her hospitalisations, both fictive (*Owls Do Cry* (1957), *Faces in the Water* [1961]) and non-fictive (three volumes of *Autobiography* [1982–84]). Kate Millet, a feminist activist and a professed lesbian, saw her compulsory treatment as an attack on her alternative life-style. Rebellious, cheeky and irritable, Millet's emotional outbursts, multiple love affairs and weird financial choices worried her family and friends. In *The Loony-Bin Trip* (1990), she tries, in vain, to convince the reader of her sanity. The diagnosis of manic-depression she received seems, even to someone very sympathetic to her circumstances, not far-fetched. Mary Barnes' autobiography co-authored with her therapist Joseph Berke, entitled simply *Mary Barnes* (1971), is an eulogy of the Kinsley Hall community and the work of R. D. Laing. These women do not mention any scientific theories about the origin of their problems and question the validity of medical authority over them.

Susanna Kaysen was treated in the late 1960s, yet wrote her account in 1993. She is not only aware of the biomedical model of madness but also addresses it, in a dismissive manner, in *Girl, Interrupted*. She believes Bor-

derline Personality Disorder is a derogatory label. According to her psychiatrist, "It's what they call people whose lifestyles bother them."[17] She also points to the gender bias in identifying socially inappropriate behaviour.

> How many girls do you think a seventeen-year-old boy would have to screw to earn the label 'compulsively promiscuous'? Three? No, not enough. Six? Doubtful. Ten? That sound more likely. Probably in the fifteen-to--twenty range, would be my guess – if they ever put that label on boys, which I don't recall their doing.
>
> And for seventeen-year-old girls, how many boys?[18]

She is just as critical of the double standards of morality as well as of mixing morality with psychiatry as of neuropsychiatry.

> It's a long way from not having enough serotonin to thinking the world is 'stale, flat and unprofitable,' even further to writing a play about a man driven by that thought. [...] Something is interpreting the clatter of neurological activity.[19]

Kaysen refuses to believe in biological determinism in an attempt to save such concepts as volition and agency. If we are indeed slaves to our neurotransmitters, what is the point of education, culture, spirituality. Holding people accountable for their actions, which is a fundamental principle of any legal system, would also lose its sense.

Though, for some people, seeing madness as brain disorder is limiting, for other liberation comes only within the biological model. Then no one is responsible for individual misery and cure comes with medication. Mark Vonnegut expresses this opinion openly: "no one's to blame. Psychological heroics are not required to improve things."[20] He dismisses the fact that, for many people, psychotherapy is just as important in the daily maintenance of their illness as pharmacology. It helps to develop healthier coping mechanisms and prevents relapses.

William Styron's *Darkness Visible* (1990) also advocates the theory of biological origins of mental disorders. Styron refuses to look at the roots of his alcoholism seeing it as a mere attribute of any great American writer, and treats madness as resulting

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[17] Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. 151.
[18] Ibid., p. 158.
[19] Ibid., p. 137.
[20] Mark Vonnegut, *The Eden Express. A Memoir of Insanity* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), p. 290.

> from aberrant biochemical process. It has been established with reasonable certainty (after strong resistance from many psychiatrists, and not all that long ago) that madness is chemically induced amid neurotransmitters of the brain, probably as the result of systemic stress, which for unknown reasons causes a depletion of the chemical norepinephrine and serotonin, and the increase of hormone, cortisol. With all these upheaval in the brain tissues, the alternate drenching and deprivation, it is no wonder that the mind begins to feel aggrieved, stricken, and the muddied thought processes register the distress of an organ in convulsion.[21]

There are several flaws, however, in Styron's seemingly neat and scientific argumentation. First of all, although he has no medical, chemical or psychological training, he tries to explain to his readers the brain neurochemistry and cognitive processes that even specialists put in much more tentative language. Secondly, if the brain starts malfunctioning because of prolonged exposure to stress, madness is a result of external pressure, not inner, biological error. It is as if someone explained that obesity is caused by too much fat tissue spontaneously accumulating within the body, not by an inappropriate demand of food intake. Finally, dismissing psychotherapy, Styron is no longer responsible for the success or failure of his treatment. His role is to wait for the drugs to "kick in."

If we accept that many organic diseases are strongly connected to lifestyle choices, why not mental illness? Norah Vincent repeatedly asks this question in *Voluntary Madness* (2008). Calling depression or paranoia a brain disease was meant to diminish stigma and fight prejudice. Yet, for many people seeing the mentally ill as inherently flawed is even more stigmatising than suspecting they are, at least partly, answerable for their condition. Responsibility, in this case, can be transferred to treatment. If "the imprimatur of the medical establishment […] absolves […] of all responsibility" since "diagnosis is not your fault," analysing patterns of behaviours and reasons for self-destruction is not necessary.[22] Though Peter Kramer, in *Listening to Prozac* (1993), gives numerous examples of people whose addictions, obsessions and self-demeaning behaviour was immediately modified by Prozac, without any therapy or change in life circumstances, most psychiatrists would not share his enthusiasm. Getting better on medication is one thing, but staying better is another.

Those who advocate the biological model tend to compare brain to a piece of complex machinery, especially the computer. Marya Hornbacher

[21] William Styron, *Darkness Visible* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 46.

[22] Norah Vincent, *Voluntary Madness. My Year Lost and Found in the Loony Bin* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2009), p. 121.

writes that the brains of the mentally ill "are wired differently than average brain."[23] Lauren Slater, reading scientific papers on psychiatry discovers they are all based on an analogy: "We can conceive of the brain as a kind of computer software, and Prozac is the program that vitiates the virus."[24] She patiently listens as her doctor explains to her about her new drug, Prozac:

> He told me it had a three-ring chemical structure similar to that of other medications I'd tried in the past but that its action on the body's serotonin system made it a finer drug. He told me about the brain chemical serotonin and its role on OCD – obsessive-compulsive disorder – the most recent of my many ills [...]. He told me about synapses and clefts.[25]

Slater, however, distances herself from these statements. Each sentence starts with the "he told me" phrase, which suggests that she listened to his words but did not necessarily agreed with them. She finds the gigantic fluorescent plastic model of a synapse on his desk hilarious. Its vulgarity diminishes the purpose it is supposed to serve – to convince her that serotonin is sucked in the synaptic cleft differently by obsessive and normal brains. She imagines that her faulty soul has a hole. "Perhaps the hole came from a neuronal glitch, the chemical equivalent of a dropped stitch in the knitted yearn of my brain. Or maybe the hole was between my mother and me."[26] Her own statements are much more tentative, as the words "perhaps" and "maybe" indicate. She is not certain what the ultimate cause of her illness is: genetically transmitted fault, problematic relationship with her distant mother, lack of warmth experienced in her childhood and adolescence. Prozac allows her to lead an ordinary life: study psychology at Harvard, get a good job, fall in love and marry. Previously, her depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, anorexia and deliberate self-harm made any semblance of peaceful existence impossible. She stresses that "correlation does not imply causation," yet "we believe that if a patient is cured by a serotonin-specific chemical, then there are probable anatomical illness correlates in the brain."[27] "We" implies scientists, psychiatrist and representatives of Big Pharma. Obviously, she knows Prozac has the power to cure her, but it does not lead her to the conclusion her illness was chemical, and chemical only.

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[23] Marya Hornbacher, *Sane. Mental Illness, Addiction, and the 12 Steps* (Center City: Hazelden, 2010), p. 28.
[24] Lauren Slater, *Prozac Diary* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 108.
[25] Ibid., pp. 5–6.
[26] Ibid., pp. 8–9.
[27] Ibid., p. 108.

Slater finds the sentence "behind every crooked thought lies a crooked molecule" deeply disturbing.[28] Seeing mental illness as a pathology located within the individual – rather than as a reaction to unbearable pressures – is very convenient for policy makers and medical establishment. It is easier to prescribe pills to people and even force them to take them than to change the society. Female depression and eating disorders stop being a reaction to a deeply sexist culture, and the post-traumatic stress disorder in soldiers has nothing to do with the inhumanity of war. Homophobia, racism, misogyny and economic exploitation do not have to be addressed to increase mental well-being of individuals.

Sometimes, coming to terms with one's illness takes time. Elyn Saks describes in *The Center Cannot Hold* (2007) how, for a long time, she rejected her diagnosis of schizophrenia on the grounds that accepting it would be synonymous with having "to admit that my brain was profoundly broken."[29] Curiously enough, it is pharmacological treatment that convinces her she is ill. She lived most of her life accompanied by terrifying inner voices and chaotic thoughts, so she did not realise other people do not share this experience. She simply thought they were more successful at managing the chaos.

> All people believed there were malevolent forces controlling them, putting thoughts into their heads, taking thoughts out, and using their brains to kill whole populations – it's just that other people didn't say so. My problem, I thought, had less to do with my mind than it had to do with my lack of social graces. I wasn't mentally ill. I was socially maladroit.[30]

When a new drug, Zyprexa, gives her clarity, sanity and balance, she changes her mind. Realising all this was achieved not through years of therapy or excruciating self-discipline but through a chemical, makes her accept her illness and, paradoxically, rescues her from its clutches.

The disappearance of voices is also a turning point in the autobiography of Ken Steele, which is reflected in its title, *The Day the Voices Stopped* (2001). He found their lack baffling, even unwelcome, as they had accompanied him nearly all his life. He remembers the day when they went away, May 3, 1995. Despite a rather affectionless, not to say cruel, childhood, he does not blame his parents for the way they treated him, contributing to his illness, years of homelessness and violence. He sees his illness as "a biological brain disorder that is manageable if properly treated with medication

[28] Ibid., p. 108.
[29] Elyn Saks, *The Center Cennot Hold. My Journey Through Madness* (New York: Hyperion, 2007), p. 244.
[30] Ibid., p. 304.

and psychotherapy," which helps him to cope with his painful past and go on with his life without resentment.[31]

An interesting example of how one's ideas about mental disorders develop can be found in Hornbacher's writing. Her debut, *Wasted. A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* (1998), is a disturbingly honest and well-researched book. Looking for the causes of her nearly successful annihilation, Hornbacher looks at various psychological theories and blames the cultural tyranny of equating slim with sophisticated and sexy. Written a decade later, *Madness. A Bipolar Life* (2008) becomes more medical in character, while S*ane. Mental Illness, Addiction, and the 12 Steps* (2010) reads like a leaflet advocating the biomedical model as the only possible explanation of any mental distress. "Mental illness is a genetic brain disorder," writes Hornbacher with a conviction of a neophyte.[32] She further argues that "our brain chemistry can cause imbalance in our moods, thoughts, and lives [… which] can be stabilized and our moods, thoughts, and lives made core manageable by medications that science has produced."[33]

Although the book has been published (and in all likelihood, ordered and sponsored by) Hazelden, a rehabilitation centre for alcoholism and drug addictions, a reader might be surprised by Hornbacher's certainty and reductionism. Previously, she used to probe deeper and found complex, multi-faceted answers to equally complex questions. The fact that culture shapes human understanding of what constitutes an illness and symptoms of mental anguish are historically changeable is not mentioned even once, making the book simplistic in comparison to her previous, eclectic approach.

Generally speaking, books that are in any way sponsored or supported by pharmaceutical companies or medical establishment seem inauthentic. The best example can be provided by *Monochrome Days* (2007) co-authored by a depressed adolescent, Cait Irwin and two mental health specialists. Published by Oxford University Press within the Adolescent Mental Health Initiative, it is a well-meaning yet disappointing book intertwining a personal narrative by Cait with pieces of advice and scientific explanations supplied by a doctor and a clinical psychologist. First of all, it is very inconsistent stylistically, as the narrator combines her own account of the story with medical register taken straight from a psychiatry textbook. She advocates the biomedical model and always gives a medical interpretation of depression first. For instance, explaining why women are

[31] Ken Steele, *The Day the Voices Stopped. A Memoir of Madness and Hope* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 15.
[32] Hornbacher, *Sane,* p. viii.
[33] Ibid., p. 28.

much more likely to suffer from depression than men, she blames the sex hormones. She adds, reluctantly, that "some stresses – for example, rape, date violence, teen pregnancy, or social stereotypes – may be different for males and females, as a group."[34] The modal verb "may" is truly baffling here – teen pregnancy in males is a phenomenon that has not yet occurred in nature, and men very seldom become victims of sexual violence. Ignoring socio-cultural origins of mental disorders, for the sake of a more optimistic and less stigmatising picture, falsifies medical knowledge. It is as if someone claimed diet and lifestyle plays no role in hypertension. Irwin gives a list of books worth reading at the end of her story. Curiously enough, it includes only "wholesome" books, which support the biomedical model and end on a happy note. She fails to include such classics as Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* or Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation* (1995), a memoir that is not only much more contemporary, but also probably more appealing to a teen audience at which the book is directed. Obviously, their inclusion would diminish the uplifting message of the book, that depression is a highly curable disorder as long as you take your medication. Most readers, including adolescent ones, would probably value more honesty, even at the price of optimism.

One of the few memoirs that simultaneously supports the official standpoint of mainstream psychiatry and explores the issues of upbringing, personality, and life experiences, is Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind. A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (1996). Just as Slater, Jamison is a clinical psychologist and a gifted, lyrical writer. She not only suffers from bipolar disorder but has built an international reputation as a scholar of that illness. Interestingly, she has long denied the reality of her condition to herself:

> Because my illness seemed at first simply to be an extension of myself – that is to say, of my ordinary changeable moods, energies, and enthusiasms – I perhaps gave it at times too much quarter. And because I thought I ought to be able to handle my increasingly violent mood swings by myself, for the first ten years I did not seek any kind of treatment. Even after my condition became a medical emergency, I still intermittently resisted the medications that both my training and clinical research expertise told me were the only sensible way to deal with the illness I had.[35]

[34] Cait Irwin, Dwight L. Evans and Linda Wasmer Andrews, *Monochrome Days. A Firsthand Account of One Teenager's Experience with Depression* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 15.

[35] Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind. A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 5.

There is great humility in that admission as it helps to understand that even experts often do not do as they preach. It is one thing to insist on the one and only course of action when it concerns other people. The perspective changes dramatically when one realises how dependant human identity, individuality and consciousness are on mere biochemistry.

The works of writers expressing a multifaceted interpretation of psychiatric disorders are probably most convincing. They tend to combine their own personal narratives with theories about mental illness, history of psychiatry, interviews with other sufferers or medical staff as well as a painful analysis of modern values, gender roles and cultural scripts. Curiously enough, authors of such accounts are usually journalists. Books that belong to that group include Elizabeth Wurzel's *Prozac Nation*, Norah Vincent's *Voluntary Madness* and Andrew Solomon's *Noonday Demon* (2001). Although their works cannot be classified as expressing support for anti-psychiatric ideas, they tend to search for more complex roots of mental distress and seldom attempt to explain the brain chemistry. Vincent does not want to be seen as a "set of chemicals" since the doctors

> were dealing with my brain as an organ, palpation it with categories, forgetting of course that, unlike its illustrious sister discipline, neurology, psychiatry is not just the science of the brain as brain, but brain as organ of thought, seat of incandescent function, impalpable, the only organ in my body that can answer back.[36]

She accepts the fact that due to her biochemical construction she might be more prone to dark moods, yet she sees her descent into melancholy as explicable. In her late twenties, she realised that the life she had supposed she would be living never materialised. Vincent explains: "I had gotten to the age when all well-loved children of the upper middle class parents begin to discover that the world is not made for them, that all meaningful questions are rhetorical, and that the term 'soul mate' is, at best, a figure of speech."[37] Individuals living in the contemporary Western culture – used to comfortable wealth and security hardly any generation before them has ever enjoyed and hardly any other part of the globe has the privilege to enjoy even now – find it difficult to accept that the constant pursuit of happiness must, sooner or later, lead to disappointment they are not prepared to handle. Human misery, which used to be treated as an unavoidable part of life, became medicalised in prosperous societies. Although clinical depres-

[36] Vincent, *Voluntary Madness*, p. 34.
[37] Ibid., p. 6.

sion may be seen as an illness, according to Vincent, Wurtzel and Solomon, it is connected with a loss of resilience to random and painful incidents in which life abounds.

Although they accept scientific arguments, they ridicule the idea that neurology and chemistry can explain everything. Solomon finds the formula given in a psychiatric textbook hilarious:

> A depression score is equivalent to the level of 3-methoxy-4-hydroxyphenylglycol (a compound found in the urine of all people and not apparently affected by depression); minus the level of 3-methoxy-4-hydroxymandelic acid; plus the level of norepinephrine; minus the level of normetanephrine plus the level of metanepherine, the sum of those divided by the level of 3-methoxy-4-hydroxymandelic acid.[38]

Thus, a urine sample should tell the doctor about the depths of our misery, pangs of unrequited love, and general existential angst. If the result is between one and zero, we might qualify for a sick leave. In a similar manner, Wurtzel accepts that she is ill, but refuses to see her illness solely through biological lenses. Her parents' agonising divorce, difficult relationship with overprotective mother and absent father, superficiality of pop culture, sense of uprootedness and unbelonging, love for Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen and Lou Reed, lack of the concept of unconditional love in Judaism – all of it, and many more, have contributed to the forging of her demanding, self-absorbed and addictive personality.

One can observe a certain pattern in the way writers interpret their illness. Women, artists and journalists, as well as people from economically underprivileged or marginalised groups, such as non-heterosexual individuals, look for social and psychological causes of madness. It does not necessarily mean they oppose its biological element or refuse psychiatric treatment or the benefits of medication. They only suggest that their traumatic experiences (like sexual violence or discrimination) contributed to their illness making its symptoms more severe and lasting. Frequently, they do not experience psychosis at all, but suffer from mood disorders, especially depression. The borderline between sadness, misery, grief and mourning and clinical depression is more fluid than between psychosis and ordinary experience. Moreover, manic states can be perceived as extremely pleasant, as they give one a feeling of omnipotence, increase creativity and sharpen the senses. Bipolar patients abhor their depressions but often find mild manias beneficial. No wonder they do not want to see their condition as

[38] Solomon, *Noonday Demon,* p. 21.

pathological. On the other hand, people who support the biomedical model are frequently those whose symptoms were more debilitating and who responded well to medication, which immediately alleviated the disturbing aspects of illness. This is the case provided by the story of Lori Schiller recorded *in The Quiet Room. A Journey out of the Torment of Madness* (1996). Her symptoms are so incomprehensible, behaviour so shockingly out of character, that all her friends and family accept the biological origin of her schizo-affective disorder without any dispute. Her mother also realises that she recalls from her childhood a few relatives who exhibited similar vacant look, bizarre habits and helplessness, which makes Lori's illness explicable in terms of genetics. Those who believe in the official psychiatric model also tend to be professionally connected to medicine and psychology, frequently working as academics. This is the case of Kay Jamison, Lauren Slater and Elyn Saks. Also men are more likely to accept the medical model as introspection, discussion of feelings and expression of emotions is not encouraged within traditional notions of heterosexual masculinity.

What is madness? A mere brain disease or a complex reaction, involving biology, to life experiences and cultural pressures? Is the brain just like any other organ or is it different? Vincent argues:

> [g]iven what it is capable of doing, the brain is like no other organ, and does not submit, at least in the lived experience of the patient, to anatomy and chemistry alone. How can we treat it the way we treat, for example, a kidney? There is the brain, whose business it thought and feeling and judgement and even mystical experience. And then there is the kidney, whose business is piss.[39]

Vincent might have forgotten that when the kidney fails to filter and produce urine properly, insanity is likely to follow. Our bodies respond to what happens to us at a psychological level, as well as cause various mental and emotional reactions. The brain, however mysterious, is no exception here. Even if we cast away supernatural explanations and accept that what we call consciousness, self, identity, soul or mind, is a function of the brain, we must admit that what happens to our brains has much more profound consequences to our perceptions of ourselves then what happens to our lungs or kidneys.

[39] Vincent, *Voluntary Madness*, p. 87.

Katarzyna Szmigiero

"No amount of serotonin will bring Darcy to the door." Understanding mental illness in contemporary autobiographical writing in English

Autobiographic writing about the experience of illness is becoming increasingly popular in English-language literature. Among many subjects addressed in patographies, the origin and treatment of mental disorders is a recurrent theme. Authors who have received a psychiatric diagnosis analyse the nature of their mental suffering, attributing it to biology, upbringing, traumatic life events or cultural stressors. Their opinions make an important contribution to contemporary discussions about mental health issues, gender roles and medicalisation of everyday life.

The aim of this article is to present various approaches to mental illness and the brain-mind dichotomy voiced in many narratives. Although contemporary psychiatry tends to see mental disorders as brain diseases, some patients find this view reductionist as it robs them of agency. Others, on the other hand, support the biomedical model of madness and seem fascinated with neurological and biochemical explanations of their own moods and emotions. The third group comprises individuals who try to find an eclectic explanation, combining biology and socio-cultural factors.

Key words: mental illness, patography, biomedical model, patients, disorder explanation

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Being her own biographer – Su Meck's memoir *I Forgot to Remember* and the fallibility of memory from the perspective of neuroscience and cognitive psychology

Memory and memoir are in many ways inextricably linked together. The first connection is etymological as the English word 'memoir' comes from the middle French word "un mémoire" (meaning "a written record"), which itself derives from the French word "une mémoire" (meaning "memory"). In fact, many other languages, including Polish, display a similar connection between their equivalents of these two words or their synonyms (e.g. in Polish, "memoir" – "wspomnienie/-a" is related to the verb "wspominać" meaning "to recall," "to remember"). Secondly, memoirs depend on our memory: that is, to write a memoir, to tell the story of our lives, we have to remember our past. This common premise is expressed by Thomas Couser, a professor of English and Autobiography Studies, who asserts that "memoir can only concern someone known to, and remembered by, the author"[1] Su Meck's memoir challenges this seemingly obvious fact as, in the course of writing her life story, she seems to perform the role of a biographer rather than a memoirist because after an accident in her youth, she lost her memory and therefore has to rely either on stories of other people or documents in order to (re)construct her life narrative. Finally, although memoirs have been written for ages (St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which date back to the fourth century, is often deemed the first Western attempt at an autobiographical narrative), and although people's

[1] Thomas Couser, G. *Memoir: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 19.

interest in the nature of remembering is even longer, as it can be traced to Plato's *Theaetetus* (composed around 369 BCE) in which he raises the idea that memory might be compared to a wax tablet onto which our perceptions are stamped, recently we have witnessed a renewed interest in memory and memoir as both gained special popularity among both the general public and the scientific community towards the end of the twentieth century.

The 1990s was famously proclaimed by George W. Bush the decade of the brain. The rapid developments in neuroscience, mainly triggered by the new brain scanning technologies such as PET, CAT, and fMRI, contributed to the intense interest in brain functions, including that of memory. This scientific interest was soon reflected in cultural products, such as films, novels, and memoirs, which focused on remembering and forgetting. Fernando Vidal, for example, shows that the advancements in cognitive neuroscience resulted in a large number of movies taking up the topic of amnesia, such as *Bourne Identity* (1988, 2002), *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), *Memento* (2000), or *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004).[2]

The period in question was also characterized by another phenomenon, related despite having a different origin, namely the Memory Wars. The Memory Wars began at the end of the 1980s with the advent of the incest recovery movement, the origin of which is often attributed to the publication of *The Courage to Heal: A Guide for Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* in 1988.[3] Authored by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis, the book suggests that people who are in their childhood frequently do not remember the abuse in adulthood. This and similar publications triggered the debate about the nature of the memory process. One model of memory, as Loftus and Ketcham explain, promotes a view of memory as a video-recorder and a belief in repression – a defense mechanism that allegedly erases painful experiences from one's consciousness.[4] The alternative model regards memory as a space of reconstruction where facts blend with fiction.[5] These Memory Wars, as Luckhurst illustrates, found reflection in cultural narratives of the 1990s, e.g., Jane Smiley's novel *A Thousand Acres* (1991),

[2] Fernando Vidal, "Memory, Movies, and the Brain." *The Memory Process: Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives*, Eds. Suzanne Nalbantian, Paul M. Matthews, and James L. McClelland (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011), p. 395.

[3] For a detailed discussion, see Luckhurst, "Memory Recovered/Recovered Memory;" in: Literature and the Contemporary: *Fictions and Theories of the Present*, eds. Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks (Harlow, Essex, New York: Longman, 1999) as well as Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *The Myths of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegation of Sexual Abuse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

[4] Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), p. 5.

[5] Ibid.

which features the protagonist who recovers the long-suppressed memories of paternal abuse, or Nicci French's *The Memory Game* (1997), which deals with the consequences of false-memory syndrome.[6]

The third development at the turn of the century relevant to this essay was the memoir boom. Julie Rak states that since the 1990s, "the writing and publishing of memoir has undergone a significant shift,"[7] namely memoirs by unknown people have become increasingly popular. She mentions such blockbuster memoirs as Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* (1993), Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1998) or Mary Karr's *The Liars' Club* (1998) – all of them written by unknown authors who gained fame due to their narratives and their subsequent film adaptations. Ben Yagoda quotes a study showing that between 2004 and 2008 the sales of memoirs increased more than 400 per cent,[8] and concludes that "[a]utobiographically speaking, there has never been a time like it. Memoir has become the central part of the culture."[9]

Memory and memoir come together in Su Meck's book, which is basically a memoir about her loss of memory as a result of the brain injury that she suffered when a kitchen fan had fallen on her head. Twenty-two mother of two at the time of the accident, Meck never recovered her memories from before the incident, and, for some time after it, she was also unable to form any new memories. After the injury, she had to learn gradually everything – from the most basic skills to recognising her once-loved ones. In this dramatic account of the loss of memory, Meck tries to understand her experiences and to rebuild her sense of self. I describe the dire consequences of such a total memory failure, especially to one's sense of self. However, I also argue that this memoir is about the fallibility of memory in general, not only in such an extreme case as a brain injury. Trying to reconstruct her story, Meck discovers that others have either incomplete or conflicting stories to tell her. I *Forgot to Remember* brings the transient and biased nature of our own memories into sharp focus. However, Meck's narrative not only exposes the limitation of our memory and highlights its importance to our sense of self but also brings to light the fluid boundaries of various life writing genres and reveals the pitfalls of placing too much emphasis on memory in relation to self.

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[6] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 205-207.

[7] Julie Rak, *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), p. 9

[8] Ben Yagoda, *Memoir: A History* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), p. 7.

[9] Ibid., p. 28.

Most scientists and humanists interested in the phenomenon of memory agree that memory is a significant part of our identity. Prominent neuroscientist, Joseph LeDoux, in his book *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (2002) asserts that "learning, and its synaptic result, memory, play major roles in gluing a coherent personality together as one goes through life."[10] Similarly, Walter Glannon, a professor of philosophy interested in bioethics and more recently in neuroethics, states that "In linking the past to the present and future, memory is […] essential to personal identity and the experience of persisting through time."[11] We therefore depend on our memory to construct a coherent sense of self, and although many scholars, especially those influenced by poststructuralist and postmodernist theories, argue that self is fluid, fragmentary, and changeable, in constructing our life stories we seem to need the semblance of coherence of our identity.

This instability of identity combined with the search for consistency is particularly evident in Su Meck's memoir. Meck claims to be a different person before and after the accident. She claims that there are two Sus with different dispositions, preferences, fears, and loves: "She rebelled; I conform. She broke the rules; I follow them. […] I like vegetables; she hated them. She loved to swim; I am absolutely terrified of water."[12] Writing about herself using a third person pronoun, Meck clearly implies that she feels estranged from her past self of which she does not have any recollection and which she can access only through the stories that her family and friends tell her. Meck also questions many of her former motives – like her decision to get married at nineteen and against her parents' will – that now seem alien to her.

Rarely do we experience such a total makeover of our personalities, but our inclinations and beliefs do change over time although frequently we are not aware of this fact due to the nature of memory which tries to adjust our memories so that they are in line with our current beliefs. Daniel Schacter quotes a study by Daniel Offer in which Offer conducted interviews with first-year high-school pupils and then interviewed the same people thirty-four years later. It turned out that the adult participants frequently misremembered what was important to them in adolescence. For instance, only one-quarter of the adults said that religion was helpful in their youth, while

[10] Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Viking, 2002), p. 9.

[11] Walter Glannon, "The Neuroethics of Memory," in *The Memory Process: Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives*, eds. Suzanne Nalbantian, Paul M. Matthews, and James L. McClelland (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011), p. 233.

[12] Su Meck with Daniel de Visé, *I Forgot to Remember* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), p. 6.

seventy per cent of them answered that question in affirmative when they were teenagers.[13]

This discrepancy is a result of one of the flaws of memory, namely bias, which Daniel Schacter discusses in his book *The Seven Sins of Memory*. He states:

> We often edit or entirely rewrite our previous experiences – unknowingly and unconsciously – in light of what we now know or believe. The result can be a skewed rendering of a specific incident, or even of an extended period of our lives, which says more about how we feel *now* than about what happened *then*.[14]

Meck's case shows that our brain determines considerably our characters and our inclinations, but also exposes the extent to which a normally functioning memory fills in gaps and alters memories so that we can experience ourselves as coherent. Meck is unable to edit her memories for a simple reason of not having any memories until 1988. Nonetheless, she feels an urge "to fit pieces together in an ever-changing life-size puzzle"[15] and "to present a narrative that feels real and whole,"[16] and attempting to do so, she has to rely on stories of others which brings to light two significant issues that often remain implicit in the autobiographies of 'healthy' individuals: the fact that identity is relational and memory, fallible.

Paul John Eakin, a distinguished critic of life writing, asserts that "autobiography promotes an illusion of self-determination: *I* write my story; *I* say who I am; *I* create my self" and he adds that "[t]he myth of the autonomy dies hard, and autobiography criticism has not yet fully addressed the extent to which the self is defined by – and lives in terms of – its relations with others."[17] In Meck's memoir this statement takes on a whole new meaning. Meck's life story, as she nicely puts it, "is stitched together from other people's memories,"[18] and her memoir is made up of reminiscences of her relatives and friends. Many of her sentences begin with: "Jim says," "Jim remembers," "Mom thinks" or "my mother recalls." On the one hand, Meck's reliance on others exposes the myth of the independent *I* in blatant ways; on the other, it shows dreadful repercussions to the sense of self be-

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[13] Daniel Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), p. 3.

[14] Ibid., p. 5. Emphasis in original.

[15] Meck, *I Forgot to Remember*, p. 3.

[16] Ibid., p. 5.

[17] Paul J. Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 43.

[18] Meck, *I Forgot to Remember*, p. 5.

cause, as she rightly notes, "there are limits to what one person can really know of another."[19] It turns out that different people provide her with different versions of her life experiences. Meck explains:

> Because I depend solely on the stories of others to fill in decades of living, anecdotes about who I was, what I did, and how I lived, I have found that my life story varies depending to whom I talk to. And a lot of the time, accounts of a certain event don't just differ but totally contradict each other.[20]

She gives us examples of these conflicting stories. For instance, reconstructing the accident and trying to determine whether she was conscious or not, she splits the story into two versions. One told by her husband who claims that he does not remember her saying anything after she was hit by a fan; another by her friend Pam who claims to remember Su speaking to the paramedics.[21] A similar discrepancy appears when she narrates the moment when her husband Jim shared the news of her accident with her family. Jim recalls telling Su's mother that Su was in a very serious condition, but Su's mother does not remember him using "such dire language."[22]

Stephen Spender suggests that every life writer confronts two lives: one is the life that others observe – a social, historical person, another is "the self felt from the inside that the writer can never get 'outside of.'"[23] To further quote Spender: "We are seen from the outside by our neighbors; but we remain always at the back of our eyes and our senses, situated in our bodies, like a driver in the front seat of a car seeing other cars coming toward him."[24] Su Meck's case demonstrates consequences of no longer being 'a driver in the front seat' and relying on others to tell our story for us. Sidonie Smith uses Spender's metaphor to distinguish between biographers and autobiographers:

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[19] Ibid., p. 10.

[20] Ibid., p. 2.

[21] Ibid., p. 21.

[22] Ibid., p. 30. Meck's memoir exposes the sad consequences of not only depending on others for memories of our life, but also depending on others in more general sense. In the course of her story, Meck reveals the abuse she suffered at the hands of her husband who frequently insulted her and cheated on her. This aspect merits a further study, which is beyond the scope of this article.

[23] Spender qtd. in Sidonie Smith *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 3.

[24] Ibid., p. 5. This comment becomes even more relevant when we take into consideration what neurologists say about the fact that our brain accesses reality through our bodies. In the words of Antonio Damasio: "It is certainly true that the mind learns of the outside world via the brain, but it is equally true that the brain can be informed only via the body" (91).

> The biographer," she says, "can circle the car with the driver in it to record the history, character, and motivations of the driver, the traffic, the vehicle, and the facts of transportation. But only the life narrator knows the experience of traffic rushing toward her and makes an interpretation of that situation, that is, writes her subjectivity.[25]

Meck's memoir challenges this sharp division for she is devoid of any memories from before the accident and the ones following it are blurred. She depends on evidence that is usually available to biographers such as documents, medical records, photographs, and interviews with her family members and friends, and these are used not to trigger her memory but to construct her story. Meck assembles these pieces of information together to create a coherent narrative. Although it is a memoir, we do not get Meck's subjective reminiscences and impressions about her past. Instead we read descriptions of her early years provided by others, interspersed with Meck's speculations about what was likely to happen.

In reconstructing her story, Meck often stresses that the events she recounts from before the accident are not the actual events but their possible versions. Her memoir is not assertive but full of doubts, questions, and gaps. She draws attention to the unreliability of her narrative, particularly in the introductory part. Instead of writing "we made love," "we talked," she says "we may have … made love," "we may have talked," or uses phrases like "probably," "it is highly unlikely," thus alerting us to the hypothetical nature of her writing and conjectural character of the past she narrates. She also poses a lot of questions and leaves many of them unanswered, like in the following fragment describing the circumstances of her release from a hospital: "Did I know who I was?… Did I know Jim, Benjamin and Patrick [her husband and two sons]? Did I understand *husband? Marriage? Son? Brother? Mother? Father?*[26] Finally, she deduces how things might have unfolded on the basis of what she knows about her habits. For example, reconstructing the day of the accident, she relates that it was Sunday and she lists things that she customarily does on a typical Sunday, like going to church.[27]

Meck might be grasping here instinctively the nature of our memory as in reconstructing our stories we depend on the amalgam of similar events. "A memory," McClelland says, "does not exist in its own separate locations – its residue in the brain is distributed over many synaptic connec-

[25] Ibid. p. 5.

[26] Meck, *I Forgot to Remember*, p. 69.

[27] Despite all these efforts to communicate her unusual circumstances, Meck creates a rather typical life narrative, by which I mean a linear and chronological story that is very easy to read. Apart from the mentioned examples, Meck does not use any techniques that would somehow make the form of her memoir parallel the experiences she had.

tions, whose values have also been shaped by many other experiences."[28] Daniel Schacter illustrates this using an example of recurring events such as Thanksgiving dinners. He explains that when people recall their most recent Thanksgiving dinner, they can usually remember the overall outline of the event but rarely remember the details such as the clothes the people wore or the conversations they had. He claims that when talking about Thanksgiving we rely on the general knowledge of all the previous feasts, while the particulars of a specific occasion fade due to transience – another of the seven sins of memory listed by Schacter – which "involves a gradual switch from reproductive and specific recollections to reconstructive and more general descriptions."[29] Therefore Meck's memoir brings to light what every autobiographer faces, namely, the fragility of memory and its biased nature, although not every writer is willing to acknowledge it. In fact, many autobiographers, especially those who wrote before the twentieth century, endeavoured to convince us about the unfailing powers of their memory. As Diane Bjorklund explains, many "nineteenth-century autobiographers viewed the act of remembrance as a simple matter of 'searching the storehouse of memory for those facts then laid up in it for future use.'"[30] This and similar declarations were undoubtedly supposed to confirm the veracity and trustworthiness of the authors' stories. Such a simple understanding of memory, though already questioned in the nineteenth century, and sometimes even earlier, was dismantled in the twentieth-century.[31] The neuroscientific research, combined with psychology studies, modernist literature, and poststructuralist theories, has challenged many certainties, including that of infallible memory.

Nowadays, most scholars, whether in humanities or sciences, agree on the transient, biased and constructive quality of our memory. James L. McClelland says that memory researchers have been aware of the constructive nature of memory since the publication of Bartlett's *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* in 1932.[32] Bartlett told people folktales from foreign countries and then asked them to recount them. He noticed that the related stories were not only shorter but also altered so

[28] James L. McClelland, "Memory as a Constructive Process: The Parallel Distributed Processing Approach," in *The Memory Process: Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives*, eds. Suzanne Nalbantian, Paul M. Matthews, and James L. McClelland (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2011), p. 139.

[29] Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, p. 16

[30] Thomas 1840, p. 252 qtd. in Diane Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 28.

[31] Of course, there are many notable people prior to the twentieth century who exhibited great self-reflexivity about the nature of remembering – Rousseau or Henry James being just two of them.

[32] McClelland, "Memory as a Constructive Process," p. 129.

that they fit Western narratives. He concluded that "[r]emembering is not the re-excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of organized past reactions or experience."[33] This view is upheld by many contemporary theorists, like Antonio Damasio, a renowned neuroscientist who, in his book *Self Comes to Mind* from 2012, draws a similar conclusion to the one made by Bartlett eighty years earlier. Damasio says:

> Our memories of certain objects are governed by our past knowledge of comparable objects or of situations similar to the one we are experiencing. Our memories are prejudiced [...] by our past history and beliefs. Perfectly faithful memory is a myth, applicable only to trivial objects. The notion that the brain ever holds anything like an isolated "memory of the object" seems untenable.[34]

Meck not only describes the complete loss of her own memory but also quotes striking cases of misremembering by others. She says, for instance, that until recently she assigned a wrong date to her accident because her husband had misremembered it, and for many years she believed that the accident had taken place on a February afternoon in 1988, most likely a weekday, but when she inspected her medical records it turned out that the accident had occurred on 22 May, a Sunday. She comments: "Isn't it sad, not knowing the precise moment when your life changed forever?"[35] The fact that Meck's husband, allegedly one of the closest people in her life, does not remember such a significant date reveals the erosions of our memories but also acts as a warning to those who attempt to recount the stories of others. There is an increasing number of memoirs written about people who depend on others to tell their story – such as disabled, illiterate, or terminally ill people.[36] Even if authors of such stories are relatives and act in good faith, they need to bear in mind the transient, biased, and also egocentric nature of their own memories.

The egocentric bias sifts memories through the subjective lenses of our experience. This psychological assumption is noticed by Jonathan Franzen, the novelist and the author of the essay "My Father's Brain," who, attempting to tell the story of his father suffering from Alzheimer's, observes: "My

[33] Frederic Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 132.

[34] Antonio Damasio, *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain* (London: Vintage, 2012), p. 133.

[35] Meck, *I Forgot to Remember*, p. 8.

[36] For details see: Thomas Couser, *Vulnerbale Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing*.

memories of the years of my father's initial decline are vividly about things other than him. Indeed, I'm somewhat appalled by how large I loom in my own memories."[37] Therefore we may ask how much Su Meck we get in the accounts of others. As Schacter notes: "The self's preeminent role in encoding and retrieval, combined with powerful tendency for people to view themselves positively, creates fertile ground for memory biases that allow people to remember past experiences in a self-enhancing light."[38]

Apart from the stories of others, Meck also has official documents at her disposal. Yet even they do not seem to give her access to the truth. Meck mentions that she examined her medical records "hoping, for those records to somehow hold *the key* that would give me answers and fill in the gaps,"[39] but the official documents are full of contradictory or wrong information. For instance, her medical records say she was struck on the left temple, while she was hit on the right side. She is also surprised to discover that she was discharged a day after it had been observed that she had impaired memory and communication and dysfunctional mobility. Her records therefore leave her with more questions than answers, and she does not find in them the Su she is looking for.

Piecing her story together and establishing herself as its subject, Meck relies on medical theories to understand better the nature of memory and to explain what she has gone through. In this respect, her memoir inscribes itself in the tradition of pathographies – narratives devoted to the experience of illness – which very often include the medical findings to either contest them or use them for self-understanding. Meck's memoir was co-authored with Daniel de Visé, who, according to the preface, was responsible for investigating the theories of memory and amnesia and explaining them to Meck.

As a result, the memoir makes frequent use of medical and psychological models pertaining to the process of remembering and forgetting. Meck mentions various parts of the brain that are usually associated with making and retrieving memories. She comments on different forms of amnesia: retrograde amnesia – the inability to remember things from before an incident – and anterograde amnesia – the inability to form new memories, and she states that she has suffered from both conditions. She also describes the division of memories into episodic and semantic. Episodic memories are memories about our personal experiences; semantic memories are facts

[37] Jonathan Franzen, "My Father's Brain: What Alzheimer's Take Away" (*The New Yorker*. September, 10, 2001), p. 2.

[38] Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, p. 151.

[39] Meck, *I Forgot to Remember*, p. 25.

that we learn at school, like that Paris is the capital of France. Meck rightly notes that her "memories of childhood are semantic memories that have been told to [her]"[40] – they are learned rather than experienced, and they are provided by other people. And while sometimes entire pages are devoted to guiding us through the intricacies of medical theories, Meck also incorporates them in a more implicit way, weaving them into her narrative, like in the following fragment: "When people remember stuff, it's usually the remarkable or shocking things, and the first part of that day was utterly unremarkable."[41] She refers here to a theory – widely accepted in the neuroscientific and psychological community – that emotional arousal contributes to memory consolidation and that people are more likely to remember events about which they felt strongly.[42]

However, despite the fact that Meck understating is informed by recent findings in neuroscience and cognitive psychology, her memoir also criticises the medical establishment. Meck mentions that her case was puzzling to medical practitioners because the scans of her brain did not show any visible damage, and some physicians insisted that her amnesia had to be psychological. On the one hand, her memoir gives her a chance to deal with the frustration of not being believed and treated seriously; on the other, it allows her to validate her story and to share it with those who might have similar experiences – the common goals of many pathographies.

To conclude, there are many reasons to question the idea that memory is important to our sense of self, although this notion is deeply ingrained in our culture. As Vidal explains, the view that memory is a shorthand for identity derives from John Lock, who, in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, insisted that personal identity requires the continuity of memory and consciousness.[43] However, we should not overemphasise the role of memory in the formation of identity, as it can have tragic consequences especially nowadays, in the era of aging community, with more and more people suffering from senile dementia or Alzheimer's. Putting our memory on a par with our identity, we are one step from saying that those who are devoid of memory are devoid of selfhood. Su Meck's memoir demonstrates that even though she does not have any memories of her past life and had to reacquire many basic skills, she was able to function, although often ineptly, in a society. So although our autobiographical self is incredibly significant, as it gives us a sense of identity and continuity, it

[40] Ibid., pp. 54–55.
[41] Ibid., p. 8
[42] See for example chapters by Robert Stickgold or Fernando Vidal in *The Memory Process*.
[43] Vidal Fernando "Memory, Movies, and the Brain", p. 399.

is not the only mode of existence available to human beings. Su Meck's memoir serves as a cautionary tale. It should remind life narrators that their memory is transient and biased; it should sensitize biographers to the fact that even documents and official records are not reliable sources of knowledge; it should make medical professionals aware of the fact that we cannot be reduced to our brains and that every patient needs to be treated in an individual way.

Anita Jarczok

Being her own biographer – Su Meck's memoir *I Forgot to Remember* and the fallibility of memory from the perspective of neuroscience and cognitive psychology

Su Meck's memoir relates her loss of memory as a result of the brain injury that she suffered when a kitchen fan fell on her head. Meck never recovered her memories from before the incident, and for some time after it she was also unable to form any new memories. In this dramatic account of the loss of memory, Meck tries to understand her experiences and to rebuild her sense of self. I describe the dire consequences of such a total memory failure, especially to our sense of self. However, I also argue that this memoir is about the fallibility of memory in general, not only in such an extreme case as the brain injury. Trying to reconstruct her story, Meck discovers that others have either incomplete or conflicting stories to tell her. I *Forgot to Remember* brings the transient and biased nature of our own memories into sharp focus. However, Meck's narrative not only exposes the limitation of our memory and highlights its importance to our sense of self but also brings to light the fluid boundaries of various life writing genres and reveals the pitfalls of placing too much emphasis on memory in relation to self.

Keywords: memory, memoir, identity

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The Representation of Memory and Thinking in *The Unfortunates* by B. S. Johnson

People search for different ways of tackling trauma, loss and grief. Psychologists say that when somebody experiences the death of a friend or a relative, an accident, a catastrophe or any other trauma, they have a tendency to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is described in the tenth version of *The International Classification of Diseases* (ICD-10) as "a delayed or protracted response to a stressful event or situation (of either brief or long duration) of an exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which is likely to cause pervasive distress in almost anyone."[1] According to the classification, a person with PTSD is likely to relive the trauma through "flashbacks" (referred to as "intrusive memories") and nightmares. A sufferer might often feel anxious, depressed and detached from other people. Avoidance of activities and situations associated with the traumatic event is typical.[2]

However terrible the symptoms may seem, psychologists have found out that PTSD can be followed by post-traumatic growth (PTG). Merve Yilmaz and Ayten Zara describe this as being "positive changes in the aftermath of trauma."[3] PTG takes place when a person is happy about relationships,

[1] *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems,* 10th ed., s. v. "post-traumatic stress disorder," n.p.

[2] Ibid., n.p.

[3] Merve Yilmaz and Ayten Zar, "Traumatic loss and post-traumatic growth: the effect of traumatic loss related factors on posttraumatic growth," *Anatolian Journal of Psychiatry,* Vol. 17, No. 1 (2016), pp. 5–11.

starts to feel their personal strength and experiences "an evolved philosophy of life such as gaining new spiritual insights.[4]" Cognitive schemas start to be restructured. Assumptions about the world, values, other people and oneself, which have been damaged by the trauma, are redefined and the outlook on life takes on a new shape.[5]

One of the ways to effectuate post-traumatic growth is through writing down one's experiences. As Kalí Tal states, "[t]he writings of trauma survivors comprise a distinct 'literature of trauma.'"[6] According to the scholar, some of the most important goals of this type of writing are "the reconstruction and recuperation of the traumatic experience" as well as creating space for communication between those who have suffered and other people.[7] Attempts to capture tragedies on paper and share stark memories have become more and more popular. Leigh Gilmore reports that "[i]n 1996, a *New York Times Magazine* special issue announced nothing less than the 'triumph' of literary memoir and linked its ascendancy to the therapy-driven 'culture of confession' with which it was a perfect fit."[8]

In the "Introduction" to his discussion of examples of autobiographies, Gilmore expresses hope for a marriage between "scientific and psychoanalytic research on trauma," whose aim is to "provide an improving understanding of helping people to heal," with "studies of self-representation," which might add new perspectives to the discussion about getting over PTSD.[9] This suggests that psychological research could benefit from taking into account literary representations of trauma, as well as implies that semi-fictional or fictional narratives indeed enable writers to gain an insight into a human's inner life. Conversely, the reading of literary fiction through the prism of psychology is justified because, as Paul Ricoeur notes:

> [N]o mimetic art has gone as far in the representation of thoughts, feelings, and discourse as has the novel. And it is the immense diversity and the seemingly unlimited flexibility of its means that have made the novel the privileged instrument for the investigation of the human psyche [...][10]

[4] Ibid., p. 6.

[5] Ibid., p. 6.

[6] Kalí Tal, "Worlds of Hurt. Reading the Literatures of Trauma," *Worlds of Hurt. Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 17.

[7] Ibid., p. 17.

[8] Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 1–2.

[9] Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*, p. 15.

[10] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 89.

Trauma and grief are indeed frequently encountered themes in creative writing to the extent that works drawing on such dramatic experience form separate literary categories. Examples include Holocaust literature, and the so-called post-9/11 novel.[11]

In this paper, I would like to focus on one of numerous literary attempts to share traumatic experience, namely *The Unfortunates* by B. S. Johnson, published in 1969.[12] It is a semi-autobiographical account of the author's experiences after his friend, Tony, died of cancer. The main character, who is also the narrator, comes to Nottingham to see a football match and write a report about it. While walking around the city, he is struck by numerous recollections, most of which are associated with the places in the city he had visited with Tony.

The novel was designed as a book-in-a-box. It consists of twenty-seven separate sections. The first and the last ones are marked, while the remaining twenty-five can be read in random order, according to readers' preferences or intuition. That is why the novel is an example of a multimodal work. Its Polish translation has been also included in the Liberature series.[13]

My main goal is to analyse how post-traumatic memory and the stream of consciousness are presented in *The Unfortunates*. This depiction of the mental processes is of particular interest to me since Johnson was a representative of the British post-war avant-garde, which attempted to develop a new language to reflect accurately on these kind of mental processes. As Johnson states in the "Introduction" to his collection of short prose *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?*, one of the tasks of a writer is to focus on "the explication of thought" and presenting "the inside of his own skull."[14] I also pay attention to the form of *The Unfortunates* and I analyse it using some psychological data concerning memory metaphors. This might help me approach the differences between

[11] For the former see Kalí Tal, p. 1–59. For the latter see Ewa Kowal, *The "Image-Event" in the Early Post-9/11 Novel: Literary Representations of Terror After September 11, 2001* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2012),

[12] Bryan Stanley Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (London: Picador, 1999). There is a visible revival of scholarship concerning this author in contemporary academic writing thanks to Glyn White, Julia Jordan, Martin Ryle and Krystyna Stamirowska, among others.

[13] The concept of liberature was defined by Zenon Fajfer and Katarzyna Bazarnik. The series is published by Korporacja Ha!art in Kraków and collects works whose form is united with the content in a way that it foregrounds the message expressed in the text and conveys additional senses. The form is carefully designed by the author, but despite the importance of the space of the book, it is always the text that plays the most important role in the whole work. Liberatic books are published in multiple copies and are available for readers also in libraries. See Zenon Fajfer, *Literature or Total Literature. Collected Essays 1999-2009* (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010) and Katarzyna Bazarnik, *Literature, A Book-bound Genre* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2016).

[14] B. S. Johnson, "Introduction," in: *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 12.

the psychological and literary means of handling loss and see if the fusion of the two scientific fields suggested by Gilmore is successful in the case of Johnson's novel.

The state of mind

It is not surprising that the circumstances in which the narrator of *The Unfortunates* finds himself evoke in him a negative attitude to life: though his thoughts do fluctuate, most of them are rather unpleasant. Some of them may be even described as depressing, e.g., "a trolley might come next, or a surprise, but no, I do not believe in that kind of miracle, or surprise, any longer, it is simply not, and does it matter."[15] Two phrases in this passage are worth noting. The first is "any longer," which suggests a division of time into periods. There must have been some "before" followed by an important event after which everything has changed. There must have been a period in the narrator's life when he used to believe in miracles, even in these simple and everyday coincidences. Unfortunately, it is over and there is no hope for it coming back. The liminal event was, obviously, Tony's death. The juxtaposition of the past and the present is a key theme in the novel, which I discuss further in "Past or present?" subchapter.

The second phrase is "and does it matter." It is like a refrain throughout the whole novel, as it is repeated many times in different chapters. What seems striking about this phrase is that it suggests the destruction of the narrator's value system and shows that he is in a depressive mood. To his mind, nothing seems to make sense, so he does not care about the world that surrounds him. He tends to find his existence pointless and confirms this nihilistic assumption with the constant repetition of "and does it matter." He has structured a vicious circle of negative thoughts and is unable to escape them.

Andrew Edward Paul Mitchell mentions "a vicious circle" in the context of mood congruent memory. Following R. M. Wenzlaff, D. M. Wegner and D. W. Roper,[16] he writes that "[m]ood congruent recall suggests that a person experiencing a transitory negative mood state can enter into a vicious circle, where their negative mood state can prime negative memories, which in turn triggers a negative affective state."[17] As presented in the above-quoted

[15] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*Time! It's after two!)*, p. 3.

[16] A. E. P. Mitchell refers to their article "Depression and mental control: The resurgence of unwanted negative thoughts," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 55 (1988), pp. 882-892.

[17] A. E. P. Mitchell, "Autobiographical Memory Response to a Negative Mood in Those With/Without History of Depression," *Studia Psychologica*, Vol. 57 (2015), p. 230.

passage, something similar happens to the narrator in *The Unfortunates*. He keeps reflecting about the trauma, which seems to make him even more depressed.

We can see a connection between this state of mind and post-traumatic stress disorder, which may encourage us to wonder if there is any chance for the narrator to experience post-traumatic growth as a consequence of his negative mood. He does not seem to start to appreciate his relationships or feel personal strength, but since the places he visits force him to recollect various situations, he definitely has an opportunity to think many issues over. Krystyna Stamirowska states that "the narrative itself […] is largely an attempt to understand."[18] Indeed during the day spent in Nottingham, the narrator can confront his situation again and reflect on life, death, trauma, his friend as well as his present state. He sometimes finds it difficult to make up his mind and faces many contradictions, but the attempt to make sense of the tragic event and his present state may allow him to restructure his outlook on life. In the following passage, I take a closer look at the stream of consciousness as played out in the novel and I try to observe how the narrator's memory functions in the traumatic state following his friend's death.

Clear or blurred?

One of the oppositions the narrator faces refers to the nature of his recollections. He describes plenty of them, and therefore, it is possible to analyse not only the situations he remembers, but also the shape and peculiar features of the memories as well as his difficulties with recollection. Undeniably, some memories described by him are full of details. For example, the one about arriving late at Tony's funeral. The narrator recollects how he and his wife got to the place where the ceremony was to be held and presents the fairly extensive complications they had on their way. He mentions the people who turned up, examines their expressions and appearance to deduce what they must have felt:

> [B]ut just as we arrived, they were coming out, the party, his mother I see still, tears, one foot on the upper step, the other one step down, caught, I see her as if in a still, held there, fixed. Friends, […] and June, already looking alone, already looking bereaved, lost, her face still showing all the pain she had carried…[19]

[18] Krystyna Stamirowska, *B. S. Johnson's novels: a paradigm of truth* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2006), p. 116.

[19] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*We were late for the funeral*), p. 1.

The recollection appears to be like a photo in his mind because he uses many words connected with vision: "see," "looking," "showing," "a still." The repetition of the first two aforementioned words emphasises that they are not chosen by accident. The reader may have an impression that the event is "relived" in the narrator's memory because the people seem frozen; they are "held up" as if somebody was looking at a photograph and describing a specific, concrete scene. Narration in this excerpt matches these assumptions. There is a set of enumerated and juxtaposed images that might resemble shots described by a film director. In such a situation, elaboration is not crucial. Pointing out the details of the scene is sufficient. As a result, stream of consciousness proves to be a helpful device to depict the vividness of the recollections. The set of enumerated elements that is a composition of nouns, phrases and sentences is rather incoherent from the syntactical point of view, but it enables the reader to share the picture of the recollection with the narrator after only having read a couple of lines. We may speak of acceleration here, which, according to Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, occurs when "the time of narration is shorter than story time."[20] They add that such a way of constructing narration speeds up the action. In Johnson's novel, it also seems to make the recollection even more emotional.

Yet, it is clear that the narrator is not really looking at a photograph. He gives many details, but there are also some blanks in the recollection: "Someone gave us a lift back to the house, I forget who, but it was packed, three or four of us in the back, the car, and as we went away up the hill […]."[21] We note that some details have been forgotten by the narrator and some information is uncertain, for example, the number of passengers sitting at the back. This uncertainty is foregrounded by the cataphoric reference. We do not know what is packed until we reach the phrase "the car." Such a reference does not follow the pattern of cause and effect and, therefore, might be difficult to comprehend after the first reading. However, it appears to be a good way of presenting how details of the recollection flow within inner speech. It is also connected with vividness: the narrator does not need any order that would govern the mentioned elements because he sees the whole scene clearly in his mind and describes it to himself. That is why the pronoun "it" can appear before the corresponding noun.

A psychologist would probably categorise this recollection as a "flashbulb" on the account of its subjective importance and emotions that play a major role in its description. With reference to research carried out

[20] Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck, *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), p. 61.

[21] Ibid., p. 1

by Brown and Kulik and published in 1977,[22] Amanda Krahal and Adriel Boals describe such memories as "highly vivid and long-lasting memories for events that are emotionally significant and personally important."[23] They add that "the important issue in flashbulb memory is not the event itself, but rather the subjective elements and personal context of the news."[24] Although such recollections usually refer to public events, such as e.g., the death of a famous person or a natural catastrophe, they may also form a part of the autobiographical memory. Krahal and Boals note that flashbulb memories are likely to contain data about the source of the information, the people who accompanied the person during the event or when hearing the news, their appearance (e.g., the clothes they were wearing) and emotions. They are usually more vivid than other recollections and a person is more convinced that they are true in comparison to "every day memories."[25]

The definition of the flashbulb memories corresponds to the description of the funeral from *The Unfortunates.* A lot of details connected to emotions, people and their clothing are included in this recollection, which makes it vivid and clear. Personal importance is obvious in this case since Tony's funeral can be treated as a liminal event for the narrator. The fact that the section *We were late for the funeral,* which is very short, is wholly devoted to this particular image suggests that the event is singled out from other remembered situations. This testifies to the significance of the analysed recollection.

Nevertheless, not all recollections are as detailed as the one depicting Tony's funeral. There are several passages in the novel in which the narrator seems to stutter or asks himself questions in order to complete the image of a particular memory. Despite the effort, he is not always able to retrieve all the information. For example, when he reminds himself of his trip to Brighton, he wonders whether Tony read the typescript he had sent him or not:

> And when I had finished it, there was another occasion, another trip to Brighton, to his parents' home, I had sent the typescript to him the previous week, or some days previously, had asked him to read it as a whole before we came, Ginnie came with me, for the day, and he had, but had he? Forget what he said about the thing, but know I was disappointed…[26]

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[22] Roger Brown and James Kulik, "Flashbulb memories," *Cognition*, Vol. 5 (1977), p. 79.

[23] Amanda Krahal and Adriel Boals, "Why so negative? Positive flashbulb memories for a personal event," *Memory*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2014), p. 442.

[24] Ibid., p. 442.

[25] Krahal and Boals, "Why so negative?", p. 442.

[26] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*Sometime that summer*), p. 3.

The narrator hesitates and the question he asks remains unanswered. He cannot remember if Tony read the typescript nor what he said about it. What has stayed in his mind is his disappointment. This demonstrates the importance of emotions in the process of recalling. The narrator may not remember facts, but he can go back to the feelings the situation evoked in him.

The narrator relies on emotions while reconstructing events in his memory, but he also tries to find other solutions to overcome the weaknesses of his memory. When he describes the wildlife at Newstead Abbey, for instance, he uses his knowledge about the world: "And geese, of special sorts, as I remember, other waterfowl, and peacocks? Were there peacocks? They would have fitted, peacocks, but I do not think I can remember there being any."[27] He asks himself questions again, but this time he is able to give an answer. The expression: "They would have fitted, peacocks" might refer to the concept of schemas, which Richard Gerrig defines as "conceptual frameworks, or clusters of knowledge, regarding objects, people, and situations."[28] He writes that "schemas are 'knowledge packages' that encode complex generalizations about your experience of the structure of the environment."[29] When the narrator searches for a missing detail of his memories, he refers to his experience and wonders what would match the given situation or the image he tries to recall. It does not mean that the object he thinks about is the right one, just as in the example above in which peacocks are evoked as a part of the schema and he becomes aware that he did not actually see them.

The narrator seems to be aware of the fact that schemas are quite inflexible and offer only an overall picture of a typical situation or place, which means he cannot completely rely on the "frameworks" while recalling a specific event. When he describes the place he is laid up at during his illness, he states: "It must have been at the front of the house, overlooking the road, rather than at the back, overlooking the valley. Not must have been, for that fits in, but I remember it was in fact the front, facing the front."[30] He distinguishes what he remembers from what he knows, thus making the report more convincing.

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[27] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*Again the house*), pp. 4-5.
[28] Richard J. Gerrig, *Psychology and Life*, 20th ed., (Boston: Pearson Education, 2013), p. 194.
[29] Ibid., p. 194.
[30] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*The estate*), p. 6.

Past or present?

Another opposition discussed by the narrator concerns the temporal aspects of the novel. The time of narration is clearly shorter than the narrated time.[31] The story from the past which is devoted to the narrator's relationship with Tony and the experience they shared is over, and, apparently, independent from the present events, namely, the journey and writing of the report. When the narrator arrives at the railway station, he treats the city as another insignificant place he has to visit to make a living. Jonathan Coe, in the "Introduction" to the novel, mentions Johnson's commentary on his job: "When you are going away to report soccer in a different city each Saturday you get the mechanics of travelling and finding your way about in a strange place to an almost automatic state."[32] However, when the narrator starts to recognise different places in the city, he realises that this visit is going to be memorable and meaningful. "The two potential chronological orders [...] the one reconstructing the history of the friendship between the narrator and Tony, and the other giving an account of the day the narrator spent in the city,"[33] as Katarzyna Bazarnik describes it, start to mingle and appear to be interconnected.

The confusion caused by the narrator's inability to settle in a specified time influences the process of recalling. The following passage illustrates there are moments when he has to correct himself: "That was the first time, that must have been the first time, yes, hitching there, here, that is, along the Great North Road."[34] The narrator sees the place where the past event occurred and therefore, can no longer call it "there." Objectively, the road remains the same for many years, but, for him, it transfers from the past to the present and becomes "here." A part of the recollection can be experienced again and other parts are going to follow, eventually, letting Tony be brought back to life in the narrator's mind. Julia Jordan notices this process and writes that:

> Johnson's sentences are the shortest sentences he can sentence himself to write, and yet the loose chapters proclaim potentially infinite continuity in their cyclical, shuffleable perpetuity – this has happened and this will happen again. The curious sense both of absolute discontinuity and a kind

[31] According to Luc Herman and Bert Vervaeck, the time of narration is "the time the narrative devotes to an event," while narrated time features "the duration of events" (*Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, p. 63).

[32] Jonathan Coe, "Introduction," in: Johnson, *The Unfortunates*, p. viii.

[33] Katarzyna Bazarnik, "Chronotope in Liberature," in: *James Joyce and After. Writer and Time*, eds. Katarzyna Bazarnik and Bożena Kucała (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), p. 125.

[34] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*That was the first time*), p. 1.

> of protensive ongoingness are brought about by the novel's aleatory method and its semantic and syntactic form.[35]

She suggests a new dimension that could be added to the opposition between the past and the present is eternity. The narrator cannot experience the events from the past again, but since he can endlessly recollect them in his mind, perhaps there is no need for judging whether they belong to the past or the present. This point of view presents the process of recalling as independent from time. Despite this fact, the narrator does not give up marking temporal references in his discourse. For instance, when he reminds himself of his relationship with his ex-girlfriend, Wendy, he says:

> I joined in, as I remember, joined in with her, to participate, rather than with the dog, to show that I was spirited, gamey, too, would not be left out, would make her share everything of hers as I made her share everything of mine. That was the way I wanted it. That was the way I went out to get it. And where I went wrong. It does not matter, now. At tea, genteel sandwiches with no crusts but made with margarine and salty luncheon meat.[36]

The division between the past and the present is underlined by the change of grammatical tense from past simple to present simple as well as by the adjunct "now." Interestingly, the sentences become shorter as if the excitement connected with recalling was giving way to a bitter realisation of the transience and the impermanence of relationships. The anaphora "[t]hat was," combined with the closing sentence: "[i]t does not matter, now," and the long space, might be associated with disappointment, resignation or irritation. The passage illustrates the narrator's development as it shows that his life, goals and desires undergo constant changes. This assumption corresponds with Johnson's belief that "[c]hange is a condition of life."[37]

The discussed opposition tells us a lot about the narrator, his personality and life situation, but it may also be applied to the author, who balances between the past and the present when he refers to literary tradition and at the same time searches for new ways of expression and invents his own innovative concepts. The idea of reporting how a character spends a day in a city can be traced back to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, while the focus on inner life and mental processes might be also associated with the novels of Virginia

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[35] Julia Jordan, "'For recuperation': elegy, form, and the aleatory in B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 28, No.5 (2014), p. 749.

[36] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*Up there, yes, the high mast*), p. 11.

[37] Johnson, "Introduction," p. 17.

Woolf, her philosophy and attitude to writing. As she explains in her essay "Modern Fiction," the task of a novelist is to "[e]xamine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day"[38] and to "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall."[39] Johnson's novel seems to be a realization of these premises to a great extent, only that the Saturday it depicts is unexpectedly affected by the trauma and, hence, turns out to be far from "ordinary" in the course of action. The narrator arrives in Nottingham to write one of his numerous football reports, but comes back after experiencing a confrontation with his life and his past. Additionally, *The Unfortunates* seem to echo "The Waste Land" by T. S. Eliot, in which the speaker also reflects on death and presents a similar depressing attitude to life:

> He who was living is now dead
> We who were living are now dying
> With a little patience.[40]

The references to modernism in Johnson's novel are accompanied by innovations like the book-in-a-box form, which works as a means of conveying "the randomness of the material"[41] and as a solution to the struggle with finding a proper way to show the characteristics of memories in the human mind. The author was aware of the fact that the form may not be perfect, but he believed it "was nearer; and even if it was only marginally nearer, then it was still a better solution to the problem of conveying the mind's randomness than the imposed order of a bound book."[42]

In *The Unfortunates*, the past and the present are inseparable. The opposition between the two temporal layers of experience illustrates features of the narrator's discourse as well as his development, but can also be analysed in a broader sense as an illustration of Johnson's dialogue with literary history. While studying the relation between memories connected with Tony and the narrator's journey to Nottingham, we can also arrive at a conclusion that chronology is restricted in the novel. The narrator is aware of the fact that time passes, so some events belong to the past and cannot be changed. He knows he will never get another chance to meet his friend. However, when he attempts to analyse the past in more detail, i.e. to put specific events in chronological order, he fails. He cannot explain why

[38] Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," in: *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, Vol. 4 (1925 to 1928), ed. Andrew McNeille (London: The Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 160.

[39] Ibid., p. 161.

[40] Thomas S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Harvest Book, Harcourt: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1962), p. 42.

[41] Johnson, "Introduction," p. 25.

[42] Ibid., p. 26.

particular situations, e.g., meetings, trips, and evenings spent in pubs, are shuffled in his memory. Even if he makes an effort, he still recollects them in a random order.

The form

When analysing the content of the novel, we can observe some characteristics of the narrator's memories and thoughts. Some of them are vivid and full of details, while others are blurred and prone to the process of forgetting. By means of memory, the past is mingled with the present. The analysis presented above demonstrates that, although the narrator might try to construct a new vision of the world and himself by creating oppositions, it is conjunction that seems to be a better tool. He makes an attempt to comprehend his situation after the traumatic event, but he does not opt for any one particular side of the oppositions.

As noted above, all these reflections are encoded in the book-in-the-box, which is yet another tool to render and understand the complexity of the narrator's mental processes. Jonathan Coe, in the essay "A Life in Seven Novels," assumes that "[c]ertainly there is nothing very sophisticated about Johnson's central conceit: randomly ordered pages as a tangible metaphor for the random interplay of memories and impressions in the human mind."[43] It may be beneficial to investigate why the author chose such a form. Abandoning the traditional bound book is significant since Kathrine N. Hayles is concerned that "[t]o change the material artifact is to transform the context and circumstances for interacting with the words, which inevitably changes the meanings of the words as well."[44] Therefore, I will take a closer look at the novel as a memory metaphor and present it alongside other related concepts.

Metaphor

Henry L. Roediger argues that "it is a natural impulse, when confronted with a phenomenon that we do not understand, to try to relate it to things that we do understand or at least are familiar with."[45] In his view, that is the reason for creating numerous memory metaphors – to comprehend what it

[43] Jonathan Coe, "A Life in Seven Novels," in: *Like a Fiery Elephant: the Story of B. S. Johnson* (London: Picador, 2005), p. 22.

[44] Katherine N. Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 23–24.

[45] Henry L. Roediger, "Memory Metaphors in Cognitive Psychology," *Memory & Cognition*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1980), p. 231.

means to think and to remember. Roediger divides the representations of memory into two categories: spatial metaphors and alternative ones, which include non-spatial and abstract concepts; and delineates the historical development of them all. According to him, the whole discussion has its roots in Plato and Aristotle's suggestion that the mind resembles the wax tablet on which all stimuli are imprinted. Other and later analogies are a gramophone, the house imagined by William James, and Freudian rooms. A switchboard, a purse, a leaky bucket or a sieve, a junk box, and a bottle, preceded one of the currently most famous metaphors, which is a computer program. It is not possible to enumerate all of the ways in which mind has been conceptualised, but the ones that are definitely worth paying attention to are Broadbent's library, the dictionary suggested by Loftus, Landauer's garbage can, the organizational theory and the two networks: hierarchical and associative.[46]

Similarities between Johnson's and Landauer's representations of memory are worth noting. Although one of them is a writer and the other a psychologist, they both present memory as a three-dimensional space in which recollections are stored randomly: a box and a garbage can, respectively. Since this paper is concerned with Johnson's idea about mental processes, we should pay attention to his suggestion that it is space beyond one's mind that arranges memories: "The mind is confused, was it this visit, or another, the mind has *telescoped* time here, runs events *near to one another in place*, into one another in time."[47] It is the city the narrator walks around that determines the order of recalled events in a way that particular places remind him of particular moments he shared with Tony. What is more, while dealing with the organization of memories in the novel, we cannot ignore the role of the reader who decides about the sequence of the sections. As Katarzyna Bazarnik explains, "the reader actively shapes the time-space of the novel, sharing part of the responsibility for the appearance of the represented world with the author."[48] The choice of the material metaphor of the box is justified by the theme of the recollections. Chaos in the narrator's memories shows what a tough experience he has gone through.

Tangible

Roediger points out that most of the psychological representations of the mind are reflected in everyday language, "the ideas of the psycholo-

[46] Ibid., p. 233.
[47] Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (*Again the house*), pp. 5–6. Emphasis mine.
[48] Bazarnik, "Chronotope in Liberature," p. 126.

gists about memory are guided by the same metaphor that has dominated common thinking about the topic."[49] Expressions like "to hold an idea in mind," "an idea is in the back of our minds," or "an idea is in the dark corner of our minds," serve as proofs of Roediger's statement.[50] We can imagine a container with "something" inside – an idea or a memory in this case. We often treat them as objects located in space when we speak about viewing an issue from various perspectives. We also describe our mental activities as searching, finding and arranging. These expressions show that the mind is a kind of space and its products (thoughts and memories) are perceived as objects.

Similarly, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe memory through ontological metaphors, i.e., "ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances."[51] They describe the metaphor of the container as the one that uses the in-out orientation. They explain that "[o]nce we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorise them, group them, and quantify them."[52] This description corresponds with Roediger's assumption that, in confrontation with an unfamiliar phenomenon, we tend to relate it to a reality that is familiar to us.[53]

According to one of the main theses presented by Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors present in language are directly linked with our experience. We can observe this, for example, while analyzing orientational metaphors: we say that we are feeling up, because "the concept HAPPY is oriented UP."[54] If we refer this to *The Unfortunates*, we might notice that Jonathan Coe's expression "a tangible metaphor" is telling and precise. B. S. Johnson transfers the metaphor from the abstract to the physical level. The content starts to "reflexively interact with the inscription technologies."[55] Johnson lets the reader experience his novel by means of touch as well as the perception of depth and space. The box functions as a medium of additional senses, it becomes a physical image of chaos. We can try to understand the story by interpreting the words, but also by manipulating the material object. By referring to the experience depicted in language, Johnson attempts to present the processes of thinking and recalling so

[49] Roediger, „Memory Metaphors," p. 231.

[50] Ibid., p. 232.

[51] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we live by* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 26.

[52] Ibid., p. 26.

[53] Roediger, "Memory Metaphors," p. 231.

[54] Ibid., p. 15. Emphasis original.

[55] Hayles, *Writing Machines*, p. 24.

that they might be clearer to his readers. What is conveyed nonverbally can easily be comprehended and does not require translation because it refers to universal representations of the mind as space. Hence, it is not surprising that the Polish translation of *The Unfortunates* has been included in the Liberature series. The concept suggests that senses can be transferred primarily by means of a text, but also by the carefully chosen form of a book and that is exactly what happens in Johnson's novel: the author communicates with his readers on different levels, by means of words as well as non-verbal devices.

Although Coe's commentary about the novel as a memory metaphor is an accurate description of *The Unfortunates*, it seems to be unfavorable. According to the biographer, the idea of putting the unbound sections into a box is not original and innovative. It might be beneficial to call this sentence into question. Perhaps Johnson did not aim at creating a "sophisticated" work, but rather at creating a mimetic depiction of memory. One of the reasons why he manages to depict the workings of memory so successfully is that the devices he uses are connected with issues researched by psychologists. Johnson refers to human experience and mental processes, so readers can understand what the narrator goes through or remind themselves of their own experiences and even identify themselves with him. That is perhaps why the novel has a strong impact on its audience.

Conclusion

Roediger concludes that "cognitive psychologists attempt to account for relations between input and output events (stimuli and responses) by postulating a variety of mental mechanisms intervening between stimulus and response. Often, these explanations are based on some sort of correspondence metaphor."[56] A metaphorical model of mental processes is useful for psychologists when it can let them predict human behavior as a response to a stimulus and help them carry out experiments. The analysis of Johnson's novel demonstrates similarities between the psychological and literary (and liberatic) approach to the representations of mental processes in terms of their conceptualisations, but it also reveals differences in their functions. The psychologists' goal is to use the depictions to predict behavior, while Johnson's aim is the representation itself: presenting the mind and trying to understand how it works seem to be his main concerns.

[56] Roediger, "Memory Metaphors," p. 243.

Despite these differences, analysing his work in reference not only to the literary, but also the psychological sources, enables us to focus on the writer's conceptualisation of mental processes and some characteristics of memory and thinking he foregrounds. He arrives at the conclusion that memories and thoughts can be either clear or blurred. He presents the mind as the space where the past mingles with the present. He is aware that particular events belong to the past, but is unable to fully reconstruct the chronology and put specific events in the correct order. The walk around the city determines the way he recollects the past and that is why it is rather space than time that arranges memories in the novel. By choosing the form of the book-in-a-box, he uses a device able to produce an equivalent effect of chaos and randomness of memories. We do not know whether these discoveries may help the narrator overcome the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, but the book allows its readers to experience what he went through during his journey and in this way *The Unfortunates* speaks volumes about the ongoing discussion on trauma, grief and mental processes.

Katarzyna Biela

The Representation of Memory and Thinking in *The Unfortunates* by B. S. Johnson

The aim of this paper is to analyse the representation of the processes of recalling and thinking in *The Unfortunates* by the British novelist B. S. Johnson. This autobiographical novel published in the form of unbound sheets in a box was written after the death of the author's (and the narrator's) friend, and it records the influence of the traumatic event on cognitive processes. The paper examines how the narrator attempts to understand the past and his present state. It analyses the literary representation of flashbulb memories, schemas and controlling mental processes. It shows how the usage of the stream of consciousness technique and other literary devices serve this purpose, referring to the literary analyses of K. Stamirowska and J. Coe. An overview of memory metaphors offered by H. L. Roediger is summarised and related to B. S. Johnson's novel whose book-in-a-box form is viewed as a material metaphor of the mind, in this way testifying to the unity between content and form. Besides the paper relates the literary work to G. Lakoff and M. Johnson's notion of the conceptual metaphor as based on experience as well as to liberature – the literary genre defined by K. Bazarnik and Z. Fajfer.

Key words: B. S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates*, memory, thinking, metaphor

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"I felt a funeral, in my Brain." Writing pain: Emily Dickinson and Halina Poświatowska

First of all, I have to explain my choice to compare Emily Dickinson, a nineteenth-century American recluse, and Halina Poświatowska, a vivacious twentieth-century Polish socialiser. What brings these two female poets together is their common experience of illness and constant fear of death. Both Dickinson and Poświatowska treated writing as a self-therapy. On the one hand, in their verse, they depicted images of ailing bodies, disturbed minds and aching hearts because it seems to have helped them to ease their prolonged and intense pain. But, on the other hand, they wrote to reflect upon the most absorbing issues, such as the meaning of life and death, and a hidden sense of suffering. They shared these two desperate needs – to answer the basic questions of human existence and to seek repose and refuge from their nerve-wracking illnesses – and they answered them in the same way, i.e. by engaging in a creative act.

It suffices to take a quick look at their works to notice that they share many similarities. Both authors overused dashes, which stood primarily for moments of rest, a deeper breath, and reflection. They obsessively returned to the theme of death, describing it from different angles and imagining their own death from different perspectives. And, above all, they both decided to direct their thinking towards nature. Their careful and detailed examination of the natural world and its laws allowed them to discover affinities between nature and their own lives, and notice patterns which, ac-

cording to many critics, are imitated in their verse. In gardens and meadows inhabited by flowers, insects, and birds, they found answers about the sense of life, but also the intricacy of love and faith. Finally, the observation of withering flowers or dying bees brought comfort and peace of mind, and helped to accept the imminence of death, which thus seemed to be only a subsequent (and most natural) stage of transition into another form of existence.[1]

It seems that Halina Poświatowska must have encountered Emily Dickinson's poetry during her stay in the United States (1958-1961). In 1959-1961, she studied at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, which was one of the leading women's colleges in the United States, situated only seven miles from Amherst, Massachusetts, where Dickinson had spent almost her whole life. The first scholarly publication of Dickinson's poetry came out in 1955 in a complete three-volume set edited by T. H. Johnson. Not only did Dickinson begin to be recognized as one the greatest American poets, but she was also seen as a leading voice of women of the nineteenth century.[2] Poświatowska might have heard about Dickinson when she arrived in the United States because that was the time when Americans took even greater interest in the poet. In 1958, a complete collection of her letters, also in three volumes edited by Johnson, appeared in bookstores. Dickinson's poetry circulated in public discourse and was widely discussed by critics.[3]

But even without absolute certainty that the Polish poet was in some way inspired by the American one, similarities between Dickinson's and Poświatowska's lives and poetry are striking. After all, they both struggled with physical and mental illnesses – that is, Dickinson suffered from eye problems, agoraphobia, psychosis or epilepsy (biographers still explore her medical history),[4] whereas Poświatowska had a serious heart disease and depression. Illness and pain were therefore the major concerns of their lives. Admittedly, many poets have made death the central theme of their

[1] Dickinson's and Poświatowska's nature poetry (discussed in the context of their illnesses) is the main interest of some scholars, particularly: Judith Farr, *Emily Dickinson: Her Life, Her Poetry, Her Garden* (New York Botanical Garden, 2010); and Anna Siemińska, *Drobina Białka: Motywy roślinne i zwierzęce w liryce Haliny Poświatowskiej* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2005).

[2] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Shakespeare's Sisters. Feminist Essays on Women Poets* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 99–121.

[3] *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Richard B. Sewall (New York: Prentice Hall Trade) was published already in 1963.

[4] E.g. Lyndall Gordon, *Lives Like Loaded Guns. Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds* (New York: Viking, 2010); or Christopher Potts, "Bright's Disease," in: *All Things Dickinson: An Encyclopedia of Emily Dickinson's World*, ed. Wendy Martin (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2014).

poetry (e.g., another nineteenth-century female poet Christina Rossetti, or a twentieth-century poet Sylvia Plath). However, according to Thomas Johnson, "Emily Dickinson did so in hers to an unusual degree."[5] Likewise, as Jan Pieszczachowicz claims, "there are not many poets who with such penetration and passion [as Poświatowska] tracked the phenomenon of death."[6] They both had to confront death as small girls and it was always there, in their life, poetry and correspondence.

From her house in Pleasant Street, located near the town cemetery, Emily Dickinson could have observed every funeral ritual, but she also watched deaths of her friends and relatives, including her cousin Sophia Holland: "At length the doctor said she [Sophia Holland] must die and allowed me to look at her a moment through the open door. I took off my shoes and stole softly to the sick room. There she lay mild and beautiful as in health and her pale features lit up with an unearthly smile. I looked as long as friends would permit […]."[7] The fourteen-year old girl was not afraid of observing the dying cousin from a short distance. It must have left a deep impression on her because, in a letter to a friend Abiah Root, written in 1846, two years after her cousin's death, Dickinson described the event in detail. T. H. Johnson believes that "it came from her precocious knowledge that death establishes new perspectives for the living."[8] Young Dickinson insisted on staying in the sickroom, as if she wanted to get to know death in advance, to "tame" her enemy.

Halina Poświatowska wrote about her first encounters with death – experienced in Częstochowa during the Second World War – in *A tale for a friend*: "Then I saw them [soldiers] for the first time. They lay with their arms spread. […] They seemed to be strangely small. I grasped my father's hand, digging my nails into it. In shallow trenches in a market square there were piles of them, their uniforms were bloodstained and torn, their eyes glazy." When she described the long weeks spent in hospitals, she always mentioned death and its numerous victims: "This hospital was full of death" or "They died often, too often for this small hospital […]. They died every day, taking with them our hope, killing our hope. A girl who had been running through a corridor, peeking in every room out of child curiosity. On a day before her surgery we read colorful books together, watching pictures of kids having fun." But the worst moments for Poświatowska were

[5] Thomas Herbert Johnson, *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), p. 203.

[6] Jan Pieszczachowicz, *Walka z niebytem (o poezji Haliny Poświatowskiej)* (Bochnia: Prowincjonalna Oficyna Wydawnicza "Exatrim," 1992), p. 45. Original punctuation.

[7] Qtd. in Dolores Dyer Lucas, *Emily Dickinson and Riddle* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1969), p. 53.

[8] Johnson, *Emily Dickinson*, p. 206.

probably those experienced after her husband's death, which happened after just two years of their marriage: "This death, my friend, touched me more than other deaths that I have lived through so far."[9] And, possibly, it was then that Halina understood that even the biggest love cannot conquer death. She started to brace herself for an even fiercer war with her "monster-heart,"[10] with "the absolute monarch."[11]

Finally, it has to be pointed out that it is the similarity between Dickinson's and Poświatowska's nature poetry that makes me feel my comparison is justified. The microcosms of the poetic worlds of both Emily Dickinson and Halina Poświatowska consist of small and rather ordinary elements, which both poets describe with such precision and from such a short distance that their speakers become much more than attentive and watchful visitors of the world of nature. They coexist with flowers, grass, bees, birds or butterflies and their poetics are determined by their own interactions with nature. The garden and the meadow are the metaphors of the writers' own lives: their blooming desires and winged passions, but also buzzing thoughts on the impending death and withering bodies.[12]

Although Dickinson's and Poświatowska's nature poetry (especially hundreds of pieces about bees and birds) seems to be of the most avid interest for their critics, I want to change the perspective slightly to explore their selected poems in terms of the brain function and its disintegration. In order to do that, following the example of many critics in that field (e.g., Jadwiga Smith and Anna Kapusta), I have decided to read Dickinson's and Poświatowska's poems as testimonies to their inner lives. In my further analysis, the poetic "I" coincides with the poet herself. Instead of including references to the rich literature on the relationship between women and illness or feminist criticism, I choose to focus only on the selected poems and take the cognitive poetics approach in the analysis provided in this paper.

It is worth observing that, in order to construct a coherent and comprehensible image of the world from the fragments that they get, Dickinson and Poświatowska often turn to nature, which they treat as an escape from mental and physical failures. Their poems are full of descriptions of interacting with nature through senses, especially through the sense of sight, but also through hearing, touch or smell. One may argue then that their poems

[9] Halina Poświatowska, *Opowieść dla przyjaciela* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1967), pp. 30, 71, 82, 85.

[10] Qtd. in Izolda Kiec, *Halina Poświatowska. Czytani dzisiaj* (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 1997), p. 39.

[11] Halina Poświatowska, „moje serce jest władcą absolutnym…," in: *Wszystkie Wiersze* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2012), p. 518.

[12] It is worth comparing e.g.: Halina Poświatowska's *Poems from 1958–1962,* 232–233 and Emily Dickinson's J54; or: Halina Poświatowska's *Poems from 1958–1962,* 252 and Emily Dickinson's J28.

can be understood as records of "re-cognition" of given sensual experience, and, accordingly, "re-cognition" in the sense of realising its meaning. The process of "re-cognition," from this perspective, is an epiphany: the speaker recognizes a greater sense behind a seemingly unimportant event (e.g., the withering of a flower or the dying of a bee), which supplements missing pieces in her or his view of the world. Such a "re-cognition" would not be possible if the poets did not make use of the conceptual metaphor of life as a garden.

Interestingly enough, commenting on the phenomenon of conceptual metaphor, characteristic for the cognitive poetics approach, Agnieszka Wiśniak links it with the subject of death. She argues that, although death is often a taboo subject and we prefer not to mention it in our everyday conversations, when we cannot avoid talking about it anymore, we use metaphors or circumlocutions. Wiśniak explains:

> In poetry, the mystery, or the riddle, present in the reflections on the end of our existence, is connected with a lyrical phenomenon of a metaphor. Georg Lakoff and Mark Johnson discovered that a metaphor – usually associated only with our language, and more precisely with literature, especially with poetry – refers to different spheres of human life, too: one's thoughts, experiences, actions.[13]

Indeed, when describing the concepts incomprehensible in "common" language, such as their illness, prolonged suffering or fear of death, Dickinson and Poświatowska apply various conceptual metaphors. Among examples discussed by Peter Stockwell, there are some shared by both poets, such as: death as departure, life as a day, war as an illness, ideas as plants, understanding as seeing,[14] but there are many more, such as body / brain as a house and death as a journey, which will be discussed in this paper.

Constraints of brain, mind and body

Taking a closer look at their poetry, it seems that Dickinson and Poświatowska experienced emotional distress or disturbance connected with the perception of the body as confinement, expressed through most striking mental imagery. As it will be demonstrated, brain, mind and body depicted in their poems often have qualities of a container, a room or a house. The

[13] Agnieszka Wiśniak, *"Od urodzenia w pożegnalnych ciałach..." Śmierć w poezji Lipskiej, Poświatowskiej i Szymborskiej* (Katowice: Wyższa Szkoła Zarządzania Marketingowego i Języków Obcych, 2006), p. 17.

[14] Peter Stockwell, *Poetyka kognitywna. Wprowadzenie*, trans. Anna Skucińska (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), p. 157.

speaker is the prisoner locked in a box, a chamber or a church, haunted by her own thoughts and feelings.

Smith and Kapusta claim that:

> If we acknowledge that while writing poems Dickinson was ill and suffered severely, we can almost treat her output as a sort of personal diary of a battle against a serious disability. Illness always modifies the life of patients; it changes their prospects for the future, forces them to learn to live with shattered hopes and lessened expectations, and most of all directs their thinking inwards.[15]

Indeed, the speaker of Dickinson's poems is one who actually thinks "inwards" and examines her mind closely: she feels "a funeral in her brain" and tries to put its split parts back together. Dickinson's work "depicts a mind which, under a heavy weight of despair, no longer obeys her."[16] In J410, the speaker describes the experience of losing control over her brain – the process of alienation of the speaker's self from her bodily organ, which starts to act independently of her will: "My Brain – begun to laugh – / I mumbled – like a fool – / And tho' 'tis Years ago – that Day – / My Brain keeps giggling – still." Finally, she asks with anxiety: "Could it be Madness – this?"[17] While Poświatowska usually tends to separate her speaker from her own body,[18] Dickinson does the same thing, but, more than from her body, she wants to distance herself from her own mind. In J937, she experiences problems with expressing herself coherently. Her mind falls apart at the seams, her brain splits, and the confused speaker tries to rescue her mental integrity:

> I felt a Cleaving in my Mind –
> As if my Brain had split –
> I tried to match it – Seam by Seam –
> But could not make them fit.[19]

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[15] Jadwiga Smith and Anna Kapusta, *Writing Life. Suffering as a Poetic Strategy of Emily Dickinson* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2011), p. 27.

[16] Ibid., p. 31.

[17] Emily Dickinson, J410 – "The first Day's Night had come - -," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/74966. Abbreviations used further in the paper: [J –] – *Johnson Edition*, ed. by T. H. Johnson, followed by the number of the poem.

[18] In the poem "Halina Poświatowska to jest podobno człowiek," the speaker says: "Halina Poświatowska – this handful of garments and these hands, and mouth which is hungry no more"; Halina Poświatowska, *Indeed I Love... Właśnie kocham...*, trans. Maya Peretz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997), p. 167.

[19] Emily Dickinson, J937 – "I felt a Cleaving in my Mind - -," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/79907.

Dickinson writes about both the mind and the brain but sometimes, as observed by Sabina Sielke, she seems to privilege the word brain over the term mind.[20] Like the poet, scientists emphasize the scope of neuropsychological processes in the brain: "How can seemingly immaterial entities such as thoughts and memories arise from biological material? [...] Advances in neuroscience have now led to wide acceptance in science and medicine that *all* aspects of our mental life – our perceptions, thoughts, memories, actions, plans, language, understanding of others and so on – in fact depend upon brain function."[21] So although brain and mind are seemingly separate entities, in Dickinson's poetry, it is the brain that embodies the mind. It contains all mental processes, so when it fails, as in the poem above, the speaker is baffled and totally confused. Jed Deppman observes:

> The lyric "I" which has a clear relation neither to the whole nor to either half of the split brain, first seeks to bring order to discordant thought the way the seamstress matches fabrics or aligns seams. Despite the violence of a "cleaving," the domestic image is philosophically heartening, for it is visualizable: two halves of a brain, or two thoughts, next to each other and needing to be sewn together.[22]

The analogy between sewing and arranging thoughts can be drawn further. In the second stanza of the same poem, the seamstress drops a stitch; her thoughts remain unfastened and disjointed:

> The thought behind, I strove to join
> Unto the thought before –
> But Sequence ravelled out of Sound
> Like Balls – upon a Floor.[23]

The repetition of the word "but" only emphasises the speaker's failure. One may observe the switch of imagery: earlier thoughts were pieces of fabric and now they are unravelling the yarns dropped to the floor. It seems that the conceptual metaphor applied here is brain / mind as a sewing box. The seamstress is the poet herself, normally confined in a container, but now depicted in the chaotic moment of creating a poem. She wants to join the balls of yarn that slipped out of the box into a coherent whole, but

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[20] Sabina Sielke, "The Brain – is wider than the Sky –" and "Re-Cognizing Emily Dickinson," *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2008), p. 68.

[21] Jon Driver, Patrick Haggard and Tim Shallice, *Mental Processes in the Human Brain* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), p. 1.

[22] Jed Deppman, *Trying to Think with Emily Dickinson* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2008), p. 99.

[23] Emily Dickinson, J937 – "I felt a Cleaving in my Mind - -."

the sounds and the sequence of words do not fit together. Dickinson, who developed a habit of writing down some of her observations on random scraps of paper (e.g., on envelopes, leaflets, recipes, etc.), might actually be describing herself hurriedly noting down her thoughts.

The poet makes use of another conceptual metaphor: brain / mind as a house. But for the American poet this architectural space / structure can be as confusing as a sewing box filled with tangled yarns and scraps of fabric. It seems that the deeper the speaker in Dickinson's poems looks inside her own mind or brain, the more confused she is and the less she seems to know about herself. She is haunted and lost in the corridors of her brain:

> One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –
> One need not be a House –
> The Brain has Corridors – surpassing
> Material Place –
> [...]
> Ourself behind ourself, concealed –
> Should startle most –
> Assassin hid in our Apartment
> Be Horror's least.
>
> The Body – borrows a Revolver –
> He bolts the Door –
> O'erlooking a superior spectre –
> Or More –[24]

The brain is represented as an old, abandoned house. The speaker wanders indefinitely through its mazes and corners, which are terrifying even though they are not haunted. Possibly, the poet sees the brain as a metaphor for an organic cause of the disease and she personifies epilepsy as an assassin. This is why the speaker feels imprisoned in the house, that is in her own body. After all, she never knows where the assassin is hidden and when it can show up, i.e., when she can experience an epileptic seizure. This can lead to madness, but the speaker believes that confronting the assassin may also be the final step to finding "a superior spectre – / Or More," which may be perceived as the final truth, a revelation.

Even if the speaker would like to "live in the mind," rather than in her ailing body (including her brain, the malfunctioning organ – if we assume that the speaker believes that her illness has an organic cause), the only

[24] Emily Dickinson, J670 – "One need not be a Chamber -- to be Haunted - -," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/77233.

problem is to find oneself in the multiplicity of different "selves" which are "concealed" one behind/within the other. "Me from Myself – to banish –," the speaker orders in J642 and continues: "Had I Art – / Impregnable my Fortress / Unto all Heart – / But since Myself – assault Me – / How have I peace / Except by subjugating / Consciousness?"[25] Again, the speaker wonders how it happens that her own body acts against her own will or even attacks her, as it may happen in epilepsy. She describes the feelings of estrangement from "herself," a dramatic split between herself (mind) and her body (brain). Therefore, we may observe yet another conceptual metaphor, i.e. that of an illness as war: the speaker's whole self is depicted as the fortress which the split I's (the mind / will and the brain / body) try to master and rule. The split is taking place because the speaker sees her body as not obedient to her conscious will. Brain / body act on their own so the only way to integrate them is to yield one to the other ("subjugating Consciousness").

As exemplified above, in Dickinson's poems, brain / body is a place of confinement. It has the features of a sewing box, a house or a fortress; and Poświatowska depicts it in an analogous way. The speaker of her poem acknowledges: "you live but for a while / and time – / is a transparent pearl / filled with breath [...] love is a word / brain – a metal box / wound up every day / with the silver key of illusion."[26] While love is nothing more than a simple word, the brain is a clock ticking regularly and showing it is working. Its functioning is automatic and mechanical. Since it is wound up with the key of illusion, it may be put back or forward against our will at any time. As in the poems above, the speaker feels imprisoned in her own brain, as she has no control over it or, in other words, she possesses no key wounding it up.

Similarly to Dickinson describing corridors of a "haunted" house, Poświatowska employs the metaphor of a house hiding some danger, bristling with pitfalls:

> my house is now filled with pitfalls
> better stay away from my house
> my lips are there red as memory
> and my arms – animals with spry fur
> and my eyes – lights at sea
> and the shriek of my eyes – for the time's overcast
> and right by the door my shoeless feet stand begging

[25] Emily Dickinson, J642 – "Me from Myself -- to banish - -," http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/75400.

[26] Halina Poświatowska, „żyje się tylko chwilę...," in: *Indeed I Love*, p. 197.

and the whole room is chilled with fear
and dark with desire[27]

The speaker's body is depicted as a house parcelled out into different elements (*pars pro toto*). Lips, arms, eyes and feet hide a danger and mystery; they are separate entities and the speaker may only observe them from a distance. Although the anaphora of the word "and" emphasizes the severity of the speaker warning the reader (the lover) not to enter her house, she actually seems to invite him to come in, as she experiences fear and desire simultaneously. She is portrayed as a woman who feels alienated in her own body, waiting for someone who is able to reunite all the separate parts.

In another poem, the speaker refers to herself as a gothic cathedral. Similarly to Dickinson's "I felt a Cleaving in my Mind" (J937) discussed earlier, Poświatowska uses the motif of yarns or threads, but unlike in Dickinson, they make up the speaker's body:

from such threads is the body woven
rapture and pain rapture and pain
[…]
I am a church
I am surely a gothic church
with this slender blood-circuit
in flutter
lifted above myself
with thirsty lips
I drink up space.[28]

Poświatowska refers to the characteristics of a gothic church: it is high, slender, spacious, towering and narrow, just as the speaker's body is tall, slim, and encouraging the reader to accept the world. The speaker is able to be "lifted" above herself and to "drink up space": in analogy to Dickinson, she experiences the double consciousness and estrangement from herself. She is the church and, at the same time, she floats above herself, observing herself from above. On the one hand, she is locked in the church (as in an ailing body), but, on the other hand, it is so spacious and so impressive that it gives her a chance to set herself some lofty goals and experience uncanny feelings. In other words, both Poświatowska and Dickinson (who finishes her poem "Me from Myself to Banish" (J642) with the stanza "And since We're mutual monarch / How this be / Except by Abdication – / Me – of

[27] Halina Poświatowska, „mój dom jest teraz pełen zasadzek…," in: *Indeed I Love*, p. 186.
[28] Halina Poświatowska, „z takich nitek uplątane jest ciało…," in: *Indeed I Love*, p. 193.

Me?"[29]) learn how to "tolerate" their brains / bodies, how to accept their advantages and disadvantages, and how to live the life of pain and joy.

Haunted corridors of her brain / body are also mentioned in many of Poświatowska's poems. In "I lack former tenderness," she describes her body as both an "animal" and a "building:"

> I lack former tenderness for my body
> yet I tolerate it like a beast of burden
> useful though it requires much care
> it brings pain and joy and pain and joy
> sometimes inert from pleasure
> sometimes shelter for sleep
>
> I know its twisted hallways
> can tell which way exhaustion comes
> which tendons laughter tenses
> and I remember the unique taste of tears
> so like the taste of blood
>
> my thoughts – a flock of frightened birds
> feed on the field of my body
> I lack my former tenderness towards it
> yet feel more acutely than before
> that I reach no further than my outstretched arms
> and no higher than I can rise on the tips of my toes.[30]

The female body is a hyperbolised metaphor of a beast of burden. It may be a very useful animal (it labours for the benefit of the speaker: thanks to it, she can experience pleasure), but, at the same time, it consumes a lot of her energy and effort because it has to be domesticated. In the extended metaphor, it also has the qualities of a room, a shelter, with twisted hallways. Poświatowska tries to communicate not only her sense of confinement due to illness, but also the uncontrollability of her body, because she is too weak to do what she would like to do. Human physicality becomes the restraint, which, paradoxically, guarantees the possibility of pleasure, but, at the same time, condemns the speaker to suffering. The knowledge of the body's intricacies means knowing its reactions, which often cannot simply be explained in biological terms. Tastes of tears and blood refer to both the mental and the physical spheres. The speaker's thoughts ("a flock of frightened birds") feed on the field of her body, which indicates that the

[29] Emily Dickinson, J642 – "Me from Myself -- to banish - -."
[30] Halina Poświatowska, „nie mam dawnej czułości…," in: *Indeed I Love*, p. 53.

mental sphere is much more than "cogito," it may develop thanks to the body. Since the speaker tries to reach further than her outstretched arms and higher that she can raise on the tips of her toes, the body teaches her wisdom and humility and also allows her to measure her own limitations and borders. Physicality interpreted in this way is not only a "burden," it is also a chance to go beyond one's constraints and gain a wider perspective.

Both Emily Dickinson and Halina Poświatowska describe the feeling of confinement / imprisonment in their own brains and bodies, which are the sources of their suffering and pain. They employ metaphors of a container: a sewing box or a metal box (a clock), or of a house: a fortress, a church. However, while in Dickinson's poems the speaker wandering through mysterious corridors experiences constant fear, ambiguity and loss of control over her own consciousness, the speaker in Poświatowska's poems is afraid and excited at the same time. Dickinson's mentality is not much more than a constraint. The speaker of her poems seems to believe that the final truth and revelation ("a superior spectre") is to be found after death only. Poświatowska's physicality is a constraint too, but the speaker is brave enough to look beyond its "walls," which may also be a chance to find some important truths in her earthly existence.

Authenticity of pain

How can one be delighted with pain? Smith and Kapusta acknowledge that "with the development of her illness, Emily Dickinson came to know the 'real' pain, the one beyond endurance, which not only immobilises but pushes onto self-destructive action."[31] In J241, the speaker declares: "I like a look of Agony / Because I know it's true – ."[32] A. B. Crowder points out that "this poem is omitted from most books on Dickinson" because "we learn that she values extreme, prolonged pain, which is an odd view to hold."[33] The poet focuses on the "reality" of pain, its authenticity and the impossibility of faking it: "Men do not sham Convulsion, / Nor simulate, a Throe – ." She leaves the reader with an image of personified anguish, who strings the beads of sweat, as if in the form of a fashionable headband.[34]

[31] Smith and Kapusta, *Writing Life*, p. 33.

[32] Emily Dickinson, J241 – "I like a look of Agony," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/79879.

[33] Ashby Bland Crowder, "Dickinson's I LIKE A LOOK OF AGONY," *The Explicator*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (2013), p. 204.

[34] Emily Dickinson, J241 – "I like a look of Agony."

Speakers in Dickinson's and Poświatowska's poetry experience "real" pain they cannot bear any longer. It is so sharp and so utter that it makes them stiff and exhausted, and yet they emphasize and value its authenticity. After some time, they seem to get used to it and treat it as an indispensable part of their existence. In the poem entitled "Veritas," Poświatowska focuses on the authenticity of pain:

if I stretch my hands
and try to reach
I'll strike a copper wire
through which electric current flows
I'll spill
in an ash shower
downwards
physics is real
the bible is real

love is real
and real is pain[35]

The speaker enumerates notions such as: physics, the bible and love, and talks about pain (a very concrete and negative feeling) at the end of the poem. She provides parallel structures ("physics is real, the bible is real, love, is real") and a reversal in the last line only, as if trying to point out how important and different from the notions mentioned above the pain is. In its intensity of a physical sensation, it surpasses physics, religion and even love; it paralyses, drags "downwards," spills "in an ash shower." This literally "paralysing" pain is metaphorically described in another poem in which Poświatowska compares it to Mount Blanc:

Sharp as Mount Blanc
I've never seen it
but I've been told
that it's high and steep
covered with eternal snow

people go there rarely
this is why
I compared my pain
to it.[36]

[35] Halina Poświatowska, "Veritas," in: *Indeed I Love*, p. 143.
[36] Halina Poświatowska, „ostry jak Mont Blanc," in: *Wszystkie Wiersze*, p. 616.

Pain seems to be inconceivable, beyond reach and beyond endurance. That is why it is hyperbolised – "high," "steep," and "covered with eternal snow." The speaker calls it "my pain." It is "her" suffering, so difficult to depict in common terms that she uses the image of the highest peak in Europe.

The inability to find the right words to describe her agony is visible in Dickinson's poems as well. She starts J599 with a general statement and only then does she describe her feeling in detail:

> There is a pain – so utter –
> It swallows substance up –
> Then covers the Abyss with Trance –
> So Memory can step
> Around – across – upon it –
> As one within a Swoon –
> Goes safely – where an open eye –
> Would drop him – Bone by Bone.[37]

The speaker also depicts the experience of the most severe pain using the metaphor of the landscape of her mind. Her suffering is so intense that she falls into a deep trance, becomes numb and indifferent. The speaker follows an open eye "blindly," drops "Bone by Bone" (as a skeleton), and sinks into oblivion. She seems to faint but she is still able to hear and comprehend. Her memory can step around, across and upon the "Abyss" of pain. Hyperboles and repetitions strengthen the description of agony. While the speaker suffers from an almost "strangling" pain, the dashes inserted between words point at the places in which she can finally take a deep breath. Every dash indicates a short moment of repose, which is extremely important especially if the speaker's agony has no end. She signalizes it in another poem as well: "Pain – has an Element of Blank – / It cannot recollect / When it begun – or if there were / A time when it was not –."[38] The real pain stays with an ill person forever. It is an unchangeable force and, even if someone claims that she has been cured of it, this indicates that she has never felt it:

> They say that "Time assuages" –
> Time never did assuage –

[37] Emily Dickinson, J599 – "There is a pain -- so utter --," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/75172.

[38] Emily Dickinson, J650 – "Pain -- has an Element of Blank --," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/79900.

An actual suffering strengthens
As Sinews do, with age –

Time is a Test of Trouble –
But not a Remedy –
If such it prove, it prove too
There was no Malady –[39]

Once more, the speaker emphasises the difference between the pretended and real ("actual") feelings. The real pain cannot be relieved. It may only intensify in time (hence the "persistent" alliteration of "s" and "t" – "suffering strengthens as Sinews do"; "Time is a Test of Trouble") and drag one into agony.

The experience of suffering from prolonged pain that cannot be assuaged is also present in one the best-known of Dickinson's poems – "I felt a funeral, in my Brain." It opens with a description of a burial ceremony:

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
and Mourners to and fro
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through –

And when they were all seated,
A Service, like a Drum –
Kept beating – beating – till I thought
My mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space – began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down –

[39] Emily Dickinson, J686 – "They say that 'Time assuages' --," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/75521.

And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing – then –[40]

Again, Dickinson repeats the phrases, sounds "f," "t," "b," and parallel grammatical structures ("kept treading – treading" / "kept beating – beating") in order to emphasise the prolongation of agony. The speaker thinks that her mind is "going numb" and she hears people "lifting a box" and "creak across her soul," which suggests that she might be experiencing first symptoms of an epileptic seizure: the loss of rational reasoning, beating pulse, waves of a stabbing headache, or the very first seconds of unconsciousness. It seems that, in the moment of the final failure of the senses, one remains a solitary and defenceless being deprived of the possibility of reaction, yet still present. As the pain gets worse, the speaker's irritation with everything that is happening inside her own brain / body increases. Her personal drama is going on, as the illness keeps performing a ritual with "those same Boots of Lead," with the same intensity. As Smith and Kapusta observe, the prolongation of suffering is emphasised by the classic ballad meter and rhythm similar to the one characteristic for a funeral hymn.[41] In the penultimate stanza, the speaker is falling down (dropping) into a tunnel or a deep shaft in the ground (possibly into a deep grave), the anaphora (and, and) serves to imitate banging (bang, bang). She lands at the bottom (a dash at the end of the sentence in the third stanza), and then, metaphorically, in the last stanza, the plank in the bottom of the coffin breaks down, and she starts falling again (another anaphoric series of ands). The aposiopesis signifies her surprise that there is no end to this pain, that it can get even stronger when you think it cannot be worse.

Lethargy and apathy result from the fact that, after some time, one slowly gives up hope that agony can actually finish. While, in the poem above, pain is represented through a metaphor of never-ending falling, in J341, the speaker describes immobility. Suffering is a down-to-earth, everyday activity. It loses its exceptionality and leads to indifference, stiffness and mechanization:

After great pain, a formal feeling comes –
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –
The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore,
And Yesterday, or Centuries before?

[40] Emily Dickinson, J280 – "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/79882.

[41] Smith and Kapusta, *Writing Life*, p. 32.

The Feet, mechanical, go round –
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought –
A Wooden way

Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone –

This is the Hour of Lead –
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go –[42]

The speaker portrays the routine of suffering. She accumulates words connected with stones, hard minerals (quartz) and heavy metals (lead) to strengthen the physical sensation of heaviness (she feels heavy as a stone), to express stiffness and immobility experienced by a suffering person. According to the authors of *Writing Life*, "the sense of numbed consciousness is enhanced by imagery characterized by possessing the qualities of lifelessness. [...] Even though the emotions seem to be as stable and firm as a gravestone, it is not strength that stabilizes them but apathy."[43] In the final line of the poem, the speaker grades subsequent stages faced by a suffering person. Pain is compared to death by freezing and results in the ultimate surrender.

A similar indifference and routine of suffering is depicted in Poświatowska's poems. The speaker says: "I slash the orange of pain."[44] Her slow process of losing consciousness is described as follows:

on the verge of dying
there are no kisses
there are no scents
nor colours

the buzz of a bee
fades over a meadow
[...]
on the verge of dying
a narrow light dims

[42] Emily Dickinson, J341 – "After great pain, a formal feeling comes - -," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/75039.

[43] Smith and Kapusta, *Writing Life*, p. 33.

[44] Halina Poświatowska, „rozcinam pomarańczę bólu...," in: *Wszystkie Wiersze*, p. 325.

and the verge so clear
dies down – pain[45]

When this pain gets worse, the senses start to fail. Touch (there are no kisses), smell (there are no scents), sight (there are no colours) and hearing (the buzz of a bee stops) cease. On the verge of dying, the speaker's world quietens, turns its lights and music off and goes to sleep. Poświatowska uses a dash as well. The word "pain" is left after the dash, and it seems that everything circles around it. When, suddenly, even the pain subsides, the speaker seems to go through its barrier, and steps over the threshold of pain, over "the verge of dying" into another world.

Indifference and apathy represented in the poems above are possible reactions to the experience of suffering, but it seems that the only way to survive chronic pain is to accept it. After some time, getting used to pain is the only solution, as demonstrated in Dickinson's following poem:

I reason, Earth is short –
And Anguish – absolute –
And many hurt,
But, what of that?

I reason, we could die –
The best Vitality
Cannot excel Decay,
But, what of that?

I reason, that in Heaven –
Somehow, it will be even –
Some new Equation, given –
But, what of that?[46]

The speaker is not affected by a prolonged pain anymore, repetitions of the rhetorical question "but, what of that?" and the pace of regular iambic trimeter strengthen the description of her acceptance. The speaker resigns herself to the fact that decay and anguish are absolute and unchangeable forces. She repeats the phrase "but, what of that?" phlegmatically, almost hopelessly. It can be read as the speaker's sarcasm, giving up, but it also resembles well-known stoic ideals. The speaker, unmoved by grief, submits to death - the unavoidable necessity – without complaint .

[45] Halina Poświatowska, „na krawędzi mijania…," in: *Wszystkie Wiersze*, p. 50.

[46] Emily Dickinson, J301 – "I reason, Earth is short - -," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed February 12, 2017, http://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/75077. Smith and Kapusta, *Writing Life*, p. 33.

Smith and Kapusta highlight that suffering and self-renunciation may also be a sign of a victory and moral strength. If one is able to overcome such an intense and prolonged agony, and then stiffness and indifference, it may finally lead her or him to acceptance, serenity and a better appreciation of things.[47] Paradoxically enough, suffering also has positive and empowering sides. It sharpens the speakers' perception, helping them to grow stronger and, in effect, to get rid of the fear of death.

It seems that Emily Dickinson and Halina Poświatowska, writing from a deep need to understand the mystery of death and the hidden sense of their suffering, apply a similar method of dealing with their anxieties. In order to rescue their mental integrity and overcome physical and emotional pain, the poets decide to distance themselves from their own bodies and minds. The speakers of their poems seem to float above "their earthly existence." They describe pain through the metaphor of never-ending falling, immobility or the utter failure of senses. In other poems, they build conceptual metaphors. Brains / bodies have the features of a sewing box, a house or a fortress (Dickinson) or a clock, a gothic church or even a beast of burden. The speakers become prisoners, unable to control their malfunctioning organs. Eventually, they come to a similar conclusion. Decay and anguish turn out to be unchangeable forces and the only way to survive their "blows" is to come to terms with the imminent death or, at least, try to find acceptance and serenity in the surrounding world.

[47] Smith and Kapusta, *Writing Life*, p. 35.

Aleksandra Fortuna-Nieć

"I felt a funeral, in my Brain." Writing pain: Emily Dickinson and Halina Poświatowska

My paper examines similarities between Emily Dickinson's and Halina Poświatowska's poetic representations of mental processes connected with illness and suffering. As they both struggled with physical or mental illnesses, that is Dickinson's eye problems, agoraphobia or epilepsy and Poświatowska's serious heart disease, their poems are riddled with the themes of illness, suffering and death. Their striking metaphors explore the brain function and its disintegration, for example, in poems such as: "I felt a funeral, in my Brain," "I felt a Cleaving in my Mind / As if my Brain had split –" and "My Brain – begun to laugh –" (Dickinson's J280, J937, J410) or "brain – a metal box / wound up every day / with the silver key of illusion" and "my house is now filled with pitfalls / better stay away from my house / my lips are there red as memory / and my arms – animals with spry fur [...] and the whole room is chilled with fear / and dark with desire" (Poświatowska's translations, *Indeed I love,* 187, 198). Brain, mind and body depicted in their poems have qualities of a container, a room or a house. The speaker becomes a prisoner haunted by her own thoughts and feelings.

Key words: Emily Dickinson, Halina Poświatowska, suffering, illness, cognitive poetics

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Neuro-based theories of beauty?

Introduction

> The principle of the neuroesthetics methods consists not in questioning concepts, but in sticking to operational definitions and in assimilating esthetic judgement to hedonic judgement.[1]

With the promise to answer the question of what it means to say that an object is beautiful, neuroestheticians have captured the attention of philosophers. With the project to build an esthetic theory based on the growing knowledge of neurosciences, they have revealed certain behavioural regularities of an unknown origin – which can have evolutionary explanations, and of which individuals are not necessarily aware – such as preferences for specific forms or colour schemes. According to them, these regularities tend to occur when individuals are confronted with a piece of art.

While neuroestheticians use classical esthetics extensively to develop their approach, they have missed important features of contemporary esthetics, such as the use of sociology, and, more generally, collaboration

[1] Fernando Vidal, "La neuroesthétique, un esthétisme scientist," *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2011), pp. 239–264: "Le principe même de la méthode neuroesthétique consiste à ne pas interroger les concepts, mais à s'en tenir à des définitions opérationnelles et à assimiler le jugement esthétique au jugement hédonique."

of esthetics with other sciences and humanities. For example, sociologists of art tell us that an individual's brain represents one's personal and sociological history. Individual preferences have to be indeed considered in a specific social context. Furthermore, philosophical topics in neuroesthetics cannot be discussed in the same way they were discussed by traditional philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant, Edmund Burke, Plato, and others.[2]

While neuroscientists may experimentally test the emotions that have an evolutionary meaning because of certain advantage they give, the same approach does not consort with the complexity of "beauty" understood as a structural concept. Our sense of beauty depends on the structures in which we have evolved and continue to evolve.[3] It should therefore be emphasised that beauty may only be tested experimentally in the context of those structures. The conclusions to be drawn need to take into account geographical and historical contexts, and are valid in given context only because the definition and experience of beauty differ in various societies, in different periods of history, and even within different classes of a society.

This paper discusses the issues the neurally-based conception of beauty raises by asking the following question: what does it mean to test experimentally a concept such as beauty? Research in neuroesthetics has become questionable for philosophers of sciences and estheticians when neuroestheticians attempted to provide a neuroesthetical account of the concept of beauty. In this article, I analyse selected works of Sémir Zéki, Jean-Pierre Changeux and Vilayanur S. Ramachandran to demonstrate, first, the shortcomings resulting from the neuroestheticians limiting the theoretical background of their research; and second, the potential that interdisciplinary research on the concept of beauty offers.

This article is divided into four parts. First, we try to understand what makes beauty a social, structured and structuring concept, contrary to the way neuroesthetics approaches it. Then, we describe how neuroestheticians turn the contextual and localised context concept of beauty into a general concept selecting specific kind of art as their research material. In the third part, we investigate into how neuroestheticians propose to naturalise the experience of beauty. Finally, we present a way towards an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account both the social sciences and humanities, and analyse the challenges brought about by selected experimental inquiries into beauty.

[2] Sémir Zéki, "Art and Brain," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 6–7 (1999) or Jean-Pierre Changeux, *Du vrai, du beau, du bien: Une nouvelle approche neuronale* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2008).

[3] See Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando, Austin, New York, San Diego, Toronto and London: Harcourt, 2003).

Why is beauty a social, structured and structuring concept?

We would like to develop an argument that beauty is a social, structured and structuring concept; that it is not necessarily a natural fact, but arises from a historical and social construction and is a societal phenomenon. Saying that an object is beautiful does not mean that this object gives one pleasure or provokes some positive emotions – it is a misconception that is perpetuated by some neuroestheticians.[4] The term "beauty," even though used casually in everyday life, carries with it a baggage of cultural and references.

This paper questions neither the possibility of testing certain emotions experimentally, nor the idea of experimental investigations into the biology of these emotions, or the neuronal or physiological responses to these emotions. However, it aims to underline that beauty cannot be reduced to pleasure or positive emotions. The concept of beauty involves a set of philosophical, historical, and sociological references, and thus, it is complicated – if possible at all – to use the word in a scientific frame without determining the exact limits of the concept and without discussing it.

Indeed, beauty was one of the main subjects of the discussions and writings of traditional philosophers interested in art. Naturally, none of their definitions of beauty is now considered more truthful than others. However, a sociological and historical analysis highlights common points in the way dominant social classes think about art. An upper-class culture is typically brought to consider beauty as the "real culture" opposed to barbarism. We can observe this way of reasoning in particular in Kant's work, as analysed by Pierre Bourdieu in his famous book *La Distinction*.[5] Neuroestheticians use this concept of beauty, but omit the fact that this notion of beauty is a construct. It seems that they still refer to the ideas promulgated by traditional philosophers. Behaving as if they were the protectors of this cultural heritage who are sophisticated enough to discuss Kant or Plato easily, they do not seem to question their social biases in their analyses and discussions about beauty, esthetics and art.

It seems that ideas like beauty are used by neuroestheticians without a deeper understanding of their meanings and conceptualisations. Indeed, from the word neuroesthetics, the mentioned researchers keep the prefix neuro- and seem to disregard esthetics in their current state of research. Zéki, Changeux and Ramachandran write about a certain type of aesthet-

[4] This is especially visible in the further-discussed works of Sémir Zéki, Cinzia Di Dio and Vilayanur S. Ramachandran.

[5] Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction, Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1979), p. 565.

ics, i.e. the one of classical art. Those authors are neurologists – rather than trained estheticians – and write about Plato, Kant, or Hegel but dismiss contemporary authors. Moreover, they write mainly about classical and modern pieces of art, but completely disregard contemporary art. As one can notice when reading Sémir Zéki: "Kant perspicaciously asked questions that lend themselves to experimental investigation,"[6] or "the question was especially well formulated, in a neurobiologically accessible way, by Edmund Burke."[7] An important point is that the debate about the experience of beauty and ugliness does not exist in contemporary esthetics the same way it existed in classical theories.

> If neuroestheticians do not explain better what they want to go over, it is maybe because – as much as we can judge by their bibliographies and their argumentations – they are only weakly informed. They quote Plato or Kant, but especially to remind us that they did not have the opportunity "to see directly what happens in the brain" when, for example, we see a piece of art.[8]

Neuroestheticians keep speaking about beauty. They do so due to lack of choice. If they abandon this concept in their research, it would mean they abandon the "esthetics" component in the term neuroesthetics which is their banner. But what happens, in point of fact, is that neuroestheticians jump from a descriptive approach – based on their research on pleasure and displeasure, and therefore, on scientific facts – to an approach based on common-sense prejudices, ingrained in them by traditional philosophy. A researcher in neuroesthetics has to explain of which idea of beauty he or she speaks. Does he speak about a feeling of pleasure or does he speak about beauty as defined by traditional philosophers? Currently, these notions are often mixed up and confused,

Universalisation and neuroesthetics

Besides being Western-centered, research in neuroesthetics is ahistorical and disconnected from what art is at the moment. This universalistic

[6] Hideaki Kawabata and Sémir Zéki, "Neural Correlates of Beauty," *J Neurophysiol*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (2004), p. 1699.

[7] Sémir Zéki and Tomohiro Ishizu, "Toward A Brain-Based Theory of Beauty," *Plos One*, Vol. 6, No. 7 (2011), accessed June 15, 2017, http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0021852.

[8] Fernando Vidal, "La neuroesthétique, un esthétisme scientiste," *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences Humaines*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2011), p. 239–264: "Si les neuroesthéticiens n'expliquent pas mieux ce qu'ils disent vouloir dépasser, c'est peut-être parce que – autant qu'on puisse en juger par leurs bibliographies et leurs argumentations – ils n'en sont que faiblement au courant. Ils citent Platon ou Kant, mais surtout pour rappeler que ceux-ci n'ont pas eu l'occasion 'de voir directement ce qui se passe dans le cerveau lorsque, par exemple, on rencontre une œuvre d'art.'

vision of beauty in art is a vision inherited mostly from Immanuel Kant who had a major impact on the subsequent research in esthetics and art. Consequently, the philosophical references these neuroestheticians use are traditional, while their artistic references are mainly taken from classical art, sometimes from modern art. This is of the utmost importance because these are the works of art that are presented to the subjects of their experiments.

Contemporary art is a part of what is seen as "legitimate art," and yet – along with the non-Western pieces of art – it is not included in the research materials of these neuroestheticians. Artworks of modern and classical art have penetrated the "collective unconscious," and have other criteria of legitimisation. That is, the objects used in the analyses of neuronal response to beauty are works of art legitimised by the "art world" and general public. Because they are labelled as the "great art," these artworks are recognised as having universal qualities, and being beautiful. Nevertheless, these statements do not concern all the research in neuroesthetics. Some proposals have been made about contemporary dance in particular, but remain to be made in the visual arts.[9]

> In the present study, we investigated the aesthetic effect of objective parameters in the works of art by studying brain activations (fMRI) in viewers naïve to art criticism who observed images of sculptures selected from masterpieces of Classical and Renaissance art that are commonly accepted as normative Western representations of beauty.[10]

In his work, neuroesthetician Di Dio uses masterpieces of the "great art" to test beauty experimentally. Without saying by whom exactly these works are accepted as "normative Western representations of beauty," her proposal is that in these artworks there would be something objective allowing us to understand what the normativity of beauty is. Besides the question of normativity, there is every reason to believe that neuroesthetics has given itself the task to explain why the "great art" is the great art, and thus, has taken a step further away from pure data analysis. By using empirical data, which they collect from their brain experiments, the researchers intend to give a definition of the "great art" and beauty:

[9] See project *LaboDanse*, accessed June 6, 2017, https://labodanse.org/.

[10] Cinzia Di Dio, Emiliano Macaluso, Giacomo Rizzolatti, "The Golden Beauty: Brain Response to Classical and Renaissance Sculptures," *Plos One*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2007), accessed June 15, 2017, http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0001201.

> Great art can thus be defined, in neurological terms, as that which comes closest to showing as many facets of the reality, rather than the appearance, as possible and thus satisfying the brain in its search for many essentials.[11]

This is why Sémir Zéki, finally, wrote that "Shakespeare and Wagner [are] among the greatest of neurologists" – in his view, they are capable of finding something universal in the brains of others. According to Zéki, they have found something profound and universal in humanity.[12] Ramachandran in turn believes that art is what shows us – as far as it is possible – reality, rather than appearances. The "great art" shows reality or rather essentials of reality:

> Indeed this was almost the basis of Kant's philosophy of aesthetics – to represent perfection; but perfection implies immutability, and hence arises the problem of depicting perfection in an ever changing world. I shall therefore define the function of art as being a search for constancies.[13]

For Zéki, works of art imply a certain kind of timeless perfection. He speaks about "immutability" because these works please their audience after many centuries. It consequently means that – in the Kantian way of thinking he adopts – art itself is timeless and does not depend on a social, historical or cultural context. By leaning openly on the Kantian philosophy, the neuroesthetician emphasises that art searches for constancies of the brain, as if there was something deep in the nature of Homo sapiens that art could reveal. Following this postulate, one can think that beauty ignores any social construction, whether it is the construction of a social class or whether it is the construction of a broader culture. Ramachandran writes: "Maybe there can never be a science of high art, but I suggest there can be of the principles of aesthetics that underlie it." To this Semir Zéki adds that the "great art" can now be defined in neurobiological terms. Once again, we can observe a jump between a descriptive and a scientific approach – based on the possibility of certain individual and even human preferences – to

[11] Sémir Zéki, *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 22.

[12] Ibid., p. 2: "Millions of people have been moved by the words of one and the music of the other. The poetry of Shakespeare has been used in so many different contexts, and to such effect, that it would be foolish to deny the universality of his language or its ability to move men of diverse backgrounds and inclinations in a profound sense [...] Both, in other words, understood something fundamental about the psychological make-up of man which depends ultimately upon the neurological organisation of the brain."

[13] Sémir Zéki, "Art and Brain," pp. 76–96.

a normative approach – based on the normativity of beauty, which these neuroestheticians seem to find in the works of the "great art."[14]

How do neuroestheticians speak about beauty?

Using traditional philosophers' ideas as the starting point for their inquiries about artworks, these neuroestheticians emphasise the assumptions about beauty that this part of my essay will explore. Indeed, one of the purposes of these neuroestheticians is to build theories about art, esthetics, and beauty, that have a neuronal basis. The neuroestheticians capitalise on the old view of esthetics, i.e. that beauty is an experience based on the feeling of pleasure. This relation between beauty and pleasure was established by traditional philosophers, who are then quoted by the mentioned neuroestheticians. This assimilation of concepts is already questionable as pleasure and beauty are often plainly mixed and confused as this analysis attempts to prove. The neuroesthetical project of testing beauty experimentally needs to be understood in a broader context. For these neuroestheticians, the experience of beauty occurs when their subject is pleased by the object at which he or she looks.

First, one can explore Ramachandran's proposition to rethink esthetics, art, and beauty, in the light of evolutionary explanations:

> Yet that is my goal for this chapter and the next: to convince you that our knowledge of human vision and of the brain is now sophisticated enough that we can speculate intelligently on the neural basis of art and maybe begin to construct a scientific theory of artistic experience.[15]

Ramachandran emphasises that our preferences may be explained by evolutionary theories, and he lists a few examples to justify this proposal. First, he draws a comparison between humans and other animals, such as bowerbirds, that build "esthetic" nests to mate. This assumption is problematic because the link between what we call an "esthetic work" done by other species and art created by human beings is not obvious. Then, Ramachandran presents his famous nine "universal laws of aesthetics and art." Even if he is cautious with this assumption, these laws are to lead us to something essential about beauty and art. The example of what is called beauty in sexual selection among animals is used by Ramachandran to justify, at least partially, some of the proposed laws of aesthetics and art

[14] Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain, A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Make Us Human* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), p. 223.

[15] Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain*, p. 156.

(based on evolutionary characteristics of the human brain, such as our preferences for symmetry or order).[16]

Furthermore, he adds that "[b]ecause both art and aesthetics require the brain to respond to beauty, there is bound to be a great deal of overlap [between art and esthetics]." This kind of emphasis may suggest that theories about art and aesthetics will be, from now on, more legitimately introduced and developed by neuroscientists rather than by researchers in other fields. Indeed, these assumptions seem to be confirmed by Ramachandran's further work – for example, the title of the seventh chapter of his book reads as follows: "Beauty and the Brain: The Emergence of Aesthetics."[17]

These assumptions are also related to Sémir Zéki's question: "It thus raises an important question: would the experience of beauty derived from different senses, say the visual and auditory, correlate with activity in the same or different brain areas?" Zéki's challenge is to propose a "brain-based definition of beauty." What does it mean exactly? The researcher tries to correlate the experience of beauty with the activation of cerebral zones. In one of his papers, Sémir Zéki correlates the experience of beauty with the activity of the mOFC (medial orbito-frontal cortex). When a given subject finds an object beautiful, be it a visual or an auditory object, the mOFC is activated. Sémir Zéki concludes that he can build a brain-based theory of beauty with the use of these observations.[18]

Jean-Pierre Changeux seems to be more careful in his book in which he approaches the subject of beauty. He writes that the naturalisation of the traditional subjects of social sciences and humanities, which is in progress at the moment, "should nevertheless bring a clarification of the ideas."[19] Changeux expresses the opinion that the project of explaining the idea of beauty by neuroesthetics challenges the humanities. It is as if he is saying that humanities have not succeeded in clarifying the idea of beauty and that neurosciences open a way to more legitimate answers.

Indeed, the above-mentioned neuroestheticians assign a great importance to studying beauty and finding related answers in their neuroscientific experiments. For the researchers that we have just adduced, beauty is a complex mixture of subjectivity and objectivity. Human beings seem to

[16] Ibid. The nine laws of esthetics: grouping, peak shift, contrast, isolation, perceptual problem solving, abhorrence of coincidences, orderliness, symmetry, metaphor.

[17] Ibid., p. 250.

[18] Zéki, and Ishizu, "Toward A Brain-Based Theory of Beauty."

[19] Changeux, *Du vrai, du beau, du bien*, p. 113: "L'entreprise en cours d'une naturalisation de la contemplation du beau devrait néanmoins apporter une clarification des idées."

have evolved to recognise certain types of figures, layouts, colours, and movements, and the experience of beauty is related to this evolution. This means that our preferences for some forms over others, which arise from our evolutionary past, explain our esthetic preferences. We can therefore, by observing the brain, discover the essence of beauty. As we have seen, Di Dio argues that some parameters in works of art can be related to our experience of beauty. It means that our brain can respond to some criteria of beauty present in objects, such as symmetry and golden ratio proportions. Because nothing is explained about beauty with the observation that "[t]he artist, after all, can only deal with those attributes of nature which his [or her] brain is equipped to see,"[20] and because beauty, as social, structured and structuring concept, is not just a response to an arrangement of colours schemes, forms, etc., we can, therefore, legitimately wonder if such approaches, that seem reductionist or, for some, eliminativist,[21] can be defended. Can beauty be understood in these terms?

Neuroestheticians tell us that the experience of beauty is formed on the grounds of natural selection. In their key papers and books, they add that the beauty one experiences – e.g., when standing in front of specific pieces of art – has universal bases.[22] This is why searching for the universal brain functions implied in this experience is such an important goal for them.

How interdisciplinarity could challenge experiments on the experience of beauty as they are performed today

If neuroesthetics is a result of an attempt to link neurosciences and esthetics – and neuroestheticians tell us that there cannot be a theory of esthetics without the support of brain sciences – then, it might be of use to re-evaluate "the perception of certain humanistic modes of study as impediments to be swept aside, rather than as allies to be cultivated, set an unfortunate, if understandable (and probably unavoidable), initial context for interaction."[23] This kind of interdisciplinarity would include all the thus-far investigated factors and would rethink experimental process in light of

[20] Zéki, *Inner Vision*, p. 3.

[21] Eliminativism or eliminative materialism is a philosophical approach whose main researchers are Paul and Patricia Churchland, in which common sense emphasis, considered as non-sense, should not be base for scientific research, and should be replaced by neurological visions and sciences.

[22] Zéki, *Inner Vision,* p. 8.

[23] Stephen Jay Gould, *The Hedgehog, the Fox, and the Magister's Pox, Mending the Gap between Science and the Humanities* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 16.

other sciences and philosophy.[24] Now we will try to address the question of interdisciplinarity in light of the analyses that we have made. For neuroesthetics, one of the possibilities to consider is to restrain its conclusions to a certain part of the investigated population. To do that, neuroscientific teams should work with social scientists, such as sociologists who would conduct an investigation into the individuals that are the subjects of a given experiment. Conclusions may be used to understand the concept of beauty in the selected group of a particular society. Another possibility is to drop the concept of beauty, and talk only about pleasure. Although, in this case, the idea of "neuroesthetics" would lose its point because it would not talk about art and esthetics anymore, but only about how our brains are pleased.

It seems that neuroesthetics should look towards contemporary esthetics rather than try to reinterpret authors such as Kant or Hegel by means of the neuroscientific language. Moreover, this contemporary esthetics is further linked with other sciences. Also, as we have already said, the debate on the beautiful and the ugly is not framed in the field of esthetics as it was in traditional philosophical theories. Modern and contemporary artistic movements are now beyond the expectation that art should be beautiful.

What does it mean to respond, today, to the problems traditional philosophy raises if they are not related to contemporary social reality, and what is the point of testing such ideas on contemporary subjects?

Being an interdisciplinary research program, neuroesthetics should consider contributions from social sciences in order to improve its results and methodological approaches. Neuroesthetics should look at proposals, debates and questionings of sociology and anthropology because these branches of knowledge work with social facts and – in the special case of art – with the so called total social facts:

> They [total social facts] set in motion in certain cases all of the society and its institutions and only in other cases, a very large number of institutions, in particular when these exchanges and these contracts tend to concern individuals.[25]

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[24] Also, maybe the concept of interdisciplinarity should be thought anew and replaced by others like multidisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity. Each of them has their own definitions and conceptual approaches of how to make sciences work together. However, it seems that interdisciplinarity is more appropriate for our questionings.

[25] Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques* (Paris: PUF, 1983), p. 274: "Ils mettent en branle dans certains cas la totalité de la société et de ses institutions et dans d'autres cas seulement un très grand nombre d'institutions, en particulier lorsque ces échanges et ces contrats concernent plutôt des individus."

This social aspect is called upon by neuroestheticians but it is also avoided in their major works. One can understand that a part of their task is to set forth a neuronal basis of our experience of beauty or, more realistically, of our sense pleasure. But naturalisation and reductionism of social and human sciences should not be pursued. We should remember that neuroesthetics is still a young field, and, even if neurosciences constitute a revolution in history, they still have much to learn from other sciences that study social facts.

On the one hand, Sémir Zéki proposes a general theory of beauty – a brain-based theory of beauty. On the other, Ramachandran emphasises the nine laws of esthetics based on his observations of pathologic brains. But, as we can notice, this debate takes place only at the level of natural sciences with almost no consideration for human and social sciences of which neurosciences speak. Researchers in those disciplines emphasise that human behaviour can only be explained in the light of biology.[26] With the development of new neuroscientific tools, this idea has become more and more attractive. Cultural objects appear to be explainable solely with knowledge of the brain evolution.

Moreover, as pointed by Joseph Heinrich, one can imagine an interdisciplinary approach which would include these other fields. The concept of beauty has been discussed in philosophy and esthetics, but it has also been analysed in sociology (the concept of taste is an important part of sociological studies).[27] Moreover, the concept of beauty is not only defined differently by intellectuals, especially by philosophers, or, generally, by societies; it is also perceived differently, depending on, for example, an individual's social class, history or culture, etc. These issues should be considered in neuroesthetics as well.

For example, neuorestheticians may benefit from reflexivity, an attitude that is assumed in many sociological works.[28] There is a number of reasons why traditional philosophers, and now neuroestheticians, are interested in the concepts of beauty and ugliness – the concepts which played an important role in the field of classical art. Those interests have sociological, cultural, political and historical causes. By exploring these causes with sociological methodologies, one may be able to understand with more certainty why those concepts are so important for the present-

[26] Sober Elliott, "Models of Cultural Evolution," in: *Trees of Life: Essays in Philosophy of Biology (Australasian Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science)*, ed. P. Griffiths (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), pp. 17–38.

[27] See, for example, Bourdieu, *La distinction.*

[28] Encyclopedia Universalis, s.v. "réflexivité."

day neuroestheticians. More generally, it would be interesting if researchers asked themselves why they use such concepts.

Another problematic question of those laboratory experiments is the following: who are those subjects on the basis of which the researchers draw their conclusions about art and the brain? If one takes a look at neuroesthetic papers, one can observe that most of the time, the subjects of experiments are students from big Western universities (in fact, the same phenomenon has been observed in other experimental disciplines that deal with human behaviour). The subjects in these experiments are more likely to come from relatively similar social groups, to be more or less of the same age and, more generally, have the same type of behaviour and generational habitus, which represents a minor part of the occidental population and an even more minor part of the world population.[29] But these social characteristics are not taken into account and the main hypothesis in neuroesthetics is: if we take as our basis that all human beings have the same brain chemistry and the same brain constitution, by studying a "pool" of brains, we understand the brain.

If one wants to preserve the idea of neuroesthetics, more importance should be assigned to communication between esthetics and neurosciences. Researchers in neuroesthetics should be more aware of philosophy as it exists today in its link with other disciplines of social sciences. Philosophers may also enlighten neuroestheticians about the problems that are fuelling contemporary debates.[30]

Conclusions

Bernard Lahire wrote that "social order is too complex in our societies to be found entirely in a single brain."[31] The concept of beauty is not an exception: studying beauty in individual brains is extremely complicated. It is necessary to remember that societies are complex structures, and it seems difficult to extract this concept and study it outside those complex struc-

[29] Encyclopedia Universalis, s.v. "habitus": "Principe générateur (et unificateur) de pratiques reproductrices des structures objectives," is an important sociological term with which to reach an understanding of the problem with which we are confronted.

[30] John Searle, *Freedom and Neurobiology: Reflexions on Free Will, Language, and Political Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 6: "One of the tasks of the philosopher is to get the problem into such shape that it can be subject to experimental testing in neurobiology."

[31] Bernard Lahire, *Ceci n'est pas qu'un tableau, Essai sur l'art, la domination, la magie et le sacré* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015), p. 60: "L'ordre social est trop complexe dans nos sociétés pour pouvoir se sédimenter entièrement dans un seul cerveau individual." Fernando Vidal, "Historical and Cultural Perspectives on Why We Are Our Brains," lecture delivered at the *Neurocultures* conference, Bielsko-Biała, September 26–28, 2016.

tures. This is why I advocate studying the experience of beauty in the light of social sciences – to understand, first, that its definition is not fixed, and second, that this complex concept is probably impossible to be studied in the light of evolution only, contrary to the feeling of pleasure, which may be experimentally tested with less difficulty.

Indeed, the concept of beauty invokes even more complex structures than art, such as the "art world," social classes or socio-professional categories, and cultural history. As we have said, when researchers study such fields as esthetics, they are confronted with total social facts that are not only complex but also already studied by other sciences. Indeed, "neuro"esthetics should focus again on its "esthetic" part. By doing so, it will reintegrate philosophy and other sciences, like sociology, anthropology, history, etc., and turn to beauty as it should be studied, that is as a complex total social fact integrating many aspects.

Donna Jung

Neuro-based theories of beauty?

Neuroesthetics proposes to experimentally test beauty – a social concept developed in traditional esthetic theories by traditional philosophers – and by doing so, it omits not only an entire part of contemporary esthetics but also other disciplines studying social phenomena, such as sociology or anthropology. Therefore, my question is: what does it mean to experimentally test beauty outside of other scientific or philosophical fields, traditionally associated with the research on beauty? I argue that it is crucial for neuroesthetic research to consider disciplines devoted to studying questions of art, beauty and esthetics? Neuroesthetic research should not be only "neuro"scientific but also "esthetic."

Key words: neuroesthetics, art, sociology, esthetics, epistemology

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Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz's Poetic Danse Macabre

J.M. Rymkiewicz, Koniec lata w zdziczałym ogrodzie [*The End of Summer in a Wild Garden*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2016), pp. 50.

In one of the works in the latest poetic volume by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz *Koniec lata w zdziczałym ogrodzie* [*The End of Summer in a Wild Garden*], there is an idyllic scene conveyed in the tone of the author's confession:

Dobrze jest – słysząc osy brzęczące w oddali
Postawić im na stole kubek pełen malin

I dobrze jest – przeliczać przelotne szerszenie
Te co na telewizyjnej siadają antenie

Dobrze też – fonetycznych mieć trochę pomysłów
I czytać Adalberga starą Księgę przysłów

A potem – na tarasie w fotelu głębokim
Patrzeć na postrzępione wrześniowe obłoki

[It is good – hearing the wasps buzzing in the distance
To put a mug of raspberries for them on the table

And it is good – to reckon passing hornets
The ones who sit down on a TV aerial

It is also good – to have a few phonetic ideas
And read Adalberg's old Book of Proverbs

And then – in a deep armchair on the terrace
Look at the jagged September clouds][1]

Let's start with an explanation: the positive energy emanating from this autothematic poem is unique and does not reflect in any other way the atmosphere of other works included in the volume, in which the dominant theme is by no means an authorial reflection on the art of poetry creation, but the motif of death presented in various constellations, manifestations and images. *The End of Summer in a Wild Garden* is patronised by: the elegiac Ovid, the mystical Słowacki, the metaphysically phantasmal Leśmian and the Brothers Grimm (masking in their fairy tales the primordial *horror vacui)*, and Lacan's Nothing (from which we emerged and in which we will eventually be lost, because "when someone dies, they completely disappear" "Stary Staff" [The Old Staff]."[2] In his latest poetic volume, Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz presents the phenomenon of omnipresent death – both in nature and in culture. He shows the face of a dark and hostile force touching both the subject of his late poems (the hero and narrator in one person), as well as his admired poets, composers, and philosophers.

The role of the harbinger of the destructive force lurking in the natural word is performed by an autumn thunderstorm that "comes in the morning and shatters everything" and culminates by striking the poem's speaker straight in the heart in "Białe są marcinki [White Are the Asters]." Cruelty of nature, inseparably intertwined with death as a mindless destructive force, is shown in the poems whose characters are animals: a cat biting frogs' feet "for fun" ("Kot szarak łapie żaby [The Gray Cat Is Catching Frogs]"), "a hideous spider mite" – a loathsome parasite eating bush leaves and, like the tick, being a mortal threat to man ("Przędziorek [Spider Mite]"), and a moth: "Deaf, blind, hairy not very pleasant / Like a dark prophecy of a different life," which falls into the room through an open window, and reacts to the sublimity of an aria from Handel's opera in no way ("Ćma [The Moth]"). In the title poem of the volume, the process of observation of the withering autumn flowers of hydrangea as well as a bird cherry and

[1] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Jak pisać oktostychy [How to Write Oktostichs]," in: *Koniec lata w zdziczałym ogrodzie* [*The End of Summer in a Wild Garden*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2016), p. 44.

[2] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Stary Staff [The Old Staff]," in: *The End of Summer*, p. 12.

vine – which await the winter attack – ends with a sarcastic couplet, that can be regarded as the author's perverse credo: "What arrives in spring – disappears somewhere in autumn / And that's my only issue here" ("Koniec lata w zdziczałym ogrodzie [The End of Summer in a Wild Garden]").[3]

The motif of declining-disappearing returns in the poem "Ślimak [Snail]" – a report of its own death maintained in the oneiric convention and presented as a journey to the other side of life:

> Spadałem – był to rodzaj sztolni albo jamy
> Właśnie czegoś takiego w co zwykle spadamy
>
> Kompletnie ciemno – może rodzaj korytarza
> Który – ciągle skręcając – ciągle się powtarza
>
> albo Wnętrzne ogromnej podziemnej skorupy
> Ślimaka – tej do której wyrzuca się trupy
>
> Krzyczałem – licząc na to że ktoś się obudzi
> Ale nigdzie w pobliżu nie było już ludzi
>
> [I was falling – it was a kind of an adit or a pit
> Just something we usually fall into
>
> Completely dark – maybe a kind of corridor
> Which – still twisting – is constantly recurring
>
> Or the interior of a huge underground snail
> Shell – the one to which the dead are thrown
>
> I screamed – hoping someone would wake up
> But there were no people around me any more][4]

The motif of dream, which in the analysed volume of Rymkiewicz's poetry is ubiquitous and announces a forthcoming death, appears, among others, in two other intriguing poems. In the first one, the poet refers explicitly to "Threnody XIX" or "The Dream" by Jan Kochanowski; however, it is grandmother, not mother, that reveals herself to the lyrical subject in his dream:

[3] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Białe są marcinki [White Are the Asters]," "Kot Szarak łapie żaby [The Gray Cat Is Catching Frogs]," and "Ćma [The Moth]," in: *The End of Summer*, pp. 5, 26, 29.

[4] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Slimak [Snail]," in: *The End of Summer*, p. 36.

Śniła mi się moja babka Irena – prześliczna – jak żywa.
– Jareczku – powiedziała. – Twoja Śmierć cię wzywa.

– Ale ja w nic nie wierzę! – Ja też nie wierzyłam,
Lecz ze Źródła Mądrości wody się napiłam.

[I dreamed of my grandma, Irena – gorgeous – as if alive
"Jareczek," she said. "Your death is calling you."

"But I don't believe in anything!" – "Nor did I,
But I drank water from the Spring of Wisdom."][5]

The second poem – entitled "Śniło mi się, że idę do szkoły [I Dreamed That I Was Going to School]" – resembles the poetics of the Bruno Schulz's imaginary-oneiric stories from *The Street of Crocodiles*, and refers as well to Tadeusz Kantor's drama *The Dead Class*. In his dream, the hero of the poem and the author's *porte parole* finds himself suddenly in Piotrkowska street in Łódź, where he lived as a young boy with his parents, and where he attended the primary school. At the school, he meets Maciaszczyk, the janitor with whom he enters into a short dialogue ending with an expressive image:

– A po co ty tam idziesz – w imię Ojca, Syna?

I krzyknął – a już miotłą znikał pod podłogą:
– Oni wszyscy umarli – tam nie ma nikogo

["And what are you going there for – in the name of the Father, Son?"

He shouted – while disappearing with the broom under the floor:
"They all died – there is no one there"][6]

In the discussed volume, the poems in which Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz recalls the suicidal acts and mysterious departures of well-known artists deserve special attention: the musician Robert Schumann, who jumped into the Rhine from Düsseldorf's bridge in 1854 ("Wyciągają go z wody [They Are Drawing Him Out of Water]"), Jan Lechoń of the Skamander group, who committed suicide leaping from a skyscraper in New York ("Lechoń"), a Young Polish poet Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer, struggling with

[5] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Śniła mi się moja babka Irena [I dreamed of my grandmother Irena]," in: *The End of Summer*, p. 9.

[6] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Śniło mi się, że idę do szkoły [I Dreamed That I Was Going to School]," in: *The End of Summer*, p. 31.

mental illness at his old age and found dead in January 1940 in a snowdrift in the streets of occupied Warsaw ("Tetmajer"), or Mieczysław Karłowicz, a composer and a pioneer of climbing, struck by an avalanche during one of his alpine expeditions ("Nagrobek dla Mieczysława Karłowicza [Tombstone for Mieczysław Karłowicz]"). The poems recalled are in a minor (understood here in the musical sense of the word) mood, showing that culture does not protect man from madness or possession or death; nor does it provide him with eternal life or salvation. Culture, Rymkiewicz suggests, has been feeding itself with the images of death for centuries, and exposing its presence both in mythological writings (the harrowing poem "Umierający Minotaur [The Dying Minotaur]") and in folk tales that are a reservoir of Jungian archetypal collective consciousness. Such is the poem "Białoruś [Belarus]," whose hero is the bloodthirsty Jariłło (Jariłła), an androgynous deity of spring and fertility; but also poems referring to the dark imagination of the nineteenth-century German storytellers like: "Śpiąca Królewna (Na temat z braci Grimm) [Sleeping Beauty (A Theme from the Grimm Story)]," and "Różyczka (Na temat z braci Grimm) [Rosebud (A Theme from the Grimm Story)"].[7] The first of the quoted poems, set in the tone of a Leśmian-based narrative that is spun on the border of existence and non-existence, ends with a meaningful distich containing a disturbing message from the subject of the poem: "If you do not understand – death will explain that to you / That is how you get from one fairy tale to another." These words can be read as a paraphrase of the famous aphorism by Frederick Nietzsche, the precursor of the never-ending cultural semiosis: "Facts do not exist, only interpretations count."[8]

In the discussed volume, there are several historical poems. They are: a prelude to the dark twentieth century forefelt by the poet Stefan Mallarme: "The whole future is now a bloodstained wall" ("Pled w kratę [Plaid with a Grid Pattern]"), a reminiscence of the bloody oblation made by Polish officers murdered in Katyń ("Dla Przemysława Dakowicza [For Przemysław Dakowicz]"), a prophecy of the inevitably impending Second World War hecatomb ("Piłsudski"), an account of Joseph Stalin's last mo-

[7] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Wyciągają go z wody [They Are Drawing Him Out of Water]," "Lechoń," "Tetmajer," "Nagrobek dla Mieczysława Karłowicza [Tombstone for Mieczysław Karłowicz]," "Umierający Minotaur [The Dying Minotaur]," "Białoruś [Belarus]," "Śpiąca Królewna (Na temat z braci Grimm) [Sleeping Beauty (A Theme from the Grimm Story)]," "Różyczka (Na temat z braci Grimm) [Rosebud (A Theme from the Grimm Story)]," in: *The End of Summer,* pp. 15, 17, 25, 21, 34, 18, 33, 42.

[8] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Wyciągają go z wody [They Are Drawing Him Out of Water]," p. 15, and Friedrich Nietzsche, "W opozycji do pozytywizmu… [In opposition to positivism…,]," quoted in: Michał Januszkiewicz, *W-koło hermeneutyki literackiej* [*A-round of literary hermeneutics*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2007), p. 19.

ments, with the tyrant listening to Mozart's *Piano Concerto in A-major* before his death ("Chan słucha Mozarta [Khan Is Listening to Mozart]"), a sarcastic philippic directed against General Jaruzelski shown as a bloody renegade-king sitting in the Mouse Tower by the Gopło lake ("Pogrzeb generała Jaruzelskiego (Oktostych z dodanym dystychem) [The Funeral of General Jaruzelski (Octostich with an Added Distich)]"), or a Cassandra-like vision of Russian supremacy over contemporary Poland coming from the East ("Bal w Pałacu Staszica [The Ball at the Staszic Palace]"). An important function for the ideological meaning of this volume is performed by two poems in which the author, an eminent expert on the Polish Romantic period, refers to the metempsychosis theory popular in the nineteenth century. Both works – "Metempsychoza [Metempsychosis]" and "Teoria wiecznego powrotu (Metempsychoza 2) [Theory of Eternal Recurrence (Metempsychosis 2)]" – have been written as intertextual references to Juliusz Słowacki's works, and their content, conveyed through the lyrical subject's mouth, is a testimony of the non-Christian vision of history reduced – as in Stanisław Trembecki's *Sofijówka* – to the fatalistic concept of the Great Period: "So the world coming out of the grave is ready / and half dead – half demonic."[9]

In this collection of forty-three octostichs, each of which is an intricately finalised philosophical and anthropological minitreaty, the poems in which the author does not engage in a dialogue with cultural texts (poems, images, treaties or musical compositions), but uses the convention of a lyrical intimate monologue, deserve special attention. The poem "Afonia [Aphonia]" shows the difficult art of man's quest for silence; for cleansing oneself of superfluous words and chatter which cannot measure up to the experience of an untold death at the moment it arrives. The lyrical subject of this poignant poem – like the lyrical "I" of "Urania," the farewell poem by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz[10] – entrusts its dying body to elements of the natural world: the oaks dropping the autumn leaves, the wind announcing the coming of winter and the dead apple tree planted once by the grapevine. A melancholic aura is evoked by the poem closing the volume, provided by the poet with a significant title: "Zachód słońca w październiku – żałobna

[9] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Pled w kratę [Plaid with a Grid Pattern]," "Dla Przemysława Dakowicza [For Przemysław Dakowicz]," "Piłsudski," "Chan słucha Mozarta [Khan Is Listening to Mozart]," "Pogrzeb generała Jaruzelskiego (Oktostych z dodanym dystychem) [The Funeral of General Jaruzelski (Octostich with an Added Distich)]," "Bal w Pałacu Staszica [The Ball at the Staszic Palace]," "Metempsychoza [Metempsychosis]," and "Teoria wiecznego powrotu (Metempsychoza 2) [Theory of Eternal Recurrence (Metempsychosis 2)]," in: *The End of Summer,* pp. 6, 10, 24, 41, 7, 30, 38.

[10] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, " Afonia [Aphonia]," in: *The End of Summer,* p. 16; and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, "Urania," in: *Muzyka wieczorem* (*Music in the Evening*) (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czytelnik, 1986), p. 5.

piosenka [Sunset in October – a Mournful Song]." Its elegant voice – beautiful and classically unequivocal – evokes the thought of Ovid's *Tristia*:

> Już zachodzi słoneczko za brzózki sosenki
> Lisy jeże śpiewają ostatnie piosenki
>
> I wiewiórka też śpiewa żałobną piosenkę
> nakłada szarożółtą zimową sukienkę
>
> I zaraz zaśnie w dziupli albo pod wykrotem
> Ja piec gazowy zapalę w najbliższą sobotę
>
> Spać! Spać! Już słychać dzikie Nicości okrzyki
> W mroku świecą błękitne gazowe płomyki
>
> [The sun is already going down behind the birches pines
> Foxes hedgehogs are singing their last songs
>
> And the squirrel is singing its mournful song, too
> Putting on a yellow-gray winter dress
>
> And soon it will fall asleep in a hollow or under a fallen tree
> While I will switch on a gas stove next Saturday
>
> Sleep! Sleep! You can hear the wild cries of Oblivion
> Blue gas flames are glowing in the dark][11]

Reading the latest (and probably the farewell) volume of one of the most outstanding living Polish poets, it is hard to resist the impression that these beautiful – yet extremely pessimistic, bitter and devoid of the eschatological hope perspective – poems fall, *nolens volens*, into the tone of the hymn of praise in honour of human spirit and human thought written by a great predecessor of the author of *Koniec lata w zdziczałym ogrodzie* [*The End of Summer in a Wild Garden*]. It is Czesław Miłosz, struggling at his old age with the seismic consciousness of the omnipotent nihilism as the end of human existence, who wrote:

> Gdyby tak było, to jednak zostanie
> Słowo raz obudzone przez nietrwałe usta,
> Które biegnie i biegnie, poseł niestrudzony,
> Na międzygwiezdne pola, w kołowrót galaktyk

[11] Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, "Zachód słońca w październiku – żałobna piosenka [Sunset in October – a Mournful Song]," in: *The End of Summer*, p. 47.

I protestuje, woła, krzyczy.

[Even if that is so, there will remain
A word wakened by lips that perish,
A tireless messenger who runs and runs
Through interstellar fields, through the revolving galaxies,
And calls out, protests, screams.][12]

(translated by Czesław Miłosz)

The words of the poet Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz – those from his earlier poetic books as well as these from the latest collection – certainly belong to the category of the words whose aesthetic power is enormous and whose message is eminently human in its meaning.

Marek Biernacki

Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz's Poetic Danse Macabre

The article discusses the latest poetic volume entitled *Koniec lata w zdziczałym ogrodzie* [The End of Summer in a Wild Garden] written by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, one of the most famous Polish contemporary poets. The author of the article first of all focuses on the motif of death, which is presented in most of forty three poems included in the mentioned volume in various symbols and constellations. The author shows also an intertextual poetic dialogue in a space of culture led by the poet.

Key words: poetry of Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz – motif of death in poetry – intertextual poetic dialogue in the space of culture

[12] Czesław Miłosz, „Sens (Meaning)," in *Wiersze wszystkie* [*All Poems*] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2011), p. 1036.

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Condemnation of assimilation in the Chicano/a identity discourse

John Alba Cutler, *Ends of Assimilation: The Formation of Chicano Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 288.

The turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries was the period in which international scholarship gained very valuable studies regarding the history and literature of the Mexican ethnic group in the United States. In a plethora of publications, special consideration was given to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s inspired by political, social, and cultural mobilisation of the underprivileged group whose presence in the USA had been marked with economic exploitation and exclusion.[1] Among them, the monograph *Ends of Assimilation: The Formation of Chicano Literature*, authored by John Alba Cutler (2015), deserves special attention. It is one of very few studies which take an interdisciplinary approach exceeding the framework (methodological, conceptual) of one academic discipline only.

In terms of the internal structure of the monograph, *Ends of Assimilation* comprises the introduction, six chapters setting the scene for literary and historical reflections concerning the production of Chicano/a literature, and the conclusion section. Such an organisation of the research allows for undisturbed contemplation of the creative ideas served by Cutler throughout the book. Cutler organises a portion of historical and literary knowledge into several problems which he resolves gradually providing historical facts,

[1] "Chicano" is a term referring to a Mexican American community. Even though it has a long and complex etymology, it was readopted by Mexican Americans during the Civil Rights Movement in America to indicate its cultural provenance. The term, which is taken from Spanish, respects the gender distinctiveness. Thus, the variants "Chicano/s" and "Chicana/s" refer respectively to "man/men" and "woman/women."

his own interpretation of social processes, and coherent conclusions. All these elements (introduced logically in subsequent chapters) contribute to the creation of a comprehensive image of the group in question.

In the introductory part, the author states the research problem, which is the interrelation between the theory of assimilation sociology and the literary creation of Mexican Americans. Presenting briefly the main assumptions of this field of study, which started to consolidate in the 1920s due to efforts made by a group of sociologists set in Chicago, the author prepares the ground for a literary and critical analysis of both selected classic works and more contemporary ones. The main thesis of the book is that the inadequate ideology embraced to explain the race relations in the United States in the twentieth century provoked a specific activist mode of writing, which may have far-reaching consequences for the U.S. cultural politics. While the assertion may seem to be most daring at first glance, the author competently analyses the slightest nuances of the mid-century sociology, pointing out its drawbacks, which makes the reader understand and acknowledge the areas of social iniquity that need to be redressed.

In the first chapter, "Becoming Mexican-American Literature," Cutler elaborates on the major discrepancy observed between the classic models of assimilation developed by sociologists in the middle of the twentieth century and the distinctive features underlying the literary works produced by writers representing the Mexican American minority group.[2] To explain and prove a historical disjunction in the two separate fields of social and cultural life (i.e. literary activity and modern sociological thought), the author analyses three novels published in the period preceding the Chicano Movement, among which we can find: *George Washington Gómez: A Mexicotexan Novel* authored by Américo Paredes (1930s), *Caballero: A Historical Novel* by Jovita González and Margaret Eimer, who coauthored the novel under the pseudonym[3] – (1930s–1940s),[4] and *Pocho* written by José Antonio Villarreal (1959). The selected books are supposed to provide evidence that the sociological assumptions concerning the categories such as gender and race lacked coherence. As a consequence, they failed in explaining and depicting the processes of integrating Mexican Americans into the main-

[2] It is important to note that the denominations "Mexican Americans" and "Mexican-Americans" convey two different meanings. While "Mexican Americans" refer to the Mexican-origin people in general, the name "Mexican-Americans" pertain normally to those who followed the assimilation policy in the USA.

[3] Andrea R. Purdy, "Jovita González de Mireles (1904–1983)," in: *American Women Writers, 1900–1945: A Bio-bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Laurie Champion (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 142–143.

[4] The both books were written over the course of several years. It is difficult to indicate any specific date.

stream culture. In this way, the author elucidates that what had seemed to be a natural path for immigrants to follow, at least for the then analysts of assimilation policies, scholars, and decision-makers, proved to be different in the case of Mexican-origin peoples. And this was also reflected in the shaping of Mexican American literature. Cutler's in-depth literary analysis also shows the vital regional differences in the compared novels. Additionally, the survey on the content-related intentions of the authors of the last of the aforementioned novels reveals how the literary work issues a challenge to the paradigm of masculinism. This observation, which has its direct confirmation in the theorisation of sociology of literature, is indeed highly important. The conclusions drawn by the author may to some extent explain how literature (which has predominantly a symbolic and imaginary dimension) operates in reality, signalling and inducing fundamental social changes.

The second chapter, "Quinto Sol, Chicano/a Literature, and the Long March Through Institutions," presents a shift that has occurred in the institutional dimension in the United States. As observed rightly by the author, the demographic and political transformations continued since the 1960s have diversified higher education. Consequently, the university is no longer employed just in reproducing national culture. Instead, it is now a central site that mediates the production, distribution, and, more importantly, the reception of Chicano/a literature in society. Moreover, Cutler examines the route that was covered by the first fully independent publisher of Chicano/a literature established in the late 1960s – Quinto Sol Publications – from its rise to the fall in the mid-seventies. In an insightful analysis, Cutler discusses how academic and publishing institutions built the foundations of literature which successfully resisted the perpetuated forms of domination developed by the mainstream culture in an earlier era. In addition, the author points out that the production of critical knowledge as well as cultural capital in the body of literary works helped to countervail the assimilatory operations run by public authorities and services. I find this part extraordinarily interesting and crucial as there is still little research on how the cultural institutions and organizations founded by minority members translated into the cultural production intended to subjugate the system.

The prime focus of the next chapter, "Culture Capital and the Singularity of Literature in *Hunger of Memory* and *The Rain God*," is brought to the problem of how the notions of cultural capital are connected to some ideal of assimilation established and pursued within a monocultural

perspective. So as to provide a proof that any hope for ascending the ladder of social hierarchy rests on a particular concept of literature, Cutler makes a comparison between two books written in the 1980s – *Hunger of Memory* by Richard Rodriguez (1982) and *The Rain God* by Arturo Islas (1984). What is important here, in my opinion, is that the insights provided by the author are set in the context of culture wars, which have had far-reaching consequences for both the creation of literature curricula and education policy in the U.S. On the basis of his examination, Cutler advances a thesis that assimilation desired by Mexican Americans is not about joining the mainstream, but about entering the public sphere. And this is reflected in the change of the literary canon.

Cutler continues to focus on the legacy of the mid-century assimilation sociology and its critique in the fourth chapter, "Lyric Subjects, Cultures of Poverty, and Sandra Cisneros's Wicked Wicked Ways." In this part of the study, the author states that the assimilation discourse gave rise to the so-called "culture of poverty" hypothesis, which is to be blamed for making poor women of colour pathologised objects of a fallible sociological approach, and generating misrepresentations. The resistance is exemplified by means of poetry composed by Sandra Cisneros, an acknowledged Chicana author. The analysis made by Cutler shows that Cisneros's poems attempt at transforming the underprivileged women into speaking subjects who can explicitly articulate their needs or goals and claim a space for their personal, familial, and professional development, among other things. In his analysis, he also alludes to one of the most meaningful dual characters of Mexican cultural mythology – La Malinche[5] – who, on the one hand, represents maternal values, on the other, is an individual pursuing her own desires. Furthermore, Cutler challenges the general assumption that the 1970s were the most formative period for Chicano/a literature. In his view, it was the post-Movement era that specified the ideas of Chicano/a literariness.

The fifth chapter, "Segmented Assimilation and Jimmy Santiago Baca's Prison Counterpublics," is devoted to the examination of prison poetry written by Jimmy Santiago Baca in which he fights the detrimental forces of segmentation and stratification resorting to the imagined spaces created in his poems. The social order represented in the analysed works constitutes some counterpublic space in which the principles and standards of coexistence can be redefined to shape a convenient environment

[5] According to historical accounts, La Malinche was a Nahua woman who acted as an interpreter and mistress for Hernán Cortés. Also, she is a symbol of betrayal of the Aztec Empire. See: Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortes, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), pp. 171–172.

for various segments of the general population. In this chapter, Cutler notes that Baca's early poetry is located on the borderland between two divergent models of assimilation, i.e. segmented assimilation (in which individuals are assimilated into other underclass groups that cannot gain upward economic mobility) and boundary-crossing assimilation (according to which, there is one boundary that must be crossed to enter the larger community). The reference to these two models helps the reader understand that assimilation as an ideology or doctrine is not something uniform. Instead, it can assume different forms, and sometimes just the combination of them is more consistent with the needs demonstrated by a given community.

The last, sixth, chapter, "Disappeared Men: Chicano/a Authenticity and the American War in Viet Nam," is devoted to the analysis of selected literary works of narrative fiction in which the central motif of the plot is the war in Vietnam, among them: *Gods Go Begging* by Alfredo Véa (1999), *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility* by Patricia Santana (2002), and *Their Dogs Came with Them* written by Helena María Viramontes (2007). As Cutler observes, war as such occupies a special position in the history of the Chicano Movement. It was the disappointment and disillusionment with World War II that contributed to the anti-systemic attitudes among Mexican Americans – their expectations resulting from their perception that loyal military service entailed no significant political decisions that would change the plight of the neglected minority. Such protest literature, as further scrutinised by the author, emerged especially in the 1980s, and it had a twofold objective. First, it emphasised the gravity of transnational affiliations of marginalised communities that would provide an alternative to the authoritative and prevailing model of society understood as a one-nation culture. Second, the literature intended to eradicate a deeply embedded idea of American exceptionalism through highlighting that there is nothing "exceptional" about the country if the internal divisions in the population structure are still vibrant. The assertion seems to touch on a sore point of American society, which on the one hand believes in the nation's global role in establishing cordial relations and, on the other, deals with openly hostile forces inside the country.

Having analysed the novels and their development over time, Cutler turns to final conclusions. In the first place, he states that the Chicano/a literature, which proliferated in the 1970s, has not lost its political orientation developed in the activist movement. Some changes concerning the intrinsic properties of textual representations are, obviously, discerned –

which results, according to Cutler, from the necessity to adapt some literary constituents to the new era. However, the essence of goal-reaching through literature is still maintained. Moreover, he notices that the one-sidedness characterising the assumptions of the mid-century sociology recedes in favour of immigrants to the United States. Even though the change is not revolutionary or groundbreaking, it allows for some multiplicity of cultures and perspectives in numerous areas of life. Both the academia and ordinary citizens seem to appreciate more the contributions made by non-white newcomers, which, hopefully, will ensure them an equal representation and participation in the mainstream.

The reading of the study stimulates a comprehensive reflection on the motivations of Chicano/a authors who have engaged in the process of writing for the sake of the group's common objectives. Confronting this kind of activism with the scholarly and political assumptions of assimilation sociology opens up new interpretative fields for acknowledged literary works of different genres. Such an original analysis may lead to the reevaluation of the mainstream culture as well as reveal complex dynamics of the literary dimension in cultural dialogue with the theory of sociology. Simultaneously, Cutler challenges a long-lived general conviction that literary works by Chicanos/as keep the antiassimilationist stance. Thanks to his discussion, it becomes clearly evident that the minority's efforts are dependent on its willingness to function within the structure of American society – not beyond it. The chronological approach, which Cutler follows consistently, makes it possible to indicate the factors which have been historically responsible for the formation of Chicano/a literature. All of these elements contribute to the recommendation of *Ends of Assimilation* as a treatise worthy of a greater audience.

Tomasz J. Brenet

Condemnation of assimilation in the Chicano/a identity discourse

The aim of this review is to familiarise a potential reader with a particularly interesting monograph written in English that has been available on the reading market since 2015 – *Ends of Assimilation: The Formation of Chicano Literature* authored by John Alba Cutler. The presented study is devoted to the literature produced by the representatives of the Mexican ethnic group in the United States – literature that owes its prime to the civil rights movement launched in the latter half of the twentieth century. As the author has noted, activism accompanying the participants and observers of this social impulse translated itself into the political orientation of literary works. What, however, distinguishes Cutler's study, when compared to similar monographs published continuously since the 1980s, is the interdisciplinary approach of the conducted research. The author not only concentrates on a typical analysis of selected works (preserving simultaneously their chronological order), but juxtaposes their subject matter and specificity with the assumptions of the theory of assimilation developed within the discipline of sociology in the 1920s. Based on this perspective, Cutler indicates the way in which the literature produced by Mexican-origin prose writers and poets was shaped. Moreover, he proves that it does not manifest any antiassimilationist attitude, as it was commonly considered so far, but rather shows the group's aspiration to function together within one society – not beyond it.

Key words: American literature, identity discourse, assimilation, Mexican ethnic group, narrative fiction

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[1] A. Folkierska, *Kształcąca funkcja pytania. Perspektywa hermeneutyczna*, [w:] *Odmiany myślenia o edukacji*, red. J. Rutkowiak, Kraków 1995, s. 172–173.

[2] Tamże, s. 174.

[3] A. Folkierska, *Kształcąca funkcja pytania*, s. 28.

[4] M. Adamiec, *Odejście Pana Cogito*, „Tytuł" 1991, nr 4.

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