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### **From Book Poetry to Digital Poetry**

In the article, I will discuss the relationship between ‘book poetry’ and ‘digital poetry.’ I examine the differences, as well as the similarities, between poetry as presented in these two media. Research on the transition from book poetry to digital poetry has mainly focussed on the significant changes in genre and work concepts as well as in the author and reader roles. However, several trends within the tradition of poetry have intensified and have further developed since the emergence of the digital media. The focus in this paper will thus be on four key features, which were founded in book poetry as far back as early Modernism and the avant-garde movements, but, to a great extent, those features have unfolded in digital poetry. The four features are the multimodality, the montage form, the network structure, and the serial form. The artistic opportunities offered by digital poetry are not only due to technological opportunities in the new media. Such opportunities are just as much due to the innovations in multimodality, montages, network structures, and seriality realized by avant-garde and symbolist poets like Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Schwitters, Eliot, and Pound in early modernism. My article concludes with an example of how the four features form the basis for a work of digital poetry, namely Johannes Heldén’s “The Primary Directive” (2008).

*Keywords: digital poetry, multimodality, montage form, network structure, serial form, Apollinaire, Pound, Mallarmé, Eliot, Heldén*

In this article, I will discuss the relationship between book poetry and digital poetry. I will examine the differences, as well as the similarities, between poetry as presented in these two media. Research in the transition from book poetry to digital poetry has mainly been focused on the significant changes in genre and

work concepts as well as in author and reader roles<sup>1</sup>. However, several trends within the tradition of poetry have become intensified and further developed since the emergence of the Internet. The focus in this article will be on four key features which connect book poetry to digital poetry. The four features are the multimodality, the montage form, the network structure, and the serial form.<sup>2</sup> These four features were founded in book poetry as far back as early modernism and the avant-garde movements, but, to a great extent, the features have unfolded in digital poetry.

### *Poetry as a historical and a dialogical genre*

Unlike other genres such as the novel, poetry seems only lightly bound to the book medium. Poetry seems to have an excellent ability to interact with other genres, art forms, and media. Poetry today is ubiquitous, if one considers its countless manifestations such as song lyrics, slogans, performance poetry, and digital poetry. The role of poetry today suggests that it is far from being an isolated aesthetical phenomenon, but that poetry has an important role in the context of other genres and historical developments.

When we talk about poetry and the development of poetry, there are two main positions in poetry research: namely one that emphasises the notion of poetry as an universal and ahistorical genre, and one that emphasises the historical development within the poetic genre and the interaction of the poetic genre with other literary and non-literary genres.

Within the first trend, a prominent example is Jonathan Culler's "Theory of the Lyric" (2015), which presents four characteristics which are fundamental to the lyrical genre as a whole. The first is the effect of a voice ("enunciative apparatus", "aurality", or "impression of the distinctive voice of a speaker"<sup>3</sup>). The second is the "effect of presence" or "the impression of something happening now."<sup>4</sup> The third is the ritual element, elicited by rhythmic and metric forms and repetitive effects ("everything that recalls song"<sup>5</sup>). The fourth effect is the hyperbolic, in relation to which Culler states: "Lyrics seek to remake the universe as a

<sup>1</sup> Morris / Swiss (eds., 2006), Engberg (2007), Hayles (2008), Rustad (2012), Larsen (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Other discussions of modernist and avant-garde poetry have focused on other features than the four features this article have explored. Among other features and concepts one could mention Hugo Friedrich's (1956) „Depersonalisierung“ and „leere Transzendenz“, R. N. Maier's „tragische Abstraktion“ and „reine Abstraktion“ (1964), Helmuth Kiesel's (2004) „Entgrenzung“ and „Ästhetik der Hässlichkeit“, and Kjell Espmark's (1975) orientation towards the universal human being ("orientering mot den universella människan").

<sup>3</sup> Culler (2015: 34-35).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

world, giving a spiritual dimension to matter.”<sup>6</sup> The four features are, according to Culler, the means by which poetry distances itself from two other dominant modes of literature: the mimetic and the narrative. The features are illustrated by nine canonised poems from the Western poetry tradition by the poets Sappho, Horace, Petrarca, Goethe, Leopardi, Baudelaire, Lorca, Williams, and Ashbery.

Culler’s linking of the nine poems can be problematized, as relations between them are, to a high degree, family resemblance. The differences between Sappho’s ode to Aphrodite, Baudelaire’s satanic-decadent sonnet, Williams’ minimalist-Imagist poem, and Ashbery’s polyphonic free speech poem are significant. A similar attempt to identify “a transhistorically valid theory of the lyric” is found in Klaus W. Hempfer’s “Theory of the Lyric: a Prototypical Approach.”<sup>7</sup>

Contrary to the ahistorical understanding of the lyrical genre is the dialogic and historical approach. In “The Lyrical Impulse” (2017), Charles Altieri points out that modern poetry, in particular, does not attempt to meet traditional genre conventions, but attempts to break with these conventions and find new ways. Altieri states that his interest lies in investigating how poets are “interested in displaying individual genius by disrupting and mixing generic expectations.”<sup>8</sup> A striking formulation of Altieri’s goes: “Modernist self-consciousness is a desire not simply to adapt generic conventions but to display how the poem deploys its generic identity.”<sup>9</sup>

A similar approach is used by Jahan Ramazani, who states that “there are no lyric exclusive characteristics.”<sup>10</sup> Ramazani discusses a number of the so-called ‘prototypical’ poetic features mentioned by Culler and Hempfer et al: namely the address to a ‘you,’ the expression of feelings and thoughts of an ‘I’, brevity, and self-reflexivity. Ramazani states that none of these features are sufficient to clearly determine lyric, as all the features mentioned can also be found in other genres. For Ramazani, the lyrical genre is dialogically determined and may only be defined in the context of other genres:

Lyric is a changing set of conventions or schemas sometimes unconsciously brought to works by writers and audiences – works that summon, resist, remix, defy, and remake those encoded presuppositions, or what we might call, after Hans Robert Jauss [...] horizons of lyric expectation.<sup>11</sup>

In “Poetry and Its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres” (2013) and other works, Ramazani argues that

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>7</sup> Hempfer (2017: 55).

<sup>8</sup> Altieri (2017: 13).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ramazani (2017: 100).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 99.

we should trace how often implicitly poetry defines itself in its affiliate and contentious relationship with the genres and discourses it both draws on and resists, such as news, prayer, and song, philosophy, the novel, the law, and tourism.<sup>12</sup>

I agree with Ramazani's arguments in my "Drømme og dialoger. To poetiske traditioner omkring 2000" [Dreams and dialogues. Two poetic traditions around 2000] (2009) and a number of my other works. In the dissertation, I distinguish between two literary historical main trends or forms of poetry, namely "central-poetry" and "interaction-poetry." By "central-poetry", I understand poetic texts with a monologic mode of enunciation and stylistic homogeneity. In central-poetry, the speaking subject acts as an unequivocal centre of the poetic universe. Furthermore, the text possesses a distinct autonomous quality. The antithesis to central-poetry, "interaction-poetry", are poetic texts in which the poetic subject interacts with a number of social contexts. That is, texts in which the monologic enunciation are infringed upon and in which we find a distinct stylistic heterogeneity. Finally, works pertaining to this type of poetry do not possess the same level of autonomy as central-poetry. In "Drømme og dialoger", it is shown that interaction-poetry has been a significant trend throughout the twentieth century. On the contrary, I would like to emphasise that the opposition between central-poetry and interaction-poetry or monologic and multivoiced tendencies should not be seen as a manifestation of a rigid either-or position but as a continuum between extremes.

One reason why it is important to emphasise that an approach to modern poetry – in book format as well as electronic format – must be based on a dialogic and intergeneric poetics is that the features that link book poetry to digital poetry are not the prototypical lyrical features which Culler, Hempfer, and others describe. Poetry is a constantly evolving genre, and new features are included in the genre after contagion from other genres. However, before we look at these four features: multimodality, the montage form, the network structure, and the serial form, we have to state that there are features that separate digital poetry from book poetry.

### *Differences Between Book Poetry and Digital Poetry*

I would like to highlight three features of digital poetry which distinguish it from what we have previously seen in literary history. Firstly, there has been a change in the production, distribution, and consumption conditions of digital poetry in relation to printed poetry since, in the former, the strong linking of the literary work to a publisher has disappeared. In addition, the power balance between the author and the reader in digital poetry is obviously changed compared to what we find in printed texts, since the reader often carries a part of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 102.

responsibility with regard to the way in which the work is perceived and that, in some cases, the reader is also included as a co-producer of the text.

Secondly, digital works differ from the printed literature by being far less definite. The paradigm shift that Roland Barthes announces with his statement “From Work to Text” (1968) is truly realised in digital poetry, as most book poetry has the character of delimited works, while the opposite is true in the case of digital literature. Hans Kristian Rustad (2012) describes how the work as a stable object has been replaced by the text as an event. We are dealing with a new interactive aesthetics in which the poem appears as a floating unit. Third, digital poetry is difficult to determine by genre, as it often involves complex mixes of writing, speech, images, graphics, film, and sound effects. This hybrid character, in which many genres, art forms, and media are mixed in the same work, makes it reasonable to point out that every work is a genre in itself in digital literature.

I will return to examples of digital poetic works later in this article. In the following, however, the focus will be on a number of features in book poetry which prejudice the way in which digital media use the poetic genre.

#### *Four Common Features Between Book Poetry and Digital Poetry*

##### *The multimodality*

The question of whether art forms have something in common and should be mixed is as old as art itself. The classic texts used in aesthetic theory as arguments for or against the question of interaction between literature and the visual arts are Horace’s “Ars Poetica” (approx. 18 BC) and G.E. Lessing’s “Laokoon. Oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie” (1766). While Horace with the formula “ut pictura poesis” sees relationships between the art forms, Lessing criticises the notion that visual and linguistic artworks should resemble one another. Lessing’s basic argument is that visual art is determined by the spatial medium and, therefore, it should produce objects that appear at the same time, whereas literature should produce objects that follow one another in time, i.e. actions. In general, this polarization between the two views on the relationship between visual art and literature has been evident throughout history up to the 21st century. While a major trend in symbolism and parts of early modernism has been to defend the purity of genres and art forms, the agenda for the past half century in postmodernism, post-structuralism, and avant-garde has been to merge genres, art forms, and media.

The interaction between the art forms could be seen as an essential aspect of the development of all art forms in the last two centuries. Peter Dayan states in “Art as Music, Music as Poetry, Poetry as Art, from Whistler to Stravinsky and Beyond” (2011) that a dominant driving force in modern art is simply the inter-artial and intermedial orientation:

The key to their expression is the description as of each art as if it were one of the others: poetry as music, music as painting, painting as poetry, and so on.<sup>13</sup>

In Joseph M. Conte's "Den multimodale ikon: Syn, lyd og forståelse i den nyeste poesi" [The Multimodal Icon: Sight, Sound and Intellection in Recent Poetries] (2013), the development of poetry is outlined based on the thesis that a shift has taken place in the way we decipher poetry. While we before Modernism basically perceived poetry as an art form that only expressed itself in one code, namely the letters on the page of a book, the poem has apparently become a multimodal icon in which text and image interact and in which text and image cannot be separated from each other. This requires, Conte claims, new approaches and competences by the interpreter, if he or she wants to be able to understand modern poetry.<sup>14</sup>

Important examples of multimodal poetry – although we have precedents in e.g. a number of Baroque poems and William Blake's poems – appear around the First World War in the avant-garde movements Futurism, Cubism, and Dadaism. Significant is Apollinaire's « Calligrammes » (1913-16), among which is a text, « Il pleut », where diagonal verse lines on the paper resemble the falling rain, while the text tells about the rain in the city:

Il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir  
c'est vous aussi qu'il pleut, merveilleuses rencontres de ma vie ô gouttelettes  
et ces nuages cabrés se prennent à hennir tout un univers de villes auriculaires  
écoute s'il pleut tandis que le regret et le dédain pleurent une ancienne musique  
écoute tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas

It's raining women's voices as if they had died even in memory  
And it's raining you as well marvellous encounters of my life O little drops  
Those rearing clouds begin to neigh a whole universe of auricular cities  
Listen if it rains while regret and disdain weep to an ancient music  
Listen to the bonds fall off which hold you above and below<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dayan (2011: 1).

<sup>14</sup> Conte (2016).

<sup>15</sup> Apollinaire (1971: 85). Translated by Roger Shattuck.

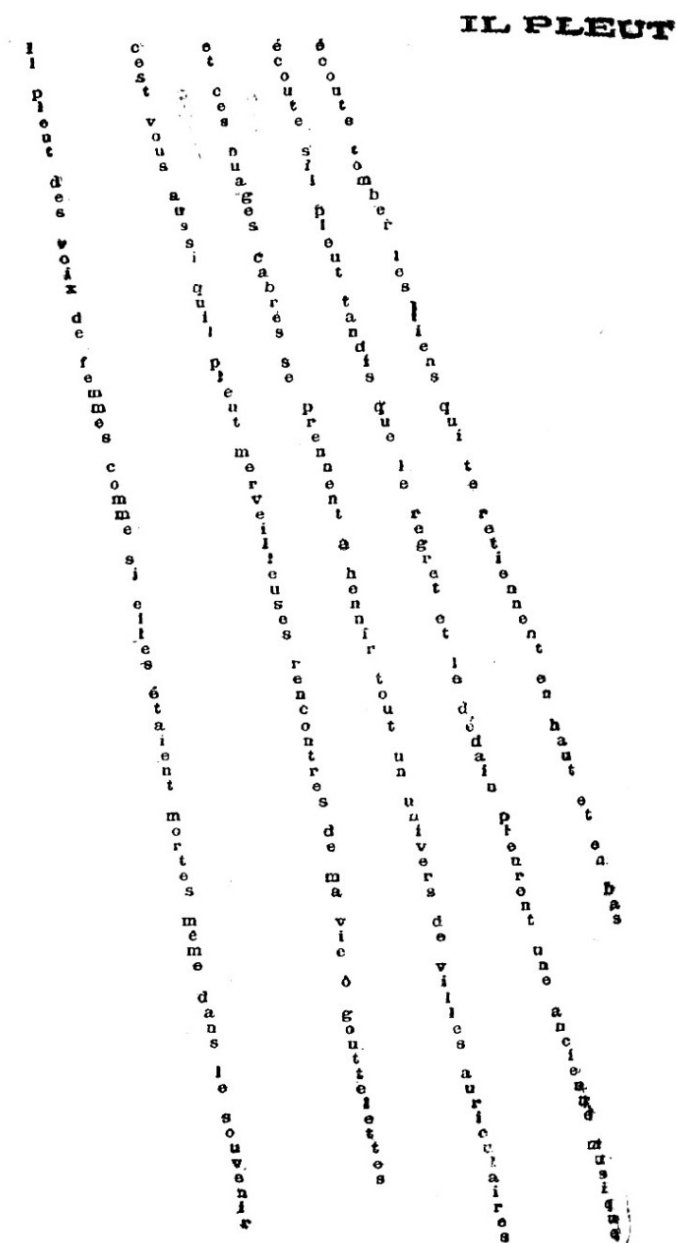


Figure 1: Apollinaire: « Il pleut »<sup>16</sup>

The poem differs from another famous French ‘rain-poem,’ Verlaine’s melancholy-symbolist and self-reflecting « Il pleure dans mon cœur » (1874), as there is no Weltschmerz in Apollinaire’s poem. The poem expresses a shift from the introverted melancholy and decadence (« Il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir ») to an extrovert, ecstatic, and triumphant experience of expansion (« tout un univers de villes auriculaires »),

<sup>16</sup> Apollinaire (1977: 24).

« tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas »). It is a synesthetic holistic experience, where the sound of the rain calls for a universal opening of the world – in accordance with Apollinaire’s « calligrammes », opening the poem to new formal horizons with its graphic experiments.

Another example of multimodal poetry relates to the interaction between poetry and music, where a similar breakthrough takes place in modernist poetry during the inter-war period. Famous is the multi-artist and poet Kurt Schwitters’ thirty page long „Ursonate“ or „Sonate in Urlauten“, written between 1922 and 1932. Schwitters seeks a new language of primordial sound and thus a completely new concept of poetry, as we can sense in the opening line of „Ursonate“: „Fumms bö wö tää zää Uu, pögiff, kwii Ee.“<sup>17</sup> The poem’s composition resembles the musical genre symphony or sonata with its division into four parts, „Erster Teil“, „Largo“, „Scherzo“, and „Presto“, and the poem’s instructions about how the words should be pronounced and how a reading should be performed. Schwitters’ „Ursonate“ has been performed countless times in the post-war era – and the work was, not surprisingly, banned as „Entartete Kunst“ by the Nazis.

### *The Montage Form*

One of the most important works that discusses montage as an aesthetic category is Peter Bürger’s „Theorie der Avantgarde“ (1974). Bürger operates with two types of artworks, namely the bourgeois, autonomous, “organic” work of art, and the avant-garde, “non-organic” work of art:

The organic work of art seeks to make unrecognizable the fact that it has been made. The opposite holds true for the avant-gardist work: it proclaims itself an artificial construct, an artifact. To this extent, montage may be considered the fundamental principle of avant-gardiste art.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, while the organic work of art implies a whole by virtue of its unique linguistic nature and its aura of something eternal, it is contrary to the avant-garde work of art, Bürger claims. The avant-garde work shows itself as a construction. The nature of the work as construction and artefact is the reason why Bürger perceives the montage as the most genuine example of avant-garde art.

Montage works are composed of heterogeneous elements with reference to different societal contexts. The elements included in the montage partly have their stylistic characteristics – which refer to their origin – and partly co-operate in a common effect. Montage appears far back in the history of art and literature, but the concept is of particular importance in Sergei Eisenstein’s film aesthetics of around 1920. As a cross-aesthetic phenomenon, the film offers a distinctive medium for the many different aesthetic techniques that are present in the montage. Later, the concept of montage has become widespread in literature, music,

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<sup>17</sup> Schwitters (1986: 74).

<sup>18</sup> Bürger (1984: 72).



and visual art. In the context of visual art, the montage, as it manifests itself in Cubism, is a construction of photographs, drawings, letters, and other visual material in a composition while, in the literary montage, different styles and different genre concepts are confronted and cooperating within the work.

Literary montages often appear in the inter-war avant-garde poetry related to movements such as Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Imagism. The two main Imagist works, T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) and Ezra Pound's "Cantos" (1915-62), are among the most influential. In these large montage texts, we experience compositions in which quotes and situations with widely different subjects and times and places interact. The second part of "The Waste Land", "A Game of Chess" is a montage whose frame is a piece of dramatic impressionism in which we overhear a conversation in an English pub interrupted by the closing announcement: "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME." In addition, this conversation is interrupted by the speech of the mad Ophelia from Shakespeare's "Hamlet", "Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night":

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said—  
 I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
 Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.  
 He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you  
 To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.  
 You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,  
 He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.  
 And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,  
 He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,  
 And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.  
 Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.  
 Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
 If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.  
 Others can pick and choose if you can't.  
 But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.  
 You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique  
 (And her only thirty-one.)  
 I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,  
 It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.  
 (She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)  
 The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.  
 You are a proper fool, I said.  
 Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,  
 What you get married for if you don't want children?  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
 Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,  
 And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.  
 Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.  
 Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.<sup>19</sup>

In the poem, we hear the petty, injurious, and vicious unmarried sister talking about her sister who has been physically destroyed by abortion pills and has rotten teeth at an early age. The jealous sister explains that she certainly understands and would find it fair if her sister's husband does not want a woman who looks like the broken sister ("if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling. / You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique").

The montage is evident in the way in which quotes from the absent sister and brother-in-law are selected and composed from numerous situations, as the voice of the unmarried sister changes with the voices of the pub guests and the bartender. In addition, the bar monologue clashes with Ophelia's speech as a confrontation between high-literary style ("Good night, ladies") and low-social language ("It's them pills I took, to bring it off"). At the same time, the similarity between the two quotes is evident since, in both cases, we hear about situations of extreme poverty, torment, and degradation. In this way, Eliot's simultaneous technique of montage fulfils its purpose, namely to show the total loss of all illusions of intimacy, meaning, and cohesion in modern civilisation's "waste land".

With Eliot's "The Waste Land", the stylistically homogeneous poem is contested. The montage is the basic feature of Eliot's text, and the notion of a monological mode is replaced by multivoicedness and Bakhtinian "heteroglossia." In "The Waste Land", an everyday-language style appears in parallel with classical, romantic, symbolist, or biblical style, with references to works from world literature.

### *The Network Structure*

Network poetics is described one of the first times in Umberto Eco's "Poetics of the Open Work" (1962). In the twentieth century, an increasing number of "open works" have been created, and the culmination of this trend has come in the new millennium with the Internet. The hyperlink structure of the Internet corresponds to the idea of "the open work." With "open works", Eco understands that a work has a structure that gives the reader a large number of possible ways in which he or she can read the work. Contrary to this, the 'closed works' are tightly composed and contain a pre-given "plan" for how the work should be conceived. Eco outlines in his essay by examples from literature, music, and visual art "the open work" as "a field of opportunity," a "structural polyphony," and "a network of communication effects." The open work, in Eco's ecstatic avant-garde rhetoric,

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<sup>19</sup> Eliot (2001: 12).

“constitutes a continually changing world that is constantly renewed to the eyes of the reader by showing still new aspects in the many ramifications”<sup>20</sup>.

Eco’s idea that a network structure in a work of art constitutes an emancipatory potential, however, has also been met with scepticism in later aesthetic and media theory. In “Cybertext” (1997), Espen Aarseth pointed out that network-structured texts, referred to as hypertexts in digital media, usually only offer a limited number of possibilities for the reader, as the work presents a series of reading routes which are strictly controlled by the author<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, the network structure is a tendency which has gained great importance within poetry since early modernism. A crucial network-structured poem is Mallarmé’s late work « Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard » (1897). A part of the twenty-page long poem’s second goes:

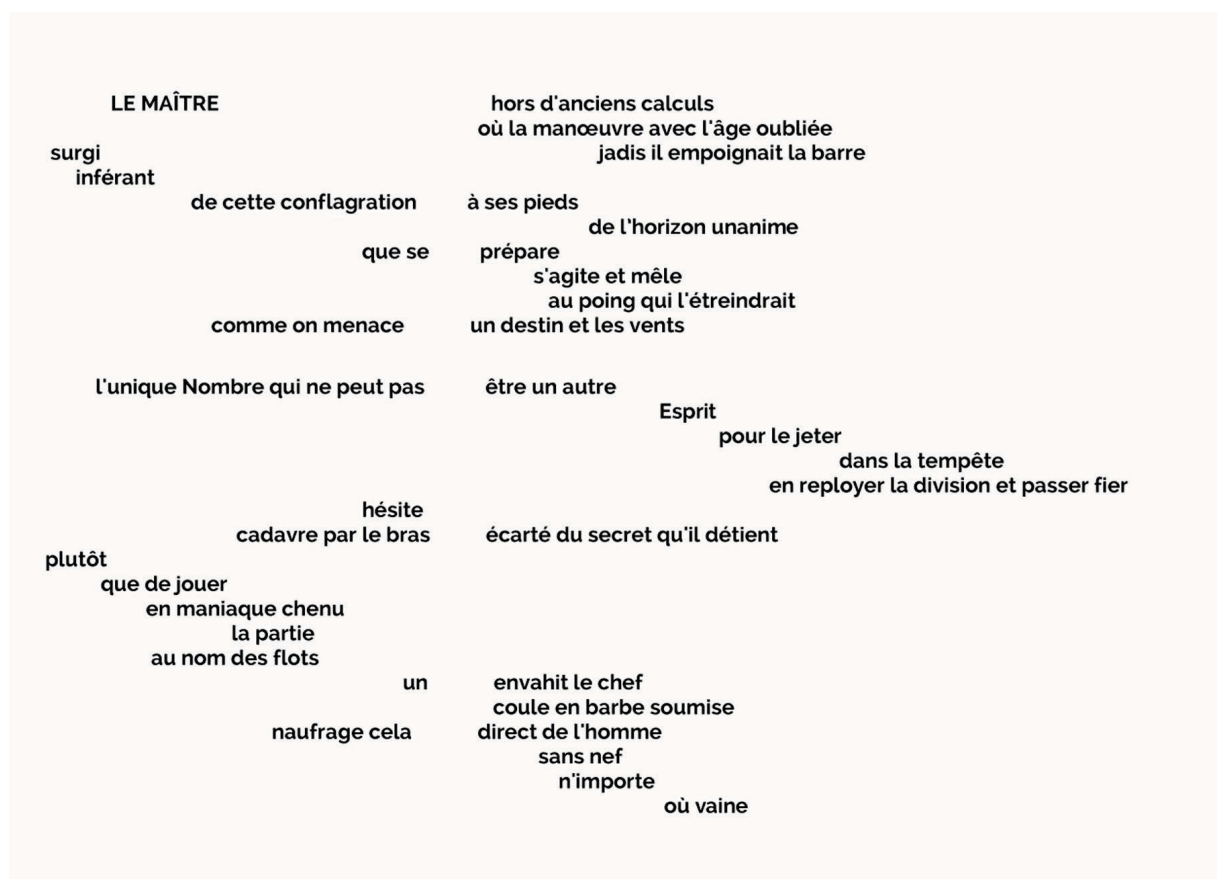


Figure 2: Mallarmé: « Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard »<sup>22</sup>

LE MAÎTRE hors d’anciens calculs où la manœuvre avec l’âge oubliée surgi jadis il empoignait la barre inférant de cette conflagration à ses pieds de l’horizon unanime,

<sup>20</sup> Eco (1989: 101, 102, 103, 113).

<sup>21</sup> Aarseth (1997: 63).

<sup>22</sup> Mallarmé (1965: 218-219)

que se prépare s'agite et mêle au poing qui l'étreindrait, comme on menace un destin et les vents l'unique Nombre qui ne peut pas être un autre Esprit, pour le jeter dans la tempête en reposer la division et passer fier; hésite cadavre par le bras écarté du secret qu'il détient plutôt que de jouer, en maniaque chenu la partie au nom des flots un envahit le chef, coule en barbe soumise naufrage cela direct de l'homme sans nef, n'importe où vaine

THE MASTER, beyond former calculations, where the lost manoeuvre with the age rose implying that formerly he grasped the helm of this conflagration of the concerted horizon at his feet, that readies itself; moves; and merges with the blow that grips it, as one threatens fate and the winds, the unique Number, which cannot be another Spirit, to hurl it into the storm, relinquish the cleaving there, and pass proudly; hesitates, a corpse pushed back by the arm from the secret, rather than taking sides, a hoary madman, on behalf of the waves: one overwhelms the head, flows through the submissive beard, straight shipwreck that, of the man without a vessel, empty no matter where<sup>23</sup>

Like Apollinaire's, Schwitters', and Eliot's poems, Mallarmé's poem has no 'prototypical' address to a 'you,' and no expression of the feelings and thoughts of an 'I,' but only « LE MAÎTRE », around whom there seems to be a maritime universe with a shipwreck. In Mallarmé's poem, we can see literary allusions to Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner" (1797-1799), especially regarding the casting of dice on the deck of the ship, to Melville's "Moby Dick" (1851) with regard to the mad, fanatic, and lonely captain Ahab, and to the legends of the Flying Dutchman. As in symbolism, however, all mythological and literary matter is used in an entirely personal and visionary way in Mallarmé's poem. In the maritime universe, we can identify a probing ship with waves and a captain (« Maître ») in the centre (« de l'horizon unanime », « les vents », « la tempête », « des flots », « naufrage », « nef »).

However, it is obvious that Mallarmé's text opposes a reading of a narrative discourse, as the syntax of the poem is a long hypotactic structure in which it is deliberately intended to make the connections between the prepositions, pronouns, and conjugations unclear. What we sense are the positive and negative values of the text. The poem expresses the personal experienced Mallarmé version of the < poètes maudits > theme. On the one hand, the poem describes the lost and cursed skipper and his ship as outcast (« inférant »), lost (« n'importe où vaine »), and deviant (« jouer en maniaque chenu ») in relation to the mob and its attitude to life (« de l'horizon unanime »). On the other hand, as in Mallarmé's « Sonnet en X » (1887) and other poems, we meet a proud and heroic suffering poet (« a reposer la division a passer fier »), « Le Maître », who creates his poetic visions and his unique poetic style despite suffering, loss, and meaninglessness in the prosaic world.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Translated by Anthony Hartley.

The question, however, is why Mallarmé has set up « Un coup de dés » in a way that deviates so significantly from tradition. In the foreword to his work, Mallarmé states:

This print-less distance which mentally separates groups of words or words themselves, is to periodically accelerate or slow the movement, the scansion, the sequence even, given one's simultaneous sight of the page [...] Imagination flows and vanishes, swiftly, following the flow of the writing, round the fragmentary stations of a capitalised phrase introduced by and extended from the title. Everything takes place, in sections, by supposition; narrative is avoided.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, Mallarmé introduces nothing less than a new way of reading poems, in which the successively progressive and narrative reading strategy is rejected. Rather than a referential structure with time, space, and characters, the specific word groups and expressions must be sensed. The large graphical spaces between the word groups thus function as a means for sabotaging a narrative reading. Instead, the text consists of explosive fields of significance between which links can be created after the reader's own choice. As an example of this, we can read the above text partly as one horizontal track, and partly as two vertical tracks on the page.

However, the dynamics and interaction between the two tracks is also clear. While the left track articulates the disillusioned and decadent side of the « poètes maudits » state with expressions such as « conflagration », « menace », « cadavre », and « naufrage », the right expresses a visionary and self-conscious attitude with words such as « destin », « Esprit », « secret » and « fit fier ».

In this way, Mallarmé's poem has a network structure which gives the reader the choice between different reading routes. If the reader chooses a vertical and a horizontal reading respectively, he or she gets different reading experiences. While the horizontal represents an unresolved stage in a crisis where things are entangled and all outward force is paralysed, the vertical reading represents a move from apathetic sadness to outward expansion. And when the poem is sealed with the Mallarmésian signature « Le Maître », it also points prophetically to the fact that « Un coup de dés » is the beginning of the revolution of poetry, where the monologic “central-poetry” is replaced by a “structural polyphonic” “interaction-poetry”.

### *The Serial Form*

The idea of a network structure leads to the equality of many opportunities. We are dealing with a phenomenon called “lists” or the serial. The essence of the serial principle is that there is no overall ideological principle or conceptual framework for the various parts of the work, but that the parts should appear in an arbitrary order.

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<sup>24</sup> Mallarmé (2004-2009: 77).

A discussion of the phenomenon of the serial form is unfolded in Joseph M. Conte's "Unending Design. The Forms of Postmodern Poetry" (1991), which claims that the poetry of recent years breaks with romantic and modernist poetics where a thematically motivated organic composition occurs:

The discontinuous elements of the series [...] are rather more atomistic or molecular than plantlike in their behavior. It would be impossible to dispense with continuity among the parts of an organic structure [...] The sections of a series are not hierarchical. There is no initiation, climax, or terminus precisely because there can be no development. In the sequence, the reader must, so to speak, enter through the front door and exit through the rear; but in a series, such as Robert Duncan's "Passages", the reader is encouraged to select any of these "passages" as an entrance.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, in "The Infinity of Lists" (2009), Umberto Eco discusses the serial as a dominant compositional principle in modern literature. Eco distinguishes between what he calls conjunctive lists, where the elements in the list have a common character, and disjunctive lists, where a dissonance between the elements in the list occurs. Eco's reasoning has a more pessimistic tone than Conte's, as the list is perceived as a mode of representation that expresses man's inability to understand great orders. On the contrary, Jan Kjørstad in "Oppramsningens mystikk" [The Mystery of Enumeration] (1989) is unequivocally positive in terms of lists. Kjørstad thinks that "the list reveals a hidden connection between the elements in the list. [...] As fireworks, the list can explode in many directions."<sup>26</sup>

The trend with serial structure begins as do the three previous tendencies – the multimodal, the montage strategy, and the network structure – in the avant-garde around the First World War. Throughout the twentieth century, the trend advances with a culmination around the turn of the millennium with the breakthrough of digital poetry. A crucial poet in the invention of the modern serial form is Ezra Pound.

Pound's "Cantos" are montage-like works which are often serially structured. Pound denotes his "Cantos" as "rucksack" texts, as the texts are collections of a large, complex, and heterogeneous material that are linked together by the repetition of certain formulations. The 116 "Cantos" were written between 1915 and 1962 and constitute an arbitrary and infinite number of works with a variety of genres and styles and a myriad of motives.

In "Canto XLV" (1936), the Latin key term, "usura", is repeated twenty-five times in 50 lines. In English the word "usury" refers to the practice of lending out money with very high interest rates. The raw guttural sound of the word "usura" corresponds to the meaning of the expression, as in each line we encounter new explanations of the destructive and evil concept:

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<sup>25</sup> Conte (1991: 22-23).

<sup>26</sup> Kjørstad (1989: 44).

*With Usura*

With usura hath no man a house of good stone  
each block cut smooth and well fitting  
that design might cover their face,  
with usura  
hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall  
harpes et luz  
or where virgin receiveth message  
and halo projects from incision,  
with usura  
seeth no man Gonzaga his heirs and his concubines  
no picture is made to endure nor to live with  
but it is made to sell and sell quickly  
with usura, sin against nature,  
is thy bread ever more of stale rags  
is thy bread dry as paper,  
with no mountain wheat, no strong flour  
with usura the line grows thick  
with usura is no clear demarcation  
and no man can find site for his dwelling.  
Stonecutter is kept from his tone  
weaver is kept from his loom  
WITH USURA  
wool comes not to market  
sheep bringeth no gain with usura  
Usura is a murrain, usura  
blunteth the needle in the maid's hand  
and stoppeth the spinner's cunning. Pietro Lombardo  
came not by usura  
Duccio came not by usura  
nor Pier della Francesca; Zuan Bellin' not by usura  
nor was 'La Calunnia' painted.  
Came not by usura Angelico; came not Ambrogio Praedis,  
Came no church of cut stone signed: Adamo me fecit.  
Not by usura St. Trophime  
Not by usura Saint Hilaire,  
Usura rusteth the chisel  
It rusteth the craft and the craftsman  
It gnaweth the thread in the loom  
None learneth to weave gold in her pattern;  
Azure hath a canker by usura; cramoisi is unbroidered  
Emerald findeth no Memling  
Usura slayeth the child in the womb  
It stayeth the young man's courting  
It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth  
between the young bride and her bridegroom  
CONTRA NATURAM  
They have brought whores for Eleusis

Corpses are set to banquet  
at behest of usura.<sup>27</sup>

The poem shows Pound's programmatic statements from the Imagist movement with the program article "A Retrospect" (1918) in the journal "Poetry." Pound's article proclaims that the poet must adhere to three conditions, namely:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective; 2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation; 3. As regards rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the first two conditions, the poem is extremely concentrated as Pound releases all of his cultural-historical knowledge without giving any explanations. The reader is expected to know Andrea Mantegna's "Gonzaga, His Heirs and His Concubines", as well as a number of other painters and sculptors from the Italian Renaissance: Pietro Lombardo, Agostino di Duccio, Piero della Francesca, Fra Angelico, Giovanni Bellini, and Sandro Botticelli, plus the Flemish artist Hans Memling. Also mentioned are the churches of San Zeno, St. Trophime, and Saint Hilaire. In all cases, Pound claims, these works were not created for profit or "usura", and therefore they possess real value and artistic quality. Pound longs for a time of ideals before modern materialism and capitalism.

With regard to the rhythmic, the poem incarnates Pound's intention to "compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome." Pound's uses an accented rhythm with three stresses in each verse line, as is known from the old English poems like "Beowulf." In this way, the verse lines are constantly given a varying organic rhythm. In addition, as a rhythmic technique, the repeated expression "usura" is used – not as an ordinary anaphor – but as an irregularly recurring mantra which constantly breaks the rhythm by appearing in the middle of a sentence:

sheep bringeth no gain with usura  
Usura is a murrain, usura  
blunteth the needle in the maid's hand  
[...]  
Not by usura Saint Hilaire  
Usura rusteth the chisel  
[...]  
Azure has a canker by usura  
[...]  
Usura slayeth the child in the womb  
[...]  
Corpses are set to banquet  
at behest of usura

<sup>27</sup> Pound (1999: 88).

<sup>28</sup> Pound (1968: 7).



The recurring “usura” destroys the organic rhythm of the poem, just as the poem tells about the destruction of culture because of the concept of “usura.”

From the beginning of the poem, “With usura hath no man a house of good stone / each block cut smooth and well fitting / that design might cover their face,” we get a description of what this negative concept means: namely the poor craftsmanship of a building which is not made with passion. Pound describes a culture that has lost its sense of craftsmanship, whether it is stonework, bakery, or weaving.

However, it is not just the craftsmanship that has fallen into disrepair, but also the artistic quality that has been destroyed: “with usura / hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall” etc. The explanation of the misery, according to the poem, is that modern capitalism with its unscrupulous hunger for profit: “no picture is made to endure nor to live with / but it is made to sell and sell quickly.” This materialism and utilitarianism also has consequences for human relations, destroying fertility and love between man and woman: “It stayeth the young man’s courting / It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth / between the young bride and her bridegroom.” The poem concludes by making a parallel between the modern perverted culture and the ancient fertility cults described as a staging of prostitutes and corpses at a banquet.

Pound’s serial poem presents an all-embracing criticism of capitalism and modern civilisation. As for other modernists of the early twentieth century – e.g. Eliot, Benn, and Hamsun – Pound’s critique has a strongly regressive tendency, so that modern industrialisation and capitalism are seen as purely destructive forces. Unfortunately, the inter-war political parties had little sense of understanding of the loss of identity and meaning that industrialisation had brought, so that only fascism and Nazism were ready to embrace those feelings.

### *Digital Poetry in a Historical Perspective*

Even though the four features – the multimodality, the montage form, the network structure, and the serial form – are the basics of digital poetry, they are all anticipated by poets of early modernism and avant-garde such as Apollinaire, Schwitters, Eliot, Mallarmé, and Pound. My initial thesis was that, although there were a number of specific features of digital poetry, namely the interaction with the reader, the difficulty in determining the genre, and the difficulty in determining the boundaries of the work, the four above mentioned features – carried over from book poetry – are at least equally significant.

Digital poetic works have been created since the early 1990s all over the world. Among such digital works are Ottar Ormstad’s “Poetry floating in the air” [Svevedikt] (2006), Monica Aasprong’s “Soldiers’ Market” [Soldatmarkedet] (2007), Cia Rinne’s “Archives Zaroum” (2008), and Johannes Heldén’s

“The Prime Directive” [Primärdirektivet] (2006) – all of them published at the Danish author Christian Yde Frostholm’s net site “Afsnit P.”

Let us take a closer look at a work from digital poetry regarding the above thesis, namely the Swedish poet and multi-artist Johannes Heldén’s “The Prime Directive.”<sup>29</sup> “The Prime Directive” consists of two parts which can be activated by clicking on two icons which represent two books. In the “book” that has the same title of the work, “The Prime Directive”, – the second “book” is called “The Path of the Fragment” [Fragmentets flyktväg] – we find a graphic, depicting a monstrous science fiction-like machine space universe, reminiscent of “Star Trek” (1966-), “2001” (1968), “Alien (1978-)” and “Blade Runner” (1982).

The title “The Primary Directive” refers to Star Trek, where the “primary directive” is presented as a law of a symbiotic balance between man and technology. The “primary directive” is, in practice, a law for spaceships moving between different civilizations in the future space, not subjecting other civilizations to the technology the spaceships bring. Heldén’s science-fiction-like universe depicts a world in which the balance between man and technology is threatening and anxiety-provoking. The graphics, sound and text allude to an apocalyptic perspective at the world. The proportions of the graphics cannot be compared to anything humanly known, as it can represent both a small technical device and a monstrous spaceship. The colours and shapes are similarly in a limbo between a biological green colour and a black machine colour, and between round organic shapes and geometric technical shapes.

The work is interactive. When the reader clicks on specific areas of the image, audio files and movies are played with poetic texts which slide down the screen. In addition, we can observe how the work is a complex hybrid of genres, and it is far more difficult to conceive of “The Prime Directive” as a work like ordinary literary works.

“The Prime Directive” is a serial and network-structured work in which the reader can choose his or her ‘reading route.’ One can argue that the work is created when the viewer activates the work by touching the screen. The work is a montage, with text fragments that the reader must combine himself. There is no logic or instruction regarding the order in which you read the texts that are activated on the screen.

Finally, the work is multimodal, as sound, graphics, text, music, and movies act as a unit. The experience when activating the various text fields is complex, as dark and fragmented Brian Eno-like ambient music is heard, while dissonant text fragments slide down the screen. The texts describe feelings of anxiety, claustrophobia, and alienation but at the same time the sound is soothing in its slow melancholic monotony.

Three fragments go:

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<sup>29</sup> Heldén (2006).

you have a great idea, you  
stumble  
will it fall into place  
afterwards because  
a set of rules mostly  
unknown  
get your time, your life back

And:

rattles, shudders when they  
cross the bridge.  
mattress in the morninglight  
the wooden floorboards the  
dust  
dense low between houses.  
October and the rain  
after my arrival.  
I understand, I am slow to  
understand

And:

Forestwall swirls  
comes  
compact towards us of  
leaves and branches  
torn apart

The dissonant state of mind expressed by the work is the result of the interaction between alienating poetic fragments, the dystopic-futuristic sound, and the apocalyptic-technological graphics. Heldén's work points to the enormous possibilities that lie in the future of poetry as it moves beyond the area of the classic central-poetry of the book.

However, it is obvious that the artistic opportunities offered by digital poetry are not only due to technological opportunities in new media. The opportunities are just as much due to the innovations in multimodality, montages, network structures, and seriality, as poets such as Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Schwitters, Eliot, and Pound did in early modernism and avant-garde. In this way, poetry of the new millennium is given much more interesting perspectives than referring to 'prototypical' notions of something called 'lyric.'

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