Ryszard Nycz
Jagiellonian University in Cracow
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2736-4675

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The New Humanities in Poland: A Few Subjective Observations, Conjectures, and Criticisms[1]

Abstract: Nycz outlines the main trends of the New Humanities in the world – digital humanities, engaged humanities, cognitive humanities, posthumanism, art-based research, as well as the main debates and misunderstandings that have emerged over the last decade in the Polish context. To illustrate the evolution in ways of thinking and conducting research, Nycz offers the example of cultural-literary studies, or CLS. This acronym stands for a variety of terms ranging from cultural literary theory to cultural-textual literacy.

Keywords: New Humanities, digital humanities, engaged humanities, cognitive humanities, posthumanism, art-based research, CLS, cultural literary theory, cultural-textual literacy

1.

When we consider that the ideas and methods known under the broad term "the New Humanities" have been current in Polish academic circles for only about ten years, the scale and intensity of the discussions that have greeted them can only be a cause for satisfaction, as these testify to the pressing and fundamental nature of the issues that have been raised – for scholars, for the various liberal arts, and for their status as academic disciplines. In this brief, introductory essay I would like, first, to consider the nature (and some misunderstandings) of the most significant disputes, concerns and cautions that the New Humanities have met with, then to sketch the principal areas of the gradually stabilizing domain of new humanistic scholarship, and finally to add some observations "from my own backyard" on the fairly specialized area that constitutes my personal field of research.

The high temperature of the discussions mentioned above is no doubt partly due to their overlapping with those about the so-called crisis of the humanities, which goes back more than fourty years in the West, and in Poland has a similar history.

1. The text was originally written as part of the project Innowacyjna humanistyka polonistyczna: "tekst jako laboratorium" of the National Science Centre, no. UMO-2012/07/B/HS2/01451. Translation source: *Teksty Drugie*, nr 1 (2017), 18–40, https://doi.org/10.18318/td.2017.1.2.

This indicates that we can no longer consider these issues in isolation, as a group of professional scholars detached from the world, because – to put it simply – both the internal and the external boundaries of the disciplines have already broken down or been pierced, and we must therefore acknowledge that we are together in one shared intellectual "space" which is at the same time fully open to public view.

On the subject of this "crisis" I would like to say only the following. Firstly, that it has its true basis in the technological/civilizational, social, cultural, and historical/political transformation of the modern world. The humanistic models of research and study have, moreover, always reacted to (and sometimes stimulated) these kinds of changes, so there is no reason to think it might be otherwise. Secondly, however, it is the result of the remarkably effective rhetoric of politicians and the administrators of "human resources" management, which reminds me irresistibly of the (temporarily, as we know) persuasive argument of "LEGO Batman" in the recent film of the same name, who sends the Joker into a serious depression by convincing him that he never was and never will be Somebody, that is, the Main Enemy of Batman himself.

For humanists, too, it sufficed to convince them that they were worthless freeloaders (living off the hard-won earnings of the taxpayer), and that what they do is unimportant for science and unconstructive for society. If we consider that the fundamental goal of the humanities is, in the long term, to cultivate critical self-knowledge, sensitivity and creativity both in individuals and in the community, it would appear that tipping humanists into such a collective depression can be politically profitable, because it allows for an instrumental takeover of their methods and fields of study, and at the same time burdens them with the blame for the results of this takeover (this process was recently described astutely by Markus Miessen in *The Nightmare of Participation*[2]).

2.

I am convinced, however, that the humanities (including in Poland) are in good condition, and their crisis – in the sense of a critical ferment, which certainly now pertains to them – testifies above all to their dynamic development and transformation. The criticisms levelled at them have, typically, an antinomic character, and today they are focused, I suggest, upon three areas of dispute: the humanities' social utility, their degree of innovation, and the professionalism of their individual disciplines.

2. Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011).

Respecting the first question, social utility: some people hold that the humanities ought, above all, to become engaged in, and seek solutions for, those social and civilizational problems that are important in today's world, rather than shutting themselves up in the ivory tower of their anachronistic, hermetic scholarly concerns. Such, I take it, was the sense of some widely-circulated remarks by former British Minister of Education Charles Clarke about British medievalists (and those medievalists are acknowledged everywhere, including in Poland, as among the elite of the humanities), that he did not "mind there being some medievalists around for ornamental purposes, but there is no reason for the state to pay for them."[3] Others, however, argue that the departure of the humanities from their mission, conceived as maintaining their autonomy and professionally carrying out correct, neutral and objective research, would indicate the ideological degeneration of this field of human study. One problem is to explain to the first group how seemingly unnecessary kinds of research have not only cognitive, but also social, and often formative, results and significance, not infrequently opening up new avenues of thought. Another problem is to convince the second group that no form of autonomic isolation is possible today (and indeed has not been for a long time).

The second question: the qualitative level of the humanities in Poland. Some seem to be of the view that to sustain a high level, it is necessary to conquer feelings of academic inferiority that result from having profited from foreign wisdom, and thus – so goes this view – to stop imitating western models, and rather to look to ourselves, that is, to search in the roots of national thought and tradition, because only in this way can we achieve true originality. In the opinion of others, the universally recognized measure of quality is the international ranking of national research in the humanities, so we must proceed as quickly as we can down the road of internationalization. The first group frequently summon the bold concept of Alexander Kiossev, in whose view the marginalized, provincial situation of East-Central Europe results from its "self-colonization," that is, the assumption of its own inferiority and subordination.[4] Regardless of the inspirational value of this thesis, which might lead to identifying and characterizing various

3. Quoted after Paula Saukko, "Methodologies for Cultural Studies. *An Integrative Approach*," in: *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research, 3rd ed*., ed. N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005), 352.

4. See: Alexander Kiossev, "Notes on Self-Colonizing Cultures," in: *After the Wall. Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, eds. David Elliot, Bojana Pejić (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999). See also Polish commentaries, *inter alia* Jan Sowa, *Fantamowe ciało króla* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011); Ewa Klekot, "Samofolkloryzacja. Współczesna sztuka ludowa z perspektywy krytyki postkolonialnej," *Kultura Współczesna* no. 5 (2016), https://www.etnologia.uw.edu.pl/instytut/publikacje/samofolkloryzacja-wspolczesna-sztuka-ludowa-z-perspektywy-krytyki.

aspects and causes of this state of affairs, to me it sounds like an (unintentional?) embittered echo of the old racist theses about the inferiority of the Slavs (here, both genetically and etymologically: slavish) and could lead to a reactivisation of obscurantist xenophobia and a cult of national "originality" in the sense of eccentric self-regard (in which sense do we sometimes speak euphemistically of an odd character as "an original").

In any case we do not find that there existed, for example, an indigenous poetic tradition in the days of the Piasts, nor has there been discovered a Jagiellonian school of cultural studies (and such traces of our cultural adolescence we could be thought to have bashfully suppressed). Generally speaking, it cannot be denied that for what is most original in our history, we (like others) must thank the effects of international exchange and fusion (both of ideas and of peoples), and especially – in our case – the influence of German humanistic studies of the 19th century. This does not mean that ideas have no national character, or that historians of those ideas have no nationality, either – indeed quite the opposite, as is evident in a glance at textbooks and anthologies: textbooks on, for example, literary theory written by English-speakers are dominated by Anglo-Saxon traditions, those written by Francophones, by French traditions, the Germans employ German theories, the Russians, Russian ones, and the Czechs, Czech. And there is no reason why textbooks written by Poles should marginalize or omit original Polish accomplishments.

The second group, as is well known, summon us to greater "internationalization," which in practice means ever greater pressure to publish research results in English. They do not, however, take into consideration that even the greatest resources dedicated to English-language output by, as it might be, the Posthumanist University of Lębork, or the College of Countryside Studies in Ojców, will not in the least increase the h-index of their contributors in the international context.

It is important to persuade the first group that a refusal to confront the wider academic world can reduce one to blind repetition, foolishness, or indeed idiocy (in the etymological sense: mental impoverishment, preoccupation with one's own affairs, lack of interest in the public sphere). The second group, meanwhile, should be reminded that entry into the highest circles of international visibility, attention, readership and discussion requires a long and laborious effort, beset with risk and contingency, and even more, that one submit to the (generally unwritten) rules set out by the research and theory "factories" of the great centres of the globalized academic industry (to which the concept of centre-periphery dependency, adapted to the social sciences and humanities, speaks eloquently).[5]

5. See Tomasz Zarycki, *Peryferie. Nowe ujęcie zależności centro-peryferyjnych* (Warszawa: Scholar, 2009).

Third question: the professionalism of disciplines in the humanities. This is, I believe, the most troublesome question, for within it lurk substantial and perhaps insoluble problems. For some scholars, the supposed novelty of the New Humanities is a plain usurpation. As Henryk Markiewicz liked to say, the "new" is often just the old that has been long forgotten, so before every claim to use this adjective we ought to go through the archives and see if anything similar can be found there. And the result of this search is likely to turn out positive (if in part because almost everything can be considered similar to everything else in one regard or another). For others, the programme of the New Humanities is a real danger to the said professionalism, for it negates the stability and definition of separate fields of study, the unity and particularity of methods, and in general the chance to construct theories according to a modern understanding of humanistic research – namely, as a systematic array of general propositions that crowns a process of arriving at individual judgements.

In response to the former objection it need be said, firstly, that nothing is more historically relative than novelty, hence every use of the word "new" has meaning only within a given context. Secondly, a sign, and perhaps the determinant, of cultural-intellectual change is a reconfiguration of the humanistic legacy: in the same manner as (so Borges wrote) an original writer creates his predecessors, so do new trends in the humanities permit us *ex post* to perceive "protogenic," anticipatory or precursory traits in trends heretofore considered historically dead or outdated. And this retroactive mechanism for reordering of hierarchies and reinterpretation is a constant feature of the historical transformation of humanist thought.

The second objection, it must be admitted, is weighty; there is much here to be done. The breaking down of walls between the various disciplines, and between the humanities and their environment, has led to a radical expansion of the empirical field and to the replacement of a closed totality of theory, conceived as a product of systematic intellectual labour, by a kind of working programme for a newly improvised research process, and thus also for its local, concrete implementations (derived from practical instances), and experimental research concepts.[6] Beyond that it has led to the constitution of fields of study through the research process itself, and to eclectic and hybrid methodologies. All this, it is evident, does not support a guaranteed identity for the (post)-discipline – area? – of New Humanistic research. But that, in my view, does not mean that we need to cellar this subject – theory, object, and method – for an age and a day, like a fine wine.

6. I have written previously about this on many occasions; see, for example: Ryszard Nycz, *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria – nowoczesność – literatura* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2012), 115 ff.

3.

The spheres of research interest in the New Humanities are not fully established or differentiated, either in Poland or elsewhere. In the midst of both substantive and turf disputes, there continue to be displacements of methods and issues, and negotiations over inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration. One of the strongest tendencies, in part because it is easiest to accredit institutionally, is the digital humanities (and also with regard to the powerful new media and capabilities) and its LABs (laboratories of digital humanistic research), which are sprouting up around the world like mushrooms after the rain (in Poland these are still uncommon, but increasing). A second tendency, equally powerful and earlier established, is the engaged humanities (i.e., engaged in social, political, economic and cultural issues), which have a critical-emancipatory character in contrast to modern assumptions about neutrality and autonomy. A third tendency combines various humanistic programmes, initiating the integration of their results and methods, cooperation, and at best also interchange with ecological studies and the hard sciences. This tendency often takes the name cognitive humanities (due to the importance of cognitive science in these humanistic inquiries). To this short catalogue of three major tendencies I would like to add two more, which are currently growing in significance. One of these is the posthumanities, which can be understood broadly as a movement that studies the relation of man to the environment (both natural and cultural) that works upon her and upon which she works. Finally, among the major tendencies of the New Humanities I would also count the artistic humanities (to give it an awkward name), including both the humanities that employ artistic tools and practices and art as a cultural praxis that is based on research.

All of these currents (and I have mentioned only those that in my subjective opinion are most significant) are at the same time connected with numerous channels of mutual influence; they form more the basin, rather than well-defined tributaries, of the river of the New Humanities. However, it can easily be seen that they share a clear, common general trait. Each of these currents creates connections rather than barriers, which had previously separated the humanities from (a) the technical sphere and technological instrumentality; (b) social, political, historical and economic life and cultural practices; (c) the hard sciences (a barrier set up during the anti-positivist effort to defend the autonomy of the *Geisteswissenschaften*); (d) the natural environment (another element of the foregoing barrier, securing the position of man as above and outside nature); and (e) the fine arts, literature and other artistic endeavours, hitherto conceived as subjects of research in the humanities, and not a part of them. In practice this does indeed expand

the field of research across the entire range of the humanities (in the broad sense) and opens up new territory; but at the cost, it should be said, of clear criteria to distinguish the humanities from other fields of science. To this key issue I will return in the conclusion, but I would like first to discuss certain problematic aspects of the tendencies listed above.

Digital humanities is today the most recognizable, and perhaps most representative, of the New Humanities and also a term to describe the greatest revolution in thinking about the role of the humanities,[7] the always-unpredictable possibilities for their development, and the always-excited hopes for new cognitive breakthroughs. Though it by no means sets itself the aim of replacing the erstwhile principles of humanistic research, it gives the impression of being, with these tools, capable of anything. About the strengths of this tendency a good deal has so far been written, so I would like to pause here to consider certain of its limitations, shortcomings, and even dangers. In my view these are of three kinds. The first concerns the creation of a risky rivalry between qualitative and quantitative methods. Franco Moretti made this question the focus of his autobiographical manifesto, in which he confessed to being fascinated by the potentials of digital humanities and its "big data," when he realized that after decades of research on the European novel, he had learned of less than 20% of the output of novels of the period and scope that interested him – and thus that the syntheses and generalizations he and other historians of literature had constructed were insufficiently substantiated.[8]

This is a valuable observation; it carries the feeling of the discovery of a great oversight. Yet once we have expressed our admiration for the author's sagacity and shared his embarrassment at his own blindness, we perhaps should ask ourselves whether these two research strategies really are in rivalry and if indeed it is worth replacing one with the other. After all, a scientistic urge to possess knowledge that is complete, and its neutral (that is, lacking an evaluative component) description, were never the primary goals of the humanities. I will not draw out this line of thought any further, but simply suggest that regardless of these doubts, there are programmes that permit us to submit to research corpora different questions than have been put heretofore, and thus to receive different, significant, new and sometimes inspiring answers.

7. See, for example, the review by Nikolaus Fogle of *Digital Humanities*, edited by Anne Burdick, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presener, and Jeffrey Schnapp (2012) under the symptomatic title, "Manifesto for the New Humanities," *Avant*, vol. IV, no. 2 (2013).

8. See Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," *New Left Review*, no.1 (Jan/Feb 2000); "More Conjectures," *New Left Review*, no. 21 (Mar/Apr 2003).

The second doubt about digital humanities concerns the aforementioned myth of knowledge that is complete, objective, and neutral, compiled by means of quantitative digital techniques. This myth obscures the very extensive process of selection, schematization, and homogenization of the subject "material" of the research. Not everything can undergo such study – only that which can be digitalized (and that which cannot conform to a database ceases to exist, that is, to be environmentally recognizable). Moreover, those things that are digitalized are sorted according to additional criteria. The research material is thus considered finally in a radically homogenized form, which extends over not just individual samples but the entire cases they represent.

As an example of this, research on a novel might take into account its formal properties (for example, the word "novel" in the subtitle) and a repertoire of ideal, not actual, traits. Therefore, we will fail to learn from such a study not only that a work placed under the heading "Literature: Novel" is a mixture of novelistic conventions with testimonial-autobiographical, essayistic, or autothematic-metaliterary ones, but also that the very category of "novel" itself has a hybrid character. As Bruno Latour observed, the scientistic spirit of modernity (which is latent in digital humanities) promotes the myth of purebred species. Certainly digital humanists are well aware of this; they generally pose questions, therefore (for instance about metrical or stylistic traits, or the diffuse course of fictional, thematic or plot schemata) which qualitative humanities research either has not posed or has not answered.

The third problem involves the consequences of revolutionary changes in the scope and methods of research. Taking the practice of digital humanities to its extreme, we can say that it leads to the following substitutions: in place of the study of texts (literary and cultural) – the elaboration of data ("big data"); in place of theory – the application of technological programmes; in place of interpretation – visualization, modelling and simulation (that is, types of description); and in place of a preoccupation with what is unique, original, value-bearing and value-forming – the statistical analysis of macro-tendencies.[9] In drawing attention to these (for me at least) questionable consequences, I do not mean to defend in every case some heretofore broad *modus vivendi* between qualitative and quantitative research methods. On the contrary, it is a question of finding a way in which quantitative methods could be made to yield significant qualitative results, and qualitative research could bolster its arguments and conclusions by exploiting the new quantitative, descriptive-analytic potentials.

9. See, for example, Urszula Pawlicka, "Humanistyka: pracownia, centrum, czy laboratorium?" *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1 (2017), 314–333.

The engaged humanities could also be distinguished fairly early on by its mass "intervention" in the social and mental landscape, its attitude towards changing the *status quo* (understood as the existing social divisions, hierarchies, privileges and stigmas), and in general what might be called its subversive-emancipatory disposition.[10] It is also worth noting that the initial primacy of a leftist worldview in this tendency's orientation is today balanced by the contribution (input) of liberal, conservative, and even religious-theological standpoints. This is borne out by, for example, the fifth edition of the popular textbook *The New Humanities Reader* (2015), which gives a good overview of the thematic and methodological topography of the engaged humanities. It does not present this project as a new field of knowledge, but rather as a humanistic – "human" – dimension of knowledge in general. The engaged humanities, rather than proposing a new kind of systematic analysis of the human condition, offers instead a constellation of diverse studies that reveal connections between various ways of thinking, methods, and fields of inquiry. These teach (or are meant to teach) a creative kind of reading, which engages not only the knowledge, but the life experience, inventiveness and imagination of the receiver. They encourage the cultivation of "knowledge as," of technical and instrumental capabilities, the embrace of risk (experimental research), a critical attitude towards certitudes and dogmas, and active participation in cultural, social and political affairs.[11]

Certainly this is not particularly new; it is rather a resurrection of the 19th-century model of cultural competence – culture as a formative praxis, an individual attribute (as Stanisław Pietraszko put it) more than an object of study. But we cannot say that it is not today once again relevant and important. In this area it is clear to see that the applicability of the new humanities (like of the humanities *tout courts*) means more than anything a capacity for the "airing" and "refurbishing" of collective and individual minds – both in the sphere of ideas, and in that of attitudes, behaviour, practical activity and emotional sensitivity. And unquestionably the best books, shows, and artistic productions (including Polish ones) manage to have such an "applicable" influence on their audience.

Cognitive humanities, however open it may be to the ideas, methods and results of research in the natural sciences (especially the life sciences and mental research) is at the same time, as far as I can judge, in a very weak position relative to them; for in practical efforts at collaboration it runs up against the unrelenting objective and methodological stance of these hard sciences (despite all the demo-

10. This was discussed by Ewa Domańska in an interview with Katarzyna Więckowska: "O nowej humanistyce", *Literaria Copernicana*, no. 2 (2011).

11. See *The New Humanities Reader*, ed. Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer (Stanford: Cengage Learning, 2015), xxii–xxxiv.

cratic, conciliatory and ecumenical language with which this cooperation is often adorned). It might be said that in this area we are still in the stage of monopolistic capitalism, in which Henry Ford could tell a customer that he might buy a car of any colour, as long as it was black. Thus their relations with the "hards" (as humanists call them) are routinely determined by their conviction that these scientists have a monopoly on knowledge that is strict, proven and complete. The help provided by some ethnologists, sociologists and philosophers of science – Bruno Latour, Karin Knorr Cettina and others – who argue for the subjective, mental, social, cultural and political influences affecting apparently pure laboratory science affords some hope (though still for the long term), and supplies some inspiration and potentially tools for building bridges of real exchange (of points of view) and cooperation.

The opening up of a new chapter of real cooperation would seem to be possible, however, only after the laying out of a common ground of study, in which research interests and points of view (humanistic and cognitive) could meet and negotiate their positions. It is possible that the role of stimulus for this might be played by the category of "embodied mind" (which has actually been appearing for some time in linguistic and anthropological studies) – at any rate, if we are to understand this concept according to the (ground-breaking) volume *The Cognitive Humanities: Embodied Mind in Literature and Culture*.[12]

Posthumanism, in turn, today arouses perhaps the most controversy in ideas, outlook and philosophy[13] – which seems to indicate the gravity of the issues it addresses and its growing significance for the humanities as a whole. Studies of objects, materiality, the natural environment, and the world of plants and animals, developing within the posthumanist framework from diverse directions, reach its limits and begin testing the stability of the anthropological barrier and the possibility of extending the field of anthropological cognition. For my part, I come to this subject following two leads that I have found inspiring. For the first I must thank Roberto Esposito, who noted that both in Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" and Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism" (both of which appeared in 1946) it is asserted that "not one of the initial philosophical stipulations – rejection of the biological understanding of human nature, the absolute opposition of man to other animal species, disregard of the body as the primary dimension of existence – has been seriously subjected to dispute."[14] And discussion of precisely

12. *The Cognitive Humanities: Embodied Mind in Literature and Culture*, ed. Peter Garratt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

13. See, for example, Agata Bielik-Robson, "Nowa Humanistyka w poszukiwaniu granic," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1 (2017).

14. Roberto Esposito, "Polityka i natura ludzka," trans. Katarzyna and Mateusz Burzyk, in: *Pojęcia polityczne. Wspólnota, immunizacja, biopolityka*, introduction by Mateusz Burzyk (Kraków: Universitas, 2015), 145.

these problems has become a central part of posthumanist practice. The second inspiring lead I take from Latour, who notes that

> we stand faced not only with the risk of overlooking all that is interesting about the entities uncovered by what is called "cultural" or "social" anthropology, but we furthermore risk not doing justice to that something that is that still more strangely is described as "materiality," which makes up the "far side" supposedly explored by physical anthropology. […] Regardless of the etymology, there is no reason that anthropology should remain *anthropocentric*. It only means that this discipline is particularly interested in certain points of contact of these agencies and certain historical figures associated with the term "humanity."[15]

To risk simplification to the point of caricature, I would say that posthumanism looks at humankind in a "culturo-natural" setting (a reciprocal linkage of culture and nature, the historical and the natural, the social and the biological). In this context, firstly, the human is apprehended as a hybrid, a beast-man-phantom (I avail myself of a conceptual device invented by Tadeusz Konwicki); the psychophysical being is possessed by shades of the past, spectres of the future and phantasmagoric longings and affective stimuli, and not like Monsieur Teste, the once renowned character of Paul Valéry: a pure intellect, self-controlled master of his fate and ruler of creation (located above and outside the biological-natural-material world). And secondly, neither man nor culture can be situated outside – or in opposition to – nature, but must be regarded as supplementary, locked with it in mutually effective participation.

The last tendency to which I will turn here consists of studies that are based upon or that employ art – "art-based research" – and which find their complement in art that makes use of humanistic research (in particular what is known as critical art). The function of this somewhat inelegant formulation – "artistic humanities" – is to indicate mutual influences between these two fields of cognitive-cultural practice. Studies making use of art have a tradition going back over twenty years,[16] and in Poland have been developed systematically and consciously

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15. Bruno Latour, "Wyrywając się snom i spekulacjom – prezentacja AIME," trans. Krzysztof Abriszewski, in: *Kolokwia antropologiczne. Problemy współczesnej antropologii społecznej*, ed. Michał Buchowski and Arkadiusz Bentkowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Inowacje, 2014), 581, 583.

16. See, for example, Elliot Eisner, *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1998); Gregory L. Ulmer, *Heuretics. The Logic of Invention* (Baltimore–London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Susan Finley, "Badania posługujące się sztuką. Rewolucyjna pedagogika oparta na performansie," trans. Michał Podgórski, in: *Metoda badań jakościowych*, vol. 2; Marta Kosińska, "Między autonomią a epifanią. Art based research, badania jakościowe i teoria sztuki," *Sztuka i Dokumentacja*, no. 14 (2016); Tomasz Rakowski, "Sztuka w przestrzeniach wiejskich i eksperymenty etnograficzne. Pożegnanie kultury zawstydzenia: jednoczasowość, zwrot ku sobie, proto-socjologia," *Teksty Drugie*, no. 4 (2016). See also the classic text of Susanne Langer that anticipates, among other

for perhaps a dozen or so, slowly emancipating this trend from that of the engaged humanities. They combine, however, approaches marked by engagement in social issues with an embrace of social sciences that are oriented towards action, and with various artistic forms (narrative, performative, visual). Artistic experimentation is here treated as a means of constructing a humanistic understanding, namely that which escapes the bounds of language and rational cognition. Research based on art in this fashion aspires to expand cognitive limits and our knowledge of human capacities, functions, and forms of comprehension, and also of means of identity formation, ideas about effectiveness, the structure of feelings, the affective basis of community bonds, etc. The classic, inspiring works of Susanne Langer (I can say with pleasure) have in this area at last received their just estimation and due.

4.

In the context of the thus-described – that is, subjectively – topography of the most important trends in the New Humanities, I would like to discuss briefly the case of the evolution of thought in literary theory, one aspect of which I had a leading role in. I am referring to CLT – Cultural Literary Theory[17] – developed a few years back as a collective term for the "transition period" between mature modern literary theory and its then rapidly-growing contemporary mutations, incarnations and metamorphoses.

The best avenue to approach consideration of the modern phase of structural thought about literary theory is provided at the beginning of the textbook definition by Janusz Sławinski, who describes it as:

> […] a branch of the study of literature occupied with investigating the structural and evolutionary properties of literature as a separate field of human activity, the general characteristics of literary works and their typological differentiation, and to a certain extent also the mechanisms of the process of creation and reception of literary works.[18]

This definition, though it makes use of one of Sławinski's favourite "elastic" terms ("investigation"), is a display of systemic and systematic thought – work, genre, convention, literature (as a "system of living norms in history"), the theory of lit-

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things, the affective turn in art studies, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).

17. *Kulturowa teoria literacka: główne pojęcia i problemy*, ed. Michał Paweł Markowski and Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2006); *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2: poetyki, problematyki, interpretacje*, ed. Teresa Walas and Ryszard Nycz (Kraków: Universitas, 2012).

18. Janusz Sławiński, "Teoria literatury," in: *Słownik terminów literackich*, 3rd expanded and revised edition, ed. Janusz Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1998).

erature and, as a supercategory, the study of literature, are all systems (or "systemoids"). Within this edifice all normative orders have their place: from elementary "typical linguistic-constructive elements" through "the literary tradition" to various specialties and schools of study. The theory of literature understood in such a way is the "generalization and schema" of various diverse research; it works out the categories that taxonomize these individual studies and bring them into a "consistent complex of knowledge about literature." (We may note here Sławiński's characteristic rhetorical "loosening of the corset" of the positivist research model: from *systematic knowledge* of literature to a *consistent complex of knowledge* about it.)

This understanding of literary theory has not, it may be said, lost its value, but that value has become increasingly of a historical kind. It may further serve – and has served – as a guide for practice; for example, the main theoretical and methodological approaches to cultural studies have adopted many of the structuralist principles of this research model. But the main problem lies, I think, in the fact that the questions (which in principle concern mostly the internal categorization of literature) to which this model can provide answers have ceased to seem all that important or interesting. Let us ask, for instance, how often scholars are inclined to read and write nowadays about narrative structure, or about the relations between *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, narrator and protagonist, space and time, description and relation, etc. Even I, when trying to formulate a dictionary definition of "literary theory" in the year 2000, wished to honour the historical (in both senses of the term) status of the category, and this conception of the development of theory in the rational and systematic spirit of modernity, and wrote, in the first sentence, that literary theory is "a division of the knowledge of literature that is concerned with systematized groups of general propositions about the essence, varieties, and (structural and evolutionary) characteristics of literature."[19]

Literary theory so conceived could not, in the nature of things, yield answers to the questions of why people write and read literature, nor what there is in it that – despite the sterility, broadness and artificiality of its structural categories – results in human desires and needs (existential, attitudinal, social) being met. Of course it can be argued that these kinds of questions were not unknown, but the practitioners of structural literary theory held that they were unprofessional or did not meet the standards of "scientific" inquiry. But it cannot be denied that views on this question, and therefore also the formulation and nature of research questions, have profoundly changed.

19. Ryszard Nycz, "Teoria literatury," in: *Literatura polska XX wieku. Przewodnik encyklopediczny* (Warszawa: PWN, 2000).

The concept of cultural literary theory seemed to be a promising way to approach these issues in large part because it was to be concerned both with the cultural (in the broad sense) dimensions of the text, and also with the cultural (and not only the normative academic) aspects of reading and analysis. From the start it neither was able nor was intended to undercut the "scientific" status of theory as an undertaking of rational, systematic and systematizing thought. "Theories" here referred to various "studies" and also conceptual "turns" and thus rather to research concepts (which arose out of diverse key postulates, such as gender, postcolonialism, memory, performance, affect, etc.); theories *in statu nascendi*, theories-in-progress, "the practices of theory" which formed more the designs of study programmes than set patterns for the systematic uptake of data from defined research disciplines. But in the West, this was the time when first there expired "literary theory," then "nonadjectival" theory, then "unattributive" theory (in Jonathan Culler's formulation), and still later "literary-cultural studies," in connection with which "theory" has almost ceased to fulfil its function as the leading operational category (precisely because of changes in the scope and role of this formulation in academic work).

I think that today, regardless of the eccentricity and even oddness of its name (for one might say: either literary theory, or cultural theory or studies), cultural literary theory had a *raison d'être*, it was needed, and comprised an equivalent to the aforementioned "literary-cultural studies." These trends were given institutional expression, for example, in the U.S. by the often reissued textbooks of Robert Dale Parker,[20] and in Europe by the work of Naomi Segal and Daniela Koleva entitled *From Literature to Cultural Literacy*.[21] This last volume, in particular, merits a brief comment – both from the perspective of "cultural literacy" and with regard to the programme that it sets out (or rather the hope it expresses) for a systematic description by both discipline and methodology of contemporary research. The former has acceded today to the role of governing notion: a blanket concept in the humanities, with a meaning and function far removed from the philological sense of "literacy" (for example as opposed to speaking ability). This was discernible already some time ago in the American tradition, as exemplified in the title of a 1980s bestseller by prominent critic E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*.[22] The term in this sense

20. See Robert Dale Parker, *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*, 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Robert Dale Parker, *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

21. *From Literature to Cultural Literacy*, ed. Naomi Segal and Daniela Koleva (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). See also Naomi Segal, "Wprowadzenie" to this volume (trans. into Polish by Ewa Kołodziejczyk) in *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1 (2017).

22. E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

has to do above all with a kind of cultural competence, with tests and exams, and thus, as remarked earlier, with "knowledge how" (rather than "knowledge that," to use Gilbert Ryle's distinction) which permits its possessor to function successfully and efficiently in today's society and culture (including technical culture).

The second motif highlighted in Segal and Koleva's anthology seems to me a key task, namely an attempt at an "identificational" clarification (adumbration, classification) of contemporary humanistic studies, which are concerned with an almost unlimited diversity of subjects and problems in ways that are at first glance radically hybridized, and that seem to lack any methodological unity or division. This ambition includes also the formulation of four distinct key categories that are to provide a guide and perhaps also a model for literary-cultural studies, namely: textuality, fictionality, rhetoricality and historicality.

I believe that this is a good undertaking, definitely worthy of development, extrapolation, and critical testing of its potential (though we are at the very beginning of these efforts). For my part I am interested in taking a somewhat different tack (though *only* somewhat). For several years I have begun lectures on cultural-literary theory with the admission that, although the acronym CLT remains fully operational, its field of reference and theoretical-methodological contents have begun slightly to shift – specifically, from *a cultural theory of literature* to *the reading of cultural texts*.

I would like now briefly to explicate these last five words. In the first place, I think we have the perfect right to go on studying texts, obviously in both the broader and narrower senses and without limiting ourselves to so-called literary texts, and especially in light of the gigantic profusion, and increasingly great role, of various kinds of textual production (both oral and written), some of them entirely new, that mark the contemporary cyberculture, in both public and private life. And we must bear in mind that other media – visual, aural, active and performative – are acquiring the status of cultural texts (that is, in contrast to material that remains the object of the physical and natural sciences), because they are semiotically-organized entities and meaning-bearing practices.[23]

23. This distinction between physical objects, examined by natural scientists, which "merely are," and cultural objects, which constitute a part of the cultural world, and "not only are, but also mean," has a long tradition in 20th-century thought. Elsewhere I have derived it from the work of Stefan Czarnowski, but Roman Ingarden, among others, was representative of this way of thinking. Considering the difference between the properties and the value of an object, he observed that the first are available to all, while the second is a kind of surplus, which "adds to the object a certain *dignitas*, a completely new manner of being, which without that, it could never achieve. Value raises the object above all those objects that have it not, that simply are, that exist, but possess no meaning." (Roman Ingarden, *Przeżycie, dzieło, wartość* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1966), 100.)

But in the second place, we must comprehend them decidedly more broadly than as just a conceptual load (content) of linguistic expressions – and this applies equally to written and to non-written (cultural) texts. Referring to remarks made elsewhere,[24] I would put it this way: if we are to maintain our understanding of interpretation as the process of ascribing meaning to hitherto incomprehensible places in the text, as the result of identifying a context within which they acquire sense and make a semantic unity of the whole, there remain beyond this process two significant fields of meaning. One contains the prelinguistic and preconceptual "feeling" of meaning, with its emergent, involuntary, self-activating character, which results from our participation in a community of experience (and to which same community belong those texts, practices and behaviours). The second contains "postconceptual" effects (physical, affective-experiential) of the force of impact of those preconceptual, conceptual and non-conceptual meanings.

Informally, we call all of these affects "meanings": we will say of something (a behaviour, attitude, or event) that we know what it's about, that it speaks to us (or is trying to), that we know what it means, that we have something in mind, that we understand. It might be said that this conceptual meaning is surrounded, permeated, or aroused by a non-conceptual meaning (which it can in turn arouse). But it would surely be more accurate to say that what we are dealing with in these cases is "embodied meaning"[25] which is hybrid in character, and extends forth from the meaning of the body, through the shared, communal meanings of the "body" of society, to the meanings that are inscribed in the cultural-natural environment and energized by the "affordances" (the term coined by James Gibson) of the ecosystem; these meanings can be understood as some sort of meaningful "offers" extended to us by the environment.

Two simple examples will, I hope, help us to understand this rather sketchy characterization. The first is from Charles Baudelaire, who begins the fourth part of his famous poem "Spleen" with the no less famous line, "When the sky low and heavy presses down like a lid […]."[26] He is here doing (at least) three things at once. First, he finds a pictorial way to describe an experience of sadness, depression, and melancholy that had theretofore not received such an imaginatively suggestive formulation (a new description though it reactivated an old tradition, for example the medieval idea of the sky as a vault, rather than as an open, limit-

24. See notes to the sketch "Literatura: litery lektura. O tekście, interpretacji, doświadczeniu rozumienia i doświadczeniu czytania. Z dodaniem studium przypadku 'Wagonu' Adama Ważyka," in: *Poetyka doświadczenia*…, 301, ff.

25. See Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

26. ["Quand le ciel bas et lourde pèse comme un couvercle…"]. Charles Baudelaire, "Spleen," *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

less space, as portrayed by, among others, Szymborska). Second, he conceptually specifies the meaning of the image (the feeling of a man overwhelmed, as if he is being squeezed down by the weight of a metal cover). Third, the force of this image, taken in by countless readers in their own fashion, unquestionably contributed to the popularity of the work as a whole, and thus played an inspirational role, influencing many other writers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (in Poland most importantly the poets of the decadent "landscape of the spirit").

Second example: When Joanna Rajkowska created *Pozdrowienia z Alej Jerozolimskich* ("Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue"), which consisted of the installation of a large artificial palm tree on the Charles de Gaulle traffic circle in Warsaw, she was also accomplishing (at least) three things. First, she activated a feeling of "nearness," a kind of affective-experiential bond between two communities and nations – Jewish and Polish – that were once neighbours, and today isolated from each other (in space, time, by barriers of death and traumas of memory, and by emotional conflicts). This was effected by an aesthetically mild (and in this way politically neutral) specific gesture (the actual installation of the palm tree), by which the imitation of a natural feature of the Israeli landscape evokes complex cultural contexts, and also the historical motivation of a seemingly arbitrary street name (a similar gesture was later performed by Rafał Betlejewski with decidedly more intensive measures in his grafitto "Tęsknie za Tobą, Żydzie" ("I long for you, Jew")). Second, the conceptual form of the salutatory "greetings" forms, on the discursive level, a type of "friendly" communicative relation at a distance – and, it can be said, performatively stabilizes the relation precisely as "friendship at a distance." Third, the impact of the gesture, which was also a very successful therapy for the sensibilities and mentality of the society, initiated a flourishing career for palm trees in the city of Warsaw, which over time acquired aspects of a palimpsest and influenced our disputatious politics of memory.

This all too simplified characterization is intended only to serve as a way to visualize the need to broaden the fields and forms of semantic activity of "cultural texts" that their reading must embrace. The concept of reading/studying can, I believe, today serve the function of an analytical "metacategory" with respect to its elements, which currently, in general use, emphasize: the process rather than the result; partiality or aspectivity rather than finality or completeness; the activeness of the subject as a condition of activated meaning, that is, participation rather than contemplation or observation; and the relative and interactive character of meaning, rather than the idea of meaning as a defined sense deposited in a given place, concealed in the text. Above all this type of reading/studying stresses the localization both of the subject and of the text in the same space, and in the same roles as causative factors taking part in the same internal

dynamics of the cultural reality (and not as being situated on opposite sides of some cognitive barricade).

Reading/studying, as a process mediating the organization of relations between these subjects/objects, becomes a vector of meaning and also a medium for participatory cultural cognition. And finally, reading/studying can – and maybe should – be treated as the quintessence or incarnation (tested in empirical work) of literary-academic competencies, equipped with tools for working out the most intricate dilemmas posed by cultural texts, "knowledge how" – how to manage successfully in a world of "cultural-natural" meanings (in which, *nota bene*, the tradition of cultural semiotics is most certainly active). With all that has been mentioned here – the status of the cultural text, the character of embodied meaning, the concept of reading/studying – it is clear that we have only the first signs indicating a starting point for a suitable methodological framework.

5.

The five principal developmental variants of the New Humanities as they have been hastily outlined above comprise only a rough attempt to create a topography of the positions around which numerous studies and phrases, arising and proliferating so abundantly in the past quarter-century, have begun to coalesce, at least according to the present analysis. Despite all their variety, and multiplicity of aims and strategies, they have some strikingly similar traits in common (shared with the separately categorized field of cultural literary theory (CLT)), to which I would finally like to draw attention. Although there are several such traits, I will discuss only what might be the three most important.

The world of the New Humanities is, first and foremost, a world of immanence, an existence of participation, of cognition from within, participatory cognition. This is evident in all of its main variants. Digital humanities works in a "culture of participation." Engaged humanities consists of forms of intervention, sometimes almost invasive disturbance, of the calcified attitudes, prejudgments, and behaviours of given communities or groups. Cognitive humanities is characterised by the participatory role of the subject as "environmentally situated." Posthumanities propagates the "cultural-natural" ecosystem as the universality of subjective activity. Artistic humanities demands the inclusion of art as both a tool and a medium of creative cognition. This mark of new humanistic cognition was most radically formulated by Kirsten Hastrup, who wrote, "We cannot get in touch with reality without making ourselves part of it."[27]

27. Kirsten Hastrup, "Social Anthropology. Towards a Pragmatic Enlightenment," *Social Anthropology*, vol. 12 (2), (2005), quoted after Ewa Klekot, "Rozpoznawanie topografii," in:

One hears in this an unmistakable echo of the Nietzschean proclamation of performative (as it would today be called) cognition – "one does not encounter the truth; one is the truth," – and also its prognostication of the replacement of objectivism: perspectivism. Generally speaking, however, we are dealing here with a sign of resistance to the modern (and neo-positivist) ideal of cognition as an impartially, neutrally and objectively executed external (from the metalinguistic perspective) view of the perceived objects, which are held to exist prior to and independent of the act of cognition. The development of humanistic studies that are conditioned on a different ontologic-epistemic principle undoubtedly presents new and attractive cognitive challenges.

This culture of participation into which, it appears, we have entered, has its own set of consequences. It sensitizes us to various kinds of taking part, including involuntary ones, to the equivocal role of the witness, of the passive observer (stimulating among other things, I might add, the current discussion on the historical expression of the role of "the bystander" during the Holocaust), and on the difficulty – or indeed possibility – of filling the role of impartial observer. It has also certain drawbacks or even dangers, among them being the feeling of being "trapped in immanence" and the inaccessibility of a metalinguistic cognitive position, one which would make it possible to attain a holistic perspective and impartial distance and realize the capacity to transcend situational contingencies. This might explain the recent attractiveness of alternative views, some of which, for example, appeal directly to the Kantian tradition.

The second striking feature equally visible in all the trends in the New Humanities is the primacy of "knowledge how" – tools and competencies. Certainly this feature is most obvious when it comes to digital humanities, which programmatically boasts its character as a set of powerful new tools that have the potential to address almost anything, at the same time seeking suitable challenges and tasks. But hardly any less is it evident in studies on cultural literacy, which define the latter in terms of categories of professional competencies, a new sort of cultural "polish" which ought to be the attribute of every modern individual. And the contemporary dominance of reading/studying and "theory" as a concept that stands for a particular kind of research process and design is also an effect of the departure from the standards of modern theory, with its emphasis on the summing up of particular results, and on finalized and systematized general knowledge (and thus propositional, conceptual "knowledge that").

As I see it, this is not necessarily a matter of replacing one model with another, but rather of trying to derive goals (including new research tasks) from new

Kolokwia antropologiczne. Problemy współczesnej antropologii społecznej, ed. Michał Buchowski and Arkadiusz Bentkowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2014), 76.

means, tools, formulations, and concepts, and not matching these means with, or subjecting them to, arbitrarily chosen doctrinal aims. For it is by employing precisely these experimental theoretical concepts, these research hypotheses, that we may attain really new knowledge of the object, and not by merely extrapolating a dominant, mandatory theory into successive fields. And in such a form this feature appears most emphatically in the remaining main currents of New Humanities: engaged, cognitive, artistic and post-humanities.

The final group of affinities I wish to mention is a preoccupation with process, and by this I mean process in preference to results, or determining essential properties of an unchanging object. These processes are creative and receptive, processes of change, practices (instead of theory as before): the active side of cultural and social life viewed as essentially equal in importance for the maintenance and development of man and culture. From this derives the concentration upon studying processes of diffusion and circulation of cultural elements in the laboratories of digital humanities; on "interventions" and studies of social activity and change in engaged humanities; on the mutual influences between man and the environment (including the cultural-natural environment) in cognitive humanities and posthumanities; and on the use of art as a performative cultural practice in artistic humanities. From this too comes the "natural" expansion of such directed research as on the issues of production, creativity, novelty and innovation (which is testified to *ex post* by the changes wrought by these processes on the prior state of affairs). From this perspective even those things that have been considered as synonyms of unity and identity – man and culture – evince their processive, mutating, hybrid, creative and "verb-like" nature.

* * *

I will allow myself to end with an anecdote (almost from my own doorstep). Having taken an interest in this set of issues, I prepared a lecture on the subject, and was quite pleased with the title I thought up for it: "Culture as a Verb." This lecture I delivered in May, 2014 as part of the Copernicus Festival. My satisfaction at my own originality and inventiveness did not, however, last long: at the beginning of 2015 there appeared a volume (which has several times been cited herein) entitled *Kolokwia antropologiczne* ("anthropological colloquium") with a publication date of 2014, and in it I found the printed text of a lecture by Tim Ingold entitled "To Human is a Verb," translated into Polish by Ewa Klekot as "'Człowieczyć' to czasownik." (An abridged version of this text had appeared still earlier, towards the end of 2014, in the periodical *Autoportret*, under a title even more similar to mine,

"Człowiek to czasownik" [man is a verb]).[28] I do not refer to this example in order to boast of my precedence in the matter, which I could not do anyway, for Ingold had delivered his lecture before I gave mine, and as an eager reader of the work of this anthropologist, whom I highly esteem, I know that he had much earlier been occupied with the category of "cultural improvisation" which the field we are discussing has somewhat absorbed.

I mention these events because I treat them as an evident (to me, anyway) testimony to the overlap, factual, theoretical-methodological, and practical, of the changes in the humanities in our globalized civilization: when both in the "centre" and on the periphery, in the minds and practices of the world leaders of humanist thought and in those of its local practitioners, there arise similar ideas, similar research plans, there ensues a similar and similarly unpredictable change of places (in positions, in points of view). It is no doubt from this consideration that the present sketch takes its subjective and at the same time cautiously optimistic tone. Accompanying this is a somewhat gloomier (because more elderly) impression, that I repeat to myself after a full quarter of a century, concerning the aspirations of the New Humanities: we do not know that it will be better, if it is different; but we know it must be different, if it is to be better.

Translated by David Schauffler

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4079-1903

28. See Ryszard Nycz, "Kultura jako czasownik," lecture, available at https://www.youtube.com./watch?v=PpiAuOxW-fzg; Tim Ingold "'Człowieczyc' to czasownik," in: *Kolokwia antropologiczne*…; Tim Ingold, "Człowiek to czasownik," *Autoportret*, no. 4 (2014).

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