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## Materiality of Poetry: Words and Bodies/ Words and Pictures (Ewa Partum, Andrzej Tobis, Adam Kaczanowski)

The article discusses the possibilities of the emergence of a neo-materialistic aesthetics of the poem. Each of the analyzed examples—Ewa Partum’s active poetry, Adam Kaczanowski’s toy-art and Andrzej Tobis’s photographic archive—reveals different aspects of this aesthetics.

The case of Partum shows that the material concreteness of poetry—today also associated with virtuality—requires other ways of perceiving / commenting / documenting the “poems” happening between the media. Active poetry consists in drawing the text (which eventually turns out to be a jigsaw made of letters) out of the formula of the finished object and making the medium of writing/language the material from which the object of artistic attention is “made”. I call Tobis’s project neo-materialistic, since it shows how we move from the human hybrid level we move to normalization and stabilization (and vice versa). Tobis seems to reach the moment when this normalization is actually happening and, at the same time, he shows levels of transformations, mutations and deviations. Kaczanowski “invents” for his poetry a medium different from the traditional record and the traditional form of the book. This principle of “invention” turns out to be very important, because it decides whether some materializations are poetic objects or not, without specifying any initial aesthetic, political and ideological criteria.

In the most general terms this new-materialist aesthetics has been linked here with the transmedia horizon of art and the transformations of materialistic thinking made under the influence of the non-anthropocentric imagination.

Keywords: poetry, new-materialist aesthetics, transmedia, artistic activities

My concern in this article is with the potential of materialistic thinking in/about Polish poetry of the twentieth and twenty-first century. I attempt answering the question whether it is possible—and if so, on what basis to shift interest in this register towards new materialisms, which I would roughly understand—after Donna Haraway or Bruno Latour—as posthumanist, non-anthropocentric conceptualizations of associated species or quasi-objects. Generally speaking, my reflection would have to do with the scope of understanding of the world in which dualism or dialectics, derived from both constructivism and representationalism, do not work and the search for material-discursive and material-visual connections is more fruitful (see Barad 2003, 801-831; Barad 2007, Haraway 2003, Latour 2011). I would like to ask, therefore, whether the aesthetic and artistic order of poetry can be thought in accordance with the order proposed in the natural, sociological and exact sciences. This is how it works in art, especially in transmedia art, where critics and artists more and more often talk about artistic research rather than creation (see Herbst & Malzacher 2018). Is a similar situation possible in Polish poetry? That is, can its value also be based on a connection with scientific and natural inventiveness?

In order to address this question I will focus on (post)conceptual artistic practices which combine the linguistic order with the bodily and pictorial order. I will discuss Patrum's active poetry, Kaczanowski's strategy of clownery and Tobis's *A-Z* project, because these are good examples of a poetry that questions the border between bodily, linguistic and pictorial media. In my analyses, I will concentrate on the relations between particular systems of signs and types of media, in order to capture the form of materiality proposed by the authors mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

Ethical and political consequences of understanding poetry as a visual-verbal medium

I would like to begin, however, from a brief outline of the history of Polish poetry. If I were to indicate the tradition of current conceptions

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1 Of course, it would be necessary to explain why the medium category would be more useful in the context of research on the materiality of poetry than categories originating from the area of semiotic research. The medium is something much broader than the semiotic system: after Tomasz Załuski, I would like to assume that the medium is a “combination of material and technology with a specific way of using it, with the overriding level of conventional artistic and cultural practices, thanks to which selected features of the material and technological layer become significant, not only in the artistic or cultural context, but also in social and political contexts.” (Załuski 2010, 11).

of language and the poem which could be called materialistic, I would derive it from the avant-garde tendency to emphasize the opaqueness of the code (see Sławiński 1998; Orska 2019; Browarny et al. 2018). Nevertheless, linguistic innovativeness or fixation on experiment, which always increase the visibility of the code, do not suffice, I think, to enable us to speak about the neo-materiality of the poem, code and poetry in general. Even if modern Polish poets used various techniques to differentiate the language of prose from the language of poetry, this usually entailed diminishing the materiality of the world seen. This is how the categories of reference and autotelicity work: the more attention focused on the medium itself (language), the lower the importance of non-literary references (see Kluba 2004). Similarly, concrete poetry contributed to the philosophy of the (autonomous) sign (see Wysłouch 2001). Obviously, the ontological duality of, on the one hand, words, text, language, poem, poetry, and on the other hand the world, reality, the body etc., was an effective blockade against materialistic thinking.

Conceptions of poetry in general, as well as interpretations of particular poems, have been inspired by similar assumptions of ontological duality. For a very long time the dominant philosophy was the hermeneutic tradition of interpretation (characterized by the effort to bypass the formal and rhetorical resistance of, for example, language, in order to discover meaning, show the authenticity of emotions or the sincerity of intentions), superseded by the structuralist and poststructuralist-deconstructive approach, which—contrary to the hermeneutic one—puts emphasis mainly on language constructions and their autonomous vitality (see Vattimo 2011; de Man 2004; Michaels 2011). To sum up, looking at various poetic undertakings, authorial conceptions of language and different methodologies of reading poetry makes it difficult to explain whether it was the criticism of poetry or rather various poetic realizations that did not favour materiality—this significant, sense-creating and active constituent of reality, equally as important as the others.

If the increased interest in the materiality of works of art (a work of art as an object) is a characteristic of the aesthetic ideology of artistic and literary modernism (Foster 1996; Buchloh 2003, Bishop 2012), one can assume that the persistence of the once dominant idealistic aesthetics of the poem indicates that a significant part of Polish poetry is not modern. This is important in the context of our cultural heritage: if we consider the prevailing part of the Polish poetry of the twentieth century as not modern—that is, as indifferent, critically hostile or counter to modernization processes—it is difficult to expect that poetry to be seriously involved in neo-materialist thinking of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is in a sense directly linked to modernity: some researchers are looking for its beginnings where the beginnings of moder-

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nity were sought, taking the discovery of the steam engine as the starting point (Clark 2015, 2–18).<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to speak about 20<sup>th</sup> century materialist traditions in Poland without referring to the poetry of, among others, Julian Przyboś, Adam Ważyk, Tymoteusz Karpowicz and Witold Wirpsza, whose artistic strategies tell of a critical awareness of modernity. Turning to new aesthetic formulas allows for placing their poems outside the dominant anti-modernist trend represented by Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Polish poetry has not become modern even after 1989: to a large extent it has remained in the scope of mythological, mythical and religious imagery. The best examples of this thesis are the most praised and recognized poetry volumes of that time, such as those of Marcin Świetlicki, Jacek Podsiadło, Marcin Senddecki, Marzena Broda, Marzanna Kielar and Ewa Sonnenberg, which legitimized a post-romantic philosophy of language and the poem. Even if we were able to indicate the materialistic dimensions of the Polish poetry of the late twentieth century, it would always be contaminated, so to speak, by some kind of idealism or formalism.

It is worth remembering that, in the 1990s, ideas concerning the materiality of poetry changed, under the influence of new techniques. As a result, conceptions of language and medium from beyond the structural and semiotic system have been widely appreciated. The focus was on the biological and adaptive qualities of signs which allowed the appreciation of the bio-art trend. One of the consequences of adopting another philosophy of the medium was not only to position language against non-literal semiotic and communication systems, but also to think about ways of coding information by animals, bacteria, and other biological organisms. Poetry turned out to be not only a product of genius, inspiration and a special metaphysical and spiritual structure of man, but also the effect of the biological and material life of more or less complex organisms. Another consequence of this shift was the inclusion of literary studies in the context of visual literacy and “literacy visualcy” as well as studies of verbal and visual media (see Mitchell 2008, 4–19; Mitchell 1994, 83–107). Therefore, it was possible to abandon comparative and competitive perspec-

2 The Anthropocene is a flow of geological factors parallel to a flow of political, social and cultural factors. If modernity is a state of increased influence of human activity on the environment, the Anthropocene reveals its consequences—radical and dangerous for our biological survival. See also: Abriszewski 2018: 371–372.

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tives (poetry as image, image as poetry) and focus on the possibilities of establishing multifaceted relations between them.

Contemporary material approaches to poetry generally spring from the conviction that the separation of cultural objects from historical, economic, personal, psychological, material and technological or similar conditions is impossible. We cannot think about a text, a poem, or poetry, exclusively within their own intratextual scope: materialistic thinking cannot be limited to the text itself. The conviction about the materialistic foundation of verbal-visual media (because this is how I want to talk about poetry) would lead us to an ethical project, in the sense that it would not allow us to reduce the number of entities involved in the object's production, distribution, circulation etc., as happens in the traditional understanding of the creative process.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps, in Polish modernism, the duality of language and world has persisted for such a long time, due to the fact that "the world" had been reduced to the homogenous form of whatever is not the poem? If we reduce the huge variety of factors affecting the material forms of human activity, we can easily talk about poetry in terms of genius, talent, intuition, ability etc., leaving aside all the material conditions of language, the subject, the object and the processes that occur between them. Therefore, although I believe that attempts to read text as if it were producing images most closely approximate to materialistic thinking, I perceive all efforts to compare literature with the visual arts, or to "equate art with a material object" (Michaels 2004, 18) as only a partial realization of the materialistic philosophy of poetry. The new materialisms (e.g. Latour's materialism, to which I am referring most eagerly here) involve codes, media, matter, materials and many lives that are disproportionate to each other on many levels and in many respects, and it all happens without any prior decision about what is a code, what is a material, what is an entity and what works or what does not work. Texts, similarly to Latour's entities, are not points but trajectories, and to claim their materiality is to appreciate the anti-essential aspect of reading: it helps us to understand how it happens that we are convinced that some texts engage in the activity of mean-ing in the way they do. The essences (meanings) demand a stabilization ensured by institutions, historical processes and ideologies.

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3 I refer to Bruno Latour's reflection concerning the multitude of actors who in modern orders were subject to purification processes and were invisible to people who were separated from them. (Latour 2011)



The ethical aspect of such poetic materialism results from the political ambitions of poetry, as it shows how discursive formations, currents of thought or networks of meanings become real and contribute to the physical world (Latour 2009, 185-252) and, therefore, it does not allow these powers to become invisible. Poetic materialism—sometimes via reification, sometimes via hypostases—introduces into the field of vision what is politically significant and what tries to remain invisible in order to shape our world more effectively.

The ethical aspect of such poetic materialism results from the political ambitions of poetry, as it shows how discursive formations, currents of thought or networks of meanings become real and contribute to the physical world (Latour 2009, 185-252) and, therefore, it does not allow these powers to become invisible. Poetic materialism—sometimes via reification, sometimes via hypostases—introduces into the field of vision what is politically significant and what tries to remain invisible in order to shape our world more effectively. Thanks to the texts of, among others, Szczepan Kopyt, Kira Pietrek, Robert Rybicki, Kacper Bartczak and Adam Kaczanowski, the neo-materialistic conceptualizations of the poem, language and their (our) environment change the aesthetic and ideological foundations of Polish poetry. The differences between these poets could be reduced to the politicization of ecological crises and their de-politization (as happens in the case of Rybicki and Bartczak), although it can be said that the aesthetic and ideological difference between these poetic worldviews results from their different observation points. It is not a coincidence, however, that they are artists who introduce language into the fields of other media: sounds, images and objects.

In order to take the opportunity given by the tradition of linguistic and concrete poets, I prefer to speak about the incommensurability of the material code, the material environment of the poem and the materiality of the poem itself, rather than speaking about the dualism of text and world. Incommensurability is an important aesthetic and philosophical category of modernity. In the opinion of Jacques Rancière, it defines the gap between the sensual (material) appearance of the object and its meaning, but it also marks the difference between various media and various arts. The conviction that all arts are exchangeable was questioned by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, but according to Jacques Rancière such an approach led to an excessive elevation of incommensurability (Rancière 2007, 66-73). Bruno Latour speaks of a hyper-incommensurability (Latour 2011, 90); Timothy Morton speaks of asymmetry “between the infinite powers of cognition and the infinite being of things” (Morton 2013, 25); Timothy Clark, on the other hand, speaks about an incommensurability characteristic of the Anthropocene (Clark 2015). The aesthetic idea of incommensurability was used in the 1960s to question the possibility of thinking about the common world (Waters 2010). Treated as a resultant of discreteness, it became an apology for the world insofar as it is strange and alienating. Since we all live in separate worlds, we do not have to be interested in and feel responsible for each other. Discreteness and incommensurability have become the justification for economic exploitation and for social, class and gen-

der inequality. The idea of incommensurability does not have to lead to the destruction of our relationship with what is not similar to us or what is different and distant from us. In the light of the fact that such thinkers as (among others) Jacques Rancière represent this idea as liberation of visibility forces from the stranglehold of word forces, it is possible to say that incommensurability enables us to think about the world with no reference to any homogenizing “common measure” (Rancière 2007, 66-79). In this perspective, one can take incommensurability as a promise of emancipation of hitherto suppressed forces that reject „common measures” but maintain what is common (Rancière 2007, 774). Bearing in mind the idea of incommensurability, I would like to analyze some cases of poetic and artistic activities and I would like to focus on the ethical and political possibilities of neomaterialistic aesthetics.

### Active poetry

Since circa 1971, Ewa Partum, has created various types of experiments with word formulas. In the Poetry Office in Warsaw, she displayed *Obszar na licencji poetyckiej* [The Poetic License Area]. The artist scattered a few sets of alphabet letters on the floor of the flat, so that the visitors, who were coming out of the exhibition, were literally taking the letters away, because the doormat was soaked with glue. During another active poetry performance, Partum scattered the letters which contributed to a fragment of Joyce's *Ulysses* in a passage of the Warsaw underground, and the letters were spread by people passing along this route. Likewise, in the case of *Metapoezja* [Metapoesis], from 1972, the floor of the exhibition was covered with paper blocks of letters, and the visitors transferred them from one room to another. Simultaneously, Partum was composing visual poetry on pages which contributed to the series *poem by ewa*. In 1971, she created, i.a. a page with her lipstick marks which reproduced the layout of the alphabet, and which Partum signed: “my touch is the touch of a woman.”

In this case active poetry consists in drawing the text (which eventually turns out to be a jigsaw made of letters) out of the formula of the finished object and making the medium of writing/language the material from which the object of artistic attention is “made.” In the case of Partum, language signs become insistently visible and deprived of semantic values as they appear in the public space. Andrzej Turowski, commenting on the conceptual nature of Partum's linguistic actions, recounts their effects as follows:



The letters scattered by Ewa Partum were sticking to the visitors' shoes and wandering with them around the city, getting lost among the rubbish on the streets. Maybe for a moment they formed a word, maybe for a moment they took shape, maybe somebody got interested or maybe got upset with their insistent presence. Finally, they disappeared somewhere, leaving only traces in the minds of those who carried them out.<sup>4</sup>

One can, of course, talk about interactive poetry, as Turowski does; but, first of all, we should ask how the forms of linguistic signs, whose systems we sometimes call poetry, can be part of the image of the public space.<sup>5</sup>

Partum shows that this can happen because of the “clinginess” of the material, which poetry uses for itself. Scattered cards, which had been cut by the artist, adhere to the bodies of people visiting the exhibition and thus leave the confined space of the museum. Due to such actions, poetry is supposed to become a public, common and collective art. However, we must admit that in the case of Partum, this strategy does not work well: it is not enough to scatter the letters and deprive the art of its meanings (as if it were matter) in order to make the poems active in public. It works badly—poetry eventually ends up as an unwanted rubbish<sup>6</sup>—and it is not because Partum did not think her actions through. In order to make the events of “active poetry” more effective, we would have to know what was happening not only during the action itself, but also later, so as to see how the poems create a public space, how they create new, distinct entities in a public space and how they make certain bodily states become subject-states, etc. It is not enough in this case to register a project reduced to the author's actions, we should also be able to follow/get to know the reactions (bodily, verbal) of people who have been included in the course of events.<sup>7</sup> This situ-

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4 „Rozrzucone przez Ewę Partum litery przylepiały się do butów zwiedzających i wędrowały z nimi po mieście, gubiąc się wśród śmieci ulicy. Może na chwilę utworzyły słowo, może przez moment przybrały kształt, może kogoś zainteresowały, może zdenerwowały swoją natarczywą obecnością. W końcu rozplynęły się gdzieś w przestrzeni, pozostawiając jedynie ślady w myślach tych, którzy je wynieśli” (Turowski 2012-2013, 51).

5 Of course, I mention here only one of many artists whose poetic actions were performed within the public space. See Jenny Holzer, Jadwiga Sawicka, Giselle Beiguelman.

6 In my opinion, changing poetry into rubbish is not intended by the poet although it may serve as proof that the „waste” elements universally participate in culture making.

7 This is what happens a few decades later in the case of Giselle Beiguelma-

ational and documentary knowledge will increase recognition of such activities, determine their boundary conditions and enable us to trace the aesthetic and social consequences of artistic actions, going beyond their momentariness.

The case of Partum shows that the material concreteness of poetry—today also associated with virtuality—requires other ways of perceiving / commenting / documenting the “poems” happening between the media. This example suggests that this poetry, which wants to increase its materialistic potential, is exposed to blockage in channels remaining beyond our visual and social sphere. We leave out a whole series of material-discursive powers and effects. In one of her manifestos (accompanying the action *Obszar zagospodarowany poezją* [The Area Managed with Poetry] in 1970), Partum wrote: “The implementation of poetry should become the reason for the creation of a real area managed by imagination in a way that extends its boundaries.”<sup>8</sup> The artist suggests here that poetry is not only a collection of artifacts defined as poetic works, but that it produces its own fields of influence, and should therefore become a situational and contextual framework for social and individual forces.

Partum’s commitment to the materiality of art is confirmed, among others, by the action *Hommage á Solidarność* [Homage and Solidarity], during which the artist “kissed out” the Solidarity inscription on a roll of paper. Dorota Monkiewicz, commenting on the course of this performance, politicizes the physical and sexual objects:

...the traditional topos of patriotic national art, lined with the phantasm of a woman’s body (an example of which we can see in Jacek Malczewski’s *Polonia*) is confronted with an active female subject falling into a public space with a project of total emancipation—feminist and national at the same time.<sup>9</sup>

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n’s *no-poems*. The poems conceived as ephemeral events in the form of sentences displayed on billboards and transmitted back to the Internet via the camera, do not focus only on „broadcast messages.” The recording of the events includes not only the activities consisting in placing the text in public space; it also gives an insight into the reaction of involuntary participants. More about the project: *Poetrica – São Paulo* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pgL6xNrvvI>

8 „Realizacja poezji powinna stać się powodem powstania realnego obszaru zagospodarowanego wyobraźnią w sposób rozszerzający jej granice” (after Gryglicka 2012, 477).

9 „...tradycyjny, podszyty fantazmatem kobiecego ciała topos patriotycznej sztuki narodowej (zobaczmy go chociażby na przykładzie obrazu *Polonia* Jacka Malczewskiego) jest konfrontowany z aktywnym kobiecym podmiotem wchodzącym w przestrzeń publiczną z totalnym projektem emancypacyjnym – femini-

According to the critic, Partum deconstructs the national narrative. The actions of a particular woman-artist make it impossible to establish femininity as an emblem of national ideas. Moreover, several years later, Partum repeated this performance in Spain and gave it a new title, *Pearls*, as she cooperated with Spanish women, “kissing out” the national flag with her lips. This action was supposed to be an allusion to the slave labor of women in the sex business and a reflection on the “status of women from poor countries in the liberal societies of Western Europe.”<sup>10</sup> In any case, the body in Partum’s work / Partum’s body serves as a medium and material and, as such, it ceases to be understood only as a representation, it stops being marked only as a social construct devoted to playing its special role, but—as the body that exists in reality—it opposes itself to being treated solely as a representation, construct or phantasm. In some contexts it is a phantasm, in others it is real, everything depends on the strategic and contextual setting, which is also reflexively negotiable.

## Translations

Andrzej Tobis has been working on his *A-Z* project for several years. It consists of an archive of photographic equivalents of dictionary entries from *Bildwörterbuch Deutsch und Polnisch* published in 1954. As Tobis writes, in the introduction to the catalogue book from the 2017 exhibition in Wrocław: “During eleven years of work on the *A-Z* project, I’ve managed to find, up till now, not much more than seven hundred visual equivalents of entries from the original dictionary.”<sup>11</sup>

Tobis’s project is a radical denial of the aesthetic assumptions originating from the Kantian tradition. Their common feature is not so much that they subject what is material, sensual or perceptual to mind, generality and reflexivity, but rather that they outline the division between sensual pleasure and contemplative pleasure, matter and form. According to critics of Kant’s theories, this led to a lack of interest in the material conditions for the existence of a particular thing (Nead 1998, 49; Hudzik 1994). In his project, Tobis deconstructs the aesthetic that allows one

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stycznym i narodowym zarazem” (Monkiewicz, 2012-2013, 83).

10 „statusem kobiet z krajów ubogich w liberalnych społeczeństwach Europy Zachodniej” (Monkiewicz 2012/2013, 85)

11 „W ramach jedenastoletniej pracy nad projektem *A-Z* udało mi się do tej pory odnaleźć niewiele ponad siedemset wizualnych odpowiedników haseł z oryginalnego słownika” (Tobis 2017, 3).

to determine what are the external characteristics of the environment, and what are the inner properties of the thing itself. Searching for the material equivalents of the old dictionary entries in the environment of—mostly—Upper Silesian cities produces visual and intellectual effects that make it impossible to confirm old categories. Tobis achieves this result on many levels: starting from multiplying the effects of the project—which was published in the form of a column in the magazine *Ultramaryna*, displayed in the form of educational cabinets in a museum, and printed as a book or as *Mały zestaw wakacyjno-katastroficzny* [Small Vacation and Catastrophic Set] included in *Notes na 6 tygodni* [Notebook for 6 weeks]—and ending with the interpretation of specific boards. The object, its presentation, its dictionary entry (in Polish and German) and its ideological, imaginative and symbolic meanings intertwine on these boards in such a way that they constitute various levels of configuration and do not become matter divided from form but, rather, function both as matter and form depending on a particular configuration.

Magda Heydel discusses Tobis's photographic and verbal configurations as being subversive to the stability and disambiguity of the rules governing the world of words and the world of things. But even when she discusses this project in the context of old problems concerning representation and language equivalents of reality, Heydel expresses doubts that could lead her (and therefore guide us) to non-dualistic situations:

Is the sunrise painted on the chimney of a cold store sunrise or not? Are some crumpled petticoats and stockings lying at the bus stop women's clothing or not? Is a pillow weighed down with a brick in a puddle a pillow, or not (any more)?<sup>12</sup>

Exactly. However, Tobis's *A-Z* dictionary cannot be captured with the reality-sign dualism or read as a part of the strategy of identification (the image is what it is made of). We are dealing here with the so-called flat ontology that was elucidated by Andrzej W. Nowak (Nowak 2016, 268) who referred to the *gol weiqi* game. This is how Krzysztof Arbiszewski depicts Nowak's conception in the context of Latour's philosophy:

12 „Czy wschód słońca namalowany na kominie chłodni jest wschodem słońca, czy nie? Czy jakieś zmięte halki i pończochy leżące na przystanku autobusowym to odzież kobieca, czy nie? Czy przydużona cegłą w kałuży poduszka jest poduszką, czy (już) nie?” (Heydel 2017, 7).

chess is a game in which each of the participating pawns has predefined “intrinsic” properties (essences), which are realized in a world with similarly specific properties (the traditional chessboard). The aim of the game is to develop the optimal configurations of these internal properties over time in the “outer” world. In *go / weiqi*, on the other hand, every stone is identical, it is only something that occupies a place. Its role, and the structures it creates, happen entirely “on the outside.” There is no implementation of pre-existent essences under specific conditions, as in chess, but only transforming structures, and the stones acquire their locally defined characteristics precisely as part of these structures.<sup>13</sup>

According to Abriszewski, both games describe well the schemes of Latour’s “New Constitution,” which has a lot in common with the aesthetic projects of modernity. *go/weiqi* reflects the translation processes that result in the production of temporary, local, networked orders. Chess—being defined as “rigid”—can be considered useful for understanding the divisions between nature and culture (matter and form) established by modernity. While the first type of game does not allow us to distinguish these poles—because it does not use the term “thing in itself”—the second type of game clearly and stably determines the characteristics of each of them. Apparently, the analogies between Kant’s aesthetic divisions (sensuality vs. reflexivity) and the poles of culture and nature that appear on one of the levels of the Constitution of Modernity are quite irresistible.

Let’s analyze the layout of the board *Der Fuchs/Lis/Fox*: German and Polish names accompany a photo of a fox that lies on a path of small stones in a rather strange position—as if it had rebounded from an attached plank, set perpendicularly to the surface of the ground. This position is explained by the story that Tobis attaches to the photo. This is a story about a family in Podhale, which was involved in the preparation of animals:

In Podhale, I came across a family of highlanders selling stuffed forest animals and tanned cow and ram skins by the road. What caught my attention was

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13 „...szachy to gra, w której każdy z uczestniczących pionków ma predefiniowane „wewnętrzne” własności (esencje), które realizują się w świecie o również określonych właściwościach (tradycyjna szachownica). W grze chodzi o to, aby wraz z upływem czasu, w „zewnętrznym” świecie rozwijać optymalne konfiguracje tych wewnętrznych własności. Z kolei w *go/weiqi* każdy kamień jest identyczny, jest tylko czymś, co zajmuje miejsce. Jego rola oraz wytwarzające się struktury w całości odbywają się „na zewnątrz”. Nie ma tu realizowania przedustawnych esencji w określonych warunkach, jak w szachach, a jedynie przekształcające się struktury, kamienie uzyskują swe lokalnie określone cechy właśnie jako części tych struktur” (Abriszewski 2018, 386).

a hare, which was formed in such a way that it was holding a walking stick in one hand and a pipe in the other (later, it turned out it was a rabbit, but a bigger one). I decided to take a photo of it. Beside it, on the ground there was a little fox, which I also photographed, as you can see. It must have fallen off the rack because of the wind. The highlander comes and says: “Why can’t you pick it up? It’s fallen down”. And I go: “I’m taking pictures of the situation as it is; if it has fallen down, let it lie there”. And the highlanders goes: “But it doesn’t look nice”. And I ask: „Why not nice?” And the highlander answers: “Because it looks as if it’s dead” (Tobis 2014, 324).

Together with Tobis, we follow the history of the emergence of objects and their creators. We move from the world of living nature (suggested by the photo) through the narrated process of stuffing animals and displaying them, to (self)abstraction or (self)elimination resulting from the denial of human participation in this process. “It looks as if it’s dead”—this sentence, spoken by the seller of the stuffed bodies of the animals, is a sign of this (self)elimination. It enables the creation of a (temporary) illusion of living nature. At some level of de-essentialising the notion of a fox—which is, I think, what Tobis’s chart is doing—we learn about human participation, and then about its removal; between these levels it is not very clear what is made by the human being and what is the work of nature. Here, the fox—a body, a specimen, raw material provided by nature, is subject to appropriate killing and mummification practices, which—after their (self)erasure—still allow the animal to be captured as natural and alive. The concept and name of a fox is linked to its painting from the exhibition of dead, exhumed animals offered for sale. Names assigned to the ready objects, displayed in the framework of educational cabinets, become not a tool for normalization but a tool for multiplication, in the form of a hybrid, as the expected image of an animal is transformed into a human-animal-artifact hybrid. In the visual-verbal medium, stabilized ontological categories, suggested by assignation of the name, are liberated from the law of order and stabilization, and what is more, they show how the stabilization processes are being erased from the visual field of social and institutional practices.

I call Tobis’s project neo-materialistic, since it shows how we move from the human hybrid level we move to normalization and stabilization (and vice versa). In this case, this is due to the erasure of the human factor. It is true that in Tobis’s work we still have visually ready, formed shapes, as if they were already subjected to normalizing factors. However, in his project—and especially in the series with text, photo and



dictionary term—Tobis seems to reach the moment when this normalization is actually happening and, at the same time, he shows levels of transformations, mutations and deviations.

### The invention of poetry

Adam Kaczanowski, an author of traditional volumes of poetry, creates as well short films with children's toys (usually Djeco, De agostini, LEGO) which are the characters of his texts. The use of toys in artistic presentations is known from, among others, the controversial staging of Zbigniew Libera. In his most famous work, *Lego* (1996), the artist used figurines, which were elements of the Danish company's plastic brick sets, to construct a concentration camp, and in *Eroica* (1998), he used figurines of women whose hands were raised in a gesture of surrender, which was a clear allusion to a photograph taken during the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto. Generally, it can be said that the use of children's toys displaces the realistic perspective of the performance, provoking us to search for borders, beyond which the toys—seriously and not seriously—stop antagonizing the images of the world. In this “toy strategy,” which, in art criticism, is called toy art (Kowalczyk 2010, 135–153), Kaczanowski includes also the staging of his own body. Unlike Ewa Partum, who works primarily with nudity, Kaczanowski dresses up as a clown, although sometimes he reads poems almost naked.

Kaczanowski's films, which are separate projects and which do not always use the texts published in his poetic books, are available on the website [tumblr.com](https://www.tumblr.com). The internet project *Moje życie jest prawdziwe* [*My life is real* (Kaczanowski, no data)] consists not only of film animations but also of static scenes—picturebook chapters. We are referred from the pictorial novel to the short films of *Moje życie jest prawdziwe*, and the tag “adamkaczanowski” begins to function as an in-text fiction, located in the external fiction of individuality that is prepared by the first name and surname. In turn, on Kaczanowski's website, we can watch the recordings of the author's performances in the disguise of a clown.

Let's analyze one of the videos in the series *Moje życie jest prawdziwe*. It is titled *Altana śmietnikowa* [A Dustbin Arbour], and the off-camera narration accompanying the presentation of subsequent shots has not been included in any book. We listen to and watch the story of a man in his family and home environment. He fantasizes about somebody who lives in a dustbin arbour and who “has not lost his sense of humor.”

It seems that the subject's fantasy embodies middle class dreams about basic self-sufficiency (domestic and commercial) and eccentric behaviour that transgress the ritualized order of the ordinary day.

The first scene takes place in the bathroom: a female figurine standing at the mirror wears only a T-shirt and is naked from the waist down; a male figurine sits on a toilet bowl with his pants dropped. In the foreground, although moved from the center of the stage, there is a large rubbish can. In the mirror, apart from the face of the female doll, we see a moving mouth that says the first part of the text: "I throw out the rubbish every day. I do it in the morning when I go to work." In subsequent scenes, the toys are joined by figures of a dog and a horse, and an important supplement to the scenery is a large packet of fruit Flaggis jelly. We can see a male figurine sitting on a dog, a female one sitting on a horse, and the dustbin that is being held by the figurine of a boy standing on the upright legs as if it was an exercise device. In subsequent scenes, the mirror still captures the reflection of human lips and faces, and the shadow of the human head appears in the background of the depicted scenes. In one of the last sequences, the head of a male figure is reflected in the mirror—in an earlier stage we see this figure in a rubbish bin with jelly packaging on its head. "I buy this rubbish every day"—this is the last sentence of the text. In the final sequence—the scenery from the previous performance being unchanged—there is a hand reflected in the mirror and it turns off the camera.

In Kaczanowski's work, the image of the human face, or the lips, in the mirror introduce the effect of disturbed proportions; in comparison with the size of the toys, the lips are enormous, "truly human": they become the sign of the superior, dominating force, and at the same time they break the illusion of the performance. Their function, however, is not only to strengthen the materiality of the medium or to weaken the credibility of the narrative. The primary purpose of the "talking reflection" is to put a human measure inside the toy scenes and deprive it of its triumphal position. For this reason, the story about the toys refers to human life—human life as authenticated by the voice of Adam Kaczanowski, who, with the reflection of a part of his face, materializes himself in the bodies of toys.

In the context of neo-materialism, I am primarily interested in the fact that Kaczanowski "invents"<sup>14</sup> for his poetry a medium different from the traditional record and the traditional form of the book. This prin-

14 I refer, here, to Rosalind Krauss's expression: "reinventing the medium" (See Krauss 1999).

ciple of “invention” turns out to be very important, because it decides whether some materializations are poetic objects or not, without specifying any initial aesthetic, political and ideological criteria. In Kaczanowski’s project, clowning, undressing and toy art function as media of signs and sounds and thus link poetry with the material particulars: the body, toys-objects, clothing. They allow the poetry to be released from regimes that recognize only its textual, “literate” character and, at the same time, they enable poetry to remain material. Kaczanowski’s artistic projects are “spreading” to more and more different areas, finding other media for themselves: children’s toys, bodies of participants, videos, etc. Of course, somebody may notice that similar experiments are carried out by various performers, public art artists going out with objects onto the streets, conceptualists who refused to treat their works as objects: broadly speaking, the art of the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. In the case of Kaczanowski, however, it is not about new sources of inspiration or new articulations of artistic quality after the aesthetic character of art has been questioned; it is about the possibility of moving from one medium to another, about the potentiality of “shifting” one medium to another and transforming the medium into the material of poetry and vice versa. Kaczanowski’s body is basically both a medium and a material—the closeness between them never leads to identification, but to an interesting play of tensions defined by the horizon of transmedia.

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**Tytuł:** Materialność poezji: słowa i ciała/ słowa i obrazy (Ewa Partum, Andrzej Tobis, Adam Kaczanowski)

**Abstrakt:** W artykule zostały przedstawione możliwości zaistnienia nowomaterialistycznej estetyki wiersza. Każdy z analizowanych przykładów – poezja aktywna Ewy Partum, toy-art Adama Kaczanowskiego i słowno-fotograficzne archiwum Andrzeja Tobisa – ujawnia inne aspekty tej estetyki. Najogólniej jednak, nowomaterialistyczna estetyka powiązana została tu z transmedialnym horyzontem sztuki oraz z przeobrażeniami myślenia materialistycznego dokonanymi pod wpływem nieantropocentrycznej wyobraźni.

**Słowa kluczowe:** poezja, nowomaterialistyczna estetyka, transmedia, aktywność artystyczna