

Peter Gendolla, Jürgen Schäfer (eds.)

The Aesthetics of Net Literature

Writing, Reading and Playing in
Programmable Media

[transcript]



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Susanne Berkenheger

i'm dying, honey

dramatized proceedings from super-space (2004)¹

Abstract

The text *i'm dying, honey* originates in a chat room. Ninety percent of it is original dialogue: digital whisper-friendships and babbling heartthrobs, pasted harangues and virtual shoulder shrugging. This is the background for my character, a provocatress who made herself known only within her own rules of speech, who played with snippets of communication as if she was a computer program. The chatters tried to crack her hermetic shield: they begged and flirted, they implored my character to speak with them in a normal language, they came up with the wildest ideas, they became impatient, they ranted and raved and thereby contributed to a dialogic piece which shall find its way back into the net after a theater performance.

yüksel: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA AAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAAA

ümit: he cant take it :)

yüksel: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA AAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAAA

ümit: check out how hard hes working at it :)

yüksel: AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA AAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAAA

ümit: he'll smash keyboard in a minute haha

yüksel: how am I supposed to WRITE AGAINST 15 PEOPLE?
AA
AA
AAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA AAA
AA
AA
AAAAAAAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAA

ümit: flooding is all he can do

yüksel: ÜMIT YOU ASSHOLE I GRADUATED! YOU DIDN'T
EVEN FINISH SCHOOL YOU BUM AROUND THE
STREETS YOU SONOFABITCH YOU CAN GO TO
ISTANBUL AND CLEAN SHOES YOU UGLY PARA-
SITE HA HA WITH YOUR LOOKS YOU'LL NEVER
HAVE A GIRLFRIEND PÜHAH?

This lively chat dialogue gives a small impression of my workday. I lurk, I compress recorded chat-logfiles, until something like the above text emerges. Sometimes I'm astonished that all this is original. Sometimes I ask myself: how come I want to even spread such conversations?

Before, my workdays looked differently. I typed, I linked, I searched in scripts for forgotten semicolons for many beautiful hours, I tried to guess the hexadecimal codes of monitor-colors for fun and was right more and more often. And now? Döners, bio-trash and sons-of-bitches?

What happened?

Or better: What is constantly happening?

Readers stubbornly try to print out my hypertexts—with poor results. Readers want to know from me whether they have seen and read everything of a certain text, and if not, how they can control that. Readers ask for my preferred way of reading of the story. Readers ask for structural maps, for sketches, early versions, for secret information that must exist for which they would be forever grateful.

To be honest: I am suspicious of them. These are not normal readers. They don't sit in front of the screen in the evening for a nice read. They have something different in mind, much less naïve: they are reworking their own works.

This leads me to three painful questions:

1. How many readers of net literature do I know?
2. How many of them read without writing about it themselves?
3. Are there something like normal readers in the net, i.e. people who are neither looking for contacts nor writing themselves, people for whom the

encounter with net literature is valuable in itself? In order not to have to answer I do what I always do in these cases, I google: In this case: "Death of the Author" (in German)—3130 hits. "Death of the Reader" (in German)—14 hits. I am pondering these numbers for a long time. Aren't these two deaths connected with each other? Doesn't the disappearance of the author conclusively lead to the disappearance of the reader? How humiliating for the reader that only 14 people in the German net cry about his loss. If there is talk about his disappearance at all, then rather in a Buddhist manner with the motto "liberation of the reader." (Google: "liberation of the reader" (in German)—94 hits, "liberation of the author" (in German)—15 hits, "liberation of the reader"—72 hits, "liberation of the author"—11 hits). As if the traditional reader in his cozy wing chair had had such a lamentable existence that he can be only too glad to disappear.

This is how I interpret the numbers: the common reader is not really appreciated in the net. And I am collecting more evidence: the net goads even those rare epicurean hypertext-readers whom I know into the urge to communicate and this craving shortens the actual reading time.

And I? If I surf without communicating I feel asocial. Shouldn't I at least say "HI" if I land on a non-commercial site? Is it rude to just look and read in the net? As rude maybe as reading at a party?

Why am I thinking of a party just now?

One sits in front of a computer. Or is one just hanging out at the computer? OK, but usually unlike going to a party one has a concrete goal in the net and then . . . hmmm . . . one ends up with people with similar intentions, people who catch you with bizarre domains and breathtaking search words. There you hang out for a while. And then, after a while, their whole linked group of friends arrives. An entertaining small group has found each other. The intention? Later. First now there is . . . oh well, somehow party, as always in the net. Some more guests come by with intentions and plans. They certainly all want to know one's opinion. There are thousands, millions, billions, trilli . . . gulp! How relaxing it would be now to meet a couple of quiet readers. Who want nothing at all from you. Whom you just hear breathing and clicking on. Wouldn't it be pleasant to feel part of a big, silent community? Shouldn't therefore as many people as possible learn to continually remain silent in the net? So that we don't feel rude if we just look and read?

I swallow—once, twice, then I think about changing my profession. After all, the strengthening of the reader's role is of a top-level interest for an author. I should be a good example and retrain as a net-reader.

I am happy with this idea. Without further hesitation I am moving to the center of the typing maniacs—a chat channel. Ending up at the following lines:

hüpfen: are we alone here? rolli
rT -rollitom: nope. I think they are listening in. And laughing their heads off about me and you..... *gggggg gluttons *llllloooooooooooooolllllllll
hüpfen: oh come on, reading is always interesting here, don't need to read a novel? Laughs
rT -rollitom: book, paper, what's that? I only read DD in certain places *gfff

I feel I'm on the right track and internally nod at the silent community of readers. As I'm reading on, astonished, reading on, bored, I am pondering whether here a reader isn't something like a listener and whether an author-reader should not be an especially good and professional reader and likewise listener as well, and whether the particularly good listeners whom I know do not also do other things than listen. On the contrary. Don't the best of the particularly good listeners help the speakers find their real reckless phrases with pointed provocations and weird behavior?

Yes. Then: I have to be provocative, much more provocative.

A little later I'm chatting as a *dumbwaitress*.

cloud ex_undea: hey u hey
u yeah u
hey speak
no no
say something your profile is crap as well
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress bows
cloud ex_undea: oh
how old
hey u
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress sizes up cloud
dumbwaitress frowns
cloud ex_undea: what kinda girl are u
wot u want
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress raises a brow
cloud ex_undea: no no
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress shakes head

cloud ex_undea: well lets talk regular
 really
 no no
 -.-"
 pleez
 pleez
 pleez
 or shall i go³

I continue my silence and in the meantime harbor more silent ideas. I could, for example, just simply repeat the phrases of the previous speakers or change them a little stylistically or continue to grill them with a few words.

The more variations of silence I can think of, the clearer it becomes to me that almost everything will work, provided I keep to my own strict rules. Namely that the stricter I keep to my ploys, the more attention I'll get. It even seems to me more and more that the real work is to suppress every spontaneous idea, response, to reply in set phrases and to come across with the varied vocabulary of a bot. That galls the public but gets me the most reading time.

I see myself only as a kind of language-machine in the chat, as a catalyst—and I record the reactions. I read them. Because I want to uphold this deserted place of the reader, the public therefore can plea, beg, implore as much as they want, they won't get anything out of me, I won't answer any more questions. I'm reading.

The net-author who I once was and will be again, however, wants to bring back the read and collated, condensed and partly fictitiously expanded text into the net—as an audio installation.

This is how it will look: an empty white screen will open. Behind it, invisible for the website visitor, are hidden six fields of different sizes, sensitive to the mouse. When the visitor is approaching one of these fields with his mouse, the hidden dialogue will be heard—at first low, getting louder the closer the pointer approaches the center of the field, reversely softer as soon as one leaves the field. If the fields are visited several times the dialogue continues where it was interrupted. All texts run in loops.

Thereby the listener samples his own "radio"-play. Like a silent, blind guest at a party he moves from one group to the next. In the best-case scenario he will recognize himself in his own role as the silent protagonist and will enjoy being a politely silent reader.

Notes

1. *ich sterbe gleich, schatz*. Dir. Manfred Kerklau. Perf. Gabriele Brüning. Sound-design Detlef Piepke. Première: Theater im Pumpenhaus, Münster. 29 Oct. 2004.
2. *i'm dying honey*: continuation of dialogue 1; chat room West coast:

ümit: flooding is all he can do
yüksel: ÜMIT YOU SONOFABITCH YOU COPY SHORT PHRASES YOURSELF THEN YOU PASTE BUT YOU CANT FLOOD THATS WHY YOURE PIS SED YOU ASS-FUCKED ASS-FACE YOU CANT RE SIST ME YOU STEAL MY WORDS? AND MY SAYINGS? SHAME ON YOU YOU UGLIN

ümit: loooool yüksel, dont you know how to fight?
yüksel: ÜMIT YOU ASSHOLE I GRADUATED! YOU DIDNT EVEN FINISH SCHOOL YOU BUM AROUND THE STREETS YOU SONOFABITCH YOU CAN GO TO ISTANBUL AND CLEAN SHOES YOU UGLY PARASITE HA HA WITH YOUR LOOK YOU WILL NEVER HAVE A GIRLFRIEND PÜHAH

ümit: I talk normally with them
yüksel: ÜMIT YOU SONOFABITCH WITHOUT FATHER . . . WHOSE FATHER I HAVE SOLD YOU BASTARD CHILD WERE FOUND IN ORGANIC WASTE AS MAGGOT AND YOU WERE BRED AS A MONSTER YOU SONOFABITCH WITH YOUR DO NER

ümit: without flooding
he can't handle it, he makes a fool of himself
yüksel: I NEVER MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF because i have no friends here

ümit: im crying already.)
yüksel: I NEVER MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF because I have no friends here

ümit: im superior to him in all things :)
he cant cope with that haha
yüksel: I NEVER MAKE A FOOL OF MYSELF because I have no friends here

yüksel: ÜMIT YOU SONOFABITCH WITHOUT FATHER . . .
WHOSE FATHER I HAVE SOLD YOU BASTARD
CHILD WERE FOUND IN ORGANIC WASTE AS
MAGGOT AND YOU WERE BRED AS A MONSTER
YOU SONOFABITCH WITH YOUR DONER
ümit: you have gargamel nose

3. *i'm dying honey*: continuation of dialogue 3; chat room Dream-Island:

c4f-prinz: hello
how can i/we help you?
cloud ex_undea: hey prinz d u know her?
c4f-prinz: cloud whats ur prob
cloud ex_undea: she dont speak man
c4f-prinz: cloud . . . the monitoring is not an official chat room, it only
serves the purpose to find the navigators faster. please leave
this room after having expressed your problem so that other
chatters get the opportunity to get help as well.
dumbwaitress . . . as it seems you donot have a problem and
you do not leave the room, you will now be expelled from the
monitoring.
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress tumbles
rubs eyes, nose
sniffles
knocks
operator: Channel Erotic is full! Change not possible
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress knocks
operator: Channel Erotic2 is full! Change not possible
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress knocks
operator: You will enter the channel Dream-Island
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress smiles vaguely
wtüte: go get me some coffee @waitress
gg
printed matter: what do we need a brain for? jellyfish dont have one, dont
need one either. they just hover thru the sea, like heyyyyy,
hoooo . . . i used to live like that also . . . and then i left
school . . . *gg
wtüte: waitress . . . wheres that coffee??? confound@domestics!
printed matter: waitress?
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress scurries towards cold coffee

wtüte: why cold???

want it warm . . . cheekwarm please

schwester2000: *(whispers to dumbwaitress)* where u from??

dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress vaguely points into the distance

operator: you have been invited into tellmemore by schwester2000; to get there enter /go tellmemore; or /sg

dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress lowers eyes

printed matter: ?????? confused is @really waitress

wtüte: i told u matter . . . u just have to listen right?

schwester2000: *(whispers to dumbwaitress)* sorry bout the attack

printed matter: is she some jeanny or gini or what that thing from the bottles called

wtüte: dunno matter . . . wait i rub her. . . . ggg

printed matter: löööööl

do we have wishes???

enthusiastically jumping from one foot to the other

wtüte: yep matter . . . but u need your own waitress . . . remember . . . like in (life of brian) monty python . . . only one waitress each . . . gg

printed matter: oahhhhh blast! . . . stonekick

dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress gets back with sludge in cup

wtüte: sludge? what sludge?

receives cup

slurps@coffee . . .

dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress watches curiously

wtüte: welllllllll@waitress . . . might be bit sweeter n bit less hot . . . other hand u r still learning

schwester2000: *(whispers to dumbwaitress)* dont like to meet?? im a decent girl. hello??

dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress lifts eyebrow

printed matter: do u lend her out sometime

wtüte: nope

printed matter: come on . . . only oooonce

dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress lifts eyebrow dangerously high

schwester2000: smiles

printed matter: waitress?????

wtüte: ahm . . . are u going to be rebellious waitress???

obey!!! talk with voice like thunder

printed matter: WAIIIIII TREEEEEEESSSS

wtüte: shes mine@matter . . . gg
printed matter: coooome chick chick chick
wtüte: away matter
wtüte: (*whispers to dumbwaitress*) smile . . . great you play along . . .
hello i am WTüte
printed matter: you are too rude to her and besides you cant pay the non-
wage labor costs
schwester2000: (*whispers to dumbwaitress*) just 5 minutes
wtüte: hey . . . shes a waitress! those are used@rude
printed matter: that right waitress? talks with lovely voice
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress strides to and fro
schwester2000: try restart
@dumbwaitress
operator: you have been invited into thisismylastinvitation by schwe-
ster2000; to get there enter /go thisismylastinvitation; or /sg
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress fingers for napkin
schwester2000: (*whispers to dumbwaitress*) hmm . . . have we met before??
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress is horribly clumsy
wtüte: no prob waitress . . . we will learn that together . . .
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress hits full cup with elbow
wtüte: aaaarghhh . . .
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress looks like nothing happened
schwester2000: meditation . . . smiles
printed matter: did she take a vow of silence . . . ?? then i will step on her foot . . .
like in life of brian
schwester2000: (*whispers to dumbwaitress*) say something—smiles
schwester2000: if i dont hear anything else from you
wtüte: loool@matter@steps on foot
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress waves napkin
wtüte: hm hm hm . . . good domestics are so rare these days . . .
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress wipes on printed matter
printed matter: on meaaaaaaa?
what are you wiping on me?
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress looks skeptically at smeary printed matter
printed matter: looks skeptically back
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress picks up printed matter gingerly
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress shakes head
printed matter: eyyyyyyyy . . . let me down
wtüte: no . . . this is not my printed matter . . . throw him away
gg

schwester2000: *(whispers to dumbwaitress)* shall i invite us once more??
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress wraps boa constricta around her neck
schwester2000: *(whispers to dumbwaitress)* special girl u r or guy perhaps
schwester2000: smiles
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress struggles for air. mpfffft
schwester2000: laughs
printed matter: you are all assholes . . .
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress gathers up her skirts
printed matter: ill stay with u
vfg
schwester2000: *(whispers to dumbwaitress)* so . . . no chance???
wtüte: *(whispers to dumbwaitress)* coffees all gone!!
schwester2000: *(whispers to dumbwaitress)* a pity, really . . . well . . .
where u from??
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress waves goodbye with napkin
printed matter: you stay waitress
schwester2000: *(whispers to dumbwaitress)* stay here waitress
just stay here waitress
schwester2000: hey
schwester2000: *(whispers to dumbwaitress)* just stay one minute or 2 hours
i beg you loudly to whisper back at me for once
dumbwaitress: dumbwaitress whispers incomprehensibly and rustles
away
schwester2000: hey

Translated by Brigitte Pichon and Dorian Rudnytsky