Investigations: On the Complex Temporalities of Today

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"To Feel the Flow of Time": The Dividual Subject and Temporal Experience in Literature

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1.

The exponentially growing number of publications in literary and cultural studies devoted to the "new temporality" has already been labeled the "temporal turn" and is now becoming its own specialized research sub-discipline.[1] However, it is difficult to see this phenomenon as merely a passing intellectual fashion; rather, these studies took shape despite numerous earlier claims about the exhaustion of the possibilities for thinking about "time in literature." Two decades earlier, John Hillis Miller addressed this issue, indicating his conviction of its untimeliness and unattractiveness,[2] and Fredric Jameson, writing at that time about the "end of temporality," claimed

1 See Thomas M. Allen's remarks in the introduction to the important collective monograph edited by him: *Time and Literature*, ed. Thomas M. Allen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Allen recalled the numerous publications that make up the "temporal turn" and identified its beginning with the appearance of Rita Felski's *Doing Time* and Stuart Sherman's *Telling Time* around 2000.

2 James H. Miller, "Time in Literature," *Daedalus* 132 (2) (Spring 2003): 86–97.

that it was rooted in economics, which reduced the horizon of subjectivity to the "present and the body"[3]; as a potential counterpoint, he postulated a temporality of life experience, including the experience of everyday life. Somewhat later, the impression of existing in a cultural "timelessness," as Boris Groys called the postmodern formation,[4] gave way to a sense of the transformative impact of many phenomena on individuals and even entire communities, which Catherine Malabou labeled the "plasticity" of time.[5] Subsequent economic upheavals, such as the 2008 crisis, as well as increasingly strong assaults by populist and autocratic forces on hitherto stable democratic institutions, have made clear the continuing relevance of the issue of temporal change. Finally, disturbing reports on the extent of the global environmental catastrophe seem to have proved decisive in this regard. One of their effects has been the development of ecocritical studies, which, together with a new temporal reference called the "Anthropocene,"[6] has dramatized the experience of time, giving it a new structure, reshaping it into images of the large-scale temporal transformations taking place in the human world. The experience of the global pandemic cannot, of course, be overlooked, as it too constituted a kind of "exceptional time," with its own particular flow and means of organization.

The diagnoses arising from the study of modernity have been of great importance for the humanities and social sciences. At least since Peter Osborne's *The Politics of Time*,[7] temporal phenomena inherent to a reality subjected to the dictates of modernization have been studied with renewed intensity. It has been noted that the homogeneous method of chronologically measuring and understanding time, which lasted for at least two hundred years and gained official acceptance in the late nineteenth century, soon afterwards became one of the mechanisms for disciplining subjectivity, along the lines of other disciplining mechanisms described by Michel Foucault. Part of these research findings were feminist, queer and postcolonial studies revealing the violent

3 Fredric Jameson, "End of Temporality," *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 2003): 695–718.

4 Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 79–105.

5 Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel. Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lizabeth During (New York: Routledge, 2005). First French edition of the book was published in 1996.

6 One of the more important recent discussions of this notion is found in the collective work *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).

7 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time. Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995).

nature of the activities that naturalize modern chronological time, revealing practices of temporal resistance and alternative forms of thinking about and experiencing temporality, leading to the discovery of asynchronous environments for human life. In fact, however, these phenomena were not entirely new, as they had been described some time earlier in the writings of Aron Gurevich, which were also closely followed in Poland.[8] This set of issues has not escaped the attention of theorists of historical research, who, due to the specific nature of their subject matter, have always been sensitive to the study of time. In the work of Stefan Tanaka, a historian of modern Japan, representative of current forms of reflection on temporality, the great chronological time of modernizing processes is contrasted (which he is well placed to describe because of Japan's rather late and sudden integration into modernity) with three temporal imaginaries, which he sees as productive today. Tanaka found the terms for them in the writings of Michel Serres: t u r b u l e n t t i m e, c r u m p l e d t i m e and t a t t e r e d t i m e.[9]

It is only through the sum of these factors that we can, at least in part, explain what led to a rejection of earlier diagnoses from the 1990s about culture entering an "atemporal" period following the great narratives and a related philosophy of history that had earlier resulted in the effects of the "arrow of time" being palpably felt. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's interesting concept of the experience of a b r o a d p r e s e n t may not have differed significantly.[10] This is because he believed that since the end of the Second World War, culture had been in a state of temporal stagnation, with nothing fundamentally changing. Although Gumbrecht noted that part of this conception of temporality is that we are "locked" in the present by an inevitable ecological disaster looming in an ever-closer future, his account did not assume the potential for processual time to have a decisive impact on the culture he was describing. In order to properly assess the nature of his diagnosis, it is important to recognize that it probably holds greater validity for cultures like that of Germany, from which the scholar hails, for which the turning point of 1945 remains a decisive factor in the cases he analyzed.[11] At the same time, however, there are increasingly

8 See, e.g., Aron J. Guriewicz, *Categories of Medieval Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

9 Stefan Tanaka, "Change and History," in *History Without Chronology* (Ann Arbor: Lever Press, 2019), 126–146.

10 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

11 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *After 1945: Latency as Origin of the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

loud voices speaking out about the need to differentiate or multiply the formulae used to grasp what is temporal, reflecting differences in how they are experienced and defined by other cultures operating in, as Serres and Tanaka put it, more "turbulent," "crumpled," or "tattered" times.

One of these key factors in the return to temporality has become literature itself. Let us recall, for example, the famous quasi-autobiographical seven-book series by the Norwegian writer Karl Ove Knausgård, *My Struggle*,[12] based entirely on the author's experience of temporal change (such as the death of his father in horrific circumstances) and regaining a sense of the temporal. Here the writer is directly referencing Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time.* The situation is analogous with the novel *A Tale for the Time Being*[13] by the Canadian-Japanese author Ruth Ozeki, though the narrator in her novel writes to achieve the "essence of time," rather than in a search for it; this essence of time is subjectivity as understood in line with the new formulae of Zen thought. Innovatively developed temporal themes have long been present in the novels of the Turkish author Orhan Pamuk. Viewing the present from Istanbul's semi-peripheral distance, the writer has constantly felt the need to artistically grasp a temporal experience that differs significantly from the one he knew from Western culture. He has strongly emphasized this since his first novels from the 1980s and 1990s, *The White Castle*[14] and *The New Life*,[15] and later developed the concept in his essays.[16] The latter novel in particular shows the conflict of the "new" inscribed in capital turnover with the "newness" discovered during the reading of an extraordinary literary work by the book's protagonist and the various temporal practices depicted in the lives of the book's many characters. The Bulgarian author Georgi Gospodinov's novel *Time Shelter*, which describes a therapy for people suffering from different varieties of dementia, who are placed in rooms and later entire city districts that fully simulate the 1960s, 1980s, or other periods chosen by the therapists, is currently enjoying a resonance. The concept is proving so infectious that the idea of European countries choosing a given time from their own past is now being discussed. I have

12 Karl Ove Knausgård, *My Struggle, Book I,* trans. Don Bartlett (New York: Archipelago, 2014).

13 Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Books, 2013).

14 Orhan Pamuk, *The White Castle* (New York: George Braziller, 1991). Turkish first edition 1985.

15 Orhan Pamuk, *The New Life*, trans. Güneli Gün (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997). Turkish first edition 1994.

16 Orhan Pamuk, *Other Colours: Essays and a Story*, trans. Maureen Freely (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

mentioned these selected works, all of which have aroused great interest in readers, but to these we could easily add authors from Korea, India, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. Although this specific enumeration of titles might be open to dispute, there is no doubt that Polish literature has seen a wave of works associated with the new temporality, the clearest manifestation of which would be the triumphant return of the historical novel, which only a dozen or so years ago seemed in Poland to be a genre that was, if not extinct, then certainly epigonic. It is significant that the Nobel committee, in its justification for awarding its prize in literature to Olga Tokarczuk, analyzed above all *The Books of Jacob*, which seems to testify to the spreading, or even normative status, of styles of literary reception in which it is increasingly common to extract temporal motifs, which are always to some extent present as one of its universal themes.

Although wider discussion focused on whether there is a wave of new temporality in literature analogous to the wave of research on it is likely still yet to come, there are already many signs of interest in this type of approach to writing, both that of today and of the past.[17] Alongside new proposals and concepts, the usefulness of earlier formulae, such as Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope," or concepts known from Paul Ricoeur's treatises such as *Time and Narrative*,[18] is being reevaluated. Classic Polish research on time in literature is also being reactivated, including studies by Kazimierz Wyka, Kazimierz Bartoszyński, Seweryna Wysłouch and others. Such past intellectual undertakings should be emphasized because contemporary studies being conducted under the aegis of the new temporality did not arise out of a vacuum, but rather blossomed on fertile ground cultivated in the past. It would thus seem particularly valuable to combine the fruits of reflections on time in literature characteristic of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works in criticism and research of these times with the new demands posed by civilization and the environment today as perceived and expressed by contemporary writers. Indeed, the first phase of interest in temporality in literature (which does not eliminate from consideration similar phenomena in earlier periods) is linked to the Romantic "discovery" of time, the positivist development of these reflections, and then their significance for avant-garde literature, inspired in part by the achievements of the physical sciences and their questioning of a Newtonian mechanistic understanding of time.

17 Suffice it to mention the recent publications on the future in literature collected in *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2022) and *Nowa Dekada Krakowska* 3–4 (2020).

18 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* vols. 1–3, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin (Blamey), David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985–1988).

2.

At times, the literature under consideration here prompts us with new artistic formulae to rethink what nineteenth- and early twentieth-century understandings of temporality have in common with contemporary expressive needs. This is certainly the case with the writing of the canonical French author Annie Ernaux, whose subsequent works signal an increasingly insistent need to describe temporal experience. At least since the publication of her *Exteriors* (1993)[19] and journal-like *Things Seen* (2000),[20] critics have felt that temporal issues are essential aspects of the study of her works, reflected in such noteworthy concepts as "material time."[21] In her dialogue with nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature (explicitly indicating Proust as her patron), Ernaux problematizes the experience of time, though she seems to bring this discourse to a more final form only in *The Years*, written in 2008 and published in English several years later. (The title of the work was also quickly deciphered by researchers as a discussion with Virginia Woolf's identically titled novel.) In this somewhat unusually constructed "depersonalized" autobiographical story, we find the recurring problem of a long-planned novel about time which the author-heroine is unable to write because she cannot find a satisfactory form for the work. At the same time, there is a recurring feeling that, as she thought as early as the 1980s, she might be able to "write 'a kind of a woman's destiny,' set between 1940 to 1985. It would be something like Maupassant's *A Life* and convey the passage of time inside and outside of herself."[22] The model of the nineteenth-century story showing a woman's fate against the backdrop of historical time is tempting as a potential means to "convey the passage of time," which without such a format would have remained indistinct and elusive. In the Polish translation, Ernaux's key metaphor is rendered as "flow," although *passage du temps* in the original accentuates the "passage" of time. This latter association is supported by a section that expresses a desire "to seize this time that comprises her life on Earth at a given period, at a given period, the time that has coursed through her, the world she has recorded merely by living."[23] The phrase *ce temps qui l'a traversée* used here

19 Annie Ernaux, *Exteriors*, trans. Tanya Leslie (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1996).

20 Annie Ernaux, *Things Seen*, trans. Jonathan Kaplansky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

21 Tu Hanh Nguyen, "Le temps matériel d'Ernaux," *Figura* 21 (2009).

22 Annie Ernaux, *The Years*, trans. Alison L. Strayer (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2018), unpaginated ebook.

23 Ibid.

emphasizes the idea of "passing through" or "traversing" (*traverser*). The aforementioned *passage* also happens to be an aquatically perceived "flow," which in turn is highlighted by another statement made by the writer-narrator: "an outpouring, but suspended at regular intervals by photos and scenes from films that capture the successive body shapes and social positions of her being."[24] The Polish translation deviates slightly from the original, where the sentence is a more impersonally expressed observation, but includes the term *une coulée*, etymologically evoking the expression "the flow of time" (*écoulement du temps*). We therefore see how the writer simultaneously activates at least two areas of association, where time "passes" and "flows" through the heroine; it is not stated what kind of matter this is, but the suggestion remains clear that the heroine-author reflexively thinks of time as something both tactile and processual. It is also worth noting the way in which she labels her subjectivity, which, as one critic writing about Ernaux's work rightly pointed out, is "porous,"[25] since "material time" not only rubs against her body, but also passes through it. Without discussing the already considerable body of research on the subject, it should be noted that through this passage and flow, which is felt in at least two ways ("inside and outside of herself"), time reveals its shaping activity. It is no coincidence that in *The Years* there are so many descriptions of photographs and films of the writer's family life, or that the narrator carefully analyses her past gestures and facial expressions and the positions her body used to assume, and how these changing forms of somatic movement are captured on film. One is reminded of Catherine Malabou, who saw in Georg W. F. Hegel's philosophy the importance of metaphors derived from the fine arts. Malabou concluded that we find here an experience of processual time in which subjectivity is not so much subject to the principles of fluidity and flexibility, but rather, once established, its shape does not easily yield to further transformations; it resists, and any subsequent changes are strongly felt. For this reason, in recent publications, the philosopher has described the experience of the destruction of personality (caused by severe strokes, injuries from serious accidents, etc.), after which we must speak of the emergence of a new person in an old body (Malabou questions the motif of a reversible metamorphosis, which originates from antiquity, and emphasizes that often a transformation of shape corresponds to a transformation of the personal "substance" it encompasses).[26]

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24 Ibid.

25 Nguyen, *Le temps*…

26 Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

A similar view of subjectivity was pursued by Jane Bennett in her book *Influx and Efflux. Writing Up with Walt Whitman*.[27] The philosopher, one of the most creative members of the intellectual movement called "new materialism," based her claims in several passages of her well-known manifesto *Vibrant Matter* on analyses of Franz Kafka's short stories. However, it was not until a rather fortuitous return to reading the poems of the "textbook" American poet Walt Whitman, that she found in literature particularly intriguing formulae for her materialist reflections. Bennett was also influenced by a return to nineteenth-century philosophical and scientific ideas, discussing the significance of literary "physiognomies" of the time with a fascination that is not typical of her. She recalls the descriptions of postures assumed by bodies, the positions they occupied in space, the phenomenon of somatic sympathy and antipathy, the "energy" flows resulting from stepping on the ground, and the sensation of being absorbed into the world by an individual who was traversing it, remaining constantly in motion. She even finds such startling convictions as the one about the body's "mannerisms" determining whether one stands on the side of the democratic order (its hallmark was said to be behavior indicating "nonchalance"). In the midst of a multitude of revelatory findings and renewals of nineteenth-century thought, there is a recurring conviction that thought about literature should reclaim the category of "influence" at least for the purposes and to the extent set out by new materialist thought. The source-perceiving self as the corporeal subject of Whitman's poems turns out, like Ernaux's heroine, to be "porous," open to material flows and the influences of energy, absorbing the matter of the world as well as emitting it, and thereby becomes a medium for flows, that is, for a whole range of processual phenomena. Bennett uses and elaborates on the notion of a "dividual" subjectivity, a description of which she found in the writings of the anthropologist McKim Marriott in his description of the Hindu understanding of the individual:

> By "dividual," I follow McKim Marriott's notion of "persons – single actors – who – are not thought… to be 'individual,' that is, indivisible, bound units… To exist, dividual persons absorb heterogeneous material influences. They must also give out from themselves particles of their own coded substances […] that may then reproduce themselves in others…"[28]

27 Jane Bennett, *Influx and Efflux. Writing Up with Walt Whitman* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

28 Ibid., xii–xiii.

Dividual subjectivity thus rejects the proud idea of indivisibility, that is, individuality, and does not need a tight, closed, sealed-off and coherent conception of the individual self as a distinct entity, as an in-dividual. Instead, it feels, exposes and seeks to know its original "attachment" to other entities and qualities, "mixing" with them, including in a somatic and material sense. This turns out to be a subjectivity that defines itself situationally and environmentally, and in order to describe it, we can use a whole spectrum of concepts characteristic of phenomenological, new-materialist and eco-critical thought. Since dividual subjectivity, which is indelibly dependent on its material "supports" and "openings," senses and describes the passage of various substances through and past it, and thus the processual phenomena involved with this movement, it could become – and this would be my proposal – a useful approach to understanding literary representations of the experience of processual time.

3.

The dividual subjectivity discovered by Jane Bennett in nineteenth-century poetry corresponded to a whole range of historically active literary expressions of the experience of temporality that are regaining their relevance today. To test a similar proposition, below I will analyze the reading possibilities opened up by a similar persona in two selected passages from recent Polish poetry. I have purposely chosen two authors representing different genders and generations, for whom temporal issues are quite clearly emphasized by critics as fundamental themes in their work.

The well-known Szczecin writer Artur Daniel Liskowacki has repeatedly described the peculiar local experience of a temporal "rupture," whereby mixed up in local culture are issues related to the end of the German history of his hometown of Szczecin, the "severed" borderland biographies of those who were "repatriated" to Western Pomerania, the history of communist Poland reflected in social or family histories, and so on. Temporal sensitivities also called for a return to the era of Romanticism, Poland's struggles for independence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the socio-political tensions of the postwar period. A number of his books of poetry are part of this increasingly recognized and intensively researched writing that includes novels, short story collections and poignant essays. The importance of experiencing temporality in Liskowacki's lyrical works was emphasized in a discussion of them by Andrzej Skrendo, who saw in them "a way of feeling the changes taking place, a particular sensitivity – reminiscent of the painful tenderness of a sprained hand – to the matter of

time."[29] The critic also added that this poetry should be read in the context of formulae such as Charles Baudelaire's statement from "The Painter of Modern Life" that "almost all our originality comes from the seal which Time imprints on our sensations."[30]

It is therefore not surprising that Liskowacki's latest book of poetry, *Szkliwo* [Glaze],[31] prominently features temporal experiences, such as the uniqueness of times of the pandemic, including the painful departures of loved ones. In the title poem, we read about the latest scientific explanation for the phenomenon of a shiny skull from Herculaneum; it is said to have been glazed over due to its surface having been covered with a young man's brain, which "boiled" at a terrifying hyper-temperature and was then "set" by the cold. The poet views human existence through the lens of similar catastrophes, its mortality an indelible "stigma imprinted by time," shattering the illusion of safety and security, placing the human subject alongside quasi-geological objects. The dividual subjectivities in Liskowacki's poems often become aware of their condition in the face of calamities similar to the eruption of Vesuvius, learning then that they exist "burning at every moment / inundated by a wave / blackened by the stars in the sky." Thus, this is not, as a rule, the joyful, vitalistic openness to the flows of matter familiar from Whitman's poems, but more often the effect of a "drilling" impact on the subject from the memory of natural and historical catastrophes. On the other hand, the protagonist of Liskowacki's poems is a dividual who, amidst powerful flows of matter in his world, seeks to feel, as Skrendo writes, "the delicate tissue of the present." I find this to be a fortuitous term for critics, as it points to the "tissue-like," life-giving materiality of time as depicted in this poem. The temporal "grows over" or "grows into" the life of subjectivity, but fosters it only when it possesses "delicate" qualities, as it is in these that the sensation of restoring to life the "tissue" that nourishes the present appears and disappears. We come now to an important conclusion: without "the delicate tissue of the present," dividual subjectivity could not survive, and thus, in a lifeworld formed by the percussive actions of catastrophes, the co-creation of the present by human and non-human actors, their creation of somatic-material constellations in which the invigorating flow of time can be felt proves to be crucial. These

29 Andrzej Skrendo, "Artur Daniel Liskowacki i liryka nowoczesna" [Artur Daniel Liskowacki and modern lyric poetry], *Autobiografia. Literatura, Kultura. Media* 2 (17) (2021): 41. If not stated otherwise, all quotations from Polish are translated by the author of this artice.

30 Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 14.

31 Artur Daniel Liskowacki, *Szkliwo* [Glaze] (Sopot: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Sopotu, 2021).

somatic-material constellations, reminiscent in many respects of Bruno Latour's actor-networks, are ephemeral, delicate concretions, "tissues," entanglements in which time can be felt as an invigorating rhythm, pulse or flow restoring existence to the rubble of formerly great "individual" cultures, such as those of ancient Rome or modern-day Europe.

The poem "Słowiczek" [Nightingale] should probably be situated against a similar background. It begins with the following stanzas:

> I heard you again, from the side of the wild field
> garden allotments, on the edge of the housing estate,
> though it probably wasn't you on that verdant night
> you who sang to the sickly scent of jasmine and feces
>
> in the grass, tossed to maggots and a civilization
> of rubbish, so many years ago, in this abandoned
> garden. I don't know, after all, how long the nightingale lives. […]
>
> I know, there were poets. Happier. They listened to you […]
> But I hear you, even though I don't have any
> Poets for that.[32]

This work is filled with temporal emblems. The singing nightingale evokes the memory of a nightingale listened to "so many years ago," a memory so intense that it must have verged on an encounter with a bird many decades ago. This provokes a "scientific" question about the lifespan of nightingales, which signals the problem of the biological diversity of the temporal rhythms to which the poem's protagonist exposes himself. The temporality of cultural change stemming from the tradition of literary glorifications of birdsong, together with the poet's trivialized associations with the nightingale, speaks even more strongly. Here the literary-historical continuity is clearly broken, as the speaker has the feeling that during the encounter with the nightingale "there are no poets for that." The further temporal horizon of this lyrical account also becomes what Marielle Macé, in her monographic account of bird issues in literature, called "the abyss of the Anthropocene."[33] The researcher saw the eradication of bird themes from contemporary poetry as a result not only of poets' flight from this lyrical stereotype, but also of the human impact on the environment that is destroying entire populations and species.

32 Ibid., 33.

33 Marielle Macé, *Une Pluie d'oiseaux* (Paris: Édition Corti, 2022).

Well-known descriptions of the loss of bird ecosystems in Europe provide a particularly painful and undeniable reason for the silencing of the bird voice in European lyric poetry. In a similar acoustic landscape, the sudden return of bird-related issues to poetry and bird studies becomes, as Macé points out, particularly audible and noticeable; birds are returning to the "field of vision" of poetry on an exceptional basis and under special circumstances caused by the catastrophic impact of the Anthropocene.[34] Liskowacki's poem belongs to this kind of lyric, one which boldly brings birds into the "field of vision" against the backdrop of a "civilization of rubbish" with its chaos, noise and waste. "But I hear you," attests the hero-poet emphatically, having experienced the "phenomenological" obviousness of an encounter in the "here and now" with a nightingale. The "nightingale" he hears is not just a mental construct, not one of the constructivistically explicated effects of reading old lyric poetry; the poet explicitly says that he is not supposed to have much in common with the nightingale (who is said to represent the poet Józef Bohdan Zaleski) known from a poem by Adam Mickiewicz. Liskowacki's protagonist says that his "poem" is supposed to be "versus verse: 'my nightingale, fly and sing!,'" that is he tries to salvage the feeling of reality, the non-exchangeability of the encounter with the singing bird in the "abyss of the Anthropocene." Seemingly contradicted by the convention of the "conversation" with the nightingale, well-known from the literary tradition, yet finding similar expressions in Macé's reading of lyricism, it reminds us that, in etymological terms, "conversation" means "living with."[35] For this reason, the lyrical speech addressed to the "nightingale," like other earlier works of this kind, serves to describe the unique, disappearing, delicate forms of "life with" birds, that is, human life fused into multiple constellations with bird environments and the material circumstances of these encounters. A little later, the speaker confesses:

> […] At night also, no one believes
>
> you, although we are close enough to feel,
> how the heart of the world throbs within us, a bell
> on a thong of blood, so fragile that it melts in the mouth […].[36]

In this passage from Liskowacki's poem we find all three components of the specificity of temporal experience described by Skrendo. The constellation

34 Ibid., 9.

35 Ibid., chapter "Converser: 'vivre avec,'" 349–361.

36 Liskowacki, *Szkliwo*, 33.

of the bodies of the speaker and the nightingale, together with the tangibly present matter accompanying their encounter, form an arrangement in which the temporal life-sustaining flow becomes perceptible against a background dominated by the dustbins of civilization. This somatic-material system is transformed into a literally understood "delicate tissue of the present." In order to express a similar feeling of flowing time – a feeling, I would emphasize, that sustains fragile forms of existence – the hero-poet says that only in this human-bird-object constellation, in their corporeal "closeness," can one "feel how the heart of the world throbs within us." The metaphor calling the heart "a bell on a thong of blood" also alludes to the "materialistic" image of the flow of life-giving blood.

The functioning of the dividual subject involves one additional element, which Bennett (drawing on Marriott's research) says involves absorbing substances, transforming them through "metabolic" processes that are inherent to the bodily form through which they pass, and then emitting them. Such a view of subjectivity, not uncommon in nineteenth-century philosophy and science, seems distant from contemporary forms of thinking about subjectivity. Despite this, the protagonist of Liskowacki's poem is careful to ensure that the bird's song maintains its natural sonic literalness, that it not be translated into human language, that it remain at the "tip of the tongue," because "further on there are only known lands." In this "unknown" land common to humans and birds – or rather, this land of unique human-bird constellations – the speaker stands in the window at night, as we read, and listens "to intoxication." This image of standing in a window – or in an opening signaling vulnerability to the flows of matter through a house-subject, through a monad with a window – seems significant, and equally important is the fact that the nonverbal ("nightingale vs. word") way of experiencing the nightingale's singing appears as an intense and powerful sound wave leading "to intoxication." Thus, the sound waves entering and flowing through the body are transformed within the body, bringing it to a euphoric state. The poem that ensues is the result of a reborn enthusiasm, a will to live and survive, an energy resulting from the transubstantiation of the physical bird-song wave "filtered" through the speaker's body, transformed into a desire to act in the aforementioned land of unknown human-bird constellations.

Marielle Macé believes that the return of birds in poetry, under the present conditions of a new intensity caused by the widespread "silencing" of bird populations typical of the Anthropocene, should be defined by the image of "a rain of birds" (this is the title of her book). She proposes a new means of thinking about lyricism and language, which should today be experienced as once again being filled with bird voices, modulated by waves of sound emitted by birds, but also animated by them. The image of a great "rain of birds" links

the idea of the rebirth of life with a blurring of the boundary between the animated life of birds and the inanimate existence of the matter of rain, and also with her proposal for the rebirth of poetry and human culture, conditioned by the materialistically conceived sonorous intervention of birds in the ways of forming all environments. If we were to agree with this, Liskowacki's poem "Nightingale" would be both a metaphorical and literal invigorating "rain" that indicates a possibility for transforming our lifeworld, moving it towards new ecologies that offer some kind of hope for the future. These ecologies can be derived, first and foremost, from prototypical human-bird-object entanglements, such as the one accidentally experienced by the poem's speaker. They should encourage the provocation of a great "rain of birds," that is, their incorporation into all dimensions of human existence, because only by doing so will dividual subjectivities restore life to the "delicate tissue of the present," not only in the dimension of lyrical experience.

4.

Natalia Malek's lyric poetry is one of the most promising poetic projects of the last decade in Poland. Discussions of her work to date have emphasized the affinity of her lyrical compositions with sculptural art, with the poem achieving an analogous material tactility to visual art forms – an issue also raised by the poet in interviews. In Malek's collections, reproductions of paintings, which are an indispensable part of the poems, correspond with poetic compositions that refer to avant-garde works exposing art's materiality. Conceived in this way, Malek's poetic works are a tool for developing innovative forms of social activism by a poet involved in the creation of women's collectives.

Malek's latest volume, *Obręcze* [Rings],[37] continues her previous artistic path, though it also places strong emphasis on the experience of time, something which was immediately noticed by critics.[38] Basia Bańda's colorful compositions, which are part of the book, can be associated with the activity of dividual subjectivity. Circles are traced around color spots that are placed freely in various places on the page, as if the artist wanted to check which flows of color matter would best accommodate and interact with the available "openings" and where she should place these openings in order to expose herself

37 Natalia Malek, *Obręcze* [Rings] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo WBPiCAK, 2022).

38 Rafał Wawrzyńczyk, *Siatki poezji najnowszej*, accessed June 2, 2024, https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/10647-siatki-historii-najnowszej.html; Jan Skurtys, *PPR #12*, accessed June 2, 2024, https://www.biuroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/cykle/ppr-12/; Agnieszka Budnik, *Wiersze jako instalacja: przestrzeń, dźwięk, kolor i kształt*, accessed June 2, 2024, https://kulturaupodstaw.pl/wiersze-jako-instalacja-przestrzen-dzwiek-kolor-i-ksztalt/.

to the flow of their colorful substance. One of the meanings of these minimalist compositions would thus be to show the actions of the dividual subject in her work with the matter of the surrounding world that flows through and past her. One can find similar tropes in the verbal and lyrical part of the volume, that is, in Malek's poems, and it is important to note that the book was originally intended to be composed of descriptions of a single "circulating year," where one poem was to be devoted to each week. Instead of this coherent composition scheme, what remained were the fractured "remnants" of these attempts, fragmented compositions that are as "dividual" to the temporal matter of the year described as Bańda's artistic visions are to the physical matter of paint. What is striking about Malek's works is the impression they create of flow; the impact of which is among the reasons for the abandonment of the project of a comprehensive temporal descriptor. As we read in *[nie robić spisu]* [not make an inventory]:

> Rainstrokes, supple, even finger-like.
> You have to pass
>
> by so many buildings. Pass by – not make an inventory.[39]

The poem appears to revisit the decision to forgo making a typical temporal "inventory." Instead, the speaker feels that she needs to take part in the "passing" of this year, to experience it, but also to organize this passage in a specific manner, to invent new formulae for it. The poem itself is an expression of this search, for the words here are like the strokes of raindrops, which have a meaning close to Macé's rain metaphor; they are matter meant to animate, but also to touch the shapes of everything nearby ("pass by"). This is why the poet says of the word-rain that it is "supple," thus recalling Juliusz Słowacki's maxim about "supple language," together with his belief in the possibility of fortuitous combinations, of correlating a supple word with what the "head will think." To add to this, the verbal rain is supposed to be "finger-like," the poems are transformed into somatic avatars of the poet's body, grasping substances, while also suggesting that her materially conceived words belong to the conglomerates found in Liskowacki's poem, composed of human and non-human entities. Only a temporal poetry approached in this way allows for the realization of the call to "pass by so many buildings," which could also be expressed as a desire for materialist poetry created by a dividual subjectivity to have an activist impact on the numerous, multifaceted institutions that determine the shape of the contemporary world.

39 Malek, *Obręcze*, 20.

This is reinforced by a similar reading of the poem "Płaszcze" [Coats], which begins with the couplet: "Or maybe time is a slogan. / Time for yellow coats." It ostensibly addresses the commodification of time by economics; meanwhile, "slogan" comes from Gaelic languages, where it meant "battle cry" but also something like a shibboleth. Malek is not contemplating the dramaturgy of the temporal uniqueness of an event, a notion familiar from Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the shibboleth; rather, she is interested in the immutability of the slogan, urging: "may they not be changed: the communal, martial, epidemic and ancestral." This is a recurring motif in the volume, even if in such a perverse form as in "Moduły" [Modules], where we read: "Maple – particle. / Hawthorn – particle." The poet wants to see in nouns, that is, in different parts of speech, something unchanging, as we know from the unchanging part of speech that is the particle. The related idea of immutability would connect closely with the verbal activity of the dividual subject – she seeks to see in the series of compositions she has created, which in her case means conglomerates of human-participle agents, "immutable" forms through which time can be felt and the organization of its flow decided. In other words: "fractured" modular compositions and a dividually framed subject are meant to make it possible to reflect on the conditions for co-determination of such a flow of time that will bring about the "invigorating" temporal matter known from Liskowacki's poems, which regenerates life and establishes its new forms. This is why one of the points of departure in this poem is the idea of a female "little strike":

> A little strike in your home, but also a birthday. […]
> I have never seen you so mature,
> so talented,
>
> so abandoned
> as a forest clearing in January.[40]

The condition for change turns out to be dividual existence, the "forest clearing" as an "opening" in the forest wall symbolizes the susceptibility of the "porous" subject to participate in the flows of matter, although this condition also represents an acute state of lack, an abandonment revealing the dramatic aspect of experiencing the "opening." The poem may begin with a scene from family life, but its meaning quickly becomes generalized. The word "strike" has always referred to the halting of production and

40 Ibid., 26.

reproduction,[41] intended as a means for changing the rules of the collective functioning of the economy. For this reason, the theme of "immutability" is so important to *Rings* as a slogan referring to the composition of a work that explores the need for a kind of immobilization. Only such pauses, poems as "little strikes," allow for a redefinition – or rather, a literal transformation – of the forms comprising one's life-world and the processualities that govern it.[42] The heroine of the poem immediately experiences the feeling of having a "birthday" as a result of the small strike; the speaker speaks of her with admiration: "I have never seen you so mature, / so talented…" A small strike, a temporary immobilization, allows the principles of feeling and sensing of the processual flows of time to be recomposed in such a way that they become invigorating, bringing about the rebirth of the dividual subject, who has both met challenges (maturity) and regained her ability to influence her surroundings (talent). The numerous images of women's activity in *Rings* are thus mini-tales of their situational "alliances" with other entities, objects and qualities to create unique new means of feeling the flow of time through and past them. These discrete endeavors become the condition for the dividual to be animated by the restorative influences of materially experienced time, supporting and revealing the potentials of dividual subjectivity in its activist pursuits.

5.

The proposed principle of reading makes it possible to trace two basic ways of experiencing time as expressed in literature featuring experiences of dividual

41 See Katarzyna Szopa's opinions on the female lyrical heroine's regaining influence on how she participates in reproductive processes and their relation to temporality: Katarzyna Szopa, *Wybuch wyobraźni. Poezja Anny Świrszczyńskiej wobec reprodukcji życia społecznego* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2022).

42 In this context, see the poet's comments from a slightly earlier interview: "being in the now, because I think that's what you mean by being between the past and the future, seems most interesting to me. It has many consequences, let's call them philosophical. One is continuity – a thing happens again and again, which would be the mechanism of universalization you asked about earlier. The second is singularity—which is the opposite of universalization […]. And the third is 'stripping', minimizing the stripping away of some of the qualities and accompanying human stories, experiences or memories in favor of exposing others. In other words, in order to move, one has to stop. Some characters are schematic, in order to animate them independently. The stripped-down, archetypal characters you move yourself." *Powiązania (Jakub Skurtys, Natalia Malek)* [Connections (Jakub Skurtys, Natalia Malek)], accessed June 2, 2024, http://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=330&artykul=6314.

subjectivity. The first is closer to the flow, described by Bennett, of variously defined temporal "substances" through the body; their "passage," which sometimes also shapes the subject, "re-tuning" it. The second involves what Annie Ernaux called the flow of time "past her." A brief analysis of Liskowacki's and Malek's poems made it possible to see that this flow is not only the result of the contact between the dividual and the matter pushing against her, subjected to processual changes. In order to describe the sensation of this flow "past her," dividual subjectivity must sometimes be seen as part of certain situational human-nonhuman groupings, with their entanglement forming a corporeal and material constellation, one that is "porous" and not closed. Through this "porous" conglomerate of being flows a particularly invigoratingly felt time, which revives the life of dividual subjectivity as the "delicate tissue of the present."

In both poetic cases studied, the discrepancy between the temporal rhythms experienced by dividual subjectivity and the temporality of the "civilization of rubbish" is quite evident. In the study of new temporality, there is a return to a conviction about the need to explore the asynchronous environments of human life, as they provide a counterbalance, hidden in the rhythms of everyday life, to the great inexorable regulator that the chronological and synchronization-enforcing time of continuous modernization has become.[43] It is tempting to say that literature has probably never rid itself of its links to these non-synchronous, multidirectional temporal rhythms of life, only that it has not been observed carefully enough from this perspective. The study of time in literature, which is now being revived with great impetus, may therefore still have a great deal to discover and say.

Translated by Thomas Anessi

43 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing has described in an interesting way the multiplicity of temporal rhythms that make up the living environment of the collectors of greatly prized and expensive matsutake mushrooms. Their lives take place in a "polyphonic" multiplicity of human and natural temporalities, which together defy the time of progress and help them to survive in a situation of ecological catastrophe with its temporal complexities. See the chapter "Arts of Noticing," in Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 17–25.

Abstract

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"To Feel the Flow of Time": The Dividual Subject and Temporal Experience in Literature

The article discusses the state of research on new temporality in literature and proposes that one of the more commonly used tools for describing temporal experience should become the notion of "dividual" person introduced by Jane Bennett in her book on Walt Whitman's poetry. This subject foregrounds its divisibility while remaining open to the flows of matter through and besides this divisibility, which enables the dividual person to experience processual phenomena, hence it becomes useful for the study of literary records of experiencing time. The analysis of Artur Daniel Liskowacki's poem allows finding dividual subjectivity in the lyrical record of the protagonist-poet's listening to a bird's song: the encounter with the nightingale occurs at a time called by scholars the "abyss of the Anthropocene," supposedly catastrophic for entire bird populations. In turn, Natalia Malek's poems from the volume Obręcze (Rims) reveal the important temporality of women's "little strike." Feeling the flow of time by a dividual woman begins with the "strike-like" stopping of the processes that reproduce her reality and leads to their "passage" through systems designed by herself. The article contributes to studies of literature on asynchronous environments of human life as a counterbalance to the synchronous chronological time of modernization.

Keywords

new temporality, time in literature, dividual person, Artur Daniel Liskowacki, Natalia Malek