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E-literary architecture by Andrzej Głowacki

*Archetyptura. The aesthetics of the QR code*¹

ABSTRACT

The author analyzes and interprets the e-literary project of Andrzej Głowacki titled Archetyptura: the QR Code aesthetics. This project, presented as an exhibition at the Europa – Far East Gallery at the Manggha Museum in Krakow at the turn of 2015/2016, is part of a larger e-literary and artistic cycle, located in the space between e-literature and artistic installation.

KEYWORDS: e-literature, new media, cyberculture, interactivity

STRESZCZENIE

E-literackie architektury Andrzeja Głowackiego. Archetyptura. Estetyka QR kodu

Autorka dokonuje analizy i interpretacji e-literackiego projektu Andrzeja Głowackiego pt. *Archetyptura: Estetyka QR Kodu*. Projekt ten, prezentowany w formie wystawy w Galerii Europa – Daleki Wschód przy Muzeum Manggha w Krakowie na przełomie 2015/2016 roku,

¹ An exhibit of e-literature by Andrzej Głowacki: *Archetyptura. Estetyka QR kodu* [*Archetyptura. The aesthetics of the QR code*] took place in the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology Europe-Far East Gallery on 29.10.2015-21.02.2016.

wpisuje się w większy cykl e-literacko-artystyczny, lokujący się w przestrzeni pomiędzy e-literaturą a artystyczną instalacją.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: e-literatura, nowe media, cyberkultura, interaktywność

At the turn of 2016, at the Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology Europe – Far East Gallery, an exhibition of work by Andrzej Głowacki, *Archetyptura: Estetyka QR Kodu* [*Archetypture. The aesthetics of the QR code*], which is a project encompassing space between e-literature and art installation, was shown. An official note at the Web site of the Museum clearly placed Głowacki in the literary context: “The Manggha Museum of Japanese Art and Technology Europe – Far East Gallery would like to invite you to the exhibition of e-literature by Andrzej Głowacki: *Archetypture. The aesthetics of the QR code*”. In the catalog of the exhibition you can read, however:

The dynamic QR code, deriving from Japan, is used ... by Andrzej Głowacki as a graphic module to construct new visual quality in the environment. Głowacki has used QR codes in his art since 2013, when the idea of creating a book stored exclusively as QR codes was born. The book, entitled *Archetyptura czasu* [*Archetypture of time*] containing poetic prose by Głowacki, was released by the Krakow Kokazone publishing company and won recognition in the circles of Polish literary scientists dealing with contemporary literature. With the *Aesthetics of the QR code* exhibition ... which is a direct continuation of the experiments with his *Archetypture*, Andrzej Głowacki fills the space with QR codes, placing them on everyday items. In manipulating the graphical language ... there is a kind of an obsessive delight over electronics. Introducing the QR code, the cliché of our electronic times, to the art gallery, Głowacki is alluding to the contemporary style of life, where virtual worlds, hermetically sealed in computing algorithms, play an increasing role.²

Głowacki knowingly constructs his installation from very different components, among which the most important are: paper cubes, pictures hanging on the walls (including images-libraries), everyday items and designer items (such as lamps), garments (women’s and men’s), bed linen, lounge chairs, a box of tea bags enriched with a QR code that contains a literary work broken down into fragments to assembly on your own.

2 Ibidem, p. 6. [accessed: 26.01.2016].

If you look at the exhibition as an example of a literary experiment, several questions arise, answers to which one should look for exploring the literary layer of the work. Links with literature are visible on many levels, not only the most obvious ones (e.g. arising from the fact that the work is intended to be read).



Photo 1, 2. A. Głowacki, *Archetyptura. Estetyka QR kodu*³.

To read the QR code⁴ it is not enough to use the natural ability of the human eye. The recipient must supplement the appropriate tools for this purpose: a tablet or a smartphone containing a code scanning program. This is undoubtedly a kind of significant barrier for the unprepared, accidental recipient. But is this not an analogous situation to the non-transparency of artistic literature (particularly poetry), which had always been a kind of

³ Photos taken by the author.

⁴ QR codes are also used by Amaranth Borsuk in *Between Page and Screen*. Cf. the author's website: <http://www.betweenpageandscreen.com/book> (accessed: 06.08.2016).

difficulty that must be overcome to understand the message of the author? What I mean is the artistic density resulting from the substance of the poetic function, a projection of Jakobson's rule of equivalence from the axle of choice to the axle of combination, therefore, we can decode and understand only what we had analyzed before (even in a very intuitive way, but equating to the process of decoding of semantic densities tropes are based upon). In the case of QR codes, the situation presents itself, of course, as much more complicated, posing a greater obstacle to the recipient. The work of literature becomes a reward for breaking through the barrier of the graphic mark, firstly – by equipping oneself with reading tool, a QR code scanning program, and secondly – by physical effort, consisting in raising your hand with the said device and scanning the code. In the end, there will be the pleasure of reading, which – let us add – also relies on a multiplied form of activity synonymous with the effort of: interpreting metaphors, decoding the meaning of symbols, composing fragments into a larger whole, juggling these fragments and then searching for an answer to the question what message emerges from the whole.

While reading fragments of the work, after decoding the QR code, one can get the impression that this is artistic prose, slightly inclining towards the magical realism (J.L. Borges, G.G. Marquez), poetic prose or even a free poem (this clue could be suggested by the abandonment of punctuation, a centered position of the text, and a metastatic course of speech), that is again a text somewhat located in the “between” sphere, this time between the epic and the poetic. The artist himself defines his works as “anti-fairy tales”, which, taking into account his gesture to define by negation, does not explain much.

Following the verifiability of the literary properties of the text, one can find that Głowacki's e-literature allows one to interpret itself, and not only at the level of the content. However, an attempt of analytical-interpretative treatment of this element of the installation proves that here we are dealing not only with a story which is multiplied many times, but also with a considerable load of metaphors opening to further, deeper readings of the work (let us look at some excerpts: “A the end of the world/that is, right next to me/in my garden/right near the **plum tree in love/he carved out a piece of time**,⁵ claiming that he was/in cahoots with the digger/it was possible/because **the woodpeckers did not knock/the time** for him or her”; “at the end of the day/she took **all her thoughts/and braided them/** tied them with a scrunchie/and tucked them behind her ears/so that they/don't bother he anymore”; “**he untied the knot/at the end of a fairy tale/** and he led her/to the end of hermetic knowledge/sharpening her senses/

5 I mark the fragments with a strong metaphorical load with bold lettering.

and appetite for the new year”; **“he hid the creative/the underlying cause/ he tied it with a red ribbon/as a sign of mystery/and he dropped it at her door”**; “you know, I’ll turn back time for you/to the very beginning/ then we’ll start the day/from the great counting/of ourselves/**the beginning of time is from six**/she asked”; “take it for a walk/she said/just keep it on a short leash/so that **it does not buck/after six degrees/of light and dark**”; **“time slows down when it’s tucked away/in the dream room/pre-tends the process of change/psychological change/tied in a knot”**). It even appears that some parts are not so easy to be extracted into the aforementioned artistic tropes, as sometimes entire sections are highly metaphorical. The motifs and themes employed notably include the topic of femininity, which returns in almost all passages of this puzzle-book. Just like the woman’s abdomen, her womb, it can hide a secret. Such a form proposed by Głowacki turns out to be only a top layer, pregnant in the content, meanings and symbols. The black and white pattern of the QR code turns out to be a kind of a gate and scanning thereof starts resembling a gesture of crossing the threshold of initiation.

We should also be aware here that this is an enormous puzzle, in the process of perceiving which no gesture is innocent, and each choice results in a change in the order of the content that is happening and has an impact on the story being generated. It may be surprising that Głowacki achieves the same effect as the authors using an interactive medium,⁶ only on a definitely larger scale and with a greater artistic impetus. In the case of e-literature, thanks to the fact that the work is based on an interactive medium, we obtain a quality that can be called *in statu nascendi*, in the process of continuous formation, never taking a final and only form, depending on the individual choices of the recipient, who ceases to be only a reader, becoming – as it happens in the case of the perception of interactive art – an interceptor and co-creator of the work.

The cube, hexahedron, the six-sided solid. The significance of the shape

Głowacki replaces the interactive medium with a paper cube. In culture, we have already dealt with, for example, cinematographic works, within the plot of which the cube turned out to be an absolutely unpredictable

6 Cf. e.g. the hypertext novel *Schemat* by Konrad Polak or *Matrioszka* by Marta Dzido. http://www.ha.art.pl/hiperteksty/schemat_stacjonarny/indeks.html; <http://ha.art.pl/matrioszka/> (accessed: 10. 06. 2018).

figure, both in terms of the space it contained and the levels of meanings it carried. In the film thrillers *Cube*, *Cube 2* and *Cube Zero*, an important function was served by the figure of the cube and hypercube, the tesseract,⁷ within which the space turned out to be transitory, variable,⁸ and thus strongly threatening to the human individual within.⁹ A similar spatial theme is used by Głowacki, who conveys it by different means of expression.



Photo 3, 4. Fragments of advertising materials used to promote the *Cube* movie franchise.

In the case of the literary layer of Głowacki's work, the same is happening, mainly due to the use of a spatial form subordinated to the individual, unplanned, free movement of the cube in the hand, which, like in the Rubik's cube, different, alternative ways of reading the text emerge. Unlike in the case of the Rubik's Cube – in Głowacki's, there is no single correct arrangement, which the reader must seek. It is replaced by a multitude, a changing receiving potential of the readers, realized in the ever repeated acts of choice.¹⁰

7 The analog of the cube in four dimensions.

8 Shredding solids into cubes or dices is also present in the case of cubism, whose very name comes from the word *cubeus* or cube.

9 Cf. the plot of the aforementioned films *Cube* (1997), *Cube 2* (2002), and *Cube Zero* (2004), directed, respectively, by: Vincenzo Natali, Andrzej Sekuła and Ernie Barbarash.

10 The cube turn out to be important also in the case of the creative work by Aya Karpińska, e.g. her *open.ended* project, where the artist cooperated with Daniel C. Howe. As Karpińska mentions: "We made two transparent cubes, one of which moved inside the other, and we arranged short phrases on both of them. The movement of the cubes made the text combine in ever new constellations. In this case, technology played a huge role. It was the force behind the project, although we also changed a few things to fit the size of the work to the text. Like I said, the best works of art are the result of mutual adaptation of the two aspects of the project – technological



Photo 5, 6. Picasso, *Guernica* (1937); Juan Gris *Portrait of Picasso* (1912).



Photo 7. A. Głowacki, *Archetyptura. Estetyka QR kodu*.¹¹

and literary – to each other. Interview with Aya Karpińska by Piotr Marecki, *Ha!art* 2014, nr 41, p. 75-76.

11 Photos taken by the author.

Literary design?

The literary layer is realized in Głowacki's project not only within these elements of the artistic whole, in which it plays a clearly foreground role, but it is also smuggled through, for example, by using utility objects (fabrics, bedding, elements of clothing – shirt, dress) or components within the aesthetics of design, or interior design elements (e.g. lamps, wall pictures). In this sense, the Archetypture artistic project is also located in the sphere of design, understood as the art of design, creating attractive product forms, shaping the identity of the product, as well as the manufacturer's image on the market (some elements included in the design are signed by the author).

Głowacki replaces the matter of literature (one would like to say: its body), both in its traditional, paper form, proper for printed literature, and the new media one, interactive, characteristic for e-literature, with a completely different type of carrier, e.g. textiles. Undoubtedly, the reading process happens differently, when the reader (traditionally) sits in an armchair, otherwise – when she stands in front of a structure erected from piled cubes and handles them, rotating them in hand, and further differently when he reads crawling on the “literary bedding”, scanning the cuff of his own shirt or the folds of her dress, or – when she stands in front of a picture hanging on a wall like in a “QR code library”.

It seems also worthwhile to consider the author's idea of encoding the work in such a manner, hiding the content (as if something to be ashamed of?) from the public eye. We are dealing here with a specific excess of form, with the situation of almost barricading the content in the “box” of the form, which only the holders of the relevant software have the chance to overcome. An additional barrier or the next level of initiation turns out to be a museum and gallery space in which Andrzej Głowacki's e-literature has been integrated. This is not a familiar shelf in a bookstore anymore, to which everyone can reach, but the space of the museum, accessible only to the recipients who join it strongly volitionally, having previously purchased a ticket for the exhibition. A specific contradiction attracts our attention in connection with this. It seems that the author suggests that only those who are not only willing but also expertly prepared will be admitted to the reading of archetypistry. On the other hand, carriers chosen by Głowacki: textiles, usable items (lamp, chair, bedding), design, direct the recipient's attention to the general availability and even mass production (on the website of the exhibition, you could find, for example, a contact address for a clothing manufacturer of the literary QR prints).

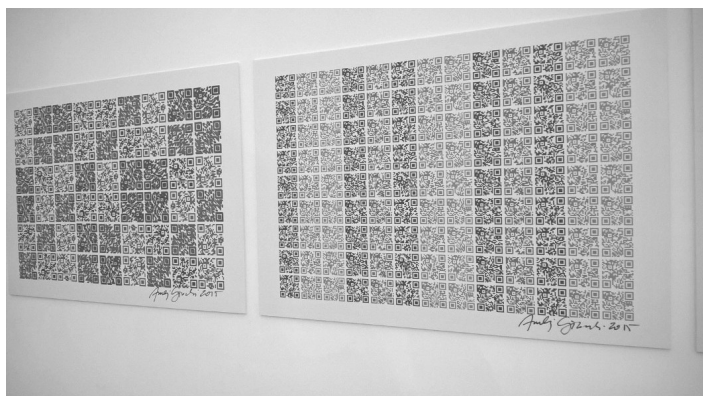


Photo 8. A. Głowacki, *Archetyptura. Estetyka QR kodu*¹².

It is well known that there is a large group of literary works located between literary genres (such inter-genre species, so-called mixed genre, include ballads, digressional poems, and poetic novels), examples of literary work and work of art mixing are also known (in this less numerous group, but undoubtedly interesting and often recently analyzed in the scientific literature, for example, some interactive installations,¹³ examples of Liberature¹⁴ or even, taking into account the formal criterion, artistic books¹⁵

12 Photos taken by the author.

13 I have described many such examples. Cf. e.g. Bodzioch-Bryła B., *Poezja interaktywna czy dzieło sztuki? Pomiędzy tekstem literackim a przestrzenią muzealno-galeryjną, czyli o wierszach „czytanych ciałem”* [in:] B. Bodzioch-Bryła, G. Pietruszewska-Kobiela, A. Regiewicz, *Literatura – nowe media. Homo irretitus w kulturze literackiej XX i XXI wieku*, ed. Bodzioch-Bryła B., *From an E-narrative Poem towards an Interactive Work of Art. Media Convergence Illustrated with DOWN by Zenon Fajfer and The Surprising Spiral by Ken Feingold*, transl. D. Ślęzak [in:] *On-line/ Off-line. Between Text and Experience Writing as a Lifestyle*, eds. P. Gärdenfors, W. Powers, J. Pluciennik, M. Wróblewski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2015, pp. 371-400; B. Bodzioch-Bryła, *Od e-poematu do interaktywnego dzieła sztuki. Konwergencja mediów na przykładzie SPOD Zenona Fajfera i The Surprising Spiral Kena Feingolda*, „Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich” 2012, Tom LV, z. 2 (110), p. 249-285; B. Bodzioch-Bryła, *Pomiędzy naturą a simulacrum. O przekraczaniu natury w sztuce interaktywnej, na przykładzie dzieła The Surprising Spiral Kena Feingolda oraz instalacji Christy Sommerer i Laurenta Mignonneau*, „Episteme” 2012, no. 16, vol. I, pp. 203-230.

14 Here one can recall e.g.: *Świątynia kamienia* by Andrzej Bednarczyk, *Ulica Sienkiewicza* by Radosław Nowakowski, and also B.H. Johnson's *The Unfortunates*.

15 The best known examples are e.g.: *Ten, który spada* by Renata Pacyna-Kruszyńska with text by Sławomir Mrozek (2006); *Oścień* by Waldemar Rudyk with a poem by Marek Wojdyło (2008); and *Książka dla Williama Błake`a* by Grażyna Brylewska with texts by W. Blake (2002).

can be mentioned), but in the case of *Archetyptura. Aesthetics of the QR code* by Głowacki, we see a completely new quality, located between literature and design, between works intended for reading and interpretation, and the sphere of objects that have been recognized so far to fulfill definitely useful functions.

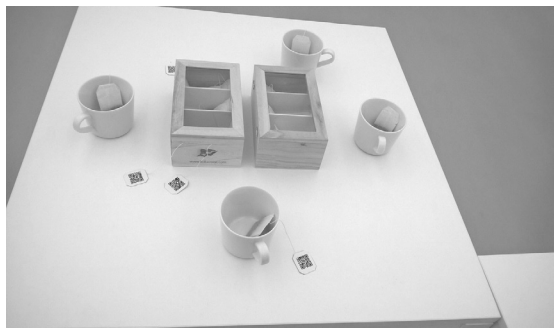


Photo 9. A. Głowacki, *Archetyptura. Estetyka QR kodu*.



Photo 10, 11. A. Głowacki, *Archetyptura. Estetyka QR kodu*.

Dialog with art. Total literature project

Głowacki locates his literary installation in the context of the most famous manifesto of Suprematism, a painting by Kazimierz Malewicz entitled *Black square on a white background*. The mentioned context proves to be important not only because of purely visual associations (the QR code

may give the impression of duplicating Malewicz's work, its multiplication or vice versa – an empty version, pixels missing from the image), but also because of the purely semantic load in both works (the QR code is a kind of a gate that moves us towards something hidden, something similar to Malewicz's work which turns out to be a plane that has two different pictures in it).¹⁶ Malewicz saw the smallest unit of art in the form presented in the painting of the "black square on a white background", a "painting atom"; Głowacki adds literary meanings to the most mundane, basic human activity in the morning (putting on a dress or shirt) and in the evening (lighting a lamp, lying down to sleep in a bed).



Photo 12. A. Głowacki, *Archetyptura. Estetyka QR kodu*.

That we are dealing here only with reference to the idea that guided Malewicz, and not following the path chosen by him, is demonstrated by the fact that the intentions of Suprematism are fundamentally reversed in relation to those that can be seen in the literary archetype of the QR code: while Suprematism presupposed detachment of art from reality, Głowacki, on the contrary, combines art with reality, the reality closest to the human

16 Cf. Co chciał ukryć Malewicz pod „Czarnym kwadratem”? Eksperti znaleźli dwa obrazy, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75477,19181271,co-chcial-ukryc-malewicz-pod-czarnym-kwadratem-eksperti-znalezli.html>; Dwie kompozycje ukryte pod „Czarnym kwadratem” Malewicza, <http://rynekisztuka.pl/2015/11/18/dwie-kompozycje-ukryte-pod-czarnym-kwadratem-malewicza/> [accessed: 28.01.2016].

being, connected with the purely utilitarian sphere. While Malewicz calls for a break with narrative and artfulness, Głowacki incorporates a usable object into the realm of art, raising the rank of a lamp, bedding, or shirt to the medium of literary work, thereby expanding their function, suggesting that each narrative should generate itself and the recipient of culture entering the museum and gallery space, juggling a three-dimensional literal cube in hand, apply its form and content to semantic fields determined by other objects placed in this space, thus piling up the meaning and building a kind of pan-art connecting the image, literature, installation, sculpture, design, and object of use within the framework of the same exhibition.

In this context, it is impossible to ignore the question, forcing itself here, whether or not will the recipient want to read that? Does this kind of literature have a chance to become something more than an attractive experiment, which is not only interesting to observe in the museum and gallery space, but which we will want to move into a private reading space in the long run?



Photo 13, 14. A.Głowacki, Archetyptura: *Estetyka QR Kodu*.

From structure to architexture. The architectural dimension of the archetype of taking turns

Considering the fact that the term “archetypture” used by Głowacki includes concepts such as: “archetype”, “type”, “arche”, and everything closed with the suffix “-ure”, which can form words defining phenomena such as “architecture”, “structure” (except for the obvious and already discussed

“literature”), it will not be an overstatement to treat them, along with their semantic fields and contexts that appear, as the author’s interpretive suggestions.

Structure, as Janusz A. Włodarczyk writes, in the context of architecture “is a more general term and signifies a building or an entire technical and material sphere of an object, as opposed to function and next to function, that is, the usable sphere (general knowledge) and form, the aesthetic sphere (art). Construction is sometimes interchangeable with structure; however, it has also other (more important) meanings, as a term for a set of problems which are the domain of action of the constructor: engineering, technology...”¹⁷

Due to the evident complexity of Głowacki’s artistic project, resulting not only from the multitude of components that co-create it, but also from the relationships that occur between them, and the tensions that arise between them we can say that we are dealing not only with individual significant elements, but also with a type of museum/gallery space that is filled with the literary/artistic architecture.

This context is noticeable on at least two levels of understanding the term “architecture”: firstly, accentuating the peculiar norms of the book’s construction, different from traditional norms, secondly, as the possibility of combining these individual (visually and structurally changed) works into larger whole, where spatial organization leads to the creation of meaningful spaces, both literary and architectural, the interiors of not only shaped but deliberately semantically “compacted” space, where “compaction” affects the decor, furnishing and the function of the room itself. In Głowacki’s work, we deal with something like a literary-artistic installation or just literary and artistic architecture, one could say, referring to the word games often used by the artist, to **architexture**.

If J.L. Borges imagined the world as the Library of Babel, if Ted Nelson, in the form of the idea of Xanadu (modeled on Vannevar Bush’s Memex system), visualized the universe – Głowacki is located very close to these ideas with this artistic project. His project goes beyond the literary text itself – towards art and life, going beyond the art itself – hiding the text inside; finally, it goes beyond life itself, making us read a usable object, instead of merely using it.

The natural ability of the human eye is not enough to read the literature encoded in the QR code. The outline of the reader’s profile has changed in an interesting way: it is not a body resting in a chair or sitting at a desk, but a body standing in front of a library hung on a wall, with a hand (equipped with a carrier) stretched out towards the wall in a dominant gesture of code scanning.

17 J.A. Włodarczyk, *Literacki słownik architektury. Wybór subiektywny*, Katowice 2007, p. 201.

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