

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)<sup>1</sup>

### 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: AA  
AA  
AAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA AAA  
AA  
AA  
AAAAAAAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAA

ümit: he cant take it :)

yüksel: AA  
AA  
AAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA AAA  
AA  
AA  
AAAAAAAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAA

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

yüksel: AA  
AA  
AAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA AAA  
AA  
AA  
AAAAAAAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAA

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 go<sup>3</sup>

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

jungguy13: (*whispers to she-lurker*) hi mouse, do you want to chat press  
press 54545454545454545454545545545545545454444

yüksel: im gonna continue!!  
BECAUSE I HAVE NO FRIENDS ON THE NET

My86Salsa: who has no friends press 5555555555555555

yüksel: I HAVE NO FRIENDS ON THE NET  
NOT IN THIS CHANNEL  
im only here TO DISS ÜMIT  
BECAUSE HE JUST THINKS HE IS KING

XxILHAN05xX: FUCK YOURE ALL FUCKED UP

ümit: haha

jungguy13: hi

My86Salsa: yüksel?

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 PARA-  
SITE HA HA WITH YOUR LOOK YOU WILL NEVER  
HAVE A GIRLFRIEND PÜHAH

ümit: everybody knows how i look,  
i dont hide like you  
i look normal :)  
not like pig :D

yüksel: FERHAT HAS FRIENDS  
BUT DOESNT LIKE YOU  
BECAUSE YOURE A LIAR

ümit: ferhat is also ugly, ferhat sucks up to you  
because youre chat friends :)

yüksel: flood!

jungguy13: who wants to chat 12-15 press 6565656565656565656565656565656565

ümit: if we had met for real, you would be an outsider because  
youre so ugly

yüksel: AAA AAAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAA AAAAAAA  
AA  
AA  
AA  
AA  
AA  
AA  
AA

ümit: yüksel, nobody can stand next to you because your nose pu  
shes them away, it is so crooked:)

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 ooounce

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 TREEEEEEEESSSS

wtüte: shes mine@matter . . . gg  
 printed matter: cooome 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 meaaaaaaaa?  
 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*