

norms are familiar themes in Asian American criticism, Kimak tackles them anew with confidence and insight, producing a very readable, carefully constructed, and elegantly written study.

### Works Cited

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Grzegorz Maziarczyk. *The Novel as Book: Textual Materiality in Contemporary Fiction in English*. Lublin: KUL Publishers, 2013. 316 pages.

*The Novel as Book: Textual Materiality in Contemporary Fiction in English* investigates the increasingly vibrant field of the history of the book, with a special focus on the supposedly transparent elements of book design and their role in producing meaning, including typeface, layout and the physical form of the book as object. As Maziarczyk points out in the opening lines of his study, the book in Western culture has come to be regarded as "the default medium for the novel" (9), thus downplaying the codex's significance as a vessel of meaning. It was perhaps only with the advent of e-books and other non-material forms of literary production that typographical features ceased to be regarded as de-semiotised structures, especially in the field of narrative fiction. Indeed, many studies have been devoted to the discussion of typographical elements in avant-garde and visual poetry, yet the domain of contemporary fiction, defined by the author somewhat broadly as "novels published since the 1960s" (10), remains, to a degree, an uncharted territory. What is especially valuable in this study is exactly the exclusive interest on contemporary fiction. Maziarczyk develops a compelling line of inquiry, discussing the works of B. S. Johnson, Raymond Federman and William H. Gass alongside those of Mark Z. Danielewski, Steve Tomasula, Graham Rawle and Jonathan

Safran Foer. Considering the broad perspective adopted, it is not surprising that the author draws on a number of different theoretical frameworks in building his argument, integrating concepts derived from narratology, multimodal discourse analysis, semiotics, and studies devoted to materiality of the text. The overall result is a comprehensive view of the evolution of typographical experiments in English fiction over almost half a century.

Maziarczyk begins by establishing the theoretical foundations for his inquiry. As has been mentioned, considering the scope of the undertaking, the tools assembled stem from various methodological fields. Chapter One begins with a brief discussion of print-centered studies of the novel, which admittedly did not ascribe typographical elements with semiotic significance, albeit established an understanding of the novel as inextricably linked with writing technology and print. Indeed, "the rise of the novel" has been specifically connected to the invention of print, thus positioning the novel in direct opposition to oral transmission and establishing it as a print-based construct. At this stage, Maziarczyk effectively argues that the connection between print and the novel, though strong and undeniable, have not been acknowledged thoroughly, avoiding the question of how print as medium may be considered meaningful. "The technological blind spot in the supposedly universal classical models of narrative, based primarily on examples adduced from narrative fiction," the author (18–19) points out, "is their failure to acknowledge the possible impact of print on its constitutive elements, purely verbal as they may be."

The discussion subsequently moves to the notion of the medium in narratology and traces the evolution of the term from its understanding confined to purely verbal narratives towards a broader view involving transmedial and multimodal matters. Going beyond the traditional, albeit misleading, understanding of the medium involving both language as a semiotic system and print as technology, Maziarczyk opts for a different theoretical designation, defining the medium as purely material and introducing the notion of the mode to deal with the sign system. Such a distinction marks a step towards the premises of multimodal narratology, which postulates that storytelling entails the use of numerous semiotic channels, verbal means being only one of many among them.

This shift allows for the recognition of multimodality of printed materials, where linguistic, graphic and spatial devices all contribute to the creation of meaning and the verbal is as important as the non-verbal. The material, however, is not disregarded for the sake of the semiotic, the double focus of Maziarczyk's study being the acknowledgment of the importance of print as a mode of expression in combination with the physicality of the book, which, in turn, is characterized as a hybrid text. Thus, the multimodal novel acts as a general term, comprising in itself the subcategory of a hybrid text which reintroduces the semiotic importance

of the visual and the material. Although this distinction may be regarded subtle, not to say secondary for the reader unfamiliar with the book and digital media studies, it actually helps resolve a significant theoretical conflict: the coexistence and the importance attached to the semiotic means both verbal and non-verbal with a simultaneous focus on the materiality of the text.

The author closes the theoretical part with an identification of three basic levels of textual materiality, also understood as a semiotic mode, in printed fiction. These are respectively typography, layout and the codex. They might be playing different roles in the production of textual meaning, metareferential, iconic and narrative, with Maziarczyk emphasizing the fact that the semiotization of textual materiality is “a strategy whereby a narrative can be constructed” (48), taking its rightful (as the author convincingly demonstrates) place among other postmodern narrative techniques.

The second chapter discusses the first significant level of textual materiality, typography, with respect to three novels exploiting its semiotic potential: Douglas Coupland's *JPod* (2006), Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995) and Graham Rawle's *Woman's World* (2005). As Maziarczyk emphasizes, the choice of texts was informed by typographical experiments present in the novels, which in all cases was further complemented by other non-verbal modes, heightening typography's semiotic potential. Before moving on to the crucial part of his analysis, however, the author devotes some critical attention to the theoretical foundations and practical applications of the description and interpretation of various typefaces.

Indeed, while a general assumption that typography is endowed with meaning is by all means legitimate, it is at the threshold of an in-depth analysis of a text that one needs to determine what exactly lies at the semiotic core of letters, their arrangement and design. Is it about their shape, color, size or orientation? Is the use of one of the above enough to produce meaning or is the combination of different factors of crucial importance here? Lastly, how does one avoid the pitfalls of arbitrariness? It is only too straightforward to ascribe subjective value to letters (e.g. italics stand for “personal”, bold for solid, and capital letters mark the increase in volume). Maziarczyk acknowledges the inherent problematic of his object of study and approaches it from a different perspective.

The author emphasizes that the recognition of typography as a meaning-carrying unit is determined by the context and the departure from the established requirement of uniformity (i.e. consistent use of a single typeface throughout the text). “Thus, whether or not typographic variation is a significant element of a particular novel,” Maziarczyk states (56), “depends on its extensiveness and/or subversion of conventional typographic patterns.” The three novels selected and discussed in an ascending order of typographic experimentation

involved exemplify precisely this systematic variation and its contribution to narrative functions.

The analyses are well grounded and insightful, demonstrating how typography is able to render various voices and modes of writing. In *JPod* variations in typography correspond to the polyphony of speech genres and to the difference between narrative and non-narrative sections. Welsh, on the other hand, marks changes in narrative perspective by means of changing typefaces: the three levels on which the protagonist's consciousness functions is represented by shifts in typography. The materiality of the text truly begins to "speak" and signal the shifting psychological states of a character. The last novel to be discussed, a typographic experiment unique in its scope and execution, a collage of cut-out words and phrases, explores typographic variation as a representation of the narrator-character's complex identity. Thus, Maziarczyk convincingly argues that textual materiality constitutes an important part of contemporary fiction, both mainstream and non-mainstream.

In the third chapter, the author discusses the meaning of the page layout, observing that, just as in the case of the letters, no comprehensive semiotic model can be established here. The typeface performs certain essential functions in the printed text, both pointing to a given text's generic classification and ensuring the clarity of structure by dividing the text into units. The author mentions "invisible" typography of novels—typography that is conventional to a point where it is not noticed by the reader. However, the focus of this chapter lies on the novels straying from the highly conventionalized layout, such as Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007), J. M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) or Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* (1976). In the first text, the graphemes are used to construct a shark which reappears throughout the novel in changing forms. By visualizing the conceptual shark, Hall changes the role of printed words, which become both carry verbal meaning and are a visual unit at the same time. Despite the fact that Saussurean division into the signified and the signifier is blurred here, the shark is materialized only within the domain of the fictive universe. As the author sees it, the shark becomes "an iconic super-signifier" (98).

The latter section investigates the meaning behind the lack of graphemes. The blank page with its empty space is used in such a way as to constitute a crucial part of the signifying system. Using Wolf's terms, the author explains the difference between the blanks that serve the role of borders of the texts, and those that visually manifest themselves through the empty or partially empty pages and it are semiotised. This intentional use of empty spaces is discussed on the examples of B. S. Johnson's *House Mother Normal* (1971) and Ronald Sukenick's *Long Talking Bad Conditions Blues* (1978).

The author continues his analysis of the page layout with the discussion of novels that through the typography undermine the linearity of the text. Both examples used here, J. M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) and B. S. Johnson's *Albert Angelo* (1964) correspond with McHale's idea of "split texts", that is texts that run in parallel. In the case of *Albert Angelo*, the arrangement of the text into columns can be viewed as an attempt of narrating two processes—internal and external—happening at one time. The use of two columns results in the constant switching between the two texts, as the reader cannot possibly read both narrations at once. At the same time, B. S. Johnson seems to encourage the reader to process the columns simultaneously, as the comparison between the two texts creates the meaning. In J. M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year*, the page is divided into three sections with the use of horizontal lines. The texts here do not belong to one genre, representing fiction and non-fiction at the same time. Co-existence of these forms seems to destabilize the ontological status of the book, as it cannot be clearly classified in one clear-cut category. The typography here emphasizes the book's hybrid and experimental form, posing valid questions about the nature of reality and fiction.

The fourth chapter takes into consideration the book as an object, as it analyses novels in which the materiality of the book transcends its conventional role and becomes an element creating the meaning of the text. The author distinguishes between two levels of involving the physical format of the book into the process of the text's interpretation. In the first one, the book is a static object that conveys a certain message; in the other, the book's format results in a dynamic interaction with the reader, forcing them to constantly flip through the pages or turn the book upside down to decipher some parts of the text, thus drawing attention to the book's materiality. Maziarczyk uses the word *performative* to describe these books that force the reader to transcend the regular act of reading and thus semiotize the physicality of a book. The examples chosen for this chapter are arranged, as the author points out, to mark the journey towards novels that manifest their physicality through performative interaction between the reader and the book.

The first example is Raymond Federman *The Voice in the Closet/ La Voix dans le Cabinet de Debarras* (1979), which combines the text in English back-to-back with the French version. Originally published in a non-standard, square format, the text follows extremely strict page layout, in which every page consists of an equal number of lines, which in turn consist of an even number of characters. These constrictions are to mirror the split identity of the author and the trauma that cannot be vocalized. The following example, Mark Z. Danielewski's *Only Revolutions* (2006) consists of two back-to-back texts which meet in the middle, and it has two front covers. This unconventional format of the book forces the reader to keep turning the book around, inevitably drawing attention to the physicality of it.

B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969) abandons the traditional format of a book completely, as it is unbound and placed in a box. Not only does this foreground the material form of the text, but it also rejects any linearity whatsoever as it is the reader has to establish the order in which to read given elements.

In the final chapter, Maziarczyk focuses on the books that combine the experimental elements already discussed with the use of other semiotic resources, such as photos. The graphic elements are blended into the text creating "total books", where the visual elements cannot be interpreted separately from the text as they become a part of it. Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) includes numerous elements, creating a multimodal formation that seems to wish to compete with the dynamic electronic media. The novel about a house becomes a house—a mystical labyrinth of clashing narrations, academic digressions, and metareferentiality. Steve Tomasula in his *VAS* (2004) explores the connection between the body and the book, and Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) involves multiple media to better convey the post-WTC world and its inadequate means of communication. In these novels, as the author claims, the graphic elements serve a more significant role than simply illustrating the fictive universe. They rather tend to undermine the stories, and to foreground the materiality of the book to draw attention to the artificiality of mimetic representation.

Maziarczyk's *The Novel as Book: Textual Materiality in Contemporary Fiction in English* traces the development of experimentation with form. As the author discusses most contemporary fictive endeavors alongside novels marking the beginning of postmodernist experimentation with form in the sixties and seventies, this study is an insightful analysis of the changing attitude to the semiotics of materiality. The book is logically organized and well-informed. The only drawback of the study is that only one illustration of each novel is included.

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Carmen Birkle and Johanna Heil, eds. *Communicating Disease: Cultural Representations of American Medicine*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2013. 465 pages.

The immensely popular "Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database," created in 1993 at New York University School of Medicine, was designed to provide scholars, educators, students and patients with resources in the field of "medical humanities" which, according to the founders, "include an interdisciplinary field of humanities