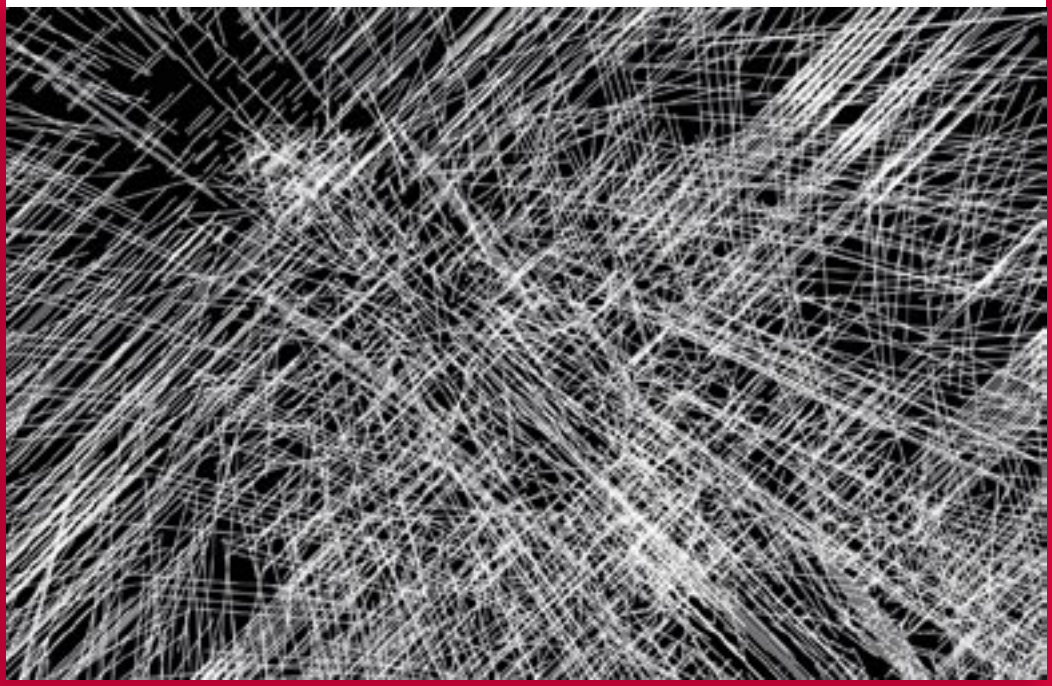
Archaeology of the Literary Medium: Time, Reading, Experiment

/22–23 January 2026

Abstracts



Programme

Thursday, 22 January

10:00–11:40 – **Media Transposition: Format, Stratification, Engagement**
Chair: Richard Müller

Marco Caracciolo: Archeological Gameplay and Literary Remediations
Laurence Dahan-Gaida: Format Games and Reading Experiences
Matěj Kos: There and Back Again: Interactivity Before, During, and After Digital Reading

13:30–15:10 – **Vectors of Temporality: (Ir)reversibility, Anticipation, Experience**
Chair: Jørgen Bruhn

Erik Erlanson: Semiotics, Symbolism, and 21st Century Mediality: Notes in View of a Non-modern Approach to the Temporality of Literature
Jan Musil: The (Un)assimilated Death: Temporal Pressure in Thanatography and True Crime
Josef Hrdlička: Is it Possible to Reverse it? The Intermedia Nature of Reversed Time

15:30–17:10 – **Subjectivities In Media Environments**
Chair: Marco Caracciolo

Jørgen Bruhn: Intermedial Subjectivity: Rethinking the Human in a Mediatized World
Vadim Keylin: Numbers Speak for Themselves: Data Subjects as Lyric Subjects in Conceptual Performance Poetry
Josef Šebek: "Crumbs, rubbish, and dust." Temporality of the Literary Medium in Hella by Alena Machoninová

Friday, 23 January

10:00–11:40 – **Practices of Intertextuality: Embedding, Appropriation, Computation**

Chair: Josef Hrdlička

Mercedes Bunz: Looking at LLM's Intertextuality and Their Mathematical Reading
Julie Koblížková Wittlichová: Old Voices in New Textures: Citational Practice in Experimental Poetry
Johanne Mohs: Turn After Reading: Figures of Temporality in the OuLiPo

13:30–14:50 – **Non-linearity Between Potentiality and Actuality**

Chair: Josef Šebek

Cindy Gervolino: Transmedial Approach to a Genetic Study of Branching Narratives
Richard Müller: Time Between the Lines: Notes Toward an Archaeology of Literary (and Altermedial) Non-linearity

15:10–16:40 – Closing Discussion (Participants Only)

Archeological Gameplay and Literary Remediations

Marco Caracciolo
Ghent University

Contemporary literature and video games are engaging in an increasingly close dialogue: just as literature is experimenting with the conventions of digital gameplay, games are drawing inspiration from the formal complexity associated with literary practices. This talk explores how the archeological metaphor has become a significant focus of intermedial exchanges between literature and games. Here archeology functions on two levels, as a signifier of both temporal stratification (and often complexity) and materiality. Thus, the talk brings to bear the concepts of nonlinearity and materiality on games that, in profoundly different ways, engage the literary imagination: the Dark Souls series (FromSoftware 2011–2018) and Pentiment (Obsidian Entertainment 2022). Focusing on how archeology guides these games' environmental storytelling and uncertain plotting, I will explore how they rework and reimagine literary practices in an algorithmic context.

Format Games and Reading Experiences

Laurence Dahan-Gaida
University of Franche-Comté, Besançon

My presentation will focus on the notion of format as theorized by David Zerbib. He defines the format as an "arrangement of material, technical and symbolic parameters" that enable "the identification and evaluation of works and other artefacts in a given cultural context" (2021). Not only does the format concern questions of scale, duration and dimension specific to the arts, but it also points to the realm of technical industry standards, as well as to the ways in which data is structured in computer science.

Format is situated between form and norm, it comes also close to the matrix and can tend dangerously towards formatting. But it also lends itself to deformation, even deformatting, and can thus become the driving force behind creation. This is precisely what makes the notion so interesting: format can act both as a "constraint" and as a creative driving force which naturally induces other modes of reading when it moves from a medium to another.

The relevance of these format games to our discussion is that they are often accompanied by intermedial practices: transfers, conversions, translations, variations from one medium to another, from one media to another. Beyond changes in scale, the interplay of formats allows for the hybridization of genres, materials and media, highlighting both their porosity and their uniqueness. Using a few literary examples, I will attempt to show how the appropriation of foreign formats—editorial, technical, and computer formats—allows literature to hybridize forms, genres, and media, thereby inducing new modes of reading.

There and Back Again: Interactivity Before, During, and After Digital Reading

Matěj Kos
Institute of Czech Literature of the CAS, Prague

Literature has long been inseparable from its technical medium of display, most notably the printed book. Although the printed publication is typically understood as a device for one-way presentation—where the reader's primary (and mostly single) physical intervention consists of turning pages—it has never been entirely devoid of interactivity. This is particularly evident in children's literature, which has historically incorporated various interactive elements such as picture puzzles, riddles, cut-out figures, or activities that invite the reader to manipulate the book materially and cognitively, thus establishing a form of bilateral communication between reader and text.

At the other end stands Kamilla Elliott's study "Ad-app-tive Illustration: Or, The Uses of Illustration" which examines interactive digital adaptations of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland developed for iPad devices. Elliott argues that digital reading applications, through their enhanced interactivity, fundamentally transform the nature of the reading experience by integrating animation, touch-based interaction, and audiovisual elements.

This paper situates digital reading practices within a longer media history of literary interactivity and asks whether contemporary reading applications truly introduce radically new forms of reader engagement, or whether they primarily remediate and intensify strategies already present in earlier print-based experiments. Conversely, it explores whether the development of digital technologies and internet culture has influenced the way printed literature is conceived and read today. Have printed books become more interactive under the pressure of digital media, or is interactivity a latent feature of literature that contemporary technological discourse has merely brought to the foreground? By addressing these questions, the paper seeks to reconsider interactivity as a transhistorical phenomenon rather than an exclusive property of digital media.

Semiotics, Symbolism, and 21st Century Mediality: Notes in View of a Non-modern Approach to the Temporality of Literature

Erik Erlanson
Linnaeus University, Växjö

One of the defining features of computational media lies in their temporality. Historically, media technologies have been concerned with storing and disseminating recorded data. Computational media, by contrast, anticipate the future and generate the very data of experience (Hansen). To draw a bold analogy: it is as if the operation Paul Klee attributed to modern painting — that it does not represent reality but makes it visible—has been realized by the machine-learning systems and algorithms that now shape experiential data. But what if this analogy is not as bold as it seems? What if the futurity that Mark Hansen identifies as the hallmark of computational media is as old as modern art? Or, to make an even grander claim, what if it is as old as symbolic reference itself ?

This presentation asks what happens to our understanding of the mediality of literature if the answer to these questions is a resounding yes – that is, if we affirm that the very datum of experience is always already a significate, generated in part by a chain of signification that recedes out of reach for consciousness. To explore this, I return to the semiotics of C.S. Peirce and a foundational text in modern poetics: Paul Valéry's essay on French symbolism. In Peirce, we encounter a conception of semiotic temporality as future-oriented and of meaning as a force acting upon the present from the future. In Valéry's essay, the problem of symbolism concerns how the verbal art of poetry can generate a specific form of experience. Literature, then, is not merely a medium for conveying an antecedent experience but also for producing a consequent one. My aim is to examine what this "non-modern" shift—from a testamentary conception of mediation-as-writing to an operational conception of mediation-as-computation means for our understanding of literature as a medium, both within and beyond the phenomenotechnics of algorithmic culture.

The (Un)assimilated Death: Temporal Pressure in Thanatography and True Crime

Jan Musil
Charles University, Prague

In what is arguably his most provocative book, Symbolic Exchange and Death (1976), Jean Baudrillard champions "symbolic exchange", an economy of excess, loss, and reciprocity, as an alternative to the "economic exchange", the for-profit logic, created and commodified by capitalism. The system of economic exchange is capable of absorbing virtually anything into circulation, with a single decisive exception: death. Death is quarantined, excluded from the exchange, only to return in a pornographic vividness of catastrophe. It functions as capitalism's systemic glitch, since it is irreversible, non-recuperable, impossible to reinvest.

Baudrillard's striking critique of modern society was recently developed further by Franco "Bifo" Berardi in The Uprising (2012) and Breathing (2018). Berardi identifies the bodily voice of poetry as an alternative to automated, financialized and increasingly dehumanized language. Drawing on Baudrillard and Berardi, I turn to the source of their critique by examining to two distinct modes of narrating death, the limit concept of the system: thanatographies, experimental literary grief memoirs that treat death as the condition of writing, and true crime, one of the most globally popular genres across contemporary media, wherein death is often sexualized.

My project investigates how these modes organize sequentiality, density of time and the economy of attention when representing death, as well as what precedes and follows it, exposing how narratives respond when confronted with the unassimilable: can genres like true crime assimilate death, or do they merely stage its inescapable rupture? I argue that different representations of death and the affective potential of their narrative arcs–such as "flat" death vs. death as climax–are closely linked to specific media forms, a linkage shaped by means and modes of production and carrying ethical implications, revealing the entanglement of ethics, economy and semiotic production.

Is it Possible to Reverse it? The Intermedia Nature of Reversed Time

Josef Hrdlička
Charles University, Prague

Some time ago, I looked at several poems that emulate a film running backwards. It may seem like an effective idea with limited possibilities. In my contribution, I would like to develop questions about the nature of the reverse course as an essential moment of literature in a media context. This is essential not only because of the initiatory effect of film, but above all because the figure of reversed time is essentially intermedial and what it means to reverse the course of time depends significantly on the medium in which we consider the reversal. Conceptually, film is important because its technology allows for a seemingly easy inversion of movement. On a morphological level, however, it appears that various media that capture events cannot operate as easily as film. A film frame itself has no temporal direction (however it is a record of a motion); this is determined by its position on the film record and the direction of movement. The linguistic expression of the event, i.e., the sentence, on the other hand, already includes a temporal orientation (mainly thanks to the verb), and temporal transformation can only be inspired by film here. In a remarkable analysis inspired by the inversion of film, Michel Serres shows that some of our stories can be perceived as mutually inverse in this field and that some movements in society can (or could) be modeled bidirectionally according to them.

On a more general conceptual level, we arrive at the question of the possibility of inversion or reversal of various processes and events (where, from the point of view of physics, the second law of thermodynamics and the associated irreversibility of certain processes in time play an essential role) in relation to the media layer of human culture, i.e., thinking about events and their time. In this paper, I will outline the basic areas of research, which I would preliminarily divide as follows: 1. events that can be reversed (conflict in Michel Serres); 2. (physically) irreversible events and their media and cultural inversion (death, loss); 3. poetry and the energy of words: an attempt to analyze verbal time sequences can lead to a distinction between narrative, which is bound to the temporal structure of language (verbal expression usually expresses time), and poetry (at the level of individual words, it is their semantic energy that is not temporally oriented by the structure of the utterance). Points 2 and 3 in particular lead to the question of the temporality of language and media in general; comparing them may reveal different temporalities of narrative and poetry.

Intermedial Subjectivity: Rethinking the Human in a Mediatized World

Jørgen Bruhn
Linnaeus University, Växjö

As media and technologies evolve at accelerating speed, traditional models of subjectivity are increasingly inadequate. This paper proposes intermedial subjectivity as a conceptual framework for understanding how human perception, agency, and meaning-making (which I will refer to as sign-action) are co-constituted by media environments. Thinkers such as N. Katherine Hayles, Mark B. N. Hansen, Bernard Stiegler and Malafouris argue that cognition and thus subjectivity must be redefined as relational and distributed and rather than viewing media as external communicative tools, I explore how "technics" shape cognition and social life. By rethinking intermedial theoretician Lars Elleström's communication model and in particular by refurbishing his concept of virtual spheres I try to show how media transforms both the conditions and possibilities of not only communication but also subjectivity.

Literature is one of the privileged archives that in form and content exemplifies, investigates and critiques what I refer to as intermedial subjectivity. To exemplify literature as illustrations of intermedial subjectivity and intermedial subjectivity as a tool to better understand crucial aspects of literature I will briefly discuss Karl Ove Knausgård's The Night School and Amalie Smith's Thread Ripper.

Ultimately, my aim is to position both literature and (aspects of) intermedial studies as vital contributors to contemporary debates on the human: they are tools to navigate the epistemological and ontological challenges of our mediatized condition.

Numbers Speak for Themselves: Data Subjects as Lyric Subjects in Conceptual Performance Poetry

Vadim Keylin
University of Hamburg

The presentation explores the poetic stagings of datafied subjecthood, taking as its starting point two conceptual performance poetry projects, whose textual content is mostly or exclusively numerical: Événements by the French poet Anne-James Chaton and Number Series by the American artist duo Mendi + Keith Obadike. In Événements, Chaton's performance texts are composed of "poor literature" – sales receipts, transport tickets, newspaper ads, etc. – collected on specific day. In Number Series, the numbers, which are read aloud by the artists and simultaneously used as control inputs for an electronic soundtrack, come from the documents related to the history of American racism, such as slave ship manifestos or lynching statistics reports. While such "post-poetry" is typically thought of as breaking with the tradition of lyric subjectivity altogether, I argue that Chaton's and Obadikes' projects rather lyrically stage the data subject. Coming from the legal discourse, the notion of the data subject refers to an individual that a piece of personal data relates to and has become particularly prominent in the digital sphere owing to the widespread practices of data mining and the related legal and ethical issues. Through the mediation of the embodied performing voice, Evenements and Number Series foreground the personal (and thus, necessarily, the political) in personal data, while at the same time pointing to the pre-digital history of datafied personhood.

"Crumbs, rubbish, and dust." Temporality of the Literary Medium in Hella by Alena Machoninová

Josef Šebek
Charles University, Prague

Hella by Alena Machoninová, published in 2023, is a very particular autofictional historical novel, in which the narrator attempts to reconstruct the life of Helena Frischerová (1906–1984), an interwar émigré from Czechoslovakia to USSR, who was arrested in 1937 and based on a fabricated charge condemned to 10 years in gulag. Already in the 1930s, Frischerová and her husband became models for characters in Jiří Weil's acclaimed novel Moscow-Border (1937); Frischerová herself was a writer, her most important work being The Days of My Life: A Gulag Memoir (1989/2014). Through these and many other literary and non-literary intertexts (such as letters by Frischerová) as well as ekphrases of photographs and other media artifacts, the autofictional narrator opens a channel through time between herself (an author and translator on the spatial axis Prague – Moscow who had to leave Russia after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022) and Frischerová. The constant movement in time, intricate, complex, and compelling, is possible thanks to the temporality in and of the literary medium, which at the same time is able to remediate the temporality of other media. The reference of autofiction both to actual and fictional worlds engages the temporal fabrics of the novel in a labyrinthine structure of literary testimony. In my paper, I will analyse the temporalities of the novel with regard to temporal aspects of the genre and the literary medium.

Looking at LLM's Intertextuality and Their Mathematical Reading

Mercedes Bunz
King's College London

My contribution looks at the writing of LLMs as a new way of doing language that requires its own mode of reading. This comes out most clearly, if we compare literary writing and generated writing while keeping an eye on the way in which their 'intertextuality' unfolds differently; here understood with Michael Riffaterre (1980) as a set of relationships which a reader perceives between a text and other texts making them differently meaningful. Both modes of production—literary writing and generated writing—make use of this intertextuality but they are intertextual in different ways.

Literary writing uses the same words and grammar as other forms of writing, but aspects within the literary text—word choices or its composition—are organized to invite the reader to notice a defamiliarization that creates space allowing for layered readings. When comparing the literary intertextuality with the intertextuality at work in the technical process of generated writing produced by LLMs, one can notice that LLM's intertextuality likewise evolves around "a sequence of embeddings" that are "summarizing the syntagm situated elsewhere" (Riffaterre 1993). This "elsewhere" however, is situated differently.

For early LLMs based on the transformer architecture, the intertextual 'elsewhere' has been "summarized" mathematically to inform a model's weights. These weights – a mathematical reading – are part of complex functions running in parallel multiplying parameters, which allows the processing of many different aspects of language such as syntax, genre and writing style as well as distributed semantics or meaning. Simplified, one can say that a prompt triggers a calculation through which the model reaches in a certain mathematical direction to produce the requested information while predicting the next best word. The presented information might not be reliable (true) as it is predicted, but it is most likely relevant, therefore not totally false. Given this new and different truth – maybe incorrect but relevant – how do we need to understand the mathematical readings of LLMs? And do readers need to learn a new kind of reading when being confronted with generated language?

Old Voices in New Textures: Citational Practice in Experimental Poetry

Julie Koblížková Wittlichová
Charles University, Prague

In historical avant-gardes as well as in neo-avant-garde movements and in contemporary digital experiments, the idea of alluding to, quoting of or manipulating with previously written pieces of literature is widespread. How does this practice change over time? In historical avant-gardes the poets were citing classical texts such as antique literature or Shakespeare in order to absorb a literary tradition into their own writing (Eliot, Pound, Cendrars). Neo-avant-garde movements such as concrete poetry was not only quoting from classical and modernist writers as well as from non-literary source texts, but also systematically manipulating the cited material (Morgan, Grögerová and Hiršal, Mac Low). Experimental electronic poetry extends the range of citational features with randomization, multiple media layers, or participative engagement of the reader (Sample, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, poetry generators). This development does not represent a linear progression but following Rosalind Krauss's famous essay "Sculpture in the expanded field" (1979), we should rather consider it as an expansion of the spectrum of possibilities. Against the notion of intertextuality, one of the key concepts of literary modernism, we can oppose the notion of appropriation, as used in this context by, for example, the American poet Kenneth Goldsmith. Moving from the former to the latter comprises several fundamental shifts: from meaning to performance, from interpretation to extra-textual information, from exclusivity of literature to ordinary textual material of "ready-made". How do the appropriative citational practice affects the conditions of literary time, space and medium? How does it draw literature closer to other aesthetic disciplines, such as contemporary art? And what effect does it have on the Western canon, which undergoes a transformation from a treasure chest to an archive ready to use?

Turn After Reading: Figures of Temporality in the OuLiPo

Johanne Mohs
University of Bremen

In keeping with the zeitgeist, in 1967, Italian writer Italo Calvino sent the author into the realm of the dead to make way for a more conscious human being who knows "that the author is a machine." Like his colleagues at OuLiPo – the Workshop for Potential Literature –, which he himself joined in 1974, he closely followed the computer technology developments of his time: Oulipo is familiar with cybernetic theories, introduces them in France, and also closely follows computer-assisted literary works such as those by Theo Lutz and Max Bense in Stuttgart. Nevertheless, the Oulipians use computing machines, if at all, mostly only to calculate structures that help them in their writing. Computer technology thus at best stimulates the genesis of Oulipian texts, but does not actually produce them. First and foremost, it opens up a mental space for the Oulipians in which they can illustrate their concept of literature and make the reader an accomplice.

In my contribution to the workshop, I would like to show how Oulipo's combinatorial understanding of machines contributes to an idea of time that strives for an overlap of beginning and end. This can lead to the reader only ever reaching the beginning of the end, as in Raymond Queneau's "Cent mille milliards de poèmes" (1961), to the reading process being designed as a loop, as in Oskar Pastior's Eine kleine Kunstmaschine (1992), or to the reader still being at the beginning of the book at its end, as in Georges Perec's La Vie mode d'emploi (1978). The extent to which these temporal figures can be understood as a conceptual anticipation of so-called machine- or "distant reading" will also be discussed.

Transmedial Approach to a Genetic Study of Branching Narratives

Cindy Gervolino
Sorbonne University, Paris

The project aims to propose an archaeology of narrative possibilities through a transmedial approach, examining both narrative video games and works of contemporary literature organized around non-linear, branching modes of reading involving choice-making.

It proposes the study of drafts (manuscripts, diagrams, decision trees, scripts) of branching narratives in order to grasp narrative possibilities at their emerging stage, prior to their stabilization within a given medium. Particular emphasis is placed on operational modes (arborescence, modularity, branching) that are found in literature and anticipate forms now commonly associated with digital media. Drafts function as an interface between two forms of writing: the writing of an emerging idea in the process of elaboration, and that of the finalized narrative object. On the literary side, the corpus includes recent branching narratives such as The Game is Murder (Hazell Ward, 2025) and La Grande conspiration affective (Romain Noël, 2024). On the narrative video games side, it could include Quantic Dream productions.

A first axis examines the spatial conception of narrative time in branching narratives. Drafts often present the story as a synchronic totality of possible paths, spatially organized through diagrams, before being actualized sequentially through reading or gameplay. This raises questions about how the transition from simultaneity to sequential experience is conceived and represented.

A second axis focuses on temporalities of waiting, possibility, and decision. Branching narratives shift narrative tension from "what will happen?" to "which path should be chosen?", without eliminating the former. Drafts make it possible to analyze how this tension is distributed, intensified, or neutralized, and how choices are hierarchized, merged, or eliminated during the design process.

A third axis addresses the draft as a space of hesitation between formal experimentation and standardization. Drafts reveal how branching possibilities are explored while negotiating constraints related to closure and the selection of plot moments that give rise to choice, between a story leading to a single destination and one opening onto multiple outcomes.

Time Between the Lines: Notes Toward an Archaeology of Literary (and Altermedial) Non-Linearity

Richard Müller
Institute of Czech Literature of the CAS, Prague

My paper aims to identify three areas of research contributing to an archaeological exploration of non-linearity in literature and other media. The first area of research would evolve from a historical exploration of the textual labyrinth (and possibly related forms) in the (Czech) Baroque, (1950s) post-avant-garde, and, finally, (1990s) hypermedia context. While different cultural paradigms and intermedial (as well as genre) situations clearly produce quite different meanings and effects for the same form, the central question I propose to focus on is whether the study of various temporal aspects hidden within the form can substantially contribute to grasping the operation of difference. The key methodological question would be whether the current differentiation of temporality recoverable across the different layers within hypermedia textual navigation (such as the usage of conditional logic and regimes of mapping, for instance) makes its latent traces visible in earlier practices, but also vice versa: whether the older forms and practices might help us achieve a certain alternative understanding of the temporal implications of engaging with the hypertextual labyrinth (its meditative quality, for instance).

I propose that a similar archaeological and intermedial logic productively shapes the exploration of the second area: the evolving temporalities of entry-structured fiction appropriating the formats of the dictionary, encyclopaedia, questionnaire, and list (from Flaubert through Bierce, Borges, Nabokov, Lem, Pavić, Perec and Gruša to Levé and Schalansky). Again, a differentiation of inherent temporal layers (for instance, the feedback of actualized lines having a halo effect on selecting prospective paths and on acts of retracing and re-reading in Pavić's Dictionary of the Khazars, 1984, with its evocation of co-existing ideologies underlying a secret, contradictory mythological plan; the novelistic re-sequentialization of the temporal logic of daily news in Levé's Journal, 2004) might be seen to work "backwards," helping us understand the "evolution" of the form in the context of an on-going re-negotiation of literature's medial boundaries. Here, the argument will be related to Tzvetan Todorov's suggestion that literature be treated as an ever-adapting mode of discourse – one that tends to produce and exploit affinities to heterogenous

non-literary discourses – and this also raises questions about the distinctions and affinities between intertextuality, interdiscursivity (and intergeneric relations), and intermediality.

The third, related focus will be only touched upon: the new constellation between the dataset, language system, and context in current large language models; the implications of, and resistances to, the (utopian) effort, in LLMs, to "minimize gaps" between event and its record, context and language system, as well as prompt and answer. Besides proposing (some of) the contours of a literary media archaeology, I wish to ask what critical potential these lines of inquiry might unfold.

Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR
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