Interface aesthetics in interactive media

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Contemporary haptic-audiovisual interactive culture, including immersive art, participatory cinema or video games, is significantly redefining the relationship between the text and its user. They are moving towards ever greater convergence[1], transversality[2] and ergodicity[3]. Users easily navigate between different media orders and textual structures, freely cross the boundaries of narrative worlds, become performers of virtual reality, actively and individually experience it and subject it to meaningful transformations. All these complex cognitive and communicative procedures are carried out through interfaces. It is them – user interfaces, i.e. "elementary transformations of phantasmagorical space"[4], which are "an indispensable element of the landscape of modernity"[5] – that are the subject of reflection in this issue of the "Quart".

The role of interfaces in contemporary digital culture is multifaceted. They interact with the user's immersion process and worldness[6]. They are multifunctional devices or software elements that serve to communicate between the user and the system – they convey information about the specifics of experiencing the digital world and provide tools for reconfiguring its respective elements. Graphical user interfaces present also an interesting example of digital art. Although their design is determined by their functionality (after all, interfaces serve primarily as interaction tools), they turn out to be an important manifestation of creative activity.

Reflecting on interfaces – their audiovisual structure, their role in shaping the relationship between creator, text and user, as well as treating interfaces as a source of aesthetic experiences – is becoming a task of growing importance for various scientific disciplines, including the humanities, social sciences as well as engineering and technology. Due to the multifunctionality, variability and reconfigurability of interfaces, reflection on them integrates knowledge and methodologies from different areas of science. A successful example of interdisciplinary insight into interfaces is, among others, the book *Design & Digital Interfaces* by John Fass, Tobias Revell, Ben Stopher and Eva Verhoeven, published in 2021. Its authors describe interfaces in socio-cultural (including political), philosophical (aesthetic and ethical), historical, technological, design and accessibility contexts[7].

[1] On the concepts of convergence, see **H. Jenkins**, *Kultura konwergencji. Zderzenie starych i nowych mediów*, Transl. M. Bernatowicz, M. Filiciak, Warszawa 2007.

[2] On the concept of transversality see **W. Welsch**, *Racjonalność i rozum dzisiaj*, [w:] *Filozoficzne konteksty rozumu transwersalnego. Wokół koncepcji Wolfganga Welscha*, Ed. **R. Kubicki**, Transl. M. Leśniewska, Poznań 1998.

[3] On the concept of ergodicity see **E. Aarseth**, *Cybertekst. Spojrzenia na literaturę ergodyczną*, Transl. M. Pisarski [*et al.*], Introd. M. Tabaczyński, Kraków 2014.

[4] **S. Žižek**, *Przekleństwo fantazji*, Transl. A. Chmielewski, Wrocław 2001, p. 187.

[5] **P. Kubiński**, *Gry wideo. Zarys poetyki*, Kraków 2016, p. 153.

[6] On the concept of worldness see **L. Klastrup**, **S. Tosca**, *Transmedial Worlds – Rethinking Cyberworld Design*, [w:] *CW '04: Proceedings of the 2004 International Conference on Cyberworlds*, *s.l.* 2004, https://www.itu.dk/people/klastrup/klastruptosca_transworlds.pdf (access date: 3.04.2024).

[7] **J. Fass [*et al.*]**, *Design & Digital Interfaces: Designing with Aesthetic and Ethical Awareness*, London 2021.

The complexity of the research subject determines the specificity of this issue of the "Quart" as well. The authors of the articles published here represent diverse disciplines such as art sciences, cultural and literary studies, history and philosophy. In their texts, they present a reflection on interactive art, and especially on the poetics of interfaces, from various perspectives and using different research methods. Sebastian Konefał describes the visualisations of futuristic machine interfaces in *Blade Runner 2049*, interpreting them through the prism of Vilém Flusser's explorations of discursive technologies (serving to enslave individuals) and dialogical technologies (corresponding to emancipatory gestures). Krzysztof M. Maj proposes a reflection on the world-making interfaces of digital games in relation to the issue of realism. He postulates to consider this category in relation not so much to the authenticity of the narrative world as to the pleasure of using the text, and describes ludotopian realism from this standpoint. The analysis of video game interfaces is also provided by Marcin M. Chojnacki, who addresses the issue of iconic representations of health in such productions. By presenting conventionalized forms of graphical user interfaces, he shows how visualisations of health indicators interact with the gameplay experience. Emilia Kiecko, in turn, discusses the key stages in the development of digital games in the context of the history of accessibility, examining the question of inclusive design of their interfaces for people with disabilities. Paweł Sołodki also discusses the history of the development of the medium – his area of interest, however, is the interactive film documentary. Analysing various manifestations of participatory documentary, the researcher formulates the thesis that interactivity enhances user involvement in documentary discourse. Kamil Lipiński, remaining in the area of intermedia art, conducts a reflection on the transfigurations of the laboratory model on the example of selected immersive installations. In an attempt to capture the transformations of exhibitions aimed at absorbing the participant into their spaces, he refers to Nicolas Bourriaud's category of relational aesthetics. The issue closes with Joanna Sarbiewska's reflections on the manifestations of negative (post-metaphysical) ontology in contemporary technoculture. Analysing the films of Béla Tarr and the video installations of Bill Viola, the author indicates that the visuality of technoimage can be a tool for liberating perception from the rational paradigm.

The collected articles demonstrate that a reflection on the interfaces of contemporary culture and interactive art enables a fuller understanding of the aesthetics and ontology of digital texts, as well as the relationship between machine (system) and organism (user). These relations go far beyond synchronic interdependence towards reciprocity, commonality and the integration of the creator, the project (work) and its recipient. Hence, the discussion of interfaces is actually about the experience of art by contemporary, convergent audiences, and consequently – can help them to understand it better.

References

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2. **Fass John [*et al.*]**, *Design & Digital Interfaces: Designing with Aesthetic and Ethical Awareness*, London 2021.
3. **Jenkins Henry**, *Kultura konwergencji. Zderzenie starych i nowych mediów*, przeł. M. Bernatowicz, M. Filiciak, Warszawa 2007.
4. **Klastrup Lisbeth**, *A Poetics of Virtual Worlds*, „Proceedings of Melbourne DAC Conference" 2003.
5. **Kubiński Piotr**, *Gry wideo. Zarys poetyki*, Kraków 2016.
6. **Maj Krzysztof M.**, *Czas światoodczucia. Imersja jako nowa poetyka odbioru*, „Teksty Drugie" 2015, nr 3.
7. **Welsch Wolfgang**, *Racjonalność i rozum dzisiaj*, [w:] *Filozoficzne konteksty rozumu transwersalnego. Wokół koncepcji Wolfganga Welscha*, red. R. Kubicki, przeł. M. Leśniewska, Poznań 1998.
8. **Žižek Slavoj**, *Przekleństwo fantazji*, przeł. A. Chmielewski, Wrocław 2001.

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Summary

JOANNA PIGULAK (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) / Interface aesthetics in interactive media

The introduction to the thematic number of "Quart", entitled *Interface aesthetics in interactive media,* presents the title issue of interfaces from the perspective of interdisciplinary humanities research. The author points out that interfaces are the basic tool for users' interaction in the digital space, and at the same time they perform various cognitive, communication and aesthetic functions. Due to the multifunctionality, variability and reconfigurability of interfaces, reflection on them integrates knowledge and methodology from various areas of science. Therefore, the articles published in this volume were prepared by specialists representing various fields and disciplines of research.