

Computer Technologies in German Literature at the Turn of the Millennium

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This poster aims to expound the preliminary results of my doctoral research in Contemporary German Literature. My ongoing thesis focuses on the literary representation of the computer and the technologies it supports (text processing programs, Internet, video game, online instant messaging, and so forth) in this language area between 1990 and the present day. However, the situation in the German-speaking countries is just a part of a global issue concerning the entire Western literature; one aspect of my work is then to replace the evidence gained from my German corpus in the broader context of European-American literature. As previous research has shown, the integration of new media into the literary discourse leads to the development of new literary patterns which intend to react to the novelty. My own thesis project relies on tools issued from the traditional literary critique on one hand, and from new media and game studies on the other hand, in order to build the new theoretical framework needed for the analysis of my corpus. By the time of the sending of this abstract, I have already identified three ways in which computers impact literature.

Firstly, the social importance of the computer challenges the traditional topical organisation of the literary text, and this becomes visible at most of its levels. The internal coherence of several existing literary genres must for instance adapt to the thematisation of video games, like the MMORPG in Burkhard Spinnen's *Nevena*, a rethinking of the love story within the virtual world. One also witnesses the birth of completely new literary genres such as the one I have called "gamer novel" with exponents like Constantin Gillies' *Extraleben*-trilogy. The textual level of the characters is also subject to change: new character types such as the "geek" appear, while others such as the machine itself remain problematic and lack an adequate literary depiction (in Friedrich Christian Delius' *Die Frau, für die ich den Computer erfand*). This problem becomes in turn a topic, as some authors write about the shifting paradigms of their profession under the influence of new text processing methods (as in Hermann Kant's *Escape – Ein WORD-Spiel*).

Furthermore, the interest for the computer induces a reflection about the kind of language to be used for the transcription of the new reality. With its ceaseless strive for an always new

relationship between topic and form, poetry is the genre *par excellence* which searches for this new language: Poets such as Robert Schindel (*Mein mausklickendes Saeculum*) exemplify this path. Schindel's poem *Endlich Word geöffnet* can be read as a report of the research for a poetical expression of the everyday life of a poet in our multimedia world. Other works remain unclassifiable, because they go so far in the formal imitation of new media that they go beyond the scope of literary genres and forms – as does Andreas Neumeister's *Angela Davis löscht ihre Webseite*.

The last visible change lies on the ideological front: the shift to a computerised society raises questions about the very political and social meaning and background of new media, as reflected in Peter Glaser's short stories (e.g. *Die Rote Präzision*). Literature can also underline the problems and perspectives going hand in hand with the appropriation of these media by different interest groups and political systems, such as the consumer capitalism in René Pollesch's *www-slums*.