

Engrams of the Body:

The Poetics of Pain

Notes in Aleksander Wat's Archive

Michalina Kmiecik

ORCID 0000-0003-0118-3657

The experience of the archive is, above all, the experience of generic heterogeneity and confusion. Organizing and cataloging all forms of textual presence is a formidable task.¹ Aleksander Wat's archive, which will be discussed in this article, openly and radically confirms this thesis. Although the archive was re-arranged in 2010, and the Beinecke Library made every effort to make Wat's legacy as transparent as possible, when we are browsing through boxes and folders we have the impression that we are analyzing scattered typescripts and manuscripts. Many pages have been numbered by the writer (or Ola Watowa), but when we open a folder, it turns out that pages are missing or misplaced. It is a fragmented, torn, and incoherent corpus. At the same time, this tendency of the archive to disperse, to create a space of atopic unrooting, corresponds to Wat's writing techniques. Wat used the poetics of small fragments in his writing: some of them are dated (but often only the day, and not the year, is given), while others function only as notes. Some pages are used and re-used many times: drafts of poems, bibliographic entries, and remarks about Wat's health can be found on the same page.

¹ On the theory of the archive and the experience of reading the archive: see J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996); M. Antoniuk, "Proces tekstotwórczy jako najpiękniejszy przedmiot badań, którego nie ma" [The process creating a text as the most beautiful subject of research, which does not exist], in *Pracownia Herberta. Studia nad procesem tekstotwórczym* [Herbert's Studio: Studies on the process creating a text], ed. Mateusz Antoniuk (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2017), 11-26; special issue of *Czas Kultury* titled *Archiwum prywatne* [Private archive] [*Czas Kultury* 193, no. 2 (2017)].

All texts in the notebooks were preserved as, as Wat observed in an entry from the Kaiser Hospital dated Sep. 11, 1964, “broken and naught (devoid of its sh shape e and volume of characters, with which I filled hundreds of pages paper sheets notes, uselessly, undecipherable sometimes even to myself.”² The quoted fragment, with its spelling and syntax mistakes, testifies to the “draft” and plastic nature of Wat’s notes. Their “naught nature,” however, is a testament to the stylistic chaos of Wat’s notes. Only the careful reader will understand them, with all their flaws and imperfections. At the same time, the notes provide us with a new perspective on genological ordering. On the one hand, Wat sees the notes as potential parts of a bigger whole, and plans to include them in various projects: his autobiography,³ *Rapsodie polityczne* [Political rhapsodies], novel about Stalin, or journals (the archive gives rise to the concept of a diary, which Ola Watowa later transformed into *Dziennik bez samogłosek* [Diary Without Vowels], and the concept of a recorded diary; unfortunately, only a few pages have survived; they were most probably transcribed from tape recordings; see: Box 32, Folder 743-745). On the other hand, their “naught nature,” their chaotic origins, their stylistic heterogeneity, and their fragmentary nature elude genological ordering, i.e. cataloging. In order to resolve this contradiction, and fully understand the meaning of Wat’s atopic archive, we have to redefine genology in a post-structural spirit: we should focus on the notion of the “scattered” archive and “family resemblance,” moving beyond the principle of uniformity. As Adam Dziadek rightly points out, referring Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever*:

The archive is concerned with the future. The archive is a place of tradition; it is a place where the past creates the present and the future. It is true that it is associated with responsibility (ethics), with responsibility for the future, because we organize and interpret the archived material.⁴

Wat’s archive, tradition, and history all intertwine. The poet constantly demands recognition for his texts. He wants his texts to be part and parcel of culture. He writes, although he knows that his notes are illegible, to make his voice heard, to restore the sense of presence he lost because of the disease. At the same time, he is unable to tame, structure, and organize his idiosyncratic experience: the genological boundaries of Wat’s texts are blurred. How can we talk about idiosyncrasy and belonging at the same time? The future of the archive is not concerned with negating its structure and its need to preserve tradition. The future must remain plastic.

The archive as a constellation of fuzzy sets

Grzegorz Grochowski in *Pamięć gatunków* [The memory of genres] reconstructs the relationships between post-structural genology and Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of “family resemblance.” He observes that:

² Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library (New Haven), Aleksander Wat Papers (GEN MSS 705), Series II: Writings, Box 28, Folder 662.

³ I wrote about the possibility of including some of Wat’s notes (e.g. from the Kaiser Hospital) in the project of heterotopic autobiography *Moje więzienia – moje szpitale* [My prisons – my hospitals] in “Zapiski z Kaiser Hospital Aleksandra Wata – fragmenty autobiografii heterotopocznej” [Alexander Wat’s notes from the Kaiser Hospital: Fragments of heterotopic autobiography] (*Wielogłos* 31, no. 1 (2017): 67-86).

⁴ A. Dziadek, “Aleksander Wat w Beinecke Library w Yale” [Alexander Wat at the Beinecke Library at Yale], *Teksty Drugie* no. 6 (2009): 257.

Belonging to a given set should be governed by (...) a dynamic system of overlapping relations between components, “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing; similarities in the large and in the small.”⁵

Grochowski quotes *Philosophical Investigations* and demonstrates that genres may be construed as a network of overlapping features or determinants. Each text can come into contact with its different parts, flexibly changing its position within the whole. Indeed, to draw on Stanisław Balbus, we could say that today, when we are dealing with a large number of texts that deliberately violate traditional generic rules, we should move away from taxonomic genology and generate

a varied field of genological references, references that are usually obscure, because many literary scholars find genre distinctions more and more obscure, multi-faceted, and ambiguous, and thus doomed. The literary genre of a given “hypertext” does not have an “obligation” to implement a genre paradigm, even in a negative sense (...). Instead, it must, in various ways, point to various genological references. There can be many such references and they do not have to be mutually complementary.⁶

Balbus draws on Gérard Genette’s “architextuality” and defines a field in which every text is a modifiable prototype of a genre made of different (sometimes contradictory) traditional features. Genology thus becomes “modified” intertextuality.

In Grochowski’s post-structural approach, one more element comes to the fore: contingency. In keeping with Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resemblance,” we order and catalogue texts in accordance with the degree of similarity, by placing them in different configurations and contexts.

Ordering according to similarities is therefore dynamic and, depending on the adopted perspective, it allows one to create various sets, devoid of permanent assignment (...). Similarities make it easier to group objects, but we cannot systematize objects on the basis of similarities; similarities do not establish transparent relations of inferiority and do not create permanent conceptual systems. They do not constitute an objective order. They are only contingent effects of ordering. Their operational advantage is their significant plasticity, thanks to which they can be adapted to the adopted assumptions and goals on an ongoing basis.⁷

Grochowski emphasizes that the analyzed texts and the created sets are neither stable nor permanent. Such is the case with Wat’s archive. First of all, it contains texts that (depending on the adopted rules or research perspective) may be classified as different genres. The notes from the Kaiser Hospital are the best example of such complexity: dates and numerous personal and biographical references indicate that the notes may be classified as a quasi-diary. However, when we read the whole, we learn that the notes were not written on a day-to-day

⁵ G. Grochowski, *Pamięć gatunków. Ponowoczesne dylematy atrybucji gatunkowej* [The memory of genres: Postmodern dilemmas of generic attribution] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2018), 52.

⁶ S. Balbus, “Zagłada gatunków” [Destruction of genres], *Teksty Drugie* 59, no. 6 (1999): 34.

⁷ Grochowski, *Pamięć gatunków*, 55-56 (emphasis mine, MK).

basis (thus they cannot be classified as a diary; they function as a journal). Upon closer analysis, we find in these notes features of literary autofiction.⁸ The reliability of Wat's notes is thus questioned; a sylleptic subjectivity is established in the text:⁹ it is torn between the grotesque represented world filled with masked figures and the experience of solitary confinement in the heterotopia of the hospital. Consequently, the contingency of the genological order is exposed: different notes give rise to different classifications. Unstable and atopic fragments undermine genre distinctions: generic boundaries are blurred. There are no clear definitions. Notes from the Kaiser Hospital, just to refer to the same example, may be classified (and thus read) as a journal, a diary, an autobiography, and a fantasy story.

Archival texts therefore should be "tested in different contexts."¹⁰ They "proliferate by crisscrossing."¹¹ They play with traditional genres, creating hybrids, and at the same time rely on traditional determinants. The text is always plastic: it has its limitations and frames; it is defined by its limits (paper, page), and at the same time it has "the ability (...) to deform, to transform and break its (...) original form."¹² Archival texts are thus generic and idiosyncratic. They are a convention and an idiom, an engram of the world and an engram of the body, a genre and an anti-genre. Classification is always fluid. It never simply is.

Therefore, the archive can be characterized as a place that is meant to generate plastic genres that defy stable classifications and only function within fuzzy sets. Drawing on Lotfi A. Zadeh's mathematical theory and his concept of fuzzy sets, we can redefine the taxonomic possibilities of genology.¹³ As Ernest Januszewski argues:

Until now, it has been assumed that a given element either belongs to a set or not. For Zadeh a given element may belong to a set to a greater or lesser degree, and therefore the boundaries of the set become somewhat blurred. (...)

The fuzzy set theory created by Zadeh provides us with tools with which we can analyze ambiguous or incomplete phenomena. Ultimately, the need to define and classify should disappear, especially since it is often simply impossible to satisfy.¹⁴

Archival texts defy generic definitions. In such a pre-textual and draft field, various conventions may be tested and defined (in keeping with Wittgenstein's idea). Archival texts are part of generic sets only to a certain extent and must remain "vague and incomplete." Atopy is un-identification, un-rooting, and difference: a given text may be found in different sets.

⁸ See: A. Turczyn, "Autofikcja, czyli autobiografia psychopolifoniczna" [Autofiction, or psychopolyphonic autobiography], *Teksty Drugie* no. 1-2 (2007): 204-211.

⁹ See: R. Nycz, "Tropy «ja»: koncepcje podmiotowości w literaturze polskiej ostatniego stulecia" [The tropes of the 'I': Concepts of subjectivity in Polish literature of the last century], *Teksty Drugie* 26, no. 2 (1994): 22-26.

¹⁰ Grochowski, *Pamięć gatunków*, 62.

¹¹ Grochowski, 61.

¹² C. Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction* (New York: Columbia UP, 2010), 46.

¹³ See: B. Witosz, *Genologia lingwistyczna. Zarys problematyki* [Linguistic genology: Introduction] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005), 99-111.

¹⁴ E. Januszewski, "Logiczne i filozoficzne problemy związane z logiką rozmytą" [Logical and philosophical problems related to fuzzy logic], *Roczniki Filozoficzne* vol. LV, no. 1 (2007): 109.

Therefore, as generic nomads, archival texts are not so much moved from one “folder” to another, defying generic classifications, but function in the gray zone of a fuzzy set, moving towards and away from different classifications.

The pain note as an engram of the body

Fragmentary, broken, and “naught” texts therefore find their contingent labels in different places. And since they are everywhere, we cannot assign and find them anywhere. This paradox results not only from their complex and ambiguous form (often devoid of distinctive features) but also from their idiosyncratic nature.

When I studied Wat’s notebooks at the Beinecke Library, I had the impression that they were internally inconsistent. The writer made different notes. Some of them were dated, like diary entries. I was looking for fragments that could theoretically fit into the spectral corpus of *Dziennik bez samogłosek*, so I was pleased to find fragments that resembled diary entries in the analyzed texts. Still, though they obviously fit into a larger corpus of Wat’s life writing, the notes as a whole form a completely different corpus: they are scattered pain notes, in which the writer summarizes his experiences as a patient. The theme that connects these short texts – disease – forces us to reflect on their formal and genological “family resemblance.” While we can read them like diary entries, they function as a specific kind of a diary: in terms of form, we can read them as a medical narrative (in keeping with the tradition of pathographic writing¹⁵), a lyrical text, and, at times, (since the addressee is mentioned) a prayer, or a letter.

Thus, on the one hand, they encourage genological reflection (and test various fuzzy sets) and function as imprints of real somatic experiences: engrams of the writing body. Jean-Luc Nancy writes in *Corpus*:

“Written bodies” – incised, engraved, tattooed, scarred – are precious bodies, preserved and protected like the codes for which they act as glorious engrams. (...) We have to begin by getting through, and by means of, *exscription* of our body. (...) the only thing left is an in-finite line, tracing the writing, which is itself exscribed, to be followed, infinitely broken, distributed among the multitude of bodies, a line of separation imparted to all its sites – tangential points, touches, intersections, dislocations.¹⁶

The body can become an engram not only through marks on the skin, but also through exscribing: as a sign. Writing is a process of exscribing the body into text. As such, the text transcends the textual and enters the experienced. When the skin of the writing “I” (and Wat’s skin burns; it is impossible to forget about it) and the skin of the text (its linguistic, phonic, and syntactic tissue, whose rhythm may be found in the rhythm of thinking and breathing) touch, they are both truly close and truly apart.

¹⁵For more on pathographic writing and the phenomenon of literary pathographies, see: I. Boruszkowska, *Defekty. Literackie auto/pato/grafie – szkice* [Defects: Literary auto/pato/graphies] (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2016) and I. Boruszkowska, *Sygnatury choroby. Literatura defektu w ukraińskim modernizmie* [Signatures of the disease: Defect literature in Ukrainian Modernism] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2018).

¹⁶J.-L. Nancy, *Corpus* (New York: Fordham UP, 2008), 11.

It is in the ephemeral and contingent pain note, as a genre, that such a strange encounter may take place. The writing body may reveal its egoism and idiosyncrasy. The pain note documents a somatic experience (it is recorded physiologically, in the linguistic tissue of the text itself). In the pain note, the self is "the flexion of a place, a fold or motion."¹⁷ The self tells in the most intimate form (a diary that is not meant to be published) about his inexpressible and constant pain. At the same time, the self describes himself "from the outside" as a case. The narrative is full of medical terms (names of drugs, calculation of doses). As Nancy writes: "*Ego sum* this local inflection, singularly, such and such each time (and how many times in "one" time? How many articulations in "one"?), even this accent, or this *tone*."¹⁸ The pain note documents a continuous experience (Wat constantly feels pain and follows uniform medical protocols) that nevertheless differs (the body's response is always different; it is impossible to feel exactly the same thing twice). Thus, the notes are similar in form (and thus may be classified as a genre) but constitute a different engram each time (a trace of a different event). The Derridean "the each-time-only-one time"¹⁹ best describes this paradoxical situation of uniformity and novelty.

Unfortunately, I cannot discuss all of Wat's notes which "resemble" the pain note in this article. However, I will analyze an exemplary fragment from a notebook from the 1960s, dated December 8 and demonstrate how the experience of pain may be forever coded in language.

December 8

Here is a generality: to the keeping of each poem, of every poem, the inscription of a date, of this date – for example, a "20th of January" – is entrusted. But despite the generality of the law, the example remains irreplaceable. And what must remain, committed to the keeping, in other words, to the truth of each poem, is this irreplaceable itself: the example offers its example only if its valid for no other. But precisely in that it offers its example, and the only example possible, the which it alone offers: the only one.²⁰

In "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," Derrida discusses a poem with a date: it is both unique (because of the day on which it was written) and repetitive (because the same date may be repeated). The poem is therefore non-and-repeatable; it is a prototype of the genre. However, the discussion of the dating system should not be limited to poetry: notes from Wat's archive are also dated texts. They also have their "20th of January."

Dating makes them unique, while the experience of constant pain makes them repeatable. According to Derrida, date becomes a gift²¹ because it allows one to break free from the world of constant pain, a homogeneous experience of suffering. When Wat dates his notes, he uproots and extracts a specific moment from the world of constant pain.

¹⁷Nancy, 27.

¹⁸Nancy, 27.

¹⁹J. Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan" in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), 11.

²⁰Derrida, 6.

²¹See: Derrida, 14.

Indeed, let us focus on the note dated December 8:

December 8

Today I had a foretaste of my best possible death. The night was terrible, I took Euphyllin at night, I felt sort of special afterwards (after 20 minutes) and, contrary to my 15-year-old custom, I fell asleep without the sleeping pills which I always take. Well, it was 36 hours after my morphine injection (+ Papaverine), which this time had such a terrible effect that I decided to get rid of morphine injections from my pharmacopoeia, once and for all (I had morphine injections very rarely, with deep reluctance and with increasingly worse results) and it made me very sleepy for an hour. Indeed, Euphyllin (after all a derivative of morphine) in a suppository had a stronger effect, not so much euphoria, but it calmed the central nervous system like nothing else, unfortunately for a short time (1-1/2 hours, and I had to observe 4-5-hour breaks so that its effect does not decrease).

Well, I woke up at 3 a.m., well-rested, but in pain naturally. I took my second Euphyllin – but this time, instead of putting it to sleep, it revived the brain, it worked faster and faster. It felt wrong in my head. But the idea of tomorrow, sleepless since 3 a.m., terrified me, I feared the consequences, a whole world of pain, paresis, irritation, oppression, sinister thoughts! So, at 3:10 a.m., according to the last ritual, I took: a glass of Passiflorine + only one Mogadon. After ½ an hour, only one ~~Litrium~~ + Litrium. My brain is working so fast that it makes me tired or destroys me, pain comes back. So, at 5:30 a.m. I decided to take one Nembutal. To no avail, unfortunately. At 6 a.m., I took the second Nembutal, fearing that I would feel the consequences of poisoning tomorrow. ~~I fell asleep~~ like lead thrown into deep waters, ~~fell~~ asleep, ~~at~~ having plugged my ears at 3 a.m., tightly. At 11 a.m. I was awakened by Ola's languid gaze. In terrible condition. My pains + severe pain in the back of the head + numbness, mild + photophobia. Bath. At 1 p.m. I took Euphyllin. Again, ~~excell~~ calming for my pain and nerves. Almost bliss. Breakfast in my armchair. Normal conversation. Then Ola, the dear tender wife Ola, is bustling around in the bathroom. I can't ~~wr~~ read, but I feel comfortable in my armchair. Then the pain comes back. Then I feel – painfully – that my blood gradually stops circulating. Numbness. Head falls to the side, the hand which is holding the notebook is lifeless, legs are wooden, I'm in pain. Heavy torso slides down and I sleep / I do not sleep. My eyes close. And again I am awakened from numbness by Ola's gaze and her agitated questions. With difficulty, struggle, I stand up, turn my head, move my hands, rub my face, close and open my eyes, I can't walk around the room: I'm in pain, so I drag myself to the couch, I lift and lower my legs, move my fingers, rub my neck, roll my eyes, drink strong coffee. Minimum 1½ hour until my next Euphyllin, 1½ hour of severe pain. But I am writing it down. Because this is how I will die one day, in an armchair, from ~~lack~~ poor circulation, it will be for the best. Die At least not in the bed I hate so much. Unfortunately, in pain, and God knows how much pain, because pain changed too. After 15 years of my face and legs burning, now – additionally – terrible *pa ecorché*; flaying. Maybe it will get worse, much worse. But – maybe in pain, despite ~~falling asleep~~ pain, thanks to pain that cannot be tolerated consciously, maybe I'll fall asleep **V** What's next, good God

V And Ola, Andrzej maybe they will think that I fell asleep without pain, which is possible?²²

²²Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library (New Haven), Aleksander Wat Papers (GEN MSS 705), Series II: Writings, Box 31, Folder 730.

The note dated December 8 was written on an orange Rhodia pad (Wat's favorite model). However, the writer did not adhere to the page division. His handwriting is neat and relatively legible. Lines are closer together (line spacing seems to be smaller) in the passage "So, at 3:10... I sleep / I do not sleep." When Wat starts writing on a new page, line spacing grows wider. Considering that an entire painful day is described here (it begins in the morning, around 3:00 a.m.), we assume that Wat wrote the note when his pain alleviated in the afternoon. This is also indicated by the broken form, which marks the moment when writing becomes impossible or difficult due to increasing somatic ailments. Wat also inserts a couple of additional mini-notes in the note (on the margin or as a "check mark" [V]). Two interpretations present themselves: either he corrects the text immediately (he read it when he considered it finished) or adds marginalia, as if simultaneously with the new sentences. He supplements his text on a regular basis whenever a new thought comes to his mind. The broken ending suggests that the second interpretation is true: the note is made on the go. It is an excerpt made in a moment, when the writer felt better. The writer does not reread the text. Once the somatic state at the beginning of the day is documented, the note takes the form of a momentary record, as evidenced by the rhythm of the sentences and the use of the present tense.

A unique double notation is characteristic for this note: at first, it reads like an entry in a journal (the past is reconstructed by means of a literary style); then, it appears to be a diary entry (focus on the present moment; syntax is more "relaxed;" signs which facilitate notation and abbreviations, e.g. "+ Litrium" or "3:00 a.m. well-rested," are used); and finally it even resembles a daily journal of a chronic illness (focus on drug doses and symptoms), which could be included in the patient's medical documentation.

Stylistic and generic complexity may be noticed in the first two sentences. In fact, only the opening sentence suggests that this is an attempt to universalize the experiences described later – that the author will try to discuss his suffering in the context of his philosophy of mortality that we know, for example, from his poetry.

Dzisiaj miałem przedsmak śmierci mojej, najlepszej z możliwych.
Today I had a foretaste of my best possible death.

In Polish, inversion governs the rhythm of this sentence: Wat writes "śmierci mojej" [death my] and not "mojej śmierci" [my death].²³ A single phonologic word becomes two: the first intonation unit is thus endowed with a strong rhythm:

/_ | _ _ /_ | /_ | /_

Upon careful analysis of this unit, we notice that tension is building up: time is underlined, then the sentence takes momentum, only to tone down, and rhythmically move towards the main intonation unit. "Śmierci mojej" reads like a funeral march, taking us to the other side of the phrase. We find relief in its descending part (it is also regular; the stress falls perfectly in the middle of the three-syllable phonological word): we learn that it would be

²³This difference unfortunately disappears in translation (translator's footnote).

the best possible death. Terror evaporates and, in its place, we find majesty, peace, and acceptance. The opening sentence is intentional: the stresses are distributed perfectly. It is an ideal phrase. The following sentence

The night was terrible, I took Euphyllin at night, I felt sort of special afterwards (after 20 minutes) and, contrary to my 15-year-old custom, I fell asleep without the sleeping pills which I always take.

violates this perfect rhythm which alternately rises and falls. The sentence is in fact divided into two parts, which are governed by an expressive subcode. In the first part, “the night was terrible,” the emphasis is on the word “night.” The emphasis is also on time, but it can have a symbolic dimension: at night the writer is in pain; he cannot sleep and rest. Fear (of pain) and hope (for relief) intertwine. This state of tension is emphasized in the second part. The intonation is alternately rising, falling, rising, falling, and rising again. Wat starts this part of the sentence a number of times (“I took ...,” “I felt,” “after 20 ...,” “contrary to...”), but the tension is defused only in the following clause (“I fell asleep without the sleeping pills which I always take”). Such a structure suggests that Wat tried to go to sleep a couple of times. It also demonstrates that Wat was thinking about a million things: each thought required clarification (he named the drug and emphasized its unique effects and its onset) and “gradual” specification (first added after a comma, then in parenthesis). Wat’s intonational chaos is additionally reinforced by “relaxed” semantical (elements of colloquial speech: “sort of”) and stylistic (repetition: night, custom, always) rules. The second sentence thus introduces us to the world of a completely different rhythm of pain that may not be subjected to any rules. There are too many words and too many thoughts. In *Dziennik bez samogłosek*, Wat calls such a state “logorrhea:”

and so much logorrhea, because I wrote only in periods of drunken euphoria between onsets of my illness and what interests, intrigues, and even fascinates my listeners is lost in mediocre storms of verbal mediocrity, when I am alone, alone with myself, when someone’s attentive gaze does not keep my logorrhea in check.²⁴

The following sentences are consumed by “logorrhea,” but Wat is also looking for a way out, creating a dynamic and tense rhythmic structure consisting of alternating “verbal storms” and laconic messages.

For example, relaxed syntactical rules and enumerations signal the “verbal storm:”

Well, it was 36 hours after my morphine injection (+ Papaverine), which this time had such a terrible effect that I decided to get rid of morphine injections from my pharmacopoeia, once and for all (I had morphine injections very rarely, with deep reluctance and with increasingly worse results) and it made me very sleepy for an hour.

²⁴A. Wat, *Dziennik bez samogłosek* [Diary without vowels], transcribed and edited by M. Kmiecik (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2018), 270.

With difficulty, struggle, I stand up, turn my head, move my hands, rub my face, close and open my eyes, I can't walk around the room: I'm in pain, so I drag myself to the couch, I lift and lower my legs, move my fingers, rub my neck, roll my eyes, drink strong coffee.

In the first passage, the sentences are longer. Disruption of harmony and order, also seen in the second sentence of the pain note analyzed above, gains momentum. Wat again uses interjections and abbreviations (“+ Papaverine,” “I had morphine injections very rarely ...”). He also breaks off syntactic relations (“I decided to get rid of morphine injections from my pharmacopoeia, once and for all (...) and it made me very”). Thus, the metaphor of *pharmacopoeia* acquires an exceptionally expressive meaning: the pain note becomes a quasi-*passage*; it is a record of a journey through the meandering world of pain and substances which alleviate it. Elżbieta Rybicka, who defines the *passage* in relation to urban texts, observes that: “in French, *passage* means a passage, a transition (...). Transition (in a more figurative sense) is a conceptual principle.”²⁵ Wat in his note moves smoothly through the stages of his pharmacological odyssey. He lists his distressing symptoms and the reactions triggered by his actions. Enumeration is his basic structuring strategy. He lists names of drugs and doses, forcing us to read this note as a *passage*: a passage that leads from one moment of suffering to the next. There is a thin line, a borderline, between the inside of the body (dark, impenetrable, and non-communicable experience of pain) and the outside (attempts to alleviate pain, to communicate with the body, to win it back for the world).

Bodies don't take place in discourse or in matter. (...) They take place at the limit, *qua limit*: limit – external border, the fracture and intersection of anything foreign in a continuum of sense, a continuum of matter. An opening, discreteness.²⁶

Wat's written body is thus contextualized in a continuous discourse. The pain notes that were made systematically could constitute a pathographic corpus. Indeed, the metaphor of *pharmacopoeia* demonstrates that the writer recognizes the connection between his idiosyncratic experience and tradition: hence the reference to the Odyssey. Respectively, the use of enumeration demonstrates that a single pain note is a configuration of different and unique events and experiences. Repeatability is intertwined with irregularity. And irregular notes and dates create a complex structure, which depends on factors unknown to us. The border on which Wat's text is situated frees him from the obligation to classify and define his place (and the position his note occupies). The poetics that elevates colloquial and, at times, ungrammatical language, as well as enumeration, thus becomes “the anatomical sign of ‘self.’”²⁷ The limit, the external border, does not dismember Wat's corpus but rather allows it to be re-contextualized and re-interpreted:

An anatomy more of numbering than dismembering. An anatomy of configurations, of the plasticity of what we'd have to call states of body, ways of being, bearing, breathings, paces, staggerings, sufferings, pleasures (...).²⁸

²⁵E. Rybicka, *Modernizowanie miasta. Zarys problematyki urbanistycznej w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* [Modernizing the city: An outline of urban issues in modern Polish literature] (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Universitas, 2003), 166-167.

²⁶Nancy, *Corpus*, 17.

²⁷Nancy, 85.

²⁸Nancy.

Wat seeks to truly understand the experience of the body. He tries to reconnect with the body with the help of drugs, movement, and actions. Writing is for him a form and a sign of regaining control: “I can’t ~~wr~~ read, but I feel comfortable in my armchair.” The crossed-out “~~wr~~” refers to writing. At that moment, it was still difficult to reach for a pen, but a moment later Wat added: “But I am writing it down. Because this is how I will die one day.” “But” at the beginning of the sentence suggests that Wat writes “despite” the pain and discomfort, “despite” the fear that it will be pointless. There are many more similar linguistic traces in Wat’s notes which refer to repeated attempts:

Then Ola, the dear tender wife ~~Θla~~, is bustling around in the bathroom. I can’t ~~wr~~ read, but I feel comfortable in my armchair. Then the pain comes back. Then I feel – painfully – that my blood gradually stops circulating.

The repeated use of “then” at the beginning of the sentence suggests that pain is chronic. It also marks the beginning of another “verbal storm.” Short and simple sentences intertwine with long lists. Wat seems to speed up and slow down the rhythm of his writing, depending on how well or unwell he feels: suffering resembles a wave. Climax and silence foreshadow another ascent and another attack. Enumeration (and the use of plus signs) allows Wat to verify all his symptoms quickly. The incorrect use of punctuation marks also marks the “waves” of pain: “With difficulty, struggle, I stand up.” The comma before “I stand up” suggests that Wat wishes to describe how difficult it is for him to do things – we do not expect the next word to be a verb. Indeed, the comma (and alliteration) endow the word “I stand up” with a completely different meaning: it is a sign of suffering and illness. The reader can feel it firsthand when Wat lists what he does in order to stimulate his body to work more efficiently. The subject tries many different things to re-connect with and activate his body. The patient repeatedly stimulates different parts of the body (stand up, turn, move, rub): he is both the subject and the object of his actions. His body is dismembered and subjected, one by one, to stimulation.

Last but not least, enumeration also allows one to focus on an experience that is singled out from an entire “wave” of sensations (similarly to providing a date). Wat uses enumeration and fragmentation to this effect. For example, some structures read like series of symptoms, recorded in the most objectified and de-subjectified manner, and combined using a plus sign (“My pains + severe pain in the back of the head + numbness, ~~mild~~ + photophobia”). Respectively, such a sequence may function as an asyndetic list of minor actions that are meant as countermeasures (“move my hands, rub my face”). Each time enumeration is only a – seemingly random – configuration of events or symptoms. They can be freely rearranged. There are days when the constellation of symptoms looks different: after all, each symptom is a movable, isolable element. At the same time – and it should be emphasized – different notations suggest a different attitude towards the disease and its perception. The writer tries to separate physical ailments from the subjective perspective and thus isolate them in a twofold manner. He wants to embed strategies of resistance to pain as much as possible within his consciousness. It proves that he does not give up, that he is still trying to control his body. He emphasizes its fragmentation, or its “local” nature. Only with the help of specific micro-actions can he regain a sense of control: he may move his legs gently, move his fingers, and move his

eyeballs. The body is not experienced “in general.” This experience is always singular: it can be felt for a moment, in a flash. Pain comes and goes.

Indeed, pain is hidden in various signs. It sends many signals. Pain organizes the entire text and allows us to perceive this collection of idiosyncratic notes as a certain genological whole. Wat emphasizes this at the end of the analyzed excerpt:

But – ~~maybe~~ in pain, despite ~~falling asleep~~ pain, thanks to pain that cannot be tolerated consciously, maybe I’ll fall asleep

In the first draft, the writer avoids the word “pain.” It seems that the sentence he intends to write will be shorter. However, pain is always present. It creeps in many forms into each part, creating a polyptoton. It grows like a polyp: multiplying and intensifying negative experiences, making it impossible for Wat to escape this experience. He is terrified and fragile, caring. He talks about his wife and son, proving that the experience of overwhelming suffering does not annihilate the experiencing self, who even manages to ask:

And Ola, Andrzej maybe they will think that I fell asleep without pain, which is possible?

Whom does he address? Does he address God? The sentence may be divided into two clauses. “Which is possible?” functions as an additional unit. It signals a different approach. It is a question directed at nobody, at a force that will neither react nor comfort. The note thus transforms into a kind of a silent, troubled, almost inaudible prayer for the “best possible” death. The figure of speech at the end of the text (the apostrophe to God) allows it to come full circle. What we thought was a broken ending turns out to be, paradoxically, a framing device that allows for this quasi-journalistic note to be included in the corpus of literary texts that deal with unanswered/unutterable prayers. It also transforms it into a literary testimony: Wat attempts to write about the body and its painful experiences so that it can be touched through reading, handwriting, and the rhythm of the sentences. The silence in the last sentence, which does not even end with a question mark, does not prevent communication. On the contrary, it establishes communication. As Nancy rightly observes:

Whereof we can no longer speak, thereof we must not stop talking. We have to keep pressing speech, language, and discourse against this body, whose contact is uncertain, intermittent, hidden, and yet insistent.²⁹

The pain note, in my view, is therefore a quasi-apostrophe. Words, although they seemingly serve to reconstruct the experience of the writer, are self-analytical, intimate, and meant to touch the listener and the empathic “you.” Making room for pain in language is an attempt to communicate the presence of the body, its movements, and dramas. Talking about pain testifies to existence – the somatic is transfigured into the semiotic.³⁰

²⁹Nancy, 61.

³⁰See: A. Dziadek, *Projekt krytyki somatycznej* [The project of somatic criticism] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2015), 20.

The body, however, is different, idiosyncratic, although still the same. The experience of the body is the experience of continuity and difference: we are ourselves, though we are constantly changing. By imposing a reproducible genological pattern on the text, by making individual entries, fragments, and notes similar, Wat unifies his experience and endows it with meaning. In writing, he finds “the best possible death:” he finds peace and comfort in listing the next stages of his illness, enumerating somatic changes, analyzing remedial measures, and using “technical” medical terms. In writing, in the intricate rhythm of sentences, sometimes arranged like a pulsating ECG, we discover an engram of the body: recorded on a given day, hour, moment in time. Pain notes may differ from each other slightly: for example, as regards intonation and the structure of sentences. It allows us to observe chronic pain and, at the same time, its idiosyncratic nature. According to Derrida:

from one repetition to the next, a change had insinuated itself into the relationship between the two initial utterances. The punctuation had been slightly modified, as had the content of the second independent clause. Theoretically, this barely noticeable shift could have created a mutual independency between the interpretative alternative.³¹

A change, which is a signal sent by the body on a specific day (and triggered by a specific sensation), sneaks into the text imperceptibly, without disturbing its cohesiveness. Thus, the text may still obey the law of the genre. From the reader’s point of view, however, the “barely noticeable” imprints, the traces of the self, are the most important. They locate the text in different places in the field of literary references and patterns, illuminating it each time (with each sound, the rhythm of the sentences) anew. The body-to-body conversation always takes place in the language we already understand and in the language we have to learn anew each and every day.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

³¹J. Derrida, “The Law of Genre”, *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 58.

References

- Antoniuk, Mateusz. "Proces tekstotwórczy jako najpiękniejszy przedmiot badań, którego nie ma." In *Pracownia Herberta. Studia nad procesem tekstotwórczym*. Edited by Mateusz Antoniuk, 11-26. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2017.
- Balbus, Stanisław. "Zagłada gatunków." *Teksty Drugie* 59, no. 6 (1999): 25-39.
- Boruszkowska, Iwona. *Defekty. Literackie auto/pato/grafie – szkice*. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2016.
- Boruszkowska, Iwona. *Sygnatury choroby. Literatura defektu w ukraińskim modernizmie*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2018.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan." In *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, 1-65. New York: Fordham UP, 2005.
- Derrida, Jacques. "The Law of Genre." *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 55-81.
- Dziadek, Adam. "Aleksander Wat w Beinecke Library w Yale." *Teksty Drugie* no. 6 (2009): 251-258.
- Dziadek, Adam. *Projekt krytyki somatycznej*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2015.
- Grochowski, Grzegorz. *Pamięć gatunków. Ponowoczesne dylematy atrybucji gatunkowej*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2018.
- Januszewski, Ernest. "Logiczne i filozoficzne problemy związane z logiką rozmytą." *Roczniki Filozoficzne* vol. LV, no. 1 (2007): 109-128.
- Kmieciak, Michalina. "Zapiski z Kaiser Hospital Aleksandra Wata – fragmenty autobiografii heterotopicznej." *Wielogłos* 31, no. 1 (2017): 67-86.
- Malabou, Catherine. *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*. New York: Columbia UP, 2010.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Corpus*. New York: Fordham UP, 2008.
- Nycz, Ryszard. "Tropy «ja»: koncepcje podmiotowości w literaturze polskiej ostatniego stulecia." *Teksty Drugie* 26, no. 2 (1994): 7-27.
- Rybicka, Elżbieta. *Modernizowanie miasta. Zarys problematyki urbanistycznej w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej*. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Universitas, 2003.
- Turczyn, Anna. "Autofikcja, czyli autobiografia psychopolifoniczna." *Teksty Drugie* no. 1-2 (2007): 204-211.
- Wat, Aleksander. *Dziennik bez samogłosek*. Transcribed and edited by Michalina Kmieciak. Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2018.
- Witosz, Bożena. *Genologia lingwistyczna. Zarys problematyki*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005.

KEYWORDS

archives

GENOLOGY

ABSTRACT:

The article focuses on the microanalysis of one of Aleksander Wat's handwritten "pain notes" (dated December 8, Wat's archive at the Beinecke Library). I discuss the note's genological classification, which – due to fragmentation, randomness, and the very nature of the diary entry (and at the same time the fact that it eludes this classification) – may not really be considered part of a larger whole. The "non-belonging" of the note and other similar notes seems to influence their poetics. Drawing on the findings of post-structural genology and the theory of fuzzy sets, I propose to see the note as a fuzzy genre that exists in many genological contexts at the same time and also gives rise to its own "singular" form. Inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy's reflections on corporeality and Adam Dziadek's somatic criticism, I define the note as an "en-gram of the body." I analyze an isolated "pain note" as an example and consider the possibility of using this category both in the context of reconstructing the genetics of the text and performing an exemplary rhythmic analysis of prose.

somatic criticism

ALEKSANDER WAT

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Michalina Kmieciak – literary scholar at the Department of Literary Theory and the Center for Research on the Avant-garde of the Faculty of Polish Studies at the Jagiellonian University. Her research interests include the history of Polish and European avant-garde (*Oblicza miejsca. Topiczne i atopiczne wyobrażenia przestrzeni w poezji Juliana Przybosa* [Images of places: Topic and atopic images of space in the poetry of Julian Przybós], Cracow 2013; *Drogi negatywności. Nurt estetyczno-religijny w poezji i muzyce awangardowej w XX wieku* [Roads of negativity: Aesthetic and religious trend in avant-garde poetry and music in the 20th century], Cracow 2016). She has published in *Teksty Drugie*, *Ruch Literacki*, and *Pamiętnik Literacki*. She prepared a genetic edition of the encrypted version of Wat's *Dziennik bez samogłosek* [Diary without vowels] (Cracow 2018). Currently, together with Iwona Boruszkowska, she is working on the project *Style zachowań awangardowych* [Avant-garde behavior styles] (NCN, Sonata 10).