

VARIATIONS (an interview from 2002 by Rafał Księżyk for Antena Krzyku magazine)

- The starting-point for your exploration of the written word was the concept of a total novel. By the end of that phase of interest you had replaced words by codes and also published "Hermetic Writings"- a piece that consisted of writings passed through a paper-shredder. Does this mean you feel you have, as far as your interests are concerned, exhausted the possibilities contained within writing?

RS Literature is a closed chapter for me and not only because of literature itself, but because I have lost faith in words. Concerning the piece you are referring to entitled "Hermetic Writings", I didn't in that case use someone else's raw material. It was a variation on one of my own themes.

- Have your artistic explorations driven you towards an apocalyptic vision? I realise that this is solemnly put, but nevertheless relevant for e.g the transformation of the written word in your books.

RS I used to be more inclined towards thoughts of destruction and finality, but I can't say that it was a conscious intent on my behalf. I was merely attempting to carry out a formal synthesis. I found meaning in intensity, condensation, excess, and in establishing a common denominator for different forms of expression. This approach took on a rather subjective form in writing, because it sprung out of my personal relation to language and literature.

- You believe that the domain of art-fiction constitutes a dimension just like time and space. This conviction seems to echo the pataphysics of Alfred Jarry. In your work I personally also find traces of influence from other eccentric Dandies of French culture such as Raymond Roussel and Marcel Duchamp. I would dare, regardless of the most immediate associations one might have, to qualify Dandyism as being totally distinct from other phenomena in art in so far as viewing the world and the subjects acting within it as pure construction. Accordingly spirituality is allowed to coexist on equal terms with technology, intellectualism with visionaryism. Do you yourself have a sense of belonging to this tradition, do you find it at all convincing?

RS I do share the fascination for science and technology, and in general the above mentioned persons have had great influence on me, but I regard upon them as individuals and exceptional characters rather than parts of a certain movement. I am mostly interested in them as individuals, I appreciate their personalities. However all that we experience has an effect on us, even if it is not an immediate and direct one, or perhaps not even a noticeable one. If you take literature as an example, I feel quite close to the approach taken on by Roussel whose work had absolutely no

reference to reality and was purely based on language. I came across his work only quite recently. Concerning Alfred Jarry you might be right in what you said about the pataphysics, but I wouldn't go that far as to think of it in terms of a tradition. The statement about fiction being one of the possible dimensions, doesn't of course in itself claim to be describing reality. Instead it is an attempt to qualify art as a virtual niche of reality, making art a variation of reality rather than an integral part of it. In this context "virtual" is used in a sense that doesn't involve cyberspace, thus creating the paradox of the virtual existing within the frames of the real. That same concept applies to fiction created by Man – even to a lie as long as it is a credible one. Art has this kind of virtual character. It constitutes a simulation created by the intermediary of what exists in reality.

- You stated in one of your interviews that "What we used to consider as metaphysics can nowadays be found within technology based on entirely materialistic grounds". This kind of premonition was also put forward in the philosophy developed by Deleuze and the psychoanalysis of Lacan. In a way the tradition I just mentioned is carried on through cyberculture – the proof of which is the book you find intriguing at the moment: "TechGnosis" by Erik Davis. Davis speaks, in a slightly subversive way, of a "visionary mistake", that is supposed to consist of mistaking technological potential for the potential contained within society or spirituality. Could you please comment further on that statement?

RS I believe that Technology has replaced religion, as means for Man to multiply his force and perhaps even as a promise of immortality. In this sense it has virtually taken over the space that used to be reserved for religion. What happened historically was the following. Out of pure metaphysical needs alchemy emerged. Later on it was replaced by the reason-based natural science, which in turn generated techniques and technologies. Today we believe in technology as we used to believe in God. Even though this belief takes on a more tangible, almost materialistic form, it still offers us a surreal sense of power and puts the need for transcendence into a less alarming spot.

- Let us once again recall the citation from above. The message it is sending may at a first glance appear almost inhumane ( unless of course we apply the philosophy of Dandyism). Differently put: which concept of the contemporary human being does the citation express?

RS Perhaps the one of a maker who no longer looks for who in turn created him.

- Towards the end of "TechGnosis", where Davis explains his theory of networks constituting the spiritual paths of our times, he writes among other things: "we must learn to think like DJ's, who chose rhythms and voices from a large selection of recordings, but remain within the organic limitations of dance".

How do you feel about such a description of spirituality?

RS This citation only describes Davis' theories in a fragmentary way, but if we are to focus our attention on this particular aspect of it, I would say that, even though comprising a vision of abundance, the citation still gives me a sense of claustrophobic discomfort. And I feel such a model for spirituality would in a long term constitute a threat to individualism and creativity. I am afraid it might breed conformism and encourage people to take the easy way out. One of the possible traps might be dissolving into something that isn't us. Another thing I fear is the danger of us turning into mere holders, only having disposal of things. The latter would incidentally make an appropriate slogan for our time, since the current times are often referred to as a period of transition. But how long can we go on chewing the bits spit out by others? Times are ever changing and with them the ways in which we look upon things. In time other possibilities, today unimaginable, will become apparent to us.

- The relation between technology on one hand, and esoterics and mysticism on the other, echo in a rather disturbing way in a time where digital technology opens virtual worlds to us. You claim that "objects" that are your own creations become part of an alternative reality. How do you look upon the alternative realities created by commercial media through use of digital technology? You once created a billboard on which you, instead of an ad, placed a psychedelic fractal poster made by use of computer.

RS This reflects the fact that we are increasingly living an illusion without even being conscious of it any more. Ultimately the image of the world that we carry in our minds is nothing but a creation of that same mind - that is in itself a sort of simulation that we make. The distinction between the virtual world of art, and that of the digital technology, can be compared to the one between what is art and what isn't. The same issues are raised in both cases. However I wouldn't take it up on myself to determine that particular distinction. I am sure you can imagine what the reasons for placing the fractal on the billboard were. I made it simply because I had never seen anything as detached from the concept of consumption and bearing less reference to reality, in a space used for propaganda or publicity. I was preoccupied by the fractal itself for a long time afterwards, and I was wandering whether and how I actually should paint it. For various reasons I really wanted to paint it in a traditional way - on a canvas - and finally I did get around to doing it. That first painting in turn inspired me to create other ones.

- I would like to once again get back to "TechGnosis" and to the networking lifestyle. Davis writes: "We must learn to recognise all kinds of disturbance, because it is in turbulence that our future diversity lies". What role does disturbance and chaos play in your work? Especially in regard to the fractal paintings you currently make? The fractal has, as you know, become somewhat of a pop symbol for the chaos theory. However the theory of chaos seems in itself to unfold - as if contrary to its name - as a theory of the order of what appears to be disorder. Subsequently the theory is not one about acknowledging chaos, but rather about recognising its existence by way of reason.

RS The tension between construction and deconstruction - that is what fascinates me the most at the moment. Certain fractals have similar qualities, and one actually discovers countless varieties, of difficult to grasp patterns, in what appears to be pure chaos. But fractals are also about non-euclidian geometry, having dimensions that do not constitute integers, for instance 1,58 instead of 2 or 3. Fractal paintings constitute an immediate representation of the virtual reality: they are derived from mathematics and in that sense they really are cosmic. Looking at them, one is inclined to believe that the universe is built on harmony and elegance, although its mere existence appears to be a huge catastrophe.