Professor Ewa Szczęsna, University of Warsaw

Research interests, conducted research and their effects

My scientific interests concentrate on the comparative poetics, semiotics, and anthropology of semiotically and medially varied statements. The subject of my research are categories shared by different textual forms, such as the sign, meaning, narration, figures, texture, text, as well as their modes of existence in different media and discourses. I am interested in their extrasemiotic and extramedial dimensions, which are the result of being anchored in human thought, are decisive with respect to their universality, and guarantee cultural continuity. I am also interested in their variable, changing aspects (modified by the technologically conditioned media and communication situation of the message, its sign structure, genre, and style); that which goes beyond existing theory. I attempt to name, describe, and reflect upon the identified changes to textual structures, which, according to my research intent, has the aim of developing the humanities (semiotics and poetics in particular – its fields of study and research tools). In effect, my research interests center on relations pertaining to signs, the semiosphere, and media (in the modern digital environment in particular) in the creation of meaning and the aesthetic and persuasive influence on the recipient.

My MA Thesis titled *Nudne uczynić ciekawym – o narracji w literaturze i filmie* (*Making that which is boring interesting – on narration in literature and film*), written under the supervision of Prof. Zofia Mitosek, was my first attempt to "liberate" poetics from the confines of literature. In this work, I performed a comparative analysis between modes of plot construction and types of narrative statements in literature and film, proving the thesis on their principal similarity despite the existence of differences in the sign systems used by both art forms.

As the result of taking an interest in modern advertising, I broadened the scope of my research field to include statements in which the aesthetic function is subordinated to persuasion. One factor which influenced my developing interests were political and economic changes in Poland in the early nineties, which were beneficial to the development of advertising. However, the direct impulse to undertake such research took the form of a cultural event – the first exhibit of award-winning American video commercials originating in the New York Museum of Modern Art, which was on display

in the Zachęta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw in 1992. My participation in this event first resulted in the publication of a paper in the monthly magazine "Dialog" ("Dialogue"), with which I collaborated at that time as an author and translator, and then in the creation of a project of a doctoral dissertation titles *Poetyka reklamy* (*The poetics of advertising*), which I completed in the course of my Ph.D. studies in the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw in the years 1994-1999 under the supervision of Prof. Edward Kasperski. The dissertation was reviewed by: Prof. Teresa Dobrzyńska, from the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and Prof. Roch Sulima, from the Institute of Polish Culture at the University of Warsaw. I was awarded the degree with distinction on December 21, 1999, and the dissertation was published in extended form by PWN (Polish Scientific Publishers) in 2001 and 2003.

I also conducted research on the poetics of advertising within the framework of a KBN (State Committee for Scientific Research) grant [the project under my supervision was titled *Dyskurs reklamowy jako gatunek wypowiedzi kulturowej* (*Advertising discourse as a type of cultural statement*), held in 2000-2003].

In *The poetics of advertising* I present advertising as a type of cultural statement; a type of discourse which generates an endless multitude of one-off, passing statements, but also a phenomenon of modern culture making use of the processes of the commercialization, democratization, and hybridization of culture. I consider as my investigative success the depiction of advertising as a statement which in its essence is fictional, playing an endless game with the recipient, which relies on concealing its own persuasive and fictional nature (the category of advertisement). In the course of the study I demonstrated that the semantization of semiospheres characteristic of advertising allows for the existence of multimedial and transsemiotic poetic figures – more efficient in terms of persuasion than those functioning within a single sign system or a single medium.

The study allowed me to gain insight into the structure of meaning of semiotic practices in modern culture, the poetics of the polisemiotic and multimedial text. At the same time, the messages of advertising, which are polisemiotic, multimedial, and reflective of the developmental tendencies of contemporary globalized culture, are expedient illustrative material with respect to the described phenomena – a topic which features in later research on the poetics of media. One of the essential takeaways of the study (which was decisive with respect to my further course of studies) was arriving at the phenomenon of the semiotic and medial transcendence of text, indicating a mutual

intersection of semiotic and medial systems in the process of creating meaning in multi-sign statements

Searching for relationships between texts of written, oral, audiovisual, and visual culture resulted in the creation of an authorial project titled *Słownik pojęć i tekstów kultury* (*Dictionary of cultural texts and terms*), for which I wrote a total of 267 entries. A nested entry structure, direct vicinity of terms and examples from the fields of literature, philosophy, theater, radio, film, and the Internet, illuminated the relationship between different fields of art and areas of interest in the humanities, between texts employing different styles and sign systems. The subtitle *Terytoria słowa* (*Word territories*) did justice to the subject matter scope of the dictionary, which only contained entries on such statements in which the carrier of meaning was a word existing independently of, or in interaction with, other sign systems. Other entry authors included: Teresa Dobrzyńska, Grzegorz Grochowski, Izolda Kiec, Zbigniew Kloch, Brygida Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, Krystyna Ruta-Rutkowska, Andrzej Szpulak, Dorota Urbańska, Dorota Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak.

The dictionary was published in 2002 by the publishing house WSiP and reprinted in 2003 in its second edition, and reissued in 2004 in its third, revised edition. In 2003 during the Polish Educational Book Fair it received the 1st prize in the book-of-the-year award "Edukacja XXI – za wybitne wartości edukacyjne" ("Education XXX – for exceptional educational values"). At that time, I also prepared 30 entries pertaining to literature theory for the school encyclopedia *Literatura. Wiedza o kulturze* (*Literature. Cultural knowledge*) (ed. Andrzej Makowiecki, WSiP, Warsaw 2006).

At this time, in 2005 I received the University of Warsaw Rector's Scholarship in recognition of my scientific accomplishments.

My research on the poetics of polisemiotic, multimedial, and interactive statements was a habilitation dissertation *Poetyka mediów (polisemiotyczność, digitalizacja, reklama)* [*The poetics of media (polisemioticity, digitization, advertising)*]. The monograph was published by the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw in 2007. It was reviewed by Prof. Wiesław Godzic (SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities) and Prof. Edward Kasperski (University of Warsaw).

The Poetics of media describes the structural features of cultural texts as statements modeled by media, changing alongside developments in technology, the appearance of new means of communication, but also using such changes to a creative end, and thus initiating the development of textual structures. This approach underlies the construction

of a poetics of new forms of statements, the reinterpretation of existing tools of description with a view to uncovering the essence of contemporary statements, which combine different systems of signs and media, investigating structures common to different messages, and pointing to shifts in their medial manifestations. I consider naming and describing such modifications of existing structures the crowning accomplishment of my study on the poetics of media.

The results of studies presented in *The poetics of media*, as well as published previously in the form of articles in science journals and multi-author anthologies, formed the groundwork of the postdoctoral habilitation procedure, which has culminated in the habilitation colloquium on May 27, 2008. The reviewers of my scientific contributions with respect to the habilitation process were: Prof. Stanisław Balbus (Jagiellonian University in Cracow), Prof. Grzegorz Gazda (University of Łódź), Prof. Maryla Hopfinger (Institute of Literary Research at the Polish Academy of Sciences), Prof. Seweryna Wysłouch (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań).

Scientific research held before attaining the postdoctoral habilitation degree additionally resulted in the publication of 13 papers in journals an 18 chapters in multi-author books, including one in English. Results of studies were also discussed and presented abroad – in France (during the 5th RaAM conference), Italy, the Netherlands, and Bulgaria – in the form of papers delivered during international conferences.

At this time, in 2009 I received the University of Warsaw Rector's Scholarship in recognition of my scientific accomplishments.

In studies undertaken following the postdoctoral habilitation degree I put particular focus on the analysis of digital communication, while still continuing intersemiotic and intermedial research in other fields of media. As part of my studies, I participated in the international project Concepts and their Contexts, performed with the cooperation of the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences an the Institute of Literature at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (under the supervision of Prof. Teresa Dobrzyńska, and Prof. Raya Kuncheva). The results of the studies were discussed during conferences in Sofia, and then published in English in 4 multi-author monographs.

In July 2012 I prepared and then submitted to the NCN (Polish National Science Centre) a research project titled *Struktura przekazu digitalnego – aspekty semiotyczne, semantyczne i komunikacyjne* (*The structure of digital discourse – semiotic, semantic, and communication aspects*), which has been put forward for funding (in the years 2011-2014) – project website http://www.przekaz-digitalny.uw.edu.pl/index_en.html

The aim of the research project was to investigate the structure of digital communication, and in particular capture the specific nature of their sign structure (the iconic and verbal dimensions), means of creating meaning, as well as means of shaping the sender-recipient relation, and their influence on the ontic dimension of the text and discourse (including mechanisms of persuasive communication embedded in the mode of the text's existence). The research team I oversaw consisted of: Marek Kaźmierczak, Mariusz Pisarski, Agnieszka Smaga, Urszula Pawlicka, Joanna Szwechłowicz, Piotr Kubiński. The research project culminated in the publication of partial results (which were discussed in the course of 23 conferences in Poland and 7 conferences abroad) in journals, monographs, and a grant-funded publication: *Przekaz digitalny. Z zagadnień semiotyki, semantyki i komunikacji cyfrowej* (*Digital text. Issues of semiotics, semantics, and digital communication*) ed. Ewa Szczęsna, Cracow 2015, pp. 404, to which I contributed several chapters.

As the most significant scientific contribution of my own in the course of the research project I consider the discovery and description of a new sign structure, which has its representation in the digital sign. I made the claim that new functions and forms of signs predicate new modes of existence of the literary text on the stylistic level. Research of the identified new digital meaning-making strategies (atomization, kinetization, and modeling) led me to the conclusion that the aforementioned strategies participate in the creation of new literary figures – reduction, adjection, transformation, permutation, and cumulation, which I then described in detail. They also lead to the modification of existing figures, of which one example is inversion, the existing onticity of which was undermined.

Changes in the modes of existence of signs, texts, and discourses also result in further changes in the field of translation of literary texts – I classified their forms by singling out digitization, digital adaptation, hypertextual translation (further divided into the translation of literary hypertext and hypertext translation proper), as well as translation of structures. Analysis of digital communication allowed me to describe the forms of intermediated persuasion used in university educational platforms, as well as their influence on educational discourse.

In the years 2012-2014 I participated as a performer in the research grant *Znakowe wartości kultury. Aspekty historyczne, tożsamość i zmiana* (*Semiotic values of culture. Historical aspects, identity, and change*) under the supervision of Prof. Zbigniew Kloch

(University of Warsaw, Institute of Literary Research at the Polish Academy of Sciences). In the course of the project I analyzed a new type of sign in the digital environment, namely the cursor, as well as the digital semiosphere and digital representations of textual structures. The results of the studies have been published in paper form in the journal "Przestrzenie Teorii" ("Spaces in Theory") 2015/24, and in the form of a chapter in the grant-funded monograph *Znakowe wartości kultury* (*Semiotic values of culture*), Warsaw 2014 (ed. Z. Kloch, Ł Grutzmacher, M. Kaźmierczak).

I undertook further studies on the poetics of digital text (as a participant and supervisor of a team of young researchers) within the framework of an international NPRH (National Humanities Development Program) grant titled *Narracja jako kategoria transmedialna: konteksty semiotyczne i kognitywistyczne* (*Narration as a transmedial category: Semiotic and cognitive contexts*) (2014-2017) under the supervision of Katarzyna Kaczmarczyk (postgraduate student in the Institute of Polish Literature in the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw). In the course of participating in the project as a performer, I researched digital narration. The studies held in the course of the project and in its aftermath allowed me to demonstrate that narration is a mental construct of figurative nature. At the same time, narration has its textual representations in different discourses, semiospheres, and media, which model its specific manifestations, determine its variants and specific forms. This is also the case with digital narration, the study of which allowed me to characterize its unique traits. Results of the study were published in the form of an English article in the quarterly "Tekstualia" (2017/1(3) Index Plus), as well as in the form of a chapter in a grant-funded book *Narratologia transmedialna. Wyzwania, teorie, praktyki* (*Transmedial narratology. Challenges, theories, practices*), Cracow 2017 (ed. K Kaczmarczyk; ed. volume in series: E. Szczęsna).

Research on the semiotics and poetics of digital texts suggests that literary artistic measures in the digital environment engage to a semantically significant degree the moving layer of representations of the word: changes in shape, color, sound, and size. The layer of word representations becomes dimensional and corporeal; and the actions of the user become a constitutive component of the figures. Kinetic, transsemiotic, interactive figures and, from a broader perspective, textual structures comprising digital literature, lead us to speak of a semiopoetics in which literary meaning is shaped in the interaction between the semantics of the semiotic tissue of the moving, shifting, interactive word and the semantics of the word as an arbitrary sign.

The book *Cyfrowa semiopoetyka* (*Digital semiopoetics*) [Warsaw 2018, publishing house of the Institute of Literary Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences, series: "Nowa Humanistyka" ("New Humanities"); reviewed by Prof. Zbigniew Kloch, Prof. Ryszard Nycz, which I consider my main research accomplishment since having received the postdoctoral habilitation degree, is the final effect of my studies initiated in the course of research on the poetics of media, and then continued and developed both within the three above-mentioned research projects and independently [partial results of the studies were also published in journals, including: "Teksty Drugie" ("Second Texts"), "Przestrzenie Teorii" ("Spaces in Theory"), "Przegląd Humanistyczny" ("Humanities Review"), "Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich" ("The Problems of Literary Genres"), "Rocznik Komparatystyczny" ("The Comparative Yearbook"), and "Studia Edukacyjne" ("Educational Studies")].

The book was the main scientific management in the process of applying for the academic title of professor (2019; scientific reviewers: Prof. Anna Burzyńska (Jagiellonian University); Prof. Anna Krajewska (University of Adam Mickiewicz); Prof. Jarosław Płuciennik (University of Łódź); Prof. Andrzej Skrendo (University of Szczecin); Prof. Marek Zaleski (Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences).

The book *Digital semiopoetics* describes changes underpinning the modes of existence of signs, texts, and discourses in the digital environment. It argues that digital technologies create new, different from those existing, representations of the semiosphere (Chapter 4), textual structures, and digital structures. They are grounded in the specific character of the digital sign – immaterial, variable, hybridic – combining the meaning-making function with the function of actions (Chapter 3). One such sign of action is the cursor – a multi-sign of action, which participates in the creation and the use of the text.

It turns out that the structure of the sign is not identical in the case of each of its different representations – instead, it is modeled technologically. The digital sign is bilateral (each sign is represented on the programming level, as well as the end-user level) and has a multivariate structure (its aspects being: representation, meanings, actions, meta). The dominance of a given aspect-sign function determines the type of the sign. The specific nature of the digital sign on the end-user level is determined by the aspect of actions, which dominates in the case of mediating signs (with the aim of transporting the user to another sign and text) and operational signs (with the aim of performing certain actions on the text itself). On the level of programming code, the specific nature of digital signs is determined by the meta aspect, that is, the aspect of defining the method of

existence of the text on the end-user use (these signs are the following: organizers, modifiers, and semantics).

The book shows that signs, texts, and discourses are analogous, interconnected structures, which means that changes pertaining to one structure result in the remodeling of the remaining structures as well. They structures are mental in nature, which means that they are inherently connected with the act of interpretation. In effect, changes to their mode of existence result in changes to the sphere of interpretation itself (Chapter 2).

The new structure and functions of the digital sign define a new mode of the text's existence on the levels of style and communication (Chapter 5). First, the layer of representation (the texture) undergoes additional semantization and textualization. Meanings emerge in the interaction of the semantics of the moving, polisemiotic texture, the semantics of words, and the semantics of the user's actions. Due to their text-making function, the user's actions become an integral part of the piece of work itself. Second, there is a change in the mechanisms of the cohesion of the text, which is characterized by instability and openness to change, and the cohesion-driving factor lies in the actions of the users, which are interpretative in nature (causative interpretation).

Meaning making strategies in literature in particular and digital art in general include atomization, kinetization, and modeling (Chapter 6). Beside the semantics of the word, literary stylistic devices engage to an unprecedented degree the word's semiotic dimension: changes in shape, changes in color, sound, and size; transformations developing in full view of the recipient – that is, movement and sound. The layer of the word's representations becomes spatial and tangible; and the actions of the users become a constitutive component of the figures themselves. Kinetic, transsemiotic, interactive figures in particular, and in general, the textual figures which create digital literature, demonstrate that the category of literature encompasses both the semiotic tissue of the text, as well as the actions of the user.

The book names and describes new poetic figures, which are not present in literature in printed form, and which are uncovered in the course of evaluating literary hypertexts. These are semiotic figures – in particular, figures of movement, which include: reduction, adjection, permutation, transformation, and interactive forms (e.g. accumulation). In addition to semiotic figures, the book also describes causative figures and shifts in the modes of existence of previous thought figures – in particular, metaphors engaging words, movements, sounds, images, and actions (the corporeality of the recipient). The book makes the argument that literary meanings (and other meanings as well) in the digital

environment are shaped in the course of interactions between the semantics of the word (here, also the narrative of the literary work) and the semantics of the level of representation. This means that in the case of digital pieces of work we can speak of the literary shaping of the semiotic layer of the text.

Transsemioticity, causation, engaging the corporeality of the recipient, also form part of the digital representation of the narration. *Digital semiopoetic*s argues in favor of the figurative nature of narration, and points to implication as the fundamental figure behind narrative thought. The link-based structure of hypertext and the mode of the recipient as the user performing certain actions on the text, initiate a new type of narration – alternative and causative in nature. The analysis of narrative works in the digital environment points to the growing significance of interpretative narration, implied relations, and the recipient's expectations. Another important factor in the shaping of meaning is the moving intratextual context, which participates in the creation of a multivariate narration.

Chapters on restructuring in regard to the sign and the text, as well as on the creation of textual meaning, form the most crucial part of the entire argument. They prove that it is no longer possible to speak of the poetics of a digital literary text in particular (as well as other discursive texts in general) without taking into account its semiotics. The engagement of a moving texture and the actions of the user (causation) in shaping textual meanings become the basis of initiating a new field of humanities – semiopoetics.

The monograph also goes into detail on digital discursivity, primarily in relation to the discourses of art, education, and the humanities (Chapter 7). It discusses paraphrasing as one of the fundamental strategies of discursive action – primarily in the sphere of art, and in particular literature and its various modes of existence in the digital environment. This is the case in e.g. digital literary translation and its types: digitization, digital adaptation, hypertextual translation, and translation of structure. The book also presents an overview of new textual forms – macrotexts, or texts built on top of a single text, created in the interaction of multiple texts, often characterized by a distinct organization of signs representing different media and discursive orders.

Analysis of text in a digital communicative situation allowed for the presentation of remediation and transdiscursivity as methods of shaping digital discursivity and mediality. It also allowed for the description of mechanisms of persuasion in the digital environment – forms of mediated persuasion used in university educational platforms and their influence on the discourse of education.

The abovementioned content in part two of the book – essential to the dissertation – has been prefaced by an attempt to define what underpins such crucial changes in regard to signs, texts, and discourses, that is, cultural changes. The answer is the phenomenology and epistemology of digitality (Chapter 1), which are the topic of the first, introductory part of the monograph. In this part, the main focus of which lies on philosophy and cultural studies rather than semiotics and poetics, includes discussions on the status of techniques and technology, their influence on the sphere of aesthetics and the creation of artistic meaning; the method of constructing texts and using texts in the digital environment. This part will provide an overview of the computer program, the link, and the interface as tools behind a new method of shaping text and discourse, and, in consequence – shaping culture itself.

The abovementioned scientific research on the digital environment also resulted in the publication of 27 papers in journals [including "Przestrzenie Teorii" ("Spaces in Theory"), "Teksty Drugie" ("Second Texts"), "Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich" ("The Problems of Literary Genres"), and "Rocznik Komparatystyczny" ("The Comparative Yearbook")], as well as 40 chapters in multi-author books, including 8 in English (in journals and multi-author monographs) and 2 in other foreign languages. The studies were discussed and presented in the course of international cooperation – (both in the course of projects mentioned above and independently) in the form of papers presented during international conferences (in Bulgaria, Germany, and Turkey), as well as lectures in France (Université Paris-Sorbonne).