Steven TÖTÖSY DE ZEPETNEK (ed.), *Digital Humanities and the Study of Intermediality in Comparative Cultural Studies*, Purdue Scholarly Publishing Services, ISBN: 978-1-62671-002-3 (ePDF ISBN: 978-1-61249-315-2), 383 pages, 2013.

Review by Alex CIOROGAR

Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University
Cluj, România
E-mail: alex.ciorogar@gmail.com

Here we are facing yet another epistemological turn. The volume reviewed here seemingly deals with the latest of these. "*Digital Humanities and the Study of Intermediality in Comparative Cultural Studies*[1] is about how intermediality influences the negotiation of culture(s)—in theory and application—and how, cultural practices shape the use of (new) media and their social significance" - this is how the editor firmly and fairly describes the work. Of course, questions quickly arise: How exactly can we define intermediality? What does one mean when employing the phrase "Digital Humanities"? These questions are swiftly answered as we learn about the new theoretical trends and their shifting away from textuality, focusing instead on the vast opportunities opened up by the new materiality of digital production, distribution, and consumption. Why is this relevant? Because culture, Zepetnek suggests, is based on "the negotiation of stories, images, and meanings", that is "through constructed and contextual agreements, power relations, and their authorization and legitimation of social positions and loci".

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[1] The containing articles were previously published online in the open-access humanities and social sciences quarterly *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>. It's also important to note that this journal follows the guiding principles of a certain field of studies known as *Comparative Cultural Studies* (a theoretical and applied framework including intermediality and digital humanities developed by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek who brought comparative literature and cultural studies together as a disciplinary wholeness.

Consequently, all discursive practices depend on the recent developments brought upon by the multimodal framework of digital processes. In other words, the new media technologies are responsible for violently redefining our ways of thinking about identity (be it individual or collective), because they don't simply act as channels of industrial distribution, they also tap into the network dynamic of our fundamental modes of socialization.

Most interestingly, the first article draws a parallel between abstract painting and post-war literary studies, arguing that methodology was simply a mask for covering up historical facts. Interpretation cannot be learned, Wolfgang Keyser proclaimed. This is why literary scholarship continued to reproduce the old Heideggerian type of hermeneutics, or so the author believes. Nevertheless, Siegried J. Schmidt shows that the phenomenological and/or existantialist movements were only part of Germany's postbellum literary culture. The collapse of the Adenauer Era transformed German society into a post-industrial, media driven community. Moreover, as Schmidt puts it, "students called for political literature and a clear political engagement of literary studies" (p. 15). In other words, the author walks us through the genesis of what are the major German literary studies of the 1960's: The Frankfurt School, Reception Theories, to name just a hefty few. Analytic philosophy and the philosophy of language represented the new methodological tools (everything from Wittgenstein to Austin or Grice) competing alongside Marxist orientations.

The problem is that Schmidt outlines this history in order to showcase his own theory. Actually, this wouldn't have been a problem at all if his theory were any different from Bourdieu's. Fortunately, the research group he established (known as ESL) proceeded to other types of work like linguistic analysis, coming up with a new understanding of the elements which make up the literary system: the social literary system (production, distribution, reception and post-processing) and the semiotic literary system (intertextuality and literariness). Of course, the literary system is described in relation to other social systems such as the religious, the political, or the education system, all of which are part of a larger social media system. Schmidt further notes that one of his most important tasks was to "convince other literary scholars that empiricity had nothing to do with positivism or materialism". Although materialism is actually relevant to literary studies, his goal still rings true. In fact, his demonstration is the best practical example of his meta-theoretical ambitions.

No different than today, the humanities were under deep governmental scrutiny in the 1980's. Clearly minded, Schmidt argues that it is important to know what type of literature people learn to love or to hate in school, "especially when they grow up in multimedia societies with much competing media" (p. 18). The embeddedness of his theories deem themselves practically inexhaustible. Heavily influenced by Niklas Luhmann's ideas, the discipline known as Media Studies should be included, he suggests, in Cultural Media Studies which, in their turn, are to be included in what Zepetnek coined as Comparative Cultural Studies. Even so, his skepticism may prove itself worthwhile, because, as we all know, new ideas

> "concerning research methods, new subjects or interdisciplinary cooperations are regarded with suspicion and they are more often than not rejected. For this reason I designate media culture   studies in terms of a research program carried out by scholars who are interested in similar topics and who are able to cooperate on a similar meta-theoretical, epistemological, and methodological basis" (p. 21).

Drawing attention to Franco Moretti's empirical research, Schmidt finally concludes that these approaches should be paired with hermeneutical endeavors since interdisciplinarity still represents one of the keywords in social and human sciences.

 Following a Weberian type of reasoning, Werner Wolf offers several types of definition to what "medium" might be. Intermediality is thus defined, in David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's terms, as a type of "remediation" (p. 29). Consequently, Wolf shows that media studies tend to have the same problems as comparative literature: knowledge of multiple "languages" is hard to ascertain, while knowledge of "mediums" present themselves as crucial problems that need to be challenged. His solution is to show that literature is, essentially and historically, an intermedial form of culture altogether. In the following passages, he describes a general typology of intermedial forms (five): myths, for example, have lost their original medium; transmediality is best understood as the adaptation of novel to film; plurimedial artefacts or hybrid media are illustrated by graphic novels; references and imitations serve as various types of intermediality; and, finally, the combination of these previous four is known as "remediation" (such as video

games). Exploiting and surpassing Seymour Chatman's narratological view on the medium, Wolf asserts we should integrate it as a category of narratology included in a general theory of literature. This is his attempt to merge intermediality within the general study of literature (be it in comparative literature or cultural studies).

The next article, signed by Jens Schröter, similarly offers a typological account of intermediality and types of discourses: 1. synthetic intermediality ("a spatio-temporal simultaneous presentation and reception of different media forms in an institutionalized frame"); 2. formal intermediality (formal devices transferred from one medium to another); 3. transformational intermediality (again, this refers to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's notion of "remediation"), and 4. ontological intermediality (something specific to a particular medium). The difference is that Schröter suggests one shouldn't start with definitions of media because intermediality "produces definitions of media" (p. 40), thus calling out scholars to differentiate between the politics of intermediality and the politics of various media.

Oleg Gelikman writes about the institutionalization of modernism and about the ascent of the audio-visual medium as a "guarantor of transparency". An important insight is that every new media claims more realism and immediacy than the prior one. The next article, beautifully written by Erin Schlumpf, shows that the study of literature should be performed in the framework of comparative and world literature, disciplines which include intermediality, especially in the case of translated texts. In other words, Erin Schlumpf believes that an intermedial mode of inquiry is necessary when one doesn't have access to the original text (whether this is literature, cinema, history or something else). The following contribution is an analysis of a digital creation in which Asunción López-Varela Azcárate and Serge Bouchardon show how

> "the Cartesian understanding of private isolated experience, independent of reality external to it, has given way to a communal understanding of experience in which the subject constitutes itself by mirroring himself/herself on its objects, producing a mutual engagement or co-creativity among interdependent intersubjects: the experience of the creators, the experience of the user/participant, and the experience of the semiotician. The first seeks to make the reader live trough the experience while telling him/her a story, the second

attempts to understand what lies behind the artistic creation, and the third proposes a revision of the ontology of perception and of the emergence of human communicative potential by relating neuroscientific research and socio-constructivist understandings of human physical development, and integrating these findings with the evolving nature of the technical media that social beings use to communicate" (p. 76).

Michał Ostrowicki's paper is an original yet bizarre research that develops the idea that the electronic environment is a sphere of being, thus opening up a new field of study called "ontoelectronics". He differentiates between an electronic image and an electronic being in order to place this distinction at the very heart of this new mode of inquiry, the so-called "metaphysics of the sphere of electronic being". He moves away from such notions as real or virtual (he prefers the terms physical world and electronic world), focusing on the ontology of electronic beings and the existence of a human within them. Connected with Platonic metaphysics, on the one hand, and to multiple world theories, on the other, the article argues that our electronic feelings are actually real. Moreover, "my argument is that when speaking of the nature of an image, particularly television images, the perceiver is the recipient of information" (p. 93). The electronic world, he concludes, has become part of human evolution. The electronic world is rapidly becoming the human world.

From print to screen, from writing and reading to audio-visual, from traditional archives to electronic databases - this is the manner in which Jeroen Bourgonjon begins his study. And he's right when saying that such dichotomies fail to see the connection between old and new media. Be that as it may, "the digital turn in art implies that new media art practices need their own grammar and aesthetics" (p. 97). Drawing on James Paul Gee's reflections, Bourgonjon returns to Huizinga's *homo ludens* only to redescribe it in the terms of a new digital rhetoric that encourages self-expression, participation, and collaboration. In her own words, Cristina Peñamarín asserts that intermedial strategies may open up the question of why and how texts are involved in discussing world issues. Harry J. Huang writes about the differences and similarities between human translation (HT) and machine translation (MT). His hope is that his study will provide

"knowledge or the study of human and machine translation within an intermedial context and that new formulas, frameworks, and criteria would be developed to standardize the quality evaluation of machine and human translation" (p. 133).

Like Bourgonjon before them, Kris Rutten and Ronald Soetaert also resort to rhetoric in discussing how the new social media practices modify old institutions and the general process of education. Consequently, rhetoric becomes some sort of conservative solution in the face of postmodernism's destabilizing activities. Following in Richard Lanham's steps, the authors analyze the role of the museum and the library, while finally introducing the curriculum as a contact zone. As already stated, the rhetorical nature of this curriculum should, in their view, act like a theoretical and conceptual framework for research and practice. Debra L. Merskin, instead, believes in the traditional transmission of values. She believes that commercials are extremely damaging to children and that parents should actually intervene and censor whatever and whenever they believe it's right to do so.

Ipshita Chanda considers Nina Paley's 2008 animation film, a culturally reconceptualized version of Válmíki's Sanskrit epic Rámáyana. She analysed the film in terms of intermediality and retextualization, putting forward the notion of "conceptual fusion" while turning to reception theories. The following paper, written by Kedar Vishwanathan, discusses how the developments in visual culture impacted Indian's national configuration. Maya Zalbidea Paniagua analyses *Dollspace* as a rhizomatic hypertext, concluding that one can easily view it as a "deconstructive cybertext" that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical of entry and exit, both in data presentation and interpretation:

"Hypertext engages the user/participant in a dialogue with the machine and, in the case of Doll-space, across people's sexual attitudes. Dollspace seeks to do more than to just shock the user. It wants to haunt him/her to become an intersubjectively embodied act, per-formed by the user/participant him/herself. It is a space where dolls become human, where reality and fiction intermingle, where the word becomes flesh" (p. 190).

I-Chun Wang investigates three Asian versions of Shakespeare's Macbeth. These adaptations, the author shows, reveal the way in which Shakespeare is read by different audiences, from different cultures across the globe. Consequently,

> "when Shakespeare's Macbeth is remediated into various forms such as the stage and cinema, Macbeth refers not only to the historical Macbeth, but also to cognitive metaphors in local contexts" (p. 200).

I-Chun Wang therefore concludes that each representation embodies an unavoidable tragedy of transgression. Svetlana Nikitina maintains that Mayakovsky and cummings foreshadowed the digital revolution of today (through the use of synesthesia), opening up the way for literature and art in the twenty-first century, a period of literary eclecticism and hybrid fictions. Isabelle Marc Martínez assesses the ways in which different aspects of the French Hip-Hop culture of the 1990's succeeded in recontextualizing mainstream values and national identities. Ignoring Richard Shusterman's contribution to the field, she writes about hip-hop poets who saw themselves as politically responsible. Their lyrics questioned official narratives about education and ethnicity.

The next article could be viewed as a pragmatic attempt to enlarge the literary canon through the inclusion of the graphic novel. Geert Vandermeersche and Ronald Soetaert discuss the ways in which one should pedagogically approach them. They postulate that literary culture must be repositioned in intermedial culture and practices. They apply Werner Wolf's typology (described above). Consequently, they analyze a graphic novel series - *The Unwritten*. They show that these types of works change "the way we look at the transfer of cultural literacy to readers and students of literature and culture" (p. 231). This and the following articles lay evidence to a return to narratology in recent literary scholarship under the pressure of the digitally globalized era. Using Ingarden's theories, Antonio J. Gil González questions the validity of the comic strip in a world in which static imagery could easily be replaced by dynamic, moving animation, while Brian Mitchell Peters chooses to question *Wonder Woman's* sexuality.

Paul Benzon's article represents the epitome of what the digital world could possibly and practically entail in terms of scholarly research:

"Benzon reads advance fee fraud as a practice of epistolary narrative that self-consciously allegorizes central processes of global financial circulation, trading in digitized narrative information rather than in digitized capital. In this sense, he suggests, it functions as a highly abstract financial instrument within the network of the global economy, dealing in a paradoxically literal fashion with imaginary money and thus using narrative form to probe and problematize the question of how and where money might move as data. Tracing the geopolitical and geoeconomic dimensions of advance fee fraud's narrative and formal structure, Benzon argues that its random interpellations, arbitrary twists, and exagger-ated claims deploy literary narrative in a manner that both relies upon and mirrors the material instability of global digital mediation itself" (p. 257).

Indeed, the study that follows is also about deceiving public opinion. Over the course of the last century, mass media has become visual media. Reinhold Viehoff argues that Western culture has had the tendency to capture important events in pictures which are massively reproduced and distributed. While mass media is responsible for transforming certain symbols into fully fledged icons, one must critically assess the roles and strategies employed by the US propaganda system.

Rebecca J. Romsdahl emphasizes the political dimension of World Wide Web. Well documented, her article reflects on the information overload present in e-participation and the lack of real, face-to-face debates over the internet. Verena Laschinger is absolutely right when saying that today's e-culture challenges notions of authority based on doctorates, because "expertise is short lived and constantly being put to the test" (p. 301). Probably one of the most interesting articles in the volume, it clearly describes the damaging effects of the all-encompassing cultural studies. Being politically and economically arrested, cultural studies transformed literary studies into vocational factories presenting creative writing degrees or odd disciplines like neurolinguistics. The shift from intellectual scholarship to employment skills is just one of the major misfortunes of the new business-like administrative apparatus. The author quotes Stanley Fish suggesting that scholars should focus on how the world is today:

"And the developed markets of the world are digital: It favors
creativity and knowledge as the main sources of global future. Seen
from this perspective, the situation of the humanities is actually a
joyous one: disciplines with notoriously vague, albeit essential
learning objectives have much to offer to the revenue of the global
creative economy, to local communities, as well as to scientific
progress. The core creative and intellectual assets clustered in the
humanities are susceptible to application in Web 2.0 and 3.0, where
their critical, analytical, logical, and informed impact on knowledge
formation processes, citizen journalism, and open source projects
become beneficial for great parts of the global community. Creativity,
conceptual, complex critical thinking, and analytical skills are not
only productive factors of the creative economy, but also paramount
as intellectual force to introduce and stimulate race, gender and class
sensitive arguments as well as ethics, ecology, and democracy
oriented values into the swarm-intelligence of a technology-driven,
global e-culture. Pragmatically speaking, by shifting the paradigms e-
culture provides a plethora of job opportunities for humanities
people" (p. 303).

Virgilio Tortosa Garrigós writes about certain elements of city planning that
could and should be viewed as parts of an intermedial spectacle. The contemporary
industrialized city, he argues, has to critically address the process of
depersonalization and stand against consumer culture and capitalism. Rocío von
Jungenfeld puts forward a general theory of intersubjective perception in visual and
plastic arts by analysing Serra's sculptures. Last, but not least, Steven Tötösy de
Zepetnek presents the key elements of what he calls Comparative Cultural Studies.
He does the same thing with regard to Audience studies. The volume concludes with
an impressive bibliography (for Intermediality and Digital Humanities work) put
together by Geert Vandermeersche, Joachim Vlieghe, and Steven Tötösy de
Zepetnek (followed, of course, by an index).

Like any collective work, the volume is qualitatively uneven. Quite
predictably, it also lacks satisfying conclusions. Nonetheless, it is a compelling piece
of scholarly research, making it an indispensable reference tool, proving itself to be

quite provocative at times, theoretically and practically framing new grounds for the future of literary studies.