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## IS ROMANIAN CULTURE READY FOR THE DIGITAL TURN?

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to describe and interpret some of the challenges that digital humanities pose to Romanian culture and Romanian studies. Apart from technical difficulties such as the lack of digitized archives, further problems arise when it comes to the interpretation of existing archives, to public perception of digitization in terms of free access to information but also, more often than not, in terms of exposing a “national identity” and national values to what are perceived as malicious interpreters and data hunters. An ethos of suspicion hinders advancements of digital humanities not only in these information-related terms, but also as far as literary analysis is concerned. Aesthetics and the aesthetic principle have ruled the mainstream approach to literature and culture in Romanian studies, and quantitative research still has to fight its way into Romanian cultural criticism.

**Keywords:** digital humanities, world literature, comparative literature, cultural analytics, Romanian studies.

### *What is the Digital Turn?*

As an epistemic transformation, the digital turn is not a matter of cultural choice, but one of statistic necessity. Starting in the mid-nineties, with the expansion of massive networking and database-sharing, the digital turn soon finds its own metadiscourse in the form of *digital humanities*, forcing an entry in the given system of disciplines and in most academic curricula. The new discourse is

received either as a threat to humanities as we know them, or as hope for the future improvement in social appreciation of the same humanities. I intend to discuss here both the state of digital research related to Romanian culture (literature, in particular) and the main challenges that digital studies are facing in Romanian context. It is my contention that an ethos of suspicion pervades the public reception of the digital turn, paradoxically sharing the stage with an uncritical enthusiasm. This is why this paper intends to pinpoint some of the things that really should be at stake in the Romanian debate around digital studies and digitization.

Defined by some authors as a new media encounter between the digital and the literary (Liu 2), and by others as “a new level of interaction with data and text, integrating thinker and machine in a complex relationship which questions the very concept of *humanity*” (Evans and Rees 21), digital humanities have evolved from being a mere set of tools, helpful in the quantitative research of “computing in the humanities”, or “humanities computing”, from “a technical support to the work of the ‘real’ humanities scholars, who would drive the projects” (Berry 2) to “a genuinely intellectual endeavour with its own professional practices, rigorous standards, and exciting theoretical explorations” (Hayles 43).

While the *first wave* of humanities computing was devoted to quantitative data production and analysis, functioning more as a service of social sciences and humanities in general, being primarily “quantitative, mobilizing the search-and-retrieval powers of the database, automating corpus linguistics, stacking hypercards into critical arrays” (Evans and Rees 28), the *second wave* adds, if not an epistemic claim, at least a methodological and disciplinary dimension to gathering big data, “addressing existing concerns in the humanities” by means of digital tools (29-30). This second wave is qualitative and generative in character, focused on interpretation and integrating experience and emotion. It is said to harness

“digital toolkits in the service of the humanities’ core methodological strengths: attention to complexity, medium specificity, historical context, analytical depth, critique and interpretation.” (Presner, Schnapp and Lunefeld).

At present, digital humanities deal with at least one of the following three actions and phenomena: **1)** archive constitution and preservation, **2)** mass dissemination of information, **3)** interpretation of big data. Problems that arise

from focusing on one or the other are not to be dismissed. Libraries – maybe more than universities in general – are the center of the primordial interest of the digital humanist, since they request digitization and offer, in return, great scholarly and cognitive advantages as far as dissemination of information is concerned. Opening access to major libraries, to rare sources and ancient or physically degraded texts has increased interoperability and collaboration of libraries and public, in a manner that was impossible to conceive of just a few decades ago.

One should mention here that, for the East-European countries, with their very long and still recent history of censorship behind them, the impact of this opening was even greater than for the Western countries. After the archive-fever urged those working in the humanities to digitize anything that could be digitized, starting with the traditional archives of university libraries and public libraries, a new problem arose: data degradation. Gathered in one format and organized in one manner, data had to be ready to switch formats, following the accelerated rhythm of technological upgrading. Also, data had to be periodically reinscribed, since e-formats proved themselves, under given circumstances, less reliable than the materiality of printed paper.

But maybe the most important transformations to our field of cultural and literary studies have come from data interpretation. Given the interdisciplinarity involved in all digital humanities projects, a new form of discourse had to be found, bridging the gap between the different disciplinary jargons. Specialists from different disciplines, as well as non-specialists have to understand each other enough not only to work on the same project, but to benefit from the sharing of the same results. So, a new focus on rhetoric and on communication skills appear as mandatory features of the digital humanist. At a different level, new technologies of research and interpretation came along. Of these, *distant reading* and *cultural analytics* are perhaps the most seminal ones.

The first one, made famous mostly by Franco Moretti (2013), dislocates the monopole of *close reading*, which has been the traditional reading method of the literary scholar, and the second one makes it possible to have access, by means of computational quantitative research to large-scale phenomena and processes. However relevant from a statistic perspective, the outcome of a digital, computational reading, that gives the researcher access to things like structure, semantic frequency, linguistic or expressive patterns, cannot replace the traditional, hermeneutic-interpretive reading (see Hayles 46), which “makes sense” of it all.

*Is Romanian culture ready for this?*

In order to find out the answer to this question, one should return to the above-mentioned stages of rethinking the humanities (and the literary) in digital terms. As far as the stage of massive digitization of material is concerned, there are some Romanian projects that should be mentioned. Most of the university libraries have been digitized to some extent (universities of Bucharest, Cluj, Timisoara, local branches of the Romanian Academy, etc.), some of the public ones are being digitized (personal archives make it directly into digital depositories – Adrian Marino, Liviu and Ioana Em. Petrescu – in Cluj, Cezar Petrescu – in Iassy) and new, digital-only archives are being established (“biblioteca digitală a Bucureștilor”, [www.bibliotecapemobil.ro](http://www.bibliotecapemobil.ro), etc.). Also, the most important Romanian publishing houses offer free-access to some of their books in e-formats: i.e. the online library of Polirom Publishing House. There is also the example of [www.liternet.ro](http://www.liternet.ro) – a platform of literary and cultural interaction, publishing texts and books in e-formats alone. A few digital centers have been established in Romania after 2010; the first academic one, Transylvania DigiHUBB opened last year at Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj and has been already registered in similar networks around the globe (see <http://centre.ubbcluj.ro/digihubb/#>); digital projects are under development in universities around the country (i.e. an internet-based project in Shakespeare studies at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures – see Nicolaescu and Mihai), traditional archives are being probed for digitization.

However slowly, first steps are taken and greater interoperability is accomplished to some extent, as well as a more friendly approach to sources that were otherwise difficult to access. Some bumps on the digitizing road are worth mentioning: there is still a public perception that fears open accessibility, and librarians are sometimes reluctant themselves to open the archives they manage, as if public archives were in fact private. In fact, this resistance to the idea of making information public features prominently not only in reactions from librarians, but also in academics reluctance to publish their results on free-access platforms. Besides, the question of technological upgrade is still problematic even in more developed countries. Many of the claimed Romanian “digital libraries” are underfunded burgeoning projects, which fail to offer complete information service and which offer unprocessed data at best. Unless the archives are being digitized

and then carefully organized into more than simple repositories, there can be no talk of digital humanities in Romania.

We should note that Romanian scholars receive more funding from European funds than from national ones, an imbalance that points out a certain blindness of the education policy-makers to the importance and acuteness of the need to digitize, archive and interpret big data in order to discover predictive patterns that would have seminal importance in establishing public, social and economic policies. However, with only 52% of the population using the internet in 2014, Romania is on place 41 among the internet-using countries, surpassed<sup>1</sup> by Albania, Bulgaria and Greece – with percentages over 56, Croatia with 65, Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Republic with over 74, not to mention Estonia and Slovakia – with more than 81. We should correlate this with the fact that Romanian internet-users are not necessarily computer literate, with only “35% of citizens in Romania having some level of computer skills. This rate is the lowest rate of computer skills in the EU and is significantly lower than the average for the EU of 67%.<sup>2</sup>” Taking all these into account, one may conclude that the first wave of digital humanities is hardly dawning on Romania.

Among the obstacles in the way of entering the digital turn, financial limitations and technological delays are not the only ones. Some other obstacles are less visible, but just as serious, building up a form of traditional resistance and protecting the *status quo*. Let me mention just two of the utmost importance: on the one hand, there is a systemic resistance among literary scholars and professors of literature to the idea of opening the literary field to what I call *hybrid objects* or to what has been called the *digitally born* praxes or methods; on the other, there is also a systemic resistance within the university to the idea of interdisciplinarity. On the one hand, openness and interdisciplinarity are among the dearest slogans of the academia everywhere and much lip service is given to that, but, on the other, imposing an intermedial or even interdisciplinary system challenges the academic status quo and its traditional resistance beyond simple slogans. There is a systemic resistance among literary scholars and professors of literature to the idea of opening the literary field to either new practices, or to what I call hybrid objects, or to

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<sup>1</sup> Internet insertion: Albania 56.47%, Bulgaria 56.97%, Greece 57.85%, Croatia 65.09%, Slovenia 72.34%, Hungary 74.38%, theCzech Republic 77.48, not to mention Estonia and Slovakia – with more than 81%. Source: <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. “Romania: Internet usage and digital skills”.Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/sites/digital-agenda/files/RO%20internet%20use\\_o.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/sites/digital-agenda/files/RO%20internet%20use_o.pdf) (data gathered for 2012).

digitally born praxes or methods; we should add to that there is also a silent but systemic resistance within the university to the idea of interdisciplinarity, nevermind intermediality. Much energy is lost in some Romanian literary studies on preservation of disciplinary purity and autonomy, on rejecting a reinterpretation of one's own place in the new web of knowledge, along with a theoretical and methodological reformulation of one's own discourse.

Or, with the advent of the digital world and the unavoidable digitization of all information come an inherently new type of organization of knowledge, whose values are quantitative analysis, mapping and digital humanism. An intermedial solution could help integrating the digital and literary studies, but there are no signs that such a solution would be adopted or even tried within our current systems of literary research and teaching. Traditional disciplines such as aesthetics, history of literature, theory of literature or comparative literature in their classic senses might lose disciplinary autonomy and, even more, disciplinary specificity. When digital humanists themselves admit that, unlike the first archives, which were more textual, the new ones are more visual, haptic and exploratory, a certain amount of traditional literary specificity is bound to give. Also, the issue of a data-driven research cannot be warmly received in a culture where literary study meant hermeneutics first of all, symbolic and aesthetic reading. While posing serious problems and risks at a systemic level, which need to be publicly and scholarly addressed, an intermedial system of research and study could function along projects, rather than disciplines, with a clearly defined set of methods. Sacrificing some form of autonomy might receive compensation from the fact that humanists are still the best one equipped for what has been called “the humanisation of big data” (Prescott), that is for the development of critical analysis systems and theories, a so-called “big theory for big data”. If it is true that “the latest frontier is about method” (Prescott) and that contextualization as “making sense of data” is one of the most important issues on the digital agenda, then Romanian literary scholars could still find meaning and reason to intermediate. Data in itself is never raw, its presentation is already a selection and an interpretation. This is where hermeneutical reading still makes a difference.

A massive switch from a hermeneutic mode to a quantitative analysis mode also implies a switch in how authoriality is itself understood and practised. Romanian literary studies still have difficulties with team work. The most important literary historiographies are works by individual authors and famous cases of

literary dictionaries or encyclopedias on Romanian literature, that result from collective projects, are incomplete or unfinished. The type of authoriality that Romanian critics, literary historiographers, theorists or comparatists seem to favor is the strong, exceptionalist form of individual authority. While the observation has been made that a new, intermedial and digital authoriality involves a return to a diffuse, collective and collaborative form of authoriality very similar to the one active during the Middle Ages in the art work of teams of artists, Romania has no real tradition in accepting team work at the same level of importance as individual work.

My proposal is in favor of intermedializing cultural studies, as a result of unanimous observations by comparatists coming from various cultural contexts. This is not a new idea, but rather the consequence of previous attempts to establish theoretical and methodological approaches of mixed discourses and praxes, such as *intermediality*, *intertextuality*, *interdisciplinarity*. Let us shortly review these terms, since they make the mandatory vocabulary of the new humanities. Intertextuality - the term coined by poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in 1966, in his paper later included in the volume translated in English as *Revolution in poetic language*, points to the shaping of a text's meaning by another text. However, it has come to have more denotations than this, all of them involving some sort of dialogue or evocation (Coșeriu). One speaks of intertextuality in cases of allusion, quotation, calque, but also in much more complex cases (both theoretically and ethically), such as plagiarism, translation, pastiche and parody. In conclusion, any author's borrowing and transforming a prior text or a reader's referencing of one text in reading another have come to involve an intertextual operation.

Interdisciplinarity, on the other hand, is understood as the methodic combination of two or more academic disciplines into one activity (e.g. a research project). It attempts the creation of something new by crossing boundaries, and thinking across them. As open as it is in its project, interdisciplinarity understands a given subject in terms of multiple traditional disciplines, not breaking the disciplinarity itself (see Ausburg for a complex analysis of interdisciplinary challenges). By comparison, the concept of intermediality – although at first extremely similar to that of interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinarity – makes it necessary to forget about disciplinarity altogether, even if some of its advocates would not agree to that, as Ausburg shows in the above-quoted study.

Although as a term intermediality was used as early as the beginning of the

20<sup>th</sup> century (see Schröter for a briefing), there is no unanimity as to what the concept should cover. Therefore, let me just mention three of the most usual meanings given to intermediality, that I have discussed in my study entitled “Literature 2.0 - Hybrid Cultural Objects in Intermedial Practice. The Case of Romania” (under print at New Directions in the Humanities, Commonground Publishing, Illinois Research Park): the **first one** refers to new methodological and theoretical approaches of given objects of study (such as literatures), beyond disciplinary borders of any kind. This would mean, of course, that traditional disciplines such as aesthetics, history of literature, theory of literature or comparative literature in their classic senses lose disciplinary autonomy and, even more, disciplinary specificity. I derive a **second meaning** of intermediality in order to rethink a transmedial approach: it would use intermedial rhetoric and strategies to draw the main lines of literary research beyond the frame of reference of the national literature. Finally, a **third meaning** postulates the creation of an entirely new intermedial system and discourse to include certain hybrid cultural objects which are at times treated as literary, but are in fact impossible to fit within traditional frames of disciplinary discourse (see Schröter’s concept of *synthetic intermediality*, as the fusion of several media into an *intermedium* that is more than the sum of their parts, i.e. “graphic poetry”). This third meaning allows the proper methodological inclusion of objects like comics, graphic novels, i-phone novels, blogs and electronic collaborative forms of creation or media applications, without the exclusion of traditional literary praxes.

The great conceptual and disciplinary advantage of this intermedial approach is integrative and restorative, closely related to the much prophesied crisis in the humanities. Some of the new humanities that have emerged in the last years integrate literary and social studies together with disciplines that were traditionally cast among the hard sciences or the natural ones. To name just two of the most promising forms of new humanities, one cannot overlook the importance of *medical humanities* and, especially, of *digital humanities*. While the first create the interface for arts, literature and biology, neurology and medicine, for both therapeutic reasons and for scholarly advancements, the latter have a good chance of dismantling the dualistic system of disciplines that traditionally opposed the hard sciences to the humanities. More important, both classes of new humanities are intermedial by definition and a good argument in favor of comparative humanities.



*Are we going intermedial?*

As good as it sounds, the intermedial turn may be facing, at least as far as Romanian culture is concerned, serious difficulties. The first one is the perpetuation of the reign of the aesthetic value and value-judgment in Romanian literary criticism – which often surpasses the importance of theory and method, if not passes for literary theory. Let us notice that the argument of this year's colloquia, made by the present-day director of the RAGCL, professor Mircea Martin, points to the paradox of literary studies specialists abandoning literature for literary studies, while philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists and literary sociologists use literature as testing grounds for their own disciplines. Specifically, while admitting to the beneficial results of this so-called „invasion”, the critic also raises the question of possible risks, especially at the expense of „the aesthetic specificity of literature and literary studies” (see argument in Cernat, Dumitru). An influent critic of the younger generation asks, in the same context:

“Which is the limit where literary studies are at risk of losing their own identity, being transformed into cultural studies or just disappearing altogether? How, in which way could we renegotiate the place and the role of literary studies in the global society that is not only defined by 'generalized communication', but also by the more and more tense relations between the local (national, regional) and the global, between the centres and the peripheries of globalization?”<sup>3</sup>

Before 1989, some of the main surviving tools of the Romanian who were facing political and social conditions imposed by the communist regime were “high culture” and especially “high literature”, seen as subversive forms of individual freedom. In Romania, the concept of “surviving through culture” or “resistance through culture” (Cornis-Pope) is still revered today. However, given the changes of the last two decades and a half, the idea of protecting the status of high culture and of keeping literary studies as “pure” as possible, for the same reasons as before

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<sup>3</sup> My translation. Original: “Care este punctul din care studiile literare riscă să-și piardă identitatea și să se transforme în studii culturale sau să dispară pur și simplu? Cum, pe ce căi s-ar putea renegocia „locul și rolul” studiilor literare în societatea globală, definită nu doar de „comunicarea generalizată”, ci și de relațiile tot mai tensionate dintre local (național, regional) și global, dintre centrele și periferiile mondializării?”.

1989, is questionable, to say the least.

One should add that the first set of challenges in the way of intermediality arise from a very tight understanding of literature within the frames of the aesthetic convention. Maybe the first difficulty in implementing intermedial study in Romania is the traditional lack of approval, within academic and scholarly media, of both theory and method. As influential critics have shown (Terian), aesthetic theory and the aesthetic principle were sometimes the only systematic criteria used to analyze and judge literature. Even Romanian literary history was and still is (with the exception of a few studies published in the 2000-s) written by authors of literary chronicles and reviews, that is, by a very particular type of literary critics. The literary chronicle enjoyed in Romania a prestige with no equal among the other East-European countries, since it was the first medium of Western cultural contact during communist years and a place where ideological censorship could be kept to a bare minimum, not to mention subverted. Rather than being condemned for its lack of scientific character, impressionistic criticism based on taste alone was used instead or as a critical method of reading and interpretation, outside theory. The situation is justified to some extent: when theory meant ideology, Romanian intellectuals were seeking a sort of relief from communist ideological pressure by turning to non-ideological areas. Applied as exclusive or most important method of critical judgment, impressionistic criticism led to the conclusion that only aesthetic fiction is “real literature”. A very strange situation was created: on the one hand, non-fiction was everybody's favorite in the 90ies, if we are to take into account editorial statistics, but critics failed to admit non-fiction as a valid category of literature, capable to dismantle the aesthetic principle. Non-fiction and non-fiction studies are still seeking field legitimacy inside Romanian literary studies, unlike in Hungary, Slovakia or the Czeck Republic.

Since the most influential theoretical system within Romanian literary studies is still Vianu's theory of the mutation of aesthetic values, literary critics and scholars assuming his stand disregard non-fiction literature as a kind of literature that cannot fulfill the aesthetic requirements. Although massively published in Romania after 1990 in the form of diaries of previously censored authors, detention memories of communist prisons or testimonies of various kinds, non-fiction still lacks both a theoretical frame and a proper recognition with Romanian literary hierarchies and canon. Authors of non-fiction are often not considered to be “real writers” and writers who are not aesthetes (such as Norman Manea or Paul Goma,

who author novels based on their own experiencing of the Gulag or the communist repression) are also contested, in spite of their Western world-acquired fame and recognition. The massive literary production born out of trauma, exile, prison, terrorism, although not written by aesthetes, acquires a growing importance both in understanding the world and in the preferences of readers. Recently, a dispute about the alleged lack of aesthetic value of Norman Manea's novels divided the Romanian literary world (see the issues of "Observator cultural" journal of February 2013). The extremely heated arguments polarized the polemicists: on one hand, advocates of the "aesthetic beauty" as unique value of literature, and on the other defenders of the idea of an "ethical aesthetic" as value of representation of human and humanity in literature.

*An intermedial literature for intermedial citizens*

Another type of challenge in the way of constructing an intermedial frame for the study of literature in Romania is the question of national literature, directly connected to the affirmation of a Romanian national identity. In this respect, Romanian culture is no different from all the other European cultures linking national identity to state recognition. Some of the problems arising from understanding literature in national terms arise from the fact that a system of national literatures cannot avoid hierarchical operations. As a consequence, comparative literature within the national literatures frame of reference is based on the idea of influence, that is, of a center of cultural power irradiating and formatting "smaller" or "minor" cultures. The project of world literature as devised by Lomnitz in his project of 1877, "Acta comparationis" (Emerson) does not accept cultural hierarchies of large/ small cultures, central/ peripheral literatures etc., maintaining that all literatures have equal chances to be represented in world literature. However, it is quite ironic for Romanian or Hungarian comparative studies (and mostly for the school of Cluj) that "Acta comparationis litterarum universarum" had no real impact upon the development of comparative literature. The French model of comparative reasoning ruled the cultural climate of East-Europe through the 20<sup>th</sup> century (when the communist power did not reject comparatism altogether during the fifties and the sixties), empowering the very imperialist perspective that Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz' multilinguism had tried to break.

We should remember that, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Romanian

studies could relate to previous comparative attempts made by B. P. Hasdeu and Lazăr Șăineanu in studies on folklore, in Titu Maiorescu's studies of aesthetics or in C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea's sociological analyses, but mostly in the programmatic effort of Lomnitz to derive comparative literature from Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur*. While Hasdeu, Maiorescu or Gherea are preoccupied, first of all, to establish Romanian specifics inside the cultural and the literary realm, in order to establish a national literature, Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz moves towards world literature when he founds, in 1877, „Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum”, conventionally considered to be the first journal of comparative literature (Voia). The journal is neither the result, nor the example of a “national” tradition (Romanian, Hungarian etc.), since its project is plurilinguistic to begin with, not to mention transnational. “Acta comparationis” initially has a threefold target: a reevaluation of literary history, unjustly seen as a “servant” to philology and history, a reevaluation of translation as an art and, finally, a constant and careful support of multilinguism.

Sometimes, in Romanian literature and culture, “the national argument” is used as a claim to universality and one should not disregard this obsession for universality. When coming from a marginal culture, one cannot be blamed for revering foreign models that seem to have universal value, and Goethe is perfectly aware of this fact when he considers “the need for an intercourse with great predecessors” to be “a sure sign of a higher talent”. However desirable, the same models can have a “crushing weight” (Damrosch 9), so there is no wonder that theories of value related to the national factor appear to counterbalance this weight. Even in Goethe's sense of *Weltliteratur* and of a “supernational literature”, a certain dream of an all-encompassing universality is visible. In the Romanian literary studies of the sixties surges a theory that serves nationalist ideology, saying that a certain creator is “so Romanian, that he becomes universal”. Especially Mihai Eminescu, still considered iconic for all kind of national ideologies, is named “the national and universal poet”, his work being taught as such in secondary school and high-school curricula of today.

A seminal proposition in favor of world literature in Romania comes as late as 1948, when Tudor Vianu – disciple of the aesthetics professor Karl Gross of Tübingen – introduces a course of comparative literature at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Bucharest, later to become a first volume of comparative studies (1960, reprinted, revised and completed in 1963). When arguing that world

literature should be studied as an academic subject, Vianu is in fact promoting the very method of comparative literature. He understands world literature within the so-called “theory of peaks”. Paying tribute to the super evaluation of the aesthetic and the literarity, Vianu’s concept of world literature will direct comparative study towards a study of the Great Books and the literary canon, while at the same time keeping the task of explaining the life and history of human societies as a result of operations of generalization and universalization starting from this study of the literary canon.

Less explored in Romanian comparative studies is the concept of “world literature” as a “mode of circulation and of reading” (Damrosch 5). With its dependence on translation studies (quite disregarded in Romanian theoretical studies, with a few notable exceptions – Paul Cornea, Gelu Ionescu, Sorin Mărculescu, etc.), this concept of world literature projects a phenomenology of literature, rather than an ontology of literature, since works of art manifest themselves differently in their generative space and outside it. This last concept of world literature goes against the “present-ism” that “erases the past, as a serious factor, leaving at best a few nostalgic postmodern references, the historical equivalent of the local color” (Damrosch 17). To this, one can add the obvious refusal of localism that presupposes that untranslatable content is completely opaque to the foreign public. This understanding of world literature dismantles the nation-based literary system, or rather opens it to a dynamic view of the alterations of the work of literature in a heterogeneous reception.

### *The impossible challenge of dismantling disciplinarity*

Maybe the most difficult challenge of intermedial practice within digital studies is the possible re-writing of traditional disciplines and objects of study in an intermedial fashion, in order to shed light on their ability to overflow their domain of predilection and to flood new fields, giving birth to new practices and methods. It is my contention that disciplinary discourses (such as the discourses involved in the study of national literatures) can be given conventional medial status. I find the concept of “remediation” particularly useful here, even if it was designed (Bolter and Grusin) to refer to media, and not to disciplinary approaches.

Cultural studies (including the literary domain) are a hybrid field of scholarship emerging from critical humanities and social sciences theories. As such,

due to remediation, traditional disciplines move towards different places within a system of disciplines as soon as the need for new disciplines (or “indisciplines”) emerges, much in the way Friedrich Kittler (cited in Schröter 38) believes new media force the media system to a new distribution. This way, “old” media rather coexist with the “new” ones, than are replaced by them. Following this train of thought, we can relate to “old disciplines” becoming defining “traces” (in the Derridean sense of the term) in the disciplinary language of “new disciplines”. Cases of intertextuality or interdisciplinarity are, in this sense, former manifestations of intermedial junctures, but they have not attempted to dismantle the nation-based literary field as world literature does in its dynamic view of a generator of circulation between cultures. Intermediality acts as a reorganizer inside the system of disciplines devoted to literary studies and one of its main actions of remediation is the advance of comparative reading from a position related to national literatures studies towards a position related to world literature studies.

In my teaching practice of comparative literature since 1998, I have heard students (entirely dedicated to their work and hoping for a cultural and social role for their subject of study) expressing doubts on the extent of the social impact of their studies, both for their own future and for the change they might have been able to make in a given field. Just recently, a student approached me asking for possible explanations of the fact that she felt faculty years and the study of comparative literature and of other literary fields were “building a bubble” around her, both protecting and debilitating her from/ to the “real world”. Although anecdotic, I find this situation to be the very reason why an intermedial approach is crucial to the study of world literature, even if it means sacrificing the literary field to a larger frame of media studies or of comparative cultural studies (Tötösy de Zepetnek). It could aim to shift attention from different objects (literary works, authors, tradition or contemporaneity) or different media (words, visual or other type of images) to the very connection of those objects or media to some idea of cultural change.

Integrating literature studies within media and cultural studies would give recognition to one of the things that readers have always known: that literature formats behaviors and sets markers of understanding and interpretation in the inform space of reality. Seeing the idea of literature as a “social system” and literary activities as “acting roles” (Schmidt 230) turns the study of literature into a rich field for media studies and into an empirical enterprise in search of new

methodology. The study of literature as an alternative praxis, with aesthetic and pragmatic value, would help integrate the aesthetic view within a more comprehensive frame. The main objection to sacrificing the specific aesthetics of literature can be met within media studies, where specific forms and materialities of different media receive specific semiotic attention. An intermedial approach to both fiction and non-fiction literature could find ways of inscribing both types of literature within the literary system, since Western theoretical solutions for non-fiction literature have not been adopted in Romanian studies. This way, intermediality can create coordination between terms from the aesthetic frame of value-judgment with terms from the ethical frame of value-judgment, in a way that would give non-fiction and fiction literature equal chances.

The main intermedial challenge addressed to humanities today is, however, one that seems ontological in nature. Just as one needs to speak of a new type of digital being, replacing more and more the good old human being, world literature scholars need to define and assess works and phenomena that no longer belong to literature per se, whether fiction or non-fiction. Inside Romanian literary studies, hostility from contemporary literary criticism and theory towards intermediality, critics' resistance to the use of virtual technology are primarily due to the addiction of the written culture to the phenomenon of sign disappearance. The cherished utopia of digital technologies seems to be, from this point of view, the perfect transparency of the medium. However, to the written culture and to the literary tradition this is a sign of the disciplinary apocalypse. Signs are regarded, in the analogue culture of the written word, as the very substance of all reality. To be able to recognize their contribution to the construction of reality, signs should be as visible as possible and by all means non-transparent. In a traditionally literary world, a way of communication based on a transparent medium deprives the user of his critical faculties, resulting in semiotic blindness.

We must admit that the principle of causality, that constitutes the very law of close reading, along with inductive reasoning, is attacked and discarded by the idea that "with enough data, the numbers speak for themselves" (Anderson), in such a convincing manner that individual errors do not change the big picture. The hermeneutic devotion to causality is ignored in favor of the almighty search for correlation (i.e. reading and family behavior, lifestyle and medicine, school and poverty, etc.). While some can vilify this data-driven type of research as deriving from economical theories of selling and retail, this stress on correlation relieves the

pressure of identification, an interpretive pressure that can take many forms: the form of overinterpretation, of serving specific causes such as “the national cause”, of serving ideologies or ready-made conclusions.

One of the most important advantages to be taken into account, before too hastily discarding correlative reading as positivism revived, is the fact that cultural analytics is predictive. This means that a sociological victory is gained with every well-conducted cultural analysis, which explains why digital humanities and quantitative analysis are, above all, intermedial praxes. Seeing prediction outside implications of manipulation and other such tropes of a suspicious ethos could help create more positive and informed cultural entities. The aim of gathering and interpreting big data is not only to question existing theories and systems, but to predict future behaviors, whether literary, cultural, social, economical or political – and this should be reason enough for the intermedial humanist of the future to want to be a part of it.

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