

## **Intermediality and Cultural Assessment: Digital Flows in the Global Age, A Review of *Digital Humanities and the Study of Intermediality in Comparative Cultural Studies*, edited by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. Purdue Scholarly Publishing Services, 2013, 375 pp.**

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### **Abstract**

A review of *Digital Humanities and the Study of Intermediality in Comparative Cultural Studies*, edited by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. Purdue Scholarly Publishing Services, 2013, 375 pp.

First, it must be acknowledged that *Digital Humanities and the Study of Intermediality in Comparative Cultural Studies* is a rather comprehensive volume containing numerous and relevant contributions on the still emergent field of intermedial studies, considering its 375 pages, 28 articles, plus an introduction. Additionally, the book offers a “Bibliography for Work in Intermediality and Digital Humanities,” which is fully complete, and useful, and an “Index” (371-375). The articles assembled, as noted in the introduction, were previously published in the online quarterly *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>.

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In the introduction, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, the editor, presents the volume by asserting how intermediality reshapes the encounters of different scholarship fields – namely literature, philosophy, art, sociology, and pedagogy – amidst the larger umbrella of digital humanities. By documenting some of these fruitful encounters, the volume allows for a fresh look into the field’s 21st-century agenda, namely by addressing the role of new media in fostering new cultural practices and social endeavors. This book aims to bridge the gap, at least to some extent, between mediated societies and the rest of the world, inasmuch as it tackles the different kinds of inequalities that make for our globalized world. Although the volume presents itself as a comprehensive guide towards intermedial studies, its organization reflects this aim poorly. Articles are simply displayed in sequence, without potentially helpful referents to any broader sections or thematic areas. Furthermore, the presented sequence does not support a proper delimitation of the articles for fields of study. Therefore, for the sake of legibility, I have chosen to group the contributions according to main focus and type of approach adopted.

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### **Literature and philosophy**

These articles depart from different genres, or address literature/discourse in their wholeness. Some are mainly theoretical, whether tracing the pathway that led from hermeneutics to media culture studies (Siegfried J. Schmidt), engaging in the application of the concepts of mediality and intermediality to the field of literature (Werner Wolf) or, encompassing different possible articulations between discourse and intermediality (Jens Schröter). On the other hand, other contributions focus on more specific phenomena, such as renowned literary authors like Cummings and Mayakovsky (Svetlana Nikitina), or the comics genre (Antonio J. Gil González; Brian Mitchell Peters). Both poetry and comics are understood as manifestations of intermediality, and their present relevance and future developments depend on that assumption. In the field of philosophy, in *Intermediality and Aesthetic Theory in Shklovsky’s and Adorno’s Thought*, Oleg Gelikman picks up the contribution of the two philosophers to aesthetic theory, and, at the same time, argues that that same theory has become an endeavor of today, within which intermedial works must be taken into

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consideration.

## Translation

In terms of translation studies, intermediality and mediation account for a revision of traditional concepts on the grounds of world literature and the cross-disciplinary dynamics it originates. The book's argument entails viewing translation as a platform for interaction of narratives, texts, images and symbols (Erin Schlumpf). Furthermore, the necessary revision is restated when comparing human vs. machine translation, since the results corroborate different intermedial processes with distinctive communicate outcomes (Harry J. Huang). In this way, one becomes resilient towards the traditional contrast between a good and bad translation, considering that in the domain of intermedial practice, what is yet to be faced (described and analyzed) are the different communicative layers, frequently overlapping, within translation.

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## Pedagogy

"Intermedial pedagogy" gets its way by pursuing one of two choices: by challenging traditional pedagogical methodology, which implies, for instance, that a widespread range of digital tools be used in direct response to our multicultural world (Kris Rutten and Ronald Soetaert), or by introducing intermedial genres as objects of study. One such genre is the graphic novel, which can help make students aware that cultural literacy nowadays is mainly a question of being able to identify intermediality (Geert Vandermeersche and Ronald Soetaert). In her article, "Digital Humanities in Developed and Emerging Markets", Verena Laschinger summarizes one side of the question, simply by emphasizing the central role of digital humanities in creating a mass of critical thinking in emerging markets like Turkey.

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## Arts

Regarding the arts, the articles, once again, differ in their fields of inquiry: film, drama, music, architecture and sculpture are contemplated. Film studies can benefit from looking at literature as a means for retextualization drawing on the combination of different media (Ipshita Chanda). In fact, the different layers of reality and fictionality arisen by retextualization allow for new intermedial interactions between film and literature. Here Shakespeare can be called on, as, for instance different depictions of Macbeth by three Asian film directors can offer insight into the intercultural dimension of intermediality, on the basis of dominant signifiers, such as political power and struggle for the land (I-Chun Wang). From Shakespeare to French rap, intermediality is consistently used to address multicultural awareness, which is entrenched in different historical narratives (Isabelle Marc Martínez). To a certain extent, the use of historical arguments within multicultural approaches can become a way of engaging in a common narrative.

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Focusing on the power of architecture projects to change urban space, the book acknowledges that public space is prone to community interventions, namely street theatres and photomontages that mostly aim to revisit the city as "polis" (Virgilio Tortosa Garrigós). The work of Eduardo Serra is also revisited on the basis of a new kind of interaction between the context of production and that of the reception of the artwork. Thus the media can, at the same time, facilitate sensorial experiences and meaning assessments (Rocío von Jungenfeld).

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## Digital projects

There are several digital projects presented and reviewed throughout the book. Asunción López-Varela Azcárate and Serge Bouchardon discuss *Loss of Grasp*, a digital project by the same Serge Bouchardon and Vincent Volckaert. The authors of the article are able to show how far we have come from a Cartesian understanding of private isolated experience, apart from any kind of external influence, to its communal understanding, according to which the subject, by mirroring himself/herself on the surrounding objects, is ready to be "experienced." The mirroring effect can lead us to the ontological distinction between electronic image and electronic being. Nevertheless, what is yet to be sorted out is the ambiguous condition of electronic "realis" caught up between human scale and electronic possibilities (Michał Ostrowicki). Still in the domain of electronic possibilities, video games can be seen as new media to "build worlds," in the sense that they endorse the construction of meaning and exercise of creativity (Jeroen Bourgonjon). As a matter of fact, dealing with works/projects which involve different media — image, text, audio — implies a process of revising

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boundaries across material structures and agency categories (Maya Zalbidea Paniagua). Paul Benzon offers a fresh look into e-mail experience by proposing that advance-fee fraud is a kind of epistolary digital narrative that tries to deceive the addressee by engagement in a fictional world of related events. This intermedial connection between fraud and literature accounts for the unsettling instability of digital mediation itself. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, the volume's editor, presents a comparative survey on daily intake of media with advanced undergraduate students enrolled in media and communication studies at Northeastern University and with advanced undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Halle-Wittenberg. The results showed opposition to cultural participation in media intake, with the two groups displaying similar media cultural participation and practices.

## Practices of intermediality

Along with digital projects, some of the book's articles rely on different possibilities of intermedial practice. Within this field of inquiry, different processes of dialogue, hybridization, and cultural translation are explored, yet never fail to recognize that communication itself entails obstacles, barriers, and intransigencies (Cristina Peñamarín). Advertising in cable cartoon programming can show that a significant number of advertisements rely on racial, ethnic, and gender values that can best be subsumed in the favoring of white boys relative to girls, and to minority children in general (Debra L. Merskin). Visual culture's impact can also be analyzed in terms of national configuration. The rise of a burgeoning visual culture, in private and public spaces, can set forth an anti-colonial movement (Kedar Vishwanathan). Moreover, media can still be used as strategy and instrument for public diplomacy. In this context, one is able to identify a history of destruction of monuments played out in the landscape of media by the U.S. government (Reinhold Viehoff). On the other hand, Rebecca J. Romsdahl discusses the effect of the internet and the World Wide Web on political public participation, and proposes that e-participation in policy-making could revitalize the dynamics between citizens and government by increasing citizen participation significantly.

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In the whole, this is a useful volume for those interested in conceptualizing the aesthetics of our global world, one in which different mediums, media and mediatization converge in the reinvention of communication probes. In terms of Digital Humanities, this eclecticism paves the way for interdisciplinary debate over concepts, methodologies, and outcomes, expanding the limits of the digital and, at the same time, reframing the contribution of different materialities within it. Intermediality is the new face of postmodern culture, a direct reflex of the mobility and transition that characterizes our encounters within and across cultures. Additionally, by revising the boundaries between cultural studies and digital humanities, the book can easily be read in dialogue with other recent contributions, such as *Interdisciplining Digital Humanities: Boundary Work in an Emerging Field* [Klein 2015].

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## Works Cited

**Klein 2015** Klein, Julie Thompson. *Interdisciplining Digital Humanities: Boundary Work in an Emerging Field*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2015.



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