



LA LITTERATURE ET LE NUMERIQUE / DIGITAL LITERATURES

BOOK - MATERIAL - TEXT

In recent times, the literary text is not only represented in the medium we are all used to: the book. Instead, we face a development that detaches texts from a physical surface and presents them in virtual form: on ebook readers – which at least outwardly suggest a similarity to the old physical object – or even online. This section wants to explore the literary text as a material as well as a virtual object. It therefore refers to the first set of questions raised by the congress organisers: „Is Comparative Literature just another Comparative Science among others?“, focussing itself on the approach to a concept of literature as can be defined in the discussion between scholars of Comparative Literature and researchers in the fields of book science, neuropsychology (enquiring the reading process), media science and history of art. Possible questions are: How does the medial change affect the process of reading? How does it affect the production and the commercialization of texts? Does it enhance or question the fictionality of the literary text? Will the book from the primary source of well-grounded information more and more turn into an art object worth collecting? Furthermore, the question arises if, in the light of the recently proposed "material turn" in cultural analysis, well-established concepts of the nature of literary texts have to be reconsidered.

The section will be organized around four keynote presentations (mentioned in step 3); each of which is opening one of the four seminar sessions. Further participants are welcome and will be able to add short presentations of about 10 min. to the discussion. The subjects of short presentations should correspond with the keynotes.

COMPARABLE MATERIALITIES

Our group section investigates the comparative approach for inquiries into the materiality of texts. Texts that draw attention to their surface, to the tactility of language or the medium of inscription, offer a fruitful ground for comparative exploration – comparison with other, historical literary experiments, for example, or with the visual arts and/or design. In the case of textual materiality, there is an indexical relation to the ‘material’ aspect of the everyday world, and an indexical relation to the physical presence of the ‘authentic’ author, both in print and in new-media literature. How do these indexical relations offer an analytical frame to study the dynamic between digital and paper-based literatures of the last two decades?

COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO DIGITAL LITERATURE

The focus of Comparative Literature has shifted time and again in recent decades, not the least because of the growing importance of digital culture. Narrative, poetry, and drama have been influenced by this development in a wide variety of ways. Even the most traditional literature is being created, stored, and published differently than before, and whole new forms of expression have emerged, such as hypertext literature, digital poetry, and computer games. Some of these developments have been very subtle, while others are so radical that the very term literature might not even be applicable any more. Regardless of their impact on Comparative Literature as a whole, the many facets of literature in the digital age have become central issues in current research. The proposed seminar aims at reflecting this trend within AILC/ICLA by extending the 2013 World Congress topics to meet the challenges of the digital age. Possible lines of inquiry include, but are not limited, to:

- Methodologies of comparison are implicitly at the center of all research concerning literature in the digital age, as the study of ‘new media’ automatically involves comparing traditional and digital forms of expression, distribution and storage. Are established comparatist methodologies suitable for the variety of questions encountered in digital art forms? Do our scholarly tools need modification, or can they be applied to any subject matter?
- Reassessing modes of comparison inevitably leads to a need for new theories, the development of which is an integral part of studies in digital forms of literature. As new theories are usually derived from existing theories developed with regard to other phenomena, they lend themselves to comparative studies of theory-building and the history of science. Are there genuinely comparatist ways of categorizing and theorizing, especially when confronted with new paradigms?
- Comparative analyses of digital literature are another pertinent field of study. The various forms of digital literature have produced new modes of reading and writing, which not must not only be compared to traditional models, but are inherently comparative as they regularly take place within e-communities which are both trans-



national and trans-medial. For this reason, transfer processes have a different quality with digital media, as is especially apparent with adaptation and translation.

- Adaptation processes that cross the analogue-digital-divide differ in many respects from those taking place between two analogue media or within one, necessitating the need to revise concepts of inter-textuality. Especially with transmedia storytelling becoming a dominant institution in popular culture, it is inevitable to take into account changed concepts of authorship, new modes of storytelling, and relations between texts and authors that can no longer be described as adaptation or interpretation.

- Translations of digital culture are equally challenging, especially as the traditional modes — linguistic and cultural translation — are only part of a greater context. Translating a text into digital code or adapting this code for different hardware and software introduces unprecedented complexities.

- Digital libraries are increasingly proliferating around the world, enabling trans-cultural reading to an unprecedented extent. It is necessary to study how readers make use of the enormous number of digital literary works in these libraries, which impact they have on the education system and how software can facilitate reading collaboratively across different countries and cultures.

- Literature in the digital age is, more than before, embedded in discourses apart from philology. To fully grasp contemporary developments, especially economic, ludic, and didactic discourses are of considerable importance, influencing the possibilities and actualities of media use. These factors intersect in a number of areas, most notably the parameters of teaching literature in the digital age.

- As digital literature is an existing and even burgeoning phenomenon, its modes of distribution, discussion, and archival (digital libraries, archives, and reviews) can be studied while they are evolving. This opens up a whole range of research inquiries on all levels, from PhD-theses to major international projects, which advance so quickly that mapping out these developments becomes a challenge in its own right that has to be addressed by international meetings of scholars in the field.

The proposed seminar will be organized by the AILC/ICLA Research Committee on Comparative Literature In The Digital Age / Littérature Comparée À L'âge Du Numérique (CLDA/LCAN) in order to present and discuss its members' recent research. Since its inception in 2006, CLDA/LCAN has facilitated the exchange of ideas and concepts in this quickly evolving field of research on an international level. The proposed seminar is a continuation and extension of meetings held at the AILC/ICLA World Congresses at Rio de Janeiro and Seoul, as well as meetings at Madrid, Bremen and Tel-Aviv. The organizers explicitly welcome talks by non-members of the Research Committee.