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DEPARTMENT OF ROMANIAN LITERATURE AND LITERARY THEORY

DOCTORAL THESIS

A VISUAL RHETORIC. SOURCES OF INTERMEDIALITY AND THE VISUAL DESIGN OF WORDS

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Introduction and Methodology

Key-words: Intermedia, Intermedial Phenomenon, Intermediality, Transmediality, Mediation, Remediation, *ekphrasis*, *ars characteristica*, *ut pictura* poesis, Literary Description, Fusion, Hybridization.

Abstract

Under the topical lens of the new media theory, *ekphrasis* becomes an intermedial phenomenon. The present undertaking puts forward an approach of the new terminology introduced by the intermediality discourses, with the direct aims of identifying and selecting a feasible programme for a new type of relationship between the visual and the verbal regimes, and of framing a series of premises intended to re-evaluate the singularity of literary description of a work of art in an instance of postmodern prose.

Summary

Ekphrasis is first and foremost a praxis. A praxis of naming, of attributing meaning, of explaining and interpreting the world manifested through the objects that we inaugurated by way of the creative force we have been gifted with. It is at the same time a praxis of remembering, of extracting from memory the object-images that have received in time a specific personal value. It is a time-honoured exercise of moulding through words of *something* that has previously been rendered through a different sign system. Since time immemorial, we manifested the desire to accumulate "more" meaning and "more" knowledge of the world we live in, and consequently to shape the materiality of this world in other objects that need in turn to be invested with a novel significance. This is the very reason why *ekphrasis* is also a symptom for our strong need to apprehend, to redesign messages from within a system and transfer them into another, where they are

metamorphosed under the aegis of a particular dynamics. Throughout time we have adopted this means of exteriorizing our thoughts (ek-phrasein), focusing on the object and following its evolution into an artefact. We have oriented our gaze upwards, into the universe, a source of life and a generator of all phenomena experienced on Earth. In its essence, *ekphrasis* is a praxis of creation (rendered at first through speech), which leads, as we intend to validate in the present research, to new meaning configurations, starting from the image of an object.

These are a few of the grounds we have established as a frame for the examination of the ancient rhetoric notion, which is to be analysed herein by way of the new paradigms of intermediality. This summary is intended as a brief presentation accompanied by some considerations on the methodology, all devised as an overall perspective of the present paper. The first part takes the form of a transmedial reading, where *transmedial* designates: „ […] the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic, or discourse across a variety of different media."[1] Under the aegis of *medium* we validate both, in a broader context, the technical media of the book, the art reproduction, the documentary film by way of which we have selected out information, and the cultural media, the institutions, movements and ideological trends that have been involved in transforming the visual-verbal dynamics, in a particular timeframe. Once recovered through the transmedial passage, the aspects related to the crossing of the artistic media borders will converge to define the new intermediality. Consequently, the motifs and treatments selected to complete the chapter *Ut Fluxus Intermedia* are concerned with the assimilation of the Dada, Futurist and Surrealist influences within the composite ideological frame of the Fluxus movement (in the 60s and 70s), the generating force behind our proto-intermedial instance called: *intermedia*.

Further along the way, we have tried to engage with a brief selection of the elements that have configured the spiritual and cultural pre-history of the Fluxus artists, and which have led to the genesis of the *intermedia* montage – an intricate fusion of new artistic forms (Fluxus objects, visual novels, poesia visiva, &c.) with new art forms (Science art, Conceptual art, Mail art &c.). The metaphor of the *flux* that codifies herein a mixture and combination of composite elements is essential in this context, considering its concrete

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[1] Irina Rajewski, "Intermediality, Intertextuality and Remediation. A Literary Perspective on Intermediality" (pp. 43-64), in *Intermédialités*, no. 6, 2005, p. 46

tendencies of *eluding the limits between the media* involved. These particular tendencies, illustrated through a series of examples, constitute the general pattern of the elements subtracted to conceptualize a strategy of defining intermediality. We intend to select from the discourse of the avant-gardes, which influenced the Fluxus ideology, mainly the elements of the arts in conjunction that had outgrown imitation at the time as: the orphic qualities postulated by Guillaume Apollinaire, the mixing of the technical media in the new art objects and the transcending of the museum space followed by the return of the artist among the ordinary media, now constituting all-purpose ploys for creation. Futurism will provide us with elements that were directly borrowed by the movement in the 60s and will display new dynamics of the simultaneous media and a reutilization of the *destruction of syntax*, previously hypothesized by F. T. Marinetti, through the inter-changing relations of man multiplied by machine. This too, as we shall observe, will display an aesthetic of the inter-media and of the crossing of borders between visual and verbal arts. Generally, the chapter focuses on the play of influence as illustrated by the Fluxus ideology and the word-image combinations, invested in this case with a particular energy at the media juncture.

The second chapter of the first part will firstly map a few aspects of the medium as currently held in the field of communication. From a general point of view to a particular one, the genealogy of the concept is intended as a highlighting of its hybrid features. The starting point is represented by Marshall McLuhan and his distinction between *medium-as-message* and *medium-as-channel*. Our intention is to emphasize the conceptual mutations that have led to overlappings between the technical and the semiotic media. *The medium is the message*, as we shall attempt to indicate, constitutes the grounds for the theories on intermediality.

In succession, we plan to illustrate a few occurrences extracted from the theories of Communication that exemplify, in our opinion, the interactivity of the media on the background of the new technologies. At this point, the historical process defined by *media convergence* will receive a technical treatment and will call attention to the mutations within the media during their metamorphosis from monomedial to plurimedial, multimedial and intermedial. At the same time, we will discuss issues of hybridization and fusion and several phenomena that support the direct involvement of the social sphere in the modifying the structure of the medium. *The Medium between the Media* will attempt to formulate a

definition of the medium in the context on intermediality. Here, it will converge towards its version involved in the artistic production and within the *inter* space, where it retrieves a new formula, considered difficult to pinpoint by the theorists. The process of mediation contributes directly by founding relations between the anachronistic instances of poetic signification. The last instance of the medium resides in this research at the level of literature and other arts, a level where the essential facets will be its spatial-temporal extensions, the variety of codes used and the cultural role gained in time.

At the moment when *intermediality* will enter the scene, it should already have acquired some of the traits extracted from the Fluxus and the intermedia *formulae*, and from the modifications operated within the medium during the period of technology insurgence, the fusion of its technical and semiotic traits that have defined its fundamental unity throughout the past twenty five years. *Post* and *Inter at Play* comes to complete the features provided by the theories of the medium with the same transmedial reading that in this case is oriented towards the conceptual *influences* injected by Postmodernism. It is here that we shall attempt to underline the *inter* coalitions evolving simultaneously with the first efforts of structuring intermediality. The signature themes chosen by the cinema, the literature and the other arts are trying to globally intercept the image of the *new postmodern character*, while marking the differences rather than the similarities. Any type of border is meant to be crossed, disassembled and reassembled again to generate the particular space of the *inter zones* as discussed by Linda Hutcheon.

The next *inter* blueprint that we plan to focus on is taken from the interdisciplinary structures promoted throughout the 60s until the 90s. From the lexicon of these disciplinary fusions, there emerged within the intermediality systems the prefixed forms of: *mono*, *multi, trans, pluri* accompanied by the general criticism against an unavoidable dilettantism. Intermediality *per se* shall materialise on the background of these *inter tableaux* engendered by *Postmodernism and Interdisciplinarity.* From this moment on, adopting the metaphor of the Newtonian light spectrum, we shall try to visualize at first a generic intermediality, while debating several theories assembled around it from different fields, making no claim whatsoever to exhaust these approaches within the economy of the present research. In the light of this diagram, we will attempt to illuminate the measureable stance of a literary intermediality with a direct focus on *ekphrasis*.

Our definition on *intermediality* will follow strictly a few of the theories, covering only the German, Canadian and Scandinavian influences in the field. At the start of the 90s, when the concept made its way from the comparative literature interdiscipline in Germany, most of the theoretical approaches were written and disseminated in German. In the past twenty years, the majority of these theories have been absorbed and completed, the concept acquired a global bearing and the most important undertakings, belonging to Jürgen Muller, Werner Wolf, Irina Rajewski, Lars Elleström and others have been translated or written in English and published internationally. The Canadian enquiry into the term is illustrated by Eric Méchoulan who solidifies a new trans-cultural quintessence to a notion that is still a work in progress. Intermediality shall also be approached through the resources of modes and modalities injected by the visual grammar of Gunther Kress și Theo van Leeuven.

We shall not endeavor to conclude this *parte prima* of the present research without a brief comparative definition of several terms deployed by the theories at work, and a discussion regarding the concept of *remediation* introduced by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, a concept that will contribute to our argument leading to establishing of a self-sufficient *intermedium* at the crossroads between the verbal and the visual. The chapter *From Intertext to Intersemiotic Transposition* is conceived as a critical and independent perspective on M. M. Bakhtin's concept of *dialogism* seen through the filter of the *intertextuality* and the gradations brought about by intersemiotic transpositions, as postulated by Claus Clüver. Our direct aim is to demonstrate that intermediality, in its focused instance of *ekphrasis*, which is probed within the present work, does borrow from the Bakhtinian hybridization, but is very difficult to incorporate in the intertextual structure, as claimed by Peter Wagner and others. Two distinct phrases will be presented at this point: primary intermedial fusion and secondary intermedial fusion referring to a set of ekphrastic instances that take the same artefact as a direct object, while appearing in temporal succession, one analysing the other. The first part shall present itself as a confluent structure that accumulates *inter*-relations in order to coagulate a logical definition of *ekphrasis* as an intermedial phenomenon.

The second part of the paper will take into consideration the „grand narrative" of media transfiguration and will attempt to follow the intermedial methodology of research as defined by Juha Herkman in *Intermediality as a Theory and Methodology*. Intermediality as

methodology implies an approach that does not focus on a singular instance of a single medium (here verbal/visual), however it does concentrate on the inter-relationships[2] between and among the media. Thus, at the moment when *ekphrasis* shall enter the stage, as a historical, cultural and literary concept, we will not approach it through a monomedial analysis – the verbal medium and the visual medium examined as separate entities, both investigated through the lens of representation and mimesis – rather we shall see it as a visual-verbal complex that fuses into a new medium. The whole investigation will be motivated by its coagulated new values and will attempt to probe a new approach. The verbal and visual media will therefore mutually define their identity and specificity. The fundamental premise of this new method states the necessity of examining a history of *mediamorphoses* that happened as *intermedial interactions* and that no longer allow for a monomedial treatment.

This second part is dedicated to *ekphrasis* and its starting point reflects on the praxis of *Progymnasmata,* a genesis that explored its evolution from the spoken to the written word. *Paideia* offers to anchor this exercise in the Greek *agora* where we shall identify a series of aspects related to spoken language and the artefacts surrounding the speechmaker at the time. The visible medium is treated as the object of reference for the exteriorization of thought.

Paragoni and *ut pictura poesis* shall probe the formation of the ekphrastic speech about art objects and the various relations between artists of words and artists of colors and other media. This chapter is presented as an interval that merges both visual and verbal instances at the same time, rendering a *tableau* that features Horatius as a unifier of the two media and Leonardo da Vinci with his *Paragone* and the superiority of painting. This particular chapter is also illustrated with examples leading to the moment when G. E. Lessing highlighted the technical intermedial differences basing his arguments on the selections of *ars characteristica.*

Describing Images in Contemporary Perspectives is not a complete and all-encompassing overview of the modern theories on ekphrasis. It briefly analyzes and

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[2] Vezi Juha Herkman, " Introduction. Intermediality as a Theory and Methodology" (pp. 10-28) în Juha Herkman, Taisto Hujanen și Paavo Oionen (Eds.), *Intermediality and Media Change*, Tampere, Tampere University Press, 2012, pp. 19-20

compares several definitions and efforts to centralize a poetics of ekphrasis. As we have mentioned on numerous occasions, the majority of the literature on the subject focuses on its lyrical aspects. Nevertheless, as we are not proposing here an analysis as such, the definitions highlighted shall illustrate the traits of *enargeia* which transfers in the new intermedial phenomenon the power of imagination, the potential of language to conjure the object (Murray Krieger, 1992) and other several approaches that anticipated, in our opinion, *ekphrasis as an intermedial phenomenon*.

The case study in three acts is in fact the stage on which we intend to bring forth a series of arguments, a series of premises converging to the conclusion that *ekphrasis* generates a new free-standing medium at the intersection between the verbal and the visual. We try again, resorting to the intermedial approach, to see Piero della Francesca's fresco – *The Legend of the True Cross* in Cappella Maggiore of San Francesco, Arezzo – in its continuity from the birth of a legend and a post-biblical account, through the various media of paintings, sculptures, bas-reliefs, its hybridization at the level of the technical media and the transformations suffered at the levels of verbal and visual semiosis, until the moment when it appears within the narrative body of *The English Patient*. The pages of this chapter will deliberate on issues of representation, history and reception of the legend, re-making of the image in the mixed-media of the Renaissance fresco, description and the hybrid media of the postmodern novel. The whole research is thus focused on the concept of intermediality perceived as: methodology, phenomenon and theory involving the new media, generated by the fields of the arts. Even though it has been seized by the arts, intermediality is nevertheless pertaining, according to Claus Clüver, to the theories of communication.

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