

Michele Rak

Borderline

Territories, gateways, prohibitions, censorship, passages
There are other kinds of literature in the media culture

1. **The silence of theory.** Since a few decades theory cautiously works on literature. In a new age also the writing re-thinks both the role it has in many cultures of the planet and its textual heritage in the information system we call *media culture*.
2. **Four reasons.** The silence of theory is associated with: (i) the birth of opposing images of literature in the planetary culture, (ii) the change of position undertook by literature into the imaginary and building of many societies, (iii) the transformation of its materials – subjects, objects, points of view, models, genres and (iv) the customs of its users – readers more and more distributed into specialized writings.
3. **Structures, processes and tendencies.** Many interdisciplinary research fields provide a growing quantity of data on the change involving all the cultures of the planet and the imaginary used in the European countries: mentality, tradition, textual hierarchy, identity and texts are subjects studied in different research fields. Through the outcome of their research, the rapid outline of new structures, models and trends in all cultures can be understood. The change also includes those cultures that have monuments, archives, books, libraries and schools which usually refer to their textual heritage and diachronic images of their history (*national literary tradition*).
4. **Other hypotheses on art and communication languages?** Through these data, other hypotheses on the type of scenarios needed to analyse and evaluate changes and tendencies can be made. This introduction is necessary to analyse the art and communication languages, literature included.
5. **Borderline.** The hypothesis is: the production of literature should be analysed using some *borderline* and *multi-centred* points of view. Studies on the lives of authors, texts, literary languages, movements and traditions are crucial for a local tradition reconstruction. Their instruments are not always suitable to control the new art language dynamics. A different approach to these studies is required to better understand the change that includes also that particular art language we call *literature*.
6. **The work of literature.** Not only is literature dealing with social representation, mentality, custom and ideology, but also with the outline of individual and group identity. For this reason, literature is strongly linked to group dynamics despite their recurring attempt to control the textual heritage. This is an age in which any form of control is limited because of the increasing use of communication technology.
7. **Seven factors.** These changes are due to at least seven factors that have never been outlined before in the cultural history. (i) The information system reached a planetary dimension and (ii) it gave rise to a unique circulation process of texts that we call *media culture*. (iii) An exchange of works, texts, icons, and objects is evident among historically separated cultures and (iv) this

exchange also involves works of art and literary works. (v) Linguistic difference is less and less important in the use of semic material put into circulation by the media (objects, films, advertisement, manifestos, etc...) (vi) A strong interaction is evident between local traditions and their system of genres, languages and texts. (vii) The more marginal cultures are progressively involved by a growing dynamism.

8. **Less borderlines.** As tried in the Contemporary age (the first phase of the industrial society, ca 1790-1930), it is difficult to outline some borderlines between literary works and other types of work, both answering the same demand of representation by social groups. The already outlined borderlines now appear weaker and weaker, accordingly to the experts' point of view who once controlled the writing. The production of the media culture takes less into consideration the borderlines that divide different works, languages and traditions.
9. **Interference and creativity.** These changes cause (i) many homogenisation, interaction, levelling and stimulation processes, (ii) a growing heritage inter-relationship and interference, (iii) a decline in the use of texts, (iv) a great creativity, (v) in any case, an often misleading approach to local traditions, (vi) a passage of texts through channels whose influence, just ten years ago, was unthinkable (from television to Internet, from mobile phones to advertisement).
10. **Consequences.** The influence on literature, its system of models, genres, subjects and role have not been analysed yet. These consequences include either the use of textual heritage (tradition) or the promotion of new writing guidelines and users, or the image of literature as form of art.
11. **Toward the media culture.** The change is more evident in some countries than others. We look at this change from the top of the towers representing the European culture that gave rise to a great cultural heritage and represent a migration meeting point. From the top of them, other European cultural tendencies can be grasped while producing new identities and literary writings. Although reflecting different traditions, any culture has corresponding features: use of a common iconic material, exchange at a fast-growing speed, use of a unitary and worldwide culture that we call *media culture*.
12. **Territories, gateways, prohibitions, censorship, passages.** In order to study these passages, it is crucial to wriggle out of the theories and instruments that outline literary borderlines, introduce genre gateways, control exchanges, often introduce censorship against writers and texts, rarely approve literary work exchange between different cultures, genres and levels due to the literary society rules. This was a common custom in the Modern age undertaken to control any possible and necessary literary deviance.
13. **Closed cultures and schools.** Due to the cultural dynamism, studies on closed cultures (see what we call *classics* or *masterpieces* used for learning, as the Easter Island's *moai*) and closed schools (either religious, ideological or military orientated) have increased. This tendency has introduced a system of rules to control the use of literary texts (as censorship, index of forbidden books, etc...)
14. **The planet is open.** Other studies are needed to seize the opportunity of borderline passages, the fall of prohibitions and the contact among historically separated cultures. The research puts forward some hypotheses to better understand how the change process works and which outcome it will have in the

future, through a prevision including literature, customs, mentality and ideology. In the meantime the media culture includes any text that circulates on the planet, changing the writing by the use of technology.

15. **Less prohibitions.** Looking from a European cultural point of view into the information system, it is more and more difficult to include some traditional prohibitions belonging to the literary society into the basic instruments needed to read literature. Literature is one of the subject that experts traditionally do not like to deal with. To understand the current change, no school of criticism is able to study, point out, elaborate such a various system of data and work on it. Some research centres elaborated surveys and studies on the many elements that feature this change. Some ways seem more suitable than others to explain events and processes, while considering the relationship between social groups and works of art as crucial. Literature is both a form of art and an instrument, and each social group uses it for different purposes.
16. **Not only literature.** Literature cannot be only analysed from a literary point of view. Literature was not produced to obtain some kaleidoscope effects dealing with subjects or languages, but as an instrument of which many critics would like to know nothing about. Now literature consists of different groups of texts produced by television, Internet, travels, the gift and fancy goods industry. These channels, activities and customs also produce story tale models and genres.
17. **From culture to literature.** The research aim, working on the more and more fragile gateways that should keep different fields separated, is to analyse the relationship between cultural dynamics (customs, mentality, imaginary) and literature (with its changeable genres). Some hypotheses permit to classify, analyse, and discuss the types of literary work which are part of that unstable field we keep on calling *literature*.
18. **Heads.** To describe these processes, we can use some current categories (as *classics*, *masterpieces*, *literary stories*, *artists*) or catalogues of writers, literary works (anthologies) and story tales (literary stories) outlined at the beginning of the Contemporary age. Traditions can effectively reconstruct a series of events and be used for primary education, but rarely can be used for the media culture, where works of art are changeable, come from different backgrounds and mix different languages.
19. **Fluxus.** We use the word fluxus, which belongs to various artistic tendencies, to indicate the semic current that involves any cultural field – from gift and fancy goods industry to theology – and that is produced by the media culture, its models and uses. The dynamic image of ‘flow’ is needed to point out how the surveys on literature should take into account the dynamics of media culture, as pointed out during the Futurism and studied by sociodynamics.
20. **Texts as pilots and regulators.** Texts work as group behaviour pilots and regulators, and as organizers of what we call *imaginary* in any open culture. At a different level, they work as regulators in some closed culture too.
21. **When and how.** The media culture altered time and ways of traditional cultural transformation processes. Any culture had to deal with the conflicts related to the circulation of news and the *image of reality* as produced by cultural models and literary works.
22. **Art languages.** The current attention given to art languages has an advantage and a disadvantage. (i) On one hand art languages point out tendencies, models and cultural dynamics. (ii) On the other hand they underline

the fast-growing change which takes place in the media culture. To state it clearly: it is the first time that all these elements take shape altogether into the history of culture.

23. **The crisis of literary society.** Unusual factors destabilized the customs in use for about two centuries in the industrial society and about five centuries in the literary society, which began when the printed book, the circulation of knowledge and the writer's autonomy took shape.
24. **Never before.** The change is due to the factors listed above, but its main feature has already been stated: these factors have never before been outlined in the history of culture. For this reason, a revision of instruments, scenarios, categories, genres, textual analyses and everything dealing with any kind of art language is required.
25. **To repeat.** (i) In a planetary information system (ii) the passage of works, texts, icons, objects among historically separated cultures has been promoted by translations, book fairs, journals, travels, and school needs of assimilating the texts prevailing in the community. (iii) The increase of exchange is strongly related to the increase of migration. (iv) A great many of works circulate as fragments and rewritings in media languages. (v) This also includes the literary works which are increasingly dealing with the change. (vi) A growing textual typology competes with literature: the layout of a European newspaper is in competition with many other literary texts. (vii) The importance of language in the use of semic material produced by media promotes textual models and an erratic reading in which images, titles and trends are crucial. (viii) The patient reader, who will look at the flow of texts floating in the planet as through a telescope in the space, will be able to see a great variety of materials (books, tv series, comics, etc...) and many rewritings: verse becomes advertisement and advertisement becomes verse, films become photography and photography becomes films. (ix) The strong interaction between different traditions, their genres, languages and texts has made weaker the literary heritage borderlines. (x) By their growing dynamism, objects are moved from marginal cultures, even though as copies or imitations - see the objects coming from Tibet to Europe - to main culture, leaving an empty space in the culture of origin that will be soon filled up by other objects coming from other cultures.
26. **Scenarios and strategies.** An analysis of literature can be made using flexible scenarios and keeping the cultural dynamics into account. The intercultural change involves any culture. This explains why other instruments are needed in order to analyse the continuous change in art languages, works and ways of restoring and preserving the textual heritage. Working on literature not only means analysing it from a historical point of view, but also working on an unstable group of texts, between languages and signs used continuously by social groups.
27. **Movement.** A part of the critics thinks of texts and traditions as lined-up images and objects used for mysterious and tourist worship, as the Easter Island' statues. The art language expert does not work on still monuments. He takes into account how any text and reading can change some traditional images. The semic material changes quickly. The knowledge of local tradition declines (only a few can now read the stories written on the cathedrals). Texts pass through different cultures, continents, translations, media and channels.
28. **What experts will do.** Studies on mediation (militant criticism), on the lives of authors and their relationships (history of criticism), on restoration of

texts (philology) are no longer sufficient. Other studies are needed on the relationship between literary works and customs, trends and fashion, reading and interpretation, groups of text and their circulation, political or religious texts and entertainment texts, literary works and genres, texts and models.

29. **From entertainment to freedom.** The highest level for an entertainment text is a form of freedom. If *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann is a text of freedom (in Italy, 1930), the spy stories released during the same year satisfied other ways of entertaining, which is a peculiar feature of literature.
30. **No more borderlines.** The information system promotes multimedia languages and in particular the use of images. The wide circulation of this kind of works, their audience and readers need other theories of literature and art, new instruments and subjects.

MICHELE RAK
Università di Siena
Dpt di Letterature moderne e scienze dei linguaggi
rak@unisi.it