

About the Situation of the Discipline of Comparative Literature and Neighboring Fields in the Humanities Today

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About the Situation of the Discipline of Comparative Literature and Neighboring Fields in the Humanities Today

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ABSTRACT

In the article, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek discusses the history of the discipline of comparative literature in the context of other fields in the humanities such as the history of literature, world literatures, cultural studies, comparative cultural studies, and digital humanities. Tötösy de Zepetnek argues that comparative literature as a discipline is experiencing a revival in some parts of the world outside of Europe and Anglophone scholarship and that this suggests a corrective measure regarding the historical Euro-US-American hegemony of the discipline. Tötösy de Zepetnek's principal argument is that the comparative and contextual approach practiced in interdisciplinarity, employing new media technology, and following tenets of comparative cultural studies could achieve the social relevance of the humanities today.

中文摘要

在《当今人文社科中比较文学及其邻近研究领域的处境》一文中，斯蒂芬·拖拖西教授讨论了人文社科中其他研究领域语境下的比较文学学科历史，比如文学史、世界文学、文化研究、比较文化研究及数字人文。他认为，比较文学作为一门学科，正在欧洲及英语世界外的国家地区兴起，而这也表明了对之前欧洲-美国中心主义的修正。其主要论点为，跨学科中所使用的比较和语境化方法借助新媒体技术，并同时遵照比较文化研究信条，则可以实现当今人文社科的社会相关性。

KEYWORDS

Comparative literature; cultural studies; comparative cultural studies; history of literature; world literatures; digital humanities

关键词

比较文学; 文化研究; 比较文化学; 文学史; 世界文学; 数字人文

1. Introduction

The perspective of comparison in scholarship has been (and continues to be) widely employed in various disciplines. Among several compelling lines of argumentation put forward of recent are, for example, by Marcel Detienne in his *Comparing the Incomparable*, George M. Fredrickson in his *The Comparative Imagination*, or as Richard A. Peterson states, “comparison is one of the most powerful tools used in intellectual inquiry, since an observation made repeatedly is given more credence than is a single observation” (257). At the same time, in and about the discipline of comparative literature, it remains a recurrent view that it is lacking definition, has no

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or only a partial framework of theory and/or methodology, and that for these reasons, the discipline remains with a history and presence of insecurity (see e.g., [Grabovszki](#)). These lacunae – acknowledged repeatedly in the discipline since its inception in the nineteenth century – are among others, a result of the discipline’s borrowing from other disciplines for the analysis of literature. Starting in the nineteenth century, comparative literature gained intellectual interest and institutional presence mostly in Europe and in the United States and in both regions, it is, since the 1990s, undergoing a diminishing presence because of the interest in and adoption of literary theory in departments of English and because of comparative literature’s Eurocentrism (see e.g., [Ahmed](#); [Gould](#); [Pireddu](#); [Tötösy de Zepetnek](#), *Comparative Literature*; [Tötösy de Zepetnek](#), “The New Humanities”; [Witt Frese](#); see also [Ascari](#); [Mignolo](#)). A further shortcoming of comparative literature remains its continued construction (theoretical and applied) based on national literatures at a time when the paradigm of the global has gained currency in many disciplines and approaches (with regard to recent discussions on this in English, see e.g., [Porter](#), “The Crisis”; [Saussy](#), “Interplanetary”, “The Dimensionality”; [Tötösy de Zepetnek](#), “The New Humanities”).

Haun [Saussy](#) makes the claim – with regard to the United States – that “Comparative Literature has, in a sense, won its battles. It has never been better received in the American university. . . . Our conclusions have become other people’s assumptions” (“Exquisite Cadavers” 3; see also [Finney](#); a corollary to the problematics in comparative literature and US-American Eurocentrism, [Saussy](#) writes “America” while referring only to the United States and this is hegemonial appropriation of a continent: contrary to established public discourse, this ought not to occur, at least in scholarly discourse: on the problem and practice of this appropriation; see e.g., [McClennen](#)). While Saussy’s analysis that comparative literature’s aims and scope have gained currency in literary study is well argued and a welcome positive view, what is missing in his assessment is attention to the discipline’s institutional constriction both in the United States and Europe. Saussy’s positive view of the new status quo represents a revision to such opinions as Susan Bassnett’s in her *Introduction to Comparative Literature* that the discipline is dead (3), Gayatri Chakravorty [Spivak](#)’s similar suggestion with the title of her book *Death of a Discipline* (i.e., comparative literature), or the negative prognosis in the entry “Comparative Literature” in the *Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* ([GMH](#)), etc. The two opposing views – that the idea of comparative literature “conquered” literary study and that the discipline is dead – refer to the United States and Europe and while both may be correct assessments depending on whether one considers the discipline’s intellectual content or its institutional status, they continue with a Euro-US-American-centric view.

What is remarkable – and this is paid scant attention to in Anglophone comparative literature or world literatures scholarship – is that both the concept of the discipline as well as its institutional presence are advancing in so-called peripheral languages and cultures including Iberian Spanish and Portuguese, Greek, etc., and this is the case also in Latin American languages, Chinese, and Indian languages, in Arabic or Farsi (e.g., a new journal was founded in 2010 – entitled *Comparative Literature Journal* – published by the Academy of Persian Language and Literature and several new departments of comparative literature were also inaugurated). Further, we submit that the advances of comparative literature in the “periphery” should not be viewed as “catching up” – that

is, the “period” view in literary history – similar to how, for example, modernity has first appeared in West Europe and then developed later in various parts of the world: current advances of comparative literature in “peripheral” regions are a result of the impact of globalization and thus a sophisticated construct with both traditional and new ideas and approaches, as well as immanent relevance (see e.g., [Krishnaswamy](#); see also [Caruth and Culler](#); [Dagnino](#); [Gould](#); [Wang](#), “Confronting Globalization”).

2. The discipline of comparative literature and the field of world literatures

I begin with my definition of comparative literature:

The discipline of Comparative Literature is in toto a method in the study of literature in at least two ways. First, Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and/or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, Comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types, etc. ... Comparative Literature has intrinsically a content and form, which facilitate the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary study of literature and it has a history that substantiated this content and form. Predicated on the borrowing of methods from other disciplines and on the application of the appropriated method to areas of study that single-language literary study more often than not tends to neglect, the discipline is difficult to define because thus it is fragmented and pluralistic. (Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Literature* 13)

Susan Stanford [Friedman](#) argues in *Why Not Compare?* that “comparison is an ever-expanding necessity in many fields, including literary studies, where the intensification of globalization has encouraged comparative analysis of literature and culture on a transnational, indeed, planetary scale” (753; see also [Dimock](#); [Radhakrishnan](#)). And this brings us back to Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur* that, among other factors, is about the relevance and importance of translation and against the national conception of literature: thus, a transnational and global enterprise (see also [Kuhiwczak and Littau](#); [Szabolcsi and Vajda](#)). While Goethe’s proposal for *Weltliteratur* did not gain presence as a structure in institutional settings (i.e., in university departments of world literatures), his notion remained and remains a standard concept in comparative literature as an intellectual concept and pedagogical approach. However, in practice, Goethe’s notion resulted in Eurocentrism and the nation approach. Similarly, in Hugó Meltzl de Lomnitz’s work and in his and Sámuel Brassai’s journal *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok* (1877–1878) (Papers in Comparative Literary History) and *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1878–1888) – while remaining important contributions to the discipline’s early years and similar to Goethe’s notion experiencing renewed interest today – the discipline remains with an essentialist European perspective (on Goethe see, e.g., [Birus](#); [Pizer](#); [Sturm-Trigonakis](#), *Comparative Cultural*, [Sturm-Trigonakis](#), “Comparative Cultural”, [Sturm-Trigonakis](#), *Global playing*; on Meltzl de Lomnitz, see e.g., [Berlina and Tötösy de Zepetnek](#); [Damrosch](#), “Hugo Meltzl”; [Fassel](#); [Marno](#); on the history of comparative literature in Africa, see [Ilo](#); in Arabic, see [Abdel-Messih](#); in Chinese, see [Wang and Liu](#); in French, see [Tomiche](#); in German, see [Lubrich](#); in Iberian Spanish and Portuguese, see [Vilarinho Picos and Abuín González](#); in Indian languages, see [Patil](#); in Italian, see [Pala](#); in Latin America, see [McClennen](#); in Russian,

see [Shaitanov](#); in Russian and Central and East Europe, see [Berlina and Tötösy de Zepetnek](#); in the United States, see [Gillespie](#)).

Perhaps, against the said shortfalls of comparative literature – that is, Eurocentrism, the loss of its locus of literary and culture theory, and its insistence on the nation-centric approach – the concept of world literature has gained renewed interest and since the 1980s but in particular since the 1990s, a good number of books and collected volumes have been published with the approach, albeit mostly in English (see e.g., [Aldridge](#); [Carroll](#); [Damrosch](#); [Damrosch, Melas, Buthelezi](#); [D’haen](#); [D’haen, Damrosch, Kadir](#); [D’haen, Domínguez, Thomsen Rosendahl](#); [Foster](#); [Gallagher](#); [Hynes-Berry and Miller](#); [Jullien](#); [Klitgard](#); [Lawall](#); [Moriarty](#); [Pizer](#); [Prendergast, Christopher](#); [Simonsen and Stougard-Nielsen](#); [Sturm-Trigonakis](#); [Thomsen Rosendahl](#); [Wang](#); in other Western languages see e.g., [Benvenuti and Ceserani](#); [Casanova](#); [Gossens](#); [Ivanov](#); [Juvan](#); [Lamping](#); [Lamping and Frieling](#); [Lamping and Zipfel](#); [Pradeau and Samoyault](#); [Sturm-Trigonakis](#); among the many articles on world literature, particularly interesting is [Jing Tsu’s](#) 2010 “Getting Ideas about World Literature in China”).

While courses in/on world literature(s) exist widely in the English-speaking world, as well as in Europe and Asia, few university departments or programs exist (on teaching world literatures, see e.g., [Foster](#); [Pizer](#)). In the United States and Canada, there is a limited development toward the establishing of departments and professorships specifically designated as “world literature” and it remains to be seen whether the concept will develop into degree granting departments, thus according it an institutional base. Of note is the recent founding of the Institute of World Literature at Harvard University (initiated and lead by David [Damrosch](#) under the designation of Peking University’s “World Literature Association”) with summer schools held in Beijing (2011), Istanbul (2012), Cambridge (2013), Hong Kong (2014), Lisboa (2015), Cambridge (2016), and Copenhagen (2017). While the undertaking is welcome and timely to further the concept and practice of world literature(s), a drawback of the summer schools is that participation is costly and thus few students and scholars from economically disadvantaged countries are able to attend. Of note is also that the Modern Language Association of America has been publishing a book series called *Approaches to Teaching World Literature* (to date with 100 volumes) and that in 2010, a new series of books has been started by the association under the designation *World Literature Reimagined* (to date with three volumes published). In the United States, departments or programs specifically in “world literature” –that is, not in conjunction with “comparative literature” of which there are several or with “English” or some other combination – include the University of California Long Beach, the University of California Santa Cruz, Case Western Reserve University, College of the Holy Cross, Creighton University, Duquesne University, the University of Houston, the University of Iowa, James Madison University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, North Carolina State University, the Ohio State University, Point Loma Nazarene University, in Canada the University of Ottawa and Simon Fraser University, in the United Kingdom the University of Sunderland, and in Australia the University of Queensland.

[Damrosch’s](#) definition of world literature is as follows: “World literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike” (*What Is* 5) and his concept of

world literature with regard to literary production, publication, and circulation is similar to the micro-system approach in the study of literature (as a system or systems) as proposed by the initiators of the approach, namely [Siegfried J. Schmidt](#) and Itamar Even-Zohar: importantly – although often not referred to by authors to other's work, similar as they are – these approaches are related to [Pierre Bourdieu's](#), Norman K. Denzin's, and Robert Estivals's works (see [Tötösy de Zepetnek](#), *Comparative Literature*, "Systemic Approaches;" see also [Gupta](#); [Sadowski](#); for a bibliography of work in the contextual and systemic approach see [Tötösy de Zepetnek](#), "Bibliography"; for a bibliography of books in comparative literature see, e.g., [Tötösy de Zepetnek](#), "Multilingual").

An alternative view of "world literature" is formulated by Saussy as follows:

the concept of world literature that consists chiefly of a canon, a body of works and their presence as models of literary quality in the minds of scholars and writers. But the phrase "world literature" is not used exclusively in so normative a sense. Another sense, increasingly prominent in recent years, makes "world literature" be an equivalent of global literary history, a history of relations and influences that far exceeds the national canons into which academic departments routinely squeeze and package literature. (It is not surprising that academic departments nationalize literature: departments are an invention of the nineteenth-century university, a supranational medieval institution re-chartered by the monoglot nations of the industrial era.) An obvious improvement on the anachronism and petty chauvinism of national canons, this global literary history remains under-valued so long as it leaves untouched by analysis the rival accounts of global history that occupy economists, historians and geographers. So, for example, the world-literature proposals of [Pascale Casanova](#) and Franco Moretti, despite their differences, assume a framework of international exchange deriving from Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory: a sudden spreading of European influence across the globe starting around 1500 and carrying with it, not just colonialism, disease and firearms, but also the novel. Extra-European populations have, in their accounts, the opportunity to respond to the European form, but it is left vague how much of a difference their own narrative traditions make outside their home areas or whether they were not perhaps in advance of the European form in various ways. By subjecting this research program, currently being carried out in dozens of university world-literature programs, to a blunt and slightly unfair description, I mean to evoke the perspective of other global literary histories taking as their center different languages, different genres, different literary practices and their diffusion from different centers A model of world literature that made room for the countless literary worlds would be relativistic, not deterministic. ("The Dimensionality" 291–93)

Similarly, Martin [Puchner](#) suggests that

world literature, or world creation literature, as I understand it, thrives on the relation between the two words of which this term is composed: world; and literature. It invites us to reconsider the dimension of reference, asking what world or worlds this literature refers to; the dimension of scale through which some type of totality is aimed at; and, by contrast, the decision to use the model as a way of making that totality manageable (347)

and [Marshall Brown](#) also suggests a relational concept: "world literature ... is writing that conveys the power and the conflicted nature of encounters with natural, or social, or metaphysical realms beyond our power to contain them" (362). Among others, these approaches are related to the thematic reading and study of literature (see e.g., [Bremond](#), [Landy](#), [Pavel](#); [Elkhadem](#); [Trousson](#)), an approach in comparative literature but one that has not taken hold in a widespread manner. While these and similar definitions of the concept world literature do not conflict with definitions of comparative literature, in world literature, focus is on how to read texts across the literatures of

the world (in translation) and on how to teach literature, thus it is a program of practice. While this approach is of course relevant for an inclusive perspective of the globalization of culture and literature, there are scholars who express reservations about the program because of the resulting competition between comparative literature and world literature (see e.g., Eoyang; Figueira; Mufti).

Of note is that in recent volumes on world literature and with regard to our discussion about cultural studies and comparative cultural studies below – Theo D’haen’s *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* (2012) and the volumes edited by Theo D’haen, David Damrosch, and Djelal Kadir, *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (2012), or Theo D’haen, César Domínguez, and Mads Thomsen Rosendahl, *World Literature: A Reader* (2012) – there is no reference to or discussion about cultural studies. This lacuna can also be observed with regard to books in comparative literature in which there are, as a rule, few if any references to cultural studies and, vice versa, in books in cultural studies, there are few if any references to comparative literature, thus indicating a divide in humanities scholarship. I note here also that – likely because the framework originates in Central Europe’s east, thus a “periphery” (see above) – the notion of the “interliterary” as developed by Dionýz Ľurišin in Czecho(Slovak) has not gained interest in comparative literature except in a few cases (see e.g., Domínguez; Gálik) despite the existence of the journal *Interlitteraria* (1995–) with the objective of promoting Ľurišin’s framework. Further, an ideological and political issue is the current discussion in the United States with regard to the designation of the field of “world literature” versus “world literatures” whereby the contention is that “world literature” remains Euro-US-American centered while the designation of “world literatures” suggests a more global and decentered understanding of and approach to the study and reading of literature (e.g., discussions at various panels at the 2013 *Annual Convention of the Modern Language Association of America*).

3. The field of cultural studies

Cultural studies is practiced as a hybrid field of scholarship, that is, not located in a specific and established discipline but grounded in critical humanities and social sciences theories which, instead of any unifying disciplinary theory and methodology of its own, embraces a broad range of theoretical approaches and methodologies (in this, cultural studies is similar to the discipline of comparative literature and the field of comparative cultural studies with the difference that while in comparative literature, an ideological orientation is not professed, in cultural studies and comparative cultural studies it is). In contrast to traditional disciplines, the strength of cultural studies resides precisely in its theoretical heterogeneity, richness, plurality, and the flexibility of its borders. It aims to reconfigure the boundaries of humanities and social sciences scholarship around new paradigms in theory and in application. Because of its diversity of methods, cultural studies can perhaps be best defined as a metadisciplinary idea across disciplines rather than as a unitary field of study. It can also be described as inter-, multi-, and even counter- or anti-disciplinary, taking its agenda and mode of analysis from shared concerns and methods, (re)combining numerous traditional and new disciplines to effect the critical study of cultural phenomena in various societies, always with an emphasis on the cultural and social context and with an aim of

understanding the metamorphosis of the notion of culture itself. Rather than privileging canonical works reproducing established lines of authority, cultural studies aims to articulate the unsaid, the suppressed, and the concealed by dominant modes of knowing, not only of texts and signifying practices but also of theories in traditional disciplines. At its best, cultural studies is a cultural critique that extols the virtues of eclecticism and embraces a holistic and democratic view of culture through a spectrum of theoretical approaches and methodologies, seeking to make explicit connections between various cultural forms and between culture and society and politics, with the aim not merely to be analytical but to promote change. Cultural studies is always potentially controversial, with at least in its origins claiming for itself a radical political commitment and a practice of social change. Thus, unlike traditional philological scholarship that strives to be “objective,” cultural studies is explicitly ideological (this particular approach is also a factor in comparative cultural studies, see below).

Although in some of its later versions, cultural studies has become less avowedly political, it continues to represent a challenge both to the atrophied elitism of traditional academic disciplines and to hegemonic power structures more broadly. The term “culture” in cultural studies refers to a cultural, anthropological, sociological, historical, narrative, etc. conception to study ordinary features of life, while it aims simultaneously to dismantle the esthetic-textual and hierarchical conception of “culture.” At the same time, this means also that cultural studies can be applied to the study of the traditional, the canonical, and the hegemonic. Cultural studies can produce more relevant knowledge than established scholarly discourses in its readiness to address everyday life, in, for example, the study of marginalized and popular cultures or in investigating culture and media interest in the creative role of its audience (see e.g., [Bathrick](#); [Berubé](#); [Cometa](#); [Franco](#); [Grossberg](#); [Grossberg](#), [Nelson](#), [Treichler](#); [Hall](#); [McCarthy](#), [Durham](#), [Engel](#), [Filmer](#), [Giardina](#), [Lalagrecia](#); [McNeil](#); [Miller](#); [Milner](#); [Prow](#); [Rojek](#); specifically on method in cultural studies, see e.g., [Couldry](#); [Ferguson and Golding](#); [Lee](#); [Lee and Poynton](#); [White and Schwach](#)).

Cultural studies can draw on and/or be worked into a large number of established disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including literary studies in general and literary theory, the sociology of culture, social theory, media studies, communication studies, cultural anthropology, cultural history/geography, ethnography, sociolinguistics, translation studies, folklore, philosophy, law, cultural policy studies, pedagogy, history, museum studies, audience studies, art history and criticism, fashion theory and history, political science, gender studies, etc. In the area of thematics, too, cultural studies can be applied to such as gender and sexuality, nationhood and (post)national identities, colonialism and postcolonialism, race and ethnicity, popular culture, the formation of social subjectivities, consumer culture, science and ecology, subaltern studies, identity politics, border studies, area studies, the politics of aesthetics and disciplinarity, cultural institutions, discourse and textuality, (sub)culture(s) in various societies, popular culture and its audience, (global) culture in a postmodern age, the politics of aesthetics, culture and its institutions, language, cultural politics of the city, science, culture and the ecosystems, postcolonial studies, feminist, gender, and queer studies, ethnic studies, (im)migration studies, urban studies, metaprofessional concerns such as the job market, academic publishing, the processes of tenure, etc. Recent scholarship in cultural studies includes cognitive science, emotion, communication, new media, memory, etc. (see e.g., [Highmore](#); [Nalbatian](#), [Matthews](#), [McClellan](#);

Smith; Zunshine). Remarkable is that while in comparative literature, attention is paid to the field of cultural studies, in cultural studies, there is hardly ever a reference to work in comparative literature when in fact in many instances in comparative literature, similar matter has been studied even before the arrival of cultural studies.

With regard to its background in thought and institutional presence, cultural studies began in Britain in the 1950s with Marxist-based critical analysis of culture by Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Edward P. Thompson, Stuart Hall, etc. in the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (see e.g., Inglis; Seidl, Horak, Grossberg). The center issued a series of influential politically engaged studies, some later combined into books, on mass media and popular culture. The earliest publications questioned literary production of what had come to be canonized as “English literature,” the influence of the cultural industry on the masses, and proposed that popular and working class productions and their audience were worthy of study. British cultural studies underwent exportation by the move of expatriate Britons who – because of the Thatcher government’s policies of education – left the United Kingdom and obtained faculty positions in the United States and other Anglophone countries. The success of cultural studies occurred and occurs in the English-speaking world (see e.g., Frow and Morris; Highmore; Prow; McNaughton and Newton; Turner). A parallel school of thought evolved in German-language scholarship with Marxist critical analysis at the Frankfurt School with the difference that while the Birmingham School studied popular culture, the Frankfurt School argued for the importance of high culture and against the impact of popular culture and based its approaches mostly in anti-positivist sociology, psychology, and existential philosophy (e.g., Theodor W. Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer, Leo Löwenthal, Herbert Marcuse, etc.). A further framework for the study of culture is *Kulturwissenschaft* – a framework developed since the 1920s in Germany and in many aspects rooted in nineteenth-century epistemological thought – based in the fields of philosophy of culture (e.g., Georg Simmel and Ernst Cassirer), history of culture (e.g., Wilhelm Dilthey), historical and philosophical anthropology (e.g., Johann Friedrich Blumenbach), sociology (e.g., Max Weber), and the history of art (e.g., Aby Warburg). While since the 1980s, practitioners of *Kulturwissenschaft* have adopted some aspects of U.S.-American and/or Birmingham cultural studies, it remains a specific field and discipline rooted in German-language historical and philosophical thought and in its history and current practice different from cultural studies (for an overview, see Crescenzi; see also Bachmann-Medick; Böhme and Scherpe; Böhme, Matussek, Müller; Glaser and Luserke; Kittler).

Cultural studies has continued to undergo fragmentation while at the same time, scholarship is done in newer areas such as globalization, the critical analysis of race, ethnographic field work, and gender studies, among others. It should also be noted – see above – that many aspects and perspectives of cultural studies have been available and exist(ed) in the discipline of comparative literature where many of cultural studies’ themes and topics had been studied before the rise of cultural studies and continue to be studied today. In the United States, in addition to the field’s prominence in departments of English, cultural studies has also been increasing in departments of history, sociology, anthropology, and other fields of the humanities and social sciences (even in medicine with regard to patient care and the diagnosis of illnesses). Cultural studies has also had influence in Southeast Asia, particularly in Taiwan and South Korea, where

many of its practitioners returned after having studied in Anglophone countries. Chinese cultural studies disassociates itself from nationalistic and political implications, favoring “Chineseness” (including overseas Chinese) as a cultural rather than ethnic, national, or political point of reference, a kind of “Chinese culturalism” that attempts to transcend geopolitical borders (see Zhang; Chen; Cheng, Wang, Tötösy de Zepetnek). The influence of cultural studies worldwide is partly owing not only to the hegemony of English as the world’s *lingua franca* but also to US-American hegemony and the spread of popular culture, which, in turn, gave the initial impetus in the United States to develop the Birmingham School’s theoretical foci and apply them in and for the study of US-American culture (which then developed further for the study of various aspects of culture altogether).

With regard to cultural studies in Europe, Paul Moore suggests that the critique of received cultural worth is hindered by Eurocentrism, the (nostalgic) belief that Europe is the repository of “high” culture, a conservative defense of which then becomes a critical value in European self-enunciation. Similarly, Roman Horak identifies the same prejudice against cultural studies and popular culture in Germany and Austria specifically, as well as the impact of the Frankfurt School, among other factors, along with the fear and disdain for the popular linked closely to a fear of US-American culture and the threat of (US-)“Americanization.” However, since the late 1990s, a number of books have been published in cultural studies albeit mostly introductions to the field in its US-American versions (see e.g., Hepp; Horak, *Die Praxis*; Lindner; Lutter and Musner; Lutter and Reisenleitner; Marcant; Musner and Wunberg; Musner, Wunberg, and Lutter). At the same time, most publications in cultural studies appear in Anglophone countries even if about cultural studies in Spanish, German, French, Italian, or Russian whose authors begin with an introduction that sets out the breadth of the task involved in developing an identifiable cultural studies dimension within the established cultural histories and traditions in scholarship of the various countries (see e.g., Burns; Denham, Kacandes, Petropoulos; Forbes and Kelly; Forgacs and Lumley; Graham and Labanyi; Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas; Kelly and Shepherd; Kennedy; see also Le Hir and Strand; Reynolds and Kidd; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári, “Synopsis”). Of interest is that in European scholarship, it is in France – in addition to Central and East Europe (see Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári, *The Study of Hungarian*) – where cultural studies has acquired the least interest (see e.g., Chalard-Fillaudeau; López-Varela Azcárate and Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Comparative Cultural*).

In the introduction to their collected volume *Cultural Studies in Question*, Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding criticize the failure to deal empirically with the structural changes in national and global political, economic, and media systems after the collapse of the Soviet empire, the consequences of globalization, and the process of democratization (this view is parallel to Tötösy de Zepetnek’s framework and methodology of the “contextual” and the “empirical” in his framework of comparative cultural studies, see below). In the same volume, John D.H. Downing proposes to examine the capacity of cultural studies to illuminate the economic, political, and cultural transitions in Central and East Europe and in Russia and, conversely, to investigate the implications of those transitions as being a major test for scholars for the evaluation of the utility of cultural studies. He underlines the necessity for scholarship to integrate society and power, conflict, and change into the analysis of communication and, in particular, to

acknowledge the power of other agents than the elite ones, that is, the role that popular culture has played in bringing about internal pressure for political change. Downing also argues that South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, and Latin America, as well as Southern Europe, which have undergone some analogous transitions, might offer terms of comparison.

In a volume entitled *Cultural Discourse in Taiwan*, the editors comment that Taiwan – owing to its colonial past and diversity of cultural heritage – “represents the dynamics of cultural processes where East and West meet in a specific and extraordinary locus” (Wang and Tötösy de Zepetnek, 1). And with regard to South Korea, Myungkoo Kang examines in her article “East Asian Modernities” the situation of cultural studies and her analysis suggests parallels which would be applicable – similar to Taiwan cultural studies – to the study of Central and East European culture(s) (see also Kang’s “There is No South Korea”; on Central and East Europe, see e.g., Konstantinović and Rinner; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Comparative Cultural Studies and the Study of Central European”). Kang outlines how South Korea has adopted, appropriated, and utilized Western theories of cultural studies beginning in the 1980s and underlines the need for cultural studies in the twenty-first century. She also describes how in Taiwan, where cultural studies has begun to be institutionalized since 1993, it has provided the Taiwan democratic movement with a theoretical foundation to carry out significant research on identity politics, minority and gender issues, and on Japanese and US-American colonization, as well as relations between Native Taiwanese and immigrants from Mainland China. With regard to the situation of cultural studies in other parts of the world, one particular example is worth noting: Latin American cultural studies – whose development has been consubstantial for the emancipation against the cultural hegemony of Europe and later of the United States – often focuses its agenda on issues similar to postcommunist Central and East Europe, such as the phenomenon of cultural penetration, censorship and self-censorship, and the symbolic manner in which popular resistance was expressed, definition of national cultures, and analyses of discourses of power (see e.g., Jordan and Morgan-Tomasunas; McClennen and Fitz; McRobbie; Moreiras).

4. The field of comparative cultural studies

Cultural studies, while innovative and an essential field in the humanities and social sciences, retains one drawback and this is its monolingual construction as it is a field developed and practiced primarily in the Anglophone world by scholars who, in general, work with two languages at best. Hence, the notion that what has been a trademark of comparative literature, namely working in multiple languages, ought, ideally, be carried over into “comparative cultural studies.” Developed since the late 1980s by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, the conceptualization of comparative cultural studies is based on a “merger” of tenets of the discipline of comparative literature – minus the discipline’s Eurocentrism and nation orientation – with those of cultural studies, including the latter’s explicit and practiced ideological perspective (see e.g., “From Comparative,” “The New Humanities,” although rarely a professed factor, there are signs that of recent, the ideological dimension is paid attention to also in literary studies proper [see e.g., Lecerclé]). Additional tenets of comparative cultural studies include that attention is paid to the “how” of cultural processes, following radical

constructivism (see e.g., Riegler; Schmidt, “Literary Studies,” *Kognitive Autonomie*, “From Objects,” *Worlds*). Hence, the objective of study is often not a cultural product as such, but its processes within the micro- and/or macro-system(s) and that are relevant for the study of culture (on the macro-system see e.g., Apter; Beecroft; Damrosch, *What Is*; Wallerstein; on the micro-system, see e.g., Even-Zohar; Schmidt, *Foundations*, “Literary Studies,” *Worlds*; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Systemic Approaches,” Villanueva, “Claudio Guillén,” Villanueva, “Possibilities,” on semiotics, comparative literature, and cinema, see e.g., Paz Gago and José; on comparative literature and sociology, see e.g., Keunen and Eeckhout).

To “compare” does not – and must not – imply hierarchy; that is, in the comparative and contextual perspective, it is the method used rather than the studied matter that is of importance. Attention to other cultures is a basic and founding element and factor of the framework of comparative cultural studies. This principle encourages an inter- and transcultural and interdisciplinary dialog, expressly ideological, and thus in this aspect, similar to cultural studies, which, among other factors, includes the perspective of the intercultural that is inclusionary (and its corollaries of multiculturalism, transculturalism, crossculturalism, etc.). Dialog is understood as inclusion, which extends to all Other, marginal, minority, and all that has been and often, still, is considered peripheral and thus an approach against all essentialism. Of note is that while up to the 2000s “comparative cultural studies” – although an obvious theoretical construction – has been a rare designation either in scholarship or institutional structures as in programs or departments, since the mid-2000s, it has been appearing increasingly both in scholarship and as in professorships and programs/departments. It should be noted, however, that while comparative cultural studies appears as a field of study primarily in the humanities, parallel developments can be seen in sociology and cultural anthropology albeit with few, if any, explicit theoretical and/or methodological description and/or aims and scope (see e.g., Pinxten; see also the University of British Columbia’s Canada Chair of Comparative Cultural Studies, *The Journal of Comparative Cultural Studies in Architecture* or *Vergleichende Kulturwissenschaft* in ethnology, anthropology, and folklore studies [the field has several university departments and programs]).

In comparative cultural studies, focus is on the study of culture both in parts (e.g., literature, film, popular culture, the visual and other arts [interart studies], television, media and communication studies and new media and also including aspects of such cultural production as architecture, etc.) and as a whole in relation to other forms of human expression and activity, as well as in relation to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Work in comparative cultural studies does not mean that the traditional study of literature including close-text study is relegated to lesser value; rather, both can and should occur in a parallel fashion. Thus, the approach enables thorough contextual cultural analysis. Ideally, comparative cultural studies utilizes English as the contemporary *lingua franca* of scholarship; however, the use of English in published scholarship, itself a subject of much theoretical discussion, does not mean US-American centrality (see e.g., Prendergast, Catherine; Ramanathan; Rubdy; Young). On the contrary, the broad use of English as the international language of scholarship allows scholars from outside the Anglophone world and continental Europe to present their works on an international forum and be understood by their colleagues in other countries. Importantly, in comparative cultural studies, focus is on

evidence-based research and analysis, for which “contextual” (i.e., the systemic and empirical) approaches present the most advantageous methodology (on this, see e.g., [Ferguson’s](#) and [Golding’s](#) argumentation for the empirical).

Comparative cultural studies insists on a theoretical focus and methodology involving interdisciplinary study with three main types of methodological precision: intra-disciplinarity (analysis and research within the disciplines in the humanities), multi-disciplinarity (analysis and research by one scholar employing any other discipline), and pluri-disciplinarity (analysis and research by team work with participants from several disciplines). Comparative cultural studies is an inclusive discipline of global humanities and, as such, acts against the paradox of and tension between the global versus the local. Further, similar to comparative literature and world literatures, comparative cultural studies includes translation studies, a still neglected field on the landscape of scholarship in general (see e.g., [Apter](#); [Bassnett](#); [Lefevere](#); [Spivak](#), *Outside*; [Tötösy de Zepetnek](#), “The Systemic and Empirical”, “Taxonomy”, “The Study of Translation”). While in the study of literature, the field of translation studies has gained interest in the last several decades, what is lacking is theoretical work and its application (although with regard to the systemic approach – an integral part of comparative cultural studies – there have been seminal works, see e.g., [Hermans](#); [Delabastita](#), [D’hulst](#), [Meylaerts](#); [Lefevere](#)). In particular, translation studies is in need of further development with regard to issues of gender (see e.g., [Flotow von](#); [Lozano de la Pola](#); [Simon](#); [Vasvári](#)), as well as in relation to issues of transnationality and the politics of globalization and translation (see [Cronin](#); [Lionnet and Shih](#); [Pym](#)). Yet, a further area relevant in comparative cultural studies is the study of the “other arts” – in current terminology designated as “interart studies” – whereby earlier designations have been and remain an important field in comparative literature (see e.g., [Finger](#)).

Comparative cultural studies attempts to reverse the intellectual and institutional decline of the humanities and their marginalization, thus arguing for the relevance of humanities and social sciences scholarship in a number of ways:

comparative cultural studies is the theoretical, as well as methodological postulate to move and dialogue between cultures, languages, literatures, and disciplines. This is a crucial aspect of the framework, the approach as a whole, and its methodology. In other words, attention to other cultures – that is, the comparative perspective – is a basic and founding element and factor of the framework. The claim of emotional and intellectual primacy and subsequent institutional power of national cultures is untenable in this perspective. In sum, the built-in notions of exclusion and self-referentiality of single-culture study, and their result of rigidly-defined disciplinary boundaries, are notions against which comparative cultural studies offers an alternative as well as a parallel field of study. This inclusion extends to all Other, all marginal, minority, border, and peripheral entities, and encompasses both form and substance. However, attention must be paid to the “how” of any inclusionary approach, attestation, methodology, and ideology so as not to repeat the mistakes of Eurocentrism and “universalization” from a “superior” Eurocentric point of view. Dialogue is the only solution. ([Tötösy de Zepetnek](#), “From Comparative Literature” 259; see also [Tötösy de Zepetnek](#), “The New Humanities”)

5. Comparative cultural studies, intermediality studies, and digital humanities

The notion of intermediality – a concept of old, but with renewed perspectives and practices in the emerging field of digital humanities – raises a number of issues

including social and cultural practices, pedagogy, aspects of globalization, the cultural industries, the publishing of scholarship online, knowledge transfer, etc. A paradox is that neither social theories concerning modernity, modern publicity, or the media nor humanities theories regarding different cultural forms, types of texts, or genres have paid adequate attention to the fact that “the past and present of contemporary culture and media are indeed part and parcel of multimodal and intermedial culture and media” (Lehtonen 71). The processing, production, and marketing of cultural products such as music, film, radio, television programs, books, journals, and newspapers determine that today almost all aspects of production and distribution are digitized. Culture today is multimodal as it makes use of technology, as well as symbolic forms (see Lehtonen). Hence, the relevance of the study of intermediality and digitality in various humanities and social sciences disciplines and fields.

Intermediality is a phenomenon for the creation of new forms of artistic and critical innovation, among others to find ways for their distribution (i.e., open access to scholarship published on the world wide web), new scholarship about intermedial and interdisciplinary perspectives of old and new products of culture, the link(s) of cultural communities in cyberspace, and to be applied as a vehicle for innovative educational practices. Today, discursive practices including visualities form a complex intermedial network of signifying practices which construct realities rather than simple representations of them. Socially constructed meaning or what we call and practice as “culture” takes place through processes of the negotiation of stories, images, and meanings; that is, through constructed and contextual agreements, power relations, and their authorization and legitimation of social positions and loci. Therefore, the ways intermedial discursive practices are produced, processed, and transmitted are relevant for research and practice and this occurs, increasingly, in digital humanities. Important is to take into account that individual and social identities are developed – at best – by and through dialog. While new media do not replace prior technologies (the “death” of print books will not take place soon or ever), they create new configurations of social, artistic, and economic systems of culture including the production and practices of scholarship. The transmission and sharing of knowledge is what culture is all about and new media have the potential to be more than just distribution channels for established cultural industries and practices.

Caution toward new media and new media technology – whether in research, publishing, or pedagogy – by scholars in the humanities is surprising, as Geert Lovink writes (although published in 2002, the situation has not changed much since):

By and large, the humanities have been preoccupied with the impact of technology from a quasi-outsider’s perspective, as if society and technology can still be separated This resistance by humanities scholars appears in two characteristic reactions to the proposition that information technology constitutes a crucial cultural force. First, one encounters a tendency among many humanists contemplating the possibility that information technology influences culture to assume that before now, before computing, our intellectual culture existed in some pastoral non-technological realm. *Technology*, in the lexicon of many humanists, generally means “only that technology of which I am frightened.” I have frequently heard humanists use the word *technology* to mean “some intrusive, alien force like computing,” as if pencils, paper, typewriters, and printing presses were in some way *natural*. (*Dark Fiber* 13; emphases in the original)

While the humanities have a difficult stand with regard to funding and social relevance everywhere and historically so, since the arrival of new media and the internet and thus the development of the frequency and expansion of communication, new possibilities have emerged for scholarship and pedagogy. In many fields and disciplines, intermediality and digital humanities are considered, increasingly, an important matter in theory, application and practice and this is the case in cultural studies and comparative cultural studies. I posit that digital humanities must be supported in research and practice to a larger extent than is the case at present (for work about intermediality and digital humanities, see e.g., Berry; Borgman; Finger; Gold; Grigorian, Baldwin, Rigaud-Drayton; Hansen; Evans and Rees; Hirsch; Inman; Jensen; Joret and Remael; Landow; Lehtonen; Lisiak; López-Varela Azcárate and Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Towards Intermediality”; Lunenfeld; McCarty; Mottart, Soetaert, Bonamie; Porter, *Internet*; Ryan; Schreier; Schreibman, Siemens, Unsworth; Soetaert and Rutten; Van Dijck; Van Peer, Asimakopoulou, Bessis; Tötösy de Zepetnek, “Aspects of Scholarship”, Tötösy de Zepetnek, *Digital Humanities*, “The New Humanities”, “Digital Humanities” <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3003>>; Tötösy de Zepetnek and López-Varela Azcárate, “Education”; Ursa; Wolf; for a bibliography of intermediality and digital humanities, see Vlieghe, Tötösy de Zepetnek).

Given that the economic and industrial situation of the rest of the world outside of the West represents a problem with regard to access and the use of the internet, one would hope that it is only a matter of time before the world altogether will have access to and will be able to use the internet and thereby participate in new media technology in scholarship, pedagogy, and publishing. As it happens, from its inception, the internet has been and remains controlled to a large extent by the United States because of where new media technology was invented and developed and because of the situation of English as today’s *lingua franca* of scholarship and technology (see e.g., Fieromonte). What is relevant to our discussion here is the internet’s corollary, namely knowledge transfer in the humanities, and I submit that humanities scholarship ought to be accessible at no cost to readers and scholars globally. While there are developments in this direction, despite the widespread discussion and argumentation for open access to scholarly journals, the issue remains unresolved except in few cases. One exception is the journal *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access quarterly in the humanities and social sciences founded in 1999 at the University of Alberta and published since 2000 by Purdue University and Purdue University Press (Tötösy de Zepetnek was founding editor 1999-2016 and as of 2017 editor is Ari Ofengenden [Brandeis University]). To date, it remains one of few journals that – in addition to peer review and open access – is indexed by Thomson Reuter’s ISI (among other indexing services). The consequence of the journal’s publication in open access is that its material has been downloaded since the journal’s pdf format 2007-2017 2,238,958 times (in 2016 252,191 times) (in addition to each article’s download count shown on its abstract page below “recommended citation”, the journal’s index page shows world-wide download figures of “recent downloads in the past day”, the journal’s “total items” published, “total downloads”, and “downloads in the past year”). Note also that in the 2016, *Scimago Journal and Country Rank*, the journal is listed with an H Index 7

(Scimago <<http://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=18800156714&tip=sid&clean=0>>). This suggests that the open-access publication of humanities scholarship furthers and underlines knowledge transfer to the benefit of scholarship worldwide.

6. Conclusion

Along with overlapping and complementary aspects and perspectives, there are differences between the discipline of comparative literature and the fields of world literature, cultural studies, and comparative cultural studies: comparative literature is a discipline with a global history, intellectual relevance, and institutional presence, while world literature, cultural studies, and comparative cultural studies are fields of study and with intellectual relevance but with limited institutional presence. The difference between comparative literature and world literature on the one hand, and cultural studies and comparative cultural studies on the other, is that in the former, focus remains on literature while in the latter, literature is one of several areas of study. The perception that in cultural studies and comparative cultural studies there is a relegation or even elimination of the study of literature per se (see e.g., [Error](#); [Gillespie](#); [Gumbrecht](#); [Hillis Miller](#); [Schmitz-Emans](#); [Wang](#); an exception is [Riffaterre](#)) is mistaken because there is a significant corpus of scholarship in these fields where literature is studied as the principal subject matter. With regard to comparative cultural studies, the situation is markedly different with mid-career (tenured associate professors) and junior scholars (nontenured assistant professors and recent Ph.D.s) in the United States and elsewhere and this is reason to assume that the field will continue to attract interest.

There are indications that comparative literature as a discipline is experiencing a revival in some parts of the world outside of Europe and Anglophone scholarship – for example, in Chinese, Arabic, Indian languages, Latin American languages, etc. – and this is a significant and promising development not the least because of the appeal of the discipline in the “periphery,” thus a corrective measure with regard to the historical Euro-US-American hegemony of the discipline. Although the related concept of world literature(s) is experiencing a revival at this point – while in many ways a welcome development – because it is occurring mostly in Anglophone US-American scholarship, the notion (and practice) of world literature(s) remains limited because it underlines US-American cultural hegemony. One would hope that the current development toward the intellectual revival of the concept of world literature(s) will gain traction outside of US-American scholarship and that within US-American education, as well as elsewhere, the notion will translate itself to institutional presence. However, the latter argument in favor of world literature(s) remains problematic because it would not help if world literature(s) as an institutional presence diminishes (further) the presence of the discipline of comparative literature. Last but not least, despite comparative literature’s often proclaimed differentiation and in many instances objection to cultural studies, the latter is gaining scholarly interest globally, although at this point with US-American – and to a lesser measure with Australian, Canadian, and British – scholarship. The drawback of cultural studies remains the field’s monolingual state of affairs with regard to theoretical precepts and here, too, is where comparative cultural studies enhances scholarship globally.

With regard to the larger context of the humanities, there has been much discussion about the “corporate university” (see e.g., [Donoghue](#); [Garber](#); [Ginsberg](#); [Hacker and Dreifus](#); [Menand](#); [Nussbaum](#); [Readings](#); [Taylor](#)). While the move toward the implementation of the corporate university has a number of negative aspects affecting humanities scholarship (e.g., in Europe and Asia the copying of “metrics”/“impact factor” from the sciences with regard to publications and tenure, promotion, and the research of funding and the move toward private funding with the implication of conflict of interest [on “metrics”/“impact factor,” see [Tötösy de Zepetnek](#), “The Impact Factor,” [Tötösy de Zepetnek and Jia](#), “Electronic Journals” <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2426>>]), humanities scholarship performed in comparative cultural studies could serve to counter some of the negative perceptions in the administrative and funding practices of the corporate university toward humanities scholarship. That is, if humanities scholars think, research, publish, and teach with and within the paradigm of the social relevance of humanities scholarship and pedagogy, a more equitable outcome could result than the habitual sidelining of the humanities. In connection with the tenure debate, in the West, a continuous debate persists about tenure and its value and process and it is no secret that too many professors – once they have obtained tenure (I am referring to research universities where research and teaching are evaluated together and not to universities where only teaching is required for tenure) – reduce their work with regard to research and publications either because with tenure they are safe in their position and/or because of their administrative work load (see e.g., [Rubenstein and Clifton](#); the survey was conducted in the United States and Canada). I believe that to make the study of literature and culture a socially relevant activity of scholarship, we ought to do contextual work parallel with regard to professional concerns such as the job market, the matter of academic publishing, and digital humanities and, put more broadly, with regard to the role of social, political, and economic aspects of humanities scholarship. Hence, my proposal that with the comparative and contextual approach – practiced in interdisciplinarity and employing new media technology – comparative cultural studies could achieve in-depth scholarship and the social relevance of the humanities.

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