INTERART STUDIES OF LITERATURE AND VISUAL ARTS

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Abstract: Interart studies must constantly consider the relations and interaction of at least two media, that is, at least two semiotic systems. The position of reading those relations, as the position of research, implies continual awareness and a dangerous search for balance in the analysis of that interaction. Hence the path of the scholar could be compared to tightrope walking. At times the scholar must focus more on the analysis of one of the arts, for instance, of the literary text (as in the ekphrasis), but the relevant study must not at any given moment ignore the other art. The study of ekphrasis would be impossible if one neglects the iconographic sources of the works of literature. The study of mixed discourses is also a sort of a movement in the mutual space created by the image and the text. The scholar must never treat only verbal or visual aspects, whereby disregarding their interaction. In the case of syncretic art forms, we find the most evident the ontological position of in-between: the cultural product is neither a merely verbal nor a merely visual entity.

Key Words: intermediality, transmediality, multimedia, paintings, text, picture, photography, comic, combined discourse, syncretic discourse, Macedonian literature.

How to read an ekphrasis which, by definition, uses one medium of representation to represent another?

Michael Benton

The message is always in the active interspace, or in the trembling effect of meaning, which in an ontological sense activates the reader to stabilise it.

Mitko Hadzi-Pulja

Introduction

At this opportunity we shall try to trace the epistemological positions of inter-semiotic and inter-art studies dedicated to the text-image, that is, literature-fine art relation. Among the numerous attempts to precisely classify the inter-artistic products that are the fundamental platform of our research, we have selected Leo Hoek’s classification, based on two criteria: 1) the production criterion (according to which one could distinguish between primacy of image or primacy of text) and 2) the reception criterion, which implies a simultaneity of image and text. According to these criteria, Hoek distinguishes
four types of discourses resulting from the text-image relations: a transmedial, a multimedia, a mixed and a syncretic discourse:

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<th>Mixed discourse</th>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Self-sufficiency</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<td>-</td>
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Source: Types of intersemiotic relations (according to Leo Hoek)

Starting from this classification, we would like to suggest an analysis of the positions and challenges of the interdisciplinary studies treating the verbal-visual relations. Defining the position of the scholar inevitably accompanies the analysis of the receptive process of intermedial products. We would therefore attempt, through interpreting several pieces of the contemporary Macedonian literary and fine-art production, to compare experiences of researching interdisciplinary phenomena in the four forms of interrelation: transposition (ekphrasis), juxtaposition (of text and photography in a book), combination (comic book) and fusion (visual poetry).

**Reading Ekphrasis – In-between Words and Images**

(Blaze Koneski: *A Visit to a Museum*)

As the starting point of our discussion dedicated to *ekphrasis* as a product of intersemiotic transposition we have selected *A Visit to the Museum*, a short poetic piece by Macedonian poet Blaze Koneski.

Their arms touched each other  
in silent excitement  
at the entrance to the small hall.  
They sat together, closely, on the bench.  
They had no need to talk about their life –  
their just stared at Claude Monet’s *Red Waterlililies*,  
and behind them, in silence, Picasso’s *Guernica*.  
(Translated by Zoran Ancevski)

This poem might be read as a simple poetic testimony of an ordinary event in one of the great museums, but also as a metaphor of the dialogue
between the visual and the verbal, between plastic arts and literature. From the viewpoint of the spatial arrangement, contextual to the topic of our congress, it is indicative that the protagonists are in between two representative works of fine art. On the other hand, the reader of this text, visiting this small poetic museum, is confronted with the titles of the two paintings in the two final verses. In his book *Museum of Words*, James Heffernan reminds us that “the ekphrastic poetry of our time [...] represents works of art within the context of a museum, which of course, includes words that surround the pictures we see, beginning with picture titles” (Heffernan 1993).

Certainly, even this poem – in which the works of art are merely named, not described – clearly shows that the creation the meaning of the text is impossible (or incomplete) unless the reader is familiar with the paintings in question! In fact, from the (inter)semiotic perspective, it does make a difference which are the two paintings between which the museum visitors are located. It is indicative that the description, even the very mention of the paintings in a literary context, must needs represent a sort of an in-between experience for the reader. In order to achieve the effect of the poem, the readers need to project the paintings in question to their mental screen. And the readers should – at least for a minute – find themselves in-between these works of art. In other words, when dealing with the *A Visit to a Museum* poem, the reader requires knowledge of the works of art as a precondition to understanding the poem.

Only the reader who was previously the viewer of Monet’s and Picasso’s paintings could read the narratives of the poem’s protagonists. “They had no need to talk about their life” since that role is played by the paintings between which they find themselves. In this poem the paintings (or, even more precisely, the titles of the paintings) should replace words. Meanwhile we must not forget that through the mediation of words the reader is offered the possibility to recollect the works of art.

The experience of ekphrasis is an “experience of two representations in two different media simultaneously.” Through the poetic text the reader learns which work of art they are regarding (the idyllic landscape), and which painting
is behind their backs (the most famous painting on the horrors of war). Hence the question: could the reader understand and interpret the poetic text without the semantic potential of the visual texts (Claude Monet’s *Waterlillies* and Picasso’s *Guernica*)?

![Pablo Picasso: Guernica, 1937](image)

**Michael Benton** offers an answer:

Being a spectator involves reading the relationship between two arts, the visual and the verbal [...] The ekphrastic spectator is engaged in a more complex and varied activity than the viewer of a picture or the reader of an 'unattached' poem [...] The ekphrastic spectator is one who contemplates a painting or a sculpture through the eyes of a poet, aware both that the visual work so represented remains, essentially a poetic fiction. (Benton 367-370)

**Juxtaposition of Text and Image**

(Vladimir Jankovski / Ivan Blazev: *Skopje with Eyes Wide Open*, 2008)

Conceived on the principle of juxtaposing photographs of the Republic of Macedonia capital, taken by the photographer Ivan Blazev, and Vladimir Jankovski’s text, the recently published multimedia book *Skopje with Eyes Wide Open* (2008) develops the *in-between* concept as a poetic doctrine. This book does not offer the well-known photographs in postcards, monographs, tourist guides and websites of Skopje. On the contrary, both text and photographs wish to offer a series of images of another city, or, as it were: “That other Skopje reveals itself as it starts serving extraordinary sights” (Jankovski/Blazev, 12).

The images of the city suggested by the photographs aim to capture something that mere text or mere photography cannot. In fact, the literary/photographic duo attempts: “to discover those moments and fragments of space in which the city turns its visible face into invisible messages” (Jankovski/Blazev 13). Through the link between the language of photography
and the verbal messages, this book insists to demonstrate that living in the city is a sort of “living and being in between”:

The city always stands ready to surprise us, to challenge us, to make us re-examine the opinion or vision we hold for it. [...] And we are searching for those photographs of the city, which have permanently constructed our cravings for it. Then we compare... We trace no sign of what we have seen on the photographs. The imaginary city hovers between what lies within us and in front of us. (Jankovski/Blazev 40-41).

The authors of this book have explicitly expressed the idea that the essential experience of future viewers and readers is based on the very comparison of the images of the city and the images resulting from the synergy of photography and text.

Combination of Text and Image
(Dimitrie Durcovski: Insomnia, 2001)

Leo Hoek explains the fundamental difference between the mixed and the syncretic discourse:

“text and image could combine in order to produce a mixed verbal/visual discourse in which each retains its own identity (mixed
discourse), or they could merge into an inseparable interrelation (syncretic discourse).” (Hoek, 226)

In the contemporary Macedonian literature of the early 21\textsuperscript{st} century there was a whole edition characteristically entitled \textit{Something in Between}, a title which, among other things, suggests the mixed discourse. Apart from the strong genre hybridity, trademark of the works in this edition were also the intermedial approach and the frequent combinations of text and image, the most illustrative example of incorporating the mixed discourse in a literary text being the book \textit{Insomnia} (2001) by the double artist (writer and painter) Dimitrie Duracovski. While reading this post-modern, largely autobiographical, work, the reader encounters a series of visual texts (paintings, photographs, reproductions, drawings and movie frames) as many as eighty times. The visual texts are parallel to the verbal text and establish all sorts of relations with it: ranging from illustration to a visual metatext.
In the tissue of this text, however, one of the most popular forms of contemporary mixed discourses – the comic book – is inserted. Even though the narrative of the execution of a civilian on a bridge during the American Civil War portrayed in the comic (combining images and words) is not directly related to the texts parallelly read, still, this comic offers the reader several opportunities to perceive the intertextual links to several fragments and helps the understanding the work as a whole.

**Fusion of Images, Words and Sounds**
(Metodij Zlatanov, *Doubletree Requiem*, 2007)

We would like to indicate the most recent example of creating a unique syncretic discourse, the *Doubletree Requiem* (2007), a project by Metodij Zlatanov. According to the critic Robert Alagjozovski, he is a poet who holds an anthological place in Macedonian literature as the representative of the so-called visual poetry, in which, equally to the text, the visuality, the calligramic, cryptogramic and calligraphic solutions take part in creating the symbolic/semantic code of writing. (Alagjozovski 89)

Metodij Zlatanov: *Doubletree Requiem*, 2007

In fact, in Zlatanov’s project, primarily presented in the form of an exhibition and only later published as a book, through the fusion of text, image and sound in an inseparable representation, the artwork could only be realised as an *interspace* of fine art, music and literature.
The calligram consists of three parts: computer graphics (that is, the musical notation) and two types of textual codes, the verses and the duration of the musical movement. In an iconic/metaphorical sense the calligram is balanced, minimalist, interactive [...] the communicative power of the cryptogram depends exclusively on the receptive knowledge of the reader. (Alagjozovski 94-95)

The architect Mitko Hadzi-Pulja has emphasised the importance of the reader/viewer in this complex inter-semiotic strategy:

The result of this synchronic causal multiplicity is a heterogeneous landscape of countless dimensions [...] The principle of double coding has been established; a synergic marking with two signifiers (signs), verbal and iconic, shifting and diffusing between each other. The message is always in the active interspace, or in the trembling effect of meaning, which in an ontological sense activates the reader to stabilise it. (Hadzi- Pulja 81)

Conclusions

The interartistic studies must constantly consider the relations and interaction of at least two media, that is, at least two semiotic systems. The position of reading those relations, as the position of research, implies continual awareness and a dangerous search for balance in the analysis of that interaction.

Hence the path of the scholar could be compared to tight wire walking. At times the scholar must direct more towards the analysis of one of the arts, for instance, of the literary text (as in the ekphrasis), but the relevant study must not at any given moment ignore the other art. The study of ekphrasis would be impossible if one neglects the iconographic sources of the works of literature.

The study of mixed discourses is also a sort of a movement in the mutual space created by the image and the text. The scholar must never treat only verbal or visual aspects, disregarding their interaction thereby. In the case of syncretic artforms the cultural product is neither a merely verbal nor a merely visual entity. As in visual poetry the artist is both poet and painter, as the recipient is both reader and viewer, so the scholar of syncretic intersemiotic discourses can certainly not be a mere art or literary critic, but he or she needs to accept the challenges of interdisciplinarity.
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INTERUMJETNIČKA PROUČAVANJA KNJIŽEVNOSTI I VIZUELNIH UMJETNOSTI

Proučavanje međuumjetničkih odnosa mora uzimati u obzir relacije i interakcije najmanje dva medija, ili, najmanje dva semiotička sistema. Ponekad moramo da fokusiramo pažnju na jednu umjetnost, kao, na primjer, na književni tekst (u slučaju ekfrazisa), ali relevantno istraživanje ni u jednom trenutku ne smije ignorisati drugu umjetnost: proučavanje ekfrazisa biće nemoguće ako potcijenimo ikonografske izvore književnih tekstova. Proučavanje miješanih diskursa podrazumijeva analizu zajedničkog prostora slike i teksta. U slučaju...
proučavanja sinkretičkih umjetničkih oblika, kulturni produkt nije ni samo verbalni ni samo vizuelni entitet.

Ključne riječi: intermedijalnost, transmedijalnost, multimedijalnost, slikarstvo, tekst, slika, fotografija, strip, miješani diskurs, sinkretički diskurs, makedonska književnost.