Embodied Social Cognition and Comparative Literature: An Introduction

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Abstract There is a growing sense among scholars working in cognitive literary studies that their assumptions and methodologies increasingly align them with another paradigmatically interdisciplinary field: comparative literature. This introduction to the special issue on cognitive approaches to comparative literature explores points of alignment between the two fields, outlining possible cognitivist interventions into debates that have been animating comparative literature, such as those concerning "universals," politics of translatability (especially in the context of world literature), and practices of thinking across the boundaries of media. It discusses both fields' indebtedness to cultural studies, as well as cognitive literary theorists' commitment to historicizing and their sustained focus on the embodied social mind.

Keywords cognitive historicism, universals, embodied social mind, world literature, translatability

There is a growing sense among scholars working in cognitive literary studies that their assumptions and methodologies align them with another paradigmatically interdisciplinary field: comparative literature. For instance, as Karin Kukkonen points out in her contribution to this issue, comparative literature and cognitive literary studies "share a global perspective on literature. In the last decades, comparative literature has ventured beyond the European canon and into the system of world literature, where transnational streams

I am grateful to Milette Shamir and Irene Tucker for their valuable suggestions in preparation of the manuscript.

Poetics Today 41:2 (June 2020) DOI 10.1215/03335372-8172500

of literary texts are investigated" (244); similarly, cognitive literary studies "sees in principle all of literature as its domain, since thoughts and emotions are features involved in texts from any language or country" (244). This special issue thus seeks to articulate points of alignment between the two fields and to propose a range of interpretive models that are self-consciously comparativist in their cognitivist explorations.

If we look for immediate disciplinary contexts of the current comparativist trend in cognitive literary studies, three factors are apparent. The first is the move away from the focus on anglophone literature. Today it is hard to believe that only a decade ago a charge of parochialism leveled against the field of cognitive approaches to literature—that "studies which link cognitive theory and literature often focus on Shakespeare and Austen" (Simerka 2012: 263)—was perceived by its practitioners as both legitimate and worrisome. As the field kept growing, it changed so much that today its center of gravity sometimes seems to be in Spanish and Latino studies (see Aldama 2009; Simerka 2013; and Jaén and Simon 2017),[1] with East Asian studies a close second and Slavic studies gaining. This becomes especially clear if we do not limit ourselves to criticism published in North America and/or sponsored by North American professional organizations and take into account critical and professional trends in other countries.[2]

The second factor is the awareness, on the part of scholars working with cognitive approaches to literature, that they need to put pressure on their explicit and implied claims about the universality of certain features of literary production, by going beyond the confines of a single literature. We know that, in anthropology and psychology, a claim about a particular cognitive pattern receives only so much traction until it is followed up by research conducted with different subject populations, often those from other countries. The practice of literary analysis is different: traditionally, cognitive literary studies have not depended on this kind of cross-cultural scrutiny. Yet it makes sense that a given cognitive-literary hypothesis benefits from being tested

1. Consider, for instance, the rapidly growing Chinese Association of Cognitive Poetics and Cognitive Literary Studies, which has been sponsoring national and international conferences since 2008. The first international conference took place in Chongqing in 2013 and was followed by the ones in Guangzhou in 2015, Beijing in 2017, and Harbin in 2020. For more information, see the inaugural issue of *Cognitive Poetics* (Rèn zhī shī xué 认知诗学), particularly an article by the association's president, Xiong Muqing 熊沐清 (2014), as well as www.cognitive-poetics.com/cn.

2. This means that graduate students trained in several languages are at a particular advantage when they choose to explore issues in cognition and literature, and they should be aware of their advantage. The unabating cultural interest in the mind/brain and the rapid expansion of academic research networks dedicated to studying those issues thus militate against the current trend of defunding university comparative literature programs and eliminating foreign language requirements.

across disparate cultures (see Crane 2001; Richardson 2001; Spolsky 2001; Hogan 2003). One can go as far as to argue that responsible cognitivist theorizing would make a point of drawing on case studies from several literary traditions that are, "at most, only sparsely and weakly interrelated" (see Patrick Colm Hogan's contribution in this issue, 194).

The third factor shaping the cognitive-comparative synergy is the continuous repositioning of what started out as a straightforward cognitive-literary inquiry in relation to various sister arts. Again, to get some sense of this development, we may want to look beyond the boundaries of the North American academy and follow, for instance, the disciplinary trajectory of the annual conference associated with the network "Cognitive Futures in the Humanities." As the conference moved from Bangor (2013), Durham (2014), Oxford (2015), and Helsinki (2016), to Stony Brook (2017), Kent (2018), Mainz (2019), and Osnabrück (2020), it has revised both its title (it is known now as "Cognitive Futures in the Arts and the Humanities") and its original focus on literature. What this means, in practical terms, is that students of literature who find themselves at one of the Cognitive Futures conferences encounter panels on the moving image, performance, theater and dance studies, the visual arts, and musicology. While panels on literary studies are present, they are not in the majority, which prompts aspiring cognitive-literary theorists to see connections and possible areas of collaboration among a wider range of media than they may have been used to. In doing so, they effectively expand the conceptual repertoire of comparativism, for "comparative literature has always been a home for scholars interested in thinking across representational modalities" (see Elaine Auyoung's contribution in this issue, 302).

The move beyond Shakespeare and Austen, the commitment to testing a given hypothesis against disparate literary traditions, and the rethinking of the role of sister arts in formulating such hypotheses—these are, then, some of the recent trends that lend cognitivism its strong comparativist outlook. This perspective takes as its starting point the immediate professional contexts of the cognitive literary studies, but yet another way to approach the affinities between the two fields is to look at how they describe themselves.

In *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Saussy 2006a), a collaborative report by the American Comparative Literature Association, Caroline D. Eckhardt (2006: 141) emphasizes the importance of moving beyond thinking about comparative literature in terms of what it *is*; commenting on academic disciplines as "behavioral and performative phenomena," she suggests that "comparative literature can be defined, at least in part, by what we *do*." Similarly, as the editor of the *Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies* (Zunshine 2015b: 3), I observed that to define the field of cognitive approaches

by what its different strains have in common—and then to present it as its "essential" feature—"would be reductive." Instead, one focuses on processes that hold this community of scholars together, such as the continuous dialogue between "literary critics and theorists vitally interested in cognitive science," who therefore have "a good deal to say to one another, whatever their differences" (Richardson 2004: 2). The emphasis on *doing* as opposed to *being* thus seems particularly congenial to the respective self-perceptions of the two fields.

Here is one issue that comes to the fore when we begin to consciously build on all these points of intersection between cognitive literary studies and comparative literature. On the one hand, comparative literature has always been hospitable, in Haun Saussy's (2006b: 34) words, "to margins and angles of all comers," serving as "the test bed for reconceiving the ordering of knowledge both inside and outside the humanities." This may mean that new, cognitively inflected interpretations could be integrated within the already extensive theoretical repertoire of comparativists, enriching the existing models. In the long run, this is what we hope for. On the other hand, it remains an open question if cognitive literary critics must deliberately engage with controversies that have been animating comparative literature, or if their cognitive approach may allow them to, if not quite sidestep the existing debates, then perhaps reframe some of them. In the rest of this introduction, I focus on some of those debates, those concerning universals, politics of translatability, and practices of thinking across different arts, outlining possible cognitivist responses to them, as represented by the articles in this issue.

Universals and Cognitive Historicism

In "Narrative Universals, Emotion, and Ethics," Patrick Colm Hogan demonstrates that comparative literature is uniquely positioned to make valuable contributions to the cognitive science of ethics if it integrates "cognitive and affective science with a study of narrative universals" (188). Using examples from Chinese, European, and Indian works, as well as from the current cultural and political discourse (e.g., Leeann Tweeden's accusation that Al Franken had groped her, without her consent, while she was asleep, in the context of the #MeToo movement), Hogan suggests that our ethical responses to fictional narratives as well as to real-life dilemmas hinge on (although are not defined by) particular emplotments of recurring story prototypes and on corresponding emotional values.

To see what is at stake in Hogan's treatment of universals, we may want to remember that both comparative literature and cognitive literary studies have a long history of grappling with this issue and that they are simul-

taneously drawn to its interpretive potential and acutely sensitive to problems inherent in facile evocations of universality. For instance, comparativist Dario Villanueva (2015: 16) has argued that

> a solidly based poetics can be achieved, as all general criteria and typologies are inseparable from the universal. It follows from this that a literary theory constructed from elements that are at the same time widespread and creative of general categories, elements that are usually called invariants, is proved more valid on every occasion that these same invariants appear among literatures that have not been in regular or close contact, for example European and Asian literatures.

At the same time, as Hogan ([1997] 2010: 227) has pointed out, both comparativists and cognitivists are wary of assertions of universal humanity that have long supported "patriarchal, colonial, and other oppressive ideologies," that is, of "pseudouniversals" (225), particularly those that manifest themselves as "Eurocentric hegemony posing as universalism" (Appiah 1992: 58). In fact, it can be said that cognitive literary critics have inherited comparative literature's challenge of differentiating universals (or "invariants") from the long and insidious tradition of pseudouniversalist thinking.

Adding a new twist to this challenge today is the siren call of cognitive neuroscience. As Saussy (2015: 75) puts it, while neuroscience seems to be holding out "the temptation of an explanation of literature through brain function," the "ambitious comparatist . . . should be wary of filtering out the specific, idiomatic features of a text in order to make it fit within a determined schema." Interestingly, cognitive literary scholars may be uniquely well prepared for dealing with the specific and the idiomatic in the context of brain function. This is because cognitive literary theory has been shaped, since the early 2000s, by its commitment to historicist analysis (see Crane 2015; Spolsky 2015: 229–32), that is, the same commitment which has been animating the larger field of literary studies for the last fifty years. This means that cognitive historicism is one of the leading paradigms in cognitive literary studies (see Palmer 2004; Zunshine 2006; Leverage et al. 2010; Vermeule 2010; Lyne 2014; Rabinowitz and Bancroft 2014; Vincent 2015; Gavaler and Johnson 2017; Jaén and Simon 2017) and that their investigation of literary universals is informed by their attention to historically specific cultural constructions. As Ellen Spolsky (2004: viii) puts it in her preface to the coedited volume *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture, and Complexity*:

> Cognitive literary theory is . . . well positioned to provide insights into a question that has been occluded by the well-deserved successes of the reemergent historical and multifaceted cultural studies that have proliferated after the New Criticism in the twentieth century. That question is this: how does the evolved architecture that grounds human cognitive processing, especially as it manifests itself in the univer-

> sality of storytelling and the production of visual art, interact with the apparently open-ended set of cultural and historical contexts in which humans find themselves, so as to produce the variety of social constructions that are historically distinctive, yet also often translatable across the boundaries of time and place? It is the job [of cognitive literary theory] to begin to chart the emergence, manifestation, and readability of these only temporarily stable relationships between the humanly universal and the culturally and individually specific, as coded and recorded in cultural artifacts.

The "only temporarily stable relationships between the humanly universal and the culturally . . . specific" are the focus of two other articles in this special issue, Haiyan Lee's "'Measuring the Stomach of a Gentleman with the Heart-Mind of a Pipsqueak': On the Ubiquity and Utility of Theory of Mind in Literature, Mostly," and my "Who Is He to Speak of My Sorrow?" Both draw on the work of anthropologist Webb Keane, who has argued that culture-specific forms of theory of mind (i.e., the evolved cognitive adaptation for making sense of people's behavior by attributing to them intentions, thoughts, and feelings) may contribute to very different ethical worldviews. As Keane (2016: 131) puts it, "[If] Theory of Mind and intention-seeking are common to all humans, how these get played down or emphasized can contribute to quite divergent ethical worlds. Elaborated in some communities, suppressed in others, these cognitive capacities appear as both sources of difficulties in their own right and affordances for ethical work."

Using a wide range of case studies—from premodern Chinese literary classics, the Sanskrit play *Shakuntala*, and a King Solomon legend, to detective fiction and the spy thriller in socialist and post-socialist China, Lee explores specific sociohistorical contexts that may encourage or suppress active exercise of theory of mind, aka mind reading, in cultural representations. Specifically, she argues that the affinity between theory of mind and narrative fiction (which has been a subject of numerous studies in the last fifteen years) "holds true mostly in modern commercial societies structured by stranger sociality, cosmopolitanism, and social mobility" but not necessarily in societies "structured by kinship sociality" (205).[3] In the latter, she argues, the representational project of mind reading—that is, of "understanding other minds in all their quirkiness" (221)—appears to be less salient than the project of "mind

3. For a recent study exploring the notion of community-specific models of mind reading, see Paul Dilley's (2017: 14–15) *Monasteries and the Care of Souls in Late Antique Christianity*, which suggests that "the training of thoughts practiced by early Christian monks led to the gradual acquisition of a new and particularly monastic theory of mind." Some of the key precepts of this monastic theory of mind were that the mind was both permeable and accessible. That is, monks had to learn that their cogitations arose "not only from the interior self, but also through divine guidance or demonic temptation" and that "God was aware of their private thoughts, which were also known to certain inspired saints" (15).

shaping," which serves "the societal goals of control, regulation, and cooperation" and may result in psychologically flat narratives that "highlight trait attributions, stereotypes, and schemata more than theory of mind" (220).

Further developing a historicist perspective on mind reading, my article builds on the work of linguistic anthropologists who suggest that different communities around the world subscribe to different models of mind, to argue that works of fiction can be fruitfully analyzed in relation to those local ideologies of mind.[4] My examples include English, Chinese, and Russian novels, as well as Bosavi (Papua New Guinea) performance genres. Focusing on the opacity of mind doctrine, found in the South Pacific and Melanesia (according to which the loss of ability to keep one's feelings hidden is considered shameful), I compare cultural practices originating in communities in which people think but do not talk publicly about others' internal states, to those originating in communities in which people both think and talk about them, indeed, in which public speculation about other people's intentions is (mostly) rewarded. While we may still be a long way off from fully understanding how imaginative literature engages with a given ideology of mind, a comparatist expertise offers an immediate advantage to scholars wishing to investigate culture-specific forms of such engagement.

Translatability and Embodied Cognition

Karin Kukkonen's article, "Does Cognition Translate? Predictions, Plot and World Literature," proposes a cognitivist intervention into yet another issue avidly debated by comparativists: the relative importance of reading literary texts in their original languages. As Kukkonen observes, while some scholars, including David Damrosch, believe that reading in translation "makes literature as world literature available" (246), others, such as Emily Apter, stress moments of untranslatability, thus reifying the role of multilingual expertise or, at the very least, retraining our attention on the process of translation.

To see how high the stakes of this debate can get, we may want to turn to Dorothy M. Figueira's (2010) article "Comparative Literature versus World Literature." As she points out, the emergence of world literature was a boon to English departments, because it effectively changed English literature studies into "identity studies," creating attractive new opportunities for scholars who could claim "to cross spatial as well as disciplinary borders" while

4. For an overview of this debate in the latest *Futures of Comparative Literature* report, both in the context of the enduring concern about universalism and in relation to the new concern about the use of "'big data' in literary studies," see Heise 2017: 4, who notes, "It is unsurprising that the world literature paradigm, as one approach to globalizing the literary object of study, would be met with resistance and alternative proposals."

"not necessarily [bothering to acquire] any site-specific knowledge of languages or historical contexts" (32):

> The practicality of English departments' usurpation of the world was that they could in many institutions colonize the now discredited area studies and the smaller and therefore more vulnerable Comparative Literature programs. . . . Most importantly, they revalorized the notion that one could responsibly read the world in translation.
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> The question that needs to be asked then is the following: What vision of the world do these pedagogies that eschew the careful study of languages, literatures, and cultures—precisely those skills and habits that . . . [are] the traditional strengths of Comparative Literature—actually impart? If the rise of pedagogies of alterity pose any real threat to Comparative Literature as a discipline, it is because of the apparent ease with which their initiates can become experts. Because they do not require Comparative Literature's linguistic skills or an expert's familiarity with specific national cultures and histories, these pedagogies allow for (and even encourage) a theoretical approach that conflates individual histories and contexts. (32–33)

While cognitive literary critics do not have to take sides in the world literature versus comparative literature debate, the stark version of this debate as outlined above may remind them, ironically, of their own situation vis-à-vis other literary critics.[5] To work with cognitive approaches to literature, they have to develop "an expert's familiarity" with a wide range of fields in cognitive science and to keep abreast of recent developments in those fields. When they see scholars who, having not done this kind of hard homework, selectively adapt a precept or two from cognitive science and produce a reductive "cognitive" reading of a literary text, they may feel the same frustration as do comparativists who observe their colleagues from English departments "read the world in translation" and make claims that conflate "individual histories and contexts." Moreover, now that immersion in at least two linguistic environments is becoming somewhat de rigueur in cognitive literary studies, cognitive literary theorists can further sympathize with their colleagues in comparative literature who value labor-intensive expertise in "languages, literatures, and cultures."

This said, cognitive literary scholars do benefit from the global take on literature, which means that they approach the conversation about translatability from their particular angle. On the one hand, they are increasingly committed to studying literary texts in their original linguistic/cultural ecol-

5. See Braider 2006 for an overview, for instance, of studies resulting from "energetic pertinacity with which students of literature have turned to . . . visual art" (167), here, in particular, to early modern visual art.

ogies. On the other hand, they see practices of literary translation as a richly promising subject of cognitivist inquiry. Thus Kukkonen takes as her starting point the cognitive-psychological concept of predictive processing, which "proposes that perception, emotion, and thought unfold along a feedback loop between predictions and the ways in which we constantly revise them in our exchange with the environment" (247). Using as her case studies the history of English and French translations of the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, she demonstrates that translators may decide to draw on patterns of prediction already familiar to readers in the target language or to introduce them to new predictive patterns, which may be linked to particular concepts from the source language. More often than not, such decisions depend on the historically specific "power relationships between different languages" in the "world republic of letters" (245), which means (once again) that cognitivist inquiry into translatability emerges as cognitive-historicist inquiry.

Kukkonen's argument that different languages enable "us to pay attention to different aspects of our experience" (251; which she differentiates carefully from the claim that "we think in language" [250]) is borne out in a striking way in Rita Charon's article, "Spoken Body: An *Infinite Jest* of Life, Death, and the Medical Tongue." The issue of untranslatability acquires new urgency in the context of what Charon describes as "a perilous experiment in identity manipulation" imposed on students in medical schools: through "a process hidden from them until the conversion is nearly complete, [they] are gradually forced to abandon their mother tongues and to become monofluent in the language of medicine" (263). Translation between the two, she asserts, is always inadequate.

Drawing on her experience of reading David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* with first-year medical students, Charon focuses on aspects of embodied social cognition that are lost when medical school students undergo a "forced reeducation in the language of medicine" (264) and cease relating to patients in their native tongue. The founder and executive director of the program on narrative medicine at Columbia University Medical Center, Charon demonstrates that the cognitive-comparative perspective has the power of liberating literary studies from their nagging anxiety of social irrelevance. As she puts it, together, "comparative literature and cognitive literary studies . . . can save lives" (278).

To return to the debates about reading the world in translation, have we, then, found the outer limits of translatability, rooted in the dynamics of embodied social cognition? Doctors who experience the world in medicalese lose touch with both their patients and themselves, for, as Charon shows, physicians become self-alienated through their "forced reeducation in the language of medicine" (263). This disembodied language (even if, ironically,

it had been called forth to describe bodily ailments) permits no "development of affinity, shared realities, opening of permeable private worlds, expansion of autonomy, and the emergence of singular selves" (277). To quote Kukkonen, it generates no "predictive processing" that the patient and the doctor can meaningfully share (247). It seems, then, that at the very least what the cognitivist approach can contribute to the ongoing comparatist conversation about global literature is a new awareness of the body as ground zero for social cognition and hence translation.

Cultural Studies, Multimodality, and Social Connection

Comparatist work, writes Ursula K. Heise (2017: 7) in her introduction to the report *Futures of Comparative Literature*, "has been interdisciplinary all along: it has interfaced with art history, film studies, gender studies, history, musicology, philosophy, and translation studies." Indeed, one could argue, she observes, "that one current understanding of comparative literature revolves not so much around the study of different languages and cultures as of different media" (5).[6] In her contribution to the same report, Gail Finney (2017: 20) goes as far as to predict that the field's current commitment to "the destruction of walls and boundaries" may eventually result in the change of its name: "By 2025 a more apt term for the discipline may well be comparative literature studies," a designation that "evokes an association with cultural studies, a field to which comparative literature is increasingly indebted."

Here, too, comparative literature and cognitive literary studies seem to be moving along the same trajectory, for cognitive literary theorists have considered for some time now the possibility that their field may be better represented by the designation *cognitive cultural studies*. The collection of articles *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies* (Zunshine 2010a) features a variety of approaches within the field so redefined: from cognitive studies of visual art and theater to cognitive ecocriticism. Moreover, the preface to the volume emphasizes the deep compatibility between the project of cognitive cultural studies today and Raymond Williams's "original vision of cultural studies, articulated in *The Long Revolution* (1961) as exploring the relationship between 'the evolution of the human brain [and] the particular interpretation carried by particular cultures'" (quoted in Zunshine 2010b: 5).

While both fields thus acknowledge their debt to cultural studies, we may want to take a closer look at the conceptual frameworks they employ to read

6. Observe, too, the interest in cultural studies in professional organizations dedicated to cognitivist explorations abroad. For instance, the Chinese Association of Cognitive Poetics and Cognitive Literary Studies is preparing to publish the first issue of its new journal, *Cognitive Cultural Studies*, in June 2020.

cultures across the "walls and boundaries" of media. Are there any approaches that they already share, or may come to share in the near future?

Starting with comparativists, one is struck by the wide range of theoretical perspectives that underlie their inquiry across different modes of representation. For instance, a feminist investigation into early modern scientific discourse and visual art uncovers "the essential unity behind apparent differences in medium or form," for, "whatever the medium, women . . . often emerge as passive objects of visual analysis and consumption" (Braider 2006: 170). Or, to use another example, a historicist reconstruction, which refuses to read poetry and visual art as running on parallel cultural tracks, and hence isolated from each other, enriches our understanding of early modern imaginative ecologies: if "texts enable us to understand how painters *thought*, and thus the ideal content or meaning of images they produced, images help us see what the poets *saw*—the world as they imagined it, the world in which they wrote and thought as they themselves understood it" (172).

Both of these perspectives, feminist and historicist, have been crucial to the development of cognitivist epistemologies. I have already outlined the centrality of historicist thinking to the cognitivist project, as theorized in the early 2000s by Hogan, Spolsky, Mary Crane, and Alan Richardson. As to cognitive-evolutionary approaches to feminism, readers will find an important primer in the work of Nancy Easterlin, particularly in the chapter titled "Endangered Daughters" of her 2012 study, *A Biocultural Approach to Literary Theory and Interpretation*.[7] Also, Kukkonen (2018) explores implications of predictive processing for feminist narratology, while both Zunshine (2015a) and Lee (this issue) discuss the interplay of gender and social class in the construction of fictional characters' capacity for representing complex mental states of other people.

It seems, then, that cognitive cultural studies finds congenial a variety of paradigms espoused by comparative literature studies.[8] That said, what cognitive literary/cultural theorists bring to the table—especially when it comes

7. Nancy Easterlin (2012: 248) begins with a rebuttal of the "literary-Darwinian" take on sexual psychology: literary Darwinists "glaringly" eschew in their analyses of literature "any discussion of sexual control and power, both of which are implicated in the conflicting dynamics of men and women." She then offers a reading of D. H. Lawrence's novel *The Fox*, which provides "a striking example of how a behavior 'designed' to serve evolutionary ends is finally dysfunctional for the specific psychological and relational needs of the individuals involved" (263). For a further critique of Darwinian accounts of feminism, see Hogan 2018: 22.

8. For further examples of theoretical compatibility between the two fields, see discussions of their respective engagements with poststructuralism (Spolsky 2002; Heise 2017: 2; see also Charon's and Lee's respective engagement with Derridean poetics in this issue), ecocriticism (Easterlin 2010; Heise 2013), disability studies (Minich 2014; Savarese 2015), queer studies (Vincent 2015; Lanser 2017), and human rights (Anker 2012; Keen 2015).

to a critical engagement with the sister arts—is the sustained focus on the embodied social mind, which is multimodal and multisensory. Thus, the two articles that complete this special issue, Casey Schoenberger's "Staging Sincerity in Renaissance Italy and Early Modern China; or, Why Real Lovers Quarrel" and Elaine Auyoung's "The Unspoken Intimacy of Aesthetic Experience: Hardy and Degas," both stress multimodality of cognition while dealing, respectively, with poetry and music and with prose fiction and visual arts. What their analyses imply is that a critical conversation that crosses representational boundaries is not merely a critical fad (which may be known, at a particular historical juncture, by the moniker *cultural studies*). Instead, it reflects a fundamental feature of human cognition, which is not carved along the modalities corresponding, roughly, to some of our disciplinary divisions.

Conflict is at the center of Schoenberger's exploration of works of musical theater from seventeenth-century Venice and China: conflict both between the romantic protagonists themselves, Emperor Nero and Poppaea (in Monteverdi and Busenello's *Coronation of Poppaea*) and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and Yang Guifei (in Hong Sheng's *Palace of Lasting Life*), and between what their respective audiences were asked to believe (that those protagonists were indeed romantic) and what they knew about the actual behavior of the historical figures portrayed in them (that "only a few years after crowning her" Nero would kick "the pregnant Poppaea to death" [283], and that Xuanzong would eventually order Yang's strangulation). "Scenes depicting lovers' quarrels and morally flawed characters," Schoenberger argues, "may paradoxically strike audiences as more authentically romantic because they dramatize an aspect of attachment emotions' functioning recently elucidated by cognitive science, namely, that of 'body budgeting,'" that is, "allocation of energy resources by the brain" (abstract, 281).

Body budgeting is a profoundly social process. Interacting with others—in the context of a romantic relationship but also, for instance, in the context of attending an operatic performance—involves "ceding, or agreeing to share, a degree of control over psychosomatic resources." Depending on circumstances, "the resulting vulnerability to 'emotional contagion'" may end up being detrimental to or necessary for our health (291–92). Suggesting that musical theater models body budgeting by playing up a wide range of conflicts, Schoenberger investigates some of the "affective 'ingredients'" of such multimodal conflict mongering (295). These include music and prosody (which compete with each other even as they complement each other), the uneasy balancing between what the spectators know about the protagonists and what they are made to feel on their behalf, and the evocation of "emotion concepts" (285), such as joy and envy, which are socially mediated and can

thus be subject to public debate (which, in fact, happened to be the case in both seventeenth-century China and Italy, when a variety of prominent thinkers came to scrutinize the "ethical status of emotion" [282]).

A multimodal conflict (or even piling up of conflicts) is one path to social connection. Another, explored by Auyoung's article, is the production of aesthetic effects by artists and writers that seem to "transcend their chosen medium" (302). In the case of Degas, it is his ability to bring forth "paintings that seem to tell a story" (as in *The Dance Class*), and, in the case of Hardy, it is his "ability to produce novels that seem painterly" (302; e.g., *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*). Such medium-crossing representations, Auyoung suggests, prompt "audiences to supply sensory and affective content that cannot be fully represented on the canvas or the printed page," and by doing so, they allow us "to enjoy a private sense of connection to and intimacy with them and the represented scene" (303).

To explain the mechanism of this private feeling of connection (which, crucially, remains nonreciprocal, for whatever "sensory and affective" meaning viewers/readers derive from them "can never be disconfirmed" [313]), Auyoung brings together research in sociolinguistics, discourse comprehension, and empirical aesthetics. She shows that Hardy cues his readers to supply "much of their own embodied knowledge" (e.g., haptic, kinesthetic, and motor) to make sense of what he describes, thus amplifying "the asymmetry between the multimodal richness of their mental representations and the perceptual features of the printed text" (304). It is this asymmetry that "enables readers to feel as if they privately share common ground with the figures in the fictional world" (304). Degas, in turn,

> calls attention to spaces and bodies that can be seen only partially by viewers [prompting] them to make elaborative inferences about what is implied. . . . They might make an inference about the implied dynamism and animation of the rooms full of moving bodies or make elaborative inferences about more local details, drawing on their social intelligence to wonder what the seated dancer in the foreground is thinking about while resting her hand on her chin.
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> . . . These inferences become the grounds for a sense of private, intimate understanding of indirect meaning that is nowhere in the external world and realized only in the viewer's mind. (311–12)

Knowing (i.e., feeling in our very body) that we understand the artist/writer's private meaning, and that this sense of intimacy cannot be taken away from us/disconfirmed, is a compelling social experience. What Schoenberger's and Auyoung's articles thus demonstrate is that a sense of social connectedness becomes more powerful when it is constructed across modalities, whether prompted by experimentation with body budgeting or with rep-

resentational incompleteness. At the very least, this means that comparative literary scholars reaching out to musicology and art history may benefit from supplementing their current theoretical commitments with an inquiry into the workings of the embodied social mind.

It seems, then, that some of the core interests of cognitive literary theorists (e.g., their engagement with the difficult issue of universals, as well as their emphasis on historicizing, as they explore the dynamics of embodiment) already implicitly align them with their colleagues in comparative literature. Moreover, by casting their projects in explicitly comparativist terms, the contributors to this special issue demonstrate that both fields share the same drive: to go wider (by reaching out to other languages, cultures, representational modalities, and disciplines) in order to go deeper (by elucidating something local, particular, and unique). One hopes that this special issue will be followed by others that will bring together cognitivists and comparativists, as they seek new ways to theorize and build on this integrative drive.

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