# Introduction

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The universal value of storytelling as a form of teaching ethics and moral values is one of the noblest endeavors of any narrative process. Indeed, human values such as generosity, cooperation, solidarity and common good have always been (un) consciously transmitted in stories (Bell, L., 2010; Brookfield 1997)  Looking at 21st century global scenarios, nevertheless, from a humanistic point of view, one cannot help but wonder how effective the instructional value of storytelling has been or *can be* in order to transmit the core values that would have prevented the 2008-2010 financial breakdowns, climate change natural disasters, mass migrations, refugee crisis, ISIS terrorism and endless daily examples of contemporary events which represent stories that put our humanity into question. As Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer highlight in *Leading from an Emerging Future- from Ego Systems to Eco systems*, current narratives indicate that "we have entered an age of disruption" where things are fallen apart at a global scale. Forms of "organized irresponsibility" operate through a collective thoughtless consent that turns a blind eye to massive injustices and inequalities (2013,  1) Overwhelming dearth of empathy and sympathy explains how even urgency in scientific and factual narratives is still not capable to trigger radically swifts that would push "ego systems to eco-relational patterns of behavior" (5).

Highlighting the transformative power of art and culture and the need to be integrated into the fabric of society, this volume explores the role that Humanities in general and the field of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics in particular, is playing nowadays to collectively unearth the deep connection between global crisis and crisis of values. Advocating for creativity, innovation and critical thinking to foster new ways of understanding divergent thinking in the Humanities, intermedial strategic narratives will be explored as the necessary awareness to heal disruptions in a conscious quest for imagining the possibility of articulating the aesthetics of transformative narratives. In these stories *I* becomes *you*; and *me* becomes *we*. Acknowledging multiplicity and complexity as part of *we*, this volume presents papers on literary, inter-artistic representations and hybrid expressions of storytelling all of which interrogate and propose new ways in which the aesthetics of transformative narratives can be recognized and embraced.

Through the exploration of self- representation, the conflicts within and nondual forms of thinking and acting (Tlumin and Gunn 2012), special emphasis has been placed on the performative dimension of storytelling to promote positive social impact; as much as on narratives which function as mediating and intercultural mechanism giving voice and empowering marginal collectives.

In the making visible the existence of discrepancies between colonial histories and colonial encounters and advocating for the convergence of theory, the narrative, the critical and the personal, in "Eso Es: Toward a New Cartography of the Migratory Text", Chris Campanioni proposes "a polysemich text, alternatively conceived, conflicting and intersectional….with many exits", that interrogates to what extent the act of writing migratory texts has the capacity to become a platform for agency to immigrant`s collectives. "What would it mean to work on and against ideology from the inside?", Chris questions. In an extremely eloquent personal voice, Campanioni shapes his theory of "*disidentifications* as a site of resistance and self-creation" from the standpoint of a Cuban polish mix- multilingual voice that celebrates multiplicity and complexity of identity. Indeed, his paper brilliantly invites us to close the gap between the personal and the critical in our research, allowing for an assemblage of thoughts and ideas "to relocate ourselves in a community of others through language". As Campanioni asseverates, it is only through testing oneself through "theoretical frameworks and cultural formations that language, understood as a colonizing weapon, can transform itself into new thresholds subversive ethnographic act". Approaching alterity as a form and site of resistance, it "problematizes" notions of unity and social order in the very constructions of European nation-states as cohesive and heterogeneous. Moreover, by developing flexible, apparently contradictory speaking positions, Campanioni breaks open binary categories and oppositional consciousness. Acknowledging therefore that "the ongoing deconstruction of academic power is a simultaneous move toward personalizing our research to and for the community in which we live and work with", Campanioni invites us into a narrative of agents of change who transform oppressive experiences in a new form of resistance and voice. In the process of illuminating a continual displacement of opposites able to generate alternative forms of identity formation, the search for healing, in the aesthetics of disrupture and performativity, "begins with language and ends with listening". Consequently, it reminds us of the courage it takes to conduct research in first person. "I don't mind having to wait" Campanioni proclaims, speaking from a welcoming vision in which a call to action envisions wholeness in the fragmentations for actions to be truly sustained and transformative.

In this call to action that storytelling allows, Mohammed Mostafa Hassouna makes visible the unbearable level of corruption the preceded and that ultimately lead to the outburst of the Egyptian revolution in his

article "Dystopian Egypt before the Arabian Spring: Critical Review on Ahmed Khaled Towfik's *The Knife* (2012)". The instructional dimension in which the novel helps to educate on the systematic corruption on the decades before the revolution, discloses the most defining features of social relations in dystopian societies. The "knife", constructed as symbolism of the spilt and shattering conditions of poverty and illiteracy, leads to prostitution and drugs and cuts the future of young generations out the possibility of believing in a better life. Also, the "knife", as the fear that governments and regimes exercise to guarantee dominance; the violence perpetrated on citizens to intimidate them from pursuing the revolution. In addition, the fear and forced silence drug lords execute in the community. And the "knife" of a corrupted caste of politicians as much as the one from religious fanatics as the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, who impose by force their worldview even though tolerance and generosity is preached. To these means, Mohammed Mostafa Hassouna highlights the novel´s thematic approach to all societal stratums, with characters who range from all social classes and come from all walks of life but nevertheless, they all represent victimized positions that perpetuate destruction. Their skeptical minds prevent a more positive view of the future since no longer there is faith in the possibility of transforming society into a more humane and fairer world.

Reflecting on the potential of Digital Storytelling to become a catalyst for social change, in the context of media technologies, Cemile Tokgöz-ÞahoÐlu paper titled **"**Digital Storytelling as a Means of Sharing Trauma", explores how can Internet becomes an aesthetic instructional tool where boundaries between private and public are blurred. To do so, she deepens in the various possibilities that performative narratives entail as a healing process towards overcoming the trauma of sexual assault. In particular, she analyses digital trauma stories of sexual violence and how the act of telling is in itself a reviving act that provides perspective and can potentially rearrange meanings in the telling of own story in own´s terms (Simsek 2012). With the help of digital spaces, experiences are dissociated thus enabling storytelling to become a safe place in which to reconstruct trauma and to connect with the community. For example, with the hashtag: *Me too*, digital activism has become a transformative tool in which to combat sexist discourses and hate speech. The potential of social media such as Facebook, twitter or Instagram is approached therefore as a way to provide new empowering narrative experiences (Hartley&MacMillan 2009).

Introducing ways of examining Shakespearean inter-texts as potentially redemptive, in "Shakespearean Traumatic Redemption(s). From the Elizabethan Stage to the Small Complex Television Screen", Victor Huertas historicizes the reception of William Shakespeare's texts in the United States in the context of trauma and redemption defined by various scholars and critics. As Huertas explores, Shakespeare's texts have been used as political weapons and as instruments for education, refinement and elevation in the

United States. Much of its reception relates to the narrative of the reparative, redemptive and curative qualities of experience. In this line, this paper scrutinizes the ways in which Shakespeare′s writings have been used as a vehicle to promote such ideological values in the history of the US.

Nevertheless, in the light of the 9/11 attacks, Huertas argues that the revival of Shakespearean texts within trauma culture tends to overshadow its redemptive nature over its traumatic experience. To illustrate his point, Shakespearean appropriations in serial complex TV narratives produced by Netflix, HBO, Fox and others are explored through the aesthetics of a reflexive narrative that articulates ethical social problems, problematizes gender policies and social justice issues as well as economic and ethnic discrimination in the contemporary American landscape.

Delving into multimodal, intermedial and transmedial explorations of stories as transformative narratives in contemporary art and culture (Lundby 2008) where a "conscious construction that can lead to critical reconstruction", Maria Isabel Castro presents "Visual Storytelling in Hypermodernity: the Transformative Construction of Symbolic Realities through Staged Photography". By traversing both the fictional and theatrical nature of stage photography, photographic storytelling emerges as a transformative force, not just a mere disguise of reality and it confronts us to interrogate the "truths" in representation. Indeed, visual aesthetics allow for connectivity and empathy, and in the context of postmodernity, hypermodern narrativity is aimed at accommodating the new symptoms of the present with a strong social engagement. As a new artistic genre, this passage opens many possibilities in a "new territory of experimentation and projection", able to free spectators from looking for resemblances and imitations and to encourage speculation upon the reflective nature of the image. In the hypermodern idea of life as a fictional and theatrical object, the image is not as important as the invitation to explore new layers of meaning and complexity that symbolically challenge us to re-examine our critical and ethical standpoint and our responses to contemporary concerns. To these means, "photographic tableauxs become metaphors of contemporary states of mind, meanings that transcend literal events". In them, theories of alienation, despair and failure are depicted as in the works of Gregory Crewdson, Sarah Hobbs, Mitra Tabrizian. Moreover, symbolic stagings for social awareness are found in the works of Jeff Wall, Tom Hunter and Taryn Simon. In their works, theories of both urban and sub-urban everyday scenarios combine social denounce, political stand, references to art history and skillful techniques that embrace and challenge a variety of social issues.

Foregrounding the ethical constructedness of the poetic text, Evelina Saponjic Javanovic introduces "Fragment as a Storytelling Device". No longer based on linearity or sequence of thoughts in large strings of text, what is known as Flash Fiction, that is, short short stories in online format, move

into shorter spans of language units critically synthesizing glances of the ordinary in an open and connectable narrative entirely oriented toward experimentation. It advocates for an anti-hierarchical rythomatic model of knowledge (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) visually understood as an assemblage of discrete elements. As a result, performativity is enacted in formats that are "detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification" in a language as intense and multi-vocal as possible. Experimenting with identities that are multiple and fragmentary, poetic structures find its innovative extreme artifice in reflective aesthetics, involving not just aesthetic taste but critical concerns**.** As Evelina states: "The short story becomes a way of practicing the fiction of identity at a time when the self is in constant change, vastly increasing the possibilities of transitory commitments and fragmented relationships", both in converge and poetic imaginings.

In a combination of entertainment and education, Elena Avanzas Álvarez *ex*plores the acquisition of knowledge through fiction, in particular, crime stories in "Criminal Readings: The Transformative and Instructive Power of Crime Fiction". It is through a process of serialization and identification with the audience that popular forensic Tv shows with crime- solving plots, just as *CSI or Bones*, are becoming mass media products blundering the boundaries between knowledge and entertainment. It inquiries into the factual science that is embedded in the audiovisual narration, which it is used it as a hook for the audiences with the purpose to stimulate critical minds by being constantly challenged by riddle and hidden meanings. Furthermore, it represents a platform to spotlight women´s writers and gender issues in the construction of strong tv female characters which are driven by a profound ethical code. The theoretical frame will be exemplified by contemporary novels in which the identification between the reader and the detective takes place thanks to the addressing of shared problematics.

Interrogating to what extent configurations in space by Image Schemas might correspond to changes in emotional states, Marta Silvela considers the biological pulse of our thought and the evolutionary pattern in our creative and imaginative processes in **"**The Crying of Lot 49: to Live Narratives is to Feel Narratives". In an attempt to expose "the invisible processes taking place in our narrative experience", this paper tries to outline contributions from cognitive linguistic models together with complex theory concepts and Neurobiology of emotions in better understanding that our emotional mind cannot be separated from our cognitive mind, for our thought processes are intrinsically bound to our emotional processes. In doing so, affective Neuroscience is articulated as the key to understand human motivation and how the markers in decision-making are anchored in the human emotional part (Bechara 2004).

In particular, Silvela applies cognitive linguistic models of Image Schemas to several examples from the novel *The Crying of Lot 49* of Thomas Pynchon in order to describe the hypothesis that relational actions from image schemas

and their inherently embodied and dynamic structures "function as attractors profiling the chaotic but deterministic trajectory of the narrative". Conceptual metaphors and image schemas blend to provide inclusion into the conceptual world of the author and the active process of literary reception. Moreover, her paper proposes a reading of the literary text "to be a poetic act, a dynamic open system which is dissipate and synergic showing how spatial constructions of narratives are highly complex acts where relations and meanings converge". This dynamic conceptualization between literature and reality responds to the arguments presented by Biopoetics, (Guerra 1992, 1995, 2011, 2013), for whom "the poetic act is an adaptative (self-organized) complex system which (con)figurates human mental reality (2013, 259).

In his article "Towards a New Teaching/Learning Experience: A Benjanimiam Proposal", Stefano Calzati reminds us that technology does not remember events but only repeats them since it doesn't run through memories but through algorithms and quantitative logic. Making a distinction between technologized communication and oral storytelling and its passing of teachings among peoples across generations, Calzati acknowledges the danger of technology to "shatter collective memory" and reminds us of the need to demand more qualitative narration "theories able to rethink the relationship between the human and the machine". As digitalization turns communication "into objectified, self-enclosed items that supplant the human ability and need to trace its roots", Calzati argues that "the practice of storytelling has been reduced to the mere delivery of information and self-standing and self-validating facts". Thus, Calzati urges to put technology at human use to create a new connection among ourselves and the environment.

To do so, he reflects on how "the utility of knowledge has made knowledge a commonality" and relies on Benjamin´s theory of "Erfahrung" (collective memory) and "Erlebnis" (dissemination and individual process) and he applies it to the realm of higher education teaching. Based on findings from a digital ethnography research conducted at Hong Kong university (38 students) enrolled in a practice- based course called "Facebook and autobiography", Calzati discusses results from online and blended courses and states that online courses recreate teaching environments that "lack any form of Erfahung". Going a step further on Benjanin and Adorno´s discussion in mass media, he questions the achievability in recreating a new technologized Erfahrung. What it is at stake, Calzati defends, is the possibility that the mediation of technologies will eventually become more qualitative and foster a new learning experience.

Examining digital storytelling as a framework for learning itself; that is, how learners learn through stories, Sofia Theodosiadou tries to answer if digital storytelling is suitable as a teaching method for preschoolers into the promotion of less complicated reflective thinking in her paper "Digital Storytelling as a Means of Teaching Media to Preschoolers". Aimed at both

deepening the discussion on how digital storytelling can further contribute to the media learning experience of preschoolers and enhance their creativity and initiative, it suggests that stories can scaffold and model thinking that occurs in the acquisition of language, mathematical skills, and arts. By Integrating critical thinking in the classroom as a common thread in the teaching of media literacy, preschoolers are equipped with an explicit, comprehensible and consistent view of the world while starting to discover themselves. Consequently, the goal of the study is to achieve a greater comprehension of the role of digital storytelling in enhancing media learning experience for preschoolers. In regard to ethics, it shows that digital storytelling is a good platform to identify values such as empathy, respect for differences and cooperation. It is also a vehicle for behavioral improvement and for solving communication problems in the classroom.

Seeking for an effective way of achieving intercultural understanding and dialogue in the context of globalization, Qingben Li proposes in his new book, *Rethinking the Relationship between China and the West through a Focus on Literature and Aesthetics*, the rethinking of dualistic models that construct China and the West as two distinct entities. As Yapeng Sun recounts in the book review article of our volume titled "A Multi-dimensional Model of Intercultural Hermeneutics Between China and the West: Book review on Qingben Li´s Work", the key relies in taking "Western learning introduced into China" and "exporting Chinese culture to the world" as an overall process that has always complemented itself. In doing so, Li adopts a multi-dimensional model of intercultural research to reinterpret literary and aesthetic relationship between "the West/China" and "modernity/ traditionalism". By relating the concept of Zen and traditional Chinese thoughts and aesthetics with the new Western aesthetics theory developed by critics such as Shusterman, many commonalities arise in the understanding of non-duality and the philosophy of benevolence. Therefore, in the bridging of tradition and modernity, the interpretation of Confucius (T[P[), Mencius (_[P[) and Xunzi (@ƒP[) together with the *Book of Changes* by the lenses of modern western literary theory and aesthetics, sheds light into the existence of many nodal points. These areas of commonality are stressed and embraced, opening up new venues for intercultural understanding and interpretation. As Yapeng recounts, Li elucidates that "Just as it is written in the Bible 'Do to others what you would have them do to you', Confucius also tells that 'what you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others`; the perspectives can be different, but the aims are the same". Indeed, an illustrative reminder that what unites us, it is always bigger than what separates us.

And it is in this spirit of shared universal values that unite different people in different places and different times that the common thread of all the different articles in this volume, can be traced. As we have seen, all contributions feature experiences and emotions that are connected to

memory and lead to a form of shared reflection, knowledge and understanding able to disrupt misleading models of identity and collectivity. Considering communication and meaning as core definitions of storytelling, they inquire in the value of storytelling as a tool for critical thinking, creativity and discussion, analyzing different types of reasoned and contrasted storytelling as forms of discursive frames which give meaning to human interactions (Barthes, 1993). In this vein, intermedial formats allow for the ordinary to be open and connectable through a new narrative entirely oriented toward experimentation in which traumas can be deconstructed and healed.

With this in mind, the final aim of this collection has been to bring together a diverse cross-section of vibrant**,** arts-infused theories of belonging and community; theories that celebrate the importance of storytelling for a positive social change. Thus, in a thoughtful deliberation about its mission, the volume celebrates the potential of literary and artistic representations to instruct *human values* while interrogating the role of Humanities, in general, and Comparative Literature and Aesthetics, in particular, in articulating effective multimodal narratives that would expand reflective tellability through new unfolding emotional frames. Indeed, it is in the power of warmhearted and contrasted stories that resides the ability to communicate the necessary compelling messages of radical openness and transformation that twentieth first century scenarios so desperately need at a global scale. To approach the aesthetics of reflective intermediality, we argue, holds the key to the possibility of global disruptions being transformed into instances of "(inter) connectivity and empathy" (Scharmer and Kaufer 2013, 5) In truth, it is in the redeeming nature of the ethical grounding and instructional value of storytelling, that the deep connection between global crisis and crisis of values can be collectively unearthed.

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