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…[W]e cannot simply go back to literary texts without assimilating what science has discovered about human nature, minds, and behavior over the last half-century, and considering what these discoveries can offer for a first truly comprehensive literary theory. - Brian Boyd

But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence, this change, inasmuch as it does away with illusion, is an absolute annihilation, or at least a reckless profanation; for in these days illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness. - Ludwig Feuerbach

The present project was proposed as an attempt to develop a critical understanding of the theory and practice of literary writing in the sphere of new media. This has been done through a close reading of selected texts of theorists (Lev Manovich, George P. Landow, N. Katherine Hayles and Marie-Laure Ryan) and practitioners (Michael Joyce, Talan Memmott and Mark Amerika) working respectively in the filed of new media theory and practice. The intention was to undertake a critical reflection on new media writing that not only questions the boundaries of the literary but also broadens the concept of writing by using the entire apparatus of computing and communications aided by computers, networking
and digital technology. The attempt has been to explore the possibilities of new media technology for creative literary writing practices by analyzing writing in the new media.

The art of literary writing came into existence with the coming of the printing press. As we know, literature has been conventionally associated with the written word. This led to the growth of a particular conception of writing vis-à-vis its manifestation in print and the confined topographical schematics of the page. However, the advent of new media technology during the last two decades has significantly altered the scene. A new generation of writers, artists, engineers and programmers started exploring the potential for creative vistas rendered possible by new media platforms. They have been actively collaborating for making experimental literary artifacts. Their accomplishments have greatly extended and enriched the traditional and dominant conception of writing while also deconstructing and critiquing it.

Writing in the new media also uses, in addition to the written word, sound, image, animation, video and programming. This allows the creation of multisensory experience constructed through the visual, aural, kinetic and textual tools. It was argued that such writing practices are not worth considering within the domain of literary studies. But our study has told us that the potential for the literary is not compromised in new media writing. Although, there are temptations to explicitly valorise the technical aspect of such writing practices. At the same time, a more subtle and better grasp of the specificity of writing in the new media should be possible only within their historical specificity. What happened with the advent of
the print press may happen yet again with the growing uses of computers. As cultural production and reproduction become digital, are we likely to have ‘digital literature’ as the predominant material form of literature in near future? In the introduction to *The Late Age of Print*, Ted Striphas writes:

> Ours, evidently, is an age in which the buzz of electronic media predominates. Amid the incessant flow of twenty-four-hour radio and television, the visual and sonic entropy of digitally enhanced cinema, the dizzyingly connective Internet maze, the kaleidoscopic intensity of digital gaming, and the frenetic pace at which new media of all stripes seem to shape patters of our daily lives. It seems difficult to imagine books shouldering much world-historical responsibility anymore [italics mine]. (2)

Reading Striphas’s declaration one is forced to confront the possibility of the end of book, particularly as it has existed so far. The form of the book concerns itself with the question of writing; the question of writing is directly related to the question of the human, and since the ‘human’ is itself undergoing a radical transmutation, it is inevitable that writing will also witness fundamental transformations which will in turn affect our understanding and conceptions of literature in the twenty-first century.

The *condition of digitality* is here, and we are living it. There is no escape from this predicament howsoever fondly we may wish. Commenting on the digital condition, Hayles writes:
Books will not disappear, but neither will they escape the effects of the digital technologies that interpenetrate them. More than a mode of material production (although it is that), digitality has become the textual condition of twenty-first century literature. (Hayles 186)

The challenges thrown up by our predicament must be confronted and tackled in all seriousness. We have no choice but to respond to the coming socio-cultural changes which the new developments in computers, networking and digital communication have unleashed. These developments significantly affect the whole range of artistic practices and aesthetic sensibilities. Scholars in the humanities (a significant section of budding scholars) need to answer the challenge of rethinking the humanities in the light of the transformations unleashed by the *condition of digitality* as witnessed by the currency of such terms like the ‘digital humanities’, ‘humanities computing’ or ‘computing in humanities’.

With the rise of the digital, it seems we are once again faced with the challenges posed by *technicity* in human life in all its nakedness and brutality. It has brought to the fore the lurking question of *techne* as the constitutive *other* of all human social life. Timothy Clark remarks that “[n]o thinking – no interiority of the psyche - can be conceived apart from technics in the guise of systems of signs which it may seem to employ but which are a condition of its own identity” (240). Seeing the technological as the essentially constitutive element significantly alters the historically constructed binary between the human and the technological. Bernard Stiegler refers to this predicament as “originary prostheticity” in tune with Clark (98). The *condition of digitality* raises difficult questions about human subjectivity
and problematizes age-old cherished notion of the human. It also compels us to rethink the relationship between the human and the technological. Consequently, the question of writing in the Derridean sense of the term has to be rethought in the light of the condition of digitality. Writing cannot remain confined to language.

Language, for Derrida, as Federica Frabetti rightly observes, “could only be a ‘mode’ or an aspect of writing” (9). Hence, the question concerning technology is directly a question concerning the nature of writing and of the becoming of writing, and of its futures vis-à-vis the unfolding of technics in all its menacing and exponentially creative possibilities. Regarding the relationship between humanities and the condition of digitality, Frabetti’s comment is perceptive:

[...C]omputation and the humanities cannot be thought as two separate entities whose relations can be defined once and for all, and that the digital humanities might need to keep the very question of the relations between the humanities and digitality (and perhaps, more broadly, between the human and the technological) open. In fact, the ability to question inherited conceptual frameworks regarding technology might be one of the digital humanities’ points of strength, which is pivotal to the production of new knowledge. (Frabetti 2)

In other words, the condition of digitality creates the possibility of rethinking the question of the technological and the scholars in the humanities must engage with this question. Of course, it is not about finding the right answer or settling the question once and for all; it is rather about generating new knowledge and constructing more inclusive frameworks for understanding the relationship between
the human and the technological. The humanities need to own the responsibility of dealing with the questions of technology.

As the field of writing in the new media appears to be in a formative stage, a substantial body of criticism is not yet available on such writing. Broadly speaking, there are two sets of responses. On the one side of the fence, there are the writers who celebrate the coming of writing in the new media as it creates an engaging and participatory user/reader, one who is free to weave in her/his own readings into the writing. Writing in the new media is being hailed as full of possibilities for disrupting the varied hierarchical relationships consolidated by print culture and the linearity of the narrative. Moreover, they see writing in the new media as self-consciously and fundamentally experimental, challenging and even subverting the notions of individual genius or creativity, canon formation and the institutional legitimation canonical works. Hypertext theorists consider hypertext as an heir to modernist/avant-garde movements like dada, surrealism, collage writing and underground writing insofar as hypertext radically challenges the institutional understandings of writing, reading and literature.

On the other side of the fence, there are the writers and critics who see writing in the new media not as radically liberating as its proponents claim. For them hypertext is nothing more than a passing fad among many and it will soon automatically die away. Laura Miller’s provocative essay “www.claptrap.com” in The New York Times, written in response to Robert Coover’s The End of Books, summarizes this view of the hypertext. She writes that reading the hypertext “is a listless task, a matter of incessantly having to choose among alternatives, each of
which, I\'m assured, is no more important than any other. This process, according to Landow, makes me \textquoteleft a truly active reader\textquoteright, but the experience feels profoundly meaningless and dull\textquoteright. Paul Duguid also questions the rhetoric surrounding the new media writing. He says that \textquoteleft the desire for a technology to liberate information from technology is not far from the search for a weapon to end all weapons or the war to end all wars\ldots\textquoteright. As with so much optimistic futurology, it woos us to jump by highlighting the frying pan and hiding the fire\textquoteright~ (Miller and Stam 247) .

Tatiani G. Rapatzikou and Arthur Redding argue that the relationship between the print medium and the possibilities opened up by the digital writing and reading technologies does not necessarily have to be one of dominance and hierarchy. It should be thought of in terms of

\ldots\textquoteleft co-development and co-evolution on the basis of how the differences and similarities between these two mediums challenge the perception of the users and, hence, how the perception or attitude of the users towards them shapes the make-up of the medium both aesthetically and structurally.\textquoteright~ (3)

The works of studied here throw significant light on the complex nature and creative potential of writing in the new media. These works not only explore the aesthetic potential of writing through new linguistic construction and strange metaphors, but simultaneously employ varied functionalities of the new media technology. In the process, we get complex techno-literary artifacts which make use of language, sound, visual, image, mythology, animation, coding, programming and neologisms to contemplate and reflect upon the questions of identity, networked
human subjectivity, digital ontology, existential nothingness, radical contingency, epistemological uncertainty, human mortality, and the undying striving after meaning in the human condition. If literature is the space where everything can be said, as Derrida has said, then writing in the new media is the potential literary space where fundamental questions about our existential predicament and social condition can be raised and explored afresh. Moreover, writing in the new media creates the possibility of overcoming the ‘alienating image’ of technology derived from popular-cultural imagination. Rather, new media humanizes technology not by any kind of mythologizing but by making literary-philosophical and critical contemplation through the functionalities of the technology itself possible. This is evident from Memmott’s and Amerika’s creative works. Memmott says that his creative aim has always been to investigate the “phenomena of identity construction and human, social interrelations as mediated through network technology” (152). Joyce explores the fragmented nature of contemporary experience by designing the narrative of his works accordingly.

Literature can be reduced neither to language and the printed inscriptions on the page nor to natural human proclivity for narrative. Literature exceeds both narrative and its inescapable materiality. It overflows with volatile possibilities, which we have only now begun to realize with new media writing. Narrative, of course, becomes one of the important aspects of writing, but it is not central to literary writing in the new media. Writing in the new media takes the urge for creative experimentation, which exploded earlier with modernism and continued into postmodernist writing, to a new level of complexity. Writing in the new media
is imbued with unimaginable possibilities. This does not necessarily mean that the writer should leave the page and fly into some pure and ethereal realm of digitality. Instead, s/he can face up to the limitations and constraints imposed upon him/her by the page. Digital technologies have opened new avenues and unforeseen vistas for experimentation. This definitely demands courage since one is called upon to visualize and construct more collaborative and participatory exercise of collaborative creative potential.

We argue that as things stand today it is still too early to prognosticate that the advent of new writing and reading practices sounds the death-knell for literature in print form. One should not get carried away by the populist view of such writings. We should refrain from making grand pronouncements about the future of printed literature if we want to nurture a more nuanced, serious and critical approach to new media writing. Literary theory, and more broadly literary studies, has always been open to engage itself with experimentation and new kinds of writing practices in order to develop a more comprehensive framework to deal with them. In a similar fashion, we must meet the challenge of building new theoretico-critical frameworks to study new media writing.

Literature is undergoing a mutation; its very DNA is under reconstruction. The conditions of its creation, production and dissemination are radically shifting. We are faced with the challenge to situate the emerging writing practices in a broader socio-cultural and historical context to understand their nature and function in the context of the emerging forms and practices of everyday life. This will help us to understand the historico-cultural function and genealogy of such writing. This
entails new trajectories for critical practices. The need of the hour, as Katherine Hayles says, is to “think digital” (par. 37). There is a temptation to read the screen of a computer as a page, but if we want to critically interpret and fathom writing in the new media, its possibilities and potential, then we must recognize “the specificity of new media without abandoning the rich resources of traditional modes of understanding language, signification and embodied interactions with the texts” (par. 29). The time has come when scholars in the humanities need to confront the phenomenon of new forms of writing practices. It should be remembered that we are still at the incunabula stage of electronic literary production. We share our perplexity with those people who witnessed the first printed book. As the field of new media writing develops, we may expect significant literary works of all kinds and varieties to emerge.

That means criticism will have its hands full.