

LITERARY CRITICISM, *DISTANT READING* AND FALSE ARGUMENTATION

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Résumé : *L'étude propose un regard critique sur la méthode d'interprétation de la littérature appelée distant reading (lecture à distance), par celui qui l'a lancée, le professeur de littérature comparée Franco Moretti. Partant d'un résumé de la critique littéraire dans la dynamique de l'histoire qu'elle a accumulée surtout après 1900, l'étude fait une analyse sommaire du discours et des arguments de Moretti. L'objectif est de montrer la position négative de Moretti sur la littérature, sur l'acte de lire et sur les consciences impliquées : l'auteur de la littérature et le lecteur de la littérature. Les stratégies argumentatives de Moretti, empruntées ou improvisées à partir de lectures en botanique, génétique ou mathématiques, construisent un faux argument basé sur le poids manipulateur. L'étude cherche, en même temps, à montrer que l'émergence de cette fausse méthode d'interprétation de la littérature est, en fait, une conséquence objective de l'évolution de la pensée philosophique moderne.*

Mots-clés : *distant reading (lecture à distance), critique littéraire, interprétation, littérature, conscience.*

Over the past decade, the interpretation of literature has embraced new changes, which should lead literary critics, of any orientation, to look with discernment at the heritage and humanistic memory in which they were educated and which they took advantage of until recently. Within the more recent debates in the field of literary interpretation, there is one particular approach that stands out after 2003: Franco Moretti's *distant reading*, which entitles us to return to an old question: *should literary criticism be art or science?* Franco Moretti has been publishing articles in the *New Left Review* since 2003; the book *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* was published by *Verso* in 2005, named in the Italian edition *La letteratura vista da lontano*. In 2013 he published, in the same vein, *Distant Reading*. Moretti forces us to return to an essential forgotten question: is there *catharsis* and *cathartic reading*? How do we reconcile it with the normative thinking and discursive-analytical strategies of a science of literature? Is critical reading *non-cathartic*,

even *anti*-cathartic, or does it assume and develop into interpretation the very cathartic moment of reading poetry, novels, or epics?

Franco Moretti invented in the 2000s the idea of *distant reading*, which would translate as follows: the study of literature, in all its forms, must be abandoned, because it is “*backward*”, rudimentary and inefficient, by the inability to produce satisfactory knowledge. It will be replaced by a *new critique*, which no longer aims at reading and understanding the text, but at highlighting legalities, models, and (macro) systemic rules. The interpretation of literature must be adapted to the new technological age, says Moretti, through a *computational critique*, which will free itself from the reading and scientific analysis of literature in order to put it at the service of a superior knowledge, with the help of technology. Between the literary text and the new scientist studying literature, the *machine* will be interposed: a software specially created by computer scientists will “*read*” literary texts—thousands, tens of thousands of texts or more—and subject them to a process of destructuring into *data*, which is later combined, associated, and recombined in order to obtain statistical analyses, diagrams and “*maps*” that the new literary critic will interpret. The interpreter’s consciousness is no longer free: it is dependent on and subordinate to the machine.

Moretti is authoritarian: literary criticism must be pure science, but a radically different science from what we still call the science of literature, with which it seems only to be vaguely related. The choices he made in his articles and books published since 2003 are based on the frontal denial of the history of literature, literary hermeneutics, and comparativism of any orientation, devoted to the interpretation of literary texts. Moretti admits no hesitation and no doubt, no real negotiation with the art of reading, with new history, with comparativism, but neither with (post) structuralist discourse. The big surprise, however, is his attitude towards the idea of reading, knowledge, and interpretation. The legitimization of the concept of *distant reading* is based on the denial of reading itself, not just cathartic reading and critical reading. Moretti frontally proposes to approach literature on the basis of an axiomatic pact, summarized as follows: “...*a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let’s learn how not to read them*” (Moretti, 2013: 13).

There is, of course, in this nuclear phrase for understanding Moretti’s direction and the seemingly nonchalant calling, when, in fact, it is imperative: “...*we know how to read texts, let’s learn not to read them anymore.*” Moretti’s challenge, which he calls “*literature without texts*”, sounds like a sinister prank or, more accurately, just nonsense, as Harold Bloom put it in an interview. It would not, therefore, be worth much effort to understand. But because Moretti’s persuasive approach has plagued serious critics and comparators over the past decade, and seems to be further fueling the enthusiasm of many who are eager to overcome, through distant reading, a state of weakness and discomfort in the interpretation of literature, it is necessary to stop with all the seriousness we are capable of and to understand what is happening. Franco Moretti achieved what he wanted: influence, power, and a clear beginning to divert literary studies to a disturbing posthumanist identity. The pact with the devil in the first place is never “*small*”, because it means from the beginning the annihilation of the difference between *good* and *evil*, in the personal and real consciousness of the critic and his voluntary transformation into an amoral consciousness, a black-box with unpredictable evolution, even for himself. Giving up previous knowledge (“*we know how to read texts*”) leads to and promises a false freedom, that of not knowing. To learn not to read means to learn not to know, not to know, not to understand, but to receive what the machine produces as knowledge and truth (“*from now on we will learn how not to... read [texts?]*”). Alvin Toffler anticipated in his writings in the 1980s that the illiterate man

of the future would not be the one who is unable to read and write, but the one who is unable to understand and who willingly empowers the machine to make judgments, to analyze and to interpret: “*A new civilization is emerging in our lives, and blind men everywhere are trying to suppress it. This new civilization brings with it new family styles; changed ways of working, loving, and living; a new economy; new political conflicts; and beyond all this an altered consciousness as well...The dawn of this new civilization is the single most explosive fact of our lifetimes*” (Toffler, 1980: 187).

Moretti makes the critic’s empathy disappear for *all* the consciences involved in the interpretation of literature, including his own conscience as a reader! Moretti denies both the presence of consciences and the need for their knowledge, personal memory and catharsis. The goal is painfully barbaric, unrelated to everything we know about the cultivation, revelation, and service of the human in art. The promise made by the Moretti method to the literary critic is to receive the power to dominate through *non*-knowledge and *non*-teaching. “...*we know how to read texts, from now on we will learn how not to read them.*” How strange, hypnotic, and destructive is this false and poisoned teaching! *Distant reading* is not just a *distant* or alienated *reading* from the text. “*Literature seen from afar*” (*la letteratura vista da lontano*), as Moretti called his method, in his mother tongue, is a *non-reading*, even a premeditated *anti-reading*, which suppresses the whole experience of knowledge through reading and replaces it with a technique that generates quantitative analyses on the data in which the literary text is broken, abusively calling it computational criticism, because it has, in essence, no substantive connection with what we call literary criticism. Every reader recognizes the belonging of a text to literature through its individuality and uniqueness, through the power to create emotion, representation and message, through the originality and unrepeatability of discourse, whose logic and order cannot be deconstructed without destroying even the primary nature of the text. The Moretti method acts premeditatedly in the opposite direction and, in fact, abolishes both the literacy of the text and its integrity. In the process of *distant reading*, the literary text becomes something other than literature: a raw material for digitized analysis, situated, as we will see, at the margins of some sciences with which the analyst is associated.

Franco Moretti, an experienced comparator, published, in three parts, from November 2003 to August 2004, in the *New Left Review* (a British journal of politics and culture), a manifesto entitled *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*, and admitted that his approach was “*to delineate a transformation in the study of literature.*” In fact, Moretti proposed a revolution, which he called, in a didactic and deceptive manner, “*a shift from the close reading of individual texts to the construction of abstract models.*” Without explicit arguments, literary criticism is then suddenly taken out of literature, to a marginal and arbitrary scientific territory, invented ad-hoc by Moretti, who associates sequences taken disparately from statistics, evolutionary biology and cartography used in geography:

“What follows is the first of three interconnected articles, whose common purpose is to delineate a transformation in the study of literature. Literature, the old territory; but within it, a shift from the close reading of individual texts to the construction of abstract models. The models are drawn from three disciplines—quantitative history, geography and evolutionary theory: graphs, maps and trees—with which literary criticism has had little or no interaction; but which have many things to teach us, and may change the way we work.” (Moretti, *New Left Review*, 2003)

Moretti justifies his choice by invoking a purely quantitative principle: the historical-literary or comparative hermeneutic judgment would be valid, according to him,

only if it is based on the knowledge of all published texts, in the area where any literary work approached falls. In this way, Moretti would like to delegitimize in bulk the accumulated literary history, the theories of the literary canon and the studies dedicated to the Western canon; he argues that they all deal with far too few texts in relation to all publications, from any era. The literary critic is seen as a helpless creature in front of the mountain of novels that should be read, because he does not have enough life to go through all the novels of the nineteenth century, for example. Therefore, the literary canon, focused on too few texts read by its promoters, would be an arbitrary selection of individual texts that unnecessarily grind the ever-renewed efforts of analysis and consequently the critic is unable to visualize the macrosystem, the universal rules (followed by the whole novel of the nineteenth century etc.). What does Moretti draw from this false judgment? If we cannot read all the novels that were published in the nineteenth century, we are reading in vain! The solution is simple: stop reading. We introduce the texts into a machine program and wait for it to provide us with “graphics, maps, trees”, which we can interpret. Moretti concludes without nuances: it is necessary to fundamentally change the approach to literature, which can no longer start from reading and can no longer be consumed in the interpretation of texts, taken autonomously:

“... a canon of two hundred novels, for instance, sounds very large for nineteenth-century Britain (and is much larger than the current one), but is still less than one per cent of the novels that were actually published: twenty thousand, thirty, more, no one really knows—and close reading won’t help here, a novel a day every day of the year would take a century or so... And then, a field this large cannot be understood by stitching together separate bits of knowledge about individual cases, because it isn’t a sum of individual cases: it’s a collective system, that should be grasped as such, as a whole—and the graphs that follow are one way to begin doing this.” (Moretti, *New Left Review*, 2004)

Moretti points to the knot of his vision of literature, which, in his view, would be a *collective system*, not a sum of *individual* cases. Supporting a *collective* nature of literature, together with rejecting the search for the individual identity of literary works, in order to know their autonomous worlds, means, in fact, denying the uniqueness of artistic creation as a source of meaning and significance and liquidating the idea of art and literature! The analysis that Moretti offers, as a demonstrative example of *distant reading*, is a series of poor data, graphs and interpretations, in order to present as an extraordinary discovery the resumption of some formal cycles in the evolution of the novel. The cyclic movement, if it exists, can be easily identified and truly legitimized, in a completely different way: by reading and interpreting. Only in such a process of analysis can it become significant, if it gives content to the dynamics of aesthetic mentalities, currents of thought, etc. Then, seemingly astonished that Bakhtin was able to invent the *chronotope* without making any maps or charts, without the help of a machine, Moretti, always looking for repetitive forms, strives to gain weight and coherence in his speech by using insistence on technical terms and phrases taken from the sciences visited (statistics, geography and quantitative history, economics): map, linear system, circular system, vectors, rays, prototype, centric composition, etc. We learn, for example, that (only) a map of a hero’s movements in his living space could lead us to look for an explanation of his movements! False argumentation touches on the ridiculous and humiliates the mind of the reader:

“When a system is free to spread its energy in space’, writes Rudolf Arnheim, ‘it sends out its vectors evenly all around, like the rays emanating from a source of light. The resulting... pattern is the prototype of centric composition. ‘Exactly: out of the free movements of Our Village’s narrator, spread evenly all around like the petals of a daisy, a circular pattern crystallizes—as it does, we shall see, in all village stories, of which it constitutes the fundamental chronotope. But in order to see this pattern, we must first extract it from the narrative flow, and one way to do so is with a map. Not, of course, that the map is already an explanation; but at least it shows us that there is something that needs to be explained. One step at a time.” (Moretti, *New Left Review*, 2004)

The further we go into Moretti’s demonstration, the more illogical and absurd the feeling becomes: in fact, we do not go through any historical-geographical or economic analysis of the fictional worlds proposed by literature, nor do we receive a critical interpretation of the literary text. What we get is a speculative experiment, based on graphics produced by some software that has blindly dismantled thousands or tens of thousands of texts for the commentator. And critical speculations, often strangely simplistic, are also possible only because previously, for more than 20 years, Moretti worked differently: he read books, interpreted them, and published (careful) analyzes of individual texts. Therefore, the Moretti experiment can capture some content only because of the memory and experience with which Moretti himself enters and plays in his own scenario. Not coincidentally, all his analyses of the *distance reading* method take place in the exact area where he published comparative studies between 1983-2003 (*Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, 1983; *The Way of the World. Bildungsroman in European Culture*, 1987; *The Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*, 1996; *Atlas of the European novel: 1800-1900*, 1998; *Il romanzo*, 2003). But such a method taught to students and PhD students in Philology, who have no humanistic education and decades of practice of the hermeneutics of literary texts, which Master Moretti has, what can produce anything but semidoctrism and pseudo-science of literature? Moretti confesses his Marxist background, his attachment to Della Volpe’s school, but especially to Darwin’s theory of evolution and morphology:

“Trees; evolutionary theory. They come last, in this series of essays, but were really the beginning, as my Marxist formation, influenced by DellaVolpe and his school, entailed a great respect (in principle, at least) for the methods of the natural sciences. So, at some point I began to study evolutionary theory, and eventually realized that it opened a unique perspective on that key issue of literary study which is the interplay between history and form. Theories of form are usually blind to history, and historical work blind to form; but in evolution, morphology and history are really the two sides of the same coin. Or perhaps, one should say, they are the two dimensions of the same tree.” (Moretti, *New Left Review*, 2004)

On several occasions, his speech becomes shockingly premeditated. Moretti forces the literary critic to forget everything he knows, to spontaneously renounce all his humanist memory and to position himself far from literature, treating it not as an art of the word, but as a rather anarchic place, populated by data that waiting to be mapped according to laws borrowed from geography, botany, genetics, but also computer science, in the absence of anything better! An example. Trying to summarize the idea of the tree as a matrix in evolutionary theory, he builds superficial associations between various scientific fields, without a clearly justified approach. He forcibly exiles both literature and literary criticism outside his own space, through a discourse based on manipulative persuasion, in

order to bring into the subconscious of the literary critic the feeling of inferiority to the state of the scientist and the frustration of being outside the game of science. He thus improvises (pseudo) arguments to legitimize the conceptualization of the tree as a method of research in literary criticism. Of course, Moretti's discursive behavior is not original at all; he is inspired by similar practices and already quite common in other experimental territories, from psychology, psychopedagogy, neuroscience-based ethics etc. Here is what he writes and how he constructs the (pseudo)reasoning:

“A diagram. After the diachronic diagrams of the first article, and the spatial ones of the second, trees are a way of constructing morphological diagrams, with form and history as the two variables of the analysis: the vertical axis of figure 1 charting the regular passage of time (every interval, writes Darwin, ‘one thousand generations’), and the horizontal axis following the formal diversification (‘the little fans of diverging dotted lines’) that would eventually lead to ‘well-marked varieties’, or to entirely new species. The horizontal axis follows formal diversification... But Darwin’s words are stronger: he speaks of ‘this rather perplexing subject’—elsewhere, ‘perplexing & unintelligible...—whereby forms don’t just ‘change’, but change by always diverging from each other (remember, we are in the section on ‘Divergence of Character’)...Whether as a result of historical accidents, then, or under the action of a specific ‘principle’, ...the reality of divergence pervades the history of life, defining its morphospace—its space-of-forms: an important concept, in the pages that follow—as an intrinsically expanding one. From a single common origin, to an immense variety of solutions: it is this incessant growing-apart of life forms that the branches of a morphological tree capture with such intuitive force. ‘A tree can be viewed as a simplified description of a matrix of distances’, write Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi and Piazza in the methodological prelude to their *History and Geography of Human Genes*; and figure 2, with its mirror-like alignment of genetic groups and linguistic families drifting away from each other (in a ‘correspondence [that] is remarkably high but not perfect’, as they note with aristocratic aplomb), ...makes clear what they mean: a tree is a way of sketching how far a certain language has moved from another one, or from their common point of origin...”. (Moretti, *New Left Review*, 2004)

Moretti's pragmatic cynicism is embodied in a persuasive benevolent and didactic strategy, trying to deduce, with tact, from the very history of literary criticism, the legitimacy for the literature vista da lontano. Let's listen to it in Italian, in order to better feel the disturbing hypersimplism of the argument, which, in fact, is a well-known type of non-argument:

“Il titolo di questo breve libro merita qualche parola di spiegazione. Intanto, qui si parla di letteratura: l'oggetto rimane più o meno quello di sempre, a differenza della recente virata del new historicism, e poi dei cultural studies, verso altri ambiti di discorso. Ma la letteratura viene poi “vista da lontano”, nel senso che il metodo di studio qui proposto sostituisce la lettura ravvicinata del testo (il close reading della tradizione di lingua inglese) con la riflessione su quegli oggetti artificiali cui si intitolano i tre capitoli che seguono: i grafici, le carte, e gli alberi. Oggetti diversi, ma che sono tutti il risultato di un processo di deliberata riduzione e astrazione – insomma: di un allontanamento – rispetto al testo nella sua concretezza. “Distant reading”, ho chiamato una volta, un po' per scherzo e un po' no, questo modo di lavorare: dove la distanza non è però un ostacolo alla conoscenza, bensì una sua forma specifica. La distanza fa vedere meno dettagli, vero: ma fa capire meglio i rapporti, i pattern, le forme.” (Moretti, Einaudi, 2005)

Moretti repeatedly uses the opposition *close reading* versus *distant reading*, which is taken over by his followers, but also by the less enthusiastic but concessive. But the complementarity invoked between *close reading* and *distant reading* is intentionally misleading and false. *Close reading*, in Anglo-Saxon studies, identifies *stylistic criticism*, *discourse analysis*, very *meticulous interpretation of texts*. Therefore, the correct association for *close reading* is with the *history of universal and comparative literature*. In the practice called distant reading, as we have already shown, literature becomes only cannon fodder, research material forcibly extracted from its homeland—*art*—and taken to the area of scientific laboratories. What Moretti says in a 2004 interview is relevant in this respect:

“After Christmas, I’m going to teach a class on electronic data in which we will work on 8,000 titles from the mid-18th century to the 19th century,” he said, eagerly elaborating his vision of what he called “literature without texts.” “My little dream,” he added wistfully, “is of a literary class that would look more like a lab than a Platonic academy.”

Moretti’s vision is not so original, because it resumes and develops a theory on the process of artistic creation, promoted by others before him. Colin Martindale, for example, a professor of psychology, in a book less known to literary critics, *The Clockwork Muse*, published in 1990, ten years before Moretti’s discursive experiments, is also working on a more old: in modernity all the arts, not only literature, have only one determining engine - *the new*. Martindale argues that modern art evolves precisely in asserting *the new*, according to statistical rules, which, according to him, have nothing to do with the search for meaning or the interpretation and representation of realities. Before Moretti, Martindale goes so far as to call for the history of literature to be an experimental science, where researchers can completely dispense with the effort of reading by using statistical analysis models and computer-controlled algorithms:

“So far as the engines of history are concerned, meaning does not matter. In principle, one could study the history of a literary tradition without reading any of literature. [...] the main virtue of the computerized content analysis methods I use is that they save one from actually having to read the literature.” (Martindale, 1990: 14)

In applying the *distant reading* method, the literary critic, who presents himself as a comparative researcher, simply loads into the dedicated software, hundreds or thousands or tens of thousands of literary texts, *without reading them*, in order to be deconstructed and transformed into *data*, according to the principles of the neomaxist-progressive ideology of inclusion, equality and *non-discrimination*. For example, the text *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare, with brilliant or mediocre plays, significant or illegible, on the theme of death or love or betrayal, from the Renaissance to postmodernity, from Europe to Africa, India, China or South America, orphaned by the reader, widowed by the author, will be automatically analyzed by the programs used, in order to produce maps or graphs, with the stated purpose of identifying models, relationships, systemic, functional relationships in large areas (all literature of a period or a genre, a thematic line etc).

Moretti and his followers propose the *euthanasia* of literature, its rapid and painless annihilation, through a computational literary pseudo-critique, capable only of silently killing its object and subject of study. Unread literature dies. It becomes latency, at most. A poem, a novel, a story exists through the reader, they come to life in the consciousness, in the memory, in the imagination of the reader. And the computational critique called *distant reading*

is a false critique, a self-proclaimed gravedigger of literature. Fortunately, poets and writers write (still) unhindered, and readers read their books, while universities and faculties of letters, seem to slowly succumb to the hypnosis of *distant reading*. There are two questions that I can think of: How did we get here? What is *distant reading* expected to offer and reveal?

Literature, in the form of *fiction* and *non-fiction*, representation and evocation, means subjective truth, expressed in unique languages, able to transfigure particular facts, the unique personal content of a real *inner man*, with a real biography, belonging to a real history and a real time. Therefore, the personal consciousness of a real author (poetry, novel, etc.) creates in a text, by word, a particular experience of knowledge and communication, where his memory, biography, imagination, thinking and personal sensitivity work and where it invites, for knowledge and communication, another real consciousness, that of the reader, which goes in the text with his personal memory, with his own biography and imagination, with the thought and sensitivity he has. The two consciousnesses do not communicate directly, but through subtle, latent, textualized consciousnesses, often called *text voices*, *heroes*, *fictional beings*.

The question we can ask ourselves would be: the application of a scientific analysis, normative and normative, on this subjective truth, placed in the story, the representation, the literary evocation, what can it give? How does it affect the consciences involved? The answer is simple: it ignore or deny them. The science of literature exists. For its followers and promoters, however, *catharsis* is, if we recognize it, only an emotional (*primitive*) remnant of unscientific, that is, non-critical, baseless reading. And the idea of consciousness is at most secondary, but usually insignificant. Russian formalists wanted to invent a scientific method of interpreting literature, by abruptly separating from the cultural and historical context, by almost banning openness to psycho-sociology and the history of thought, by focusing on literary techniques, the study of languages and dynamics. discursive. The purism of Russian formalists, born out of a desire to oppose the transformation of art into a colony of politics and ideologies, led to the absolutization of the autonomy of the text in modern structuralist and poststructuralist critique. The premeditated denial or ignorance of the importance of consciousness and its presence in literature legitimized itself and was perfectly in sync with the evolution of the discourse of post-nietzschean philosophy, fueling the science of literature throughout the twentieth century. The fear of politics did not in any way save literature and literary criticism from politicization and did not give them the independence they dreamed of, but ultimately led, through a predictable internal process existing in all social sciences, to the opposite effect: massive ideologization. The explanation is related to the fact that the radical decentralization of the critical reading of literature from content to form, the forced substitution of the presence of consciousness, memory, moral vision with expression, discourse, linguistic marks, dehumanized both literary criticism and reading literature.

A serious experience in comparative literature allowed Franco Moretti to understand in detail the deadly weakness, structural emptiness, expectation, nuclear confusion accumulated by the end of the twentieth century, not only and not primarily by literary criticism and theory, but by all humanistic thinking applied to the arts and, in general, of all humanist philosophy and hermeneutics, which fervently established itself in a state of crisis a century before, especially after 1880. In the face of an army of humanists determined, paradoxically, to dispossess the power they had acquired in the dynamics of ideas and social influences, the Moretti-type reaction belongs to pragmatic logic. Humanists, with rare exceptions, however, were called during this period—modernists

(post)nietzscheans, existentialists, expressionists, dadaists, surrealists, structuralists, deconstructivists, postmodernists etc.—for more than a century they have transformed the dynamics of interpretation (and not its conclusions) into knowledge. It has, therefore, come to develop a huge flow of overlapping discourses, as “*interpretation of interpretation*”. Paul Ricoeur, for example, speaks of a “*school of suspicion*” and comes up with a puzzling summary definition, which, instead of clarifying, is ambiguous: interpretation, one as a recovery of meaning, the other as a reduction of the illusions and lies of consciousness—but also by the fragmentation and scattering of each of these two “great schools” of interpretation into “theories” different and even foreign to each other. Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, according to Ricoeur, “*would dominate the interpretation of interpretations, through a demystifying hermeneutics*”, because

“... all three clear the horizon for a more authentic speech, for a new reign of Truth, not only with the help of a «destructive» critiques, but by inventing an art of interpretation. [...] Starting from them, the understanding is a hermeneutics: to look for the meaning, from now on does not mean to push the consciousness of the meaning, but to decipher its expressions. So what should be faced is not just a triple suspicion, but a triple trick. If consciousness is not what it thinks it is, a new relationship must be established between the manifest and the latent... [...] The essential thing is that all three create, with the means at their disposal, respectively with and against prejudices of the age, a mediated science of meaning, irreducible to the immediate consciousness of meaning. What the three tried in different ways was to determine the coincidence between their «conscious» methods of deciphering and the «unconscious» work of encryption that they attributed to power, the social being, the unconscious psyche. For sly, a sly and a half.” (Ricoeur, 1998: 42-44)

The metamorphosis of truth into migrant hypotheses has given rise to the most astonishing aesthetic dynamics in all history. It has transformed art and literature into a universe of personal freedom and absolute authenticity. Poets, writers, artists, and philosophers were the new magicians, the new prophets, they lived under the magic of the multiplication of the voices of consciousness, and of the pluralization of identity, which led them to the pathetic experiment of (self) denial and the construction *de*-construction of ever new alternatives spaces, often magical, seductive, but fundamentally weak—to spirituality, culture, memory, history to which they have broken through various forms of criticism, denial, forgetting, distancing. The humanists of the last one hundred and fifty years have played to the brim with the state of crisis, while they have created an experimental art, as unique and brilliant in creativity as it is fragile in its primary refusal or inability to—and legitimizes ultimate meanings, being attached to perpetual redefinition. Moretti’s choice was a pragmatically negative one. He took over the humanist energy turned against his own project and unexpectedly multiplied its strength by sharply unifying with progressive discourse. In the absence of a solution or some humanitarian exit from the systemic crisis, Moretti imagined a posthumanist Trojan horse and placed it right in the middle of what we already call, with (self) irony and hesitation, the *City of Letters* or *The Humanities* - a tired, diminished Troy, which most commentators consider to have been already conquered. Moretti’s ironic skepticism and speculative cynicism would like to transform *distant reading* from a simple concept of approaching literature into a corridor for its possible annihilation. And not only!

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