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**SUMMARY OF THE PhD THESIS
ENTITLED**

***INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND TRANSDISCIPLINARITY IN MAX
BLECHER’S NARRATIVE WORK***

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INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND TRANSDISCIPLINARITY IN MAX BLECHER'S NARRATIVE WORK

Aim of the research

Max Blecher (September 8th 1909 – May 31st 1938) was a Romanian writer, of Hebrew origin, whose work, published from 1930 to 1937 and posthumously, in 1971 – the last novel, *The Lit up Burrow* – has been received differently ever since the appearance of the author's first writings.

Most of the times, approaching Max Blecher's work was in strong connection with the terrible illness he suffered from, Pott's disease (spinal tuberculosis), illness which put an end to his existence at 29 years old, despite the prolonged and bitter treatments he went through in the sanatoriums of Berck-sur-Mer – France, Leysin – Switzerland and Techirghiol – where at first the author was treated for rheumatism.

Thus, M. Blecher, as he signed all his work, except for the articles issued under the pseudonyms – Mihail Bera and In-Interim, was 'sentenced' ever since childhood to what the writer called in his second novel, *Scarred hearts*, to live "in an atrocious life category"¹.

The analytical endeavour undertaken proposes an analysis of the writer's three novels – *Adventures in Immediate Unreality*, *Scarred Hearts* and *The Lit up Burrow* from a transdisciplinary perspective, starting from Basarab Nicolescu's theory, displayed in his work – *The Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*², published in 1999.

The transdisciplinary approach did not exclude the monodisciplinary perspective on the work, the boundaries of the discipline being, in this way, very well explored. Thus, *monodisciplinarity*, *the integrated approach*, *inter-* and *pluridisciplinarity*, became in the current endeavour, stages of the transdisciplinary approach.

The demonstration started from the *integrated approach* of the text which presupposed, in a first stage, a selection of those contents which facilitate an interpretation of the text. Integration was a complex process, which I accomplished progressively, from the classical disciplinary model up to the dissolution of the disciplinary barriers – transdisciplinarity.

¹ Max Blecher, *Scarred Hearts*, edited by Florian Ioniță, Bucharest, Art Publishing House, 2009, p. 39.

² Basarab Nicolescu, *The Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*, translation by Horia Mihail Vasilescu, Iași, Polirom Publishing House, 1999.

The idea was to offer a coherent reading of Max Blecher's text which would go beyond the narrow boundaries of the discipline, starting from other literary texts – expressions of suffering, illness and death. The discourses of authors such as George Bacovia, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka and others, became *integrated contents* for deciphering the Blecherian text.

The next steps I took for a transdisciplinary interpretation of the text, after the *integrated approach*, were the *inter-* and *pluridisciplinary researches*.

This endeavour also considered relating the discourse about illness and the death of the Blecherian character to the philosophical texts of Martin Heidegger, Søren Kierkegaard, Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers and the graphical representations of some Expressionist and Surrealist painters.

The transdisciplinary approach of Blecher's text started from the conceptual delimitation of the terms "real" and "reality", made by the Romanian scholar Basarab Nicolescu.

Thus, I noticed that the non-homogeneity of the reality in which the Blecherian character lives led to the creation of some "levels of reality", each of them functionable according to its own set of rules.

In this context, I suggested noticing the connection Basarab Nicolescu was referring to in the above-mentioned work, between "the transdisciplinary object – the ensemble of the levels of reality" identified in the text and its "complementary, non-resistance area" – and "the transdisciplinary subject – the ensemble of the levels of perception" of the character and its "complementary, non-resistance area" by means of the „hidden third party" which, through the area of "absolute transparency"³, makes possible the communication between the information flow which traverses the outer world and the consciousness flow which traverses the inner universe.

I interpreted the *world* of Blecher's text vertically, by noticing all the "levels of reality" and "perception" the character is experimenting.

The topicality of the theme

In 2000 I had the opportunity to enter a training programme offered by the Education 2000+ Centre, financed by George Soros's Foundation for an Open Society

³ Basarab Nicolescu, "Transdisciplinarity and the Open Unity of the World", in *work cit.*, p. 66.

which invested in this programme for 10 years. From 2000 to 2004 I was trained on *New Didactics in a Transdisciplinary Perspective*, becoming, at the end of this programme, a national trainer on *Transdisciplinary Didactics*. As a teacher-trainer, I delivered courses on this topic as part of different projects financed with European funds. The experience I gained first as a trainee and later as a trainer was essential to me as it changed my perspective on the didactic approach.

The idea of this research project started from a reality, observed throughout time, from the teaching practice, especially after 2000 when the school curricula stipulated accomplishing some inter-, pluri- and transdisciplinary approaches in teaching.

Thus, I noticed an incorrect/inadequate transgression of the discipline boundary when it comes to interpreting the literary text. The limit, if any, must be transgressed correctly. The problematics of the contemporary world is so complex that we can no longer follow the monistic idea which used to be promoted in pedagogy, giving priority to the monodisciplinary interpretation of the literary text.

The idea of an inter -, pluri - and transdisciplinary approach of the literary text is, in the current context – that of curricula which stipulate the formation of transcurricular competences in students and the existence of alternative textbooks - a necessity.

Having become aware of the complexity of the contents discussed in class made me give up, in time, the strictly monodisciplinary approach, an approach which is not only poor but also almost impossible to accomplish.

I also chose Max Blecher's work due to its mostly unidirectional interpretation – the critics' perception being "guided" in most cases by elements related to the author's biography.

Thus, interpreting Max Blecher's texts from a transdisciplinary perspective suggests, in stages, *the integrated approach*, accomplishing the *inter-* and *pluridisciplinary* approaches, in order to reach in the end a cross-curricular analysis of the writer's work.

Methodology and the working material

The research project proposes an approach of the Blecherian novelistic text from a transdisciplinary perspective. I related this perspective to other methods of investigating the literary text – the psychocritical method (Charles Mauron, *From Obsessive Metaphors to Personal Myth*), biographical (Karl Jaspers, *Philosophical Texts*), symbolic (Gilbert Durand, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*);, René Guénon (*The King of the World and Symbols of Sacred Science*) and oceanographic (Mircea Eliade, *Oceanography*)

Thus, I emphasized those “obsessive metaphors” of the Blecherian text, the hallucinations and the symbols which helped the vertical interpretation of the work, by observing all the “levels of reality” and “perception” in which the character lives.

The first step towards transdisciplinarity was represented by the integrated approach of the contents. The correct transgression of *the limits* of the literary text presupposed a careful selection of those contents which would allow for the text to be decoded not enciphered. Incorrect transgressions of *the limit* are frequent, the result being the radical change of the meaning of the work: (for example: Mircea Eliade interprets *The Arges Monastery* – as the apology of sacrifice, while Mircea Cărtărescu – the apology of murder). *The limit* of the text, if there is one, must be transgressed.

George Bacovia’s and Mihai Eminescu’s poetic texts, the works of writers such as Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann and others, became integrated contents in order to decipher the Blecherian text.

I proved that the text cannot be read only in itself; I emphasized certain significances by applying other reading scales.

The next step, after *the integrated approach* was *interdisciplinarity* – noticing those connections the text has with other fields. Thus, the endeavour undertaken focused on the way in which the Blecherian text accomplishes a „dialogue” with the philosophical texts of Martin Heidegger, Søren Kierkegaard, Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers and with the graphic representations of painters such as Edvard Munch and Salvador Dali and others.

From a *pluridisciplinary* perspective, I noticed the way in which the major themes of the Blecherian creations – illness and death – were approached by the other arts the text entered an open relationship with.

In transdisciplinarity “we arrived” after having compulsorily covered these stages. In order to go beyond the boundary of the text we had to “read” carefully what lies inside the text by appealing to different reading scales.

The hypothesis

The reception of Max Blecher’s work throughout time, ever since the author’s first volumes, has been under the biographical sign.

Starting from one of the fundamental principles of transdisciplinarity – *the opening* and from the belief that the Blecherian character lives in a multidimensional universe, his work tried to catch, according to Basarab Nicolescu’s theory, all the “levels of reality” it is projecting, levels ordered by the hero’s exacerbated perception.

The transdisciplinary approach allows for the transgression of the subject's limit in order to reveal the true significances of the literary text.

The innovative character of the research

The endeavour undertaken contributes to enriching the interpretation perspectives for one of the important writers of the Romanian literature.

The work noticed some aspects which literary criticism treated incidentally – the association of Max Blecher's texts with the works of Surrealist painters. In this way, I accomplished, in a separate chapter, an *interdisciplinary* analysis of the writer's work with the graphic representations of not only the Surrealist but also the Expressionist painters. I "read" the writer's work in the light of these paintings. From a *pluridisciplinary* perspective I noticed the way in which two major themes of the Blecherian work – illness and death – are reflected in these artists' paintings. This endeavour was possible after the *integrated approach* of the Blecherian text – explaining the text by appealing to other literary texts. Also, starting from Basarab Nicolescu's transdisciplinary theory, in the last chapter of the work I expanded aspects which the literary criticism had ignored. Thus, I "went beyond" the boundary imposed by the monodisciplinary approach, discovering the "multidimensional universe" of Blecher's work, the "levels of reality" and "perception" in which his character actually "lives". Actually, I proved that the *worlds* in which Blecher's character lives, the "levels of reality" and "perception" he experiments, are the result of the visions and hallucinations of an ego caught in an undesirable reality.

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

In "**Bio-bibliographical points of reference**" I did a review of the most important moments in the author's biography – the writer's attending and graduating from *Roman Vodă* Secondary School, his departure to the capital of France to study Medicine and last but not least, discovering his illness. I related Blecher's case to that of other writers suffering from tuberculosis – the Brontë sisters, Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, an illness accompanied by an emotional and psychological instability obvious in their case.

I suggested an analysis of the author's first writings – narratives whose role was to anticipate Blecher's novels. These first stories, except two of them, grasp stages of the writer's suffering, excerpts which I also identified in the novels. Two of these fiction stories – *Incursions* and *Berck. City of the Damned* needed special attention as they are

explicit for the author's belief in a multidimensional universe on the one hand, and on the other hand, for shaping the life philosophy of the patient in later fiction.

I also analyzed the correspondence Blecher carried in his era, insisting on the letters to painter Lucia-Demetriade Bălăcescu, Geo Bogza and Mihail Sebastian. Blecher's passion for painting was communicated directly, hence the pictorial impression his novels create (I proved that the creation of Lucia Bălăcescu's famous painting *Scheherazade* was accomplished according to suggestions received from the author). I emphasized the fact that this correspondence limited the reception of Blecher's work, in general, to only one event in the writer's life – his illness.

Blecher's first novel and his last one were very well received literary criticism. This was not the case with his second novel, *Scarred Hearts*, which was associated for a long period with Thomas Mann's famous novel *The Magic Mountain*. I noticed that this novel raised the interest of film and theatre directors so that, in this subchapter, I also presented the author's work from the perspective of theatrical arts and film studies, insisting on the fact that many of the film critics called Blecher's novel - "an emotional abscesses"⁴.

In "**Current stage of the reasearches**" I noticed the most important moments in receiving Blecher's work.

Thus, I enumerated and analyzed – the reception of Blecher's work by Geo Bogza and Mihail Sebastian, in the period: 1967-1979 when Dinu Pillat and Saşa Pană reissued the writer's novels, the moment of Ovidiu S. Crohmălnicenu's *The History of Romanian Literature between the Two World Wars* – the first critic who noticed the proximity between Blecher's work and Kafka's, classifying the author's work as existentialist fiction by I. Negoitescu, Al. Protopopescu and Nicolae Balotă, Eugen Ionescu's especially important observations from the perspective of the transdisciplinary approach about the role of perception in constructing the Blecherian universe. Last but not least I discussed the studies of R.G. Țeposu, Nicolae Manolescu and one of the most recent, that of Ada Brăvescu, regarding the very way in which the writer has been regarded throughout time. All these interpretations became integrated contents for a transdisciplinary approach of the Blecherian text which went beyond the border imposed by the author's illness.

⁴ Mihaela Mihailov, „Scarred Hearts: an Emotional Abscesses”, in *The Culture Supplement*, no. 101, dated 4 November 2006.

CHAPTER II: THE FICTION OF AUTHENTICITY

In the subchapter “**Conceptual boundaries**” I pointed out the most important opinions of the authenticity theorists, starting from Montaigne, Marivaux, Apollinaire, Sartre, Camus and reaching Joyce and Woolf – in the universal literature and Camil Petrescu and Lucian Blaga in the Romanian literature.

Separately, I analyzed the concept of authenticity for Mircea Eliade, Anton Holban and Max Blecher.

In the subchapter “**Mircea Eliade – *authenticity as inauthenticity***” I rendered the point of view of the Romanian scholar about the authenticity of a literary work. I associated Mircea Eliade’s fiction with that of Max Blecher, emphasizing two particularly important aspects which bring together the two writers’ works: the supremacy of the *lived experience* and the possibility to reveal *the sacred hidden in the profane*.

In the subchapter – “**Anton Holban – authenticity as a feeling of death**”, I analyzed the two writers’ works starting from the fundamental theme of their novels – death. From a transdisciplinary perspective, the pronounced feeling of death or the “wing of death”⁵ which influenced both their writings, allowed them to perceive reality at a different level, their characters living the drama of the impossibility to change the given identity.

In the last subchapter of the second chapter, “**Max Blecher – authenticity and the immediate unreality**”, I approached the problem of the writer’s authenticity from the perspective of the *authenticity – inauthenticity* relationship noticing that, in terms of the transcurricular approach of the text, it can be rendered in the shape of a *multidimensional universe – unidimensional universe*.

I noticed that in the *obvious inauthenticity* of some spaces – the fair, the panopticon, the cinema, the theatre – the Blecherian character identifies ways of accessing another reality. I analyzed in detail the oneiric scenarios, the hallucinations and visions of the Blecherian character, noticing that these actually represent the hero’s “levels of perception”.

CHAPTER III: PARATOPIE IN MAX BLECHER’S NARRATIVE TEXTS

In the first subchapter – “**The Blecherian narrative discourse**”, I analyzed Blecher’s novelistic discourse starting from Dominique Maingueneau’s study, *Literary*

⁵ Dumitru Micu, *Searching for Authenticity*, II, Bucharest, Minerva Publishing House, 1994, p. 74.

Discourse. Paratopie and Enunciation Scene. From an *inter-* and *pluridisciplinary* perspective, I emphasized the way in which the discourse constitutes itself “thematizing its own making”.

In the second subchapter, “**The world and the worlds of Max Blecher’s work**”, I also started from a study of Dominique Maingueneau, *A Pragmatics for the Literary Discourse. Literary Enunciation*. The novelty of the approach consisted in noticing the way in which a real, unidimensional universe, aligned into the limits of illness and suffering, apparently without any literary claims, gives birth to the multidimensional universe. The specificity of Blecher’s work, from a transdisciplinary perspective, is not given by the limited world of the sanatorium he describes, but by the hallucinating worlds and the reeling visions which are born from this world. The originality of the interpretation resides in valorizing the integrated contents which in Maingueneau’s terminology become “the legitimization mirrors” of Blecher’s work.

In the last subchapter, “**Paratopical constructions in Max Blecher’s narrative texts**”, I identified the three types of paratopies Dominique Maingueneau was referring to in her work *Literary Discourse. Paratopie and Enunciation Scene*: “the identity paratopie”, “the spatial paratopie” and “the temporal paratopie”. While the first of the three types of paratopies enunciated refers to the ego’s desire to evade from a restricted individuality, the Blecherian ego after a Kierkegaardian understanding of the fact that “he is only given to be I”, the other two types of paratopies, analyzed from a transdisciplinary perspective, speak about the desire of the ego to evade from the unidimensional universe in which he lives. Thus, I proved that all the visions and the oneiric scenarios which presuppose modelling the time and the space in which the character is situated, speak about his desire to evade from the “topical society” in which he is forced to live.

CHAPTER IV: THE LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSES OF THE BLECHERIAN NARRATIVE TEXT

In this chapter of the paper I proposed an *interdisciplinary* approach of Blecher’s three novels from the perspective of the philosophical “dialogues” accomplished both by the author’s texts and by the texts of other authors.

In the first subchapter, “**Adventures in Immediate Unreality or discourse on the primary suffering**” I analyzed two aspects which this first novel of the author is raising – the need of a different identity and the “obsessive metaphors” of the *immediate unreality*.

As for the first aspect, the need of the ego to be something else than what it was given to be, I related Blecher's text to that of Kafka, the transformations of the Blecherian narrative ego being as spectacular as those of the hero from Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, with the mention that, unlike Blecher, with Kafka the change comes from the outside. The association of the Blecherian novel, from this perspective, was not done only with Kafka's writings, as Blecher also comes close to Urmuz. In addition to approaching Blecher's texts from the viewpoint of the relation with Kafka's and Urmuz's writings (which in this context have become *integrated contents*), I also proposed noticing the Kierkegaardian influence (by referring to two of the Danish philosopher's texts – *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Seducer's Diary*), concluding that „the illness” of Blecher's character is caused by being captive in an undesirable body from which he wants to evade. By means of the imaginary worlds, the character *seduces* „the reality levels” created in which he pragmatically proposes himself to live.

“**The obsessive metaphors**” of the Blecherian text noticeable in the immediate unreality in which the Blecherian character lives and the world they are configuring, allow for associations between the text of the Romanian author and the Aristotelian philosophy of imitation, the Eliadean texts and, last but not least, Gide's text – *Theseus* (especially through the attempt to build the ego beyond any constraints) and Sartre's – *Nausea* (through the feeling of repulsion towards the world in which he lives). The bleak perspective of the world is a Bacovian one, the poetic texts of George Bacovia, the texts of Eliade, Gide and Sartre being *integrated contents* for the disclosure of the real significances of the Blecherian text).

In the second subchapter, “**Scarred Hearts or discourse on the illness-generated suffering**”, I analyzed from the perspective of the human being model proposed by Heidegger, the character's relationship with death and inherently with the time in which he lives, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the specific topos of the sanatorium, situated at the interference between Eros and Thanatos. The way of envisaging the Eros brings Blecher's texts close to those of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu – especially through the lack of the affect and the reduction of love to a sum of sensations. Last but not least, I noticed that the love rituals the Blecherian characters practise lead to the Indian erotic mysticism rendered by Eliade in his novels.

In the last subchapter – “**The Lit up Burrow or discourse on degradation and decomposition as effects of the suffering**” I analyzed Blecher's “inner worlds” through Lichtenberg's and Jung's theories, the Blecherian dream being “a reality level” the

character lives at, more real than the reality he belongs to, a way in which he can evade from the given identity.

CHAPTER V – GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BLECHERIAN TEXT

In chapter V I proposed an *inter-* and *pluridisciplinary* approach of Blecher's novels, considered "expressions of suffering", relating them to famous paintings of Expressionist and Surrealist painters. I emphasized the role of the correspondence the writer himself had with painter Lucia-Demetriade Bălăcescu, whom he told that his model of perfection was Salvador Dali.

Thus, I noticed that the subjective representation of the world and the distortion of reality are two of the features which bring Blecher's texts, especially the writer's first novel, close to the anthropomorphous paintings of Flemish painters, especially those of Joos de Momper and the Expressionist paintings of Frantisek Kupka, Georges Rouault and Edvard Munch. I proved that Blecher's texts can be rendered graphically, *the worlds* represented being "levels of reality" at which the character lives.

The attempt to explore the human subconsciousness identified especially in the author's first and last novel brings Blecher's texts close to Surrealist painting, as the work maintains its specific characteristics.

Thus, I noticed that the way of thinking about death in *The Lit up Burrow* is similar to that of Surrealist painter Jean Arp (his paintings created with the "earthquake lines" technique express, as in Blecher's work, the unpredictability of death), crossing the levels of existence by merging with nature reminds of Sabin Bălașa's paintings, the occasional grotesque of the dramatic events sends to Endre Bálint's paintings and last but not least, the bewildering visions, the hallucinations and the agglomeration of objects without any clearly established connection among them, reminds of Dali's paintings. Surrealist painting practically supports through images the idea of an unclearly marked border between reality and unreality.

From a transdisciplinary perspective, these ideas put forward by Blecher's work allowed for the crossing of the border whose outline is intentionally not mentioned by its author so as to go *beyond*.

CHAPTER VI: BEYOND THE TEXT BOUNDARY

The final chapter of the work represented the last stage of the endeavour undertaken – crossing the text *frontier*. This step was possible due to having abided by all the steps that transdisciplinarity presupposes – *the integrated approach, inter- and pluridisciplinarity*.

In order to go beyond the limit of the text I analyzed, first of all, the Blecherian imaginary. I proved that this is where the writer's *worlds* originate. What was interesting to notice, for the first and especially the last of Blecher's novels, was the way in which the narrative imaginary works. Thus, I noticed that what triggers the crossing *beyond* is the character's illness which makes him valorize life differently. First of all, I noticed an exacerbation of the narrative ego's senses which allows him to have a brand new perspective of the world. I associated, at this point, Blecher's texts to those of the American author E. A. Poe, the "distortions incompatible with reality" originating in both authors' cases inside an "ego sick" with the world.

Poe's work, just like Blecher's, configures a poetics of closed spaces where all the hallucinations and the visionary projections originate. I noticed that what allows for *the opening* to another "level of reality" is exactly placing the characters in a closed space.

In the second subchapter I explained Basarab Nicolescu's theory regarding the "levels of reality/perception". Of Husserlian origin, the idea put forward is that of the existence of different ways to perceive reality. Thus, I made the clear distinction between the disciplinary approach of the literary text which presupposes the analysis of only one reality and the transdisciplinary approach which includes noticing all the "existent levels of reality". Illness, in Blecher's case, offers the possibility to access various "levels of reality" because the role death plays in our life – as Nicolescu himself states – is that of discovering new meanings to life.

Approaching the text from a transdisciplinary perspective I reached the conclusion that the world in which the Blecherian character lives is a multidimensional one, containing as many levels of reality as the character's levels of perception.

I emphasized the multiple subjectivities and objectivities of the world that the Blecherian character undertakes, so that, in the end, the effect was obtaining a *trans-nature*, the last step of the transdisciplinary model suggested by Nicolescu.

I noticed that the endeavour the Blecherian character undertakes in order to obtain the *living nature* is that of integrating the experience he is living into the analysis. Thus,

illness and implicitly the detailed observation of all the modifications it generates allows for the *opening*.

I noticed that the world's subjectivities and objectivities are produced according to the correspondence which exists between the "levels of reality" and the "levels of perception". Blecher's character understands that in order to transgress the limits of the world in which he lives he has to cross the barrier of his own body. Thus, the process of transgressing the reality presupposes a dilated perception first of all of the ego, before the world.

The conclusion I reached, by means of this transdisciplinary endeavour, was that the result obtained by the Blecherian character, as a consequence of successive transgressions, is not that of changing his identity, an aspect he wished would have happened, but that of creating some parallel worlds in which the ego can have any identity he wants. I noticed that in the last novel we can see the height of *opening* towards something else because here there are the most attempts of the ego to know its own self. Last but not least, I analyzed the character's oneiric projections in order to understand if transgressing the limit and the newly-formed realities keep the reminiscences of the real from which the character comes. I emphasized that the solution the Blecherian character is addressing so as to escape these reminiscences is the detailed analysis of pain and not the attempt to erase it.

In the last subchapter, "**The sacred as experience of a lived reality**", I analyzed Basarab Nicolescu's theory from the above-mentioned study, according to which, a coherent approach on the world in which we live must presuppose discussing the idea of the "sacred".

Starting from the idea that the sacred is defined by "the experience of a lived reality", I proved that Blecher's text allows for an opening towards the transdisciplinary interpretation precisely due to the fact that, despite being apparently closed, it actually includes the author's feelings.

Thus, I noticed that the sacred, defined as that "resistance zone" which connects the "levels of reality" to the "levels of perception" gives the character, through direct experience, the possibility to simultaneously experience all the existent levels.

The conclusion I reached is that living and contemplating a unique experience at the same time, allows for the formation of a "trans-perception" through which the character knows all the levels of reality.

The transdisciplinary endeavour I undertook was aimed at observing and analyzing all the “levels of reality” after the correct transgression of the narrow limit of the text which, most of the times, does not help us see the reality but its copy.

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