The way Comparative Literature has been bloated during the last few decades in order to cope with the threat of being usurped by some of the newborn disciplines is not only surprising but also what fundamentally defines Comparative Literature today. The question concerning how to produce and disseminate knowledge on discourses of literary comparison, while at the same time both alluding to interdisciplinarity and resisting a mere simplistic additive (X versus Y) comparison, has called for forging links with other state-of-the-art disciplines within the Humanities and Social Sciences. While acknowledging that Comparative Literature, as a discipline, renders disjunctive temporalities, and multiple vernacular iterations, in other words, different ‘paradigms’ in which comparatists in different places and time work, what I see Comparative Literature in Canada falling short of is its commensurability with disciplinary practitioners when it comes to conversing within paradigms.

Academic disciplines are never monoliths, and for the sake of their own existence need to reorient themselves periodically with respect to the trends and developments in other disciplines. Say, for example, a paradigmatic shift away from classical to quantum physics would invariably fuel interest in microbiology; otherwise, the disciplinary foundation of Biology would be at stake. Accordingly, with the establishment of what we now know as Area Studies in North American universities in the 1970s, Comparative Literature had to reconfigure itself, feeling the need to put thrust on the linguistic Other lest it be usurped by the Area Studies. What I am pointing to is the fact that in parts of the world where Comparative Literature did not have to go through a negotiation with Area Studies (or, later, Cultural Studies); it has had a long “afterlife” if we are to believe Spivak’s proclamation of the “death of a discipline” in North America.

The agenda of Comparative Literature in the 1970s, therefore, had been to dis-
tistinguish itself, both in terms of methodology and the objects of study, from the single literature or national literature programs, and in so doing put stress upon the need for finding “common ground in language” (*American Comparative Literature Report*). Around the turn of the century, when Cultural Studies programs started to usurp some of its domains, Comparative Literature responded “in the style of a smorgasbord at bargain rates” (*American Comparative Literature Report*). Since Cultural Studies “neither possessed a well-defined methodology nor clearly demarcated fields for investigation” (During 1), the task before Comparative Literature was to reconcile between having clearly-defined methodologies of literary analysis and bringing on board a Cultural Studies-style ‘smorgasbord’ as the field of inquiry is concerned. The problem here, however, is that Comparative Literature did not have (like Cultural Studies) the politico-emancipatory agenda of de-canonizing literary/cultural texts—what During calls “uncoupling of ‘culture’ from the ‘society’” (3)—nor could it afford to zero in on a narrow field (as with Area Studies).

With its efficacy as a discipline being questioned, Comparative Literature started to function under the basic axiom that “humanities and social sciences must supplement each other” (Spivak 27). Thus interdisciplinarity became a buzzword for a discipline that forged links with most of its Humanities and Social Science cousins in order to rearticulate itself *in contrast* to Area Studies and Cultural Studies in particular. While interdisciplinarity came to be understood as deploying tools and conceptual apparatuses of another discipline from within the boundary of one’s own, the ‘common ground’ of the coalition became language. In other words, it has been easier for a comparatist to enter into a dialogue with a neighboring colleague—say, for example, from history or philosophy—than a fellow comparatist elsewhere.

Take, for example, the concept-note of the Comparative Literature Program at the University of Alberta, which serves for me as a case study of the point I am trying to make. The program’s website reads: “Explore the interrelationships between literature and areas such as ideology and colonialism, cultural studies, film and other visual arts, gender studies, religious studies, political thought, and the natural and social sciences...Comparative Literature is dedicated to the study of literature in the broadest possible framework: interlingual, intercultural and interdisciplinary” (*Comparative Literature*). At any rate, the state-of-the-art practice of *doing* Comparative Literature concerns the study of literature, but simultaneously using tools and language of other disciplines, and at most subsuming a newer object for inquiry, such as film, gender, or religion. The question that demands attention at this point is: how many of those objects can Comparative Literature continue to subsume at the most?

Over the last couple of decades, on questions of disciplinary liaison, Comparative Literature took Cultural Studies, Film Studies, and Gender Studies, among others, as trailblazers. The emerging disciplines for the near future seem to be Video Game Studies and Digital Humanities. Is that what Comparative Literature is now going to reorient itself with respect to? Disciplines will continue to be born; the point is, how many of them will Comparative Literature appropriate for the sake of, to
use Rancière’s evocative phrase, “regulating dissensus” (6)? It is perhaps time that Comparative Literature turns back and contemplates mending its own internal dissensus.

“All this [disciplinary] classification and distinction”, posits Popper, “is a comparatively unimportant and superficial affair. We are not students of some subject matter, but students of problems” (88). There are so many factions among comparatists today that being able to refer to themselves as ‘we’ in the first place becomes problematic, let alone finding a problem that cuts across the dissensus. The biggest challenge comparatists face is to be able to engage in a dialogue with fellow comparatists in different locations when solving a problem. What I am pointing to is that the ease and flexibility with which a physicist in Canada is able to interact or dialogue with, say, an Asian or African physicist, or even two Canadian physicists working with two different paradigms in Physics—say, one quantum physicist and another astrophysicist—is what Canadian comparatists need to work towards in order to foster a more inclusionary understanding of the discipline.

Works Cited

*Comparative Literature, University of Alberta*. Web. 10 December 2013.