



In-between worlds, in-between images

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REPORT

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Workshop on Intermediality in Contemporary Central and East European Cinema, 30–31 May 2016, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania



The Film Studies Department of the Cluj-based Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania conducts an ongoing research about questions of film and intermediality. Participating scholars approach highly relevant topics concerning the reality of the digital image, the functions and modalities of the moving picture in the post-media age and contact zones between different art forms and visual inventories, to name but a few of their points of interest. The latest workshop held at Sapientia focused on such topics in the context of contemporary east European cinema, with participants arriving mainly but not exclusively from Sapientia and the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest, where a parallel research is in progress (*Space-ing Otherness. Cultural Images of Space, Contact Zones in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Film and Literature*).

The keynote speakers of the two-day conference and workshop were Christina Stojanova (University of Regina), Ewa Mazierska (University of Central Lancashire) and Ágnes Pethő (head of the Film, Photography and Media Studies Department of Sapientia, and the main organizer of the workshop). The three scholars offered three different approaches towards the questions of film and intermediality. Christina Stojanova's paper

focused primarily on the propaganda genres of communist cinemas and the ideological revision of the patriarchal status quo in New Romanian cinema. Stojanova admitted that she was relying on multiple methodologies, mingling concepts of social sciences and psychoanalytic framework in her personal journey through communist and postcommunist cinema. Ewa Mazierska profiled Walerian Borowczyk as ‘pornographer’, arguing that the same artistic approaches (e.g. the role of materiality and haptic sensibility) led to the Polish auteur’s animation work and erotic films as well, thus his oeuvre can contribute to deconstructing the dichotomies of ‘low’ and ‘high’ art. Ágnes Pethő’s paper offered a thorough theoretical overview on the post-media figurations of intermediality, and examined what counts as ‘picturesque’ in the digital age, providing examples of the tableau vivant and other aestheticized images from contemporary arthouse cinema, showcasing memorable scenes of Abderrahmane Sissako’s *Timbuktu* and Martti Helle’s *In the Crosswind*. Comments on her paper highlighted the fact that digital images have to find audiences in every platform, and the variety of YouTube clips, festival screenings and trailers presses the directors to compose every scene of a film as individually captivating pieces of art.

All of these topics and approaches reappeared in the conference papers of the workshop, as scholars were elaborating on key questions of intermediality in film. Case studies of transmedial works focused on theatricality in Szabolcs Hajdu’s body of work (e.g. the internationally acknowledged *White Palms* and *Bibliothèque Pascal*), examined by Balázs Varga (ELTE), or pop music as ‘sonorous envelope’ of longing for imaginary worlds in the Hungarian musical comedy *Liza, the Fox Fairy*, as analysed by Hajnal Király (ELTE-Sapientia). Both scholars emphasized that the integration of different media led to creating distinctly artificial, self-reflexive filmic worlds. Mónika Dánél (also from ELTE) spoke in details about the notions and interpretations of atmosphere and landscape through presenting *The Possibilities of Making Friends*, a Hungarian TV movie based on Transylvanian writer Ádám Bodor’s short stories. Bence Kránicz (independent researcher with strong ties to ELTE) brought examples of east European superhero movies and visual tools resembling the comic book form, emphasizing that ‘nationalized’ superheroes can be easily utilized as tools of criticizing western cultural dominance.

In-depth analyses of certain films focused on influential contemporary classics like Alexander Sokurov’s *The Russian Ark* and one of the most popular yet controversial Romanian films in recent years, Radu Jude’s *Aferim!*, while other papers treated different aspects of Corneliu Porumboiu’s oeuvre. Fátima Chinita (Lisbon Polytechnic Institute) chose the notion of the ‘flow of time in space’ as a guideline for *The Russian Ark*, and presented the various layers of time in Sokurov’s film. Judit Pieldner (Sapientia) stated that *Aferim!* represents a radically different stylistic and thematic approach than the dominant forms of the Romanian New Wave: its carefully composed, lavish black and white shots and genre (western) elements demand the rethinking of critical discourse around the New Romanian cinema. However, like other directors of Romanian arthouse cinema, Radu Jude also deals with historical and social injustices, such as the slavery of the Romani people in nineteenth century Romania.

The multi-layered notions of border crossings and contact zones were interpreted as connections between western genres and eastern (communist) ideology in Andrea Virginás’s paper on communist science fictions (such as Ion Popescu-Gopo’s *A Bomb Was Stolen*) and postcommunist musicals (namely *Dollybirds* and *A Kind of America 2*, Hungarian hits of the 1990s and 2000s, respectively), while Katalin Sándor (Sapientia)

considered territorial borders and those of national cinemas in her analyses of films such as Hajdu's *Bibliothèque Pascal*, a Hungarian–Romanian–German–UK coproduction and Marian Crişan's *Morgen*, made as a Romanian–Hungarian–French effort.

Medium identities of the filmic image were in the centre of Melinda Blos-Jáni's paper. She presented a number of recent Romanian films which were explicitly self-referential, discussing them in the context of the crisis of Romanian cinema and the crisis of masculinity. Doru Pop (Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj) and Zsolt Gyenge offered an insightful analysis of the films of Corneliu Porumbuiu, arguing that what is most important in the films by this directed is not represented, but conveyed by different means. Pop did so by concentrating on the director's use of off-screen space, whilst Gyenge looked at his use of different types of signs.

The last paper was presented by Teri Szűcs, an independent researcher, who investigated Hungarian video art on Holocaust representation, discussing how the working through the trauma, experienced by the third generation of the Holocaust survivors and victims, illuminates the problems faced by contemporary Hungary.

By and large, this event demonstrated that intermediality is an approach which not only allows to discover many aspects of eastern European cinema which eluded researchers using different approaches, but also that scholars from this part of the world already added much to the history and theory of intermediality. Let us hope that their work will not be overlooked by colleagues working on cinema in other geographical areas.

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