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CONFERENCE REPORT

Probing the borders of real and the intermedial

The XVI Film and Media Studies Conference, 23–24 October 2015, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

With the advent of the digital image, the question concerning the cinematic illusion of the palpable and material alongside the constructed and mediated has become even more puzzling. Taking the intertwining of the real and the intermedial in film as its title, the XVI Film and Media Studies Conference was held on 23rd and 24th October 2015 at Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania in Cluj-Napoca. The event was organised as a part of the ongoing project 'Re-mediated Images as Figurations of Intermediality and Post-Mediality in Central and East European Cinema' which examines the shifting context of film poetics from conventions of modern film to 'post-media cinema'.

Lúcia Nagib (University of Reading) delivered the first keynote address entitled 'From Non-cinema to Total Cinema: A Reflection on Film Beyond the Medium'. Linking to the term 'trans-national' explored within the recent film theory, Nagib turned to trans-mediality seeking to examine how cinema can reach beyond the medium in order to reproduce life but at the same time retain art. Her reference to Bazin's 'myth of total cinema' – whose ambition is to achieve perfect identity between the film and the real – was illustrated by Jafar Panahi's *In film nist/This is not a Film* (2011), which reflects the impossibility of making a film about making a film, and by Beto Brant's *Crime Delicado/Delicate Crime* (2005) situated at the intersection of cinema, theatre and painting. Nagib also recalled Bazin's defence of the long take and long shot as faithful to the spatio-temporal continuity of the pro-filmic event, and as opposed to the fragmentation in a close up. Here as examples illustrating Bazin's realism served contemporary landscape films: Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Leviathan* (2014) and Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Kış Uykusu/Winter Sleep* (2014).

Nagib's examination of the real was counterbalanced by the closing keynote address – Laura Mulvey's (Birkbeck College, University of London) 'Between Stillness and Movement/Between Reality and Masquerade: Thirty Seconds of Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953)'. Focusing on the artificial and constructed, Mulvey proposed a close analysis of the song sequence from Howard Hawks' film. This fragment explores the aesthetics of gesture dynamically communicating the excess of the erotic through layers of song and dance as well as star attraction along with costume (de-naturalising the body and exaggerating the gestures) and colour (Monroe's cosmetic masquerade with recognizable make up developed for her over time). Here, the iconic actress brings to mind a beautiful female automaton: the natural – the real – is erased.

The first panel was devoted to the history and media reflexivity in Romanian cinema. It began with Katalin Sándor's (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania) study of Lucian Pintilie's *Balanța/The Oak* (1992) and *Dupa-amiaza unui tortionar/The Afternoon of a Torturer* (2001) in which historical criticism bridges the period of communism and

postcommunism through featured media technologies: the home video, the voice recorder, the Polaroid camera and the telephone. These devices produce the effect of reflexivity in film and introduce a quasi-documentary gaze. Mónika Dánél (Eötvös Loránd University) delivered a paper on Milo Rau's *Die letzten Tage der Ceaușescus/The Last Days of the Ceaușescus* (2012) and Radu Gabrea's *Trei zile pana la Craciun/Three Days Till Christmas* (2012), both juxtaposing fiction film and documentary elements in a celebration of multi-media specificity. These post-1989 re-enactments of political events (recalling the discourse of Bakhtinian carnivalesque with its dethronement and de-hierarchization) are turned into spectatorial galas which combine present and past perspectives. Referring to Certeau's and Lefebvre's theories of space, László Strausz (Eötvös Loránd University) considered hesitation as a rhetorical device linked with passing and mapping various subjective positions. Strausz compared broadcasts of the 1989 Romanian Revolution offered by authoritarian state television – as the official attempt to control the space through panoptical dominance – with the POV of a hiding camera revealing an embodied presence, a body in danger. Such juxtaposition resulted in the creation of 'hesitant space' and conflicting viewpoints. The first panel was closed by Melinda Blos-Jáni (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania) who presented on Nae Caranfil's *È pericoloso sporgersi/Sundays on Leave* (1993) and *Mai aproape de luna/Closer to the Moon* (2014), situating them outside the anti-spectacular Romanian New Wave. Blos-Jáni discussed the role of these meta-referential and meta-fictional films in shaping the perception of the past and the role of cinema in different moments of Romanian history.

The second panel of the day investigated the relationship between trauma and magical realism in Eastern European cinema. Balázs Varga (Eötvös Loránd University) discussed magical realism in the context of socio-political transformations in the region. Considering inter- and multi-mediality in film, Varga focused on the self-presentation of the narrators and their layered performances in Szabolcs Hajdu's *Bibliothèque Pascal* (2010). Linking back to Varga's paper, Judit Pieldner (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania) compared contemporary Hungarian magical realism with the minimalist aesthetics of the Romanian New Wave and turned to Cristian Mungiu's *După dealuri/Beyond the Hills* ((2012) with its long takes, tableau compositions and references to traditional icons. Pieldner analysed the film within the context of intermediality and the liminal experience of trauma. In the paper closing this panel, Teréz Vincze (Eötvös Loránd University) offered an insight into László Nemes' *Saul fia/Son of Saul* (2015) which uses both experimental formal strategies and those typical to mainstream cinema. The film turns to the haptic to represent the unrepresentable (here the Holocaust). Hapticity – introduced majorly through sound and camera work – accentuates the psychological realism and produces the effect of immersion in the subjective experience of the character.

Opening the panel 'Painting and Film, the Saturated Image', Jana Gavriľiu (University of Bucharest) examined Pieter Bruegel's paintings in which the painter, viewer and reader construct a shared reality. Gavriľiu posed that Bruegel's works encourage to look, listen and read in order to interpret the evanescence of music, dance and literature. In the next presentation beginning with references to Fukuyama and Derrida, Fabio Pezzetti Tonion (Museo Nazionale del Cinema, Torino) explored Lars von Trier's cinema as the search for a mode of representation that moves towards the negation of indexicality. This tendency is strengthened in *Melancholia* (2011): in the film, the disintegration of narrative leads to

the end of history and, consequently, to the end of stories thus bringing about the supremacy of the image. The panel was closed by my own analysis of Alexander Sokurov's family trilogy. I argued that *Mat i syn/Mother and Son* (1997), *Otets i syn/Father and Son* (2003) and *Alexandra* (2007) interrogate ways in which the sensed body can be shown on screen. Through intertwining a range of representations of skin, the films highlight the sensual, the material and the socio-political simultaneously emphasising the artificial, stylised and painterly.

The morning panel of the second and final day of the conference turned to the art of still images. Małgorzata Szubartowska (University of Warsaw) engaged with re-imagining of the past in popular culture. As Szubartowska claimed, colourised photographs – the focus of her paper – distort the perception of reality and, by evoking nostalgia, point to kitch (as defined by Kundera). Tamara Voninski (University of Sydney/Sydney College of the Arts), a photographer, a filmmaker and the founding member of Oculi Group, discussed the photo-essay as linking film and photography as well as expanding and questioning the borders of both. Through references to the overall evolution of the essay as a genre, Voninski reflected further on the photo-essay as a precursor of film.

Moving from photography to arthouse 3D cinema, Kurtuluş Özgen (Gazi University, Ankara), Şafak Dikmen and Ersan Ocak (both from Bilkent University, Ankara) explored the techniques used in Wim Wender's *Pina* (2011) and crossing the borders between film and other media. Özgen noted the significant and frequently overlooked influence on the film: baroque art with its understanding of time and space as well as the use of light. Dikmen argued that while 2D cinema allows for immersion in a story, 3D film invites immersion in the image. He turned to spatial representation in the film used for simulating space and dance. The scope of the panel was broadened by Ocak who considered dance as a fundamentally stereoscopic cinematic concept and described Wenders' search for new techniques in presenting choreography on film.

Three presentations comprising 'Intermediality and Transmediality' offered an interesting panel on the fringes of cinema. Atene Mendelyte (Lund University) stated that Samuel Beckett's works are essentially transmedial and situated at the intersection of literature, theatre, film and television. Erica Ignacio da Costa (UFPR/Lumière University Lyon) proposed a theoretical support for her doc-poetry video interpreting Kipling's poem *If* and merging poetry, dance and cinema. Elza-Emőke Veress (Babeş-Bolyai University) focused on Harriet Bart, a performance artist using a range of materials and found objects (including those from the domain of medicine) to create visual poems.

Fascinating keynote addresses along with 18 panels in three parallel sessions affirmed the rich diversity of topics and approaches to the real and the intermedial, particularly with regard to cultural divergences, subjective points of view and a heightened awareness of the historical moment. As panels run in parallel sessions, I was not able to attend all presentations. Thus papers not mentioned in this report include Jürgen E. Müller's (University of Bayreuth) keynote address 'Real, Digital, Intermedial? When Intermediality Meets Augmented Realities and New Documentaries' along with a presentation delivered by Ágnes Pethő's (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania) – 'The Image, Alone: Photography, Painting and the Tableau Aesthetic in Post-Cinema' – and Cecilia Mello's (University of São Paulo) 'Poses, Still Lives and Ruinations in the Cinema of Jia Zhangke'.

Worth mentioning were also panels on cinema and the city, the post-media effect, stillness in moving image as well as fantasy, simulation and hyperreality in film. The papers will be published in the next issue of *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae: Film and Media Studies*.

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