

**“The Use of Other Media within Film as a
Passage to Material Reality.”
*Interview with Lúcia Nagib***

by Ágnes Pethő¹



*Lúcia Nagib as a keynote speaker at The Real and the Intermedial
Conference in Cluj-Napoca, in 2015.*

In the brochure of the international conference, The Moving Form of Film: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method, that you organized in November 2017, at the University of Reading, UK, we can read the following bio-bibliographical note about you: “Lúcia Nagib is Professor of Film and Director of the Centre for Film Aesthetics and Cultures at the University of Reading. Her

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research has focused, among other subjects, on polycentric approaches to world cinema, new waves and new cinemas, cinematic realism and intermediality. She is the author of *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* (Bloomsbury, 2011), *Brazil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia* (I.B. Tauris, 2007), *The Brazilian Film Revival: Interviews with 90 Filmmakers of the 90s* (Editora 34, 2002), *Born of the Ashes: The Auteur and the Individual in Oshima's Films* (Edusp, 1995), *Around the Japanese Nouvelle Vague* (Editora da Unicamp, 1993) and *Werner Herzog: Film as Reality* (Estação Liberdade, 1991). She is the editor of *Impure Cinema: Intermedial and Intercultural Approaches to Film* (with Anne Jerslev, I.B. Tauris, 2013), *Theorizing World Cinema* (with Chris Perriam and Rajinder Dudrah, I. B. Tauris, 2011), *Realism and the Audiovisual Media* (with Cecília Mello, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), *The New Brazilian Cinema* (I.B. Tauris, 2003), *Master Mizoguchi* (Navegar, 1990) and *Ozu* (Marco Zero, 1990). "This is a summary of an impressive research output, but what is even more intriguing for me, is that also, somewhere in-between the lines, there is a personal journey from Brazil to the UK (accompanied by a language shift from writing in Portuguese to writing in English), and an intellectual journey from a "polycentric approach" to world cinema to an intermedial approach to film.

Can you tell me first a little more about the personal aspects of this journey? What were the major "ports of call" in your life, before and after you came to the UK and how did they shape you? Is research also a kind of personal journey?

Let me start with an anecdote. My first degree was in Law, but from day one I realized I had no inclination to that subject. Instead, in my second year at the university I started to work at a literary magazine in São Paulo, called *Escrita*. The way I was hired at that place is hilarious. São Paulo was going, in the 1970s, through a poetry boom, led by self-published poets who distributed their work in mimeographed booklets, and *Escrita* was a forum for all these young literati. I had been writing poems and songs since I was 12, and at 19 I had completed a book of poems. So one day I sneaked into *Escrita's* headquarters, dropped my manuscript on a desk and ran away. A week or so later I received a call from the magazine's editor-in-chief inviting me for an interview! I was beyond myself with excitement, but when I met him, he started to leaf through my poems, read out one or the other and laugh out loud! You can imagine my humiliation, but he then concluded: "Look, forget about poetry. But you can write. Would you like to work for me?" So that's how my literary ambitions were cut short and my career in literary criticism

started. They say that critics are frustrated artists, and there might be some truth in it. Whatever the case, this was a major event in my life that defined my future career. Given the poverty of that small press, I was one of the only three workers there, and the editor would give me simply everything to do, from posting letters to writing reviews of big names. Because I knew a bit of French, I was even given the translation into Portuguese of Charles Baudelaire’s *An Opium Eater*, a piece he wrote on Thomas de Quincey’s *Confessions of an Opium Eater*. To my horror, this translation is still circulating in Brazil to this day, with all the errors and misunderstandings introduced by a fledgling 19-year-old.

All this to say that my initial subject was indeed literature and not film. And it was in fact literature that led me to film. In the 1970–80s, in Brazil, still under military dictatorship, there were some sanctuaries where films were allowed to show without prior censorship. The Goethe-Institut was one of these places, safeguarded by diplomatic immunity. That period also marked the peak of the New German Cinema, and in the premises of the Goethe-Institut, in São Paulo, we could regularly watch, fresh from the oven, the latest masterpieces of Alexander Kluge, Edgar Reitz, Werner Herzog, Margarete von Trotta, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Wim Wenders, and some others who are lesser known today, such as Peter Schamoni, Herbert Achternbusch, Werner Schroeter, Rosa von Praunheim etc., all in the 16mm-copies distributed by Inter Naciones for educational purposes. I was particularly riveted by the films of Werner Herzog, and watched them compulsively to the point of becoming completely familiar with their casts, crews and contexts. However, the decisive work, which actually changed my life, was the book *Of Walking in Ice (Vom Gehen im Eis)*, a travelogue Herzog wrote while walking continuously nearly a thousand kilometres, in the winter, from Munich to Paris, breaking into leisure houses at night or simply sleeping rough. The motive of this pilgrimage was the hope that Lotte Eisner, the great German film historian, who lived in the outskirts of Paris, would be healed from her life-threatening heart condition once he arrived there. This heroic and semi-religious kind of prowess would perhaps not attract me so much today, but it fascinated me so much at the time that I decided to learn German in order to be able to read the original book, which I had first read in French. Two years later I translated it into Portuguese and published it with a prestigious press. I then went on to translate Lotte Eisner’s foundational *The Haunted Screen* as well as other film books from Germany and other places.

It was my Herzog fascination that led me to start a postgraduate degree in film studies. Master’s degrees were very long in Brazil at the time (full 5 years!), and I was lucky to be accepted by Brazil’s leading film scholar Ismail Xavier,

who supervised my MA dissertation titled *Werner Herzog: Film as Reality*, which was then published as my first single-authored book (1991). During that period, I undertook many research trips to Germany, funded by the DAAD and the Goethe-Institut, interviewed many filmmakers, including Herzog, and made perhaps one of the last interviews with Lotte Eisner, in 1982, before she died in 1983, all of which were published in the Brazilian daily newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, to which I contributed as a film and art critic for c. 20 years from the early 1980s. In hindsight then I could perhaps say that film was never an isolated medium for me, as my cinephilia had a straight relation with the written word.

Already during the development of my MA dissertation my interests started to divert. It was again a foreign institution, this time the Japan Foundation, which caused the next significant turn in my career by introducing me to the work of Nagisa Oshima. Brazil, and in particular the state of São Paulo, concentrate the largest Japanese population outside Japan, so Japanese arts and cultures are very familiar to us, *paulistas*. Japanese films were distributed directly to the outlets of the major Japanese studios in São Paulo, so I had seen a number of them before the life-changing impact of watching a full retrospective of Oshima's films, organized by the Japan Foundation in 1988. Again the great Ismail Xavier accepted to supervise my PhD research on Oshima, and soon after, I was awarded a Japan Foundation grant to spend a year in Japan, between 1991–92, conducting research for my thesis. I was so privileged to count, during this period, with the generous support of Oshima himself, who gave me numerous interviews, invited me to private screenings, granted me access to all his TV documentaries and introduced me to some of his key collaborators. My year in Japan is one of the most memorable in my life. I was blessed with the opportunity to meet and interview the great composer Toru Takemitsu, the actor and director Takeshi Kitano and several other celebrated actors. In subsequent funded visits, I interviewed seven key directors of the Japanese nouvelle vague generation: Masahiro Shinoda, Kiju Yoshida, Seijun Suzuki, Susumu Hani, Hiroshi Teshigahara and Shohei Imamura, as well as Nagisa Oshima. These prolonged visits gave me the opportunity to immerse myself completely into the Japanese culture, resulting in two books: my PhD thesis turned into a single-authored book on Oshima, titled *Born of the Ashes: Authorship and Subjectivity in Oshima's Films (Nascido das cinzas: autor e sujeito nos filmes de Oshima, 1995)* and *Around the Japanese Nouvelle Vague (Em torno da nouvelle vague japonesa, 1993)*, with a foreword by Oshima himself, though prior to that I had already published two edited books on Japanese cinema, *Ozu* (1990) and *Master Mizoguchi (Mestre Mizoguchi, 1990)*.

Herzog and Oshima may sound like completely disparate subjects, but what connected them for me was the fact that they consistently worked on the borderline between art and real life. Herzog famously commits crews and casts, as well as himself, to the physical accomplishment of the acts portrayed in his films, albeit in hostile environments such as deserts and jungles. As for Oshima, the physical encounter with the real takes place on a transgressive, sexual plane, resulting in unique erotic masterpieces such as *In the Realm of the Senses* (*Ai no korīda*, 1976). Both in Herzog and Oshima, I identify an ethical commitment to the event of truth, as described by Badiou, through which the process of filmmaking is aimed at entailing personal, social and political change.

As for Brazilian cinema, it only became meaningful in my life once the military dictatorship had ended and filmmakers were again able to express themselves freely in their films. The mid-1990s gave rise to the so-called Revival of Brazilian Cinema, a boom of fascinating films which I felt an urgency to map out and record, resulting in two books: *The Revival of Brazilian Cinema* (*O cinema da retomada*), containing interviews and analyses of the work of 90 filmmakers of the 1990s, conducted by me and a group of postgraduate researchers under my supervision. This was followed by my single-authored *Brazil on Screen: Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia*, first published in Brazil with the title *A utopia do cinema brasileiro: matrizes, nostalgia, distopia*.

During these developments, my interests wandered a lot. The question of realism is inherent in most new cinemas since neorealism, so new cinemas (from France, Japan, Germany and the Brazilian Cinema Novo) were all the object of my interest, and there was a period between 1994-96, when I travelled to India and to sub-Saharan Africa, and wrote several pieces about the cinema of these regions.

Do you consider yourself more of a film historian of Brazilian and world cinema, a theorist well versed in philosophies of film, a researcher of cinematic intermediality, or a combination of all these?

My polycentric approach to (world) cinema proposes, in a way, a new method in film history and geography. Being open to a multitude of national cinemas made me understand the futility of trying to organize them through some artificial chronologies or evolutionary schemes. West African cinema, due to processes of colonialism, is usually considered a late bloomer in cinematic terms, but only if you don't take into account their ancient oral literature traditions that include live performances, music, sculpted masks, costumes and body art, as well as a

considerable amount of proto-cinematic illusionism. As Alexander Kluge has once stated, “cinema has existed for over ten thousand years in the minds of human beings” in the form of “associative currents, daydreams, sensual experiences and streams of consciousness. The technical discovery only made it reproducible” (1975, 208). We also know that our ancestors drew dynamic pictures of animals on the walls of caves, which they animated with the help of torches in their magical or religious rituals. Plato’s cave is a foundational philosophical formulation of the existence of cinema before its technological invention. All this to say that, yes, I have an interest in the history of cinema, but only if it can be told from a non-linear, non-evolutionary perspective. One way of organizing this history, as I propose in my paper *Towards a Positive Definition of World Cinema* (2006), is through comparable creative peaks across history and geography.

In terms of film theory, my positive definition of world cinema seems to have had considerable repercussion. World cinema was not a concept for me before I moved to the United Kingdom – in Brazil and other non-anglophone countries we simply refer to “cinema,” rather than “world cinema.” But then in the UK I understood that “cinema” meant Hollywood, or the mainstream associated with it, and all the rest was referred to as “world cinema.” This negative definition, in my view, was unhelpful for the understanding of the rich variety of cinemas produced around the world. Thus, drawing on Robert Stam and Ella Shohat’s deconstruction of Eurocentrism (1994), I formulated a polycentric approach to world cinema with a view to defining their singularities, but also their interconnectedness in time and space. It’s a short piece, published in the book *Remapping World Cinema*, edited by Song Hwee Lim and Stephanie Dennison, but it attracted a lot of attention. Many scholars around the world wrote and still write to me to say how empowered they felt by reading it. I then expanded on this idea in some of my other books, notably the edited collection *Theorizing World Cinema* (2011) and my single-authored book *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism* (2011).

The latter undertakes to develop my understanding of “realism” in the cinema, a term which is often utilized without any scholarly rigour, and can encompass from Hollywood’s narrative illusionism to Bazin’s ontology of the photographic image. My book defines a number of possible realist approaches including physical realism, the realism of the medium and conceptual realism. In another book I co-edited with Cecília Mello, *Realism and the Audiovisual Media* (2009), I provide a breakdown of film’s possible relations with the real, including indexical, mimetic, representational, phenomenological, documentary etc., which I find useful in the classroom. In my current book in progress, *Realist*

Cinema as World Cinema, I am working on the idea of realism as mode of production, rather than address and reception.

Now about the intellectual journey that lead you to questions of intermediality: when and why did you first get interested in questions related to interart and intermedia phenomena? Was there any specific theoretical or artistic work or personal experience that steered you towards theorizing intermediality alongside your other major interests? And how did this interest unfold from the key issues that you addressed in your first major writings and that you continue to write about up to the present day (realism, corporeality, the political aspects of art, etc.)? What is the trajectory (and the intertwining) of the main ideas that you developed in your writings?

My experience in Japan was key in introducing the new element of intermediality into my research. If there is a cinema unconcerned with medium specificity it is the Japanese, although, as Aaron Gerow (2010) has documented, there was a strong “pure cinema” movement in Japan in the 1910s. This was however doomed from the start in a country where cinema sprung out of the kabuki houses and the first moving images were intended to register geisha dances. Watching *kabuki*, *noh*, *bunraku*, and being exposed to scroll painting and calligraphy in Japan opened up myriad avenues for me to better understand this production. If you don’t take *kabuki* and scroll painting into consideration, you will not understand camera angles and long takes in Mizoguchi. The world of *shunga*, or erotic prints, from the Tokugawa period, explains the whole aesthetic conception of Oshima’s *In the Realm of the Senses*. I wouldn’t have understood the film’s colour palette and bodily disposition were it not for this exquisite art. Thus, when I was based at the University of Leeds, the opportunity arose to apply to the White Rose University Consortium, involving the universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York, for an academic network involving three PhD studentships. I devised a project entitled Mixed Cinema Network focusing on Japanese cinema and drawing on Hugh Gray’s (mis)translation of Bazin’s famous article, *In Defence of Impure Cinema* (which he rendered as *In Defense of Mixed Cinema*) (1967), championing the interface between cinema, theatre and literature. I was successful in this application and the PhD student allocated for my supervision was the extraordinarily talented Julian Ross, now an international authority on matters concerning expanded cinema and intermediality. One of the outputs of this network was the Impure Cinema conference that originated the book *Impure Cinema: Intermedial and Intercultural*

Approaches to Film (2013), which I co-edited with Anne Jerslev. My piece in this book refers to the use of the *noh* mask in *The Sound of the Mountain* (*Yama no oto*, 1954), by Mikio Naruse, which defines the lighting, camera angle and ambiguous expressions of the main character, played by the mythological Setsuko Hara.

This first approach to intermediality opened up so many doors for me that I realised that the entire history of cinema could be refashioned and recounted from an intermedial point of view, in order to illuminate areas of filmmaking which are normally overlooked for being unrelated to the technical and/or narrative specificities of the medium. This point of departure makes the core of my current AHRC-FAPESP funded InterMedia Project, whose full title reads: “Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method,” a bilateral project involving the University of Reading, where I am based, and the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar), Brazil. As the title says, our primary goal is to recount the history of Brazilian cinema from an intermedial perspective, but another important aspect of the project is to test intermediality as a historiographic method as applied to cinema as a whole.

The keywords for our own international conference organized at the Sapientia University in Cluj in 2015, “the real and the intermedial,” could be considered keywords that define the main axes of your researches, as well. No wonder, that you delivered a memorable keynote speech² at this conference, one that has had a great influence on researchers ever since. How do you see the relationship of “the real” and the “intermedial” now, with a few more years of research added to this talk? Where and in what way do these two intersect and what aspects of these interest you most at this time? How does “politics” come into this relationship?

Intermediality is such a fascinating subject when it comes to cinema that one feels tempted to spend time identifying intermedial relations within a film and being satisfied with this exercise. I try to resist this temptation by focusing on the politics of intermediality. Bazin’s defence of impure cinema was political in that it resonated with the rejection not only of “pure cinema” currents, but of the catastrophic Nazi-fascist experience, still very fresh in his memory, whose emphasis was precisely on racial purity. In this, as well as in many other respects, Bazin was ahead of his time because he foreshadowed the politics of hybridisation, multiculturalism and transnationalism that would arise in the wake of the structuralist and poststructuralist

2 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLDesrDcatwbYh-6nwUlXTKdpDDYkScJwS&v=yExHA8xaJ0Q>. Last accessed 22. 08. 2018.

schools of thought. The subject (and defence) of border crossing has become even more pressing in our time, marked as it is by the rise of xenophobia and the erection of national walls. But a discovery I made very early on in my intermedial adventure is that the use of other media within film often functions as a passage to material reality. An example already explored by Bazin is the film *The Mystery of Picasso*, by Henri Georges Clouzot (*Le mystère Picasso*, 1956), which shows Picasso in action, drawing on a transparent surface which is filmed from the other side. This glass wall that separates the work of art from real life is trespassed by the film medium, changing the act of painting into a passage to life as it happens, with all its contingencies and unpredictable events. When Oshima, in *In the Realm of the Senses*, basing on a *shunga* print, has the actors engage in real sex for the sake of the camera, the print at the origin of the scene becomes a passage to physical reality.

That this passage is also political is made clear, for example, in Jafar Panahi's films produced under his ban from making films, starting with *This Is Not a Film* (2011). These are works that can only exist by denying their nature as art and attempting to become life itself. In so doing, Panahi is proclaiming film to be his lifeline, in defiance of the Iranian oppressive regime, meaning that the absence of film equals death, and this is why the motif of suicide haunts his forbidden films.

How do you evaluate the state of the art in the area that we can consider “intermediality studies” of cinema today? What do you see as the major challenge that researchers of intermediality have to face today? Do these challenges come from the “outside,” i.e. from the new and complex media phenomena that we encounter today, the new theories that have emerged dealing with media relations, or do they come from the “inside,” i.e. from the specific methodologies employed by researches and the quality of researches on intermediality? Do you see intermediality as an established research area with important results, or still as a kind of “blind spot” ignored by “mainstream” film studies, and still as a not sufficiently questioned question?

In my view, intermediality as a method has never been more relevant than today, in the post-cinema era. Convergence and remediation are all around us and audiovisual media permeate all our activities from WhatsApp conversation to the didactic materials we use in the classroom. Cinema as we used to know it is increasingly becoming entangled with, or even superseded by streaming services, which are also radically affecting the real-time appeal of television. Audiovisual media have never been as fluid as they are now, in the age of Internet.

Intermedial studies are undoubtedly a key tool to understand such phenomena. There are challenges of course, the most important of them being “preaching to the converted,” i.e. intermedial scholars becoming trapped in an ivory tower in which they only talk to each other through a sophisticated jargon undecipherable (and irrelevant) to the rest of the world. Taxonomies are a temptation hard to resist, and I myself have succumbed to them many times, but they risk becoming an end in themselves. We, scholars, must constantly remind ourselves that intermediality is not an object but a method, a way of better understanding phenomena around us. Ágnes Pethő is a master at applying intermediality in revealing ways, for example, with her fascinating analysis of tableaux vivants in Agnès Varda and others (2011). I am currently reading a book which explores “intervisuality” in Visconti (Blom 2018), and understanding more about him than I ever did before. In ways not unrelated to Pethő’s, I am also fascinated by processes in which cinema animates other inanimate arts, for example, a film such as *Mysteries of Lisbon* (*Mistérios de Lisboa*, 2010) by Raúl Ruiz, in which paintings, drawings and toy theatres come to life, while real characters freeze up into paintings, sculptures and murals (Nagib 2017). I have addressed this kind of phenomenon via intermediality but also theories such as speculative realism, inspired by Quentin Meillassoux (2016), that ascribes to objects a life of their own, unrelated to human design. This is why I find it premature to sound the death knell for intermediality.

What do you see as the most productive method, or theoretical approach in researching intermediality? Can intermedial researches articulate relevant questions that reveal and interpret important issues with regards to the arts and culture? If yes, what are these?

A useful procedure, at least as far as I am concerned, is the combination of intermedial and intercultural studies, which has proved extremely productive, not only in my writing but in the classroom, too. Students become tremendously excited by discovering, for example, how understanding a different medium within a film can open up the doors to a whole national culture, whilst film continues to be film and the other arts continue to be distinguishable within it. The understanding of *kabuki* and *noh* in Mizoguchi, Ozu and Naruse, for example, is tremendously revealing of the Japanese cultural context of these filmmakers. You simply cannot understand the full breadth of Visconti without taking opera, and Italy’s devotion to it, into account. And if you overlook the central role of music in Brazilian culture, you’ll be missing the juicy bits of Brazilian cinema.

You invited Jacques Rancière for a public lecture and discussion to the University of Reading where you currently work as the Director of the Centre for Film Aesthetics and Cultures.³ In 2017 you also invited Alain Badiou as a keynote speaker for an international conference that you organized. Even though he had to cancel in the last minute, you managed not only to provide an adequate context for the lecture he sent to be read, but also to stage a lively debate on his work. You have had the opportunity to have conversations with both of these major contemporary philosophers and you have used their thoughts on the impurity of cinema as stepping stones in your own writings. What can you say about their influence on your own work and on contemporary thinking about intermediality?

Those are two giants whose complexity of thought I cannot claim to fully master, but who nevertheless have been tremendously influential on my scholarly approach to film. The beauty of French philosophers is that they take cinema seriously and have produced innovative thought on the basis of it. As you know, Gilles Deleuze has changed the way cinema was being read as “language” and “discourse” before him, by introducing a sensory-motor element resulting from the combination of time and movement that defines film. Both Rancière and Badiou engaged in fierce debates with and about Deleuze, and I wouldn’t like to take sides here. But Rancière, whose work I penetrated via his *Film Fables* (2001), was inspirational to me for redefining the relation between film (and all other arts) and the audience, through the anti-Brechtian idea of the emancipated spectator. His basis here is the eighteenth-century French teacher Joseph Jacotot, whose Dutch students had to self-teach French in order to understand his lessons, and were successful in devising their own learning methodologies. Rancière was also important for me for his praise of the creative power of (political) dissensus.

As for Badiou, he gave me grounds to develop my theory of an ‘ethics’ of realism. Let me cite my book *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism*, where I explain that, following Badiou’s terminology, what I call ethics about the films of my choice is their commitment to the truth of the unpredictable event. For Badiou, “there can be no ethics in general, but only an ethic of singular truths, and thus an ethic relative to a particular situation” (2002, vi). Badiou’s “regime of truths” is governed by the notion of “event:” “to be faithful to an event,” he says, “is to move within the situation that this event has supplemented, by *thinking* [...] the situation ‘according to’ the event” (2002, 41). “A truth,” says Badiou, “is solely constituted

3 See the video recording of this here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtH9PIJaZgo>. Last accessed 22. 08. 2018.

by rupturing with the order which supports it, never as an effect of that order” (2007, xii), that is to say, by the emergence of the unpredictable event. Such notions of “event” and “situation” chime with my approach in many respects, in particular as regards spontaneous presentational aspects that occur within representation and the commitment of filmmakers and actors who choose to remain faithful to these presentational moments, or, in Badiou’s terms, who demonstrate “an active fidelity to the event of truth” (2007, xiii). Badiou is also key to my approach as regards intermediality. There is a quote that perfectly summarizes his contribution in this realm and that has been decisive to my own thought: “it is effectively impossible to think cinema outside of something like a general space in which we could grasp its connection to the other arts. Cinema is the seventh art in a very particular sense. It does not add itself to the other six while remaining on the same level as them. Rather, it implies them – cinema is the ‘plus-one’ of the arts. It operates on the other arts, using them as its starting point, in a movement that subtracts them from themselves” (2005, 79). From this we can conclude that cinema cannot exist without the other arts, and that this fact is its most distinctive specificity.

At present you are the PI of the AHRC-FAPESP funded project, Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method, which brings together researchers from the UK and from Brazil. According to the information posted on the website, the aim of this project is to produce “the first groundbreaking intermedial history of Brazilian cinema.” Can you explain how this “historiographic method” has been employed in the researches of the group? What does this method consist in? How do you assess the innovative value and the productivity of your method? What are your most important findings and results at this stage? What can Brazilian cinema teach us in terms of intermediality?

The AHRC-FAPESP funded InterMedia Project has provided a privileged ground for Brazilian film scholars to interact with their British counterparts. Because the project does not acknowledge hierarchies across the different artforms, cinematic periods and styles, it has been tremendously liberating for both sides. It is a big surprise and great pleasure to me to see my Reading colleagues working so well with Brazilians they have not known before and vice versa. Intermediality applied as a historiographic method is allowing us to place different periods of Brazilian cinema on the same plane and make them converse with each other in a completely novel way. One of the main finds of our project has been the realization

of the huge importance of music in most phases of Brazilian cinema, starting with the musical comedies of the 1940s and 50s up to the boom of music films from the late 1990s onwards. Popular theatrical forms come very close to music in the way they have inflected this national cinema, and we are discovering real treasure troves, including the theatrical film prologues of the 1920s, which will be re-staged in Brazil later in June 2018, and then again in the UK in December 2018, both under the auspices of our project. We have revealed a facet of the *Tropicália* movement which was mostly unknown to the general audiences. *Tropicália* is mostly associated with music and the visual arts, but it was also hugely influential on cinema, and the *Tropicália Film Season* we held last November at Tate Modern provided abundant evidence of this. The project has already elicited c. 40 published articles, and there is still a similar number to come, alongside three hefty catalogues accompanying the *Tropicália Season*, the *Brazilian Film Music Season* held at the Reading Film Theatre in January 2018 and the forthcoming re-staging of the silent film prologues. There will be two edited books, one focusing on the intermedial history of Brazilian cinema and another on intermediality as a general film historiographic method, plus a dossier on Intermediality in Brazilian Cinema coming out in the *Screen* journal in the near future.



Lúcia Nagib at The Moving Form of Film: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method Conference organized by her research team at Reading University, in 2017.

Your research project involves a wide range of activities: besides the publication of scholarly articles, you have already organized two major conferences and a workshop,⁴ as well as several artistic events; your research group also makes audio-visual essays, and you yourself are directing a documentary film. How do all these different types of activities add up? What can this kind of diversification of the research activity bring to the study of intermediality in the cinema?

One of the most gratifying aspects of our project was the realization that publications were not enough to express our finds. So, alongside the publications, events and conferences, several of us have devoted ourselves to audiovisual productions focusing on the subject of intermedial film studies. John Gibbs (a specialist in videographic criticism) has produced two marvellous video essays with Brazilian colleagues Flávia Cesarino Costa and Suzana Reck Miranda, the latter of which has been published in the electronic journal *[in]Transition*. Our two postdoctoral researchers, Albert Elduque and Stefan Solomon, have also produced video essays which have been published in *[in]Transition*.

As for myself, who has never shot a film before, I am now involved, together with my Brazilian colleague Samuel Paiva, in the production of a feature-length documentary (or rather essay film) entitled *Passages*. The film starts from the premise that the relationship between cinema and the real is one of the most central and complex issues in film studies. *Passages* attempts to address this issue by looking at a selection of films in which intermedial devices, that is, the utilization within film of artforms such as painting, theatre, music, photography and others, function as a “passage” to political and social reality. In order to reflect on this premise, we have interviewed 15 key Brazilian filmmakers, technicians and curators, all of whom are prominent figures of the Brazilian Film Revival that started in the mid-1990s and brought back to the agenda the question of national identity and Brazil’s lingering social issues. The flourishing and diversification of independent filmmaking from that period onwards favoured not only a new approach to reality, but an emboldened use of the film medium that acknowledged and exposed its inextricable connections with other art and medial forms. The *Passages* project proposes that the intermedial method is thus strategically poised to shed a new light on the ways in which these films not only represented but interfered with and transformed the world around them. The chosen case studies hail from Pernambuco, in the northeast of Brazil, and from

4 See videorecordings of these events here: <https://research.reading.ac.uk/internidia/video-gallery/>. Last accessed 22. 08. 2018.

São Paulo, in the southeast, whose filmmakers, though stemming from disparate regional cultures, have been in a close artistic dialogue since the Brazilian Film Revival, demonstrating their shared values at a certain historical juncture and interconnectedness across Brazilian geography. At the time of writing, the interviews are being edited with clips of relevant films and other imagery and sound, in order to buttress the film’s central hypothesis of the recourse to intermediality as a means to access physical and historical reality.

You currently live in the UK, but you come from Brazil (and you also have family ties to the Arab world, am I right?); how do you think that your ethnic and cultural background has influenced your work? Do you think this shaped your interest in a wider area of world cinema or made you more sensitive towards the relationships between the different arts?

Furthermore, I find that the notion of intermediality is far more popular in Brazil, than say, in the scholarship practiced in the US. Why do you think this is? Do you think there is something like a Brazilian school of intermediality studies? Or at least, some kind of a tradition that makes researchers more open to questions of intermediality?

I am not sure of the extent to which my background has determined my choice of subjects and methodologies. São Paulo, where I come from, is very cosmopolitan and we are all exposed to foreign influences there in very natural ways, as our daily bread. Japanese *sushi*, Italian spaghetti and Lebanese *sfiha*, alongside our native *churrasco*, are all part of our diet. As you say, I am a descendent of Syrians on my father’s side and from Lebanese on my mother’s side, and I remember, as a child, being surprised at seeing the grandparents of some of my classmates being fluent in Portuguese, because from my home experience elderly people could only speak Portuguese with a heavy accent. But I do think that the protestant background in the Anglophone world entails some sort of iconophobia and guilty feelings towards (audio)visual pleasures – something addressed with great poignancy in Laura Mulvey’s epoch-making piece *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, a powerful indictment of the pleasures derived from cinema. Of course, Mulvey was addressing the ideological content of the Hollywood mainstream, and proposing in its place an experimental cinema that appealed to reason rather than emotion. Narrative art cinema has no place in this piece, though Mulvey will devote important scholarship to it in subsequent writings. Cultural Studies, which dominate film studies in the anglophone world, are devoted to detecting misrepresentation of minorities, so

the main drive is normative, films are judged by what they should be, rather than enjoyed for what they are. In my cinematic education in Brazil we gave free rein to our audiovisual pleasures, which I think is a common attitude in other Latin countries such as France, Italy, Portugal and Spain, and their former colonies in Latin America, and probably Romania, too. My colleagues and I never felt guilty for enjoying films, in particular art films, to the point of obsession. Intermediality as a formal method of analysis certainly captures this kind of pleasurable, artistic imaginary, so this might be an explanation to your query.

The title of the research project you are currently leading contains an unusual spelling of the word “intermedia” as Intermdia. Can you explain why this is spelled like this? Why was it important for you to retain this spelling, even though everyone in the English-speaking world will think it is mistaken without further explanation? What would have been lost in translation?

In Portuguese, “intermedia” is spelt “intermídia.” We adopted the Portuguese spelling of it, plus extended the “I” in the middle to highlight its foreignness and connectivity at the same time. I am sorry that some readers will be lost in translation!

Do you think that the scholarship on intermediality, which deals with mutual influences, “border crossings” and often involves interdisciplinary methodologies, is basically “accent” free? Or do you think that our researches are more or less embedded in the cultures we live in and are informed by the specificities of the artistic phenomena we are studying? (Just a thought, as an example: does the carnivalesque, colourful diversity/heterogeneity of Brazilian culture has anything to do with the similarly colourful combination of scholarly and artistic activities within your research project?)

Yes, that is very true. Intermediality exists everywhere, though it may not be called so. And I agree that Brazilians are “intermedial” to the core in their daily practices – and there is a particular revelling in bad-taste mixtures that can be identified, for example, in *Tropicália* pieces that delighted in breaking the boundaries between high and low cultures.

In what way is the cultural diversity of your own research team (consisting of British, Brazilian, Spanish, Australian members) productive for your research project?

Even if I wanted, it would be impossible to form a team from a single nation or culture. Multiculturalism is now inescapable, and I love it!

Do you plan to continue this type or area of research after the conclusion of this InterMedia project? How? What are your plans for the future?

Intermediality will certainly be part of my next ventures. It will appear in my next book under the guise of “non-cinema,” and in a new, major collaborative research project entitled *Understanding the Audiovisual Planet*, which addresses the ubiquitous presence of audiovisual media in the contemporary world.

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