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Conference report: 24th SERCIA Conference: Symbiotic Cinema – Confluences between Film and Other Media

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- 1 In September 2018, SERCIA (Société d'Etudes et de Recherche sur le Cinéma Anglophone), a society founded in 1993 to gather researchers in the field of English-speaking cinema, held its 24th conference at Linnæus University, Växjö (Sweden). The conference was organized by Fátima Chinita (Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon) and was hosted by the Linnæus Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (IMS). The opening ceremony was presided by the organizer and by representatives of these institutions, including Anders Åberg (Head of the Department of Film and Literature at Linnæus University), Lars Elleström (director of the IMS Centre), and the 2014-2018 SERCIA president, Jean-François Baillon (Bordeaux Montaigne University). In his inaugural speech, Baillon called attention to the hybrid nature of this collaboration, a symbiosis that fit the spirit and subject-matter of the conference, which he qualified as a contemporary “urgent theme.”
- 2 The topic of the three-day conference, symbiotic cinema and intermediality, was, indeed, tackled from a wide variety of angles and by an overall number of fifty-three speakers distributed into sixteen panels, as well as by three keynote speakers—François Jost (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris III), Lúcia Nagib (University of Reading), and Miriam de Rosa (Coventry University). The large-scale spectrum of cinemas covered by the presenters ranged from classical to contemporary, from US, British, and Canadian to Swedish and Brazilian productions, from genres like the musical to horror and science fiction, and from fiction to non-fiction and animation films. Yet the most enthralling aspect of the conference was that it reached well beyond the realms of cinema, sparking engaging debates on cinema’s confluences with other media like television, journalism,

advertising, music, literature, plastic arts, and new digital forms such as podcasts, phone apps, games, and virtual reality.

- 3 This hybrid approach proved to be a relevant way of addressing cinema's multimodal position within an ever-changing and expanding digital culture. One of the main ideas raised during the conference, and one that may serve here as point of departure, is cinema's intrinsic interartistic nature. Far from considering intermediality as a strictly contemporary phenomenon, speakers such as Judit Pieldner (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania) in her analysis of the convergence between cinema and dance in *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997), foregrounded cinema's inherent tendency to "incorporate all the arts without losing its specificity." In this spirit, many of the panels focused on the way individual films intertextually integrate other forms of art—music, dance, painting, literature—within themselves.
- 4 Music and sound were addressed in two panels. In them, speakers reflected on the various ways the musical score interplays with the narrative, producing an ironic effect, as claimed by Raphaëlle Costa de Beaugard (University Toulouse Jean Jaurés II) in her study of the diegetic use of opera and classical music in *Unfaithfully Yours* (Preston Sturges, 1948); or altering its temporality, as argued by Steen Ledet Christiansen (Aalborg University) in his examination of how sound alters time in *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine, 2013). As in Costa de Beaugard's presentation, classical music was also the target of Beate Schirrmacher's (Linnæus University) analysis of the mechanisms through which *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1975) merges music like Beethoven's with representations of violence to invoke an involuntary musical imagery that prompts identification with the perpetrator. For her part, Signe Jensen (Linnæus University) applied a three-step semiotic approach to character construction through music in animated films, taking *Up* (Pete Docter and Bob Peterson, 2009) as illustrative example. Céline Murillo (University of Paris 13) looked into the "anti-everything" ethos of punk films, whose anti-Hollywood aesthetics generate the synesthetic effect of "looking" at punk music. Finally, focusing on music documentaries, Albert Elduque (University of Reading) explored the way in which *No Direction Home* (Martin Scorsese, 2005) and *Cartola: Music for the Eyes* (Lírio Ferreira and Hilton Lacerda, 2007) use intermedial mechanisms like the inclusion of fiction film excerpts to reflect on the interrelations between music and film history.
- 5 The intersection between film and painting was dealt with in detail in a panel formed by Irina Melnikova (Vilnius University), Fátima Chinita (Lisbon Polytechnic Institute), and Jean-François Baillon. Using the concept of "intermedial references," Melnikova argued for the expressive potential of painting when included in films either in the form of literal canvases or as *tableaux vivants*. Fátima Chinita delved into the director Derek Jarman's *oeuvre* and his use of the tableau format, emphasizing cinema's pictorial nature as a visual medium operated by light and color. For his part, Baillon analyzed Mike Leigh's biopic *Mr. Turner* (2014), underscoring how the portrayal of the painter's encounters with other media like music, photography, and theater ultimately contributed to the film's self-reflexivity.
- 6 The incorporation of literary references within specific audiovisual works was addressed by Carmen Pérez Rúa (University of Oviedo), who read the insertion of poems within poets' biopics as cases of transmediation and interpolation of one media into another. Liviu Lutas (Linnæus University) also traced the use of biblical motifs in two British films

—*Goltzius and the Pelican Company* (Peter Greenaway, 2012) and *Dead Man's Shoes* (Shane Meadows, 2004)—as cases of transmediation.

- 7 Finally, several speakers focused on the multiple artistic references that can be found within films. This was the case of Doru Pop's (Babes-Bolyai University) account of the parasitical accumulation of borrowed trans-mythological, filmic, and literary references in George Lucas' *Star Wars*' franchise, including its profit-driven influence on future narratives ("intramedial cloning") and extratextual elements like merchandising. João Pedro Mota (University of São Paulo) investigated the transmedia intertextual elements existing in *The Matrix* franchise. Fátima Chinita also called attention to the inclusion of the seven arts— theater, poetry, music, dancing, painting, architecture, and sculpture—in the Quay's brothers' *The Piano Tuner of EarthQuakes* (2005). Jørgen Bruhn (Linnæus University) and Anne Gjelsvik (NTNU) presented a three-step analytical model to catalogue, organize, and contextualize the intermedial elements present in individual films. Finally, Celestino Deleyto (University of Zaragoza), who presented a paper co-written with María del Mar Azcona, discussed *Birdman's* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2014) multilayered and hybrid fictional space, filled with references to journalism, television, social networks, and, most especially, to theater. Underscoring the film's knocking down of boundaries between reality and fantasy, auteur cinema and blockbuster, and highbrow and popular art—a fluidity visually highlighted by the illusion of a long take—Deleyto and Azcona concluded with the idea introduced at the beginning of this report: that is, with cinema's triumph in its incorporation of all the arts.
- 8 The second major line of inquiry of the conference moved beyond the exclusive medium of cinema to explore the interconnections between different forms of media. This was materialized, first of all, in the form of adaptation studies. David Goldie (Aix-Marseille University) questioned the validity of the battle between literature and cinema through the example of the *Harry Potter* franchise, signaling the pointless nature of this battle in the age of transmedia storytelling and convergence culture. His idea that stories will transform into various media if they are "strong enough" was also developed by Constanza Salvi (Independent Scholar) in her examination of *The Thin Man* (Dashiell Hammett, 1934) and its adaptation from literature to cinema and from cinema to radio, with each medium adding new layers of meaning to the story. Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot (University of Burgundy) and Gilles Menegaldo (University of Poitiers) discussed the symbiotic relation established between literary source and audiovisual adaptation and the translations that are necessary to create a successful audiovisual product, while at the same time conveying the spirit of the original work. Schmitt-Pitiot examined the different audiovisual adaptations of Ruth Rendell's detective novels, including the US film *Diary of the Dead* (Arvin Brown, 1976), the Canadian *The Housekeeper* (Ousama Rawi, 1987), the French *La Cérémonie* (Claude Chabrol, 1997), and the British TV series *The Ruth Rendell Mysteries* (ITV, 1987-2000), while Menegaldo looked into Christopher Nolan's adaptation (2006) of Christopher Priest's novel *The Prestige* (1995). For her part, Anna Gutowska (Linnæus University) focused on the uniqueness of the female character in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and compared the way the novel's beginning had been translated to the screen in the 1995 BBC TV series and Joe Wright's 2005 film. Finally, Mihaela Ursa (Babes-Bolyai University) traced the literature-film symbiotic connections of the "intermedial lives" of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*—both as character and novel—in Anglo-American films.

- 9 Another literary genre that was explored from the perspective of audiovisual adaptation was the graphic novel. Xavier Bittar (Paris Nanterre University) looked at the English-speaking series and film adaptations of the Belgian comic strip character Largo Winch (Jean Van Hamme) and its cinematic influences. David Roche (Toulouse Jean Jaurès University), for his part, offered a comparative analysis of Frank Miller's graphic novel *Sin City* (1991-1999) and its 2005 film adaptation (Frank Miller, Quentin Tarantino, and Robert Rodriguez). Roche refuted common ontological distinctions between both media, warning against essentialist readings that may undercut the plurality of meanings of a work and advocating instead for a poetics approach to adaptation studies, that is, for putting the focus on the aesthetic choices made by each work.
- 10 Roche's non-ontological approach was also shared by the first plenary speaker, François Jost, who addressed the recent transformations of the television medium into a "legitimate" form of art using *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013) as guiding example. Jost advocated for adopting a pragmatic approach to intermedial studies, focusing on the experience of the user, which varies depending on the way a product is broadcast and consumed—whether watched on television as it is broadcast, binge-watched on streaming platforms or DVDs, speed-watched, or by paying attention to detail through screen enlargements and browsing online websites for fans. In turn, these new ways of watching reshape the works themselves, with creators adding, for instance, details and "Easter eggs" to satisfy their fanbase and thus create more marketable products and byproducts of the series. Also focusing on television, Elizabeth Mullen (University of Western Brittany) looked into the filmic echoes found in *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-) and *American Horror Story* (FX, 2011-) and the way in which these create a symbiosis. For her part, Marianne Kac-Vergne (University of Picardie Jules Verne) looked at the ways in which the television adaptation of the *Terminator* franchise—*The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (Fox, 2008-2009)—transposed science fiction elements to the small screen, redefining, for instance, the target audience of the original films through the feminization of its cyborgs.
- 11 Moving still further away to other forms of media, Julie Assouly (University of Artois) examined the symbiosis between marketing and cinema in her talk on the "Wes Anderson-ification" of advertising. Assouly described the way Anderson's distinctive 1990s hipster aesthetics have pervaded mainstream culture from the 2000s till today, with Anderson himself becoming a brand and directing ads as a form of self-promotion. Marguerite Chabrol (University Paris 8) called attention to the intermedial network that was established between the radio, the vaudeville, and Hollywood films during the 1930s. Focusing on political journalism, Martin Knust (Linnæus University) analyzed the evolution of the television news programs scores from the orchestra music of the 1980s and the club music of the 2000s right up to the use of ominous horror music in the Trump era, underscoring the medium's cinematic influences. Meanwhile, Dario Llinares (University of Brighton) focused on the "liminal praxis" and academic possibilities of the relatively recent digital medium of the podcast, synesthetically describing film podcasts as "cinema for the ears." Other arts and media explored included Ágnes Bakk's (Moholy-Nagy Art and Design University) examination of an interactive application that creates theatrical situations and Julian Ross' (University of Westminster) study of the slide projector and its intermedial merging with other media like analogue film.
- 12 The second plenary speaker, Lúcia Nagib, took the postmodern film *The State of Things* (Wim Wenders, 1982) as a paradigmatic example of "non-cinema," a cinema that negates itself due to its inability to apprehend reality in its entirety. Nagib emphasized cinema's

constant conflict with the real world and its impurity as a mimetic art form composed of other arts, a fact on which Wenders' film explicitly reflects. Cinema's constant struggle to represent reality was also tackled by various speakers. Claire Dutriaux (Sorbonne Universités) analyzed the use of archival historical footage in blockbuster dramas like *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994) and *JFK* (Oliver Stone, 1991), arguing that this intermedial use authenticates the movies' recreation of the past while at the same time blurring the frontier between fact and fiction. The difficulty of identifying the borderline between fact and fiction was likewise explored by Sébastien Lefait (Paris 8 University) in his analysis of *The Square* (Ruben Östlund, 2017), a film that plays with the inability to distinguish art performance from reality, a blurring of boundaries which Lefait related to an intermedial spectator overexposed to a multiplicity of media. Similarly, Hervé Mayer (University of Paul Valéry Montpellier 3) took the action sequences of contemporary blockbuster cinema as instances in which digital imaging and aural effects blur the border between reality and representation, expanding the viewers' experience. Alfredo Suppia's (University of Campinas) talk also dealt with this tension between reality and its representation in a theoretical discussion of realist and formalist approaches to contemporary cinema.

- 13 Focusing on the documentary form, Zachary Baqué (Toulouse Jean Jaurès University) advocated the use of the less essentialist term “docmedia” to allude to any medium that deals with reality; Marc Bosward (University of Derby) examined the capacity of non-fiction collage films to describe the complexity of socio-historical phenomena; and Péter Kristóf Makai (Linnæus University) looked into the intersections existing between documentary, computer gaming, and the theory of evolution. Moving still closer to reality, Olivia Eriksson focused on archival art gallery practices; and Per Bäckström (Karlstad University) and Cristina Pop-Tiron (Babes-Bolyai University) offered analyses of art performances.
- 14 The final major conversation of the conference centered around the notion of post-cinema and its theoretical implications. In the closing plenary session, Miriam de Rosa offered an insightful compilation of the recurring terms that had come up throughout the different panels—circulation and liminality; plurality of trajectories; union as an alternative to battle in adaptation studies; dialogue to read paradoxical binaries; complex media collages and ecosystems; and overflowing realities. De Rosa used these keywords as a springboard to launch a stimulating talk on the need to adopt a broader theoretical perspective that steps away from any essentialist rhetoric or media specificity discourse. She advocated, instead, an outlook that encompasses the multiplicities and the in-betweenness of conjunctions and confluences between different media, taking the floating “artistic moving images” of photographer Richard Mosse's *Grid* (2017) and Julian Rosefeldt's *Manifesto* (2015) as case studies of these media entanglements.
- 15 De Rosa's approach was presented as a possible way out of limiting discourses that forecast the death of cinema. The idea of a flowing, non-linear, multi-temporal and multispatial reality, which was compared by Jean François Baillon and François Jost to Zygmunt Bauman's “liquid modernity” and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's “rhizome” in the later debate, was also underscored by other speakers in their analyses of individual films and series. Silvia Murillo (University of Zaragoza) called attention to the non-linear narrative arrangement of space and time in *Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, 2016), using Einstein's relativity theory and broadening the scope of the intermedial concept of “ekphrasis.” The term “disembodiment” came up in a panel devoted to the digital

anxieties articulated by science fiction and horror. In it, Christophe Gelly (Clermont Auvergne University) related *Her's* (Spike Jonze, 2013) troubled digital romance to the viewers' changing experience of (post-)cinema, equating the ungraspable AI lover with the spectator's relationship with digital cinema and its problematic onscreen representation. Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris (University Paris Nanterre) brought attention to the posthuman fluidity featured by the transplantable consciousnesses in the Netflix series *Altered Carbon* (2018-), comparing the erasure between machine, AI, and human being with the processes of digitalization at work in media culture. And Julia Echeverría examined the superposition of virtual monsters in two horror films, *It Follows* (David Robert Mitchell, 2014) and *Unfriended* (Levan Gabriadze, 2014), both articulating—the former through nostalgia, the latter through the mediation of film as computer screen—the fears generated by a digital hyperinformation society. In line with this digital theme, Miriam Ouertani's (University of Quebec) talk focused on the technical evolution of digital cinema—the use of CGI, motion capture, and simulcams—by applying the notions of “uncanny valley,” “reality effect,” and “individuation.” Andrea Virginás (Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania) dealt with the proliferation of electronic screens (television, video, computer, mobile, surveillance) as built-in elements of filmic diegetic worlds and their duality as mediums of both simulation and representation. Virginás drew attention to the paradoxical proliferation of screens at a time when they are starting to disappear due to the emergence of virtual reality.

- 16 As remarked through this report, the main discussion in the 24th SERCIA conference revolved around the paradoxical symbiosis and plurality of contemporary media. Speakers explored cinema's state-of-the-art by means of close formal analyses that proved the medium's expansion beyond itself—its continuous confluences with other arts, media, and reality. In general, speakers advocated a theoretical approach that shies away from ontological essentialisms and embraces this plurality and hybridity, branching out and blurring the borders between disciplines. Intermediality came across as an apt methodological framework and bridge for approaching this culture of convergence and for theorizing and understanding cinema's new position in the digital age. The engaging debates attested to this multiplicity and signaled it as necessary to push forward the frontiers and discussions on media culture.

INDEX

Keywords: cinema, film, series, television, documentary, animation, media, intermediality, transmediality, intertextuality, hybridity, symbiosis, genre studies, adaptation studies, music, painting, photography, theater, poetry, graphic novels, performance, advertising, journalism, radio, podcast, digital studies, virtual reality

Quoted persons: Wes Anderson, Jane Austen, Zygmunt Bauman, Ludwig van Beethoven, Arvin Brown, Miguel de Cervantes, Claude Chabrol, Gilles Deleuze, Pete Docter, Lírio Ferreira, Levan Gabriadze, Alejandro González Iñárritu, Peter Greenaway, Félix Guattari, Dashiell Hammett, Derek Jarman, Spike Jonze, Harmony Korine, Stanley Kubrick, Hilton Lacerda, Mike Leigh, George Lucas, Shane Meadows, Frank Miller, David Robert Mitchell, Richard Mosse, Christopher Nolan, Ruben Östlund, Bob Peterson, Sally Potter, Christopher Priest, Timothy Quay, Stephen Quay, Ousama Rawi, Ruth Rendell, Robert Rodriguez, Julian Rosefeldt, Martin Scorsese, Preston Sturges, Oliver Stone, Quentin Tarantino, William Turner, Denis Villeneuve, Wim Wenders, Joe Wright, Robert Zemeckis

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