

Abstract

**Judit Pieldner: *Intermediality and Remediation: Forms of In-Betweenness in Cinema*
(Habilitation Thesis, 2020)**

The habilitation thesis presents the most important scientific research results achieved since obtaining the PhD degree in 2013. It includes a series of studies which approach phenomena of contemporary cinema from the perspective of intermedia relations and which were published in a 305-page volume entitled *Adaptation, Remediation and Intermediality: Forms of In-Betweenness in Cinema* (Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2020). The thesis starts with an overview of the main scientific achievements, outlining the most important publications, the participation in research projects and involvement in academic work. It offers a representative selection of works completed in the recent years, bringing together multiply overlapping investigations grouped around the key terms indicated in the title of the thesis, intermediality and remediation.

The range of films analysed in these studies include not only widely known works of – mostly European – arthouse cinema, but also lesser-known films from the Eastern European region, with special focus on Hungarian experimental filmmaking, taking further the research carried out within the framework of the PhD studies. My research preoccupations have also taken me beyond the geocultural boundaries of European film and beyond the borders of cinema itself through the investigation of thought-provoking (non-)films belonging to contemporary Iranian cinema. In all the cases, the in-depth analysis is placed in a relevant theoretical framework that addresses particular aspects of intermediality and remediation.

The researches that serve as the basis of these studies have focused on the intermediality in film as well as on various cases of intermedial figurations that can be encountered in contemporary arthouse cinema. A distinction has to be made between the intermediality *of* film, which constitutes the inalienable specificity that defines film as a hybrid medium from the onset of cinema, and the intermediality *in* film, which refers to the ways in which film interacts with other media incorporated in its medium, with the aim of exploring the media tensions and fusions that arise from this interaction. The analysis of intermediality in film is aimed at exploring the various modalities and forms in which the involved media leave their mark on the medium film with their own media properties. Thus the notion of intermediality implies a dynamic category within which media constellations are in continuous motion, being reconfigured by one another, the cinematic medium becoming a playground of media interactions and meaning emerging out of the tensions, collisions, on the boundaries, in-between.

The methodological opportunities that open up in the in-depth analyses of intermedial figurations have proved particularly fruitful in: looking at the dancefilm practice as a possibility for film to fathom the essence of its own mediality through the medium specificities of dance and the other arts; identifying converging tendencies in different trends of contemporary Central and Eastern European cinema, such as the utilization of *tableaux vivants* and *tableau* compositions in magic realist and minimalist realist representational modes; localizing painterly anamorphosis, as a key to the interpretation of the experimental feature film template; examining intermedial connections in film, such as literary, painterly and musical references; describing multiply reflexive cinematic dialogues with the tradition of historical film in terms of intermedial collage; identifying the reflexive and figurative potential of the utilization of archival footage in contemporary cinema, and finally, pointing, through highly stylized photofilmic images, at the artistic potential inherent in the revival of black-and-white filmmaking in the digital age.

The opening chapter of the thesis, entitled *From Paragone to Symbiosis. Sensations of In-Betweenness in Sally Potter's The Tango Lesson*, discusses the multiply reflexive and autobiographical story of the filmmaker Sally Potter and the dancer Pablo Verón as an allegory of interart relations, a process evolving from *paragone* (i.e. the contest of art forms) to symbiosis, the inseparable co-existence of arts. With a special focus on dancefilm strategies, the study examines the intermedial relationship between film and dance.

The second chapter entitled *Magic Realism, Minimalist Realism and the Figuration of the Tableau in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Cinema* surveys two modes of representation present in contemporary Hungarian and Romanian cinema, namely magic realism and minimalist realism, as two ways of rendering the “real” in the Central Eastern European geocultural context. The magic realist tendency of contemporary Hungarian film and the minimalist realism of contemporary Romanian film, albeit being distinct cinematic discourses, equally resort to the utilization of *tableaux vivants*. The study illustrates this phenomenon with Hajdu Szabolcs's *Bibliothèque Pascal* (2010) and Cristian Mungiu's *Beyond the Hills* (*După dealuri*, 2012).

The third chapter, entitled *Anamorphosis as the Figuration of In-Betweenness in András Jeles's Sinister Shadow*, looks at the Hungarian experimental filmmaker András Jeles's *Sinister Shadow* (*A rossz árnyék*, 2017), with special attention to the way in which the film transposes the painterly figuration of anamorphosis to the medium of film. By integrating Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Ambassadors*, together with its interpretive possibilities, Jeles devises in the medium of film an anamorphic narrative in which this painterly figuration gains an overarching

signification, intended to effect a surplus potential that film is capable of only through the other arts.

The fourth chapter, entitled *Performing the Unspeakable. Intermedial Events in András Jeles's Parallel Lives*, investigates intermedial figurations that can be identified in András Jeles's *Parallel Lives* (Senkiföldje, 1993). Jeles draws attention to the paradox that a particular medium of artistic expression can best manifest its own mediality through the "foreign" material of other arts and media. The film appeals to the other arts, incorporating a set of classical cultural – literary, painterly and musical – references. Jeles touches upon the sphere of the unrepresentable through the deconstruction of human civilization, pointing at the impotence of art and aesthetics in the face of inhumanity.

The fifth chapter, entitled *Remediated Bodies, Corporeal Images in Gábor Bódy's Narcissus and Psyche* addresses issues of screen adaptation, examining the cinematic medium in connection with the medial representation of the human body. Going far beyond the scope of screen adaptation, Bódy's monumental film experiment of encyclopedic character, conceived in the spirit of the new narrativity and new sensitivity of the 1980s, becomes a multilayered, intermedial and self-reflexive meditation upon the eye as the connecting link between the body and the image. The intertwining story of Narcissus and Psyche, extending over several generations, turns into the narrative of the history of evolution of optical media, from the *laterna magica*, through Marey's chronophotography and Muybridge's photo sequences, to the birth of the moving image.

The next two chapters of the thesis introduce the concept of remediation and deal with some of its forms of manifestation in contemporary cinema such as the use of archival footage. In their volume entitled *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (1999) Jay Bolter and David Grusin define remediation as the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms. It manifests in the interaction between the *immediacy of experience* (i.e. the authenticity of representation, the impression of reality) and the *hypermediacy of experience* (i.e. the mediated character of representation, the emphatic presence of the medium). The cases of remediation examined in these chapters demonstrate the profound interconnectedness of the impression of transparent representation and the perception of the medium itself.

The article entitled *Remediating Past Images. The Temporality of "Found Footage" in Gábor Bódy's American Torso* brings into discussion the use of archival/found footage or creating visual archaisms in the spirit of archival recordings, within the practice of the Hungarian experimental filmmaking of the 1970s and 1980s. The archival/ found footage can be viewed not as images simply standing for "the real," rendering some kind of transparent

representation but rather as figuration in itself, as an alternative modality of mediation and representation, creating productive tension and opening up the possibility of interaction between two distinct sets of moving images. Hence the paradox of the archival/ found footage: the apparently transparent reality turns into a stylistic figuration and becomes the carrier of manifold – cultural, temporal, medial – significations. The study argues that the authenticity of the moving image in Gábor Bódy's *American Torso* (1975) is achieved through a combination of the *immediacy* and the *hypermediacy* of cinematic experience.

The essay with the title *History, Cultural Memory and Intermediality in Radu Jude's Aferim!* deals with a film that simultaneously constructs and deconstructs the illusion of historical reality, being situated in the in-betweenness of the seemingly “natural”/unmediated, and the impression of artificiality/mediatedness. On the one hand, the film creates the impression of historical reality as an experience of immediacy, on the other hand, the effect of the real is overwritten by the hypermediacy of cinematic experience. The study seeks the answer to the question how intermedial collage, that is the effect resulting from the mix and playful contrast of different media, contributes to debunking the iconography of the mythical representation of history.

The penultimate chapter of the thesis, entitled *Black-and-White Sensations of Intermediality and Female Identity in Contemporary Polish and Czech Cinema*, addresses the aesthetic of black-and-white filmmaking in the digital age, with special attention to the ways in which the black-and-white image manifests its perceptual otherness and heterogeneity in between the analogue and the digital, the natural and the artificial, the cinematic and the photographic. Through examples taken from contemporary Polish and Czech cinema, it discusses the distinct uses and functions of the black-and-white image rendering female identity situated in the fore of Eastern European history. The black-and-white image is often associated with high artistry and the photographic quality of film; accordingly, the emphasis is laid on specific figurations of photofilmic images, such as photographic and tableau compositions, static shots and long takes, which confer on the digital monochrome subtle sensations of intermediality.

The last chapter of the thesis, *The Camera in House Arrest. Tactics of Non-Cinema in Jafar Panahi's Films*, deals with the reflexive and intermedial possibilities that open up at the boundaries of filmmaking. Jafar Panahi's recent films made in illegality reformulate the relationship between cinema and the “real,” defying the limitations of filmmaking in astounding ways. The paper explores the ways in which the film's self-reflexive and intermedial solutions become accented political gestures.

As a conclusion, the cinematic phenomena outlined above and explored in these studies, grouped around the key notions of *intermediality* and *remediation* with manifold connections between them, reveal nuanced perceptions of contemporary cinema and draw attention to varied forms of in-betweenness: between film and the other arts, reality and mediation, stasis and motion, the analogue and the digital, cinema and non-cinema. The thesis includes the list of works cited and concludes with a chapter on research perspectives, scientific and academic development plan.