

# Film in the Post-Media Age



# Film in the Post-Media Age

Edited by

Ágnes Pethő

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Edited by Ágnes Pethő

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                |   |
|------------------------------------------------|---|
| Introduction: The Post Media Life of Film..... | 1 |
| Ágnes Pethő                                    |   |

## **Part I: Images Moving into the Post-Media Age: Re-Location, Re-Mediation, Re-Configuration**

|                                                                                          |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| How Does Difference Matter? Dialogue and Reflexivity in the Flow<br>of Remediations..... | 17 |
| Yvonne Spielmann                                                                         |    |

|                                                                |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Shifting Paradigms in Web Video: From Access to Curation ..... | 35 |
| Simon Ruschmeyer                                               |    |

|                                                                     |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| The Voyage of the Spectators around Exhibited Moving Pictures ..... | 57 |
| Andrea Éva Tóth                                                     |    |

|                                                                                                                                    |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Jean-Luc Godard's Passages from the Photo-Graphic to the Post-<br>Cinematic: Images in between Intermediality and Convergence..... | 81 |
| Ágnes Pethő                                                                                                                        |    |

|                                                    |     |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----|
| The Transplane Image and the Future of Cinema..... | 125 |
| Jens Schröter                                      |     |

|                                                                                      |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| See More, Think Big: The IMAX Brand Before and After the Digital<br>Remastering..... | 143 |
| Beja Margitházi                                                                      |     |

## **Part II: Cinema Adapted to the Post-Media Condition**

|                                            |     |
|--------------------------------------------|-----|
| Lives of Cinema: Against Its "Death" ..... | 161 |
| Niels Niessen                              |     |

|                                                                             |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Along the Track of the Effaced Trace in Michael Haneke's <i>Caché</i> ..... | 185 |
| Judit Pieldner                                                              |     |

|                                                                                                                     |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Prestidigitation: Some Reflections on Cinema in the Digital Age.....                                                | 207 |
| Doris Gassert                                                                                                       |     |
| Back to the Future of Capitalism: <i>A Christmas Carol</i> in 3D .....                                              | 227 |
| Marco Grosoli                                                                                                       |     |
| From Narration to Information: <i>Robin Hood</i> and <i>Sherlock Holmes</i><br>in the Age of New Media .....        | 239 |
| Hajnal Király                                                                                                       |     |
| War, Lies and Video: Documentary Features of the War Film Genre<br>in the Post-Media Age .....                      | 255 |
| Peter Ole Pedersen                                                                                                  |     |
| Cybernetic Systems, Electronic Culture and the Post-Photographic<br>Image in Contemporary Hollywood Dystopias ..... | 271 |
| Wendy Sterba                                                                                                        |     |
| Feeling Together: Cinema and Practices of Sociability in the Post<br>Media Condition .....                          | 293 |
| Ruggero Eugeni                                                                                                      |     |
| Database Logic, Interactive Narrative and Films .....                                                               | 309 |
| Miklós Sággy                                                                                                        |     |
| <b>Part III: Bridging the Old and the New: Digital Aesthetics of DVD,<br/>Television and Computer Games</b>         |     |
| “This Image, which I Have Never Seen. Which I Still Remember:”<br>DVDs and the Memory and Loss of Materiality ..... | 329 |
| Eirik Frisvold Hanssen                                                                                              |     |
| “It’s not Television, It’s DVD”– New and Old Ways of Representing<br>the World in <i>The Wire</i> .....             | 343 |
| Anne Gjelsvik and Jørgen Bruhn                                                                                      |     |
| New Forms of Narrativity and Documentary on DVD. György Pálfi’s<br><i>I’m not Your Friend</i> -Project .....        | 357 |
| Lóránt Stóhr                                                                                                        |     |

|                                                                                                        |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Realism Reconsidered: On the Aesthetics of Visual Simulation<br>in Games.....                          | 381 |
| László Tarnay                                                                                          |     |
| More than a Matter of Making Images Seen: Iteration, Agency,<br>and Procedurality in Game Studies..... | 411 |
| Gábor Zoltán Kiss                                                                                      |     |
| Contributors .....                                                                                     | 423 |



# INTRODUCTION: THE POST MEDIA LIFE OF FILM

ÁGNES PETHŐ

Ever since the centenary of cinema there have been intense discussions in the fields of film studies and film criticism about the imminent demise of the cinematic medium, endless articles championing the spirit of genuine cinephilia have proclaimed the death of classical cinema and mourned the end of an era, while new currents in media studies introduced such buzzwords into the discussions as “remediation” (Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin<sup>1</sup>), “media convergence” (Henry Jenkins<sup>2</sup>), or “post-media aesthetics” (Lev Manovich<sup>3</sup>). By the turn of the millennium, the whole “ecosystem” of media has been radically altered through processes of hybridization and media convergence. Some theorists even claim that now that the term “medium” has triumphed in the discussions around contemporary art and culture, the actual media themselves have already “deceased,” as digitized imagery absorbs all media which become in this way, perhaps not actually dead, but at least “undead” media, that is mere “phantoms of their former self.”<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, within the last few decades we could witness a sustained re-evaluation and an inevitable re-definition of the term “medium” from several perspectives in an effort to reconcile this paradoxical duality consisting in the current diversification of technical media on the one hand, and the unifying effect of digitization (i.e. the general blurring of traditional media boundaries), on the other. Cinema and photography going through the transition from analogue to

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<sup>1</sup> See: Grusin, Richard. *Remediation. Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> See: Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York and London: NYU Press, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.alice.id.tue.nl/references/manovich-2005.pdf> (last accessed: 15.01.2012).

<sup>4</sup> See Sven Lutticken’s article: Undead Media. *Afterimage* 2004. Vol. 31: 12–13.

digital became the “forefathers” of new media hybrids and the main testing grounds for the new theories of mediality.<sup>5</sup>

However, amidst all the hype around the proliferation of new visual technologies, around the synergy of media perceptible over the new digital platforms, and amidst discussions of the ensuing dissolution of medium specificities, the art historian and theorist Rosalind Krauss has recently declared that she considers the “post-medium condition” to be “a monstrous myth,”<sup>6</sup> and argued in her latest books for the necessity of analyses that can “reclaim the specific from the deadening embrace of the general” and concentrate on revealing the creative use of “new technical supports.”<sup>7</sup>

The essays gathered in this volume are published in this context, as outlined above with these few keywords and ideas, a context in which “post-medium” is still a fairly general term deployed over a very volatile terrain where previously established notions are being continuously uprooted and earlier theories swept away. What connects these writings is therefore not a cohesive system of thought but the mere fact that they have all been written under the tacit assumption that the proper response to this “monstrous myth” (if we can accept it at all as an existing fallacy of a certain type of over-generalizing approach to contemporary media phenomena) is a more thorough examination of specific instances that occur in the post-media age, and that the “ecosystem” of contemporary moving images can be understood not as a unified digital environment that nullifies differences, but as a thriving and highly diversified, “multisensory milieu”<sup>8</sup> that poses ever new challenges both for the consumer/producer and the theorist.

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<sup>5</sup> Rosalind Krauss, Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy, Lev Manovich are only some of the names among the art and media theorists or philosophers concentrating on examples from film and photography in addressing crucial issues of the “post-medium condition.”

<sup>6</sup> Rosalind Krauss: *Perpetual Inventory*. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2010: xiv. See also her latest volume: *Under Blue Cup*. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> See her influential article, Reinventing the Medium (*Critical Inquiry*, Winter, 1999. Vol. 25, No. 2: 305). This idea in this way somehow counterpoints her much debated dismissive stance towards what she saw as the “aesthetic meaninglessness” resulting from the “the abandonment of the specific medium” that “spells the death of serious art” (see: *Perpetual Inventory*. Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2010: xiii).

<sup>8</sup> I use this expression not necessarily restricted to a reference to the ideas of Jacques Rancière who re-fashioned the old term of “medium” to be understood as a “sensory milieu,” but in a more general sense that allows several interpretations.

Moving images have entered the once exclusive art galleries, but they have also moved into the streets and into our everyday life as a domesticated medium at everybody's reach. Can we say therefore that cinema is gradually becoming an "incredible shrinking medium," as David N. Rodowick suggests (in *The Virtual Life of Film*, 2007), disappearing into the archives and film museums, or – on the contrary – can it be considered as the ultimate, chameleon-like inter-medium that can continually shift its shape, "moving from a sculptural to a painterly medium,"<sup>9</sup> or nowadays amid the fashionable CGI and motion capture techniques combining both the "sculptural" and the "painterly" in 3D cinema? Consequently, should we speak more of an all pervasive "cinematic experience" instead of a cinematic medium? What really happens to film once its traditional medium has shape-shifted into various digital forms and once its traditional locations, institutions and usages have been uprooted? What are the most important new genres in post-media moving pictures? Is it the web video, is it 3D cinema, is it the computer game that operates with moving image narratives, is it the new "vernacular" database, the DVD, or the good old television adjusted to all these new forms? How does theatrical cinema itself adapt to or reflect on these new image forms and technologies? What are the most influential thoughts that have surfaced in the discussions of a cinematic post-medium condition? These are only some of the major questions that can be asked about film – or, to use a more general term, about the moving image – in our post-media age, and which these essays try to cover reflecting on some of the possible subjects of analysis within this field.

The majority of the essays published in this volume have been written following the vivid discussions hosted by the international film and media studies conference "Film in the Post-Media Age" that took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2010, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, at the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, the Department of Photography, Film and Media. Some of the articles were also additionally solicited by the editor for the purpose of expanding the range of the topics and viewpoints covered by the collection. The volume lists as authors a series of young researchers working on their PhD theses or already on post-doctoral projects alongside prominent scholars in the field of film and media studies.

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(See the latest presentation of Rancière's thoughts on this in his essay, *What Medium can Mean*, published in *Parrhesia* 2011, No.11: 35–43.)

<sup>9</sup> Rodowick in an interview to the Harvard University Gazette (<http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2005/02.10/03-rodowick.html>, last accessed: 15.01.2012).

The book has been structured to cover what we can perceive as three main areas of research connected to “the post-media life of film:” 1) challenges faced by the moving images through their relocation from the traditional cinema theatre into new private and public environments (and into a fusion of both via the Internet), through extensive processes of all kinds of re-mediations taking place, as well as through the major changes in the haptic and spatial perception of the images themselves that occurred before and after the digital age; 2) the theoretical investigation and in-depth analyses of feature films that reflect on the transition of (analogue) cinema into the (digital) post-media age, and on cinema’s ways of adapting to the newly instituted forms of moving images; 3) the examination of the convergence of old narrative and visual conventions with an emerging digital aesthetics traceable in typical post-media “hosts” of moving images like DVDs, TV shows or video games.

In this way, Part One, *Images Moving into the Post-Media Age: Re-Location, Re-Mediation, Re-Configuration*, comprises articles that deal with the problems connected to the new contexts of the display and re-mediation of moving images, the new genres that seem to take shape in the digital environment, and the media forms and formats that have re-configured the way we can perceive moving images within the last few decades. Yvonne Spielmann’s theoretical essay, *How does Difference Matter? Dialogue and Reflexivity in the Flow of Remediations*, has been written on the premise that among present creative practices that cross media borders and expand cinematic concepts of temporal-spatial representation into virtual and interactive spaces, two important criteria stand out: one is the crossover of different cultural and media elements in dialogical contexts; the other is the interaction of different views, attitudes and realities in processes of interactivity and virtuality. Herein, we experience variety and diversity beyond and across tendencies to homogenize difference in networks and hybrids that simulate and remediate all kinds of media and cultural representation in the digital. The author describes pertinent examples of creative practices involving in-between zones, virtual spaces within expanded media landscapes. A variety of new media art projects are presented whose inventive processes rely on variable and collaborative methods that stress the notion of fluidity, contemporaneity, and multiplicity of differences.

Simon Ruschmeyer’s analysis in his article, *Shifting Paradigms in Web Video: from Access to Curation*, connects to Spielmann’s text by dealing with one of the most important new contexts of moving images nowadays, the Internet. With over two billion video uploads a day, repositories like YouTube have become significant archives of our audiovisual culture,

contrasting the most diverse material – from the amateurish to the professional, from the past to the present, from the artistic to the commercial. While in the early years of the Internet democratized access was at the core of the medium’s discourse, now structuring and contextualizing the videos will become the new paradigm. Ruschmeyer examines the cultural practice of curation in a web environment from curatorial gestures of the average user to the selection taxonomies of traditional art curators. The article also unfolds an argumentation that the media-based specificity of Web Video has to be analyzed closely in order to understand the object both as a cultural artifact and its potential as an art form.

Andrea Éva Tóth describes another context for the re-location of contemporary moving images: the space of the art gallery. In her article, *The Voyage of the Spectators around Exhibited Moving Pictures*, she connects Deleuze’s so-called “voyage form” in modern films with the ambulation of spectators of contemporary art installations, as well as with the onlookers of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century fairs’ moving pictures. At the same time, the theoretical works of Raymond Bellour, Jacques Rancière, Dork Zabunyan and Françoise Parfait are contrasted with the ideas hailing the immobility of the visitors of museums put forward by Anthony McCall and Chris Dercon.

The next essay, *Jean-Luc Godard’s Passages from the Photo-Graphic to the Post-Cinematic. Images in between Intermediality and Convergence* written by Ágnes Pethő,<sup>10</sup> takes a closer look at the various re-mediations that characterize both the cinematic and the “post-cinematic life” of one of the most important artists who himself reflected upon the complex intermedial connections of cinema and the fate of art and the image within a post-media environment. The essay begins with an attempt to trace the various domains of Godard’s widespread influence that reaches beyond contemporary cinema in our post-media culture (installation art, literature, music, graphic design, commercial videos, the current vogue of the “Godardesque” retro look promoted on the scene of fashion world, and finally, photography). The advertising strategies used by the Band of Outsiders fashion label using Polaroid photos that reconstruct or imitate Godard images are analyzed in more detail, their connection with a “photo-op” culture and the emergence of the “photo-filmic” image is emphasized. The essay then connects all these “Godardesque” features that survive in the post-cinematic world to the intermedial use of photography

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<sup>10</sup> The text was first published in the international peer-reviewed journal *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae: Film and Media Studies* vol. 4, 2011: 23–61.

in Godard's films that may have pre-figured their post-filmic appropriation. Some of the relevant junctures are pointed out between the "cinematic" and the "photographic" revealing how photography in Godard's films seems to offer a centre stage for inter-medial tensions but also allows for their assimilation by other media. His latest film, *Film Socialisme* (2010) is described in this sense as an allegoric passage of the photographic image from intermediality to media convergence.

The final two essays in this first part of the book both deal with the way moving images have undergone some major re-configurations. The first, Jens Schröter's essay, *The Transplane Image and the Future of Cinema*, was written following the current boom of 3D-Cinema.<sup>11</sup> The essay addresses some basic questions concerning this phenomenon: What exactly are 3D-Images? Why is there a boom of them today? What will be their role for the future of cinema? The essay starts by critically examining Jonathan Crary's highly discussed model of describing the history of vision. An alternative model, which allows a better historical understanding of 3D, or transplane images, is outlined. After this theoretical and historical discussion the question of the function of transplane images in popular cinema can be posed again. The author argues that a "3D-revolution" in cinema is not to be expected. Beja Margitházi's article, *See More. Think Big. The IMAX Brand Before and After the Digital Remastering*, addresses the huge polarity between giant (immobile) versus the small (portable) screen moving image experience in our contemporary visual environment. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to the well-known urban legend, the audience overwhelmed by the image of an approaching life-sized train screamed and ran out from the projection of the Lumière brothers. After a century in the ads of the IMAX theatres dinosaurs and sharks are breaking out from the screen, and the audience is shocked by the size and the effect of the images. In the years 2000 the IMAX gradually became a medium used not only for educational purposes (e.g. documentaries) but for "pure" entertainment (full length Hollywood features), emphasizing the idea of sensual immersion and emotion (as the official IMAX® slogan in 2010 says: "See more, hear more, feel more. Think big. IMAX, the movie experience"). The author analyzes the way in which the IMAX image re-configured the cinematic experience before and since digital remastering (DMR).

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<sup>11</sup> Jens Schröter's essay condenses some of the central arguments of the author's German language monograph *3D. Zur Geschichte, Theorie und Medienästhetik des technisch-transplanen Bildes* (Munich: Fink, 2009). The English translation of this book is due to be published in 2013 at Continuum Press, New York with the title: *3D. History, Theory and Aesthetics of the Technical-Transplane Image*.

Part Two of the book, as the title – *Cinema Adapted to the Post-Media Condition* – shows, consists of analyses that examine the way in which cinema survived and reflects on the multiple changes in context and technology in the so called post-media age. Niels Niessen’s essay *Lives of Cinema: against its “Death”* that was first published in the film studies journal *Screen*<sup>12</sup> was included in the volume to introduce the second part of the book and makes a transition from theoretical issues related to the re-location, re-mediation and re-configuration of moving images to questions that can be posed regarding concrete films within the post-media environment. Niessen opposes the notion that the advent of the digital image has been accompanied by the death of cinema and argues that the main reason the theoretical quarrel surrounding the death of film/cinema persists is that many theorists have avoided being sufficiently clear about the philosophical implications of defining cinema in terms of indexicality. The author claims that a radical divide between analogue and digital cinema, as for example David Rodowick draws in *The Virtual Life of Film*, does not sufficiently take into account the role that the relation between viewer and image occupies in cinema’s ontological makeup. Drawing upon and critiquing recent interventions in the indexicality debate, as well as revisiting some of Charles Peirce’s writings on the index, this essay argues that, unless one is willing to fully reduce the essence of cinema to the experience of being in the presence of something that cannot be perceived directly, namely the trace itself, the declaration of cinema’s death arrives prematurely. Instead, Niessen suggests that certain aspects of Stanley Cavell’s characterization of cinema as a mode of watching the world unviewed have survived the digital turn, as well as the ongoing displacement of the cinematic image into spaces other than the theatre that has been accompanied by this turn. As its title suggests, this essay argues that this displacement of the cinematic world is not happening to cinema, but is a part of its essence.

Judit Pieldner’s essay (*Along the Track of the Effaced Trace in Michael Haneke’s Caché*) continues important issues addressed by the preceding text: it also deals with the question of indexicality and its changes from modern to post-media cinema, analyzing in detail Haneke’s *Caché* (2005), a film also mentioned as a prominent example in Niessen’s theoretical examination. Pieldner focuses on the shift of perspective that can be identified in the interest of post-media age motion picture in the employment and incorporation of other media to reveal the relationship between the medium and the mediated trace, between the inhuman

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<sup>12</sup> The article was first published in *Screen* Vol. 52 No. 3, 2011: 307–326.

technical apparatus and the perceiving self, between fiction and documentary, between truth and the ethical dimension of the image. *Caché* is interpreted as a subversive remake of the late modernist paradigm embodied by Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) and related to problems that reverberate with Gábor Bódy's concept of the cinematic image, also present in his *Dog's Night Song* (1983).

Doris Gassert's essay, *Prestidigitation. Some Reflections on Cinema in the Digital Age*, uses the example of Christopher Nolan's film, *The Prestige* (2006) in order to scrutinize the "digital rupture" beyond its visual and visible effect. While the film's narrative takes us back to the landscape of late 19<sup>th</sup> century stage magic to deconstruct the art of prestidigitation, *The Prestige* can also be examined as a media-reflexive allegory of the cinematic medium that, when situated against a digital backdrop, opens a discursive space to reflect on contemporary transitions that cinema and the moving images are facing in the digital age. In tracing the mythological lineages of the first "living pictures," *The Prestige* exposes the myths that continue to reanimate cinema in the age of digital transformation. While the digital code is said to pose a threat to the very identity of cinema because it bereaves the medium of its indexical nature, new digital technologies are marketed as a media revolution in the history of cinematic visualisation. *The Prestige* relativises the "digital rupture" by locating the revolutionary impact not within the technology, but instead in the intermedial practices and surroundings that appropriate the technological invention and thus create and define the cultural medium beyond its technological grounds. Rather than a revolutionary break in the history of the moving image, *The Prestige* marks the digital transformation as a slight shift in prestidigitation that does not fundamentally challenge the nature of cinema: cinema has always been a hybrid mixture, a "mongrel muse" (Durgnat) that has, even in its analogue form, relied on the mixture of various media as well as on the "imaginary double" for the cinematic effect to become magical on screen.

Marco Grosoli identifies another media-reflexive allegory in Robert Zemeckis's 3D version adaptation of Dickens's well-known novel, *A Christmas Carol* (2009). He states that this is certainly not the first film by Zemeckis to allegorize the contemporary status of cinema. Such movies as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988) or *Death Becomes Her* (1992), for instance, were all patent allegories of how cinema was going to be changed under the heavy influence of the then-new "special effects." This time, the project is even more ambitious. Not only the film aims to allegorize what cinema is going to look like in the 3D era, but also what capitalism is going to be *after* capitalism. What *A Christmas Carol* seems

to state is that this “new” subject (the new movie spectator *and* the new post-capitalist subject) is an utterly impersonal, inhuman one: a thing among other things, traversed by a fundamental tension between the organic and the inorganic. Which is exactly what the half-digital animated figures created by “3D motion performance capture” aim to depict: an artificial form of life contrasted from within by “actual” movement (i.e., actually captured from the body of the actors by apposite sensors).

Hajnal Király traces somewhat similar imprints of the digital age within two literary adaptations. In the essay *From Narration to Information: Robin Hood and Sherlock Holmes in the Age of New Media* she observes that in the course of the last two decades the “classic,” comparative, hierarchical discourse of adaptations became unsustainable, crying out for a new conceptual, terminological and methodological basis. The concept of “medium specificity” has erased the hierarchy of arts, but only with the realisation specific to the post-media age (i.e. that “all media are mixed media”) did all barriers fall down, and did the concepts of “transmediality” and “intermediality” become the neutral yet flexible alternatives for the adaptation turned into a “bad object.” New media have become a melting pot of different media, facilitating the free cross-fertilization between them. Narration is not medium-specific anymore and nor is data or information. In close case studies of *Sherlock Holmes* (Guy Ritchie, 2009) and *Robin Hood* (Ridley Scott, 2010) the essay reveals some interesting cases of intermedial fusion: narrations can become fulfilled in new media forms (for example, the character of Sherlock is, in fact, as physical, hypnotic and interactive as the characters of video games), others, as it happens in the case of Scott’s *Robin Hood*, are broken down into pieces, data and information, and reassembled into a new, culturally actual narrative, similar to a digital image made up from pixels.

In the next chapter, *War, Lies and Video. Documentary Features of the War Film Genre in the Post-Media Age*, Peter Ole Pedersen examines the impact of web videos over current cinematic narratives of war. The author notes that the popularity of video sharing websites like YouTube and LiveLeak gradually permeates most areas of our contemporary film culture. Film is now often experienced in diminutive formats, fragmented form and surprisingly low quality. In his 1964 publication *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* communication theorist Marshall McLuhan points out that film is characterized by a high level of information which dictates an analytical participation with the media. McLuhan terms this as “hot media.” On the contrary, the TV-image is signal-based and with its low resolution of flickering colours, it engages the viewers’ senses on an unconscious level. The TV-signal is in addition also connected to the live-

transmission. Its multi-sensual aspects are categorized as “cold media.” With a point of departure in McLuhan’s terminology, the new film-based institutions on the Internet – the video sharing websites – can tentatively be termed a “lukewarm medium.” Instantaneous streaming of the web videos often results in a distinct low-resolution appearance and momentary pixelation of the material: all characteristics that mirror the blurred, roughly edited, documentary look of the amateur recording and manifest themselves as a form of “live-effect.” Over the last few years, these media institutional characteristics have found their way into the mainstream film, both as thematical content and as specific aesthetic expressions. The essay addresses this audiovisual transformation of the “classic” narrative film with examples from the war film genre, more precisely Brian De Palma’s *Redacted* (2007) and Paul Haggis’s *In the Valley of Elah* (2007).

Wendy Sterba continues the analysis of the paradoxes involved in the presence of digitized imagery and digital media in contemporary cinema both as content and as form in her article *Cybernetic Systems and Electronic Culture and the Post-Photographic Image in Contemporary Hollywood Dystopias*. She presents the way in which recent Hollywood films utilize and recognize the chimerical necessities of contemporary life, while simultaneously decrying it. Recent films like *Strange Days* (1995), *Minority Report* (2002), *Southland Tales* (2006), *Surrogates* (2009), and even *Paparazzi* (2004) acknowledge the ways in which post-media have become systems of information that can interconnect powerfully and simulate realities in a postmodern schizophrenic world. Each “film” is itself hybrid, neither pure film nor pure video, nonetheless they invoke a perspective of demonizing the very systems of which they have become a part.

Ruggero Eugeni’s essay, *Feeling Together – Cinema and Practices of Sociability in the Post Media Condition*, deals with the way contemporary intermedia network provides the framework for the creation, the development and the sensible experience of the social bond. The author calls such a process “sociability,” by gathering a term used by the philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Arguments are provided through the analysis of *Star Trek* (J. J. Abrams, 2009), the “rebooting” of the well-known saga. This movie is considered a theoretical audiovisual discourse about the relationship between media and sociability in the contemporary condition. The article focuses on three points. Firstly, the dynamics of sociability are indentified in three stages: feeling of being together, feeling of acting together and feeling of feeling together. Secondly, it is argued that in this ongoing process, the distinction between direct interactions and mediated ones is

not relevant: the ground for sociability process is neither a physical nor a digital one, but an “assemblage” of both. Thirdly, the author regards the cinema as the medium which, better than others, can build great epic narratives of the processes of sociability. In the case analyzed, even the construction of the fandom community (which is a very important feature of the *Star Trek* phenomenon) is transformed into an epic narrative.

The last text included in Part Two, Miklós Sággy’s *Database Logic, Interactive Narrative and Films* focuses on the question how contemporary medial environment, which is basically defined by computers, influences the language and narrative techniques of films – if it does so at all. The main emphasis of the analysis is on database logic which has become a dominant principle in sorting and storing information and the main organization structure of human experience in the digital age, according to Lev Manovich. Narratives (as traditional organization forms) can be contrasted with databases, and it can be argued that the former organizing methods do not have the same status in computer culture, since databases occupy an important, if not the largest, territory of the new media landscape. The article in this way also introduces some of the basic issues that will be examined more closely in the essays constituting the last part of the volume.

The Third Part of the book proposes an incursion into the world of the DVDs, television shows in the age of post-media and video games bringing into focus first of all the way in which these new forms rely, re-mediate and transform narrative patterns and visual structures established not only in classical cinema but also earlier in the other arts like literature or painting. The first essay published in the section *Bridging the Old and The New: Digital Aesthetics of DVD, Television and Computer Games* is Eirik Frisvold Hanssen’s “*This Image, which I Have Never Seen. Which I Still Remember:*” *DVDs and the Memory and Loss of Materiality*. Acknowledging the fact that during the past decade, curatorship and exhibition of film history carried out by film archives and national film institutions is increasingly taking place in digital arenas such as web services, YouTube channels, and the production of DVDs, the author states that this re-contextualization of film heritage raises a number of historiographical issues, in terms of the consequences for cultural memory as well as canonisation, and broader questions regarding forms of cultural, material or aesthetic dimensions of film history that are being transformed or lost forever. The essay examines a number of recent DVD editions of films with regards to strategies for digitally simulating or translating material and spatial dimensions of the original work: the physical film material as *object*, the exhibition of film as a *process*. Using recent debates

on film curatorship as well as classical film theory as points of departure, the “medium” or “dispositive” of the DVD is considered as a site for representing, as well as analysing, the memory and loss of the original materiality of the film medium.

Anne Gjelsvik and Jørgen Bruhn reveal how in the so-called post cinematic age, the “incredibly shrinking medium” (Rodowick), cinema, has not only moved into the white cube of the museum, but it has also moved into the little box at home: television, and propose a closer examination of an HBO TV series in the article, “*It’s not Television, It’s DVD*”– *New and Old Ways of Representing the World in The Wire*. While critics have argued that cinema has suffered several crises, television has been regarded as the all-dominant new audio-visual storytelling medium; with descriptions such as “televisuality” (Caldwell) and “Quality-TV” (Thompson) suggesting a major change in how fiction on television is told and consequently how the world can and should be represented. The authors discuss the critically acclaimed HBO-series *The Wire* (David Simon 2002–2008) as a representative for the tendency of making cinema for television, and they argue that this is both a new and an old form of storytelling. Rephrasing HBO’s famous slogan (“It’s not Television, It’s HBO”) they show how the scale and structure of the series differ from traditional series in a way which is more suitable for new distribution channels such as the DVD-box-set. At the same time they argue that *The Wire* is best understood if compared to older narrative media, such as the novel; in particular they compare the series to the genre of the novel, many examples of which were written in order to be read in installments over several weeks (for instance Dickens, Balzac or Dostoevsky). In sum, by way of intermedial comparisons and theory they argue that parts of contemporary television in our post-medium condition may be not only “old structures in new clothes” but even a new televisual medium, incorporating and transgressing both novel and cinema.

Lóránt Stóhr proposes another inquiry into the relationship between the formats of the fictional feature film, the documentary and the DVD focusing on *New Forms of Narrativity and Documentary on DVD*. György Pálfi’s *I’m not Your Friend-project*. The author quotes Lev Manovich who projects the future of filmmakers as interface designers who work with (quasi-) documentary materials and asserts that the DVD, as one of the most popular exhibition forms that has a simple interface handling moving pictures, sound tracks and photos arranged in a database structure, can change the way we understand narratives. The essay explores the permanent changes of interpretation levels during the navigation on the DVD intratext of György Pálfi’s *I Am Not Your Friend-project*. The

Hungarian director best known abroad for his film *Taxidermia* (2006) produced a unique mixture of documentaries and improvised fiction film that exists only on DVD. The case study focuses on different forms and levels of performativity of the project in order to prove that this DVD intratext eliminates the border between fiction and documentary, and works rather as a catalogue of human behaviour than a collection of linear narratives.

László Tarnay's essay, *Realism Reconsidered. On the Aesthetics of Visual Simulation in Games*, traces the way in which new strategies in image making and sensations of realism connect to old forms of visual representation established in the visual arts. The author asserts that there is no denying that digital technology has inaugurated a completely new era in visual representation. With the arrival of 3D movies and movie theatres and the highly advanced level of computer graphics, the almost impeccable simulation of virtual reality both in films and computer games, and the almost omnipotent technique of morphing has called into question all previous forms of realism including the hyperrealism of the sixties. With the technology of projecting images onto the air, virtual reality has crossed the actual/virtual boundary only to encroach upon what we had thought to be our own reality. The essay has grown out of the need to redefine realism in art or visual representation after taking full stock of the most recent means of visual image reproduction, or rather, production.

Gábor Zoltán Kiss also proposes an incursion into the world of video games and addresses the issue of the relationship of new and old media in the final essay included in the volume, *More than a Matter of Making Images Seen: Iteration, Agency, and Procedurality in Game Studies*. The author argues that despite their superficial similarities, games do not participate in lucrative relations with old media. However, the current situation of the video games is quite familiar: the origins of cinema show the same issues we see in games today. Cinema also used to be an experimental art form with several technologies competing fiercely for its audience. Video games reproduce the same historical pattern: they are arguably in their early medial state, before their standardized technology and language, before their institutional mode of representation. The changing concepts of gaming make it very difficult to develop a general consensus about the medium; on the other hand, the lack of consensus is enriching, as it gives way to experimentation. The author considers that it is the critics' task to keep up with the form's advancement and describe its complexity through increasingly advanced conceptual iterations, through participation, agency, co-authoring, and procedurality.

As this brief survey may indicate, the essays that we offer to our readers have ventured into only some of the possible areas within the ever changing “ecosystem” of moving images. Yet we launch this collection of essays and in-depth case studies with the intention of at least touching upon some of the key research axes that can take shape, hoping that they will constitute useful contributions to ongoing theoretical debates and help a more detailed mapping of the volatile terrain of the post-media experience of moving images. With the range of the authors, the issues put forward as well as the scope of the viewpoints deployed in the individual chapters, the book may also be representative of the decentralization of the discourse itself conducted in the field of film and media studies over questions regarding the post-medium condition, and can be considered as open invitation to further studies aimed at exploring the blooming post-media life of film.

**PART I:**

**IMAGES MOVING  
INTO THE POST-MEDIA AGE:  
RE-LOCATION, RE-MEDIATION,  
RE-CONFIGURATION**



# HOW DOES DIFFERENCE MATTER? DIALOGUE AND REFLEXIVITY IN THE FLOW OF REMEDIATIONS

YVONNE SPIELMANN

## **Introduction: Networks**

The current debates on convergences in media and culture are dominated by insights from the fields of cultural studies and post-colonial perspectives which conclude that encounters with strangers and otherness are manifested in cultural contexts that can be best described as “*contact zones*.” This discussion focuses on exchange and dialogue in the lived experience and communication of encounters of “real” people in our physical reality; whereas in the fields of media analysis the discussion focuses on complex mergers of media. These involve the encounter of the “real” with the “virtual” and the transgression of temporal-spatial relations which determine our physical reality in the direction of interactive and virtual mediascapes. When viewed together, interdisciplinary discourses on our contemporaneity regard the multiplicity of connections between highly diverse components where these connote media and cultural plurality. This becomes noticeable in dynamic intermedial, intercultural and further hybrid mergers. The latter in particular result from a flow of contemporary contacts and encounters which have no stable or consistent identities.

Regarding the changes and challenges in media and culture which go hand-in-hand with the global and digital present, striking novelties can be seen in transnational and transcultural connections now technically realisable in virtual dataspaces. Such technological achievements as the internet, mobile telecommunication networks and the transmission and processing of large amounts of data in realtime, have a significant cultural impact and promote the emergence of hybrid mergers. These re-mediate and recontextualise media and cultural specificity within larger networks.

“New digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts, and they

refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts” (Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin 1999, 19). This re-mix happens to communication systems and the exchanges of political, social, ethnic and national groups across national and geographic borders. It also allows the encounter of hybrid virtual-real identities in cyberspace. Finally, new mediascapes arise in translocal coordinations, which means that they are not bound to physical time and space. Participatory and social media environments verify the parameters of new media settings, such as chatrooms, Second Life, YouTube, Facebook and so forth.

Computer networks provide the technological base for the realisation of translocal encounters between persons who can be present in the internet with multiple identities. It is a striking property of the virtual-interactive situation of communication that it replaces a commonly experienced temporal-spatial contiguity with a paradoxical simultaneity of multiple presence. Multiplied sameness of “selves as others” can be realised in multiple places. This kind of multiplication increasingly determines our understanding of our own and other cultures and their interconnectedness. Networked technologies intervene directly into temporal and spatial order. This usually frames the modes of representing the encounters in media realities where – as in the cinema and related recording techniques – the real person was “there” in a specific moment of time and in a specific space – what might be termed the “pro-filmic event.” Yet, in the actual communication situation with the digital computer, the dialogue partner must not be present in any real space/place or at any given moment in time. In the dataspace, “factual” presence is not a necessary requirement in order to be “actually” present in the virtual. That is because virtual “presence” functions as if real, but unbound from time and space as we experience them in the physical world we live in. The resultant new configurations alter the scale and dimension of the encounter itself. Distinguishing parameters of spatial and temporal relations and of inside and outside, before and after, and real and virtual are deliberately mixed up and essentially disrupted. This indicates a major shift on a global scale which challenges us to develop an interdisciplinary understanding encompassing technical specificity and transnational contexts with regard to the media and cultural components and their interrelatedness.

### **Ways of Creative Intervention into Hybridity**

Notably, discourses of Cultural Studies in accordance with approaches in Media Studies have stressed a concept of hybridity which manifests in-

between zones and in-between spaces where multiplicity, diversity and plurality blossoms. The important point is that as they occur the effects of fusion are not considered one-sided: differences are neither effaced nor regarded as separating forces, but these in-between places are characterised by the encounter of differing influences which coexist in paradoxical processes of mutual dialogues. A closer definition describes these in-between zones as core areas of contemporary hybridity as noted by Néstor García Canclini (1995), when he finds it necessary to consider the interrelationships between homogeneous (effacing difference) and heterogeneous (stressing points of difference) elements. This view opposes one-sided polarities – either through plurality or unification – and also negates any notions of supposedly “pure” contexts of some kind of “origin.” Even more effectively, Homi K. Bhabha (1994) has argued for the recognition of these in-between spaces by coining the term “Third Space” which indicates a forum for politically motivated action that is equally suitable for aesthetic-creative intervention into our contemporary processes of increased networks. As Bhabha points out, when we wish to face the challenges of the globalisation of capitalism and the digitisation of media communication it will be important to develop cross-cultural interventions in our cultural contemporaneity. Interventions, which need to be seen as located at in-between places, will inhabit “*Third Spaces*” which are by definition extra-temporal and extra-spatial. That is so insofar as they effectively exist in-between past and present and make connections across traditions and cultural practices in “the here and now.” Clearly, when we add the particular attributes of our media landscapes to this concept of “Third Space” – which originates from cultural criticism, it can be concluded with a nod to the discourses of media studies that a “*Third Space*” settles down in the encounter of the real and virtual.

In conclusion, creative arts making this kind of intervention will disrupt thinking in dualities. Aesthetic intervention crossing the borderline of art and politics, here and there, real and virtual, will drive significant change in ways that promote possibilities of media and cultural travelling and permeable translation. “Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent “in-between” space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The “past-present” becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.” (Bhabha 1994, 7.)

With hybrid conditions that stabilise and with mergers across differences that are reinforcing the status quo of media convergence, we have reached a level of remediation that solidifies the transgression of borders and indistinguishable contexts. Against such homogenising effects

of hybrid mergers – which also reach into the conceptualisation of post-medium – the concept of creative intervention can become a counter-force in making distinctions recognisable. This can effect transformation. What needs to be considered here is a concept of art and material that resists conceptual erasure of medium and/or cultural specificity. To avoid misunderstanding, I find it necessary to stress the difference between technology and medium as a necessary condition when we wish to hold on to express reflexivity in the critique of media representation. It will not support critical perspectives if we regard them as fused. However, a certain loss of media specificity has entered the discourses, which dissolves the level of materiality and apparatus. As Rosalind Krauss (1999), one of the major representatives of this strand of argument points out, a “post-medial” condition derives in the electronic age and dispenses from the start with categories of medium specificity. If the display explodes with the displayed, we have, according to this view, reached a point where material and form converge and this would describe the “post-medium condition.” This overlooks the fact that a radical questioning of the material characteristics is expressed and has to be presented within the media form, for example in experimental film, in experimental video and furthermore in self-reflexive digital arts. Here these processes are perceptible, visible and audible. When the expressive means of a medium which has developed into a converged media landscape are put into question, it is a question of how to represent the technological processes. These critical stances can be made aesthetically perceptible via media technology which is using the respective vocabulary against the grain, in a self-reflexive manner. The proposed dissolution of medium and technology into an overall post-medium condition would therefore have opposite results and is of no advantage. This would rather enhance the dissolution of self-reflexivity and not help us recognise how the creative intervention into the media landscapes takes place. Alternatively, the paradoxical phenomena of difference between medium specificity in relation to hybrid media landscapes, on the one hand, and between technology (material and apparatus) of digital fusion, on the other hand, are interesting to observe in their interplay when we search for examples of critical dialogue with and within the media. As pointed out, one effect of convergence tends toward standardisation and homogeneity wherein difference does not matter. Another effect of the same kind of hybrid processes derives from aesthetic-political intervention and stresses diversity and difference in in-between spaces. These are identified as being capable of expressing critique and changeability. This can provoke reflexivity on such processes of remediation where they “refashion” older media practices.

Bhabha's proposal of creative intervention gives the most radical advice to aesthetic practices, when he calls for reflexivity on such processes of transformation and reworking of preceding historical, inter-medial and inter-cultural patterns. What is at stake now, is a question of intervention as creative invention. Here, components of the present and the past, and attributes that belong to ourselves and to strangers, and elements of the real and the virtual are all configured afresh together in the here and now. In this, hybrid conditions become recognisable as challenges to make changes. Artists, pioneers and developers of creative media art practices who are instigating inventive processes will proceed in variable and collaborative methods and forms of presentation to stress the notion of fluidity, contemporaneity, plurality and multiplicity of differences and in sum connote changeability. This picture of potential intervention through aesthetic practices refers to Bhabha's understanding of hybrid in-between zones as "Third Spaces" because these places are regarded as unstructured and beyond dual and polar options. They provide variability beyond fixing and instead foster dialogue. As Bhabha puts it: "'Being in the beyond,' then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; [...]. In that sense, then, the intervening space 'beyond,' becomes a space of intervention in the here and now" (1994, 7).

This space of intervention because of its hybrid attributes serves the generation and proliferation of aesthetic-creative practices beyond media and cultural borders and their manifestations. Simply because the intervention provokes the emergence of difference in dialogue with the present conditions which at the same time are taken under critique. This multilayered action instigates the creation of something different, starting from a different view and understanding of the present. The strategy of creative invention seems to be the appropriate *modus operandi* in particular when we have to consider that the present is determined by hybrid conditions of media and culture. This means that multiple convergences and interrelationships are shaping and determining the fields of encounter and remediation which are no longer inter-medial but hybrid in-between zones and spaces. Such contact zones and in-between spaces already express a dynamic understanding of interrelationship and encounter which is based on the technological environment of dataspace and their trans-local and non-territorial coordinates. Concurrently, it is necessary to acknowledge these fundamentally dialogical and naturally paradoxical core characteristics of contemporary hybridity. We need to know about ways in which different media and cultural contexts are

“refashioned,” building on the constituent premise of any effective politically and aesthetically articulated criticism. A valid critique to oppose standards of global scaling that we perceive and experience in globalised and digitised network communication.

In conclusion, intervention as invention means deviation from universal standards in data systems, communication networks and internet portals – namely in any computer based standardisation that sets the tone worldwide. Notably, the extent to which corporate-commercial and political-governmental control systems enforce unified and standardised norms of technological applications in the internet and the broader dataspace and establish unified formats in software as well as hardware, gives rise to world formats for the production and distribution of tools and devices. This can be seen, for example in television and video formats, digital code zones, and regional codes of mobile telecommunication networks. In contrast, creative practices which wish to express disagreement with the standardisation and fixing of technological possibilities are interested in demonstrating flow and multiple overlapping. They stress the paradoxical potential of encounters with mixed realities. Again, it is not so much a target in itself to maintain “older” concepts of medium specificity and self-reflexivity of the medium as it was appropriate strategy in intermedial encounters. Nowadays, creative practices have to cope with challenges of refashioned mediascapes that are already blurred, mixed and essentially hybrid. In this context, creative practices are using technologies of interactivity and virtuality in a dialogical mode that is twofold: they stress diversity and multiplicity, on the one hand, and at the same time demonstrate other/different operational modes of these technologies, on the other hand. Together they develop different programmes and applications that intersect with the recognised standard which maintain dominant modes of operation. These complex and often paradoxical approaches in the creative intervention produce aspects of invention which become more intense the more the dialogical processes themselves are made apparent. This praxis of reflexivity when it renders virtual-interactive encounters perceptible in in-between spaces can make us aware of our own presence, participation and activity when we engage in hybrid encounters, for example in on-line communication and in interactive installation arts. Hereby, the contact becomes permeable between reality and virtuality, between past and present, and we are actively participating in the flow of building “Third Spaces.”

In the following, I will focus on selected examples of artistic-creative practices that intervene into cyberspace, virtual reality and interactivity with and through the use of computers. The point is to demonstrate how