

Report

2023 The Institute for World Literature, Harvard University, USA

Colloquium 13: "World Literature & Cinema"

Colloquium leader: DDr. Olha Voznyuk – independent scholar

This colloquium united 10 scholars from Israel, China, Turkey, Switzerland, Cyprus, Spain, and Ukraine with different scientific backgrounds such as MA students, PhD students, faculty members, professors, and independent scholars, who are investigating in their research the intermedia relations between world literature and cinema. Each of the four colloquium sessions was devoted to a unique problem, which was actively discussed during the paper presentations of the international participants of the IWL 2023 in Harvard.



The aim of the first session “Relations between Cinema and Art” was to analyze the influence of art and media on world cinema, the intermedia dialogue between cinema and theater, the reception of art through cinema and theater, and the audiovisual effect of art’s message to contemporary viewers. Each presenter has started their presentation after a short biographical introduction, provided by the colloquium leader. John Hernandez Alvarez, a PhD student in the Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies at the University of Illinois, Chicago, opened the discussion floor with his presentation “*Study in Intermediality in Slow Motion: Lech Majewski’s “The Mill and the Cross”*”, where he examined the intermedial relation of film and painting in the named film, directed by the Polish filmmaker Lech Majewski. Inspired and guided in part by American historian Michael Francis Gibson’s close study of Pieter Bruegel’s

painting, the film enacts a slow and nearly silent recreation of Bruegel the Elder's "The Procession to Calvary" (1564). The researcher analyzed how Majewski's film used multiple techniques and strategies to both examine the painting from within —through the character of Brueghel (played by Rutger Hauer), who comes in and out of his own painting, and from without, by having real actors playing particular figures and scenes in the painting—through a series of animated *tableaux vivants*. He emphasized the importance of the audio and visual effects of the movie to express the message of the painter to the contemporary viewers and how the film director, by using the modern technology, explains the art's heritage and historic period of Bruegel to contemporary recipients. Philipp Makowski, a MA student from Switzerland, commented the presentation as a respondent, emphasizing the impact of this film to understanding the image of history and biography of Bruegel for modern viewers.

The next participant, Carlos Linares Ávila, a PhD student with the specialization on relations between audiovisual media and theatre from the University of Granada, Spain, highlighted the importance of theatrical performances in nowadays audiovisual media. In his presentation titled "*Relations between the Audiovisual Media and Theater: Recordings of Theatrical Performances*" the researcher paid attention to the importance of the preservation of theatrical heritage. As the theater recordings have a specificity compared to the recording of other artistic performances such as dance or circus. The study of these performances allows to understand the intermedia relationship between those two media, the process of translation or adaptation from one sign system to another. The combination of a semiotic methodology and formal audiovisual analysis helps to analyze the reception of the audiovisual spectator as opposed to the scenic spectator. He also claimed that the quality results of these investigations can serve as a tool for the proper functioning of the industry (distribution, festivals, programmers) and as a document (research and teaching, preservation of theatrical heritage). As a respondent, Yam Traiber, a MA student from Israel, pointed out that the movies and theater records provide materials for investigation of the transition between the media tools for revealing the message to the society. After the open floor for discussion, in which all participants took a very active part, the session was concluded with a summary of ideas for future mutual potential projects.

The second session was titled "Cinema's Influence on Society" and was opened by the Cultural Studies MA student at Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey, Binsu Dincer. She presented her analysis of "*Werner Herzog's The Wild Blue Yonder: A Poetic Trance to Rethink the Anthropocene*", with a focus on how the present study investigates how Werner Herzog's 2005

science fiction fantasy film problematizes and displaces our relationship with the manmade geological era, the Anthropocene. She pointed out that Herzog's poetic narration raises the critical question, "How is it that we are thinking about and creating relationships with our surroundings, how is it affecting us and is another way possible?". The film takes real documentary footage from NASA's space shuttles, arctic scuba divers, and interviews with scientists, and puts them somewhere that is alien to them, inside a science fiction fantasy film. This way, truth and fiction become intertwined, and the director is able to create a new ontology for these pieces of footage, making the viewers question their own lives through a radically different perspective in the meanwhile. Especially, the failure of civilization, waste and its consequences, proliferation, and extinction narratives of the alien protagonist resonate with the threats that today's human and non-human life is facing according to Nicholas Mirzoeff and Myra J. Hird. Olha Voznyuk, a Comparative Literature and Slavic Studies scholar, while responding to this presentation, mentioned, that the human versus alien juxtaposition reveals the boundaries of human cultural values transition. This science fiction also reveals the problem of understanding and acceptance of the "Other" in modern society.

With the next presentation, provided by an independent researcher from Ukraine, Olha Voznyuk, the attention of participants was focused on the *"Ukrainian Culture in Transition: The Influence of Post-Maidan Films on National Identity"*. In her presentation she was focused on the representation of Ukrainian history in contemporary films. After the collapse of the USSR, Ukrainian culture raised the question of studying its own historical and cultural heritage. The process of rethinking and reanalyzing of the past also revealed the problem of rediscovering the unspoken and, as a result, forgotten names of Ukrainian intellectuals during the USSR time. With the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the development of Ukrainian cultural and cinematic narratives, in particular, has increased significantly. Specifically, the film industry has begun to play the role of popularizer of Ukrainian history, i.e., to fulfill the task of restoring historical memory to a society. In particular, the film industry began to play the role of popularizer of Ukrainian history, to fulfill the task of restoring historical memory to a society. She investigated the role of historical events and their influence on the cultural transformation of post-Soviet Ukraine by using the visual message of new such films as "Winter on Fire" (2015), directed by Evgeny Afineevsky, "Hutsulka Ksenia" (2019), directed by Olena Demyanenko, "Viddana" (2020), directed by Chrystyna Syvolap, etc. John Hernandez Alvarez in his comment to the presentation mentioned

the importance of the media presentation of Ukrainian culture in nowadays political situation in the world.

The session was continued by the presentation of Shi Song, a Chinese professor at the School of Foreign Studies at Minzu University in Beijing. His research presentation “*The Continuity and Absorption of Transnational Imagination Based on the Variation Interpretations of Martial Arts, Kung Fu, Wuxia, and Martial Arthouse Films*” revealed the issue of representation of the image of Chinese Martial Arts culture in American movies. As the most popular and acceptable “Chinese” film genre abroad, Martial Arts, Kung Fu, Wuxia, and Martial Arthouse Films represent various perspectives and phases of the genre’s acceptance in the English-speaking world, which have quite different signifier and signified relationship between eastern and western context. While crossing the borders, the connotation and denotation of the extraneous cinemas could be interpreted in an indigenous way that is varied from its original meaning. In the western context, the process of dissemination and acceptance of genre films of Kung Fu has been regarded as one of the examples of cult, symbolizing the alternative, sub-cultural way of Asiaphilia and camp sensibility; while Martial Arts, which is different from Wuxia, signified as Pan-Asian Greater China, including Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippine, etc. As far to mention Martial Arthouse, it is a form of the Hollywood universal product in the globalization age on the basis of long time absorption and integration of the previous three types and put them as a whole into the Hollywood system. In her response to the presentation, a Spanish scholar Nieves Rosendo Sánchez mentioned the role of censorship and its influence on the international representations of films in different countries as well as a role of cinematic stereotypes of the image of Other for the transnational communication. The session was concluded by a productive discussion with reflections and advice to presented research.



The topic of the third session was announced as “Films and Personalities” and the floor was opened by presenters from Israel and Spain. Thus, the presentation of Nieves Rosendo Sánchez, a professor at the University of Granada, Spain, where she teaches in the Department of General Linguistics, Literary Theory, and Comparative Literature, “*Filmed Letters: The Cinematic and Epistolary Correspondences between Victor Erice and Abbas Kiarostami*” raised the question of the contemporary installations and their message to the society. Here was presented the close reading of the filmed correspondence between two internationally renowned filmmakers, Victor Erice from Spain and Abbas Kiarostami from Iran, featured in the exhibition *Erice-Kiarostami Correspondences*, which was held at the CCCB in Barcelona from February 10 to May 21, 2006, and curated by Alain Bergala and Jordi Balló. The exhibition features ten filmed letters between the filmmakers that have been screened as a film at numerous festivals and cultural spaces, including Cines del Sur in Granada and the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. *Erice-Kiarostami Correspondences* focuses on the themes of childhood, the city, and natural landscapes as part of a cross-cultural and artistic dialogue. This study adopts a transmedia perspective that considers the diverse languages used in the exhibition, including Spanish, Catalan, English, and Iranian, which reflect the cross-cultural nature of the collaboration, and the diverse media involved, such as video, text, photography, cinematic pieces, and even some cinema workshops for children in the installation at the CCCB. Through their filmed letters, Erice and Kiarostami develop a deep bond of friendship that transcends language and cultural barriers, revealing a common interest in the role of art and cinema in human experience. Marilena Kirmizi, a Cyprus scholar, who joined the session remotely due to health issues, responded to this presentation by highlighting the importance of studying cross-cultural installations as an object of intercultural dialogue that helps to create mutual values.

The next presentation by Yam Traiber, an MA student in the Department of Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, was devoted to the analysis of a work of Natalia Ginzburg “*Sound and Vision: Reading the Voices and Listening to the Composition in Natalia Ginzburg’s Novel*”. She presented a reading of Natalia Ginzburg’s novel, “Voices in the Evening” (1961), by using the concepts of sound and still photography. Using the terminology of photography and sound, this reading has raised methodological questions about the possibility of expanding the inter-media relationships between literature, cinema, and other visual arts. The scholar has focused on the notion of voices and recordings in the novel, alongside the narrative strategy as a composition of a photograph and argue that the use of the

inter-media reading reveals new aspects in Ginzburg's writing and re-writing of the Italian anti-fascist memory. The importance of being able to articulate the memory and the thought during the war and to present them to the next generation through the media sources was investigated among other important questions. Alba Torrebejano Osorio, a Spanish researcher, responded to this presentation with the comment of the importance of investigation of the narration of trauma through the visual and audio space in movies versus literature. The session was finished by a discussion devoted to the topics presented during the meeting.



The last session was focused on the contemporary research devoted to “New Technologies and Cinema” and was opened by the presentation of Marilena Kirmizi, a PhD student in English Literature & Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Cyprus. Her presentation “*The Duality of Human Nature and the Presentation of Psychopathology in Robert Louis Stevenson’s Book ‘The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde’ and its 1912 and 1920 silent Film Adaptations*” investigated the notion of duality, that has always been prominent in literature with the most common battle being that between good and evil. As a frame narrative, Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel *‘The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde’* (1886) deals with the concept of duality, as the author explores the two sides of the main character’s personality: his benevolent nature and his malevolent nature. As a psychological novel in the Gothic tradition, it challenges the notion of the ‘self’ as homogeneous and explores the two conflicting alter egos of the main character. In this sense, the novel reveals the potential for moral monstrosity inherent in human nature to the reader. This revelation thought is much more strikingly depicted in the 19th century silent film adaptations of the book. The absence of speech, as well as the early visual techniques such as close-ups, panning, three-point lighting, and long shots allow both the character himself as well as the spectator to see beyond their bare eyes into a new reality. Based on Lacan’s theory on the split between the eye and the gaze, the aim of this presentation was to show how the film adaptation of Stevenson’s book challenges the all-powerful ‘I’ and by extension, the concept of seeing. Dincer Bensu replied to the

presentation with the remark that the investigation of the transformation between ego and alter ego has a significant representation in the world literature culture.

An investigation of an impact of role-playing games to the world cinema was traced in the presentation of “*Role-Playing Games and World Cinema: A Transmedia and Intermedia Approach*” made by Alba Torrebejano Osorio, a PhD student in the Languages, Texts and Contexts program at the University of Granada, Spain. She analyzed the problem of transmedia phenomena and its significance within the fields of Literary and Cinema Studies. Often, this subject is associated with the rapidly growing entertainment industry of video games. However, it is essential to recognize the influence of tabletop role-playing games as precursors in the development of world-building, predigital hypertexts, and their social and collective expansion components. Furthermore, Live-Action Role-Playing games (LARPs) offer intriguing adaptation processes, with many plots based on books, films, or television series. The scholar presented the history of role-playing games from their inception to their contemporary manifestations, by analysing their analogies and differences within the context of transmedia narratives. She also explored the hybrid and intermedial presence in these role-playing games, including their written dimensions—through guides and preliminary ideas—and the oral execution of the games. The respondent Carlos Linares Ávila stressed the importance of the game studies and their narration in contemporary international intermedia research and their role for the future development of game studies as a discipline.



The session was finished by the presentation of Phillip Makowski, a MA student at the University of Bern, Switzerland. In his presentation “*Cross-cultural Imaginations of “Others” in Get Out (2017) and Us (2019), directed by Jordan Peele*” the researcher was focused on the problem of horror genre and its analysis in contemporary cinematography. *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019), both directed by Jordan Peele, as well as Little Marvin’s series *Them* (2021), comment on the lies that are told about white Americans’ relationship with the black ‘other’,

the transgressive body that puts American social norms to the test. In the suburban setting, these films take the idyllic silence and cleanliness, and turn it upside down to reveal the horrors behind the post-racist façade. When African American individuals legally enter these spaces, the invisible borders of segregation become apparent only because they are transgressed. This produces tension that is, in these works, negotiated by what is not said, the silence. The silence is strongly linked to the definition of something abnormal, as evident in the appropriated black body in *Get Out* or the neglected double in *Us*. This powerful technique is incorporated in all three works to comment on the state of American society and its problem with racism. *Get Out*, *Us*, and *Them* have all been produced in the last 6 years yet take different points in time of American history, 20th and 21st century, point at the lack of progress with racism. The researcher tried to demonstrate how the horror genre lends itself to using the emotional affect and inform the viewer, the political audience, of the repressed racism that is masked under micro-aggressions. Shi Song emphasized in his reponse to the presentation that the problem of racism in contemporary horror films opens a new level of discussion about the problem of other in intercultural context.

As a conclusion of the colloquium, all researchers agreed, that the intercultural and transmedia discussions improve the importance of World Literature in a context of understanding and transmitting the cultural values of “self” and “other”. The intermedia dialogue allows to create a new space of interpretation and communications not only between the media, but between the cultures and centuries. The screening of World Literature masterpieces by crossing borders reveals the differences of cultural values and variety of stereotypes, political problems, and the issue of interpretation of art in different political and cultural spaces. However, the transmedia communication between World Cinema and World Literature opens a space for the transcultural dialogue that will enable to establish a new cultural space for intercultural creations.