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Encounters: Studies in Honour of Ágnes Pethő*

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REFERENCES

Melinda Blós-Jani, Hajnal Király, Mihály Lakatos, Judit Pieldner and Katalin Sándor, eds, *Intermedial Encounters: Studies in Honour of Ágnes Pethő*, Cluj-Napoca / Kolozsvár, 2022, 595 pages, bilingual (English and Hungarian), ISBN: 978-606-975-073-5.

1

Ágnes Pethő is a major reference in the field of Intermediality and Interarts Studies. As a Professor at the Film, Photography and Media Department of the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, located in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, she is uniquely placed to understand the confluences of film with other media, not only from a theoretical standpoint but also, and most importantly, from a practical and analytical perspective. She has edited several important book collections, sits on the editorial board of the Scopus-indexed journal *Acta Universitatis Sapientia – Film and Media Studies*, and has been the leading academic in several funded research projects whose conferences have drawn many specialists in this field to gravitate in her orbit. For that reason, this tribute book is not only a recognition of her work so far, but a much-deserved accolade

from those she has influenced over the years. The book draws many of them together and may serve to influence newcomers as well.

- 2 The compilation *Fostering Intermedial Encounters* is one of the best tribute books I have ever read, not only due to its extensiveness, but also because of its intermedial richness and variety. It reads like a best-seller, an unusual trait in a very large volume permeated with accounts by academic specialists in the field. The authors lovingly embraced this challenge in honor of Ágnes Pethő. They evince just how much their respective research, and careers, were directly or indirectly influenced by her. Many engage with her theories and quote her emphatically in their texts; others present pieces which could not have been written without her influence as mentor, colleague, researcher, or conference organizer. As put forward by Jens Schröter, much intermedial research stemmed from a contact with this field at Cluj-Napoca in her “impressive series of conferences” (39) hosted by Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania. Most of the keynote speakers at those events grace us with their contribution to this volume. That is the case of Brigitte Peucker, Jens Schröter, Joachim Paech, Jürgen E. Müller, Laura U. Marks, László Tárnay, Laura Mulvey, Lúcia Nagib, Ruggero Eugeni, and Yvonne Spielmann. Others, such as András Bálint Kovács, Lars Elleström, Marie-Laure Ryan, Martine Beugnet, and Steven Jacobs, who could not contribute, made a point of signing the *Tabula Gratulatoria* which contains over 130 names, an impressive register. The book is bilingual, with some contributions written in English only and others in Pethő’s teaching language, Hungarian. The table of contents, the foreword and the titles of each section are presented in both languages. Yet one fourth of the book is written in Hungarian, as a deliberate part of the tribute. This book review only deals with the contributions written in English.
- 3 Given that Ágnes Pethő is immediately equated with intermediality, being considered by Schröter a “founder of [that] discursivity” (38), this book works as the most complete collection on the subject to-date and provides myriad examples of its potential. Most authors shy away from dense theoretical accounts and steer towards more practical case study approaches, as Pethő herself is known to do. That is the case of the two most geographically inclined sections of the book, dealing with Romanian and Hungarian cinema, respectively, which for a foreign readership holds an additional interest. Yet, the analytical propensity is spontaneously adopted throughout without neglecting the academic article format. The texts are full-fledged articles, but one senses that they were written with passion, and not to fulfill an imposed academic task. The authors seem to partake of Ágnes Pethő’s tastes, sharing with her their newest research developments, as if written for her eyes only or deriving from well-spent moments in the intermedial conferences she sponsored or took part in.
- 4 The book sections do not *strictu sensu* correspond to the intermedial conferences Ágnes Pethő organized at Cluj-Napoca; rather there is a broader correspondence with her research interests: Jean-Luc Godard and self-reflexivity, affect and the senses, painting and the *tableau vivant*, digital practices and post-cinema, old and new media, photography and the image in general, metalepsis. All the articles written in English tackle one or more of these subjects. Because they were written in a probably more relaxed fashion than usual, these articles are highly engaging, both for those who move comfortably in the field and for those who may be approaching it for the first time. The book is the best calling card on intermediality— especially the hybrid, impure, in-between type advocated by Pethő – and I am confident that it will attract many more

proselytes to this academic cause, multiplying the “encounters” which have already taken place by generating new ones in the future.

- 5 The book is divided in several sections possibly related to Ágnes Pethő’s authored books and edited collections. The section “Personal Encounters” reverses the table on her and her practice of interviewing intermedial colleagues and lets others write about her. The section “An Archaeology of Intermediality” uses the title of a special dossier of the *Acta Universitatis Sapientia - Film and Media Studies*, volume 15 (2018). The section “Cinema In-between Media” points to Pethő’s crucial book *Cinema and Intermediality. The Passion for the In-Between* (2011, republished in an enlarged edition in 2020), in which she explains the type of intermediality that she advocates, beyond any border crossing. The section “Intermediality and Authorial Reflexivity”, the most heterogenous of the book, befits the volume *Reflexivity in Film* (2013, a bilingual edition). The section “The Allure of Painting in Cinema” speaks of Pethő’s long lasting love for painting and her constant appraisal of filmmakers through that art form, be it in connection with the *tableau vivant* or the pictorial properties. The sections “Screens of Memory in Post-1989 Romanian Cinema” and “The Poetics and Politics of Intermediality in Hungarian Cinema” recall Pethő’s interest in East European cinema, particularly of these two nationalities, which were given prominence in the edited collection *Caught In-Between. Intermediality in Contemporary Eastern European and Russian Cinema* (2020). The section “Embodied Visions” points to the collection *The Cinema of Sensations* (2015), just as the section “Scenes of the L’Entre-Images” evokes the edited volume *Film in the Post-Media Age* (2012). Finally, the section “The Real and the Intermedial” repeats the title of the Cluj-Napoca conference of 2015.
- 6 A more detailed account of each contribution is in order, but I present it in an arrangement different from the one in the book. As Ágnes Pethő’s *oeuvre* is marked by hybridity throughout, I find it difficult not to establish similar artistic links.
- 7 Ruggero Eugeni’s historical account of how intermediality was born (57-64) is well complemented by Jürgen E. Müller’s report on the influence of sound in pre-historical art by way of Plato’s allegory of the cave as both a physical and metaphorical site present in many films (65-76). Ivo Blom, a film historian, informs on the recycling practices of furniture and props in Italian early cinema, revealing how these mediums interrelated during cinema’s infancy (125-136). Orsolya Milán analyzes the practice of ekphrasis in two Hungarian poems from 1907 and 1912, which describe the early cinema experience (137-145).
- 8 Fátima Chinita traces the transition of cinematic self-reflexivity into intermediality, and how it can be made to be even more hybrid along the lines of Pethő’s in-betweenness [of the arts and media] (149-156). Mircea Valeriu Deaca writes his piece on metacinema, and although his case study is a film by Michael Haneke, he is drawn towards Jean-Luc Godard and film modernism for a comparative measure (77-93).
- 9 Yvonne Spielmann’s defense of video as a noble medium, and not just a poor relative of cinema, calls forth the importance of artistic language and the affinities and differences of the former medium to the latter (109-115). Susan Felleman’s example of Hollis Frampton’s (*nostalgia*) compares image to narrative as the film shows several photographs burning while the voice over is already describing the next photograph to enter the frame, in an audiovisual deliberate asynchrony (117-124). Teréz Vincze approaches the director Hong Sang-Soo’s films as narrative variations on a theme: usually stories about filmmaking (157-164). Miklós Sággy’s article meditates on

narrative from the angle of literary adaptation: he peruses how in the rural landscape of Hungary local inhabitants uncomfortably deal with the return of two male Jews who survived the Nazi concentration camps (281-288). From a completely different angle, that of new media, Asun López-Varela explores a novel intermedial association between image and text in three-dimensional space. Poetry is produced in a mixed human-computer agency, generating what the author calls a “poïesis” (457-464).

- 10 Ewa Mazierska’s contribution (171-175) is about *A Hole in the Head*, a film concerning theater, just as Lúcia Nagib’s is a film about opera, although from an unexpected realistic perspective (359-372). According to her, Luchino Visconti’s neo-realist film *Ossessione* has an operatic essence. Beja Margitházi’s contribution (335-243) deals with performatic rehearsals as a medium itself albeit transitory, which leads to the conclusion that this genre should rather be called “rehearsal as film”. György Kalamár’s piece also deals with the representation of the female body (343-350).
- 11 Joachim Paech’s contribution (195-201) describes how in a painting entitled *Escape from Criticism* it is impossible for a specific character to escape from the frame, whereas in film these screen passages can be made to occur, as is the case with Kurosawa’s film *Dreams*. Brigitte Peucker (203-210) comments on the spectatorial fascination with the presumed continuity between a work of art, such as a painting, and the so-called “real”, as portrayed in some films about Van Gogh. According to Judit Pieldner (211-220), the narrative and mood of Martin McDonagh’s film *In Bruges* revolves entirely around Hieronymus Bosch’s painted diptych *The Last Judgement*, with its allegorical penchant. László Tarnay (177-186), in a more sensorial approach, perceives the use of the *tableau vivant* as being posited between the formless and the form, in a sensual in-betweenness. Cecília Mello (373-380) adopts the opposite approach *vis à vis* painting in her analysis of Jia Zhangke’s *Dong*, a documentary film dedicated to the realistic painter Liu Xiaodong and his ongoing painting of a canvas amidst China’s beautiful landscapes.
- 12 The cinema of sensations is the subject of Laura U. Marks’s contribution (319-324), which draws on the material properties of cinema to claim a Deleuzian enfolding aesthetics, an idea she has been working on. Hajnal Király (325-333) concentrates on landscape depictions and the sensuous experience they impart, despite being witnesses to many human wrongdoings as in *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*. Anne Gjelsvik and Jørgen Bruhn’s piece (381-391) features the sensible aspects of the Anthropocene via an ecocritical study of the documentary *Behemoth* which depicts the working and living (as well as dying) conditions of Mongolian miners.
- 13 Other articles, which address certain cinematic technologies, contribute to the material perception of cinema and its resulting sensoriality. Laura Mulvey’s text (425-433) concerns rear projection, contrasting the classical uncanny back projection with a more recent and self-reflexive pictorial rendition which fully assumes the artificiality of the device: Mark Lewis’s *Rear Projection: Molly Parker*. Zsolt Gyenge (447-456) reflects on the site-specific exhibition of moving images and highlights the differences between the cinematic apparatus and the multi-channel Installation’s *dispositif* with its simultaneity of vision and audition. Ágnes Karolina Bakk (465-473) discusses Hybrid Reality Theater which is situated between video game mechanics (focusing on play) and theater performances with humans (stressing the game factor), with examples drawn from Blast Theory’s performance *Right of Passage*.
- 14 Andrea Virginás’s (237-242), Christina Stojanova’s (243-248), Katalin Sándor’s (249-257) and Mónika Dánél’s (259-269) texts all grapple with intermediality in the films of

established Romanian filmmakers: Lucian Pintilie, Corneliu Porumboiu, Cristi Puiu, and Radu Jude. Ying Zhu (165-170), for his part, looks at Chinese filmmaker Feng Xiaogang who made two films which expose media's impact on his homeland morality.

- 15 The collection is amply illustrated with images that help readers to further engage with the several study cases selected by the contributors and intensifies their sensoriality, an aspect so dear to Ágnes Pethő. The last hundred pages of the book are entirely dedicated to Pethő herself, containing a detailed CV, a list of the conferences she organized and a priceless photographic record.

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