

Introduction

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Many borders to cross ... some have already been outlined in issue 7 of the journal, actual geographical borders as well as historical, political, social and gender ones, and now time has come to examine virtual and metafictional ones. One could contend that, on film, all frontiers are virtual, as they and their possible (or impossible) crossings are but represented and abstracted from reality. Yet the objects of study here make a self-conscious attempt to depict the border-crossing dynamics existing between reality and its multiple representations.

The crossings of the frontiers between, on the one hand, the filmic space, the film narrative and the visual and aural pageant the spectator is supposed to get immersed in and, on the other, the latter's awareness of its fictionality generally involve a rupture of the realistic illusion, and a disruption of the "willing suspension of disbelief" Coleridge described as the novel reader's essential position. However, the crossings go both ways since, when the spectator forgets about their surroundings and gets immersed in the world of fiction, he or she steps beyond the divide between their reality and the filmic one, only to step back into the "real" world moments later. Depending on various factors, either material ones, like different cases of interruptions, or cognitive ones, as when the spectator starts analysing the film or becomes aware of the production process, the crisscrossing activity can be constant and intense. This intensified crisscrossing may occur, for example, in the case of academics "reading" a film text for their research, even if it (ideally in the classic Hollywood model) may be reduced to one incursion into the filmic realm, the length of which would coincide with that of the film. Hence, a definition of the spectator's involvement in a film that can be but fluid and infinitely varied, as the "spectator in fabula," to paraphrase Eco,¹ crosses the symbolic divide between film and watcher times and times again.

Tex Avery's incredibly inventive 1946 cartoon, *Northwest Hounded Police*,² offers a striking illustration of our concerns when the runaway wolf Droopy is chasing actually jumps over the film border and back again to take shelter in a movie theatre showing an MGM cartoon that opens on

¹ Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula ou la coopération interprétative dans les textes narratifs*, traduction française, Paris: Grasset, 1985 (1979).

² US animated short film directed by Tex Avery, produced by Fred Quimby, MGM, August 1946, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6e5qoy>

Droopy greeting the wolf thus: “Boo you!” (05:06-05:28) – a perfect *mise en abyme* of possible crossings of the “fourth wall” or interface between films and their audiences. Another perfect and similarly enjoyable representation of such a crossing can be seen in the *Purple Rose of Cairo* (Woody Allen, 1985), in which the protagonist attends so many screenings of the eponymous film that she attracts a character’s attention, lures him into the theatre and then is drawn into the film within the film.

Woody Allen’s film is quoted by Céline Murillo as she introduces her study of the “risky game” Jim Jarmusch plays with his spectators, who are successively, indeed almost simultaneously, drawn into the fiction *and* reminded they are watching a film. As her survey offers many precise analyses of the different degrees and modes of spectatorial involvement and is extensively grounded in theory, we have chosen it as an inaugural essay in this selection of contributions dealing with intergeneric and intermedial issues. The articles derive from the superb SERCIA Conference Wendy Everett hosted in Bath in 2011. However, while this foreword means to be brief and subservient to the authors whose texts we are happy and proud to present, we would like to evoke a few mechanisms of self-reflexivity that are explored by the authors in the following individual essays.

First, as films are watched, moments of intimacy may occur between their “text” and the spectator’s consciousness, especially when the latter’s senses are awakened by different signs working in a way not very different from the famous Proustian “madeleine” or Venetian pavement in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. During SERCIA’s 2012 Conference on Intimacy, Dominique Sipièrè showed how the spectators of *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) could realize, thanks to a shot of Judy Barton/Kim Novak in a robe and walking bare-footed on Scottie’s/James Stewart’s wool carpet, that the latter had indeed undressed her, as the image on screen conjures up memories of the sensation of wool on bare skin and sensual connotations translating the character’s desire for Judy.³ Far from being purely visual, film can relate to all our senses, indirectly in the case of touch, taste and smell,⁴ and directly in the case of hearing.⁵ The infinitely varied degrees and modes of involvement act along paradoxical lines as the spectator’s consciousness wavers on the razor’s edge between immersion and reflexivity: an actor’s voice, a tune,⁶ a few notes from a song you recognize, the spectacle of rain trickling down leaves or a mouth-watering shot of a bubbling casserole are enough to trigger sensory memory together with cognitive activity. This sensory input draws you into the fiction while activating subjective thoughts, thus reinforcing both the realistic illusion and your awareness of being a spectator.

Other instances of paradoxical crossings would be those moments when an actor or actress/character seems to address the onlooker beyond the screen, as Céline Murillo writes in her analysis of Jim Jarmusch’s *Only Lovers Left Alive*. When a film like *Annie Hall* (Woody Allen, 1977) begins with a medium shot of a man who is known as the film’s director and an ex-stand-up comedian standing against a white backdrop and telling jokes to the invisible audience he faces, that first contact establishes a special relationship in which the spectator hardly forgets he or she is watching Woody Allen introducing his new film. Moments later, the second scene shows the actor/director as character

³ Dominique Sipièrè, « Petite grammaire de l’intime : l’hélicoptère, le microscope, la voiture qui fume et les pieds de Judy Barton », in Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot, David Roche, *De l’intime dans le cinéma anglophone*, Condé sur Noiret: CinémAction, 2015.

⁴ Thomas Elsaesser, Malte Hagener, *Film Theory, An Introduction through the Senses*, New York and London: Routledge, 2015 (2010).

⁵ Michel Chion, *Un art sonore, le cinéma. Histoire, esthétique, politique*, Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 2003.

⁶ Céline Murillo, David Roche, “Unheard Possibilities: Reappraising Classical Film Music Scoring and Analysis. An Introduction,” *Miranda*, 22, 2021.

Alvy Singer auditioning a bad comedian. The inaugural address fittingly introduces Allen's special brand of fiction and the illusion of entering the film space is then potentially established thanks to the spectator's capacity at understanding, or better, comprehending such ironies as the basis of their enjoying the film.

In a different way, camera looks,⁷ which also address the viewer, will create an illusion of proximity and yet deepen the mystery of what happens on the interface between a film and its spectator. The smile and camera look of Noodles/Robert de Niro at the end of *Once Upon a Time in America* (Sergio Leone, 1984)⁸ have been extensively commented upon, yet if the address actually draws the viewer into the filmic space, it is only to trigger their thoughts by challenging him or her into solving the enigma of that smile and of the disappearance of Noodles' alter ego and nemesis. The final address of the film shows Noodles withdrawn into an opium dream the spectator cannot share in despite their illusion that the character is summoning them into the fiction.

To sum up those few remarks on the blurring of the frontier between the spectator and the film, the ultimate representation of the former's paradoxical modes of involvement can be found in the *mises en abyme* of the cinematic spectacle that mimic the crossing of the divide between the diegetic space and the theatre. Years after the already quoted *Purple Rose of Cairo*, the *finale* of Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) illustrates the ambiguities and riches of such meta-filmic strategies. Here, the diegetic spectators are Hitler/Martin Wuttke and his clique. They are thoroughly enjoying the spectacle of one of their heroes shooting down dozens of enemies when, suddenly, the theatre's owner Shosanna Dreyfus/Mélanie Laurent avenges her family's massacre at the hands of Nazi colonel Hans Landa/Christoph Waltz by using highly inflammable film as ideal kindle and fuel on the Nazi theatre audience. As Tarantino's spectators enjoy the massacre in their turn, the *mise en abyme* complexifies and possibly mitigates their pleasure. Shosanna's story, and history itself, indeed justify the glee one can feel at getting rid thus of the utterly evil (if only!), yet the fact that the spectators find themselves in the same position as the villains turned victims denounces their satisfaction while making them aware, on the one hand, of the totally illusionary nature of their experience and, on the other hand, of the darker side of the pleasure induced by the spectacle of violence.

In other words, the moments when the spectator witnesses or experiences such blurring or crossing of the frontier between their spheres and the worlds and stories films build can be seen as manifestations of the oscillation between belief and disbelief Octave Mannoni summed up in his famous "I know, of course, and yet..."⁹

This meta-filmic invitation to cross the screen frontier was already explored by early cinema. Long before the spectacular, self-reflexive theatre scene of *Inglorious Basterds*, and before the diegetic screen jumps of the already mentioned characters in Tex Avery's MGM cartoon and Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, Buster Keaton had toyed with the idea of screen crossings with his character of the projectionist in *Sherlock Junior* (1924). In it, Keaton falls asleep while projecting a film in a movie theatre and, in his dream, he walks up to the stage, goes through the screen and enters the film realm. As in dreams, the film-within-the-film's settings and the characters' faces change and overlap, perplexing a disoriented Keaton and underscoring the dreamy quality of cinema. Keaton's film incursion blurs the physical border that separates the movie stage from the audience, granting depth to the

⁷ Marc Vernet, "The Look at the Camera," *Cinema Journal* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Winter, 1989), 48–63, published by University of Texas Press, <https://doi.org/10.2307/122511>.

⁸ Adrian Martin, *Once Upon a Time in America*, London: Bloomsbury, 2019 (1998).

⁹ « Je sais bien, mais quand même », Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'imaginaire ou L'autre scène*, Paris: Seuil, 1985 (1969), 21. (Our translation).

screen and bringing cinema closer to live theatre. Keaton's ability to jump in and out of the film turns the screen not into a border but into a threshold that connects the audience to the story in a self-conscious way.

In the second article of this issue, Fabrice Lyczba uses Keaton's memorable scene to introduce his discussion on fade-in prologues. This 1920s practice consisted in short theatrical pieces that were performed before and sometimes during the intermissions of film projections and that were usually thematically related to the films they accompanied. Not unlike Keaton's play with the screen-turned-stage, as Lyczba argues, fade-in prologues reflect the proximity of theatre and cinema in its early stages and the easy fluctuations spectators could experience between one and the other. The blurring of frontiers between the two artforms encourages a more active mode of spectatorship, one in which the audiences are invited to reflect on the multilayered reach of stories and their expansion beyond the limits set by the screen and the stage.

The scene with Keaton's projectionist epitomizes the crossing, at the same time, of the frontier that separates dreams from reality, underscoring thus the oneiric quality of cinema. This type of crossing is explored in detail by some of the articles featured in this issue. Pierre Floquet's essay on *Alice in Wonderland* (Tim Burton, 2010) relates Alice's fluctuation between reality and fantasy to the film's use of CGI, as is further explained below. For her part, Nicole Cloarec analyses the British miniseries *The Singing Detective* (Jon Amiel, 1986), in which the protagonist, a writer suffering from a skin disease and stuck in a hospital bed, mixes dreams, memories and the fictional universe of his new detective novel. The series blends different diegeses together and, in it, as in Keaton's dream sequence, space, time and characters crisscross and intermingle. Cloarec applies Gérard Genette's notion of metalepsis – the transgression of narrative levels –¹⁰ to explain this breaching of narrative frontiers in what she refers to as a "mindscape" where passageways and transitional spaces are, in the end, more relevant than boundaries. As Cloarec argues, metaleptic devices call attention to the artificiality of the process of representation and encourage spectators to adopt, once again, an active cognitive position.

Apart from these narrative and diegetic crossings of frontiers, this special issue includes essays that focus on the blending of cinematic genres in specific case studies. In these instances, the crossings occur at an extradiegetic level, as they depend on critical considerations based on pre-existing labels which, as film genre theorists have consistently established,¹¹ are but conventions that often result in hybrid crossovers. Since genres provide frames of reference that shape spectators' expectations about a film, their mixture and hybridity may call attention to the artificiality of the film and the medium itself, thus resulting in self-conscious exercises. In her article on Vincente Minnelli's *Some Came Running* (1958), Raphaëlle Costa de Beauregard uses the concept of "cross-fertilization" to examine the intergeneric combination of the melodrama with elements taken from the musical. Through an analysis of the use of bright colours, typical of the musical, and of moral family and class issues characteristic of the melodrama, Costa de Beauregard outlines Minnelli's filmmaking evolution and contends that this generic crossover ultimately typifies the characters' diegetic crossing of social class barriers. The melodrama, mostly a black-and-white genre so far, benefits from the spectacular elements of the musical and vice versa, a generic miscegenation that underscores the rich possibilities of hybridity.

In another instance of generic crossing, Julie Assouly analyses the Coen brothers' neo-noir *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001) by focusing on the figure of its protagonist, a barber. Assouly traces the

¹⁰ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

¹¹ See Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, London: Macmillan, 1999 and Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

origins and evolution of this emblematic, usually benevolent, figure in US popular culture. The article describes the mythical meanings attached to the barber as depicted by painters of the American way of life like Norman Rockwell and Edward Hopper and film genres like the Western and *film noir*, where the barber was typically represented as a meek secondary character. Assouly argues that the Coen's film transgresses these connotations of subservience by placing the barber as the protagonist and, at the same time, by gathering the sometimes-conflicting meanings attached to it in a blending that is also reflected in the film's hybrid tone, dark humour and intertextual combination of low and high cultural references. Assouly claims that the Coen's barber exemplifies the way this figure cuts across artistic and generic borders while, at the same time, it is closely associated with the Frontier and the first US settlers, that is, with an ingrained sense of nation and nationality.

These generic and artistic crossings are further explored by Christophe Gelly through another figure, in this case a literary one, that transcends borders: Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote. Standing at the intersection between reality and fiction, Christophe Gelly looks into the special case of *Lost in La Mancha* (Keith Fulton and Louis Pepe, 2002), the "making of" Terry Gilliam's never-finished project *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*. Even though a different version of the project was eventually filmed and released by Gilliam under the same title in 2018, Gelly examines the reflexive and postmodern potential of Fulton and Pepe's work about the 2000 failed production. As Gelly contends, the work stands at the crossroads between two genres: the "making (or *unmaking*) of" a film and a documentary about the failure to make it. Gelly claims that fiction, in the shape of the never-released film, progressively takes over the documentary, since, in it, Gilliam the creator is subtly compared to Don Quixote, as if he were possessed by the character's idealistic spirit in his "fight against the windmills of reality." Thus, reality and fiction intertwine, with the actors and crew becoming fictional characters in a story about failure and then even spectators of such failure. In the end, as Gelly states, the work becomes an entity on its own, a postmodern comment on a film that was never fully completed and, therefore, does not even exist as such.

Just like the US barber and Don Quixote, who travel across borders, genres, and time, Dominique Sipièrè's article delves into another literary figure that crosses a wide variety of media and dichotomies: Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. As Sipièrè states, the renowned fictional detective has jumped out of the literary pages to become almost a "real" person, a "fixed label" with his own devoted museum in London's Baker Street, thus defying the limits of fiction. Ironically, Holmes performs the opposite crossing from that of Buster Keaton described above in *Sherlock Junior*: he jumps out of fiction and into reality, becoming a familiar signifier with its very idiosyncratic features. Sipièrè uses Linda Hutcheon's cultural concept of the "meme" (which, in turn, she takes from Richard Dawkins's theory of cultural transmission)¹² to outline the many different adaptations and takes on the detective. Sipièrè explores the extent to which this figure has been, and continues to be, reimagined and reinvented in each new version, claiming that it pushes the borders of its own literary constraints.

Finally, in the last essay of the present collection, Pierre Floquet moves forward his questioning of the technical and artistic merging of live actors and computer-generated imagery in a study of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland*. Where Walt Disney had transformed a book into an animation film, thus crossing the line between literature and cinema, the page and the screen, Tim Burton brings the venture one step further and uses Computer Graphics (CG) to picture shifts between realistic and fantastic episodes, blurring the transitions to mirror Alice's and, possibly, the spectator's wonderings at

¹² Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, London: Routledge, 2006; Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016 (1976).

the degree of reality of what they experience. His study of the CG Red Queen combining digital and natural components leads to a reflection on the evolution of acting, with the technique reinforcing the essential hybridity of actors and actresses merging the personal and the acting in their personas, with Jean-Baptiste Massuet's research¹³ as a theoretical frame.

The latter's studies on the encounter between animation and live movie seems to point at a progressive abolition of the frontier between photography and animation thanks to digital technology. In the last decade, this has raised concerns about a loss of the specificity of cinema as an art devoted to the recording of live pictures.¹⁴ Animation creatures, even – or maybe especially – hybrid ones like Tim Burton's Red Queen, consciously emphasize the digital manipulation of images. And yet, as seen with the example of Buster Keaton's dreamy projectionist, early twentieth-century audiences were no strangers to this reflexive presentation of cinema as a construct, and this would not prevent them from enjoying the original "flicks" as hybrid sources of pleasure, especially when associated with a piano player in the theatre. The different essays of this volume all tend to show how films are built through constant crossings, between their audience and themselves, between genres, media and mediums, enabling forms and ideas to circulate and expectations to evolve. At a time when politics, climate change, and now pandemics seem to make the circulation of human beings more and more dangerous and difficult, these cinematic frontiers remain open in a positive form of cultural globalization.

¹³ Jean-Baptiste Massuet, *Le dessin animé au pays du film: Quand l'animation graphique rencontre le film en prises de vues réelles*, Rennes : PUR, 2017.

¹⁴ Shane Denson and Julia Leyda, *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, Reframe, 2016.