

Conference Report on "The Arts of Mediation"

Catholic University of Lisbon, 17-19 March 2010

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This very conference report, and the process through which it came into being, may well serve to illustrate what "The Arts of Mediation" was primarily concerned with: selecting, highlighting, reconstructing – paradigmatically as well as syntagmatically – transporting and, finally, transforming and creating, in sum, mediating the event in Lisbon from 17-19 March, 2010. The process of writing this conference report can be seen as a way of (re)producing the event, rather than giving an unmediated picture of it – and maintaining a healthy doubt about the existence of immediacy at the very same time. Like Ariadne's thread, the means and functions of remediation, mediation and premediation led us through the conference and guided us through an inspiring labyrinth of presentations, discussions and lectures in this attempt at rendering the impact of "The Arts of Mediation".

After welcoming and introductory words by ISABEL CAPELOA GIL, the conference opened with a keynote lecture by RICHARD GRUSIN, co-author with Jay David Bolter of the seminal work *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999). The lecture, titled "Premediation, Affect and the Anticipation of Security", addressed questions of mediation and premediation in the context of contemporary social networks, new media and the present socio-political conditions of global insecurity. Grusin stressed that all mediation starts with the body – and even the other way round – and took a look at, among other things, how the contemporary human body, in working with interactive social networks on mobile phones or home computers, performs gestures which are anticipatory of connectivity. In the way it referred to the sense of insecurity which pervades our age, the lecture raised a number of insights that would recur throughout the three-day conference: the challenges of new media and technological innovations, the mediation of local and global memory, and mediation in the face of national trauma.

The importance of remediation and mediation within an insecure age, in terms of a rendering of images of national and supranational trauma, identity, and memory, was expressly addressed throughout the conference, notably in the two sessions on remediation(s) of nationhood. Papers in these sessions discussed among other things how sports coverage contributes to create national identity (BERNADETTE KNEIDINGER: "The (re-)mediation of national identity in the sports coverage. A quantitative analysis of Swiss and Austrian Newspapers about the Euro 2008"), and how English literature remediates the notion of

national identity (ANNA RETTBERG: "The remediation of a 'rebranded Englishness' in contemporary English Literature").

Reflections on the problematic nature of (re)mediation of national identity and memory were equally present in ELSA PERALTA's paper "Mediating the Past: Empire and Public Memory", and in CÂNDIDA CANDAVEZ's paper "Mediation in Tourism – The Importance of Being Naïve", on the mediation of national identity during the Salazar age in Portugal. In Candavez's paper, the construction of a people's singularity is, in part, enacted through the touristic branding of a nation and with the help of the tourist's gaze. The mediation of travelling was also discussed in KAI SICK's lecture on two travelogues of North Pole explorations at the beginning of the 20th century. Alongside the dichotomies of distance and proximity, singularity and continuity, authenticity and technicity, he examined the characteristics of the travelogue as mediation strategy.

The re-branding of a national image through a mimetic construct, i.e. mediation by a foreign gaze, was also referred to in ANA BELA RAMOS MORAIS's paper "Representations of the Hero and of the American stereotypes in contemporary Cinema", which pointed to how American (anti-)heroes are seen, in a number of influential movies, through the eyes of non-American directors (such as Sam Mendes, in *American Beauty*, or Lars von Trier, in *Dogville*). A new conceptualisation of the figure of the hero was also discussed in STEFANO ROSSO's talk "Radical Western Repressed: Notes on American Post-western Revisionism in Fictions, Films and TV series".

The complex mediation of powerful images pertaining to a nation's icons or stereotypes was also touched upon in the lecture on the movie *Queen Christina*, presented by ELIZABETH WÅGHÄLL NIVRE at the PhDnet Round Table, under the title "Reenacting the Past: Queen Christina of Sweden in the Movies". The potential of media and movie images to either fight and challenge or, on the other hand, perpetuate certain ideas, both positive and negative, about racial or national identity, was further illustrated by FRANK STERN's lecture on the Jewish gaze throughout 20th century movies, titled "The Jewish Gaze from the Screen".

The (re)mediation of national memory and trauma carries certain responsibilities, as was illustrated in ELENA AGAZZI's lecture on Günter Grass's *Camera Obscura*. Günter Grass's was not the only case of a complex (re)mediation of national past analysed during the conference. Recent evolutions in China, as well as the modernisation put violently in motion with Mao's cultural revolution, were seen through the looking-glass of movies in TANIA GANITO's paper "Remediation, memory and identity in Zhang Yang's film *sunflower*" and with the help of photographs in ELISABETTA COLLA's paper "Picturing the Hunger: The Barthesian Punctum in the Photograph 'Mao and the farmers'".

Various ways of mediating national, personal, family or global trauma were presented in papers by DIANA GONCALVES, MARIA EMILIA FONSECA, DANIELA AGOSTINHO and OLIVIER NYIRUBUGARA. Diana Goncalves discussed the remediation of 9/11 in literature, while Maria

Emilia Fonseca gave a hopeful account of transforming arms into art in war-ravished Mozambique, and Daniela Agostinho presented the mediation of memory and trauma in the aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars in two recent Bosnian movies, drawing on the concept of postmemory (Hirsch 2008). Olivier Nyirubugara pointed out how trauma and memory within local contexts is also (re)mediated through name-giving, with mediations potentially spanning centuries.

The keynote by DAVID WELLBERRY, "Kafka's Wish: On the Art of Interpretation" took on the feel of an excursion. His close reading of Kafka's text "Wunsch, Indianer zu werden" illustrated the mediation of images from visual arts to literature, philosophy, and back, at the same time scrutinising the very notion of interpretation as such.

The central function of narrative as a tool for structuring catastrophes, and the importance in this process of selection, abstraction and prioritisation, was illustrated in ANSGAR NÜNNING's and VERA NÜNNING's paper entitled "How Do You Turn Catastrophe into Art? – Metafictional Reflections on the Impact of Pre- and Remediation on the Representation of Reality in Julian Barnes's A History of the World in 10½ Chapters".

The dramatically different mediation of global and local memories in news channels was the subject of BARBIE ZELIZER's keynote lecture "Where Local Memories Go in the Global Flow of News". Since local memory and global media(tion) work in significantly different ways, there is often no real match between them, particularly after trauma. As a case study, Zelizer used the collapse of communism in Hungary in 1989, questioning the problematic way memory travels as news in global media.

Journalism was also addressed in the panel on "Journalism and the Challenges of Mediation" and MICHAEL SCHUDSON's keynote "News as a Blurred Genre: The Contemporary Transformation of Journalism". Schudson gave an extensive, concise overview of the latest challenges and transformations of journalism. Using a wide range of factual and statistical evidence he showed how the dichotomies of reader/writer, professional/amateur, and profit/non-profit are gradually becoming less clearly defined. The blurring of these categories places new demands on journalism and journalists.

The panel "Meaning(s) and Mediation" took a closer look at both technical and cultural aspects of mediation, discussing among other things why some functions of the mobile phone medium are successful and others are not, and how this determines premediation (CARLA GANITO: "The Mobile Phone as a Technology of Premediation"), and examining digital visual archives as a source of meaning making and change in the discourse of 'media art' (FLORIAN WIENCEK: "Mediating Media Art – Digital Visual Archives as Mediation-Tools"). The influence of media and the importance of intermediality were further explored in lectures by ISABEL SIMÕES FERREIRA ("The Celebration of the Wedding of Prince Charles to Camilla Parker Bowles: Royal Mediation and Press Mediatization") and ANA CHRISTINA MENDES ("In CinemaScope and Glorious Technicolor': Film as Mediation in Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses"). SABRINA

KUSCHE's lecture "New Media(tion): cultural models of reality in the new literary genre e-mail novel" introduced the new genre of e-mail novel as a representation of new models of reality, and stressed the impact of new narrative forms on culture.

All told, the conference revealed the many ways of mediation with which we are confronted in everyday cultural life: from journalism, to Facebook, to literature, film and art, mediation is inevitably present, creating our knowledge and memory as well as our 'immediate' reality. Different media and technologies, and the mediated narrations they convey, are utterly crucial in shaping our means and strategies of meaning making.