

Moving Pictures and Their Theoretical Reflections (Foreword)

Barbara Zorman

This thematic block offers a selection of contributions that were first presented at the Eleventh International Colloquium “Literatura in gibljive slike / Literature and Moving Pictures,” held on 12 and 13 September 2014 in Koper as the first from a series of colloquia dedicated to studying the connections between literature and other arts.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes describes the concept of *punctum* as wounding, by which the photograph affects and at the same time assigns meaning to the viewer. Similarly, it seems that the entry of language into the relationship with the image makes sense primarily as a form of opening up to its own vulnerability because it is only in confronting its own boundaries that opportunities are created for transcending them. Reflecting on the media aspects of the relationship between language and pictures, it seems useful to start from the semiotic perspective and draw attention to the difference between traditional two-dimensional pictures and contemporary ones, which are essentially determined by the “techno-imaginative paradigm,” as Vilém Flusser terms it; that is, audio-visual images. These are further classified within the framework of film, video, and interactive art. At the same time, it is also possible to reflect on the relationship between word and image in discussions of the cognitive processes that give rise to literature. Literary studies often illustrates reading and writing as a series or sequence of mental images. In her study “Pesniške, mentalne in druge podobe” (Poetic, Mental, and Other Images; 2010), Darja Pavlič notes that the literary term *image* has established itself as a result of “metonymic transfer from material to product: images or internal pictures were material for metaphors and comparisons, and the same expression was also used for the end product; that is, metaphors and comparisons” (245). The beginning of the theoretical study of mental imagery goes back at least to Aristotle, whose thesis that thinking is not possible without representative images (*phantasmata*) opened a debate on the comparability of thought to sensory phenomena. Among the older authorities on the theory of mental images, Darja Pavlič highlights Thomas Hobbs because his

sensualist theory is the origin of expanding the meaning of *image* from the realm of visual perception to any sense. English authors of the eighteenth century that dealt with literary studies, followed by German aesthetics from the nineteenth century,

adopted the concept of the image into their vocabulary; among other things, they used it to refer to renewed sensory perception. They treated images derived from perception as material with which writers create their works. During the time of philosophical empiricism, the word *image* thus underwent what is most interesting from the point of view of literary studies: it became a literary term. Ray Frazer, who dealt with the origin of the literary term *image*, determined that the classical rhetoric of the Renaissance era was unfamiliar with the notion of the image, and instead spoke about figures or techniques of expression (Pavlič 239–40).

With the development of modern thought, thinking about literature was also affected by the dominance of visual perception over other channels of perception; the real world was felt to be most artistically convincing when reflected in pictures. Thus, understanding the writing and reading of literature (largely) became the creation of images. In the twentieth century as well, visual metaphors were at the forefront of literary theory discussions. Viktor Shklovski introduced his study *Iskusstvo kak priem* (1917) with the assertion: “Art is thinking in images,” which he modified on the following pages, especially by differentiating the prose image, which is a means of abstraction, and the poetic image, which is a means of language. He went on to distinguish between “prose image” which is “an abstraction of the object’s characteristics”, and poetical imagery as one of the devices of poetic language. It seems that for Shklovsky, theoretical understanding of poetry is founded primarily on the analysis of the laws of poetic language and less of the mental visions such defamiliarised language produces. In his study *Das literarische Kunstwerk. Eine Untersuchung aus dem Grenzgebiet der Ontologie, Logik und Literaturwissenschaft* (1931) Roman Ingarden approached the creation of mental images through the concept of “schematised aspects” – textual indices which trigger the creation of mental images in readers’ perception. These textual and consequently internal representations are always incomplete, conveying only certain aspects of the represented objects. For Wolfgang Iser, who in *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (1976/2001) established the image as the central category of the reading process, such “indeterminacies” represented one of the main strengths of the literary texts. Viewing a fictional character in a film adaptation, after having read its source text (novel), we realise how “optically poor” our mental images during reading are. But such “optical poverty” is the “indication of the fact that [these images] illuminate the character, not as an object, but as a bearer of meaning” (217). Iser draws on Stanley Cavell (*The World Viewed*, 1971) when he claims that the disappointment with the cinematic adaptation of literature has its origin in the fact that its human agent has been removed from the cinematic/photographic medium; while the imaginary world produced by literature is considered alive

for its reader, it is not the same with a photograph: “reality in a photograph is present to me, while I am not present to it” (23). Reflection on images as a starting point of the relationship between literature and photography or film is central to studies of adaptations. In his article “Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory” (2003), Tomas Leitch systematically exposes fundamental flaws in comparing literature and film, whereby he objects to equating film with photography (as the basis of film), which is very common in such comparisons, as well as to the belief that the viewer engages in less imaginative activity while watching a movie than when reading. According to Leitch, equating a film with a photograph overlooks the fact that film is based not only on a visual code, but also on the interpretation of sounds, music, movement, silence, and more. Likewise erroneous is the conviction that because of its abundance of visual information film does not allow viewers to create their own conceptions about the story-world. First this is due to the fact that a film presents the viewer with only a fragment of diegetic space and time; the viewer must compile the whole from his own participation in the events. In addition, today it is also known that the perception of literary and audiovisual content is not based only on “internal viewing.” Modern interpretations of the perception of works of art often rely on the insights of cognitive science, one of the central discussions of which still asks whether mental images are essentially “propositional” or rather “depictive” (*The Case for Mental Imagery*, S. Kosslyn with W.L. Thompson and G. Ganis, 2006). It seems, though, that the distinction between the propositional and the depictive format does not correspond completely to the difference between the visual and the verbal representation. Furthermore, recent studies in this field describe mental imagery as hybrid representations: they interpret data by means of depicted space but also partly through more abstract, nondepictive information (Kosslyn 19). We know, thus, that verbalisation and visualisation are not strictly separate, but interwoven cognitive processes. Findings on the impact of physical and affective responses in reception are also becoming increasingly important; identification with the text, for example, arises through conscious as well as automatic responses, such as involuntary muscular reactions upon sensing certain sounds or movements. How, then, is one’s perception of art conditioned by the media, by material carriers, by bodies? This question leads back to the media aspects of the relationship between word and image; in modern theory, this no longer operates on the principle of dichotomy, but of dialogue and hybridity. One of the polemical claims of W. J. T. Mitchell’s *Picture Theory* (1994) is “that the interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no ‘purely’ visual or verbal arts,

though the impulse to purify media is one of the central utopian gestures of modernism” (5). The author later modifies the radical nature of this claim; the universality of the images/text as a symbol of the heterogeneity of representation and discourse does not mean a lack of attention to the material, design, and historical specificity of an individual medium. At the same time, the friction between various representations and codes within an artwork can help us to a better understanding of particular arts, media and their relations.

The discussions in this thematic issue shed light on the relationship between literature and the moving picture in the dialogue between different disciplines and approaches. It highlights the problem of textually crossing semiotic systems, transcoding, and the applicability of literary studies in film and video, and vice versa; it sheds light on the relationship between literary, film, media, and visual studies, theory of new media, and so on. It also presents the crisis of the concept of authorship and the related work and rights that arose with the transfer of texts in the domain of new media. The discussions in this issue stem from the tensions, contradictions and paradoxes that open up in the movement of literary content on the screen.

In his article *Contingency and Coincidence as the Ruins of Time: Text, Image and Motion in W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn** **Thomas Elsaesser** focuses on W. G. Sebald's novel, which weaves through a combination of text and photos. In the reading process, the photos reveal repeating and mixing motifs; thus a series of photographs creates stories that can be parallel or even counterpoints to the text. This kind of perception of the sequence of photographs in the book creates a unique illusion of movement, which is reminiscent of the pre-cinematic flip book. Elsaesser points out that Sebald translates “cinema” back into his books; this offers the reader the opportunity to “re-discover” and reinvent the cinema. At the same time, the immersion of cinema into the book encourages literature in the twenty-first century to rediscover motion that does not necessarily follow a linear plot and causal sequence of events. “The footsteps and lonely wandering, the train journeys and the crossing by ferry, the backtracking and circular routes that shape the encounters in Sebald's fiction”, can create new narrative paths and narrative techniques, writes Elsaesser, who derives his understanding of Sebald from the (impossible) hermeneutics of contingency: chance or possibility.

In the introduction to his article “Fragmented Subjectivity as the Subject-Matter in Novel, Film and Digital Forms of Narration”, **Darko Štrajn**, like Elsaesser, engages in how cinematographic principles have been submerged in literature, and the implications of this process for the development of both media. The topics he sets up at the outset are then

highlighted as means of transforming constructions of social reality in mass culture. The author continually returns to the issue of “de-montage,” which already implicitly appears in the reflection on one of the first literary attempts at mounting fragments of reality, Döblin’s novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* – established in dialogue with Benjamin’s reflection in his essay “The Crisis of the Novel.” The movie-like nature of this novel is further highlighted in the analysis of works that sought to adapt Döblin’s text for the screen, especially in Fassbinder’s television series, which uses film lighting and sound to join elements back together, and thus “de-montage” Döblin’s constellation of motifs and characters. In his conclusion, the author reflects the concept of montage in the light of the digital age; in the fusion of the specifics of the various semiotic characters and subjectivities, the narrative of digital media results from the de-montage of reality or the placement of the imaginary in the core of reality.

In his article “Flexible Word-Images: Electronic Literary Text in the Paradigm of Film, Video and the Internet”, **Janez Strehovec** also highlights montage as one of the fundamental principles with which the cinematic paradigm marked the twentieth century. The focus of the discussion is oriented to the movement of words, resulting in a “film of words” for which the author has coined the expression “word-image-movement”. This presents a challenge for theory because it expands the concept of textuality to include non-verbal markers and its existence is conditioned by the new media para-texts. Strehovec analyzes the effects of such text using video and film theory; for example, Bonitzer’s stain theory (a disruption in the flow of the text that upsets the normal reading dispositive). Strehovec further parallels flexible electronic poetry with video, in which he follows Maurizio Lazzarato’s theory and emphasizes thematization of the ontological assumption of their media bases as a common point.

Ayşe D. Temiz focuses on (self-)reflection of film and literary media, which is (also) generated by the tension between description and narration. The author’s article “‘The Slow Pale Chaos Drift West’: Depth of Field and *The Crossing* into the ‘Pure Past’ of the American South” first addresses literary and film modernist experiments that followed the collapse of linear time. This is derived from Deleuze’s concept of the “crystal-image,” which is freed of subordination to action and is attached to temporalities that are heterogeneous to the character’s/ viewer’s present and not simply locatable in its past. The author bases her analysis of this new image of time on two concepts of virtual time drawn from Bergson and Leibniz works: the “pure past” and “impossible worlds”. Through a detour to Nietzsche she then returns to Deleuze’s research on Leibniz’s “impossible worlds” in conjunction with his schema of perception in

“monads,” she presents these concepts through a reading of the post-apocalyptic world in Cormac McCarthy’s novel *The Crossing*.

In his article “Literature and Film in the Context of the Media Turn”, **Ernest Ženko** establishes the relationship between literature and film in a dialogue with William C. Johnson or with the traditional position of the *Geisteswissenschaften* based on the understanding of changes in the development of consciousness. The author continues with an analysis of media in various historical contexts to highlight the fundamental principle of this type of substitution and displacement: filling something that has been emptied. In his conclusion, the author makes a turn from the traditional relationship between consciousness and media, when he agrees with McLuhan, and especially with Kittler, that the media are the defining element of consciousness, and not the other way around. In this light, the shift from literature to film is not the answer to a change in consciousness, because only replacement of the medium causes a change in consciousness. Hence, he connects the media turn to media materialism and media determinism.

Ana Beguš’ study “Internet Copyright Practices as Instances of Secondary Orality” offers some views on the historical development of authorship based on the concepts of various cultures of literacy that were developed in the Toronto school of communication.

In order to be able to examine the changes in authorship in general, the author describes the history of linguistic expression, which according to Ong (*Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 1982) can be divided into three main stages: primary orality, characterized by speech as the first medium with mnemonic techniques bearing the key role in communication; literacy, as established first by the phonetic alphabet which exteriorised language, and later by the printing press, which widely distributed the epistemology of the phonetic alphabet and further consolidated it by its systematic typographical orderliness; and secondary orality, as imposed by electric technologies (especially radio, television and now the Internet) which cannot, however, simply be equated with primary orality, since it significantly differs in that it builds upon the legacy of literacy.

Narvika Bovcon’s article “The Language of Moving Images in Computer Visualizations of a Literary Database” reviews the various connectivity options and mutual transformation of literature and moving pictures. She discusses film, video, and digital image as the reference media that serve as mediators in this connection. She determines that “diagram thinking,” which evolved through Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* project, is the cognitive model relevant for understanding the problems of visualizing data; for example, in the modern digital humanities. In the second part of the article, the author presents a project that she carried out

with her students at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Computer and Information Science. She presents a number of different visualizations of the WomenWriters database in which data are collected on the literary history of female authors. The database is accessible online and has already grown to a size that allows interpretation of its content; the project is still running and developing, of course. As a rule, the dynamic visualizations that have arisen and that Bovcon comments on illustrate the opportunities and limitations of computer and design processing of quantitative data in terms of literary studies and the humanities in general.

In her article "From Text to the Corporeal and Material: The Problem of the Body in Bouchardon and Volckaert's Work *Loss of Grasp*", **Maja Murnik** presents the shift in dealing with the body in new-media research from (over-)emphasizing the spiritual and non-physical substance of the cyberworld to an emphasized interest in the human body and its modifications and extensions through a world transformed by electronic technology and the Internet. The body, as the author shows, is transformed in both the real world and in digital worlds, just like, for example, objects in the internet of things. Methodologically, she follows the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his concept of body schema, which is an important complement to the concept of body image, which is linked more to the consciousness. The article presents several interpretations of new-media literary works by Shelley Jackson, Serge Bouchardon, and Rui Torres.

Aleš Vaupotič's article "Vilém Flusser's Theory of the Technical Image" presents Flusser's distinction between a myriad of colorful images that have saturated the world since the mid-twentieth century onwards, and images that are related to human notions; for example, based on perception of the world. In the writer's opinion, Flusser's distinction between "old images" and technical images is an important methodological apparatus for understanding moving pictures, the title concept of this thematic volume. Techno-images are admittedly two-dimensional images—frequently enriched with multimedia—but they must be understood within the framework of a fundamentally different paradigm of reality than old pictures; techno-images are image substitutes of texts; they do not directly relate to anything other than text; for example, theories. Flusser's communicational view of the problems of modern media provides a productive methodological answer to the questions that modernity raises at all levels of life: the positions of communication partners and their treatment of messages and their bearers represent the level at which analyses of individual media (e.g., video, film, theater, or books) are retained. However, Vaupotič also connects Flusser's analysis of interpersonal communication with Bakhtin's theory of dialogism.

Federica Ivaldi's study "The 'Rebound Effect': Formal and Structural Influences of Cinema on Italian Literature" focuses on the far-reaching influence of film language on literary narration; it examines this influence in particular in the domain of the concept that Gérard Genette defines as the "reflective effect of one medium on another." In her interpretations of Pasolini, Tabucchi, and Camilleri, the author questions the process in which literature seeks to self-reflexively contemplate the establishment of time and space and at the same time to imitate the film model; examines the possibility of transferring literary description into film narration and the narrative role that the specific status of the film narrator dictates to other writers; questions the possibility of an ellipsis of the authorial voice in literature, and, in the conclusion, highlights potential changes in the reader's horizon of expectations conditioned with new features that have been introduced into production and other elements of the literary system under the influence of cinema.

Transcoding from literature into film is also the basis of **Matevž Rudolf's** article "Changes in the Reception of Film Adaptations of Literary Works in Slovenian Cinema". Rudolf detects shifts in the reception of the relationship between Slovenian literature and film, especially by looking at the critical reviews of film adaptations of literature. He draws attention to the fact that in the period up until 1991 a full forty percent of Slovenian films were based on literary works, and so many writers labeled cinema as a victim of literature that violently "literalized" movies. At the same time, he draws attention to the fact that the negative critical reception of adaptations is also importantly contingent on the fact that the literature of this period represented a channel through which ideological influence entered film. After Slovenia gained independence, the smaller number (20%) of adaptations and a substantial shift in the motivation of choice for the transfer of literary works to film changed the attitude towards film adaptation, which the author notes is gaining force in contemporary Slovenian critical reception.

The study by **Leonora Flis** "Joe Sacco's Graphic Literary Journalism – the Blending of Literature, Comics, Journalism, and History" deals with the transfer of history into a work of art, especially in the works of Joe Sacco. His literary journalism is a form of narrative that combines objective descriptions and empirical reality outlines with subjective visual performances and eyewitnesses thus introducing the more subjective note of literary journalism. As the author notes, such comics expand the spectrum of representation (of immediate or historical reality). Moreover, they humanize the stories in a way that conventional journalism never could, and, with their visual component, make the stories more vivid and more easily accessible to various audiences. The article, which primarily focuses on the works *Footnotes in*