

FILM AND ITS MULTIPLES

IX International Film Studies Conference Udine, March 19-23, 2002

Call for papers

In the early years of film, its originality peacefully coexisted with its *repeatability*, that is, with the *plurality* of versions. Projectionists had also the responsibility of “editing” which further enhanced a regime in which individual products were subjected to multiple modes of existence. The “work” (the view or the short fiction film) became an abstract entity, a series of different forms of actualisation, more than a stable entity with a definite identity, which could bear variations and corruption. In other words, at its birth, cinema combines a fascination for novelty with one for repetition, while the novelty itself is independent from any notion of uniqueness and authenticity (except cases in which there was the need to cling to singularity to contrast competition and protect legal rights).

The following phase of institutionalisation (i.e., the phase of the rise of art film, author cinema, the feature length film and monopoly distribution, as well as copyrights issues) causes films to acquire the status of “works” (works of art or of the culture industry, where their circulation is dependent upon their authenticity). However, the notion of *seriality* remains both at the level in which film is conceived and circulates, thus problematizing the opposing tension toward uniqueness. Processes of multiplication are furthermore increased by the international circulation of films, although in this case multiplication is focused on the need of the foreign market and purposely differentiated.

The fast evolution of the modes of representation and of the institutional models (and of cultural frameworks and issues of taste as well) also brings about the widespread practice of *remake* and draws attention to the status of each print.

In the late ‘20s, with the advent of sound, a situation that seemed quite settled, begins changing – and once again towards the multiplication of the modes of existence of individual works. The *multiple versions* of the first years of sound film result in the institutionalisation the phenomenon in terms of ways of production and of representation, and also of the processes of theoretical qualification of film as an “object.”

The IX International Film Studies Conference – organised by Udine University in cooperation with other Institutions – will be devoted to the exploration of these processes and frameworks, specifically concerning the years from the birth of cinema to the early ‘30s (although, as it has been frequently done by the Udine Conference, consideration will be given also to later periods, up to the present time). In connection with the research project called “Topography of Italian film genres,” a section of the Conference

will be devoted to the analysis of these phenomena in Italian cinema. Room will be also given to the processes that regulate the phenomena of plurality within the textual system of television: the idea is that a theory of early or silent cinema has a lot to say also about the present situation.

Some proposals and conceptual areas are described below. Consistently with the tradition of the Udine Conference, they are linked to historiographical perspectives as well as theoretical and methodological ones.

Multiples. The multiple conditions of existence of films in the early years of cinema raise issues that go beyond the study of a particular regime (which includes, among other things, phenomena such as *plagiarising* and *counterfeit*). They rather offer a privileged viewpoint for the definition of the “object” early cinema.

Seriality. The plurality of the film text is also expressed by seriality. While grounded on processes that follow specific protocols, seriality in all its forms (episodic narration, series of films with the same actors) contributes to enlarge the boundaries of the text, making it multiple as opposed to singular.

Remake. This is maybe the best known pattern of multiplication of a text. The procedures employed in a remake collide with categories such as originality and singularity even when they take place within a framework of institutionalised acceptance of the plurality of the enunciation. Because of its circulation and of the variety of strategies employed, the remake is one of the most important phenomena within this framework.

Genre. Genre is the most fundamental criterion of regulation of modelling and recognition. It can be easily considered the area in which the plurality of the text finds its strongest regulation and institutionalisation – to the point of challenging the notions of work of art, original, authorship, while at the same time offering a context for their surreptitious survival.

Auteur. The plurality of the film text questions or at least relativizes the primacy of the author. The research project already pursued by the Udine Conference in 1996, can be further developed within this new perspective.

Cultural models. The processes of adaptation of a film to a different market cannot be confined to processes of translation (linguistic translation or even adjustment of characters and situations). The whole textual (and cultural) system undergoes reformulation. All the issues raised by the silent era practice of editing films for the foreign market, with few exceptions, hasn't been fully researched yet.

Multiple versions. Within a short period during the early sound film a new model takes on, based on a radical mutation of the modes of production and enunciation. This model constitutes (within an already highly institutionalised, if not “classical” phase) the most daring attempt to dismantle the singularity of the work and the humanistic notion of the author. Such phenomenon has been already given attention at the historiographical level; however, the broader theoretical implications have yet to be explored.

Intertextuality and intermediality. The multiplicity of cinema also sprung from the encounter of the film text with different expressive systems, themselves affected by phenomena of seriality and plurality. Intertextuality as a broader line of inquiry can be a useful point of reference.

Plurality induced by restoration. The new interest in the philological aspects of film and the increasing number of restorations has brought new light on the plurality of texts. The traditional coexistence of different copies is replaced by a situation in which one copy strives to become the point of reference for all the others. Interestingly, this copy is itself fraught with plurality given the provisional nature of restoration.

No theory. Film genres and (although to a lesser extent) phenomena of seriality have been part of film theory for long. Why hasn't a theory of the most radical forms of plurality of film yet been articulated? Why isn't there a theory of the remake – its most striking actualisation?

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