

Introduction

Van Hove, Hannah; Penso, Andrea; Meert, Mathias; Hauthal, Janine; Peeters, Ann

Published in:
Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings

Publication date:
2020

Document Version:
Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Van Hove, H., Penso, A., Meert, M., Hauthal, J., & Peeters, A. (2020). Introduction. *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings*, 5(1), a1-8.

Copyright

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, without the prior written permission of the author(s) or other rights holders to whom publication rights have been transferred, unless permitted by a license attached to the publication (a Creative Commons license or other), or unless exceptions to copyright law apply.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document infringes your copyright or other rights, please contact openaccess@vub.be, with details of the nature of the infringement. We will investigate the claim and if justified, we will take the appropriate steps.

Introduction

Janine HAUTHAL, Mathias MEERT, Ann PEETERS, Andrea PENSO and Hannah VAN HOVE

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

This issue of the *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings*, the fifth since its launch in 2017, groups together six articles selected through an open call. Ranging in subject matter from contemporary Italian street poetry to Bram Stoker's classic novel *Dracula*, they illustrate some of the wide-ranging concerns of the journal, presenting studies which engage with literary and intermedial phenomena from various methodological angles and a wide range of disciplines including literary, theatre, media and cultural studies. The publication of this latest issue goes hand in hand with the launch of a new website for the journal and we warmly invite you to take a look at [our new online publication platform](#). Investigating the 'in-between,' the articles in this issue cover medial, literary, generic, spatial and cultural crossings and focus not just on intra-, inter- and transmedial phenomena but also on genre hybridization, cross-cultural entanglements, multilingualism, cross-border movements, and topographies.

The six articles featured in this new issue were selected in response to our latest open call. Showcasing the work of emerging and established scholars, these articles, though very diverse in subject matter, methodologies and time periods covered, collectively illustrate a move towards interdisciplinary forms of study which the journal is keen to foster. Borrowing methodologies and insights from adjacent fields of study, all six articles show that the 'in-between' is a productive space of investigation in which to develop findings, thereby moving beyond the strictures single disciplinary categories (such as 'film studies, 'literary studies, 'theatre studies', etc.) can engender.

In the first article of this issue, ‘*Poeta sei tu che leggi*’, **Rachele Gusella, Ann Peeters** and **Andrea Penso** (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) provide a panorama of contemporary Italian street poetry. In particular, they focus on understudied constellations of so-called ‘poetic assault’, considered as a fluid, artistic phenomenon where street art, (guerrilla) poetry and urban space meet. Against the background of Irina Rajewsky’s theory of intermediality, the authors aim to conceptualize ‘poetic assault’ as a fundamentally intermedial practice through the analysis of its intermedial references, transpositions and media combinations. The contribution categorizes different forms and techniques of poetic assault and focusses particularly on the works of the *Poeti der Trullo* and the *Movimento per l’Emancipazione della Poesia*, two poetry collectives engaged with contemporary street poetry and poetic processes of re-mediation. Both collectives use the Italian/European city space as a symbolic environment for artistic exchange and poetic dialogue through the combination of poetic texts, posters and graffiti art.

According to the authors, the intermedial practices of both collectives reveal a strong political engagement and can be linked directly to the ideology of emancipation and democratization. The concept of open dialogue plays an important role, both with regards to the idea of collective-poetic production and the accessibility of poetry in contemporary capitalist societies. The intermediality of poetic assault is therefore studied in close relation to the manifestos published by the collectives, inaugurating respectively a ‘metroromantic’ poetry (*Poeti der Trullo*) and an anticapitalist emancipation of poetry beyond literary markets and publishing houses (*Movimento per l’Emancipazione della Poesia*). In so doing, the authors analyse how both groups reflect on the political functionality and intermedial dimension of street poetry. At the same time, they also reveal crucial differences between the studied collectives, specifically with regards to the politics of remediating their work through digital and social media.

In her article, **Sabine Hillen** (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) analyses the concepts of ‘home’ and deferred ‘homecoming’ in the work of the Belgian multimedia artist and filmmaker Johan Grimonprez. Here, Hillen critically contextualizes Grimonprez’s vision and aesthetics of individual and historical time. Drawing upon the work of Svetlana Boym, the author elaborates on the concept of nostalgia, literally meaning the ‘pain of coming home’, and connects it to depictions and portrayals of deferred homecoming in Grimonprez’s critically understudied works. His cinematic and documentary works rely on a variety of different sources, ranging from literary texts and adaptations to television fragments and news items and create a multi-layered mixture of images, interviews and texts. Hillen starts with a detailed overview of Grimonprez’s early works *D-I-A-L History* (1997) and *Double Take* (2009) in order to analyse how the sources used in both works elaborate on the dangers of cocooning. Reading Grimonprez’s work against the background of the essayistic work of Daniel Schreiber, Hillen proceeds by discussing the role of image and cinema in the construction of a home and the process of homecoming from the perspective of transnational globalization. The combination of globalization, homecoming and homesickness is then analysed in Grimonprez’s latest work, *Shadow World* (2016).

According to Hillen, the sources used in *Shadow World* attempt to create a global ‘home’ through the use of geopolitical images on television, yet at the same time the film draws attention to the fact that these images trigger the surveillance of crowds, behavioural disciplining and the creation of strategic and fearful interpretations of reality. Through its discussion of the imposed mobility of the human workforce, the global spread of finances and the international arms industry, which are interlayered with different journalistic and poetic discourses, *Shadow World* continuously reinvents conventions of the cinematic and documentary genre. Compared to Grimonprez’s early works, Hillen proposes a different aesthetics of delay in *Shadow World* which accounts for Grimonprez’s new awareness of

deferred homecoming and which can be read from the perspective of a ‘global drama’ beyond national borders.

Moving from documentary filmmaking to a consideration of a Mexican classic, the article by **Marie Devlieger** (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) engages with the theme of death as it manifests itself in the 1962 novel *The Death of Artemio Cruz* by Carlos Fuentes. While Devlieger acknowledges that the novel is exemplary for the death cult that is deeply embedded in Mexican culture and which predominated earlier, culture-specific readings of the novel as an allegory of Mexico’s social and political history, her article broadens such explorations of the theme by adopting a philosophical and self-reflexive approach. Her article claims that death in Fuentes’s novel is not merely a manifestation of Mexico’s death cult but also points to the intricate links between death, language and literature as theorized by French philosopher Maurice Blanchot. Blanchot’s theoretical framework allows Devlieger to pay attention to the novel’s transcultural dimensions and to explore death and/as alterity. By combining French thought with Mexican literature and culture, Devlieger argues that death becomes an impediment to both the attainment of a fixed identity for the novel’s protagonist as well as to that of a fixed meaning for the novel’s readers. Devlieger’s reading concentrates on the novel’s engagement with alterity and demonstrates how Fuentes foregrounds the fragmented and divided self of the main character, the fictional newspaper magnate and veteran of the Mexican Revolution Artemio Cruz. She particularly focusses on how this transformation of the self into an ‘Other’ emerges as a result of the novel’s triadic structure and its mirroring devices, including the shifting use of tenses (present, past, future) and of narrating instances ranging from first- to second- and third-person narrators. Devlieger then connects these aspects of narration to Blanchot’s theorization of the two-sidedness of death: on the one hand, by allowing one to look back on one’s life as a whole, death seemingly promises finality and completion, yet, at the same time, the infinite act of dying, which the novel by Fuentes calls attention to,

does not provide deliverance or meaning but, rather, the anonymity of ‘one’ dying erases the self.

In a second step, Devlieger discusses the protagonist’s failed attempt at creating an authentic self by remembering his life and she identifies his loss of identity in the process of dying as a manifestation of literary self-consciousness. Elaborating on how Blanchot perceives the process of literary creation as analogous to that of dying allows her to conceptualize the novel as a literary meta-text which – by way of the fictional author figure of Artemio Cruz – self-reflexively engages with the creational processes of both writing and reading and thereby reflects on literature’s ontological status. Devlieger’s cross-cultural approach thus points to a self-conscious dimension of the novel that socio-political and cultural-historical readings so far have largely neglected.

Adopting an intermedial approach, the contribution by **Wenjun Zhu** (Université Libre de Bruxelles) presented in this issue scrutinizes the representation of theatrical bodies in Samuel Beckett’s work for the stage through the lens of Alberto Giacometti’s sculptures. The article begins by tracing autobiographical affinities between the two artists’ experience of the Second World War, but then concentrates primarily on the striking aesthetic resonances in their depiction of bodies. Zhu traces the progressively increasing intermedial references to sculpture in Beckett’s dramatic oeuvre. The article does not just consider the playtexts of *Happy Days* (1961), *Play* (1963), *Not I* (1972), *Footfalls* (1976) and *Catastrophe* (1982) but also Beckett’s directorial notebooks, in which his instructions for theatre productions are documented. Zhu identifies four similarities between the representation of bodies in Giacometti’s post-war sculptures and Beckett’s theatrical bodies by which the latter attain not just a mineral, stone-like quality but specifically resemble Giacometti’s characteristically stretched, emaciated bodies. To begin with, both Giacometti’s sculptures and Beckett’s theatre transform bodies into abstract and de-individualised figures. Just as Giacometti’s walking man or standing woman

do not display any individual physical characteristics, Beckett avoided realistic settings and eliminated external accessories in his theatre by reducing colours, props and movements. A second similarity between Giacometti's statues and Beckett's characters is the physical weakness that the dehumanized, coarse, aging or ill bodies evoke and which could be seen to symbolize the frailty of human existence. Thirdly, the images of immobilized or dying bodies in Beckett's theatre produces a sculptural effect which resonates with Giacometti's buried busts, which cross the border between human bodies and objects as well as that between life and death. Both artists, finally, have visualized bodily fragmentation and physical disintegration, by reducing bodies to suspended heads or mouths. According to Zhu, the intermedial references to sculpture enabled Beckett to broaden the representational mode of the theatre, as his creation of de-individualized, emaciated, partly buried and fragmented bodies innovated the traditional representation of bodies on stage. Achieving a sculptural effect, Beckett's bodies open up a metaphysical dimension and function as symbols of existence. Simultaneously alive and dead, the failing bodies in Beckett's theatre represent a dehumanized corporeality and depict deteriorating subjectivities which – in the case of both artists – may reflect their traumatic wartime experience and their personal witnessing of death.

Spanning a similar time period to Beckett's plays, the article written by **Lisa Chinn** conducts an intermedial reading of the post-WWII little magazine, a platform where crossings between poetry, fiction and literary criticism proliferated in the twentieth century. Despite their limited print-runs, the fragile material they consisted of and their very specific target audience, the small magazines became "twentieth century's most influential type of publication through which avant-garde poetry was cultivated and flourished" (f1). In particular, Chinn's article targets the intermedial relationship little magazines had with the mimeograph machine, an economic duplicating device that allowed printing by pushing ink on the paper through stencils, and became the ideal tool for counterculture artists to spread their work in the years following

the Second World War. After briefly reconstructing the state of the art on the scholarship about the mimeograph, pinpointing how academics have neglected the topic of the mimeograph machine in favour of more traditional printing processes, the article deepens its connections with the little magazines, by conducting an intermedial analysis of a particular case study, the mimeographed little magazine *The Floating Bear* (1961-71). Firstly, Chinn analyses the fundamental role played by the mimeograph in the building of an audience and of a community for the avant-garde poetry of the time. Secondly, it demonstrates how the mimeograph enables a sonic reading experience. Thus, the article convincingly connects the study of the little magazine to the field of intermedial studies.

The article which closes this latest issue of the *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings* is entitled “Changing Hands, Changing Forms: Dracula and Intermediation” by **Jeremy Lakoff** (The University of Tampa). In his contribution, Lakoff focuses on the representation of intermedial processing, both from a narrative and stylistic perspective, in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. According to the author, the detailed depiction of how modern communication media enhanced the protagonists’ ability to defeat Dracula does not only contribute to the modern character of the novel, it also engenders the foundation of contemporary multimodal discourse. More specifically, Lakoff stresses the importance of Dr. Seward’s phonographic diary and shows not only how the access to the data itself, but also the conceptualisation and the transcription of its content present an interesting illustration of the integration of modern media in literature. After developing his theoretical framework, the author offers a detailed analysis of how Mina conducts the process of editing and archiving the data collected from the phonographic diary, not without taking into account the struggles and tensions that come along with it. Throughout the article, Lakoff focuses on the difficulties that arise when the character tries to converge traditional and innovative frames of reference and conventions. This process of intermediation is illustrated with the help of pertinent examples

taken from the novel. In his conclusion, the author emphasizes that “what *Dracula*’s media ultimately reveal is that convergence, multimodality, and intermediation – whether in the analog or digital era – are not smooth processes, and that we should account for the invisible labor and invisible assumptions that guide users’ choices when they locate points of transfer between media” (g17-18).

Throughout the issue, the articles are ordered chronologically, based on the primary material they discuss. Starting with 21st-century street poetry and ending with a late 19th-century novel, they reflect the fact that literary, intermedial and cultural crossings are not confined to a single medium and do not solely characterise our contemporary age; rather they can be equally fruitfully studied across media and in the centuries preceding ours.