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Kateřina Svatoňova heads the Department of Film Studies at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague (FF UK). She prepared an exhibition and book (together with Lucie Česálková) *Laterna Magika* (2019) based on research project NAKI II 2016–2020.

katerina.svatonova@ff.cuni.cz

Translated from the Czech by Phil Jones.

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A LIFE IN IMAGES AND THE DISLOCATING VISION: REFLECTIONS ON THE MEDIALITY OF MOVING IMAGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF GERMAN MEDIA STUDIES OR *MEDIENWISSENSCHAFT*
KATEŘINA SVATOŇOVÁ

"You don't make a movie, the
movie makes you."
Jean-Luc Godard

The Consciousness of the Camera

"[W]e continually live inside
images, just as images live
inside us."
Malte Hagener

This text does not examine the relationship between art and film from a historical perspective or in terms of the aesthetic influence each has had on the other. Instead, it reacts to the current media situation that (Czech) visual artists (of the young and middle generations) find themselves in, and, by drawing on the work of several of these artists, highlights the transformation of the creative perspective taking place within the "expanded" field of visual culture. This transformation does not reside in the substitution of the analogue image by the digital,**1** but in a far more fundamental shift taking place within the media field. The loss of fixed media boundaries (if such ever existed) is impacting everyday life, provoking endless debates over what we mean by the medium and the medial.

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2 David N. RODOWICK made these comments in connection with what was his newly released book *The Virtual Life of Film*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2007, which was originally to have been subtitled *The Death of Film and the Renaissance of Film Studies*. Petr SZCZEPANIK – Jakub KUČERA, "Rozhovor s Davidem Normanem Rodowickem", *Iluminace*, vol. 15, 2003, no. 2, p. 94.

3 Anne FRIEDBERG, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1993. In the same spirit, at the start of the millennium Lev Manovich predicted that film would become the cultural interface of the future.

4 Malte HAGENER, "Where is Cinema (Today)? The Cinema in the Age of Media Immanence", *Cinema & Cie*, vol. 11, Fall 2008, p. 18.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

6 Ever since the era of the new wave, films about shooting a film have been popular. As regards the generation of artists this essay addresses, we see these procedures in the work of Petr Zelenka, for instance.

7 I refer here to the debates and to the thinking taking place around the International Research Institute for Cultural Technologies and Media Philosophy (IKKM) in Weimar. Though the institute does not aim for an integrated output, the passionate debates it organises have inspired me to connect this heteroglossia with specific art works.

This in turn is impacting on art, a sphere in which theory and practice are closely intertwined conceptually.

My starting point is the remarkable fact that, within all these different discussions, there is almost unanimous agreement on the superior role of film, regardless of whether those debating the issue regard it as a dead medium or not. David N. Rodowick emphasises that, while film itself might disappear, the same cannot be said of *cinema*, since the narrative structure characteristic of what we recognise as a feature film persists and remains firmly anchored in our media unconscious.**2** The crucial significance of film is backed up by theories associated with Anna Friedberg that claim that film has transformed forever our perception and vision,**3** and that we are now subject to the "consciousness of the camera" and only capable of thinking and perceiving cinematically.**4** According to Malte Hagener, film is already indistinguishable (in human perception) from reality: "we continually live inside images, just as images live inside us".**5** Faced by such a fluid situation, film theory searches for something to hold onto by tracking the content and symbols that reach out beyond the work itself. In the spirit of "film on film", theory examines the reflexive moments of the medium and its unfathomable materiality, or it focuses on the cultural techniques that shape and condition film and that largely ignore the aesthetic intentions of the filmmaker. Art theory then incorporates the tools of film analysis into its analytical arsenal and starts to relate artists to film, in part for the way that artists use film in galleries and work with film representation and narration. The multiple possibilities of artistic dislocations and translocations open up a distance between the gaze of the viewer and that of film as such. This side-on reflexivity is fundamentally different than that attainable by filmmakers. Self-reflexivity from the core of "our" medium**6** reveals to us the mechanisms behind the creation of a film, the backdrop of the film industry, and the aesthetic, stylistic and formal resources. However, it does not allow us to see the

processes concealed behind the resulting medium, the mediality of the medium as such. I use the term "mediality" in accordance with contemporary Germany media theory and philosophy,[7] not as a one-way linear means of communication, but as a space that allows for movement (cultural, intellectual or perceptual), not as a given subject, but as a tool that influences the process of being and that raises ethical (or more generally philosophical) questions. Mediality represents a certain potential and not a one-way diktat. The shift away from an investigation of media to an interrogation of mediality goes hand in hand with the movement away from the material depicted by the medium to the very materiality of the medium, i.e. from the topic represented to the topic of representation, from matter and the material to an investigation of what has been made out of them and how and what material is doing, what and how it acts, reproduces, organises, knows, and what it is thinking about. Mediality and the materiality of the media can help us understand culture as a network of linguistic and social relations.[8]

However, we immediately face our first problem, namely that the media mediate without being capable of mediating themselves.[9] They do not offer us space for reflection, because the kernel of further medialisation is concealed within reflection. If we remain in the space of the given media, we are able to reflect on our own position but unable to view mediality as such, something that has a fundamental philosophical and ontological status in that it permits us to return from the media back to the individual and their relationship with the world. However, mediality is to be seen precisely at the moment it begins to fade and become deformed and transformed. Disappearance represents the very possibility of its discovery and emergence. Mediality can be seen in the interstices or fractures in the media order, or revealed to us from a lateral, anamorphic perspective[10] that supplements reflections from the very centre of mediality. These functions are performed by the reflexive gesture used by artists, and herein resides

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Cf. Bernd HERZOGENRATH (ed.), *Media Matter: The Materiality of Media/Matter as Medium*, New York: Bloomsbury 2015. This shift is so important that it is spoken of as a "material turn" in the humanities, and the investigation of materiality is regarded as a specific realm of research and reflection. Cf. Tony BENNETT – Patrick JOYCE (eds.), *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*, London: Routledge 2010; Daniel MILLER (ed.), *Materiality*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2005.

9

In "Tertium datur" Dieter Mersch writes: "The media obscure their mediality to the same extent as they produce mediating effects. 'Media' forfeit their own appearance by making something appear. Their presence has the format of an absence." Dieter MERSCH, "Tertium datur: Úvod do negativní mediální teorie", in: Kateřina KRTILOVÁ – Kateřina SVATOŇOVÁ (eds.), *Medienwissenschaft: Východiska a aktuální pozice německé filosofie a teorie médií*, Prague: Academia 2016, p. 338.

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Waldenfels speaks of "dislocating vision". Bernhard WALDENFELS, *Sinnesschwelle: Studie zur Phänomenologie des Fremden 3*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1999, pp. 154–158. Cf. Josef VOJVODÍK, *"Metaxy pheromenon neboli v prostoru mezi…* K současné filozofii médií a mediality", *Slovo a smysl*, vol. 11, 2014, no. 21, pp. 15–45.

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11
When speaking of the media landscape, Baladrán uses the metaphor of a city full of ruins in which everything is in constant movement, everything is disappearing and reappearing, the superficial alternates with the deep and the periphery with the centre. Here's Baladrán himself: "the difficulty in differentiating between images and the sheer number of images creates the impression of a saturated environment. Individual strata overlap, emerge, are mutually utilised and participate in each other. New combinations form new wholes, while others are dissolved into other images." Zbyněk BALADRÁN, "Ruiny, archeologie a mezera mezi obrazy", http://www.zbynekbaladran.com/new/cs/2016/07/03/ruiny-archeologie-a-mezera-meziobrazy/ (accessed 29 December 2016).

the potentiality of the relationship between fine art and film, namely the possibility of turning away as the basis of a new perspective, disappearance as revelation. The deviational approach of artists working with film resources allows for the unveiling of mediality and the activation of its potential, the capturing of the process of thinking via film or video.

I shall focus on three types of possible internal transformation of the media framework within the space of fine art and its saturation by film. I regard the most crucial of these to be the spectrum running from the retention of media boundaries on the one hand, to their gradual dissolution on the other. I will examine artists who have a background in fine art but who have begun to use film and video formats in their work. Such figures have deviated from their own position just as they have disrupted the basis of the film medium and exploited the interstices already referred to. It would of course be foolish to claim they are the first to work with film: however, the artists I examine use film differently. I have selected these artists as representatives of the generation possessing "camera consciousness", for whom film no longer represents the enhancement of visual expression, but is a type of image that infiltrates our daily lives in the same way as does art. For these artists, intermediality is no longer the objective but the norm, the ground zero from which media specificities are derived. For me these artists are representative of a generation that is used to working with conceptual media transpositions without their main aim being to deconstruct them into components of the film *dispositif* in order simply to spotlight their ideological content. Their work for me represents three of the many possible caesuras at the intersection of the media chiasmus that might coax us into looking differently at mediality and the materiality of film, as well as ways in which transformations might be effected in seeing through film (Zbyněk Baladrán), the recollections of film (Adéla Babanová), or the consciousness of film and thinking through it (Tomáš Svoboda).

As Though from a Panorama:
Or, from Simulation and Subjectivity to the
Negation Thereof

> "The angles of all the corners in
> the rooms are more acute than
> 90°, of that I am sure. Because
> of this, the entire building is
> collapsing in on itself."
> *Práce oka* (*Work of the Eye*)

Orientating one's way through the complexities of media networks and the current media saturation is possible with the aid of a range of media transpositions and thanks to conceptual frameworks that firmly anchor artistic creativity. Art practice must be permeated by theory, specifically theory that either attempts to clarify the current state of the media by examining links to "old" media (or to newer but still conceptualised), or to track their possible future, which as yet remains undefined.

As an example of the first strategy I shall examine the work of Zbyněk Baladrán on the boundary of art and film. Baladrán attempts to utilise and understand the current media "clutter"[11] by borrowing from the concept of media archaeology (or perhaps anarchaeology) promulgated by the German theorist and historian Siegfried Zielinski. Following Zielinski's model, Baladrán concentrates on the search for "lucky finds", curiosities and unexpected connections in media worlds that can mediate our cognition of the present, yet also allow us to understand the past and anticipate the future.[12] To this end he often returns to archives, both in the architecture of exhibitions[13] and in his own artwork,[14] explores clippings as possibilities of interpretation, and works with assemblages. Individual media are connected not only horizontally but vertically. The links between findings, fragments of image and text, archive materials, photographs and films do not lead only transversely across the media field in the manner of intermedial relations, but traverse

15
Zbyněk BALADRÁN,
"Vystřihování jako praxe myšlení",
http://www. zbynekbaladran.com/
new//cs/2016/07/03/
vystrihovani--jako-praxe-mysleni/
(accessed 30 December 2016).

16
As well as media archaeology,
Baladrán is highly influenced by
the theories of Bertold Brecht.

17
I am drawing here on the ideas of
Lorenz Engell, who shows that
film is not only the representation
of reality, but, given that the
entire mechanism of filming and
film material is part of the
surrounding world, is the very
process of recording through the
formation of a new reality. Lorenz
ENGELL, "Moving Images as
Ontographic Images", in:
HERZOGENRATH, *Media/ /
Matter*, pp. 138–140. https://
philpapers.org/rec/ENGMDF

the individual temporal layers, cultural strata and deposits in order to reveal unexpected connections, counterpoints and analogies that include within themselves some form of philosophical or political statement. The resulting whole can be viewed as a network, perhaps in the spirit of a Deleuzian rhizome, with non-linear causalities, non-hierarchical aggregates, and "plastic landscapes of mental relations",**15** which do not allow for a single interpretation but open themselves up to a plurality of readings.

This media-informed archaeological gesture is intensified when Baladrán begins to work with the moving image. His film recordings of found curiosities use second-order recycling and combine a variety of media practices (partly in order to activate and reactivate the viewer's attention),**16** which, however, are then enriched by other media operations, e.g. writing, even though the actual process of writing (and often rewriting) is a visible component of the film image, or the operation of speaking. This linguistic gesture is not simply an ornamental expansion of the visual field, but can be understood philosophically. It is a deviation from film-based self-reflection and allows us to see the mediality and materiality in the background of individual works, i.e. to spotlight the actual process of thinking. The medium of film conceived of in this way represents the possibility of particularising the thinkable and discovering the unthinkable. At the same time, the technical process of recording associated with the techniques of speech is not a way of stating something about reality, but a recording of reality through reality itself.**17** Filming and speaking/writing are on the same level – they are simply different examples of processes by which it is possible to capture thinking and to activate the thinking of the viewer – and are thus the same gestural figure named by Vilém Flusser:

> It is not right to say that writing fixes thinking.
> Writing is a way of thinking. There is no thinking
> that has not been articulated through a gesture.
> [...] Strictly speaking, there is no thinking before

making a gesture. [...]To have unwritten ideas really means to have nothing.**18**

The gesture of selecting visual material, especially the gesture of the camera and the recycling of its perspective (processes often at odds with the gesture of language, which is related to individual images), can represent the possibility of thinking along with the film, the utterance of opposites and the mutual support of theses and conceptions.

As media archaeologist and collector, artist and exhibition architect, Zbyněk Baladrán reflects upon his theses and hypotheses not only via the image, specifically the relationship of showing and writing, but also with the aid of space. Space and spatial configurations also shape thinking, regardless of whether they are physical or illusory. In our case, thinking is linked to the space of the gallery (encouraging different considerations from the space of a cinema), but also the space *of* film and the space *in* film. The film space as realised in two layers on a screen or monitor is distinct in that it is "changeable, flexible, versatile; more precise and radical: the cinematic space is the changeability of the space itself", as Lorenz Engell points out.**19** For this reason too, the configuration of the film image and its internal world allows both its creator and its viewer to ask questions that would not be possible in the case of a different mode of expression.

We find the intersection of several different approaches to mediality and the reformulation thereof within new frameworks in the video *Work of Eye* (2014), which Baladrán shot with Barbora Kleinhamplová. In the manner of media archaeologists, the artists return to the past, as regards film prehistory almost symbolically, and to the research into subjective perception conducted by Jan Evangelista Purkyně, in order to reflect upon contemporary experiences and perceptions. Purkyně conducted experiments on himself in extreme conditions, including an investigation into balance, loss of balance and visual

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18
Vilém FLUSSER, "Die Geste des Schreibens", in: *Gesten: Versuch einer Phänomenologie*, Düsseldorf: Bollmann 1993, p. 39. English translation at https://jpgenrgb. files.wordpress. com/2017/07/338252667-flusser-gestures.pdf (accessed 15 October 2018).

19
Lorenz ENGELL, "Mediální filozofie filmu", in: KRTILOVÁ–SVATOŇOVÁ, *Medienwissenschaft*, p. 363.

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The consciousness of the camera
is close to Deleuzian camera
consciousness. Deleuze shows
camera consciousness to be that
for which movements that follow
or enact are not as fundamental
as the spiritual relations it is able
to establish. Gilles DELEUZE, *Film
2: Obraz-čas*, Prague: Národní
filmový archiv 2006. However, in
this case it is the movement of
the camera that sets off thoughts
and spiritual relations.

21

The panorama could only be
realised after the individual visual
perception was acknowledged as
a relevant approach to the world,
a process in which Jan Evangelista
Purkyně played a significant role.

22

Joachim PAECH, "Obraz mezi
obrazy", *Iluminace*, vol. 14, 2002,
no. 2, p. 7.

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vertigo. He claimed that the feeling of vertigo provoked
a conflict between unconscious, involuntary muscular
action and conscious, voluntary activities. In order to
demonstrate this, he constructed a mechanism similar
to a carousel, which the subject being investigated was
strapped onto. The carousel started spinning and was
then suddenly brought to a halt, upon which the subject
experienced the visual illusion of continuing movement.
Baladrán and Kleinhamplová utilised the same rotation-
al movement, but instead of attaching themselves to the
mechanism attached the generator of the technical im-
age and the new "consciousness", i.e. the camera.[20] The
camera is rotated 360 degrees in the space of open offic-
es. The filmmakers are not interested in understanding
the origin of vertigo, but how it is induced, the feeling
of confusion and paranoia caused by work environments
within agoraphobia-inducing spaces. The moving image
is accompanied by whispering voices recounting micro-
stories from the workplace and by a photographic re-
cording entering the compact trajectory of the film. The
overall effect is one of heightened anxiety and hallucina-
tory perception.

For our purposes what is remarkable is not only how
the film conceptualises the media methods of archaeol-
ogy and ascribes subjectivity to technology, but also the
way it exploits thinking by means of and with the im-
age with the assistance of a very specific gesture of the
camera, spoken word, and the space (in) of the film. The
rotating view (interrupted only by static photographs,
obstacles or changes of direction that cause the story to
branch off in different directions, and, on the contrary,
intensified by the continuous flow of the spoken word) is
close to panoramic representation. The artists transpose
the media practice of the original painterly illusion,[21]
simulating a realist and authentic view of landscape –
a concave immersive image with a rotating perspective
with a missing centre that is completed by the observ-
er[22] – to the moving image. They thus find a different

viewpoint, a lateral perspective that does not belong to panorama, film, the object being observed or the observing subject.**23** The panoramic shot is of course part of film discourse. In the traditional narrative film it copies the illusoriness of the painterly panorama, but always only partially: the movement of the camera never describes a full circle but reveals context and shows the viewer what is happening at the edge of the frame and beyond its borders so as to provoke feelings of omniscience. This often involves an establishing shot that rids the image of an undesirable secrecy. Within the panorama as a whole the viewer's perspective merges with the movement of the camera and examines the panoramic surface from close up in a process which, on the other hand, deprives the viewer of distance, overview and the possibility of seeing the whole. The overall panorama thus becomes a highly symptomatic, expressive, almost subversive element that disturbs the seemingly realist impression offered by the film spectacle and draws attention to the reality inside it, to the media gesture, to the ideological figure of the camera and the film material. The all-encompassing gaze is restricted by the upper and lower boundary of the frame and horizontally restricted to the extent that the viewer ceases to perceive the free space (similar to the way that open space is not experienced as genuinely open), but, on the contrary, becomes aware of the confined nature of the perspective and its strict, linear course – the medium in itself and its empty centre.**24** The film's gaze simply tracks the technical medium, the film loses interest, as it were, in the viewer and becomes a "thinking" film,**25** a film that reflects upon itself, an autopoietic system, the self-driver of filmic form that is not simply a method of depiction but also a method of philosophical deliberation. The thinking of such a stylised and performative film then opens up not only phenomenological and ontological themes, but raises questions pertaining to the dominion of technology, power, supervision and manipulation.**26**

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Confusion accompanied by an openness to perception is close to the moments we encounter in Deleuze's "optical situation", during which we see that that which is seen is something visible, though we do not know who is seeing it. DELEUZE, *Film 2*.

24
Another type of "thinking" panoramic shot is that used in the film by Laura Mulvey *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977). A long scene charting the everyday life of the central character also raises questions of power and manipulation, as well as the dominance of the male gaze and the type of narration as represented by traditional film. The panoramic shot is thus both thematic, subversive and reflective, as well as being an attempt to find and express a female voice and a film discourse appropriate to oppositional film or counter-cinema.

25
Lorenz ENGELL, "Mediální filosofie filmu", in: KRTILOVÁ–SVATOŇOVÁ, *Medienwissenschaft*, pp. 356–377.

26
Baladrán himself writes of the moving image as both a tool of emancipation and tool of control". Zbyněk BALADRÁN, [Explikace k dvoukanálové instalaci *Mikroskop a dalekohled času*], http://www.zbynekbaladran.com/new/cs/2016/07/03/511/ (accessed 30 December 2016).

↑↗ Zbyněk BALADRÁN – Barbora KLEINHAMPLOVÁ, *Práce oka* (Work of Eye),
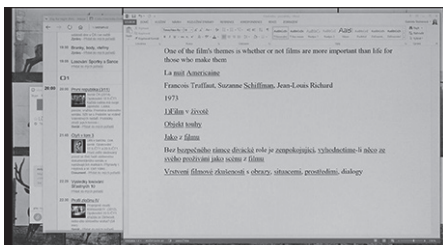2014, video, 7 min.

↑↑ Adéla BABANOVÁ, *Já tam mám tělo* (I Have a Body There), 2012, video, 32 min.
↑ Adéla BABANOVÁ, *Polobozi* (Demigods), 2009, video, 9:30 min.
↗ Adéla BABANOVÁ, *Návrat do Adriaportu* (Return to Adriaport), 2013, video, 13 min.
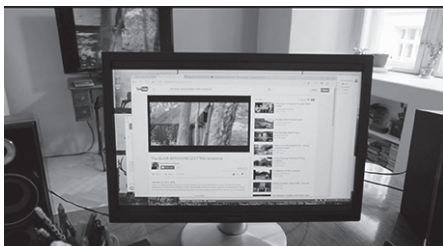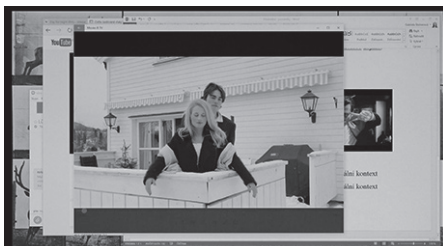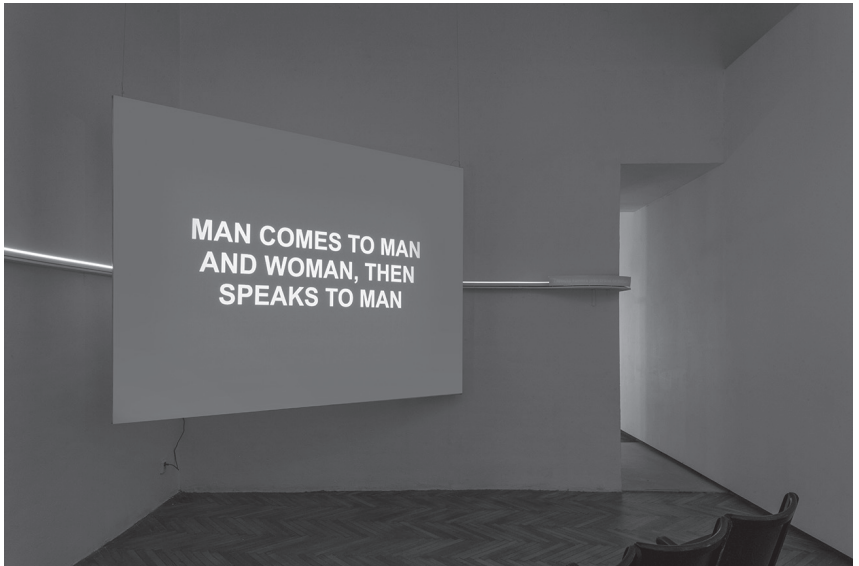
←← Tomáš SVOBODA, *Imagine Psycho*, 2008, video, installation, Berlin: Galerie Antje Wachs.
← Tomáš SVOBODA, *Jako z filmu* (Like in a Movie), 2017, video, 84 min.
↑ Tomáš SVOBODA, *Jako z filmu* (Like in a Movie), 2017, view of installation, photo: Hynek Alt

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As Though from Reality, Or, Photography as the Basis of (False) Memory

> "It was said that
> Czechoslovakia's bold
> intervention in the map of the
> world had disrupted the laws
> of spacetime, and paranormal
> and inexplicable phenomena
> had begun occurring on the
> island…"
> *Návrat do Adriaportu* (*Return to Adriaport*)

The example of Baladrán showed how media instability allows for a conceptual transposition between fine art, photography, art video intended for a gallery and film intended for the cinema, above all on the level of production and postproduction, presentation and perception. However, we can also track how certain artists work with contemporary media hybridity within the framework of intermedial interactions and interferences. Their work is then marked by a tension between the use of media in accordance with theories that attempt to bring to a halt or demarcate the erasure of media sets, and by an attempt to create conceptual mergers that forget about individual sets. This can be seen in the work of Adéla Babanová, who having studied different disciplines at the Academy of Fine Arts, settled for new media and began to shoot films in cooperation with professional filmmakers, in the process drawing on film media practices and conventions in order to voice her ideas. And though Babanová often works with spatial installations and multichannel videos, she regards the resulting work as the outcome of teamwork.

Unlike Baladrán, who is inspired by the history of media, Babanová is more interested in recent media practice and its definitions. She does not claim allegiance to specific theoretical traditions. However, we may follow a certain affinity

between the way she handles a medium and the concept of intermediality as discussed by Irina O. Rajewsky. The latter does not view intermediality as an outmoded concept and avant-garde vision of possible media cooperation, but as a critical category that can be drawn on for the analysis of specific media configurations.**27** Rajewsky outlines three possible axes transcending media boundaries. Firstly, there is transformation, in which one medium is the basis for another. Secondly, there is combination, which she claims is typical of new media and characterised by the fact that individual media retain their own materiality. And thirdly, there is reference, in which the medium remains identified with its own specification but "plays" around its borders. Babanová draws on all three axes in her films, though is closest to the third.

Her trilogy *Zurich* (2008), *For the Artist of the Year I have Chosen Myself* (2009), and *Demigods* (2009), parodies the artificiality and egotism of the art world. It comprises a series of monologues reminiscent of the theatre of the absurd. The films draw on film and TV discourse (in the selection of the size of shots, the way that dialogues are edited and the work with mise-en-scène), elements of serial production (e.g. the combination of image and subtitles), and the traditional figuration and composition of fine art, and does so in places where the moving film strip is held up and fossilised in the form of a live image. Babanová also abides by a fine-art presentational style. Her films are installed in galleries and the film narration may be divided into several lines and presented as multichannel video. *Telling* linked to *showing* is then reduced to the second of these elements, while chronological time is transformed into synchronous time and intensifies testimony. The film *I Have a Body There* (2012), a variation on the theme of the TV detective story, is constructed in a similar way. The film narration alternates with a static "screen" intertwined with shots stylised into the form of an amateur family film and pornographic imagination.

This play around media borders works with citations of processes and practices known from other media. The

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Irina RAJEWSKY, "Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality", in: Lars ELLESTRÖM (ed.), *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2010, pp. 51–68.

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28
Renate LACHMANN, *Memoria fantastika*, Prague: Herrmann & synové 2002, pp. 39–40.

29
The film *Neptune* is conceived of in a similar way. However, a combination of archive material and acted out scenes runs through Babanová's work, and even the wholly fictive *I Have a Body There* is inspired by real events.

intermedial level is thus multiplied and enriched by intertextual relations across the full range of communication between old and new text/image as defined by Renate Lachmann: from participation via troping to transformation. While troping, as Lachmann says, fights against foreign images, absorbs them into the actual space of the work, attempts to overcome their origin and include them in the work (as Babanová does with the artistic compositions in static canvases), the process of transformation usurps and appropriates these images and completely withholds and conceals their origin (in moving images). Standing in opposition to this is participation, which represents the dialogical participation in other images that is manifest by the repetition of the existing and known (as can be seen in pervasive media practices).**28** The construction of a world of images then becomes thematisation, remembrance and forgetting. While in the media transposition of Babanová's film parodies, remembrance and forgetting are of a medial character, in her mock documentaries (another string to her bow) this tension impacts even the thematic level. The media game again reveals mediality as such and supports theoretical questioning, above all of the relationship between medium and memory and how the memory of a medium may disappear within the process of transfer in order to reveal the media essence and reflect upon the past.

A perfect example of this is Babanová's parody of a documentary film *Return to Adriaport* (2013).**29** This fictional documentary film is freely inspired by the ambitious project dreamed up by Professor Karel Žlábek, who in 1975 designed a tunnel intended to link Czechoslovakia with Yugoslavia and offer access to the sea (and thus free up travel). Babanová blends period footage with misinformation and draws on science fiction and parody. On the formal level she works with collages put into motion that are crucial in respect of the subject matter. The flow of the moving image is not brought to a halt in the form of live images/corpses, as was the case in the trilogy referred to above, but is replaced by static photographs, the individual parts

of which are put into motion using trick photography. We thus follow how the media practices of documentary film (including archives and the primary research of the filmmakers, which in this film are unveiled so as to become a theme in themselves), accompanied by "proof" in the form of static photographs, are intertwined with the procedures of experimental and animated firm and creative interventions. At these moments, the film, which is based on the interstices between images of photographed moments that create the impression of movement between immobile images,**30** comes to a halt. The reality of the image becomes clear but the film movement begins anew, this time within the image or on its second plane.**31** Individual planes and their functions are thus reversed. A figure remains in place, creating an empty space that takes over the moving background. The individual media characteristics are exchanged in a similar fashion. Film metamorphoses into the collages and photomontages of fine art, all undermining their own essence. The film, which attempts to eradicate all differences in the image and replace them with the illusion of continuity, is broken up, torn into pieces and disrupted by the resources of self-reflective art, and the differences emerge on the surface. Finally, just as regular film movement comprises several mobile layers, standardised time is replaced by differently paced flows. This work with mediality is very close to what Dieter Mersch describes as the potential of media paradoxes:

> Mediality in this context is that indeterminability from which one can only make new sketches whose delineations and breakdowns arise above all from transferring performances and their interruptions, coming from the side and intervening in the structure involved, inventing leaps and contradictions, which attempt to tackle the paradox of the medial, its disappearance at the moment of appearance, using medial paradoxes to literally tease it out of the reserve, to challenge it, break it open and

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For more on the relationship between immobile and mobile images see Joachim PAECH, "Obraz mezi obrazy", *Iluminace*, vol. 14, 2002, no. 2, pp. 5–16.

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A similar tension is to be found in the film *Rampa* by Chris Marker, where a scene is inserted between the immobile shots/photographs in which the main female character wakes up and opens her eyes.

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MERSCH, "Tertium datur", p. 342. This mobile immobility is close to Lyotard's description of two extreme poles of the static image and the swift movement: "an object that we observe for too long eventually escapes our gaze because it loses its contextual coordinates, while fast movement, on the contrary, can be seen as ripples on the surface of water and understood as motionless form." Lyotard too, albeit from different theoretical positions, spotlights "disappearance" as the basis of possible appearance. Jean-François LYOTARD, "Idea svrchovaného filmu", in: *Návrat a jiné eseje*, Prague: Herrmann & synové 2002, pp. 102–103.

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expose the contours which stubbornly hide in the appearance of things that are not only technically perfect.**32**

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MERSCH, "Tertium datur", p. 348–349.

For Mersch, these paradoxes are made up of all the

> interventions, disturbances, obstacles, the reversal of structures, the extreme slowing or acceleration of time, the doubling up of or iteration of signs, amplification exploited to obscenity and much more: they all induce strategies of difference which cannot be listed individually, only discovered anew.**33**

Just as in the trilogy, non-aesthetic elements disturbing the self-presentation of the main characters seep into the art world and, as in the mock documentaries, undermine the credibility of the historical document through ironic commentary and subtle interrogation of the evidentiary materials, so that the film shots are subverted by errors or wrinkles, traces and fissures, as Mersch describes medial paradoxes. The technically perfect film is disrupted by deliberate, non-thematised technical errors, e.g. the boom mike is visible, the camera shakes or wavers, the image is covered with scratches, or aesthetic discontinuities, for instance the sudden emptying of the image or the appearance of an unmotivated view behind the frame of events.

In the case of Babanová these procedures and medial jumps allow for the medial situation to be unveiled and for internal subversion, as well as allowing for an investigation of more general themes, especially in relation to (both subjective and collective) memory, history, time, manipulation and self-presentation. Photography and historical documents, regarded as evidentiary material, are "deleted" thanks to many definitions and interstices, thus revealing their own mediality and in turn the falsity of this evidence. As a consequence, the performative context struggles against its own source and the individual spaces between images reveal the illusory character of representation in

a completely different way than would be the case in a work of fine art. The original affinity between authenticity and the material presented is destroyed by constant transformation inside and outside the medium of film/photography, and replaced by a sophisticated postmodern game.

Like in a movie, or, reflections upon mediality

> "[F]ragments of movement image [...] memories of something that has never happened."
> *Jako z filmu* (*Like in a Movie*)

In order to understand contemporary media one has to look at its past or into the theoretically comprehensible "pre-present". The third approach I wish to examine involves finding a starting point in the present (or future), especially in relation to the digital image. Not only new media can be thematised, but also the relationship of the image to its code, which is now so open, composed of ones and zeroes, that it is not only ubiquitous but contains gaps within itself. I am not so much concerned with the artwork that works creatively with digital code[34] as with works that emerge from theories of the contemporary world-image in such a way as to rotate the artwork back on itself, just as they stood in opposition to the medial practices of individual artistic forms. Only in this way is it possible to locate the essence of the image and understand the principle of this transformation.[35] Only at the moment that film disappears is it possible to get close to its essence as film or to think about the contemporary film consciousness.

These approaches are deployed by Tomáš Svoboda, who since 2008 has been working on exhibition projects that evoke the medium of film using a variety of non-filmic practices.[36] He often works at the intersection of two media (his works

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See for example Andreas Pohle, Daniel Hanzlík, etc.

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And perhaps also attempt to overturn Lyotard's thesis that referentiality disappears from these bitwise images along with imagination and sensibility. Jean-François LYOTARD, "Přepsat modernost", in: *Návrat*, p. 219.

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At the exhibition *Imagine Psycho* at the Antje Wachs Gallery, Berlin, for instance, Svoboda uses reproductions of the mises-en-scène from Hitchcock's famous horror movie (by placing a replica of the motel in which the murder takes place behind a glass wall), while the accompanying projection of the film image was replaced by texts explaining in simple ways the events and the spaces of the film narrative. *Imagine Psycho*, Berlin: Galerie Antje Wachs 2008. Cf. Sylva POLÁKOVÁ, "Tomáš Svoboda : Dekonstrukce a (re) imaginace", *Fotograf*, vol. 11, 2012, no. 19, pp. 68–71. Svoboda worked in a similar way on the exhibition *Like a Movie*, which was an almost exhaustive presentation of possible medial transformations. *Like a Movie*, Prague: Tranzitdisplay 2015–2016.

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MERSCH, "Tertium datur",
p. 351.

38
LACHMANN, *Memoria fantastika*,
pp. 39–40.

are interwoven with references to film and the filmic imagination, and the rhythm of his works is structured in the manner of jump cuts) or the permeation of projection and reconstruction (Svoboda creates architectural imitations of film mises-en-scène in the space of a gallery). A confusion surrounding media codes is also typical of his work and he often reverses the function of word and image (the moving image is often accompanied by text and is transformed into text, while the text takes on the film format). "[It] thus unhinges the text-image hierarchy that has been established for centuries. For now it is no longer clear which has priority, if the image dominates the text, or the text the image",**37** as Dieter Mersch says of similar practices. Svoboda achieves a double effect through these media shifts. On the one hand, with the aid of artistic strategies he attains the effects of media reflection, and on the other returns to the primary shift in which the film enters a gallery in order, inter alia, to deconstruct the spellbinding film narration, unfold it in space, and underscore the ideologisation of a seamless media form. Looked at in this way, although these works represent the migration of the fine artist into the field of film, they continue to respect the gallery tradition, the intermedial logic tied to the boundaries of individual media, and the citation methods of an intertextual character that we have seen in the work of Adéla Babanová. Svoboda here uses participation, a participation that acknowledges its own origin and draws on clear references, as Renate Lachmann writes of it.**38** Though the projections and installations disrupt the film *dispositif*, the viewer is able, on the basis of many references, to construct an imaginary film and connect up to the Rodowick-style consciousness of cinema that no longer permits us to distinguish the narrative elements of a traditional film from its fragments.

While these projects remained driven by the logic of the physical relocation of film to a gallery, yet often drew on the media practices of fine art in order to reveal what film is and where it is to be found most, Svoboda's entry

into the movie theatre and full-length feature film with the title *Like in a Movie* (2016) reflects the second possibility, i.e. an internal change, a transformation of perspective (understood as both gaze and approach), which no longer thinks only about film, but *with* film and *by means of* film. The question of what a film is is transformed into the question of when something can operate *like* a film. *Like in a Movie* can be seen as a theoretical film that examines not only how film visuality seeps into our reality and how we are constantly surrounded by the moving image, but also how we identify with film vision and film narrative, become film actors, and how we accept the cinematographic apparatus as our living space and dissolve within it. We follow various types of life in film, film in life, film as life and life as film with the aid of many different formats and genres. The idea of film is mediated to us in the form of manifesto, feature film, narrated screen action, or using a collage of individual extracts and short videos from YouTube, and the transformation of filmic form is accompanied by the ongoing unveiling of the filmic illusion (the use of blue screen, the creation of a storyboard by the director, the construction of rails for a tracking shot, etc.). This systematic deconstruction constantly reminds us of a film concept focused on the ideological operation of new media as well as a philosophical reflection upon the situation of mankind in the world-image.

However, *Like in a Movie* is not restricted to this level, a level close to self-reflective films. In the process of filming and within the space of the cinema Svoboda condenses the thoughts he has had up to this point on the essence of film as inspired by the gallery space. At the same time, the process of writing and rewriting individual theses is accompanied here by the instantiation and representation of perception. Film viewing (the subjective shot, the movement of the camera enhancing fluidity and continuity, and, on the contrary, editing, which is always a break in the narration as well as in the

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Georg Christoph THOLEN, "Medium/Media", in: KRTILOVÁ–SVATOŇOVÁ, *Medienwissenschaft*, p. 45.

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Malte HAGENER, "Kde je (dnes) film? Film ve věku imanence médií", *Iluminace*, vol. 23, 2011, no. 1, p. 83.

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A technique often used by Svoboda (both on the axis of art–film and on the sub-axes text–image, literature–film, static image–moving image, amateur–professional, etc.; the film format is filled with individual images mediated by a range of media, as though it had emerged from some collective cinematographic unconscious).

contemplative experience and persistence of the gaze) communicates with the modes of seeing of the age of the internet (interactivity, spatial layering, the concurrence of events, the rapid rotation of images, impatience and volatility, etc.), in a lively dialogue (sometimes almost a duel: during extracts from YouTube the computer monitor overlaps with the film screen). Not only film qua method and form of thinking plays an important role in the film, but the computer does too. The computer here is a superior intellectual structure, the integrator of existing medialities, and comments on the construction of all the media formats and codes that it simulates.**39** However, this simulation is not shrouded or effaced, but materialised, instantiated, made visible (on the simplest level by poor quality shots and pixelated videos), revealed as that which has irreversibly intruded upon our knowledge, perception and thinking by virtue of having become an everyday technique and routine.

The film thus distances itself from traditional formats and moves closer to its future form. Despite its apparently cinematographic, vectoral direction it becomes more like a palindrome, in which it is possible to return, with which dialogue is possible, a palindrome that is a formation more spatial (artistic) than temporal (filmic), which is a cultural interface but also a Godard-like archive or internet-based network, which, in contrast with intermedial participation, conserves, stabilises and yet loses its memory, forgets its memory, constantly transforms it and frames it anew.

One of the starting points of Svoboda's film is the thesis propounded by Malte Hagener that film has lost its stability both on the cultural and economic level and on the aesthetic level, by virtue of the fact that film and life are intertwined and there therefore exists "no transcendental horizon from which we can evaluate the ubiquitous mediatised expressions and experiences".**40** It appears that the media transfer or transit within the film *dispositif***41** and the dialogue of different intellectual forms and representations

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permits this reflection. It is possible to show via the moving image thus conceived of what these theories genuinely mean and how they relate to the "viewer's" world, which is losing its stability and is "simulated" by the digital world of social media.

The lateral perspective

> "Above all we must create the
> interstice in the system."
> *Roland Barthes*

The moment that filmmakers began exiting the cinema and drifting next door into the gallery, it was clear that fine artists would soon be using the cinema as a possible space for their work.**42** Since this move possesses a distinctively conceptual character, it tends to be accompanied by theoretical rationales that deal on the one hand with the kinship between film and fine art or the borderline areas separating them,**43**, and on the other transpose these procedures from one medial framework to another. And so we see how new art projects can learn from the archaeology of (technical) media, draw upon the contemporary, theoretically staked out media landscape, or be inspired by media visionaries. I have selected three examples (Baladrán, Babanová and Svoboda) that I believe best demonstrate what this transformation can involve, not only for artistic form, media content, subject matter and mediality itself, but also for the viewer.

Shifting away from our own position and adopting a perspective on film at once central (formally speaking) and side-on (ideologically speaking), a lateral view, the uncovering of strategies, techniques and process of the artwork using the strategies, techniques and processes of "foreign" media, types and formats allows us to uncover the obverse of visible phenomena. Film discourse distances itself from the way it is traditionally used and becomes more a way of thinking about its own location in film. This is multifaceted and

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As regards the institutional framework and from the point of view of production, it is symptomatic of this movement that the Czech Film Fund began publishing independent grant applications for the development and creation of experimental film that are often taken up by fine artists.

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For more on the intermedial image see Raymond BELLOUR, *Between-the-Images*, Zürich: JRP│Ringier – Dijon: Les presses du réel 2012.

complicates the traditionally configured situation of film, such as the distinction between objective recording and subjective shot, between object and subject as character and viewer. Film as a closed space of mediation is opened up. The medium then arises before our very eyes in its (usually concealed) processuality, while its mediality, materiality, reflexivity and performativity are displayed in the interstices. Film appears at the very moment it disappears, not as a method of capturing the front-of-camera reality, but as a way of thinking. The three examples I have analysed spotlight three different aspects of this thinking and three different ways of posing questions by means of film and video, its material, film composition, and by means of the space where film is presented. The questions that arise in the interstices between individual media then interrogate the nature of memory, manipulation and the loss of reality. The medium that has overlain our perception/vision is not concealed, but constantly revealed, and this enables us to think along with film and thanks to film about our own situation in a media-saturated world.