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Poetics of the Borders:
Meeting Points and Representational Border-Crossings
in Contemporary Central and Eastern European Cinema

The research of migrant or diasporic cinema represents a well-established tradition in film studies today. The analysis of movies representing migrants, narrating the story of migration, centred on displaced individuals and communities affected by the influx of migrants has produced insightful scholarship. From the influential concept proposed by Hamid Naficy in *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001), explaining the formation of "exilic and diasporic" practices in recent cinema, to the mapping of the cultural impact of migration, as is the case of the volume edited by Eva Rueschmann, *Moving Pictures, Migrating Identities* (2003), the issues of traversing from one culture to another and the various representations of the "Others" in movies remain an important part of academic debates.

Some recurrent approaches in recent literature view these experiences from the perspective of the formation of self-identity, representation of otherness and marginality, of transnational mobility, economic inequity or multicultural interactions. Previous works on these topics, such as Daniela Berghahn's and Claudia Sternberg's edited volume *European Cinema in Motion Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe* (2010), have discussed extensively the transformative power of migration in contemporary European societies. The movement of diasporic populations, especially the flow of migrants from "New Europe"

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(countries like Poland or Romania) to the "Old Europe" (mostly Western countries), to-gether with its complex transnational effects, either political, economic or social have been widely used as cinema subjects. The repercussions of migration in terms of self-representa-tions, the representation of alterity and the social identities, have also been integrated into many research subjects covering the effects of post-colonialism and post-communism.

Some of the topics published about the way in which cinema represents the post-Cold War Europe, when some of the largest migration processes have happened, have sometimes emphasized negative dimensions. Innumerable films, for example, about the lives of immigrants in the West have showcased the pervasive effects of criminal phenomena such as prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, disenfranchised and homeless migrants turning to criminal activities, or the trauma of dislocation and the impossibility of integration.

Today, these anxieties related to the violence and negative dimensions of migration are reiterated in many media narratives. Media representations either exaggerate the threat of "migrant caravans" or cultivate the fears of local communities, incited by scares about unruly foreign barbarians supposedly raping and killing, disrupting their "normal lives" or engaged in a menacing take-over of the "civilised West." All these themes have entered the public and political discourse and moviemakers have frequently included them in their productions. Responding to such negative stereotypes, researchers have increasingly focused on the darker aspects of migration in cinema. There are now many relevant discussions exploring thecomplex and sometimes problematic relationships between host countries and influxes of migrants and the related challenges of racism, xenophobia, inequality and illegal movement of people, as illustrated by Nilgün Bayraktar's *Mobility and Migration in Film and Moving Image Art: Cinema Beyond Europe* (2016) or William Brown's, Dina Iordanova's and Leshu Torchin's Moving People, *Moving Images: Cinema and Trafficking in the New Europe* (2016). As Central and Eastern Europe has been confronted with one of the most important geopolitical and demographic transformations in recent years, with a massive wave of migrants coming from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other places fleeing war, poverty and political repression, these issues have become part of media discourses and cinematic representations. Yet once again, this has resulted in a very narrow way of dealing with this phenomenon, concentrating on notions like "Fortress Europe" (e.g. Loshitzky 2010), or the more conflictual paradigm of the "clash of cultures," treating the manifestations of migration in binary terms.

In order to overcome the limitations of these interpretations, based on the oppositions that sometimes have, in fact, been invented by negative media narratives, frequently based on stereotypical portrayals or, alternatively, manipulations of reality and facts, another point of view is necessary. While the commonplace of dealing with migration is often related to violence, sexual aggression, or an imminent threat to "order," the notion of "breaking the boundaries" should be changed from the "traditional othering" to a more inclusive

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understanding, as suggested in Guido Rings' *The Other in Contemporary Migrant Cinema: Imagining a New Europe* (2016). Migration studies scholars are recognising that a more holistic approach in relation to migration is needed, and look at different ways of overcoming binary oppositions by taking into consideration the complexity of specific environments as spaces of contacts between cultures, languages, and communities (e.g. Rovisco, 2009), and developing more all-encompassing approaches.[1] Borders, redefined in this way, as places imbued with shared emotions, histories, spaces, and experiences, emphasise the quality of the contact, its meanings, and impact triggered by discovery of the Other (regardless of change happening or not).

Meeting Points and Representational Border-Crossings in Contemporary Central and Eastern European Cinema is intended as an effort to refocus the current scholarship of the cinema on migration to provide a contribution towards change of paradigm in researching representations of migration. The two main notions are proposed here: that of the poetics of the borders and meeting points. The "borders" and the "meeting points" are not defined in terms of contrasting identities, separating cultures and societies. Instead, they are oriented toward dealing with shared emotions, spaces, representations, and experiences and go beyond the stereotypical trope of locals meeting strangers, and "us" versus "them," instead emphasizing the quality of the contact and discovery of the Other (regardless of change happening or not). They represent narratives that are not mainly about widely perceived negative aspects of migration, such as conflicts, sexual exploitation, harassment, and trafficking, and seek to move beyond the concept that "they are coming/we are leaving." The metaphor of the "meeting point" is used here in order to redefine not only the spaces of contact, but also to close the emotional, psychological and cultural chiasmus between these meetings.

Content-wise, the special issue consists of two mutually related blocks, in which the notion of meetings points is examined globally and in Central and Eastern European context. The submissions are interrelated in a way that they take into consideration a variety of cinematic genres as well as novel and experimental approaches to poetics of migration of film, highlighting narrative tools which convey not only aesthetic, but also ethical aspects of cinematic representations of migrations spanning the twentieth and twenty first century.

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1 See for instance the concept of "borderscape," which looks at the complexity of specific environments as spaces of contacts between cultures, languages, and communities (e.g. Rovisco 2009; Brambilla 2015), and has found its application in the areas of social science research, especially geopolitics and human geography (Strüver 2005), art and humanities, especially when it comes to representations of different types of migrations and borders in a wide sense in literature and performative arts (e.g. Giudice and Giubilaro 2014; Schimanski 2015; Nyman 2017).

In her article "**Dis/Orienting the Border: the Poetics of Disorientation in Avant-Garde Accented Narratives**" Christina Vicera looks at migrations as spatial-temporal rather than purely spatial phenomena. By comparing works of two transnational filmmakers, Belgian-American Chantal Akerman's film *News from Home* (1977) and Lebanese-British Mona Hatoum's video installation *Measures of Distance* (1988), Vicera's approach allows insights into complex experiences of relocation beyond stereotypical linear timeline of migration narratives, which are usually constructed around a journey from one's place of origin to a foreign destination. In light of Hamid Naficy's reflections about accented structure of feelings, Vicera is looking into how past and present meet and overlap in order to convey complexity of experience of migration.

In the second contribution to this block, "**A Tiny Boat Lost at Sea: Trauma and Ethics in *Havarie* (2016)**," Anat Tzom Ayalon also grounds her discussion within Naficy's work on accented cinema as well as scholarship reflecting on voice and translatability of trauma (e.g. Caruth, Derrida, Lyotard, Levinas), asking whether motivating viewers to focus on human voices rather than human faces may be used as a narrative tool which challenges ingrained cinematic links between the visual and audial representations of migrations. On the example of the documentary consisting of a single shot depicting a boat with thirteen refugees adrift in the Mediterranean sea, Ayalon also explores novel and reconfiguring approaches to media expressions of trauma in general.

While the previous two articles explore subversive audial reconfigurations of the narrative of migration, in the final contribution to this block "**Towards a multicultural community: The Accommodation of Ethnic and Religious Minorities in the 'Migrant Comedy' Genre**," Adam Domalewski expands Daniela Berghahn's interpretation of the so-called "wedding film" into a more encompassing "migrant comedy" which emphasises a rather happy and optimistic ending to the process of integration to a new environment, especially in case of Muslim minorities. Even though these films offer quite stereotypical views of characters and society, and promote importance of traditional family values, they bring an interethnic and interreligious love story to the fore, successfully negotiating between multicultural integration and traditionally divisive ethnic, cultural, and religious values.

The Central and Eastern European block is introduced by Silke Martin's article which, similar to Vicera's and Ayalon's contributions, also builds on Naficy's concept of accented cinema, as well as Marcel Goldberg's (2008) take on dialect cinema in discussion of Stefan Schwietert's music documentary *Echoes of Home* (*Heimatklänge*, 2007) in which a spatial transposition between the Swiss Alps and a global, transnational space through sound is the point of departure for reconsideration of differences and similarities between dialect and accented cinema.

Martin's article is incorporated within the block on Central and Eastern European cinema because of our deliberate attempts to think of Central Europe beyond the stereotypical

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understanding imposed by the Cold War and post-Cold War geopolitical narratives, seeking to secure an undisputed political and cultural border along the line of the former Iron Curtain. Instead, Central Europe is seen as a cultural concept which re-incorporates cultural, linguistic, and historical developments shaping Europe for centuries. The complex and evolving notion of *Heimat* (homeland), which Martin's article very briefly and indirectly touches upon, specific for German collective memory, national and territorial identity, is one such concept. The concept of lost *Heimat* has had far reaching transnational applications in countries such as Poland, Czech Republic, Russia, as well as Romania, which in the postwar years all experienced forced relocation and expulsion millions of ethnic Germans from their ancestral homelands. Consequently, such events of transnational traumatic proportions resulted in nostalgia for lost homelands, memories (and postmemories) of them, as well as a number of literary and artistic works cutting across ethnic divides, seeking insights into experiences of forced migrations, loss of home, nostalgia, and search for belonging.[2]

One such representation is Luboš Ptáček's "**The Sudetes in Czech Cinema – a Political Space Trapped by National and Class Stereotypes**," which discusses Czechoslovak and Czech cinematic representations of the expulsion of over two million ethnic Germans from the border regions of Czechoslovakia, known as the Sudetes, in the days following the end of the Second World War. Ptáček maps cinematic responses to the events in this border region starting with the interwar films, continuing to the war-time Nazi and postwar communist propaganda, to allegoric films and revisionist attempts of the last decades of the twentieth century, in this way also demonstration how representations of forced migration reflects on the turbulent twentieth century history of the region.

The block then continues with two contributions on the theme of contemporary Romanian cinema. The first is Antonio Bonome's "**Formal and conceptual border-crossings in *Crulic-drumul spre dincolo* (2011)**," a close reading of Anca Damian's film *Crulic – The Path to Beyond* (*Crulic – drumul spre dincolo*, 2011) in the context of new Romanian cinema, particularly the way experimental genres within the film medium, such as animation, collage, and innovative narratological approaches, are used to represent a human story of suffering, but also to suggest a novel perspective to the theme of transnational violence which is a recurrent motif when it comes to artistic rendition of the issue of migration in contemporary Europe.

Doru Pop's paper "**Romanian diasporic cinema. Dislocation and paraphrastic forms of expression in recent migration films**" discusses three recent Romanian films, used as case studies for describing a larger, typological change, manifested in the national cinema. *La Gomera* (2019) directed by Corneliu Porumboiu, *Parking* (2019), directed

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2   See for instance Eigler 2014; Wienroeder-Skinner 2006.

by Tudor Giurgiu and *Lemonade* (2019) directed by Ioana Uricaru share as a common denominator the fact that they are films taking place abroad, are shot entirely or partially in a foreign country, describing the experiences of Romanians living abroad as immigrants. These productions are not simple co-productions, nor do they provide the typical depictions of re-localized experiences. They disclose a change that allows us to establish some conceptual distinctions between migration cinema, that is films depicting the experience of migrants, and diasporic cinema, productions that represent experiences that lead to changes in identity formation. These new narratives indicate a shift not only in the cinematic productions, with Romanian film crews working in international and transnational contexts, but also a transformation of the social imaginary.

The special issue continues with an interview with Hanno Höffer, a musician, internationally awarded film director and producer of German origin born in Timişoara and now living in Bucharest, who reflects on his own life in the border region of Romania, multilingualism and multiculturalism of the region, as well as his own migrant experiences in Germany, and artistic take on contemporary Romanian history. The issue concludes with the review of Cătălina Simion-Călin's monograph *Autorul de film și Cinematograful Exilului* (2018), in which the author discusses poetics of a number of Romanian and foreign film directors in exile.

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