Thinking Space in Cinema and Literature

Call for papers

Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3
Département Cinéma et Audiovisuel

&

New York University (NYU)
Department of French Literature, Thought and Culture

With the participation of the
Department of Media, Culture and Communication (NYU)
Université Paris Diderot

Dates: March 7, 8, & 9, 2019.
Place: New York University (NYU)
La Maison française, 16 Washington Mews
New York, NY 10003, USA.

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Following our first conference, “Thinking Literature and Cinema Through Visual Culture” which took place at the Maison de la recherche de la Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, April 12-14, 2018, we wish to continue our reflections by exploring the question of the relations between cinema and literature through the prism of space. Space is one of the aspects of visual culture within which literature and cinema meet, as we observed during our 2018 conference: common or distinct imaginaries of space; filmed spaces, gestures and writings; haptic forms; the relationship between the apparatus (dispositif), displacements and written or film adaptations, etc.

In the wake of Michel Collot’s concept of “literary geography,” we would like to explore the problematics of space by distinguishing three approaches.

1) The “geography” of literary and cinematic creation examines the spatial context in which works are produced from a historical, social and cultural point of view. This perspective would be constituted by a literary-critical approach typified by Madame de Staël, Michelet and Taine. In the manner of Michel de Certeau’s “operation of marking out boundaries” (bornage) cinema and literature, as well as the critical discourses of which they are the object, form a cadastral map that differentiates works on the basis of a geopolitics of nations, of social groups (“art-house” and “popular” cinema), and of genres and media (critical discourses on the “purity” of the literary work and its “betrayal” by the film adaptation). Placing the emphasis on the (often de-hierarchized) circulation of images and sounds, visual culture contributes to an interrogation of these boundaries. Opposed to this “geographic” approach to literature and cinema would be those critical approaches that seek to go beyond its geo-politics, from the perspective of the genesis of works as well as their reception of its geo-politics, from the perspective of the genesis of works as well as their reception. This could take the form of a universalist hypothesis (Bazin), deterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari), a dialogic approach (Bakhtin), an “archipelagic thinking” (Glissant), or of cultural hybridity that undermines the social determinisms and cultural essentialization that result from the Nation-State paradigm (Stam/Shoat).
2) **Geocriticism** explores spatial narratives as the result of perception and the substance of an imaginary. Through the intervention of the perspective of subjectivity, any space becomes a “lived space” (Lynch, Frémont). Geocriticism analyzes the imaginary formed by spatial images that emerge in texts (Bachelard, Mitterand, Collot) and films (Lefebvre, Gardies, Harper/Rayner). In continuity with our first conference and previous works, cinema and literature thus constitute an ecosystem of spatial images and narratives made of chiastic borrowings and exchanges: literature is rife with “pre-cinematisms” (Bourget/Nacache, Soulez/Jullier) and cinema borrows literary *topoi* such as the Romantic “homme-paysage” or the Baudelairian aesthetic of shock. Opposed to this spatial imaginary in literature and film would be those aesthetics of ambiguity that weaken traditional semiotic codings of spaces henceforth “without quality” (the Deuleuzian Time-Image, aesthetics of emptiness, *détournements*, iconoclastic practices).

3) **Geopoetics** would study the relations between space, forms and genres, both literary and cinematic. The semiotic perspective of texts (Genette) takes on spatial modalities: typography and the materiality of the book considered as object; spectatorship and modalities of the apparatus (Barthes, Metz, Baudry); stylistic figures made possible by the gap between apparent signified and the real signified; effects of symmetry and montage, both lexical and perspectival; intertextual play; spatial and visual dimensions inscribed within narratives (Starobinski, Rousset, Dällenbach, Metz). We can subsequently understand space as a structure of representation. The study of literary and cinematic morphology from the geopoetic point of view allows one to apprehend the intersection of the readable, the visible and the degree of trust that the reader or spectator places in the succession of words and images. Geopoetics further permits one to explore the spatial dimension of trust and *fiducia* (Valéry) through the relationship that it maintains with visual apparatuses and modes of perception (absorption, reflexivity, other modes of attention), made contemporary particularly by the concept of “visual culture” considered as a heuristic field.
**Areas of research:**

- What new geographies of literary and cinematic creation can we imagine in the context of digital media, fluxes of information and tensions between cultural hybridity and national identity?
- Are representations of space in literature and cinema vectors of a naturalization of ideologies or, on the contrary, foundations of a reflexive critique?
- What influences do cinema, literature and philosophy exercise over one another in strategies of “detrerritorialization?”
- Can we advance the hypothesis of a “geology” of cinema and literature whose meaning goes beyond that the “geography” of national, historical and sociological frameworks?
- What relationship can we establish between the space of literary and cinematic narratives, representations, and the history of optical apparatuses (updated through the concept of “visual culture” in the work of Jonathan Crary)?
- In what ways does the concept of “artialisation” (Montaigne/Roger) operate within spatial representations in cinema and literature?
- To what extent are writers, directors, theoreticians and film critics influenced by the study of space in the social sciences (ethnology, anthropology, geography)?
- What are the spatial modalities of collective participation and social bonds in cinema, literature and critical discourses (collective and individual viewings, new cinephilic practices in the era of digital media)?

| Abstracts (500 words max., in English or French) as well as a bio-bibliography must be emailed before **June 15, 2018:** nyuparis3conference@gmail.com |

**Select bibliography:**


Gracq, Julien : *En lisant, en écrivant*. José Corti (1980).

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Paquot, Thierry et Younès, Chris (dir.): *Espace et lieu dans la pensée occidentale*, La Découverte (2012).


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Vidal de la Blache, Paul : Tableau de géographie de la France. La Table ronde (1994).