

Minutes

From the doctoral defence of Ms. Linda Petříková,

Held on 5th June 2014 at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague.

Title of the dissertation: “Against Adaptation: Toward Transdisciplinarity and Minor Cinema.”

Present: Prof. PhDr. Martin Procházka, CSc (chair of the committee), Eric Roraback, PhD. (Charles University supervisor), Mgr. Linda Petříková (candidate), PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M.A. (Charles University opponent), members of the public, Barbora Hrušková (recording secretary).

Absent: Prof. Richard Burt (University of Florida opponent)

The chair of the committee, professor Procházka, welcomed all present and invited the supervisor to introduce the candidate.

The supervisor, doctor Roraback, introduced the candidate as one of his most accomplished students and summarized the progress of her studies at the department, praising her willingness to engage in highly sophisticated conceptual theories as she does in her thesis and finding it inspirational to work with someone like her.

The chair thanked the supervisor for his candid recommendation and invited the candidate to briefly present her dissertation.

The candidate acquainted all present with the content of her dissertation. She said that while preparing the ground for her argument, she had discovered that there was a sense of crisis in adaptation studies, which had been over the past decades trying to escape the confines of the predominant fidelity discourse. She proposed that the way to address this issue is to explore and encourage new transdisciplinary approaches to adaptation.

The theoretical framework of the thesis formed the writings of French critical thinkers: Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Rancière and André Bazin. As Deleuze and Rancière do not address the issue of adaptation directly, only that which was relevant in their theories was discussed.

The most important argument for the thesis and the basic premise that had been developed from Deleuze was his idea that film is essentially a pre-linguistic or pre-verbal material meaning that images were there before language and when we watch films we apply linguistic patterns through images in which a narrative is involved. Rancière reevaluates Deleuze’s film-related concepts and takes them even further when he talks about gaps between fables and reality, the fundamental rupture between a fable and cinema. In his theory, fable is seen as false and cinema is seen as truthful; adaptation is then perceived as the negotiation of the two.

Three concrete examples of films to which the theories were applied were given to manifest how the theories could be put into practice: Jean Luc-Godard’s *King Lear*, as an exemplary case for the director’s films are mélange of different arts, Orson Welles’ *Chimes at Midnight*, as Welles is an important author of Shakespeare’s adaptations with radical and unorthodox opinions in terms of creating ruptures between stories and histories in Shakespeare’s plays, and finally Akira Kurosawa’s adaptation of *King Lear*, which is often regarded as the most faithful to Shakespeare

despite the fact that there is absolutely no use of Shakespeare's language. The explanation as to where this illusion comes from is provided.

The concluding part of the thesis was devoted to the justification of the study of film adaptation as an individual discipline, that is to say separated from the framework of film theory. The candidate said that her ultimate goal was to argue that film adaptation should be regarded more as a place where arts stand next to each other.

The chair thanked the candidate for her presentation and invited the opponents to present their assessment and questions.

The Charles University opponent, doctor Nováková, stated that her review of the work is very positive and recommended the dissertation for defence.

She appraised the organisation of the dissertation, structure, and especially the candidate's "ability to find a way through the dark forests of Deleuzian theory" and the way the analytical passages reflect back on to the theory. The opponent's overall favourable impression had been spoiled by a few minor formal flaws.

Inspired by the meaning of the dissertation and by the concepts there, the opponent commented on three specific areas of interest reaching beyond the thesis itself. First, she enquired about the idea of an adaptation of a stage play (how a film adapts a stage, what are those conventions of theatre the directors ignore, the relation between a stage text and a screenplay). Second, she had missed some treatment of the relation between the stage and the film in the case of the *Chimes at Midnight*, which was originally a play by Orson Welles, and enquired whether the fact that it was a stage play first would change the candidate's chapter on Welles or her ideas about his attitude. Third, she commented on the candidate's focus on minor cinema directors and other Shakespeare directors' relevance within her concept of adaptation, such as for example Kenneth Branagh and his adaptation of *Henry V*.

The chair thanked the Charles University opponent and proceeded to read the assessment and questions of Professor Richard Burt, the University of Florida opponent.

The opponent recommended the thesis without hesitation. He enquired about the concentration on adaptation and film only and why should we think about adaptation in the framework of film theory and why other forms of adaptation are not discussed. He suggested that the word "transdisciplinarity" in the title of the thesis should be replaced by a more common term such as "transmediality" or "interdisciplinarity," especially given the titular word "seems to disappear" in the thesis itself. He was concerned about the relation between the Deleuzian approach and the candidate's motivation for the selection of films, as her thesis seems to "straddle two fields, film adaptation studies and Shakespeare in film studies."

The chair invited the candidate to answer the questions of both the opponents.

The candidate thanked both the opponents for their comments and proceeded to answer prof. Burt's questions concerning the title of the thesis. She explained the use of the word "adaptation" in the title. The initial intention had been to focus on the adaptation as a passage purely between literature

and film but it had soon become clear that such passage is impossible to pin-down or isolate from much larger topics and from the media. By not specifying the term “adaptation” in the title, the candidate was aiming at multiple interpretations of the title, which the phrase “against film adaptation” would have weakened. The non-specification enabled her to keep the discussion between several interpretations open: the first one is going against the adequacy of the term as applied in general in arts, its scientific connotations including hierarchy and evolution; the second is going against the traditional understanding of adaptation as a fidelity-driven product, against the idea that film has some kind of obligation to literature; and the third, interpreting the title as a means to describe how art is capable of resisting to what it adapts; this process is contained in the films themselves.

The paradox between Deleuze’s concept of minor art and films of minor cinema that interact one way or another with the work of the most canonical author, Shakespeare, makes the films very powerful and unique. The paradoxical gap between the major and the minor had been the fuel for the selection of the films. Shakespearean film adaptation studies had thus provided the richest study material. The fact that Shakespeare is so deeply embedded in popular culture and subsequently in our collective memory, as Godard incorporates in his films, adds multiple layers for a film director to negotiate in the art of film. “Forgetting Shakespeare” is necessary, as Godard demonstrates, for a Shakespearean film to exist. In his *King Lear*, Godard has Shakespeare disappear only to meet him in person and start reinventing an image simultaneously with his play.

The use of the term “transdisciplinary” instead of “intertextuality” or “interdisciplinary” is problematic; the candidate was hoping that transdisciplinarity would transpire from the text rather than being described or theorized. Transdisciplinarity calls for a redefining of knowledge, for a dismantling rather than combining of established approaches. The term is mostly used in connection with Deleuze’s method in philosophy in terms that he does not want to subject cinema to philosophical discourse but argues for them to be on the same level.

As regards the concept of minor cinema, Deleuze limits the use mostly to post-colonial films. A crucial and often overlooked aspect of his concept is the idea that the definition of a minor art has less to do with the sociopolitical milieu in which it was created: minor describes the “revolutionary conditions” within the great or established literature. The concept of the minor was developed by Deleuze in connection to the works of Franz Kafka but can quite easily be applied to other art forms. As for the term “art film” prof. Burt uses, the candidate did not use it anywhere in her thesis for the same reasons we do not speak about art literature or art painting. Especially Orson Welles would object to this term because his primary intention in his Shakespeare adaptation was to reverse the high-brow and the low-brow, bring Shakespeare to the masses by a means of a popular movie.

In terms of the issue how drama adaptation would differ from the adaptation of a novel, given the ability of both the theatre and cinema to resist the text, there would not be a distinction. The boundaries between disciplines are much more fluid than we may think. Theatre is often perceived as an art form that is closer to cinema than any other art form. This is a false notion. Both Welles and Godard disagree with such notion and link film to painting rather because film was invented as an art of lights and shadows and only subsequently became a narrative.

The Charles University opponent enquired whether the candidate found any information on the theatrical production of *Chimes at Midnight*.

The candidate replied that the play was originally staged in Dublin as *Five Kings*, Welles also tried to bring it to New York and direct a few productions, but unfortunately there is no record of what Welles' theatre productions looked like.

The supervisor also pointed to the fact that the translations of Shakespeare's work into theatre (*Five Kings*) and film (*Chimes at Midnight*) was a long standing project for Welles.

The Charles University opponent suggested that it was indeed a transmedial project.

The chair noted that the general discussion had already stated and encouraged further remarks. He himself found some problems with the Deleuzian transdisciplinarity as he thought that the concept existed because not sufficient attention was given to the Deleuzian notion of sign and its deficiencies. One has to go back to Deleuze's unjustly neglected book *Proust and Signs*, and consider certain shortcomings of his sign theory, which is surprisingly new and bright in contrast to the structuralist notion of sign, but at the same time establishes certain limits and limitations (such as the complete neglect of the issue of to what extent it incorporates the theory of gestures and to what extent it connects the film theory with gesture) which are projected on and determine Deleuze's later works on cinema. When considered along with his idea of a literary machine, we have to ask whether cinema is also a kind of machine and if so then what kind of structure or process this machine represents.

The candidate said she mentioned very briefly the machine in connection with Godard's methods of montage.

The chair referred to a recently defended MA thesis on montage in Samuel Beckett and Sergei Eisenstein's influence on Beckett and his realisation that it has to do with the idea of the machine, which is also very significantly present in *Kafka: Toward a Theory of Minor Literature*. There are two origins of this kind of philosophy of machine: the desiring machines from *Anti-Oedipus* which precedes *Kafka* and the work of art as a machine. However these two concepts do not in fact communicate in Deleuze and because of that there is a certain discrepancy in his later approach to cinema. The underlined concept of dynamic structure is not homogenous enough to sustain and support the whole theory. But at the same time it is present in the idea of minor culture because minor culture works by means of certain machinist structure (it is impersonal). In terms of wider and deeper philosophical reflection, this question deserves more attention. Are we producing a kind of new theory for signs based on the understanding of heterogeneous dynamic structures? Then we do not have enough firm ground on which the heterogeneous dynamic structures could be because Deleuze somehow refrains from stating anything.

He acknowledged that both the prof. Burt's questions and doctor Nováková's questions on the affinity between theatre and film focus on and are extremely relevant to such pertinent issue.

He returned to the issue of the title and asked about the connotation of the term "adaptation" which establishes a hierarchy in the sense that adaptation is secondary to the original as a kind of

imperfect copy of the original alluding to Deleuze's notion of the copy-original relationship as the relationship of power rather than a relationship of resemblance.

The candidate replied that she had never thought about adaptation as something secondary.

The chair thanked the candidate and then ended the discussion.

The public part was closed and the committee proceeded to the secret ballot.

In terms of the Charles University conventions, the committee voted unanimously (yes: 4, no: 0, abstained: 0) in favour of conferring the doctoral title.

The chair thanked everyone for their contributions and congratulated doctor Petříková for her success.

Recording secretary: Barbora Hrušková

Chair's signature: