

# In between (of) cinema and literature

## Richard de Brabander

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Studied philosophie and science of literature in Rotterdam and Leiden. He teaches at the Ichtus Academy Rotterdam and publishes articles on French philosophy of difference. He is finishing a thesis on Blanchot and Derrida, that will be published in 2002.

Speaking of the relation between film and literature, what first comes to mind is the screen-version of a novel. But the reverse also occurs. As Franz-Josef Albersmeier has described in his monograph on the relation between theatre, film and literature in France, the 'ciné-roman' and the 'ciné-poem' take a film for their motif and follow a cinematic structure.<sup>1</sup> Albersmeier does not conceive this relation between film and literature in terms of representation but in terms of intermediality. The interaction of different artistic media engenders new genres in literature. This interaction requires an intermedial approach: for an adequate interpretation of *Charlot mystique* of Louis Aragon we have to relate this poem to Chaplin's film *The Floorwalker*. Albersmeier's notion of intermediality analyses the crossing of borders between artistic disciplines and media and describes the effects of these interactions on their respective audiences.

However, to my opinion his approach restricts intermediality to an extension of intertextuality and multimediality: intermediality as a result of semantic and semi-otic cross-references between media. The intermedial reading of poems for example only uncovers references to specific films or paintings, which in their turn refer to other poems, novels, plays or operas. This kind of intermedial reading however does not specify the 'inter' or the in-between that is produced as a reception-aesthetic experience.<sup>2</sup>

## Movement-image/Time-image

The distinction between movement-image and time-image, made by Gilles Deleuze in his books on cinema<sup>3</sup>, may be helpful to reflect upon the difference between intermediality and multimediality. These two general types of images are differentiated into more specific images. The movement-image consists of perception-image, action-image and affection-image that are realized as montage or *in-*

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<sup>1</sup> See: Franz-Josef Albersmeier, *Theater, Film und Literatur in Frankreich. Medienwechsel und Intermedialität*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1992.

<sup>2</sup> See for a more extensive analysis: Richard de Brabander & Henk Oosterling, "Politiek gevoelig. Bij wijze van afleiding" in: *InterAkta 2, Politiek gevoelig. Intermedialiteit in theater, dans en literatuur*. CFK, Rotterdam 1999, p. 29 ev.

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1. The movement-image*. The Athlone Press, London 1986 (1983); *Cinema 2. The time-image*. The Athlone Press, London 1989 (1985).

*terassement*<sup>4</sup>. A film can be overdetermined by one of the images, but the others always play their part. So movement-image and time-image do not equal different genres, like westerns, comedy and detective. They have their own characteristics that produce different effects in all kind of genres. But whatever image Deleuze refers to, every image is constituted by an inbetween (entre-deux) or interval: a gap BETWEEN the action and the reaction”<sup>5</sup>. The same counts for intermediality: it is not a qualification of a genre, but a trait of medial interactions with their specific effects.

The movement-image, which Deleuze generally relates to pre-war classical cinema, follows a sensory-motor scheme: characters in certain situations react upon what they perceive. The movement-image proceeds by narratological and linear incisions and references. Action sequences have a (chrono)logical order which is represented through actions in an spatial configuration. Whether the film starts with a present situation the character is confronted with, or with a flash-back or a flash-forward is not of much importance. Relevant is that in the movement-image past, present and future are clearly distinguished from each other. The spectator immediately recognizes whether a scene refers to something that has happened in the past or alludes to something that is going to happen in the future.

Deleuze conceives the movement-image as a homogeneous structure. This clarifies how images refer to each other and to the whole: the story being told as an open structure that encompasses the perception of every action. Unlike the movement-image the time-image does not proceed by rational incisions and references. Italian neo-realism and French nouvelle vague introduced new forms of cinematographic reality. The time-image no longer follows the chronological order and narratological representation of actions and reactions. Time-image makes past, future and present indistinguishable. Crucial for the time-image is the coexistence of several levels of duration. As such the time-image breaks with the Aristotelian *principium contradictionis* that defines something as not being *simultaneously* its own opposite: it is to be or not to be. According to Deleuze, their coexistence defines the imaginary.

### **Connection and intervals**

As Deleuze states in *Negotiations* (1990) the time-image changes the relation between images, text and sound into a fundamental dissymmetry of these media. As a result connections between these different media cannot be considered as an *ars combinatoria*. A simple combination of media is only complementary and as such proceeds in accordance with the logic of movement-images. Sheer combination of media constitutes a homogeneous structure in which each medium act and reacts upon one another and more or less functions as an illustration. It is this combination that defines *multimediality*.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Assemblage’ is the english translation of ‘agencement’. See for a critique of this translation and a more extensive analysis: Henk Oosterling & Siebe Thissen, “Bestemmingsplan. Vertalen is transformeren” in: *Chaos ex machine. Het ecosofisch werk van Félix Guattari op de kaart gezet*. CFKj1, Rotterdam 1998, pp. 15-16.

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema*, o.c., p. 61.

Every film combines different media as sound, image and text and uses different artistic disciplines as literature, theatre, dance and music. However, to connect media does not mean to combine them. Connecting has to do with a fundamental dissymmetry between media. As such a connection of media is supplementary in the sense Jacques Derrida uses the term: a surplus is generated that cannot be reduced to an *ars combinatoria* precisely because it constitutes the possibility of the connections.

Deleuze phrases this as 'rhizomatic interaction of heterogeneous media'. This mediamatic heterogenesis does not follow rules that prescribe the interaction in advance. It proceeds in an unpredictable way and produces new realities on a reception level. Media do no longer represent nor solely mediate. Interactions have become 'autonomous' to the extent that they produce their own 'virtual' reality. The mediamatic heterogenesis brings forth an endless multiplicity that branches off in every direction. It offers multiple entrances and has neither beginning nor end. According to Deleuze entering this rhizomatic dynamics posits the spectator in the middle or the in-between. This middle or in-between has nothing to do with the Aristotelian middle, known as the Doctrine of the Mean, and can neither be represented nor located between two media. The middle or in-between is not a place: it is a continuous becoming. It cannot be identified, because it is a duration and a sensation or – as it is phrased in *What is Philosophy?* (1991) – “a compound of percepts and affects”<sup>6</sup>. The becoming in-between is neither an imitation nor a simulation of the in-between. The in-between is not a third element that combines two or more media, rather it affirms the lacking of this third element in producing new realities.

### **‘Cineliterature’**

How does literature relate to cinema, perceived from this intermedial perspective? I briefly focus on two recent novels in which film - on a content level – plays an important role: *Boy* (2000) of the Dutch writer J. Bernlef and *Glamorama* (1998) by Bret Easton Ellis.<sup>7</sup> Both novels are situated in America: *Boy* at the beginning, *Glamorama* at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike the ciné-poem these novels do not refer to specific films. It is the interaction between cinematographic and literary images that has a specific relevance for introducing another configuration of cinema and literature, a configuration I prefer to qualify as ‘cineliterature’.

*Boy* tells the story of William Stevens, reporter of a local newspaper who investigates the murder of the filmstar Norma ‘Polly’ Todd at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the novel William remarks that the first films did not have a plot. They only show events like the famous arrival of the train: people coming out of a factory, a ship swaying on the ocean, a family drinking chocolate in the garden. Daily life is shown just as it is: slowly moving, leading nowhere. It is precisely these plotless events that Bernlef admires in the films of John Cassavetes, on

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<sup>6</sup> Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, London/New York 1994 (1991), p. 164.

<sup>7</sup> This approach differs from the opposite procedure: for instance the film version (2000) of Ellis’ *American Psycho* (1991). This filmversion once more proved the impossibility of translating literary suspense into cinematographic horror.

which he has written an essay in 1998. Cassavetes' films are characterised by absence of plot and absence of tempo. The sequences of events do not follow a narrative structure. The order of images lack intention or orientation: they do not lead to a specific goal. Although Bernlef does not use this terminology, one can nevertheless conclude that the films of Cassavetes are rhizomatic.<sup>8</sup> But *Boy* is not a novel without a plot. Quite the opposite I should say. Its development is like a Hollywood film: William Stevens discovers the truth about the murder and the innocence of the accused deaf-and-dumb boy, a truth that Stevens is unable to prove. He publishes his version of the murder, is fired, decides to become a writer and finds himself in the arms of Amy who he has met during his investigation. Given this narrative structure, it seems justified to conclude that *Boy* is a literary pendant of the movement-image. However, this is too premature a conclusion. As William says at the beginning of the novel, people get annoyed seeing movies in which nothing happens. They want stories and stories they get. But when we take into account the references made to these first plotless films and the hyperbolic way the novel develops as a story that contradicts these films, on another level *Boy* could also be read as a parody of Hollywood film with its movement-image. As a parody it calls attention to both the artificiality of the novel and the artificiality of daily life. What seems real and plausible appears to be no more than an artificial plot. *Boy* is written as it is in order to seduce the reader to accept artificiality to be real. This can be acknowledged as a weak as well as a strong point.

In *Glamorama* initially the plot is as clear as it is in *Boy*. The model and actor Victor Ward - the Boy of the Moment - is young, dynamic, handsome and rich. He is going to be the owner of a new nightclub in Manhattan. He knows the rich and famous, so success is assured. But gradually he gets involved with a group of terrorists who happened to be filmmakers, producing a violent film. From the moment Victor meets them he becomes part of the film they are making. Ellis does not make a clear-cut distinction between life and film. As a consequence it becomes unclear whether Victor's actions are part of the film or of his life as told in the novel. This raises the question whether the film is part of the novel. Perhaps film and novel coincide. Since what happens to Victor in the second part of the novel is connected with his history, it is also possible that he already acts in the film from the beginning of the book. Furthermore the confusion between novel and film does not only account for the second part of the novel. All this makes it impossible to settle the question whether Victor and the other characters are actors or not. Does *Glamorama* tell the story of Victor Ward getting involved in terrorist action that is covered up by filmmaking? Or does it coincide with the film that tells the story of the actor and model Victor Ward who, against his will, gets involved in terrorism? For Ellis the impossibility to decide if someone is acting or not is not only a matter of 'literary montage'. He also wants to point out that the impossibility to decide what is real is a constitutive feature of western culture of

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<sup>8</sup> Deleuze analyses Cassavetes' films in *Cinema 1* and 2, respectively pp. 121, 207 and p. 192: "The greatness of Cassavetes' work is to have undone the story, plot, or action, but also space, in order to get to attitudes as to categories which put time into body, as well as thought into life"(192).

the spectacle. In his novels, people do not recognise each other from what they are, but from what or how they look like: his protagonists are mediamatic models. Neither in *Boy* nor in *Glamorama* film and novel mirror one another. They enact a relation between film and literature that goes beyond the cinematographic adaptation of the novel or the poetic adaptation of a film. As a result of this conflation *Glamorama* can be seen as a literary pendant of the time-image, as Deleuze applied the term. In *Boy* this is less manifest, but not totally absent. As a parody of the movement-image it transforms the relation between perception and (re)action. Does William (re)act upon a situation or does he act in a plot? Both on content and on a formal level the conflation of different media produces a fundamental dissymmetry between media, provoking a distortion or destabilisation of identification and representation. Cineliterature deconstructs the metaphysical opposition between being and appearance raised to the square, thereby producing the experience of the inter of inbetween in connecting media.