



Young Europe:

realities, dilemmas and opportunities for
the new generation

Barcelona, 16-18 July 2014



Multisection Workshop:

Film, Theater and the Political

Friday 18 July 2014, 16:00h, IEC

Film and performing arts play an important role in shaping the political dimensions of culture, far beyond a narrow understanding of the political as propaganda and political programs. They affect the foundation of the political: the basic ideas of humanity, the good society, the role of the body, gender issues, justice and other basic dimensions of collective human life that give rise to the beliefs, organizations and institutions we live by. Theater as an embodied performance has done so for thousands of years, and throughout the 20th century film, as a screened performance, has done the same. But film and theater are ambiguous social and aesthetic media. On the one hand, political powers exploit them to underpin their position by a sophisticated use of visual aesthetics and a conscious staging of political events as controlled performances. On the other hand, and often with identical techniques, the same media are also powerful instruments provoking a radically reassessment of the values, habits and power relations of social life. The panel will focus on this ambiguity in a historical and contemporary perspective.

16:00 – 16:05 Introduction, by Svend Erik Larsen

16:05 – 17:45 Speakers:

Patrizia Lombardo

David Lynch's challenge to Hollywood

César Domínguez

Global Novel, Silent Cinema and the Great War

Susana Onega

The function of art in the representation of the Holocaust and the danger of banalisation and political misappropriation



17:45 – 18:00 Break

18:00 – 19:30 Speakers:

Marko Juvan

From the Political Theater in Yugoslav Socialism to the Political Performance in Global Capitalism: The Case of Slovenian Performing Arts

Jakob Ladegaard

Capital Fun: Economy and Politics in the Comedies of Marlowe and Jonson

Svend Erik Larsen

The Court Case: The Political and Theatrical Moment

Abstracts and bios:



César Domínguez is associate professor of comparative literature at the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, where he holds the Jean Monnet Chair “The Culture of European Integration.” His last two books are *World Literature. A Reader* (Routledge, 2013; co-edited with the Theo D’haen and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen) and *Literatura europea comparada* (Arco/Libros, 2013). Member of AE.

Global Novel, Silent Cinema and the Great War

The aim of my paper is to discuss *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (Dir. Rex Ingram, 1921), which stands as the first movie in the immediate aftermath of WWI that is based upon a novel, namely, *Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis* (1916), by the Spanish writer Vicente Blasco Ibáñez. My analysis will focus, on the one hand, in the relationships between Ingram’s movie and the WWI’s immediate aftermath cinema, mainly D.W. Griffith’s 1918 *Hearts of the World*, Charlie Chaplin’s 1918 *Shoulder Arms* and King Vidor’s 1925 *The Big Parade*, the latter being the second movie that is based upon literary materials (Joseph Farnham’s play *The Big Parade* and Laurence Stallings’s autobiographical novel *Plumes*). On the other hand, I will concentrate on how Ingram’s movie is the result of a complex translation process, which includes the translation of Blasco Ibáñez’s novel from Spanish into English by Charlotte Brewster Jordan and the adaptation of the English translation into a movie. The interest lies in both being the first WWI movie that is built upon a novel and that the Spanish writer precisely aimed at reaching a world audience, in contrast to the scant attention paid to the study of scripts—and less so scripts that derive from literature—in silent cinema.



Marko Juvan, MAE, is literary theorist and comparatist, head of the Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies at the Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), and professor of Slovenian literature at the University of Ljubljana. He has been member of the REELC/ENCLS Executive Committee and the ICLA/AILC Committee on Literary Theory. In addition to numerous articles and edited volumes (e.g., *World Literatures from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Century*, special issue of the *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 2013), his recent book publications include *History and Poetics of Intertextuality* (2008), *Literary Studies in Reconstruction* (2011), and *Prešernovska struktura in svetovni literarni sistem* (The Prešernian Structure and the World Literary System, 2012). Member of AE.

From the Political Theater in Yugoslav Socialism to the Political Performance in Global Capitalism: The Case of Slovenian Performing Arts

The political theater is usually defined as the theater in which politics figures as the dominant content and the ultimate goal. Granted, the matters of *polis* had been constitutive of Western theatre and drama from Aeschylus' *The Persians* to Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Moreover, the modern political drama in the narrow sense of the word emerged in the aftermath of the French Revolution (Büchner's semi-documentary *Dantons Tod*), while the pronounced political theater started in the 1920s with avant-garde practices of Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht. Notwithstanding these traditions, the term "political theater" as a new trend gained currency in Slovenia and Yugoslavia in the 1980s. During the crisis of Yugoslav socialist political system, the political theater (e.g., Ristić's *Missa in A-Minor* performed in 1980/81 by Mladinsko gledališče in Ljubljana) was conceived as a kind of (post-)avant-garde cathartic ritual that stages politics as Fate and an individual as its tragic victim. At that time, the political theater in Slovenia and Yugoslavia was predominantly oriented towards the historical past, attempting to unveil the traumatic events that, although tabooed by the official ideology, founded the existing political rule. The underlying narrative of *Missa* and similar performances is Mallet du Pan's adage "the Revolution devours its children," this time referring to the international Communist movement (its fractional conflicts, Stalinist purges, dissidents, etc.) Through the open dramatic form, collective acting, the montage of documentary material, testimonies, and fiction, and drawing on the avant-garde *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the political theater of the 1980s, aimed to radically break with the conventions of the bourgeois stage and transgress the aesthetic formalism of "socialist modernism." During the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the wars in the Balkans, and the transition period, the political theater in Slovenia lost much of its edge. However, it is in the wake of the global economic crisis that it is again becoming topical. Rejecting the tragic mode, it has morphed into a radically critical post-dramatic performance that, using multimedia and life documents, undermines any kind of dramatic illusion and tackles the social contradictions of the actual present, which the mainstream media tend to downplay, for example the position of the Roma people in the Slovenian "national state" (Hrvatini's *Slovenian*



National Theater of 2007). Instead of rehearsing the “master narrative” of Revolution, the new political performance focuses on small narratives and local happenings, in which class, gender, racial, and other conflicts of the global capitalism come to the fore, while also reflecting the very socio-economic conditions and the political impact of the performance itself.



Jakob Ladegaard, Associate Professor in Comparative Literature, Aarhus University. Areas of interest include the relations between literature, cinema and politics. Recent publications include ‘On the Frontier of Politics - Ideology and the Western in Jerzy Skolimowski’s *Essential Killing* and Jim Jarmusch’s *Dead Man*’, *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 4:2, 2013 and ‘Spatial Affects: Body and Space in Philippe Grandrieux’s *La Vie nouvelle*’, Lars Sætre et al. (eds.): *Exploring Text and Emotions* (Aarhus University Press, 2014). AE Burgen Scholar 2011.

Capital Fun: Economy and Politics in the Comedies of Marlowe and Jonson

The Early Modern era was a time of great changes in Western Europe. Capitalist economies and institutions began to take shape fueled by private trade and colonialist expansion. Meanwhile, political power was centralized in absolute monarchies that fought to control the increasingly global trade networks. This political-economic goal and recommendations for its accomplishment were described in early works of mercantilist thought around 1600 (de Malynes, Mun). At the same time, political theories of natural law (Suárez, Grotius) struggle to articulate the resulting tensions between private economic agents and state power. All this has been described in histories of economic and political thought. However, if we wish to understand how such latent conflicts affected the imaginaries, power relations and practices of daily social life, we would do well to turn to literature – and especially to comedies. For comedy is a genre that specifically deals with the ways in which abstract concepts and conflicts *work* in the material life of ordinary people. In this talk, I will focus on comedies by English authors (Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* and Ben Jonson’s *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*), and show how they reflect critically on the political-economic historical realities and discourses of their time.



Svend Erik Larsen is professor emer. of Comparative Literature, Aarhus U, chair of the section of Literary and Theatrical Studies, AE, and member of the AE Board of Trustees. He has published books and numerous articles on literature and cultural history and is at present working on a book project on Forgiveness as a Cultural Challenge. Member of AE.



The Court Case: The Political and Theatrical Moment

Theater does not only happen on stage. Sociologists like Erving Goffmann have likened human behavior in public space with a dramatic event. But most prominently, the court case shares essential features with a dramatic performance: it is a rhetorically staged verbal interaction, based on bodily presence, with a behavioral and verbal institutionalization in an ordered time sequence like scenes or acts in a drama. Apart from certain examples of crime fiction where the court case and the smart lawyer, as it were, take center stage, the court case had, across media and genres, dramatic genres included, marked what I will call the theatrical moment within a culture where the political surfaces almost with necessity. But this does not happen as propaganda or a political program, but as a delimited situation which, *in nuce*, exposes and challenges the basic values of the universe it belongs to, which frame the use of social power and social interaction in general. Here, what is institutionalized and formalized as right and wrong has to marry what is regarded as just. However, when such a marriage becomes divorce or when a marriage is simply impossible, due to the enormity of the iniquity brought to court or to the contradictory nature of the case, then the imaginary workings of literature, drama and film are necessary to discuss and understand the dead end of the discourses of both law and justice. I will discuss this intricate issue focusing on the 4th act of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1597), a court case where a fake lawyer outsmarts the legal procedure in order to uphold a sense of justice embracing only the power elite. Thus, the theatrical moment becomes also the political moment. At the same time, it is a theatrical moment within a comedy, turned into numerous films of which I will show a short sequence to analyse the complexity of the situation also in relation to its wider context.



Patrizia Lombardo taught French literature, Comparative Literature and Film at Princeton University, University of Pittsburgh. She teaches at the University of Geneva and directs the Project “Affective Dynamics and Aesthetic Emotions” at the Interdisciplinary Swiss Center in Affective Sciences. Among her publications: *Cities, Words and Images. From Poe to Scorsese* (Palgrave 2003); L. Saetre, P. Lombardo, and J. Zanetta, *Exploring text and Emotions* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2014); *Memory and Imagination in Film. Scorsese, Lynch, Jarmusch, Van Sant* (Palgrave 2014). Member of AE.

David Lynch's challenge to Hollywood

Criticism of the Hollywood system can be expressed in several ways: from the directly political rejection of Independent Film to the forms defying the classical Hollywood mode of composing stories and presenting characters. The so called New Hollywood refused that mode proposing an acute metafilmic consciousness, an irregular narrative rhythm, and inventive editing. David Lynch accomplishes one of the most challenging



critiques of Hollywood with *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* both in terms of form and content.



Susana Onega is Professor of English at the U. of Zaragoza and the Head of a research team working on the rhetoric and politics of suffering in Contemporary Narratives in English. She has written extensively on narrative theory and on British writers like John Fowles, Peter Ackroyd and Jeanette Winterson. She is the former President of the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies and the former Spanish Board member of the European Society for the Study of English. She was a Research Fellow at Birkbeck College (U. of London) in 1996. Member of AE.

The function of art in the representation of the Holocaust and the danger of banalisation and political misappropriation

The emergence, in the 1990s, of a great variety of testimonial, literary, theatrical and filmic works on the Shoah points to a generalised need in the western world to come to terms with a historical event of such colossal traumatising magnitude that it defies assimilation and cultural integration. One of the main functions of art has always been to facilitate this process by presenting the traumatic events indirectly, through metaphor and myth, thus providing the community with mechanisms of resilience aimed at overcoming the shock and foster social cohesion. The potential healing effect of these artistic representations is, however, constantly threatened by the danger of banalisation and political misappropriation of the true horror of the historical events. The paper proposes a discussion of these issues as reflected in Enzo Cormann's *Storm Still* (*Toujours l'orage*, 1997), and Roberto Benigni's *Life Is Beautiful* (*La Vita è bella*, 1997).