



**4th Workshop of the Russian Art & Culture Group
“Intersections of Art, Science, and Technology in
Soviet Film and Culture”**

Jacobs University Bremen,
Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Jacobs University, Bremen,
Lab III.

September 22-23, 2016

Cover: Aelita (1924, directed by Yakov Protazanov).

Intersections of Art, Science, and Technology in Soviet Film and Culture

By maintaining the tension between artists' imaginative approaches to technology in the Soviet Union (Meyerhold's Biomechanics), film directors' use of science such as physiology (Eisenstein's Expressive Movement), and scientists' own theorization of art history (Lev Vygotsky's The Psychology of Art), this workshop aims at unpacking the historical and political forces behind Soviet film theory, film practice, and art history in relation to science and technology. While examining the juncture between art, science, and technology in post-Revolutionary Russia, with a focus on the avant-garde period until the death of Joseph Stalin, cinema is thus considered as a *device* beyond its medium of film (Francois Albera, Maria Tortajada: *Cinema Beyond Film*) and the medium-specificity of the arts is called into question.

PROGRAM

Thursday, September 22, 2016

14:00 **Opening of the Workshop, Prof. Dr. Isabel Wünsche**

Session 1:

14:30 – 15:00 Oksana Maistat (European University, St. Petersburg)
Imported Ideas inside the Russian Formalists' Approach to Film Theory

15:00 – 15:30 Dr. Gal Kirn (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)
Cineficiation: From Agit-trains to Medvedkin's Cinema-train, between Politics, Aesthetics, and Technology

15:30 – 16:00 Coffee Break

16:00 – 16:30 Hanin Hannouch (IMT Lucca / Jacobs University Bremen)
Sergei Eisenstein as Art Historian: Physiology and the Body in "Cinematic Paintings"

16:30 – 17:00 Irina Schulzki (LMU, Munich)
Eisenstein on Gesture and Poststructuralist Imagery (Deleuze, Agamben)

17:00 – 17:30 Discussion

- 18:00 19:00 Dinner
- 19:00 – 20:30 Evening Talk – Prof. Dr. Tanja Zimmermann (Universität Leipzig)
Science Fiction and the Combat Against Misery in the Soviet Films

Friday, September 23, 2016

Session 2:

- 9:30 – 10:00 Dr. Noemi Smolik (Universität zu Köln)
The Relation of Painted Images to Images of Cinema: Malevich's Writings on Cinema
- 10:00 – 10:30 Dr. Magdalena Nieslony (Universität Stuttgart)
Evolution and Play: Models for Art History in the 1920s
- 10:30 – 11:00 Coffee Break
- 11:00 – 11:30 Viktoria Schindler (Freie Universität Berlin)
Searching for Objective Methods of Investigation in Art: Ivan Kliun's Scientific Approach to Artistic Media
- 11:30 – 12:00 Dr. Fabian Heffermehl (University of Oslo)
Tarabukin reads Florenskii - On the Connection Between Mathematical and Pictorial Spaces in Russian Modernism

12:00 – 12:30 Discussion

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch Break

Session 3:

14:00 – 15:00 Martin Čihák (FAMU: Film and TV School of Academy of Performing Arts, Prague)

From Collision to Distance: On Artavazd Ashotovich Peleshyan

15:00 – 15:30 Coffee Break

15:30 – 16:00 Concluding Session

ABSTRACTS

Oksana Maistat

Imported Ideas inside the Russian Formalists' Approach to the Film Theory

My paper addresses the attempt to introduce the study of films into formalist theory as represented in the *The Poetics of Cinema* (1927) with special attention to the borrowed foreign terms and the impact of currently imported texts and ideas (Béla Balázs, photogénie etc.). Specifically, I will be looking at the articles of Boris Eichenbaum and Yuri Tynianov in order to analyze, how their perception of film medium and the assessment of its sign nature defined the reception of foreign film theories.

Focusing on the specificity of film as art form, i. e. the new language, the formalists contrasted it to the photography, which was seen as a technical precondition for film and was in itself deprived of sign features. Thus, the theory of Balázs and Delluc were basically inept for the new phase of reflection, and required a renewal of terms and concepts. For instance, Eichenbaum approached the problem of film's relation to reality from the perspective of *photogénie* in which he saw an analogue to *zaum'*, and claimed it to be, together with montage, the basic principles of a film-medium. Trying to distance himself from the term *montage* understood as a mean of plot-construction, Eichenbaum translated Balázs' *Bilderführung* into *kadrovedenie* or *kadrostseplenie* and tied it to the notion of the film style, which was understood as *visuelle Kontinuität* or *space-time unity* (Eichenbaum notices the advantages of the German term *Zeitraum*, but does not borrow it literally). The aim of *photogénie* and *montage* is to create a visual integrity, not conflict, as it was perceived by Eisenstein.

The analysis of these texts from the perspective of absorption of existing theories of film meaning shows the nonlinearity and variability in the process of the constructing of Soviet film theory with its emphasized focusing on montage. In

case of Russian formalists the certain terms and concepts of Western film theory were put into practice through their adjustment to language theory, which implied the altering in meaning and also the renounce of the “visible reality” beyond the frame and montage.

Oksana Maistat studied film history and history of art. She graduated with a degree in Culture Studies from Pedagogical State University in 2010 and then entered the Department of Art History at the European University at St. Petersburg. In 2014 she defended her M.A. thesis on the concept of “proletarian film” in the Weimar Republic. Oksana's research interests include the film theory, Soviet film policy and the interrelations between Soviet Union and Germany considering films.

Dr. Gal Kirn

Cinefication: From Agit-trains to Medvedkin’s Cinema-train, between Politics, Aesthetics, and Technology

The contribution will give a short overview of the process of “cinefication”, which was the largest cinematic campaign in the world history, and in particular I will present a case study of the late avant-garde Medvedkin’s journey of Kino-poezd in early 1930s. If Medvedkin’s experiment could be perceived as “productivist” operating on the plane of the abolition of art in the service of (Stalinist!) state, the results of the process were much more ambivalent and even subversive for then existing socialism.

Gal Kirn is a postdoctoral fellow of Humboldt Stiftung at the Humboldt University, while he received his PhD in political philosophy at the University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia in 2012. He was a researcher at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht

(2008-10), and a research fellow on the topic of socialist modernist memorial sites in Berlin, at Institute of Cultural Inquiry (2010-2012). He published a book *From partisan rupture to market contradictions in socialist Yugoslavia* (Sophija, 2015), and is a co-editor (with Peter Thomas, Sara Farris and Katja Dieffenbach) of the book *Encountering Althusser* (Bloomsbury, 2012), (with Dubravka Sekulić and Žiga Testen) of the book *Yugoslav Black Wave Cinema and Its Transgressive Moments* (JvE Academie, 2012).

Hanin Hannouch

Sergei Eisenstein as Art Historian: Physiology and the Body in “Cinematic Paintings”

Recent studies about Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) have mainly considered his films and film theories and less his research on art history which started in 1928 and lasted until his death. My contribution is to disentangle Eisenstein’s question of how did ways of seeing in the field of cinema instigate new ways of seeing in art history by considering his category of “cinematic paintings”. One of the conditions needed for a painting to be cinematic is the unity, wholeness, and concreteness of the depicted body, exemplified by Valentin Serov’s portrait of Maria Yermolova. On the other side of the spectrum are the Italian Futurists with their deliberate fragmentation of the depicted figures, that fall short from being cinematic. The first part of my presentation will revitalize Eisenstein’s distinction between wholeness and fragmentation in cinematic and non-cinematic paintings respectively. While in the second part of my talk, I will highlight how his engagement with physiology through Vsevelod Meyerhold’s *Biomechanics* and the ensuing research on “Expressive Movement” through William James and Rudolf Bode was an integral part in Eisenstein’s views on art history.

Hanin Hannouch is a PhD candidate at IMT Lucca, Institute for Advanced Studies (Italy) working on Sergei Eisenstein as an art historian, and is the founder of www.kinoimages.com. After having completed an International Masters in Art History and Museology (IMKM) between École du Louvre (Paris) and Universität Heidelberg (Germany) as well as a previous Masters in modern art from Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik (Lebanon), she has been, since March 2016, a guest researcher at Jacobs University, Bremen, as part of the Russian Art and Culture Group.

Irina Schulzki

Eisenstein on Gesture and Poststructuralist Imagery (Deleuze, Agamben)

The focus on body expressions in early cinema transcends the technical conditions of silent film by playing a decisive role in the yet nascent montage theory of Russian cineastes. The paper discusses Sergei Eisenstein's reflections on gesture within the framework of his theory of "vertical montage". It refers to one of Eisenstein's crucial theoretical sources, the monograph *L'art et le geste* (1910) by the music theoretician Jean d'Udine. This monist study on origins of arts, undeservedly consigned to oblivion, provoked Eisenstein to formulate gesture as the key notion of synaesthetic unity between image and sound that he advanced in his untranslated essay *The Underlying Gesture* (1940). The "only means of linear commensurability of image and sound" and "the cradle of all kinds of imagery", gesture is deployed in Eisenstein as a figure of potentiality, or "an embryo" awaiting its actualisation in the so-called "audio-visual image". One cannot fail to notice the structural resemblance of Eisenstein's argumentation with the figurative language of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy. The idea that line (fold, gesture) is thought by Deleuze very much in tune with Russian avant-garde was first articulated by one of Russian leading contemporary philosophers Valerii Podoroga, albeit in another context and as an implicit questioning of the novelty

of the Deleuzian philosophical project. The paper aims, first, at putting gesture at the centre of Eisenstein's sustaining preoccupation with drawings and, broader, geometrical imagery. Secondly, it addresses parallels of his, by all means modernist, theorisation of gesture with poststructuralist theory (Deleuze) and the 'gestural turn' of nowadays triggered by Agamben's seminal essay *Notes on Gesture* (1992).

Irina Schulzki is a PhD candidate of the Graduate School Language & Literature (LMU Munich) completing her doctoral thesis "Kira Muratova: A Cinema of Gesture". Her principal research interests focus on contemporary Russian literature and film, theories of (post)postmodernist fiction and film. She published articles on film in the intersection with theories of fan fiction, phenomenology, and theories of the comical.

Prof. Dr. Tanja Zimmermann (Universität Leipzig)

Science Fiction and the Combat against Misery in the Soviet Films

After the October revolution, the genre of science fiction was gradually integrated into the Soviet value system, where it contributed to replacing the messianic aims of religion and its transcendent path to salvation. The combat against misery of the proletarian class was implicitly addressed by visions of future progress and plenitude. Mediations between science fiction and the Soviet scientific discourse were not an easy process. Only some - mostly technological - aspects of progress and technology were adopted, whereas others, for example regarding psychology, were rejected. In the paper I will analyze transformations going along with the scientification of science fiction in films about space travel as linked to an exportation of communist ideology - from Protazanov's *Aelita* (1924) to Klushantsev's *Road to the Stars* (1957).

Tanja Zimmermann is professor of the history of art with a focus on East, Central East and South East Europe at the University of Leipzig. She completed an academic curriculum as well in history of art as in Slavonic literatures, studying in Ljubljana, Munich, Augsburg and Vienna. Before joining the University of Leipzig, she worked in research and in teaching at the Universities of Munich, Erfurt and Konstanz. Her main fields of interest include memory cultures, media and art policy in Eastern Europe from the 19th to the 21st century as well as cultural transfers between East and West Europe.

Dr. Noemi Smolik

The Relation of Painted Images to Images of Cinema: Malevich's Writings on Cinema

Between 1925 and 1929 Kazimir Malevich wrote 4 essays on cinema: O vyjaviteljach, I likujut liki na ekranach, Chudožnik i kino and Živopisnye zakony v problemach kino. In this essay he is talking about the difference of the painted image and an image in a film and about the capability of the film image to abandon as the painting can do the world of objects. He is a sharp critic of the filmmaker Sergej Eisenstein and his as Malevichs believed old fashioned use of images. This almost unknown discussion between Malevich and Einstein would be the issue of the talk.

Noemi Smolik grew up in Prague, studied Art History, History and Philosophy in Cologne and New York. She is art critic and curator with publications in Artforum/New York, Frieze/London, Frieze d/e, Berlin and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. She was teaching as Professor or Visiting Professor at the HfBK in Hamburg and Dresden and at Alanus University, Bonn. Now she teach at the University of Cologne. She lives in Bonn and Prague.

Dr. Magdalena Nieslony

Evolution and Play: Models for Art History in the 1920s

The relationship between art and science stands in the center of any reflections about the historical development of art. The art historian who wants to grasp the development of his object must first assume a view on the laws behind the man-made phenomena. Depending on that precondition – e.g. if the assumed laws are thought of as mechanical/causally determined or as teleological – the writing will take different directions. In the Russian Avant-garde of the 1920s different scientific models – e.g. the Darwinist evolution theory or Pavlov's reflexology – were (mis-)used for historical writing, offering the authors not only a reliable research tool, but also an aura of objectivity. Kazimir Malevič and Viktor Šklovskij represent two contrary intellectual approaches to the question of historical development of art. Malevič's *Theory of the Additional Element* as well as the charts and images accompanying it, formulate a conception of history in which the laws behind the phenomena are forged after the model of evolution (still combined with teleological motifs), resulting in a linear and rationally explicable narration. As an artist, Malevič strives to legitimate his own work through historical arguments; his writing thus has to conform to the politically sanctioned materialist ideology – a target which stands in sharp contrast to Malevič's own idealist thinking, as known from his philosophical texts on Suprematism. Viktor Šklovskij, on the contrary, revisits the old metaphor of play to characterize the historical movement of art. In his anthology *Knight's Move (Chod konja, 1923)*, published during his emigration in Berlin, the author turns against the Marxist conception of art. Using text and image, Šklovskij also argues against a comparison of art with natural phenomena (when conceived as mechanical and causally determined). The reader of Šklovskij's book is immediately informed about the reference of the title, as the cover and the first page show a schematic

representation of a possible trajectory of the chess figure 'knight' on a chessboard.

Magdalena Nieslony is an Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Department of Art History at the University of Stuttgart. In 2013 she received her Ph.D. from the Goethe University Frankfurt; her book about the Russian avant-garde artist Ivan Puni and the discourse of conditionality of painting in Western and Russian art criticism has been published recently (*Bedingtheit der Malerei. Ivan Puni und die modern Bildkritik*, Gebrüder Mann Verlag, 2016). Her research addresses the Russian and European avant-gardes, American art after 1945, the methodology of Art History, and the interrelationship between art, art criticism, and mass media. She is the co-editor of *Theorie². Potenzial und Potenzierung künstlerischer Theorie* (with Eva Ehninger, Peter Lang Verlag, 2014). Her current work deals with the critique of linear perspective in the American art of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Viktoria Schindler

Searching for Objective Methods of Investigation in Art: Ivan Kliun's Scientific Approach to Artistic Media

Ivan Kliun (1873-1943) belongs to a group of Russian avant-gardists who endeavored to find out whole new methods for investigating artworks, to develop art theory backed by science and to renew art. Kliun faced this great challenge by scientifically researching the various elements of art such as color, form, texture, light, space and their principles of combination, in order to illustrate which aspects of a work of art have an impact on viewers and their psyches. According to Kliun, only abstract art and suprematism are applicable for an analytical investigation of the painting as they are built by single elements and hence are

free from narrative and descriptive content. Kliun developed his own hypotheses and then attempted to corroborate them with experiments and through various scholarly treatises.

Viktoria Schindler (birth name Prokopovic) was born in Lithuania. From 1998 until 2002, Viktoria studied German philology at Vilnius University. She continued her studies by earning a Master of Public Management at Mykolo Roemerio University (Lithuania) and performing research at the Verbandsmanagement Institute at University of Fribourg (Switzerland). Since 2011, Viktoria has been writing her PhD thesis on the „Examination of the Manuscripts of Wassily Kandinsky and Iwan Kliun on the Primary Elements of Painting as a Premise for the Establishment of the Science of Art“.

Dr. Fabian Heffermehl

Tarabukin reads Florenskii - On the Connection Between Mathematical and Pictorial Spaces in Russian Modernism

Contrary to a common view of a) art as distinct from science and b) modernism as a-historical my research explores how innovations within mathematics and geometry motivated a re-discovery of the medieval Orthodox icon in Russia after the revolution. The focus will be on the presentation of mathematical spaces in theories of pictorial space. I am going to testify to what extent the geometrical studies of the Armenian-Russian mathematician and theologian Pavel Florenskii (1882-1937) could constitute a framework for interpreting the artist and theoretician Nikolai Tarabukin's idea of the icon's reverse perspective. For both Florenskii and Tarabukin the reverse perspective did not only function as a phenomenon within painting, but also as a sign of a worldview that should ultimately replace classic occidental paradigms of space and perception.

Florenskii did not directly connect mathematics with his artistic research. However, Tarabukin described the reverse perspective in categories of non-Euclidean geometry and theory of relativity, which earlier had been developed by Florenskii in his book *Imaginations in Geometry* (1922). My research question is the following: how can Tarabukin's, as well as some other thinkers', transdisciplinary perception of the icon be traced back to the transdisciplinary nature of Florenskii's own writings?

Fabian Heffermehl (<http://fabianheffermehl.wordpress.com>), PhD, University of Oslo, is a scholar of Russian literature and art. Heffermehl has published several articles in Russian, German and Norwegian about Pavel Florenskii, Varlam Shalamov and Fiodor Dostoevskii. In Heffermehl's monograph "The Image Seen from the Inside" (forthcoming) he analyzes the interaction between mathematical concepts in the 20th century and theories of the Orthodox icon.

Martin Čihák

From Collision to Distance: On Artavazd Ashotovich Peleshyan

In 1974 soviet film director of armenian origin Artavazd Ašotovič Peleshyan published his crucial theoretical text: *Montage-at-a- Distance, or: A theory of Distance*, that is standing in opposition to the traditional principle of russian montage school, that could be described as a "montage of junction" (Kuleshov) or "montage of collision" (Eisenstein). In his text Peleshyan declared:

"The main essence and emphasis of montage work, for me, is not to join shots but to disjoin them, putting between them a third, fourth and fifth fragment. When joining two key shots which carry an important semantic charge - we shall henceforth call them bearing shots - I strive not to bring them closer, not to make

them collide, but to create a distance between them". For better understanding of the Peleshyan theory, we are going to use the conceptual model called "Peleshyan's ball" (in russian: Шар Пелешяна) that help us to simulate the relationships between the *bearing shots* in Peleshyan's films and describe them with the term potential energy and also to compare it to classical "montage of collision", that is based on the term kinetic energy. But there is some more fundamental difference in the conception of time. Contrary to the "old classics" (Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Ejzenstejn etc), which were "operating" with the time only in it's quantitative aspects (time as a homogeneous fluent chronos, in greek: χρόνος), Peleshyan is dealing with the time in it's qualitative aspects - time as heterogenous kairos (καιρός), as a "time of ripeness".

I will analyze the eight minutes long Peleshyan's film *The End* (КОНЕЦ, 1992), in order to demonstrate the "incarnation" of the theoretical statements in "tangible" artistic work.

Martin Čihák is a lecturer at FAMU (Film and TV School of Academy of Performing Arts in Prague) at the department of film montage. Now he is also co-author and editor of the book *Distance Montage of Artavazd Peleshyan*, that consist of an original texts written by young Czech and Russian theorist - it would be published (in czech language only) at the end of 2016.