

Erica Carter

## Response to the *Apertúra* Questionnaire 2018

### Szerző

Erica Carter a Birminghami Egyetem német és kultúratudományok szakán doktorált. 1986-1988 között a londoni Institute for Contemporary Arts munkatársa, majd a Southamptoni Egyetem előadója - ebben az időszakban kezd el filmtörténettel foglalkozni. Szerkesztője annak a kötetnek, amelyben Rodney Livingstone fordításában megjelenik Balázs Béla két korai filmelméleti műve, *A látható ember* és *A film szelleme*. A kötetről a *Screen* folyóirattal közösen konferenciát is szerveznek 2009-ben. *Filmes publikációi közül néhány: Dietrich's Ghosts. The Sublime and the Beautiful in Third Reich Film* (British Film Institute, 2004); *The German Cinema Book* (co-edited with an introduction by Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter and Deniz Göktürk) (British Film Institute, 2002); *How German is She? Post-war West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (University of Michigan Press, 1997).

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### I. Academic policy

The paramount social challenge is environmental. As this year's global summit in Katowice demonstrated, world powers and national governments have signally failed to develop policies that will halt the current escalating rise in global temperatures, and tackle the multiple challenges of environmental change, including loss of life in extreme weather events, destruction of infrastructure, and displacement of populations on a global scale.

The humanities and cultural studies including film studies have a key role to play here. Climate change has been accompanied by a marked tendency towards climate change *denial* on the part of some opinion formers and national governments: a tendency that is in turn fueled by misinformation as well as a turning away from evidence-based information and towards emotion-based "fake news".

Film studies is one amongst a range of humanities disciplines that trains students in critical literacy, equipping them with skills in audio-visual analysis and critical thinking that enable informed judgement on social, political and scientific questions, including climate change. The aesthetic, social and political questions posed by film theory and history also enable consideration of the ethical issues raised by planetary developments, and of historical precedents that suggest alternative pathways towards global futures.

### II. Self-reflexive questions of the field

2. The focus on aesthetic questions that is a feature of film studies is not replicated in other media studies fields. The loss of the discipline would seriously diminish the capacity of students, researchers and the broader public to make critical sense of audio-visual "texts" – not just films, but screen media across the range, including within social media and on a multitude of online platforms. Such critical discernment is in turn essential if citizens are to retain the power of judgement that underpins democratic decision-making. Film studies, in other words, is one amongst a number of humanities disciplines that upholds the connection between aesthetics and politics that is a legacy of the Enlightenment: a connection that in turn enables the maintenance of democratic values and informed participation in citizenship in contemporary societies.

3. My own work is largely focused on popular cinema. My research approach derives from theories and histories of aesthetic experience, and I apply many of the same methodologies to work on popular film as to art cinema, since it is popular genre cinema and its contemporary television and digital media successors that arguably most centrally shape popular knowledge, aesthetic experience, identity and subjectivity.

4. Film Studies has developed an invaluable methodological toolbox for the study of audio-visual texts and artefacts in social context. Despite (erroneous) claims to the contrary, the film medium continues to attract enthusiastic theatre audiences across the global North and Asia. At the same time, the dispersal of screen media across multiple exhibition platforms, as well as the multiplication of formats for narrative and audio-visual representation, demands critical approaches that allow scholars, policy makers and the broad mass of citizens to understand changing media environments and make informed judgements on their best use. Film studies acts in this context not simply as a specialist discipline focusing on film as one element within larger media cultures, but as a laboratory for new methods and approaches that enable critical understanding of contemporary moving image culture tout court.

### **III. Public and tertiary education (and national curricula, such as the NAT in Hungary)**

5. One key challenge is the saturation of daily lives with social and digital media messages, and the sensory overload and lack of critical differentiation that ensues among some students.

Increasingly, the job of film studies is to *decelerate* media consumption: to spend time with students in joint exercises to make sense of film in all its current and past manifestations, and to train eyes, ears and minds in the art of informed critical judgement. The greatest challenge to this approach is posed by demands that film education be instrumentalized in the service of apparently pragmatic goals (the commercial development of national media systems, narrowly conceived forms of skills training for future jobs etc.). Advocacy for the pursuit of such short-term goals – which is pervasive in discussions of the place of the humanities in contemporary societies – is certainly to an extent legitimate: students need jobs, and economies and societies need working populations with the requisite skills to sustain functioning economies. But too narrow a focus on immediate industrial, commercial or public policy objectives can also be corrosive, undermining as it does the larger interest of societies and polities in developing in students and scholars the capacity for long-term complex thinking: a capacity that is in turn the only meaningful response to such large-scale global problems as climate change, war and global conflict, accelerating economic inequality, long-term political instability etc.

6. See my answer to question 5 in relation to applied science approaches to media literacy. The British Film Institute education programme, though it has suffered from funding cuts in recent years, continues to provide models of good practice. Particularly ripe for emulation is the work

done by the BFI to engage audiences across all ages and social groups: see

<https://www.bfi.org.uk/education-research>

Bonus: Yes, there will be film studies. From a local perspective, recruitment patterns at my own university and across the UK suggest that students recognise the value of a discipline that gives them the tools to grasp the increasingly complex social world they inhabit, to find a meaningful place within it, and where possible, to effect change. In global terms, as the burgeoning of film industries in countries including China, South Korea, India and Nigeria demonstrates, economic and social development can be seen demonstrably to travel hand in hand with the emergence of flourishing local and global film industries. Globally, populations are using the medium of film to establish an identity and add their voice to debates on issues of planetary concern. Any society that fails to recognise the place occupied by film in social developments, and that fails to give to film studies its rightful place as a discipline at the cutting edge of global understanding, is guilty of wilful disregard of the need for informed understanding of larger cultural and social questions amongst rising generations of students and citizens.

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