

Polónyi Eszter

Archaeology versus Convergence: Film Studies Today

Szerző

Eszter Polonyi is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the History of Art and Design Department of the Pratt Institute where she works on the histories of film and photography.

<https://doi.org/10.31176/apertura.2018.14.1.8>

Archaeology versus Convergence: Film Studies Today

The filmmakers Máté Bori and Lichter Péter devoted their *October 8, 2016* to the last issue of *Népszabadság*. An intertitle at end of the film explains that the date in the title marked the time that the newspaper's staff appeared in their offices to find their daily had been suspended. The reason Máté's and Lichter's film is significant is not only that it acknowledges the journalists who, for decades, constituted in print form the voice of the opposition. The film is also significant because it posits the vulnerability of print media and the practices and conventions of meaning-making with which print has been associated. Conceived of as print on paper, the newspaper has failed. Delivered as image, however, *Népszabadság* may have an afterlife. Following the prompt of what social issue the humanities, and more specifically film studies, might contribute to, this statement speculates as to the significance of film to the persistence of critical forms of visual literacy. In an era where control is ensured through transparency, the film image still offers the refuge of semiotic multiplicity and hence un-searchability.

Legibility seems beside the point in *October 8, 2016*. Ostensibly, the film is devoted to the contents of the newspaper printed on the date referred to in the title, which coincided with its last issue. Given the absence of warning regarding the government's decision to close on the paper, it is likely that the last articles to be printed, which had been prepared the day prior, contain little of egregious value. In fact, the film seems to actively resist being approached as a record of the events covered by this last run of the newspaper. Máté and Lichter have cut out segments of texts that they then pasted onto the length of the narrow strip of photocelluloid. Hence the line of text frequently appears upside-down, rotated, reversed in direction and sometimes exceeding the limits of the film frame. The employment of photocelluloid as a repository for printed matter substitutes the conventions of legibility normally offered by paper. Where the column format of a newspaper article might have facilitated and accelerated consumption of its contents, the optical logistics it offers have nothing in common with the reasons the filmstrip runs vertically through the projector. Placed in the context of a reading apparatus that moves through its material at a rate of fifty centimeters a second, the experience might perhaps be likened to fast-forwarding through the paper on microfiche. The text the viewer might spot is likely to be different with each "reading." There is little to differentiate these fragments of sentences, words and letters from the epileptic dance of pins and tacks in a Man Ray film.



Still from October 8, 2016 (Máté Bori and Lichter Péter, 2016)

In principle, the operations of the digital allocate no room for semiotic chaos. Digitization projects align different conventions of meaning-making in a single idiom of binary code.^[1] The presumption that the computer's ability to eliminate differences through digitization has fueled associations of the internet with the Western enlightenment project of ensuring literacy and learning through open access. Hence many such projects tend to employ the rhetorics of totality, such that the contents remediated by the project aspire to grant access to "all" of a given category of culture.^[2] While many of these epic undertakings fail for legal reasons or at least undergo indeterminate periods of deferred activity, there is also growing concern with the presumed neutrality of the mediating determinants of networked information transmission and with the socio-ethical benefits of such attempts at transparency.^[3]

Images occupy some of the last dark spots on planet web. The severe limitations under which Googlebots are able to read images quickly becomes apparent from use of any search engine's image bar. Unless images have descriptive file names, contain tags or alternative information (ALT tags), they remain about as undecipherable as radio frequencies are to your smart phone. This is why integrating images into politically sensitive blogging practices has historically been considered a tactic of circumventing automatized forms of online censorship.^[4] Appearing in the medium of film practice, the pages of the *Népszabadság* receive cover under the guise of the information technology protocol that distinguishes between files containing words and images. They are released virtually immediately from the realm of legible and therefore censorable material.

Not all images can all be hacked by artificial intelligence and machine learning. Máté's and Lichter's intent is not only to present print that cannot be deciphered for content but to also remember the ways in which it was handled and the processes in which it originated. The brittle materialities of newspaper. The weight of the unfolded page. Its sudden transparency when wet. Its tendency to smear. The silky feel of tearing newspaper along a crease or a fold. The way we

remember certain articles and forget others. The many clippings we have gathered in scrapbooks and family records. *October 8, 2016* remembers these forms of the newspaper's consumption through direct citation of properties of photocelluloid. As such, it is an archaeological image. The archaeological image is never exclusively about itself. It situates itself at the interface of at least two technical media. These are images whose processes deliberately repeat, recycle and reenact the gestures and conceptual or material determinants that constitute the images of another apparatus. Much ambitious media art today employs archaeological methods. Such is the role of media in the work of Zoe Beloff, Tony Oursler or William Kentridge. Be it online, analog or on paper, their images are imbricated by the logics of an absent apparatus. It is in this sense that the work by Máté and Lichter appears to generate affect, through the kind of haunting without which the image makes no sense. And because its commitments are split between different types of sign system, the archaeological image is (as yet) impermeable to all but human memory.

Cinema figures centrally among the media informing the archaeological image. This is partially because of the hybrid constitution of cinema. More than any medium, cinema has been produced under the guise of different material practices. The cinema that appeared in the mid-twentieth century resulted from a radically different configuration of techniques and technologies from those employed in the early 1900s or in the early 2000s. Reading the film image has prompted the matter of having to first locate it in relation to a given apparatus, with recent work in Film Studies aiming to diversify and expand the genealogies of the moving image.^[5] Asking "where" text might appear before it can be read, *October 8, 2016* confirms the role of cinema in resisting the pressures of media convergence.

1. For a description of the convergence between the languages of different media see Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999, 220-226 and Wardrip-Fruin, Noah, and Nick Montfort, eds. *The New Media Reader*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003.
2. For instance Google's project of digitizing all forms of print culture
3. For the demonstration of how internet protocol asserts control despite the apparent decentralization of its technical means see Galloway, Alex. "Protocol, or, How Control Exists after Decentralization." *Rethinking Marxism* 13, no. 3 (2001): 81-88 and Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59, no. 1 (1992): 3-7. For a critique of the socio-economic instrumentalization of the discourse of transparency, that is the making accessible of documents relating to the behavior of institutions, persons or governments see Klayman, Larry, and John Dean. "Open Secrets and Dirty Hands." In *The Secrets of Law*, edited by Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas, and Martha Umphrey. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012 and Barry, Andrew. "Transparency as a Political Device." In *Debordements: Melanges Offerts a Michel Callon*, 1-14. Paris: Presses des Mines, 2010.
4. See the deleted images in posts of Chinese Weibo bloggers reposted by the Spatial Information Design Lab in 2013 <http://www.spatialinformationdesignlab.org/projects/jumping-great-firewall>. Or the more recent use of emoticons by Chinese feminists on the same blogging platform <https://www.wired.com/story/china-feminism-emoji-censorship/>
5. Gaudreault, Andre, and Philippe Marion. "The Cinema as a Model for the Genealogy of Media." *Convergence* 8, no. 4 (2002): 12-18; Elsaesser, Thomas. *Film History as Media Archaeology*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016; Strauven, Wanda. "Media Archaeology : Where Film History, Media

Art, and New Media (Can) Meet.” In *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art. Challenges and Perspectives*, edited by Julia Noordegraaf, Cosetta G. Saba, Barbara Le Maître, and Vinzenz Hediger, 59–81. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013 but also see de Bruyn, Eric. “Expanded Field of Cinema, or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square.” In *X-Screen*, edited by Matthias Michalka, 152–76. Cologne: Walther Koenig, 2004; Walley, Jonathan. “Identity Crisis : Experimental Film and Artistic Expansion.” *October* 137, no. Summer 2011 (2011): 23–50.

Irodalomjegyzék

- Barry, Andrew. “Transparency as a Political Device.” In *Debordements: Melanges Offerts a Michel Callon*, 1–14. Paris: Presses des Mines, 2010.
<https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pressesmines.721>
- Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999, 220–226.
- de Bruyn, Eric. “Expanded Field of Cinema, or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square.” In *X-Screen*, edited by Matthias Michalka, 152–76. Cologne: Walther Koenig, 2004.
- Deleuze, Gilles. “Postscript on the Societies of Control.” *October* 59, no. 1 (1992): 3–7.
- Elsaesser, Thomas. *Film History as Media Archaeology*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016.
- Galloway, Alex. “Protocol, or, How Control Exists after Decentralization.” *Rethinking Marxism* 13, no. 3 (2001): 81–88.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/089356901101241758>
- Gaudreault, Andre, and Philippe Marion. “The Cinema as a Model for the Genealogy of Media.” *Convergence* 8, no. 4 (2002): 12–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/135485650200800402>
- Klayman, Larry, and John Dean. “Open Secrets and Dirty Hands.” In *The Secrets of Law*, edited by Austin Sarat, Lawrence Douglas, and Martha Umphrey. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012.
- Strauven, Wanda. “Media Archaeology : Where Film History, Media Art, and New Media (Can) Meet.” In *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art. Challenges and Perspectives*, edited by Julia Noordegraaf, Cosetta G. Saba, Barbara Le Maître, and Vinzenz Hediger, 59–81. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048513833-005>
- Walley, Jonathan. “Identity Crisis : Experimental Film and Artistic Expansion.” *October* 137, no. Summer 2011 (2011): 23–50.
- Wardrip-Fruin, Noah, and Nick Montfort, eds. *The New Media Reader*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003.

© Apertúra, 2018. Ősz | www.apertura.hu

webcím: <https://www.apertura.hu/2018/osz/polonyi-archaeology-versus-convergence-film-studies-today/>

<https://doi.org/10.31176/apertura.2018.14.1.8>

