

Jörg Schweinitz (Universität Zürich)

Ostentation vs. Immersion: Effects in the Early Cinema and the Case of Representing Hypnosis

Abstract:

The shift from the early cinema of attractions (Gunning) to narrative film can be characterized (in regard to the preconstructed viewing position) by two theoretical concepts: *immersion* vs. *ostentation*. From the viewpoint of this juxtaposition the shift turns out to be an historical evolution from a predominantly ostentative to an immersive cinematic exhibition (respectively experience). The early writing on film and the commencements of film theory re-echo this development. In the early writings (e.g. in Germany by Walter Serner) the cinema is often defined as an ostentative appliance of visual pleasure while later on with the admittance to the institutional mode of representation the medium was described as highly immersive (e.g. by Hugo Münsterberg).

Not accidentally accesses Münsterberg cinematic immersion with reference to hypnosis when he presents an example of a patient getting mesmerized: while watching a shot taken with a spinning camera, the spectator experiences vertigo and a pre-hypnotic state of mind, transmitted in a process of somatic empathy. A sequenz on hypnosis in Fritz Lang's film DR. MABUSE, DER SPIELER (1922) follows the same logic. This montage sequenz could be read as an emblem of hypnotic immersion. However, the subject of hypnosis in film is not necessarily connected to immersion. This visual and narrative motif emerges as early as cinema itself. As Andriopoulos has recently shown, the public obsession with mesmerism and hypnosis in the last two decades of the 19th century was responsible for this boom in the early cinema. But it was connected there to an ostentative (instead of an immersive) presentation likewise hypnosis on stage in the precinematic time.

In my paper I will show early cinema's shift from ostentation to immersion by the special (and emblematic) case of representing hypnosis. I will argue on this topic against the backdrop of the current development of film in the digital age, where the relationship between ostentation and immersion is about to become re-negotiated.

CV:

Professor of Film Studies at the University of Zürich (Switzerland) and currently chair of the Zürich Film Studies Departement; he teaches courses in the history of film theory and in the history of film/cinema. After his 1981 Ph.D. from Leipzig University, he taught film aesthetics in the Leipzig cultural studies programme. As a researcher he joined 1985 for 8 years the Film Studies Center of the East-Berlin Academy of Arts, and later with a DAAD postdoc grant 1993 to 1994 the Princeton University. From 1995 to 2001 he taught as visiting professor film studies at the Freie Universitaet Berlin, the Universitaet Potsdam, the Universitaet Marburg, the Universitaet Klagenfurt (Austria) and in 2002 at the University of Chicago. With a DFG Fellowship he wrote his book on the film theoretical discourses on stereotyping, serving as Habilitation (defended in 2002 at the University of Konstanz). During the following years he taught at Bochum University and he received in 2006 a call from the Babelsberg Film Academy as Professor of Film History. In 2007 he moved to Zürich. Professor Schweinitz is co-editor of the German film theory journal *Montage AV*. Among his publications on the history of film theory is the source book *Prolog vor dem Film. Nachdenken über ein neues Medium 1908-1914* (Leipzig: Reclam 1992), the commented first German language edition of Hugo Münsterberg: *The Photoplay* (in German: *Das Lichtspiel*, Wien: Synema 1996) and *Film und Stereotyp. Eine Herausforderung für das Kino und die Filmtheorie. Zur Geschichte eines Mediendiskurses* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2006).