

Introduction



DE GRUYTER
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Dear reader, what you are holding in your hands is the inaugural issue of a new journal dedicated to audio-visual arts and media in the Baltic Sea region. The institution behind this journal that has initiated and supported its launch is Tallinn University's Baltic Film and Media School (BFM), also an academic establishment responsible for the wellbeing of audio-visual culture and the associated industries in the region. While this issue is set to be launched at and support the "Creativity in-front and behind screens" conference organised jointly by BFM and Estonian Public Broadcasting, the journal has come to stay for much longer. We intend to become an annual academic (peer-reviewed) journal, a platform for informed academic dialogues on the natures and dynamics of audio-visual cultures in our region.

Yet, the question remains, why such a journal and why now? Let us start with the ambiguous geographic pointer in our title, the 'Baltic'. In vernacular English the 'Baltic' would probably refer in the first place to the three Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Still, we aim at widening the term. While the cold war era created East-West divisions and the Iron Curtain vertically cut Europe and the Baltic Sea region; we suggest that the dissolution of the former Soviet bloc and the subsequent EU enlargement has mobilised new alignments and created conditions for rekindling interactions in the historically integrated Baltic region. Hence our definition of the 'Baltic' encompasses not only the three 'Baltic states', but includes all countries around the Baltic Sea. On the one hand, this understanding is motivated historically, as the region's past testifies to rich and complex cross-cultural exchanges. On the other hand, the recent decades have witnessed increasingly intensive flows of people, funds and ideas traversing the territories around the Baltic Sea. In several instances the practises of cooperation among the region's audio-visual industries have been already firmly institutionalised – take the various co-production projects and treaties, joint educational programmes, festivals, devel-

opment 'labs' or pitching sessions. All such practises call for a critical point of view beyond the notion of 'nation-state' or former regional definitions – a point of view that would allow for critical accounts of audio-visual dialogues and 'co-evolution' over the past two decades, as well as of earlier inter-connections.

The second term included in the title of the journal, the 'screen media', also needs justification. It evokes our aim to publish articles on film, television, interactive media, video art, video games, mobile augmented reality, etc. The contemporary audio-visual mediascape is profoundly shaped by the constant interplay between these various strands of expression. Thus, in order to facilitate a better understanding of this multifarious whole, we have opted for a broad perspective. That is, we invite articles on all these individual media, but we specifically prioritise articles that scrutinise the co-evolution of these various screen media forms. Equally, we invite studies on the full spectrum of audio-visual culture – including textual analyses, accounts on education, production, exhibition, distribution and reception, as well as reflections on relevant theories and frames of references. We strive to provide a platform of dialogue to both scholars and practitioners of screen media from all countries of the region.

We like to believe that this inaugural issue already includes quite a few intriguing accounts aimed at initiating a variety of such interdisciplinary and international dialogues. The issue includes a study on the clustering tendencies of the audio-visual sector in Tallinn (by Indrek Ibrus, Külliki Tafel-Viia, Silja Lassur, Andres Viia), an account on the development and potentials of Estonian Film Database (by Hagi Šein), a proposition for a method for analysing transmedia projects (Renira Rampazzo Gambarato), an analysis of contemporary Lithuanian video art from a gender studies perspective (Audronė Žukauskaitė), an account of the early evolution of Estonian television news (Indrek Treufeldt), a critical discussion on product placement in contemporary films and its effects on an

audience's dietary behaviour (Harro Rannamets) and a discussion on the evolution of surrealist animation film and how it has found a home in Eastern Europe, especially in the Baltics (Ülo Pikkov). In addition, for promoting further academic dialogues we have invited several reviews of recent publications on film and audio-visual culture in the region. This is a line of work we aim to continue and look forward to further suggestions to review publications close to the thematic scope of this journal.

All in all, to answer the initial question of why such a journal exists here and now we suggest that the time is ripe. Firstly, the 'ecosystem' that includes both academic institutions of film and media studies as well as the production processes and institutions in the three Baltic States have matured enough to be in need of systematic, all-encompassing and informed academic reflection. Secondly, it has become increasingly clear that the 'Baltic' as a historically situated notion needs to be opened up to reflect the geographically much more expansive dynamics that influence the audio-visual cultures in all individual countries around the Baltic Sea. And, thirdly, in the era of 'convergence culture' it is perhaps exactly in those relatively small countries of Northern Europe that the strict distinction between different forms of audio-visual expression and the exclusion of some such forms or activities from integrated academic analysis would not be easily justifiable – after all, as the industries are converging together with reception practices so should the instances of academic studies, communications and meta-languages. Therefore, we invite all academics and practitioners of relevant fields to not only to get acquainted with what this journal has to offer but also to look up our further calls for papers and contribute to this evolving dialogue.