

MASKS AND SCREENS: Meiji University-Edinburgh University Intermedia Research Collaboration Symposium

Report on 2023 Meiji University-Edinburgh University Intermedia Research Collaboration symposium, “Masks and Screens”.

The fourth symposium organised by the Meiji University-Edinburgh University Collaboration (and second to take place at Meiji) was held on Sunday December 17 at Meiji University Surugudai campus.

The Meiji University-Edinburgh University Collaboration brings together academics, students and practitioners at both institutions to develop international publications and events developing both institutions’ strengths in intermedia studies. Intermedia studies investigates the links between different media, including media combinations (for instance, computer installations, illuminated manuscripts and opera); medial transpositions (film adaptations and novelisations); and intermedia references (references to music in films or books).

The aim of the symposium itself was to investigate the intermedial nature of early modern, modern and contemporary literary and theatrical forms in Japan and the West from a comparative perspective. The conference addressed a range of questions, including: how have masks been portrayed across the centuries, and what has been their role in human exchanges on stage but also in images and texts? What intermedial strategies have been employed to address the problematic ‘readability’ of masks and of the emotions and (social, cultural) significations they convey? How have screens contributed to dialectics of exhibition, mediation and concealment, in relation more specifically to representations of the body and its environment? What commonalities can be found between ancient uses of screens and contemporary technologies mediating our relation to the world and that are often used on stage nowadays? In addition to bringing Meiji and Edinburgh in dialogue, the event also sought to include contributions from practitioners, including artists and film-makers.

The event began with a panel focusing on “The Face and the Body”. Artist Karin G. Nomura explained how she sought to develop what she termed “a personal artistic language that mirrors the instability and anxiety within all representations of self”. Emmanuelle Lacore-Martin (Edinburgh) compared the use of anatomical similes and metaphors in representations of the self in early modern French literary texts (Rabelais, Montaigne) with the development of anatomical illustration in anatomical treatises of the period. Xingtong Zhou (Edinburgh) examined the Japanese-born author Yoko Tawada’s semi-autobiographical novel *Das Bad* as an intricate investigation into the complex and multiple processes of subject formation.

The second panel was entitled “Theatre”. Alexandra Smith (Edinburgh) discussed the use of social masks and the grotesque in Vsevolod Meyerhold’s productions of French, Russian and Belgian plays in the early twentieth century. Kaori Oku (Meiji) examined the role of the Harlequin in eighteenth-century French painting and theatre. Alex Watson (Meiji) described the French landscape painter and stage designer Phillip James de Louthembourg’s 1781 *Eidophusikon* a large-scale miniature theatre that used moving three-dimensional objects, realistic sounds and dramatic lighting effects to simulate the illusion of moving natural landscapes.

After lunch, a special session on “Adaptation and Genre” started with Inma Sanchez-Garcia discussing the use of William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* in Ingmar Bergman’s *Fanny and*

Alexander. The film director Tatsuya Mori then discussed his new project September 1923, film about the Fukuda Village Incident, in which nine ethnic Japanese people were killed on suspicion that they were ethnic Koreans.

The fourth panel examined “Performance, ritual and power”, and began with Toru Yamada (Meiji) describing the religious and theatrical use of kagura (神楽) masks in multi-religious communities in Nagasaki’s Goto Archipelago. Mariko Naito (Meiji) followed with a paper examining the intermedial role of screens in the *renga*, medieval Japanese linked-verse, composed and theorized by the poet and aristocrat Minamoto Toshiyori (1055-1129).

The fifth and final panel comprised a detailed discussion of the theme of “Interface”. Rumiko Oyama (Meiji) investigated linguistic and visual communication in the work of illustrator Ryo Honda. Ema Tanaka (Meiji) explored the use of masks in mobile app games *PokemonGO* and *Harry Potter Wizards Unite*. Fabien Arribert-Narce (Edinburgh) concluded by examining the intermedial rewriting and (self-)reappropriation processes between images, words and sounds in the French writer Annie Ernaux’s film documentary *The Super 8 Years* (2022).

A follow-up event, entitled *Theories and Practices of Intermediality Today* will take place at University of Edinburgh, 14 and 15 March 2024. This will feature around twenty-eight speakers, and extend the collaboration to Linnaeus University (Sweden) and Aix-Marseilles University (France). Mariko Naito, Rumiko Oyama, Ema Tanaka and Alex Watson will attend and give papers.

The event also marked the publication of the first book of edited articles based on this collaboration, *Intermedial Encounters, With and Beyond Roland Barthes* (Peter Lang) edited by Fabien Arribert-Narce and Alex Watson, and featuring essays from students and staff at both Edinburgh and Meiji. Peter Lang have already commissioned a follow-up, *Intermedial Encounters: Identity, Ethics and Aesthetics*, to be edited by Marion Schmidt (Edinburgh) and François Giraud (Edinburgh). Given the high quality of the papers at the December event, the organisers intend to use both events as the basis for a third volume in this international publication series.

Alex Watson, Meiji University, January 12 2024