

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **REDISCOVERING AND CONTEXTUALIZING BALTIC SEA REGION FILM HISTORY AND CURRENT TRENDS**

The special edition of the journal *Culture Crossroads* dedicated to film and audio-visual media comprises proceedings from two academic conferences organized by the Latvian Academy of Culture in 2020 – the 6<sup>th</sup> Baltic Sea Region Film History conference and the conference *Being Juris Podnieks* (a session of the annual research conference *Culture Crossroads*). The volume contributes to a growing body of research on the region in the field of film and audio-visual media continuing explorations and providing new topics and approaches to already previously published special issues of the journal on this field (vol. 10 (2017), vol. 14 (2019)).

The Baltic Sea Region Film History conference is an annual international event that aims to bring together film scholars and researchers who focus on film history and current trends of the audio-visual sector of the Baltic Sea region. The first conference was held in 2014 in Tallinn, Estonia. From 2019, the conference has been changing its location, Vilnius was its host city in 2019, but in 2020 it was Riga. The sixth edition of the conference was dedicated to the phenomena of genre entitled “Genres and their Transformations: Global and Local Contexts, Production and Reception” and was held in Riga on 14–15 October 2020. Genre is a frequently used term in theoretical analysis of film, and specific denominator for promoting films to the audiences. It was explored by a number of international scholars from various perspectives. In a joint effort of the Latvian Academy of Culture, in partnership with Lithuanian Theatre and Music Academy, and Estonian Film Archive, the conference was held in a hybrid form due to the Covid-19 epidemiological restrictions.

The articles published in this collection which developed from the conference papers look at the fiction films, documentaries and TV series, exploring formal qualities, production contexts, and issues of authorship from different methodological perspectives. Gunhild Agger (Aalborg University, Denmark) and Dita Rietuma (Riga Stradiņš University, Latvian Academy of Culture) analyse the phenomena of television serials, which are receiving growing audience and scholarly interest. Agger examines the dual legacy of the Nordic noir, which draws on the tradition of social realism and of Gothic thrillers, looking closely at two recent serials produced in Denmark and Sweden. The notion of quality TV serials is at the centre of Rietuma’s study. Looking back at the popularity of the serials in the 1980s Latvia, the author explores contemporary situation

and the reasons for the loss of this tradition over the recent decades. Sanda Rapa and Jana Taperte (University of Latvia) analyse the importance of speech and its absence as storytelling strategies in two Latvian films representing slow cinema. In the context of genre, documentary films are examined by Mantė Valiūnaitė (Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, Lithuania) and Zane Balčus (Latvian Academy of Culture). Valiūnaitė offers close reading of two recent Lithuanian documentary films which invite to re-evaluate the way animals are represented in cinema, whereas Balčus approaches the presence of the documentary filmmaker onscreen as a participant of the film's narrative in three recent Latvian documentaries.

The other two materials in this volume focus on the filmmaking oeuvre of the Latvian documentary director and cinematographer Juris Podnieks (1950–1992). 2020 marked the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Podnieks, and the day of academic and creative study *Being Juris Podnieks* was held on 4 December in the framework of the annual research conference *Culture Crossroads*. The conference consisted of academic papers, a discussion with international experts, presentation on the documentary film being produced on Podnieks (with the planned release in 2022), and screening of the Academy's film students work made specifically for this occasion. In the journal Daniela Zacmane's (Latvian Academy of Culture) article discloses the presence of melodramatic modality in Podnieks' film "Is It Easy to Be Young?" (*Vai viegli būt jaunam?*, 1986), an approach less addressed in documentary studies than fiction filmmaking.

The volume concludes with the transcript of the discussion *Juris Podnieks and the Constellations of Times*, where four international experts and film practitioners discussed Podnieks' films, especially those made in collaboration with international televisions (like "Hello, Do You Hear Us?" / *Mēs*, 1989), his stylistic approach, as well as broader issues on documentary filmmaking. "Hello, Do You Hear Us?" was a milestone work documenting the collapse of the Soviet Union in the five-part film broadcast on the UK televisions ITV and Channel 4 in the early 1990. The participation of the film's commissioning editor Richard Creasy (UK) in the discussion, as well as film's editor Antra Cilinska (Latvia) offers an in-depth look into the production context of this important film.

We hope that the materials collected in this volume will inspire other researchers to explore the heritage of film and audio-visual media of the region, as well as its contemporary developments. The possibility to familiarize with the research done in different countries within one volume is significant insight in the current interests of the colleagues from the region, and it could contribute to further exploration of related and new topics.

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