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Special Issue on “Opera and Cinema”. A Note from the Editors and the Guest Editor

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Opera and Cinema

A Note from the Editors and the Guest Editor

The relationship between opera and cinema is as old as the medium of film itself. It dates back to the silent period, when even such a complex art form as opera made its way into silent-movie houses. An impressive number of films were made of operas ever since—from Cecil B. DeMille's “mute” *Carmen* (1915) to Kasper Holten's “digital” *Juan* (2010), and including classical renderings such as Ingmar Bergman's *The Magic Flute* (1975), or Hans Jürgen Syberberg's *Parsifal* (1982). And yet, the interplay of opera and film from the silent period to the digital era—a history punctuated by episodes of both attraction and avoidance, as well as by successful and unsuccessful collaborations—cannot be equated with the various stages in the development of the hybrid genre of opera-film. On the one hand, opera incorporated the medium of film in itself. This happened as early as when Berg intended the orchestral interlude of *Lulu* to coincide with the projection of a silent movie. On the other hand, cinema has always represented, reframed, and displaced opera in many different ways—namely, whenever a movie includes operatic music in the soundtrack or features a character attending an opera performance or listening to operatic music.

The importance of these facts notwithstanding, a few questions are worth asking to give a glimpse of the complexity of the topic at hand. What actually happened to opera, when film, the art of the moving picture, became a reality? In what extent did the situation change when sound was later introduced? How did opera perceive the newcomer—as a threat, or rather as an opportunity of renewal and even of survival? And how did film deal with opera in turn? Did it see it as a prominent precursor that might intercede in favour of its dignity as an art form? Or did it try to supersede its predecessor, and to get rid of, rather than to acknowledge, its alleged operatic inheritance? Whatever the responses, it seems clear that the relationship between opera and film was not immune to controversy. Quite on the contrary, as Stanley Cavell has compellingly suggested, a certain sense of affinity has often been met by a sense of competition.

These questions—and the sense of unresolved tension that they convey—provide the background for this issue. They are also an echo of the conference “Opera and Cinema: The Politics of an Encounter,” jointly organized by the editors and the guest editor (with the collaboration of the INET-MD and the CESEM), that was held at the Teatro Nacional de São Carlos (the Portuguese National Opera House) in November 2012. United by a shared interest in opera and cinema, part of the contributions gathered here derives from papers presented in that occasion. Likewise, the interview with Richard Leppert presents a timely development of the lively exchange of ideas that followed his keynote address at the same meeting. We are extremely glad to present an equally varied and stimulating set of contributions—including three articles and the above-mentioned interview—that engage intersections of opera and cinema from a variety of angles. As a whole they prolong an inquiry that remains unfinished by virtue of the mutability of its object: the intriguing and ever-changing dialogue between opera and cinema. It is our hope that the reader will be willing to add her or his own voice to the on-going discussion.

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Guest Editor

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