

# CONTACT ZONES

STUDIES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN FILM AND LITERATURE

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CONTACT ZONES OF CULTURAL IMAGES, TEXTURES, ACCENTS

THE DANUBE AS CULTURAL BODY/SPACE

PLACES OF ENCOUNTER: THEMATISING CULTURAL EXCHANGE  
IN CONTEMPORARY HUNGARIAN-ROMANIAN CO-PRODUCTIONS

CAN FREUD CURE VAMPIRES? *THERAPY FOR A VAMPIRE* FROM  
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TRANSGRESSIVE BODY IN HUNGARIAN LITERATURE AND FILM:  
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Space-ing Otherness. Cultural Images of Space, Contact Zones in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Film and Literature

## Contact Zones of Cultural Images, Textures, Accents<sup>1</sup>

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*The Hireling decided that when he woke up he'd find his slip of paper and copy down into his notebook the names of all the ships he'd seen that day, 14 August: Razelm, Istria, Salvator, Bucureni, Polar, Malnaş, Izer, Mîndra, Costila, Tîrnava, Somes, Caraiman, Topliţa, Polar XI, Ciucaş, Snagov, Mizil, Lupeni, Rîureni, Athanassios D, Tîrgu Jiu, Braşov, Vîrsan, Călimăneşti, Gheorgheni, Voiajor, Leopard, Cardon, Cocora, Dorobanţi, Cormoran, Pontica, Căciulata, Grădina, Amurg, Colina, Zheica, Semnal.*

(Péter Esterházy)

The sentence above closes Péter Esterházy's *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn (down the Danube)*, published in 1990, a book that creates Central and Eastern Europe as a geographical, historical, cultural and textual agency, an intertextual *language*. Esterházy, a prominent author of the Hungarian literature after the 1989 regime change, finishes his novel with a Hungarian sentence including Romanian words. The language of the novel is a frontier, just as the meaning of the last Romanian word is “signal, sign”, signalling that the Hungarian (literary) language, the Hungarian reader reaches a limit. The listing of Romanian names indirectly signals the lack of Romanian sentences. The limit of one language is the opening of the other. And at the same time the opening up of one's own language. The strangeness of the list, its liminal linguistic experience is also an impulse for imagination. The words listed as names of ships transfer the reader into an imaginary geography of travelling. The otherness does not appear descriptively, but it becomes the experience of the reader. The sentence is a frame, the listed names and words, whether or not understood, as signals of a different (linguistic) world, send the reader outside the frame of the book.

Our project, started in 2014 – *Space-ing Otherness. Cultural Images of Space, Contact Zones in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Film and Literature* (OTKA NN 112700) –, focuses on Romanian–Hungarian relations while also analysing the discourses of the East–West dichotomy. It maps the formations created in and referring to this geocultural space in works of art, and indirectly also grasps the common identification spaces of belonging to several cultures. The contact zone is understood as the creation, interference or transformation of frontiers or differences in a cultural and medial sense. The works of art are related to the

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geocultural, social space as spaces of imagination differing in their medium. At the same time, the works of art as creators of imagination shed light on the imagination which always appears in the understanding of the other, the foreigner, and inseparably from this, of oneself. The limits of the “own” are outlined by imagined communities (Benedict Anderson, 1991), cultural differences, imagined spaces, and geographical imagination (Edward W. Soja, 1999). In contact spaces the imagination, the plurality or conflict of perspectives materialises in the tension of differences, the dominant feature is ambiguity, and movement, being-on-the-road becomes a fundamental experience. It is a space of the in-betweenness of understanding and non-understanding where in Péter Esterházy’s closure/opening Romanian words render fluent the meaning of the Hungarian sentence.

Hajnal Király’s article in the first issue of the journal presents Romanian–Hungarian film co-productions as a dynamic space of cultural differences deriving from the different aesthetic traditions of these two neighbouring filmic cultures. She regards the directors who create the special aesthetics of the co-productions (Marian Crişan, Szabolcs Hajdu, Kornél Mundruczó) as radigrant artists (Nicolas Bourriaud), as contemporary figures of the wanderer/traveller who create art between cultures under contemporary conditions. In this interstitial space multilinguality acquires a figurative role, and “accent becomes an unmistakable trace of identity.” The particularities created in the in-between become the specificities. In translation, transcoding images and transplanting behaviours implies an external (third) view, in these films the inclusion of the third is connected to the West. The (post)colonial and gendered gaze analyses what kind of associated images are needed to transport the “unspoiled landscape” and the body as “meeting ‘site’ between East and West” in this cultural mediation.

Diána Sóki discusses “how the different cultural particularities are projected onto the body and the space” in two literary works. Mór Jókai’s novel, *Timar’s Two Worlds* (1872) and Péter Esterházy’s *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn* (1990) are historically and aesthetically different inscriptions on the geography of the Danube. This way they create the divergent historical embodiments of geographical and cultural ideas. While in Jókai’s novel the Turkish girl and her unreadability borders the space from the East, Esterházy’s traveller with the “glances” of an Austrian countess borders the “same” space from the West. The landscape and the (female) body are imaginary/projection surfaces and thus they reflect cultural readings. An important subtext for both Hungarian novels is Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), published close in time to Jókai’s novel, a work that presents the East–West relation

from an English (colonizing) viewpoint, which also brings forth the fear of *reverse colonization* (Stephen D. Arata, 1990). Esterházy's traveller reads this work as well down the Danube, reflecting the cultural experience of the landscape as text. Stoker's work, as among others Stephen D. Arata also stresses, draws the (fluid) frontier of East and West also on the line of the Danube. "Harker immediately invokes a second convention of the travel genre when, having crossed the Danube at Buda-Pesth, he invests the river with symbolic significance. 'The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East; the most Western of splendid bridges over the Danube [...] took us among the traditions of Turkish rule' (p. 9). In crossing the Danube, Harker maintains, he leaves 'Europe' behind, geographically and imaginatively, and approaches the first outpost of the 'Orient'" (Arata 1990, 636).

András Hlavacska's study analyses a contemporary filmic re-medialization of the abovementioned influential Dracula legend and its varied interpretations. Austrian film director David Rühm's *Therapy for a Vampire (Der Vampir auf der Couch, 2014)* implicitly parodies the stigmatisation of the expropriating, psychologised and ideologised space of cultural imagination by layers of linguistic and visual allusions, generating a series of diegetic misunderstandings. Drakula's Eastern/Romanian exoticism is reduced to the – this time – Hungarian strange accent of his last name impossible to pronounce. Geza von Közsnöm's individual, intimised story appears integrated into a decisive western, psychoanalytic discourse, within which his reflections of self-knowledge become parodical (also parodying psychoanalytic interpretations). Indirectly, the film could also be seen as a parody of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century topos "Transylvania is Europe's unconscious" (Geoffrey Wall, see Arata 1990, 635): the *embodied* unconscious that visits Freud for therapy in the figure of the count changes the interpretive (metaphorical) discourse into a literal one. The stigmatising figurativity of colonising discourses appears here as a parody: creating an ambiguous contact surface of an imagined vampire subtext and a literal psychoanalytic discourse.

Eszter Vidosa's article analyses the phenomenon of transgressive entity in Hungarian contemporary works. Noé Tibor Kiss's *Incognito (Inkognitó, 2010)* is the first Hungarian transgender novel after 1989, in which the social genders and borders become dynamic through the language-seeking modality of an insecure narrator. Benedek Fliegauf's *Womb* (2010) opens up the limits of the human body through the possibility of the cyborg body. The literary work is a linguistic attempt to fluidise the (post)communist limits of gender, to visualise the "eternal in-between" identity. With the problem of cloned entities (copies), the

film subverts the relationship of the artificial and natural body. The fear of the “cyborg which is exactly the same”, which can be imagined because of the technological conditions, turns into the fear from the identical. The racial fear from otherness understood as reverse colonization (vampirism as the barbarisation of the body) in *Dracula* is “neutralised” here in the technical cyborg-imagination generated by *human* fear.

Our journal wishes to explore the contact zones of (geocultural) imaginations from different times and different media, with special focus on connections and passages between cultural and medial differences. We believe that these become traces of identity on an “imaginative map” of regional space-images.

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# Places of Encounter: Thematizing Cultural Exchange in Contemporary Hungarian-Romanian Co-Productions<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The dissimilarities between contemporary Hungarian and Romanian cinema, detectable in the representation of postcommunist phenomena and different stylistical choices - a formalist, poetical approach to these topics in the case of Hungarian films and a preference for realism and “immediacy” in the Romanian ones - appear reconciliated and even reflected upon in co-productions between the two countries. Besides bringing together different languages, acting and directorial styles, as well as geocultural settings, the co-productions in question often thematise cultural encounters, communication issues, border crossings and identity quests. These topics are mostly figured by heterotopia enhancing in-between-ness and liminality, such as the no man's land in *Morgen* (Marian Crişan, 2010) or the house built on water in *Delta* (Kornél Mundruczó, 2006). In line with Ewa Mazierska's assumptions regarding the tendency of co-productions to produce heterotopias, I propose to analyse a corpus of four Hungarian-Romanian co-productions with the aim to reveal the transnational dynamics reflected in the diegeses of these films, most importantly in their choice of heterotopias that are, in Foucault's definition, in a reflexive relationship with all the other sites and social discourses. I will also argue that these films can be ultimately regarded as heterotopias themselves, enabling communication and a mutual understanding between the two cultures. I will also show how this exchange is orchestrated by directors who fulfil the criteria of the *radicant* artist, a traveller who excels in translating ideas, transcoding images and transplanting behaviours (Bourriaud 2009, 22).

**Keywords:** co-productions, heterotopia, accented cinema, radicant, contemporary Hungarian and Romanian cinema

## Introduction

Despite a similar and interconnected socio-political background, contemporary Hungarian and Romanian cinema shows striking differences in terms of dealing with postcommunist phenomena such as memory work, migration, the effects of globalisation and those of the adherence to the European Union. In terms of the figurative representation of the postcommunist subjectivity and identity crisis, the two cinemas display an opposite movement: while in Hungarian films the body becomes a figure reinforcing the Western concepts and discourses on alienated subjectivity, capitalist production, consumerism, fetishism and spectacle, Romanian films seem to be confronting Western theories and concepts of the body, national and sexual identity, and memory with the Romanian socio-political actuality. Stylistically this difference is reflected in an exaggerated formalism that characterises Hungarian films as opposed to a preference for immediacy and micro-realism

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alternating with an alienating camera work in the case of Romanian cinema. I argue that in Hungarian-Romanian co-productions the collision between the two cinematic traditions can be seen as the articulation of cultural specificities and of a dynamics of cultural interactions. In my presentation I propose to analyse four Romanian-Hungarian co-productions that, intriguingly, thematise cultural, ethnic relationships between the two countries, doubling, in an ironical way, the transnational dynamics of co-production.

Hungarian director Kornél Mundruczó's *Delta* (2006), set in Romania, with mainly Hungarian actors, tells the story of a young man returning from the West to the region of the Danube Delta, inhabited by both ethnic Hungarians and Romanians who are regarding with suspicion his project to build a house on the water and his too intimate relationship with his sister. This ultimately triggers the anger of the community and causes their death.

Szabolcs Hajdu's *Bibliothèque Pascal* (2010), set and shot in Romania, partly with Romanian actors and crew, focuses on the narration of a prostitute who returns to Romania from the UK and applies for the custody of her daughter. This film appears as a cross-breeding between the two mentioned cinematic paradigms, its visual stylisation corresponding to the magic realism of the protagonist's narration, a distinct feature of Hajdu's films, being anchored in the harsh reality of the state official's office (a recurrent location in Romanian films) and his practical approach to the case in question. Hajdu's most recent film, *Mirage* (2014) is already set in Hungary, with mostly Romanian actors and a surprising participation of Isaac de Bankolé, and displays a utopian vision of a farm where Romanian gangsters acting like cowboys keep Hungarians as slaves. Finally, Romanian director Marian Crişan's film *Morgen* (2010), set on the Romanian border town of Salonta, is the story of an unlikely friendship between Nelu, a Romanian man working as a security guard in a supermarket (played by a prominent ethnic Hungarian actor of the Hungarian Theatre in Cluj, Romania) and an illegal emigrant (a Kurdish refugee, according to the screenplay, played by Turkish actor Yilmaz Yalcin), stuck on the way towards Germany.

In these co-productions the central topic of transnational communication characterises by a series of recurrent features that all four films share: the figurative role of the spoken idioms, the recurrent topic of protection and dependency, the preference for heterotopias and the inclusion of a third, Western party in the narrative, figurative of the economic background of the co-productions. In what follows I aim to prove that these aspects are not only figurative of intercultural exchange, but they overtly thematise the economical and even (cultural) political implications of co-productions orchestrated by what Bourriaud calls a "radicant artist," (2009) who moves and translates freely between cultures and languages.



## The Figurativity of “Accented” Films

All four films discussed here are multilingual: besides Romanian and Hungarian, occasionally other languages occur: English and Spanish (used between the female protagonist Mona and Pascal, the brothel owner in *Bibliothèque Pascal*, the mysterious black man and the Romanian gangster-cowboys in *Mirage*), as well as bits of German and Turkish (or Kurdish?) in *Morgen*. Besides an evident reflection on a multifaceted European identity, constantly replanned due to border shifts and crossings, linguistic diversity often figurates the economic exchange between Hungary and Romania, as well as a Western party, involved in the cinematic production process. In *Delta*, for example, the intrusion of Romanian ethnic Hungarians (speaking a dialect of Hungarian) into the Paradisiac waterland, bringing huge (phallic) poles of wood that Mihail paid for with Euros, in a way replicates the arrival of an international film crew eager to transform the unspoiled landscape into a commercial product. Similarly, foreign language (together with foreign currency) appears as an instrument of a dodgy business in *Bibliothèque*, *Mirage* and *Morgen*, too.

The figurative role of multilinguality is especially prominent in films of Szabolcs Hajdu. As Balázs Varga argues, linguistic hybridity and miscommunication only emphasise the sense of being lost or in-between, prevalent in his films. In these linguistically charged situations the capacity of translation is crucial: characters manage to come out from a pressing situation depending on their ability to switch between languages. In *White Palms* (2007), for example, in Canada, Dongó, the main protagonist, is more appreciated by his student for his improving English than for his professional skills (Varga 2015, 8). This great adaptability of the East European individual to the demands of the Western market is best represented by the character of Mona in *Bibliothèque*: she switches without effort between four languages (Hungarian, Romanian, English, Spanish), depending on location and situation. However, her speech is always “accented:” her Romanian has Hungarian accent, her Hungarian bears the trace of ethnic Hungarians from Romania and her English has East European accent. In these films spoken language, either Hungarian or Romanian, often bears imperfections, detectable in pronunciation and omission of cultural nuances, resulting in what Hamid Naficy calls “accented cinema” in connection with diasporic cinema. Accented language as a source of misunderstandings and miscommunication becomes a signifier of national identity and otherness, that is, of a cultural discourse different from the official one: in *Bibliothèque Pascal* Mona speaks a very good Romanian grammatically, though with a strong accent, and she is immediately detected as non-Romanian by Viorel, the alleged father of her daughter.

As Katalin Sándor in her analysis of this film argues, “Mona defines herself as ‘jumi-juma’ (‘fifty-fifty’) as Romanian – Hungarian, her identity being negotiated in-between languages, cultures, ethnicities.” As such, “the ethnic-linguistic hybridity is not only manifest in a discursive-conceptual but also in a corporeal way”, manifest in Mona’s accent: “while being completely fluent in Romanian, her body, the organs of speech remember and reproduce the sonorous memory of another language” (Sándor 2014, 89).

Mona’s reply, uttered in Romanian (“You speak as if there were only Romanians on the Earth, but there are Hungarians, too. And some are fifty-fifty”), however, goes beyond a simple statement of her nationality, revealing a clear irritation regarding the official language or as it were, official discourse [Fig.1.].



[Fig.1.] "some are fifty-fifty" - Mona and Viorel in *Bibliothéque Pascal*

In a similar vein, although they speak the same language, at first Mona apparently fails to understand the adoption officer’s intention to help her with a lie that seems realistic instead of the truth that appears as surrealistic. And conversely, the officer, though understands Mona well, fails to detect the trauma that eventually lies behind the fantastic details of Mona’s narration. Accent becomes an unmistakable trace of identity in these films, both of the character and actor, a sign of home even in circumstances of displacement such as migration, exile, or work-related journey. In *Morgen*, for example, Nelu’s accent points both at the actor’s ethnic Hungarian origin, as well as the linguistic and cultural influence of Hungary’s geographic proximity (the majority of the town’s population are ethnic Hungarians). Similarly, in press material and interviews Behran is referred to as both a Turkish and a Kurdish immigrant, which raises the problematic relationship of identity with nationality and

ethnicity.<sup>2</sup> Although the spectator cannot judge whether Behran speaks with an accent or not, it is intriguing that the two actors and the protagonists played by them participate in a mirror structure: the ethnic minority Hungarian playing a majority Romanian and the representative of the Turkish majority playing an ethnic minority.

According to Hamid Naficy, “it is impossible to speak without an accent”. Consequently, accent can be one of the most distinguishing traits of personality:

Depending on their accents, some speakers may be considered regional, local yokel, vulgar, ugly, or comic, whereas others may be thought of as educated, upper-class, sophisticated, beautiful, and proper. As a result, accent is one of the most intimate and powerful markers of group identity and solidarity, as well as of individual difference and personality. (Naficy 2001, 23)

Naficy applies the term “accented cinema” for exilic and diasporic cinema not only due to the regular accented speech of the protagonists – this is just one of the characteristics of the films in question. The syntagm rather refers to a cinema that “derives its accent from its artisanal and collective production modes and from the filmmakers’ and audiences’ deterritorialized locations.” (2001, 23) Although the films under analysis do not belong to the exilic and diasporic cinema in its more restricted sense (involving a permanently dislocated director and topics related to various aspects of life in diaspora), I contend that they still fulfil the most specific requirements of accented cinema as described by Naficy. They are low budget, multilingual films, often characterised by a convoluted production process, multisource funding and collective production. The three main traits of accented cinema – interstitial, partial, multiple – also apply to most aspects of these films: they are interstitial (that is, articulating difference) in terms of their topics, choice of characters, actors and sometimes a mixture of genres and cinematic traditions (Naficy 2001, 46). In concordance with this, they are only partially adapting to any cinematic paradigm and, as an alternative, choose multiplicity of styles and cultural voices.

Additionally, their directors are often crossing borders, just like their characters involved in a great variety of journey narratives, including homecoming scenarios. In the case of films of Szabolcs Hajdu, the female characters are played by his fetish actress who happens to be his wife, Orsolya Török-Illyés, an ethnic Hungarian woman from Transylvania, Romania. In *Bibliothèque* and *Mirage* (both featuring Romanian actors also) her bodily presence mediates between the two, Hungarian and Romanian cultures not only on a diegetic, but also the metadiegetic level of the co-production process, due to her ability to translate

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Kuzma and Pfeifer (2011) and Ella Veres (2012).

between the two cultures and even to catalyse the possible tensions and miscommunications. I contend that the recurrent topic of freedom and authority, protection and dependency, often implying a third, Western party, is related in all four films to money and profit, figurating, again, the East-West relationships in general and the given co-productions in particular.

### **Protection, Dependency and the Third, Western Party**

In *Delta*, the protagonist Mihail, arriving home from the West, cannot buy the acceptance of the community he depends on and is unable to protect himself from its rage. He can buy services from the community he once left with Euros, but he is regarded with suspicion, as an intruder menacing the old equilibrium of the village and finally is eliminated as an unwanted element. Similarly, the topic of slavery in *Mirage* figurates an economic dependence in Hajdu's utopistic vision of Romanian-Hungarian relationships: on the farm in ruins, situated somewhere in the Puszta, a typical Hungarian landscape close to the Romanian border, Romanian cowboy-gangsters (played by Romanian actors displaced from their natural Romanian setting), who also speak English when it comes to business, keep Hungarians as agricultural slaves, including a woman (played by Orsolya Török-Illyés), the mistress of the gangster's leader. In this situation revolving around Hajdu's favourite topic of freedom and oppression arrives the mysterious black man, whose money might offer a solution of escape for the oppressed, and ultimately causes the self-annihilation of the community in question. In a similar vein, in *Bibliothèque*, the act of converting of the East European body into a Western European cultural product and foreign currency reiterates the same topic of the colonising effect of the Western influence, also detectable in co-productions. A number of studies have already emphasised the colonising Western male gaze represented in this film in the setting of a brothel where the exquisite clientèle is served with Eastern European bodies re-enacting scenes from Western-European cultural heritage. The unknown, thus untouchable Eastern-European body can be approached only if culturally "domesticated," thus Mona, the "fifty-fifty" Hungarian-Romanian woman is forced to enact, in turns, Joan of Arc and Desdemona. In the Desdemona-scene, the "alien" female body and Shakespeare's drama meet in a fetishistic object-image, a figure covered all over in black plastic stretchy clothes. Besides acting as an artificial skin that excludes all authentic social communication between the perpetrator-coloniser and his victim, the plastic cover works as an attractive "packaging" that exposes her as a commodity, a common capitalist currency. The image of this morbidly sexy body (recalling the Catwoman from the *Batman* films) appears on the poster of the movie, becoming the "official image" of the film conceived as just another Eastern European

product, turned into a Western commodity. While we can agree with Aga Skrodzka in refusing a too radical condemnation of the Western gaze turning the Eastern female body into a sexual object (Skrodzka 2015, 124), we can still argue that this body, bearing the traces of cultural memory, is both a transnational and a transitional object involved in a complex intercultural translation between East and West [Fig.2.].



[Fig.2.]. Mona's body as (erotic) product in *Bibliothèque Pascal*

Besides the East-West connection, the framing scene at the custody office also displays a peculiar form of protection and dependency, termed by Mónica Dánél as the ambiguity of authority and solidarity, detectable between the officer and Mona in the use of languages and gestural expression (Dánél 2015, 47).

Finally, in a most emotional example, in Crişan's film the relationship between the two lonely men epitomises this protection-dependency correlation, figured by Nelu's parodic security-guard image and the motorcycle with the side wing. After accepting the foreign currency from the Kurdish immigrant that he exchanges into Romanian Lei, after repeated attempts, at the end he carries across the border his friend, with whom he communicates perfectly without a shared language [Figs.3–4.].



[Figs.3–4.]. Nelu as provider of security in *Morgen*

The co-productions under analysis also involve a third, Western party, most often Germany, France, the UK and the Netherlands, figured in the narratives through a character returning home (in *Delta*), a cosmopolitan businessman (*Bibliothèque*) or a visiting, mysterious foreigner in *Mirage*, who represent the Western gaze. Ironically, neither the businessman from *Bibliothèque*, nor the football player are innate Western citizens: they both represent an “adopted,” “accented” Western gaze associated with a self-colonising attitude and (in both cases) dodgy businesses thriving on the outskirts of a Western capitalist, global economy. What Svetlana Boym considers a Russian phenomenon, the films of the “return of the prodigal son” be it an émigré or an international prostitute who comes back to the motherland after many misadventures abroad” also appears in the films coming from the former Eastern bloc and are meant to thematise the encounter and the aforementioned

dependency relationship between the East and the West. The figure of the foreigner in literature and film is used to defamiliarise the local culture, to give an alternative perspective on it; however, in *Delta* or *Bibliothèque* the native is not allowed to fall back in love with his own homeland, to rediscover the pleasure of the familiar, as Boym points out about Russian films (Boym 2001, 65). In *Delta* this return appears as a disruptive, colonising, aggressive act, symbolised by the phallic wooden poles bought with Euros, and inserted in the unspoiled water by Mihail [Fig.5.]. In *Bibliothèque*, the return doesn't necessarily imply the existence of a home: in the closing scene we see Mona and her daughter in a furniture supermarket, Kika or Ikea, an imitation, a globalised simulacrum of a home.



[Fig.5.]. Figuration of aggressive (cultural) intrusion in *Delta*

In all the films under analysis, the Western element, symbolised by foreign currency, a fetishising gaze, or consumerism also appears as a cause of disruption inside a Romanian-Hungarian community: Mihail from *Delta* is murdered, Mona loses her family after becoming a sexual object in a Liverpool brothel, the Turkish migrant cannot continue his journey to Germany because he lacks enough Euros and he is stranded at the border, causing serious problems for Nelu, while in *Mirage* the arrival of a black man with a football full of money stirs a war between the local gangsters. Isaac de Bankolé's "reframed" image of the lonely wolf, a mysterious Jim Jarmusch franchise since *The limits of control* (2009), is the key to the Western audiences and thus Western money. With an ironical switch, after everybody got

killed, the black man takes his suitcase (“a multifaceted metaphor of the mobility of identity” according to Naficy [2001, 266]) and the football with the money and leaves on horseback, stylishly disappearing into the sunset on the Puszta [Fig.6].



[Fig.6.]. Unlikely cultural and genre encounters in *Mirage*

Many of the characters representing local authority or the Western party, or even those returning home from abroad (with money or without) correspond to what Naficy calls “a shifter:” an “operator” in the sense of being dishonest, evasive, and expedient, or even being a “mimic,” “a producer of critical excess, irony, and sly civility” (Bhabha 1994). As Naficy argues, in the context of so-called “border filmmaking,” “shifters are characters who exhibit some or all of these registers of understanding and performativity. As such, they occupy a powerful position in the political economy of both actual and diegetic border crossings” (2001, 32). The brothel manager Pascal, the adoption officer and even Mona in *Bibliothèque*, the border police in *Morgen* and the gangsters in *Mirage* gain their power, as Naficy puts it, “from their situationist existence, their familiarity with the cultural and legal codes of interacting cultures, and the way in which they manipulate identity and the asymmetrical power situations in which they find themselves”. (2001, 32) Extra-diegetically the creators (directors, producers, actors) of these co-productions can also be considered shifters, “mimics” adapting to and manipulating cultural codes in order to critically reflect upon transnational communication and the authorities orchestrating this communication.

In these films bodies are not only objects of exchange between countries, but often appear as heterotopias themselves, become meeting ‘sites’ between East and West. The body of Mona in *Bibliothèque Pascal* functions both as a ‘container of memories’ of her home and a surface onto which Western cultural stereotypes and prejudices can be projected. As I have already argued, her body is negotiating, on an extra-diegetic level, the meeting between



Hungarian and Romanian cultures. This results in the heterotopia of the film itself, presenting a compelling mixture between the formalism characteristic of most contemporary Hungarian films and the hyperrealism of the so called Romanian New Wave.

### **Heterotopias as Scenes of Intercultural Dynamics**

According to Naficy, the preoccupation with territoriality, rootedness and geography are distinct features of accented films. As he argues: “Because they are deterritorialized, these films are deeply concerned with territory and territoriality. Their preoccupation with place is expressed in their open and closed space-time (chronotopical) representations.” (2001, 5) Besides chronotopes (of which the most prominent is the house, the new or left-behind home of the protagonists) heterotopias are basic ingredients of an accented cinematic discourse on identity, cultural and economic interaction, as well as power relationships.

The fair, the train station, the police station, the brothel and the house built on water are all localisable places, whose in-betweenness, transitory and/or liminal character contributes to a figural discourse on the cultural implications of mobility and immigration, as well as on Eastern European identity. These places are what Foucault calls ‘other places’ being in a metaphorical, reflexive relationship with society while gathering more than one aspect of it. In Foucault’s definition, heterotopias are ‘in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect’ (Foucault 1986: 24). As an illustration of Foucault’s concept, Szabolcs Hajdu's *Mirage* takes place somewhere in the middle of the nowhere, on the Hungarian *Puszta*. This typical Hungarian landscape closely related to national identity (many poets have dedicated poems to it) is “contaminated” here with a building in ruins that opens up a historical dimension, as well as the traces of agricultural and industrial lifestyle, all inhabited by Romanian cowboys and their Hungarian slaves. The house appears here as “a threatened physical place that may experience successive possessions, dispossessions, and repossessions” (Naficy 2001, 169), a dynamics that culminates in the final armed clash between the gangsters and slaves, ending with the elimination of the former and the re-possession of house and land.

This distorted vision of intercultural relationships is reflected upon by the very title of the film, *Mirage*, an allusion to the optical phenomenon frequently visible in the *Puszta*, showing things upside down, as reflected by the last image of the film. As a kind of distorted mirror, the film as a mirage itself can be seen as a heterotopia that reflects heterogeneous cultural and cinematic influences and references from Hollywood film genres to the trend of

slow cinema and European arthouse film tradition, merging the global with the local into a visionary representation of what Svetlana Boym calls the “glocal.” (Boym 2001, 67) This also corresponds to the already mentioned interstitiality of accented cinema, defined by Naficy as the ability “to operate both within and astride the cracks of the system, benefiting from its contradictions, anomalies, and heterogeneity. It also means being located at the intersection of the local and the global, mediating between the two contrary categories, which in syllogism are called “subalternity” and “superalternity.” (2001, 46)

The preference for settings at geopolitical borders and the topic of border crossings involving issues of ethnic and national identity defines the four films under analysis as “border films” (Naficy 2001, 239) rich in heterotopia that appear as “portal places charged with intense emotions, involving fearful escapes, tearful departures, sudden entrapments, devastating rejections, joyful arrivals, and a euphoric sense of liberation that cannot be recuperated easily.” (Naficy 2001, 238)

As Ewa Mazierska argues in her article revealing Eastern European co-productions as productions of heterotopias, in these films the international collaboration is reflected in the diegesis, revolving around cross-cultural communication and actions that take place in or generate heterotopias (2012, 484). This is the case of *Delta*, a Hungarian-German co-production set in the Romanian Danube Delta, casting Hungarian actors, a story about the hostility against the new (a heterotopic house built on the water) and the Western influence in a traditional society in which enmities between ethnic Romanians and Hungarians are not completely resolved. *Bibliothèque Pascal*, a Hungarian-Romanian-German-British co-production casting both Hungarian and Romanian actors, with the creation of the brothel-library heterotopia reflects on the Western Gaze on the Eastern European body, both that of the actor and of the protagonist, as affordable and exotic product. The house on the water, the brothel disguised as library are heterotopias that, as Mazierska would argue, exist outside the normal political, cultural and sometimes physical order (2012, 502). They are places of transition illustrating the issues of increased mobility in Europe, transnationalism and cultural communication, of which co-productions became the most compelling examples, other places themselves, facilitating the meeting of distant, sometimes incompatible places and cultures.

### **Conclusion: Co-productions and the Radicant Artistic Mode**

As we have seen, the co-productions discussed above are often thematising the cultural interactions required by the production process in their very diegesis, through their “accented” characters involved in situations of translation, miscommunication, various types of journey

and return narratives, the topic of (economic) protection and dependency, the presence of a third, often Western party (owner of foreign currency), as well as the preference of heterotopic places of transition, borders and other liminal spaces. As such, although they don't belong to what Naficy terms as exilic cinema, nevertheless they fulfil the requirements of border cinema and accented cinema. This latter category doesn't simply refer to the accented speech of the protagonists, but also to an accented cinematic language detectable in its difference from mainstream narratives, genres and production modes. Additionally and most relevantly, as Naficy puts it, "accented filmmakers are not just textual structures or fictions within their films; they also are empirical subjects, situated in the interstices of cultures and film practices, who exist outside and prior to their films." (2001, 4) As constant travellers between cultures, the filmmakers Mundruczó, Hajdu and Crişan can be considered "shifTERS" themselves, "with multiple perspectives and conflicted or performed identities". (2001, 32)

Both terms of "accented" filmmaker and "shifter" describe an artistic mode that, beyond exilic cinema, characterises what Nicolas Bourriaud terms the artistic superrealism of our times. The case of the directors referred to above epitomises the definition of the radicanT artist who adapts freely to different conditions of production, acting styles, language, as well as to the different stylistic paradigms of cinematic traditions involved. As Bourriaud argues,

To be a radicanT means setting one's roots in motion, staging them in heterogeneous contexts and formats, denying them the power to completely define one's identity, translating ideas, transcoding images, transplanting behaviours, exchanging rather than imposing the figure of the wanderer at the heart of contemporary artistic creation, accompanied by a domain of forms, the journey form, as well as an ethical mode, translation (2009, 22).

In the light of these definitions, all four films referred to above fulfil what Bourriaud calls the surest criteria to judge an artwork today: the capacity of displacement and the figuration of a productive dialogue with different contexts and cultures (2009, 105) ensures their dislocation from a provincial, Eastern European context, placing them in the global discourse of mobility and identity.

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# The Danube as Cultural Body/Space<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** I have chosen Mór Jókai's novel, *Timar's Two Worlds* and Péter Esterházy's *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn*. The travellers and the narrators of these texts are different, but from a certain viewpoint they are comparable: they try to understand their own milieu and find out what is missing from their life with the help of the Danube. The various aspects change the ways is strongly represented in both texts. The main questions of the study are directed by the Danube, which is a factual and nominal line at the same time. I try to reveal the role, the function, and the meaning of the river in the novels, while drawing a parallel between the two texts. The analysis goes through intertextuality with help of the viewpoint of narratology and the mentioned one can grasp the constructive force of the river through other mediums, not only with the help of other texts, but inside the writings as well, I also touch the topic of intermediality. Consequently, I study the Danube as a text and as a deposit of other texts, namely the Danube as textual and geographical space, as a body in this space, as corpus, as human body, and as the body of the land.

**Keywords:** intermediality, intertextuality, historical, cultural and mental spaces, travelling observer, Danube, Mór Jókai, Péter Esterházy

The paper uses the complex phenomenon of the Danube to analyse, based on two texts written at different times, how the river as a decisive element of space and (its inscriptions on) the human body relate to each other, how they reflect through each other and what kind of attitudes and approaches they convey. I compare two texts: Mór Jókai's novel published after the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867,<sup>2</sup> entitled *Timar's Two Worlds*,<sup>3</sup> and Péter Esterházy's novel, *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn (down the Danube)*,<sup>4</sup> published after the 1989 regime change.<sup>5</sup> The spaces of both texts are heterogeneous, allowing the examination of how the text creates the human body and a historical, cultural and mental space through the construction of the image of the Danube and its meanings.

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<sup>1</sup> The study is a revised version of the BA thesis supervised by Mónika Dánél, written for the ELTE, BTK, MA, Hungarian-German department, and it was created within the project *Space-ing Otherness. Cultural Images of Space, Contact Zones in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Film and Literature* (OTKA NN 112700).

<sup>2</sup> Hungary and the Habsburg Empire had co-existed since 1526, and the compromise laws of 1867 gave new legal form, new frame for the cohabitation to last for another half century.

<sup>3</sup> Jókai Mór: *Az arany ember (Timar's Two Worlds)*. <http://mek.oszk.hu/00600/00688/00688.pdf> 1994 [1872]  
Mór Jókai: *Timar's Two Worlds*. Translated from Hungarian Mrs. Hegan Kennard. New York. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31409/31409-h/31409-h.htm> 2010. [*The Man with the Golden Touch*, 1888]

<sup>4</sup> Esterházy Péter: *Hahn-Hahn grófnő pillantása (The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn)*. Budapest: Magvető Publishing, 1990

Péter Esterházy: *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn (down the Danube)*. Translated from Hungarian by Richard Aczel. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999

<sup>5</sup> In 1989, in Eastern-Europe, alongside with the elimination of state socialism the decisive turns of the democratic transition also took place, which led to the first free Hungarian democratic election in 1990, after the fall of socialism.

The protagonists of both novels are male identities travelling on the Danube, seeking answers to their social and individual problems from various angles and geographical spaces. In *Timar's Two Worlds* Mihály Timár, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Midas, a merchant who commutes between an island on the lower Danube and the town of Komárom, between “free” life and social constraints. In *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn*, a narrator and a traveller (the two characters are inseparable) start out following a childhood memory to travel down the Danube from the Black Forrest to the Black Sea, going through various texts, encounters and vehicles. Meanwhile, the narration maintains its attempt to define the Danube and through it, the narrator’s own life process and the regional culture and history in which he grew up.

Péter Esterházy’s text attempts to define the Danube as an experiment of self-understanding, self-definition and the reformulation of history. The river is in a sense the (lost) thread of narration, a meta-narrative of a sort, and at the same time a phenomenon which permanently changes its meaning according to how and from where it is looked at.

In Jókai’s text, the Danube acts as a divine creature, a mythical force that influences the events. This Danube is a feminine character when it is identified as Ishtar, or when it is represented as a female face, a female body and its readable or unreadable nature. Also, it is a masculine character when it builds or when it helps raising a child like a father. The river is also a building: a sanctuary, a church in which the female character coming from a different culture appears as a work of art, and a library in which the books are read by a male character through knowledge involving the language of sailors or certain myths and legends.

Although Jókai’s Danube is static compared to Esterházy’s repeatedly de- and reconstructed, metamorphosing entity appearing on various surfaces and texts but ungraspable in its entirety, it nevertheless comes across in just as many meanings, modes and facets. In both texts, the river works as a body (body of identity, surface, formation), a text (created by texts, readable as a text), and a space (cultural, geographical, physical, historical, mental). Its inevitable presence equally delineates the boundary and the path, separates and bridges textual and cultural spaces. This paper attempts to analyse the river as a textual body and textual space in the dynamics of created bodies and spaces. At first, I discuss the connections of textual and geographical space, then I move on to the reading and interpretive strategies related to the Danube and the observer positions highlighted in the text. Finally, I point out how the different cultural particularities are projected onto the body and the space.

## Spaces of time, place and text / Temporal, geographic and textual spaces

“...an East or Central or kind of in-between European, on the other hand, speaks about himself, there is this thing himself, and he speaks about it, albeit through an object.” (Péter Esterházy)

„...egy afféle keleti, közép, köztes, az magamagáról beszél, van ő, és erről beszél, egy tárgyon keresztül.” (Esterházy Péter)

Before I move on to how readings of space and body are connected in concrete textual fragments, it is important to highlight the basic particularities of the two novels (textual, temporal, and constructed geographic space) in order to find their similarities. These connections derive from the literary tradition in which the two texts position themselves, the textual procedures of intertextuality and intermediality, and the basic narratorial situations.

The texts of both Mór Jókai and Péter Esterházy are representative of the Monarchy-tradition, both looking at it from different positions and contexts, as a terrain that contains partially overlapping points and lines. It is an important observation that “*the existence of a Monarchy-literature presupposes and constitutes an interpretive community*” (Gángó 2009) because this literary tradition brings together the texts of the two authors in a dialogue. One important issue tackled in the literature dealing with the literary tradition connected to this region is whether the phenomenon of the Monarchy or Central Europe can be interpreted in an integrated way. György Konrád defines the idea of Central Europe as “a flourishing diversity of the parts (...) and their awareness of this”, (Konrád 1984) in this case the parts being the neighbouring countries in Central Europe. After the regime change, several thinkers and artists have used this concept as a basic element of self-definition. Cultural diversity, the tension between the idea of nationalism and the ethnicities living on no unified territories has been a very important feature of the Monarchy.

It should be kept in mind that Jókai’s novel was published in 1872, a few years after the Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867, the official establishment of the Monarchy, while *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn* appeared in 1990, after the regime change. The former was written in a newly established territorial “unit”, the latter was written right after the dissolution of such a territorial “unit”. This has its detectable effect on how the narrative constructs the geographical space and creates the human bodies in this space, for the creation or dissolution of a territorial unit induces changes that may offer new perspectives, new possibilities of self-reflection. It is this space that several work

s, among which these two novels, have tried to interpret and reconstruct retrospectively, and compare it to its previous formations.

The narrator of Jókai's text speaks from a post-compromise position when he recounts the story of Mihály Timár, the protagonist who by the end of the novel places himself outside time and society, and whose story had started in a time preceding the Monarchy.

*Történetünk idejében még nem jártak a Dunán gőzhajók. Galactól elkezdve fel a Majnacsatornáig kilencezer ló járta a partokat, a hajók felvontatásával fáradva; a török Dunán a vitorlát is használták, a magyar Dunán nem. Azonkívül a csempészhajók egész raja járt-kelt akét ország közötti víz hátán, csupán izmos karú evezők által hajtatva. A sócsempészetnek volt ott divatja. (Jókai 1994)*

*At the time to which this history refers there were no steamers on the Danube. Between Galatz and the junction with the Main, over nine thousand horses were employed in towing ships up-stream; on the Turkish Danube sails were also used, but not on the Hungarian branch. Besides these a whole fleet of smugglers' boats traded between the two countries, propelled only by strong arms. Salt-smuggling was in full swing. (Jókai 2010)*

*Elmondtam neki a hazai eseményeket, hogyan lett Magyarország Ausztriával egy „és” szócska segítségével összekötve. Nagy füstfelleget fújt pipájából; a füst azt mondta: „Az én szigetem nem tartozik oda!” (Jókai 1994)*

*I told him what was going on in the world. I informed him that Hungary was now united to Austria by the word “and”. He blew a cloud from his pipe: the smoke said, “My island has nothing to do with that.” (Jókai 2010)*

The text is unequivocal but also oversimplifying in dividing the pre-existing space into two parts, a Hungarian and a Turkish side, in order to reinforce, in this way too, the basic conflict which derives from the complicated relationship of a man and woman coming from different cultures.

The geographic area of Esterházy's novel partly overlaps with the area of Jókai's novel. However, this is a space constituted in the time of a regime change, with the Danube itself as the decisive line of separation and bridging amidst the reorganised boundaries. It is a line of separation in the sense that it is seen as a demarcation line, also in the debate or opposition of various territories' relation to the river. At the same time, it is also a bridging of different territories. The narrator and traveller moving in the space of the novel watches, follows, writes the river in an attempt to draw space and narration together in a sort of unity.

*A szocialista embertípus – aki vagyok – fogta magát és elutazott egy szomszédos országba, melyet most nem neveznék néven, mindenesetre egy olyanba, amely szintén a*



*minap nyerte el, úgymond, a szabadságát, és még azt is dicséretére lehet felhozni, hogy ott előbb kel föl a nap, mint itt. (Esterházy 1990, 204)*

*The child of state socialism - which is what I am - took himself off one day to a neighbouring country, which shall for now remain unnamed. It was, at any rate, a country which had also just won its - so to speak - freedom. A country in which, to its eternal glory, the sun rises earlier than it does here. (Esterházy 1999, 216)*

This space, just like Jókai's reconfiguring space after the change, struggles with the problem of not being able to become an integrated, conflict-free terrain. Even if the power relations are rearranged, the basic problems, the conceptions inherited from the previous system which lie at the basis of self-definition, still prevail. Jókai's text also lists such conflicts.

*Azután megmagyaráztam neki, minő keserves tusákat küzdenek most nálunk a pártok egymással, vallás, nemzetiség, hatalomvágy mennyi keserűséget okoz. (Jókai 1994)*

*I described to him the bitter struggle of parties, the strife between religion, nationalities, and ambition. (Jókai 2010)*

The post-compromise space of Jókai's novel is a fictive space characterised by cultural diversity. The multi-national country of Hungary is incorporated into a multi-national federation of states. Jókai creates the narratives of his literary texts with a dual concept of history, through two patterns. (Margócsy 2014) On the one hand, he tries to embed it into a unified narrative through a mythical approach, and on the other hand he himself continuously deconstructs the historical narratives of his own time which offer several views of the same age. In his novels, the dialogue between various cultures displays the tensions between interpretations of spaces and persons, the problems of strangeness and the space of strangeness. The dialogues, voices, texts show the image of the possessor culture.

Just as there are multiple cultural spaces in the texts, there are also multiple texts and media as well. The Danube is an intertext, it appears in an intertextual mode of being and reveals itself through texts. It is carried by texts, but it is itself a carrier of texts, connected thus to the issues of intermediality and intertextuality. In addition, the Danube as a factor of textual organisation – especially in Esterházy's novel – shows similarities with the mechanisms of intertextuality and intermediality. The (textual) spaces shaped and connected by it become spaces of intertextuality, intermediality and interculturality. The analysis of the texts' intertextual and intermedial relations is important for two reasons. First, the analysis of intertextual relations reveals how the Danube appears as an element in the textual space of the novel, what texts it consists of, and how that given text interacts with the other texts of the world and their interpretations. Second, the analysis may also reveal the connections of

landscape, territory and the human body, and the ways of reading the body through the geo-cultural space and the space through the cultural body.

In Jókai's case the Danube is the space of a "*library in stone*"<sup>6</sup> (Jókai 2010) which is built up of various myths and legends. In this textual space the river, the water is itself a mythical element, "*the giant stream of the Old World, (Ister) the Danube*" (Jókai 2010) / "*az óvilág óriás folyama, az Ister: a Duna.*" (Jókai 1994), which fundamentally determines the shaping of the text and the story, almost like a divine principle. The river of Esterházy's text is "... *a sonnet, a mode of speech, a discourse.*" (Esterházy 1999, 15) / "*egy szonett, beszédmód, diskurzus.*" (Esterházy 1990, 17) That is to say, a self-constructing and self-demolishing phenomenon which keeps changing its form, built up of several texts, modelling the movement and operation of the water even by the shape of the text. Both texts create the area of the Danube building on previous textual tradition.

In Jókai's case the mythical approach indicates the depths, the roots of the problems, as well as the self-reflectivity<sup>7</sup> that informs late 19<sup>th</sup>-century prose. The human body, the touch of the hand is a very important motif of Midas's myth, also employed by the novel.

Esterházy uses earlier texts which employed the subject of the Danube and of travelling. An especially important referential basis of the novel is the character of Ida von Hahn-Hahn,<sup>8</sup> an aristocratic female traveller who visited the East in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and wrote reports on her experiences. Her contemporary, Fanny Lewald published a parodistic text under the pseudonym Iduna Grafín H.H., entitled *Diogena*, a travesty of the elevated, overly sophisticated and overly decorated style of the author. This same instance can be seen in Esterházy's novel, making continuous references to his contemporary Claudio Magris's book *Danube*, as to an author who writes the history of the states situated along the Danube from an outside view – so to say, as an "Italian uncle". Both novels place the functioning of seeing, touching, that is, perception amidst the conflicts of cultural and social spaces.

The narrative situation in *Timar's Two Worlds*, similarly to Esterházy's text, starts from a childhood memory. The reader finds out in the last chapter that the narratorial voice is

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<sup>6</sup> "It is a library in stone, the names of the rocks are the lettered back of the volumes, and he who knows how to open them may read a romance therein. Michael Timar had long been at home in this library." (Jókai. 2010. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/31409/31409-h/31409-h.htm>)

<sup>7</sup> The conception of literary work as constructed text develops at the turn of the century in the self-reflection of literature, which is present in the myths, tales, sagas and legends built into the text. By literary self-reflection I mean that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary language, its reception possibilities, its constructing and its mode of being became more and more important.

<sup>8</sup> It may be an interesting connection in terms of the analysis that Ida von Hahn-Hahn was Jókai's contemporary, and her influence on Jókai can be observed in the fictitious literary quote as well.

actually not an omniscient point of view, but it is a piece written at request, a fiction containing elements of memory.

*Negyven év múlt el azóta, hogy Timár eltűnt Komáromból. Ábécetanuló gyermek voltam akkor, mikor annak a gazdag úrnak a temetésére kirukkoltattak bennünket, akiről később azt beszéltek, hogy talán nem is halt meg, csak elbujdosott; a nép azt hitte erősen, hogy Timár még él, és valamikor ismét elő fog jönni. Talán Athalie-nak a fenyegető szavai költötték ezt a hitet. A közvélemény ragaszkodott hozzá. (Jókai 1994)*

*Since Timar's disappearance from Komorn forty years had passed. I was in the alphabet-class when we schoolboys went to the funeral of the rich lord, of whom people said afterward he was perhaps not dead, only disappeared. Among the people the belief was strong that Timar lived, and would some day reappear; possibly Athalie's words had set this idea afloat—at any rate, public opinion was strongly in favor of it. (Jókai 2010)*

In Esterházy's novel, the text starts with a childhood family memory. The metaphor of the river appears already in this beginning part, together with the genealogical tree which shows to the reader that the river is an important element for all levels of the interpretive system.

*Volt nekem egy távoli, fantasztikus és titokzatos nagybátyám, akit mindenki csak Robertónak hívott, mintha olasz selyemfiú lett volna, kivéve apámat, ő nem hívta sehogy, „nevét nem vette ajkára”. Nem vér szerinti rokon, egy nagynéniszerűség férjeként lett rövid ideig családtag, anyai ágon, mégpedig épp ott, ahol ez az ág játékosan és sorsszerűen érintette az apai ágat – egy a folyó, akárhány ága-boga van is. (Esterházy 1990, 1)*

*I once had this mysterious, distant uncle, whom everyone simply called Roberto, as if he were some Italian gigolo. Everyone, that is, except my father, who didn't call him anything at all: the man's name 'never so much as passed his lips'. He wasn't a blood relation. It was as the husband of a kind of aunt that he briefly became part of the family, joining it at precisely the point where the two sides, maternal and paternal, playfully and fatefully joined hands. A river is always the same river, however many arms it has. (Esterházy 1999, 1)*

In the first chapters there begins a travel, which narrates in parallel a memory, a one-time travel on the Danube, and the reliving of that memory in the present. By the continuous change of perspective and the first and second person, the reader is maintained in a state of confusion as to whether the character of the traveller and the narrator are identical. There are permanent references that the novel displays the self-reflective process of text creation, and this creative process is the actual subject and the river is the shape, operation and thread of this stream of consciousness.

*[K]italálom én a Duna-deltát. (Esterházy 1990, 203)*

*I'll intent the Danube Delta for myself...* (Esterházy 1999, 215)

Jókai employs a similar turn in the closure of the novel, when it is revealed that the narrator is actually a writer who unfolds the story from end to beginning, putting the reader in fact into a stream of text closing up on itself.

*Mondtam neki, hogy regényíró vagyok... Az egy olyan ember, aki egy történetnek a végéből ki tudja találni annak a történetnek az egész összességét.* (Jókai 1994)

*I told him I was a romance-writer... One who can guess by the end of a story what the whole story was from the beginning.* (Jókai 2010)

Both narratives are constructed in a subjective net of memories, the decisive element of which is the Danube. Just as for Esterházy “... *and the way a whole life can be determined by the water, the river...*” (Esterházy 1999, 196) „*egy életet teljes egészében meghatároz a víz, a folyó...*” (Esterházy 1990, 185), in the memories of Jókai’s narrator, “*The Danube was at that time a powerful master, and uprooted forests in its rage; a mortal venturing on its surface was like a worm floating on a straw, and yet this worm defied it.*” (Jókai 2010) „*[a] Duna rettenetes úr (...), ki haragjában erdőket szaggatott ki gyökereikből; a hátára szállott ember csak egy féreg, mely egy szalmaszálon úszik. Hanem ez a féreg dacolt vele.*” (Jókai 1994) This river delineates a territory, behaves like a human body, and in both cases it is built up of texts and itself builds texts with its presence.

### **Reading strategies**

From the strong connection of the textual spaces presented above, I will now turn to the interpretive attempts used by the protagonists to observe the surrounding territory. The interpretive attempts of the observers (travellers, narrators) involving the river and the human bodies inform the body- and space-concepts of the texts. The basis of these concepts is that “narratives do not only unfold in space and time, but also construct a certain perspective of space and time”, for “just like the ordinary perception of space and time, the narrative space and the narrative time are also results of construction”. (Füzi-Török 2006) Based on Jonathan Crary’s *Techniques of the Observer*, the observer can be defined as “one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations.” (Crary 1999); in addition, these are travellers, observers who see their environment through permanently changing spaces. It is this change that reflects the duality of both texts in that it shapes its familiar and unfamiliar concepts along certain barriers and

mirror positions. These barriers appear in the cultural differences represented by characters, the wounds on the body, in travelling on the river, and they articulate time and space; the mirrors are surfaces, such as real mirrors or the face of a character, the surface of water, in which the individual experiences itself through differences and similarities. Consequently, Michael Harbsmeier's attempt to examine travelogues as sources of the history of mentalities can also be valid for these texts. He claims that the duality of the collective differentiation appearing in the concepts of *we* and *others* becomes more general in the economy of images and notions in the description of foreign cultures and societies. (Harbsmeier 2006) The two texts are also worth reading while having in mind these two definitions. The narrative designates certain observers, interpreters, who understand the world via a certain language, a certain medium and a certain (geo)cultural, historical, social and economic perspective, and define themselves against others within this understanding.

As I have mentioned before, in Jókai's case the Danube is a "library" in which the traveller, the merchant Mihály Timár, appears as the reader. He understands the space, the history of the river via the myths and legends of the sailors. The following example shows the merger of these two textual spaces:

*Mint tapasztalt vadász és vízjáró hamar rátalált a törésre, amin keresztül a nádasba lehet hatolni, s ott azután a vízi növényzet megmondta neki mindig, hogy hol jár. Ahol a víz színén a nagy nymfėja-levelek libegnek zöldesfehér teljes tulipánvirágaikkal, ott mély víz van, ott a talajt növénytörmelékkel hordja meg a víz sodroma (...) Ha a csónakos útmutató növényeit nem érti, úgy belebódulhat a nádberekbe, hogy egész nap sem talál ki belőle. (Jókai 1994)*

*Being an experienced marsh-sportsman, he soon found the one opening in the reeds through which it was possible to penetrate, and recognized by the vegetation the depth of the channel. Where the great leaves and snowy cups of the water-lily float on the surface, there is deep water which scours the weeds and mud away (...) The boatman who does not know these vegetable guides might lose himself in the reed-beds, and not get out all day. (Jókai 2010)*

Timár's interpretation is based on the familiarity with the language of the sailors, the knowledge of their myths and legends. His interpretation is conveyed to us by the narrator, who appears not to be an omniscient figure, for he passes on the legend of Timár's life. Timár's reading rests on two important pillars: one is the interpretation of the elements and signs of a landscape familiar because of being repeatedly walked through, and the other is the textual world he has become familiar with through the culturally embedded myths, tales, legends of various places. This is how Mihály's Danube is constructed in his mind almost like

a virtual library. It is by this reading experience closely related to the river that he tries to understand people and the surrounding world.

In Esterházy's case, one can speak of a dense network of texts incorporated into the novel. At the end of the book, there is a list of works (an index) the narrator constantly refers to. The text complex is built up of various embedded fragments and references to texts about the region, while itself plays with the shape and behaviour of the Danube. This creates a situation in which the novel becomes identical with the river, while the river is construed as a dense network of texts.

*A Duna az nem valami, nem a vize, nem a vízmolekulái, nem a veszedelmes mederviszonyok, a Duna az egész, a Duna a forma. A forma, az nem köntös, mely alatt megbúvik valami nálánál fontosabb és szeriőzebb.* (Esterházy 1990, 25)

*The Danube is not something, not the water, not the molecules, not the dangerous currents, but the totality: the Danube is the form. The form is not some mantle beneath which something still more important and serious lies hidden.* (Esterházy 1999, 24)

The bodies are construed similarly to the river. At Jókai, one sees a complex, corporeal female figure positioned in the sacred space of the Danube.<sup>9</sup> From a feminist critical perspective, the female body appears as a work or art, an object of observation.

*Igaz, hogy még gyermek, alig több tizenhárom évesnél; de magas, nyúlánk alak és komoly, szoborszerű arc, tökéletes antik vonásokkal, mintha anyja a milói Venus arcán feledte volna szemeit valaha. Sűrű, fekete haja valami érces fénnel bír, minő a fekete hattyú tolla. De szemei sötétkékek. Két hosszú, vékonyan rajzolt szemöldök csaknem összeér homlokán; az ilyen összeérő szemöldök valami varázshatalmat kölcsönöznek az arcnak. Ez a két vékony szemöldök együtt mintha valami fekete aureole volna egy szentkép homlokán.* (Jókai 1994)

*She is certainly only a child, hardly more than thirteen; but her figure is tall and slender, her face calm as if hewn out of alabaster, with severely antique lines, as if her mother had looked always at the Venus of Milo. Her thick black hair has a metallic gleam like the plumage of the black swan; but her eyes are dark-blue. The long delicate eyebrows almost meet over the brow, which gives her face a curious charm; it is as if these arching brows formed a black aureole round the brow of a saint.* (Jókai 2010)

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<sup>9</sup> "The Iron Gate has a history of two thousand years. Four nations—Romans, Turks, Roumanians and Hungarians, have each in turn given it a different name. We seem to approach a temple built by giants, with rocky pillars, towering columns, and wonderful colossi on its lofty frieze, stretching out in a perspective of four miles, and, as it winds, discovering new domes with other groups of natural masonry, and other wondrous forms." (Jókai 2010) / „A Vaskapunak kétezer éves története van, s négy nemzet nyelvén nevezik azt. Mintha egy templom közepén állna felénk, melyet óriások építettek, pillérekkel, melyek kőszá- lak, és oszlopokkal, melyek toronymagasak, csodálatos kolosszalakokat emelve a felmagasló párkányokra, mikben a képzelem szentek szobrai látja, s e templom csarnoka négy méter távolba mélyed, fordul, kanyarodik, új templomot mutat, más falcsoportokkal, más csodaalakokkal.” (Jókai 1994)

This female figure shows similarities on several points with the rocky church-like area around the Iron Gate, and with certain states of the river. In one episode, Timár gets lost on the frozen river, on the very surface of the water, because he cannot read the unfamiliar terrain. Like in Midas's myth, the matter around him becomes stiff, unusable, unreadable. The reading of the female body coming from the Turkish culture, and the frozen Danube which covers up its signs well known for a sailor, shows many similarities.

*Az volt az utolsó reménysége, hogy majd ha megvirrad, akkor csak megtudja a napról, hogy merre van kelet. Arról azután hajós létére majd tájékoztatja magát, hogy merre van a Duna folyása. Ha valahol léket talált volna a jégen, akkor a víz folyásáról is megtudhatta volna, merre menjen; de a jégkéreg szilárd volt mindenütt, s áttörni fejsze nélkül nem lehetett. Meg is virradt, legalább világos kezdett lenni, de a sűrű ködön át napot nem lehetett látni. Menni pedig kellett, mert a pihenés a jégen veszedelmes. Kilenc óra is elmúlt; még mindig nem talált partot. Akkor egy pillanatra ritkulni kezdett a köd; a nap fénytányérja láthatóvá lett, mint egy fehér, fénytelen arc az égen, mint a nap árnyéka. A lég mintha számtalan ragyogó jégtűkkel volna tele, amik szikrázva gomolyognak össze egy szemvakító homállyá. (Jókai 1994)*

*His only hope was, that when day at last dawned he would be able to guess by the sun where the east lay, and then, as an old sailor, could ascertain his position. If he had come across a hole in the ice, the current of the water would have shown him in what direction to go; but the surface was entirely covered, and without an axe it was impossible to make a hole. At last it began to dawn, but the fog hid the sun. Nine o'clock, and he had not yet found the shore, though the fog seemed to grow less and the sun's disk was visible, like a pale, colorless ball (face), a mere shadow of its glorious self. The air was full of countless glittering particles of ice, which melted into a dazzling vapor. (Jókai 2010)*

Just as on the frozen Danube, he gets lost too in his attempts to explore Timea's face. In vain does he try to read the girl through his knowledge of the sailor's language, of natural phenomena; just as he was left clueless on the "transformed", stiffened Danube, he is now unable to understand his wife, who carries within herself the customs and culture of the East.

Female figures who show similarities with the behaviour of the Danube exist in Esterházy's novel as well. Such parallels can be drawn between Dalma, the woman/women always called by different pseudonyms – usually names of women travellers – and the river.

*Állandóan változott az arca, nagyvilági nőből egy kislány majd egy szigorú alkalmazott, minden mindig változott rajta, még a teste is, olykor az is elszigorodott, máskor megvonaglott vagy háttérbe szorult, szorította magát, csak a szeme maradt állandó,*

*rejtélyes ékkő, felemás macskanézés, tigristekintet. Még soha nem néztem meg ennyire egy nőt. Nem gondoltam, hogy valaki ilyen sok.* (Esterházy 1990, 21)

*Her face changed continually: from the woman of the world to a little girl, then an austere employee. Everything about her kept changing, even her body, which at time also become austere, then at other times simply twitched or receded into the background. Only her eyes remained perpetually the same. Two enigmatic precious stones, strange cat's eyes with a certain tigerish gaze. I have never look so closely a woman before. I have never thought that there could be so much of anyone to look at.* (Esterházy 1999, 20)

Like the river, the other person is also constructed in a complex manner. In this text as well, the reading of human bodies is closely connected to how a traveller explores a region. Here we see bodies whose physical existence is penetrated by that historical, geographical, cultural and textual space in which they exist.<sup>10</sup> Such is Roberto, who imagines himself to be the Danube,<sup>11</sup> or an aunt living in Austria whose body reflects or evokes the Monarchy.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the narrator is permanently at pains to grasp or piece together the space as a body based on previous cultural knowledge, as seen for instance on 16<sup>th</sup> century maps representing *Europa regina*.<sup>13</sup> In this sense we get a fragmented body, a territory fallen apart and incapable of cooperation, and a permanently metamorphosing Danube.

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<sup>10</sup> "She became famous for living strictly according to the European clock (her body too)." (Esterházy 1999, 225) / „Avval vált ismertté, hogy aggályosan betartotta és őrizte az európai időt, egyszerűen aszerint élt (a teste is)." (Esterházy 1990, 213)

<sup>11</sup> "So Roberto is the Danube. That's his game. He imagines that he is the Danube, concretely, that this bit is Passau, that is Eschingen, and every night he takes her wrist and leads her hand over his body." (Esterházy. 1999, 224) / „Tehát, hogy Roberto a Duna, ez a heppje, ezt képzelet magáról, hogy ő a Duna, de konkrétan, tehát, hogy ez Passau, amaz Eschingen, és minden éjszaka végig kellett az asszonynak mutogatnia a Dunát, Roberto fogja a csuklóját, és vezeti a kezét" (Esterházy 1990, 211)

<sup>12</sup> "Nelly herself resembled the Empire so far as she too was made up of diverse, internally contradictory elements: she was a large, hefty woman, as big as a wardrobe, but had small, fine hands with a light silken touch, and bushy, almost manly eyebrows which leaped up and down like brush, or like a pair of misplaced moustaches, spruce moustaches..." (Esterházy 1999, 7–8) / „Nellyke maga is hasonlított a Monarchiához, amennyiben különböző, egymásnak ellentmondó részekből volt összerakva: nagy debella asszony, egy szekrény, akkora, viszont kicsi, finom keze könnyű, selymes tapintású, dús, szinte férfias szemöldöke, akár egy pamacs föl-le ugrál, olyan, mint egy, illetve kettő bajusz." (Esterházy 1990, 10)

<sup>13</sup> "If Prague is the heart of Central Europe, says György Konrád, Budapest is its crotch. Okay, that's fine, heart, crotch, there's not a lot to lose here. But the way the breasts and buttocks sing or caterwaul, dance or shrivel, is not a matter of indifference. Show me the town that would accept such an idea with its head (breasts, etc.) held high? Central Europe's ankle? Zagreb as Central Europe's nipple? Vienna as its earlobe? And how about the whole woman? What is she like? Well? Well she's fond of her homeland and has lovely earlobes." (Esterházy. 1999, 132) / „Ha Prága Közép-Európa szíve, mondja Konrád György, akkor Budapest az öle. Rendben, ez jó, szív, öl, itt sokat nem lehet veszíteni. De már a mellek, a segg, hogyan zeng vagy kornyikál, táncol vagy kókad, nem mindegy. Mely város, ki ilyesmit emelt fővel (kebellet stb.) elvállalna? Közép-Európabokája? Zágráb, mint Közép-Európa csecse? Bécs meg a fülcimpája. És milyen a nő? Milyen, milyen?! Hát szereti a hazáját és szép a fülcimpája." (Esterházy 1990, 125–126)



## Perspectives, the space and the observer

“*What constitutes the Danube is for me to decide.*”  
(Péter Esterházy)

„*Hogy mi a Duna, azt én mondom meg.*”  
(Esterházy Péter)

Both texts put forward two basic positions of observation: one is peeping, observation, the other is the moment of border crossing. These are perspectives which offer a more reflected glance on the relationship of the *we* and the *other*. Laura Mulvey calls on the theory of psychoanalysis in her study *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Mulvey 1999), presenting how the unconscious of the patriarchal society<sup>14</sup> influences the film’s mechanism of giving pleasure, its language built on seeing, and how this structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking. In the culture she examines, the woman “...stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of a woman still tied to her place as the bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.”<sup>15</sup> The positions of the observer, the peeping and border crossing can be easily related to Mulvey’s analysis, for peeping eliminates the onlooker from the circle of active characters similarly to the observer in cinema, and border crossing is a kind of relation in which our image of the other leads us to ourselves. Connecting this to Crary’s view that “Vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product and the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification.” (Crary 1999) I analyse these situations by looking at the media and practices through which they appear.

### Peeping

In Esterházy’s case, the problem of seeing appears in several forms, connected to how, through what means the observer contemplates the surrounding world. His method is sometimes similar to an agent’s observation, reminiscent of power practices before the regime change. The element, instrument and object of observation is the Danube.

*Őt is a Dunáról kérdezgettem, mondjon bármit.* (Esterházy 1990, 187)

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<sup>14</sup> Mulvey emphasises the dual role of women in this, being a symbol of the danger of castration, and at the same time the will to fill the lack formed on his body.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

*I asked about the Danube – 'Say whatever comes to mind.'* (Esterházy 1999, 199)

Peeping, so we are told, is a learned behaviour which the individual acquires in a certain period, and can no longer observe the world in the lack of it.

*Ez a szocialista embertípus sok mindent gondolt magáról – nem sokat, hanem sokfélét –, de az álmában se jutott volna eszébe, hogy ő szocialista embertípus. Nem okvetlenül mondta magát szabadnak, óvatos duhaj volt, de azért végül is, valljuk be őszintén, azt gondolta, hogy nem fertőzte őt meg ez a rendszer, az a rendszer, amelyik már nincs is. Megvolt mindennek az ára, megfizette, kész, passz. És nagyon örült, hogy ez az egész így szépen összedőlt, fölszabadulásnak érezte, minthogy nagyon sok ereje fölszabadult, minthogy már nem kell folyamatosan résen lennie, vagy csak annyira, amennyire ez természetes.* (Esterházy 1990, 205)

*This child of state socialism thought a great deal about himself – or rather, not so much a great deal, as many different things – but never in his dreams would he have imagined that he was a child of state socialism. Not that he thought himself free; he was far too cautious for that. But – we are bound finally to admit – he did think that he had not been corrupted by the system (the system which no longer exists). Everything had its price, and this he had duly paid. And that, he thought, was that. He was very pleased when the whole thing fell to pieces, seeing it as a kind of liberation. A liberation of energy, above all, for he no longer had to be perpetually on the alert. Or at least no more than was natural.* (Esterházy 1999, 216)

The text parallels this observer with the novel's reader-observer, who participates in the reading process in a similar manner, in a sense as an outsider. However, Esterházy's text does not only mean to confuse the reader by these constant character changes, but permanently reflects on the narrative situation, the observer's position, and dismantles seeing itself, disassembles the field of vision by never creating a unified interpretive perspective from where the world looks graspable in its entirety.

Jókai's novel also contains two important places from where the protagonist may become the observer of his own and others' lives. One is a secret place behind a picture, which is in itself a complex symbolic system. In a visually complex situation, the peeper himself, Timár, becomes part of a painting (dragon) that the reader "sees" mediated by the narrative.

*Timár, midőn így látta őt, csüggedten üté homlokát öklével, s elfordítá arcát a Júdás-lyuktól, melyen leskelődött. [...] Hát az a másik férfi ott a Szent György-kép háta mögött, hát az nem érezte-e magát úgy, mint az a sárkány, melynek az arkangyal dárdáját torkába verve tartja?* (Jókai 1994)

*When Timar saw her so, he struck his forehead with his fist, and turned his face from the Judas-hole through which he had been looking. For the next few moments he saw*

*and heard no more. [...] And that other man behind the picture of St. George – must he not feel like the dragon when the knight thrust his spear into him?* (Jókai 2010)

The other distant observer position is the No Man's Island on the Danube,<sup>16</sup> a hiding place from which the text points at Timár's own life as well as the entire society. In relation to Jókai's character representation, István Margócsy mentions that "the viewpoints of the narrator and the protagonist are much closer to each other than in the other novels." (Margócsy 2013) In Jókai's text Timár finds himself in a similar position with the narrator, who creates the events from outside the narrated world. The novel presents permanently changing spectator positions by the use of mirrors, reflections, portraits appearing on paintings and other media, and by this it can be connected to the period's theories on subjective seeing: in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, objective seeing was considered graspable by individual particularities, the differences of the observers' interpretations.

### **Border Crossing**

The moment of border crossing is closely linked with the peeping, the voyeuristic observer's status. The border makes the personal and the uncanny space visible as a mirror, as a breakage. Esterházy's sentence reads: "*Elsewhere is a negative mirror. The traveller recognizes the little that is his, discovering the much he has not had and never will have.*" (Esterházy 1990, 147) „*A távol nem más, mint negatív tükör. Az utazó felismeri azt a keveset, ami a sajátja, miközben felfedezi azt a sok mindent, amit nem ért el, és nem ér el soha.*" (Esterházy 1990, 150) The questions related to the setup, the structure of the space cohere in terms of the notions of *the other*, *the stranger* and *unity*, which are hard to interpret in both texts. In Jókai's novel this manifests especially in Timár's attitude towards Tímea, a woman of Turkish origin, while he is shown as the representative of European culture also in search of his identity. In Esterházy's novel it manifests through the traveller-narrator's questions related to space, neighbours and women.

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16 "In many places it has already mastered the obstacles which barred its way, and flows foaming through the open breach. There, it has burrowed beneath the wall of the ravine, and by its continuous current has washed out a channel below the overhanging rock. Here, it has carved islands out of the stubborn granite, new creations, to be found on no chart, overgrown with wild bushes. They belong to no state—neither Hungary, Turkey, nor Serbia; they are ownerless, nameless, subject to no tribute, outside the world. And there again it has carried away an island, with all its shrubs, trees, huts, and wiped it from the map." (Jókai, 2010) / „Néhol szigeteket rakott le a legyőzhetetlen sziklák mögé, új földalkotásokat, mik semmi régi térképen nincsenek; azokat benőtte vad fa és bokor, azok nem tartoznak semmi államhoz, sem magyarhoz, törökhöz, sem szerbhez; a senki országa az, adót nem fizető, urat nem ismerő, világon kívül eső, meg nem nevezett föld! Másunnan meg elhordta a kikezdett szigetet bokraival, erdőivel, kunyhóival együtt, s letörülte alakjaikat a térképről." (Jókai 1994); "...the Danube built it up for no one." (Jókai 2010) / „A Duna építette – senkinek." (Jókai 1994)

The different countries call for particular interpretation, the observers living on a given territory understand the world differently than those living in other countries. It is this difference that the traveller on the Danube experiences (who meanwhile also experiences his own strangeness).

*Vagy túlstilizálom a „keleti-utazás” okozta szorongást? Reise-Fieber volna csak? Lehet.* (Esterházy 1990, 189)

*Or am I ver-stylizing the anxiety of 'going East'? – Nothing more than a bit Reiseum? Maybe.* (Esterházy 1999, 201)

The text, playing with the use of “*eastern-journey*” and *Reise-Fieber* terms shows how the traveller distances himself linguistically from the territory he is approaching by using a German term and the attribute *Eastern* to describe the journey’s nature. Using a phrase of a more western language area and the term *Eastern*, he places himself outside the zone.

*De azért itt tényleg más világ kezdődik. Más az igen, más a nem, más a soha, más az örökké, más a végtelen, azaz más a geometria; más a becsület, az adott szó, a bosszú, mást értenek jogon és kötelességen: egy szó mint száz: utazom néhány száz kilométert, és egy egészen más értelmezésével fogok találkozni – Arisztotelésznek. (A szörendet beáldoztuk a szerény csattanóért.) (Majd látni fogom, hogy ez a másság nem ilyen. Egyszerűbb. Szótalanabb, szó nélküli. – Utólagos bejegyzés.)* (Esterházy 1990, 189)

*But then we really are entering another world. A different ‘yes’, a different ‘no’, a different never, a different forever, a different eternity – that is, a different geometry; a different sense of honour, of giving one’s word, of revenge, a different understanding of right and obligation. Or, to cut a long story short: I am travelling a few hundred of kilometers and I’m going to meet a completely different interpretation of – Aristotle. (Here syntax has been sacrificed to enhance the humble punchline.) (I shall soon see that the difference is not quite like that. It is more simple. More wordless, without words. – Note added later.)* (Esterházy 1999, 201)

The traveller senses the space of strangeness differently, through his previous experience, which can be grasped especially in language, in readability. He has no language for the country he enters, so he draws his reading on previous textual knowledge.

*Próbálok olvasni. Jonathan Harker (Bram Stoker: Drakula gróf válogatott rémtettei) megerősít abban, hogy elkezdődik a Kelet. Útitársaim szemfogát vizsgálom. A házaspár férfitagja jóindulatúan oktatgat. Hogy inkább németül, mint magyarul szólítsak meg ismeretlent. „Bajos lehet.” De már Ó-Romániában vagy a Duna-delta környékén nyugodtan beszélhetek magyarul, az ott már nem jelent semmit. Semmit. Nem ijesztgetni akar, hanem segíteni. „Nem tanácsos.”* (Esterházy 1990, 197)

*[E]lőjött minden kiszolgáltatottsága, minden ijedelve, gátlása, minden, amit mégiscsak megörökölt a rendszertől, ő, a szocialista embertípus. (Esterházy 1990, 209)*

*I'm trying to read. Jonathan Harker (Bram Stoker: Selected Atrocities of Count Dracula) confirms my suspicion that we are now entering the East. I check the upper canines of my fellow-travellers. The male party of a married couple well-intentionedly suggests that I'd be better off addressing strangers in German rather than in Hungarian. 'Could be dicey.' But in Old Rumania, or in the region of the Danube Delta, I can, by all means, speak Hungarian. There it signifies nothing. Nothing. He wasn't trying to alarm me, only being helpful. "Not a good idea." (Esterházy 1999, 197)*

*And it was now that his defencelessness and subservience, his anxieties and inhibitions really made themselves felt, as qualities which he, the child of state socialism, had inherited from the system after all. (Esterházy 1999, 197)*

These fears are hereditary, they were transmitted not only by a past system, but by a whole textual world as well. Reading Dracula's figure into the landscape points to the reader, to the reading process through the identification opportunities given by the textual world. The dialogue carried on the train about the working processes of meaning shows the demise of an interpreting attitude similar to the pattern of the manner of observation. This kind of inheritance of fear is compensated with the relativity of sensations experienced in the waiting room, where space changes through knowledge.

*Elsőre a váróterem is hatalmasnak tetszik, gigantikus, de ahogy kiismerem lassan, úgy zsugorodik. (Esterházy 1990, 198)*

*At first glance even the waiting-room seems immense, but shrinks the more I begin to find my way around. (Esterházy 1999, 210)*

The borderline is very pronounced in Jókai's novel. The division of space shows not only in the name of the territory and the Eastern–Western opposition, but through the notions of health-sickness and the description of the landscape as well.

*Alant aztán hegy, völgy, erdő és falu mind az ég tűzfényével volt kifestve: e kinzó ragyogvánnyal, mely árnyékot nem vet; középett a Duna, mint a lángoló Phlegeton, s annak a közepén egy sziget tornyokkal és nagy, tömör épületekkel, mik mind úgy izzanak, mintha csupa egyetlen olvasztókemencét képeznének, amin keresztül kell menni, mint a purgatóriumon, minden emberi teremtésnek, aki a dögvészes keletről a tiszta nyugat határvonalán átlép. (Jókai 1994)*

*There the evening clouds were piled like an avalanche, in all shades of fiery and blood red, and if the glowing mist-veil parted through the rent, the sky was not blue but emerald-green. Below, mountain and valley, forest and field, gleamed in the sunset reflex with radiance which hurt the eye, unable to find a shady point of rest. The*

*Danube rushing on beneath, like a fiery Phlegethon, and in its midst an island with towers and massive buildings, all glowing as if part of a huge furnace, through which every creature, coming from the pestilential east to the frontier of the healthy west, must pass as through purgatory. (Jókai 2010)*

Crossing the border is linked with an investigation process where touch receives the central role.

*Mivelhogy semmiről sem ragad el olyan könnyen a keleti pestis, mint az ércpénzről, annál fogva azt a keletről érkező hajósoknak elébb bele kell tenni a vízzel telt korsóba, s a nyugati tisztaság öre onnan veszi azt ki már megtisztultan, éppen úgy, ahogy a Szkélanál szükséges minden adott pénzt a vízmedencéből kihalászni. (Jókai 1994)*

*As the oriental plague is more easily communicated by coins than by anything else, the sailors coming from the Levant must throw the money into a jug of water, in order that the western health-officer may take it out cleansed: just as at the Szkela every one must fish the money he receives out of a basin. (Jókai 2010)*

The explanation for Timár's problem, for whom wealth causes all conflicts in all human relationships, can be found in the overlapping notions of money, sickness and touch. This is the age of the pioneers of microbiology, when touch, contact and the problem of germs spreading this way becomes important.

*Mert minden idegen néppel való érintkezésünk valami új, eddig ismeretlen ragállyal ajándékozott meg bennünket. Kínától kaptuk a vörhenyt, a szaracénoktól a himlőt, az oroszoktól a grippét, a dél-amerikaiaktól a sárgalázt, s a kelet-indusoktól a kolerát - a törököktől pedig a pestist. (Jókai 1994)*

*For each contact with a new people has endowed us with a new disease. From China we received scarlet fever, from the Saracens small-pox, from Russia influenza, from South America yellow fever, and from the Hindoos cholera. But the plague comes from Turkey. (Jókai 2010)*

This idea can be well paralleled with Timár's touch, who, after getting in contact with money, is incapable of managing human relationships, and keeps indirectly wounding others. Susan Sontag discusses the metaphorical meaning of illness in her study, *Illness as Metaphor*. (Sontag 1997) In the light of Sontag's text, Timár's illness is the metaphor of a social problem that threatens people living in good economic conditions, people touching matter.

The initial description of the ship arriving with a Turkish girl on the mighty river Ister, the Danube, gives the impression that the river breaks through from the East, straight from under the ground, from the cradle of myth's origin, from the subconscious. The text sometimes shifts from the description of Timár's perspective to show the point of view of Timea's presumed culture.

*Timéa le nem vette a szemeit e látványról, míg a hajó el nem haladt előtte, s a bércek megint összecsukódtak a szép táj fölött, s ismét az alpesek árnya takarta be a mély szakadékot. - Úgy képzem - szólta Timéa a biztoshoz -, mintha egy hosszú-hosszú börtönfolyosón keresztül mennénk be egy országba, amelyből nem lehet visszajönni többé. (Jókai 1994)*

*Timéa never turned her gaze from this spectacle until the ship had passed, and the mountains had closed over the exquisite scene, hiding the deep chasm in their shadows. "I feel," she said, "as if we were going through a long, long prison, into a land from which there is no return." (Jókai 2010)*

The landscape becomes dynamic through the journey on water in this scene. The mountains close like a prison gate in the glance of the woman's eye, foreshadowing her observer fate. The prison is presented later by the narrator as the custom-system and culture the woman functions in,<sup>17</sup> that does not let her think freely about herself in the European space, ultimately leading to total devastation.

The images of a "clean" West and the West as prison function simultaneously in the text. The reader advances along two different cultural perspectives, picturing the main source of tension, of conflict, which emerges in the characters' relation to each other. The text strives to unfold the functioning of the woman's glance as well. At the same time, a closer analysis of the text shows that it reflects the narrator's point of view.

We can see a "hard" border crossing road and a related journey full with ordeals in both texts. The two travellers experience something very similar on the Lower Danube's almost exactly same spot. In Esterházy's text the moment of sluicing is metaphorically linked with the historical moment of regime change.

*Megkezdtük az átzsilipelést, leengedték a vizet, nyolcemeletes lucskos kamrafal tornyosodott fölénk, aknában éreztük magunkat, a zsilip ellentétes kapuzata lassan kitárult, a besütő nap átmelegítette a kriptahangulatot. Ami azonban ekkor történt, azt nem kívánom az ellenségemnek sem. A szűk zsilipkamra vizét úgy megtekerte a szovjet Diesel hirtelen elindított, asztal nagyságú csigája, hogy elsüllyedtünk. A távolodó szovjet hajó parancsnoka, Majakovszkij, udvariasan sajnálkozó mozdulattal intett hátra: a hidrodinamika törvényeivel szemben ő is tehetetlen, elvtársak, ne lőjete!* (Esterházy 1990, 215)

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<sup>17</sup> "Here a great difficulty arose. The Mohammedan religion has nothing to say to women in its dogmas. To a Moslem a woman is no more than a flower which fades and falls, whose soul is its fragrance, which the wind carries away, and it is gone. Timéa had no creed." (Jókai 2010) / „A mohamedán nők nem tagjai az eklézsiának; jelen sem szabad lenniök a férfiak istentiszteletén (...) Ettől a nőknek mind nincs miért félni, de viszont nem is jutnak el a paradicsomba a nagy Tubafa árnyéka alá, mert ott a férfiaknak örájuk semmi szükségük nincs: azokra ott az örök ifjúságú „hurik” várnak, minden férfira hetvenhét. A mohamedán nő semmi sem, csak egy virág, lehull és elmúlik, lelke virágillat, elfújja a szél, és nincs többé.” (Jókai 1994)

*The sluicing commenced. As they let out the water, a wet and dirty eight-storey wall towered up before us. It felt like being in a mine shaft, the sluice gates slowly pulling apart and the sun warming the crypt-like air. What happened next, however, I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. The massive diesel-powered propeller of the Soviet ship suddenly began to turn, churning up the water in the tight sluice chamber so violently that we went under. As the Soviet ship sailed off into the distance its captain, Mayakovsky, politely waved back at us, full of regret before the laws of hydrodynamics even he was powerless, comrades, don't shoot! And that is the authentic story. (Esterházy 1999, 227)*

The chamber wall, the crypt-like atmosphere, the receding Soviet Diesel and the sinking all hint to a difficult change taking place. In Jókai's text border crossing indicates a similar turn.

*Csak az történt, hogy a hajó szerencsésen áthaladt a puskás sziklák öblén is, s készült a román csatornába befutni, hanem az öböl medencéjéből, kivált nagy szél mellett, a csatornába oly sebesen ömlik át a hullám, hogy valódi zuhatagot képez, s itt a salto mortale leghalálosabb pillanata. (Jókai 1994)*

*It was only that the ship had passed safely through the "gun-rocks", and was about to enter the Roumanian channel; but from the little bay the water rushes so furiously into the canal that a regular water-fall is formed, and this is the dangerous moment of the "Leap". (Jókai 2010)*

The dip into the water, death, the moments of death's proximity and resuscitation are linked to both crossings. Both descriptions are symbolic, both emphasise a change that starts a self-analyzing process. Border crossing is linked to a turn that makes the interpreters question their own limits.

## **Projection Surfaces**

*"Michael frowned, and possibly Athalie understood him."*

(Mór Jókai)

*„Mihály összeráncolta e szóra a homlokát, s Athalie talán olvasni tudott e homlokredőkből."*

(Jókai Mór)

*"A face, too, is a landscape."*

(Péter Esterházy)

*„Az arc is táj."*

(Esterházy Péter)

The environment, the landscape is closely connected with "the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the



person in the world.” (Mulvey 1999) The surfaces of the human body and the surfaces of the Danube, of nature often get closely linked. The various texts, signs, portraits, body parts that can be understood as projections of inner interpretations and feelings appear on surfaces like matter, physical spaces. The description of the man and the body is helped by the textual formation of the Danube. We see man through the Danube, respectively the Danube and the connected area is mapped on the body, it is drawn on it or appears inside of it.

As I've shown with previous examples, in Esterházy's text the surfaces of the body work similarly to geographical spaces, and the other way around too. Time is influenced by different historical and cultural spaces (Monarchy, European time zone). The body is shown as a geographical space, and space accordingly takes the shape of human body, body parts, or, at least, the observer is trying to see it as such. Thus, we get complex surfaces where we can analyse the line and the imprints of the Danube in contrast with each other.

In Jókai's novel human bodies get in contact with matter and media that can be found in nature and in the parallel sacred spaces. The structure of the Danube's "body" and the description of its material being is worth knowing and analysing in comparison with the foreign, Eastern woman's body.

At the beginning of the novel we can read about the writing showing on the riverbed's sides. It can be interpreted as the personalisation and denotation of a place with the function of "the expression, foundation and maintenance of identity. People leave their traces on the environment (...) in order to display their individual characteristics and distance themselves from others." (Düll 2009) The narrator indicates that the readers (Timár and Timea) of this writing behave as the readers of different cultures and genders in the interpretation process, which marks their relation to each other.

*A szürkület Ogradina táján találta a hajót, ott figyelmezteté Timéát a biztos a tizennyolc százados történelmi emlékre. Traján táblája az, a meredek sziklafalba vágva, két szárnyas angyal tartja, s sarkait delfinek veszik körül, a táblán az isteni császár emberi művének emléksorai. Timár odanyújtá a távcsövet, hogy olvassa el vele a sziklába vésett írást.*

*- Nem ismerem ezeket a betűket! - mondá Timéa.*

*Azok latin betűk. (Jókai 1994)*

*Dawn found the ship near Ogradina. The captain drew Timéa's attention to a monument eighteen hundred years old. This was "Trajan's Tablet," hewn in the precipitous cliff, held by two winged genii and surrounded by dolphins. On the tablet is the inscription which commemorates the achievements of the godlike emperor. (Jókai 2010)*

(Translation omitted:

- I don't know these letters. - said Timéa.

These are Latin letters.)

The interpretation of the Latin writing reveals that cultures are unable to read each other, because their sign system is not universally understandable. Latin letters are unfamiliar to the Turkish girl, they are unravelled by Timár. Because they are not universal, they cannot be almighty or beyond “*the achievements of the godlike emperor*” (Jókai 2010) „*az isteni császár emberi emléksorai*” (Jókai 1994). Up against this human language it is worth taking a look at the Danube’s “writing”, the river’s “language” that is mediated by the narrator’s point of view. This writing is partially universal, making the signs visually perceptible, it becomes the same for every reader.

*[E]gyik fal sima, mint a csiszolt gránit, vörös és fehér erek cikáznak végig rajta: rejtelmes istenírás betűi* (Jókai 1994)

*One wall is smooth as polished granite, red and white veins zigzagging across it like mysterious characters in the handwriting of God.* (Jókai 2010)

This writing was not created by the God imitator man with “*iron-clad hand*” criticised in the novel. It was carved on the surface by different laws and energies. The tension between the space and its readers is shown by the Danube’s surface.

In *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn* space bears similar lines.

*De a város nem beszél múltjáról, magába zárja, mint tenyérvonalait a kéz, felrajzolva az utcák hajlatába, az ablakok rácsaira, a lépcsők korlátaira, a villámhárítók antennáira, a zászlók rúdijára, minden vonalat át- meg átszelnek a még újabb karcolások, fűrésznyomok, vésetek, vonalkák.* (Esterházy 1990, 138)

*The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.* (Esterházy 1999, 145)

As lines get written onto space, traces of inner and outer vibrations get onto the skin<sup>18</sup> where memory, spiritual processes and different cultural codes become visible. The sketches and writings on the Danube and the scars on the human skin become readable surfaces “The wound on the body is not only a distinguishing mark of the person and the basis of

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<sup>18</sup> “I bear on my skin a whole album of wounds which I owe to you: the brand, the chain-sore, the sword-cut, and the dog’s bite.” (Jókai 2010) / „Egy eleven album az én bőröm, tele a teérted kapott sebekkel; bélyegsütés, láncgörés, kardvágás, kutyaharapás, mind, mind a te baráti emlékjeleid a testemen. Most mondd, hogy mit csináljak én teveled, hogy ki legyünk egymással egyenlítő?” (Jókai 1994)

“...and naked, too, the wretch’s soul stood there, and it too was full of loathsome wounds inflicted by Timar’s hand.” (Jókai 2010) „És a lelke is éppen olyan meztelenül állt előtte, az is tele utálatos sebhelyekkel, és azokat is az ő keze verte rajta.” (Jókai, 1994)

identification, but it is also the place where the body can become text, where it can enter literature. It can be interpreted as a letter, as a sign, a hieroglyph which becomes readable at the appropriate point in the text. Those texts which explicitly foreground this particular signification of the body tend also to refer to a recurrent effort in literature to turn the body into text.” (Zsadányi 2004) For Esterházy, scars are caesura similar to historical fractures.

*A seb egyszerre volt rettenetes, mintha egy rés, szakadék lett volna az arcán, valami régi ügy, valami ott maradt, archaikus botrány, amiről inkább nem beszélünk, és egyszerre bagatellizálta is mindezen elképzeléseket, inkább megfiatalította az arcot, egy rosszcsont kölök képét vetítve az asszonyéra. Mindez, azt hiszem, a szemének volt köszönhető... (Esterházy 1990)*

*The scar was at once horrifying, like a crack or cavity in her face, the mark of some ancient affair, some archaic scandal, about which the less said the better, and at the same time seemed to dismiss all such thoughts as trifles, and actually made the woman look younger, projecting onto her face the image of a somewhat wicked child. And the reason for all this was, I think, her eyes. (Esterházy 1999)*

The past, the body becoming a memorial site of self-history manifests in the scars, similarly to how the text tries to interpret the Danube’s line in space and time. In Jókai’s novel there is a memorial mark that is the imprinting of a conflict and that can be linked to the memorial tablets on the Danube’s bed representing the Western culture and power. A Western woman’s signature turns up on the Eastern, statue-like woman’s face.

*Hanem aztán rejthetlen elégtelenség árulja el magát vonásain, mikor belép Timéa, és Athalie látja ezt az arcot, szoborfehéren, mint valaha, és e fehér homlokon a halántékig egy piros vonalat, a gyilkos vágás sebhelyét. Ez az ő emléke. (Jókai 1994)*

*But in spite of that she showed unconcealed satisfaction when Timéa entered, and Athalie saw the face paler than ever, the red line over the marble forehead, the scar from the murderous blow; this memento was from her. (Jókai 2010)*

In Esterházy’s novel the Danube is often shown as a line drawn as on a map, on the skin, on the body interpreted as an area. Thus, the reading of scars on the skin and the reading of the river get closely connected. We can determine that the novel reads, interprets, grasps geographical space, history and the body along different lines.

*Ujjával finom vonalat húz a homlokon végig (Győr, Komárom), bekanyarodva a szemgödörbe (Visegrád), le a remegő orr mentén a korallpiros ajkakig (Baja).  
– Duna – mondja a nőnek bizakodva. (Esterházy 1990, 173)*

*The man tries to draw the map of Hungary on the woman's face. He sketches a fine line across her forehead with his finger (Győr, Komárom), sweeping into the socket of her eye (Visegrád), down along her bumpy nose to the coral-red lips (Baja).*

*'The Danube', he whispers intimately to the woman. (Esterházy 1999, 183)*

The line of the face merges with a decisive line of space, drawing the decisive mark of identity on the skin's surface as on a map. The area, the Danube is part of self-identification, of identity that is in close correlation with the body's lines and the body as a whole.

Touch works differently in Jókai's novel, but is similarly closely linked to the Danube and to scars. The experience of the stranger appears in this touch (we are at the beginning of the story). The woman's body, artificially put to sleep, lies in the ship sailing on the Danube, and Timár can make her regain consciousness only by using a substance. The woman figure is a painting and a statue, bearing the attributes of two media. Thus, reviving is the moment of the work of art coming to life. The Christian and the Muslim culture and myth contradictorily meet in the touch of the body that is linked to the sacred spaces of the Danube. This is how the woman's body merges with the Danube, and becomes the canvas of Timár's problems of self-understanding and his own strangeness.

*Timár remegve nyúlt hozzá, mintha egy elbűvölt tündéralakot tapintana, kinek érintésétől a szegény halandó életvesztő szívfájdalmakat kap. Az üvegcsében levő illó szesszel elkezdé az alvó halántékait bedörzsölni. És aközben folyvást figyelt arcára (...) Az alvó arc pedig semmit sem változott a homlokán és halántékain tett bedörzsölésre; két összeérő vékony szemöldöke ráncot sem vont homlokán, midőn az idegen férfi kezei érinték. Az utasítás azt mondá, hogy szívgyödrét is be kell az ellenszerrel dörzsölni (...) a szőnyeg alatt dörzsölé be ujjával a szeszt az alvó alak szívgyödrébe, s hogy ment legyen minden kísértettől, folyvást a lány arcát nézte azalatt. Olyan volt az, mintha egy oltárképet nézne, melyről a hideg sugárzik. Egyszer aztán felnyíltak a sötét szempillák, s a két szem sötéten, ragyogástalanul tekintett elő. (Jókai 1994)*

*Timar approached her as if she were an enchanted fairy whose touch might cause deadly heart-sickness to a poor mortal. He began to rub the temples of the sleeper with the fluid from the bottle. In doing so, he looked continually in her face (...) The lovely face remained unchanged, in spite of the friction on brow and temples; the delicate meeting eyebrows did not contract when touched by a strange man's hand. The directions were that also over the heart the antidote must be applied. (...) And then he spread the Persian quilt, which the girl had thrown off in her sleep, over her whole person up to her neck, and rubbed above the heart of the sleeper with wetted fingers, while, in order to resist temptation, he kept his eyes fixed on the maiden's face. It was to him like an altar-picture—so cold, yet so serene. (Jókai 2010)*

*Egy alabástromszobor az. Egy szobor, mely hajlik, simul, enged, de nem él. (Jókai 1994)*

*She is a marble statue – a statue which bows, dresses itself, submits, but is not alive.*  
(Jókai 2010)

### **The connection of body and space in the two novel closures**

In Jókai's novel the lines meet at the Lower Danube's banks. In the last two chapters the movement of the characters' bodies is worth comparing to the situation in the geographical space they are located in. What takes place is partly Timea's death, partly the total change of Timár's identity, his placement outside of society and his personality's identification with the existence of an island.

*S mikor halálát közelegni érzi, leviteté magát Levetince, nehogy ha meghal, ama sírboltba temessék, ahol ki tudja, ki porladozik Timár címere alatt. Ott keresett ki magának egy csendes fűzfás partot a Duna mellett, azon a tájon, ahol atyját elveszté, ahol Ali Csorbadoszi a Duna fenekén nyugszik; olyan közel a „senki szigetéhez”, mintha vonzotta volna őt oda valami titkos sejtés... Az ő sírköve s a sziget téveteg sziklája láthatják egymást szemközt. (Jókai 1994)*

*And when she felt the approach of death, she had herself taken to Levetinczy, that she might not be placed in the tomb where God knows who mouldered away under Timar's name. There she sought out a quiet willow grove on the Danube shore, in the part nearest to where her father, Ali Tschorbadoschi, rested at the bottom of the river: as near to the ownerless island as if some secret instinct drew her there. From her grave the island rock was visible. (Jókai 2010)*

The placement of the body near the Danube happens close to the border crossing, at No Man's Island. In this picture the text identifies Timea with the grave plate made of stone through the sense of "sight", with the help of which the woman's perspective faces No Man's Island. This is a permanent look (gravestone) moulded into matter that cannot be eliminated because it continually serves remembrance with its presence and function. The woman constantly characterised as a statue gets in immediate contact with stone and with the Danube's church-like landscape. In the world of the novel the body of the father, the sunken Turkish man can also be found here. The ground, space, as the bearer of the past and of history fills with hidden memories.

No Man's Island is also located here, close to the border. Just as the female character becomes part of the landscape by death, the man also assimilates to the island in his mode of being.

*A múlt években egy öreg természettudós barátom, ki fűvészi és rovargyűjtői nevezetesség volt nemcsak hazánkban, de az egész tudós világban, beszélt előttem azokról a kivételes földterületekről, amik a magyar és török birodalmak között találhatóak meg, s minthogy egyik félhez sem tartoznak, magántulajdont sem képeznek; és emiatt valóságos Kaliforniai a szenvedélyes természetbúvárnak, ki ott a legritkább flórát és faunát találja együtt. Az én öreg barátom minden évben meg szokta e helyeket látogatni, s heteket tölt ott szenvedélyes búvárlatai közt.*

*Egy ősszel rábeszélte, hogy menjek el vele én is. Magam is műkedvelő vagyok e szakban. Üres időm volt, elkísértem az öreg tudóst az Al-Dunára. (Jókai 1994)*

*Some years ago, an old friend of mine, a naturalist, who is celebrated as a collector of plants and insects throughout the world, described to me the singular district between Hungary and Turkey, which belongs to neither State, and is not any one's private property.*

*On this account it offers a veritable California to the ardent naturalist, who finds there the rarest flora and fauna. My old friend used to visit this region every year, and stay there for weeks zealously collecting specimens: he invited me to share his autumn expedition. I am somewhat of a dilettante in this line, and as I had leisure, I accompanied my friend to the Lower Danube. (Jókai 2010)*

We arrive at a space which lies outside any power struggle and system, a family withdrawn from society where the origin is the “Nobody” who rewrites his own past and story by disappearance.

In Esterházy's novel we arrive across Romanian territory to the Delta, the sea. The search for the Danube and the constantly unsuccessful experiment of creating a personal story and a uniform historical narrative runs into the sea at Sulina. The formation of a uniform, superior meta-narrative is impossible through the constant change of perspective, just like the definition of a river embracing the area desired to know. Only fragments, parts can be known. In the Delta, at the end, words come apart. On the emblematic anniversary of the death of origin, of the mother, the sun, that helps sight with its light, is “shot down”, while the narrator falls asleep, closes his eyes in the lap (delta) of an unknown, foreign language-speaking girl, thus closing the text stream without sight and language.

*Bérlemény újra meglátta a téren a kislányt. Kicsit tartott ettől a találkozástól. I am... Mit kell most csinálnia? De nem kellett semmit, a lányka leült mellé a padra, ő az ölébe hajtotta fájós fejét, és megpróbált elaludni. Erősen sütött a Nap, melyet pedig már agyonlőttek. Vége. A lány arcán éles kegyetlen vonal, kifejezéstelen tekintettel a Dunára mered, keze lágyan a férfi hajában. Bérlemény arra gondolt, hogy ha majd fölébred, bemásolja a cédulájáról a füzetbe a neveket, azon hajókét, melyeket ma, augusztus 14-én látott: Razelm, Istria, Salvator, Bucureni, Polar, Malnaş, Izer, Mîndra, Costila, Tîrnava, Somes, Caraiman, Topliţa, Polar XI, Cinceaş, Snagov, Mizil, Lupeni, Rîureni, Athanassios D, Tîrgu Jiu, Braşov, Vîrsan, Călimăneşti, Gheorgheni, Voiajor, Leopard, Cardon, Cocora, Dorobanţi, Cormoran, Pontica, Căciulata, Grădina, Amurg, Colina, Zheica, Semnal. (Esterházy 1990, 231)*

*On the square the Hireling saw the little girl again. He was a little frightened of this meeting. I am ... What was he to do now? But he didn't have to do anything: the girl sat down on the bench beside him, he thrust his aching head in her lap and tried to sleep. The sun shone brightly, in spite of having just been shot dead. The end. On the girl's face a sharp, cruel line. She stares at the Danube without expression, and softly runs her fingers through the man's hair. The Hireling decided that when he woke up he'd find his slip of paper and copy down into his notebook the names of all the ships he'd seen that day, 14 August: Razelm, Istria, Salvator, Bucureni, Polar, Malnaş, Izer, Mîndra, Costila, Tîrnava, Somes, Caraiman, Topliţa, Polar XI, Ciucaş, Snagov, Mizil, Lupeni, Rîureni, Athanassios D, Tîrgu Jiu, Braşov, Vîrsan, Călimăneşti, Gheorgheni, Voiajor, Leopard, Cardon, Cocora, Dorobanţi, Cormoran, Pontica, Căciulata, Grădina, Amurg, Colina, Zheica, Semnal. (Esterházy 1999, 244)*

Both texts construe an ideal, imaginary space: in Esterházy's novel it is Konrád György's Eastern-Europe, and in Jókai's novel it is the No Man's Island's Rousseauian utopia, placed outside power systems. The existence of the Danube is an important element in the formation of both spaces. But they form it and use the river's phenomenon differently.

The aspects of my analysis are based on the Danube's different forms as text, surface and identity. I analysed their relationship in the perspective of the two novels. Péter Esterházy's novel is constantly aiming at deconstructing the renaissance space, showing that we cannot trace a uniform human perspective that embraces everything. We can only sense and interpret in a fragmented way, because something is always left out or hidden. Interpretation attempts are nonetheless important, because we exist and experience the world through them. Interpretation works with the constant wobble of questioning and perspectives. "Elsewhere is a negative mirror." This is linked to important questions such as: is there individuality and is there fate?

Mór Jókai's text, where the characters are unable to get over themselves, they scratch the surface, they try to break through it, but they only meet their own image and mirrors everywhere, can be associated with this metaphor. In this respect, the relativity and discrepancy of sight and sense shows through here in their most exact definitions. In *Timar's Two Worlds* the interpretation of people and society happens through the reading and interpretation of the Danube and its area. Besides the unifying concept of history, we can constantly see its destruction and the many faces of space.

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## Can Freud Cure Vampires?<sup>1</sup>

### *Therapy for a Vampire from the Perspective of Dracula's Psychoanalytic Readings*

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**Abstract.** A common feature of the *Dracula* (1897) studies is that they always search for figurative meaning in the text. Most *Dracula* analyses replace the different segments of the story (for example the vampires, the vampire attacks, the transfusions of blood, etc.) with something else: for them these elements always point at another meaning. Although it would be an exaggeration to claim that the psychoanalytic readings established this method in the *Dracula* research, however there is no doubt that these analyses used it first in a comprehensive manner. In the last fifty years the psychoanalytic reading of Bram Stoker's novel has been the subject of many debates: some confirmed, others denied its validity – and in the meantime the psychoanalytic interpretation became an inevitable part of the *Dracula* research. However, the psychoanalytic readings have no sole responsibility for the figurative interpretation of vampires: ambiguity was present for a long time in the popular culture based on *Dracula* – especially in cinema. Contemporary vampire movies have to take into account this psychoanalytic heritage: in my essay I would like to shed light on how *Therapy for a Vampire [Der Vampir auf der Couch, 2014]* deals with this heritage.

**Keywords:** Dracula, vampires, psychoanalytic readings, metaphorical interpretations, sexuality, David Rühm, Bram Stoker

There is no doubt that amongst the various theoretical approaches of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) the most numerous and the most influential are the psychoanalytic readings. The first psychoanalytic interpretation of the novel was written in 1959 by Maurice Richardson (*The Psychoanalysis of Ghost Stories*). In the 1970s and 1980s many critics analysed the *Dracula* from the same point of view (Welsch 2009, 41–45). Yet from the 1990s these kinds of interpretations provoked sharp criticism: the *Dracula* research turned its attention towards the historical, ideological, cultural, technical, etc. context of the novel (see Arata 1990, 635; Spencer 1992, 197; Highes 2000, 3–4; Aikens 2009, 42). Mathias Clasen's study is an example (perhaps the most explicit one) of this change: “enough with the talk of »bleeding vagina[s]« and evil mothers already. *Dracula* scholars would do well to leave Freud and his followers behind” (Clasen 2012, 380). However, contemporary vampire movies show just the opposite: they are proof of the persistence of *Dracula*'s psychoanalytic readings in the 2010s.

The *Therapy for a Vampire [Der Vampir auf der Couch, 2014]* directed by David Rühm epitomises this approach. A free adaptation of *Dracula*, its plot is far from the original

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novel's story. However, the movie makes numerous references to the novel and its heritage. The vampire Geza von Közsnöm, one of the main characters, always recalls with great joy his relation with Romania, Hungary and Transylvania, all significant places in Stoker's novel. Lucy, the name of another main character in the movie also turns up in Stoker's novel. The action of the movie takes place in 1932 – just one year after the premier of the famous *Dracula* adaptation directed by Tod Browning. But what makes *Therapy for a Vampire* really interesting for the *Dracula* research is its affinity with psychoanalysis: the movie could be easily interpreted as a reflection of the relationship between vampire stories and Freudian psychoanalysis. For this very reason I will focus on the various psychoanalytic readings of Stoker's novel reflected upon in the film in question.

Maurice Richardson's statement („[only] from a Freudian standpoint – and from no other – does [*Dracula*] really make any sense") (Richardson 1959, 427) and Mathias Clasen's aforementioned reflection on this represents the two opposite poles detectable in the researchers' approach to psychoanalytic readings of *Dracula*. While many studies written after Richardson's essay proved that Stoker's novel can be interpreted from different perspectives, *Therapy for a Vampire* and similar movies make it clear that the psychoanalytic readings cannot be disregarded once and for all.

In my analysis I will emphasise one of the features of the psychoanalytic readings – namely the metaphoric interpretation of the novel. The *Dracula* studies' common feature is that they always search for figurative meaning in the text. Most *Dracula* analyses replace the different segments of the story (for example the vampires, the vampire attacks, the transfusions of blood, etc.) with something else: for them these elements always point at another meaning. Although it would be an exaggeration to claim that the psychoanalytic readings established this method in the *Dracula* research, however there is no doubt that these analyses used it first in a comprehensive manner. C. F. Bently sees the vampirism as “a perversion of normal heterosexual activity” and the blood fusion as a symbol of sexual intercourse (Bently 1972, 29); Phyllis A. Roth reads the female characters' transformation into vampire as the awakening of their sexual desire (Roth 1977, 114–115); Alan Johnson argues “that the novel's form is largely determined by its presentation of the vampire Count Dracula as a literary double for the unconscious or only partly conscious rebellious egoism experienced first by Lucy and then by Mina in reaction to the constraints and condescension which have been inflicted on them by their society.” (Johnson 1987, 20) and for Christopher Craft the vampires blur the conventional Victorian gender categories (Craft, 1999, 93–118).

We could continue the list, but these examples sufficiently exemplify the psychoanalytic interpretations of the novel. In the last fifty years this perspective has been the subject of many debates: some confirmed, others denied its validity – and in the meantime the psychoanalytic interpretation became an inevitable part of the *Dracula* research. In 2006 Elizabeth Miller already wrote that it is hard to “imagine a *Dracula* in which wooden stakes are wooden stakes, and blood is merely blood.” (Miller 2006)

But the psychoanalytic readings have no sole responsibility for the figurative interpretation of vampires: ambiguity was present for a long time in the popular culture based on *Dracula* – especially in cinema. To take just one example: in Roman Polanski’s horror-comedy, the *Dance of the Vampires; The Fearless Vampire Killers, Or Pardon Me but Your Teeth Are in My Neck* (1967) vampirism and vampire attacks obviously have a sexual overtone. In the first half of the movie vampires attack young women only when they are naked or half-naked. These attacks in itself would not have been significant, but later events in the castle shed new light on them. For example, at their first encounter in the castle, Herbert, the homosexual son of the vampire count Krolock, shows his affection towards Alfred, the young vampire hunter. Later Herbert attacks Alfred [Figs.1–4].



[Figs.1–4.]. *Dance of the Vampires; The Fearless Vampire Killers, Or Pardon Me but Your Teeth Are in My Neck*

The scene where Sarah uses the bathroom next to Alfred's room is also a striking example that vampire attacks have sexual overtone. Alfred finds himself in a dilemma: he really likes to peep Sarah through the keyhole, but his conscience does not allow him to do it. This is when Count Krolock turns up – as if he would be the manifestation of Alfred's desires – and does

what the young vampire hunter would like to do: first he peeps Sarah through the skylight, then flies into the bathroom, bites her neck and runs away with her [Figs.5–8.].



[Figs.5–8.]. *Dance of the Vampires; The Fearless Vampire Killers, Or Pardon Me but Your Teeth Are in My Neck*

Alan Johnson in *Bent and Broken Necks: Signs of Design in Stoker's Dracula* mentions many other novels from the 19<sup>th</sup> century in which a character is presented as a – usually evil or immoral – double of a main character. As Johnson writes: “the second-self character enters the narrative at just the point when the central character is, or supposed to be, feeling or thinking what the second character personifies.” (Johnson 1987, 20).

The last example is important for the psychoanalytic readings of *Dracula* for two reasons. On the one hand, it shows how the central theme of the psychoanalytic interpretations, sexuality, lives on in a vampire movie closely related to Stoker's novel. On the other hand, it illustrates that the main method of the psychoanalytic analyses, the metaphorical reading can be applied both in the novel and in its cinematic heritage.

The *Therapy for a Vampire* has an ambivalent relation to the psychoanalytic interpretations of *Dracula* and the metaphorical readings. At first sight it may appear that the movie parodies both these analyses and the methodology. At the beginning of the movie Geza von Közsnöm visits Freud and asks for his help. Once during the treatment the Count talks about his dead lover. Suddenly he quotes from the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Totem and Taboo*: “»We know that the dead are mighty rulers«”. Then Freud says that this is a misinterpretation of the sentence, but Közsnöm replies: “The true meaning of this sentence hasn't been grasped yet. Maybe you

underestimate its depth yourself.” This comical scene – a vampire explains the true meaning of the *Totem and Taboo* to its author – becomes even funnier if we associate it with the psychoanalytic readings of *Dracula*. In the *Dracula* research time and again the question arises to what extent the “design” of Stoker’s novel was intentional. Some argue that Stoker intentionally wrote an erotic, quasi-pornographic novel, while others on the contrary describe him “as an author unconscious of the essential nature of his novel” (see Johnson 1987, 18).

In the movie Geza von Közsnöm gives Freud a taste of his own psychoanalytic therapy, and shows that the meaning of a sentence cannot be determined by the author’s intention, rather by the reader’s interpretations. The movie also parodies the psychoanalytic interpretation of monsters appearing in dreams. At the beginning of the story Freud asks his friend, Viktor, to draw his patients’ dreams. The scene takes place as follows: Freud is lying on the sofa and he is reading his notes (“Then the tree turns into a hybrid creature of a wolf and man. The young damsel is now lying in a cave on a big rock, and the mythical creatures lurk around her with excitement. She feels lust and guilt at the same time.”), while Viktor is drawing in a sketchbook. Suddenly Viktor interrupts Freud and says that these dreams “could interest a wider audience.” But Freud replies without hesitation that all these cases must be handled with absolute discretion. “Discretion” and “lust” strongly suggest that these dreams about mythical monsters have a sexual characteristic. (Later when Victor’s girlfriend, Lucy looks into the sketchbook in secret, we can see that Victor has drawn the dreams like erotic images) [Figs.9–10.].



[Figs.9–10.] *Therapy for a Vampire*

Thus the movie emphasises that, from the Freudian psychoanalytical perspective, monsters – such as wolf men, minotaurs, vampires, etc. – always have a sexual overtone. In the *Dracula* scholarship it is not uncommon that a psychoanalytic reading is based on this assumption: it neglects the context or the description (of the monster) and – referring to psychoanalytic experiences – takes for granted that events associated with vampires have sexual meaning, which only should be confirmed with a closer look of the text or the scene (see Bentley 1972, 27). Contrary to this approach, the movie reveals the importance of the context. It not only presents sketches of monster-dreams, it also provides insight into such a dream. One night Geza von Közsnöm helps his pickled wife, Elsa to lie down. Then he sits down beside her coffin and holds her hand until she falls asleep. But once his wife is asleep he leaves the crypt. However, shortly afterwards we see him again sitting near his wife’s coffin. He looks at his wife with loath and hate, takes a sharp wooden stake, places it right over his wife’s heart, and strikes it with a hammer. Next the Count is startled awake in his car and it becomes clear that he only dreamed the previous scenes [Figs.11–13.].



[Figs.11–13.] *Therapy for a Vampire*

To strike a wooden stake into the heart of a vampire is a well-known method of destroying an undead; therefore the scene can evoke not solely the *Dracula* but many different vampire narratives. However, in some elements of Geza von Kőzsnöm's dream we can easily recognise a similar episode from Stoker's novel. In that chapter the vampire hunters – led by Van Helsing – destroy Lucy Westenra, a young vampire. Arthur Holmwood, Lucy's fiancé must execute this terrible act; he strikes the stake into her heart. This episode became a cornerstone of *Dracula's* psychoanalytic readings: researchers supporting the sexual interpretation never miss to quote it. For example C. F. Bentley claims, that “[t]he methods used to destroy vampires also contain sexual implication [...]. Lucy, who becomes a vampire after succumbing to Dracula's attack, is released from her »undead« state into true death by her erstwhile fiance Arthur, who drives a hardened and sharply pointed wooden stake through her heart. The phallic symbolism in this process is evident” (Bentley 1972, 31).

Yet there is no sexuality in Geza von Kőzsnöm's dream. The movie – with the crypt scene – evokes Stoker's *Dracula* and its psychoanalytic readings and – by Victor's sketches – also refers to the reference framework of these readings. However, the only monster-dream in the movie does not imply any sexual symbol. The movie sends a clear signal: it is fully aware that vampire stories could have sexual meanings, but at the same time it claims that these are not always relevant.

*Therapy for a Vampire* mocks the associations which connect vampirism (blood sucking) to sexuality. There are two scenes in the movie where a character misunderstands bloodsucking because he interprets it as a sexual act. Towards the end of the movie Elsa bites and transforms Victor's girlfriend, Lucy into a vampire. Geza von Kőzsnöm tries to protect Lucy so he takes her under the supervision of Freud and lays the unconscious girl down in the doctor's bed. Shortly afterwards Freud – who has taken sleeping-pills earlier – also falls asleep. Lucy waking up in the middle of the night experiences strange changes on herself: her sensory system becomes extremely sensitive; she hears the blood pulsing in the professor's jugular vein loudly. She cannot resist the temptation, she bites Freud's neck and starts sucking his blood. In this very moment Victor wakes up in the room next door. He hears voices from the doctor's room so opens the door and catches sight of Lucy pressing her lips tightly to the doctor's neck [Figs.14–17.].





[Figs.14–17.] *Therapy for a Vampire*

It is a strongly ambiguous scene – not a surprise that Victor misunderstands Lucy’s act: LUCY: “Something crazy has happened.” VICTOR: “I can see that. You, in his bed? [...] That old geezer? [...] Why are you in his bed? [...] What are you doing in his bed?” However, in a later scene it is Lucy who misunderstands Victor’s words. When she asks the painter about the nature of his relation with Elsa, and Victor replies that Elsa “just drank my blood”, Lucy is shocked by this answer (“That’s pretty intimate!” – she says). *Therapy for a Vampire* shows that sometimes we misunderstand the situations if we interpret blood sucking as a sexual symbol – as it was the case of the monster-dream.

The movie not only parodies the psychoanalytic readings but generally mocks all metaphorical interpretation. It is most clearly represented in the conversations of the vampire Count and Freud, but other episodes of the movie also confirm this assumption. At their first encounter, Geza von Közsnöm says to Freud: “I’m not good at self-reflection. I need your help. [...] There’s nothing left for me to discover. [...] My blood flows languidly and cold through my veins. I’m fed up of this everlasting night. This eternal darkness, swallowing me

up. I long for light. Bright light, where I can disappear and dissolve.” The viewer – who already knows that the Count is a vampire – perhaps finds this scene comical because he understands the ambiguity of these sentences. But Freud does not observe the Count from this point of view; he tries to interpret what he heard with his own psychoanalytic theory. Towards the end of the movie, he displays the same attitude when Victor wakes him up in the middle of the night. “She’s [Elsa] a vampire, an undead. She has no reflection, I saw it.” – the painter says. It is obvious that Victor needs immediate and urgent assistance but he only gets a big dose of sedative from Freud. The message of these scenes seems clear: sometimes we do not need to interpret the vampires’ existence, just accept them as they are: vampires, bloodsucker monsters. This is the only way to help them or those who fight against them. If we search for a figurative meaning we find nothing.

Two other scenes of the film demonstrate the same perspective. In Victor’s apartment the artist is about to paint Elsa when the vampire woman steps closer to him and whispers into his ear: “If you manage to paint me, you’ll become immortal.” As in the case of Közsnöm’s monologue quoted above, only the viewer can perceive the ambiguity of the sentence. Victor – since he does not know that Elsa is a vampire – only could think that the painting will make him famous. He cannot suspect Elsa’s covert offer (if he paints the vampire woman she transforms him into an immortal bloodsucker).

In the second scene the same characters are having a dinner in a restaurant. When Victor orders stake with garlic sauce, Elsa immediately interrupts him saying that they do not need the garlic sauce. Victor first seems confused but then breaks into a smile: “Who knows what the night will bring.” For the viewer (as in the last scene) it is obvious that Elsa was misunderstood: she does not refuse the garlic sauce because she has an intimate plan for the night but because she – being a vampire – hates it. The conclusions of the scenes are similar: Victor could only understand Elsa if he saw her true identity, her vampire-self.

Nevertheless, many features of *Therapy for a Vampire* make the parodic interpretation of the movie uncertain. It is very revealing that the vampire goes to Freud and not the other way round. As I mentioned above, when Freud asks Geza von Közsnöm what the purpose of his visit is, the vampire replies: “I’m not good at self-reflection. I need your help.” The ambiguity of the first sentence is clear for everybody who is familiar with the vampire lore: it refers to the “disability” of the vampires that they have no reflection in the mirror. If we know this, the vampire’s answer to Freud could easily mean that he looks for practical and not psychological help. However, in this case he would have certainly visited someone else, not

Freud: this is made clear in the movie with Elsa's story – when a vampire needs practical help he or she goes to a painter.

The narcissistic Countess wants to see the image of her face at any cost, as she would like to know how she really looks: at the beginning of the movie she asks her husband to give a detailed description of her face. Later we see her in front of a mirror applying a lot of makeup powder because she expects to see her face in the cloud of the powder [Figs.18–19.].



[Figs.18–19.] *Therapy for a Vampire*

When she finally asks for external assistance she has no intention to visit a psychiatrist, rather she hires a painter. If Geza von Közsnöm would have the same kind of problem, he would probably act similarly. So the fact that he visits Freud suggests that the nature of his problem is of different nature and he thinks that Freud could help him. It is clearly not the case that Freud completely misunderstands the vampire during the therapy – just as Victor misunderstands Elsa –, but rather that Geza von Közsnöm uses ambiguous expressions on purpose: he is aware that the primary meaning of them is not understood by the doctor, however he wants to know how Freud interprets them. The therapy is not a game at all for the vampire: he does not go to Freud to mock him, rather he would like to see how someone not knowing that he is a vampire interprets his existence – he simply wants to increase his self-awareness through the therapy. In short, he would rather like to understand how a psychologist interprets the vampire existence with psychoanalytic method. The fact that Geza von Közsnöm does not reveal his vampire identity during the therapy – even when Freud asks about it – demonstrates this assumption. Talking with the doctor about his ex-lover, Nadila, Geza von Közsnöm claims, that “[s]he made me what I am today.” This sentence has a

connotative meaning: it could mean that Nadila transformed the Count into a vampire. However, when Freud asks what he is today, the vampire's response is evasive: "That's why I'm here. I'm not myself. Or what I used to be. That's my problem."

To sum up, *Therapy for a Vampire* parodies the *Dracula* and its psychoanalytic readings. Many scenes suggest that sometimes if we try to interpret metaphorically the vampire stories, we easily misinterpret them. However, it would be misleading to state that the movie generally parodies the metaphorical interpretations. While *Therapy for a Vampire* usually mocks these kinds of approaches, it cannot be disregarded that sometimes the movie itself uses strong metaphors – and wants us to recognise them.

The best example of this is a scene at the beginning of the movie where Lucy has a fight with Victor. At the end of the scene Lucy storms out from the apartment and Victor slams the door. In the next moment the movie shows a withered bouquet which – due to the slammed door – loses its last petal [Figs.20–21].



[Figs.20–21.] *Therapy for a Vampire*

Earlier we saw that Victor gave this bouquet to Lucy. The bouquet and the falling petal clearly indicate that their relation came close to an end. The image of the withered bouquet is an example of the film's visual metaphors; we could understand this conventional metaphor as a signal towards the viewers: LOVE IS A FLOWER is a classical metaphor, most of the viewers will note it. Thus the movie with this metaphor not only makes the changes in the relation between Lucy and Victor more tangible, it also draws attention to its own figurativity, calling out for a complex interpretation.

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## Transgressive Body in Hungarian Literature and film: Matters of the Cyborg-phenomena<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* attempts to destroy barriers of body, discourse and even society, creating a brand new idea of a half-human, half-machine hybrid, called the cybernetic organism. In my opinion that is what protagonists of many fictional short-stories, novels or films do too: in my article I would like to present some of them as an ancestor of this peculiar creature, which makes philosophers and art and literary theorists redefine concepts of body, repression and actually everything about the Other. With a short overview of different theories (from Michel Foucault to Judith Butler), I attempt to prepare my interpretation of a Hungarian novel and a Hungarian film, *Inkognitó* (2010) by Noé Tibor Kiss and *Womb* (2010) by Benedek Fliegauf, in order to explore the meaning of a being that might be the most unimaginable and misunderstandable of all, and which definitely has a somewhat different meaning, that could lead us to whole new paths of understanding the Other.

**Keywords:** posthuman, cyborg, body, contemporary Hungarian cinema, contemporary Hungarian literature, transgression, feminism, Tibor Noé Kiss, Fliegauf Benedek

What happens when the main focus of the text is an entity whose appearance, body and nature is absolutely controversial in multiple aspects, transgressive and inconceivable? In my essay, after a detailed introduction, I take a look at a novel and a film, which rewrite conventional barriers of body, and even address their *raison d'être*: Noé Tibor Kiss's novel, *Inkognitó* and Benedek Fliegauf's *Womb*. I attempt to read these pieces of art alongside the so called cyborg body-experience, which allows us to seek out new aspects of the theoretical idea which begins with crossing barriers of body and identity. The cyborg entity can appear in different kinds of theoretical texts, but it is worth comparing them to find potential initial points and intriguing ideas in primary texts.

The deconstruction of the body as unity, or its construction, its natural aspects is a frequent theme of literary texts. This body, which according to some classical concepts is rather unified, impenetrable, unbreakable, is only desirable, ideal and healthy if it appears as a whole. In *Homo Sacer* Giorgio Agamben talks about the perfection of the bodies from Paradise, the Glorious Body which neglects the vegetative, biological functions of the body and the senses, and all the existence of internal organs, lymph, as well as the internal necessities. Agamben argues that the two most critical aspects of this idea are obviously the representation of the eating and reproductive organs, amounting to the tension between ambivalent questions related to the ideal body and its actual usage. With glory comes and

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prevails the concept of workless body: disarmedness is not about abilities, but only aims and modalities – practice is written and separated in them. (Agamben 1998) If we take a look at ancient arts, the unbreakableness of the canonical human body, which is envisaged as a unity, is very dominant in painting or statuary. Winckelmann declares that in the representation of the ideal human body creators avoid all the unwanted features. (Winckelmann 2006). All the traces that might indicate illness, and all the roughness of the surface, every sign that marks internal functions and operation is forgotten: usual outlines clearly separate the inside from outside of the body and even from itself. While Virgil's *Laocoön* makes an awful noise, the Greek master's sculpture shows us the pain without rampage, and the opening mouth is just like exhaling a lesser sigh. When Hans Belting examined the European pictorial history of the body, he came to the conclusion that its beginning was the very moment of the crisis of the pictures of the body. The reason for this is the contradictory Christian attitude towards ancient anthropocentric culture, which makes the cult of the body a taboo: the meaning of a new picture of the body is the deprivation from the body (Belting 2011). This unified, outward, impenetrable concept of body is there in literature and cinema, but it seems that as time goes by with different periods of cultural history, it falls apart, changes and relates to other concepts as well.

It is obvious that (medical) science affected philosophy and even literature: as the body becomes unfoldable from a closed, unified material, which is created analogically to God's portrait, it also makes its way to literal texts. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a meaningful example of this idea, because in the story, often mentioned as a Gothic horror, the main opposition is the idea of the creator versus created, and living versus dead, where the visualisation of human body parts as fixtures, installed and defined by a human itself, are highly remarkable. It is also important that Frankenstein creates a monster, in which he defines the roles of all of the body parts, making a creature that definitely breaks those rules of body which are established, classical, or as Butler calls it, naturalised, meaning that it is marked as natural by the forces and processes of power (Butler 1990, 6). We don't know what is the gender of those parts constituting the body of the monster – which entails a very important aspect of gender too: from a point like this, barriers between sexes can't really mean anything. In the centre of the text there is a marginalised and traumatised protagonist with many complexes. The undetermined identity of this transgressive entity keeps the narrative going. Addressing and abolishing the unity of the body as manipulation of the body is obviously a privilege of God, which is demonstrable by the Bible or ancient mythology. In *Metamorphoses* transformation is generally in the form of intervention and punishment:

Actaeon's penalty is getting transformed into a deer, after he sees Artemis bathing. The goddess also punishes Callisto with transformation, but we can think of Daphne, who ends up as a laurel after running away from the love of Apollo. What is most remarkable about the transformation from human to another organic material, whether in the case of Ovid's stories or the paintings and sculptures trying to seize this moment of transgression, is the goal of capturing that very moment of change. In the texts, it seems like the transformation goes step by step, from one body part to another: we can almost see the process of metamorphosis through the detailed, pictorial portrayal. It is notable that despite the transformation, there is a beating heart beneath the crust, pointing out the fact that, after this change, something essential is still there from the girl who turned into a tree. In my opinion, those pieces of art that have the potential of presenting these stories in the most impressive way, are always the ones that are showing this transgressive moment, that trice of transformation when there is some unique ambiguity about the protagonist, for example about Daphne. This game with human and non-human body parts entails the birth of a hybrid entity – just like in Ovid's writing, Bernini's famous sculpture or Poussin's painting – that can become imposing and meaningful, and also inexplicable and indescribable, thanks to its ambiguity. While we keep getting closer to the question of robots and cyborgs, it is intriguing to think about Talos, the automaton of Hephaestus: a hybrid entity, created by the Greek god. This bull-headed, bronze colossus had just one vein in its body, which went up to its head from its knee, and it killed the enemies with its hot embrace or just its gaze. This robot-like creature is inherently positive in the story, since its job is to defend Europa in Crete, but is still an unnatural, dreadful and feared freak – in many ways, it is like a pre-cyborg creature.

Attila Atilla Kiss investigates cyborgs – now by this we mean cybernetic organisms in general – in postmodern films. He declares that the focus on the theory of body developed and enhanced the sensitivity of cultural semiotic and cultural political parallels, which can be interpreted unattached to any structuralist and organicist modelling ideas (Kiss 2006). He examines barriers of body, the lymph, the sexualised and truncated body parts in the context of horror movies. The main question of his essay is how these films impact the conventional structures of society and culture – through the example of consuming space and time, mocking history or devaluating any inventions. It is important to take a look at the phenomenon of horror films that integrate cyborgs to the narrative: why do truncated, dislocated body parts and morbid monsters make viewers feel joy after all? György Kalmár argues that horror films can be read as the unsealed meaning, as discourses on the instability of the subject (Kalmár 2012). In his opinion this brings us back to the fact that classical horror



movies usually do not have a denouement, they impact the subject by conflicting oppositional ways (sadism and masochism, the subject and the Other, joy and fear etc.), and they bring in the question of subject by presenting its impossibility. There is a somewhat similar thought in *Being and Time*, in the chapters about the call of conscience: the call invoked by anxiety makes it possible to the presencing to project itself (Heidegger 1962). Horror films and even cyborgs make point and make something visible by decomposing, questioning and looking further.

With its attempts to understand its operation and substance, the structure of the body fell apart before to even smaller pieces and blended into different discourses. A philosopher and doctor from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Julien Offray de La Mettrie compared human body and organs to mechanical parts, and in *L'Homme Plante* he even makes parallels with other biological organisms. He writes about the very own vibration and mechanical movements of the body, stretching and limped cogs: the body is just like a watch, where fresh lymph is the watchmaker (La Mettrie 1994). Farkas Kempelen explores the operation and possibilities of human (and animalistic) language in his essay, *The Mechanism of Human Speech*, utilising the analogy of human and machine, thus creating a mechanical concept of understanding the functions of internal organs and the body. He made a speaking machine that had a detailed installation guide: he required every organ to speak as a device, made by fixtures (whistle, windbag), which were operating like the original organs. Kempelen's former great invention is the chess machine, which served as inspiration for several artists, including Poe and Hoffmann. The secret of the Turkish figure was a living human, hiding inside him, who reacted to the opponent's turns, using mirrors and other hidden methods to trick everyone. Thus creating humans with mechanics became more and more usual in many different areas, thanks to telescopes, microscopes, cameras and projectors. Questions like what is perception, how it can be represented and whether it is as natural as we thought became addressed by sciences and arts as well. Peter Bexte names the 17<sup>th</sup> century as the epoch of the revolution of optical instruments, when humankind could not believe what it saw any longer: these were the times when medium, picture and perception together began their circulation, that makes them going on nowadays too (Bexte 2009, 29). The very first of those Blickmachines, as he calls them, was the eye itself: along with the experiments and dissections of this organ came the experiments with photo machines or microscopes. Eye becomes a medium, the camera obscura, where picture is the screened image and perception, and vision is the process of screening. What is interesting about this theory is that Bexte sees an organic, human-animal part as something machinelike. His essay counts these Blickmachines as permanent and

significant objects of the past and the present: by asking one, we may look into another (Bexte 2008). When Kittler talks about the history of seeing and creating the science of optics, he emphasises the importance of classical Greek culture. He believes that the eye itself was the broadcasting object, its activities reached things in the world, and after that, they made signs to the spirit (Kittler 2009). According to this idea, the ray of sight that tended to the source made it possible to see an object: the concepts of the eye, light, seeing changed over and over (Descartes for example saw seeing as a talent, which helps us notice objects, and light, its size etc. as a feature of the actual object), but it was indeed the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the famous Siècle des Lumières, which was a turning point according to Kittler as well. This complex epistemology of the eye almost gives authorisation to evaluate seeing as something more than just a simple organic phenomenon. This thought is also available to the whole human body, its deconstruction and mechanicalisation, for example in the case of puppets, automatons, robots, so the adequate question is whether this complexity is enough reason to strain borders of nature and “naturalness” with the myths of hybrid creatures, robots, etc.?

Questions of relations between machines and living organism from a theoretical, structural or ideological angle, the phenomenon of disappearing barriers between organic and artificial entities, with the related mysteries and myths served as inspiration to many scientist, artist, critics and philosophers. Mechanical humans, or robots, automatons, machines with human features are usual topics in modern and postmodern texts. In cultural and literary studies this could have various functions, and whether it is about philosophy, matters of utopias, tools of horror stories or just writing science fiction, destabilising the (seemingly) static system is often very effective. If we take a look at the phenomenon of transformed human body from the animalistic-human, the living-dead, the mechanical prosthesis body parts, we may reach the absolutely transgressive cyborg entity. A cybernetic organism is the ambiguous, controversial, both biological and mechanical creature, that is often a popular topos of science fiction, thus it can be called the most transgressive cultural and literary figure.

What is it exactly that the alliance of machine and human can offer in the future? If we look at the social effects of it, the pure, productive idea of cyborgs carries the hope of utopias. Michel Foucault sees utopias contrary to the body, when he declares that they are born against the body and to wipe away the idea of body: they are dislocated spaces that a body leaves itself, becomes pretty and clear, transparent, shiny, agile, immeasurably powerful, infinite, freed, invisible, protected and forever changing (Foucault 2006). This forever changing matter, taken out from its framework, is the central idea of postmodern feminist philosopher Donna J. Haraway’s cyborg manifesto from 1985, in which she uses the cyborg concept to

make arguments about the social relations at the end of the century. She believes that this entity is the source of fertile and imaginative ideas, and the fiction that replicates social and material reality (Haraway 2000). In her opinion, relations of living organisms and machines were always battles for borders (of power, reproduction or production), and by disturbing these borders, she attempts to create an idea of a utopia without gender, to contribute to socialist and feminist culture. Thus this myth of cyborgs created by Haraway is about broken borders, its advantages and dangers, mostly in the case of questions about defining and reinterpreting female body.

A cyborg becomes a peripheral figure by disregarding conventional barriers of body. Which are these barriers and what does an ideal body look like? It is important to note that the body and its representation is always something formed by social frames and rules, therefore a cyborg-like creature can only get marginal positions in discourses. Talking about barriers of bodies (of repressors and repressed ones), Bourdieu declares that the body, which is marked by relations of authority, is defined by habitus. The French philosopher investigates this concept in connection of symbolic violence, which is in his opinion the key to understanding this system of power, because talking and noticing habitus leads the way to understanding the system that rules the body as a product of relations of power. In his famous text, *Masculine Domination*, the most important ideas are phallogocentrism, the relations of repression, so it is obvious why feminist or postcolonial theories can benefit from it: in this masculine system of power, magical barriers – as Bourdieu calls them – are created and named and they make and force their mark by which social identity is created, and which leaves a mark on biological nature (by naturalising) becomes habitus (Bourdieu 2001). If habitus, thus human body ruled by symbolic domination disregards these barriers, it places itself outside society. The naturalisation of body can be linked to Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Butler subverted normative and not normative, natural and artificial categories, speaking about marginalised sexual identities, and declared heteronormativity itself as something artificial. Thereby she emphasised the process of naturalisation, she legitimated all identities that are not normative about their sexuality or their body. The concept of sexual identity and the body of an entity is a performative phenomenon, which is made up by different cultural gestures, repeating actions, thus it is not an a priori feature of a person. Knowing about cultural and social constructions, we must dismiss the unquestionable facts of gender's nature, coming from one's biological sex. If the inner truth of gender is a social construction, and if the real social sex is just an act of imagination, which is carved in the surface of bodies and

institutionalised, it seems that genders cannot be true or false, but simply created like the truth that impacts on the discourse of stable and primary identity (Butler 1990).

What can we tell about the post-gender theory and the cyborg phenomenon, especially if we read a book or watch a film? In my opinion the Hungarian transgender novel, *Inkognitó* by Noé Tibor Kiss can answer this question, as the novel shows us how a transsexual person seeks identity. There are two timelines in the narrative: first, there is the late eighties and early nineties in Hungary, when the protagonist is in his teenage years, and also the present of the narration, when we can see an adult person trying to fit in and struggling with relationships. Dynamic alternation of these timelines keeps the narrative fast and tense, but it also creates tension via the unusually long exposition when compared to the length of the entire novel, as it sketches the heavy atmosphere of socialism. The protagonist grows up in a depressing era of Hungary, and as a kid, he likes to play football, his favourite colour is blue. The text emphasises the differences between Tibor's childhood and his adult life. There are many noticeable repetitions in the text and the storyline: "I dusted, vacuum-cleaned the carpet, mopped the floor. I wiped the commode, the shelf and the tables clean. I slowly blew the smoke out of my mouth." (Kiss 2010, 6: translation by me, VE) These patterns aren't just about demolishing the ways of usual, naturalised activities: textual repetitions and monotony can be compared to the process of forming an identity which is ruled by social conventions. Stepping over objects is a recurrent and indicative pattern that can repeat itself in the text, or can come back after different chapters. These moments, like stepping over puddles and doorsteps, might symbolise immobility rather than going forward, the frozen moments of temporality, thus being eternally in-between and helpless. There are those types of repetitions that are stacking different thoughts and sentences and switching words in the text. I think that this next part emphasises the instability of relations of words and their actual meanings, intensifying the idea of the battle against definitions, thus the issues of self-realisation. "The marks of my lips, lipstick, brown like a brick on the porcelain cup. The mark of lipstick, brown as a brick, the mark of my lips on a porcelain cup. My lips are like a brown brick, lipstick mark on the porcelain cup. My lips are marks of lipstick, the mark of the porcelain cup brown as well as a brick." (Kiss 2010, 100: translation by me, VE) According to Judith Butler, norms of gender function by demanding the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity and masculinity. Expropriating performative acts by queer ideas both imitates and shows the biding power of heterosexualising law, the possibility of its deprivation of authority (Butler 1990, 7). This thought can be important if we take a look at the protagonist, Tibor, who faces the problems coming from the symbolism of clothing. "Women's purse, women's

watch, women's wig. My reflection is a stranger's on the balcony door. My bracelet sparkles, my nails shine." (Kiss 75. Translation by me, VE)

A transsexual protagonist, standing between, and trapped by, traditional categories of man and woman, is a good example if we talk about non-conventional body parts that are not able to reconcile with norms, and can confirm the queer transgression of the body often analyzed by Butler. At this point it is the drag that can be very significant: the transsexual person, who embraces conventional norms of the other gender, and the so-called double drag, which describes the look of a transvestite. Having feminine looks, but a masculine body, while as an opposition to this idea, having masculine body and gender, but being feminine under the surface. A person, described as such, weakens the difference of eternal and external, of physical and spiritual, and points out the fluidity of identity, such as its external social representation. These rather interesting processes, which result not simply in the crossing but also in the fading of the conventional barriers of the body: with these contradictions, according to Butler, all kinds of social marks are liquidated from the discourse of true and false (Butler 1990). The drag and queer therefore levitates in an eternal in-between, appearing as a cyborg of gender aspects, in front of the gaze of the observing power: fear, disgust, exclusion, body that functions in a good or a bad way, death and life, the living and the dead, natural and unnatural are all related concepts. In Noé Tibor Kiss's book, self-reflexivity plays an important role, whether through the protagonist's bodily experiences or through the interpretation of supervising gazes: confusion, disgust and aggression are emphasised by obscene verbal reactions of those observing Tibor's body. I think it can be fruitful if we compare drag against cyborg phenomenon and identity: sexual practices aren't sanctioned by the hegemonic system of power, which induces the concept of transgression of body. There is a parallel between this and the collective fear and repugnance caused by machines, cyborgs, or with the questions of authority and identity as well. Since Haraway emphasises the post-gender essence of the utopian world imagined and traced in her manifesto, in my opinion cyborg entity can be seen as the hardly describable queer individual of science and fiction – and vice versa. Body is not glorified and impenetrable anymore, as Agamben wrote about it, rather it is taken apart along identity, inside and outside.

It is noticeable that violence is highly emphasised in the novel: both in the narrative and in the text. Other than actual violence, for example from the protagonist's childhood, there are many verbal marks of aggression in the novel. Strangers usually don't understand the state Tibor's in: they call him a pervert, ask harsh questions about his biological sex and often berate him without consequences. The opinions of these characters are marked by

silence, for example at the shoe store, when Tibor buys a pair of high heeled shoes, or they are short and obscene: “Fucking faggot, you son of a bitch!” (Kiss 2010, 99: translation by me, VE). These one-sided verbal attacks are expressing fear, uncertainty and the impossibility of understanding the Other. The narrative style of *Inkognitó* consciously plays with these feelings: it is not just about how Tibor and the others react – it also has an impact on what types of feelings we read the story with. While Tibor’s position is completely uncertain, and the text works with this uncertainty: it is more than a usual coming-out story, because it’s also a very cleverly written piece of art.

It is unquestionable that the fear of the Other destroyed barriers of body and highly transgressive characters can have key roles in other types of literary works, and of course films too. Science fiction and its predecessors are great examples of showing how body and identity also fall to pieces and their unity becomes a question. Contemporary sci-fis, the androids of Philip K. Dick, the so-called multiorganisms of Margaret Atwood are preceded by the automatons of E.T.A. Hoffmann, but also transgressive stories from ancient mythology, like Medusa, or the already mentioned half-human, half-bull monster made by Hephaestus: the emergence of cyborg entity is thus an immensely interesting process through eras of culture and literature. Finally that is why I mention a film by a Hungarian director featuring an absolute transgressive persona, which, just like in *Inkognitó*, deconstructs the body to its very elements.

In Benedek Fliegauf’s *Womb* (2010), we see a mechanically constructed picture of body and identity that can be copied, which, however, carries many contradiction and problems: as I see it, this is the moment, when this interesting, extremely transgressive and tense game, based on cyborg identity comes into play. The story is about a woman whose lover dies, but thanks to technology it is possible to clone him (which action is considered illegal, blameworthy and excludable), bear and raise him as her own child.



[Fig.1.]. *Womb*

The film wipes away not just barriers of body, but the essence of parent-child relations and identities, which is emphasised through the dialogue. “There are no two alike.” – says the boy, who does not know then that his mother cloned him: he is the copy of an exactly same entity, who is dead by now. This entity is the same, but yet completely different: this is the kind of ambivalence that absolutely disturbs every character, and the spectator as well. Not only the identity of the growing child becomes a question, but the identity of the one who bore him, and who has a very strange sexual connection with him.



[Fig.2.]. *Womb*

“Who are you?” – he asks her mother at the end of the film, when he finds out that he is a clone of somebody. After that, he has sex with his mother, and the picture hints at the possibility that he impregnates her as well. Different types of body-barriers are broken in this

narrative: there are no more exact lines between lover and parent, child and adult, the entity and identity of one and another.

It is an important aspect of the narrative that cloned entities, so-called Copies are not welcome anywhere, and they occupy a space at the periphery of society. When ordinary people speak about this issue, there is an obvious importance about the contrary between artificial and natural materials, about how organs sense difference and about experiences of the body: “Copies smell. Copies have a weird smell. They smell like window cleaner. It comes from their skin.” Or: “Dima is a victim of artificial incest. Her mother gave birth to her own mother.” It is worth noticing that the child, who is actually born and raised by the protagonist, also learns, uses and embraces the practice of exclusion, without knowing his own origins.



[Fig.3.]. *Womb*

This picture addresses problems about how human body and identity can be constructed when the seemingly stable system falls apart: at one point the mother says to the child that she decided to clone him, because that way she could give a new life to her lover. Just like in *Inkognitó*, fear is an important impression in the film: not only the people fear these postmodern cyborgs, called Copies, but also the mother and the viewer. The cloned boy grows up, and the viewer sees it from the mother’s ambivalent perspective, who desires her child from the first time, but also fears him. This fear is about the consequences after committing a crime, the fear of her feelings, and also the fear of the unknown Other, who appears to be somebody she knows well, yet he is someone else after all.

I think fear from something almost entirely incomprehensible, and the emerging aspects of the Other are the main reasons to examine *Inkognitó* and *Womb* in parallel: the



source of fear is always an immensely transgressive character, marked by the attributes of nowadays' cyborg entity. I believe that tracing the background of cyborg as the absolute transgressive character of posthuman literature helps us understand and rethink science in postmodern novels and pictures. The protagonist of *Inkognitó* breaks social rules and norms with his ambiguous identity and the norm-breaking appearance of his body: it is very hard to understand and often implies fear and disgust. In *Womb*, the mother makes almost a human-machine out of a neutral material which is a result of technology and living substance, a transgressive, frightfully unrecognisable Other, who breaks all barriers of body. A cyborg which is exactly the same, yet it faces all identities, all bodies which had a picture of unity, impenetrableness, naturalness emphasised by many scholars, and that will probably serve as a conceptual inspiration with its ambivalence in upcoming socio-cultural discourses.

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**From the Romanian New Wave through New Romanian Cinema to Contemporary  
Romanian Cinema**

Review of *Politicile filmului. Contribuții la interpretarea cinemaului românesc contemporan*  
[The Politics of Film: Contributions to the Interpretation of Contemporary Romanian  
Cinema]. Coordonat de Andrei Gorzo și Andrei State. Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2014, ISBN  
606843750, p. 318.

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Although a short review does not offer the space and time to thoroughly argue such an opinion, I think that the 2014 collective volume of essays *The Politics of Film: Contributions to the Interpretation of Contemporary Romanian Cinema* coordinated by Andrei Gorzo and Andrei State is a book above the average importance of any well conceptualised endeavour. If compared to the much appreciated 2011 collective volume coordinated by Cristina Corciovescu and Magda Mihăilescu – *Noul cinema românesc. De la tovarășul Ceaușescu la domnul Lăzărescu*, [New Romanian Cinema: From Comrade Ceaușescu to Mister Lăzărescu] – its specific characteristics emerge, making it possible to register changes in Romanian film critical and film theoretical thinking as well.

Already the differences in the two cited titles are telling. The earlier volume does not foreground any specific focus of analysis, unless we consider the latent opposition of a political leader (Comrade Ceaușescu) and a filmic character (Mister Lăzărescu) in its subtitle, the ever-present historical framework and the predilection for thematic description in the essays possibly re-confirming such a hunch. In contrast, the later one explicitly takes a stance in this respect with *The Politics of Film*, evoking the looming, yet disavowed figure of aesthetics and beauty.<sup>1</sup> Also, they conceive of their corpus of analysis in quite different manners: “New Romanian Cinema” has become a more neutral name for the slightly

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<sup>1</sup> I thank the editor, Hajnal Király for her suggestion that *la politique des auteurs* might be another solution to the riddle.

anachronistic “Romanian New Wave”, with the coordinators of the 2014 collective volume opting for the denomination of “contemporary Romanian cinema”, of which the previous formation is but a slice. Compared to the ten wide-scope essays organised around concepts like the West, the family, or the road and written by established Romanian film critics or film historians (Mihai Fulger or Marian Țuțui among them) that form the 2011 volume, the more recent, 2014 one contains sixteen essays organised in two parts – “Prim-planuri” [Close-ups], respectively “Planuri de ansamblu” [Master shots/Establishing shots] – and it is co-authored by a totally different group: a much younger generation of film critics and early-career PhDs in the humanities, many of whom are active, even professional in the vibrant Romanian cultural blogosphere.

The first part of *The Politics of Film*, “Close-ups”, contains portraits of figures who supposedly reach the threshold of creative authorship in contemporary Romanian cinema, and, furthermore, the close-reading of the film that seemingly constitutes the nodal point of this interpretative group’s internal canon – Cristi Puiu’s 2010 *Aurora*. The authors covered include screenwriter (and contemporary prose-writer, also director) Răzvan Rădulescu, whose input to an incredible percentage of Romanian films made after 2000 is paramount; furthermore “the usual suspect” directors credited with reinventing Romanian cinema – Cristi Puiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, and Radu Muntean –, with Cristian Mungiu, interestingly, only invoked as a piece of comparison; and finally, with three new names introduced to the pantheon, albeit with great care: Marian Crișan, Adrian Sitaru, and a pre-*Aferim!* Radu Jude. Some common features that might be generally attributed to all the essays in this first part of the volume (authors: Andrei Gorzo, Laura Dumitrescu, Andrei State, Costi Rogozanu, Raluca Durbacă, Irinia Trocan and Andrei Rus) are their film critical, often impressionistic approach, with an effort to be easily understood and up-to-date, and a common attention paid to the kind of “realism” emerging from an author’s oeuvre, as well as the class dimensions of the represented diegetic worlds. However, only occasional references appear to the class dimension inherent in the creator’s lives, as well as other types of social structuring relations and power forces at work, such as gender, ethnicity, or the capital and the periphery in Romanian culture.

The second part, “Master shots/Establishing shots”, presents us with eight longer-breath, better documented essays that might be called academic in their scope. Radu Toderici argues convincingly for points of connection between New Romanian Cinema and 1990s European

realist film, with the creations and the poetics of the Dardenne brothers, Bruno Dumont or Ken Loach invoked frequently. The study of Florin Poenaru is structured around the concept of auto-colonisation, its argument based on Fernando Solanas' and Octavio Getino's *first, second* and *third (-world) cinemas*, with the Romanian New Wave and its aesthetic-formal reception and canonisation (achieved by Alex. Leo Șerban or, more recently, Andrei Gorzo) classified as a branch of modernist European cinema made foremost for the educated middle-class. Dora Constatintinovici's contribution makes (absent) popular/mainstream Romanian cinema its central preoccupation, offering a highly enjoyable cultural criticism of its stereotypes, not losing sight of comparing the amount of state funding invested in their production either. Alex Cistelean sketches the outlines of an interesting (affect) theory of how experiences of intimacy permeated the public sphere in the communist period, contributing to the huge success of the *Liceenii* [High-schoolers] teen movie series which experienced a flop in 1993, when post-communism redrew the boundaries of public intimacy. Lucian Maier offers a panorama of the documentary genre in contemporary Romanian cinema, exemplifying Bill Nichols' popular categories with recent examples. Cătălin Olaru outlines the field of what he names "the second wave": those films and even authorial oeuvres that, although recreating numerous formal and thematic, also canonical characteristics of the Romanian New Wave, or New Romanian Cinema, add to the mix a degree of symbolism, metaphors, jump cuts, or highly suggestive non-diegetic music, while being noticed only at smaller festivals – among them titles such as Bogdan Apetri's *Outbound (Periferic, 2010)* or Călin Peter Netzer's *Medal of honour (Medalia de onare, 2009)*. Christian Ferencz-Flatz combines specific philosophical ideas of Marcel Proust, Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin along the concept of "conscience," culminating in the interpretation of Corneliu Porumboiu's 2013 *Metabolism*. Finally, Claudiu Turcuș summarises the dominant models of understanding New Romanian Cinema advanced by Andrei Gorzo, Dominique Nasta and Doru Pop respectively, all founded on various conceptions of realism and/or minimalism. Turcuș concludes, through a joint reading of the much referred to *Aurora* and *Metabolism* as presenting the crisis of authorship through self-reflexive methods that "New Romanian Cinema will possibly reinvent itself by starting to question the cinematic perspective that made its existence possible (at all)" (p. 298, my translation).

The coordinators also included a short preface that justifies the “political” in their title, or a not exclusively aesthetic-formal approach sensitive to class and power relations in the society, and consequently, in film too. They end with an epilogue analyzing Radu Jude’s 2015 *Aferim!*, nowadays a popular and important example of contemporary Romanian cinema, but a very fresh title at the time of editing *The Politics of Film*. That *Aferim!* is much in tune with the critical practice and ideological standpoint of the new interpretative community that we might greet under the guise of *The Politics of Film*, adds an extra – even if not necessary – brick to their legitimacy.

## Conference Report

### **XV. International Film and Media Studies Conference in Transylvania**

*Figurations of Intermediality in Film*

**Cluj-Napoca, 24-25 October, 2014**

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Intermediality has emerged as a distinct theoretical issue that brings a fresh view into film studies by focusing on the manifold dialogues between different media, orchestrated by cinema. As part of this discipline in formation, in recent years the poetics and the figurations of cinematic intermediality gained increasing interest in the community of researchers of this rather unknown field. This is what constituted the premise of the XV. International Film and Media Studies Conference in Transylvania, held in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, between 24 and 25 October, 2014.

The conference was hosted by the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania as the fifteenth edition of the international conference series organised by the Department of Film, Photography and Media. At the same time, it was the second international event organised within the framework of the research project entitled *Re-mediated images as figurations of intermediality and post-mediality in Central and East European Cinema*, supported by a grant of the Ministry of National Education of Romania.<sup>1</sup> The film conference series of the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania enjoys an excellent international reputation, embracing a wide range of topics such as *Words and images. Language/Literature/Moving Pictures* (2007), *Film in the Post-Media Age* (2010) or *The Cinema of Sensations* (2012), to mention but those titles that resulted in volumes of studies published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. As the second conference of the project mentioned above, it was preceded by another prestigious event, organised together with the International Society for Intermedial Studies (ISIS), entitled *Rethinking Intermediality in the Digital Age* (2013).

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<sup>1</sup> Website of the project: <http://film.sapientia.ro/en/research-programs/cncs-uefiscdi-pce-idei-research-program>

The recent edition of the series, entitled *Figurations of Intermediality in Film* (2014) constituted the organic continuation of the direction marked by the previous year's conference. It aimed to bring together researchers from all over the world specialised in themes related to intermediality in film in order to discuss issues related to the rhetoric and the poetics of intermediality in film in general, and to the theory and methodology of analysis of the figurations in particular. The conference call addressed various aspects of intermediality that can be encountered in a wide range of works from the experimental, avant-garde canon to some current examples of mainstream, "hypermediated" digital cinema, from painterly movies bordering on installation art to so-called "slow cinema" projects. The event focused on one of the key aspects of intermediality, the fact that intermediality as such always manifests as a kind of "figuration" in film. Through this, medial differences are visibly and self-reflexively "re-inscribed" within the moving image. In general, philosophical terms, intermediality can be conceived as belonging to the domain of the "figural" in the sense used by Jean-François Lyotard in *Discourse, Figure*, and elaborated by D. N. Rodowick in his seminal book *Reading the Figural*.

The conference call encouraged the problematisation of intermedial figurations in film from philosophical, aesthetical, ideological, historical, and media theoretical perspectives. It relied on theoretical works dealing with the ways in which moving images operate within a network of interrelated media, re-evaluating cinema's connections to traditional forms of visual arts (e.g. Angela DalleVacche's, Susan Felleman's, Belén Vidal's, Steven Jacobs's works on cinema and painting), on theoretical analyses of the figuration of the *tableau vivant* in cinema (e.g. Brigitte Peucker, Pascal Bonitzer, Joachim Paech, etc.), as well as on recent studies dealing with the relationship between cinema and photography (e.g. Damian Sutton, Garrett Stewart, Régis Durand, David Company, etc.). The theoretical background also included the relationship between stillness and motion within cinema, along with analyses of the connections between cinema, video and installation art (e.g. Raymond Bellour, Yvonne Spielmann, etc.). Besides the issues of intermediality and the figurations of intermediality in film approached from a theoretical vantage point, proposals were also invited to address the rhetoric of intermedial cinema, discussing phenomena of figuration and disfiguration, *mise-en-abyme* and embedding, intermediality and metalepsis, *tableau vivant*, intermediality and inter-sensuality in film, the represented body as the site of intermedial figurations; remediated images as figurations of intermediality and postmediality (remediation, recontextualisation, reframing, media collage, remix); and figurations of



intermediality as imprints of and meditations upon history and time, cultural and personal identity.

The invited keynote speakers of the conference were prominent personalities, authors of volumes with a most significant contribution to this scientific domain: Brigitte Peucker, Professor at Yale University, New Haven, USA, author of *Lyric Descent in the German Romantic Tradition* (Yale, 1987), *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts* (Princeton, 1995), *The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film* (Stanford University Press, 2007), editor of Blackwell's *Companion to Rainer Werner Fassbinder* (2012); and Eivind Røssaak, Associate Professor at the Research Department of the National Library of Norway, his publications including *Sic. Vedlitteraturensgrenser* (Spartacus, 2001), *The Still/Moving Image: Cinema and the Arts* (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010), as well as the edited books *The Archive in Motion: New Conceptions of the Archive in Contemporary Thought and New Media Practices* (Novus Press, 2010) and *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography, Algorithms* (Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

About 50 researchers from 20 countries attended the two-day event. The presentations covered a wide spectrum of topics related to the relationship between film and painting, film and sculpture, the art of video installations, old and new experimental films, the aesthetics of the *tableau vivant*, as well as connections among image, sound, corporeality and media. These questions brought up a broad range of examples from silent cinema to diverse genres of contemporary film, among which special attention was given to the poetics and politics of intermediality in East Central European films that can be seen – as highlighted by the host of the event, Ágnes Pethő – in the context of shifting paradigms in film poetics: from stylistic patterns of modern/postmodern cinema towards what may be termed as “post-media” or “post-postmodern” cinema, and also in the context of an increased integration of Central and East European cinema into globalising trends in film, revealing a “communication” not only between media and arts, but also between cultures.

On the first day of the conference Brigitte Peucker delivered a keynote lecture entitled *The Space of Art in Greenaway*, discussing the aesthetics of intermedial spaces in films by Peter Greenaway. While situating these films between narrative and database, she also emphasised the evocation of theatre rather than film in *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover* (1989). In a close analysis of this latter work, Peucker demonstrated Greenaway's ironical approach to the constraints imposed by the central perspective in paintings, detectable in the painterly image of the dinner table, a reference to the oblique framing of Hans Hals' *The Banquet* (1616). The three parallel panels dealt with the following topics: embodied

spectator, intermedial sensuality; translation and remediation: different facets of intermediality in the digital age; democracy and interactive media; figurations of intermediality in contemporary East European cinema; intermedial storytelling and documentary games; recontextualisation, collage and hybridity; restoration and re-evaluation of avant-garde figurations.

The conference continued on the second day with Eivind Røssaak's keynote lecture entitled *The Delay in the System: from Hitchcock to Glitch*. Touching upon several issues of the conference but significantly providing new vantage points, the lecture reflected on the crucial role that errors – delays, detours and arrests – play in the communication and information systems as gestures beyond the system. The analysis focused on errors as events of reflection in the age of technical mediation, mapping an intermedial and transdisciplinary arena and discussing various artistic practices spanning from the cinema to the Internet, from Hitchcock to glitch art. The second conference day embraced panel lectures on various aspects of the figurations of filmic intermediality, such as the connections between literature, sculpture, architecture and cinema; the reframing of established pictorial forms; the cultural logic of intermediality; experimental remediations; post-Hollywood narratives; multisensorial cinema.

The conference initiated a productive international debate on theoretical problems of the intermedial relations in film (discussions on the relations among media and arts, the concept of re-mediation, medial hybridity, the relations between narrativity and intermediality, ideology and intermediality, etc.), as well as on specific figurations of intermediality or re-mediation in film (*tableau vivant*, collage film, etc.), based on diverse concrete examples taken from various filmic genres belonging to different periods and styles. Besides the dissemination of key concepts on figurations of intermediality in film within the framework of keynote lectures and the concluding round table, the friendly and inspiring atmosphere of the conference provided the participants a great opportunity for exchange of scientific and cultural experience and also for more personal encounters in the vibrant, multicultural city of Cluj.

The written versions of the papers presented at the conference are to be published in the peer reviewed journal *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*. The conference programme, the abstracts of conference papers, as well as photos and videos can be accessed at: <http://film.sapientia.ro/ro/conferinte/xv-film-and-media-studies-conference-intransylvania>.

As an organic continuation of this event, the *XVI. International Film and Media Studies Conference in Transylvania* was organised at Sapientia University between 23–24 October, 2015, in Cluj-Napoca, having as key-note speakers three prominent experts in film and intermediality studies: Laura Mulvey (University of London), Lúcia Nagib (University of Reading), and Jürgen E. Müller (University of Bayreuth). The conference held under the auspices of the research project mentioned at the beginning of the report focused on the question of the “real” and the “intermedial” in contemporary media and film: the intertwining of the illusion of reality with effects of intermediality, connecting the experience of everyday world with artificiality, abstraction and the awareness of multiple mediations (<http://film.sapientia.ro/hu/konferenciak/the-real-and-the-intermedial>). The 2016 workshop entitled *Intermediality in Contemporary Central and East European Cinema* (30–31 May, Sapientia University, Cluj-Napoca) – having Ewa Mazierska (University of Central Lancashire) and Christina Stojanova (University of Regina) as invited participants –summed up the results of the three-year research project focusing on methodological and theoretical issues related to intermediality, as well as on strategies of intermediality, remediation or media reflexivity discernible in the cinemas of Central and Eastern Europe.