

**Modern Tales of Anti-Capitalism: Gábor Reisz's *For Some Inexplicable Reason* (2014)
and Mészáros Ujj's *Liza, The Fox-Fairy* (2015)**

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Abstract: The article discusses the explicit and implicit socio-political reflections in Gábor Reisz's *For Some Inexplicable Reason* (*VAN valami furcsa és megmagyarázhatatlan*, 2014) and Károly Mészáros Ujj's *Liza, The Fox-Fairy* (*Liza, a rókatündér*, 2015). Through an institutional, contextual and diegetic perspective, the paper discusses the outsider position of the Hungarian Y generation within the post-socialist, consumerist-capitalist structure. By concentrating on the physical space and its two-dimensional narrative space on screen, and the discursive realm these spatial interplays present, the article discusses the directors' approach to the Hungarian past, present and future.

Keywords: capitalism, *For some inexplicable reason*, *Liza, the Fox-Fairy*, space, socialism, Hungarian cinema

Established by the American-Hungarian Andrew G. Wajna, the Government Commissioner for the Renewal of the National Film Industry, the inauguration of the Hungarian National Film Fund (MNF) in 2011 aimed at resuscitating Hungarian cinema by securing international and domestic success with a few, but outstanding productions (Muhi, 2012). Although the new film law has been widely criticized for being 'the centaur of the socialist and Hollywood system' (Muhi, 2012, 4), in the light of festival successes, the accomplishments of the new structure are hard to be questioned. Benedek Fliegauf's *Only the Wind* (*Csak a szél*, 2012) won the Jury Grand Prix in Berlin in 2012, Kornél Mundruczó's *White God* (*Fehér Isten*, 2014) received the Prize Un Certain Regard in 2014 at Cannes, while János Szász's *Notebook* (*A nagy füzet*, 2013) – similarly to György Pálfi's *Free Fall* (*Szabadesés*, 2014) – won numerous awards at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival. The series of festival trophies reached its peak with László Nemes's *Son of Saul* (*Saul fia*, 2015), the main project of the fund that won the second Oscar in the film history of Hungary and put the country back on the map of world cinema.

Despite the international harvest of prizes however, the MNF failed to achieve the prophesized 300.000-500.000 viewers per film, which clearly demonstrates the disappointment of Hungarians with domestic cinema productions (Ficsor, 2016, Csákvári, 2016). The most popular post-2010 projects, such as Dénes Orosz's *Coming Out* (2013),

Attila Herczeg's *Whatever Happened to Timi* (*Megdönteni Hajnal Tímeát*, 2014) or Attila Árpai's *Argo 2*. (2015) crossed the number of 100.000 sold tickets. The success of these films mirrors the taste of Hungarians who prefer light, enjoyable comedies and find less joy in heavy art cinema productions. To keep the balance between genre productions and European art film, the MNF seems to lay special emphasis on films that create a fusion of the two; that is, they keep the aesthetics of art cinema, while giving the story a higher entertaining factor. Gábor Reisz's *For some inexplicable reason* (*VAN valami furcsa és megmagyarázhatatlan*, 2014) and Mészáros Ujj Károly's first feature film, *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* (*Liza, a rókatündér*, 2015) are examples of this kind of hybrid filmmaking. Both productions had immense success in Hungary – Reisz's film had more than 60.000 viewers and Mészáros's debut sold more than 126.000 tickets (Csákvári, 2016), while receiving a wide range of praise from film critics. Beyond doubt, the reason for the enormous success is people's easy identification with both stories that, on the one hand, challenge societal norms by discussing certain weighty themes, such as unemployment, migrancy and settling down, while putting these subjects into a comic frame that somehow makes the topics easier to consume. These hybrid films thus wrestle with heavy existential themes that mirror people's struggles in post-millennial Hungary, which gives these productions a critical-political tone that is represented within a self-reflexive, amusing narrative structure.

The present article aims at discussing the very topical dilemma these films investigate via a diegetic-contextual approach to the filmic texts. While arguing that the domestic success of *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* and *For some inexplicable reason* lies in their very national tone, the paper scrutinizes the stylistic elements of the films, with special attention given to the pro-filmic, physical space. By revealing the spatial games that frame the structure of the films, the analysis aims to highlight the directors' explicit as well as implicit preoccupation with the criticism of capitalism. As it will be pinpointed, the very narrative base of the productions – that is built on the individuals' fight for a better future – forms a point of identification for a society in crisis. In this way, the very topical themes of *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* and *For some inexplicable reason* reject the post-socialist, capitalist-consumerist national framework while dealing with the implicit-explicit forms of social(ist) remembrance. The commemoration of the past and the grief over the present situation are situated in a comic set that, despite the funny framework, mirrors a depressed/depressive and lost society.

Hungarian capitalism: uncertainty and volatility

After more than twenty-five years of the fall of communism and the introduction of market capitalism in Eastern Europe, the now member-states of the European Union still face a difficult economic situation. The crises-driven Europeanization process that aimed at introducing welfare capitalism in the post-socialist region was accompanied by serious recessions in social services, such as the cut-back of unemployment benefits and pensions that ‘sent post-communist welfare states into a spinning variegation between welfare states, pension states and debt states’ (Lendvai and Stubbs 2015, 451). For a “particularly crisis-prone” and publicly and externally indebted country like Hungary, the post-2008 economic crisis meant an even deeper recession that highlighted the external and internal imbalances and uneven neo-liberalist structures within the European Union, and strengthened the voices of Euro-scepticism in the country (ibid). Although Hungary is often referred to as having the most liberal market form of post-socialist capitalism, the Hungarian neoliberal structure – including ownership, market and state relations and capital resources – still reflect the socialist political-economic legacy and the mark of the troubled, competitive transition (Roderick, 2008). Since the accession of Hungary to the European Union, the income poverty, rising social exclusion and material deprivation led to an ever-rising demand to exit the insecure labour markets that resulted in the mass outward-migration of educated, young Hungarians¹⁶ (Galgóczi et al, 2009).

The most effected social layer of mass migration is the Y-generation whose members often struggle with unemployment, as well as social and emotional uncertainty. Born between 1977 and 1997 into a digitally advanced society, these young people can hardly remember socialism and/or understand the political struggle of the parental generation (Piszcz, 2014).

¹⁶ In 2009, the level of outward migrant stock was about 1.8-2 % of the Hungarian workforce that means the 0.7-0.8 % of the Hungarian population (Bordbély, 2009). The flow of outward migration reached its height in 2012, when almost 80.000 people left Hungary to seek work in West European countries, such as Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom, in this way raising the number of Hungarian emigrant labour force to 239.000 people (Gödri et al, 2014).

Although they bear with a more liberal, Western way of thinking (ibid.), they also struggle with a post-totalitarian shock that Hundorova (2016, p. 96) calls “trans-generational apocalypse”. In her analysis on contemporary Ukrainian literature, Hundorova argues that the post-socialist trauma led to a great level of instability in the new generation that effects familial connections and historical continuity, which results in a dissociative behaviour among youngsters. As she states, the post-totalitarian generation faces a double-traumatised experience: “on the one hand, they are traumatised by the reassessment of one’s parents’ values and, on the other, by the absence of socio-cultural norms and orientations, which are substituted for active imitations by mass consumer society” (Hundorova, 2016, p. 96). This trans-generational apocalypse that is accompanied by a sense of disconnectedness and social alienation, contributes to anxiety and distress among members of generation Y that is further exacerbated by the lack of future prospects in the Hungarian social context. On the spatial level of the selected films, the outsider position of the protagonists gets often distorted by the degradation of female and male territories and the wandering in the city-structure that builds up a suffocating, disciplinary construction (Foucault, 1975).

Generation Y in crisis. *For some inexplicable reason*

For some inexplicable reason deals with all the heavy topics that form the everyday struggles of the Y-generation. Be that outmigration, political unrest, corruption, unemployment, private life and partnership or the young generation’s broken system of belief in personal, educational and cultural values, Gábor Reisz’s production is not afraid to touch upon all the troubling symptoms characteristic of contemporary Hungarian society. The main protagonist of the film is the young, freshly graduated twenty-nine-year-old Áron (Áron Ferencsik) who suddenly finds himself in a deep personal crisis as he realizes that his diploma has no value in the country. His depressing situation is further exacerbated by his parents’ constant harassment who try to push their son towards a prosperous career by correcting his CV, and having a say in everything the young man does. However, Áron’s most troubling problem – and the frame of the film itself – is his break-up with his girlfriend Eszter (Juli Jakab), who leaves him for another man, which brings Áron in a devastated, disheartening situation. Without a job, girlfriend, future prospects and an emotionally supporting and encouraging family

background, Áron decides to use the flight ticket he mistakenly bought in the heat of a drunken night. In the hope of a better life and personal change, he travels to Lisbon. In Portugal he gets a job as dish washer in a restaurant and then as a doorman in a fancy office building, while he also starts dating a beautiful, local girl. However, the monotonous, robot-like life does not change his way of thinking and personality, and he eventually decides to capitulate his foreign life. In the end, he returns to Hungary where he finds himself in the very same situation of not having a job, a girlfriend and future perspectives.

While displaying all the emotional, professional and social problems of the Y-generation, *For some inexplicable reason* creates a very Hungarian atmosphere. On the one hand, Reisz uses a typical Hungarian milieu that features the emblematic ruined pubs of Budapest, well-known squares and meeting points, and private spaces dominated by a strong (post-)socialist décor. Budapest gets a leading role in the narrative by not only connecting the various locations and sets of the film, but also by standing as the melting pot of all the problems that the younger layer of Hungarian society faces. In this way, the capital functions both as a physical as well as discursive space that contextualizes the Y generation.

Reisz emphasizes the crucial role of the city by several bird-view, panorama images and long shots of Budapest's well-known squares, such as the Astoria, Blaha Lujza and Deák Square. Interestingly, the opening shots that give a comprehensive city-image of Budapest, feature Áron dying in these prominent meeting points, thus giving the physical space a crisis-laden tone. The extra-diegetic narration of the young man explains how he re-visits the central places of Budapest, while imagining and acting his own death. Illustrating the alienation within society and people's self-centred behaviour, no one stops to help Áron who, out of curiosity, collapses at various scenes. His death-tourism in Budapest contextualizes him as an absolute outsider in the city-text that also forecasts his upcoming migration from the space that does not take him in.

Áron is an absolute homeless in his native town that is expressed via the equipment of his rented flat and his constant, languid flaneuring in the city. His accommodation lacks any kind of domesticity: after his girlfriend leaves him, his room gets emptied out and gets further simplified when, in the middle of an emotional breakdown, Áron decides to get rid of the memories that connect him to Eszter. After emptying the walls and windows of curtains and pictures, the home of the young man gets completely bare, with only a bed in the middle of the room. In his parents' flat, he could eventually find a sense of home but, thanks to the

constant harassment of his father and mother, and his outsider position in the family structure, he is treated as an outcast. First, he has to collect the product of his sister-in-law's morning sickness when his brother announces the news about the pregnancy of his wife. Crawling on all fours under the table where he is surrounded by the legs of his family, Áron is portrayed in a spatially-emotionally humiliated position. As the black sheep of the family who, in contrast to his brother, has not settled down or started a prosperous business, Áron gets further annoyed by his parents when he announces his journey to Lisbon. First, he forgets to bring sour creme to lunch, which leads to an enormous fight. His father blames him for not being self-sufficient and gets upset for Áron's selfish move to buy a flight ticket from their money. Áron is portrayed sitting in the cross-fire of his parents who bomb him with a series of questions that he does not know how to react upon [Fig.1.]. Later, when he decides to stand on his own two feet and announces his leave for Lisbon, he is positioned in a similar, spatially subordinated position. Just like in the lunch-scene, the latter interrogation-like situation is captured from a high-angle shot that puts the man into an imprisoned, suffocating spatial position with his parents facing and yelling at him from the couch. These scenes represent Áron's subjective view by constantly playing with a shot/counter-shot structure that builds up a suffocating spatial constellation.

His homeless position in the narrative is further emphasized by his clothing. Dressed in large winter clothes, with his thick scarf embracing his figure, he is often portrayed in extreme long shots in the streets and squares of Budapest, which accentuates his utterly lost and devastated situation. That is, the young man takes on a doubled-outcast position, with both the interior (private) as well as exterior (social) places rejecting him. His drifting in life – that is juxtaposed by his wandering in Budapest – transforms thus the city-text into a metaphor expressing the instable state of the Y-generation.



[Fig.1.] Áron's subordinated position. *For some inexplicable reason*

Reisz also emphasizes the current anti-establishment atmosphere and political upheaval of Hungary by capturing strikes and demonstrations that, as repetitive occasions, accompany the spatial drift of Áron. As a flaneur who stands as a sign of capitalist alienation and disconnectedness among individuals (Benjamin, 2002), the young man remains in an inert, unmotivated position, which further accentuates the downtrodden psychological state of the Y generation. While trying to reach his mother on the phone, the young man walks through extreme right-wing demonstrations, anti-government protests, national commemorations, a well-known beach and a summer festival. The scenes of political unrest and the spaces of leisure and relaxation get thus connected via a long montage-sequence that encompasses four seasons. Áron walks through these emblematic spaces in the same clothes, while focusing on his phone and the long-awaited answer of his mother at the other end of the line. Thanks to the invisible umbilical cord that connects Áron and his mother – which is signified by a cable that binds the man's home with the parental space – this long montage-scene gets interconnected with the metaphoric layer of the narrative that expresses his spatially-psychologically isolated position.

Also, for the sake of an even more realistic portray of the Y generation, Reisz uses several documentary-like scenes. These sequences capture the friends and family members of Áron in frontal, interview-like positions as they make comments on their own life and occupation. These episodes do not fit the narrative flow of the film and pause its narrative progression; however, they also add a very intimate and informative layer to the crisis-brimmed tone of the whole production. It becomes clear, for instance, that all of Áron's friends are intellectuals in

their early 30s who struggle with financial instability. Moreover, these tableaux-like scenes also reference *Neighbours* (*Szomszédok*), Hungary's most successful television soap opera that ran from 1987 to 1999 and was an integral part of the everyday life of the whole nation. The show followed the life of lower-middle-class dwellers in a prefabricated socialist living quarter and mediated a strong political and moral education based on socialist values (Hammer, 2013). Its tableaux-like messages of the protagonists in the end of the episodes portrayed wise "direct-address pledge[s] on the viewing audience" (ibid, 227), usually summarising a situation or teaching something about friendship, society or politics. Aesthetically speaking, these ending scenes show remarkable analogy to the documentary-like episodes of *For some inexplicable reason*: the protagonists are portrayed in the centre of the frame and, while looking into the camera, they convey a message about their everyday life and/or struggles to the viewers. This intertextual reference recalls a post-socialist nostalgia, with special attention given to the childhood of the Y generation that was socialized on this series. The friends of Áron provide the spectator with positive insights into their lives and tell the viewer about small moments and thoughts that interest them, such as the expansion of a business, the recipe of a morning shake or doing sports. As was the case in *Neighbours*, these smaller portraits illustrate everyday gestures – such as smoking in bed or giving a wash to the Hungarian flag – while they also lecture about the significance of leisure time and recycling.

Although the overall atmosphere of the second tableaux scene of *For some inexplicable reason* is generally positive, it cannot overcome the pessimistic – but often humorous – tone of the whole film. Because the friends of Áron and the main protagonist himself struggle to create an existence in Hungary, they often discuss the socio-political problems they face. When it comes to Áron's decision to leave the country, his friends jump into a verbal fight, thus enumerating all the contemporary problems of Hungary. After discussing migration, unemployment and unbearable taxes, the young men find nothing that would attract them to/OR: that would keep them in the country. Ironically, when one of Áron's friends proudly suggests that after all, *Túró Rudi*, a Hungarian sweet is a good thing, another friend responds with arguing that the chocolate bar is not even Hungarian but a Soviet invention. During the discussion, Áron silently draws on his plate and, similarly to his position in the city-text, remains passive in the fight.

Because of the documentary-like scenes and unprofessional actors dominating mobile, jittering shots and the low budget of the film, *For some inexplicable reason* has also been

discussed as a mumblecore-film (Bujdosó, 2014), a production shot by friends to illustrate their everyday life and/or struggles via certain situations. Certainly, the film's mumblecore atmosphere – the spontaneity of the dialogues and certain shots, the well-known sets of the city and the familiar situation and Hungarian experience of the protagonists – made *For some inexplicable reason* a very authentic production that, thanks to its message that a whole generation can identify with, became one of the biggest cinema hits in Hungary.

Global and local spaces. *Liza, the Fox-Fairy*

While Áron drifts in the public spaces of Budapest, Liza spends most of her time in the private, domestic spaces of the film. This coincides with the ideas of Davidoff and Hall (1991) who, while discussing the 19th century segregation of social classes and architectural differences between private and public in 18th- and 19th-century England, identify private space as female and public space as male territory. Arguing that female space is strongly connected to intimacy, while public areas prompt one to associate public work with men, the ideas of Davidoff and Hall corresponds to Gyáni's argument on male sociability and female domesticity and the division of life into a male and female sphere in 19th-century Budapest (Gyáni, 2004). Women were thus tied to the home that also assured their moral superiority, while men occupied and ruled over the public spaces of the city. This gender division and spatial stratification is prevalent in both Reisz's and Mészáros-Ujj's film. Both directors play with the private and public spaces that they surrender to the very female and male distinction, while putting it into a multi-historical spatial setting.

Similar to the clumsy figure of Áron, the titular protagonists of *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* lives in another universe. In this case however, this other world means a literally different fairy-tale-like spatial set created by a unique fusion of socialist, capitalist and monarchist elements. Liza (Mónika Balsai) lives as a live-in nurse of the widow of the Japanese ambassador, spending her last twelve years taking care of the old woman. Lonely as it sounds, the 30-year-old Liza escapes into romantic Japanese books and creates an imaginary friend for herself in the shape of Tomy Tani (David Sakurai), a Japanese pop-singer from the 1950s. Although singing and dancing with Tomy Tani, while dreaming of the prince to arrive, seem to satisfy the young girl, Liza dreams of real love. Eventually, the sudden death of the widow gives a new

direction to her life and the woman – who, in the meantime, became the legal owner of the flat – starts dating. However, out of jealousy, Tomy Tani murders the men Liza meets, which leaves the young girl in a devastated situation. She soon starts to believe that she is inflicted with a curse of the Japanese Fox Fairies that kills every man she comes across. The unusual number of deaths in her environment eventually prompts the police to investigate the case. Sergeant Zoltán (Szabolcs Bede Fazekas), who is assigned to solve the case, soon moves into the empty room of Liza's flat. As expected, he eventually falls in love with the girl and their mutual emotional connection breaks the curse.

Liza, the Fox-Fairy has often been referred to as having an Amelie-like visual structure (Von Hoeij, 2016; Harvey, 2016) that corresponds to the fantastic frame of the narrative. Indeed, the film has a very stylized, highly sensory audiovisual world drenched in bright, yellowish colours and a dull, vintage-like atmosphere. The dresses of Liza and the other protagonists of the film all recall the candy-coloured 1970s, while the urban sphere of the city and the interiors form a “swinging Eurokitsch” (Harvey, 2016) featuring elements of different historical episodes. As von Hoeij (2016) argues, “Rather than just a pretty backdrop, these elements form a sort of natty visual anachronism with a touch of wish-fulfilment (since Hungary was a Soviet state in the 1970s, instead of a Western-style capitalist society). So what's onscreen here is a historical impossibility, underlining the story's escapist and absurdist undertones”. Mészáros Ujj himself argued that the film is set in the capitalist Budapest of the 1970s (Mészáros Ujj, in Bujdosó 2012) which, as noted by von Hoeij, is an impossible historical constellation, given the fact that Hungary followed the Marxist-Leninist dogmas until the fall of socialism in 1989.

By making the time frame of the film even more confusing, Mészáros Ujj uses different locations to portray the political, economic and social milestones of 20th-century East European history. In the fictionalized Hungary of the 1970s (Aguilar, 2015), Liza's private female space serves as a monarchist-bourgeois space enriched by handcrafted furniture, Persian carpet and lace tablecloths and curtains. However, the hardwood floor and the glamorous chandelier, together with the antique cabinetries that were once symbols of the status of the inhabitants, had lost their glamour and in their dusty, dingy state, now stand as reminders of a once-prosperous and aristocratic past [Fig.2.].



[Fig.2.] The bourgeois space. *Liza, the Fox-Fairy*

Thanks to the dark, greyish colours and the lack of light in this bourgeois apartment, Liza's early 20th-century home mirrors a ghost-like, ruined universe that also signifies the crises-laden female quality of the space. The broken waterpipes, and the lack of electricity and phone further emphasize the antique essence of this space that seems to get stuck in the bourgeois past. Most of the deaths happen in this vintage universe: the widow of the Japanese ambassador and Liza's first two dates die in these rooms, while Zoltán has a series of accidents in this flat. The home of the young girl and Tomy Tani thus becomes a lethal space that, on the one hand, mediates the atmosphere of a long-gone historical epoch, while the constant deaths also articulate the faint smell of decay. On the other hand, Mészáros Ujj structures the physical space of this apartment along tableaux-like images that double-frame the figure of Liza, which gives the narrative space a suffocating feeling. The young girl is encapsulated in a past-universe that she, as the textuality of the images illustrate, cannot escape. Her only companion in this cursed universe is the Japanese pop-singer who, as a ghost, only deepens the spooky atmosphere of the flat. Interestingly, the arrival of Zoltán and his hard work to restore and fix the broken installation and torn-apart equipment of the flat, bring changes to the personal life of the young girl who finally starts dating, thus freeing herself from the burdens of the prison-like flat that kept her captive.

Liza's favourite place in the city is the local branch of the fast-food chain "Mekk Burger", the palace of the capitalist-consumerist structure. The kingdom of burgers, fries and sugary beverages is embraced with an emotive excess that expresses the desperate longing of Liza to find true love. In this way, capitalist consumption and emotional security gets juxtaposed in the same space that serves as the number-one destination for the girl to chill out as well as get to know other people. The most important pillar of Mekk Burger is the consumption of fast food that Mészáros Ujj eroticizes through slow-motion acts of eating that he wraps in a close-

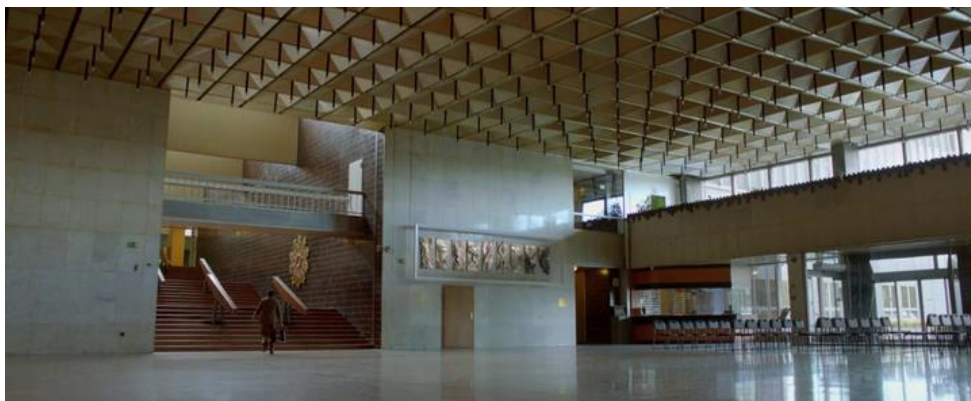
up format. To criticise consumption culture, the director features lonely, obese people in the depth of the images. In this way, Mekk Burger brings attention to one's alienated position in this social space and links food with love that Liza seeks so much. The dominant red colours of Mekk Burger thus accentuate (the lack of) the desired love that the young woman is looking for, while referencing McDonald's – the number one point of Mészáros Ujj's criticism. The process of McDonaldization that pushed consumer capitalism into the realm of local identity and interaction (Ritzer, 2004), has definitely reached and exploited the Eastern European region and went hand in hand with a cultural colonialization that foregrounded Western values and brought about the introduction of the four main principles of McDonaldization in society – predictability, calculability, efficiency and control (ibid). Henrik (Zoltán Schmied), Liza's womanizer friend and possible future love, gives Liza a lecture about the McDonaldization process of society, and highlights the very poor quality of food in Mekk Burger, while criticizing the policy of the fast-food chain to attract naïve people with their small plastic toys that, as gifts, accompany the menus. Still, Liza's determination to find love in this space – that also demonstrates the successful McDonaldization of Hungarian society – is irreversible and gets even stronger when she witnesses a seemingly successful date in Mekk Burger. Inspired by the idea of printed dating service, she registers in a journal column to find love.

Her first – and last – date with the way-out Ludvig Úr (Lehel Kovács) also takes place in Mekk Burger but goes in the wrong direction when the small, potbellied man takes medication and drinks alcohol at once in the hope of a successful night. Although Liza has followed all the instructions that the *Cosmopolitan* magazine – another ideological tool – gave her, Ludvig Úr dies of heart attack, which pushes Liza further away from finding the one true love. Emphasizing her lonely and hopeless situation in the consumerist-capitalist space, Mészáros Ujj again uses the double-framing technique characteristic of the old, bourgeois apartment. In Mekk Burger, Liza is always portrayed against a large, silver column that divides the screen space into two smaller, vertical sections [Fig.3.]. In this way, Ludvig Úr and Liza's other dates get separated from the girl, thus accentuating the isolated position of the nurse in the modern spatial constellation.



[Fig.3.] The divided space. *Liza, the Fox-Fairy*

The third dominant space of the film mirrors the socio-historical period between the monarchic times and postmodern era, thus closing the circle of 20th-century political epochs in Hungary. Socialism, the most influential episode of last-century politics, is strongly connected to the police apparatus and bureaucracy in the film. Recalling the coercive power of communist police forces that aimed to nip any internal, anti-establishment unrest in its bud and practiced ultimate control over society, Mészáros Ujj uses a very strong socialist-realist aesthetics to highlight the heritage of this tyrannical culture. It is not only the old socialist secret police slogans that return on the walls of the police station, but the furniture, equipment, cars and even the fluorescent lighting references the epoch. The large, empty space of the station that recalls the regime's thirst for monumentality, is designed according to a functionalist aesthetics that includes symmetrically aligned, terracotta-coloured chairs and tables. Similarly, the socialist décor returns in the interior of the monumental prefabricated office bloc where Ludvig Úr works. This colossal space of bureaucracy is equipped with socialist-realist mosaics and an enormous, concrete stairway and marble walls that dwarf the figure of the strange man [Fig.4.].



[Fig.4.] Ludvig Úr in a socialist frame. *Liza, the Fox-Fairy*

To outweigh the rigidity of the socialist places and their indirect association with coercion, Mészáros Ujj makes a laughing-stock of the police apparatus by featuring a superintendent who communicates via well-known Hungarian proverbs whose endings he cannot recall. He finishes these trite commonplaces with angry cursing, which caricatures the police force as a powerful institute and transforms it into a laughable national construction. By making fun of the socialist police apparatus via its time-worn mottos, investigation techniques and workers, Mészáros Ujj criticises the very kernel of Hungary's socialist past. The very sarcastic tone of the police scenes – the non-working, smoky coffee machine, the cut-off head of a Barbie doll at a murder scene and the white investigation patterns on the floor of Liza's flat – are all associated and juxtaposed with the police's comedy of manners, thus giving the film a humorous tone and, together with the absurd death scenes, transform *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* into a black comedy.

Whether a monarchist-bourgeois, capitalist or socialist spatial construction, Liza finds herself enclosed into all these spaces. Eventually, her struggle ends with the complete transformation of the narrative space that connects all the above discussed spatial realms of the film. While dying, Liza has a vision being in Mekk Burger, the place of her dreams and happiness. Being near death, she first meets Henrik who then transforms into Tomy Tani. At the same time, the surrounding space also undergoes a complete change. While talking to Henrik, Mekk Burger shines in its average glamour, with a candy-coloured set in the background and the usual silver column in the middle of the frame. This peaceful illusion is then intercut with a parallel scene depicting Zoltán trying to get to Liza who lies in his bed. Reality and delusion thus unite in a cross-cut, whereby the latter constantly varies and gives way to Liza's worst nightmare. When realizing that Henrik only played a game with her emotions, the environment of Mekk Burger suddenly darkens and Tomy Tani finally reveals himself. The Japanese singer asks Liza to stay with him and while getting more and more aggressive, the surrounding buildings of Mekk Burger start to collapse. After the annihilation of the outer capitalist space, the urban sphere changes into a wintery and then a spring landscape with the blossoming of cherry trees around the fast food [Fig.5.]. Then, when Liza realizes that her secret admirer is Zoltán whom she also loves, the tone of the image turns into black and white and Tomy Tani again starts changing faces. When Liza finally agrees to sacrifice herself to save Zoltán, the space of Mekk Burger gets demolished by a black storm that, while breaking the curse, destroys the film's capitalist-consumerist space. The

commodity fetishism connected to the fast food chain thus gets eradicated, giving Liza a final chance to true happiness.



[Fig.5.] The transformation of space. *Liza, the Fox-Fairy*

With cross-cutting between the images of the young nurse's flat of and Zoltán's struggle to reach the woman, the scene also damages the bourgeois space of the film. While running towards Liza, the investigator destroys the chandelier of the living room, and ruins the furniture with his gun. By destroying all the dominant spaces of the film – the space of consumptive practice, the aristocratic room and, by Zoltán's wounds, the socialist police apparatus as well – Mészáros Ujj reckons with all the leading ideologies and political constructions that dominated the space of the film. In this way, he opens a new chapter in Hungary's 21st-century history that, instead of a consumerist-fake culture, socialist nostalgia and nationalist ideology, builds on a new, romanticized world view.

Conclusion

Although *Liza, The Fox-Fairy* does not reference the struggles of the Y generation on an explicit level, the financial instability and emotional unsteadiness that surrounds the main protagonist in her early 30s, is a politically significant point in the narrative. Also, while the film does not openly attack Hungarian society or reveals the ever-rising tensions within it, Mészáros Ujj's production clearly emphasizes the McDonaldization's devastating effects on one's system of belief. Thanks to the spatial contexts of the film that mirror three periods of ideology and social establishment, the director also references the pre-capitalist period and mirrors a post-socialist nostalgia. However, this nostalgia is not identical with longing for the

past. Rather, it illustrates the impact of socialism on Hungarian society whose collective memory is still strongly connected to the era. In *Liza, The Fox-Fairy*, this nostalgia is more of a historical reference that is reflected on the textual level of the film, while in *For Some Inexplicable Reason* it creates a discursive space that encompasses and explains the generation gap within Hungarian society. In contrast to a strong socialism critique, the main pillar of criticism in both films concerns the consumerist-capitalist framework. While Áron has no illusions about the new world order and knows that with his degree in Film Studies, he cannot get on in life that is built on the values of neoliberal economics, Liza believes in the capitalist magic. Still, as Mészáros Ujj's production suggests, she can only be happy by destroying the space of capitalism, thus ending the process of McDonaldization. For Áron, there is no way out of the crisis: although he travels to Lisbon, he remains in the same capitalist context and subordinated position abroad.

Although *Liza, The Fox-Fairy* and *For Some Inexplicable Reason* are seemingly very different productions, both films reference – implicitly or explicitly – the burden posed by the inheritance of the socialist economic system, the McDonaldization of society and the struggle of the Y generation in the capitalist context. While discussing such heavy contemporary phenomena, Mészáros Ujj and Reisz embrace a self-referential, ironic tone that, thanks to the humorous situations and comedy of manners, makes the message of the productions easier to digest and, together with the socio-political references, forms a very Hungarian socio-political texture.

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