

**Hajnal Király and Teri Szűcs**

**Safe Zones?**

If one needs to point at a central topic that connects the papers in the current issue of the Contact Zones journal, it is certainly the experience of strangeness or otherness. The concept of retreating to a safe zone, be it a geographical or mental territory, is discussed in two papers. Both essays coin the term of the 'retreat' and they offer it as a helpful tool to understand new tendencies of Hungarian cinema to represent practices that go against the pressing existential frustration and torment of feeling strange or different from a non-authentic social, ethnic or geographic environment they are constrained to live in. The authors of the two texts, both senior members of our research group, engage in a fruitful dialogue in mapping up the different types of retreat and interpreting them from the point of view of their outcome in terms of psychological development. In this respect, starting from György Kalmár's assumptions and categories of retreat in contemporary Hungarian cinema, Miklós Sággy argues convincingly that in the films under analysis retreat and isolation is depicted as a solution to an existential crisis only if it is paired with the need and acts of (self)understanding. Strangeness becomes an existential torment when the concept of having a home or feeling at home is deconstructed, when it becomes apparent that the place one calls their home is rather the space where our strangeness and otherness can painfully be recognised and experienced. The paper in our volume dealing with the recently published novel of Gergely Péterfy is focusing on the process of this recognition – how the “the uncanny, phantom-like otherness” of a visibly strange character mirrors the inherent estrangement of a society and an era. As the author of this essay, Judit Pieldner argues, the story of the novel set in the era of Hungarian Enlightenment, becomes a plastic allegory of our present-day situations and experiences of otherness.

Finally, as a new initiative, we would like to introduce a new section in our journal, in which the members of our research group as well as our colleagues and friends discuss socio-cultural and political issues that we find nowadays especially pressing. In this dialogical Q and A form we share our thoughts and personal experiences related to the categories of 'East' and 'West'. Do we consider either of them as our home, do we feel strange when we need to pick one of these binaries as our own? Is there a “retreat” from this geo-political and geo-cultural opposition? In the following issues of the journal we wish to carry on with this thought-provoking debate. The following five answers represent personal approaches filtered through research interests and resulting conceptual, theoretical difficulties. While trying to answer the question, they raise new ones. The contribution of László

Strausz and Hajnal Király refers to contemporary Romanian Cinema as resisting to post-colonial projections, while that of Bence Kránicz views the sensuality of contemporary Hungarian art as a means of expression of difference and specificity. The more argumentative pieces of Zsolt Gyenge and Zsolt Győri are calling for a reconsideration of existing terms and categories responsible for a schizophrenic Eastern European identity.