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Masculinity Reloaded. Subverting Discourses of Authority in Contemporary Eastern European and Russian Cinema

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The '89 régime changes in Eastern Europe have triggered a period of transition marked, among others, by the violence of Balkanic wars, the miners' uprisings in Romania, and a chronic societal instability reflected in institutional crisis and changing social and sexual roles. The repeated waves of migration, culminating after some of the countries of the region joined the EU , have deeply affected family structures, redrawing an essentially patriarchal and hierarchical order, as well as the concepts of 'home' and belonging. As Herbert Kitschelt points out, after the fall of communism, these societies turned back to a political and administrative tradition pre-existent to the instauration of the communist régime. This generated/produced a functioning civil society only in the cases of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and the former East Germany, while in all other cases, including the non-Baltic members of the former Soviet Union, it triggered a regression to pre-bureaucratic structures based on a hierarchical, patriarchal authority and nepotism. (Kitschelt 1993) The miscommunication between institutions and the generalized issue of (European) forms that these countries cannot fill with their own content, is a recurrent topic of contemporary Romanian, Russian and Bulgarian films, while Hungarian cinema is mostly characterised by representations of the existential crisis of the individual, often not anchored in a specific time-space frame, but timeless, allegorical, even mythical or biblical.

As the articles of this issue testify, these cinemas posit themselves very self-consciously through their relationship with Western (American, West European) stereotypical discourses of the region that they only apparently serve. But the refusal to deliver an image of a barbaric and chaotic East just to please the "Western gaze" is not the only subversive act these films present. They show a clear resistance to the "authority" of mainstream cinematic practices and paradigms in representing deep social and individual crisis on a discursive level. Thus parody, intermediality, stylistic excess, minimalism, fragmentation and a visual creation of a specific cultural atmosphere all become a set of tools susceptible to reveal a deep crisis of the discourse of authority and masculinity. As such, from a post-colonial theoretical point of view, representation in these films appears as a political act, an act of power of the colonized,

turning back the (Western, male) gaze. In this respect, these articles fit perfectly in one of the main research lines of our project, concerned with the figurations of otherness. Although the project focuses mainly on contemporary Hungarian and Romanian cinema, with this issue we decided to examine the topic of a falling political, social and discursive authority in a larger, post-communist context.

Mónika Dánél, in her article on a cinematic adaptation of a series of short stories by Hungarian writer Ádám Bodor, entitled *The Possibilities of Making Friends* (*A barátkozás lehetőségei*, Gábor Ferenczi, 2007), analyses the possibilities of intimacy in a complex grid of observers and the observed, modelling surveillance under communist dictatorship. In her effort to describe the concept of atmosphere, she focuses on cultural interpretations of landscapes, that, together with typical interiors, in this particular film contribute to a "pervading mood of a place or a place or situation, its aura or flair." (Böhme 1993, 119) The close analysis of a scene emblematic for the possibility (of the representation) of intimacy between two men under the circumstances of authority considers the underlying atmosphere of landscape and specific situation as decisive in the transformation of a hierarchical structure into friendship. As she argues, the atmospheric depiction of short encounters in the film also manage to convey this intimacy to their (Western as well as young) readers and spectators (who weren't socialized in communism, but can be sensitive to atmosphere).

The post-communist survival of an empty authority is often thematised in the films of the New Romanian Cinema, but lately it has also appeared on the metanarrative levels of signification. The article of Zsolt Gyenge focuses on the tendencies of semantic and conceptual experimentation in contemporary Romanian cinema, most prominently represented by the films of Corneliu Porumboiu. As he argues, in *Police, Adjective* (*Poliţist, adjectiv*, 2009) the protagonist's resistance to empty authority can be detected in his struggle to translate the visual experience of the observation to the verbal system of the institution. Relying on a solid background of theories of visual and linguistic representation (from Saussure, Foucault, J.W.T. Mitchell and Gadamer), Gyenge manages to prove that Porumboiu's films are evoking the spirit of Magritte's paintings by modelling the incompatibility of the linguistic and the visual. The boundaries of representation correspond here to the boundaries between a mainstream discursive (institutional, political, cinematic) practice and individual experimentation that characterises this generation of filmmakers refusing to accept a father figure or any authority.

The same subversive attitude towards war narratives and stereotypes can be detected in contemporary Serbian war films, analysed in Vivien Magyar's essay. As she argues, films like *The Knife* (Nož, 1998), *Vukovar* (Vukovar, jedna priča, 1994), *The Tour* (Turneja, 2008) and *The Enemy* (Neprijatelj, 2012) are mirroring stereotypes and subvert them in order to weaken the postcolonial discourse regularly applied to Serbian film. As subversion strongly relies on ambiguity, it is often the visual style of a film that carries the subversive undertone. The self-imposed stylistic otherness revolts against discursive tyranny establishing a hierarchical relationship between East and West, Balkans and Europe, civilized and barbaric. But, as Magyar points out, beyond self-exoticisation, the reiteration of Western stereotypes of the aggressive, uncivilized, barbaric Balkan man and the exaggerated depiction of feelings and passions, there are also identifiable moments of visual "slippage" or excess (painterly or theatrical references) in all these films, which stop and divert the narrative towards cultural, male and female narratives of the colonized. . , .

Bence Kránicz in his essay deals with a similar phenomenon of subversion targeting the American superhero narrative and genre in contemporary Hungarian and Russian films. As he points out, this can be identified in the act of intermedial and transnational adaptation and implies a postcolonial and postsocialist interpretation of national versions of these narratives, their connections with local mass culture and folklore. Kránicz addresses the subject of intermediality and adaptation through the representation of the protagonist, focusing on the connections and continuity between national mass culture, folklore and contemporary national genre films. The superheroes are either popcultural agents of American military, cultural and ideological dominance over the rest of the world (in films like the Russian *Black Lightning* (*Chernaya molniya,* 2009, Dmitry Kiselev – Aleksandr Voitinsky) or national, ethnicized heroes as parodistic characters enhanced by a comic book style (the case of Hungarian *Taxidermia,* 2006 and *Sha-Man* vs. *Ikarus* [*Táltosember Vs. Ikarus*, György Pálfi, 2002]). In both cases the superhero character, genre and style serve as a means to define a burdened relationship to the Soviet/communist past, thus opening these films to cultural, political interpretations.

All four articles re-contextualize myths, narratives and socio-political models of masculinity in order to show how war, surveillance, the colonizing gaze, struggle for institutional power, social hierarchy and the appearance of national superheroes become symptomatic of a declining patriarchal order affirming itself either through violence or verbal/linguistic dominance. In all films analysed the subversive attitude against this also

appears on a discursive level of the representation, adding a new, conceptual approach to the research of contemporary East European cinemas.

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Atmospheric Adaptation as Cultural Translation[1]

(Ádám Bodor – Gábor Ferenczi: *The Possibilities of Making Friends*, 2007)

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Abstract. In the theoretical part of my article, based primarily on the works of Gernot Böhme, Peter Zumthor, Mădălina Diaconu**,** Juhani Pallasmaa, I define the atmosphere as a complex phenomenon in which the aesthetic, social and geocultural potentials are simultaneously present. It equally depends on the represented environment, on medial representation as well as on the receiver's (cultural, social and emotional) education. Analysing Gábor Ferenczi's adaptation of short stories of Ádám Bodor, *The Possibilities of Making Friends* (2007), I investigate the creation and effect of atmosphere. The film employs narrative intermissions, but connects them into a (detective story-like) linearity, that closes with a punchline and applies the duality of optic and haptic visuality, keeps its viewers curious while also bodily involving them. This mode of cultural translation draws the viewers, hopefully not only Eastern Europeans socialised in the atmosphere of communism, into the community atmosphere of a dual dictatorial world of interwoven codes of observation and intimacy.

Keywords: atmosphere, adaptation, contact zones, intimacy, surveillance, landscape, optical and haptic visuality, Ádám Bodor, Gábor Ferenczi

Atmosphere as Intercorporeal Aesthetic Category

In the complex reception of the Hungarian writer Ádám Bodor's works there appears to be consensus in the sense that the author's writings are characterised by a powerful and unique atmosphere. Atmosphere, which is created between nature/architecture/city and their reader/perceiver, is the manifestation of human affectivity (e.g. perceiving nature as landscape), this is why it carries *aesthetic potential*. In his 1991 study which has become a basic reference ever since, Gernot Böhme introduces atmosphere as a new aesthetic category: "Atmoshpere can only become a concept, however, if we succeed in accounting for the peculiar intermediary status of atmospheres between subject and object" (Gernot Böhme 1993, 114). It is not localizable, not clearly definable, this is why it is related to the qualities of uncertain and obscure – as Böhme wrote, "'atmosphere' is meant to indicate something indeterminate, difficult to express, even if it is only in order to hide the speaker's own speechlessness" (Böhme 1993, 113). Still, it is evidently spatial, it has *spatial dimension*

[1] This work was supported by the project entitled *Space-ing Otherness. Cultural Images of Space, Contact Zones in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Film and Literature* (OTKA NN 112700) and by the János Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

similar to the aura. Referring to Hermann Schmitz, Böhme says: "Atmospheres are always spatially 'without borders, disseminated and yet without place, that is, not localizable'. They are affective powers of feeling, spatial bearers of moods" (Böhme 1993, 119). *Bodily presence* is an important part of it: "Atmospheres are evidently what are experienced in bodily presence in relation to persons and things or in spaces" (Böhme 1993, 119). At the same time, atmosphere also has a *synthetic function* as the common reality of the perceived and the perceiver.[2] It is the *quality* of a feeling extended as (indeterminate) spatial presence. The sphere of the perceived evokes an atmosphere which can have an effect through affective participation, through the bodily presence of the perceiver.[3] As the Romanian philosopher Mădălina Diaconu summarises:

> "Finally, when we speak of atmosphere we mean the air in a particular place and, by extension, the pervading mood of a place or a place or situation, its aura or flair. Correspondingly, the atmosphere of a city is the total impression of the urban reality which people share with one another in that city. (…) they [atmospheres] are neither purely objective, so that people would react instinctively to objective features of a space, nor purely subjective, that is, mere projections of one's affective disposition into a basically neutral environment, but express a specific interaction between subject and object. Nor is the experience of atmosphere abstract knowledge, like reading a map. It requires very corporeal presence in situ, as the necessary condition for feeling it: you have to be there and move trough the space in order to feel the atmosphere" (Mădălina Diaconu 2011, 228–229).

Thus, atmosphere requires bodily presence, it surrounds and covers the perceiver, and at the same time the intensity of a feeling is extrapolated through/within it. Intensity – according to Gertrud Lehnert – is formed within the encounter with people, things or spaces, where the perceiving person becomes "grabbed" through the aroused interest.[4] Feelings are also bound to bodily presence, as Lehnert writes: "Feeling itself is totally present and not really reproducible (in the sense of re-living, re-activation). However, the feeling creates the possibility of remembering things, events, people and spaces" (Gertrud Lehnert 2011, 16–

[2] See: "Atmosphere designates both the fundamental concept of a new aesthetics and its central object of cognition. Atmosphere is the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived. It is the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality of the perceiver, insofar as in sensing the atmosphere s/he is bodily present in a certain way. This synthetic function of atmosphere is at the same time the legitimation of the particular forms of speech in which an evening is called melancholy or a garden serene. If we consider it more exactly, such a manner of speech is as legitimate as calling a leaf green" (Böhme 1993, 122).

[3] See: "Atmosphere is the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived. It is the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality of the perceiver, insofar as in sensing the atmosphere s/he is bodily present in a certain way" (Böhme 1993, 122).

[4] See: "Intensität kommt in der Begegnung mit Menschen, Dingen oder Räumen zustande, die Aufmerksamkeit erzeugen und die wahrnehmende Person 'ergreifen'. Die Intensität von Eindrücken und Gefühlen ist wesentlich für die Qualität von Wahrnehmungen, sie macht Ereignisse und Dinge bedeutsam, hebt sie anderen gegenüber hervor und macht sie überhaupt erst erinnerbar" (Gertrud Lehnert 2011, 16).

17).[5] This is why feeling and atmosphere get close to each other in Hermann Schmitz's interpretation; atmosphere can be grabbed as extended feeling-space situated on the side of the body's space: "Atmosphere in this sense is a frameless, indivisibly extended occupation of a surfaceless space" (Hermann Schmitz 2011, 89).[6] As emanation, it floats, it is formed in the co-presence of the subjective and the objective as intersubjective experience. And as such it can create *collective intimacy* as integrating potential. The unique atmosphere of a landscape, a city or a building can turn its perceivers into a community. As Juhani Pallasmaa states:

> "Our culture of control and speed has favoured the architecture of the eye, with its instantaneous imagery and distanced impact, whereas haptic and atmospheric architecture promotes slowness and intimacy, appreciated and comprehended gradually as images of the body and the skin. The architecture of the eye detaches and controls, whereas haptic and atmospheric architecture engages and unites. Tactile sensibility replaces distancing visual imagery through enhanced materiality, nearness, identification, and intimacy" (Juhani Pallasmaa 2014, 38).

According to him, the *real* experience of buildings is created out of peripheral vision (and not out of perspectival, fixed spatial vision) through the *sense of imagination*, through the projected (anticipated imaginary) spectacle/vision: "Perspectival space leaves us as outside observers, whereas multi-perspectival and atmospheric space and peripheral vision encloses and enfolds us in it embrace" (Pallasmaa 2014, 38). We get into the atmosphere of a building, which is at the same time our extended space of perception, and the fact that it is not merely subjective is shown by atmosphere's power of creating collective intimacy; we can experience an atmosphere on our own or we can experience it together with others. At the same time, atmosphere can also individualise its perceiver as long as it is grounded on emotional sensitivity (and its individual differences). We perceive atmosphere first as mental formation and then we "comprehend" it rationally. First it touches us (spontaneously), and it is only later that we identify and interpret it:

> "It provides the unifying coherence and character for a room, space, place, and landscape, or a social encounter. It is 'the common denominator', 'the colouring' or 'the feel' of the experiential situation. Atmosphere is a mental 'thing', an experiential

[5] In original: "Das Gefühl selbst ist vollkommen präsentisch, es kann nicht wirklich erinnert werden (im Sinne von: wieder-erlebt, re-aktiviert). Aber das Gefühl bringt die Möglichkeit der Erinnerungen an Dinge, Ereignisse, Menschen und Räume hervor."

[6] See: "Gefühle – wohl zu unterscheiden vom Fühlen als Wahrnehmen oder als affektives Betroffensein von Gefühlen – sind ausgedehnte Atmosphären in einem flächenlosen Raum, einem Gefühlsraum, der sich den unter 2 erwähnten flächenlosen Räumen, darunter dem Raum des Leibes, an die Seite stellt. Raumform, um die es sich handelt. (…) Eine *Atmosphäre* im hier gemeinten Sinn ist eine randlose, unteilbar ausgedehnte Besetzung eines flächenlosen Raumes" (Hermann Schmitz 2011, 89).

> property or characteristic that is suspended between the object and the subject. Paradoxically, we grasp the atmosphere of a place before we identify its details or understand it intellectually. In fact, we may be completely unable to say anything meaningful about the characteristics of a situation, yet have a firm image and recall of it, as well as an emotive attitude towards it" (Pallasmaa 2014, 21).

Atmosphere, according to Peter Zumthor, "addresses" emotional perception.[7] This quick pre-intellectual perception is simultaneously multisensorial corporeal experience and polyphonic understanding. Thus atmosphere works similarly to the medium of invisible scent and smell, stimulates imagination as unlocalizable air and presupposes the presence and contribution of the body as (breathing) whole. At the same time, as Hermann Schmitz writes, "atmospheres dispose of such total corporeal vibrations as freshness, total exhaustion or total satisfaction" (Schmitz 2011, 89).[8] Atmosphere is an intercorporeal contact zone, it is outside the body, however, it is inseparable from it as multisensorial space of perception, the basis of which is touch, "the mother of the senses" (Ashley Montagu, see Pallasmaa 2014, 34). According to the etymology of the German language, similarly to the English, feeling also means touching, in other words, feeling means feeling haptically.[9] As Pallasmaa points out:

> "All of the senses, including vision, are extensions of the sense of touch: the senses are specialisations of the skin, and all sensory experiences are related to tactility. We can also acknowledge that overpowering atmospheres have a haptic, almost material presence, as if we were surrounded and embraced by a specific substance" (Pallasmaa 2014, 34).

Thus, irresistible atmospheres have a strong presence of materiality, a haptic presence. Referring to Hubert Tellenbach, Diaconu calls the sense of olfaction – as what is between the smell and the taste – a sense of proximity and intimacy and connects it with *memory*: it stores from the present what is not transient, namely the dimension of the atmospherical. (See Diaconu 2007, 42–43.) In other words, the sense of olfaction is in interference with the atmosphere of memories, memories can be evoked through it. However, *evocation* does not necessarily presuppose only an acting subject but also one with whom all this happens. According to Diaconu smell disarms and decentralises its subject. The olfactive subject is simultaneously active and passive, it is no longer the triggering subject but the one exposed to external impacts. Diaconu uses the term *passibilité* borrowed from Jean-François Lyotard for

[7] See: "Atmosphäre spricht die emotionale Wahrnehmung an, das ist die Wahrnehmung, die unglaublich rasch funktioniert, die wir Menschen offenbar haben, um zu überleben" (Peter Zumthor 2004, 12).
[8] In original: "Atmosphären haben auch die ganzheitlichen leiblichen Regungen, wie Frische, ganzheitliche Müdigkeit, ganzheitliches Behagen."
[9] See: "Das deutsche Wort "fühlen" hat etymologisch zu tun mit Betasten, d.h. mit dem haptischen Fühlen;" (Lehnert 2011, 17.)

this in-betweenness. (See Diaconu 2007, 53.) When we breathe, we interiorise the transpiration of other bodies in an intimate way, and fill it with its pleasant or unpleasant character. Besides the aesthetics based on the Kantian "still the noblest", i.e. vision[10], olfaction and atmosphere through its function of evoking, triggering memories can also have their place in an aesthetics integrating the senses of smell and touch.

Thus atmosphere as an aesthetic category (Gernote Böhme), as multisensorial bodily experience, as *passibilité* calling forth reception (Mădălina Diaconu), as "energy" with a powerful effect on the senses of olfaction and touch (Peter Zumthor), as the in-betweenness of emanation and perception can be grabbed as an "affective power" (Böhme). As Pallasmaa summarises: "Atmosphere is the overarching perceptual, sensory, and emotive impression of a space, setting, or social situation" (Pallasmaa 2014, 20).

I regard the atmosphere defined above as a complex phenomenon in which the aesthetic, social and geocultural potentials are simultaneously present. It equally depends on the represented environment, on medial representation as well as on the receiver's (cultural, social and emotional) education. Thus it simultaneously links the works of art to their specific geocultural and natural environment and mediates about them. The works exercise their impact and can be evoked again and again through the intensity of their atmosphere and they resist the mere social gaze through the connection between atmosphere and the aesthetic potential. At the same time, the objectifying atmosphere can be the basis of exoticization. Atmosphere simultaneously carries the potential of localization as characteristic and creates the medium of aesthetic layeredness of nuances. It requires an intimate relation, sensuous "education", which is organised not merely by vision and cognition, and, according to my hypothesis, it can be a common ground for the social and the aesthetic gazes.

Adaptation as Cultural Contact Zone

The television production *The Possibilities of Making Friends* (2007), directed by Gábor Ferenczi is the adaptation of four short stories by Ádám Bodor. By interweaving the four

[10] See: "The sense of sight, even if it is not more indispensable than that of hearing, is still the noblest, because among all the senses, it is furthestremoved from the sense of touch, the most limited condition of percepcion: it nor only has the widest sphere of perception in space, but also its organ feels least affected (because otherwise it would not be merely sight). Thus sight comes nearer to being a *pure intuition* (the immediate representation of the given object, without admixture of noticeable sensation)." (Kant 2006, 48.) See also: "Wich organic sense is the most ungrateful and also seems to be the most dispensable? The sense of *smell*. It does not pay to cultivate it or refine it at all in order to enjoy; for there are more disgusting objects than pleasent ones (especially in crowded places), and even when we come across something fragrant, the pleasure coming from the sense of smell is always fleeting and transient" (Kant 2006, 50-51).

texts, the film highlights their unique common atmosphere as the distinctive mark of the literary texts, which at the same time also depends on some kind of interpretation. The atmosphere is always created as a specificity and as what is the most difficult to grab through the text, through the effect of the text. Thus Gábor Ferenczi's film, while it creates characters, landscapes, spaces and occurrences, also turns the atmospheric effect of the texts into film language. In each others' proximity the literary texts and their adaptation first of all dissolve the misconception that they can replace each other. While the media specificities of film and literature, their uniqueness and irreplaceability are represented through the intermedial relational space, the contact zone resulting from their relation which no longer belongs to either of them also becomes more powerful. At the same time, this intermedial contact zone also reveals the differences of the correlating media. I use the term contact zone according to Mary Louise Pratt in a social, political and intercultural sense, as where the various uses of space, temporalities and cultures meet;[11] at the same time I also use the term according to Doris Bachmann-Medick in an aesthetic and intermedial, interdisciplinary sense in the case of the literary adaptation in question, as what creates the common space of film and literature, the zones of translation.[12]

The narratorial positions of the four short stories *(Our Driver Has a Bad Day, A Muggy Morning, The Possibilities of Making Friends, So We'll See Each Other Then)* simultaneously employ the duality of intimacy and surveillance. In the first short story, as its

[11] See: "I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today. Eventually I will use the term to reconsider the models of community that many of us rely on in reaching and theorizing and that are under challenge today." Mary Louise Pratt: Arts of the Contact Zone. Web: http://www2.fiu.edu/~ereserve/010035191-1.pdf Last accessed 07. 07. 2016.

[12] See: Doris Bachmann-Medick: *Epistemological* and *Methodological Dimensions* of the Translational Turn. In Doris Bachmann-Medick: *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture* Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016. See also: "Reclaiming mediation processes (that are not necessarily always smooth, always successful, or capable of 'bridging gaps') that are sensitive to translational qualities and differentiation thus enriches much more than the analysis of cultural contacts. Furthermore, the decisive qualities of translation actually also embody the basic elements for a *self-reflection of interdisciplinarity.* Only by exceeding the current limits of explorations at the margins and borders of the disciplines will it be possible to clearly understand the zones of overlap between different disciplines as perhaps conflictual yet productive and readily negotiable zones of translation. This is where the points of interconnection between subjects, problem fields, and cultures – in the sense of readily translatable 'contact zones' – become accessible. It is because of this, among other reasons, that cultural studies/Kulturwissenschaften itself can be seen as translation studies. With its almost programmatic pluralization and transgression of borders, this translational approach to cultural studies demands broadening its horizon to include cultural reflections beyond Western Europe. It is because of this orientation, among other reasons, that cultural studies is equipped to lay bare or even conceptualize translation(al) horizons. These would certainly be more globally accessible than the more culture-specific approaches rooted in the universalistic horizons of the humanities/Geisteswissenschaften and its outmoded role as an orientational and integrative science." Doris Bachmann-Medick / Boris Buden: Cultural Studies – a Translational Perspective. Translated by Erika Doucette Web: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0908/bachmannmedick-buden/en Last accessed 07. 07. 2016.

title also suggests, with the community subject of "our driver", in the second one with the female figure eavesdropping in the muggy morning public space (petrol station) the subject positions are inherently placed in some kind of public/common sphere. The private world (a driver's day, the private conversation between a man and a woman) manifests through others' *mediation*, the linguistic position is simultaneously informative, mediating and surveilling. The last two short stories focus on private relations, on the possibility of a friendship and on the breaking off of an intimate relationship, however, we experience again the presence of some kind of alienating effect, distancing device, which is inherently present in the private relation: in the third short story Amirás, the tenant, cannot easily make friends with the owner of the house for some reason, in the fourth the man breaking off the relationship gives one of his binoculars as a prosthesis creating intimacy instead of himself to his (former) lover, and at the same time interiorises the structure of a surveillance system based on keeping secret in the private sphere of breakup. We can read the man's decision which he will later carry out on the basis of confidentiality in the last short story entitled *So We'll See Each Other Then.*

> "Dzsoni Kuptor, the former observer of roes, made up his mind while he still was an observer of roes that he would break up with Gizella Weisz. […] But when she inquired about the new job, Dzsoni Kuptor's face became stiff: – The world is severe. A new job, that should be enough. I cannot tell you what it is" (Bodor 2016, 39).

The private and the public, the individual and the community, intimacy and surveillance structures appear as inseparable bonds in these human relations and stage one of Ádám Bodor's most characteristic features: intimacy, the private sphere can be created in the grid of the public, of the community, of surveillance, and language itself is displayed as such a grid. His texts display the ambiguity of interdependence and observing each other also as one feature of Eastern Europeanness. The hotel receptionist tries to decode the hotel driver's behaviour from unusual external signs and verbal omissions and becomes more and more involved due to the unusual character of the situation. Based on the conversation heard in the petrol station, the eavesdropping woman becomes curious about the relationship of the interlocutors; the house owner will force his attention and friendship onto his tenant; the binoculars as the device of optical intimacy will make this ambiguity medially evident. Still, hypothetically, the binoculars replacing intimacy and serving to bridge distance – through its linguistic ambiguity – become the technical aid of looking into each others' eyes. Thus it is not only the ridiculing of an imagined/hypotetical route of quest of the dismissed woman, but the text also marks ironically the mediatedness of interpersonal relations. At the same time,

the false male narratorial viewpoint of this short story, which keeps the new job secret, uses this underlying expectation for private separation. This lie also deprives the female subject of her intimacy and alienates her as a surveillor. Surveillance is given, however, it is a private matter – in this case a male private matter – how it is applied, "utilized" in the private sphere and how it is turned into the basic experience of the intimacy of the other subject.

The short story that inspires the title of the film can stage the linguistic difference between friendship and making friends. The house owner, Emerik wants to make friends with his tenant called Amirás. Similarly to the in-between spaces of the other short stories (hotel, petrol station), the rented flat endows the tenant with an Eastern European pseudo-private subject position depending on the owner. The stake of the short story will be whether the two characters are capable of transforming this hierarchical and material structure in the direction of making friends. The possibility is created by the owner's initiating a conversation and by floating together in the salty water. However, the possibility remains hypothetical; the subjects of making friends are situated in a medium emanating mistrust, they are influenced by this (mental) atmosphere. After the scene of their bathing together we read this dialogue:

> "– Mr. Emerik, you want something from me – said Amirás.
> – Sure I do – said Mr. Emerik – I want you to have a good time!" (Bodor 2016, 35.)

The inner surveillance and the mistrust of the subordinated and distrustful Amirás – manifesting in the preconception "you want something from me" – becomes public in his attitude towards a concrete person.

The structure of mutual surveillance and mistrust inherent in interpersonal relations is created in a similar way also in the adaptation dialogues of *Our Driver Has a Bad Day*:

> "Receptionist: I haven't seen Dujmond yet today.
> Juci: Me neither.
> Receptionist: Exactly!
> Juci: But has he seen us?
> Receptionist: You're right. We'd better get this straight right now.
> Receptionist: The boss asked about you.
> Driver: Thought so.
> Receptionist: I fronted for you this once.
> Driver: You fronted for yourself.
> Receptionist: For myself, sure… But because of you!
> Driver: Well, don't then!
> Receptionist: We won't." (Ferenczi 2007)

The hotel as a transit place (non-place) and workplace is simultaneously the scene of public and private relations. The personal relation at the workplace, the “fronting” for each other takes place within the framework of a panoptical surveillance structure. At the same time, private and common property is not sharply separated in it (the receptionist takes home the coffee from the hotel).

Thus the four short stories create nuances of human relations unfolding within the (Eastern European) panoptic sphere; the ironical linguistic attitude simultaneously familiarises the reader and distances him or her into an observing position.

The narration of the film, launching all the narrative threads in the opening scene(s), applies interruption, intercalation and punch line ending similarly to the short stories, thus it simultaneously has a framework, a non-linear and linear narrative structure, where the absences and contacts, jumps and links equally shape the narrative flow. The most expressive visualization of this structure is provided by the connecting, intersecting and separating roads and travellers transforming nature into landscape as well as by public spaces such as petrol stations, which are the connecting points of the distinct narrative threads and where the travellers can come into contact with other intimacies [Figs.1–4.].

[Figs.1–4.] Roads, travellers, public intersections

Richard Sennett writes about the capital space: “The idea of space as derivative from motion parallels exactly the relations of space to motion produced by the private automobile” (Sennett 2002, 14). This is related to social isolation, to the right to be mute, resulting from the public visibility in cities: “in public places, an isolation directly produced by one’s visibility to others. (...) When everyone has each other under surveillance, sociability decreases, silence being the only form of protection” (Sennett 2002, 15). And about this silence Sennett writes:

> “In this society on its way to becoming intimate – wherein character was expressed beyond the control of the will, the private was superimposed on the public, the defense against being read by others was to stop feeling – one’s behavior in public was altered in its fundamental terms. Silence in public became the only way one could experience public life, especially street life, without feeling overwhelmed. In the mid-19th century there grew up in Paris and London, and thence in other Western capitals, a pattern of behavior unlike what was known in London or Paris a century before, or is known in most of the non-Western world today” (Sennett 2002, 27).

Contrary to Western capitals, the passengers of the cars moving in the mountain landscape and in the Eastern European post-industrial public space are driven by a surveillor’s curiosity directed towards each other: There is a girl sitting on the side of the road; the female passenger of the car passing by her asks her husband what she is doing there. This curiosity is at the same time historical/social – the dictatorial conditioning of communism – and cultural, Eastern European, on the other hand [Figs. 5–6.].

[Figs. 5–6.] Intimate silence and curiosity

With its concealments and panoramas, the mountain as narrative space can simultaneously turn into the medium of movement in space and the medium of the observer’s gaze. On the one hand, we can hardly see (we first see with technical amplification) the slowly advancing Dacia in the huge mountain, while a man in leather coat observes the landscape with binoculars [Figs.7–10.].

[Figs. 7–10.] Landscape and observer’s gaze

The mountain turns into the medium of encounter and surveillance, into the common space and mood of the voyeur and flaneur in the filmic diegesis. The duality of hiding and merging into the environment and of the grid of surveillance organises the visual strategies of both the natural landscape and the constructed spaces. The grid of observers and observed signals the presence of the represented world in a general surveillance through mediation [Figs.11–16.].

[Figs. 11–16.] Observer's gaze, grid and structure of surveillance

The adaptation alters the short stories through subtle nuances; out of the four narrative threads, it is only one in which the characters speak in Hungarian, but they are also overheard by a curious Romanian woman, who understands the other language, in this way the film places the narrative into a Romanian-Hungarian intercultural contact zone and thus it stages the use of the mixed names of the characters from the short stories [Figs.17–18.].

[Figs. 17–18.] Hungarian speakers and Romanian eavesdropping woman in the petrol station

A nomadic female character links the narrative threads performing the connecting function of the roads or public spaces. However, the male position indicated in connection with the last short story (separation is not contextualised by lie) gets isolated from this female character.

Thus she can leave as the subject of a mutual intimacy, *passibilité*; this is an important change in the film from a gender viewpoint [Figs. 19–20.].

[Figs. 19–20.] Nomadic, animalised and jumper women figure

The dialogues of the short story entitled *The Possibilities of Making Friends* also become understandable from the perspective of the gender codes especially for a spectator not socialised in communism. The mechanism of power revealed in the dialogue of the two men (which consists not only of the strength of the superior position but also of the static nature of subordination) stages Amirás's character as "feminized" through haptic visuality[13] [Figs.21–22.].

[Figs. 21–22.] Perceived (tactile/haptic) landscape

Through the man's attempt of making friends the humanization of the landscape takes place; one teaches the other to swim, then eats from his hand, that is, the landscape becomes the medium of cultural and intimate habits [Figs.23–28.].

[13] For distinction between optical and haptic visuality, and for haptic visuality as possible "feminine kind of visuality" see Laura U. Marks: The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses. Durham and London : Duke University Press, 2000, 162–164, 170.

[Figs. 23–28.] Landscape and human praxis. Visual framing

The con-sent structure of surveillance and the con-sentiment condition of friendship get merged. Referring to Aristotle, Giorgio Agamben writes:

> "The expression that we have rendered as 'share the pasture together' (…) means in the middle voice 'partaking', and so the Aristotelian expression could simply stand for 'partaking in the same'. It is essential at any rate that the human community comes to be defined here, in contrast to the animal community, through a living together (syzen acquires here a technical meaning) that is not defined by the participation in a common substance, but rather by a sharing that is purely existential, a con-division that, so to speak, lacks an object: friendship, as the con-sentiment of the pure fact of being. Friends do not share something (birth, law, place, taste): they are shared by the experience of friendship. Friendship is the con-division that precedes every division, since what has to be shared is the very fact of existence, life itself. And it is this sharing without an object, this original con-senting, that constitutes the political" (Agamben 2009, 47).

The female character, however, melts into the landscape both as observer and observed, and will belong to it once and for all; due to the driver's unattentiveness, she gets back to nature and definitely gets out of the panoptical structure. Thus the film recreates the opposition of the classical female closeness to nature vs. male cultural coding. The contact with the landscape seems to be culturally coded from an optical perspective in the case of making friends (the camera lifts into the optical perspective of male friendship also the figure of Amirás, who previously also perceived the landscape haptically, see figures 21–22) while in the case of the dismissed female figure the haptic contact becomes (optically) invisible for the driver [Figs. 29–30.].

[Figs. 29–30.] Optical (with Christian iconography) and haptic visuality

The female figure getting from optical surveillance to haptic closeness melting into the landscape walks on the mountain as a wild animal, she does not follow the order of roads but intersects, jumps through them and thus becomes the passive subject of the narrative closure. (In this way the film transposes the ironical female rambling of the last short story, the quest for intimacy with binoculars into a tragic outcome.) The driver doesn't see her because he moves optically, along the order of roads; the woman hears the approaching car too late because she is elsewhere with her senses, she looks into the binoculars and without the other's gaze (through binoculars) she becomes an imperceptible image. (Paradoxically, she could become visible as a woman only for a thorough pair of binoculars perceiving every motion on the mountain.)

Contrary to the optical (iconographical) perspective of the men's making friends, the female figure gets animalised through haptic representation in the landscape. Thus the woman's (private) trail/route connects the threads and ends the film as the clash between the car regularly moving on the road and the woman animalised in her pain [Fig.31.].

[Fig. 31.] The clash from optical perspective/distance

On the one hand, the film localises the scenes through particularities of nature (e.g. salty lake), through languages and mental structures; on the other hand, those image sequences when the camera, accompanied by the Romanian mountain horn, pans the painting that creates the common space of wildlife and socialist architecture, can be understood as self-reflexive, ironical scenes of the ethnicisation of landscape. The self-irony of visual representation also recreates the subtle (self-)irony of Bodor's texts [Figs. 32–33.].

[Figs. 32–33.] Camera-movement on the painted landscape as visual self-irony

In the film the natural landscape as atmosphere – as what smoothes the ruptures and contacts the routes and narratives – stages surveillance and the experience of being observed. At the same time, with the duality of the surveilled (optical) landscape and the perceived (haptic) landscape it also creates the landscape as the connecting and chiastic medium of the natural, the human and the cultural. All this makes the role of the camera self-reflexive: the surveilling camera, showing extreme long shots and panoramas, as well as the camera swaying in a handy camera-like manner/melting into the landscape simultaneously require the perspectival/observing and the peripheral/atmospheric perception. This ambiguity folds back on the language of the short stories as well, which transmit (observed) intimacies in an

intimate way – also involving the senses of smell and touch – through which they also (bodily) involve their (Western as well as young) readers (who weren't socialised in communism, but can be sensitive to atmosphere) and initiate them into the historical public surveillance (characteristic of communism).

The analysed adaptation mediates a world based on a post-industrial Eastern European surveillance system, and stages the way surveillance structures the curiosity between interpersional relationships, human attention, and also the codes of intimacy (see the ironic objectification in the telescope and in the part *So We'll See Each Other Then*). The film interiorises the experience of surveillance through optical extreme long shots and the bodily proximity of haptic representation, creating the pervasive atmosphere of dictatorial regimes, in the sense of the expression "it is in the air".

The narrative structure built on interruptions (lacks) and ended with punchlines, the cohesion and interchange of observed and observing elements created in optical and haptic representation ask for affective participation, the viewers are drawn in, and thus the film resists the objectifying gaze of colonialisation, exoticisation. It becomes cultural translation in such a way that it offers the experience of the atmosphere of a dictatorship, and turns the viewers from external contemplators into a community. Through staging encounters on roads, the film creates nostalgia, not only in an Eastern-European viewer, for the duality of surveillance and human attentiveness. At the same time, it also highlights that the most powerful element of an observing dictatorial regime is the atmosphere. The dictatorship as community atmosphere has a much deeper effect/consequence because it does not disappear with the elimination of the institutional frameworks: the interiorised mechanisms, resulting in a long transition, are materialised for a long time afterwards as being truly present.

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This is Not Magritte
Corneliu Porumboiu's Theory of Representation[1]

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"Porumboiu is a filmmaker obsessed with definitions and signs."
Alice Bardan

Abstract: Maria Ioniță in her paper on Corneliu Porumboiu compares the director's work to Magritte, arguing that both reflect on a "fundamental incompatibility of the visual and the linguistic". The paper will thoroughly analyze the theoretical implications of the director's "visual philosophy", and will interpret Porumboiu's cinematic quest from this point of view. The starting point of the paper is that his films can be interpreted as "direct theory" - a term introduced by Edward S. Small to describe the way in which experimental films and video works are directly creating a certain type of theory, without being confined to linguistic expression.
The questions related to the possibilities and boundaries of representation raised by Porumboiu's films will be grouped in five thematic chapters, where the theoretical discussions will be accompanied by the close analysis of several scenes. First the relationship of the verbal and the visual will be analyzed based on Foucault's view on Magritte; then Barthes' and Gadamer's theories on the differences between signs, symbols and images will be compared; afterwards I will assess the role of mediality following Mitchell's analysis; I will also focus on the perception and expression of experience from a phenomenological point of view, and finally I will take a look on representation and definition understood as a practice of power, where the power over the system of signification affects the medium's capacity of representation.
An important goal of the paper is to leave behind the usual discourse on realism, neorealism and a non-defined though often mentioned minimalism that has almost completely dominated the critical and scholarly reception of the new Romanian cinema. Instead I will try to prove that a focus on the mediality of perception, communication and representation can provide a more sophisticated interpretation of Porumboiu's cinema.

Keywords: Corneliu Porumboiu; representation theory; Romanian New Wave; semiotics; phenomenology

Minimalism, realism, neo-realism – these are the terms most often used to describe the Romanian New Wave in the critical and scholarly discourse. As Maria Ioniță writes, since 2001 Romanian cinema "has been increasingly associated with a distinctive brand of realism: […] This type of realism demonstrates a gift for the patient observation of characters and surroundings, and an attraction towards the more unvarnished, marginal or muted aspects of reality" (Ioniță 2015, 176). This emphasis on realism is understandable if we take into consideration the metaphorical-allegorical character of Romanian cinema in the 80s and 90s, compared to which it is certainly realism that strikes the viewer when watching the films

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produced after 2000. However, one of the main motifs leading to this paper was a drive to leave behind and to transcend the discourse of realism on Romanian cinema for two obvious reasons. If we use realism for the whole New Wave, either we have to enlarge the meaning of the term beyond acceptable limits and thus make its informative value loose; or we have to make the differences between filmmakers disappear.

Though most critics and scholars agree that besides some similarities, the cinema of Corneliu Porumboiu represents something completely different from other directors of the Romanian New Wave (cf. the famous debate between Andrei Gorzo and Alex Leo Șerban in *Dilema Veche*[2]), they still have difficulties in leaving the terminology and the theories of realism behind. Andrei State also acknowledges that Porumboiu's cinema differs from the approach of other Romanian directors, but still analyses his works within the paradigm of realism: "his most important characteristic is formal innovation, a continuous experimentation with different forms of realism" (State 2014, 79. Translated by me, Zs. Gy.). He even identifies three forms of realism in Porumboiu's films: situational realism being the dominant form of *12:08 East of Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost?*, 2006), semantic realism being the core approach of *Police, Adjective (Poliţist, adjectiv,* 2009*)*, and conceptual realism being in the centre of *When Evening Falls on Bucharest or Metabolism (Când se lasă seara peste Bucureşti sau metabolism,* 2013) and *The Second Game* (*Al doilea joc*, 2014). (State 2014, 80–87)

Instead of continuing this discourse on realism, I will argue that Porumboiu is not a realist filmmaker, he is just theorising the possibilities of realism, especially of the filmic representation of reality. In this regard I consider that Porumboiu's films should be interpreted as what Edward S. Small calls "direct theory" in relation to experimental cinema: as films that actually do theory through moving images (Small 1994). Porumboiu's digression from the mainstream of the Romanian New Wave and the outstanding complexity of his cinema is also proven by the way in which his work became an integral part of theoretical discourses where it is analysed in the broader context of contemporary world cinema.[3]

Text and Image

2 The first three articles by Gorzo describe how Porumboiu defies the rules of conventional filmic language, reaching an "anti-spectacular realism" (Gorzo 2009a, b, c). In his answer, Alex Leo Șerban argues that while he agrees that *Police, Adjective* is an important film for Romanian cinema, in his view this is not due to its realism. (Șerban 2009).

3 Cf. Ágnes Pethő's paper, where focusing on the cinematic tableau, she compares Porumboiu's cinema to that of Roy Andersson and Joanna Hogg (Pethő 2015).

When analyzing the discursive characteristics of images and the pictorial characteristics of texts, W. J. T. Mitchell in his book entitled *Picture Theory* introduces two important terms: "metapicture" and "imagetext." However, the goal of his inquiry is not the comparison of literature and painting, rather he focuses on the cooperation of images and texts in such hybrid genres as illustrated books, comic books, films or theatre. In the case of film – he argues – the image–text relation is not a merely technical question, "but a site of conflict, a nexus where political, institutional and social antagonisms play themselves out in the materiality of representation." (Mitchell 1994, 91) So, according to Mitchell, the real issue here is not the difference between words and images, but what difference these differences and similarities make – for example how their use will affect the selection of future spectators based on their social status, and so on. His approach led me to the idea that it is worth discussing Porumboiu's cinema from the perspective of the relation of verbal and visual expression. *Police, Adjective,* for instance, is not a film about the verbal or visual nature of the filmic expression, but rather about the role of images and texts in processing, interpreting and sharing everyday experiences (as in the scenes where Cristi, the protagonist tries to understand and then to communicate what he actually perceives).

When arguing about the imagetext, Mitchell states that we have to "approach language as a medium rather than a system" (Mitchell 1994, 97), which might open the possibility to analyse verbal communication not as a closed system governed by predefined rules, but rather as a specific kind of "*material* social practice" (Mitchell 2005, 203). Furthermore, if we accept that there is no such thing as pure verbal or pure visual expression, not even in the case of the typical example of modern abstract painting, then we can speak of intermedial relations not only in the case of media generally considered being hybrid (like cinema, theatre, comic books). This approach – Mitchell continues – "[…] also permits a critical openness to the actual workings of representation and discourse: […] the starting point is with language's entry into (or exit from) the pictorial field itself, a field understood as a complex medium that is always already mixed and heterogeneous, situated within institutions, histories and discourses: the image understood, in short as an imagetext." (Mitchell 1994, 97–98) According to him, the term "imagetext" is useful because it makes possible to analyse effects and meanings that would not be visible if we regarded a discourse solely as text or image.

The second term coined by Mitchell is "metapicture," and in his theory it is similar to metalanguage. By creating the term, he asks if image is capable of grasping its own functioning in the same way as language. After analyzing different images, he concludes that "pictorial self-reference is, in other words, not exclusively a formal, internal feature that

distinguishes some pictures, but a pragmatic, functional feature, a matter of use and context. Any picture that is used to reflect on the nature of pictures is a metapicture." (Mitchell 1994, 56–57) Velazquez's famous *Las meninas* (1656) is a paradigmatic example for Mitchell who argues that it was Foucault who made it from a "simple" masterpiece of art history into a real metapicture through questioning the identity of the spectatorial position.

In the following I will try to perform a similar analysis on Porumboiu's cinema: I will consider it as a metapicture. Regarding the spectatorial position, it is interesting to observe that in *Police, Adjective* there is a similar approach to the way in which Velazquez included the objects and the subjects of the gaze (that is, the royal couple) into the picture. Analyzing the scenes of trailing and stakeout, we may observe that even when we first get the impression of watching a POV shot belonging to Cristi, after a few moments he enters the frame, thus highlighting the difference between the spectator of the film's diegetic reality and that of the filmic image, and cancelling the visual identification of the spectator's point of view with that of the protagonist.

[Fig.1.]. *Police, Adjective*

Metapictures, according to Mitchell, are not a subgenre within fine arts, but a fundamental and inherent potentiality of visual representation. The metapicture "is the place where pictures reveal and 'know' themselves, where they reflect on the intersection of visuality, language, and similitude, where they engage in speculation and theorising on their own nature and

history." (Mitchell 1994, 82) The main question, in my view, is not whether Porumboiu's films can be regarded as metapictures (because, as we have seen, according to Mitchell any image can be used as such), but rather if they reach the complexity one can find for instance in Magritte's paintings.

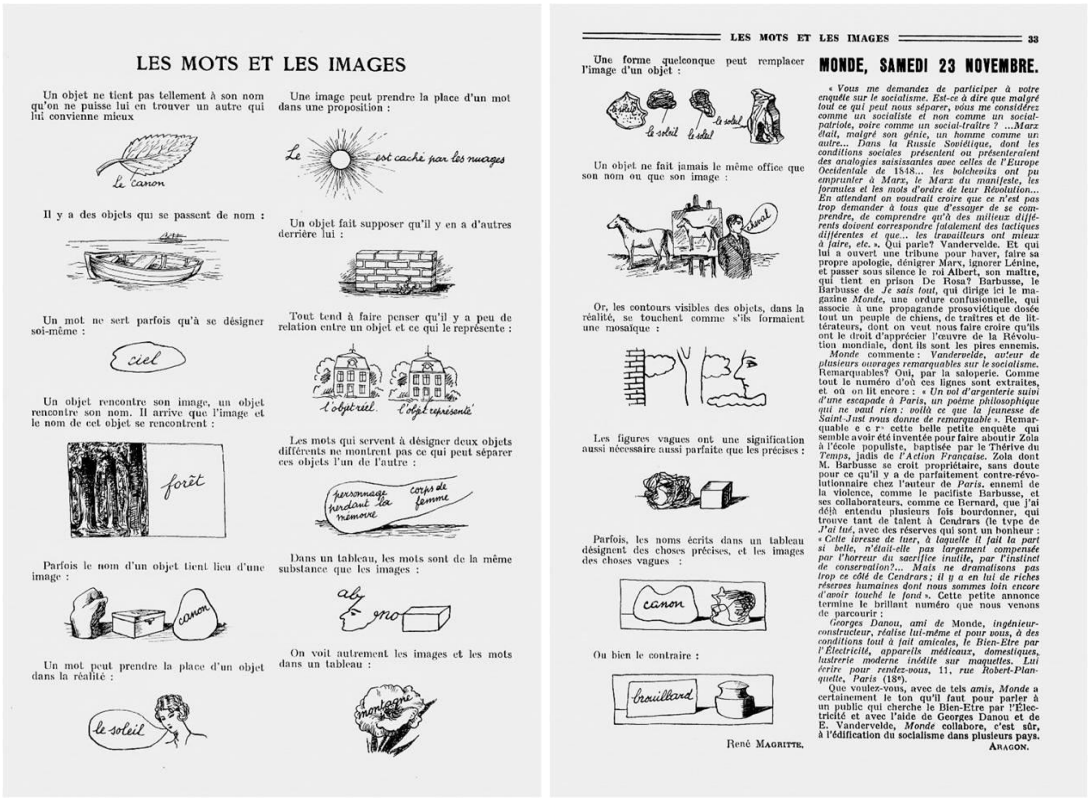
Maria Ioniță, in her remarkable paper on Porumboiu, starts her analysis with two Magritte paintings that on the one hand question the visual representability of reality and on the other hand reveal the fundamental incompatibility of the visual and the linguistic. She argues that in a similar way to Magritte, the first two films of Porumboiu (her paper was written in 2010, so no later films could be included) "represent a deliberate exploration of the limits of cinematic realism and a polemic engagement in cinema's ability to present an objective snapshot of the real." (Ioniță 2015, 173–174) One important feature of Porumboiu's cinema – which also uses long takes like Mungiu or Muntean – is that here everything takes place outside of the frame: the revolution in *12:08 East of Bucharest*, the drug dealing of the teenagers in *Police, Adjective*, the shooting of the film within the film in *Metabolism*, and finally the actual discovery of the treasure in *The Treasure (Comoara*, 2015). "All that is left in the frame is a sense of form and organization – an apparently accurate rendition of reality from which meaning has been somehow excised: a pipe which is not a pipe." (Ioniță 2015, 178)

Foucault in his famous paper entitled *This is Not a Pipe* argues that Magritte's painting *La trahison des images* (1928-29) can be understood through the analysis of the peculiar phenomenon of the calligram. "The calligram uses that capacity of letters to signify both as linear elements that can be arranged in space and as signs that must unroll according to a unique chain of sound. […] Thus the calligram aspires playfully to efface the oldest oppositions of our alphabetical civilization: to show and to name; to shape and to say; to reproduce and to articulate; to imitate and to signify; to look and to read." (Foucault 1983, 21)

We can draw the conclusion that Magritte's strategy of bringing the relation of the verbal and visual representation into focus is based on the derailment of the functioning of the two systems of significance. According to Mitchell, *La trahison des images* is a third order metapicture, where "it isn't simply that the words contradict the image, and vice versa, but that the very identities of words and images, the sayable and the seeable, begin to shimmer and shift in the composition, as if the image could speak and the words were on display." (Mitchell 1994, 68)

Therefore when Cristi in *Police, Adjective* reaches out for the limits of written and visual communication and acknowledges the incompatibility of the two, he in fact faces the modernist problem of (visual) representation. Only that his conclusion is somehow opposite

to that of Magritte, who in the 12th issue of the journal *La Révolution surréaliste* published a kind of visual dictionary through which he argued that in visual representation the images are as arbitrary as the linguistic signs and the material of (written) words and images is identical (Magritte 1929).



[Fig.2–3.]. *Les mots et les images*

The detective of Porumboiu's film, however, believes in the authenticity of his direct (visual) experience, but, with his limited verbal means, he is incapable of grasping his uncertain feelings and intuitions based on his direct, unrepresented experience of the events. For him, until the last scene of the film, the real chasm is between reality and its representation in a pre-established signification system.

Porumboiu's semiotic inquiries

In order to contextualise Porumboiu's reflections on representation we need to take a short semiotic and hermeneutic detour. As Mitchell also puts it, the central anomaly of semiotics is the icon (Mitchell 2013, 63), the most problematic element in Peirce's taxonomy of signs. Without going into details, we only point out that the most important statement of semiotics

regarding visual and verbal signs is related to the arbitrary, unmotivated nature of (symbolic) signs (that is, the lack of genuine connection between signified and signifier - Saussure 1959, 67-70) compared to the image that is closely affected by the thing it represents. When analyzing a Panzani commercial, Roland Barthes argues that if we remove all verbal signs from it, we will remain with a message that uses signs which are not originated in any institutionalised set of signs, and thus we get to a paradoxical "message without a code." These messages, says Barthes, and in fact

> all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a 'floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others. Polysemy poses a question of meaning and this question always comes through as a dysfunction […]. Hence in every society various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs; the linguistic message is one of these techniques. […] The denominative function corresponds exactly to an anchorage of all the possible (denoted) meanings of the object by recourse to a nomenclature. […] When it comes to the 'symbolic message', the linguistic message no longer guides identification but interpretation, constituting a kind of vice which holds the connoted meanings from proliferating. (Barthes 1987, 38–39)

In *Police, Adjective* the protagonist when writing his reports is forced to fix the proliferating polysemic connotations of his direct experience within the precise grammar and vocabulary of the judicial language. This process becomes even more evident later, when his superiors (first the prosecutor, than the commander) make him precisely define the meaning of the words he is using. If we are to apply Barthes's analysis to the problematics exposed in *Police, Adjective*, we should replace the image (and especially photography) with direct experience and observation – which is of course recorded and transmitted to us via moving images that – as we have pointed out earlier – do not represent Cristi's exact view of the events. The transfer here does not take place between images and texts, but between the real and its representation.

In his next movie, *Metabolism*, Porumboiu pushes this idea even further. It is a scientific image, an endoscopy lacking all stylistic and conventional artistic features (in other words: pre-established signification rules) that is used to illustrate the difference between two kinds of interpretations of an image.

[Fig.4.]. *Metabolism en doscopy*

The physician invited by the producer to analyze the recording of the endoscopy performs a professional medical analysis looking only at the images themselves, without paying too much attention to the missing verbal codes that should identify the patient and the medical office. Only afterwards, through the verbal comments of the producer it becomes clear to us that this is a forged endoscopy: an image that is completely misleading, if one ignores the anchoring function of the linguistic signs attached to it. The producer, who is the director's superior (this aspect will be developed later on), does exactly what Barthes described as the fixing of the "floating chain of signifieds."

According to Gadamer, there are two extremes of representation, the sign and the symbol between which every form of representation can be identified. "The essence of the picture is situated, as it were, halfway between two extremes: these extremes of representation are pure indication (*Verweisung*: also, reference), which is the essence of the sign, and pure substitution (*Vertreten*), which is the essence of the symbol. There is something of both in a picture." The sign completely effaces itself in order to indicate something else: "It should not attract attention to itself in such a way that one lingers over it, for it is there only to make present something that is absent and to do so in such a way that the absent thing, and that alone, comes to mind." Unlike the sign, the symbol does not only indicate or refer, but also represents in the sense that it makes present something that is not here: "Thus in representing, the symbol takes the place of something: that is, it makes something immediately present."

(Gadamer 2004, 145, 147)

As we see, for Gadamer picture is situated between these two extremes in the sense that it is capable of indicating something, but in a certain way it also stands in the place of the represented thing. As he argues, "the picture points by causing us to linger over it, for […] its ontological valence consists in not being absolutely different from what it represents but sharing in its being. […] The difference between a picture and a sign has an ontological basis. The picture does not disappear in pointing to something else but, in its own being, shares in what it represents." (Gadamer 2004, 146)

Though acknowledging its revelative characteristic, I would argue for a different schema of the three elements of representation, where the two extremes would be the sign – that is, complete indication and self-deletion – and the picture that invites us to linger over it, that is capable of conveying something about the represented without "sending us away" from the picture itself. In my view, the antithesis of complete self-deletion and indication is the emphasised "lingering over", the attraction of attention towards itself – which is the definition of the picture, according to Gadamer. In this schema symbol is to be found in the middle, for its appearance has a certain informative value in itself but its ontological status is still strictly connected to the thing it is standing for. This structure can also be argued for by looking at the arbitrariness of representation: the complete freedom of choice in the case of signs is opposed to the close relation of the picture to the pictured thing. Symbol is to be found in the middle in this respect too, because though there is a certain arbitrariness in choosing the symbols, a kind of analogous relation and a fidelity to traditional symbolic representation is always present.

Cristi's main dilemma in *Police, Adjective* is how to translate the undefined visual and direct experience into the conventionalised system of language. And this is the angle from which the scene of the song analysis gets great significance. As the silly pop song makes the protagonist nervous, his wife tries to explain that the lyrics of the song might sound silly, but she just discovers images in it, and she argues that the song tries to define love with the help of symbols. In this situation Cristi takes on the same role his bosses will play opposing him a little bit later, and he asks for precise definitions: are these pictures or symbols? The wife continues that these are images that have become symbols – in other words, pictures that, when included in a conventionalised communication system, have lost their iconic characteristics, because for the purpose of the song it is completely irrelevant what the sea or the meadow mentioned in the text actually look like. Based on this scene, we could argue that Porumboiu's main dilemma is related to the in-communicability of images: neither the wife, nor Cristi himself is able to adequately communicate the non-verbal experience of reality. He

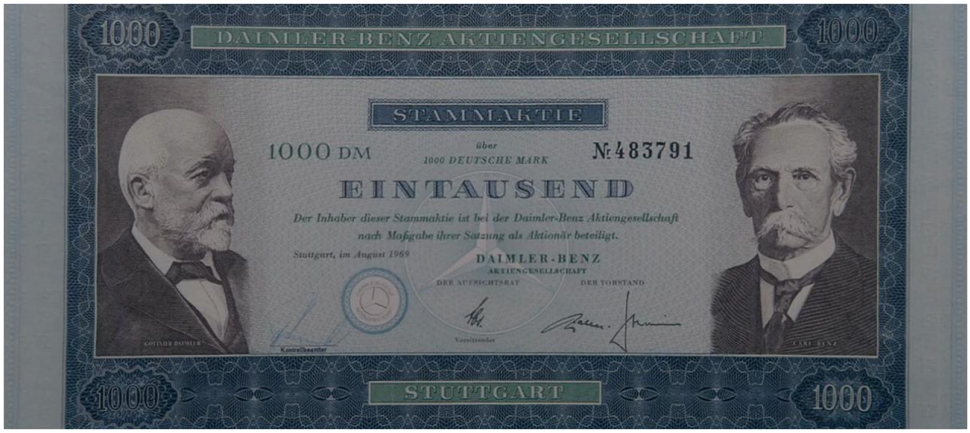
is less concerned with the inadequacy of image and reality, and more with the fact that images or visual experiences are not shareable.

At the end of his struggle with the translation of the visual experience of the observation to the verbal system of the institution Cristi is forced to accept an in-between compromise. In the last scene he is compelled to draw the map of the police raid. If we are to find its place in the aforementioned re-configured Gadamerian schema, the map is a symbol that stands between sign and image, as it uses both visual (iconic) and verbal (conventional) elements. Thus, the compromise occurring in the narrative is reflected in the choice of the form of representation.

In *The Treasure* the interpretation of the diagram of the metal detector can also be interpreted as a symbolic representation to be found somewhere between sign and image. The diagram is a specific kind of image because, though the colours and forms drawn on the monitor are conventionalised signs, the image is connected in a strictly indexical way to the reality it represents. The fact that in *The Treasure* the protagonists are analyzing and interpreting the signification systems of different metal detectors in long scenes, clearly shows the director's strong interest in intermediality. His characters in his other films also seem to be stuck between the possibilities and the limits of expression of different media: the detective in *Police, Adjective* is to be found between visual observation and textual description, whilst the director of *Metabolism* between film and its rehearsal.

In this latest film the completely untrustworthy nature of verbal, iconic and symbolic signs is finally revealed by the fact that the myth of the treasure buried before the Second World War, which initiated the whole quest in the first place, is simply incoherent with the Mercedes stocks from 1969 that were finally found. Though the treasure actually exists, its representation in the collective memory of the family is completely false. The last twist in this web of intermedial plays is that at the very end of the film, in order to make the story of the treasure credible for the children, the father transforms the signs of wealth (that is, the stocks) into an image (jewellery), creating a new type of representation.[4]

4 This transfiguration is backed up by the narrative of the film through several scenes where the father reads the tale of Robin Hood to his son.



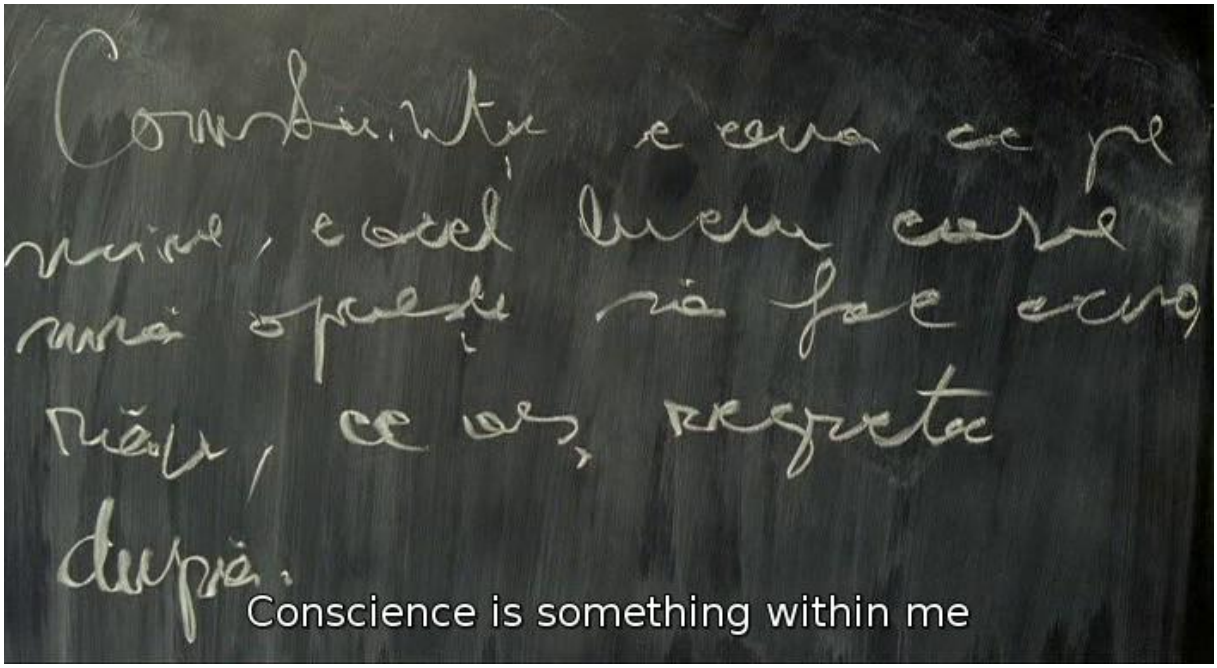
[Figs. 5–6.]. *The Treasure stocks; The Treasure jewelry*

Mediated Reality

The problem of writing, its relation to the spoken text and finally to meaning represents another issue tackled by Porumboiu's cinema. Mitchell points out that in medieval illustrated manuscripts the dialogues do not emerge from the mouth of the characters (as in modern comic books), but from the gesticulating hands – thus emphasising the primordial difference between written and spoken linguistic expression. He argues that "the medium of writing deconstructs the possibility of a pure image or pure text […]. Writing, in its physical, graphic form, is an inseparable suturing of the visual and the verbal, the 'imagetext' incarnate." (Mitchell 1994, 95) If we are to consider the written text as imagetext, it should be interpreted both as an image, that is capable of revealing something about the represented through its formal characteristics, and as an arbitrary sign that is simply indicating a pre-established set of meanings.

This problem is evidently exposed in *Police, Adjective* by the fact that, though Cristi writes his reports by hand, the commander asks in the end for the printed dictionary that becomes the site of institutionalised meaning as opposed to the vague nature of personal experience. In this

regard, it is of utmost importance that Cristi's vague definition written by hand on the blackboard takes up at a certain point the whole surface of the image. Here the form of the handwriting gets the same kind of significance as in Magritte's *La trahison des images*, where Foucault's analysis pointed out the image-like nature of the childish handwriting (Foucault 1983, 25).



[Fig. 7.]. *Police, Adjective*

In his third feature (*Metabolism*), Porumboiu explores the classical problem of the relation of form and content. All the scenes of the director and his actress/lover evolve around one issue: is there a strict connection between the inner "essence" and the expression that makes it perceivable, visible? This issue is in the middle of all discussions, be that about the difference of digital and celluloid film, the use of forks and knives or chopsticks in European or Asian cuisine, the possibility of Alina being taken as an authentic French actress in France, and so on. In this respect the scene from the beginning of the film is especially meaningful: the director lies to his producer about being ill and during the telephone conversation he presses a spoon to his stomach just to create the pain he verbally represents.

Magritte is invoked in *Metabolism* too, in the scene where during a rehearsal the director stands in a door frame turning his back towards us in the same way as the mirrored figure of Magritte's painting, *La reproduction interdite* (1937). Though the original of the mirrored figure, which is present in the foreground of the painting, cannot be seen in the film, we know

that there is a director watching this image from the set from a similar position. Thus the events of the film, the film within the film and the film we are watching are superimposed in a similar way to a palimpsest. To make this medial reflection even clearer, in a later scene Paul turns a video projector directly towards us (and toward the camera recording this scene) to watch the footage from the previous day. When the projection starts, the camera of the film we are watching (*Metabolism*) becomes the screen for the film within the film – thus, against all conventions of the cinematic apparatus, the film does look back onto its spectator, and the role of the observer and of the observed gets swapped for a short instant.

Perception, Experience and Expression

Cristi's struggle to express his experiences in *Police, Adjective*, as we have pointed out above, leads us to one of the main questions of phenomenology. As László Tengelyi explains, Husserl is concerned with the relationship of the perceptual experience and its expression, when he talks about an apparent contradiction. First he argues that even the simplest perception of an object contains a categorical surplus of meaning, that is, something that goes beyond the simple apperception of the object lying ahead of us. From the other perspective, however, Husserl also acknowledges that every linguistic phrase contains a surplus of meaning compared to the appearing object (Tengelyi 2007, 49). This means that the word and the appearance of the object it describes overlap only partially. Drawing on Husserl, Tengelyi argues for the understanding of the experience "as an event in which new meaning emerges by itself." (Tengelyi 2007, 345. Translation by me, Zs. Gy.) However, he adds that "in the life of human beings experience without expression, language and concept does not occur. This, however, does not change the fact that experience contains a *surplus of meaning* compared to the linguistic meanings that express it and that, by their own nature, can never be perfectly fitted to it. That is why they can never be brought in perfect overlapping with it." (Tengelyi 2007, 347) This lack of perfect overlapping is expressed through the story of Cristi in *Police, Adjective.*

The same issue is discussed from a different angle and with a different conclusion by Merleau-Ponty regarding the interconnected nature of expression and the expressed. He argues in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1981) that the things perceived by human consciousness cannot be divided into two separate entities (their objecthood and their meaning), as objects are given to me together with their meaning. In the same way as my bodily habits and gestures cannot be dealt with independently from their meaning, language

cannot be regarded as a signification system without a meaning. In his view it is unacceptable to consider that there is such a thing as unexpressed thought and meaningless word which are later connected through some kind of conventional system.

> In the first place speech is not the 'sign' of thought, if by this we understand a phenomenon which heralds another as smoke betrays fire. […] The word and speech must somehow cease to be a way of designating things or thoughts, and become the presence of that thought in the phenomenal world […]. Thought is no 'internal thing, and does not exist independently of the world and of words. […] Thought and expression, then, are simultaneously constituted, when our cultural store is put at the service of this unknown law, as our body suddenly lends itself to some new gesture in the formation of habit. The spoken word is a genuine gesture, and it contains its meaning in the same way as the gesture contains it. (Merleau-Ponty 1981, 181–183)

If we apply this to Porumboiu's cinema, first we have to assess the detective's communication issues in *Police, Adjective*. Cristi has a certain experience of the events that occur to him together with a specific meaning and significance, based on which he considers that the youngsters should not be punished. What the police commander does is trying to separate the objecthood of the events from their meaning in order to get an "objective" view of the facts. But in reality he does not present the pure facts freed from all meaning and interpretation, instead he links these facts to his own language and terminology, thus proving to us that Merleau-Ponty was right: things are always given to us in perception together with their meaning, and the word does not only designate the thing, the object itself, but in the same moment it brings this meaning into play.

Maria Ioniță's take on the issue of perception revolves around the comparison of vision and language, as she contends that in *Police, Adjective* "in the absence of vision, words take over" – even though the protagonist, as his reaction to his wife's song analysis shows, is sceptical towards the expressive power of language. This is how "the trajectory of *Police, Adjective* goes from subjective vision (inaccessible to the audience), to traces of this vision (Cristi's stakeouts), to poetic language mixed with music, which still maintains a certain flexibility, as well as the promise of some sort of vision […], to handwritten reports (a subjective attempt at reducing a subjective vision), to printed language – the dictionary in which the rigidity of words eliminates any need for the real", and finally the film ends with the sublimation of reality into the abstract code of the map (Ioniță 2015, 180–181).

Institutionalised meanings

The social and political aspect of mediality is discussed by Porumboiu from the perspective of

institutions that are empowered to define the rules of representation. Porumboiu's most important question is quite different from that of Goodman or Gombrich who both questioned the capacity of representation to represent reality, and were keen to define the rules that make perceivers interpret these images, symbols or texts as representations of reality (Mitchell 1994, 329–344 and 345–369). Porumboiu does not believe in the existence of such rules anymore: he is much more interested in those collective or individual institutions that are considered by society, or at least by a smaller group of people, as instances that can define the precise relationship between signs and reality. Referring to the closing scene of *Police, Adjective*, Andrei State argues that "the fight is won not by the one who masters the language, but by the one who is in the position to impose the rules of the language game. Cristi loses […] not due to his verbal incompetence, but because from the moment he accepts the grammar of the law, he is not able to modify its rules anymore". (State 2014, 85. Translation by me, Zs. Gy.) Cristi will have to accept the compromise we have presented above because he does not hold a position that is empowered to control the rules of signification: he cannot present a counter-institution to the dictionary used by the commander. Andrew Sarris seems to draw a similar conclusion in his review of the film, claiming that the endgame "contains a parable of society's mechanisms designed to bring all its citizens to heel." (Sarris 2009, 14) Thus, an argument on the semantic definition of words is transformed by Porumboiu into an analysis of social relations, and especially of the way in which those of higher ranks are able to exercise their power through the control of interpretation, without being forced to apply traditional coercive measures. Finally, we have to take note of the fact that the roots of Cristi's attitude lie deeper, as he is simply unable to contextualise individual situations, like when in his argument with his wife he is not willing to accept that the Romanian Academy has the right to change the rules of orthography.

Due to its self-referential layer, the question of the role of the film director in *Metabolism* is, from a certain perspective, even more sensitive than that of the commander in *Police, Adjective*. In his interactions with the actress it is always Paul who leads the communication process, defining the timing, the site and the structure of the rehearsals, and he also conducts the private discussions, including those that tackle intimate sides of Alina's personality. However, Paul finds himself in a different position in his relation to his producer, as she does not believe his story without evidence, and asks for the recording of the endoscopy. Though apparently the director can finally save face by forging a recording, it is clear to us that the producer, who defined the rules of the language game, does not believe him. Paul might have won the battle, but he most probably will not get away next time.

Another aspect of the same issue of hierarchical positions is brought up in *The Treasure*, where it is the operator of the metal detector who could be the key player in the semiotic game. However, due to his incompetence he has to divulge the signification system of the tools and thus makes himself dispensable. It is not by accident that the two protagonists will finally find the treasure exactly in the same spot where the owner of the property thought it was from the beginning, as if suggesting that the input of the metal detector was more or less irrelevant.

All these examples point out that according to Porumboiu the power over the signification system is the most important element of any communication. If one can define the grammar of communication, he/she can control the possible set of meanings that can be articulated through that semantic system.

On the preceding pages I have presented several theoretical discourses that seem to be relevant in discussing Corneliu Porumboiu's cinema, and I've linked them to the close analysis of the films. My goal was twofold: firstly, I wanted to prove that Porumboiu's cinema can be more adequately analyzed without the restricting terminology of realism and realist filmmaking that is most commonly associated with the Romanian New Wave. Secondly, I wanted to show that his films can also be considered direct theories (as defined by Edward Small) in the sense that the films are capable to discuss theoretical issues through their narrative and visual composition. For this purpose I built the discussion around five major topics: I have analyzed the relation of text and image; the interconnected nature of signs, images and symbols; the mediated nature of representation or the classical problem of form and content; the perceptual experience and its shareability; and finally the political role of institutionalised meanings.

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False Gods. Superhero Myths and Graphic Storytelling in Contemporary Eastern European Cinema[1]

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Abstract. The paper examines how certain contemporary Eastern European genre films use superhero myths rooted in American comic books, and apply specific techniques and methods of graphic storytelling.
Besides the visual connections between the two media, film and comics, the paper also addresses the subject of intermediality and adaptation through the representation of the protagonist, and deals with questions concerning postcolonial and postsocialist interpretations of superhero adaptations outside of the United States. It focuses on the connections and continuity between national mass culture, folklore and contemporary national genre films, and briefly examines other ways of intermediality in national genre movies (film and literature, film and video games), dealing with film in an artistic oeuvre or the larger context of big-budget national genre movies produced for both local and international markets.
The interpretations focus primarily on *Shaman Vs. Ikarus* (György Pálfi, Hungary, 2002) and *Black Lightning* (Dmitry Kiselev – Aleksandr Voitinsky, Russia, 2009), but also hint at other non-American superhero movies (e.g. *Gagamboy*, *Krrish*), Russian genre films (*Night Watch*, *Hardcore Henry*) and Hungarian art films (*Taxidermia*), as well as the possibility of reading certain Eastern European fantasy films as tales of national superheroes.

Keywords: superheroes, popular myths, visual narrative, comic books, masculinity, postsocialism

We live in the age of superheroes. No complicated explanations are necessary to see that films involving superheroes – mainly adaptations of stories from another medium, such as comic books – are highly successful on the global market, and should be considered an important trend of contemporary mainstream cinema. This is what the success of Hollywood consists in, a success mainly of a financial nature. Before the 2000s only one comic book adaptation finished as the top-grossing film of the year on the American domestic market. After 2000 the same happened four times, and all four of those films were superhero movies.[2] The tendency is also visible on the international market: since 2000 two comic book adaptations (both of them superhero movies) have gained the position of the highest-grossing film of a given year.[3]

[1] This work was supported by the project entitled *Space-ing Otherness. Cultural Images of Space, Contact Zones in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Film and Literature* (OTKA NN 112700).
[2] See on this Box Office Mojo: Yearly Box Office – Domestic. *http://boxofficemojo.com/yearly/* Last accessed 06. 07. 2016. As of July 2016, another superhero movie, *Captain America 3* leads as the top grossing film of the year.
[3] See on this Box Office Mojo: Yearly Box Office – Worldwide. *http://boxofficemojo.com/yearly/?view2=worldwide&view=releasedate&p=.htm*. Last accessed 06. 07. 2016.

Without exception, these films are megapics produced by major Hollywood studios on a high budget, which means they are distributed globally on as many markets as possible. This also means that they influence popular cinema outside of the United States as well. My paper focuses on this subject: not the American superhero movies, but the ones produced outside of the US, by smaller national film industries which can be considered peripheral from the point of view of the American audiences and distribution. The term "peripheral" needs to be explained and clarified instantly, since by adapting American superhero stories the national film industries in case open a "third space" through hybridity, mixing elements of both cultures, thus attempting to destroy the oppositions between "centre" and "periphery" (Wang and Yueh-yu Yeh 2005).

In this paper I aim to examine how the superhero genre and characters are interpreted, adapted and changed in the context of two Eastern European film industries. How do the writers and directors create an American-type superhero in their own national environment and local culture? How do they aim to reposition their own national film industry on the global market through these characters and films? Are there any stylistic elements kept in the respective films from comic books, the original medium of the most famous superheroes? Do the resulting films function as superhero parodies or "serious" superhero movies (meaning superhero stories played for a dramatic effect instead of comedy)? And last but not least: do these national superheroes function as tools of criticising and opposing the West?

Who Are the Superheroes and What Do They Do in Eastern Europe?

Superheroes are globally present and open to interpretation. All nations, ethnicities and cultures create their own superheroes – in fact, certain mythic figures and characters of national folklore can be considered superheroes in the first place. This is true in spite of the fact that most English-language theoretical works on the subject mainly consider comic book characters created from the 1930s onwards when defining superheroes. The bulk of these works define superheroes as fictional characters with extraordinary physical and/or mental abilities, who use their skills protecting not just their loved ones, but large groups (even societies) of average people. As Fingeroth argues, among the defining characteristics of superheroes "the most obvious things are: some sort of strength of character (though it may be buried), some system of (generally-thought-to-be) positive values, and a determination to, no matter what, protect those values" (Fingeroth 2004, 17). Another definition states that "the main theme that can be applied to superhero narratives is the cult of the individual; that is the

focus on a single person with a great kind of power, usually a combination of mental and physical strength, who succeeds against all odds" (Gray II and Kaklamanidou 2011, 4).

It is safe to say though that there is a certain theoretical gap or ambiguity present here: if we consider Batman a superhero, a man with above-average physical skills, a detective's mind and of considerable wealth, who vows to protect his fellow men after his personal loss, why don't we consider Zorro a superhero as well? After all, he can be described with exactly the same words. This conflict between different definitions remains unresolved. One can only assume that American scholars tend to forget about the fact that the concept of the American-type superheroes can be connected to other nations' folklore, fables and popular culture. This makes it easier to adapt these characters to local contexts, while the adaptation itself inherently calls for the use of postcolonial theoretical concepts and methods, both because of the nexus between the peripheral and the globally present Hollywood film industries, and the symbolic role of the superheroes as popcultural agents of American military, cultural and ideological dominance over the rest of the world.

Adapted, "nationalized" superheroes can serve multiple purposes. Evidently, their creators are tempted by the promise of financial success: since superhero movies form a globally popular group of films, it's only natural that film industries outside of Hollywood also try to create their own superheroes. Ideally, the new characters will interest local audiences (because they operate in local spaces and contexts), and will be marketable on the global market (because the superhero genre is popular almost everywhere).

The promise of success on both the local and international markets clearly led the distribution plan of a number of recent non-American superhero films. The big-budget Bollywood production of *Krrish* (Rakesh Roshan, 2006) and its sequel, *Krrish 3* (Rakesh Roshan, 2013) were distributed on many foreign markets, in 8 and 13 countries, respectively.[4] *Krrish* grossed 1,4m USD in India, and another 16m worldwide, which shows the film's worldwide appeal.[5] The Russian superhero movie *Black Lightning* (Chernaya molniya, Dmitriy Kiselev, Aleksandr Voytinskiy, 2009), which I will be examining in fuller detail later on, was distributed in 30 countries either in cinemas, on DVD or on television.[6]

However, these iconic characters of Western, particularly American popular culture have a different significance in national-peripheral cultures: they can be interpreted as symbols of

[4] Data according to the IMDb pages of the films.
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0432637/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_ov_inf; . Last accessed 11. 07. 2016.
[5] See on this Box Office Mojo: Krrish.
http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=krrish.htm. Last accessed 11. 07. 2016.
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1569364/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_ov_inf. Last accessed 11. 07. 2016.

Western cultural dominance. As the author of a paper on a recent Mexican superhero comic book puts it: "[...] the modern moral code inherent in the superhero profile was not built originally on philosophical universals, but on a national ethos. Thus, a close relationship can be discerned between a national, status quo vision of modernity and the emergent twentieth century cultural figure of the superhero: 'the American Way' of individualism and capitalist democracy in superhuman form, dressed up in tights for good measure" (Campbell 2009, 29). An "ethnicized" superhero (of American origin, but operating in local spaces and contexts) means something different in countries with historical pasts as colonies, or historical and ideological opposition to the West. In the cases of Indian, Russian or Japanese superheroes, the symbolic-ideological position of the protagonist becomes essential, and can be analysed using methods of postcolonial or postsocialist theories. In fact, simply the adaptation of the superhero can be seen as a gesture of mimicking, which contributes to the deconstruction of Western cultural hegemony (Dudrah 2006).

A mixture of concepts from these theoretical frameworks ought to be applied when dealing with Eastern European superheroes, because both the Hungarian short film *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus* (*Táltosember Vs. Ikarus*, György Pálfi, 2002) and the Russian feature film *Black Lightning* follow the same narrative method: they use the archetypical character and storyline of the American superhero to define their relation to the Soviet past.

Shadows of Our Life in the Eastern Bloc

Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus[7] is an 18-minute Hungarian short film directed by György Pálfi. It was screened as part of the omnibus project *A Bus Came...* (*Jött egy busz*, 2003), which consisted of five short films directed by five then-upcoming Hungarian directors. In a sense *A Bus Came...* was a showcase of Hungarian talent in film and new directions of Hungarian cinema, which highlights the importance of the fact that Pálfi used the superhero genre, then unknown in Hungarian cinema, for his approach.

His film is inspired by the ancient Greek myth of Ikarus and his father, Daedalus. In Pálfi's version Daedalus, here called Daeda and presented as a comic-book supervillain, tries to resurrect his son, Ikarus, and presumably gain control over the world. His son, though, is not a person but the collective entity of the bus vehicles used for public transport in present-day Budapest – a special brand of Socialist-era buses still in use, called Ikarus. The only one who

[7] Internet sources differ in the English title of the film, which is sometimes cited as *Shaman Vs. Icarus*. The pun in Sha-Man is obviously a reflection on common superhero names.

can stop Daeda is Sha-Man, the superhero of Budapest, a middle-aged, caring father in his daily life, and a fearless superhero at night. Sha-Man's name comes from the word "sámán" – shamans were medieval priests of Hungarian tribes before the country adopted Christianity, and are part of Hungarian national folklore. Thus the film connects local and "international" myths, tales of old times and the 20th century.

Even the narrative summary of Pálfi's film reveals that *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus* is indeed a superhero parody, which partly explains why Pálfi was so keen on using self-reflexive, comicbook-inspired stylistic elements throughout the film. According to the director's approach, superheroes are evidently parodistic characters in the Eastern European context, both because of the different cultural background, the lack of present-day mythic tales in a country which endured so much suffering during the 20th century, and the insufficient financial and technical background to present on-screen superheroes, using up-to-date special effects. Thus parody is the proper genre for a Hungarian superhero tale, and because parodies are often considered inherently self-reflexive films (mixing different genres, playing with narrative tools and visual elements), Pálfi is not afraid to apply a self-conscious, often alienating visual inventory. As Gehring argues, "self-consciousness represents the ultimate parody prick, since nothing affectionately deflates a celebrated genre or auteur faster than a comic reminder that this is, indeed, only a movie" (Gehring 1999, 16).

The self-reflexive style in question comes directly from the visual inventory of comics, which is a postmodernist trick in itself, since *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus* is not an adaptation of a single comic book. Mainstream comic book adaptations usually tend to leave behind all stylistic elements of the original medium, because visual tools, which are perfectly normal and mainstream in comics, become transgressive and alienating on screen. Comic book films which use some of these techniques are typically parodies, e. g. the American *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (Edgar Wright, 2010), with its split-screens and visible sound effects, or *Gagamboy* (Erik Matti, 2004), produced in the Philippines, using frequent axial jumps.[8]

The dominating visual tools of *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus* are diegetic frames and the split-screen effect. Pálfi and his DoP, Gergely Pohárnok constantly play with split screens of different shapes and numbers, resembling comic book panels, guiding the audience through an intimate dinner scene in an apartment using at least three split screens with moving cameras and characters, who are drifting from one screen to another from unexpected directions, confusing the audience in their spatial orientation. In other scenes, the director creates diegetic frames:

[8] A notable exception is Ang Lee's *Hulk* (2003), which is not a superhero parody, but uses axial jumps to highlight the split personality of the protagonist.

the space inside of a bus, divided into different sections by the stanchions, or the long-shot of a bus garage, where the separate garage doors form separate on-screen frames [Figs.1–4]. These visual tools and some computer-generated images form the visual excess of *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus*, and move the film closer to the self-reflexive approach of the superhero genre.

[Figs.1–4.]. *Split-screens and diegetic frames in* Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus.

Beside this unique form of "graphic storytelling,"[9] *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus* is notable because of its place in Pálfi's auteuristic oeuvre, the way it introduces superheroes into contemporary Eastern European cinema: as agents of the auteurs' art cinema. The director sets up a mythical war in our everyday world, and uses precisely the dull objects of this world (buses, especially) as symbols of this battle of ancient origins. The name Ikarus connects and mixes two different pasts: the mythic past of Hellenic gods and the real past of Soviet oppression.[10] The parodistic effect partly comes from the fact that the banal, everyday situations of present-day Hungary are stylised into the setting of a supernatural battle – and also from Pálfi's joke about building the myth of the socialist decades of Hungary. Thus *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus* puts a postmodern twist on two separate "heroic ages."

Stylising real past and real present into mythical, folkloristic time and space is a method Pálfi follows frequently in his films. Without analysing further his oeuvre, I would only like to hint

[9] I use this term based on one of Will Eisner's seminal works on comic books (Eisner 1996).

[10] The situation is even more complicated than that: indeed, Ikarus was a brand built under communist rule and encouraged by the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it's a Hungarian, not a Soviet brand. Ikarus buses were products of the Hungarian industry, and were exported into communist countries as far as Cuba.

at the timeless, or rather out-of-time Hungarian village of his debut feature film *Hukkle* (2002); the transformation of landmark historical moments of the 20th century into a symbolic family tale of generations in *Taxidermia* (2006); the magical-realist events in present-day Budapest in *Free Fall* (*Szabadesés*, 2014); and his unfinished project based on Toldi, a famous Hungarian heroic saga from the 19th century, envisioned as a "medieval action film." The adaptation of the superhero character fits perfectly into this group of films, which build bridges between realistic and mythic worlds and tropes.

Putin's Own Superhero

When analysing the Russian superhero movie, a question arises: can postcolonial theories be applied to the cases of postsocialist countries, especially Russia? The problem is contradictory. On the one hand, the Soviet Union acted as a colonising power in the Eastern Bloc after World War II, while simultaneously the Soviet state oppressed and deformed the Russian culture.[11] After the fall of the Soviet Union, Western cultural influence left its mark on the Russian film industry and the films' attendance, just like in every other country in Eastern Europe: in 1985, 40 Soviet films were attended by more than 5 million people, while in 1994 not a single Russian film was seen by more than 500.000 people (Larsen 1999, 193).

Angles of postcolonial interpretations seem to be relevant in the case of *Black Lightning* for two reasons. Russian stereotypes about the peoples of the ex-Soviet countries are still lingering in the film, echoing the colonising attitude of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, contemporary Russia is similar to other ex-colonies in the sense that Eastern Europe is often considered a homogeneous geopolitical unit and the Other of Western Europe (Mazierska et al. 2013, 22).

The cultural dominance of the United States, mirrored by the number of attendance of films screened in Russia, focused attention on the significance of producing genre films. In the 1990s many Russian film critics and other members of the film industry shared the opinion that it was essential to produce genre films to attract audiences, if they aimed to revitalise the Russian film industry (Seckler 2009). Like other national film industries in Europe, Russian filmmakers realised they had to learn the rules of professional genre filmmaking if they wanted to compete with American genre films. This task was not easy at all – as the author of

[11] On the differences and similarities between postcolonial and postsocialist theories, and the appliance of postcolonial theoretical framework in the case of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, see Chari and Verdery (2009).

a paper on contemporary Russian genre film emphasises, "not a single Russian film was able to reach high professional standards" (Komm 2002).

Among others, Dmitriy Komm wrote about the demand for a new cinematic national myth, which could serve as the foundation of the local genre film production. To follow his train of thought: the superhero genre is perfectly suitable for creating modern national myths, as seen by the present-day popularity of superhero characters created in America in the 1930s. Black Lightning, the superhero saving Russia, emphasises the moral superiority of the "Russian Way," the refusal of the Western capitalist logic, also functioning as an answer for American genre films. Dmitriy Kiselev and Aleksandr Voytinskiy's *Black Lightning* uses motifs from several contemporary American blockbusters, such as the *Transformers* films, but first and foremost, *Spider-Man*: the protagonist's trauma and motivations, the sense of responsibility fuelled by guilt are elements directly lifted from Spider-Man's origin story.[12]

Dima is a university student who lives with his parents in a poor working-class family. As a birthday gift from his father, he gets a used, dingy Volga car. Soon he realises that the car can fly. Dima starts working as a flower courier to make some money with his marvellous car, which was engineered by Soviet scientists with a new, still-unknown source of energy decades before. One evening Dima has a meeting with his father, but before they would meet, his father is stabbed by a criminal. Dima doesn't know his father is the victim, and, although a passer-by is urging him to call, he fails to call an ambulance in time. Because of his carelessness, his father dies. Realising this, Dima decides to use his flying car to patrol the streets and the sky of Moscow, to protect his fellow men and fight for justice.

The protagonist doesn't have supernatural physical abilities, his power comes from a technological marvel, the flying car (which resembles the robot cars from *Transformers*, or even Marty McFly's DeLorean from *Back to the Future*). In his everyday life Dima is in many ways similar to Peter Parker (Spider-Man): he is considered a nerd in school, and is frustrated by the financial background of his family. An essential part in Spider-Man's history is the fact that Peter Parker first wants to make money with his supernatural abilities – this motif is also very important in *Black Lightning*.

There are two characters in the film who influence Dima to think that if he wants to move up the social ladder, and win the heart of the girl he wants, he needs to focus on financial profit. His schoolmate, Max is bragging with his new toys all the time: his Mercedes car and his iPhone are Western status symbols, which mesmerise girls and which other boys are envious

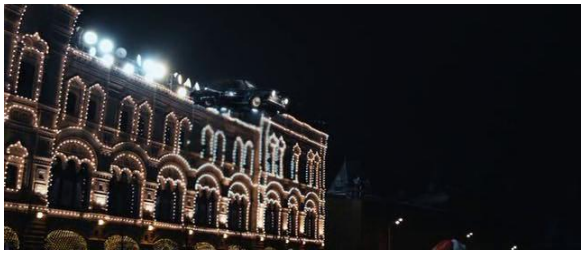
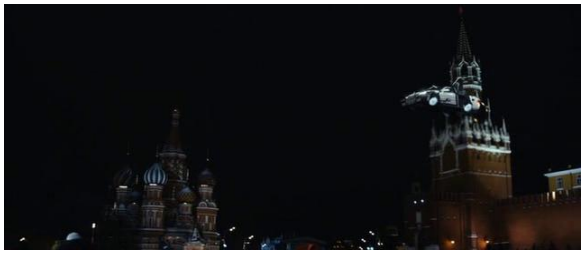
[12] For the earliest Spider-Man stories, see Lee and Ditko (2006).

of. Dima fancies his new classmate, Nastya, and thinks he needs the same artefacts symbolising wealth to impress her. As a flower courier, he starts to make money – he's more successful than his colleagues, since using the flying Volga he doesn't have to trudge in traffic –, and spends his first wages on an iPhone to get Nastya's attention. I am emphasising the clash between Soviet and Western technology, because later in the story, while Dima is fighting to save Nastya and other people, Max can do nothing but follow his friend's actions on the news, staring at the screen of his smartphone. Thus the narrative role of gadgets and technology is to underline the conflict between two cultures and two ideologies: Russian technology helps fight the good fight, while Western technology only creates a simulacrum, a secondary channel to follow events in real life.

Another character, a millionaire businessman, Mr. Kuptsov, also encourages the protagonist to focus more on material goods and moneymaking. In his lecture given at Dima's class, Mr. Kuptsov states that the world only moves ahead if everyone minds their own business, instead of helping others. He offers one million rubles to the student who promises him: when they have a chance next time, they *won't* help another person in need. The character is perfectly defined by Slavoj Žižek's term, who applied Lacan's dichotomy of intellectuals, the "fools" and the "knaves" to members of the European intelligentsia after the fall of the Soviet Union. According to Žižek, the "knave" is "a neoconservative advocate of the free market who cruelly rejects all forms of social solidarity as counterproductive sentimentalism" (Žižek 1997, 45).

However, Kuptsov is not only an "advocate of the free market," he's also the antagonist of the story. He is looking to find the flying car to lay his hands on its core, the "nanocatalyzer." With it he plans to drill deeper into the ground than anyone before him, and extract more and more resources from the body of "Mother Russia." The Lacanian-Žižekian psychoanalytical interpretation seems to be plausible also because we find many phallic symbols in the story, which can be considered weapons in the men's battle for saving or ruling Russia. Kuptsov's headquarters is called Diamond Tower, while Dima's father works as a tram driver: the two opposing parties may be defined as representatives of phallic objects which strike through the city in vertical or horizontal shapes. The flying car destroys this opposition, as it is able to move through the city in every direction, on ground and in the sky. Upon realising that Dima is Black Lightning, Kuptsov kidnaps the scientists who once built the flying Volga, and commands them to build another car: this time, a flying Mercedes. Thus Kuptsov becomes an advocate of the West not just in his ideologies, but also by his iconology. In the end, the clash of the Volga and the Mercedes over the Red Square becomes the battle between two

ideologies, two world orders [Figs.5–6]. This is why *Black Lightning* is not only a "harmless" superhero movie: as I later argue, it is a key production in the battle against Western popcultural dominance, that is, the flow of Hollywood genre cinema in international markets.

[Figs.5–6.]. *Flying Volga Vs. flying Mercedes above the Red Square in* Black Lightning.

While the evil businessman – and Dima's dumb but well-meaning classmate, Max – are advocates of an ideology strongly associated with the West and presented as false and unjust, the marvelous car which makes Dima a hero is an innovation of the Soviet Union. Its innovators were scientists working on the technological advance of the Soviet Union, and the Volga is a distinctly Soviet brand, which was distributed in all countries of the former Eastern Bloc.[13] The most curious element in *Black Lightning* is that it not only represents innovations of the Soviet Union as useful tools and glorious achievements of the Russian culture, but through these the film builds continuity between the Soviet past and the present-day Putinist political system. When his father gives the Volga to Dima, he proudly adds that "Putin has the same car." This means the creators of the film do not only build an opposition between Russia and the West (mainly, the United States) in the ideological and cultural spaces, but they also add a political interpretation. *Black Lightning* bears proudly the heritage of the Soviet popular culture, and is positioned as a tentpole production among the new Russian genre films, defying the dominance of Hollywood – it's role is parallel to Putin's actions who also aims to defy Western interests and create his own "Russian way." This problematic and simplified opposition is heavily criticised by Muireann Maguire in her analysis of the film: "*Black Lightning* attacks market capitalism, but it offers no replacement morality besides sentimentality, and no social alternatives except nostalgia" (Maguire 2010).

As Russia fits into the role of the "colonized" party who rebels against cultural oppression through criticising the capitalist ideology associated with the West, *Black Lightning* also

[13] "The Volga Gaz-21 is very much a Soviet hero-car. Its large-scale production signaled the Soviet Union's postwar economic recovery. Last manufactured in 1979, the car now recalls the good old days prior to perestroika – a living symbol of the sturdiness, durability and economy of Soviet craftsmanship" (Maguire 2010).

reveals the colonising attitude and reflexes of the late Soviet Union in its storyline and character building. Clearly this is the case with Dima's boss, a Georgian florist called Bahram, who is represented as a penny-pincher exploiting his employees. As if this stereotype were also a tool of nostalgia for the Soviet world order: *Black Lightning* is pervaded by the enthusiasm over Soviet technological advance, anticapitalist (antiimperialist) ideology and an ethnicist viewpoint echoing the hierarchy of the former Eastern Bloc. The adaptation of the superhero in this context signals the claim to defeat the Americans with their own popcultural icon, with their own "weapons." The remorse of the protagonist, adapted from the myth of Spider-Man, is not only felt for the father's death: figuratively, it is a sense of guilt for the fall of the Soviet Union, and the protagonist vows to act as a superhero to give new meaning to the values of the Soviet past in the present.

As I have mentioned earlier, *Black Lightning* cannot only be considered a Russian answer to the globally popular Hollywood superhero films because of the ideological opposition of the story and the adaptation of the superhero myths, but also due to its production budget and distribution. Its budget was roughly 15 million dollars, and was distributed in 30 countries. This means that it was a big-budget production in Russian terms, and was intended to be distributed on the global market – apparently this is why the internationally well-known Timur Bekmambetov produced the film. Also, *Black Lightning* is not the only Russian film which uses Western genre patterns or adapts other media to appease both the local and the Western market. Again, I would only hint at other films of this pattern, instead of examining them deeper: Bekmambetov's series of vampire fantasy, *Night Watch* (*Nochnoy dozor*, 2004) and its sequels were also successfully distributed abroad, while *Hardcore Henry* (2015), again with Bekmambetov as a producer, aims to exhibit the forms of masculinity supported by Putin's Russia through a POV action film (Sepsi 2016). In this aspect *Hardcore Henry* is very much similar to *Black Lightning*, as the superhero film also demonstrates the contemporary Russian way of masculine hierarchy: Nastya is constantly floating between different men who try to win her by showing off money, or demonstrating their physical strength. Based on these two films, all a man has to have is power, be that economic or physical, and nothing else.[14]

While *Black Lightning* evidently can't compete with American megapics on the international markets, the use of the superhero character shows the endeavour to appease global audiences. The creators of the film use a Western archetype, a superhero story based largely on *Spider-*

[14] Looking back at *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus* from the gender perspective, it's evident that the superhero character is seen as a confident family man and a responsible father, which also builds towards the traditional and conservative male roles associated with the superhero genre.

Man, to oppose a simplified capitalist ideology associated with the West, and interpret their moral-ideological disagreement in the present-day political and social spaces. This is how the American-type superhero becomes a tool of explicit criticism of the West.

Where Are the Other Supermen of Eastern Europe?

This paper is a step of an ongoing research which focuses on superhero films made outside of the United States. I wouldn't say that many countries produce as many superhero films as to create their own versions of superhero mythology – maybe Japan is the only country outside the U.S. where so many superhero films were made that the group of films could be considered to form a distinct superhero mythology.

Eastern Europe particularly lacks superhero films. I chose a short film from Hungary to examine because so far no superhero feature films were produced there. One of the directions of this research would be to focus on the cinematic folklore tales of the Eastern European countries to see if these films work with storyline and character patterns close to a superhero story.[15] Also, it's fascinating to see what kind of superhero films are yet to be produced in the respective countries.

However, *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus* and *Black Lightning* are both exciting objects of study in the context of postcommunist memory of the past – an important aspect regarding contemporary Eastern European works, and one connected to nationalist discourses. Regarding these contexts, the difference between the cultural position of the two films becomes evident. *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus* is essentially arthouse cinema: it playfully draws parallels between an ancient, global myth and a modern, local one, emphasising that a way of dealing with the past is to convert it to fantastic and, ultimately, harmless mythology.

On the other hand, *Black Lightning* is a somewhat propagandistic effort to establish the power of contemporary Russian popular culture, strongly connected to Russian national identity. It is equally important here to make peace with the past, but the methods and conclusions are different: Soviet times are presented as an era of Russian dominance. It is an era worthy to be remembered with nostalgia, and, partly, worthy to be recreated.

Beside these distinctly Eastern European problems, other patterns of international superhero adaptations can be seen even through such a small number of films. The choices between a

[15] For example, Marcell Jankovics's 1981 animation adaptation of the folk tale *Fehérlófia* (*Son of the White Mare*) could be considered, from many aspects, an early superhero film. I would like to thank Zsolt Gyenge for this observation.

"serious" superhero film and a parody, the targeting of a local or a global audience, the use of local folk myths or the adaptation of Western stories, the relation towards the Hollywood system and the American popcultural dominance are issues which have to be dealt with whenever national film industries decide to produce superhero films. These are the questions that had to be answered by the creators of both *Sha-Man Vs. Ikarus* and *Black Lightning*. Their approach shows how the narrative elements of superhero stories and the stylistic tools of comic books move national genre cinemas towards new, fresh and sometimes deeply political directions in the Eastern European context.

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Myth and Stylistic Excess: Moments of Slippage in Contemporary Serbian Film

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Abstract. Due to the stereotypical image of the Balkans perpetuated by the discursive dominance of the Western perspective, Serbian filmmakers are constantly faced with decisions about dealing with expectations. Mirroring stereotypes and subverting them in order to weaken the postcolonial discourse is a constant issue for Serbian film. As subversion strongly relies on ambiguity, it is often the visual style of a film that carries the subversive undertone. The unique stylistic features of Serbian film – which can be grasped in its attraction to visual excess – provide an opportunity for filmmakers to create a moment of slippage as defined by Homi Bhabha that offers an escape from the compelling world of stereotypes. This self-imposed stylistic otherness acts as a defense mechanism against the oppression of the Western gaze, and in the case of certain films, goes hand-in-hand with a cultural (religious or mythological) reference – such as the appearance of the weeping painting of Christ in *The Knife* (Nož, 1998), the Fates in *Vukovar* (Vukovar, jedna priča, 1994), the myth of Iphigenia in *The Tour* (Turneja, 2008) and the demiurge in *The Enemy* (Neprijatelj, 2012). Such cultural motifs serve as excuses to provoke a stylistic moment far-fetched from the films' more or less consistent realism, and as they are inconsistent with the constant appropriation of stereotypes that most of these films seem to succumb to, can be interpreted as stylistic revolts against discursive tyranny. Pointing them out may lead us to a more nuanced view of the last decades of Serbian cinema, constantly balancing between subversion and appropriation.

Keywords: postcolonialism, stereotype, mimicry, Homi K. Bhabha, Serbian film, Balkan cinema

An Introduction to Serbian Cinema's War Against Stereotypes

Since the breakup of Yugoslavia that resulted in the devastating civil war of the 1990s, Serbian film has been carrying the burden of having to redefine not only itself as a national cinema with unique attributes and cultural roots, but also the perception of the nation to which it belongs, in the eyes of its own people as well as outsiders. Serbian films notoriously engage in the discourse that revolves around the hierarchical relationship between East and West, Balkans and Europe, civilised and barbaric. As stereotypes are played back to their originators, most cinematic works, particularly those of the turbulent 1990s, appear to do more to strengthen the postcolonial discourse than attempt to dismantle it.

At first glance, the majority of recent Serbian films simply reiterate Western stereotypes of the aggressive, uncivilised, barbaric Balkan man and the frivolous, hedonistic, carnivalesque nature

of the Balkan lifestyle.[1] If we were to do a quick roundup of the themes and motifs that are commonly thought to constitute Serbian film, we would arrive at precisely what the West desires to see in Balkan works of self-representation: a secluded land with no connection to the rest of the world, ruled by barbaric customs, violence and crime, where the superpotent maniacs that are the male protagonists live their uninhibited lives. The assumption that this is what a Serbian film is supposed to look like comes from the West's general lack of knowledge about the region and its perception as a distant, exotic, foreign land perpetuated for decades by the media, as well as contemporary films from Serbia itself that do, in fact, reiterate stereotypes, either to comply with the expectations of international audiences, or on the contrary, to subvert the image that is mirrored back to them (whether Kusturica belongs to the former or the latter category, I leave it up to the reader to decide). When aiming to go against these expectations, perhaps even dismantle some of these stereotypes, and at the same time produce a commercially viable piece of cinema, the filmmaker's options are limited. Due to the ambivalent nature of stereotypes and the thin, almost undetectable line between what is "real" or "authentic" and what is not, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the filmmaker to think outside the box. Marko Živković is right to point out in his book on the Serbian National Imaginary that there is a limit to what, for a given individual or collective subjectivity, it is possible to imagine (Živković 2011, 77–82). It is obviously not the filmmakers' lack of creativity or inability to portray their own society authentically that results in stereotypical depictions of the region. It is the boundaries of the Serbian national imaginary that confine the filmmaker to a world that uses stereotypes as a language. Any attempt to take up a fight against these stereotypes would have to come from within, by first learning to speak the language.

As Marko Živković notes, the Serbian responses to Western stereotyping can be placed on a spectrum that ranges between the complete and utter acceptance of the West's negative valuation, through processes that Živković identifies as minstrelisation or voluntary self-denigration, to the maximal exploitation of the positive valuation, through a process known as self-exoticising (Živković 2011, 826–832, 845). The former is the result of a submissive resignation to the discursive oppression of the West; the latter requires a more optimistic as well as opportunistic approach, as it regards stereotypes as opportunities that can be turned to one's

[1] For instance, Emir Kusturica's *Underground* (Podzemlje, 1995), Srđan Dragojević's *Wounds* (Rane, 1998) or Goran Paskaljević's *Cabaret Balkan* (Bure Baruta, 1998) are often accused of adopting the image of the violent Balkans described above.

own advantage. Of course, in practice, the two extreme poles of the spectrum are never actually manifested, as each response (or in our case, each film) demonstrates a mixture of the two attitudes in different proportions. What is more, both attitudes provide fertile terrain for subversion. Stereotypes, in order to be subverted, must be adapted first. As Dušan I. Bjelić writes based on Fredric Jameson's thoughts, subversion exposes and undermines a hegemonic system of stereotypes by means of performative destabilisation (Bjelić 2005, 104). Furthermore, as Milja Radovic notes, subversion invites the viewer to reconsider ideology, but always in a subtle and ambiguous way, through adopting the prevailing ideology as well as its aesthetics to use them as tools of subversion (Radovic 2009, 6).

As subversion is always subtle and ambivalent, it is open to interpretation: and the most subtle tool for providing layers of meaning is style. Even though an attraction to certain tones, such as black humour and a sort of bittersweet, grotesque "magic realism" (a misleading term often used to describe Emir Kusturica's films) can be discovered in recent Serbian cinema, there is no uniform stylistic tendency that could be outlined. However, what these films do have in common is their obsession with stylistic excess, which stretches from the exuberant use of motifs through the exaggerated depiction of feelings and passions to the visual exploitation of violence.[2] The use of excess as a stylistic tool is a trait that makes these films distinct and recognisable, and very much unlike the cinemas of neighbouring countries (especially the characteristically minimalistic cinema of Bosnia and Romania, countries which, in the eyes of the ignorant Westerner, fall into the same vague and generalised category of "the Balkans" as Serbia, without recognising that each of these national cinemas retain their own unique characteristics). It is within the context of this attribute, the use of excess that I believe Serbian cinema can find ways to take back its position as a subject (as opposed to a passive object being described from the outside) and reclaim its own perspective.

To better understand the process of subversion and its relevance to our topic, let us turn to the methods and concepts of postcolonial theory. The type of subversion that we are about to

[2] To put it simply, when watching these films, the viewer is bound to get the impression that there is too much of everything: too much colour, too much noise, too much music, too much laughter, too much crying, too much blood, too much nudity, too much swearing, too much makeup and so on, resulting in an extremely heightened sense of overabundance of everything that appears on the screen. It may not be wrong to presume that this unquenchable desire for excess (and using excess in order to send a message about serious matters such as the state of a society) is now a tradition of Serbian cinema, as it first appeared in the radically outspoken, provocative, ruthlessly taboo-violating films of the Yugoslav black wave that did not shy away from portraying anything at all on screen (with special regard to the works of Dusan Makavejev).

identify in a number of recent Serbian films is closely connected with phenomena best described by Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry. The former refers to the ambivalent nature of the postcolonial identity constructed by the merging of the Self and the Other, where the two identities exist side by side, in a dynamic discourse of differences, without integrating or dissolving (Bhabha 1994, 25, 112). The latter signifies a complex process through which the colonised – or, to use a more generic term, the oppressed – imitates the culture of the coloniser – the oppressor –, adhering to its system of expectations. However, mimicry is defined by ambivalence. The picture that is played back is almost the same as the oppressor's expectations, but not quite: mimicry always produces a subtle difference that Bhabha calls excess or slippage (Bhabha 1994, 86). Mimicry poses a threat to the authority of the oppressor, as it unmasks the ambivalence of the colonial discourse. Conversely, mimicry provides the oppressed with a chance to fight against the imposed power of dominant culture (Bhabha 1994, 88).

In relation to our topic, Bhabha's observations can be taken quite literally. In recent Serbian films, the slippage or excess of mimicry that Bhabha describes is generated through stylistic excess. Due to its subtleness and ambivalence, grasping exactly where and how slippage "happens" in films is a daunting task, but we can at least provide a few guidelines as to where to look.

I believe that many recent Serbian films can be described by the use of excess as a stylistic tool, and most produce the kind of slippage that Bhabha describes. However, the films that I am about to analyse have another trait in common: in each case, at a certain point in the film, stylistic excess reaches its peak, and produces a moment of slippage that coincides with, or is provoked by a cultural reference – an allusion to an element of religious or ancient mythology –, resulting in a level of abstraction. Such moments can be considered acts of subversion as they step away from the films' overall tendency of speaking in stereotypes, and require interpretational codes other than those of Western expectations. Moreover, these moments have an effect on the natural flow of the narrative, which comes to a halt as the viewer contemplates the meaning of the reference on one hand and the sudden stylistic "upheaval" on the other. As the conventional narrative is the most extensive hegemonic system of these films, any attempt to overthrow it, even if just for a brief period of time, can be seen as the film's struggle to overstep its own boundaries, to subvert its self-imposed rules. To prove my point, I will select a range of films to stand as examples of how visual excess, "fertilized" by a clear-cut cultural reference, culminates

in moments of slippage that goes against the established aesthetic as well as narrative norms of the film. All of the following films use the language of stereotypes to some extent, especially due to the fact that all of them are about the break-up of Yugoslavia and the civil war of the 1990s. As most stereotypes build on the supposed inherently aggressive, barbaric nature of the peoples that inhabit the Balkans, films set in a time of extreme violence tend to reinforce a lot of these clichés. However, in the case of each film, there is just enough *difference* to prove that these films are not simply reflections of Western expectations.

Brought to a Halt by Tears of Blood: *The Knife*

Director Miroslav Lekić's film, *The Knife* (Nož) is a 1998 adaptation of an infamous novel by Serbian writer and politician Vuk Drašković, a book heavily laden with hate speech against Bosnian Muslims. The film is less explicit in its portrayal of nationalism, and contains several ambiguous elements that hint at a desire for reconciliation, but the underlying pro-Serbian ideology is undeniable. The film reiterates the most basic stereotypes about the Balkans in that it explains the ethnic feud with the surfacing of ancient hatreds that have existed for so long that no one remembers their origins. However, the film does more than just tell the story that has been told over and over again: it makes attempts to break the system of expectations that surround Serbian films, especially ones with ideological connotations.

Following a short prologue, the story of *The Knife* begins on Christmas Eve, 1942. A Serbian Orthodox family is about to celebrate and enjoy their dinner in peace, when they are suddenly attacked by a group of ferocious Muslims. They rape the women and slaughter the men, concluding the massacre by setting their church on fire along with the priest, the head of the family. The viewer is shown a picture of one of the victims lying dead, blood dripping from his wrist. Then, the director cuts to an image of Jesus Christ's face, presumably a detail from a larger painting. From somewhere above, blood starts dripping on the painting's eyes and running down its face [Figs.1–2.]. Having seen the previous shot of a man lying dead, the viewer is led to believe that it is his blood dripping on the painting. However, the two images are solely connected by montage: they are never shown in the same frame. Furthermore, such a painting was never seen in the preceding massacre scene that takes place in the dining room. Thus, it appears as though the image of Christ itself were shedding tears of blood, mourning the death of

his faithful followers. As questions regarding the painting's location (could it be a part of the Church's iconostasis?) and the meaning of the surreal image start to arise, they distract the viewer and divert attention from the plot. The pathos of the image lingers long after the scene is over and the viewers may wonder: did we just see some sort of supernatural revelation? Are we to witness divine appearances throughout the film? Will the transcendental take part in the unfolding of the story?


[Figs.1–2.]. *The Knife*

Of course, such expectations are never fulfilled. The rest of *The Knife* focuses on a young man's quest for identity who had survived the massacre as a baby and was raised by Muslims. The powerful image of Christ shedding tears of blood remains the only such apparition in the film, easy to be dismissed as a sort of stylistic impingement or the director's momentary lapse of judgment that allowed him to succumb to kitsch. The practical purpose of the image, of course, is to solicit sympathy for the Serbs who met a tragic death at hands of Muslims.[3] However, as the image becomes an obstacle that impedes the natural flow of the narrative, and raises questions that take the viewer far beyond the shot or the scene itself, it can also be interpreted as a gap in the carefully woven fabric of mimicry. The fact that it appears at the very beginning of the film strengthens this inclination. The viewers feel misled, even manipulated, just as the shot of the painting was manipulated by the filmmaker. The excessive pathos of the image that commands such complex, ambivalent meaning provides the filmmaker with a chance to take back control, to

[3] God's sympathy for the Serbs is directly related to the notion of Serbian victimhood. The myth of the Battle of Kosovo, the Serbs' most important national narrative, is meant to convince Serbs that they are a chosen people, the Holy Nation. Throughout history, this myth, originating from an actual battle that took place between the Serbian and the Ottoman army in 1389, when Prince Lazar's army was defeated by Ottoman troops, has been used as an ideological tool to provide Serbs with an excuse to see themselves as sacrificial victims of eternal aggression by outside forces. The myth played a major part in inciting ethnic hatred in the 1990s, and provided the ideological background for *The Knife*, among other films made in the decade.

take the reins from the bearers of expectations. It is essentially the film's realism that is broken when the thought-provoking image halts the narrative and portrays something surprisingly inconsistent with the realistic world of the diegesis. In the context of the brutal, bloody fight – which complies with the Western stereotype of the barbaric Balkan man perfectly – an icon, worshipped by the followers of the Orthodox religion as if it were God himself, shedding tears of blood inevitably invites pondering over the existence of the supernatural.[4] The director builds three subversive gestures into a single shot: the image stops the narrative in its tracks, subverts the film's visual realism and introduces a level of interpretation that is completely alien to the rest of the film (the realm of the divine). Within the context of the scene, the image is first and foremost meant to express Christ's compassion for the Serbian family who have become martyrs. However, on a more universal level, the image of the Saviour shedding tears is a symbol of Christ's sacrifice to redeem humankind, and as such, a symbol of all selfless sacrifice. Suddenly, the scene is not merely a depiction of a family massacre: it raises questions that point beyond the specific matter at hand with the use of a religious symbol that has a universal meaning. The moment when the film "slips" onto this level of interpretation is when it manages to break free from its own world of simplification and clichés.

Keeping in mind the role of the Orthodox Church and religious ideology in the politics that led to the war of the 1990s, it is not surprising to find religious allusions in war films produced in the era. However, religious references are not the only tools capable of transferring a film to a more universal level of interpretation: next, let us examine a similar moment in another film that connects its own moment of difference to myth.

Caught in the Grasp of Destiny: *Vukovar*

Vukovar (Vukovar, jedna priča) is a 1994 war film directed by Boro Drašković that tells the story of a young interethnic couple, a Croat girl and a Serbian boy, who suddenly find themselves on opposing sides when war breaks out in former Yugoslavia. The film is a classically constructed melodramatic love story set in the city of Vukovar that likens the war to an unstoppable storm,

[4] It would be interesting to study the difference between a Serbian and a Western viewer's reaction to such an image. I speculate that the former would feel less alienated by it than the latter, since such apparitions are accepted by the Orthodox religion – several of the so called weeping icons have been approved by the Orthodox Church to be authentic and miraculous.

an inevitable tragedy that destroys the lives of individuals, without acknowledging the role of politics in stirring up the ethnic animosity that led to its outbreak. As the film emphasises the irrationality of war, it complies with Western stereotype of the Balkans as a barbaric land where irrational aggression can tear the community apart any minute without warning. On the other hand, similarly to *The Knife*, *Vukovar* also incorporates a moment of slippage that produces a difference from the film's overall approach.

Towards the middle of the film, Toma, now a drafted soldier in the Serbian army, is wounded in a shootout and fleeing from a group of Croatian soldiers. As he staggers through the ruins of the war-torn city, he finds three eerie-looking women building a fire and cooking meat in a cauldron. They invite him to sit with them, and the soldier, dizzied by his injury, obliges. One of the women rips a piece of cloth from her skirt and bandages his forehead. They inform him that the pig's meat cooking in the cauldron is for the orphans hiding in a shelter, adding that the animal had fed on human flesh. They offer Toma a taste but he refuses. As he gets up to leave, the women capture a white bird, similar to a peacock, its feathers blackened by dirt and soot. Before disappearing into the smoke rising from the burning buildings, Toma turns back and listens to one of the women explain that according to the butterfly effect, the whole world gets worse each time an offence is committed in the Balkans.

In addition to invoking Shakespearean tragedy with a reference to the weird sisters from Macbeth, the scene also conjures up classical mythology: the three women are incarnations of the destiny-weaving Fates (Greek: Moirai, Roman: Parcae).[5] In ancient myths, they control the destinies of men as well as gods, thus, they stand for the inevitability of fate – making them fearsome and even seemingly evil.

The theatricality of this scene remains unparalleled throughout the film. The three women appear in a sinister tableau vivant: it is as though a curtain of smoke is pulled apart to reveal the Fates standing in a triangle, one sitting on a pile of rubble, elevated above the other two, in a strikingly artificial and theatrically frontal composition [Figs.3–4.]. They look like unfortunate beggars, battered war refugees, and yet there is something demonic about their bulging eyes, their crazed laughter and their bizarre amusement at the fact that eating a pig's meat that feasted on human flesh can be likened to cannibalism. They speak as though they shared one mind, one knowledge,

[5] The weird sisters in Shakespeare's play themselves are likely to have been inspired by the Greek and Roman myth of the Fates, among other sources (such as British folklore and the Norns of Norse mythology).

each of them saying one sentence at a time before the other takes over. The soldier who has played an active role in all of the previous scenes is now a completely passive object in the hands of the Fates. It seems they do not wish to hurt him, but Toma remains wary of them as they capture the white bird, the last remaining symbol of peace.

[Figs.3–4.]. *Vukovar*

The tableau vivant is in itself an intriguingly hybrid phenomenon: it is halfway between theatre and painting, unusual, uncanny even, in its strange stillness. Within the context of a film, the tableau vivant is a technique of mise-en-scène that serves the same function as the photograph that Raymond Bellour describes in his essay *The Pensive Spectator*. Bellour's photo-within-a-film is a tool designed to freeze or suspend the film with the help of its sudden, unexpected stillness, and inspire the viewer to reflect on what is being shown (Bellour 1984, 120). The appearance of a photograph, according to Bellour, causes a slight swerve in the film's course and uncouples the spectator from the image (Bellour 1984, 122), turning the spectator into a pensive one (Bellour 1984, 123). Such a pensive spectator is born when the frozen image of the three witches, completely alien to the natural dynamic flow of the moving image, appears in *Vukovar*. The viewer is instantly drawn away from the immediate context of the film to the more abstract realm of mythology. The appearance of the Fates brings the idea of a higher power (or at least a higher knowledge) into *Vukovar*, just as the image of Christ shredding blood introduced the idea of the transcendental in *The Knife*, and remains the only such apparition here too. Moreover, this is the only scene where, through the referencing of the butterfly effect, the viewer is invited to contemplate whether the film is about something more universal than the conflict between the ex-Yugoslav nations in the nineties. The stylistic realism of the film is contorted by the appearance of the mythical creatures, which results in a strange, theatrically stylised episode

loaded with symbolism and philosophical questions. It is as if the plot (Toma fleeing from the Croatian soldiers) had been twisted and squeezed out like a rag, to get rid of all the excess to the last drop, then smoothed out once again. It is this excess that makes *Vukovar* more than "a war film from the Balkans", as the West would have it. Here too, the cultural reference is paired with an episodic distraction that diverges from the plot, as well as a stylistic discrepancy that subverts the film's consistent realism. The scene is just as visually excessive, layered with meaning and altogether out-of-place within the framework of the film as the image of the weeping icon in *The Knife*, thus, it can be interpreted as slippage.

Stopped to Pay Our Respects: *The Tour*

The invocation of classical mythology and the theatrical style defines a key scene in the 2008 film *The Tour* (Turneja), directed by Goran Marković. Uniting all the ex-Yugoslav states in a coproduction, *The Tour* offers a much less biased and one-sided view of the war than the previously analysed films, and uses stereotypes to rework and disavow them.

The film is about a troupe of actors who travel to the war zone in 1993 in hopes of earning some money by entertaining the troops stationed there, only to find that whoever they run into, Serbs, Croats or Muslims, their lives are always in grave danger. Towards the end of the film, the young, naïve actress Jadranka recites a monologue from Euripides' tragedy Iphigenia to save her fellow players from the Muslim soldiers holding them hostage. Her idea of delivering a performance out of nowhere in the middle of a tense situation is a courageous and desperate act: it is so powerful and so unanticipated that everyone around her freezes, including her companions and the soldiers, and stares at her in awe. Throughout the film, the actors struggle with their own lack of artistic inspiration and their inability to perform passionately and convincingly. However, to everyone's astonishment, the young actress's portrayal of Iphigenia's sacrifice is not strained or unnatural, but sincere and captivating. Here too, the plot is suddenly suspended, and the viewer's attention shifts: we are no longer focusing on the cat and mouse game between the soldiers and the players, but are trying to draw parallels between Jadranka's selfless actions and the sacrifice of Iphigenia, a trail of thought which may last even after the film is over – and thus, Bellour's pensive spectator is born. The director signals the shift from one level of interpretation to the other by slowly moving the camera towards the actress's face

when she begins her monologue, then opening up the shot once more to include those sitting around her, their expressions completely changed, their aggression and fear completely vanished, their eyes fixed on her. The rest of the soldiers gather around as the porch that Jadranka is standing on turns into her stage, and they turn into her audience. None of the other theatrical performances in the film are presented this way: the actors are often shown in neutral long shots, sometimes even from behind their backs (focusing more on the reactions of the crowd than their acting), whereas here, the powerful close-ups of Jadranka's face augment the sensation of frozen time [Figs. 5-8.].

[Figs.5–8.]. *The Tour*

This particular performance differs from the others seen in the film not only in the way that it is visually conveyed: unlike the previous performances, it is not an interpretation of a patriotic play of questionable artistic value, but of a classical tragedy based on an ancient myth. The significance of this is that the appearance of the myth coincides with what, in the context of this film, can be identified as visual excess (i.e. excessive use of close-ups, exaggerated acting and an increasingly manipulative way of directing the viewer's attention with the help of composition

and camera movement). In this way, the scene becomes yet another example of a film turning against its own set of rules and using a cultural reference to take a step back and temporarily exit the world of stereotypes.

Interestingly enough, like in the case of *Vukovar*, here too, it is an art form within an art form, theatre within film that carries the subtext or the second meaning. The mythological reference brings together two dimensions: that of post-war Yugoslavia and that of our world, whose innocent inhabitants have been subjected to different forms of aggression since ancient times. The question of victimhood, above all that of female victims, has been a major concern in the study of the possible psychological motives and aftereffects of the war in Yugoslavia, especially considering the horrifying brutality of aggression against women and endless cases of rape committed in the course of the war. Thus, on one hand, Jadranka's monologue can be understood as an expression of solidarity with the female victims of the war, and on the other hand, as an ode to all innocent victims of violence.

Cornered by Evil Itself: *The Enemy*

The final film to be analysed in this paper, *The Enemy* (Neprijatelj) is a 2011 thriller by genre director Dejan Zečević that tells the story of a group of soldiers stuck in a desolate place as they await commands in the first days following the end of the war. As they search the abandoned towns in the area, they find a man walled up in an old factory and take him back to their shelter. Soon, strange things start to happen: the mysterious man seems to have a power that affects the soldiers in a way that they become restless, paranoid and hot-tempered, and eventually turn against each other.

The visual style of the film is fundamentally defined by the fear and tension caused by the notion of a supernatural evil walking the Earth. The presence of the demonic figure creates a colourless world of constant unease, where weak specks of light try to fight their way through the thick, sinister shadows. It is not the closeness of war and its immediate aftereffects that create the ominous atmosphere. The characters are used to the sight of the war-torn landscape, the bombarded town, their rundown hideout, even the sight of dead bodies heaped into a pile. What they are not used to is this seemingly otherworldly power that turns each other against them.

One of the characters, Čaki, an educated man, likens the stranger to the demiurge, the craftsman-like creator of the world, a being that he interprets as a malevolent force, even though he denies believing in it. The soldiers whisper behind the stranger's back, but he always seems to be watching them and from time to time comments on their suspicions about him: as the "demiurge" delivers his enigmatic monologues, the camera moves closer and closer to him, until the background is completely blurred and his face is torn from the context of the real world. The camera moves restlessly around the room, as if trying to analyse the characters, picking their faces apart with one extreme long shot after the other.

The tense, anxious visual style of the film culminates in a scene where the supernatural power attributed to the mysterious man takes effect explicitly. Towards the end of the film, Čaki is severely wounded by a landmine that accidentally goes off, and is found dying by one of his fellow soldiers, Cole, who keeps the strange man prisoner, and a young girl, a war refugee returning home who had previously joined the soldiers at their hideout. By this time, all the other soldiers are dead, killed by each other in irrational outbreaks of fear and aggression. Čaki attempts to shoot the "demiurge" because he blames him for pitting them against each other, but misses, and accidentally shoots the girl. He himself dies immediately after the shot is fired. Cole rushes to the girl lying on the ground, and orders the stranger to bring her back to life. Suddenly, the girl stands up and tells him that she is alright, and that the bullet only grazed her side. Cole appears to believe that the mysterious man did in fact bring her back.

The scene is highly ambiguous due to the masterfully choreographed camerawork, which can be interpreted as a source of visual excess. When Čaki fires, we are looking at intercut close-ups of his and the stranger's face, and we are not shown who was hit by his bullet. First, we see Cole embracing Čaki's lifeless body in grief: only then are we given a shot when we notice the girl's body, blurred, barely noticeable, in the background. Then, as Cole walks up to the stranger and holds a gun to his head to threaten him, the girl's body is once again off screen, out of sight. The dialogue between Cole and the stranger is shown as the camera spins around them in a circle: as she is "revived", the girl suddenly appears out of nowhere, from behind Cole, in the same shot [Figs.9–12.]. We never find out whether she was actually shot and brought back to life by the stranger, or whether she was really unhurt all along, just as we never find out what really turned the soldiers against each other. Was the stranger really the manipulative devil they thought he

was, or was it just the evil inherent in mankind brought to the surface by the war that eventually destroyed them?

[Figs.9–12.]. *The Enemy*

Again, it is the presence of the (supposedly) mythical creature and the possibility of a supernatural occurrence that trigger the sudden intensification of style. The invocation of the demiurge serves a similar function here as the appearance of the Fates in *Vukovar* and of Iphigenia in *The Tour*: the viewer is invited to think outside the strictly fixed perimeters of the film and to consider the main questions posed by it on a philosophical level and in a wider cultural context. We no longer see typical Serbian soldiers senselessly battling each other, but are invited to think about an otherworldly evil that may be out there to corrupt the human soul. This is where the difference or slippage that is meant to secure the film's unique perspective appears. The achievement of *The Enemy* (and particularly this one captivating scene) is that even though it is set in a very specific environment, and says a lot about its social and cultural context, it sheds the constraints of stereotypes and brings to life a universally relatable story within the thriller genre that is still deeply rooted in its own unique culture.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to shed light on a type of visual and narrative subversion that may serve as an opportunity for Serbian filmmakers to defend themselves against the oppression of stereotypes. As the examples of the analysed films suggest, Serbian directors can turn to mythology and the stylistic excess uniquely characteristic of Serbian cinema to create a moment of slippage that can be understood as a subversive gesture, as it stands in contrast with the rest of the film in several ways. Firstly, it turns into an episode within the film that is more or less independent from the plot. Secondly, it offers several ambiguous layers of meaning that the viewer is left contemplating long after the moment itself is over, and may even affect the viewer's interpretation of the film. Thirdly, these episodes also serve as acts of stylistic subversion, as their visual presentation differs from the films' overall realistic style. The examples of films like *The Knife*, *Vukovar*, *The Tour* and *The Enemy* prove that even if it is virtually impossible for Serbian films to completely free themselves of stereotypes and the expectations generated by them, there are ways for them to produce a kind of difference that marks them as unique works of self-representation.

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The product of many years of research, teaching and critical writing, prominent Hungarian film critic Gábor Gelencsér's new book strikes us with the huge film and critical material it mobilises, as well as an approach that alternates between wide overviews and meticulous detail analyses. As such, it is a curious mixture of different genres of critical writing on film, bringing together historical descriptions, socio-cultural and political reflections and reports, case studies as well as content and form analyses both contemporary with the films and from the last two decades. Most curiously, Gelencsér choses as main focus of this "possible history" of the Hungarian cinema between 1945 and 1985 the literary adaptations of this period. Starting from the preliminary observation that during these four decades the social representative function is often taken over from literature by film and that the revolutionary changes in film (both formal and ideological) are frequently represented by literary adaptations, the author apparently represents the optimistic voice in the ongoing debate around literary adaptations. By stressing the mutually fertilising interaction between film and literature, he presents adaptations as a new dimension of the cultural-political function literature once had, reflecting, at the same time, on the changed status of the Writer as Author. Although repeatedly touching upon the concept of "author function" introduced by Foucault, describing a culturally defined role as organising principle of texts, the book almost completely avoids fashionable theoretical considerations of adaptations studies. In fact, he documents the socio-political circumstances of each adaptation, cross-examining them with the reflections of a new generation of film scholars.

The huge filmic and critical material gathered in the book − concerned in more or less detail with 100 authors, 200 literary works, 70 film directors and 200 adaptations – is organised along two main points of view: the cultural function of film and the priority of cultural signification in film (decreasing from the 1960s) and the aesthetic point of view concerned with innovative stylistic aspirations detectable in the literature-film interaction. Structurally, the first part of the book examines historical-cultural processes as reflected in the literature-film relationship, while the second part focuses on case studies organised around the names of emblematic film directors (Károly Makk, Péter Gothár, Judit Elek, Pál Sándor, István Gaál, Béla Tarr) who reformed film language with literary adaptations from prominent

authors (such as Zsigmond Móricz, Iván Mándy, Miklós Mészöly, Tibor Déry, László Krasznahorkai).

The first part consists of 7 chapters offering an overview of historical periods that seem to correspond to film historical stages marked by an intense literature-film interaction: 1. **The coalition period (1945–48)** marked by innovative literary influences; **2. The era of social realism (1948–53)**, characterised by the devaluation of the role of the film director and a solid position of the writer (the "ironical" Mikszáth, the "critical" Móricz and the romantic Jókai), the movement of popular writers resulting in peasant/production films (most prominently Frigyes Bán's *Treasured Earth/Talpalatnyi Föld*); **3. The period of ideological softening and formal experimentation (1954–62)**, detectable in a distanciation from literature and parallel innovations, resulting in a "two-facedness," that is, films presenting conflicts characteristic of the previous period, in a metaphoric language, a taste for parables, landscapes as state of mind, a dislocation from public to private, connecting Hungarian films to a universal film history (Károly Makk's *Liliomfi* and *The Obsessed Ones/Megszállottak*, Zoltán Fábri's *Merry-Go-Round/Körhinta*, László Nádasdy's *Razzia*); **4. The Hungarian New Wave (1963–1969)**, characterised by a decreasing formal influence of literary adaptations, while the number of films based on original screenplays increases. This is the period of social parables (Miklós Jancsó's films), thematisation of social-ideological conflicts of generations through recurrent topics like search for the father, crisis of romantic relationships, in a figurative projection of processes of consciousness and stylistic, narrative reflexivity (represented by films like Miklós Jancsó's *Cantata*, Zoltán Fábri's *Twenty Hours/Húsz óra* and *Cold Days/Hideg napok* by András Kovács); **5. The 1970s (1970–78)** are marked by the crisis of both literature and film, their social function diminishes. Under these circumstances adaptations serve individual stylistical quests, while the overall film production characterises by a differentiation of stylistical orientations: documentarism and authorial stylisation (Huszárik's *Szindbád* and Károly Makk's *Love/Szerelem*), as well as generational feeling-films, complemented with a neo-avantgarde and underground line (represented by the creators of the Balázs Béla Studio, among others by Gábor Bódy's intermedial experimentations); **6. The period of transition of the 1980s (1979–1986)** coincides with the so-called "prosaic turn": filmmakers are not adapting narratives anymore, but rather transposing styles, textual worlds, linguistic performances (see the films of Bódy, Gothár and Jeles from this period**); 7. and finally the poetical, political reflexion of the regime change (1987–95)**, which formally is a continuation of the previous period. It is the period of historical, political de-concretisation, with allegories and parables represented by Tarr's

adaptations pertaining to the so called Black series (*Damnation/Kárhozat*, *Satantango/Sátántangó*, *Werckmeister Harmonies/Werckmeister Harmóniák* and Gothár's *The Outpost/A részleg*).

The second section consisting of case-studies that were previously published in journals and essay collections, in fact reiterates titles and examples already touched upon in the previous chapters, from a new perspective establishing connections between writers and directors (Erzsébet Galgóczi-Lajos Galambos, Miklós Mészöly-Gaál István, László Krasznahorkai-Béla Tarr). This second part admittedly fills gaps in Hungarian film history by calling attention to forgotten literary works and films. Additionally, the presentation of the third chapter of the first section, entitled *The period of ideological softening and formal experimentation (1954–62)* is adding considerably to a monographic approach of this period in Hungarian film history. Besides conferring a new perspective to Hungarian literary adaptations of a historically and ideologically charged period of 40 years, the biggest strength of the book is the mapping of big cultural-political correlations reflected in a changing authorial function oscillating between literary and cinematic forms. While in the first two periods the cultural function of adaptations is more pervasive, in the following three periods they appear as formally innovative pieces marking new eras in Hungarian film history. As Gelencsér argues, while the study of adaptations until 1962 greatly contributes to a complex description of film historical processes, this is not true for the following periods, when the influence of adaptations on these processes systematically decreases.

The huge amount of information and case studies makes of Gelencsér's piece an excellent handbook for mainly academic purposes and not only. Due to the effort to establish connections, distinguish processes, establish categories, delineate periods, at times argumentation might seem repetitive. However, this doesn't affect the overall picture: it helps to follow the line of thought that balances on an admirable combination of small details and big correlations.

Report on "Masculinity and the Metropolis: An Interdisciplinary Conference on Art History, Film and Literature"

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"Masculinity and the Metropolis" was an interdisciplinary conference hosted by the University of Kent. Its expressed aim was "to explore the complex and contradictory engagements between masculinity and the developing metropolis since the beginning of the twentieth century." As the organisers pointed out in their call for papers, the modern metropolis has been a paradoxical place in the twentieth century, as it was "simultaneously a place of liberation and possibility, whilst also a place of alienation and oppression."

The questions addressed by the organisers provoked a wide range of papers. There were talks covering issues from geographical areas from China through the US to Hungary, papers on black and white, straight and gay, more and less privileged masculinities, boxers and painters, workers and photographers, in literature and all kinds of visual art. This colourful palette of topics was paired by a variety of researchers from various continents, at very different stages of their careers. The keynotes, as usual, were established scholars. Peter Ferry from the University College Dublin, delivered "Writing the City, Writing Masculinity: The Flaneur in American Fiction", an excellent choice for opening such an event. His lecture showed how the figure of the flaneur has been employed and reimagined in contemporary American fiction, while also indicating the new configurations of masculinity it entails. Later there was also a whole panel devoted to flanerie. The second keynote was by Gabriel Koureas from the University of London. His lecture, "Male terrors in the Metropolis" addressed such other key concepts of the conference as terror, violence in the context of gender.

As the keynotes also proved, connecting the questions of metropolitan spaces and masculinity may be most fruitful. In the twentieth century these cities became condensed reservoirs of all sorts of masculinities with all kinds of cultural, economic, ideological and material backgrounds. The extremities characteristic of cities (wealth and poverty, cultural elites and masses of underprivileged people) produced a variety of gender-constructions hardly visible elsewhere. The fast pace of development also created possibilities of liberation and self-fulfilment for some, while brought about the crisis of their gendered identities for others.

In spite of the differences in topics, approaches and media representations analysed, there were several key points that tended to resurface time and time again during the conference.

Such were the crisis of masculinity, gay life in metropolitan spaces, masculinities after historical traumas (such as 9/11 or the Eastern European regime change), and war. Connecting cultural experiences from such diverse places as the US and Hungary opened up inspiring dialogues about post-traumatic masculinities. Recurring concepts and ideas included Connell's hegemonic masculinity and its subsequent critiques, the ways hegemony is negotiated and constantly renegotiated in context and interaction, how hegemony needs to be affirmed by the gaze of others, the flaneur and its contemporary versions, acts of physical engagements with metropolitan spaces, the re-imagining of urban space in counter-hegemonic narratives, the difference between the cartographical and the phenomenological, the process of forging usable pasts by urban communities, and finally the ways such historical events as 9/11 in the US rewrite dominant modes of representation.

In the light of the papers of the conference, the concept of "the crisis of masculinity" seems so wide in scope that it may eventually become quite meaningless. The general conclusion of the papers concerned (if such a general conclusion is possible) could be that gender is always in a flux, sometimes change is slower and thus easier to digest, but often more dynamic, thus creating the feeling of crisis. Such changes as the appearance of black boxers in Britain in the early 20th century, or the terrorist attacks of 9/11, or the regime changes in Eastern Europe or China may all result in such rapid, crisis-like rearrangements of gendered identities. Some respond to these situations with the somewhat predictable affirmation of hyper-masculinities, as in such American post-9/11 films as *United 93* (Peter Greengrass, 2006) or *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone 2006), some with conservative, backwards-looking, root-seeking attitudes, as in such Chinese films as *Hero* (Yimou Zhang, 2002). Yet, some rather reacted with sardonic, self-deprecating humour, as British newspapers responding to the losses of white boxers to black ones in the 1910s and 1920s, or such Eastern European films commenting on the post-1989 situation as *Kontroll* (Nimród Antal, 2003), and there were also examples of serious self-criticism, as in case of the protagonist of Spike Lee's *The 25th Hour* (2002).

Seeing such diverse cultural examples in one context usually leads to establishing creative links between seemingly distant fields. Though no official volume is planned, several international co-working projects started at the conference, indicating that this inspiration took place in Canterbury as well.

For the full programme of the conference see: https://masculinemetropolis.wordpress.com/