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

(Péter Esterházy)

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

Our project, started in 2014 – *Space-ing Otherness. Cultural Images of Space, Contact Zones in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Film and Literature* (OTKA NN 112700) –, focuses on Romanian–Hungarian relations while also analysing the discourses of the East-West dichotomy. It maps the formations created in and referring to this geocultural space in works of art, and indirectly also grasps the common identification spaces of belonging to several cultures. The contact zone is understood as the creation, interference or transformation of frontiers or differences in a cultural and medial sense. The works of art are related to the geocultural, social space as spaces of imagination differing in their medium. At the same time, the works of art as creators of imagination shed light on the imagination which always appears in the understanding of the other, the foreigner, and inseparably from this, of oneself.

The limits of the “own” are outlined by imagined communities (Benedict Anderson, 1991), cultural differences, imagined spaces, and geographical imagination (Edward W. Soja, 1999). In contact spaces the imagination, the plurality or conflict of perspectives materialises in the tension of differences, the dominant feature is ambiguity, and movement, being-on-the-road becomes a fundamental experience. It is a space of the in-betweenness of understanding and non-understanding where in Péter Esterházy’s closure/opening Romanian words render fluent the meaning of the Hungarian sentence.

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

Diána Sóki discusses “how the different cultural particularities are projected onto the body and the space” in two literary works. Mór Jókai’s novel, *Timar’s Two Worlds* (1872) and Péter Esterházy’s *The Glance of Countess Hahn-Hahn* (1990) are historically and aesthetically different inscriptions on the geography of the Danube. This way they create the divergent historical embodiments of geographical and cultural ideas. While in Jókai’s novel the Turkish girl and her unreadability borders the space from the East, Esterházy’s traveller with the “glances” of an Austrian countess borders the “same” space from the West. The landscape and the (female) body are imaginary/projection surfaces and thus they reflect cultural readings. An important subtext for both Hungarian novels is Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), published close in time to Jókai’s novel, a work that presents the East–West relation from an English (colonizing) viewpoint, which also brings forth the fear of *reverse colonization* (Stephen D. Arata, 1990). Esterházy’s traveller reads this work as well down the Danube, reflecting the cultural experience of the landscape as text. Stoker’s work, as among others Stephen D. Arata also stresses, draws the (fluid) frontier of East and West also on the

line of the Danube. “Harker immediately invokes a second convention of the travel genre when, having crossed the Danube at Buda-Pesth, he invests the river with symbolic significance. ‘The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East; the most Western of splendid bridges over the Danube [...] took us among the traditions of Turkish rule’ (p. 9). In crossing the Danube, Harker maintains, he leaves ‘Europe’ behind, geographically and imaginatively, and approaches the first outpost of the ‘Orient’” (Arata 1990, 636).

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

Eszter Vidosa’s article analyses the phenomenon of transgressive entity in Hungarian contemporary works. Noé Tibor Kiss’s *Incognito (Inkognitó, 2010)* is the first Hungarian transgender novel after 1989, in which the social genders and borders become dynamic through the language-seeking modality of an insecure narrator. Benedek Fliegauf’s *Womb* (2010) opens up the limits of the human body through the possibility of the cyborg body. The literary work is a linguistic attempt to fluidise the (post)communist limits of gender, to visualise the “eternal in-between” identity. With the problem of cloned entities (copies), the film subverts the relationship of the artificial and natural body. The fear of the “cyborg which is exactly the same”, which can be imagined because of the technological conditions, turns into the fear from the identical. The racial fear from otherness understood as reverse colonization (vampirism as the barbarisation of the body) in Dracula is “neutralised” here in the technical cyborg-imagination generated by *human* fear.

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

References

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