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The Big Picture: Representation, Society and Data

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PICTURING WORLDS, ENGAGING AUDIENCES

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Travel Down Memory Lane: Nostalgia and Nostophobia in *Youth* (2017)

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Abstract. The article analyses *Youth*, a Chinese melodrama directed by Feng Xiaogang in 2017, as a representation of China during a transitional period in history. It explores issues of nostalgia and nostophobia in connection with the complexities of memory, representation, and viewing pleasure. It discusses how sound and image trigger memories and conflicting emotional reactions. In the film's nostalgic and elegiac re-enactment of a controversial past, the military art troupe performs songs and dances extolling socialist virtues as their own lives gradually unravel with the dawn of a post-socialist era. The article elaborates on how *Youth* reflects and enlivens personal and collective social memory as well as how we negotiate our ambivalent feelings towards the representation of a controversial past.

Keywords: Chinese cinema, Feng Xiaogang, *Youth*, nostalgia, nostophobia.

Introduction

My article addresses issues of nostalgia and nostophobia as they pertain to the filmic representation of China during the transitional period from socialism to post-socialism. I use a 2017 Chinese feature film *Youth* (Feng Xiaogang), a sweeping coming-of-age melodrama set during the 1970s–1990s about the transformation of a Maoist military art and culture troupe to address the relationship between (a) popular films depicting a challenging past and (b) viewers' collective memories as well as viewing pleasure. In the film, the young military art troupe members perform songs and dances that extoll "red hearts and iron wills" as their own lives gradually unravel with the dawn of a post-socialist era (Jenkins 2017). The film's exuberant camerawork captures colourful costumes, revolutionary choreography and chorines familiar to a generation of youth coming of age during China's Cultural Revolution. Its doting portrayal of youth innocence and beauty during the first half of the film

is punctuated in the second half by a graphically brutal depiction of the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War that shattered the lives of the two main characters. As the movie takes us further into the free-market era, the male lead – an exemplary collectivist admired for his altruism – is seen to be outdated and cast aside in an increasingly mercenary China. I will examine how *Youth* reflects and enlivens personal and collective social memory as well as how we negotiate our ambivalent feelings as we react to the filmic representation of a murky past. I will also discuss how sound and image function at the most primal level by triggering mixed memories and conflicting emotions as they capture a culture in transition. A few crucial moments in the film will be singled out to encapsulate the story and the aura of the film and to elaborate on the paradox of memory and viewing pleasure that are simultaneously nostalgic and nostophobic, when the longing for a bygone era is mixed with the fear of that era.

The concept of nostalgia is a term coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in 1688 by combining the Greek words *nostos*, meaning "return home" and *algia*, meaning "longing" or "pain" (Anspach 1934). To Hofer, nostalgia was a medical condition with a simple cure: return to one's homeland. Nostophobia is the antithesis of nostalgia, the fear of returning to a past and a place. My focus here is more on the temporal dimension of the concepts rather than their original connection to space and location. As I analyse reactions to the film, I will incorporate autoethnography, a self-reflective form of analysis to explore my own visceral and corporeal reactions to the film, particularly its soundtrack, while recognizing that younger audiences have a different connection to the film and that their memories of the past are virtual, the result of the transference of the memory of their parents' generation. Though the implanted memories are not part of their repository of experiences (Hirsch 1997), many of the young college-age Chinese viewers I spoke to register mourning and melancholia as part of their emotional journey encountering the film.

Youth as a Story: The Image

Youth depicts a group of young performers in a military art troupe who sing and dance to the revolutionary tunes of a socialist China against the seismic social and political upheavals in China in the 1970s–80s, from the death of Mao in September 1976, to the subsequent overthrow of the Gang of Four,[1] and the ascent of the

1 Led by Jiang Qing, Mao Zedong's last wife, the Gang of Four was a political faction composed of four Chinese Communist Party officials who came to prominence during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and were later officially blamed by the Chinese government for the worst excesses of the societal chaos that ensued during the ten years of turmoil. Their downfall on October 6, 1976, a mere month after Mao's death, marked the end of a turbulent political era in China.

reform-minded Deng Xiaoping. The film largely eschews major political events to focus instead on the change of life at the personal level of these young performers, including the fashionable outfits and hair styles they are drawn to and the Taiwanese and Hong Kong pop music they yearn for, none of which would have been allowed or available during the Mao era, when army uniforms and revolutionary songs were the only options. It is a film about ordinary youth who happen to live through extraordinary times. The film's two main characters are Liu Feng, a good-natured male dancer compelled to put the wellbeing of others above his own, like an altruistic Communist solider should do, and He Xiaoping, a new female recruit whose provincial demeanour is ridiculed by the more sophisticated performers from more privileged social backgrounds [Fig. 1]. Liu is teasingly nicknamed "Lei Feng Reincarnation" that compares him to Lei Feng (1940–1962), a model PLA soldier in the 1950s known for his altruistic spirit and deeds, and for his devotion to the socialist cause. Lei has become a cultural icon since his death with a nationwide posthumous campaign "Learn from Lei Feng" led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). His name entered daily speech and his images appeared on memorabilia. Lei has also become a source of private derision amongst the more cynical youth. Calling Liu "Lei Feng" is a form of mockery. Liu and He become two outcasts among the more flamboyant "mean girls and boys," to use the modern lexicon. The flirtatious relationship and the occasional bullying among the young dancers in *Youth* may be an effort by the director to imitate the trendy contemporary youth romcoms to attract younger audiences, a group otherwise with little use for a film depicting the experience of a generation coming of age during Mao's era. The sensuous display of sexual tensions and the sweet tantrums of youth are speculated by *Hollywood Reporter* to have been a "calculated ploy to attract the young demographic" (Tsui 2017), which is a filmgoing majority that has left Feng Xiaogang and his recent biopics and social satires behind.

A veteran commercial filmmaker responsible for establishing the lucrative Chinese New Year comedy as a genre for Lunar New Year celebration (Zhu 2010), Feng Xiaogang has transitioned from making crowd-pleasing films to making personal films more satisfying to himself and his own conscience. Part of the impetus for making *Youth* stems from Feng's nostalgia about his own time at an army cultural troupe during the same period. He wanted to make a film that shows that the antics of youth coming of age during the drab socialist past were just as compelling as the travails of contemporary youth. Feng spoke fondly of his own experience and how the army cultural troupe he served as a young adult "satisfied all my wishes at that time," as he puts it (Hurst 2018). The film aims to "amplify the favorable impression of the

Cultural Troupe."[2] The first half of the film shows the travails of pampered soldiers living a sheltered life largely unaffected by the political turmoil unfolding outside the army camp. As one critic points out, "the explicit display of sensuality and the emphasis on physicality defies China's officially sanctioned representation of the People's Liberation Army as existing well above basic human desires" (Tsui 2017).

Feng's nostalgic recast of an otherwise controversial era serves to remind audiences how the young soldiers from a more dogmatic era could be just as human as contemporary youth. As the film progresses, major political events are quickly noted only to mark the passage of time until one event: the Sino-Vietnamese war in 1979 which serves as a pivotal transition for the narrative to leap from the blissful life of army brats to the horror of war during the second half of the movie [Fig. 2]. Here the film takes a decisively less charitable tone, juxtaposing the elegant dance sequences with the exceedingly gruesome battle scenes and eventually taking us to the grim life that awaits Vietnam veterans in a newly commercialized China. As the movie takes us further into the post-socialist era, the male lead, our exemplary collectivist admired for his altruism, is shown to be outdated and cast aside in an increasingly mercantile China. Nostalgia about a purer past lingers, pitting the money-driven post-socialist now against the then seemingly blissful time in a collective cultural troupe, with war serving as disruption and the beginning of the end of an era. As Andreas Huyssen puts it, we have moved since the 1980s from being preoccupied with searching for grand futures to digging into the past. That is, we have turned our attention from "present futures" to "present pasts" (Huyssen 2003). Indeed, nostalgia in contemporary usage is primarily concerned with time, or what Stuart Tannock calls a "periodizing emotion," which perceives past as better than now (Tannock 2006). According to Tannock, time can be segmented into the "prelapsarian" epitomized by the Golden Age and such, the "lapse" – a natural catastrophe or a manmade war that disrupts or ruptures, and the "postlapsarian," which is a present that feels in some ways to be lacking, deficient or oppressive (Tannock 2006). When there is a rupture, nostalgia brings comfort and functions as an emotional refuge that shelters us from violent changes (Bronfen 1998). The "periodizing emotion" in *Youth* is marked by the ample repurpose of some of the old revolutionary songs in the soundtrack, which triggers mixed memories of war and sacrifice in a socialist past, intended or unintended.

2 See: Youth. All Those Years of Youth, All Those Years of "Fang Hua" (那些年的青春，那些年的《芳華》). *Art Zip*, n. d. *http://www.artzip.org/youth-uk-release.* Last accessed 03. 04. 2020.

Youth as Hymn to the Hero

Youth deftly mixes songs performed diegetically as part of the onscreen stage performances by the young dancers and singers and non-diegetically, as theme music, revolutionary hymns popular in the 1960s–1970s, which, as one reviewer commented, brought back the memory of her youth: "It makes me feel nostalgic" (Weerasekara 2018). All of the songs in *Youth* have their origins in the Mao era, when personal sacrifices at the service of the nation were glorified. Many come from old revolutionary classics, the films that were popular in the 1960s. The soundtrack resonated widely among the generation coming of age during Mao's era. So much so that one Chinese fan set up an online repository to list the titles and lyrics of all the songs from the film and their origins from classic war films (Xiao 2018). The songs have been shared widely on Chinese social media and Youtube.

One song, *Hymn to the Hero* (英雄赞歌) originated in a 1964 film about Chinese People's Volunteer Army soldiers fighting against the US and its allies during the Korea War (1950–1953), *Heroic Sons and Daughters* (武兆, Wu Zhaoti), which is an adaptation of *Reunion*, a novella published in 1961 in a high-brow Chinese literary magazine *Shanghai Literature* by the renowned Chinese writer Ba Jin. Best known for his novel *The Family*, Ba Jin is one of the most well-known and widely read Chinese authors of the 20th century. *Reunion*, a little-known work, resulted from a North Korea tour he joined as part of a literary group dispatched by China's National Cultural Workers' Association during the height of the Korean war in early 1952 (Ying 2019). The resulting novella *Reunion* depicts how the war engulfs the lives of five siblings in a family, leading to their separation and eventual reunion on the battlefield. Xia Yan, a playwright known for his pro-CCP film activities during the Republic era and later the deputy head of the Chinese Culture Ministry assigned to Changchun Film Studio, one of the earliest film studios under the CCP, to adapt the story into a movie. Wu Zhaoti, born in Pittsburgh to an overseas Chinese intellectual family[3] and later known for directing one of the eight model opera films,[4] *Shajiabang* (1971), was tapped to direct the film. The finished film focused on one sibling in particular, the now legendary martyr, who sprinted into the enemy's command center holding a Bangalore torpedo, killing the enemies, and himself in the process. The death of the hero led to the unexpected reunion on the battlefield of his father

3 See: Wu Zhaoti [武兆堤]. *Bai Ke Bai Du. https://baike.baidu.com/item/*武兆堤. Last accessed 03. 04. 2020.

4 The eight model operas are stage plays orchestrated by Jiang Qing, the wife of Chairman Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Revolutionary in both theme and musical features in comparison to the traditional Chinese operas, many of them were adapted to film.

and sister. The sister, a singer at the Army Cultural Troupe then performs the song, *Hymn to the Hero,* paying tribute to her brother and other fallen heroes. The song was written by the poet Gong Mu (公木) known for writing in 1939 the lyrics of the *Military Anthem of the Eighth Route Army*, a CCP army branch during the Republic era. The song was anointed in 1988 as the anthem of the People's Liberation Army. Newly exonerated from his earlier conviction as a rightist during the anti-rightist campaign,[5] Gong was reluctant to accept the overture of writing lyrics for the film for fear of any potential political fallout but eventually took up the assignment.[6] Liu Chi (刘炽), a Chinese composer with quite a few popular socialist songs under his belt was chosen to compose the song. The final melody reportedly drew inspiration from Mongolian folk songs Liu was exposed to during his field days collecting folk songs in Inner Mongolia (Ti 2019).

Both the film and the theme song came out to great fanfare at a time when Hollywood films were banned and the only few films available were socialist propaganda pieces. When the Cultural Revolution started with a vengeance in 1966, Ba Jin was denounced and his novella *Reunion* was accused of promoting pacifism and exaggerating the horror of the war by deliberately sending the hero to death (Ba 2005).[7] The film survived unscathed, though the subtitles "adapted from Ba Jin's novella" was removed (Fa 2003).[8] Both the film[9] and its theme song have now become part of the revered "red classics," this latter being performed repeatedly by well-known Chinese singers including Peng Liyuan, an army soprano with soaring voice and now China's first lady. Peng's popular 2007 album, *My Soldier Brothers* included this song. In *Youth*, the song appears during the second part of the movie, when Liu, the wounded male lead stays alone in the battlefield after ordering his remaining team to evacuate and take the fallen soldiers out. As the truck carrying his comrades pulls away, we see Liu, played by the painfully handsome dancer turned actor and heartthrob Huang Xuan standing alone in the war-ravaged roadside. The film then cuts to a tracking shot of Liu leaning against an abandoned military vehicle. The

5 The Anti-Rightist Campaign was a political campaign from 1957 to 1959 to purge alleged "Rightists" within the Communist Party of China (CPC) and abroad. The definition of rightists officially referred to those intellectuals who appeared to favour capitalism and were against collectivization. Launched by Chairman Mao, the campaign led to the political persecution of at least 550,000 people.

6 See: Ying Xiong Zan Ge [《英雄赞歌》]. *Zhong Hua Gong Shi Wang. http://gong4.zupu.cn/wenhua/317761.html*. Last accessed 03. 04. 2020.

7 "渲染战争恐怖、有意让英雄死亡，鼓吹和平主义": *https://web.archive.org/web/20060920023943/http://book.sina.com.cn/nzt/his/suixianglu/78.shtml*. Last accessed 03. 04. 2020.

8 Undated original content from law-thinker.com, archived at *https://archive.ph/20041212182401/http://law-thinker.com/show.asp?id=1692*. Last accessed 03. 04. 2020.

9 *Hymns to Hero* remains the most well-known film about the Korean War in China.

camera closes on him and we see his expressionless eyes staring into the distance as if in a trance. We hear a voiceover accompanied by melancholic melody speculating, in an ironic tone, his mental state. "Perhaps the deputy instructor was right. He didn't want to live. He yearned to be a martyr. Only through sacrifice would his ordinary life become a hero's tale, and his heroic story would grow and spread and travel far. Maybe it would be turned into a song with lyrics and a tune in the songbook of a female singer. A singer named Lin Dingding, who, in the end, would have to sing for him. And every time she sang, she would have to remember him." The ironic voiceover defuses the otherwise melodramatic undertone of the sequence, and is a quintessential touch of Feng Xiaogang, whose signature genre, the lunar New Year comedy is known for its biting satire (Zhu 2007). And the female singer in question is Liu's love interest, who had spurned his overture earlier in the movie.

Youth as a Love and War Story

Roll back in time, earlier in the film, the sound of a soft Taiwanese ballad sung by the Taiwanese pop icon Teresa Deng stirs up passions in our otherwise upright communist hero and leads him to a misguided confession of love for a wrong girl, not the leading lady we root for, which results in an awkward yet consequential embrace. [Fig. 3.] While alone in a room with his love interest, who is a lead singer in the art troupe, our hero expresses his admiration for her. She is flirtatious but non-committal. As she is leaving, he stops her at the door and pulls her close for a tight embrace while whispering to her ear that he loves her. This mistimed moment is observed by two fellow troupe members who happen to be walking by. One member snaps and says in an exaggerated tone that earlier the Commissar had said that "rot in an army begins with rot in behaviour." Embarrassed and confused, the girl pushes Liu aside and runs off.

This awkward moment is a poignant reminder of a rigid Mao era, when revolution took place in one's bedroom, and personal affection and intimacy were forbidden, or at least not allowed to show publicly, including in films. The voyeuristic Chinese audiences in turn flocked to Eastern European films, the only imports allowed, to catch glimpses of kisses and embraces. Romanian and Albanian films in particular, with their ample hugging and kissing were popular hits, serving as a rite of passage for young lovers on clandestine dates. Soviet films, with their occasional scenes of intimacy also drew Chinese fans. As recounted by Wu Haohu (吴鹤沪), a film projectionist who did mobile screenings for PLA troupes, the soldiers loved *Lenin in 1918* (Mikhail Romm 1939), a Soviet film depicting the failed assassination of

Lenin, partly for the ritual of kisses and embraces when characters greeted each other (Ni 2013). The projectionists were instructed to block inappropriate scenes while screening foreign imports. In the case of *Lenin in 1918*, there were two scenes that were deemed objectionable, one showcasing a *Swan Lake* performance as an assassination was being plotted at a theatre, the other depicting the night when Lenin settles into the home of his protégé Vasili to rest. In the first scene, the dancers with their short skirts exposing bare legs were thought to be indecent. In the second scene, Lenin settles into Vasili's living room and drifts off as the relieved Vasili and wife look on. The wife then leans back and onto her husband's shoulder, which leads to sexually charged hugs and kisses. Wu had been diligently blocking the two scenes whenever they came up, leaving the music and the dialogue to "speak" for a black screen. He relented during one screening, letting parts of the film remain visible through the gaps between his fingers. Audiences perked up instantly as he recounted, and no harm was done.

In *Youth*, the innocent embrace leads to the girl's report to the political commissar, which leads to a sinister interrogation scene where our model soldier is coerced into confessing to sexual harassment. As punishment for his refusal to acknowledge his alleged sexual transgression, Liu is assigned to a Sino-Vietnam border outpost and eventually sent to the battlefield. During one battle, Liu's team is ambushed and suffers casualties. Liu himself is wounded. As he watches the truck pull away and take his comrades to safety, the song *Hymns to the Hero* fades in, together with the voiceover narration about how he wishes for the girl to sing for him. The camera then takes us to the diegetic performance scene where the girl to whom he declared his love earlier is performing the song to a group of soldiers in the field. As she sings, the subtitle shows the English translation of the lyrics:

"Smoke billows from the beacon fire.
I sing of a hero.
The rings of mountains bend their ears.
In the blue sky, thunder beats a golden drum.
The ocean churns with waves singing in harmony.
The people's warriors drive out the predators,
Laying down their lives to protect peace.
Why is our battle flag as pretty as a picture?
The blood of heroes has stained it red."

Played as the wounded hero's death wish and his revenge fantasy as he hallucinates about the posthumous devotion of the girl who earlier spurned his overtures, the *Hymns to the Hero* song turns eerily haunting. Though the original song is written

to pay tribute to heroes in a different war with a different cast of young lives, the message is the same: dying for one's country is heroic and glorious, whether the Korean War, or the Sino-Vietnamese War, which is a subject rarely touched upon.

Youth is the first Chinese film that directly touches upon the subject of the Sino-Vietnamese War. China went to war with Vietnam in 1979, after Deng Xiaoping pushed to punish Vietnam for occupying Cambodia and overthrowing the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, which was an ally of China. Deng reportedly sought a quick war yet the Chinese army's incursions into Vietnam did not go as planned. China and Vietnam each suffered heavy casualties. Leaks from Chinese military sources indicate that China suffered 6,954 deaths and lost 3.45 billion yuan in overhead, delaying the completion of its 1979–80 economic reform plan. *Youth* deftly wades into the Sino-Vietnamese War by throwing its main characters into the horrific battlefield without explaining what the soldiers were fighting for, or against, which rendered the war and its attendant human sacrifice utterly meaningless and cruel. *Youth* met resistance from the censors and its scheduled colossal rollout across China was halted amidst the Chinese Communist Party's preparation for the national congress in October 2017, a political event staged every five years (Choi 2017). It turns out that veterans of the Sino-Vietnamese War, a group featured in *Youth*, had previously protested at the Congress, seeking better compensation and treatment. Some speculated that officials delayed the film's release in fear of triggering a new round of protests at the 2017 Party Congress.

There are other potentially objectionable scenes in *Youth*, particularly the gruesome infirmary and brutal battle scenes. In a remarkably fluid five-minute and 30-second-long take in the film, the camera sweeps around the chaotic battlefield, darts over explosive tanks, finally settling on desperate soldiers trying to save one of their own. An explosion wounds Liu and eventually leads to the amputation of one of his arms. Feng reportedly wanted "to make audiences see the cruelty and terror of war," which might have contributed to the film's delayed release (Buckley 2017; sina.com.cn 2017). To make the matter worse, *Youth* depicts the hardships veterans endured after the war. In one key scene depicting the aftermath of the war, our leading man, now a disabled war veteran is being manhandled by thugs from the notorious local Public Orders Bureau (POB), a controversial civilian organization set up to assist the police in patrolling the community. POB is notorious for harassing people for minor offenses with steep fines, and also for blatant extortion. When Liu tries to reclaim a vehicle that was confiscated for a minor traffic violation, a vehicle he relies on as a delivery man to pay his bills, the POB handlers literarily "threw him out" after a physical scuffle.

Youth was eventually released on December 15, albeit with a much smaller rollout. The version eventually screened in public in China is said to have been 11–12 minutes shorter than the one that premiered at the Toronto Film Festival on September 28, 2017 (Weerasekara 2018). During a screening at the Pingyao Film Festival in late October 2017, Feng said that the cuts were an effort to "sharpen the film's rhythm" and draw younger audiences (Weerasekara 2017). Despite the cuts, which reportedly include scenes that capture human cruelty living in the Mao era, when the film was released, China's Police Departments were reported to have monitored its screenings. An unnamed theatre manager reportedly revealed that local police departments in several Chinese cities sent police officers to some screenings of *Youth* in order to monitor audiences' reaction to certain scenes in the film.[10]

Youth as Revolutionary Songs and Cultural Memories

Youth nonetheless became a popular hit upon release, eliciting both tears and chatter about China's collective and individual memories of a bygone era. The film raked in $48 million during its opening weekend, nearly 30% higher than the figure for *Coco* (Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina 2017),[11] the 3D animation sensation (Weerasekara 2018). Audiences spoke fondly of the film, particularly its appropriation of popular songs from a different era. "The 1970s' propaganda music in the soundtrack reminds me of my youth and of what our families went through," said a 53-year-old security guard to a reporter. "It makes me feel nostalgic." (Week in China 2018.) My own interviews with Chinese audiences confirm that scenes depicting the more innocent and cheerful time at the cultural troupe in the first half of the film trigger fond memories of a past seen as less stressful and more innocent. Nostalgia for a collective socialist past when society was perceived to be less mercantile is palpable. But not all memories are associated with nostalgia. The darker moments in *Youth* easily trigger nostophobia, the fear of a bygone era. As one Chinese viewer reflects on the interrogation scene when our hero is forced to detail his sexual transgression, "the false allegations in the film are reminiscent of tactics used during the Cultural Revolution to destroy someone's career" (Weerasekara 2018). The viewer reflected further that "the film is full of such references to rotten things that happened in that era" (Weerasekara 2018). It is clear that while revolutionary songs and dance numbers, and happy lives of innocent youth in the first half of the film bring back

10 See: Headlines from China: China's Police Departments Monitor Screenings of 'Youth.' 2017. *China Film Insider*, December 15, 2017. *http://chinafilminsider.com/headlines-from-china-chinas-police-departments-monitor-screenings-of-youth/*. Last accessed 03. 04. 2020.

11 *Coco*, incidentally, is also a film about nostalgia.

nostalgia, the darker sequences in the film trigger negative memories, or the fear of returning to a past that is associated with negative emotions and experiences (Baake-Hansen 2015).

As the story develops further, the female lead, who is secretly in love with Liu, is also dismissed from the dance troupe after she passively resists her dance assignments as a way to protest Liu's dismissal. As punishment, she is sent to a war-ravaged casualty ward where she undergoes a traumatic rite of passage as a young army nurse attending to disfigured and dying soldiers with both disorientation and anguish. She yearns for Liu but lives in fear of seeing him at her infirmary where only the severely wounded are sent. She eventually suffers a nervous breakdown and is sent to a mental hospital. The version of the film publicly screened in China omits the scene when her nervous breakdown occurs. The original film shows – in a typical ironic Feng Xiaogang fashion – that she loses her mind at the moment she is given a medal of honour at an award ceremony to recognize her contribution and extol the sacrifices of the soldiers who died and suffered for their country.

The end of the film takes us to a gritty epilogue set in the 1990s, when the state controlled market economy took hold in China, leaving the less fortunate – including the two main characters – to fend for themselves. Here the film takes a decisively rueful turn, with its theme song, *Sumptuous Flower* playing over the film's last montage sequence when the two main characters reunite years later, and she finally confesses her love for him after all the lost time [Fig. 4]. As he leans over to wrap her in his arms, the theme song swells in, accompanied by a voiceover narration that tells us that ten years from now, the two will remain friends and will look after each other. The theme song continues as the camera pulls back from the two old friends sitting on a bench outside a train station and the closing credits roll. It is a song with a piercingly melancholic tune and hauntingly metaphoric lyrics that gets me personally every time. The song is yet another repurposed revolutionary tune, this time from a popular 1979 film, *Little Flowers* (张铮, Zhang Zheng, 1979), a patriotic film about two young women with no knowledge of their interlaced family history who fight side by side for the Chinese Communist party during China's Civil War. Similar to *Hymn to the Hero*, which was written for the Korean war, *Little Flowers* in its original version features a different war. Composed by a veteran Shanghainese composer, it plays over the scene of a female solider climbing up long and steep stairs with bloody feet and knees carrying a wounded fellow soldier to safety. The song highlights heroism and is uplifting in its original version. When used in *Youth*, it is elegiac, the mourning of a youth that is prematurely annihilated. The lyrics of *Sumptuous Flowers* become a metaphor for a past that is both innocent and traumatic:

"There is a beautiful flower in the world
The flower is youth, wonderfully fragrant
Strong and unyielding it blooms
And its petals are stained with blood
Sumptuous flower
Its sweet aroma all along the road up the mountain cliffs
In the world there is a heroic flower
The flower is growing youth
The flower bears its loved ones up the mountainside
To stand tall and proud and greet the sunlit clouds
Sumptuous flowers
Its sweet aroma all along the road up the mountains."

The pathos triggered by the song is excruciating, at least to me, as I mourn the loss of a generation, and indeed the waste of an entire nation being swept up by the brutality of wars and political violence: historical traumas that apply not only to China. A life sacrificed is a life decimated, no matter when, where, and for what purposes. Judging by the conversations I had with some audiences, the cultural memories the song conjures up have stirred up both tenderness and sorrow among the generation of Chinese viewers whose lives were so thoroughly devoured by years of relentless political campaigns. In a black humour style typical of Feng's signature satire, *Youth* is punctuated with the subversive repurposing of old revolutionary songs that wax lyrical about sacrifices and wars of different eras. Accompanied by the same melodies and lyrics, the sacrifices and wars become inter-changeable and thus lose their initial sacredness and glory. The fact that one song can be applied to all wars puts the absurdity of war and politics on full display. "We believed in the call of duty and the fight for our country. We were proud of our sacrifices. But what's the point of all the sacrifices looking back now" is what one Vietnam veteran said to me with resigned sorrow while reflecting on how the songs in *Youth* resonate. By triggering among certain viewers a complex set of memory mixing yearning and mourning, the film's soundscape re-summons the experience of a past time and place as it sets the tone of nostalgia together with nostophobia for our summation. *Youth*'s soundscape raises intriguing questions about the impact of the codification and memorialization of certain historical events utilizing patriotic anthems and tunes, memorial hymns, and even noises such as the sound of warfare. If, as Walter Benjamin claims, history breaks down into images, history can certainly persist in memory in relation to sounds that are either connected to or disconnected from the past events.

Youth as Nostalgia and Nostophobia

Youth reflects and enlivens the director's ambivalent personal memory of China from the late 1970s to the 1990s. Viewers' emotional reactions to the film are linked to their own experiences as part of the collective social memory, which is conditioned by the zeitgeist of the Mao era. The revolutionary aesthetic reflected in the theme songs of classic revolutionary films forms the affective dimension of that era. The social zeitgeist and the aesthetic experience of that zeitgeist form what Raymond Williams calls "structures of feeling" (Williams 1977). This concept tackles the issue of nostalgia from a cultural studies perspective. It tries to capture "a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or a period" (Williams 1977, 131). In other words, it tries to capture "the elusive stratum of reality" that is "evanescent in its manifestations" (Sharma and Tygstrup 2015, 1). Williams suggests that we complement the analysis of the social and material infrastructure of reality with a third layer, that of affective infrastructure. Our interpretative horizon is very much linked to a particular structure of feeling, and to the interaction between our unique experiences and a larger historical condition.

While western Marxism has placed more emphasis on economy and philosophy than on culture at large, Williams calls our attention towards the historical production of space, the social and cultural life/world, the "thick" anthropological description of historical reality, and the physiological sensations including feelings and emotions, moods and drives, propensities and longings, dreams and visions, and also rage, love, hate, lust, disgust, pride, shame, elation, and so on. "Feeling" is more fluid than fixed "world-views" or "ideologies," and more in line with meanings and values as actively lived and felt. Nostalgia and nostophobia are part of this emotional experience under the larger umbrella of "structures of feeling." As Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup articulate in the introduction to their book, *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*, Williams's approach examines how experience is articulated in a close and complex interaction between humans and their environments, how it plays out in a particular spatial framework, and how it is inextricably invested in and dependent on social relations between humans, and between humans and social institutions (Sharma and Tygstrup 2015). This approach directs us to the multifarious fabric of everyday life, and to the ways in which culture is continuously reproduced in still new dimensions. For Williams, affective infrastructure regulates our predisposition and modes of presence as well as our participation in social situations.

Youth has divided critics, with some panning it as a vacuous love letter to a cushy adolescence, and others praising it for its gritty depiction of war. Some dislike the film for its sentimentality and charge it with historical revisionism. Some charge the film with failing to take a critical stand against an art troupe that instills patriotism in fellow soldiers, and disapprove of its celebration of spectacular renditions of military songs and dance numbers. This criticism essentially equates nostalgia with romanticizing a brutal past that is supposed to be unconditionally repudiated. The criticism fails to account for the complexity of our individual and collective memories. As structures of feeling, nostalgia and nostophobia are modes of memory that are closely connected with but also different from each other. Svetlana Boym makes a distinction between restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia (Boym 2011). As Boym puts it, "restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (Boym 2001, 49–50). Conceived in this way, the longing in nostalgia does not preclude critical thinking, and fond memories do not absolve one from critical reflection.

Both nostalgia and nostophobia share a strong connection to the lost home/time. A nostalgically remembered chronotope can be hostile, cold, and dark, which generates disgust and repulsion. Yet it is still about *nostos*, i.e., home. It can be a lost homeland devoid of the usual utopian and romantic images. It could be a dystopian chronotope that elicits fear and loathing. In his work comparing Joseph Roth – an Austrian journalist and novelist best known for his family saga *Radetzky March* (1932) about the decline and fall of the Habsburg empire – and Herta Müller, the Romanian born German novelist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature for her work depicting the effects of violence, cruelty and terror under the Socialist Republic of Romania, Martin Baake-Hansen argues that nostalgia transforms flaws and weaknesses into virtues and merits in Joseph Roth's romantic depiction of a lost empire, while nostophobia highlights them in the unflinching works of Herta Müller (Baake-Hansen 2015). Both emotions co-exist in *Youth*, with the repurposed old revolutionary songs evoking and bridging these pasts. The theme song for *Youth*, *Sumptuous Flowers* strikes a simultaneous chord of nostalgia and nostophobia in viewers, including me, stirring up the overwhelming sensation of yearning for a more innocent imaginary past and the mourning of the loss of that innocence, a sensation so acute that it paralyses. The past we yearn for is connected to a particular period in our lives, what we casually and at times dismissively call youth. In a sense, memory is never pure nor absolute. As Martin Baake-Hansen (2015, 122) puts it, "nostalgia cleans up the past, while nostophobia displays its dirt," and both are two

sides of the same coin. Expressed in the stylistic approach of a film, emotional tone conditions how audiences receive and perceive the work. *Youth*'s intense focus on the rise and fall of individuals against the sweeping panorama of a nation in transformation elicits both compassion and repulsion, nostalgia and nostophobia. The film triggers in us the memory of a simpler time with moments of blissfulness and innocence but also of profound sadness for how political and national events can lay waste to the personal and the individual. *Youth* elicits both fond memories and critical reflection.

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Figure 2. The hero's blank stare in the Vietnam War.

Figure 3. The mistimed embrace of the characters.

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Angry Old Men in Post-Crisis European Cinema

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Abstract. The paper explores the representation of ageing white men in 21st-century European art cinema in the socio-cultural context of the series of crises that European societies had to face in the first decades of the new millennium. In Europe ageing is a growing concern, which already influences economic productivity and further endangers the welfare system. Ageing white men, who used to belong to the hegemonic majority of society during their active period, are often disoriented and frustrated by rapid technological development, social changes, shifts in social values or the failures of the welfare system. This paper, through the analysis of *Tyrannosaur* (Paddy Considine, 2011), *I, Daniel Blake* (Ken Loach, 2016) and *A Man Called Ove* (Hannes Holm, 2015), explores the ways these issues are represented in contemporary European cinema. The films of this period often depict the disappearance of an old life-world, together with its old sense of community and its old types of men. Thus, these films tend to be critical of globalized modern societies, and often reveal both the vulnerability and the potential destructiveness of these vanishing masculinities.[1]

Keywords: masculinity, crisis, old age, white men, anger.

Old age has never been one of cinema's favourite topics. If such a sweeping generalization can be allowed, narrative cinema, historically, mostly favoured stories of young people, and, similarly to television, contributed to the systematic underrepresentation of elderly people in visual media (Harwood 2007, 151; Harwood and Anderson 2002; Chivers 2011, xv). Though in film history one finds numerous noteworthy examples of films telling stories about older people, in most cases old men and women play minor, supporting roles, a high percentage of which are fairly stereotypical, predictable stock characters. The silver screen seems to be no country for old men, and probably even less for old women.

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One possible reason for this may be that cinema, be that American or European, genre or auteur, heavily relies on the visual pleasures that the sights of young bodies entail. Ironically, oftentimes even films teaching (or preaching) the higher moral message that "what is essential is invisible to the eye" prefer to do so with actors and actresses who do look young and pleasing to the eye. The practical filmmaker's point seems to be that even if the film is to display the worst miseries and tragedies of life, it works better if there is something in the faces and bodies that visually attract, entertain or captivate the spectator. Though this tendency may very well be read as a sign of the irreducible frivolity of cinema, I would argue that there is more to this phenomenon than the simple addiction to voyeuristic pleasures, the secret affinity between pornography and cinema, or the sexual energies driving the cinematic narrative, as numerous psychoanalytic film theorists have been arguing since the seventies. It appears that there is something in the lack of youthful physical beauty that disturbs the entire sociocultural process of film-enjoyment and cinema-going, at least in its current form, which has been thoroughly intertwined with the cult of youth and beauty throughout its history (Chivers 2011, xv). The lack of youthful protagonists may disturb the cinematic processes of idealization, identification, affective suture, or generally the spectators' emotional connecting with the film, and this constitutes a risk that apparently most directors (and producers) simply would not take.

The other possible reason for cinema's inclination to tell stories of young people is that a narrative needs desire, action, drama and excitement, and people in their young age simply tend to have more of that. Besides cinema's much discussed patriarchal heritage and traditional connection with the perspective of active male protagonists, there is a number of sociocultural and probably also biological reasons why young men in particular tend to be in the centre of cinematic narratives. History tells us that it is mostly young men who make revolutions or fight in wars, criminality records tell us that they commit more crime and especially more of the violent and spectacular ones, insurance policies are based on the assumption that they are more likely to get into danger or take unnecessary risks. Young age in general means more filmic action, in terms of sex, romance, passion, violence or the will to take physical action in order to change the world, and it is probably through young, innocent eyes that the world's cruelty and corruption can be seen most clearly. Thus, both social and psychological statistics and the specific necessities of the film medium suggest that young people, and especially young men, tend to make much more visually interesting and action-oriented (and thus filmable) stories for cinema.

Beyond our "primate package" of behavioural heritage, as well as the above general cinematic considerations (which can be clearly traced back to the history of film as such),

one may also note broader cultural trends underpinning cinema's long-standing ageist inclinations. According to the literary gerontologist Kathleen Woodward, "in every culture, age, like any other important category, is organized hierarchically. In the West, youth is the valued term, the point of reference" (1991, 6), and "our culture as a whole has not succeeded in producing persuasive representations of aging – in particular of the aging body – which are characterized by *tolerance*" (1991, 8). Furthermore, one may notice a systematic disregard of old age in our culture (Woodward 1999, x), which, I would argue, may have something to do with how badly our modern, secular, individualistic culture handles issues of bodily decay, impermanence and death.

As a result, up until quite recently, old age as a central theme was mostly confined to well-defined quarters of the medium. Generally, one's impression is that old-age-related films were either farcical comedies, such as the Jack Lemmon–Walter Matthau *Grumpy Old Men* (Donald Petrie, 1993) and the British *Waking Ned Divine* (Kirk Jones, 1998), or contemplative, dark art-house films about death, impermanence and the meaninglessness of human existence, such as Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957) or Kurosawa's *Ikiru* (1952) (see Chivers 2011, xvi–xvii).

As several film critics have noted, in the 21st century one may notice a shift in this cinematic treatment of elderly people, and "the proportion and types of age-focused plots have increased" (Chivers 2011, xviii). Surprisingly, on both sides of the Atlantic, middle aged and old(er) people have infiltrated several genres previously explicitly associated with youth, such as action cinema or romantic comedy. As a telling example on this ever-widening palette, we even have a Pixar production about an old man, the remarkably sensitive and expressive *Up* (Pete Docter, 2009). Needless to say, there is no shortage of titles demonstrating the trend in European quality film either.

One can detect several causes behind the growing number of films about old people. The first is financial: as a result of ageing first world societies, and the shifting demography of cinema-going, film industry increasingly targets middle-aged and older audiences too. The second reason, arguably more relevant to European quality film, is that the series of crises characteristic of the early 21st century has hit the elder population particularly hard. In the new millennium, there is plenty of drama about old age, and the cinematic representation of the troubles of the elderly is more and more of a must for any socially engaged filmmaker. Moreover, I would argue, the decreased sense of agency and increased insecurity of elder people make them apt representatives of the sorts of troubles many people go through in post-crisis Europe. The third, and most general reason is that when the overall demographic structure of the population is changing, the interpretation of different age groups

inevitably shifts as well, which is bound to show in all fields of culture. One of the most exciting aspects of this cultural and cinematic transformation is narrative and stylistic: it would be logical to claim, as Sally Chivers does (2011, xvi), that older populations and older actors and actresses will require different narratives and perhaps different cinematic styles. And it is likely that audience demands will change what harsh critiques of the cult of beauty could not.

There are some specific trends to the socio-cultural context of this relatively new tendency in European cinema that one needs to address when examining films. The first is population ageing. As a result of longer life expectancy and decreasing birth rates, Europe's developed countries, similarly to those in North America and Asia, are going through a demographic transition never seen before in human history. Life expectancy has doubled since 1900, the number of people aged 60 and over has tripled globally since 1950, and researchers predict that in twenty years the largest population cohort in Europe will be those over 65. Though the increase in human longevity is to be applauded, the current demographic situation raises several concerns (Brinstock and George 2010).

The gradual dismantling of the welfare state, as many European citizens are all too painfully aware, has been well on the way before 2008. The main reason for this is that Europe's glamorous welfare systems were designed for very specific socio-economic conditions, most importantly for the post-World War II booming economy and high birth rates (Kohli and Arza 2011, 252). Many contemporary pensioners grew up with this generous and caring model of the state in mind, and they had every reason to believe that after an early retirement they would be able to live comfortable, affluent lives. The system started to change in the mid-70s, when both economic growth and birth rates started to decline. By the 1990s, welfare costs were seen as explicit threats to economic competitiveness, benefits were cut and pension schemes rearranged in most European countries (Kohli and Arza 2011, 253–254). The long-term consequences of this history did not only concern financial policies and entailed the state's withdrawal from its former, caring responsibilities, but also led to a general decrease in social security and well-being, produced the precariat, the "new dangerous class," and rearranged family structures and gender roles too.

These social and economic rearrangements no doubt shaped the lives of many people in European societies, and seldom for the better. As several post-crisis European films also indicate, the way the state went back on its previous promises has left many with bitter feelings, weakened trust in public institutions, undermined the modern promise of endless progress, and often resulted in the cinematic production of bleak, off-modern landscapes.

Of course, in this grim story white men still seem to fare better in most respects than either women or people of colour. Studies show that though age may make white men more vulnerable to such adverse social changes, they still enjoy certain privileges (Harrington Meyer and Parker 2011, 323). The tendency in developed countries is still that men work more than women, and usually in more responsible jobs (326), which means that old white men tend to be less economically fragile than women. Needless to say, more work and responsibility do not only entail certain economic safeguards, but also heightened stress and additional health risks, which may contribute to the fact that in developed countries men live about seven-year-shorter lives than women. As Frankenberg and Thomas point out, "men use and abuse alcohol and tobacco at greater rates than women, and men also face greater occupational exposure to hazards. Injury and suicide rates are higher for men than for women" (2011, 82). These statistics indicate the kind of strain times of crisis put on white male identities: at such times, lives and identities based on an older construction of masculinity that includes the breadwinner model, performance in the public sphere or financial productivity become particularly fragile and precarious.

Tyrannosaur

Few films express the bitterness, frustration and anger of elderly white men who have "eaten shit" better than Paddy Considine's directorial debut, *Tyrannosaur* (2011). The film tells the story of Joseph (Peter Mullan), a greying, working-class, alcoholic, unemployed widower with serious rage issues. It focuses on Joseph's friendship with Hannah (Olivia Colman), a middle-class charity shop worker, as well as Samuel (Samuel Bottomley), a six-year-old neglected boy living opposite the street. The narrative focuses on how the dramatic events around him, most importantly the abuse suffered by Hannah and Samuel, help Joseph channel his inner turmoil towards legitimate goals, and turn him into some sort of a lonely, silent, involuntary protector.

This summary should not deceive anyone: *Tyrannosaur* is not a sentimental journey of two battered people finding redemption and true love in each other's arms, nor is it a story of a lost soul who finds his true self and becomes a saviour. Though reckoning and redemption are among its key motifs, *Tyrannosaur* follows the tradition of British kitchen-sink dramas and gritty social realism, and never shies away from facing the darker, deeply compromised, destructive aspects of its main characters, or the profound disillusionment that almost all the characters share.

Joseph has "eaten shit" and in his world, "it's dog altogether" – as Tommy, Joseph's drinking buddy succinctly puts it. The film's reliance on authentic locations in Leeds, its interest in the nitty-gritty life of the lower classes, its refusal of middle-class decency (and hypocrisy), its angry critique of the dog world that (some parts of) Britain has become connect it with a long-standing British tradition in literature, theatre and film that involve the 1950's Angry Young Men movement, as well as the work of such socially committed filmmakers as Tony Richardson, Mike Leigh, Ken Loach or Shane Meadows. With its strong intertextual ties and cinematic references, *Tryannosaur* creates a historical arch stretching between the angry young men of the fifties and the angry old men of the early 21st century.

The first, introductory scene already lays out everything that can go wrong or become toxic about white masculinity. Joseph gets drunk and upset about the bookies, and when he is thrown out, in his rage he kicks his poor dog's ribs in. In the first two minutes of the film Joseph displays everything that makes one keep away from such men: cursing, verbal abuse, violence, destructiveness, drinking, gambling, and taking out anger on weaker ones. Yet, the film does not stop here: it also shows the ensuing remorse and bitterness, the moment of clarity when the cloud of rage has passed, as well as the painful recognition of one's own destructiveness. Joseph carries Bluey home, through the shabby post-industrial outskirts of Leeds, and buries him in his yard. Rage and reckoning, violence and remorse, aggression and small gestures of kindness constitute the emotional roller coaster the film follows. *Tyrannosaur*, undoubtedly partly because of Mullan's superb performance, manages to take us inside the world of someone that we usually avoid for very good reasons, and thus provides a psychologically accurate, yet compassionate picture of an all too well-known sort of violent white masculinity.

The film presents rage as a result of an intimate part of a certain culture of disillusioned, frustrated masculinity, a desperate and distorted expression of human agency and dignity in situations where one is denied any sense of agency (Bradshaw 2011, 1). The film can be seen as a study of the anger issues of disenfranchised men, the relationship between socio-economic deprivation and anti-social behaviour, or generally of masculinity gone monstrously wrong. After all, most characters are men, and all of them in important roles are terrible people. It is quite telling that there are only two or three women and one child in the film, and all of them are victims of male domestic violence.

However, in spite of the above general ramifications, Joseph's is not a universal, textbook-like psychopathology: it is built from and coloured by hundreds of cultural markers. Race, class, gender, the history of the British working class, the

post-industrial landscapes of the Midlands, the usual furniture of the unpretentious British corner pub, the sight of a pint on the table in front of a solitary white man, the grey metal shutters on shop windows in the lower part of town all provide the characters with subtle details, historicity, geographical specificity, and the feeling of authenticity. With the strict segregation of the upper and lower classes into the upper and lower part of the town, the film clearly connects to the world of contemporary globalized capitalism, where those who cannot adapt to the quickly changing circumstances are simply left behind. Hannah's infertility, and the general scarcity of young people in the film explicitly relate to the above discussed demographic issues, and add a lot to the gloomy, slightly end-of-the-wold atmosphere that creeps into the film's otherwise fairly strict realism.

Joseph's charity shop encounters with Hannah are among the scenes when these nuances are laid out. It is after a pub fight that Joseph seeks refuge in the charity shop for the first time, though it is unclear whether he wishes to flee from the revenge of the youngsters whom he has attacked, or rather it is his own bad conscience that makes him hide behind a rail full of used women's clothing. Hannah tries to help, offers even to pray for him, yet Joseph seems beyond redemption. Though he silently cries behind the clothes, the next day he rebuffs Hannah's religiously-termed help as fake and condescending: "God ain't my fucking Daddy. My daddy was a cunt, but he knew he was a cunt. God still thinks he is God. Nobody told him otherwise. […] I met people like you in all my fucking life. Goodie goodies. Make a charity record. Bake a cake! Save a fucking soul! You've never eaten shit. You don't know what it's like out there. You haven't a fucking clue!"

The rejection of the "goodie-goodies" turns into explicit scorn when it turns out that Hannah lives in Manors Estate, a posh, middle-class part of town up the hill: "Manors fucking Estate! How is Manors Estate? How are the five-bedroomed, double-garaged, nicely trimmed lawn, fondue, coffee-morning fucking lifestyle Manors Estate? How is it up there? Swimming, is it? What the fuck are you doing down here, huh?" These monologues, I would argue, are significant because here it is not only Joseph who is rejecting the sweet narrative of soul-saving as a condescending, dishonest, middle class fairy-tale. Though he apologizes to Hannah the next day, this seems to be a position that the film as a whole shares. It can be read as a statement about *Tyrannosaur*'s possible interpretations: it warns us never to understand Joseph by the end of the film simply as a redeemed, righteous man, now walking the straight and narrow path. This is not a film with an unambiguous happy ending or an uplifting moral message, and by the end, the well-meaning middle-class spectator will not be able to lie back with the comforting feeling that after all,

all people are essentially good, and everything is OK with the world. Joseph's nasty words warn us against pretending that we completely understand him, that we can fully integrate him into a nice cosy world of meaning, *our* meaning.

This is a film about wasted lives, and its general approach is less that of redemption than mourning. Nowhere does this become clearer than at the funeral of Joseph's best buddie. The connection between masculinity and death runs deep in our mythologies of gender, and will be fully played out in the other two films discussed below. However, in *Tyrannosaur* it is not Joseph who dies, but his old drinking mate, who also stands for the nasty part of Joseph's character. There is only one conversation between the two men before the friend dies, which can be seen as a twisted version of the above quoted one where Hannah tried to convince Joseph that God loves him. Here, once again, we witness the rejection of idealizing and consoling "goodie-goodie" narratives: at this time it is his dying friend that insists that he is "fucked," that his daughter hates him and he is going to hell, and it is Joseph who tries (probably unsuccessfully) to convince him otherwise.

The friend's funeral, as well as the farewell party in the local pub are key scenes for the film's take on these kinds of masculinities. Both Joseph and his friend were abusive husbands, and in their old days both look back on that with regret. To make the scene even more ambiguous, Hannah who has just been beaten up by her husband, parties with them, and finds refuge with them. These ambiguities are never resolved in the film: the party makes it clear that the dead friend was both loved and hated by his daughter. Similarly, when later Hannah asks Joseph whether he loved his wife he says he loved her and hated her. Because of this emotional ambiguity there is no nostalgia associated with mourning and melancholia here. When Hannah asks whether Joseph would like Pauline, his deceased wife to be alive and here with him, he clearly says no, which expresses the film's general attitude to the past. We see old types of men dying, the old shed torn down, an old world and old culture of masculinity going by, things that the film both loves and hates, and *Tyrannosaur* manages to make us mourn these without wanting to bring them back.

The most expressive image of this attitude is that of Joseph sitting in his old armchair, in the middle of his side-yard, amidst the ruins of the shed that he had recently torn down. [Fig. 1.] He is wearing his usual black trousers and a (once) white undershirt, the kind that is often called in Britain sarcastically a "wife-beater." In his right hand there is a machete, in his lap the head of the neighbour's Pitt-bull that attacked the boy Sam. He is a terrible but spectacular sight, an old patriarch, whose kingdom has been reduced to a run-down side-yard and a torn-down shed, which he destroyed himself because it connected to too many bad memories. He sits there

as a tyrant, a mad king of a terrible bygone kingdom, yet with a sense of justice. This time, the killing of a dog was for the protection of innocence, and Joseph was the only one who decided to do something to end the abuses that Sam had to suffer from his stepfather and his fighting dog.

Thus, the two dog-kills map Joseph's inner journey: from killing his only friend in a momentary outburst of rage, to a bloody but premeditated act of protecting innocence in a dog-eat-dog world. With this act, the film also criticizes our all-too-decent ways of turning our heads when seeing injustice, and suggests that perhaps we still need men who are capable of taking action. Joseph may be an old type of man, who has to go, yet the film also subtly calls one's attention to the uncomfortable question where we will be, how we will deal with such issues without people like Joseph taking action in such situations.

One of the telling details and possible strengths of the film is that Joseph's rage against the world is never given a direct cause. There is no original trauma (that we, well-meaning, educated spectators of art films so much like to have), we see no past event outside his power that made him a villain, something that would help us see him more like a victim. He knows and explicitly states that he is not a nice person, and the film wants us spectators to accept that, to see him without categorizing him either as a villain, a victim or a saviour of the weak. He is simply like that, a man struggling with his own bitterness, anger and rage. His rage is somewhat like his old friend's cancer: a part of him that he can neither control nor understand. An illness that both he and the ones around him are suffering from, yet something that – to a large extent – defines him.

This lack of psychological motivation makes the film and its critical edge immensely stronger. The way Joseph's above quoted monologue pulls him out from under God's providence, this lack of psychological understanding pulls him out from any universal humanist interpretation. This way the film retains a segment of meaning that cannot be translated into words and concepts, something weighty, perhaps even traumatic, that we cannot explain away. He is an Other, also to himself, a symptom, a malfunction, a painful mistake with a consciousness and an ability to suffer. An otherness that challenges our world, while indicating our potential responsibility. Joseph remains intimately close, yet out of arm's reach: we cannot save him, only mourn him.

I, Daniel Blake

Ken Loach's 2016 directorial comeback, *I, Daniel Blake* is probably the most well-known of the three films I discuss in this paper. It was reviewed in most major European newspapers, won the Palme d'Or in Cannes as well as a BAFTA prize for best British film. Though it tells a fairly simple, straightforward story of an ordinary man falling through the cracks of the social security system, it clearly pictures larger social processes, and taps into some of the most pressing issues of our time.

I, Daniel Blake is Loach's "angriest film" (Hattenstone 1), "a battle cry for the dispossessed" – as Mark Kermode called it in the Guardian. It recounts a few weeks in the life of Dan, a widowed carpenter in Newcastle, of about sixty years of age. After a near-fatal heart attack, his doctors tell him that he cannot go back to work, yet the health-care professional of the American company to which the government has outsourced benefit allowance evaluation deems him fit and thus not entitled to sickness benefit. Thus, he gets trapped in a series of catch-22 situations, yet another victim of the bureaucratic machine of the contemporary British welfare system. The narrative, which spans between two heart attacks, recounts his struggles with an inhuman system that was not designed for help, his growing frustration and anger, as well as his desperate attempts at preserving human dignity. As in *Tyrannosaur,* a female friend becomes a key element in the plot: this time it is Katie, an unemployed single mother with two small kids, who had to move to Newcastle from London because available council accommodation can only be found there. Unlike Joseph, Dan is basically a nice old chap from the very beginning. The old sort of patriarchy that he represents does not include violence or (self-)destructive attitudes, but rather such traditional working-class values as a dignified work ethic, honesty, solidarity, and a simple, matter-of-course helpfulness towards the ones around him. True to Loach, the film was shot on real locations in Newcastle, the social and institutional background is well-researched, the traps of the system are real. As usual in this type of British realist filmmaking, the cinematography is unaffected, documentary-style, avoiding sensationalism, relying on the sheer force of human drama conveyed by great acting. As in *Tyrannosaur*, the raw power of the unfolding events, real places and the use of basic cinematic techniques add to the feeling of authenticity and only make the cinematic experience stronger.

Loach has been the voice of the silenced and dispossessed all through his career. His socially engaged, politically charged works managed to call public attention to social injustices time and time again. The awareness about single mother and child homelessness raised by his BBC television play *Cathy Come Home* (1966)

led to a parliamentary discussion of the issue, but his films also motivated the establishing of several charity organizations. Loach's international reception tells a lot about how the crisis has changed our perceptions: while his earlier works met mixed international critical responses, were often criticized as politically biased and didactic, and were even censored and banned in the 80s, his post-crisis works are received in a markedly different manner. Perhaps the ageing director's political message has also become more subtle, but it is also quite likely that Loach has been making more or less the same points all through his life, and it is simply the recent crisis that makes his work less "didactic" and more realistic. Arguably, the economic crisis and the general sense of resentment about where neoliberalist policies led us make his works quintessential expressions of the spirit of our times. *I, Daniel Blake* is not only about a simple guy in Newcastle, or the controversies around the British social security system. The film came to cinemas in late 2016, in the year of the Brexit vote, and it dives into some of the very social processes that are currently tearing Europe to pieces. I would argue that the film reveals some of the causes of the resentment, frustration and anger about the brave new world of neoliberal capitalism that motivated so many angry protest voters, and ultimately led to Britain's leaving the EU. On an even more general level, the film also investigates crucial questions concerning identity in the 21st century, such as what happens to a work-based, breadwinner masculine identity when ageing or health issues knock on the door, or when the global economy simply finds somebody redundant.

The film's fist scene, half of which is just a dialogue we hear while watching credits in small, minimalist white letters against a black background, manages to set the main theme and atmosphere of the film as much as the first scene of *Tyrannosaur* did. Here we listen to the dialogue between Dan and the healthcare professional (who turns out to be neither a doctor nor a nurse). It quickly shows that the questions asked (such as "Can you walk fifty meters without assisted by any other person" or "Can you raise either arm to the top of your head?") do not have much to do with Dan's heart condition, which he tries to explain, but to no avail. Clearly, the healthcare professional's goal is not to understand his particular condition, or to find the best solution to his case, but just to go through the form and tick yes or no after each question. Annoyingly enough, she asks each and every question with the same intonation, sounding almost like a robot. (As a matter of fact, many virtual assistants that operate at the other end of the line at big companies at the time of writing fare better at meaningful intonation.)

It is no coincidence that the healthcare professional's face is never shown in the film: she is the first representative of a faceless, inhuman system that Dan meets.

As it turns out, it does not make much difference whether he is talking to real life human beings (at the Jobcentre Plus, for example), or to the answering machines of various institutions that keep him waiting for hours, or someone at a call centre: everywhere he meets the same lack of competence, as well as the lack of useful information, practical help, or will to solve his case. This is not a *Terminator*-movie, or a *Matrix* type of dystopia, no secretly self-developed artificial superintelligence has sneaked out from Google to finish off organic life-forms on the planet, yet one gets the impression that an inhuman System has taken over this segment of society, and ordinary human beings hardly stand a chance.

Of course, the phenomena of self-serving inhuman bureaucratic systems or male resistance to them are not new at all, as every reader of Kafka's *The Trial* or Melville's *Bartleby* knows. There is a long and well-documented history of male disaffection and discontent in the face of the ever more sophisticated and more bureaucratic systems of first world societies. As Robert T. Schultz contends in the context of American literature and film in *Soured on the System*, "in various late nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural texts men's agency is depicted as being on the decline, and that decline is associated predominantly with the reorganization of social and economic life that accompanied the corporate reconstruction of […] capitalism" (Shultz 2012, 7). *I, Daniel Blake*, together with Kafka, Melville and countless other similar examples may lead one to a key recognition regarding the issue of agency and modernity. Let us recall that Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* discussed the post-eighteenth century shifts in the working of power, most importantly the shift from direct physical punishment to inner discipline, in a somewhat celebratory tone, as one of the necessary conditions of the birth of Europe's first sophisticated modern societies (see for example, Foucault 1977, 202–203). These films and pieces of literature, however, also attest to the drawbacks of these cultural paradigm-shifts. Discipline, internalized power, bureaucratization and institutionalization have surely made human life more civilized, and freer from physical violence. Yet, as these new agents of power are much harder to spot, resist, target and fight, this shift also led to a decline in one's sense of agency. It is a telling detail, in this respect, that the most important blind spot of Foucault's theories is that of resistance and human agency (see Certeau 1984). As several post-crisis social surveys and health statistics indicate, this may have more damaging effects on men, whose gendered identities are arguably still more reliant on activity in the public sphere.

Moreover, as most of us know from experience, modern technology took bureaucracy's frustrating effects to a new and unnerving level: after all, only machines can repeat the same sentence or the same five minutes from Vivaldi's *The*

Four Seasons exactly the same way for an infinite number of times. Unfortunately, this is not just a small, annoying aspect of 21st-century life, a small bump on the glorious road to utopia: for those whose livelihoods depend on getting things sorted out as fast as possible, such bureaucratic traps are hell, a gradual descent into desperation and humiliation. First, because when you talk to machines or machine-minded bureaucrats, you are reduced to something subhuman: numbers, codes, points, a set of possible and well-identifiable pre-coded answers, ones and zeros, yeses and nos. Second, as the film shows in psychologically precise ways, because fighting such an invisible, all-pervading system gradually deprives one of all sense of human dignity and agency. Thus, one of the questions that the film asks is what happens to human beings, and more specifically with honest, hard-working men who have built their lives around work, production and activity, when they are deprived of all these. The disheartening answer here is that in 21st-century Europe these men have little chance to enjoy any of the respect that they did either in traditional societies or during more affluent times of industrial modernity.

"They'll fuck you around," the next-door black lad tells Daniel, "make it as miserable as possible – that's the plan." And indeed, time after time, Dan finds himself facing problems that were actually generated by the system. All through the film, he tries to reason, to point out the obvious solutions, as one would do in any normal human interaction, but no one can or would listen to him. Of course, when one's sense of agency is taken away, frustration, resentment and anger follow. When you realize that you have no chance to make yourself heard, when you understand that the system is not for, but against you, and you cannot mend it – then you go into protest mode, as Dan does, or just try to break the system any way you can, as arguably many Brexiters (and Trump voters) did.

Interestingly, in the film it is Katie's small son, Dylan who best expresses this dynamics of frustration. One day, while Dan is helping the family, mending this, fixing that in the house, Dylan keeps bouncing his ball hard and loud on the stairs, without end, in quite a nerve-wrecking manner. Dan tries to start a conversation, or get him help him, but nothing works: he would not answer questions, and would not stop. Seeing Dan's bewilderment at the situation, Daisy, the older sister explains: "He does it when he's angry. People never listen to him, so why should he listen to them?" This scene adds two things essential to the meaning of the film. First, it shows the above-mentioned dynamics of frustration and destructiveness: Dylan had to leave his friends and relatives in London because of a system larger than him, which he had no chance to argue with. This frustration leads to anger, which is expressed in destructive protest action the only meaning of which is its

meaninglessness. Second, the scene associates such acts of protest, including Dan's later graffiti-vandalism (and possible protest votes), with the innocence of a child. The scene suggests that angry protest in such situations is legitimate, and it results from the frustrating lack of power and self-determination, rather than malice or the taste for destruction.

Details of Dan's life enrich his fight with the system with further and less political resonances. He is a carpenter who has been working on construction sites all his life, and his hobby is carving all sorts of artefacts from wood. This is a symbolic choice for a number of reasons. Dan's craftsmanship associates him with the old economy of material production, where people still produced something material and practical, something you can see, grasp and appreciate (as opposed to most office jobs offered by corporate capitalism, where you work at what Marc Augé has called non-places, never leave your computer, and never really see the physical results of your work). I would argue that there is much more at stake here than the demise of the traditional working class, or the crisis of work-oriented breadwinner masculinities. The film also comments on the rapid technological change that has reorganized our societies to an unprecedented degree in the past few decades, the change that makes human life more and more devoid of sensory affect, real objects, organic surroundings, and meaningful, face-to-face human interaction. The world of globalized capitalism in the digital age looks more and more like a giant simulation, designed and run by a narrow and well-paid elite of technocrats (and their algorithms), where people like Dan appear like obsolete organic leftovers. This world is "digital by default," as Dan is informed at Jobcentre Plus, which is a completely unknown world for an elderly carpenter, who is, as he remarks, "pencil by default." One wonders to what extent the elderly's distrust and fear of this new, technocratic world played a part in the Brexit referendum: after all, the greatest of such faceless, technocratic, digital-by-default bureaucratic institutions is the EU itself. The position of *I, Daniel Blake* is clear on this. The only valuable help Dan gets during his crisis is coming from people outside these bureaucratic institutions: neighbours, friends, co-workers, that is, ordinary people still operating on basis of an old kind of humanity and social solidarity. The only person at Jobcentre Plus who does help Dan does it by going against protocols, and gets duly reprimanded for it. Thus, I would argue that what the film presents us, perhaps against Loach's intentions, is not simply a contrast and conflict between the inhuman institutions run by the neoliberal state on the one hand, and ordinary human beings following an old-school community spirit on the other. It is also a contrast and conflict between the new and the old, digital and organic, numbers and affective qualities, bureaucratic responses and genuine

human interactions, machines and humans – which may very well be one of the defining set of conflicts of 21st-century life.

At this point, let me refer briefly to Thomas Friedman's book *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*, which was similarly published in 2016. Friedman makes at least two points that are significant for the context of the film. First, he demonstrates that changes in the most formative aspects of our life conditions have been accelerating exponentially in the last few decades, with a speed that is simply incompatible with the adaptive potential of biologically and psychologically defined human beings. In other words, the technologically-driven transformation of modern economies, labour markets, natural habitats or communication patterns can be disorienting and frightening (especially for older and digitally illiterate people) partly because of the sheer speed of change (Friedman 2016). In the context of the present paper it is particularly relevant to notice that the fastest transformation of the world during human history takes place in front of the eyes of the oldest (and therefore possibly least flexible) population that has ever lived on the planet.

The second point Friedman makes that is worth considering in the context of the social processes that the film taps in, is that such historical events as the Brexit referendum or the 2016 US elections (where Donald Trump was elected president) can be seen as signs of a backlash in the developed world against these frightening accelerations. In other words, the conflict between ordinary human beings left behind by the system and the new, quickly developing technocratic world that *I, Daniel Blake* presents, is also a conflict that determined the outcome of arguably the two most important votes with symbolic value in the 21st century so far, the Brexit and Trump's presidency.

Dan's journey is that of defeat and withdrawal: from work to his home, from the world of digitalized bureaucracy to such an old-school, real-life mode of public protest as writing graffiti on the wall of a public institution, from attempts at coping with the system to stubborn defiance. The public celebration by passers-by that accompanies his street protest clearly pits the local community of ordinary citizens against the representatives of the inhuman system. The scene, as many others, expresses anti-neoliberal, anti-modern, anti-globalization sentiments and can be clearly read as a pledge for an old sense of justice, dignity and solidarity. *I, Daniel Blake*, however, remains realistic about the practical fruitfulness of such public demonstrations. Though the protest is an empowering ritual in which both Dan and the spectator learn with relief that there is a community that can stand together, the ensuing celebration cannot last long. Dan is taken away by the police, and his act

remains an angry, spectacular, but ultimately futile gesture. As in *Tyrannosaur*, such actions, motivated by frustration and anger, are the last and only means through which agency and human dignity can be expressed, also the only acts through which masculinity is connected with power and activity in the public sphere. Importantly for the film's overall picture of contemporary social issues, these defiant gestures remain mostly symbolic, seldom solve anything, and tend to bring trouble to the desperate men resorting to them [Figs. 2–3].

The film is clearly pessimistic about the chances of these old (kind of) men to enter the 21st-century life-world or meet its challenges. Dan's death can be regarded as symbolic in this respect. Even though a lawyer that his friend Katie got him promises success, he never lives to see it. Thus, his funeral, the film's last scene, becomes a mourning of more than one man. Similarly to *Tyrannosaur*'s last shot, which shows Joseph walking away from the camera in a symmetrical composition, this is a symbolic good-bye: there is the sense of a farewell to an old kind of man that simply has no place in our rapidly-changing world. The difference is, however, that Dan's life was not wasted, like that of Joseph: there is no history of violence here, but rather a history of caring and help. Though Dan upholds an old sense of order in an older style of patriarchy that younger generations may dislike (he reminds his young neighbour to take away his smelly garbage from their shared corridor, he shouts and curses at the man who repeatedly takes his dog to shit in their yard), he never becomes violent or physically threatening, and relates to people in need with a spontaneous, down-to-earth, unsentimental helpfulness. Moreover, he has a whole set of traditionally feminine characteristics: we learn that he used to take care of his sick wife for years before she died, and he is happy to look after Katie's children while she is out looking for work. Thus, he has to seek no redemption. Quite the contrary, with Dan's death, the film mourns the loss of and pays homage to an old type of man and the values he lived by.

A Man Called Ove

The Swedish *A Man Called Ove* (*En man som heter Ove,* Hannes Holm, 2015) presents a markedly different take on the issue of ageing white men in Europe's rapidly changing 21st-century societies. Though the number of motifs shared with the previously discussed films is conspicuously large, the approach, the style and the emotional journeys are quite different. In this adaptation of Fredrick Backman's best-selling novel, similarly to the previously discussed films, one finds a working class widower, out of work, going through a period of personal crisis, struggling with

alienation, loneliness, lack of purpose, and absence of meaningful human relations. And as in the previous films, it is through finding new human relationships, face to face "neighbourly" connections (and the responsibilities that come with them) that the existential crisis is abated, and some sort of purpose or meaningfulness is found by the end of the narrative.

In spite of all these similarities, *Ove* offers a completely different experience for the viewer: this time it is not gritty social realism set in Broken Britain, but a hyperrealist black comedy placed in a neat and well-kept Scandinavian gated community. Moreover, here drama is regularly sweetened by touches of nostalgia and sentimentality, and slightly complicated by irony, black humour and self-reflexive distancing. As opposed to the straightforward heart-gripping-stomach-punching emotional rollercoaster of the first two films, here one generally encounters a feel-good approach with heart-warming moments, and a delicate balance between nostalgic sentimentality and instances of that particular kind of dark Nordic humour that non-Scandinavian spectators either instinctively get (and thus enjoy) or simply do not (in which case the film is practically unenjoyable). The immediate Nordic intertext of *Ove* would include the adventure-comedy *The Hundred Year Old Man who Climbed out the Window and Disappeared* (Felix Herngren, 2013) and the comedy-drama *Elling* (Petter Naess, 2001). As the generic tags also indicate, these also combine the theme of men in crisis with (weird and often dark) humour, as well as surrealistic or hyperrealistic storytelling. Regarding the wider context of *Ove*, Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* must also be mentioned, arguably a paradigm-setting art-house film about ageing. While *The Hundred Year Old Man* and *Elling* share *Ove*'s fondness of absurd, dark humour in their approach to ageing, isolated men, *Wild Strawberries* is a significant precursor with regard rather to its fundamental situation of an embittered, cold, slightly sociopathic man re-evaluating his life before death.

Similarly to the other two films discussed above, *Ove* starts with a short prelude before the main title that serves as an introduction of the main character, as well as an outline of the key social and psychological issues that define ageing and masculinity in early 21st-century Sweden. In the very first shot we see an elderly man looking at bunches of flowers in a gardening store, where – as the spectator immediately understands – if you have a coupon, you can buy one bunch of roses for 50 krones and two for 70. The next shot shows the man at the counter, trying to buy one bunch for 35, quarrelling indignantly with the shop assistant, who is patiently trying to explain to him the logic of the deal. Next, we see him at a railway crossing in front of a cemetery, with the flowers in his hand [Fig. 4]. At this cut, the change of sound marks the change of mood: the smooth shopping music from the

store is suddenly interchanged by the harsh noise of the train passing by, then by the silence of the cemetery, and Ove's clumsy words as he is trying to explain the flower incident to his deceased wife. "That's all wrong! That's totally insane!" – he says, which we will soon understand as his general opinion of the world around him. He arranges the flowers, cleans the top of the gravestone with a handkerchief, pauses for a moment and says "Miss you."

These scenes define Ove as the stereotypical cantankerous old grump that everybody avoids, and thus sets the scene for the comic parts to come. However, as some of the above details may have indicated, this prelude also starts building up the emotional history that led to Ove's embitterment. Arguably, it is this retrospective psychological inquiry that makes the film more than just another absurdist black comedy about a grumpy old man: this is what turns the film into an in-depth study of the recent history of Europe and its ageing men.

Similarly to the other two films, the prelude shows the main character getting upset over something ordinary, and thus associates ageing men with frustration, anger, and harsh criticism of the current state of the world. This seems to be a logic very similar to the meaningfully marginal perspectives created by old age in general in the *Wild Strawberries* cinematic paradigm. As the nearness of death may create a perspective from which life can be seen and evaluated as a whole, social and emotional marginalization may create a perspective from which our current social systems can be critically assessed. In both cases it is exclusion from the centre (or the mainstream) and regarding phenomena from the margins that produces meaningful insights, it is hard to notice when one is still successful and/or in the middle of life. Ove's most direct critique in this opening scene concerns consumer capitalism, although (in line with the absurd humour and constant distancing) it is clear that he is neither right about the specific issue (the flower deal), nor has any chance of winning his case, which is clearly indicated by the fact that in the cemetery we see him with two bunches of flowers.

The film's real narrative, however, starts only a couple of minutes later, with Ove's loss of his job at the railway wagon factory. Having done his early morning routine social-work-and-security-round-trip at the gated community (collecting cigarette stubs, checking that garage doors are properly closed, double-checking that recycled garbage is properly selected, making notes of improperly parked cars, cleaning kids' toys left buried in the sandbox, chasing suspicious-looking cats away from the sandbox), Ove goes to work in his old Saab. As a symbolic signifier of the marginality or anachronistic quality of his blue-collar job (or the Swedish heavy industry in general), a static aerial shot shows his blue car turn left at a roundabout

where all the other cars go straight. In the factory (where Ove is in a blue overall, among blue machines, inspecting railway wheels with his papers in hand), he is called into the office by two managers, men half his age in white shirts and suits. In the office the managers, who are sitting at a desk with their identical laptops open in front of them, fire Ove according to the rhetorical and ethical standards of contemporary corporate capitalism. With forced, wry smiles they break the news to Ove that after 43 years of work at the company, and even though he is only 59, they thought that he would fancy doing something different, and therefore offer him a government-paid education course in digital literacy. As a clear commentary on the concerning social issues (also seen in *I, Daniel Blake*), in this scene the white-collar/blue-collar difference on the two sides of the desk is coupled with the antagonism between young and old, winner and loser (of global capitalism), as well as that of digital and analogue (laptop versus pen and paper).

Ove, of course, immediately understands that he is being fired, even if in this cultural environment nobody would call a spade a spade, and thus simply walks out the door. When he is about to leave the office, however, so as to make the farcical situation even more pointed, the managers stop him to offer the company's farewell gift, a spade "for gardening." It is a telling detail that the gift is picked up from a long line of spades placed by the wall behind them, suggesting that many of Ove's colleagues will soon get the same generous offer. The real critical edge of the scene, as well as the source of Ove's humiliation, however, stems from the twist in the power/age relations: in this scene, seniority is associated with disempowerment, lack of competence, as well as economic and social redundancy. To make things worse, the managers keep using euphemisms and sweet lies to cover up the moral susceptibility of their decision to fire someone after 43 years of "loyal service" (as Ove calls it), thus associating the new generation and the new (global, neoliberal, corporate) capitalism with hypocrisy, inauthenticity and the lack of human responsibility.

So far, *A Man Called Ove* hardly presents anything really new: similar situations of men mistreated by corporate capitalism abound, moreover, in Ken Loach's *The Navigators* (2001) one finds this well-known drama (of the decline of the working class, of privatization and outsourcing, men's economic redundancy, short-term contracts and precarious existences) in the similar setting of a British railway company. What makes *Ove* unique in this cinematic context is what comes after this almost caricature-like commonplace scene. As he has nothing more to live for, he decides to end his life, and the rest of the film is structured by his repeatedly failed suicide attempts. However, each time he tries to commit suicide, some silly, ordinary event ruins his plan. Furthermore, each near-death experience brings up

memories and visions of the past. Thus, with each suicide attempt the spectator gets a glimpse into Ove's past, into the beautiful and the tragic events that led to his present miserable existence. Significantly for the aesthetic qualities of the film, each (often nostalgic) recollection ends with some kind of darkly humorous event forcefully dragging Ove back to life. With this twist, the film manages to evoke a saturated, nostalgic view of the personal and national past, contrast past and present, yet to do it in a way that avoids uncritical sentimentality.

These absurdly funny situations often include a family of new residents moving next door. As it is a young family (regarding their age, the parents could be Ove's children) with two little girls (while Ove and his late wife did not have any children), and the wife is of Persian origin, their interactions set in motion an intricate dynamics of social and political relations, as well as thematize several hot contemporary issues. It is their arrival, more precisely the husband's clumsy manoeuvring with the semitrailer in front of Ove's window, which first makes the control-freak Ove get the rope off his neck and climb down from the chair so as to get the trailer in position without any further bumps on the nearby fences or post-boxes.

The fact that it is this new, young family that accidentally but repeatedly hi-jacks Ove's suicide attempts highlights the way the film twists the commonplace relationship of past and present, old and new. Whenever Ove is about to submerge in his nostalgic near-death visions about his past (hanging from the noose or inhaling his car's emissions in the closed garage), these annoying but sympathetic newcomers always draw him back into life, inadvertently and gradually endowing his life with new tasks, responsibilities, and even new purpose. In their relationship Ove clearly represents an old kind of masculinity, an old sense of order and way of life. In many ways, Ove's character functions in the film as a connection between past and present, a reminder of the passing of time and all the valuable things being lost. Thus, in this film, the past is not simply obsolete and irritating, but it is also something worth mourning.

The passing of time, loss and mourning are key issues in both Ove's character and the film's approach to recent history. As the spectator learns, before losing his job, Ove lost his mother at an early age, he saw his father hit by a train at the wagon factory on the day of his graduation, he witnessed their old house burning down (probably deliberately set on fire by the "white-shirt" investors who wanted to build a gated community on the land), lost their unborn baby when he and Sonja suffered an accident during a vacation, and finally saw his wife Sonja die in cancer as well. He still wears his father's watch, which he got on the day his father died, a detail that clearly indicates that he lives in the past, according to old standards and ideals. In his house not only the young Sonja's picture is displayed, but her clothes are still

hanging in the closet. These details suggest that Ove's mourning processes have been stuck, and the series of losses that he suffered simply do not let him move on.

Though the long list of Ove's losses is something that (hopefully) very few people share, the above motif of accumulated unprocessed traumas can be recognized as a characteristically 21st-century socio-psychological phenomenon. As already mentioned in the previous section in connection with Daniel Blake's problems with the "digital by default" system he struggles with, due to the ever more accelerated social and technological change, the less flexible (for example elderly) segments of our societies are under heightened stress. Old life-worlds and value-systems are vanishing at such a pace, yesterday's skills are becoming useless so rapidly, one's knowledge about the world is getting updated so often that the feelings of disorientation, frustration and anxiety are almost inevitable, especially for the less flexible.

Adding this social issue to the wider context of *Ove* may seem somewhat far-fetched for many who have seen the film, especially those who are moved by (and thus focused on) its sentimental journey into Ove's past. However, the old, grumpy man of the first scenes of the film, standing behind the locked entrance of his gated and fenced community, surrounded by signs of prohibition and warning, is already one of the most politically influential figures of our times [Fig. 6]. As we learn, it was Ove who invented most of these restrictions (where to drive, where to park cars, what kinds of pets are allowed, etc.), and it is also him who meticulously guards these rules, day after day, expressing direct anger and contempt for anybody who may break them. Thus, the film presents Ove as a guardian of a bygone age, an embittered defender of a fortification that he has turned his habitat into. The film establishes a clear allegorical relation between Ove and a previous, now vanishing Sweden, thus inviting the spectator to see the gated community as (Good Old) Sweden or (Fortress) Europe itself. The stereotypical characters of the film further emphasize this social (or national) allegory: apart from the old, grumpy man and white-shirt agents of the neoliberal capitalist order, there is a gay lad, an overweight lad, a Barbie-doll-like blond woman with high heels and a Chihuahua, an old couple with the husband paralysed, a well-meaning and socially engaged female journalist, and of course, the immigrants, that is, the newly arriving Persian-Swedish family. Ove's anxieties about what the world has come to are placed within this social tableau, and are clearly meant to be understood beyond the individual story, in more general or allegorical ways too.

Thus, *A Man Called Ove* also ventures to explore the psychological profile, or at least one such profile, of people who feel anxious and frightened of our rapidly transforming world, people who like to withdraw into their well-known smaller

surroundings, who retreat into the local and the personal, who would very much like to turn back time. Today, when the world is still wrestling with the damaging, unforeseen side-effects of the Brexit referendum or Trump's presidency, it could be revealing to ask ourselves the following question (as a sort of thought experiment). If offered a referendum with which Ove could double-cross the white-shirts and could hope to turn back the processes of globalization and accelerated change, would he do it? Or: If such people as Ove, Joseph or Daniel saw a politician who promised them to make their country great again, punish the parasitical financial elites and their opportunistic white-collar servants, and bring back the good old days, would they vote for that politician? And if they did, should this come as a surprise?

The film paints a complex picture about the worth and chances of old men like Ove in such contemporary communities. First, it legitimizes Ove's grumpiness by telling the story of his losses. Second, it reveals that the principles that he upholds in such often annoying ways have much social value. Third, in a manner reminiscent of Joseph's defence of the young boy in *Tyrannosaur*, it suggests that this older generation of men were and are still capable of (even heroic) action. (Most notably, in a memory-scene we see Ove running into a burning house to save a child when nobody else dares to do anything.) And finally, the film suggests that with newly established, productive social relations these old men do have a chance of integrating into our changing societies (here it is mostly Ove's becoming friends with the Persian woman and eventually turning out to be a surrogate-grandfather to her children that serves the function of the essential social link).

In its approach to the above mentioned hot and no doubt pressing issues of early 21st-century Europe, *A Man Called Ove* applies an interesting and slightly deceiving strategy. By creating the allegorical association between Ove and Good Old Sweden, and by making the spectator more and more emotionally attached to his figure, the film also makes us feel nostalgic about the old Sweden that was transformed (or destroyed) by the globalized capitalism of the white-shirts. By this artistically successful but politically ambiguous strategy the film manages to tell a story about the loss of Good Old Sweden through a narrative of personal (and often romantic) loss. Mourning the death of Ove's father, wife, or Ove himself thus becomes a politically unproblematic way of mourning a past version of the nation or the local life-worlds lost in globalized capitalism. Likewise, the nostalgia evoked by the good old days seems less politically reactionary when it is associated with the memory of genuine, innocent, private happiness.

Through the absurd situation of telling a life story through the repeated suicide attempts of Ove, the film also comments allegorically on how difficult it is for this

old kind of man to pass away. As many events unfold from his interrupted suicide attempts, in most of the present-day scenes Ove is wearing his "nice," blue, "to-be-buried-in" suit, which thus also serves as a constant reminder of his imminent passing from this world. As the narrative unfolds, this blue colour will gradually signify both the working class (blue-collar) and the feelings of mourning and melancholia. The connection of these two clusters of meaning through Ove's figure, who is working himself through situation after situation while secretly preparing for death, contributes to the film's commentary of the demise of the traditional working class and its iconic masculinities. Thus, *A Man Called Ove* is simultaneously an obituary, a farewell, an act of reckoning with the past, and a message to the future, on both personal and social levels.

Like Daniel Blake, there is a number of things Ove has to do before he dies. He has to fix things, such as punctured bicycles, leaking heating systems, broken relationships, and unchallenged aspects of his own self. The film suggests that these old men still have a lot to do, a lot to fix, a lot to add to the new world, which they do not recognize as their own, before they leave. Moreover, he also has to pass on things: objects, knowledge, skills and useful traditions. He gives the cradle he once made for their baby (who was never to be born) to the Persian-Swedish neighbours, explains how to park with a trailer, he teaches Parvaneh how to drive, and passes on his routines of checking the orderly functioning of the community to the younger generation. In the very last scene of the film, after Ove's funeral, it is the Persian-Swedish little girl (Ove's foster-granddaughter) who turns back to properly lock the gate of the community, thus symbolically taking over Ove's responsibilities. Similarly to *Tyrannosaur* and *I, Daniel Blake*, the film sympathizes with some of the values of these old kinds of masculinities, and successfully demonstrates the social value of seemingly annoying or disturbing attitudes, personal characteristics. Yet, this acknowledgment of the values of (some of) the old ways of this old, white man does not seem to be shaped by any ideological masterplan or political doctrine, or at least not in overt ways: as the gate-checking scene suggests, maintaining (Ove's sense of) order in one's community is important, but it can be equally well done by unemployed overweight lads, gay kebab-makers or half-Persian schoolgirls.

Similarly to its message about orderliness, the film's criticism of global capitalism also lacks explicit political overtones. This is clearest in the episode when the community stands together to prevent a private caregiver company's taking away Rune, a paralysed elderly member, against the will of his wife, who wishes to keep taking care of him. Though the community demonstratively gathers in Rune's house to stop his forceful moving into the company's home (which, in Sweden, is paid

by the government), what leads to success is the intervention of a female journalist from the local newspaper who manages to blackmail the white-shirts to back off by revealing the company's secret Channel Islands bank accounts and undeclared millions. Here the confrontation between global capitalism and the local community is physically manifest (the locals basically line up on the lawn), and the conflict between financial interests and human well-being, exploitation and solidarity is obvious. However, this does not translate as a nationalist or populist message: though the crooked "white-shirt scum" is driven out, and the gate is closed behind them, the community tableau is notably diverse, including young and old, Swedes and immigrants, blue-collar workers and educated people, straight and gay. It is in their standing together, overcoming their differences and the standard alienation of modern urban societies, it is their fight for what they value that makes Ove reintegrate into the community. It is no accidental detail, then, that Ove has his first heart attack only after this successful mission. Apparently, now, having passed on his fighting spirit, values and principles, he is more ready to go.

Though the above mentioned strategy to wrap national nostalgia in terms of personal or romantic mourning may suggest a conservative political stance legitimizing the attitudes of the older generation of white men, the film's ending rather resembles a liberal utopia. The way the community's internal differences are erased in their common fight against the white-shirts may call attention to the way difference is systematically underrepresented and downplayed in the film. Paravaneh, the Persian immigrant, for example, speaks perfect Swedish, dresses and behaves as a modern European woman, and shares more of Ove's principles than any other character. Her cultural difference is reduced to the fact that she puts saffron into rice meals (which Ove, actually, learns to appreciate). Similarly, the most damaging conflict that the community has seen, the one between Ove and Rune, stem from their loyalty to different car brands. While Ove is devoted to Saab, Rune always buys a Volvo, which distances them. The ultimate breaking point in their friendship is when Rune, after their children move abroad, decides to buy a BMW convertible, "the ultimate betrayal" – as Ove calls it. In these and other similar instances, there is nothing about differences of age, ethnicity, religion, political opinion or sexual orientation that could not easily be overcome. In a truly idealistic, even Hegelian manner, difference can be overcome and fully integrated into the system of the same. The film suggests that (except for the corrupted white-shirt servants of global capitalism) all people are essentially good, they share the same values, their conflicts are easy to solve, mutual understanding and respect can be reached, and their living together is unproblematic.

Conclusions

The most striking characteristic that these three films share in their depiction of old men is the association between crisis and ageing. Sometimes it is provoked by one's retirement, loss of employment, sometimes by the death of a spouse or close emotional support, but all three films are invariably crisis narratives. Though the stories of these crises are told through individual details, richly meaningful local settings, which clearly comment on the time, place and the specific social problems that these involve, all three male protagonists are allegorical figures, signifying (in various ways and degrees) the crisis faced by a whole generation of men, or a whole culture, life-world and ethos. Thus, following arthouse cinema's traditional approach of using old people as mirrors to the world, as critical perspectives on the life that they are leaving behind, all three films offer a critical analysis of contemporary European societies, and the lives lived in them.

One key aspect of the crisis these elderly white men are facing stems from their reduced social status and limited sense of agency. In case of Joseph and Daniel, this goes back mostly to financial and social reasons, such as living on benefits or losing even those benefits, being lonely, isolated, living outside the human and institutional systems of care. Accordingly, in these two British films the sense of crisis is depicted through evocative images of after-modern landscapes, run-down buildings, unheated and unfurnished apartments, closed-down shops and graffiti-covered metallic shutters. In case of *A Man Called Ove*, the crisis lacks the financial aspect and the sense of a physically declining modern world, but the feeling of social and institutional malfunctioning is clearly there, as well as such other shared problems as isolation, loss of social and economic worth, the experience of redundancy, emotional vulnerability and humiliation. It is partly this more general or figurative sense of social commentary that makes death a key motif in all three films. Through the death of either the protagonist (*I, Daniel Blake*, *A Man Called Ove*) or a substitute close friend (in *Tyrannosaur*), the films comment on the passing of this older generation of men.

It is also quite significant that all three films express the idea that the world has changed and is no longer accommodating, comfortable or home-like for these men. They feel dispossessed, neglected and disregarded, they do not understand the new, "digital by default" world of globalized capitalism, run by the financial interests of international capital, faceless computers, difficult-to-operate softwares, and unfathomable algorhythms, as well as by an outsourced-by-default white-shirt bureaucracy that is clearly disconnected from the local people and the local issues

they have to manage. This also affects the films' narrative trajectories, which are not driven by forward-looking desire, but by pain, mourning, melancholia, nostalgia and a wish to restore a life-world that has already been lost. This regressive, moribund journey is often presented as a destructive and self-destructive downwards spiral, which stems from one of the possible emotional responses that can be given to such situations of defeat, loss and disempowerment. Perhaps the fundamental emotional conflict of these films concerns precisely this inner struggle between progressive and regressive emotional responses. While the above listed painful and frustrating experiences drag these men down, towards more destructive and self-destructive journeys, we can also witness their desperate efforts to move forward, preserve the values that they cherish, reconnect with people, or to find new purpose for their lives. In this situation, another key issue is whether they can channel their frustration and anger in productive ways. The journeys of Joseph and Ove clearly run from more destructive to more productive uses of their bitterness and anger, however, Daniel's story is that of a series of frustrating attempts to keep up normalcy, and a resulting gradual falling down.

Importantly, social institutions fail in all three films: we can witness the crumbling of the great, innovative features of modern societies, most importantly the protective and care-giving function of the state (Porter 1999, 195–230). Thus, besides its personal stories, allegories of older kinds of masculinities, these films also dramatize the post-crisis shifts in the functioning of the state and the ensuing changes in the definition of citizenship. Many contemporary European citizens experience similar problems, the demise of the welfare state, the reduction of its caring functions, the outsourcing and privatization of health care, the malfunctions of bureaucracy, less secure streets and increased crime because of under-funded police departments, piles of garbage on the streets or unmaintained roads – these are all parts of post-crisis world and its after-modern landscapes. As the films also attest, such changes also undermine the post-war concept of the state as well as the late 20th-century idea of citizenship, and even forces the characters to go back to pre-industrial human "networks of mutual aid" (Porter 1999, 195) or characteristically pre-modern systems of justice (killing the dangerous dog in *Tyrannosaur*, or blackmailing the private caregiving company in *A Man Called Ove*). One worrying aspect of this trend (on- and off-screen) is that these social systems of providing and care are probably not only the luxurious fruits of an affluent and politically stable form of modernity, but are also parts of its preconditions. When seeing the anger of either these old men in cinema or the millions of protest voters that come from the precariat, "the new dangerous class" (Standing 2011), it may be worth recalling that

in the quickly industrializing German Reich of the 1880s, Bismarck introduced a system of welfare policies (which today we regard as the forerunner of the late 20th-century form of the welfare state) precisely as a means of defusing such anger and undermining proletariat-based revolutionary movements, which he recognized as a threat to the stability of the state (Porter 1999, 198).

Perhaps it is precisely this withdrawal or malfunctioning of the modern state that highlights the importance of individual action associated with these older forms of masculinity in these films, which often imply that the pre-crisis affluence and all-providing state created inert, passive, consumer-type citizens, who are simply not prepared for crisis-situations or the gradual withdrawal of the all-providing state. When in *A Man Called Ove* a man accidentally falls on the rails from the platform, most people simply watch without any idea what to do, and a woman even starts recording the scene with her phone. It is only Ove (who went there to jump in front of the train anyways) who jumps down, lifts the guy, and shouts at the onlookers to help him pull back the poor fellow to the platform. As several other situations in these films indicate, these older men were and perhaps still are capable of taking action in situations where there is no use waiting for some kind of public service to step in and solve the situation. His angry shouting at the onlookers can be interpreted as a symbolic wake-up call, forcefully dragging ordinary citizens (who are apparently not prepared for such a crisis) out of their slumber of passivity.

Such acts of help and solidarity, however, are not necessarily defined in these films as individual, heroic, or necessarily gendered masculine. These older men stand, rather, as catalysts, igniting social cohesion, action and a social dynamics of solidarity. In *Tyrannosaur*, it is the death of Joseph's old buddy that pulls the local community together, in *I, Daniel Blake*, it is Daniel's desperate street protest that brings ordinary pedestrians to some sort of political consciousness and united protest, and in *A Man Called Ove*, it is Rune's impending misery and Ove's angry intervention that makes the whole community stand up together against the greedy "white-shirt scum." Their anger, desperation, loud calls and spectacular deeds seem to be necessary for a proper social response to a crisis-situation, which response would include people, attitudes and styles of responses across divisions of race, class and gender. All three films refrain, however, from idealizing masculinity as the source of socially desirable action: on the contrary, all three films hint at the potentially destructive and/or self-destructive qualities of embittered old men, and imply that the individual frustration or anger of these men can be turned into socially productive, non-destructive action only with the support or guidance of female companions.

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Figure 3. *I, Daniel Blake* (2016). Dan's graffiti: a human cry for justice and compassion in an increasingly inhuman world.

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Arrested and Arresting: Intermedial Images and the Self-Reflexive Spectator of Contemporary Cinema

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Abstract. The paper departs from the assumption that while the analysis of the systematic effect that popular cinema (genres like melodrama, horror or action movies) has on its spectators has been largely discussed by film theorists, little has been written on the affective dimensions of arthouse cinema. The lasting effect of visually compelling films on the individual spectator's emotions has been addressed only sporadically by cognitive film theory, film phenomenology and aesthetics. Therefore, the author proposes to bring together terms and concepts from different discourses (film and literary theory, intermediality studies and empirical psychological research of the literary effect) in order to elucidate how intermedial, painterly references in midcult and arthouse films mobilize the associative dimensions of film viewing and may have an impact on spectatorial self-reflexion and emotional growth. Moreover, films that rely on the associative power of still(ed) images, painterly references bring into play the personal and cultural experiences of the viewer. As such, they can be effectively used in professional and cultural sensitivization.

Keywords: arresting image, self-reflexion, intermediality, stillness, painterly reference, professional sensitivization.

Classical, structuralist and poststructuralist aesthetics of visual arts have always been preoccupied to some extent with the factors contributing to the impact of the image on its spectator, calling them, in turns, "the pregnant moment" of the painting (Lessing in his *Laokoön,* 1984[1766]), "the punctum" or the "third meaning" of the photograph and film (Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida,* 1982, and in *The Third Meaning*, 1975), or "images in-between" (Bellour 2012) without, however, explicitly raising the issue of individual response to certain – unusual, uncanny, disturbing – images. Similarly, in cognitive film theory, which focuses on

the cognition-emotion correlation of film-viewing processes and on psychosemiotic interpretation, narrative and genre-centred approach remains dominant, with less focus on emotional responses to formal, aesthetic aspects of cinematic expression and more specifically the impact of images carrying meanings that exceed narrative comprehension (Bordwell 1985 and 1989, Branigan 1992, Caroll 1988, Plantinga and Smith 1999). Film phenomenology relates to the topic of the spectator's emotional response with the introduction of core notions such as *embodiment* and *affect.* Scholars of this theoretical paradigm argue that when viewing films feelings and sensations are not only cognitively evoked by the spectator, but are embodied as affects. However, despite a rather large bibliography tackling this subject (for example, Grodal, 1999, Carroll 1988, Plantinga and Smith 1999, Tan 1999, Smith 2003) very little has been written on the individual spectator's state of mind, emotional wellbeing beyond the description of the mechanism of embodiment during the actual film viewing. Starting from the 90s, empirical studies of film, reuniting cognitive film theorists and psychologists, sociologists or neuro-scientists have been busy staging and testing the theses formulated by cognitive theorists of film. These researches involving both quantitative and qualitative methods focused mainly on the spectatorial "meaning making" of film narrative and style, and to a lesser extent on the emotional involvement of the individual spectator (Tan 1996; 2013a; 2013b, Reinhard and Olson 2016).[1]

This essay departs from the assumption that both cognitive and phenomenological film theory has dealt only marginally with film as a possible means for individual self-reflexion and emotional growth.[2] As Margrethe Bruun Vaage argues, cognitive film theory is still preoccupied with general and typical spectatorial or "audience" responses, defined by Ed Tan as "a systematics of the emotions evoked by films" (Tan 1996, Bruun Vaage 2009). Individually and culturally different responses to film seem to lie beyond the scopes of cognitive film theory. From this theoretical paradigm, it is Torben Grodal getting probably the closest to the phenomenon of subjective response not only to film narrative but also to isolated, powerful film images. As he argues, "the simplest way of evoking a subjective feeling is by

1 In Hungarian context, an issue of *Metropolis* (2014, no. 1) was dedicated to empirical film studies, authored, among others, by Katalin Bálint, Edina Fecskó, András Bálint Kovács and Orsolya Papp-Zipernovszky. Only recently, in the past few years can be detected a preoccupation with the qualitative research of the spectatorial experience, the relevance of the socio-cultural background and with the role of foregrounding in identification, empathy or sympathy.

2 An exception constitutes Vivian Sobchack's rather anecdotic account of her own leg amputation in the context of spectatorial embodiment, meaning-making and functioning as a kind of "self-therapy," (2004) or Laura U. Marks's interpretation of the culturally determined role of haptic images activating a sensual memory that serves identity quest in non-mainstream films (2000).

showing images, which only elicit a very limited amount of propositions and which have no links to some concerns of some protagonists. The viewer will quickly make all the cued propositions, and if the sequence goes on beyond the time when all possibilities or making propositions are depleted, the mind will shift into a subjective mode" (Grodal 2000, 90).

Looking for a theoretical, conceptual framework for the persisting emotional and individual effect of disturbing images that multiply the interpretations of a narrative, we can find a similar preoccupation in Barbara Klinger's essay on evocative cinematic images that she calls "arresting images," (2006) and in Margrethe Bruun Vaage's critical writing on cognitive film theory that avoids dealing with the idiosyncratic emotional effect of cinema on its spectator (2009). Instead, Bruun Vaage proposes that film studies apply the findings of empirical literary studies regarding the power of the unfamiliar leading to self-reflexion and self-modifying realizations of the beholder, largely researched by Canadians Don Kuiken and David Miall.

In what follows, I propose to contribute to this rather marginal discourse on the individual emotional impact of certain film images by focusing on a special group of arresting images: pictorial, intermedial images and arrested, still(ed) images, images "in-between," working out a dialogue, as Raymond Bellour formulates "between the movement of the camera and the freezing of the still image, between the present and the past, inside and outside, front and back" (2012, 15). As he elaborates, these images in-between "affect the time, the body-soul and the position of the body-gaze, which all find themselves associated with the force that could produce them, or that could at least attest to their visibility: the time between the still and the moving image" (Bellour 2012, 15). Intriguingly, Bellour does not expand on this effect on the body-soul and his reflexive spectator seems to be more concerned with what she/he sees rather than what she/he feels. In this regard, as Bruun Vaage also suggests, the findings of the empirical research of the reader-response theory,[3] represented most prominently by the Kuiken–Miall duo, and bringing evidence of the so-called "self-modifying feeling" triggered by aesthetic foregrounding, can establish a link between reflexive and self-reflexive spectator (Miall and Kuiken 2002, 268–69). I will illustrate my arguments with examples that either thematize the emotional effect an image/painting can have on its spectator (the case of Tom Hooper's *The*

3 This is represented also by Wolfgang Iser, Norman Holland, Hans-Robert Jauss, Roland Barthes, Stanley Fish and Louise Rosenblatt. The main characteristic of this approach is individualism, as it focuses on the transaction between the text's inferred meaning and the reader's subjective response (see transactional theory, represented by Iser and Rosenblatt), on stylistics that works only if subjectively interpreted (Stanley Fish), on the subjective motives of the reader (Norman Holland) and the role of "interpretive community of minds" (Stanley Fish).

Danish Girl, 2016), or exemplify the complex intertextual web of associations of an arresting still(ed) or painterly image, associations that prompt self-reflexion (the case of Jane Campion's *The Piano*, 1994, Martin Koolhoven's *Brimstone*, 2017, Guillermo del Toro's *The Shape of Water*, 2016 and Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Loveless*, 2017). The case study at the end of this article exemplifies the role of defamiliarizing painterly references in films, as tools of professional and cultural sensitivization in the training of health professionals.

Arresting and Selfing Images

The opening images of *The Danish Girl*, a film based on the true story of Danish artists Lili Elbe (one of the first recipients of transsexual surgery) and Gerda Wegener, show a landscape with a group of leafless trees emanating solitude and melancholia. The first scene of the film departs from the arresting painted image of this landscape, as contemplated by artist Gerda Wegener at the opening event of a gallery exhibition of her husband's works. She is visibly lost in the contemplation of this painting representing something she does not know, something about her husband that she, in a confusing way, feels, but cannot name. The landscape turns back at the end of the film, when, after the death of her husband Einar (who became Lili Elbe and whom she had supported all along in his painful struggle to change his sexual identity), she visits the place depicted in the painting. The return to the initial scene of the film, as a kind of re-framing, appears as a narrative, structural tool closing a psychological process launched with the first shot: a suspicion becoming certitude and finally turning into acceptance and supporting behaviour. I argue that the first scene models not only the position of a pensive spectator who is extracted, isolated from her fictional context by an intermedial image that, as Raymond Bellour puts it, pulls her "out of this imprecise, yet pregnant force: the ordinary imaginary of the cinema" (Bellour 2012, 96). The "mise en scene," the gallery, and the point-of-view shot thematize, beyond "the effects of suspension, freezing, reflexivity, effects that enable the spectator to reflect on what he is seeing" (Bellour 2012, 96) also what she feels. The "arresting" painting launches confusing emotions that later in the film will be voiced as tantalizing questions about own needs in a relationship, the possession of the loved one, the limits of sacrifice, acceptance of the other, and ultimately the capacity of unconditional love.

Although there are other aspects of a film that can trigger self-reflexive, idiosyncratic response – such as the identification with a character, intense emotional scenes, representations of changed states of mind –, I will mainly focus

on painterly references through framing, composition, lights or colours, or simply images that slow down, open up the narrative, suspend time and linger with us long after watching the film.

Besides the aforementioned individual reference, in *The Danish Girl* the re-enactment of the intermedial gesture of a pose in a painting stirs intense emotional and bodily reaction in the protagonist, prompting his desperate quest for a new sexual identity. The unexpected emotional reaction of Einar sitting as a female model for a painting executed by his wife creates a tension, a confusion in the spectator as well that will escalate along the plot [Figs. 1–2]. Paintings as arresting images and the very act of painting participate organically in the constant self-reflexion and identity quest of the male protagonist, guiding, at the same time, the spectator's attitude towards otherness.

Barbara Klinger's main example of arresting image is the last image from Jane Campion's *The Piano*, an underwater shot showing Ada, the female protagonist floating in the infinite blue of the sea, accompanied by the puzzling words of the poet Thomas Hood: "There is a silence where hath been no sound. / There is a silence where no sound hath been, / in the cold grave under the deep, deep sea." This closing image corresponds to Bellour's account of the image in-between stillness and movement, a silent "freeze in the frame" connected to an exceptional existential moment, in this case a secretly desired death. As Klinger confesses, this enigmatic image with a blurred meaning has hunted her and prompted her to examine her own emotions and, entering a web of further associations (Hitchcock's *Rebecca,* 1941 and John Guillermin's *King Kong*, 1976, among others), helped her to reconsider her subjective implication in a quest for a liberated version of a feminine self (Klinger 2006, 40).

The highly associative power of this arresting image from *The Piano* is epitomized by its almost identical surfacing, after twenty years, in another Victorian drama with strong undertones of psychological horror, Martin Kolhooven's *Brimstone*. The image occupies the same position in the narrative, as it appears at its closure and is accompanied by a female voiceover, that of the daughter of the woman in the water. "As life progresses, images blur. Are they remains of memory? Some of them true, some of them false. I remember her well. She was a warrior. In the old century you had to be in order to survive." It is as if Ada's fantasy is coming true, as Liz, the mute female protagonist, a fugitive from her abusive father, deliberately chooses death by water, with an ultimate gesture of freedom, instead of being executed by her male oppressors. Her underwater smile, disturbing as it is, launches a mini-archaeology of memory involving not only *The Piano*, but also Caravaggio's *Medusa*, described

by Thomas Mitchell as a paralysing spectacle addressing the enemy (Mitchell 1995, 176). [Figs. 3–4.] According to Freud, it also stands for the female genitals and sexuality, an apotropaic, or monstrous image addressing a patriarchal order in crisis (Mitchell 1995, 176).

The liberating monstrosity of female sexuality appears in a similar closing scene in a third example of this associative web, *The Shape of Water,* a romantic monster-phantasy film telling the love story between a humanoid monster from a research laboratory and a mute cleaner: after being chased and shot into the water, we see them embracing underwater. This time a male voiceover accompanies the image, quoting from Persian poet Hakim Sanai, words that again leave us clueless and linger with us, stirring feelings that are either completely new or just have never been experienced in the form provided by the film: "Unable to perceive the shape of You / I find You all around me / Your presence fills my eyes with Your love / It humbles my heart, / For You are everywhere."

According to Barbara Klinger, "arresting images" occur "when a film stops to contemplate an exquisitely composed, significantly evocative and/or uncanny image. The forward motion of the narrative slows down or temporarily halts, allowing this spectacle to capture fully our attention. […] The exact meaning of the arresting image is unclear; it is at once visually stirring and interpretively opaque. […] Just as it forestalls easy interpretation, its emotional effects are both intricate and obscure" (Klinger 2006, 24). In her effort to explain its emotional impact, Klinger defines arresting image as a site of lingering affective power and uncertain meaning, strong, ambiguous, memorable, associative, with an unusual temporal status: situated outside of time (fantasy, dream) and serving as a focal point for emotions, it activates a web of associations (personal and cultural experiences, the spectator's storehouse of images). This image is regressive: it goes back to personal and cultural mother lode of images, instigates a mini-archaeology of memory (of other images) and as a moment of intense contemplation, it defamiliarizes its contents. Klinger also speaks about a collusion between autobiography and film when facing an arresting image, revealing the personal as "a strangely composite construction" (2006, 41).

To further elucidate the phenomenon of individual response to arresting images, Margrethe Bruun Vaage proposes the conceptual framework of the empirical research conducted by Canadians David Miall and Don Kuiken. They differentiate between narrative and aesthetic feelings and as they argue, the unconventional flow of feeling experienced at times in literary reception can prompt unexpected realizations. According to them, reflecting on an emotion can trigger cognitive

transformations. "What is realized (recognized) also may become *real-ized* (made real) and carried forward as a changed understanding of the reader's own life-world. We propose that this process of real-ization through literary reading involves a form of reflexivity that is itself figurative. We also suggest that the feelings integral to such figurative real-ization be called *self-modifying feelings* to differentiate them from evaluative feelings toward the text as a whole; aesthetic feelings in response to stylistic variations; and narrative feelings in reaction to the setting, characters, and events" (Miall and Kuiken 2002, 268–269).

As Miall and Kuiken point out, while not identical with them, these self-modifying feelings are greatly produced by aesthetic feelings resulting from unsettling, defamiliarizing images, that in case of intermedial references seem to lie outside the narrative, as if meant to reframe our emotional experience stirred by the story. The ending images of Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Loveless* exemplify this mechanism plastically. It is a dramatic story about the devastating effects of a painful divorce, which follows the desperate quest for a missing child – fugitive due to strong emotional neglect – exposing the spectator to strong, contradictory feelings; then the narration comes to a halt: the boy is found dead and an unidentified gaze is moving around in the former home of the broken family, at that moment empty and under refurbishment. The presence of this gaze is unsettling, reminiscent of ghost stories: it slowly leaves behind the workers in the apartment and slides through the window after framing the view behind it as a silent painting reminding of Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *Winter Landscape with a Bird Trap* (1565), probably one of the most well-known paintings in the world [Figs. 5–6]. The palette of greys, blues and pale greens is offset by the colourful costumes worn by many of the participants, the overlapping branches of the trees and bushes, serve to create a wonderful decorative effect. This gesture of leaving behind a scene contaminated with so much pain and betrayal, and stepping into another, apparently peaceful painterly composition reframes our numbness caused by the shock of this outcome as a kind of acceptance of the fragility of life. In fact, it has often been suggested that the *Winter Landscape with a Bird Trap*, for all its realism, also contains an underlying message alluding to the precariousness of life. In one of his engravings of *Winter – Ice Skating before St. George's Gate, Antwerp*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder added the inscription: *Lubricitas Vitæ Humanæ. La lubricité de la vie humaine. De slibberachtigeyt van's Menschen Leven* ("The Precariousness of Human Life") referring to the ways in which people find themselves slipping and sliding through a life whose existence is more slippery and fragile than ice itself. In *Loveless*, the modifying of a first feeling, that of terror, by a second, that of acceptance with the intermediation of a painterly reference

can be conceived as a form of catharsis, understood by Kuiken and Miall not as purification, but rather as a clarification of the spectator's emotional experience (Miall and Kuiken 2002, 234). In line with Margrethe Bruun Vaage's argumentation, the aesthetic feelings stirred by the intermedial reference in *Loveless* enhance feeling-guided boundary crossing (Bruun Vaage 2009, 226).

As the examples and analyses above prove, intermedial images and images in-between movement and stillness, due to their highly associative potential are susceptible to prompt self-reflexion and the clarification of the spectator's emotional experiences. The issue of idiosyncratic emotional response to arresting images may seem a slippery ground for research, but there is already evidence of both individual and group benefits of their cultural, associative value, with a relevant therapeutic and educational potential to be exploited. The following case study presents an excerpt from a training programme for health professionals using films, with focus on the clinical representations of the sick body and its intermedial image as tool for cultural and professional sensitivization.

The Intermedial Image as Educational Tool

The optional course *Representations of the Body and Healthcare in Contemporary European Cinema* was held in two consecutive semesters in 2019 at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Szeged, Hungary. It proposed a cultural theoretical approach to the body representations in contemporary European cinema through ten representative films from all over Europe: Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Romania, Italy, Greece and Spain. Special attention was given to the body seen in a clinical setting and to the clinical gaze, both symptomatic of current European social, cultural and institutional relationships. Relying on anthropological, cultural and psychoanalytical discourses, this practical course focused on the ways the social body is reflected in the individual body, this latter often becoming a figure of a deep identity and existential crisis. The debated topics included the body as site of sexual identity, the cinematic representation of the female amputee and her social rehabilitation, the clinical gaze as a figure of alienation and distancing, of a hierarchical and patriarchal society, the clinical gaze and Foucault's panopticon model, clinical (self)observation and quest for identity, the clinic and sanatorium as crisis heterotopia in Western culture, body and addiction, as well as the issue of political/institutional loyalty and the morality of health professionals. The educational aims of the course were familiarization with cinematic representations of the (clinical, sick, addicted, sexual, etc.) body, its

cultural discourses and theoretical concepts, development of the awareness of the interdependence between the individual, physical and social body, training of the ability to recognize the figurative representations of the relationship between body and society, of the psychological, institutional implications of bodily symptoms, as well as the training of empathy and moral attitude through group discussions about representative scenes involving health care, patient–health professional relationship and social, cultural taboos of the sexual body.

The course was held in the framework of English-language training of mostly non-European students, future nurses and physiotherapists coming from Middle Eastern, Far-Eastern or African countries: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, India, China, Egypt, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, South Africa and Morocco. Many of the students had only been in Hungary for a relatively short time (up to one year), therefore a careful selection of European arthouse films with a topic related to healthcare in a clinical setting and/or representations of bodies in physical or psychological distress also had as secondary purpose a cultural socialization with European arthouse cinema trends of visual representations of the body, of its European healing institutions, professional networks and hierarchies, as well as with the discourses of the gaze and supervision objectifying the body. The analysed films and topics[4] served as a framework for in-group discussions in which own cultural experiences were compared, contrasted and filtered through the culturally determined visual and narrative codes of body-representations in European arthouse cinema. The discussions revolved around the narrative and visual familiar and unfamilar, the emotional response of the students to these aspects of the films under analysis, clarification of unclear scenes and situations, and had the purpose to help students understand new and demanding professional situations, as well as ethnic, bodily, sexual otherness, and live their emotions related to all this in a safe, guided group context. In-class discussions were completed with a feedback-questionnaire (adapted by me, H. K. from Kuiken and Miall's *Literary Response Questionnaire,* 1995), focusing on the film-viewing

4 The ten films and topics debated in the course of each semester were the following: The Body under Post-Communist Conditions (Cristi Puiu, *The Death of Mister Lazarescu*, 2006), The Clinical Gaze in Contemporary Hungarian Cinema (Kornél Mundruczó, *Johanna*, 2005), The Panopticon Model of the Clinic (Ágnes Kocsis, *Adrienn Pál*, 2010), Clinical Investigation and Identity Quest (Attila Gigor, *The Investigator*, 2008), History and Body-Memory (György Pálfi, *Taxidermia*, 2006), The Public and the Private Body (Christian Petzold, *Barbara*, 2012), Body and Sexual Identity (Pedro Almodovar, *Talk to Her*, 2002), Entrapped by Own Body: Narcissism and Addiction (Steve McQueen: *Shame*, 2011), Rehabilitation of the Amputee (Jacques Audiard, *Rust and Bone*, 2013), The Sanatorium as Social Allegory (Yorgos Lanthimos, *The Lobster*, 2015), The Sanatorium and the Western Obsession with Youth (Paolo Sorrentino, *Youth*, 2015), and Precarious Bodies: the Sanatorium in the Eastern European Cinema (Radu Jude, *Scarred Hearts*, 2016).

experience: the degree of absorption or alienation (how difficult they found watching the film, with the specification of the difficult aspects), familiar/unfamiliar scenes (with a possibility to explain the reason of it), degree of identification with the main character, and a further question referred to the effect of slowness (as a shared characteristic of all the films under analysis) on the viewer.

The responses to the questionnaire revealed the difficulty of "watching the pain of others," for example in the scenes draining the puce from the vertebrae of Emanuel with a big needle in *Scarred Hearts*. Students also reported feeling for him because of being condemned to spend his life horizontally, closed in a cast. At the same time, they have appreciated his coping strategy largely based on poetic writing, verbal expression, play with language, humour and building human relationships, making friends and falling in love with women. Just like in Paolo Sorrentino's *Youth* (2015), in *Scarred Hearts* beauty (art and literary writing) becomes the sole remedy for physical and spiritual pain. This idea is reinforced by one of the unusual, highly figurative representations of the above-mentioned medical intervention. This tableau-image, arrested and arresting, is a straightforward reference to Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (1632), and just like its original, is rich in coded, figurative significations regarding both the represented medical attitude and the spectatorial meaning making [Figs. 7–8]. It models a distancing, objectifying attitude towards the body of a patient still alive: all the participants of the scene are focusing on the critical spot of his body, pointed out by the jovial doctor who is unable to support his patients in terms of giving them a continuous, realistic, up-to-date diagnosis. This avoidant attitude, characteristic of the whole staff is relying on promises and humour, systematically substituting the person with the body. Empathy and sympathy are represented by current and former patients of the sanatorium who are able to feel the distress of the other. Some of them come too close and their sympathy is mistaken by Emanuel for love (the case of his affair with Solange). For the students who had already known this painting, the unsettling effect was double, familiar and unfamiliar at the same time: the role of the tableau-shot arresting the flow of action and the spectator's attention in the case of this particular film instigated a new meaning-making. While throughout the guided discussion students identified this aesthetic framing as corresponding to the main character's own sublimatory strategy, this shot also actualized the message of Rembrandt's painting: "see the person in the medical scene!"

An interpretation of this painting – although in a different context – appears in Christian Petzold's film *Barbara*, set in a remote clinic of socialist East Germany. The reproduction of the painting in the office of the chief physician André (a doctor

recently relocated to this hospital due to disciplinary reasons) serves as a mediator in the communication between him and Barbara. As Wim Staat argues in his essay on Petzold's melodramas, in this film artefacts (painting and literature) have the role to provide coded messages under the conditions of constant supervision and a politically generated atmosphere of mistrust (Staat 2016). Barbara immediately realizes that there is a mistake in the painting (the wrong hand is being dissected), a mistake considered by André as deliberate, since none of the characters in the painting – the disciples of dr. Tulp – observe it because they are focusing on the anatomy book in front of them, on theory and rules instead of the body itself. In this scene, which is also modelling spectatorial meaning-making, Rembrandt's message "Look at the body!" or "Look at the patient!" translates as "Look at me!" – as an invitation for Barbara to trust André, her colleague, despite the political context and its rules. [Figs. 9–10.]

In both *Scarred Hearts* and *Barbara*, the intermedial tableau-shot and the reproduction on the wall function as arresting images that activate a web of personal and cultural associations in the spectator and instigate a mini-archaeology of memory of other images by defamiliarizing its contents (this is not only an anatomy lesson). As such, it can be regarded as a figuration of all visual representations and interpretations of the body and healthcare in the contemporary European arthouse films discussed in the course with the educational purpose of sensitivization, that is, of training the ability to see the story *beyond* the case and the person beyond the body. The emotional responses (of fear, repulsion, puzzlement, embarrassment, pity, sympathy or empathy) could be lived in a safe framework provided by the fictional story, visual mediation and figuration, as well as the open discussion in the educational context of the seminar.

The professional sensitivization programme described above relied on the elementary power of visual storytelling and figuration, which, due to its highly associative potential, is likely to prompt self-reflexion and the clarification of the spectator's emotional experiences. It made possible for students, future health professionals to experience safely – with the intermediation of arresting images – difficult clinical situations and reflect upon their own feelings of empathy and sympathy, as well as their different cultural stereotypes of the body in distress. As the above presented films and analyses emphasize, these reflections can prompt a web of associations animated by own biography and lead to self-modifying feelings, as well as to a cathartic moment that clarifies initial feelings and motivations.

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The Ethical Anxiety of Remediation and Speculative Aesthetics in Landscape Film

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Abstract. The link between avant-garde cinema and painting has always been a conspicuous one but perhaps never as much as in the case of landscape films. However, not only repurposing or evoking specific paintings but constructing entire films with the intention of producing cinematic analogies to certain traditions of landscape painting presents a number of issues, especially when the films in question are inspired by the sensibilities of 19th-century Romanticism and explore similar topics, such as the works of Peter Hutton. The problem is essentially twofold: on the one hand, how to break away from the painterly roots and make an exclusively cinematic pictorial representation of landscape and, on the other hand, how to account for the complicit position of the filmmaker with regard to the nature–technology opposition they address. Within the theoretical framework of the recent speculative turn in philosophy and the implications of this with regard to aesthetics, I argue that an object-oriented approach to landscape filmmaking – as seen in the works of Chris Welsby –, by establishing pre-compositional rules within which landscape itself can intervene in the filmmaking process, provides a solution to both the aesthetic and the ethical anxiety that haunt landscape filmmakers.

Keywords: landscape film, landscape painting, environmental ethics, speculative aesthetics, post-humanism.

Introduction

In his proposal to the Canadian Film Development Corporation in 1969, Michael Snow writes that he wants "to make a gigantic landscape film equal in terms of film to the great landscape paintings of Cezanne, Poussin, Corot, Monet, Matisse and in Canada the Group of Seven" (1994a, 53). After he has realized this ambition in the form of *The Central Region* (*La Région Centrale*, 1971), he further elaborates in an interview how he got the idea for making the film: "the traditional painting

division of subjects seems to me to be still applicable – portraiture, landscape, still life, etc. There are good reasons why those divisions are still used. It's like animal, vegetable, mineral – those things do exist. And I thought about how you could make a landscape film" (Snow 1994b, 78). The decision to bring landscape from the background to the foreground in cinematic representation and elevate it into a proper cinematic subject on its own right (just as it is in painting or, for that matter, in poetry), without it being subordinated to the demands of plot progression or character psychology, is an admittedly rare but by no means singular phenomenon.

As a matter of fact, this heightened attention to landscape as a space liberated from the constraints of storytelling, along with a return to certain traditions of landscape painting as a primary influence, coincides with the resurgence of independent and avant-garde cinema in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The particular style of landscape painting the films evoke and the artists they take inspiration from vary greatly – for instance, Stan Brakhage's *The Machine of Eden* (1970) provides a cinematic analogy to Cézanne's post-impressionist landscapes, while Werner Nekes's tracking panorama shots in *Makimono* (1974) recall Chinese landscape scrolls. Nevertheless, the most enduring influence on this type of filmmaking, for a multitude of reasons, remain the works of 19th-century Romantic landscape painters, evident in Jon Jost's deep affinity with the Rocky Mountain School of painters in *Canyon* (1969), in the luminism of Larry Gottheim's *Fog Line* (1970), or in Peter Hutton's evocation of the Hudson River School in *Study of a River* (1997). Scott MacDonald delineates the roots of this shared interest between 19th-century artists and late 20th-century independent filmmakers. "For a good many filmmakers coming to maturity during those decades, a broad and penetrating cultural critique was essential. This critique was often directed at the commercialism of Hollywood, which was seen as a particularly visible index of the increasingly rampant materialism of capitalist culture. […] For many filmmakers working outside the Industry and wanting to critique it, the fundamental question was how to develop a film practice that worked against the demands of the commercial and against this increasing tendency toward overload—and where to go for inspiration." (MacDonald 2001a, 4.)

Furthermore, the re-emergence of landscape as a site of complex cultural discourse in cinema is not only a reaction to the function it had taken up by that point in mainstream cinema (a complement to narrative progression and character development), but also to its appropriation and reification as a tool of ideological interpellation. It is enough to recall Frederick James Turner's famous frontier thesis to see how closely (the image of) the American West is tied to the formation of certain values and principles, how westward expansion and the myths it has created

have become inextricably intertwined with a set of characteristics which are seen as essential for the US: individualism, democracy, freedom, patriotism, etc. This ideological function of the frontier was not abandoned after the 19th century but was taken up by cinema, especially by westerns – this really is, as André Bazin refers to it, the "American film *par excellence*" (1971, 140). James Benning's *California Trilogy* (2000–2002), for instance, provides a sustained deconstruction precisely of these myths by calling attention to how the formation of Southern Californian landscapes are a result of particular social institutions and class division.

Considering, therefore, how landscape imagery in mainstream cinema had, by the 1960s, become a mere story-space, completely subservient to narrative demands, and was seen almost exclusively through an ideologically pervaded camera lens, then the decision to return to 19th-century landscape painting and treat landscape as an autonomous cinematic subject by focusing on it for an extended period of time, divorced from the impositions of narrative and pointing to the external forces that almost imperceptibly transform and produce it, can be understood as a radical expression of the aforementioned anti-commercial aesthetic and counter-cultural attitude that independent filmmakers of the period were seeking. However, landscape filmmakers, by consciously entering into a pictorial dialogue with 19th-century Romantic landscape painters and reviving their heritage, carry a burden that their aesthetic predecessors did not. Ágnes Pethő refers to this indebtedness that results from "incorporating, refashioning other media while also relating to these other media […] as a major authority that cinema has to come to terms with" as the "anxiety of remediation" (2011, 233). In this paper, I outline the ethical implications of remediating 19th-century Romantic landscape imagery and exploring its central theme of nature–technology opposition, and then, referring to the works of British landscape filmmaker Chris Welsby, I propose that this ethical deadlock be resolved by unshackling cinematic representations of landscape from their painterly roots.

The Ethics of Landscape Cinema

The simplicity of subject and the directness of its representation that Gottheim's *Fog Line*, Hutton's *Time and Tide*, and many other landscape films made in a similar vein present (the works of James Benning, Sharon Lockhart, etc.) is analogous to the early cinema of the Lumière brothers. MacDonald sees this link to their actualities in *Fog Line*'s uninterrupted 10-minute shot of the titular fog gradually dissipating over a New York valley, filmed from a fixed camera position (2001a, 5–7), and in Peter Hutton's similarly long, static shots broken by moments of darkness, almost

as if they were separate short films in themselves (2013, 22). There is, however, in landscape film, not only a connection specifically to the films of the Lumières, but to what Tom Gunning in his seminal essay refers to as the early "cinema of attractions" in general. His contention is that these early, non-narrative films construct a markedly different relationship with the spectator than the narrative films that were to follow them: they are exhibitionist rather than voyeuristic (Gunning 2006, 382). MacDonald propagates precisely this new position that landscape films are able to carve out for the spectator (requiring them to slow down, be more attentive to the subtleties of the landscape, recognize how cinema transforms its object through the mechanical reproduction of its image, etc.) as the requirement of an ecocinema. This would "provide new kinds of film experience that demonstrate an alternative to conventional media-spectatorship and help to nurture a more environmentally progressive mindset" (MacDonald 2013, 20). Of course, the early cinema of attractions broke its realistic illusion by having the actors look into the camera, while landscape films generally assert their non-illusionism in a manner that is typical of structural/materialist filmmaking, by calling attention to their own process of production and artificiality. *Fog Line*, for example, has a faint shape in the upper part of the image that is simply a smudge on the camera lens, while the apparatus in *The Central Region* occasionally ends up filming its own shadow on the ground.

This interrelatedness of natural phenomena and technological processes is not only a specific theme of a number of landscape films, repeating the similar concerns of 19th-century Romantic landscape painters. Rather, the interaction of nature and technology serves as the basis for the genre as such. In his essay on landscape cinema, P. Adams Sitney locates the essence of landscape films in bringing together "the disjunctions and the meshings of the world and the temporality of the medium" (1993, 125). Maureen Turim similarly emphasizes the interwoven processes of nature and technology as an inevitable concern for the genre, claiming that "a technology, that of the camera apparatus, confronts nature, transforming it. The manner in which this confrontation of artist, machine and nature takes place is inscribed in the image traces which comprise the film. The culture/nature paradigm is therefore inherent in films studying landscape" (1985, 122).

Hutton's *Time and Tide* makes this parallel to the cinema of attractions – as well as his awareness of his own participation in the long history of the Hudson's pictorial representation – quite evident by having, as a cinematic preface, *Down the Hudson* (Frederick S. Armitage and A. E. Weed, 1903) played in its entirety before beginning his own voyage on the river. Going up and down the Hudson and into the New York harbour, Hutton's meditative pacing and the silent beauty of his

rigorously framed shots quickly lull the viewer into a state of quiet contemplation. That being said, the serene images of nature, taken from the decks of tugboats and tankers or filmed through portholes, are punctuated by the sight of industrial sites, nuclear power plants, and smoking factories along the coast. The commercial importance of the river – already evident a 100 years earlier in *Down the Hudson* – has led to the incessant exploitation of the area's natural resources and to the Hudson's pollution. However, what complicates matters is that Hutton himself, though to a much lesser degree, contributes to this environmental damage and enjoys its benefits merely by being a filmmaker.

Comparing Thomas Cole's painting *The Oxbow* (1836) and Gottheim's *Fog Line*, MacDonald observes two crucial differences between the positions from which they can approach their subject. According to him, what separates their common concern for the depiction of the intersection of natural processes and technological development lies in the different historical positions of the artists and the medium they utilize. When Cole divided his painting between the cultivated lands on the right and the untamed wilderness on the left, positioning himself in the act of painting on the side of the latter, he could still reflect on the gradual transformation of nature by technology as a detached observer, as one who could keep his distance and remain outside of the processes he critically addresses. Gottheim, as well as Hutton and other landscape filmmakers, does not possess the same privilege for two specific reasons. The first one is that untouched nature itself, by the early 1970s, had become no more than an illusory, unattainable ideal: even what little remained and remains of it now "functions entirely within those technological systems developed to exploit it, including the 'system' of motion picture production" (MacDonald 2001a, 12.) In this sense, the appreciation of natural beauty in an age where it is almost non-existent – or, at the very least, inevitably tainted and contaminated by technology – can be compared to Adorno's example of returning to tonal composition after Schoenberg's atonal revolution. After a radical historical break (atonal composition or, in our case, the disappearance and complete transformation of nature in the time between 19th-century landscape painting and late 20th-century landscape cinema), going back to the old ways (tonal composition or the appreciation of natural beauty) acquires a new meaning: it has "lost its innocence" by necessarily being mediated by this break and now functions "as its negation," so that it inevitably becomes "a nostalgic clinging to the past, something fake" (Žižek 2012, 193). And, indeed, the second reason is that the camera itself is a product of the very same technological advances that have put an end to wilderness and led to the increasing exploitation and domination of nature, thus, the apparatus remains "connected to the industrial

revolution by an umbilical cord" (MacDonald 2001a, 12). Or, as Stephen Rust and Salma Monani put it in their introductory chapter to a collection of essays on ecocinema, "from production and distribution to consumption and recirculation, the cinematic experience is inescapably embedded in ecological webs" (2013, 2).

Filmmaking itself is a dirty industry since it involves photo-chemical processes that contribute to environmental damage. There are certain images in Hutton's *Time and Tide* which conspicuously read like an abrupt return of this repressed ethical anxiety. For example, a ship passes by in front of the porthole that the camera films through in an early shot, revealing the name on its side that reads Chemical Pioneer [Fig. 1] – a phrase that could just as well describe Hutton himself, "who uses a mechanical/chemical medium against the flow of commercial media and commercial life in general" (MacDonald 2013, 29). Another shot of the glowing neon GE letters of the General Electric sign can easily be mistaken for spelling the letter H: H, of course, standing for Hutton [Fig. 2]. The connection that is made between General Electric and the filmmaker is quite distressing considering that the company had significantly contributed to the pollution of the river for decades and protested its proposed clean-up by the Environmental Protection Agency (MacDonald 2013, 27). Hutton, however, sees an essential fissure between humans and nature. An overhead shot of a ship breaking its trail through the frozen surface of the river and then the ice quickly closing the gap after the ship has passed at once recalls the transcendence of nature that is suggested in the proverb that inspired the film's title ("time and tide wait for no man") and expresses a hope that nature can heal itself, as it were, and the ecological footprints humans leave behind will eventually disappear. [Figs. 3–4.]

It is clear, then, that the materiality of film cannot be disregarded in landscape cinema but this "historical complicity of cinematic beauty and environmental damage" (2001b, 87), as MacDonald refers to it, means that the landscape filmmaker, unlike the landscape painter, is necessarily implicated in the very processes they appear to criticize. This, as we have seen, is very much recognized by Hutton, as well as by Benning, Gottheim, and others, who are all painfully aware of this inherent self-contradiction of their work.[1] The question remains, however, whether there is anything to be done to circumvent this ethical issue at the heart of landscape cinema rather than merely admitting it. It is my contention that the films of Chris

1 "Benning is aware that, despite his counter-Hollywood aesthetic, he is, in some ways, complicit with the industry. Benning: 'I am also somebody who's demanding a service that's polluting the earth: filmmaking isn't a clean industry, so one can question my righteous view. We're *all* the enemy in this story. To make *Deseret*, I drove to Utah from California nine times.'" (MacDonald 2001a, 442.)

Welsby – which are conspicuously absent from the above-mentioned ecocinema book – provide a possible solution.

From Landscape as Subject to Landscape as Agent

Briefly returning once again to Snow's *The Central Region*, I believe it is essential that he emphasizes camera movement as "an unexplored potentially rich part of cinema" and the apparatus itself as "an instrument which has expressive possibilities in itself" (1993a, 53). I would argue that it is precisely Snow's structural/materialist approach to landscape imagery that opens up a space in which the aforementioned ethical deadlock can be resolved and, what is more, presents cinema's most important contribution to the historical development of the pictorial depiction of landscape by creating post-painterly landscape imagery. Filming a barren landscape in the northern wilderness of Canada, Snow not only eliminated any traces of human presence and activities in front of the camera but, what is even more crucial, removed himself from the filming process by having had constructed an elaborate tripod which could move according to pre-determined programming or with the help of a remote control. The machine was free to move horizontally and vertically with different speeds, while the camera mounted on it could rotate around its axis. However, the full implications of this method of landscape filmmaking, utilizing the expressive potentials of the camera, were only subsequently explored by the British filmmaker Chris Welsby. The crucial difference between Snow's *The Central Region* and Welsby's works is that the latter's a priori compositional rules do not only reduce the filmmaker's direct influence on the image-capturing process but also, when applied, extend his creative agency to the cinematic subject.

This is perhaps best illustrated by two of his films where the changing movement of the wind is utilized as an organizing principle for the film's form. In *Wind Vane* (1972), the titular objects are attached to two cameras that are mounted on tripods. Since the cameras are completely free to pan horizontally, the way they end up recording images of the landscape is determined by the varying strength and direction of the wind. *Windmill II* (1973) similarly relies on the shifting speed and direction of the wind. In it, the camera films a park landscape through the blades of a small windmill. Since the blades are covered in a mirrored fabric, the recorded footage varies between the landscape seen through the blades and the camera's own image reflected in them depending on the changing qualities of the wind. If there is no wind and the windmill does not move, we see the landscape behind it, and if there is wind and the windmill's blades rotate with enough speed, then we see the

camera's reflection in them. More than a mere self-reflexive gesture that is meant to assert the materiality of the representational process as opposed to sustaining cinematic illusionism, calling attention to the apparatus and its transformative power with regard to the filmed landscape suggests Welsby's keen awareness of the complexities of nature–technology relationship and the peculiar position landscape films occupy between the two.

Although Sitney claims that "the mechanical function operating in Welsby's and Snow's landscape films resist [Stan Brakhage's] metaphoric humanization of the filmic apparatus, and by extension, the landscape it records" (1993, 123–24), I would argue that this is only true in the case of Snow's *The Central Region*. Welsby's camera-eye, on the contrary, remains just as much a camera-I as it is in the case of Brakhage, except that in Welsby's films it is not the filmmaker's "intense experience of seeing" that it conveys (Sitney 2002, 160); rather, it captures the gaze of the landscape itself. Especially in *Wind Vane*, the immediate association that the two-camera setup – functioning almost as two eyes – elicits is that we see, in the film, nature looking and seeing itself through the camera. At first, this anthropomorphizing of nature might appear as a step back from Snow's purely mechanical vision of the landscape. Somewhat counterintuitively, though, it might be precisely a certain degree of anthropomorphism that is needed to avoid the kind of anthropocentrism that puts a fissure between humans and the environment they are inextricably embedded in. According to Jane Bennett, "maybe it is worth running the risks associated with anthropomorphizing (superstition, the divinization of nature, romanticism) because it, oddly enough, works against anthropocentrism: a chord is struck between person and thing, and I am no longer above or outside a nonhuman 'environment.' Too often the philosophical rejection of anthropomorphism is bound up with a hubristic demand that only humans and God can bear any traces of creative agency" (2010, 120). We can see in this parallel concern between Welsby and Bennett one of the many ways in which the former's works appear to prefigure the recent speculative turn in continental philosophy. The cinema of Welsby implicitly and the writings of certain speculative materialists explicitly propagate an object-oriented approach to nature, one that believes that all objects (human and non-human entities) of the world subsist on the same ontological plane, standing in a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship to each other, affect and are affected in a multitude of ways. Ben Woodard turns his attention specifically to the relationship between nature and aesthetics in *Uncomfortable Aesthetics* (2014), asking what an ecologically focused speculative aesthetics would look like. According to him, the immediately obvious answer would be either to "reinstate the Kantian sublime but orient it

towards transcendental realism by moving the split of sense regarding space from the subject to the object" or to "restructure our interaction with nature in order to seriously reconsider all material production as having a real irreparable cost" (2014, 107–108). Having said that, neither of the two are viable approaches in his view, considering that the former strategy is "preempted aesthetically by the fantasies of eco-catastro-porn," while the latter, "by urging superficial changes to consumption practise, aims to make capitalism compatible with ecology" (Woodard 2014, 108). Turning to Schelling's nature writings in search of an alternative approach, Woodard concludes that "ecology requires an aesthetics of manipulation that emphasizes the razorblades of contingency" in order to "capture at once nature's forming of us and our forming of nature" (2014, 110–111). Incidentally, I believe this is precisely what Welsby's films, unbeknownst to Woodard, manage to achieve.

Let us now turn our attention to another one of his works, *Park Film* (1972), which, by introducing human presence and activity into his usual pre-compositional frame, renders this reciprocal and non-hierarchical determination between human and non-human elements visible, and by doing so, I claim, illustrates how an object-oriented approach makes landscape imagery enter into a post-painterly phase in landscape cinema as well as circumvents the ethical anxiety that pervades the genre. In this film, the camera, which is pointed at a busy park pathway, takes a frame each time a person enters the picture and each time a person moves out of the picture. The frequency with which the camera triggers its shutter – in other words, the temporal sequences or the pace of the film – is therefore determined by the movement of the people through the park. Their flow dictates the speed with which clouds, shadows and everything else moves in the image, but the flow of the people is, in turn, also dependent on such external factors as the weather, what time of the day it is, rush hours, etc. The point is not to enter the risky territory of panpsychism and assume that even non-human entities possess some form of consciousness but rather to cinematically engage in what Levy R. Bryant refers to as alien phenomenology; that is, to make an attempt to "suspend our own human ways of operating and encountering the world so as to investigate non-human ways of encountering the world" (2014, 63). Welsby's *Park Film* in particular, to use Bryant's terminology, allows us to witness the ways in which humans, nature, and the camera apparatus are structurally open to each other, the kinds of flows each of them respond to and the unique operations they carry out to transform these flows.

As far as the two prominent aesthetic sensibilities are concerned that pervade romantic pictorial representation, the beautiful and the sublime, Hutton's *Time and Tide* firmly occupies the position of the former with its tranquil pacing and

contemplative gaze. Drawing on Barbara Novak's distinction between the two approaches to 19th-century landscape painting – the "grand opera" and the "still small voice," which are roughly parallel to the Kantian categories of the beautiful and the sublime –, MacDonald compares Hutton's serene and atmospheric landscapes with the works of Luminist painters, which reflect and offer "a more meditative route to the spiritual than that provided by the awesome paintings of Church, Bierstadt, and Moran" (2001b, 68). Contrary to this, Welsby's films clearly evoke a sense of sublimity but neither by attempting to represent sublime objects in the grand operatic style nor in the way that Woodard rightly rejects as being a dead-end for an ecologically sensitive speculative aesthetics. Rather, in line with how Lyotard characterizes the modern sublime in 20th-century avant-garde, they are "sublime in the sense that Burke and Kant described and yet it isn't their sublime any more" (1991b, 93).

The modern sublime of minimalist and abstract art that Lyotard proposes is something whose seeds are already present in the Kantian aesthetics of the sublime, specifically in what he calls negative representation or non-representation (1991b, 98). However, contrary to the romantic attempts to represent sublime objects, he sees the task of the avant-garde precisely in representing the unpresentable itself.[2] The way Lyotard describes the modern sublime at work in Newman's paintings also reveals the manner in which Welsby's post-romantic films allude to something ineffable, evoking the unpresentable through their form: "when he seeks sublimity in the here-and-now he breaks with the eloquence of romantic art but he does not reject its fundamental task, that of bearing pictorial or otherwise expressive witness to the inexpressible. The inexpressible does not reside in an over there, in another word, or another time, but in this: in that (something) happens. In the determination of pictorial art, the indeterminate, the 'it happens' is the paint, the picture. The paint, the picture as occurrence or event, is not expressible, and it is to this that it has to witness" (1991b, 91–92). Later on, Lyotard writes that "with the advent of the aesthetics of the sublime, the stake of art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was to be the witness to the fact that there is indeterminacy" (1991b, 101). While the paintings of Newman, Pollock, Rothko and others do so through the abandonment of classical and baroque figuration, Welsby achieves this by inscribing this indeterminacy in the form of the films themselves to approximate

2 Nevertheless, there is a clear link between 19th-century Romanticism and 20th-century Abstract Expressionism. Years before Lyotard, the Romantic heritage of the non-representational school of New York painters was already recognized by Robert Rosenblum in his article entitled *The Abstract Sublime*, while Barbara Novak also saw a clear connection between 19th-century landscape painting and Abstract Expressionism (Gustafsson 2007, 68).

an inexpressible real at their core. Unlike Hutton's *Time and Tide*, Welsby's films can thus be said to offer, by rendering visible the invisible through its formal indeterminacy, "a way out of romantic nostalgia because they do not try to find the unpresentable at a great distance, as a lost origin or end, to be represented in the subject of the picture, but in what is closest, in the very matter of artistic work" (Lyotard 1991a, 126).

Although, as we have seen before, landscape film can be considered as a return to the early, non-narrative and exhibitionist cinema of attractions, Welsby's films construct a certain narrativity that Peter Wollen praises precisely for bridging the gap between non-narrative avant-garde cinema and narrative cinema: "the British landscape film-makers often use a new type of narrativity, in which both film-maker and 'nature' as causal agent play the role of protagonist. A pro-filmic event, which is a conventional signified ('landscape'), intervenes in the process of filming, determining operations on the 'specifically cinematic' codes" (Wollen 1976, 86). Welsby's unusual understanding of the interrelatedness of nature and technology is already evident in the definition he gives of landscape in an interview. "I see landscape as part of what we call nature, which is everything that cannot be included in the definition of mind. And nature would include, on this definition, all of technology too. […] Landscape is a subdivision of nature as a whole. The degree to which we call it landscape is the degree to which mind has had an effect on it, the degree to which it is structured and modified by ideas and concepts. […] Technology and landscape are both part of nature." (Welsby 2003, 125.) Although this characterization, as Henrik Gustafsson points out, "seems to circumvent the fact that 'nature' is a charged cultural construct on its own" (2007, 16), it nevertheless clearly indicates the position from which he can reconceptualize the nature/culture binary and the role of (film) technology within it. The antagonism of nature and culture, and the inevitable disharmony rapid technological development introduces between the two and whether it can be in any way reconciled was, of course, perhaps the most frequently explored topic among landscape painters in the wake of the second industrial revolution. The depiction of railways and steam locomotives – possibly the most symbolic images of the era – are very much ambiguous in, for instance, Thomas Cole's *River in the Catskills* (1842) and in George Innes's *The Lackawanna Valley* (1855). Both paintings are susceptible to two contradictory interpretations: they can be seen either as affirming the irreconcilable tension between nature and civilization or as celebrating the harmony between the two. Furthermore, Cole's already-mentioned *The Oxbow* makes this ambiguity and uncertainty about the future even more visible in the way that the Connecticut River appears to form a

question mark between the untamed wilderness on the left and the cultivated lands of civilization on the right.

Sitney points out that Welsby's definition of landscape is strangely Hegelian (1993, 124) and, likewise, his approach appears properly dialectical in rejecting the simple dualism of nature and technology, treating the question already as its own answer and initiating a shift of perspective, allowing a new subjective position to emerge. In his films, technology is no longer simply conceived in contrast to nature, as an instrument of exploitation, domination, and surveillance – rather, through a dialectical turn, the development and ubiquity of technology becomes a positive condition in that the unique capacities of the camera apparatus allow us to reconceptualize nature and our place in it. As Welsby extends his own creative agency as a filmmaker to his cinematic subject by establishing a specific pre-compositional framework within which the landscape can actively participate in the filmmaking process, the inherently colonizing and totalizing gaze of the camera is turned – at least to a certain extent – in the service of nature: his introduction of chance-based operations and indeterminacy in this manner transforms the filmmaking process from artistic exploitation based on a hierarchical relation into an act of collaboration between the filmmaker and his cinematic subject.

The expressive capacity of the camera that Snow emphasizes and is utilized through Welsby's pre-determined compositional rules is something that neither the brush of the landscape painter nor the pen of the landscape poet possesses. However, the indeterminate movement and operations of the recording device within a strictly defined compositional frame is reminiscent of musical compositions which are, in some way or another, indeterminate with respect to their performance. Using Johann Sebastian Bach's *The Art of the Fugue* as an example, where the timbre and amplitude of the material is not given, John Cage compares the function of the performer to "that of someone filling in color where outlines are given" (1973, 35). The landscape takes on an analogous function in Welsby's films, where the strict outlines are provided by his a priori compositional frame and nature takes on the role of the performer, filling it in with colour, as it were. The dynamic and reciprocal interactions between nature and technology are thus no longer an implicit presupposition of the genre or a subject of representation but come to be performed through the very form of the film. It is in this way, I would argue, that landscape cinema is able to transcend its painterly heritage, at once resolving the ethical deadlock that is present in films which rely on painterly traditions as well as instigating a radical break in the historical development of landscape imagery. In Chris Welsby's films and in the works of other (mainly British) landscape

filmmakers who utilize similar structural/materialist approaches to their subject, William Henry Fox Talbot's early description of the camera as the pencil of nature appears more accurate than ever before.

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Modern Classic in the Web Environment: Narrative Variations of V. Nabokov's *Lolita* in Fanfiction

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Abstract. The main focus of this paper is on the narrative strategy used by fan writers in the process of interpretation of a modern classic. The research is based on the hypothesis that text-interpretation implements the existing yet implicit narrative lines of an original source. The discussion focuses on Vladimir Nabokov's œuvre represented by the novel *Lolita* in amateur writers' communities. The article's hypothesis is that due to the existence of English and Russian versions of *Lolita*, fan texts in both corpora differ in the choice of linguistic means, but use similar narrative structures (Greimas). Whenever the narrative scheme is not oversimplified to resemble the model of a mass literature novel, it follows Humbert's confession scheme in a way the character himself wants the fictional reader to perceive it. If the name of one of the actants is omitted or the two-actant model is expanded, the amateur text is close to the plot of the novel and its auto-citation structure. The novel, devoted to the story about an erroneous interpretation, is open to any mass-media adaptations. The original narrative strategy of *Lolita* is more exposed through the fan adaptations: the active reader is an obligatory participant in the artistic creation.[1]

Keywords: fanfiction, transmedial translation, Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*, actantial models.

Introduction

Modern classics and their screen adaptations are always transformed in the interactive digital sphere, where the communities of readers or viewers discuss the arts and create their own works, based on the original film or novel. These amateur

1 The study was funded by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research, within the research project № 18-312-00127.

works reflect the individual interpretation of texts. In this case, the internet is a medium where consumers and authors "collide" (Jenkins 2006, 2): the reception of texts is an independent object for criticism and assessment. International online sources and archives such as *Archive of Our Own, Fan Fiction*, and *Kniga Fanfikov* are the space where readers' and viewers' creativity can manifest itself in different forms: reviewing other fan texts, shaping the fictional world based on the original source, writing stories (Magnifico et al. 2015, 158–159).

Despite a lot of fanfiction being based on films or TV series (Fiske 2001, 46), the most popular form of audience creativity includes verbal texts in which visual methods and techniques are transposed to the fictional narration. The appeal to the original plot or scenario in fanfiction is connected with "ritualized viewing" (Brooker 2017, 164) and high degree of fans' identification with fictional characters (McGee 2005, 165): verbal texts are the results of emotional engagement, when the literary or film criticism on the one hand and personal experience on the other are combined (Barnes 2015, 75).

Hitherto, fan practice has been researched as a form of adaptation, interpretation and re-reading inherent in fan community. If fans freely change the original text, does it itself respond to their changes? What is the relationship between an original and a fan narration? The understanding of a fan text from these positions originates from Roland Barthes's conception of text-as-reading and his conception of author and authority: "the most subjective reading imaginable is never anything but a game played according to certain rules" (Barthes 1989, 31).

The basis of our research is the statement that text-interpretation implements the existing, yet implicit narrative lines of the original source. Thus, potential strategies of the text itself live in its reader adaptations presented in the interactive media. *Lolita* is one of the fandoms where fan texts are equally influenced by both the movie adaptations and the original novel. The multiplicity of intermediary translations determines the international existence of V. Nabokov's *Lolita* as a part of English- and Russian-speaking cultures. Identifying fan narrative strategies determined by the language and culture of reading and observation is one of the objectives of our study. The research of fan stories based on *Lolita* notes that the existence in an interlingual and intermedial environment itself is due to the interpretation strategies embodied in the original text.

Methodology

We turned to fanfiction depositories as the source of the study material. When choosing web-sources for our research, we were guided by several factors:

1) The availability of data – the number of texts whose authors use various forms of media should be sufficient to represent a community of Lolita's fans. In global fic writers' community there are three non-commercial depositories that contain both original texts and texts that can be published on small resources and even on private web-pages, particularly *FanFiction*, *Archive of Our Own*, and *Kniga Fanfikov* (over 2,000, 5,000, and 4,000 literary fandoms respectively). These sites are the biggest archives of texts based on novels, films, music, and advertisements connected with Nabokov's *Lolita*.

The information about fandoms and the texts contained in them are open to any user. Not all fandoms have the same number of texts, and the difference between a popular and unpopular fandom is sometimes very sizeable. We found that there are about 10–17% of fandoms with over 50 texts and about 40–50% of fandoms with 1–3 texts. The popularity of the texts based on Lolita is sufficient on the English websites (17 texts on *FanFiction* and 23 texts on *Archive of Our Own*) and is comparatively higher on the Russian platform (89 texts on *Kniga Fanfikov*).

2) Users' involvement in active discussion of other people's work and in co-creation. In a fan community, each text is a part of a forum where an author can discuss his or her work with readers.

3) Interface features including categories selected by fan authors' community itself. The interface of the sites should allow fic writers to communicate freely with each other, make individual selections of texts and edit their own works in response to criticism. So, fanfiction as a phenomenon of the new media has the property of automation and variability (Manovich 2001, 27–30). Thus, any user can create an individual collection (or "blocks of data" [Manovich 2001, 97]) of texts based on their own requests and add or update their own texts without changing the structure of the entire database. Thus, the fanfiction depositories *FanFiction, Kniga Fanfikov*, and *Archive of Our Own* are representative for researching a fan's interpretation of *Lolita*.

The intermediality of fanfiction is explicit in the original genre system created by fic writers that allows them to create fanfiction based on films, literature, music, and video games. These genres are common in different media forms (for fanfiction genres see Viires [2005, 165]). The need to develop such classification system occurs

because fanfiction not only involves different media, but also presumes interaction and interference of various cultural practices in itself.

During the first stage of our research, we compiled the study material – the works listed under the tag "Lolita, V. Nabokov." This tag reflects that amateur writers consider their work as a form of reader creativity. Generally, when fanfiction authors affiliate their text to the "canon" by tagging, they explicate their affiliation to the readers' community (they receive "textual identity" [Black 2006, 172]). We cannot use tags for more discrete text analysis because the users who post their texts on the resource set the system of tags and keywords themselves. Individual tags cannot verify the features of amateur text interpretation.

During the second stage of the research – studying the methods of textual interpretation in detail, we explore the linguistic features of texts that are used to transform different types of media. This is predominantly manifested on the rhythmic or lexical levels, which are associated with the genres chosen by the fic writers: we consider the metaphor, wordplay or keywords with common semantics that connect a secondary text to the original source. Here we follow the statement of G. Leech that "linguistic deviation is essential to a linguistic account of literary language" (2013, 14): fic writers copy the explicit features of the language of the source text and thereby make its peculiarities common for all participants of a fandom.

One of the possible forms of classifying and studying a fandom and corpora of fan texts surrounding it is the detection of stable components in the narration. Using these components, fan writers realize potential narrative lines, "text's potential future" (Johnson 2007, 286), implied in the plot of the original text.

The actantial model ("*modéle actantiel*," Greimas 1986, 174) offers a quantitative indicator for the analysis of fanfiction corpora and reflects the properties of the structure of individual texts. Some observations of the actantial structure in fanfiction were carried out by Mar Guerrero-Pico, who noticed the interrelations between actants, the structure of fanfiction, and its genre incarnation (Guerrero-Pico 2016, 80). The theory of actantial model is a universal tool for the analysis of narration in fiction and non-fiction. The theory is based on V. Propp's (2003) classification of characters in a folktale, which describes three axes that are in constant interaction and have specific functions: the axes of desire (subject and object), power (helper and opponent), and transmission (sender/receiver) (Greimas 1986, 218). The model is used as a description method in different research: gender analysis of the cinema (Fernández-Morales and Menéndez-Menéndez 2013), analysis of journalistic texts (Aarva and Tampere 2006) and literature (Woloch 2003). Moreover, the theory of actantial models allows us to classify fanfiction texts

in accordance with the narrative strategies that have been chosen as a result of readers' individual reception.

The advantage of using such narrative grammar in the analysis of amateur transcriptions is that the actantial model takes into account the hybridity of fanfiction texts (and, in general, of digital media), which are based not only on literature, but also on movies, video games, and music; it also includes the transformation of different media. The main feature of the *Lolita* fandom is the use of the structures of the novel and Stanley Kubrick's (1962) or Adrian Lyne's (1997) movies as a single source. Moreover, it is difficult to define which elements of a fanfic were created exclusively on the model of the film adaptations and which on the model of Nabokov' s novel. A lot of fan texts combine Lolita's narration and plots of mass literature, TV series, and cartoons (about 21% of the whole corpora). The research of actantial models will allow us to understand why *Lolita* is used by amateur authors as a text open to intermedial creation.

Related Works

Fanfiction as a phenomenon of media, literature, and culture has been the centre of interdisciplinary research since the 1980–1990s. Initially, there was a stereotyping view of fan culture (Jenkins 1992, 12–13) that was considered as a part of "pluralistic culture" (DiMaggio 1977, 447). Early studies describe fans as a socially, politically, and economically determined community (Jewett and Laurence 1977; Burchill 1986).

The most influential direction in fan studies coincides with the appearance of new methods in social and anthropology studies. Henry Jenkins's approach, outlined in his book *Textual Poachers,* impacts the subsequent research and determines the primary goals of fanfiction studies in general. Jenkins (1992, 4) defines a new direction in culture research: there is "no privileged position from which to survey a culture." Fan interpretations do not always include the conventional meaning of the canon: "fan critics work to resolve gaps, to explore excess details and undeveloped potentials" (Jenkins 1992, 284). The variety of strategies of fan interpretation and methods they use to play with the original source allows us to classify fanfiction as one of the forms of "transmedial translation:" "transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels" (Jenkins 2007).

According to Bronwen Thomas, the first wave of fan studies established readers' dependent position on consumer practice and disproved it, then the second wave

observed the inner mechanisms of power distribution in fan communities (Thomas 2015, 4). Describing the duality of a commercial movie and a cult movie, Mark Jancovich (2002, 307–308) notices the inner mechanism of influencing fandom and provoking active communication within it. In our research, this peculiarity of a cult movie fandom is very important: a fandom based on classical literature as a high culture considers the strategy of both mass and niche media.

As Thomas notices, the third wave of fan studies investigates the paratexts that surround fan community, underscoring the connections between fan practice and contemporary culture; the third wave is also distinguished by interest in forms of fan creation in "everyday life" (Thomas 2015, 4). The research methods of this wave are presented in the book *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world* (Gray 2017). Researchers refuse to define fans as part of the high and low cultures, and show how fans take part in the creation of different media. This wave investigates a different form of fan practice and perceives fans as part of a subculture. For example, John Tulloch, the author of the first fan studies research devoted to readers of Russian classics, noticed a strong pattern in theatregoers' interpretation of Chekhov's work (Tulloch, 2007). His study convinces us that the conventional scholarly discussion of classical literature determines ways of fans' interpretations.

We also suggest that fan studies which are focused on the unfolding fictional world might amplify theoretical approaches using the tools of adaptational studies. Christopher Marlow (2009) studied various forms of textual adaptations in his work devoted to the fanfiction on *Doctor Who* TV series. There he suggests that adaptation research deals with complex narrative "traits and sequences," where the text "quotes, displaces or folds itself" (Marlow 2009, 48).

In order to show the "elasticity of the storyworlds" (Thomas 2015, 10), with which fic writers interact, a lot of researchers turn to the methods of narratology. Cornel Sandvoss (2007) mentions Roland Barthes's conception of an Author and his "condition of textuality" where "text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (Barthes 1977, 148). Describing the narrative strategies of "gap filling," Sandvoss (2007, 29) uses Iser's notion of "normalization." Bronwen Thomas (2015, 10–13) lists the whole corpora of variations using the narrative terminology in fan studies. As we suggest, the centre of each work is occupied by one dominant narrative category: hyperdiegesis (Hills 2012), encyclopedic narrative (Murray, 2017), story mode (Bedows, 2012), narrative frame (Steenhuyse, 2014). These terms allow us to describe peculiarities of the narration such as the intersection of plot lines as an inherent characteristic of fan writing.

In fanfiction, the boundary between different types of perception is erased: the author of a fanfic is simultaneously a spectator, a listener, and a reader; herewith, to create fanfiction means to mix different types of such experiences and their digitalization. The history of development, as well as the hybridity of the fan writing attribute fanfics and fan-sites to "new media objects" (Manovich 2001, 13–14). In fan works, different media forms interact with each other and determine the process of the original source transformation. Comparing the language of digital culture with the language of cinema and visual arts, Lev Manovich discusses the technique of transforming different media in the digital space. "Digital compositing in which different spaces are combined into a single seamless virtual space is a good example of the alternative aesthetics of continuity [...] compositing aims to blend them into a seamless whole, a single gestalt." (Manovich 2001, 144.) Therefore, the creation of fanfiction is associated with two opposing mechanisms: 1) the use of basic, recognizable elements of one or several primary sources (it does not matter if they are literary or any other art-form); 2) the inclusion of specific changeable elements in the original text.

This form of media transformation is similar to the process of "digital compositing," when "some elements are created specifically for the project; others are selected from databases of stock material" (Manovich 2001, 136).

Another feature of fanfiction as a type of new media is the form of authorship. Amateur tags and fanfic genres developed by global community at the same time constitute its universal terminology and play the role of the "menus of software packages" (Manovich 2002, 3). The interface of sites containing fanfiction suggests that the authors value communication with each other, although the "author and the user are often two total strangers" (Manovich 2002, 2): fans can use other people's work along with conventional original sources. The question about the intermediality of fanfiction is discussed by Karin Wenz, who is trying to find a relationship between transmediality and intermediality. "If we understand intermediality [...] in the sense that several media lit at the basis of the production of the fan's narrative [...] fanfiction is intermedial." (Wenz 2010, 123.) Thus, fan literature acts as an intermedial environment distinguished by the fact that because of the transformation of the discrete features of different forms of art it develops new ways of interaction between the perceiving reader/spectator and the original source in the digital space. However, the question of how this converged environment transforms the original source (which is intermedial itself) remains open. The goals of fanfiction research are related to Müller's assertion that the research of the intermediality of new media can be focused on "how traditional audiovisual media

and/or analogic sounds and images have left their traces in these digital worlds, what modalities could be reconstructed" (Müller 2010, 33).

The article's hypothesis is that due to the existence of two versions of *Lolita* – Russian and English –, fan texts in both language corpora differ in choice of linguistic means, but have similar narrative structures. Thereby, our research draws on the assumption that a fic writer models the original source and embodies this model in his or her creation. It allows us to describe the mechanisms of borrowing and interpretation of semantic elements of the original source in the transnational corpora of fan texts.

Strategy of Interpretation of Nabokov's *Lolita* in Russian and English Fandoms

a) Comparison of Linguistic Features

Vladimir Nabokov is a popular writer in the amateur authors' community. His heritage holds a special place on Russian- and English-speaking fic writers' websites: *Lolita* is the only novel by Nabokov presented in most of the fan texts. Due to the lack of a unified methodology for fan audience research (Barnes 2015, 74), the portrait of an ordinary fan author cannot be described in detail. We adhere to a general portrait of a fan writer based on the whole global fandom. The research devoted to fan practices convinces us that most fanfiction writers are young people (Black 2007; Thorne 2010) and "predominantly female" (Barnes 2015, 75).

In the case of the *Lolita* fandom, we can describe the cultural preferences of the community. On the one hand, fans perceive the narration about Lolita as a mass formula (Cawelty 2014, 35–36), given by various media adaptations, as a story about forbidden love of an adult man for a young girl. On the other hand, fic writers perceive Nabokov's novel as a text by a modern classic which is difficult to understand. The verbal technique as well as the characters of the novel are integral components of the text recognizability in amateur authors' reception. Fic writers' narrative strategies differ in the choice of style as a "sum of linguistic features associated with text" (Leech 2013, 54). By copying linguistic patterns of *Lolita,* fic writers act as amateur researchers: they try to "suggest distinctive 'mind-styles' in authors and characters" (Fowler 2003, IX).

In *Lolita* fandom, two different language strategies correspond to two different archives of fan texts (Russian- and English-speaking) and two different artistic forms (lyric or prose).

One of the features of the English-speaking *Lolita* fandom is the formal predominance of prose texts over lyrical ones: poems are one-fifth of the fan corpora. The prosaic form of amateur texts chosen by fic writers correlate with the complex genre structure of the original source. In Nabokov's *Lolita* a detective story, pseudo-research ("As a case history, *Lolita* will become. No doubt, a classic in psychiatric circles" [Nabokov 2011, 3]), diary and commentary on the cycle of poems (Humbert's parodies of the English poetry and his lyrical verdict on Quilty) are combined.

Fic writers often divide this genre combination and embody one of the dominant verbal techniques in their own texts. For example, fic writers copy diary features: they use first-person pronouns, reach out to fictional readers, and include words such as *prose*, *style*, *note*, and *write* to create a character's thoughts about the writing process: "and when this entry is completed in its fancy prose style I shall also endeavour that it is burned and destroyed" (*A confession to trounce all others* by Eureka234). Unlike the lyrical composition, the prosaic narration reflects Humbert's analytical mindset in amateur authors' reception. English-speaking fic writers note the duality of his narrative style, where his confession combines the pragmatic theory and witty literary references and allusions. In English fanfics, allusions are focused on the similarity between events and plots of the European classical literature and the events presented by Humbert. For example, the reference to Rostand's comedy Cyrano de Bergerac in the fanfic *Colorado* by xGraybackx: "Cyranose knew well that his Roxane had much faith in Christian, it – *he* was good and gracious." In fanfics the verbal game with metaphors and allusions is shown as mechanical and imitative.

The sangfroid of enamoured Humbert, who glorifies Lolita, allows fic writers to metaphorically compare the nymphet hunt and the narration about Lolita to a logical game. In the fanfic *Fruhling In Paris* by Lady_MidnightII, Humbert's double (similar to the character of Nabokov's other novel *The Defence [The Luzhin Defence]*) detects the game decorations in the world around him: "the tiles are black and white marble, like a great chessboard."

Humbert's capability to compare himself to other literary characters is determined in amateur texts by the implicit but conflict-forming character's claim to be an author of the entire text, who is free to use "semantic deviations" like a poetic metaphor (Leech 2014, 59). Despite the fact that Humbert's hidden motivation is not always recognized by the English-speaking fic writers, the interpretation of the event structure of *Lolita* can in general be described as Humbert's *mind game.* For fic writers, the character's mind game consists of his sophisticated verbal technique.

Unlike English texts, Russian fanfics are predominantly poetic and lyrical. Lyrical texts generally imply the presence of a lyrical hero as an "objectified author" (Bakhtin

1999, 66), who corresponds to Humbert's narrative strategy. Contrariwise, a genre of the song used for the poetic paraphrase of the novel's plot introduces another voice into the monologic narration – the voice of Lolita, who is sensitive to melody and rhythm in the original novel. It is reflected in the rhythmical narration of the original novel: "sometimes […] I could hear Lo's bare feet practicing dance techniques in the living room downstairs [...] and-one, and-two, and-one, and-two" (Nabokov 2011, 206). In poetic fanfics Russian-speaking fic writers use not only metrical forms (especially iambus), but include motifs of the rhythm or dance: "you know that I will run away, but you do not believe... / Someday I will dance on your grave" (*I am no longer a child... [Ja ved' uzhe ne ditya...]* by S.A.SH.A.) (our translation).

Russian-speaking fic writers do not single out analyticity as a stable component of the original novel, but rather an artistic ornateness and stylistic paradoxicality of Humbert's speech – inner duality of his voice, which is explained by his "madness." In Russian fanfiction, Humbert turns out to be a poet, and Lolita is not a real lover, but a muse of the inspired writer: "I don't remember for how long I have been looking at you, reading poems by heart about my love" (*My Lo* [*Moja Lo*] by Dancing with myself). Russian-speaking fan authors emphasize that the character does not act like a sharp hunter, but like a lunatic. Fic writers trust the unreliable narrator who calls himself a "maniac" in a commentary about his own poem.

Therefore, in the multilingual community the peculiarities of the interpretation of the novel can be explained by the perception of the linguistic features of two different variants of Nabokov's work. Russian- and English-speaking fic writers dealt with different sources. In *The Postscript to the Russian Edition*, Nabokov (1982b, 191) notes "the poetry of thought," which he was able to represent in the English version and which is not reflected in the auto-translation. In English-speaking fanfics, the combination of "natural" and "unnatural passions" is reflected in the repeated plot about admiring Lolita and simultaneously searching for signs indicating her demonic essence. Copying Humbert's narrative style, fic writers select common and literary words simultaneously: "was it once a sin to lay eyes upon the *sacred Aztec gold*? Surely, most assuredly, it was *punishable by death*" (*Like Fire, Hellfire* by fishstick) (our italics).

At the same time, "everything tenderly human, but also everything coarse and crude, juicy and bawdy" was conveyed in the Russian text (Nabokov 1982b, 191). Obviously, the "gestures, grimaces, landscapes, the torpor of trees, the odor, and rain" in the Russian version of *Lolita* were inspired by Russian classical poetry among other things. Thus, in the Russian-speaking fanfiction, similarly to the auto-translation (but not in the English original), Humbert acts as a reader of Pushkin's

Eugene Onegin: "she is fragile and refined, like a forest fallow deer" (*La folie* by Emine_) – the portrayal of Lolita repeats that of Tatyana in Pushkin's novel.

b) Comparison of Narrative Structure

The texts of the international *Lolita* fandom are heterogeneous in terms of their aesthetic complexity. The main difference between the Russian- and English-speaking corpora is a selection of linguistic features. Multilingual Lolita fandoms use similar narrative patterns and have no nationally or culturally determined characteristics, besides the differences in style and pretext.

Firstly, the homogeneity of narrative variations of *Lolita* can be explained by the specifics of the two original sources, the author of which is bilingual and focuses both on the European and Russian readers. The novel *Lolita* turns out to be a space in which not only different national artistic traditions, but also different readers – the carriers of these traditions – come together ("as a reader, I […] can easily fill a huge sympathetic auditorium with my doubles") (Nabokov 1982b, 197).

Secondly, uniformity of the narrative interpretations of *Lolita* in the Internet community is influenced by the image of Lolita, which is widespread in popular culture: film adaptations, musical variations of the heroine's image (in both the Russian- and English-speaking fan communities the work of the American singer Lana Del Rey is mentioned), advertising incarnations (for example, the advertisement for the perfume Lolita Lempicka, where the image of a butterfly girl is commercialized [Bertram and Leving 2013, 18]). Images and scenes that are repeated in visual adaptations and absent in the original source influence Russian-speaking and English-speaking fandoms. For example, Humbert watches Lolita sitting in a chair (*Vanilla Chick* by LivingSculptureofPemberley; *One Way or Another* by come along); Lolita chewing gum as an integral attribute of her image that is described in the novel only once (*Lolita* by Gone With the Wind, *Colorado* by xGraybackx).

The analysis of the fandom allows us to note that transformation of different forms of media into fanfiction is explicit precisely at the level of the narrative organization of the text. Writing the fanfics on *Lolita* involves not only reading a book or watching a movie, but also a reading-writing game based on other adaptations. The numerous media variants of Lolita impact the methods of fan writing: fic writers overlook the events of the novel itself; they create isolated excerpts, lost episodes. In most of the fanfics presented as Humbert's memories of Lolita, fic writers do not change the narrative structure of the original source, but model a possible scene that was missed in the novel.

The distinctive feature of the lost episodes is their emphasized static nature and, obviously, orientation towards the language of visual arts (music video) and advertising. This process repeats the technology of "sampling" (Manovich 2001, 27): sustainable images of *Lolita* are "discrete" – they can be repeated in other texts. Within the boundaries of this intermedial game, *Lolita* is converted through audiovisual media. Firstly, it is carried out by the combination of text, hypertext and audio recordings, as, for example, in the fanfic *You Miss the Point* (by looneyngilo2), where the reader is invited to download and listen to the artistic reading of the fan text. Secondly, fic writers try to create the rhythm of their text through the division of the text into stanzas/paragraphs. For example, the author of the fanfic *Lolipop Parks And A Girl Named Candy* (by Lady_MidnightII) is trying to convey a counterpoint combining the music of The Killers and the performer Lana Del Ray in the lyrics about Lolita. Fic writers borrow gestures, mimic characters from the movies and use montage techniques: in the fanfic *Your Lolita is no more* (Tvojej Loliti bol'she net) by monsters_inside the image of an adult Lolita is combined with the image of a child Lolita who represents herself as a film actress – who is literally Lolita from the screen versions of the novel. Even if fic writers do not directly point to a song or film as a canon, and the only source present is the novel, the intermedial game continues. We suggest that fic writers fix intermediality as one of the stable features of Nabokov's novel itself. In general, such understanding of *Lolita* is close to the author's perception of the reader as a spectator. "We have no physical organ (as we have the eye in regard to a painting) that takes in the whole picture and then can enjoy its details. But at a second, or third, or fourth reading we do, in a sense, behave towards a book as we do towards painting." (Nabokov 1982a, 3.) Therefore, the process of readers' "digital composing" implies rereading.

Narrative structure in fragmentary texts is incomplete: it is only clear that Lolita is an object of Humbert's desire. On the one hand, in the original source Lolita in her trying to mimic the actresses from posters, is "the ideal consumer of advertising" (Nabokov 2011, 167). On the other hand, Humbert's narration begins to parody advertisements: "and I doubt not that you and I would make a pretty ad for the Traveling Agency when portrayed looking-you" (Nabokov 2011, 101). The fragmentation of the story about Lolita into many scenes set by the narrator in the first part of his confession ("She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school" [Nabokov 2011, 7]), as well as the search for Lolita's doubles, is motivated by Humbert's desire to immortalize his beloved, to stop the time. The glorifying of the demonic Lolita, whom Humbert in his *Confession* compared to the immortal literary and artistic nymphets, takes the form of an advertisement or a piece of poor

quality literature. Brian Boyd connects this narrative anomaly with the character's perverted imagination: "his attractive urge to transcend the self decays at once into nothing more than its own parody, into the mere promotion of self" (Boyd 1991, 228). Fic writers, creating their own work in form of a fragment, continue the narrative strategy of Humbert – unreliable narrator. In these fragments, the conflict between Humbert and the reality, in which Lolita is a child, does not end, but only intensifies: "And these tender memories / Fade into the black screen / Leaving only heartbeats / Eternally reminding me that / You will always be / My vision quest" (*Looking for Lolita* by HappyHippy).

Fanfiction fragments demonstrate the limited possibilities of narrative modelling as they resemble lyrical genres, whereas in the rest of the texts of the international fandom two dominant narrative principles are prevalent.

The first narrative structure is created by the transition from a four-actantial model (McFate[2]/Humbert – Lolita/reader) to a two-actantial model (Humbert – Lolita). It allows fic writers to transpose any popular work into the plot framework of the novel *Lolita*. Most of these texts (listed in the crossover category and involving popular fandoms like Marvel comic books, Harry Potter universe or the Star Wars trilogy) focus on the forbidden relations of the main characters. Although these fanfics clearly reference Lolita, it is unclear what influenced them more – Nabokov's novel or modern TV series and comics.

Another implementation of this narrative model is the transformation of *Lolita* into a detective story or a thriller, which presumes the presence of an "ignorant" character as a subject. The event in this fanfiction is the disclosure of secrets. In the Russian fanfic *One way or another* (by comes along) the plot of *Lolita* is integrated into the story of the rivalry between detective Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty (Humbert). Humbert-Moriarty is a criminal and insane genius who destroys Lolita's life. The ignorant heroine is the narrator in the fanfic. A similar plot structure is used in the English fanfic *Any Other Name* (by PeekabooFang), the crossover of *Lolita* and the *Batman* comic books. The husband of Lolita plays the role of an ignorant character, who loses his mind after his wife's death, becomes a villain (Joker, the main opponent of Batman), and kills Humbert. Despite the fact that this interpretation of Lolita is close to its "highly moral" meaning (Nabokov and Wilson 2001, 331), fic writers do not notice the imaginary nature of the whole world invented by Humbert. Any attempt to evaluate the actions of Humbert from the point of view of possible carriers of common sense ends in failure: it is symptomatic that the same characters of fanfiction turn into madmen in the end.

2 Humbert gives the alias to his own fate.

("Because he could not disappear. Because he settled in her." [*Any Other Name* by PeekabooFang])

In fanfics, transposition of quotations from the original source arises due to the perception of Nabokov's self-quotations ("self-referential elements" [Rampton 1984, IX]) in the novel itself. Fic writers use quotes to amplify the connection of their texts with the original novel. However, the citation is inherent in the fanfics with an incomplete narrative structure and an imitative style. In the original source, the auto-citations mark the presence of another creative consciousness unnoticed by Humbert. This creative consciousness permits the elements of hypertext in the character's confession (for example, reference to the finale of the novel *The Luzhin Defense*: "But there was no Charlotte in the living room" [Nabokov 2011, 109]).

Therefore, the use of the first narrative scheme leads to the exit from the field of fiction and to the distortion of the original source, in which one of the main actors (sender) is the creator McFate (Nabokov 2011, 120), existing outside of Humbert's world.

The second narrative structure organizes a much smaller number of texts in the international fandom. It changes the composition of narrators and subjects of speech in general. Nabokov-writer is displayed by fic writers as a character of a special type (character-writer). For example, in the poem *Write Me Already, Write (Pishi zhe menya, pishi* by Matvey.snezhhy.) the plot is built around a dialogue between the characters of the novel and the character-writer. In this poem, the object of the conversation of three voices is the reality of unfolding events: "Lolita is dead. But her voice is ringing;" "He asks you to understand [...] / That his love is real and it really exists." In the English-speaking fanfic *A confession to trounce all others* (by Eureka234), the name of Humbert's beloved, which is generally mentioned often by other fic writers, is verbalized only once. In his own diary, the character focuses not so much on Lolita but on his attempted murder of Charlotte Haze. Humbert convinces readers of his involvement in the murder of his wife, denying the role of McFate (the other possible character-writer): "Lenient members of the jury, let it be duly noted that I murdered her first." (*A confession to trounce all others* by Eureka234.)

Thus, the motivation of the other actants introduced by fic writers is connected to the characters' exit from the textual reality of Nabokov's novel or the creation of their own text, in which the time would be subordinated to the will of the character-writer. Both in Russian and English fanfiction, the interaction and even the rivalry between two creative forces are brought to the fore as the key event of the original novel.

Conclusion

Fanfiction as a new medium constantly interacts with other forms of media. The interface of fan communities (forum, archive, and gallery) and the reader game itself involves the constant transformation of other works and the modelling of original interpretation in the digital environment. Converting the source, fic writers investigate its kernel: "we may imagine a community formed around some creative work: this community would agree on what constitutes the kernel of this work" (Manovich 2002, 10). Therefore, the original source itself, presented in fic writers' interpretative works, leaves its original trace in digital environment: the more converted various media are in the original source, the more actively it is transferred to the intermedial fanfiction. In the novel *Lolita,* various forms of conversion of other aesthetic realities are reinterpreted, and the protagonist himself is ultimately subservient to others' artistic concept. Therefore, in the fan milieu, the *Lolita* narrative strategy acts as a universal model for any kind of transformations of an artistic text, including the transformation of the language of new media.

Unlike other fandoms based on classical literature, where unrealized but possible narrative lines are highlighted, amateur adaptations of the novel *Lolita* demonstrate fic writers' strict adherence to the style and structure of the original source. By copying the images of the original source, seeking to preserve its style, fic writers reproduce the key motif of the novel, but do not always recognize its role in the forming of the events in Nabokov's text. Thus, the complex system of actants in the original source continues to function in its various media adaptations. In the case of blind copying or parodying, the adapter continues the narration begun by Humbert, who is also blind to the extra-textual reality manifested even in his own confession. The novel, which tells about an erroneous interpretation, is open to any misinterpretations and to any mass-media adaptations. This narrative feature of *Lolita* is interpreted in the ironic preface of the novel, where all possible variants of the distortion of *Lolita* are predicted.

The narrative analysis of the texts in *Lolita* fandom allows us to speak about fanfiction not only as a reading practice, but also as a practice of amateur intermedial research. The purpose of rewriting the original is not only the experiment with the text but also its research. As a result of the rewriting, fic writers either recognize the meta-literary nature of the text or perceive Humbert's defensive speech as reliable and ignore Nabokov's game with the "duplicity of inner speech" (Genette 1983, 178) that relates both to the action and the act of writing. Fan interpretation of the modern classic is based only on what lies within the text or its various media adaptations. "The interpretation demanded by a specific text, in its plurality, is

in no way liberal: [...] it is a question, against all in-difference, of asserting the very existence of plurality, which is not that of the true, the probable, or even the possible." (Barthes 2002, 6.) Emergence and spreading of such form of transmedial translation as fanfiction, where the reader acts as a co-author, makes the narrative combination of Nabokov's novel *Lolita* even more obvious. It is structured in such a way that even an amateur text re-created as a result of misinterpretation continues the author's strategy delineated in the original source. It is obvious that along with the actant-creator, or McFate, implicit in Nabokov's novel, there is another potential actant — the receiver-reader, an obligatory participant in the aesthetic game.

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Sights and Sounds of Big Data: Ryoji Ikeda's Immersive Installations

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Abstract. The Japanese multimedia artist Ryoji Ikeda's work can be interpreted as a contact between mediums, but also as a contact between disciplines. Most of his video installations are based on concepts borrowed from the field of mathematics, physics or information technology. In this paper I will examine Ikeda's audiovisual installations by presenting these multimedial installations as possible methods of visualizing digital data in the context of contemporary art. Considering their digital and abstract nature, these works can also be analysed as unique audiovisual environments built from different media based on the same data-sets, offering the possibility of immersion. By unfolding the medial relations within Ikeda's work I will try to demonstrate how the combination of sight and sound creates the inter-sensual experience of getting in touch with digital data.[1]

Keywords: Ryoji Ikeda, data visualization, video installation, electronic music.

Despite the current economic, technologic and political fetishization of big data[2] and its utility, it is a fact that data is never in and of itself pure: it is always interpreted and modified for presentation. Big data being a relatively new concept, the art as well as the new kind of aesthetics based on this is also a fresh movement within the global art world. Artists from all around the world have been transforming

1 This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of National Education, CNCS – UEFISCDI Romania, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016-0418.

2 The definition of big data on Wikipedia: "Big data is a field that treats ways to analyze, systematically extract information from, or otherwise deal with data sets that are too large or complex to be dealt with by traditional data-processing application software." *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_data*. Last accessed 20. 08. 2019.
Big data is a huge opportunity both economically and politically. Leading technology companies like Facebook, Alphabet Inc. or Amazon mainly built their economic success on analysing and selling data extracted from their users. Modern authoritarian governments use big data technology in order to analyse and monitor the citizen's online behaviour as a form of digital surveillance.

streams of data into abstract aesthetic forms. Their works sometimes function as a commentary on the world we live in, an artistic examination of contemporary phenomena, other times data is transformed into such forms that it becomes an experience unto itself. (For example, Aaron Koblin took 24 hours of flight data and turned it into a 60-second video showing the flow of air traffic across the United States in his work titled *Flight Patterns* [2011]; Nathalie Miebach turned weather data into elaborate and abstract sculptures made of wicker and coloured beads, having it accompanied by musical scores written for a string quartet, based on the same data pattern as the sculpture in *Changing Weather* [2006].)

The Japanese-born, Paris-based multimedia artist Ryoji Ikeda is a key figure in using big data as the base of his audiovisual art. He is a composer who makes music from noises (non-musical sounds) and glitches accompanied by abstract and minimalistic visual stimuli. Ikeda's performances, installations and artworks explore the building blocks that constitute the flow of data that increasingly permeates our world (sine waves, sound pulses, pixels of light, binary digits and numerical data). Using digital technologies, his audiovisual performances and concerts[3] offer a unique perception of our multimedia environment and culture. These artworks, based on scientific concepts borrowed from the field of mathematics, physics or IT can be analysed as collaboration between disciplines, as discourse between science and art.

In this paper I will examine Ikeda's audiovisual installations, focusing on the juxtaposition of digital sounds and images, scrutinizing the musical means used by Ikeda and inspecting the nature of data-based images and their relation to analogue image. I will describe these unique audiovisual environments created by this juxtaposition as a standalone form of installation art. I propose that Ikeda's installation works are not just unique audiovisual environments engaging the human senses but each of these works examines the basic characteristics of installation art and the artistic possibilities granted by digital technology and big data. Furthermore, these works can also be seen as a form of post-human aesthetics, and works that test the threshold of human perception. And perhaps these works

3 E.g. *test pattern* (an ongoing audiovisual installation series, started in 2008), *datamatics* (an ongoing series, started in 2006, which consists of audiovisual concerts and installations), *C4I* (a series of audiovisual concerts, performed from 2004 until 2006), *formula* (a series of audiovisual live concerts, performed from 2000 until 2005), or *superposition* (an ongoing series of audiovisual performances, employing human performers and audiovisual installations, started in 2014). Ikeda performs and exhibits worldwide at spaces such as the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, the Barbican Centre in London, the Pompidou Centre in Paris or the EYE Film Museum in Amsterdam. In 2001, Ikeda was awarded the Ars Electronica Golden Nica prize in the digital music category and he was short-listed for a World Technology Award in 2003. In 2014 he was awarded the Prix Ars Electronica Collide @ CERN residency, which granted him access to the CERN headquarters in Switzerland to work with data produced at the Large Hadron Collider.

can also be analysed as tools to understand different aspects of the functioning mechanisms of our postdigital[4] environments.

The Sound

Ikeda started his career as a DJ in the Tokyo club scene, being a music composer turned into multimedia artist. Most of his artworks are based on structures borrowed from music (for example rhythmical repetition of images), moreover the main concepts of his installations can be traced back to ideas firstly examined through the medium of electronic music. His albums +/- (1996), *0°C* (1998), *matrix* (2000), *op* (2002), *dataplex* (2005), *test pattern* (2008), *supercodex* (2013), *The Solar System* (2015), *code name A to Z* (2017), and *music for percussion* (2018) pioneered a new world of electronic music which can be described as a strange, experimental mixture of minimal techno, modern classical music and Japan's experimental music. Ikeda's sound is built on a variety of "raw" sound states, such as sine wave tones, noises, often using frequencies at the edges of the range of human hearing. Rhythmically, Ikeda's music is very complex, with beat patterns made up of glitch and beep sounds which create the semblance of a drum machine. His work also resembles ambient music, some of the tracks on his albums are concerned with slowly evolving soundscapes, with little or no sense of rhythm.

According to Torben Sangild, Ikeda's music focuses on sounds "that are rarely recognized in everyday life; the forgotten secondary sounds of electronic equipment" (2004, 258). These sounds are withdrawn from their regular, concrete environment and inserted in an abstract, empty, sterile sound space where, endowed with a relative autonomy, they can be perceived as music. This process of decontextualization has the ability to influence the perception of digital microsounds in daily life, thus providing the opportunity "to relate more consciously to the sounds we are involuntary exposed to in our techno-environments, and to become aware of the stress they inflict upon us as well the as the potential beauty they possess" (Sangild 2004, 266).

4 Mel Alexenberg defines postdigital art as "artworks that address the humanization of digital technologies through interplay between digital, biological, cultural, and spiritual systems, between cyberspace and real space, between embodied media and mixed reality in social and physical communication, between high tech and high touch experiences, between visual, haptic, auditory, and kinesthetic media experiences, between virtual and augmented reality, between roots and globalization, between autoethnography and community narrative, and between web-enabled peer-produced wikiart and artworks created with alternative media through participation, interaction, and collaboration in which the role of the artist is redefined" (2011, 10).

The digital glitch sounds in most cases indicate malfunction, some kind of error, a failure within a digital device and they occur abruptly, distorting the flow of sounds, becoming an alien piece in the soundscape. However, Ikeda (as many other electronic musicians[5]) uses these glitch sounds in a very precise way for constructing beat patterns, they are never accidental or random. And as Kim Cascone (2002, 18) notices, this technique of exposing the minutiae of errors and artifacts for their own sonic value forces the listener to examine the preconceptions of failure, malfunction and detritus more carefully. The listeners become aware of the technological apparatus used to create the music, but also of the apparatus used for playback, as Theodor W. Adorno notes: "there is only one point at which the gramophone interferes with both the work and the interpretation. This occurs when the mechanical spring wears out" (1994, 607). Thus, glitch sounds function as stylistic tools in contemporary electronic music, reflecting the digital nature of the music.

Ikeda uses the sine wave tone[6] in the album entitled *matrix*, which is one of the highlights of his ambient works. Philip Brophy defines sine wave tone as "the sonic DNA in formulating electronic music" and out of that "counter to just about any other sound in the world, the sine wave tone is the sonic realization of a graphical visual display. It requires no imagined synthetic corollary because its sonority is the outcome of its visuality, and its visuality is the outcome of its mathematical determination. For example, the sounds of a flute, a seagull, or a baby laughing result from the pre-existence of their physical manifestation. Conversely, the sounding of a sine wave tone results from a mathematical computation; being a visualized theorem, its sound is not dependent on the physical, acoustical world" (2015, 226).

+/- plays on the threshold of human perception with tones the listener only becomes aware of upon their disappearance. The quality and the technical capabilities of the playback device is also important in this case: "with normal or poor speakers one almost doesn't hear anything until this last track on the album stops and a sudden release of tension is felt" (Sangild 2004, 265). *Dataplex*, an album released by Raster-Noton[7] in 2005, came with a warning sticker attached, which said: "Caution! This CD contains specific waveform data that performs a data-read test for optical drives. The last track will cause some CD players to experience playback errors, with no

5 There is a whole subgenre of electronic music built around digital glitches, and created by groups like Oval, Pan Sonic, Autechre, etc.

6 A tone with a single frequency, also known as a pure tone or sinus tone. Its waveform (the pattern of sound pressure variation, usually displayed as a two-dimensional graph of amplitude against time) is that of a sine wave (mathematical curve that describes a smooth periodic oscillation).

7 A now defunct record label founded by Olaf Bender, Carsten Nicolai and Frank Bretschneider in 1996, which was meant to be a platform or a network covering the overlapping border areas of pop, art and science. It realized music projects, publications and installation works.

damage to equipment." The album *test pattern* was accompanied with a similar warning message. "Caution! This CD contains specific waveform, impulse and burst data that perform a response test for loudspeakers and headphones. High volume listening of the last track may cause damage to equipment and eardrums." Testing the limits of human perception (moreover the biological limitations of the human body) and the capabilities of playback devices are the core concepts of these works, and these are the concepts further considered within the context of the audiovisual installation series *test pattern* as I will point it out hereinafter.

The musical piece written by Ikeda in 2016, called *Body Music [for duo]* also explores the relation between the human and the inhuman in an interesting manner: two musicians perform the complex rhythm patterns which Ikeda made with software, using only their bodies (clapping their hands, stamping their feet).

The ongoing project started in 2000, titled *A*, consists of sound installations built around the musical note A. The A note (also known as La) is generally used as a standard for tuning. When an orchestra tunes, the oboe plays an A and the rest of the instruments tune to match that pitch. This concert pitch, however, has varied over the past few hundreds of years, from Bach's era to the recent definition by the International Organization for Standardization, which defines this pitch at 440Hz. Therefore the A note as the standard pitch for orchestras has never been precisely defined, and still varies depending on orchestras or countries. The installments of the *A* series consist of varying number of loudspeakers that play the different frequencies of the note A. Visitors[8] experience their own particular interference/oscillation in their ears which constantly and interactively changes and resonates at both physical and intrapersonal levels in accordance to their own movements as they figuratively walk through the history of music standardization.

Thus, Ikeda's music incorporates data-based sounds that can only be found within digital environments and uses these sounds in a self-reflexive manner, defining a strong bond between the listener, the technical apparatus, and the artwork itself. Ikeda's musical pieces are far more than deconstructed soundscapes, they also function as sonic experiments to test both the technical apparatus used in the playback process and the listener's auditory senses, establishing a sensorial relation between the listener and the machine, between the human and the inhuman. Moreover, based on the notions of the highly influential Fluxus artist and theorist Dick Higgins, who coined the term intermedia (a term primarily used to describe various inter-disciplinary art activities that occurred between genres in

8 Margaret Morse recommends the term "visitor" over spectator or viewer in the case of art installations (1990, 155), so in this paper I will use this term.

the 1960s), and who in his essay *Synesthesia and Intersenses: Intermedia* identifies John Cage's musical experiments as pieces that explore the intermedia between music and philosophy (1984, 26), Ikeda's musical works can also be interpreted as pieces that explore the relations between music and technology, music and musicology, music and sound design, music and the human sensory reception. However, I would rather define these connections as inter-disciplinary relations than as intermediality, nonetheless, an intermedial approach could be useful for the interpretation of Ikeda's audiovisual works.

The Visuals

As in the case of sound, the images used by Ikeda are purely synthetic, data-driven images. Data-driven images can only be created or experienced with some kind of coding/decoding device, they are immaterial, they have no weight, they do not even exist without these devices. In a way they function just like the sine wave tones, but there is a main difference: digital images sometimes are representations of the real physical world, they reproduce a fragment from it. However, in his installations Ikeda uses abstract digital images, created within digital environment, without any connection to the physical world, although, in some cases these images contain signs with explicit semantic values (like numbers, geometric forms etc.), but these signs – just like the sounds in his music – are withdrawn from their context.

The visual language used by Ikeda shares some features with the visual language of the structuralist filmmakers of the 1960s and 1970s. The four main concepts (the elimination of the aestheticizing attitude of the early avant-garde film, the examination of the filmic apparatus with the film itself, minimalism and conceptualism) that define structuralist/materialist films also characterize Ikeda's visual language. We cannot speak of any kind of aestheticizing attitude. Some of his works are openly dedicated to examine the technical apparatus (for example the *test pattern* series, which – as the title implies – tests the performance of visualization devices). His works are minimalist (they use monochromatic abstract graph-like shapes and geometric forms) and conceptual (each work is built around a well-defined concept). The subject of self-reflexive examination in his works is not the celluloid film material or the analogue, mechanical movie projector,[9] but

9 Like in the case of Tony Conrad's experimental film from 1966 titled *The Flicker*, which is now recognized as a key work of structural filmmaking and which consists only of black and white frames. The changing of these frames during projection causes a stroboscopic effect, highlighting the functioning mechanisms of the cinematic apparatus: rolling frames transforming the light into projected moving images.

rather high-performance (high display resolution, high image refresh operation) digital video projectors and computer hardware with high computing performance to visualize big data sets through these video projectors.

The digital nature of these abstract images also implies the use of visual signs that can be interpreted as glitches, however like in the case of Ikeda's musical pieces, the use of glitch in his visual work is a stylistic tool not just to emphasize the mediality of these images,[10] but also to unfold digital imaging processes. Rosa Menkman describes visual glitch as a powerful interruption in the flow of images (for example, in a television broadcast), which occurs as a result of unexpected malfunction, and notes that the artistic use of glitches may unfold not just the medial characteristics of a digital image, but also the political and social connotations of these (2011, 7–11). The images used in the *datamatics* series, for example, contain a lot of visual signs that can be identified as glitches: half-rendered images, different coloured blank spots, draft-like graphics – glitches that indicate disruptions in the rendering process[11] of these images. However, Ikeda uses these glitches intentionally, as integral parts of the images, not just to unveil the functioning mechanisms of digital image rendering but also to capture an in-between state: no longer data, not yet image. [Figs. 1–4.]

Margaret Morse suggests that "the 'video' in video installation stands for contemporary image-culture *per se*. [...] each installation is an experiment in the redesign of the apparatus that represents our culture to itself: a new disposition of machines that project the imagination onto the world and that store, recirculate, and display images; and, a fresh orientation of the body in space and a reformulation of visual and kinesthetic experience" (1990, 155). In Ikeda's case, the moving images are deeply rooted in our postdigital, data-based image making processes indicating that digital images used as the raw material of video installations emerge as the "natural" world upon which the artists exercise their influence as subjects (see Morse 1990, 161). Continuing this line of thought, in the postdigital era it is not only the images that can be seen as the raw material of the installations but, as we see in Ikeda's works, the digital data itself too.

10 According to Clement Greenberg (1961, 133–139) in the context of modern arts, abstraction becomes the indicator of mediality in a self-reflexive manner. Abstraction simplifies the paintings to their core characteristics: the canvas becomes the indicator of the two-dimensional nature of painting, the pigments of paint become the indicator of materiality, the colours, the lines and the forms become the indicators of basic forms of pictorial self-expression.

11 Rendering or image synthesis is the automatic process of generating image from data by means of computer programmes.

The Relation between the Sound, the Visuals and the Space

As we have seen, the sounds and the images used by Ikeda share strong similarities: both are created within digital environments (incorporating data-based visual and sonic elements that can only be found within these environments, elements without any kind of representational value), both can be showcased with the use of digital devices, and both have self-reflective characteristics. To further examine the relation between sound and image, Cindy Keefer's notions about Visual Music can be a good starting point. Keefer, based on William Moritz defines Visual Music as "a music for the eye comparable to the effects of sound for the ear" (1986, 22). She considers Visual Music as a subgenre of experimental movies and lists artists like Oskar Fischinger, Len Lye, Norman McLaren and Jordan Belson as Visual Music filmmakers. Keefer (2015, 84–85) identifies four phenomena that can be considered Visual Music: 1) the translation of a specific musical composition (or sound) into a visual language, 2) creating a visual structure of a kind or style of music (a new composition created visually but as if it were an aural piece), 3) a direct translation of image to sound (e.g. images drawn or scratched onto a film's soundtrack, directly converted to sound when the film is projected, or sometimes shown simultaneously, like in Oskar Fischinger's *Ornament Sound* experiments from 1932), 4) a static visual composition created as the visual interpretation of a specific music (e.g. Keefer mentions the paintings of Paul Klee, but Jean-Michel Basquiat's painting titled *Horn Players* from 1983 could be a good example too). Considering the relation between sound and sight, Ikeda's audiovisual installations can be defined as Visual Music in the sense of the first, the third and the fourth categories described by Keefer.

Most of the images used by Ikeda can be analysed as a translation of musical composition into a visual language. In every audiovisual installation created by Ikeda the sounds and the images are strictly juxtaposed, accurately coordinated: a change in the soundscape always and immediately (without any delay) implies the changing of the sight.

One of his first multimedia projects, titled *cyclo.*, created in 2000 together with Carsten Nicolai,[12] is a great example for direct translation of images to sounds. In this project, Ikeda and Nicolai worked with software that enabled real-time

12 Carsten Nicolai (also known as Alva Noto or Noto) is a German music producer and multimedia artist, probably best known as the composer of the soundtrack for the 2015 Alejandro González Iñárritu movie *The Revenant*.

graphical representation of sounds, allowing them to compose music based on various images. The graphic appearance of the images determined the recorded sounds. As a result of the project, a CD-ROM with a catalogue-like attachment was released, the attachment containing the two-dimensional graphical representation of sounds on the CD-ROM.

Two pieces from the *test pattern* series, the painting-like pieces exhibited in Taipei Fine Arts Museum between August 10–November 17, 2019 and the images from the book released by Onestar Press in 2017 can be seen as static visual interpretations of Ikeda's sound. The static, barcode-like, printed images are not just still image variations of the moving images used in the audiovisual installations, but also a kind of static visual interpretation of Ikeda's music (the pictures precisely represent the rhythmic structures used by Ikeda).

We can further scrutinize the relation between sound and sight in Visual Music through the notions of Yvonne Spielmann. Spielmann defines the difference between intermedia, mixed media and multimedia by suggesting that intermedia deals with the interrelationship between distinct media that merge with each other, the term multimedia should be applied in the case of synchronous occurrence of different art forms within the frame of one integral medium that at the same time remain distinct from each other (such as opera or theatre) and the term mixed media should be applied in the case when a medium incorporates elements of another (for example photography in film or painting in photography) (2001, 56–57). Based on Spielmann's notions, Visual Music is multimedia. The translation of a musical composition to a visual language does not blur the medial borders, the medium of image (still or dynamic) and the medium of sound remain easily distinguishable. For example, in Ikeda's case, despite the synchronous occurrence, the accurate juxtaposition and the similar stylistic elements, the sound and the image remain two separate medium with solid medial borders.

spectra (started in 2000, ongoing) has been the first project in Ikeda's body of work that introduced space as a major determinant of the spectacle. In this series, Ikeda created large-scale site-specific installations employing intense white light (accompanied by a sine wave tone) as a sculptural material. Ikeda describes the white light employed in this series as "one of the purest forms of transformation from electricity"[13] (in this analogy, sine wave tones can also be interpreted as one of the purest forms of transforming electricity to sound). The installations are designed in response to public sites, altering the landscape. Through these installations visitors witness how the transformation of electricity to light alters the environment itself.

13 *http://www.ryojiikeda.com/project/spectra/*. Last accessed 18. 12. 2019.

The sight, the sound and the space are combined to create the sensory experience. [Figs. 5–6.] The *datamatics* series[14] (started in 2006, ongoing) could be interpreted as a further experimentation with space, especially with the museal space and the exhibiting traditions (institutionalized ways of exhibiting art) implied by this space.

Due to their large scale and the way they are installed, some installments from the series offer the possibility of immersion for the visitors. The *data.tron [advanced version]*, for example, was set up in an abandoned armoury in New York City, between May 20 and June 11, 2011, and the projected image appeared on an 18-metre-high and an 18-metre-wide canvas set in the middle of the hall, creating a large-scale "wall of visualized data." In the installation titled *data.path* (set up in the Fundacion Telefónica, in Madrid, between September 28, 2013 and January 5, 2014) 7 projectors were used to project horizontally moving images onto two parallel walls of a corridor, creating the effect of stepping inside a "data cable." Continuous motion of images greatly alters the perception of space and makes the visitor feel as if they were flowing with data. The installment *data.tron [8K enhanced version]*, set up in Ars Electronica Center in Linz, AT, between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2010 can also be mentioned, in which 8 high capacity projectors combined with 9.2ch sound system filled the whole gallery hall with data, literally immersing the visitors in the work. Through their large scale and the possibility of immersion offered, these works reflect the huge amount of digital data that surround us in our daily lives: data become visualized both literally and figuratively.

In the installation *data.scan*, Ikeda uses a completely different approach. He exhibits moving images based on datasets containing the results of contemporary microbiological and astronomical researches displayed on LCD screens placed on the top of wooden boxes. By presenting these datasets as museal artifacts, Ikeda channels the data as an artistic material into a larger, art historical context. The spatial arrangement of the *data.matrix [nº1-10]* also mimics a museal space. In this variation the data-based motion pictures are projected on the wall, imitating paintings hung on the wall. Visitors can walk through the exhibition and watch the moving images, enjoying the experience at their own pace.

The relationship between digital data and analogue representational modes is also explored in the installation titled *data.film [nº1-a]*. This work uses series of analogue 35mm film rolls mounted in a light box. The image on the film is constructed from microscopically printed data codes and patterns from pure digital sources, while

14 *datamatics* is an art project that "explores the potential to perceive the invisible multi-substance of data that permeates our world. It is a series of experiments in various forms – audiovisual concerts, installations, publications and CD releases – that seek to materialise pure data" *http://www.ryojiikeda.com/project/datamatics/*. Last accessed 18. 12. 2019.

the unusual proportions of the light box (4 cm high, 10 metres wide, 4 cm deep) create a long, narrow strip of film. Only upon close examination by the viewer can the film and its contents be recognized. From afar it looks like a simple, shining white stripe mounted on the wall, but if the viewer leans closer the details emerge. This process can be seen as allusion to photo enlargement, moreover it exposes an analogue way of storing and exhibiting digital data through the technical apparatus of analogue photography.

The work entitled *data.scape* (set up on December 16, 2016) is an experiment to display data as an integral part of a building's architecture. Being a site-specific, permanent audiovisual installation, the datasets are visualized on a 100-metre-wide and 4-metre-high LED screen mounted on one of the outdoor walls of the Sydney International Convention Centre: moving images based on datasets integrated in the medium of architecture. In the *datamatics* series Ikeda does not just explore the modes of materializing data through different technologies and different media, but every piece also functions as a self-reflexive examination of the medium itself and of the technical and stylistic means offered by contemporary technology and contemporary art to visualize data. Ikeda is highlighting here that the vast majority of information out there is not in a format that we can understand and by converting these datasets into sounds and images, he, in a way, rehumanizes the dehumanized data and allows us to interact with it through our senses.

The *test pattern* series, as its title already suggests,[15] is a kind of self-reflective examination of the digital video-projecting apparatus, of the sensorial perception, furthermore of the possibilities offered by the media of video installation. Each piece in the series is based on an algorithm programmed by Tomonaga Tokuyama[16] that converts digital data (texts, sounds, photos or movies) into binary code and visualizes it using black and white barcode-like lines. The alternation of 0s and 1s is visualized as the alternation of these black and white lines. The visual elements tightly accompany the music composed by Ikeda in the same manner (converting data sets into sounds, then arranging them into different rhythm patterns). The alternation

15 "A test pattern is a television test signal, typically broadcast at times when the transmitter is active but no program is being broadcast. Used since the earliest TV broadcasts, test patterns were originally physical cards at which a television camera was pointed, and such cards are still often used for calibration, alignment, and matching of cameras and camcorders. Test patterns used for calibrating or troubleshooting the downstream signal path are these days generated by test signal generators, which do not depend on the correct configuration (and presence) of a camera. Digitally generated cards allow vendors, viewers and television stations to adjust their equipment for optimal functionality. The audio broadcast while test cards are shown is typically a sine wave tone." *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Test_card*. Last accessed 11. 12. 2019.

16 He also programmed the algorithm used in the *datamatics* series.

of different frequencies, amplitudes and rhythms affects the images, for example deep frequencies correspond to thicker lines and high frequencies give rise to thinner lines, while the speed of the alternation is dictated by the rhythm of the music. [Figs. 7–8.] The velocity of the sound and image is so fast that it sometimes requires the displaying of 400–500 frames/second and the playing back of very high and very low frequencies, thus testing the projecting and the playback devices. Furthermore, the sensorial skills of the visitors are also tested: the perception of rapidly alternating images after a time becomes impossible to the human eye and the audio frequencies may sometimes be too high or too low to be heard by the human ear.

The first edition of the series, titled *test pattern [nº1]* (set up at Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media in Yamaguchi, JP, between March 1 and March 25, 2018) was an audiovisual installation made up of eight LCD monitors and sixteen loudspeakers aligned on the floor in a dark space. The eight rectangular surfaces placed on the floor flicker intensely, the sixteen-channel sound signals are mapped as a grid matrix, passing and slicing the space sharply. *Test pattern [nº2]* (presented at ARTe SONoro festival in Madrid, ES, between April 22 and June 13, 2010) applied two digital video projectors: one projected the barcode-like images on the wall, the other one on the floor of the dark, cube-shaped room. This variation has already allowed a certain level of immersion, which is further enhanced by the later variations. *Test pattern [enhanced version]* (set up at New York City, together with the *data. tron [advanced version]* between May 20 and June 11, 2011) used a 20x15 metre image projected on the floor, while another one used an image projected to a 30x15 metre canvas. In some installations, the image projected on the wall is missing, like in the case of *test pattern [nº5]* (set up at Carriageworks, Sydney, AU, between June 8 and July 1, 2013) or the *test pattern [100m version]* (set up at Ruhrtriennale, Kraftzentrale, Duisburg, DE, between August 23 and 25, 2013). This implies another kind of immersion: the constant movement of the images projected on the floor in a way forces the visitors to interact by following the velocity of the lines.

The *test pattern* series test not just the sensorial capacities of the visitors, but also the unconscious attitudes defined by historical experiences in different cultures. Philip Brophy (2015, 222) observed that while European and American visitors approached the installations playfully, regarding them as a kind of entertainment, the Japanese audience approached them with fright. Brophy deduces this from the fact that these installations were perceived by the Japanese audience as a representation of floods or tsunamis (natural disasters common in Japan), particularly due to the addition of sine wave tones, which in Japan has been used as a warning signal for natural disasters in television and radio broadcasts.

The variation titled *test pattern [times square]* was displayed on the large-sized electric billboards of New York City's Times Square. Between October 1 and 31, 2014, three minutes before midnight, all of Times Square's billboards went dark and the *test pattern* series' black and white lines appeared on them for three minutes, returning to the usual commercials at midnight. On the one hand, this can be interpreted as a test of Times Square's technical apparatus, but it can also be perceived as a form of social criticism: the testing of a consumer society accustomed to advertising.

Gene Youngblood in his highly influential book *Expanded Cinema* (1970) describes the *Vortex Concerts* series created by Jordan Belson and Henry Jacobs as a perfect example of an "immersive projected environment." The experimental concert series was performed at Morrison Planetarium in San Francisco, between 1957 and 1960. In these concerts Belson (who was responsible for the projection) and Jacobs (who selected and composed the music) used the technical apparatus of the planetarium (more than a hundred projectors and loudspeakers, stroboscopes, etc.) to "full fill the hall with images and sounds." Contrary to cinema, which requires a fixed gaze, in the case of *Vortex Concerts* the images floated all around the spectators, transforming the complete hall into a screen. Youngblood also notes that in the case of the *Vortex Concerts* the projection became not just a performative act but a carrier of a paradigm of audiovisual experience that also functions as a projection of the collective subconscious (1970, 387–391). Ikeda's audiovisual installations show strong similarities with the *Vortex Concert* series. On the one hand, the projection in Ikeda's audiovisual installations also have a performative nature, because nothing really happens other than the alternation of abstract images (there is no narrative, no storytelling, etc.) so the focus is on projection and on the medium itself. On the other hand, even though Ikeda's audiovisual installations cannot be described as a projection of the collective unconscious, these works certainly reflect a global phenomenon that has become an unnoticed part of our everyday life (the omnipresence of digital data). Another, and perhaps the most important connection is the loading of spaces with motion pictures, creating immersive environments, in which the medium of sound and the medium of image unify through the human senses as a new sensorial experience offered by the medium of audiovisual installation.[17]

17 An interesting contemporary example of an immersive environment filled with moving images used in a less avant-garde and more commercial manner is the Atelier des Lumières opened in Paris in 2018. A former iron foundry plant was converted into a digital art centre featuring 120 video projectors and 50 loudspeakers, created especially for immersive audiovisual installations (e.g. based on the paintings of Gustav Klimt, Vincent van Gogh, Yves Klein). One of Ikeda's artwork optimized for this space could be an interesting experience.

The Visitors

Ikeda bases his works of art mainly on the human perception and the human sensorial functions, making the visitor's role and position an important aspect in his body of work. In the case of Ikeda's audiovisual installations visitors cannot interact directly with the artwork (like in a video game or in an interactive movie), but with their movement through the exhibition space, they can change the point of view, detect new optical effects, and observe different details of the projected images. Moreover, with their bodies, visitors shape the installation itself, since the moving images are often projected onto the bodies of visitors, making them an integral part of the installation. However, this is not a distinctive feature, the same is true for every artwork which applies projected environments. (It is important to note the difference between "projected environment" and "single-channel"/"multi-channel" video installations, where the latter can be perceived in a passive way.) In Ikeda's artworks it is the juxtaposition of sound and these projected environments that creates something unique. Not only that image and sound function in perfect synchrony, enhancing each other's synaesthetic effect, but due to the use of high volume, these environments also make it possible to perceive the sound with the whole body, not just with the hearing organs. In this way, these audiovisual installations offer not merely a sensory experience but also a physical one. Ikeda's audiovisual installations can be seen as the opposite of virtual reality, which has at its core the complete disconnection of human senses from nature and matter, even if Ikeda's nature and matter are based on digital data too. The concept of transporting viewers into an enclosed, illusionary visual space is similar, but in the case of VR the presence is virtual, one's body is being in one environment (here) and the subjective experience in another, digital environment (there); in Ikeda's case the presence is real, one's body and one's subjective experience are in the same, digitally altered environment.

Ágnes Pethő suggests a phenomenological approach on filmic intermediality, based on the assumption that "while 'reading' intertextual relations engages our intellectual capacities, 'reading' intermedial relations requires more than anything else, an embodied spectator who gets 'in touch' with the world of the film," and notes, that the "intermediality of film is grounded in the (inter)sensuality of cinema itself, in the experience of the viewer being aroused simultaneously on different levels of consciousness and perception" (2011, 4). Based on Vivian Sobchack's notions, Pethő describes the filmic intermediality as a corporeal experience, which uses one's dominant senses of vision and hearing "to speak comprehensibly to

our other senses." Also based on Sobchack's notions, she uses the metaphor of the "film's body," which she describes as a "complex phenomenon at the 'crossroads' of the specifically cinematic 'game of mirrors' (played between illusion and reality, the projection room and the screen, the 'gaze' and the 'touch')" and which "is perhaps the most comprehensible and 'tactile' aspect of mediality in the cinema that we can think of" (Pethő 2011, 71). Through the example of Abbas Kiarostami's *Shirin* (2008), Pethő points out that the meeting of one's body and the film's body creates the cinematic experience, which is "clearly located not on the screen but in the 'eyes of the beholder,' on the face and body of the spectator," moreover, "the film's body becomes the spectator's body mirroring the carnal world of the screen, responding to each flicker of the cinematic spectacle" (2011, 77). Applying Pethő's notions onto Ikeda's installations is a valid way to approach the medial relations in these works. On the one hand, Ikeda's abstract images resist reading with one's intellectual capacities; on the other hand, in Ikeda's case we are dealing with a sensorial experience mainly caused by an interaction between the human senses and between media. Entering one of Ikeda's installations, the visitor encounters the body of the audiovisual installation (the abstract digital images, by their nature, unveil their mediality), which becomes the visitor's body. Paul Hegarty, based on Matthew Herbert's notions describes this encounter as experiencing the infinite with "our own nerve endings: in intensely variable streams of visual or [and] sonic information, in what floods the retina" (and floods the eardrum, we may add) (2015, 159). Hegarty also notes that Ikeda makes pieces that "combine visual and audio in installation form, they are precisely not 'audiovisual' in that they are designed to be neither, and the very existence of either sound or image becomes a pleasing side-effect, a way for limited humans to see into the world of data, much as the scrolling figures of *The Matrix* (1999) tried to demonstrate" (2015, 159).

According to Yvonne Spielmann, "Ikeda's work arguably demonstrates a level of computing in which there is none of that synergetic linkage denoting traditional processes for a conversion or a restructuring of media elements. There is not much point in talking about media elements from different origins. [...] A common level of functioning in programming accompanies computers as simulation machines. On this level, there is no longer any need to undertake transformations altering the structure of different media forms" (2012, 123).

Based on these insights, perhaps it can be said that the body of audiovisual installation in the case of Ikeda's works is a body in which the medium of sound and the medium of moving image interact within the visitor's perception. Neither the sound nor the image has a primer nature and due to their simultaneous and

synchronous presence the medial borders blur within the human perception: the image becomes the visualization of sound and the sound becomes the sonification of the image, both being the dual expression of the same material: data. Moreover, it is presumable that the abstract nature of Ikeda's works (i.e. there is no carnal world on the screens, no representations, no figurative forms, no signs) can initiate cognitive functions too, the visitor unintentionally starts to think about the meaning of these works and perhaps starts to reflect on the functioning mechanisms of his/her own senses and on the functioning mechanisms of the medium.

Conclusion

Ryoji Ikeda's audiovisual installations, in addition to creating a dialogue between science and art, by borrowing concepts from the field of physics, information technology, and mathematics, always reflect on the medium of video installation. His digitally created environments are not mimetic representations of the world but rather simulations, which through the inter-sensual stimulation caused by mediums generated from the same raw material of data offer the possibility of getting in touch with something that is naturally untouchable and unreachable. James Bridle in his book *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future* (2018) argues that the development of technology has exceeded humanity. In the postdigital era we no longer understand the functioning mechanisms of our digital environments. Technology has become the integral part of our everyday life, our digital gadgets have become extensions of our bodies, but the functioning mechanisms are too complex and too abstract to understand. In this sense, Ikeda's body of work perhaps can be seen as a tool which helps us to understand some aspects of our digital environments.

Marshall McLuhan described the analogue film through the example of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1937) as the embodiment of a mechanical era. The film reel and the conveyor, the clockwork and the projector form analogies: they have common medial forms, they organize their material (people standing next to the conveyor, people sitting in the cinema) in a similar way (1968, 317). Based on McLuhan's analogy, Ikeda's audiovisual installations perhaps can be described as the embodiments of the data-driven postdigital era: spaces built up from digital data (the Internet for example) inhabited by people who are able to freely roam and form their space.

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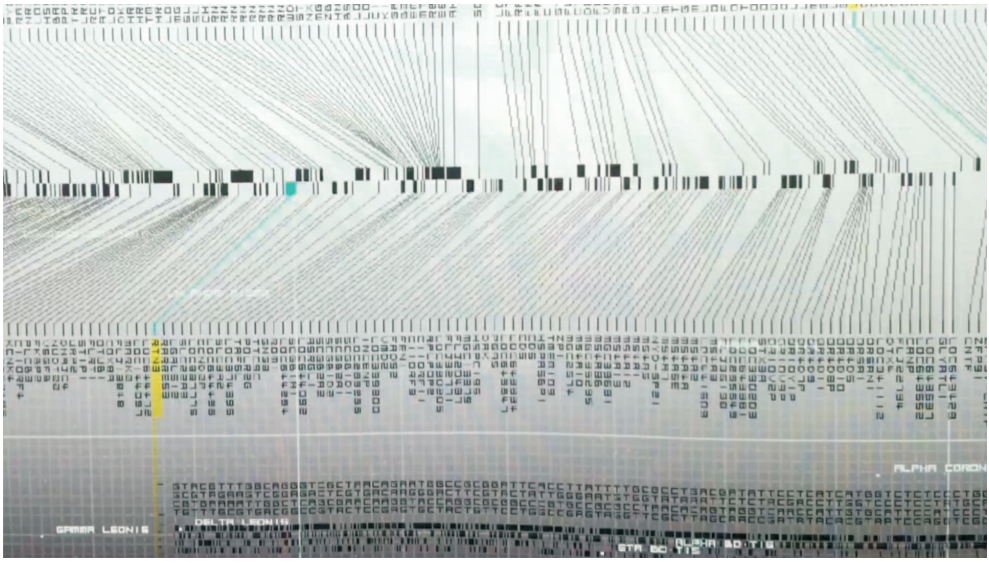

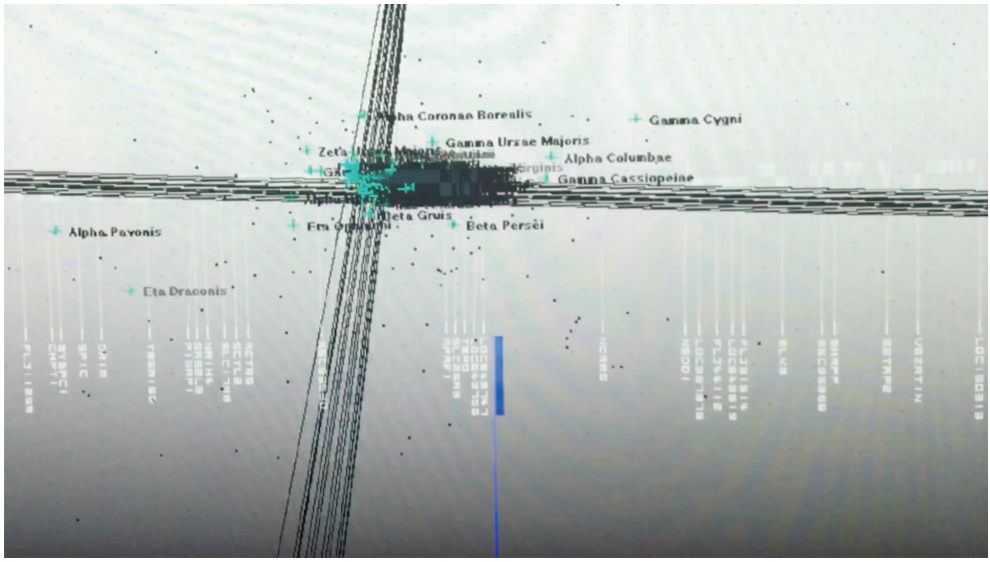
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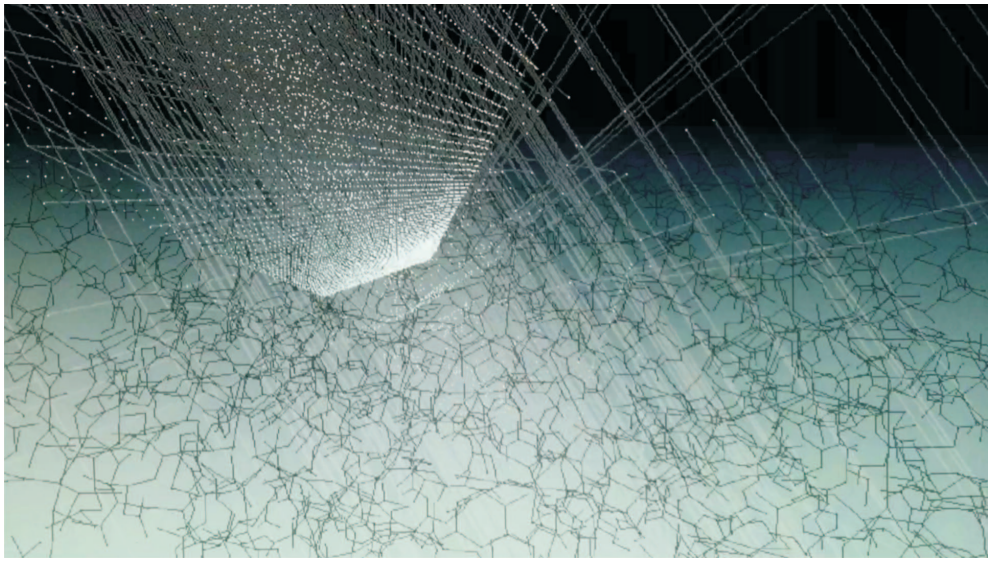
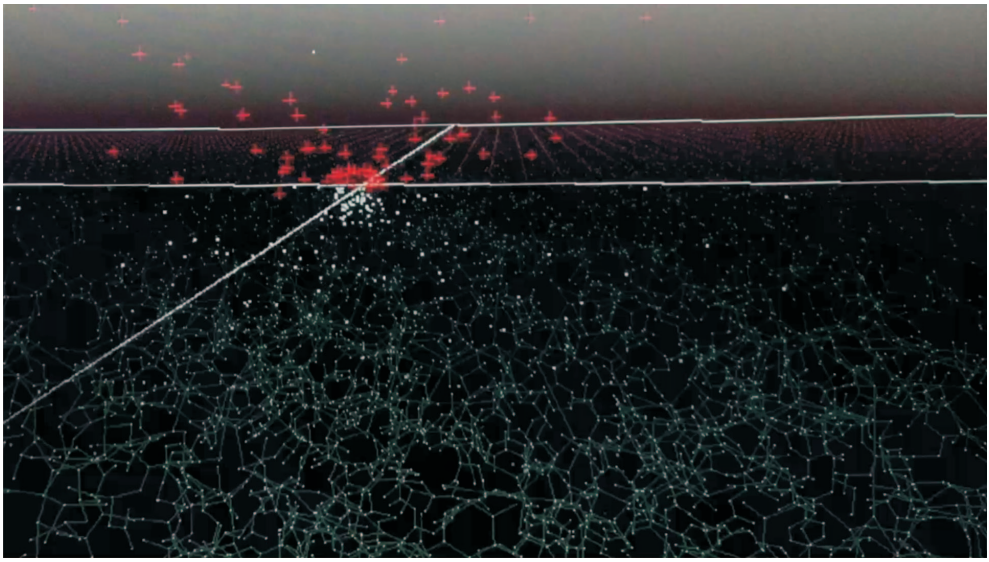
Gamma Ursae Majoris
Alpha Columbae
Gamma Cassiopeiae
Beta Gruis
Beta Persei
Alpha Pavonis
Eta Draconis





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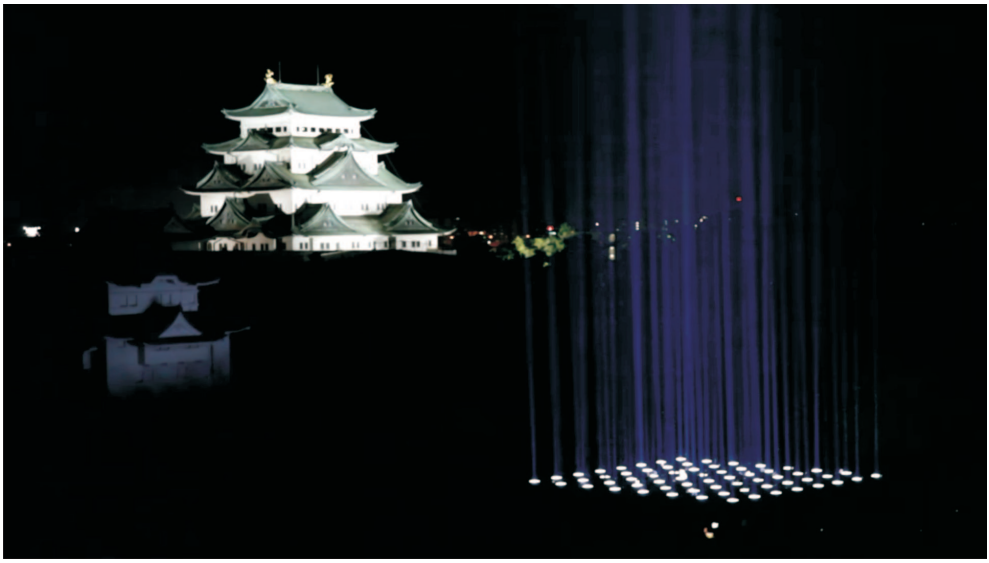

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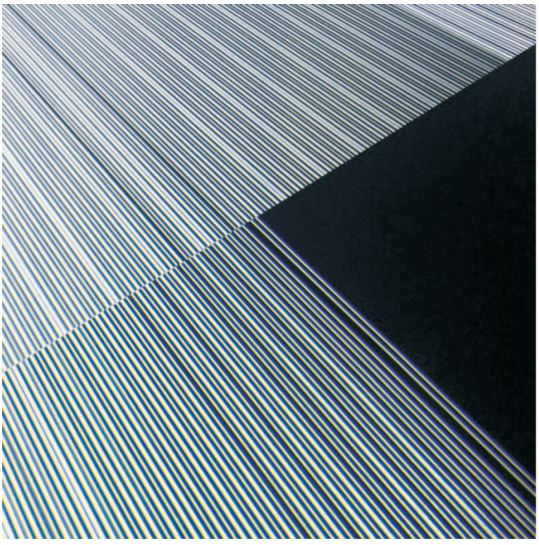

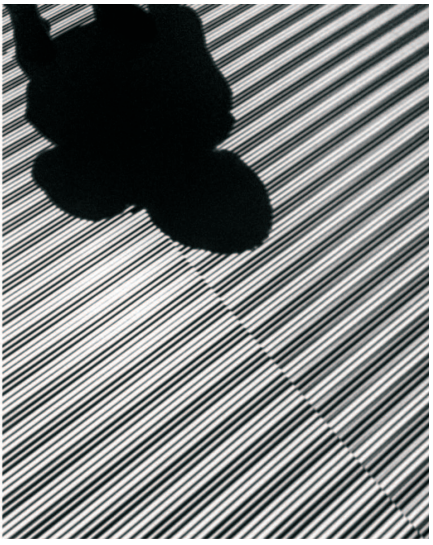

SPECIAL DOSSIER: THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF HUNGARIAN CINEMA

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Conflict Types in Hungarian Film History

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Abstract. The article introduces the collective research project entitled *The Social History of Hungarian Cinema, 1931–2015*, executed by the staff of Film Studies Department Eötvös Loránd University. This data-driven research aims to examine how and why Hungarian films have changed over time. Using the case study of conflict types in the plots of Hungarian films this study discusses the methodological problems of longitudinal explanations of change in Hungarian film history (periodization and dividing film between genre-based film and auteur films/art cinema). Based on the analysis of statistics and trends, the study presents the most important types of conflict in Hungarian film history. With respect to the political turning points and the periodization of Hungarian film history, the article states that each of the three broad periods (1931–1944, 1945–1989, 1990–2015) is characterized by its own distinctive set of prominent conflict types. The pre-1945 era is characterized by a massive number of love conflicts, the socialist period by the highest rate of political conflicts (and the lowest rates of love and crime conflicts), and the post-socialist period by a high rate of crime and generational conflicts. Furthermore, by analysing the connections between conflict types and genres, the study reveals recurring patterns and trends of shorter periods: it shows how the range of conflicts narrowed considerably over the 1970s and discusses the extent to which this is related to the dominance of auteur films in the era.[1]

Keywords: Hungarian cinema, conflict types, statistical analysis, genre films and auteur films, periodization.

The history of film history writing is a long succession of various paradigms and turns, and is usually arranged around certain binary opposites that are familiar to the fields of humanities – such as text/context, empirical/conceptual, close reading/distant reading, data-driven/hypothesis-driven. The connections between – and dynamics and prevalence of – formal, stylistic, generic norms and social-cultural

1 This paper was supported by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office (number of Agreement: 116708).

contexts is the subject of endless debate, questioning whether we should focus on the descriptions, explanations and the understanding of formal norms or on the determinative forces of social and cultural contexts in the shaping of films. David Bordwell, discussing the methods of historical poetics, voted for the first option and emphasized that film historians should consider two broad questions. "1. What are the principles according to which films are constructed and by means of which they achieve particular effects? 2. How and why have these principles arisen and changed in particular empirical circumstances?" (Bordwell 1989, 371.) However, Bordwell never denied the formative force of exogenous factors as he stressed that "it is perfectly possible to find that the formal phenomena we're trying to explain proceed from cultural, institutional, biographical, or other sorts of causes" (Bordwell 1997, 5).

In a special issue of *Cinema Journal* in 2004, which discusses the past and present challenges of film history writing and comments on Bordwell's thoughts on historical poetics, Lee Grieveson formulated the open-ended question of texts and contexts in the following way. "What are the possibilities for a cultural history of cinema that takes the tenets and reservations of historical poetics seriously? Likewise, what are the possibilities for a historical poetics that takes seriously the aims and possibilities of a cultural history of cinema?" (Grieveson 2004, 122.) In our collective research project entitled *The Social History of Hungarian Cinema* we have faced similar questions: how can we take seriously these different forces of historical poetics and social-cultural history? Our project aims to examine how and why Hungarian films have changed over time. We explore the evolution and transformation of motifs, forms, patterns, genres, and topics over time, and seek the possible causes and explanations of these changes. Thus, the key questions are: how do we recognize a change in films (what is changing over time), how do we identify and perceive the collection of thematic, generic or stylistic patterns as being indicative and significant (which of these changes and patterns reveal an important trend or connection, and hence calls for explanation), and then how do we provide the (historical) explanation for that change? The basic explanatory factors (with which we would like to explain historical change) are: historical-political influences, social factors, institutional-technological effects, cultural causes, and local and international trends within filmmaking culture. We do not want to engage in the debate on which endogenous forces, formal components or social-cultural factors take precedence in the shaping of Hungarian films. We believe both endogenous and exogenous factors have their own impact, and these effects change and combine over time. Our project examines well-known trends

and seeks novel patterns of change in Hungarian films, and assumes that there are different factors that can cause and explain these changes. Our assumption is that in different periods and in different situations these potential factors are activated in different ways, in other words, some of them will be said to have a stronger (and others to have a weaker) influence when we explain the forces behind the change in the patterns of Hungarian films.

This article will use the case study of conflict types in the plots of Hungarian films made between 1931 and 2015 to show the methodological problems of longitudinal explanations of change in Hungarian film history. Of the questions of detecting change over time and the explanation of the motivating factors of change, the article will focus on the former, and will discuss what the analysis of conflict types might reveal about Hungarian film history and about the social functioning of cinema. Following an overview of the problems of Hungarian film historiography and the examination of questions of longitudinal analysis (specifically periodization and dividing film between genre-based film and art cinema), the article will introduce the basic methodology of the research and show what novel trends and patterns the analysis of conflict types reveals.

Historiography of Hungarian Film History

An important aim of the research is to describe the changes in Hungarian film history according to homogenous and consistent criteria. Existing texts and longitudinal discussions on the entire history of Hungarian cinema generally lack methodological and theoretical reflection, and review Hungarian film history in chronological order with a focus on the most important trends and prominent and iconic films of the given era (Burns 1996; Balogh, Gyürey and Honffy 2004; Cunningham 2004; Gelencsér 2017). This is presumably not independent of the fact that their main target audience is the cultural public that is interested in Hungarian and Eastern European cinema (such is the case with the English-language volumes), or that they provide a kind of textbook-like introductory narrative to Hungarian film history.[2]

Academic texts on Hungarian film history have applied heterogeneous considerations, and have not consistently examined the whole continuum of film history. These studies usually focused only on a given period, and their considerations were diverse. Gyöngyi Balogh and Jenő Király's monumental

2 Gábor Gelencsér's recent book entitled *Hungarian Film 1.0* even highlights this aspect with its title, and stresses in the introduction that its target audience is the teenager and youth generation (Gelencsér 2017).

work on early and mid-1930s Hungarian filmmaking culture employed detailed textual and genre-based analysis, providing a thorough investigation of the films as products of Hungarian cultural history and mentality (Balogh and Király 2000). Tibor Sándor and Márk Záhonyi-Ábel conducted extensive archival research to explore the political contexts and the influence of regulation on the Hungarian cinema of the late 1930s and early 1940s (Sándor 1997; Záhonyi-Ábel 2019). Gábor Gergely and David Frey examined the political discourses and institutional contexts of the 1930s' and early 1940s' Hungarian filmmaking culture (Gergely 2017; Frey 2018). Gábor Szilágyi's books provided an analysis of the institutional context and the production history of Hungarian films from the early and mid-1950s (Szilágyi 1992, 1994). Gábor Gelencsér's book on the 1970s analysed the main artistic trends of the decade (Gelencsér 2002). My book focused on the post-socialist institutional transformation of Hungarian film industry (Varga 2016a). These works reflect on a limited scope (aesthetic, institutional, political, etc.), and therefore cannot portray the period comprehensively. A further limitation of existing research on specific periods is that it does not consider how the preceding years and trends influenced these eras in the form of institutional, structural and socio-cultural traditions (and even less attention is directed to the question of how each period influenced the one following it). Furthermore, analyses with a limited scope cannot adequately portray how different areas and forces of culture and Hungarian cinema's ecosystem interact with each other. Stylistic analyses cannot accommodate questions on the cultural context at a specific time, and production histories do not consider how an institutional structure impacts the various types of films produced.

Therefore, our research project attempts to fill the gap outlined above by analysing Hungarian film history not through its separate features but as a complex and interconnected phenomenon. This project is not concerned with selected periods but rather with the complete history of Hungarian sound film, using a methodology that allows for the investigation of trends and traditions over a long period – a consideration that is missing from existing literature.

Periodization in Question

The decision to perform a longitudinal analysis of Hungarian film history brings with it the challenges of periodization, and in particular the questions of discontinuities and ruptures. It is not necessarily our goal to revise the dominant narratives and existing periodizations of Hungarian film history, rather to understand whether the patterns emerging from our data-driven research confirm or disprove the temporal

divisions and the periodization of previous studies. We are aware that periodization is already a contentious and much debated point in the field of historical studies and humanities (for example contemporary literary history/theory). It has also been more than fifty years since Michel Foucault drew attention to the problematic nature, and the controlling and consolidating power of periodization. Yet, periodization is still with us. The tendency toward demarcations and periodization might be understood to be an underlying human impulse: "we describe the world as changing in particular structured ways not because it actually always does so – though sometimes it does! – but because a series of biases toward change at a certain scale are built into our most fundamental models for understanding culture" (Hayot 2020, 203). An important argument in favour of periodization is that it makes differences apparent and helps to establish the context of a text. Although terms (and styles, accordingly) that are used to describe periods are often relative and artificial, they might be useful for comparison, to help analyse contrasting trends and styles (Brown 2001). Contrasts, conflicts and ruptures are inevitable but productive outcomes of periodization. "Given this background of how we measure change in the past, we must remind ourselves that historians generally see the past as both continuous and discontinuous. Stringing together facts, in what often appears to be a functionally deterministic way, historians draw a smooth line through the past. Both the facts and the continuity are, we now realize, constructed. We construct what is a fact and recognize that we could have emphasized other ones. And we impose continuity upon those we have selected. Equally important, however, is the recognition of ruptures in history." (Mazlish 2011, 32.)

In the following, I will discuss two crucial aspects of studying Hungarian film history as a complex, long-term social-cultural phenomenon: ruptures and periodization as markers of dramatic political changes, and the question of the division of Hungarian cinema corpus between mainstream-commercial genre films and auteur-art films.

Ruptures in Eastern European Film History

The general issues of periodization and of ruptures will be especially relevant if we turn to the filmmaking culture of the Eastern (Central) European region. In his examination of Polish film history, Marek Haltof begins with the parallels between, and the common periodization of political and film history. "It is feasible to distinguish films made in the Polish territories during the absence of the Polish state (before 1918), the cinema of interwar Poland (1918–1939), the cinema of

communist Poland (1945–1989), and the films made after the return of democracy in 1989." (Haltof 2018, 2.) However, the relationship between these periods and their place in the film history narrative is at least as interesting.

Marcin Adamczak, discussing the trends of transformation of post-socialist Polish filmmaking culture, emphasized the problem of the disproportionate portrayal of different periods in Polish film-history books. "Polish cinematic output of the postwar communist period tends to be valorized and nostalgized. In contrast to those of the Second and Third Republics, such films are very much a part of Polish film culture thanks to continued popular and academic interest. Exemplifying this situation is the book *The History of Polish Cinema: Masters, Films and Contexts*, in which Tadeusz Lubelski devotes only 67 pages to the cinema of the Second Republic, and just 79 to the Third Republic. These numbers stand in marked contrast to the 374 pages he allocates to the cinema of the People's Republic." (Adamczak 2012, 45.) In Adamczak's interpretation, the biased discussion emphasizes the value-oriented narrative of Polish filmmaking culture: "these periods function as mere bookends to the main body of enquiry. However, it should be stressed that, at the time of writing, the combined duration of the Second Republic (21 years) and Third Republic (23 years) is equal to that of the 44-year-long People's Republic. Estimates indicate that the number of Polish films produced in the two periods is roughly equal to that of the much-vaunted People's Republic. The disproportionate attention paid to the cinema of the People's Republic can only partly be explained as a product of the difficulties involved in accessing surviving Second Republic films or of the time-lag that often characterizes Film Studies' embracing of contemporary cinema" (Adamczak 2012, 46).

The same political-temporal segmentation is used to portray Czech film history. "During its hundred-year-long history, the Czech film survived five different social systems. Its origins (the first films on the Czech soil were presented by Jan Kříženecký in 1898) are rooted in the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the First World War, it continued its development in a free and democratic Czechoslovak Republic which was after two decades destroyed by the Nazi Germany. A fundamental systemic change occurred in 1945 when the Czechoslovak film was nationalized i.e., that the state (and after 1948 the Communist establishment) completely controlled all film activities in the entire country. (1) After the demise of the Communist dictatorship in 1989, a democratic regime was reestablished and with it the market economy; the film production was privatized and returned to the hands of private producers and distributors. (2) This dependency of the Czech film production on external conditions which were preventing the natural, continuous and intrinsic development of the film art was intensified by a specifically Czech cultural tradition

which often preferred the social and educational function of art over its aesthetic function." (Voráč 1997.) Further examples could, of course, be added, but perhaps, for these purposes, it is sufficient just to mention German film history, which is also "structured around the historical events, including two world wars and five regime changes, which mark German cinema as a site of crises, ruptures, and antagonisms, but also of unexpected influences, affinities, and continuities" (Hake 2002, 1).

Two dates intuitively determine how to think about periodization and continuity regarding Eastern European cinema: 1945 and 1989. In other words, the years of state socialism (as years of shared political and cultural experience of the countries of the region) clearly articulate, and also organize the periodization of both political and film history through ruptures and/or continuity. Subsequently, historical overviews of the filmmaking cultures of the region are organized (in a way that is almost taken for granted) into a three-part structure: the pre-socialist, the socialist, and the post-socialist period.

It is also clear that while 1945 and 1989 stand out in the film history of Eastern European countries, there are significant differences between national film cultures and political histories in terms of what changes took place and how. For Czech, Slovak and Polish political and film history, the years 1938 and 1939 represent times of dramatic ruptures and change, although in different ways. Polish filmmaking almost totally came to a halt during German and Soviet occupation (1939–1945). Only a few films were made, and many of the filmmakers emigrated after the invasion (Haltof 2018). Similarly, there were no feature films made in Slovakia during the German occupation (Votruba 2005), and the annexation of Czechoslovakia also dramatically impacted Czech film production. However, due to its high technological equipment and standards, Prague became an important centre of German film production (Johnson 2012). Besides German productions, some Czech feature films were also produced, but the domestic production numbers dropped dramatically (Klimes 2007). Most of the Czech films that were made were filmed in the smaller and less well-equipped studios. Because the Czech film industry was able to survive the devastation of the war relatively unscathed, its resumption in 1945 was also smoother (Hendrykowska 1999).

1989 was, undoubtedly, also a turning point for the region's filmmaking cultures. The transition for both Polish and Hungarian film production was more continuous. For Czech film, privatization and generational change were the major challenges, while the filmmaking culture of Slovakia, which became independent in 1993, as Katarína Mišíková wrote, was on the path of "eternal revival" (Mišíková 2016). Ruptures and continuities are fascinating topics for the discussion of the late-Soviet

period, and the cinema of perestroika (Beumers and Zvonkine 2018). Furthermore, the position and investigation of East German filmmaking culture, and the question of how it is situated, embedded and contextualized within German film history, are also challenging. Did East German filmmaking culture start from nothing in 1949, to be dispersed and terminated in 1990 with the reunification of Germany? What can German cinema and film historians of German cinema do with the legacy of the East German filmmaking culture? (Heiduschke 2013; Byg 2002.)

Therefore, we can agree with Sabine Hake that "the notion of national cinema as a category of difference and contestation also complicates the understanding of film history as a linear narrative with distinct periods and movements, continuities and ruptures, and cycles of rise and decline" (Hake 2002, 6).

Auteur Films and Old/New Divisions of Hungarian Film History

Besides the challenges of periodization, there is another intricate division of the Hungarian film corpus that must be tackled, namely the duality of, and the distinction between genre-based films and art/auteur films. This topic is closely related to the problem of periodization, since Hungarian film history is usually described as having a pre-1945 period dominated by popular filmmaking and genre films, while after 1945 (and especially from the 1960s) auteur films and art cinema assumed the dominant position. The explanatory power of this binary framework (not to mention its theoretical clarity) is limited, for example, by the fact that the post-socialist era is difficult to place within this duality (as after 1989 we can see relative balance between commercial and art cinema – with a continuous decline in the proportion of the latter, and a hybridization of the strategies of mainstream-popular and authorial filmmaking). Yet, research that seeks to examine Hungarian film history in a unified way must respond to the problem of the duality of genre-oriented commercial cinema and art cinema/auteur films. So far, I have used the terms art and auteur in parallel, which is not by accident. Hungarian film critics and film historians generally do not distinguish between the two concepts and use them interchangeably, as if they were synonyms. The fundamental thesis of auteur theory, namely that authorship and genre-based filmmaking are not incompatible with each other, has little weight in common interpretations of Hungarian film history: critics and historians usually use the term auteur to mean the opposite to commercial (and designate as auteurs those directors who are the scriptwriters of their own films). Yet, we would not be more well-equipped if we were to consider many of the

leading directors of pre-1945 popular filmmaking culture as auteurs (although it is a relevant and resourceful way for the reinvestigation of the first decade of Hungarian sound film era). It seems a better solution to describe the aforementioned (pre-war and post-war) divisions within the duality of genre-based commercial filmmaking and art cinema, which is not easily characterized by (the direct and open use of) genres. Setting aside the problems related to the definition and the divergent use of the auteur film category, we immediately run into another terminological problem, namely when describing art film and art cinema. Art cinema, if it is possible, is an even broader and less definable category than auteur film. Theoretical discussions regarding the term usually underline its elusiveness, heterogeneity and impurity (Andrews 2013; Galt and Schoonover 2010), and highlight the value-oriented aspects of the category (which serves as a basis to contrast art cinema with Hollywood and mainstream/popular filmmaking). Our research, in order to analyse the broader trends in Hungarian film history, relies on those theories that describe art cinema as an institution and as a mode of film practice (Bordwell 1979; Neale 1981). Thus, we consider art cinema to be more complex than a set of formal and narrative characteristics (such as realism, opacity, open textual qualities and authorial vision) and focus on the cultural, social and institutional aspects of this type of filmmaking. Yet, we claim that there are distinct textual specificities to art films that allow us not only to distinguish them from genre-based films, but to place both (i.e. genre films and art films) within a broader and unified system of categories. Although art films have important thematic features (the theme of the film is often the expression of the author's own vision [Kovács 2018]), they cannot be thematically delineated – as opposed to many genres such as western or war film. However, we can point to another very important genre, namely comedy, for which it can also be said that it cannot be delineated thematically. Besides their significant narrative and dramaturgical features, art films cannot be narrowed down to these distinguishing attributes, nor to the differences in their impact on the viewer (they primarily target an intellectual effect instead of the emotional impact expected of genre films [Kovács 2018]). Finally, an art (auteur) film "typically has a traditional genre component, and often more than one at a time, but its main feature is that it is not genre specific, i.e. it doesn't have thematic and dramaturgical features that make it function as a specific genre in a broad sense. One sign of this is that it has subgenres like the essay film, the mental journey film, or the intellectual melodrama" (Kovács 2018). Thus, in our database we have a category for the broad, introductory description of the films in which we characterize them based on their leading genre – and in this category we include auteur film alongside the main genres. All this, then, in

our interpretation, is not a category mistake but an effort (supported by the above arguments) to describe and typify Hungarian films in a unified way. Furthermore, we use the term auteur (and not art film) as a category precisely because it fits better with the Hungarian tradition of film criticism. Finally, given the importance of genre bending and hybridization, and so as not to characterize a film by a single category/term, another category of subgenres is also included in the database. Here, in addition to the main genres, the list also includes the art/auteur film subgenres mentioned by Kovács (mental journey, docu-fiction, intellectual melodrama, essay film). This is again an eclectic list of (sub)categories, and we do not claim that these subgenres of art/auteur films are typical and valid in all cultural contexts. This list is based on our preliminary hypothesis and knowledge regarding Hungarian cinema: there are categories which might be important within the context of Hungarian (Eastern European) film history, such as intellectual melodrama, but there are some, such as mental journey, that are broader – and therefore likely to be a more internationally recognized subcategory of auteur films.

Regarding the distribution of main genres (including auteur films) in Hungarian film history, we can see in the graph shown in Figure 1 the impact and importance of auteur films within Hungarian filmmaking culture. According to our database, the first auteur film is Miklós Jancsó's *Cantata* (*Oldás és kötés*), from 1963. From that year on, there is an ongoing growth in the number of auteur films. In the 1960s there is balance amongst the leading genres (comedy, drama, historical and crime films) and auteur films, but the next decade, the 1970s brings the (almost) total dominance of auteur films. There are comedies and historical films, but the majority of the films belong to the eclectic group of auteur films (art cinema). Thus, contrary to the common perception that the 1960s were the golden era of auteur cinema (which is naturally relevant in terms of the local and international breakthrough of auteur films in this period), from the perspective of (statistical) balance within Hungarian filmmaking culture, the 1970s were the peak period. This trend continued in the 1980s, although the genre spectrum of Hungarian cinema became more varied in this period. Following the political changes, the dominance of auteur films gave way (again) to a much more balanced, more heterogeneous profile and genre pattern – especially from the mid-2000s (Varga 2016b).

In his study, Kovács connects the changes and variations of the dominant genres in Hungarian film history with the changes in the industry and financing systems. He states that in addition to comedy, the other leading genre in Hungarian film history is melodrama (both its more classical genre-form and the art cinema/auteur film version), where it is interesting that in Hungarian filmmaking culture it is not

the dichotomy of joyous and serious genres but that of the cheerful and sad genres that suggests hopelessness, and this dichotomy reigns not only before WWII but also during the socialist and post-socialist period (Kovács 2018).

Film History and Statistical Analysis

While big data and statistical analyses have fundamentally influenced and inspired the methodology and the scope of approaches to screen studies, there are some areas that are more likely to be examined – while others are less so. Stylistic analysis (Salt 2006; Heftberger 2019) and the examination of cinema audiences and the moviegoing public (Maltby, Biltereyst and Meers 2011) belong to the first, and the discussion of long-term genre trends and narrative patterns belong to the second. However, there are some notable studies which focused on the analyses of long-term trends of genre change and (narrative or content) patterns of a given (national) film corpus.

Claude Rubinson and John Mueller's study examined how genres are combined in mainstream American films, and how the popularity of particular genre combinations changed between 1946 and 2013 (Rubinson and Mueller 2016). By distinguishing between "contextual genres" (which identify a film's subject matter) and "affective genres" (which identify a film's intent), they found marked differences between the post-war and blockbuster (post-1970s) eras of Hollywood film industry.

Another interesting study was Jessica Allen, Sonia Livingstone and Robert Reiner's piece on the changing images of crime in British post-war cinema (Allen, Livingstone and Reiner 1998). Their investigation employed both a quantitative and a qualitative content analysis of popular crime films in Britain released between 1945 and 1991. Despite common beliefs, they found no overall increase in the number of crime films.

Finally, the UK Film Council commissioned a report examining British films with respect to the portrayal of Britishness, covering the period 1946 to 2006 (UK Film Council 2006). The total corpus of films they examined and considered to be British consisted of 4,655 films. For the purposes of detailed analysis they created two samples. The first group, called intuitive, included the films that, according to the critical consensus, were the most influential. The second group comprised a list of films that were randomly selected from the whole film corpus, to serve as a control for the intuitive group. Both groups consisted of 200 titles. In addition to disproving some commonly held ideas (such as British films tend to turn to the past), a very interesting aspect of the study was its investigation of the portrayal of

Britishness through British values. These values were compiled based on various public indications, with the list containing such values as tolerance, fair play, decency, honesty, reticence, understated patriotism, and gallantry or self-sacrifice. The main (but not really surprising) finding of the report was that the intuitive films' portrayal was more satirical and challenging towards these values, and the random corpus represented a more mainstream (i.e. more reinforcing) image and attitude towards them. Furthermore, the report contained 30 case studies which identified eight themes that are characteristic of British cinema. It is a varied and eclectic list, comprising the protagonist-types and thematic motifs of small-time criminals; comedies about eccentric characters or ordinary people (dreamers) in extraordinary situations; the ambivalent portrayal of heroism and victory; the trend of popular films to show fantastic and heroic characters; the openness and tendency to portray the lives of youths; period films with aspirations to convey moral lessons to a contemporary audience; and the discussion of controversial sexual and gender issues.

The approach taken by our research group differs from the projects described above. We do not examine the transformation of a particular genre or group of genres, we are not directly interested in social representation, and we do not analyse the portrayal of values or attitudes.

Our research is aimed at genres, plot types, milieus and locations, the socio-economic background of the protagonists, character development, and the question of when the films' plot takes place. What we are looking for is the repeated occurrence of patterns which reinforce or reframe our understanding of the main trends and trajectories of Hungarian film history. Additionally, we are looking for the possible explanations for these trends and patterns: we would like to analyse the predominant factors behind these patterns. To put it differently: we are looking for the social, cultural, endogenous and exogenous explanations of change over time in the patterns of Hungarian filmmaking culture.

Methodology

Our research is a data-driven project which uses a database to register relevant features and characteristics of Hungarian films (genre, subgenre, plot time, conflict type, location, milieu, the social background of the protagonists, character development, etc.) and seeks to explain the patterns and the changes over time. The corpus of the research consists of all Hungarian sound (feature) films made between 1931 and 2015 – a group that can be analysed with a coherent approach. However, the database forms only the foundation of the research. Statistical analysis is used

to perform most of the queries (e.g. the number and proportion of Hungarian feature films with female protagonists in film history, combined with other aspects such as genre, conflict, social status, or just how the given film portrays the story of social mobility or social and financial downfall). Why and for what is statistical analysis good? Garin and Elduque asked this question in the following way. "Are those quantitative efforts expanding traditional methods of historiography with new research tools? Or do they reinforce fully institutionalized parameters, and therefore point us to the same old story?" (Garin and Elduque 2016, 884.) On the one hand, we are using the database to confirm previous assumptions regarding the trends and dynamics of Hungarian film history, and on the other we are looking for patterns, topics and problems that have not been studied before, and that can reveal new connections within Hungarian filmmaking culture. The database can be queried in every possible way, but obviously not all queries, reports and graphs will be interesting and revealing. Some of them will be insignificant and others will confirm well-known trends. We are therefore looking for queries that show unexpected patterns and connections. These results might call for fresh answers and help us to work on new and complex interpretations – mobilizing different types of endogenous and exogenous explanations. In this sense, we can say that our research is not based on pre-defined questions, but seeks out novel and unexpected patterns.

Through statistical analysis we look for patterns, variations and combinations that have not been noticed and analysed in previous studies. As Boyd and Crawford point out: "Big Data is notable not because of its size, but because of its relationality to other data" (2011, 1). Thus, what we are seeking is new and relevant connections, conjunctions and patterns in Hungarian film history, and we are trying to allow for the possibility of "distant reading" which, in Franco Moretti's words, might allow us "to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems" (Moretti 2013, 48). Working with a database and with queries means that there is a series of transformations: first, we are coding cinematic texts into database records. Then (via queries), converting these records into numbers. This is followed by another shift – the transformation of these numbers into abstract models of visualization: graphs. The aim of these transformations is that they can be used (similarly to maps) as analytical tools to "dissect the text in an unusual way, bringing to light relations that would otherwise remain hidden" (Moretti 1998, 3).

However, the visuals and the revealing power of graphs, tables and diagrams should not go unquestioned. As Rachel Serlen argued, criticizing Moretti: "the problem is always quantitative; whether it be the slope of the line, the dots on the

map, or the branches in the tree; but the explanation of that problem comes from another realm of knowledge. The external aspect of explanation, which interpretation lacks, is what explains the data, what causes the data to be what they are. The graph itself can never answer the graph. What can answer the graph is form" (Serlen 2010, 220). Indeed, the hypothesis of our research project is that there are other significant aspects of explanation besides the form – namely cultural factors, and institutional and political causes. These factors combined, along with their complex interplay, have shaped Hungarian filmmaking culture and the world of Hungarian films.

Periodization and Trajectories of Hungarian Film History

Having considered the questions of methodology and historiography, and before we get into the specifics of genres, conflict and plot types, it will be important to briefly examine the corpus and explore the broader trends of Hungarian film production. This will then lead us to the general periodization of the years between the early 1930s and the 2010s. Figure 2 shows the number of Hungarian films made between 1931 and 2015, i.e. the more than fifteen hundred films form the corpus of our research. The distribution over time and peaks reveal important specificities of Hungarian film history. Most obviously, we see major fluctuations in the number of films made per year. The yearly average is 18 films, but the gap between the peak year (51 films were made in 1943) and the lowest point (only one film was produced in 1946) is dramatic, even if it is clear that the end of WWII resulted in a "zero year" (and was followed by a restart). Since the early 1930s, when Hungarian sound film production began, there has been a steady rise in the number of films produced, which peaked with the boom of the wartime years (especially 1942–43, when the boycott of American films opened South-Eastern distribution markets for Hungarian films [Frey 2018]). After 1945 and the restart of the industry, annual numbers began to rise again slowly, and film production got a strong boost in the mid-1950s. After that, and following the decentralization of the industry in the early 1960s, the annual Hungarian film output stabilized (Varga 2012). Since then, and essentially up until today, an average of 20–25 Hungarian films are made per year – although there have been major fluctuations in the recent years: in the mid-2000s, in connection with the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution, a lot of films were produced (with the financial help of a special state fund), and at the beginning of the 2010s, in the years of the transformation of the Hungarian film financing system, the number of films fell sharply (at that time state funding almost stopped for two–three years) (Varga

2016a). It can also be seen that there are definite political-institutional reasons behind the annual number of films and their fluctuations – where the change in the number of Hungarian films produced is principally influenced by external forces rather than endogenous factors within the local filmmaking culture.

Now, if we take the aforementioned unequivocal political demarcation points (1945, 1989) and segment the graph with them, the nature of the three resulting periods, and their film output, is very different. Between 1931 and 1944, during a dramatic fourteen years, 354 films were produced (23% of the corpus). The more than four decades of the socialist era, between 1945 and 1989, brought 701 films (46%). And finally, after 1989, in the post-socialist era, 461 films were produced (31%). Considering the length of the periods and the number of films produced, there does not seem to be a dramatic difference between them: as in each there was an average of 15–25 films made per year. Yet, if we look at the dynamics within each period, the differences become more pronounced and interesting. Between 1931 and 1944 we see a rapid increase and boom. Between 1945 and 1989, after a slow increase, a steady annual output sets in. And after 1989, there is no consistent trend – instead, there are large fluctuations in the number of films made each year. These differences can actually be readily understood through the distinguishing features of the three periods: the market-oriented commercial film production between 1931 and 1944, where growing demand resulted in increasing production, followed by four decades of socialist film production and its state-controlled, planned-economy logic, which resulted in a balanced and stable output. And ultimately, after 1989, the post-socialist period that was characterized by an uncertain, hybrid ecosystem and environment in which neither market demand nor state objectives were dominant and predictable. In the following, by examining conflict types, we will review the trends, ruptures and continuities of Hungarian film history with special regard for the question of how these trends are related to the crucial political boundaries of 1945 and 1989.

Why Are Conflicts Important?

So far, we have discussed the problems associated with assigning critical divisions to Hungarian filmmaking culture and film history – namely periodization and the distinction between, and duality of genre and auteur films. As we have seen, our solution to the latter problem was to position auteur (art) films as an alternative to genre film groupings within the same category in the database. Although we believe this to be a helpful approach, the examination of other general thematic aspects of Hungarian films is needed as well.

In order to be able to obtain information about the multi-segmented, diverse and multifaceted Hungarian film history, it was important to use categories that provide unified queries on thematic-content aspects. With this in mind, the notion of conflict offered the most powerful means of categorization to expand the range of content and thematic queries for the database.

Although conflict is a keyword of narrative analysis and scriptwriting, theoretical discussions on conflict are more common in literary theory than in film theory. Subsequently, we are unable to build on a tradition of discussion on conflict types in film studies. Instead, the list of conflicts that we used in our research reflects our hypothesis and our understanding of the specificities of Hungarian film history.

What is a conflict? How can we define it? Conflict is a core characteristic of a narrative which is aligned to both action and character (and, if we define action as a product of the relationship between characters, then the two are inextricably linked). Thus, it does not only underpin the thematic category, describing the topic of the given film (what it is about), but also has relevance in terms of its nature and character. Conflict arises through opposition between two or more actors/actions, hence it represents the opposition of wills and intentions. So, if we define conflict as opposition – the conflict of values and interests – the next question is how these conflicts manifest themselves. By our definition, it does so in characters and actions. Conflict thus creates a connection between actors and actions, and is usually related to the theme of the film. Furthermore, every film has some kind of conflict – be it genre film or auteur film.

What makes conflicts particularly important in the study of Hungarian film history is the fact that the listing and analysis of conflicts can reveal the variations of a critical feature, namely the relationship between the individual and the community, the private and the public. Thus, when compiling the list of conflicts, an important consideration was to obtain relevant information for the classification of these features. In our list, conflicts describe the thematic scope of the film, with special regard to the relationship between individuals and larger groups of society. In our research we distinguished between, and used, the following conflict types: moral, private life, love, workplace, political, gender, generational, class, crime, racial/national, religion, fake identity, sport/leisure. This is indeed a heterogeneous list. It should be noted that this reflects our own hypothesis and understanding of the specificities of Hungarian film history, and therefore enables us to focus on the various dimensions and aspects of the relationship between individuals and community, private and public values. Thus, many of the conflict types we used might be applied to these dimensions. Moral conflicts are usually used to portray

the conflicting perspectives of individuals. Love conflicts, apart from being one of the more common topics and plot types, focus on the story and conflicts of the romantic couple (thus, the focus here is still on the individuals). Conflicts of private life, in our definition, cover all types of conflicts which are beyond those of romantic love (that is not the formation and fulfilment of love [i.e. marriage, parent-child, husband-wife]). Conflicts within the family are usually coded as conflicts of private life, however, parent-daughter/son conflicts might be coded both as generational and/or private – depending on the focus of the given story.

Besides those conflicts that focus on individuals (e.g. romantic couples), we can isolate a different group of conflicts that focus more on the relationships within a group of people, or the conflicts between individuals and smaller groups (be it a family or workplace). Additionally, there are conflict types which usually mark conflicts or reflect divisions between individuals and the society: from political conflicts or crime conflicts (a special type of conflict, linked to the norms of society) to more general conflicts of generation, gender, class, religion – and also racial/national conflicts, which are usually interpreted at the general level between communities and nations. Finally, we incorporated special, thematically unique conflicts as well, such as the conflict of fake identity (disguise, recognition)[3] and conflicts regarding the fields of sport or leisure time.

Why and how is conflict different to genre? Certain conflicts we use can occur in different genres (e.g. religious or generational conflict). As some of the genres are defined thematically, there is some overlap (especially: crime conflict and crime films), however, there are certain types of conflicts which are to be found in almost every genre, such as romance. Similarly, private conflicts or workplace or moral conflicts are not limited to a certain genre. To conclude, conflicts are potentially very useful in at least three different ways: 1) they provide a broad thematic category which is applicable throughout the entire time span; 2) they transcend the genre and auteur film divide; 3) they transcend the demarcations of political periods (1945, 1989).

3 By this term we mean when one or more characters pretend to be different to whom the people around them think they are, or, because of misunderstandings, coincidences, etc. they look different to their normal appearance. Stories of disguise, makeup, camouflage, misunderstanding and deception appear in different variations and genres, but are equally found in spy films (deceptive, false identity), adventure films (outlaw heroes hiding from authorities), comedies based on misunderstanding and auteur films (stories of renegotiating and discussing identity).

Conflict Types in Hungarian Film History

After this brief introduction to the discussion of the conflict types used within our research framework, we can now examine the distribution of conflicts recorded in our database. The following list shows the total number of conflicts in the films and the total number of different conflict types in order:

films between 1931–2015	**1516**
total number of conflicts in the films	**4166**
love conflict	769 (18%)
conflict of private life	768 (18%)
moral conflict	578 (14%)
political conflict	391 (9%)
workplace conflict	385 (9%)
crime conflict	306 (7%)
conflict of fake identity	277 (7%)
generational conflict	228 (5%)
class conflict	150 (4%)
racial/national conflict	135 (3%)
gender conflict	84 (2%)
sport/leisure conflict	58 (1%)
conflict of religion	37 (1%)
total number of conflicts	**4166 (100%)**

Each film was characterized by at least one type of conflict, but typically two to three conflicts were aligned with each film. The two most common conflicts in Hungarian films are love conflict and conflict of private life [Fig. 3]. As mentioned before, we defined conflict of private life as anything that goes beyond a love affair, so the two categories have different focuses, and although there is, or may be, an overlap between them, they essentially complement each other. There is a love conflict in more than half of the Hungarian films, which is the same proportion as the conflict of private life. The conflict with the next highest count is moral conflict, which is typical of more than a third of the films. This means that half of all the conflicts found in Hungarian films are covered by these three types. Approximately a quarter of Hungarian films have political conflict, and there is a similar proportion of workplace conflict in the films.

However, as aggregate numbers carry only a limited message on their own, it is worth considering the distribution of conflicts over time as well. The following graph shows the percentage of films represented by each conflict type, in the three

major periods (1931–1944, 1945–1989, 1990–2015). Certain types of conflict are found in the same proportions of the films in all three periods, while other types are much more characteristic of certain periods [Fig. 4 shows the occurrence of conflict type by period]. Private, moral, and workplace conflicts are present in the films in similar proportions in all three major periods. However, the pre-1945 era can be characterized by a massive number of love conflicts, and also a significant number of conflicts of fake identity. Specifically, 92 percent of the films have a love conflict and 44 percent have a conflict of fake identity. Films made during the socialist period have the highest rates of political conflicts (one in every three films), and the lowest rates of love and crime conflicts. In post-1989 films, the high rate of crime and generational conflicts are both noteworthy, although in this period, compared to the previous two, there are fewer outlying conflicts.

These distributions confirm the tendencies and basic hypotheses that are generally applied to Hungarian film history. Based on this, the period before 1945 can be characterized by romantic and private stories – the topic of uncertain identity also being particularly important. All this is clearly in line with the common thesis that the two leading genres of the era are comedy and melodrama (Balogh 2000; Vajdovich 2014).

The high rate of political conflicts in relation to films made during the years of socialism is also not surprising. There is an interesting feature – which is not in contradiction to any of our preliminary expectations, but rather has not been considered thus far – that the rate of love conflicts in this period is quite low. All this, of course, coincides with the general impression that in the period of socialism it was not private life but public and community themes that were in focus, and this trend is reflected with these changes in conflict types.

Finally, the period after 1989 is conspicuous in that it does not have, at first glance, any particularly conspicuous characteristics. An initial hypothetical explanation for this is that this period is characterized by heteronomous and diverse effects, and is in many ways a kind of complex mix of the prior two eras. Earlier in this article, the different perspectives on the close relationship between politics and film in Hungary and Eastern Europe were discussed. On the one hand, political changes strongly and decisively influenced the periodization of film history in the region, and on the other, politically motivated art/auteur films were important, due to their international (Western) critical and festival profile, at drawing attention to the Eastern European region during the era of socialism – especially from the 1960s to the change of regime. Therefore, we do not need to expand too much on the importance of politics. However, the role of, and changes in political conflicts

are worth examining – across the history of Hungarian sound film. In the following, I will examine the deeper dynamics and the evolution of political conflicts with a more detailed analysis of their temporal variation and their relationship to genres.

Political Conflicts in Hungarian Film History

By political conflicts we mean what is related to public affairs, or, to put it differently and in a more general way, those events that can have an impact on society, or larger groups in the community. In this sense political conflicts are disputes, contentions or actions that are linked to power relations, or to the exercise of power. Thus, we coded as political conflict the activities and motifs that were directly connected to the values and organization of society, as well as discussions of these values. Political conflicts might take place between individuals or groups of people, between an individual and an institution, or between an individual or a group and an ideology. With this in mind, we can now examine the distribution of political conflicts in Hungarian films. The blue graph in the following figure shows the total number of films made each year, and the green graph shows the number of films which contained political conflict.

As discussed earlier, political conflict is one of the more common types of conflict, though not the most common one. We found political conflicts in a quarter of Hungarian films (391 out of 1514) [Fig. 5]. However, as we have already seen, the three major periods differ dramatically in terms of the occurrence of political conflict in the films. While we found political conflict in 12 percent of films made between 1931 and 1944, and in 21 percent of films made after 1989, more than a third, 36 percent of films made during the socialist period contained political conflict.

However, it is also worth noting that in the pre-1945 period, the graph shows a steady increase in the proportion of films with political conflict. Of course, this trend is also reflected in academic literature discussing Hungarian and Eastern European cinema, which has highlighted the strengthening of political content (and political, ideological control) since the late 1930s (Sándor 1997; Frey 2018; Gergely 2017). It is also clear how, in terms of the number of years of the socialist realist era, its low film output was caused by political content and conflict (Szilágyi 1997; Pólik 2019). However, from the mid-1950s onwards, the proportion of films containing political conflict appears to be broadly unchanged (but is, however, quite high in number), relative to the number of films made annually. It should be noted that political conflicts did not disappear from Hungarian films after 1989, in fact, this theme is almost as common in the post-socialist period as in the years before the change of regime.

It might be helpful if we interrogate the data using an alternative visualization – by framing it in percentage terms. The graph in Figure 6 shows that there was a steady rise in the number of films containing political conflict since the late 1930s – but in this period the annual number of films also rose significantly. During the wartime years the number of films containing political conflict was around one-fifth of the films made each year. By comparison, in the Stalinist era – around 1950 – four out of five Hungarian films depicted political conflict. After that, until the change of regime, one-third of the films included some kind of political conflict, although with large annual fluctuations across the timeline (such as there being a peak year in 1970). Furthermore, it is worth noting that the proportion of political conflicts did significantly increase in the years before the change of regime, in the second half of the 1980s. Half of the films were politically charged during this period. However, in a very short time after the political change, the number of films containing political conflict dropped to ten percent in a few years, before returning to between ten and thirty percent – but still fluctuating massively. As there are wild fluctuations in the numbers across the whole timeline, we can examine the data after it has been smoothed, as shown in Figure 7. The trendline is much clearer here: we have a peak at the beginning of the 1950s, then there is a slow decrease till 1964 (the beginning of the so-called consolidation of the Kádár-regime). It is followed by growth up until the late 1960s and early 1970s, where the numbers remain high for a couple of years. A decrease starts in the mid-1970s and lasts until the early 1980s – where growth then begins, up until the political changes. After 1988 there is a constant decrease. Thus, we have three distinct peaks: 1951–1952, 1969–1970, and 1986–1988 – which are all relatively easy to explain (taking account of the filmmaking lead time, i.e. the length of time it takes to make the films). Each peak is related to some easily-identifiable political event or period. The first peak is in 1951–52: this is the era of Stalinism in Hungary, which was marked by years of planned cultural production and socialist realist films, when direct political-ideological interest led to the production of a vast number of films dealing with explicit political conflict. The next significant period is the ascent to the 1970 peak, which begins in 1968. In this year, the number of Hungarian films containing political conflict jumps. This boom can again be directly linked to the reform period around 1968 – and the still high number of politically-charged films in the aftermath of (with reflections on) 1968. The third peak is between 1986 and 1988. It is not exactly the year of the regime change itself, 1989 (which is when the sharp decline begins), but the period before it. This peak can be linked to the weakening of censorship and the increase of filmmaking autonomy: to the growing possibilities of free speech about recent traumas (1956 revolution, Stalinism,

Holocaust) and the political-social difficulties of the present. However, the insight lies somewhere else. Not in the high values, but in the low ones. A new research question might be: why the role of political conflicts is declining in the second half of the 1970s? Additionally, what other changes were characteristic of this period? The changes that took place in that era are also shown in another graph, where we see the distribution of class conflicts. Figure 8 shows even more clearly the backdrop of social and political forces than the previous one. In this graph the interesting thing again is not necessary where we see the highest occurrences of class conflict in Hungarian film history (i.e. during the war, in the 1950s, in the 1960s, and – which is something of a revelation – in the 2000s) but where it is absent.

From the mid-1950s to the first half of the 1970s, political conflicts were present in Hungarian films together with (or, often, but not necessarily, in the form of) class conflicts. From the mid-1970s until the end of the socialist years, there are essentially no class conflicts in Hungarian films. As we have seen, from the mid-1980s onwards, the occurrence of political conflict increased significantly. However, class conflicts do not follow this trend. In other words, in that time (for an almost 20-year time span) political conflicts were presented in stories of a different nature. Here, then, a question arises: how can it be explained that the late Kádár-era was an island of class harmony in Hungarian films? Why are there no class conflicts, and what is in their place? I.e. what other conflicts characterize that period? To find explanations, we can check other queries in the database for insight and look at what other indicators have notable changes during this period. And hence we find such an indicator: in the second half of the 1970s political conflicts usually appear in stories that do not take place in the present time. The eras represented are varied, so this is not just the trend that has been widely discussed in Hungarian film criticism, whereby the number of films dealing with Stalinism and the 1956 revolution systematically increased in the late 1970s (Gelencsér 2002; Murai 2008), as the interwar period (*A Strange Role* [*Herkulesfürdői emlék*, Pál Sándor, 1976]), the postwar years (*Angi Vera* [Pál Gábor, 1978], *My Father's Happy Years* [*Apám néhány boldog éve*, Sándor Simó, 1977]) and the nineteenth century (*800 Hussars* [80 huszár, Sándor Sára, 1978], *Dead or Alive* [*Élve vagy halva*, Tamás Rényi, 1979]) are also represented here in a meaningful way. Thus, the change in the inner dynamics and types of political conflicts seems to reveal a parallel decline in the number of class conflicts and present-day topics, which can be interpreted as a move away from direct criticism of everyday life.

However, the Hungarian films of the 1970s are not only characterized by a parallel decline in political and class conflicts. It is revealing to see that the percentage of

each type of conflicts decreases during this period and begins to rise at the end of the decade [Fig. 9]. So how can this change be explained, and how does it affect the way Hungarian films look like in general? We know from previous graphs that the 1970s has another important feature: an increase in the proportion of auteur films. The question is whether these two trends are independent and parallel, or somehow related: i.e. can both be traced back to a common cause, or is one a function of the other? Does an increase in the proportion of auteur films cause a decrease in the number of conflicts in the films? Do auteur films have a narrower range of conflicts?

31 percent of Hungarian films are coded as auteur films, and of the total count of occurrences of conflict across the corpus, 26 percent can be found in auteur films. So, on average they have a narrower range of conflicts within them versus genre films – but obviously this does not imply that they are any weaker in conflict.[4] In the next decade, in the 1980s, when the proportion of auteur films was also high (and even slightly higher), the number of conflicts was larger. Yet, the graph neatly shows that the different variety and broader range of conflicts in the 1980s can be attributed to the increase in the number of political and, especially, private conflicts in that decade. Moral conflicts define the 1960s and conflicts of private life define the 1980s. Political conflicts are important in both periods. However, there are no particularly prominent types of conflict in the 1970s, which also contributes to the narrower range of conflicts in that decade. In this case, can we attribute some common exogenous or endogenous reason to the trends? Does this narrowing range of conflicts in the 1970s stem from an era that is grey, neutral and characterless? Would this be the much-mentioned stagnation period, the dullest decade of socialism? In accordance with existing literature, our preliminary hypothesis would be that Hungarian filmmaking culture of the decade was shaped by the following important influences (moving from the political influences to the more internal, endogenous factors): the slowdown in reforms, the already mentioned socio-economic stagnation, the declining political influence of filmmaking, the sharp decline of attendance numbers (as well as a generational change), and the disappearance of the masters of popular cinema (Márton Keleti, Viktor Gertler, Frigyes Bán: filmmakers who began their career in the commercial filmmaking culture of the interwar period). All of this has so far been associated with the dominance of auteur films. We must now take the important next step of relating all these factors to the changes in conflict types, and other patterns of the films in this era.

4 Some types of conflict are more typical of auteur films (generational, political, private, and racial), and some are less characteristic (mainly fake identity and love – where there is a significant downward deviation from the average).

Genres and Political Conflicts

As we have seen, the changes in the political conflict numbers can reveal much about the filmmaking culture of certain periods. To understand this more, we need to relate the different queries and patterns to each other. In the following, final section of the article, we return to the subject of genres and examine the relationship between political conflicts and genre patterns in Hungarian film history. Figure 10 shows the genre segmentation of the films containing political conflict. If we look at the distribution of films that contain political conflict by genre, we see that different genres are associated with political conflicts in different periods of Hungarian film history. Melodrama in the early 1940s, socialist realist production film[5] in the early 1950s, comedy in the 1960s, auteur film in the 1970s and 1980s, and varied genre patterns in the years after the change of regime. The presence of politics endures throughout the timeline (which, as has already been said, is not at all surprising), but it varies from era to era in terms of the genre and the kind of story that the political conflict appears in.

In the 1940s, melodrama, which was a common and characteristic genre of the era, was the primary bearer of political conflict. In these films, political conflict is often linked to national confrontation – especially in the case of stories which take place in Transylvania, displaying the topic of Romanian–Hungarian ethnic conflicts (*Bence Uz* [Jenő Csepreghy, 1938], *Silenced Bells* [*Elnémult harangok*, László Kalmár, 1940]). Melodramas which had wartime settings were another significant vehicle for political conflict in this period. In the early 1950s, socialist realist films contained explicit political content – with their narratives focusing on sabotage actions against the Soviet Block (*Underground Colony* [*Gyarmat a föld alatt,* 1951], *Full Steam, Ahead!* [*Teljes gőzzel!*, Félix Máriássy, 1951]). In the 1960s and 1970s, comedy, and within that, satire was the most consistent vehicle for political content and the grotesque presentation of the everyday life of socialism (János Dömölky's *The Sword* [*A kard*, 1976], Márton Keleti's *The Corporal and the Others* [*A tizedes meg a többiek*, 1965], or Péter Bacsó's *The Witness* [*A tanú*, 1969]). However, from the late 1970s, auteur films were a major bearer of political content, such as László Vitézy's *Peacetime* [*Békeidő*, 1979] and *Red Earth* [*Vörös föld*, 1982] and Gyula Gazdag's *Lost Illusions* [*Elveszett ilúziók*, 1982]. With all this in mind, it is particularly interesting to see that in the post-socialist period, after 1989, we cannot find a privileged genre that, in terms of proportion, would most often carry political

5 We use the term production film for the socialist realist films which focus on the topic of factory production work and kolkhoz labour, thereby portraying the building of socialism.

conflicts. Instead, we see a diverse genre distribution, i.e. political conflicts appear in different genres – be it auteur film (*The Lord's Lantern in Budapest* [*Nekem lámpást adott kezembe az Úr Pesten*, Miklós Jancsó, 1998]), drama (*Sunshine* [*A Napfény íze*, István Szabó, 2000]), comedy (*Witness Again* [*Megint tanú*, Péter Bacsó, 1994]), melodrama (*Salmons of St. Lawrence River* [*A Szent Lőrinc folyó lazacai*, Ferenc András, 2002]), crime film (*The Way You Are* [Így ahogy vagytok, Károly Makk, 2010]) or historical film (*Children of Glory* [*Szabadság, szerelem*, Krisztina Goda, 2006]).

The decrease in the number and the role of political conflicts in Hungarian auteur films is clearly shown in Figure 11. Compared to the peak in the early 1970s, the number of auteur films with political conflicts is steadily and gradually declining. It is especially striking that in the years following the change of regime this type of conflict almost disappears from Hungarian auteur films – to then rise again in the 2000s. If we examine the temporal change and pattern of other genres with respect to political conflicts, we get additional informative results. In the case of comedies [Fig. 12], there are three major points of intensification of political conflicts: the early 1940s, the years after 1968, and the period from the first half of the 1990s to the early 2000s. Again, these periods can be characterized by typical (political) comedy variants. The comedies of the wartime years are typically placed in a historical milieu, and are often associated with operetta schemes (*Gül Baba* [Kálmán Nádasdy, 1940], *Prince Bob* [*Bob herceg*, László Kalmár, 1941]).[6] At the turn of the decade in the 1960s and 1970s, the satires mentioned before (*The Witness*) are prominent. And finally, in the 1990s comedies mobilizing post-socialist nostalgia are typical (*Dollybirds* [*Csinibaba*, Péter Tímár, 1997], *We Never Die* [*Sose halunk meg*, Róbert Koltai, 1993]). If we look at crime movies instead of comedies, we get the same three points of intensification as we saw with comedies [Fig. 13]. However, in the case of crime movies we are dealing with a smaller number of productions (because they are a less common genre). There are crime films that include political conflict in the early 1940s (*Machita* [Endre Rodriguez, 1943]), then in the late 1960s and in the subsequent few years (*The Mummy Interferes* [*A múmia közbeszól*, Gábor Oláh, 1967], *I've Become a Cop* [*Hekus lettem,* Tamás Fejér, 1972]). But in the more than thirty years between 1978 and 2010, for example, we find a total of only three such films. With this in mind, it is particularly interesting that the increase in crime

6 It is also important that in the period considered the first golden age of Hungarian comedy, in the years between 1931 and 1938, we do not find any comedy that would have included a strong political conflict. Nevertheless, this can also be attributed to the fact that political conflicts appeared in the films of that period in a covert, latent way (but in a consistent and large number), as stated, for example, by Gábor Gergely in his book (Gergely 2018).

films (and series) everywhere in the region in the 2010s (including Czech, Polish or Romanian films and series [Varga 2018]) is an important trend in Hungarian cinema as well – and accompanied with a growing number of political conflicts within them (*X – The eXploited* [*X – A rendszerből törölve*, Károly Ujj Mészáros, 2018]).

However, it is important to note that in terms of the proportion of films with political conflict, auteur and historical films have the highest numbers. Auteur films lead (more than 140), historical films are next (nearly 100), comedy and drama have far fewer (both around 40), and crime and melodrama films have even fewer cases than that.

On the one hand, the massive number of historical films in the group of Hungarian films dealing with political conflict is not surprising [Fig. 14], as it supports the statement expressed in literature that Hungarian (and Eastern European) films were strongly political (Dobreva 2012). Or that the works of the region and of Hungarian filmmaking culture have used history as a device, primarily to depict political conflicts (and often to create an allegory or parable about the present). This is also supported by the fact that the number of historical films dealing with political conflict increased in the 1950s (while the early 1940s already had precursors to this trend [Varga 2017]) and such films were present in high numbers until the end of the Socialist era. Historical films with political conflict did not disappear after 1989: although their number is decreasing, they are sometimes bolstered by an external institutional factor – such as the aforementioned wave of films made on the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution (around which the graph also shows a large increase). On the other hand, it should also be emphasized that almost 80% of the works belonging to the group of Hungarian historical films have a political conflict, therefore politics is one of the most important aspects of Hungarian historical films (but also of the genre in general).

In terms of the relationship between political conflict and genre, it is worth mentioning another, final case: melodrama [Figure 15]. Looking at the distribution of this genre, we see that while melodramas are present throughout Hungarian film history, melodramas containing political conflict are almost completely the preserve of one era, namely the most prevalent period of the genre, the early 1940s. In this respect, we can say that while historical films are one of the most characteristic carriers and portrayers of political conflicts in Hungarian film history, in the case of melodrama, the concurrence of political conflict and melodramatic narrative is not typical – and can only be seen in an era where melodramas are made in a uniquely large number anyway.

Conclusions

One of our initial claims was that the trends and changes of Eastern European filmmaking cultures were decisively influenced by politics, and that especially in the years of socialism, the international attraction and appeal of films from the region was driven directly by political curiosity. Examining the conflict types of Hungarian films, this article inquired as to what other long-term trends might characterize Hungarian filmmaking culture – beside the two key turning points (1945, 1989) and beyond the duality of and the division between genre and auteur/art films. We have found that the two most common conflict types in Hungarian films are love conflict and conflict of private life, followed by moral conflicts. Both love conflicts and conflicts of private life can be found in half of all Hungarian films (these conflicts usually complement each other), and moral conflicts are typical of more than a third of the films. While political aspects play a prominent role in the discussion of Hungarian films, it is important to note that political conflicts are only the fourth most common type in Hungarian film history (with almost the same count as workplace conflicts). With respect to the political turning points and the periodization of Hungarian film history, we have found that each of the three broad periods is characterized by its own distinctive set of prominent conflict types. The pre-1945 era is characterized by a massive number of love conflicts, the socialist period by the highest rate of political conflicts (and the lowest rates of love and crime conflicts), and the post-socialist period by a high rate of crime and generational conflicts. The examination of conflicts has also yielded results in terms of rethinking our understanding of genre and auteur/art films. We have found that by analysing the connections between conflict types and genres, we can see several recurring patterns that have received little attention thus far. One of the most astonishing of these is the status and trends of the 1970s: the range of conflicts narrowed considerably over the decade, especially in the middle of the 1970s. The parallel trend of the dominance of auteur films in that decade goes some way to providing an explanation for that, as Hungarian auteur films have a narrower range of conflicts compared to genre films. Furthermore, we found that while moral and political conflicts define the 1960s, and conflicts of private life and political conflicts define the 1980s, there are no particularly prominent types of conflict in the 1970s, which might also contribute to the narrower range of conflicts in the decade. This concurrence of trends (the dominance of auteur films and the narrowing of the range of conflicts in the films of the 1970s) suggests a combination of cinematic, cultural, and political influences, and calls attention to the importance of further investigation.

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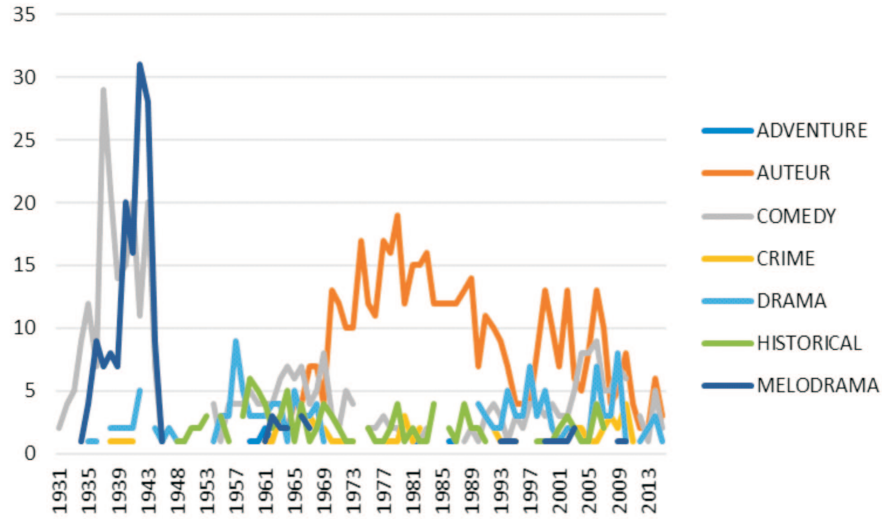

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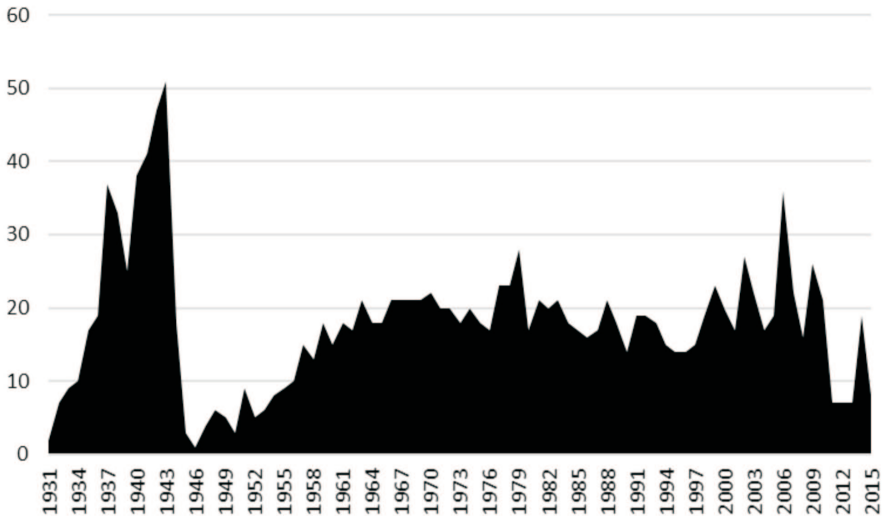

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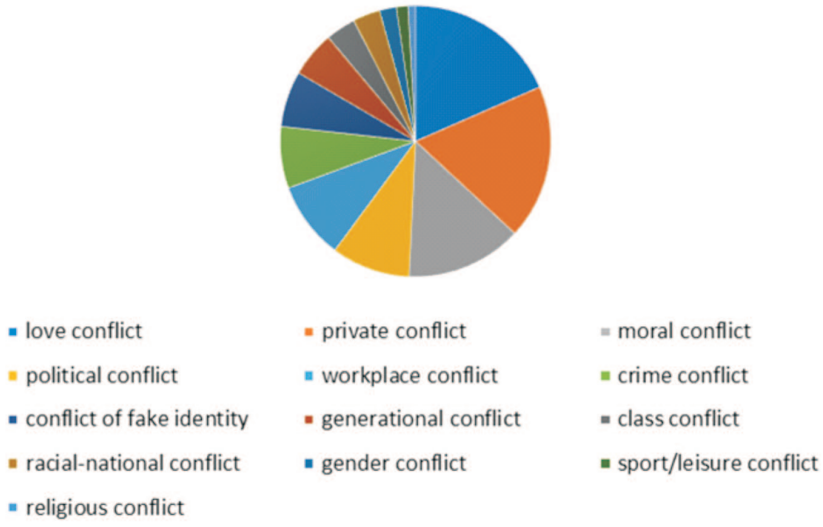

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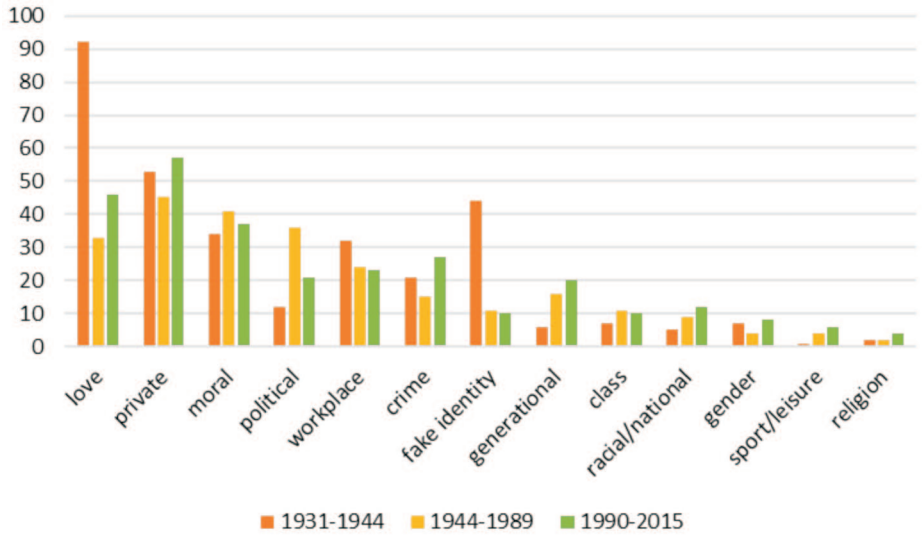

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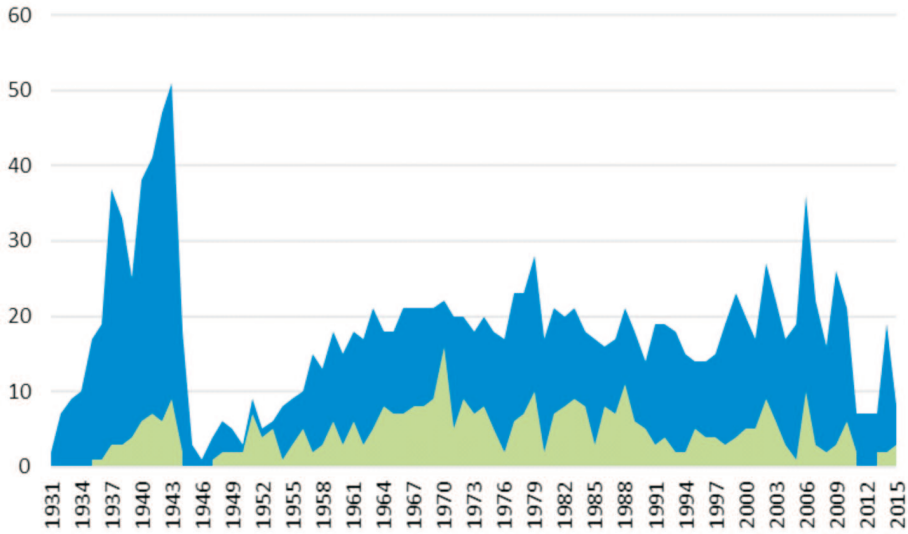

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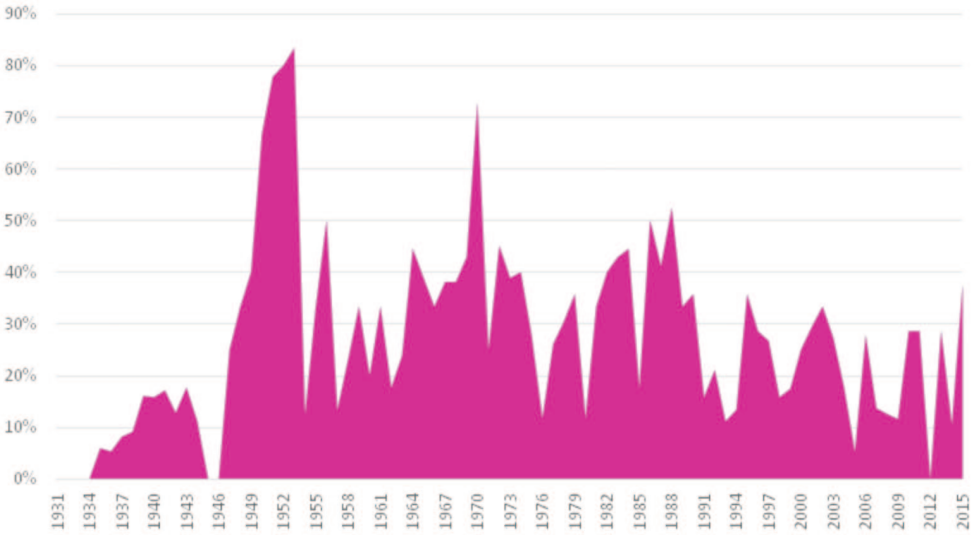

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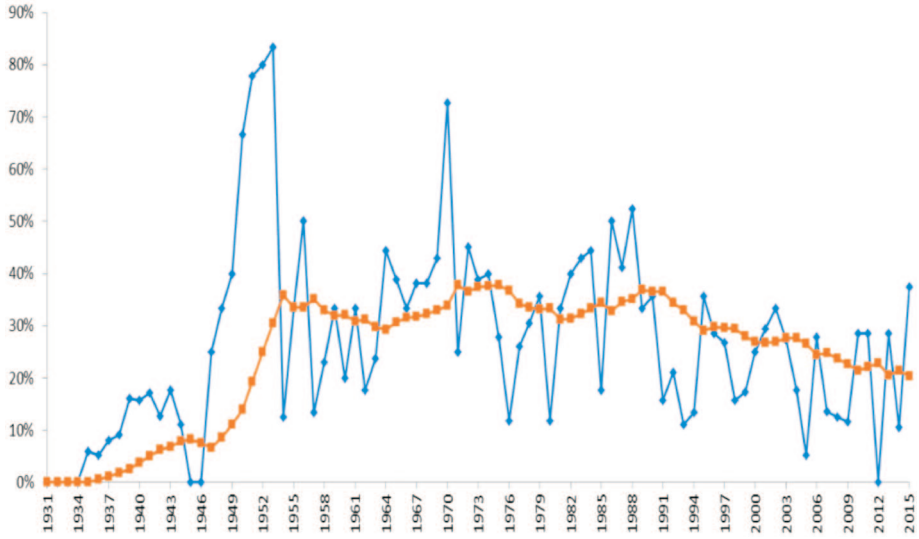

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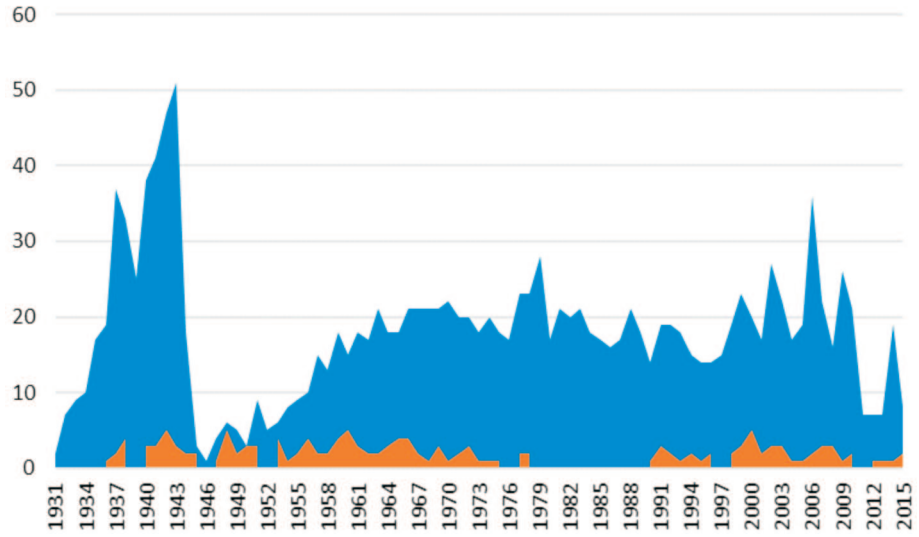

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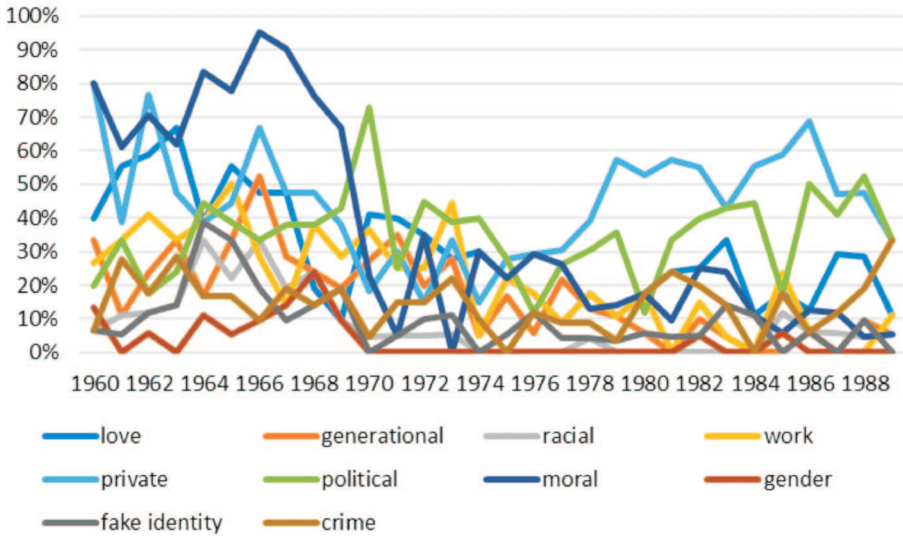

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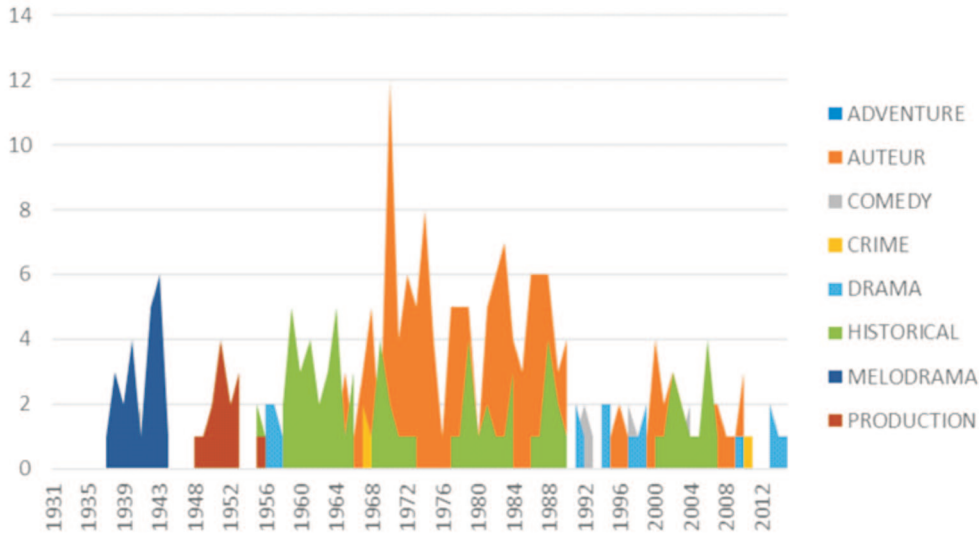

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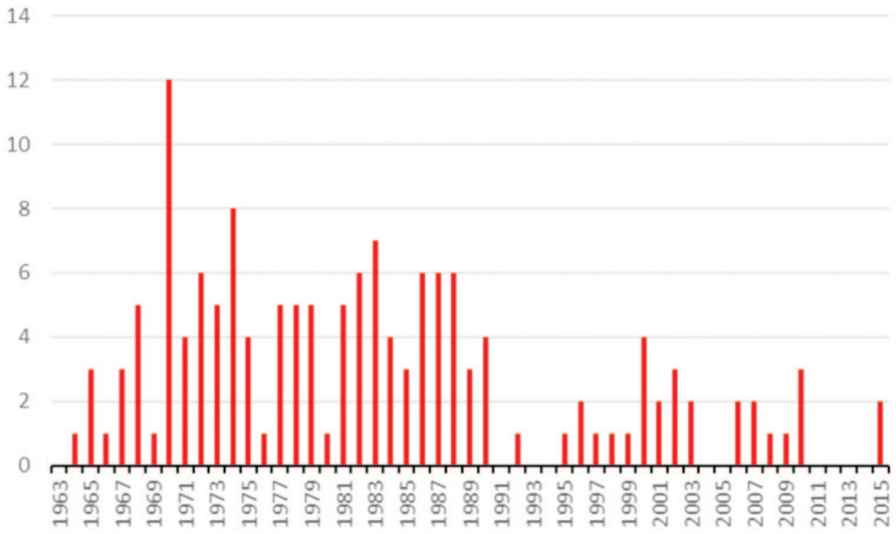

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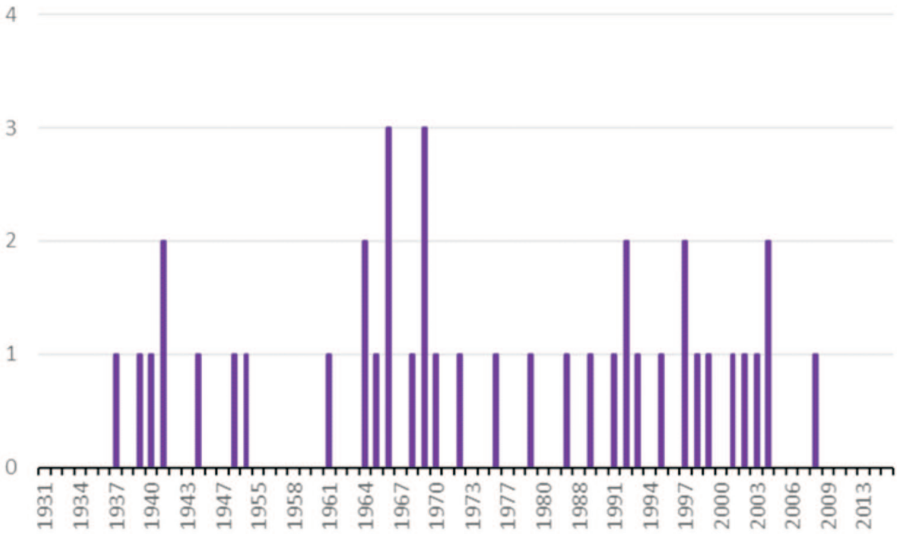

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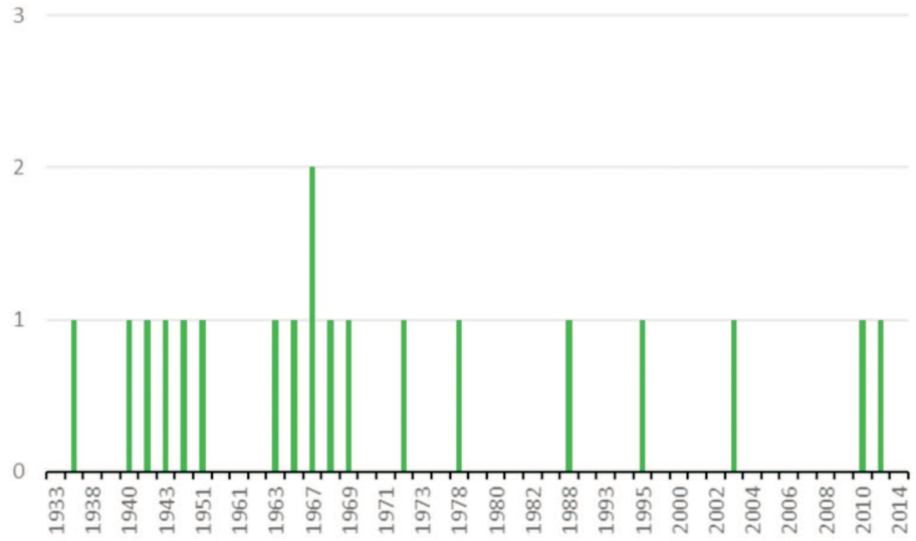

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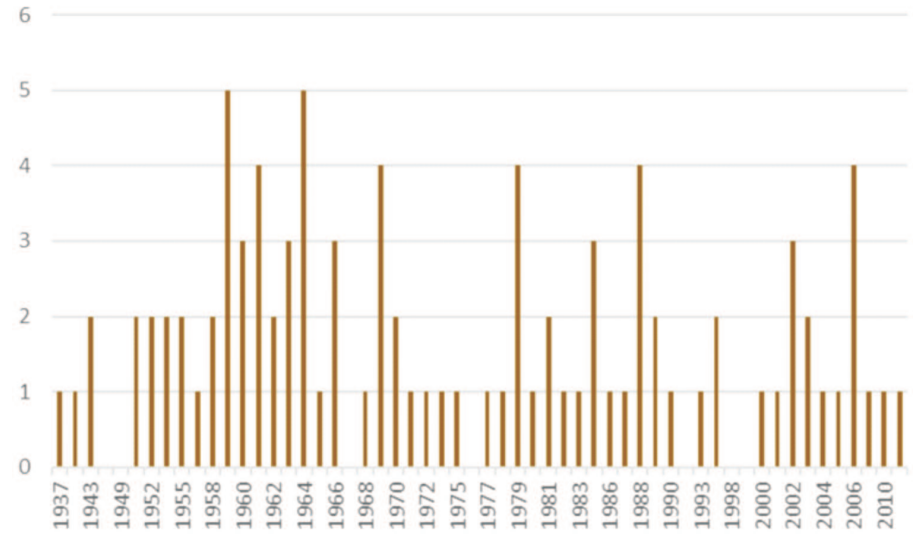

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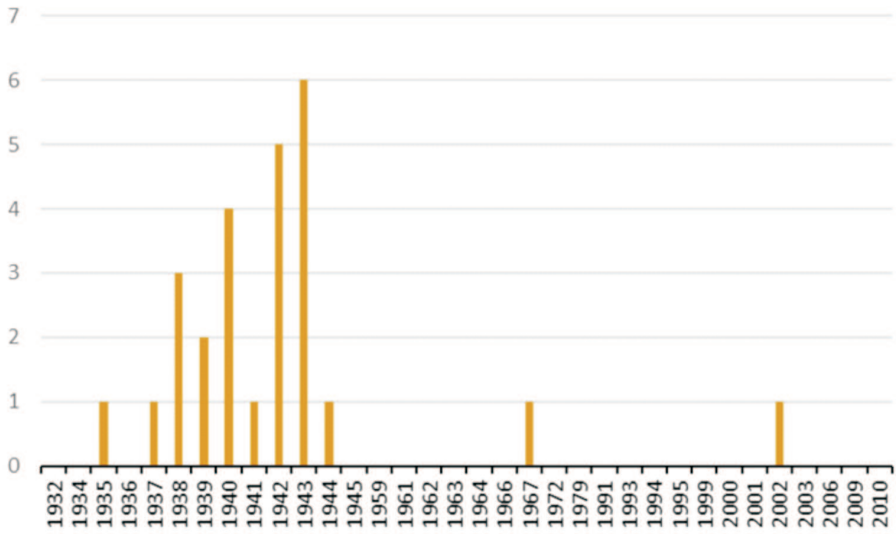

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Distressed Glamour. Genres and Political-Social Context in Hungarian Cinema of the 1930s and 1940s

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Abstract. The article focuses on Hungarian films produced between 1939–1944 by examining how they tend to refrain from representing conflicts, and scrutinizing the political as well as social issues. However, directors started to revise this avoidance of conflicts by employing a so-called noir sensibility from the beginning of the Second World War in certain films, especially in "doomed love movies" such as *Deadly Spring* (*Halálos tavasz*, 1939), *Mountain Girl* (*A hegyek lánya*, 1942), and *A Woman Looks Back* (*Egy assszony visszanéz*, 1942), or melodramas, such as *At the Crossroads* (*Keresztúton*, 1942), *Lent Life* (*Kölcsönadott élet*, 1943), and *Black Dawn* (*Fekete hajnal*, 1943). The essay also offers a case study of the banned Hungarian movie *Half a Boy* (*Egy fiúnak a fele*, shot in 1943, but only shown in February 1946) by D. Ákos Hamza, which represented and protested against the stigmatization of Jewish people. *Half a Boy* is an often-cited emblematic film of its era. It is also an enigmatic one: it is a work full of social and political-historical reflections. Its humanistic point of view makes it outstanding in its era, nevertheless it is also rather ambivalent in terms of its orientation of values.[1]

Keywords: Hungarian cinema in the 1930s and 1940s, noir sensibility, melodrama, genre analysis.

Even though Hungarian films of the 1930s did not necessarily avoid showing problems, they avoided genres – especially the genre of crime stories – typically dealing with confronting problems. Although issues resonating with the feelings of larger masses, such as poverty, uncertainty of social status, class clashes or declassing do appear in the films of the 1930s, these works lack any analysis. The main reason for including contemporary social issues in films is the same as the reason for

1 This work was supported by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office (number of Agreement: 116708).

portraying these issues as resolvable, namely, serving the popular demand. It is first and foremost due to this reason, and not due to the elimination of heavier issues that Hungarian films of the 1930s are films of peaceful noncontroversy. This approach – suggesting a lack of problems – is not due to censorship. Although the Hungarian government supported filmmaking similarly to the Russian and German governments of the time, the film culture that results from it is more similar to the American one. While the influence of politics is not to be dismissed, it is secondary to viewers' needs. It is predominantly the viewer and not the politician that dictates. At the end of the 1930s, however, this silent directive of conflict avoidance is overridden in certain pieces as well as in certain genres: prominently in the genre of "doomed love" movies (e.g. *Deadly Spring* [*Halálos tavasz*, László Kalmár, 1939], *Mountain Girl* [*A hegyek lánya*, Zoltán Farkas, 1942], *A Woman Looks Back* [*Egy asszony visszanéz*, Géza Radványi, 1942], *Éva Szováthy* [*Szováthy Éva*, Ágoston Pacséry, 1943], *Machita* [Endre Rodriguez, 1944]), or in melodramas (*At the Crossroads* [*Keresztúton*, Viktor Bánky, 1942], *Lent Life* [*Kölcsönadott élet*, Viktor Bánky, 1943], *Black Dawn* [*Fekete hajnal*, László Kalmár, 1943]) (Pápai 2018). The aim of the following train of thought is to shed light on the political-historical and socio-psychological background of the conflict-avoiding films of the 1930s and, furthermore, to explain why and how the conflict-avoiding attitude was very carefully corrected beginning from the end of the decade via noir-sensibility in some films, in the so called Hungarian film noir (Pápai 2013). Noir-sensibility can be understood – following Robert G. Porfirio (1996), Jenő Király 1989, 7–8), Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton (1996) – as a certain sensibility, a typical 20th-century life experience as well as a set of solutions and techniques, both stylistic and thematic characteristics, which aimed to capture the distress culture of the period. Noir-sensibility thus can be described by notions such as estrangement, frustration, failure, unsatisfied desires, fears, alienation, loneliness, purposelessness, chaos, violence, paranoia (Király 1989, 7–8, and Porfirio 1996, 85–92). Therefore, noir-sensible films comprise a group of mainstream films whose aim "was to create a specific alienation" (Borde and Chaumeton 1996, 25). In this sense, film noir can be defined not as a genre but as some kind of distressed mood, and this is why certain domestic films made between 1939 and 1944 can be regarded as Hungarian film noir. In the words of Robert G. Porfirio, "it is the underlying mood of pessimism which undercuts any attempted happy endings and prevents the films from being the typical Hollywood escapist fare many were originally intended to be. More than lighting or photography, it is this sensibility which makes the black film black for us" (1996, 80).

Borderline-Fixations: Towards Three Quarters of the Sky

The propensity for self-deception and the cult of fake problems was more than anything present in the way the Trianon trauma[2] was lived. We need to emphasize this firstly because Trianon and its revision (Püski 2002, 226) was the background that provided legitimacy to the Horthy-regime; secondly, the slogan, "Everything back!" ("Mindent vissza!") was one of the few ideologies that united the society; thirdly, because the films of the period were fundamentally determined by the taste and the compromises of the nobility, magnates, and above all the higher (or perhaps: historical) middle class, those who made up the political base of the regime, and who played a leading role in (mis)treating the Trianon complex. The dominance of the taste of these classes was signified by the fact that the bourgeoisie and landowners were overrepresented in film while those at the lower end of the social hierarchy were underrepresented and were represented in problematic and conflicting ways (Balogh and Király 2000, 74–79). The dominance of the values of the historical middle class (the gentry) can, however, also be shown in films that happen to – seemingly – criticize it. This, among other things, will be examined in the case study in the second half of this essay.

These circumstances make it necessary to consider the Trianon complex, even though the issue is explicitly present only in extreme examples from the Horthy era, like *Hungary's Revival* [*Magyar feltámadás*, Jenő Csepreghy, 1939], a film which has been lost, and there are also only few cases where the topic is indirectly represented. Before 1939, the Trianon trauma is articulated in the form of scattered allusions in *Rakoczi March* (*Rákóczi induló*, István Székely, 1933), *Budapest Pastry Shop* (*Budai cukrászda*, Béla Gaál, 1935), *Address Unknown* (*A címzett ismeretlen*, Béla Gaál, 1935), *Bence Uz* (*Uz Bence*, Jenő Csepreghy, 1938), *Wild Flower of Gyimes* (*Gyimesi vadvirág*, Ákos Ráthonyi, 1939); and after 1939, in works such as *Transylvanian Castle* (*Erdélyi kastély*, Félix Podmaniczky, 1940), *Cadet Love* (*Kadétszerelem*, Frigyes Bán, 1941), *The Thirtieth* (*A harmincadik*, László Cserépy, 1942), *Doctor István Kovács* (*Dr. Kovács István*, Viktor Bánky, 1942), *Message From the Volga Shore* (*Üzenet a Volgapartról*, Alfréd Deésy, 1943). There was, however, no Trianon-film. It is obviously difficult to present a historical event that is a failure in almost all respects. It is also beyond doubt that the trauma was too recent, too vivid for a reckoning, but the main reason for the lack of any Trianon-

2 I.e., the trauma caused by the Trianon peace treaty of 1920, imposed by the victorious allies after the end of World War I, and which stripped Hungary of two-thirds of its territory and half its population.

film(s) was partially the belief that the *status quo* was temporary (the conviction that the political climate would soon be different and borders would be redrawn) and the lack of willingness to confront the situation. To simplify it a little: those in position did not confront the Trianon trauma for the same reason they had led the country to Trianon. The tradition of leaving real problems unarticulated was not a new development in the interwar period in Hungarian society. This tradition had been getting strong since the last third of the 19th century the latest, which is documented by the endless political arguments from the age of the dual monarchy. The arguments were feeding from the internal conflicts of the structure created in 1867, namely the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, which lied to the Habsburgs that their empire remained intact and to the Hungarians that they gained independence (Bibó 1986, 585–586). The nostalgia for the structure of the Compromise, for the dual monarchy, got stronger the minute the Austro-Hungarian Empire fell apart or at least the moment the Treaty of Trianon was signed. Nobody in "truncated Hungary" wanted the independence gained after four centuries. A good illustration of the nostalgic feeling for the Monarchy is the film *Queen Elizabeth* (*Erzsébet királyné*, Félix Podmanicky, 1940), which is about the role of the titular character, wife of emperor Franz Joseph I and a friend of Hungary, in the creation of the Compromise, and about the turnaround of the originally completely intransigent revolutionaries of 1849 and their becoming defenders of the Habsburgs. The film portrays the change in world view and ideology not as a weakness but as a heroic and moral act.

The lack of realistic reading of the situation and the lack of open confrontation with problems was especially strongly encoded in the structure of the Compromise on the Hungarian side. The political theorist, István Bibó saw it as a specifically "Hungarian phenomenon" that "the country […] from the end of the 19th century, in crucial historical moments, above all between 1914–1920 and 1938–1944 proved fatally incapable of seeing the realistic makings of its own situation and the tasks that follow from it […] it could not find or could not get into power those leaders or such leaders who could have expressed well and found well its needs, its interests, its road ahead. […] in the Hungarian national community, again and again, questions that are crucial, that are relevant and divisive for the whole community have arisen in a way that as a consequence the community got tangled in unproductive fights not leading anywhere, and it has become blind to the real tasks and real problems" (Bibó 1986, 573–574).

The illusions of Hungarian grandeur did not disappear post-Trianon; on the contrary, they solidified and got burdened with further suppressions. Thus, it was not a consequence of the Trianon trauma that self-deception developed in Hungarian society, however, the loss of parts of the country had an important role

in the aggravation of the problems, due to the lack of confrontation. The tragically damaged self-image, the tendency to misread the situation, the dominance of complaint culture, the suicidal orientation, the belief in salvation by achieving a single goal, as well as the oscillation between lethargy and euphoria are all elements of what psychopathology describes as typical of a borderline personality disorder. On this analogy, the characteristics of the interwar borderline nation, or perhaps more precisely borderline high-middle class, can be grasped as follows: the damages to its self-image and self-identity are signified by the adherence to a dream of a superpower position; the propensity is evidenced by a series of bad decisions made in the first half of the 20th century, based on misreading the situation. The dominance of complaint culture can be illustrated by grievance politics – using Miklós Zeidler's words (Zeidler 2009, 189) –, emphasizing grievances instead of elaborating mature suggestions for solutions. Suicidal orientation is shown by receptiveness to visions of death of the nation (which had already been present before Trianon but increased after that). The belief in salvation by achieving a single goal was expressed in the slogan: "Truncated Hungary is not a country, complete Hungary is heaven!" The oscillation between extreme lethargy and euphoric false optimism was manifest in the reception of the signing of the peace agreement and the hysterical reception of the 1940 re-annexation of territories.

Beginning with 1939–1940 Hungarian politics can be characterized by bad decisions and/or indecision, and the crisis gets deeper after entering the war, the destiny of the country takes a catastrophic turn. Perhaps not coincidentally, in some Hungarian films the issue of decision-making is problematized and indecisive thus tragic protagonists appear. It may be an exaggeration to hypothesize such a direct connection between political and social history and film history, but it can be stated with certainty that the year 1939 brings a turning point both in Hungarian politics and in Hungarian films. In the war period of the '40s, the myth of problemlessness is still dominant; however, some anxieties and frustrations are articulated in films. The change can be seen in two directions: while most of the films are still problem-free, (a) doomed love movies with tormented heroes and unhappy endings appear, and (b) there are some melodramas depicting anxieties despite their happy endings. Films in these latter two groups can be considered to be noir-sensitive (these could be considered as examples of the Hungarian film noir), though it must be emphasized that the number of these films is still far below the number of glamourous and optimistic ones even in the '40s.

The changing voice of Hungarian film is made evident by the end of the reign of happy endings. Hungarian films of the interwar period were originally repulsed

by unhappy endings. In this respect Hungarian film is more Hollywood-like than Hollywood itself. During the years between 1931 and 1939 there were hardly any films that had an unhappy ending (perhaps *Spring Shower* [*Tavaszi zápor*, 1932] by Pál Fejős is an exception, although even in that case it is not obvious that the ending is unhappy; and *Henpecked Husband* [*A papucshős,* 1938] by János Vaszary can also be mentioned here). The change was brought by *Deadly Spring* at the end of 1939, and after that one or two films with unhappy endings were made each year until 1944. Such films are *Deadly Spring* (1939), *Yellow Rose* (*Sárga rózsa,* István György, 1940), *Silent Monastery* (*Néma kolostor,* Endre Rodriguez, 1941), *Today, Yesterday, Tomorrow* (*Ma, tegnap, holnap*, Viktor Bánky, 1941), *Men in the Alps* (*Emberek a havason*, István Szőts, 1941), *Mountain Girl* (1942), *Male Fidelity* (*Férfihűség*, István Daróczy, 1942), *A Woman Looks Back* (1942), *Guarding Post in the Outskirts* (*Külvárosi őrszoba*, D. Ákos Hamza, 1942), *Love Fever* (*Szerelmi láz*, István Lázár jr, 1943), *Éva Szováthy* (1943), *Machita* (1944), and *Madách* (Antal Németh, 1944).

Distressed Melodramas

Hungarian films of the Horthy era seem at first sight to be divorced of their social-historical context (where social is meant to include not only social phenomena but also history, ideology and politics) since they hardly reflect directly on contemporary events, especially in the 1930s. The Trianon complex, which was present in everyday life, was avoided or only brought up carefully. If they comment on events, they show crises to be easily manageable, as can be seen in *Man Under the Bridge* (*Ember a híd alatt*, László Vajda, 1936) about the problem of professional unemployed people, or also in the representation in many films of the loss of fortune and title, that is, declassing, a problem that was an intense experience for many, be it films showing bourgeois protagonists (*Money Talks* [*Pénz beszél,* Jenő Csepreghy, 1940], *Happy Times* [*Boldog idők,* Endre Rodriguez, 1943]), or aristocrats and the nobility (*Rózsa Nemes* [*Nemes Rózsa*, Emil Martonffy, 1943], *Tokaj Wine* [*Tokaji aszú*, Viktor Bánky, 1940]). It is not by accident that the motif of declassing is emphasized in films: the historical, social and economical cataclysms – lost revolutions, Trianon, the emigration from the newly formed states into the remnant state, and the Great Depression – all make downslide a collective experience, the audience can identify with the main characters who lose their foothold. Declassing is also a gratifying topic for genre films: there are great reserves of suspense in it (whether the protagonist will fall further or manages to climb back up), not to mention that showing the

problem to be solvable (by way of happy endings) performs a useful task for the state: it eases the accumulated tensions of the community.

The voice, value system, and to some extent the genre division of Hungarian film changes at the end of the 1930s. Even comedies are not the way they used to be: they show more absurd situations (*One Skirt, One Pants* [*Egy szoknya, egy nadrág*, D. Ákos Hamza, 1943], *The Perfect Family* [*A tökéletes család*, László Sipos, 1942]); furthermore, the charming ingénues of the '30s become hysterical (*It Begins with Marriage* [*Házassággal kezdődik*, Viktor Bánky, 1943]) or retarded (*Lucky Fellow* [*Szerencsés flótás*, István Balogh, 1943]). The most important change is the emergence of the doomed-love movie, and melodrama as a genre strengthens its position after a scattered presence earlier (*Purple Lilacs* [*Lila akác*, István Székely, 1934], *Sister Maria* [*Mária nővér*, Viktor Gertler, 1936], *Anniversary* [*Évforduló*, Béla Gaál, 1936], *Only One Night* [*Café Moszkva*, István Székely, 1936]).

At first sight, it does not seem easy to distinguish between melodrama and doomed-love movie since all characteristics of a melodrama fit doomed-love movies as well. From Thomas Elsaesser (1972), Christine Gledhill (1987) to Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (1991), theoreticians generally agree on the following basic features of melodrama: it shows explicit emotions, it cumulates conflicts, it builds from series of extremely dramatized scenes, and due to this, it does not refrain from the use of pathos created by gestures of characters, certain types of scenery, lighting, or montage identified as typical of Hollywood.

All of these characteristics can be found in generic melodrama (and its subgenre, the love melodrama), as well as in doomed-love movies. However, despite their similarities, love melodramas and doomed-love stories are different in several key features. They are distinct in several thematic elements, in their structure and, above all, in their ideology. Most of their differences come from the fact that – as Jenő Király writes – "love story is the genre of deadly love; melodrama is that of sacrificial love" (Király 2010, 34). The doomed-love movie, which can be taken to be one of the oldest genres of film history[3] lacks the melodramatic miracle (which is not to be taken as a fantastical element, but as a dramaturgical surprise that leads the lovers into a safe haven), and the prominent structural element of the genre is the unhappy ending. Its mood is determined by pessimism of fatalism, its main character is the protagonist who is unsuccessful in his/her pursuits and fails.

3 In Hollywood, the doomed-love movie is a significant genre already in the age of silent films, for example: *A Fool There Was* (Frank Powell, 1915), *Broken Blossoms* (D. W. Griffith, 1919), *Camille* (Ray C. Smallwood, 1921), *The Unknown* (Tod Browning, 1927).

From the end of the 1930s, there appear characters in domestic doomed-love movies and melodramas alike who do not only carry the burden of their bad decisions but also that of their indecisions. Moreover, these characters are generally foreign to Hollywood movies (even to the noir genre), which celebrate action. Inactivity is not to be understood as a lack of productive action, that is, moments of patient and suspenseful waiting (which is prevalent in Hollywood movies), but as a futureless doing-nothing and miracle-waiting, as well as the feeling of "we will survive somehow." A dramaturgical tool typical of most movies of the era is related to this latter aspect. Chance is a plot-structuring force in Hungarian films, independent of genre and topic. It can be found in romcoms (*Together* [*Kettesben*, László Cserépy, 1943], *This Happened in Budapest* [*Ez történt Budapesten*, D. Ákos Hamza, 1944], *Yes or No?* [*Igen vagy nem?*, Viktor Bánky, 1940], *The Friend of the Minister* [*A miniszter barátja*, Viktor Bánky, 1939]), doomed-love movies (*Deadly Spring, Yellow Rose, Male Fidelity*), more classical (*Marriage* [*Házasság*, János Vaszary, 1942]) or more distressed melodramas (*Strange Roads* [*Idegen utakon,* Imre Apáthi, 1944], *Half A Boy* [*Egy fiúnak a fele*, D. Ákos Hamza, 1944], *At the Crossroads*, *Lent Life*, *Black Dawn*). The motif of chance is thus characteristic of the whole body of film. Should the story go towards tragedy or should it end happily, it is as if the characters gave up on controlling their destiny. In Viktor Bánky's *Yes or No?* – which does not have a tragic ending, on the contrary, it is a film that has multiple happy endings –, in one of the scenes, the characters are discussing the role of chance in shaping destiny, and when one of them inquires about having an influence on chance, the other one rejects this hypothesis.

"– Last night I really did not think that I would actually be here for this breakfast!
– *Oh, chance is capable of many things.*
– *Only… only chance?*
– *What do you mean?*
– *Did you not help chance out a little bit?* (...) *Yes or no?*
– *What is this insinuation? I am a gentleman.*"

This dialogue reveals a lot, whether we consider its literal meaning or understand it on a more abstract level. In the increasingly dark atmosphere of that period, among the more and more frightening events, the individual is not his/her own master, is not the controller of his/her destiny, not even in fiction. The protagonist may reach a happy ending, but it is less by their own powers and will. Some external control is vital. The "big brother" of Hungarian film protagonists is chance, which always watches over them, and in this respect it is almost immaterial if the work of chance

leads them to a happy or unhappy ending. The series of chance events shows that the protagonists cannot meet the challenges on their own.

The typical representations of the protagonists with a weakness of will are two tragic characters. One of them is Iván Egry, from the paradigm-changing doomed-love movie *Deadly Spring* (1939) at the beginning of the new era in film history. His tragedy is not that he is cheated on, but that he cannot decide between "nice evil" and "pure beauty" (Király 2010, 111), and his suicide is nothing else but the admission of his indecision. The other one is the titular character of the film *Madách* (1944). Further works dealing with decisions are, among others, *Temptation* (*Kísértés*, Zoltán Farkas, 1942), in which it is the lover, *Light and Shadow* (*Fény és árnyék*, Klára Tüdős, 1943), in which it is the wife, or *Closed Court* (*Zárt tárgyalás*, Géza Radványi, 1940), in which it is the wife and the lover together who decide instead of the inert husband. Bad decisions and/or indecision are both the cause and the result of distress, therefore, these motives are the generators of noir-sensibility in the works.

Even though problems are intensified in certain films, directors rarely get to the point where they let the main character be completely destroyed. Even if they take pity on them with a happy ending, they are far away from glamorous romances. True analytic art movies are not made in the period; but the peculiarities, or even anomalies of the local variations on genres imported primarily from Hollywood often say at least as much, if not more, about the values of society as art movies do.

The appearance of the doomed-love movie among the genres in 1939 is symptomatic on its own, however, the changes in melodrama, the way it presents and handles conflicts, are even more telling than the rise of the doomed-love movie. The most exciting films represent the collective mood of society primarily by resetting genre structures. These films are the descendants of a glamorous aesthetic on the surface; however, they are related to film noir below the surface. Problems seem to be resolved in them, but in fact, they get deeper.

Although Hungarian melodrama with noir-sensibility offers happy ending to the viewer, sometimes it questions the essence and point of a happy ending with various techniques. An excellent example is the happy ending in *Black Dawn*, which narrates the meeting of the lovers, while also questioning the idyllic end by hinting at the uncertain parenting of a child. Another example is *Half a Boy*, in which all questions raised get an answer in the cathartic ending, the emotions quiet down, conflicts are smoothed out, but the harmony seems superficial, and a deeper analysis can show the difficulty of getting rid of prejudice in the small community.

This approach, that is, calling on basic principles of the genre by negating them, for example by having happy endings with multiple meanings, is present parallel

to processes going down in the international movies of the period. There are only sporadic – and artistically quite controversial – examples for this in Hollywood movies before the '40s (*Baby Face* [Alfred E. Green, 1933], *The Kiss Before the Mirror* [James Whale, 1933]), and it is a rare approach even in the '40s. It appears during WWII in films such as *Mr. Skeffington* (Vincent Sherman, 1942) or *Random Harvest* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1942).[4] Most American film historians relate the melodramatic theme of taking issue with happiness – its apparent realization and its simultaneous ironic questioning – to the so called family melodramas, especially to the works of Douglas Sirk (*All That Heaven Allows*, 1955, *Magnificent Obsession*, 1954), but they often forget about Sirk's predecessors, the makers of pre-code films, as well as the directors making melodramas during the war.

Techniques similar to those applied by LeRoy and Sherman, and in some sense by Sirk, are the ones that Viktor Bánky and László Kalmár experiment with in their distress melodramas. Moreover, the concealed, indirect social consciousness can also be paralleled to Sirk's films. John Mercer and Martin Shingler write that these "become emblematic through a particular use of the ironic mise-en-scène, which suggests a critique of bourgeois ideology that reveals wider conflicts and tensions that manifest themselves through the dominant cinema of the period" (2004, 40). The undertakings of *Black Dawn*, *At the Crossroads* or *Lent Life* are eerily similar to this. On the surface they offer a glamorous world view, moreover, they deepen the happiness theme – the son of the landowner falls in love with the adventuress (*Black Dawn*), the head of the company falls in love with the secretary (*At the Crossroads*), the bourgeois woman falls in love with a penniless soldier (*Lent Life*) –, however, below the surface, they correct the glamorous world view and criticize this portrayal in as much as they signal the price of becoming happy. This price can be the potential of being cheated on (in *Black Dawn* the lover of the main character sleeps with his blackmailer, and it is hinted at that the child believed to be shared with the protagonist is the fruit of this night), the fatal loss of true love (in the ending of *At the Crossroads* the heroine enters a better-than-nothing relationship), or even the death of a person, the unnecessary third (*Lent Life*). Just like Sirk's films, these can be interpreted as real melodramas, or as distress melodramas, questioning the basic tenet of the genre, the theme of happiness.

A special type of distress melodrama is represented by those works that mix elements of various genres. In the study of Hungarian films between 1939–1944, the category of noir-sensibility and the method of genre-analysis are useful as they help in mapping out the hidden value-structures of the films. Films such as *Closed*

4 On the subversiveness of the above-mentioned films, see: Pápai 2018, 16.

Court or *The Last Song* (*Az utolsó dal*, Frigyes Bán, 1942) and *A Heart Stops Beating* (*Egy szív megáll*, László Kalmár, 1942), which adapt pre-code logic, present a mixed perspective on values, among other reasons, because they give happiness to the protagonists undeservedly.

A Case Study: *Half a Boy* by D. Ákos Hamza

The film by D. Ákos Hamza shot in 1943, but only shown in February 1946, is an often-cited emblematic film of its era. It is also an enigmatic one: it is a work full of social and political-historical reflections, although some say that it is too careful in answering questions and is ideologically two-faced. The film is an excellent material to illustrate the problems touched upon in this paper. It demonstrates how strongly attractive the value system of the historical middle class is in contemporary Hungarian films (Hamza obviously wants to depart from this value system, but remains captive to it until the end), and it can be a great help in mapping out the working mechanisms of distress melodramas (especially through the analysis of their controversial happy ending).

In an interview made in Budapest in 1987, the director called the film "an expressedly anti-German and anti-racial discrimination film" (Balogh 1987, 38), which is, however, still vacillating and unsure at certain points. It takes a stand against stigmatizing people based on their origin and against all forms of exclusion, which were also made into law at the time when the film was made, while it passes a concealed judgment on some people of atypical fate. It argues for accepting differences, but it also makes slandering comments on the object of tolerance. With the allegorical story it tries to recalibrate the feelings of the historical middle class, while at the same time reproducing its reflexes. Not to mention the fact that the film's approach in showing problems to be solvable seems to be belittling these – at the time acute – problems.

Despite the above, the making of *Half a Boy* was a brave gesture, a fighting act in 1943. It was not only a special act but also a source of danger; even though the Catholic Church stood up for the film, it was still banned in 1944. Even its own contemporaries felt its controversial nature, so when it was finally shown to audiences, after the war, there was an insert after the main title which, while also praised it, contained critical statements related to the way it discusses issues judged to be less heroic: "This film was made in 1944 [more precisely in 1943 – Zs. P.]. At that time, it was banned due to censorship. We may now consider its voice timid, weak. Then it was a brave, risky stand against hatred and evil."

The film is based on the short story with the same title by Kálmán Mikszáth, written in 1886, and had already been adapted for several times by Hungarian directors. The first, literal adaptation was made a brief 20 years before Hamza, in 1924, by Géza Bolváry. The plot of the short story and this first adaptation is the following: Lőrinc Gáthy's wife dies in childbirth. The man promises to get a mother for his son, a mother who loves the child like her own. Gáthy carries out this plan in a less than common way. He gives the son to foster parents, looks for a new wife, and he also gives their shared son to foster parents. After several years, he brings home both children, but he does not tell his wife, even after her persistent urging, which child is hers, but promises to reveal the secret when the sons come of age. The boys grow up and are enlisted for war. One of them dies in the war. When Gáthy is about to fulfil his promise, his wife asks him to throw the birth certificates into the fire, since – as Mikszáth writes – "at least this way half of the son remains hers." Géza Bolváry follows this short story rather faithfully in his film adaptation.

However, Hamza and the scriptwriter József Kerekesházy only kept the basic idea of the short story, that of the boys being born and taken into the same family. Otherwise they turned it into a parable about the current laws against the Jews and the persecution of this people. The story was changed in the following way: The landowner Lőrinc Gáthy's wife comes close to death when she gives birth to their only son. They send for a priest but they can only find a wandering friar, who arrives with a baby on his arm. He has found the baby along the road, and he asks the head of the house to raise the child with his own son. Gáthy is hesitant but finally gives in; he promises that if his wife recovers from post-partum fever, he will raise the little newcomer beside his own son as a gratitude to God. He is helped in his decision by the fact that the two infants are accidentally put into the same bed and he cannot distinguish them, they are so similar – so he has to raise both if he wants to be sure that he keeps his own son. 25 years pass, the remaining three-fourths of the film's events follow the lives of the two boys. The newly graduated Gáthy boys are about to get married: János has chosen the daughter of a landowner, named Lujza, while István has chosen Anna, the daughter of Vida, who is a social climber, a former worker turned into a landowner. István's plans are against his father's will (he considers it morganatic), and János's plan is rejected by his prospective mother-in-law because she hears the gossip that one of the Gáthy boys is a foundling and she does not want to marry her daughter to a possible bastard. Since nobody knows which boy is the real Gáthy child and which is the found one, both of them are stigmatized for their parentage. It is not only Lujza's mother and Lujza who are preoccupied with the secret of the parentage but also the people around. Moreover,

even old Gáthy wants to be certain, no matter how his wife and the doctor who was there at the birth want to convince him about the futility of this. In the end, due to the influence of this doctor's actions and convinced by the reappearing friar, they all set aside their doubts. In the last quarter of the film they all relent – as if they are handing the torch to each other –, first the old Gáthy, then Lujza, and finally the prospective mother-in-law, who seems most persistent in her rejection. The closing scene shows a coming together in the Gáthy-house, where all the characters who had an important role earlier are present besides the Gáthys: the friar, the doctor and all prospective family members are there, cleansed of their prejudices and happily enjoying the end of the conflicts.

The plot spectacularly diverges both from Mikszáth's writing and from Géza Bolváry's adaptation. The short story and its first adaptation focus on the childhood of the main characters, Hamza focuses on the boys who have turned 25. While in the short story and the first adaptation it is the mother who is obsessed with the correct identifications of the boys, in Hamza's film the father is preoccupied with this. Naturally, the three plots were born in three different times, however, in Hamza's version the events obviously take place in the 1940s. The Hamza-film introduces several characters who are not mentioned by Mikszáth or Bolváry: the doctor, the prospective mother- and father-in-law, as well as the fiancées. Not to mention the friar, whose character is worth taking a closer look at.

This character has an especially important role in the film, even though no friar is mentioned by Mikszáth or in Bolváry's adaptation, and the Christian context is not present in either of them. Although the friar has little playtime, that is, he is only present in a small number of scenes, his significance is shown by the fact that he plays a decisive role both in the creation and in the resolution of the basic conflict.

From the changes made by Hamza and Kerekesházy to the story by Mikszáth the most importants are the introduction of the friar and the morals provided by this in sententious, succinct lines, which, however, play a rather significant role in making the film ideologically muddled, to say the least. Acceptance is placed into an exclusively Christian narrative context via the character of the friar, as well as the cross symbolism connected to him and emphasized at various points, such as the beginning and the closing image of the film. Acceptance and love are not presented simply as human values but as specifically Christian ones, which can be possessed by those who understand the friar's message. It is beyond doubt that the words of the friar had an important self-reflecting message for the contemporary Hungarian Christians, however, Hamza unwittingly polarizes acceptance and exclusion to Christian and non-Christian poles, which is problematic from the point of view of

the persecuted Jewish people. These issues are legitimate even if the narrowing of the context of acceptance can, to some extent, be explained by the contemporary political situation. Putting an emphasis on the strictly Christian acceptance could be justified by the fact that in 1943–1944 it was mostly Christians that needed to be reminded of the importance of acceptance, and it was the Christian-national wing and its representatives that had to be warned of the same, by emphasizing that Christianity is love. Nevertheless, it is not an ideological problem but an aesthetic one that follows from the previous line of thought. Hamza also slims down the horizon of interpretation by narrowing the space of acceptance, and he more or less makes the film into a thesis movie. It is a different set of issues that this parabolic, or perhaps allegoric nature of the film was considered more of a merit than a mistake at the time, even though the message had no influence since the film was left in a box at the historic moment when it should have been shown to a wider audience.

Related to the ideological issues of *Half a Boy*, it is worth considering the argument that acceptance is based on uniformity and not on accepting the other in it. The film seems to suggest that we do not have to accept the fact that we are different but the fact that we are the same (two halves of a boy: the possessive structure alludes to the Christian holy trinity). This does not only obliterate the significance of being different, but – even worse – gives it a negative shade in some contexts. The representation of the other that is picked to be accepted is sometimes negative. István tries to act like he is the found child in order to win Anna's hand, who is the daughter of the social climber Vida, despised by the aristocrats (and István thinks that if he proves this, then the old Gáthy will accept his morganatic marriage). When István tries to play that he is the found child, he thinks he can prove it by uncouth behaviour: he uses vulgar language and spits loudly. So, he learns to be primitive in order to identify with the otherness that is to be excluded – this is very controversial and can be understood as cryptically anti-Semitic if it is translated to be about Jews. By this, otherness is polarized again, and the film suggests that "clean blood" is sophisticated, even if it sometimes goes to the extremes, but "bad" parentage cannot be fully compensated even by the social climber farmer (that is, the assimilated Jew).

By this logic, the problem of exclusion – the hierarchical approach to people – is not questioned in the film at all. The farmer remains a farmer, and good blood is good blood; Christian morality just pulls a blind sheet over it. Without questioning the humanist intent of the makers, this can be interpreted from a Jewish perspective as hurtful and condescending since despite its best intentions, the film does not advertise acceptance and love but rather assimilation and the necessity to assimilate to those higher up.

This problematic aspect of the film is balanced, however, by the central conflict, from which it follows that there is no otherness; the distinction between one and other does not exist because only identical exists. That is to say, one can consider, contrary to the above, that while there are problems in the film concerning the character of the social climber farmer and the judgment about him, these problems cannot be extended to the whole plot. The dilemma of accepting or not accepting the other is not predominantly connected to the figure of the farmer, but to the characters of the two boys.

According to what certain aspects of the film suggest, it can actually be difficult to accept otherness; however, the main story claims the exact opposite, that otherness in fact does not exist. At least this is the meaning of the "other" boy being the same as the "real" one, and those who want the "real" one – may it be the mother, the father, the mother-in-law, or the wife – can only do so by accepting the "other," the "fake" one as well, which is not very difficult, since the "fake" one is the "real" one at the same time, as it is impossible to know which is which. Gáthy mom realizes this from the beginning, but Gáthy dad is incapable of this for a quarter of a century. The fact that the argument between the mother and the father does not simply comprise the pinpointing of a moral dilemma poses a difficulty, as this argument reflects the creators' immature moral statement and their opinions full of muddied values, although definitely based on good intentions.The problem of lineage, which is a recurrent element of melodramas of all times, is also exemplified by the film *Devil's Horseman* (*Ördöglovas*, 1943), created by Hamza right before *Half a Boy*. It premiered on March 15, 1944, that is, four days before the German invasion. This film, which takes place in the 19th century and is full of adventure plots, executes an impossible mission, it undertakes to resolve unresolvable conflicts as it tells the story of the fulfilment of an impossible love affair, the engagement between Móric Sándor, a man of Kossuth-like temper and looks, and the daughter of Metternich. A story like this almost belongs to the area of fantasy if we judge it based on historical facts, but it is perfectly suitable for a melodrama because it takes social prohibitions to the extreme. Such prohibitions are often the source of key conflicts in the genre, as well as conflicts between parents and children related to picking a partner. This latter could not be more extreme than one caused by a marriage between a faithful devotee to Hungarian freedom and the daughter of a main figure of the oppressive regime. The film *Devil's Horseman* shows that the question of lineage is not only a problem of contemporary politics but also a problem related to a genre in Hamza's hand: emphasizing it can intensify certain basic conflicts of a genre. Thus, when discussing the ideological issues concerning the film, it must be remembered that

Half a Boy is a melodrama. The happy ending of the film, which raises various questions, must also be approached with this in mind.

The first issue of the genre-related discussion should be the ending of the film because one of the most vulnerable points of the values transmitted by the film lies in the fact that there is a happy ending – which is actually a recurring problem with melodramas that handle contemporary social issues. Film historians and theoreticians of genre have often stated that it is very risky if a melodrama takes up discussing historical crises or acute social issues, even if this does not serve a propaganda purpose, as the genre's orientation towards a happy ending can take off the edge of a problem. The happy ending suggests that the problem is resolvable and thus there is a fair chance that it adulterates or at least belittles the issue. *Schindler's List* [Steven Spielberg, 1990] is a good illustration of this conflict, and it fits here due to its topic as well. The crucial ambivalence is that the film is about the Holocaust and still talks about the escape of Jewish people. Accusations similar to those brought against Spielberg's film can also be raised in connection with Hamza's work. The ambivalent approach so typical of melodramas, namely, the reconciliation of irreconcilable elements is present here, too, but only apparently. *Half a Boy* is actually not a real melodrama. The director adheres to the melodramatic values without belittling the problem raised: he seems to tie off the threads containing conflicts and gives the film an optimistic closing; however, he lets it be implied, using some concealed motifs, that the crucial crises have not been solved in spite of the happy ending. It is for this reason that *Half a Boy* can be regarded as a typical example of Hungarian distress melodrama.

At first sight, *Half a Boy* is an excellent example of the melodramatic narrative: the film tells the story of how the main characters – specifically the people in the close vicinity of the two boys – get rid of the prejudices and biases that shackle the fulfilment of their relatives' happiness. The parents reconsider their social interests that make it impossible for them at the beginning to support the love of their children, and get rid of the obstacles raised by their financial self-interest in their soul. Furthermore, Lujza successfully gets rid of the obstacles in her psyche that were raised by her mother's rejection of János Gáthy. To sum up: the film shows how the characters that are made sick by their bad reflexes get to the point of self-healing and reach the reconsideration of their desire for happiness. *Half a Boy*, thus, achieves brilliantly the directives of a melodrama, by which it suggests that the problems raised can be resolved, even though it may not be easy. So, on the surface, problems can be overcome. However, some characteristics of the film weaken the catharsis. Such a strong emphasis on the resolvability of the problems is suspicious. The question raised in the film is too

painful, the turnaround of the characters is too sharp, and the happy celebration in the final scene is too big for the closing to seem credible. But then, why does Hamza use it? Before we can answer this, we must take an excursion to some characteristics of melodrama that have not been discussed so far.

Half a Boy is a film full of anxiety from several points of view. First of all, mainly due to its contemporary political relevance, as it is impossible not to notice its parabolistic nature. The basic situation, the ideas in the plot and the verbal communication of certain characters make it obvious that it is about the stigmatizing and persecution of the Jewish people. D. Ákos Hamza employs verbal signals as an important part of establishing the parabolistic nature of the film from the very beginning, when the friar gives the following monologue: "what kind of a destiny is it, to be a found child? And if he grows up, if he becomes someone, even then, even then, he will be asked, perhaps in the most critical moment: who are you, where do you come from? Never will he be asked: who are you, where are you going?" There is a large number of similar comments later, very obviously about the persecution of Jews. "Everyone is the same before God" – notes the friar when he meets Gáthy, who is desperately looking for him and wants certainty about his sons. "People have gone insane. They are always looking for the differences among themselves." – concludes Gáthy the moral of the meeting with the friar. The message of the friar's closing words is similarly unambiguous. "There is a commandment: love each other! As there is nothing stronger and bigger in the sky and on earth than love. Let its dew fall on your heads. Love is awake and is not asleep even when sleeping. It flames upwards like the burning torch, and it breaks through everything like the fast flame. People, do not cause harm to each other!"

At the same time, anxiety appears in *Half a Boy* not only due to its signals that can be decoded as political statements, but also due to the way the basic characteristics of the Hollywood melodrama appear in it. The most conspicuous is the repositioning of the countryside, which is a traditionally positive melodramatic feature. The countryside is usually "a space of innocence" (to use Linda Williams's term [1998, 65–66]) in Hollywood melodramas: it is a Paradise-like territory that protects and guards, and if the protagonist gets away from it, (s)he is faced with a series of challenges. The space of innocence is not only rural, it is also characterized by being matriarchal. The countryside and the presence of the mother protect the protagonist, whose destiny is bound to turn to the worse if the connection to one or another part of this melodramatic environment is lost. Most of the time, the connection is lost with both elements, see for example Anne's descent to hell in Griffith's *Way Down East*, made in 1920, or, to give a current example, Albert's

trajectory in *War Horse,* directed by Spielberg in 2011. D. Ákos Hamza reconsiders, partially destructs and perverts the two features of the typical melodramatic environment, which is meant to ensure the protection of the protagonist(s). Although Gáthy mom is representative of the classic melodramatic mother role, Hamza also makes one of the main antagonists a mother (Lujza's mother), and he fills the countryside with toxic people depraved by gossip, and so not only does he rid it from its protective function but also represents it as an area that can bring destruction on the protagonists. This crude devaluation of traditional melodramatic values plays a role in shaping the plot.

The third factor influencing the turning of *Half a Boy* into a distress melodrama is also connected to the re-evaluation of the melodramatic principle of the countryside. Repositioning the countryside and rewriting its traditional role in the plot, as well as giving unusual characteristics to the people who represent the countryside all play a role in the creation of the ambiguity of the ending and in the relativization and dulling of the final catharsis.

The messages of the film are substantially modified by the fact that the director – by following the route of the gossip – shows the reflections and reactions in the wider environment of the protagonists, and furthermore he interprets those as being events of outstanding significance since he emphasizes their major role in the outburst of the central conflict. This motif is completely missing from the original short story. In Mikszáth's work, the people in the wider environment of the protagonists play no role in the complication of the events. Contrary to this, D. Ákos Hamza does not only indirectly signal the destructive nature of gossip, but – to be completely sure – verbalizes it, for example, in the conversation between Lujza and her mother.

"– After all this, of course there can be no talk of this marriage!

– But mother, maybe all of this is just stupid gossip!

– My dear girl, gossip is worse than reality. Because people do not always believe the truth. But everybody believes gossips.

– But perhaps it is not János but István!

– There's the rub, nobody knows which one is the found child. So both of them are said to be the one!"

The director achieves the multilayeredness of the closing by showing the problems to be – seemingly – resolvable in the close environment of the protagonists, but he stays quiet about what happens in their wider environment. While he goes through the stages of the growth of prejudice in a smaller and a wider circle, the reckoning with prejudice is only shown in a smaller circle. He accurately reports

on the behavioural changes of the protagonists and on the rollercoaster ride of their opinions, he tellingly does not say whether the people who live in the neighbourhood (who played a major role in the spreading of the prejudice earlier) have changed or not. More precisely, by leaving this question unanswered, he suggests that the everymen of the neighbourhood have not changed. For what reason should they have changed?

To signal the cleansing of the small community of prejudice, it would have been an obvious solution to step out of the closed environment of the Gáthys in the final scenes and to close the film with images of a wedding that shows not only the main characters but also the supporting ones. The conflict could have been ended with a symbolic celebration where the old and the young of the neighbourhood are happy together. This solution would have been in line with the melodramatic tradition (for example, we can see such an ending in Griffith's *Way Down East* [1920], two weddings in the presence of a lot of people; or to mention a domestic example, of the two available Hungarian feature films by Mihály Kertész, the earlier one, *The Exile* [*A tolonc*] from 1914 also closes with an assembly celebration, with a wedding that brings together a crowd), but Hamza decided not to use something like this.

If we watch carefully, we can find one more person in the closing, besides the supporting characters, who does not articulate a change of opinion, despite being present at the big resolution, unlike the supporting characters. From the parents, Gáthy mom, as well as Vida and Gáthy dad express their opinions that they are not curious about the secrets of the boys' parentage; however, Lujza's mother – who can be considered as the antagonist in the film since she plays a major role in the eruption of the conflict besides the supporting characters who spread the gossip – does not say a word, although in the sequence right before the closing scene, where she is talking to the doctor, it is obvious that she is still concerned about the parentage of her prospective son-in-law. Hamza actually emphasizes her silence with a cut where Vida says that he is not interested in which of the two boys is the found one. While Vida speaks, Lujza's mother is standing right next to him, but she does not say a word. So, Hamza omits to give unambiguous signs in the final scene that Lujza's mother has changed her opinion. The mother is smiling in the last cuts, and so it seems that she, too, has changed her opinion, but we do not learn why she would have done so. Was she affected by the arrival and the words of the friar? But if so, why does she not make it obvious using her words – like Vida and Lőrinc Gáthy do?

To sum up: the film *Half a Boy* is a definitely special one at the end of the Horthy era due to its social consciousness and its humanist standing, however, its ideology is ambivalent. Nevertheless, a genre-based examination reveals such

concealed contents and makes the controversies, which definitely exist, at least partly understandable, even if it cannot fully explain them. In Hamza's film, the solutions and resolutions required by the structure of a melodrama are embedded within a complex context. *Half a Boy* can be understood as a film over-emphasizing the melodramatic happiness concepts (since the behaviour of the main characters, who originally show rejection, takes a radical turn), but it can also be understood as an underachievement of happiness concepts (the everyman is not rid of his prejudices). Similarly to other Hungarian distress melodramas of the period, this film does not simply reproduce the classic melodramatic structure, but, on the one hand, it overstacks its features creating catharsis and effect, and on the other hand, it also questions the validity of these features and overrides their traditional meanings.

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The Representation of Women and Female Mobility in Hungarian Films between 1931 and 1944

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Abstract. György Vajdovich's article aims to describe the representation of female roles in Hungarian feature films of the period 1931 to 1944. The study is based on the analysis of the database that was created within the framework of the research project *The Social History of Hungarian Cinema*. Concentrating on the representation of female protagonists, this article first analyses the presence and prevalence of female figures in all Hungarian sound films (up until 2015). Then it narrows the scope of analysis to films produced between 1931 and 1944, and describes the typical professions and social and financial positions of female protagonists, as compared to those of male protagonists. The second half of the text examines the representation of female upward mobility in comedies – showing that according to the popular myths of the era, female upward mobility is principally realized through good marriage, with the narratives of the films rarely presenting the professional success of female protagonists and their possibilities of emancipation. Analysing the narrative patterns and gender roles in the films of the time, the text concludes that the narratives of female ascension, which mostly took form in comedies, reflected the desire of middle-class people to transgress the social and financial boundaries in society. As such, the films served to maintain and strengthen the patriarchal order of the era.[1]

Keywords: history of Hungarian cinema, representation of women, female roles and occupations, social mobility, statistical data analysis.

The first period of the sound era in Hungarian film history between 1931 and 1945 was a very productive period, where 354 films were produced, film productions were almost continuously growing in number, and Hungary became the third biggest producer in Europe at the beginning of the 1940s (Sándor 1997, 137–138). In contrast

1 This paper was supported by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office (number of Agreement: 116708).

to the period after 1949, the film industry of this era was essentially a self-financed, market-based industry where private investors and companies produced films with minimal state support. Although the Hungarian film industry was controlled by the state, it predominantly aimed to meet the demands of the market, therefore we can surmise that the prevalent themes, motifs or narrative patterns satisfied the expectations of the contemporary public. The specific influence of the state can be traced in the controlling regulations: like in the institution of state censorship exercised after the production but before the release of the film (introduced in 1920, which prohibited and regulated the representation of certain motifs), and later also in pre-production (introduced in 1939, controlling the content of the script, the cast and the budget of the planned film); in the constitution of the censorship board;[2] in the control over the studio facilities through which the state could give priority to preferred productions (Záhonyi-Ábel 2020, 116); and by providing production loans (Záhonyi-Ábel 2020, 115) and later premiums to selected works. The state also influenced film production with the enactment of anti-Jewish laws in the film industry[3] – which prompted a considerable change in the profile of filmmaking personnel from 1939, and tried to encourage the production of films with preferred ideological content. Therefore it is difficult to gauge to what extent state expectations and market demands determined production in that era. Film production was dominated by genre films: whereby 50% of the works were comedies, while the other 50% comprised six other genres, mostly melodramas. Films made specifically with artistic intentions were rare during this period. Even the often praised works by Paul Fejős (director of Hungarian origin, who made two films of the era, *Spring Shower* [*Tavaszi* zápor, 1932] and *The Water Decides* [*Ítél a Balaton*, 1932]) and by István Szőts (director of *Men in the Alps* [*Emberek a havason*, 1941]), which are cast in a highly elaborate and artistic form, were unusual of the time – but were still essentially melodramatic pieces (Benke 2013, 29, 47). Although works

2 Márk Záhonyi-Ábel explains that members of the censorship board (National Motion Picture Examination Committee) were appointed by different institutions and social circles. Beside the different representatives of the state – like delegates of the Prime Minister's Office and of the Ministry of Home Affairs or other ministries –, representatives of different cultural or social circles (such as delegates from the film industry, members of the cultural or scientific elite, representatives of certain social institutions and different churches, etc.) also participated in the activity of the board, but generally the Ministry of Home Affairs appointed most of the leading officers, and the representatives of the different ministries had a decisive and continuously increasing share in the decisions (minimum 45%, which increased to 80% by 1941) (Záhonyi-Ábel 2020, 214–296).

3 Through the establishment of the Hungarian Chamber of Film and Dramatic Arts, the regulations of the first anti-Jewish law entered into force in the film industry, which limited the number of Jewish persons working in the film industry at 20% and prevented them from working in upper positions. (Sándor 1997, 27–30; Gergely 2017, 201).

conveying direct political messages were produced in small number, it seems that the often unpredictable application of censorship regulations and political pressure encouraged filmmakers to avoid risk and refrain from the representation of problematic topics and social criticism. Historians of Hungarian cinema generally consider that the films produced in this era were dominated by the expectations of the market and represented an idealized image of Hungary at the time – depicting more the dreams than the real life of the average viewers (Nemeskürty 1965, 105, 118; Gyertyán [1994], 21; Cunningham 2004, 41).

This study will examine the question of representation of female figures in Hungarian feature films between 1931 and 1944 – comparing it to the social conditions of the time and exploring the narrative strategies that contributed to the creation of a so-called dream world. Starting from the statistical analysis of the database of Hungarian films that was created in the framework of the research project entitled *The Social History of Hungarian Cinema*, it will examine the narrative patterns and the social and gender roles related to women in the films of this era. It will first examine the proportion and prevalence of male and female protagonists, then the typical social and financial position of the figures and professions associated with the two genders, and finally it will focus on the possibilities of social and financial mobility in the case of female protagonists.[4] Closer examination of female mobility in comedies compared to the results of certain surveys on social conditions of the time seems to prove the general statement of film history accounts that contemporary films represented an idealized image of contemporary Hungarian society. Detailed analysis shows that comedies that enact the upward mobility of female protagonists reflect the endeavour for social mobility of middle-class people in society at the time, while enforcing the traditional, patriarchal views on gender roles at the same time.

Male and Female Protagonists in Hungarian Films

The aim of our study is to assess the number and the importance of male and female protagonists in early Hungarian sound cinema, and the narrative patterns assigned to them. The differences in forms of financing, level of state control, and political and social circumstances resulted in the preference of different genres, topics and narrative patterns in the subsequent periods of Hungarian cinema, along with the varied representation of gender relations. Gender relations can be generally

4 The scope of this study is limited only to the analysis of data concerning the protagonists of the films. Although the database includes data of secondary figures as well, their enumeration was not exhaustive – therefore it would render statistical analysis unrealizable in that area. In the present study, data analyses are based on the version of the database as of 21. 09. 2019.

described by the presence of male and female protagonists in films of different periods, so our examination first focused on the number of male and female protagonists, their relative proportions, and how these factors changed during the history of Hungarian sound cinema.

Figure 1 shows the respective number of male and female protagonists in relation to the number of films produced each year, and based on this data we can state that during the 80 plus years of Hungarian sound cinema male protagonists were more numerous across the films than female protagonists, except for three years (1941, 1980 and 2012) when the number of women in main roles slightly exceeded those of men. Therefore we can state that Hungarian cinema has preferred to depict male-centric stories, however, we can see considerable differences between certain periods. From the middle of the 1950s to the beginning of the 2000s the number of male protagonists exceeded the number of female ones considerably – where in most years their number was 1.5–2 times higher. This trend shows that during the decades when Hungarian cinema was dominated by author films and was financed and controlled by the state (being nationalized from 1949 until 1989), the male-centric narratives where female protagonists were present in smaller numbers (or were absent) or where women fulfilled only minor roles in the story, prevailed. Contrary to this trend, during the period between 1931 and 1944 (in fact on the basis of the data until 1948), the number of female protagonists correlated with (or were often equivalent to) the number of films, while the number of male protagonists was always slightly higher, but followed similar patterns. This correlation originates from the typical narratives and genres of the time. With the dominant genres of the time being comedy and melodrama, wherein the love story of a heterosexual couple created the core of the narrative, it meant that (at least) one male and one female protagonist was indispensable for the plots. This resulted in a relatively similar presence of both genders in the main roles of films produced in this era. A love plot was essential even to those works where the principal plotline was rooted in a different genre (for example crime stories, war films or spy films). Between 1931 and 1944, 92% of films contained a love story,[5] which generally occurred between the male and female protagonists. This did not mean that the representatives of the two genders had equal importance in the story, but contrary to later periods, during these years the heroine was almost always an indispensable partner to the hero.

5 From among the 354 films produced between 1931–1944, 327 contained a love plot. Love stories mostly took place between the protagonists; we can only find a few examples when the love story only constituted the plotline taking place between secondary figures.

The slightly higher number of male protagonists is due to those narratives in which two heroes were competing for the heroine (examples of this type are provided by *The Water Decides*, *Cobweb* [*Pókháló*, Mária Balázs, 1936], *Three Spinsters* [*Három sárkány*, László Vajda, 1936], *Sarajevo* [Ákos Ráthonyi, 1940] or *Closed Court* [*Zárt tárgyalás*, Géza Radványi, 1940]); or narratives where beside the love plot another plotline was included which focused on a conflict between male characters (for example *In Room 111* [*A 111-es*, István Székely, 1937], *The Red Wallet* [*A piros bugyelláris*, Béla Pásztor, 1938] or *Unknown Opponent* [*Ismeretlen ellenfél*, Endre Rodriguez, 1940]). Only the years 1942 and 1943 (during World War II) were exceptions to this trend, where the number of male protagonists far exceeded those of women (they were 10–30% higher). During these years new types of narrative appeared beside the usual love comedies and love melodramas – they were war melodramas focusing on groups of male soldiers (for example *Message from the Volga Shore* [*Üzenet a Volgapartról*, Alfréd Deésy, 1942], *Brothers-in-arms* [*Bajtársak*, Ágoston Pacséry, 1942]), *Hungarian Eagles* [*Magyar sasok*, István László, 1943], and *Storm Brigade* [*Viharbrigád*, István Lázár, 1943]); works containing a crime story, a spy story or thriller elements (e.g. *Guarding Post in the Outskirts* [*Külvárosi őrszoba,* Dezső Ákos Hamza, 1942], *Sabotage* [*Szabotázs*, Emil Martonffy, 1942], and *A Machine Has Not Returned* [*Egy gép nem tért vissza*, Ágoston Pacséry, 1943]); or the so-called problem films of right-wing ideology focusing on male peasant figures (e.g. *The Thirtieth* [*A harmincadik*, László Cserépy, 1942] and *Your Loving Son, Peter* [*Szerető fia, Péter*, Bánky Viktor, 1942]. Therefore, we can state that the moderate correlation of the numbers of male and female protagonists is largely due to the dominance of love stories in Hungarian sound films before 1945. However, this type of narrative was never absent from the films produced in later decades, but became less prevalent – and the films that depicted it were fewer in number. Figure 1 seems to indicate that a pattern similar to the years 1931–44 reappeared after 2012. It would require further examination to establish whether this trend persisted after 2015, but we can state that these years were marked by the return of love stories – this time mostly in the form of contemporary romantic comedies.

Typical Social and Financial Positions

In order to be able to assess the idealization of the image created of society at the time, an analysis of the different social strata and their financial positions might be a useful indication. The database created in the framework of the research project includes data about different characteristics of the figures, therefore it enables

the analysis of the prevalence of certain social groups and financial positions in relation to male and female protagonists. We have to note that the analysis covered the entirety of the feature films between 1931 and 1944, and therefore also included the pieces taking place in earlier historical periods or in foreign lands. This analysis does not exclude such works as there is the supposition that even these films reflected the values and ideals of Hungarian society at the time. A large proportion of non-contemporary plots were adapted from literary works which leaned on the popularity of the adapted pieces among readers – and plots taking place predominantly outside Hungary only constitute 9% of the examined corpus, with more than half of them enacting stories of Hungarian characters abroad.

Analysis of the social strata of film protagonists shows that the representation of middle-class characters is dominant in the case of both male and female protagonists in all the periods of Hungarian sound cinema. However, films produced before 1945 [Figs. 2–3] depicted a more hierarchical society than those produced in the following eras, in accordance with the more hierarchical structure of Hungarian society of the time. Although middle-class figures represent the highest numbers both in the case of men and women, upper-middle-class and upper-class protagonists also constitute a considerable proportion throughout this period. Concerning the structure of society and the relative proportion of different strata, no significant differences can be traced between male and female protagonists. However, main figures belonging to the lower stratum of society, such as workers, peasants and lower ranking employees of businesses or the service industry who do not possess business property are represented in small numbers, creating the illusion that these circles represented only a small segment of society. Comparing this distribution of social strata to the actual social conditions of the time we can state that the dominant tendency in cinematic representation was to overrepresent upper-class groups and underrepresent lower-class groups of society. Lower-class figures only constituted 12–13% percent of the protagonists, which is in stark contrast to statistics that show that these groups made up more than 50% of the population of Hungary during this era (Kövér and Gyáni 2006, 205). In contrast to that, members of elite groups (such as rich aristocrats, landowners, and owners or managers of banks and factories) provided 15% of the protagonists, while their actual proportion in society was less than 0.5 % of the population (Vajdovich 2018, 25). This tendency in representation created an image of Hungarian society where upper-class circles gained greater importance than their proportion in numbers, with their role in society becoming overrated. This seems to suggest that representation of upper-class groups reflected their power and dominance in contemporary Hungarian economy and political

life, rather than their numbers. The prevalence of middle-class figures in film plots might be explained by the fact that most of the filmmakers and financers belonged to that group, and the majority of the cinema-going public also comprised lower- or middle-class viewers (Nemeskürty 1965, 101–102), so we can suppose that this tendency fulfilled the expectations of the viewers (Nemeskürty 1983, 413, 417).

If we examine the financial position of male and female protagonists, we can state that it largely correlates with their social status. Protagonists with an average financial position dominated Hungarian sound film production until 2015, but the distribution of different financial positions of main figures in the films before 1945 reflects a more hierarchical society. No considerable differences can be observed in this dimension between male and female protagonists [Figs. 4–5], which is in contrast to later periods of Hungarian film history – where their relative positions showed a greater disparity.

However, the distribution of financial positions in these films does not completely correlate with that of the social strata. It would be logical to suppose that lower social status correlates with poverty, middle-class status with an average financial position, upper-middle-class position with considerable prosperity and upper-class position with great wealth, but statistical analysis of the characteristics of the figures show that a considerable proportion of middle-class protagonists are poor. Films of the era reflect an image of Hungarian society in which middle-class people lived in bad conditions and their financial position did not enable them to live the way of life traditionally associated with their level in society. This tendency in representation reflects an important phenomenon of society at the time: "the declassing of middle-class families in large numbers" (Kövér and Gyáni 2006, 162; Romsics 2010, 128). It is also apparent that protagonists living in extreme poverty are rarely presented in films of the era, and we hardly see main figures with no abode or basic problems of subsistence. Most probably images of extreme poverty were largely absent because the representation of this subject would have led to social criticism – which was unwelcome in the film industry during this period. Although censorship regulations of the time did not forbid social criticism in films – and only excluded the disrespectful depictions of representatives of the state, of armed forces and Hungarian authorities, etc. –, decisions of the censorship board indicate a political pressure to avoid such topics.[6] This distorted representation

6 A typical example is that authorities wanted to omit the scenes showing extreme poverty from the print of *Men in the Alps* that was sent to the Venice Film Festival in 1942, because "they shed negative light on the country" (Fazekas and Pintér 1998, 74). László Ranódy's project entitled *Abyss* was refused a shooting permit because it intended to present the antagonism between the poor and the rich (Nemeskürty 1983, 579). Márk Záhonyi-Ábel also lists several examples from

of society seems to support the statement of film historians considering films of this era as escapist. Although 77% of the films took place in contemporary times and 91% of them were mainly set in Hungarian locations,[7] these works were not intended to give an authentic representation of contemporary Hungarian society. The focus on love conflicts, the almost complete dominance of happy endings, the ignorance of lower-class or very poor people and their problems all contribute to an idealized image of society at the time.

Occupations of Male and Female Protagonists

The professions associated with the main figures indicate the gender roles associated with men and women in contemporary society, and their comparison to the actual social circumstances reveal the highly conservative point of view of the filmmakers. Analysis of the data about protagonists shows that in contrast to the relatively similar distribution of social and financial positions of male and female figures, the distribution of typical occupations differs considerably.

If we examine the typical occupations of male and female protagonists [Figs. 6–7], we can only find two categories which are characteristic of both groups. The most frequent occupation for both genders is the category of dependent child, which basically marks a way of life without occupation when the young adult, but still unmarried, member of the family has no personal income and is supported by his/her family. This position means that the child is financially dependent on, and also subordinate to an elder member of the family – which is generally the father.[8] This subordinate position is more frequent in the case of female protagonists, where almost one third of them (32%) were dependent children, whereas less than one fifth of the male protagonists (18%) were in an equivalent position. The other common occupation is artist, which seems to represent the very opposite position. Although being an artist did not always mean a source of income (upper-middle-class or middle-class figures often worked as an artist not for a living, but as a vocation),

the decisions of the censorship board, where scenes had to be omitted from a film or the licence of export was refused for films because they showed the problematic phenomena of Hungarian society or would have shed negative light on Hungary abroad (Záhonyi-Ábel 2020, 376–386).

7 For the calculation of these percentages, films where there was no information regarding the time or place of the plot were omitted. From 354 films of the era, there were around 30 films where there was no detailed information available (these are lost or highly deteriorated films).

8 A special characteristic of this era is that children or adolescents hardly appear among dependent children. This category mostly includes young adults or students before graduation, close to adult age. The reason can be the filmmakers' strong interest in love stories ending in marriage, and as such dependent children were interesting as potential partners to be married in the near future.

but it was a kind of symbol of an unconventional way of life which was free of constraints and family obligations. It may be indicative of the level of freedom in the case of men and women that this occupation can only be found within 5% of the female protagonists, but 11% of the male ones.

The second most frequent occupation for female protagonists is housewife or female relative, which can be found within 15% of the heroines – followed by entertainment industry worker (7%), service industry employee (6%), office clerks and secretaries (5%) and the above mentioned artists (5%). On the contrary, in the case of male protagonists the second most frequent occupation is landowner, which has the same incidence as artist (they are both at 11%). These are followed by such classical professions as engineer (9%), soldier or policeman (8% combined), and owner or manager of a factory or a bank (6%). The most frequent occupations associated with male and female protagonists in the films reflect the actual differences between the circumstances and spheres of activities of the two genders. Almost half of the heroines are represented in a passive, dependent position – they are not active, productive members of society and their activities are limited to the household and the family. In contrast to that, only less than one fifth of the male protagonists are dependent, non-active members of society, and the majority of them have a profession which indicates a position of power or provides creative satisfaction. These figures partly correlate with trends in contemporary Hungarian society, as according to the statistics in 1930 less than one third of the female population was employed – with the number of active women up to 40% only in Budapest (Nagy 1994, 159, 164). However, the representation of female occupations could also serve to reinforce traditional concepts of female roles, as during World War I a large number of women started to work and would have liked to remain active after the war years, but conservative forces of the 1920–30s strived to restore earlier conditions and to reserve paying positions for men, against the backdrop of increasing unemployment (Karády 1994, 179).

However, the patterns of occupation represented in film did not follow real life trends in the case of women. Although we only have access to data on female professions in Budapest during this era, those show that the two most frequent forms of employment for women in the capital were those of factory workers and of domestic workers (Gyáni 1983, 26–27), and other occupations such as secretaries and other professions requiring a higher level of education only appeared gradually. Hungarian films of the time hardly represented the two most typical female occupations as only 1.5% of female protagonists were domestic workers, and those of factory workers did not even amount to 1%. Domestic workers often figured in

films as side characters, where they were indispensable elements of middle-class and upper-class households and were supporting figures beside the heroines – mostly serving as a source of humour. But women working in factories were completely ignored by the film industry of the time, even though it was a typical phenomenon of big cities undergoing modernisation to have an increasing number of working women, and this profession provided a relatively safe income and independence for women and it helped their emancipation. Peasant women are also underrepresented in films between 1931 and 1945, where only 3% of the protagonists are agricultural workers; they are rarely represented during work, and in most cases they serve as a symbol of pure, uncorrupted country life and as the love of the hero (e.g. *John, the Hero* [*János vitéz*, Béla Gaál, 1938]; *Doctor István Kovács* [*Dr. Kovács István*, Viktor Bánky, 1941]; *Your Loving Son, Peter*). Another underrepresented profession in film was that of pedagogues – where only four female protagonists had this occupation, despite it being the most frequent profession among educated women at the time (these films are *Help! I'm an Heiress!* [*Segítség, örököltem!*, István Székely, 1937]; *Magda is Expelled* [*Magdát kicsapják*, László Vajda, 1937]; *Princess of the Puszta* [*Pusztai királykisasszony*, Béla Csepreghy; 1938]; *Quicksand* [*Futóhomok*, Alfréd Deésy, 1943]). This profession increased among women in growing numbers, where in the 1930s almost half of the school teachers were women (Kövér and Gyáni 2006, 181–182). This created a special territory of female emancipation as, in contrast to the general expectations of the time, schoolmistresses often continued working after marriage, and sometimes even after having children (Kövér and Gyáni 2006, 182). But the films ignored the problem of the reconciliation of family and work, they rarely depicted their heroines at work, and they suggested that schoolmistresses would abandon their work after getting married at the end of the story.

Therefore we can state that the representation of male and female occupations contributed to the creation of an idealized image of society by overshadowing working and peasant women and expelling domestic workers to second- or third-grade roles in the film plots. The films also helped to reinforce traditional gender roles and restore a patriarchal order that was more accepted before World War I by representing female protagonists often in passive roles in a domestic sphere of activity, and avoiding the representation of occupations which offered the possibility of female emancipation.

The Representation of Male and Female Mobility

The data on the details of the characters within the films provides the opportunity to examine the trajectories of mobility for both the male and female protagonists; as the database registers such changes in character attributes as social and financial ascension and decline, professional success, character development and moral decline, etc. Among these factors, social ascension and decline and financial ascension and decline are the characteristics which contribute to the representation of the social circumstances of the protagonists. We have to note that these concepts of mobility are not wholly aligned to their equivalent sociological terms, rather they describe the narrative attributes of the figures as expressed through their shift in state between the starting and closing points of the plot. Figures 8 and 9 show the prevailing trajectories of male and female protagonists in the films made between 1930 and 1944. In contrast to the typical social and financial positions, it is apparent at first sight that the films express different trajectories for male and female protagonists.

In the case of male protagonists the most common trajectory was financial ascension. We can note in the case of both sexes that the trajectories were more variable between 1931 and 1935 – this is partly due to the low number of films, but also to the experimentation in the first years of the sound era, as films had more varied topics and genres before 1935 than they did later on.[9] The dominant pattern for male heroes was financial ascension, which was characteristic of 16–30% of male protagonists after 1935. Social ascension, however, was present with a much smaller percentage of male protagonists, at only 5–16 % of the heroes. The social and financial decline of men was not a preferred topic in the films of the era as financial decline was only typical of 3–11% of male protagonists, and social decline did not exceed 5 % (with the exception of the year 1944). However, the dominant narrative was where the social and financial position of the male protagonist did not change during the course of the plot, which was evident with almost one third (29%) of the heroes. This means that films depicted a rather rigid society that provided only a limited chance of ascension for men; and where it did occur, it could mostly be realized in terms of financial position only, and not social. Bearing in mind that the majority of protagonists were middle-class figures, this tendency in representation reflected the rigidity of the contemporary Hungarian society, where trajectories of

9 Balogh and Király call the period 1931–36 "the period of the elaboration of Hungarian film style, the formation of the system of genres and stars" (Balogh and Király 2000, 61). Another study describes the experimentation inside the comedy genre before 1934 (Vajdovich 2014, 8–10).

upward mobility were mostly closed for middle-class people.[10] The films consider male positions to be relatively stable, with only a small chance of downward mobility, and even in the case of decline, they consider financial downfall more probable than a social one. Earlier studies demonstrated that this tendency in the representation of male protagonists was idealistic, as social and financial decline was a considerable problem in society at that time, both in the case of middle-class and elite groups (Lakatos 2018, 14–17; Vajdovich 2018, 28).

In the case of female protagonists, the films express a much more favourable trend in mobility as trajectories of both social and financial ascension were more open to them, and their chances of upward mobility seemed to be higher than those of men. Trajectories of financial ascension were typical of 9–39% of female protagonists after 1935, and social ascension of 13–37%. Decline is much less prevalent among female protagonists than among men. It was not even portrayed before 1935, and it remained at a low level throughout the period – where social decline did not exceed 6%, and financial decline did not exceed 7%. However, the proportion of heroines whose status did not change was higher than those of heroes (5% higher during the whole era).

The comparison of the possible trajectories between the two sexes seems to suggest that women had more chances of upward mobility and that their trajectories were more varied: as social ascension was also open to them, in contrast to the circumstances of men. However, the following analysis will show that this impression is false in the sense that a greater chance of mobility did not bring forth greater freedom or range of possibilities for female figures. In the following we will examine what kind of trajectories of upward mobility were represented in the case of female protagonists, and the motives and the narrative patterns that underpinned them.

Narratives of Female Ascension

Gabriella Lakatos examined the narratives of ascension (or as she called them, success narratives) in films between 1931 and 1944 and she arrived at the conclusion that, taking into account both the protagonists and the important side characters, stories of ascension are present in 52% of the works (Lakatos 2018, 12). In contrast to that, narratives of social or financial decline are present in less than one fifth of the films, so it can be concluded that narratives of ascension make up one of the dominant topics in the era. Lakatos investigated the origins of ascension in comedies, and she

10 According to Ignác Romsics, trajectories of upward mobility were mostly open for workers or peasants and merchants or craftsmen. But it was rather difficult for representatives of the lower-middle class to get access to the circles of upper-middle class, and it was practically impossible to enter the elite circle of great land owners and rich bourgeois (Romsics 2010, 134–135).

stated that the rise in social or financial status is due to the talent or competence of the figure in only a small number of cases – whereas it is more typical that protagonists can rise as a result of favourable marriage, legacy, the help of relatives, some kind of disguise, or sheer luck. The most frequent reason for ascension in comedies is through good marriage (Lakatos 2018, 13), and the following analysis shows that this factor is even more dominant in the case of female protagonists.

A closer study of comedies featuring female ascension reveals that possibilities and spheres of ascension for heroines are very limited and are unvaried in type. The social or financial rise of the female protagonist appears in 70 comedies and concerns 72 heroines: which means 20% of the films and 18.5% of the female protagonists, therefore, it covers a rather expansive corpus. The most apparent characteristic of these comedies is that female protagonists are always present as part of a couple, sided by a male protagonist. This reveals the importance of the love motif, but also implies that female ascension is rarely independent from the presence of men. In fact, all these comedies close with a happy ending and 97% of them with a marriage – or the high probability of a marriage (in the remaining two films, the partners were married since the beginning of the film). These factors show that female ascension has a very limited scope, and in comedies it can never be realized outside marriage.

The majority of cases of female ascension in comedies concern middle-class protagonists. Upper- or upper-middle-class heroines only experience a raise in their status in eight films, and in half of them the typical narrative depicts a rich upper-middle-class or a very rich bourgeois girl marrying a nobleman or high aristocrat, where their marriage facilitates the union of wealth and hereditary titles. The stories of impoverished upper- or upper-middle-class girls create interesting examples among these films because they express narratives of female emancipation. The heroine of the *Old Villain* (*A vén gazember*, Heinz Hille, 1932) is the daughter of a bankrupt baron who is in love with the grandson of their steward, an army officer of lower-class origin. She refuses her family's request to marry a rich aristocrat and revolts against social expectations and etiquette in different ways, preferring the company of lower-class people to the traditional circles she moves in. At the end of the film she inherits great wealth from the steward, who stole it from her extravagant father, in order to save it for her. And in possession of valuable properties of her own, she is able to marry the partner she wishes to. This film does not only criticize the way of life of aristocrats, but provides an opportunity of autonomy for the young female character – which was rare in the films of this era. In two other films, *Heart for Heart* (*Egy lány elindul*, István Székely, 1937) and *Keep On Smoking, Ladányi!* (*Te csak pipálj, Ladányi*; Márton Keleti, 1938) the daughter of the impoverished upper- or

upper-middle-class family revolts against family expectations for her to stay at home in passivity, and instead starts a business and helps her family gain back its earlier financial status. These films underscore female talent, capabilities and hard work: in contrast to the incompetence of the male members of the family. And although the films show that the businesses are built with the help of other members of the family, the fundamental professionalism stems from the young adult girl who is clashing with the social expectations of the time. And once these girls have restored the financial stability of the family, they can then choose their love partner in accordance with their own wishes. Both films also suggest that the heroine will not give up her job after marriage. However, it must be noted that these films provide exceptions to the general trend of representation among the films of this period.

In three quarters of the cases of female ascension, the heroine is a middle-class woman with an average or a bad financial status. In almost half of these stories of ascension, social and financial rise are both realized, and the most typical way of ascent is through good marriage. The most popular storyline of the comedies of the era is a love story where a young middle-class woman meets a rich man of a higher social level, and following several complications she ends up marrying him (István Nemeskürty calls this "the Car of Dreams story," as it was popularized by the film *Car of Dreams* [*Meseautó*, Béla Gaál, 1934], one of the biggest successes of the era) (Nemeskürty 1965, 118–124). This narrative pattern is present throughout the era, but is more dominant among female success stories between 1934 and 1938 than later. Typical examples of this storyline are the *Car of Dreams*, *The New Relative* (*Az új rokon*, Béla Gaál, 1934), *Keep Smiling!* (*Barátságos arcot kérek!*, László Kardos, 1935), *Address Unknown* (*Címzett ismeretlen*, Béla Gaál, 1935), *The Homely Girl* (*A csúnya lány*, Béla Gaál, 1935), *Lady Seeks a Room* (*Úrilány szobát keres*, Béla Balogh, 1937), *Affair of Honour* (*Lovagias ügy*, István Székely, 1937), *Friday Rose* (*Péntek Rézi*, László Vajda, 1938), *The Last Wereczkey* (*Az utolsó Wereczkey*, Sándor Szlatinay, 1939), and *One Bad Egg* (*Jómadár*, Ákos Ráthonyi, 1943). This type of comedy suggests that a rise in financial or social status is only realizable for women in the society of the time through good marriage. The importance of financial stability is strongly emphasized in these stories, it being presented as the desired, ideal state of life for middle-class couples. Therefore, in those works where the male partner is not wealthier than the heroine, the couple must come into the possession of money in some way. In certain stories, one of the partners inherits land or property from some distant family member (e.g. in *Help! I'm an Heiress!*, and *Dream Waltz* [*Álomkeringő*, Félix Podmaniczky, 1942]), in which cases financial ascension is not due to the marriage, but takes place simultaneously with it. In some films the female

protagonist comes into the possession of some money (e.g. *Borrowed Husbands* [*Kölcsönkért férjek*, Viktor Bánky, 1941] or *Kádár vs. Kerekes* [*Kádár kontra Kerekes*, Ákos Ráthonyi, 1941]), while in a few films the male protagonist gets into better financial status due to some lucky turn (e.g. *Bachelor Flat to Let* [*Garszonlakás kiadó*, Béla Balogh, 1939] or *Left-Handed Angel* [*Balkezes angyal*, Ákos Ráthonyi, 1940]). A common element of the different variations of comedy is that financial stability is a prerequisite to marriage – therefore either the male hero has to be rich, or the couple has to get into a better financial position prior to their wedding. In *Bachelor Flat to Let* this problem is verbalized when the heroine (a poor beautician) tries to convince her fiancé (a newly graduated doctor) to get married in spite of their poverty, but he is not willing to do so until he earns enough for both of them. The conflict between financial ascension and social decline is presented in only one film, *The Sun Shines* (*Süt a nap*, László Kalmár, 1938), where the middle-class heroine (the daughter of a village priest) gets married to a wealthier, but lower-class peasant after a lot of contemplation on the part of the family, who are reluctant to accept her social decline as the price for her future financial stability.

Stories of lower-class female protagonists present similar narrative patterns, with the small difference that for women of these social circles marriage with a middle-class man is considered a lucky turn. Consequently, in *The Friend of the Minister* (*A miniszter barátja*, Viktor Bánky, 1939) the poor manicurist is happy to marry the man she thought to be an upper-class figure, even when she realizes that he is only an engineer; in *Friday Rose* the penniless orphan girl wants to marry the school doctor even if he earns poorly; and in *African Fiancé* (*Afrikai vőlegény*, István Balogh, 1944) marrying a petroleum engineer means considerable ascension for the poor employee of a beauty salon.

As a conclusion, we can state that narratives of female ascension in Hungarian comedies between 1931 and 1944 present good marriage as the fundamental mode of ascension. Good marriage primarily equates to the notion of financial stability, such that the man can be considered to be a good match where he can bear sufficient income for his wife and his future family, but it is even better if marriage helps the female partner also to ascend in social hierarchy. Only rich girls (generally heiresses of wealthy upper-middle-class families) can afford to ignore the financial aspect, but in those cases the family expects the heroine to use her wealth to enter the upper class by marriage. However, these films tend to present the narrative primarily as a love story, with financial considerations being secondary in the plot, where the poorer or lower-class female partner accidentally happens to fall in love with a male partner who is wealthier and/or in a higher social position than her.

Narratives of female ascension of the era overshadow the professional success and career of women. In the films where the female protagonist has a good business idea, the success narrative is presented in a way that she cannot realize it on her own: she has a male partner in the business or her family, who takes part in the realization (e.g. *Heart for Heart* or *Keep On Smoking, Ladányi!*). In those cases where the female protagonist had a successful career prior to marriage, she has to renounce it after the wedding. Most of these stories present women working in the entertainment industry: actresses or singers who are able, or would be able to sustain themselves and be independent, emancipated women. But the love narratives position marriage over career, so these heroines opt equally for marriage either if they are well-earning artists at the peak of their career (e.g. *The Wise Mother* [*Az okos mama*, Emil Martonffy, 1935], *Three Spinsters* [*Három sárkány*, László Vajda, 1936], *Old Waltz* [*Régi keringő*, Viktor Bánky, 1941]), or if they have gained their first success and have the potential to become independent, self-sustaining women (e.g. *The New Relative*, *Barbara in America* [*Borcsa Amerikában*, Márton Keleti, 1938]). Unique examples are provided by *The Last Wereczkey*, where the heroine is the manager of a transport company and has a key role in the proper functioning of the company, and *Leave It To Zsuzsi* (*Mai lányok*, Béla Gaál, 1937), where the female protagonist learns to become a joiner and interior designer, and opens a furniture and decor store with her friends. In both these cases the female protagonist is presented as a successful business woman, but at the end of the story she chooses marriage, leaving her successful professional career behind without hesitation. And although her future husband will be able to sustain their family, she renounces the independence that is assured by her personal income.

Female initiative and creative problem solving can only operate effectively in one area in the films: that of the activities of finding one's match. Although the ideal woman of the era is supposed to be modest, shy and be passively waiting for the initiative of men, in half of the narratives of female ascension the female protagonist actively contributes to the formation or fulfilment of the love story. In certain films the heroine takes the initiative, and pretending to be a modest and conservative girl applies different strategies to entangle the potential husband-to-be (like in the story of *Thanks for Knocking* [*Köszönöm, hogy elgázolt*, Emil Martonffy, 1935], *You Will Be My Husband!* [*Maga lesz a férjem*, Béla Gaál, 1937], or *Leave It To Zsuzsi*). In other cases the female protagonist makes her partner jealous to compel him to confess his feelings and propose to her without delay (e.g. in *The New Relative*, *Little Mary* [*Marika*, Viktor Gertler, 1937], or *Sweet Opponent* [*Édes ellenfél*, Emil Martonffy, 1941]). In a few works the female protagonist fights for her

legacy (*The Last Wereczkey*, *Borrowed Husbands*) or helps the male protagonist into a position of good income (*The Chequered Coat* [*Pepita kabát*, Emil Martonffy, 1940], or *Heart for Heart*) thus establishing the financial stability necessary for their wedding. These narratives suggest that women should utilize their talent and capacity not in the arena of work, but for seduction (so as to entice or advance a marriage proposal) or for creating situations where the financial conditions of the wedding can be ensured.

As a conclusion we can state that narratives of female ascension presented in comedies mostly enact the rise in social and/or financial position of middle-class women, who in several cases are in a bad or not very favourable financial situation. In contrast to the actual descriptions of social conditions of the time, we can conclude that the films created an idealized image of society as the stories suggested that social and financial rise is possible, while in real life these trajectories were generally closed for middle-class people. The pessimistic perspective in the films is expressed by the implication that women have more chance to rise than men, and they present marriage as the primary form of ascension, overshadowing professional success, talent or hard work. At the same time these cinematic narratives reinforced the traditional state of things, suggesting that women should not pursue a professional career after marriage, even if they are successful in their profession.

Female Narratives Told by Men

These conservative narratives prioritizing marriage always present an idealized image of such relationships. While in society at the time partners were selected and marriages occurred based on practical and financial considerations (with such considerations taking form in several films of the era), the films underscored the myth of love marriage that was predominant in popular culture. Although narratives of female ascension always present stories ending in a marriage to be beneficial for the female protagonist from a social and/or a financial point of view, they are primarily presented as the fulfilment of a love story – where these other gains are subsidiary advantages. The priority of (good) marriage is especially apparent in stories where there is a big age difference between the two partners (e.g. *Iron Man* [*Márciusi mese*, Emil Martonffy, 1934], *Friday Rose*, *Biting Husband* [*A harapós férj*, Márton Keleti, 1937], *Orient Express* [*Orient Express*, László Cserépy, 1943]) or where the male partner to be conquered is unpleasant and unattractive at the beginning (*Help! I'm an Heiress!*, *Biting Husband*, *There are Exceptions* [*Tisztelet a kivételnek*, Ákos Ráthonyi, 1936], *Sweet Opponent*). It can even happen that the

female protagonist eventually marries another man that she wished for, if the new partner is wealthier or higher in position. In *Iron Man* the female protagonist pays a visit to the uncle of her love to convince him to give permission for their marriage, then ends up marrying the uncle, who is considerably wealthier and in a higher social position than the original fiancé, but also about twenty years older. *There is No Accident* (*Nincsenek véletlenek*, László Kalmár, 1938) presents an even more unusual love story about a newly married bride who spends her wedding night searching for a ring in order to convince her husband of her fidelity. During her search she meets a playful, kind young man (who happens to be rich and upper class), and by the morning she lets her new husband divorce her and accepts the marriage proposal of the other man that she met only a few hours earlier.

All comedies of this era celebrate the happy union of lovers, and most of them, especially narratives of female ascension, present these stories as the fulfilment of female desires. The emphasis on the supposed desires of women is particularly strong, as half of the narratives of female ascension have a female focus: they present the story from the female protagonist's point of view, and show the events of her life and her emotional changes – such that viewers identify with her. One quarter of these narratives operate with a double focus (alternating between the male and the female protagonist's point of view), and only one quarter of them express these trajectories through male eyes. As a result, a large proportion of the comedies of the era presented these conservative male-female relationships of patriarchal order as a reflection of the female psyche, and thereby repressed notions of female strivings for independence or emancipation.

As we examine this question we should not forget that popular myths of the time were created and presented mostly by men, and in the film industry they were almost exclusively created and presented by men. Out of the 354 Hungarian feature films made between 1931 and 1944 only two films were directed by women (*Cobweb* [*Pókháló*, Mária Balázs, 1936] and *Light and Shadow* [*Fény és árnyék*, Klára Tüdős, 1943]). Almost half of the scripts of the era were adapted from a contemporary or classical literary work: out of which only nine were adaptations of works by female authors. Other areas of culture were also dominated by men: for example according to statistics from 1930 only 3–4% of journalists were women, and only 8% of the authors enlisted in the encyclopedia of Hungarian writers were female (Papp and Sipos 2017, 65). This resulted in the depiction of women being dominated by male authors, and discourses at the time about the role of women were guided and controlled by men. Papp and Sipos cites different opinions about the role of women in society of the time, most of which idealized traditional female roles (Papp and

Sipos 2017, 66–68). Typical views considered the vocation of a woman as being a wife and mother (Papp and Sipos 2017, 66), others declared that women would be unhappy if they could not join and serve a partner (Papp and Sipos 2017, 67). At the same time some of the encyclopaedias already mentioned feminists striving for emancipation (Papp and Sipos 2017, 69–71).

In reality, female emancipation tendencies appeared in several different areas of society at the time. The number of working women showed continuous growth (Nagy 1994, 158–162), just like the numbers of women who remained active in their profession after their wedding. Widows were present on the labour market even before the 1930s, but during this era more and more divorced women also started to work (Nagy 1994, 162–163). The economic segregation of men and women decreased, therefore an increasing number of women took positions in professions previously reserved for men (Nagy 1994, 164). Although both the proportion of educated women and the level of women's education were considerably lower than that of men during this era, more and more fields of higher education opened to female students (first teacher training, then humanities and medical universities, later engineering, and finally, at the end of the era, faculties of law) (Karády 1994, 185). Women suffered from disadvantages both in education and on the labour market (Nagy 1994, 164), which generated frustration among them and led them to strive for emancipation. At the same time large numbers of female workers who replaced the male workforce during World War I did not intend to give up their positions, and wished to remain active. But the rate of unemployment increased, and conservative groups favoured men in working positions, as they were perceived as the breadwinners of families. Therefore popular myths praising traditional male and female roles were not only supported by conservative Christian ideologies, but also by the prevailing economic necessities. These myths presented marriage as the absolute aim of female protagonists in the films and tried to convince female viewers to return to traditional female roles, to renounce work, and to accept the role of housewife.

Films of the era represented working women, but the representation of independent, self-sustaining women, mostly in upper positions in companies, is rarely completely positive. Women in leading positions tend to be depicted as incompetent, ridiculous figures or bad managers. The most typical example of this type is the leading figure of *Miss President* (*Elnökkisasszony*, Marton Endre, 1935) who inherits a big textile factory from her father, but she behaves childishly and is absolutely incompetent as a manager, so she must quickly get married so that the company can have a male president. The female protagonist of *The 2000 Pengoes Man* (*Kétezer pengős férfi*, László Cserépy, 1942) dresses in a manly way and directs the family company in

a very strict manner – to prove herself as a president of the chemical factory; and the heroine of *Hotel Sunrise* (*Hotel Kikelet*, Béla Gaál, 1937) can only run her hotel successfully at the risk of ending her marriage, and eventually she has to relinquish the manager's position to her husband to save their marriage.

Women who are successful in their career are not taken seriously. The heroine of *Seven Plum Trees* (*Hétszilvafa*, Félix Podmaniczky, 1940) is a good manager of her father's factory and land, but everybody considers her as a young girl to whom they can marry; while the female protagonist in *This Happened in Budapest* (*Ez történt Budapesten*, Ákos D. Hamza, 1944) is a successful lawyer, whom we only see in traditional female roles such as organizing a dinner, receiving guests, taking care of a child, and enticing the male lead etc. Therefore if films included emancipated, independent women, these figures were mostly represented as incompetent or foolish, or the importance and success of their work was minimized.

The above examined cases of female ascension all belong to the group of comedies, therefore the happy ending – the union of the male and female protagonist at the end of the story – partly exists to fulfil the audience's expectations of the genre, which is partly an influence of Western models of film comedy. Genre specificities of romantic comedies expect the representation of the birth and development of the love relationship, and the union of the couple in the end, which in this era was equivalent to marriage. Melodramas often represented male-female relationships after the wedding, thus creating the opportunity to represent problems of marriage. But according to Attila Benke, they often ended with the restitution of traditional patriarchal order (Benke 2013). Stories of female ascension in melodramas mostly end in marriage, so even if they represent the problems of love relationships, or the tragic side of love, they also enforce the value and position of marriage (except for a few cases when one of the partners dies). Therefore, narratives of female ascension of this era, even if they include an independent, emancipated female protagonist, both in comedies and melodramas, envision female ascension via marriage or through some events linked to or happening parallel to the heroine's wedding, and do not consider professional success as a possible trajectory of ascension for women.

Conclusion

Our examination of Hungarian feature films produced between 1931 and 1944, based on the database of films of the era, has shed light on certain aspects of the representation of female protagonists. It showed that a dominant proportion of female protagonists were of middle-class origin and in average or bad financial circumstances – reflecting the unfavourable social and economic trends having a negative effect on this social strata. Almost half of the heroines were portrayed as inactive women, who, lacking a personal income, were financially dependent on and subordinated to male members of their family. Even if Hungarian society of the time was rather rigid, films suggested that trajectories of social and financial ascension are more open for women than men, although they positioned marriage as the primary mode of ascension. Considering the fact that the majority of the filmmakers and the public also belonged to the middle class, we can suppose that the narratives of female ascension, which mostly took form in comedies, reflected the desire of middle-class people to transgress those social and financial boundaries which were generally closed for them. At the same time narratives of female ascension reinforced traditional views on the role of women in society, denying their success in business and work, emphasizing the primary importance of marriage, and suggesting that a professional career cannot be reconciled with the vocation of being a married woman and a mother. This trend in representation ignored those phenomena in society that opened up the way for female emancipation in education, in work or in wedded life. Therefore, films of the era strengthened the patriarchal order that was prevalent in society and conveyed a rather conservative image of Hungarian society at the time.

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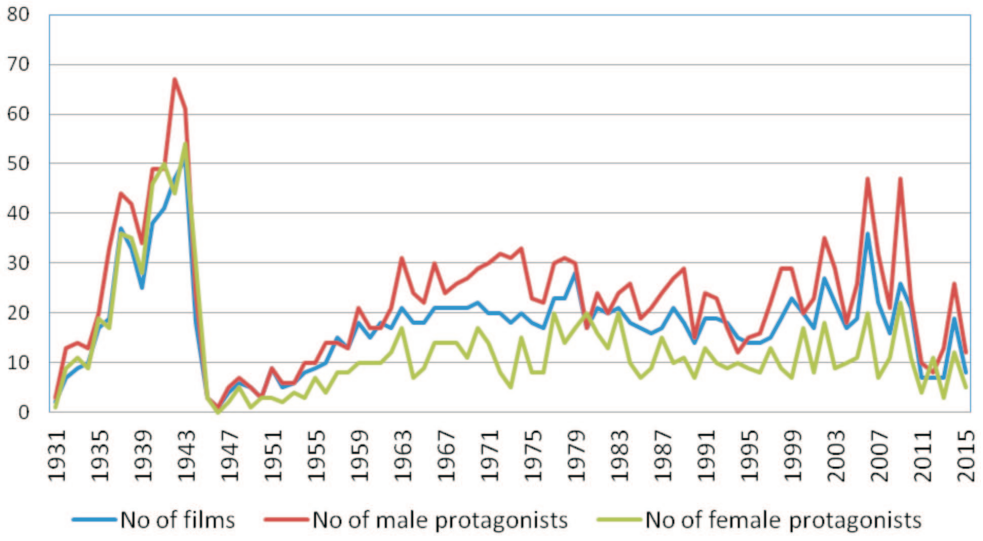

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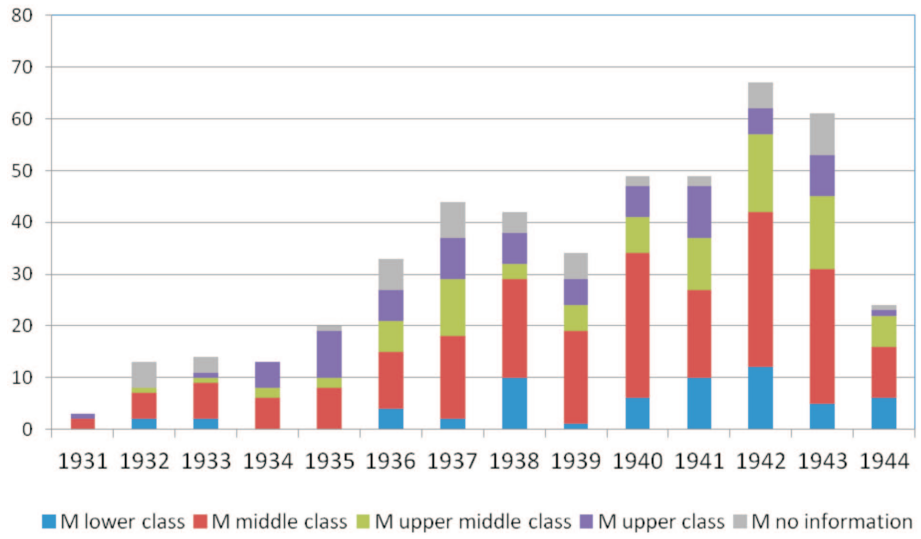

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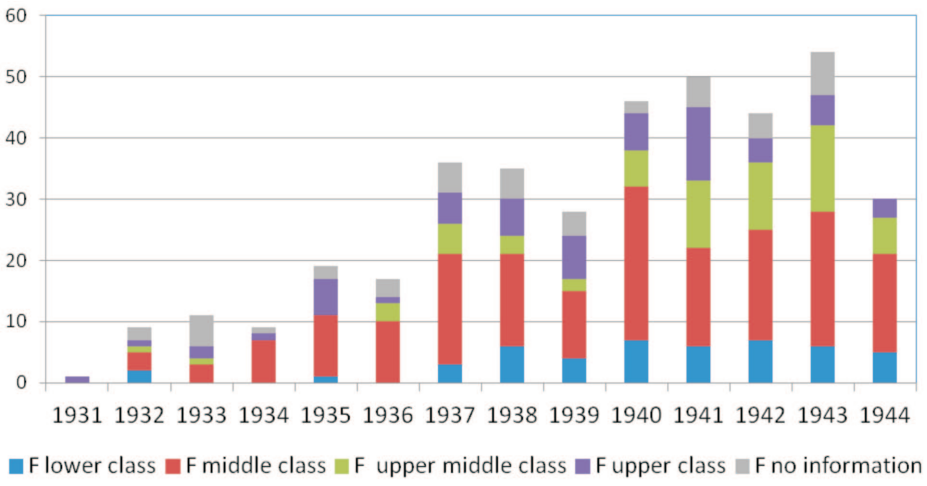

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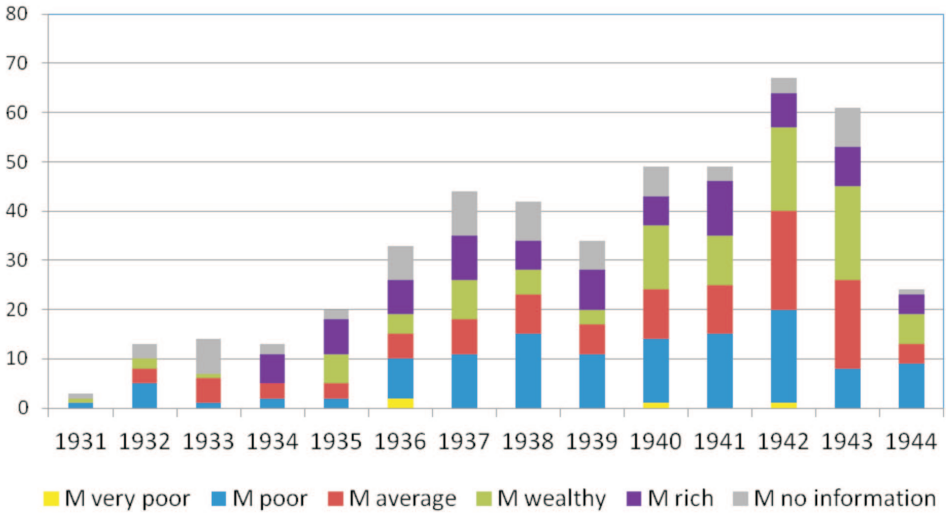

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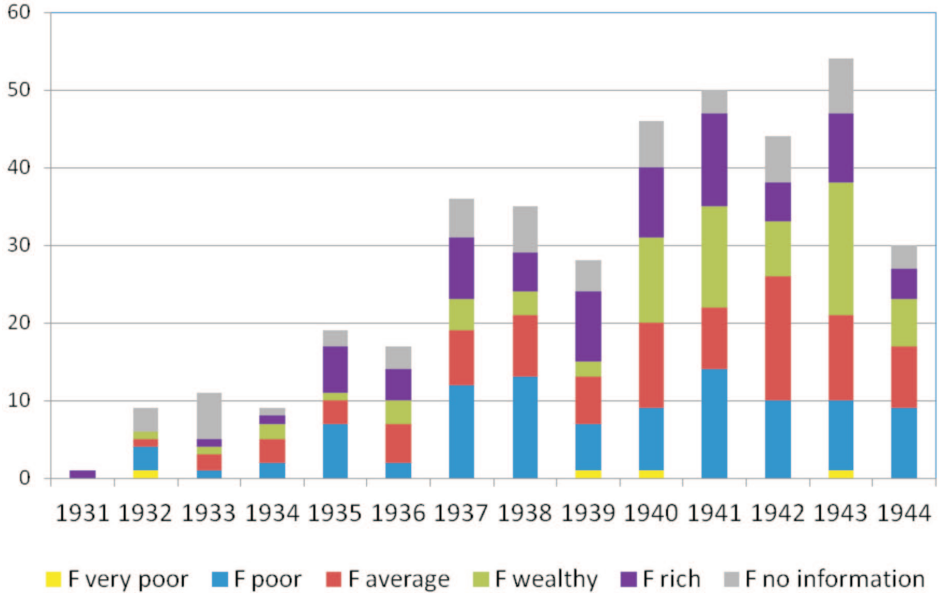

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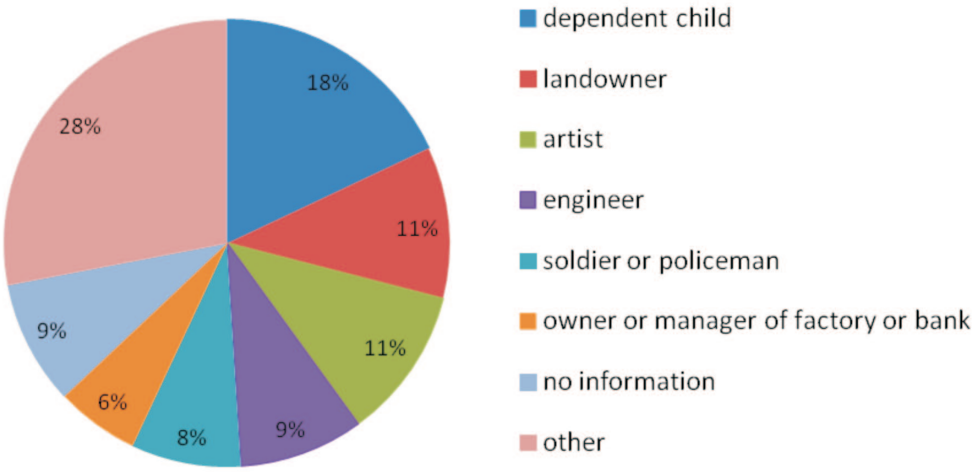

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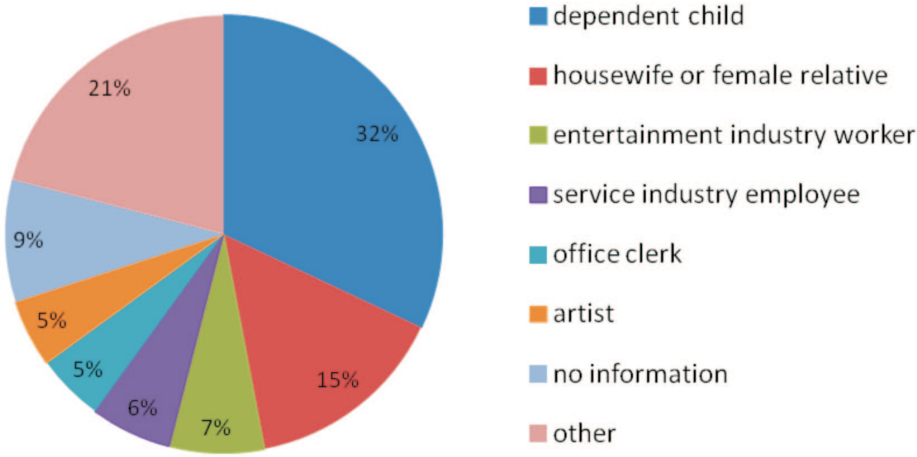

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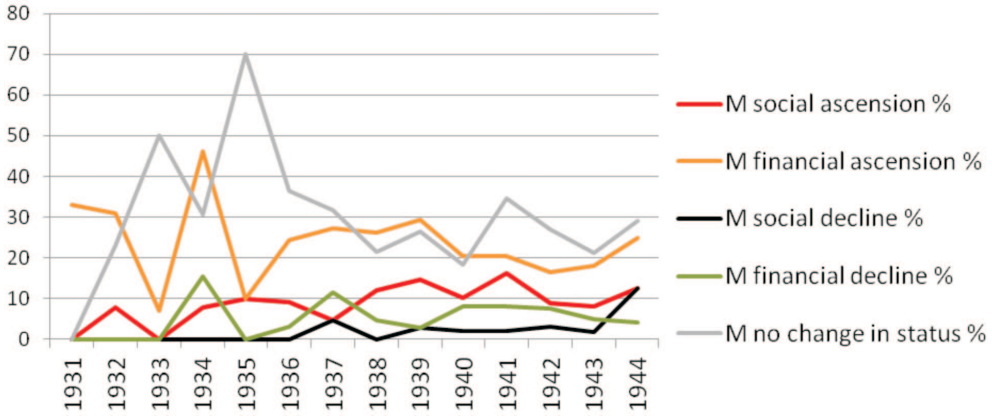

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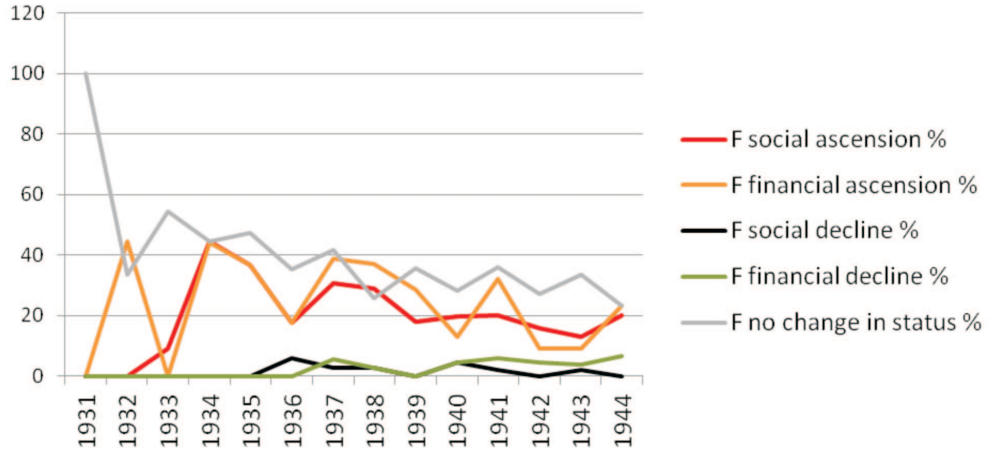

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Up the Slope. Women's Mobility Stories in Post-Transition Hungarian Cinema

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Abstract. Using data and statistics obtained in the research project *The Social History of Hungarian Cinema (1931–2015)*, this study investigates the upward and downward mobility movements of women in the Hungarian films made after the regime change. The political transition following the collapse of communism radically altered the economic and social structure of Hungarian society. The social experiences of losses and failures, as well as the closing social structure are reflected directly and explicitly in many Hungarian films made between 1990 and 2015. With the help of Bernard Weiner's social attribution theory for describing failure and success, the article analyses the narratives of these films in terms of the extent to which and the proportion that they are attributed to inner, individual dispositions or external circumstances. Based on this approach, the author states that female heroines in these movies appear to move "up the slope," as they are pulled down not only by the gravitational force of economic and social crises, but also by the lack of emancipation and gender equality.[1]

Keywords: Hungarian cinema, change of regime, social mobility, female protagonists, statistical data analysis.

The end of the communist era did not bring revolutionary changes to the visibility of women in Hungarian cinema, although the emerging new directors and the changed quality of female presence enriched the overall picture with new details. One of the rarely analysed effects of the reorganization of Hungarian film industry after the 1989–1990 regime change was that many more women appeared among filmmakers. Even though their proportion is still very low, over the past thirty years female directors have been involved in many more genre films than before – in addition to the traditionally cultivated auteur films.[2] Although their increased

1 This work was supported by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office (number of Agreement: 116708).

2 The number of female feature film directors has doubled in the post-transition period, partly due to the earlier, but still active generation of directors (Márta Mészáros, Lívia Gyarmathy, Judit

presence has not influenced the number and frequency of female protagonists compared to previous decades,[3] some qualitative changes have become more pronounced – for example, in the more prominent female perspective and the trend of multi-protagonist films,[4] while the majority of contemporary Hungarian films still continue to neglect women's point of view, their problems and difficulties, and their successes and achievements.

Working with data obtained in our research project *The Social History of Hungarian Cinema (1931–2015)*, in this study I examine the social positions and opportunities associated with women in Hungarian films made between 1990 and 2015. In particular, I will focus on women's mobility stories, the rise or fall of women from different social and financial backgrounds, and the way these successes and failures are presented in relation to individual abilities and external circumstances. I assume that the examination of female social mobility sheds a light both on how women are imagined and portrayed in post-transition cinema, and in a more general sense, on the way Hungarian films depict Hungarian society, the overview they offer on the emerging obstacles and opportunities after the change of regime.[5]

In general, it can be stated that contemporary Hungarian film does not idealize regime change, rather it openly reflects on some of the on-going, post-transition social processes – even if this reflection is sometimes highly selective. The deeply rooted tradition of Hungarian auteur film from the 1970s and 1980s to portray downward social and financial movements still persists, although from the 1990s, genre films catch up with the trend of presenting social difficulties (but predominantly

Elek, Ildikó Szabó, Ildikó Enyedi, Krisztina Deák), and the emerging young filmmakers (Ágnes Incze, Ágnes Kocsis, Diána Groó, Krisztina Goda, Anna Faur, Réka Almási, Júlia Szederkényi, Sára Cserhalmi, Virág Zomborácz, Lili Horváth, and most recently Orsi Nagypál and Zsófia Szilágyi). However, the twenty-five female directors still shot only 10% of post-transition feature films. (For more details see Margitházi 2019, 16.)

3 The average number of 0.6 female protagonists per film was higher only between 1931 and 1945 (0.8, meaning 341 heroines in 396 films). Between 1990 and 2015 there were 274 female protagonists in 448 films; 322 in 514 films between 1964–1989; and 109 in 182 films between 1946–1963.

4 See for example the films of Kocsis, Incze, Enyedi, Goda, Lili Horváth and Zsófia Szilágyi prefer nuanced female characters and perspectives, or the emergence of multi-protagonist films featuring a group of women (friends, relatives or colleagues) as main characters like in *Bitches* (*Csajok*, Ildikó Szabó, 1995), *Espresso* (*Presszó*, Tamás Sas, 1997), *Just Sex and Nothing Else* (*Csak szex és más semmi*, Krisztina Goda, 2005), *Girls* (*Lányok*, Anna Faur, 2007), *Espresso – 10 years later* (*Presszó 10 év múlva*, Tamás Sas, 2009), *Lull* (*Szélcsend*, Tamás Sas, 2009), *Singles' Night* (*Szinglik éjszakája*, Tamás Sas, 2010), *My Wife, My Woman, My Girl* (*Nejem, nőm, csajom*, Péter Szajki, 2012), *Swing* (Csaba Fazekas, 2014), *Free Entry* (Yvonne Kerékgyártó, 2014), etc.

5 In our research we addressed both aspects: about the social image of post-transition films see for example Varga 2016, and about the image of women in Hungarian feature films see Vajdovich 2016 and Margitházi 2019.

tell social and financial success stories). Compared to male heroes, our research finds that after the regime change female protagonists have become more active indicators of social transformations. Social decline and financial success are two types of alterations that are especially often associated with women, although these never appear together. In this article I will argue that Hungarian films paint a pessimistic picture of post-transitional social changes through female protagonists, emphasizing social difficulties and hopelessness in stories of decline, and revealing the lack of emancipation in stories of success – which often represent women as being dependent on men. Using Bernard Weiner's social attribution theory for describing failure and success (Weiner 2012), I will analyse the nature of these changes in terms of the extent to which and the proportion that they are attributed to inner, individual dispositions or external circumstances.

The situation of women can thus be studied in the context of the 1989–1990 regime change, which despite its diverse and contradictory impacts, can be considered a turning point triggering economic, political and social transformation. In the followings I will briefly summarize the impact of Hungarian regime change on social mobility, and review the portrayal of women in the context of their class and financial status, to finally address the particularities of women's mobility stories through brief plot analyses and comparison of situations, conflicts, causes and motivations.

Regime Change and Social Mobility

The peaceful transition from (state) socialism to capitalism in the entire Eastern European region came at a much higher social and economic price than imagined. In Hungary, the inherited difficulties of the strongly centralized planned economy of the Kádár era were accompanied by the jolt of Eastern European regime changes coinciding with the acceleration of globalization mechanisms. Thus, the Hungarian society transitioning to a market economy faced several challenges for which it was not prepared; as a result of these, the first crisis in the 1990s was quite predictable.

While the essence of political transitions (from party-based dictatorship to parliamentary democracy) and market transformations (from planned economy to market economy) can be clearly and accurately described, social changes show a much more complicated overall picture (Valuch 2015, 21). The post-communist society has become significantly more stratified than before; as a result of the changes in regionality, income, education, occupation, and participation in the private economy, a highly polarized, fragmented and markedly disintegrating

society has emerged, which stood in sharp contrast with the imagined "balanced, modern society capable of creating and maintaining the long-awaited, desired well-being" (Valuch 2015, 15).

Social mobility, in the original sociological sense, refers to the various changes in status whereby individuals and families move between social classes and strata (Andorka 2006, 233). Mobility opportunities reflect the dynamics of social structure, provide insights into the chances of social openness, the opportunities of advancement, and the possibilities of retaining acquired positions in a given age and political system, and thus are comparable to data from previous eras (Bukodi 2002, 193). This makes visible what social movements the respective system allows, how it changes the stratification and to what extent it provides similar leeway for those belonging to different groups; in other words how open and closed the social structure is. Modern mobility research defines mobility not only as a change in class and property status, but in several other categories, like occupation, income, education, place of residence, lifestyle, esteem and prestige (Andorka 2006, 233). In addition to vertical movement in the social hierarchy, mobility can also be horizontal (e.g. change of occupation within the same property and class situation), and it can also stagnate if the status of the participants shows permanence. In addition to intragenerational changes (achieved in a person's lifetime), sociologists examine intergenerational mobility in large samples, comparing statistics from fathers and sons; they also distinguish between objective and subjective mobilization, which refers to real and perceived status change, and the degree of satisfaction with it.[6] The mobility study may also shed light on gender differences in mobility opportunities, highly affected for example by family formation.[7]

After the change of regime, the stratification of Hungarian society, and the size and composition of the individual groups began to change gradually, partly following the processes that started in the last decade of the Kádár era. The political transition between 1990 and 1995 was accompanied by a painful transformation of market conditions, a slowing economic development and a sudden increase of unemployment, which affected many. As usual at the beginning of a new era, the structure of society became more open and mobility increased (Róbert and Bukodi 2004, 287–288). Hungarian society became more heterogeneous, the elite transformed, the middle class became smaller and the lower middle class increased

6 On the subjective mobility in relation to Hungarian regime change see Róbert 1999, or recently Huszár and Záhonyi 2018.

7 See, for example, differences in education, employment and career development, or the case of marital mobility, which refers to changes in the social situation of people of different backgrounds through marriage (Andorka 2006, 234).

(Valuch 2015, 99), while the proletarian, marginalized urban and rural people formed an increasingly significant part of the Hungarian society of the 1990s – that is, most of the mobility movements were downward (Róbert and Bukodi 2004, 292).

The period between 1996 and 2002 brought about a consolidation of the rearrangements. By the turn of the millennium it became clear that the change of regime meant an ascent for some and a descent for others; social groups and mobility opportunities had become more closed by this time, as "entry and exit required more and more effort" (Valuch 2015, 99). The vertical mobility of men had slowed or even reversed, but that of women had also deteriorated (Németh 2006, 23), if not to the same extent as that of men (Róbert and Bukodi 2004, 311). At the beginning of the 2000s, European integration and temporary economic consolidation were followed by a crisis (2008). As a result, the embourgeoisement process of the formation of a stronger middle class did not materialize for the 2010s as it was expected. Drastic differences have developed between metropolitan, small-town and rural groups, and due to their weight and proportion, the lower social strata has become more and more dominant.[8] In the wake of the processes that started with the change of regime, by the 2010s "mobility opportunities have become largely one-way: it has become easy to move down one layer, but virtually impossible to step back or move to a higher social status" (Valuch 2015, 123).

Women, Protagonists, Data

Socially relevant statistics of feature films offer new perspectives in studying women's portrayal, but also raise a series of methodological questions. Based on the analysis of narratives and characters, previous literature on female figures of Hungarian films either undertook a more comprehensive, historical, sociological examination of certain films of a period (Szilágyi 1983; Szilágyi 1985; Varga and Kresalek 1995; Gyarmati 2004; Schadt 2012), or critically analysed some films according to a given paradigm of cultural theory (Hollós 2000; Havas 2010; Havas 2011; Király 2018). This was occasionally complemented by the context of production as well as the perspective of female creators (Hock 2007; Hock 2010; Virginás et al. 2018), while neither approach used statistics or systematically collected big data about films.

One of the key features of the data on women explored in our research was the quantity and frequency of female protagonists. In relation to the gender of protagonists

8 Tibor Valuch is quoting here the data of the social structure also referred to as the "pear," published in the summary of the survey *Osztálylétszám 2014 [Class Headcount 2014]* conducted by MTA TK and the GfK Market Research Institute (Valuch 2015, 123).

and the number of films, it can be clearly seen that the number of male protagonists always exceeds the number of films in any given year, whereas the number of female protagonists is typically below that (see Figure 1 in Vajdovich's article in this issue, vol. 18 of *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae*, *Film and Media Studies*) – which means that most Hungarian films have fewer female protagonists than male ones, or none at all.[9] This trend shows somewhat varying proportions from era to era, but has been moving along similar parameters since the late 1940s. After the regime change, the number of male protagonists and the number of films sometimes align, the number of men sometimes even falls below the number of films (see 1994), while that of female protagonists, with one exception (2012), falls short of both.[10]

Of course, besides the quantity of protagonists, the quality of their presence may also vary. Even if female protagonists appear, the way in which they are presented will be dependent on the storytelling techniques – in terms of whether the perspective or opinion of the woman really counts, whether her character is nuanced, whether her thoughts and feelings are revealed, and whether her real problems are given space. In genres dealing with love ties (e.g. melodrama, romantic comedy), it is particularly common for both members of the couple to appear as protagonists due to the action-shaping significance of the heterosexual relationship, yet the narration adjusts its point of view to the male protagonist.[11] This also affects the mobility stories discussed here: women sometimes appear on the side of men as associated protagonists, in that they only have a secondary role in the narrative (like e.g. in *Noah's Ark* [*Noé bárkája*, Pál Sándor, 2007], *Feri and Sweet Life* [*Feri és az édes élet*, György Czabán, 2001], *Bakkerman* [András Szőke, 2008]), while in several other cases they appear as absolute protagonists (e.g. *The Rapture of Deceit* [*A csalás*

9 The 1509 films in the database feature a total of 4452 male and 2573 female characters, of which 43% and 44% are protagonists (1946 men and 1101 women), respectively. This proportion seems to be valid not only for Hungarian films. Janet Thumim, for example, found similar relations when examining female protagonists in British popular films: the ratio of male and female protagonists in the most popular and profitable movies of the forties, fifties and sixties is 2:1, but there appeared also more men than women in the supporting roles, or in the streets and other mass scenes (Thumim 1992, 86–88).

10 For a brief overview of the proportions of female and male protagonists in the different eras see Vajdovich 2019, 10.

11 In the love stories of contemporary romantic comedies, for example, both members of the couple may appear as protagonists, but the narrative is rarely double-focalized; while in some cases we can follow the vicissitudes of matchmaking from the perspective of the female protagonist (e.g. *Stop Mom Theresa!* [*Állítsátok meg Terézanyut,* Péter Bergendy, 2004], *Just Sex and Nothing Else*, *Singles' Night* or *Liza, the Fox-Fairy*), in several other cases we follow the plot through the struggles and problems of the male character (e.g. *Pizzaman* [*Pizzás*, György Balogh, 2001], *SOS Love* [*SOS szerelem*, Tamás Sas, 2007], *9 and Half Dates* [*9 és fél randi*, Tamás Sas, 2008], *Poligamy* [Dénes Orosz, 2009], *Coming out* [Dénes Orosz, 2013], *What Ever Happened to Timi* [*Megdönteni Hajnal Tímeát*, Attila Herczeg, 2014]).

gyönyöre, Lívia Gyarmathy, 1992], *Dear Emma, Sweet Böbe* [*Édes Emma, drága Böbe*, István Szabó, 1992], *Virtually a Virgin* [*Majdnem szűz*, Péter Bacsó, 2008], *All is Casting* [*Casting minden*, Péter Tímár, 2008], *Swing* [Csaba Fazekas, 2014] or *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* [*Liza, a rókatündér*, Károly Ujj Mészáros, 2015]), thus, the reasons and motivations that drive their actions are also more transparent.

The adult,[12] middle-class, middle-income woman is overrepresented among the female protagonists after the change of regime, as in Hungarian films in general, but beyond that, women's social and wealth status varies widely. The comparison of the social stratum of male and female protagonists [Figs. 1 and 2] shows the regular and continuous presence of the lower and middle classes for both sexes after 1990: with one exception (women, 1999), these two classes are continuously present in Hungarian feature films, although the large number of middle-class protagonists is not fully in line with the actual social stratification trends of the period, which point towards a slimmer middle class and a gradual increase of the lower strata.[13] There is a gender gap for upper-class protagonists: while we find an almost equal number of upper middle-class men and women, the class at the top of the hierarchy is represented more often by male than female protagonists; while upper-class female protagonists appear only in certain years (for a total of seven years), for male protagonists this seems to be a more typical status (absent for a total of eleven years).

The financial position shows a more nuanced picture and more gender differences [Figs. 3 and 4]. The number of protagonists with average wealth is by far the highest for both sexes, but while poverty appears associated recurrently with male characters (with the exception of 2012), poor female protagonists are missing for several years (1989, 1995, 1997, 2002, 2012). However, extreme poverty – almost totally underrepresented throughout Hungarian film history – is more often associated with female actors (see 1999, 1992, 2007, 2008 and 2012) than with men (2012). The wealthy status, indicating the best financial situation, typically soars after the 2000s for both sexes, but in total it is associated more often and more persistently with men than women. While the wealthy woman appears as a characteristic category of post-transitional Hungarian film, the class and wealth positions of female protagonists broadly follow the trends of men; however, significant exceptions appear at the two endpoints of the social spectrum: women are more absent from the upper classes and are more present among the poorest, which suggests unequal power relations and a subordinate position of women.

12 827 adults, 191 young women, 31 children and 49 old women.

13 The stratification of Hungarian society after the change of regime has been researched and described according to several methods and concepts, some of them different from the ones we apply, thus the results are often not convertible into the categories used in our research.

Characteristics of Female Social Mobility

The social mobility of characters is reported in the "changes" category of our database, which records the major changes in status experienced during the plot, from the beginning to the end of the story. Some of these are changes in wealth (financial success, enrichment; financial decline, bankruptcy), social status (social ascension; social decline), other changes in status (recognition, success; moral downfall; character development; death) or an absence of change altogether (no change; no information). We measured upward mobility by the positive changes in wealth and social status (financial success and social ascension), and downward mobility by summing their negative counterparts (financial bankruptcy, social decline). These character-related changes appear in the movies in different configurations, as a character can be associated with several different types of change within a category. In the calculations we took into account the occurrence of the given types of changes, regardless of the context and other associated change types.

Viewed from a chronological perspective, we have found that after 1989 [Figs. 5 and 6], the category of social decline reaches the highest, most extreme values for both sexes, but while for men it peaked earlier, in the late 1960s and then in the last half of the 1990s (30%), in the case of female protagonists this took place in the early 1990s (58%) and then in the mid-2000s (above 40%), and to an even greater extent than in the case of men. Despite fewer female protagonists, financial decline is also much more common among women at the "low point" of the early 1990s, when the occurrence of it rises, along with social decline – although material success is also associated with women more often and in greater numbers in the mid- and late 2000s. This follows the general upward and downward social and financial tendencies described in Hungarian society in these decades (Valuch 2015; Róbert and Bukodi 2004). Social ascension reaches its highest values at different periods in the case of the two sexes: we see the highest values between 1993 and 1997 for men and between 2006 and 2009 for women. Financial success, on the other hand, has shown the highest values for both sexes only since the second half of the 2000s, and it is also clear that the lack of change ("no change" category) is more common among male actors.

If viewed in proportions [Fig. 7], data aggregation shows that financial decline was the only mobility factor that was present to a similar extent for both male and female protagonists before and after the change of regime (5–6% of all types of change). Of the four aspects examined, however, the most common category, social decline develops differently for the two sexes: it increases in the case of women by about the same amount that it decreases in that of men (4%). At the same time, the occurrence

of financial success increased for both sexes – but much more significantly for women (from 1% to 6%) than for men (from 5% to 6%). The incidence of social ascension is just the opposite: it varies little for women (from 3% to 4%) and decreases significantly for men (from 9% to 4%). The category of "no change" (i.e. characters who do not show any type of change) does not necessarily mean neutrality; whereas the presence of this type of change is exclusive to a given character, the large number of examples may display a general condition of immobility and stagnation – this aspect is unchanged for women (remains around 30% before and after the change of regime), but increases by 10% for male protagonists.

In summary, therefore, for women, a positive and a negative mobility value, financial success and social decline are most common in post-transition films, while for men, the values of both social decline and ascension come to a halt, which is, on the other hand, confirmed by the significant numerical increase in the category recording the absence of any changes. Based on the data, it seems that the mobility movements of female protagonists better embody and embrace the real, ongoing upward and downward mobility fluctuations experienced by society after the regime change, while the values of men much rather reflect immobility, the narrowing opportunities, and the closure of the social structure.With the data grouped from a different perspective, it becomes clear that the thing the regime change affected most dramatically is the distribution and polarization between genre and auteur films of women's success and failure stories [Fig. 8]. In the period between 1964 and 1989, stories of women's downward mobility were clearly the preserve of auteur films, wherein the value of social decline is particularly high, with there being almost no examples of upward mobility (financial success or social ascension). In contrast, social ascension is somewhat more common in genre films – a level to which the values of social decline are closer. In the two and a half decades after the regime change, this will change drastically: while the preference of auteur films for social (and financial) decline stories remains unchanged, genre films evolve a lot in terms of both number and types of mobility displayed: social decline is an absolute leading value here as well, but is immediately followed by financial success, then financial decline, then social ascension. All this, then, indicates two parallel processes: on the one hand, popular genres are becoming more common[14] and on the other, the represented social changes are becoming more diverse. The number of examples of

14 After the change of regime the number of auteur films gradually decreased, while the number of genre films increased. In the 1970s (1970–1979) 68% of films (137 out of 202 films), and in the 1980s 72% of the movies (145 out of 201) were auteur films, by the 1990s this proportion had fallen to 45% (77 out of 171 films). By the middle of the 2000s the proportion of auteur films falls to 38% (112 out of 297 films between 2000 and 2015).

upward and downward mobility is increasing, thus, by giving a balanced spectrum of social changes, genre films seem to give a more complete picture of the changes taking place in Hungarian society.

In moving to a closer analysis of why and how the successes and failures are motivated, I review these narratives with the help of Bernard Weiner's attribution theory (Weiner 2011). In this model, Weiner classified the causes associated with individual successes or failures along three dimensions (see an interpretation of Weiner's categories in Fig. 9): according to the locus (external or internal origin), the stability (permanent or occasional, temporary), and the controllability of the causes (Csepeli 1997, 254–255). Internal, personal causes can be long-term (talent, ability) or occasional (efforts, mood), just as external causes can be stable (social, economic circumstances) or occasional (luck, chance). In this system the only controllable element for the individual is the internal, occasional factor (effort), while the other three factors act regardless of the person; specifically, external, permanent (circumstances) causes are most inherently related to the social context. By this, the social references of the films become identifiable, as in most mobility stories a distinction can be made between situational or distributional attribution. In the following, I review the stories of women's financial and then social ascension, and afterwards the narratives of social, then financial decline, and reflect on the causes of these mobilities.

Financial Successes: Inheritance, Prizes, Talent and Self-Reliance

While the narratives of success, i.e. the stories of social ascension and material prosperity were thematized in half of the films in the period between 1931 and 1944,[15] after 1989 we find far fewer examples of upward mobility for both sexes. In this era there are no overlaps between upward and downward mobility values in the case of female protagonists, only within categories: financial success and social ascension may go hand in hand, just as values of decline may appear together at times, but we see no example of intersections (ascension with decline). Although we have not taken it into account here that the category of "moral downfall" often accompanies enrichment.

Financial success associated with women occurs typically only in the 2000s and exclusively in genre films: mainly in comedies and crime films –in the case of the latter it is always paired with moral downfall (*Konyec*, [Gábor Rohonyi, 2006],

15 52% of the feature films of the era (183 out of 354 films) presented stories of upward mobility, while downward mobility appeared in only 18% of the movies (Lakatos 2018, 12).

Nosedive [*Zuhanórepülés*, Erik Novák, 2007], *Deathwaltz* [*Halálkeringő*, Károly Krisztián Köves, 2010]). According to the moral of these stories, women do not get rich as a result of practising their profession or through hard work, but rather as a reward for their skills and perseverance; internal, permanent and occasional causes are sometimes accompanied by external, occasional causes (luck), and the origin of money is typically gambling, lottery winnings, cash prizes or inheritances, and in stories of financial decline, bank robbery or drug dealing.

Blind chance alone plays a role in only one film: in *Feri and Sweet Life* (2001) the title character's wife, Joli, who is in her fifties, unexpectedly wins the lottery. György Czabán's film simultaneously reflects on the everyday working-class life conditions (housing estate, second jobs, weekend fishing) and the *nouveau riche* accessories (luxurious villa, alternative medicine, love adventures, etc.), and shows the process by which ordinary workers try and fail to adapt to an elite lifestyle. The moral of the story would be that sudden upward mobility through financial success raises conflicts, leads to disintegrating relationships and does not bring the desired happiness. Three other female protagonists also expect inheritance, but wealth brings moral dilemmas with it. In the story of *Point of Return – Transylvania 1990* (*Ennyiből ennyi*, Gyula Maár, 2000), which is set in the nineties, Klára Szapolyai wants to occupy a Transylvanian village mansion by pretending to be the baronial heiress of the neglected castle. Village life, and specifically the local entrepreneur and the engineer's conflict reflects on the new conditions after the collapse of communism – with the rearrangement of power positions and redistribution of goods. Klára seems to be a smart swindler: although there are several indications that she has nothing to do with the former baronial family, using her attractiveness she skilfully wins the engineer over to finally take control.

Money does not help, and there is no release from past sins of the family members in Köves's crime film, *Deathwaltz* (2010). Elza, a pregnant policewoman in her thirties, is party to a love triangle between her policeman husband and his criminal friend, in a situation that is both morally and financially compromising. The unexpected visit of Elza's long unseen father brings her the opportunity for a new beginning: the former detective father tries to save her by removing all the criminal evidence against her. He even sells his house to leave his entire fortune to his daughter, but only Elza's new-born child survives the shooting at the end of the film.

Inheritance appears as a reward for deserving work in the romantic comedy *Liza, the Fox-Fairy*, in which a lonely maid cares for the widow of a Japanese ambassador for several years; the widow in her will leaves the apartment to the modest servant instead of her money-grabbing relatives. But in the surreal-fantastic story the

inherited apartment itself does not bring happiness for Liza, as she has to defeat an evil demon and survive the torments of matchmaking and dating.

In another group of films, female protagonists have specific individual or community goals, for which they earn money in the form of prizes or cash rewards, through ingenuity, perseverance, and some luck. In Sándor Pál's *Noah's Ark* Ede Stock persuades his granddaughter, Kati, to participate in a commercial TV contest for the best grandfather in the country: if they win the five-million-forint grand prize, he could buy his longed-for Harley Davidson motorcycle. The partying, rebellious Kati is more of a sometimes dynamizing, sometimes obstructive side character in her grandfather's plot, and in the end she only benefits indirectly from the prize.

In addition to talent and perseverance, the teacher heroes of Gábor Fisher's comedy, *Montecarlo!* (2004) also need luck to win the money that is needed to save the school. The noble community goal ironically tells of the lack of funding for education, and the intellectual heroes forced to convert their professional knowledge to gambling. The French teacher, Annamari will be a key figure in this process: although the money won on gambling in Montecarlo can be attributed to her colleague's magical intuitions, she is able to finally attain the prize by joining a French player.

Jutka, the engineer protagonist of *The Rapture of Deceit* (1992) receives a big sum of money as a reward. In the chaotic years after the change of regime, her husband, in the hope of a better career, goes off with his boss' daughter. Jutka loses her job and apartment, and so needs to work as a waitress. At the bistro she finds herself in the middle of a restaurant mafia clash; since she does not lose her cold blood and perseverance, her boss rewards her loyalty with a substantial sum of money. The artificial happy ending of Livia Gyarmathy's drama suggests that even if the money is "dirty," it rewards the loyalty and trust of an innocent person, giving her back the chance of starting a new life in her own home, independently and freely.

These stories attribute higher importance to situational considerations than the heroines' own efforts or skills. We rarely find autonomous female protagonists who work hard for financial success and independence, whereby their ascension clearly has permanent and occasional dispositional motivations, like talent and efforts. In some of the exceptions, like Péter Bacsó's farce *But Who are those Lumnizter Sisters?* (*De kik azok a Lumnitzer nővérek?*, 2005) the world of restaurants appears to be a man's world; the only woman amongst the protagonists, Milica, is an atypical character, employed as a detective and bodyguard. She investigates the mysterious restaurant critics on behalf of her corrupt boss, until she finally falls in love with one of them. Even if her upward mobility is ensured by the comedy's

happy ending, she acts as an independent and successful woman, able to resolve the conflicts around her: after resigning from her job she buys up the newspaper where the gastronomy experts will be allowed to write their free-spoken reviews. Bacsó's other drama emphasizes the role of education and learning in upward mobility. In *Virtually a Virgin* (2008), Boróka Árva, who grew up in an orphanage, experiences the most significant journey of ascension in these movies: beginning her adult life as a prostitute she finally becomes an advertising expert, partly because of her resilience and partly due to the support of her boyfriend; then she not only succeeds in her newly acquired profession, but even teaches her former clients and pimp a lesson.

The films after 2000 reflect on the growing role of media, advertising and entertainment industries in daily life. The road to financial success leads through show business for the female protagonists of two musical comedies, which typically emphasize not only talent, but the combined power of casual, external circumstances, relationships and luck. In Péter Tímár's *All is Casting,* the Roma Kati Ormos is the heroine of a mobility story sprinkled with folk tale elements: she becomes a nationally known singer by winning a TV talent competition, which not only requires endless perseverance from her, but also appropriate supporters (teacher, Dadus). In Csaba Fazekas's *Swing,* three women of different ages and backgrounds begin their singing careers in a summer roadshow with the support of a former diva. The narrative successfully weaves together the differences between the characters' talent and their ideas about success: Kati, the single mother, needs money; Rita, who broke up with her wealthy, unfaithful husband, needs time and distance; Angela, the beginner singer, who left her kindergarten job, needs independence and opportunity to break out. *Swing*'s story about individual accomplishments and female collaboration points out the importance of adapting and learning, but it is also clear that success would not be attainable without patrons and connections.

Social Ascension with Male Help

Social ascension of female characters after 1990 appears in dramas and comedies, rarely in auteur films, and often, but not in all cases, accompanies financial success – like in *Virtually a Virgin*, *All is Casting* and *The Rapture of Deceit*. But while financial success could be achieved by women on the basis of their abilities, social ascension, according to the lessons of the films, is much more likely to be possible on the side of men. Marital mobility was a typical upward mobilization path in

Hungarian films before 1945;[16] after the change of regime, marriage is not the only reason for, and is not a guarantee of a change in social status, but a relationship, or male company accelerates the process in several films.

In the grotesque-surreal, fairy-tale-like world of *Liza, the Fox-Fairy* the inherited apartment does not automatically move Liza up the social ladder; her ascension is fulfilled after her marriage to the detective, when she becomes a modern wife, travelling every year to a different place for vacation with her family.

In another comedy, *Bakkerman*, the female hero does not see any trajectory of upward mobility in her village community, the members of which are portrayed as a group of bumbling losers. The villagers prepare to bake the biggest bread in the world to rescue the small local school, but their plan is already hampered by the collapse of the oven built of stolen bricks. In the meantime, the unemployed teacher, Tündike, after some hesitation, chooses to accept the offer of a star-maker manager who travels through the village, and goes with him in the hope of a better future. The growing chaos and the rearrangement of social structures seem to favour the advancement of female protagonists.

In *Werckmeister Harmonies* (*Werckmeister harmóniák*, Béla Tarr, 2000), one of the rare auteur films presenting female social ascension, Tünde, the former wife of an old musicologist, Mr. Eszter, gets actively involved in controlling riots on the streets; the men listen to her word, and together with her new partner, the police captain, she initiates strategic decisions on how to calm down the enraged mass.

Marital mobility is somewhat reversed in the western woman–eastern man pair of *Bolse Vita* (Ibolya Fekete, 1996), where the main character, Maggie, visits Budapest out of a desire for adventure; there she meets and then marries the Russian musician Jura, with whom she travels back to England, from a chaotic Hungarian capital that is beset with the turmoil of the regime change.

Social Decline: External Circumstances and Emotions

Social decline is the most common mobility process assigned to women in Hungarian films after the change of regime. In many cases it appears as a single factor, but it may be accompanied by character improvement or financial decline, and less often by moral downfall or death. If women's success stories regularly emphasized the

16 Györgyi Vajdovich calls "love-career-stories" those films made between 1931 and 1945 in which women reach better financial status and/or a higher social position through marriage (Vajdovich 2016, 9). In this era, half of the success narratives of comedies (52% of 109 films) are characterized by this type of mobility, mostly associated with women (69% of the cases), but it is not uncommon in male protagonists either (Lakatos 2018, 13).

role of disposition (individual abilities), in most of the decline stories situational factors (external causes, circumstances) are responsible for showing a gloomy overall picture, filled with stagnation or deterioration. Individual competencies here do not even get the chance of being revealed, or are doomed to failure from the outset, as can be seen in most of the auteur films involved. These situational factors causing the decline have in many cases a political and ideological origin, and the heroines, as victims of the circumstances, slide helplessly lower and lower. In the case of some of the historical films, this is linked to traumatic events of the first half of the twentieth century, such as the Holocaust, the Stalinist cleanings, or the revolution of 1956.[17] The protagonists of these auteur films offer a contemplative and observational female perspective on these historical events, in which they are unable to act, or unable to confront the incidents. In *Why Wasn't He There*? *(Senkiföldj*e, András Jeles, 1993), Eva as a little girl watches and documents in her diary the deportation of Jewish families in a small town, until finally her family has to go too. In *Little Vilma – The Last Diary (Kisvilma – Az utolsó napló*, 1999), Márta Mészáros reconstructs the title character's story from the perspective of her adult self returning to a Kyrgyz camp, recalling the process of losing her parents and then the years spent in an orphanage. The condition of the protagonists of two other stories, which are set closer to the present, is similarly vulnerable and hopeless. Based on the short story by Ádám Bodor, *The Outpost* (*A részleg*, Péter Gothár, 1994) is set "somewhere in Eastern Europe" in the eighties; the faceless higher office awards the white-collar protagonist, Gizella Weisz a mission, in which she finally loses everything she had. She endures with dignity the exile to the end of the world, in a mountain hut, but the film leaves no doubt that this is an irreversible decline story in which the protagonist's opportunities for action are utterly narrowed. Similarly, Mária, the heroine of the crime film *Death in Shallow Water (Halál sekély vízben*, Imre Gyöngyössy and Barna Kabay, 1994), which is set in the early nineties, is helpless against the systemic oppression: first her inventor husband and then her student son were drowned in the river by KGB agents, as a result of reports filed by informers. Mária vainly attempts to confront their former friend with the consequences of his actions, whereupon the man, who has meanwhile acted as the hero of the regime change, routinely breaks her down and calls an ambulance to take her away.

17 In films commemorating the 1956 revolution, female protagonists, drifting with the events, gradually lose everything, whether as mothers (like Teréz in *Rosehill* [*Rózsadomb*, Mari Cantu, 2003], Mrs. Mansfeld in *Mansfeld* [Andor Szilágyi, 2006]), or as the love-interests of young male protagonists (e.g. Viki Falk in *Children of Glory* [*Szabadság, szerelem*, Krisztina Goda, 2006] or Júlia in *56 Drops of Blood* [*56 csepp vér*, Attila Bokor, 2007]).

In the set of decline stories that make up the largest group, heroines actively fight to survive, so as to move out from the periphery or from their disadvantaged situation, however not only is the outbreak impossible, but they often slide even further down the slope. In the process of decline men often show up as downward mobility factors, either as representatives of power or as love interests. In one of the two non-synchronous films, *Opium – Diary of a Madwoman* (*Ópium – Egy elmebeteg nő naplója*, János Szász, 2007) a strange young graphomaniac girl, Gizella Klein, becomes a patient of the sex maniac, morphine-addicted psychoanalyst and writer, Dr. Brenner. In Szász's auteur film the doctor is struggling with a creative crisis, while his patient is suffering from the consequences of a serious mental illness; the two start a relationship, which is difficult to hide in the closed institution. Finally Gizella is the one who will lose everything: understanding that she will never be able to be healed, she asks Brenner to perform a lobotomy on her before he leaves the hospital for good. In Péter Bacsó's drama, *Stalin's Bride* (*Sztálin menyasszonya*, 1990) mental illness similarly indicates downfall. In a Soviet village in the 1930s people don't know how to treat Paranya, the mentally disturbed, strangely behaving heroine, so sometimes they help and sometimes they abuse her. Fed up with the emotional manipulation and threatening mood of terror, Zorka, a villager, finally kills the tormented woman, who is eventually endowed with a strange power.

The majority of women's failure stories take place in Hungary after the change of regime and are told in auteur films. The two young Russian teachers of István Szabó's *Sweet Emma, Dear Böbe* had moved from the countryside years before the change of regime in the hope of a better life; after the change their knowledge suddenly proves to be unnecessary, and their desperate survival strategies prove hopeless in the Budapest of the nineties. Tucked away at a teacher's hostel, they take English language courses, look for work and love, but neither Emma (who becomes the lover of the opportunist schoolmaster), nor the more uninhibited Böbe (who eventually goes to prison for prostitution and illegal currency transactions) can find happiness. Although Emma finally enters into a new relationship, the hopelessness of their situation is strongly emphasized by Böbe's decline, and Emma is unable to stop her girlfriend from committing suicide. In György Szomjas's grotesque and tragicomic *Junk Movie* (*Roncsfilm*, 1992), set right in the year of the regime change, everybody gets by in the closed, chaotic world of a dirty, run-down pub and block of flats of Budapest's eighth district, but it is redundant to contemplate any kind of mobility. Men and women are equal and their actions are unwarrantable: Gizi Sánta throws out her tenant and welcomes a new man into her apartment, but nothing can bring about a groundbreaking change in the everyday lives of the petty

people wallowing in physical violence, misfortune and alcohol intoxication. For the heroines of *Bloodline* (*Vérvonal*, Pál Erdőss, 1993) and *Passport* (*Paszport – Útlevél a semmibe*, Péter Gothár, 2001), which are set in the countryside, there is no way out of deep, chronic poverty. The (half) orphaned teenage girls in Erdőss's film, after an unsuccessful suicide, escape from an educational institution and visit the alcoholic father of one of them. On a farm in the middle of nowhere, in accordance with the girls' plan, Marianna seduces Marilyn's father as form of revenge; the pregnant girl and her girlfriend escape from the torched farm to start a new life and to raise the unborn child, which is particularly disturbing in the light of these terrible events. In Gothár's film, Jelizaveta, who is toiling in a brick factory at Beregszász, will be the wife of her distant relative, Jóska, a seriously alcoholic farmer who has been left behind by his father and sister. The conformist and optimistic Jelizaveta gladly moves to Hungary and gives birth to a little girl for Jóska, but finally comes to realize that he is a violent man who destroys everything and everyone around her. The woman flees, leaving her apartment and existence behind, but her sufferings persist, as she almost loses her daughter, and she cannot hope to get help from the law.

Csaba Bollók's 2007 film also sets its story in a peripheral region (the valley of the river Jiu in Romania) that is sunk into deep poverty, where the title character of *Iska's Journey* (*Iszka utazása*) collects metal around the mines, and brings all the money home to her alcoholic and violent parents. The little girl, who has been abused several times by her mother, slips even further into decline at the end of the film: on one of her wanderings she is kidnapped by traffickers and sold as a child prostitute.

Another group of characters find themselves in a vulnerable position for dispositional reasons, sometimes as a result of a wrong decision made at the wrong moment – such as the divorced math teacher, Galina in *Homo novus* (Pál Erdőss, 1990). In helpless rage, Galina hits one of her speech-impaired teenage students – this unleashes the fury of the small town, which sweeps her and her son away. Hanna Szendrőy, the elderly, middle-class protagonist of *The Eighth Day of the Week* (*A hét nyolcadik napja*, Judit Elek, 2006), was once a successful prima donna, now she lives in her garden villa in Buda, but soon she finds herself among the homeless people of the Eastern Railway Station because she cannot see through the tricks of the housing mafia, who successfully cheat her out of her fortune. Benedek Fliegauf's drama (*Womb – Méh*, 2010) is set in the future. Rebecca, the heroine, is unable to cope with the loss of her love, Thomas, so she offers to be impregnated with Thomas's DNA. This brings heavy social isolation, and fatal, unprocessed emotional burdens for both the woman and her son. Szandra, in Károly Makk's *The Way You Are* (*Így, ahogy vagytok*, 2010), finds new love, but she cannot stand idly

by to watch the murder of his former protégé, so in revenge she publicly shoots the deputy mayor of the small town, making his future prospects even more doubtful in a morally depraved environment.

Another group of middle-class characters is trying to break free from their stagnant lives and stifling relationships, but the breakout does not always bring the hoped-for liberation; although in the meantime they get enriched with spiritual experiences and fateful realizations, the material and social decline is often irreversible. Emotions, as well as men, will play an important role in failure stories too. Stepping out of her seemingly ideal middle-class life, actress Juli, leaving her husband and daughter behind, seeks out a new self and moves in with the drug-addict András in *Cloud Above the River Ganges* (*Felhő a Gangesz fölött*, Gábor Dettre, 2001), whereupon the two go through the everyday hell of addiction. Later, despite being dragged back to reality by her husband, Juli ends up again, within a few weeks, next to András in hospital. The depressed and wealthy photo model, Csilla, in *Paths of Light* (*A fény ösvényei*, Attila Mispál, 2005) struggles alone in the world of superficial relationships and drug parties, until she suffers severe burns from a fatal encounter with a strange, homeless man. With permanent scars on her face, she needs to radically rethink her profession, family relationships and future. At first, the lonely heroine of *Anarchists* (*Anarchisták*, Tamás Tóth, 2000), Majka, bitterly discovers the signs of corruption in a charity organization, but her protests lead nowhere; together with Gavrilov, who is also about to rebel, they take revenge on corrupt leaders, but then their anarchist tendencies escalate: the boy gets hold of some weapons and eventually shoots Majka's anarchist father, too. Finally, they run away together. The young adolescent heroes of *Who the Hell's Bonnie and Clyde?* (*Miskolci bonniésklájd*, Krisztina Deák, 2005) and *Girls* (*Lányok*, Anna Faur, 2007) have no specific plans, they are drifting and take the first opportunity to break free, and are not worried about run-ins with the law. Lili flees with Pali from Miskolc, leaving behind her abusive stepfather, to undertake a bank robbery as a great life adventure; after their initial successes, the teenagers both end up in prison. In Faur's film, which is set in the nineties, the two teenage girls, Dini and Anita, have a home and family, yet they linger all day in Budapest; they get involved in minor thefts and learn to drive from taxi drivers, in exchange for favours. They dream of a trip to Switzerland, but end up killing a taxi driver to get the car they will need to go there – the police catch them almost immediately.

Emotions control the heroines of *School of Senses* (*Érzékek iskolája*, András Sólyom, 1996) and *Stracciatella* (*Sztracsatella*, András Kern, 1996), who stake their all on a single roll of the dice – and lose it when they fall in love. Lili Csokonai,

the young gypsy girl, takes the first love of her life incredibly seriously, throwing herself into the relationship with extreme devotion; while she advances from a cleaning lady to a waitress, her attachment becomes more and more of a burden for the entrepreneur, who has a family. In a car accident after a quarrel between them, Lili loses her legs, and finds herself in a wheelchair in a panel apartment, under the care of a neighbouring man, Naxos; Lili finally takes revenge by shooting her successful and wealthy lover. In Kern's comedy, dr. Andrea Lantos and a middle-aged orchestra conductor, recovering from a nervous breakdown, fall in love with each other whilst he is receiving psychological treatment. The family man does not dare stir things up because of his new love; when he breaks up with her, the psychiatrist is fired, so she has to return to her home village.

Only in two cases do we see that the heroines are free to decide how they want to go on with their lives, that they have real choices and their decision counts. Gyula Maár's film *Whoops* (*Hoppá*, 1993) presents the situation after the regime change from the perspective of a couple in their sixties who see themselves as losers of both systems. Ede wants to move to the countryside to keep the reminders of failure away from them, but Kati dreams of more and would prefer to actually leave her husband – yet returns to him at the end of the film. Aglaja, the title character of Krisztina Deák's adaptation (2012), has to follow the profession of her circus performer mother, but after the family's decline, she can only perform half-naked on the stages of cheap provincial variety shows. Under the pressure of her mother, she almost takes over from her the life-threatening and bizarre stunt of hanging by her hair; in the final scene, with a sudden bold decision, she cuts off her extended hair just before a major performance in Berlin – thus likely altering her fate.

Financial Decline: from Above or Below

In the Hungarian films after the regime change, financial collapse, like social decline, often affects characters who are already in poor financial conditions and struggling for survival, as well as suffering from loneliness; they slide further down, even if they had temporarily fought their way up before. In these mainly auteur drama films, individual efforts are made from time to time but always prove futile as the fate of the characters is decided by external occasional (misfortune) and lasting (difficulties) circumstances.

The struggle for emotional well-being and financial survival determines the everyday life of *Sweet Emma*'s failing teachers, and this is echoed in the stories of the mother figures in *Light-Sensitive Story* (*Fényérzékeny történet*, Pál Erdőss, 1993) and

Fresh Air (*Friss levegő*, Ágnes Kocsis, 2006). Juli, the protagonist of Erdőss's film, is a divorced photographer in her thirties who lives with her university student lover and young son. Financial problems make the love relationship even worse, but Juli breaks down only when she realizes that she has lost her son, who was sent abroad to her ex-husband. Juli converts everything she has into money in order to go after him, but she never gets back her son. In Ágnes Kocsis's film, the neat-freak Viola, who is raising her adolescent daughter alone, is attacked and robbed at her workplace, in a public toilet. While she is hospitalized, her daughter reluctantly steps into her position, but the ending leaves open as to whether Viola will ultimately retain her job or not. Anna apparently has no say in her fate in *The Days of Desire* (*A vágyakozás napjai*, Pacskovszky József, 2009). As a young girl she does housework for a wealthy couple who are living a self-destructive life. In an unexpected development of equilibrium the mute girl seems to find not only a home but also a family: the employers see in her their daughter, who they had previously tragically lost. But the apparent happiness disintegrates from one moment to the next: Anna is left without relationships, work, accommodation and money when she is suddenly dismissed; her suitor also breaks up with her after realizing that she is not the daughter of the rich family. While Anna's story is about unfortunate circumstances, Lili of *The School of Senses*, or the teenage girls of *Bloodline,* slide even further down from their original position of having nothing. The young girls take revenge for their emotional loss through murders, and are pushed into the realm of lawlessness and moral decline by a combination of circumstances and bad decisions. Protagonists of crime films *Who the Hell's Bonnie and Clyde?* and *The Great Post Office Robbery* (*A nagy postarablás*, Sándor Sőth, 1992), and the comedy *Gulls and Gangsters* (*Balekok és banditák*, Péter Bacsó, 1996) are also law-breakers, but their crimes are portrayed in a different tone. In Sőth's crime comedy, a small, pitiful team of a father and son come up with the big idea, together with the lover, Mari, who is also an accomplice: they start operating the local post office before its official opening to benefit their own pockets, but the profits of the trickery are eventually stolen by their even more devious acquaintances. In Bacsó's satire, Piroska becomes the girlfriend of a successful criminal who starts out as a stooge and then gets involved in increasingly dirty affairs, until the woman finally gets tired of lying and leaves him.

Only in a few exceptional cases does financial decline affect higher social class heroines who are living in better material conditions. While the protagonist of *The Eighth Day of the Week* loses her house and garden due to her inattention and credulity, in the grotesque comedy *Sexplorers* (*Szűzijáték*, István Nyíri Kovács, 2006), the young girl, Anna enlists the services of a company to lose her innocence, even

though the right partner (in the form of her shy tenant) has been there in her apartment all along. Anna loses all her belongings on account of the horrible Virgin Ltd., but the love found compensates for everything. The aging, well-to-do title character in the 1930s-set story of *Eszter's Inheritance* (*Eszter hagyatéka*, József Sipos, 2008), a drama adapted from Sándor Márai's novel, also does not mind losing everything for her love: meeting the man after twenty years, she moves voluntarily into a nursing home and gives up her property for the benefit of her former lover and his adult children.

Conclusions

The political transition following the collapse of communism radically altered the economic and social structure of Hungarian society. The growing unemployment, the inequalities in income and property, the narrowing and consolidating upper classes and the lagging lower classes led to increasing differences in living standards and the deterioration of living conditions for many. The social experiences of losses and failures and the closing social structure are reflected directly and explicitly in many Hungarian films made between 1990 and 2015. The database created by our research allowed us to group and review the films that show mobility processes featuring women. Female heroines in these films appear to move up the slope, but are pulled down not only by the gravitational force of economic and social crises, but also by the lack of emancipation and lack of gender equality.

By exploring the attributional framework (Weiner 2011) of the films, with consideration for the way the narratives present female characters' skills and prospects in relation to the external circumstances, I proposed a way to explain how contemporary Hungarian film imagines mobility opportunities for women in the society of regime change. Based on this, it became apparent that according to these movies, personal, internal disposition is not enough to enable financial success or social ascension, while downward movements are accelerated by the overwhelming power of permanent situational, external factors – namely the social and economic environment. That is, in the context of multiple pressures and subordination, women rarely achieve success because of their own qualities, skills or perseverance; stories emphasize the weight of external conditions, in the form of luck, relationships, men, and economic circumstances.

The research also highlighted the polarization of the mobility stories from a genre perspective, meaning that upward mobility is regularly represented by genre films, while downward mobility is the preserve of auteur films. Stories of female financial success, for example, are typically and exclusively told by genre films (comedies,

dramas, crime films), which acknowledge individual characteristics (effort, talent) of women, but also accentuate the role of patrons and luck. Getting rich or achieving a better material position in these films is not an everyday, normal practice, rather it is an exception, and it is not related to hard work, employment, or being an expert at something. By featuring luck, rewards, prizes and inheritance instead of salary or income, these films express a pessimistic and critical view of the value of work and the legal opportunities of making money in the society after the regime change. Social ascension of women, presented in dramas and comedies, sometimes accompanies financial success, but is often attained through marital mobility, or promotion through partnerships, thus completely eliminating the role of women's individual competencies, and suggesting the survival of a traditional gender hierarchy.

The research also explored the female social decline stories, which make up the overwhelming majority – appearing typically in auteur films, and sometimes in the drama, melodrama and comedy genre films. These usually emphasize the influential power of external causes and hopeless circumstances, while women's relationships with men also play a crucial role in impoverishment and decline processes. Failure stories often report the fall of heroines living on the social periphery, who often slide even further from their initial low position, indicating the structural constraints of this social layer and the one-way mobility at this level. Also preferred by auteur films (and sometimes drama, melodrama, but rarely crime and comedy genre films), the financial collapse of women, like social decline, usually affects characters who are already in poor financial conditions and struggling for survival, and also suffering from loneliness; they slide further, even if they had managed to climb higher before. The visibility of women in Hungarian film after the regime change may have been transformed, but their mobility opportunities still report a traditional gender hierarchy, and a difficult, downward sloping social terrain.

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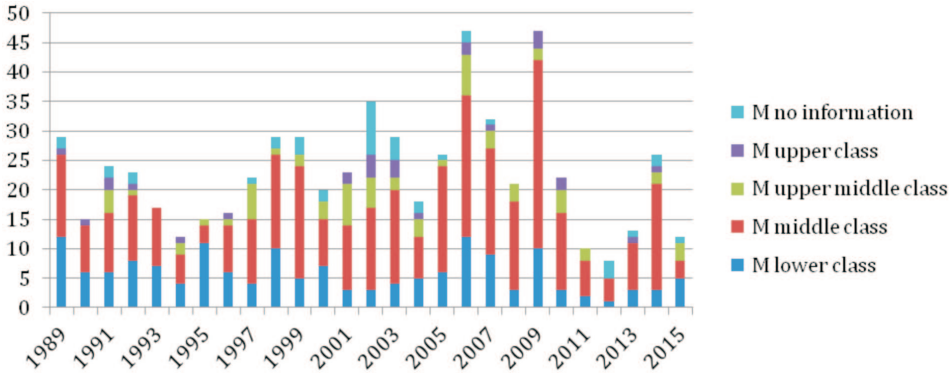

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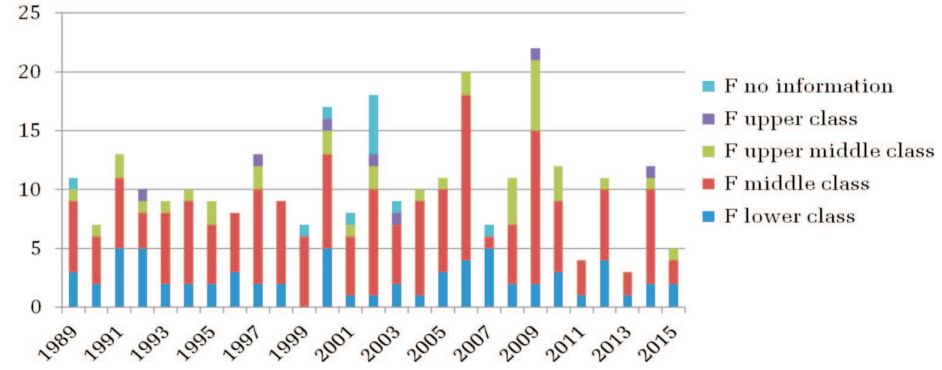

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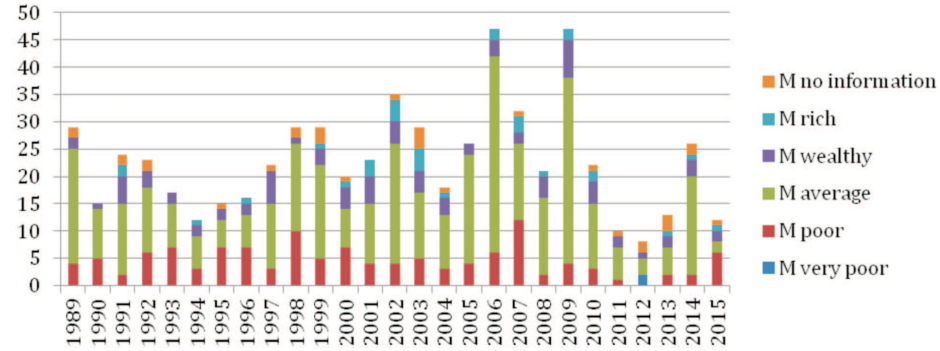

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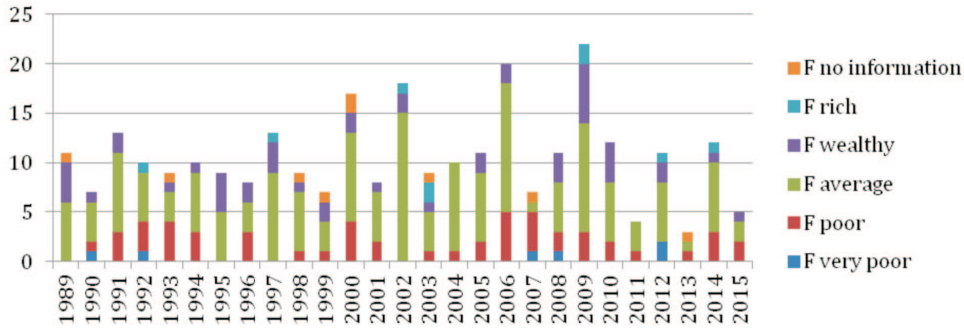

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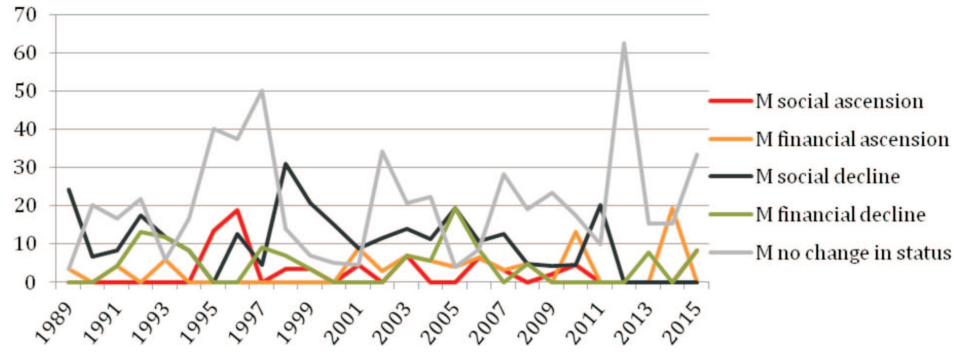

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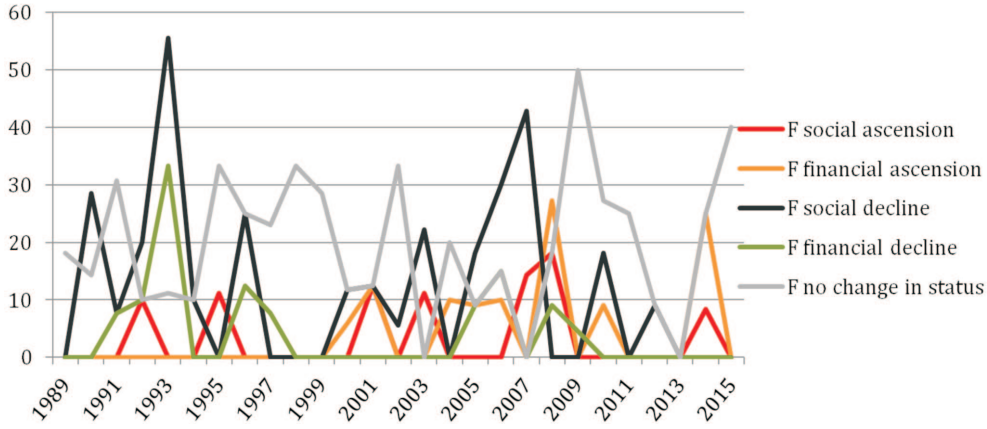

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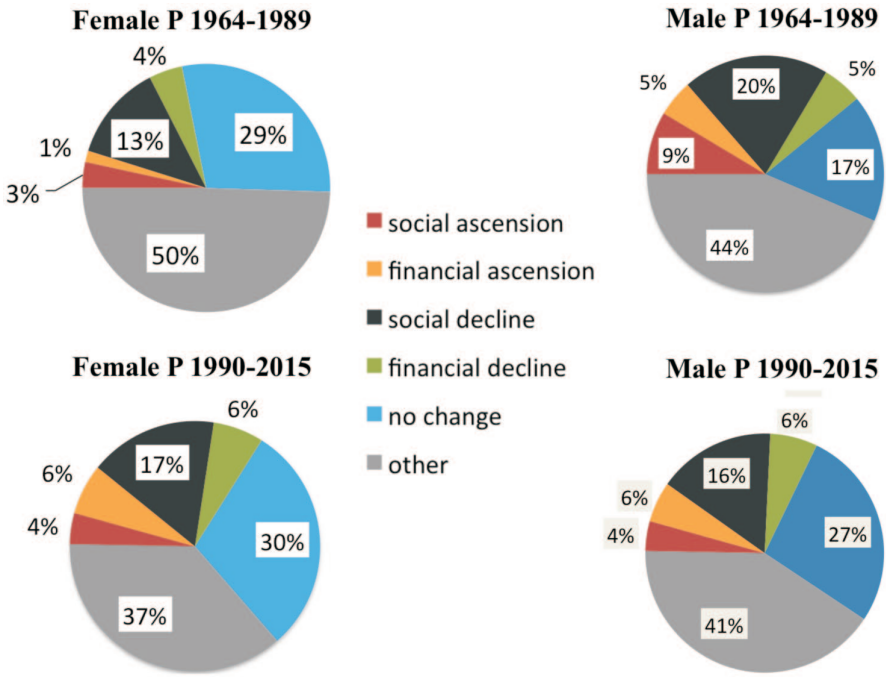

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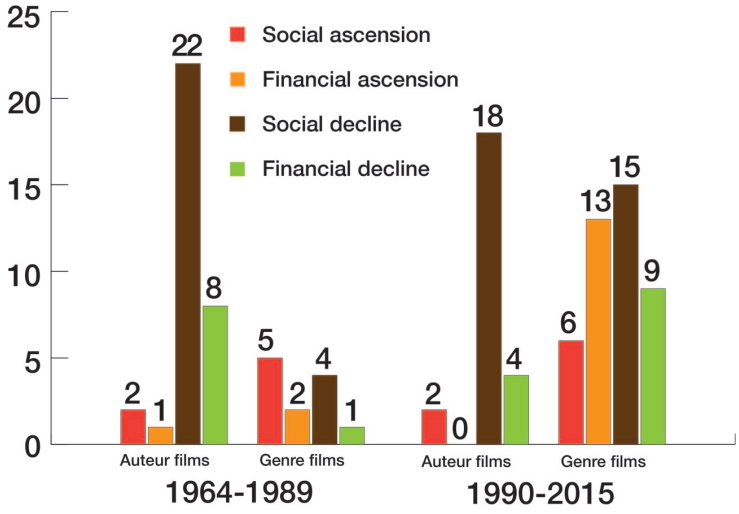

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	permanent, long-term (stable)	**occasional, temporary (unstable)**
Disposition (personal, internal)	ability, skill, talent	effort, motivation, mood
Situation (external, circumstances)	task difficulty, origin (gender, class, etc.), other economic and social factors	help, chance, luck or misfortune

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