Postsocialist Mobilities

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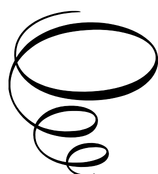
Studies in Eastern European Cinema

Edited by

Hajnal Király and Zsolt Győri

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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INTRODUCTION: BROKEN MOBILITIES IN EASTERN EUROPEAN CINEMAS

ZSOLT GYŐRI[1] AND HAJNAL KIRÁLY

Writing about mobility and connectivity amidst the Covid-19 pandemic is challenging. With billions in lockdown and international travel essentially non-existent, people all around the world need to adapt to the experience of isolation while also coping with mounting fears of unemployment, financial instability, suspended social contacts and boredom. Hamlet's painful comment about time being out of joint has once again become menacingly relevant as global outlooks and local regulations change literally on a daily basis and what has been generally perceived as the accustomed state of things seems shattered. The present situation, sometimes termed as the Great Lockdown (Gopinath 2020), is perceived as miserable because mobility – a basic human freedom for some, while a basic necessity for others (e.g., commuters, guest and seasonal workers and those employed by industries who are compelled to travel) – lies at the root of modern life(styles). Constraints on movement are understood as limits on social liberties and progress or survival depending on whether one comes from the First or the Third World. As Tim Cresswell has noted, "there seems little doubt that mobility is one of the major resources of twenty-first century life and that it is the differential distribution of this resource that produces some of the starkest differences today" (2010, 22). Yet exactly because mobility is a resource that produces and distributes power relations while also being produced by them, the loss of control over mobility threatens to reshuffle, or downright undermine existing status quos, that is, nothing less than the global geopolitical order. Bodies might be doomed to immobility but minds are not, which offers a space for reflection on personal and other matters.

[1] This research was supported by the János Bolyai Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the ÚNKP-20-5 New National Excellence Program of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology from the source of the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund.

The present situation creates ideal conditions for the fermentation of thought, in fact we believe that much intellectual aspiration will concentrate on the assessment and comprehension of the political, social, cultural, economic, technological, ecological, and psychological impact of immobility.

Although quarantines, lockdowns and social distancing serve the single aim of limiting contact between people, they have been put into practice with varying levels of effectiveness in different parts of the world. News outlets praised Eastern European countries for their low infection and death rates during the first wave and called their response to the situation exemplary. Amongst the many reasons why poorer Eastern European countries could outperform richer Western ones in almost all areas of statistics, experts list the mistrust of populations towards their country's healthcare system (Walker–Smith 2020) and a greater admission to conformism. As Petr Pavel, a Czech official responsible for designing the country's containment strategy, explained "people in the former communist East are more accepting of inconvenience and more tolerant of state-mandated restrictions" (Pancevski–Hinshaw 2020). These explanations point to the enduring influence of the state socialist heritage on people's mentalities, a problem area that serves as one of the main focal points of this volume.

Eastern Europe did not only make headlines as a positive example of wrestling the pandemic in spring 2020. In the UK, as elsewhere on the European Continent, reports about critical labour shortages in agriculture abounded. With existing travel restrictions, seasonal farm workers from Romania, Bulgaria and Poland were not able to carry out the essential harvesting tasks they had been attending to for over a decade, an activity which put fresh vegetables on the dinner tables of households in affluent societies. As this scenario also proves, Western citizens are reliant on Eastern Europeans and vice versa, while both groups are dependent on mobility that allows for the free movement of labour within the EU. Since 2004, when Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and the Baltic states joined the EU and 2007, the year Bulgaria and Romania were admitted, economic migration has transformed whole economic sectors in Europe. As large numbers of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labourers headed towards old member states, multinational companies began to invest in the region and so did the EU through Cohesion and Structural Funds under the convergence objective. As the terms cohesion and convergence suggest, these policies, on the one hand, recognised regional inequalities and, on the other hand, hoped to redress these by promoting territorial cooperation, increased competitiveness and efficiency. Both enhanced mobility and the framework of financial support made

European citizens aware of the West-East divide and the multiple cultural binaries and stereotypes associated with it. Some use this knowledge in the "Old Europe" for self-justifying prejudice and provincialism as the Brexit referendum has shown, while others use it as a licence to lecture poorer European neighbours on core European values. At the same time, there is mounting criticism in the "New Europe" targeting bureaucratic political institutions, outdated liberal ideologies, wasteful Western societies and their colonial attitudes towards Eastern Europeans. Mobility and connectivity that made a truly closer community possible in Europe has also laid down its own borders, frontiers and obstructions. When everything halts, like in the wake of the pandemic, these frictions remain and, in fact, they are likely to deepen with renewed fears of the EU breaking up, of the global trade war reigniting, and of increasing social fracture as a result of growing tensions between people employed by the real economy and the teleworking elite. In order to understand mobility, we not only have to understand its stoppages, regulatory mechanisms and broken lines, but also the various discursive frameworks within which connections between Western and Eastern Europe (partners, neighbours, adversaries) are conceptualised.

The Region and Cinemas in Focus

The region discussed in this volume corresponds to the Visegrad Group (V4) and Romania. With Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary as member countries, the V4 was called into being in 1991 after the fall of state socialism as a regional initiative to promote political, economic and cultural cooperation. Having similar historical experiences, cultural traditions, access to natural resources, and export-driven economies, the alliance coordinated European integration efforts and, after their accession to the EU, continued to plan and implement shared projects. Romania, one of the Eastern frontiers of Europe, has a history, education system, political and economic make-up comparable with that of the Visegrad Group. Furthermore, it also shares the V4's demographic challenges such as high emigration, an ageing society and low fertility rates.

The film cultures of the countries focused on by this volume are also characterised by a thematic and stylistic homogeneity. As Dina Iordanova asserts, "the regional framework allows us to reveal leading stylistic or narrative trends and other general aspects […] by looking regionally we see trends that otherwise remain neglected" (2003, 12). She argues that the study of the cinemas of Eastern Europe in regional terms comes naturally due to "the symbiotic and synergic phenomenon of East Central European intelligentsia and their struggle to establish the idea of Central Europe as a

shared cultural space" (Iordanova 2003, 12). Having acknowledged the proximity of national cultures in the region, Iordonova traces shared features of the industrial, thematic, stylistic and geopolitical kind. Although most of the arguments in *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (Iordanova 2003) regard the Soviet period, the regional framework is valid for post-communist filmmaking as well.

Having abandoned the authoritarian practices of managing culture and embraced neoliberal economic principles, Eastern European film industries saw a sharp decline in state support, leaving filmmakers to wrestle over scarce financial resources. It was often the elder, internationally acclaimed directors whom the new system of state grants favoured, leaving upcoming generations to find creative ways to complete film projects, (international coproduction, commercial television, EU funding, and more recently, crowd funding) or simply leave the profession. Competitiveness has equally affected material resources and properties of a once burgeoning industry. As Iordanova contends,

> the film industry saw previous state assets sold off to new, usually foreign, owners, who swiftly turned the region into a cut-price production playground. The 'film factory,' previously run by state apparatchiks, now turned into a bargain-basement service economy offering skilled personnel and amenities to international runaway film businesses. (Iordanova 2012, xvi)

Also, the predominance of art cinema over popular cinema was a shared heritage hardly contested either by funding juries or the critical establishment. In post-communist cinema critical appraisal and commercial success hardly ever converged, resulting in unbalanced film cultures. For many aspiring talents from the region, festival participation was a more precious goal than box office appeal. While this attitude, as the case of New Romanian Cinema testifies, resulted in some truly outstanding films, it also brought about a large number of mediocre art films.

Romania is also the only country in the region where the communist regime was overthrown by a short but violent popular revolt. Unlike the velvet revolutions in other Eastern European countries, Romanian events seemed to be a televisual revolution "produced" by the bare forces of history. Not unlike live broadcasts of the Berlin Wall being ripped apart (as an allegory of moving beyond the era of the Iron Curtain), this intense audiovisual event and "improvised communal happening" exploded into living rooms around the globe, giving irrefutable proof of the irreversible awakening of Eastern Europe. Cinemas of the region, as the chapters of the

first section elaborate, keep returning to this quasi-mythical "year zero," but without the initial euphoria and optimism. As of today, much of the antagonisms and social frustration that characterise the region can be traced back to the ambiguities of these revolutionary times perceived, on the one hand, as ephemeral moments of bliss and, on the other hand, as a breeding ground for primary urges to accumulate power and wealth.

Mónika Dánél's chapter *Multiple Revolutions. Remediating and Re-enacting the Romanian Events of 1989* explores strategies of cinematic remediation and re-enactment of traumatic events in the wake of the demise of the Ceaușescu regime. In countries with a more peaceful transition, like Slovakia, the memory of the Velvet Revolution plays an equally important role in national self-definition. Jana Dudková's and Katarina Mišíková's chapters about the transitional period remind us how different the maiden years of democracy look when observed from the epicentre of events and when addressed through retrospection. While the television films of the early 1990s were prophetic in ascribing to the young generation the agency of revolutionary change, films produced for cinema, more specifically the genre of political film, paint a rather critical or even cynical picture. This cynicism, shared by both intellectuals and the general public around the region, was fuelled by the perception that democratic political institutions and the universal empowerment they were supposed to achieve were corrupted by the power elite. The presumed benefits of representative democracy, including the public control of elected bodies and individuals, the freedom of speech and the right to express opinion freely – that is, the mobile framework of sharing responsibility between the state and the individual – were gradually broken as bureaucratic red tape, political scapegoating, hate speech and the rise of populism undermined political consensus and erected barricades between citizens. As film industries entered the new millennium, cinematic mediations of history broadened and would include the recent past, both the banal and the extraordinary episodes of life under state socialism. This shift is most visible in Polish cinema where besides traumatic narratives of the Second World War and the Holocaust, a number of very popular films set in the Soviet era were made. In addition to shifting time frames, the inclination of genre cinema to forge a dialogue with the social universe became another shared regional feature. Elżbieta Durys' chapter *Cop Cinema and the Cinema of National Remembrance: The Case of* I'm a Killer *by Maciej Pieprzyca* arrives at this conclusion in the context of the detective film, while Hajnal Király's and Zsolt Győri's contributions make similar claims for male melodrama and noir western. The New Romanian Cinema is again relevant, since its thematic concern with common people, strained social relations and moral

dilemmas has clearly influenced other film cultures, most notably Hungarian cinema. Apart from family melodramas, biopics, comedies, road movies, and crime cinema, it has creatively combined generic attributes with social reflection and served as a flexible trans-regional frame to address topics related to gender, ethnicity, immigration, old age, and sexual orientation, to name just a few. These topics are tackled in the comparative analyses of contemporary Romanian films representing "border events," the effect of immigration on family relations discussed extensively in Katalin Sándor's chapter, as well as mobility between the city and the countryside on the one hand, and different districts of metropolises on the other. As Fanni Feldmann's chapter argues with regard to Hungary and the Romanian capital Bucharest, such mobility figuratively superimposes geographical, social, cultural, and sexual transgressions. Westbound mobility as a possible trigger of national identity and immobility as its potential antidote is discussed by Michael Gott in the context of the New Czech Cinema, while geographical, social and cultural border crossings between the East and the West, reflected in exchanges between different media, are analysed in the chapters by Edit Zsadányi, Ștefan Firică and András Hlavacska.

Research and Theoretical Background

Mobility, meaning the "ability to move freely" – in geographic, economic or social terms – has a distinguished meaning for Eastern European societies, kept "immobile" for almost half a century by a mostly invisible but no less effective and tantalising Iron Curtain. The fall of the Berlin Wall, another symbol of this long-lasting captivity, ritually set free long repressed desires, marking the beginning of often uncontrollable transnational migrations with significant impacts on Eastern European societies and the radical transformation of family structures as well as social, economic and gender roles. In this process of "re-entering" Europe, the cinemas of former Eastern Bloc countries played a significant role, with their efforts to bridge the gap between a Western European lack of knowledge and curiosity and an Eastern European post-socialist reality, as well as a desire to be re-discovered and accepted by the European community. These efforts have been honoured with numerous prizes at prestigious festivals – especially in the case of Romanian, Hungarian and Polish cinemas – and resulted in an increasing number of monographs, collections of essays from Western authors and publishers celebrating, among others, "the unexpected miracle" of the New Romanian Cinema (see Nasta 2013). Many of these authors are themselves subjects of the same mobility thematised by the films they analyse, insider-outsiders settled in Western Europe or the US, reflecting on

cinematic expressions of socio-political processes from a position of cultural in-betweenness.[2] A third perspective is represented by a generation of local film theorists and critics who, beginning with the first decade of the new millennium, have been active in researching the new formations of their national cinemas and publishing extensively with both prestigious international and national publishers.[3] Additionally, film scholars of the former Eastern Bloc have started collaborations materialising in the organisation of conferences, participation in conferences with shared panels, as well as international research projects, resulting in monographs and collections of essays.

The immediate background of the present volume is an international Hungarian-Romanian research project, funded by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Romanian Ministry of Education, titled *Space-ing Otherness. Cultural Images of Space, Contact Zones in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Film and Literature* (OTKA NN 112700, 2014–2018) and *Figurations of Intermediality in Eastern European and Russian Cinema* (2013–2017). Additionally, an international conference titled *Contact Zones. Transnational Encounters, Dialogues and Self-Representation in Contemporary Eastern European Literature, Cinema and Visual Cultures*, the main event in the closing phase of the projects, provided another context for a dialogue between American, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian and Slovakian film scholars and resulted in valuable contributions to this volume. As the titles of the projects and the conference suggest, the main purpose of these meetings and collaborations was the creation of a "discursive contact zone" of the various forms of mobility performed by the post-socialist subjectivity, as represented in Eastern European cinemas.

The plural in the title thus refers to the social, cultural and geographical variety of mobility, their repetitive nature, as represented in cinema and experienced by their creators, spectators and theorists. In addition, it also stands for the mobility of "travelling" concepts and theories. One of the core assumptions of both the international research project and the conference was that consecrated Western theories and concepts of space meet some

[2] See, for example the essay collection edited by Michael Gott and Todd Herzog (2015), the books edited by Anikó Imre, a film scholar of Hungarian origin settled in the US (2005, 2012), as well as the volumes edited by Ewa Mazierska, Matilda Mroz, Elzbieta Ostrowska (2016), or Cristina Stojanova (2019).

[3] This approach is represented, for example, by monographs and collective volumes: Andrea Virginás's edited essay collection on cultural approaches of these cinemas (2016), the monographs of László Strausz (2017) and György Kalmár (2017) on the New Romanian Cinema and formations of masculinity in Hungarian films, or Anna Bátori's comparative study of Hungarian and Romanian Cinemas (2018).

"resistance" when applied to contemporary Eastern European films, a resistance that can greatly contribute to the nuancing of existing discourses. The most often referred concept of the volume is probably that of "heterotopia," from Foucault's sketchy but very influential 1984 essay, *Of Other Spaces*. It is probably the sketchiness of this critical concept that allows it to be used flexibly while being adapted to a variety of cultural spaces and places in the Eastern European context, be they national, ethnic, sexual, liminal or "in-between." In the films analysed in this volume, Eastern Europe itself appears as a heterotopia, a space often situated outside the core scenes of community interaction yet reflecting on them critically. As the films and their analyses demonstrate, crisis and deviancy heterotopias are often interchangeable, and also inseparable in the mobility narratives of the Eastern European subjectivity, moving between institutions that fail to represent their case. A similar revision of the Western discourse presents itself when Marc Augé's concept of "non-place" (2009) is applied to Eastern European mobility practices: although they exist in post-socialist societies, the contractual relationship they imply is not accessible for most of their citizens. Similarly, while originally employed to diasporic cinemas, Hamid Naficy's term "accented cinema" appears as an all-pervasive metaphor of Eastern European cinemas under analysis, describing accurately its main topics, stylistic trends, production modes, all conceived of as "languages" of an assumed and well negotiated otherness (Naficy 2001). Post-colonial concepts of the "subaltern" (Spivak 1994) and "the other" first consecrated by Homi Bhabha (1994) are also reiterated in chapters of the volume, with emphasis on "the self as the other" in both ethnic and sexual terms, and with special focus on the phenomenon of "self-othering" as a conscious choice of the directors to represent East-Europeanness as expected by its Western counterpart (Elsaesser 2005). This and reverse colonisation by migration is thematised by the Dracula myth and its continuous adaptations on both sides of Europe and the US (Arata 1990, Gelder 2001). Ironically, as many of the films discussed here testify, the main scenes of this intensely perceived Eastern European otherness are not those Western European countries where former Soviet Bloc citizens seek work and live temporarily, but their native countries, which, nevertheless, can only be a home ridden with conflicts and crises (Elsaesser 1990, Rodowick 1990). Generational and gendered conflicts escalating in small communities and claustrophobic family relationships attract and are tested against classic melodrama theories and gender theories (Gledhill, Elsaesser and Rodowick, 1990) in a separate section of this book.

The originality of this volume is conferred primarily by its complex comparative approach involving medium-specific representations (literature,

film and other media), as well as cinematic national and regional traditions/paradigms. Our aim is to theorise the contact zone along Western discourses and concepts which are still underrepresented in the study of Eastern European socio-cultural phenomena and the communist–post-communist transition. Drawing on individual and group research projects from five countries (four from the former Eastern Bloc and one from the United States), the volume overviews representational trends and thematic intersections through socially and culturally sensitive readings by two generations of Eastern European critics. Just like most of the directors presented in the volume, some of our authors were socialised under communism and reached young adulthood after the fall of the regime. Their critical insights are well complemented with those of the representatives of a post-Berlin Wall generation more sensitive to actual, global social phenomena. With chapters on contemporary Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian and Slovakian cinemas, receiving prizes and attention at prestigious international competitions and festivals, and films that despite their significance to national film cultures have not been discussed in English language scholarship, we believe this volume conquers uncharted territories.

The Structure of the Volume

The volume comprises four thematic sections, of three chapters each, organised along various forms of mobility and border crossing facilitated by an enlarged Europe and a perpetual identity quest, also prompting a comparison between Western and Eastern discourses of otherness. The shared topic of the three chapters of the first section entitled *Screening the Regime Changes* is the cultural and individual memory work with regard to the 1989 revolutions in Romania and Slovakia, as well as the subsequent political events, as represented by a variety of television and film genres, including documentary films, docu-fictions, arthouse movies, TV series, and popular film genres.

As the in-depth analyses of both Romanian and international productions in Mónika Dánél's chapter *Multiple Revolutions. Remediating and Re-enacting the Romanian Events of 1989* suggest, in the case of Romania the traumatic event of the regime change called for a repeated re-enactment (and re-mediation) as a strategy of (self)understanding and sublimation. As Dánél argues, these films demonstrate how traumatic body memory, reflected in the disorientation or disinformation caused by the technical conditions, the circulation or lack of images, the alternating silences and chanting on the street make past events incomprehensible and medially dissonant for the

spectator. Focusing on the representation in TV films of a much less traumatic Velvet Revolution and its aftermath, Jana Dudková in her *Images of Youth, Revolution and Conformism in Slovak Television Productions of the Early 1990s* applies an entirely new approach to the Slovakian post-revolutionary period. Relying on James Krapfl´s analysis of the public discourse during the Velvet Revolution, she explores rare examples of romantic narratives with political overtones in TV films (entirely missing within the frame of cinema), their possible links to the idea of democratisation of socialism, as well as the role of the trope of the "Youth" in them. Katarina Mišiková's chapter *Engaging with the Past. Poetics and Pragmatics of Representing the Political Situation of the 1990s in Slovak Cinema* complements the account of the representations of post-revolutionary events in Slovakia by analysing and comparing "political" films from the year 1990 with those of more recent years. As she argues, distance from historical events of the 1990s brought a significant change in genres, poetics and pragmatics of films: while the 1990s were dominated by approaches of auteur art cinema, contemporary films adopt popular genres as a way of ensuring broader social reception and discourse on the subjects in question.

The second section titled *Changing Masculinities* focuses on Eastern European adaptations of global (traditionally Western) popular genres such as the melodrama, the western, the gangster movie and the cop movie, exploring how they present the challenges facing post-communist gender roles, with emphasis on the crisis of masculinity. As the authors of this section contend, such a crisis is regularly portrayed as a transgenerational confrontation with the haunting spirit of dead or missing fathers or grandfathers.

Hajnal Király in her *The Text of Muteness in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Family (Melo)Dramas* stresses the prominence of male melodramas in the two cinemas and the relevance of displacement as a melodramatic tool substituting accurate transgenerational communication. By a comparative analysis of two representative melodramas (by Hungarian Szabolcs Hajdu and Romanian Cristi Puiu), she aims to illuminate how metanarrative, narrative and figurative displacement of unspeakable emotions in these films gradually gives way to the final (dramatic) confession of the male protagonist, breaking the curse of patriarchal secrets and taboos. In the same vein of comparative analysis, Zsolt Győri's chapter *Ruralising Masculinities and Masculinising the Rural in Márk Kostyál's* Coyote *and Bogdan Mirică's* Dogs focuses on a Romanian and a Hungarian film which address the obsolete model of masculinity as a heritage burdening young male protagonists. Portraying a movement from the civilised city to a

lawless rural territory, these films reuse certain elements of the neo-western genre while calling attention to the relationship between rural sociocultural spaces and masculinity. The third chapter of this section by Elżbieta Durys, titled *Cop Cinema and the Cinema of National Remembrance: The case of* I'm a Killer *by Maciej Pieprzyca* analyses the correlation between masculinity and genre in the context of contemporary Polish cinema. Having established synergies between the local, Polish critical category of the Cinema of the National Remembrance and the American cop cinema, the case study of Piepryzca's film is used to reconstruct the myth of symbolic castration of Polish men by the communist system.

The three chapters of the section titled *Moving In-Between* share a focus on the representations of "in-betweenness" as a par excellence Eastern European condition in three cinemas of the former Eastern Bloc (that of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania), defined through recurrent topics of mobility and immobility, internal and external border crossings, the Foucauldian notion of heterotopia, as well as a (sexually and ethnically) transgressive identity quest. Michael Gott in his *Ambivalent Mobility in "New Czech Cinema"* discovers in the New Czech Cinema a trend to represent the nation as a liminal space between Western and Eastern Europe through the tropes of mobility and immobility. As he argues in his analyses of five representative films, eastbound, westbound and internal travel and other symbols of mobility become expressions of the Czech's continuing "otherness" vis-à-vis "Western" Europe, while reflecting, on a more general level, on the new dynamics of space, whether local, national, transnational, or European. Katalin Sándor's *Uncrossed Borders and Border Events in* First of All, Felicia *(2009) and* Oli's Wedding *(2009)* explores the topic of border crossing in the context of the New Romanian Cinema, analysing two films that focus on small-scale social interactions affected by broader socio-economic and political processes such as migration and border politics. Her central argument concerns the more blurred, porous aspect of cultural, linguistic and institutional contact zones, foregrounding spatial and identity practices that may question the power mechanisms of border-formation and the territorial understanding of space and identity. The last chapter of this section explores the topics of in-betweenness, contact zones and border crossing from the perspective of queer and ethnic identities and their unfavourable public perception. Fanni Feldmann, in her *Minorities in Love. Intersections of Space, Sexuality and Ethnicity in* Village Romance *and* Soldiers. *Story from Ferentari*, showcases another comparative approach, this time between a Hungarian and a Romanian film, both focusing on the intersections of spatial, sexual and ethnic marginality. As Feldmann argues, in the two documentaries the narrative framework of forbidden, doomed

love is used as a reflection on heteronormative societies' attitudes towards same-sex relationships complemented by ethnic transgression, which points out the socio-cultural environment's homophobia and racism. The in-depth analyses primarily concern the marginal places where these unlikely encounters take place and introduces the concept of the "ethnoqueer," a critical term which accentuates shared experiences of sexual and ethnic otherness.

The last section *Intermedial and Intercultural Encounters* complements the topics of post-socialist geographic, social, political, sexual, and ethnic mobility explored in the previous chapters with that of mobility and the interchange between media, be they film adaptations of intercultural "migrating" concepts and motifs, or multiple remediations of personal experiences of the migrating Eastern European subject.

Edit Zsadányi in her chapter *Voicing the Subaltern in László Krasznahorkai's* Satantango *and Its Film Adaptation by Béla Tarr* applies the concept of the post-colonial subaltern coined by Gayatri C. Spivak in the analysis of issues of marginalisation and dictatorship in *Satantango* (both the novel and the film). Sharing Spivak's claim that (even Western, democratic) political representation cannot guarantee that all citizens will be heard, she provides multiple examples from the novel and the film, modelling the difficulty of understanding the fragmented speech of the subaltern (the character) by the reader and the spectator. András Hlavacska, in his chapter *Dracula Goes to the West. Vampires, Regionality and Technology in Contemporary Cinema*, brings Eastern-European and Western cinematic examples of figurative remediations of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and proposes to open up geopolitical and media-theoretical layers of signification. As he argues, Márk Bodzsár's *Comrade Drakulich* (2019) adapts the vampire story to the Hungarian socialist regime and its "bloodsucke" socio-political mechanisms that continue in the post-socialist period, characterised by capitalist forms of production and exploitation. The Western example, *Shadow of the Vampire* (E. Elias Mehrige 2000), reiterates similar connections between the Dracula narrative and technology (as capitalist modes of production and consumption). According to Hlavacska, while these films depict vampires as atavistic, primitive (Eastern European) creatures who can hardly use modern media, they also render legible (on a narrative or meta-narrative level) the vampire-like (or vampirised) face of cinema as a medium. Ștefan Firică's *Adapting In-Betweenness: Transpositions of Aglaja Veteranyi's Literature in Theatre, Music and Film*, through the case of multilingual writer Aglaja Veteranyi, explores the intermedial construction of the migrant identity. As Firică argues, Veteranyi's writings – merging fiction, autobiography and poetry – have been adapted to film,

theatre and music in various languages, showcasing discursive encounters specific for today's societies: individual versus authority, migrant versus native, citizen versus non-citizen, "West" versus "East," male versus female. The chapter looks into some of the literary, theatrical, musical and cinematic strategies – with special focus on Hungarian Krisztina Deák's adaptation *Aglaya* (*Aglaja,* 2012) – that turn Aglaja Veteranyi into an icon of transgressive art and identity. As in the case of the two previous chapters, intermediality and remediation are regarded as figures of transcultural mobility and perpetual identity quest.

Through their numerous in-depth and comparative, transcultural analyses all these chapters ensure an accurate and topical cinematic image of post-89 Eastern European societies, in which all-pervasive mobility, so promising in the first decade after the regime changes, has turned in the post-millennial years into a reckless quest for identity of a generation socialised in the communist era. While trying to move on without this burdening heritage, most of the authors of this volume appear to have integrated the experiences of the communist "lockdown" and transformed it into a creative force under the Great Lockdown of 2020: while not claiming to cover all existing aspects of mobility (mass migration could be the topic of another book), this volume finalised in the spring of 2020 is proof of an existing, ongoing dialogue between film scholars from the Visegrad countries and Romania and a timely contribution to the (self)understanding of these nations and cinemas.

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I.

SCREENING THE REGIME CHANGES

MULTIPLE REVOLUTIONS. REMEDIATING AND RE-ENACTING THE ROMANIAN EVENTS OF 1989[1]

MÓNIKA DÁNÉL

Simulation, Collective Imaginary, Inner Strategies

In relation to Romanian events, there is a consensus regarding three particularities: this was the bloodiest regime change in the Eastern European bloc; television was a medium that influenced the events – and thus its historicity appears as a media event – and the events were dispersive. The documents, interviews, and hypotheses ever-growing in number, the different narrative versions nuance and modify today's memories. Their contradictory, dissonant nature indirectly also stages the reflexive understanding of the past event. Borrowing Michael Rothberg's idea, the 1989 Romanian events become comprehensible today as an event that was shaped at the crossing point of the narratives of *multidirectional memory* (Rothberg, 2009).[2] The simultaneous events of the period between the 21st and 25th of December 1989, the last public speech of Nicolae Ceaușescu and the execution of the Ceaușescu couple make a chronological approach impossible.[3] These few

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[2] In addition to competitive narratives, which do not cancel each other's truth, we must also posit here the presence of simulated, manipulated narratives, which shaped the events with their non-truth as well.

[3] I use the dates of the two events broadcast on television (in the case of the execution, the delayed images) because of their wide media circulation. The designation "beginning" and the "end" of the revolution is much more problematic. For instance, one of the currents of Romanian historiography (namely, the chronology of Alex Mihai Stoenescu) tries to overwrite the initiating (and partly Hungarian) character of the events at Timișoara on the 16th of December 1989, and replace it with the protest attempt at Iași on the 14th of December.

days stratify the various shaping, simultaneous narratives of a military coup d'état and a popular movement, a revolt turning into a revolution, each with a different starting point. There are ideas that trace the events back to international – Russian, American or even Hungarian – conspiracies.[4] Yet others emphasise the disruption within the system. The complex, discursive medium, through which one can relate to the events of that time, is created by the hybrid street protests partly organised and directed, and partly spontaneous.[5] The "spontaneity" of the street events is also shaped by ideas of provocateurs. In the narrative of international interference, such as the suspicion that foreign agents existed in Timișoara, or the hypotheses about voice manipulations of agents of the yet existing communist regime at the Palace Square meeting. Ceaușescu convened a mass meeting at the Palace Square on the 21st of December 1989, and the speech he delivered (meant to condemn the events of Timișoara and demonstrate his power) was broadcast live on television. The interpretation of the Palace Square events is an excellent indicator of the divergent nature of the 1989 events in Romania. The archival evidence on the Revolution, the so-called *Revolution Files*, opened to public access in the summer of 2016, also revealed that it was about the collision of various strategies. One of the probable narratives claimed that a sound-and-light grenade was used in the square (Hodor 2016).[6] (This type of grenade was developed for creating confusion and disarming in hostage-taking situations, efficient mainly in closed spaces, emitting strong light and sound and making it impossible to sense the surroundings.) The agents of the Securitate and the Special Antiterrorist

[4] For example, this is the preconception of Susanne Brandstätter's film *Checkmate,* which presents the Romanian events at the intersection of international strategies (see Brandstätter–Adameşteanu 2004). The film follows the visual dramaturgy of a chess game, compiling the memories and interpretations of an Eastern European representative of the American secret services, French and Romanian historians, Miklós Németh, the parents of a victim from Timișoara, and other characters. Miklós Németh mentioned, for instance, that Victor Stănculescu, one of the key figures of the events, who organised the technical conditions of the execution of the Ceaușescus, had a fair command of Hungarian, thus the linguistic conditions of a Hungarian conspiracy are met, and the film offers a possibility of Hungarian influence.

[5] The military also has a twofold role in the narrative of the events. For a comprehensive summary of the hybrid narratives of the army and the Romanian revolution, see the groundbreaking study of Ruxandra Cesereanu (2009).

[6] For the "psychological war" aired on the news of TV2 on December 21, 2016 at 19:29, see: *http://stiri.tvr.ro/razboi-psihologic-in-21-decembrie-1989--armata-a-folosit-tehnica-speciala-pentru-a-induce-panica-la-mitingul-convocat-de-ceausescu_812738.html*. Last accessed: 22. 08. 2017.

Unit, mingling with the crowd, used these devices to threaten the groups of protesters trying to invade the square. The panic and movement of the crowds created by the sound grenade were sensed by Ceaușescu himself, who archived the effect for posterity himself, as he had to stop his speech because of the noise, and the camera that filmed him recorded it. (The sudden sound that was created must have been quite drastic in the silence required for a public speech.) Also, his gaze pointed directly at the place where the order was broken. Simultaneously with this, as Hodor claimed, the men of the Securitate standing near Ceaușescu concluded that the "Comrade" was in danger, and their nervous movements also indicated this on the TV monitors. As a third component, Ilie Ceaușescu, the president's brother and deputy Minister of Defence, a fanatical producer of the idea of foreign (Hungarian and Russian) invasion, also carried out an intimidating action. In reference to the files of prosecutor Bogdan Licu, Mădălin Hodor claimed that Ilie Ceaușescu gave orders to use a special sound amplifying technique on the square. The president's brother thought that the grenade was an attack, so he had the pre-prepared track of "psychological war" connected to the amplifiers on the square, and this rumbling noise simulating tanks and aeroplanes triggered panic in the crowd. Hodor's article also argues that the dictator (code name "Comrade Oak") probably saw that there was no imminent danger, so he did not withdraw but tried to continue his speech (eventually completing it), and thus prevented a massacre (for there were armed soldiers all over on the surrounding buildings). This argumentation considers that Ceaușescu's interjections ("*Ho, bă!*", "*Nu, mă, ho!*" – in English, approximately: "Hey!", "Hey, no!") were instructions to stop the shooting. However, this interpretation is somewhat doubtful in the context of the images showing the insecurity on the dictator's face, and in the given situation it could have just as well referred to the fact that the dictator did not want to leave the balcony where he was standing.

The last public speech that was broadcast live has the historical value of a turning point: the disruption of the speech and the live transmission and the temporal distance between the two irrevocably revealed the insecurity, if not outright fear, perceptible in the dictator's voice, visible on his face and in his movements, and on those of his entourage. At any rate, the camera archived the dictator falling out of his role built up and practiced over the course of decades. Using the terms of Henri Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1991), in the moments of the disruption of his speech, Ceaușescu himself became the perceiver of the space that formed in the tension of the representation of space and spatial practice. The structure of the space that had previously been set as a panopticon (in a structure that objectifies people) lost ground because of the revolted occupants of the space, although their experience of

the space was not readily visible. The effect, that is, the tension between the abstract (here: dictatorial) use of the space and the experience of the people who moved away from this abstract space, was "broadcast" by the dictator himself. Through him, or rather through the camera and the broadcast, the viewers could also perceive the live space for a short while. Paradoxically, he was the first who could experience the space and pass on the disruption in it thanks to the space representation constructed by the camera.

After this disruption, the previously centralised structure and representation disintegrated into the transmitted images and time planes of partly simultaneous and contradictory events. It was a media event in the sense that the TV studio turned from a space of representation into a location, amplifying the circulation of (phantom) images and further enhancing the dramatic sequence of events. Television had a decisive role in creating the image of the terrorists as the collective (imaginary) enemy.[7] Supposedly, however, other technical simulations also assisted this image of the terrorists, created in an unparalleled manner under the technical and mental conditions of the age, to look real.[8]

So, while the simulations of the technical apparatus (and their circulation) coded and created the (manipulated) events of the age, other circumstances not unrelated to the technical conditions also shaped these in an invisible, implicit way. Based on the memories of the participants, I think that the unspoken (hypothetical) strategies of the key individuals in the shaping of the events "collided" and led to various decisions. These inner strategies/narratives were created by the panoptic control as unspoken suggestions and suspicions. However, precisely by being unspoken, they led to decisions, because of the common knowledge of the structure of the

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[7] The identity of the so-called "terrorist" has never been reassuringly solved. Ruxandra Cesereanu in her above-mentioned book lists ten different versions. Presumably, it was Ceaușescu himself who first used the term "terrorist actions" in the context of an international conspiracy at the last meeting of the Central Committee. Then it appeared again in the language of the actors of the new power as the "terrorist phenomenon" (Nicolae Militaru), and as "certain terrorist gangs" (Ion Iliescu, interview for the BBC on the 23rd of December 1989). Iliescu staged these "gangs" as the protectors of the escaped dictator and his wife. It gained different contexts in different narratives as an empty signifier, but it is a fact that cannot be avoided that after the 22nd of December 1989, the day the couple escaped, 942 people died, most of them having been shot in the head.

[8] The authors of an article published in January 1990 thought it was possible that there were shooting points that simulated shots. Cf. Uluitoarea Tehnică a Teroriștilor. (The Amazing Techniques of the Terrorists) *Adevărul* (20. 01. 1990) *https://romanianrevolutionofdecember1989.com/uluitoarea-tehnica-a-teroristilor-adevarul-20-ianuarie-1990-p-2/.* Last accessed: 22. 08. 2017.

dictatorship. The virtual stage of the assumed power of phantom images created from simulations and the unspoken strategies was simultaneously efficient and operative. The duality between what the members of the hierarchical social structure knew, based also on each other's mutual supervision, and what they did not know because of the novelty of the situation created an open, malleable medium of suggestions and suspicions, where the responsibility of the individual decisions became stronger (this was the case, for example, of the army barracks commander from Târgoviște, Andrei Kemenici, who guarded the Ceaușescus in their last days). The strategies surrounding the execution of the couple were partly staged as such a virtual game.[9] While the dictatorial structure was loosened by street movements, a playing field for individual tricks or agendas also emerged. Supposedly, the group that had the strongest strategic vision was best in transferring the mental conditions based on mutual supervision and turned the change into a long transition to a new status quo. In the work of Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică (analysed later on) and the restaging of Irina Botea, the process of the naming of this new political status quo signals the fluidity of the reproduction: Ion Iliescu would have been willing to leave the term "Socialist" in the name of the new party, but when he was told it was not the best idea, he easily agreed to name the party National Salvation Front, connected to the people of Timișoara. It was much less important what they called themselves as long as they represented the only centralised power. They had no language, no concept for the change. For the other strategists, as soon as they sensed this centralised power, and because Communism had already conditioned them for it, their interest was to go

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[9] The participants of the nearly four-hour-long 1999 talk show *The Last Days of the Ceaușescu Couple* tried to legitimise the events of the execution and their own role in it through their own memories. The "show" also played on the reconstruction of the events by the choice of the location (the building of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, the former room of the Political Execution Committee), and later it exposed interpretations of the hypotheses and decisions of the actors, who shaped the events (Victor Stănculescu, Gelu Voican Voiculescu, Ion Cristoiu, Andrei Kemenici, Ion Boeru, Viorel Domenico, Constantin Lucescu, Constantin Paisie). The show can be watched online at: *3.06.1999 – Ultimele zile ale soților Ceaușescu (partea I)*: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNw-gJuHzkg&t=5579s*, and *3.06.1999 – Ultimele zile ale soților Ceaușescu (partea a II-a)*: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tt1qXeZm1H4*. Last accessed: 22. 08. 2017. Corneliu Porumboiu's talk show imitation and parody *12:08 East of Bucharest* (2006) can be interpreted in this media context of the 2000s. Radu Gabrea's feature film *Three Days Till Christmas* (2011) can be seen as a re-enactment of this archived show, as a staging of the self-reflective character of the remembering process, in which the participants think about their former decisions.