DOCTORAL DISSERTATION – THESES

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CHANGES IN THE MEANING OF THE IMAGE-TEXT

Rhetoric of the Image

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THE TOPIC AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

This doctoral dissertation examines the changes in the meaning of the image and of the motion picture from the theoretical, historical and critical-analytical points of view. The theoretical framework is that of classical rhetoric and the rhetorics of the image; and the material analyzed is the motion picture, the film, the most characteristic branch of visual art forms and media which have become dominant in the 20th century, especially in the past few decades – obviously, along with photography, television and the internet. The more than two-and-a-half-thousand-year-old discipline of rhetoric provides a justified interpretative base because the more recent trends in art theory have somewhat moved away from social reality, and they help promote and support works of art that scale down and deconstruct the aesthetic and human values.

The corpus I am analyzing consists of nine Hungarian feature films made between 1941 and 2011, whose professional recognition is proved by first-category awards both in Hungary and abroad, and which are considered by the specialist literature to be works representing paradigm shifts in a constant series of renewal, in the context of the intellectual history of modernism.

My dissertation consists of four main parts: the introduction, the theoretical section, the analyses and the appendix.

In the introduction I present the theoretical framework, define the period and the material to be analyzed, summarize the hypotheses, and describe the methods used for the analysis.
In the theoretical section I briefly present the main schools and trends of classical and modern rhetoric, of visual rhetoric and the rhetoric of the image, which I am going to use in the analyses. Concerning the rhetoric of the image, I describe the figures and tropes, as well as the symbol (this latter in a separate chapter); moreover, I also present the most important sources of my argumentation. Also in the theoretical section I discuss the development of the concept of the film-image, as well as some concepts and terms of film theory and narratology that are indispensable for rhetorical analysis: narrator, author, raisonneur, viewpoint, angle of view. As the theory (aesthetics, stylistics) of film has its roots in philosophy, I also give a brief outline of the theories of Modernism and the philosophical and intellectual schools supporting them, such as Marxism, Existentialism and Deconstruction. I introduce only two new terms/concepts: one, for the designation of the era of the symbol-image; two, the comprehensive term symbolical-rhetorical film, which category is hallmarked by a specific set of artistic tools. These terms were developed from concepts and categories applied to earlier periods of film history (and theory), such as the terms movement-image and time-image by Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze 2001, 2008).

In the theoretical section I also present the structure and methodology of the rhetorical analysis employed in the dissertation.

In the analysis I interpret nine Hungarian feature films with the help of classical rhetoric, the rhetoric of the image, and also partly with the help of the concepts of narration. Six of these were made between 1998 and 2011, and are important representatives of the mature and declining period of the symbolical-rhetorical film as defined by me. I have chosen three films for analysis from an earlier
period of Hungarian film history (1941, 1965, 1971). These films are important precursors of the *symbolical-rhetorical* film, and are considered to represent significant paradigm shifts according to the theoretical history of Modernisms connected to this category of film. The analyses are supported by 333 seven-centimetre wide snapshots taken from the films and embedded in the text, along with 5 other images.

The section containing the analyses also contains a questionnaire on the understanding of film language and I have discussed its evaluation connected to one of the films analyzed, *Oda az igazság* (*So Much for Justice*) (2010). The two evaluations of the test (in table format and in full sentences) can be found in the main text, while the grouping of the answers and the concepts/terms are listed in the appendix. Apart from the detailed bibliography, the appendix also contains a model for the archiving of feature films for the purpose of analysis (*Nekem lámpást adott kezembe az Úr Pesten – The Lord's Lantern in Budapest*, 1998), as well as the text of Bernhard’s five-minute-long monologue from *A torinói ló* (*The Turin Horse*) (2011).

**Theses, Aims**

I intend to prove the following hypotheses in my dissertation:

1. In the innovative mainstream of Hungarian film history, during the high and late period of what is called Postmodern style (c. 1998–2011), but already in its important forerunners, it is the *symbol-image* and the *symbolical-rhetorical film* which are the most prominent.
2. By the middle and the end of this period (1998–2011) the shifts in the Modernist paradigms had deconstructed the story-telling narration, and with the tool of exaggeration they turn the effects of the progressive expressive methods of film, the rhetorical-stylistic tools of the image and of the text, into the opposite.

3. The films, interacting with the theory, and in the course of the closed professional selection process, develop a manipulative set of artistic tools, which deconstruct social values in the name of and under the pretext of aesthetics.

4. In spite of their gradual alienation from the public, the persuasive strategy of art films still prevails indirectly, and influences the thinking of people.

5. My survey has shown that the persuasive strategy of the Postmodern-style *symbolical-rhetorical film*, which has distanced itself from the facts and life, is not successful among the young, 16–18-year old students who are not yet influenced by theories and ideologies.

The main aim of my dissertation, apart from proving my hypotheses, is to reduce the uncontrolled effect of the flood of visual and multimedia information, and to strengthen people, primarily students, in the position of analytical critical reflexion. The means of achieving the above are: 1. Establishing the theoretical background with respect to rhetoric, semiotics, film theory and philosophy; 2. Defining the set of stylistic-poetical tools of a typical Modernist film category, that of the *symbolical-rhetorical film*; 3. Establishing a new methodology and practice for the rhetorical analysis of films; 4. Presenting a detailed analysis of the nine typical, Modernist Hungarian feature films that are considered to be representing paradigm shifts; 5. Evaluating a test on the understanding of film language and the psychology of expressive arts; 6. Outlining the course of
Modernism in Hungarian film history in a rhetorical, semiotical, film theory and philosophical context with the help of the analyses and a short summary.

THEORETICAL SECTION

In the theoretical section, as I have already mentioned it before, I briefly outline the schools and trends of classical and modern rhetoric, and those of visual rhetoric and the rhetoric of the image which I found useful for my analyses. The school of the rhetoric of the image chosen by me, the one which is hallmarked by the collection of studies entitled Bildrhetorik (Knape 2007), approaches persuasion primarily through figures and tropes. For this reason, relying on the above approach, I present the most important figures and tropes; illustrated with examples from the films that are to be analyzed later.

Based on the specialist literature, I also define the symbol, which is a basic element of the analyzed film type, and in connection with which along with the process of abstraction a reverse process of abstraction can be observed: the pictorial representation of the preliminary, often philosophical concepts. The use of symbols is already a basic tool in the classical rhetorical genres, independent of the medium: “rhetoric is the treatment of symbols with the purpose of coordinating social action” (Gerard Hauser, cited in Cooper 1989: 12). The symbol always represents some idea, thought, opinion, belief; and the person using a symbol creates a message determined by a certain philosophy, a certain worldview (ibid). The aim of rhetorical analysis is to uncover, to expose this message.
Christian Doelker’s examples for the figures of the image (Doelker 2007: 80–111) illustrated with snapshots from the films analyzed in the dissertation (two examples):

7. Figure based on omission (*ellipsis*)

At the beginning of *Szindbád* (*Sindbad*, 1971) the actor in the title-role (Zoltán Latinovits) is dancing with two ladies (Ildió Móger, Éva Leelössy). The snapshot symbolizes asymmetry: Szindbád is courting two (or more) women, and this is also indicated by the music and the dance, as the three of them are dancing a quadrille, which is meant to be performed by four people.

14. A part-and-whole figure (trope) based on inversion (*synecdoche*)

In *Emberek a havason* (*Men on the Alps*, 1941) the town of Kolozsvár (Cluj, Romania) is represented by two objects found in the main square: a part of the statue of King Matthias and of Saint Michael’s church (*synecdoche*). The image can be considered *metonymy* at the same time, representing an association with the sky.
It is also in the theoretical section that I discuss the main sources of my argumentation (ethos, pathos, logos), apart from the most important concepts of film theory, film language and narratology, such as the film-image. As the argumentation can not be examined merely on the basis of logical elements and stylistic tools, or only on the basis of the work of art, the rhetorical analysis would have to be extended to the relationship between the orator and his/her audience (in our case, that of the film director-author and the spectators). Film is a type/genre of public discourse (Cooper 1989: 12), which does not only wish to persuade its target audience with the help of formal logic, thus the orator would have to exploit the persuasive force of his/her own personality (ethos) and the effect it has on the audience (pathos). As well as that, the orator would also have to accommodate himself/herself to the system of values of those addressed, otherwise he/she commits a mistake in argumentation (Perelman 2009: 27–39).

As meaning is created to a great extent at the level of style in cinematic works of art (a difference in style also makes a difference in meaning), and style depends on aesthetics, while aesthetics depends on philosophy and theology, I briefly have to refer to those philosophical schools that affected the filmmakers and their works in the period under scrutiny. These philosophical schools (Marxism, Existentialism, Deconstruction) are the primarily ones to have determined in the last decades the history, the "development", the constant paradigm-shifting practice of Modernisms. The era of the symbol-image approximately corresponds to the period when the style of the Postmodern emerged and then petered out. The Postmodern is also part of the paradigm of Modernism, thus I have also used the relevant specialist literature in my thesis.
The *symbolical-rhetorical* film is a significant film type both from the point of view of stylistics and the history of ideas. Its basis is the disillusioned artistic attitude which emerged after the utopian practice and the fall of Marxism, which, through the practices of the renewal and of the disowning of Modernisms, deconstructs the classical forms of image-language, film language and dramaturgy, as well as human values. This type of film substitutes symbols for the traditional elements of dramaturgy, and in the intermediate and the large structure of films creates meaning through the underlying and often individual patterns between symbols. The symbols represent concepts, often philosophical theses in a sensory form, thus compensating for the distancing of these concepts from social reality. The *symbolical-rhetorical film*, with is growing radicalism and its negation of everything, by the end of this stylistic period (Béla Tarr: *A torinói ló – The Turin Horse*, 2011) arrives at the thesis of the revocation of creation, as well as the negation of the film itself, of film aesthetics and of the effect that a film can produce.

In the chapter on *The method and structure of rhetorical analysis* I present in detail the structural and theoretical elements of the analysis as proposed by me. I propose the use of a complex method, which examines the formal and content constituents with special emphasis and in relation with each other. As I believe that the analysis should be done not only at the level of style, I have complemented the various points of view with the use of the argumentation theories of classical and modern rhetoric. The basis for this was the system for rhetorical analysis developed by Anna Jászó (Mrs. Adamik) (A. Jászó 2012: 178–179), which I have adjusted according to the special characteristics of the film. The basis of the analysis is the
work of art, the film-text/film-language, but it also takes the orator (author, director) and the audience into consideration (Corbett 1969: xix). The criteria of the analysis are the following: 1. Rhetorical situation; 2. Genre; 3. Structure (according to both the film tradition and the rhetorical tradition); 4. Argumentation in the large structure (logical and/or emotional progress); 5. Argumentation in the intermediate structure (topoi); 6. Argumentation in the small structure (style); 7. Interpretation, actor’s performance; 8. The effect on the spectators; 9. The ethos of the director (narrator and raisonneur); 10. Summary. Apart from the theoretical support I also give practical advice for individual and group work based on my analytical experience, such as the use of pictorial and textual archiving.

ANALYSES

The nine films analyzed in my dissertation can be divided into the following groups: first, I analyzed in detail two films that anticipate the shifts in the modernist paradigm: Emberek a havason (Men on the Alps, 1941) by István Szőts and Szindbád (Sindbad, 1971) by Zoltán Huszárik, both highly acclaimed works. For the purpose of highlighting the most important connections in his oeuvre, I also briefly discuss Szegénylegények (The Round-Up) by Miklós Jancsó (1965). The main part of the corpus consists of four films from the seven-part Kapa-Pepe series directed by Miklós Jancsó (1998–2010); and also of the two final works of the symbolical-rhetorical film and of the Postmodern style: Szelid teremtés – A Frankenstein-terv (Tender Son – The Frankenstein Project, 2010) by Kornél Mundruczó and A torinói ló (The Turin Horse, 2011) by Béla Tarr.
One of the forerunners of modern Hungarian film is *Emberek a havason* (*Men on the Alps*, 1941) by István Szőts. “Szőts was one of the fathers of the film conceived in images” (Miklós Jancsó, cited in Pintér and Szabó 1998). Szőts complemented the traditional dramaturgical basis with marked film-language elements, pictorial rhetorical figures and tropes. Above all, he created a new film-language style with the help of the camera through personification, looking into the camera, fade-ins, and compositions based on metonymy and synecdoche. In his case the use of symbols is still in harmony with the narrative structure and the content. The film won the main award at the international film festival in Venice in 1942. With hardly over a year of filming experience, the Hungarian director himself alone managed to create the intellectual-aesthetical poetics that Italian Neo-Realism later gave the world, and which was developed and elaborated by the Italian film makers at the same time as the work of Szőts.

*Szindbád* (*Sindbad*) by Zoltán Huszárik (1971) radically pushed back storytelling into the background, and anticipated the *symbolical-rhetorical* film from the point of view of film language, but without distancing itself from the audience. About the short film which can be regarded as a forerunner to *Szindbád* (*Sindbad*), *Elégia* (*Elegy* 1965) by Huszárik, Gábor Bódy wrote the following: “the first Hungarian film which was thinking indeed in film-language” (Bódy 2006: 38). The film belongs still to the Modernist paradigm of film history from the ideological point of view, but in its set of stylistic tools, it is a precursor of Postmodernism. The dramaturgical elements have been replaced by symbols, and these have significantly suspended the story-like characteristic of the film: in terms of the
chronology, the catalogue of the elements and as far as the relationship between cause and effect are concerned. *Szindbád (Sindbad)*, by showing the beauty of decay, through the eyes of the alienated man of the modern age, conjures up in a self-critical and nostalgic way a world that is considered to be more unified and more consistent. The film received numerous accolades in both Hungary and abroad both from experts and from the audience.

In the subsequent chapters I analyze five feature films directed by Miklós Jancsó. In this section a general introduction to Jancsó’s film as well as one to his series of films can be found. In the latter I discuss the stylistic-poetical characteristics of the *blödli* (burlesque-like) genre and those of the “pattern of the narrative of punishment” (Hirsch 2002: 74). The most characteristics works belonging to the category of *symbolical-rhetorical films* are Jancsó’s Kapa-Pepe films (1998–2010). I also examine one of the director’s other films, *Szegénylegények (The Round-Up, 1965)* as a forerunner to these films, thus presenting both the stable and the changing elements of his oeuvre. This film is still story-based, and similarly to the work of Szőts analyzed above, it also complements its argumentation with symbols. This work, however, which received several awards, re-writes historical facts to a great extent, in a “false historical” way (Jancsó, cited in Szlanárs 2010).

The Kapa-Pepe films of Miklós Jancsó were created within the context of the more and more radically changing practices of Modernisms and under the influence of fashionable philosophical-aesthetical trends (Existentialism, Deconstruction). The changes and renewals, in the context of the compulsive negation of the negation of negation resulted in the suspension of many aesthetical and human values. These films, however, extensively employ the
rhetorical figures and tropes in the course of creating and rewriting symbols, with the result of falsifying and manipulating facts. The aim to astonish and to shock intrudes from the level of form into the level of content, and thus symbols representing national and universal human values are negated with biting sarcasm. Under the pretext of “Freedom and Nothing” the most important symbols of national identity: the female ancestor of Hungarians, Emese, and her dream, King Matthias, the Revolution of 1848, Lajos Kossuth, the National Anthem, István Széchenyi, Prince Csaba, the National Day when the foundation of the state is celebrated, the Hungarian folksong, the Kodály method, etc. are all rejected.

The style and film form termed blödli (burlesque-like) by film historians is widely accepted, but only among critics and in general among the leading circles of film makers. At least this is what the critical acclaims and the various awards earned by Jancsó in Hungary and abroad show. For example, for the second Kapa-Pepe film, Anyád! a szúnyogok (Damn You! the Mosquitoes, 1999), Miklós Jancsó received the award for best director at the Hungarian Film Festival in 2000.

In contrast to the professional circles, the audience turned away from these films. The number of spectators declined gradually – to one 33rd of the earlier number between the 1960s and the turn of the 20th century (Tárnok 1978: 11; Filmévkönyv 2001: 206); and those who watch these films at a special evenet rarely understand them, and mostly reject them.

A part of my dissertation consists of the evaluation of a questionnaire on the understanding of films, in the course of which 37 secondary school students between the ages of 16 and 18 had to note down what they could
remember from one of the films by István Jancsó, *Oda az igazság (So Much for Justice, 2010)*, which treats the person and era of King Matthias with biting sarcasm and irony; the students also had to evaluate the film on a scale of 10. The film got an average of 2.97 points out of 10, and the majority unanimously rejected both the stylistic and the content elements of this feature film. It follows from this that it would be advisable to further test the understanding of film language in a more refined way; moreover, students could benefit from learning and putting into practice a comprehensive analytical method.

The two final pieces of the *Postmodern* and the *symbolical-rhetorical* film are *Szelíd teremtés – A Frankenstein-terv (Tender Son - The Frankenstein Project, 2010)* by Kornél Mundruczó and *A torinói ló (The Turin Horse, 2011)* by Béla Tarr, both of which were praised and awarded prizes by professional circles; however, they attracted very few spectators (*NMHH 2011*). Both of them are characterized by seemingly returning to the feature film with a story-telling, conventional dramaturgy; however, in reality they retain the priority of the symbol-stratum of the paradigm in both the creation of meaning and in argumentation. The genre of these films is seemingly epic drama; however, in reality these are both philosophical thesis films, the symbol-patterns of which deviate from the meaning of the fake historical stratum to a great extent, and they actually put into effect its exact opposite. Both deconstruct the aesthetics of the film based the pessisimist and nihilist foundation of Existentialism, and also negate (or, more exactly, retract the concepts of creation and redemption. The large structure of these films is ironical, and this is achieved by the figure of thought called *litotes* (affirming something by stating its negative). However, this
figure does not retract the denotative and judgement-like nature of the statement in spite of the theoretical argumentation trying to defend it and justify it.

The oeuvre of Béla Tarr outlines even on its own the course of Modernisms from its beginning represented by a positive and progressive opening in film language through the deconstruction of stylistic and human values to the point of having reached the stage of self-contradiction and the denial and negation of everything. The initial radical left-wing activeness of the director turned into an extreme kind of existentialist passivity towards the end of his career, justifying his statement from 2008 according to which he was going to make a film about the end of the world, and then he would altogether give up film making. The spectators do not perceive much of this rhetorical situation, as only about half a thousandth of Hungary’s population watched this film (NMHH 2011); and the critics who are not well educated in philosophy are still hoping to see another film by Tarr.

THE MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS OF THE DISSERTATION

The analyses and the whole of the dissertation are an attempt at approaching and interpreting the motion picture, modern Hungarian film and the symbolical-rhetorical film, and some characteristic works belonging to these categories, with the help of rhetoric, a discipline that is both new and old at the same time. This method, based on its presentation in the dissertation or transformed and rewritten according to individual need, can supply anybody with the tools to critically interpret and evaluate the flood of visual and multimedial information of our age in a balanced way.
I have given conference papers and published articles or reviews of seven out of the nine films analyzed in my dissertation. I have considered it important to present in one volume the results of my research together with the analyses according to a unified criteria system, complemented by a theoretical description, along with the methodology of the analysis, so that film viewers, as well as the “consumers” of other visual media (painting, architecture, photography, television, internet) could use it as a manual for establishing or complementing their own analytical practices.

I would like to recommend the direct and indirect application of this manual and these analyses to the teachers and students of the school subject *Motion picture and Media Studies*, as this could be of help in interpreting the works of directors such as Huszárík, Jancsó and Tarr, who figure in the National Curriculum. Moreover, I would also like to recommend it for achieving the aims laid down in the National Curriculum, according to which this subject should contribute to, “among the priorities of personal development, to moral education, education in democracy, the development of self-knowledge and community culture, the raising of the consciousness of both physical and mental health, and, of course, first and foremost, to educating students in media awareness” (*Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet/Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development* 2012: 7, 13)
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