

The “burden of the real” in Eastern  
European and Scandinavian genre films:  
knitwear, dance, endoscopy

Andrea Virginás

Sapientia University, Cluj, Romania

*Thinking Time and Reality through Film*

Lisbon University, 2014 May 5-10

**HYPOTHESIS:** Eastern European/Scandinavian generic fiction films are supposedly “more real”, “more faithful to reality” than Hollywood/Bollywood /Hong Kong examples, which may be immersed in extravagant illusions and spectacles. **However, effects of reality in generic fiction films just as artificially created as effects of imaginary spectacles**

**METHODOLOGY:** using the concept of **diegesis** for the analysis of

- hand-knit pullovers on fictional characters
- spontaneous dance sequences
- the endoscopy-conveyed image of a stomach in close-up

**EXAMPLES:** Danish, Icelandic, Hungarian, Romanian melodramas, comedies and crime films from 2006-2013

Creating/participating in a diegetic world: illusionary

- Jan Simons' 'four modes of attention': fictivization - "in which the spectator fully engages with the film's diegetic illusion."
- Christian Metz' concept of diegesis as also referring to "the film's fictive, imaginary elsewhere"
- Buckland also positions diegesis as something "which acts as a boundary between fiction and non-fiction"

(all examples cited from Buckland *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film* 2003: 46-48)

**QUESTION:** if diegesis acts as a boundary between fiction-non-fiction, how can certain elements signify "the real/reality" in it?

Knitwear: detective Erlendur in *Myrin* (Iceland, dir. Baltasar Kormakur, 2006)



Knitwear: make-up woman in *Metabolism*  
(Romania, d. Corneliu Porumboiu, 2013)



- CONTINGENT DETAILS: "that the narrative mentions (...) only because *it is there* , and because the narrator, abdicating his function of choosing and directing the narrative, allows himself to be governed by "reality", by the presence of what is there and what demands to be "shown". A useless and contingent detail, it is the medium par excellence of the referential illusion, and therefore of the mimetic: it is a connotation of mimesis." (Genette *Narrative Discourse* 1980: 165)
- Hand-knit pullovers/sweaters in *Myrin* (B. Kormakur, 2006), *Jagten* (T. Vinterberg, 2012), *Metabolism* (C. Porumboiu, 2013): "they were there, demanding to be shown"

Dance scene from *A Month in Thailand*  
(Romania, d. Paul Negoescu,



Dance by the fire in *Katalin Varga* (UK-Hungary-Romania, Peter Strickland, 2009)



Dance: mother Ida and son Kenneth in *Love is All You Need* (Denmark, d. Susanne Bier, 2012)



- Dance in film: presentational and mechanic/electronic media
- *Love is All You Need* (Susanne Bier, 2012), *Katalin Varga* (Peter Strickland, 2009), *A Month in Thailand* (Paul Negoescu, 2012), and *A Soap* (Pernille Fischer Christensen, 2006)
- Hand-held camera " marks the actual anchoring of the cameraperson in the space and time of the events she is filming" (Buckland *The Cognitive* 2003: 101)
- Deep focus and long take also "default methods" in filming spontaneous dance sequences

A stomach through endoscopy: *Metabolism*  
(Romania, d. Corneliu Porumboiu, 2013)



- The reality effect of the endoscopy-sequence explained by Fr. Casetti's four types of shots (*Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator 1998*), esp. "the unreal objective shot": "[it] refer[s] to unusual camera angles. This type of shot is characterized by the inability to attribute it to a character, and by the absence of enunciator and addressee (only the camera's look is present)." (Buckland 2003: 62-63).
- Identification with the camera: a situation somewhat similar to hand-held/long-take-deep focus camera technique

# Etienne Souriau's "seven levels of filmic reality"

## **EXTRATEXTUAL REALITY (BUCKLAND)**

1. Afilmic reality (the reality that exists independently of filmic reality)

**Knitwear?**

2. Profilmic reality (the reality photographed by the camera) **Knitwear**

## **TEXTUAL REALITY (BUCKLAND)**

3. Filmographic reality (the film as physical object, structured by techniques such as editing, camerawork) **Dance: hand-held camera. long take. deep focus**

4. Screenic (or filmophanic) reality (the film as projected on a screen) **Mediatic surfaces: knit plastic patterns. dance. endoscopy**

5. Diegetic reality (the fictional story world created by the film): **not reached**

## **COGNITIVE REALITY (BUCKLAND)**

6. Spectatorial reality (the spectator's perception and comprehension of a film)

7. Creational reality (the filmmaker's intentions)." (Buckland 2003: 47)

- CONCLUSION: the impression of realism/reality achieved by Eastern European/Scandinavian /small cinemas' generic fictions films is significantly due to the accumulation of such other effects that appear as if grounded in a-filmic reality ("contingent details", "hand-held cameras as anchoring to a point", "deep focus and long take creating spatial unity", "unusual camera angles allowing for identification with the camera"), when actually contributing to profilmic, filmographic, and filmophanic/screenic reality
- Withholding the construction of imaginary fictional coherence that diegesis and diegetic reality are supposed to be > hovering between Roger Odin's two operations (performed in fiction film reception) figurativization and diegetization, never fully reaching the latter

- "realism is nothing more than an effect of the successful positioning of the spectator into an imaginary relation to the image, a position which creates a sense that the film's space and diegesis is unified and harmonious." (Elsaesser and Buckland *A Guide* 2002: 202)
- "'classical realism ... involves the homogenization of different discourses by their relation to one dominant discourse - assured of its domination by the security and transparency of the image' (1986: 183)." (Elsaesser and Buckland *A Guide* 2002: 203).
- Heath's "imaginary relation" is increasingly governed by characteristics of what Buckland calls textual reality, as opposed to extra-textual reality and the (as yet unmapped, changed) cognitive reality of viewers in digital contexts

Thank you for your attention.

[avirginas@gmail.com](mailto:avirginas@gmail.com)

Project title: *The Role of Generic Panels in European Small  
Cinemas*

**PNII-RU-PD-2012-3-0199, UEFISCDI-Romanian Ministry of  
Education**