

# **Spatial Confinement and Emotional Entrapment in “Global” and “Postcommunist” (“Small”) Melodramas**

Andrea Virginás (Sapientia University, Cluj-Napoca)  
[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

## Spatial Confinement and Emotional Entrapment...

- “global melodramas”:

- Douglas Sirk’s 1955 *Written on the Wind* (USA),
- Wong Kar-Wai’s 2000 *In the Mood for Love* (Hong Kong)
- Todd Haynes’ 2011 *Mildred Pierce* (USA)

- “small” and/or “postcommunist” melodramas:

- Sas Tamás’ *Down by Love* (2004, Hungary),
- Pernille Fischer Christensen’s *A Soap* (Denmark 2006),
- Radu Muntean’s *Tuesday, after Christmas* (Romania, 2010)

- “postcommunist” vs. “small cinemas”
- the need of “foregrounding the theoretical currency of Eastern European cinemas for a globally conceived and interconnected film studies” (Imre *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas* p. 7)

## Spatial Confinement and Emotional Entrapment...

- “The melodrama is an oxymoronic product in that **it has to produce dramatic action whilst staying firmly in place**; this gives it an inherently circular thematic structure, hence often the recourse to **flashbacks** (Cook, 1985, 80). This circularity also signals claustrophobia. **The melodrama is played out in the home or in small-town environments.** Time is made to stand still, suffocating the child, teenager, young adult – especially women. **Windows and objects function similarly to suffocate, entrap and oppress. The décor or mise-en-scène become an outer symbolization of inner emotions, fragility or torment** (Elsaesser, 1987, 59).” (Hayward *Dictionary of Film Terms* p. 220)

## Spatial Confinement and Emotional Entrapment...

- In line with the panel's Foucauldian and "spatial" origin, the work of the actors' bodies is downplayed for the sake of analysing **the structure of spaces filmed, and the role elements of décor play**: WHAT KIND OF DIFFERENCES ARE THERE BETWEEN THE TWO MAIN TYPES OF MELODRAMA?
- Two cultural analytical concepts have been of great help in choosing my unit of analysis and processing it: Michel Foucault's concept of **"crisis heterotopias"** and Kristin Thompson's concept of **"cinematic excess"**, with the four subtypes listed

- “In so-called primitive societies, there is a certain form of heterotopias that I would call “**crisis heterotopias**”; that is, there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places reserved for individuals who are in a state of crisis with respect to society and the human milieu in which they live. Adolescents, menstruating women, women in labor, old people, and so on. In our society these crisis heterotopias have but disappeared, though one still finds a few remnants of them.” (Foucault “Different Spaces” 179)
- “**crisis heterotopias**” in the melodramas: relational and/or marital quarrels morphing into rows, fights, and even miscarriage, rape and murder, staged in the house (one or several rooms and the staircases between them): opening/closing instances, forced confinement

## Spatial Confinement and Emotional Entrapment...

- “global” and “small” “crisis heterotopias” differ in the amount, intensity and composition of moments of “cinematic excess”
- “Notoriously, the production of melodramatic identities involves excess of expression: hyperbolic emotions, extravagant gesture, high-flown sentiments, declamatory speech, **spectacular settings** and so on.” (Gledhill “Sign of Melodrama”, p. 215)
- “Motivation is the primary tool by which the work makes its own devices seem reasonable. **At that point where motivation fails, excess begins.**” (Thompson “Excess”, p. 58) / “More precisely, excess implies a gap or lag in motivation.” (Thompson “Excess” p. 57).

AV1



**Slide 8**

---

**AV1**

Andrea Virginas; 2013.06.21.









You've ruined my life.  
What, did I say something wrong?



You ' ve already said that. I ' m making your bed, okay?





- “Strong realistic or compositional motivation [ which is a poetical choice in the case of the examined regional, small melodramas ] will tend to make excessive elements less noticeable; the perception of the narratively and stylistically significant will dominate.” (Thompson Excess 57).
- choices of cinematic excess are strongly influenced by compositional/realistic motivation as observed by Thompson, however generic conventions also ask for specific moments of cinematic excess



Call me if you need me.







MAIN DIFFERENCES may be established between

- vertical and non-vertical possibilities of movement
- issues of visibility and non-visibility
- evocation of multidimensional (opera, theatre, sculpture) vs. two-dimensional (frieze, embossment) artistic correspondents

However, the usage of such **framed devices as windows or mirrors**, and certain colours at similar dramaturgical moments of the „crisis heterotopias” (**yellow flower, yellow patch**) seems to betray a COMMON GENERIC BASE between Sirk's 1955 global mainstream melodrama and Muntean's 2010 small, „postcommunist” melodrama