CULTURAL MEMORY-WORK AND SMALL NATIONAL CINEMAS: SOME DIRECTIONS OF ANALYSIS COLLOCVIUM OF THE JANOVICS CENTRE FOR SCREEN AND PERFORMING ARTS, BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA

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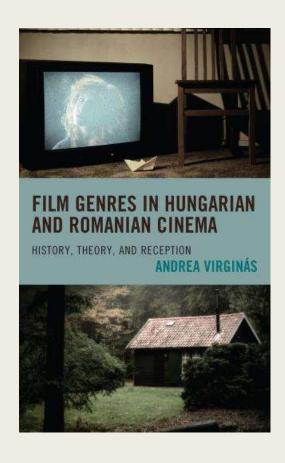
Structure of presentation

- 1. How did I got here? Meta-framework, previous research
- 2. Main points of actual research presentation
 - Processes of cultural/collective memory-work
 - Comparing popular historical films in the 2010s
 - A female filter: small national working conditions and making historical films
 - Small-scale history?

Meta-framework

- Three different directions of my 2010s individual and group research(es) converge in the topic that I hope to present today:
- 1. the postdoctoral research referring to the functioning of film genres in so-called small national cinema contexts and the comparative Scandinavian vs. Eastern European film genres study that I worked on
- 2. the efforts to come to terms, on my own level, with the collectively traumatic dimensions of the communist era, as these are being present in Eastern European films
- 3. the (common-sense) revelation that shared regional traumas can be and are worked through historical films in European cinema, a most popular genre in Eastern Europe

Meta-framework 1: Film Genres & Small National Cinemas



- This research started in 2013, with presentation and written output throughout the 2010s, the last item being this monograph with Lexington Books (April/May 2021)
- the present topic was highlighting the adequacy of comparatively examining films belonging to small national cinemas (Swedish, Danish, but also Hungarian and Romanian films) on the basis of their working with classical/transitional/post-classical film genres (Langford

- In this respect my entry point proved to be the female characters of a handful of films with Eastern European associations or production background that I kept returning to
- Obviously, the main method in this proved to be that of identifying allegorical subtexts, as well as using allegorizing as a main theoretical tool, with the individual female characters attributed collective dimensions thanks to various (audiovisual) poetic possibilities

I worked with the audiovisual representation modes of distinctly female traumas (rape, prostitution motherhood) and their possible intersections with the Eastern European region's recent history





I went on examining the process of afilmic natural spaces becoming profilmic ones, arguing that such a method was capable of evoking memories coded in the body



Finally, I ended up with a comparative analysis of white collar working women with this time Romanian associations or Romanian production background, suggesting that their characteristics of mixing various class aspects are indicative of large-scale social mobility with roots in the communist-era social engineering



Meta-framework 3: shared regional traumas &historical films in European cinema





Meta-framework 3: shared regional traumas &historical films in European cinema

- the (common-sense) revelation that shared regional traumas can be and are worked through historical films in European cinema, a most popular genre in Eastern Europe too
- thus the particularly pressing transnational memories, often traumatic, could find a mode of expression in this way

"Where sociologists prefer the term 'collective memory' (or 'social memory'; see Olick et al. 2011) and wonder who is doing the remembering and with what impact on social relations, scholars in the field of cultural memory studies focus on the cultural foundations of collective memory: using which media technologies and with the help of which cultural models and forms, do particular stories become constituted, shared and linked to identity?" (Ann Rigney 2016, 66)

- "[o]urs is a world in which films rank second only to photographs as the means by which people claim to connect with the past (...)." (Hughes-Warrington 2009, 1).
- European cinema may be conceived of "as a dispositif that constitutes, through an appeal to memory and identification, a special form of address, at once highly individual and capable of fostering a sense of belonging" (Elsaesser 2005, 21).
- An 'apparatus' for working through collectively traumatic experiences: (historical) narrative (fiction) film

- "[...] the way a cultural work narrates a trauma is a function not only of the nature of the event and its initial impact on the victims, but also of the conditions of the work's production and reception" (Hirsch 2004: 10-11).
- While deeply conceptual artistic works need to be examined as modes of coping with unresolved collective traumas, in a Hungarian and a Romanian, indeed, in an (Eastern) European framework, narrative feature films also provide valuable insights, as non-exclusive, habituated "modes of production and reception"

■ "There must be details, not necessarily many of them, to set the action in a period which the audience unhesitatingly places in the past – not a vague past but a past considered as historical. The cultural heritage of every country and every community includes dates, events and characters known to all members of that community. This common basis is what we might call the group's 'historical capital', and it is enough to select a few details from this for the audience to know that it is watching an historical film and to place it, at least approximately." (Sorlin 2009, 14-15).

- Such historical films pertaining to the (Eastern) European canon that have gathered visibility either through good (domestic) audience numbers and/or thanks to their being granted awards and (prestigious) festival recognitions
- Thus (Eastern) European historical films that are authenticated by collective recognition are markers that the act/process of collective remembering has been going on smoothly, with the necessary pitchings happening between the (collective) remembering strategies favoured by the creative crew of the films and the remembering strategies mobilized by the non/professional audiences within the Romanian and the Hungarian domestic markets placed within the larger European canon

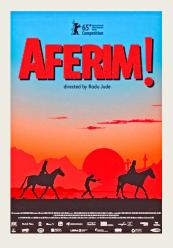
- the Assmannian model of the three communicative generations as positioned in relation to the (cultural) reworking of historical/collective traumas (2012);
- such historical films that have gathered visibility in one of the enumerated professional or non-professional modes of recognition
- the female workforce present in these instances of collective memorywork, also as a terrain of analysis remarkably similar to small national production conditions

- The Assmannian model of communicative generations creates the chain of actual victims, forgetters and mourners/recallers positioned as successive generations in relationship to the collectively traumatic happenings
- Referring to such mid-twentieth century happenings in an (Eastern) European setting as the 2nd World War and/or the instauration of the communist dictatorships would position older filmmakers of historical films as victims of the represented events, while those a generation younger could fall in the category of forgetters, and the youngest ones to the third-generation memory restorers, lacking autobiographical, personal experiences.

- The first generation of the victims those who (in their capacities of filmmakers and/or audience) actually had direct experiences of the historical events depicted in a given historical film;
- the second generation of forgetters whose "task" is to forget, also as creator(s) and audience;
- the third generation of memory restorers who need to remember and mourn the dead, in their historical film-related activities too (Assmann, 2012).

The mid- to late 2010s saw the domestic success in Hungary and Romania of two – apparently very different – historical films that return to the 4th, respectively the 7th decades of the "long" 19th century.

Aferim! (2015, diegetic time: 1835)



Bet on Revenge (2017, diegetic time: 1860s)



Combined framework – communicative generations and that of collective – audience or critical – success

- addressing an era when the present-day states created on nationalistic principles did not exist either in Hungary or in Romania
- both short-circuit the Assmanian model, making it irrelevant from the horizon of the films' period of production and that of the actual audience seeing them
- Hungarian and Romanian audiences of the 21st century (who should mourn and remember the historical collective traumas of the 20th century) prefer to encounter such eras and happenings that fall outside the Asmmanian chain of communicative memory

Combined framework – communicative generations and that of collective – audience or critical – success

• "(...) in favouring the visual and emotional data while simultaneously playing down the analytical, the motion picture is subtly – and in ways we do not yet know how to measure or describe – altering our very sense of the past." (Rosenstone 2009, 35).

Poetics: combining irony and playfulness, being anachronistic regarding the depicted era, linguistic puns and cultural re-codings betraying contemporary sensibility

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQ9N3ABLdbY



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASrZHyKMO-Q



- Even if it seems quite adequate to position historical film as a formalaesthetic dispositif culturally authorized to operationalize these generations of communicative memory, a great audience segment in Eastern Europe
- 1. happily participates in such memory-work that goes beyond the three communicative generations
- 2. enjoys the postmodern poetic strategies employed by the two films
 which thus perform a profound re-coding/re-thinking of the historical film discourse.

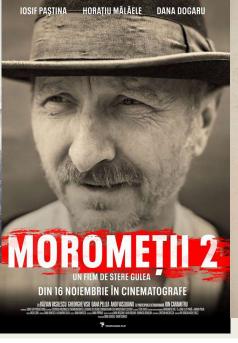
■ Cases of what Fredric Jameson positions as "the nostalgia film", paraphrased by Marnie Hughes-Warrington as when/how "the surface sheen of a period" is transformed into a commodity as a "compensation for the enfeeblement of historicity in our own time" (Hughes-Warrington 2009, 3)?

Such historical films that deal with the (aftermath) years of the 2nd WW and also achieved audience and critical success within their respective

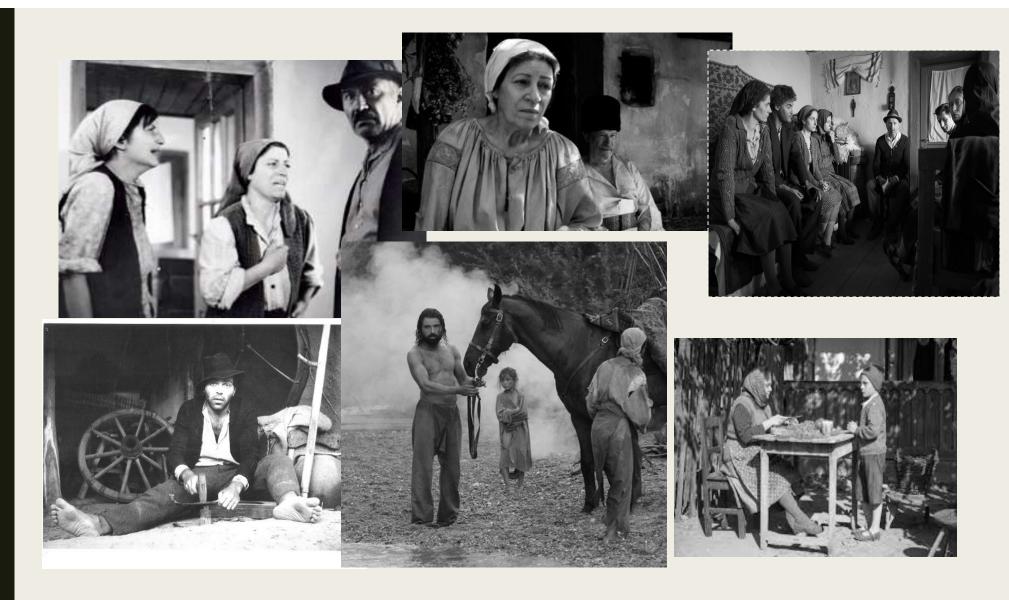
domestic markets in the 21st century

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- Depicting a country in a limbo between eras and orders
- The style overwrites/is stronger than the historical specificity: ripe monarchism (1987 *Morometii*) looking similar to the feudal state (*Aferim!*) or early communism (*Morometii 2*), only the plight of the Romanian peasant remaining eternal.
- What we see here is exactly the lack of any "surface sheen" specific of a historical period, and a strong audiovisual composite style of its own standing, which, instead of "the enfeeblement of historicity" as formulated by Jameson could be rather described as a wish for ahistoricity, for being posited outside of actual, historical time and space.



- The late 1940s and the early 1950s in the 2010s Hungarian historical film discourse with a mass/popular domestic appeal are conceived of as chamber dramas, short-span narratives with one or more breaking points, mostly filmed within interiors recreated with a painstaking historical precision as far as furniture, decors and household objects are considered.
- The attention to "surface sheen" is definitely present.
- The same favouring of stories set in a limbo state between two state forms (the immediate years following the 2nd WW) or two stages of the communist state (the proceedings of the 1956 Hungarian anticommunist uprising).

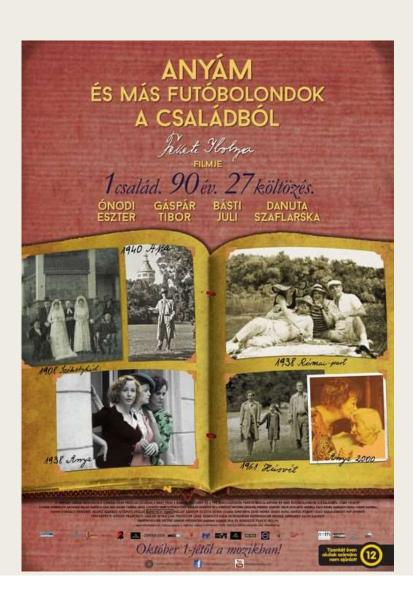
- Such processes, or further ones described above as "appealing to memory and identification" or "fostering a sense of belonging" while passing through the meanders of mediation are hardly unidirectional, superficial or univoque,
- The popularity of a high number of Eastern European historical films in the 21st century as measured in cinema attendance numbers or streaming presence for non-professional, and in critical opinions, festival inclusions and prizes for the professional audience segment might be taken to signal a success in "connecting to a mediated past".
- Combination of specific collective memory practices and certain poetic principles contribute to this phenomenon.

- The conditions of emergence of an Eastern European female perspective on what we can refer to as such generational memory work that concerns faraway, yet collectively traumatic, historically defining events, with selectively accessible if at all personal experiences
- Recent Eastern European films (also)referring to happenings of the 2nd WW (and as) leading to the instauration of communist regimes by the mid 20th century



Aglaja (2012)

Novel by Aglaja Veterányi, script and direction by Krisztina Deák, film editing by Bernadett Tuza-Ritter, costumes by Györgyi Szakács, lead roles Eszter Ónodi, Piroska Móga, Babett Jávor



Mother and Other Loonies in the Family (2015)

 Writer/dir. Ibolya Fekete, costumes by Györgyi Szakács, lead actors Danuta Szaflarska, Juli Básti, Eszter Ónodi



Aurora Borealis (2017)

Dir. Márta Mészáros, script Márta Mészáros and Éva Pataki with Zoltán Jancsó, lead roles performed by Mari Törőcsik, Ildikó Tóth and Franciska Törőcsik

THE MOROMETE FAMILY ON THE EDGE OF TIME

Moromeții 2, 2018

Dir., script Stere Gulea, prod.
 Oana Giurgiu, editing Dana
 Bunescu, Alexandra Gulea,
 costumes Dana Paparuz,
 actresses Dana Dogaru and
 Oana Pellea in
 lead/important roles



Eternal Winter (2018)

Dir. Attila Szász, script Attila Szász and Norbert Köbli, production design by Viktória Horváth, Marina Gera and Mária Magdolna Kiss in (chief) acting roles



I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians (2018)

Writer/dir. Radu Jude, producers Maren Ade, Ada Solomon, etc., production design Iulina Vilsan, chief acting role Ioana Iacob

Cultural memory-work/historical film/female participation

- Hypothesis: communication generations related female memory-work

 as present and perceivable in recent historical films addressing 2nd
 WW happenings and the instauration of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe has specific features
- Frameworks of explanation
 - the model of small national cinemas;
 - production studies research on the condition of European female filmmakers
 - theories of cultural remembering amid mediatized conditions

Small national cinemas/The Cinema of Small Nations (Hjort and Petrie 2007)

Country	Population (million)	Area (km²)	GNI per capita (USD, 2017-18 estimates)	Domination by non- nationals
Hjort-Petrie reference values	4 - 10	> 273 000	1 200-60 000	Colonial/empire
Denmark	5.5	42 000	~56 000	Sweden, 'Scandinavia', 'European Union'
Sweden	9.8	450 295	~53 000	'Scandinavia', 'European Union'
Hungary	9.9	93 000	~14 700	Ottoman Empire, Austro- Hungarian Monarchy, Eastern Bloc, 'European Union'
Romania	19.8	237 491	~11 850	
	4.8 d Bank country sheet d for 2017-18. (Wikip		~75 000 y pages, Hjort-Petrie 2007.	British colonialisation, United Kingdom

Small national cinemas

- Characterized by the unforeseen, non-projectable nature of material, technical, institutional and human resources
- Film production is often not performed in integrated film studios, but in improvised conditions, often theatre or television provide production facilities and actors
- The distribution of national films is non-integrated with production, for an outsider it might seem chaotic or non-existent
- Local and regional audiences are divided by serious linguistic barriers
- Because systematic and long-term market- and audience research is also non-existent, even arthouse film producers (Hungarian Ferenc Pusztai for example) decry the fact that Eastern European audiences are unknown
 - The model of Hjort and Petrie referring to small national cinemas postulates that all of the above problems might be resolved through co-productions involving multiple partners

European female filmmakers

- The Women in Film and Television (WFTV) and Skillset's Why Her? Factors that have Influenced the Careers of Successful Women in Film & Television, 2009 British survey;
- European Women's Audiovisual Network/EWA: Where are the women directors? Report on Gender Equality for directors in the European film industry, 2006–2013 (and covering six countries: the UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Austria, Croatia), published in 2016;
- A small-scale 2017 group research project Female creators in Eastern European film industries: examples from Transylvania, Slovakia and Hungary (Andrea Virginás, Emese Bíró, Mária Botházi and Réka Kassay, funded by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences/Domus), designed on the previous two.

WFTV, Skillset 2009: Why Her? Factors that have Influenced the Careers of Successful Women in Film & Television

- Qualitative study, in-depth interviews with successful women filmmakers in the United Kingdom, working in the following areas: directing, screenwriting, camerawork and sound.
 - Perceived attributes for success: creative and highly skilled, adaptable and flexible, dealing with rejection in a positive way, self-belief and self-confidence etc.
 - Life history characteristics:
 - Strong female influences in the family
 - Early creative leaning, supported
 - Various strategies to enter the film industry

Female creators in Eastern European film industries: examples from Transylvania, Slovakia and Hungary 2017

- Re-confirmed the value of flexibility and dealing with rejection in a positive way
- Entrance into the film industry in the most varied ways
- Theatre: Hungarian Eszter Ónodi, Ildikó Tóth or Mari Törőcsik, Romanian Dana Dogaru or Ioana Iacob having a (life-long) dual career in theatre and film
- Hard and delayed, involving a professional reprofiling in their late twenties, early thirties for directors: Ibolya Fekete, the actresses
- Working lower-prestige jobs documentaries, television, true for Márta Mészáros, Ibolya Fekete, Krisztina Deák

Where are the women directors? Report on Gender Equality for directors in the European film industry, 2006–2013

- Only 21% of all films are directed by women. The Hungarian average for the first part of the 2010s (2010-2015) somewhere around ~13,7%, Full length feature films produced in Romania (2014-2016, statistics from cnc.gov.ro): 69, only 10 of these films were directed by women, which means 14% in this period
- Only 16% of all funding goes to films directed by women.
 - A different trend starts to appear in the second part of the 2010s, and in the case of debut feature films: between 2015-2018 in the Hungarian Incubator Program for Debut Films of the (Hungarian) National Film Institute 40-50% of the funding has been offered to female creators by the juries always containing female members too. But these ARE NOT historical films.



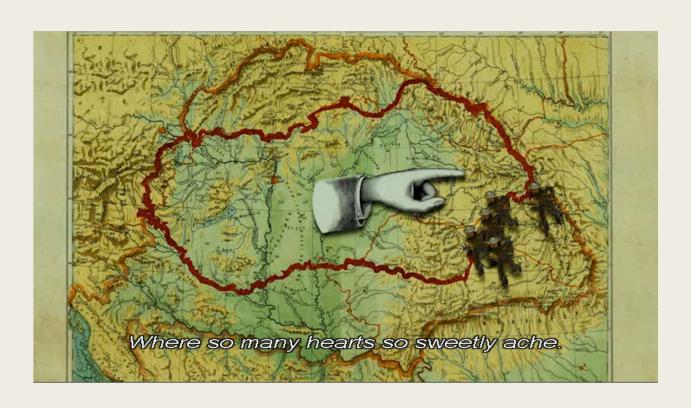
Theories of cultural remembering amid mediatized conditions

■ "A common memory, then, is an aggregate notion. It aggregates the memories of all those people who remember a certain episode which each of them experienced individually. (...) A shared memory, on the other hand, is not a simple aggregate of individual memories. It requires communication. A shared memory integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode (...) into one version. Other people in the community who were not there at the time may then be plugged into the experience of those who were in the square, through channels of description rather that by direct experience. Shared memory is built on the division of mnemonic labour." (Margalit 2002, 51-52)

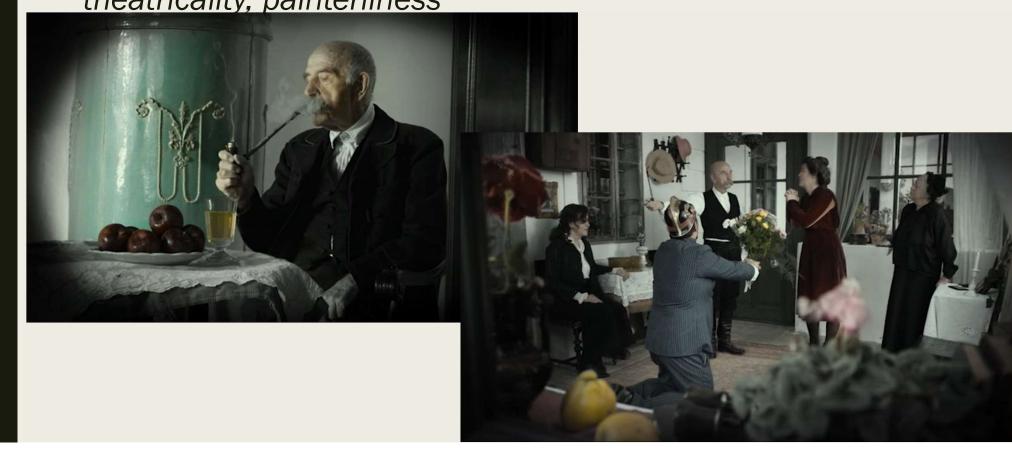
Theories of cultural remembering amid mediatized conditions: 'veiling/screening' over the traumatic wound

- Introduction of out-of-the ordinary, possibly estranging audiovisual elements when historical moments of extreme significance are rendered
- Trauma, like a covered stain, still has effects. It makes the traumatized person react disproportionately to a present trigger on the strength of the injury from the past. Or it displaces that which brought the trauma about with a different object that is somehow associated with the object of the past." (Margalit 2002, 126).

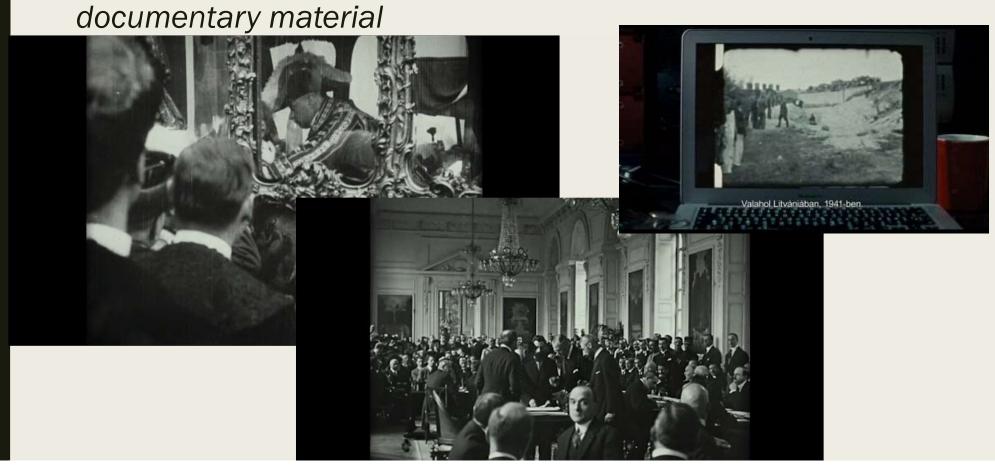
Theories of cultural remembering amid mediatized conditions - 'veiling/screening' over the traumatic wound: animation



Theories of cultural remembering amid mediatized conditions - 'veiling/screening' over the traumatic wound: theatricality, painterliness



Theories of cultural remembering amid mediatized conditions - veiling/screening over the traumatic wound:



Theories of cultural remembering amid mediatized conditions - veiling/screening over the traumatic wound: *painterliness*







Theories of cultural remembering amid mediatized conditions - veiling/screening over the traumatic wound: *midcult*

- Often equated with the televisual characteristics of flatness, closeups, and the preference of dialogues appearing in cinematic worlds
 - televisual experience of many female filmmakers of historical films
 - need to convey a reasonable amount of "historical capital" (Sorlin 2009) to the remembering community

Theories of cultural remembering amid mediatized conditions - veiling/screening over the traumatic wound: *midcult*

- "synchronic communities of living men/people" (Király 1998, 233)
- "banal commemoration" a mode of remembering also linked to mediatized group or mass communication, characterized as "informal, subtle, and non-intrusive" and "able to contain a memory that would otherwise generate protest and animosity" (Vinitzky-Seroussi 2016, 90)

Conclusion (temporary)

- The female filmmaker a "victim" of the represented historical event: midcult canon and aesthetics adopted Aurora Borealis, Morometii On the Edge of Time
- Belonging to the second generation of those "who need to forget": the "veiling over" method occurs alongside the midcult choices Aglaja and Other Loonies in the Family
- A third-generation standpoint of hoping for historical accuracy and authenticity (in spite of the lack of bodily, personal, common memories) might result in exclusive midcult the case of *Eternal Winter* or exclusive "veiling over" methodology, as in *I Don't' Care*

Thank you for your attention!

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Feature Filmic Processing of Collective Traumatization in Contemporary European Film: A Possible Model of Mediated Public Memory-Work (Bolyai János Research Scholarship, Hungarian Academy of Sciences 2021-2024).



Thank you for your attention!

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