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THE EFFECT OF FILM REPRESENTATION ON LITERATURE
(AN EXAMPLE: RHETORICAL ROLE OF THE CAMERA IN THE NOVEL *FILM* BY MIKLÓS MÉSZÖLY)

> *"The medium is the metaphor"*
> Neil Postman

In the novel *Film* (1976) by Miklós Mészöly—an outstanding figure of post-war Hungarian literature—the question of *who is the seer and who is the narrator* has been divided on the level of metaphors as well, since the camera, as a mechanical focalizor, emphasizes the questions of seeing and making to be seen beside the act of verbal storytelling. The camera, as a trope of the narrator, signifies the intent to strive for accuracy and representation without the "knowledge of emphases". And it indeed seems that due to its mechanical automatism the recording device really fulfils the requirement of unbiased, undistorted representation. A further advantage of the camera is that with the adjustment of its lenses, or if you like focusing, it is able to penetrate into the details of the image and make them visible and analyzable by this blow up. The novel that is reliable and that intends precise representation often uses this method, as the narrator, in a somewhat reflexive way, says a few times: if "from the rastered background we only focus and make an at least double close-up of two faces (...)—then we are able to study the anatomy of a traction beyond all passion from a micro-close point of view" (33);[1] "with our usual method: close-up to the pores" (45); "For a second, we bring it as close as to be able to see the wooden rack of crates" (80); "we show the edge of the furniture in an enlarged close-up" (89); "we bring the face so close that one is unable to think of anything else" (119), etc. These are only examples of the explained occurrences of the procedure in question, while the method itself, i.e.: close-up "to the pores" is always present in the novel's representation technique.

However, whether the focusing operation of the camera's *object-lens* does *indeed* results in more objective representation? Bringing something into micro-closeness is often paired with viewing the enlarged image out-of-context: "if this

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[1] MÉSZÖLY Miklós: *Film*. Jelenkor, Pécs, 2002. (my translation)

image had been detached from its context and the process of its direct precedents", i.e.: through blow up, then—we could add—we would get a picture that contradicts the intention of unemphasized and unbiased representation. Or the result of accentuation from the background is that the skin of the Old Woman becomes smooth, younger as the close-up image is able to show a face, "which can be eighteen or seventy-nine years old." (120). According to these latter examples the focusing of the camera not only refines but also *reorganizes* the image, by taking it out of context as the first step.

How does the reorganizing process of the camera's closing-up procedure take place? For the analysis, let's turn to the following excerpt: the Old Woman's "neck is pigmented. It is white as dough, although she is stringy and does not seem as shaking. A few longitudinal thews push up the loose skin with the uncertainty of half-open umbrella's steel wires and let them fall back on both sides. This excerpt can be seen as a landscape from micro-closeness. (...) The Old Man (...) jerks sometimes with his sore nasal bone, shaking the baggy flesh and setaceous eyebrow-bush. The shelf-bone above the eye is hardly longer than a toy-house's flowerbox, plugged with wire-like toy-stalks" (6). Making the bodies of the old persons seen from up close results in the organization of focal surfaces and protrusions becoming *similarity relations*. In the above excerpt, the following similarity formations can be seen: "her skin is white as dough", "the thews on her face are uncertain as the wire-frame of half-open umbrellas", "the flesh on his face is loose as a bag", "the shelf-bone above his eye is almost as long and as plugged (with eyelashes) as the flowerbox of a baby-house". The metaphor "face as landscape" is at the same time summarizes the method of making the body seen from micro-closeness, namely that the "close up to the pores" first brings the focus as close as tearing it out from its context and make it into an undefined, contourless patch. This uncertainty, the close-up dissolving contours makes it possible to reorganize the picture as when the things seen cannot be identified then they can be ordered into one of the existing perception categories based on the associating abilities of the perceiver. In the case of the face, for example, the method changes its curves and depressions into real hills and valleys with the pores being craters. Or as Susan Sontag says in her work *On Photography*: Due to the close-up effect of the photography, now everyone can imagine the formerly merely *literary metaphor*: geography of the body; to make, for example, the body of a pregnant woman to be seen as a hill and a hill to be seen as the body of a pregnant woman. We can say that the method of close-up forces the application of the similarity theory, which realizes itself on the rhetorical level of the text as a formation defined as a trope of similarity, namely a metaphor.

From this point of view, bringing something into micro-closeness can be regarded as a process that draws our attention to the basic organizing principle of

the text, i.e. it zooms on it. Interpreters of the novel *Film* agree upon the view that the main structuring process of the novel is "striving for a universal analogy", which projects events happening in different points of time and their different locations related onto each other along the *relation of similarity*. At the same time, the metaphoric principle operated/forced by close-up fundamentally *differs* from the analogical process of ordering levels of time and space together because as the latter relates narratives—spoken or read stories—into associative networks, the former with, the focusing process of tearing details out of their context models the formation of a contourless image back into linguistic form. In other words: the so called "principle of universal analogy" creates relations between linguistic media, while the close-ups depict the process of the *experience of seeing* turning into language. In this sense, the novel *Film* presents a (basic) metaphoric principle working on—no fewer than—two levels. At the same time I find it important to point out that the tropes of similarity, which can be ordered to the focusing process of the camera are emphasized at least to the same extent as the "universal principle of analogy" analyzed deeply by professional literature, since the most used (almost exaggerated) method of depicting the Olds is close-up to the pores. And if we consider the feature of Mészöly's text, namely that one of its most important (and explicated) objectives is to "find out the logic of an unrepeatable act" (63), meaning that the players of the act, the Old Man and the Old Woman, are in the center of "recording", we can see that the closing-up and depicting technique appears again and again as the old persons get into focus, that is throughout the whole text.

What can be said about the similarity formations that are related to the method of close-up? First of all—the formerly mentioned—shift of media, which takes place between the image created by lighting conditions and its conceptual determination and that this formation into language is not at all without obstacles as the method of close-up obstructs the automatic process of recognizing categorization itself and forces the perceiver to try to name an experience of seeing with an undefined content based on his/her former naming categorizations. This naming is carried out with the help of the metaphor, which trope makes different experiences of seeing identical through their similarity in perception.

The formation of the shift between the world of seen objects and the sphere of language has a definition in the literature of rhetoric: *sensory metaphor*. This notion is used to depict the *shift* between stimuli transmitted by organs of perception and mental processes, namely bringing the "outside" experience "inside". This way we can talk about visual, acoustic, tactile, and—rarely, but all the more significantly—smell and taste metaphors. In his study *Metaphor*, Paul de Man analyzes the short allegory in Rousseau's Essay on the

origin of language[2] pointing out the metaphoric process of transforming a visual experience into the inside, namely how a perceiving person changes the outside, visible characteristics into his or her inside feelings. In his views the mode of operation linked to sensory and perceptional metaphors can be found at the basis of the order of notions. By analyzing Rousseau's example he shows that creation of the notion of *man* has born out of the linguistic capturing of a "spontaneous" and "passionate" moment of *visual experience*, which is based on a mistake, on "blind passion". When a primitive man on meeting other men names them giants he merely projects his fears into his visual experience and this deed results in a linguistic formation ("giant" metaphor) that can be regarded neither true nor false. The word "giant", however, that the "frightened primitive man made up to signifying his human fellow-being is indeed a metaphor in that is based on a correspondence between inner feelings of fear and outward properties of size."[3] Objectively speaking, this metaphor can be challenged since the other man is not at all taller than the perceiver but viewing the same subjectively it can be regarded as sincere because in the eye of the frightened primitive man the other does look taller. Or rather: the statement may be faulty but it is no lie. It well "expresses" the inner experience, the fear of the primitive man. "The metaphor is blind, not because is distorts objective data, but because it presents as certain what is, in fact, a mere possibility."[4] One can easily imagine that they are dangerous and can indeed attack and hit the frightened primitive man or they may not. By naming them giants his feeling is stiffened into a fact despite actually being only an assumption, fiction, or rather—with the words of the theory's author: a *figural state*. With Rousseau's example De Man proves that hierarchic structure of notions is built upon the basis of errors of sensual metaphors and their "blind passion", or if you like, upon formations that miss the fictional, textual element hiding in the nature of the existing they have called upon and feign to believe in their referential meaning.

The basis of the pyramid of metaphors—similarly to de Man—is seen by Nietzsche as being made of a sensual order of metaphors, or as he puts it: "primitive world of metaphors", which is constantly overlooked by man seeking truth, as only through this forgetfulness "can one live in slight peace, security and

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[2] ROUSSEAU, J. J.: "Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité." In: *Oeuvres completes*, ed. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond. Gallimard, Paris [Bibliothéque de la Pléiade], 1964. vol. 3. 146–51.

[3] DE MAN, Paul: „Metaphor (Second Discourse)". In: *Allegories of reading*. New Haven and London Yale University Press, 1979. 150–51.

[4] Ibid., 151.

in a consequent way."[5] And with the knowledge that he is "the axle of the world" around which the world turns. "Primitive metaphors" and "ancient forms" are called by Nietzsche "intuitive metaphors", meaning that they work on turning external nerve stimuli into internal images and this transfer is "if not the mother but the grandmother of all notions". It is not things that actually enter out conscience only their metaphors "as between two so greatly differing spheres as subject and object there is no causality, correctness and expression but only an *aesthetic* relationship between them."[6] Thus when we think that we know something about the things themselves, namely when we talk about trees, colors, snow and flowers we do not have anything else but the metaphors of these things and they are the least equivalent to the original core."[7] This figurative notion of recognition includes a violent gesture as well since the mind does not leave alone the (perceived) entities; rather it performs an operation of comparison on them. Or as Robbe-Grillet puts it: metaphors "create a constant relationship between the universe and humans", they build some kind of "soul-bridge" between things and the perceiver.[8] This gesture is obviously arbitrary as this "soul-bridge" is not a priori existing between the universe and humans. Even Aristotle regards this figurative "bridgework" as one of the main characteristics of human race, although if we accept this as true then the question arises: what is the origin of the desire controlling the "rhetoric" operation of recognition that can be called violent and authoritarian? The answer is obvious says de Man "as this is the only way in which it can constitute its own existence, its own ground. Entities, in themselves, are neither distinct nor defined; no one could say where one entity ends and where another begins."[9] A world turned into a meaningless, soulless impenetrable surface becomes a frightening force that we no longer control and to avoid this desperation we attach a "human face" to those not having a face. Otherwise it

[5] „Nur durch das Vergessen jener primitiven Metapherwelt, nur durch das Hart- und Starr-Werden einer ursprünglich in hitziger Flüssigkeit aus dem Urvermögen menschlicher Phantasie hervorströmenden Bildermasse, nur durch den unbesiegbaren Glauben, diese Sonne, dieses Fenster, dieser Tisch sei eine Wahrheit an sich, kurtz nur dadurch, dass der Mench sich als Subjekt und zwar als künstlerisch schaffendes Subjekt vergisst, lebt er mit einiger Ruhe, Sicherheit und Consequenz". (NIETZSCHE, Friedrich: Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im ausselmoralischen sinne. In: Kritische Studienausgabe, Herausgegeben von Giorgio Golli und Mazzino Montinari. Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag de Gruyter. 1988. Vol. 1. 883.) (my translation)

[6] Ibid., 884.

[7] Ibid., 879.

[8] ROBBE-GRILLET, Alain: "Nature, Humanism, Tragédie". In: *Pour un nouveau roman*. Les édition de Minuit, Paris, 1986. 48. (my translation)

[9] DE MAN, Paul: „The Epistemology of Metaphor". In: *Aesthetic ideology*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis / London, 1996. 44.

would be possible—a situation quite unbearable for man—that I am not more meaningful than —in fact equal with—a piece of stone and the world "affects me as the dark vision of organized chaos."[10] Anthropomorphization, attaching faces on the basis of similarity relations turn things into mirrors, where man sees his own image forming. As Robbe-Grillet says: "they have been tamed, they are calm and look onto man with his own look"[11] Human characteristics projected into nature by metaphors suggest that the world and I have the same soul, we share the same secret. That nature "exists within ourselves as well as in front of us."[12] This is why formations of comparisons are never meek tralatitions but tools at hand for owning and taming the world.

Through close-ups the narrator of the novel *Film* builds a soul-bridge between the Olds and himself, which forces the relation of familiarities and similarities onto the not too far from few gestures of two extremely closed bodies. The Olds neither signal to nor communicate with the camera and narrator questioning them. They are strangers, unpossessable and their secret about the past—if they have any—is unknown to the analyzing eye. The close-ups that try to turn perceivers' "outside" signs into "inside" ones forces the undominatable, the unknown, in this case the Olds into relations of similarity. This way close-ups make the speaker visible, who wants to measure everything by his own means, wants to include everything in his own world or as Beáta Thomka puts it: "close-ups, micro-perspectives (...) distortions of viewpoints (...) are never biases of the seeing organ, rather they are biases of the seeing person and the way he sees. In this way objectivity becomes pretence, the tool turning back to the seer, the speaker."[13] Close-ups and micro-closeness do not want to get to know the Olds, rather *expropriate* them through the metaphoric formations within focusing. The Old Man and the Old Woman do not give any deliberate signs and according to the narrator: they do not want to share their silence with us. For example, "there is no sign whatsoever" in the eyes of the Old Man "that we could read from". (98–99) Despite all this the narrator's often used and recurring expressions are "by all signs" and "as if" and through this he introduces the *nevertheless* interpretations of the Olds' gestures. These interpretations are based on relations that put/places allegedly telltale signs parallel to gestures already

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[10] MÉSZÖLY Miklós: „Warhol kamerája – a tettenérés tanulságai." [The Camera of Warhol – The Morales of being caught in the act] In: *A tágasság iskolája.* Szépirodalmi, Budapest, 1993. 137. (my translation)

[11] ROBBE-GRILLET:"Nature, Humanism, Tragédie". 62.

[12] Ibid., 51–52.

[13] THOMKA Beáta: *Glosszárium* [Glossary]. Csokonai Kiadó, Debrecen, 2003. 22. (my translation)

seen, known and thought to be similar. We could say that he seizes the movements of the Olds but this violent interpretation does not tell about the secrets of the two bodies but the intentions waiting to˘ be deciphered. All this, however, still suggests that the Olds and the narrator share some kind of knowledge. And this is reinforced by the so called "universal" order of analogies ordering different time and space level to each other as these comparisons are introduced as if they aimed at uncovering the sins of the Olds, while the truth about these allegations—due to the silence of witnesses—cannot be uncovered, and they only draw attention to the "suspicion" of the narrator. Seemingly the narrator is awaited by failures from two sides if he seeks for the possibility of knowing without biases: at the level of universal analogies and in the use of the micro-close (close-up) camera. We could say that the investigator-narrator is surrounded so much by these repeated anthropomorphic analogies that they uncover a whole metaphysical system he is unable to break out of.

But is really the role of comparison, or face-giving such a powerful force in getting to know and finding out the truth? I think that if the camera's process of close-ups has any significance in the text in question then it can be determined exactly through the analysis of this question. The camera's automatism "free of emphasis" promises that we can put aside our preconceptions by which we relate to things in everyday life, in other words: it is able to uncover such depths for the perceiver that we would only be able see by ignoring our mind's recognizing categories. In this sense the camera's view would be a pre-human view going beyond all orders brought or formerly recorded and determined by notions, mathematics, geometry, etc.; namely, embodying the hope that a secret pre-existence would be visible. According to Csaba Könczöl, Mészöly's writings often include such intentions going beyond notions as "the writer consistently strives for remembering soul landscapes and emotional states that are beyond good or bad' – that is, beyond determined truths, ideologies and value judgements; and "he somehow suspends his conscience of an 'ideologist', and breaks away from his prejudices and dissolves all elements between the world and himself that are not incontestable and are not evident."[14]

Mészöly himself in potentials essay *The Camera of Warhol – The Morales of being caught at the act* writes about the possibilities of camera viewpoints: "for a short period of time—as long as it is possible—we have become cameras. We have got a glimpse of such a raw mechanism of the happening view, that we usually decline to submerge (self-defense; we are 'I', and everything is 'else'. And

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[14] KÖNCZÖL Csaba: "Rendezés vagy végrehajtás? [Directing or accomplishing?] (Mészöly Miklós: *Film*)". In: *Tükörszoba*. Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986. 220. 230. (my translation)

what happens if we lose the 'I'? Who will notice and be affected by the 'else'? Even reality is lost." Furthermore, Mészöly indeed sees the role of the camera *to cut out metaphysical determinations*: "this is all what happens, when we consider everything by *cutting out metaphysical projections*. In spite of this the camera appearing in the text of *Film* seems to work differently than the automatic recording device described in the essay. Its most important function, the close-up, focusing—as I previously pointed out—does not penetrate the—the world missing human interpretation, nor does it show us this world's inhumanity, its chaotic nature and endless extraneity, but rather, it immediately names the unrecognizable partial image torn out of its context and writes it back into the "pyramid" of notions through a relation of similarity. We are not made to see things in their own reality but only their metaphors. So what is it that the camera allows us to see? "An army of ever-restructuring metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms, shortly: a summary of human relations".[15] Mészöly's camera does not point beyond notions but outlines the *source* of notions, the "primitive" or in other words "intuitive" world of metaphors, where "external" stimuli (giving soul to the soulless) are transferred into a psychic order. In other words it closes-up on the moment when things turn into things and the world turns into the world for us. This way we get a close-up picture of the event of recognition, something we tend to forget about, namely the basis of human truths, the world of metaphors created in a "wild and spontaneous" way.

In this sense the camera is not the metaphor of the narrator but the signifier of the process, which the narrator—contrary to all of their intentions—is unable to evade and cut out. This way the camera becomes the *metaphor of metaphorization,* a formation of the process transferring "outside" stimuli to "inside" ones, which builds a soul-bridge between the world and a human. Or as Neil Postman says: the form of the media (e. g. camera) "are rather like metaphors, working by unobtrusive but powerful implication to enforce their special definitions of reality."[16] The close-up process of the recording device puts the text's own metaphoric operation into focus, pointing out that as the narrator's intention to cut out all emphases and biases uncovers his own face-giving and world-taming proceedings, the showing of "universal analogies" does not lead the investigation to the suspected sinners (the Olds?) either, rather, it outlines the figure coining accusations. To sum, its main function is to reflect back on the viewpoint. Thus the text's process of close-up makes its own

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[15] NIETZSCHE: "Ueber Wahrheit..." 880.

[16] POSTMAN, Neil: Amusing Ourselves to Death. Penguin, New York, 1985. 10.

rhetoric proceedings universal and this way it draws the attention to the narrative determination of all laws, truths and foundations of accusations dedicated in language. In the words of de Man: "If the referent of a narrative is indeed the tropological structure of its discourse, then the narrative will be the attempt to account for this fact."[17] Or if we wish to translate this statement to the language of the novel in question we can say that it is an attempt to account for why we can never get to know whether the Olds are guilty or not and whether they have anything to do with Silió's (other important character in the novel) existence beyond time and space, or not.

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[17] DE MAN: „The Epistemology of Metaphor." 44.