



## Images of Strangeness in András Jeles's Films

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**Abstract.** The paper discusses the perpetuation of unconventional stylistic features of the modern film, as well as its possibilities of introducing a new, existential meaning in the Hungarian film production of the 1970s and 1980s. “New-narrative” films experimenting with narrative forms display an ambition of the filmic medium to join other, extraneous formations (such as music, literature, theatre), fulfilling thus the modernist ideal that the film as a “free indirect discourse” will demolish the monolithic unity of filmic narration. In a Hungarian perspective the experiments with narrative forms were similarly approached by three names as representative for the period: Miklós Erdély, Gábor Bódy, and András Jeles. Although film language experiments result in strongly medium conscious forms with all three directors, they are stylistically very different nonetheless. Experimentation in Erdély's films leads to a minimalist form, in Bódy's to an analytical construction, while in Jeles's to a non-film-like form. The stylized world of Jeles's films proves a particular concern with form, which, similarly to literature and theatre, must be able to transmit abstract (symbolic) meanings articulated at the same time in an existential experience.

*„Strangeness, the consistent non-adequacy  
of expression at a given place”*

(András Jeles)

The study highlights three focal points of András Jeles's films, examining: the collision and confrontation of documentary and fictional narrative forms; the asynchronous relations of image markers not subordinated to the narration, as well as sound markers; and finally the presence of the paradox visual field

occurring with the refraction of the filmic nature. All three aspects subserve the investigation of the *experience of strangeness* or eventlikeness, understood in the sense of an unrepeatable individuality (ipseity) and otherness (alterity), which in Jeles' art emerges as a result of the overdrawn film image, or the insertion of some sort of peculiar viewpoint.

## Film Language Experiments in Hungarian Films of the 1970s

The end of the 1970s witnessed a common ambition directed to the fundamental renewing of film language and the subversion of filmic conventions. In a Hungarian perspective the experiments with narrative forms were similarly approached by three names as representative for the period: Miklós Erdély, Gábor Bódy, and András Jeles. According to András Bálint Kovács, it was Miklós Erdély who most radically opposed narrative conventions, Bódy was the most anarchic, while Jeles proved to be most dangerous from a political perspective<sup>1</sup> (Kovács 1989, 2). All three of them sought a "new narrative" in the film, and this endeavour was matched with concept art with Erdély, music with Bódy, and literature and theatre with Jeles.

In characterizing the films of the new sensibility unfolding in the first half of the 1980s, Miklós Erdély relies to a certain extent on Bódy's classifications regarding the Hungarian film of the 1960s, and the tradition of "subjective" and "objective" filmmaking.<sup>2</sup> However, the specificity of Erdély's views is the fact that he regards this experimental and unconventional filmmaking in its connection with the documentary ambitions developing in the second half of the 1970s. He writes in connection with Béla Tarr's film entitled *Autumn Almanac* (*Őszi almanach*, 1984): "Hungarian filmmaking gradually outlines a particular tendency, which was prepared on the one hand by the documentarists, while on the other hand it fed on a philosophical ambition as a compensation of isolation and oblivion, pointing well beyond national issues. Artists such as

<sup>1</sup>András Jeles's film *Dream Brigade* (*Álombrigád*, 1983) was confiscated even before it was released, as it outlined one of the most delicate subjects at the time, the low people of a society directed from above, it pictured the conditions of simple workers.

<sup>2</sup>In Bódy's approach there are two defining tendencies of the Hungarian film of the 1960s: *subjective* filmmaking, which goes back to the tradition of author films, and is characterized by the emphatic presence of the director's personality; and *objective* filmmaking, characterized by a kind of realism taken in the best sense of the word, as the understanding and love of reality, a general and deep knowledge of humanity. (Cf. Bódy 2006, 26–34.)

Péter Gothár, András Jeles, Gábor Bódy and others represent a particular mixture of microrealism and an endlessly enlarged meaning" (Erdély 1995, 260). Generalizing Erdély's thoughts, one may conclude that the basic feature of the films in question is that they work as representational processes contrary to the trivial meanings of the represented plot, which they eliminate or elevate to new levels of meaning. In other words, the objective reality represented with microrealistic accuracy is embedded into a representational (fictional) frame which, on a conceptual level, significantly enlarges, modifies, and rearranges the primary level of meaning. It is by no means a kind of "new symbolism" which gains place in these films; on the contrary: the primary level of meaning does not get dissolved in the general meaning guided by the representation, instead, it appears in its strangeness diverging from the customary. If one considers all this as pertaining to the working of perception as well, then one might grasp the basic feature of experimental film in that it aims not only at the transformation of film watching habits, but also the "liberation" of sensory perception – particularly seeing – from under cultural conventions and the autocracy of consciousness. This idea is congruent with László Beke's general definition about experimental films, formulated at about the same time, according to which this kind of film attempts at creating motional visual combinations by which *it influences the hitherto untouched domains of the eye and consciousness* (Beke 1997, 197–198).

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## Intersection of Documentary and Stylized Film Forms

In Gábor Gelencsér's view the form history of the 1970s revolves around those works which manifest a *transparent style*<sup>3</sup> in intertwining documentarism and authorial stylization (or fictional film form). In this perspective, he perceives

<sup>3</sup>Transparent style does not refer here to the transparency of the film medium, but on the contrary, to that non-film-likeness where the narrative patterns and styles of the film become unconcealed. (Cf. Gelencsér 2002, 383).

Bódy's radical innovation in that he mixes for the first time documentarism with a conscious film language in such a way that the film language and the world it represents mirror each other (2002, 389). Jeles takes one step forward in his films, he no longer believes in the possibility of separate documentary or fictional film forms. For this reason the centre of Jeles's art is not the theoretical or practical issue of "documentarism and/or fiction", but the *style* (2002, 395). In this interpretive framework<sup>4</sup> this means that the issue for Jeles is to confront the *styles* of documentarism and fiction.

The films of Bódy and Jeles may be regarded as experiments which show a simultaneous sensibility to both the elements of spectacle and the way of representation structuring these. The *what* defining all-time representation and the correlation and breakpoint issues of the *how* has been a concern for both artists. The method which Bódy termed analytical stresses the tension resulting from the superposition of the documentary and fictional representational systems. According to his definition: "we may call analytical any kind of solution which forms an *explicit*, combined document of the objective reality transposed to film and the fact of filmmaking; in which, that is, the '*double projection*' takes on a conscious shape" (1996, 64). In a primary sense, this duality is of course a basic characteristic of all films: in documentaries, besides the objective reality they capture, the forming marks are, among others, cutting and lighting, while in case of fictional films the settings and the actors form a basic documentary stratum. However, due to the particularities of the film form, both sides can never be expressed at the same time since that would weaken the validity of the requirements towards the film.

It should be noted that for Bódy the document usually does not mean a film form or the documentation of the objective reality present at all shooting, but a self-reflective act: first of all, it means the documentation of the cinematographic capturing. It is not the captured, but the filmic representation of the capturing process which has an authenticating value. In opposition with the ideal of the traditional documentary form,<sup>5</sup> here it is not the event before the camera, but the relationship of the event and the camera, that is, *the decisive presence of the camera which makes the document*. When the camera documents its own presence and creative force, then – paradoxically –

<sup>4</sup>Gelencsér's analysis is mostly based on Jeles's study *Teória és akció (Theory and Action)* (1993, 39–43), and his first feature film, the *Little Valentino (A kis Valentinó)*, (1979).

<sup>5</sup>The ideal of traditional documentary form, valid even today, is that the objectivity of the presented world can be attained if the camera disappears behind the events.

it authenticates as a “document” that which is impossible to be represented as a document. Already in his first feature film, the *American Torso* (*Amerikai anizix*, 1975), the continuously modified masking and the thematization of the viewpoint (cross-hairs, drawing on the image, etc.) frames the archaic-looking, granular images modulated by light-cut technique. This method brings to the forefront the structuring, organizing activity of seeing as opposed to a documentary view or the presentation of historical events. The way of presenting the narration penetrates the system of representation so far as to make it static, stretch it apart and unmask it. It can be noticed that the documentary and fictional modes of representation are hierarchically organized here: the document is subordinated to fiction as a structuring principle, and this is repeatedly underlined in the film.

For Bódy, film form subserves the formation of abstract meanings; however, since abstract meanings are always reconnected with the medium of a contingent shot or with raw matter, the projective illusion of the fictional system is permanently impeded. Connecting the obscure and uncertain first level meanings into an abstract, symbolic network of meanings, he does not dissolve them nevertheless (the actor's character or way of speaking does not disappear in the roles he plays either), but by the effect of the fictional system the film permanently reacts to this manipulated first level. This mutual reaction results in an ostentatious presence of the artificially formed construction on both levels: on the “document” side by the alienating elements appearing in image and sound media (sound distortion, painting, and light-cut effects), and on the “fiction” side by polarized characters and situations, and the stylization of the setting. Often the scenes shot with documentary techniques, the improvised texts of the civilians create a declaimed, stage-like effect as well, while the fictional order of the plot shows unmasking contingencies. This means that Bódy does not merely apply the two well definable representational systems of documentary and fiction, but stratifies them in a way that the one takes on the characteristics of the other, and vice versa: *the document shows createdness, while fiction shows either possible rawness, or it becomes an exaggerated and incredible fantasy.*

Owing to his literary affinity, András Jeles keenly clashes concrete images deriving from the nature of the film with the stylized and abstract forms of textuality. More precisely, he plays off the possibilities lying in visual representation and textuality against each other. On the one hand, it escapes transparent images and the projective illusion deriving from the photographic nature of the film, and in this endeavour he is aided by highly stylized literary

texts and theatrical language.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, however, searching for the zero degree of expression, his lifework proves a strong suspicion against a culturally determined symbolic order (that is, language). The broken forms of communication can be observed already in Jeles's first theatre direction, the *The First Day of Freedom* (*Szabadság első napja*, 1975) in Kaposvár, when he made his actors walk on pieces of glass, with the effect, among other things, that their speech was incomprehensible (Nánay 2004, 44). Similarly, the maid in the *No Man's Land* (*Senkiföldje*, 1993) stutters and in the Constantinople scene of the *The Annunciation* (*Angyali üdvözlét*, 1984) there is a lisping little girl. The dialogues are fragmentary, the people speak too fast about incomprehensible things. As Nánay writes, "these are sound effects intentionally deprived of their meaning, rather playing a musical or alienating role" (Nánay 2004, 44). It seems that it is not speech that is important here, but the eventless passage of time, the small gestures, the role of unexpected, surprising, and sometimes grotesque simultaneities and contingencies. One finds a similar solution of invalidating textuality in the ring-buying scene of the *Little Valentino* (*A kis Valentinó*, 1979), when the caption covers the sound of the dialogue, and the director withdraws these instantly with a conditional structure ("he could say"). This solution is a good example – in Gelencsér's formulation – "of the original difference between filmic transparency and linguistic-logical negation" (2002, 410).

## Asynchronous Relations of Image and Sound

In Jeles's films, starting with the *Dream Brigade* (*Álombrigád*, 1983), besides the confrontation of documentary and fictional styles, there is a more particular sense of overdrawing the film image, which may be connected to the production of an experience of strangeness understood in the sense of unrepeatable individuality (ipseity) and otherness (alterity). For this end it does not only aim at the destruction and breaking of the narrative modes of traditional film forms and genres, but it also corrodes the simplest elements and usual relations of the audio-visual medium.

The first experiment with the asynchronous relation of image and sound appeared in Hungary in Tamás Szentjóby's *Centaur* (*Kentaur*, 1976), and

<sup>6</sup>Cf. with Jeles's thoughts: "*amint a szép híves patakra a szarvas kívánczik* [just as the deer yearns for the nice cool stream] – fragment from a 16<sup>th</sup> century poem by Bálint Balassi], the film also yearns for literature and real theatre. Nothing has disturbed more the mind of filmmakers than *film-likeness*" (2006, 6–7).

Tibor Hajas' *Self-fashion-show* (*Öndivatbemutató*, 1976). Miklós Erdély also employed the same technique in the 1970s. Jeles experiments with this deconstructive form for the first time in the *Dream Brigade*, when it is not only image and sound that are separated and incompatible, but the text itself also falls apart into parallel phrases (Kovács 2002, 271). This technique later becomes Jeles's particular use of form, emphatic not only in his films, but also in his theatrical directions. Like, for instance, in his later performance, *Dramatic Events* (*Drámai események*, 1985–86) directed for the Monteverdi Birkózókör theatrical company, in which the actors utter consonants and vowels separately. The sometimes completely undetachable sung or uttered sounding text splits into articulated and inarticulate manifestations. By this method the film develops from the drama everything which is the opposite of the original text, the "other side" suppressed by the text (Kovács 2002, 271). It is not about the duality of "appearance" and "reality", but rather about undertaking the program that reality must be exhibited within concealed appearance, while at the same time this ideologically constructed reality must be made transparent.

Already in his first feature film, the *Little Valentino*, the destruction concerns the ideological stratum of the language, while the social critical tone lies merely in the presentation of misery. The film is set in a familiar, realistic environment, and stylization only occasionally alienates the image from the concrete setting. Still, the sound and imagery of the film shows unusually interesting relations and intersections. Its stratification creates on the one hand the documentary naturalism of the image, while on the other hand, by the insertion of misplaced elements, it points to absurd stylization. Sometimes neither the speech of the actors (due to distortion and the use of noise curtain), nor the captions (due to the elliptic and inarticulate form of the writing) set up as an articulated language; but the images are determined by their rendering the fantastic nature of the everyday, of created existence. Nevertheless, stylized, distorted speech is not always an instrument of irony for Jeles; indeed, it serves the creation of an aesthetic experience of strangeness. In addition to unmasking the ideological content of film form, genre, or speech, it serves the elimination of customary cultural reflexes.

Owing to the frequent repetitions, the noises and speech often become musical. Speech reduced to a mere sound or emphasizing its incomprehensibility unwillingly exhibits its own pulsation, rhythm, and melody. Jeles uses human speech, music, and noises not only to cover one another, but also to sometimes approach one another: by the musicality of its sound the world of objects gains an expressive power, while the spoken sound approaches the noise because of its distortion. Moreover, Jeles often

uses music instead of text on certain emphatic points of his films. This use of music does not necessarily mean Mozart or Bach – he is keen on mixing the elements of elite and popular culture. The musical material is not employed as “background music” merely for the sake of atmosphere, but as a quotation, as cultural debris, which operates in a productive tension with other filmic means of expression. Elevated scenes are usually clashed with popular musical genres, and conversely, trivial or “boring” stories are blown up by lofty music (Nánay 2004, 46). One characteristic example thereof is the famous series of images of the *Little Valentino*, when the hero burns his coat and watches the dust-bin in flames, while lying on a bench. Apart from camera movement, the scene is completely ordinary, but certain unexpected instances re-evaluate and “elevate” the situation. The ordinary atmosphere of idleness becomes strangely tensed by the appearance of the bridal party exiting the church and the sound of Bach’s *Pastorale*. Furthermore, the end of this scene becomes one of the strongest parables of this associative technique which couples cultural values with fragmentary, ordinary gestures: a statue representing a female nude emerges from the ruins of the burnt dust-bin – this could as well be Jeles’s *ars poetica* (cf. Gelencsér 2002, 413).

For Jeles, repetition is not merely an instrument of form and style, but also an existential question concerning a traumatic experience of strangeness. In addition to the repetition of audio-visual material – let us think of the rehearsals of the *Dream Brigade* or the sound technique of the *Joseph and his Brothers – Scenes from a Peasants’ Bible* (*József és testvérei – Jelenetek egy parasztbibliából*, 2003) – the plot also contains a circularity based on particular repetitions. Péter Balassa gives a perceptive account of the circularity in the structure of the *The Annunciation*: “It deepens, dissolves the historic, evolutionist, national, and traditionally accepted problem of the *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*, a Hungarian drama written by Imre Madách, 1862) in circularity and repetition; we see a circulating, repetitive existential structure, which passes in front of our eyes as juxtaposed parables almost as a social dance we watch” (Balassa 1989, 276). His stories seem to be eternal repetitions of the Passion, all break-out attempts end up there: beginning already with the hopeless possibilities of escape in the *Little Valentino*, through the *The Annunciation* to the parallel Passion of the *Joseph and His Brothers*. In the *The Annunciation* this arc connects birth and death, burdened by the tribulations of expecting death. Birth and death stand at the intersection of two spheres, just as the title itself makes reference to that canonic topos of literature and the art of painting in which celestial and terrestrial things



chiastically<sup>7</sup> meet. The placement and setting of the plot also carries this particular duality: besides literally earth-like environmental elements, theatrical immobility and ornamental forms reminiscent of the viewpoint of eternal things are particularly stressed in the film. The representation of frail existentiality seems to be made from a *sub specie aeternitatis* viewpoint, from which everything that belongs to life is terrible and wonderful at the same time – that is, tragic. The film only hints to the viewpoint of a non-human regard – it lies in the background of a more familiar viewpoint as a burdening alienness – representing a point of mobility in the contemplation of things.

## Experience of Strangeness and Eventlikeness

It was Pasolini who first recognized the peculiarity of the modern film as depending on divergent aspects which refract the “prosaic” nature of classical film – that is, the *unary*<sup>8</sup> continuity of space and time – and replace it with unpredictable variability and “free indirect discourse” (Pasolini 2007, 211–233). Pasolini experiments in several of his films with applying this free indirect discourse, not reduced to the double (direct and indirect) use of a parabolic discourse. He usually refers the plot of his films to an external,<sup>9</sup> to a viewpoint which does not fit into the given situation, and is thus alien, which questions the unity of the narration, while at the same time places it into a different light. This viewpoint introduces a polyphonic character into the visual space which reveals cracks, discrepancies, and incompatibilities within the film image: they open up to alien meanings. Deleuze’s idea, according to which one basic

<sup>7</sup>The reference to this concept of late phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty is not accidental, as in this case also we are speaking about the intersection of viewpoints, the interrelatedness of the seer and the seen. The concept of chiasmus refers to the intersection of impossible viewpoints, which means not only the inversion of the I and the other, but also the interrelatedness of the I and the world, and the perceiver and the perceived (1964, 264.).

<sup>8</sup>Roland Barthes applies this term for a group of photographs which only emphatically transform “reality” without breaking it apart or making it insecure. A photograph is unary for Barthes if there is nothing indirect, ostentatious, or divergent about it. (1985, 49).

<sup>9</sup>The relationship of the represented and the representer, the internal and the external, the issue of a viewpoint always external to the represented objectivity and the (external) viewpoint appears most clearly in his film *La ricotta* (1963). The reference to the external is sometimes formulated linguistically as well, but the selection of black-and-white and coloured images also underlines it. In the presentation of the Passion, the inversion of the internal and the external is best represented by Stracci’s crucifixion, as also highlighted by the last sentence of the film: “He had to die to show us that he was alive.” See the analysis of Maurizio Viano on this (1997, 99–110).

characteristic of modern film is “the obliteration of a whole or of a totalization of images, in favour of an outside which is inserted between them” (1989, 187) is a familiar one. Related to this, Jacques Aumont also reaches to the conclusion that the film art of both Pasolini and Godard – by the peculiar use of shot–anti-shot, cutting, speed, and viewpoint – causes a *transmigration* within the film image which follows the canonic representation of the Annunciation scene: it creates the simultaneous presence (*coprésence*) of two heterogeneous ontological entities within a paradoxical visual space (Aumont 2002, 64).<sup>10</sup>

## Diegetic and Non-diegetic Narrator

Jeles also employs an instrument of sound technique for creating the experience of strangeness: he sometimes doubles filmic storytelling with narration. However, contrary to the general use, here the employment of the narrator does not assist the understanding of the plot, but withdraws the narrator’s external viewpoint. Traditionally, the narrator either explains the plot – transmitting important information to the viewer – or reflects upon the entire work by “speaking out” of the film; this happens in the case of a media-conscious use of film. In Godard’s films for instance the narration approaches the author’s commentary or is even completely equivalent to it: the narrative activity can be understood as a manifestation of a personality completely independent of the plot (Bordwell 1996, 329–330).

Jeles’ films contain two kinds of narrators: the diegetic and non-diegetic sound narration. The employment of the diegetic narrator is characterized by its partaking and involvement with the situation. The narrator’s inclusion into the plot invalidates in fact its privileged position due to its extra-diegetic situation. Jeles mostly uses this form in the *Dream Brigade*: the visible and thus unmasked narrator begins narrating time and again, but he always gets lost among the possibilities and ravel of the “tempting” stories; then he passes his role on to a more objective narrator, returning again later, and then disappearing for good.

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<sup>10</sup>It is more than interesting that Jeles asks for a similar heterogeneity in Pasolini’s *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*: “the Jesus-story would not be boring, it could even be intriguing if – say – I met the Gospel episodes as recounted by an eye witness who *had a wrong knowledge of the Galilean events* and interpreted the crucifixion as an initiation ritual for example, etc. In such cases [...] the reflexes attached to codified images disappear and every scene – as the narration mode is almost perpendicular in relation to the traditional story level – is enlightened in a dramatic sense, acquiring a new, unexpected meaning.” (2006, 37).

In his film *Joseph and His Brothers* one finds shared and multiple narration. As the characters of the shadow theatre do not speak to each other, the external narratorial voice is an organic part of the plot. The basic story is connected to Joseph's story intermingled with the stories of Jacob and Rachel, Judas and Tamar, Isaac and Abraham, and Jesus. The narrator's voice (Dezső Mészöly) completely replaces the character's speech, it is rather a storyteller or the voice of certain characters. However, another narrator also appears in this same line of the plot: the sacrifice-story of Abraham and Isaac embedded into the Joseph-story is told by a different narrator (Péter Haumann). His way of speech is less archaic, he speaks out to the viewer, interrupts the speech of the first narrator, reflecting sometimes even to his own text (Varga 2004, 65–66). The story of the film basically follows two strings, the other one is a present-day story of a prostitute, subordinated to the first one. The alternation of the two stories seems to contain certain points of connection, but the use of the narrating voice is essentially different.

The appearance of the non-diegetic narrator in Jeles's works is mostly identical with the authorial voice. This form appears already in his first film: "Cry, cry, cry" – the external voice says in a pub scene of the *Little Valentino*. At the end of the film a hitherto unheard, silent narration of an insecure voice offers a new possibility of interpretation. The sound material connects the story of the sinking Titanic as a parable of the destiny of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the paraphrasing of Wittgenstein's thesis of unutterability: "It is not befitting to utter everything, then let us be quiet, Sir, about the sinking ship..." – while it starts to roll around itself, causing thus the stratification of a multiply denied and overwritten film language structure (Gelencsér 2002, 411).

The prostitute-story in the *Joseph and His Brothers* also shows a different use of the non-diegetic narrator, when the narrator (Mrs. Ferenc Kiss) dispassionately repeats all the dialogues. Here the actors' speech and the narrator's voice are redundant. Someone superfluously *repeats* everything that the actors have already said. The film undoubtedly cites the doubled narration of Miklós Erdély's *Spring Execution* (*Tavaszi kivégzés*, 1985). At the end of the film, in the credits, Jeles considers important to note that the sound technique employed in the frame-story of the *Joseph and His Brothers* is a tribute to Miklós Erdély. In the *Spring Execution* the uncanny effect of the narratorial voice's unjustified redundancy is increased by the fact that it is the story of a man awaiting execution. The narrator of the frame-story in Jeles's film repeats the jargon of the prostitute and her pimp with a similar objectivity (Varga 2004, 66), while obtaining a peculiar alienating effect. Even in this completely reduced jargon one may feel something of the prophecy of art, that

our deepest discourse is the self-revelation of the human world (Balassa 1989, 8). In this narration concerning sacrifice and the Passion, the theatrical and stylized traits deriving from the shadow play render the narration ahistorical. The story – both the biblical and the present-day string – emerges from its concrete spatial-temporal environment – as if marking that the story does not bridge a beginning and an end, that the Passion does not and cannot have an end. Such a use of this repetitive pattern – besides a stylistically appearing musicality (rhythm) – also diminishes the privileged place of an “omniscient” narrator: *the narrator’s position remains the prisoner of the diegetic speech*, because it is temporally belated as compared to the actors’ speech. It is only its neutral and passive discourse which reminds of its externality. As any repetition, this also remains a prisoner of origin, marking that there is no external position in relation to the Passion. The absence of the external position questions at the same time the issue of narratability, invalidating the possibility of narration and by this also of the form of expression.

## The Eventlikeness of the Sight

Jeles’s “technique” can be partly opposed to Bódy’s analytical construction, inasmuch as the former may rather be likened to a disposition of expectation, to a basic position of openness or sensibility necessary for accepting eventlikeness.<sup>11</sup> Jeles is guided exactly by the film image’s transgression of the authorial intention, generating a foreign viewpoint wherefrom that what was seen before (the reality of the film image) is placed in an originally different light. Almost all his films enforce this foreign viewpoint, which in the plot is usually located in a naïve, childish (angelic) regard. In the *Little Valentino* this viewpoint is not only attached to the adolescent hero, but is also inscribed into the film structure. It can be grasped in the always branching and interrupted strings of the plot, and in the construction that it is immaterial what the camera follows, as it could as well follow something else. This is particularly enforced by the last scene, when the film leaves the hero during a long coach ride and starts to follow a hitherto unknown figure. The film does not aim at a detailed representation of everyday life, but at the constitution of a naïve and uninterested regard, unversed in the things of life. Besides the structuring of the narration, the stylization of the film image and the series of grotesque

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion of György Báron and Jeles: “In our work at the Monteverdi Birkózókör it was a basic principle that the production was alive if we created the possibility of unexpectedness” (Báron 1993, 4).

oppositions all play an important role in the construction of a viewpoint completely alien to a practical and rational perspective. Stylization in this context means not the unmasking or negation of the documentary form, but serves the introduction of a foreign viewpoint, whence all well-known things appear in their strangeness.

The *Dream Brigade* also continuously experiments with the strangeness of events seen or heard. The film advances from a strongly fictional discourse to a less fictional nightmare, raising the ultimate question – “for what reason?” – of human existence. True, already the beginning of the film dislodges from the usual viewpoint: the imageless sound material reflects upon the situation of the spectator sitting in the darkness and waiting; the form of address is direct and ironic. Even with the appearance of the narrator, it is not the promised “moving life” which fills the screen, but a fictional and multiple framed film form. The display of the narrative viewpoint questions the possibility of representation: “life” should be represented by a literally petrified narrative form, “alien to life”. In the piece entitled *Premium* (*Prémium*), during the direction process with civilians (workers), a plurality of fictional frames is stratified upon each other in the film. In parallel, but contrary to fiction, a kind of existentialist life reality gains ground, formed by the informality of speech situations, and the contingencies of the process of acting. Occasionally, the roles/arguments and the status of the workers acting them out are stratified up to the point of delusion. This narrative form, overwritten and framed several times, gradually demolishes and turns itself inside out due to the tautological nature of the narrator and the narrated.<sup>12</sup> The narration is continuously broken by inappropriate incommensurable elements, which almost permanently threaten the spectator’s consciousness with the danger of misunderstanding, that the nearly constructed plot will suddenly fall apart, or take a radically new turn.

In the *The Annunciation* the roles played by the events and the children receive a grotesque and strange substratum, because they are not played by “professionals”. This strangeness breaks a fantastic hole in the film, it is present in all uttered words and vague gestures. The sharpness of the tragic is conveyed by the fact that the Passion’s failure-burdened story as told by Madách – the end, the fall, the meaninglessness – is shown from the naïve perspective of children.<sup>13</sup> They speak and act as unprofessional angels in a ruthless world

<sup>12</sup>Just as the risky acceptance and censorship judgment of the concrete work (the *Dream Brigade*) is getting increasingly inscribed into the plot of the film.

<sup>13</sup>Jeles explains the frequent presence of children’s perspective in his films in the following way in an interview: “I cannot get used to the fact that innocent beings are exposed to

infected with suffering, where the transition from being to non-being emerges as the basis of all narratable stories. The rebirth in all scenes keeps necessarily towards death. It suggests the hopelessness of life stretched between birth and death, and the grotesque superposition of these two events in the London scene, staging one of Beckett's sentences ("They [mothers] give birth astride of a grave").

The eventlikeness of lifeless, asynchronous and immobile gestures and series of events are evoked by ancestral things, impregnated with the mineral and the sacred. [Figs. 1–2.] In relation to a theatre performance which has never been completed, the *Winter Journey* (*Téli utazás*), Jeles declares about an immaterialized idea: there is hardly any movement, but if there is, that is a sensation (significant and functional), there is hardly any speech, but if there is, it is poignant, as if it was an oracle or a psychotic. Movement and sound, any theatrical event is like a natural catastrophe, which signals that the eternal laws try to express themselves in a way understandable to humans" (Jeles 2006, 144). Here, as in the *Dream Brigade*, stylization moves in the direction of immobility reminiscent of eternal things,<sup>14</sup> which may as well be interpreted in connection with the eternity of the Passion of the outcast. From this perspective everything can be *misrepresented* and recognized: it carries the eventlikeness of the experience of strangeness and the possibility of new meaning creation.

## The Overdrawing of the Film Image

In his reflections about the film image, András Jeles emphasizes that aspect of form usage which is able to eliminate the transparent and illusory nature of the reality of film image by overdrawing it. The idea emphasized in his text entitled *Az ötödik elbeszélő* (*The Fifth Narrator*) is decisive in this respect: "Invention is that idea – "law of game" – which in the course of unfolding is capable of overdrawing the reality of the film image by "metaphysical" accents. (Because the "reality" of the film image is at issue here!) I claim therefore that

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everything that has already been created and made fatal before us. I think it is the greatest drama that children are born, and immediately get mixed up into something that they have nothing to do with. [...] This is the human drama itself." (Báron 1993, 6).

<sup>14</sup>Jeles also writes in relation to the *Winter Journey*: "Let us not forget, the trick of the doll (the mask) is that while everything around it is alive, changing, fretting, and flashing: it reacts to all these with an eternally existing, immobile face (personality). [...] It is as if it declared: I only care for the immovable, I only perceive eternal things (life-death, mobility-immobility, soul-body, darkness-light, etc.)" (Jeles 2006, 143–144).

the film which cannot enchant its own images (settings) is afilmic (amusical). [...] What is the point after all? It is, I think, that beyond the visible, beyond individual film images, and again beyond the randomness of these images – something invisible would emerge in the spectator's imagination" (2006, 11). But how should one understand the overdrawing of the reality of film image? Paradoxically, it is precisely the elimination of the reality of film image which may lead to its essential reality. When saying essential reality I do not mean speculative metaphysical subjects, but the aesthetic values decisive for European tradition. It seems that Jeles's conception deals with a twofold reality-concept, constructed of a *direct reality* deriving from photographic fixation on the one hand, and an impossible *Real* in a Lacanian sense on the other.<sup>15</sup> The real operates with idealities pertaining to the symbolic order of desires, while it is still an alien power with a particular ethical and traumatic structure, opposing linguistic constructedness. In the context of the film, this is to be understood as the real pertaining to the use of form which articulates and creates it. However, I wish to stress at this point that the emphatic formal stylization of Jeles's films never becomes an arbitrary ornament; instead, it is a means to voice something of the "impossible real" which proves unmanageable from direct reality.<sup>16</sup>

In a discussion, the director explains the stylized, alien world of the *The Annunciation* as follows: "the body of the film had to be combined of two qualities. One of these, of course, had to be formed from our historical knowledge, and the other quality from the dream-like representation, aberration, overdrawing of these. Even if I don't take into account that something here dreams the things, it is still compulsory to *include an unexpected element*, in order to suggest the atmosphere of life, of unrepeatability, and so on. I have to show at once that these events are real, and at the same time I have to overdraw reality in a way that it is clear for everybody that *this is it*, and it still isn't" (Jeles 2006, 89, emphasis added). The experience of dream or strangeness with the effect of eventlikeness – which is a characteristic of outstanding moments – also appears in the quality of the

<sup>15</sup>About the differentiation of the *symbolic*, the *imaginary*, and the *real*, see Jacques Lacan's lectures *On the Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (Lacan 1986). On the importance of Lacan's thinking for film theory, see Todd McGowan's book, mainly its introductory theoretical part (McGowan 2007, 1–23).

<sup>16</sup>Cf. with László Tengelyi's outstanding analysis of Lacan's ethical seminars (Tengelyi 1998, 314–326). Tengelyi's opinion about the Lacanian structure of desire may be of use also in discussing Jeles's perception concerning the reality of film image: "the real – the real as such, the weight of the real – never becomes present in our activity without losing direct reality given as a limitless presence" (Tengelyi 1998, 320).

image, because they used specially manufactured objectives for the shooting.<sup>17</sup> The aim of this film is not merely the palpability of created existence, but the grasping of the rare moments of creation: when something exceptional, almost miracle-like appears on the image. Here the images and words alike carry the traumatic strangeness of the nightmare of creation/createdness. Jeles' exquisite directorial trick appears in the fact that he deprives the language of its original function of articulation by repetitions and distortions, and he also deprives the film image from its reality – and accommodates the spectator with this strangeness.

Similarly to the tension between the opposition of death and “have faith” in the *The Annunciation*, a film closely defined by its title (Balassa 1989, 275), the narration of the *No Man's Land* also refers to a tragic shock, as the main character little girl's naïve regard confronts the deportations to Auschwitz, consistently misunderstanding the events going on around her. It is not only a didactic, document-based reconstruction of a historical event, but the dramatic clash of two kinds of vertically intersecting human mentalities: a regard open to the Other, able to accept it in its strangeness, and a rationality which eliminates, demolishes the Other in its otherness.<sup>18</sup> The viewpoint of the archaic and folkloric narrative in the *Joseph and His Brothers* carries this same naivety, although it does not point out this naïve viewpoint as seen in the previous examples. The logic of the narration emphatically raises the presence of an ahistorical and external viewpoint which is able to mobilize the usual everyday approach. What is more, the structure of the stories offers the possibility of misunderstanding: the lascivious and tale-like passion stories are crossed over by the present-day story of the prostitute, which holds forth a possible mutual misunderstanding.

The overdrawn image has another meaning as well in Jeles's art. The aesthetic meaning of strangeness is nothing else for him than the consistent non-correspondence of expression at a certain point (2006, 144), that is, a systematic disorder, the destruction of the artistic form. However, the

<sup>17</sup>The memories of Sándor Kardos, the cameraman of the film, are interesting in this respect: “When during the preproduction we accidentally met with Jeles we talked about how unimaginable it is for somebody to make photographs in Paradise. So I imagined some completely strange image quality, to make it somehow acceptable that a camera got into the Garden of Eden”. (Jeles 2006, 88).

<sup>18</sup>See György Báron's interview with Jeles: “Auschwitz *works*, is always revealed, in many visible forms. [...] This mentality can be discovered in the European man's everyday activity. By European man I understand that educated being over-loaded with self-consciousness, who is the creator and beneficiary of modern industrial culture and failure.” (Báron 1993, 6).



destruction of the artistic form is never a merely aesthetic or ornamental question, but a *problem of destiny* referring to human existence: this is what lends a special tragic quality to his art.<sup>19</sup> Adorno's ideology critical remark regarding the artistic form may be revealing in this respect: "As it is gradually becoming impossible to imagine events to be rational in themselves, the ideal of the aesthetic figure as the unity of appearance and conception increasingly becomes an illusion. [...] Never has horror sounded this true" (1974, 327) Just as for the theatre performance *Dramatic Events*, or in the *The Government Inspector* (*Revizor*) made with the homeless, it can be extended to Jeles's entire art that the degraded means of expression and their inadequate use *voice the horror of human existence*. The inability of verbal expression, the deprivation of articulation, the series of inadequate gestures and grotesque stylizations reveal at the same time a kind of refined culture criticism, and surface the deprivation of the world of the poor, the underprivileged (Balassa 1989, 289–290). This is why Jeles's stylized world cannot be called ornamental, no matter how similar it seems to Parajanov's films, the timeless nature of beautiful form and an "existence carved in stone".<sup>20</sup> In Balassa's understanding Jeles's accomplishment lies in the fact that the traditional instruments of his art – from direct quotations to stylized ornamental forms – refer to the stations of the destiny of an entire culture, as the source of the tragic (1989, 299–300).

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<sup>19</sup>Cf. with Jeles's thoughts: "this age is in the condition of sinfulness. [...] Now, it is possible that the *Valentino* is a special documentary, especially by external life, of this sensation, the *Dream Brigade* is also about something similar, but perhaps with the painful calling and necessity of redemption, [...] and in the *The Annunciation* it is perhaps about the fact that, whoever was touched by this sensation, turns away from present reality, and shows the opposite of this world in a film medium which does not deny sin and the thirst for redemption" (2006, 98).

<sup>20</sup>Cf. with the ideas of Ákos Szilágyi on the ornamental film: "In the ornamental film image it is always the living which is resembled to the lifeless, the organic to the inorganic, the natural to the artificial, and not the opposite way. [...] For the existence carved in stone, beauty is not transient, not frail, not a defenceless existence – it is a timeless, finite existence, as a beautiful form ought to be" (Szilágyi 1987, 35).

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## List of Figures

Figures 1-2: András Jeles: *The Annunciation* (1984). Lifeless, asynchronous and immobile gestures and series of events are evoked by ancestral things, impregnated with the mineral and the sacred.

