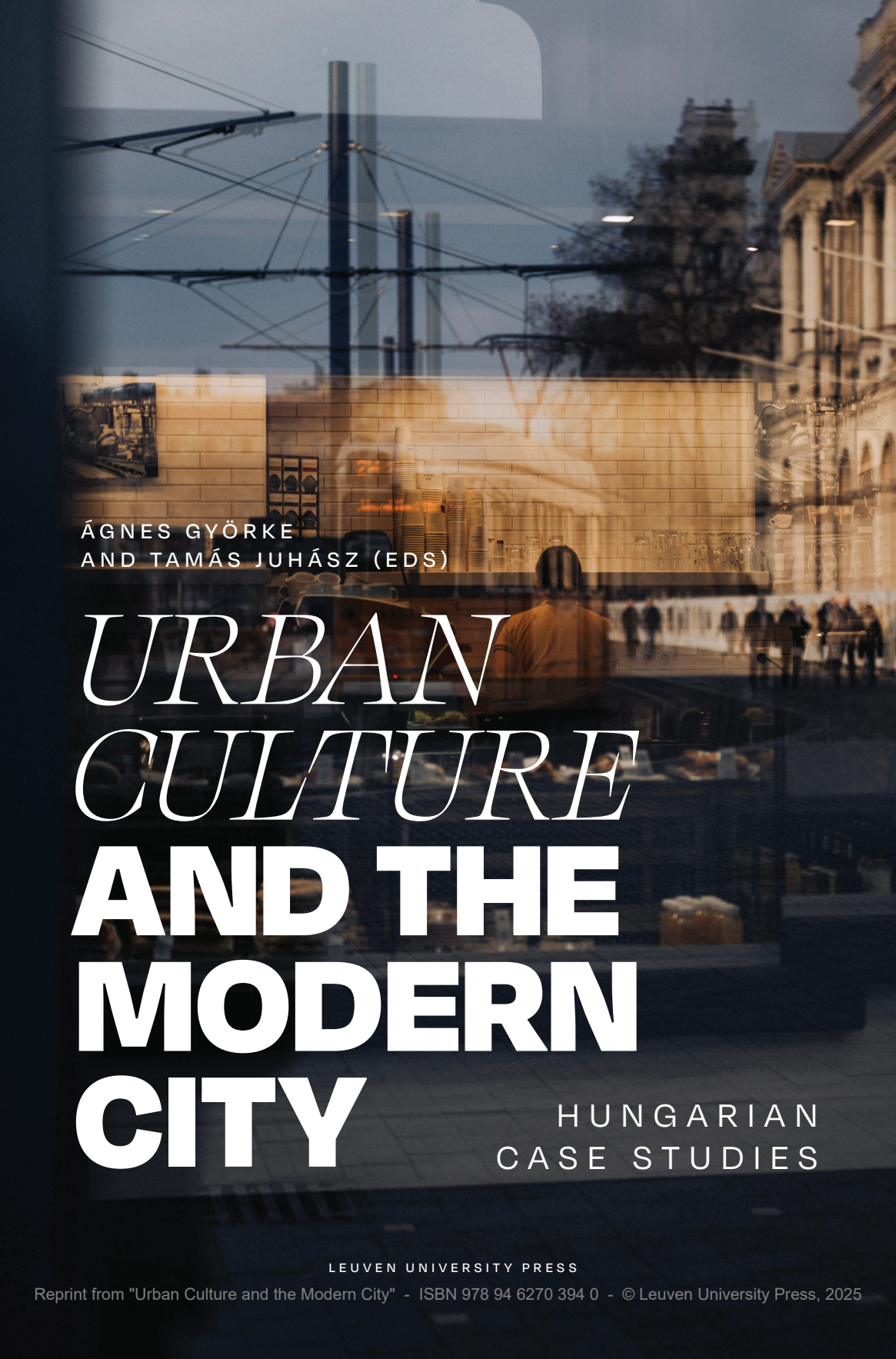




ÁGNES GYÖRKE
AND TAMÁS JUHÁSZ (EDS)

*URBAN
CULTURE*
**AND THE
MODERN
CITY**

HUNGARIAN
CASE STUDIES

LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Urban Culture and the Modern City

Hungarian Case Studies

Edited by
Ágnes Györke and Tamás Juhász

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INTRODUCTION

The Modern City in Hungarian Culture

Translocal Interventions

ÁGNES GYÖRKE AND TAMÁS JUHÁSZ

When walking on the streets of Budapest, one cannot escape the feeling of being in Central Europe. Ornamented nineteenth-century bridges lead to baths built during the city's Ottoman years; grand neo-Gothic buildings are juxtaposed with communist-era architecture; local markets showcase the colours of everyday life, and, sometimes, the flavours of poverty. As Mr Ryder, the English piano player arriving at an unnamed Central European city in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* (1995), the traveller might feel strangely at home yet totally lost in Budapest at one and the same time. The walk reveals incongruous layers of the city's past, not unlike urban novels, films and artworks that engage with the Hungarian capital. Prague, Brno, Krakow and many other Central European cities have related stories to tell: remapped after both world wars and isolated from the West in the very period when Western cities became spectacularly transcultural, the Central and Eastern European region and its urban centres reveal a marginalised, lesser-known side of European modernity.

Focusing on Budapest and other Hungarian towns since the period of modernism until the present day, the eleven case studies in this volume offer new insights into urban studies from the perspective of Central and Eastern Europe. We use the term 'modern' not only to refer to the modernist artistic movement at the turn of the twentieth century but also to the emergence of the modern urban environment in roughly the same period. Our concern is, however, not only the public space of the city: the authors of the volume investigate old and new forms of artistic practices, focusing on the ways in which urban space has been imagined and reimagined through paintings, theatre, film, literary works and inscriptions on buildings in the city. Relying on Doreen Massey's assumption that 'the spatial is social relations "stretched out"' (2), the essays in this volume foreground the role of urban space as a dynamic carrier of social signification and

offer insights into the role various artistic practices play in resisting hegemonic discourses in the Hungarian cultural context.

Though city studies has become an expanding research field in the past few decades, no volume has discussed the role that art and material culture play in imagining the modern city in Hungary. There is growing interest in postcolonial cities such as Johannesburg and Mumbai, for instance (Varma 2011; Ameen 2023; Gaylard 2023), yet cities in the so-called 'Second World' are still often missing from definitive works on literary urban studies, leaving the reader with an incomplete sense of the urban cultural relevance of locations where, among others, Freud, Joyce and Kafka lived and worked. Jeremy Tambling's important book published in 2016, *The Palgrave Handbook of Literature and the City*, includes a section on 'European cities', yet only two Eastern and Central European cities feature in the volume, Vienna and Saint Petersburg. His new volume, the monumental *Palgrave Encyclopedia of Urban Literary Studies*, adopts an even less West-centric perspective and includes chapters on fin-de-siècle Zagreb¹ and Budapest,² yet many significant Central European cities, such as Prague and Krakow, are missing from the volume. Recently, scholars working on Central and Eastern Europe have also adopted the urban perspective: Uilleam Blacker's *Memory, the City and the Legacy of World War II in East Central Europe: The Ghosts of Others* (2019), for instance, is an important contribution to the field from the vantage point of this region. However, due to its focus on Poland, Ukraine and Russia, this book rather opens a dialogue about cities as archives of memory in Central and Eastern Europe than offers an exhaustive study.³

Urban Culture and the Modern City aims to continue this dialogue by mapping cultural representations of Budapest and other Hungarian towns in a translocal analytical frame (Brickell and Datta 2011; Mattheis 2021; Györke and Bülgözdí 2021; Ehrig, Jung and Schaffer 2022), which is an approach that foregrounds the role of the local within the global flow of ideas and focuses on local-to-local connections. So far global cities have been studied in this framework, which are often seen as 'sites of translocality par excellence' (Brickell and Datta 16). We would claim, however, that the translocal approach is particularly productive in the Central and Eastern European context due to the remapping of the region after the world wars and its isolation during the communist period. To put it simply, one needs to see both local contexts (including issues that concern gender, ethnicity and social status, for instance) and connections that transcend national borders in order to begin to understand this region. Furthermore, the term also evokes a move through and beyond local spaces, borders and concerns, which is the primary aim of our volume. In an effort to cut across several historical periods, *Urban Culture and the Modern City* offers impressive overviews and in-depth analyses of the intriguing links between urban locations in Hungary and the world beyond the borders of this country.

The Country and Beyond: Cultural Life and Artistic Practices in Hungary from Modernism to the Present Day

As elsewhere in Europe, cultural life in Hungary at the turn of the twentieth century arises out of determinants and impulses that are reflective – directly or indirectly – of the key historical events in the era, with the First World War as their inescapable, cataclysmic centre. This holds true only retrospectively, but even the general sense of security and bourgeois well-being (based on economic and technological development, rapid urbanisation, improved public health and education) that the final third of the nineteenth century and the pre-war years see (again, in most parts of Europe) can be construed as a lead-up to the large-scale military confrontation that had long been brewing. In other words, when the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy finds a pretext to attack Serbia in 1914, the act springs, partly at least, from the various envies that the Monarchy and its main ally, the German Empire harbour about the colonial privileges of France and Great Britain. While these two states had advanced economies, their lack of additional (especially colonial) territories proved a major head-wind hindering further growth and global competitiveness.

Correspondingly, the general economic-political condition of fin-de-siècle Hungary may be simultaneously described as relatively stable and very much fraught with tensions on multiple levels. After the so-called Compromise of 1867, Austria and Hungary existed, within the legal frame of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as dual states, and the ensuing several decades of peace and co-operation result not only in significant economic growth but also a degree of bourgeois development working against, or alongside, still dominant feudal structures and cultural reflexes on the Hungarian side. As an emblematic example of modernisation, the Budapest metro opens as early as 1896, predated, in Western and Central Europe, only by the London underground. But parallel to this prolonged period of consolidation, a number of social-political factors bode ill for the future of the Monarchy. These include the crisis of land structures leading to mass migration, various labour movements, a high unemployment rate and, crucially, the increasingly strained relations between the Monarchy and the various nationalities living within its boundaries. The occupation and subsequent annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1878, 1908) was part of the Habsburgs' expansionary politics and an anti-Ottoman move, however, it worsened relations with Serbia and Russia to the point where declaring war in 1914 seemed, to the prominently Austrian political leadership, to be the right course of action to pursue. (Shortlisted for an Oscar in 1985, prominent Hungarian film director István Szabó's biographical *Colonel Redl* [Redl ezredes] treats opinions that differed and sensed the real dangers of the impending war.)

Hungarian cultural life in the pre-war years is also characterised by a particular mixture of highly heterogeneous artistic attitudes and objectives, where one trend or vision appears to gravitate towards pleasing or entertaining, and the other is bent on exposing social ills, the increasingly solitary life of the modern individual, or even presentiments of war or other violent upheavals. Thus, to cite only a few examples from this era (often called retrospectively the 'happy years of peace'), the film industry emerges as early as the 1910s (with the first actual studios operating about a hundred cinemas in Budapest alone), the popularity of the lighter theatrical genre of operetta is close to its peak (one of the busiest Budapest squares is named after Lujza Blaha, perhaps the biggest star of these shows) and a number of grand buildings (the best example is probably Vajdahunyad Castle in City Park) are erected as parts of the millennium celebrations (commemorating, in and after 1896, the Magyars' conquest of the Carpathian Basin) in a style and spirit that are, for many spectators, not only overornamented, but also suggestive of a heroic reading of the past and as yet unshaken monarchical confidence. All these upbeat, exuberant and often patriotically oriented cultural flows coexist, however, with types of modernism more familiar from the Western Europe of the same era. Tellingly, the most significant literary periodical was named *A nyugat* (The West) (1908–41). These approaches tended to highlight fragmentation, decadence, loss of community and confusion about moral values, sometimes engaging with these themes via experimental, avant-garde techniques and offering, all in all, a complex and rather sombre artistic experience. To name only a few notable figures to exemplify this aspect of the pre-war years, the careers of literary authors Endre Ady, Dezső Kosztolányi, Zsigmond Móricz and Gyula Krúdy are well underway in the 1910s, and composer Béla Bartók finishes his magnificent, quintessentially modernist masterpiece *Allegro Barbaro* by 1911.

The First World War and the attendant collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918 produced consequences whose significance is difficult to overestimate. Beyond the fact that Hungary (which, following the brief revolutionary waves of 1918 and 1919 becomes, in 1920, the Kingdom of Hungary without a king) loses two-thirds of its territory and one-third of its ethnic Hungarian population under the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, the widely shared popular desire and political will to restore the original boundaries drew Hungary, once again, into the political orbit of Germany. This was because the Hungarian leadership (under Regent Miklós Horthy) assumed that the lost territories could not be regained without the help of a stronger state. For this reason, the country entered an increasingly tighter alliance with Germany, paving the way for Hungary's tragic participation in the Second World War. During the interwar years, Hungary became a Christian-conservative country, formally with a functioning

parliamentary system yet in essence a half-feudal, authoritarian state. The slowly unfolding fascist character of the 1930s is memorably captured in *Professor Hannibal* (Hannibál tanár úr, 1956), directed by Zoltán Fábri. Many cultural energies from the pre-war years remain at work – Bartók does not emigrate to the United States until 1940, the *Nyugat* continues to be a literary centre until 1941 – and they are supplemented by new ones. Thus, citing again just a few examples, poet-visual artist Lajos Kassák, composer Zoltán Kodály and poet Mihály Babits rose to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s, which is also the period when Attila József, whom many see as the greatest Hungarian poet of the century, became recognised before committing suicide in 1937.

Although the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 already marked a severe trauma for Hungarians, it was not until the post-Second World War period that the country became the periphery of Europe, along with other countries of the Eastern Bloc. Under Soviet totalitarianism, literary and cultural life was severely censored: creative work was either supported, tolerated or repressed. Marxist aesthetics and realism dominated the literary scene, which aimed to support working-class perspectives and repress 'bourgeois ideology'.⁴ In the 1950s, criticising the system publicly was unthinkable. The revolution against Soviet communism in 1956, which was a moment in history when Hungary could have put an end to totalitarian dictatorship, was severely crushed. Nearly 200,000 Hungarians left the country, including writers and intellectuals such as Agota Kristof, who settled in Switzerland and wrote about the period in French (*Le Grand Cahier*, 1986); the parents of Tibor Fischer, the British author, who published a novel titled *Under the Frog* (1992) about post-Second World War Hungary in English; and the parents of Zsuzsa Bánk, who wrote about everyday life in Hungary in the 1950s and 60s in German (*Der Schwimmer*, 2002).⁵ In the 1960s, iconic satirical films such as Péter Bacsó's *The Witness* (A tanú) (1969) came out, which was suppressed right after its release.⁶ In the late 1970s, when the first writings of Péter Esterházy were published, post-modernism emerged in Hungary as elsewhere in the West, yet it had a distinctly political character in the Eastern European context: due to its interest in language games and self-reflexivity, which challenged the principles of 'official' Marxist aesthetics, postmodernism was seen as a political act in itself (Kisantal 51).

It was in this period that the peripheral character of the region was established both politically and regarding language. Although the assumption that Eastern Europe is the semi-oriental 'Other' of Western modernity originates in the eighteenth century, when the Western Europe of the Enlightenment era 'invented' Eastern Europe as its complementary other half' (Wolff 4), the region was imagined as a geopolitical and imaginative periphery behind the Iron Curtain after 1945 (Bottoni 3; Györke and Bülgözdí 1). This also meant that Central Europe, or *Mitteleuropa*, ceased to exist (Lord 9). The term *Mitteleuropa*, which was coined

by pre-First World War German thinkers, originally referred to a hypothetical German-led political and economic alliance of German, Hungarian and Slavic peoples, to be later exploited by the Nazis to justify their territorial expansion (Bottoni 2). During the communist period, Mitteleuropa became associated with Nazism, and Soviet satellite countries were claimed to belong to Eastern Europe – hence the expression, Eastern Bloc.

When the crisis of communism became apparent in the region, however, the notion of Central Europe resurfaced. In the mid-1980s, dissident public intellectuals argued that nations such as Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia represented Western civilisation (Bottoni 5). Milan Kundera, for instance, claimed that Central European countries belonged to the Eastern world politically yet were part of Western Europe culturally (192). For these countries, the most profound meaning of revolt against communism unfolds in their ‘struggle ... to preserve their Westernness’ (Kundera 197).

Since the collapse of communism in 1989, a number of recently coined terms have offered new ways to engage with Eastern and Central Europe as a geopolitical space (Györke and Bülgözdi 2). For example, the region is proclaimed to be a ‘borderline civilization’ by Nataša Kovačević who finds that Eastern Europe is caught in a limbo between the mutually exclusive categories of the European and the ex-communist (1–3). But even if Eastern Europe is still frequently seen as a cultural periphery, this very categorisation undermines, Colpani and Ponzanesi argue, conceptualisations of ‘core Europe’, revealing that the history of European modernity cannot be complete without the inclusion of the cultures of these regions (Colpani and Ponzanesi 7). The present volume hopes to contribute to this more comprehensive history by the translocal analytical frame its authors have adopted. Questioning both the binarism implied by the core–periphery model and the West-centric bias of transnational theories, translocality as practice, perspective and theory should help us not only reassert the role of the region in the global flow of ideas but also detect new local narratives.

The City and the Countryside: Urban Cosmopolites and Nostalgia for the Rural

In the history of Budapest, 1873 was perhaps the most important year: three previously independent cities, Buda, Pest and Óbuda, were unified and a dazzling metropolitan city was created ‘with the stroke of a pen’ (Gyáni 3). This administrative unification ‘produced an urban conglomerate that then served as the basis for metropolitan development’ (Gyáni 3), and the multiethnic capital, where Germans, Romanians, Slovaks, Croats, Serbs and other nationalities lived apart

from Hungarians, was turned into the symbol of the Hungarian nation. As Gábor Gyáni remarks, in '1892, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Compromise⁷ and of the coronation of Francis Joseph as king of Hungary, the time seemed right for Hungary to initiate a move so that the second major city of the empire, Budapest, would be recognized as being of equal standing with Vienna' (Gyáni 9). In other words, fin-de-siècle Budapest was a fast developing, cosmopolitan city, which rendered its ethnic inhabitants largely invisible as the millennial celebrations commemorating the 1,000-year-old Hungarian nation transformed it into a national symbol by the time modernist literary experiments emerged.

Therefore, Budapest could, towards the end of the nineteenth century, accommodate a high degree of linguistic-ethnic-cultural pluralism and yet have its political-social energies coalesce into the creation of a capital city suggesting the idea of a thoroughly Magyarised, unified nationhood. It was the liberal constitutional character of the Hungarian part of the Monarchy that allowed these seemingly contradictory processes to unfold. This political structure and system of preferences was simultaneously conducive to, on the one hand, fast-paced economic development, religious and other freedoms and, on the other, the bolstering of national self-awareness. As a key difference from the ensuing decades, the type of nationalism that these policies fostered perceived key continuities and thus patterns of unity in historical traditions, rather than ethnic-linguistic homogeneity. This will change by the early twentieth century when, due to the dissatisfaction with laissez-faire capitalism (voiced, on the fortieth anniversary of the unification of Buda and Pest in 1913, even by the then incumbent, liberal Lord Mayor István Bárczy himself), the rise to prominence of a deeply conservative, national-Christian ideology and, as part and parcel of the previous two phenomena, intensifying anti-Semitism (fuelled by both broader European tendencies and the identification of several leaders of the short-lived and violent Republic of Councils in 1919 as Jews), the nation and its authentic representations came to be defined on ethnic grounds. (For an in-depth, complex engagement with these processes, especially the second half of Gyáni's monograph on turn-of-the century Budapest is a valuable source.)

Because Budapest was, for a few decades after its official creation in 1873, at once a shining example of liberal-urban cosmopolitanism and an emblematic expression of national unity, the ethnocentric, Christian-conservative shift in the 1910s and 1920s had to adopt a distinct anti-Budapest sentiment to resolve this apparent contradiction. The 'Guilty Budapest' slogan emerged and more and more ideologues found that the country was best represented not by its most developed urban centre (which, in their version of social criticism, was also a hotbed of corruption), but its longstanding conceptual counterpart, the village and the conditions of rurality in general. Gábor Vaderna's entry on Budapest in Tambling's *The Palgrave Encyclopaedia* convincingly argues that unlike major

West European cities, Budapest was envisioned by its planners, market players and inhabitants not only in comparison to other big cities but also in relation to the village. As part of a regionally popular 'Republican historical narrative' (Vaderna 306) celebrating simplicity, egalitarianism, 'puritan military morals' (Vaderna 306) and natural virtue, this reference ignored contemporary ethnographic research and it promoted, in related political discourses, an unlocalisable and idealised notion of the village, invented specifically for the city dweller's imagination (Vaderna 304, 309–11).

The idea that the urban (as a site of sin) and the rural (as a site of innocence and an originator of natural moral communities) are binary opposites has a long history in Europe, however, the specific course this dichotomy ran in the Hungary of the early twentieth century is the complex and unique result of social processes that were peculiar to this region in those days. Drawing on Carl Schorske's classification of fin-de-siècle approaches towards the modern city (including the gestures of praise, blame or negation), Gyáni notes, for example, how irregular the attitude of numerous Hungarian painters to Budapest was in the broader context of Western modernism. While in the West the city became an obvious artistic subject matter for the capturing of concerns and anxieties about modernisation and the urban experience, it appears that notable groups of Hungarian visual artists (such as The Eights [A Nyolcak] or the so-called Nagybányai painters) eschewed engagement with Budapest cityscape altogether, and had their modernist visions evolve through rural configurations (Gyáni 215–16).

The dichotomy of the urban and the rural is also showcased by the debate between 'traditionalists' and 'urbanists',⁸ which had an impact on Hungarian literature since the 1920s. This debate attached different symbolical meanings to the urban and the rural: the city was seen as the product of urbanisation where Western influence and patterns of behaviour played out, while the countryside was considered the repository of national customs and ethnic traditions. The reason behind the debate is the stagnation of urbanisation and modernisation in Hungary after 1920 (Monostori 79), which made traditionalist writers such as Áron Tamási and László Németh shift their attention towards the countryside in the 1930s. The concept of tradition used in this discourse is very different from the modernist notion of tradition, which emerged at about the same time in the English-speaking world, thanks to T. S. Eliot's 1919 essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. Whereas Eliot redefined the relevance of tradition in the context of modernist experimentation in an urban and cosmopolitan context, traditionalists in Hungary focused on the countryside and the peasantry as repositories of national customs and virtue. Hungarian urbanists, nevertheless, had a disposition akin to Western modernists, whom they viewed as examples to follow. These terms, which refer to 'opposing systems of ideas' (Monostori 77, my trans.), evoke strong feelings even today.

The heated debates and polarised attitudes concerning the cultural-political position of the capital city play out with similar ideological charges in the quite different accounts of national history towards the end of the century. As a result, two competing narratives shape cultural memory in post-1989 Hungary. First, a right-wing narrative that focuses on the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 and sees Hungary as a victim that was ‘mortally wounded firstly by Western European states who decided to truncate the body of the country and later by a Sovietized regime that repressed and terrorized Hungarian people’ (Kisantal 49), and second, a leftist interpretation that represents twentieth-century Hungarian history ‘as a story of victims and perpetrators as well, but [...] [focuses] mostly on the Holocaust and the atrocities of [the] socialist regime’ (Kisantal 49). As for the right-wing discourse, it has supported the creation of a nostalgic narrative about the territories attached to neighbouring countries, which were conceived as a ‘lost paradise’ (Kisantal 50). The heart of this nostalgia is Transylvania, which was acquired by Romania, and, to some extent, Transcarpathia and ‘Upper Hungary’, which were attached to the Soviet Union and to Czechoslovakia. The centennial of the Treaty of Trianon, which redraw the borders of the country, still made emotions run high in Hungary and the surrounding countries with significant ethnic Hungarian minorities after 100 years (Györke and Bülgözdí 8). Nostalgic visions of Transylvania dominate well-known novels such as Áron Tamási’s *Ábel Alone*, published in 1932. The theme appears in twenty-first-century Hungarian literature as well, albeit in self-reflexive and realistic ways: Noémi Szécsi’s *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* (2002), discussed by Ágnes Györke in this volume, evokes memories of ‘Greater Hungary’ in a postmodern, parodistic manner, and Andrea Tompa’s *Fejtől s lábtól. Kettő orvos Erdélyben* (Head to Feet: Two Doctors in Transylvania, 2013) depicts the life of Transylvanian minorities in the 1920s without nostalgic overtones.

The polarisation of cultural memory, then, reflects the ways in which urban and rural identities have been fashioned in Hungary. Whereas elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe cities such as L’viv, Vilnius, Gdansk or Wrocław inspired narratives of loss after the Second World War (Blacker 4),⁹ in Hungary this loss is primarily associated with nostalgic memories of a non-cosmopolitan, traditional countryside. Due to the population transfers after the Second World War, displaced East German and Polish urban communities also ‘cultivated a powerful mythology of the “lost paradise” of the pre-war towns and cities’ (Blacker 4), and writers such as Günter Grass ‘have created significant literary monuments to those lost cities’ (Blacker 4). In Hungary, however, the vision of the lost paradise is markedly rural, at the heart of which are the Transylvanian mountains. The urban, which is, first and foremost, associated with Budapest and the left-wing discourse of cultural memorialisation, has been regarded as a Westernised, deceitful

environment since modernism, as showcased by Géza Gárdonyi's 1905 novel, *Az öreg tekintetes* (The Old Honourable). Recently, the difference between the city and the countryside has also been expressed in terms of political preference: Budapest largely votes for the leftist and liberal opposition, while the countryside, apart from a few significant exceptions such as Szeged, supports the right-wing government, which has been in power since 2010. As the division between the urban and the rural solidified, nostalgia for the 'lost paradise' has become more clearly connected to the right-wing position, and, sadly, turned into a central element of populist political propaganda in contemporary Hungary.

Therefore, the concept of 'thirling', used by various scholars to refer to novel, hybrid conjoinings in late modernity,¹⁰ is of vital importance when it comes to the politics of cultural memory in Hungary. Exploring the Hungarian capital as well as frontier cities, small towns and locations outside the borders of present-day Hungary, this volume aims to offer an alternative approach to the urban in Hungary, which, as a Central and Eastern European example of 'thirling', no longer relies on polarised dichotomies. The urban narratives and memoryscapes (Kapralski 150)¹¹ analysed in this volume, both symbolic and material, shed light on patterns that are more complex than the ideologies of the two dominant antithetical positions. Thus, for instance, Papp's conceptualisation of Hungarian small towns vis-à-vis both big cities and transnational examples, Guca's case study of a Hungarian Jew's contribution to the Parisian art scene, Federmayer's discussion of the Hungarian capital as an alienating place in the works of woman writers, or Bak's meticulous analysis of the narratives that public statues tell about the transforming cultural memory of a Romani composer showcase this 'thirling' as they explore Hungarian literature and art in relation to other localities and the global flow of ideas.

The Early Twentieth Century: Literature, Painting and the City

The three main sections of this volume focus on the early twentieth century, the mid-century and the contemporary period, starting with the collapse of communism in 1989. Entitled 'The Early Twentieth Century: Literature, Painting and the City', the first larger unit comprises four individual chapters, which explore art-related spaces, practices and institutions in the first half of the twentieth century. Themes range from the analysis of Budapest locations as inspiration in early twentieth-century drama (Pellérdi), the connection between nationhood, theatre and metropolitan culture (Juhász) through a Bakhtian approach to fiction that depicts small-town life but is, in fact, heavily saturated by an awareness

of the big city (Papp) to the idea of transnational artistic communities outside Hungary (Gucska).

Márta Pellérdi studies early twentieth-century theatrical representations of the capital city in “‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’: Ferenc Molnár’s Budapest in *Liliom* and *The Guardsman*’. The analysis explores patterns of spatiality, urban narratives and the concepts of mirroring and spectacle in modernism along with biographically oriented discussions of the playwright’s career and personal life. Indeed, as several critics note, Molnár’s œuvre seems to be inseparable from not only his intimate knowledge of, and profound interest in, Budapest but also his familiarity with Western audiences and their respective urban cultural experiences. By far the internationally most successful Hungarian novelist and playwright, Ferenc Molnár (1878–1952) authored plays that resonated well with both domestic and, for example, American theatre-goers, and this fact in itself invites critical concern with modulations between place, locality and cosmopolitan space in dramatic arts.

Pellérdi opens her essay through taking the reader on a virtual walking tour to a number of locations in Budapest – including, for example, the downtown district of Józsefváros, the City Park (Városliget) and the theatre called Vígszínház – and explains their significance in Molnár’s career and, in certain cases, his non-dramatic literary publications (which includes the highly popular novel *The Paul Street Boys*). Afterwards, the chapter discusses the numerous ways in which Budapest is portrayed in *Liliom* (1909) and *The Guardsman* (1910). In the first of these, the theme of the artist and his displacement in the metropolis is treated and inspired by de Certeau’s ideas about walking in the city (de Certeau 106–7), but Pellérdi also pays particular attention to those cultural-verbal influences (especially journalism and coffee-house dialogues) that shaped the shifting cadences of the play. The analysis of *The Guardsman* too reflects on the relevance of non-theatrical arts in the culturally vibrant years of the pre-war period in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Recapitulating key points about the reception and production of *Liliom*, the final segment of the chapter considers those processes of de-Hungarianisation by which both of these plays could embark on a successful international career and that highlight, indirectly, the deeply cosmopolitan character of the Hungarian capital city around the turn-of-the-century.

Tamás Juhász’s contribution ‘City in the Land: Nationalism, Technology and Celebrity Culture in Gyula Krúdy’s *Primadonna*’ is focused on the interplay between the phenomena of stardom and imagined communities in distinguished Hungarian writer Gyula Krúdy’s 1926 historical novel. Treating the life and successful career of the actress Ilka Pálmay (1859–1945) before the 1910s, the novelist offers, according to the present analysis, a complex cultural geography of both the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its global situatedness. The author of the

chapter argues that the rising sense of nationalism to characterise the period and make various symbolic statements about the ultimate unity of an undivided, sovereign land originates, in harmony with Benedict Anderson's influential study, not from the romantically valorised rural territories themselves but, instead, globally exposed, modern urban centres and such related domains as commerce, advertising and journalism.

To pursue this thesis, the essay's first section familiarises its readers with Krúdy and his interests in theatre and with Pálmay's domestic and international career. In addition to this background, it offers a general overview of *Primadonna* as a literary text. The second section probes into conceptual and historical connections between the idea of stardom, the ways in which celebrity cult itself becomes conducive to certain types of imagined communities and urbanisation that not only boosts 'commerce, industry, communications and state machineries' (Anderson 77) but also shapes attitudes towards the cities' opposite, the rural land. Afterwards, *Primadonna* is approached through the perspective of how it portrays Pálmay's movement inside and between cities, how nationalistic thought is inscribed into the actresses' non-political activities and why Pálmay's own gradual estrangement from church and monarchy itself exemplifies the turn-of-the-century social tendency to construct communal feelings along horizontal rather than vertical axes. The chapter pays particular attention to the relevance of the novel's post-war genesis because it finds that Krúdy's artistic interest in national icons and efforts of symbolic unification are to be viewed in the light of the Trianon Treaty of 1920 when the sense of national oneness suffered a significant blow, and mute because obvious communities come to be replaced by political nationalism's '[s]poken-of-communities' (Bauman 12).

The particular significance of Ágnes Klára Papp's chapter, 'Small-town Poetics: The Provincial Small Town as the Counterpoint of Metropolis in Dezső Kosztolányi's *Skylark*', comes from its ability to detect and expose big city influences in locations far beyond the actual sites of their origin – in this case, in the day-to-day operations of the Hungarian small town in the early twentieth century. To argue her point, the author rereads *Skylark* (1924), a well-known novel by key modernist writer Dezső Kosztolányi and finds that the topos of the provincial small town – a term derived from Bakhtin – not only defines representations of urban space, social relations and human character in the novel to a decisive degree, but it does so from within a complex cultural awareness of nineteenth-century metropolitan relations. A story of family frustration over the hopeless spinsterhood of the two main characters' daughter, *Skylark* yields, in the present analysis, an exact portrayal of why the uneventful, circular and claustrophobic feel particularly painful when measured by (real or imagined) standards of supposedly sophisticated urban living.

Papp's argument is informed by a large number of theoretical and literary historical contexts. Starting with reflections on the relevance of both Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin for urban studies, the essay establishes the big city–small town binary first with regard to Paris and French literature, then continues with primarily Russian examples, resulting in the incorporation into the analysis of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, two highly canonical literary examples where the unseen yet powerfully felt presence of Paris and Moscow act as potent objects of desire. Kosztolányi knew Chekhov well, and the chapter often offers analogies between *Skylark* and the play. For her discussion of the novel, Papp turns to Yuri Lotman's writing about the mythic foundations of big cities (Lotman 191–2) and goes on to describe Kosztolányi's fictional small town in terms of the anti-mythic and the peripheral. As another theoretical inspiration, Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope (Bakhtin 247–8) helps the author elaborate on such diverse topics in the novel as the treatment of space and time, perception, psychology, and religion in an otherwise secular world.

With some wordplay in the title to engage with the consequences of the First World War and the clashing of nativist and non-nativist views, Magdolna Gucsa's "Métèques" and the Central Powers of "Montparnasse": Emil Szittyá and the École de Paris' investigates the participation of Hungarian-Jewish painter, poet and theorist Emil Szittyá (1886–1964) in the contemporary debates about the role of foreign artists in Parisian art life. Living much of his adult life in Western Europe and especially Paris, Szittyá's career instantiates the fundamentally cosmopolitan character of the avant-garde and modernism, a condition that nevertheless coexisted with the rising xenophobia of the postwar years. The chapter surveys, therefore, the dominant views in the theoretical-political discourse about the alleged limitations that foreign artists (*métèques*) faced in their attempt to authentically render the local specificities of the French capital city and the French landscape in general and studies how Szittyá positioned both himself and other artists of non-French origin in this controversy.

To unpack the key ideas during the related disputes of the 1910s and 1920s, the author engages with the contemporary definitions of national modern art, the then dominant two main trends in art history (one emphasising cultural embeddedness, the other connoisseurship), and the role (and also exhaustion) of the French impressionist legacy. Afterwards, Gucsa offers close readings of the Hungarian expatriate's extensive commentaries and pursues the various ramifications of the facts that Szittyá was not perceived in his environment as Jewish, that during his career he wrote first in German only, then in German and French, and later in French exclusively. Related to this biographical examination is the chapter's engagement with the fact that despite his Jewish background, the artist's solid cultural-linguistic German background made him a suspicious presence

in the aftermath of the Great War. Szittyá's way of countering anti-Semitic and xenophobic definitions of national modern art is treated in the essay centrally. According to the Hungarian emigré's view, the idea of national characterology is to be derived not from humans and their traditions but the 'possibilities in the configuration of the landscapes' (Szittyá 7), therefore anyone with talent, including the foreign-born, can capture it authentically.

Perspectives on the Mid-Century: Public Art and the Novel

Reviewing a somewhat later period, three contributors address issues of gender, collective memory and practices of civility through reflections on locations inside and outside Budapest in the section titled 'Perspectives on the Mid-Century: Public Art and the Novel'. The first author offers further commentary on the small town-capital city connection through examining the role of private and public gardens in literary works (Federmayer). The second chapter is concerned with the ways in which the display of public statutes of famous Romani persons in Budapest was subject to a variety of political considerations in the mid-twentieth century (Bak). The third essay demonstrates the link between small-town culture and the values and politics of civility in Géza Ottlik's opus magnum, *School at the Frontier* (Hörcher).

Éva Federmayer explores the significance of setting and ambiance in two novels by two critically acclaimed twentieth-century women writers from a gender-conscious perspective. In 'Place, Space, Gender and Narrative Agency in Margit Kaffka's *Colours and Years* (1911, 1912) and Magda Szabó's *The Fawn* (1959)', a large number of prominent themes – including mourning, career, gender, class, ethnicity and nationhood – is approached through their complex, often quite indirect yet artistically crucial connectedness to the spatial points from where narration emanates and that prove, after the major personal losses that are recounted, adequate terrains for 'meaning reconstruction' (Neimeyer and Sands 10). For the story of an elderly gentry woman in a provincial town in Eastern Hungary (*Colours and Years*, 1911; 1912), it is the private garden of a rented apartment; for that of an outwardly successful yet deeply troubled actress in Budapest (*The Fawn*, 1959), it is a historic garden cemetery.

Positing heterotopia as the central critical category in her essay, the author combines Foucauldian cultural theory with feminism, ecocriticism and urban studies to explain the artistic-narrative logic behind assigning the narrative act to these two locations. Because both private gardens and garden cemeteries have a mode of existence that is neither purely natural or human-made, their sense of in-betweenness itself becomes, in Federmayer's analysis, inspiration for the two central characters to critique and destabilise the restrictive, sometimes exclusive social

roles they have been offered before. Related to this act of mental-emotional rejection is the preference for a literary language that makes much of free associations, the withholding of information and non-linear storytelling narrative decisions that Federmayer places in the context of international literary modernism, evoking, for example, the writing of Edith Wharton. The reliance on a loose, associative logic also becomes, in the argumentation of the chapter, a tool to reflect on the experience of living in Budapest. While both characters moved to the capital city at one point of their lives, neither comes to prefer it to rural existence, and the opposition, and inevitable flow, between city life and small-town existence reaffirm the relevance of a Foucauldian critical lens.

Árpád Bak's contribution 'Told and Untold Histories of Oppression: Hungarian Romani Composer János Bihari's Memory Sites in Budapest under State Socialism' treats the political-ideological aspects of the artistic representation of significant members of Roma communities from 1947 to 1988. This historical focus involves a necessary overview of art, and especially patriotic art, in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. As a corollary, the reader is extensively informed about the various modulations in the (often strained) relationship between the majority Magyar society and ethnic or national minorities. The historical memory of prominent composer and musician János Bihari (1764 – 1827) provides a particularly complex example for the way in which the need to remember and commemorate intersects with sustained patterns of bias and prejudice.

Thus, to contextualise this process, the first part of the chapter offers an overview of both the historical significance of Bihari's achievement and the construction of his public memory before 1945. This includes, among other topics, such details as Bihari's authorship of the popular genre of the so-called verbunkos music, his assumed authorship of the Rákóczi March and his appearance in painting, literature and, famously, in a book by Franz Liszt. The second segment is devoted to how, drawing a parallel between anti-Habsburg independence efforts in the nineteenth century and the opposition to Governor Horthy's regime in the twentieth, Marxist historians harmonised the patriotically-nationalistically oriented art of the previous eras with officially endorsed socialist realism and what has been referred to as 'the Sovietization of public space' (Mevius 262). This practice, however, did not stop the state socialist regime from continuing to treat the Roma population as second-class citizens, and it found, Bak argues, in Lenin's theory of nationality a justification to limit the celebration of ethnic plurality to the past, and not extend it to the present. To demonstrate this process, the chapter treats Bihari's public statutes, plaquettes and other representations (or, in certain cases, the lack thereof) in particular details, exposing historical trends, institutional practices and racial-political bias that celebratory art works may, at first sight at least, conceal.

In 'Small-town Civility and the Concept of Liberty in Géza Ottlik's Opus Magnum', Ferenc Hörcher explores Ottlik's best-known, supercanonical novel entitled *School at the Frontier* (1959). The essay opens with a brief, politically oriented biographical portrayal of Ottlik, and it suggests that even if the novelist – comparably to such Central-European intellectuals as Milos Forman, Bohumil Hrabal and Milan Kundera – refused to take an explicit stand on political issues, his moral integrity and insistence on artistic and spiritual freedom nevertheless created, for many of his readers, a strong association between the writer's public image and the idea of anti-totalitarianism. According to Hörcher, this resentment of oppressive practices and ideological fervour in general (or, as he quotes Edward Shils, the 'stir[ring] of the passions', 470) is rooted in the author's cultivation of civil virtues or, in other words, the politics of civility.

The main parts of the essay elaborate on this idea by reference to *School at the Frontier*, a long narrative set in a military school in the 1920s. While the chapter revisits certain essential, often noted critical notions about Ottlik's work – the novel as a Bildungsroman, as a portrayal of the opposition between civilian and military ways of life or as a symbolic representation of all those social and psychological borders that are necessarily crossed during the passage from childhood to young adulthood – its focus is on those values and practices of civility that Hörcher associates primarily with Kőszeg, a town situated on the western border of Hungary. According to the author, this setting serves as a depository of the kind of civility that the main characters of the novel covet so much in their oppressed, dehumanised condition at the school. Hörcher demonstrates this link between small-town culture and the values and politics of civility by highlighting the role of Kőszeg in resisting Ottoman expansion and exemplifying the best of European urban traditions. After reviewing a substantial amount of related literature (for example, the writings of Coventry Patmore, Walter Pater, Matthew Arnold and Dante), he contends that the concept of civility is best understood within the value system of the Western town dweller and as a mode of local as well as national attachment.

Reflections on the Contemporary City: Material, Literary and Visual Cultures

The four authors in the last section titled 'Reflections on the Contemporary City: Material, Literary and Visual Cultures' explore such diverse yet subtly connected topics as heritage studies, cultural memory, the post-1989 generation and care culture in the Central and Eastern European context. After an analysis of contemporary cultural perceptions of arrow cross signs in a variety of brick surfaces (Munteán), Ágnes Györke explores the translocal aesthetic strategies of a

contemporary Budapest novel, Noémi Szécsi's *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire*. Next, György Kalmár's chapter explains how contemporary Hungarian film draws on socially-politically charged locations for its narratives about historical turning points. Concluding the volume, Eszter Ureczky's contribution offers an analysis of Kristóf Deák's *Az unoka* (The Grandson, 2022) from the perspective of medical humanities, discussing the significance of care ethics in the Central and Eastern European context.

With its provocative title and subject matter, László Munteán's chapter 'Surface Matters: An Archaeology of the Arrow Cross in Budapest's Façades' studies a type of visual representation that most locals, assuming its total disappearance from public spaces, must have passed unnoticed. Having perpetrated some of the worst atrocities towards the end of the Second World War, the Arrow Cross was a far-right party and military organisation that only fringe political groups would commemorate today. Yet, as the author skilfully demonstrates, small arrow cross inscriptions constitute a still existing element of the cultural-material fibre of the capital city. They usually appear (or appeared in the recent past) on brick surfaces, either drawn or carved in, fully visible or partly erased, but because of their smallness and the abundant presence of other inscriptions from other eras, these signs reveal themselves only by accident or through the efforts of whom the author calls elsewhere 'plaster archaeologists' (Munteán 42-45).

Munteán explains his interest in these signs by citing contemporary examples of officially endorsed narratives of military heroism, with special regard to the recently published book entitled *Budapest hegei* (Scars of Budapest, 2019). He offers an alternative approach to wartime urban heritage that not only counters official memory politics but also engages with the shifting experience of historically informed flânerie in today's Budapest. Indeed, the chapter places crucial emphasis on the notion of 'curated decay' (DeSilvey 13) where, in distinction to the static contextual implications of the museum and the exhibition, the open-ended and unpredictable position of a given find is recognised without an effort towards preservation. Because the focus is on the public appearance of notorious fascist inscriptions, Munteán offers in-depth discussion of such topics as the history of the Arrow Cross movement, their propaganda in the 1940s, nostalgia, resistance and what cultural theorist Sarah Ahmed calls 'affective value' (Ahmed 134). Three specific examples supplement the otherwise theoretical general direction of the study: a centrally located university building, a former synagogue turned into a fencing school, and the main entrance of an army base.

Ágnes Györke's chapter titled 'Budapest in Noémi Szécsi's *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire*: The Grand and the Peripheral' explores Noémi Szécsi's first novel, which is set in Budapest after the collapse of communism in the Eastern European region. Györke argues that Szécsi is an urban writer whose novels and non-

fiction books reveal a profound interest in metropolitan identities. According to Györke, *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* showcases the perspective of the post-1989 generation, which is characterised by a profound search for new identities after the collapse of communism, and depicts Budapest as a city that, after decades of isolation behind the Iron Curtain, is connected to the global world behind the country's borders in countless ways. After mapping the cultural-historical context the title of the novel evokes, including the legend of 'Eastern European vampirism', the author goes on to explore the peripheral perspective that characterises Szécsi's narrative, which, she argues, can be conceptualised as a hopeful yet timid vision that offers an alternative to polarised discourses of cultural memory in contemporary Hungary.

According to Györke, *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* portrays Budapest after the collapse of communism as a post-socialist city in transition, which is contrasted with memoryscapes of the late nineteenth-century capital. This dichotomy, which, first and foremost, plays out in the opposition between nineteenth-century urban grandness and post-socialist peripherality, is analysed in the chapter in detail. Through the close reading of the novel, Györke convincingly demonstrates how translocal allusions to English-speaking literary culture, used by the narrator to conceptualise both vampire legends and the late nineteenth-century city, expose the incongruities that characterise national grandiosity. This allows the author to conclude that nationalism is not only undermined by the narrator's ironical tone but also through the translocal aesthetics of the novel, which foreground connectedness instead of singularities and focus on the mundane instead of the spectacular. Finally, the author briefly discusses Szécsi's recently published collection of short stories, *Rohadt állatok* (Rotten Animals, 2023), as a metacommentary on her debut (the title refers to the unmarketable book the narrator of *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* wrote more than twenty years ago). Instead of the post-1989 generation's perspective, Györke points out, populist animals and consumerism dominate this volume: stories abound in references to opportunistic 'statesmen', greed, beauty culture, and corrupt companies, suggesting that the more we see of the twenty-first century, the less likely it is that the peripheral vision fostered by *The Finno-Ugrian Vampire* will survive the Millennium.

'Three Postcards of Budapest: Paradigms of the Urban Imaginary in Post-communist Hungarian Cinema' by György Kalmár examines representations of Budapest in three contemporary feature films: *Moszkva tér* (Moscow Square, 2001), *Kontroll* (Control, 2004) and *Jupiter holdja* (Jupiter's Moon, 2017). The capital city is, of course, not just the cultural-geographical setting that these films happen to share, but it is argued to be the urban entity that shapes, and is shaped by, such filmic processes as, for example, explorations of the human body and its uses, the impact of the built environment on subjectivity formation and identity

construction on local, national and transnational levels. Indeed, change – sometimes uplifting, sometimes traumatic and sometimes both – is a key concept in the chapter: director Ferenc Török's *Moscow Square* reflects on the so-called regime change (Hungary's shift from a totalitarian one-party system to capitalism and its various new freedoms) in 1989, Nimród Antal's *Control* offers an insightful if indirect commentary on Hungary's joining the European Union in 2004 and Kornél's Mundruczó's *Jupiter's Moon* engages with the refugee crisis of 2015.

As suggested by its title, spatialised political practices find quite direct expression in the first film. Departing from the transformations and complex histories of an iconic Budapest square, the author discusses how the at once chaotic, vibrant and highly optimistic period in the immediate wake of the regime change triggered the reappropriation of the city and sometimes almost literal breaking down of its earlier boundaries (Varga 297). *Control* too treats a difficult, and in this case much less hopeful, passage into not simply the EU, but its broader corollary, a Westernised, rationalised system as embodied by the film's setting, the Budapest underground transportation. An allegorical underworld and cultural-political Other for the West, this location invites, in Kalmár's analysis, all those characters who find themselves dispossessed of territory to deploy fascinatingly varied tactics of resistance as theorised by de Certeau (62). The politically-morally darkest vision arises in *Jupiter's Moon* when Hungarians and especially Budapest dwellers encounter an unprecedented influx of refugees from non-Christian countries, and watch them, loyally to the actual events of 2015, congregate in the Budapest Eastern Railway Station. The chapter focuses on the spatially coded reflexes and experiences of the cinematic characters, among which compassion, fear, susceptibility to governmental anti-immigration discourse and, as demonstrated through examples from contemporary German social history and Derridean philosophy, even a disguised and misplaced Messianic belief are prominent.

Eszter Ureczky's essay titled 'Old City: Ageist Crime and Transgenerational Care in Kristóf Deák's *The Grandson* (2022)' concentrates on a contemporary Hungarian film by adopting the perspectives of age studies, care ethics and socio-spatial studies. According to the analysis, the phenomenon of the social isolation of elderly people in urban settings – which forms the main thematic core of the film – should be approached as part of a global demographic-biopolitical pattern and the cultural reactions and representations that this new paradigm elicits. At the same time, Ureczky's understanding of the film makes much of the regional specificities of the predicament of the ageing city dweller and identifies, as a result, phenomena that are at once transnational in character and yet firmly rooted in local histories and circumstances.

Thus, after introducing Sally Chivers's concept of 'silvering screen' (Chivers xvi), Ureczky situates her project in the context of global film history and

contends that the moral and sociological problems depicted in *The Grandson* align with the worldwide trends of so-called 'greying societies' with clear impacts on the demographical composition of East and Central Europe, too. As these problems involve the particular vulnerability of senior citizens, the chapter analyses the circumstances, and consequences, of the kind of urban crime where criminals, posing as either police officers or an injured close relative, phone elderly people to demand immediate cash payment to avoid expenses that some alleged accident might still incur. The chapter argues that this type of crime is inseparable from the intensely heterotopic urban setting within which it operates. This is because after the breakdown of 'traditional sources of collective identity and meaning' (Machielse and Hortulanus 122) in the represented post-socialist metropolitan milieu, no powerful enough social structures prevent the general deterioration of the ageing urban subject. In fact, even such traditionally protective institutions as the police or the hospital can, in certain critical situations, augment the blows that the ageing urban subject already suffered. At the same time, emerging support groups that the contemporary East European city environment fosters can alleviate pain. In addition to the discussion of the new structures of collective care, the concept of transgenerational care – as represented in the film mainly by the titular character of the victim's grandchild – also constitutes a focal point in the analysis. Finally, the chapter productively engages with the utopistic aspects of the institutional solutions that appear in the code of the film.

As attested by the eleven chapters in this volume, reading the stories that creative works and material culture tell about cities is a particularly productive way to explore Central and Eastern European cultures. These studies, which we call translocal interventions, offer new vantage points from which the region can be explored as they foreground the significance of local narratives vis-a-vis contexts that point well beyond the borders of towns, cities and nations. However, this volume is far from being an exhaustive study of Hungarian urban cultures, let alone the urban world of Central and Eastern Europe. The findings it presents, we hope, will inspire further research on the region.

Notes

1. Tatjana Jukić, 'Zagreb' (Tambling, *The Palgrave Encyclopedia*, 1941–50).
2. Gábor Vaderna, 'Budapest as a Product of the Biedermeier Imagination' (Tambling, *The Palgrave Encyclopedia*, 303–12).
3. Blacker's study takes a comparative perspective yet does not aim to offer an account of the East Central European experience: 'It proposes to limit its investigations geograph-

- ically to Poland, Ukraine and Russia (the latter principally in relation to Kaliningrad), as these country case studies not only represent some of the most dramatic examples of the phenomenon that is being investigated, but their juxtaposition also provides a broad coherent comparative perspective' (17).
4. For a detailed analysis of socialist cultural policy see Miklós Péti's *Paradise from behind the Iron Curtain*.
 5. See Györke, 'On the Periphery'.
 6. The full, uncensored version of the film has been restored only very recently: it premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2019 and has been on at cinemas since June.
 7. The Compromise of 1867 established the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary.
 8. Urbanists are modernists who focus on experimentation and have a cosmopolitan disposition, such as Endre Ady and Mihály Babits, while the term 'traditionalist' refers to a new generation of writers who explored the countryside and whose works had nationalist overtones, such as Áron Tamási and László Németh.
 9. As Blacker argues, '[t]he deported Germans continued to cherish their memories of their eastern European or Prussian homes, forming their own organizations and communities in post-war Germany; today Germans constitute large tourist markets for Gdansk or Wrocław (pre-war Danzig and Breslau)' (4).
 10. See, for instance, Homi Bhabha's and Edward Soja's concept of 'third space' in Rutherford 211–12 and Soja 53–60.
 11. Drawing on the work of Arjun Appadurai as well as Hamzah Muzaini and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, Kapralski defines *memoryscape* as 'a memorial landscape – both material and symbolic – through which 'collective memory is commonly spatialized [Muzaini and Yeoh 345]' (150).

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