

Paths to Quality Television in Eastern Europe. Where Do Hungarian and Romanian HBO Series Come From?

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This article provides an overview of HBO television series in Hungary and Romania, highlighting their relation to film traditions in each country. While it might seem surprising that HBO helped create original series in countries without a long-standing tradition in quality television, the roots for this 'wave' of Eastern European shows can actually be traced in local film production tradition. For these shows, HBO has worked to make regional voices heard internationally. These two Eastern European neighbours belong to the same categories in terms of cinema and television production in that they represent small markets with potential for development under the support of Western media. Yet this article shows how cultural differences surface when comparing these two countries' filmic traditions, authorial perspectives, international recognition of professionals, and domestic audiences. In Hungary, prestigious directors, as well as new television professionals and 'outsiders' from other fields, play significant roles in HBO projects. Together, they develop a relatively wide range of genres that target a broad spectrum of audience demographics. In the case of Romania, there exists a certain continuity with New Romanian Cinema in the HBO series. The Romanian productions attempt to attract larger numbers among domestic viewers in addition to international audiences. The emergent quality television in both countries demonstrates a reliance on the small cinema tradition, while capitalizing on the success of certain academic directions and the success independent film enjoyed in Europe. Given the lack of cooperation in Eastern Europe across numerous cultural and creative industries following 1989, this article examines how HBO acts as a catalyst for Hungarian and Romanian creativity. By bringing together local resources and using its legitimacy as a major player in international television, HBO empowers local professionals to upgrade the quality of their televised content.

Keywords

Eastern European television series
Professionalization in television
HBO quality principles
Filmic tradition
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INTRODUCTION¹

As Time Warner has demonstrated an inclination for convergent and transatlantic media, HBO Europe proposed a new production model, particularly among TV series in Eastern and South-Eastern European countries. In a region where quality television has not been a focus of the media, transnational circulation has lacked, and regional cooperation has been scarce², locally-produced HBO shows have mobilized a multitude



of creative resources, in turn responding to at least three necessities of the television market: the creators' need to reach both local and wider European demographics, the local audiences' desire for high quality series made in their home countries, and the European viewers' curiosity for discovering through serialized fiction a different part of the world, one that has been traditionally underrepresented on the small screen. This last market necessity had already been achieved through the circulation of "small cinema" productions, including prestigious Hungarian films and works of New Romanian Cinema. Because HBO lessened the gap between television and cinema³ in terms of quality and production strategies, we argue that the positioning of Eastern European series under the label of the international broadcasting giant conscientiously evokes some effects of the film tradition in these countries. On the multinational entertainment arena, HBO 'imposes a vision of an élite TV culture on the field',⁴ and this strategy has influenced the structure of series made in the Eastern Europe. Moreover, Hungary and Romania were among the first Eastern European countries involved in HBO projects whose adaptations of international formats paved the way for the creation of original series. In this sense, we observe how Hungarian and Romanian HBO series are reminiscent of an apparent paradox foregrounded in the reception of small cinema productions:

These films offer a window to the social and geographical reality but they are not 'about' them, they treat geographical space as a backdrop only for more general explorations of human responsibility and emotions. Nevertheless, such films are usually described in the context of 'origin'. Where they come from is as important as what they deal with. The two areas seem irrevocably connected.⁵

This excerpt from a study (Desser, Falkowska, Giukin, 2015) exploring the concept of 'small cinemas' points out how Czech, Hungarian, Russian, and Polish cinema are inextricably linked to their original socio-geographical circumstances. Despite being involved in a transnational chain of production and distribution, the Hungarian and Romanian series discussed in this article are primarily the result of already extant, domestic filmic traditions. These pre-existent domestic cinematic heritages then come to be reshaped with international resources made accessible by HBO and influences of newcomers in TV production.

Scholarship acknowledging Eastern Europe's role as a participant in global cultural exchanges after 1989 has long been focused on its consumer status. In his seminal work *The Cultural Industries*, David Hesmondhalgh not only draws attention towards the 'unfettered marketisation'⁶ of culture and the media in the post-communist age, but also questions the 'optimistic projections of benign globalization'.⁷ The emergence of original, Eastern European serialized television circulated on a transnational



scale marks the redefining of positions and expectations in the field of television production. Such shifts in standards and aims ought to be considered through certain derivations of Bourdieu's sociological analysis of the field of cultural production, especially when it comes to recent reinterpretations in media studies.⁸ In any case, HBO's initiatives in the field of Eastern European television series can be regarded as a significant factor in redefining the regional 'space of possibles',⁹ to put it in Bourdieu's terms. Although the French theorist's influential work is most frequently applied to study national, social spaces (and not multinational media enterprises),¹⁰ some of the concepts developed in his work prove to be useful when approximating the positions of agents in recent Eastern television production. Therefore, references to the concept of *small cinema* as a formative influence and Bourdieusian ideas related to cultural production underpin our overview of HBO Hungarian and Romanian TV series. While this is not an attempt at designing a possible model for the structure of cinema and television cultural spheres in Hungary and Romania, we contest that instrumentalizing readings of Bourdieu help delineate both the trajectory of the power relations and capital dynamics developed before and after HBO's presence as a major stakeholder interacting with the local Romanian and Hungarian talents.

CHANGES IN HUNGARIAN TELEVISION AND CINEMA CULTURE AFTER 1989

In 1991, HBO becomes the first foreign cable television company to broadcast in Hungary. However, it is not until 2007 that HBO's role extended beyond a content provider. Only in the second half of the 1990s the broadcasting group starts to invest in the production of original Hungarian content.¹¹ The steps taken by HBO in developing local creative enterprises typically include an initial test run of original scripted content, a later production of transnational formats, and a subsequent return to the original scripted content. This development involves a smooth process of cultural imperialism and gradual localization combined with hybridization of formats, audiovisual language, and talent development.¹² While the strategy employed by the company can be either criticized as a form of cultural hegemony¹³ or praised as an emancipatory process of serial audiovisual content creation,¹⁴ we must acknowledge that the implementation of the quality TV format in the local market was a risky dealing and entailed systematic creative labor, as well as an understanding of local market dynamics, audiences, and production principles of other cultural industries. Balázs Varga comments on transformations in Eastern European television culture after the fall of socialist regimes framed according to a master narrative that he summarises as follows: 'the direction of change leads



from imported content to original domestic production'.¹⁵ Yet Varga claims that this process of change does not unfold linearly or coherently. From the point of view of production, HBO responded to double standards generated by the attempt to reconcile different intentions: preserving the traits of the HBO brand image, discovering a unique path in integrating local knowledge into international generic formats, and appeasing the expectations of local audiences.¹⁶ In such a way, the creation of HBO television series in Hungary synthesized the influences of three cultural industries with strong local traditions: the domestic movie industry, the Hungarian theatrical culture, and more broadly, the local television production enterprise. Given the scope of this claim, this article focuses on the influences of local movie making on HBO Hungarian series and leaves the question concerning theatrical and televisual influences to be a potential area for further investigation.

During the three decades since the launch of HBO in Hungary, the domestic movie industry was marked by the reorganization of the studio system and the setup of a predominately politically-controlled state funding system.¹⁷ By the same token, the arrival of commercial cable TV companies,¹⁸ which had a major impact on the screen culture of local audiences, largely influenced this process. Before the regime change, the official Hungarian movie scene was dominated by censored filmic content, excluding two kinds of movie formats: on the one hand, auteur films involving socio-political-cultural criticism and targeting elite audience groups (cf. the internationally recognized Hungarian filmmakers, Béla Tarr, Miklós Jancsó, István Szabó, Károly Makk, Márta Mészáros, etc.), and on the other, popular generic blockbuster movies aimed at mass audiences. After the regime change, redefining popular film content became a significant trend that surfaced through the creation of popular comedies and midcult heritage films, e.g., works by directors like Róbert Koltai, András Kern, Gábor Herendi, Gergely Fonyó, Péter Rudolf, etc.. Similarly, the auteur tradition played a major role in reorganizing cinema studies at the University of Theater and Film Arts in Budapest (UTFA) focusing on preparing directors for experimenting with art film. This tendency is well-represented by the members of the so-called 'Young Hungarian Cinema' (Ferenc Török, György Pálfi, Szabolcs Hajdu, Dániel Erdélyi, and Gábor Fischer). All of whom were affiliates of the same promotion stature at the University of Theater and Film Arts. In order to accurately sum up the achievements of the last three decades, it is necessary to note that Hungarian small cinema¹⁹ garnered key international recognition, culminating in László Nemes Jeles's Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 2016. In Hungary, the local response to small cinema production was moderate: not as consequential as in the Czech Republic and not as insignificant as in Romania.²⁰ Besides the stakeholders encouraging popular movie formats and the young auteur filmmakers cultivating directorial styles acquired at the university, a new generation of so-called outsiders also appeared on the scene. These newcomers were influenced by international drama formats and dramatic



storytelling (Benedek Fliegauf, Zsombor Dyga, etc.).²¹ A Bourdieusian conceptualization of the Hungarian movie industry of the period reveals that the above mentioned tendencies can actually be categorized according to the four poles of Bourdieu's autonomous fields of artistic creation, the critically acclaimed avant-garde (some of the young Hungarian filmmakers and members of the auteur tradition), movies with strong cultural publicity (award-winning movies made by directors descending from the auteur tradition), mass productions (directors interested in comedies or other popular generic formats), and the outcasts.²² HBO's talent seeking activity was met by representatives of all these local traditions and newly formed professional groups.²³

COMPARING APPLES TO ORANGES. FROM ORIGINAL DOMESTIC PRODUCTION TO ORIGINALLY IMPORTED CONTENT CREATION

From the perspective of production strategies, the difficulty with the aforementioned four filmic categories lies in the fact that the field has had to reconcile the HBO brand with its own avant-garde position in serialized tv creation.²⁴ At the end of the 1990s, this position had not yet appeared in Eastern Europe because, as Varga stated, HBO's history in the region as a content provider cemented the public's perception of the company as a premium cable service, and not as a producer of quality TV series.²⁵ HBO's choice to work with representatives of 'young Hungarian cinema'²⁶ for the first locally produced and original television series attempts at negotiating instances of avant-garde from two different cultural contexts: the domestic cinematic milieu and the international network background attached to HBO's presence. An overview of the team involved in the creation of *Született lúzer* ("Born Losers", 2007-2008) reveals that directors who were UTFA²⁷ alumni had a strong predisposition for experimenting and maintaining control over the creative process. In fact, they conceived the unusual structure of the morbid anthology series, which consisted of a number of 12-minute episodes, screened in pairs during primetime on Sundays. These series, governed by the aesthetics of a rural freak show, follow the lives of peasant characters who find themselves in absurd, morbid, and ridiculous situations. In this first example of original content production, HBO remained practically insignificant in terms of creative control. Considering both its production and development, *Született lúzer* presents itself to be much more closely aligned to the standards and production culture of the Hungarian film industry at the time than to HBO's production model.²⁸ There are, however, some of the thematic elements in the show, namely its curiosity for the figure of the freak, that associate it with one of HBO's most controversial productions, *Carnivàle* (2003-2005).



Even though *Born Loser* is regarded as a failure, it remains significant in that its creators later became important personalities in Hungary's television industry. Their careers went from an avant-garde position to acquiring strong cultural publicity.

After its poorly received sketch of the rural Hungarian landscape in *Született lúzer*, HBO struck gold with *Társas játék* (an adaptation of the Israeli format *Mataynitnashek*, 2007), released in 2011. Following the satiric depiction of rural Hungarian realities dealing with poverty, marginality, and liminality, HBO relocates to Budapest where a large number typical HBO consumers live, namely cultural creatives and the representatives of urban upper-middle-class. The production of the series adopts a novel regional approach in lieu of a country-specific strategy of HBO, in particular the adoption of transnational formats. This moment represents the turning point of HBO's local strategy marked by the creative control over the domestic production manifested by format adaptations and transmission of the productional prowess of the media powerhouse.²⁹ The series was also adopted by the channel in Romania and in the Czech Republic. Before *Társas játék*, Gábor Herendi and Gergely Fonyó direct domestic box-office hits in 2002, 2004, 2008 and 2009.³⁰ The majority of their filmography represents the tradition of the Hungarian popular comedy, with one exception only: Herendi's *Magyar vándor*, a historical comedy that pokes fun at elements of popular nationalism and national mythology. Herendi's experience further includes a television series production that precedes his collaboration with HBO: between 2002-2003, Herendi directs the Hungarian sitcom *Tea*, and over the following years, he continues to work with the genres of romance, comedy, and dramedy in serial or feature film formats. While 'from the perspective and standards of quality television, it could have seemed strange and improper that HBO chose a romantic comedy as its first local adaptation',³¹ the reception of the series underscores the professionalism and the higher quality of the production compared to other domestic romance TV shows in terms of dialogue, acting performances, locations, and storyline.³²

For the two successive format adaptations, *Terápia* (In Treatment) and *Aranyélet* (Golden Life), HBO selects directors with strong cultural and public ties (for *Terápia*, the local adaptation of the Israeli format *BeTipul/In Treatment*, 2012-2017) and representatives of the outsider perspective with proven skill in independent and low-budget filmmaking/ production (for *Aranyélet*, a loose remake of the Finnish series *Helppo elämä*, distributed internationally with the title *Golden Life*, 2015-2018). The second adaptation of an Israeli format after *When Shall We Kiss*, *Terápia* is marked by the contribution of directors presenting the established legacy of the prestigious Hungarian school of filmmaking. Four directors contributed to the series: Ildikó Enyedi, Attila Gigor, Orsi Nagypál and Mihály Schwechtje (for one episode). In this instance, the influence of the UTFa school is obviously present—Enyedi, Gigor, and Schwechtje are both



alumni and current teachers at the university. Yet, the new dynamics of the Hungarian movie industry are particularly formative in Orsi Nagypál's career, in that she earned a degree from the London Film School³³ after quitting advertising. Given the adaptation of *Terápia* was produced in all the four Eastern European countries on the HBO map at that time (Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Hungary), the series tackles questions of cultural proximity in the case of transnational formats³⁴ and shows how critically acclaimed domestic directorial practices translate into format-guided logic. The fact that Enyedi, a sort of *grande dame* of contemporary Hungarian cinema, plays a decisive role in the creation of the series, is in itself a guarantee of the show's quality.³⁵ Issues of psychology, treatment, therapy, the representations of psychoanalysis in Central and Eastern Europe were formerly present in Enyedi's work, choosing her as director has a strong rationale.³⁶ The works of all four directors discuss the inquiry on mental well-being, the psychological implications of ordinary conversations, investigating codes of normality, the socio-cultural contexts of anxiety. The filmic language of Enyedi's film, *On Body and Soul* (2017),³⁷ directed at the same time as the third season of *Terápia*, displays a corresponding artful interest in human gestures, faces, and nonverbal signs, which have consistently characterized Enyedi's work. The actual therapy scenes and the representations of behavioural disorders in both the movie and the series illustrate how the TV show contributes to the discursive implementation of the therapeutical metaphor as a social, cultural construct in Enyedi's filmic language. The series and the movie present a wide range of therapists, from the series main character played by Pál Mácsai to the superficial and pedantic yet frivolous female psychologist from *On Body and Soul*, played by Réka Tenki. Through the collaboration between highly prestigious actors, directors and screenwriters, *Terápia* works to bring about the cultural relocation of therapy itself.

HBO's Hungarian-made shows play an important role in the transnational and cultural circulation of trends in the Hungarian film industry. *Golden Life* gives rise to the recognition of a new directorial generation—Zsombor Dyga and Áron Máttyássy—that had previously been limited to low budget formats. The professional paths of these two directors turn out to be fairly different: Máttyássy emerges from the UTFA as a member of the second Simó-class while Dyga starts off as an independent outsider without a degree in filmmaking.³⁸ Nonetheless, both directors begin their HBO collaboration with a degree of familiarity for low budget solutions, an interest in generic formats, and previous work experience in TV. The work of these two directors is significant in that it evidences a process of professionalization in TV series creation that culminates in the hybridization of audio-visual and cultural formats. In such cases, Bourdieu's categories are not applicable because we observe a mix of strategies and an attraction between the different poles of the industry's subfield of cultural creation. That is, the creators can be assimilated into the avant-garde current (cf. Máttyássy's



debut movie, *Utolsó idők* – 2009, or Dyga's numerous experiments in film genre³⁹), but still maintain their status as culturally acclaimed directors with a recognizable filmic language. In this way, it is precisely because of their experience in TV series production and their experimentation that the commercial mass movie production does not appear foreign to them. When analysing Dyga's career, it is clear that Dyga's ability to overcome his position as an outsider proves to be instrumental. Moreover, if we consider film categories, the never too sharp, yet persistent distinction between auteur cinema and genre-oriented movies reveals itself to be outdated, as *Golden Life* mixes thriller, crime, action, and even chamber drama. In fact, the series has been compared to *Breaking Bad*, *The Sopranos* in addition to film noir and a well-known Hungarian crime drama from 1982, *Dögkeselyű* (directed by Ferenc András).⁴⁰ Such comparisons reaffirm *Golden Life* as an example of transnational and transcultural hybridity, mixing humor, action, and drama in order to depict the moral inconsistencies of contemporary Hungarian society.

It should be noted that this article's overview of filmic influences in Hungarian-HBO productions overlooks the role of showrunners and scriptwriters in the content creation. Nevertheless, the role of a showrunner, like Gábor Krigler, the creative producer of HBO Hungary and co-creator of *Született lúzer*, *Terápia*, and *Golden Life* or the impact of a head writer like István Tasnádi (*Terápia*, *Golden Life*) illustrate the sociological complexities of a creative industry undergoing a complete restructuring process.

FROM THE NEW WAVE IN ROMANIAN CINEMA TO HBO ROMANIAN TELEVISION SERIES: AN ATTEMPT AT REGAINING LOST DOMESTIC AUDIENCES

The lack of a long-standing tradition in the production of Romanian television series targeting either domestic or transnational audiences has triggered Romanian directors' and production companies' eagerness to collaborate with Western European or American professionals in order to acquire new skills, to adapt to more demanding and diverse audiences, as well as build confidence in locally developed film techniques. After 1989 and the fall of the Iron Curtain, Romanian audiences, witnessing the liberalization of the media culture, become increasingly inclined to prefer Western media productions over local ones. This tendency is a consequence of the collapse in audiences' support to the national media which had been employed as a vehicle of the political power during the socialist period. Over three decades later, locally produced, quality television is still developing rather slowly. In fact, the majority of the television series made in Romania



are mainstream comedies or soap opera romances with a specific, localized target audience. Romanian audiences' preference for American films and television series is a well-known characteristic of media consumption in the country, thus marking a difference from the inclinations of viewers in other Central and Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, or Poland, where the interest for national cinema and television shows is more developed.

Though HBO first becomes available in Romania in 1998, the company does not invest in local production until over a decade later, preferring to broadcast international blockbuster films. The promotional offer that first appears with the launch of HBO in Romania features a film selection that is eloquent for (eloquent for does not make sense here, perhaps 'indicative of') the expectations the giant broadcaster had about the tastes of an audience in a post-socialist country: *Dirty Dancing* (dir. Emile Ardolino, 1987), *Disclosure* (dir. Barry Levinson, 1992), *Batman Returns* (dir. Tim Burton, 1992), Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992), *Johnny Mnemonic* (dir. Robert Longo, 1995), as well as pop music concerts such as the Spice Girls' *Live in Istanbul* (1997). Sensationalism,⁴¹ highly imaginative popular productions, special effects, narrative twists, science-fiction or horror movie tropes – all approached with technical professionalism and visual sophistication – are among the elements in these films that had been absent from Romanian cinema and television not only during the socialist era, but also amidst the economically harsh years of transition to capitalism and democracy. Therefore, this preference for American movies stems from the deprivation of cultural capital and the desire for unrestricted consumption of commodities that had for many years symbolized the 'forbidden fruit'. This steady fixation for American mainstream culture, entertainment, and lifestyle becomes an integrated part of a rapidly emerging post-1989 social habitus.⁴² It even surfaces in institutional positions of a 'national' habitus: the Romanian President himself officially welcomed pop superstar Michael Jackson to the country in 1992 and attended the inauguration of McDonald's in Bucharest in 1995. These signs of cultural import and 'self-inflicted imperialism'⁴³ add to a more general and pervasive change in public policies, as Romania made efforts to join Western-led international structures and organizations, to assert its kinship to the Western world, and distance itself from the former Soviet domination and its cultural legacy.

Despite this massive enthusiasm for embracing American popular culture and entertainment, Romanian cinema and television series did not start to imitate structures and strategies of the American productions (or if they did, the enterprise was never managed very successfully, due to the lack of financial means and dearth of experienced and talented professionals who might have been interested in such endeavours).

In terms of fictional serial production and television drama, Romania evolves quite differently than other Central and Eastern European countries,



such as Poland, where the explosion of domestic TV series is understood to be a response to the influence of conventional American storytelling and aesthetics.⁴⁴ Instead, film directors begin to cultivate their attachment to the values of realism, minimalism (especially, in terms of technical means of cinematography), and the rhetorics of critical interrogation focused on the post-communist transition. These directions occur in fictional constructions inclined towards social critique, reflexivity, and discrete uses of allegory.⁴⁵ These tendencies lead to a flourishing trend known as New Romanian Cinema (NRC) or New Romanian Wave, a phenomenon which brings international recognition for several productions and their creators. The success of NRC is mainly reflected in the prestigious European prizes awarded to its films (see Appendix). Therefore, while fictional television production does not change significantly upon the arrival of HBO in Romania until 2010, the first decade of the new millennium is defined by the ascension of Romanian cinema and its young representatives. Some of the directors who are labeled as New Wave filmmakers include: Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, Radu Muntean, Tudor Giurgiu, who would soon be followed by new names earning praise at international festivals since 2001.

These directors went from the status of outsiders (most of them educated in Western universities and virtually unknown in their home country) struggling to finance their projects independently on low budgets to critically acclaimed professionals. This change of status has had many consequences on the development of Romanian film, among which is the development of new projects and financing sources,⁴⁶ as young Romanian directors founded their own production companies: Cristian Mungiu is the director of Mobra Films, Cristi Puiu's films are produced by his own company Mandragora, Tudor Giurgiu leads LibraFilm and is also the founder of Transilvania International Film Festival (TIFF). Since 2018, Mobra Films has been the main Romanian partner for the production of HBO series made in the country: this collaboration shows that the achievements of the New Romanian Cinema have a long-lasting impact and can lead to structural transformations in domestic production and multinational creative projects.

The international recognition of Romanian directors has created a new impetus in the field and became part of an alternative path to 'Americanization' in the post-socialist phase of the professionalization of Romanian television and film production. Therefore, co-productions such as *Hackerville* (2018) or *Tuff Money* (*Bani negri*, 2020) capitalize on the experience and techniques of the New Romanian Wave, even though script, storytelling, and marketing strategies are different: the HBO series are more focused on local narratives, on using locations in historically diverse regions (i.e. Timișoara, Piatra-Neamț) while bringing into play the transnational circulation of forms and hybridization of genres. *Shadows* (*Umbre*, 2014-2019), *The Silent Valley* (*Valea Mută*, 2018), *Hackerville*, and



Tuff Money (*Bani negri*) are all based on plotlines typical of crime fiction or noir, but each one develops, on the side, a particular mix of stylistic/generic elements, such as comedy, dark/absurd humor, cybersecurity-themed speculative fiction, realist portrayals of post-communist trauma, commentary on gender awareness and its empowerment in highly conservative, patriarchal communities. One may grasp a certain continuity with tendencies present in Romanian New Wave classics such as *Stuff and Dough* (*Marfa și banii*, Cristi Puiu, 2001), *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*, Cristi Puiu, 2005), *The Paper Will Be Blue* (*Hârtia va fi albastră*, Radu Muntean, 2006), *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (*4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile*, Cristian Mungiu, 2007), *Aurora* (Cristi Puiu, 2013), which propose a cinematic language that relies on detailed accuracy, camera angles that hint at a questioning of the nature of truth and knowledge, and a refusal of post-communist transition stereotypes and nostalgic biased views. As director Cristi Puiu claimed, the purpose of his films was to ‘erase the boundary between documentary and fiction, by reconciling spectatorial and creator positions’.⁴⁷ But despite this statement, it can be argued that some features of the Romanian New Wave have found common territories with the realm of crime fiction series: dark humor, a bleak view on society as a whole and on individuals themselves, the shadow of corruption lurking over the individual. Additionally, the topics of discrimination and abuse have also been included in films by Cristian Mungiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, and Cristi Puiu as well as in the general outline of recent series produced by HBO in Romania. The messages that the films and the series convey bring to mind some remarks about small cinemas, in that the message sent by TV series produced in Eastern Europe seem to develop connections with the films of the region:

*In the 1990s and 2000s, small cinemas coming from various countries, often underprivileged ones or the countries under oppression, give spectators a privileged look into the lives of other people and other cultures. The directors of these films present reality in their countries in an unbiased way and give access to the nitty-gritty elements of their existence.*⁴⁸

Therefore, it is interesting to note that by the time HBO decided to initiate the production of television series in Romania, the New Wave had changed its position within the field: most directors had moved from being independent and underfunded to critically acclaimed filmmakers with prestigious international prizes and had therefore become part of a consecrated avant-garde, to cite Bourdieu again.

In hindsight, some of the key topics or cinematic stylistic traits in the films of the Romanian New Wave had been to some degree employed previously by directors in the 1970s and 1980s, in an era where censorship would eradicate any type of realist approach other than socialist realism fueled by the ideological constraints imposed by the ruling Party and by dictator



Nicolae Ceaușescu. Even under these circumstances, films by Lucian Pintilie (*Reconstituirea*, 1968), Alexandru Tatos (*Secvențe*, 1982), Dan Pița (*Concurs*, 1982) managed to develop a subtly metaphorical realism which seemed tolerable for the authorities but engaging enough for the audience to decode political irony and contemplate absurd or tragic events set against the background of daily life in a socialist country. However, this descent did not make New Wave films very popular among Romanian audiences, who remained faithful to Hollywood productions during the 1990s. In a 2003 short article, Cristi Puiu eloquently summarizes the factors contributing to Romanians' choice of films to watch:

In Romania, going to the cinema costs more than a citizen with an average income can afford, and when one eventually does go out to see a movie, they will definitely choose an American production. If by any chance they go to a Romanian film and they do not fall asleep in their seats, they will leave the theatre dissatisfied and outraged. Paying a ticket in order to watch a Romanian film is either a display of one's prosperity, a whim, or even an evidence of masochism.⁴⁹

These claims may seem drastic, but they do reflect Romanian social realities of the 2000s from an economic perspective. The remarks are also accurate in encapsulating the perception that, for the average Romanian viewer, television as well as cinema have been since 1989 the epitome of difference and alterity: movie watching comprised the need to participate, through the audiovisual experience, in 'something else' beyond an artistic expression of their day-to-day reality. Under such circumstances, realism in Romanian art cinema became an avant-garde enterprise, in the sense that it was regarded as eccentric in relation to the preferences of average viewers. Puiu's opinion is echoed in Romanian critic Doru Pop's analysis of the psychological impact of these films: 'Romanian New Wave cinema has built its identity, by replicating a traumatic world and a traumatic experience, by projecting onto the screen a masochistic desire for reliving pain. [...] [T]he New Wave films bring us again and again in front of a reality which otherwise we might choose to avoid'.⁵⁰

Pop's interpretation, however, seems to be founded on the implicit postulate that the aesthetic experience involves, on the one hand, 're-living' events, and on the other hand, that the realities familiar to the viewer (because they are more or less part of a generic, commonplace Romanian experience of reality) can be avoided. Both sets of remarks are based on the assumption that the Romanian audience has difficulties in discerning between perceived reality and an artistic representation of reality. The belief that the national audience is not very educated is a rather widespread perspective. Bogdan Mirică (director of *Shadows* and of the 2016 feature film *Dogs* – original title: *Câini*) was part of creative teams in original projects made for the national television market as well



as in international productions. He asserts that the slow development of Romanian serial productions has to do with the condescending views that many professionals in the industry hold about the public:

To be honest, I have not really seen many Romanian impressive series. Except for those produced by HBO, where quality always comes first, the others seem to prioritize quantity and the audience. To me it seems that they always start with the wrong assumption that the audience is not educated and therefore they must be provided with frivolous TV series: simplistic narrative structures, simple language, no production value – how would Romanians know what that means? But things could not be more different than this view. Romanians do watch international series. With the era of easy Internet access came the massive openness and curiosity towards everything, including pop culture. You cannot trick your audience. [...] Romanian television series can evolve only if producers start to treat their audience respectfully and to invest more in quality screenwriting and production strategies.⁵¹

The major role of HBO as an agent promoting quality shows in areas where the concept was absent from the industry's praxis is thus revealed by professionals themselves. The international broadcasting company challenged the local *habitus* by proposing different approaches to seriality than those recurring in mainstream domestic production.

ROMANIAN HBO SERIES AND THEIR DIRECTORS: THE TRANSFER OF EXPERTISE AS SYMBOLIC CAPITAL

Despite shortcomings such as those mentioned by Mirică, Romania was the first among Eastern European countries to develop a locally produced HBO series. *În derivă* (2010-2012)⁵² was the Romanian adaptation of the famous Israeli show *BeTipul/In Treatment*. The series was directed by three experienced filmmakers, Constantin Popescu, Adrian Sitaru, and Titus Muntean. Although it featured famous Romanian actors (for example, the protagonist, psychotherapist Andrei Poenaru, was played by Marcel Iureș, famous and appreciated by the local audience for starring in Hollywood films), the series was considered a disappointment because its representations of relationships seemed somehow disconnected from Romanian social realities. *În derivă* was regarded as excessively complacent in imitating the Israeli and American versions. Even though the topic of psychotherapy was familiar to urban upper-middle class and the script lacked authenticity in terms of narrative and expressive choices, *În derivă* was remarkable for its visual and marketing quality, as well as



innovative in proposing a new dramatic format and dynamic dialogues. Therefore, it functioned as a sign that such endeavours were possible with locally produced series, and that the industry was prepared to take a step forward.

This step was followed by the adaptation of another Israeli series, *Matay nitnashek* (also adapted in Hungary as *Társas játék*): *Rămâi cu mine* kept Constantin Popescu on board as director. Mihai Bauman, the co-director, previously made a documentary film (*Groapa – The Pit*, 2001), some short films, worked as a casting director in Romania and abroad, and directed TV series for commercial television. Constantin Popescu already directed not only *Terăpia*, the first HBO adaptation series in Romania, but also two critically acclaimed feature films, *Principles of Life* (*Principii de viață*, 2010) and *The portrait of the Fighter as a Young Man* (*Portretul luptătorului la tinerețe*, 2010). Furthermore, he had co-directed *Tales from the Golden Age* (*Amintiri din comunism*, 2009), a series of stories about the Communist era in Romania. The first two Romanian HBO series were relatively well received by domestic audiences.

Things changed with the next fictional production HBO developed in Romania. *Shadows*, another adaptation based on an Australian show *Small Time Gangster* (2011). In this case, the series' take on the original show was focused on changing its genre conventions, switching from comedy and soap opera conventions to 'a mix of crime, social realism and irony'.⁵³ The directors collaborating on the first part of this project were Bogdan Mirică and Igor Cobileanski, and after the second season, *Shadows* was directed by Mirică alone, as Cobileanski's creative input migrated towards another HBO Romanian series, *Hackerville*.

Mirică started his career as a screenwriter (he collaborated on the script for a popular comedy show, *Las Fierbinți*, 2012-) and a director of short films (*Bora Bora*, 2011), thereby obtaining independent production experience in mainstream television. His position seems similar to those of Hungarian directors trying to explore several subfields of the industry. Igor Cobileanski brought on screen humoristic as well as gloomy and absurd perspectives in stories set in the Republic of Moldova, his native country with strong ties to not only Romanian culture, but also to Russian influences. *Eastern Business* (2013), his most famous film before becoming involved in HBO projects, is a comedy depicting the desperate attempts of a music teacher and his friends to overcome poverty through illegal business. With the attempts gone awry, the main character contemplates his dramatic fate in prison, as bitter humor permeates the end of the film.

Mirică and Cobileanski's collaboration on *Shadows* features gloomy characters, shocking violence, and a witty use of coarse language. Cobileanski's ties to the New Romanian Cinema is reflected in his 2016 collaboration with Corneliu Porumboiu, whose script idea and characters lie at the core of *The Unsaved* (*Limita de jos a cerului*). Between the two seasons of the HBO show, Mirică directs *Dogs*, a thriller granted the FIPRESCI award



at the 69th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in 2016. The film echoes Mirică's spatial mannerisms in that settings in *Bora Bora*, *Câini* along with in some key scenes in *Shadows* are shot in immense desolate plains, which create strong contrasts with the tensions of the human clashes, chases, and crimes crossing those territories; this type of perspective offers the viewer a chance to explore a meditation on violence, corruption as well as atavistic attachment to rural land. Mirică and Cobileanschi's recent works indirectly show that not only does *Shadows* foster a different atmosphere, a greater level of authenticity, and connection to the Romanian audience, but it also opens new possibilities for its directors, giving them the opportunity to consolidate their positions within the artistic field.

Another noteworthy HBO series within the context of this article is *The Silent Valley* (*Valea Mută*, 2016), based on the Norwegian thriller show *Øyevitne* (2014). The director of this project, Marian Crișan, is best known for *Megatron*, which gained the Palme d'Or award for short film at the Cannes Film Festival in 2008. A representative of New Romanian Cinema, Crișan's filmography often handles the topics of marginality, migration, and addiction. In light of this, it makes sense Crișan ends up directing a series that challenges stereotypes related to homosexuality, gender roles, and ethnicity issues.

Through elements such as directorial choices, co-production services, thematic areas, and stylistic choices, Romanian HBO series reveal how the local industry benefits greatly from the expertise and recognition of the New Romanian Wave. Professionals' resentment and frustration with domestic audiences preferring American movies transforms into a creative formatting that blends the high-quality standards promoted by HBO with the interest for local stories that recall the realist, critical, and sometimes dark turn in New Romanian Cinema.

CONCLUSION

HBO Eastern European productions from Hungary and Romania are strongly related to the traditions and country-specific circumstances after 1989. For Hungary, in particular, the Bourdieusian model to approach the field of cultural production theory seems to adequately explain the predilections of film directors in terms of why they adopt specific artistic styles and how they treat specific genres. In fact, such openness towards artistic experimentation is rather significant in a domestic industry where post-socialist freedom of expression has been thoroughly explored in theatrical, cinematic, and television works. Accordingly, HBO projects could benefit from this interest in professionalization and international recognition that had already been formed. In Romania, the absence of quality television was contrasted by the international success gained by Romanian New Wave film directors who ironically were not very popular



among Romanian audiences. HBO initiatives established a connection to the achievements in the domestic field of cinematic production and have so far contributed to further change in Eastern European creative industries. Further research on the topic of Eastern European TV series and their integration into transnational circuits could elaborate on the structure of the local fields of cultural production and show in detail how the national and regional industries interact with the globally dominant players of the television market.



Notes

¹ The research presented here has been financed by the research project *DETECT – Detecting Transcultural Identity in European Popular Crime Narratives* (Horizon 2020, 2018–2021) [Grant agreement number 770151].

² See Dona Kolar-Panov, 'Television and cultural cooperation in Southeastern Europe' in *The Emerging Creative Industries in Southeastern Europe*, ed. By Nada Švob-Đokić, (Zagreb: Institute for International Relations, 2005), p. 71: 'Co-production of television programs with a cultural content does not happen very often in SEE, and there is no established protocol for exchange of cultural programs, with very few cultural events shown outside their country of origin'.

³ See *The Essential HBO Reader*, ed. by Gary R. Edgerton and Jeffrey P. Jones (Lexington: Kentucky University Press 2008).

⁴ In the same vein, Janet McCabe and Kim Akass argue that 'HBO structures a particular restricted field of cultural TV production, set against the mainstream network model – driven as it is by advertising revenue and ratings – which has, in turn, not only normalised what we've come to think of as important television work (critical acclaim, nominations and awards), but also kept these beliefs and practices of TV in circulation', in their article 'HBO and the Aristocracy of Contemporary TV Culture: affiliations and legitimatising television culture, post-2007', in *Mise au point*, no. 10/2018, Online since 15 January 2018, connection on 6 May 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/map/2472>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/map.2472>.

⁵ *Small Cinemas in Global Markets. Genres, Identities, Narratives*, ed. by David Desser, Janina Falkowska, Lenuta Giukin (Lanham and London: Lexington Books, 2015), p. XI.

⁶ David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, Third Edition (London: SAGE, 2013), pp. 147-149.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Janet McCabe and Kim Akass list a comprehensive set of recent perspectives on Bourdieu in the article cited above.

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 64.

¹⁰ See David Hesmondhalgh, 'Bourdieu, the media and cultural production', in *Media, Culture and Society*, Vol. 28(2), 2006, p.222: 'A related problem in *The Rules of Art* is that Bourdieu has nothing to say about the domination of cultural production by multinational entertainment corporations across all cultural industries'.

¹¹ The first Hungarian HBO production is a television series *Született lúzer*, (2007–2009). The show qualifies as a failure and, in fact, is not even included in the HBO library. The year 2009 sees the first Hungarian HBO documentary, *Miss Plastic*. This work, directed by Dávid Spáh, documents the beauty contest of plastic surgery obsessed women. The second decade of the new millennium brings continuity to fictional and documentary content creation. This article focuses on fictionalized serial contents. HBO Hungary subsequently produced the following series: *Társas játék* (2011–2013), based on *When Will We Kiss/Matay Nitnashek* (Israel 10, 2007–2008), *Terápia* (2012–2017), based on *In Treatment/Be tipul* (JCS, Scheleg, 2005–2008), *Golden Life/Aranyélet* (2015–2017), based on *Easy Living/Helppo elämä* (Moskito Television, 2009–2011). In the following the titles of the series will be quoted in Hungarian when there is no international circulation, in English and Hungarian for cases of international circulation and in Hungarian when the English title is the same for various franchised national versions.



APPENDIX:

The following table lists the awards received by Hungarian and Romanian directors involved in HBO series.

DIRECTOR	HBO SERIES DIRECTED OR WRITTEN BY	FEATURE FILM PROJECTS DEVELOPED IN THE SAME PERIOD	SHORT FILM PROJECTS DEVELOPED IN THE SAME PERIOD
PÉTER BARTOS	Született lúzer, 2007–2009		Ólomidő, 2005–
MÁRTON SZIRMAI	Született lúzer, 2007		Summertime, 2009; A süllyedő falu, 2007; Every Day a New Challenge, 2006; Szalontüdő, 2006.
BARNABÁS TÓTH	Született lúzer, 2007	Camembert Rose, 2009	Meglepetés, 2007; Egy szavazat, 2006;
GÁBOR FISCHER	Született lúzer, 2008–2009	Montecarlo!, 2004	
GYÖRGY PÁLFI	Született lúzer, 2008	Taxidermia, 2006; Nem vagyok a barátod, 2009	Nem leszek a barátod, 2009
MÁRTON VÉCSEI	Született lúzer, 2008–2009	Diamond Club, 2011	Farkasember, 2008
DÁNIEL ERDÉLYI	Született lúzer, 2009		411-Z, 2007, Magasfeszültség, 2010.
GÁBOR HERENDI	Társas játék, 2011–2013	Valami Amerika 2., 2008	
GERGELY FONYÓ	Társas játék, 2011–2012	Made in Hungaria, 2009	A látogató, 2013
PÉTER FAZAKAS	Társas játék, 2013		Mélylevegő, 2012
ILDIKÓ ENYEDI	Terápia, 2012–2017	Testről s lélekről, 2017	
ATTILA GIGOR	Terápia, 2012–2017	Kút, 2016	
ORSI NAGYPÁL	Terápia, 2014–2017	Nyitva, 2018	
MIHÁLY SCHWECHTJE	Terápia, 2017	Remélem legközelebb sikerül meghalnod, 2018	Aki bújt, aki nem, 2018
ZSOMBOR DYGA	Golden Life, 2015–2018	Coach surf, 2014–	
ÁRON MÁTYÁSSY	Golden Life, 2015–2018	The Transmissioner – 2016 Vikend - 2015	The Master of Light – 2019
ADRIAN SITARU	În derivă, 2010–2012	Pescuit sportiv (Hooked), 2008; Din dragoste cu cele mai bune intenții (Best Intentions), 2011; Domestic, 2012; Ilegal, 2016.	Valuri, 2007; Colivia, 2010; Artă, 2014; Excursia, 2014; Counterpart (in English), 2014
BOGDAN MIRICĂ	Shadows (Umbre), 2014–	Câini (Dogs), 2016	Bora Bora, 2011
IGOR COBILEANSCHI	Shadows (Umbre), Seasons 1 and 2, 2014–2017; Hackerville, 2018	La limita de jos a cerului (The Unsaved), 2013; Afacerea Est (Eastern Business), 2016.	Colecția de arome (The Flavors Collection), 2013.
MARIAN CRIȘAN	Valea Mută (The Silent Valley), 2016	Morgen, 2010; Rocker, 2012; Orizont (Horizon), 2015, Berliner, 2020.	Megatron, 2008
ANCA MIRUNA LĂZĂRESCU	Hackerville, 2018	La drum cu tata (Die Reise mit Vater), 2016; Glück ist was für Weicheier (Happiness Sucks), 2018.	Apele tac (Silent River), 2010
DANIEL SANDU	Hackerville, 2018 (writer); Bani negri (Tuff Money), 2019–2020	Un pas în urma serafimilor (One Step Behind the Seraphim), 2017	Cai putere (Horse Power), 2014



The data reveal how previous experience and recognition contributed to the involvement in projects produced by HBO Europe, as well as how such collaboration strongly influenced the career paths of these professionals.

OTHER TV PROJECTS DEVELOPED IN THE SAME PERIOD

AWARDS RECEIVED IN THE SAME PERIOD

OTHER MENTIONS

Credits in Camera and Electrical Department		
	Szalontüdő – Valladolid International Film Festival – Audience Award, 2007.	
	Egy szavazat – Silver Busho Winner, 2007	
	Taxidermia –Silver Hugo, Best Feature Film, 2006; Don Quixote Award, 2006, Fantasporto, Audience Jury Award, 2006; Hungarian Film Week, Grand Prize, 2006; Transilvania International Film Festival, Best Direction, 2006	
Beugró (TV2, 2007-)		Producer for several projects in 2009
Hajónapló (M1, 2010); Matula kalandpark (M1, 2011); Karádysokk (Duna Televízió, 2011); Hacktion (M1, 2012-2014)	Granada International Festival of Young Filmmakers, Audience Award, Best Feature Film, 2009 – Made in Hungaria,	
Szabadság különjárat (Szupermodern Stúdió, 2013); Fapad (Magyar Televízió, 2014-2015)	Berlin International Film Festival, Golden Berlin Bear, Winner, Prize of the Ecumenical Jury, Winner - 2017; Hungarian Film Week, Grand Prize, Best Director, Best Screenplay – 2018 – Testről s lélekről	
		Cinematic trailers for video games
Tóth János (Megafilm, 2017); Csak színház és más semmi (Duna Televízió, 2016)		
Egynyári kaland (MTVA, 2015-2019); Jófiúk (RTL Klub, 2019)		
Mintaapák (TV2, 2019-2020)	Valuri, 2007 - The Golden Leopard (Pardo d'Oro) for short film at the Locarno Film Festival, 2007; Jury Award for Best Cinematography, Aspen Shortsfest, 2008; BAFTA Certificate of Excellence, 2008, Best Short Film at the Sarajevo Film Festival, 2007; Pescuit sportiv (Hooked), 2008: New Voices/ New Visions Grand Jury Prize at Palm Springs International Film Festival, 2009; Colivia, 2010: DAAD Short Film Award, Golden Bear – Berlin – Nominee, 2010; Best Intentions, 2011: Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival – for Best Director and Best Actor (Bogdan Dumitrache); Best Central&Eastern European Film at the Cleveland International Film Festival, 2012; Ilegitim, 2016: C.I.C.A.E. Award, Berlinale Forum, 2016; Prix Sauvage at L'Europe autour de l'Europe Film Festival, 2016.	
	Bora Bora, 2011: Best European Short Film at the Premiers Plans Festival, Angers, 2011; Dogs, 2016: FIPRESCI Award, Prix Un Certain Regard, Cannes Film Festival, 2016; Transylvania Trophy at the Transylvania International Film Festival, 2016.	
	The Unsaved, 2013: FIPRESCI Prize for Best Debut at the Cottbus Film Festival of Young East European Cinema; Eastern Business, 2016: Best Script and Best Actor at the Talinn Black Nights Film Festival, 2016;	
	Megatron, 2008: Palme d'Or for Best Short Film, Cannes Film Festival, 2008; Morgen, 2010: Special Jury Prize, Locarno Film Festival, 2010; Best Director and FIPRESCI Award, Thessaloniki Film Festival.	
Wir sind die Welle (We Are the Wave), 2019, Netflix	Apele tac (Silent River), 2010: Nomination for Best Short Film, Golden Bear Award, Berlin International Film Festival, 2011; Audience Award, Angers European First Film Festival, 2012; Short Award, Berlin Interfilm Festival, 2011; Best Film, Brussels Short Film Festival, 2011; Grand Prix, Brest European Short Film Festival, 2011; Grand Prize, Mediawave, Hungary, 2012, and others; Die Reise mit Vater, 2016: One Future Prize, Honorable Mention, Munich Film Festival;	The Secret of Deva, 2007, documentary film on Romanian gymnastics.
	One Step Behind the Seraphim, 2017: Best Picture, Athens International Film Festival, 2018; Best Screenplay, Bucharest International Film Festival, 2018.	Had previously collaborated in a domestic popular TV series (national broadcast only) directing and writing La Bloc (2005, 2006).



¹² The dynamics of cultural imperialism and localization/hybridization constitute a well-known process and appeared in the previous phases of transnational television development. Cf. Joseph D. Straubhaar – Luiz G. Duarte, 'Adapting US Transnational Television Channels to a Complex World: From Cultural Imperialism to Localization to Hybridization', in *Transnational Television Worldwide: Towards a New Media Order*, ed. by Jean K. Chalaby (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 216–254.

¹³ Anikó Imre, 'HBO's e-EUtopia' *Media Studies*, 5.2 (2018), 50–68; Anikó Imre, 'Streaming Freedom in Illiberal Eastern Europe', *Critical Studies in Television*, 2 (2019), 170–186.

¹⁴ Anna Bátori, 'The Birth of the Post-Socialist Eastern European Televisual Collectivhood: Crime and Patriarchy in *Umbre*, 2014–', *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies*, 17 (2018), 37–48.

¹⁵ Balázs Varga, 'Familiar, much too familiar... HBO's Hungarian original productions and the questions of cultural proximity', in *A European Television Fiction Renaissance*, ed. by Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni (London-New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 275–294 (p. 276).

¹⁶ Kim Toft Hansen, Anna Keszeg and Sándor Kálai, 'From Remade Drama to Original Crime: HBO Europe's Original Television Productions', *European Review*, August (2020); Varga, p. 277–279; Petr Szczepanik: 'http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=YxABEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT239&dq=info:xf07zjJmrZQJ:scholar.google.com&ots=Ur_K0H5qE&sig=vTuiGtP0pHD5q30o0mAGZl6uqno', in *A European Television Fiction Renaissance*, ed. by Luca Barra and Massimo Scaglioni (London-New York: Routledge, 2021).

¹⁷ Balázs Varga, *Filmrendszerváltások* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2016), p. 137–144; Gábor Gelencsér, *Magyar film 1.0.* (Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 2017), p. 231–243.

¹⁸ In 1997, within a gap of three days, the two major commercial TV broadcasters started their activity on Hungarian soil. TV2, owned at the time by the German company, ProSiebenSat1, currently owned by Hungarian TV2 Média Csoport Zrt., and RTLklub, owned by RTL Group Central & Eastern Europe GmbH from Luxembourg.

¹⁹ The concept of small cinemas applies ambiguously to the case of Romania and Hungary. The term is more adequate in the case of Hungary where the decrease in the number of annually produced films accommodates with regard to the average numbers of small-scale markets. On the Eastern European movie cultures and the concept of small cinema cf. *Small Cinemas in Global Markets. Genres, Identities, Narratives*, ed. by Lenuta Giukin, Janina Falkowska and David Desser (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015); *European Visions. Small Cinemas in Transition*, ed. By Janelle Blankenship and Tobias Nagl (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012). In the relation to this concept in the cases of Romania and Hungary cf. Andrea Virginás, 'A kis mozik fogalma: román és magyar gyártási példák', *Filmszem*, IV/3. Autumn (2014), 56–67.

²⁰ Regarding the movie-going practices of Central and Eastern European countries, there are two extremes. On one end, in the Czech Republic, local interest in homeland productions is very important. Czech movies are largely viewed by domestic audiences. At the other end of the spectrum, in Romania, where the international prestige of the Romanian movies translates into a large number of awards and festival recognition, the local interest in Romanian movies is quite insignificant within the confines of the EU. Cf. Susanne Nikoltchev, *Yearbook 2018/2019. Key Trends. Television, cinema, video and on-demand audiovisual services. The Pan-European Picture* (European Audiovisual Observatory, Council of Europe, 2019) <https://rm.coe.int/yearbook-keytrends-2018-2019-en/1680938f8e> [accessed 30 October 2020]; Marzia Bona, 'European cinema-going habits vary significantly: a look at the current divide between Western and Eastern Europe', *Filmrendszerváltások*, p. 20–21, <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Europe/Europeans-at-the-cinema-from-East-to-West-186036> [accessed 30 October 2020].



²¹ As a conclusion to an analysis concerning the trends in the Hungarian cinema post-socialism, Balázs Varga states the following: 'If we want an answer to the question who made the most movies in Hungary in the last two and a half decades, than, following our data, and slightly oversimplifying the facts, we can argue that [they are] those who dared to begin without any financial background, those who produced movies for the masses, those who had a canonic, prestigious oeuvre and those young directors who were welcomed at foreign film festivals', Varga, *Filmrendszerváltások*, p.144.

²² Gábor Erőss, 'A magyar film emancipációja', *2000*, Special Issue (2004), 25–40 (p. 25).

²³ For a better understanding of the relation between the directors' work for HBO and their access to international recognition see the appendix. It details how these processes have been mutually interdependent.

²⁴ Janet McCabe and Akass Kim, 'It's Not TV, It's HBO's Original Programming: Producing Quality TV', in *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*, ed. by Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott and Cara Louise Buckley (New York: Routledge 2008), pp. 83–94.

²⁵ Varga, 'Familiar, much too familiar... HBO's Hungarian original productions and the questions of cultural proximity', p. 279.

²⁶ The directors labeled with this name had a quasi-synchronous apparition in a symbolic year, in 2000. Cf. Varga, *Filmrendszerváltások* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2016) p. 145–146.

²⁷ Three of the directors involved in the creation of *Született lúzer* were members of the famous Simó-class (Dániel Erdélyi, Gábor Fisher, György Pálfi): a UTFA class coordinated by Sándor Simó, director of the Hunnia Studio who proved to be a very efficient teacher in talent development. The members of his first class set the tone for 'Young Hungarian Cinema' due to their famous coming-of-age movies (*Moszkva square*, Ferenc Török, 2001; *Macerás ügyek*, Szabolcs Hajdu, 2001; *Előre!* Dániel Erdélyi, 2002). The story of the second Simó-class was marked by Simó's death after the first academic year. However, the members of the class had a quasi-similar, yet not as strong as the members of the first class. From this second generation, HBO worked with Attila Gigor (*Terápia*) and Áron Máttyássy (*Golden life*). Curiously, even though Simó's strategy was marked by the coming-of-age story, the directors who worked for HBO experimented with genre formats. Cf. György Pálfi whose first international success was an experimental crime thriller, *Hukkle* (2002)., Fisher's first movie was a comedy (*Montecarlo!*, 2004) and Gigor's debut film was a crime drama (*A nyomozó*, 2008). For the history of the Simó classes see Klára Buzogány, 'Így jöttek...', *Korunk*, February (2002) <https://epa.oszk.hu/00400/00458/00134/buzoganyk.html> [accessed 30 October 2020]. On Simó's impact on his students career cf. Interview with Áron Máttyássy made by Ferenc Varga and Lili Mesterházy, *Filmklub Podcast*, 8 January 2013; Interview with Attila Gigor made by Ferenc Varga and Lili Mesterházy, *Filmklub Podcast*, 28 February 2019.

²⁸ Varga, 'Familiar, much too familiar... HBO's Hungarian original productions and the questions of cultural proximity', p. 280.

²⁹ Petr Szczepanik, 'Transnational Crews and Postsocialist Precarity: Globalizing Screen Media Labor in Prague', in *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor*, ed. by Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), pp. 88–103; Varga, 'Familiar, much too familiar... HBO's Hungarian original productions and the questions of cultural proximity', p. 282.

³⁰ 2002: *Valami Amerika* (Gábor Herendi, 526,000 admissions); 2004: *Magyar Vándor* (Gábor Herendi, 456,000 admissions); 2008: *Valami Amerika 2* (Gábor Herendi, 428,000 admissions) ; 2009: *Made in Hungaria* (Gergely Fonyó, 225,000 admissions).

³¹ Varga, 'Familiar, much too familiar... HBO's Hungarian original productions and the questions of cultural proximity', p. 285.



³² Gusztáv Schubert 'Az HBO első magyar tévésorozatával is a minőségi szórakoztatást képviseli a bulvárchatornák ellenében', *Filmvilág*, 3. (2012) 47.

³³ In a discussion of her career path, Orsi Nagypál acknowledges that she is an outsider amongst Hungarian directors because of her different education. Though she admits that a degree offered by the UTFA ensures a precious social network in Hungary, she also affirms that working with HBO made it possible for her to collaborate equally with two of the main personalities of the university. Cf. Interview with Orsi Nagypál made by Bálint Horváth and Janka Pozsonyi, *Filmhu Podcast*, 15 July 2018. On the working methods of Ildikó Enyedi, many of her collaborators acknowledged that she is a pro? seasoned in of a soft? working culture where safety and personal expression are core values. Cf. Interview with Attila Gígor made by Ferenc Varga and Lili Mesterházy, *Filmklub Podcast*, 28 February 2019.

³⁴ Cf. the analysis of the show in Varga, 'Familiar, much too familiar... HBO's Hungarian original productions and the questions of cultural proximity', pp. 286–287.

³⁵ Anikó Imre, 'Minőség és televízió', *Apertúra*, tavasz (2018) <https://uj.apertura.hu/2018/tavasz/imre-minoseg-es-televizio/> [accessed 30 October 2020].

³⁶ Cathrin Portuges, 'Central European Twins: Psychoanalysis and Cinema in Ildikó Enyedi's *My Twentieth Century*', *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 27:4 (2007), 525-539, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07351690701484675>.

³⁷ This movie received 17 international awards.

³⁸ On the career paths of the directors cf. Interview with Zsombor Dyga made by Dénes Varga and Janka Pozsonyi, *Filmhu Podcast*, 28 September 2018. Interview with Áron Mátyássy made by Ferenc Varga and Lili Mesterházy. *Filmklub Podcast*, 8 January 2013.

³⁹ Zsombor Dyga's first movie was celebrated because it was received as 'finding its way between adapting current Hollywood genres and actual cult movies.' Lóránt Stóhr, 'A meglelt haza. Dyga Zsombor Tesó', *Filmvilág*, 4 (2003), 52–53 (p. 52).

⁴⁰ Tamás Dénes Soós, 'Aranyélet - Jobban teljesít', *Filmvilág* 2 (2016), 34–35.

⁴¹ See Adina Schneeweis, 'To Be Romanian in Post-Communist Romania. Entertainment Television and Patriotism in Popular Discourse', in *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism*, ed. by Timothy Havens, Aniko Imre, Katalin Lustyik (New York-London, Routledge, 2013), p. 143: 'Content-wise, television production in particular has shifted to a focus on entertainment and sensationalism, on both public and private stations, having to cope with new market demands and competition from imported content. The bulk of the programming in the last 22 years (films, dramas, situation comedies, and soap operas, as well as successful formats for television talk shows, game shows, reality and news shows) has been imported mostly from Western countries, mainly from the U.S.; and yet local production is certainly on the rise'

⁴² Norbert Elias, 'Changes in the We-I Balance', in *The Society of Individuals* (Oxford, UK-Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1991), argues that: 'The social habitus, and therefore the layer of habitus forming the national character, is certainly not an enigma. As a social formation, it is (...) flexible and far from immutable. It is, in fact, always in flux. (...) the changing power relationships, both within and between states, influence the formation of feelings in this area', p. 211.

⁴³ Jérôme Bourdon, 'Self-Inflicted Imperialism? On the Americanizations of Television in Europe', in *We Europeans? Media, Representations, Identities*, ed. by William Uricchio (Bristol-Chicago: Intellect, 2009), pp. 93-109.

⁴⁴ See Sylvia Szostak, 'Immitation, Borrowing, Recycling. American Models and Polish Domestic



Drama', in *Cinéma& Cie*, vol. XII, no. 19, Fall 2012: "The dramatic growth of the Polish television market and production sector now allows Polish producers to engage with, and respond to, viewers' expectations by producing original Polish drama that emulates American visual style and its production value", p. 87.

⁴⁵ See Andrea Virginás, 'New Filmic Waves in Hungarian and Romanian Cinema: Allegories or Stories about Flesh?', in *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, 4, pp.131-141.

⁴⁶ See Anikó Imre, *A Companion to Eastern European Cinema* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), p. 14: 'they have been able to carve out a financing structure within and between the complicated schemes of state and European funding and public and private enterprise'.

⁴⁷ Cristi Puiu, 'Şansa', in *Dilema Veche*, 23.01.2001 (my translation). The director recalls his university years at at École Supérieure d'Art Visuel in Geneva and writing his dissertation on realism in film. Upon returning to Romania, his project was to apply these ideas in order to make cinema that would be 'like Godard said: *la vérité vingt quatre fois par seconde*'. The article is available in Romanian here: <https://newskeeper.ro/articol?id=6C15F049E868B2834DB0896B4B60444D&data=2001-02-23>

⁴⁸ *Small Cinemas in Global Markets. Genres, Identities, Narratives*, ed. by David Desser, Janina Falkowska and Lenuta Giukin (Lanham-London: Lexington Books, 2015), p. X

⁴⁹ Cristi Puiu, 'Despre contribuția regizorilor la betesugul cinematografiei', *Dilema*, no. 540, 8 – 14 August 2003, available online in Romanian: <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/dileme-on-line/articol/despre-contributia-regizorilor-la-betesugul-cinematografiei> [accessed 5 January 2021] (my translation for the quoted excerpt).

⁵⁰ Doru Pop, *Romanian New Wave Cinema. An Introduction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), p. 111

⁵¹ Bogdan Mirică, in an interview for the press agency News.ro, edited by Patricia Marinescu, 11 November 2017, available on: <https://www.news.ro/cultura-media/interviu-regizorul-bogdan-mirica-despre-noul-sezon-umbre-vecinul-tau-e-mafiot-vrei-sa-stii-cum-e-viata-lui-1922403011002017111017382542> [accessed 31 January 2021]. My translation from Romanian.

⁵² In this section of the article, television shows produced in Romania are referenced with their original titles, i.e. in Romanian only if they have not circulated internationally. Otherwise, their titles are mentioned in English as well as in Romanian.

⁵³ Anna Bátori, 'The Birth of the Post-Socialist Eastern European Televisual Collectivehood: Crime and Patriarchy in *Shadows* (Umbre, 2014-)', in *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies*, No. 17, 2018, p. 40.