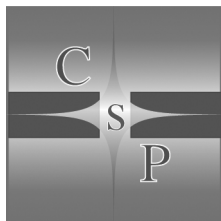


THE SPECTRAL BODY

THE SPECTRAL BODY
ASPECTS OF THE CINEMATIC OEUVRE OF
ISTVÁN SZABÓ

By

Zoltán Dragon



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INTRODUCTION

There are two very special moments in István Szabó's oeuvre that call attention to the role of the body in cinematic representation. In the first example, at the end of Szabó's *Love Film* (*Szerelmesfilm*, 1970), a blinding light "draws" the contours of a female face looking into the camera, at the audience. The character recounts her past some months and, significantly, the trauma of losing her baby. Then her face dissolves into the blinding white light again. The other example is from the Academy Award winner film, *Mephisto* (*Mephisto*, 1981), where—again at the end of the film—the focal character is chased around on an empty stage and is finally caught by the spotlights. He turns to face the camera and addresses the audience in his despair. Then his body starts to dissolve into the light apparently emitting from within his own body, and gets petrified by the end as an X-ray of his own body, with fading contours.

These two scenes call attention to the representation and the role of the body in the feature films of István Szabó. The foregrounding of the appearance and disappearance of the two characters' bodies suggests that the filmic and narrative contexts which they appear in are more problematic than they might seem at first glance. In film, the body connects what is seen with what is told, in other words it is the knot between the scene and its story. Since the characters' bodies are signifiers, and containers or carriers of the stories that make up the plot of the films, the strange moments of their extraction from the visual homogeneity of the filmic representations in *Love Film* and in *Mephisto* also signal breaks in the specific narrative contexts. The two strange moments therefore imply an uncanny operation both at the level of visual representation and at that of the narrative.

These two examples are not the only strange ones in the oeuvre. Several bodies in the focus of the filmic representation return from film to film to continue their narration. What is strange in these returns is that the characters appear in largely similar family histories and seem to lead a linear narrative life, yet they are signified by different names. One such example is the character Bence in *Father* (*Apa*, 1966), whose life we can follow until his university years. Then we meet the very same character with the very same family background and painful trauma (the loss of his father) in *The Age of Daydreamings* (*Álmodozások kora*, 1964) and in *Love Film* as an engineer, appearing as Jancsi. Along with the character and his family history, some specific objects and memorable sentences also recur, as if to strengthen the idea of a contiguity beyond the specific filmic texts they appear in.

Even though the films are self-contained and complete in themselves, the strange visual effects and the uncanny returns of some characters, names, objects and specific sentences point beyond the contexts they are parts of. They are, in a

sense, heterogeneous to their visual and narrative environments, and thus may reveal the logic of representation in the Szabó oeuvre.

Methodologically the analysis will proceed on two separate, yet closely related lines. The first is a narrative analysis, which lists the tropes of narration in the films and then establishes a “map” of the diegeses: an intertext. This narrative analysis will focus on the most important recurring motifs of the films in a way that their interrelatedness sheds light on a specific, hidden or covert line of intertextual narrative. I will also refer to a few specific *effects* in the films that resist fitting into this intertext. These mainly visual effects cannot be explained in their relation either to the film’s diegesis, or to the intertext. They point beyond both, yet they exert strange effects on the entire oeuvre. This gives the second line for the analysis: by tracing the recurrence and possible roles of these effects, I embark on the examination of the visual aspect of the oeuvre. These two lines of analysis are only seemingly separate: by the end of the analysis one should underscore the other. I wish to emphasise here that although my analysis tends to present the films as parts of an intertext or map, they are unique film texts with narrative and visual unity, comprehensible without the support of clues from different diegeses and especially without the clues from the biography of István Szabó, the *auteur*. By the juxtaposition of these texts I want to point out, however, that these films present certain features that point beyond themselves, and that the investigation of these features enlarges the scope of the interpretation of the Szabó oeuvre.

Concepts and aims in the narrative analysis of István Szabó’s oeuvre

The narrative analysis takes the films as constituting a specific line of intertextual narrative. This narrative is composed of a coherent story of the central characters, on the one hand, and common stylistic elements, on the other. The two aspects—central bodies and stylistic features—are in an ostensible relation to each other: the common stylistic elements can be recognised by their relationship to the recurrent bodies in the films. Szabó’s feature films can be grouped into two well-distinguishable parts: the films made before *Mephisto* (*Mephisto*, 1981), and the films from *Mephisto* onwards. While the earlier films pay tribute to the French New Wave,¹ the later films can be classified as classical film narratives.² In the

¹ Cf. Bordwell and Thompson 1994, 548; 657-8.

earlier films the central character is embodied (without exception) by András Bálint, whereas with *Mephisto* the casting policy changes: Klaus Maria Brandauer embodies the central characters of the “grand trilogy” (*Mephisto*, *Colonel Redl* [*Redl ezredes*, 1984], and *Hanussen* [*Hanussen*, 1989]), and then it is only *Sunshine* (*A napfény íze*, 1999) that takes up—quite explicitly—the issue of recurring bodies in the focus.

The narrative intertext that I talk about is a web of filmic references. These include recurrent names, bodies, objects, sentences, places, and situations. To list these correspondences, to “inventory” them, means to establish a structure that maps the entire oeuvre in a potentially meaningful, i.e. interpretive manner. This intertext becomes a “fusion” of several narratives. Primarily, it includes the family histories of the particular central or focal bodies of the films. I refer to the protagonists of the films as “central bodies”, “central characters,” or “focal bodies” almost interchangeably. However, with the different terms I imply different aspects in my discussion. “Central body” refers to the corporeal emphasis of the protagonist. The term “central character” is used when the emphasis is placed on the functional aspect of the character. I use the term “focal body” when I intend to emphasise the essentially or purely visual aspect of the character, and its relation to the scopic field.

I restore the family history of the central characters as much as possible within the context of a particular diegesis, and then fill in the gaps of this story whenever there is any reference or information fitting into it in other films. For instance, Jancsi Oláh’s family history—he is the central character of *Father*, and the same body takes up the same central role in *The Age of Daydreamings*, *Love Film*, *25 Firemen’s Street* (*Tűzoltó utca 25.*, 1973), and *Budapest Tales* (*Budapesti mesék*, 1976)—can only be reconstructed partially from the film in which he appears. However, due to the recurrence of the same body surrounded by the same characters and functions, the gaps in the family history can be filled in to an almost full extent. The same can be done in the case of the family history of the central bodies of the grand trilogy, although with much care, since they do not seem to have any familial correspondences. The recurrent motifs, situations, names, family members, relationships and characters provide a stable ground for such an argument, nevertheless.

The central characters until *Confidence* (*Bizalom*, 1979) are intradiegetic (and also homodiegetic) narrators in the films, i.e., they tell their own stories, while

² Classical film narratives are characterised by a clear narrative structure (order/disorder/restored order), a plot set in motion by a character, seamless editing, and a narrative closure. (See: Hayward 2000, 64-68.)

simultaneously they participate in them. Their personal narratives can be channelled into a quite coherent narrative spanning beyond the actual narrative context. This special intertextual narrative is underscored, on the one hand, by a stable family background and, on the other hand, by the very same historical circumstances – thus the frames of this narrative secure the stability of the narrating “I.” Furthermore, this family narrative is also dependent on the specific intertext that the films make up based on the recurrent motifs and situations. But what is this intertext?

Originally, the term “intertextuality” is a translation of the Bakhtinian “dialogism,” introduced by Julia Kristeva in *La Révolution du Langage Poétique*. According to Bakhtin, the term denotes “the necessary relation of any utterance to other utterances.”³ Furthermore, any verbal (or non-verbal, for that matter) performance “inevitably orients itself with respect to previous performances in the same sphere, both those by the same author and those by other authors.”⁴ I will not elaborate on the potential extra-oeuvre implications of Szabó’s films here, but focus on merely the intra-oeuvre references that dialogically make up a cinematic intertext.⁵

There is, however, an even more relevant aspect of dialogism to the present analysis than the importance of “intertextuality”: “Dialogism refers to the relation between the text and its others not only in the relatively crude and obvious forms of argument ... but also in much more diffuse and subtle forms that have to do with ... what is left unsaid or is to be inferred,” as Robert Stam argues.⁶ This is a definition that is missing from the most often quoted uses of “intertextuality,” and a definition that I wish to retain in my use of that term. This way, the cinematic intertext does not only reveal the references of one film to the other within the Szabó oeuvre, but will also be seen to hide several other potential references.

In Gerard Genette’s phrasing, intertextuality is basically “the effective co-presence of two texts.”⁷ Kristeva’s reformulating of the term has further relevance to the present project. She designates two sides of (inter)textuality: the “pheno-text” and the “geno-text.” The former is the visible surface of the text, the “remainder” of the play of signification of the latter, which is productivity *par*

³ Stam 1992, 203.

⁴ Voloshinov (Bakhtin) 1986, 95.

⁵ Most extra-oeuvre intertextual references are listed in Marx 2002.

⁶ Stam 1989, 14.

⁷ Stam 1992, 206.

excellence.⁸ That is, there is a mechanism, a “process,” behind or beyond the given text, and this process is what creates avenues to other texts as well.

What I wish to explore in this book is this very process. In Szabó’s oeuvre the operation of the geno-text creates an eerie, haunting effect in the pheno-text. It means that the very production of the text is beyond the dimension of mere production: it is a controlled and directed production that creates a pattern in the form of compulsive returns of certain features, objects, bodies and sentences from film to film. Some of these returns can be accounted for on the basis of a narrative analysis of the films, some of them are simply inexplicable in their own context.

One such inexplicable return is that of the narrator in some subsequent films (notably *Father*, *The Age of Daydreamings*, *Love Film*, *25 Firemen’s Street*, and to a certain extent *Budapest Tales*). According to Peter Brooks, “[n]arratives both tell of desire—typically present some story of desire—and arouse and make use of desire as dynamic of signification.”⁹ It is the ambition arising from this desire to tell the story that “constitutes the very ‘readability’ of the narrative text,”¹⁰ the ambition that is rooted in the body and identity of the narrator. The question that insists in all narrative acts is the “why”. Why does the narrator tell the particular story? Why does the narrator *have to* tell that story, and why in the particular way and form? And, finally, why does the narrator return in subsequent films to continue his story?

Narration is a question of desire, then. According to Jacques Lacan, desire is born out of a lack and it is always a desire for something else (i.e., other than what is the immediate satisfactory object). Providing an analysis in which he discusses the working of the unconscious in terms of the Jakobsonian tropes, Lacan defines the mechanism of desire in similar terms as the operation of metonymy.¹¹ The continuity provided by metonymy is the basis of all narratives. Working with this Lacanian notion of desire as a basis for narration, Brooks argues that what lends coherence to a narrative in the continuous slipping from metonymy to metonymy is repetition, which may result in a compulsion to repeat. According to him, a narrative is always already a repetition: something that happened is told as a story.¹² As to the inception of this repetition, he conceptualises repetition as a “form of remembering, brought into play when recollection properly speaking is

⁸ Kristeva 1986, 120-1.

⁹ Brooks 1992, 37.

¹⁰ Op. cit., 39.

¹¹ Lacan 1992a, 167.

¹² Brooks 1992, 97.

blocked by resistance.”¹³ This resistance is the unconscious repressed, that is, a lack initiated by some repression, by some traumatic experience.

Whatever recurs within the frame of the narrative (which is already repetition itself) should be seen as a representation stemming from the very same trauma of the subject of narration. That is to say, the objects in the narrative that are repetitively present (from film to film in terms of the Szabó oeuvre) have an organising function in the diegeses. These recurrences underpin the intertext of the oeuvre, since they are the manifest evidence of the repetition at work in the film texts. This also implies that the specific objects that recur have a special tie to some initial lack, and thus to the desire that propels narration.

In the Szabó oeuvre the act of narration is performed by recurring bodies in several cases. As I have mentioned, in *Father*, *The Age of Daydreamings* and *Love Film* it is Bence (the same character with the same family background under different name in the two latter films, where he is called Jancsi) returns to continue his story. In the so-called “grand trilogy” it is Höfgen/Mephisto/Redl/Schneider/Hanussen (three films, five names, one focal body) who seem to return. Finally, in *Sunshine* it is the three generations of the Sonnenscheins (one film, three names and characters, one focal body) that repeat the pattern of compulsive returns. In all cases the desire to tell the story on and on fails to be satisfied within the frame of the diegesis (except for *Sunshine*, but there the three parts of the narrative may be seen as corresponding to three films, as it were, and the ending implies a/the beginning). It means that the enigma posed at the beginning—or the lack that propels the narration—could not be resolved by the end, even if the surface story provides a closure. For me it implies that there must be something that compels the narrator to appear again and continue the telling of the story of his life. This makes the whole act of narration *uncanny*.

The uncanny effect of the Szabó films, from a narratological point of view,¹⁴ is the compulsion to perform the narrative act from film to film. According to Freud, there is a kind of “daemonic power” compelling the repetition and this power is what he thinks is uncanny, since it is unexplainable.¹⁵ The realisation that a narration is “daemonic” or uncanny is necessarily retrospective. It is in the light of the narrative contiguity of the family history that I claim that there is something outside the diegeses that drives the narrators to tell their stories. Outside the diegeses, since were it within them, it could be revealed, resolved, or simply

¹³ Op. cit., 98.

¹⁴ I will discuss the visual aspect of the uncanny later on, elaborating on the concept of the phantom.

¹⁵ Rashkin 1992, 31.

exorcised. The “daemonic possession” underlying the compulsion to repeat is thus foreign to the particular narrative framework in which it produces the uncanny effects. As I will argue, the uncanny effects cannot be restrained to the narrative part of the oeuvre, they are manifest (even more uncannily) in the visual field of the films, too.

Objects, names, sentences are repeated in the Szabó oeuvre, and they not only refer to the traumatic lack that gives birth to the desire to narrate, but they also hide or conceal that trauma. This mechanism of referring to something while effectively hiding it at the same time, on the one hand, constitutes an uncanny effect. On the other hand, however, it has further implications, as well. These recurrent tropes, as I have already argued, make up an intertext, the gist of the Szabó oeuvre, so to speak. This intertext reveals the web of references that creates a meaning for otherwise inexplicable motifs in given films. However, taking the above discussion into consideration, I claim that the explanatory power of this intertext may be misleading. Since the intertext is made up of the tropes that refer to and hide the inception or cause of the narratives, they cannot be adequately used to explicate unclear motifs in the films. The intertext, therefore, only obscures and further conceals my access to the kernel of the films, and of the oeuvre.

My aim here with the setting up or mapping of the filmic intertext of the Szabó oeuvre is to assess the recurrent features and motifs that seem to explain everything and that seem to underlie the oeuvre. I will reveal that this intertext, while giving possible meanings to the films, hides another potential interpretation, and that the core of this interpretation cannot be accessed from the particular diegeses themselves. This core or kernel is foreign or heterogeneous to the narratives. That is the reason why I introduce an analysis of the visual aspect of the oeuvre separately. At the end of my analysis, the two aspects will reinforce one another, allowing to see the reason and inception for the filmic narratives.

Concepts and aims in the analysis of visual representation in the oeuvre

The second line of the analysis of the Szabó oeuvre consists of looking at those—primarily—visual effects that simply do not fit the narrative of the intertext that the films constitute. In other words, it is an analysis that takes into account all the effects that seem to be out of place in the particular context they appear. These effects form blocks to understanding, therefore, must be regarded separately. They point beyond the narrative intertext and threaten it with disruption. What are these effects? Where do they come from? How do they haunt the oeuvre?

To account for these effects I will use the concept of the *phantom* first defined by Nicolas Abraham. Abraham uses the concept of the phantom in a *transgenerational* sense: it is an entity that carries unspeakable and undisclosed secrets from generation to generation. “The phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious – for good reason. It passes ... from the parent’s unconscious into the child’s.”¹⁶ While passing from one generation to the next, it carries secrets that are the results of repressions from previous generations. Thus, in certain cases, the unspeakable secrets of a generation dwell in the unconscious of another generation without the latter’s knowing about it.

What manifests itself in the effect of the so-called haunting is therefore not the repression itself (as in a Freudian sense of the return of the repressed), but the carrier’s effect. This carrier is the phantom. In Abraham’s theory the phantom carries out its task by “travelling” in language. The child learns the language from the parents, but it is not merely the language that the child receives: the undisclosed and unspeakable secrets are transferred into the unconscious of the child, too.¹⁷ This way, the first repression of the child is already a repression of something that has previously been repressed. As the phantom operates through language, the effects of this operation (i.e., the mechanism of symptom-formation) surface in the use of the language. As Abraham notes, the phantom “works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject’s own mental topography.”¹⁸ The phantom is, therefore, a “foreign body lodged within the subject.”¹⁹

The phantom, or ventriloquist, governs the speech acts of the subject from within his/her unconscious. Since the subject does not know and notice that a stranger is speaking through him/her, it also remains concealed from him/her that his/her behaviour becomes incongruous. This is actually the case in most of István Szabó’s films. Central characters occasionally utter sentences in one film that are the sentences of other characters’ in another film in a way that they entirely absent their feelings during the act. That is, the original libidinal content of the sentence is emptied out. That becomes clear only in the light of the original character’s utterance, where the very same sentence referred to some painful experience.

This part narrative line of analysis, however, does not take account of the strange visual effects in some of the films. For instance, what explains that in *Love Film* and in *Mephisto* the final frame is blinded by a harsh white light? This is a common feature in both, but it resists integration into the intertextual matrix of the

¹⁶ Abraham and Torok 1994, 172.

¹⁷ Op. cit., 140.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Op. cit., 174.

narratives and is completely heterogeneous to the visual aspect of either film. What is the source of that strange light? Why does it appear there and how? What motivates its reappearance? These questions are only a few that indicate a gap in the understanding of Szabó's film narratives.

Effects like this blinding light necessitate a redefinition of the phantom. While keeping the definition provided by Abraham, the concept needs to open up towards a visual type of haunting, too. The basis of a more complex redefinition is the etymological root of the word "phantom." The Greek word *φάντασμα* translates as "vision," "spectre," which is the synonym of "phantom." When looking further, it becomes apparent that the word *φαντάζεντι* means, "to display." This etymological trace discloses that the very word "phantom" encrypts in itself the condition of visibility, of being a ghost-like medium, and also the potential to show and to present. Using the word "phantom," therefore, implies a possibility to identify a complex theory of cinematic re-presentation in the Szabó oeuvre: the phantom shows something only to hide something else even more effectively.

The phantom effects, therefore, point to the gaps in the understanding of the narrative genealogy in a way that they hide these gaps with the very same gesture. Showing in order to hide: this is the logic of the phantom. This "visual" definition of the concept of the phantom opens the way for the analysis of the uncanny visual effects of the Szabó films. This definition connects the undisclosed secrets of the narratives and the secrets that are beyond the genealogy – or it reveals that the secrets discovered in the genealogy derive from previous ones. This implies a "text" beyond the established intertext, which is also beyond the visible surface of the films. Referring to Elizabeth Bronfen's application of Abraham's theory, I designate this text as "phantom text."²⁰ This text is the narrative of the silenced secrets that became encrypted at one point and that occasionally cause blockages in the comprehension of the specific film narratives of the oeuvre. The blockages are formed by the returns of the phantom (and not by the returns of the secrets or the crypts by themselves).

The phantom, therefore, is an agent of the phantom text. The phantom text is then an intertext governed by the phantom. Referring back to my initial proposition of a tripartite interrelation of the *film*, the *name* and the *body*, it can now be argued that these three entities find their common knot in the "bizarre foreign body"²¹ of the oeuvre: the body on display, whose appearance is triggered by the phantom. In

²⁰ Bronfen 1998, 157.

²¹ Abraham and Torok 1994, 175.

what follows I outline step by step how the concept of the phantom relates to each of the three terms.

Film and the phantom

Film is a display. It is an illusion inasmuch as it *presents* something that is *absent*. It puts forth a show, which also means that it conceals something: if something is projected, the source of it is always concealed. In the present analysis I am not trying to tackle the technical aspects of projection, rather, I allude to a rhetorics simultaneously of showing and hiding at work in the cinema. The moment an image appears on the screen, something is repressed behind it. It may be useful to refer to Lacan's theorisation of the *screen* here. In the field of vision the subject and the object of vision are not in a direct relationship with each other. There is a kind of mediation between them that on the one hand makes sight possible, while on the other hand it detaches them on the axis of the look.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* Lacan illustrates the moment of looking at an object by two lines coming from the side of the subject, forming an apex at the object. This figure corresponds to the description of the perspective of the eye.²² What this eye sees, however, is not the object, but an *image* of the object that Lacan posits between the object and the subject of vision. Then he introduces the reverse of this triangle: what was originally the object becomes now the point of light emitting the lines that form the sides of the triangle meeting in the apex, which is now the subject. In this second scene it is the subject who thus becomes the picture. The mediation between subject and object is not the image any longer, but the *screen*.²³ What Lacan describes here is that the subject is always already included in the field of vision, which is to say, there is something that includes the subject in the vision before the moment s/he looks at an object. Lacan designates this entity as the *gaze*. The gaze is "unapprehensible,"²⁴ something that escapes the subject's look that disappears the moment it would appear: it is always present through its very absence.

The two polar points of the field of vision, the gaze and the look, are mediated to each other through the screen. As Jacqueline Rose explains,

an object veiled from sight by an over-intense light can be discerned only if a screen is interposed which partially obscures that light and/or the observing subject; the

²² Lacan 1998, 91.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Op. cit., 83.

screen thus blocks the subject from the light in order to expose its object, and the 'look' of that object is seen to emerge only in this moment of partial elision...²⁵

It is the veil that, by hiding, reveals the image. Similarly, in the cinema, things on the screen appear as images, not as objects. In other words, what the spectator sees are images of things, not the things themselves. The way the screen operates, furthermore, is very similar to the mechanism of haunting. In haunting something comes to the fore that hides something else, but as it comes forth, it lends itself to investigation. The display (shell) always contains something of its source (kernel). According to Abraham, "the shell itself is marked by what it shelters; what it encloses is disclosed within it."²⁶ In other words, the screen on the one hand hides something from the spectator's view, and on the other hand this something is also "contained" in the scene. Since in the Szabó oeuvre the haunting is produced by certain traumatic secrets, as I will argue in the analysis of the films, something of these secrets are manifest on the screen. This is possible through the work of the phantom, as the messenger of these secrets.

I have to specify here what is meant by secrets and what their relation is to the phantom and the display. The secrets Abraham and Torok talk about are not the everyday secrets of gossip, confidential information or something that has to be covered up. Rather, these secrets are so painful or shameful that they cannot be articulated by the subject, which means that they cannot be consciously passed on to another subject. These secrets are thus silent, unable to surface by themselves. The repression which they are the results of is then different from the repression Freud talks about. As Nicholas T. Rand summarises, for Abraham and Torok,

"Secret" is not synonymous with "hidden," "unknown," or "latent," even in the Freudian sense of a person's unconscious or repressed desires, apt to reappear only in opaque, symptomatic compromise-formations. In Abraham and Torok's sense, the secret is a trauma whose very occurrence and devastating emotional consequences are entombed and thereby consigned to internal silence, albeit unwittingly, by the sufferers themselves.²⁷

The form of repression Abraham and Torok talk about in such cases is called "preservative repression." This type of repression causes a split in the psyche of the

²⁵ Rose 1986, 192. Note that Rose employs the term "look" to refer to the "gaze." I stick to Sheridan's translation (gaze), as in Lacan 1998.

²⁶ Abraham and Torok 1994, 80.

²⁷ Rand in Abraham and Torok 1994, 100.

unwitting subject, a rupture in the psychic topography. Secrets of this type are entombed: the walls of the *crypt* arise around them to keep them intact. That is why these secrets cannot surface by themselves. But since they haunt, they are not completely absent. This is possible because of a formation that objectifies that rupture²⁸ while it carries from one subject to another through the very silence within speech. This is true for the visual type of haunting in Szabó's oeuvre: it is the phantom that carries the secrets, the crypts, from one film to another. Thus, the displays that are generated by the phantom, i.e., the films under the name of Szabó are surfaces through which the crypts shine forth. This shining forth is precisely the haunting effect.

The phantom's role is in one sense very similar to, in another, very different from the screen. Their role is similar in that they both sustain a certain relationship between something visible and something hidden. In Lacan, the screen simply hides in order to show, which is true for the phantom, although in reverse: the phantom shows in order to hide. Moreover, the phantom, by presenting a display to conceal inevitably lets the crypts shine through it. These secrets are *nesciences* (i.e., unknown knowledges), heterogeneous to the display itself – hence their haunting effect. While the screen is drawn up to dim the over-intense light to make vision possible, the phantom brings in the over-intense light to obscure vision.²⁹

The images in Szabó's films, thus, occasionally carry haunting secrets in the form of crypts shining through as over-intense light. In this respect, the screen itself can be reconceived as a *crypt screen* - as an overt reference to Freud's *screen memory*. The screen memory is usually an insignificant event preserved as a childhood memory. According to Freud, however, this event of minor significance is but a displacement of a significant one, which thus becomes repressed.³⁰ The screen memory is, in Freud, a memory that screens another one. The contrast between this concept and Abraham and Torok's concept of the crypt screen lies in the origin of the screen. Whereas in Freud's elaboration the screen stems from the subject's own experience and displaces an experience related to it somehow, in Abraham and Torok's analysis the crypt screen is generated by a specific encrypted

²⁸ Abraham and Torok 1994, 171.

²⁹ This over-intense light will be the basis for an analysis of haunting effects as it literally appears in *Love Film* and *Mephisto* (most enigmatically in the last of these films).

³⁰ Freud 1995b, 303. I have to note here that Freud's concept of the screen differs from Lacan's formulation. In the application of the crypt screen in this analysis I wish to retain the function of hiding apparent in Freud's definition, and Lacan's idea of the screen as mediating the invisible to the visible.

secret, which might not even be the subject's own secret or repression. Therefore, the references to the displaced event are under multiple distortion.³¹

The crypt screen, furthermore, is not merely a displacement. Although Abraham and Torok discover a rather complex mechanism of a series of displacements (through alloemes, homonyms, etc.), I would go beyond that, since I find this concept highly relevant to the analysis of Szabó's cinema. Relating to the above discussion on the concept of the screen and its role in the present analysis, I wish to emphasise the work of the phantom behind or beyond this screen. This means that the crypt screen is not merely a complex of distortions of an encrypted secret, but the secret is heterogeneous to its screen just as it is to its origin. It is primarily a *nescience* (an unknown knowledge) that is unknown or dissociated right from the beginning. In other words, while Freud's memory screen covers another scene through dynamic repression, the crypt screen covers a scene that is a "non-scene": it covers something that derives from somewhere else. It is, then, a concealment of something that has already been concealed from the very beginning.

This elaboration is necessary to underscore the effect of haunting so ostensible in some visual phenomena in Szabó's films. But how does the crypt become manifest visually? How does it carry out its work as a haunting? What haunts and how, in other words? I refer to the haunting effects as *uncanny*. Indeed, the work of the phantom is *uncanny*, so the effects produced as a result of this work are *uncanny*, too.³² Abraham, again, extends or modifies Freud's concept elaborated in the case study of the *Sandman*.³³ The original German term, *unheimlich*, has a capacity to refer to two antagonistic meanings at the very same time, and it is also capable of signifying a development whereby a generally *heimlich* (that is, known, familiar) object becomes *unheimlich* (that is, unfamiliar, strange, bizarre). In an Abrahamian vein, the object or effect becomes uncanny not because it is in a direct relation to the subject, but precisely because it is an unknown knowledge (*unheimlich* – "unhomely" as "not in the home or family") in one generation, while

³¹ Abraham and Torok coin the term in Abraham and Torok 1986, 47. According to them, the crypt screen is essentially an "image screen" operated by a logic similar to the dream-work described by Freud.

³² I would like to note that in Hungarian the two words, the uncanny and the phantom, have a common etymological root. The uncanny in Hungarian is "kísérteties," which also means "ghostly." The phantom is a "kísértet," that is, a "ghost." In Hungarian, that is, the uncanny is the effect of the phantom, even simply on the basis of the words themselves.

³³ Freud 1995c.

it may be known (*heimlich* – “homely” as “in the home or family”) in a previous one.³⁴

What haunts, therefore, are primarily familiar objects, but the effects they produce make them and—as a corollary to this—and their appearance and recurrence uncanny or, in other words, “phantomogenic,” i.e. phantom-like. This uncanny effect in the field of vision is closely related to the Lacanian concept of the gaze, according to Slavoj Žižek.³⁵ The gaze is a point in the object that puts the subject into the field of vision before s/he would look at that object. It is what Lacan identifies as the blurred spot in Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*, which from another point of observing it becomes decipherable as a skull. As Žižek explains through a Hitchcockian procedure of shooting a mysterious scene, it is precisely the gaze that makes the entire scene uncanny, since the vision in which the looking subject is included comes from an unidentifiable point in the object of the look. Therefore, it is precisely the “unapprehensible” gaze that creates the uncanny effect.³⁶ But how does it become uncanny – which implies *heimlich* and *unheimlich* at the very same time?

According to Parveen Adams, Lacan’s analysis of the Holbein painting describes “two moments of viewing.”³⁷ What is more, the coming into focus of the strange floating spot in the picture as a skull “shows up a gap between those two moments.”³⁸ The two moments under discussion correspond to the two sides of the uncanny. The first moment finds the subject in contemplating the picture in a “learned” way, standing in the vanishing point of the perspective.³⁹ By contrast, when the skull becomes visible out of the spot, the scene in the field of vision turns inside out, so to speak. Nothing is what it was before: everything becomes ambiguous in relation to the second moment. The gap that the second moment of viewing initiates, as Adams explains, “reveals the structure of the illusion of the

³⁴ Esther Rashkin’s elaboration, who adds that the word *heimlich* can also be understood as “within the family or house,” alluding to the possibility of a transgenerational aspect. Rashkin 1992, 30.

³⁵ Žižek 1992b, 126.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Adams 1996, 141.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Contrary to the belief that the so-called Renaissance perspective is the most perfect rendition of human vision, several studies in art history and visual culture prove that the *quattrocento* invention is purely artificial. This way the realistic proportions of space in the paintings of this technique provide the observer with a “naturalised” point of view that the observer must learn in order to become a “knowing” spectator, or to occupy the position of the look in the Lacanian scheme.

image and the subject's wishes in respect to it."⁴⁰ It is this revealing that I intend to do in Szabó's strange visual effects: to look beyond the "over-intense light."

However, even if I succeed in screening that light, all I will uncover is the crypt that has shone forth before obscuring my sight. Even though I reveal the haunting mechanism generated by the phantom, I have to tear open the walls of the crypt that had originally sent the phantom to haunt. In other words, the gap that opens up in the two moments of viewing the strange and haunting images in Szabó is a gap that should be opened up to another gap. It is at that point when the phantomatic mechanism at work in the visual register of the films in the Szabó oeuvre can join the other, narrative line of the analysis in order to bring to light the undisclosed secrets.

At that crucial juncture of the two lines of my analysis another concept will be of use: André Gaudreault's theorisation of *monstration*. *Monstration* works in the mimetic register, as opposed to (or as a corollary to *narration* which is characteristically a feature of the diegesis). According to Gaudreault, *monstration* precedes narration, that is to say, the image comes before editing. As he explains, film operates on two separate, yet interwoven levels: one is the showing of an image (mimesis), which is then refigured through the process of editing (diegesis). It is the editing process that determines and finally shapes the point of view of the narrator of the film.⁴¹ According to Gaudreault, *monstration* is an "act of 'showing forth,' of presenting events in present time."⁴² In this system, then, film is constructed by the superimposition of two layers, a mimetic and a non-mimetic, that is the "lamination of *monstration* and narration."⁴³

Gaudreault's definition of *monstration* implies a connection with the concept of haunting: similarly to the crypt, it is also an act of "showing forth." In other words, the mechanism of *monstration* underscores the mechanism of haunting: it *is* the way the haunting effect is transmitted towards the spectator. It can even be formulated that the act of *monstration* is nothing else but the work of haunting performed by the phantom in the Szabó oeuvre. This is then refigured through editing to form a coherent narrative. Although editing masks this "shining forth," it cannot erase the effect of it completely. It obscures the "light" but it only reinforces it by rendering an uncanny "aura" of "over-intense light" to it.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Stam 1992, 115.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

Names and the phantom

Names are particularly significant in the Szabó oeuvre. Not only do the names of the central characters form a special intertextual web (which underscores other aspects of the intertext of the oeuvre) but some specific names also return in successive films – sometimes in the same function or role, and sometimes in peripheral ones. For example, the name “Sonnenschein” appears first in a slightly different Hungarian version as “Fényes” (“shiny”) the name of the central character in *Budapest Tales*. The central character is embodied by András Bálint, who had provided the focal bodies of *The Age of Daydreamings*, *Father*, and *Love Film*. Later the same focal body appears as Dr. Sonnenschein in *Colonel Redl*. Then in 1999 Szabó produced *Sunshine*, which word is a literal translation of the name of the family, the Sonnenscheins.

Szabó himself confesses in a recent interview that it often happens to him during the writing of a script that he is thinking of placing an earlier character or the name of that character in the new context, simply because he believes that there is more to talk about concerning the particular character, or his/her story.⁴⁴ Szabó describes this process as an experience when writing the script of *Sunshine*:

I was thinking, I made an inventory of my resources, and I saw that I had a couple of characters from *Colonel Redl* and from *Hanussen* who were not yet elaborated, who had already been sitting here in this room when I started to write *Sunshine*. I had nothing else to do but to let them into the space where the film was to take place. And they brought their characters, which they had already known, only they did not have the chance to elaborate in the films where they appeared.⁴⁵

In recalling the role of Dr. Sonnenschein in *Hanussen*, Szabó remembers that he started to know so much about the character that he wanted to continue his story, to craft a family history and a context around him. It is thus clear that the names constitute a special kind of genealogy in the oeuvre, as they form a history, a story on its own right. Nonetheless, these stories are embedded in the family stories articulated in the plot of the films, too. To follow the reappearance of the names is also a way to map the intertext. That the names are closely related to the family histories has further implications as well.

I have already referred to the secrets encrypted in the families of the oeuvre, and now I have to extend this to include the names in the process of transmitting

⁴⁴ Halász 2002, 28.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

these painful *nesciences* (unknown or unrecognised knowledges). Names are given by the parents, and thus appropriated as a signifier for the subject. It means that names—like the inherited gaps and silences in the speech of the parents—refer to the undisclosed secret in the family history. It is important to emphasise this, since the names in the Szabó oeuvre come to be detached from the bodies occasionally, to signify other subjects, and different bodies. By so doing, names transmit these gaps to the new subject or body, and conversely, whenever a body appears signified by a different name, the new name takes over the secret, and transmits it forward according to the logic of displacement. My aim in the analysis of the intertext is to reveal this process in discussing particular examples.

In the Szabó oeuvre, names have further signifying potentials. Many of the titles of the films are names of certain characters. Obvious examples are *Mephisto*, *Colonel Redl*, *Hanussen*, *Meeting Venus* (1990), *Sweet Emma*, *Dear Böbe* (1991), but some of the less explicit references can also be in this inventory: *Father* and *Sunshine*. These names signify the bodies and the film texts at the very same time. To refer to the tripartite structure of film, name, and body I set out to explore in this section, it seems that names are the knot between the films and the bodies, they perform the transmission between the narrative and the visual aspects of the crypts in the oeuvre.

According to Ned Lukacher, “[t]o name is always to mask, to conceal, and in concealing, to reveal.”⁴⁶ What the name masks and conceals is the body *par excellence*. The basis for such a claim is provided by the films in the Szabó oeuvre, since here several names are given to signify (i.e., cover, hide, and conceal) the very same body. Jancsi, Bence, then Höfgen, Mephisto, Schneider, Hanussen, Redl, and finally Sunshine *qua* Sonnenschein are all covers for the same body (the three groups of names designate the three central bodies each film). They displace each other metonymically, just as they displace the bodies themselves. As I have implied, this concealment is not a mere veiling over of the bodies, though. It is also a concealment of haunting secrets inherited from the family sagas through the parents. These names are thus names that hide, and names that lie. They hide, as they stand in for and conceal the body. They lie, since none of them can be seen as the “proper” name for the body: they are only displacements of one another, like the masks of Mephisto/Höfgen. Therefore, these names are *cryptonyms* and *pseudonyms*.

First, they are cryptonyms because they hide and incorporate the secrets that haunt the individual unwittingly. They are means of transmitting *nescience*. The

⁴⁶ Lukacher 1986, 95.

parent gives the name to the child, thus passing on with it the silenced secrets as well. It should come as no surprise then that “[n]ames sometimes have incorporated meanings that can determine our idiom without our ever noticing it.”⁴⁷ An illustration of this statement is the story of the name of the Sonnenscheins. To facilitate integration into society, the young Sonnenscheins decide to change their name to avoid negative discrimination because of the overt Jewish connotation. They change it to “Sors,” that is “fate.” The “grimace” of fate is that the new name reveals their Jewish identity precisely by way of concealing it: everybody knows that Sors is but a displacement of something else. The new name becomes thus a name that lies, just as is the case with the names of many other central characters in the oeuvre.

These names are pseudonyms because they are chosen to displace the “proper” name, thus construing a possible family story for support. This is what happens with the Sonnenscheins, but it is the case with Hanussen, too. His “proper” name is Schneider, which is changed for a more Nordic sounding name in the Weimar Republic. Hanussen thus becomes a pseudonym – and also a cryptonym. “Schneider” is the German for “taylor,” that is, “szabó” in Hungarian. Thus, the name of the author can be heard as an echo in the Hanussen cryptonym.

As it is presented in Nicholas T. Rand’s cryptonymic analysis of Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black*, the name as a pseudonym can be understood as a cryptonym, since that word conceals certain connections between the body of the texts (in the case of the Szabó oeuvre, the films) and the bodies in the texts.⁴⁸ A pseudonym *qua* cryptonym hides and conceals these connections, but with the very same gesture it foregrounds them, too. This is the haunting effect of the names in the oeuvre, and this is how the phantom can make use of them. However, the signifying moment of the names is always already preceded by the signification of something else. As Jacques Derrida explains in his foreword to Abraham and Torok’s analysis of the Wolf Man, “The body always signs even before any ‘proper’ name.”⁴⁹ The name, therefore, comes *after* the body, it is a derivative of the body in this respect: it is the message of the phantom, the message of a body that is present through its very absence. To decipher the haunting effect in the oeuvre and to draw the contours of the phantom at work in (behind or beyond) the films I have to turn to the discussion of the body, and more particularly to the investigation of one body: the *spectral body* behind the names.

⁴⁷ Op. cit., 94.

⁴⁸ Rand 1986, lxi.

⁴⁹ Derrida 1986, xxviii.

Body and the phantom: the concept of the spectral body

Hendrik Höfgen (alias Mephisto) in a moment of hysterical outburst, in Szabó's *Mephisto* shouts to his black lover in her Hamburg apartment after a scene of violent lovemaking: "My eye is not my eye; my leg is not my leg; my face is not my face; my name, even my name isn't mine! Because I'm an actor. You know what it means to be an actor? The actor is ... a mask ... among people." By the end, Höfgen reduces himself to a bodiless and nameless entity: precisely a non-entity, a mask that comes alive only if attached to a *body* and a name. That is, it is not the body that lends itself to the role on stage, but vice versa, the role lends itself to the body and the name. But what body and what name is Höfgen talking about here? Whose body and name, if not his? Moreover, what does it mean that he is *nothing*, that is to say *non-thing*?

Höfgen's body, which is not even his own body, can be seen in a Lacanian framework as an *object a*. It becomes clear by the end of the film, when this body starts to disappear, or fade. Although its fading freezes into a white source of light, it is clear that Höfgen's body is not the same as before. It is a disappearing body, a strange, uncanny corpus that seems to underlie the filmic representation in its very disappearance. Significantly, when at the end of *Mephisto*, he is caught on the stage by the lights as Höfgen (i.e., without the roles that would provide him with the bodies), his body becomes the surplus (or leftover) of the scene: he encounters the Real, that is, he diminishes with the eruption of *jouissance*: the over-intense (or excessive) light that outdoes all other sources of light in the diegesis.

Without his roles, he is really *nothing* on the stage. It is precisely his body that is lacking. It is in this light that I designate his body as a strange, even bizarre foreign body, as a *spectral body*. When I mention spectral body, I refer to the concept of the phantom coming from Abraham, only I add a corporeal aspect that is essentially visual in the cinema. Indeed, it is the visual aspect that makes the body "phantomogenic" and thus spectral. In this sense, the adjective "spectral" is to encode the visual and also the uncanny aspects of that body. The spectral body is a body whose origin cannot be located in the diegetic realm it appears in. It is a strange, bizarre, and foreign body that nonetheless secures the coherence of the narrative, and of the oeuvre.

This role of the body in the diegesis is very similar at first to the way Roland Barthes defines the significance of the body in narratives. According to him, "the 'symbolic field' ... is occupied by a sole object, from which it derives its unity. ...

This object is the human body.”⁵⁰ In his discussion of the body, Peter Brooks argues that the body Barthes talks about is a “narrative body,” that is to say a semiotised body that brings along the “somaticization of story: a claim that the body must be a source and locus of meanings, and that stories cannot be told without making the body a prime vehicle of narrative significations.”⁵¹ Any meaning of the narrative, that is, must derive from the body in view. This is, as Brooks goes on to argue, “a narrative aesthetics of embodiment, where meaning and truth are made carnal.”⁵² In the Szabó oeuvre, everything seems to depend on this carnal meaning: hence the recurrence of certain focal bodies in the subsequent films. However, the recurrence of these bodies alludes to another possibility, too, notably that these bodies are *used* so as to screen meaning and truth (whatever these two concepts cover at this point of the analysis).

The more so, since these bodies are never ever in full view. The look of the spectator is allowed to see only fragments of these bodies, by which those parts in view come to be privileged objects. These objects simply conceal the unity of the body, in other words, body parts are used to cover the body. Thus they become metonymies of the body. The body parts in the scopic field become screens for the whole body, and also for the psychic processes of the character the body represents. As I have already argued, the body itself becomes a kind of screen, that is, it becomes a “shell” for a “kernel” to use the Abrahamian terminology.⁵³ What is important in this is that “the shell itself is marked by what it shelters; what it encloses is disclosed within it.”⁵⁴ This brings me back to the Lacanian definition of the screen as the entity that conceals to make vision possible.

When in Lacan, the two moments of viewing the picture bring about the opening up of the image onto the Real, in Abraham the same reveals a secondary kernel, which does not allow a further opening. It is at this point that the uncanny effect gives way to the phantomogenic haunting. That is why I talk of a foreign body: it is foreign not merely to the particular diegesis in which it appears, but it is also such a foreign body in the intertext made up of these diegeses. It is thus that the “beyond” of a phantom text can be theorised. The working of this phantom text is channelled through the phantom that provides the films with visible bodies. Since the phantom in itself cannot appear, it forms characters (the very word meaning “form” itself), in other words, sends spectralised bodies to carry on the

⁵⁰ Barthes 1974, 214-5.

⁵¹ Brooks 1993, xii.

⁵² Op. cit., 21.

⁵³ Abraham and Torok 1994, 79-98.

⁵⁴ Op. cit., 80.

secrets. These bodies make utterances that make up the narratives. However, these utterances are driven by the phantom, thus they become ventriloquisms. That is to say, the bodies in the films are shells for the kernel. Through a multiple metonymical transposition the invisible phantom finally lodges in the diegetic realm via the spectral body.⁵⁵

The way the haunting effect is created by the phantom is, thus, a simultaneous work of hiding and showing in what is hidden also comes forth in uncanny apparitions. To account for these apparitions, I refer to the concept of the uncanny once again, with the aim of introducing a spatial aspect of the term: to describe the relationship of interiority and exteriority. The discussion of this aspect is crucial when I arrive at the point in the analysis where the eruption of the strange, over-intense light blurs the boundary of inside and outside. This way the body in sight will merge with its exterior, i.e., with the scene in which it appears. To underscore my argumentation I turn to a Lacanian rereading of Freud's concept, upon which I further enlarge to introduce the Abrahamian notion of the phantom.

The haunting effect of the *mise-en-scène* is uncanny, as I have already argued before. The uncanny quality of this showing and hiding is perhaps best expressed in Lacan's rendering of Freud's German term, *Unheimlich*, to the French: *extimité*, which has been appropriated in English as the *extimate* or *extimacy*. The term refers to a blurring of the boundary between inside and outside, between the kernel and the shell. As Elizabeth Bronfen argues, the concept is essentially useful, since it can "designate the phantomatic, encrypted presence of kernels of the real traumatic knowledge in the Symbolic," where this encrypted *nescience* "returns not only as a hallucination but as an embodiment with both psychic and somatic

⁵⁵ This is similar to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of the *chiasmus*. The *chiasmus* is a trope of reversibility, it is that "unique space which separates and reunites, which sustains every cohesion." (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 155.) This is the logic behind the claim that "every visible is invisible" and that "it is the visibility itself that involves a non-visibility." (Op. cit., 247.) In other words, the invisible insists ("in-sists" and "ex-ists" at the same time) in the visible. Similarly, perception is possible only when there is imperception, and showing is possible only if there is a simultaneous act of hiding. In Abraham's terminology—which grounds itself to a certain extent in the Husserlian tradition of phenomenology—the model of the *chiasmus* can be seen to underlie the depiction of the shell and the kernel in the formation of the self. What is hidden (the kernel) is also in what is shown (the shell). This is a phantomogenic logic: the phantom shows in order to hide, but what it strives to hide is always within the scene. This way the scene is invaded by an unknown knowledge, a *nescience*, that haunts the visible. That is to say, this *nescience* is put into the scene by the phantom, by which the *mise-en-scène* is formed.

reality.”⁵⁶ At the moment when extimacy reaches the subject, the material from the real floods the symbolic space.⁵⁷ I argue that this is the moment when the over-intense light floods the diegesis at the end of both *Love Film* and *Mephisto* in the Szabó oeuvre.

The body has always been in the centre of representation, or perhaps it is better to say that forms of representation have always been preoccupied with rendering the body. As Barthes says, it is the human body that not only occupies the symbolic field (i.e., the field of vision in terms of the cinema), but also it lends coherence and unity to this field.⁵⁸ Jonathan Crary in *Techniques of the Observer* traces the history of modes and mechanisms of visibility from its earliest appearance to the modern age. In discussing the structure and role of the *camera obscura* and its relation to the human body, he argues that “[t]he body ... is a problem the camera could never solve except by marginalizing it into a phantom.”⁵⁹ Crary does not use the notion of the phantom developed by Abraham. However, my redefinition of the phantom in visual terms may make use of this insight in the relationship of the body, the camera, and the orchestration of the field of vision in the mechanism of cinematic representation. Therefore, although Crary does not talk about secrets or crypts, his usage of the term “phantom” fits into the spectral scenarios that I attempt to elaborate on in this book.

The bodies of some of the central characters of the Szabó oeuvre become bizarre, foreign and haunting bodies in visual representation, as they take shape as spectral bodies. But the way a particular body attains its spectral status in the Szabó oeuvre is a bit more complicated. The spectral body of the Szabó films is a messenger of the encrypted secret of the oeuvre, the carrier of the crypt, the transmitter of the *nescience* that is guarded by the phantom. The spectral body is a visual phenomenon that is sent forth into *monstration* by the phantom in order to screen the unspeakable secrets of the *narrative* part of the oeuvre. It is precisely this spectral body that acts as a knot between the two registers of the cinematic representation, and also as a screen for the phantom of the entire oeuvre.

⁵⁶ Bronfen 1998, 385.

⁵⁷ Op. cit., 390.

⁵⁸ Barthes 1974, 214-5.

⁵⁹ Crary 1991, 41. Crary does not use the notion of the phantom developed by Abraham. However, my redefinition of the phantom in visual terms may make use of this insight in the relationship of the body, the camera, and the orchestration of the field of vision in the mechanism of cinematic representation. Therefore, although Crary does not talk about secrets or crypts, his usage of the term “phantom” fits into the spectral scenarios that I attempt to elaborate on in this book.