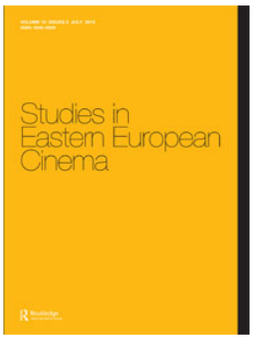

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Fluid audio-spatial aesthetics and the communalization of popular music in the multi-clip movie Balaton method

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ABSTRACT

Bálint Szimler and Rév Marcell's film *Balaton Method* (2016) includes 16 music videos –featuring contemporary pop and underground-rock bands – unified by the methodical use of the long take. With sound and image being recorded synchronously and uninterrupted in a single location, *Balaton Method* defies existing categories of music videos and its novelty is best captured by the label "live music video". While in feature cinema, the long take aesthetics may problematize the relation of time and narrative substance in a direct time-image (Deleuze 1989), adopt an analytical approach to space (Kovács 2008), and allow for the perception of the wondrous (Koepnick 2017), the 'method' of *Balaton Method* involves the creation and management of cinematic space that serves both as a film set and a recording studio, but more importantly, one that is extremely fluid. We demonstrates how the employed digital technology highlights the fluidity of the mise-en-scéne and allows for increased spectatorial immersion in aural-visual space. In the second part of the article, we claim that, while the music videos in *Balaton Method* are non-narrative in the strict sense, they evoke Lake Balaton as a nostalgic and transgenerational narrative that foregrounds shared affective experiences and a communal sense of belonging.

KEYWORDS

Documentary; music video; Hungarian cinema; long take aesthetics; nostalgia; retro

Introduction

Balaton Method *(2015)* is a recent Hungarian crossover film combining the generic elements of music videos, road movies, documentaries and feature films. Its loose narrative line is organized around the theme of the 'Hungarian Sea', Lake Balaton, presenting 18 different Hungarian pop and underground bands (Quimby, Bin-Jip and Punnany Massif, among others)[1] to provide a subjective panorama of the current alternative musical scene in the country. The movie is the structural as well as the stylistic continuation of the highly successful *Kodály Method* videos (2012), a video blog created by the director Bálint Szimler and the director of photography Marcell Rév as a joint venture. In the *Kodály Method* project, the creative duo shot a video monthly with live audio recording, featuring Hungarian underground bands, who played at diverse locations in Budapest. As the sequel of this work

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and the first crowdfunded feature film in Hungary, *Balaton Method* is a unique artistic and industry experiment to popularize contemporary pop and alternative music. The film also recycles and recontextualizes the lake's post-socialist visual imagery and its nostalgic, retro-like atmosphere that resonates powerfully with all generations of Hungarians.

As opposed to the all too familiar spaces of Balaton, the film relies on mostly post-millennial musical inspiration by creating a framework of conceptually interlinked music videos. The iconic elements of the so-called 'Balaton feeling' of cycling, sailing, bathing, eating langosh,[2] taking a ferry in the sunset or meeting German tourists are accompanied by diverse musical impressions, such as a wind section, a women's choir or percussionists drumming on a Polski Fiat. In terms of cinematic techniques, the multi-clip movie's combined use of single-take clips and very long takes recorded live at Lake Balaton. Moreover, the inclusion of archival footage from several previous Hungarian films – such as Gábor Zsigmond Papp's *Balaton Retro* (2007) – rewrite Hungarian viewers' attitudes to this national heritage site and offer a unique glimpse into contemporary music to foreign audiences. Based on the above insights, the article argues that the contrast between the voicing of the current alternative musical scene and the visualization of the lake's post-'Socialist cultural memory create a dramatic tension that makes the whimsical journey around the Lake Balaton both a retrospective survey of a nostalgic site of memory and an audio-visual time capsule for present-day youth culture communities.

Intergeneric encounters: music video and film

To put *Balaton Method* on the map of contemporary Hungarian cinema and popular music, the creators' unique artistic background needs to be explained. The director, Bálint Szimler and the director of photography Marcell Rév, also known as the cinematographer of the widely acclaimed film, *White God* by Kornél Mundruczó, 2014, both graduated from the Film Academy of Budapest in 2012, and their first short film entitled *Here I Am* was in competition at the Cannes Cinefondation, and also shortlisted by the European Film Academy. Having completed various commercials, viral videos and music videos together, Szimler and Rév came up with the idea of the so-called *Kodály Method*[3] videos to create a new visual field for the popularization of the Hungarian alternative music scene. They started a monthly video blog introducing various Hungarian underground bands playing at diverse, often outdoor locations in Budapest, with high-quality live audio recording.[4] *Balaton Method* continues in this creative tradition, exploring the potentials of the 'method' beyond the capital of Hungary in one of the best-known and most iconic countryside destinations. Lake Balaton offers a culturally loaded geographic space richly embedded in state socialist and contemporary popular culture and also a specific sonic environment.

Given the professional background of Szimler and Rév, their specific method is primarily cinematographic and explores the aesthetics of single-take videos, that include long takes (alternatively called sequence shots) without (or with very few editing), complex camera movements and inventive use of the depth of field.[5] According to Steven Neale, the long take is 'a mark of quality and directorial bravura' (Neale 38) while David Bordwell emphasizes the flexibility and fluidity long takes allow filmmakers to represent space (Nielsen 2004). In the assertion of Lutz Koepnitz, the long take 'endorse[s] the seemingly paradoxical effort to take time amid our ever-more timeless time to reflect on and push against the

many proclaimed ends of time' (Koepnitz 2017, 4), adding that 'it slows down processes of perception—not for the sake of slowness itself, but to rebuild what it might mean to recognize and attend to the new as new, as a wondrous event in time' (Koepnitz 2017, 9). Critical assessments of the long take often emphasize that these sequences decline to tell a story and often lack chronological narrative substance. Exploring Andrei Tarkovsky's cinematic style, Ákos Szilágyi and András Bálint Kovács argue that the long take principally problematizes the relation of time and narrative substance (Kovács & Szilágyi 1997, 51), while, in *Screening Modernism*, Kovács ascribes to long takes and extended camera movements an analytical approach to space (Kovács 2008, 149) and minimalist use of setting elements (Kovács 2008, 156).

Hungarian cinema enjoys a long history of experimentation with the long take, including Miklós Jancsó's highly praised films between the late 1960s to the early 1990s, during which period János Kende served as his cinematographer. More recently, the long take has become a trademark of the films directed by Béla Tarr and photographed first by Gábor Medvigy and later by Fred Kelemen. Whereas the films of modernist filmmakers and practitioners of slow cinema frequently feature long takes, music videos have not yet fully explored and hardly popularized this approach. If Jancsó and Tarr gained critical recognition for having broken with the spatial and temporal regime of the classical montage and its strict perceptual orientation, Szimler and Rév should be acknowledged for not surrendering to the normalized spectatorial regime of music videos characterized by attention-grabbing spectacle and fast-paced editing patterns.

By the same token, *Balaton Method* proves wrong Theodor Adorno's oft-quoted essay on the cultural functions of pop music, 'the fundamental characteristic of popular music is standardization' (Adorno 2005), a claim unsupported by the film's experimental style and choice to feature pop and underground bands equally. The film also defies conventional notions of the synergies between sound and image, as theorized by David Machin. According to the author, linkages between the aural and the visual layers of music videos are standardized to serve the formal requirements of 'unobtrusiveness', 'coordination with the action', 'emphasizing emotions', 'underlining the setting' and creating a 'sense of continuity' (Machin 2010, 155–156). *Balaton Method* takes different approach from the one characterized here and, with the long take serving as a cornerstone of its aesthetic ambitions, introduces a novel method of recording sound and image synchronously and uninterrupted in a single location.

Popular music studies have offered countless, sometimes mutually exclusive definitions of the music video, some of them dismissive, some of them appreciative, describing it as an 'intrinsically ephemeral, disposable form, one whose lifecycle is determined solely by the economics of capitalist business practice' (Railton 2011, 6); or a genre that is 'already a secondary product, an advertisement for another cultural form' (2). Graham Fuller goes as far as arguing that music videos are 'the trash can of popular culture, throwaway art … the Kleenexes of popular culture' (1). *Balaton Method* resists such limited conceptualizations, and also declines to serve merely marketing purposes for the performing artists – although the film's advertising techniques (along with its homepage, public screenings and distribution by scattering pen drives all over Budapest) showed much marketing potential. Since most songs featured in the film already had their official music videos – with Punnany Massif's 'Részletek' (Details) being the only one written especially for *Balaton Method* – it

seems legitimate to claim that in the 'method version' of the videos, visual originality comes before marketing demands.

For its evident artistic aspirations, it is difficult to put the film into generic categories. Reflecting on the viewers' experiences, reviewers have suggested various generic labels including 'a love movie' (Csider 2015) to the Hungarian Sea; 'a best of record' (Zalka 2015); a 'road movie', and, last but not least, a 'multi-clip movie' (N. a. 2015), the first since Péter Tímár's *Moziklip* (*Movie Clip*) from 1987. Tímár's film can be regarded as a generic and stylistic predecessor precisely because it reflected on the popular music scene of late-socialist Hungary just as clearly as *Balaton Method* engages with the diverse impulses of the present, post-millennial cultural moment. Both films offer a cross-section of contemporaneous popular music to capture the generational experience and its forces of canon formation. Director Dávid Szimler has also emphasized the conservational and canonizing function of *Balaton Method* in an interview: 'It's surely going to be worth watching it in twenty years' time to see what kind of music we listened to in Hungary in 2014' (N. a. 2015).

Generic categories are also difficult to apply because the film lacks a strong narrative. The post-socialist Balaton sites do not add up to a coherently narratable story, but they form a kaleidoscope-like collage of personal and collective memories of a generation of artists whose formative childhood experiences mostly coincided with the final years of state socialism in Hungary. The structural logic of the film fits Carol Vernallis's description in *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* claiming that the music video is 'fundamentally anti-narrative, it is a kind of postmodern pastiche that gains energy from defying narrative conventions' (Vernallis 2004, 3). While *Balaton Method* does not have a major plotline and/or three-dimensional characters, the settings of the successive music videos often share a powerfully ironical, pastiche-like distance from the surrounding post-socialist locations that must have been the sources of unforgettable childhood memories not only for the makers but also the audience (the subchapter on retro-scaping will further elaborate on this aspect). Although there is no overarching narrative pattern, transitions do involve medial references or present stylistic continuities. The transition between the videos of Grand Mexican Warlock and Kamikaze Scotsmen, for instance, is a sudden cut from the interior of a train carriage to a car on a road at night. On the car's stereo, however, the song of the previous band is still playing. The televisual medium is also used as transition between the songs of Akkezdet Phiai and Vera Jonas Experience: the former ends with the director shouting 'cut' while the initial shot of the latter shows a screen with just white noise. Close-ups of water serve as transition as well between the song of Fran Palermo and that of Hó Márton és a Jégkorszak, just like people framed by doors and windows in the case of four other videos.

Another feature that makes the use of existing genre-labels unhelpful in the case of *Balaton Method* is the marked differences individual videos show. Many show resemblance with the subgenres Andrew Tudor's identifies as the 'pseudo-documentary', the 'art music video', the 'narrative music video' and the 'staged performance music video' (qtd. in Railton 2011, 43). The subgenre of the pseudo-documentary music video seems to be especially applicable here, as 'this genre of music video deploys the aesthetics of documentary realism to portray the "working life" of the band or artist and, as such, functions to legitimate them as skilled, professional, musicians' (Railton 2011, 49).[6] There are two instances when videos begin with musicians off the set, having spontaneous fun: members of Akkezdet Phiai improvise medieval-sounding choir music just to entertain themselves before the shooting;

while the beginning of the Quimby video presents band members drinking, smoking and joking around a table, imitating the style of traditional Hungarian gypsy music.[7] These techniques establish a professional and also personal context for their music to be performed, showing the musicians' creative process, erudition and community spirit.

Hardly any of the above discussed generic categories take into consideration the stylistic uniqueness of *Balaton Method* founded on the long take aesthetics that ensures the homogeneity and continuity of space and time. The single takes are realized through careful preparation, complex choreography, lengthy rehearsals and technical bravura to create aesthetically appealing experience. In line with previous scholarly assertions of the long take, the videos are non-narrative, apply an analytical approach to space which they perceive of as being essentially fluid. Fluidity is likewise supported by the music recorded not only live on the shooting set but featuring additional instruments, even philharmonic orchestras and, in some cases, choirs as background vocals. The mixing, balancing and recording of various audio sources while performers and cameramen move around the set needs increased collaboration between filming crew and sound engineers. As such, the 'method' involves the creation and management of space that serves both as a film set and a recording studio, but more importantly, one that is extremely fluid. Recognizing the novelty of this method, we label the film as a 'live music video'.

Method in the making

As all the videos were recorded live at various locations near Lake Balaton from July till January, the individual settings of the songs add seasonal variety and cyclicality to the film's episodic, multi-clip structure, representing many different faces of the lake and visually echoing the stylistic and aural diversity of the included songs. Lake Balaton, the largest sweet-water lake in Central-Europe, does not merely offer itself as a scenic visual backdrop of the videos in *Balaton Method* but forms an essential part of the concept of musicalizing space. Many videos incorporate the sound of water, like that of 'Hello, Purgatórium!' by the band named Hó Márton és a Jégkorszak, where the mild splashing of waves on the lakeshore serves as a rhythmic pattern. In other songs, water vehicles are used as minimalist musical instruments, as in the case of paddleboats in the song 'Bordahajtogató' ('Rib Folder') by Elefánt, or the hull of the ferry and the chassis of the cars it transports featured in the video of Bin-Jip's 'Heavy'. In the former song, percussionists utilize the hollow plastic bodies of the paddleboats as sources of unique drum-like sounds, while in the video of 'Heavy', musicians first tap on the dashboard, then on the bonnets and rooftop of the cars, or simply slam their doors according to the rhythm patterns of the songs. The musicalization of the lake is just as much part of the artistic concept as turning the music into a fluid, oceanic experience. In the video of Fran Palermo's 'Am I right boy', the camera follows band members into the lake and dives underwater while the music also gains an aquatic acoustics quality and sounds different than in the space above the water (Figure 1).

In most cases, the aesthetics of fluidity in *Balaton Method* means the fluidity of the camera, achieved through complex movements, including tracking shots, crane shots, Steadycam shots and optical reframings (zoom-ins and zoom-outs). The flexibility of the camera and its labyrinthine choreographies, which resemble trapeze artists or ballet dancers, serve the continuity of takes. The video of ('Or Whatever') contains the following camera

Figure 1. The musicalization of cars on the ferry between Szántód and Tihany.

movements: the initial static shot is succeeded by a 90° tilt down shot ensued by a 180° roll of the camera, then a dolly, another tilt down shot and a tilt up. The spectator loses spatial orientation due to the complex physical manoeuvres but also because of the awkward set design: objects are fixed on walls to confuse and disorientate the eye so it becomes difficult to tell what is a floor, a wall or a ceiling. Also, at one point, the singer enters the frame by being lowered from the ceiling using a winch while the video ends with a backward dolly, revealing all the mechanical appliances used to move the camera in the video. Thus, this piece can be read as a meta-commentary about the technical dimension of the method itself. The song also presents fluidity in its lyrics, twisting, welding and combining otherwise unrelated words resulting in such expressions as Lev TolsToy-story, Andy Vajnamöjnen,[8] Tom Cruise-ing, Ramadan/Danish Roma Csuklyaizomlázálompár (an untranslatable compound consisting of the words trapezius muscle, muscle soreness, nightmare, sweethearts). The singer refers to this practice as verbal Shotokan, but it could equally be called verbal surrealism founded on the logic of free associations (Figure 2).

The video of Punnany Massif, another hip-hop band, achieves a similar degree of complexity by employing the split screen technique and displaying the live feeds of six handheld cameras. Although the musicians occupy a single diegetic space, the cameras – recording images with different focal planes, angles and height of framing – capture it as fractured. In one sequence, for example, the two singers are filmed by three cameras each, one rendering them in a full frontal shot, the other two in quarter turn shots from the left and the right. While the split screen technique transforms the frame into a geometric grid and a mosaic, the combination of multiple viewpoints, mobile perspectives and multiplicity within an image calls into mind the Cubist technique of planar faceting. The simultaneous disruption and reestablishment of unity, nevertheless, points beyond paying tribute to art history and offers a meta-cinematic commentary. After all, the video builds upon the two basic elements of cinematic representation: the shot and the cut. The fluid visual aesthetic is enhanced by the simultaneous presence and dynamic relationship between the centripetal

Figure 2. Stages of the fluid camera movement from the first to the last shot in Akkezdet Phiai & Amoeba's 'Vagy Mindegy'.

ingredient of fixation (the shot) and the centrifugal element of dislocation (the cut). Although these may seem exclusive of each other, the video proves their dialectic relation in cinematic expression. The viewers' attention is fragmented and challenged by the multiplication of frames, especially so since the 'tiles' of the mosaic are frequently rearranged: musicians exit one frame and enter another, exchange positions in front of the cameras and the cameras also move around in the diegetic space. Managing meaning is contested in these mobile frames but not rendered altogether impossible; it just requires a new form of attentiveness and stretching the limits of one's comprehension. The dynamic and fluid relationship of frames within the split screen calls to mind the dialectic relationship between the acoustic individuality of each music instrument and the acoustic harmony of the composition. In fact, the video is not only a meta-cinematic commentary, but illustrates how unique sounds – made with cups, bowls, an eggwhisk, a syringe barrel and a bicycle pump – along with the characteristic sounds of more traditional instruments such as the trumpet, the cello and contrabass flow into the rhythmic beat pattern of hip hop. The song's lyrics also acknowledge the constructivist approach with the line 'One point, one space, one form. These are all but pieces/To exist in a singular time and era. As part of a whole' (Figure 3).

The synchronous production of a visual and aural space, the very method underlying *Balaton Method*, advocates the spontaneous expression of the here and now by combining individual images and voices into a collective representation. This aim is well reflected in the video of Subscribe's song by the title 'Ringside seat'. The grainy shots recall the visual style of the archival footage of popular bands which regularly performed at the lakeside in the 1970s and 1980s. While the obsolete water slide also recalls this period, the hardcore-garage sound of Subscribe unmistakably belongs to the 2000s. The upbeat music harmonizes with the frantic visuals comprising of a soft focus camera rapidly tilting and panning between parts of the set. Its frantic movement fractures space and creates the feeling as if our eyes moved between several parts of a giant tableau. Eventually, the tableau in its natural proportions is revealed in a wide-angle establishing shot, in flawless colours and sharpness. As a cinematic reference, we might recall Antonioni's *Blow-up,* where entering the image comes with ontological uncertainty and the fracturing of reality previously imagined as coherent. This is the opposite case: exiting the image underlines Punnany Massif's message that parts, indeed, come to form a whole (Figure 4).

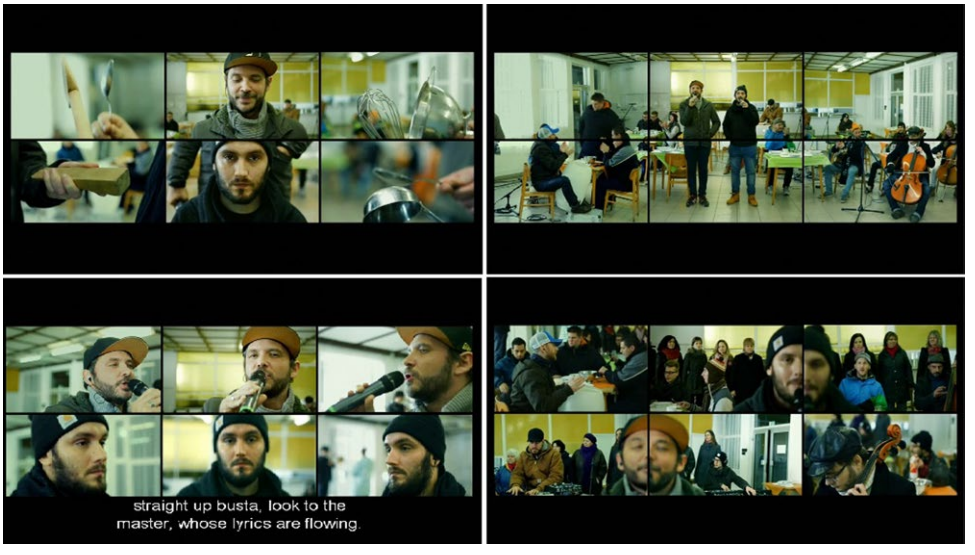

Figure 3. Dynamic and fluid relationships in/between frames in the video of Punnany Massif.

Figure 4. Fractured, out-of-focus spaces and the establishing shot they construct (left-bottom frame) in Subscribes's video.

The fluid aesthetics of the long take suits well the formulation of a shared reality. Jancsó himself maintained that for him 'the long take is nothing more than thinking accomplished through continuous movement—there is a five minute long conceptual unit and I create movement within it' (qtd. in Vidovszky 2006, 9). The video of 'Love Struggle' performed by Grand Mexican Warlock showcases the ability of the long take to 'think' the formation of community. At the start of the video, the lead singer orders drink in the pub adjacent to the railway station, shares it with a fellow musician waiting on the platform and goes to buy tickets while a train arrives and passengers get off: all captured by a tracking camera moving swiftly behind the character. Xylophone music starts playing as he approaches the ticket window, but instead of following him, the camera puts the musician into the centre of the shot, thus shattering the illusion that we are hearing a traditional film score. This is an important gesture, as the privilege of images over music disappears and the autonomy of the latter is recognized. Soon further classical musical instruments, then the singer and

eventually electronic instruments join in the song. As the camera leaves the building, it enters a busy scene of musicians occupying the whole platform, each playing their respective instruments. The hierarchy between elitist and popular, classical music and rock music is eliminated, just as the dominance of cinema over music. Speculating about the creative potentials of the video image, Gilles Deleuze writes that 'sound achieving an autonomy which increasingly lends it the status of image, the two images, sound and visual, enter into complex relationships with neither subordination nor commensurability, and reach a common limit in so far as each reaches its own limit' (Deleuze 1989, 265–266). The common limit here, on the one hand, is the spatialization of music, the act of marking out its territory within the functional space of the railway station and, on the other hand, the musicalization of images: the camera's acquiring a fluid rhythm which leads all other movements and allows the vitality of life to be born frame by frame.

Other videos in *Balaton Method* make gestures of a similar kind towards the elimination of the traditional barriers between high and popular culture, sophisticated and plain styles, intellectual and instinctual means of expression, as well as star performers' and vocalists' audio-visual presence. In Soerii & Poolek's song 'Valahol messze' (Somewhere far Away), the guttural voice and extravagant outlook of the lead singer and the well-dressed musically well-versed members of the choir and the philharmonic orchestra are not antagonistic. On the contrary, they enter into a shared 'refrain': the song describing (a deep desire for) wild partying transforms into an angelic psalm. By the same token, the chapel that serves as shooting location is not desecrated by the presence of prodigal pop musicians but adds to the spirituality and sanctity of the performance, also emphasized by the quasi-religious procession at the end of the video. Another video – 'C (Where art thou, Muse)' performed by the band named W. H. – removes the presumed barrier between the gracefulness of William Shakespeare' sonnet and the minimalism of the long take. Shot at night in a cottage, the five-minute-long sequence shot 'meditates on' the cosmic struggle between darkness and light: the absence of poetic inspiration and arrival of the Muse. Shakespeare's lyrical reflection on creativity is visualized in a likewise lyrical tracking shot showing the lead singer enter the premises where band members play in a pitch-dark room. The lighting design, employing diffusers and filters, transforms the premises into a mental space, the struggles of which are expressed through the symbolism of light. Flickering bulbs come to be associated with inspirational energies thrusting forth, darkness expresses their drying up while the strong illumination from glaring floodlights placed outside windows are associated with enlightenment. The continuity of the sequence shot becomes a 'thought-sequence' as Shakespearean lyre is visualized and the images are musicalized: it the dialogue between musical performance and the pulsating light that render legible the intellectual struggle for creativity (Figure 5).

The method as retroscape-ing

Close readings of selected videos explain the double goal of Szimler and Rév to achieve a unique artistic agency by not imitating past music videos' styles and to articulate a generational identity and canon by realizing the visual and aural space of the here and the now. Nevertheless, we do injustice to the method if we limit its exploration to stylistic matters and do not acknowledge its strategies that point towards the communalization of music

Figure 5. Pulsating light effects in W. H.'s 'C (Where art thou, Muse)'.

experience and memory work. After all, Lake Balaton is not just a movie set and a sound recording studio but an affective space underlined by a certain sense of post-socialist nostalgia and retro.

The lake has always enjoyed an iconic place in Hungarian pop music, it is referred to in the much hated and/or loved but still very popular songs such as Anikó Felföldi's 'Nekem a Balaton a riviéra' ('Balaton is My Riviera', 1960), KFT's 'Balatoni nyár' ('Balaton Summer', 1985) or 4F Club's hit 'Balatoni láz' ('Balaton Fever', 1996), just to name a few. Most Hungarians know the lyrics of these song whether they ever cared to learn them or not. For those who came of age between the 1960s and the 1990s, Lake Balaton symbolized the ultimate Hungarian holiday destination and site of initiation, where freedom, love and the simple pleasures of life were available. The place is deeply engraved in popular memory as the success of Zsigmond Papp Gábor's *Balaton Retro* (2007) proves, a film that catalogues general perceptions, imaginations, stereotypes and socio-cultural practices that defined lakeside vacations for post-millenial nostalgia and retro. *Balaton Method* evokes Papp's film both through visual quotes and the cultural status of this holiday resort.

Even though *Balaton Method* is ultimately a snapshot of the contemporary Hungarian alternative music scene, it does link up with nostalgic and retro images of Lake Balaton to establish a shared socio-cultural background for the generation of Hungarian artists appearing in the film. Thus, Lake Balaton can be simultaneously read as a filmic and cultural *scene*, the latter understood as a shared affective space where, as youngsters, the members of the bands gained formative experiences. As one critic pointed out, 'music and Balaton are two things that to some extent connect all of us. Balaton has been a silent witness to our childhood, family holidays, freshers' camps, first loves, growing up, it is a shared point in the Hungarian unconscious. The embodiment of retro, still current, and thus served as a perfect set for the shooting' (Palotás 2015). Although the artists' private memories are not emphasized in the clips themselves, the power of generational memory was recognized by a series of sponsored spots in which each performer featured in the film was invited to improvise

a 30-second song based on their most formative Balaton-related memories.[9] Since most of the artists were children or teenagers around the time of the change of the regime in 1990, what they recollect has typically to do with first love, anxieties, parties and various kinds of transgressions and rites of passage. The lake continues to link formative personal experience and popular music, especially as many of Hungary's most significant international summer festivals – including Balaton Sound in Zamárdi, Valley of Arts in Kapolcs, Strand Festival in Zamárdi and B.my.Lake in Keszthely – transform the lakeside into a paradise of youth culture. These annual festivalscapes not only define present-day perceptions of Lake Balaton as a cultural scene but accumulate, in the manner of Michel Foucault's understanding of heterotopia, past imaginations and material signifiers of life and entertainment under state socialist decades.

Spaces belonging to this era are featured heavily in the videos, whether they are easily recognizable or more symptomatically depicted. The railway station and the familiar signal of Hungarian National Railway (MÁV) in Grand Mexican Warlock's video could be in any lakeside resort, just like the canteen of a former summer camp for children in Punnany Massif's, the water slide in Subscribe's, and the *plage* with sunbathing adult and kids building sand castles in Fran Palermo's song. The ferry between Szántód and Tihany in the song by Bin-Jip is easily recognizable and so is Hotel Ezüstpart in Siófok (opened in 1983) which recalls the state-'Socialist golden age of the lake. Having served as a retro hotel on the southern shore of the lake, the building was closed down soon after the song 'Tulipános' by the band Napra was shot on the premises. The spectacular facade of the hotel, reminiscent of a tic-tac-toe board, allowed for the creative use of the crane shot: each band member occupied the balcony of a hotel room and the camera moved from one to the next. The grandiosity of the long take, in this case, resulted from the sheer size of the building (Figure 6).

Besides symptomatic and iconic spaces around the lake, the many water vehicles – paddleboats, rowing boats, sailboats – and old socialist cars, like Ladas, Wartburgs, Polski Fiats

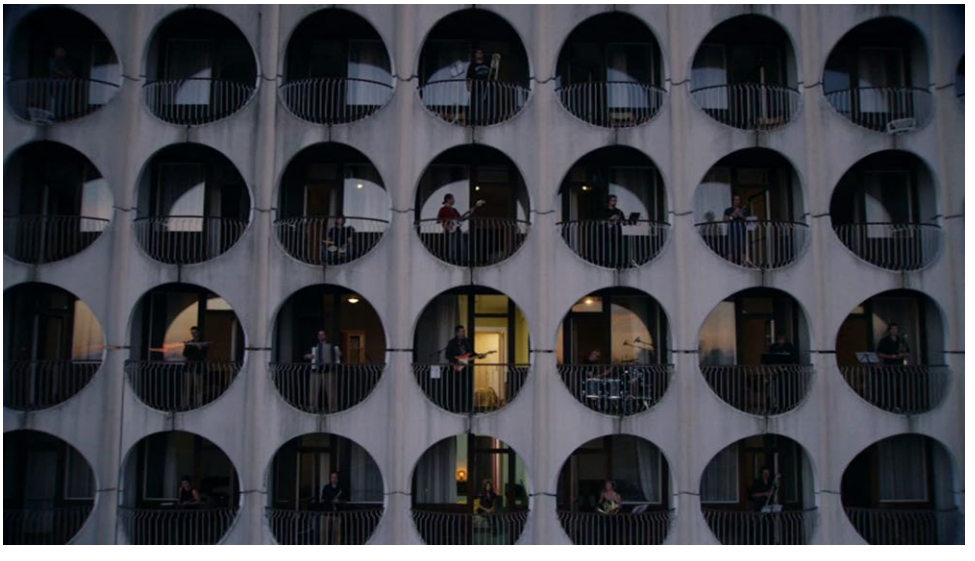

Figure 6. Hotel Ezüstpart in Siófok reinterpreted as a retro concert setting.

are featured in music videos as integral parts of the Balaton-retroscape. The video of Dirty Flow Club's song by the title 'Self Piti' spotlights the nostalgic VW T2s, the so-called hippy-buses, which not only recall the global youth movement but also alludes to thousands of West Germans who travelled to Lake Balaton every summer to unite with friends and relatives from the DDR. In the video of 'Das Land' performed by the Kamikaze Scotsmen a classical American convertible crusier appears, a timeless symbol of freedom and Western affluence. Other space-specific tropes like sailing, eating langosh, taking a ferry in the sunset, train journeys, camping out at night in the woods, socializing with Western tourists, carving love messages into the bark of wood. These simple pleasures have proven equally appealing to Hungarians and foreigners, just like the featured songs can capture audiences within and beyond the contemporary alternative music scene of Hungary.

Youth culture is further emphasized by flashmob-like scenarios with musicians emerging from the lake or getting off a train, seizing public spaces for performances while locals and tourists serve as a curious, puzzled and spellbound audience. Such spontaneous musicking expresses non-conformism with established forms of staging music and also accentuates the counter-cultural appeals of many featured bands. This is especially true for Quimby, the most prominent band appearing in *Balaton Method* and an important influence for the post-millennial Hungarian underground scene. The video of their song 'Jön a huzat valahonnan' (There Is a Draught Coming from Somewhere) was filmed in the narrow spaces of a lakeside cottage inhabited by band members and their friends. The clip is introduced by a shots of half-drunk musicians talking about turning 40 and singing traditional Hungarian Gypsy folk songs around a table. The song captures the mood of the morning after both musically and visually: filmed in a sequence shot, the singer moves around empty bottles and exhausted, sleepy people. The complex manoeuvres of the Steadycam in the narrow corridors captures both the slowness and melancholic lyricism of the hungover and the intimacy that exists between the company of friends. In contrast with the commercial accommodations of Lake Balaton, the holiday home featured in the video foregrounds privacy: a retreat from public entertainment and mass culture.

All shooting locations of *Balaton Method* are gender-neutral, except for the pub, illustrated explicitly in Middlemist Red's 'Aanimal'. The video of the psychedelic rock band which performs one of their hits to a completely dumbfounded audience of silently drinking men comments on the general position of the alternative music scene in Hungary. Bearing in mind that pubs are masculinized sites of intentional forgetting, we see middle-aged men, presumably regulars, sitting and observing as a silent audience not particularly moved, even less fascinated by what they see and hear. Although stoical faces of men, resembling forgotten objects from a previous age are not a rare sight in pubs, the video implies that present-day Hungarian alternative music does not thrive to satisfy rock and roll's vigorously masculine ideals.

Intergenerational encounters: from nostalgia to retro

As we have contended in the previous section, *Balaton Method* subscribes to nostalgia and retro in the presentation of what it perceives as the progressive sounds of Hungarian popular and alternative music. The paradox of this statement lies in the divergent agencies of nostalgia's backward-looking conservativeness and the innovative progressiveness of alternative music. In other words, is not the expression of generational experience through nostalgia

and retro (the common past) is a way of admitting that the present lacks empowering impulses and shared values (common goals)? To explore this paradox, we turn to the theoretical differentiation of these two forms of popular memory and also its specific Eastern European contexts.

Nostalgia has been a popular academic buzzword in the past few years as part of the so-called 'memory boom', to use Andreas Huyssen's expression for the revival of memory studies within the omnivorous field of cultural studies. Approaching the notion in general, the relationship between nostalgia and the post-modern, fragmented view of history appears to be a central element: 'it has often been remarked that postmodernism is characterised by nostalgia, perceived as a longing for the past that stands in the way of historical analysis' (Cook 2005, xii). Nostalgia not only offers a perception of the past as something unified but also 'becomes, consequently, a way to transform the past by imagination' (Niemeyer 2014, 10), exactly via its inability to approach its subject analytically. Understood as an ambivalent personal and cultural emotion, 'nostalgia could consequently present a symptom of progress, but also of crisis' (Niemeyer 2014, 2), unavoidably loaded with various ideological meanings. On the whole, it becomes a device to produce affectively meaningful connections with the past on the collective, social level.

All these features – related to the memory work of nostalgia as an effective way of simultaneously connecting with and detaching from the past – are given a special twist in the case of Eastern-European nostalgia, also often called Ostalgia. In her influential study of post-socialist Hungarian nostalgia, Maya Nadkarni also claims that 'the power of nostalgia in post-socialist Hungary lay not merely in how it helped Hungarians to recuperate the past independent of current political considerations, but also how it enabled them to articulate cultural value in the present' (Nadkarni 2010, 206). Nadkarni also associates nostalgia with the production of a kind of national initiation narrative: 'The political transition was thus often narrated as a collective coming-of-age, in which the demise of paternal authority brought about a painful but necessary loss of innocence' (199); and adds that 'the popularity of nostalgia in the Hungarian context was less concerned with reviving the socialist past than with making sense of the post-socialist present' (192).

Although there are, as discussed previously, certain elements of nostalgia in *Balaton Method*, it does not adopt what Frederick Jameson has called the 'nostalgia mode' (1991) and defined as a stylistically conveyed pastness. Rév and Szimler's work has nothing to do with music films like *Csinibaba* (*Dollybirds*, 1997) by Péter Tímár and *Made in Hungaria* (2008) by Gergely Fonyó which present Sixties music through 'the history of aesthetic styles' (Jameson 1991, 20). Not only the single-take aesthetics of *Balaton Method* differ radically from the glamourizing styles of these two films, but so does the music featured in them. Certain types of popular music, like Schlager and dance music were not only welcomed by state-socialist youth in general but also commissioned and heavily supported by state authorities. The historical roots of post-millennial alternative musical scene, by contrast, are to be found in the counterhegemonic popular musical and artistic practice of the state socialist era. As John Connell and Chris Gibson contend, these have 'often challenged the authority and legitimacy of state systems, including repressive colonial and neo-colonial regimes, communist regimes (in the last years of the Eastern Bloc) and various forms of nationalism and capitalism; likewise, music has also contested systems of hetero-patriarchy' (Connell 2003, 129). The authors also elaborate on the Eastern-European significance of popular music, including Hungary, claiming that due to its political implications it was

more of an elite, acquired taste than a really popular, mainstream response to the oppressive political climate.

These insights about the heritage of popular music can be fruitfully applied in the interpretation of *Balaton Method*, since the film's seemingly apolitical approach differs from the non-political agency of nostalgia. Quimby's 'Jön a huzat valahonnan' is the sole example of a video with symbolic political framing. The song ends with the police knocking on the door of the fancy lakeside house where the band has been partying, suggesting that the presence of surveillance and authoritative power is inescapable, that Big Brother is still watching. Apart from Quimby (whose members are the oldest among all featured performers) none of the individual or collective memories evoked are connected to specific state-socialist political contents (political parties, politicians or landmark historical events). Most of them are apolitical, addressing topics like love, music and friendship, and maybe this is the strongest generational bond uniting artists and also a central element of scene-building. But does the intentional silence and lack of interest when it comes to politics mean that the videos of *Balaton Method* have no politics? We believe it does not. In fact, we contend that the repossessing the iconic sites of Lake Balaton as non-post-socialist but simply familiar locations of memories of love and inspiration is a conscious act of defying nostalgia.

Unlike nostalgia, Elizabeth E. Guffey's definition of retro – as an attitude which 'considers the recent past with an unsentimental nostalgia' (2006, 11) – suits well the appeal of *Balaton Method* to both mainstream musical subcultures and resignify the nostalgic post-communist heritage site of Lake Balaton. Expounding the difference between nostalgia and retro, Guffley claims that 'if retro must be linked with nostalgia, then, to paraphrase the writer Peter de Vries, nostalgia isn't what it used to be. Where nostalgia is linked to a romantic sensibility that resonates with ideas of exile and longing, retro tempers these associations with a heavy dose of cynicism or detachment; although retro looks back to earlier periods, perhaps its most enduring quality is its ironic stance' (Guffey 2006, 20). Retro's specific characteristics include a concern with the relatively immediate past, reliance on available archived documentation, an interest in artefacts of popular culture and a tendency neither to idealize nor sentimentalize the past (Reynolds 2011, xxx). Based on these features, Reynolds grasps retro through its reference 'to a self-conscious fetish for period stylisation (in music, clothes, design) expressed creatively through pastiche and citation' (Reynolds 2011, xii–xiii). The retroscapes of *Balaton Method* are reliant on 'recycling and recombining: the bricolage of cultural bric-a-brac' (Reynolds 2011, xxx–xxxi) underline this point. Retrochic prevails in the already discussed 'instrumentalization' of the post-socialist material environment to create music but also in the visual references Szimler and Rév make to archival material. When Papp's previously mentioned *Balaton Retro* is cited in the film, images are liberated from their original context, the political discourse about the Kádár-era and of Goulash Communism is dismissed and the visual properties of the original footage gain in importance. For instance, the archival footage quoted from Balaton Retro showing people hitchhiking to Lake Balaton follows the video of the band Dirty Flow Club which was shoot in its entirety through the windows of car. Here, motivic continuity serves as the organizing principle. The same archival quote ends with Demjén Ferenc and the Bergendy Band performing their hit by the title 'Balaton' on the lakeside. The sequence is cut as the song reaches a sharp trumpet melody and the footage shows a sailboat on the lake. The video that follows, Subscribe's 'Ringside seat', begins with a zoom-shot of a white sail while the song also contains a distinct wind section creating a motivic continuity both in terms

Figure 7. Motivic continuities between *Balaton Method* and Zsigmond Papp Gábor's *Balaton Retro*.

of image and sound. These examples demonstrate how *Balaton Method* consumes *Balaton Retro* and uses the 'retro mode' as a technique of re-attribution, as a method of transforming an image with ideological depth into a surface of sheer materiality (Figure 7).

Balaton Method thus plays out the friskiness of retro against the seriousness of nostalgia. Another explicit articulation of its politics is the choice to finance the film not through state funds but crowdfunding and hold screenings all across the country, especially for high school students, to spread it on free flash drives the creators scattered around Budapest, to design a webpage attractive to the eye, make as much material available on YouTube as possible and publish a DVD edition with an extra disc of behind-the-scenes footage. Apart from these strategies of generational community-building, the principle achievement of this approach is to speak the voice of Generation Y and Z for many members of which national belonging and the current political situation are not central issues, who do not mind if a Hungarian band sings in English, or that the singer of the same band is an Afro-American woman (Sena from W. H.). On the whole, the politics of the film is to voice and reach the Balaton Method generation.

Conclusion

Balaton Method is an intergeneric and intergenerational audio-visual experiment in mainstreaming Hungarian alternative and underground music while resignifying through retro memory an iconic site of national heritage. This article first explored the difficulty of placing the film into existing generic categories and proposed the label of the live music video which acknowledges the method introduced in the film. In our understanding, this method originates from the long take aesthetic, that is, the creation of uninterrupted aural and visual spaces which, in the present case, fit organically into the physical sites of Lake Balaton. We argued that the complex technical stylistic procedures aimed to create musical-cinematic sequences create unified transmedial and transgenerational experiences, and articulate an artistic agency, which is produced and shared communally. While the first part of the article addressed the poetics of the method, the second part examined its politics: its relationship

to post-socialist nostalgia and retro as affective and ideological forms of memory. In this part, we no longer focused on the visual-aural construction of space but its affective dimensions embraced by the cultural heritage of state socialism, and the musicians' generational and childhood memory. We found that the agency of contemporary popular and underground music subscribes to the affective space of retro: a more creative, unsentimental and consumer-oriented form of memory than nostalgia.

Even though Márton Hó and the Ice Age in the music video of 'Hello, Purgatory!' sing that 'I've never understood this generation thing', the film really is a multi-genre generational experience very much rooted both in the past and the present moment. As Anita Libor contends, the videos of *Balaton Method* add up to 'a blueprint of our everyday life. They bring a generation together. With each other or with a different generation' (Libor 2015). The film is a collage that questions traditional barriers and established relations between image and music, popular and alternative, poetics and politics. The visual, aural, fractured, scenic and hybrid spaces of Szimler and Rév bring Lake Balaton to life as seldom seen, yet, the lake also enters the film and enriches it with a rare fluidity and liveliness.

Notes

1. The following songs are featured in the film: Akkezdet Phiai & Amoeba's 'Vagy mindegy' (Or Whatever), Bin-Jip's 'Heavy', Dirty Flow Club's 'Self Pity', Elefánt's 'Bordahajtogató' (Rib Folding), Fran Palermo's 'Am I Right Boy', Grand Mexican Warlock's 'Love Struggle', Hó Márton és a Jégkorszak's 'Helló, Purgatórium' (Hello, Purgatory), Jónás Vera Experiment's 'Send Your Love', Kamikaze Scotsmen's 'Das Land' (The Land), Middlemist Red's 'Aanimal', mindenkinek megvan a maga története's: 'el kell' (Having To Let Go), Napra's 'Tulipános' (Tulip), Punnany Massif's 'Részletek' (Details), Quimby's 'Jön a huzat valahonnan/Kaktuszliget' (There's a Draught Coming from Somewhere/Cacti Grove), Soerii & Poolek's 'Valahol messze' (Somwhere Far Away), Subscribe's 'Ringside Seat', W. H.'s C', and Bajdázó's 'lekapcsolom a villanyt a fejemben' (I swith the light down in my head).
2. Lángos (Hungarian pronunciation: ['laːŋgoʃ]) is a Hungarian food speciality, a disc-shaped deep fried dough, typically served fresh with savoury toppings such as garlic sauce, cheese, ham or sour cream, it is a typical beach food any can only be eaten in a 'messy' way.
3. The so-called Kodály method, also referred to as the Kodály concept, is a way of developing musical skills in very young children and teaching musical concepts from an early age on. The method, named after the legendary Hungarian composer, Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967), uses a child-developmental approach to sequence, introducing skills according to the capabilities of the child.
4. See the following websites for more information about the creators' video blog called *Kodály Method*: https://port.hu/adatlap/film/tv/kodaly-method-kodaly-method/movie-129877 and http://www.komethod.com/.
5. The first instance of the long take being associated with music numbers is the opening scene from Busby Berkley *The Gang's All Here* (1943).
6. Another kind of typology differentiates between six subgenres in terms of their relationship to the display of performance: (1) the anti-performance piece – videos which do not contain performance of the song; (2) pseudo-reflexive performance – videos which display the process of video production; (3) the performance documentary – videos which contain vérité documentary footage of onstage performance and/or off-stage activity; (4) the special effects extravaganza – videos in which human performance is overshadowed by spectacular imagery; (5) the song and dance number – videos which focus on the physical abilities of the dancing performer(s) and the vocal presentation of the song, usually through lip-synching techniques; and (6) the enhanced performance – videos which blend performance elements with other visual elements, a blend justified through either associational, narrative or abstract forms of motivation (Railton 2011, 47–48).

7. Hungarian Gypsy music is often erroneously represented as the only music of the Roma. In the Hungarian language, 19th-century folk styles like the csardas and the verbunkos are collectively referred to as cigányzene, which translates literally as Gypsy music (see Sárosi 1997).
8. A pun combining the figure of Vejnemöjnen from the Finnish epic Kalevala (Finnish is a Finno-Ugric language, just like Hungarian) and the name of Andy Vajna, the Hungarian film producer, who has made a career in Hollywood (*Rambo, Terminator*) and then returned to Hungary and since 2011 become the government commissioner for the development of national cinema.
9. Available on YouTube, the short videos served both as promotion for the film and a continuation of the Balaton Method project. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLTpABhH-sc&list=PL8h7tL4qcxSmYACdOoB3e9NfLu0p34nUG.

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