

# **Theses of Doctoral (Ph.D.) Dissertation**

The *fin de siècle* Budapest – The Narratives of the Modern Metropolis

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## I. *Aims of the Thesis*

My thesis deals with *fin de siècle* Budapest. I analyse the cultural milieu of the Monarchic capital, reading it as modern metropolis with special focus on its representational features.

For my purposes of analysis, I apply the critical apparatus of so-called 'city-discourses', which let me interpret the city/metropolis as a discursive phenomenon, mediated by textual representations, sociocultural aggregates, architectural constructions and their supplementary descriptions or depictions. My research shows special interest in the different modes of mediation: I ask, for example, how a 'fictional city-historiography' conveys *fin de siècle* Budapest-images in a literary novel (originally published as a series of newspaper articles), or how contemporaneous maps, guidebooks and postcards do the same. I try to 'map the traces' of these figurative and representational processes with the help of media-archeological studies. (My terminology and methodology primarily resembles contemporary media studies.)

Interpreting urban space requires the reader to reflect upon the very texture, the materiality of signs and sign systems, that make up the city as a meaningful entity. One can only decipher symbolic meanings if (s)he becomes aware of the medium. Any reading of the mentioned city-texts should be produced by careful 'detectation': only by following the signs or textual traces of 'the thing that is not there' (namely: *the city*), and by preambulating imaginative *loci*, can one seize these places as mental representations. The city, then, turns out to be a discursive effect of rhetorical and pictorial space construction.

In my thesis, I also deal with the 'narrated city': the city, that is represented, that is a product and medium of narration rather than merely being a scene or locale for the plot. This explains why I do not endeavour to give an overall review of *fin de siècle* Budapest-novels and other fictional texts thematizing on the Monarchic capital. I tend to emphasize, instead, how the city as a many-folded cultural medium functions and is created. This consideration has been my guideline in selecting the sets of material that I analyze in my dissertation.

As recent researches convince us, modern metropolis is more than a complex socio-economical entity, it is a rather unique and characteristic socio-cultural milieu, transmitted and (at least partly) stored by each nation's cultural memory. This view justifies for applying the disciplinary scope of media archeology. It allows for a double-reading of urban textures: Our reading imagination either scans and 'palpates' these material surfaces (texts, pictures,

maps) in order to get technically mediated representations of the city; or (re)produces a recognizable 'imaginary city' and allows for reflecting on its tangible and material aspects.

Modern metropolis is of interest for recent research in several disciplinary fields, including urban anthropology, anthropology, literary, cultural and media studies. Seen in a cultural-historical context, the phenomenological complex that we call 'metropolis' or 'the city', rearticulates many modernity-problems as representational issues. My thesis also inquires how Budapest, this modern national metropolis of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, is read by (various) sign clusters, made up of either architectonic or narrative Budapest-images; and how these readings reveal the technical-material character of the given representation. The analysis also includes a comparative study of *modernity* and '*metropolitannes*', in order to make the concept 'modern metropolis' operational for Budapest-discourses.

With the emergence of modernity, extensive changes and a rapid technicalization of urban environment has resulted in unprecedentedly modified visual stimuli, which has even affected perceptual mechanisms. As a result of speedy transport or newly introduced infrastructural developments (e.g. street lighting) perceptual conditions have been transformed and human experience modified. Also vice versa: alterations in perceptual experience has their impact on space and city-representation. Such a phenomenon as 'modern metropolis' is perfect model for observing both perceptual schemes and the pragmatics of social space. Metropolis seems to be a *par excellence* spatial metaphor for modernity. The modern metropolis subsists exactly by 'accomodating' the most fundamental cultural practices and social establishments of modernity, as much as it generates modernisation itself. In other words: *modernity* produces special forms of spatiality that induce its own escalation. Modernity and the metropolis seems to be mutually intelligible definitions.

In the introductory chapters, I make a short *excursion* in the field of 'city studies' which has been deeply influencing academic criticism lately. Then I present a case study of such literary analysis, where I examine, how narrative biography and urban history-narration are interrelated on the narrative level in Krúdy Gyula's *Budapest vőlegénye* (*The Bridegroom of Budapest*). From among Krúdy's novels I have chosen this particular text to demonstrate that typical features of urban experience do not necessarily appear on the thematic level, but might as well gain poetic function and become relevant on the narrative level: here, such factors as speed e.g. turn out to organize the whole dynamism of forgetting–remembering processes within bourgeois identity-formation. I supplement narratological analysis of the novel with a media-archeological scope on the text. *Budapest vőlegénye* fictionalizes the city as a piece of text, constantly being written/recorded, as a sample of symbolic representation

with indefinable textual origin. It enacts a narrative voice that keeps commenting on the technical apparatus that materially makes this 'cityscopic' representation possible.

From among postcards, I have selected a set of so-called panorama picture cards. They display remarkable and quite characteristic images of the Monarchic Budapest, still stored in Hungarian cultural memory as *the real face* of the genuinely modern national capital. These panorama picture cards retain certain trifles, street details, signals of public practices as well – each of them are particularly emblematic of modernity. The way the postcards 'remember' the places/loci/locale makes them real 'lieux de mémoire', for it is via these photographs that Hungarian cultural memory conceptualizes *fin de siècle* metropolitan space.

I also deal with maps and guidebooks, which are exceptionally telling as 'city discourses'. Cartographic illustrations are able to unfold crucial structural and infrastructural changes of the city which has been transforming from its 19th century urbanity into a modern metropolis. As a result, the united Budapest (or: Pest-Buda) managed to fulfill her two most prestigious roles: she became the representative twin-capital of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; and a desirable, comfortable and sanitary target for tourists. In connection to with the latter role, one can observe the plans concerning city organization and space structuring by Fővárosi Közmunkák Tanácsa (Bureau of Public Services) which, in a sense, might be called *narratives-of-the-capital* as well. I read guidebooks as potential (by-)products of a new social practice, that emerged towards the end of the 19th century, and soon became an extensive travelling habit, especially popular among citizens: tourism. Tourism is a typical social attitude in modern pop culture; a constitutive cultural behaviour that has accompanied and accelerated the urbanisation of bourgeois society. In so-called 'city tourism' space gets spectacularized, what calls forth a new type of traveller: the hobby-tourist. Experiencing re-shaped, pre-formed, performative urban space (designed for touristic purposes) establishes new identities both for the tourist itself and for the city (which as a touristic target). These identificational processes will be fostered, implemented and transmitted by touristic guidebooks. The books somewhat schematize space usage by creating and maintaining certain cultural routines. Such routines, in fact, conditionalize the perception of the city, as they set up a narrative framework for urban experience. This interpretational framework includes a set of narrative clichés and pre-made scenarios like: approximation of the place, tariffs and means of public transport, local habits, facilities for accommodation, famous city sights. Sight-seeing tours and grand historical narratives play an extraordinarily important role in the newly evolving, marketable city-identities. With their descriptive techniques and tactics, guidebooks

become integrative parts of modern city-discourses, thus it is unavoidable to discuss them here.

## ***II. Applied Methods***

The primary aim of my thesis is to examine how metropolitan space is culturally constructed, how the topography of this cultural space is textualized or otherwise represented, and how the different forms of mediation become subject (or, at least, field of interest) in the several branches of literary and cultural studies. My interpretative framework necessarily involves space theories by the two French thinkers Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau, both of whom have integrated their comparative observations on the heterogeneity of places (and on spatial experience in general) into systematized topological discourses. As the analysed material contains maps, picture postcards and other pictoriographical objects, it seemed reasonable to apply the descriptive methods of visual anthropology by Hans Belting. I point out in my thesis, that technical-material conditions of mediating the city, like reproductional technologies (of picture postcards, e.g.) or cartographical delienatory regulations (in the case of city maps) quite actively bias our understanding of city space, and contribute to modernity-symptoms. As for this 'media-archeological' context, I follow current theoretical trends initiated by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Sybille Krämer.

Since the late 1990s and especially around 2000, scientific interest in 'city researches' has become conspicuously intensive, even in Hungarian Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies. The volume entitled *Terek és szövegek- Újabb perspektívák a városkutatásban (Places and Texts. New Perspectives on City studies)* is an excellent summary of the main achievements of this revival. This collection of critical essays present the dominant research methods and the most decisive theoretical trends, queries of recent Hungarian 'city studies'. The mentioned researches provide interpretative context for 'reading' and understanding *the city* by closely collocating the concepts of *text* and *space*. This approach allows for a special reading of urbanism where the city appears as a discursive space made up of texts. City texts, in fact, are readable as textures that are able to display, or even construct the cultural meanings of urban topography. *Terek és szövegek* informs the reader what the main focuses of contemporary Hungarian city studies are: the city as text(ure) shaped by architecture and spatial topography; the city as (a set of) cultural practice(s); and '*the narrated city*' as urban milieu. The book separates some distinctive areas of academic study: those that concentrate on city narratives written in architecturally constructed urban environment; those that analyse certain cultural practices and behavioral patterns connected to public space; and those that read

the city as a narrative place (topos) generated by the medium of photography, film, poetry and prose fiction. This repertory of current research locates Hungarian city studies in an interdisciplinary terrain and contextualizes their subject matter inter-discursively. The way I discuss the *modern metropolis* owes a lot to all these new approaches.

If one talks about Hungarian city discourse(s), it is hardly possible to leave Gyáni Gábor and Hanák Péter unmentioned. Hanák Péter, in his book entitled *Kert és műhely (The Garden and the Yard)*, interprets urban phenomena in a Monarchic context. The *garden* and the *yard* are his leading metaphors in narrating, how urbanisation, citizenship, informal popular culture and the formal cultural establishment create a metropolitan milieu, with respect to the system of cultural relations between *fin de siècle* Bécs and Budapest. The two spatial metaphors designate similarities and differences of the two Monarchic 'twin-capitals'. *Garden* is meant to represent the identity crisis of Austrian cultural-intellectual elite, and their escapism into an artistically articulated self-representation against public and private decadence (that has been triggered by individualisation). *Yard* can be assigned to the self-assertive social attitude in the dynamic, industrializing milieu of rapidly urbanising Budapest, still not without intellectual refinement and artistic cultivation. This mirroring of the two cultural 'cityscopes' enacts their topography as self-portraits of urban-mentality: that of the grand baroque imperial centre *versus* that of the modern, progressive national capital.

Gyáni Gábor, who follows Hanák's researches on Budapest, chooses another perspective to investigate and discuss city history: New Historism, particularly the discourse of microhistorical inquiries and narrative historiography. In his foundational book *Az utca és a szalon, A társadalmi térhasználat Budapesten, 1870-1940 (The Street and the Saloon, Public Space and What It is Used for in Budapest betw. 1870-1940)*, Gyáni examines, how public space is used by the society of a 19th century metropolis, and how city-topology differentiates itself into micro-structures like: the circus/ringroad, the boulevard, the street, the department store, the parlour, and the café. Gyáni reads these as symbolic structures of public space, which localize and 'stage' certain socio-cultural practices that are characteristic of the modern metropolis. One of the most beneficial contribution of Gyáni's research to Hungarian criticism is that he introduces the discursive aspect into city studies, and shows, how the complexity and heterogeneity of the city or the metropolis is interdependent upon a range of symbolic social rites. Gyáni tells his readers about public and semi-public places: his stories are narratives of city space, historiographies of the modernizing metropolis and of Austro-Hungarian citizenry. Furthermore, he interprets urban experience as *spectacle* and

*aliennness* in reformulates it terms of topological narratives. Understanding the city through this optics draws a profile of *fin de siècle* Budapest as modern metropolis.

Modern metropolis as an aesthetical object raises questions concerning 'the representative' versus 'the represented' city. Metropolitan Budapest-images are not only present in built or social spaces of the bourgeois public, but are coded inasmuch in percetional patterns and artistic representations of the city. In this point, let me refer back to Gyáni's inventive concepts which still influece present-day discussions on the topic.

### **III. Results**

In my thesis I try to reveal some inherent characteristics of fictional and non-fictional city texts, and distinguish between representational strategies of written and pictorial, graphic and photographic representations. Their heterogenity resides in the materiality and medium of these images, what, of course, results in differences of semiosis and semantisation. A fictional text and a touristic guidebook obviously conveys alternative city images. Likewise, the percetional and interpretative framework of 'mapping' the metropolitan environment can not be the same when it appears in an imaginative biography or in a guidebook. In the former case, narrative strategies already set up a perspective or point of view for the reader and mark all the fictional places as 'probable' or 'realistic', yet not necessarily 'real.' In the latter case, guidebook-rhetorics conceal the signifying process, and rather make the represented city-images 'transparent' (with zero self-referentiality), in order to channel the reader's attention on the actual *locus*. If the tourist is able to identify the narrated place, reading is succesful. This extraneous condition of referentiality is a distinctive factor between fictional and non-fictional texts.

City image is not a mere message conveyed by mediums, but also a surface 'stained' by the materiality of other media: literary fiction as such, bears the traces of other texts, and traces of 'the imaginary' (by Iser); while touristical writings are imprinted by the scanning look of the tourist. Once it enters this medial transfer, the city itself becomes medium: throughout the reading process it transmits a geniune experience of place – which makes it eventually readable.

As opposed to guidebooks, fictional texts resist any reading strategy that would try to correlate the narrated places with actual building constructions. While urban *loci* of touristic texts get their final form architecturally (supposing that we leave their written form unmentioned), fictional topology is located in the *imaginary*. How something becomes

readable and meaningful, largely depends on the navigation between these two mediums. Referential readings of guidebook texts are supported by pictoriography: we find illustrative pictures embedded in most of these texts. Turn of the century guidebooks already made use of photographs and city maps. (Let me note, however, that not each of the analysed guidebooks contain the latter.) An *itinerary*, e.g., combines the materiality of the written word, the photograph and the city map to 'delineate' the city. Reading, in this case, turns out to be a multimedial act: one sets up medial connections, and concentrates on the indexicality and iconicity of the written sign (either textual or pictorial sign) in favour of successful semiotisation. Fictional texts, on the other hand, are monomedial and prefer the symbolic reading of linguistic signs.

Krúdy's novel observes Budapest through the contrastive optics of *Egy régi gavallér emlékiratai* (*Memoires of an Old-Fashioned Gallant*) by Podmaniczky Szilárd, of the narrator's own *fictive biography* and of the iterative textual memory of urban anecdotes. A fictional synopsis of the 19th century, evoked by the tiny scrapings of a quill-pen, contrasted with those 'speedy' 20th century trams, which hamper the old man on his daily walks, presents the (metro)polis in its ever-changing identity. The fictional text itself becomes a store, a 'reservoir' of textual (and non-textual) traces, however, rhetorical flows make this reservoir dynamic. Due to the amount of repetitions and paraphrases, city sights are emptying themselves, and, devoid of the pragmatics of space use, reflect on their own linguistic-rhetorical constructedness. Self-comments on the tangibility of writing make Budapest a locus produced by literary codification.

Budapest guidebooks (by Gelléri Mór, Hevesi Lajos and Karl Baedeker), on the contrary, are designed for practical purposes: they presuppose, that the 'written city' (the representation) is able to point to the *objectness/thingness* of built space. This type of semiosis obviously requires medial shifts: the given city-image has to be shuttled between textual space and spatial texture. Textual signs must be made transparent, which is only possible if reading becomes conscious of the materiality of the given maps and photos. In fact, it is the eye of the tourist, that realizes this transparency and transports those *loci* into the *real*. The moment the city-user recognizes the 'written place' being the very *locus* (s)he is actually 'mapping' or (s)he has just ranged through, is the exact moment of identification/illumination. It is the moment of identifying one sign as the index of another. According to media arceology, the looking eye has to pierce (through) the physical body of the sign in order to reach the various strata of the distant meaning. If one talks about

guidebooks, this penetrative look has to convert the written text to photographic views and cognitive images.

As for the attached maps: they do not only contain cartographical signs, but iconical signs as well, assist visual orientation and help the viewer to select the data offered by literary descriptions or photographic representations of city architecture. Descriptions, photographs and maps are convertible to each other in the guidebook context. Signifier and signified become mutual substitutes within the same medial framework. Perceiving a sign via either one presupposes a number of reflections on the other, for each message is medium-dependent, and retains traces of the material transmitter if it wants to remain readable.

City representations gain symbolic function in these touristic guidebooks. Originally, the given historic brochures, canonical photos, annotated maps were to mobilize pragmatic knowledge and activate the reader's general competence of topographic orientation. Once they are no longer valid or actually applicable, they turn to be archives: they store contents of collective cultural memory and construct 'topological memorials' of the modern national capital. Published literary texts, in their mediality, store other city-versions, while they keep aesthetic distance from the represented contents through a number of fictional transgressions. Literary texts are free to create *possible places*, or tell alternatively (re)constructed (hi)stories of the past; thus playing an active role in cultural remembrance. Whether a city image is labelled as '*probable-realistic*' or as '*navigational*', depends on their media-environment. Material properties of the different media types (or different modes of mediation) organize respective discursive orders and rules of interpretation: either as touristic or as literary.

Instead of attributing the distinctive differences between the image-making processes, mapping and representational technologies of the mentioned texts simply to their inherent discursive properties ('fictional' versus 'touristic'), I would rather conclude with stating: modern metropolis itself (either as cultural phenomenon or as a new mode of perception and the public experience of space) exists exclusively in representational forms, largely dependent upon the material medium.

Literary texts, thus, construct city-images as symbolic representations of textual origin, while they keep reflecting also on tangible aspects of writing. Within the fictional framework, the narrator comments on the technical apparatus and material conditions of how the given 'cityscope' is being recorded.

Guidebooks also call into mind the material aspects of semiotizing the city and how it is displayed for the reader's eye: by connecting different modes of representation and incompatible medium-reading techniques (texts, photographs, tabloids, schematic maps), they

set up cognitive correlations and collocate different perceptual patterns, which then organize the process of semiosis. Such city-images bear indexical-iconic references, but under certain conditions they might gain symbolic status.