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Inf(l)ection of the Medium: Sándor Kardos's Films in Between Eye and Hand

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Abstract: Slitfilm *(*Résfilm*, 2005) and* The Gravedigger *(*A sírásó*, 2010) are two Hungarian experimental films made using a slit camera. The director/photographer Sándor Kardos's adaptations of Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's short story "The Handkerchief" and of Rainer Maria Rilke's "The Gravedigger" expose a particular "physiognomy" of the filmic medium through the use of this technique. Likewise, the face as the privileged medial surface for emotion becomes an uncanny, stretched painting with grotesque associations, similar to Francis Bacon's paintings. The sharp, clear narrator's voice, layering the literary texts "onto" the moving image further emphasises the colour-stained plasticity of the visible. Both films attempt to articulate a liminal experience: the cultural differences between the East and the West that are inherent in expressing and concealing emotions (*Slitfilm*) or the questions relating to life and death, the speakable/conceivable and the unspeakable/inconceivable (*The Gravedigger*) that are embedded in the communicative modalities of social interaction. Through the elastic flow of images, the face and the hand become two uncovered, visible, corporeal surfaces engaged in a rhythmic, chromatic relationship (due to the similar skin tones of face and hand), and thus gradually uncover the medium of the film as a palpable skin surface or violated, wounded flesh. The article approaches the fluid, sensuous imagery that displaces the human towards the inhuman uncanny of the unrecognisable flesh through Deleuzian concepts of fold and inflection.*

> "Inflection is the ideal genetic element of the variable curve or fold. Inflection is the authentic atom, the elastic point." (Deleuze, *The Fold* 14)

The Director and the Slit Camera

This article focuses on the directorial work of Sándor Kardos, a well-respected Hungarian cinematographer and director; specifically, it considers two experimental films recorded using a slit camera, in which Kardos also deconstructs the cinematographer's work, a fundamental element in the process of filmmaking. Through the use of this unique technique, the two adaptations entitled *Slitfilm* (*Résfilm*, 2005) and *The Gravedigger* (*A sírásó*, 2010) reflect on and reinterpret the modality of adaptation, the mediality of film and the role of the spectator. *Slitfilm* adapts Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's 1919 short story entitled "Hankechi" ("The Handkerchief"); *The Gravedigger* draws on Rainer Maria Rilke's 1903 short story "Der Totengräber" ("The Gravedigger"), while also making use of fragments from Rilke's "The Eleventh Dream", Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* and Homer's *The Odyssey*.

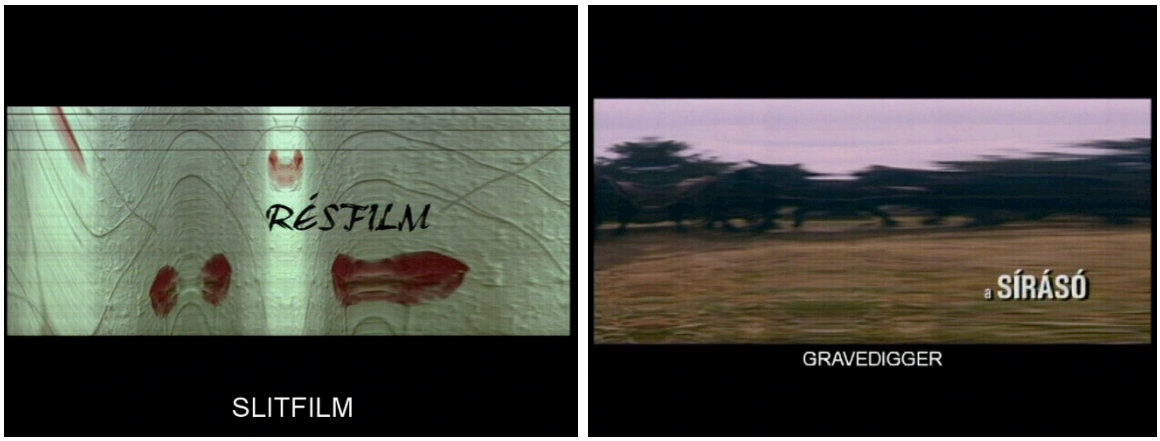


Figure 1 (left): *Slitfilm* (Sándor Kardos, 2005). Inforg Studio, 2005. Screenshot. Figure 2 (right): *The Gravedigger* (Sándor Kardos, 2010). Inforg Studio, M&M Film, 2010. Screenshot.

In an interview with Lóránt Stőhr, Kardos describes the slit-camera technique in the following way:

> The slit camera has been developed for the photo-finish; it is used to determine which of the ten horses crossed the finish line first. The slit camera only detects the strip of the finish line. There is a 0.2 mm slit in front of the film plane; the film continuously advances behind it. … It does not expose 24 frames as the traditional film camera, but due to the continuous advancement it records an infinite number of vertical lines every second. These lines cannot be separated and they are not sharp, as due to the continuous motion of the film strip the camera never makes exact exposures. … The film strip must advance in the camera in the opposite direction compared to the racers in front of the camera; this is why the direction of the film winding can also be changed. The speed of the film winding can also be adjusted from 0 to 50: 5 is for the speed of long-distance walking, 50 is for the car race. ... If we deliberately wind the film more quickly, then thinner figures will be created, if we wind the film more slowly, then the figures will be more stretched. (Stőhr; author's translation)

Thus, the cinematographer's work is restricted to the adjustment of direction and the speed of the film winding, which creates stretched, fluid or intermittent images. Because there are no frames, only continuous movement, the director's role is to compose and edit the endless flow of painterly images.





Figure 3 (left): Sándor Kardos and the slit camera. Figure 4 (right): On the set of *The Gravedigger*. © István Bezdán

"Ever since I engaged in filmmaking, I have been bothered by the concreteness of the filmic image" (Kardos qtd. in Stőhr)—Kardos's statement might also refer to the conception and modality of adaptation, in that, while literature "allows" internal images and imagination to unfold freely, the film adaptation of a literary text concretises these images. Kardos experiments with the adaptation of literary texts that are generally perceived as being "inadaptable", such as Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, which he adapted in 2009. In this film, Kardos avoids concretising the image of Gregor Samsa through the use of the insect's subjective point of view, by means of a panoramic camera fitted to a remote-controlled mini-robot "seeing" in 360 degrees and consisting of six lenses. In this way, the spectator experiences space through the "bug eye" of this camera.

In this article, I examine these films made with the slit-film technique in relation to the theoretical in-betweenness of interfaciality applied to painting (Kocziszky), intermediality elaborated in the domain of film theory (Pethő), as well as the philosophical terms of fold and inflection (Deleuze, *The Fold*; *Francis Bacon*).

Adaptation as the Liminal Zone of (Inter)Culturality

The literary works from which the two films are adapted are concerned with the representation of liminal experiences, the tensions between the familiar and the foreign, life and death, and the speakable and the unspeakable. This liminality serves as a common denominator in the directorial choice of these two texts. Both Akutagawa's and Rilke's works delineate the contact zone of customary cultural codes, social conventions and interpersonal codes, and that of the unfamiliar and the inexpressible. This is, simultaneously, the in-between, intermedial zone of experimentation. Thus, the adaptations created using the slit camera are the visual, intermedial figurations of this uncanny contact zone, which, as a result of the technique used, is not concretised, as its very nature is dependent on the impossibility of domesticating it; instead, they extend to the medium of film the ontology of contact, the uncanny, the transitory duality of the amorphous and the ambiguous. They translate the liminal experience of the familiarity and foreignness of cultural and linguistic codes into the liminal (tactile-optical) medial experience of the moving image.

In both adaptations the literary texts are literally transposed to film through narration; however, the narrative voice accompanies a visual universe that does not allow immersion

into the illustrative equivalence of the aural and visual media, but rather underscores their layered, nontransparent nature throughout the film, making both words and images separately "perceptible" in their own mediality. In this way a continuous space of correlation is created between sound/voice and image/motion. The visible, elastic image-traces or figurations "move" on the boundary of concretisation stimulating the sense of touch in the spectator. They do not erase the individual interior images created while reading or listening to the literary texts; instead, they touch on and evoke these imagined images through their sliding, blurred character.

The moving images stretched through this unique technique offer the viewer the experience of a sensual and structural mode of intermediality. As Ágnes Pethő states: "Intermediality in film is grounded in the (inter)sensuality of cinema itself, in the experience of the viewer being aroused simultaneously on different levels of consciousness and perception" (Pethő 4). Pethő distinguishes two basic "templates" that generate what she defines as a more or less emphatic sense of cinematic intermediality:

> 1. a "sensual" mode that invites the viewer to literally get in touch with a world portrayed not at a distance but at the proximity of entangled synesthetic sensations, and resulting in a cinema that can be perceived in the terms of music, painting, architectural forms or haptic textures; and
> 2. a "structural" mode that makes the media components of cinema visible, and exposes the layers of multimediality that constitute the "fabric" of the cinematic medium, revealing at the same time the mesh of their complex interactions. (99)

Both works by Kardos evoke artistic (painterly, literary) and medial (silent film) traditions using a structural mode of filmic intermediality, but—through trans-figuration—the traces of the artistic and medial antecedents are also defigured and inflected, shifting towards a sensual mode of intermediality, that "always involves a synesthetic reading of the world … In such a 'sensual' mode haptic imagery usually contrasts with the optical, cinema shows a tangible, vibrant, fragile world at the proximity of embodied experience as opposed to clear-cut, geometric shapes that can be observed at an aesthetic distance" (Pethő 140).

In Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's short story "The Handkerchief", a Japanese professor who is familiar with Europe meditates on the contact between Eastern and Western cultures while reading August Strindberg's *Dramaturgy*.[1] This creates a self-reflexive situation both for the reader of Akutagawa's short story and for the viewer hearing the text in voiceover form in *Slitfilm*. When the professor returns from the world of letters, the welcoming sight of the Gifu lantern—a traditional Japanese handmade craftwork item originating from the seventeenth century, made of thin (Mino Japanese) paper with candlelight inside—bought by his American wife helps him to recognise Japan as a bridge between East and West. However, later on an unexpected visitor, the mother of one of his students, will subvert this idea. While the visitor informs him of the death of her son, her face does not betray any feeling; however, when leaning down to pick up a fan, the professor involuntarily witnesses her "weeping with her whole body" as she tears her handkerchief apart under the table (Akutagawa 149). As stated in John McVittie's "Introductory Note" to one of the short story's English language editions:

> "The Handkerchief" ("Hankechi") is not a traditional Japanese commodity. The use of the handkerchief since the early Meiji era is one of the innumerable instances of the

> Japanese imitation of Western habits and dress from the time of the Restoration (1868). (140)

The professor perceives this tense opposition between face and hand as the cultural trace of the Bushido moral principles (the code of ethics and conduct of the Samurai). However, the short story does not stop at the safety provided by this cultural order, as, after the visit, the professor looks at his book again, and now interprets the tearing of the handkerchief as the exaggerated, mannered expression of feelings in Strindberg's critical reflection, this time applying it to Western theatrical culture. Thus the spaces of experience and reading mutually infect each other, and this time the professor returns unrelieved to the painted paper of the Gifu lantern.



Figures 5 and 6: The experience of (visual) reading; the zone of face-book-hand relations. *Slitfilm*. Inforg Studio, 2005. Screenshots.

Akutagawa's short story centres on the tension between the communicability of the pain of death and its cultural codification. Moreover, it highlights the subversive character of interculturality by juxtaposing two kinds of cultural interpretations of the "weeping hand" (on the one hand, Eastern, Bushido morals, and, on the other, the exaggerated theatricality and mannerism of the West), creating a sense of disquieting homelessness for the professor who is familiar with both cultures. The layeredness of the different cultural codes confronts him with the incomprehensibility and impossibility of decoding feeling or experience. In this way, Akutagawa's text conceives interculturality as the stratification and folding of cultural codes that simultaneously cover, preserve and disrupt each other. Beyond retelling the story, the adaptation translates the tension between cultural code and experience into an intermedial reflection. At the same time, it deconstructs the face, the privileged, visible surface of feelings into an elastic extension, while also transposing and fragmenting it into the ambiguous and sensuous in-between of the face and the hand, the visible parts of the human body, mutually signalling their presence through their common skin tone in the amorphous cinematic image. Thus, the two figurations of the slit camera technique are the haptic extension and the rhythmically articulated body fragments, which reorder interpersonal, emotional and cultural relations by preserving traces of culture and physiognomy. While this technique dissolves the cultural readability of the face and thus transposes the main question of the adapted text—the undecodable aspect of the Japanese face—into the moving image, it also preserves the visual interpretability of the body through "communication" between face and hand, made visible through the identifiability of skin colour.



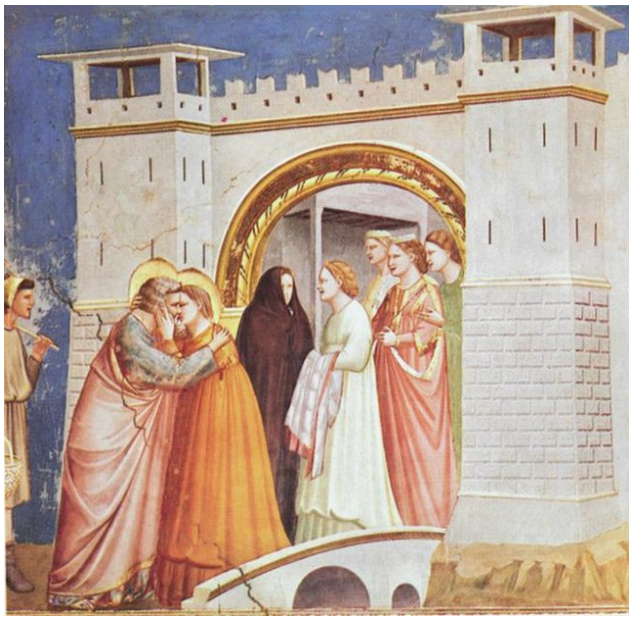
Figures 7 and 8: Communication between faces and cultural codes. *Slitfilm*. Inforg Studio, 2005. Screenshots.

Hand and Face—Intercorporeality, Interfaciality

In the Greek language, the word "*prosópon*" (προσωπον) is used for both face and mask. This common (linguistic) surface turns the face into the joint architecture—or sometimes into the battleground—of the external and the internal, the so-called natural and the codified, the personal or intimate and social expectation. The human face is also unique in its reciprocity, that is, a face always exists through another face, even if it is only a mirror image. As Éva Kocziszky writes, "the face is not only the place of seeing and hearing, but a reciprocal phenomenon, active and passive at the same time, seen and seer, speaker and listener".[2]

After surveying the cultural history of the "readability" of the face from Plato to Deleuze, Kocziszky analyses Giotto's fresco detail entitled *Meeting at the Golden Gate* as an excellent example of interfaciality (a term principally based on Emmanuel Levinas's and Peter Sloterdijk's philosophy), where the prophetic news acquired separately (namely, that St. Joachim and Anne are going to have a child) turns into a common knowledge visually reflected by the encounter of the figures' faces, on the one hand, through their golden halos and, on the other hand, through the fact that

> the two faces are, so to say, completed in each other, they form a common face, which is well contoured in between the two faces as a "third" one. However, interfaciality is not primarily the characteristic of the intimate sphere. The face is a message for the other, that is, a role, a masque, a well-composed, well-structured text. The face is *prosópon* in Greek and persona in Latin, that is, a mask, a *dramatic role*, the partaker of a fictitious story. (Kocziszky; author's translation; emphasis in original)




Figures 9 and 10: Interfaciality: the visuality of the prophetic voice. Giotto di Bondone, *Legend of St Joachim, Meeting at the Golden Gate* (1305). Cappella Scrovegni, Arena Chapel, Padua. Detail.

As we can see in Figures 7 and 8, Kardos turns the fully inscribed surface of the face into the plastic medial self-reflection of film. Using the slit camera—while preserving cultural codes as hints (we can see the trace of bowing and Japanese objects)—the culturally/morally regulated Japanese physiognomy and language of gestures become plastic together with the professor's memories of Berlin, brought from the West. The film dissolves the dichotomy of emotion versus (cultural) expression, of Eastern and Western codedness of the notions of "honest" and "mannered" in the short story by questioning and recreating the cultural codedness and its validity as a whole. It stretches and fragments the human face into a skin-coloured (flesh) surface, highlighting it against the background of abstract colour only through chromatic difference and facial elements, thus connecting it to other human "face" and "hand" surfaces. In this way, the cultural and emotional surface turns into a landscape that is suggestive of human physiognomy; however, the cultural codes no longer separate or connect the figures, but turn into a uniformly grotesque and open landscape that overwrites them, evoking visual codes instead.

The reciprocity of the "face" is connected with the sense of touch and with haptic gaze in the case of the spectator, who also has to pay attention to the hand in the course of the slow film motion, evoking the undulation of a bas-relief. As Deleuze writes: "Bas-relief brings about the most rigid link between the eye and the hand because its element is *the flat surface,* which allows the eye to function like the sense of the touch; furthermore, it confers, and indeed imposes, upon the eye the tactile, or rather *haptic* function" (*Francis Bacon* 122; emphasis in original). It is also clear in Giotto's painting that interfaciality is formed in conjunction with embracing hands and posture. Kardos's filmic images are stretched and fragmented but they still preserve memory—the visual tradition and harmony—of Giotto's painting. Thus, the memory of the visual codes of Giotto's painting as figural traces infuse Kardos's moving image with sacrality: in *Slitfilm* the human face is stretched into the elastic image of the Eye of Providence, the all-seeing eye of God, and in *The Gravedigger* two hands are folded into an inverted halo.



Figure 11: Eye-face (eye of providence). *Slitfilm*. Inforg Studio, 2005. Screenshot.

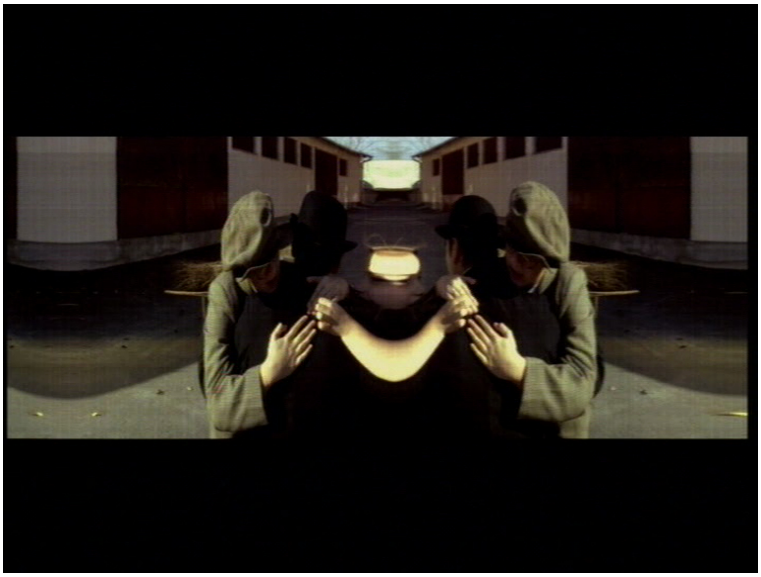


Figure 12: Inverted hand halo. *The Gravedigger*. Inforg Studio, M&M Film, 2010. Screenshot.

While I do not wish to exhaustively examine the relationship between the face and the filmic medium, I propose to highlight a few ideas from Béla Balázs's 1923 work *Der sichtbare Mensch* (*The Visible Man*), which in English translation became part of his *Theory of The Film: Character and Growth of A New Art*, a relevant reflection on the filmic medium at the dawn of cinema. Béla Balázs connects the specificity of the medium to the rehabilitation of the human face and body in contrast to the representation of the face in literature. The medium of silent cinema returns the face to the body as a moving, expressive surface. As Balázs writes:

> Now the film is about to inaugurate a new direction in our culture. Many million people sit in the picture houses every evening and purely through vision, experience happenings, characters, emotions, moods, even thoughts, without the need for many words. … Humanity is already learning the rich and colourful language of gesture, movement and facial expression. This is not a language of signs as a substitute for

> words, like the sign-language of the deaf-and-dumb it is the visual means of communication, without intermediary of souls clothed in flesh. Man has again become visible. (41)

Less than one hundred years later, Kardos's moving images evoke the tradition of silent cinema through the contrast between the visual and aural components of the medium. The extradiegetic narrative voiceover resembles the musical accompaniment of silent films, and meaningful language is layered on the fluid imagery in a collage-like manner. At the same time, narration and music follow the rhythm of the images in a meditative way. *Slitfilm* and *The Gravedigger* differ from each other precisely through the medium of sound. In *The Gravedigger* the director experiments with the displacement of sound within the sensual images: the sounds and voices do not merely mediate or accompany some sense or meaning but intermingle with echo-like repetitions or hyperreal noises. Kardos's experimental moving image evokes the tradition of silent cinema through separating and liberating the perception of the image from the meaning of words, and—at the same time—through de-figuring the visuality (Balázs's "visible man") of silent films into a sensual experience. Thus, for Kardos, experimental film becomes an intermedial cultural archive that is graspable in its sensual tactility. This specific technique inflects the filmic medium in the direction of Francis Bacon's "manual chaos", released from the optical organisation of the fingers (Deleuze, *Francis Bacon* 104). In keeping with Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon, it can be said that the face is reabsorbed by the head and becomes embodied as amorphous flesh. The facial expression as physiological language flows back into the kneadable, stretchable mass, into the chaos of the skin. The human physiognomy appears as belonging to the past, the figures are placed in the in-between zone of amorphous flesh, patches of colour and cultural-facial traces. Deleuze writes similarly about the diagram in relation to Bacon:

> The diagram is the operative set of traits and color patches, of lines and zones. … The diagram is indeed a chaos, a catastrophe, but it is also a germ of order of rhythm. It is a violent chaos in relation to the figurative givens, but it is a germ of rhythm in relation to the new order of the painting. As Bacon says, it "unlocks areas of sensation." (*Francis Bacon* 102)

The slit-camera technique enables *Slitfilm* to maintain the tension between face and hand by showing their separatedness; however, their visual images also operate in parallel: the grotesque, stretched, open faces communicate with each other (Figures 7 and 8) and the torn layers of the handkerchief are iterated in the professor's fragmented corporeal and facial details. The respective neutrality and intensity of the woman's face and the tearing motions of her hand are transposed into the experience and spectacle of the professor receiving the news. Interfaciality turns into the fragmented communication of hand and face through the mediation of a handkerchief functioning like a bodily prosthesis.



Figures 13 and 14: Hand–prosthesis, face–torso. *Slitfilm*. Inforg Studio, 2005. Screenshots.

The handkerchief as a cultural object (as referenced earlier, imported from the West in the Meiji period) has the function of emotional vehicle in between the human and the object; through the handkerchief, the body tries to escape itself; the invisible spasm of the body folds into the ruptures of the handkerchief, recalling Deleuze's observations about the body in Bacon's painting *Figure at a Washbasin* (1976):

> The body exerts itself in a very precise manner, or waits to escape from itself in a very precise manner. It is not I who attempt to escape from my body, it is the body that attempts to escape from itself by means of ... in short, a spasm: the body as plexus, and its effort or waiting for a spasm. Perhaps this is Bacon's approximation of horror or abjection. There is one painting that can guide us, the *Figure at a Washbasin*, 1976: clinging to the oval of the washbasin, its hands clutching the faucets, the body-Figure exerts an intense motionless effort upon itself in order to escape down the blackness of the drain. (*Francis Bacon* 15)

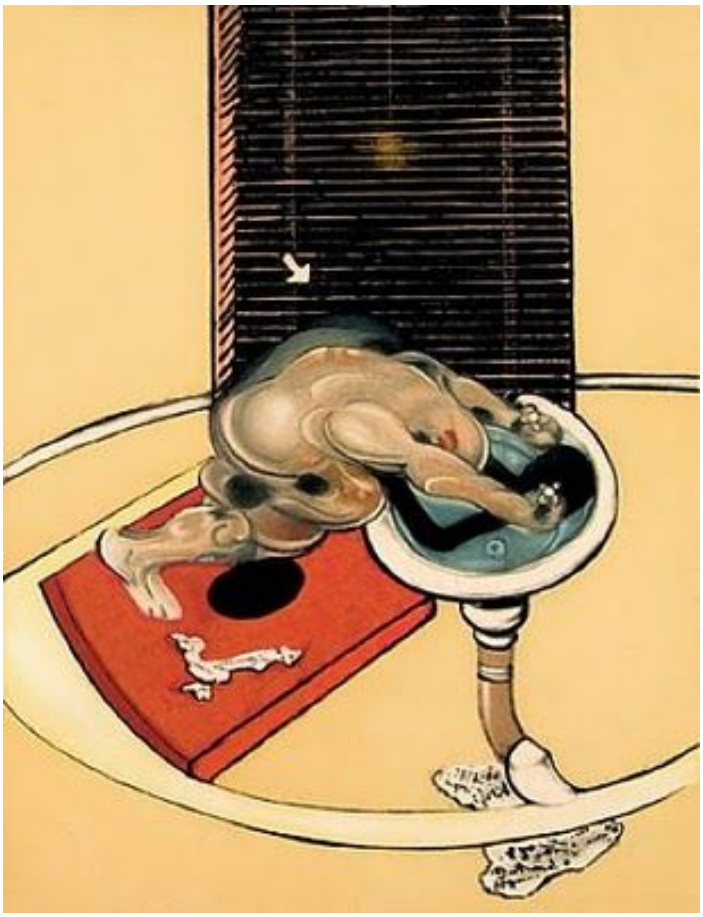


Figure 15: Francis Bacon, *Figure at a Washbasin* (1976). Andipa Gallery, London. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2015.

Anthropomorphic and Nonanthropomorphic, Organic and Nonorganic Zones

In Rainer Maria Rilke's short story, which focuses on the disruption of the culturally regulated social order due to the spreading of the plague in a small town, the involuntary relation between eye and hand is reflected by the arrival of the new gravedigger. The opening episode of Rilke's short story reflects interfaciality from the outset through the face-hand-face relationship. The foreigner is *domesticated* into the given social order through the point of view of Gitta, who is the daughter of the podestà (the mayor) of the town. Gitta's infantile point of view simultaneously validates social judgements based on appearance and looks (the foreigner looks like he could have been a physician or an attorney) but at the same time it displaces this normative judgement as she involuntarily looks at the gravedigger's hand. The foreigner who—through his hand and shovel—will become the caretaker of the graveyard and the guard of the contact zone/inflection between the living and the dead, arrives *into* and is familiarised *through* the viewpoint of a little girl. However, this also entails the displacement of the girl's cultural point of view in shifting from the order of the face and looking towards the illegibility of the hand.

The Gravedigger further shapes the in-betweenness emerging in the zone of the face and the hand in such a way that the landscape of interculturality is displaced by the intimacy of interpersonal relations and the *infection* of the plague. In Rilke's short story, a foreigner moves into the graveyard and becomes its careful guard, transforming the graveyard into a garden; the citizens regularly visit the graveyard, among them the *podestà*'s daughter,

whom he tells about his past. The idyll created is gradually broken by the outbreak of the plague. In the case of both intimacy (the tender friendship between the little girl and the gravedigger) and infection (while the inhabitants of the town become infected in Rilke's short story, Kardos's film also transposes fragments of Defoe's suggestive descriptions of the 1665 plague into the moving image), touch has a privileged role. In the Hungarian language infection (*ragály*) is the etymological result of being infected (*átragad*), and the same verb stem (*érint*) stands for touch (*érintés*, e.g. touching somebody) and contact (*érintkezés*, e.g. cultural contact). Thus, the momentariness and the stretchedness of touch are "imaginable" in Hungarian. Kardos's slow image flow turns the pastness of touch into a fluid present, making visible the in-between zones between bodies—the contact zone that is created in intimacy or that is spread in the case of an infection.

In his essay on Auguste Rodin's sculpture, Rilke writes about touch:

> There is a history of hands; they have their own culture, their particular beauty; one concedes to them the right of their own development, their own needs, feelings, caprices and tendernesses. … As the human body is to Rodin an entirety only as long as a common action stirs all its parts and forces, so on the other hand portions of different bodies that cling to one another from an inner necessity merge into one organism. A hand laid on another's shoulder or thigh does not any more belong to the body from which it came,—from this body and from the object which it touches or seizes something new originates, a new thing that has no name and belongs to no one. (*Auguste Rodin*)

In my view, in Kardos's film, Rilke's interpretation of Rodin's statues becomes visible—any part of the "vibrating surface" of the body being given "the independence of a whole" (*Auguste Rodin*)—and can be connected to Deleuze's theory of the fold. As Deleuze writes about Leibniz:

> His myriad connections and series of concepts are not held in a prescribed order or a unifying system. Multiplicity and variety of inflections produce "events," or vibrations, "with an infinity of harmonics or submultiples." Movement of a concept that has bearing upon a subject's impressions of the physical world does not elevate according to a spiral plan, which belongs to philosophy, but radiates or ramifies everywhere in the geography of experience, such that we can imagine movement of light and sound, together, as folds of ethereal matter that waft and waver. (*The Fold* xiii)

In a Deleuzian sense, and in terms of a non-Euclidean space concept, Kardos turns the filmic image into an infinite inflection of folds and flexures, in which time cannot be divided into moments, the present happens or is inflected in the transition between the past and the future. Human bodies are inflected in the environment, they become flesh-like intermediary zones, in this way reminding us of Bacon's paintings.



Figures 16 and 17: *The Gravedigger*. Inforg Studio, M&M Film, 2010. Screenshots.



Figure 18: Francis Bacon, "Three Studies for Portraits Including Self-Portrait" (1969). Private Collection. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2015.

The body parts in the film images are shaped by their relations and undulations, which rhyme and stretch; they acquire both anthropomorphic and nonanthropomorphic character in the common space of experience of the Other (human, object or landscape element).



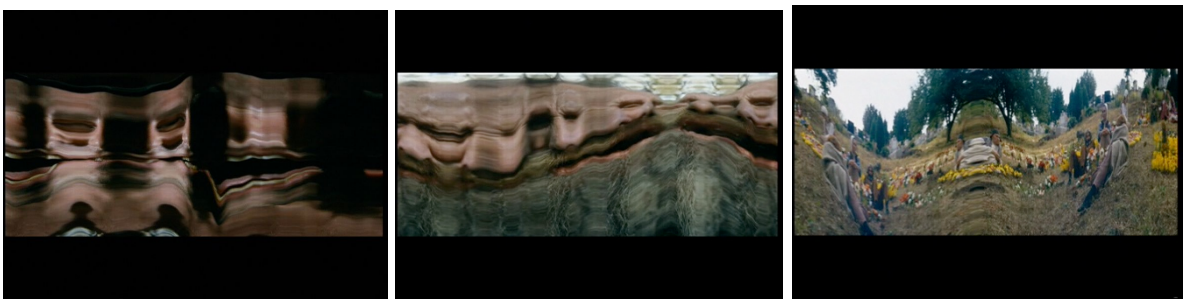
Figures 19 and 20: *The Gravedigger*. Inforg Studio, M&M Film, 2010. Screenshots.

As Merleau-Ponty writes in *The Visible and the Invisible*, in the concept of the "flesh" the inside and the outside, the perceiving (body) and the perceived (world) fold into each other: "[t]he flesh (of the world or my own) is not contingency, chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself" (146). Through the concept of the flesh a phenomenological pact is articulated according to which the flesh "is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things" (146). This fold is openness, it is simultaneously touching and being touched: a "bursting forth of the mass of the body toward the things, which makes a vibration of my skin become the sleek and the rough, makes me *follow with my eyes* the movements and the contours of the things themselves" (146; emphasis in original). The eye sees itself seeing and the hand touches itself touching in this chiastic relation: in "this fold, this central cavity of the visible which is my vision, these two mirror arrangements of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the touched, form a closebound system" (146).

From the perspective of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh, Kardos's filmic images seem to make visible the contact with/in the world, as the bodies are stretched into relations, into an amorphous state preceding representation. They turn into an elastic flow, where the distance between the object and subject is dissolved in the encounter of the smooth elastic skin surfaces like in massage, resulting in interpersonal and anthropomorphic/nonanthropomorphic zones and figurations. On the one hand, the intimate relationship between the young girl and the adult man, unnameable from the perspective of normative society, becomes visually palpable. (This interpersonal relationship cannot be considered as paedophilia since the two characters' reciprocal attention never crosses corporeal boundaries: their tenderness, as well as the space of the cemetery where they meet, are "outside" cultural stigmatisation.) On the other hand, through the spreading of the plague, which happens through contact, the filmic image stretching the uncodable body boundaries stages the extension of the infection and the isolation into quarantine through the body parts—the visual in-betweenness of life and death—as the human mouth and eye become cavities or the graves of the face (Figures 21–25).[3] From this perspective, Bacon's triptych below also appears to bear the trace of infectious flesh (Figure 26).



Figures 21 and 22: The extension of the plague and torso quarantine. *The Gravedigger*. Inforg Studio, M&M Film, 2010. Screenshots.



Figures 23, 24 and 25: The graves of the face. *The Gravedigger*. Inforg Studio, M&M Film, 2010. Screenshots.

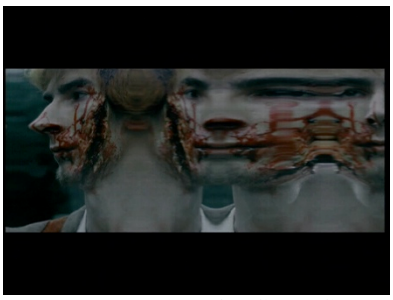
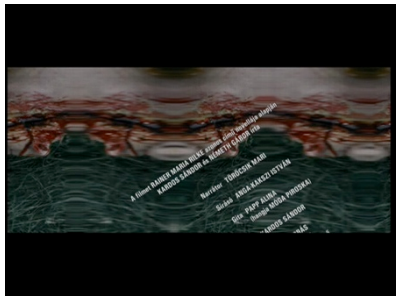


Figure 26: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for Self-Portrait* (1975). Galerie Claude Bernard, Paris. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2015.

The Infected Zone

At the end of the film, the shovel, the tool used as the cultural control of death, becomes the extension of the murderous hand (the gravedigger kills a corpse transporter using one). The shovel as the prosthesis of the hand rips up the face, rendering the head lacerated flesh. The wound of the filmic image also affects the viewer, facing him/her with its "suture"

nature, that is, with its transfiguration into an image. In both films, the reflection upon the body as prosthesis is also self-reflexive as regards the medium: while, through the handkerchief, the body can manifest as human by getting rid of its cultural codedness, at the end of *The Gravedigger* the shovel, as the extension of the hand, turns into the medium of surrendering/dissolving the human.

Figures 27, 28, and 29: Shovel as hand-prosthesis. *The Gravedigger*. Inforg Studio, M&M Film, 2010. Screenshots.

Kardos's second film *performs* the Deleuzian inflection and its in-between zones as *infection*: life and death, human and nonhuman, culture and what is beyond it mutually infect each other. The disquietude of Akutagawa's professor in his earlier film, due to the unreliability of cultural codes, becomes threatening in the second film. The difference between the hand and prostheses in the two films is also suggestive: the handkerchief, as the trace of a custom (one which is adopted), serves to express pain; the shovel murdering the drunken cemetery worker as the extension of the gravedigger's hand is directed against the human remnant that violates cultural codes, and in this way the guardian of the dead turns into the instrument of death. Traces of the human are formed and cease to exist in the inflection of the two kinds of nonhuman: flesh and prosthesis. In the inhuman pain of the plague, people dispense with their cultural habits, the corpse transporters respect neither the living nor the dead any longer: they murder and are murdered as an infection.[4]

Conclusion

While layering various artistic codes upon one another and spatially inflecting their temporal differences, Sándor Kardos's films, created using the unique slit-camera technique, make visible the medium of film as a fold, in line with Deleuze's concept. From the perspective of the layers of reception of art history, Kardos's technique distances the film medium from issues of figuration in the sense of the fold. The reception of the two works is conditioned by cultural memory and figurative antecedents (painting, sculpture, literature and silent film) and thus it implies a structural mode of intermediality; at the same time, figuration is inflected in a tangible visual fluidity displaying a sensual mode of intermediality. Through the slow rhythm of movement, the films fold the moving image, subverting Western cultural codes into the practice of Eastern meditation.

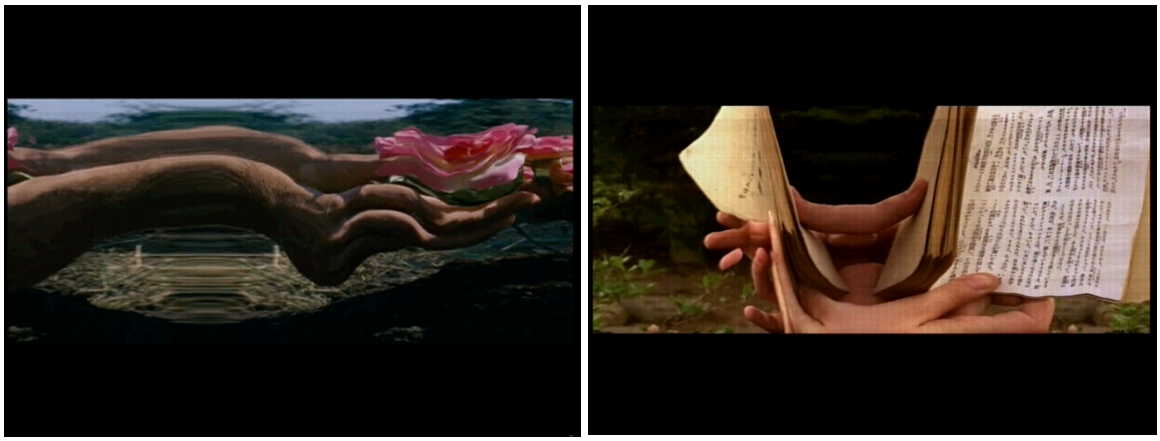


Figure 30 (left): Haptic Inflections: olfactory hand. *The Gravedigger*. Inforg Studio, M&M Film, 2010. Screenshot. Figure 31 (right): Optical hand, origami-fold. *Slitfilm*. Inforg Studio, 2005. Screenshot.

Sándor Kardos makes us rethink and re-experience film as physiognomy. He offers us the medium of the moving image as a cultural-sensual depository in such a way as to inflect the touching layers of the hand into the optical culture of the eye, causing its irreversible infection.

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Notes

[1] To my knowledge, Strindberg did not write a work of this title; in this way, Akutagawa weakens the credibility of the professor's character. The professor's name (Hasegawa Kinzo) can be regarded as an allusion to the name of Hasegawa Takejirō (1853–1938), an innovative Japanese publisher specialising in books in European languages on Japanese subjects. It can also be perceived as an anagrammatic reference to Nitobe Inazō (1862–1933), who can be associated with the hero of the short story, as he studied in the United States and in Europe and had an American wife, and was thus also crossing the border between East and West. In 1900 he wrote a book entitled *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*. On the professor as a caricature of Nitobe, see Bierwirth (qtd. in Weingärtner 237).

[2] Author's translation. This exposedness, openness towards the Other will constitute the façade in Emanuel Lévinas's philosophy. See Éva Kocziszky's summarising study of the history of the face, which outlines the determining physiognomical researches of the eighteenth century.

[3] In *A Journal of the Plague Year* Defoe describes the plague through the tension between spreading and seclusion/exclusion:

> About June the Lord Mayor of London and the Court of Aldermen, as I have said, began more particularly to concern themselves for the regulation of the city.
> The justices of Peace for Middlesex, by direction of the Secretary of State, had begun to shut up houses in the parishes of St Giles-in-the-Fields, St Martin, St Clement Danes, &c., and it was with good success; for in several streets where the plague broke out, upon strict guarding the houses that were infected, and taking care to bury those that died immediately after they were known to be dead, the plague ceased in those streets. It was also observed that the plague decreased sooner in those parishes after they had been visited to the full than it did in the parishes of Bishopsgate, Shoreditch, Aldgate, Whitechappel, Stepney, and others; the early care taken in that manner being a great means to the putting a check to it. (1722)

[4] Defoe's description, which appears in the film, also indicates the cultural liminal space in the case of the funerals, but Defoe's attitude is that of a Christian's faith:

> This was a mournful scene indeed, and affected me almost as much as the rest; but the other was awful and full of terror. The cart had in it sixteen or seventeen bodies; some were wrapt up in linen sheets, some in rags, some little other than naked, or so loose that what covering they had fell from them in the shooting out of the cart, and they fell quite naked among the rest; but the matter was not much to them, or the indecency much to any one else, seeing they were all dead, and were to be huddled together into the common grave of mankind, as we may call it, for here was no difference made, but poor and rich went together; there was no other way of burials, neither was it possible there should, for coffins were not to be had for the prodigious numbers that fell in such a calamity as this.
> It was reported by way of scandal upon the buriers, that if any corpse was delivered to them decently wound up, as we called it then, in a winding-sheet tied over the head and feet, which some did, and which was generally of good linen; I say, it was reported that the buriers were so wicked as to strip them in the cart and carry them quite naked to the ground. But as I cannot easily credit anything so vile among Christians, and at a time so filled with terrors as that was, I can only relate it and leave it undetermined. (1722)

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