

Gábor Bódy: A Precursor Of the Digital Age

One of the most important and probably most enigmatic figures of the Hungarian cinema in the nineteen-seventies and eighties was someone whose career was most unusual right from the start all the way to an end that came both untimely and unexpectedly. This person was Gábor Bódy.

Gábor Bódy's position in European art cinema is one of abandoning the modernist paradigm with the awareness and a presentiment of the forthcoming digital age. Not only his artistic creation but also his quite significant theoretical writings prove that Bódy was one of the first filmmakers of international significance to realize and to foresee the important changes of technology and style caused by the end of modernism and the advent of the new media. I will present his work in the context of the transition between modernist author cinema and the age of the new media mixing various techniques, styles and mythologies. His works and ideas could be best compared to British filmmaker Peter Greenaway's, who has had the same overall perspective of filmmaking as Bódy, incorporating various media, and creating an eclectic and heterogeneous form of cinema.

Bódy was born in Budapest in 1946. He studied philosophy and linguistics at ELTE University in Budapest with long interruptions from 1964 until 1971 when he got admitted to the Hungarian Film Academy to become a filmmaker. Still at the university he became highly impressed by the linguistic and semiotic approach of film theory and started not only theoretical writing but also used the opportunity provided by the official film school; thus he commenced his experimental film career in which he consistently adapted and tried out his theoretical ideas.

Very soon he became the leader of an experimental film group, and by the mid-seventies his name became the epitome of Hungarian avant-garde film of the time. In 1976 he made his first full length feature film, *Amerikai Anzix (American Postcard)* using much of the experimental formal devices he had developed in his short films. However, to the surprise of many, the film's structure and story was conventional enough to be appreciated by mainstream filmmakers and film critics as well, which propelled Bódy immediately from his marginal status onto the ranks of the "most innovative young talent of mainstream Hungarian cinema". In the meantime, he did not forget his interest in theory. He constantly planned to develop his thesis into a large theoretical work, and he attended in 1977 the Congress of Film Semiology in Paris organized by Christian Metz whom he desperately wanted to meet. He also planned a university course in film theory which he in fact held in 1979 and 1980. In the same period he realized his great project, the 270 minutes long *Nárcisz és Psyché (Narcissus and Psyche)*. This film was meant to be the synthesis of all Bódy's ideas about philosophy, and the new forms of the audiovisual medium. This film also became a rally of all the avant-garde of contemporary Hungary: painters, theater artists, and musicians. After this film Bódy became not only a leading figure of Hungarian experimental film but one of the Hungarian avant-garde as such.

In the early Eighties Bódy was invited to teach in the Berlin film academy, and he spent a considerable amount of time in West-Germany. He got involved with the international community of contemporary video artists and organized a network (called *Infermental*) for publishing and distributing pieces of video-art all over the world. He also continued to work in different formats: finished another full length feature film in 1984 (*A kutya éji dala The Dog's Night Song*), and prepared a third one while making short experimental video clips, and organizing a circle of young Hungarian video artists. On October 24, 1985, at the age of 39, to

all of the Hungarian film and cultural communities' greatest consternation Bódy committed suicide.¹

The European Context

In terms of the context of European art cinema the debut of Bódy's career by and large coincided with that of such filmmakers as Wim Wenders, Chantal Ackerman and Peter Greenaway. That was the beginning of the Seventies when modernist cinema, so to speak, lost its "sense of reality". In other words, for many filmmakers not only interior and exterior realities were increasingly hard to distinguish – which was one of the main topics of modernist cinema in the beginning of the sixties – but their perception was that all cornerstones to interpret what could be called exterior reality were disappearing entirely; which perception later became a distinctive standpoint of post modern art. Many filmmakers– Fellini, or Fassbinder for example – looked for inspiration in theater, others looked for grasping reality in documentary style – like Rivette or Ackerman – yet others looked for realities outside of Europe of the early Seventies - like Wenders and Herzog. Some, like Jancsó turned reality into abstract symbolism, and some, like Tarkovsky, replaced the outside reality with the subjective reality of the self. That was the endgame of the highly intellectual and melodramatic attitude of modern cinema. Soon after the mid-seventies much of European art cinema turned back to classical narration, emotional storytelling the best representative of which tendency was one time French new wave filmmaker François Truffaut. Formal innovation and experimenting with the medium became rather scarce at the turn of the Seventies and Eighties. However, some of the latecomers of modernism thought that the innovative process of modernism could be continued, but following different principles; namely, on the premises of the changing audiovisual medium and the new developments and stylistic tendencies in the arts. Bódy was one of those rare filmmakers who were convinced that the end of modernism did not necessarily mean the end of artistic innovation, especially when the audiovisual medium itself appeared to will be going through a revolutionary transformation.

Bódy's Position in the Hungarian Cinema

Bódy came to filmmaking when an important generational shift started to take shape in Hungarian cinema. The generation of the fifties and sixties with Miklós Jancsó, Zoltán Fábry, Károly Makk, András Kovács, István Szabó and István Gaál were already established filmmakers, mostly enjoying considerable international reputation. They represented a kind of "engaged" filmmaking concentrating on topics of great historical and political importance. For them, the main question was how to represent historical, moral or political truths; by what means they can circumvent censorship in order for truth to surface in their films. Bódy consciously opposed this attitude: "Moralism and lyricism: those are the two constellations under which the entire fictional system of the sixties developed in Hungary. One thing is clear however: neither of them appeals to the youth of our time. In fact these are the two most repulsive subjects for them."²

¹ There is no definite answer for his suicide. Probably one important ingredient in his motives could be a fact that no one in his professional and personal environment was aware of: Bódy was an informer of the Hungarian secret police providing regular information and reports about his colleagues' political ideas and activities. According to the available documents he continued this activity from 1973 through at least 1981. The documents of his activity as a police informer are available at the Történeti Hivatal (History Bureau). File number: H-59552.

² Bódy Gábor: *A végtelen kép* Budapest, Pesti Szalon, 1996. p.50.

For the next generation, emerging in the early Seventies, “truth” was not an absolute category anymore. They regarded “truth” as a function of the vision one has about reality. They were largely influenced by the 1968 leftist ideology especially as regards the central role of imagination and the subjectivity of concepts of reality. In the films of the new generation, the politics of nation yielded to the politics of individual desires; and communities of traditions and history yielded to communities of individual choices. Most of them started making documentaries of a very special ironic kind, which resembled the style of the Czechoslovak New Wave of the Sixties. Some of them, Bódy being the most prominent, joined the new experimental and avant-garde wave of the late Sixties and early Seventies envisioning a complete new start in filmmaking very much in the sense Godard defined it in his 1968 film, *Le gai savoir*, in which he claimed to return to isolated sounds and images to rebuild cinematic expression.

Bódy’s peculiar style and technique were intimately related with these ideas. Especially at the beginning of his career, he put more emphasis on transforming and manipulating existing images than on the careful elaboration of their creation. His first feature film, *American Postcard* (*Amerikai Anzix*, 1976) was shot rather traditionally, did not use any peculiar props or visual elements, such as spectacular camerawork or set design, yet the visual texture of this film was a revelation in Hungarian cinema in the mid-seventies. By various acoustic and visual post-production techniques he dissected his images into elements that were each given a different stylistic aspect. On the one hand, Bódy gave his film an appearance of a film made in the mind-19th century, on the other hand, he created a particularly rich semantic texture as the visual and acoustic elements of his film represented different meaningful layers many time contradicting or deconstructing each other. Reusing existing visual material, decontextualizing elements of images or images of sequences, manipulating, transforming stylistic aspect of the visual and acoustic material were his main tools at the beginning in deconstructing narrative, visual and semantic conventions of modern cinema.

Later in his works, starting from the late seventies, he increasingly used “on-location” manipulating technique, such as, special props, highly artificial set designs, unnatural lighting, extreme camera angles, body tinting, extravagant make ups and costumes, together with mixing different recording techniques and film stocks like 8 and 16 millimeter film with 35 mm film stock.

The techniques Bódy used in his experimental and feature films were not simply the result of random choice. Bódy had very articulate theoretical ideas as to the functioning cinema’s way of making sense. Especially at the beginning of his career, he almost worked like a scientist: he used extensively filmmaking to demonstrate his theoretical ideas.

Bódy’s theory of cinematic meaning

By the end of the Sixties, Bódy, following a mainstream intellectual fashion, became interested in the signifying process in cinema, and he studied film semiotics. However, his main concern was not a typically structuralist problem. It was the question, how to divert the sense of visual and narrative elements from their most trivial and conventional relationships and associations. The concept describing the process of changes of meanings he referred to most often, and which he borrowed from German linguist Herman Paul, was “isolating and new grouping” (*Isolierung and Neue Gruppierung*).³ This idea foreshadowed his peculiar approach which focused not on the different structures of paradigms and syntaxes but rather on the merging of paradigm and syntax.

³ See op.cit. 16.

Bódy's most elaborate theoretical works use a semantic approach founded on linguistic theory, aiming at the analysis of meaning in the cinema. In the early Seventies he developed his main ideas following his studies in linguistics; and his later, less elaborate theoretical works basically repeat and vary his initial ideas.⁴ Even though the main points of his theory never changed, the focus of his theorizing shifted from the early Seventies to the early Eighties. While in the beginning he investigated the problem how we attribute meaning to cinematic images, from the late Seventies on he increasingly used his theoretical ideas to explain his unusual filmmaking practice. This shift of focus is important, because it proves that even when Bódy's activity became predominantly one of a practical filmmaker's a theoretical awareness was constantly present, and he was always attentive to refreshing and developing his theoretical ideas too.

Bódy's approach to film semiotics was informed by a sensibility to serial structures. He based his theory of cinematic meaning on the idea that the meaning of individual images is dependent on the overall syntactic structure of the film. Following this approach meaning is basically a pragmatic category that changes according to the actual usage of meaningful elements. The meaning system of cinema follows a strict transformative process, which starts up from what Bódy calls following again German linguist Herman Paul's terminology the "usual" or "trivial" meaning. Later he called this level of meaning the "zero degree of meaning". On this level the meaning of individual elements is related to the most frequent general usage of the most salient elements in the image. The trivial meaning of an image is well determined and unlimited at the same time: well determined, because it is trivial, but there are infinitely more meaningful elements in an image than what the most immediate trivial meaning refers to. In the context of a film's structure, the meaningful elements start to transform their meanings according to *series* in which they are compared to other subsequent elements. The film isolates various trivial meanings and places them into different series according to given paradigms.

Particular traits of the indeterminate character of the trivial (actual) meaning become salient through repetition and interrelatedness, and create different series. There opens up an imaginary field of meaning ...it is in this sense that we can speak of *serial meaning* which suppresses the zero degree of actual meaning although it is nourished by it.⁵

The main process by which a film creates its meanings is isolating and regrouping. A series of images isolates a certain number of elements, and places them into a special semantic group, or paradigm. However, he claimed that those paradigms are created by syntactic structures. Bódy determined three main types of syntactic paradigm, or three main principles of organizing the overall structure of a film: the local and chronological type, the metaphoric type, and the serial type. It is the serial type of meaning that interested him the most.

Infinite series of self-reflection and the problem of reality

In the early and mid-seventies, when Bódy was developing his ideas, the theories of post-structuralism were far from being mainstream or fashionable; they were just about to take shape. This was ten years before Deleuze published his two-volume philosophy work on cinema setting forth a conception of the condensation of time into the image. Just like

⁴ In his semantic approach he was largely influenced by Hungarian linguist János Zsilka. Zsilka in his theory of the „organic linguistic system” basically followed early 20th century German linguists' theories supposing a close relationship between semantic changes and the functioning of the syntactic system. Bódy used Zsilka's theory to show how in a film different syntactic structures determine the meaning of individual elements.

⁵ Op.cit. p.16-17.

Deleuze, Bódy also founded his conception about the relationship between time and image on the idea of infinite series and repetition.

“According to our secret concept each moment of time contains the previous moments, and this idea can be connected to the principle of conservation of matter and energy. The moment a picture is created it becomes a part of reality, and thus becomes a canvas of new pictures and this is how it sinks into time. ... Long series of images stand behind each image along vast distances. Ancient Greeks explained the act of seeing as follows: little images come off an object and get to our eyes. This interpretation may seem childish but compared it to modern philosophy, it is interesting that unlike most of the theories that have been elaborated since then, it regarded image in its ontological status, and not only as a virtual phenomenon of consciousness.⁶

Serialism in Bódy's approach was closely linked with the idea of self-reflection:

In contemporary art the idea of ontological status of the image is mostly maintained in the notion of *mirror* and *reflection* (...) My methods were multiple repetitions, freezing the pictures at a couple of points, taking up my place in bending contexts, forcing the picture to develop its meaning completely. ... I tried to demonstrate that the moment fixed on the real is a limit behind which there are infinite series. In representation these series must converge to a single point in which not only the content of expression but the way of expression also appears.⁷

According to Bódy, images are not generated by a reality that stands outside them; images are generated by an ultimately *infinite* series of other images. Meaning and interpretation from this perspective looks like a function of a communication system consisting of images. In other words, images are not reflecting the outside world; they reflect each other and the communication network that relates them to one another. Meaning therefore is not a simple relation of a sign and an idea; it is an endless self-reflecting process which penetrates through a series of images.

For the pictures are submerging into each other in the reflection you cannot draw the line between *reality* and its *image*. ... If you stand in the axis of two parallel mirrors, to control the sight you will cover the picture, but if the axis of the *controlling* eye does not coincide with the axis of reflection the infinite sequence will bend and disappear at an n number. The picture of an electric mirror system can be conducted, controlled, infinitely microfied or magnified, or even altered. Let us take two cameras, one will watch the monitor of the other and vice versa. The result is also an infinite reflection, only in this case it goes like between two **subjects**. If you put your hand between a camera and a monitor, the image of your hand will appear in the whole system. Now you can easily imagine a system consisting of four thousand million members, and each of them can see what any other can, without being able to locate through which transmission it received the image and which member has seen the original object. What is more, each member can see in one picture what the others can, for example what the 15th or the 58.967th member can. But it is not simultaneous even if the time lag is as small as it is needed for the distance to be covered at the velocity of light and electrons. This way time can be induced in one picture.⁸

The idea that the cinematic image gets its real meaning by juxtaposition is almost as old as cinema itself. But Bódy's point is not here. He goes far beyond montage theory. He doesn't mean juxtaposed pictures; he means pictures that are *in each other*. He speaks about a relationship that can be grasped through penetration into the picture. This penetration would work through small semantic distortions which are exercised by the manipulation of the material. But these are not images superposed on one another. These images are in a constant metamorphose. They do not include each other nor they overlap, they rather generate, then submerge and disappear in each other. The second image invalidates the first, and the third does so with the second. They are mutual transformations of each other and not distinct units. The identity of the image here is no longer determined by its frame. The frame has become only a transient limit relative to a particular meaning which is also transitory.

⁶ Beke László, Peternák Miklós (eds): *Bódy Gábor*, Budapest, Műcsarnok, 1987 p.281.

⁷ *idib.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

The problem of the frame is crucial by Bódy. In the focus of his theoretical and artistic works there are these questions: what are the limits of a conventional meaning? How far can we go in peeling off conventional semantic layers (trivial meaning) from the picture before we destroy it completely? If the meaning of the picture is an infinite reflection that never reaches a fixed point, isn't there still a substantial reality somewhere way beyond the images?

An early experimental study of his from 1976, called "Four Bagatelles" clearly demonstrates his views about how the essentialist concept of reality disappears from the image when it is filled by authorial comments. In these four pieces he examines the impact the constant change of internal frames within the picture has on meaning. The four studies are juxtaposed in a logical order so that they can express the relativity of the image and the arbitrariness of the meaning. The first scene depicts a traditional composed dance and a fixed natural background as a frame. The author put another artificial frame on the image which moves independently from the interior movements. In the second, the dance is not a traditional one; it consists of very articulate and expressive, but fragmented movements. There is no natural frame of the picture, the space where the action takes place is indeterminate, and our view is limited by a circular black mask that always changes its size. Here the frame is subjective and abstract. In the third scene we can see a disorganized "dance" of drunken man, and the frame is twofold. On the one hand we have the frame of the film material, which is unchanging and completely arbitrary, not even subjective, and on the other hand we have an internal framing within the picture. In the foreground there is a scholar speaking about the social meaning of drugs and drinking, and behind him sits the drunken man with a bottle in his hands, laughing like an idiot. The two persons are two images one behind the other, but, at the same time they are the images of *each other* too. They are reflecting each other, the first talking about something the second illustrates, but he is the one that gives sense to the first being there. So the meaning of the image comes out of its self-reflection which is created by the medium. The fourth study shows all this on an abstract level with the electronic mirror system in which images are created.

These four studies illustrate the idea that the more traditional conventions are pulled out of the image, the more its arbitrariness and conventionality become salient. Reality in the image is only a certain semantic convention that we are simply accustomed to.

New narration

The importance of this study is that although its main point is a clearly modernist experimental project demonstrating the relative and subjective nature of our concept of reality based on traditional conventions. But at the end, Bódy comes to a conclusion which, due to the idea of serialism and infinite reflection, goes beyond modernist essentialism. The serial conception of meaning led Bódy to the idea of a new kind of narration. "New narration" would not be based on the linear and causal development of one situation into another, which is the basis of classical narration, nor on the ambiguity, the falsity and the reflexivity of narration as in some films of modernism. It would be based on the serial logic of databases and the systematic cataloguing of possible elements of various paradigms. This idea of paradigmatic or serial narration was exactly the same Peter Greenaway developed further beginning with his 1982 film *The Draughtsman's Contract*. Bódy set out to realize this idea in his *opus magnum Psyché*, in 1980.

The film's narrative idea was to tell a story where the passing of time looked like a spatial extension and variation of series of motives rather than a linear and irreversible evolution of a process. Although the film did not cancel linear development of a given plot, the plot embraced an unrealistic time span – a hundred years from early 19th century to the 1930s –

during which time the main characters did not grow old. The key idea of the film, however, is not “eternal youth”; but the problem of how the idea of eternal values conceptualized by classicism are devaluated and destroyed by the emergence of modernity. They experience time as an infinite variation of relationships and motives of their environment. Bódy did not multiply only thematic motives in the film but also narrative and visual styles thereby creating a certain visual and narrative eclecticism. When asked at the time about this eclectic character of his film, this is how he explained it:

If we think in old stylistic terms, it is just possible that naturalism is present in my film, just as well as eclecticism; but I want to add that all these are present within quotes, within the film’s own system of symbols. Our selection of styles is dominated by hyper-fictionalism and hyper-narrativity. This means that the various parts marked by different styles are used as blocks, which have mere hints of styles. ... Eclecticism arises from the encyclopaedic nature of the film. From the point of view of style, we regard the various cultural symbols as being equal in value. Kitsch and myth, for instance, are equal in value insofar as both carry symbols and bear a universally characteristic feature. I have conceived the entire film to be similar to those vivid, colorful encyclopaedic-type books which were popular throughout German culture about the turn of the century.⁹

Here one can grasp very clearly the difference of Bódy’s thinking from Hungarian cinematic traditions. He does not distinguish between truth and myth, nor between “true” or “false” mythologies. Nor does he condemn kitsch as something that is opposed to “authentic art”. All these distinctions were essential to the tradition of Hungarian modern cinema of the Sixties and Seventies. For Bódy “reality” or “truth” have no substantial values. They are all aspects of meaning. Eclecticism and the encyclopaedic character of the film were only the categories that could be grasped the most easily with conventional categories. As much as later in Greenaway, in Bódy’s film eclecticism and cataloguing were not just an arbitrary stylistic and narrative choice, they were means of the process of serial transformation of meaning. Unusual grouping, visual transformation and ornamental manipulation of visual elements served as modifiers of the “trivial meaning” isolating elements in their original contexts for the sake of “new grouping” unrelated to essential categories like “reality” or “truth”. The “new group” is not a closed set determined by the function of a linear narrative. It is an open series, a catalogue of objects, persons, aspects, etc. that relates one narrative situation to another by virtue of the heterogeneity of its elements. Serial construction was not the only way narrative situations were linked together. As I said, traditional linear narrative construction had its part to play in the construction of the film, so the serial system (the “new grouping”) functioned as a different layer of meanings in the narrative of which the transformed elements were “entries” on the superficial or trivial narrative layer. “New Narration” is not a narrative structure completely unheard of. It could be best defined as a narrative constructed of parallel interrelated virtual realities, in which narrative and visual elements may play a role in more than one virtual level. That is why Bódy used the term of “hyper-narrative” or “hyper-fiction”. Bódy conceived of his film as a system of fragments of systems where the important thing was not the consistency and the interconnectibility of the original systems but the consistency of his own “hyper-system” by which a wide variety of heterogeneous elements could be ranged in new catalogues.

Bódy’s method was absolutely new at the time especially in the context of commercial art cinema, which, in the beginning of the Eighties, leaving behind modernism was just turning back to conventional narration at best playing with kitsch elements of mass culture (Beneix’s *Diva*, 1981, or Coppola’s *One From The Heart*, 1982 for example). Bódy’s film did not have a success Bódy would have expected in that circuit. It was presented in several international festivals, including the unofficial section of the Cannes film festival, but received only one prize (in Locarno), and was not widely distributed outside of Hungary. The film was viewed as an extravagant and eclectic stylistic exercise rather than as a radical innovation in

⁹ Op.cit. p.132

narrative cinema what it intended to be. Bódy was aware of the novelty of his film as well as of the possible lack of a breakthrough as witnesses a letter written to French producer Anatole Dauman at the completion of his film:

My fear, if there is to be one, about this film arises out of those NEW elements which emerge from the point of view of understanding and techniques which may become the public property (or clichés) of modern filmmaking. A new attitude comes up as worms after rain, so I am afraid that as a consequence of my special geo-political situation I may seem to be a self-plagiarist if my film does not get appear before the world in time.¹⁰

Bódy asserted several times in private that he was not disappointed at the film's not being a breakthrough, because he was certain that his film created a language contemporary cinema was not prepared for. He said ten or fifteen years later his film would be viewed in a totally different manner, when elements of new narration and the new media will be of common use.

New media

Bódy was convinced that new forms of the cinema will be largely informed by the mere technological possibilities provided by the spreading of the electronic media such as video and computer animation together with the super 8 amateur format very fashionable at the time. New technology for him meant new ways of manipulating “trivial” or “usual” meaning of the images. Thus, he never abandoned experimenting with available new formats, even after he became an established filmmaker. In his short experimental videos – he called “philos and mytho-clips” – he experimented with visual and narrative structures characteristic of the audiovisual culture of the digital age. Three points are worth mentioning in this respect: the database system, the composite image and hypertext structure.¹¹ I mentioned already the hypertext structure in *Psyché*, I will now briefly deal with the rest.

In the early eighties Bódy had a utopist vision about how audiovisual culture of the new age will look like. He talked about a universal audiovisual dictionary, a database of sounds and images from which anybody anywhere on the Earth will be able to take any item and use it. He envisioned this “dictionary” to be available via satellite communication. That database would store any image and sound created in the world and isolated from its original context. He had this idea ten years before the World Wide Web appeared, and at a time when remote connection of computers were known only by some very specialized areas like the military, the aviation and scientific usage, and by far was it not known in everyday communication. But this idea was remarkable also from the point of view of the aesthetics of the “new media”. According to Lev Manovich one of the “new media’s” particularities is the database logic that conceives of the world as a deposit of sounds and images that are constantly available and can be used for various purposes in new constructions. The database logic is contrary to the linear narrative thinking, and makes an intimate linkage between the paradigm, the data and the way the data is reached or organized, in other words, the syntax belonging to the media. Bódy’s conception about “new narration”, and in his experiments with different formats are very similar to this conception, only instead of “databases” he used the word “encyclopaedia”. He worked on a project to establish an official experimental workshop within MAFILM the state sponsored Hungarian film studio, to find ways of extending various alternative tech-

¹⁰ op.cit. p. 128.

¹¹ For the characteristics of the „new media”, see Lev Manovich: *The Language of the New Media*. M.I.T. Press, 2001.

nologies such as super-8 and video.¹² In his last feature film, *The Dog's Night Song*, he systematically mixed various techniques, 35mm, video, 16mm, super-8. The different media were meant to convey different meaning levels, constantly comparing the visual and narrative elements to one another. Thereby not only the visual elements created a certain paradigm, but the various forms of representation also. The syntax became paradigmatic, as Manovich put it twenty years later.

The idea of the composite image resides in the representation of a seamless reality or various virtual realities composed of heterogeneous elements. The composite is contrary to the idea of montage which is based on juxtaposition of homogeneous elements. In the composite image the elements are not disjunctive, and its stylistic equivalent is eclecticism. However, the idea of the composite is not only different styles, but also different material molded one into the other. Essential to this idea is the fluid transformation of images instead of clear cut borders or edges inherent in the idea of montage. A lot of examples of this way of thinking can be found in *Psyché*, as well as in his short experimental videos, naturally within the limits of the computer and video technology of the early eighties. The term Bódy used to designate his conception of the composite image was “multimedia”, which he considered as the great potential of cinema: “That is precisely the magnificent possibility of the motion picture, i.e. that the mutual correlation of various media may produce a complex balanced unity of diverse philosophical systems.”¹³

Bódy made his films and videos with the presentiment that some important changes were to come in the audiovisual medium. He was convinced that within ten or fifteen years his profession will be considerably altered. In 1984 he wrote: “I am a film director, but perhaps ten years from now my profession will be called video-director. ... I may say that to me video is the promise that the potential of cinema will be realized, namely that filmmaking is actually a language, which can communicate thoughts in all kinds of ways.”¹⁴ The commercial sector of cinema was aware of the fact that the entertainment industry would extensively use computer technology to enhance its effects. New forms of narration, mixing of various media were spreading in the art film industry. But very few filmmakers at the time were thinking about digital technology – or as it was called, video and computer – as something that will considerably alter cinema to the point that a completely new audiovisual *language* will come into being. Peter Greenaway and Gábor Bódy were the ones who made films with the consciousness that they were speaking a particular *language* only future audiences will be able to really appreciate and understand.¹⁵

Conclusion

Bódy's international recognition remained limited. The explanation of this relative lack of success would need a more meticulous and critical analysis of his work which exceeds the limits of this essay. One could nevertheless formulate some hypotheses.

First, he worked in a period when international attention went for such Hungarian films that in one way or another dealt with some contemporary political issues. It was pre-

¹² He predicts in his report (1982) that the super-8 format will have no more than three to five years to go, the time video technique becomes more perfect and cheap enough. See. Bódy, 1996. 315.

¹³ Bódy 1987. p. 132.

¹⁴ Bódy, 1996.p 340.

¹⁵ In some respects Greenaway is even more radical inasmuch as he considers true cinema as something that is not yet created. He expressed this idea in an interview I made for Hungarian Television in 1995.

cisely this tradition that Bódy contested. Second, all of his works prior to *Psyché* qualify more as experimental films than as accomplished works of art susceptible to reach a wide range of audiences. Third, in *Psyché* he did not create a sufficiently consistent aesthetic framework that could hold together the highly eclectic stylistic texture throughout the lengthy runtime of the film (more than three hours), so even this film was viewed as a rather extravagant stylistic exercise. Fourth, not only did his next film *The Dog's Night Song* not contribute to some kind of stylistic or conceptual coherence of his style; it seemed instead rather chaotic and undisciplined. And last, the sudden and tragic ending of his life did not allow any consistency to unfold in time in later works. Bódy's main role in Hungarian cinema was that of radically deconstructing old cinematic conventions and to forcefully introducing a new artistic vision and new conceptions about the future of the audiovisual medium way ahead of his time, which became an important inspiration for more than one young filmmaker in that period.