Revealing the Criminal: Crime Films as Symptoms of the Social Imaginary of Late-socialist Hungarian Society

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Abstract

This paper discusses the social dilemmas and anxieties of late-socialist years in Hungarian society through the analysis of crime films of the period. Through identifying key social issues as themes in the allegorical narrative of these films, I will draw attention to aspect of the social imaginary and uncover social reality of the 1980s. These products of the social imaginary come forth as identification and potential solution fantasies to help the people of this time of unpredictability navigate the social situation they were in. I argue that the detectives of these crime films undertake a journey to bring light to the malfunctions of the system through revealing the criminal, while living the anxieties and dilemmas of the common people.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The attention given to works of art as a discourse by which social reality can be analyzed and interpreted is often unrecognized. Film as a discourse, cannot be understood without taking into account the social and historical time in which it was born. It provides a platform for key disputes, and can reflect on aspects of social reality that are present in the public's common imaginary in the given context in which it was made. Péter Apor asserts that the "experience" through which of the common people understand their history is different from that of official and political transcripts, and ideology based historical narratives that are published of a given area. Common people's values and priorities that determine their everyday practices, are different from that of the political elite's and is often understated in historical narratives. The best way to understand the national experience is, therefore, through small scale personal reflections that are representations for the feeling and experience of many others.

The aim of this thesis is to uncover reflections on various aspect of the social reality of Hungary in the time of emerging change in the early 1980s, while still struggling with the ideology of an oppressive system. In order to achieve this, I will analyze products of the social imaginary that align with the potential fantasy formulations as a response to uncertainties, dilemmas, and fears that may serve as a help mechanism to navigate in times of difficulty. My analysis will be through the use of Hungarian *crime fiction films* that were released in the early and mid 1980s, when an economic crisis has started to emerge again, in the dying years of the Kádár regime as the new economic mechanism in Hungary proved to be insufficient. The films I am going to analyze send the detective on a metaphorical tour of social investigation, where throughout their journey they discover and bring light to key aspects of the malfunction of the system, while trying to navigate and work around them.

The crime film genre perfectly aligns with the aim of my investigation; it observes a society in which someone has acted against the norms and the offender has to be uncovered and punished. The figure of the criminal is likely to point us to the direction of who the fantasy solution frames, or in other words, the figure that the social imaginary puts the blame on for the malfunctions and flaws, for how and why things are wrong in society. The figure of the detective is the personification of the figure who will bring light to or reveal the criminal. In some cases, more implicitly than in others. The detective's personal motivation is the incentive of a collective, a desire for discovering whom to put the blame on, while it is also a judgmental collective eye. The issue when looking at crime fiction in late-socialist Hungary is that in socialist ideology crime was a taboo, it did not officially exist and it was not allowed to be publically discussed, either. There were some detective films made, nonetheless, however, these were not equivalent to the big, hard-boiled detective stories of the West (Koltai, 1986).

So, the question remains, if they were not like the ones in the West, what were they like? There was a range of crime films made in the 1980s, that were quite different in the way they treated crime and the figure of the investigator. None of these films present the typical hard-boiled Hollywood detective. Hungarian crime film in the 80s either presents the national police, who can solve the case alone, or the official detective who works for the government and often makes a comedy out of crime. It is obvious that the figure of the detective in Hungarian film is in transformation, and this is why my choice lies in looking for the detective who is not either of these figures.

Before I do that, however, I will discuss some that I call the "containment" films, that eliminate the social detective. *No Clues* (1982) and *Blood Brother* (1983) present a society in which crime is present, and the criminal offends the rules of socialist ideology. However, no one personifies the detective, in these films enforcing justice is not up to any individual. The

jurisdiction is up to the local police, or detectives who officially work for the government. These investigators do not have a big role in the films, they are often name-less as well. However, someone needs to inspect or at least act upon criminality, that is their job. Agnes Koltai (1986) asserts that in principle these films present everyday pity offences committed by average crooks, They are close enough to reality, or down to earth, that they are easily believable, it could happen to anyone, however, they have enough mystery to retain the viewer's fantasy (Koltai, 1986). The protagonist of Peter Fabry's *No Clues* (1982) is a talented artist, who has given up his ambitions for a fix paid job at a store. However, he is bored of his job and of his life in general. He never wanted to get involved with outlawry, but he sees that without taking risks he is not going to get anywhere. He teams up with some acquaintances, and becomes a privy in a robbery. The police start investigating the case, trying to find the criminals through established procedures, looking at figures and probabilities. They list the potential professions and occupations, characteristics who are likely to get involved with crimes. The motivation of the characters', especially of the protagonist, can be seen as an allegory for a wider social phenomenon. *Blood Brothers (1983)* presents two young soldiers who escape from service and get involved with more outlawry on their journey. Similarly to *No Clues*, in *Blood Brothers* the real detectives are absent, they are not personified by any individual. The "crime" is investigated because the criminals offend the socialist ideology, mostly because of their inability to live in accordance to it and are tired of compromise on their own loss and disadvantage. We can see the battle of ethics and suggestions for social conflict but it is not as explicit here.

There are other crime films made and released in the 80s, that already present an individual detective but he serves the socialist police and the government. One of the most famous and popular ones are the Ötvös Csöpi movies, that investigate crime cases of the Lake Balaton area. These were a series of films starring the same detective, Csöpi, who was

often referred to as Hungarian version of Bud Spencer in West, giving these crime films a rather comic sense. These films were: *The Pagan Madonna* (1980), *Don't Panic, Please!* (1982), and *The Enchanted Dollar* (1985). Similarly to *No Clues*, these movies personify the figure of the criminal as a foreigner, mostly from German or Austrian origins. The roots of this detail can be connected to Hungary's relationship with the West, and the government's aim to raise negative connotation in this regard. Therefore, these films can be characterized as "containment" films, that aimed to avert attention from the real issues. They are significantly different from the ones I aim to analyze in this thesis, which try to face reality instead of comically distract the audience.

The transformation of the figure of the detective to the ones I aim to analyze in this paper is associated with the time period in which they were born. Ferenc András' *The Vulture* (1982), Zoltán Fábry's *Housewarming* (1983) and Leány András' *The Peep-Hole and the Key* (1984) fall into the category where the detective is not working for any official agency but are average people. In this sense, they are not conventional detective films but rather their protagonists are the *social detectives*, which I will discuss in more detail in later chapters.

The reason for choosing to look at the 1980s rather than any other area in Hungarian socialist history is due to the nature of the period, with the approaching change that terminated communism in Hungary in the end of the 1980s. By the time transformation happened, there were years of preceding economic crisis, joined by social tension and discontent with the existing situation. The Kádár regime of the 1970s brought significant developments to well-being and prosperity to the people, much more than in any other country of the Soviet Block. This is why Hungary was hit the hardest when the system became indebted and faced crisis which could lead to its complete collapse. The insufficiencies of the Kádár system were unable to continue for too long before the economy would collapse and this would mean significant cut-backs again, which the society at this

point could not tolerate. The common feeling was that everyone had "enough of the uncompleted promises" (Kis, 1987), they were tired of being fooled any longer with more unsuccessful attempts at reform. The atmosphere of this period can be described as being determined by *tense waiting* (Kis, 1987). As a reflection on the events of 56' and its aftermath, it felt safest to wait for something to happen, which they knew would happen, but unsure of when or what exactly it will be. Also, a desire to take action and rather than *complain, demand*! This is what I insist characterizes the films I aim to analyze here.

My research question focuses on *What is the social reality constructed through a common socio-political imaginary of the late-socialist Hungary conveyed through the criminal fiction films of the 1980s?* The most important points of analysis are the figure of the detective in comparison to the figure of the criminal. Through Jameson's theories (1981, 1995) in chapter "Literature Review: Social Imaginary: Investigating the Political Unconscious in the Criminal Master Narrative", I will discuss the significance of these characters and analyze their social and political implications through their role in the *fable*. "National Experience in the Allegorical Narrative" will discuss the nature of *master narrative* as a platform for the political unconscious, which is disguised in the details of the story or "text" and enables an entry into the imaginary. The journey of the characters is deeply influenced by a broken surrounding social world, one in which crime happens as a result of its malfunction, which is elaborated in the analysis subchapter, "Social Experience of Fear and Distress". Throughout my analysis, I aim is to look for meaning that is complex but not explicit, a meaning making which does not specifically have one major message for the spectator but becomes visible in the taken-for-grated. The motivation of the detective feeds on a desire scenario, to take action in a social world where everyone is withdrawing, because it seems like no one else wants to take it on, as explained in "The Self-Appointed Social Detective". The criminal that is revealed in the end is also different from the conventional

offender, their criminality is rooted in deeper social conflicts, which will be discussed in "Socio-economic Differences: The Figure of the Criminal" and "Peek-a-Boo: Who's story is it, anyway?".

Literature Review
Social Imaginary: Investigating the Political Unconscious in the Criminal Master Narrative

This thesis will aim to look for some meaning that the genre of detective text, or as Jameson calls it the "conspiratorial text", offers in terms of collective imaginary. The shared imaginary works as an "unconscious, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us in the late twentieth century", looking at the Hungarian social situation in the early and mid-1980s as a case study (Jameson, 1995:3). Furthermore, the paper will look for the "national allegory", *master narrative*, in order to help grasp the social anxieties at the time of change, or as Jameson (1995:4) puts it, understand "whatever ideas in the air are left, and a fantasy-solution to all the anxieties that rush to fill our current vacuum".

For the purposes of this paper, before defining the social imaginary, it is important to clarify what we mean by *imaginary*, how it is different from *imagination* and even more, from *fantasy*. The denotation of the term imagination and to be able to imagine is highly associated with the individual and individual psyche rather than the social (Bottici, 2014). A number of important references that will be used in this paper refer to the term *fantasy* [ex. Jameson: 1981 1995], and even though these terms are very similar, they are not quite identical or interchangeable. Bottici (2014) points out that Freud in his psychoanalysis almost never uses the term *imaginary* in any of his works, to which he prefers to use the word *fantasy* (*Fantasie*). However, Jung (1936:62), as cited by Bottici (2014:34), prefers to use the term imagination because it "is an active creation finalized to a certain end", in contrast to fantasy, which is "pure unreality". The issue with the term fantasy is that "it is more systematically associated with the idea of unreality", while imagination [Einbildungskraft] connotes the "power to construct something" (Bottici, 2014:34). The term imagination has been transformed and referred to as *Imaginary* by Lacan, and became the locus of his theory

in “return to Freud” (Bottici, 2014). While imagination can be regarded on individualistic terms, imaginary is “what produces us as social beings” (Bottici, 2014:39). This is precisely because rather than existing solely as individuals, we are “always already social beings who cannot but exist within a certain background or social context within which we are born” (Bottici, 2014:39). Taylor offers a definition for *social imaginary*: “the way people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underline these expectations” (Taylor, 2004:23). He further asserts that the way people imagine their social existence is most often carried out in “images, stories and legends” and is shared by a large number of people, or often an entire society (Taylor, 2004:23). The social imaginary is also a means by which people learn to achieve collective practice, enriched by the conventions of “how things usually go” in practice, “interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go” (Taylor, 2004:24). In other words, the social imaginary conveys “how we continuously stand or have stood in relation to others and to power” (Taylor, 2004:27). I aim to use Taylor’s definition of the social imaginary to discuss how the characters of crime film perceive *how things are* in society, and contemplate *how things should be* or at least, that they *should not be as they are*.

Public vs Private

The following chapters deal with film, which is the manifestation of an individual’s (director’s) imaginary, but portrays and allegorizes a social and political reality. This study thus relies at the theoretical level on the concept of this connection and interdependence. How should it be conceived, then? In her recent book, Chiara Bottici (2014:90) provides important tools to this end when she introduces the notion of “imaginal” in order to explain the “interaction” between the individual and the social faculties (private and public), and explicitly argues that “politics coincides with spheres of public life and therefore includes all that concerns the social and the political”. Politics thus understood depends on the imaginal

because it is "only by imagining it that a public comes into being". Here Bottici draws attention to the dependence of politics specifically on the individual through the individual's ability to imagine. There would be no collective that comes together without a shared imaginal, it would only be "scattered bodies" (Bottici, 2014:90). She stresses this fact because humans are "imaginal being", they cannot coexist without a shared imaginal (Bottici, 2014:90).

Another recent body of work may help us: Sarah Ahmed's. The postcolonial scholar discusses the individuals' connection to the public through emotions. She talks about a feeling of emotion that comes "from without" (Ahmed, 2004:9). Firstly, she considers that people would normally think that emotions or feelings are generated within the private and can move out into the public from within. However, she brings a different side to it, using Durkheim's standpoint, to argue that emotions are both personal and are present in the collective and can come from without (Ahmed, 2004). She talks in particular about threat, which provokes a feeling of collective hate (Ahmed, 2004). This threat could be provoked by the "imagined other", who's presence is imagined to threaten one's security or even "take the place of the subject" (Ahmed, 2004:43). This hate originates in racism, which has political importance in the sense that it "sticks the white nation together" and can be used for political purposes (Ahmed, 2004:43). Taking Bottici's and Ahmed's argument about the way in which the personal intervenes with the political, it can be noted that according to these authors the two levels are inseparable. It appears like they have a mutual dependence and constantly influence one another.

These two contributions illustrate findings of the general social theory of "structuration", which explains how structure and agency mutually constitute each other through a perpetual feedback process (Giddens, 1984). Agents can be thought of as the individual, while structures are the larger social frames and norms embodies through

institutions (Berger and Luckman, 1967). Giddens (1984:17) defines structures as "the properties which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them systemic form". Structures, he argues, are guiding rules rather than external entities imposing their laws on agents. He also notes that "the domain of the study of social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, not the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across time and space" (Giddens, 1984:2). Therefore, he argues that the private actor (agency) cannot be thought of separate from structure. Giddens discusses that structures are produced through practice, which comes about because of the individuals' (agents') actions (Ritzer, 2011). Overall, the idea of Giddens' structuration theory is the duality of structure and agency, they do not exist without the other.

Doxa vs. Ideology

I feel it is necessary to clarify that while the paper will discuss some instances of underlying meaning or representation that Jameson (1981,1995) refers to as ideology, I propose to use it in a different manner. Jameson has a Marxist theoretical take on film analysis and he is looking for an ideology that is a coherent totality, "a system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (Zizek, 1994:77). Zizek (1994: 79-80) argues that is terms of ideology "men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form", "the imaginary representation of the real world". While I propose to use Bourdieu's notion of doxa, which is a concept of an ideology that can be self-contradicting, multiple, through connotations and not just denotations, a meaning making that is more complex. Bourdieu (1994:168) asserts that the "social world doesn't work in terms of consciousness; it works in terms of practices and mechanisms". Bourdieu (1994:139) is "more concerned to examine the mechanisms by which ideology takes hold in everyday life". Therefore, rather than looking for the workings of false

consciousness, unconsciousness and so forth, Bourdieu (1994:139) calls attention to the *taken-for-granted* common sense that "goes without saying" in the everyday life. Bourdieu (1994:168) proposes a new way to think about ideology and explains that "we accept many things without knowing them, that is what is called ideology". I propose to use the term ideology in terms that involves complex forms of meaning making without having one major message, but tensions and contradictions; rather than the expression of "class struggle".

Crime and the *Symptom*

I will use the notion of the *symptom* in the very end of my analysis as applied to crime films. According to Zizek (1989) the symptom is the discrepancy between the Symbolic (reality) and the Real. We might encounter the symptom directly, and the manifestation of the symptom (seeing it) may alert us that there is something unknown that triggers the symptom. What is repressed is always behind the surface, however, the presence of its symptom hints at its existence. Zizek (1989:57) further points out that the symptom "will only ever be a trace, one which will continue not to be understood until the analysis until the analysis has got quite a long way, and until we have realized its meaning". Until then, "symptoms are meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but constructed retroactively- the analysis produces the truth; that is, the signifying frame which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning" (Zizek, 1989:58).

In his final years Lacan developed the theory of symptom as something, which is present instead of nothing, "almost everything that is becomes in a way a symptom" (Zizek, 1989:77). "The symptom arises where the world failed, where the circuit of the symbolic communication was broken: it is a kind of "prolongation of the communication by other means'; the failed, repressed word articulates itself in a coded, cyphered form" (Zizek, 1989:79). Therefore, I will argue that the crime film is a discourse used for a symbolic communication of a failed, repressed world. It is the non-explicit, non-verbal dimension of

meaning-making as symptomatic manifestations that makes my hermeneutic work, as an analyst or interpreter, even more meaningful and required.

Film as a Medium for Socio-political Analysis: The Conventional Detective Story

Film, similarly to other means of cultural production- literature, economics, history, etc.- is a textual and narrative discourse, as Derrida (1988:148) put it, "there is nothing outside the text". Films and the context of social-historical reality in which they were produced, are inseparable. It can, therefore, be used to deconstruct the social and political realities of a given period and not only in terms of a commentary on it. Monaco (2000:262) points out that the "politics of film and the politics of 'real life' are so closely intervened that it is generally impossible to determine which is the cause and which is the effect". Its political nature is presented ontologically as well, as it "tends to deconstruct the traditional values of the culture" (Monaco, 2000:263). Film becomes an agent for socio-political analysis in the sense that "every text at its more fundamental level a political fantasy which in contradictory fashion articulates both the actual and potential social relations which constitute individuals within a specific political economy" (Jameson, 1981: xi).

As mentioned above, Jameson (1981, 1995) argues that everything is political and there is no text that is free of ideological or political influence. He identifies a method of analysis, cognitive mapping, which can ultimately be called the political unconscious (Jameson, 1995). It is the "phenomenon by which people make sense of their urban surroundings, it works as an intersection of the personal and the social, which enables people to function in the urban spaces through which they move" (Jameson, 1995: xiv). I recast the political unconscious as the political imaginary, to make more space for the complexity of meaning and theoretically for the practical social function, dynamic of films. The political imaginary is a vehicle for our experience and the trauma of the "Real", disguised in its *symptoms* (never fully represented). The political imaginary presents the world view of the

period, and "a national destiny fantasized", which is a different way to say what Taylor has conceptualized as how things usually go in comparison to feeling or imagining "*how they ought to go*".

Films of different genres offer different structures for the exhibition and resolution of socio-political conflicts that have symbolic significance. Jameson (1995:36) asserts that the genre of "the detective story, clearly seems to offer the most articulated form in which the problems raised by this or that epistemological vocation for representation have been acknowledged". The point-of-view that the audience sees, that of the detective, is completely separate from the one that needs to be reconstructed. In the detective story narrative, it is clear that the story of "knowing" is ontologically distinct from the story of "doing", meaning that the narration of the story as such, from the point-of-view of the detective, is distinct from the underlying "fable" (Jameson, 1995:36). This is precisely why a "myth" or "ideology" is involved in the story, to show the "outset that the knower is part of the same social world as the known", which will be discussed later on (Jameson, 1995:36). The classical detective might seem to be personally uninterested and his reconstruction of the crime unmotivated, this cannot be the case since "such neutrality and ideology-free objectivity can never obtain in the realm of social knowledge, where every position is ideological and implies the taking of a political stance and the making of a social judgement", therefore, the motivation of the detective is always political (Jameson, 1995:37).

Jameson distinguishes between the classical and the social detective and argues that in the classical detective story, there is an individual detective who tackles an individual crime, which is normally committed by an individual criminal. However, he or she becomes a social detective once one of these roles reaches the collective status. He has to have a motivation, namely, the "motivation of the device" (to win narrative plausibility), which will "take on

some deeper historical and ideological urgency" (Jameson, 1995:37). This supplementary motivation is of course political (Jameson, 1995:37).

This deeper historical and ideological manifestation of the story, that Jameson mentions, is in a sense a national allegorizing, which means using the protagonist's mission and narrative to deliver "individual narrative representations through which the national destiny can be fantasized" (Jameson, 1995:37). This offers a narrative in which a fault in the national can be centered, and describe crime as an "emblematic disorder of the national soul" (Jameson, 1995:38). Jameson (1995:38) further characterizes the social detective as someone "who can most often be identified as occupying the space and position of the intellectual as such: that unhappy consciousness, forever suspended between the classes, yet unable to disengage from class realities and functions, and from class guilt; that "objective traitor"…who, disengaging from whatever class of origin, is never fully welcomed into the group ideologically adopted; whose disinterested intellectual and epistemological commitment finally always risks being unmasked as this or that practical subservience to social forces of a scarcely altruistic nature". Therefore, the social detective is always in a sense an outsider, or someone on the periphery of society who has the ability to scrutinize it. Jameson (1995:39) further asserts that, "it will be the more general positioning of the intellectual in the social structure which endows the individual protagonist with collective resonance, which transforms [them] into a vehicle for judgement on society and revelations of its hidden nature, just as it refocuses the various individual or empirical events and actors into a representative pattern symptomatic of the social order as a whole" (Jameson, 1995:39).

Jameson firstly identifies the classical detective story, in which both the criminal and the detective are individuals, from which the first alteration is when the criminal takes a collective stance, in which the detective remains an individual. However, there are instances when this works the other way around, the criminal remains an individual while the detective

is transformed into a collective instance (Jameson, 1995:46). This transformation to a collective apparatus is what Jameson calls the "final manifestation of which they were supposed to be allegories in the first place, namely, the collective- the group or class- as agent, actor, or communal agency". In cases when the individual crime event is replaced by something broader and social, is distinct in the sense that they present "society as a whole that is the mystery to be solved", rather than a specific mystery (Jameson, 1995:39). In case the crime transforms to be of collective nature, meaning that it is a whole society that commits it, then the collective must work together to cover it up (Jameson, 1995).

To understand the workings of the social imaginary in film, the social anxieties at the time of change, is to identify the meaning of the "master narrative" (Jameson, 1981:34). Lukacs, as cited by Jameson (1981:33), argues that cultural texts are vital allegorical models of entire societies, due to the symbols and components, especially found in its characters, "as figures for the various social classes and class fractions." Jameson (1981:34) suggests that these master narratives "have inscribed themselves in the texts as well as in our thinking about them; such allegorical narrative signifieds are a persistent dimension of literary and cultural texts precisely because they reflect a fundamental dimension of our collective thinking and our collective fantasies about history and reality". The allegorical aspect of the narrative can be identified as a *fable*, which lies underneath the obvious or first-hand understanding of the narrative of the film, in other words, it is hidden under the surface. Jacques Derrida (1988) explains the possibility of meaning making by creating an uneven world where some things signify different things, *différance,* that make meaning possible. The ability of a story to have allegorical references that create different meanings. The notion of allegory is what Jameson (1981:48) refers to as a "fantasy or *protonarrative* structure as the vehicle for our experience of the real". The origin of the allegorical representation comes from or connects to a specific historical period, as Jameson (1981:27) asserts, which "in its

own way, 'expresses' some unified inner truth- a world-view or a period style or a set of structural categories which marks the whole length and breadth of the "period" in question". Jameson (1981) points out that these "narrative representations" stand for an individual period in the history of that given nation, from which it gains its significance. The narrative serves as a "larger virtual nightmare" of "different anxieties (allegorically)" (Jameson, 1995:42). According to Jameson (1981:39), it is important to note that history as such is not a text, but the only way to grasp it through its "textualization" in the political unconscious.

The System in Crisis: Transitology and Historical Recap

My aim with a small recap of some important aspects of the 1980s historical and sociological background is to make it more explicit what the films I am going to discuss relate to in terms of their allegorical representation. Furthermore, to show the details of a context in which films of such nature could be born.

I will apply the theory of transitology as formulated by theorists such as David Stark (1992) and Burawoy and Verdery (1999), cited by Gans-Morse (2004) to argue that the period I am going to discuss is a time when transformation has already started to happen in some respect. There are various theories of transformation from the communist system to capitalism, and various implications of "transitology" which argue that this change has an end point, a "linear historical progress", which means a sharp break from the previous system (Gans-Morse, 2004:321). However, the theorists mentioned above dismiss this notion of a "presumed endpoint to transition", which is liberal democracy, and claim that it is rather a "transition from socialism" (Gans-Morse, 2004: 335,336). Therefore, I argue that what resulted in the collapse of socialism in Hungary in the very end of the 1980s, has been building up long before its termination and has been developing for a long time afterwards. In many aspects, political or economic, it might seem like the change was sudden, especially in

Hungary. However, the preceding years of crisis that built up to its collapse are just as evident and significant as the years that came after.

From the number of countries in transition in the socialist block, this thesis looks at Hungary as a case study.* Starting from the 1956 revolution that shook the oppressive system in the county, 'Kadarism' emerged, which is associated with the "new economic mechanism", starting in 1968 (Kontler, 2002:434). This regime had the highest rate of "bourgeoisement" in Hungary: "range of material and cultural satisfactions were made available for a slightly wider range of people" (Kontler, 2002:437). The central focus of the government at this point was to improve living standards and boost consumption in the country, and also, to boost social satisfaction in general. This dictatorship toward the 1970s was referred to as "goulash communism" or "refrigerator socialism", which was a rather 'soft dictatorship' (Kontler, 2002:443).

Other improvements included travel bans that were lifted and a larger segment of the population was allowed to, and could afford to, travel. Other developments followed, such as a rise in the income rates, which he notes were the highest in 1978, together with shortened working hours and less working days. These factors permitted workers to have a second job, allowing them to spend on a little more than their primary needs, for example: holidays, and other "luxury" goods that were still far-fetched for other countries in the Eastern bloc. The purchase of Soviet-made Lada and Trabant cars increased, by the new "petty bourgeois" of the Hungarian society. Strict state control and propaganda was lifted from the private life and a new strategy was introduced, called the Three T's (tilt, tűr, támogat), which translates to prohibited, permitted, promoted. This model established relatively well the so called "taboos"

* The historical synopsis was created using the following sources:
Apor, Péter 2008; Berend, T. Ivan 2009; Csánády, Márton. 1999; Gyarmati, György & Valuch, Tibor 2009; Kis, Janos 1987; Kontler, László 2002; Slachta, Krisztina 2017.

and things that were seen as violating socialist ideology were simply denied access to for the audience. This lighter version of propaganda control allowed for a little more freedom in the artistic domain as well. Kontler (2002:447) points out that different art forms, and especially films were made, "with eternal human themes often subtly related to sensitive issues in Hungary's past and present".

However, still one of the weaknesses of the Hungarian industry was the limited choices of food and textile products and that of raw materials. Therefore, the new economic mechanism was based more on "higher technological expertise rather and less raw materials" (Kontler, 2002:441). By the 1980s, an economic crisis was approaching the system, because what it was most dependent on started to increase in cost (such as oil and raw materials). The oil crises brought about a shock to the whole world economy. Hungary could not generate much power on its own, apart from the Paks nuclear plant, there were not much other means to do so. The great boost of the quality of life had its cost, the country started being significantly indebted and more depended on the West. The Hungarian economy hoped that this crisis would be short lived, and hence kept up the speed of growth. They wanted to keep up the growth without having to give up the new model, but "the fact that foreign trade dramatically declined…resulted in a deficit that in ten years equaled a full year's national income, or nearly the amount lost during the Second World War" (Kontler, 2002:452). The country became highly indebted, which reached the amount of 8 million dollars by 1978. This put the country into near bankruptcy by 1982 and the people grew impatient and disappointed in the consequences that this brought to the general public.

About two-thirds of the population consisted the second (and often the third) economy, who were "vulnerable to the frequent changes and inconsistencies in the relevant regulations- the unpredictability of the system" (Kontler, 2002: 457). This stage of emerging change can be characterized as an opportunity understood as '*take what you can as soon as*

you can'. Even though the details of the failed reform were deliberately hidden from the community, they knew what was going on. Those who did not become part of the second economy suffered a great decline in their quality of living. According to Kontler, "nearly 20 percent of the population lived on or below the 'social minimum' level" by 1987. Gyarmati and Valuch (2009: 421) point out that "the vast majority of Hungarians in the 1970s and 1980s felt that they were able only in part to get where they wanted", and where their destiny depended on "the often-mysterious intentions of the authorities". Furthermore, Csánády (1999) identifies relevant fears and causes for distress in the 1970s and 1980s Hungarian society. First of all, he identifies "classical political fear" and "paternalistic fear", which is the fear of the state and its police-state organizations (Csánády, 1999:17). He asserts that paternalistic fear was a kind of habitual anxiety, which makes people fear unwritten "laws" that are dictated by authority figures. Csánády (1999:17) suggests that this ruled over society because at this point everyone had "a little bit more to lose than their comfortable chains".

Housing underwent significant changes especially in the period of attempted reforms following the 1956 Revolution. The peak of house construction was in 1975, from where is significantly dropped by the beginning of the 1980s, due to the declining economic conditions. Socialist ideology believed in the non-existence of unemployment, none, or very little private property and very drastic wage differences could not exist either. This would mean that there should not be different socioeconomic differences, or in other words, such a big gap in different social stratums. However, Slachta (2017) claims that in the 1970s research proves that instead of diminishing socioeconomic differences, the system rather escalated them. She points out that block of flats built identically, typicality fit up to four people, to promote compact living and crowd assimilation. Supposedly, and as of socialist ideology, all the members of society, as they were equal, were supposed to live under the same conditions. However, she claims, that this was nowhere close to be true. The workers

were living in the worst conditions, who, in theory, were supposed to be the most important building blocks of the system. Also, instead of giving priority to second economy families with more children, priority was given to supervisors and those in higher position, when it came to flat distribution.

Going back to some statistics, in the 1980s Hungary was on the top of the list in an international survey of suicide rate and among the first when it came to the intake of alcohol. The rate of suicide was continuously increasing until 1987. In 1983, 70% of men and 45% of woman claimed to consume alcohol daily. This is important because the consumption of alcohol is known to be the most wide-spread method used to ease *distress*. Furthermore, when questioned, 8% of those below 30, and 25% of those above 60% felt like their future was hopeless.

"We've got something- but not the real thing…" (Kontler, 2002:458). By the mid-1980s people started to "desire the real thing", even if it was quite unclear what it was exactly. This was the result of realizing that the efforts to achieve some greater capital for their hard and additional work was all in vein. Kontler (2002:458) describes the atmosphere of the mid to late 1980s in comparison to the beginning of the attempted economic reform as "growing self-exploitation was hardly sufficient even to maintain the standards already achieved, let alone raising them, gradually undermined the terms of the legitimacy of the Kadar regime".

Weakened economy, shortages, growing social and economic distress and dissatisfaction were the ruling attributes of this time. This was mixed with social anxieties about the future as a result of the inevitability of change but at the same time uncertainty of its exact details. By the late 1980's it became evident that Kadar has to go and the citizens were called for action because it is obvious that the authorities will not keep their promise.

Furthermore, the public opinion held that it “does not support any more sacrifices” for a system that is unlikely to succeed (Kis, 1987).

Analysis
Imagining Crime and Punishment: the Doxa of Social Life

The following chapters aim to employ the theoretical models discussed in my previous chapter as it can be applied to selected Hungarian crime fiction films. I aim to look at three Hungarian films that were made and released in the early and mid-1980s, *The Vulture (1982), Housewarming (1983), and Peep-Hole and the Key (*1984) to discuss aspects of social imaginary.

It is evident that Hungarian filmmaking was not well known for its fruitful or outstanding production of crime fiction, especially under socialism (Koltai, 1986). The existence of crime opposed communist ideology, which declared that only sick and irresponsible people would commit crime. The detective of conventional crime films is not only after the criminal or murderer as such, but discovers the malfunction of such a society in which it happens. Furthermore, György Báron (1982) film critic talks about the viewers' expectations of the generic or "the real" crime film as presenting a life full of luxurious yachts and daring man-hunts on golden pleated streets. Instead of fighting real crime as such, it was the confrontation or battle of morals and ethics. The expectation and fantasy that surrounds the crime film is highly alien to Hungarian social reality, the luxurious life of the cunning criminal and the handsome detective is incompatible with what this society can genuinely offer. Hungarian reality at the time of socialism was not the "optimal crime-scene", nor did it have the conventionalities that the genre demands (Báron, 1982). Socialist Hungarian reality consisted of communal block buildings, dusty streets and Lada cars. György Báron (1982) talks about the potential of a successful (or at least not ridiculous) Hungarian crime film, as a sort of miracle. However, and despite this, there were attempts at the Hungarian crime genre even though the scope of it was completely different.

National Experience in the Allegorical Narrative: The Fable

The allegorical narrative is a story behind the plot, which directly creates a platform for the political and social imaginary, to guide our experience and trauma of the "Real". Jameson (1992:88) asserts that 'the meaning of the fable lies not in the making a stab at interpretation… but rather, in locating and hypothesizing that feature of the national culture and the national experience to which this peculiar interpretive dilemma can be said to be relevant". In this chapter, I will not attempt to interpret the ideological and ontological meaning of filmmakers' story, but rather spot the traces of national experience and a fantasized national destiny, or as Hochschild (2016) calls it, *the deep story*. Firstly, I will talk about the general allegorical reflection that the narrative mirrors. By allegorical reflection, I mean "an unconscious one, for it is only at this deeper level of our collective fantasy that we think about the social system all the time, a deeper level that allows us to slip our political thoughts" (Jameson, 1992:9). As seen in the narratives, the protagonists personify the subjects who live the national experience, struggle to bring about justice when they see outlawry, but encounter ideological and ethical struggles, which feed fantasies that relate to the common experience and imaginary of the national future.

This allegorical reference translates into "that segment of daily life to which we now confine 'history', and the public sphere and which, …becomes associated with historical references from which the film had to triumphantly kept its distance" (Jameson, 1992:60). Péter György (2003:179) describes the period of the late 1970s, early 1980s with regards to art production as a time when "the traditions of compulsory Socialist Realism had almost disappeared". What took over from Socialist Realism was something that he describes as "sincere cynicism", where the ideologies of the regime were no longer present in art, and a "politically provocative artistic realm remained, that of social issues" (György, 2003:180). The national experience that will be discussed as the *fable* behind the narration is characterized by a social atmosphere of prevailing uncertainties and a habitual fear, little

opportunity for real social or economic progress, and therefore, the feeling of hopelessness and uncertainty regarding the future but a compulsion to take action. To make a meaningful correlation between the filmic narrative and the fable, the upcoming subchapters will discuss these points in more detail, namely the socio-economic problems, fear and distress, and the feeling messiness and impenetrability of Hungary in the 1980s.

Unavoidable change started in Hungary after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which, as mentioned earlier, aimed to raise the living standards, greater self-fulfillment and general economic satisfaction in the country. Not long after the reforms, economic crisis emerged, which was sudden and abrupt, bringing about another sociological crisis as a consequence (Slachta, 2017). It is also important to note, that other aims and achievements that were very important at this time was that people could accumulate a little more wealth than before, very slowly and steadily (Slachta, 2017). Propaganda and other state influence started to loosen and move out of personal and family matters and also lifted from the artistic sphere (Slachta, 2017).

These films produced in the early and mid 1980s give contextual home to the anxieties that emerged as a result of dissatisfaction and peaking transition. It will discuss precisely the picture that these films paint of "*how things are*" and even if they do not necessarily point to how they ought to be, they definitely show that they should not be as they are. The allegorical narrative fuses with different parts of social imaginary, it gives the context to show "how we continuously stand in relation to others and to power" (Taylor, 2004).

As a result of interconnectedness, I will distinguish between three distinctive detective stories that draw on different aspects of the same fable. The first distinction is the nature of the detective, which will discuss the nature and motivation of the detectives in *The Vulture*, *Housewarming* and *Peep-Hole and the Key.* These crime films deal with similar

social issues and anxieties, some of which will be discussed in more detail than others. It is evident that all of these films present a protagonist, or the detective figure, who is sent on a journey of social investigation. They are all single, divorced and have a young child that they (unintentionally) neglect. Their life did not turn out the way they wanted to and they are often intellectually bored and stuck in this condition. All of them have housing issues of some sort: tiny apartments or are forced to share with others despite their troubled relationship. Furthermore, confusion and the lack of clear and reliable information is a common theme that characterizes the tone and mood of these films.

The products of the social imaginary that will be discussed in the upcoming chapters are significant shares in a web of meaning, displaying a collective dilemma, accommodating a collective solution-fantasy or as Jameson called it, an "individual narrative representations through which the national destiny can be fantasized".

The Self-appointed Social Detective: The Vulture (1982), Housewarming (1983) and The Peep-Hole and they Key (1984)

Ferenc András' *The Vulture (1982)* offers a narrative story, which presents a self-appointed detective dedicated to bring justice in his own life and, figuratively, point to a larger scope of social and political injustice. Aesthetically, the film presents the dusty streets, dull square socialist buildings and uniform Lada cars, which compose a suitable habitat for the petty robbery of the elite elderly ladies who commit the vital crime. The protagonist of the film, József Simon, is a fallen intellectual, an educated man who earns his living as a taxi driver. He is divorced, indebted and pays child care to his ex-wife. The ordinary urban prototype of the second economy in socialist Hungary. The conflict starts building when his hard-earned money is stolen by two elderly robbers, whose identity he ought to discover after both his boss and the police reject to help him. His story is unconvincing and he is hinted to try looking for the missing money more closely, perhaps he would find it under the chair, suggesting that he is making a fake accusation. His only way to get back his money is to find

the criminal alone, however, in the meantime he becomes one himself. He mutters that if no one believes him, or willing to help him, he will get the money back himself, but there will be no thanks for it. Meaning, that he is not likely to do it the nice, or the "lawful" way. He kidnaps the wealthy lady's dog and later his daughter too, and blackmails the robber for days while asking for much more money than what was stolen from him. Finally, he gets what he wants but it seems like this is not enough to satisfy him and after setting the young lady free he ends his own life.*

Ferenc András' film sets out to follow the man who used to be the man of order, but he needs to get out of this role and his motivation becomes to act precisely because order does not serve him when he needs it. The narration presents József is a genuine man, he is robbed and he seeks help from the police, from his boss, since he does not initially want to personally investigate the case. After he is let down, he is left on his own and it becomes his obligation to bring light to the conspiracy. His moral motivation is born out of a social condition, if he wants to accomplish something that serves his own benefit, he has to take action. As we know, he was robbed of his last monies, that he was going to spend legitimately on paying back his debt and his default child-care. On the other hand, it seems like the subject of the crime committed against him is only an excuse for the legitimation of the real reason why he ought to get involved. He is "taking a political stance and making a social judgement", even though it seems like he just wants to get his ten thousand forints back (Jameson, 1995:38). The detective needs a reason, a cover-up story, to start the investigation, even if it is a petty robbery, it will become clear that his intentions are not *ideology-free.* His cover-up story is clear, but his real moral motivation has multiple sides. He presents how things are: corrupt, unfair sociologically and economically, connected by a feeling of helplessness and inability. Then, he does not present how things ought to be in

* See Appendix i for a complete plot summery of *The Vulture* (1982)

particular, but shows that it should not be like this, rather, presents an aspect of social imaginary that in order to break out of this, waiting in general or waiting for the authorities to take action will not help.

I argue that within the detective genre, *The Vulture* follows a narrative structure which Jameson (1992:60) identifies as the "rebel plot". Following József's journey, his motivations and finally the destination of his heroic journey, it fits the convention of those stories (rebel plot) that "draw their heroic qualities from the very sense of the inevitability of doom and failure" (Jameson, 1994:60). In these stories, as Jameson (1995: 60) points out, "the detective is thus the murderer and the victim all at once". József also becomes a criminal through his journey, apart from being the victim at the same time. He is set out to "revolt and to destroy the conspiracy…and to destroy him[self] in the process" (Jameson, 1992:60). However, as József gets close to achieving his justice, it turns out that it is not what his true aim was after all, he cannot win because "bureaucracy wins out over the rebel", as demonstrated through his fatal end (Jameson, 1992:60). This is when the ethical drive comes into play again, he lost everything, so why did he do it?

It is his obligation, as the rebel, not only to serve justice for his own sake, but to destroy conspiracy for the sake of the collective good. He becomes the detective without a gun, wealth or even private property, but he is clever and precise. It becomes clear that his aim was much deeper and greater than the forced compensation of his money, and he hints that this mission was not solely for his own sake. Therefore, József is the social detective, who proposes an individual motivation for a crime that only seems to be committed against him, but it was not committed by an individual criminal, which I will discuss in the next chapter. This supports the fact that his motivation was ethically but rather politically driven and aimed at the "indictment of a whole collectivity" (Jameson, 1995:37). He returns from his double mirror image of being a criminal and the victim at the same time, to the personify

the victim and the hero. On the surface, it would seem like there was no point to his act, since he achieved nothing tangible with it, but his motivation and output was a battle of an ideological and ontological nature, which will be further discussed in relation to the *fable* in the "Fears and Desires" chapter.

Zoltán Fábri's *Housewarming* is built on a similar premise, his protagonist, Luca Péteri, is an educated woman, a journalist who is set out to investigate an old case of attempted murder. She is, just like József, a self-appointed but unofficial detective. She feels like there is something suspicious about that case, there was something unlawful done that she must bring light to. However, she is greatly discouraged by her boss, who even threatens to fire her if she does not stop looking into that particular incident. She is determined, however, and even if it means going against her boss and other principal figures, she will investigate the case*.

However, rather than filling in for the rebel plot, Luca becomes the social detective through other means. She fulfills the receiver of a symbolic letter that Lacan, as cited by Zizek (1992:10), deems "always arrives at its destination", since "its destination is wherever it arrives". Luca is the receiver of this letter because personally, it seems like, she has nothing to do with the case of investigation, she was not personally involved with it other than having heard about it from her lover. However, she feels like it is her obligation to act upon it. The letter has to be understood figuratively, as a call for action. This is what Zizek (1992:12) explains happens when the "addressee of the call of the big Other (Nation, democracy, Party, God, and so forth)" recognizes him or herself as the receiver of the call, "one becomes its addressee when one is reached". Therefore, she must act upon her obligation to bring light to aspects of the social imaginary that lay under the surface in the master narrative, the level on which the unconscious implications become apparent.

* See Appendix ii for the complete plot summary of *Housewarming* (1983)

Just like József, she is the social detective, she confronts a crime of an individual nature but her motivation goes deeper than the individual level (or an individual criminal): to investigate a crime which has been committed by a collective, a stratum of society. She is after a man in authoritative position, wealthy, powerful and part of the social elite. Luca's motivation to submerge this man is unclear, and even though it is not a fatal decision, it seems like her motivation is to fulfill the gap of uncertainty and dilemma of many others who have faced injustice. This motivation is to bring light to the inconsistency of information and the impenetrable nature of the higher stratum is indeed a political motivation in disguise. She presents the what triggers the social imaginary in respect to *how things are*, similarly to József, and with the same desperation she must act upon it, signaling that *things should not be like this, someone should take action*.

On the other hand, it is also evident that even though *Housewarming* was released in 1983, it is set in the 1970's Hungary and presents a critique of the society at that time. So how is the story useful for the social situation in the 80s? Luca digs up an old case, which she feels obligated to solve, however, there are many people getting hurt and killed in her obsessive investigation to find out the truth. Apart from the other meanings and significations I discussed or will discuss throughout this essay, there is another theme or dilemma that Fabri wants the viewer contemplate: It is perhaps better to leave things are they are because it could lead to more trouble than good. However, he leaves to the viewer to anticipate, without provided a definite answer to the question of what is better: to dig deep and find out the truth or to leave everything as it is and nobody gets hurt? Making this film about the 1970s at the beginning of the 1980s could be understood as a warning sign, *perhaps we should learn from our past*. This dilemma seems to be unresolved by the director.

In *The Peep-Hole and the Key* the narrative offers a very interesting twist to the role of the detective. Precisely because a figure who impressively resembles Detective Columbo

finds our protagonist, Péter Halász, and offers him a job, where all he has to do is observe. He cannot tell him why or for whom he is collecting the information that he gathers, but he knows who the subject of the observation is Márta Kincses. He starts following Marta around, peeking in through windows and hiding in dark alleys to keep out of her sight. However, he gets to know her personally, after visiting and questioning people who know her through various ways. It is unclear throughout the film what the exact purpose of this peaking is, or for whom, and the film finishes without giving us, or him, the answer.* At one of the events he attends in his stalking, someone asks him, "are you here to examine this social phenomenon?" to which he nods his head thoughtfully and responds, "you see, this is the right way to put it". Observing Marta seems to be a good cover-up reason for a social investigation, however, Péter Halász is only a puppet, he is not aware of what his real intention is, but the mysterious detective, his constituter probably does.

Through his peaking and following, Peter turns up at random, politically conscious situations and awkward places that even he does not understand. His job is not to understand, but to follow Marta wherever she goes. However, through his point-of-view we have an interpretation free vision, we learn with the detective as he observes, collects information and contemplates. The fact that his mission is unknown even in the end is suspicious but we are hinted that his mission was clear all along: he is the social detective; Marta is not the true or only subject of his investigation. At certain points in the film he repeatedly encounters the mysterious detective figure who hired him. At one of these encounters the detective warns him that from then on they have to refer to everyone they talk about in disguise, using names of capital cities in Europe. After listing a few names Péter ask: "And how about Márta Kincses?" To which he responds: "I thought you would discover by yourself… Budapest!" This might seem like a coincidence, but most likely it suggests the viewer that who he is after

* See Appendix iii for a complete plot summary of *The Peep-Hole and the Key* (1984)

is nothing less than Budapest. More precisely, of course, he is after *what is going on in Budapest*.

Socio-economic Differences: The Figure of the Criminal in *The Vulture (1982)* and *Housewarming (1983)*

This subchapter aims to identify and discuss the figure of the criminal, which becomes evident in the socio-economic differences problematized in the films. They appoint an individual criminal, who becomes the personification of a collective, or in other words, they stand as a representation for an entire stratum of society. As mentioned earlier, even though the socialist system did not believe in socio-economic differences and disproved of inequality, it existed non-the-less, especially problematically toward the 1970s and 1980s. The important product of the social imaginary in these films, the indication of and social dilemma or *how things are,* is the issue of the elite's unequal and superior quality of life, which caused by their power to take way more out of the collective pot than the average person.

Ferenc András' *The Vulture (1982)* presents a self-appointed detective dedicated to bring justice in his own life but as mentioned before, his true allegorical intention is to bring light to and punish the representatives of the lavish elite. The general feeling that rules over these films is a severe social-critique, in which the aim is to find the "person" to blame for the malfunction of the system and for the general dissatisfaction. This social critique is shown through the identification of the "elite" or those in authoritative positions as the figure of the criminal, as *that person* they are looking for. The situation, which evoked this dilemma is related to the discontent and frustration of social and economic inequalities I mentioned in the historical overview, and to which I will refer back to here.

I already identified the figure of the detective, who became a social detective through the crime's transformation to a collective level, as according to Jameson. This is precisely what happens in *The Vulture*, even though the crime is committed by two ladies, it becomes

evident that József is after a larger group of people. Therefore, the criminal takes a collective stance, and develop a conspiracy to cover up their criminality. This collective is a social stratum in this case, the elite, who seems to have a privileged life and despite that, they are corrupt enough to steal from the poor. This does not necessarily have to be in monetary or even in a material sense like in the film, but even in a symbolic manner: opportunities, freedom, equality.

It seems like there is no one in town who goes after these well-disguised criminal ladies who have robbed multiple people but no one ever accused them as potential suspects, as they hide behind their age and status. However, in the master narrative these characters represent a collective crime that was committed by a stratum, arguably a level of society. Jameson (1995:37) called this the instance when "the detective tends toward absolute reduction, while the other, the collective term becomes the occasion for the indictment of a whole collectivity". This would explain why the persons in authority (boss, police) try to cover up for them, perhaps because they want to save their own skin, but József cannot be fooled. Consequently, József is after a layer of society who figuratively and/or even physically rob the hard-working man even of their last pennies.

When József meets the old lady's daughter for lunch, he starts questioning and commenting on to the fact that their family is overly wealthy, probably live in a big villa on top of Rózsadomb*. The young girl wears a long fur coat, expensive looking clothes and she is not ashamed to talk about its price to József, whom she just met. József cunningly comments on the probable cost of their house and her clothes, but asserts that she likely has no idea how much a kilo bread or sugar cost at the store. This little exchange between the

* A hill on the Buda side of the city, typically associated with rich and aristocratic families and big family villas. György Majtényi (2008) claims that the Rózsdomb and Pasarét were commonly referred to as the "cadre's holiday-resort" in the 1950s.

characters, who clearly represent different layers of society, points to the prophetization of power relations in the master narrative.

József kidnaps the spoiled girl as it seems like he wants to teach her a lesson, and to take revenge on her mother, but his main goal is larger than this. As mentioned before, he wants to make the *likes of them* pay, those *invisible hands*, who rob the ones like him. The likes of them are obviously the wealthy and powerful, who take away from the poor and enjoy privileges in all aspect of life. Even though at first it seems like József wants to punish these women personally for what they've done to him, it turns out that this is just a cover up story. This is evident when he decides to set his hostage free and refuses to keep any of the money he demanded. Also, in his final speech he explains to the young woman:

"I will punish you because your mother has robbed me of my last pennies…and I am not the only one. I will punish her, however I can, and not only in my own name".
*"Do you know how many invisible hands there are in this city, who reach into pockets and pulls out those difficultly earned forints?"**

In *Housewarming*, a very similar instance comes forth regarding the problematic socio-economic differences between characters. As mentioned before, Luca Péteri encounters a case that she feels obligated to solve, involving a wealthy authoritative man, who got away with attempted murder. There are some very clear references in the plot of *Housewarmin*g that discuss the issue of power relations and especially that of the elite's "good life". The monologue I want to discuss here is given by one of the elite figures, who is also present at the housewarming party the night the incident happens, he comments on the life of this like, drunkenly:

"Who are you?... You know who you want to resemble?... a real noble casino. The old aristocrats at least did these deeds in a more discrete manner… They had the brains not to

* My own translation

*upset the people without reason. But you, you divide lands between yourselves from state money… build roads to your villas on state money…"**

The rest of the group does not take his speech seriously, they only acknowledge what a great speech he put together, while drunkenly laughing at him. It seems like they do not want to deny their luxurious way of life, at least not amongst themselves. They act as a group of oligarchs, who divide the public property and other goods among themselves, while the workers and lower classes live close to poverty. They joke around with other stories, when they could corruptly arrange things to serve their own good. One of them comments mockingly:

*"I know what this game is about, the new strata, the top ten-thousand, the ruling strata. This is what they rub in our faces recently. But I am not ashamed to admit that I like to live a wealthy life and that I might take more out of that so called "collective pot". So, what? I put 10 times, 100 times more back into it!"**

The difference between *Housewarming* and *The Vulture* is that in the first one the power relation issue is given much more attention to, and its existence is known, however, it is a taboo to talk about it. They do not want to get involved, so they do not discuss it or recognize it. In *The Vulture*, the figure of the criminal, or collectivity, is there but the protagonist does not give word to it so often, instead, he recognizes it and decides to act upon it. The criminals are wealthy, powerful, they do not live in the communal block buildings, but in villas on wealthy areas of the city, on the top of the Buda hill. They have other housing advantages, such as to build roads that lead up to their houses, all from the collective money. They eat and drink whatever and as much of it as they like and enjoy other benefits that are awarded to them solely based on their status and influence. And most importantly, they are never convicted as the criminal, they are either not suspected at all or they can cover it up and

* My own translation

get away with their outlawry. It is the social detective's job to bring the truth into light and show the collective imagination regarding how things ought to be.

Peek-a-Boo: Who's Story is it, Anyway? in *The Peep-Hole and the Key (1984)*

Lányi's *The Peep-Hole and the Key* presented us a slightly altered figure of the social detective, which is not different in the case of the criminal, either. It is more explicit in this film than in *The Vulture* or *Housewarming*, that what is most important is not the end result of the investigation, or the final reveal, but the journey itself. This allows for the discovery of even less explicit meaning than in the previous instances, in complex web. The relationships and connections between characters and situations seem to be mixed and confused in this story. The *role* of characters is also quite blurred, and often interchangeable. Tamás Koltai's (1985) critique asserts that the film confuses what is reality and what is just appearance, things seem to be different than how they *actually* are. While the protagonist seems to come to the understanding of some things, he completely misunderstands others (Koltai, 1985). This jumble and mess surrounds the atmosphere of the film: information is disclosed or falsely given, and no one knows what the truth is. Or believes something to be the truth, which is not. So, who's story is it, anyway?

It is obvious that we are presented with a potential criminal, since she has to be kept an eye on for mysterious reasons. However, she never turns out to have committed any sort of crime, at least not in the detective's point of view. We found out that Marta Kincses is a humanitarian, she sacrifices herself to help out those in need. She explains to Halász:

*"I have four families. At night, I make the bed for a disabled railway man, check the homework of two children with alcoholic parents, and twist the knife out of a homeless man's hands. You see, I am a busy person". **

* My own translation

However, officially she is only employed as a cleaner at the institution for social care. *Why has she been degraded?* This is also what the detective is trying to put together, when he is hinted that the issue with Márta is that she "only cares for the interest of the average workers, this is why they are afraid of her, she does not act in favor of the bureaucrats". She is a potential danger to the existing system; in that sense, she is the one personifying the criminal. However, this seems to be a cover up story to the master narrative, which points to the real aim of her inspection, to inspect society, in the face of her. After all, she symbolizes "Budapest", as discussed before. The hypothesis proves to be true when the "official detective" walks out on Halász when he demands to know why he has to spy on Márta. All of Halász's questions are left unanswered and he is left solely with what he has uncovered for himself. Therefore, it is evident that the primary intention was not to frame anyone but to witness a complexity. Perhaps, that even well-doing has to go undercover for it to survive or the sad reality of the housing situation, or even the unfair and obscure censorship of publishers. Possibly, all of these points put together, in a web of details of why things are not as they ought to be, that feed the imaginary.

Social Experience of Fear and Distress

Fear and distress is present in different forms in the films, but are inspired by what Csánády (1999) referred to as 'habitual fear of unwritten laws'. The instability of the system lead to an uncertainty and insecurity about what was safe or risky, which manifests through the political unconscious as seen in the master narrative. The narrative connotes that it was safest to keep cautious and not take risks, intentions of the authorities were rather mysterious (Gyarmati & Valuch). Even though it was obvious and a widely known fact that Kadar has to go and that the present situation is unable to sustain itself much longer, no one had the courage to ask for what was needed- change.

The young boy Robi, the victim of the elite criminal László Bíró, represents the lower classes, as we find out he works as a museum assistant. His presence serves to bring a sudden light to the public's growing discontent with the elite's power. He faces the powerful, wealthy man, and tells him:

*"Who do you think you are? What gives you the right to permit or prohibit? You are a wash-out, corrupt, bureaucratic group! In the lower level poverty and shut your mouth, while up here: hunting, drinking and conspiracy without any control."**

The discontent and opposition is certain and obvious; however, the protestor needs to be shut up and abolished. It remains unclear when the angry father attempts to shoot him down, if it is truly because the boy wants to marry her daughter, *or* whether he has just revealed his and his crews' conspiracy. In the narration, it might serve as a cover up story, however, in the fable, it underlines the peaking truth that none of the leaders want to hear- they failed, and should start to except it. It is certain however, that the boy is sent off to the countryside to a clinic, where it seems like he has gone mad. He has panic attacks and thinks that he cannot trust anyone and everyone is after him. In the end, he ends his own life. Even though he is not present in the narrative very often or for a long time, his character plays a crucial role. His misfortune sets off the investigation of outlawry, his life and his future, which is at stake. He played a major role in the incident, as the victim. However, he is never involved in deciding upon his own deeds. What happens to him is not up to him to decide, this is what he got for trying to oppose the powerful. This is a very important component of the social imaginary in a complex way, how things are: fear and intimidation of authority and unwritten laws based on experience, and potential suppression. Furthermore, how things ought to be: your rule is already over but you don't know about it yet.

* My own translation

In *The Vulture*, József challenges the threat of the system and despite the potential consequences of his actions, he chooses to go against order. He represents a collective, not only as a social detective who wants to bring light to and reveal the real criminals of society, but also as the man who will not let the system threaten him anymore. He says "this is the first thing I'm going to fully accomplish in my life". This is precisely to point out the powerless and hopeless life of the "small fry", the lack of opportunity for forward movement. Inevitably, who attempts to oppose the system, even if he is done good deed, needs to perish.

Even though he is willing to go against order, motivated by his desperation to get back his money, he is afraid of be reported. This is problematic because it becomes unclear what counts as outlawry, underlining the mysterious and uncertain nature of law and the before mentioned "unwritten laws". He is late to pay his child-care to his ex-wife, whom he worryingly begs not to report him. However, he goes around kidnapping a woman, runs from the police and demands for millions of forints as ransom. There is a clear instance of habitual fear, but perhaps a bigger instance of growing distress, which makes the fantasist restless and grow impatient about his life, refuse to settle for less anymore. The plot aligns with the master narrative: "We've got something- but not the real thing…". The subject gathered the courage to explore and grope the social ground, to make sense of his surroundings and try to break out of the barriers that the social and political condition has placed upon him.

Conclusion
Crime Film as a Symptom of the Historical Situation

This thesis discussed aspects of the social experience of the 1980s in Hungary through the use the social imaginary, and the way it manifested in the crime films released in this time period. The social imaginary was discussed in terms of "how we stand in relation to others and to power" and the display of a communal feeling regarding "how things are" in comparison to how we feel "they ought to be", using Taylor's (2004) definition. The premise of the essay aimed to point out that learning about social reality and the national experience of the common people based on their everyday lives, from stories and fables, is a useful tool for sociology and anthropology. Film is a text in which the national experience can be traced on a smaller scale, on individualistic stories that project it onto a more general and nationwide phenomenon. My job as the interpreter was to use the detective story as a tool to follow the individualistic story of people, fictitious characters of the imagination, to uncover the details of their journey and to present "how things are" in society, how they stand in relation to their family, to their neighbors, while problematizing the fact that things are not how they ought to be, and their job is to initiate the *first step* in the direction of action.

The thesis analyzed aspects of the social imaginary using three films from the time: *The Vulture*, *Housewarming* and *The Peep-Hole and the Key*. The *fable*, or underlying master narrative provided the platform for the display of an emerging political unconscious. The essay analyzed the figure of the social detective, who's motivation was generated by the common imaginary, and the figure of the potential criminal who or *what* might be responsible for the shared feeling of discontent. The aim was not to find an all synthetic expression of ideology but rather, a complex web of taken-for-granted meanings that come to the surface about the lived social reality, when looking at these films in more detail.

Finally, I want to argue that the detective film is therefore a *symptom*, born out the malfunction of society. The proliferation of detective films is symptomatic and was triggered

as a result of the critical social and political atmosphere of the 1980s. Crime film, especially in the sense that it was discussed in this thesis is a symptom since it is never fully represented but its occurrence indicates its existence. Seeing it alerts us that there is something that activates the symptom, which is a significant and widely shared feeling, the belief in the fault in the system, which is peaking at this point but is not truly fulfilled yet. Zizek (1989:82) asserts that the interpretation of the symptom can be done by "going through fantasy". This implies a psychoanalytic approach, in this case, to the unconscious messages in the text. The nature of these films present an imaginary at work, which is made up of fantasy scenarios. Going through the fantasy of the film is, therefore, going through the fantasy of the collective, and this is the way the symptom can be distinguished and interpreted.

With regards to further research, it would be remarkable to look at the proceeding years in terms of Hungarian crime films; what happens to the figure of the detective after the official transformation has taken place? Perhaps, other gates opened up for representation and the common imaginary started shifting to other aspects of social life. What happens to the self-appointed detective and the criminal after the transformation of 1989? Does the Hungarian film invent the hard-boiled detective? If it does, what is the social space he inhabits and what are the leftovers from the years before?

Appendices

Appendix i: Plot Summary of *The Vulture* (1982)

József Simon is an intellectual who cannot sustain himself from his diploma and instead works as a taxi driver. He has just been through a divorce and he has debts and child-care leeway. He picks up two elderly ladies with his taxi, who furiously start to complain about the way he chose to take them to their destination. They demand to get out of the car and he stops but after they left he notices that his money is missing from his wallet. He runs to the taxi station and reports the robbery to his boss who does not believe his story. He goes to seek help from the police too, but get the same response. He decides to take on the case himself and discoverers from remembering the ladies' conversation that their dog went missing. He reaches the new paper for lost dogs and starts calling up the numbers, which leads him to success. He finally manages to arrange a meeting with the robber's daughter, who brings him the money he demanded. However, at their meeting he changes his mind, seeing the luxurious look of the girl, and decides that he wants a greater ransom. He kidnaps the girl and phones her mom to tell her his further demands, when the old lady reaches out to the police and the chase beings. Finally, the old lady has the money ready for him, and the police is there to catch him but he is too clever: he takes the money but does not keep it. Finally, he sets the daughter free after giving her a small speech on why he has gone this far and why he felt he had to punish her mother. After the girl left he ends his own life by setting the house on fire.

Appendix ii: Plot Summary of *Housewarming* (1983)

The story starts with a housewarming party where a significant group of the elite of chiefs and leaders is invited to fest and end up drinking quite a bit. László Biro's daughter, Andrea, turns up with her lover Robi, and she announces that they are going to move in together. László does not support this and he asks his daughter not to but Robi starts insulting him and his "friends". To this, Laszlo goes up to the house and gets his friends', Haudek's, gun and shoots the boy. He does not die but he is seriously injured. Luca Péteri is a journalist, who hears about the story from her boyfriend, the doctor who operated the bullet out of the boy. Luca has a small daughter who lives with a nanny and she seldom sees her. Being a journalist Luca thinks that it would be a good case to write about in the paper but his boss highly discourages her from doing anything with it. However, she is so determined to go through with her investigation that it even costs her job. She finds out that Haudek, the chief at forestry, took the blame for László Biro for this incident and confessed at court that he shot the boy by accident, thinking it was a stray dog. In the meantime, the boy was put in mental hospital and developed panic and mania about being followed and monitored; finally, he commits suicide. Luca collects evidence and puts the puzzle together, it was László Biro who committed the crime but he was not held responsible for it, no one was. Robi was the only one punished even more, he was silenced for good about any details of the truth. László Biro was impossible to reach regarding the case but he knew about it coming into light again, and he wrote a letter in which he confesses, and of intolerable guilt he ends his own life.

Appendix iii: Plot Summary of *The Peep-Hole and the Key* (1984)

Péter Halász is a university professor, who is asked by a detective agent to help him with being an observer. He assigs him a suspect, Márta Kincses. He follows her around, wherever she goes and finds out details of her life. However, he does not know what kind of information he is looking for or for what it is needed for. Slowly he gets to know Márta, that she is a social worker and she helps lots of elderly and woman in need. However, she is officially employed as a cleaner at the social institution. She also lives at the same flat with her ex-husband and his new girlfriend. Her life is a mess and in no time, Halász finds himself in the middle of conflicts that he does not understand at all. It seems like his point of view is an empty paper, which is influenced by the things he sees, understands and some that he completely misunderstands. The premise of the story is on a blurry issue concerning riddling and a riddle column that does not publish one of Márta's outpensioner name amongst winners with correct solutions. This issue persists throughout the film and, like other mysteries, it remains unresolved. However, Márta and Péter end up falling in love, getting married and we never find out why, what kind of information or for whom he had to observe Márta for.

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