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Two Masks, One Cultural Consciousness
Theoretical Background

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1.1   The Alternative Ending in Emir Kusturica's Film
Time of the Gypsies (1988) as an Introduction

Time of the Gypsies (1988) is the film that catapulted Emir Kusturica to international prominence. This signature work of his is nowadays one of the most widely known 'gypsy'-themed films and in its controversial and contradictory ways forms the crown of the 'gypsy' genre. Interestingly, the film ends one scene earlier than originally scripted and filmed; for some reason, the last couple of minutes of the story were discarded from the final version. The outtake is distributed, instead, as part of the DVD bonus features and is presented as the film's alternative ending. I want to open the discussion by zooming in on the cut-out finale of *Time of the Gypsies* and the inverted image of the human being that it artfully constructs, in order to bring the reader right into the middle of my research topic with all its unyielding complexity.

In its officially released version, the film ends with the 'gypsy' character Merdžan (Husnija Hasimović) as he is running through the rain and mud up towards a small, solitary chapel in an open field. His appearance and slapstick manner are reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin's – he smirks under a black toothbrush moustache, sporting the overfamiliar bowler hat and suit. As we watch him skip away from the camera, the credits begin to roll. In the originally filmed ending, however, Merdžan continues to run up the muddy slope and stops in front of the chapel

Fig. 1. Assembled screenshots from *Time of the Gypsies* (1988, Dir. Emir Kusturica): the 'gypsy' character Merdžan (Husnija Hasimović) in conversation with God; a visual metaphor that conveys the symbolic position of the 'gypsy' in relation to the Christian deity.

entrance. The camera frames his face with the chapel's blurred cross. The scene that follows is structured like a dialogic exchange that has the cross standing in between two interlocutors. On the one side of the cross is Merdžan, while on the other side is a wooden painted crucifix that has tipped over, with Christ's head and outstretched arms pointing downwards (**Fig. 1**). Merdžan turns to God, talking to him, notably, in Romani, wondering what has happened to him. He enters the small, visibly neglected chapel, its altar draped with tattered pieces of nylon. In a close-up, we can see the 'gypsy' character tilting his head sideways, literally trying to come face to face with the inverted image of Christ. He offers to help God, but on the condition that God helps him in return. He warns God, waving a finger in his face, that otherwise he is unwilling to be of service. Apparently assuming that he has reached an agreement, Merdžan ardently kisses the crucifix and carefully sets it upright, turning Christ's figure head up. With tears in his eyes, he implores God to take care of small Perhan, Merdžan's nephew, who has been left without parents, and to spare the boy's sad heart. When it comes to his second wish, Merdžan pulls out a pair of dice and demands from God that as long as he lives, they should fall according to his will. With a serious tone, he explains to God that he wants to rule with the help of the dice. At the end of this statement,

the crucifix starts wobbling and swiftly, as if in answer to Merdžan's pleas, tips back over and down.

The scene that shows Merdžan bargaining with Christ is a visual metaphor so saturated in religious and mythic symbolism that one can easily fill pages with its many possible interpretations. At this stage, I want to present the dialogic exchange between Merdžan and God to the reader without attempting to define and thus delimit the rich symbolic meanings that the moving pictures convey only in a matter of a few minutes. There is no doubt, though, that the sequence is a testament to Kusturica's cinematic genius: it provides an elaborate visual analysis of the manner in which the imagined 'gypsy' is constructed through its relationship to the Christian deity, whose significance here lies in providing human beings with an aspirational ideal. The dialogue between Merdžan and the upside-down Christ on the cross abstracts the principle of obverse mirroring after which the 'gypsy' figure is commonly imagined into being.

In a short film interview about his 'gypsy'-themed films, Emir Kusturica affirms point-blank that "[i]n Gypsies you always have this advantage, in which impossible things could happen in their life" ("Rencontre"). This assertion of his, just like the above-described scene, encapsulates an essential quality of the imaginary 'gypsy' figure and links directly to the driving questions of my research: Why is almost anything believable about a 'gypsy' character? Why can filmmakers ascribe almost any aberrant quality to their 'gypsy' figures and utilise them for almost any dramatic purpose without straining their audience's belief? What makes this construct so pliable, so open to re-interpretations and ascriptions and yet so readily recognisable in almost any culture, so plausible, so real, so tenaciously durable over time? Why are 'gypsy' figures and their stories so excessively and, at times, so obsessively popular in films produced and shown all across Europe and the USA? And why are, at the same time, 'gypsy'-themed films so heavily under-researched, most of them still largely overlooked, looked down upon or even avoided by scholars?

In the above-mentioned interview, Kusturica talks at length about his intimate knowledge of the Roma, who were a part of his formative experience while he was growing up in Sarajevo. But in the course of the conversation, it quickly transpires that the filmmaker's primary concern – he calls it even an obsession – is to forge a new and expressive film language, or as he puts it: "giving cinema an injection that could extend its life" ("Rencontre"). Kusturica associates 'gypsy' characters

with the unexpected ingredient in his works, as well as with the necessary departure from established genres. His talk about his Roma neighbours insensibly flips into talk about stylistic devices and genre conventions.[4] No word is said about human rights or discrimination, about racist stereotypes in the mass media or oppressive social hierarchies. Instead, the minority and the dire conditions they are forced to live in are perceived exclusively as marketable material that can be exported for profit to Western cinema audiences.

Kusturica's 'gypsy'-themed films have been heavily criticised by some scholars[5] and yet, to this day, the ethics and aesthetics of his oeuvre – and more importantly of 'gypsy'-themed films as a pan-European phenomenon – have not been sufficiently challenged. And this is precisely the objective of my study. In the chapters that follow, my effort is directed at unravelling the principle of obverse mirroring that underpins the artistic rendition of the 'gypsy' phantasm on the big screen (**Fig. 2** and **Fig. 3**). By working out the singular creative pattern that generates the numerous, endlessly varied and yet invariably familiar celluloid forms of the 'gypsy' figure, the present work seeks to bring about a deeper understanding of its plastic content, its black-and-white aesthetics and its significant functions. In my view, the medium of film has played a vital role in shaping and ingraining a black-and-white lens of perception among national majorities in Europe; film has been instrumental in instilling a shared picture of reality that is antigypsy and that condemns the Roma minority to chronic social exclusion and poverty. The role of cinema in sustaining antigypsyism as a visual regime of normality is the main concern of the present study. In addition to that, I want to outline the extent to which the 'gypsy' construct has been instrumental in energising the language of cinema, and by doing so, to show that the resultant aesthetic innovations, commonly celebrated as singular acts of artistic rebellion, mostly serve to cement social hierarchies and to reify the 'ethno-racial' status quo. More than

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4   In another interview, Kusturica easily glides from the topic of 'gypsies' to the topic of film aesthetics: "I was attracted by the beauty of alternate universes. The Gypsies of my film survive like insects, according to the principle of the natural selection, according to the beauty of the colours and the shapes of the wings. (…) My film *Black Cat, White Cat* can be regarded as an anti-genre film in the direction where it wants to warm the heart of men" (Radakovic).

5   For a discussion of the antigypsy content in Kusturica's films, see Brittnacher, *Leben* 12–15, "Gypsygrotesken"; Tumbas 113–117; Gotto 88–108; Roth 232–244; Holler 75–77.

Fig. 2. Screenshot from *Drei Birken auf der Heide* (1956, Dir. Ulrich Erfurth): at the film's start, the 'gypsy' characters Mirko (Hubert Hilten) and Susanna (Margit Saas) are introduced for the first time to the viewers as inverted reflections of human beings.

a century after the birth of cinema, it is high time to reflect on the role of the seventh art in propagating, aestheticising and normalising antigypsyism, an age-old form of racism[6] that has unfailingly accompanied the rise of modern nationalism in Europe, being its inseparable and extremely unsightly underside.

Over the length of the exposition, I introduce, one by one, the components that go into my multi-perspective framework of analysis. Parallel to that, as a way of substantiating my claims and arguments, I offer a broad array of examples from the film corpus. It is also my intention to familiarise the reader with as many film titles as possible: works ranging, time-wise, from the dawn of cinema to the present day and, space-wise, from across all of Europe and the USA. Before diving into the vast film corpus, however, in the remaining pages of this chapter, we shall consider the central concepts and theoretical considerations that inform my approach to 'gypsy'-themed films. For the analysis of

6   For a working definition of the term antigypsyism, consult the Reference Paper drafted by the Alliance against Antigypsyism accessible at Antigypsyism.eu. For an analytical overview of the debate that surrounds the term and the field of study, see End, "Antiziganismus" 54–72; Heuss 52–68.

Fig. 3. Screenshot from *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (1967, Dir. Aleksandar Petrović): Beli Bora (Bekim Fehmiu) and Pavle (Milosav Aleksić) take care of drunken Mirta (Velimir Živojinović), who is loaded head down into Pavle's cart with the following exclamation: "Into the garbage cart, you Gypsy bastard!"

screen images, I introduce the notion of the mask after Hans Belting; the notions of the semiosphere, semiotic centre and boundary after Yuri Lotman; and the notion of 'whiteness' after Richard Dyer. In the context of the European semiosphere, the construct of 'whiteness' (in representational arts) is clearly an emanation of the cultural centre, while the construct of 'gypsyness' (in representational arts) coincides with the cultural boundary. To create a coherent picture of the dynamic semiotic processes at work and to lend storyboard clarity to the analysis of abstract cultural constructs, I have coined two complementary concepts that give the title of my work, namely the 'white' mask and the 'gypsy' mask. My contention is that the 'white' mask and the 'gypsy' mask are in a reciprocal relationship, creating the force field of European culture where individuals are organised in colour-coded social groups (class, nation, ethnicity/'race') by being inculcated – from a very early age – to admire and emulate the 'white' mask while disdaining and distancing themselves from the 'gypsy' mask. These two constructs represent the two defining structures of consciousness – one charged positively, the other charged negatively – that regulate the European cultural realm.

1.2 The Mask as a Working Concept

While developing my approach to 'gypsy' figures in film over the years,[7] I have assembled the somewhat clumsy term the 'imaginary gypsy figure' to emphasise, both lexically and orthographically, the fact that the object of my analysis is a fictional creation with origins in European literature and arts dating back to the fifteenth century.[8] In addition to that, my goal has been to draw a clear-cut line of demarcation between this literary phantasm, which was conjured into existence at a time when the notion of ethnicity and ethnic minorities was non-existent, and the ethnonym Roma, which denotes actually existing groups of people with a minority status. 'Roma' is a relatively novel term; internationally, it has been in circulation since 1971,[9] while as a self-designation it has a much longer history.

Led by the same intention, i.e. to foreground the artificiality of 'gypsy' figures in film and thus to set them apart from real individuals and collectives, a number of film scholars have coined other similar terms, such as "screen gypsies" (Imre), "celluloid gypsies" (Dobreva), "metaphoric Gypsies" (Iordanova, "Mimicry"), "als Rom_nja markierte Figuren" or "nation-ethno-kulturell markierter Figuren" (Kraft). The first two formulations are particularly felicitous, not only because they highlight the constructed nature of 'gypsy' faces and bodies on the silver screen, but also because they point simultaneously to the materiality of the medium, to the physical substance out of which these imaginary faces and bodies are produced. An example in the negative comes from the literary scholar Sean Homer who, by contrast, does not recognise the need for a terminological distinction between fictional characters in film

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7   See Mladenova's "Imagined Gypsy" and "Figure".

8   The first written records of 'gypsies' in Europe are to be found in late-fifteenth-century chronicles. As the German literary scholar Klaus-Michael Bogdal wittily puts it in his comprehensive work *Europa erfindet die Zigeuner*, in the beginning were the chronicles. This is where the main problem lies: the chroniclers were not eye-witnesses producing themselves stories and illustrations for a public that was not interested in the actual existence of Roma but in their representations (cf. 23–25).

9   The self-designation 'Roma' was adopted in 1971 at the First World Romani Congress, which took place in Orpington (south-east of London) with delegates from fourteen countries (Kenrick 101–108). It needs to be stressed at this point that Roma are not a homogenous group; for the official definition of the ethnonym, see "Council of Europe Descriptive Glossary of terms relating to Roma issues" published online by the CoE.

and actual people existing in the socio-historical world. In his otherwise incisive analysis of *Gadjo dilo* (1997, Dir. Tony Gatlif), the scholar treats the terms 'Roma' and 'Gypsy' as interchangeable synonyms. He questions 'gypsy'-themed films and their claim to authenticity, ultimately encapsulating the findings of his critical examination in the very title of his article: "The Roma Do Not Exist". So, while providing an insightful analysis of screen images, Homer's approach inadvertently disavows the existence of real-life Roma.[10]

In the present work, I introduce the notion of the 'gypsy' mask as my main working concept; this newly coined term should complement and expand the notion of the imaginary 'gypsy' figure by putting the stress on its formal (visual) and dramaturgical aspects. In the sense used here, the term 'mask' refers to a legible, socially recognisable sign for a role, which role is enacted by the performer's real face and body. On the big screen, the embodied or enfaced 'gypsy' mask appears as a two-dimensional image (a segment of the screen) having been previously modelled through various cinematic tools and conventions, such as framing or low-key lighting, for instance. It is important to underscore that the 'gypsy' mask equals a role – an archetypal life-script, a trajectory through mythic time-space, and this motion of the 'gypsy' mask is propelled by a specific set of human values and qualities. Thus, as an analytical term, the 'gypsy' mask calls attention to three important aspects of screen images: 1) the visual tools and devices as well as the technical conventions in cinema; 2) the role of the mythic 'gypsy' and his/her life-story plot; and 3) the constellation of values that set the 'gypsy' mask in motion. The notion of the mask can also serve as a meta-concept in film analysis; we can treat it as a terminological shortcut to signify the abstract content matrix of the mythic 'gypsy' universe.

The present use of the term 'mask' draws substantially on the insights and ideas advanced by the German art historian and media theorist Hans Belting in his book *Faces: eine Geschichte des Gesichts*. Belting operates with the concepts of face and mask, and redefines their meaning in the context of representational arts by shedding light on the

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10 Although Charnon-Deutsch does not discuss films, it is worth making a note here of her set of analytical terms. She proposes three discursive categories: 'gypsies', which roughly corresponds to the Romantic construction; 'Gypsies', which is the commonly used racialised designation of actual ethnic groups; and 'Roma' (or Romá, Romany and Travellers), which is a category employed by modern social scientists in an endeavour to conduct research independently of stereotypes, fictions and racialised thinking (11–13).

significance of the mask in prehistoric cult rituals, but also in the epochs that lead up to modern theatre. With his work, Belting endeavours to restore the privileged place of the mask in the cultural genealogy of the face, and so he posits that the face should be understood by way of the mask that depicts or enacts a face (cf. 45). In the words of Belting, in early prehistoric cultures, the ideas that people had of the human face were expressed in the form of ritual masks and used to summon the spirits of the ancestors. These masks also carry statements about the living face, which is understood here as a carrier of social signs and controlled by society. Ritual masks could be artefacts that one placed on one's face or make-up that changed one's face (cf. 44). Belting stresses that the mask is simultaneously a surface and an image, and the same holds true for the face: as a carrier of expressions, in its absence, the face offers itself as an image, while also being a surface that can be painted upon (cf. 45–46). An inseparable element of the ritual mask is the practice of its performance, which Belting calls a 'dance', his blanket term for the stage appearance of the mask. He underlines that the significance of the mask in cult rituals lay less in the mask's physical shape and more in the manner and the place of its re-enactment; being a requisite for a role, the mask and its 'dance' cannot be understood or studied separately from each other (cf. 50). In the modern era, the mask is back on the theatre stage, Belting concludes, embodied by the face; it is a role that the individual has to enact with his/her real face and his/her entire body (cf. 63–64).[11]

In the context of film analysis, the 'mask' is a particularly fruitful term for a number of reasons. Compact as it is, it is also an ideogram for a 'cultural construct' denoting a material object that both exemplifies and signifies artificiality. Another way of defining it is to say that the 'mask' is a visual synonym of 'representation' as the latter analytical term is used in the representational theory of art. By virtue of its proper meaning, the 'mask' evidences that representations are, above all, material objects, products of aesthetic fabrication, and that their

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11 See also Wulf D. Hund's analytical approach to racism as a social and historical phenomenon; in a recently disseminated draft version of his introduction to *Marxist Theory of Racism*, the German scholar comments on the utility of the term "character mask", and points out that Marx used it as a metaphoric phrase to refer to the personification of social relations. Hund goes on to explain that "[s]ocial masks are not a means of disguise. Their usage is not a matter of free choice. Their dramaturgy is not subject to an individual configuration but is prescribed by social relations and grounded in economic conditions" (6).

manufacture is governed by a set of visual tools and conventions specific to the artistic medium. It is, therefore, necessary to view cinematic representations also as material objects (surfaces, two-dimensional screen images) that result from a concrete process of manufacture. Most importantly, the concept of the mask stresses the artificiality of realist and documentary images, drawing attention to the materiality of light and the role that film lighting techniques have in the production – in the very literal sense of the word – of skin colour and 'ethno-racial' difference on the big screen.

The notion of the mask makes it obvious that the deconstruction of the 'gypsy' mask is hinged on the deconstruction of 'whiteness', i.e. the representation of 'white' identity, which for the sake of parallelism I call the 'white' mask. In this line of thought, the notion of the mask facilitates the comparison between the set of visual tools and conventions employed for the construction of 'the universal human being as being essentially European and white', a field of research which falls within the domain of Critical Whiteness Studies, and the set of visual tools and conventions employed for the construction of 'the imaginary gypsy figure as essentially non-European and non-white/coloured/black', a field of research which lies in the domain of Antigypsyism Studies. My central thesis is, to phrase it once again, that in the context of nation building projects, the 'white' mask and the 'gypsy' mask represent the two sides of European cultural consciousness, reflecting its two regimes of seeing, or its two modes of exercising power, and that these two complementary regimes of seeing operate in 'gypsy'-themed films.

Finally, the notion of the mask foregrounds the theatricality of film. It makes apparent, to the point of tautology, that the 'gypsy' mask is not identical with the human being associated with it, that it is independent from the living face (this fact makes it akin to the convention of blackface minstrelsy[12]), and, what is especially important, that it does not necessarily coincide with representations of Roma (i.e. by representations of Roma we should understand here constructs that represent in a mode of normality actual people from the socio-historic world, whereas the 'gypsy' mask is a construct that visualises the antigypsy phantasms circulated by art and pseudo-scientific works). The autonomy of the 'gypsy' mask provides some explanation for its remarkable plasticity and for its eager appropriation by various individuals and/or

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12 For a discussion of blackface minstrel shows and their functions, see Rogin; Roediger; and Saxton.

groups of people.[13] Finally, the notion of the mask focuses attention on the human face, the most important and carefully constructed sur*face* on the screen.

1.3   The Semiosphere: Yuri Lotman's Dialogic Model of Culture

For its broader theoretical framework, my research draws on Yuri Lotman's dialogic model of culture for which the Russian semiotician has coined the special term 'semiosphere'. The meta-disciplinary concept of the semiosphere has proven very beneficial for my work because it opens up ample space for a scientific investigation that strives to abstract the underlying patterns of cultural processes without eclipsing their historical dynamism or their interdisciplinary complexity. In this section, I give a short definition of the semiosphere, in its simultaneous capacity of signifying "an object- and a meta-concept" (Torop 164), and then I outline the manner in which Lotman's understanding of culture informs my approach to 'gypsy'-themed films.

In his texts, Lotman refers variously to the space enclosed by the semiosphere, calling it "semiotic space" ("On the Semiosphere" 205), "specific semiotic continuum" (206), "semiotic universe" (208), "space of semiosis" (*Universe* 124), etc. The main property of this space has to do with providing the necessary conditions for the existence and functioning of languages, which is also to say that outside of the semiotic space there can be neither communication nor language; "[t]he semiosphere is that same semiotic space, outside of which semiosis itself cannot exist" ("On the Semiosphere" 206). While the semiotic space can be conceived mathematically as an abstract space, it also partakes in the properties of living organisms and represents "a unified mechanism (if not organism)" (208). Although Lotman does not state it explicitly, it becomes clear in his exposition that he takes the isolated fact of human consciousness, the universe of the mind (an abstract

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13   In show business, for instance, where the 'gypsy' mask has a high selling value, it is eagerly appropriated both by members of the Roma community and by members of national majorities. An example of the first case is the Macedonian Romani singer Esma Redžepova, who takes pride in being called 'Queen of the Gypsies'; an example of the second case is the Manhattan-based band Gogol Bordello, formed by musicians from all over the world, promoting themselves as a Gypsy punk band. The musical genre 'Gypsy punk' was christened by Eugene Hütz, Gogol Bordello's founder, who is known to have Roma ancestry (Dimov 255).

space and an emanation of a sentient being) as the smallest semiotic unit and turns this unit into a general model of culture. As Lotman explains, the semiotic space is suitable for performing the function of a template because it can model all the qualities of the phenomenon onto which the conclusions are being extrapolated: the phenomenon of the conscious mind shares the structure and the properties characteristic of the larger phenomenon of culture.

The space enclosed by the semiosphere is, in other words, the medium of human thought and understanding, of dialogue, and as such this medium precedes language, being the impetus and the precondition for the emergence of languages. Communication, the two- or multi-directional flow of information, is the ontological characteristics of human consciousness; the very nature of this medium is dialogic. Lotman describes the semiosphere as "a generator of information" with a complex inner structure: it is formed by an ensemble of semiotic formations (or embedded semiospheres) occupying a range of hierarchical levels (*Universe* 127). Exhibiting semantic asymmetry, all these semiotic formations are permeated by currents of internal translation that move in a horizontal as well as in a vertical direction (cf. 127, 130). The semiotic space is a space in a state of dialogue where all its semiotic levels are engaged in an information exchange, albeit at different moments in time and at different speeds. Subsequently, each semiotic formation within the semiosphere operates both as a participant in a dialogic exchange and as the space of dialogue ("On the Semiosphere" 225).

The methodological principle of dialogism that undergirds Lotman's approach to the study of culture, his understanding that communication is the motive power behind cultural processes, allows me to shed light on the dynamic complexity of 'gypsy'-themed films from a multitude of viewpoints. On the one hand, these works of art can be regarded as the outcomes of a specific dialogic situation in which the national majorities and the minority are the two partners in dialogue. This perspective highlights the politics of film production and raises questions about the institutional mechanisms of the film and media industry. On the other hand, 'gypsy'-themed films can be regarded as text-messages partaking in a range of dialogic exchanges: within, between or among national cultures in Europe as well as between the cultural core and the periphery/boundary that define structurally the European semiosphere.

By applying Lotman's dialogic model of culture to 'gypsy'-themed films, or in fact to any artworks that purvey antigypsy attitudes, there

is one important realisation to be gained. Power asymmetries, often cited as the primary reason for the racialised representations of the minority, do not necessarily preclude the possibility for a genuine dialogue. Consequently, power asymmetries cannot serve as a sufficient explanation for the prevailing antigypsyism in European arts. This realisation logically leads to one important question that I deal with at a later stage of my exposition: given the unequal power relations between national majorities and the Roma minority, what conditions need to be satisfied in order for a dialogue to take place?

1.3.1 Cultural Centre and Periphery

The division of the semiotic space into a centre and a periphery is one of the laws governing the internal organisation of the semiosphere. The centre of the semiosphere is occupied by a natural language that serves as an organising principle for the rest of the semiotic space. This structural nucleus plays a vital role for the semiosphere: without it, the culture runs the risk of being infused with too much diversity (invaded by too many foreign texts), losing its unity and disintegrating. An individualised semiosphere, one that exhibits the highest form of structural organisation, is a semiosphere in which the dominant nucleus formation has reached the stage of self-description. At this stage, the cultural centre elaborates meta-languages, producing texts, such as grammars, laws and various codices, that lay down the norms of language, of behaviour, of dress style, etc. Besides generating norms, the centre is also engaged in extending these norms over the entire semiosphere, horizontally and vertically across its levels. Consequently, the periphery becomes a repository for partial and semi-developed languages or languages that only serve certain cultural functions. The most important feature of the norms generated by the cultural centre is their neutral status, the fact that they are perceived as unmarked (in terms of colour, scent, shape and so on), 'common to all' or 'normal', while the semiotic formations in the periphery, in turn, are perceived as marked or deviant (cf. *Universe* 141). Lotman explains that the act of self-description contributes to the unification and individualisation of the semiotic space. This process also implies the first-person pronoun: the nuclear structure produces a stereoscopic picture of reality, dividing the world into 'my/our' vs. 'their' and claiming "the right to speak for the whole culture" (133). Another consequence of the legislative role of the nucleus is that it banishes all semiotic phenomena that do

not correspond to its norms and standards; these are disregarded or regarded as non-existent (cf. 128–129).

1.3.2 Cultural Boundary

The boundary sets the limit of the semiotic space and serves as a contact surface with extra- or non-semiotic space. Just as in abstract mathematics, the borderline area represents "a multiplicity of points, belonging simultaneously to both the internal and external space" whose function is to translate (re-structure) incoming impulses or texts into the language of the semiosphere ("On the Semiosphere" 208). By nature, the boundary is ambivalent: its situation is epitomised by the oxymoron 'our pagans'[14] (cf. *Universe* 137). Being a zone of cultural bilingualism (or plurilingualism), it ensures the semiotic contact between two worlds. It both connects and divides two spheres of semiosis, controlling, filtering and adapting the external into the internal (cf. 140). The boundary is therefore in a reciprocal relationship to the homogeneity and individuality of the semiosphere and can also be described as "the outer limit of the first-person form" (131).

Lotman points out that it is an existential need of conscious human life to have a special time-space organisation, or a 'picture of the world'; the latter comes into being with the help of the semiosphere that structures itself so as to fulfil this basic need (cf. 133). In my exposition, I refer to the special time-space organisation of the semiosphere as a 'mythic world' or 'mythic universe'. Every culture organises itself in the form of a mythic time-space, producing a stereoscopic picture of reality, one that maps out the existentially essential coordinates of human life: the temporal axis of past, present and future and the spatial axis of internal and external space as well as the boundary in-between (cf. 133). Lotman posits that every culture begins its self-description by "dividing the world onto 'its own' internal space and 'their' external space", a process that represents one of the human cultural universals (131). As a result of this process, 'our' inner world tends to be perceived and dubbed as an organised cosmos while 'their' outer world tends to be branded as chaos, "the anti-world, the unstructured chthonic space, inhabited by monsters, infernal powers or people associated

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14 Note, for example, that both in English and German Romantic literature, local 'gypsies' are conferred the status of 'familiar other' (Houghton-Walker 9; see also Margalit 29).

with them" (140). Lotman proceeds to enumerate the elements of the anti-world. It is a travesty underworld symbolised by the robber whose time is the nocturnal time presided over by the moon, whose anti-home is the forest, who speaks an anti-language (obscenities) and engages in anti-behaviour: "he sleeps when other people work, and robs when other people are sleeping" (141). It is worth considering in this context the US film *Under a Gypsy Moon* (Dir. Frank E. Jessop), whose official synopsis sums up the story in just one word: "Crooks" (BFI). The film's title and short description demonstrate in a succinct and unequivocal manner that in artworks the imagined 'gypsy' world is modelled on the anti-world of the semiotic boundary.

As a general model of culture, the semiosphere is both abstract and highly schematic (centre vs. periphery/boundary) and yet simultaneously all-encompassing – comparable to a museum that contains exhibits from different periods of time, in different languages and with various instructions for decoding them (cf. *Universe* 126–127). If I am to adopt Lotman's museum metaphor to my research, the exhibits that come under scrutiny here are film texts displaying a high degree of diversity as to the time and space of their production, i.e. when we consider their historical and cultural contexts of origin. However, as to their content and aesthetics, these works of art display a high degree of similarity, drawing heavily on a shared racialising (antigypsy) matrix. Moreover, 'gypsy'-themed films are not "dead exhibits", but continue "to play a part in cultural developments as living factors" (*Universe* 127). Most of them still circulate in the European and US American cultural realm and worldwide; they are freely available for purchase and are regularly screened on festivals dedicated to Roma culture. What is of great significance is that their essentialist, racialising (antigypsy) content and aesthetics are commonly regarded as 'normal' and, to a great extent, still remain a 'blind spot' in the film industry as well as in academic scholarship. To account for the perceived 'normality' of 'gypsy'-themed films and their regulative functions within and between national states in Europe, I have mapped out Lotman's model of culture onto the European cultural realm, meant to encompass the nation states on the territory of Europe and the USA. In this thus defined European (Eurocentric) semiosphere, the cultural boundary aligns with the 'gypsy' construct, while the cultural centre aligns with the aspirational ideal of 'whiteness'. The two main structural components of the semiosphere represent two complementary constructs that mirror each other in reverse, sustaining one and the same 'picture of reality'.

In academic scholarship, the critical study of the 'gypsy' construct and the critical study of 'whiteness' fall, respectively, into the domains of Antigypsyism Studies/Stereotype Research (see Bogdal, Brittnacher, Patrut, Reuter, von Hagen, Bell, End) and Critical Whiteness/Critical 'Race' Studies (see Dyer, Forster, Garner, Bonnett, Miles, Griffin, Benthien, Hund). As already pointed out, the mask is a particularly valuable concept for film analysis, so for the sake of brevity and terminological synchronicity, I use the 'white' mask and 'gypsy' mask as meta-concepts to denote the cultural centre and the boundary of the European semiosphere. The main endeavour of my research is to examine the 'gypsy' mask – both as an object- and a meta-concept – in the medium of film, to defamiliarise it, spelling out its content, form and functions within the cultural dynamics of European national narratives. Over the length of the exposition, the 'gypsy' mask is described in detail, first as a cluster of attributes, then as a narrative or a life script, i.e. a role charting a symbolic life trajectory. As to its form, the 'gypsy' mask is considered with regard to cinematic conventions and devices, and, finally, attention is paid to its various functions.

1.3.3   Norm Face and Anti-face

In his book *Sehen: Wie sich das Gehirn ein Bild macht*, the German scientist Rudolf E. Lang draws on a series of neural studies to explain the infinitely complex physiology of seeing and face recognition. In the current section, I recap some of his conclusions as they furnish novel evidence attesting to the validity of Lotman's model of culture with its two main structural elements: the centre and the boundary. Significantly, the findings from recent brain research, discussed by Lang, also bear direct relevance for representational arts and for my critical analysis of racialised screen images.

Lang explains that for its ability to make out the image of a human face, the brain relies on a specialised neural system for face recognition. It develops a network of brain cells specialised in one of the seven basic elements that make up the standard human face: face oval, hair, eyebrows, eyes, iris, nose and mouth. What is particularly interesting is that the brain cells are sensitive not only to the form of the said features but also to their size and proportions. In processing the image of the face, the brain acts similarly to a painter invested in giving the most accurate depiction of the object seen. It is as if the brain cells place an imaginary ruler over the facial features and engage in measuring both

the features and the geometric connections they form among each other (cf. 87–89).

Over time, the brain creates an inner normative face, a prototype allowing it to recognise one face amongst hundreds of others in the matter of a split second. The norm face is an artificial product, a face that the brain has never actually seen. The neural recognition system has defined this face, though, by overlaying all observed faces one upon the other and calculating their average value. This inner face prototype explains, for example, why Chinese people are accustomed to seeing small noses, which they perceive as 'normal', while for Europeans, it is the long nose that constitutes the norm. What Lang calls an 'anti-face' (*Gegengesicht*) also has an important function to fulfil. As one experiment[15] demonstrates, the brain needs significantly less time to recognise a given target face when it is briefly exposed to the same face with antithetical features. Such an anti-face has all the characteristic features of the target face but reversed in their opposite: if the target face has a broad forehead, a thin nose and full lips, the antithetical face will have a narrow forehead, a broad nose and thin lips, for example. The main function of the 'anti-face', as Lang observes, is to sharpen the brain's alertness, preventing it, as it were, from going blunt (cf. 91–93).

The findings presented in Lang's book reveal something important about the relationship that the anti-face bears to the norm face. If the norm face created by the brain is grounded in real-life experience, the anti-face created by the scientists for the purpose of their experiment is merely a functional image. Its utility has to do with its ability to invigorate the mental norm image by exhibiting attributes of opposite/negative value, i.e. the anti-face has a derivative nature and has little bearing on actual human faces. This revelation, in turn, has significant implications for the representational arts, where effective contrasts constitute the essence of the craft. One might expect that the task

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15 Lang refers to an experiment devised by the neurobiologist David Leopold from the University of Tübingen, who sought to establish if face recognition occurs via a comparison to an inner prototype face. Leopold asked the participants in his experiment to commit to memory the faces of four men. Afterwards, the participants were shown a series of images of a face that gradually assumed the identity of one of these men. The scientist recorded the point at which the participants were able to recognise the target face, noting that the speed of recognition increased significantly when, prior to seeing the image series, the participants were exposed briefly to an 'anti-face' of that person. The face with antithetical features helped the participants recognise the target face when the face shown in the image series had reached a similarity of less than 20% (cf. 92–93).

of breathing life into a literary figure defined solely by its being an inversion/negation of norm images and conceptions would pose a challenge to any writer or visual artist. In fact, succeeding to create such a figure is often a measure of craftsmanship. So, as an illustration of great literary dexterity, I want to bring up in the discussion two quintessential 'gypsy' figures from nineteenth-century French literature, indisputably generated with recourse to the principle of the anti-face: the abandoned 'gypsy' child Quasimodo in Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1833) and the 'gypsy' temptress Carmen in Prosper Mérimée's tale of the same name (1845).

It is with visible pleasure that the narrator in Hugo's novel expands upon Quasimodo's physical deformities – and, as his overly detailed descriptions inform us, defects plague almost all of the character's body parts and faculties. The text establishes a clear parallel between Quasimodo's "misshapen form" and the "blind movements" of his soul, urging the reader to interpret his physical monstrosity as a natural expression of his spiritual depravity from which, one should surmise, both the narrator and his readers are absolved: "he was savage because he was ugly. There was logic in his nature, as there is in ours" (140–142). Here, I quote a small portion of the narrator's voluminous descriptions, from which portion it is immediately obvious that Quasimodo's figure has been modelled on the obverse image of the 'normal' or average human being.

> It was, in truth, a countenance of miraculous ugliness (…) we shall not attempt to give the reader any idea of that tetrahedron nose, of that horse-shoe mouth, of that little left eye, stubbled up with an eye-brow of carotty [*sic*] bristles, while the right was completely overwhelmed and buried by an enormous wen; of those irregular teeth, jagged here and there like the battlements of a fortress; of that horny lip, over which one of those teeth protruded, like the tusk of an elephant; of that forked chin; and above all, of the expression, that mixture of spite, wonder, and melancholy, spread over these exquisite features. Imagine such an object, if you can. (43)

> When he had taken the child out of the sack, he found him to be, in fact, a monster of deformity. The poor little wretch had a prodigious wart over his left eye, his head was close to his shoulders, his back arched, his breast-bone protruded, and his

legs were twisted (…) He baptized his adopted child and named him Quasimodo, either to commemorate the clay on which he had found him, or to express the incomplete and scarcely finished state of the poor little creature. In truth, Quasimodo, with one eye, hunchback, and crooked legs, was but an apology for a human being. (138–139)

In sculpting his 'gypsy' figure, Hugo brings the logic of inversion to an extreme, producing an impossible monster. His contemporary Mérimée, in comparison, comes up with a more balanced but just as compelling solution. The narrator in Mérimée's tale introduces the reader first to the Spanish conception of female beauty – as it were, the cosmic order embodied in a female face – and then, against this background, he delineates Carmen's features in a point-counterpoint manner, noting how they conform to and deviate from this beauty ideal.

> I seriously doubt whether Señorita Carmen was of the pure breed; for she was infinitely prettier than any of the women of her race whom I had ever met. No woman is beautiful, say the Spaniards, unless she combines thirty points of beauty; or, if you prefer it, unless she can be described by ten adjectives, each of which is applicable to at least three parts of her person. For example, she must have three black things: eyes, lashes, eyebrows, etc.
> My gypsy of the Cordova bathing hour could make no pretension to so many perfections. Her skin, albeit perfectly smooth, closely resembled the hue of copper. Her eyes were oblique, but beautiful of shape; her lips a little heavy but well formed, disclosing two rows of teeth whiter than almonds without their skins. Her hair, which was possibly a bit coarse, was black with a blue reflection, like a crow's wing, and long and glossy. To avoid wearying you with too verbose a description, I will say that for each defect she had some good point, which stood out the more boldly perhaps by the very contrast it offered. Hers was a strange, wild type of beauty, a face which took one by surprise at first, but which one could not forget. ("Carmen"[16] 64)

16 In this particular instance, I refer to the uncredited translation of "Carmen" published in *Lotus Magazine* (1914) because, unlike the Oxford edition that is otherwise quoted here, it renders with significantly greater precision the effect of Mérimée's contrastive description.

What these two literary examples tell us is that there is no one logic or content plane of inversion: every writer as well as every artist can devise his/her own formula of effective juxtaposition, highlighting different aspects of human nature and using the strengths of the respective artistic medium. A realist fiction film, for instance, could hardly visualise Carmen's face in such a way that the spectators would immediately discern, feature by feature, the irregularity of its attractiveness against the Spanish paragon of beauty. Nor could the disfigurement of Quasimodo's face and body be shown on the big screen in its all-encompassing dimensions as it is described in the novel. (Interestingly enough, these two 'gypsy'-themed stories are among the most often filmed ones; "Carmen" being the most frequently filmed narrative in the history of cinema (Davis ix).)

This is also to say that the anti-face is just one of the numerous visualisations of the cultural anti-norm, the obverse image of the world that the cultural centre negates in its striving to maintain dominion over the entire semiosphere. In a way, the analysis of 'gypsy'-themed films here is a study of the cultural anti-norm in representational arts; an attempt to cover the variety of possible answers to the following question: How and for what purpose do filmmakers use the 'gypsy' mask in order to represent the anti-world of the cultural boundary, its anti-time and anti-space, its anti-human beings with their anti-faces, anti-homes, anti-language, anti-behaviour, and so on? As to examples from the big screen, I have already highlighted at the start of the chapter several film scenes that make use of the principle of obverse mirroring: the alternative ending in Kusturica's film *Time of the Gypsies* (**Fig. 1**), a frame from the opening scene in *Drei Birken auf der Heide* (**Fig. 2**) where the 'gypsy' characters are first introduced as mirror-inverted human shadows, and a scene from *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (**Fig. 3**) where the drunken 'gypsy' character Mirta is transported in a rickety cart with his head dangling from the edge of the cart and dragging on the muddy ground.

1.4 The 'White' Mask or the Aspirational Ideal of 'Whiteness'

As already stated, the abstract notion of whiteness is one of the key concepts underpinning my analytical approach to 'gypsy'-themed films. The concept comes from the relatively new academic domain of Critical Whiteness Studies, which sees as its main project "making whiteness

strange" (Dyer 4). Since there are many aspects to whiteness and it itself has multiple layers of meaning, I outline and expand on the insights advanced by the film scholar Richard Dyer, drawing exclusively on his book *White* that, in a nutshell, is "a study of the representation of white people in white Western culture" (xiii).

In the book, Dyer applies his analytical eye to racial imagery that, in his words, "is central to the organisation of the modern world" (1). He develops the notion of whiteness in relation to his discussion of cinematic but also photographic and painted images of human bodies. Simply put, whiteness can be grasped as a surface property of images, a representational convention that makes use of the colour white to depict a specific group of people and, in doing so, to classify their bodies as white. To stimulate a new perception of this ubiquitous convention, Dyer examines a number of questions: Who gets to be associated with the colour white, which also happens to be the default colour of the medium in painting, photography and cinema (white canvas, white paper, white film screen)? What is the symbolic significance of the colour white in Western culture and what are the political implications of identifying some individuals and collectives with it, and others not? How did this artistic convention establish itself as a norm and what is the material and technical production underside to it?

Dyer organises his findings around the notion of embodiment, "the idea of an exercise of spirit within but not of the body in a mode that, as inflected by Christianity, 'race', and imperialism, comes to define the visible white person" (xiv). The logic of embodiment captures the ambivalent nature of whiteness: on the one hand, it reflects a surface property of images of human bodies; on the other hand, it makes manifest the presence of an elusive substance called "spirit, mind, soul or God" that white people have, albeit in different amounts, and that non-white people lack (16). Crucial to the motif of embodiment, as Dyer underlines, is that it makes it possible to think of human bodies in hierarchical terms as "containing different spiritual qualities" (17).

'Whiteness' posits not only a boundary that includes 'white' bodies and excludes 'non-white' ones; it is also inherent to its logic to generate a string of hierarchies among 'whites', cutting across gender, class and/or other socio-cultural affiliations,[17] that is, whiteness never

17 The string of hierarchies described by Dyer is a concrete manifestation of one intrinsic property of semiotic space; as Lotman posits, "the entire space of the semiosphere is transected by boundaries of different levels, boundaries of different

exists separate from the other identity categories. Thus, "in representation, white men are darker than white women", "[w]orking class and peasant whites are darker than middle-class and aristocratic whites", "lower-class women may be darker than upper-class men; to be a lady is to be as white as it gets" (57). There is also a geographic gradation of 'whiteness' where Eastern Europeans are darker than Western Europeans, while Northern Europeans represent the pinnacle of 'whiteness' (cf. 12). As Dyer asserts "[t]rue whiteness resides in the non-corporeal" (45), which makes it a vague and unstable category and yet one that has a remarkable social and political cohesiveness, "often being terrifyingly effective[18] in unifying coalitions of disparate groups of people" (19). Its strength hinges on its indefiniteness.

In addition to that, 'whiteness' can be conceptualised as a set of values, as social norms or as forms of cultural capital in the Bourdieu sense of the word, an approach put forward by the social scientist Steve Garner and extensively discussed in his book *Whiteness*. In the light of Garner's approach, the notion of 'whiteness' can be treated as synonymous with the complex phenomenon that Lotman calls the dominant cultural grammar, a set of norms that is produced, in this case, by the centre of the European semiosphere (cf. *Universe* 128–129). A matching description is offered by Dyer, too, who identifies in whiteness a matrix for social cohesion: "whiteness as a coalition with a border and an internal hierarchy" (51). Historically, the idea of a white people has been instrumental for European rulers and nation states in establishing centralised control over chosen territories and their populations, first on the European continent and then through conquests outside of it (cf. 17).

Another way of approaching 'whiteness' is by equating the centre of the semiosphere with the panoptic eye of power that Foucault theorises in his fertile work *Discipline and Punish*. In this theoretical framework, 'whiteness' can be conceived of as the hegemonic European regime of seeing that associates one group of people with the colour white. Characteristic of this gaze is that it claims universal subjectivity and is oblivious of its own 'racial' position. It is "the (white) point in space from which we tend to identify difference" (Carby 193 qtd. in Dyer 3). The aim of Dyer, as well as the other proponents of Critical

languages and even of texts (...) These sectional boundaries which run through the semiosphere create a multi-level system" (*Universe* 138).

18 The concept of race, of the 'white' race, blots out class differences and – as Otto Kirchheimer demonstrates in his overview of the legal order established during National Socialism – it replaces equality before the law with racial equality (356).

Whiteness Studies, is to dislodge the Western European white subject from its invisible position of power,[19] to shift the focus of the panoptical eye in 'white' Western European culture from the 'colourful fishes' to the 'transparent fishbowl' that holds them. The often-quoted fishbowl metaphor that marvellously illustrates the need for a self-reflexive readjustment of focus is Toni Morrison's brainchild. In her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, celebrated as the founding text of Critical Whiteness Studies, the American novelist muses over the linguistic strategies employed by 'white' American writers for the fabrication of the "Africanist persona" to come to the realisation that "the subject of the dream is the dreamer":

> It is as if I had been looking at a fishbowl – the glide and flick of the golden scales, the green tip, the bolt of white careening back from the gills; the castles at the bottom, surrounded by pebbles and tiny, intricate fronds of green; the barely disturbed water, the flecks of waste and food, the tranquil bubbles traveling to the surface – and suddenly I saw the bowl, the structure that transparently (and invisibly) permits the ordered life it contains to exist in the larger world. (…) What became transparent were the self-evident ways that Americans chose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence. (17)

The call for a self-reflexive shift of focus is palpably necessary in the domains of photography and filmmaking where the relationship between racist/antigypsy narratives and the historical world is mediated, with heightened authority, by the mechanical eye of the camera. In *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, the film theoretician Bill Nichols makes use of the fishbowl metaphor to discuss the effect of realism in ethnographic and pornographic films. These two film forms, as we shall see, share a number of assumptions and conventions with 'gypsy'-themed films:

> The objects of both pornography and ethnography are constituted as if in a fishbowl; and the coherence, "naturalness", and

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19 The point here is not to reject the idea of the universal human being but to make visible the racialising imagery that has been lumped together with it.

the realism of this fishbowl is guaranteed through distance. The fishbowl effect allows us to experience the thrill of strangeness and the apprehension of an Other while also providing the distance from the Other that assures safety. (223)

A fitting illustration of Nichols' point is one scene from the cult film *Queen of the Gypsies* (1975, Dir. Emil Loteanu) that has stamped itself indelibly in the memory of its millions of Soviet spectators and can be seen as a key to the compelling allure of Loteanu's style. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the director stages a spectacle in which the ethnographic is masterfully blended with the pornographic. Here is what happens in the scene [1'14'12:1'15'50]. After the free-spirited 'gypsy' Rada has succumbed to the passionate embrace of her suitor Zobar, both of them rolling unawares into the nearby river, the two fiery 'gypsy' lovers set about drying themselves. Naked to the waist, covered only with the wet strands of her long black hair, Rada starts undressing, removing one after the other her numerous skirts, each of them surprising the viewer with a different pattern and colour. Eventually, she spreads all of her skirts, nine in total, out on the ground, creating an alluring patchwork of colours and decorative motifs. What is particularly titillating to this para-ethnographic display of clothing is that, all the while, the viewers are bestowed with the rare opportunity of gazing at Rada's naked breasts, one of the first instances of female nudity in Soviet film.[20] Let us be reminded that the voyeuristic gaze and the audience's emotional arousal are both carefully choreographed by the filmmaker, whose gaze concurs with the allegedly objective and

20 Sokolova reports that, in its day, the scene was perceived as almost pornographic. The film director Loteanu refused to cut it out and his decision posed, for some time, great obstacles to the film's release (163). The photographic construction of the 'gypsy' female as seen by a sexually charged, tourist gaze is discussed in profuse detail by the German historian Frank Reuter, who gives various examples in his book *Der Bann des Fremden*: photo postcards from WW1, amateur photographs from WW2, professional photographs in popular magazines from the post-war period, etc. (327–329, 358–359, 458). This representational regime that assigns its subjects the status of colonised, coloured and sexually available 'natives' is also discernible in the documentary footage *Kampf-Geschwader 51 "Edelweiss"*, where a young Roma woman is made to remove her shirt and dance with her bared breasts in front of a soldier's camera [11'20'50:11'21'40]. The dancing scene was filmed during WW2 in Bessarabia, which is, interestingly enough, also the setting where Loteanu staged in the 1970s the undressing of his 'gypsy' Rada. The film *Kampf-Geschwader 51 "Edelweiss"* [Material No. 2] is located in Film Archive Agentur Karl Höffkes and I am grateful to the filmmaker Annette von der Heyde for sharing the source information.

objectifying gaze of the camera. Being an extension of the filmmaker, the mechanical eye of the camera occupies this 'white' or neutral point in space that the viewers unconsciously identify with and from the safe distance of which they can relish in the colourfully erotic display of 'gypsy' Otherness. The pleasure of voyeurism comes in double measure: not only does it grant access to forbidden sights, but it also implicitly affirms the rectitude of the 'white' national majority and its virtuous females, for it is the 'non-white' 'gypsy' who willingly and eagerly exposes her naked flesh and sexuality in public. The consistent portrayal of Rada (Svetlana Tomá[21]) and Zobar (Grigore Grigoriu) as 'non-white' in the modus of the 'gypsy' mask is at the core of the film's ideological workings, for it implicitly assigns characters and spectators to two antithetical universes, a 'black' one on the big screen and a 'white' one in the cinema hall. As the American anthropologist Alaina Lemon discusses in the chapter of her book called "Roma, Race and Markets", in the countries of the former Soviet Union, 'gypsies' are by and large perceived and self-perceived as 'black' (an attribute usually associated with the people of the Caucasus). At the same time, the scholar underlines, Roma "are no darker in complexion than some Russians" (69). Reflecting on the paradoxes of 'blackness', Lemon comes to the conclusion that this racialising category is a 'shifter', its meaning entirely dependent on the social context. For this reason, she argues, 'blackness' can be likened to a personal pronoun whose function is to point to *relations* between 'us' and 'them' rather than to a stable collective or to an actual skin tone (cf. 78).

A final note is in order here with regard to the strategies that can be used to deconstruct 'whiteness' or indeed any of the other racialising constructs ('blackness', 'gypsyness', 'yellow race', etc.), and these strategies move in two directions. One effective approach is to trace the historical development of the idea of 'whiteness' and to point to its varying forms across time and cultural space. The second effective approach is to highlight the discrepancies that surround the notion of 'whiteness' and that is what we shall consider next. In the section to follow, I hone in on the paradoxes and ambiguities that are intrinsic to the colour white as they bear a direct relevance to the analysis of cinematic representations.

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21 The 'gypsy' temptress Rada with her long, raven-black hair is performed by the Moldavian actress Svetlana Tomá, who is actually a blonde.

1.4.1   The Visual Rhetoric of Whiteness

The visual identity of 'white' people is constructed mainly through association with the colour white. As Dyer points out, white has three distinct aspects that are unrelated to each other but are often collapsed into a single meaning: white as a hue, white as a skin colour and white as a symbol.

With the term 'hue', Dyer denotes white as a colour in its own right, a colour that occupies a segment on the colour palette and displays an infinite gradation of tones. The range of possible whites becomes obvious when one thinks of white kitchen tiles or textiles, for instance. Another meaning of white as a hue, found in dictionary definitions, is that of colourlessness. Paradoxically, white signifies both a presence and an absence of colour. It denotes a specific hue and yet a hue that is associated with colour neutrality. This innate ambiguity of white makes it ideal for the representation of a group of people that claims for itself the position of humanity in general. On the one hand, this specific hue guarantees visibility to the group in question, while on the other hand, it marks their position as colourless or neutral, as identical with that of the medium and for that reason invisible. What is more, in physics, white is conceived not as a specific colour but as all colours fused together. In colour theory, white is the colour of light, and neutral light (the painter Roland Rood calls it white light or whiteness) is the ever-present medium in which all other colours are submerged. There is a third important property to white as a hue: unlike other colours, it has an opposite, black. If white is light, black stands for its absence. This absolute polarity that appears natural and corroborates dualistic thought gains significance when it is inflected with whiteness as a skin colour and as a symbol (cf. 46–48).

'White' as a skin colour, Dyer argues, is an unclear, internally variable category with an unstable boundary. It is used to describe the pigmentation of human flesh and the latter, to begin with, is infinitely variable.[22] In the wide spectrum of complexions, skin that stands the

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22   The portrait project *Humanæ* created by the Brazilian photographer Angélica Dass shows that human flesh has a wondrous multitude of hues. In her TED talk "The Beauty of Human Skin in Every Colour", Dass explains how she came to realise her idea "to document humanity's true colours": she photographs individuals, then takes an 11-pixel square from the area of the subject's nose and paints the portrait's background with it, matching it with the corresponding colour in the industrial palette "Pantone". The talk delivered by Dass is a verbal equivalent to

chance of being categorised as white occupies the range between pink and beige. When we think of skin tones as the rich colour palette they make up, it is apparent that there is not and cannot be a clear demarcation line separating the 'whites' from the 'non-whites'. 'White' skin colour, then, is far from being a fixed epidermal fact. It is more adequate to think of it, as Dyer suggests, as an aspiration and, within bounds, as an ascribed attribute. He illustrates his point with the history of make-up in the West, which can be summarised as the history of whitening the face. White skin, the colour of milk or alabaster, used to be a status symbol associated with royalty, aristocrats and the rich, while today it is an overarching attribute of entire nations. The main question is who is in position to say who is 'white'. In this context, the politics of representation comes to play a crucial role. Dyer demonstrates that painters and photographers have often rendered 'white' people as partially or literally 'white'. This in turn has to do with the representational conventions in line drawing and black-and-white photography that depend on "the readiness to take the literally white graphic face as a rendering of the socially white face", a readiness that has been extended over to oil painting and colour film, too (48–49). Finally, to make things more complex, Dyer observes that skin pigmentation is not the only factor in determining one's skin colour ('race'); it is rather an interplay of elements in which skin hue is only one decisive physical feature, the others being the colour and the shape of the eyes, lips or hair. Focusing specifically on colour, Dyer comments that blue eyes and blond hair have come to be exclusively associated with the 'white' 'race', so that 'non-white' people with such features are considered curious exceptions (cf. 44, 48–57). When it comes to the Roma minority, there are many such tell-tale examples. In the introduction to her book *Between Two Fires*, Lemon has placed a photo of a blonde girl, a young dancer from the Moscow Children's Gypsy Ensemble *Gilorri*, photographed minutes before an outdoor performance in 1991. To highlight the perceived incompatibility of blonde hair and "real Gypsies", the scholar comments

her photographic pursuit. It provides beautifully detailed descriptions of her family members and their unique complexions: "an intense dark chocolate tone", "a porcelain skin and cotton-like hair", "somewhere between a vanilla and strawberry yogurt tone", "a cinnamon skin (…) with a pinch of hazel and honey", "a mix of coffee with milk, but with a lot of coffee", "a toasted-peanut skin", "more on the beige side, like a pancake" (Dass). The portraits in *Humanæ* demonstrate in an empirical manner the insubstantiality of the 'racial' ideology with its classification of human beings into four 'races' associated with the colours white, red, yellow and black.

under the girl's photo: "Audience members on this occasion in 1991 (as on others) questioned whether she was an 'authentic Gypsy' because she had blond hair. Sometimes the choir director addressed such doubts publicly before appearances" (15). The question is left open also for the reader, since Lemon explains that the dancers in *Gilorri* were both Romani and non-Romani children and – tellingly – provides no details about the girl's identity.

The third theoretically distinct sense that Dyer isolates in relation to the colour white is that of a symbol. Despite national and historic variations, the symbolic meaning of white is clear and, unlike its other meanings, more stable. Most often it takes the form of a moral opposition in which 'white' stands for 'good' and 'black' signifies 'bad'. Dyer states that this moral symbolism need not carry 'racial' implications. It is used to differentiate between good and bad characters and can be applied to people from the same social skin group. The opposition can work with 'white' people (as in the fairy-tale "Cinderella"), just as it can work with 'non-white' people, as in the film *Dances with Wolves* (1990, Dir. Kevin Costner), or with 'white' people in the deviant context of lesbian romance, as in the film *Desert Hearts* (1985, Dir. Donna Deitch). Since the Renaissance, it has become a commonplace to equate white with a list of moral connotations: purity (physical, sexual, 'racial'), innocence, chastity, cleanliness, goodness, and virtue (cf. 72–73).

The three definitions of white – white as a physical property of surfaces, white as a social/ 'racial' skin colour and white as a symbol of moral virtue – do not need to be activated simultaneously in written or visual texts. Dyer agrees that the contrastive use of black and white need not have 'racial' or moral implications. Yet his perceptive survey of dictionary entries, canonical texts (such as Shakespeare's plays), paintings and films provides ample evidence that there is a pervasive slippage between these three registers, to the effect that questions of colour are abridged into questions of morality[23] (62). In support of Dyer's observations, I want to bring up in the discussion D.W. Griffith's directorial debut *The Adventures of Dollie* (1908), a cinematic re-enactment of the literary motif of child-stealing 'gypsies' and a textbook example of antigypsyism. The official synopsis of the film provides a perfect illustration of the slippage between the three registers outlined by Dyer, focusing on not the colour white but its diametrical opposite,

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23   Consider here also Forceville and Renckens's well-illustrated paper "The 'good is light' and 'bad is dark' metaphor in feature films".

the colour black. The Biograph Studio's publicity annotation gives an account of a man who comes to rescue to his distressed wife while she is being pestered by a 'gypsy' basket peddler:

> [T]he husband, hearing her cries of alarm, rushes down to her aid, and with a heavy snakewhip lashes the Gypsy unmercifully, leaving great welts upon his swarthy body, at the same time arousing the venom of his black heart. ("Synopsis")

In the quote, there are three references to the 'gypsy' character. First, he is introduced with the ethnonym "Gypsy" and not with a personal name, as someone who is being subjected to lashings. The next clause delivers information about his skin hue – "swarthy" – that in other contexts could have been decoded as a description of a neutral epidermal fact, but here is used to make explicit and lay emphasis on the 'racial' subtext of the ethnonym. The real culmination, however, comes in the third clause. The phrase "the venom of his black heart" activates simultaneously all the three distinct senses of the colour black: black as a flesh hue (not only his skin, but even his heart is of a black hue), black as an 'ethno-racial' colour and black as a corrupted moral quality. The indirect message is that swarthiness is but the physical manifestation of an innate spiritual quality, that the 'gypsy' body literally secrets a poisonous lifeblood. The abridged causal relationship between the man's 'ethno-racial' identity and his spiritual depravity is also what the text offers as a justification for the violence inflicted upon him by the 'white' husband.

1.4.2 Whiteness as an Aesthetic Technology

From the Renaissance onwards, whiteness has also been operative as an explicit aesthetic ideal in Western culture and arts. Dyer details the way in which folklore and literature, the visual arts and intellectual thought have elevated whiteness to a universal paragon of beauty. In Western myths and fairy-tales, for instance, blondness is synonymous with beauty or fairness. By the end of the Renaissance, Christian iconography had succeeded in gentilising and whitening the image of Christ so that in the nineteenth century the son of God was represented not only as light-skinned but also as blond and blue-eyed (cf. 68). In sixteenth-century England, whiteness was identified with beauty, especially in connection to Queen Elizabeth. In his *Farbenlehre*,

Goethe declared the white man to be the most beautiful. The idea of the non-particular, white man also resonated with the Enlightenment ideal of the subject without properties. Intertwining science with aesthetics, nineteenth-century racialist thought proclaimed the Aryan race as the pinnacle of human development, including in terms of beauty.

Whiteness as a universal epitome of beauty is identified above all with the 'fair sex', while men are often conceived of as the dark desire that strives after whiteness. Dyer emphasises that this gendered relationship to 'whiteness' is a central feature of the construction of the white skin identity (cf. 70–81). There is a direct link between the idealised image of the fair-skinned, blonde and blue-eyed female who glows with whiteness, as if illuminated by the spirit within, and the development of modern technologies of light, namely photography and cinema. Underscoring the social nature of technologies, Dyer demonstrates that, historically, innovations in the field of film stock, cameras and lighting were geared by the desire to render visible the white beauty ideal. The main concern that steered improvements in photographic equipment was how to render right 'white' flesh tones, how to ensure visibility to the right image, the one that conformed with the prevalent ideas about humanity. The technology of lighting and movie lighting (exposures, lighting set-ups, make-up, developing processes) took the 'white' female face as a norm. This prevalent practice, as Dyer rightly observes, has 'racial' implications. The main argument he puts forward is that photography and cinema have a tendency to assume, privilege and construct the idea(l) of the 'white' person. In this dominant technological regime, the task of photographing people who strongly deviate from the typical subject – generally accepted to be a 'Caucasian' with skin reflectance of approximately 36% – is then seen as a problem.

1.5   The Dynamic Principle of the 'White' Mask and the Dynamic Principle of the 'Gypsy' Mask

In this concluding section to Chapter One, I bring together the various theoretical strands, concepts and insights presented so far, in an attempt to produce a single coherent picture and account for the multi-level identity dynamics within the European semiosphere. As already pointed out, to facilitate the analysis of cultural processes, I refer to the 'gypsy' construct and the construct of whiteness as the 'gypsy' mask and the 'white' mask. The synchronisation of terms is beneficial

to my endeavour because the term 'mask' points to the dual nature of whiteness/gypsyness, the fact that these are conceptualised as a set of attributes and visualised in an embodied form, signifying an abstract cultural norm/anti-norm and a material screen image of a human face.

As an expression of the cultural centre, the 'white' mask refers, as already stated, to a set of heterogeneous attributes whose main purpose is to regulate the various and very different aspects of human existence: the bodily aspect of human life, or how to deal with one's own body – bodily maintenance and grooming (hygiene, health, the socially accepted code for hair styling, etc.), clothing (dress code), sexuality (continence, reproduction, socially accepted rituals); the social aspect of human life, or how to establish relations with other members of society – respect for the individual (individuality, privacy), family structure (nuclear family), social structure and political organisation (sedentary life, private or collective property, capitalism or communism); the spiritual aspect of human life, or within what value coordinates to situate one's existence – religion (Christianity, Jesus and Mother Mary as symbolic ideals), culture (written culture with emphasis on education, rationality and modern science; European/'white' national ideologies; state-supported national literature, music and fine art).

Being an image and a narrative at the same time, the 'white' mask is more than just an aesthetic condensation of socially desirable attributes; it stands for a dynamic principle. It is a shorthand for the paradigm of social integration within the European (read: 'white') semiosphere, specifying the conditions and rules according to which human beings are successfully woven into the fabric of the nation. And so it would not be an exaggeration to say that the 'white' mask encodes the principle of life. Thus, the process of socialisation within the European semiosphere can be understood as a teleological aspiration towards the 'white' mask. This is a self-perpetuating process that should say that newcomers, i.e. new-born children or foreigners, are as a rule indoctrinated into the principle of the 'white' mask as a way of ensuring their successful social integration. Moreover, the principle of the 'white' mask is that of positive reinforcement; it is the benign approach the cultural centre adopts to discipline its members. Adherence to the model behaviour exemplified by the 'white' mask promises the reward of social respectability (i.e. one blends with the majority) and access to resources. The social matrix of power crystallises in the 'white' mask, which underwrites the legitimacy of such figures of symbolic or real power as the Christian deity, the king, the

aristocrat, the bourgeois, the communist, the policeman/judge, the universal human being.

The 'white' mask produces the 'gypsy' mask: both are an expression of the same cultural norm representing the two extreme modes of European cultural consciousness in the context of nation-building projects (two regimes of seeing and of exercising power; two regimes of photographing and filming people). The 'white' mask is the dominant, positively loaded core (read: presence of socially desirable qualities), while the 'gypsy' mask is the peripheral/lowest ranking negatively loaded extreme (read: absence of socially desirable qualities) – both mark the two ends of a hierarchically stratified continuum of attributes along which human nature is culturally codified. This coding can also be reserved so that the 'gypsy' mask is associated positively with primal life energy, as opposed to the 'white', which is associated negatively with lifelessness; this re-coding will be dealt with later. As to time and its narrative encoding, it is important to add that the 'white' mask is associated with the linear progress of time and points to the ideal/modern human being of the future, whereas the 'gypsy' mask stands for the cyclical time of nature and points to the pre-modern human in a state of eternal present. This stratification and hierarchisation of time by means of 'white' and 'black' figures is not confined to antigypsyism only but is a defining feature of racist thought, as David Roediger points out in reference to George Rawick's book *From Sundown to Sunup*:

> The racist, like the reformed sinner, creates 'a pornography of his former life… In order to insure that he will not slip back into the old ways or act out half-suppressed phantasies, he must see a tremendous difference between his reformed self and those whom he formerly resembled.' Blackness and whiteness were thus created together. (95)

Viewed as signs, the 'white' mask and the 'gypsy' mask also mark the two extremes on the continuum of relationships formed between signs and their referents; they signify two diametrically opposed relationships between form and content. The 'white' mask stands for the stable, supposedly natural connection between signifier and signified and therefore generates the most authoritative knowledge within the semiosphere, whereas the 'gypsy' mask stands for the loose, arbitrary connection between signifier and signified, opening up a vast space for epistemological uncertainty. The sudden encounter of 'white' Europeans

with 'non-white' 'gypsies', a set piece in many artworks, explores the tension between signs with a fixed referent and signs without a fixed referent. Leafing through the modern European literary canon in her perspicacious article, Katie Trumpener comes to the conclusion that 'gypsies'

> become a major epistemological testing ground for the European imaginary, a black box, or limit case for successive literary styles, genres, and intellectual moments. Thus for neoclassicism they are there to symbolize a primitive democracy; for the late Enlightenment, an obstruction to the progress of civilization; for romanticism, resistance and the utopic of autonomy; for realism, a threat that throws the order and detail of everyday life into relief; for aestheticism and modernism, a primitive energy still left beneath the modern that drives art itself; and for socialist and postcolonial fiction, finally, a reactionary or resistant culture force that lingers outside of the welfare state or the imperial order. (874)

If the 'white' mask encodes the principle of life in the films analysed here, the 'gypsy' mask encodes the principle of social disintegration, of failure and death. It stipulates the deviations that condemn the individual to public punishment and exclusion, to symbolic, social and/or physical death. To be labelled a 'gypsy' is a severe form of punishment[24] in itself: it means to be categorised socially or 'ethno-racially' as the lowliest form of a human being, to be openly ridiculed, denigrated and denied access to social respectability and resources. When a community ostracises the 'gypsy', it reinforces, in effect, its own norms, rules and values, confirming anew its abidance by the established order.

The strategies of positive and negative reinforcement linked to the cultural norm and its anti-norm can be explained more easily if we draw an analogy to a dance lesson. When a teacher introduces her/his students to a traditional dance, s/he first shows them what is right: the right steps, the right rhythm, the right figures. Performing before the group, the teacher offers a model dance that the students then strive to emulate. After the students have tried out the steps themselves, the second part of the lesson begins: the teacher, who has in the meantime

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24 Significantly, the trap of labelling has grave implications for community development projects and policies.

observed the students practising, draws attention to their mistakes. S/he then directs their attention towards the wrong moves – often in an exaggerated manner – delivering the same lesson but this time in the negative. By showing what is wrong, by making a show out of the mistakes made, s/he can elicit laughter, shame or even fear, depending on the pedagogical approach. The dance lesson as such represents a miniature version of the larger process of socialisation within any of the national cultures in Europe, all of which, notably, use the spectacle of 'gypsy' mistakes to get their normative message across. The 'gypsy' example in the negative is especially useful when a culture's 'dance' evolves at a fast pace with too many complex figures that require an increasingly greater level of skill and discipline; then the negative lesson – the often highly entertaining punitive spectacle of 'gypsy' (read: wrong) movements – can acquire crucial political importance and will be restaged with greater frequency and fervour.

Furthermore, the 'gypsy' mask can be conceptualised as a collection of heterogeneous attributes that stand in reciprocal relation to the qualities subsumed under the 'white' mask. Consequently, the process of socialisation and civilisation, of internalising the achievements of European modernity, can be described as a process of striving to bear the least resemblance to the 'gypsy' mask. The 'gypsy' mask stands for qualities that – in relation to the qualities laid down by the 'white' mask – signify absence, misapplication or reversal, all of which are a form of negation. Here, I give only a short sketch of this construct to pinpoint, once again, its implausibility. Just like Quasimodo, the deviances of the 'gypsy' body have a synchronous multitude of dimensions: it is 'non-white' and dirty (and thus implicitly attests to the 'whiteness' and physical and 'racial' cleanliness of the national/European body); it is marked by physical deformities and other shortcomings, such as unkempt hair, scars and tattoos, missing teeth, etc. It is a naked body, a body wrapped in rags, dressed as a caricature of the aristocrat or the suited businessman or the working-class hero. It is a sexually incontinent body, hungry for sexual escapades and abandoned carnal pleasure. It disrespects and misapplies established rituals, rules and laws. It has no proper religion, practising paganism and superstition. It speaks a broken language, a language full of mistakes and malapropisms, or, as Lotman puts it, the anti-language of obscenities. It has no work habits: it is an indolent body, a thieving body or a dancing body, and so on. Thus, the 'gypsy' construct – in a reverse form – makes visible certain normative values that have lost their public salience. By claiming, for

instance, that 'gypsies' are lazy, Europeans indirectly remind themselves that they should be industrious and that hard work is one of the core values that should be held in high esteem.

In support of my view that the 'gypsy' mask is antithetical to the 'white' mask, its negation, I draw once again on Katie Trumpener's text, quoting her illuminatingly succinct account of "the Western construction of the 'Gypsy Question'" (848). Importantly, negation, as Trumpener's analysis shows, can also be couched in spatial terms; it can be represented not only through absence, misapplication or inversion, but also as occupying a space that is outside or beyond the domain of the 'white' mask:

> Gypsy life remains in the popular imagination as a carefree, deviant, disruptive alternative to a Western culture (…) Moving through civil society, the Gypsies apparently remain beyond the reach of everything that constitutes Western identity (…) outside of historical record and historical time, outside of Western law, the Western nation state, and Western economic orders, outside of writing and discursivity itself. (860)

Invariably, 'gypsy' reality is imagined as antipodal to the 'white' national projects in Europe and, as Trumpener stresses, its purpose is purely instrumental: "[c]ompact, transportable, self-perpetuating, the tropes of racism express the same essentializing beliefs again and again in widely diverging situations and for a whole range of reasons" (861). At this point, it is necessary to readjust Trumpener's geographic map of references and add the rest of Europe to it: for even though 'whiteness' and 'gypsyness' are indisputably products of the Western literary and political imagination, the black-and-white racist dynamics that they unleash are palpably present well beyond the so-called West.

On this last point, we can turn to Bulgarian folklore tradition for one example of astonishing clarity; I refer here to an initiation ritual which is mentioned in passing in an article by the Bulgarian professor of folk arts Georg Kraev. Kraev's text concerns itself with underwear (as a type of cultural immunisation), a topic which has no relevance to our discussion here. Yet it is noteworthy that the scholar introduces the reader to the subject of his analysis by way of commenting on the meaning and significance of initiation rites in Bulgarian oral tradition and, in just three sentences, sketches out one revelatory folklore ritual. Here is how Kraev's article opens up:

Която и да е социално-антропологична общност имунизира културата си (или ценностната си система) против някакъв вид заплаха, „болест" или синдром за болест. Най-често това е чуждостта. Класическият фолклор или по-право „устността" се имунизира чрез институцията на „табу"-то. Нарушаването или преодоляването на табуто води до социалната „смърт" на индивида и преминаването му в нов социален статус. В класическата фолклорна сватба другоселската булка, когато е достигала до междата на мъжовото си село, са я пременявали в носията на селото и тя, прекрачвайки междата, е наричала: „Мойто село – циганско! Батьовото село – царско!"

Any socio-anthropological community immunises its culture (or value system) against some kind of threat, "disease", or disease syndrome. Most often it is alterity. Classical folklore, or more properly "orality", is immunised through the institution of the "taboo". Breaking or overcoming the taboo leads to the social "death" of the individual and his/her transition to a new social status. In the classical folklore wedding, the bride from another village, upon reaching the border of her husband's village, was re-dressed into the attire of that village and when crossing the border, she called out: "My village – gypsy! The village of Batjo[25] (my master) – kingly!" [my translation, R.M.]

This initiation ritual from Bulgarian folklore tradition is yet another example in support of my thesis of the reality-maintenance functions of the 'gypsy' mask in a pan-European dimension. The bride's vocal affirmation of her new abode simultaneously involves the negation of her birth home; the hierarchical opposition between these two spatio-temporal worlds is established with reference to two mythic figures: the old world of the birth village is labelled as "gypsy" and thus assigned, symbolically, to the lowliest and least desirable social position, and, temporally, to the past, while the new world of the husband's village is labelled as "kingly" and thus assigned to the highest and most desirable social position, and to the future. Kraev leaves

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25 The Bulgarian word 'Бате' or 'Батьо' means 'older brother', but also 'master', 'leader', 'husband'; etymological dictionaries show that in the early history of the Bulgarian state, the word 'bat' was used as a ruling title meaning 'prince' or 'king'.

the bride's ritual affirmation uncommented-on, and proceeds with his topic, clearly assuming that by quoting the bride's call, he can offer his readers a straightforward, easily decipherable explanation as to how the institution of the taboo functions in classical oral tradition. Kraev's scholarly text itself is a testament to the widespread, if not universal, signification of the stigma 'gypsy' and we can discern the reality-structuring effect of the latter both by the manner in which the phantasm 'gypsy' has been incorporated into classical Bulgarian folklore (in a mythic opposition: 'gypsy' vs. kingly) and by the uncritical manner in which this phantasm has been referred to by the scholar, i.e. as a self-explanatory antipode to "kingly".

Here, another important point comes to light from Alaina Lemon's research, in which the pertinent observation is made that scholars often fail to account for the Roma minority through a lens of normality, even when they consciously try to detach themselves from the racialising perspective afforded by the 'gypsy' mask:

> In this representational void, many non-Romani investigators see themselves as penetrating a hidden social world, pulling back a curtain of false stereotypes to reveal the variety of the "real Gypsies." But these unveilings sometimes reproduce the veil, if only because the model of a curtained proscenium divides observers and actors into two realms of "reality." The two realms continue to be imagined as maximally different. (80)

The metaphoric description Lemon gives of this peculiar kind of intellectual myopia is very accurate and can be easily remapped onto Lotman's model of culture. Via the veil metaphor, she describes the scholars' inability to reconcile – within themselves, within their own mental universe – the world of the semiotic centre with the anti-world of the semiotic boundary, the two defining structures of consciousness whose main function is to sustain one's inner sense of reality. In this instance, the 'white' mask and the 'gypsy' mask clearly reveal themselves to be externalisations of human consciousness and its two main functional structures; therefore, these two constructs need to be understood as signs that point to inner psychic phenomena rather than to actual humans in the socio-historical world.

The positively coded 'white' mask and the negatively coded 'gypsy' mask create, in other words, the force field that ensures the unity within European national cultures. These two constructs sustain one and the

same myth of the 'white' 'race' and the 'picture of reality' the said myth entails. Just like the 'good cop, bad cop' routine, these two inversely coded forces share the same goal but take recourse to two mutually reinforcing tactics: the tactics of reward and the tactics of punishment. Immersed in the force field of European culture, the individual is inculcated (not to say house-trained) to emulate and strive towards the cultural centre, whose artistic abstraction is the 'white' mask, while, at the same time, despising and distancing him/herself from the cultural boundary, whose artistic abstraction is the 'gypsy' mask. A Janus-faced construct, the 'white' and the 'gypsy' masks lie at the core of European cultural grammar, generating a string of hierarchical boundaries[26] that cut, in addition, across nationality/ethnicity, class and gender. This string of bilingual or two-faced boundaries codifies the processes of socialisation on a familial,[27] national and supra-national level, specifying at each level what is socially desirable and what is socially unacceptable.

One final note should be made here of Romantic literature in Europe and its role in (re-)shaping and popularising the 'gypsy' mask. When we consider Romanticism in the context of Lotman's model of culture, we can argue that some, if not many, of the Romantic writers envision a radical shift in their works, re-coding the cultural force field defined by the 'white' mask (read: norm (+)) and the 'gypsy' mask (read: anti-norm (–)). Taking a critical stance on the normative worldview in their respective cultures, a handful of Romantics succeed in reversing the values attached to these two constructs, so that the 'gypsy' mask becomes the new norm (+), while the 'white' mask

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26 As Alastair Bonnett points out in his book's first chapter, entitled "Who is white? The disappearance of non-European white identities and the formation of European racial whiteness": "the development of whiteness as a racialised, fetishised and exclusively European attribute produced a contradictory crisis-prone identity. Two sets of conflating discourses are implicated in the process: first, colonial imperial and national rhetoric of European racial equivalence that, ostensibly, offered the privileges of white identity to all European-heritage peoples; second, the denial or marginalization of certain European-heritage groups' whiteness, a process of racial suspicion fostered by social exclusion based on gender, class and ethnicity" (8).

27 Consider, for example, the scare story of child-stealing 'gypsies' that was part of the arsenal of so-called poisonous pedagogy (*schwarze Pädagogik*) practised in nineteenth-century Europe; surprisingly or not so surprisingly, this scare story is still in use today. For a study of the motif's journey through popular media and arts, see Mladenova's publication *Patterns of Symbolic Violence*.

is demoted to its anti-norm (−);[28] these few Romantics are thus able to uncover the positive potential of psychic phenomena banished to the mythic underworld of 'gypsies'. Here, the analogy with the dance lesson can be helpful again in highlighting one specific intellectual achievement of Romanticism. If we imagine that European societies have been struggling since the late eighteenth century to keep up with the ever-accelerating tempo of modernisation and industrialisation, the Romantic movement signals a halt in the 'dance' and an abrupt change of rhythm and steps. By uncovering the value of the 'gypsy' 'dance', what had been deemed wrong and punishable is now considered a desirable ideal. With recourse to the positively coded 'gypsy' mask, Romantic writers are able to envision and communicate effectively alternative 'dances' to the status quo and these 'dances' are, notably, of two very different kinds: the first kind of 'dance' is past-oriented, i.e. a return to slower and simpler version of the already familiar steps and figures, whereas the second kind of 'dance' is novelty-oriented and as such it represents the point at which true originality can enter the semiosphere.

The majority of the Romantics simply idealise 'dances' of the past, casting literary 'gypsies' "as spokesmen for cultural conservatism" (Trumpener 844) or as tropes of nationalist nostalgia, "envisioned as a kind of time capsule for storing national forms (music, folklore, traditions)" (Lemon 41). Still, a small number of authors brave enough to explore the radical, utopian position that rejects any prescribed 'dance' and, instead, bestows value on steps and figures that arise spontaneously out of the dancer, making the entire idea of mistakes obsolete.

28 Commonly, the idealised and positively connoted image of the 'gypsy' is associated and even equated with the figure constructed by nineteenth-century Romantic writers; hence, it is abridgedly called the romanticised 'gypsy' or the Romantic construct. A closer look at Romanticism and its manifestations in European literatures, however, reveals a different story: the 'gypsy' phantasm is far less often idealised and positively imagined than scholars tend to assume. Since it is beyond the scope of my work to examine the extent to which Romantic 'gypsy' constructs are genuinely positive idealisations, I want to call attention to several literary works, representative of German, French and English Romanticism, which manifestly purvey antigypsy tropes. The reader may consider Achim von Arnim's exceedingly anti-Semitic tale "Isabella von Ägypten", a text that at the same time greatly contributed to the popularisation of the epithet *Zigeunerromantik* (Gypsy Romanticism) (Brittnacher, *Leben* 280). Two more examples, already discussed here, are Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* and Prosper Mérimée's tale "Carmen". William Wordsworth's poem "Gipsies" is one further example, studiously analysed by Houghton-Walker in her book *Representations of the Gypsy in the Romantic Period* (126–154).

Using the 'gypsy' mask as their main expressive device, as a figure of self-reflexivity and a source of genuine novelty, poets like Alexander Pushkin,[29] Nikolaus Lenau or Karel Hynek Mácha indeed broaden the cultural consciousness of the European semiosphere, redeeming the value of freedom and individuality, of love and emotionality, of femininity, of nature, intuition, the subconscious, etc. It has to be stressed here that the Romantics, too, made use of the 'gypsy' mask (and *not* of Roma representations), a genuinely Western construct, universally recognisable, designed to enable the expression of those aspects of the human psyche that are, so to speak, left out in the shadow of enlightened thought. Nevertheless, even when positively connoted, the 'gypsy' mask in Romantic writing preserves its antithetical relationship to the 'white' mask; the normative world and its anti-world may swap their values, with the anti-world turning into an invigorating source of aesthetic innovation, but the line of division between the imagined majority and the imagined minority remains in place.[30] Assessed from the perspective of its potential, the Romantic period provides evidence that the 'gypsy' mask is a potent identity tool that can be used to radically re-configure and/or expand cultural consciousness. Scholars are only now beginning to acknowledge the significance of the 'gypsy' construct for 'white' (European/national/social) identity formation, an area of research that has received little academic attention to date. As to cinema, it goes without saying that each national cinema in Europe needs to write its own chapter on the deployment of the 'gypsy' mask in the history of establishing, individualising and stabilising the national self-image as 'white' and European. The current work hopes to provide the basic framework and the impetus for such further research.

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29 For an insightful analysis of Pushkin's 1824 Byronic poem *Tzygany* (*The Gyp-sies*), which extolls "the free exercise of will and caprice, volja" as opposed to "the ordered liberty from rule (svoboda)" (37), see Lemon (35–46).

30 Such is the premise of the clichéd story in Baz Luhrmann's romantic comedy *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), whose title is explanatorily translated in German as *Strictly Ballroom – Die gegen alle Regeln tanzen* [those who dance against all rules]. As David Callahan comments in his article "His Natural Whiteness: Modes of Ethnic Presence and Absence in Some Recent Australian Films", Luhrmann's film uses "ethnic opposition in order to critique what passes for the Australian norm", where the contrastive ethnicity to 'white' Australians is none other but Spaniards-cum-Andalusian 'gypsies'. In the film, the 'gypsy' dancer even gets the steps of the *paso doble* wrong (cf. 97–98).