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The Functions of the ‘Gypsy’ Masquerade Staged in Film

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It is a widely held view among film scholars that to be perceptive and precise, film analysis needs to consider films in their socio-historic embeddedness. A detailed contextual study is indispensable, especially when trying to understand how and why a film works; yet, in this chapter meant to bring to light the multiplicity of functions performed by ‘gypsy’-themed films, I will refrain from contextual reconstructions. This is not out of disregard for scientific rigour, for I am well aware what immense impact socio-political and cultural forces have on shaping a film product, and that they often offer the only way to access the filmmaker’s motives, his/her choice of a story and visual aesthetics, or the slant his/her film has taken on the topic. Nevertheless, in my research I had to bracket out to a great extent the contextual specifics in order to reduce the semiotic complexity at the level of individual film analysis and thus, hopefully, to open space to set up the methodological tools necessary for tackling the complexity of semiotic processes at another level: it has been my aim to sketch the contours of the largely ignored and unexplored phenomenon of ‘gypsy’-themed film on the vast map of European and American cinema, to pinpoint the significance of the ‘gypsy’ mask in the development of film grammar and its role in the complex dialogics within and among national narratives. Just as in a syntactic analysis one can describe any sentence, no matter how singularly unique and complex it is, by reducing it to the parts of speech that it is made of and explaining the rules that govern their internal relationships, so in my approach to films, themselves unique and infinitely complex texts, I hope to have reached a similar level of

analytical abstraction. It should help me demonstrate that the 'gypsy' mask is not an exchangeable decorative element that adds colour to the surface of the big screen, but that it represents an indispensable part of cinematic language, a core element of European cultural grammar without which it would be impossible to imagine ourselves the way we do today.

All the while, my essentially pluricentric approach to 'gypsy'-themed films does not eschew questions that probe into the film's socio-historical context or take an interest in the film's reception by popular and professional audiences; quite the contrary, for it is mandatory to ask: What functions does a 'gypsy'-themed film fulfil at a particular historical stage of development for a given national culture? Did 'gypsy'-themed films, for instance, play a specific role for fascist/communist/capitalist political regimes in Europe in the twentieth century and what is this role? (For the National Socialist regime in Germany, for Franco's dictatorship in Spain, for the Socialist Bloc during the Cold War, as well as for Western Europe, for the period of transition after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, and so on?) What is the unstated purpose of staging the 'gypsy' mask on the big screen? What unspoken needs of the national majority are met through the story, what socio-political anxieties are alleviated, what kind of identity crises are stabilised? The response of the various audiences is also symptomatic of the functions a film performs, so it is also necessary to ask: What is the general reception of the work? Who is praised in filmmaking circles and for what? Who profits directly from the film's success and who is excluded from that success?

It is obvious that a sustained contextual study, one that gives satisfying answers to all these questions while focusing on one film or a wave of 'gypsy'-themed film in a given national culture, will fill the pages of an entire book. And it is to be hoped that the current research would serve as an impetus for such future studies, in which film scholars pay close attention to concrete socio-political realities and the way 'gypsy'-themed films address and help shape these realities. In this final chapter, though, I will limit myself to an overview of the five broad functions that 'gypsy'-themed films perform within national cultures but also at the supranational level of the European semiosphere, in an attempt to refract, restructure and wrap up the findings presented in the preceding eight chapters through the lens of functionality. As we have already seen, the cinematic spectacle of the 'gypsy' mask fulfils an array of disparate functions and these are not dissimilar to the functions identified in relation to blackface minstrel shows (see here Saxton;

Roediger; and Rogin); we can distinguish the following five main types of functions: aesthetic, disciplining, carnival, subversive and socially integrative. The 'gypsy' mask is ubiquitous in film narratives and therefore it can endow figures and stories with a high level of visibility (aesthetic function). The enactment of the 'gypsy' mask, in turn, may be used in a way that stabilises the norm-setting 'white' mask by way of ostracising and punishing deviance (disciplining function); it may be used in a way that enables filmmakers to give vent to pent-up emotions and broach taboo topics (carnival/expressive function); or it may enable them to voice a critical view of the 'white' mask and put forward alternative models of social cohesion (subversive function). The subversive potential of the 'gypsy' figure may also add a measure of self-reflexivity and/or true originality to the film, two aspects of great cultural significance. Just as in blackface minstrel shows, the performance in 'gypsy' mask may have a strong uplifting effect on the professional career of the 'white' filmmaking crew, elevating the film director and the lead actors – and sometimes even the national cinema they represent – to the first ranks of the international film scene (socially integrative function). These are, in a nutshell, the five main functions that 'gypsy'-themed films may have and often simultaneously, which explains the complex aggregate of messages that could be contained within one film as well as its ability to address with equal success a broad variety of audiences.

9.1 Aesthetic Function

The fictive-discursive entity that, to facilitate the analysis of film images, we have called here the 'gypsy' mask is, from a filmmaker's perspective, a very economic and expedient visual storytelling tool: it is universally decipherable, it is easy to mark and stage on the big screen and it is unusually malleable, both in narrative and iconographic terms. The 'gypsy' mask is an ingrained part of the language of European art, having been instrumental in the development of European classist, racialising and nation-building discourses for the past five centuries, and as such it enjoys a truly universal recognisability. At the same time, not much artifice is needed to evoke this fictional phantasm in the spectator's mind: it is enough to bring into use the label 'gypsy' and furnish its disparaged dark-haired bearer with one or more clichéd accessories, such as a striped blanket, a pair of golden hoop earrings, a golden tooth flashing amid dark, bushy facial hair (for the men) or

while taking a pull at a pipe (for the women), darker than 'normal' skin, or some eye-catching facial feature (eyes of different colour, unusual physiognomy, missing front teeth, a crude body tattoo). This imaginary phantasm is so pliable that it can be juxtaposed, as the polar-opposite ethno-social bottom, to practically any dominant norm, be it the one embodied by European aristocrats, the bourgeois, or the heroic working class from the Eastern bloc, and, as a visual signifier of the ethno-social lowlife, the 'gypsy' mask can be assigned almost any expedient and generally deviant quality.

Furthermore, there is one more crucial stylistic advantage to the 'gypsy' construct: it is a universally recognisable figure with an ethnic tag that is colour coded as 'non-white'/'black' in such a way that its colouring conveys simultaneously at least four distinct meanings: an archetypal black where the colour signifies lack of light or darkness, a religious black which is a direct reference to the devil and the colour of its body (cf. Brittnacher, *Leben* 230–232), a psychological black where the colour stands for the unconscious, and a racialising, epidermal black where the colour is used to brand the entire minority,¹⁴³ and this in spite of the actual fact that Roma are phenotypically as diverse as most other European groups (see Sections 1.4.1 and 5.4.2). Of all groups with an ethnic tag in Europe, the Roma are the ones who are still scapegoated aesthetically in the arts today,¹⁴⁴ and importantly this is done via the language of the dominant medium of modernity, film, in both its black-and-white and colour stages of development; the Roma are aesthetically scapegoated in the sense that the entire

143 The Roma scholar Ian Hancock opens his book *The Pariah Syndrome* with an illuminating quotation from the work of Sam Beck, an American fellow scholar who has conducted extensive fieldwork in Romania: "Romanians who are in administrative government and political positions of authority, explain the Tsigani [a racial slur for the Roma] situation by referring to America. 'You know,' they say, 'The Tsigani are like your Negroes: foreign, lazy, shiftless, untrustworthy and black'" (2).

144 Two other Europe-based groups with an ethnic tag that have traditionally been seen as 'black' are the Irish and the Jews. Dyer points out that "[f]or much of British history, the Irish have been looked down upon as black", whereas the Jews have "constituted the limit case of whiteness" but were regarded as 'black' in Nazi Germany (52–57). On the ambivalent whiteness and racialisation of the Irish, see also Heinz Tellingly, while discussing the 'gypsy' romance of *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1944), Sue Harper comments that it is mandatory for cultural historians to explore the role of marginal groups in popular cultural forms in Britain, because "[they] provide a way of exploring the limits of social pollution that is, of negotiating the boundary between the pure and the impure, the safe and the dangerous" ("Madonna" 51).

minority has been consistently linked to a fictional figure playacting the colour-coded role of the 'gypsy' mask. In symbolic terms, this means that as a group the Roma are fully assigned to the dark side of the black:white divide and thus limited to performing the 'black' role in 'black' stories or in stories which didactically juxtapose the 'gypsy' mask to the 'white' mask.

In purely pictorial terms, a local 'black' figure with an ethnic tag is indispensable for the cultural realm of the Old Continent, whose populace self-fashioning itself as 'white' in 'ethno-racial' terms. Put in other words, it is impossible to create a realist image that compliments the European ruling elites or the dominant national cultures for their the 'social' or 'ethno-racial' 'whiteness' without making use of a local 'black' figure. Artistic language operates through value contrasts, and since there are no absolute values in the extra-diegetic world that it can draw upon, it creates its own values inside the semiotic system of the film. This is what makes the 'gypsy' mask – stylised as the quintessentially 'non-white' Europe-based figure – a ready-made, energy-saving 'black' construct of great storytelling power.¹⁴⁵ It is ideally suited to bringing the 'white' mask into relief and it can have this effect not only in visual terms as in the black-and-white aesthetics of early film but also narratively. Being a hybrid aggregate of visual and semantic attributes, the 'gypsy' mask is, thus, capable of furnishing a psychological *trompe l'oeil* of a shared reality.

This is the reason why the 'black' figure of the ubiquitous 'gypsy' has also become an indispensable element – narratively and stylistically – in the multi-directional flow of group identity narratives that compete on a metric of Europeanness and thus shape the dynamics of the European semiosphere. Notably, this flow of competitive narratives is paced asynchronously within and across its various, hierarchically structured zones, zones linked to the key organising concepts of modern life – social class, 'ethno-racial' group, nation, broader geopolitical

145 Paying critical attention to "the process of literarization" to which the Western imaginary has subjected 'gypsies', Katie Trumpener points out that over the course of the nineteenth century, 'gypsy' figures came to be used increasingly as a textual effect (849, cf. 869); stylised, exoticised and reduced to "generic" figures of mystery, adventure, and romance", they not only became "a mainstay of the new genre of the fantastic" but played an integral part in the formation of literary tradition itself, "acting as figurative keys to an array of literary genres and to the relations between them" (869, 873). Listing literary works on the 'gypsy' theme, the scholar drives her point home by observing that these works are "virtually synonymous with the modern European literary canon" (874).

formation. Since 'whiteness' cannot be pinned down to one valid-for-all skin tone, the instability of its boundary, the fact that is used as a movable criterion of in/exclusion creates conditions for a constant rivalry on the level of group identity fictions – classist, 'ethno-racial', national(ist), West vs. Central and East European/the Balkan, North vs. South European, etc.; these are narratives that, plainly said, find themselves in a constant competition to define and assert which group is 'white', which 'off-white', and which is 'whiter' than all. As Dyer pertinently points out:

If there are only two colours that really count, then which you belong to becomes a matter of the greatest significance. (...) Given the overwhelming advantage of being white, in terms of power, privilege and material well-being, who counts as white and who doesn't is worth fighting for – fighting to keep people out, to let strategic groups in, fighting to get in. (52)

Though providing an incredibly perceptive analysis in his book, Dyer cites only the Jews as constituting the boundary case of 'whiteness' (cf. 52), and surprisingly does not make a single mention of any of the numerous 'gypsy'-themed films in the history of cinema. Once again, such an omission is a clear indication that, as a subject of academic study, the 'gypsy' topic lies well below the threshold of cultural awareness, because the limit case of 'whiteness' cannot be exemplified better than by the cinematographic 'gypsy' construct. On European soil, the boundary that separates the symbolic realm of 'whiteness' (European-ness) from that of 'non-whiteness'/'blackness' (un-European-ness) is codified primarily by means of the 'gypsy' figure, which accounts also for the mercurial nature of this construct. The 'gypsy' is an oxymoronic construct that oscillates between white and black, as well as between the symbolic and real-world notions that these contrasting colours are associated with; its semantic fluidity results from the detachment maintained between signified and signifier. Its inherent ambivalence, which contains the oxymoronic tension between the polar opposites of black and white, is evoked in many ways: it is suggested in film titles such as *La gitana blanca* (1923), *Morena Clara* (1936/1954), translated into English as "Dark and Bright" or "The Fair-Skinned Gypsy", *La caraque blonde* (1953, Dir. Jacqueline Audry), *The Gypsy and the Gentleman* (1958), *Isabella the Gypsy Duchess* (1969, Dir. Bruno Corbucci), *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1945), *Black Cat*, *White Cat* (1998), *The*

Black Swallow (1997);¹⁴⁶ it is hinted at by character names like Morena Clara (white/light brunette), or Beli Bora (White Bora), the swarthy villain in a white suit; it is present in the pattern of character costuming – impeccably white outfits for characters from the national culture vs. black or black-and-white outfits for the ‘gypsies’ if we focus on the black-and-white film era (see Chapter 3), a pattern that has been adapted to colour film, too (see Section 7.1 as well as Section 8.2.1); it is sustained visually by carefully crafted and often highly stylised montage sequences that recreate the symbolic play of black and white using different objects, mostly animals: a white rabbit and a black cat in *The Bohemian Girl*; a white and a black horse in *Queen of the Gypsies*; white geese set against mud or swarthy skin in *I Even Met Happy Gypsies*, a motif that is profusely exploited in both of Kusturica’s ‘gypsy’-themed films; a black and a white cat in *Black Cat, White Cat*; a ‘gypsy’ dressed in black dancing with a white doll in the opening sequence of *Gipsy Magic*; the ‘gypsy’ character Somáli in a white suit dancing with Death in black in *Roming* (2007, Dir. Jiří Vejdělek); Papusza’s pregnant mother, dressed in black rags, gazing at a stylish white doll displayed in a shop window, etc. As the examples show, the symbolic play with the colours black and white can be staged between the world of ‘white’ mask and the world of the ‘gypsy’ mask, or it can be contained within the world of the ‘gypsy’ mask.

The ‘gypsy’ tag denotes simultaneously an ‘ethno-racial’ group and stigmatised social strata, vacillating between the two notions; one intertitle in Lubitsch’s *Carmen* exemplifies this polyvalent meaning: it describes the tavern “Lillas Pastia’s” as a place frequented by “smugglers, gypsies, cutthroats”. All the while, the ‘gypsy’ mask can be impersonated by (inter)national celebrities, which gives filmmakers great freedom for subtle power games in the realm of the symbolic. Moreover, the ‘gypsy’ figure is traditionally contrasted to that of an aristocrat, the two figures representing the two opposite poles in the ‘ethno-social’ hierarchy. Originally, in Cervantes’ tale “La gitanilla”, this contrast was conceived as part of a game of fluid identities, as an irony-laden social masquerade, in which a child of noble birth (‘white’) is first stolen and raised by ‘gypsies’ (suntanned) and later found and reclaimed by its

146 In Bulgarian, taken on its own, the title of the film sounds redundant, because swallows are generally seen as black. However, the title alludes to the image of the ‘white swallow’, an expression used to describe something very rare; this expression has become widely popular through Iordan Iovkov’s canonical short story “The White Swallow”.

birth family. In its original conception, the 'gypsy' mask was designed as a foil to aristocrats: to expose the unnatural, artificial and fetishised nature of the ideal of 'white' skin (and the virginity of the noble female to which 'whiteness' implicitly refers), Cervantes mockingly juxtaposes his suntanned 'gypsies' to fair-skinned Esmeralda, whose complexion remains unchanged by the sun. Yet, contrary to Cervantes' clever ploy, the 'gypsy' figure has acquired the meaning of a misleading sign: 'gypsies' are said to be masters of false appearances; the 'gypsy' figure brings with itself the question of what is true and what is false. This is the way Terry Gilliam uses the minor 'gypsy' character in his latest film *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* (2018): in the beginning of the story, the filmmaker Toby has a fateful encounter with a nameless 'gypsy' who, like a messenger of the past, brings him his long-lost first student film. Later, when Toby gets mired in a world in which it is hard to tell what is truthful and to separate fiction from reality, he comes across the nameless 'gypsy' again and asks him for a direction. Unsurprisingly, the friendly advice he is offered by the 'gypsy' turns out to be cruelly misleading.

The 'gypsy' mask is not only an indispensable element of European film language, but it is also remarkably prolific. By all appearances, 'gypsy'-themed films provide a safe ground for exploring and experimenting with the 'black', with the forbidden and the despised, but also with the radically alternative, and therefore the films seem to induce in everybody a powerful release of creative energy. Just like the *noir* mood, the 'gypsy' theme carries the rare potential of bringing out the creative streak in all involved: directors, cameramen, screenwriters and actors. Again and again, a 'gypsy'-themed film will mark a high, often turning point on an artist's career trajectory. What is more, 'gypsy'-themed films seem to have a horizon-widening effect that comes to bear not only on the artists involved but also on the national cinemas in the context of which these artists work. Over the preceding chapters, I have made a conscious effort to include, by way of short detours, examples of such striking developments, which I will now try to bundle together, as far as such an endeavour is possible. As we have seen, some cinematic works on the 'gypsy' theme enjoyed or still enjoy an obsessive popularity, turning their director and starring cast into true glocal celebrities. A prime example here is the Yugoslav "Black Wave" production *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (1967), which was a springboard for its non-Roma cast, catapulting the director Aleksandar Petrović and the leading actors Bekim Fehmiu and Olivera Vučo out of their 'Balkan' obscurity

and into the international spotlight of film fame. Bekim Fehmiu, the Sarajevo-born actor of Albanian origin who playacts “the heart-throb” Beli Bora, even gained entrance to the US dream factory, becoming “the first Eastern European actor to star in Hollywood during the Cold War, appearing in over forty films alongside cinematic legends such as Dirk Bogarde, Ava Gardner, Claudia Cardinale, Robert Shaw and Olivia de Havilland” (“Bekim Fehmiu”). Astonishingly similar is the effect which the Mosfilm production *Queen of the Gypsies* (1975) has had on the professional career of its Moldavian director Emil Loteanu and its leading stars Svetlana Tomá and Grigore Grigoriu (see also Section 4.1). Further analogous examples are Florián Rey’s ‘españolada’ *The Fair-Skinned Gypsy* (1936), starring Imperio Argentina (see Section 5.2); Toivo Särkkä’s costume drama *The Vagabond’s Waltz* (1941), starring the number-one couple of Finnish cinema Ansa Ikonen and Tauno Palo (see Section 4.1); the Gainsborough costume melodrama *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1944), “an immediate smash hit” in the words of Sue Harper (“Madonna” 47), featuring Phyllis Calvert, who, on account of her ‘gypsy’ impersonation, was recognised as one of the “genuinely glamorous British stars in the Hollywood mould” (Murphey 39) (see Section 5.2); or Emir Kusturica, hailed as “the most innovative filmmakers of his generation in Europe”, among others, for his crime drama *Time of the Gypsies* (1988) and for his romantic black comedy *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998) (Naficy 226). Here, we can invoke the assessment of Serbian film scholar Nevena Daković, as it places Kusturica’s works in the broader national context; thus, according to Daković, Yugoslav films about ‘gypsies’ “played a special role in the recognition of Yugoslav cinema abroad. The films were awarded the highest international prizes and became the trademarks of ‘quality’ Yugoslav cinema” (392). Just as intriguing is the case of the Czechoslovak film *Pink Dreams* (1976), starring the very young Juraj Nvota and Iva Bittová (roles which, as an exception, both artists do not seem to be proud to include in their professional biographies); however, during the repressive 1970s, the film became the only Slovak film to be shown abroad and has remained as Dušan Hanák’s most popular film (cf. Votruba).

It is also thought-provoking that some of the classic *noir* filmmakers who worked in a period that Paul Schrader describes as “probably the most creative in Hollywood’s history” (61) have a ‘gypsy’-themed film in their filmography, artists like Raoul Walsh, Ray Nichols, Joseph Losey or Charles Vidor (see Section 6.2.2); other artists made their directorial debut with a ‘gypsy’-themed film, like D.W. Griffith, dubbed

the “Father of Film” and the “Inventor of Hollywood” (Brownlow and Gill) (see Section 3.1); Rasmus Breistein, who brought about the emancipation of Norwegian national cinema with his *Gipsy Anne* (1920) (see Section 7.3.1); Valentin Vaala, one of the most significant filmmakers in the history of Finnish cinema, who made his directorial debut with *Dark Eyes* (1929), in which both he and his directing/acting partner Teuvo Tulio play the leading male ‘gypsy’ roles (see Section 4.1); or the Czech director Karel Anton, also credited for inaugurating the lyrical tradition in Czech cinema with his *Gypsies* (1921) and *The May Fairy* (1926) (Bock 15) (see Section 3.2). Here we should also recall Alexander Khanzhonkov’s first film production, *Drama in a Gypsy Camp near Moscow* (1908); released some two months after *Stenka Razin* (1908, Dir. Vladimir Romashkov), it failed only by a hair’s breadth to bring about the producer’s “dream of releasing Russia’s first picture on an everyday theme” and to herald the beginning of Russian film production (see Section 6.3) (Tsivian 50). A ‘gypsy’ story was also chosen for the first British production of Famous Pictures – *Betta the Gipsy* (1918), and also for the first Technicolor film shot on the British Isles – *Wings of the Morning* (1937).¹⁴⁷ As for the early British silent film *Rescued by Rover* (1905), we can turn to the film scholar Michael Brooke who argues that this is “possibly the only point in film history when British cinema unquestionably led the world”, because the film represents “a key stage in the medium’s development from an amusing novelty to the ‘seventh art.’” (see Section 3.2). That the ‘gypsy’ theme offers an extraordinarily fruitful ground for filmmakers is also reflected in the fact that the most frequently filmed narrative in the history of cinema is considered to be Prosper Mérimée’s tale “Carmen” (Davis ix), the text that created and introduced the prototypical figure of the *femme fatale* in the European imaginary (see Section 1.3.3). Many of the titles highlighted here have also been instrumental in introducing and/or invigorating the ‘gypsy’ genre in the respective national cinemas, bringing about a proliferation

147 Interestingly, the comedy *Carmen Comes Home* (1951, Dir. Kinoshita Keisuke), shot using Fujicolor, is Japan’s first domestic feature film in colour. This Japanese version of a *Heimatfilm* tells the story of Lily Carmen (Hideko Takamine), a star of Tokyo striptease shows made popular by the American occupation forces after World War II. The stripper Lily Carmen returns to the village of her birth together with her friend Maya (Toshiko Kobayashi). Flaunting colourful, body-revealing American-style dresses, the two girls put on a hypnotising show for the local farmers, bringing at the same time great embarrassment to the men they care for. The film’s success prompted its sequel *Carmen’s Pure Love/Karumen junjō su* (1952, Dir. Kinoshita Keisuke), again a story about a stripper (cf. Darr).

of further works on the theme. And these are just the more conspicuous examples, those that are easier to spot in this bird's-eye survey of the 'gypsy' theme in European and US American cinema; however, there is enough reason to expect that a research which sets itself the goal of examining the role of the 'gypsy' mask in the history of each of Europe's national cinemas will provide further evidence of its centrality in developments of an aesthetic, narrative and ideological nature.

9.2 Disciplining Function

Like the aesthetic function, the disciplinary function of the 'gypsy' mask and its emphatically realist spectacle gains its true scale and import when considered in the context of nation-building projects. To recap from the previous section, aesthetically, the 'gypsy' mask has a very flattering homogenising effect – designed as the limit case of 'whiteness', it has the capacity to ascribe 'white' identity in reverse, through contrastive juxtapositions and by implication. The simplistic black:white dichotomy blots out social differences and tensions: when contrasted to 'gypsies', all social strata, all subgroups and all individuals embraced by the narrative of the national project appear equally 'white' (and as virtuous as a virgin noblewoman); conversely, all those who are not 'gypsies' belong to the 'white' nation.

Although nowadays it is unquestionable that European nations are 'white' from the social top to the bottom, this was certainly not so self-evident for low-income strata in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The mass medium of black-and-white film facilitated the symbolic consolidation of modern nations, making it feasible for them to project a realist image of themselves as 'white'. The stories of 'gypsy' child-theft, for instance, which were especially virulent in the early days of cinema, set in place a symbolic structure of identification by the logic of which any visitor of the nickel odeons could identify emotionally with the virtuously white figure of the bereft mother (a visual symbol for the 'white' nation) and imagine themselves as her noble auxiliaries and righteous protectors; even the poorest factory worker could see him/herself in the face of the 'white' parents and vicariously suffer at the hands of the 'non-white' child-kidnappers.

The disciplinary aspect of the 'gypsy' mask goes beyond the flatness of surface appearances and addresses one question that contains in itself probably the greatest political challenge: How to create unity

of thought and feeling among thousands of heterogeneous and often conflict-ridden groups of people? How to make thousands, even millions of individuals fight wars under one banner or work for a higher common cause? Here, we can return to our discussion on punishment in Section 3.4.1 and reformulate this question so as to reflect the order that the King of Ou gave to his general Sun Tze: How to turn a sizeable group of frivolous high-born women into soldiers and train them to march as one? Reflecting on the order of the ancient Chinese king, Alexander Kiossev posits that we can think of socio-historical realities as symbolic conventions that are instilled in individuals and installed as common daily practices through brutal acts of violence. General Sun Tze establishes perfect discipline in the group of the giggling women by beheading two of the king's favourite wives. As I have pointed out in Chapter Three, this anecdotal story captures only halfway the cultural dynamics of violence, be it of symbolic or physical nature. So here, I want to complement Kiossev's explanatory model with another micro-story which illustrates the role allocated to the 'gypsy' figure in the self-regulatory dynamics of national narratives. It is a short scene that comes from Bulgaria's 1894 novel *Under the Joke* written by Ivan Vazov, the demiurge of the national literary project, who wrote many of his works with the explicitly didactic purpose of infusing a shared sense of national patriotism. In short, his novel tells the dramatic story of Boycho Ognyanov, a model figure of the revolution, who takes charge of the insurrection against the Turks. In Part 2, Chapter 28, entitled "The Spirit in the Fort", Ognyanov is informed that four of his men want to desert the battlefield. He talks to the soldiers and through the conversation we learn that these are decent Bulgarians in their forties, established merchants and heads of families who – and this is a truly endearing detail – have never used a gun and are afraid to kill a man. So, at this point of the story, the character Ognyanov, but more so the author Vazov, the mastermind of Bulgaria's national novel, is faced with an insolvable dilemma: for the sake of military discipline and order, the four rebels must be executed, yet such a bloody act would discredit the national cause. Vazov solves the difficulty with great ingenuity by resorting to the *deus ex machina* of the 'gypsy' figure. Just when Ognyanov is pondering on the inevitable death penalty, all of a sudden and out of nowhere, a 'gypsy' character runs into the story and rescues it, diverting everybody's attention from the rebels and their due punishment to his guilty self. The 'gypsy' male is nameless, described as a barefoot refugee, and he is soon captured by his pursuer Borimechka

(Bear Fighter). The omniscient narration strategically briefs us that by nature and by interest, ‘gypsies’ are Turkish allies, and that this one in particular has committed numerous crimes against Bulgarians and their struggle for national liberation. In the next chapter, entitled “One Baptism”, the military council condemns the four rebels to death; the council’s sentence is emphatically described as “death without delay”, but instead of being shot, the Bulgarian revolutionaries are ordered to shoot the ‘gypsy’, who is also tied to a tree. The episode ends with a voice which explains to the four that they have served their punishment by having been “baptised in the blood” of the ‘gypsy’, a mercy they owe to Ognyanov and the military council; the scene ends with a round of applause.

Vazov’s solution has some obvious advantages over the solution provided by the ancient Chinese general: by incorporating the scene with the bloody execution of the ‘gypsy’ – a figure traditionally perceived in European literary and legal documents as punishable by default – the author redesigns the dilemma that has faced the main character Ognyanov, enabling him to establish military discipline among the hesitant Bulgarians without sacrificing valuable soldiers of the in-group. The brutal violence necessary to transform a disorderly group of people into a disciplined unit (a nation) is averted – by means of a well-timed narrative stratagem – from the cultural centre of power (the favourite wives, the respectable Bulgarian merchants and heads of families) to its periphery (the ‘gypsy’ Other). With recourse to the micro-scene in which the ‘gypsy’ is exemplarily punished, the objective of group discipline is achieved in the most efficient manner: the law is successfully communicated to all in-group members (all the soldiers in the diegetic world of the novel but also the readers), making them aware of the grave, deadly consequences of non-compliance, while at the same time no one from the in-group has to be sacrificed.

Vazov’s narrative stratagem has nothing original about it; his deployment of the ‘gypsy’ figure diligently reproduces the narrative design of nation-building fictions across all Europe. The ritual expulsion of the ‘gypsy’ is an integral part of Europe’s national myths, an important micro-scene in their self-perpetuating dynamics and symbolic re-enactments. This can be particularly well observed in one episode from the history of Norway; it is detailed and critically scrutinised in Katie Trumpener’s article “The Time of the Gypsies: A ‘People without History’ in the Narratives of the West”, so I will only provide a brief summary of it to bring to light the invariable role of the ‘gypsy’ in the symbolic

spectacle of the national. As recounted by Trumpener, in 1904, one year before Norway declared its independence from Sweden, two days of official festivities took place in the town of Lillehammer. The local people gathered to celebrate the opening of the Maihaugen Open Air Museum and the precious collection of folkloric artefacts that it housed; the collection was gathered by Lillehammer's dentist Anders Sandvig during the 1880s, prompted by a surge of Norwegian patriotism. Trumpener describes the various features included in the celebration programme, all of them pointing to the proud ambition of the fledgling nation to take stock of itself: repeated singing of Norway's national anthem, a spectacle in which the Maihaugen people re-enact their daily chores, showcase their authentic accent and recite their sagas. At the end of the festivities, in the final hours, a family of 'gypsies' arrives and sets up camp on the grounds, performing a tableau of 'gypsy' life; their show includes an attempt to usurp a cradle prepared for the offspring of the Maihaugen people. Eventually, the notorious baby-thieves and interlopers are chased away. Thus, the ritualised expulsion of the 'gypsies', Trumpener concludes, comes to mark the high point of the nationalist celebration.

There is also one striking detail about the 'gypsy' spectacle performed in Lillehammer which holds special relevance for our discussion on the masquerade design of 'gypsy'-themed films, and it is that the roles of the 'gypsies' in the Lillehammer festivities are played by disguised Norwegians; on this point, Trumpener turns to Anders Sandvig's eye-witness account of the event in which the man reports:

Remarkably enough, there wasn't anyone except those in the know who realized that the whole thing was a staged feature of the evening festivities. Everybody believed that they were genuine gypsies [but they were in fact well-known townspeople]. They were costumed so well, and everyone played his role so brilliantly that thus the masquerade was carried out. (Sandvig, qdt. in Trumpener 845)

In Trumpener's words, the 'gypsy' episode "provides a final, piquantly transgressive illustration of how the whole museum, in assembling a national heritage, blurs the boundaries between literary, historical and 'representative' figures" (846). Moreover, perceiving the event through Sandvig's eyes, we can also see that at the turn of the twentieth century, that is, before the film era had truly set in, the staging of the 'gypsy' spectacle was already an integral part of the nationalist rhetoric. Not

only that, it followed a script that local audiences were very familiar with, it had the design of an ‘ethno-racial’ masquerade, and yet, even in its theatrical presentation, it exerted a powerful effect of authenticity. The perceived realness, at the time, of the ‘gypsy’ show allows us to gauge the extent to which the film industry has been able to further enhance the effect of authenticity that it has on the big screen: by shooting the staged ‘gypsy’ spectacle in a realist mode (with the mechanically objective eye of the camera) and marketing it as an ethnographic document, but also by distributing the films across great stretches of space and time, presenting the mediated para-ethnographic ‘gypsy’ shows to remote audiences on whom the underlying masquerade design of the films is entirely lost. Watching films made in the eastern parts of Europe, for example, Western audiences are unable to recognise the fact that it is local celebrity actors who perform in ‘gypsy’ garb. The theatrical set-up of the films is also obscured by the sheer lapse of time. Watching old and especially the very early films on the ‘gypsy’ theme, today’s audiences are less apt to recognise the ideological artifice that reifies ‘gypsies’ by situating them temporally further back in the past. Unable to discern the difference between the point in time when the films were shot and the imagined past into which the ‘gypsies’ are localised through the film’s art direction, present-day viewers¹⁴⁸ are inclined to take the film images at their face value, as simply truthful documents from an era long gone by.

Certainly, the strong reality effect of the ‘gypsy’ spectacle is of direct service to the film’s disciplining message and punctuates in turn the validity of this message in the pro-filmic world. Through the perceived realness of ‘gypsies’ and the punishment inflicted on their undisciplined bodies, the spectator is given to understand that the cultural norm – the imperative that all in-group members should train their bodies in emulation of the ‘white’ mask – has to be taken in all earnestness; or conversely,

148 Here I have in mind not only popular audiences but also professionals who work with film archives, such as film festival organisers or filmmakers. One example of a less felicitous recent film that makes uncritical use of early film material is Eike Besuden’s docudrama *Gipsy – Die Geschichte des Boxers Johann Rukeli Trollmann* (2012). Besuden’s film features scenes from László Moholy-Nagy’s short experimental film *Großstadt-Zigeuner* (1932), treating these scenes as if they were ethnographic documents. Indeed, Moholy-Nagy’s film is labelled a ‘documentary’, but a closer look at it shows that the protagonists and the events in it are artfully choreographed so as to provide the camera with a ‘gypsy’ spectacle. For a detailed, critical scrutiny of Moholy-Nagy’s film, see Frank Reuter’s article “Mediale Metamorphosen”.

that one should avoid at all costs the 'dance' of the 'gypsy' mask, no matter how dazzlingly tempting and seductive it may seem. If in purely fictional films the violation of the cultural norm and its concomitant punishment could be interpreted as confined within the boundaries of the diegetic world, in 'gypsy'-themed films, however – thanks to their reality effect – the disciplining message crosses over to the socio-historic reality of cinema audiences, waving a finger directly in their face.

With its realist spectacle, the 'gypsy' mask can be regarded as a storytelling tool used to form a culturally significant shared structure of feeling among the members of the in-group; this collective feeling can be described as a complex mix of fascination and repulsion enveloped in fear. While, on the one hand, the 'gypsy' evokes strong fascination and/or repulsion with its dark mystery, with the excessiveness of its self-expression and with its freedom beyond the confines of social requirements and laws, it is, on the other hand, codified as a figure punishable by default, a universal cultural sign meant to sober one up to the reality of punishment. No matter what slant a given film has taken on the 'gypsy' theme, whether the emphasis is on the alluring aspects of 'gypsy' lifestyle or on its moral and material baseness, the didactic storyline is in store to remind us that the 'gypsy' comes to a bad end.

What follows next is an overview of the three main ways in which 'gypsy'-themed films communicate their disciplining message. To start with, punishment can be visualised in a straightforward manner as part of the film's diegesis; in this case, we have sequences in which the transgressive 'gypsy' figure is chased away by the community, arrested by the police, locked in a prison cell, beaten, flogged or hanged. Examples of such sequences can be found, among others, in *The Adventures of Dollie, Notre-Dame de Paris* (1911, Dir. Albert Capellani), *Zigeuneren Raphael*, *Gypsy Wildcat* (1944, Dir. Roy William Neill), *The Bohemian Girl*, *The Gypsy and the Gentleman*, *Queen of the Gypsies*, *I Even Met Happy Gypsies*, *Devils, Devils* (1991, Dir. Dorota Kędzierzawska) and *Papusza*. Court trials are also a recurrent plot element of 'gypsy'-themed films; the two versions of *Morena Clara* (1936, 1954), for instance, feature very long and elaborate court trial sequences. Further examples of court scenes can also be found in *Gipsy Anne*, *King of the Gypsies*, and *The Pilgrimage of Students Peter and Jacob* (2000, Dir. Drahomíra Vihanová). Secondly, over and above the literal visualisations of punishment, the disciplining message is transmitted on a meta-level, through the film's plotline. The bulk of 'gypsy'-themed films and subplots tell 'black' stories about the moral and physical downfall of their protagonists and this, as we said,

is a way of conveying the film's disciplining message across the diegetic boundary, bringing its cautionary moral into the socio-historic reality of the spectator (see Section 6.3). Alternatively, the 'gypsy' figure may function as a sign of imminent danger, foreshadowing the demise, or even the death, of the 'white' hero, as in *A Romany Spy* (1912, Dir. Urban Gad), *Jánošík*, *The Gypsy and the Gentleman*, and *Guardian Angel*, as well as in most film adaptations of Mérimée's tale "Carmen". And thirdly, the 'gypsy' figure is conventionally treated as an object of ridicule and humiliation. Unlike typical war propaganda films, 'gypsy'-themed films seldom blacken up their protagonists in a crude, unequivocally defamatory manner; filmmakers resort instead to subtler methods and achieve their goal by inserting seemingly trifling particulars that evoke scorn and derision. The discrediting of the characters is suggested obliquely; it is as if tucked 'between the lines' and thus made significantly more effective: it may be a suggestive hint, a disparaging remark on the part of the authorities, a nauseating detail with reference to 'gypsies', and/or a contemptuous/jeering camera perspective.

With their explicit claims to truth and authenticity, 'gypsy'-themed films are in position to reinforce the disciplining message attached to their cautionary stories and, importantly, to confer a sense of reality to it that goes beyond the fictional world of the diegesis. The public spectacle of punishment is once recreated on the big screen, in the virtual realm of made-up images: rather than real bodies, it is the images of real bodies that are shown as objects of disciplining; but in a next step, this ritualised form of violence unproblematically enters the socio-historic world, claiming for itself the legitimacy of normality. Consider in this context the filmed spectacle of Mitko's public derogation, designed as a humiliating military drill and circulated on the internet by its frankly proud filmmaker (see Section 5.5). In essence, 'gypsy'-themed films and subplots replicate the narrative stratagem that re-directs violence from the in-group to the 'gypsy' Other, and as such they show themselves to be important artworks in the self-regulatory mechanism of the nation, that modern unit of docile 'white' bodies. Through the filmed stories on the 'gypsy' theme, all in-group members are indirectly instructed on the cultural injunction to adhere to the norm, to discipline their bodies and to make themselves acceptable for the workforce¹⁴⁹ and/or the army. The

149 Looking at the history of the first American working class and the tensions and anxieties that accompanied its formation, David Roediger shows that there is a direct link between the rise of racism in the urban North prior to the Civil War, expressed among other things by the huge popularity of minstrel shows,

punishment exercised exemplarily on the deviant 'gypsy' figure may take various forms in the films: from ridicule, via corporal punishment, jailing and social ostracism, to expulsion and genocide. As such, it is symptomatic of political and identity crises in the cultural core. That is to say, whenever we become witness to 'gypsy' bashing – be it on the symbolic plane of mediated images, or in real life – we need not bother examining 'gypsy' nature, culture or way of life but should rather gauge the kind of crisis that is taking place at the centre of symbolic and political power.

9.3 Carnival (Expressive) Function

With its black colour coding and its otherised ethnic tag, the 'gypsy' mask is a safe, tacitly sanctioned vehicle that enables artists to represent and thus give free expression to those aspects of human nature that the dominant norm has negated, rejected, criminalised, cast in contempt or altogether rendered taboo. In its transgressivity, the carnival function of the 'gypsy' mask is in no way different to that of a nineteenth-century performance in blackface:

In minstrelsy, a layer of blackness applied to the white face released it from law. Just as entertainers, through or by association with blackface, could render permissible topics that otherwise would have been taboo, so American writers were able to employ an imagined Africanist persona to articulate and imaginatively act out the forbidden in American culture. (Morrison 66)

Taken as a whole, the genre provided a kind of underground theatre where the blackface "convention" rendered permissible topics which would have been taboo on the legitimate stage or in the press. (Saxton 4)

However, like no other art form, film is capable of immersing the audience in the underworld of 'gypsies', a carnivalised world in Bakhtin's

and the imperative of capitalist competition and labour discipline, which forced workers to adopt a profoundly new ethos, one that was hostile to leisure, nature, sexuality, life-work integrity and immediate gratification (95–31). In the light of Roediger's insights, it will be interesting to examine if and how the popularity of 'gypsy'-themed films is linked to the growth of industrial discipline in the various European societies at the turn of the twentieth century.

sense, with an added ethnic tag. In this throbbing underworld, spectators can vicariously experience all that exceeds the restraints imposed by the normative model of self-control; they can live out in the imagination the *Sturm und Drang* of the undisciplined, naturally spontaneous body in the full gamut of its excessiveness – emotional, sexual, musical and so on (see Section 8.2.3). If the feelings of fear and aversion can be attributed to the disciplining message of the ‘gypsy’ spectacle, its carnival aspect is in turn responsible for evoking obsessive fascination and is also the source of the creative potential that the construct carries. This is probably the main reason why well-made ‘gypsy’-themed films gain inordinate international popularity, one that crosses effortlessly the boundaries of national cultures and lasts over time. As Sue Harper writes about *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, “some films contain elements which evoke residual, forgotten or repressed aspects of culture. The individual consciousness contains such aspects too. When there is match between an audiences’ secret mind and a films’ inner landscape popular success will inevitably result.” (“Madonna” 51). Moreover, the spectators’ need to relive again and again that which is forbidden to them in daily life also makes these films an important cultural safety-valve, one that contributes to keeping social tensions in check. This in turn is also the reason why the emotional truth of the ‘gypsy’ spectacle is so crucial for its perceived authenticity.

Likewise, stereotypical and debasing portrayals of African Americans have long constituted an obsessive theme in American arts and life, as George Lipsitz discusses in his book *Time Passages*; he offers a psychoanalytical reading of minstrelsy shows which helps explain the popularity of ‘racial’ masquerades, be it in blackface or in our case gypsyface, with the severed relationship that spectators have to the emotions elicited by the staged spectacle:

The minstrel show “Negro” presented white society with a representation of the natural self at odds with the normative self of industrial culture. Uninhibited behavior could be savored by the id during the minstrel performance, but overruled afterward by the superego. The viewer could release tension by pointing to the minstrel show “darkie” and saying “It’s him, not me.” But the viewer came back, again and again. The desire to subjugate and degrade black people had political and economic imperatives of its own, but emotional and psychic reinforcement for that exploitation came from the ways in which racist

stereotypes enabled whites to accept the suppression of their natural selves. (64)

It has to be stressed, once again, that works on the 'gypsy' theme represent an approved, a culturally acceptable outlet for the suppressed energies of human nature. Due to its lowest-ranking position in the hierarchy of human beings, the figure of the 'gypsy' poses no threat to the dominant norm and this in turn also makes it a tolerable mouthpiece for giving voice to social taboos ranging from open (deviant) sexuality to harsh political criticism; let us not forget that in spite of all the liberties it is granted, the 'gypsy' figure gets its final verdict through the downward-pointing plotline.

When it comes to difficult or even diplomatically sensitive matters, the need to subject films to a context-sensitive analysis becomes more than obvious, because only a contextual study can provide insight into the unmentionable issues that troubled a given society at a given historical moment and can illuminate how these issues are addressed by a particular film. Thus, as Sue Harper demonstrates with her historical reconstructions, we cannot fully gauge the social impact of Gainsborough period dramas unless we understand that the films' sartorial language countered the post-war austerity imposed on British women in their daily life, giving vent to the negated female sexuality (see Section 8.2.1). One example of a film that screams for a contextualising study is Stole Popov's auteur work *Gipsy Magic* (1997); the film can hardly conceal the filmmaker's anger at the United Nations' peace-keeping operation in Macedonia in the aftermath of the Yugoslav war. Following the example of Cervantes, Stole Popov stages a grotesque spectacle of the 'gypsy' mask to voice and at the same time to disguise his rabid critique of the West. So far, to the best of my knowledge, his work *Gipsy Magic* has not been analysed through the prism of its circumvented political commentary. Further invaluable evidence that the 'gypsy' theme is considered a safe ploy for bypassing censorship comes from Alaina Lemon's field research:

One Russian director at the Moscow Romani Theatre claimed to me that under socialism he always had used Gypsy freedom to hide antisocialist themes, that Gypsies functioned rather like a "bourgeois white piano," a forbidden stage property signifying decadence. When a playwright feared the censors, said the director, he would throw something marked as being in bad socialist taste into the script, such as white piano or girls in bikinis. The

censor would hopefully be distracted, command only that the decoy piano or girls be deleted, and miss the more subversive subtext: "Gypsies work the same way. You can stage any social conflict you want, as long as you set it in a Gypsy camp." Gypsies were for him no more than a trope for antistate and antimodern nostalgia. This was crystal clear in the way the director described how he actually chose elements of Gypsy tradition for his scripts: "The audience wants to see customs, superstitions, something miraculous. When I pick up a book, I read about customs in ancient France and in India, where people are yet unspoiled by civilisation.... I take a custom and gave it to the Gypsies.... Theatre is the means to reach another world, when we are talking to God, ... in any play, an exit to such a level is art" (interview from field notes 1991). Gypsies were his vehicle "to reach another world," separate from mundane life, "unspoiled" and more essential. (42)

Putting all these individual cases aside, we can see that popular 'gypsy'-themed films can serve as a litmus test for taboo topics and can thus aid researchers in identifying issues that were hard to broach openly at a given historical moment. With its topsy-turvy spectacle, the 'gypsy' mask has a subversive side to it, but this subversiveness works only as temporary release from the shackles of normality; it damps the energy of revolt and thus stabilises the racist status quo. The next section considers the subversive function of 'gypsy'-themed films where subversiveness is understood to be either an expression of social and cultural criticism towards the world of the 'white' mask or it constitutes a challenge to the black-and-white racist paradigm altogether.

9.4 Subversive Function

*Writing has laws of perspective, of light and shade just as painting does,
 or music. If you are born knowing them, fine.
 If not, learn them. Then rearrange the rules to suit yourself.*

Truman Capote (22)

As laid out in Cervantes' tale "La gitanilla", the 'gypsy' theme presupposes a two-world narrative organisation of space: the 'gypsy' world serves as the negative foil against which, explicitly or by implication,

the world of the dominant norm gains psychological salience. In this split-in-two space, the 'gypsy' world represents a certain blind spot for the vigilant and violent gaze of the norm: it is the underworld in which the male 'white' hero – like the character Don Juan de Cárcamo/ Andrés Caballero in “La gitanilla” – can slip away from the controlling eye of society and disappear without a trace for a certain period of time. In a number of 'gypsy'-themed films, this dramatic ploy is preserved in the plot: persecuted by those in power, a 'white' male hero finds refuge among 'gypsies', becoming invisible in his 'gypsy' garb to his persecutors, and thus manages not only to save his life but also, at a later point, to stand up to injustice. Such a structure underpins, for example, the stories in *Gypsies* (1921, Dir. Karel Anton), *Gypsy Wildcat*, “The Gypsy” – Episode 8 from the Bulgarian television series *At Each Kilometer* (1969, Dir. Nedelcho Chernev and Lyubomir Sharlandzhiev), *The Bohemian Girl* (1922, Dir. Harley Knoles), *Golden Earrings*, and *Papusza*.

Importantly, the two-world design of the 'gypsy' narrative creates conditions for a subversive play with alternative perspectives and world models. Here, we can distinguish between two types of subversiveness: one that is encoded within the two-world design of the 'gypsy' theme and one that playfully revises, recodes and transcends that very two-world paradigm, exposing its insubstantiality and masquerade nature. In this subsection, I will elaborate more on the first type of subversiveness, since 'gypsy'-themed films and their aesthetics of authentication are our main object of study. In 'gypsy'-themed films, the two worlds are dominated by the two complementary regimes of seeing – the self-aggrandising (whitening/humanising) gaze towards the ethno-national Self, stabilised by the deprecating (blackening/dehumanising) gaze towards the 'gypsy' Other; these two modalities of the dominant gaze homogenise, essentialise, racialise and stratify people into hierarchical and therefore incompatible categories. Nevertheless, the 'gypsy' world can also offer a vantage point from which to critically scrutinise one's own world as if standing outside of it; it allows for an estranged view on the dominant culture and its mores. This narrative ploy is used especially in 'gypsy'-themed stories that retrospectively look at discredited political regimes, as in the six films mentioned above. Moreover, the 'gypsy' world offers a vantage point from which to envision new, future-oriented paradigms for social cohesion. As we have seen in our discussion of *Gucha* and *Gipsy Anne* (see Sections 7.1 and 7.3.1), this subversive potential is harnessed only piecemeal and, importantly, it

is contained within the two-world narrative paradigm; other examples include *Madonna of the Seven Moons* and *Pink Dreams*.

The film *Pink Dreams* (1976) presents something of a paradox case here, because its filmmakers resisted for a year the demands of the communist government in Czechoslovakia to give the story a happy ending and show a marriage between a Slovak and a Romni (cf. Hames). Set on conducting an integrative policy, the communist government requested a story that revises the nationalist spectacle and advances in its place a more progressive vision for social cohesion, one that allows for a harmonious relationship between the ethnic majority and the traditionally scapegoated ethnic minority. Yet, rebelling against socialist realism and its future-oriented utopia, the filmmakers felt that their task was to underline the impermeable lines of 'ethno-racial' division rather than to create a text that explores the possibility of togetherness. Thus, translated into Lotman's terms, their film *Pink Dreams* presents a plotless text whose function is that of classification – the main 'white' hero Jakub attempts to deviate from the established norms and temporarily forms a relationship with the 'gypsy' girl Jolanca, but then erases his boundary transgression by returning back to his community. The film has a circular structure: it starts and finishes with scenes of Jakub waking up in his bedroom. His heroic experience of transgression and transgression erasure is framed by identical waking-up sequences; as such, it is a phase of initiation that only solidifies his place in the majority society. The real event in the film is the courtship and marriage of the town hall administrator Irena (Sally Salingová), a 'gypsy', and the town hall maintenance man Ondro (Milan Kiš), a Slovak, two minor characters, yet this revolutionary plot remains on the periphery of the film.

It is also noteworthy that atmospherically the filmmakers resort to antigypsy elements to suggest the incompatibility of the two worlds; their film is a prime example of the split black-and-white vision: the world of 'white' Slovaks is presented through a lens of gentle humour and lyrical dreaminess, while the world of the 'gypsies' is seen through a lens of slum naturalism that borders on the oppressive. The Slovaks in the film are shown in a poetically humorous way; their predicaments always have a comic twist and are not overshadowed by a feeling of existential burden or imminent tragedy. Just the opposite: the anecdotes with Jakub's hypochondriac father, with his lonesome uncle who finds solace in fresh eggs, with his dreamy grandfather, who once tried to fly with an umbrella, with Mr. Babja, the post office employee who finds

his shoe in a mail bag and cannot recognise it, with his elderly neighbour, who never gets enough to eat and finds refuge in a bathtub full of provisions up a tree, etc. – all of them focus on the uniquely individual in a humorously benevolent manner. The viewers are introduced to the endearing quirks of the Slovak village inhabitants in a mode of looking that has a lightness, laughter and pure cinematic poetry to it.

The depiction of the 'gypsy' shantytown is, by contrast, marked by a naked and at times quite oppressive realism; there is no comic lightness or dreamy poetry to it. Through a number of socially diagnostic sequences, we are introduced to the existential dramas that plague life in the 'gypsy' quarter and from which Jolanca wants to flee: we see her, for instance, carrying two buckets of water down an unpaved street in the company of two small children, to one of whom she later gives a bath; we are shown a breastfeeding mother who asks Jolanca for a cigarette (a clichéd image overused in literature, painting and film), a lazy husband whom Jolanca tells off for not working, a prematurely old mother whom Jolanca criticises for giving birth to so many children, and so on. Moreover, through many details, the film suggests an identity between Jolanca and her blind, all-knowing grandmother who, in addition, has a disturbingly disfigured face. At the start of the film, we see Jolanca's grandmother peeling green peas in a huge pot, which is also when she prophesises that her granddaughter will leave and then come back. Near the end of the film, Jolanca is shown peeling green peas in a huge pot, at which moment she tells Jakub that she wants to go back to her people. The same method of portraiture is employed to suggest an identity between Jakub and his dreamy grandfather, the Umbrella Alois. In two rhyming sequences, we see each of them get drunk and then try to fly with an umbrella. Obviously, the film constructs on many levels a line of separation between the Slovak majority and Slovak 'gypsies', advancing the argument for the impossibility of social cohesion. And if the filmmakers may have felt proud for resisting the dictates of the communist government, the aesthetic and narrative solutions they have opted for are the opposite of rebellious, because they simply reproduce the age-old patterns of antigypsyism.

Pink Dreams is an example of a film that harnesses only partially the subversive potential of the 'gypsy' theme, upholding at the same time the colour-coded two-world narrative model. Now, we move on to the second type of subversiveness, where the split-world model itself is subjected to revision: this type of subversiveness is manifest in a different grouping of films that have been discussed here only marginally. As

outlined in Chapter Two, these are films that take a consciously playful stance towards the ‘gypsy’ mask and, while making a deliberate, even exaggerated use of it, they furnish it with a new content matrix and a new plotline. The development of this aesthetic tendency can be easily traced in Tony Gatlif’s prolific body of work. Other works that display this type of de-constructivist aesthetics, albeit in different measure, include *Golden Earrings* (1947, Dir. Mitchel Leisen), *Train of Life* (1998, Dir. Radu Mihăileanu), and *Gypsy Woman* (2001, Dir. Sheree Folkson). The narrative and the visual design of these works openly defy the racialising aesthetics of authentication and so they can also be read in more universal terms, as meta-narratives that provide a self-reflexive commentary on the fluid, performative nature of modern ‘ethno-racial’ identities. This type of films require separate study, together with the third type of films, the ones which entirely abandon the ‘gypsy’ mask and direct their critical gaze instead towards the dominant culture and its structures of power.

9.5 Socially Integrative Function

*Traube ist noch nicht der Wein –
Traube will gekeltert sein.
Wald und Flur ist Bild noch nicht –
Wirklichkeit noch nicht Gedicht.
Geist ist das was Leben leiht –
Kunst ist Geist der Wirklichkeit.*

Ernst von Wildenbruch (Bund deutscher Barbier 1)

The socially integrative effect of the ‘gypsy’ spectacle should have become clear to the reader by now, as it has been highlighted from various angles in the previous four subsections. To be certain, extrapolating five different functions in relation to the ‘gypsy’ mask is a heuristic device that aims to facilitate the analysis and present the complexity of the subject matter in an easily readable, logically structured way. In fact, it is much more sensible to think of these five functions as an organic bundle, inextricable from one another, which is what makes it impossible to discuss one function without involving the others. However, I find it important to isolate this last, fifth function and consider it separately, giving it a name of its own, on account of the paradoxical nature of its operation. To better grasp this function, we

can liken it to the psychotherapeutic tactic of paradoxical intervention, which involves the voluntary re-enactment of undesired symptomatic behaviour as a way of overcoming it and distancing oneself from it. The same paradoxical logic is manifest in initiation rites, where, as we have seen, the hero (or the heroine) is subjected to a phase of trials in the mirror-inverted world of darkness, the successful passage of which helps him distance himself from that darkness and secures him a place in the world of light. So, transposed to the symbolic spectacle of 'white' identity formation, we can see that the paradoxical logic of social integration requires the invocation and re-enactment of the 'non-white' 'ethno-racial' Other – routinely portrayed as an undesired symptom of the (pre-modern) past – in order for the 'white' Self to gain its full autonomy and its separate, superior 'ethno-racial' identity. We can then approach the production and obsessive consumption of 'gypsy'-themed films as symptomatic of the need of a given social/ethno-national group to symbolically re-cross the 'ethno-racial' boundary as a way of re-asserting and possibly re-configuring its 'white' (European) identity.

Here, once again, the parallel to blackface minstrelsy proves invaluable. In "Making America Home: Racial Masquerade and Ethnic Assimilation in the Transition to Talking Pictures", Michael Rogin draws on various Jewish newspaper articles and films at the turn of the twentieth century to elucidate the paradoxical effect of blackface minstrelsy, which, as he writes, "promoted identification with native peoples as a step in differentiation from them" (1052). Stressing the crucial role of film, Rogin describes element by element the complex symbolic technology mobilised in the process of creating American national identity. As he argues, the minstrel show "became the agent of Americanization", "the world-wide sign of American identity", the chief instrument of the melting pot that turned Europeans into Americans (1054–1055). Minstrelsy, according to Rogin, instructed new immigrants about the importance of 'race' in American life and had the power to stabilise "white ethnics from a racially liminal to a white identity" (1061). "Facing pressure that would assign them to the dark side of the racial divide, immigrants Americanized themselves by crossing and re-crossing the racial line. Their discovery of racial inequality propelled the United States beyond ethnicity" (1053). Thus, if 'racial' cross-dressing facilitated the removal of differences between 'whites' divided by ethnic lines in America and levelled out class and regional differences, democratising in effect one part of American

society, it did so at the expense of the excluded and racially stigmatised ‘non-whites’. Here, I want to draw special attention to the fact that the convention of ‘racial’ cross-dressing – which we have both in blackface minstrelsy and ‘gypsy’-themed films – operates through a *temporary* phase of identification with the stigmatised ‘ethno-racial’ Other and has a high emotional charge.

Similar observations can be found in Alexander Saxton’s article “Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology”, in which the scholar examines the ideology of the minstrel show at the interface of form (racist) and content (social), stressing the ubiquity and pervasive influence of the blackface convention. To drive his point home, Saxton gives Mark Twain as an example: even this eminent man of letters, otherwise known for his caustic critique of American society, embraced uncritically the most popular form of American mass entertainment. Quoting several lines from one of Twain’s favourite minstrelsy songs, Saxton articulates the implicit message it conveyed as well as its emotional charge: “The black puppets are striving to be white, singing in white voice, while the white audience in the new city or the new West lingers through a moment of self-pity and regret for things past” (28). Like Rogin, Saxton explains that contemporary ‘white’ audiences identified emotionally with the blackface performers whose music and sketches appear to have “touched the central chords of white consciousness” (28). This is to say that the convention of blackface, or for that matter of the ‘gypsy’ film genre, does not preclude the spectator’s identification with the staged ‘ethno-racial’ Other. On the contrary, these works of art are often the only socially sanctioned outlet that enables the expression of rejected aspects of the ‘white’ Self; to wit, racist artworks are so popular precisely because they resonate strongly with the anxieties and emotional grievance of their audience; they are nothing but a form of autocommunication, if we resort to Lotman’s terms (*Universe* 21), an ‘I – I’ monologue, a split-personality dialogue, in which the second ‘I’ is artfully disguised as the stigmatised ‘ethno-racial’ Other (**Fig. 51** and **Fig. 52**; cf. Mladenova, “Imagined Gypsy” 18–19). We can hardly fail to recognise that the ideology of racism inflicts damage not only by creating impenetrable hierarchies among groups of human beings, denying the human status of those labelled as ‘non-whites’, but it also leads to a perverse stratification of human psychic phenomena, to a grave form of self-alienation which affects everybody.

A textbook example of the widespread art of ‘ethno-racial’ masquerade comes from a German make-up guide published around 1910 by

the Association of German Barber, Hairdresser and Wigmaker Guilds with the title *Das Schminken in Theorie und Praxis*¹⁵⁰ [Make-up in Theory and Practice, my translation R.M.]. The demand for this book was so high in its time that within two years of the first publication, it was republished in a revised and expanded version.

In a series of colour plates, the guide explains how a 'typical German' actor is to apply make-up and to dress up in order to impersonate different masks; the masks are grouped into four main categories: racial and folk types (e.g. Indian, Negro, Gypsy man, Gypsy woman, Jew: old, and Jew: young), age masks (e.g. student, artist, professor, old lady), historical masks (of really existing figures such as Friedrich the Great or Bismarck, or of phantasy figures such as King Lear, Faust or the Flying Dutchman), character masks and caricatures (e.g. clown, shoemaker, tailor, the King of Babylon) (cf. 21–24). Here, I show two colour plates that illustrate the theatrical convention of blackface (**Fig. 51**) and the theatrical convention of gypsyface (**Fig. 52**). It is notable that the model head used on the colour plates for racial types, both for male and female masks, is that of a blond, blue-eyed male in a suit. The plate on the left-hand side shows the model head with only complexion make-up applied. The plate on the right shows the same model head with complexion make-up, additional make-up, wig, accessories and costume. Underneath, all masks are supplied with a "physiological justification", a short description meant to justify the choice of materials, and this type of knowledge forms the core of the guide's theoretical rationale.¹⁵¹

150 I am thankful to Dr. Frank Reuter for this valuable find, which reached me in the final phase of my dissertation project. The print book is of remarkable quality and its pages bear the traces of the makeup-smearred fingers of the artists who have consulted it. The examples it provides fit also well here, in this concluding chapter, because they point, once again, to the pertinence of the term 'mask' in analysing film texts, and illustrate the relational nature of the coloured 'gypsy' mask to the blank 'white' mask (on page 3), leaving no room for doubt as to the racist subtext that underpins the 'gypsy' spectacle staged in virtually all arts, and thus make one aware of the normalcy of this spectacle, of its mind-boggling ubiquity.

151 See also Andreas Schwarz and André Karliczek's article "Mit Haut und Haar. Vom Merkmal zum Stigma – Farbbestimmungsmethoden am Menschen".

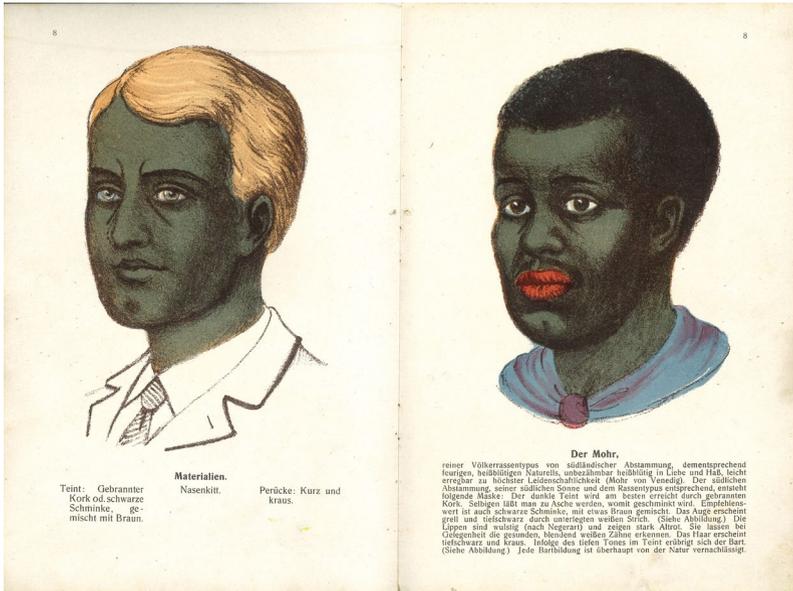


Fig. 51. Scanned page from the book *Das Schminken in Theorie und Praxis* (ca. 1910): Der Mohr.



Fig. 52. Scanned page from the book *Das Schminken in Theorie und Praxis* (ca. 1910): Zigeunerin.

Zigeunerin

Dieser bekannte Rassentyp ist fast auf jedem Masken- und Kostümball zu finden, wobei Trägerin zum Gaudium der Umstehenden und zu angenehmen Unterhaltung der Gäste ihr Wahrsagertalent entfalten muss mit verblüffender Virtuosität. Die unstillbare Wanderlust und das damit verbundene unstäte Leben, der ständige Aufenthalt in der freien Natur bei Tag und Nacht, bei Wind und Wetter und Sonnenschein, die berüchtigte Unreinlichkeit des Körpers, sowie Unsauberkeit in der eigentümlichen Kleidung und Haarhaltung geben der Zigeunerin ein wildromantisches Aussehen. Darum folgendermaßen zu schminken: Zu Teint verwende man No.16, schwach aufgetragen. Dieser braune Grundton wird mäßig jugendrot überhaucht. Das Auge ist lebhaft blitzend, in Leidenschaft erglühend, hinreißend und bezaubernd. Kräftige schwarze Augenbrauen, dunkle Striche unter dem Auge, einige Falten (nach Abbildung) erhöhen seinen Ausdruck. Ausschlaggebend für das phantastische Aussehen der Zigeunerin ist besonders das lange, starke, in natürlichen Wellen oder Locken herabfallende tiefschwarze Haar, das meistens mit Zierraten und Reifen verschiedener Art oder bunten Tüchern geschmückt ist. In natürlicher Umrahmung umschließt es das braune Gesicht und lässt es einnehmend und interessant erscheinen. (10)

Gypsy Woman

This well-known racial type can be found in almost every masquerade and costume ball, whereby the wearer must develop her fortune-telling talent with astounding virtuosity in order to delight bystanders and entertain guests. The insatiable wanderlust and the unstable life associated with it, the constant staying outdoors by day and night, in wind and weather and sunshine, the notorious impurity of the body, as well as uncleanness in the peculiar clothes and hairstyle, give the gypsy woman a wild, romantic look. Therefore, apply make-up as follows: For complexion use No.16, lightly applied. This basic brown shade is to be moderately overlaid with youth red. The eye is sparkling with liveliness, glowing in passion, ravishing and enchanting. Strong black eyebrows, dark lines under the eye, a few wrinkles (as shown in the picture) increase its expression. Critical for the fantastic appearance of the gypsy woman is especially the long,

strong, deep black hair falling in natural waves or curls, mostly decorated with ornaments and hoops of various kinds or colourful cloths. In a natural frame, it surrounds the brown face and makes it appear engaging and interesting. [my translation, R.M.]

In the preface to the first edition, Julius Pfeffer from the Federal Executive Board explains with pride and enthusiasm that the guide is meant for the various professionals from the guild, but that it can also be of use to theatre make-up artists and hair stylists, as well as to the specialised schools. Pfeffer underscores the need for the guide by referring to ‘reality’:

Wohl sind Lehrbücher für den Friseur- und Perückenmacherberuf vorhanden; aber der schnelle Fortschritt auf den Gebieten der modernen Mode und Technik bedingt naturgemäß, dass alles aufgeboten werden muss, um ein genaues Bild, die Wirklichkeit, wie sie die moderne Bühne erfordert, herzustellen. (3)

There are textbooks for the hairdressing and wig-making professions, but the rapid progress in the fields of modern fashion and technology naturally means that everything has to be done to create an accurate picture, the reality, as required by the modern stage. [my translation, R.M.]

Added to the considerations voiced above, this example should hopefully help understand the still-prevalent high level of acceptance, even admiration, of ‘gypsy’-themed films in academic and film circles. In the light of this discussion, it is opportune to revise the thesis of “projective identification” advanced by the film scholar Dina Iordanova in her often-quoted book *Cinema of Flames*, published in 2001 (216). According to Iordanova, ‘gypsy’-themed films from the ‘Balkans’ are not made to represent the Roma minority but to project concern about the ‘ethno-national’ Self, so that the projected image of the ‘gypsy’ conforms to the way the ‘Balkans’ want to be perceived by the West; the author asserts that “the compassion exhibited for the plight of the Roma is often a parabolical expression for the (suppressed) self-pitying attitude of the dominant group, who may be dominant in one context, but feels subservient in another” (216). Iordanova’s thesis has gained new currency and is assertively promoted in some recent publications, namely Jasmina Tumbas’s article “Countering Persecution,

Misconceptions, and Nationalism; Roma Identity and Contemporary Activist Art” (cf. 114), and Sunnie Rucker-Chang’s article “Roma Filmic Representation as Postcolonial ‘Object’” (cf. 855–856), while Goran Stanić details the scholarly debate on the term’s utility in his dissertation *The Roma Between the Self and the Other: Representations of the Roma in Yugoslavian and Serbian Narrative Film* (cf. 28–29).¹⁵² Undeniably, the thesis of “projective identification” contains an element of truth, yet Iordanova’s critical analysis stops halfway through, paying attention only to the phase of identification and ignoring the effect of dis-identification and distancing; what is more, her text takes up the perspective of the filmmakers and foregrounds the grievances of the dominant culture which they represent, a position that runs the risk of exonerating the antigypsy form/content of the said films. Let us not forget here that – as the case of Yugoslav ‘gypsy’-themed films has clearly demonstrated – it is the non-Roma filmmaking team, the director and the lead actors, who reap the benefits from staging the ‘gypsy’ spectacle; they might decry their marginal position in Europe and yet they are the ones who receive the prestigious awards and garner the lavish international attention, a personal artistic victory that has also raised the reputation of the entire Yugoslav national cinema, whereas the Roma lay actors are excluded from the success and altogether from the filmmaking industry (see also Section 5.4.1). As a conclusion to this subsection, we can say in a nutshell that the socially integrative function of ‘gypsy’-themed films manifests itself on various planes – its paradoxical workings can affect directly the non-Roma members of the film crew by integrating them into renowned film circles, and this type of career advancement is usually the most immediate and easily traceable outcome of the socially integrative function, but this function can also be studied in a broader context, as an ‘ethno-racially’ inflected paradox art intervention that engages local and foreign audiences in an intra-national and/or in an international ‘I – I’ dialogue over the issue of ‘whiteness’.

152 It is striking that in his corpus-based analysis of “Roma-themed films”, Goran Stanić does not make a single reference to racism as one possible reason for the stereotypical representations of the “Roma” characters (29).

In Chapter One, the pivotal question was raised as to which conditions enable a genuine dialogue between two (power-unequal) interlocutors, and so far, this question has not received an explicit answer. When discussing the mechanism of dialogic exchange within the hierarchically structured semiosphere, the Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman points to love, “however strange this may sound in this kind of text-book”, and asserts that “a necessary condition of dialogue is love, the mutual attraction of the participants” (*Universe* 143). Considering the problematic, often non-existent dialogue between dominant national cultures (in Europe and the USA) and their traditionally ostracised Roma minority groups, it is more productive to rephrase the notion of love by recalling Erich Fromm’s negatively formulated explanation in *The Art of Listening*: “To understand another means to love him – not in the erotic sense, but in the sense of reaching out to him and of overcoming the fear of losing oneself” (193). Now, the question as to what makes a genuine dialogue possible is connected to another, very practical question that must have formed in the meantime in the reader’s mind: namely, what is the artistic alternative to ‘gypsy’-themed films? Considering the critique levied at the films’ authentication strategies, is it at all possible to shoot a film about Roma? Is the study implicitly advancing the thesis that more Roma should be involved in the filmmaking process as a way of ensuring fair representation and film quality, and does this demand for increased participation of minority representatives not run the risk of becoming itself a fallacious, essentialising form of authentication? Again, the answers are complex and multifaceted, so I will outline a general direction in which to continue the query process. As to the involvement of Roma at all stages of filmmaking, this is without doubt a necessary condition for raising filmmaking standards, but it is not a sufficient condition, because it needs to be coupled with a paradigmatic shift of perspective towards the minority, towards the dominant culture and towards the medium of film. In its originally planned scope, the current book was meant to have two more parts, in which the remaining two segments of the film corpus were to be considered in detail: the group of films that re-write the ‘gypsy’ mask and the group of films that transcend the ‘gypsy’ mask and its racialising aesthetics. These two parts would have thus provided an insight into alternative strategies of representation that a number of exceptionally talented filmmakers have come up with. Due

to various constraints, these parts have not yet materialised, so I can instead offer the reader several film examples that can serve, for the time being, as a shortcut answer:

- Tony Gatlif's filmography
- *The Raggedy Rawney* (1988, Dir. Bob Hoskins)
- *Train of Life* (1998, Dir. Radu Mihăileanu)
- *Gypsy Woman* (2001, Dir. Sheree Folkson)
- *Brats* (2002, Dir. Zdeněk Tyc)
- *El Paso* (2009, Dir. Zdeněk Tyc)
- *Duh Babe Ilonke* (2011, Dir. Tomislav Zaja)
- *Just the Wind* (2012, Dir. Benedek Fliegauf)
- *Peaky Blinders* (2013, Script Steven Knight)
- *Aferim!* (2015, Dir. Radu Jude)
- *The Garbage Helicopter* (2015, Dir. Jonas Selberg Augustsén)
- *The Deathless Woman* (2019, Dir. Roz Mortimer).

9.6 The Phenomenon of 'Gypsy'-themed Films Viewed from Five Different Perspectives: An Overall Conclusion

The present study is dedicated to one largely disregarded phenomenon in the history of European and American cinema and this is the phenomenon of 'gypsy'-themed fiction films. Analysing a wide range of works, the study demonstrates that 'gypsy'-themed fiction films constitute a genre of their own and occupy a central place in the national cinemas on the Old Continent and in the USA since the birth of film. Specific to these films is their skeletal structure of an 'ethno-racial' masquerade, their inherent likeness to the cinema of attractions and film *noir*, as well as the instrumental use they make of the overfamiliar 'gypsy' figure – invariably portrayed as the 'non-white' Other – for the construction, (re-)negotiation and stabilisation of national 'white' identities across Europe and the USA. The research findings are presented in nine chapters, whereby each chapter throws light on the subject matter from a new angle, expanding the discussion with a new set of analytical tools and theoretical coordinates. This systematic change of perspective requires, in turn, readers to equip themselves with a new 'set of eyes' for each new chapter; thus, each of the nine chapters presupposes a substantial readjustment of the mental lens. It is important to stress here, once again, that in each film example, the analytical

focus is directed at one select aspect, so that the film analyses cannot and should not be read as evaluations of the works in their entirety.

The theoretical foundations of the study are outlined in Chapter One, which advances a novel approach to the analysis of screen images of 'gypsies', or in fact of any ethnicised/racialised identity, an approach based on Hans Belting's notion of the mask. This approach is led by the understanding that the human face is unrepresentable in itself; since it finds itself in a state of constant change, the human face in practice escapes all attempts to have it fixed on a material surface, which is to say that every attempt to capture the human face on canvas, on paper or on the silver screen is only partially successful and provides more information about the materials, techniques and traditions of representation than about the given face. Therefore, by opting for the notion of the mask, the study can highlight two important points: firstly, that the really existing Roma gain visibility in film, and generally in representational arts, exclusively via the visual regime imposed by the 'gypsy' mask, a practice that represents nothing less than a form of aesthetic scapegoating; and secondly, that the 'gypsy' mask can be attributed at will to any other individual or minority group in an act of symbolic violence, but also that it can be appropriated by artists in a symbolic act of rebellion or even for purely commercial reasons. Importantly, in the analysis of the films, the 'gypsy' mask is not considered in isolation, as is usually the case, but always in its relation to the national identity construct, that is in a dialogic exchange with the 'white' mask. Overall, it can be claimed that the spectacle of the 'gypsy' mask – regardless of whether it is coded in positive or in negative terms – is invariably deemed antithetical to the spectacle of the national Self.

The research findings presented here rest on extensive empirical material, a film corpus comprising 153 film titles released between the years 1897 and 2019, of which there are 118 fiction films and 35 documentaries (with some newer titles added after the final count). Chapter Two provides an overview of the process of corpus building, lists the sources of information, comments on the main selection criteria and gives insight into the corpus structure. Thematically, the film corpus consists of three main segments, of which fiction 'gypsy'-themed films represent the largest one. It should be made clear that the segment consisting of 'gypsy'-themed films exemplifies the dominant tendency in the staging of the 'gypsy' mask; this prevalent tendency is called here the racialising aesthetics of authentication. The other two comparatively smaller segments of the film corpus exemplify aesthetic

countertendencies which are not covered in detail by the study and remain to be examined.

As a kind of prologue to the topic of 'gypsy'-themed films, Chapter Three offers insight into the silent era via the motif of 'gypsy' child-theft. Chapter Four is a central element of the architecture of the book, as it outlines in summary form the methodology underpinning the entire study: the five-tiered analytical approach that has been developed specifically for the evaluation of 'gypsy'-themed fiction films and which offers a multi-perspective assessment of each film by examining its 1) production set-up, 2) content matrix, 3) visual design, 4) paratextual framing, and 5) functions. Following the algorithm established by this approach, the remaining five chapters take up and delve into each of these five aspects, offering insight into the films' racialising aesthetics of authentication by citing concrete examples, either entire works or select film sequences.

Subsequently, the focus in Chapter Five is exclusively on the politics of production. To expose the masquerade nature of 'gypsy'-themed films and to provide a certain distance from their emotional allure, a parallel is drawn between the films and blackface minstrel shows. Considering the asymmetrical distribution of roles at the phase of film production, it becomes plain to see that 'gypsy'-themed films are nothing other than ventriloquised cultural forms. With hardly any exceptions, these fictional works of art are scripted, directed and playacted by professionals from the dominant national culture, and in the cases when Roma lay actors are involved, this takes place after scrupulous casting based on dark skin colour and conformity to stereotype. Another recurrent feature of the films is the deployment of Roma extras who are used – together with their homes, music, language and artefacts – as authenticity props.

Introducing the next shift in focus, Chapter Six draws attention to the content matrix of the 'gypsy' mask. In the form of keywords, this content matrix abstracts the characterisation of the imaginary 'gypsy' figure – its distinctive qualities, personality traits, inner values and all other notable attributes ascribed to it over the length of a given film. As a way of pointing to the structural affinity that 'gypsy'-themed films have with the cinema of attractions, the choice for the first sample film fell on the US production *The Bohemian Girl* (1936). The second sample film subjected to a sequence-by-sequence content analysis in this chapter is *King of the Gypsies* (1978), again a US production, which, in addition, brings to light the affinity 'gypsy'-themed films have with

film *noir*. The comparative content analysis of the two US productions helps deepen the understanding of the functionality of the 'gypsy' mask, its subordination to the 'white' mask and the continuities and discontinuities in its fabrication. As for the dramaturgy, it should be noted that the plot structure in 'gypsy'-themed films unfolds vertically, as in melodramas and *noir* films, and is marked by the hero's inability to change his/her life circumstances through conscious effort or action.

In Chapter Seven, the focus of attention changes from narrative content to visual form. The formal analysis of 'gypsy'-themed films, in turn, foregrounds the colour symbolism of the 'gypsy' mask as well as its complex and often ambivalent relationship to film lighting, facial visibility and realist skin colour. Following the convention, the 'gypsy' mask is brought to life on the big screen as a universally recognisable sign that signifies absence of light. The meaning of this sign may be interpreted by filmmakers figuratively, to refer to darkness, that is, the shadowy side of human nature, and/or 'ethno-racially', to indicate the character's belonging to the 'non-white' part of the spectrum of human groupings. Subsequently, when characters from national majorities in Europe and the USA are visualised in juxtaposition to 'gypsies', they tend to be markedly blond. As such, the black-and-white aesthetics in 'gypsy'-themed films is fraught with many intricacies, which are discussed in further detail in relation to three very different works: the Serbian romantic musical *Gucha – Distant Trumpet* (2006), the Norwegian silent rural drama *Gipsy Anne* (1920) and the Polish black-and-white biographical film *Papusza* (2013).

The cinematic effect of documentary (ethnographic) authenticity forms the aesthetic core of 'gypsy'-themed fiction films. Not only that but 'gypsy' authenticity appears to be the yardstick by which the films' artistic merit is generally measured and it also seems to be their main selling point. Elusive, multifaceted and continually shifting with technological advancement, the aesthetic quality of authenticity specific to 'gypsy'-themed fiction films is, however, meticulously scripted, directed and staged. The power of its aura rests in the ability to transpose the purely fictional into 'a slice of reality'. Chapter Eight scrutinises the various elements and strategies of authentication deployed in 'gypsy'-themed films, focusing specifically on paratexts, visual style and sound design.

The final Chapter Nine outlines the main five functions performed by 'gypsy'-themed films. Similar to blackface minstrel shows, the cinematic spectacle of the 'gypsy' mask fulfils an array of disparate functions,

among which we should distinguish an aesthetic, a disciplining, a carnival, a subversive and a socially integrative one. The 'gypsy' mask is ubiquitous in film narratives and therefore it can endow figures and stories with a high level of visibility (aesthetic function). The enactment of the 'gypsy' mask may be used in a way that stabilises the norm-setting 'white' mask by ostracising and punishing deviance (disciplining function); it may be used in a way that enables filmmakers to give vent to pent-up emotions and broach taboo topics (carnival function); or it may enable them to voice a critical view of the 'white' mask and put forward alternative models of social cohesion (subversive function). The subversive potential of the 'gypsy' figure may also add a measure of self-reflexivity and/or true originality to the film, two aspects of great cultural significance. Just as in blackface minstrel shows, the performance in 'gypsy' mask may have a strong uplifting effect on the professional career of the 'white' filmmaking crew, elevating the film director and the lead actors to the first ranks of the international film scene (socially integrative function). These are, in a nutshell, the five main functions that 'gypsy'-themed films may perform, often all at once, which in turn explains the complex aggregate of messages disseminated by a given film, as well as its ability to address with equal success a broad variety of audiences.

To conclude, with its tailor-made five-tiered analytical approach to fiction films on the 'gypsy' theme, the study sheds light on the interplay between their production set-up, content matrix, visual design, paratextual framing and functions. Drawing on a sizeable corpus of works from the European and US American cultural realm, it demonstrates that regardless of the place and time of origin, 'gypsy'-themed productions tend to share the skeletal frame of 'ethno-racial' masquerades. As such, they are akin to blackface minstrel shows and often enjoy similar levels of obsessive popularity. If the film industry mobilises its powerful apparatus to assert the authenticity of the works and advertise them as untampered 'slices of reality', the x-ray vision advanced here makes it plain to see that these films are but ventriloquised cultural forms.