

Péter H. Nagy: *Alternatívák: A popkultúra kapcsolatrendszerei*. Budapest: PRAE.HU, 2016. 352 p. ISBN 978-615-5070-55-6

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The book *Alternatívák [Alternatives]* written by Péter H. Nagy analyses the relationships of pop culture in six chapters. The first block reviews the possibilities-conditions of mass-marketed movies and popular literature from the point of view of education and scientific thinking, while also addressing the issue of celebrity cult. The second block examines some of the fundamental texts of popular literature from the aspect of canon formation and pays attention to the changed situation of alternative canons (sci-fi, fantasy, horror etc.). The third block deals with intertextual and intermedia strategies in popular literature, highlighting some issues of central significance (e.g. changes in the image of man). The fourth block is about Lady Gaga, probably the most important phenomenon of contemporary pop culture, including the media strategy of the artist, her activities inspiring literature and the structure of her shows, among others. The fifth block contains film and clip analyses using the works of H. R. Giger as context, respectively it approaches Star Wars franchise. The sixth block is based on critical reflection on popular culture according to two noteworthy monographs; finally, the publication is closed by a bibliography and filmography.

In the book, therefore, relationships with recurring protagonists, such as Darwin, Hawking, Gaga are being dynamized; or there are possible associations that may increase the complexity of a phenomenon or work. The given works and media configurations work well in professional-scientific discourses, but are clearly for the general public. Using the author's apposite example, the *Matrix* film could be so popular in its time because it had perfectly hit something from the empirical (techno media) tissue of the given period. While the film's spectacle set adds ordinary elements to the world of matrix and virtual elements to reality (the latter being a computer simulation), the pattern of transposition of reality and mediality within fiction became accessible for everyone through this reversal, whereas the world of the creators-recipients is determined by the same: the viewer recognizes their own technocultural environment again as a mediated world. Such patterns and pathways make the new chapter of pop culture research so actual after the 20th century media theories.

H. Nagy's book takes it as a prerequisite that literature is (also) intermediate because it is part of some kind of historically existing and temporary technomedia environment. If we are aware of the fact that reading literary texts reduced to linguistic codes ignores this media configuration, it becomes clear why literary history has become a part of media history and not the other way around. The shift from monomediality towards intermediality obviously favours the appearance of such works that amplify this dynamics. On the other hand, H. Nagy emphasizes that we live in a scientific age and we read in the horizon of science. Even recently, the belief that there is an insuperable intellectual division between liberal arts intellectuals and natural scientists has remained strong. Several generations have grown up in

the misconception that artistic and literary sensitivity is incompatible with the rigid discipline of science. Nowadays, it is an evident experience that scientific thinking may not necessarily exclude the sophistication of aesthetic perception, just like the results of science may define and carry away artistic activity as well. In this sense, more and more people speak about a so-called third culture, and at the same time, it became increasingly apparent that, reflecting on its own media, literature is undermining the separation of the two cultures.

It is evident that *Alternatívák* has triggered a lot of reflections in a short period of time; there have been many writings about it, and positive references to it in several places. In his study titled *A popkultúra-kutatás eredményei [The results of pop culture research]* published in *Prae* (2017/4), a literary journal, József Keserű considered H. Nagy's book a unique achievement in today's Hungarian literary and cultural discourse. According to Keserű, there is currently no book in Hungarian language that would reveal the potential of popular literature and culture in such a diverse context (and reflected all the way), while keeping in mind the main principle of scientific thinking: respect for facts against irresponsible speculation. It is a fact that, in this respect, *Alternatívák* is a relevant scientific achievement, but it is also a science-popularizing work, which sets an approach to follow for the dynamizing Hungarian pop culture research.