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Seventies

A dystopia about the Hungarian society

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Abstract

Introduction: Ageing society is an ever-raising issue, however, not so many movies use critics towards it. The movie *Seventies* had its debut in Hungary 2014. Its specificity is the lens that were used to show the deficits of the attitudes towards the elderly in Hungary.

Aim: The aim of the paper is to explore the dystopian nature of the pseudo-documentary in order to show a picture of the possible deficits in Hungarian society with the help of the narratives of the artwork.

Methodology: In this paper a social psychological approach is considered as the process of affective characterization of movie scenes which are analysed with content analysis.

Theoretical background: There are two main aspects that are held in the analysis, the cognitive schema theory and the nature of dystopian content as a filter for the interpretative framework. Cognitive schema theory is used for perception and cognition of scenes, canonical set-ups, and

interpretation-processes. In the analysis, the focus is on the memory objects, the mental models and the cognitive fields.

Conclusion: The film experience includes a sort of awareness of the perceived scenes, thus the real world can be divided from imagination. Indeed, subjectivity and the shaping process of our reality are serving the demands of one's aspects. Therefore, the film can be considered as a valuable starting point of a debate of the future of Hungarian society, highlighting the situation of elderly.

Hetvenes

Disztrópia a magyar társadalomról

Kulcsszavak: demográfia; politika; disztópia; pszeudo-dokumentum film

Absztrakt

Bevezetés: Az elöregedő társadalom jelensége egyre aktuálisabb kérdésként jelenik meg mind a köznapi, mind a tudományos gondolkodásban. Nem találunk sok példát olyan műalkotásokra, melyek a filmek világában jelenítik meg kritikájukat a témával kapcsolatban. A Hetvenes című film 2014-ben debütált Magyarországon. Sajátossága, hogy a magyarországi idősökhöz való disztópikus hozzáállást helyezte a fókuszba.

Cél: A tanulmány célja, hogy az ál-dokumentumfilm disztópikus jellegét feltárva, a mű narratíváinak segítségével képet mutasson a magyar társadalom lehetséges diszfunkcióiról.

Módszertan: A tanulmányban szociálpszichológiai megközelítést veszek figyelembe, amelyben a filmjelenetek affektív jellemzésének folyamatát tartalomelemzés alapján elemzem.

Elméleti háttér: Az elemzésben két fő szempontot tartok szem előtt: a kognitív sémaelméletet és a disztópikus tartalom jellegét, mint az értelmezési keret szűrőjét. A kognitív sémaelméletet a jelenetek észlelésére és megismerésére, a kanonikus beállításokra és az értelmezési kontextusokra alkalmazom. Az elemzésben az emlékezeti tárgyak, a mentális modellek és a kognitív mezők állnak a középpontban.

Következtetések: A filmélmény magában foglalja az észlelt jelenetek tudatosítását, így a valós világ elválasztható a képzelettől. Valójában a szubjektív és a valóságunk alakítási folyamata az egyes szempontok igényeit szolgálja, ezért a film értékes kiindulópontjának tekinthető a magyar társadalom jövőjéről szóló vitának, kiemelve az idősök helyzetét.

Introduction

Ageing society is an ever-raising issue, however, not so many films use critics towards it. The movie *Seventies*¹ had its debut in 2014 in Hungary.² Its specificity is the lens that were used to show the deficits of the attitudes towards the elderly in Hungary. The movie can be considered as a dystopia of Hungarian society as it aims to show us how far could we go in case of neglecting the ideas such as liberty, equality, justice, fraternity, human dignity, human rights that are the principles on which modern democratic societies are based. In practice, these are often violated in reality - for example, when elder people get discriminated due to their age (Hell, 2020). In this work, I seek to raise theoretical questions I foremost seek theoretical questions however, I leave them open to be answered. I use the film as a work of art to rethink some issues about today's society using a critical approach.

In this paper I consider the approach of perception and cognition of scenes when analysing the movie. The work contains aspects of mental representations and event comprehensions with the function of showing the meaning of the time- and action-related narratives. With the help of the logic of contrast, I highlight the possible cognitive schemas and the canonical set-ups of the film to discuss the related deficit-oriented narratives.

Methodology

Considering the aim of the paper, which was to explore the dystopian nature of the pseudo-documentary, methodology was selected by the aspects of content analysis. As Park, Oh and Jo (2012) emphasised in their work, movie analyses can be carried out as an information retrieval, especially when phenomena in a society is researched. Pictorial, auditory and social representations in the work of art show a viewpoint that can be connected to the aforementioned social phenomena as a schema (Money, & Agius, 2008; Smoliar, & Zhang, 1994). Analysing the film, my aim is to examine shot angles, duration of cuts and changes, mise-en-scenes and sounds in order to have a broader understanding of the work of art.

¹ Hungarian title: *Hetvenes*, directed by Dombrowszky Linda.

² The basic idea behind the film is similar to the prose of the Kossuth Prize-winning Hungarian writer Ferenc Sánta's *Sokan voltunk (We were many)*. In the story, we are given an insight into the life of a poor, starving family with brutal honesty. The everyday life of poverty leads people to solutions that may be astonishing to those with 21st century morals: after a certain age (approximately 70-75 years old), the elderly voluntarily exile themselves into a poisonous cave full of sulphur fumes, thus helping their families under the banner of "one less mouth to feed".

In this paper I operate with a social psychological approach in which I analyse the process of affective characterization of movie scenes based on content analysis (Soleymani, et al. 2009; Benschhoff, 2016).

Discussion

There are two main aspects that are held in the discussion, the cognitive schema theory and the nature of dystopian content as a filter of the interpretative framework. Cognitive schema theory is used for perception and cognition of scenes, canonical set-ups, and interpretation-processes. In the analysis, the focus is on the memory objects, the mental models and the cognitive fields. Cognitive schemas are used to determine the perceptual and cognitive aspects of the movie, while canonical set-ups offer a multidimensional framework of the analysis in order to define the dystopian nature of the work of art.

The dystopian nature of the movie

The relation between the narrative and the events that are depicted in a work of art has always been the source of many questions in interdisciplinary discussions. David Carr (1986) considers traditional narratives as tools to show what really happened. At the same time, fictional narratives can give us perspectives of events that might have never happened before, but there is a chance to do so. These stories can be seen as inaccurate or invraisemblable ones, which have the possibility to become real because any narrative approach has the potential to present us real life events in a layered context (Baker-Smith, & Barfoot, 1987). In this respect a cumulative feature of the movie *Seventies* is a source that is provided of the interplay of board historical and ideological factors of ageing as gerontology in the social sciences. Humanities can raise a number of questions, whether in the public or in scientific discourse (Simigné Fenyő, 2020).

The rhetorical patterning of the work of art can be seen as a fiction-based pseudo-documentary. Considering cognitive schemas means, in this context that speaking of reference in cinematic fiction and of reception and personal appropriation of the movie are the sources of the nature of the dystopia.

The role of the narrator seems to have more functions in this documentary as she helps us understand the happenings, and at the same time, with her comments that are based on facts she gives us a perspective that can awaken the critical thought of the individual. The extreme close

shot of the scene³ has an even more intimate meaning in terms of conveying the very close range of the narrator. In that way we can get an insight of her true feelings.

Figure 1. The narrator at a close shot



Source: Seventies. 0:03:08.

The dystopian nature of the movie can be discussed in the context of mental representations, including personal refigurations of fictions according to Paul Ricoeur (1981). By extrapolating issues in connection with ageing of our present into an unseen future, the dystopian nature is always hidden between the lines.

3.2. Perception and cognition of scenes

The movie *Seventies* can be seen as a work of art that contains many representations of unreal social phenomena. The producer imagined them as future-to-be problems in a world, where radicalism reaches its peak if it comes to the case of elderly. This narrative shows a mainstream scientific stand for - this is how it contains one specificity of the background of radicalism.

"Our society is an ageing one, the number of inactive people is growing and our current system of pensions, social security and contributions is becoming unsustainable. At last, the EU is addressing this problem."⁴

³ 0:03:06-0:03:29

⁴ 0:01:45-0:02:03, Ildikó Imre, politician

Figure 2. Representation of a politician



Source: Seventies. 0:01:51.

There are two types of scientific comments in the film: philosophical and statistical. These views can be acknowledged as the relevance of the dystopian nature of the film (Noblejas, 2004).

"If a person is no longer useful to the community, no longer serving the common good, the common happiness, then for sentimental reasons we can hold on to him a little longer, beautify one's last days or weeks, but then, as the Seventies Law provides, we will part with the one and end one's earthly career in the interest of the community."⁵

⁵ 0:00:58-0:01:26, Mihály Tóth, philosopher

Figure 3. Representation of a philosopher



Source: *Seventies*. 0:01:11.

*"At the beginning of this year, a quarter of the population was over sixty. In the last ten years, the number has increased dramatically to 390,000. Our institute predicts that in twenty years' time, one in three people will be over sixty. We see similar trends in other countries in Europe."*⁶

Within these particular texts there are some statistics that are used to intellectualise and rationalise phenomena in a way that leads to the sought collective attitude - in this case, the death of people older than seventy. The composer represents intellectuals with people using scientific words, and at the same time their clothes are coherent with the collective idea of a person who works as an analyst. Both shot angles are mid ranged ones, as it is usually done in news interviews. These angles are close enough to build the scene of an intimate nature, however, the scientific context makes us take a step back. The duration of the cuts of the scenes are extended as the monologues are not interrupted. The setting of these two mise-en-scenes are of great importance for their intellectual content - it is likely that the recordings were made in the workplace. There are also non-diegetic sounds in the background that are altering both the dystopian content and the news atmosphere.

⁶ 0:01:27-0:01:44 , Péter Kovács, staff member, Hungarian Central Statistical Office

Figure 4. Representation of a staff member of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office



Source: Seventies. 0:01:28.

Movies have a function that is to entertain their audience (Ally, & Kasih, 2021). The work of art starts with a scene that makes us think we are watching the news. This fictive narration comes to the surface soon, as radical attitudes are shown in connection with the elderly in Hungary. The movie's first minutes are like hidden entertainments, however, when the watcher realises that only a few separates reality and fiction, one starts to get involved and think about the elderly deeper.

According to Münsterberg (1916), imagination is the psychological faculty that movies use to harmonise pictorial and mental representations. This is how involvement goes deeper when we continue to watch the movie. Indeed, the viewer can get more and more information about a settlement that is the home of the main character, uncle Józsi. This top-down explanation of the narrative represents cause-and-effect relationships between the stakeholders' and the citizens' attitudes, decisions and even emotions (Dill, 2013).

In the following I am going to discuss phenomena shown in the movie with the help of cognitive schemas and canonical set-ups in order to examine the dystopian nature of the content of the work of art.

Cognitive schemas and canonical set-ups

When analysing canonical set-ups, there are two frameworks that can be associated with. On the one hand, cognitive schema theory provides the psychological interpretive framework, focusing on mental representations be it an auditory or pictorial nature. On the other hand, modern information-processing theory gives a perspective that is used as a tool of analysing a work of art focusing on declarative and procedural representations.

Phillips (1995) operated with a multidimensional framework for contrasting constructivist viewpoints.⁷ In this work I use only the first aspect which contains the contrast between individuals and the public discipline as a continuum. The pseudo-documentary contains this opposition, too. It introduces uncle Józsi's story through the glasses of the individual and the community, however, it is also shown how the staff represent the system. The reality of the movie is in contrast with the idea of *gerontocracy*, according to which the ancestors are at the top of the social hierarchy, followed by elders, adults, adolescents and finally children. At the same time, the dystopian nature of the work of art is also given by the fact that the concept of *neo-neontocracy* is used as a tool by the social hierarchy, since it is not the child who is in the focus of attention, but everyone else, until the age of 70 (Lancy, 2015).

*"Uncle Józsi was born during World War II. He was orphaned at an early age, but after that he managed on his own. As a child he worked in a vineyard. His first wife gave birth to a daughter. He had been a widower for seven years. He met Margitka after his wife's death. She was taken away by the Dream Car last year. He has two grandchildren."*⁸

⁷ The other two aspects contain a differentiation between theorists whether they assume knowledge constructions a socially determined or an individual process. The third considers constructivists according to the degree of "true" constructivist features. There are two main views of points: one is the empiricist position, the other is the radical nature.

⁸ 0:06:55-0:07:12, the narrator

(Old pictures are shown - what he was as a child, then as a young man and a soldier.)

Figure 5. Uncle Józsi and his grandchildren



Source: Seventies. 0:07:11.

As the quote shows, the composer introduced the protagonist using not only his life story, but the historical background of his existence, too. The chronological structure presents us, that Uncle Józsi had a hard life not only because of himself, but also because of the lack of opportunities provided by the social environment. The composer represents this when old pictures are shown of his early life as a football player, or with his family of origin as a child. Within these shots there are sensitising contents that prepare the viewer for the inexplicable brutality of the next few minutes. After showing the pictures, the composer uses a mid range shot to demonstrate the presence of Uncle Józsi in a frame where he is with his two grandchildren.⁹ The setting is created as they are sitting/lying on a bed which makes us feel we are interrupting an intimate moment. Not just because of the fact that time is passing by very fast, but because we also know that the protagonist will reach the end of his life soon. Therefore it is a moment that may never be repeated again. There are diegetic sounds in the background that are calming and with this they are indicating a dissonance between the text and the visual, the auditory and the linguistic representations.

In the following, I will revise two theories that are connected to the cognitive schemas and canonical scenes. Modern information-processing theory will provide a context that shows the mechanism of manipulating common sense with dystopian ideas. The chapter of interpretation

⁹ The role of evolutionary and social influences on the development of grandparental care has been shown in a large range of research (Csinády 2019).

of the cognitive schema goes on and enhances the inner realities that make one's reality parallel to the reality of the dystopian documentary of the movie *Seventies*.

Modern information-processing theory

Cognitive construction embraces the modern information-processing model that evolved from the Pittsburgh School of cognitive psychology (Derry, 1996). The dominant cognitive architectural model has emerged (Anderson, 1983), however, it continues to describe human memory as having both declarative and procedural aspects. The transmission of information, on the basis of information and attitudes in common consciousness, is how the film built its message through the news reports. People from different backgrounds give their converging views: middle-, and lower-middle-class men in Budapest, then a rural man who is clearly not a white-collared one. Their comments recall the basic principles that played an important role in the creation of law.

*"We have reached the limit. Europe can no longer support pensioners, so it was time to act and enact this law."*¹⁰

*"Some people eat almost as much as I do. In fact, there must be some who eat even more. I don't think we need them."*¹¹

*"There is no point in old people. Everything they knew is on the internet. You type it into Google search and that's it."*¹²

Figure 6. Young man on a riverbank



Source: Seventies. 0:02:27.

¹⁰ 0:02:10-0:02:16, upper middle class, middle aged man in the city centre

¹¹ 0:02:17-0:02:23, lower-middle class, middle-aged man on a promenade

¹² 0:02:24-0:02:31, lower-middle class, young man on the riverbank

Declarative knowledge is represented as propositional networks, while skill knowledge is presented as complex collections of if-then statements, called production systems. In addition, news from abroad shows a broader aspect. However, by not expressing contrary opinions, they legitimise what happened in Hungary.

*"So it seems that people everywhere have understood the need for this measure."*¹³

*"It was in a small European country where they first introduced this strict law, commonly referred to as the Seventies."*¹⁴

*"The launch of the Seventies was not followed by any major scandals, so the multi-billion advertising campaign finally achieved its goal."*¹⁵

Figure 7. News in English



Source: Seventies. 0:02:35.

As it was emphasised through the modern information-processing theory, dominant cognitive architectural models were used to introduce the mechanism of manipulating the common sense with the help of the news. By reaching out to the general public as well as to the members of the intellectual class, and by backing up opinions with views from outside the country, it presented a broad perspective that is important for the processing of information.

¹³ 0:02:04-0:02:10, presenter - in Russian

¹⁴ 0:02:31-0:02:39, presenter - in English

¹⁵ 0:02:39-0:02:46, presenter - in French

Interpretation-processes of cognitive schemas

Cognitive schemas can also be interpreted from the information-processing perspective. These two have already been connected if we think of Kantian philosophy (Marshall, 1995), or of Barlett's (1932) treatise on remembering. According to Kant, the power of judgement (*Urteilkraft*) is the ability to summarise according to rules. This summary is provided by schemas, which are the new classes of images. These are products of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), and they mediate between the senses and the intellect. Bartlett's thoughts about remembering help us to establish an understanding of cognitive schemas with the dimension of time with particular attention to the past.

In the following, I attempt to review the critical reflections that deliver the main messages of the narratives in the documentary from three perspectives: memory objects, mental models and cognitive fields.

Memory objects and mental models

Cognitive constructivism is definitely not an uncommon theoretical framework, but a metaphorical inference about the characteristics of cognition. Memory objects are favourable tools to combine with various types of representations. Movies as pictorial and auditory representations of nature hold the possibility to interpret the content in many ways - through our senses, emotions, and consciousness. There are two types of mental representations according to diSessa (1995). One of them is called p-prims (phenomenological primitives). These are basic, intuitive schemas that have minimal abstractions of common sense. The other is called object family, which is a loosely organised selection of mental representations that can be found in different types of situations.

According to Johnson-Laird (1983), the term 'mental model' is a form of mental representation. There are different aspects considering mental models. There are researchers who refer to them only as representations of some aspects of the world, while others acknowledge them as analog objects in the world. Their function is to explain the relation of one's cognitive activity and the world (Borges, & Gilbert, 1999). The construction of mental models can be described with a conceptual structure that contains presuppositions and beliefs (Vosniadou, & Brewer, 1994). Ontological presuppositions can be captured in the film referring to the contrast of solidarity and stability in the attitudes of the relatives and the staff members of the Dream Factory (representing the system). A birthday is an event where individuals are given a choice between solidarity or stability (of the system). That's when the epistemological presuppositions come to appear - instead of idealising the event, there is a chance to see them as they appear to be aware

of the consequences. Through observations and cultural information of the Seventies Law, one can decide (even if the law is contrary to the religion practised¹⁶) between the interiorated given by emotions and the common consciousness as the system serves the sustainability of material needs. Mental models can be divided into two groups according to the beliefs of the level of agreement with the system. It is the anti-systemic actions that show the level of disagreement. The question is only when the mental model turns into action and engagement, or when it remains latent.

Figure 8. The last birthday



Source: Seventies. 0:16:24.

The aim of mental modelling is to construct an understanding of a phenomenon. Mastered schemas (memory objects) provide pillars for modelling, but mental models represent situational understandings that are dependent on the context.

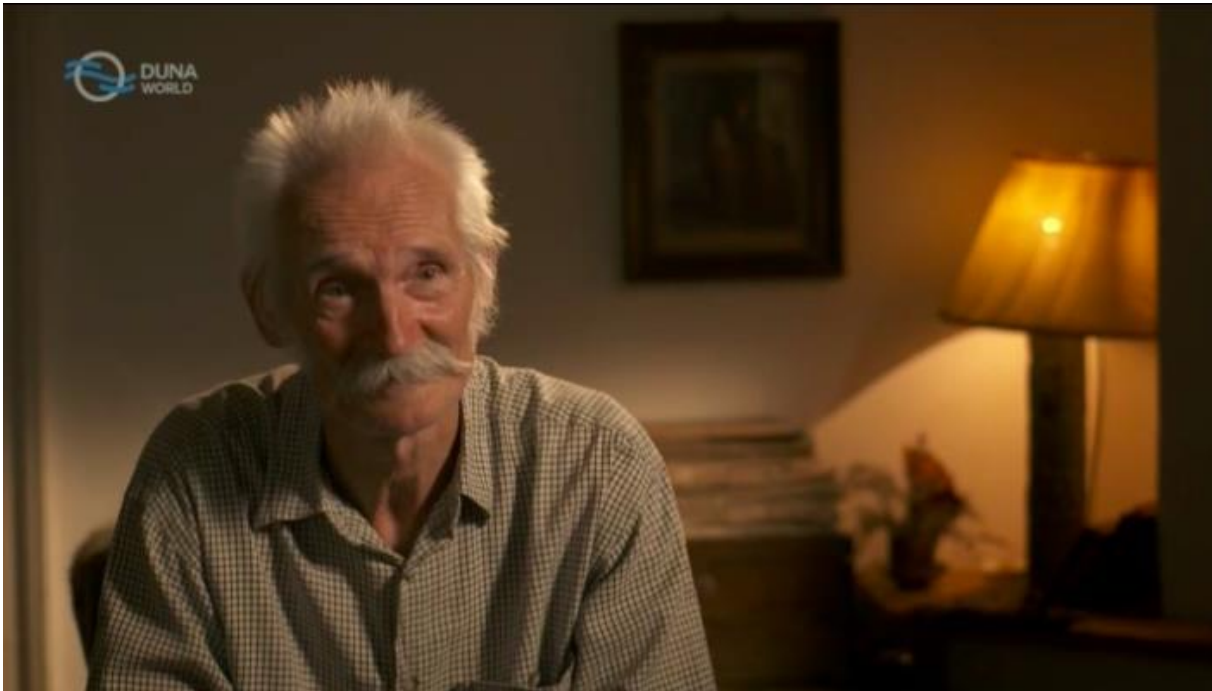
“- What were the most important things in your life?

- Well, sports, exercise, trips, hikes, and dance. I can't imagine life without dance. The good wines, the parties when we were sipping wine. I really like Riesling. The Italian Riesling. And if possible, I don't miss a card party in a pub. Well, that's all I can say.”¹⁷

¹⁶ There are many representations of christianity in the film in the forms of crosses hanging on the wall, or the church that shows up in one of the final scenes.

¹⁷ 0:07:53-0:08:19, Uncle Józsi

Figure 9. Uncle Józsi recalling the most important things in his life



Source: Seventies. 0:08:05.

Within the aforementioned text there are both memory objects and mental models, too, as Uncle Józsi recalls his happiest moments of his life. The object family of his happiness sources are loosely organised as there aren't concrete events mentioned. Within the mid-range shot the composer used chiaroscuro to create a mysterious atmosphere. The setting provides the feeling of intimacy as it is at his home. His narrative contains p-prims of the basic representations of happiness - these are things that may be common in his environment and at his age. This simplicity enhances that there are many other people that share the same life and also the same fate.

Cognitive fields

Cognitive fields are a sort of distributed pattern of memory activation processes that occur in response to a particular action that is responsible for making some memory objects more accessible than others (Derry, 1996). Cognitive fields consist of a huge number of simple processing elements. These elements are connected by excitatory and inhibitory signals. It means that distributed models are about to maintain alternatives to mental representations that can be abstract and summary representations like logogens, prototypes, semantic memory representations or linguistic rules (McClelland, & Rumelhart, 1999).

In the following three scenes it will be examined from different aspects as they enhance the dystopian content in various ways, mentioning the paralysis of emotions, the unjustified coercive measures and the unacceptance of “fate”.

"You also need to know where you can set boundaries so that... To live peacefully next to each other. You have to stand aside, and sometimes you have to put your emotions aside, because there are those. However, there are also disagreements. So..."¹⁸

Figure 10. An elderly couple in a field



Source: Seventies. 0:08:43.

The scene of interviewing an elderly couple at the countryside almost conveys the feeling of exaggeration, given the choice of location of the interview. Two aspects can be mentioned in connection with it. One is the grotesqueness of rural existence as they are in a field. The other is the symbol of agricultural land as they are in a post-soviet country. In the propaganda of the socialist past, the hammer and sickle were often used as symbols. The reference to the idea also has the function of emphasising the conformity of the spirit of time. The content of the text confirms the essence behind the pictorial representations with the help of semantic memories: history can repeat itself.

¹⁸ 0:08:19-0:08:43, a retired woman (next to her sits his husband)

Figure 11. When faith fails you



Source: Seventies. 0:25:38.

The shot duration of the church scene is extended. Instead of calming down the audience, it gets worse from second to second. It gives an insight to an intimate moment in which the final reckoning takes place. The presence of transcendence at the end of the story is not accidental: it could serve as a solution, but the thought that the Dream Car could arrive at any moment keeps knocking at the door. Uncle Józsi has his back turned and stands out from his surroundings. His white clothes suggest his purity, while the background is dark. The light of the candles is dim, which can be interpreted as the symbol of hope. The chiaroscuro of the frame has the function of transmitting the a context mentioned above.

As it has been considered above as an alternative conceptualization, cognitive fields are superpositional approaches when it comes to memory. The abstraction-representations of the specific dilemma of the movie *Seventies* can be seen through the glasses of the distributed model of cognitive fields. According to McClelland and Rumelhart (1999) superposition of traces results in abstraction, however, some idiosyncrasies of specific events and experiences can still be preserved.

Conclusion

The film experience includes a sort of awareness of perceived scenes, thus we can divide the real world from imagination. However, subjectivity and the shaping process of our reality are serving the demands of our souls. Therefore, the film can be considered as a valuable starting

point of a debate of the future in Hungarian, highlighting the elderly's situation. To conclude, movies are works of arts that can form one's worlds (Fithratullah, 2021).

The dystopia contemplates the equifinality of the future, while on the individual level the protagonist counteracts the thesis by asserting his autonomy and awakening the hope of multifinality in the viewer. At the same time, the first thoughts of the short film foreshadow the dangers of the future:

*"At the time, this video went viral on the internet. Many people didn't notice, but this short film was actually a signal for the birth of a new era. But the world seems new, took the message and adapted. That's when the Seventies Law was born."*¹⁹

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¹⁹ 0:00:37-0:00:55, the narrator

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