Close Up

FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES

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Vol. 1, No. 2, 2013

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Editor's Note

Dana Duma

PhD Proffesor UNATC

The internationally acclaimed breakthrough of Romanian Cinema over the last decade has made us feel that reflection on film has been left behind. An attempt to close the gap, the academic film journal "Close up" aims, as the title suggests, to stimulate in-depth exploration of recent developments in cinema, in a bid to broaden the discussion/dialogue on film. The accelerated changes (both aesthetic and technical) generated by the move from analogue to digital have also forced us to multiply the approaches and the tools of investigation, to break down the disciplinary boundaries in film and media research. Besides favouring topics related to Romanian cinema, the journal includes, in its second issue, papers covering diverse aspects of our field of research, from film history to film aesthetics, from film theory to cultural theory, from postcolonial studies to gender studies.

In the opening article of the issue, Sorin Alexandrescu puts forward – using Andrei Ujică's film *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceauşescu /Autobiografia lui Nicolae Ceausescu* (2010, a montage of official documentary films shot during the 'reign' of the Romanian Communist dictator) as a starting point – a new interpretation of the television report, based on the analysis of the meaning(s) that can be assigned to filmic images.

The "Romanian area" is completed by Christina Stojanova's study on the role and forms of comic irony in New Romanian Cinema and Marian Ţuţui's article on the earliest advertising films produced in Romania.

Based on exhaustive research, Annamaria Motrescu-Mayes's paper explores the aesthetic and ideological framework by which gender and racial colonial identities were constructed and represented in two amateur (personal) film collections made in India between the 1920s and 1940s. In a close reading of the film *The Return* by Andrei Zvyagintsev, Anaïs Cabart identifies Tarkovskian influences and analyses the author's approach to the Pan-Slavic metaphysical worldview.

Opting for a more technical approach to filmmaking, Laura Baron's paper analyses the specificity of the trend-setting MTV style of editing.

The issue concludes with a book review section. Irina Trocan reviews *Film After Film: Or, What Became of 21st Century Cinema* by J. Hoberman, the influential American critic's volume on the main trends in cinema over the last decade, and Lucian Georgescu reviews *Writing for Visual Media*, whose author, Anthony Friedmann, describes and evaluates the techniques of writing for digital media.

I want to thank all the authors for their efforts, and am convinced that their contributions will provide a vivid account of the complexity of the development our medium, which deserves multi-layered investigation.

Autobiografia lui Nicolae Ceaușescu, by Andrei Ujică. What Kind of Realism?

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Abstract

The present article focuses on Andrei Ujică's film *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu / Autobiografia lui Nicolae Ceaușescu* (2010), a montage of official documentary films shot during the "reign" of the Romanian Communist leader (1965-1989). A special attention is given to the footage of Ceaușescu's "working visits" to an Alimentara and to the Vitan bread factory, respectively, as captured in the television reports of the time. Building on some recent revaluations of André Bazin's view on cinematic realism (Daniel Morgan), my aim is to suggest a new interpretation of the television report, based on the analysis of the meaning(s) that can be assigned to filmic images. In my view, such an analysis could only benefit from recent contributions to the theory of documentary (Carl Plantinga, John Fiske, Noël Carroll), from the analogy between visual acts and speech acts (Gregory Currie), and from the distinction between theatrical and cinematic performances (Siegfried Kracauer). The first section of my paper will therefore aim at discussing the relevance of such approaches for the critical understanding of the stock footage used by Andrei Ujică and, implicitly, for the accurate interpretation of his montage. My basic assumption in analyzing these images is that they are, or at least they might be, conveying more than the univocal, propagandistic meaning they were supposed to have at the time by virtue of their "realism." A closer look at the stills will thus reveal surprising details in the attitude, the gestures or the glances of the protagonists, details which, unknowingly or deliberately captured by the cameraman, might have signaled to the audience that the allegedly realistic, unproblematic shots (also) had a secret, subversive meaning which betrayed the intention of the political apparatus to confiscate reality for its own purposes, and replace it with a staged performance for the benefit of the public. The interest of this interpretation, however, is not exclusively political; in the conclusion to this article, I will try to show that in fact it might open up a broader, ontological perspective on (realist) film.

Sorin Alexandrescu, professor emeritus at the University of Amsterdam and professor at the Bucharest University (UB), Romania. In the Netherlands, he concentrated on semiotics and the history of ideas and founded the *International Journal of Romanian Studies* (1976-1990). Since 2001, his research focuses on visual studies. At the UB, he currently runs the Center of Excellence in Image Studies, a research and educational institute in interdisciplinary Human Studies, and the Doctoral School "Space, Image, Text and Territory". A selection of his published books is the following: *William Faulkner* (Bucharest, 1969); *Logique du personnage: réflexions sur l´univers faulknérien* (Paris, 1974); *Roemenië. Verhalen van deze tijd* (Amsterdam, 1988); *Romanian Paradox* ("Paradoxul român", Bucharest, 1998); *Identity and Identity Breach. Romanian Mentalities after the War* ("Identitate în ruptură", Bucharest, 2000); *La modernité à l'Est. 13 aperçus sur la littérature roumaine* (Pitești, 2000); *Mircea Eliade, as seen from Portugal* ("Mircea Eliade, dinspre Portugalia", Bucharest, 2006).

I. PRELIMINARIES ON REALISM

Andrei Ujică's film spurred public interest partly because of its deceivingly simple format: a montage of television reports about Ceaușescu. And yet, after having been off the screens for more than 20 years, the stock footage irritated those who had seen the original broadcast, and surprised those who were watching it for the first time. "Is it really necessary to watch all this rubbish again?" asked the viewers in the first category. "And why hasn't Mr. Ujică shown unofficial films and other recordings depicting the poverty and humiliation we all lived through?" On the other hand, the second category of viewers wondered, not without reason: "Was that it? Maybe those years our parents rarely mention were not that dreadful after all: these images don't frighten us, they simply make us laugh."

Having those television reports fall out of circulation, or just seeing them become an object of derision, signals a natural change in the criteria employed to evaluate the events they depict, but also a shift in the use of some fundamental concepts called for by the actual experience of the events: what was, in our sense, the reality, the truth, the meaning of those events? What and how much of them did we accept as true *back then*? Which parts didn't we believe, and why? And to what extent and how do we appreciate the present re-use of the respective images *now*, in Ujică's film? In other words, having communist everyday life behind us gives us some perspective on these images, which does not mean, at least for me, making excuses for what happened or minimizing the importance of those events. It is simply an urge, maybe a duty, to discuss with their help the fundamental concepts mentioned above.

I.1. Revisiting realism

André Bazin formulated – alongside others, less often quoted – the so called 'guiding myth' of cinema:

> The guiding myth… inspiring the invention of cinema, is the accomplishment of that which dominated in a more or less vague fashion all the techniques of the mechanical reproduction of reality in the nineteenth century, from photography to the phonograph, namely an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time. (*The myth of total cinema* 36)

This definition, taken out from a 1946[1] article, coincides with the extraordinary success of post-war Italian neo-realism, which had become the generic definition of film. Re-evaluations later changed due both to the popularity of Eisenstein's and Pudovkin's montage theories, and to the theories accompanying Nouvelle Vague French films and the entire Structuralism trend. Although founded by Bazin, *Cahiers du cinema* embraced during the 1950s the policy of *auteur* films under the influence of Truffaut and Godard. Similarly, the Anglophone magazine *Screen*, developing along the lines of Metz, Peter Wollen, and Laura Mulvey, saw Bazin as a conservative. Things later shifted again, partly because of Barthes and Deleuze, partly due to the prominence of the new values of the 'presence' of the art object (Michael Fried). Commenting on this evolution, Lisabeth During says: "For years realism languished in theoretical obscurity, an embarrassment to critics of ideology. Bazin makes us see this neglect as a mistake. What we want from realism is not fidelity to the conventions but truth and film's power to bear witness to things" (263).

Influenced by the film philosopher Stanley Cavell, Daniel Morgan shifts the focus of discussion – as

I will try to do below – from the *knowledge* of reality to what the viewer can do with this knowledge (*acknowledge*), and sees in the act of acknowledgement the very meaning of realist film.

> On the one hand, there is the brute or physical reality of objects in a photograp. On the other, there is what a film takes as its reality, which is already the result of the acknowledgement of physical reality... The task is to discover from looking at a film what it is that its style is acknowledging – what it takes the fact of the film to be – and whether that involves doing something with the knowledge of its ontological foundation. (120).

The reconsideration of realism as a fundamental concept after years of theoretical disregard – a new trend which we are witnessing in Romania as well as abroad – is therefore an altogether different thing from understanding a film, any film, as being realistic only because it captures, much like photography, "what is in front of the camera." If the latter view – a rather primitive one which can be easily exploited for propagandistic purposes, as it actually happened under the Ceaușescu regime – were replaced with other, more 'sophisticated' definitions, such as the ones quoted above, I believe the entire perspective on the 'communist reality' may change. I will try in the following pages to explore this theme.

I won't go on, however, without bringing up a last argument in favor of a new approach to 'reality' in film analysis. Nelson Goodman makes a distinction between realism, which 'dépend plus de l'art de raconter que de ce qui est raconté' (34) – and truth. "La question du réalisme est celle de la familiarité des symboles utilisés dans le récit; la question de la vérité concerne ce qui est raconté, que ce soit de manière littérale ou métaphorique, au moyen des symboles familiers ou fantastiques" (34). Fiction alludes to reality, of which there is only one – Goodman is a stated opponent of the theory of 'possible worlds' – but what it denotes is literally false, it is a 'contre-vérité'; its truth can only be a metaphorical one. Furthermore, there are numerous 'rival truths' about the same reality: "Il y'a plutôt de nombreuses versions du monde correctes, certaines d'entre elles irréconciliables avec les autres" (38)[2]. From this point of view, television reports in general, as is the case with those featuring Ceaușescu, can be considered realistic because they use images in a way that is familiar to us, but this does not mean that they are substantially true. Their truth can be literal or metaphorical. Literally, they describe a 'visit' to a grocery store (the Alimentara). But, 'metaphorically', couldn't this event (also) be viewed as a 'working visit'?

I.2. About reportage

While so many issues emerge in relation to realism in general, the term is even more problematic when associated with reportage. On the one hand, the television reports reinforce the feeling, especially when (re)viewed today, that they simply show us 'what happened,' in the sense that Ranke attributed to the role of the historian – "wie es eigentlich gewesen" – or Cézanne, to that of the artist – "Je vous dois la vérité en peinture, et je vous la dirai", although this promise included the 'forgetting' of the object initially seen –, or as Barthes defined the object of photography: "ça a été." It should be noted, on the other hand, that these statements mix two types of certainties, namely that the event actually took place and that it happened just as it was represented; or, to be explicitly semiotic, they mix the reference (the first certainty) with its meaning (the second certainty). As we have known ever since Frege, these two readings of a term (*Bedeutung* and *Sinn*, respectively) do not coincide. It is true that in the case of reportage the impression of coincidence is stronger, but at the same time, non-coincidence obviously transforms an informative film (with an open meaning) into propaganda (with a fixed meaning) or into a deliberate caricature, that is, into fiction.

No film, and documentaries even less so – defined under communism as the result of a 'social command' – is produced in a vacuum, but in a specific discursive universe or at the intersection of various discourses, as Colin MacCabe asserted in relation to the reductionist opinion that *Bicycle Thieves* shows Italian reality: "Against this traditional analysis, I argue that film does not reveal the real in a moment of transparency, but rather that film is constituted by a set of discourses which (in the positions allowed to subject and object) produce a certain reality" (82); even symbolic relations with the world, in Lacan's interpretation, need not be understood "as a set of one-to-one relationships but as a tissue of differences"(84). I will now attempt to put before you this network of issues, or web of intertwining differences.

Starting from Ujică's film, we should focus on two fundamental questions:

1. Ujică used stock footage. Does it accurately render the world we lived in *back then*, is it realistic only because it represents the mechanical recording of what went on in front of the camera? And is this the *reality*? Or the *truth* about what happened then?
2. Does Ujică's editing of some footage lead to the creation of another film, always a documentary? And if so, what is this *meta-documentary* in relation to the original footage?

"Documentary", a study by Carl Plantinga, reviews the various understandings of reportage. The first principle of reportage is the following: the more firmly it relates to reality, the less fictional and aesthetically oriented it becomes; at the same time, its transparency, which allows us to perceive reality 'directly,' increases proportionally.

But is this the whole of reality? In the first half of the 20th century, pioneering documentary film-makers – documentary and reportage are not identical, but neither are they different enough for me to discuss them separately in relation to the matter in hand – such as Robert Flaherty, John Grierson and Humphrey Jennings, did not hesitate to stage various events (*stagings, re-creations of events*) for higher, social and rhetorical, purposes, something which happened, apparently, in Grierson's famous *Housing Problems*. Still, how do they use such a 'trick' in their films? It is one thing to slightly *exaggerate* the extent of repairs needed by housing that is already in disrepair, as Grierson does, and another to *create* a reality that fits your way of filming. We will see that, in footage from the Ceaușescu era, staging also indicates that the meaning of reality itself is at stake, not just the rhetoric of its presentation. The simplistic argument that 'others did the same thing' cannot therefore excuse it.

John Fiske, an American media scholar, admits however, pragmatically, if not cynically, that TV realism does not reproduce reality *as such*, but the *dominant* sense of reality, the argument against the so-called "transparency fallacy" (21) being that television produces reality rather than reflects it.[3] "Realism is defined by the way it makes sense of the real, rather than by what it says the real consists of" (25). Like any radical critic of (American) democracy, he thinks that, even if the television presents 'ordinary people', 'not kings' – to be compared to footage of Ceaușescu – TV realism is reactionary because it naturalizes the *status quo*. The real TV ideology is therefore a culpable social practice. And still, this presentation of television in a democratic country seems innocent in comparison with that of present-day Romania. But neither of them can justify the function of television in a totalitarian state, as was the case in Romania under Ceaușescu. This was not Fiske's intention either. In fact, what I am trying to do here is to find *a third interpretation* of television reportage, which differs both from the kind that openly justifies propaganda by means of arguments similar to Grierson's or Fiske's, and from the kind that sees the Ceaușescu-era reportage not as propaganda but as an obviously realistic film, because it was simply showing things as they were. Between justifying the reportage by admitting its falseness but countering that fabrication supports a (just) cause, which it promotes in this way, and justifying it by appealing to an unavoidable truth – given that anything that appears on screen was actually in front of the camera – we have to make room for an analysis of the meaning.

The one I am trying to provide here should be discriminating enough, I hope, for it to be closer to the truth, if not wholly truthful, and honest enough, if not completely unbiased, to fit the ontological framework of reflection.

And one more thing. The analysis of the Ceaușescu-era footage and the way Andrei Ujică uses it cannot be undertaken as such. Just as literature or painting before it, film used to be, and still is, a social effect. In Plantinga's words, "The status of a film as fiction or documentary is a social construction rooted in the communicative function documentaries are thought to play in social discourse" (497).

Plantinga then applies to the documentary film the criteria of pragmatic linguistics and sees filming as a speech act, in the sense of Austin, Searle, etc.: "In nonfiction, the filmmaker takes the assertive stance, presenting states of affairs as occurring in the actual world" (498). In his first book, *Speech Acts*, John Searle has already showed that "talking is performing acts according to rules" (22). An utterance is a speech act in the sense that the speaker, reporting what happened, states, implicitly or explicitly, that what he or she says is true. In verbal language we can thus distinguish between the 'propositional content' of the sentence "It is raining outside" and its illocutionary force, expressed with the help of various modifiers: "I am convinced it is raining outside" or "I don't think it is raining outside," for instance. The interesting point here is that the reality of rain is independent of the truth value of the sentence: it *is* raining outside (or not), whatever I may say about it. In either case observable reality can prove me wrong. To put it differently, we must distinguish between two kinds of truth values: one which pertains to the fact I am referring to – the rain – and the other which applies to the way I am asserting it – my illocutionary point.

What Plantinga does is expand to the realm of the visual, more specifically to the documentary film, a phenomenon identified in language. Can we, in other words, distinguish between *what* the documentary filmmaker is showing and *the illocutionary way* in which he or she is doing it? Fictional film and documentary film have different conventions: for the latter we automatically assume that the image is true. While we must admit that Bazin and the Italian neo-realists thought the same about the former, the question of truth in fictional film has always been more nuanced. Can we further refine these distinctions?

Let us get back to Plantinga. He quotes Noël Carroll and Trevor Ponech. The first argues that any film may or may not have a fiction 'index' to help us interpret it correctly. For Ponech, making 'a cinematic assertion' means "to employ a motion picture medium... with the expressed intention that the viewers form or continue to hold the attitude of belief toward certain states of affairs, objects, situations, events, propositions and so forth, where the relevant states of affairs... need not actually exist" (apud Plantinga 498). Carroll's theory is consequently based on an intention/response process, while Ponech's rests only on the intention of the producer. From this perspective, it is irrelevant if the events and objects shown by the filmmaker really exist: all that matters is that they are presented as such. Plantinga shares this opinion: "The illocutionary act characteristic of the typical documentary is to provide a veridical, that is, an implicitly truthful, reliable and/or accurate representation" (499).

In the following analysis of a television report covering Ceaușescu's visit to Alimentara, one of the central questions will be whether the mere filming of that moment was "a veridical, that is, an implicitly truthful, reliable and/or accurate representation" of an event, that is, something typical for the documentary, or, on the contrary, whether its illocutionary force lies elsewhere.

I.3. Traces and speech acts

Unlike the theories of intention discussed above, Gregory Currie has developed a theory of reportage as a 'trace', different from the 'testimonial' approach common, I would say, to the authors I have previously quoted. Currie's theory seems to me more germane in analyzing the reportage about Ceaușescu:

"A testimony is the record of what someone thought about something; testimonies are belief-dependent. Traces, by contrast, are records that are, to some extent, independent of belief" (496). When we watch, for example, the images of Ceaușescu's visit to the Alimentara, are they the *testimony* of the cameraman, in which he himself believes, or only a *trace* of that visit, independent of his personal opinion – and independent, too, of the opinion of much, if not all, of the public television's audience? The first attitude would be that of a 'Ceaușescu propagandist' or that of an admirer of the Leader (there were many of those); the second, that of a technician forced to film a scene of which he has a different opinion than the official one. We are dealing here, of course, with the well-known dual attitude, the simulacrum through which the individual (the artist, the Romanian intellectual) believed he was satisfying both his honor and the demands of his job, or even that he was 'resisting through culture.' Without going into this thorny problem – to be honest, I myself don't believe in this type of 'resistance' – I would postulate the existence of an additional layer of meaning. The visit captured on film undoubtedly took place, but was it also a visitation, or a 'working' visit, as it was officially called? We are faced here with the old logical distinction between the *naming* and the *description* of an event by means of words. Calling this real event a 'visit' is obviously an accurate designation, in the traditional sense of a public official's coming to see something, an occasion on which he or she is photographed or filmed; not the same thing, though, can be said about the adjective used to qualify it. Ceaușescu's rapid passage and the short conversation with the locals do not support the idea of 'working', a term which implies a more substantial interaction between visitor and hosts. Therefore, we might look at the cameraman's ambivalence in a way we have not discussed so far: he offers as a *testimony* and as a *description* of an event a number of images, while at the same time he produces them as a *trace* and as an *act of naming*. The simulacrum – the dual attitude – takes place between the two 'layers' of filming.

Like Carl Plantinga, I, too, see this act as being analogous to a verbal speech act, in the sense of Austin's and Searle's examples, but adapted to the visual and refined by means of the above difference between *naming* and *describing*. Gregory Currie's 'testimony' would then be, in this case, built as an 'assertive' which commits the utterer to the truth of the statement, a proof of the cameraman's belief that what he had filmed was indeed a 'working visit.' The 'trace', subsequently, would not be an assertive, but something else, an illocutionary act, visually weaker, which leaves the character of this visit unclear, or rather, which does not fully reveal what the cameraman thinks about it: maybe he sees it as a simple 'visit,' for instance, and not as a 'working' one. Let's call this 'trace' an indirect speech act[4] – or a subcategory of this; see below – similar to the famous example, "Could you please pass me the salt?" – which is not a question, as it seems, but a request (an indirect, polite one). Or we can nuance the attitude of the cameraman even further, and read it as an indication of doubt ("I don't think this was a working visit"), or as an act of dismissal, the refusal to take a stand ("I don't know if this was a working visit"), etc. I believe that acknowledging and analyzing such an act in the field of the visual is both a necessary and a theoretically valid approach. All that follows is based on the assumption that there are (also) *indirect visual acts*, in the sense that the filmmaker, or the documentary filmmaker, can – although he or she is in no way obliged to – suggest to the viewer more than the images actually show, by means of a *background information*[5] shared with the audience. Later on I will introduce the term of *unqualified visual act*, or *multiply qualifiable visual act*, as a *sub-category of indirect visual acts*, easier to apply to film and the filmed situation on account of its ability to suggest a certain tension between possible, yet not definitive meanings in a given context. The art of the so-called 'esopic' language' in the novels, essays, theater or film of the communist era was based, after all, on such an indirect communication between author and public, which allowed the latter to grasp the critical allusions to the ruling regime as connotations escaping censorship, which usually focused on denotations alone, that is, on the primary meanings of the text or the image. When we speak about 'esopic'

performances or films we usually have in mind works such as Lucian Pintilie's, for instance, although *Reconstituirea* was more than this. But the term I suggested above would considerably broaden the sense of the adjective 'esopic,' making it applicable to various genres, including documentaries, and even montage sequences. Is this possible?

But, some might argue, isn't this complicated interpretation threatening to take us back to the old assumption of the 'resistance through culture'? No, if we support it with an extended and more specific interpretation of images.

II. TWO WORKING VISITS

II.1 A fixed scheme

The 'working' visits to the Alimentara and the Vitan bread factory, respectively, quite difficult to date but most likely made during the last years of Ceauşescu's 'reign', judging by his appearance, follow an outline common to all his official visits, regardless of dates or sites. The television report analyzed here – like other such sequences in Ujică's film – is divided into three acts, each of them further divided into three to five alternating scenes, sometimes repeated (in both visits).

I. **The outdoor scenes of the arrival, consisting of:**
    1. The arrival of the car convoy;
    2. A welcoming speech by a local representative: applause;
    3. A young woman presents a bouquet of flowers, which is then quickly passed by Ceauşescu to an aide; sometimes a rushed embraced follows;
    4. Entering the workspace.

II. **The inside scenes (the workspace):**
    1. The general layout of the venue preceding the visit, with all the employees in their assigned places;
    2. A welcome from other local representatives with whom the Leader does not talk, he simply walks past them;
    3. The entrance of the official group into the workspace proper, always with Ceauşescu leading, immediately followed by one or two bodyguards. Or, more exactly, people posing as bodyguards, if we take into account their age, appearance, sharp intimidating looks and their complete indifference during the visit to the Leader's interactions with the locals (when such interactions occur at all); see the heavy man wearing glasses, sitting closely behind the Leader, who betrays his high-ranking officer position in the Securitate; most likely, he is the one who organized and now is monitoring the entire event. He even repeats Ceauşescu's earlier order that the applause should stop (what authorizes him do so? the applause was not meant for him!). We should also note the presence of a military officer: what is the purpose of having the Army attend a 'working' visit to a bread factory?
    4. Ceauşescu's inspection of some production detail and the communication of his observations, maybe also of the solution, to some quiet local representatives;
    5. Applause from the factory workers.

III. **Outside scenes (exiting the workspace):**
    1. Applause from the entire staff, lined up at the exit;
    2. Farewell embraces;
    3. The car convoy leaves.

II.2 The two isotopies

We can of course argue that the scenario goes unchanged because it follows a certain unavoidable logic of the event, that is, the logic of the relationship between the Visitor and the Visited. This relationship is in fact twofold, corresponding either to the 'guest versus host' or to the 'controller versus controlled' isotopy (I understand *isotopy* as a dimension of meaning somewhat constant in a given text or speech). Although partially overlapping, they are still divergent. The first isotopy is a formal one, and as a rule it operates between equals, because each party gives something and receives something else in return, of an equivalent value, according to a given social norm. Ceauşescu graces the visited with his presence, in his capacity of President of the country (plus many other titles), while the hosts, who acknowledge this honor, overstate their affection: while the kissing is mutual, the flowers are an extra, an addition to the words, a tribute to the guest. This addition is an unusual one, though, functioning as a bridge towards the second isotopy. According to the rules of politeness among equals, the visitor is the one who brings flowers (or gifts) to his hosts. The reversal of roles suggests precisely that this equality is not real; it is simply acted out.

The second isotopy concerns the purpose and content of the visit: the inspection made by a Superior on an Inferior, according to power, interest and competence codes at work between participants who are by definition not equal. The two parties still have or at least they should have shared values on all three levels of action. This form of supervision requires a minimum of collaboration, because the parties are, no matter what, partners. The incompetence of one party disqualifies it in relation to the other, while the competence, even of a different nature, ensures the success of the inspection. The power of the superior can, theoretically, assist the inferior if it provides him with a constructive solution to the problems that are ultimately found. On the other hand, competence and power can, of course, be at odds with one another, with the superior imposing a solution on the inferior, even in the absence of real competence.

II.3 Initial assumptions

Is this little theory – based on a logic of communication once formulated by Habermas, but considered 'normal' in a rational and democratic society – relevant to the scenes in the documentary? I wouldn't want to start by ruling this out, even if the historical and political reality discussed here is so very different. I would rather start with the opposite assumption, that the Visit is a normal one, and I will try to get a confirmation, or a refutation, of my premise after having analyzed the scenes. The two isotopies will thus be followed simultaneously as scenes succeed one another, regardless of whether they belong to constants of the formal register or to variables of the content register. My decision to follow the succession of the scenes in the documentary is based on another assumption, namely the fact that filming was truthful and accurate, without intentional deviations, either positive or negative. The information is mostly visual, sound is rather scarce; the words uttered, by Ceauşescu alone, are sometimes translated into English. No answers can be heard, making the dialog exclusively visual and largely implicit. Finally, ignoring whether Andrei Ujică made any cuts in the original footage, which he probably used to create his own montage, or if he changed the order or length of the original scenes, I am taking them for granted; within the timeline of the film, they occur at approximately 2h44-2h47.

III. THE VISITS

III.1 The arrival

The arrival is evidently announced to those concerned (a voice: "The Comrade is here!") because both the staff and various ranks of management are waiting for him in the street (in this case, Calea Victoriei),

but not to the random passersby; they stop out of curiosity, without being allowed anywhere near the site of the visit (another voice: "Please step away from the site!"): so the visit is meant to be a working one, not a public appearance. A fundamental distinction is thus created between the random crowd which does not applaud and the informed assistance, which applauds. What, then, are the consequences of the announcement? The scenes between the arrival of the cars and the entrance to the workspace are very brief: the local representative and the female host are speaking rapidly, Ceauşescu doesn't answer anything, the bouquet is almost tossed away into the hands of an aide, the woman steps aside, and the Leader enters the site. We could therefore state that the ceremonial part of the visit is taken seriously by the hosts, but not by the visitor, who is denying its relevance, although he is actually accepting the accolade. This attitude, repeated at sequences II.2 and II.5, as well as at the end (III.1) in fact annuls the 'guest to host' obligations, maintaining only those of 'host to guest.' The visited are playing their part, while the visitor treats them only as subjects to an inspection. Curiously enough, one party rejecting the code does not lead to a similar reaction from the other; the lack of balance between the attitudes of the visitor and the visited, respectively, will thus reproduce at the moment of departure. Everybody applauds constantly, despite the lack of any reaction from Ceauşescu. This is the first indication of a secondary meaning, underlying the expected polite exchange: the behavior is *pre-scripted*, applause is commanded; it is not the natural result of something said or spontaneously done by the visitor, as is normally the case, but it happens for no particular reason: the visitor is, all the time, *applauded by default*.

III.2 The displays

The suspicion that we are dealing with a pre-scripted behavior, not with a spontaneous one, is reinforced by other details. Just as the passersby on Calea Victoriei are kept outside the site of the visit (I), so is the workspace sealed off for public during the visit (II). The cameraman shows the empty aisle between the display cases before the arrival of the Leader, with the motionless shop attendants behind them, waiting: another indication that the event was prepared in advance. Then the displays are filmed separately and, at a given moment, a voice can be heard demanding authoritatively that the camera go: "More to your right!" Another parallelism slowly emerges. Just as the salespeople are lined up *behind* the display cases, so is the merchandise inside. In all of the displays, the bread rolls, loaves, bottles, cheeses and salamis are perfectly stacked: nothing is missing from any geometrically rigorous pyramid of food, none is amiss, and the cases are perfectly closed. How can this exemplary display be explained otherwise than by no merchandise having been touched before the visit? Since this is impossible under normal circumstances, we can safely conclude that no previous sale has taken place.

In fact, during the visit, Ceauşescu is the only one to weigh a loaf of bread in his hand! No one else touches anything, not even the Securitate officer on duty, let alone the 'salespeople': a sort of general paralysis is keeping their hands from moving, as if hellfire would burn their blasphemous fingers if they did otherwise. A kind of sacred terror prevents the participants from making any gesture, or saying anything unrehearsed, as a young man at the entrance of the Vitan factory tried to do, quickly discouraged by the cold glance of the Visitor: he wasn't there for conversation, he

seemed to imply. The presence of people and objects laid out with meticulous precision, each in its assigned space, the absence of any buyers, the excessively visible price tags, printed on immaculate cards, make the space look more like a museum than an Alimentara. People and objects are treated equally: their only function is that of exhibits; the piles of food need to be seen, not consumed; they have an immutable place, never travelling from the shelves into the bag of a shopper. The Alimentara is an immobile world, of objects lined up by someone else, a Madame Tussaud's wax museum of sorts, where hyperreality takes the place of the real. The film leaves us with the impression that the Leader and his escort are visiting such a museum, and as soon as they are done, the hands of some wax figures will automatically start applauding behind them. Various scenes in all of the three acts confirm this observation: I.2, II.2, II.5, II.1, III.2.

III.3 Evaluation I: *unqualified* speech acts

The 'discussion' is limited in both visits to a phrase said by Ceaușescu that is met with immense respect from the audience: "The bread must be quality stuff" at the Alimentara, and something along the lines of "The crust is a bit thick" and "The bread is better outside the capital" (Vitan). At least these are the English translations, because the hurried movements and the faulty sound make it impossible to fully understand what is being said in Romanian. Of the last phrase, I think I can make out something along the lines of, "In the country they make better bread." The three sentences are perfectly commonplace, but the Leader's tone and his grimace, the way he weighs a loaf of bread in his hand – he is being told it is diet bread – give his statements a critical tinge. The first sentence can be taken as a simple encouragement, while the other two are *predicative* ones; they attribute a quality to an object, without making an explicit reference to the immediate context. Can they be, or were they thought of at the time as *directives*, in the sense of "You should make quality bread!" or were they *indirect* speech acts, in the sense of "This bread is not quality stuff!", "This bread shouldn't have so thick a crust!" and "Shouldn't the bread made in the capital be as good as that made in the country?" The locals look somewhat anxious when they hear these statements, especially at the Vitan factory, where the man in the middle looks genuinely disconcerted, as if asking himself what secret but menacing message the Leader is uttering, while another, sitting further away, takes off his hat in alarm. It is stranger still that nothing related to the context can make the messages less ambiguous. Uttered against the background of indistinct chatter, or in the middle of complete silence, the sentences sound like veritable *oracles*: they can be understood either as a critical comment on the Vitan bread factory, or as praise for the bread factories in the country. In fact, the speech acts studied by Austin, Searle and many others work only within and in relation to a given context, whether in direct ("Please close the door!") or indirect connection with it ("Would you be so kind as to close the door?"). As Ceaușescu's statement is neither an order (as in my first example above) nor a request (as in the second example) to the person he is addressing – but in fact who is he talking to? – Austin would have spoken of *infelicities*, 'inappropriate' circumstances which lead to the failure of the speech act. Indeed, the context of interlocution being a confusing one, the speech act malfunctions, in the sense that it remains open to interpretation.

We might say, perhaps, that oracles have been, from antiquity to modern times, as it is the case with the one I am analyzing here, *unqualified speech acts*, or *multi-qualifiable speech acts*. Telling a baker in Bucharest that the bread is better in Brașov could be a tactless observation, a criticism of the baker in the capital or a nostalgic praise for the Brașov baker. The same could be said about Ceaușescu's statements above. How can the hearer decide, then, what was the Leader's intention in uttering them? Since the linguistic context, which is quasi-nonexistent, can't help, maybe the gestures, the facial expressions, the glances will provide us with more information.

III.4 Evaluation II: *multi-qualifiable* visual acts

It is at this point that the documentary can be of assistance. The shot above immediately follows the uttering of the sentence, "The bread must be quality stuff." The members of the group – Ceauşescu's 'shadow', the military and so on – have straight, expressionless faces, but there is also a guilty air about them: they bend their heads and gaze down, as if trying to avoid any eye contact with Ceauşescu, and he himself is actually doing the same. No one is speaking, the sentence uttered by the Leader remains without reply, the inspection continues. In the following shots, the shop attendants automatically applaud. What are they applauding? Is it the passing of the convoy, or Ceauşescu's sentence? Probably the former, since the same reaction is repeated at other moments, when no words are spoken. Oddly enough, there is no answer to the Leader's observation. How can he tolerate this situation? He probably knows that everybody there is sufficiently familiar with the code to understand the secret meaning of his assertion. If he had meant it to be a positive remark, he would have said it with a smile, however faint; the absence of smile indicates the negative implication of the observation, the rebuke, the 'party criticism', as it was called, which will be inevitably followed by 'self-criticism' and, maybe, punishment. "We will see about this, later!" is probably the meaning of these words: they seem tossed around without much sense for us, but they sound menacing to *insiders*. In keeping with the tradition of the oracle, Ceauşescu's message was confusing only for the ignorant, but anyone able to decipher its secret meaning would have understood it as a warning. This is how riddles, enigmas of all sorts, drawings and cryptic sculptures function.

The *unqualified* speech act, as I have described it above, can be *qualified as a secondary meaning* if we take into account the *visual* context in which it is expressed. What we see, or hear, is consequently a *delayed communication* for those outside the intimate circle – the shop attendants, the viewers of the TVR documentary, then and now – but not for those familiar with the process.

III.5 Dual interpretation as a political game

At the Vitan factory, Ceauşescu is more exigent: he takes a loaf of bread in his hand, weighs it with an expert air and addresses the Securitate officer, conveying to his escort the result of his reflections, namely that the bread is better outside the capital. Ceauşescu's expression as he turns his face towards his group – again, without addressing the hosts – is markedly, almost theatrically negative, as if he were horrified at the sight of the 'exhibit.' Even if we can't fully trust his revolted grimace, knowing that it was also the result of a longstanding disability and a progressive disarticulation of his body, visible in his famous waving of hands and arms, similar to the hectic movements of an unrestrained

puppet, it would be safe to assume that his disgusted-looking face had a real impact on the group of local representatives and high officials. They couldn't afford to disregard the possibility that his grimace was indeed critical, not just an unintended facial expression. His sentence, in *this* visual context, sounded exceedingly negative. Unlike the previous example, the non-verbal context here allows for the disambiguation of the spoken sentence, even if the contrast between reticent verbal communication and facial expression overstatements persists. In fact, the Controller is sending the Controlled two messages at once: a public, verbal one and a private, visual one. Just as the old aristocracy who, if they were fighting during dinner, refrained from speaking too freely *devant les domestiques*, the Leader pierces those whom he holds responsible with his gaze, but his words, recorded by the TVR, remain quite civil. But the TVR recorded images, too, and, if we analyze the scenes shot by shot, we will be able to see details that very likely escaped the TV audience of the time.

III.6 Three outfits or three worlds

In the above scenes, the dual interpretation appears very clearly. The man sitting at the table, one of the 'simple folk' in the parlance of the day, takes off his peasant hat with an involuntarily comical gesture – is he afraid of what is being said or is he expressing his admiration of the Leader? – while the official standing between him and Ceaușescu, maybe an engineer or a member of the middle class of the day, wearing a city hat, moves to the front so as to *see* the Leader speak, knowing from experience that Ceaușescu's facial expression can communicate a message which is far different from the casual one put into words. As a result, the official in question looks really worried. He is afraid because he recognizes the dual code, but he ignores the real meaning of the message. For us, though, the three characters, involuntarily comical, drawing an oblique line across the image, from the 'simple folk' to the President of the country – the latter wearing a worker's cap – are a comprehensive image of Romania at that time: the three costumes – we could extend the analysis from the hats to the whole outfit! – correspond to three social worlds (which I have merely outlined here) to be found under communism: three worlds which form an obviously hierarchical society, three worlds bound by mutual fear but also by solidarity, all of them controlled by the Communist Party and the Securitate, which in their turn are controlled and confined by one single individual in an infinite universe of fear.

III.7 The third world, eloquently quiet

The third world is more present than it seems. More discreet when compared to the visibility of the characters so far, consubstantial with the 'simple folk' from before, it supports the whole performance

by its applause but undermines it by means of the participants' glances. The two shots above, showing the motionless shop attendants behind the display cases, are perfectly similar except for one detail: the shifting of the glance of the woman on the left and of the boy in the middle away from the display case – but implicitly also away from the camera, which is placed on their right, somewhere in the aisle: that is, *in front of us, the viewers* – towards the official group. Their bodies are frozen still. Only their eyes are moving, avoiding to be seen by the cameraman, to be 'read' by him, a potentially damaging witness to their behavior. For that split second that our eyes meet, their glance tells us everything. It tells us: "We cannot help being here, we are not allowed to talk, but we can watch you!" Since such a detail can only be revealed by the freezing of the shots, the film records their testimony without retaining their individual identities. As Balázs said, the human face speaks. And what these faces tell us is the horror of the show they are partaking in.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

From what we can see in these three minutes of footage, we can conclude that none of the rules I have discussed at the beginning of this article, neither the formal, nor the content-based ones, apply here. Ceaușescu does not work with anyone, so he is not there on a working visit, but on a formal inspection, the likes of which are often ridiculed in anti-military satire movies, where generals don't evaluate the combat potential of their armed forces, but the centering of name tags, chevrons and badges in their soldiers. The controller can't be bothered to ask for some useful information, let alone to supervise or improve the activity of the controlled. He has neither the competence to oversee the work that is being done, nor the interest in collaborating with the workers, and he has no concern at all for the ones he has allegedly come to see. His visit is the parody of a working visit.

We wonder then – and this is primarily a sociological and political interrogation – why such visits have ever happened. The most likely answer is that they served only as a display of discretionary power over the visited, who, to make the comedy complete, were supposed to applaud gratefully. Just as military parades at official anniversaries are not meant to exhibit the military strength of a nation, but the possession of arms, this popularity show reminded those involved in it of the Power under which they all lived. In much the same way, ancient oracles did not disclose the will of gods but merely reminded people that everything was subject to that will. But, as happens with any ritual, its mere repetition worked to maintain the real popularity (of gods, of the dictator and their respective priests). If the women in the Alimentara, lined up in front of the visitors, were expected to applaud – theoretically, they could have refused to do it, of course, and thus performed a small gesture of defiance, but this is a different matter from the one I am tackling here – the random, anonymous passersby were applauding either out of habit or to signal their conscious approval of the regime. The fear of being exposed as objectors to the cult of Ceaușescu does not fully explain it; some people actually participated in this cult.

But more than the sociological explanation, what should get our attention is how the documentary is made, and what this particular means of representing reality can disclose. And also, what is specific to Andrei Ujică's undertaking. A longer study is needed to answer these additional questions: I have attempted this somewhere else.[6] But this three-minute footage should be enough to draw some general conclusions.

The cameraman filmed what actually took place at the Alimentara and at the Vitan bread factory, but everything that was going on there was staged, a performance following a precise scenario, not a 'slice of life,' as the 19th century realists, or the Italian neo-realists, or the great documentary filmmakers used to say.

IV.1. Theater or film?

In this sequence of scenes, the only moving elements are the cars, Ceaușescu and his escort. The public, both in the street and in the store, is standing completely still. We might say that this view on the action, and on the space it takes place in, is theatrical rather than filmic. It is also reminiscent of some ceremonial scenes in which the Great Priest or the Monarch is the only one moving, while the assembly on the stage, which is, in a way, assimilated to the audience in the theater hall, is motionless.

Other aspects make us think of intensely rehearsed performances, as is the case with large stadium displays under communism, where *nothing unexpected is allowed* to happen. Similarly, while every site is different, all visits follow the same pattern, regardless of the setting that is being used. What we are viewing is not a proper television report about *what is about to happen* in a specific place, but a *filmed show* of what is *made* to happen, repeatedly, anywhere. The show is all about the script, not about the setting, the theme or the cast. The preferential use of wide and medium shots, both endowed with a certain depth, the fact that the *offscreen space* is never used or even suggested, and the total lack of other *talking heads* engaged in discussion with Ceaușescu, including the absence of those whom he is addressing directly (*shot* and *reverse shot*), all these technical details indicate the deliberate removal from the footage of everything except for two types of characters: the homogenous masses with no distinctive features, and Ceaușescu himself walking through them (sometimes accompanied by his wife, a doubling which produces an eerie *doppelgänger* effect), the only individualized, mobile figure filmed in close-up, but not subject to analysis, because a personalized *gros plan* is missing from our example.

According to Kracauer, the essential 'affinity' of the fiction film – and even more so of the documentary film – is with the "lo desteatralizado" (89) (I am using here a Spanish translation, the only complete one I found), because theater is par excellence anti-cinematic (89-90). What the realist film needs to achieve is to capture the "flux of life, material and mental" (102). On the other hand, the director is compelled to stage something, "a escenificar no solo la acción sino también el entorno" (*el entorno*, the surroundings), a legitimate thing, if the purpose of the staging is to enhance the resemblance with reality (58). The director needs to convey the impression of immediate reality, "de modo tal que el espectador sienta que está observando sucesos que podrían haber ocurrido en la vida real y que fueron fotografiado al instante" (59). Kracauer further maintains that what is staged gives a stronger impression of reality than "el suceso original en caso de haber sido captado directamente per la cámara" (58). In regard to the present footage, though, it is hard to determine if such options, theoretically admissible, belonged to the director or if they were imposed from above: the fact that the TV viewer was expected to feel that he or she was watching events that *might have really happened* ("sucesos que podrían haber ocurrido en la vida real"), a phrasing which implies the possibility that, in fact, the events *did not* happen as shown, is equally imputable to 'the services': these were 'staging' 'the reality' itself, a fact that didn't go unnoticed by the onlookers, be they witnesses or TV viewers. In fact, the television 'reports' of the time, especially those shot during Ceaușescu's last years, often leave the impression, because of his physical and psychological degradation, that rather than controlling the event, he was made to play a part in a performance directed by other people. Could the character I call 'Securistul' (the Securitate officer), because I don't know his name (the only one the Leader is talking to in the scenes I have analyzed), be the actual creator and controller of the event, not a subordinate but a superior, the master puppeteer 'handling' the decrepit puppet presented as the Genius of the Carpathians?

But, notwithstanding, did the cameraman have the minimal liberty of filming the crowd *otherwise* than he did? Or is his cinematic *overstatement* an indication to the audience that "Here, this is *how* the visit *really happened*, and not in any other way"? An argument which is hard to prove, but difficult to ignore.

We should mention that such a theatrical non-event – anti-cinematic, according to Kracauer – cannot be compared with classic reportage (like Grierson's, for instance), where certain unavoidable 'adjustments' of the setting and the action are easily discernable. But with Grierson, they are the result of the cameraman's or the director's search for the truth by perusing documents, making thorough inquiries, and showing images in which previously concealed things are made visible. Building up tension by the accumulation of unpredictable situations within the framework of a quest for truth happens, of course, in theater as well – ever since *Oedipus* – but it is defining for any filmic investigation, be it fictional (the detective movies, for instance) or non-fictional (historical documentaries, television reports, etc).

Let us return for a moment to the question of whether the theatralization of reportage under Ceauşescu is really the option of the cameraman/director or whether it is dictated from above. A definitive answer is difficult to provide. As with anything that happened in Romanian culture after 1971 (Ceauşescu's July theses), few television people in subordinate positions challenged the specifications coming from higher up; at best, some tried to elude them, but most overdid them. An unwritten code on 'what the Comrade wants' was gradually – but rapidly – put together, and most cameramen followed it thoroughly and unreflexively, just as other previous codes had been followed before, albeit at a different social level. The Byzantine art canon or the Impressionist style, both with an enormous longevity in Romania in proportion to other countries, could serve as cases in point. A *conservative attitude* characterized in fact almost all Romanian cultural periods. And here I am again making a *sweeping generalization* without any (direct) connection to my topic. To which I will now return.

IV.2 Odd traces

In the first section I made a distinction between the cameraman's *testimony* on a certain event and its *traces* in the film, and between the *description* and the *naming* of the event or, to put it differently, between proper *speech acts* (direct or indirect) and *oracles*, the latter being unqualified speech acts which can become multi-qualifiable by means of visual disambiguation or through the intervention of other mediums of expression. In all the above pairs of terms, the second one is the weaker, unintentional derivative of the first (which is strong, intentional). When we apply them to the three-minute footage analyzed here, it is obvious that professional duty required of the cameraman to adopt the first attitude. The question is, however, whether by doing so he produced only the first type of meaning. In fact, if the event is *produced* as a pastiche of a theatrical performance, its ambiguity will be apparent in the filmed sequences. The fact that the Visit has only one mobile performer, who does all the talking, while the rest of the characters are immobile and speechless, creates a lack of balance on the stage that the audience can *see*. We don't know if the cameraman was given strict directions on how to take his shots, or whether it was he who 'translated' the rather vague indications from higher up into a filmed sequence. It is certain, though, that the *testimony* he was giving about the event having taken place (the reference value of the event; see above I.2) bore, inevitably, the *traces* of the ambiguous way in which it had happened (the meaning value of the event). As we have seen above (I.2), Flaherty and others did not exclude a certain percentage of *staging* in the making of a documentary, if this was meant to render the film more poignant, and better serve its purpose. But in the scenes I have analyzed here, the two official Visits give the impression that the whole event, with the exception of the setting – maybe the only exception as compared with a three-minute fictional movie located in an Alimentara – was staged. What then is its documentary value?

On the other hand, if we go back to MacCabe's observation that the documentary is not produced in the 'transparency' of reality, but is an effect located at the intersection of several social discourses, the images of the Visit cannot ignore what was public knowledge in those days, namely the fact that

in any Alimentara the display cases were virtually empty at all times, and that the merchandise was placed there on the eve of the Visit, turning the event into a Potemkin-like performance! This wasn't only a 'show in praise of the Leader' but also a large-scale fraud, offensive to the entire population. This knowledge, to which all the shop attendants in the film are already privy, explains their tensioned glances, especially in those I have previously termed "the third world, eloquently quiet": the boy in one of the shots looks like he can barely contain his anger. This was, perhaps, the true role of the Securitate officer glued to the Leader: to prevent – through looks, gestures and sheer display of power – any such outbursts that might have 'ruined' the show and 'exposed' the social edifice.

Was Ceaușescu aware of all this? There is no doubt about that, but the whole performance was meant, as I have said above, to reinforce the Potemkiniad: the only way to maintain his power was to make the *display* of power all-pervasive, a giant show in which everyone had a part to play. We witness here a strange phenomenon: the persistent pretense to reality of a staged performance turns it real! Through simple repetition, fiction becomes hyperreality. This, let's not forget, recalls not only the story of the cardboard villages devised by Prince Potemkin, the favorite of Queen Catherine II of Russia, but also the postmodernist models of Baudrillard[7] or Groys. Or, to a wider degree, they are reminiscent of the fictional films themselves, that we perceive, while watching them, willy-nilly, *as* reality.

The documentary's official testimony consequently bears the traces of its own falsity, of the fact that what is being filmed is not reality, but a staged performance. Did the cameraman plan on introducing this ambiguity into his film, or did he not actually have a choice, since ambiguity was constitutive of the event itself? While, put like this, the question can hardly hope to receive a definitive answer, its relevance grows considerably when we address it not to the original cameraman but to Andrei Ujică, who authored the montage. (The editing is visible even in the three-minute footage I have analyzed, as some scenes end abruptly, not at their logical endpoint). Without being able to prove my argument at this point, in the absence of the original scenes to be compared with Ujică's selection and montage, I would nonetheless advance the hypothesis that these operations transform Ujică's film into a *meta-documentary*, if I may call it so, and that, at *this* particular level, the role of the traces, of the illocutionary devices, from indirect acts to multi-qualifiable acts, is obvious. What was implicit in the various scenes at the beginning becomes explicit at the level of the entire film. Ujică shows, through this very radicalization, that the images with and about Ceaușescu are *self-denouncing* as fabricated, they are images of the reality deconstructing themselves into hyperreal images, images of a show that only mimics reality.

At the broadest level, I believe that the interest of this unusual film lies *also* in its highlighting of the extremely complicated relationships that film – any film – can have with reality, at least in the field generically known nowadays as 'new realism.' This kind of film not only presents itself as realistic, but at the same time it deconstructs its own mechanisms. If, based on Stanley Cavell, Daniel Morgan was interested not (only) in the information provided by a film (*knowledge*), but (also) in what we are doing with this information (*acknowledge*), then we can use his words to state that, watching Ujică's film, we need to discover "what it takes the fact of the film to be – and whether that involves doing something with the knowledge of its ontological foundation." Following this line, I believe that we should understand from *Autobiografia lui Nicolae Ceaușescu* not only that the documentaries of the time were false – which is a commonplace affirmation – but also that the communist reality, due to the very fact of being represented to the public, was a type of self-destructive propaganda, one that simultaneously constructed and deconstructed itself. If this is true for the most servile documentaries of the era, it must have been even more so in highbrow literature and arts. We have always looked at the latter, and we still do so now, as semi-propaganda, partly redeemed by ingenious 'covert statements.' But maybe we should change our view: it was not the 'covert statements' that threatened or

redeemed it; the discourse itself was already falling apart, right when it seemed triumphant, because of its incoherence and its internal contradictions, undesired but unavoidable. Propaganda, however, and the intricate web of the cultural interests at the time, always restarted the engine.

This socio-political evaluation of the matter cannot replace an ontological perspective. The former is concerned specifically with Ceaușescu's 'reign', the latter takes into account man as such. To take this perspective does not mean that we should find excuses for or minimize the Dictator's stagings, but merely that we must bear in mind the limits of (realist) film in general. The fact that it is realistic does not necessarily make it true, as Goodman pointed out: an image of reality, in its most seductive form, can be ontologically uncertain, even deceptive. Reality can be slippery, elusive; it vanishes even from the images that are supposed to represent it. Film, perhaps more than any other art form, and precisely because it is so realistic, captures in images the fact that reality is simultaneously being built and deconstructed before our very eyes. Endlessly.

NOTES

1. *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* appeared posthumously, between 1958 and 1962, in four volumes, with an abridged Romanian translation published in 1968 by Meridiane Publishing House. The American version, *What is Cinema?*, was published between 1967 and 1971 by the University of California Press, Berkeley. An article on photography giving a similar definition of realism, and considered by many a typical error, appeared in the same volume. "The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it" ("The ontology of the photographic image," in: *The Philosophy of the Visual Arts*, ed. Philip Alperson, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 277-280). The quote can be found on p. 279. As far as I know, the critique of this article was not subsequently re-discussed.
2. The French translation includes two chapters of the English original; see *On Mind and Other Matters*.
3. Most television critics underline the distance, if not worse, between the information on TV and reality. Television no longer informs about what is happening, because this is not the important thing; the important thing is what others think about it: "Massenmedien berichten nicht, was geschieht, sondern was andere für wichtig halten. Sie beziehen sich in erster Linie nicht auf die Welt, sondern auf sich selbst" (Bolz 46).
4. In *Expression and Meaning*, Searle revises his opinion as expressed in his first book, *Speech Acts*, and admits the so-called indirect speech act, where "the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer" (31-32).
5. See MacCabe.
6. See Alexandrescu 119-61.
7. "The image is interesting not only in its role as reflection, mirror, representation of, or counterpart to, the real, but also when it begins to contaminate reality and to model it, when it only conforms to reality the better to distort it, or better still: when it appropriates reality for its own ends, when it anticipates it to the point that the real no longer has time to be produced as such" (Baudrillard 182-83).

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Ethics Is the New Aesthetics: Comic Ironic Modes in New Romanian Cinema

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Abstract

This article is continuation of the study on the role of irony in New Romanian Cinema (NRC), entitled *The New Romanian Cinema Between the Tragic and the Ironic* by the same author in collaboration with Dana Duma (*Film International,* Intellect UK, 10 (1), 2012, 7-21). It now looks at the proximity of the tragic 'inevitable irony' of the NRC realism to the comedic irony of savage black humour, surrealism and the absurd. First, it looks at the tenuous border between the tragic and the comedic ironic modes through a brief comparison between Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu,* Romania, 2005), and Călin Peter Netzer's *Medal of Honor (Medalia de onoare*, Romania, 2009). Secondly, it scrutinizes Radu Jude's *Everybody in Our Family* (*Toată lumea din familia noastră*, Romania/ Netherlands, 2012) as a prime example of dark ironic comedy within the context of NRC, spilling into surrealist irony and black humour of films like Puiu's *Aurora* (Romania, 2010) and Gabriel Achim's *Adalbert's Dream (Visul lui Adalbert*, Romania, 2011). Then the article moves towards the lighter end of the comic irony, which is concerned primarily with social ills, by comparing and contrasting Tudor Giurgiu's *Of Snails and Men* (*Despre oameni şi melci*, Romania, 2012) to Mircea Daneliuc's *The Snails' Senator* (*Senatorul melcilor*, 1995). And finally, the article concludes with a look at another off-shoot of the lighter ironic comedy, Corneliu Porumboiu's *Police, Adjective (Poliţist, adjectiv*, Romania, 2009), featuring a character who, although failing the typical comic reintegration, appears wiser than the rejecting society. Designed to subvert certainties, endorsed by government and elitist discourses, or by traditionalist and mainstream ones, the NRC ironic comedic modes demystify on an immediate socio- political level the power dynamics in Romanian postcommunist society by exposing its absurdities. On an existential level, however, the various ironic strategies challenge the certainties of the human condition by 'unmasking' its universally unsettling ambiguities, which has contributed immensely to the international successes of the New Romanian Cinema.

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Christina Stojanova

Irony irritates us because it denies us our certainties by unmasking the world as ambiguity.

Milan Kundera

Irony indicates saying (or showing) as little as possible and meaning as much as possible … [thereby] relying on complete objectivity and suppression of all moral judgements.

Northrop Frye (40)

In a previous study on the role of irony in New Romanian Cinema (NRC), entitled *The New Romanian Cinema Between the Tragic and the Ironic*, we referred to the proximity – indeed, interchangeability – of the NRC realism with the tragic and the ironic, which 'sometimes, as in Corneliu Porumboiu's and Radu Jude's films,' colludes with the comedic 'by balancing on the verge of dead-pan black humour, suspense and existential angst' and even absurdity (Stojanova, Duma 2012:14). In light of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* the article focused on the restricted ability of selected NRC protagonists to 'act vis-à-vis their environment (or society),' and concluded that their plight for social inclusion is overwhelmingly relegated to that of *alazons* (or impostors) and even worse – to *pharmakoi* (or scapegoats) – types of character, separated from society and representative of what Frye calls 'tragic ironic modes' (qtd in Stojanova, Duma 2012:13). It is in this 'peculiar narrative space' located between the 'opposite poles' of the 'inevitable irony' of the Nietzschean 'human, all too human' and the 'incongruous irony of human life… whose archetype is Christ, the perfectly innocent victim, excluded from society', where most of the NRC heroes and anti-heroes are to be found (qtd in Stojanova, Duma 2012: 14). Gravitating mostly towards 'the pole of inevitable irony,' their fate – like that of their champion Joseph K, the hero of Kafka's *Trial* – is 'not the result of what they have done, but the end of what they are' (qtd in Stojanova, Duma 2012: 14).

Yet in their complexity, the NRC characters are not only *pharmakoi*[1] and *alazons*[2], plainly rejected by society, they are also self-deprecating *eirons*,[3] boastful *miles gloriosa*,[4] or 'clever, likeable but unprincipled' *picaros*[5] eager to (re)integrate into society, typical of what Frye calls comic ironic modes, and even combinations of both (Frye 1990: 45). Thus depending on the mode, one and the same type of character could be cast as either tragically or comically ironic *pharmakos*; and the tragically ironic *alazon* is as easily transformed into a comic *miles gloriosus* as in *picaro*. For, while the ironic tragedy emphasizes how the helpless victim endures the pain, undeservedly inflicted on him or her by society, and in the process solicits more pity than fear, at its lower end dark ironic comedy borders with savagery as it focuses on the various ways of 'inflicting pain on a helpless victim,' thus in its extreme forms evoking more cruel ridicule rather than sympathy (Frye 1990: 45). Towards its lighter end, ironic comedy shifts its focus more towards society than on character and derides it as corrupt and snobbish, or could even feature a protagonist, who fails or shuns the usual comedic reintegration because he or she proves to be much wiser than the society at hand.

It is to the proximity of the tragic 'inevitable irony' of the NRC realism to the comedic irony of savage black humour, surrealism and absurdity that this essay now turns. First, it looks at the tenuous border between the tragic and the comedic ironic modes through a brief comparison between Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*, Romania, 2005) and Călin Peter Netzer's *Medal of Honor (Medalia de onoare*, Romania, 2009). Secondly, it scrutinizes Radu Jude's *Everybody in Our Family* (*Toată lumea din familia noastră*, Romania/Netherlands, 2012) as a prime example of dark ironic comedy within the context of NRC, spilling into surrealist irony and black humour of films like Puiu's *Aurora* (Romania, 2010) and Gabriel Achim's *Adalbert's Dream (Visul lui Adalbert*, Romania, 2011). Then the essay moves towards the lighter end of the comic irony, which is concerned primarily with social ills, by comparing and contrasting Tudor Giurgiu's *Of Snails and Men* (*Despre oameni și melci*, Romania, 2012) to Mircea Daneliuc's *The Snails' Senator* (*Senatorul melcilor*, 1995). And finally, the essay concludes with a look at another off-shoot of the lighter ironic comedy, Corneliu Porumboiu's *Police, Adjective (Polițist, adjectiv*, Romania, 2009), featuring a character who, although failing the typical comic reintegration, appears wiser than the rejecting society.

AT THE CROSSROAD OF IRONIC MODES

The protagonist of *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* is a typical *pharmakos*, whose abilities to act are restricted by his age and infirmity, and his isolation from society ultimately causes his death. And yet the genre of the film is defined by its English-language trailer as a 'black comedy' not only for marketing purposes. The viewer moves from the playful mirth – solicited by the protagonist's early antics and jokes, as well as by his pompous name, Dante Lăzărescu, ironically suggesting resilience in death and afterlife – to the escalation of his misadventures culminating in his death. Mr. Lăzărescu's descent into the hell of the Bucharest hospital system exposes the 'incongruous irony' of a 'perfectly innocent' character's victimization by the very institutions that are meant to help him, thus arousing the viewer's scornful sneer at these institutions, but also enhances the pity for Mr. Lăzărescu's tragic lot.

In *Medal of Honour*, the viewer is positioned to follow a similar empathic curve, but in a much lighter manner since the hilarity, stemming from the intertwined personal and public ironic discourses, does not end in death and is therefore transformed into sympathy towards this temperate *miles gloriosus*. The year is 1995, and the protagonist Ion Ion – a retired accountant whose wife has been giving him the silent treatment since it became known he had prevented his only son, now a successful doctor in Canada, from leaving the country clandestinely by informing the communist police – is awarded a medal by the Ministry of Defence. Aware of his brief and far from heroic participation in the second phase of WWII (23 Aug., 1944-9 May, 1945), when Romania fought against the Germans, Ion Ion embarks on a quest for the reasons of this awarding, only to discover that it was meant for a namesake, who actually fought on the side of Germans during the initial phase of the war (22 June, 1941-23 Aug., 1944). Thanks to the protagonist's hilariously resourceful *demarches*, the original recipient renounces the medal and – along with a number of ageing former officers of dubious political allegiances, kept under wraps during communism (including a member of the notoriously nationalist and anti-Semitic Iron Guard) – our hero is awarded the medal at a ceremony, presided by then President Ion Iliescu who (in a self-reflexive ironic twist) plays himself in the film. However Ion Ion's guilt in appropriating another man's distinction and the moral perks that go with it, pale in comparison to the ensuing sadistic vengeance with which the Ministry's bureaucratic machine punishes him. By brutally sequestering the medal which, as the Ministry secretary says, he 'should have taciturnly kept instead of making all this fuss,' the postcommunist Romanian institutions – not unlike the Bucharest hospitals in *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* – emerge as the site of one of the most terrible ironies known to art, that of the inordinate callousness of a society towards a harmless simpleton, who only wants to impress his wife

and win back his son's respect. The last episode features Ion Ion, decorated with a medal he had just bought from a pawn shop, finally taking his place at the Christmas dinner table next to his son and his Canadian family. Instead of exuding pride and joy, however, he bursts into tears of guilt, shame and humiliation. The minimalistic imagery and editing, compounded by the ascetic interpretation of Victor Rebengiuc – one of the best Romanian actors from the older generation – throw in high relief the ironic split between the subjects of sympathy and ridicule, and their resolution into the melodramatic pathos of the finale as a powerful form of social criticism.

THE DARK IRONIC COMEDY: CHARACTERS AGAINST CIRCUMSTANCES

Building on Aristotelian ironic tradition, defined as a punctual communicative mechanism wherein we say one thing to infer another, in her exhaustive study of irony Linda Hutcheon approximates M.M. Bakhtin's school of dialogism, namely V. N. Voloshinov's understanding that irony is an 'encounter in one voice of two incarnate value judgements and their interference with one another'; a way of 'speaking by contraries', or by contradiction (qtd in Haynes 2006: 26). In this 'superimposition or rubbing together of meanings,' Hutcheon writes (19), irony 'comes into being in the interactions between said and unsaid, but also between intention and interpretation, as well as between verbal and visual sign system' (178). It is this rubbing together of contradictory meanings that is intrinsically related to emotional investment, or what Hutcheon calls 'affective charge,' with lesser contradictions producing minimal affective charge and greater contradictions – maximal. Based on this assumption, Hutcheon has drafted a table of 'the nine functions of irony,' ranging 'from the most benign in tone and inferred motivation' to the 'contentious zones,' where irony becomes a 'strategy of provocation and polemics' (Hutcheon 1995: 46-7). Moreover, as 'discursive strategy,' irony, like humour in general, has 'a lot to do with power and dominant discourses' (Hutcheon 1995: 17), whether ideological, social, cultural, or aesthetic. Yet irony seeks not only to reverse power dynamics as some theoreticians of irony and black humour have it (Erickson 1988: 201), but rather to blur (or trans-ideologise) it by 'denying us our certainties by unmasking the world as ambiguity' (qtd in Hutcheon 1995: 15).

In light of this, both *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* and *Medal of Honour* feature irony of the 'more benign in tone' kind, where antagonistic ironic contradictions are resolved, respectively, either in the death of the protagonist or in his child-like helplessness, typical for melodrama. *Everybody in Our Family*, however, represents a more extreme form of ironic comedy, crossing into the territory of the savagery, rife with unsolvable contradictions, where the protagonist externalizes his own hang-ups on those closest to him, using his projections as an excuse for his erratic behaviour. The film follows closely Marius (Şerban Pavlu), a divorced thirty-something man, throughout a single day by the end of which he – not unlike Emilian from *Principles of Life (Principii de viaţă,* Constantin Popescu, Romania, 2010) – would see his life in tatters after having totally failed as a father and a human being. Like Emilian, Marius is an arrogant, self-deceiving *alazon,* who believes he deserves more than he actually gets from life. An exaggerated version of this obviously common human type for NRC is Viorel from *Aurora*. This three hours plus quasi-documentary patiently follows in painstakingly long takes a day in the life of its sociopathic protagonist Viorel. Rejected by but also rejecting society, Viorel makes no attempts to re-integrate because he lives in a parallel universe, where it is all right to kill four people out of desperation or in revenge for his divorce. Puiu's deadpan parody of the sensationalist Hollywood rendition of serial killers is among the finest examples of ironic comedy verging on surreal absurdity, but it is also a profound psycho-social commentary on the endemic frustration of divorced men, separated from their children. In a way, Marius' introversion and belligerent defeatism brings him closer to Viorel rather than to the extroverted and successful businessman Emilian.

The highly charged 'oppositional' or 'assailing ironic function' (Hutcheon 1995: 47) here works on two levels – personal and social. In the former case, it stems from the widening gap between Marius' image of himself and his actual behaviour, which gradually descends into verbal and physical violence. Such a 'semantic splitting' is also indicative of 'wider social traumas' (Haynes 2006: 27). In Marius' case, the 'wider social trauma' is the post-communist crisis of masculinity, precipitated mainly by the economic crisis, but also by the advent of western ideas as part of the new dominant political and social discourse. Trying to make sense of Romanian post-communist gender issues through the prism of western feminist theories, Shannon Woodcock – an Australian scholar living and working in Bucharest – notes that

> [E]lite (government and intellectual) support for the discourses of the European Union thus stands in tension with the post-communist mainstream project of defining gender through "traditional" values as constructed in the Romanian patriarchal matrix (2007: 154).

In other words, Eastern European elites in general – and Romanian in particular – have recommended that Eastern European males abandon summarily their patriarchal attitudes, formed over hundreds of years, and embrace the new and machismo-free western ideas almost overnight. Since this is a task few of them could or want to manage, the overwhelming majority of males stubbornly insist on perpetuating the traditional status quo as a matter of principle. It is this clash between the officially espoused elitist discourse of 'political correctness' and the factual situation on the ground, so to speak, which represents the 'semantic splitting' on an overarching social level and which predicates the acerbic social satire and black humour of *Everybody in Our Family.*

Other markers of 'semantic splitting,' pointing to even more endemic post-communist 'social traumas' – unemployment and underemployment, parents-adult children co-dependence, unravelling of familial bonds – are inferred to, verbally or visually, from the moment the badly hung-over Marius, on his way to pick up his five-year old daughter Sofia for a weekend at the seaside, drops at his parents' place to borrow their car for the trip. The usual rowdy jokes between father and son quickly degenerate into a full-blown argument about Marius' ex-wife Otilia. And while Marius is trying to defend his divorce arrangements as mutually accommodating and 'civilized,' his father, being the unreformed domestic tyrant he is, without mincing words accuses Otilia of making a fool of his son by using Sofia, and worse, thus shaking Marius' already low self-esteem. When he finally gets to Sofia, he finds her still sleeping, jet-lagged and, as both her grandmother and step-father Aurel (Gabriel Spahiu) insist, feverish. Regardless of whether her indisposition is real or, as Marius suspects, just an excuse drummed

Everybody in Our Family (2011) directed by Radu Jude (stills)

up by her mother to frustrate him again, it becomes increasingly clear that dragging the child out of town after she has just returned from a vacation abroad is not a good idea. Yet, instead of amending his plans accordingly, Marius, already overwhelmed by conflicting emotions, aroused by his father's earlier harangue and the jealous realization that Sofia is drifting away from him, stubbornly insists that they leave. He seems to have come to regard any compromise through his father's eyes as an un-manly weakness, so when Otilia (Mihaela Sîrbu) finally returns, the hell has already broken loose! Minutes after Marius has recited affectionate haikus, brought flowers to the grandmother, and generously declared to Sofia that 'everybody in our family will go to Heaven' since all of them – including Aurel and Otilia (but excluding 'an' uncle) – are really good people, he accidentally whacks Aurel's head against the front door, when the latter tries to prevent him from taking the girl on the road. And although Aurel has only suffered a minor bruise, Otilia's animosity for Marius is so great that instead of talking things through with him and Aurel, she calls the police to report domestic violence. The irony here is that, since Romania joined the EU in 2007, extraordinary attention has been 'focused on gendered violence in the private sphere' by both scholars and the authorities which, in Woodcock's view, forcefully 'reflects the assumption that the place of women is at home,' thus perpetuating the patriarchal discourse instead of tempering it (154). Yet, despite of Otilia's expectations, the authorities' prompt response only exacerbates the situation for Marius, angered by her refusal to withdraw the complaint and anxious about the inevitable legal consequences of the call, is pushed into another round of escalating aggression which – staged like an indie horror movie in its surreal mixture of the hilarious and the scary – culminates in gagging and tying together Otilia and Aurel.

In this 'theatre of cruelty' as Artaud once called situations evoking black humour, Grandmother and Granddaughter are denied the privilege of distance, enjoyed by the film viewers, for whom the unfolding events are ridiculous rather than piteous for, as André Breton had it, black humour is the 'mortal enemy of sentimentality' (qtd in Haynes 2006: 27). And yet, disturbingly, most of the abusive action happens in front of Sofia whom, at his lowest moment, Marius asks to stand witness to his foul-mouthed accusations against her mother and Aurel.[6] Unlike *The Happiest Girl in the World / Cea mai fericită fată din lume* (Netherlands/Romania/France/Japan, 2009), where only the eponymous girl enjoyed some semblance of Jude's empathy, here both Sofia (in the amazingly mature interpretation of little Sofia Nicolaescu) and the grandmother (Tamara Buciuceanu-Botez) are seen as endearing victims – or *pharmakoi* – who due to their helplessness are totally isolated from society and left on the mercy of three egoistic adults, blinded by power struggle and trampling irresponsibly on each other's feelings.

Indeed, as another theorist of irony and black humour has it, 'with the immediate comedic impact' of the characters' actions, there also emerges a 'countervailing, aesthetic seriousness that interferes with and comments upon the very conditions' of the hilarity produced' (Haynes, 2006: 27). It is this 'aesthetic seriousness' that helps Pavlu, Sîrbu and Spahiu to bring into focus the ironic clash of growing contradictions between what their characters believe themselves to be in the context of enlightened western gender discourses and what they actually are, thus subverting or trans-ideologising these discourses.

In *The Happiest Girl* Pavlu appeared as the Director of the commercial, sponsored by the orange juice company, which featured their lottery prize winner – the 'happiest girl' – sitting in her newly won car and ingesting even more juice. Despite his relatively small role, Pavlu was able to prove his mastery over such incongruous sentiments as aggression and vulnerability, posturing and low self-esteem, and paint his character as an up-startish *alazon*, eager to be recognized as a seasoned film auteur, who scoffs at commercials, yet stoops to the sponsors' whims at the expense of his crew and especially of his non-professional actress, the 'happiest girl.' As Marius, Pavlu has had the very

rare opportunity to pursue the widest possible register of human emotions, ranging from his heart-wrenching tenderness for Sofia and desperate last ditch attempts to reclaim Otilia's love or at least her sympathy, to the lowest pit of emotive and physical cruelty towards Otilia and Aurel. It is Pavlu's acting that keeps Marius at the precarious edge between the naturalistically authentic representation of a frustrated ex-husband and an exaggerated caricature thereof. His derisively humiliating escape through the bathroom window with a bleeding head offers no closure to the film, only the dark certainty that this would not be the last of his troubles.

Mihaela Sîrbu, just fresh from her breakthrough role in Lucian Georgescu's *Fantom Father* (*Tatăl fantomă*, Romania, 2011), sustains her part of the reticent, passive-aggressive Otilia in a carefully balanced contrast to Pavlu's explosive temperament, making their marital incompatibility painfully obvious. The irony of her 'semantic splitting' is that, on one hand, she considers herself an emancipated woman, capable of taking care of her mother and daughter on her own but, on the other, indulges her quite conservative desire to rule over a submissive husband, who bends over backwards at her will. Otilia's is, or aspiring to be, what Woodcock calls the Romanian 'super woman' – that is, a woman, who in accordance with the older models of 'ideal feminine subject,' both 'fulfils her role of sexual object' being 'feminine (beautiful, reproductive),' and is also 'successful in the public sphere as a career woman' (Woodcock 2007: 156). Otilia's family arrangement is actually representative of many a post-communist woman's understanding of western feminist ideas – not as a form of enlightened equality which takes the gender relations to a higher new level, but as a simple reversal of the power dynamics with women now ruling over men with the help of law enforcement, if necessary. Which happens to be traditional men's worst nightmare, thus sealing the impasse of the gender wars.

In this light Gabriel Spahiu as the ostensibly timid Aurel, deserves special attention. In addition to providing an extreme – and thus ironic – narrative contrast to Marius, he is an example of an adaptable self-transformation of traditional machismo into its opposite, but equally unpleasant variety – a domesticated meek creature of neutral gender, at perennial disposal of the women in the house, spineless and soulless. Or is he? For when Marius attacks him with the cork-screw in the kitchen, at first Aurel takes it in silence, but once taped and gagged, he starts screaming at Otilia, blaming the family showdown on her in even more foul – and surprisingly audible despite the gag – language than Marius, thus revealing the true colours of his opportunistic self.

It is hard to imagine another actor in this role but Saphiu, the NRC's superb master of the dead-pan humour and the double *entendre* – it is enough to recall him as the maladroit and fatalistic safety instructor Iulică Ploscaru in *Adalbert's Dream*. A veritable *eiron* – a character, who has given irony its name because of his understated and self-deprecating persona who is also the agent of the happy ending in comedy or catalyst of the tragic catastrophe in tragedy – Ploscaru is trying really hard to stay integrated within his almost surreal social circumstances, not to mention the general absurdity of late Romanian communism, which include a loving wife, children, an eccentric mistress and a boss, who treats him as an errand boy. Predictably for a NCR film, *Adalbert's Dream* covers a day in Ploscaru's life, and a special one at that he has been long preparing for. As part of the factory celebration of the 65th anniversary of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR), Ploscaru is invited to show two of his amateur 16 mm shorts on labour safety side by side with congratulatory speeches and songs. Before that, his chaotic itinerary takes him through all kinds of activities, including taking his boss' mother to the doctor. The film is surprisingly authentic in reproducing in details not only the fashions and the look of the last Ceaușescu's years, but also the attitudes and the extant discourses, which are so severely restricted by ubiquitous eavesdropping and informing that all Ploscaru and his colleagues feel comfortable talking about is his bad dream about a fox, and Romania's 1980s goalie Duckadam. Even his ownership of a precious VCR is ideologically suspicious due to its subversive potential to

play western films. Ploscaru however uses it shrewdly as a parallel currency in exchange for scarce goods and services, pretty much like Kent cigarettes were used at that time.

The real story of communist censorship and propaganda, which Frye calls 'major arts of the ironic age,' and the fear of repression that made them unusually effective, is to be gleaned from the juxtaposition of Ploscaru's title instructional film – a shaky amateur rendition in the style of the offensively didactic Socialist Realism, the officially prescribed communist aesthetics – to the main narrative (Frye 1990: 47). In a macabre turn of events, worthy of Ionesco, the worker Ploscaru has asked on a side to make him some souvenir knives for a pay, shuns the celebration to work on these, but cuts off his hand in the process. This episode exposes the mechanism of totalitarianism by foregrounding the blatant contradiction between what Ploscaru propagates officially as a safety instructor and his actions, which have precipitated the accident at one degree of separation. It is this ubiquitous clash between official discourses and reality, or superimposition of contradictory meanings, which Hutcheon calls the 'transgressive' and 'subversive' aspects of 'oppositional' irony (47). The conclusive episode, where Ploscaru is asked to participate in a re-enactment of the accident so it could be used for future safety references, is a chilling parody of Lucian Pintilie's *Reconstruction/ Reenactment* (*Reconstituirea*, Romania, 1968). Needless to say, in his artistic zeal to make things look more authentic, Ploscaru is injured during the shoot, thus justifying the premonitions of his bad dream.

THE LIGHT IRONIC COMEDY: CIRCUMSTANCES AGAINST CHARACTERS

The ironic modes – both tragic and comic – define not only how the NRC characters fare within a society that mostly rejects them, is indifferent or only accepts them grudgingly, but also grasp the absurdities of post-communist – and in a few films, the late communist – society, which defy and even deconstruct the NRC emblematic 'slice of life' narratives. Yet while in comedies the focus is by (Aristotelian) definition on successful social integration, the NRC ironic comedies – as has been proven so far in this essay – tend to subvert this proposition since they pay closer attention to the social, political and economic merit of the circumstances into which the characters wish but are unable to integrate. A good case to point is the ironic take on the post-communist reality in Cristi Puiu's first film, *Stuff and Dough (Marfa și banii*, Romania, 2001), where the so much desired integration of the accidental teenage drug traffickers into the brave new world of criminality and easy money teeters on the verge of farce with its ridiculously ominous coincidences and delays, frustrating their integration. And yet, paradoxically, preserves not only their moral integrity but also their lives, which disrupts the inherent value judgements on social isolation as negative and social integration as positive.

The Snails' Senator and *Of Snails and Men*, discussed below, pay particularly meticulous attention to the preoccupations, fears and myths, percolating within their characters' immediate environment. Thus they engage with the political and cultural discourses – elitist, official or mainstream – which inform that environment. And while in the former film a 'more intense irony is achieved when the humorous society simply disintegrates without anything taking its place as frequently happens in Chekhov,' the latter – as is typical of the 'most ironic phase of comedy' – sees its unworthy society 'triumphant or undefeated' (Frye 1990: 176, 177).

Of Snails and Men is both a pastiche of and a tribute to Daneliuc's *The Snails' Senator*, interwoven with romantic comedy, and as such employs functions of benign irony and humour, which Hutcheon calls 'complicating' and 'ludic,' where the contradiction between the superimposed meanings is small. Daneliuc's film, on the other hand, treads dangerously in the contentious zone of the highly charged 'oppositional' and 'assailing' functions, where the ironic clash of contraries results in caustic satire and black humour. Undeniably, the discursive community of viewers that had partaken into the meaning creation of *The Snails' Senator* has been replaced by a new one, from whose vantage point circa

2012 – due to the painfully protracted 'transitional' period to democracy and market economy – the immediate post-communist aftermath looks either like a paradise lost, or – because of the generational gap – as time immemorial. This explains why a number of Eastern European films looking back at the late 1980s and early 90s have turned with nostalgia and playfully ambiguous irony to the events from that time, as evidenced by the so-called *ostalgic* trend in German and post-Yugoslavian arts and popular culture and by such NRC films as Cătălin Mitulescu's *How I Spent the End of the World* (*Cum mi-am petrecut sfârșitul lumii*, Romania, 2006) and the omnibus *Tales from the Golden Age* (*Amintiri din epoca de aur*, Romania/France, 2009).

A brief discussion of narrative tropes and symbols, common to both *The Senator's Snails* and *Of Snails and Men*, reveals the mechanism through which their very different ironic approaches operate. The casting of Dorel Vişan as an archetypally opportunistic apparatchik in both films is an intriguing entry point to the analysis. In Daneliuc's film Vişan plays the title Senator Vârtosu, who arrives in the provinces for a ribbon-cutting inauguration of a new hydro-electric dam. A former communist boss turned *nouveau riche*, the Senator has summarily traded his allegiance to the all-powerful communist party for allegiance (or rather lip-service) to such newly-minted, politically correct dominant discourses as democracy, free market, ethnic and gender equality. His unreformed hedonistic nature, however, plays a bad trick on him – and on the whole local village, for that matter. Thus his exotic desire to have local snails for dinner at which he would also indulge the Swiss TV crew that happens to be staying at the same picturesque retreat, becomes a catalyst for the ensuing nightmarish events, violating just about any of Romania's newly-embraced human rights commitments. And when the villagers are herded up the hills *en masse* by the local authorities to collect snails, a young teacher is raped by two Roma boys (or by two Tzigani, as the pre-EU discourse had it), and a man dies after being knifed from behind – a death that might or might not be caused by the Roma boys. As a result, the village descends into a fiery murderous mayhem, avidly filmed by the otherwise indifferent Swiss crew. The rubbing of contradictions here creates transgressive and destructive irony on all level since most of what is said is promptly questioned by what is shown. Indeed, as Woodcock writes, 'accession to the EU requires a series of economic, judicial, and social reforms, but while the necessities for equal opportunities' have been reflected in the respective official documents, very little has been done by these same officials to help eradicate the endemic grass-root ethnic tensions (152).

Of Snails and Men (2012) directed by Tudor Giurgiu (stills)

Police, Adjective (2009)
by Corneliu Porumboiu (still)

The film ends with the Senator and the Swiss crew fleeing the chaos yet stopping for a last look at the mysterious Ark, being built on the hill-top and arousing superstitious fear and awe in the cynical Senator and his entourage. A nod to the numinous allusions of the 'incongruous irony of human life, whose archetype is Christ' (Frye), the Noah Ark serves as – even if a far-fetched – warning that the postcommunist deluge would spare no one but the likes of the maverick Ark builder, whose 'mind is governed by the Spirit' (Romans 8:7).

In Giurgiu's film, the ageing Vişan is cast as Vladimir, the director of a big plant in the provinces, who is destined to preside over its demise. Over the years, Vişan's character's archetypal virility and hedonistic panache have mellowed, but the aggressively opportunistic core of his persona has remained intact and, as it turns out, Vladimir has been fostering semi-criminal designs about the bankrupted plant, involving a couple of French businessmen who are about to arrive in town. The film, built on the irony of contrasts and contradictions, opens with Vladimir preparing a speech addressing the pending plant closure while the TV set in his office broadcasts a reportage on Michael Jackson's Bucharest leg of his 1992 Dangerous Tour. Scenes from the shoot of his music video 'Police Walk' in a Bucharest stadium with Jackson donning a Romanian police officer uniform, surrounded by thousands of extras, are followed by a reportage from his meeting with then President Iliescu – at the time, an inordinate honour for a pop-music celebrity! Sustained by the Jackson coverage both symbolically and politically, the film establishes a hilarious incongruity between the global and the local. And goes on to contrast the overarching hegemony of western entertainment industry – a symbol of the so much desired capitalist paradise – to the ubiquitous postcommunist economic crisis, encapsulated metonymically in doomed attempts to preserve the national and the classical artistic heritage: as a welcoming greeting for the French businessmen, the local school-teacher adapts Ravel's *Bolero* for melodica solo and rhythmic knocking on desks!

Vladimir's arrogant disregard of workers' needs is furthered by the French quotes from the once banned Romanian émigré thinker Emil Cioran he sprinkles his speech with, which alludes to the Francophile fever that had gripped Romanian elites from that time. By contrasting this scene with the next, where one of the workers, the handsome George, is having sex with Vladimir's secretary, the beautiful Manuela on the plant roof-top, Giurgiu introduces yet another layer of ironic hilarity which, in a truly postmodern fashion fuses social satire with the playfulness of a romantic comedy. Needless to say, casting along with Dorel Vişan such NRC stars as Andrei Vasluianu (George) and Monica Bârlădeanu (Manuela), known best for their dramatic even tragic characters – the bindly

devoted husband Aurel from *The Other Irina (Cealaltă Irina*, Andrei Gruzsniczki, Romania, 2009) and the eponymous Francesca, the equally devoted girlfriend of a weak man in Boby Păunescu's first film (Romania, 2010) – was a gamble that did pay off generously.

Vladimir's sycophant and conceited dealings with the French businessmen – strongly remindful of Senator Vârtosu's ways with the Swiss crew – constitute another intertextual level of irony. In an attempt to conceal the fact that, once sold, the plant would be closed and dismantled, Vladimir starts a rumour that the French will transform its operations in order to produce canned snails (sic!) for export. In the meanwhile Manuela – whose romantic involvement with the younger businessman Olivier progresses all the way through its triumphant resolution with a marriage proposal – informs the workers of Vladimir's true intentions. In yet another romantic twist, Olivier promises to preserve the plant as a wedding present to Manuela, and the film ends with a panoramic shot of the plant workers, herded up the hills *en masse* to collect snails for export. The sarcastic potential of the superimposition of meanings in this direct visual quote from *The Snails' Senator* cannot be underestimated. What Daneliuc saw in the early 1990s as an act of public humiliation, inflicted by arrogant powers-that-be, now looks like an acceptable solution to a serious economic impasse after two decades of worsening economy. Especially after the collapse of the back-up plan, initiated by George, according to which the workers were to collect hard currency through sperm donations and thus buy out the plant themselves. This plot-line represents another energetic level of irony, targeting simultaneously a couple of popular manifestations of Balkan machismo – its over-investment in bombastic quick-fixes and in the myth of its inordinate sexual virility. Yet it also blurs or, as Hutcheon has it, trans-ideologises these arrogant certainties with a smart narrative coda. It turns out that the clinic refuses to accept so much domestically produced sperm as the international demand privileges Danish students' sperm donations because of their higher IQs and blue eyes! The film then ends with George reclaiming his estranged wife, although – in a final ironic twist – he has just learned that his sperm was rejected as infertile and he could not have been the biological father of his beloved son.

IN WAY OF CONCLUSION: CHARACTERS OUTSIDE CIRCUMSTANCES

Corneliu Porumboiu is the NRC master of dead-pan absurdity, as amply demonstrated by his début film, *12:08 East of Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost?,* Romania, 2006) as well as by his third film, *When Evening Falls on Bucharest or Metabolism* (*Când se lasă seara peste București sau Metabolism*, Romania,

12:08 East of Bucharest (2006)
by Corneliu Porumboiu (still)

2013), which is, reportedly, a tongue-in-cheek meta-cinematic deconstruction of the so much tooted NRC realist aesthetics, revealing in less than twenty long takes the meticulous artifice that goes in staging what would later look on screen as a seamlessly realistic flow of life 'caught unawares' as Dziga Vertov famously had it.[7] It is however his second film, *Police, Adjective*, which comes closest to Frye's description of a 'very ironic comedy,' whose character fails the proverbial comedic (re)integration yet proves to be much wiser than the rejecting society :

[T]he more ironic the comedy, the more absurd the society [which is] condemned by or contrasted with, a character that we may call the plain dealer, an outspoken advocate of a kind of moral norm who has the sympathy of the audience (176).

The 'plain dealer,' who consciously bypasses social – or rather institutional – integration in the name of a 'moral norm,' is Cristi, in the understated interpretation of Dragos Bucur, one of the NRC star actors with more than a dozen serious roles since his break-through in *Stuff and Dough* and in Radu Muntean's *Furia (*Romania, 2002). Cristi is a young, reticent, plain-clothed police officer who develops scruples over making an arrest. The film dramatizes the question of fairness and justice against the background of the police institutional bureaucracy, which in itself runs counter to the mores of a society which is still heavily marred by the 'malevolent hangover from many years of a police state' (Denby 2010). While in search of evidence Cristi follows a teenage boy suspected of selling hash to his class-mates, he realizes that the boy is just a scapegoat for the corrupt law enforcers, who seize his case as an easy way to demonstrate their effectiveness, while turning a blind eye to much more serious infractions. Porumboiu devotes a lot of screen time watching Cristi tailing the boy, letting us in on the unglamourous, even humiliating aspects of the police procedural. In an interview, Porumboiu even called 'absurd time' his 'devotion to a man watching and waiting' (qtd in Denby 2010).

Shaped by low contrast lighting (overcast skies, night shots, dim interiors), the mise-en-scène of *Police, Adjective* serves as an ominous hieroglyph of Ceaușescu's era and its aftermath, consistent with its ugliness. The dehumanized (or desacralized as Eliade would have it) interiors and exteriors underscore Cristi's growing existential angst. The intensity of his inner resistance against the short-sighted (and soon to be repealed) law against drug possession and its potential to ruin the kid's life, takes over his whole being. He moves around like an automaton, wearing the same clothes day in and day out, comes home late, eats his cold supper alone and in silence, and rarely attempts to converse with his wife, whom he finds always in front of the computer – either listening to an YouTube recording of a popular love song, or watching a romantic film. Their alienation reveals the dynamics of yet another of the NRC unorthodox family pairs, challenging familiar gender stereotypes: Cristi is the sensitive one, while his wife – a philologist by profession – despite her ostensible interest in sentimental entertainment lore, is the rationalist, who feels at home in the intellectual domain of mind games. Moreover, her competency in complex linguistic terms she somewhat condescendingly explains to Cristi prefigures the humiliation he suffers at the finale.

The first part of the film is comprised by an almost hour-long, slow-paced (in)action, whose halted rhythm mirrors the pace of Cristi's awakening conscience. It however turns out to be just a long introduction to the conclusive second part – a more than 15 minutes-long episode – whose stasis underscores on narrative, aesthetic and ethical level what Hutcheon calls 'oppositional' ironic clash with the preceding procedural. Summoned by his boss who, obviously bemused by Cristi's insubordination, questions him on the literal meaning of words like 'conscience,' 'police,' 'law' as defined by Romanian dictionary, Cristi is subjected to an intellectual and moral test, whose paradigmatic importance for the NCR films discussed here, cannot be underestimated. The aesthetically risky endeavour of juxtaposing abstract text (written or pronounced) with representational images vindicates Cristi's unravelling when he is pressurized to rationalize his intuitive ethical stance, or what Kant called 'the moral law within',

during the public reading from the Romanian terminological dictionary. Cristi's 'best, truest, most generous impulses about justice' are seen 'crushed by authoritarian habits that, embedded in language, remain as strong in the new Romania as they were in the old' (Denby 2010). Indeed, the attempt to remake reality in the image of Hegel's rationality—'What is real is rational, but not everything that is rational is real'— has been the philosophical foundation of every authoritarian creative destruction, which centres on the full rationality of absolute knowledge.

And yet, Cristi does not suffer a moral defeat thanks to the ambiguity of this scene, which oscillates between biting social satire, black humour and existential desperation, thus blurring or 'trans-ideologising' the power dynamics, and soliciting an unequivocal sympathy for a 'plain dealer' who is much nobler and wiser than the rejecting society. Furthermore, being an intrinsic part of the new 'ethical aesthetics' of the NRC, the ironic strategies, deployed in *Police, Adjective* and in the other films discussed above, also blur or trans-ideologise the boundaries between the tragic and the hilarious, the particular and the universal, the local and the global (Stojanova, Duma 2012: 8). Designed to subvert certainties, endorsed by government and elitist discourses, or by traditionalist and mainstream ones, the NRC *pharmakoi, alazons, eirons* and 'plain dealers' demystify on immediate socio-political level the power dynamics in Romanian postcommunist society by exposing its absurdities. On an existential level, however, these ironic strategies challenge the certainties of the human condition by 'unmasking' its universally unsettling ambiguities, which has contributed immensely to the international successes of the New Romanian Cinema.

NOTES

1. The character in an ironic fiction who has the role of a scapegoat or arbitrarily chosen victim (Glossary to *Anatomy of Criticism*, at http://northropfrye-theanatomyofcriticism.blogspot.ca/2009/02/glossary.html)
2. A deceiving or self-deceived character in fiction, normally an object of ridicule in comedy or satire, but often the hero of a tragedy. In comedy he most frequently takes the form of a *miles gloriosus* or a pedant (Glossary to *Anatomy of Criticism*)
3. A self-deprecating or unobtrusively treated character in fiction, usually an agent of the happy ending in comedy and of the catastrophe in tragedy (Glossary to *Anatomy of Criticism*)
4. A comic version of the *alazon*, or braggart (Glossary to *Anatomy of Criticism*)
5. Yet another 'comic counterpart' to the *alazon* (Frye 1995: 45).
6. Judging from little Sofia Nicolaescu's genuine reactions, one tends to doubt whether the young actress was spared all of that mayhem and vulgarity, although such an assumption would unfairly imply that the making of the film is a bleak ironic denial of its own ethical standards, compromised in the name of its aesthetic perfection – an unthinkable compromise for a NRC film, where 'the ethics are truly the new aesthetics' (Stojanova, Duma 2012: 9).
7. See Dimitri Epidis, Toronto International Film Festival Catalog at http://tiff.net/filmsandschedules/festival/2013/wheneveningfallsonbu; Boyd van Hoeij in Hollywodd Reporter at http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/evening-falls-bucharest-metabolism-locarno-602652; Jay Weissberg in Variety at http://variety.com/2013/film/reviews/when-evening-falls-on-bucharest-or-metabolism-review-locarno-film-festival-1200577482/; David Hudson in the Locarno Festival daily Keyframe at http://www.fandor.com/blog/daily-locarno-2013-corneliu-porumboius-when-evening-falls-on-bucharest-or-metabolism

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Women, Personal Films and Colonial Intimacies

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Abstract

Recent interest in amateur cinema studies reinforces the importance of exploring the documentary merit of colonial amateur films. Their study contributes to the re-examination of imperial gender politics and also of colonial women's histories that are not necessarily evident in governmental and commercial productions such as documentaries, newsreels and feature films. This paper explores the aesthetic and ideological framework by which gender and racial colonial identities have been constructed, represented and misconstrued in two amateur (personal) film collections made in India between 1920s and 1940s. It discusses gender and racial hierarchies as shaped by specific imperial governing rules, and explores how the domestic, sexual and political identity of several women and men was confirmed or challenged within the thematic and stylistic cannons of amateur filmmaking. Visual narrative patterns are also examined to identify how, and in what circumstances, amateur filmmakers recorded British women and Indian men as vectors of colonising credos and as commodified subalterns of imperial paternalism. Finally, social conventions implied by domestic commitments, labour networks, parenthood, and political engagements form the framework for interpreting gender and racial imperial identities in colonial personal films.

Keywords

Colonial studies, anthropology, amateur film, imperial gender politics, women representation, documentary, women amateur filmmaking

One of the key visual components of British colonial culture is represented by amateur film practice, which until recently has been largely neglected in terms of its historic relevance in the construction of British imperial identity. The study of British colonial amateur films offers reliable counter-narratives to the conventional, official and commercial visual historiography of the British Empire. Most colonial

amateur filmmakers documented in great detail their travel and settlement experiences, jobs, sports, and private and official events. Moreover, recent interest in amateur cinema studies, as well as the online access to a large number of amateur films, reinforces the importance of exploring the documentary merit of this cinema practice, distribution and reception patterns. Such scholarship also contributes to the examination of particular imperial gender politics. Traditionally perceived as a predominantly male hobby, amateur filmmaking across the British Empire has also been a pastime embraced by women. The study of women amateur filmmaking practice aims to recover the historical discourses enabling new interpretations of gender and racial hierarchies within the framework of the filmmakers' cinematic vocabulary, and of their dependence on imperial visual culture and ideology – on British interwar popular representational conventions. It thus becomes possible to speak of a gendered-based visual narrative identifiable across British colonial amateur filmmaking, one validated by the thematic choices made by women amateur filmmakers and their shared visual literacy. This article charts representations of women's identities across several amateur film scenes made on 16mm by two British women filmmakers in the 1930s in India. Their films illustrate the migration of imperial female identities across diverse colonial contexts – a gender dynamic that is not necessarily evident in British interwar governmental and commercial productions such as documentaries, newsreels and feature films. The article explores issues of gender and racial hierarchies as shaped by specific imperial rule and confirmed, or challenged, by the British women's cinematic vocabulary. The case studies considered here support a comparative analysis of repetitive visual narrative patterns documenting the ways in which women's domestic, sexual and political roles had been represented in amateur films as vectors of colonising credos and/or as commodified subalterns of imperial paternalism. Social conventions such as marital commitments, education, labour networks, motherhood, holidaying and political engagements form the framework within which the migration of female imperial identities can be located and interpreted within colonial domesticity and ghettoised imperial networks and gendered visual ethnographies.

A flexible comparative methodology is employed here to allow the identification of a possible gender-based nationally and racially distinctive visual language created and developed by colonial women amateur filmmakers. The filmmakers selected for this study are Lady Eleanor Dalyell and Lady Isabella Claire Kendall. They belonged to, and represented through their activities and social affiliations, the Colonial Indian Service (I.C.S.) – the ultimate 'impartial, incorruptible and omniscient' and 'heaven born' British colonial elite in India (Ferguson 2004: 186-188). Like other women amateur filmmakers across the Empire, such as those belonging to the Australian Grail Film Group, Lady Dalyell and Lady Kendall embraced this technology-driven pastime as if it were an act of gender liberation and a step toward modern times, while their films showed the Empire from a peripheral perspective that often challenged official imperial narratives (O'Sullivan 2000). The core research for this article relies on four scenes selected from Lady Kendall's' and Lady Dalyell's personal films and which prompt renewed explorations of the aesthetic and ideological frameworks within which colonial female identities have been constructed, represented and misconstrued.[1] The Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge, holds the *Kendall Collection,* and the Bristol City Council Archive, UK, holds the *Dalyell Collection*. While the *Kendall Collection* is available online,[2] the *Dalyell Collection* can only be consulted on site at the B.C.C. archive.

COLONIAL AMATEUR FILMMAKERS AND THEIR PERSONAL FILMS

Amateur filmmaking came into existence in 1895 with Auguste and Louis Lumière's first recording of family life in their short film *Le Repas de Bébé (Feeding the Baby)*. However, some historians have suggested the official date for the birth of amateur filmmaking as 1921, the year when Marion Norris

Gleason used a 16mm Cine-Kodak prototype camera to film her ten-month-old son playing in the garden (Compton 2003). Throughout the years, amateur filmmakers experimented with various film formats including, for example, 9.5mm, 17.5mm, 70mm, Standard 8mm (1932) and Super 8mm (1965). While a vast number of amateur films were produced in various formats and with different techniques, their narratives relied mostly on the synthesis of experimental technology and personalised records of private and public events. In time, amateur filmmaking gravitated around a set of production guidelines and themes. These included often unscripted narratives, a seemingly spontaneous recording of events and activities, direct interaction with the people filmed, and the use of the film camera with rapid and abrupt variations of speed, focus and perspective. Owing to the prohibitive film stock prices and high laboratory costs, amateur film practice in Britain and across the British Empire remained for most of the first half of the twentieth century the privilege of the more affluent classes.[3] In interwar Britain, financial hardship hit amateur filmmakers and many men gave up smoking to save for a few extra film reels.[4] For instance, in the mid 1930s a two-minute reel of black and white or colour film was £24 and £35 respectively, while the average annual salary reached £5,000.[5] From the 1950s onwards, and especially after the Super 8mm film equipment became an inexpensive commodity of the post-war era, working-class amateur filmmakers started to join amateur film societies and clubs, with amateur filmmaking becoming a prevalent pastime soon to be continued by the video culture and, more recently, by the affordability of digital recording.

Amateur film practice, generally embraced as a leisure activity, combines the ludic impulse to experiment with a specific recording technology and the filmmaker's need to preserve instances of his or her life beyond the fleeting moment. Moreover, for the British amateur filmmakers who lived and worked in colonial settings amateur filmmaking was an important component of their social status rather than a simple pastime. It was a necessary investment in their self-representation that confirmed their ability to be financially and culturally in touch with modern imperial times, and thus in a position of power. Also, this was a commitment that secured their credibility and position within a specific colonial and social hierarchy. Since most British colonials' income was not always sufficient to risk an investment in the hobby of amateur filmmaking, especially when they hoped to send their children to Britain for a 'proper' education (Buettner 2004), this pastime became the prerogative of businessmen or of those enrolled in the Colonial Service and the military. Often, they made several copies of their films, which they sent as cinematographic postcards to family members and friends living across the Empire. Several missionary groups, such as the St. Joseph's Missionary Society, also chose to experiment with amateur filmmaking such that moving images documenting their work in various colonies and settlements would secure a wider audience for their fundraising campaigns organised in Britain.[6]

Interwar British amateur filmmaking evolved within the framework of the imperial popular film culture represented by the Empire Cinema genre that consisted mostly of feature films, *topicals* (news), instructional and documentary films made on the theme of the British Empire. These films benefited from an international distribution alongside governmental commissioned reportages, news about imperial immigration schemes and war propaganda films. The Empire Cinema dealt with, and promoted dominant British attitudes and popular cultural trends, and it had a significant role in confirming and strengthening British peoples' support of the imperial enterprise. Empire Cinema genre incorporates all films about the British Empire, including early production such as *Savage South Africa. Savage Attack and Repulse* (Warwick Trading Company, UK, 1899); *Attack of a China Mission. Bluejackets to the Rescue* (James Williamson, UK, 1900), and has promoted a cinematic iconography of British imperial identities built around stereotypical tropes and dominant forms of representation centred on concepts of imperial expansionism, the 'white man's burden' of interlocked duty,

self-sacrifice and destiny, the noble colonial heroes and the triumph of the English character. This film genre gained momentum during the interwar period, owing in particular to the films produced by Alexander and Zoltan Korda such as *Sanders of the River* (1935), *Elephant Boy* (1937), *The Drum* (UK, 1938) and *The Four Feathers* (UK, 1939). Throughout the 1930s, the Empire Cinema films produced on both sides of the Atlantic shared a range of thematic templates relying on the Western European white man's conquest of new territories and his allegedly civilising and altruistic ruling of indigenous peoples. Some of the interwar Empire Cinema key productions attentive to portraying British colonials as 'heaven born' with a civilising mission include, for instance, *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (Henry Hathaway, USA, 1935), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (Michael Curtiz, USA, 1936), *Gunga Din* (George Stevens, USA, 1939), and *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1947).[7] A similar ideological rhetoric is also present across most type of colonial testimonies, from diaries, letters, home movies, fiction films and, most recently, documentaries, as in the case of *The British Empire in Colour* (Stewart Binns, UK, 2002).

The illustration of British identity and imperial endeavour are also present in non-fiction films made from as early as 1911 when the Topical Budget newsreels were first produced with the sole aim to show 'traditionalist Britain what it wanted to be shown of its Empire' (McKernan 2003-12). Subjects related to monarchy, tradition and Empire were among the favourite topics covered by these newsreels with royal visits, marching troops, Empire Day celebrations, imperial exhibitions, and princely tours of the Dominions as key themes. These films promoted British imperial identity worldwide on the grounds of British national pride and its civilising superiority, preserved a Britain-centralised colonial perspective and promoted the ideological lineage of Victorian imperial credos, a visual and thematic rhetoric that was challenged only after the Second World War and the beginning of decolonisation. Due to the wide distribution of Empire Cinema productions it is possible to argue that most colonial amateur filmmakers would have been familiar with such films. Moreover, a detailed analysis of their films reveals that they had often emulated themes and filming styles common to imperial feature films and non-fiction productions. This thematic *mirroring* has been also highlighted by recent TV productions such as *Echoes of the Raj* (Catherine Clay, UK, 2000), *The British Empire in Colour* (Stewart Binns, UK, 2002), *Empire: How Britain made the Modern World* (Channel 4, UK, 2003) or *Lost World of the Raj* (Marion Milne, UK, 2007) in which have been incorporated excerpts from colonial amateur films for their alleged illustration of British imperial culture. As a result, scenes from colonial amateur films are often misused as thematically tautological fillers rather than primary visual sources able to challenge historiographies of British imperial traditions and identities.[8]

Investigating British imperial identities across colonial amateur films usually focuses on the identification and analysis of three major thematic strands: social, political and ethnographic. The former theme, with family-related topics, is generally the canvas for the other two; the political theme covers official events and ceremonies, and the ethnographic theme becomes apparent in scenes that show indigenous peoples and cultures. Most interwar colonial amateur films offer images of what one was expected to be, of how he or she had to behave according to his or her imperial status and social network. Although it is impossible to define a prescribed gender-based thematic framework, there is nevertheless a distinctive set of topics that appears to have been preferred by women across various colonial contexts. This thematic division was typically determined by their given social contexts rather than by their gendered-based preferences. While women filmed their immediate and often socially claustrophobic world of homebound activities, children, pets, servants, and leisure activities shared with other British female companions, men filmed topics informing their administrative work, entrepreneurial and military activities, travels, sports, cars, railways, factories, and industrial and agricultural infrastructures. On rare occasions, the gendered perspective informing recordings

of domestic versus public spheres, corresponding to feminine versus masculine worlds, are inverted. For instance, Lady Dalyell filmed her husband's travels across the North West Frontier Province, his meetings with frontier tribal chieftains and Indian nomad communities, military parades, official meetings, and traditional Muslim and Hindu religious ceremonies. Also, she filmed the dance of emancipated slaves outside the British Agency during the Id al Fitr festivities in Manama, Bahrain, on 20 January 1934, and rare instances of Arab traditional Khaliji (Gulf-style dances) alongside ceremonial rituals performed by Arab women wearing *thawb nashals* during the wedding festivities of one of the Sheikh of Bahrain' sons, in April 1934. Access to the latter event was granted on her gender basis only and not on colonial or racial authority. These records locate Lady Dalyell's amateur filmmaking within the network formed by British women amateur filmmakers like Ursula Graham Bower, Beatrice Blackwood, Eileen Healey and Antoinette and Diana Powell-Cotton, who were creating in the 1930s new gendered visual literacies through their ethnographic field work at a time when the 'discovery' of new cultures and peoples was almost exclusively a male prerogative, and the relevance of visual records such as photographs and films to anthropological studies had not been yet acknowledged (Mead 1953, 1970). From this perspective, colonial women's interest in amateur filmmaking was an expression of their changing role in society, selfhood awareness, and their place in the imperial world. Directing, shooting and screening their personal films about private and public spheres, from home-Britain to distant colonial locations, amateur women filmmakers had created a unique, transnational and cross-cultural visual archive informing their experiences, understanding and representation codes of their social milieus, and also their negotiations of class, gender, race and historical events.

DOMESTICATING IMPERIAL MANHOOD

In the colonial tradition of gender dynamics British women acquired and perfected social skills that enabled them to act within certain behavioural parameters while often being stereotyped as enjoying a purely frivolous life, one in which they remained 'confined… in cages like the feathered race' and having nothing better to do 'but to plume themselves' (Wollstonecraft cited in Donovan 2000: 24). Even in the late colonial era British women acted as their husbands' guarantors of a reputable public image, caretakers of the 'little empire-builders of the future' (MacMillan 1996: 14), leaders of an imperial enterprise in miniature – their homestead – and often as experienced and proud hunters. At the same time, British 'men were very suspicious of their women moving out of th[is] particular groove, out of their particular role', and when they did step out of their assigned roles they become a 'threat' to their society (Iris Mcfarlane, V091, BECM).

It was in this context that most women who embraced amateur filmmaking as a new hobby also acquired, almost by default, a new form of freedom and the chance to reinvent themselves and their immediate world in spite of patriarchal and sexual restrictive norms (Zimmermann 1995; 1996). One of the British women's prerequisite while living in colonial outposts was that they should be 'taking an intelligent interest in the country, in the natives, and in […] immediate surroundings' (Procida 2002: 105). Most British women amateur filmmakers met this requirement by recording portraits of local communities and landscapes – records that illustrated within a tourist-gaze agenda the generally accepted, expected and exoticised behaviour and culture of non-Western/non-European people. Scenes of domestic duties, private and public education, labour networks, parenthood (mostly instances of motherhood), journeys to and fro colonies and Britain, and of official engagements are at the fulcrum of the study of colonial personal films that highlights new perspectives on the visual historiography informing the last decades of the British Empire. Most such films reveal a particular insight into British imperial ideologies and mores and propose a credible representation of a less

egocentric, perfectionist, or mythologised set of British imperial identities than those promoted by the Empire Cinema films. Moreover, some women amateur filmmakers were often able to promote with their unofficial, un-commissioned personal films of late colonial history, new understandings of political, racial and gender transformations specific to crucial times for the British Empire (Kaplan 1983; McCabe 2004). For instance, several films made by Lady Kendall and Lady Dalyell function as personal visual diaries of 'instances of self-observation' and of 'spontaneous performances' informing specific imperial times and communities (Neumann 2001). From this perspective, the four scenes discussed here indicate how both women filmmakers avoided straightforwardly, or involuntarily, the thematic and aesthetic subordination to the predominantly male-dominated amateur filmmaking practice, and to the thematic and aesthetic monopoly of commercial imperial visual discourses.

The first case study discussed here is an excerpt from the *Kendall Collection* filmed by Lady Isabella Claire Kendall, wife of Sir Charles Kendal, Acting High Judge of High Court in Allahabad in the early 1930s. It is an extremely short sequence shot during a picnic attended by the Kendall family and some of their friends. Viewed at normal speed, the scene shows a small group of Indian Colonial Service men and women enjoying a picnic in the Naini Tal mountainous landscape. An Indian bearer (servant) attends to them standing nearby in a central-stage position as if presiding over the event. The scene gains new meanings once it is played in slow motion, almost in a frame-by-frame projection, and proposes a different, more nuanced reading of the events. This time it becomes evident that one of the British women, perhaps Lady Kendall's oldest daughters, Barbara Donaldson, after having looked attentively at the filmmaker turns her head towards the servant and stands up. At this point, the recording stopped only to start again when the woman was already standing next to the Indian man. Without even glancing at him, she positioned herself in front of him, smiling and looking straight at the camera.

The Indian servant stepped aside and re-gained his central position. The woman, too, stepped aside and, once again, concealed his presence. Moreover, she also stretched her arms with an ample gesture and, for a brief instant, completely masked his body. In order to be visible, to be 'in the view' again, the bearer stepped aside for the second time just before the recording stopped abruptly. It is possible to argue that this scene decodes details of colonial, gender and racial dynamics that go beyond any presumptive ludic performance; it also shows an example of self-representational control employed by two people embodying different racial and colonial hierarchies.

The innate need to be *in the picture* – to become a permanent mark of that moment – determines the bearer's and the woman's simultaneous strategies employed in securing their own visual portraits. The man wanted to preserve his central position in the frame, while the woman playfully fought for the allegedly *correct* image, for the proper and conventional imperial framework in which she and her friends presumably wanted to be immortalised on film. It is only when viewed in slow motion that this scene shows a particular case of imperial dynamic developed between colonised and coloniser; between the local host – the Indian servant *was* at home – and the British guests, the Raj, who metonymically *struggled* through the woman's actions to be in charge. In this scene, to quote Edward Said's term, it is not the Indian *Other* but the British *Otherness* that becomes explicit (Said 1979). The woman's gestures of hiding the Indian servant's presence, whether as a prank or not, could be indicative of underlying racial and colonial alienations specific to the British Raj. It is also noteworthy that two women played this 'hide-and-not-seek' game – the filmmaker and one of her daughters. They appear to have devised an ad-hoc gag that, for its brevity and its awkwardly mysterious logic, accounts symbolically for the ways in which the fight for an independent identity was equally important to Indian and British people in interwar India, with the former being denied their claim to self-representation and self-ruling.

Fig. 1 *Kendall Collection*,
early 1930s. © CSAS,
University of Cambridge
(screen capture)

The second case study also belongs to the *Kendall Collection* and proposes an example of British women's *Otherness* in the context of colonial amateur filmmaking. The scene was filmed by Lady Kendall and shows her two daughters, Barbara and Nancy, together with John Coote Donaldson, her first son-in-law, waiting in a railway VIP open-air lounge by a train platform. Once again, Lady Kendall directs her daughters throughout the scenes. They have to take off their sola topees, stop reading the paper, and start a conversation. While Barbara, the older and married daughter, obeys her mother's indications, Nancy appears reluctant to look at the camera, to uncover her head, and to even acknowledge the filming session. She refuses to 'perform' for the camera and her behaviour suggests her dismissal of Lady Kendall's hobby as an invasive act performed publicly. Nancy's apparently rebellious behaviour resembling an act of teenagehood stubbornness, and her rejection of her mother's filming indicate domestic and gendered tensions more so than a bout of shyness. In an interview from 2004,[9] Nancy mentioned that her mother used to show her films not only to family and friends but also to members of the Indian Colonial Service at the Club in Allahabad. Thus, it is possible to argue that Nancy's discomfort at her mother filming her on that occasion could have been an attempt to refuse having another cinematographic portrait made within the on-going pressure raised by her spinster status. Self-secluded in her tacit revolt against both her mother and her social milieu, Nancy appeared to experience a case of temporarily confined womanhood and had her gendered identity 'muted'. While as a British Memsahib – the generic term for European women colonialists – she remained in a position of power, Nancy was at the same time visually *constructed* by her mother as a gendered subaltern, an *Other* in the context of both her family and of British colonial India. This scene of a British woman displaying signs of discomfort, revolt and refusal when being filmed is one of the very few examples identifiable across most colonial amateur film collections held by British regional and national repositories. The majority of the British colonial amateur film collections, with their repetitive themes and representational codes, indicate the filmmakers' tendency to portray the Memsahibs' lives in India as safe, comfortable and unchanging in their social and racial power dynamic. However, there are examples of amateur footage that reveals the Memsahibs' colonial, racial and gendered *Otherness* in surprising accounts of imperial identities marked by trauma, loneliness and revolt as in the case of Lady Kendall's two short film scenes. Such examples indicate that the study of colonial amateur films can occasionally challenge stereotypical illustrations of British imperial societies and of Memsahibs' almost always enjoyable, easy-going lives sheltered by a 'heaven-born' wealth – a life style celebrated by interwar Empire Cinema productions and, more recently, by TV documentaries about the British colonial rule, i.e. *Hilda at Darjeeling* (dir. Vron Ware, Channel Four, 1989) and *Echoes of the Raj* (dir. Catherine Clay, UK, 2000).

The last case studies discussed here are two short sequences filmed by Lady Eleanor Dalyell some-time in the early 1930s when her husband, Colonel Percy Gordon Loch, was secretary to Sir Stuart Edmund Pearse, the Mysore Resident.[10] These sequences support the theme of the *domestication* of British men serving in the Indian Colonial Service (I.C.S.) and the Army Forces. The first sequence illustrates how some Memsahibs ascribed derogatory identity traits to some British members of the I.C.S.. On this occasion, an I.C.S. officer has his Wolseley helmet carefully put on his head by his wife. He then straightens his back and holds his hands steady while her gestures recall that of a mother get-ting her son ready for school. Shortly afterwards, under the gaze of his wife and of two other women, the man struggles with the hilt of his sword while trying to take it out from the scabbard for a mock attack on the film camera. This is nothing short of boyish playfulness. The woman amateur filmmaker's choice of topic, the wife's gestures, and the other women's gazes determine and co-direct the man's behaviour and his attempt at being funny while wearing his official attire. The sequence decodes the filmmaker's seditious attempt at discrediting the man's imperial status and career by *domesticating* him through a parodic impression of a young boy playing with his dummy sword. Although brief, this sequence signals the intricate interpretative perspectives often inspired by colonial amateur films.

Fig. 2 *Dalyell Collection*, early 1930s. © BCCA, Bristol, UK (screen capture)

A similar visual and gender-coded narrative is found in another short sequence filmed by Lady Dalyell in Mysore, possibly in the garden of the Resident's house. This sequence shows a senior British army officer holding a pair of giant paper scissors and pretending to cut off the tails and muzzles of Lady Dalyell's two Great Dane dogs. The man wears a military uniform and shiny tight leather boots. At first, he calls the dogs but neither obeys him and so he joins them in a corner of the garden. The dogs refuse to interact and the man is unable to relax and to add an element of playfulness to the event. He appears intimidated by the film camera, is clumsy and barely manages to get the dogs interested in a possible chasse around the garden. In this sequence, the gag-like effect is the backdrop for Lady Dalyell's portrayal of the man's identity. If at the beginning he is joyfully waiting for her instructions to start the game, at the end he looks at her with obvious embarrassment. His behaviour suggests a candid apology for having failed to provide the necessary clownish skills required for a good prank. It is possible to argue that on this occasion Lady Dalyell's directorial suggestions decoded her unwitting exercise in *domesticating* the imperial league of the British I.C.S. peerless manhood. It is also possible to

interpret this sequence with added symbolism in the context of the British imperial rule. For instance, the man acting as a naughty boy who insistently attempts to chop-off the tails and muzzles of two large dogs could symbolise the primordial male ambition to emasculate and subordinate those weaker than him – i.e. the colonised people. In addition, on a different level of contextualised playfulness, the game involves two dogs rather than two children. The former appear as surrogates of the family's offspring – pet often filled emotional gaps in those British colonial families in which the Memsahibs faced an early separation from their children when these were sent to Britain for schooling. At the time of filming this scene, Lady Dalyell's son, Tam Dalyell,[11] was in Scotland, and she often enjoyed filming the two Great Dane dogs and their puppies as if children by proxy.

Fig. 3 *Dalyell Collection*, early 1930s. © BCCA, Bristol, UK (screen capture)

The amateur film scenes discussed here support the thesis that both Lady Kendall and Lady Dalyell have fortuitously preserved in their films startling records of imperial attitudes toward race and gender politics. As if 'morphing history into histories', their films have sometimes portrayed racial and gender identities in colonial India in contrast with the stereotypical portraits of British Memsahibs found in most Empire Cinema productions that relied on typified psychological and social features defining them as women gratefully bearing the burden of the civilizing mission and of imperial motherhood (Zimmermann 2008). In the context of colonial amateur films racial and gender agencies are identifiable within the migration of their visual representations from customary articulations of imperial typologies to informal colonial personal films able to contest interwar official and commercial representations of imperial identities. In making these films, both Lady Kendall and Lady Dalyell have replaced the traditional imperial male gaze and, consequently, reversed their female passive role into an active, often critical and defamatory act of comment and witnessing. As such, they became 'bearers of the look' targeting the spectacle of manhood and cultural schisms of the British Raj and, implicitly, of the Empire Cinema productions (Mulvey 1975). Kendall's and Dalyell's short scenes reveal the diverse intricacies of imperial relationships and propose a vital visuality of the British rule as manifest in the women amateur filmmakers' choice of topics.

CONCLUSION

Amateur film practice represents one of the key components of the British Empire's visual popular culture. This area of research has been largely neglected in terms of its historic relevance in the construction of British imperial identity. The colonial life scenes recorded by British amateur filmmakers, whether men or women, confirm that only a constant reassessment will save their documentary merit from historical decay and the passage of time. As visual documents, these films function as primary research source in deciphering aspects of British colonial life and psyche, and in documenting specific imperial, racial, social and cultural dynamics. Therefore, within new scholastic trends that challenge the British national memory, colonial amateur films such as those made by Lady Kendall and Lady Dalyell act as necessary catalysts for reinterpretations of Britain's imperial past – a discourse reinforced by half a century of post-colonial hindsight. Allegedly problematic for its imperial narrative and visual rhetoric, colonial amateur footage offers new perspectives on the twentieth century imperial history and deserves to be better known, interrogated and understood. Moreover, the footage shot by British women amateur filmmakers in former colonial settings provides an unofficial yet often centre-stage view upon public occasions and private moments during the final decades of colonial rule. As a result, amateur film collections similar to those made by Lady Kendall and Lady Dalyell function as authentic records of significant historical and cultural relevance, and call for a broader understanding of the amateur film genre's historical relevance to new interpretation of national, imperial and gendered identities through a dual analysis. First, through the study of distinct articulations of self-representations and self-imagining found in amateur films. Second, by analysing the cultural constructions that legitimated specific gender-based visual narrative patterns across colonial amateur films (Kuhn 1994). The narrative, stylistic and self-representational similarities informing colonial illustrations of social, racial and gendered self-representations validated several indexical British national and colonial imaginings (Langford 2007). They are also particularly important in the context of a larger investigation addressing amateur cinema within its self-referential visual rhetoric that has only recently been recognised by film and media scholars (Hallam 2007, Motrescu-Mayes 2011), and in the framework of an almost ubiquitous online archival access to such films, one that facilitates their in-depth and cross-disciplinary study. This article considered multiple answers to why colonial amateur films made by women can often reveal a definite and definable female agent-gaze – a specific female visual aesthetic identifiable and shaped by a range of imperial, social, gendered and ethnic particularities (Erens 1991), and it has suggested that films like those made by Lady Kendall and Lady Dalyell should be explored as effective connections between conventional historiographic representations of the British colonial rule in India and emerging research methodologies and theories in imperial and woman studies. Ultimately, such films are primary research sources for deciphering aspects of British colonial life, gender and psyche, and of specific imperial, racial, social and cultural dynamics. It is in the context of new scholastic trends that challenge the British national memory, and also in that of free digital access to archival or private collections, that colonial amateur films act as unique catalysts for new reinterpretations of Britain's imperial past.

NOTES

1. In the last couple of years it has become common practice among film and media theorists to define amateur films (and all related sub-genres such as home movies, feature amateur films, educational amateur films etc) as 'personal films'. Moreover, public events and publications are promoting this theoretical framework, i.e. *Digital Film, Digital Lives* (*Personal Film workshop*, British Library, November 2009) or *Poets of their own Acts. Personal Films, 1915-1950* (*Northeast Historic Film workshop*, May 2012).
2. See http://karachi.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/films/kendall1.html – http://karachi.s-asian.cam.ac.uk/archive/films/kendall4.html. Accessed May 2013.

3. For example, in 1897, only a small number of home movie-makers could purchase 35mm film. Thus, for some time, the principal market for this new technology of moving images remained the attribute of corporate and/or small entrepreneurs. Starting with 1912 when Edison and Pathé launched their 21mm and 28mm formats, new technologies had been gradually made available to the amateur filmmakers such as Pathé Baby with 9.5mm film and projector (1922), the first Kodak 16mm film (1923), Kodak lenticular on 16mm colour film (1928), and Kodak standard 8mm film (1932). The search for the most suitable film format continued until the mid 1960s when Kodak introduced the Super 8mm film and equipment. Super 8mm was an affordable, safe and easy to use format and became the standard choice for most amateur filmmakers.

4. See also Adrian Wood's interview, the Archive Producer for *The British Empire in Colour* series, in the DVD 'making of' section.

5. "The story of practical 'home movies' began in 1923. [...] For years, the Eastman Kodak Company had worked to develop a system of movie equipment and film that would be easy enough for the advanced amateur photographer to use, yet reasonably affordable. The result was the Sixteen Millimeter 'Cine Kodak' Camera and the Kodascope Projector". The camera itself weighed about seven pounds, and had to be handcranked at two turns per second during filming. A tripod was included in the package, all of which cost a whopping $335.00! And this in a time when a new Ford automobile could be purchased for $550.00." *Super 8 mm Film History* (http://motion.kodak.com/motion/Products/Production/Spotlight_on_Super_8/Super_8mm_History/index.htm#ixzz2YO8uay00). Accessed January 2013.

6. The St. Joseph's Missionary Society film collection is held by the Bristol City Council Archive, UK.

7. A selection of other significant and also more recent films employing the thematic and stylistic cannons of the Empire Cinema genre includes, for example, *Palaver* (Geoffrey Barkas, UK, 1926), *The King Solomon Mines* (Robert Stevenson, UK, 1937), *Old Bones of the River* (Marcel Varnel, UK, 1938), *Men of Two Worlds* (Thorold Dickinson, UK, 1946), *Kim* (Victor Saville, USA, 1950), *Simba* (Brian Desmond Hurst, UK, 1955), *Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean, UK/USA, 1957), *North West Frontier* (J. Lee Thompson, UK, 1959), *Carry on up the Khyber* (Gerald Thomas, UK, 1968), *Staying On* (Silvio Narizzano, UK, 1979), *Gallipoli* (Peter Weir, AU, 1981), *Heat and Dust* (James Ivory, UK, 1983), *Gandhi* (Richard Attenborough, UK/India, 1982), *A Passage to India* (David Lean, UK/USA, 1984), *The Jewel in the Crown* (Christopher Morahan, Jim O'Brien, UK, 1984), *My Beautiful Launderette* (Stephen Frears, UK, 1985), *Partition* (Ken McMullen, UK, 1987), *Mountbatten: Last Viceroy* (Tom Clegg, UK, 1986), *White Mischief* (Michael Radford, UK, 1988), *Mountains of the Moon* (Bob Rafelson, USA, 1990), *Mister Johnson* (Bruce Beresford, USA, 1991), *Britannia* (Joanna Quinn, UK, 1993), *Jinnah* (Jamil Dehlavi, UK, 1998).

8. Although amateur cine-clubs and societies were founded as early as the mid 1920s (Dyson 2012), it was only from the 1980s onwards that amateur cinema gained sustained academic recognition for its social and historical documentary merit, and has received extensive public exposure through national and international events, competitions, festivals and more recently dedicated websites, i.e. Amateur Cinema Studies Network (http://amateurcinemastudies.org). A list of such events includes, for example, the National Film and Television's 'The 20th century remembered: your home movies at NFT' (2001); The Association of Moving Image Archivists several 'Small Gauge Symposiums', and the annual meetings of Small Gauge/Amateur Film interest groups and related panels; the FIAF/IFTA Conference in Cartagena, Colombia on issues regarding the storage of amateur films at various international Film Institutes (2001); Northeast Historic Film summer symposiums (2000-2007); and the Orphan Film Symposiums that have been on-going since 1999. The *Home Movie Day*, http://www.homemovieday.com, remains one of the key worldwide public events that addresses amateur filmmakers, scholars of amateur cinema, media journalism and visual artists.

9. Interview conducted by the author at Nancy Vernede's (nee Kendall) residence in Oxfordshire in 2004.

10. Lady Eleanor Dalyell was one of the few amateur filmmakers to experiment with the Kodak lenticular colour film camera and projector between 1928-1930. Lenticular film was manufactured by Kodak as "an unusual type of 16mm black-and-white film that projects as a colour image when shown through a customised projector with a three-colour lens". (*The Film Preservation Guide* 2004: 11).

11. Tam Dalyell later become Scotland's twentieth-century longest serving MP and was the Father of the House between 2001 and 2005.

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Andrei Zvyagintsev's *The Return*: A Tarkovskian Initiation

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Abstract
The present article undertakes an analysis of *The Return (Vozvrashchenie)*, the first film by Russian filmmaker Andrei Zvyagintsev, through an examination of the Tarkovskian influences seen in the film. Evidence of the influence of Tarkovsky's cinema in *The Return* is thematic – particularly as relating to the Pan-Slavic metaphysical worldview – but also formal and aesthetic. In parallel, the article explores the ways in which Zvyagintsev's first film diverges from Tarkovskian style, in part through elements indicating more conventional cinematographic influences.

Keywords
Andreï Zviaguintsev, Andreï Tarkovski, Russian cinema and aesthetic, Pan-Slavic metaphysical worldview and Orthodoxy.

The Return, honored by the highest award at the 2002 Venice Film Festival, is the first film by Siberian director Andrei Zvyagintsev. Like Andrei Tarkovsky, whose directorial debut *Ivan's Childhood* earned the Golden Lion four decades earlier, Zvyagintsev garnered immediate recognition on the international film scene when his first film was awarded the same prize. Such a level of appreciation for a Russian film abroad had not been seen since *Burnt by the Sun* (Nikita Mikhalkov, 1994).[1]

Influenced by the great filmmakers he came to know through the Moscow film archives, such as Antonioni, Visconti and Bergman, Zvyagintsev describes himself as "concerned with the mythological dimension of human existence."[2] The filmmaker places emphasis on screenplay and character development more than on formal innovation, although he does use heavy equipment for distinctly perceptible camera movements. Like Pudovkin, who highlighted the work of 1930s screenwriters, conveying the view that it one should never – for the sake of a simple succession of shots – neglect the structure of a screenplay,[3] Zvyagintsev, who has a background in theater, places high importance on this element, all the while maintaining his distance from socialist realism.

The Return tells the story of a taciturn father who returns, after a long and enigmatic absence, to his wife and two adolescent sons, Andrei and Ivan, who have never known him. He decides to take the two boys on a short camping and fishing trip, awkwardly attempting to make up for twelve years of paternal absence in seven days. But this initiation journey ends tragically: the father, in an attempt to save his younger son, slips and falls to his death.

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The Return, a film reflecting a number of influences, both Russian and Western, is particularly laden with similarities to Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Roublev*. Identified by Michel Estève as "one of the best representatives of a new generation of filmmakers,"[4] Zvyagintsev integrates both contemporary and traditional elements, corresponding with a symbolism that is both biblical and pagan. He thus places his film beyond the realm of time. Through an intimate personal narrative, the filmmaker, like Tarkovsky, places his initiation drama within a collective dramatic reality.

CINEMATIC INFLUENCES: PREDOMINATELY RUSSIAN, SOMETIMES WESTERN

A contemporary film reflecting the cinematic trends of its time, *The Return* exhibits primarily Eastern European influences, although it also contains echoes of the cinema of the West. References to the films of Andrei Tarkovsky are found throughout Zvyagintsev's first film, taking the form of visual quotations or homage. The close-up of the two boys' mother, focusing on the back of her neck – a shot characteristic of Russian cinema of the Khrushchev Thaw period – echoes the well-known shot of the mother in Tarkovsky's *The Mirror.* Here, Zvyagintsev resurrects the representation of the abandoned mother, a canonical element of Russian cinema.

The Return (A. Zvyagintsev, 2003)   *The Mirror* (A. Tarkovsky, 1975)

A number of the film's shots depicting natural landscapes, meanwhile, may be viewed as references to *Andreï Roublev*. Certain long shots and close ups of a grove of birch trees – a Pan-Slavic symbol of eternal renewal[5] found throughout Eastern European cinema – suggest the cyclical nature of the work, while the image of a dead white bird, a device also used as an omen in *Andrey Roublev*, foreshadows the coming tragedy.

Andrey Roublev (A. Tarkovsky, 1966)

The Return (A. Zvyagintsev, 2003)

Thus, certain shots in *The Return* are adapted, *mutatis mutandis*, from Tarkovsky's films, at times serving as symbols of a specific metaphysical tradition.

The tragedy of *The Return* is intricately linked to the return of the past and its coexistence with the present, another characteristic theme of Eastern European films, as the cyclical nature of time in the film's Pan-Slavic metaphysical worldview blends past and present. The use of what Deleuze defines as crystal-images,[6] particularly through photographs seen within shots, highlights the coexistence of the different temporalities. An old family photograph, stored away in the attic, allows the two brothers to verify the identity of the stranger claiming to be their father. The photograph legitimizes the father's claim in his sons' eyes in the diegetic present, but it also served to keep him alive in the form of a memory during his absence, in the diegetic past: the crystals of time[7] created by this device renew the past by creating a bridge with the present.

Furthermore, the film's metaphysical undercurrent and its references to Tarkovsky's films give a sacred quality to the image of the father. According to Orthodox tradition, rather than simply representing divinities, icons contain the divine: Christ is believed to reside within the icon that represents him. Interestingly, the father, as we will explore in further detail below, is depicted as a Christ-like figure. In spite of his physical absence, he remains present in the photographs, which thus come to resemble icons. The father's soul, like that of Christ, endures in the material world through the representation of his corporeal form. It is also continued, of course, through his offspring, in the form of his two sons.

Here, once more, a reference to *Andreï Roublev* is apparent: like the epilogue to Tarkovsky's film, which shows icons by the famous painter over a remix of Gregorian chants and electronic music, the epilogue of *The Return* features several photographs of the protagonists over music with religious overtones combined with ambient sounds. These black and white photographs, taken by the older son Andrei, represent the diegetic past, while the rest of the film, representing the diagetic present, is filmed in color. The choice of this chromatic scheme once again calls to mind *Andrei Rublev*, in which the diegetic world of the film is shot in black and white, representing the past, while the epilogue is in color, signifying the icons' existence in the present reality.

The father's return harkens back to the past, to the time of his presence, while at the same time restoring the patriarchal tradition in the diegetic present. Notwithstanding the fact that his two sons have lived with their mother and grandmother for over a decade, the father immediately resumes his role as head of the household, an authority figure who demands respect. Furthermore, the figure of the fatherless adolescent – a typical motif in Eastern European cinema, in which a lack or a handicap is a common trait of a child character[8] – conveys the psychology of a separate development from the adult and the possibility, as in the Myth of the Eternal Return,[9] for the regeneration of the world fated for destruction. The two physically active brothers thus represent the future opposite the past, symbolized in part by the silent and passive grandmother. Like the young orphaned foundry artist in *Andrei Rublev*, the two adolescents in *The Return* have been abandoned. In Zvyagintsev's film, although the father returns to initiate the children before disappearing once and for all, the theme of abandonment – found throughout Tarkovsky's body of work (*Ivan's Childhood*, *Andrei Rublev*, *The Mirror*) – remains dominant.

The portrayal of the two adolescents takes on its importance through the actors' psycho-physical performances, in which their exacerbated emotions lead viewers to identify with the protagonists rather than to distance themselves from them. Closer to Stanislavski's system than to Meyerhold's approach, the onscreen performances of Vladimir Garine and Ivan Dobronravov tend towards realism and psychological depth. In accordance with Stanislavski's system, the actor, employing technique that is both corporal and spiritual, must relive the emotions to then be able to embody

the character: it is not about "acting well, but acting right, and from the right reaching the real."[10]

On the other hand, the characters of the parents – the father, the mother and the grandmother – are less developed psychologically, and the performances of the actors playing them are more unequivocal. Presenting only one or two character traits, they are mere symbols, whose anonymity – their names are not revealed – gives them archetypal status. This absence of psychological details places them in a more Brechtian dynamic, closer to Meyerhold's biomechanics.[11] In addition, this lack of psychological details regarding the adult characters accentuates the mystery that underscores the film, particularly through the very secretive character of the father. While his wife claims that he is a pilot, he himself remains silent about his past. We do learn, however, that he does not eat fish because he "has eaten too much of it... somewhere far away."[12] As a result, the viewer, like the two sons, is led to wonder about the life experience of this man, whose somewhat military rigidity suggests that he may have been imprisoned on the island, where he digs up a box that will sink with his body, carrying his secret to the bottom of the lake. The realism and psychological depth in the characterization of Andrei and Ivan hence contrasts with the enigmatic quality of the father.

A certain hybridism is also apparent in the film's editing and sequencing. The director alternates between a number of brief shots and longer scenes, where time seems to be suspended. A classic style, seen particularly through the use of the shot reverse shot technique, coexists with Tarkovskian influences, seen in wide and contemplative shots that present nature as an active component in the coming initiation drama. Like those seen in *Andrei Rublev*, the horizontal panning shots in Zvyagintsev's film highlight natural landscapes, adding a certain fluidity and softness to the image. The style is reminiscent of that of classic western films, a comparison which once again calls to mind *Andrei Rublev*. In his book on Tarkovsky's film,[13] Robert Bird notes its similarities with the films of Sergio Leone, and namely with *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966), a comparison that was highlighted before the film's release to promote its distribution abroad. Even when filming outdoor scenes, Zvyagintsev uses heavy-duty equipment for the technical performance afforded, in order to "magnify the real rather than filming its imperfections."[14]

Notwithstanding elements suggesting the influence of more conventional cinema, the director's style remains close to that of Tarkovsky in terms of camera angles and movements. Zvyagintsev carries out several lateral and vertical tracking shots, as well as bird's-eye and counter bird's-eye shots. These horizontal and vertical elements echo the metaphysical elements of the Orthodox tradition, according to which the divine lives as much on Earth and in humanity as it surpasses the material world. In Tarkovsky's work as well as in Zvyagintsev's film, these horizontal and vertical shots represent this coexistence of the immanence and transcendence. These moving images convey the idea of knowledge that is passed on from above, by the voice and the law of the father, and also of an awareness – that of Good, Evil, and life – that is immanent in all things on Earth. It is through the passage from a biblical symbolism to a pagan one that the initiation, made possible by nature, occurs.

Inscribed within the Russian film tradition, *The Return* renews specifically Russian esthetic canons and themes, but it also reflects elements of its modern era. The film accordingly combines Slavic and Western influences, bearing a particularly strong resemblance to the films of Tarkovsky, and most notably to *Andreï Roublev*, through its alliance of a spiritual dimension with a certain modern quality.

SPIRITUALITY AND MATERIALITY

Like the work of Andrei Tarkovsky, *The Return* is brimming with biblical symbols, which are often closer to Catholic traditions than to Orthodox ones. But a worldview based on the four natural elements, which Dominique Nasta identifies as an integral part of Tarkovsky's work,[15] is also highly present in the film, giving it a significant pagan dimension. These two traditional aspects are accompanied by

the subtle intrusion of modern elements, resulting in a juxtaposition that once again calls to mind *Andrei Rublev*.

No churches appear in *The Return*, a fact that sets the film apart from the traditional iconography of Eastern European cinema. However, the representation of the father makes him a Christ-like figure, in the same way that the icon painter Rublev is portrayed with certain similarities to Christ. Like Jesus, both characters are betrayed by a loved one. In Tarkovsky's film, Rublev's fellow monk, Kirill, disparages his ability as a painter in front of Theophanes the Greek in order to take his place, and he allows Rublev to be accused of denouncing a skomorokh they encounter. In *The Return*, the rancor that Ivan feels towards his father will ultimately, due to unforeseen circumstances, lead to his father's death. Through his formal choices, the filmmaker deifies the father despite the fact that he is so despised by his sons. His photograph is hidden away in a book of religious engravings, next to an image of Abraham prepared to sacrifice his own child – an illustration that foreshadows the situation that will lead to the father's death. He is then pictured laying in a bed, enveloped in a sheet, a position that brings to mind the portrayal of Jesus in a painting by Andrea Mantegna. Finally, the father serves food and wine to his sons at the table – the body and blood that Jesus offered to his disciples and followers. In spite of this flattering parallel, Ivan, and later Andrei, are wary of their father. There is also a biblical reference in the names of the two sons, which are the Russian transcriptions of Andrew and John, two apostles of Jesus Christ. But the trinity formed by the three protagonists falls apart after the death of the father, calling to mind that of the three monks at the start of *Andrei Rublev*, which is broken when the painter's two companions leave him. Just as Rublev learns that he must depend only on himself, Andrei and Ivan (re)learn that they must live without their father.

The biblical dimension of the film is also present in its visual references. Like Tarkovsky, who stages a pastiche of pictoral works in certain shots – in *Andrei Rublev*, the director draws inspiration in particular from the paintings of Brueghel the Elder (*The Procession to Calvary*, 1564) and of Vitorre Carpaccio, in addition to more recent references – Zvyagintsev recreates the Andrea Mantegna painting *Lamentation of Christ* (1480), *mutatis mutandis,* when filming the sleeping father. This allusion to the Quattrocento period, a Catholic reference rather than an Orthodox one, also creates a parallel with *La Ricotta*, a film in which Pasolini stages recreations of the paintings of Rosso Fiorentino.
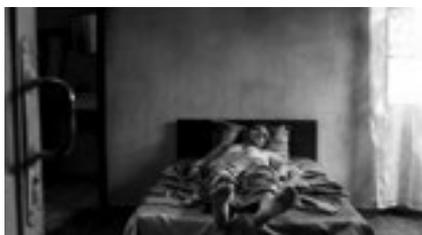
The sleeping father in *The Return*
(A. Zvyagintsev, 2003)

Lamentation of Christ
(A. Mantegna, 1480)

Finally, this biblical dimension is also conveyed within the very structure of the film. The narrative of the film begins on Sunday and spans across seven days, each one announced by an extradiegetic insert. Sunday – the first day of creation according to the Judeo-Christian cosmogonical myth, as recounted in the Old Testament – is also the day on which Christ is resurrected in the New Testament.

Establishing a parallel between the fate of the protagonists and Christian cosmogony, the film also depicts the rebirth of one world – in which the father returns but then vanishes again – and the end of another – the world of the father's absence as well as that of the sons' reunion with him.

Furthermore, like the demiurge Tarkovsky and in the image of Plato's Demiourgos,[16] Zvyagintsev draws upon the four elements to create his diegetic world.

The fusion of these four elements brings about a polysensoriality that once again evokes Tarkovsy's cinema, in large part through the sensorial emotionality brought on by "visual and chromatic synesthesia."[17] The passage from the purely spiritual realm to the material one, represented by the confrontation with nature, thus enables the initiation that lies at the center of the film. In a dialectic view of immanence and transcendence, matter is necessary for accessing the sacred, as it contains the divine. It is thus through the materiality of the four elements – water, fire, earth and wind – that the two sons will become closer to their father, who himself represents the divine through his Christ-like aspects.

In *The Return*, water emerges as the most significant of the four elements. Water refers simultaneously to baptism, which enables access to the sacred, and to rebirth, allowing a return to the amniotic liquid and symbolizing ontogeny, notably in the form of rain.[18] It also symbolizes the abyss of the Jungian unconscious.[19] According to the view that the sacred exists both within and outside of individuals, access to the depths of the unconscious is seen as a way of attaining the divine.

In contrast to its symbolism in Tarkovsky's films, fire is not a destructive element in *The Return*. On the contrary, it is beneficial, allowing the characters to eat, to warm themselves and to dry off after the rain. Around the fire, the sons and their father share intimate moments. In contrast, at the start of the film in the family's home, behind the still and silent grandmother, the fire in the hearth diminishes, like the sacred fire of life dying out, announcing the coming tragedy.

Earth, on the other hand, is an element that attempts to imprison the characters, namely when it is combined with water. In the form of mud, the telluric element slows the protagonists' progression as they become mired in it, like the character in *Ivan's Childhood*.

Finally, wind, or *pneûma* in ancient Greek, represents the breath of the divine. An element enabling the transfer of knowledge, it can also symbolize the anger of the gods and the displacement of souls: the wind blows when the father shows Andrei the panoramic view from the top of the tower, but also when he falls to his death from the same tower.

The film takes us through the Christian cosmogony, which occurred *in illo tempore*, making the characters contemporary to the original creation within the diegetic world. Alongside the biblical and pagan symbolic components in the film, modern elements are depicted in the form of technological objects. When one considers the date of the film's production, however, the presence of these objects seems subtly anachronistic. Symbols of modernity presented within a more traditional atmosphere, they contrast with their environment and are unable to rival the forces of the natural elements. For example, the car in which the father and his two sons embark upon their journey becomes mired under the torrential rain, and is later left behind on dry land, unable to take the protagonists to the island. The film camera used by Andrei seems outdated; it is both a symbol of technology and a retro collector's item, which produces old-fashioned photographs in black and white or sepia. The fact that the "iconic" images taken of the father do not actually serve to keep him alive may also be seen, on some level, as a representation of the limits of technology. As for the outboard motor the father finds to improve the boat, it consistently breaks down. On the way to the island, under torrential rain, and on the return journey, under calm skies, the protagonists are eventually forced to row to reach the shore. Finally, the musical score composed by Andrei Dergatchev establishes an ambiance with ceremonial resonances, but with an additional contemporary element of electronic music. *The Return* thus seems projected beyond the realm of time, even without the use of such distinctly anachronistic elements as those seen in *Andrei Rublev*, in which the contemporary language used contrasts with the historical setting. Technological materiality has a place in Zvyagintsev's film, but it is presented as something rare, possibly insignificant, and unable to rival the four elements.

The Return is a film in which one feels the polysensoriality of the image as well as the concrete nature of the father-son relationship and the passage into adulthood. In order to achieve mental growth, the characters, like Andrei Rublev, require the physical stimulation that results from contact with matter. The film's detachment from any particular time period accentuates the universal character of the two sons' coming-of-age experience and initiation. This rite of passage is staged several times within the film's cyclical chronology, occurring for the final time on an island, a sanctuary cut off from the world, which is an appropriate setting for these dramatic and educational events.

A WORK OF INITIATION

The island provides the setting for the final confrontation between the father and his two sons. Referring to European literary traditions, the journey to the island can be compared to the crossing of the Styx, representing the passageway into Dante's fifth circle of Hell.[20] In Greek mythology, similarly, the crossing can be compared to that of the Acheron on Charon's ferry, which brought the dead to the Underworld. Furthermore, referencing alchemic traditions, "the nocturnal crossing of the sea is a type of descent into hell (*descensus ad inferos*) […] into another world, beyond this one, in other words beyond consciousness; it is thus an immersion in the unconscious."[21] But the uninhabited island is first and foremost a heterotopia,[22] a term used by Foucault to signify a physical place that represents or parallels a utopia. Literally "other place," the term is defined by the author as a setting for initiation. It is a place that is open to the rest of the world and can be located geographically yet is difficult to access. The island is, like the house in *The Sacrifice* and that in *Nostalghia*, "the true cosmos, the ultimate primordial setting."[23] It is a sanctuary in which both death and rebirth through initiation will take place.

As in Tarkovsky's films, particularly in *Ivan's Childhood* and *Andrei Rublev*, the four elements depicted in Zvyagintsev's *The Return* "mark the dramatic progression of the main stages of the initiation narrative."[24] This narrative, in turn, accentuates the aspect of mystery that pervades the film. Descended from the Greek *mustêrion* and the earlier *mustês*, meaning "initiated," the word mystery designates religious rituals accessible only to those who have been inducted. The word also signifies certain revelations of the Christian religion which, like faith, are said to be beyond the reach of human reason, such as the mystery of the Holy Trinity or of the Resurrection. Jung also notes that mysteries have been archetypal initiation schemes since ancient times.[25] In a broader sense, mystery also refers to the hidden secrets of natural phenomena or of individual sentiments and motives. The father, an enigmatic and Christ-like figure, fully embodies this conception of mystery. He will ensure the initiation of his sons by bringing them into confrontation with the mysteries of nature, life and death.

The initiation exists within the cyclical dimension of the work, which accentuates its timelessness. Like *Andrei Rublev*, in which Robert Bird identifies a bell curve symmetry[26] – at the end of the film, the characters return to the Andronikov monastery and the suspense felt as the bell is raised echoes that felt in the prologue when Efim attempts to fly – *The Return* also consists of binary visual "rhymes." In fact, the film takes the shape of a tragic loop: the final scenes, showing the father's death, echo the first images of the film, and the same actions are carried out, although in reversed order, as if in a mirror. The film opens with images of a boat lying at the bottom of the lake. Later, the viewer learns that this was a flash forward to a time after the last images of the father. The initial sequence continues with a group of adolescents jumping from a tower that becomes a makeshift diving board. The young Ivan feels dizzy and refuses to dive, and he waits atop the tower until his mother comes to his rescue. A chasing scene ensues, in which Ivan tries to catch up with Andrei, ending when the two boys return home to find that their father has returned. The father is pictured asleep in the blue sheets on the bed, and the sequence ends with a close up of the family photograph kept in the attic.

During the sequence leading up to the father's accidental death, the order of scenes is the following: chasing scene – Andrei runs behind his father who attempts to catch up with Ivan – then the climb up the tower and the accidental fall. The father is then seen in a lying position, on the ground and then in the boat, as he was in the bed. Finally, the boat and the father's corpse are seen sinking into the depths of the lake while the two brothers reach the car, where they find a family photograph behind the sun visor. In this image, the father is absent. The Orthodox worldview is compromised: if the Christ-like father is no longer in the image that is supposed to represent him, it could mean that he has disappeared entirely from the material and the spiritual world. This photograph, in addition to showing that the father had not forgotten his children, also marks the return of the father's absence. Alongside the film's cyclical aspect, then, there is also an element of regression, of a return to the initial situation. But following the initiation, the two adolescents have become men.

Moreover, the beginning sequence of *The Return*, which shows a fall from a high point, is reminiscent of the prologue in *Andrei Rublev*. In *The Return*, "the initial diving board scene sets the tone for the film's atmosphere, grounded in questions of courage, of virility."[27] But unlike in Tarkovsky's film, in which the character who attempts to fly ends up crashing,[28] *The Return* shows the adolescents ascending the tower with the intention of diving into the depths of the lake, which from a Jungian perspective represents the depths of the unconscious. Thus Andrei passes this first step of initiation, which allows him to belong to the group of friends and symbolizes his rebirth. On the other hand, the young Ivan, who is not yet ready to face his interior mind, does not muster the courage to dive.

Like that of Andrei Rublev, the initiation of the two brothers takes place in three phases. It begins with an observation phase, during which Andrei photographs his father and Ivan spies on him through a pair of binoculars. The two adolescents thus find themselves in the position of voyeurs, particularly when they open the door to the bedroom to observe their sleeping father. This first phase is accompanied by the principle of imitation. Andrei, for example, copies his father's facial expressions and gestures – he chews a toothpick and picks wild berries – while Ivan emulates his father's authority by giving orders to his older brother, whom he sternly tells to get a can to collect worms for fishing bait.

The second step of the initiation is that of confrontation. Early on, Ivan, who closely resembles the character of the same name in *Ivan's Childhood* – blond, insolent and hot-tempered – rebels against his father's authority. Refusing to eat at the restaurant after catching his father admiring a passing woman, he is quick to express his discontent whenever the occasion presents itself, a tendency that leads to his being abandoned by his father in the rain as punishment. For Andrei, the desire to revolt develops only with time. Like Andrei Rublev, he is calm and patient. Nonetheless, after being hit by his father for the second time because he disobeyed to make Ivan happy, he also rebels.

Finally, after the confrontation that leads to the father's death, the sons must fend for themselves and use the knowledge their father has imparted to them. They bring back the father's corpse "with their hands,"[29] start the boat's motor and finally row to reach the other shore. This third phase, which was linked in *Andrei Rublev* with creation, hear signifies the passage into adulthood: at the end of this week of initiation, the two adolescents have become men and are able to return home on their own.[30]

This initiation also has a certain oedipal connotations. As indicated in the opening sequence, in which he refuses to dive into the lake symbolizing the unconscious, Ivan remains closely attached to his mother. When she arrives to rescue him from the top of the diving tower, he tells her of his shame at being too afraid to jump, saying that even if they tell the others he jumped, she will know he did not. From a psycho-analytical point of view, Ivan's vertigo can be seen as an indication of his incapacity to face his unconscious. The initiation that takes place in the film will ultimately allow him to resolve his Oedipal complex and thus to abandon the cocoon of maternal safety.

The reference to Oedipus, a character originating from Greek mythology and later co-opted by

modern psychology, represents yet another element of Western influence. Russian interest in psychoanalysis was repressed early on by the Communist state, which saw the practice as a futile one that did not serve the interests of the Party. In the West, on the other hand, psychoanalysis developed rapidly and became very popular, particularly in the 1970s.

According to Freud, the young boy must resolve his oedipal complex in order to avoid having neurotic tendencies as an adult. Like the central character of the Oedipus myth, who kills his father and then marries his mother, the young boy longs for his father's symbolic death so that he can possess his mother. According to the scheme of Freudian stages, these subconscious incestuous and patricidal tendencies arise during the phallic stage, which occurs from ages three to seven. Thus Ivan, like his brother, should have resolved his oedipal complex several years prior to the film's narrative. But not having known his father, he was not able to kill him symbolically. Accordingly, he shows hostility towards the paternal figure and initially refuses to take part in the initiation. He does not want to learn how to make a bowl from birch wood, for example. Finally, when his father takes the place of his mother during the final confrontation – like her, he climbs to the top of a tower to reach his son – Ivan resolves his oedipal complex in a tragic manner, finding himself unwillingly responsible for his father's actual death: the initiation has thus taken place.

In an interview with French radio station France Culture, Andrei Zvyagintsev explains that "it is actions that determine men, and not words." Thus, the violent father dies, killed symbolically by his son. Although he claimed to love his children and to want to spend time with them, his brutal behavior laid the groundwork for his undoing. After the drama, there is a change in the behavior of the two initiated sons. Andrei continues to imitate his father through his actions and words, but he also gives paternal advice to his younger brother: when Ivan complains about having wet feet, like Andrei earlier in the film, Andrei tells him to take off his shoes, just as his father had advised him before. Now that Ivan has finally become an adult, obeying justified orders, he acts more and more like his brother. Now the oldest male in the family, Andrei thus takes the role of the absent father and the two brothers return home on their own. *The Return* is thus the story of three returns: the father's return to the family home and to the uninhabited island, and finally, that of the sons to their mother after their distressing initiation.

ZVYAGINTSEV: A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE "NEW GUARD"

In 17th-century Russia, the literature of the protopope Avvakum, despite its clear emancipation from certain Slavonic traditions, presented a "worldview that remained archaic."[31] The work of Andrei Tarkovsky, and later of Andrei Zvyagintsev, can be compared to the Avvakum's writings. The directors of the Thaw broke free of the socialist realism imposed by the Stalinist regime, both by returning to traditional Slavic representations and by adopting cinematographic elements inspired by the Western avant-garde movements. Andrei Zvyagintsev, for his part, puts forth a similar combination during an age in which Russian cinema is becoming more western and attempting to correspond with American canons. For example, the filmmaker made significant adjustments to the screenplay for *The Return*, which originally focused on two Russian émigrés living the United States, revisiting memories from their past, presented in the form of flashbacks. By eliminating this element, Zvyagintsev was able to combine Eastern European cinematic traditions with more classical or Western elements, particularly by avoiding any clear reference to a specific setting in time, adding to the film's element of mystery.

Thus, in spite of its timeless setting, Zvyagintsev's film bears the mark of the age in which it was produced and contains Russian specificities. Its Eastern European influences range from the simple esthetic nod to more meaningful references which are signs of a cultural and spiritual tradition. Like Tarkovsky's *The Mirror*, Zvyagintsev's film creates a bridge between East and West, which has the

added benefit of making it suitable for distribution abroad. Zvyagintsev draws inspiration from Tarkovsky's style, directing a film with undertones of cosmogony and initiation, and in which sacrifice is portrayed as necessary. But in comparison to many of Tarkovsky's films, whose comprehension requires a significant amount of effort on the part of the viewer, *The Return* is relatively easily understood. While Tarkovsky combined sensorial emotionalism and cerebral interpretation, Zvyagintsev relies instead on synesthesia. Furthermore, in contrast to Tarkovsky's body of work, *The Return* is a psychological drama, in which it is not outward drama that brings about the crisis – as was the case in *Ivan's Childhood* and *Andrei Rublev* – but rather the characters' inner drama.

The film's narrative of initiation into adulthood – or coming of age – is a universal and timeless theme. Like the protagonists of *Andrei Rublev* and of *Ivan's Childhood*,[32] Andrei and Ivan, the young adolescents of *The Return*, are projected beyond the realm of time during their initiation. Nonetheless, they are also anchored within a modern time frame thanks to the technological elements that punctuate the film and provide a counterpoint to the natural elements which enable the initiation to take place. Alongside the metaphysical and polysensorial aspects of the image, Zvyagintsev introduces an element of mystery, particularly through the representation of the paternal figure, which allows him to break free of Tarkovsky's style in spite of remaining very close to it.

In an article entitled *Le cinéma russe contemporain* ("Contemporary Russian Cinema"), Anaïs Le Brun identifies Zvyagintsev as belonging to an emerging generation of Russian filmmakers she refers to as the "*nouvelle-garde*" (the "New Guard"). According to Le Brun, the new cinematic style "highlights, with stylistic dexterity, the human, social or political problems confronting the Russian people"[33] and explores the nation's history without avoiding taboos, particularly that of the patricide theme. As seen in Zvyagintsev's work, this "New Guard" represents a cinema of mystic interiority, an auteur cinema such as that embodied by Andrei Tarkovsky during the Soviet era.

NOTES

1. D. Péron, «L'impromptu de Venise,» In: *Libération*, Paris, 08/09/2003.
2. D. Péron, «Un choc russe en clap de fin,» In: *Libération*, Paris, 06/09/2003
3. E. Breton, «La naissance du 'réalisme socialiste',» In: *Le cinéma russe et soviétique*, dir. J.-L. Passek, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1981, p. 67.
4. M. Estève, "ZVIAGUINTSEV Andreï (1964-)", In: *Encyclopedia Universalis*, [online], URL: www.universalis-edu.com/encyclopedie/andrei-zviaguintsev, consulted 22/02/2013.
5. H. Normand, *Dictionnaire des symboles universels basés sur le principe de la clef de la connaissance*, Tome 1, ed. Dervy, Paris, 2005, p. 253.
6. G. Deleuze, *L'Image-Temps*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1985.
7. Crystal-images are images that show one actual facet but also include one or more virtual facets, which can take the form of separate images, or of a modification to the content of the same image. These different facets are bound in a coalescent relationship. Actual and virtual are to be understood here as present and past, both immediate and distant. Therefore, the photographs contained within an image can result in its crystallization. The father in the photograph belongs to the past, but he now also exists in the actual, present moment. His two sons consider him to be identical to the unchanged photograph they have kept of him, as if his twelve-year absence created a temporal void during which the father did not age.
8. D. Nasta, "Andrei Tarkovsky, Démiurge," In: *Materiali di Estetica*, Milano, December 2006, p. 6.
9. See M. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, first published 1969, English translation, 1971.

10. C. Stanislavski, *La mise en scène d'Othello*, Point 42, Paris, 1973, p. 210. «[Il ne s'agit pas de] jouer bien, mais juste, et à partir du juste d'atteindre le vrai.»

11. Through his principle of biomechanics, Meyerhold – who proposed "the distancing effect before Brecht and the primary role of the actor's body before Artaud" – theorizes a performance that emphasizes the importance of physical presence" and which "forgoes any resemblance to real life." The principle suggests a theatrical style in which the viewer "completes, through imagination, the picture from the allusions given on stage" and where the actor is freed from the psychological realism promoted by Stanislavski. I. Perelli-Contos, «Stanislavski et Meyerhold: pionniers de la pédagogie théâtrale,» In: *Etudes littéraires*, vol. 20, n° 3, 1988, p. 13-25, [online], URL: http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/500812ar, consulted on 20/02/2013.

12. Kostantin Lavronenko in *The Return* (Zvyagintsev, 2003).

13. R. Bird, *Andreï Roublev d'Andreï Tarkovski*, Les éditions de la transparence, Chatou, 2008.

14. V. Ostria, «Le Retour», In: *Les Inrockuptibles*, 01/01/2003 [online], URL : http://www.lesinrocks.com/cinema/films-a-l-affiche/le-retour/ consulted on 20/02/2013.

15. D. Nasta, "Andreï Tarkovski, Démiurge," op. cit.

16. In her article "Andreï Tarkovski Démiurge," op. cit., Dominique Nasta explains that Demiourgos, Plato's demiurge, creates the universe by using the four elements and seeking equilibrium between humanity and nature.

17. See D. Nasta, «Andreï Tarkovski, Démiurge», op. cit., p. 1.

18. N. Julien, *Le Dictionnaire des Symboles*, Marabout, Alleur, 1989, «Eau» pp. 113-115 and «Pluie» pp. 303-304.

19. Jung compares diving into the unconscious with an immersion in a Mercurial bath. With its liquid form, Mercury represents "this mysterious psychic substance that we today call the unconscious psyche." Diving into the water of the lake thus represents a descent towards the unconscious. C. G. Jung, *Psychologie du transfert*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1980, p. 103.

20. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante describes Hell as an inverted cone composed of concentric circles. The fifth circle marks the entrance into Lower Hell, accessed by crossing the swampy waters of the Styx, where the wrathful and the sullen are mired for eternity.

21. C. G. Jung, *Psychologie du transfert*, op. cit., p. 108.

22. M. Foucault, «Des espaces autres,» *Dits et écrits, volume II, 1976-1988, Quarto Gallimard, Paris, 2001.*

23. D. Nasta, «Andreï Tarkovski, Démiurge,» op. cit., p. 5.

24. D. Nasta, «Andreï Tarkovski, Démiurge,» op. cit., p. 4.

25. C. G. Jung, *L'Homme et ses symboles*, R. Laffont, Paris, 1964, p.131.

26. R. Bird, *Andreï Roublev d'Andreï Tarkovski*, op. cit., p. 71.

27. V. Ostria, «Le Retour,» op. cit.

28. This sequence undoubtedly references the Icarus myth, but it also echoes a very common Russian theme – that of the will to transcend, to cut ties with the material and terrestrial world. It also evokes the writings of Plato, for whom, as Dominique Nasta notes, this element is seen as "a vital necessity for the renewal of the cosmological creation myth." (D. Nasta, "Andreï Tarkovski Démiurge," op. cit., p. 6.)

29. Andrei repeats the phrase his father used earlier in the film to describe how to free the car's wheels from the mud.

30. Indeed, adulthood implies the possibility of being the *creator* of one's own existence.

31. L. Martinez, «Orthodoxie et littérature en Russie,» In: *Géopolitique*, n° 47, automne 1994, p. 46.

32. D. Nasta, «Mythes de la stabilité et de la mutabilité: l'humain et l'étrange dans l'œuvre de Tarkovski,» In: *Les cahiers du Cerli*, n° 14, Bruxelles, janvier 1987.

33. A. Le Brun, «Le cinéma russe contemporain,» In: critikat.com, [online] URL: http://www.critikat.com/Le-Cinema-russe-contemporain.html, consulted on 20/02/2013.

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The First Advertising Films in Romania

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Abstract
The article looks at the earliest Romanian advertising films that are still preserved as well as the ones we only know about from the press and documents. It concludes that the advertising films were short fiction films and, later on, documentaries; sometimes it is difficult to distinguish them from the propaganda films or the newsreels. Most of them have been commissioned by representatives of multinational firms, with great ambitions and appropriate means.

Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon/ La Sortie des usines Lumière à Lyon (1895) by Louis and Auguste Lumière is not only the first film ever shown in a public screening at Salon Indien du Grand Café in Paris on the 28th of December 1895, but it can also be considered the first advertising film because, in the background, it shows, for 46 seconds, the signboard of a firm, which produces photographic materials. However, it is difficult to establish which was indeed the first advertising film. Even if Thomas Alva Edison did not think about presenting his films for a tickets-paying audience like the Lumière Brothers, as early as 1894 his firm, Kinetoscope, made films such as *Corbett and Courtney Before the Kinetograph*, which were advertising both the boxing match and the camera for moving pictures designed by the great inventor. Kinetoscope also made *Black Diamond Express* (1896) and other films with the support of Lehigh Valley Railroad. In fact, they were doing advertising for the trains on the Buffalo-Niagara[1] route. Instead, one can certainly say that the first television advertising film was the one for Bulova watches and was broadcast by US Television WNBT in 1941 before a baseball match[2].

In Romania the situation is similar. We deal with films commissioned by firms and organizations in order to promote themselves, but it is difficult to decide whether some productions were aiming exclusively towards advertising or propaganda. They are longer than the advertising clips today, they have sometimes more than 10 minutes and they show in detail equipment, production processes,

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marketing of products, etc. that resemble the reportages and monographs made by Sahia Studios under communism. In addition, the films made until 1932 and thereafter are silent, therefore the explanations are provided by plug-ins, initially on cards interspersed between sequences and later superimposed on the images. In sound films a voice off with a timbre a little affected for the taste of modern audience offers a laudatory comment. Musical illustration does not appear in all films of this type and usually consists of symphonic music and basically is used only in the passages without comment.

In 1927 the Romanian representative of the Diamant bicycle factory commissioned a report of 8 minutes, *Diamant Bicycle Race*, showing the same year race on the route Bucharest-Târgoviște and return, while the Romanian Association for Promoting Aviation (ARPA) commissioned a documentary film called *The Aviation Exhibition of Carol Park/ Expoziția de aviație din Parcul Carol* (10 minutes). The "authors" of these films are unknown[3]. These films have a certain advertisement character but can be foremoste considered newsreel subjects. Other films with advertising and propaganda character, such as *Romanian Oil/ Petrolul românesc* (1937, a production of ONT and Pathé-Journal Paris, directed by Aimée Gorce and M.V. Pușcariu), were ordered by the Romanian government to be presented at international exhibitions. This film was shown in France, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and USA[4].

The first Romanian documentary film with certain advertisement character still preserved is *Mediaș Enamel/ Emailul Mediaș* (1930). Its length (7 minutes) and the abundance of explanatory inserts and details clearly distinguish it from the newsreels episodes. The unknown author shows not only the machinery and production process but finally adds some scenes "performed by actors", in which a peasant woman commits the factory and replaces the clay cooking vessels with some enameled ones.

An important film that shows, in its running time of 20 minutes, the printing process and the activity of the Romanian press in the 30's is *The Universe/ Universul* (1931) directed by Tudor Posmantir, an experienced filmmaker that began his work during WW1 at the "Photo-Cinematic Service of the Romanian Army". Obviously, the newspaper *The Universe* wrote about the film and its screeening during the same year at the cinema theatres Trianon and Regal. A similar film is *STB* (1932), commissioned by the the Tramways Company Bucharest, that, in 20 minutes, depicts all the aspects of recruitment, training, healthcare and transport organization in Bucharest, offering also unique images of inter-war Bucharest, including images from the tram cabin in the move.

The great Hungarian cinematographer Eugen (Jenő) Janovics (1872-1945) directed in 1935 *The Wire Industry Brăila/ Industria Sârmei Brăila*. The director of photography was Istvan Miskowsky. The film was made by "Foto-Film Cluj". How can we explain the participation of a great Hungarian filmmaker in the making of such films? Due to filmmakers such as Eugene Janovics, Sándor László Kellner and others, the city of Cluj had a genuine cinematic boom during WW1, while the American and French films were banned. After the war, however, those films came back and, adding to this the collapse of Austria-Hungary, it resulted in a drastical market crash. After 1918, when Cluj and Transylvania became part of Romania, Korda and Janovics adapted, working also for the Romanian market[5]. Janovics also worked on the northern part of Transylvania, which was occupied by Hungary between 1940- 1944, where he made films such as *Mureș and Târgu Mureș/ A Maros es Marosvasarhely/ Mureșul și Târgu-Mureș* (1941), while Sándor László Kellner emigrated to Great Britain in 1919 and became famous as Alexander Korda[6]. In Romania, Janovics made no less than 29 films[7], usually together with Miskowsky, such as the touristic documentary *Brașov* (1937), about the sights and surroundings of the town from a Romanian perspective. However, Janovics is not the only filmmaker who made propaganda movies for the two different regimes.

Between 1935-1939 the films with advertising and touristic character significantly increased and only the outbreak of the war replaced them with propaganda ones. In 1935 *Tourist and Ship Line*

Lilly Stănescu, S. Sismanian and Paul Sbrentea in
Lache in the Harem



The Chocolate and Sweets Factory Queen Mary

Society Hamburg-America/ Societatea de turism Hamburg America Linie was made about the open-ing of the tourist society with the same name, in 1937 *Danube Cruise by Luxury Ship King Carol/ Plimbarea pe Dunăre cu vasul de lux Regele Carol*, by Hary Yagar, for the Romanian Society for River Navigation. In 1938 two films by Constantin Petrovici and Iosif Bertok *Bragadiru Brewery/ Fabricarea berei Bragadiru* and *Romanian Industry. Manufacturing Electric Light Bulbs/ Industria românească: fabricarea becurilor electrice* (about manufacturing bulbs for Tungsgram-Krypton Company), in 1939 *The Chocolate and Sweets Factory Queen Mary/ Fabrica de ciocolată şi produse zaharoase Regina Maria* directed by Tudor Posmantir (preserved in just one print without sound), *Leather and Footwear Enterprises Grigor Alexandrescu/ Întreprinderile de pielărie și încălțăminte Grigore Alexandrescu* and *The First Romanian Tire Factory Banloc-Goodrich/ Prima fabrică românească de anvelope Banloc-Goodrich* (directed by Wilfried Ott, about the factory near Ploieşti). All these films are almost entirely pre-served. About other advertising films we have only information from the press of those times. In a 1927 edition of the newspaper *The Universe* we can read about the screening, at the Capitol Cinema Theatre, of a first film about the ship King Carol, *An Offshore Cruise by King Carol Ship/ O excursie cu vaporul Regele Carol în larg,* in 1928 about the screening at Trianon Cinema Theatre of the film *A Visit at Astra Train Cars Factory/ O vizită la fabrica de vagoane ASTRA* and about making the film *Steindorf Anina Sanatorium/ Sanatoriul Steindorf Anina*, while in 1936 about *The Manufacture of Fabrics Tellmann/ Fabricarea stofelor Tellmann* (directed by Eftimie Vasilescu). According to Constantin Ivanovici's memoires, in 1933 he shot the film *Brewing Czell Beer/ Fabricarea berii Czell*[8].

In 1930 Romanians began to make touristic and propaganda films in co-production with Germany[9]. By collaboration with UFA Studios, certain technical difficulties could be surmounted such as the introduction of sound. Eight such films are preserved. One of them preserved is a 10-minute copy of *Bear Hunting in the Carpathians/ Vânătoare de urşi în Carpaţi/ Bährenjagd in den Karpaten* (1930, directed by Ulrich K.T. Schulz, directors of photography Bernhard Juppe and Kurt Stanke). Besides the detailed story of the hunting, the filmmakers included a "story" with actors. Thus, a forester is terrorized by a huge and fierce brown bear and makes a call in Germany and a team of hunters arrives and shoots the beast[10].

It is interesting that in Romania, but also in other Eastern European countries, the first advertsing films were not documentaries but short fiction films. Therefore, sometimes, the advertising message is not explicit or is expressed only in the end. In Bulgaria, for example, *The Magic Carpet/ Famozniat kilim* (1933, directed by Vasil Bakardjiev), a fantastic movie where an oriental prince is flying on a carpet, includes in the end an insert mentioning that the film was made in order to advertise the carpet factory Ohanes Tomayan in Panagyurishte[11]. In 1912 Constatin Ardeleanu, owner of the Valea Zorilor

Beer transportation. *Bragadiru Brewery*
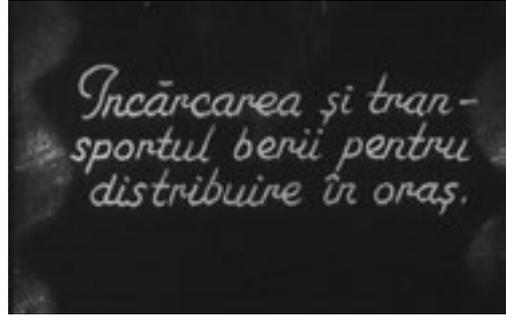
Insert from *Bragadiru Brewery*

Wine Company, commisioned the film *Vintage/ Culesul viilor* to Gheorghe Ionescu. Several actors of the National Theatre in Bucharest, among whom Ion Iancovescu, participated by even dancing the Sârba in this film, shot at Valea Călugărească. The next year the Romanian branch of Pathé made for Clasic Cinema Theatre *A Circle Dance in the Countryside or Iulian in His Slum Sketches/ O horă la țară sau Iulian în creațiunile sale de mahala*, a short film about the comedian Iulian Coșna Manda[12]. Several other short films followed, which usually represented additions to the program or advertising for some foreign actors or characters. The only film of this type still preserved is *Lache in the Harem/ Lache în harem* (1928, directed by Marcel Blossoms and V.D. Ionescu). An unemployed man fells asleep on the shores of Floreasca Lake while watching a group of girls who bathe. He dreams about saving a girl from the harem of a pasha, but right at the moment when they are preparing to escape from the palace the girls wake him, laughing at him. The film is littered with advertisements and the movie itself is actually an advertisement of a show of Cărăbuș Theatre. In fact, the girls in the film are dancers of the theatre. We can also mention that one of the film directors, Marcel Blossoms (Blumen), benefits from his experience from Vita Studios in Vienna[13].

In the collections of the Romanian Film Archive there are some pieces of prints with sketches of animation films with advertsing character made in the 30s. They were drawn by Marin Iorda (Iordache), cartoonist, comic book writer and creator of the first Romanian animation film preserved, *Haplea* (1920), after Nicolae Batzaria's story. It is possible that Marin Iorda made some advertising animation films although there is no written mention of them. In the preserved sketches we can find a fat character with a round nose similar to Haplea and a radio, an adversting for "Nora" radios, a weightlifter and a bar of chocolate advertising for the chocolate "Grivița" and the portrait of Mona Lisa wearing a knitted sweater as an advertising for "Monica" knit.

Nowadays the Romanian televisions have shown short films of several seconds with actors of soap operas addressing a few words to the audience about the respective television programme. Such an idea is not new. In 1930 the Romanian audience could hear a second film spoken in Romanian with the Romanian version of *Paramount Parade/ Parada Paramount* (directed by Charles de Rochefort, Ernst Lubitsch and others). This film was made in 13 national versions in 13 countries, including the Romanian version sketches starring Ion Iancovescu and Pola Illery (Paula Iliescu)[14]. The care of the distributors for the local version is proved also by another initiative, of including "ancillary scenes" filmed in the country where the film was distributed. Therefore a print of *The Revenge of Louis XIII/ La vengeance de Louis XIII* (1910, directed by André Calmettes) is hand-colored, frame by frame (most probably in China) and in the scene where the king reads the letter, it is written in Romanian! In order to do that, a letter in Romanian was filmed and included in the print released in Romania. Today some would say that such a method would impede the integrity of the work, but, in fact, the method is similar with the

one where the foreign actors are dubbed by local actors, a wide-spread practice in the USA, Germany and other countries, which has begun to be used also in Romania but only in films for children.

We can conclude that it probably was not by chance that the first advertising films preserved in Romania, both fiction and documentary, have been commissioned by representatives of multinational firms, with great ambitions and appropriate means, same as most of advertising clips today. The fact that most of such films are not preserved is also due to their occasional character. However, despite being too long and including too many details according to contemporary views, or, perhaps, precisely for those reasons, they preserve rich and sometimes unique moving images of Romania's industry, tourism, sport, press and transports between 1910-1939, that the classic film genres have ignored or mirrored just in passing.

NOTES

1. Musser, Charles- Edison Movies, http://www.kino.com/edison/d1.html.
2. http://www.bulova.com/about/about.aspx.
3. Borcan, Silvia, Rîpeanu, Bujor T., *Catalogul filmelor documentare românești 1897-1948*, Arhiva Națională de Filme, Bucharest, 1981, p. 21-22.
4. Rîpeanu, Bujor T., *Producția cinematografică din România 1897-1970. Filmografie adnotată II/ 1A*, Arhiva Națională de Filme, Bucharest, 1975, p. 114.
5. Stoil, Michael Jon, *Cinema Beyond the Danube: The Camera and Politics*, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Metuchen, New Jersey, p. 40-43. See also Stoil, Michael Jon, *Mass Media in Mobilization Regimes: The Case of Balkan Cinema*, George Washington University, Washington D.C., 1979, p. 21.
6. Tabori, Paul, *Alexander Korda*, Living Books Inc., New York, 1966, p. 60.
7. Rîpeanu, Bujor T., *Filmat în România. Filmul documentar 1897-1948*, Ed. Meronia, Bucharest, 2008, p. 575-576.
8. Rîpeanu, Bujor T., *Ibidem*, p. 56. See also Rîpeanu, Bujor T., *Filmat în România. Filmul documentar 1897-1948*, p. 306.
9. If *Europe`s Last Pelicans/ Ultimii pelicani din Europa/ Europas Letzte Pelikanen* is obviously a touristic film, *Gold Diggers in Romania/ Căutătorii de aur în România/ Goldgraber in Rumanien* tackles a rather sensational topic, while *German Working Places/ Locuri de muncă germane/ Deutsche Arbeits Statten* is in fact a propaganda film for the German-Romanian collaboration.
10. Borcan, Silvia, Rîpeanu, Bujor T., *Ibidem*, p. 136.
11. Kardjilov, Petar, *Balgarski igralni filmi. Anotirana iliustrovana filmografia*, Tom I, Ed. Petar Beron, Sofia, 1987, p. 153.
12. Modorcea, Grid, *Dicționarul filmului românesc de ficțiune*, Ed. Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 2004, p. 21.
13. Țuțui, Marian, "Biografia inedită a unui regizor interbelic", see   http://www.cinemagia.ro/stiri/biografia-inedita-a-unui-regizor-interbelic-marcel-blossoms--7451/
14. Caranfil, Tudor, *Dicționar de filme românești*, Ed. Litera Internațional, Bucharest-Kishinev, p. 257.

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MTV and a New Style of Editing

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Abstract

The paper tries to map out the characteristics of the MTV editing style within the framework of the general evolution of new media techniques and trends. The analysis of aesthetics trends relies on case studies and media theories. The paper also examines the mutual influence between cinema and music video and their influence on spectator reception.

Keywords

Editing, MTV, music video, new media, digital technologies, music video aesthetics, "eye catching techniques"

The MTV style of editing used in the last 20 years is associated with the appearance of the American television station which bears the same name. The influence of the music video on film editing becomes apparent. Music videos particularly drawn the interest of young television audiences yearning for strong visual stimuli to supplement a musical piece.

This method of filmmaking has its roots in the success of experimental films and, evidently, in the most successful media of this format, the advertisement.

The influence of the music video surpassed the limits of television by replacing the traditional set of narrative purposes that include a narrative thread and focusing on a character and a subject using a multiple plane approach. There is a subject and a character, but perhaps the location or the feeling is the main component of the music video.

The traditional meaning of time and space together with the conventions used to relate real time to film time are replaced by a much less direct correlation. In fact, many music videos attempt to establish their own points of reference between reality and film time.

Such connections may represent large leaps in time and space, and the vivacity of the resulting image offers a new correlation, giving filmmakers the freedom to "live" in their own imaginary world.

Correlated with this narrative style, the editor has creative freedom to "play" with images, oftenly giving meaning in such a way that was not planned during filming.

Music videos are a neglected art form and are part of what we nowadays call "new media". A music video has all the characteristics required for it to be part of this trend: it has its own operating system and it uses different software applications to create apparent images and virtual realities.

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According to Lev Manovich[1], it can be stated that the principles that govern new media, correlated with the idea of music videos, are:

1. **Numerical representation:** An image may be described by different mathematical functions, becoming an observable, predictable element.
2. **Modularity:** The image has a fractal structure. Each consists of a multitude of other images and/ or meanings.
3. **Variability:** The image does not exist through itself but has infinite versions of itself.
4. **Transcoding:** The image is translated from one digital format to another.
5. **Automation:** The image is subjected to binary coding: the modular structure of the image determines the automation of the steps involved in the process of creation, manipulation and access.

THE ORIGINS OF THE MUSIC VIDEO

Although the non-narrative experiments of Luis Buñuel in *Le Chien Andalou* (directed by Luis Buñuel, 1929) have certain similarities with contemporary music videos, a greater influence is due to music that has a narrative thread and fictional characters.

The famous films of the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* (directed by Richard Lester, 1964) and *Help* (directed by Richard Lester, 1965), from the '60s, mark a new starting point. Later, the *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (directed by Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones, 1975) and *Life of Brian* movies further added stylistic elements to the genre. It must be pointed out that these films were different from traditional musical and narrative films, which featured song and dance routines. Movies such as *Pirates* (directed by Vincente Minelli, 1948), *An American in Paris* (directed by Vincente Minnelli, 1951) and *Invitation to the Dance* (1957) were exceptions.

The most famous musicals, such as *Singin' in the Rain* (directed by Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952) and *West Side Story* (directed by Jerome Robbins, 1961), had a visual style that fit the energy and "emotion" of the story. Going back to Lester's films *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) and *Help!* (1965), these are musicals that set fairly high standards for the main characters and performers.

Music is included in the understanding of narrative threads, but the story is secondary and does not set the same high goals as musicals do. In fact, the viewer has to find a common sense and a feeling in the narrative of these films which are an "excuse" for song and dance routines that symbolize what the Beatles represented in the history of music: energy, anarchy and ingenuity.

Moving on to the *Monty Python* series of films, we add a literary basis for reference and we become aware of how characters draw attention to their condition of inhabiting screen space and communicate directly with the viewer. The result is the audience is encouraged to discover the construction of a gag.

Such elements - literary metaphor and introspection - cover the repertoire of a music video. Reference points transcend literature and film to other media such as television, journalism and computer games.

Eisenstein's film *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), which features a series of battle scenes, choreographed to music composed by Sergei Prokofiev, set new standards for film music and is considered by some to be the first music video.

MEANINGS

The music video (similar to its accessories: fashion and sexuality) is not standardized; it is a product of a rebellious, non-conformist social category.

It is an avant-garde product and has a very precise target: the viewer that must assimilate the message, often through strong visual impact and a "violent" style of editing. It is subjected to the viewer's judgment which transforms it into what is perceived: art/trash. Steven Connor claims:

"What is characteristic of the postmodern music video is its refusal to take a firm stand vis-à-vis its imagery, its particularity of reacting equivocally in not communicating something clear."[2]

It is meant to create an image rather than tell a story.

Manipulating colors, sets, dance styles and wardrobe, the music video director reshapes an idea, gives it a different meaning and remodels it.

In the end, the director must come up with another idea rooted in other foundations, with other meanings, achieved through editing.

If we were to make an inventory of postmodern references, we would realize that music production and music videos are actually the combination and altering of quotes extracted from plays or films that already exist. Likewise, we notice that the music video abandons the narrative in favor of the non-narrative. Finally, does the music video fall prey to ecstatic communication without any meaning? At this point of the analysis we can make a clear distinction between "video art" and "contemporary artistic video".

The main difference is the presence of music as motivation in the first and as background in the second. Video image does not reproduce "something", a perceivable element of reality, or a human emotion: image manipulates, it structures things and gives them a meaning by "arranging reality".

THE ELEMENTS OF THE MUSIC VIDEO

The music video is a multi-discourse, intertextual phenomenon that is composed of three basic elements: the performance, the narrative and the message that it sends to the viewer.

The existence of these three elements makes the connection between the text, the image and the viewer. There is of course a conventional method of storytelling, of conveying the narrative of a music video.

This method is closely related to the featured characters, the sets that are used, choreography, etc. On the other hand, the image, the frame, is not merely a piece that can be suppressed, but an ideogram full of meaning, in direct correlation with the reality it expresses.

THE MUSIC VIDEO. CASE STUDY, *STAN* - EMINEM FEATURING DIDO

An artist's music is influenced by his life, the environment he lives in and the education he receives. In the case of hip-hop artist Eminem, famous for his extremely violent lyrics, music is a direct reflection of his life.

His mother gave birth to him at the age of 15 and, shortly after, his father left them. He dropped out of school in the ninth grade, when he failed to pass his exams. From the age of fourteen, he began trying to make a name for himself in the rap music industry.

After several failed attempts and poverty, a record label eventually took him in and, in 2000, he released *The Marshall Mathers LP*. The album debuted was at the top of the U.S. Charts, it won three Grammy awards and was the first rap album nominated for "Album of the Year", after selling over 8 million copies in the U.S. alone. From this album, one of the most promoted tracks, that also featured a music video, was *Stan*.

The lyrics of *Stan* tell the story of one of Eminem's obsessed fans that, failing to receive a reply to the numerous letters he sent to his idol, decides to commit suicide, while also killing his pregnant girlfriend. After his death, one of his letters eventually reaches Eminem, but by then it is already too late. *Rolling Stone* magazine places *Stan* at number 290 in the top of the Best 500 Songs Ever Made.

The first shot is a dolly that enters the house through the window, where we see a woman sleeping. It is night outside and it is raining. The cut with the following shot is synced to the flash of lightning. We slowly start to hear violins playing, hidden under the sound of the rain.

The atmosphere is typical of a thriller - it is a somber, tense atmosphere, created through images, sounds and music. The pregnant woman gets out of bed. We see a new character, a young man in the bathroom pouring water over his head. Through parallel editing, the pregnant woman is shown walking down a corridor.

The young woman reaches the bathroom, where the couple has a fight. The moment he rushes out, the music begins, as the first shots (that may certainly be considered shots of a film) are the prelude.We discover the obsessed fan's room through a circular traveling camera motion. The walls are completely covered in posters of his idol, Eminem. The young man starts writing a letter, where the words are the lyrics of the song. A shot of Eminem reading the letter connects the two scenes.

We realize we are simultaneously seeing two time frames: Stan's time when he is writing the letter, and Eminem's time when he is reading the letter. After the letter is finished, we see that it is lost by a postman.

Thus, it does not reach Eminem. At that point, the viewer is aware of more than the characters are, knowing why the letter never reached its destination. But Stan does not know this, so he writes another, much more resentful letter, where he accuses Eminem of not responding.

The viewer pities Stan, we feel compassion for this character that is mistakenly accusing his idol due to a simple postal error. The protagonist is shot from a downward angle in this sequence, as opposed to the first part of the music video.

An element of film grammar is thus used to show the temper of the protagonist. The second stanza of the song reveals much more personal information about the life of the protagonist and focuses on the connection to Eminem that only exists in his head. The young pregnant woman steps into the altar Stan has created in Eminem's honor. Her presence makes Stan furious. In the following sequence, Stan is driving while recording himself on a small tape recorder. He is positively furious. He sends a final message to his idol before driving off a bridge, killing himself and his girlfriend who is tied up in the trunk of the car.

He is angry because no one has replied. The flashes of lightning, the acting, the lyrics and the dynamic editing all create tension, revealing the young man's anger.

After the shot of the car plunging into the water, we see a shot of Eminem holding a letter, a shot that is similar to the one in the beginning of the video. Thus, the viewer knows that Eminem is reading the second letter. We then see his response.

He is trying to calm his fan down with his reply. Towards the end of the song, Eminem realizes that "Stan" is the same person that he saw on the television on the news for having killed himself and his girlfriend by driving off a bridge. The moment is extremely tense.The fan receives his answer. However, it is already too late.

The music video has an open ending, as we see Stan's six-year-old brother next to his grave, having also dyed his hair blonde to look like Eminem, seemingly continuing in his brother's footsteps. This is an open ending because Stan's death is not the end of Eminem's extremist fans. His brother has inherited Stan's obsession.

"Audiovisual technique is actually an infinite sequence shot, just like reality is for our eyes and ears, during the time that these senses are active. And this sequence shot is nothing more than a reproduction of the present."[3] That is another way of approaching the music video, that finally sums up the whole theory that a music video can be a "performance clip", when it is presented in the form of a live performance, or a "conceptual clip" when the music video is based on a concept it illustrates, that it tends to follow.

It is a simplistic way of looking at the theory of music video, where things tend to be polarized: beauty versus ugliness, art versus commercial, naturalism versus anti-realism, woman versus man, etc. It is seldom that the narrative of a music video is based on a certain type of discourse where a figure

(usually a woman) becomes the object of an erotic tale, of male sexual lust.

The narrative is usually objective and the viewer can "touch" the bodily image, dematerialize it and wish to possess it. These non-narrative music videos which are the most controversial are usually based on reality and have political and/or social implications: the inequality between sexes, the issues of homosexuality, sadism, masochism, ideas that take priority in the fight against significant bourgeois practices.

WAYS OF RECEPTION

The ways that a music video is perceived by the viewer, whether initiated or not, may be categorized into three levels. The first is instinctive, requiring a display of indifference towards music videos in general, where the content is perceived on a subconscious level.

The second level is intersubjective, based on stimuli coming from one's entourage, friends, stimuli that influence how the music video is perceived. The final level requires individual perception with a high degree of subjectivity, labeling a music video as either good or bad, based on our own aesthetic expectations. The viewer has the final decision on a music video's quality, judging it according to its own aesthetic preferences.

On the other hand, it is fair to say that the relationship between the clip and the viewer is fantastic and/or of identification. The viewer identifies itself with a certain object, being or image in the music video. The music video shows us a fictional, three-dimensional image that allows us to navigate through it, picture ourselves there and be a part of it.

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW STYLE OF EDITING

In recent years a new trend has appeared that breaks the rules and conventions of editing theory, being based more on the graphic elements of the frame and less on spatial-temporal relationships.

In his attempt to define the MTV editing particular style, Ken Dancyger claims that

"…the editing implications of the MTV style shift the focus from character and the structure of the narrative as a whole to the set piece itself. In a sense, the MTV style subverts the linear experience and elevates the scene over the sequence, an Act, or indeed the whole film"[4].

This new style of editing employs certain "tricks", both visual and auditory, in order to make audiences relate to the bidimensional image, while creating a third dimension in their heads.

American film theorists David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson believe that there are four types of relations between two shots separated through an editing cut:

• Graphic relations
• Rhythmic relations
• Spatial relations
• Temporal relations

To quote Bordwell, "Graphic and rhythmic relationships are present in the editing of any film. Spatial and temporal relationships may be irrelevant to the editing of films using abstract form, but they are present in the editing of films built out of nonabstract images (that is, the great majority of motion pictures)."[5]

Graphic and rhythmic relations are dependent on image, while spatial and temporal ones are dependent on the flow of time. In the traditional style of editing, spatial and temporal relations

serve to create the narrative flow of the story by explaining where we are and what is happening at a certain time.

The other two are used to "refine" the connection between shots, making spatial and temporal relations less important. Graphic and temporal rhythmic juxtapositions become more prevalent and even if, for some, this style may appear more abstract, the films are still narrative. In two-dimensional editing principles, the new style of editing voids two of the basic principles of continuity: it breaks the 180 degree rule and crosses "the line".

When the principle of continuity is broken, it is advisable to set up a set of rules for the audience to follow. There are two ways to make the audience accept the breaking of the principles of continuity: either build a new set of rules or distract them so that they don't pay attention to these principles.

EYE SCANNING

The idea of scanning or exploring using only one's eyes is by far the most important principle of video editing and it is based on the idea that the eye is unconsciously attracted to what it finds most appealing at any given time. When we look at a film or a picture, the eyes move in a certain rhythm (pattern), involuntarily. In a close up shot, the eyes gravitate towards the person's eyes, then mouth, ears and other recognizable elements of the facial expression.

All the elements that draw the eye are called "eye catchers" (an object, a character, etc. that draws the attention); movement is the most important of them all. Other important elements are contrasts, bright colors or objects that may be used in building the narrative logic or in the description of characters. There are two ways of using motion in editing. A sudden but brief movement may lead the eyes of the viewer where it is intended and can be used to connect to a shot that has an eye catcher (an object or a character that draws the attention) in approximately the same place. If movement takes place over a longer distance, speed and duration must also be accounted for, in order to make the transition to the next shot appear seamless.

An object in a shot always has a meaning, either for the narrative or for the description of a certain character or location. When a character picks up a gun, we focus on the hand, because of the movement. However, if we know that the character holding the gun is in danger, we look at the gun even if there is no movement.

CONTRAST

The "eye catching" method (object, character, movement, etc. that draws the attention) based on contrast is not merely a question of difference between light and dark. It is clear that our eyes are attracted to a small black spot in the snow or a lantern in a dark forest, but contrast can be used in a wider meaning. If all the objects in a shot are largely the same, the item that stands out due to its size, color, light or texture will draw the eye.

COLORS

Colors that exist in nature, such as bright red or yellow, are used to symbolize danger. Such colors draw our attention and send a subconscious message, and, through experience, we come to form associations, such as red symbolizing love and yellow standing for cowardice. The principles of color and contrast can be applied to a very light object appearing in a dark environment or in even more obvious ways, such as in *Schindler's List* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1993), where the little girl in red appears in a black-and-white image.

We find a similar example in *Cries and Whispers* (Ingmar Bergman,1972), where in a red room with red furniture, the fire alarm is white, to contrast with the red that would normally represent

danger. If all the elements in a shot save for one are out of focus, our eyes will immediately move to the element displayed with sharpness. If the focus changes to another part of the frame, our eyes will immediately follow the point of focus. If a new object that is out of focus appears in the shot, our eyes will attempt to focus on it, ending up frustrated if the camera does not do the same.

TOLERANCE IN TIME

As many editors say, sometimes the difference between a good cut and a bad one is a single frame. Of course, this depends on a multitude of factors, such as what shot follows and the rhythm of the entire sequence. In the case of a jump shot, a strong "eye catcher" must be employed to draw the attention of the viewer. Almost all "eye catchers" start off strong the first time they are used, their effectiveness decreasing as viewers start to predict them.

If the "eye catcher" is a movement that continues in the next shot, tolerance may drop to a single frame, while in a dialogue, a cut may be made virtually anywhere without diminishing the viewer's attention paid to the dialogue. Another way to compensate for not using the traditional rules of continuity is to distract the audience every time you do it, either visually or by using sound.

WHITE FLASH EDITING

One of the most often used ways is to insert one or two frames of white image in the middle of the cut. In traditional editing, this may be equivalent to cutting in cases where they would naturally occur, such as a flash of lightning.

SWISH-PAN

A very quick panoramic movement may result in an unfocused picture, blurring space and making it easier to cut in a completely different place from where it started. In the case of a "violent" pan, the difference between a clear and an unfocused image is a single frame. Sometimes, the trick is done by using a dissolve between two unfocused shots. This is by no means a novelty, as it is a method employed as early as *Some Like It Hot* (Billy Wilder, 1959); Marilyn Monroe tries to seduce Tony Curtis on a yacht, while, at the same time, Jack Lemmon is dancing in a restaurant on shore. Through a very rapid dolly, a shot can cover distances of several miles in a short time, as seen in the first part of Lars von Trier's *The Kingdom I* (1996) where the swish-pan is used differently; during a conference, the camera moves from one person to another, seemingly not breaking the 180 degree rule. In this sequence, a cut would have worked just as well to connect two shots filmed from opposing directions.

Sound plays a very important role. It is evident that, similar to music videos, music plays an important part, and rhythmic relations are primordial, but there is also a more specific way of using sound: the sound-bridge, noises. Loud noises such as a door slamming may mask an imperfect edit. In the new style of editing, such elements are added without any connection to the story. Noises such as those used in cartoons are included as "audio white-flashes".

THE "MTV STYLE"

One of the main purposes of the music video is to create an emotional state. Music, particularly music without lyrics, expresses human emotion. This musical equation with increased emotional experience was developed as an effect of cinematic experience.

In this sense, the sound of music is more concentrated than the film experience in itself. Music that accentuates a certain image may be perceived as a higher concentration of emotion. When we add lyrics to a song, that are generally poetic, we add emotion to the music; if a narrative value sets in, it is given by the lyrics. In conclusion, the purpose of music and lyrics is to create an emotional

state defined for the created state. An emotional state can be sudden or it can set in gradually; it can be like the progression of a dream or it can slowly develop.

In each case, the state creates a disconnected meaning, dissociated from narrative. In the case of music videos, we are dealing with a succession of dissociated sequences, each one memorable on its own, but not organized in the ascending order of traditional filmmaking. This is why, for certain films, we only remember disjointed sequences, while not recalling the entire story or each of the characters.

THE NOTION OF SET-PIECE

The "MTV style" is better understood if the narrative structure that unfurls is seen as a set of stories that cover and include a dramatic arc. Editing shifts the point of interest from the overarching story and characters, to one of the individual stories, also known as a set-piece.

In a way, it emphasizes the importance of a sequence over a set of others, an act or even the entire film.

Esentially, within a sequence, the MTV style focuses on the evolution of emotion, exceeding the boundaries of the narrative thread.

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BOOK REVIEW

Film after Film: Or, What Became of 21st Century Cinema? by J. Hoberman, Verso Books, 2012

Reviewed by Irina Trocan

Devoted readers of J. Hoberman will certainly find that *Film After Film*[1] fulfills their expectations: this volume has the veteran film critic apply his customary wit and scope of analysis on the noteworthy films of the last decade. I hesitate to call them masterpieces – though Hoberman primarily takes on films that inspire him to write euphoric appraisals – because the focus is less on the assessment of individual artistic achievement than on the evolution of cinematic form; ontological inquiry trumps star rating.

The first part of the book ("A Post-Photographic Cinema") addresses Bazinian notions of the privileged relationship between cinema and reality – since the camera lens (the *objectif*) records reality without human mediation – and their inevitable transformation in the age of digital filmmaking and obligatory post-production alteration. Hoberman mentions David Rodowick's standpoint that this privileged relationship is lost to any digital film – be it CGI animation or a single-shot inquisitive-mobile-camera feature like Sokurov's *Russian Ark*; or, in Rodowick's exact terms, "digitally acquired information has no ontological distinctiveness from digitally synthesyzed outputs that construct virtual worlds". To Hoberman himself, the issue is more nuanced. For instance, the Hermitage-set *Russian*

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Ark is "essentially Bazinian, most radically in its performative aspect – that is, in the orchestration of the camera and profilmic event". So is Abbas Kiarostami's *Ten*, given its unfolding in steady long shots and the appearance of non-intrusive direction.

As for André Bazin's notion of Total Cinema – "an integral realism, recreating the world in its own image", Hoberman suggests its latest development is to be sought in 3D films like *Avatar*. Though Bazin himself became skeptical of technological developments – which, starting with color cinema, "may make film look more like painting than reality", Hoberman argues: "As in the first motion pictures, small sensations dominate. Where 2-D movies privilege action, 3-D movies induce optical awareness". However, the artifice of 3D is by no means infallible in providing the illusion of reality: *Toy Story* 3D is "redundant in imbuing virtual depth with virtual depth".

Leaving behind the technical and social history of the 20th century, Hoberman claims that, by placing under psychoanalysis the motion pictures of the twenty-first century, two symptoms would be revealed. The first is objective anxiety – due to the disappearance of the film *medium*, of its traditional infrastructure and cultural role. The second is hysterical anxiety, linked to the globally broadcasted terrorist attack of 9/11, the echoes of which subsequently permeated cinematic spectacle (i.e. Hollywood blockbusters would be infused with fresh iconography): "Cinema itself would insure that the post-9/11 disaster film would be experiential, communal and above all naturalistic".

This is further developed and put in perspective in the second theoretical part of the book, reuniting articles published between 2001 and 2008: "A Chronicle of the Bush Years". Establishing direct correlations between US politics & foreign policies and the entertainment industry, Hoberman shows how the war on terror is molded into a narrative. Some examples he provides are blatant in themseves – the case of the telefilm *DC 9/11: Time of Crisis,* (re-)enacting the president's dignified actions following that fateful day, with politicians' lookalikes in every important role; as Hoberman points out, it was the patent of Stalin-era social-realist films to feature the current president as a star. Other examples become relevant by comparison, as when he carefully analyzes the portrayal of Iraqis in several types of films; the most (ostensibly) authentic film in the list is also the one to deny them a voice. (Since the Hollywood-politics dynamics goes both ways, Hoberman delights as well in recounting Arnold Schwarzenegger's electoral victory: "California's «Action-Figure Governor» has proved a «surprise hit» in Hollywood. But there's nothing Hollywood loves more than success (unless it's propaganda in the service of narcissism)."

Hoberman's take on the 9/11 is completely amoral and compassion-free, but his standpoint is completely understandable. Far from being cynical, Hoberman merely assumes that terrorism – just like any other spectacle – can be contrived to signify whatever fits an official agenda – an idea with a long tradition behind it. Reviewing *Carlos*, he spells it out:"The conventional wisdom of the seventies held that urban terrorism was incapable of effecting political change and remarkable mainly for the attention paid to it. 'Terrorism ultimately aims at the spectator', psychiatrist F. Gentry Harris [claimed] in early 1974. 'The victim is secondary'." However numerous the differences between an ostensibly leftist Venezuelan mercenary and religious extremist groups, mass-media impact functions pretty much the same.

The third part of Hoberman's book, "Notes Toward a Syllabus", expands on the collective analysis of films by singling out twenty-two films and a sports ceremony for full-length reviews. This is where the veteran reviewer's authority in judgment comes into full display. Discussing the terrorist-as-superstar theme of *Carlos*, he notes that, during the OPEC summit hostage-taking, "Assayas can't resist having one of the lesser oil ministers request an autograph". After describing Cristi Puiu's *Aurora*, he concludes: "Less a psychological case study than a philosophical treatise, *Aurora* embodies the «shame of self» that Sartre describes in *Being and Nothingness* as the disconcerting recognition that one is «the object which

the Other is looking at and judging»." Ernie Gehr's latest avantgarde film "is innocuously titled *Cotton Candy* – although given the piece's implications, he could have easily gotten away with something as weighty as «Montage of Attractions,» «The Myth of Total Cinema», «Carnival of Souls,» or «That's Entertainment.»" Joe Swanberg's *LOL,* exploring the social life of computer geeks, was completed barely six months before the invention of smartphones – thus becoming "a near-instant period piece".

Hoberman is spared the naïve assumptions and quick categories used by film theorists who aren't simultaneously cinephiles. Whatever the cinematic means employed by a certain film, he quickly and finely distinguishes their effect. Considering *Dogville*'s odd mix of *cinéma-vérité* camera style and strikingly schematic set (mimicking a Depression-era American village - "call it Dogmaville"), Hoberman notes that shooting on digital video "not only allows for a greater sense of spontaneity than 35mm but in its immediacy effectively precludes any nostalgia inherent in the movie's period setting". Circling back to the *Russian Ark*, he wonders "What, beside the movie, is ending? Is it modernism or museum culture, socialism or czarism, authentic Russia or bogus imitative Russia? Is it preservation or transcendence or the end of photographic cinema – which both preserves and transcends?"

Writing for Visual Media by Anthony Friedmann, Focal Press, 2010
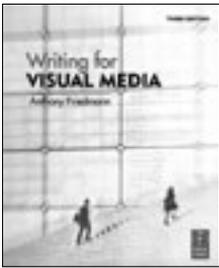
Reviewed by Lucian Georgescu

Burlington US, Oxford UK: Focal Press, 3rd. ed., 2010, 399 pp., ISBN: 978-0-240-81235-9

Most would consider *Writing for Visual Media* a commercial success, with three editions published in a decade. The amount of text has almost doubled in the latest version, and the old CD-ROM has been replaced by a website with examples and demos, script samples, video materials, storyboards and an interactive glossary of camera shots, making the tandem book/website a handy manual for both teaching and learning writing for the audio-visual industry. The successive versions have grown with the online media and mobile telecommunications (r)evolutions, the most significant part of the current edition being the in-depth analysis of interactive narrative and the description of writing techniques for digital media. It is quite rare for a senior filmmaker (*Bartleby* [1970], written and directed by Anthony Friedmann, was awarded at the San Sebastian IFF in 1972) to have such an understanding of the digital universe. In this respect, Part 4, *Writing for Interactive and Mobile Media*, might be the most useful and advanced section of the volume, a memorable reference for anyone interested in researching writing for new media. Another significant change in the author's point of view within the latest edition is the "reflection on the history, evolution and origins of this kind of writing […]. This is not just a writing manual. It is also a book about the economic, production and social contexts in which writing for visual media occurs." (2010: xviii) We agree with this definition of a *manual* (in the very pragmatic American sense) yet the level of success integrating "history, theory and practice" – as Steven Maras (2009) had accomplished – is debatable. One may acknowledge that this challenge would not have been necessary, or could have been left for a further instalment, the fourth edition having been

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announced. The book already had an ambitious challenge from the beginning – to accommodate all visual media forms and their corresponding formats and writing techniques – so the outcome might be considered a success (in the sense of the above mentioned industry *manual* definition), but adding to this a historical perspective and (other) theories, could lead away from the initial goal.

Professor Friedmann does not make too much fuss about academic references, apart from a very few common ones. Aristotle is cited, quite *en passant* (we are used to the McDonaldization of the Greek), without a clear index reference, yet the edition cannot miss a reproduction of his Louvre statue… In the reference list second comes Campbell, but from the evangelists and new kids on the writer's block the only one to be referenced is Vogler, but he is not cited within the book – he probably takes the credit on behalf of Campbell.

I personally found the lack of academic references refreshing, as it makes the book quite a holiday read… The author has a tonic, politically correct approach and he is persuaded he has found a universal method – *the seven steps concept development* which he applies to all audio-visual species. On the other hand, let's face reality: does Syd Field mention any other script doctor besides Aristotle? Anthony Friedmann is sincere in his complex attempt "to get the beginner started" (2010: xxi) and probably has to be absolved from the "curse of the scriptwriting manual", at least because "even the worst script manual can be plundered as a tool box, no doubt providing some canny reader somewhere with a stray good idea, helpful device, or way to unjam writer's block" (Martin, 1999). As *Writing for Visual Media* is far from being a bad script manual and is more a compendium of forms, formats and techniques, I believe it lies outside the witchcraft condemned by Adrian Martin. However, even when in agreement with Martin – the definition of the script as a blueprint – Friedmann is not too concerned about definitions either. In the *Script Development* chapter there is no clear line between premise and synopsis, log line and concept, concept and premise again (2010: 177-180); the list is confusing, and even a repeated reading doesn't help. One reason could be the chaos within the industry jargon, but another is the tendency towards literary indulgence. Professor Friedmann enjoys making lexical innovations (e.g. *vidience* vs. audience – 2010: 5), but sometimes the results are debatable, such as "The most important job a writer has to do is think, not just write" (2010: 113); "Don't tell me animals are not characters!" (2010: 88); "Andy Warhol made an 8-hour movie of someone sleeping. That's *realism.*" (2010: 191). The whole read is a trip from agony to ecstasy and back. From the pleasant side I chose some good intuitions such as the dichotomy of story vs. history in documentary (2010: 141), the feature script structure analysis based upon the Red Riding Hood story with the two options of bad (Perrault) vs. happy (Grimm) ending (2010: 163) and the lack of a three-act structure in the episodic construction of road movies (2010: 169). At times the author appears brave: "Why three acts? Shakespeare had five." (2010: 165) – yes! – but quickly loses his courage – "So why three acts? The reason is *it works*." (2010: 165)…

The book is structured in five parts (sic!) covering all audio-visual areas: fiction, documentary and non-fiction narrative, corporate communications and advertising, film, television and interactive entertainment. All are supposed to validate *the seven-step method for developing a creative concept*, which originates in the advertising agency brief, so familiar to the author; the steps (defining the communication problem, the audience, the objective, the strategy, the content and medium) lead to the most important one, *the concept*, the alternative conceptual process being characterized as "meta-writing". The method could be a valid development paradigm, helping beginners to articulate the theme of their audio-visual project, but it is debatable if this applies to cinema; we can accept that the audience is purely entertainment driven, but the ultimate goal of a filmmaker cannot only be making viewers cry or amusing them, as popcorn alone cannot create *hybris*.

No one has defined better than Pasolini what a script is, and even though hundreds of books on

this topic are still being published, the truth remains in his words, between one structure and another (2005). Today's hunger for content is leading to increasing demand for learning or teaching writing for specific media and formats; therefore a specialized (or wannabe) teacher has to choose carefully from a wide selection of how-to manuals, ranging from crap to useful. If I were forced to pick only one, then *Writing for Visual Media* would probably be my choice, as it is comprehensive, it covers all areas of both traditional and new media, meets the general needs of lecturing for an audience ranging from colleges to public schools to the students of any of the film departments proliferating today in all universities. Last but not least, if your teaching job is far away, then this book easily fits into low-cost airline cabin luggage and would spare you the time of carrying and, eventually, reading others.

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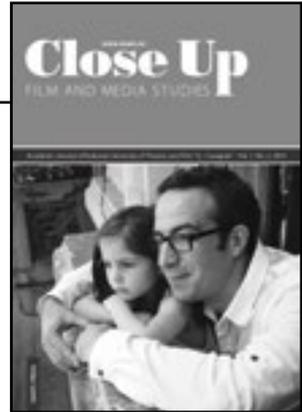
Informations for authors

Close Up: Film and Media Studies is a bi-annual English-language journal published by UNATC and it provides a platform for scholars and researchers with an interest in exploration of any aspect of cinema, film, television and new media. It aims to publish contributions interested in an in-depth analysis of the developments in this fields and encourages fresh and interdisciplinary approaches, encompassing film and media theory, representation theory, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, culture studies, etc. The journal expects theoretical and scholar articles that analyze new forms of cinematic and media practice, that try to apply new tools of investigation and to enlarge the horizon of film and media studies.

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- The paper must be written in English, Times New Roman font (12 point), double-spaced
- The text should be accompanied by an abstract (of up to 150 words), key words, a mini-bio (up to 100 words) containing your academic affiliation and your email address. Please, send the pictures separately, in a jpg format.
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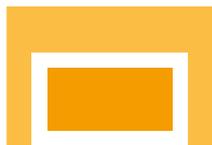
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