

Research Seminars

BEHIND-THE-SCENES ASPECTS OF A FILM RECEPTION. THE CASE OF *THE INDEPENDENCE OF ROMANIA* (ARISTIDE DEMETRIADE, GRIGORE BREZEANU, 1912) AND *THE REST IS SILENCE* (NAE CARANFIL, 2007)

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Abstract

*The foreign reader and viewer can find nothing better -or faster, given the exigencies of modern life- than the film as an introduction to the character, history, identity of a nation. With the awards garnered by directors like Cristian Mungiu and Nae Caranfil, new interest has been focused on Romania's film, community, and history. That is why, an investigation regarding the Romanian early cinema would be necessary in the field of improving education from abroad. The purpose of this paper is to analyze a number of aspects, such as the importance of incorporating a course on cinema in foreign language teaching, one of the major goals being the opportunity to educate the students in the field of movies and thus offering them distinct cultural perspectives. However, this article does not plea for the need of a pedagogy of media studies in higher education, given the complexity of the topic. It rather aims to focus on the history of two Romanian movies: *The Independence of Romania* (1912) and *The Rest is Silence* (2007) and highlight the reasons why an urban icon of the city of Tampere is called "Plevna". This paper sets out to analyze the two mentioned Romanian films who proved to be interesting for Finnish students since they depict an episode of our common history, the 1877 War of Independence (The Russo-Turkish War). At the same time, the paper aims to familiarize them with the allure of the event when Romanian and Finnish soldiers fought shoulder to shoulder on the same front, at Plevna. The Romanian film, *The Independence of Romania* shot in 1911-1912, was the first feature film to be kept almost entirely in the Romanian National Film Archive; the other one, *The Rest Is Silence* directed by Nae Caranfil (and representing Romania's first entry into the 2009 Oscars) and inspired by *The Independence of Romania* wanted to show the real story of our first full-length filmmaking. Therefore, this latter film contains like a palimpsest an older mute movie, discovered in Romanian Movie Archive. The current article draws upon the insights provided by the Finnish students after watching the two films and summarizes their conclusions. In other words, these lines provide a behind-the-scenes glimpse of what they learned and discovered. The films were met with positive reviews, and we tried to follow the students' spontaneous reactions and emotions. An important part of our work was to put in perspective the two inspiring patriotic marches which are commemorating the departure of the Romanian and Finnish soldiers at Plevna in the Balkan's theater of War: *Drum bun!* (farewell song composed by Ştefan Nosievich to the lyrics of Romanian patriot Vasile Alecsandri) and *Kauan on Kärsitty / Long have suffered*, a well-known patriotic song of the Finnish Guard (*Suomen kaarti*). This article tangentially discusses the role of perception in educational activity, which is presented under two correlated aspects, namely: the activity carried out in this sense by the teacher and by the students and the role of cinema in creating cultural memory from a general perspective, in a way that transforms the manner we think of film and its social importance.*

This article starts from a very particular point of view, as we discovered by pure chance the name of Plevna building in Tampere, and goes to a more general aspect, which is the battle of Plevna, one of the most important episodes from Romania's modern history.

Keywords: Plevna Building in Tampere; Romanian War of Independence (1877-78); reception of film; film as pedagogy; film as cultural memory.

Motto:

“There is no such thing as the ideal spectator. It is ideal to have spectators. Everyone is welcome, please have a seat in the room!” Nae Caranfil

Introduction

In the second semester of the 2015-2016 academic year, we held a course on Romanian cinema at Tampere University. This was the fulfilment of an older wish to make and present a course on cinematic history and culture at a foreign university, the one in Finland being renowned for its welcoming educational system. During our first days after arrival in this city, we were rather surprised to find that one of the largest buildings in the town's central market is called *Plevna*. On the ground floor of this building there is a very popular restaurant and a brewery frequented by the students as well, called *The Plevna Restaurant*. The Romanian public is very aware of the fact that Plevna marks a very important landmark in the modern history of Romania. But how does this name –Plevna– resonate with the public conscience in Finland? What relations are there with Finland's history? The discovery of this connection persisted a very long time in our heads until it finally received a definitive form on paper.

To signal the fact that this building has a series of interesting stories behind it, we did investigations with the students and discovered a web-like social context related to this architectural landmark that shaped the industrial landscape of the city and played a key role in the evolution of the Finnish society. What is extremely interesting is that its name refers to a page of history which is known to the Romanian people, but, maybe, less known to the others. In our classes we turned to film to bring this 19th century history and society closer to our souls.

1. Scandinavian cinema. A brief history on the beginnings

At the brink of the 20th century, the first films were in the making throughout Europe. The representatives of the so-called “Swedish”, “Northern” or “Scandinavian” cinema tend to be mentioned as part of this early age. Denmark was the first country to reach a prominent position in film production and distribution in the early 1910s, followed by Sweden a few years later. Norway witnessed regular film production only in the 1920s. Neither Finland nor Iceland were independent countries in the early silent cinema era. Finnish film production was relatively modest before the country gained independence from Russia in 1917, and it was only in the 1920s that film producing became a profitable business. Iceland gained significant independence from Denmark in 1918, but it would take until the end of 1970s until regular film production could be upheld. What the Nordic countries do share, especially since the latter part of the 1900s, is the strong role of the welfare society in relation to cinema. Danish cinema pioneer Peter Elfelt (1 January 1866 - 18 February 1931), a photographer, was the first Dane to make a film. Between the years of 1896 and 1912, he produced around 200 documentary films on life in Denmark. His first film was *Kørsel med Grønlandske Hunde* (*Traveling with Greenlandic Dogs*), a silent movie in 1897. Furthermore, he produced the first Danish feature film: *Henrettelsen* (*Capital Execution*, 1903). The first film shot in Denmark took place in the Panorama cinema on the Town Hall square

in Copenhagen, in June 1896. However, the selection of films had been made and produced abroad.

Cinema in Finland got a flying start with a visit of the Lumière company in 1896 and in 1907 when fiction and nonfiction film productions were launched almost at the same time. Case in point, Mauritz Stiller (17 July 1883 - 18 November 1928), a Swedish-Finnish director and discoverer of great actress Greta Garbo, and Jörn Johan Donner (5 February 1933 - 30 January 2020) a Finnish writer, film director, actor, producer, politician and founder of Finnish Film Archive. His first movie was shot in 1963: *A Sunday in September*. Other illustrative examples are those related to the Danish director Benjamin Christensen (28 September 1879 - 2 April 1959) who continued his career in Sweden, and to the Finnish film director Nyrki Tapiovaara, (10 September 1911 - 29 February 1940), both being active in the interwar era. Benjamin Christensen and Nyrki Tapiovaara belonged to the *Tulenkantajat* group which promoted highly modernist ideas in Finnish culture and media. The contributions of contemporary directors, such as Aki Kaurismäki (born on the 4th of April, 1957, in Orimatilla, Finland), known to the Romanian public due to films such as *The Man Without a Past/ Omul fără trecut* (2002) and *Fallen Leaves* [Frunze căzătoare] (2023) is also worth mentioning. We have also attempted to tackle, from this angle, several remarks of a theoretical connection with aspects of the beginning of film making in Romania. We have pondered particularly on the reflections regarding “the childhood of European film” (Bagh, 1998, p. 12), on *talking pictures* or “talkies” in the late 1920, on the beginnings of Nordic cinema, but also on the Romanian context of a filmmaking, especially on the most ambitious project among the early ones: *Independența României* [The Independence of Romania], shot in 1912, directed by Aristide Demetriade (10 July 1872 - 21 February 1930) and by the meteoric Grigore Brezeanu (1 August 1891 - 23 May 1918), a man that died in his prime.¹ This film was not at all known to Finnish students; therefore, it was a real pleasure for us to familiarize them with the world of this silent, historical film from the beginning of the 20th century.

2. First Romanian feature film

Film, like literary text, is a space of remembering, an instrument of collective cultural memory which stores and gives new meaning to data from an unforgettable past. A true memory space that legitimizes the historical identity of a people, film, particularly the historical one, is centered on commemorative memory or remembering. Without doubt, cinema has become central to the mediation of memory in modern cultural life. We thought that in line with this tradition, the same concept of the *triad of memory* (Assmann, 2013, p. 19) establishing or confirming a sense of an individual, collective, and cultural unity through a shared past can be found in the seventh art. According to this German professor, the film represents an information storage medium (Assmann, 2013, p. 19), which preserves language,

¹ Film critic Tudor Caranfil wrote in his book *In Search of the Lost Film* that the script of *Independența României* [The independence of Romania] is treated as work of joint authorship of great actors and producers like Aristide Demetriade, Petre Liciu and Constantin Nottara. The initial assumption that the true director of this movie was the young Grigore Brezeanu was gradually replaced with the idea of an active collaboration between him and the more experienced Aristide Demetriade. We mention that there is still a debate according to which the true director was, actually, Aristide Demetriade, but we did not insist upon it because it would have taken us into a completely different direction. “Could Grig Brezeanu, the recent graduate from the National Music Academy be the soul of such a large project? – Tudor Caranfil asked himself. The hypothesis is so attractive because of its ingenuity and novelty, that is hard for us to give it up” (Caranfil, 1988, p. 12, our translation). Grigore Brezeanu, the son of Iancu Brezeanu, a famous actor of the Romanian National Theatre, was also the author of the lost film *Amor Fatal* [Fatal love] a play filmed with two famous actors of the time: Tony Bulandra and Lucia Sturdza and premiered on September 18, 1911 at Cinema Pathé Palace in Bucharest.

images, voices and sounds, a *topos* that transforms a communicative memory into a truly cultural one. Thus, so far, *The Independence of Romania* remains a film of reference in the history of Romanian cinema, and also a moment of powerful reminder; it reflects the history of the last two centuries in which layers of the history, as well as layers of memory – subjective and collective – intersect. The story of this movie has been reassembled from living fragments which cannot be ignored, and which essentially contribute to the transformation of an abstract idea, that of a war from 19th century into a living and emotional one.

This film, which represents the vibrant debut of Romanian cinema in Europe's public conscience, has largely contributed to the consolidation of Romania's image abroad. After the premiere in Bucharest on September 1, 1912 at the Eforie Cinema Hall on Elisabeta Blvd., the film played in Budapest, Vienna and Paris and enjoyed favorable reviews in the issues of the Parisian Journals. French productions of the time, from around 1910, were on the road to acquire some sort of legitimacy. Through the evolution of editing and narrative techniques, the concept of film has started to be seen as an "art-form", trying to reproduce the theatrical language in film. The need to bring back into discussion the first Romanian fictional feature mainly bears on its time of conception, one could even speculate on how much of this debut was related to the historical reconstructions which suffered from French influence. Due to the large budget, the film was considered a super production of those times. The quality of the editing, the complexity of the script, the fidelity of the rendering of historical figures, made of this movie an avant-garde project of an era. It gives us a pioneering insight into "voice" as a category continually in development, with interactions with categories of gender, race, class, nation, and technology. The unsettling of the *status quo* during the silent to sound transition allows us to denaturalize the fusion of voice and image in cinema as it currently exists, to remember that as Assmann Aleida states, "recordings do not reproduce sound, they represent sound." (Assmann, 2011, p. 40). By adopting the notion of "total cinema", the French film critic André Bazin aimed to counter a theoretical tendency to attribute the essence of cinema to the *image* alone; he repeats that cinema is more inclined with visuals rather than talking. Movies that heavily rely on talking are usually more derivative than films that take advantage of their medium. A movie that does not have talking at all allows other aspects of the film to get the spotlight (art direction and music in this case). Films with sound "dilute the image-versus reality dichotomy", proclaims André Bazin, it appears that the fight for authenticity is won by the mute films.

But not only the theorists struggled with accepting sound on film: cinema itself awaited major transformations, exemplified most clearly in the early sound films of the silent film icon, Charlie Chaplin. Incidentally, this shift in cinema's visual paradigm also surfaces in Bazin's work on Chaplin, which develops from an almost nostalgic recollection of silent cinema via a 'mythification' of his famed silent film persona The Tramp, into an ambiguous defense of talking cinema (Joret, 2019, p. 25).

This declaration is even more interesting considering the fact that the Romanian movie was set using the first technology of that period and without benefiting of a "sound track" (Taylor, 2009, p. 5). The first age of Romanian movies was characterized by the art of montage which ascribes a depth to the image in a universal scenography, where filmmakers were at their beginnings; they sought to forge a link between the New Art and the New World. For them, the new function of the image and sound was related to an interesting and personal pedagogy of perception considering the lack of experience and tradition. Filmmakers were frequently insiders to the motion picture industry, they were directors,

actors, writers and sometimes even make-up artists, like the Romanian actor Pepi Machauer (a person that achieved mastery in all cinematic subjects). They knew that everything that was narrated could be represented in a visual image. Jan Assmann speaks about a connective structure which combines image, historical memory and telling along with identity formation. “Both the normative and the narrative elements of these – mixing instruction with storytelling – create a basis of belonging, of identity” (Assmann, 2011, pp. 3-4). The craft of telling stories is probably as old as our species. Storytelling proceeded through millennia of oral tradition, then much later spread through plays and then through literature, so that by the time full-length movies came along a century ago, there was an extremely well-articulated notion of how to tell a story. For those people of the beginnings, the power to reshape ideologies or to challenge them was a responsibility that they managed to fulfil.

However, it also links yesterday with today by giving form and presence to influential experiences and memories, incorporating images and tales from another time into the background of the onward moving present, and bringing with it hope and continuity (Assmann, 2011, p. 4).

We organized in Tampere various events including public film projections offering the Finnish students the opportunity to get to know something from this daring cinematic experience of the beginnings in Romania. The chosen film, *The Independence of Romania*, was received without hesitation by the Finnish and by other foreign students enrolled at the Tampere University. For many this was the first experience of viewing Romanian historic movies on the screen, for others it was the chance to see films that they might not normally choose to see. The Finnish students were impressed by the first artistic achievement of this Romanian film, but were surprised to find out that the film showing the battle of the Romanian troops in Plevna Province, offers a panorama of a wider historical context, in which the Guard of Finland (Finnish: *Suomen kaarti*, Swedish: *Finska gardet*), part of the Imperial Russian Army was in the action, according to historical sources (Laitila, 2016, pp. 37-48).

When attention is paid to historical authenticity, viewers are transported to a specific time and place, fully engrossed in the story unfolding before them. As in the case of the two hundred young Finnish soldiers who voluntarily enrolled in Tampere on September 4, 1877 for the war (from the very front of later named Plevna building), the Romanian soldiers sent on the front, as seen in the movie, were not aware of the effects and seriousness of the events that followed. These very precise historic relations helped us to recreate the atmosphere of times long gone. At that time, the first Romanian Army comprising almost 120 000 soldiers had already crossed the Danube and had joined forces with the Russian Army. The Finnish Guard received an order to shut down all the business and leave to the Balkan War. Immediate action was taken, which included the recruitment of a reserve company for reinforcements. A large number of volunteers signed up. An enthusiastic departure party was held at the free expense of the city of Helsinki in the newly completed Guard Hall. Early in the morning of September 6, 1877 the guard boarded the train while the theater orchestra played inspiring national tunes. They said goodbye to their own and to the Czar” (Laitila, 2016, pp. 48-50). The journey led through St. Petersburg, the Baltics, Poland and Ukraine, across the Danube to Bulgaria. Despite their enthusiasm, the war was full of challenges they did not expect. The resistance of the Turks was fierce and nature was harsh. The Russians directed their attack in the direction of Plevna, where the Turkish military Osman Pasha was established. After many persistent attempts, Plevna finally capitulated on 10 December 1877. During the capture of the Gorni Dubnik fortress, hundreds have lost their lives. The Finnish branch of the Red Cross was established for the treatment of the wounded and sick. Importantly, there are memoirs, eyewitness

testimonies of the Guardsmen speaking of the “fearlessness” (Laitila, 2016, pp. 48-50) of the Romanian and Finnish soldiers. Laitila brought to light the reality of the war, in which the heroes (theatrically presented in the Romanian movies) were people who suffered and lived in difficult conditions during the War.

3. Sensitive memories in the Balkans

The Ottoman Empire was called ironically “the sick man of Europe” by Chancellor von Bismarck, furthermore the Chancellor appeared in a public debate on the Russo-Turkish War of 1877/1878: “If there will ever be another war in Europe, it will be because of a damned nonsense from the Balkans; the Balkans do not deserve a single grenadier from Pomerania to leave his bones there” (Țuțui, 2008: 14) No human deserves to experience the atrocities of war. It is just a futile attempt to solve geographical problems. However, the evolution of historical events let us show that *balkanization* representing mainly the process of a nationalist fragmentation was a characteristic of Balkan states who started to become free from Ottoman rule.

It is symptomatic that the word <balkanization> which is most often used to denote the process of nationalist fragmentation of former geographic and political units into new and problematically viable small states, was not created in the course of the 100 years when the Balkan nations gradually seceded from the Ottoman Empire. When the term was coined, at the end of World War I, only one Balkan nation, Albania, was added to the already existing Balkan map; all others had been nineteenth-century formations (Todorova, 2009, p. 32).

Historical proof shows that the Ottoman Empire was known at the end of 19th century for its economic decline, even more, the fight at Plevna was the last card that they played. We could see in the Romanian film the mobilization of the troops, the battles of Plevna, the tragic situation in the Valley of Weeps and of the campaign hospitals, where the King Carol I and Queen Elisabeta handed out medals to the injured, the fall of Plevna and the surrender of Osman. Some aspects address issues of cultural memory arising from the use of a well-known patriotic song on the film soundtrack: *Drum bun!* [Fare well!]. During the War for Independence, the Romanian army lost more than 10 000 human lives, which demonstrates how dearly the Romanian people paid for the realization of a national ideal. The students told us that the battle of Plevna and as well the sacrifices of the Suomi soldiers is also commemorated in the Finnish Guard Song: “Long have we suffered hunger and cold / Fighting in the Balkan Mountains / Oh precious fatherland, Finland the sweet North / There is no land dear to us.” The song stated that music was played while Finnish soldiers marched on the walls of the fortress mentioning that after the war some still lied buried in the Balkan sands. Impressive is the common trait, an entire philosophy of pessimism and optimism, but also the use of interjections in both songs: “Hooray now our company is heading home / To the sweet shores of Finland! Oh, precious Fatherland, the sweet North / There’s no land dearest to us.” The same emotions and artistic effects can be found in the Romanian Marsh: “Farewell, farewell, drum is beating, farewell / With the sack tied at the back, with weapons in the hands, hooray.” *The Society for Romanian Culture and Literature* in Bukovina posthumously published this song; thanks to those people the original song was well preserved. Both songs can be considered as “national anthems”, portraying social attitudes and even revealing the unconscious assumptions of past societies, the tune is the same, while the lyrics are slightly different.

The reconstruction of the Romanian war sites was predominantly depicted with long documentary shots so that the entire battlefield was visible – the students noticed. The film has several symbolic sequences, but some of them especially attracted our attention, such as the one related to the consecration of flags. The students gave comparisons to other similar and more recent events, for example the consecration of the Finnish Jaeger flag at the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Liepaja in 1918. These remarks proved to be invaluable in determining not only the role of the film reception, but the intellectual and aesthetic developments necessary in consecrating a more truthful image of the past.

The second focus was on the bravery of the Finnish Guard sharpshooter battalion who participated in the battle of the Bulgarian site, storming the fortress walls and guaranteeing the Russo-Turkish War's success. Of course, the Romanian film does not refer to individual aspects of Finnish history, but the context makes us think of the common struggle of these courageous officers from both armies. Another important aspect marked by this film was the historic gathering between Czar Alexander II (played by Pepi Machauer) and the Romanian ruler, Carol I (played by Demetriade himself). To review the troops, the two leaders met in Poradim, near Plevna. Framed by a flag, Carol I, the future King of Romania was entrusted by Czar Alexander II of Russia (and Grand Duke of Finland) with the supreme command of the two allied armies which both went to War.

The mentioned scene aroused the students' historical sensibilities bringing identity and continuity in context. They were invited to apply their historical insight directly to this issue and thereby contribute to a valuable perspective of the past. Plevna is a Bulgarian town, known by the name of *Pleven*.² Therefore, there is no coincidence in the fact that a building in Tampere was named after the Bulgarian city to commemorate the Finnish soldiers and the units of the Finnish Guard who were sent on the Balkan's theatre of war. The red brick construction designed by architects Georg Gunliffe and Calonijs for the textile manufacturer *Finlayson Oy* was built from 1876 to 1877, exactly in that period of time involved in multiple challenges: historical, political and social.

4.Reception of film

The students have realized that between the making of the Romanian film and the great historical event, thirty-five full years have passed and, probably, most issues from the year 1877 have already been erased from the public consciousness. Another remark was that the Romanian film opened its gates on the same year in which the Titanic met its untimely demise. Since the movie and the genuine filming of the Titanic were made in the same year, we could compare the quality of the recordings between the two and see how advanced the Romanian technique was in relation with the British Pathé recording. We have also dismantled tenacious general misconceptions that the visual quality of the silent movies is poor and that these films are unwatchable by modern standards. Although it uses the limited technological resources of its time to stage the fighting that led to the sovereignty of Romania, the movie is spectacular and, without a doubt, the best part of it is the characters. It is one of the very rare historic movies that feature actresses and actors who look, feel and act like modern people having very strong and profound feelings and emotions. The film boasts some of the most authentic and likeable characters, which is what primarily hooks the viewer in. In the rather pathetic farewell scene between the namesake hero, Peneş Curcanul, and the apple of his eye, Rodica, one may notice stylistic conventions to direct attention to formal features that are diagnostic for their artistically salient aesthetic,

² The name *Pleven / Plevna*, the English equivalent of the battle from 1877 is frequent as street name not only in Bulgaria or Romania, but also as a town name in Kansas, in Montana, a village in Ontario, a road in Hampton, Middlesex, London, Pleven Saddle on Livingston Island in the South Shetland Islands in Antarctica.

expressive and semantic content. Attractive and delicate, this scene can be read as an expression of the inexpressible: the ineffable and unfathomable suffering of going to the front, the uncertainty that the departed will ever return home. What followed was a “tale” of astounding honor, bravery and compassion. The idea that “the nine and with the sergeant ten” (Vasile Alecsandri) go to war, while the women stay at home involves a range of social, psychological, and political issues. The film provides a unique window to a specific culture, opening a brand-new perspective on what the film theory and film criticism describe as national cinema.

Another interesting aspect of the Romanian film: it was packed with real scenes of overwhelming historical importance, and one of them was *The Royal Parade of 10th of May* featuring images of the royal family. These recordings convinced some students to learn more about this particular historical topic. In the Royal Parade sequence, the students remarked that there was a teenager curiously watching the camera. Maybe this is just like when movies *break the fourth wall*, individuals realizing that they are filmed. This symbolically tears down the barrier between the people from times long gone and the people from the present. It is almost like the person was talking to us, it also gives a sense of mortality by which we mean that everyone must die one day, but tapes like this help to prolongate life and perspective.

A “pedagogy of cinema” based on the role of images within evolving communication and information technologies is noted as particularly significant.³ Therefore, Romanian theatrics and film image can affect student's motivation to think, to interact, to communicate and transmit knowledge in Romanian. Beyond this, it is still suggesting the fact that a nation must preserve its memory, including its cinematic one. “By introducing young people to classic cinema, we are encouraging an appreciation of film as an artistic, cultural, and historical document, leading to an awareness of the importance of artist’s rights and the need to protect our motion picture heritage” (Cole & Bradley, 2016, pp. 67-70), in a world in which AI (Artificial Intelligence) rules over.

Considering the narrative thread of cinema, Nae Caranfil, the representative director of Romanian cinematography, undertook extensive research to get as close to the real story of the Romania’s first film making as possible. In fact, the idea of the movie was inspired to him by the book called *In Search of the Lost Film* signed by his father, Tudor Caranfil. The main focus was to recreate history and film from what we already know, through active memory. Whether you’re a filmmaker, actor, or simply a fan of cinema, these kind of books with Proustian resonance are offering a behind the scene glimpse and, definitely, can be very important for a filmmaker. Tudor Caranfil tells us in his book that the painter Tanți Demetriade, descendent of the actor Aristide Demetriade, forced by a change of residence to give up a part of her furniture, found in an old drawer with notebooks the variants of the old film script alongside other letters and documents. ‘There was the text of the role of Hamlet along with a sandbag from Pyramids, boxes of Swedish matches from the beginning of the century, letters of inestimable informative value [...]’ (Caranfil, 1988, p. 9, our translation).⁴ To those documents were added fragments of the film discovered by researches in the Romanian Movie Archive, in 1985. In this regard, an important role was played by the theater historian Ionuț Nicolescu who provided the necessary documents to the film critic. This story fascinated Nae Caranfil and, as he himself stated, it was hard for him to resist the temptation

³ Cole and Bradley’s book *A Pedagogy of Cinema* is an articulated theory based upon Deleuze’s concept “cinema-thinking” (*Cinema 1: The Movement Image* -1983 and *Cinema 2: The Time Image* -1985) The emergence and exploration of the term “cinema-thinking” is a truly interdisciplinary venture, drawing from areas of the fine arts, cultural studies and film studies. In terms of visual images, the work of Cole and Bradley has made a powerful contribution to an understanding of a grammar of images within a socio-cultural and semiotic framework.

⁴ Original text: “Era textul rolului lui Hamlet alături de un saculeț de nisip din Piramide, cutii cu chibrituri suedeze de la începutul secolului, scrisori de o valoare informativă inestimabilă...”

to make a film that would have this event in its center. Finnish students were taken by surprise by the fact that someone was considering to reboot the history of making the very first Romanian movie and decided that the result was a beautifully done film, a sweeping and spellbinding narrative in every sense. They understood that the film presents the mostly true story of young Grig, the son of a star of the National Theatre of hundred years ago. As key characters were *introduced in the plot of the film, the students also became familiar with the exciting action*. Grig persuaded the millionaire Leon Popescu (alias Leon Negrescu, a rich landlord, a financial tycoon and philanthropist from Ialomița), who had never seen a movie, to invest in the new art, the cinema. He invites him to see Sarah Bernhardt, “whose interpretation made anyone feel chills down the spine when her voice thundered” (Skinner, 1974, p. 203) in *Hamlet*, at Cinema Eforie. The young director rushes to point out the “high life” of the room but cannot calm him down. Instead of Shakespeare’s popular play, a burlesque episode is presented, and everybody started to laugh.

The vivid scenes and images, outlined in detail, the rapid exchange of ideas, the thorough analysis of the evidence and the speed with which the events take place, make you think of an American action movie. Bernhardt’s first apparition is enough for the audience to make her an icon in the industry. In that atmosphere, it seems only natural for Hamlet’s father, returning from the dead, address Leon, commanding him to enter the dream of the young man sitting beside him. At the subject of characters, students noticed a tendency to romanticize the gestures and traits that place the story on a subconscious level.

From a relational point of view, there is a kind of symmetry between Grig and Leon, in the sense that the relation is slightly affective, close to the father-son bond, but observing this pair, we can also find a source of constant differences. Leon remains in our conscience as the financier of the entire undertaking. In fact, Grig had an arrangement with the man projecting the film to add an insert and Leon –an ambitious businessman– is the obvious victim of this mystification. ‘There is a sort of theatrical universe here, included in this Matryoshka doll of the film’ (Băicuș, 2021, our translation).⁵ Inter-textual allusions to **Shakespeare’s later tragedy** quoted through the movie in which Hamlet’s part was played in a silent film by Divine Sarah **Bernhardt** are relevant reminding us the fact that the relation between an old book and a film is a *postmodern* one, and that the procedure itself, the “Matryoshka dolls” technique, made its debut in François Truffaut’s *La Nuit Américaine* [The American night] (1973). Leon’s laughter was prophetic – encouraging public to appreciate these subtle yet significant interventions in people’s life. In fact, *The Rest Is Silence*, the story of two men who fought the luminous chimera of immortality was, in the eyes of everyone, students and the public in general, impressive.⁶

In an explosive beginning of the 20th century, when the magic of the new world happens, the automobile, the airplane, the gramophone, the telephone and the cinema, Grig and Leon consume the drama of their own existence, fascinated by dreams, chimeras and ideals. They refuse to let this chimera go and they both die. The students appreciated this movie and saw it as an allegory or a “continuous metaphor”. We have therefore two “categories” in which “the object” can be placed: the object as such, namely the *film* and the *film camera*, which are found in both movies and do not have a symbolic function,

⁵ Original text: “Există un soi de univers teatral, închis și el în această păpușă Matrioșka a filmului.”

⁶ We note that Nae Caranfil was seduced by the idea of a young director with flickering of genius. In its cinematic version, the role of Grig was given to the Romanian actor Marius Florea Vizante. He was incredible in every scene, breathing life into a character comparable to the grand story of which he was a part.” [...] I didn’t like this interpretation of events, because I wanted to explore this artist-mogul opposition and I needed a strong and contrasting binomial: the artist had to be a kid and a dreamer, not a prestigious actor of mature age; Grig’s youth is a vital element because it burns in its confrontation with money, more precisely with Leon Popescu” Nae Caranfil, film interview (as cited in Duma, 2013, p. 26).

and the object-symbol, the art of film itself, which contains, in addition to the intrinsic value of a built-in object, an allusion that contributes to the allegory that is meant to be represented. Nae Caranfil's film implies metatextual references. Significantly, *The Rest Is Silence* began with a funeral recorded on the *film camera* (an image that represents the death of an art, the theatre, and the rebirth of another – the art of the film). One of the saddest chapters of film history is the lack of preservation of films from the silent period or the accidental destruction of some very important film sequences. Only in this particular case, the Romanian film was to last two hours from which about twenty minutes are lost. The Romanian actress Aristizza Romanescu was part of a group of mothers who are saying their goodbyes to their sons taken to war. Her role was magnificently played, it is a shame that it was not kept on tape. Because of the rain during filming, the image of the magnificent actress was not recorded by the cameras of the time. We caught students' attention by saying that silent films are sometimes poorly preserved leading to their deterioration, many of them being second or third generation copies. There are great silent films and there are great sound films from this era, but very few have been preserved in the original version. It is also regrettable that the gathering between Carol I and the Czar Alexander II, as it was imagined by the great actors of the National Theatre in Bucharest, was recorded, but not kept on the tape (we have only photos of this scene). In the light of these observations, it is challenging to think how moviegoing will continue to transform in the digital century, to our collective surprise and wonder.

Thus, both Romanian movies are a must-see for everyone working with visuals. The 1912 film showed the vibrant entry of Romanian cinema in public European conscience. The 2007 version revives the perfume and effervescence of those times in which the western offensive was fighting with the heiress of the Orient, a world that has set. Both are movies with traditional Balkan aesthetics: an abundance of elements and patterns, symmetry, grandeur, and dynamics. To mention last, but not least, the incredible military and civil costumes of the protagonists. The films have several symbolic sequences, but some students were impressed by a certain scene: The gesture to burn the celluloid, to destroy a masterpiece makes Leon think so easily, who will, in the end, become an unwilling killer. Along with the Balkan theme, the students discovered the colour palette which, in opposition to the black and white movies, plays a decisive role. Therefore, the films of the silent period, with their monochrome look, often refer to "the cinema of narrative integration", or "transitional cinema", and are no longer based on viewers extra-textual knowledge, "but rather employ cinematic conventions to create internally coherent narratives" (Pearson, 1996, p. 23).

Film reviews a good way to measure contemporary reaction. Usually written between a few weeks to sometimes one hundred years after a movie's release, they typically contain information about a film's plot, style, and quality of scenario, as well as the director's biographical details.

Accounts on *The Independence of Romania* (1912) pile up from one generation to the next. Otherwise, the national proto-epic about the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 also garners consensus – herein, the reenactment of battles, which, despite benefitting from directions provided by veterans, seem entirely out of hand. Alright, *Independence of Romania* isn't a masterpiece of the silent film, and it's fair to say that there's been much protochronism all over, but far be it from me to be tempted to deny Brezeanu's compositional verve. A little over a decade after the <postcards> of Romanian operators came the heyday of the *tableaux vivants*; it's easy to see it in the documentary, and *Independence* is the sole testament to the factual side of fiction (Boto, 2021).

What is the future of movies that have a digital recording, production, and rendering? There is still no guarantee of digital preservation of data. This reminds us of the image from

the end of Caranfil's film on how frail and friable the world of cinema is. Where should we look for this "pact with the imagination"? Should we look long time ago, when people have experimented with various devices which will later become key elements of cinematography: projecting images with the help of light (using the "dark chamber" and the "magic lantern"), should we look in the present or in the future? Out of all artistic forms, cinematography is the one that had the fastest upwards trajectory. Its transformation is taking place with the same amazing speed digitally. In Romania, one century late – very few films from the origins of cinema have survived. Metaphorically, the gesture to burn the celluloid, to destroy a masterpiece so easily is representative for the entire world of cinema, a world as fragile as a sandcastle. Leon scams his partners in Caranfil's movie and sets a trap and then, in one of his sentimental bursts, goes to church and prays that Grig will not touch the bait and will not sign the disadvantageous contract. The film touches every fibre of the human being, it is the equivalent of great Italian films from the age of neorealism.

5. Conclusions

With all the hesitations and downfalls of the beginnings, *The Independence of Romania* is a cinematic jewel, it represents not only the childhood of the Romanian cinema, but also a symbol for the collective memory which brings together, equally, the national identity, the official memory and the living, private memory, the oral history, the written and the visual history. In this case it is built through the media; collective memory succeeds therefore in becoming an ideological and cultural tool. On the other hand, *The Rest Is Silence* belongs to the modern Romanian cinema which, through its genuine performance, reminds us of the world of the beginning of the filmmaking. It explores how new technologies and interpreting scenarios can give life to "old cinema". A world full of bravery as was that one of Federico Fellini's *La Strada* or Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso* keeps popping up, delivering today a heady dose of nostalgia. *The Rest Is Silence* offers picturesque frescos of a charming, pre-war Romania, as well as the unavoidable backstage of making any film. It is the film of a memory which has almost faded away from collective mentality and of the unconcealed melancholy which can be felt by someone thinking back to their childhood. This film seems to have truly gone not too far from the artistic inheritance, which was left by Visconti, Vittorio De Sica, Rossellini, Rosi, even though it preserves the most important landmarks. As in Tornatore's Italian *Cinema Paradiso*, the Romanian movie is one about memory. Remembering the past is, in this context, a projecting gesture, which always takes place in the present. By remembering, "societies project their self-image and perpetuate their identity through the generations." (Assmann, A. 2013: 18). German critics like Jan and Aleida Assmann, fundament through their studies (which in the meantime form an impressive multidisciplinary bibliography) the idea of a cultural memory, following the complex manners in which nations state their cultural and political identities, making use of their own history.

Cinema is evolving today into a new pedagogy involving this new generation of students' advanced learning needs. This systematic literature based on film pedagogy has found that films can enhance student engagement and learning experiences, help retain subject interest, teach crucial management skills performance, and develop community feeling. In support of our belief in the cinematic experience, we found that venturing into the world of the Romanian film was convenient and pertinent for the Finnish students because it arouses their interest in finding out more details related to our shared historical past. This idea has determined us to insert certain *elements of cinematic culture* into our Romanian course emphasizing the participating of Finnish and Romanian soldiers in a specific section of our history: *The Balkan's War of 1877*. In this context, it seems that for this generation as well, the cinema remains a privileged place that allows cultural memory to reactivate itself and to

be proactive in a demanding and in a full change contemporary space. It turned out that through cinema, history can be not only emotive, but also controversial, considering the public's own loyalties, interests and identities.

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