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AN ANALYSIS OF ROMANIANS' SELF-IMAGE IN CONTEMPORARY CINEMATOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS

Abstract: Although contemporary Romanian filmmaking is recognized today as an important part of the global cinema and the young Romanian filmmakers have created a cinematic culture accepted as a model in Europe and internationally, there has been much criticism about the role of the “New Wave” in Romanian culture. The most common critiques describe the productions of this new generation of filmmakers as promoting a negative image, clearly “denigrating” the Romanians, Romanian education or medical systems, suggesting that these are unworthy projections of the identity of the Romanian people. The question is if the new Romanian films are indeed negative representations of our society? Here is the fundamental hypothesis of this study, this fundamental dilemma. In order to answer it, we must ask first if the Romanian films in general are true expressions of national identity? This is why, on a first level, this study will address the issues related to the positive - negative representation of the national identity. We must see how movies can generate negative or minimizing representations, but also if and how cinema can represent the identity of a social group. The second problem refers to the dynamics between these negative-positive projections as they appear in the movies. The goal here is to describe the functioning of the mechanisms of self-representation in the domestic cinema industry. To understand the structuring of the discourses about identity, the premise is that these films must be considered in their diachronic manifestation. The author distinguishes between the movies made before and after 2000 and, in order to develop the working hypothesis, it uses as main research method chosen a comparative interpretive approach. This essay

compares four major moments in the history of contemporary Romanian cinema (the movies made during communism and especially those of the Ceaușescu regime, the post-revolutionary films, the productions so-called “miserabilist” films and the “new cinema”, or the “Romanian New Wave” cinema.

Key words: Romanian cinema, New Wave, national brand, communism, post-communism, national identity

Is there such a thing as a bad “Romanian soul” ...?

A constant preoccupation, recurrent throughout the cultural history of the Romanian nation, is to define the concept of self-identity. The premise, enunciated by the first authors who wanted to describe the “Romanian soul”, precisely says that we do not own a self-awareness yet (Dumitru Drăghicescu 1996, 24). We do not know who we are and, in order to feel ourselves as part of a nation, we have to identify our specific features. The identification of both the qualities and the faults of Romanians has always oscillated between two extreme points. On one hand, we have the bravery, the intelligence and the faith; on the other hand, the resignation, the fatalism and the moral degradation (Drăghicescu 1996, 269). In fact, this apparently paradoxical dichotomy has been evident since the most ancient description of the populations living on the actual Romanian land. In his *Histories*, Hérodote firstly offers us a heroic representation of those called “the bravest and the less fearful of the Thracians”. This description has been assumed by many Romanian philosophers by adopting a selective self-fiction, since the same historian will depict the Thracians as polygamists, alcoholics, lazy people and thieves – not to talk about being called sellers of their own children (Hérodote 1964, 67).

It is relevant that we are confronted with the same dilemma nowadays; what is the reality about “who are we as Romanians”? Are we the thieves or the whores of Europe, or, on the contrary, we are hard-working, industrious and a creative source for this “old land”? Do we have a bad self-image because it really represents us, or is there a malignant intention, a world-wide conspiracy that causes the humiliation of this gentle and kind nation?

Right from the beginning of the modernity, the first authors that have reflected upon the critical description of national identity have identified the existence of some negative Romanian peculiarities. The author that has accurately

described these shortcomings is Constantin Rădulescu Motru. His classical study focused on “the Romanian spirit” is an example for the way in which the description of our negative ethnical peculiarities is used as a self-understanding instrument. Motru was mentioning a series of defects (gregarious inclination, mimesis, conservatism), as if the identification of these negative attributes would make their expiation possible. This tendency derives from another component: the impossibility to define a specific identity.

Drăghicescu's study was published in 1907 and it was focused on the “psychology” of Romanian people by means of a cultural-socio-geographical approach. As the study indicates, trying to sum up the traits and the character of this nation can be realized only by accepting the multitude of influences. The Romanian identity is an “unfinished” identity, that is not-over and not-defined yet. Drăghicescu sees in the Romanian nature the delineation of some predominantly negative features, such as a passivity really close to servility, fear leading to hesitation or fatalism joined by indifference. This is a critical tradition that goes as close as an important contemporary author, whose considerations are frequently quoted in a negative manner. H. R. Patapievici's essays, that represent a rational critical voice, have been labelled as “anti-Romanian”. After all, they are some scans very similar to those of Motru and Drăghicescu, through which the author examines “the Romanian body” almost in a clinical way. Especially in the volume *Politice*, where Patapievici tackles the preconception of self-awareness (“I thought that being Romanian is an inherent quality”) one can notice that he has taken up a critical attitude that allows the cure of Romanian “vices”. His other books, where he exposes the Romanian “deficiencies”, also seen as moral diseases (gossiping, lies, mediocrity), and denounces these problems (such as the so-called “gregarious” spirit or the primitiveness) are nothing else than an effort made to know one's identity.

Or a good one?

On the other hand, there is a lasting tradition of the heroic interpretation of the “Romanian spirituality”, which has gained popularity in the twenties or thirties, due to the philosophical considerations of Nae Ionescu, Mircea Vulcănescu, Emil Cioran or Lucian Blaga, who have been trying to catch the positive traits of an

eternal “Romanian spirit” manifesting itself in an almost mystical spirituality (Blaga and the “lamb space”), or by means of an epochal destiny (the imperial projection of Cioran’s Romania).

Later on, the national-communist regime of Ceaușescu has continued to use these positive patriotic projections, with an ideological aim. The multitude of books and studies, from which the remarkable one is that of I.C. Dragan, *Mileniul Imperial al Daciei* or *Mitologiile* by Romulus Vulcănescu, have culturally stimulated this heroic, but false projection of the ethnical “Self”. In the same period, the publication of some interwar authors has been allowed and encouraged, the most important of them being Constantin Noica. He was talking about a “Romanian feeling of being”, as a phenomenal reality where the ontological pattern of “within” (*întru*) became an example for the entire national community (Constantin Noica 1976, 112-143). A single word is enough for the Romanian philosopher in order to delineate a special mental universe, that differentiates Romanians from all the other human beings in the world. Of course, the question remaining is whether the autarchy of “within” is itself an ideological expression of the interpreter Noica. However, this “Romanian vision” of the world – characterized by sovereignty and a certain self-sufficiency – simultaneously brings into discussion the national perception that there might be a global conspiring attitude against Romanians. This preconception has been there for decades and recently the prophetic author Dan Puric has released a volume entitled *Suflet românesc* (with the portrait of Decebalus, the first king of Romanians' ancestors, the Dacians, on the cover), where he maintains the eternal hypothesis of the archaic beauty of our nation, morally damaged by its obscure enemies. Because of his wish to make a biography of the Romanian human being, based on the existence of a positive moral soul, threatened with degradation by modernity, the solution of such authors is also the autarchy, the return to a mystical spirituality, the a refuge inside self-fiction.

Emil Cioran, the author of the famous essay *Schimbarea la față a României* [*Romania's Transfiguration*], represents another type of attitude. After an enthusiastic phase, he adopted the “critical position of the denigrators” of the Romanian identity. It becomes relevant that there is a group of authors embracing another premise, that is best described by Mihai Râlea (Mihai Râlea 1997). The Romanian identity is hard to define because it is not coagulated yet, it is about being made, it is seeking for its own self (Râlea 1997, 191). Actually, this uncertainty of our social group is the one that can become a generic feature. In an extremely well-

spread study, entitled *De ce este România altfel*, Lucian Boia trenchantly expresses this apparently shocking hypothesis. We do not own a national brand, because, afterwards, our brand expresses the fact that we do not own any brand, that we are, in other words, unbrandable (Lucian Boia 2012, 97).

Why is it good to have a “national brand”?

One thing is clear, Romanians are extremely concerned with their self-image. After 1989, the interest for the “national image” has been institutionalized under the impact of the new promoting techniques – especially the international marketing and the strategies regarding global public relations. This is why, in spite of Romania’s national image, that has been a constant preoccupation during communism, in the two post-communist decades certain initiatives for “promoting Romania” have reappeared.

One of the first international promoting campaigns, realized in 1996, has led to the publication of a really controversial album, entitled *Eterna și fascinantă Românie* [The eternal and fascinating Romania]. It projects a beautiful and pastoral Romania, rural and somehow ethereal, a project that costed a few millions of dollars. Obviously, this “eternal and fascinating” Romania has been part of a huge mass media scandal, being linked to a series of venal processes. In 2001, the initiative was amplified, due to a new campaign lead under the slogan “România, mereu surprinzătoare” [The always surprising Romania], for which almost 20 millions of dollars have been spent on international publicity, with badges recorded on the biggest TV shows in Europe and North America. After 2005, when Romania’s image was defined as a “strategic objective” (<http://www.imagine-romania.ro/evenimente/imaginea-romaniei-obiectiv-strategic>), the expenses have started to increase; later “the touristic brand” of Romania was developed, which had, in 2008, an approximate budget of 75 millions of euro. Meanwhile, in 2007, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was involved in another controversial project, consisting of the elaboration of “Fabulouspirit” campaign, one of Lucian Georgescu’s creations, at the time an employee at “Gav Scholz and Friends”. A specialist in communication, subsequently concerned with cinema, he will combine the terms fabulous and spirit. Unfortunately, this combination, that seems to

dictate whenever we want to define ourselves, has become, because of its English translation, a stupid-ridiculous mixture of alcohol (spirit) and fiction.

Afterwards, in 2010, the Minister of Tourism has identified and realized an image of the Romanian identity, a logo by which Romania can be promoted both on its own territory and abroad. The touristic brand of Romania, that costs almost one million euro, has become a green leaf. The slogan associated with this “positive image” is “Explore the Carpathian Garden”. Certainly, as Lucian Boia was stating, the fact that our national identity is a green leaf, which means nothing in terms of regional identification, is relevant, since “the green leaf” is associated, in Romanian folklore and beliefs, with the inability and the incapacity of doing something relevant or significant, as our collective imaginary shows.

Is the national brand a negative fiction?

Surveys indicate a different reality from the sweetened-positive one of the big promoting projects. As the IRES study realized in May 2013 shows, almost 60% of the Romanian people consider that Romania is negatively perceived in UE, 42% of those interrogated talked about a “bad” image and 18% that we still own a “really bad” image. Just 38% of our fellow citizens consider that our country is “well-seen” inside the European Union. Furthermore, just 1% from those interviewed said that Romania is very well-seen inside UE (<http://www.ires.com.ro/articol/231/dupa-sase-ani--ce-cred-romanii-despre-uniunea-europeana>). It is evident that Romanians think they have a negative image in the West. What is the explanation for this?

As one survey has recently shown, one of the potential culprits for the negative image of Romanians and their ancestral nation is represented by films. Even though the contemporary Romanian cinema has been widely acclaimed by international chronicles and European awards, there are several critics of what we could call “the New Wave” of the Romanian cinema. Hence, a Romanian Congressman, a PSD deputy from Vaslui, Victor Cristea, has openly attacked the movie “Poziția copilului” [Child's Pose], describing it as a “derogative” creation for Romanians and the educational Romanian system, suggesting that the film is full of obscenities, trivial facts and curses and that it should be prohibited. “We are tormenting ourselves in order to educate children in schools”, the angry deputy was complaining, while this movie full of “curses” damages our image. This kind of

movies should not be subsidized anymore, the representative from Vaslui has suggested in the Parliament's meeting.

It is true that the movie "Poziția copilului", directed by Călin Peter Netzer in 2013, has been nominated for Oscar and won one of the most important European prizes, The Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival. Actually, this movie is part of a series of productions that lead to Romania's international acknowledgement as one of the major cinematographic schools of Europe. The question is whether the young Romanian film-makers have created cinematographic productions that helped Romania to be known worldwide or if they globally destroyed the positive image of a fabulous Romania. Are the new movies negative representations of our society? It must be said that, while a contemporary Romanian movie has a minimum budget of 500-600 thousands euros, using the amount of money spent on the "national brand's projects", there could have been made at least 50 films! In this respect, the most profitable national brand remains the contemporary Romanian film (<http://www.gandul.info/stiri/noul-val-din-filmul-romanesc-primul-brand-valabil-de-tara-puiu-mitulescu-porumboiu-si-mustata-povestesc-pentru-gandul-despre-ofensiva-cinematografiei-romanesti-5585051>).

Two fictions: history and films

Because it has become obvious that the question "who are we, the Romanians"? is too frequently disputed and almost impossible to be clarified, a more attainable approach, for which we can find a relative indirect answer would be if there is a "we, the Romanians" in the vernacular cinema? To clarify this connection, we must discuss the consequences that result when two fictions meet. What happens when the cinematographic fiction and the historical one come together?

For now, we have two premises regarding this problem. The first one is negative. The new Romanian films are negative representations of society, manifestations of a disinterest for our national identity, even assuming the existence of a quasi-conspiring project, that could destroy this identity. The counter-argument is that contemporary films actually represent the most important

way of promoting Romania abroad. The question is whether movies “damage” our image or “improve” it?

In order to offer descriptions and arguments at this level, I believe that the most productive manner of interpretation is the comparative view applied in the field of cinematographic analysis. We can describe four major moments and four self-representational mechanisms for the Romanian movie. These hypostases are not necessarily expressed from a chronological perspective, but, in order to clarify our argumentation, we will describe them from a diachronic perspective. These four formulas that reveal the national identity are: the heroic national fiction (precisely that of the “patriotic” movies belonging to the communist period), the “transitional” post-communist movie, the movies describing the “Wallachian nothingness” and the contemporary cinematographic realism. They can be circumscribed to four major descriptions of national identity: the positive self-image, the negative self-image, the ironical self-image and the authentic self-image.

Before going any further, there are several issues emerging from the aforementioned problems, almost without a direct answer. Can we define a “positive” and a “negative” manner of making films? Is cinema a way of denigration or a realistic thing about ourselves? Can we delineate some specific mechanisms of representation for the cinematographic art or can we draw any conclusion from the way in which movies create a positive self-image of a social group, or about the way in which film-makers can damage the national identity? After all, how does the national identity manifest itself inside the sphere of cinematographic production?

Some truths about the biggest lie, the cinema

Without offering too many details, since several studies have been written about the false nature of films, my premise starts with one of the most exciting distinctions, established by Gilles Deleuze. A film is based on what the French philosopher was calling “the power of falsity”, it projects a “false movement” (Gilles Deleuze 1983, 213), possible only due to an artificial system that is the filmic production, in its turn possible thanks to “a false continuity” (Deleuze 1983, 28). The relationship between falsity and movie is a natural one. Because, although we perceive what is presented to us as real, no movie has an absolute realistic power. In the end, every movie is a type of fiction, first of all because every director/filmmaker tampers the reality that is filmed. When he selects a piece of real, when

he fits the image, he distorts the reality. Therefore, the movie is a lie even when it is presented as being “more than true”.

The false cinema starts with a cinematographic convention: it is possible thanks to a mechanical principle based on the reciprocal acceptance of an “untruthful consent” between the spectator and the creator of images. This convention is based on the inherent realism of every film camera (or photo camera), in fact on the technologies that promise “the capture of the real”, as it is. But the simple fact that we see something that *seems* to be real does not make that object true in the genuine sense of the word. The confidence (sometimes extreme) in the sight's competences is actually the one allowing the misrepresentation, and to which every cinematic production resorts. No movie can be a perfect copy of reality. The question here is if the cinematographic images are real because they are taken from reality or is it just us believing they are true, since they are shown to us as such? Or, perhaps, thanks to the cadres and the editing of any cinematographic manifestation, they naturally become false?

Actually we are attending a doubly falsity of the movie. As we have seen, on one hand, cinema is a way of fiction and of falsifying the reality due to its technological nature. On the other hand, cinema gives birth to fictional worlds, elaborates invented narratives owing its discourse's nature. And the creation of stories belonging to cinema is also made using a conscience that is external to reality. This is why all movies, even the documentary ones, embody aspects of narrative deceptions – because they utilize our expectations in such a way as to induce us false experiences. We are taking part at the actions and the events on the screen as if we were living them for real. Despite that, the experience allowed to us is always built by someone else.

Even more in the postmodern world, where the boarder between the real and the hyper real has faded out, cinema plays a major role in re-writing the history. As Umberto Eco has demonstrated, in the hyper real universe we do not even need the real, but the falsified real, which is more real than the real itself (Umberto Eco 1986, 4). The invention of history takes extreme shapes, where the cultural products of a ruling system, especially due to Hollywood's cinematographic productions, have gained the aspect of the absolute false (Jaap Looijman 2008); in a global culture where what just seems to be real is a substitute for history and the truth of the reality itself, history and fiction intertwine. The classical example of the way in which this

fusion works is Robert Zemeckis's movie, *Forrest Gump* (2004). Now, history can be re-invented by using the digital technologies. This taint is possible not just due to the manipulation of images (realized by the other cinematographic technologies too), but thanks to the direct intervention of the cinematographic narrative on the factual truth. This is why, while *Forrest Gump* interviews John Lennon, he participates to Martin Luther King Jr.'s discourse, or shakes hands with JFK, by means of the photo-real super-imposition and, simultaneously, he is presented to us as he teaches Elvis Presley to dance or how he directly influences the major events of the recent past. History and fiction emerge until they cannot be separated anymore, and the total dissolution of the historical aspect in the cinematographic one leads to the creation of a post-historic identity.

Of course that the dynamics between cinema, representation and lie is more complex. Very often, the contemporary cinema comes up with counter-histories, like in the case of the really-disputed *JFK*(1991) of Oliver Stone. Here, the director elaborates a counter-mythology, utilizes factual information to show the historical truth. The cinema becomes the only instrument thanks to which reality can still be present, ironically, once more due to a fiction!

Some lies about the biggest truth: history

History, in turn, is based on a false convention – that of the absolute truth. Even though the Big History (in capitals) argues that it describes things that really happened, actually history just talks about some events whose reality we cannot truly certify. History, apparently based on the scientific credibility of its objective discourse built on accuracy, fairness and reliability, can offer just fictional warranties. Perceived in a detached way, history is a sequence of meanings created from variations, partial interpretations. Even the faith in history is based on a falsity – we never truly know what happened, we just receive versions of some people, of those who chose to record their memories. In this sense, History, as Keith Jenkins says, is the manner by which people “partially build their identity” (Keith Jenkins 1991, 23), the things we choose to tell about ourselves.

There are several examples that prove the falsified nature of history. Probably the easiest to understand is the fact that the historical chronology used nowadays is wrong. We now know that counting the years “of our era” is based on an historical estimative error, “the error” of situating the year of Jesus's birth, as it

was wrongly identified by Dionysius Exiguus and then perpetuated. In reality, history is an extensive series of efforts to falsify, from the attempt to eliminate Hatshepsut by Thutmose III, to the rewriting of the Gaelic war by Caesar, from the removal of the non-canonical texts made by Church, to the wish of falsifying the history, by Nazism and communism. As the theologian Franz Overbeck was noticing, even “the most trustful” history, as is the history of faith, is the result of the process of a systematic misinterpretation, affected by amnesia for some parts of the past and imposition of some selective, desirable visions.

Since the dominant history resorts to the permanent elimination of other “competing stories”, this makes “History” a collection of accepted stories, while the omitted or the damaged stories simply remain “bad stories”, abandoned narratives. Even the fidelity for preserved sources (texts) is doubtful, because throughout the years there have been kept just the information convenient for someone, having a certain aim. If we see things from this perspective, history is the rebuilding of stories from relics, remnants and pieces of broken time. If history is nothing but a sequence of stories, of narratives about the events at which none of our contemporaries took part, the historical discourse is permanently invented and reinvented by those who “are telling it now”.

In this respect history is a fictional history, as Curthoys and Docker show, and, because the connections between history and literature are stale and date back to Hérodote and Thucydides, we cannot ignore the fact that history is the writing and, especially, the re-writing of time. This does not imply the acceptance of some conspiring theories, like the one proposed by John Hamer, who affirms that we are the victims of a long process of fraud, organized throughout the centuries by an elite controlling all the events (John Hamer 2012). History is not fictitious neither in the sense of the postmodern historiographic relativism, nor of the idea according to which “history is over”, but rather from a perspective that understands “past as promiscuity” (Keith Jenkins 1995), respectively that sees the impossibility of realizing history otherwise than in the present tense.

History is a form of “manipulation” not because it is always trying to explain something, but because it depends on the utilized tramps, on the way in which the interpretation takes place. Actually, we can talk about a meta-history (considering White’s sense) which leads to the creation of facts by means of a discourse, rather than by the representation of truth.

The movie of the national identity – some problems of Romanian meta-history

As Benedict Anderson was proving in his classical study about the national identity, nations are nothing but imagined identities. What interests us here is the argument according to which not only the political space where the social groups function is imagined (Benedict Anderson 2006, 6), respectively, not only the content that social values receive is built up, but the entire historical patrimony is created, and also, the cultural identity on the whole is generated by mass mediums, such as television or cinema.

Reaching the Romanian context, the strong connection between the national identity and cinema must be highlighted. Here, we have to describe two situations. The first one results from the fact that the shaping of the Romanian national identity has common roots with the moment when the foundation of the autochthonous cinematographic culture begins. It is not incidentally that the subject of the first Romanian fictional movie, *Independența României* (Aristide Demetriade / Grigore Brezeanu, 1912), is the War of Independence and utilizes, as narrative base, an event that established the modern Romanian state. Several vernacular cinematographic representations, right before the communist propagandistic period, will have used history as the main inspirational source. From *Independența României* to the TV series from 1977, *Războiul Independenței*, or the pseudo-documentary movie of Sergiu Nicolaescu in 1999 (*Carol I. Un destin pentru România*), the cinematographic rewriting of the “starting moment” of identity has remained recurrent. Even contemporary authors, like Nae Caramfil (*Restul e tăcere*, 2007), always go back to the discourse regarding identity.

However, the second major problem of the meta-historical discourse refers to the communist cinematographic period. In a series of productions whose ideological content was directly controlled by the communist ideology, as C.T. Popescu eloquently shows, cinema becomes the first instrument to control the public imaginary (Constantin Tudor Popescu 2011). Totally registered to the ideological aims of the political power, Romanian movies are made to spread historical falsities. Thus, due to some directors controlled by the central committee of the communist party, stories about national identity are built. The Dacian king Burebista was portraying himself as a regional leader, who created the first centralized Dacian state. The genesis of the Romanian nation is also fictionally represented, looming from the combination of Dacian women (known as

Decebalus's relatives) and Trajan's centurions (*Columna*, Mircea Drăgan, 1968), and Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave) was close to conquer Istanbul (1970). Thus it was possible that factual impossibilities – Decebalus had been beheaded, the Dacian army decimated – and historical absurdities – Mihai Viteazul has extreme fights, he does not have the necessary resources to occupy territories from the Ottoman Empire – take to the reshape of the historical discourse itself. The most relevant episode of the history of Romanian movies is when Mircea cel Bătrân (Mircea the Elder) achieves the name of Mircea cel Mare (Mircea the Great), to not disturb the vulnerabilities of the ageing communist leader.

The rewriting of the historical discourse and the history itself are, probably, best illustrated by the cinematographic treatment that one of the most traumatic episodes in recent history has received: the Romanian revolution. Beyond theories of conspiracy, which suggest that the revolution itself, as media and political event, was nothing else but another low budget film made by Sergiu Nicolaescu, we know that this tragic and shocking event, completed with the execution of the dictatorial couple, Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu, was perceived exactly as a movie. As the director Sergiu Nicolaescu was admitting, the film of the trial was edited by himself by means of some covered frames, with ellipses and juxtapositions, as if it had been made in the setting cabin of a fictional movie (http://adevarul.ro/cultura/istorie/24-ani-executia-sotilor-ceausescu-misterele-zilei-25decembrie-1989-1_52ba7c38c7b855ff56fb32b9/index.html). Another element that proves the strong connection between the cinematographic fiction and the historical fiction are the discussions between the political leaders about the "Revolution's scenario". The intention of fictionalizing is obvious from the discussions regarding the sentence of the couple, where several "set-ups" (<http://www.curentul.ro/2011/index.php/2011122267120/Decembrie-1989-marturii-si-documente/Iliescu-l-a-ucis-pe-Ceausescu-la-ordinul-Moscovei-Executia-a-fost-trucata.html>) are proposed, but the filming of the execution itself is framed-up, because apparently, the cuttings of the frame hide a previous shot. Thus, the falsification of history takes place both at the level of the narratives concerning events (as a story about something) and at the level of the alteration of the events themselves (as an invented story).

Actually, the narration of the political change in 1989, as well as the tragic story of that Christmas has constantly troubled the Romanian directors. One of the

first movies that cinematographically verbalized the event also belongs to Sergiu Nicolaescu. *Punctul Zero* (Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1996), a movie with a delicate plot resembling an international thriller, contains a relevant shot. Accused by supporters of theories of conspiracy of having directed the Romanian revolution, the director rapidly showing up at the national television channel during the events, Nicolaescu is also concerned with the rewriting of history inside the fictions he produces. Sergiu Nicolaescu not only filmed the reenactment of the presidential couple's shot, realizing the production right at the authentic places, but he also claimed that the record made by him is a "minimal" reconstruction of reality (<http://sergiunicolaescu.ro/filme-lung-metraj-punctul-zero-1996/>). In fact, the movie of the Revolution in *Punctul zero*, as well as the detested reshaping of the Revolution days in Timisoara (15, 2006) treat the dynamics between history and fiction really lightly. The director utilizes the entire arsenal of the pseudo-documentary movie, throwing light upon the fiction by means of authentic filming during the events or by remaking the chronological scheme of the tragedies. However, as we can clearly see in *Punctul zero*, a movie where international actors are starring, with a background represented by erotic scenes and a multitude of plots of a cop's movie, Nicolaescu supplies the conspiring theories, because he places the two occidental spies that participate at the Revolution to be witnesses of the execution of the husbands Ceaușescu in an inexistent sewage, and he makes them to stop a supposed attempt of rescuing the dictatorial couple by some assumptive "terrorists". History and fiction are so strongly connected, that their borders are permanently removed.

This interest to reconstitute the events is also visible for some directors that did not have any contact with the political propaganda. Almost all of the directors alleged after 2000 will realize movies that directly or indirectly treat the problems of the Romanian revolution. Actually, in 2005, 3 movies treating this subject simultaneously appeared: *Cum mi-am petrecut sfârșitul lumii* (Cătălin Mitulescu), *Hârtia va fi albastră* (Radu Muntean) and *A fost sau n-a fost?* (Corneliu Porumboiu). Two other examples are, however, relevant: Andrei Ujică, the director of a remarkable documentary, where the identity of the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu is restated by making use of epochal movies based on propagandistic television tools (*Autobiografia lui Nicolae Ceaușescu*, 2010) and Radu Gabrea, who realizes a cinematographic reproduction of the dictatorial couple's trial. For these directors,

finding a historical significance is less relevant than dismantling the false produced by previous movies.

The national fiction of patriotic movies between '60-'80

One of the first major events for the development of the fiction regarding identity was represented by the epoch when some of the most popular movies in the communist period were made. Among these, we can find the imposing historical movies of the so-called cinematographic and national epic (Elena Saulea 2011). The productions about Dacians, starting with the homonymous movie of Sergiu Nicolaescu in 1967 and the “sequel” realized by authors like Mircea Drăgan (*Columna*, 1968) or Gheorghe Vitanidis (*Burebista*, 1980) developed a series of heroic representations of our national history that, very often, were merely fictional. In an extensive series centered around the mythology of origins frequently fully invented, these directors designed a social identity in accordance with the ideology of the personal dictatorial system of N. Ceaușescu. The need to find a national identity able to ensure the autonomy of the system related to the Soviet Union was nourished by these cinematographic creations that were supporting the “Dacian spirit”. Relevant here is a dialogue of *Burebista*, written by the academician Mihnea Gheorghiu, where *Burebista* (a pretty obscure character regarding historical documents) not only affirms the Thracian identity of Geta-Dacians, quoting directly from Herodot, but also speaks by using Marxist-Leninist maxims (no work without bread) and enunciates the principle of self-determination, using the language of Ceaușescu - each nation should defend itself (Mihnea Gheorghiu).

The second category of historical movies are those dedicated to the foundational rulers (*Mihai Viteazul*, Sergiu Nicolaescu 1971; *Buzduganul cu trei peceți*, Constantin Vaeni 1978), the “revolutionary” Romanian heroes, the despots (*Întoarcerea lui Vodă Lăpușneanu*, Malvina Urșianu 1980) or to the group of social rebels, pseudo-Marxists before the Marxism (*Pintea*, Mircea Moldovan 1970; *Horea*, Mircea Mureșan 1984). Beyond the fact that heroes frequently defend an inexistent Romanian identity (*Mihai Viteazul* not being motivated by any ethnical reasons in the alliance of the 3 countries populated by Romanians), these movies become remarkable thanks to an explicit foundation of a national identity and history dedicated to the worship of personality. As some other movie critics were

noticing (<http://mirceadumitrescu.trei.ro/serialul.html>), the cinematographic figures have been made heroic in order to make the figure of the strong and right leader a heroic and trustful one – that is that of Ceausescu himself.

Fiction is complete in these movies, and the reconstruction of the autochthonous visual universe resembles to an invented puzzle. The alteration of history realized by these cinematographic representations sometimes even leads to the spatial and archeological alteration. It is well-known the situation when, in order to realize Sergiu Nicolaescu's movie, *Dacii*, the sanctuary from Sarmisegetuza was devastated and reinvented to serve the aims of the director, the circular wood construction in all the photographs being “set” in the ground by the filming crew (actually, the wood pillars could not stand to two hundred years exposed to natural disasters).

The transformation of the historical space is identical to that of the historical time and is part of the same coherent effort to alter the imaginary. In another famous sequence from the movie *Mihai Viteazul*, where the triumphal arrival of the “unifying hero” takes place at Alba Iulia, the director gives birth to a pure geographical fiction, made up by several real locations. The succession of scenes takes place as such: in the real space, Mihai proceeds on the medieval streets from Sighișoara, nearby the buildings of a renovated fortress, then he goes across the bridge of the castle belonging to the family of Huniazi, in the interior courtyard of the same building and finally, in a gothic interior that did not exist in Alba-Iulia. Composed of several locations, this reality is fictive. Because, beyond the fact that the Romanian peasants who acclaimed the “rescuing” prince were still considered as serfs and they could not have been found on the streets of the town together with the nobiliary families (equalitarianism), all the “patriotic” movies had an ideological purpose. They were built with the aim of serving the delusive pictures of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime. History and national identity were consecrated to the figure of Ceaușescu, who saw himself as the successor of Burebista, Ștefan cel Mare or Mihai Viteazul. All these cinematographic figures were simple projections of the communist propaganda and they were using some fictions lacking in any culture .

The Romanian cinematography from Ceausescu's epoch (and not only then) utilized, like the public discourse did, a type of selective history. This lead to a false lacking in quality, the historical Romanian movie being nothing else than an ideological representation of an inexistent reality.

The myth of “the good Romanian” and the comedy of being a “good Romanian”

At the beginning of the 90's, when the first groups of Romanian emigrants were leaving for Italy and Spain, and the phenomenon of migration has reached huge proportions, a new mythology was born, that of the good hard-working Romanian from abroad. One of the most important Romanian business-men, Eli Davidai, was describing Romanians as “the Jews of Europe” from nowadays (<http://www.zf.ro/companii/eli-davidai-romanii-sunt-evreii-europei-cum-comentati-5135691>). In an interview published by the most read business magazine in Romania, Davidai, who has Jewish roots, indirectly compared the migration of millions of Romanians with the migration of the chosen people. This way, the Romanian movement to “diaspora” belongs to a positive mythology. Somehow, this image is sustained by statistical data. Romanians living abroad are a source of prosperity, because starting with 2005, when the Romanian workers from diaspora could officially send money home, using the banking system, it was estimated that the migrants who left Romania have sent back home approximately 40 billions dollars! Only in 2008, the best year for the migratory working people, they pumped in the Romanian economical system huge amounts of money, approximately 9,3 billions of dollars accessing their home banking accounts. Romanian workers, deprecatory called “căpșunari” (strawberry reapers) thus improved the GDP of Romania with an estimated sum of 25% of the total amount of the incomes.

Searching for a positive self-image, as it results from the sociological studies on national identity realized by Septimiu Chelcea (Septimiu Chelcea 1995, 14), Romanians have formulated a series of mainly positive features. Romanians ascribe themselves qualities like hospitality, hard-work, and kindness, and the Romanian movie has tried to offer positive representations of this national identity. These are myths about ourselves through which we define “us, the Romanians”, as being good, kind and hard-working. One of the first movies released in 1990 was *Campioana*, made by the well-known director of some appeaseable productions, such as *Mama* or *Amintiri din copilărie*, Elisabeta Bostan. The story of the talented gymnast that leads to the international acknowledgement ends with a triumphal raising of the flag and the intonation of the national hymn in an international context.

Other times, because these positive characteristics seem to belong rather to “the simple Romanian”, the essence of the Romanian spirit was localized in contexts

slipping to parody. Right after 1989 a series of movies based on what we could call “the comedy of being Romanian” have appeared. Productions such as *Miss Litoral* (1990) or *Sexy Harem Ada-Kaleh* (2001) counted on the false image of the “good migratory man”. In Mircea Mureșan’s movies, Romanians going abroad do this job with enthusiasm and with a type of primitive naivety. It does not matter that these cinematographic productions made after 1989 are strongly sexualized, and the cinematographic discourse is misogynist. Self-representations achieve auto-ironical connotations, and we, Romanians, are joyfully confronted with our destiny – even if this destiny implies humiliating situations, at the limit of prostitution.

Sometimes these movies show, as in Nichita Stănescu’s statement, “a sad country, full of humor”. The category of “movies full of fools” belongs to this process of enunciating a self-identity that is positive and comic. Movies such as *Garcea și Oltenii* (Sam Irvin, 2001) and later on, *Trei frați de belea* (Theodor Halacu-Nicon, 2006) focused on characters that were part of the humoristic show *Vacanța mare*. They project the image of some Romanians who are “smart”, creative and ingenious, but make fun of everything. The ridiculous element in *Garcea și oltenii* reminds of the Dacian myths, the central story being the possibility of transforming the Dacians (and implicitly, the Romanians) into the masters of the world. This is the situation with the policeman Garcea or the garbage man Bizo, who are similar human types and examples for the survival based on mocking. It is relevant that *Garcea și oltenii* has remained for a long time the most watched production after 1989, with almost 30 thousands people as audience. Recently, a series of television productions recorded a similar success by using the same kind of self-abjectness. Television movies such as *State de Romania* or *Las Fierbinți* rebuild a mentally burlesque universe, that is also self-ironically rural, the same space found at the boarder of degradation and human decline, but which allows the survival of its members as a symbolical projection of the entire Romania.

Holding everything up to ridicule constitutes the rescuing formula of these self-representations. We, Romanians, do not take ourselves seriously enough and we are light-mindedly, but this is what makes us different. It can be said that the formula these productions utilize is that we become historically ridicule. They show the Romanian identity as a comic fiction, by means of a burlesque and ironic discourse, depicting the situation where what we think we are we will never be.

The shame of being Romanian – the self-demonization

The degradation and the negative self-depreciation is another feature of the way in which Romanians represent themselves in the artistic productions and the public speeches. Negative stereotypes, as we have seen before, are recurrent. Once again, socially and culturally speaking, the phenomenon of migration is eloquent. It connoted a series of negative representations of Romanians in the majority of occidental informational mediums. Regarding the Romanians living abroad, some of the most frequent stereotypes that mass-media uses belong to these categories: “beggars”, “gypsies”, “lazy immigrants”. One of the states where mass-media stereotypes about Romanians are really strong is Great Britain. The language utilized by the British mass-media about “the Romanian danger” surpasses the negative myths about our citizens working abroad, seasonal migrants being ironically called “căpșunari” (strawberry reapers).

The “anti-Romanian” messages have entered the Western public and media space; not only the cases of brutal outlaws allowed negative descriptions, but the presence of some film-makers, such as Cristian Mungiu, lead to depictions like “Romanian gypsies”. Relevant is the way in which Mungiu was presented by the show “Les Guignols de l’Info”, broadcasted by the French channel Canal+, as being a beggar in comparison to Steven Spielberg and using a language typical for beggars.

If the foreign mass-media transformed all the stereotypes into means of negative labeling, these clichés were for several times assumed even by the discourse about ourselves. One of the most relevant examples for this propensity to emphasize the negative features of the Romanian people can be found in the movies of the “Romanian mioritic nothingness”, in what is called the poverty of the 90’s. Many Romanian movies realized in the first years after “the cinematographic freedom”, allowed by the 1989 Revolution have used a self-depreciator discourse. The 90’s were marked by the publication of a series of monstrous figures, sinister and aberrant characters, with sequences dominated by scenes of groundless sex and explicit political references. The post-communist blank was filled with scenes full of grotesque and brutish humor, often by using a scatological language and stories built around some primitive heroes, aroused by visceral tendencies – Romania being depicted as an abject world. These movies lead to the demonization of the

“Wallachian nothingness”, describing a sub-humanity of the new Romanian created by the “false post-communist democracy”.

The most representative movies of this category are those of Mircea Daneliuc. By far, the most brutal movie is his second one, realized after 1989, *Patul conjugal* (1993), which distinguishes itself by a series of situations going from terror to aversion. Even if they outline dramas that seem to illustrate typical feminine problems (such as abortion or social exploitation), their treatment consisted of the elaboration of some of the most degrading scenes about human life and human relations in the history of autochthonous movie. Daneliuc continued this representation of the Romanian misery on the big screens in Romania. Daneliuc builds and rebuilds this “abject” grotesque of the Romanian society, with the help of Răzvan Popescu, one of the post-communist “new-writers”. Popescu is also representative for the wretched flow, this time in the Romanian literature. He concentrates his stories on the same devaluation of the human being, that has occurred due to the moral degradation of the post-communist society. Indicative of this is also the fact that Popescu, who became scenarist for some of the most tough movies – *Paradis Terminus* (1990) or *Faimosul paparazzo* (1999), composes scenarios as adaptations of his own novels entitled as such: *Omul cu cioc și gheare* or *Subomul*, with direct references to this degradation of the humanity during profound social changes.

Daneliuc’s abject movies – *A unsprezecea poruncă* (1991), *Această lehamite* (1994), *Ambasadori, căutăm Patrie* (2003), *Sistemul nervos* (2005), *Marilena* (2008), *Cele ce plutesc* (2009) will resort to a self-dirtiness more and more aggressive, being eloquent for this inverted projection, self-depreciatory image of ourselves. Finally, these representations mean the litter of history. They are a clear reaction against the false victory of the political moment, produced by the aversion against the stilted and pompous self-projections, that are impossible to prove. As one of Daneliuc’s characters says, quoting right from the title of a judiciary album about Romania, *The future of Romania*, the curse becomes the only possible instrument for a critical discourse.

To the reality of simply being a Romanian

Starting with 2004, every year Romanian movies have received some of the most important awards of the European cinematographic industry, a remarkable fact for the history of Central and East-European movie. After *Un cartuș de Kent și un pachet de țigări*, the Goldener Bär prize for the Best Short Film at the Berlin International Film Festival (2004), there have followed *Moartea domnului Lăzărescu - Un Certain Regard*, Cannes Festival (2005), *A fostsău n-a fost*, *Camera d'or*, Cannes Film Festival (2006), *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 3 zile*, “Palme d’or”, Cannes Film Festival (2007), *O zi bună de plajă*, the Goldener Bär prize for the Best Short Film, Berlin International Film Festival (2008), *Polițist, adjectiv*, the Jury Prize - Un Certain Regard, Cannes Festival (2009), *Eu când vreau să fluier, fluier*, Silver Bear Jury Prize, Berlin International Film Festival (2010), *Superman, Batman, Spiderman*, European Short Film, European Film Awards (2011), *După dealuri*, The Best Female Act (Cosmina Stratan, Cristina Flutur), Award For Best Screenplay, Cannes Festival (2012), *Poziția copilului*, Golden Bear for Best Film, Berlin International Film Festival (2013). It is obvious that Romanians' self-image belonging to the cinematographic representations of the New Wave, that firstly appeared after 2000, due to the post-communist movie, has suffered a series of major transformations in comparison to the anterior cinematographic discourse.

However, the young Romanian film-makers have been accused of depicting a wrong image of Romanians and of Romania. Moreover, some movie critics, like Grig Modorcea, talk about the new wave of film-makers as representing the cinema “of mockery”, that pushes everything to parody. To top it all, directors are accused of considering “anti-Romanian, pre-ordered reactions”. Actually this hypothesis of an anti-Romanian conspiracy, revived by Modorcea from the conspiring discourse, can be also applied to a media channel, such as the Media Pro trust, described as a place where a new interest group “have been fooling for 23 years now a nation too patient, creating a new Romania, a Romania full of wankers, of manipulable people” (<http://www.ziaristionline.ro/2013/09/02/grid-modorcea-despre-incremenirea-in-proiect-sunt-o-baba-comunista/>).

The arguments of these detractors are based on the idea that the movies of this new generation represent ourselves in a distorted way. Thus the migration phenomenon is presented in an incorrect manner (*Occident* or *București-Viena 8-*

15): the movies of the “New Wave” are not proper because they show a defective image about the Romanian medical system (*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*), these movies promote homosexual relationships (*Legături bolnăvicioase*), the directors attack the church and they question the Christianity of Romanians (*După dealuri*), spread the image of Romanians as potential delinquents (*Eu când vreau să fluier, fluier*) or simply, destroy the image of our country and history (*Europolis*). Tudor Giurgiu recounts a suggestive happening, that took place during the Pro Cult festival in Rome, organized between 10-18 November at Accademia di Romania (<http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-cultura-13515991-filmele-imaginea-romaniei.html>), when the director and the manager of the most important movie festival in Romania received an official letter where he was asked that “Movies that are broadcasted must not depict a negative image of Romania (drugs, sex, gypsies, alcoholics, trivial language)”. Such described, most of the movies that gained international awards can be part of this category; this kind of perspective shows the essence of the negative discourse, that always implies the existence of some “anti-Romanian” messages in these productions and an inherent negative intention.

Without further details, I consider that the contemporary film is the only truly interested in recapturing one’s self and representing “the reality of being Romanian”. These films are deeply concerned with authenticity, not with auto-representation or critical or symbolic fiction. Afterwards, self-knowledge is the only one that can lead to the truth of the actual history. By telling real stories, these directors are actually searching for our real identity and by always describing the present time they succeed to create an image close to the one that is lived.

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