

**Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca**

**The Faculty of Theatre and Television**

**Methods and Methodologies of Research in Visual Culture, Film and Media Studies**

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**Habilitation Thesis**

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# SUMMARY

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## I. Abstract of the Habilitation Thesis: *Methods and Methodologies of Research in Visual Culture, Film and Media Studies.*

### I.1. Summary and general statements

This habilitation thesis presents my main professional and academic achievements in the related fields of *Visual Culture, Film Studies and Media Research* as they can be placed in a more general context of the current stage of these disciplines nationally and internationally. It will include the future plans of my career and the directions for further development in the scientific fields I am specialized and that I already followed as a teacher and research. The main goal of this thesis is to demonstrate my qualifications to coordinate research in visual culture studies, with a specific interest reference in film and media studies, which would allow me to coordinate other young researchers in these fields.

### I.1.2. Structure and contents

The presentation of my achievements in the field will follow the structure of the main themes of research I was interested in: Academic Teaching in Media Environments, Visual Culture and Visual Communication, Media Research, Television Studies, Film Studies, Film Criticism, Cinema

Adaptation. In the Introduction of the thesis I present my personal philosophy as university professor, academic manager and researcher, which comes from the idea of the public intellectual. The second part, dedicated to my professional development, I am mapping the evolution of my career in the decade since I obtained my Ph.D. degree in the History of Philosophy with a thesis on Visual Culture (From Modern to Postmodern in contemporary philosophy). I have continually upgraded my academic status by studies, research activities and academic involvement. My professional development from the moment when I started as an assistant professor in 1996, when I taught for the first university level courses at the Department of Journalism until today were focusing on a couple of major research fields. All my contributions to the research in the fields of visual culture, film studies, media and television studies are anchored in a couple of methodological practices, which are part of a macro-analytic perspective, that of the qualitative studies methodology, with several nuanced perspectives, like the content analysis approach and various interpretative techniques, like the semiotic and the psychoanalytical analysis.

The main objectives of this habilitation thesis are founded in several fundamental research questions that I followed throughout my academic career: how can we develop research practices in the so called "arts field" which would be respected by the more "traditional" branches of the academia. This effort to a theoretically grounded methodologies in the fields of visual culture, film and media studies was a constant preoccupation.

One of the most important parts of my development as academic is described in the chapter discussing my teaching career, my academic management experience and my involvement in institutional development. In this section I draw a map of my academic course in the Babeş-Bolyai University from 1997 to the current date. I consider that this is an important side of my activities and efforts as professor, the institutional development. During a long period of time (2000-2011) I was in charge of two main departments of my university, and mostly the Cinema, Photography and Media

Department (the official name of the department at that time). Here I created several new courses, I opened new fields of research and, more importantly, I created the first line of studies in Filmology, at the Bachelor degree, in Romania. I was part of many curricula development boards, involved in creating admission procedures, evaluating candidates, and the adoption of good institutional practices. This is a relevant part of my habilitation effort, since I consider an important next step the creation of a doctoral school in visual culture, media and films studies at Babeş-Bolyai University.

Another important part of my institutional efforts was the creation of a new academic journal, *Ekphrasis. Images, Cinema, Theater and Media*, in which I was involved as Senior editor since its creation. This journal is now indexed by EBSCO and one of the three indexed Romanian journals in the field of cinema and film studies.

My habilitation thesis presents, according to the legal requirements and *CNATDCU Guide*, the already published “scientific, professional and academic achievements on disciplinary or interdisciplinary thematic directions” together with “development plans of my own professional, scientific and academic career”. In this context an important part of the thesis is dedicated to the presentation of my current achievements in the subfields of my specialization, that is Visual Culture, Media and Television Studies, Film Studies and Film Criticism. The first section of the habilitation thesis presents the results of major research directions explored after obtaining the title of Doctor of Philosophy (2003 at Babeş-Bolyai University), that is approaching visual culture studies from a multi-disciplinary perspective, integrating a multi-methodological approach to visual culture and visual communication.

Another important part of my habilitation thesis describes the main methods and methodological approaches I use in academic teaching and the path I chose in order to elaborate my own vision of researching this field, an extremely disputed area of academic research. I also offered an important place in my habilitation thesis for the description of the most important achievements I

reached in international visibility and the creation of a scientific reputation internationally. Here I detail the efforts to attain one of my first and foremost goals, that of the publication of internationally relevant studies. Another goal was to participate in relevant groups of international researchers and to be awarded relevant international research grants. Many of my scientific contributions have a major international relevance and visibility since they were accepted at prestigious international conferences and were published at publishing houses belonging to international academic community. The publishing of six books as single author and many chapters in books printed by recognized national publishers are also significant proofs of my academic proficiency.

Another major section of my habilitation thesis presents my work in media and television research. This part of my interest was oriented towards the dynamics between media and politics, media and democracy and the research of political and cultural mythologies, was manifested in publishing several books, chapters in books and several articles published in relevant journals. This part of the habilitation thesis illustrates the main methods and methodological approaches I used in media and television research most particularly in the use of comparative media analysis and content analysis (part II. 7 )

The next chapter of the thesis deals with general framework of my studies in film and cinema, where I integrate my experience in media studies with my knowledge from visual culture philosophies. Here I describe the inherent interdisciplinary nature of studying films, and the need to bring cinema studies among the academic disciplines which can bring together theories and methodologies otherwise considered to be separated. Once again underline that I consider important to approach research by embracing semiotics, structuralism, feminism, queer theory, race studies, post-structuralism, and post-Marxist criticism, in a multi-layered view of what cinema studies as academic discipline needs to be. Considering cinema as the main form of mass communication, I describe the methodological pluralism I practice, a mixture of linguistic structuralism and semiotics, Marxism and psychoanalytic

interpretative techniques. A sub-chapter of this part is dedicated to my long time interest in myth interpretations, which I consider to be extremely relevant for the cinema today.

The last, but not least, part of the thesis is dedicated to the possible application of the multiple-method in studying the contemporary Romanian cinema. This chapter presents my main research papers in this territory and the most important international conference papers I presented on the topic. Finally, as one of the most important results of my research efforts, I present the publication of my book on the New Wave Romanian Cinema, at McFarland Publishers in Jefferson, North Carolina, USA. This research is novelty not just because it represents the only study concentrating on the New Romanian filmmakers, but is also an achievement for the Romanian academia, since it provides a major international visibility and impact.

The following chapter of the thesis present my career development plans, including research directions and academic prospects. Section II.3 is concentrating on describing the plans for the development of my professional, scientific and academic career. The plans for the progress and development of my career follow three main objectives. The first is to continue the research visibility in the contemporary dialogue on visual culture, media and film studies. The second is to continue developing the research on multi-disciplinary studies in these fields, especially by the elaboration of a more complex study on methods and methodologies in visual culture and visual media. Also, from the experience accumulated so far, I consider compulsory to extended and continue my international activities in grants and research networks. A third objective is to share my abilities with future researchers, which could be significantly put to work in research teams which will include doctoral students, coordinated as a result of this Habilitation Thesis.

The third section of the habilitation thesis presents, as required, “the references associated to the content of the first two sections”. In this part I extensively provided the most up-to-date information and references in the fields of my specialization.

## I. 2. Rezumatul tezei de abilitare: *Metode și metodologii de cercetare în cultura vizuală, studiile de film și media*

Prezentarea realizărilor în domeniul meu specific de activitate academică va urma structura temelor principale de cercetare de care am fost interesat de-a lungul întregii mele cariere: predarea la nivel academic, prin utilizarea diverselor mass-media; Cultură și comunicare vizuală; Cercetări media și studii de televiziune; Studii de film, critică de film și rolul adaptării cinematografice. Mai întâi, într-o scurtă introducere a tezei de abilitare prezint filozofia mea personală, în calitate de profesor universitar, director de programe academice și de cercetător, bazată pe ideea de intelectual public.

Partea a doua este dedicată dezvoltării mea profesionale, aici fac o scurtă cartografiere a evoluției carierei mele din ultimele decenii, din momentul când am obținut doctoratul cu o teză despre cultura vizuală, din istoria filosofiei, titlul tezei fiind relevant: *Filosofia culturii vizuale*. De la modern la postmodern. În cei 17 ani de când sunt cadru didactic universitar am actualizat continuu nivelul studiilor academice, am dezvoltat și realizat multiple activități de cercetare și am fost mereu implicat în dezvoltarea instituțional-academică. Dezvoltarea mea profesională, din momentul în care am început ca un asistent universitar la catedra de Jurnalistică (mai întâi cadru didactic invitat, din 1996) unde am predat pentru primele cursuri de nivel licență, și până în prezent, când predau cursuri de master la mai multe facultăți și universități din țară și străinătate, s-a concentrat pe o serie de domenii de cercetare considerate de mine importante și conexe. Privind în retrospectivă, toate contribuțiile mele la cercetarea academică s-au concentrat în jurul culturii vizuale, prin studii de film, cercetări aplicate pe diverse mass-media, prin studii de televiziune și publicitate, toate fiind ancorate într-o serie de practici metodologice comune. Aceste practici sunt liantul care pun cercetările mele într-o perspectivă macro-analitică, aceea a metodologiilor specifice studiilor calitative. Desigur, de-a lungul timpului, am lucrat cu mai multe perspective și metode nuanțate, cum ar fi abordarea diverselor media prin analize de



conținut și prin diverse tehnici interpretative, precum semiotica sau analiza de factură psihanalitică sau mitologică.

Principalele obiective ale acestei teze de abilitare sunt întemeiate pe o serie de întrebări fundamentale de cercetare, pe care le-am urmat de-a lungul întregii mele cariere academice. Acestea pot fi descrise într-o singură problematică: Ce trebuie să facem pentru a dezvolta practici de cercetare valide, în așa-numitul "domeniu artistic" sau al artelor spectacolului, practici și metode care să fie respectate de către mai multe ramuri sau domenii "tradiționale" ale mediului academic. Acest efort a însemnat în principal recursul la o metodologie teoretic fundamentată pe studiile culturii vizuale, pe studiile de film și mass-media. Acest interes pentru metode și metodologii a fost o preocupare constantă pentru cariera mea.

Una dintre cele mai importante părți ale dezvoltării mele în context academic este descris în capitolul ce discută cariera mea din punctul de vedere al experiențelor de predare, al experienței mele la nivelul managementului academic și al implicării mele în dezvoltarea instituțională a Universității din Cluj. În această secțiune am trasat o hartă a parcursului academic pe care l-am urmat în cadrul Universității Babeș - Bolyai din 1997 până în prezent. Consider că aceasta este o parte relevantă a întregii mele activități și că eforturile ca profesor, ca membru al comunității academice, implicarea în dezvoltarea instituțională fac parte integrantă din rezultatele carierei mele. O lungă perioadă de timp (2000-2001 și apoi între 2004-2011) am fost responsabil de două departamente principale din universitatea mea, și mai ales m-am implicat în dezvoltarea Departamentului de cinematografie, fotografie și media (numele oficial al departamentului de la acea vreme). A fost pentru prima oară când în România, în afara apreciatei școli tradiționale de la U.N.A.T.C. a funcționat o specializare în cinema și televiziune. Aici am creat mai multe cursuri noi, am deschis noi domenii de cercetare și, mai important, începând din 2010, am creat prima linie de studii în Filmologie din România, la nivel de licență. În toată această perioadă am făcut parte din mai multe echipe de dezvoltare curriculară, am fost

implicat în crearea de proceduri pentru admitere, în evaluarea candidaților, în selectarea viitorilor mei colegi precum și în adoptarea unor bune practici instituționale. Aceasta este o parte relevantă din efortul meu de abilitare, deoarece consider că un rol important pe lângă rezultatele deja obținute, ar fi crearea unei școli doctorale specializată în cultura vizuală, -media studii de filme la Universitatea Babeș – Bolyai, școală doctorală în care aș putea fi participa prin experiența acumulată.

O altă parte importantă a eforturilor mele instituționale a și crearea unei reviste noi, de nivel academic: Ekphrasis. Imagini, Cinema, Teatru și Media, revistă în a cărei creare în care am fost implicat în calitate de fondator și, ulterior, Senior editor. Această revistă este acum indexată EBSCO și CEEOL și este una dintre cele trei reviste indexate din România pe domeniul studiilor de cinema și de film.

Teza mea de abilitare prezintă de asemenea, în conformitate cu cerințele legale din Ghidul CNATDCU, atât realizările profesionale și academice, cât și realizările științifice de deja publicat,, pe principalele direcții tematice, disciplinare și interdisciplinare, împreună cu "planurile de dezvoltare de carieră profesională, științifică și academică". În acest context, trebuie să subliniez că o parte importantă a lucrării e abilitare este dedicată prezentării de realizărilor mele actuale din subdomenii de specializare cum sunt cultura vizuală, studiile media și de televiziune, precum și studii de film și critică de film. Prima secțiune a tezei de abilitare prezintă rezultatele direcțiilor majore de cercetare pe care le-am explorat după obținerea titlului de Doctor în Filosofie (2003 la Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai), și care pot fi circumscrise domeniului de ansamblu al studiilor de cultură vizuală, dintr-o perspectivă multidisciplinară, ce integrează mai multe metode și metodologii, mai multe perspective de abordare a culturii vizuale și a comunicării vizuale prin mass-media.

De aceea o parte importantă a tezei de abilitare descrie principalele metode și abordări metodologice pe care le folosesc, atât în procesul de predare la nivel universitar, cât și traseul de cercetare pe care l-am ales, cu scopul principal de a elabora o viziune proprie despre cercetarea în acest

domeniu, într-o zonă extrem de disputată din cercetarea academică. Prin urmare am consacrat un loc important în teza mea de abilitare pentru descrierea celor mai importante realizări la care am ajuns în ceea ce privește vizibilitate internațională și în ceea ce privește construirea unei reputații științifice pe plan internațional. Aici am oferit în detaliu descrierea eforturilor depuse pentru a atinge unul dintre cele mai importante obiectivele ale dezvoltării de carieră, respectiv publicarea de studii relevante pe plan internațional. Un alt obiectiv în acest sens a fost participarea în grupurile relevante de cercetători la nivel internațional, precum și câștigarea și implicarea granturi de cercetare internaționale și naționale relevante pentru domeniul meu de activitate. Consider că multe dintre contribuțiile mele științifice au o relevanță internațională majoră și o vizibilitate remarcabilă, atât pentru că au fost acceptate la conferințe internaționale de prestigiu și pentru că au fost publicate la edituri apreciate de comunitatea academică internațională, cât și pentru nivelul important al citării operei mele. Publicarea a șase cărți ca unic autor și a mai multor capitole în cărți tipărite de edituri naționale recunoscute sunt printre dovezi semnificative în ceea ce privește competența academică prezentată în această teză de abilitare.

O altă secțiune importantă a tezei de abilitare prezintă munca mea în domeniul studiilor media și în cercetarea conținuturilor de televiziune – atât ca programe, cât și reclame și alte conținuturi vizuale. Această parte din interesul meu s-a orientat de la început spre dinamica relațiilor dintre mass-media și politică, a urmărit raportul dintre mass-media și democrație și a fost axat pe cercetări aplicate asupra mitologiilor politice și culturale. Rezultatele au fost exprimate prin publicarea de mai multe cărți, de capitole în cărți publicate național și internațional, precum și a mai multor articole publicate în reviste relevante internațional. Această parte a tezei de abilitare ilustrează principalele metode și abordări metodologice pe care le-am folosit în studiile media și în cercetările aplicate pe conținuturile de televiziune, mai ales prin utilizarea unor analize comparative și a unor analize de conținut media (partea II . 7).

Următoarea secțiune a tezei se ocupă cu cadrul general al studiile mele din domeniul filmului și al

cinematografiei, unde am putut integra experiența mea din studii de mass-media cu celelalte cunostintele ale mele din filosofia culturii vizuale. Aici aş putea spune că eforturile de cercetare ilustrează cel mai bine natura interdisciplinară a studiilor mele, inerentă de fapt studiilor de film. În toate eforturile de publicare am urmărit necesitatea de a aduce studiile de cinema printre disciplinele academice care pot reuni teorii și metodologii altfel considerate a fi separate și distincte. Încă o dată, în această secțiune subliniez faptul că am urmărit apropierea în procesul de cercetare a unor abordări multiple precum semiotica, structuralismul, feminismul, studii de gen, post-structuralismul, critica post-marxistă, într-o viziune multi-stratificată a ceea ce înseamnă studiile de cinema ca disciplină academică aparte. Având în vedere că cinemaul este ca principala formă de comunicare în masă în lumea contemporană, am descris pluralismul metodologic pe care îl practic drept un amestec benefic de structuralismul și semiotica, de marxismul și tehnici interpretative psihanalitice, reunite sub într-o metodă analitică orientată spre conținuturi. Un sub-capitol din această parte este astfel dedicată interesul meu de lungă durată pentru interpretări multiple, pentru analizele mitologiilor media, pe care le consider a fi extrem de relevante atât pentru cinematografia contemporană, cât și pentru cultura de azi.

Ultimul, dar nu cel din urmă aspect al tezei de abilitare este dedicat aplicării acestor metode multiple în studierea cinematografiei românești contemporane. Acest capitol prezintă principala mea realizare în ceea ce privește cercetarea în acest domeniu, dincolo e importante conferințe internaționale unde am prezentat lucrări pe acest subiect. În 2014, ca o încununare a eforturilor mele de cercetare și de prezență în dialogul științific internațional, am publicat volumul intitulat *The Romanian New Wave Cinema. An Introduction*, la editura McFarland din Carolina de Nord, Statele Unite ale Americii. Această editură, care deține una dintre cele mai importante colecții din zona studiilor de film din lume, a publicat o cercetare care nu este o noutate doar pentru că reprezintă singurul studiu românesc care se ocupă exclusiv de realizatorii români de azi în limba engleză, dar este,

de asemenea, o realizare pentru mediul academic românesc, deoarece oferă o vizibilitate internațională majoră și de impact pentru Universitatea din care fac parte și pentru cercetătorii români în general.

Următorul capitol al tezei prezintă planurile de dezvoltare a carierei, inclusiv direcțiile de cercetare și perspectivele academice viitoare. Secțiunea II.3 se concentrează pe descrierea planurilor de dezvoltare a carierei mele profesionale, științifice și academice. Aceste planurile pentru dezvoltarea viitoare a carierei mele urmează trei obiective principale. Primul este acela de a-mi continua eforturile academice de vizibilitate prin cercetare, de participare la dialogul contemporan din zona culturii vizuale, a studiilor media, de film și televiziune. Al doilea este acela de a-mi continua studiile ce vizează cercetare pe multi-disciplinară în aceste trei domenii, în special prin elaborarea unui studiu mai complex cu privire la metodele și metodologiile ce pot fi folosite în cultura vizuală și în media vizuale. De asemenea, prin experiența acumulată până în prezent, consider obligatorie și necesară extinderea activităților mele internaționale prin granturi și implicarea în rețele de cercetare. Un al treilea obiectiv este de a împărtăși abilitățile mele cu viitorii cercetatori, care ar putea fi puse în mod relevant în practică prin conlucrarea în echipe de cercetare, care ar putea include doctoranzi, pe care aș putea să îi coordonez în cadrul unei școli, ca urmare a acceptării acestei teze de abilitare .

A treia secțiune a tezei de abilitare prezintă, după cum este solicitat în ghid "referințele asociate conținutului primelor două secțiuni", respectiv în această parte am oferit pe larg informații și referințe din volumele de specialitate cele mai noi pentru domeniile mele de calificare: cultura vizuală, studiile media și de televiziune, precum și studiile de film.

## II. Scientific and professional achievements, development and career evolution

### II. I. Introduction. Personal statement.

Before discussing my academic professional trajectory, which I will develop in this first part of this habilitation thesis, I would like to start by stating my main research interests, as they will appear detailed in the following description of my recent work. First and foremost I would describe my overall research projects as interdisciplinary, following three main directions: cinema studies, media studies, visual culture studies. My academic interests and achievements not only pertain to the theoretical fields of visual philosophy and culture, cinema studies and media research, but they represent a continuous effort to join these directions in a coherent research path. Although each of these fields will be discussed separately, with particular attention to the research aspects and the national and international visibility of my works, I believe that they cannot be separated in the general understanding of my activities. As I will further develop, I consider that another important element of my activities, together with the professional relevance of my work, is not just the academic dissemination of research, but also the socially and institutionally relevance of my involvement in Romanian and international academic dialogue. An important aspect of my career will describe my academic efforts, since in the last two decades I was constantly involved in considerable activities regarding the institutional development of two departments of the Babeş-Bolyai University, coordinating two departments of media and cinema, creating at least one new specialization, organizing and creating an new academic journal, specialized

in the field and acting as manager in the development of an international network of online teaching, with five international partners. I would also underline the fact that, throughout my academic career, besides publishing academic research, with six books as single author, and author of several workbooks and contributions for chapters in many scientific works, I continued to publish in the cultural and political press, where over 150 articles, essays, reviews and analysis appeared in the most important literary and opinion journals in Romania such as Echinox, Caietele Echinox, Steaua, Apostrof, Observator Cultural, Convorbiri literare, Dilema Veche, Dilemateca, Tribuna, Tribuna Ardealului, Poesis, Euphorion. Also, as a film critic, I considered important to be present in the public sphere by providing film reviews, many self published on my cinema blog: [www. cinemafotomedia.wordpress.com](http://www.cinemafotomedia.wordpress.com)

All these are integral part of my professional development and, as I will discuss in the final part of this thesis, in order to present my future plans I consider all these activities to naturally follow from the already existing results. My personal philosophy as university professor, academic manager and researcher comes from the idea of the public intellectual. As Richard Posner, who devoted an entire book to this concept (Posner 2001), has critically pointed out, not everybody is a public intellectual. Every society needs a critically involved investigative mind, a qualified voice to analyze his world and to culturally push forward his community. With my modest resources this is what I tried to achieve throughout my professional and academic career.

## II. 2. Education and professional development

I began my academic studies 1988 and graduated in 1993 at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca with a Bachelor of Arts degree (B.A.) in Literature and Language. The title of my B. A. thesis, coordinated by prof. dr. Liviu Petrescu was *The Double in the Prose of F.*

*Dostoyevsky (Dublul în proza lui F. Dostoievski)*. This early work as an undergraduate student indicates my first interest in the study of the imagination, of cultural relevance. As the copy of the degree, which is attached to the habilitation thesis, indicates all my overall grade was 9,43, with a maximum 10 for the thesis. At that time, an important moment in my academic development was the winning by competition a TEMPUS Fellowship, financed by the European Union. While studying from January to May 1992 at the Université de Nantes, Franța, École d'Education, where I had the opportunity to develop my interest in cultural studies and especially in the field of imaginaries and cultural mythologies.

Another major career changing moment for my professional development was the opportunity to study at the New School for Social Research in New York, as a Fulbright research scholar in Liberal Studies, financed by The US-Romania Fulbright Committee. My research at this important critical theory school, conducted from June 1995 to May 1996, allowed me to put the Fulbright Fellowship offered by to good academic finality and to participate in internationally relevant research exchange. During this time I had the great opportunity to study with Agnes Heller and to part take to a seminar taught by Jacques Derrida. This was a moment in my career when I decided to shift my attention from literature and literary studies towards cultural research, towards the understanding and interpretation of media and political spheres, as part of a broader research field which has its roots in the philosophical tradition of the critical theory school in Frankfurt.

It was soon after my return from my studies at the New School for Social Research in New York that I began my career as assistant professor at the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences and Administration, Babeș-Bolyai University (more details on my teaching activities, undergraduate level). In terms of publication and research this was followed by the publication of my first book as single author, *Social Obsessions (Obsesii Sociale)*, published by the prestigious editing house Institutul European, Iași, in 1998. This study started my decade long interest in media studies



and in political and cultural mythologies. The main question put forward by this study was how to turn personal obsessions into academic categories? These cultural and political obsessions are not simply dilemmas (situations with two contradictory solutions, irreducible) nor problems (which have a psychological motivation), these were repeated social questions that do not find a satisfactory answers. The interrogative nature of the researched, who deals with society by his intellectual resources, makes the intellectual the critical voice of a social group who asks continuously, who is not satisfied with the immediate answers and who uses the cold eye of the objective and skeptical disbeliever. My obsessive quest was to understand our society, to deal with lucidity and objectivity with the world around us, to looked at oneself and the society we belong in with the desire to make sense of the complex present and past conditionings, ideological pressures and cultural dependencies.

A step in my professional development was the fact that I was awarded a fellowship by the The Ron Brown Fellowship Program, which was established in 1994 as the Central and Eastern European Graduate Fellowship Program, supported by the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and was administered in IREX and IIE. For two years I had the opportunity to further develop my international training and concomitantly to received my Master of Arts (M. A.) degree in Mass Communication, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. My studies at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, from 2001 to 2003, ended with a Master Thesis which was focusing on international communication, entitled: *International Public Relations*.

My doctoral studies, which I began in 1998 at the Faculty of History in the History of Philosophy Doctoral School, at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, were focusing on the general framework of visual culture, which I considered to bring together my interests in comparative literature, media studies and visual communication. I was awarded the title of philosophy Doctor (Ph. D.) in 2004, after defending my thesis in 2003. The thesis entitled *Modern și postmodern în filosofia culturii vizuale (Modern and Postmodern in the Philosophy of Visual Culture)* was the result of a

research I conducted from 1998 until 2003 and was evaluated by the reviewing committee with a “cum laudae” distinction. By discussing the transition from modern to postmodern in the philosophy visual culture I was researching to relationship between the “eye” and the “body” in the Western culture, that is I intended to provide a diachronic presentation of visuality in the European culture. Discussing how the different philosophical systems of the nineteenth century (rationalism and empirical thinking) connected with the perspectives of the twentieth century (phenomenology, psychoanalysis and postmodern philosophies) the purpose was to provide a general representation of the main theoretical approaches to culture generally. Starting from Descartes, moving through Husserl's system of thought, then reviewing authors like Freud and Lacan, Foucault and Maurice Merleau – Ponty, Rorty and Baudrillard, I wanted to outline a systematic and philosophical map of the most important discussions about the imaginary, starting with the culturally clad ocularocentrism to the metamorphosis of visuality in late postmodernity.

### II. 3. Teaching career, academic management and institutional development

My current position is that of Associated Professor at the Department of Cinema and Media, the Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University. From the moment when I became a member of this department, in 2004, and until 2007, when I was promoted from the position of Senior Lecturer, to Associated Professor I was involved in all the activities regarding the development of curriculum, writing and submitting administrative materials for the creation and accreditation of Cinema and Media studies and Films Studies track at the Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University. As head of the Cinema and Media studies track I created many new courses and course materials and, from this position I was able to participate in forming several generations of young film directors and television specialists. Throughout my academic career I was a member in

numerous selection committees for academic positions both at the Faculty of Theater and Television, and at the Faculty of Political Sciences and Administration. Developing curriculum and administrative materials for the creation and accreditation of Films Studies track, Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, 2004-2010. It was here that I introduced new courses such as Introduction to Visual Culture, Image Interpretation or Cinema and Ideology, among many others. This was facilitated by my experience in developing curriculum plans, syllabi and other administrative materials for the improvement of Journalism and Media track, Department of Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University, 1997-2001 Besides teaching courses on Communication Theory and Nonverbal Communication, I also introduced several new courses like Media and politics, Discourse analysis.

Since 2000, when I became interim Head of Department, Department of Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University, then in 2004, when I was head of the Cinema and Media studies track at the Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, I was directly involved in selecting and supervising the careers of many of my young colleagues. After my promotion as Associated Professor I was a member in several doctoral committees, by advising and evaluating many Ph.D. thesis at the Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai Univ. (Doctoral School Prof. Mircea Muthu) and at Bucharest University (Doctoral School Prof. Monica Spiridon). Besides this, I continued to stand in many undergraduate and graduate evaluation committees, both as coordinator of B.A. and M.A. dissertations and thesis and as evaluation member for many B.A. and M.A. dissertations at the Faculty of Theater and Television, the Faculty of Letters and the Faculty of History, Department of International Communication.

My specializations included courses and seminars in the following topics: Visual Culture; Philosophy of Visual Culture; Research Methods and Methodologies in Visual Arts; Cinema Studies; Film Semiotics; Romanian and European New Wave Cinema; Image Interpretation; Communication

Theory; Nonverbal Communication; Media Studies; Media Theory; Media and Politics. My undergraduate teaching was supported by publishing several workbooks and course materials. This is the case with my Media and Politics course, which is based on my research published in *Media and Politics (Mass media și politica*, Institutul European, Iași, 2000). This is a course which aims to introduce students into the main concepts and notions of the relationship between the media and politics. The main objective of the course is to generate discussions and debates on key topics that would allow the students to understand the social dynamics, the economic and ideological systems of contemporary media. The aim of the course is to stimulate students' ability to put into context the theoretical information provided. Another important course which has a workbook is Introduction to Media Theory, a course which has a well documented support in the workbook published in 1999, Introduction to Media Theory (*Introducere în teoria media*, Editura Dacia, Cluj, 1999) and *Media and Democracy (Mass Media și democrația*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2002).

Over the years I taught and developed undergraduate level courses, B.A. in Cinema and Media, Film Studies, Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeș-Bolyai University and Faculty of Political Sciences, Babeș-Bolyai University such as: Introduction to Media Studies; Introduction to the Theory of Communication; Image Interpretation; Nonverbal Communication, Media and Politics. At the graduate level, M.A. Studies I taught courses for the Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of History, International Communication, Babeș-Bolyai University, the Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University, Excellency Center for Image Studies, Bucharest University such as Introduction to Visual Culture, Cinema and Ideology; Research Methods in the Visual Culture. I also taught courses for international students from Romania, Italy, Germany and Finland within the framework of the European Virtual Academy (EVA), 2010-2014, with topics such as Visual Culture and Image Interpretation.

During the last decade I was invited to present lectures and to give presentations and courses for

various international universities. Starting with 1998, when I was guest teacher at the Center for International Mass Communication and Research, Grady College, University of Georgia, Athens, USA, until February 2012, when I was invited at Arizona University, Phoenix AZ (USA) with a lecture about *Reading Literature through Cinematic Devices*, I was a guest lecturer at many universities in countries like France, Finland, Germany, Italy or Hungary (see more in my Curriculum vitae, the section Visiting professor and international conferencing). However, the most important and enriching experience was, my semester at the Bard College in New York, USA. Benefitting from a prestigious Fulbright Scholar award, which is granted to only ten Romanian academics and university teachers each year, I had the opportunity to be visiting professor at the Bard College in New York, United States. Here I taught a course on the new wave philosophies and practices in the European and Romanian film. This course, which was appreciated by the American students, allowed me to be a part of an academic community supporting high professional standards and to give me the opportunity to enrich my networking abilities and my teaching skills.

An important aspect of my academic and research activities at an institutional level was to coordinate and create national and international publications. Since 2008 I was founder and Senior editor of *Ekphrasis. Images, Theatre, Cinema, Media*, academic journal of the Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University. *Ekphrasis* was founded in 2008 as a result of a research grant I conducted, financed by the CNCSIS project "Ideas". As Senior editor I was managing the publication activities of the journal, coordinating and organizing the journal according to its purpose by coordinating the editorial plan, doing paper selections, peer review, copyediting, page editing, publishing, dissemination and promoting the journal as well as all other relations with parties and collaborators. The publication of the journal was a response to the lack of specialized scientific journals in the field of cinema and media studies in Romania, at that time there was no peer-reviewed journal, indexed in international data bases. The principles followed by the journal are academic

freedom, multiculturalism within the European scientific community, openness towards international and interdisciplinary research practices. *Ekphrasis* functions as semi-annual journal of The Faculty of Theater and Television, Cinema and Media Department, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj. The journal is dedicated to interdisciplinary approaches in visual culture and publishes peer-reviewed articles from any field related to the contemporary media and image related productions. *Ekphrasis* concentrates both on research and theory, and on practical aspects of the related domains, focusing on cinema and media representation studies. It also also feature book reviews and interviews as well as practice based approaches to arts and video arts. *Ekphrasis* is dedicated to indexing in national and international data bases (CEEOL and EBSCO).

Another indicator of the internationality of my research career was to participate in the composition editorial boards in various scientific journals. Besides coordinating the publication of *Ekphrasis*, I am also a member of the Editorial board, *Caietele Echinox* (ERIH; CEEOL; EBSCO), a member of the Editorial board for Journalism and Mass Communication, David Publishing USA (Pro Quest; EBSCO) and a member of the Editorial board, *Studia Dramatica* (CEEOL; EBSCO). I am also serving as peer reviewer and academic advisor for *Ekphrasis*, *Caietele Echinox*, *Journalism and Mass Communication* and *Studia Dramatica*.

As part of my institutional involvement I was also participating in many student activities. During the years I created and coordinated several student groups, such as the first student journalism newspaper called *Altfel* (Different), at the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University. At the Faculty of Theatre and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, I organized the first cinema magazine for students (*Filmonada*) and the first classical cinema screenings, with weekly presentations of “cult” films. One of my most important achievements in this respect was my involvement as founder and manager of the International Film Festival for Students (FFeST), activities of dissemination, workshops and jury evaluations, [www.ffest.ro](http://www.ffest.ro), 2007-2014. The festival is

dedicated to young students, filmmakers and producers of short fiction films, animations, documentaries and other visual anthropology and media productions, The most important goal in creating this film festival was to promote quality student films and to allow the exchange of experiences between young filmmakers and audiences eager for new and alternative cinema productions. The festival organizes screenings and workshops, and my activity consisted both on selecting films, organizing workshops, seminars and other events, but also the promotion of the event. The festival, which is open to all students producers/ writers of films from Romania or abroad, provided that the films are not commercial production, is organized by the three most important academic institutions specialized in cinema and media in Cluj: The cinema and media department, of the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj, The cinema and media department, of the Hungarian University in Transilvania, Sapientia, and the video art department of the Arts and Design Academy in Cluj. Today this is among the most important film festivals in Romania and in the region (with participating students from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia).

#### II. 4. International reputation and impact

One of the most important aspects of my professional development was the participation in the international academic dialogue. I considered that academic visibility must be a personal goal for any researcher, since the dissemination, the accessibility, and the recognition of my scholarship was key to improve my University's international visibility. Any form of academic “productivity” is parochial if it lacks a larger international and national outreach. This is why the contribution to the existing knowledge in the fields of visual culture, cinema studies and media research was among my continuous goals. As I will detail these activities below, during the last decades I participated in dozens of international and national conferences, which was done as an integral part of my professional

development and as a conscious effort to disseminate the results of my scientific efforts.

Yet first and foremost the publication of internationally relevant studies was my key goal. This was accomplished by publishing with a relevant group of international researchers like Petr Bilek from Charles University in Prague, Jan Culik and Zuzana Varga from University of Glasgow. Zwierzchowski, P., Alicja Kisielewska, from University of Bialystok or Piotr Zwierzchowski, Kazimierz Wielki University, Bydgoszcz. Our study printed by Sussex University Press in 2013 under the title *National Mythologies in Central European TV Series: How J.R. Won the Cold War*, was the first international comparative study of the mythologies promoted by popular TV series. This research included case studies from former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania and was focusing of cultural and media manifestations before and after the fall of communism. Researching popular television and their impact on society was mainly operating with concepts like cultural mythology, ideology and other cultural practices on everyday life. My participation in this research was part of my interest for the impact of the communist regime in the societies of Central and Eastern Europe, how ideology was used to impose the values and ideas of the regime upon the citizens. Using my experience in media studies I consider that such analysis had a major impact on the actual research about social values and understanding the formation of individuals and collective identity in Communist and post-Communist Europe. As part of a group interested in understanding how societies of the Central and East European countries were affected by the media transfer of significations from the West, I considered necessary to also understand political, social and cultural discourse in my own country. My participation in this research was to using a comparative of samples of popular television and to provides methodological resources about about how to approach the research material. This study is an integral part of my investigations on media representations, cultural and social myth making and overall criticism of ideas.

Probably the most relevant achievement of my scientific reputation internationally is the



publishing of my book by McFarland in the United States. Romanian New Wave film . An introduction is the first book published in English that analyzes the phenomenon often called the Romanian "New Wave." The fact that it was published by a prestigious publishing house in the United States, which hold one of the most important collections in the world on cinema studies, marks an important opening towards the international dialogue of ideas. Not only that McFarland Publishing placed the volume already for orders on sites like Amazon and Bookdepository, both in print and ebook version, but the Library of Congress in the US and other major libraries have catalogued this volume. More so, books.google.com has a preview of the book, which makes this publication not just one of the most important personal achievement for my career, but also a relevant publication for the international visibility of the University where I work since 1997. To have a volume published in English and to be visible at the international level is the highest achievement for a researcher in the contemporary academia. This book is a first also because it is the first in-depth research available today in the international academic field dedicated exclusively to the recent Romanian film. Other authors have published already historical approaches to the Romanian film, yet a study in English, dedicated exclusively to the young filmmakers was never published outside Romania. This puts the Faculty of Theatre and Television and the film studies department I have created for the first time in Romania at the bachelor level, on the global map of specialized film research. The study, which includes all the major directors of the contemporary Romanian film, created after 2001, included films made by Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, Tudor Giurgiu, Radu Muntean, Cătalin Mitulescu, Corneliu Porumboiu, Marian Crisan and Florin Șerban. Explaining the phenomenon of the contemporary Romanian film is done by going beyond the impact it had in international film festivals, going to those mechanisms which connect these filmmakers to cinematic currents like the Italian neorealism, the French New Wave, the new British cinema and other European film schools. This book explains how the recent Romanian filmmakers are part of a more general, European film making tradition, and demonstrates how these

new movies makes the Romanian film industry an integral part of European cinema. The study deals with subjects such as the grammar of the Romanian New Wave, Cristi Puiu's film aesthetic, notions like marginality, anti-heroes or absent audiences.

Disseminating the findings of my scholarly research and having them circulate for the international exchange of ideas with scholars from the my particular research area was another aspect of my career. I was constantly interested in increasing my exposure and the international research visibility. Organizing conferences was an integral part of the academic activities designed to increase my international and national visibility. One of my first experiences with conference management was in July 1997, when I worked as co-organizer of *The International Conference on Copyright*, at Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj- Napoca. Together with members of The Cox Center for Media, Athens University USA and my colleagues at the Department of Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University, when we managed to bring together researchers from the Europe, the United States and Romania. More recently I am involved in the organization of *Bodies in Between. Corporeality and Visuality from Historical Avant-garde to Social Media*, an international conference which will take place on May 2014, at the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj- Napoca.

Some of the international conferences listed me as invited key speaker, as was the case with the presentation *The Grammar of the New Romanian Cinema*, presented at the XII. International Film and Media Studies Conference in Transylvania, *NEW WAVES*, Sapientia University, Cluj-Napoca, and October, 2009 and the paper *The Absent Spectator: Case Study on the Romanian Cinema Spectatorship in the Last Decade*, presented as keynote speaker at The International Conference “The Bad Spectator in Film, Visual, and Performing Arts”, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, June 2012. For other conferences I was invited as part of the program, where important international participation and attendance allowed me to disseminate the findings of my studies on the Romanian cinema. This was the case with papers like *The Imaginary of the New Romanian Cinematographers*

*and the Christian Orthodox Iconography*, in *Iconic Turns. Nation and Religion in Eastern European Cinema since 1989*, Münster Universitat, Germany, June 2010; and *Being and Seeing Foreigners in Contemporary Romanian Cinema*, in *(Trans)National Subjects. Framing Post-1989 Migration on the European Screen*, organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, December 2011; *Developing a Pan-European Learning and Teaching Platform*, International Workshop on Online Teaching Initiatives, at University of Applied Sciences in Mittweida, Germany, within the frame of the 22nd International Scientific Conference Mittweida, October 2012; *On the Representation of Sexual Violence in the New Wave Romanian Cinema Today*, at Cine-Excess VII Conference, University of Birmingham, November 2013. *Representation an Realism in Contemporary Romanian Cinema*, at *Reproduction as a Work of Art*, International Conference, University of Sankt Petersburg, November 2013. More recently I was accepted as part of the International Conference on Philosophy and Film, *Thinking Reality and Time Through Film*, University of Lisbon, May 2014 with the paper *Is there a Romanian Realism in Cinema*.

This international participation in conferences and lectures did not hinder my participation in national activities. I consider that national and local academic visibility are also extremely important, and this is why I attended several national conferences. These conferences are an important component of my academic and professional activities, since creating local networks of researchers allows the development of future activities, research groups and research centers. Some national conferences were opened to international audiences, like my presentation about *The Anti-Hero in the Romanian Contemporary Cinema*, XIII. International Film and Media Studies Conference in Transylvania, *FILM IN THE POST-MEDIA AGE*, Sapientia University, Cluj-Napoca, October 2010; the same was true for my papers on *Peer to Peer Financing, A New Model for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Movie Making*, Keynote speaker at the International Conference *The Digital Generation. Self Representation, Urban Mythology and Cultural Practices*, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, September 2011; *Romanian Cinema*

and *Dark Humor*, International Conference „Imaginaire et Illusion”, Alba Iulia University, organized by The Center of Imagination Research „Speculum”, with Grenoble University and South Africa University, September 2011.

Workshops and other academic presentations are also part of my dissemination and visibility efforts. Such is my presentation on *Cinema, Representation, Deception*, at the FILO DAYS, organized by the students of the Faculty of Letters, room Popovici, Cluj-Napoca, December 2013. Throughout the years I was presenting courses and seminars for many other non-academic institutions, such as yearly course financed by the Friederich Ebert Foundation (1999-2008), by the Chambers of Commerce and Industry Cluj (1997-2001) and by the Ovidiu Sincai European School (2004-2011) and occasional presentations and trainings organized by Vitrina Advertising Agency.

An integral part of my professional activities was the coordination and participation in several national and international research grants. In 2008 I was awarded by the National Council of Scientific Research (CNCSIS) a research grant within the Exploratory Workshops projects. I proposed and managed the Cinema of Reality and the Anthropological Research, with 5 participants, coordinated by Babes-Bolyai University. As a member I participating in national research grants such as the CNCSIS (type A grant, theme 3), The Romanian Imaginary versus the European Imaginary (Imaginarul românesc versus imaginarul european, project coordinated by Prof. dr. Corin Braga and supported by the Ministry of Education and Research, during 2005-2007. I was also a member in the CNCSIS grant (type A, theme 7, 1519), Memory and Truth. Gulag and Holocaust in the Romanian culture (Memorie și Adevăr. Gulag și Holocaust în cultura română), project coordinated by Prof. dr. Ruxandra Cesereanu and supported by the Ministry of Education and Research, during 2007-2008. I took part in the grant financed by AFCN, Generation X-Men and Women (Generației X-Men & Women) Conf. dr. C.C. Buricea-Mlinarcic, prof. univ. dr. Miruna Runcan) and the CNCSIS II ID-2569 grant Theater, Film, Media. The Mythosphere of the Generation X (Teatru, Film, Media: Mitoșfera Generației X-Men)

project coordinated by Conf. dr. C.C. Buricea-Mlinarcic, prof. univ. dr. Miruna Runcan, in 2009.

I was also involved as member in various international research grants, and this membership in international grants and research teams allowed me to expand the professional and personal network. During 2008 and 2010 I was *member in the Fabric Fabrique Culturelle Europeene*, Grant 140005-CU-1-2008-1-FR-CULTURE-VOL121, coordinated by Conf. Univ. Dr. Mocan Rodica. From 2011 to 2012 I was a member of the British Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences grant, coordinated by prof. Jan Culik, from the University of Glasgow. However, the most important grant was the project I wrote, developed and managed, grant awarded by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. The project entitled European Virtual Academy, 509941-LLP-1-2010-1-RO-ERASMUS-EVC, was financed by the European Union and reached a total cost estimated at approximately EUR 300.000. This grant initiated and developed a transnational educational platform, which was a response to the general tendency for digitization of the cultural discourses. The project was designed to start a series of virtual online courses, developed by professors from arts and humanities sciences, linked with visual culture education. In this project academics and professional teachers developed over 15 courses in visual culture and imaginary studies, studies in the philosophy of visual culture, studies on film and television and so on. The development of the series tutorial began with the 2010 Fall semester and is still going on, available on the platform [evaonlinecourses.eu](http://evaonlinecourses.eu). This was designed as a digital replica of a real university, with library, classrooms and workshop, laboratories and forum space, the educational process would be made available to all the students of the participating universities. The program is supported by four universities in EU countries and has participating departments from the fields of arts, media, letters and philosophy. The common language tutorials was in English and more than 12 professors and 300 students were involved in this technological and academic effort.

## II. 5 Clarifications about methods and methodological approaches in teaching

During the last decades one of my most important research interest is the methodological approach to visual culture and visual communication. This effort was mainly a continuation of the research process I have been developing while building my Ph. D thesis. At that time I was focusing on the philosophies of visual culture, tracing parallels from Descartes to Husserl, from Freud to Lacan, and from Derrida to Rorty. The thesis, entitles "The Eye and The Body. Modern to Postmodern in the Philosophies of Visual Culture", was published in 2005 by Dacia Publishing House in Cluj. This was at that time one of the only reference books in this field, a reality proved by the fact that many doctoral programs and several thesis in the arts and cultural studies field included it as compulsory reading. As proof of this there are several available resources which can be accessed online. Thus my book was used as a reference in defending Ph. D. Theses at the University of Arts and Design in Cluj (see [http://www.uad.ro/storage/Dataitems/rezumat\\_ro.pdf](http://www.uad.ro/storage/Dataitems/rezumat_ro.pdf)); at Alba Iulia University in Ph. D. studies (see [http://www.uab.ro/upload/1542\\_rez%20ro%20trif.pdf](http://www.uab.ro/upload/1542_rez%20ro%20trif.pdf)) or at Petru Maior University, Targu Mures (see [http://www.upm.ro/scoala\\_doctorala/assets/pdf/rezumat/2013/Sonia%20Vass%20-%20Gheorghe%20Craciun-Iluzia%20corporalitatii%20REZUMAT.pdf](http://www.upm.ro/scoala_doctorala/assets/pdf/rezumat/2013/Sonia%20Vass%20-%20Gheorghe%20Craciun-Iluzia%20corporalitatii%20REZUMAT.pdf)), while the same books was part of the curriculum of many universities, at the Babeş-Bolyai University, where it is used as a course support [http://comunicare.cassoe.ro/home/cassoe/public\\_html/comunicare/user/userfiles/files/Comunicare,%20globalizare.pdf](http://comunicare.cassoe.ro/home/cassoe/public_html/comunicare/user/userfiles/files/Comunicare,%20globalizare.pdf)). The book has also been a reference used in numerous articles and studies, published in some of the most important research papers in Romania and abroad - more about references in the Reviews, citations, and references in international and national research chapter of my Curriculum vitae.

Published as a volume, "The Eye and the Body. Modern and postmodern in the philosophy of

visual culture” was mainly a research into the history of ideas, which was providing a panoramic description of the main philosophical and theoretical concepts related to visibility. Dealing with the early problems of the relationship between subject and object in terms of visibility, the purpose of this research was to define visual theory, with all its conceptual ramifications: subject and objective viewer, view, look, vision, consciousness and body, thought and perception and so on, all summed up in the metonymic couple from the title of the book: eye and body. This approach of the topic, which is extremely complex, involved a series of conceptual distinctions and nuances, allowing a multiple approach, a multi-method understanding of this "hybrid field". Visual culture situated on a borderline between several theories, made possible the elaboration of a dominant perspective, which was early on interdisciplinary. This is why I was adopting multiple philosophical perspective and a complex theoretical view. By making references to psychoanalysis and psychology theory, to the sociology of communication, aesthetics, to cultural studies and semiotic approaches, I was able to elaborate a variate approach to a difficult academic terrain. This approach remain my specific trait. The ability to include power discourses and media analysis from by creating a theoretical synthesis, with information from both the American and French cultural studies and by conceptually integrating inflections and nuances of multiple methodologies, I elaborated my own vision of researching this field, an extremely disputed area of academic research.

Part of my efforts to propose an up to date method was to find the specific use of multiple methodologies not only in the visual culture research, but also in teaching. Some results were published in the paper *Teaching Methodologies in the Pedagogy of Visual and Media Arts* (Noi practici educaționale în artele vizuale și liberale, *Studia Dramatica*, nr. 2, 2006). In this work I described how many of the new teaching methods and practices, that draw their resources from the pedagogies of Left and the critical liberal arts can be put into practice. The perspective was critical of the traditional teaching methods, which I considered to be inadequate in studying and teaching visual arts and, for that

matter, any liberal studies courses, such as film studies or even media studies. This study supported the necessity of implementing methods and practices which were designed to bring creativity in the classroom. Considering the inadequacy of the Romanian pedagogical practices, coupled with the pressures created by the changes in the academic structures, I tried to demonstrate how, with the emergence of new fields of study and new courses introduced in the curriculum are required radical changes in the structure of teaching. Teaching strategies that have been successful in traditional contexts can not work in these new situations, especially in the field of practical studies such as vocal training, arts practice-oriented, less dependent on the theoretical study. The changing habits of the students must lead to the transformation of the studying methods, by using innovative activities and processes. This effort was illustrated by the example of the three years of study at the Faculty of Theatre and Television at the Babes-Bolyai University, where the I tried to apply some of these teaching methods, by applying contemporary critical and liberal teaching practices and innovative educational contexts for learning. In this study I presented the difficulties, the challenges and some of the results of my academic experience in using new pedagogical methods and learning techniques .

As I also indicated in my introductory article, “Practice Based Research in Visual Culture Interpretation”, published in *Ekphrasis*, 2/2011, pp. 5-6, the proposition: “science is not for artists” needs to be constantly addressed and refuted. Since the earliest formation of universities, when during the XI-th Century the Bologna University started offering its first European academic degrees, the problem of the divide between practice-based research and theoretical studies in the fields of visual arts (theater, painting, music later cinema, photography and visual/ media arts) remained one of most disputed issues of contemporary academia. Practice-based projects, often misunderstood as professional degrees, that suggest the possible "removal" of the academic requirements when it comes to art, are still questioned and are still questionable. One of the ways of integrating artists into the academic system was the "professional degrees" offered as if the demonstration of skills can be



equivocated with the competency. Yet the "artists" are most of the time rejecting the research processes as foreign to their practice. For this line of thought to practice is, naturally, to have nothing to do with the constraints of the scientific discourse. Thus "doing" art or any activities related to visual or artistic representations are considered, in some circles, as "sufficient" for proving a qualification in any given field. It was the Columbia University who offered, in 1767, its first "professional doctorate" for the medical school, and this was later followed by other fields. While in France the doctorate degree is offered only for research based studies, other European countries offer the possibility to equivocate experience with academic skills. Looking for "equivalents" of qualifications was a practice widely accepted in Communist time Romania, yet the new education laws are now less permeable, since the requirements for a doctorate (PhD) are mandatory in order to teach in the higher education system, which brings us back the question of the separation between the artistic and the scientific practices. On one hand it is obvious that rejecting the rules of scientific discourse and only practicing a given art does not mean that research is embedded in that process. While research means creativity and originality, it is also true that the process of systematic and methodic coverage of the field may hinder the practical abilities. In order to find a common ground we need, as underlined by Patricia Leavy, to bring the practice based research to the place where the methods "meet" the artistic efforts (Leavy 2009).

I consider that there are two main problems in this respect. On one hand, the research in the so called "arts field" was rejected by the "traditionally" respected research branches of the academia as not "scientific" enough. The only "real" scientist is the mathematician, or the naturalist or the physicist, while the actor, the musician, the painter, the cinematographer or even the poet is simply an "artist", somebody unable to reach the depth of what science is supposed to be. Of course, this contempt for the artists, has a long history in the European culture, and it was inherited from Plato and his "Republic", a text where the artist as creator of illusions is only an irrational and dangerous member of society. The so called "mimetic arts" were far from the truth, and any association with them can only lead to

"inferior offsprings". On the other hand, the arts teachers and professionals were rejecting the rules of scientific discourse and sometimes affirmed that only practicing a given art it means that one is already doing research, a sort of research practically embedded in that process. By this they are following the logic of the artist as craftsman, a technician of tools, for whom to "do research" means, only too often, to do "art works". Or, in the worst case, to read some books or articles from which you can write some works of compilation, which gives you access to academic or professional positions, which are comfortable social is not what a public intellectual is supposed to be.

Certainly there is an important methodological level to research, which needs to be theoretically motivated. Since the theories in this field are often linked to some of the most important, already existing scientific discourses, these too have to be mapped. In this respect, one first step for my research efforts was the publishing of a chapter on methods and methodologies of the visual culture and imaginary, chapter which appeared in a book coordinated by prof. Univ. dr. Corin Braga, the director of the Phantasma center for Imaginary Research, of the Faculty of Letters. As a member of this research team I took upon myself to deal with methods and methodological problems. My main interest for methodologies lead to the idea of convergency of methodologies in visual culture research. Thus fundamental philosophical ideas, art criticism and other forms of interpretation (of painting, advertisings or cinema) can be practiced from multiple perspectives. One important resource comes from media analysis and content based studies. The second stems from the qualitative approaches of different cultural products which can be integrated in a possible general method of evaluating a variety of visual objects. Once more, the main idea is that visual arts, either produced in the "new" media or belonging to the "old" media, are confluent and convergent in analytical discourse.

I tried to put into practice this theoretical research experience from the moment the Faculty of Theater and Television developed a Master program dedicated to Film and Media Production. Here I began teaching for the first time a course entitled: "Research methodologies in the Arts of the

Spectacle”. Later the same course was offered for other Master Programs: The history of images, the history of ideas Master Program, for the Faculty of Letters, coordinated by prof. dr. Ruxandra Cesereanu; for the Excellency Center for Image Studies, Bucharest University, coordinated by prof. Dr. Sorin Alexandrescu; and the *International Communication* Master Program, of the Faculty of History, coordinated by prof. Dr. Adrian Ivan. The main purpose of this course was to introduce master level students into the main methodological practices in the research of such areas like cinema, theater, media and visual arts. The course presented the main theoretical approaches to the problems and complex nature of studying images, visual products, art objects and any cultural materials related to visuality. The course was focused primarily on the issues related to the main differences between the interpretative methodologies and aimed to describe the main directions of research available in the field of visual culture. The course aimed primarily to provide concrete examples and direct in terms of visual culture objects simultaneously critical and analytical discussion of issues raised by research projects in the field. What I intended to do was to present the master students with the main concepts and notions used in the study of visual arts and culture, with practical application to their specific disciplines and - especially – to the specific cultural practices today. By using case studies the focus of the courses was to provide illustrations of how research can be done by using the multi-perspective method. The course was, of course, developed around several important educational objectives: introducing the students in the methods and methodologies that would help them develop their own scientific paper and to develop the writing techniques and tools for any type of visual research. The students were advised to master the processes and practices of research in the field of visual studies, and encouraged to acquire critical analytical skills in studying images. At the end of the course the students were evaluated in their ability to recognize the main descriptive methods and the most important techniques of quantitative and qualitative research of images (fixed or moving). They were also encouraged to use the scientific method in formulating a hypothesis, to define their research strategies, ways of gathering information

and presenting scientifically their findings. The students were encouraged to finish their studies with a research project that would contain at least two methods from the main methods of the course: compositional analysis, content analysis, semiological analysis, psychoanalytic interpretation and discourse analysis. Again, the mix of the two main methods was considered fundamental: the quantitative scientific methods for the formal interpretation of the images and their qualitative understanding. The main topic which follows is how to combine the interpretation of the basic forms of images, what are the "phonemes" of any "visual text"? Here some general principles and methods of analysis were used: the part and whole analysis of fixed image; iconography and iconology as they were defined by Erwin Panofsky; using semiotics as applied science of interpreting the visual field, and by this the interpretation of the visual markers inside any visual product. The final purpose was to have a coherent practice for encoding and decoding visual objects, according to the context and relationship between the elements in the image. The second major approach came from the phenomenological tradition. What is the phenomenology of knowledge and how it can be used from the perspective of the image analysis. Here comes, starting with Husserl's definition of intuition, the foundation of qualitative interpretation. Further Merleau Ponty's phenomenology of perception was used, then the role of Gestalt theory in analyzing images and other experience based cultural studies and trends within postmodernism. A third approach comes from the Marxist tradition, with John Berger's studies on the practices and "ways of seeing". Analyzing the social context of the understanding the inner dynamics of the visual cultural products can follow either the sociological dimension of the visual objects, that of anthropology and visual ethnography, or the sociology of vision. Last, but not least is the psychological foundation of image interpretation. From Freud to Lacan, bringing into discussions elements from psychoanalytic interpretations, allows establishing a link between pleasure and technology. Here the symbolic and mythological interpretation and understanding, the narrative level brings us to the concept of "translation images into words". Thus, in the development of my practice and teaching

research methods I am joining the concepts of objectivity, of observing and interpreting scientifically images, and the resource of the constructionist perspective of visuality, of the qualitative perspective of what methodologies provide the best understanding of visual objects.

I considered this to be a logical step forward in my overall research and, as I will detail further, I have been publishing extensively on this topic, in an effort to develop several academic lines of questioning. First and foremost it was part of my effort to define what research is in the field of visual culture, and to explain what distinguishes it from mere curiosity or concern for a particular topic. In this respect I consider that research must be seen as a search for meaning, for multiple meanings and truths, for laws and how they function, not only simple search data, facts, and factual knowledge. Also, following this line of thought, I wanted to show what actually "doing research" means, which too often in the Romanian academia was extremely intuitive. My purpose was to answer questions like how can we use visual objects as sources of scientific research? What are the main objectives of scientific research in the practice of the visual arts. That is to define a general methodology of the visual culture. In this respect one of the conclusions I reached was that there is not a single method and methodological approach which would provide answers. This is why the division between "natural" sciences and "humanist" sciences need to be closed. My approach was to bring together the methodological resources of qualitative studies, with an understanding of the importance of the quantitative study of images and the involvement of qualitative methodologies. Basically to considered both the quantitative and the qualitative as equally important in the field of visual studies, cinema research and media analysis.

## II. 6. Integrating methods and methodologies in visual studies, media and cinema research.

A major part of my research interest was to apply the multi-methodological approach to visual culture and visual communication. There are two main problems in dealing with research and interpretation in the studies on visibility. The central question remains the following: "How can we researched images, visual messages and other persuasive structures using the vision as communication channel?" A research method applied to all the events of the "sight" needs to be fundamentally connected to the applied studies of imaginary formation. On one hand, the first methodological area comes from the quantitative studies and sciences, mostly of sociological descent. These allow only a superficial description of visual phenomena, that is a mechanical description of images and imagination. The premise here is that the only important parts are the tangible elements and mechanisms in the images. Here we are faced with a descriptivism which is not interested in a deep penetration within the images, in what is the "impalpable" nature of the imaginary. We can identify here three major research strategies (described by Wolcott 2008): participant observation, the interviewing techniques and the archival research. These are based on three major ways of collecting informations about any research object: from direct experience, from inquiry or direct examination of available data. Each strategies provide a number of techniques, which promise the studying of visual phenomena scientifically. The first level connects the studies of the visual with other "archive" based methods", traditionally part of the "historical studies"; they are manifest in classical history, the literary criticism, or literary analysis. The interrogative strategies, which are the most widespread in the social sciences, are based on the techniques of investigative questioning. Here is the group of methods belonging to biographical and oral history methodologies. Last, but not least, participatory and observation methods remains the most important tools of "ethnographical research".

The second important level of the interpretative models which can be applied to visuality are the purely subjective or hermeneutical directions, similar to those of the pictorial analysis. Based on the methodologies of the qualitative studies, these methods involves simultaneously the acceptance of speculation. Here we have the group of analytic methodologies belonging to the so-called critical theories of culture, from the late Marxism of the Frankfurt School, to the British cultural criticism, to Foucaultian approaches and the feminism traditions. They are theoretically centered around the idea that complex conceptual structures, with are opened to reading cultural structures as constructions, provide the deep understanding of the "visible materials". Here the challenge is to integrate a plurality of phenomena, from various domain of human cultural actions, into a unified research methodology. This approach, no matter how general it seems, it provides the theoretical support of for any qualitative method of studying images. Within the general theories of interpretative sciences, we should allow three qualitative analytical methods: the research of the ideological, the symbolic and the the material. Now the research of content production can integrate all the levels of visuality. Therefore any interest in studying how the imaginary works or how images enable social construction of identity (from architecture to advertising, and from media to cinema or photography) must follow the visible expressions of culture, the modes in with images are sources of transmission for specific social ideologies and symbols of humanity.

Even if there is no "one size fit all" understanding of what "visual culture research" means, a possible narrowing of the interpretation is the tracing of a map of visuality, a chronological and ontological description of how images acquired social and cultural functions, how their manifestations were integrated in the context of the modern/ postmodern societies and how visual culture comes into place.

First we must define visual culture and, although there are many theoretical approaches that attempted to describe the visuality in contemporary culture, we must define visual culture as an eclectic

"discipline" because of its multiple manifestations. This vast and uncertain visual studies field is a "hybrid" and can be dealt with only within an "multi-inter-disciplinary" paradigm (Walker and Chaplin 1997). The "visual" includes a continuous accumulation of invariants: all images and visual meanings, any manifestations of the signifier and signified in the visible and the invisible sphere, any forms of expressions between a spectator and a spectacle, any active and passive consumption of visual objects. One can say that post-industrial civilization has entered its visual peak, a level where we endlessly consume and we are consumed by images (Stuart Ewen), a world governed by meaningless scopophilia. We are insatiable visual consumers, we devour any symbols, signs, metaphors and messages which are promoted or connected to an image value.

So what is the scope of the visual culture? We include here any forms of visual media, from basic visual productions (videos and photos), to advertising and graphic design, to complex cinema production at industrial scale. We also include any forms of studies related to the visual, from visual communication studies, to aesthetics, the philosophy and history of arts, visual semiotics, visual rhetorics, visual anthropology, visual sociology. Also the studies dedicated to the visual media are part of this domain, such as media and television studies, cultural studies focusing on visual artifacts, film studies or cinema production studies. All the visual arts must be included (photography, drawing and any other hybrid forms) as well as the theoretical fields referring to the visual, such as art theory, architecture, theater and any other arts of the representations and visual performance. Some authors distinguish between the "hard" visual culture and the "soft" visual Culture. The first belongs to aesthetics and the history of arts. Some art historians consider that the visual culture is a creation of cultural elites (Heywood and Sandywell 1999), with its a "birth date" placed in 1550, the year when Giorgio Vasari's book "Lives of the most prominent painters, sculptors and architects" was published.

A negative definition of visual culture, which I dismiss is that visual culture opposes rationalism and empiricism, that the visual arts and practices are not a part of the social sciences, they do not



belong to the "scientific" tools of modern academia. One of my efforts was to identify and develop those methods and methodologies which could make visual interpretations a part of the scientific discourse, of the "scientific method" as research practice. At this stage, I want to underline three methodologies which I considered relevant in this direction. The first is provided by iconology, which started with Erwin Panofsky's works, and which provides an relevant part of the content analysis base for any visual interpretations. Another scientific tool for image interpretation is semiotics, understood both as a method for studying the "laws" that govern the formation of significations, and a principle of analysis allowing access to the mythological, more profound levels of meaning. The third would deal with the ideological implications, resulting from the cultural criticism practices. These methods, which are no longer strictly formal, provide us an understanding of visual culture products that is not available through formalism or the semiological "readings". Here visual anthropology and visual sociology allow a more complex discussion about the processes that make up our visual experience.

These methods and methodological clarifications were then applied to the most important fields of the visual culture I was interested in: media representations, mythological formations in the public sphere and cinema. As detailed in the following chapters of this thesis, each methodological stand-point was then applied to the particular medium, considering that image analysis is not simply a form of finding significations within particular representations, but also by establishing connections with a broader social and cultural context. Performing image interpretations means to analyze everything that surrounds the individuals, every cultural instance where the activity of "making sense" through the sense of vision becomes a form of making sense of the society as a whole.

## II. 7 Media and television research

### II. 7. 1. Studying the imaginary of the Romanian politics and media spheres

As pointed out before, my interest in the dynamics between media and politics, media and democracy and the research of political and cultural mythologies, was manifested in publishing several books. After my first work about the public sphere in Romania, entitled *Social Obsessions (Obsesii Sociale)*, published by the prestigious editing house Institutul European, Iași, in 1998, I published three workbooks in this field: *Introduction to Media Theory*, a class support for the basics of media theory (*Introducere în teoria media*, Editura Dacia, Cluj, 2001), *Introduction to Public Relations (Introducere în teoria relațiilor publice)*, Editura Dacia, Cluj, 2000), course support for public relations specialists and *Media and Democracy (Mass Media și democrația)*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2002), a very well received study book for the specialists in the fields of media and communication. In 2003 I also published an essay on the political changes happening after the terrorist attacks on the United States, entitled *911. The Day Democracy Dies. Essay about the limitations of liberty (911. Ziua în care a murit democrația: eseu despre limitările libertății)*, Editura Dacia, Cluj, 2003).

It was Marshall McLuhan who first defined the media as one of the most important factors of change in society, and while the “transforming” role of played by the media should not be seen separated from the other social instruments of generating reality, decoding the symbolic impact of such changes, by means of the rhetorical forms available in advertising, offer clues as to the deeper layers of significance. This is why one of my main research interest about media was oriented towards

understanding the role played in contemporary society by *media mythologies* and media imaginary construction. Interpreting the ritualized nature of the media narratives and of the image structures allows us to understand the mechanisms of the public psyche. As Katz and Liebes argued convincingly in their classical study, *The Export of Meaning*, media functions a basic and fundamental tool of mythology making. The tools of media mythology are oversimplifications, thus using stereotypes, caricature emotions, or simplistic conflicts between the “classical” archetypes of good and evil, we can penetrate the inner functioning of social modeling promoted by the media. The schematic representations, integrated in the media discourses, both national and international, are the main object of media research.

In my research paper *Visual Exploitation of Women in Romanian Media Representations*, published in *Caietele Echinox*, vol. 10/ 2006 (pp. 300-311) I argued that we can use the representations of the human behavior in cultural contexts (movies, advertising and other popular media) in order to have access to the deeper meanings, mainly how society is really functioning. Basically all visual recordings of reality (be it fictional or documented) are objects of studying society, they have cultural value. By using advertising examples from Romanian media, I provided an interpretation mechanism of social identity. The argument was that the contemporary Romanian society is going through a process of cultural callousness, where the over-sexualized images of women are markers of their social and personal exploitation. More and more television programs are associating the image of women to non-humanity, projecting a general perception of women as being either sexual objects or dumbed-down beings without identity. In this research I pointed out some elements of how the subordination of women is integrated in the public media discourses and how women are portrayed as subservient and depicted by their sexually gratuitous nature.

This research direction was followed by another paper, *The Roles and Functions of Advertising Myths: A Typological View on the Romanian Contemporary Public and Media Sphere*, published in

Caietele Echinox, 17, 2009. This paper also starts with the idea that a myth analysis of advertising products can provide relevant information about society as a whole. The central hypothesis being that contemporary advertising functions as a transformative social matrix a typological interpretation of advertising products as they appear in the videos of the top ten brands in Romania, focusing on products like personal hygiene and cosmetics, alcoholic beverages, sweets and chocolate, home cleaning chemicals and non-alcoholic beverages and the telecommunication companies, is extremely relevant. In this paper I was using a content analysis based on the critical tradition of authors like Lévi-Strauss, Barthes and Goffman and I proved that advertising is reconfiguring the imaginary of Romanian society, shaping the minds and cultural values of a community, as media and advertising mythologies generate new narratives about personal and social identity. By discussing the key advertising myths in Romanian media, especially those linked with the ideological transformations from Communism to free-market base societies, generating new social archetypes of the industrial modernity we are actually performing a *myth analysis*, that is using myth as a concise imaginary form, describing beliefs and socially acceptable and desirable behaviors.

Following the path initiated by Roland Barthes, when interpreting advertising one needs to analyze the substance of the profound changes occurring in society in terms of their impact on our value systems. In this respect, myths make acceptable structures that otherwise would belong to a stricter social order. According to Barthes, advertising is reconfiguring mundane objects into positive symbolic substitutes, and this “transfiguration” of commodities plays an important role in the dynamics of capitalist societies. The role advertising played in shaping the minds of individuals that were previously subjected to collectivist thinking is yet to be assessed. Another theoretical premise is that the mythologies constructed by advertising messages are idealized structures, translating a given group’s fantasies and self-projected identities. Since Lévi-Strauss expanded the definition of myth into the cultural boundaries of media (1963), even if we don’t perceive them as such, media mythologies

generate stories about ourselves, narratives that shape our sense of personal and social identity. As Erving Goffman suggested that we witness a continuous process of alienating ourselves from personal interaction and thus we develop substitute ways for defining interactions. Advertising is one of those outlets where we construct imaginary rituals, where we learn and gather information about the existing social rules for interaction. Advertising is a “feel good” agent, by its mystified displays forms of interaction and by the continuous phantasm it generates.

Of course, all these story-like mythologies generated by the media and the advertising industries, are created in order to endorse of cultural goods. Yet, when we ground the interpretation on the conception that these myths have a profound symbolic relevance, and that they shape the way we define acceptability and social correctness, then the advertising *mythos* provides the interpreter with a map of the changes within the public psyche. One of the key advertising myths in the contemporary Romanian media comes from the need to recharge the myth of public space. This is visible in those ads which reconstruct the public identity. The Romanian urban communities, which were quickly developed during the Communist regime, by the process of forced movement of people from rural to urban life, created communities without identities during the last decades of “construction of Socialism”. It is my contention that after the political changes in 1989, media and advertising have filled this identity void with their own imaginary structures and mythologies – some of them based on neoliberal ideologies and some forms of mythological.

Using the terminology that Raymond Williams provided (1980), advertising can be seen as a “system of organized magic” that shapes the correlation between the dynamics of the individual’s relationships with the material culture he lives in and with the social network he exists in. Selling fantasies involves a certain degree of myth-making and by this an influential tool for mind changing. We are witnessing the production of new social archetypes promoted by advertising messages, and interpretation of ads becomes a useful interpretation tool of these new cultural, political and behavioral

practices. In this respect we need to engage in a deconstructive effort as a means of understanding the mechanisms of meaning production, so we can generate links between the visual, linguistic and semiotic content of advertisements in order to obtain cultural significance. While myth consumers, in the sense that the object of consumption is linked with the symbolic reference, this dual relationship provides us with the possibility of integrating into the logic of objects consumption. Basically this symbolic reshaping is producing an imagined cultural community, a phantasm-like world, an urban space of “how our world should look like”.

Starting from the assumption Barthes provided, that advertising functions as a social instrument by which the “little bourgeoisie” constructs its social practices, and that it imposes a certain way of life that is specific to its ideological functions; we can state that advertising practices create an environment for new social archetypes. Archetypes, says Jung, are fundamentally oversimplified means of generating content. It is the case with the new Romanian low and middle-class mythology, that includes a new idiom, the changes at the linguistic level being the indicators of the deeper move within society. One manifestation of this process is the re-naming of social groups, by stereotypes and processes of stereo-typifying the “Other”.

Another direction in which advertising analysis provides relevant information is at the ideological level. Schudson (1984) has shown that advertising is an instrument to create an ideological mythology, in this case the mythology of capitalism and of liberal capitalism, based on individualism and the values of private space – opposed to the ideologies of collectivism and state owned space. Following Douglas Kellner's suggestion (1995), the media cultures are “social allegories” which articulate the fears, desires and hopes of a given community or group. Using this argument, I discussed the recent advertising productions as a primary source for these new symbolic investments of cultural materials and signifiers. The new imaginaries in the post-Communist Romanian society were building around the schematic structure of the mythologies of luxury and wealth, where the modern media are

generating continuously images of a new Golden Age of consumption and prosperity. Here the desired objects as commodities, are shaping more and more the personal pleasure and of egoist needs, is retained for oneself. In Marxist terms, this false consciousness generates a false social attitude. Although highly disputed, this cultural dimension of advertising is nonetheless one of the most important mechanisms of streaming and distributing beliefs into the social existence.

Advertising narratives position social success in this logic of identification with capitalist values, with the logic of technological modernity and generates mythological structures to support these levels of identification. Building new social realities, by means of discourse changes and of symbolic intervention, advertising represents a major explanation for meaning production in Romanian collective psyche.

Another important moment in my research was the publishing of my book focused on the elections campaigns in the Romanian politics. *Election from Hell. False treatise about the malformations of the national political imaginary (Alegerile naibii. Fals tratat despre methenele imaginarului politic autohton*, Editura Indigo, 2007) was an attempt to provide an in-depth content analysis of the visual structures used in the public communication. Dealing with the Romanian political mythology as irrational and interpreting the campaign ads from the perspective of content analysis, this study was based on the close monitoring of two rounds of electoral campaigns, from 2000 to 2006. While analyzing the visual discourses by which the political leaders are trying to politically activate citizens, I was de-constructing the mechanisms through which the politicians are operating with symbolic mechanisms, specific to a primitive level of functioning in a society, in order to induce their agenda. And, since one of the fundamental myths of mankind is the eternal struggle between “us” and “them”, this myth was often used to develop social narratives. This study looks into the ways the mythically charged "stories" have been used in Romanian political campaigns and how the Romanian reality was through political conflicts, with hidden mythological purpose. The final argument is that the

structure of the contemporary collective imagination is deeply affected by the construction of political reality, by the use of visual and mythological messages. My research traces the major transformations in the Romanian society by the transformation of the political discourses and the impact of infotainment on society. Romanian politics is gradually becoming a form of superficial media spectacle, one in which the collective psyche is mutating. In an effort to depict these mutations, the book presents the most important techniques of visual persuasion used in the political campaigns. By providing an analysis of visual ads, graphic depictions of the political competition I tried to provide a broader map of the political imaginaries in contemporary Romania. The “tele-novelization” of the Romanian politics is considered to be the most profound change, and the war of images and words between politicians is having a huge impact on the general public. Another important elements in this book was to trace the role played by the “emotional marketing” in political advertising. The mechanisms used in this process include the apparition of the photo-op politicians, the vulgarization of the public dialogue, the return of the spiritual and even the occult in the persuasion practices. While the citizens are transformed into “couch potato” electorate, the political sphere is more and more based on the techniques of marketing, using promotions and cheap attraction tactics, which come from outside the accepted political dialogue.

Another important contribution to the research of Romanian media mythology was the publication of my paper *The political myths of Good and Evil in Post-Communist Romania (Miturile politice ale Binelui și Răului în România post-decembristă)*, in Sergiu Mișcoiu and Sergiu Gherghina eds., *Miturile politice în România contemporană*, Institutul European Iași, 2012. This research starts with the main assumption that the Romanian psyche is divided along a profound dichotomous fault line. My line of argument is based on the hypothesis put forward by Lucian Boia, that the main political function of the myth is to codify the key ideas of a social group. When discussing myths (cultural, social or political) we are dealing with structures of thought, which operate as identifying factors



specific community traits, that allows us to decipher the beliefs pervade that group. On the other hand the political myths are, as suggested by Christopher Flood, collective narratives and stories by which individuals socialize or simply justify their activities. Therefore, the main function of a political myth is to explain how the participants in the political exchange understand the dynamics of their social group. Therefore political myths are fundamental explanation tools, they provide necessary interpretative resources for understanding the social relations between individuals in their given community.

In this study I focused on the political mythologies of Good and Evil, which were always at work in public narratives. When it comes to political leaders, these myths about what is good or bad, become electoral instruments of war. In this study, following the ideas of Hans Blumenberg (quoted by Chiara Bottici), who theorized the idea that myths are narratives of identity constantly changing, we can formulate the idea that the collective public identity is constructed in a fluid flow, and in order to interpret political mythology we need fixed structures such as the conflict between Good and Evil. Borrowing from the conceptual arsenal of religious narratives the imaginary battles between good and evil always required a specific eschatological view of the world. This means that the two political sides can not reach any compromise, no agreement is possible, they can reach no agreement. This vision of political struggle is, on one hand, Manichaeist in its nature and, on the other hand, profoundly contemporary. As proved by Jean Baudrillard, the relationship between good and evil in contemporary societies has reached the stage of the total transparency of Evil. The Romanian media is also permeated by this mythology of demonization of the Other, by the construction of political speeches which are labeling the opponents by using radical oppositions, following the logic of conflict between “them” and “us”. These separations can be found in the distinction between the right and the left politicians, between liberals and conservatives, but also in the continuous oppositions between intellectuals and workers, between urban and rural populations, or between pro-Communists and anti-Communists. Again, an important level of this conflictive separations shows in the political mythologies. Recent

developments in the Romanian political discourses include references to the story of Snow White, claims that the adversaries belong to the Evil and their representation as animals or monstrous figures.

I followed further this interest in the problems of contemporary society in many other research papers. Among the most recent is a study submitted to the ISI Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies, entitled “The Wizards of the Violet Flame. A Magical Mystery Tour of Romanian Politics”. This study presents the manifestations of irrational practices in recent Romanian politics. Providing a short history of the mystical and the occult in Romanian politics, this research uses as a case study the alleged use of the occult “violet flame” in the presidential campaign of 2009. By showing how public religiousness and the daily mystical practices are changing, the author is describing the transformations of the national political communication under the pressure of the news media, which are becoming more and more pervasive to the occult discourses and the magical thinking. The author describes these transformations as part of the general transformations of the political imaginary in Romania. The Romanian public psyche belongs more and more to the culture of infotainment, a culture based on cultivating superficiality, where mystical and simplistic thinking have replaced the traditional processes of public exchange of reasonable ideas. Thus a main trait of this video-pathology in which the Romanian media is engulfed, is the substitution of the rational discourses with the superficial understanding of the world and supernatural explanations about the universe. One of the conclusions is that the manifestations and functions of the irrational in the Romanian political sphere have become more innocuously connected with a deep mysticism already in place, and are profoundly changing the society as a whole.

Of all the methods used throughout my papers, I consider the *comparative media* approach as *the most important*. I was using this method in almost all in my media and television researches, since I consider it provides some of the most relevant insights. In this respect, my chapter of *The influence of Dallas on East and Central European TV series. A comparative media approach*, published in the 2013

*collective volume National Mythologies in Central European TV Series: How J.R. Won the Cold War. Bilek, P., Pop, D., Varga Z., Zwierzchowski, P., Kisielewska, A., and Čulík, J. (eds.) at Sussex Academic Press provides a relevant example of how the method can be applied. This is part of my effort to underline the importance of looking for wider significations by using qualitative research, one which will go beyond the narrow scope of the quantitative interpretations.*

This methodological tool that I consider appropriate the majority of studies on media mythologies and representations is based on the classical comparative media research, theories and practices put forward by Hallin and Mancini (2004). The method suits the objective of many research processes since its purpose was from the very beginning to provide a tool for comparing media in different cultural and ideological contexts. As the two authors indicated in their seminal study, comparative media research is a form of social research continuing the research practices of comparison used before in traditional humanities (as was the case with comparative literature), only applying these techniques to objects of interest taken from contemporary media. From the early stages of developing media analysis techniques, comparing media systems and their respective differences was one of the key historical approaches to television. Several comparisons are possible, yet comparing the contents and functions of televisions in a region, was one of the most productive research practices in the field. In this case it is a useful tool since comparing production practices from different social systems and different time frames presents some inherent difficulties.

In *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* Hallin and Mancini have pointed out some of the most important modes of comparison in media research: comparing different types of media, comparing different production systems, or even comparing different media audiences. Doing a comparative media analysis of three different products, in three different times and ideological scopes, should begin with the premise that there is a comparison made possible by the internationalization of content production. In this respect my approach is a typical comparative media

research, since it has as a scope a wide range of media products that belong to different contexts, even to different cultural set-ups and to different ideologies. In this respect, having as object of study trans-cultural” products, it means looking for signification formation in multiple situations, by multiple perspectives; and this is what comparative media research facilitates. The fundamental idea is that we cannot interpret only similar objects, since this will only generate a description of similar structures. More so, in a fluid media environment, as is the global media today, an inflexible approach, based on comparisons of similarities, on common traits, strictly following the rigid, sociological view of the facts finding, would not be productive.

Another assumption for comparative analysis of different media contents used was that proposed by John Fiske. For Fiske TV programs are “stable and fixed” entities, thus opened for interpretation. Being created and sold as commodities, television programs can both be interpreted as sheer content, and according to the different contexts they are received. As Fiske has eloquently put it, even if television seems to over-represent social realities, it nonetheless provides us with an understanding of social values of that given culture (Fiske 2003).

The media analysis of advertising and politics, of public myth-making processes and of the collective imaginaries was followed by a natural interest for other myth-making formations, and cinema provides one of the best resources for such interpretations.

## II. 8. Films studies research

### II. 8. 1. Establishing a link between visual culture, media studies and cinema

Within the general framework of my approach, the most important methodologies used belong to the tradition of media studies, which in turn and extract their research roots from the theories of communication. Since my declared purpose is to try and integrate the "interpretation" of content with the "criticism" of society, while still performing an "analysis" of the content itself, media studies are providing those forms of interpreting narratives, style and effects of the cultural products (cinema, television, arts) which show a light on the society as a whole.

I believe that there are three main elements which can be exported into film studies (interpretation, analysis and criticism), and which must be seen here as integral parts of a broader view, that of visual culture theories, in which movies are considered cultural and visual materials that can provide the understanding of our culture as a whole, both of particular, subjective, meanings and of the meanings with social role. I am defining cinema as the quintessential mass medium of our times, and this means that we are able to use it as the dominant visual instrument by which we transmit and understand social, cultural and personal values. This is enabling us to interpret cinema in both of its roles, as mediating knowledge for the spectators and as mediating the relationship of the viewer with the world.

Film studies, as an academic discipline, were to come only late into the dialogue of theoretical and practical social sciences. In order to legitimate cinema studies one must legitimate not only writing on cinema, but also the practice of film watching, as being more than a simple form of entertainment. From literary studies, to critical studies and then to the interdisciplinary approaches of the 90s, cinema

studies went through some major changes. As Richard Maltby has indicated, there were three major historical moments in the academic acceptance of cinema studies. The first was during the 1960s when the fast growth of universities made film studies a discipline in universities around the world, most of the times under the supervision of literature departments and literary studies. The second was under the impact of cultural criticism and the expansion of post-Marxist critical theories in global academia. It was only recently that film studies started to integrate interdisciplinary approaches as acceptable tools for interpretation. Due to the inherent interdisciplinary nature of studying films, something which was once called the "seventh art", cinema studies are among the first disciplines to bring together theories and methodologies otherwise considered to be separated. Once again I must underline that this is the main reason why I consider that embracing semiotics, structuralism, feminism, queer theory, race studies, poststructuralisms, and post-Marxist criticism represents a major asset of cinema studies as academic discipline.

## II. 8. 2. Cinema as a form of mass communication

Following Douglas Kellner and Meenakshi Gigi Durham (2006, xiv) in their Introduction to the classical anthology on *Media and cultural studies*, we need to define critical media and cultural studies as forms of analysis that understand all visual artifacts of the established culture and society as being filled with meanings, values, biases, and messages that advance the social relations. The understanding of cinema as key symbolic interaction instrument of contemporary culture appertains to communication studies in that it means studying how people analyze, receive and use visual information, received through cinema, and by this to explore the knowledge formation in society. Also from the tradition of media and communication studies comes the multidisciplinary character of cinema studies, using various perspectives about the given media (economic, political, psychological, cultural, social,

technological, etc.) allows a thorough explanation of how our societies work. In this respect both cinema studies and communication studies are also multidisciplinary fields of interpreting systems of media, that is dealing with multiple issues, like production/distribution, consumption and use.

The relationship between cinema criticism, popular culture and communication theory is, following the suggestions of Littlejohn and developed later by McQuail, based on the critical nature of contemporary social sciences. Considering cinema as one of the most important channels of communication in today's world, if not the dominant channel of cultural transmission of information, must lead to the integrating cinema studies in wider problem of the audience in mass communication. Understanding this component of films should be identified as relevant, and not just from the statistical perspective, that is of the number of spectators, but also from their political-economic impact on the public and on their imaginary.

My interest in cinema comes from the fact that I consider cinema as a fundamental “cultural form”, which is similar to literary texts or any other social manifestations. In this respect, cinema must be considered as a way of articulating social and communication realities, by a medium which has inherently a global impact. This allows us not only to understand how the film industry works, but also how society expresses itself through this media, and just as history or political sciences explain the functioning of society, cinema divulges the inner mechanism of the collective psyche. Being a form of cultural production, interpreting cinema becomes automatically a part of popular culture studies, since every visual artifact, such as cinema, is an ultimately an expression of the culture which produced it. Just as the media narratives approach allows the evaluation of the triad author, story, audience, when we are discussing the films as representations of the communication structures in societies we can use the same triad.

Another important aspect comes from following the arguments of the structuralist theories, as represented in the studies of Roland Barthes. Since any media narrative is a form of mythology, coding

meanings and significations deeper than the forms it is manifested in (films, advertisements, literature), interpreting films becomes a form of studying the manifestations of society and of humanity in its entirety. As Gilles Deleuze has arguable put it, looking for the essence of cinema means searching for that which is more than just from the cinematic. Cinema studies means to put into place a critical practice, a socially and politically relevant interpretation of culture.

There are two issues which follow from this line of argument. How can we go beyond de essence of films if, on one hand, cinema fulfills our broader need for communication then it should be interpreted simply as a communication tool. On the other hand, there is a cognitive perspective, which explains cinema as a visual communication medium, created and centered around the physiology of perception. As Gregory Currie suggests, the movies belong to a complex medium that has profound psychological properties, offering us access to heroes, narratives, social models, modes of consumption beyond the inherent perceptual limits (Currie 1995). If cinema allows us to see through the reality at hand, and allows us to have access to a deeper understanding of how society works, then film criticism must be focused on the content as it influences our perception of the world itself. This is where a third perspective comes into place, that suggests we need addressed the influence of cinema on various other fields of culture, due to its importance as cultural institution. As a part of the “massification” of contemporary culture, cinema is more than a “text” that can be “read”, it is a carrier of ideology.

One of the main research question which comes out of my problematization about film studies is coming from this key topic in cinema reception and interpretation. My research efforts were often concentrating on the issue of how we can approach cinema in order to overcome the deeply rooted subjectivity in the forms of film reception and interpretation. Starting from this point on, there follows a line of questions were we must find a way in order to understand and to discuss a movie in a framework of objective assessment, yet one which will be consisting not only in finding factual data about movies (like audience, investment and return of investment, production modes), but also



philosophically relevant and, in terms of the methodological approach, one that would insure an academically sound, scientific interpretation of the cinematic products.

As discussed before, I will develop in this chapter of my habilitation, my main contention comes from the analytical theory of cinema, which is based on heterogeneous sources and methods, starting from the classical theory on the cinematic, which is a mixture of linguistic structuralism and semiotics, Marxism and psychoanalysis. This methodological pluralism is one key element to provide cinema theory with the necessary scientific credibility and to offer a transition from the subjective discussing of movies, towards a scientifically sound and methodologically fit field of studies. As shown by Bill Nichols, in his Introduction to the classical anthology “Movies and Methods”, the transition from the amateur, to the semi-academic writing and the academic scholarship – implies the mix of methodologies in film studies. Although some of these theories are seen as “non-specific” to cinema, they bring the necessary “explanatory power” (Nichols 11) to the research of cinema, providing an academic foundation for a scholarly, objective and valid discussion of of movies.

As Robert Stam has put it in his classic study of film theory (Stam 2000), the study of cinema must be practiced as a complementarity of approaches (from structuralism to feminism and from semiology to post-colonial studies), where various methods and interpretation techniques are put into action. There isn't a theory of "pure" cinema studies, mostly because the discourses about cinema integrate several types of analysis, ranging from literary analysis, to social analysis, to content analysis, philosophical analysis and so on. With each of these movements, phases, stages and approaches film theory has been enriched with several concepts and notions, that have become an integral part of the cinematic vocabulary. It would be just complementary to the power of cinema, which is a mix of multiple arts (painting, photography, theater), a more complex methodological approach.

This is why my studies always revolve around a couple of case studies, selected as examples for different types of methodological approaches. In this sense, to make cinema studies means to apply

different method to different types of cinematic objects. In the following argumentation I will be constantly referring to the suggestion of Richard Maltby, who proposed an understanding of cinema studies on a theoretical triad composed of semiotics, Marxism and psychoanalysis (Maltby 528); I will provide a methodological demonstration for each of these three theoretical fields with cinematic examples. Thus I will use the new modes of production in the "peer-to-peer" networks, where the ideological methods are going to be used as interpretative instruments, as an example for *Marxist and post-Marxist interpretations*. I will apply the *textual and mythological* approaches in a couple of cinematic contexts, like the block buster *Avatar*, by James Cameron, and in the new fantasy movies, where new forms of mythologies take shape; other relevant examples will come from the theories of adaptation, where the illustrations will provide references to the *inter-textual* nature of film studies. And, last but not least, segmentation and psychoanalysis will be followed using *Inception* by Christopher Nolan as key example.

### II. 8. 3. Cinema studies, cultural studies and critical theory

One of the most important methodological issues which needs to be dealt with is how can we develop a critical discourse about cinema and how can we critically analyze films? My approach in this direction was to bring into discussion some of the most profound relationships between cinema, as the most important production practice in the contemporary world, and ideology. Since cinema was deeply rooted in the early capitalist mode of production then it must be described within the context of ideological production. During the 70s and 80s cinema studies were more into re-evaluating the social and economic issues of movie production, that the simple narratives of the cinematic. This radicalization of the discourses was made possible by the links cinema studies established with other disciplines and theories, like cultural studies or critical theory.

Yet the situation is not that easily resolved. Obviously, at the simplest level, all movies are "pure ideology", in the sense that they transmit a set of social and political ideas and values. As seen in *The Strike* (Stachka 1925), one of the earliest ideologic films of Soviet times, Sergey Eisenstein's first films, moviemaking can be considered a "political" tool. Here we see explicit connection between the use of the new cinematic technologies and the intent of the producers and directors to convey a political meaning. Naturally, this is not a trait of Communist film industry or of the totalitarian regimes, since this intent is transparent even in recent Hollywood movies like *Good bye and good night* (Clooney 2005), where the ideology of anti-McCarthyist view of the world allows the spectator to interpret a social moment in recent history by following a clear political statement. Cinema has been long criticized and denounced for this political usage, and the behavior of the directors and actors was often putting into action ideological purposes. The deeply ideological nature of the films was always present, whether if it was in the form of the racist ideology in the early Griffith's films, whose images of the black community in the Southern United States, attacking innocent white ladies were delighting the audiences of the time, but sentenced later the director to the status of pariah; or in the case of the Sylvester Stallone's adrenalin driven *Rambo* series, which can be read like a propaganda instrument for militarism, since the American public, tired of the war in Vietnam and its unfortunate results, disappointed and disillusioned, was provides with an illusory replica of an imaginary victory. Actually Rambo indicates the presence of a double ideological rooting. On the one hand, a single American "war machine" can destroy the Soviets and North Koreans, and, in the same time, he remains faithful to the Protestant mythos of the solitary and ethical heroic figure fighting against malevolent groups.

An "ideological" reading should be applied to any film, from the productions of John Ford, where we can interpret *The Horse Soldiers* as having a "fascist" component in the description of the main character, since John Wayne behaves like a fascist dictator, inhuman and violent to more explicit productions, or as is the classical case of the Ku-Klux-Klan forces intervening at the end of *The Birth*

*of a Nation*, where the members of this racist organization are presented by D. W. Griffith in a positive perspective. This is where a relevant example is provided by the type of analysis practiced by Douglas Kellner (1995: 76) on films like *Top Gun*, which is considered by the author as an expression of the Reagan Era ideology, where war is cultivated by a kind of pleasant sensation related to militarism. Zielinski (1999: 72-74) provides a similar approach when he examines the development of film as a mass medium in the context of the growth of militarism and of technologies stemming from military research. Actually some of the most important concepts in cinema are taken from militaristic discourse, like shot or shooting (the frames), defined in relation to the firearms, especially the machine gun produced by Maxim, which was the mechanism which allowed later the "shooting" of more frames per second, thus of cinema. In fact, in the early history of cinema cameras were mounted directly on the weapons and one of the names of the camera was "shot gun" (fusil photographique), as Etienne Jules Marey indicated it. So movies are "deadly weapons", within the reach of the dominant institutions of socio-economic interest, while they are carrying an appetite for weapons and guns. Another suggestive example can be found in the Rambo series, where gratuitous shooting of people

As suggested by Jean-Louis Comolli in his classical Cahiers du Cinema (216/ 1969) study, at another level, even more important, any form of film production is political, since it belongs to an ideology which allows it to be manufactured in a certain way, the film stock belongs to capital, the capital is part of an economic structure, thus the product would be a representation of that ideological structure. It was Raymond Williams who identified three basic levels of ideology in any cultural product - the first, where ideology is a representation of the way of thinking of a social class; second, ideology is a set of false opinions, of illusory beliefs, propagated in order to maintain social status quo; third, ideology is a means to create social meanings. This final level of ideology formation can be used in film analysis, where we can follow the ideological discourse, which integrated most of the twentieth century's ideologies, not only Marxism, but also colonialism and anti-colonialism, gender studies,

feminism in particular, racism and racial or sexual exploitation, ecologist or New-Agist social theories. We can understand the general significance or the ideological content of any film by searching for its relevance to the society it belongs, or looking at the intended social purpose the movies address. As such, any film makes reference to a social or a cultural phenomenon, or, in the words of Sergey Eisenstein, any film plays a major role in shaping the social and ideological understanding of the community we are members of. Movies have become the dominant art of our century, where all other cultural manifestations are subject to its hegemonic pressure (to use the term Gramsci), since cinema appears to take over books (who become "written films"), comics and even computer games.

One possible answer comes from the critical theories, who see movies as expressions of the dominant ideologies of their time. The very fact that we treat movies with a critical detachment may prove beneficial to our interpretation, since it frees us from the "captivity" of the formal aspects of the cinematic world. The most important critical theories concerning cinema-making belong to the Frankfurt School, especially with authors like Adorno, Benjamin or Kracauer, for whom the film is a source for "vulgar" entertainment, whose extraction "low" lead to the undermining arts "high" aesthetic value. Mass culture has no "aura," as Benjamin says, it has become mimetic to the extreme, inauthentic and devoid of significance. As Adorno before, in his classical study *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Kracauer goes even further and argues that the film contributed to the overall superficiality of our contemporary culture and promoted a culture devoid of depth, and example being the dissolution of the German republic and Hitler's ascension to power in a society preoccupied by the visual phantasies of the new technology. We must see not only that cinema has a social mission, but the fact that it also helps us form a certain form of social identities. At this wider level of identity formation, as Althusser interpreted the definition Marx gave ideology - where ideology is, for Marx, an imaginary *bricolage*, a dream which is empty, put together from pieces of altered reality - this cinematic identity must be decoded as pure artificiality, a multi-layered illusion.

This is why films are ideological in the first place, because this ideology is a mixture of racism (as happens with Griffith's films, which were rightly complained that portrays blacks in a negative image), sexism (sexploitation films, where women and sexuality female viewers used to use men) or or a form of subjugation.

If there is always a double meaning of any movie, the explicit meaning, which is presented directly, and which any viewer can perceive immediately, and the implicit meaning, that which is not obvious at the first viewing, then the interpretation process must follow this separation. On one hand, we must identify the explicit signification which is constructed on a formal level, where concrete and specific elements are put into place by the director. The second is the residual level, which is no resulting from the creativity of the author, but from the political-economic pressures on the production itself. Of course, the main methodological question remains the same, as we had it from the very beginning of the discussion here: Can we attain objectivity, what is the use of film interpretations and, even more profoundly, can we analyze movies at all?

I consider that studying cinema by applying clear methodological guidelines provides the answers. One example derives from accepting the concept the cinema was linked with capitalist production and capitalism. A relevant example of treating these issue is extensively presented in my chapter “Peer to Peer Financing. A New Model for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Movie Making”, published in the proceedings volume of the *The Digital Generation* conference. Since today cinema represents the most important and dominant form of cultural production, and it has the highest attendance rate worldwide, compared to other forms of cultural entertainment, film making must be seen as a dominant instrument of generating cultural significations around the world. As suggested, cinema-making was influenced by the experience of the railways, where accelerated vision and the rebuilding of the world seen through frames, perceived as if in a window, became traits of an art dominated by technology (Kunzle 378). Some of the most important production practices in hollywood were rooted in the early capitalist

mode of production, that is they were not only based on the philosophy of a profit-making economy, but also on a labour style dominated by Fordism and Taylorism. Therefore, if movies are products created by means of labour in an assembly line model, where individual workers are part of a system where directors, actors, writers, photography directors, technicians and composers are the work force that toil together in order to produce a commodity that is more expensive than anything else in the world, then any changes in this structure is an indicator of cultural changes. The studio system, as factory style of organization, was illustrated by the work of G. W. Griffith, who managed to make huge profits out of a relatively small investment, and, using what the French called “la chaîne de montage” (Beller 2006), he kept each part of the production of a movie is separated from the whole, so the workers were alienated from their final product.

Another aspect is that films are the most expensive commodities produced by capitalism today, no other singular product involves more money and generates more revenues than the movies. On this level, it must be stated that the power of the movie industry in the United States began with the World War I, and it was actually about the same time when the US industry took the lead in global economy and politics. After WWI, the United States emerged as economic and cultural winners. While in 1914 the U.S. investments abroad were about \$5.0 billion, by 1919 U.S. investments abroad had risen to \$9.7 billion, with a positive balance between exports and imports to about \$6.4 billion. As Guy Debord indicated in his revolutionary “Society of the Spectacle”, modern culture is so much dominated by the visual media that even the visual storytelling created by a profit oriented society are impregnated by the logic of the spectacle. The Spectacle has become “Capital” and it is reproduced by the continuous accumulation of images, to the point that “it becomes an image” itself (Debord 1967). With the American film industry at the centre of this economic system based on this new type of technology which is generating profits by selling images, cinema-making is obeying the fundamental rationale of capitalism: to constantly expand, to reach wider markets, to target consumers as widely as possible.

Once the initial source is depleted (cinema-going and theatre tickets), the profit-making moves to other sources (cable tv, home video, then television networks). today, most revenues come from this multiplication of sources; video-games, clothing, fast-food advertising, merchandising and other offshoots to generate more profits. Even if capitalism has not changed fundamentally over the past century, since the emergence of the cinema industry, the spectacle of images as commodities has become the quintessential “Capital”. Another important element must be noted here; cinema, both as a mode of production and as a form of reception, is *fetishist* in and by itself. It was Georg Lukács who has taken even further the Marxist concept of alienation, by linking the commodity fetishism with the very process of alienation. In the cinematic/spectacle society, not only do we exchange real values with “false” images, but we are convinced that these values are deeply rooted in our everyday life. In this symbolic exchange the activity of the worker/consumer is never part of the production/ profit dynamics.

It was Jonathan Beller who took the argument of Debord even further, in his book about the cinematic mode of production. He demonstrated how the cinema took the industrial revolution and “projected it into bodies through the eye”, making it a part of the dominant mode of production of what it is today “post-industrial” capitalism. The cinematic mode of production is based on several traits, similar to those of capitalism: cinema enacts the circulation of economic value; cinema is a visual medium which under the structures of private property; it uses the body inside this visual economy based on the value of human attention (Beller 10). By means of massive production (hundreds of movies each year) and global circulation, the visual representations of Capitalism have become the very essence of capitalist ideology. Again, Beller follows the line of thought proposed by Guy Debord. Contemporary culture is a society oriented towards visual media, this in turn allows a commodification of significations (in cinema, advertising, and television alike), which is then linked to the “thinking” of capitalism, manifested in its signs. So, if the world’s most important source of visual storytelling was



generated, since the 1910s, by the Hollywood studios (Bordwell 2008: 4), then this mode of production must be linked with a type of narrative specific to Hollywoodian productions. As David Bordwell showed in his seminal book on Hollywood's storytelling, there are a couple of specific elements, like fast-paced action and an increase of special-effects, the creation a fantastic worlds, with the maintaining of narrative coherence intact that would characterize this classical form of storytelling and of subjectivity. These traits are indicators for the relationship between the mode of production and the content generated by this mode of production.

My particular part in this type of research focused on a hypothesis first introduced by Michael Bauwens, a Belgian theorist who founded the P2P Foundation (<http://p2pfoundation.net/>). In this line of thinking we must consider how the new internet based modes of production will end up by transforming our entire society, together with the dominant modes of production. The argument is that there is a process leading to what Bauwens calls the "P2P political economy", and this new political economy, based on P2P platforms will enable "a third mode of production" and "a third mode of property". Following the assumptions of the critical theorists mentioned above, I analyzed the consequences of these changes in terms of cinema narratives. Movements like "participatory cinema", or the collaborative film productions, developed around sites like Wreck-a-Movie, Write Our Movie, Open Source Cinema, are generating communities involved in new ways of cinema production processes. Using examples from recent movies, like Iron Sky, Cosmonauts, or RIP!, which were developed on the revolutionary principle of using the Internet resources for film production, I suggested that these collaborative production modes will involve several changes at the level of content. By collaborative participation in drafting scenarios, by peer involvement in the development of CG, by volunteering for various parts of video production and finally in film financing we are witnessing the transformation of the narratives themselves. The transition from the classical Hollywood narratives, based on an active, goal-oriented protagonist who confronts various obstacles in a quest to

attain certain objectives, to genre based (and limited) storytelling structure towards the P2P funded narratives which are dialogue based, made possible by the content (not only production) transformation from the viewers. This in turn will bring a new form of authenticity in the storytelling, these new narratives have women heroes or male heroes who do not fit in the “power structures” of the capitalist society and are including strong humanist values.

#### II. 8. 4. Analysis of myth-making in film-making.

As I tried to argue in my study *Mythology Amalgamated. The Transformation of the Mythological and the Re-appropriation of Myths in Contemporary Cinema*, published in *Ekphrasis. Images, Theatre, Cinema, Media* (2/2013), myth-making plays an important role in cinema making and it should be an integral part in film studies. When dealing with myths in cinema the first perspective the link between films depicting the Greco-Roman heritage and classical myths. Called neo-mythologism (Winkler 2001), this is the way in which the mythological cinema becomes a visual reproduction of the supernatural. There is a new-mythologization of the ancient stories which in turn is part of the deep need of humanity for the sacredness of myths. As a matter of fact the history of the human culture offers many examples where the visual and the mythical are mixed. Myth-making appears in cinema often as figures from classical mythology: mermaids, monsters or demigods of the ancient world. Some variations are continued forms of other folk-tale narratives, like medieval stories, pre-modern fairy-tales and or ancient legends. The question is how do we analyze movies if we were to begin with this understanding of the profound role played by mythologies? One approach is to use mythological narratives as interpretative tools for understanding the inner processes of the movies. By analyzing the effects of mythology in cinema we can, simultaneously have a glimpse of the functioning of ideologies. This is what I tried to prove in my paper *The „Double Mirror” in James Cameron's Avatar* –

*Philosophy, Ecology, Ideology and Ontology on Pandora*, published in Ekphrasis 1/ 2009. The main idea of this work was to take a critical stand against the use of eco-myths in films today. Using the concept the “double mirror” put forward by Northrop Frye, as a symbolic interpretation form, I intended to show how character development and narrativity follow some of the key mythological oppositions, transparent in the movie, which are not only the relationship between human and aliens, but also those of mind over matter, nature versus technology and power against community.

These bindings of the opposites, as it was interpreted by structuralists like Lévi-Strauss (1963) are an intrinsic part of the myth-making processes and interpretation. Without going too deep into the debate about the structuralist interpretation of myths, we must say that this is a perspective using the binary oppositions as the basis for understanding all primitive religious thinking. The oppositions divine-human, male-female, cooked-raw, hot-cold are series of divisions which are, in turn, generating symbolic meaning. Many myths use this discursive opposition and the binary contrast in order to finally manifest as a structural unity, more so since these very oppositions can be later used as tools for interpreting the mythological narratives. These binary transformations are indicators for the mental patterns of humanity. Thus, by simply following the permutations of these binary codes, the structuralists are identifying the inner essences of culture and social imaginaries (Levi-Strauss 1963: 16). In my myth analysis of films I often used this interpretation practice. For instance, when discussing James Cameron's *Avatar* there are clear indications that the narratives of the movie are based on other accessible storytelling structures. The story of Jake Sully, a former marine, now paraplegic, whose twin brother unexpectedly died and left him to take his place in controlling an “avatar” of a being having a mixed DNA – belonging to this dead brother and a creature belonging to the Na’vi culture on Pandora – falls in love, transforms himself, and ends up saving the entire planet is part of the traditional American narratives, going back to Fenimore Cooper. Movies like Kevin Costner’s “Dancing with the Wolves”, where the white men abandon their own identity for the sake of love or

*Little Big Man* (1970), where the massacre of the Sioux nation becomes the vengeance of the Omatcaya against the (mostly) white men aggression on Pandora, or the landscapes in *The Horse Whisperer* (1998), make *Avatar* a revamped story with a touch of 3D extravaganza, meant to bring into action the nostalgia for a simpler way of life. A movie like *Avatar* is clearly using mythology, since from the very moment we arrive on the alien planetoid we find out it is called Pandora, a magical reference from the very beginning of the Western culture. Another moment is when the tribe is “praying” to Eywa, and Jake Sully compares the situation on Earth, where humans have “killed their mother” with that on Pandora. Pandora (and its Mother Goddess, Eywa) is a reversed reference to Gaia, the Mother-Goddess of Terra, this being even more powerful since in Greek mythological representations the iconography of Gaia is indistinguishable from that of Pandora. If within human mythology Pandora is the reverse of Gaia, in the Pandoran mythology the planet of the Na’vi is nothing but the reverse of that from Earth. It is not by chance that the planet in the Alfa Centauri system, around which Pandora gravitates, is called Polyphemus. For in Cameron’s works the multiple links with multiple and different mythologies is an artistic statement. The connection here is clear and explicit: Pandora, the wife of Prometheus’ brother Epimetheus, who has released suffering into the human world, becomes now an entity that is founded on peace, interior balance, natural equilibrium and love. On the other hand Polyphemus, the cyclops killed by Odysseus, governs a planetary system dominated not by deceit and rational deception, as the hero from Ithaca has put it into action, but an universe guided by the total openness between the groups and living beings there. In a word, Pandora is everything Earth is not, and, by consequence, the world we enter by magic is a complete reversal, a mirror replica of our own world. This is the mirroring of mythology which allows us to interpret the film. Another reference at hand, besides that of the earliest Greek mythology, is the myth of the Lost Paradise. Pandora is nothing but an utopian paradise, a recurrent myth which points to the Edenic nature this CGI Garden in another planetary system. Again, the connotations are multiple; it can also be

Samsara, the absolute illusory reality in Buddhism transformed by 3D technology; it can be the Paradise found of the Europeans finding the Americas.

For other authors (Singer 2008) film as myth-making is nothing but an integral part of the Western civilization's permeability to mythological stories, like The Garden of Eden, or the variations of the Pygmalion myth, The Beauty and The Beast or Orpheus stories. By cataloging the manifestations of various tropes we can have an indicator of the process of mythological re-enactment. Also, the interest for myth and mythology in cinema can be linked to the Victorian fascination with classical art and narratives. This interest grew with the development of mass produced images and is now part of our popular culture (Williams 2013). Clearly, the contemporary media function as instruments of myth-making and an important path by which myths come into the popular culture is by their modernization through cartoons, movies and other graphic forms of storytelling. As Janet Wasko showed it, Walt Disney opened the path for the re-appropriation of old narratives (Wasko 2001). As noted by many other authors, almost all the Disney stories (also those which are not directly taken from the Grimm brother's repertory) are at a certain level re-enactments of old myths, most of them referring directly to the Greek mythology. Snow White is nothing but Persephone re-designed (with Demeter as Evil Mother), or Hercules who is a simplified version of the ancient hero.

In my paper *Cinematic mixology, some critical corroborations. Connections, Convergences, Combinations and Commutations in Contemporary Culture*, published in *Caietele Echinox*, 26/ 2014 I took the argument further and questioned the way recent Hollywood cinema is re-appropriating classical myths. Using *Thor: The Dark World* (2013), as example, I discussed the movie created by Alan Taylor (director of a couple of episodes from *Games of Thrones*, among other TV series) within the logic of mythological integrations. This film, which begins with the conflict between the Dark Elves, who are misdealing with dark matter, named Aether, and the Norse Gods. Malekith, the leader of the malevolent Elves is defeated by Bor, the grandfather of Thor, in a galactic war fought with futuristic

weapons, is a futuristic illusion where the Nordic Gods manage to overcome with swords and hammers plasma guns and laser canons. In *Thor* the Galactic destruction put into place by the Elves looks strangely enough like that in other steam-punk movies, like *Riddick (2013)*, *Pitch Black (2000)* and *The Chronicles of Riddick (2004)*, with a mythological mixup combining apocalyptic conflicts (nothing more than a re-mixing of movies like *2012*) and Aryan legends (with the blond gods of Asgard overlooking humanity from afar and the dark haired Loki opposing his positive brother). More relevantly, the central plot of *Thor 2* is centered around a Mayaesque prophecy, called “the convergence”. The Nine Realms (Muspelheim, Alfheim, Vanaheim, Asgard, Midgard, Jotunheim, Nidavellir, Svartalfheim and Niflheim), all fictional regions of Yggdrasil, are on the brink of converging for the first time in 5.000 years. Just like in the Maya apocalyptic prophecy, this convergence of different worlds opens the portals of the realms, is making possible the crossing from one universe into another. Here the cross-mixing by convergence becomes one of the most important elements in the junkyard of representations. Just as the converging world of Yggdrasil allow the reunion of Nordic gods with humans and dark elves, the mythological convergence allows the travel of meanings through separate worlds of significations. Actually the entire universe of this modernized Asgard represents a convergence of imaginaries, based on the coexistence of the weird, the mechanical and the witchcraft, followed by the re-mixing of contents from other narratives. The transformation of the red-bearded god from Norse mythology into a blond, beauty pageant contestant follows the logic of mixing of modern technology and ancient mythology.

The structures of the city of Asgard and all the uncertain supernatural beings from the Scandinavian mythology are highly technological, at the edges of steam punk. Some authors have seen in the steam-punk a philosophy of re-using a reaction to the disposable culture of consumerism. Following Ashurst and Powel (2012), steampunk is an aesthetic form using a blend of mechanic-magical hybridity, sometimes called techno-gothic. Combining the industrial with the artisanal, the

manufactured with available antiques, steampunk sees scrap as a vital energy, borrowing and re-mixing as key mode of expression. The Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki, in one of the most remarkable examples of this re-using of elements, found in *Spirited Away*, puts forward the logic of steampunk philosophy in the following key phrase, which describes this mindset: “Yubaba rules others by stealing their names”. The “theft” instrumented by steampunk philosophy is based on a timeless conjunction of elements, where the blending of discarded elements with artifacts from the past and modern scientific discoveries allows the creation of a completely new universe. Steampunk, as a science fiction sub-genre which was born in the 80's, is quintessentially a primary form of mashup culture. The principle of steampunk is blending by creating the inexistent from existing realities with impossible antiquities. The collapsing of time, as we historically know it, its transformation into a new, bizarre temporality is also a characteristic of the steam-punk melange. Mixing the Victorian era with medieval times, post-apocalyptic technology and primitive religiousness, this new time is neither past, nor future, nor present, albeit a mixture of time frames put together. We no longer experience linear time frame, this would explain why H.G. Wells’s “Time Machine” has long been a model for the apparition of a “punk time”. Punk time is a time frame beyond anachronism and futuristic manifestations. The same happens in *Thor*, where mythological time (actions for Norse legends) coexist with a science-fiction time and with the real time of humanity, in a total convergence of space and time.

As a conclusion we can describe these new hybrid representations as functioning completely different from the “rhizomatic” chains of significations proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in their classical study on postmodern mixing (1980/ 1987: 27). The incompatibility of elements, which is provided by the rhizomatic connecting, is still functioning within a semiotic chain (Deleuze and Guattari 7-8), while the mangle-mangled mythologies we analyzed, with their “aethereal qualities”, refuse any unity of significations. Contemporary culture functions within an illogical development of combinations, connections, convergences and commutations, defying any structural interpretations.

Mixing science, magic, medieval technologies and science-fiction “knowledge”, re-mixing mythology with occultism, vampires, undead and aliens, everything turns into a vast melange of electricity and occultism. Something which began as the trademark of Romanticism, with Mary Shelley's “Frankenstein”, has led towards a total Frankensteinization of our imaginaries.

#### II. 8. 5. Film studies, mythology, intertextuality and adaptation

There was a strong disdain for cinema studies in academia, one which most often comes from the disdain of the “literary critics” towards the art of cinema. Roland Barthes, the famous French literary theoretician, who on several occasions confessed (and here the argument comes from his interview with Jacques Rivette and Michel Delahaye in 1963) that he is not going very often to the movies, and, anyways, that he does not see a movie more than “once a week”. Even so, he was supporting some of the most radical positions regarding the interpretation of cinematic products. For Barthes film cannot be “talked about” because this would mean the “death” of its profound significance. In his seminal article entitled “The third sense,” the French critic blatantly says that the cinematic significance cannot be explained, it always remains inside the film. If filmic significations begin only when the language ceases, and when speaking about a movie stops, then when we can not say anything after we watched a movie, because we understood its significance at the time of the “hypnotic” reception. Many writers, starting with Baudelaire, considered the “technologies of photography” as technical means that brought about a corruption of the arts. Others were even more radical, as for Leo Tolstoy the cinema was an “attack” on literature and its methods. Even film critics, like André Bazin, have placed the evolution of the cinema at the moment of the “decadence of literature”. Are movies less than literature or is literature a form of the “high-brow” cinema?

I consider these questions as extremely important, and this is why another important direction of



my research in films studies was to discuss the complex relationship between literature and cinema. There is a lifelong “love and hate affair” between writers and film makers, and authors like J. D. Salinger and Gabriel García Márquez have expressed this difficult dynamics between the motion picture industry and literature. In tackle this issue in two of my research projects, the paper: “About the cinematic adaptation of *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Notes on Cinema and Literature”, published in *Caietele Echinox*, 14/ 2008 and “Adapting Shakespeare's Adaptations. Image, content and narrative problems (and solutions) in Shakespeare's adaptations, a study case on *Romeo and Juliet*”, published in *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai, Dramatica*, Vol. 54 Issue 2/ 2009.

“About the cinematic adaptation of *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Notes on Cinema and Literature” discusses the filmed version of *Love in the Time of Cholera* and the problems that emerged from the production, distribution and reception of this particular movie. One central hypothesis of this article is that the cinema and magic realism cannot come together since the main problem of any director would be the transforming a “purely” literary work into a “purely” cinematic production. One of the problems of the theatrical representation of *Love in the Time of Cholera* was identified early by the critics. For example *The Los Angeles Times* movie critic, Carina Chocano, has described the efforts of the producers as “an enormously daunting task to adapt a book at once so sweeping and internal, so swooningly romantic and philosophical”. This is one of the central problems facing literature turned into cinema: most of the times the dramatic setting of the book does not evade the melodramatic component of movie making. García Márquez had the possibility to built more than just a love chronicle that covers both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, he has developed an entangled narrative structure that brings together literary myths (such as the myth of Don Juan, the myth of eternal love), social epic (the background of the love between Florentino and Fermina is one of the most difficult in Latin America) and everyday life – in one word, creating a masterpiece of literary magic realism. And cinema can not simply follow this path since its “natural elements” are out of place

if a literary dependency develops with the original text. Here a major problem of cinema is how to deal with the passing of time, in this case the aging of characters. A poor treatment of time would result of a sort of cinematographic “sketch”, the fact that the 51 years, nine months, and four days that the main character famously waited in the novel for his true love to depicted by means of make-up and facial transformations make the entire work simply not credible.

While analyzing the problem of adaptation in the case of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, I wanted to underline an intricate relationship between the magic realism in literature and the magic of reality in cinema. Both the “poetry of cinema” and the poetics of literature, where magic realist literature is even more relevant, offer us the possibility of “writing on the imaginary”, they can be both perceived as related ways of painting within the imaginary world of our brains.

In “Adapting Shakespeare's Adaptations. Image, content and narrative problems (and solutions) in Shakespeare's adaptations, a study case on Romeo and Juliet”, published in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Dramatica*, Vol. 54 Issue 2/ 2009, I tackled with the problems of the intertextual nature of the cinematic. Using Shakespeare's works I was following the terminology used by Linda Hutcheon, who indicated that there is enough proof to say that Shakespeare creates a “multilaminated” (Hutcheon, 21) narrative assembly, where he integrates recognizable elements from other works in order to obtain a new medium, a new form of expression. And, as Douglas Brode pinpointed very clearly this concept, when we compare the movie director and the writer we get the same fundamental approach to the source text. “The director perceived himself not as interpreter of Shakespeare, akin to a live-theater director, but as an auteur: the primary artist, freely adapting the play to his own medium, much as Shakespeare felt free to transform a preexisting Italian *novelle* into an Elizabethan play—taking from the tale what he needed, shaping it as he saw fit, and discarding all else” (Brode, 2001: 50). No matter what levels of appropriation we identify in the process of adaptation - for instance Andrew described a typology of adaptation based on the following triad: borrowing, intersection, transformation and for

Linda Hutcheon there are three elements of adaptation, adaptations are recognizable transpositions of a given work or works, a creative and interpreting process by which a work is salvaged or appropriated, and an intertextual involvement with the original work – adaptation has a profound cultural role to play. This is where concepts like bricolage, intertextuality, multiple usage of elements from other sources become interpretation tools not only for the Shakespearean theater, but also from its cinematic representation.

Following this line of thought and coupling it with one of the simplest definitions of cinema adaptation entails any form of transformation occurring to a “source text” that is turned into a motion picture, and we can use the process of adapting from literature to movie as tool for cinematic interpretation.

There are two important levels are to be discussed here. One is that of the fidelity between the source and the secondary work. The second is the ability of the secondary author to produce a work that is aesthetically autonomous. Another element to be taken into consideration is the technical nature of the medium. Literary fiction and cinematic fiction are two fundamentally different artistic media. Fidelity to a literary source is hard to maintain when the fictional work is adapted to the screen (Gene D. Phillips, 1998: 151). It is relevant that the type of adaptation Zeffirelli puts into place can easily be fitted in the category described by Robert Stam și Alessandra Raengo under the name of *logophilia*, or “verbal valorization” of the source text. This in itself encumbers the fact that the second author, here the cinema director, accepts and reveres the existence of a unique and privileged “Text”, that is the work of Shakespeare, one that prevails and precedes in all aspects the cinematographic “text”, implicitly accepting an inferior stance. For in this approach, the “sacral” nature of literature makes the adaptation discourse dominated by a silent acceptance of the fact that there is a given axiomatic “superiority of literature over movies” (Stam și Raengo, 2005: 4).

Zeffirelli himself recognized that he was influenced by the treatment of Shakespeare via *West*

*Side Story* (1961). The development in *West Side Story* anticipates an important direction for the Shakespearean adaptations. Again, using the terminology of Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo who see the relationship between literature and cinema in terms of *anteriority* and *seniority*, where the adaptation process is hindered by the self assumed idea that “older arts are necessarily better” ones, with the apparition of *West Side Story* there was a source sources of hostility between cinema and literature. This *dichotomous thinking*, which for Stam and Raengo presumes a bitter rivalry between film and literature produces the *the myth of facility*, which wrongly assumes that films are “easy to make and suspectly pleasurable to watch”; this dichotomy assumes that cinema vulgarizes and dumbs down literature even uses literature in a certain type of *parasitism* that sucks out the vitality of their literary hosts.

Another relevant example comes from the version created by Baz Luhrman for the story of the Verona lovers, *Romeo + Juliet* (2000), known also as "MTV Shakespeare". Luhrman's movie was in a way a natural continuation of *West Side Story*. The democratization of the story and the modernization of the cinematic narrative used for Shakespeare's play makes out of *Romeo + Juliet* and example of how “conservative” approaches to the Bard can be rejected and how a new historical and cultural relevance can be provided.

More examples which provide illustrations for this dynamics are *Romeo Must Die*, (2000) a karate version of Shakespeare's hero, and *Chicken Rice War* (2000) a Singapore film from the director Cheah Chee Kong, both an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* and of Baz Luhrmann's film and several manga animations were developed in the years that followed *Romeo+Juliet*. *Romeo Must Die* is a modern day kung fu action movie, where Jet Li plays Romeo and hip-hop singer, Aaliyah Haughton plays Juliet. Chinese mafia replaces the Capulets and American mobsters replace the Montagues and this conflict is resolved by kung fu action. This superficial treatment of the story can be found in *Chicken Rice War*, for example, where the two feuding families have chicken-rice stands in Singapore

and are fiercely fighting for customers and for whose chicken rice is best. Premiered in 2007 in Japan, *Romeo x Juliet* was a manga series for television that was based on Shakespeare's characters, taking place in a fantastical aeropolis of Neo Verona. Reiko Yoshida created a universe parallel to that of Shakespeare, but nonetheless viable and submerged into the anime culture. The animated series was followed by comics and other related materials, pushing the process of Shakespeare adaptation into the future.

Following this line of thought, one of the possible answers to the problem of literature and cinema is that the literary is incompatible with cinema. On the other hand, as Márquez described cinema, movies are “the most important discovery of our world” and many writers were involved in cinema production, even in directing and screenplay writing. One of the major divides comes from the dismissive role of the writer in the movie industry. While Márquez considers that “cinema was a more complete means of expression than literature”, the question remains intact – in what respect does cinema take over literature's mechanisms and how does fiction come into place in this new medium. This is one of the main issues in literary adaptations, and most of all in those productions which maintain a too close a connection to the “literal” meaning of the book, and by this it does not give space to any of the “natural elements” of cinema to come into place. This question was treated by Bazin from the stand-point of the destination of movies, its effectiveness of message and meaning production. When we ask, with Bazin, “what is Cinema”, we look for the answers in the spectator. Bazin says that cinema has a “digest” nature, it provides the viewers with a narrative that is completely different from that of literature, because it is designed for the spectator and not for the reader.

Cinematic narrative deals more with the ability to give the spectator a freedom within reality and less with the intricate construction of a multi-layered narrative. This implicit oversimplification does not mean a reduction of complexity, on the contrary. The mechanisms of cinematographic art are adjacent to the other arts in the sense that – as it is for Bazin – cinema is realistic in its very nature and

the fact that the camera is mediating this reality brings forward an objective reality. And, going back to the concept of magic realism, while in literary terms, myth and reality can be inseparable, writing in itself being an elaborate process of continuous fictionalisation, cinematic mythology is making mythology out of the very reality.

Another important point, which I presented in the lecture offered as Guest Speaker at World and Comparative Literature Conference, “Literary Imaginary and the Poetics of Truth”, ASU College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Fulton Center, Arizona State University, SUA, February 2012: “*Reading Literature through Cinematic Devices: Peter Esterhazy*, is the mutually advantageous relationship between cinema and literature. As I developed the subject in my conference, the dynamics between literature and cinema is extremely complex. Focusing on the complementarity of the two apparently contradictory arts, my hypothesis was that cinema can be used as a tool by which we can have access to levels of understanding literature which are otherwise inaccessible.

Even if literary theoreticians like Rene Wellek and Austin Warren denounce any possibility of an inter-art adaptation, that is the possibility of the "literal metamorphosis" of poetry into sculpture, or of novel into painting, the novelization of cinema (the apparition of poor quality literature that transmits the film into novel and the other way around), are manifestation not only of the marketization of literature, by such literary productions can be used at a deeper level.

Following the arguments developed by Dennis Cutchins, Laurence Raw and James M. Welsh in their Introduction to the compendium *The Pedagogy of Adaptation* (2010), cinematic adaptations can be used in the teaching environment in an extremely wide range of objectives. When using an adaptation in the teaching environment the adaptation is an early approach to texts, it even a trope of understanding the literary. On the other hand adaptation can be put in the context of guided viewing and reading, that is having access to multiple possible interpretations. More so, adaptation can be used in both ways, discussing the possible adaptation of movies to literature could be another type of

understanding. The cinematic as learning experience should not be limited to producing treatments, scripts or storyboards, it could also favor collaborative learning, by having students write “for the cinematic”. Students can use movies to produce interpretations which are more engaging and visually pleasant, can learn new taxonomies, belonging to another "language", that is the cinematic language (angles, shots) and can explore many sides of the intentionality of the authors, by “reading” the mutations from the literary to the cinematic. Last, but not least, using cinematic examples can provide access to contexts like the financial social and historical background of literary stories.

#### II. 8. 6. Psychoanalysis, Segmentation and Interpretation in Cinema Studies

Roland Barthes, who refused any the interpretation of movies as productions of significations, also claimed that movies can be analyzed because they are "texts". This textualist interpretation practice, which involves decoding a film by splitting it into the main components, deals with the specific parts of the movie while refusing the understanding the whole product. The films are used as “excerpts”, which may be cited as any literary critic makes quotations from a book. The only way we can read a movie is by using the "frames" as the minimal units of interpretation. A shot, divided into 24 frames per second, is the structural foundation for any film analysis. “Segment analysis" becomes, for critics like Christian Metz, the foundation for any interpretation. Every unit of a movie, which is not interrupted by any changes in narrative or cinematic punctuation becomes an autonomous source of meaning and can be interpreted. As for Barthes, a film can be analyzed because it is "text" and the textualist/ interpretative "cutting” of the cinematic involves decoding all the parts by the individual components. The problems arise precisely from the impossibility of "citation" of the features in a film, the movie excerpts may not be cited as the literary critic does with quotations from the book. If this technique is practiced as such, it can only show a formal level of the cinematic meaning production.

Another possible approach, which I considered as relevant for my research, was to join scene segmentation with psychoanalysis. There is a long lasting psychoanalytical “lineage” in film interpretation, which is taking us from Sigmund Freud, to Jacques Lacan, and from Christian Metz to Stephen Heath. This type of movie interpretation is based on a fundamental principle, a deep connection between cinema and dreaming: there is an inescapable desire to explain why we love moving images, to develop a *Bildersprache* which can tell us about the meanings of what we see. This is why cinema was defined by many film theorists in a *psychoanalytic sense* (Metz 1982); as an art that stimulate and satisfy our deepest desires, a cultural practice deeply rooted in our pleasurable and disgusting attraction with movies. Movies are fundamentally "mechanisms of desire" and by desire I mean the central concept exploited by psychoanalytic theory. We are simultaneously unable to reach our deep desires, which forces us to resort to representations of the repressed desires. Thus, in terms of imaginary representations, movies are images transformed and altered, manifestations of unconfessed desires.

As Sigmund Freud, who addressed the problems of dreaming in a scientific way, explained it, desires are transferred, by means of their subconscious formation and manifestation, through images, from our daily experiences into the fantasy world of our mind (Freud 1900). Even if psychoanalysis as a technique was used to understand and interpret the mechanisms of image formation in our subconscious, and extracting significations from what is hidden in our psyche and imaginary, its mechanisms are practical in almost all arts, and especially cinema. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which was first published in 1900, about the same time the first public representations of movies, was one of the earliest efforts in the direction of explaining the formation of images in our minds. Freud defined dreams as hallucinatory fulfillments of irrational desires, produced within the projection room of our minds, where we use visual materials from our everyday life in a phantasm-like way. Freud made a clear distinction between latent and manifest expressions of experiences in the dream-work, and



considered that the unconscious fulfills our wishes coming from the daily experiences in a strange way, by dreaming.

Cinema and psychoanalysis share a similar dream-language. The cinematic language and dreaming are deeply connected. Fantasy formation and the construction of imaginary worlds are part of the history of moviemaking. Movies work as dreams from the beginning, and today, due to computer generated images, virtual reality and other technological innovations, we can see illusionary worlds which compete with our most fantastic dreams. In the darkness of the cinema theatre we are witnessing the integration of myths, fairy tales dream-like images. Today, more than ever, the moviemaking industry is properly named as a “dream factory”. Sleeping, dreaming and the technologies of imagination were deeply connected with the process of moviemaking. But can we use psychoanalysis as an interpretative instrument?

Answering this question was the main goal of my paper Cyber(psycho-punk)analysis. Interpreting a scene in Christopher Nolan’s *Inception*, published in *Caietele Echinox* 20/ 2011 (p. 206 – 219). I found that Christopher Nolan’s *Inception*, considered by some as an expression of cyberpunk cinema, is relevant for the uses of psychoanalytic theory in film studies. One approach comes from the French structuralists, who were the first to make use of the psychoanalytical instruments and concepts in order to explain the functioning of the cinematic language. In *Cahiers du cinéma*, issue 223 in 1970, we have one of the earliest examples of how psychoanalysis can be practiced as a methodology for film interpretation. Using John Ford’s movie *Young Abe Lincoln* (Ford 1939) the French structuralists explained the film by using Freud's notions developed in the Oedipus complex. Later Thierry Kuntzel (*Communications* 1975) made use of the Freudian concepts to discuss the manifestations of the unconscious in movies when he analyzed *The Most Dangerous Game* (E. B. Shoedsack and I. Pichel, 1932). Kuntzel, together with Bellour, and Metz continued their efforts in this direction, focusing on explaining how films are ways by which we fulfill our unconscious desires, by means of identifying

with the actions and characters on the screen.

Among the film studies pioneers who were using psychoanalysis Christian Metz suggested a very important dynamics between cinema and psychoanalysis. (Metz 1982). Metz used Freud's theory in order to explain the functioning of cinema itself from the standpoint of the psychoanalyst who dissects the manifestations in the dreams in order to explain the deeper significations. In my research I used his technique of segmentation, a method described by Christian Metz in his classical work on film and psychoanalysis (Metz 1982). By using the syntagmatic interpretation elaborated by the French theorist, that is we can use a segment from a movie in order to characterize the entire structure of the film, comes from Freud's suggestion to use segments of dreams in order to explain entire structures of the formation of our mental world and imaginary (Freud 1900).

The second methodological standpoint is provided by Jacques Rivette, who also described moviemaking as a form of projection in the dark, similar to what we do in the dream-work. Movies do "the same things as dreams" (Rivette in Rosenbaum 1977), and, as Rivette suggested in the interview he made with John Hugues ("The Director as Psychoanalyst"), the director of a movie must be seen as "secretly involved in levels of dream and fantasy". Rivette suggested that we must see the director as "a kind of psychoanalyst".

Using these key hypothesis I was trying to identify the psychoanalytical structures in Christopher Nolan's *Inception* and these elements are representative for the role of the director as analyst of dreams. My contention was that, following Freud's definition of the psyche divided between the Id, the Ego and the Superego, we can follow exactly these types of "agencies" at work in this film. For illustration, I am interpreting the scene which starts 54 minutes into the film and lasts for six minutes. It begins when Ariadne "projects" herself into the dream of Dominic and it is relevant that the sequence is placed at the very centre of the movie, after this the entire plot develops into the action style narrative (in itself dreamlike, but at the level of manifest content). I consider this one of the most

suggestive sequences in the movie because, in terms of psychoanalytical interpretation, this is the key to the entire narrative. Dominic's climbing and descending on the various floors of his own subconscious, where he faces several repressed emotions, some manifest, some latent, some positive, some aggressive, some on the upper level and others on the underground, where the monsters of his own guild reside, is deeply rooted in the Freudian concept of the psyche. This was expressed clearly in Freud's theory of the mind, as composed by the Id, the Ego and the Super-ego – in Freud's terms “das Es,” “das Ich,” and “das Über-Ich” (Freud 1923). This is one of the most important definitions of mental formation in the classical theory of psychoanalysis, and defines three levels of our mind, where the unconscious is just one of the manifestations of the Id, while instincts and libido (together with other repressed materials) are other manifestations of its existence.

In even simpler terms, following the formula Arthur Asa Berger applied, the Freudian interpretation can be transferred on the main characters of any movie, as it is the case with *Star Trek*, where Captain Kirk can be described as the Super-ego (since he is always the manifestation of duty and control, Spock as the Ego (belonging to the Real and the Reasonable) and McCoy being a manifestation of the Id (as encouraging the emotional side of Kirk). Yet, while Berger notices that these components of the psyche operate as meaning formations outside the creative process (Berger 2000), I consider that these attributes are intricately connected with the sublimation process of the artistic work. Ariadne, the girl who became Dominic's apprentice/ guide, is the manifestation of the Super-ego. She enters the elevator, which starts at the 8th floor of the main building in Cobb's dream and goes up to the 9th, yet in a paradoxical way the lift is descending, and Ariadne stops at level of the cabin of Dom and Mal, and there she witnesses them standing by each other, re-refreshing their shared existence in the imaginary world. This is the first explicit reference to what Freud has identified as the relationship between the elements of our mind, the original identity of the Id and the Ego (Freud 1937). The Id and the Ego (Mal and Dominic) are peacefully coexisting until the outside intervention of Ariadne, as the

Super-ego. Ariadne functions here in a similar way the analyst operates inside the therapeutic effort, and even the camera is doing this identification, she sees them from a subjective perspective, allowing us as spectators to connect to her intervention. As Super-ego, Ariadne forces the Ego into appropriating those parts of the self that were conquered by the Id, so that it will be able to function normally. Actually this is the very problem Dominic faces. Once he is in the dream of a victim, his own Id (as Mal) appears on the scene and destroys his efforts to extract information. Once Ariadne finds out about Mal, she goes together with Dom into the repressed memory of his own past.

In the second movement of the sequence Dominic realizes that Ariadne is watching him and Mal, an outside observer that sees the unseeable. As Dominic moves towards Ariadne the camera changes position, we observe Dom from the point-of-view of Mal. He realizes that the presence of an outsider poses a threat to his hidden dreaming, so takes her to the 12th floor, the top floor of his own psyche. There, at the top of his psyche, is a solar beach near a sea, where Mal is with their two children are peacefully playing. This is the highest level of consciousness, where the Id is totally tamed and under control, fully exposed to the viewing of the Super-ego. Then Dominic takes Ariadne again to the inferior floor, but forbids her to push the “B” sign on the lift list, meaning the basement, that is the place where the most hidden aspects of the psyche are hidden. As we will later understand, this is where the Id dwells. The intermediate level is manifested in the form of trauma, where the two children live, where the guilt of abandoning them has formed. Having access to memories that are not supposed to be shared makes Ariadne run away in the elevator, as the Super-ego does not want to cope with the pain of the Ego and does not accept traumatic experiences as being real. In the elevator she pushes the “basement” button and reaches the lowest level, where the Id is. In terms of *mise-en-scène* this is the place where the death of Mal took place, where the violent nature of the psyche manifested. The meeting between the two women, between the Id and the Super-ego, between the subconscious and the conscious, the repressed and the innocent is described in terms of the classical Oedipal episode. Mal

behaves like the Sphinx when he meets the son of Laius, telling Ariadne a “riddle”: “You are waiting for a train that will take you far away, you know where you hope this train will take you, but you don’t know for sure, but it doesn’t matter”. When Ariadne says that she’s trying to understand, Mal moves against her, trying to kill the intruder. This is obviously a clear manifestation of the subconscious that attacks any intruder (the analyst) who wants to bring change, who separates the Ego and the Id, and it is the expression of the deeply violent nature of the Id. This libidinal/ Thanatic subconscious, who is now violently attacking Ariadne, has already stabbed the girl, when Dominic took her to a bridge in the beginning of the movie. Mal comes forward abruptly and stabs Ariadne, waking her from the dream, a clear manifestation of the destructive instincts that dominate the Id.

Unlike her first encounter with Ariadne, now Mal behaves like a hysteric woman, an clear expression of the Id as furious energy that scares off any reason. As Ariadne and Dom leave, the camera moves into a view that presents Mal from a high angle, putting her into the perspective of a captive beast. It becomes explicit why Mal is the source of anxiety for Dom, just as the Id is provoking the anxieties the Ego cannot face and process (Freud 1926), she becomes the expression of the inability of the subconscious to discern between reality and fantasy, between desires and actual life, thus trapping the Ego into a traumatic, repetitive behavior. Also, that fact that Mal lives in the “basement” of Dominic’s subconscious, similarly with the repressed instincts in the Id, is turned into a significant structure when Dom comes to save Ariadne from the furious attack of Mal (as the violent Id) and he is blocking her using the elevator doors, thus using the barrages of the psyche protecting the self from the impossibility of the Id and the Ego to live together. Here it is clear that Ariadne is the expression of the Super-ego, the young girl helping Dominic to recover from losing the grasp between real and illusion. Just as Ariadne in the Greek myth saved Theseus from the Minotaur, the beastly manifestation of the animal drives, the young architect in the movie saves Dominic from his own libido, from the drive of Death provided by the Eros.

What is relevant in this type of sequence analysis is the fact it provides a key to understand and interpret cinema beyond the apparently linear and action-based part of its production. It is here that Nolan puts forward more than an action film, but also profound philosophical issues, ideas and frames of mind which are beyond the sheer “cinematic pleasure”.

## II. 9. The multiple-method technique in understanding the contemporary Romanian cinema

The recent Romanian cinema was extremely successful in international media and academia, Romania has an internationally recognized school of film making, which took our cinema after 2000 from anonymity to global recognition. We also have a growing film culture, where the viewership is constantly growing, yet the Romanian film criticism and, more importantly, film theory is lagging behind. As I tried to map this situation in my paper *Report about the State of Film Studies in Romania, Ekphrasis, 1/ 2013 (pp. 25-37)* if the Romanian film makers are accepted as equals by their European colleagues, this is not the case with the Romanian film criticism. In only a decade the Romanian cinema became the most important European film phenomenon and authors like Cristian Mungiu went from being just a candidate for the FIPRESCI Prize at the Sofia film festival in 2003, is now a full member of the Cannes film festival jury in 2013.

International recognition came from some of the most important film reviewers abroad, who were critically evaluating the New Wave of Romanian directors. A.O. Scott, writing for *The New York Times*, Philip Kennicott for the *Washington Post*, or Ronald Bergen, writing for *The Guardian* were among the first to give the necessary conceptual recognition of the works of the young Romanian directors. Others soon followed path, like the French movie magazine, AlloCiné, a specialized cinema publication online which dedicated an entire dossier-cinéma to the already famous “Golden Age” of Romanian movies. In countries nearby, as was the case with Hungary, authors like Goracz Aniko

published books dealing with this new trend in European film making, the film critics focused on the theoretical aspects raised by the new Romanian films.

The Romanian film criticism seems trapped in the impossibility to come to an agreement about this new cinematic school. On one hand, there has been a long debate over the idea that the Romanian cinema is part of the Balkan cinema. In order to position the Romanian film making practices on the global map, some critics claimed a so-called Eastern European movie-making identity. Marian Țuțui who was one of the Romanian film critics supporting this concept, suggested that Romanian films are part of a successful Balkan cinema.

Some other, more prolific writers like Alex. Leo Șerban, or Valerian Sava used the concept The New Romanian Cinema. Even a young film critic, like Andrei Gorzo, followed the footsteps of Alex. Leo Șerban, his mentor, and used the same acronym, NCR (Noul Cinema Românesc), to officially describe the New Wave cinema. Andrei Gorzo's relevant theoretical discussion on the Romanian young cinema, *Things that cannot be said Otherwise. A Way of Thinking Cinema, from Andre Bazin to Cristi Puiu* (Lucruri care nu pot fi spuse altfel. Un mod de a gândi cinemaul, de la André Bazin la Cristi Puiu, Humanitas 2012) took a clear decision to keep the contemporary film makers within the framework of "Bazinian" thinking. In this category enters Alex. Leo Șerban's anthology of film reviews: *Why do we see movies. Et in Arcadia Cinema (2006)* and his second book: *Four decades, three years and two months with the Romanian cinema*. Cristina Corciovescu și Magda Mihăilescu, who are also dealing with the recent Romanian cinema wrote *Top 10 Romanian films of all time determined by the votes of 40 critics (2010)* and *The New Romanian Cinema. From Comrade Ceaușescu to Mister Lăzărescu (2011)* with relevant reviews about this trend in contemporary film making, yet holding the same theoretical ground.

Another, more "neutral" approach to film studies was the dictionary and historical perspective. Here Tudor Caranfil, Călin Căliman, Cristina Corciovescu and Bujor T. Rîpeanu were among the

representatives of this perspective on cinema descriptivism. Yet none of these critics, young or older, cinema journalists and historians, did not agree on a clear understanding of the Romanian films, beyond the claiming of the “miraculous” nature of these productions, as is the case with the study published by Dominique Nasta in 2013 (*Contemporary Romanian Cinema: The History of an Unexpected Miracle*). There is a major challenge in the field of Romanian film studies to find ways of expression that would finally put the theoretical discourse about cinema at the same level as the recent film production. Last but not least, there is a strong provocation to follow suit the movie makers who got out of the autarchy of the local academia and the close circuit of national pride, bringing the Romanian film criticism into the international dialogue.

My own interest in researching the Romanian cinema came from this double determination. On one hand it was a provocation from a methodological questioning stand point. The other was purely an academic and research provocation, that of getting the discourses about the Romanian cinema into the international exchange of ideas. My perspective on understanding this extremely productive cultural phenomenon, the Romanian New Wave cinema, was fundamentally based on a multi-method approach. By trying to apply some of the classical approaches in cinema theory, like the semiotic, the ideological, the iconological, the feminist or the psychoanalytic method, I considered that they will provide a more in-depth understanding of the most important films produced in the last decades. From the very beginning I was a constant interpreter of the movies made by authors like Cristi Puiu, Marian Crişan, Tudor Giurgiu, Cristian Mungiu, Radu Muntean, Cătălin Mitulescu, Corneliu Porumboiu, and Florin Şerban. The representatives of the “New Wave” in the Romanian cinema, all of whom received some of the most important European and international film awards, were discussed from many perspectives. I was more interested in the elaboration of a “grammar of the New Wave” and the understanding of the Romanian film-aesthetics. After several interviews with some of the most important director (Cristi Puiu, Tudor Giurgiu and Florin Serban), published in English, I decided to follow a multi-method



approach, using three main methods. The first was a content analysis and a thematic analysis, the second was a postmodern reading, from the perspective of feminist theories in cinema and the third was the psychoanalytical investigation.

My initial article, *The Grammar of the New Romanian Cinema*, presented as keynote speaker at the 12 International Film and Media Studies Conference in Transylvania, *NEW WAVES*, organized by Sapientia University, Cluj-Napoca (October, 2009), and later published in the academic journal, *Acta Sapientiae. Film and Media Studies* (3/ 2010), was focusing on the possibility to describe such a grammar. The hypothesis was that, in terms of movie criticism, this large group of movies were sharing many things in common, and that there was a common “code,” a language, or a syntax. This idea, which was a long debated question in international film studies, suggested that cinema has a “language” of its own. My problem was to find out what was the essence of this “grammar”, what made this cinematic language so specific? The first suggestion was coming from my training as a literary critic. Any cinematic production could be interpreted as a “coherent text”, thus as having a language. Here there are three different approaches. One is that the fundamental unit of the cinema is the shot, as was proposed by the early Russian formalists. Thus, by simply analyzing shots we can penetrate the logic of the cinematic “sentence”. The second is that by analyzing larger units, the sequences, or series of shots united by time and space, which we can interpret as phrases, we can provide better interpretations. The third was to look for larger units, like themes and narratives, larger “vocabularies” of cinema to be interpreted.

For the first approach to the methods of interpreting movies I chose one of Cristi Puiu's short films, *Cigarettes and Coffee* (*Un cartuș de Kent și un pachet de cafea*, 2004), which was awarded the Golden Bear in Berlin for short film. Based on the simple narrative, an interaction between father-son, Puiu created in *Cigarettes and Coffee* an entire universe by using simple cinematic tools. After an ample interview with the director, published in *Ekphrasis*, issue: 2 / 2011, by the title “*The cinema is a*

*question of malpractice*”, I realised that an in-depth study of Cristi Puiu's approach to film-making was needed. In my paper entitled *The Aesthetics of the New Wave, According to Cristi Puiu, published in Ekphrasis*, issue: 2 / 2011, pp. 60-76, I provided an extensive shot analysis, based on the principle that a structural analysis of the short film becomes extremely relevant. In this eleven minutes film we have five shots, two general shots, one two-shot, two “over the shoulders”, two camera movements, one horizontal pan, and a final vertical tilt, for punctuation. By using a series of abbreviations for the shots: Shot A (the general view of the restaurant) – pan – Shot B (the general view of the table by the window) – “two shot” (shot C) – over the shoulder with the son (Shot D) - over the shoulder with the father (shot E) we can follow the path of a formalist interpretation. For example, at minute 1:13, in shot A, the father is entering the restaurant, then camera makes the first move, a short left pan, only to bring us into the second shot, where the son is waiting at the window (1:26). After the reply of the father: "I'm late", to minute 1:36, we have the first cutting, and we go to the classic "two shot", shot C, where the two characters are captured in an classical American shot, while sitting face to face. This combination of shots is used repetitively, and they build the oppositions between father and son, starting from the early interactions between characters, to their final and disappointing separation.

For the second approach, that of thematic analysis, I followed two different methods. The first was that of semiological interpretation. As I demonstrated in two of my papers dealing with the Romanian contemporary cinema: *What's Eating the Romanian "New Wave"?*, published in *Ekprasis*, 1/ 2012 and *The Iconoclasm of the New Romanian Cinematographers*, published in *Ekprasis*, 2/ 2010, pp. 77-93. The first study focused on the important function of eating, used early on into movies. The contention was that using food in cinema is done by attributing symbolic and metaphorical significances, which are building deeper references into the cinematic scene (Zimmerman 9). This dimension of cinema, best exemplified by the famous table sequence in Bunuel's *Viridiana*, or in the famous *Gold rush* sequence, where Charlie Chaplin eats a slice of his own boiled shoe soles, and later

becomes himself a roasted chicken in the eyes of his antagonist, makes food a semiotic tool. The actions in these films take place at the table, where apparently regular people consume food. Yet each has more profound references; in the first there is a reference to the Last Supper of Christ and in the second food is used as symbolic treatment, to build metaphorically on it. Food goes from a simple material or a natural action, into a psychological tool. By using some relevant examples from the most important cinema makers of the new Romanian cinema, like Cristi Puiu, Corneliu Porumboiu and Cristian Mungiu, I developed a paradigmatic discussion on the role played by eating in Romanian films. Following the binary structure of myth-making and myth interpretation proposed by Lévi-Strauss (savage – civilized, processed – natural), I went on to give an analysis of the significations provided by the contemporary Romanian moviemakers.

In the paper dealing with *The Iconoclasm of the New Romanian Cinematographers*, I undertook the investigation from another main presupposition, that the Romanian recent cinema holds deeply coded, symbolic and iconographic messages. Again these movies were seen as case studies, treated as if they were “visual text”. The main contention was that meanings can be deciphered, since we can find their connotations outside the cinematic world. A *semiological* analysis provided access to those levels of meaning which are concealed by the apparently mundane representations of reality. In the Romanian New Wave cinema, a form of filmmaking based on cinematographic realism. On the one hand, the semiological description presumes the analytical decryption of the repetitive “signifying practices,” which can be traced in the recent Romanian cinema. Here I followed the interpretative path put forward by Roman Jakobson (Jakobson 1963: 62–63), who used this technique in art interpretation, by applying “metaphor” and “metonymy” as the two fundamental, analytical concepts. Employing these concepts as primary tools designed to interpret the “hidden significance” of visual narratives (possible in the movies and in any other forms of visual cultural production) the two terms will provide content for in-depth explanations of specific meaning construction in the Romanian films today. Metonymy was used

as a form of association of significant and metaphor as essentially a form of substitution. Any time an element “stands for another,” in order to bring forward a new significance, they will be considered as *significant*. This allows us to surpass the problem described in the beginning, that of discerning between “explicit” reference and the “covert” significance, between the coded content and the external manifestations.

Rather than using a formalist or a narratological approach, at the second level we will be looking for those specific *signs* and *significations* that make the young Romanian directors belong to a national imaginary. This is why an important field of interpretation is considered to be religious imaginary, as it is reflected in the recent Romanian films. And even if the interpretation will focus on the connections with the Orthodox traditions, here the *iconic* level will not be used in the sense Pierce utilized it, but in a larger, culturally relevant way. Linked with the traditions of the Christian Orthodox Church and the Christian visuality as a whole, the Romanian cinema is considered to have its own specific ways to deal with this cultural inheritance. In another paper, *Cinema as Exorcism. About Mungiu's Red Herrings*, to be published by the *CESI VIZUAL journal*, I was also focusing of Cristian Mungiu's *Beyond the Hills* (După dealuri, 2012). Here Mungiu's most recent movie, which was internationally awarded, was nationally contested and accused of being "anti-Christian", blasphemous and provocative to the Church, or a ill intended criticism of the Romanian society. In my point-of-view, *Beyond Hills* should be analyzed as a movie focused on going beyond biases. In this study, my suggestion is that Mungiu is taking his filmmaking beyond the appearances, in an double effort of using cinema as a form intensity and of exorcising cultural biases. By using the movie as a big "maguffin" or by using a technique known as a "red herring", the director exposes the bias of genre cinema, the bias of religious controversy, the bias of his own cinematic approaches and creates a remarkable work of art. In order to understand how Mungiu is amplifying his techniques of misdirection to the scale of an entire film, we must again use a semiological approach. In order to see

how the director is purposefully showing us some elements, when, in fact, he is following other intentions, providing his viewers false focal points, he is taking us to the essence cinema.

Within this method, the interpretation of the “thematic tropes” of these films can be described as segments of meaning with larger scope, broad units of signification which carry information beyond the simple narrative intent. These themes are not interpreted at the cinematic level, but rather at the structural level, the main purpose of this research being the identification of categories and not the description of cinematographic tool. Now the main hypothesis was that the Romanian New Wave movies were united by characteristics which went beyond the formal level (cinematography), or the stylistic level (technical commonalities, or narrative and dialogues). The movies made after 2000 share some common themes, which link them together and allow us to interpret them as a whole.

Another research paper using thematic analysis, presented at the international conference *(Trans)National Subjects. Framing Post-1989 Migration on the European Screen*, organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 15-17 December 2011 (<http://www.transnationalsubjects.eu/>) was focused on this very difficult path to film studies. It was obvious that in the New Wave Romanian cinema there were five major themes, which can be quantitatively identified by reviewing the feature films of all the directors, writers and producers considered to belong to the Romanian New Wave, as described below. This list contains the following (alphabetically) productions: Bodgan Apetri (1 movie as director); Marian Crişan (1 movie as director) Tudor Giurgiu (3 movies as director, 9 as producer); Andrei Gruzniczki (1 movie as director); Radu Jude (2 movies as director/writer); Hanno Hoffer (2 movies as director); Cătălin Mitulescu (2 movies as director/writer, 2 movies as producer); Cristian Mungiu (4 movies as director/writer, 2 movies as writer, and 1 as producer); Radu Muntean (4 movies as director) Cristian Nemescu (1 movie as director), Netzer (3 movies as director); Bobby Păunescu (1 movie as director/writer, 3 movies as producer) Cristi Puiu (3 movies as director, 1 movie as producer, 2 movies as writer); Corneliu Porumboiu (2 movies as director/writer); Răzvan Rădulescu (1 movie as

director, 13 as writer); (1 movie as director); Florin Șerban (1 movie as director). The five themes are father and son (mother and daughter) relations, questioning authority, violence against women, anti-heroes, and immigration.

In order to develop a scientific analysis of the Romanian cinema one of the methodologies best serving the purpose was that of the structuralist view on film interpretation (Altman 1984). I opted for one of the best interpretative tools, the “classical” theme analysis, as it was practiced in social sciences research. The use of thematic analysis comes partly from content based interpretation, which was mostly used as a technique allowing access into the essence of a various social or cultural phenomena. As a basic qualitative method, the thematic analysis was influenced by the textualist tradition, and it was suggesting the approaching of the cinematic text by coding the existing data and making comparisons among the elements which are found to share similarities.

In this case, using the movies of the new generation of Romanian directors as general cinematic texts, and using their commonalities as common “themes”, it permitted a deeper study of the phenomenon. In my research the “theme” was defined following the traditional content analysis techniques, a transversal idea that could be found in various instances (Brooks and Warren, quoted in Bordwell 1989, 115), either within a genre, or within a film school, in this case the Romanian New Wave films. Then my analysis identified eight major sub-themes within the larger immigration trope in recent cinema: (1) the impossible departure (*Bucharest-Wien*, Mitulescu; *On the Wings of Wine*, Porumboiu); (2) the impossible return (*First of all, Felicia*, de Raaf; *Medal of Honour*, Netzer); (3) the tragic history of transfuges (*Oxygen*, Pintilie; *Silent River*, Lăzărescu); (4) the traumatic experience and the psychological consequences of migration (*If I Want to Whistle I Whistle*, Șerban); (5) migration and the issues of crime and prostitution (*Loverboy*, Mitulescu; *Francesca*, Păunescu); (6) the absence of communication between those at home and those who left (*The international phone call*, Hanno Hoffer, *Yellow Smiley Face*, Popescu); (7) self-identity and the relationship with the foreign immigrants

coming to Romania (*Morgen*, Crișan); (8) the painful return and the search for identity (*Phantom Father*, Georgescu). They were used as an example of how thematic analysis provides a very relevant research results.

Another angle which was not taken into account by the Romanian film critics was the problem of femininity and feminine identity. My next approach was built around this main research question, if there is any possible connections between the new Romanian cinema and the contemporary feminist theories or rather was it is called as the "women's cinema". Looking for signs of this new cinematic trend in the Romanian "new wave", I was trying to show the ideological link between the changes of narratives and the return of the female protagonists in the contemporary moviemaking. Even if we cannot speak about "a first" or "a second" wave of feminism, my research paper looked into three main aspects of the philosophies of feminist origin. The first was to discuss the problems stemming out of the transformations of a patriarchal society, dominated by a "Father-Leader", into a society missing a well established center, a post-modern world. The second was oriented towards identifying the changes of narratives and the troubled relationship between the viewer and the subject; while the third questioning comes from the issues of "the look" and "the gaze", as generating power relations. I took into consideration movies made by female directors, like *Ryna* (2005) or *Felicia înainte de toate* (First of All, Felicia, 2009); also productions dealing with homosexuality, like *Legături bolnăvicioase* (Love Sick, 2006); movies about rape *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* (4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days, 2007), *Katalin Varga* (2009); and narratives concerned with power issues like *Cea mai fericită fată din lume* (The Happiest Girl in the World, 2009), *La source des femmes* (The Source, 2011) and *Loverboy* (2011).

My paper *Feminism, feminine discourse and the representation of women in the new Romanian cinema*, published in *Ekphrasis* 1/2011 (pp. 12-37) was following the definition provided by Alison Butler. According to her, a women's cinema is the type of cinema "made by, addressed to, or concerned

with women, or all three” (Butler 2002), and thus should not be restricted to cinema made by women. Following this understanding of women’s cinema, as that type of moviemaking concerned with violence against women, abuse of women by men, or authority conflicts and alteration of women’s lives, this paper looks for these elements in the new Romanian cinema. Of the above mentioned themes, several are ominously present in the kind of cinema the young Romanian movie makers are creating: domestic and sexual abuse, sexual taboos and awareness of sexuality, women as victims of individual or social violence and women’s identity within the social hierarchy. The Romanian cinema, during and after Communism, can be described along the typical patriarchal representation patterns. As Laura Mulvey suggests in her seminal study about the relationship between “visual pleasure” and the narrative cinema, there is a strong link between the patriarchal narratives and the formation of social structures, and even more so of social order (Mulvey 1975). If cinema is connected to male desire then women are objects viewed and “offered” as viewable by the implicitly male spectators, who are endowed with the power by male centered narratives. My working hypothesis was that the new Romanian film-makers went against the patriarchal narratives of the past. This is how we can explain movies like *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* or *Felicia, before all*, who were in search of a new rhetoric, centered around some of the most challenging use of female characters and depictions of men’s roles. Another great example is the troublesome character of the mother, from Florin Șerban’s *Eu când vreau să fluier*, *fluier*, where the role played by Clara Vodă can not only be seen as causing psychological damage to her children, but is also a source of abandonment and of the subsequent lack of identity for an entire generation. Tudor Giurgiu’s is also tackling these issues, his first fiction film, *Legături bolnăvicioase* (Love Sick 2006) is centered around the dissolving of the traditional family relationships. Breaking the taboos of incestuous love, a brother, Sandu (Tudor Chirilă, a pop singer at that time), falls in love with his sister, Kiki (Maria Popistașu), at her turn in love with her best girlfriend, Alex (Ioana Barbu). The “disease” that is used as a catch phrase in the title, is not the



homosexual love, but the monstrous nature of traditional family, who alters identity and ignores personality.

In my conference presentation, *Cinema and the representation of sexual violence in the New Wave Romanian Cinema Today*, given at Cine-Excess VII Conference, University of Birmingham, November 2013, I took further these arguments, intending to analyze deeper the functions of sexuality in the recent movies produced. Using again a comparative method, my interpretations focused not only on authors like Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, Cătălin Mitulescu but they were also compared with the previous generation of moviemakers, like Mircea Danieliuc or Mircea Mureșan or Lucian Pintilie. In a patriarchal society the women are often represented as sexual victims, and my interpretations looked at the ways the New Wave Romanian cinema dealt with narrative describing rape and male aggression. Discussing the differences between the Romanian New Wave cinema, the communist propaganda films and the Romanian miserabilism (similar to the French New Brutalism), this study put into work concepts like sexuality and exploitation, cinema of cruelty, social brutality in movies, and gratuitous representation of sex acts. It also describes those recent productions dealing with female and male homosexuality, issues of sexual control in contemporary families, and the main the stereotypes of the sexuality of women and men in Romanian society today. Sexual violence in cinema (both verbal, physical or visual) was interpreted in this study through its significance at the cultural and political level, as a tool to understand the deep changes in the Romanian society as a whole. Together with the dismantling of the “positive paternalistic” family, and with the dissolution of the father figure as the protector of his children, there is a new social dynamics taking shape in the contemporary Romanian society, where trafficking of women for sexual exploitation, incestuous relations in the family or explicit violence against those perceived as powerless become sources from new cinematic narratives.

Relevantly enough, the New Wave Romanian cinema, that is the cinema produced after 2000, deals redundantly with narratives revolving around rape and male aggression against women. From

famous films like Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile, 2007), to Cătălin Mitulescu's *Loverboy* (2011), the young Romanian directors use sexual abuse and stories of women victimhood in society as their key target. The question is if these representations of sexual violence (in narratives, in discourse, in physical or visual displays) can be interpreted as significant at a deeper, cultural and political level? And, as a secondary question, can these instances be used as critical tools to understand the changes taking place in the post-communist Romanian society?

Before moving to the particular examples of the young generation of Romanian directors, an important aspect is to look for the roots of the “rape narratives” in the Romanian patriarchal culture, that is to describe a short history of how women were represented as sexual victims in movies. The previous generation of Romanian moviemakers dealt with these issues and this allows a good comparison basis for understanding the mechanisms of recent rape narratives. In the recent cinema the representation of sexual violence must be seen within the frame of its narrative functions. Rape in cinema (and in any visual art) is an instrument of instilling male power. As Diane Wolfthal has eloquently put it, there is an “aestheticization of rape” and “sanitization of violence”, beneficial mostly for the dominant masculine discourse, which is constructing a positive perspective on a power relations in society. As it is explicit in a famous series of paintings, done by almost all the “Masters” of European art (the most common example being *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, from Giambologna to Rubens and Poussin), there is a form of legitimizing the social and political aggression. The raped women, who become respectable matrons accepting their social condition, are part of the validation process where the abuse is legitimized by the victims. Later the narratives of rape and murder were integrated popular discourse and, as described by Jane Monckton Smith, this is an indicator that there is a profound link between these stories and deeper cultural and social meanings. Exploring the rape narratives can be used to dismantle the signification process, of deconstructing the meaning formation in various social contexts. On one end this allows the understanding of how the patriarchal power is

expressed by stereotypes in representing male/ female power, where the sexual aspects and the change of focus to and from the male point of view generate a possible criticism of society. Reading this violence as a cinematic function becomes a critical function and a key interpretative tool.

Fundamentally rape is a cinematic phantasy of males, the sexual aggression against women is always represented with a male spectator present on the scene. As Sarah Projansky has demonstrated so eloquently in her study on the relationship between popular culture and the representations of rape, the history of cinema traces a long history of sexual violence against women, which is often depicted as acceptable and even desirable and which has become an integral part of the main cinematic genres. Following Joanna Bourke, who accounted one rape in every eight Hollywood movies, rape remains one of the most complex forms in which we deal with our humanity and instrument of de-humanization of the Other. Thus, we can follow four main functions of rape narratives in cinema: rape as cinematic phantasy of the implied male spectator, sexual violence as social criticism in society, sexual violence as a tool for creating brutal realism, and rape as a manifestation of the “politics of hate” – a part of the de-humanization of the “Other”.

When dealing with rape in movies we must also deal with ideology, as is the case with the communist cinema. Even if there are few representations of sexual violence - and even more rarely the rape scenes - in the Romanian films during communism, they always served a political purpose. Sexual violence in the communist cinema was following this ideological function, that is to express symbolically the exploitation practices of the capitalists (represented as violent men), on the working classes (represented as female victims). In one of the first Romanian movies to be critically acclaimed in the European film festivals, *The Revolt* (Răscoala, Mircea Muresan, 1965), the rape dynamics is reverted, while still being an expression of the class conflict. The story set during the peasant revolts of 1907, and has in its climax the rape of the boyar women, the beautiful “exploiter” Nadine. During a sexually intense scene, the noble woman is pursued and sexually molested by the leader of the

rebellion. The rape sequence, cut over an extra-diegetic music similar to that of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, is built in such a way that it generates pseudo-sexual tension from frame to frame. Everything is leading to the depiction of the sexual act as a retribution for the social violence perpetrated by the ruling classes against the exploited. "You mocked us", tells the rapist, "so why shouldn't I defile you?", thus creating a connection between the spectator of the abuse and the "positive" performer of the violent act. The end of the scene grows even more stereotypical, since the victim is described as enjoying the sex act, pleasurably caressing the hair of her aggressor.

Another, more brutal form of using violence as a symbolic function was practiced by the "cinema of misery" (often described as mizerabilism), developed after 1989 in the movies of Mircea Daneliuc. In the last two decades, his productions exhaustively used sexual aggression, designed to describe a violent and debased society. Over and over again the director turns to harsh and atrocious representations of violent sexual acts in order to convey his message. Compared with the French New Brutalism and the "cinema of cruelty", Daneliuc, who was one of the most important directors of the Romanian cinema during communism, is often depicting gratuitous rape scenes. Unlike Catherine Breillat's *Baise-moi* (2000) or Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* (2002) the Romanian director uses dreadful representations of human degeneration in brutal cinematic attempts to convince his viewers of the horrid nature of "real life" in contemporary Romanian society. Daneliuc has notoriously created some of the most violent and senseless scenes of sexual violence in the history of world cinema; in his *Conjugal Bed* (*Patul conjugal*, 1993) we witness how a pregnant wife gets stabbed by her husband, who also puts nails into her head, while asking her for clean shirts.

So, as many feminist film critics assumed the inherent patriarchalism of cinema, following authors like Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston and Patricia Mellencamp, we can say that the recent Romanian films are breaking with the tradition of the typical patriarchal fantasy, the man (and pleasurable) while the woman is seen (and receives recognition), re-centering their stories around more

“feminine” points-of-view.

This leads to another important interpretative method used in my research, the psychoanalytic analysis. In my paper about *Cinematic Symptoms – Psychoanalytical Keys to Understanding the Romanian New Wave*, published in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai - Dramatica* 2/2010, I took further the elements of theories of gender, based on the dichotomy private / viewer (female / male), continues on all levels of representation: passive / active (women "expect", men are "dynamic"), submission / domination (women are victims, men controlling) object / agent (women " offered "men" take ") and moved towards another critical level. As feminist theories of film critics were based on reading the "Electra complex" in movies, I considered important to use the parallel theories of the psychoanalytic Oedipus complex. As Kaja Silverman (1992: 90-106) discussed Frank Capra's film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, as an example for the failure of paternal authority, where George Bailey, the male hero, is incapable of being emotionally attached, we can find this similar image of the castrated father, lacking identity and in a search for a phallic equivalent of his “penis” in many Romanian films.

As described in the classic Freudian theory, the conflict between the mother and the son is deeply rooted in the Oedipal relationship, a relationship explicit in a remarkable movie like *Eu când vreau să fluier, fluier*, by Florin Şerban. Here the traumatic stage takes place directly in front of us. A boy is held in a prison and is ready to be released, when he meets his mother after a long time, and confronts her for abandoning him. The drama of Silviu, the older son who substituted himself to the figure of the father but he could not fulfill this role because it seems the mother abandoned him repeatedly, is a sociological drama. The same happens in *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days*, when Otilia takes control of her life and moves about as a substitute male figure. She substitutes herself with a „substantial father”, a replacement of the father – a key to understanding the Oedipus myth in cinema –, yet plays the victim and a victimising role, linked to the development of the Oedipal relationship in the primordial scene. Here, the portrait of the rapist pseudo - doctor, who is under the domination of

his mother, described as an infantile character, although he manifests himself like a sadistic father, and an abuser of his victims, is a portrait of the „social father”. He himself is an abused individual, abused by the system, by a higher Father, by the presence of The Law of the Father. He is raped by the society, and thus lacks any paternity identification.

Another fundamental problem which can be explained best by using psychoanalytical terminology, is that of the imaginary traumatic relationship with the “father figure” of authoritarian rule of Ceaușescu. Ceaușescu, like Stalin, insisted to be called „The Father of the nation” (while his wife, Elena, was identified with „The loving Mother” of all Romania's children). The relationship, imposed during Communist time from early stages of socialization (children in kindergarten were forced to learn poems and songs of this sort) cannot be ignored if one wants to understand the internal mechanisms of the new Romanian cinematographers. This approach was previously used by Fernando Cesarman for explaining the characters in the movies of the Spanish author, Buñuel (Cesarman 1982). By using the concepts of psychoanalytical theory, he noted that some of the favored subjects of the Spanish author (torture, violence) can be put into perspective by connecting them with the phantasm of abandonment by the parent. Discussing Buñuel's visual metaphors, Cesarman finds a connection between the absence of identity of the characters and the personal experiences of the cinematographer during the authoritarian regime in Spain.

As it is in Freud's fundamental perspective on interpretation, the repressed memories are not traumatic until they are revived at a later date, and the recollection of suppressed memories is that which brings trauma to its compulsive repetition of the past. Here we must quote the case of the loss of the authority of the Oedipal father, which produces a dysfunctional and ambivalent individual, situation that will be valid for explaining a dysfunctional society. Trauma lacking heroism leads to rebellion, or quoting Freud, we can say that a hero is „someone who has had the strength to rebel against his father and has in the end victoriously overcome him” (1923: 12). The question rising here is if the Romanian

cinematographers are rebelling against the Father figures of authority and if they successfully manage this rebellion.

This is why Romanian directors positioned themselves from the very beginning as rebels against the established forms of expression in cinema. From the very beginning they contested the authority of their predecessors (like Nae Caramfil), contesting the institutions of the cinema establishment (like Cristi Puiu) or bluntly refused to accept any state financing (like Corneliu Porumboiu). Starting from the assumption of Adorno (1991), who suggested that cinema is by its means a source of authority, the refusal of using the mainstream forms of expression, contesting power and establishment is manifested by searching new forms of expression. The source of their discontent is based on the fact that Romanian cinema production was for decades under the total control of the Communist state, and it was clearly an „Ideological State Apparatus”, in the very terms of Althusser, a means of producing identity and social cohesion. The disillusion of the new Romanian cinematographers come not only from the problem, deeply rooted in psychoanalysis, of identity. As it is the case with all anti - heroic figures, who are in search of their identity – the defiant nature of the films being oriented against any forms of authority – in a similar way the anti - heroic figures of American cinema (like Marlon Brando and James Dean) became icons of rebellious anti - authoritarianism, where, in terms of classical cinema making, the cut and the use of the fast cut was perceived as a form of rejecting the authoritarian intervention on the „matter” of the film. In the European cinema, the totalitarian intervention of the director in the shot (by the classical dialogue shot - reverse shot) was rejected early on, and was substituted with the use of the long shots.

In terms of Freudian analytical language, this is a case of typical sublimation of an experience which cannot be dealt with in an every - day manner. The aesthetic manifestation of trauma in cinematographic expression is fundamentally linked to social trauma, since traumatic memories cannot be accepted as exact accounts of things that really happened. Thus the individual constructs his own

version of the traumatic experience, in order to cope with it. The Romanian Revolution is not only an example of a traumatic collective experience, it becomes a cinematic expression for two elements that need to be taken into account: one is the recovery from the painful memories of the past and the other is the post-traumatic recovery in post - communism. Thus the understanding of the Romanian cinema must be seen through the psychological impact of an external event, which was the Romanian Revolution. This traumatic event took place, for the young generation of directors, in the early stage of their psychic development and its importance cannot be minimized. Using Spoto's biographical approach and starting with the fact that the theme of the „Romanian Revolution” was recurrent as a motive and was a constant reference point for several movies, we have to note that only in 2006 there were three movies, made by representative directors of the new generation, which focused upon this topic: *A fost sau n-a fost* (12:08 *East of Bucharest*, 2006) *Hîrtia va fi albastră* (*The Paper Will Be Blue*, 2006) *Cum mi - am petrecut sfârșitul lumii* (*How I Spent the End of the World*, 2006). This relationship between biography and the understanding of a work of art, fundamental for the psychoanalytical method, becomes instrumental.

One major moment in my research efforts was the elaboration of *Romanian New Wave Cinema. An Introduction*, a book I recently published at the prestigious American publishing House, McFarland in Jefferson, North Carolina, which explores all these theoretical aspects. This study was conceived as an overall interpretation which could provide the tools necessary to explain the productions of the “glorious decade” in the Romanian cinema. Since the directors belonging to this period were constantly refusing the label of “film generation,” I was looking for similarities among the members of this small group of filmmakers. In order to better understand the phenomenon, I conducted several in- depth interviews with the most representative directors (Cristi Puiu, Tudor Giurgiu, Florin Serban), trying to find possible ways to describe them as a coherent movement.

I considered that these young cinema makers and their films lack a “thick description”, within



the academia and in the public debate, although national and international critics writing extensively on the subject. From the perspective of film criticism and academic discourse, most of the studies dedicated to this generation of filmmakers were focusing on the cinematographic norms and conventions, the technical choices and rarely on the aesthetic choices. Also, the discourse of Romanian academic film studies was narrowly concentrating on historical aspects and on film criticism; most of the time, the interpretations were simple comments on particular movies—simple film reviews. This is why I considered that a single point of view, a film-criticism perspective, was not enough for elucidating the complex nature of Romanian filmmaking practices today.

The first level of interest is represented, naturally, by the search for common cinematographic traits. Identifying the filming techniques and practices shared by the young Romanian moviemakers will help describe a grammar and the common cinematic language shared by all of these young moviemakers. My ambition was to identify the visual “memes” and the image syntax, or the visual grammar of the Romanian New Wave filmmakers. The second part of this study represents the result of an effort to go beyond the formal approach, and to discover those common themes and ideas, narrative and storytelling devices shared by all of these productions. It is here that the key characteristics of this specific, local version of a long European cinematic tradition come into place. This is why multi-method approach is my quintessential perspective. I am using this as an interpretation technique, considering that a single view of a cinema movement, like the recent Romanian New Wave, would be too narrowly insufficient. The simultaneous application of some of the classical approaches in cinema theory (thematic, semiotic, ideological, iconological, feminist or psychoanalytic methods) will provide a detailed and in-depth understanding. Once again, the main purpose of the book is to go beyond describing the moviemaking techniques of the new Romanian cinema makers and to define their “cinematic grammar” from a paradigmatic coding of this type of cinema. This is why the first level of analysis, discussing the cinematographic elements of the

productions, is closely followed by perspectives from cinema narrative theory and film semiotic.

One of the subjects these films have in common, and which was quickly noticed by many film critics is their interest in Communism and the Romanian revolution, or the ironic treatment of social conflicts. By doing a thematic review of the most important films, five major themes can be quantitatively identified. After reviewing the feature films of the most relevant directors, writers and producers considered to belong to the Romanian New Wave, these are: the concern with marginal characters and anti-heroic figures; shared dark humor as a key motif; interest in the troubled relationships between fathers and sons; and awareness of feminine issues and questions, at a broader thematic level. Some other major themes of the recent Romanian movies are the stories of immigration and, subsequently, the apparition of a new typology of characters, the anti-heroes. All of these were analyzed in details.

An important role is given to the techniques and narrative innovations of the key director of this phenomenon, Cristi Puiu. As is widely accepted by film critics, both the specialists from the Romanian journals and the international reviews, Puiu has set the founding blocks of this new filmmaking school. Thus, in order to understand the aesthetics of the Romanian New Wave, I believe it is important that we understand the thinking and the artistic views of Puiu. He supported and has put forward some of the most innovative filmmaking techniques, setting the tone for an entire generation. This is why an entire generation begins and ends with Puiu's films, from *Stuff and Dough* (2000) to *Aurora* (2011). The selection of the movies discussed in this book is based on this chronology.

Another major chapter is dedicated to the mechanisms of dark humor and the techniques used by these filmmakers, many of them coming from the theater of the absurd and the laughter of surrealists, in order to ironically reconstruct a world which they profoundly reject. And finally, a chapter was dedicated to the possible openings of the future cinema in Romania, to the anticipation of the ways the Romanian cinema can develop.

## II. 10. Future plans for professional, scientific and academic development

### II.10.1 Scientific research plans

Planning my future career means first to take a look back to the achievements I already reached and I consider that any future development plans need to continue the existing results. The overall plans for the progress and development of my career will follow three main objectives: academic teaching at doctoral level, multi-disciplinary studies and methodologies and the continuation of my interest for the fields described in this Habilitation Thesis. Thus I will continue my research along lines of the main themes of research I worked extensively: methods and methodologies in academic teaching and research, visual culture and visual communication studies, media and television research, film studies and film criticism. For the future development of these research fields, I will continue to work within my already developed research networks and will apply for international and national financing and grants. One of my international research networks is made of the group of academics financed by the British Academy, and I intend to keep working with this group.

I will also continue my activities as part of the national research centers I am affiliated with: the Research and Creation Center for Theater, Film and Media, Vlad Mugur, managed by Prof. Dr. Miruna Runcan and Phantasma, The Center for Imagination Studies coordinated by prof. dr. Corin Braga. I intend to continue my publishing effort for the main academic journals I was collaborating with (Caietele Echinox, Studia Dramatica) and more importantly, my activity as Senior-editor of Ekphrasis, a journal which is now in an internationalization indexing process, procedures have been initiated with

Thompson Reuters and Proquest.

The organization and coordination of national and international conferences at Babeş-Bolyai University, and the participation in other national and international conferences in another important goal. Maintaining the international visibility and the increase of the scientific reputation internationally is one of the most important parts of my academic career.

Among the most important research objectives for the near future is the elaboration and the publication of a book discussing the complex issues of methods and methodologies in visual culture and visual media. This book, which would be both a working tool for students and academics and an instrument for the general audience, is designed to review the most important concepts and methods of research in the field of images and to expand its scope at the level of a general “grammar” of visual interpretation. Such a research effort must be undertaken since there is an increased need xx This book, with the working title *Methods and methodologies in visual culture, film and media research* is going to be dedicated to the systematic mapping of existing scientific discourses and, more importantly, to providing examples of interpretations, specific to each methodological perspective. Its double nature, applicative and theoretical, would ensure that such an effort will xx

The interest for media studies will also be a part of my future plans as a researcher. One direction that I will elaborate on will be the inner dynamics of the Romanian political imaginary under the pressure of yellow journalism and media superficiality. I intend to write an ampler study designed the various shades of “political vaudeville”. Establishing a connection between the vaudeville entertainment of modernity and what is now part of the cultural mainstream, I am formulating the basis of my analysis on the impact of easy amusement, cabaret theater, gratuitous shocking amusements and other sensationalism oriented public discourses. I also understand the “politics of vaudeville” as an effect of the popular entertainment, which is equal with the "boudoir" fun and the public exposure of controversial circumstances, only for the sake of public amusement. Analyzing the public images and

the imaginary affected by this trend in our political culture.

The continuation of my film studies research will be manifested along the lines described in this Habilitation Thesis as myth interpretations. My purpose is to elaborate a book, designed for the international academic dialogue, most probably published in English, which will provide a survey of the changes taking place in contemporary cinema. The hypothesis, already developed in some of my already published studies is that the contemporary culture is going through a phase of genres fuzziness which can be characterized as a strange hybridizations of our imaginary. The cinematic re-mixing and the media hybrids that appear seem to be natural forms of expression. My analysis will go beyond the argument of some film critics, like Janet Staiger, who claim there is no purity in film genres, and I will be looking at Hollywood films as ushering into an era of impure genres, resulting from an inbreeding of genres. My argument is that the combinations and commutations we are witnessing in our contemporary visual culture, in the media, and especially explicit in cinema, are taking us beyond the simple hybridization as juxtaposing, or the hybridization as ironic reference. We have reached the stage of *meaningless mashups* of images and myths, of something for which I proposed two new analytical concepts: cinematic kakology and the myth-illogical. These would be the key terms in this future book, having as working title these theoretical premises: *The Cinematic Kakology and the Mythological mixup in contemporary culture*.

## II. 10.2. Academic development plans

I consider that an important part of my future project is the continuation of my already existing work in the educational level of my University, which will be relevantly improved by the acceptance of this Habilitation Thesis.

Of course, my research efforts will continue to be integrated into the courses I teach at Master

Programs of the Faculty of Theater and Television and the Faculty of History. I will also continue to be present in international academic exchanges, both within the framework of the European Virtual Academy, the online platform providing courses together with our three international partners, and for other institutions requiring my expertise. An example for this academic presence is the fact that I was recently invited to give a lecture on the Romanian cinema at the Stockholm Kulturhuset ((26-28 May 2014).

Furthermore, by receiving the certificate of Habilitation in the Performing Arts (Artele Spectacolului) specializations, will help my develop research groups, to coordinate future researchers within the two Centers for research I am member of, and other possible researchers I am in contact with, through the already existing international networks, which could lead to creating joint doctorates in the field. This third objective is to share my abilities with future researchers, which could be significantly put to work in research teams which will include doctoral students, coordinated as a result of this Habilitation Thesis.

### II. 10. 3. Conclusions

I would like to conclude this Habilitation Thesis with a brief summary of my overall activities. In almost two decades as teacher at the Babeş-Bolyai University I managed to publish 11 books. Of these, six books were published as single author, of which one was published at an international publishing house in the United States, within one of the most relevant collections of studies in the field of film research today. During this time I also took part in the publishing of five collective books, with relevant chapters, and among these collective books one was published by an internationally recognized academic press, the Sussex Academic. I also developed five workbooks and manuals, either at nationally recognized publishers and available online as ebooks for the students in my courses.

I published intensively both in international academic journals and in other national peer-reviewed specialized journals. Over 30 scientific articles appeared during this time and more than 150 essays and studies were published in the Romanian cultural press. My presence in the public academic and professional exchange of ideas and cultural values was constant and tenuous.

I was keynote speaker at two international conferences and I participated with presentations at 13 internationally recognizable conferences. I was invited to teach at some of the major universities in Romania and in other countries like the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Finland and Hungary.

Throughout my academic career I created many new courses, coordinated two departments at a prestigious university and managed to create new lines of study and new academic papers. All these personal and professional qualifications justify my intent to further develop my career by this Habilitation Thesis.

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