

# REPRESENTATION OF CLUJ-NAPOCA IN THE HISTORY OF FILM FROM THE FIRST FILMS UNTIL 1948

## Extract

The aim of my research is to examine films about Cluj-Napoca (film archives, feature films and various independent / amateur films that have become legacies). I have compiled a database of my researched motion pictures, which includes footage about Cluj-Napoca made in Cluj-Napoca anytime between 1896 and 1948. I also examine the historical eras and various periods of filmmaking. I compare and analyze these films with regard to the relationships between the city, the footage and its creators.

Cluj-Napoca has been mentioned, captured and recorded in a vast number of letters, memoirs, historical and literary works, along with countless drawings, painting and photographs. The most relevant to this study are the numerous motion pictures made about the more or less significant moments in the history of the city. Every description creates an image in the reader's mind, thus the collection of knowledge and memories coalesce into a collective virtual picture. Everyone gets a chance to glimpse the city, even those who never have before, by visualizing written descriptions, augmenting photos with their own imagination, and with the help of motion pictures, by piecing together their own image of the city.

My research started in 2012 with me going through VSH tapes, original film strips made about Cluj-Napoca. However, during the recent years, many of them have been digitized. While working on my master's thesis, I only had a flatbed editing table to look at the amateur films waiting to be digitized. Nowadays, I have databases and searchable virtual archives to aid me in my work. New media is always built onto the foundation of the old: cave paintings turn into canvas, canvas turns into photographs and still images turn into motion pictures. These turn into archives of media-history, preserving the image, the past, the culture and the memories of the city.

City and film have a two-way relationship. On one end, films preserve the image, the events of a city and the everyday lives of those within, while on the other end, the city, through its existence, provides fertile ground for the artist within the city to create a personal artwork, which provides a unique glimpse into the city for those without.

Motion pictures have a history that spans further than a century, which allowed countless films to be made about the city. The goal of my research is to compile and categorize these visual representations (either professional or amateur / independent motion pic-

tures) into a database. This is followed by finding and examining the historical and cultural context of the images, as well as examining the way the visual representations affect the private and public image of the city-center and various significant cultural institutions within the city (schools and churches, for example). I also look at how different film representations give rise to the now almost emblematic image of the city center and thus, the entire city of Cluj-Napoca. Studies also shed light on the various occasions that led to the city being captured in motion pictures (filmmaking becoming an act of cultural significance and a method of creating memories), those who captured the image of the city (a new category in the social network of the city), the purpose each film was made for (new communication strategy) and the circumstances which led to these visual and narrative representations being created. My research also analyzes the various methods, contexts and anthropology of media consumption. I aim to reveal the consumers and producers of motion pictures based on data from various images and personal memories from subjects, along with the way media was used (technical criteria, various habits and competences: whether footage was used on an amateur or professional level). I examine the subjects of these films, as well as the methods used in their production (the selection process and the templates used to create various images), the relationship between independent and professional filmmakers, and last but not least, the role these films played in the everyday lives of the people. In my paper, I delve into greater detail about the types of films made about Cluj-Napoca, various genres, the goals regarding their production and where these films are kept currently or who owns them.

In the initial phase of my research, I could not estimate the amount of films I would be able to acquire, however, it quickly became evident that a limit needed to be established in the timeline of film history, beyond which no more films would be examined. This coincided with a significant ideological and political change. Historical events were the primary guidelines along which this limit was drawn, however, technology and perspectives in filmmaking have also changed. My goal is to outline the various eras of filmmaking based on all three of these aspects and analyze the footage in my possession.

The time period in which the films that I examine were made was divided into four shorter periods based on important events in history and media history. The first period ends with the beginning of World War I when the first film factory of Cluj-Napoca was founded by Jenő Janovics.

The second period encompasses everything from the first production of Jenő Janovics's film factory to the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, along with the events of World War II. Hungarian media history claims this era to be the golden age of silent film production in Transylvania.

The third period consists of the years following Transylvania's union with Romania, up until the Second Vienna Award, which gave the northern and eastern parts of Transylvania back to Hungary.

The fourth period is made up of the years following the Second Vienna Award up until the Paris Peace Treaties in 1947 which put an end to World War II.

When determining the endpoints of each period, I decided not to separate the historical background of the data carriers from the cultural context. This allowed me to create Cluj-Napoca's local historical periodization, which helped me process and categorize the footage I had, and also to formulate my conclusions. The films proved that my periodization was correct, therefore the periods of Cluj-Napoca's film history are the same historic periods that I've outlined at the beginning of my research. The most significant factors for periodization are historical events of both social and political significance. These events have also had an effect on the possibilities for film production and consumption. When looking at the history of technology, it becomes evident that Cluj-Napoca could never keep up with the technological advancements of the time, however, the producers with access to recording cameras made an effort to capture what life in the city was like.

The found footage, which includes 243 films was divided into four categories based on their genres: newscasts, documentaries, feature films and independent or privately produced films. Cluj-Napoca held many social, historical, private and public events and continues to do so up to the present day. During the 100-years-old history of film, every significant event has some sort of film representation made about it.

During my research, I visited public archives, film-shops and private collectors. I have categorized the footage by genre, assigned it to the right historical periods and introduced all information into a database. The two most prominent data providers were the Hungarian National Film Archives and the Romanian National Film Archives, who allowed me to examine their entire collection of films about Cluj-Napoca. I have also managed to find films in the archives of smaller associations, which I have also digitized.

The archives gave me 135 newscasts, educational films and documentaries. The newscasts are from the Hungarian and Romanian national archives. Feature-films appear in the largest numbers with 79 of them having been produced; however, only 11 of them remain as complete films, along with parts from four more. Two films were shot in Cluj-Napoca during World War II, the copies of which are kept in the Budapest Film Archives. 76 out of the 79 films were produced in the silent film era, with only 3 films containing soundtracks. I have managed to process 29 of the amateur films. I have four further rolls in my possession, which, due to their bad condition, could not be digitized. Only after proper conservation procedures can they be viewed frame-by-frame through a scanner.

In the first part of my thesis, I summarize the concepts related to the relationship between city and film. The periods I examine yielded mostly silent films. While examining various communication models, relationships between film and memory and film production as a ritual, it became evident that every genre examined in my thesis – with their own unique perspectives – creates a new method of preserving memories through stories, be they collective or personal. Therefore, before something is captured on film, three important questions must be answered: what, how, and with what tools. Films are reproductions, meaning whatever the filmmaker aims to reproduce must appear before the camera in real life. When films are examined from the perspectives of cities as locations, it is required to show the city itself. This gives us insight into the relationship between the producer and

the city, as well as the way the producer portrays reality. Films are a cross-over between visual experiences and social interactions.

The thorough review of the city and film history was followed by the review of the individual datasheets of each film.

The films are interpreted from historical and media-anthropological standpoints. The medium of films is not examined on its own, rather in relation with the complex factors of media consumption and the integration of media into the everyday life of the private and public sector. Images are examined as cultural representations, imprints of a certain age and context.

My thesis is based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. In the first part of my work, I collected all the data about the films I had found, and in the second part, I grouped those by their genre, their type of data carrier and their state of existence. In the third part, I used qualitative methods to interpret the footage I had found, the connections between the films and their producers, along with their relations to the city. Through analyzing the contents and known data attributed to some of the films, my goal was to show the places where they were shot, the way the city was used as a set, or in the case of documentaries or newscasts, the places the events that would later be captured took place.

109 of the 243 films can be viewed in various archives, which make up only 44.96% of the films in question; only pieces of data remain about the rest. Silent films present the worst ratio. The reason behind this fact is that, for a very long time, there was no institution to preserve the footage, and this role has been played by the Hungarian National Film Archives and the Romanian National Archives to this day. There are instances of random copies emerging from all over the world, which yield little to no information early on. Their identification is usually done based on speculation alone. Since digitization has not been going on for very long, I theorize that more footage is likely to emerge in the following years. Western-European archives are luckier in this regard: they have better methods for digitization and preservation than their Eastern-European counterparts. However, it is possible that new footage about Transylvania or Cluj-Napoca will be found even on other continents. Only 10.53% of films made during the silent film era can actually be viewed.

Newscasts (46.08%) and documentaries (51.52%) are in a better position, however, the chance for more films in this genre to emerge is significantly smaller. The rolls in the Hungarian National Film Archives have already been digitized, with partial newscasts from Transylvania, especially Cluj-Napoca already available for international purchase on a small scale. The footage digitized and documented in the previous decades is already available for online viewing. The chance for new newscasts or records of various events in Cluj-Napoca to emerge is even greater in Bucharest, since digitization is still in progress there.

The 100% ratio in the case of amateur films is slightly misleading; however, nonetheless true: everything I used is real, which I know from seeing the footage. However, this is the most promising genre with regard to the chance for new, previously unknown footage to emerge. These are the rolls and records that are likely to emerge not from institutions,

but from attics, cellars, flea-markets and family bookshelves. Sadly, these rolls of film have a limited lifespan, especially if not kept under proper conditions. They are prone to drying out, their emulsion layers may melt off, rendering them impossible to play with a projector. However, today's technology is able to bypass this issue with frame-by-frame digitization, which is still a very costly procedure.

Most of these films were shot in the city center, usually as a means to document important events. Many newscasts and demonstration films were shot in an area called Cetățuia Park (Little-Fort Park), containing panoramic shots which show the city from above. Amateur films captured other attractions within the city, such as the Central Park of Cluj-Napoca and the Botanical Gardens. Feature films also use well-known locations as backgrounds, mostly the city center, the Cetățuia Park and the theater from the Avram Iancu Square. The contemporary, yet still emblematic parts of the city play the most prominent roles in amateur films, as well as in newscasts, documentaries and feature films. Sports and cultural events pose an exception, with a very small amount of footage having been preserved about them.

With changes in the city's administration, the roles of various squares have also shifted. Instead of the city center, parades and representative events are held at the junction between the Ștefan Cel Mare square and the Eroilor street. However, the existing institutions (universities, libraries and theaters) have served as the focus points of many opening ceremonies in the films examined, despite the buildings having changed very little.

I have managed to answer all questions that arose at the beginning of this research project. Over the examined time period and during the 70 years since, film production has changed significantly. Discussions and theories about filmmaking have also changed, however, these are the first 50 years that define Cluj-Napoca's history in filmmaking. The "Transilvania" International Film Festival commemorates the golden age of silent film production every year. New studies are conducted and new results published annually and film-major university students recreate lost films based on old scripts. Therefore, it can be said that my collection is merely a database of film-history; however, these films are still kept alive. After defending my thesis, I plan to show a documentary about the parts most relevant to the history of the city. I will also make the database available for further, more thorough research.

My plans for further research, along with the expansion of the database, are to find more amateur footages about the city, dating up to present day, since the real golden age of amateur filmmaking started after the 1950s. I believe that collecting amateur films is important, since there is no designated archive for them, and most data carriers – even VHS tapes – show significant deterioration with regards to quality.