

Draft version

Teaching Political Science at the Movies

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POLITICAL SCIENCE AFTER THE EU ENLARGEMENT: CHALLENGES TO THE DISCIPLINE

Doing social science nowadays is rather a complicate matter yet not because of the usual challenge of bridging theory to data, concepts to reality and research with action. Social sciences might loose their appeal on their usual 'clients', students being one of the most important categories. Mirroring good social science in popular culture and the other way around can bring a much needed reality check into a discipline that finds its virtues in the ability to accommodate a complex political and intellectual agenda. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the didactic potential of film in Political Science teaching/learning, using practical cases build by scholars worldwide. Firstly, I will asses some of the advantages and drawbacks of film based Political Science teaching and then continue with brief overviews of core Political Science fields and the way they are linked with film production, either fiction or documentary. Next, a more practical section is presented as to identify typical challenges arising in developing this specific study format.

Keywords: Film, Political Science teaching, political theory, international relations,

Argument

Teaching political science through visual material can launch a bet that, if won, can plainly reward faculty effort. The bet challenges political science as to become apt and willing to reinsert itself functionally in a world extremely complex and fast. Secondly, it can smooth further student reach of highly theoretical literature by driving the process from the diversity of life and historical situation towards general patterns of explaining human behaviour. Majority of great movies political science community might be interested in usually follow great books. This way political science is connecting to valuable intellectual contribution and helps shaping itself a wider academic horizon. A good read, a good film and a good theory might be the recipe for a modern, attractive and ultimately, useful science. This format is also likely to attract students pursuing majors other than political science (history, sociology, law, journalism, anthropology etc) but still interested in politics helping disciplines link and generate new tracks of inter and multidisciplinary research.

Yet, the ultimate challenge is to reconsider political science, as a discipline and a research track in a new different context. Its capacity to capture political events and provide sound explanations and expertise is widely challenged as the politics grows in complexity, velocity and connectivity of the world. Linking with popular culture and media technology can help discipline to reinvent and not dilute.

In a much-celebrated book¹, Mattei Dogan argues one of the main aims of the comparative research is to leave ethnocentrism behind. Stretching further the argument it can be argued films can help both students and professors avoid common places, stereotypes and prejudices build against distant people, threatening neighbours or irritating minorities.

¹ Mattei Dogan (1993) How to compare nations. Comparative Political Sociology, Alternative: Bucharest, (Rom. ed.) p.9

Films in Political Science as discipline

The richness of popular culture productions was almost inescapably linked with the social sciences. Political science is not at all advanced in this matter compared with the disciplines of sociology, psychology and anthropology. Within these disciplines visual material is used as a special research tool more than a teaching one². The development of qualitative methodology privileged this kind of material. The institutional framework for scholars is provided mainly through the *International Visual Sociology Association*³. This association is supporting the *Visual Studies Journal*⁴ that is giving the members of this community a valuable outreach opportunity. These efforts show a clear sign that visual elements are becoming more important for the social sciences.

Political Science is also catching up with this trend notably in *American Political Science Association* and more recently in *European Political Science Network*. These two organizations, and probably the other also, show particular interest in linking the teaching activity with the film use. In the APSA Meetings, the *Conference Group on Politics and Film*⁵ is constantly organizing panels on various issues related to film and political science teaching. In the 2004 APSA meeting to be held in Chicago, the Group organizes a panel *Political Elections in Films* and in the 2003 the same Group organized the panel called: *Cinematic Interpretations of Politics in Hollywood Films*, together with a short course dedicated to the usage of films in teaching political science concepts. However, the American scholarly interest on the topic is not confined to the activity of this group. Young faculty and not only, try and often succeed in convincing readers and students of the usefulness of visual a more diverse and rich approach in political science teaching.

The usage of film in teaching political science is also covered by certain journals open to 'unorthodox' contributions. I would mention here only *International Studies Perspectives*, *Perspectives on Political Science* and *New Political Science*. I have to note that the international relations/foreign policy disciplines, at least in American academia are the most productive in this sense. One of the most informed and applied contributions to the topic is coming from this field covering much of the psychological and literature in support for making a case for film based foreign policy teaching⁶.

² Jon Wagner (2002) contrasting images, complementary trajectories: sociology, visual sociology and visual research, *Visual Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2.

³ **The International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA)** is a non-profit, democratic, and academically oriented professional organization devoted to the visual study of society, culture, and social relationships. The organizational membership represents a wide spectrum of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, education, visual communication, photography, art, journalism, and related fields.

⁴ *Visual Studies* is a major peer-reviewed journal. Published on behalf of the International Visual Sociology Association the journal will provide the key resource where issues of a visual nature, whether it be epistemological, methodological, empirical, symbolic, or ethical may be aired and debated.

⁵ American Political Science Association: <http://www.apsanet.org/mtgs/program/program.cfm?event=1434501>

⁶ Lynn M. Kuzma and Patrick J. Haney, (2001), and ...Action! Using Film to Learn about Foreign Policy, *International Studies Perspectives*, 2, 33–50.

Advantages of film based Political Science teaching

In the excellent article “*And...Action! Using Film to Learn about Foreign Policy*”, Kuzma and Haney identify five convincing reasons to use film in teaching social science. Firstly, this method is helpful in *stimulating the senses*. The usual verbal communication has its strong and weak points. Image has many advantages that can be converted into long lasting memories. Using films or clips doesn’t divert student attention from the written materials and lectures speeches. They just add a plus of imagine and sound, possibly reverberating in personal life experiences. Secondly, film can help *making abstract concepts concrete*. Social science typically uses more abstract concepts than natural sciences. These concepts are not at all easy to explain and made operational. The authors mention the concept of deterrence that can gain a substantial analytic body by seeing how it really works in the real life. One of the best visual references is provided by the Cold War dark comedy *Dr. Strangelove (1964)*.

Engaging emotions is also an important benefit. The emotional imagery created by movies can help students adding higher stakes to the topics debated. Yet, emotions can hinder the learning process, as some movies/scene can prove too moving to allow a meaningful debate. Teaching politics by using movies a group can address easier the past issues. Using films *helps creating bridges to the past*. Collective and personal memory doesn’t help so much in this matter. So, apart from books and recollection came from elderly relatives and friends, we might need to ‘relive’ and historically and theoretically relevant experiences of our societies. We often do speak about the 21st Century World Wars with a certain detachment. The carnages of our century tend to be forgotten or insufficiently assimilated. If students will watch Mann’s *All Quiet on the Western Front (1979)* after the novel of Eric Maria Remarque or the Francis Ford Coppola's cinema masterpiece *Apocalypse Now (1976)*, just to name two, students might see in a different light the conflict of this century. Last but not least, using films helps the faculty *advancing the learning paradigm*. From a hierarchical pattern of interaction, they can move towards a more open and creative frame. Students become more easily involved if they know that their contribution is not evaluated in relation with the ‘good answers’ from the books. Watching movies can bring in the class every student with its own ideas, experiences and viewpoints. The teacher moves from a central position and leaves the floor to the students. Ultimately, it is a move from a teaching to a learning paradigm, the latter being significantly more student orientated than the first.

Difficulties of film based Political Science teaching

There are other obvious drawbacks of this kind of format. The first difficulty comes with the actual film. Usually, the fictional films tell stories where the “personal” plan comes first. Great movies are great not only because of good stories only. Great directors and great actors make the difference. “Personal” stories and impressive acting performances might drive away students from the actual political/theoretical substance of the film. Watching *Apocalypse Now (1979)*, a student could be more impressed with Marlon Brando’s acting, instead of assimilating the information about the military and political aspects of the Vietnam War. Seeing *The Dictator (1940)* in a class dedicated to Nazi political ideology and regimes, viewers can be seduced by the extraordinary performance of Charlie Chaplin. It is the difficult task of the instructor to lead the discussion back from the story in the more general topic to be studied, and to drive away the interest from characters and experiences towards typical individual behaviour, meaningful processes and institutions in a given period.

Secondly, it is difficult to discern ideology from valuable political information/arguments. Movies are seen especially because are part the dominant culture of their society and age. We watch the Nazi films to grasp stereotypes and psychological patterns of the German population of the machinery of Nazi regime. This is true for all propaganda film either fiction or documentary. When ideology is not there sometime simple human sorrow moves in. If we remove Spielberg's *Schindler List*⁷ (1993) and a number of other rough movies about Nazism, and we will project Benigni's *La Vitta e Bella* (1997) or Mihaileanu's *Train de Vie* (1998) the effect is still emotionally striking.

In a similar vein we watch American and Soviet movies dated in the Cold War period to explore the clashing views of the two sides. Any production is ultimately linked to a view of the world and human being that generate ideological inclinations. Chaplin's films only by shaping an artistic agenda centred on the life of the poor group in a developing American society displayed a certain kind of bitter tasted leftism.

Related the that, one major problem is that political science can be taught this way only in cultures with high developed movie industry. As any other industry related with culture carries vivid biases. The movie industry is completely dominated by the American productions, which are rarely bothered by cheesy Latin American soap operas and art orientated European movies. Even though American movies were not all the time patriotic and militaristic⁸ they still retain some psychological patterns. Emmerich's *The Independence Day* (1997) movie displays the naked global political leadership of United States forged against the worse enemy mankind had from its inception. Threat, if we were to put it in Rational Choice terms, might be insufficiently credible to symbolically justify such actions, but the point was anyway made, passing to the audience a sense of political exceptionalism profoundly related to American political culture. Of course, there is always an inverse relation. Politics is influenced by movies. The *Star Wars* trilogy (1977, 1981, 1983), a well known pop cultural icon in United States and worldwide, provided to the American administration with a symbolical imagery which framed the security policy in a positive context (1983 - Strategic Defence Initiative, the so-called "Star Wars" Plan launched by Ronald Reagan)⁹.

The cowboy movies that populated the childhood of the present mature generation did promoted certain attitudes and patterns of interaction with the inchoate political authority and other population living in the country. The typical hero is a self-employed gunman who comes a saves a community¹⁰ by its own strength from the menace represented by thieves and burglars. He usually ignores the incapacitated sheriffs and mayors and while fighting the villains is also combating the savage Indians who endanger the life and property of the civilized newcomers. When wondering why the National Rifle Association (NRA) is the most powerful civil organization United States, one has to look in the history and to the way this history has been told by this moment. As an interesting counterbalance of the popular individualism, anti governmental stances and gun use supporting attitudes, it is interesting to

⁷ please also see movie's Teaching Guide at: <http://www.tulane.edu/~so-inst/slindex.htm>

⁸ Tom Pollard (2002) The Hollywood War Machine, *New Political Science*, Volume 24, Number 1.

⁹ David S. Mayers, Star Wars, *Star Wars* and American Political Culture, *Journal of Popular Culture*,

¹⁰ Mary P. Nichols (2002) Heroes and Political Communities in John Ford's Westerns: The Role of Wyatt Earp in *My Darling Clementine*, *Perspectives on Political Science*, Spring 2002, Volume 31, Number 2

watch Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2001) an awarded documentary which challenges many of the American political and policy traditional items¹¹.

The limits are not only related to the ideological bias but directly to the reach of the story. *West Wing*, an excellent serial produced by NBC and potentially very useful in teaching politics and government¹², has the obvious limit that it covers only the American political system. If the movies reach foreign policy issues it becomes substantially more interesting for the non-American viewers. Although very informative and insightful, *West Wing* sheds little light on other types of presidential institutions than the American one.

Another problem is posed by differences in student openness to a variety of films. When students hear they will see movies they think of their favourite movies. Yet watching Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) might be less appealing than seeing Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999). It is the task of the instructor to frame the movies in a convincing manner that overpasses the natural barriers of taste and perception of fairly different movies productions.

Another problematic aspect is the difficult access to films that is making the design of course selective and potentially affecting the coherent approach of topics. Given the example of the Cold War films, it would be advisable to select materials from both 'sides'. If there are any, they could be really hard to get and use (translation can be one problem).

To conclude, it is very difficult to link the movies to the topics and is especially difficult to present two or more sides of the story. Unequal development of film industry and little access to such visual resources affect the coherent coverage of the topics. More importantly, it is very hard to discern any 'objective' knowledge coming from the movies. If the original book the film is inspired from is ideologically biased, it is probable producers, screenwriters, directors and even audiences to alter the potentially objective knowledge or information provided.

Forging links between Film and Political Science

The overall production of films is too large to even think of mapping it. Political science also is a large umbrella discipline where various sub-field emerge and connect. The diversity of film and political science is overwhelming. Yet a certain order can be done in the film-discipline nexus. The references in this part tries are not at all complete, both movies and topics are more than numerous to be grasped by this simplified disciplinary account.

Film and political theory

Apparently this is the field where is the easiest to find connections. Many movies relate to political philosophy and history of political thought topics and arguments. We may agree that not everything is politics leaving the rest aside. Yet, it is not so easy to discern what is political and what it isn't. Personal or collective, present or past, human experiences comprise

¹¹ Michael Moore developed a comprehensive website related to his work, both movies and books. It is useful to note that *Bowling for Columbine* is completed with rich teaching material to accompany the movie. Moore is offering a Guide for teaching *Bowling for Columbine*.

¹² Bjh An (2002) *The West Wing as an inspiring teacher*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts.

the combined actions of institution and organizations. Their nature is interesting for us all as politics from the beginning of time and the present days has changed too much its ends. When thinking of the classical *The Prince* of Nicollo Machiavelli, the historical reference to Renaissance Florence might be too exotic. As long as Machiavelli himself substantiated his arguments with antic and real stories from his close environment, why not look closer to seek examples of human behaviour in situations marked by uncertainty and competition? Such reference was identified in the classical Coppola's *Godfather* (1972)¹³, as a good example of meaningful environment for explaining the nature of power and leadership.

Societies will always react like the little boys stranded on an island in Brooks's *Lord of the Flies* (1963) following a famous novel of William Golding which many people consider the book of the Second World War. Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) is a natural reference a certain definition of politics seen as a struggle and continuous effort. The question of ideology, as doctrine and political system, is generously covered in the movie collections. Apart from great books and movies, there are a lot of interesting documentary that observe closely aspect of politics and history. As long as they are seconded by quality literature they all can be useful.

In a very interesting material¹⁴, Schelben and Yenerall, develop the methodology of film-based teaching of several undergraduate politics courses. They admitted that the selection of the topics combined two criteria, namely the *importance of the topic* in the overall theoretical debate and the *availability of film*. They group the topics in a cvasi dialectical manner focusing on the Twentieth century ideologies. The films are presented around the lines of Marxism/ communism, the American responses to communism ("the Red Scare") the Eastern European contestation of the official ideology and last but not least a look into fascism as an alternative to the communist ideology.

For the communist ideology, the teachers used a number of films that, apart from their obvious propaganda scope, uncovered relevant arguments and issues specific to that ideology. In Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) one of the masterpieces of the world cinema, which tells the story of the unsuccessful 1905 Russian revolution, the communist ideology gains a body by identifying the main actors of the political process, the sailors serving on Potemkin / the proletariat and the Czarist regime and their interaction, irreconcilable and unavoidable conflict based on two conflicting views of the world. The second movie used was Shub's *The Fall of Romanov Dynasty* (1927), which is presenting an image of a broken Russian society dividing the small yet powerful Czarist oligarchy and the poor and numerous Russian peasantry.

The American reaction came both in political and cinematic term. The 'Red Scare' of the early Cold War generated an abundant production of movies. The anticommunist hysteria flowed from Hollywood to Washington and the other way around. The obsession of infiltration by communists was central to the American cinema: *The Iron Curtain* (1948), *The Red Menace* (1949), *I Married a Communist* (1949) etc.

Hollywood soon recovered and started to fully criticize the flaws of anticommunist dodgy and abusive policy. With films as *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), a science fiction

¹³ David Caroll Cochran (2002) Using *Godfather* to teach the *Prince*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts

¹⁴ Mark Sachleben and Kevan M. Yenerall (2002) *Seeing the Bigger picture, Using Film to represent Cross-field Problems in Political Science Classroom*, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts

allegory, American cinema becomes very sensitive to the prices of fighting anticommunism. The sacrifices of personal freedom are put into balance with achieving real, or for worse, imaginary political goals. In the classical Frankenheimer's movie *Manchurian Candidate* (1962) the lethal conformism of American class is critically assessed and the political manoeuvres of leaders to instil psychotically fear in order to boost their careers is strongly opposed¹⁵. The anticommunist fear stayed with American cinema for a long period of time, even the in the last deacades. The topic was also addressed by highly appreciated documentaries (*Hollywood on trial -1976* and the *Black list: Hollywood on trial -1996*).

As for the communist contestation, the authors chose films from the excellent Czech cinema school, where Milos Forman is by far the most well-known and acclaimed director. Part of the charm of Eastern criticism is that it had to more subtle and cunning as to avoid the censorship of the regime. This cinema produce some memorable pieces as *The loves of a Blonde* (1975) and *Firemen's Ball* (1976) a dissimulated yet striking critic of the absurdity of the Stalinist like regimes in Eastern Europe. Both stories are stories about simple people in simple life situations, yet extremely corrosive to state ideology. It is interesting to note that Milos Forman kept his commitment to liberty of expression during his activity as a US hosted director. Movies like *Amadeus* (1984) and *The people vs. Larry Flint* (1996) were both controversial and concerned in advocating free speech and expression.

Continuing the dialectical route through Twentieth century the author mention some important items regarding the rise ad fall of fascism (including Nazism). In a cinematic description of fascism the main landmark is *The Triumph of Will* (1934), directed by Leni Riefenstahl, an unprecedented mix of filmmaking and ideological standoff. Yet fascism was not profiled in the propaganda movies but also in the American cinema. In La Cava's movie *Gabriel over the White House* (1933), a United States president, just recovered from an accident decides to confront the smear economic crisis of the Great Depression by mounting a Nazi type of authoritarianism (combining extreme centralization of power in own hands and solving the macroeconomic problems through full state employment). The effects of this kind of regime are projected on a confused and American society.

Much later in a more subtle way, the counterfactual question of what would have happened in the Germany won the Second World War is posed in Brownlow and Mollo's *It Happened Here* (1966) British movie. Fascism, even long dead still haunts public opinion. In Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* (1997) action movie, the benefits of a fascist like society are presented. In a society close to chaos and confronting a fierce enemy, the best recipe for survival is to rely on brute violence and power. However scandalous is to imagine a linkage between citizenship and military service, the film was harshly criticized for its pro-fascist stance even though the director probably didn't want to make a case for fascism but rather to imagine ways out of conflict and crisis.

The number the films presented by author are not by far sufficiently covered in the article. Virtually, any movie which questions the ways of social organization can be useful in understanding political terms as power, influence, authority, etc. Any films where an institution is acting upon the life of one or millions can be critically scrutinize starting from films but always-reaching relevant literature on the topic.

¹⁵ Elisabeth Anker (2003). Aligning historical reception with political context subversion and satire in *The Manchurian Candidate*, paper prepared for delivery at the 2003 annual meeting of the american political Science Association, Chicago

Film and International Relations Theory

As mentioned earlier international relation field enjoys greatly the benefits film industry worldwide. Question of war mainly, are at the core of the paradigmatic debates and also rank very high on the popular interest scale. When one looks in the history, the majority of issues raised come traditionally in the IR playground. The topics come from the most unexpected sources. The recent resurgence of ancient history movies (*The Gladiator-2004*, *Troy-2004*, and *Alexander Macedon-2004*) hopefully will bring attention to very meaningful periods of time. Scott's *The Gladiator* recall us the imperial experience of Rome, experience which is considered by some scholars of high relevance to the 'current' empire, United States. Seeing *Troy* for example brings us to the World of ancient Greece city-states and their anarchical relations that practically offered the ground for the invention of history and international relation. After all, the stepping-stone of these disciplines is provided by the stories of Thucydides who inspired for centuries people to look in the hidden resorts of war and peace. Even though the war of Troy and the Peloponnesian wars are quite different, at historical scale they seem rather. The question audience leaves from the theatres is why Troy felled? If you look further than the love story between Paris and Elena, one can see a textbook strategic game. The king Agamemnon uses his predominance over the other smaller kings of old Greece to attack and destroy the rival prosperous Troy. He achieves two objectives with only one war: he destroys a defiant and potentially dangerous enemy, and fosters his authority forging the Greek common identity. If World War 1 and the Peloponnesian war were explained in terms of inevitability and the funnel of choices why couldn't the Troy War be?¹⁶

We don't have to go so early in history to find relevant cases for international relation theory. The war in contemporary history gives us enough material to study. Moreover, as we have seen during the last two Iraqi wars, the way war is understood is intrinsically linked with the image. In an excellent film, which presents a tragic story happened during the Bosnian war-Tanovic's *No Man's Land (2001)*- international media by its global influence puts pressure on the ignorant peacekeeping troops to move in and help three stranded men caught between lines. In order to understand war nowadays, you have to both open a book and press the TV button for the latest war new on CNN or BBC.

Even though I am sure that there are others, I would mention here only two IR related efforts to integrate movies in teaching. Building on their experiences in teaching an American foreign policy course, Kuzma and Haney proposed three topical issues to be address the courses: history of U.S. foreign policy during and after the Cold War, actors and institutions that affect U.S. foreign policy and emerging and enduring issue areas in U.S. foreign policy. In the opening course, the instructors used a clip from Moore's documentary *Canadian Bacon (1995)* that presents the dilemmas of American policy makers after the end of the Cold War including the effort to come up with a new enemy on the line. The first topic was covered with movies like Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978)*, previously mentioned and Badham's *War Games (1983)*. The latter movie presents the effects of a policy of US top leadership aimed at eliminating any kind of human error in dealing with security threats, thus giving to a computer the capacity to decide on and launch nuclear attacks. The picture is enriched with some documentaries (*Post War Hopes, Cold War Fears-1988*, and an anti-Communist propaganda film produced by the Department of Defence entitled *Red Nightmare -1962*). In order to grasp the final stage of the Cold War, the authors moved to a surprising film, *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country (1992)*. This choice may appear strange but as soon as you get the plot it all makes sense. The star ship Enterprise and its crew have to fight

¹⁶ Joseph Nye Jr. (2003) *Understanding International Conflict*, Pearson: New York, pp 12-20,78-80

a dying Klingon Empire, which is collapsing due to bad economic performances doubled with a severe energy crisis. The analogy with the US Soviet Union-Russia became obvious for all the students enrolled in the course.

Moving forward to the actors of US foreign policy, the instructors picked for their classes 6 movies, 5 fictions and one documentary. In order to map the policy actor's position in foreign policy, Petersen's *Air Force One* (1997) was used. Next the Stone's biographical movie *Nixon* (1995) was presented, an excellent piece which uncovers the finest psychological and organizational resorts of being at the top leadership level. For an overview of the impact of technology on security and intelligence activity and specifically its interaction with the political decision making it was used Scott's *Enemy of the State* (1998) movie. Moving outside the borders of United States, the instructor used Englund's *The Ugly American* (1963) to present the way the foreign policy is actually put in practice highlighting the way it produces impacts on other societies. This movie was projected in order to create a empathy for the citizens of the countries which are affected by American policy often designed in remote offices in Washington and loosing its grip on the field situation. One of the most important topics of US foreign policy is the relation with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. To explain the two superpowers behaviour, especially when it comes to the nuclear war, they used Page's *Missiles of October* (1974). The movie tell the inside story of decision making during the missile crisis in Cuba.

Last but not least, they are adding a critical note to the foreign policy making as mirrored in the arguments of Noam Chomsky, a staunch critic of US security policies. In the Canadian documentary *Manufacturing Consent* (1993), the attention of the class focuses in critical vein on the role in conflicts of the international media.

While turning to the emerging and enduring foreign policy issues, the instructors used the movie Duigan's *Romero* (1989), a biography of a Salvadorian bishop that became a human rights activist assassinated by a paramilitary group. The focus of the discussion was on the US policy in the country several point being raised regarding the support to military/authoritarian regimes whose sole quality is conduciveness to US interests.

The students next watched Kubrick's black comedy *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and the *Atomic Café* (1982) documentary, a compilation of newsreels and government films presenting US agenda in atomic matters. For the post World War 2 period, the last movie presented showed the potential friction between the civilian sector and resourceful military sector. In Frankenheimer's movie *7 Days in May* (1964), the commander of the Joint Chief of Staff is trying to overthrow the president on the basis of his pretended 'soft' security policy.

Another interesting contribution comes from Cynthia Weber¹⁷ who presents the efforts to combine teaching International relations theories and popular movies. She first settled to a number of five core group theories (Neo-Realism, Neo-Idealism, Wendtian Constructivism, Gender and Globalization) and proposed core proposition for each of them¹⁸.

The movies selected to accompany each of the theory groups and underlying statement were: *Lord of the Flies*-1963, *Independence Day*-1996, *Wag the Dog*-1997, *Fatal Attraction*-1987 and *The Truman Show*-1998. The discussion concentrated on the capacity of movies to

¹⁷ Cynthia Weber, 2001, The Highs and Lows of Teaching IR Theory: Using Popular Films for Theoretical Critique, *International Studies Perspectives*, 2, 281–287.

¹⁸ Neo-Realism—"international anarchy is the permissive cause of war", Neo-Idealism—"there is an international society", Constructivism—"anarchy is what states make of it", Gender—"gender is a variable", Globalization—"it is the end of history"

explore the conceptual depths of the theories but also on the extent they can provide valuable critical arguments for/against the assumption of the theories.

Film and Comparative Politics

As well as for the film and political theory part, the cinematic references in relation to core comparative politics topics are abundant. If we are thinking only of election or the activity of government and leadership the offer becomes almost discouraging. Biographies can be extremely welcomed. I have mentioned earlier *Nixon* but Schaffner's *Patton (1970)* and Attenborough's *Ghandi (1982)* can be easily added. Biographical movies can bring us inside the minds of important leaders and decision makers. Thus we can create a psychological back up in their institutional incentives and constraints for action.

Moving to subfield of comparative politics, namely the theory of democratization, the references become fascinating. Orson Welles *Animal Farm (1999- John Stephenson)* and 1984 (the movie version, Giliam's *Brazil-1985*) can bring us inside the mechanisms of a totalitarian state and the processes of which a democracy can fall and cede to an authoritarian regime.

A special note deserves the post communist democratization. Unfortunately there aren't great movies convincingly telling the story of post communist transitions. The cinema was high jacked by the intellectually poor action productions about Arab terrorist using Soviet weapons and the obsessively violent accounts of the Yugoslav war. The film footage of the Ceausescu's execution, even though very interesting, didn't help too much¹⁹.

I am convinced that great movies about transition were made (it is certainly the case for Romania) but they didn't reach a large audience as to become popular points of reference.

This trend was somehow enriched by productions like Kusturica's *Underground (1995)* that tells the story of Balkan people, surviving with bloody hands to communism and ethnic war. The movie offers maybe one of the most seductive metaphors of communism. During World War 2, one of the main characters is hiding from Germans in a bunker together with a group of fellow Serbs. At the end of the war his best friend doesn't tell the people inside war is over and he keeps them producing weapons for the now imaginary war. The people inside live with the idea of the ongoing war waiting for its final day. They are going out of the bunker only when communism is extinct and plunge directly in the ethnical war.

Within the maybe forced frame of comparative politics I would like to stress here the special status of rational choice theory that enjoyed a consistent backing from the popular culture. Rational choice gain unexpected support with the well acclaimed Howard's movie *A beautiful mind (2001)* presenting the fascinating life of John Nash, the Nobel prize winner for economy and one of the fathers of game theory. John Nash gave the world one of the conceptual solution to the problems of social interaction (the Nash equilibrium).

Yet the references are much older. The well-known Chicken's Game, one of the standard strategic games in social science had its name taken from a situation in the classical movie *Rebel without a cause (1955)*. Rushing the cars off the cliffs is maybe one of the most well-known movie scene of this century. Game theory blossomed in cinema along with the Cold War when the strategic interaction between US and the Soviet Union was successful framed using theory's conceptual tools.

¹⁹ Vincent Kelly Pollard(2002) The ISP forum: dialogue and debate. At the Movies: A Continuing Dialogue on the Challenges of Teaching with Film, *International Studies Perspectives*, 3, 89–94.

Rational choice works satisfactorily when it comes to conflicts involving two or more sides and when clear-cut decisions are made. The event rather than process approach made this paradigm theory more obvious and a theoretical safety net for many political situation and events. The link between the game theory and the popular culture is realised also in excellent way through a portal which is one useful teaching learning tool²⁰. The portal contains specific references to the films which make the association really easy to be done.

Film and Public Policy

Even though it is not a field where cinematic references are immediately obvious, this is in fact one of the most fertile tracks of discussion²¹. Virtually every political situation involves the direct and indirect actions of a public authority. Coming back to the above mentioned *Bowling for Columbine*, one of the major stakes of the film is to answer to one obsessive question: Why America is so violent (the reported deaths by shooting)? This concern that uncovers the need for causal reasoning can make happy (or miserable) any political scientist. The policy perspective we can also mention movies that address issues of bureaucracy and organization of public services. In the British television serial comedy *Yes, Minister* the relation between the political leadership of on minister and secretary is depicted as to show how the influence and actual policy making heavily relies on the expert bureaucrat rather than the shallow politician.

A special note deserves Soderberg's *Traffic* (2000), a movie that, by its influence on the public, and the media can be considered as a focusing event²² for a major policy change. Even though this effect it is hard to demonstrate, we can say that many movies treat problems that are failure of policies or actions of government. Virtually any film describing an unwanted social situation can raise serious questions on the ability of government to solve problems.

A new interdisciplinary research track emerged as the world and especially US recovered after the 9/11 attacks. The quantity of the literature in the case of terrorism is consistently smaller than the number of movies. We can say that fear from terrorism is corresponding to the early Cold War 'Red Scare'. Terrorists are everywhere, in the world and in America. US are again vulnerable in the face of vicious attacks (see for a reference Leder's *The Peacemaker-1997*). In an excellent piece²³, John S. Nelson describes extensively the Hollywood production related to terror and horror. The almost painful connection between politics and film was the cooption of Hollywood screen players in designing defence plans against terrorism. It was acknowledged that the Hollywood in its commercial rush explored so thoroughly America's fears and vulnerabilities that they have become the first line in combating terrorism.

²⁰ Game Theory .net is a *A resource portal for educators and students of game theory*. hosted at the Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt University available at www.gametheory.net.

²¹ O.C. McSwite(2003) Now more than ever—refusal as redemption, *Administrative Theory & Praxis* Vol. 25, No. 2, 183–204.

²² Stephanie Riker (2002) Film as Focusing Event.traffic's effect on drug policy Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts

²³ John S. Nelson Hollywood prefigures politics. Cinematic anticipations of terrorism in America

Practical challenges for film based Political Science teaching

Given the arguments presented it might seem a good idea to use films in teaching. Yet when one moves to the practical aspect a number of serious concerns come up.

Up to this point it seems possible to go for two approaches that in fact can be parts of a spectrum covering the extent the visual material is used. In the comprehensive manner we can design a whole course based on films. A course of authoritarianism and democratization theory can very well be taught using films. Following a narrow approach, film or clips from movies can be used to highlight arguments or initiate specific debate only. This represents the middle way in combining the impact of the visual material with the depth of a regular reading/discussion. This kind of meetings might very well be set outside formal classes as workshops or applied seminars. The advantage of this kind of meetings is that the students attending for sure want to be there and participate. If the format proves to be successful in terms of participation and even output (for example articles or small essays projects), it can become more institutionalized by organizing optional/ compulsory courses, having more formal requirements. The extent and the level of institutionalization of this format depend on many factors. When it comes to using films there are contextual factors that can help the success of this kind of initiative

The topics. Political science is a broad field. If we were to believe that politics is everything than political science has the unwanted but still noble burden of explaining human behaviour in most of its contexts. Yet some disciplines can be more completely covered than others. The political history or the international relation-foreign policy of one country /period is likely to benefit from consistent contribution rather than policy-making or any other subfield.

The class level. The general aim of this teaching format is framing Political Science topics in general cultural knowledge and products. These way students can be encouraged to think critically and further deepen arguments and issues. As students climb the specialization ladder, the general interest on the exercise might decrease. This kind of format is well suited for undergraduate/ introductory courses.

The cultural openness. Faculty openness to this format is decisive. Let us imagine a Political science department receiving a proposal of introducing a course of political science based on visual materials. The reaction, surprisingly or not, would be a rejection, if the case is not strongly made. Not all the scholars are ready and willing to accept such a change of direction in teaching. It is important to stress that the visual material is complementary to the learning process, which includes compulsory reading and optional materials and the normal assignments (term projects, essays, research etc).

The technical level and the movie availability. The technological part of this teaching format seems the less serious concerns one might have. If proper equipment (PC's, video projectors etc) is not available the work might be more complicated. Secondly if the university doesn't have a good collection of movies it might be hard to get coherent coverage of the topics debated

Conclusion

The ultimate aim of the paper is also to formulate an open invitation to all scholars and researchers willing to expand their usual reference and style of teaching. There are great movies out there that can illuminate aspects of politics maybe insufficiently highlighted by normal textbooks. All the sources consulted show relevant improvements of the student's performance as soon as the movies were introduced. The challenges ahead for the instructors are to convince faculty, students and even themselves that teaching political science can be more interesting if we sometimes close the books and start look around at what everyone sees and consider important.

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<http://www.apsanet.org/mtgs/program/program.cfm?event=1434501>

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<i>The Dictator (1940)</i>	<i>No Man's Land (2001)</i>
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<i>The Independence Day (1997)</i>	<i>Red Nightmare (1962)</i>
<i>Star Wars Trilogy (1977, 1981, 1983)</i>	<i>Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country (1992)</i>
<i>Bowling for Columbine (2001)</i>	<i>Air Force One (1997)</i>
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<i>Hollywood on Trial (1976)</i>	<i>Ghandi (1982)</i>
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