

The Declining Civilization – *The Social Network*

Movie Reviews

Author: Andrei Bangu

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David Fincher's latest film, *The Social Network*, is the story of the creation of the virtual network Facebook. It starts with a Harvard dorm and ends with a Boston federal court, where a trial took place between Mark Zuckerberg and a couple of his college classmates, who claimed they had been cheated in various ways and consequently put in a claim for damages. The unusual part of this event is that none of those who paid off their scores was particularly likeable and moreover, none of them was one hundred per cent right. Hollywood movies generally throw us this type of 'lifesavers', so that we may have something to hold on to. *The Social Network*, however, lets us float adrift or, at best, watch the show and marvel. The violent selfishness and the eagerness to get rich that surfaced then are portrayed as a big warning signal. If, in *Zodiac*'s case, they spoke about 'informational cancer', everything here is affected by it. This form of cancer can be conveniently called the Internet or the virtual information, but in reality, it may be something much darker: it might be human nature itself. Neither Fincher, nor screenwriter Aaron Sorkin bothers to comment much on the new type of socialization (the virtual one), or on the way it influences human relationships. Instead, they offer enough evidence of our habit of destroying relationships ourselves, with or without the help of the Internet – we merely need the right circumstances.

Zuckerberg is extremely disagreeable. That is why he is not really the usual type of hero, and young actor Jesse Eisenberg, feeling at ease as an arrogant, misanthropist nerd, delivers a great performance. As early as the first sequence (a wild dialogue racing along for 5 or 6 minutes), he treats his girlfriend as an unaccomplished kid (she attends Boston University, which, according to him, is a kind of cradle of mediocrity), and afterwards he calls her every name under the sun on his blog. Eduardo Severin (played by Andrew Garfield) appears to be Zuckerberg's best friend, but you cannot be sure of that. Zuckerberg seems to use him in different ways: he uses his money, his knowledge about business economics, and the algorithm he had developed, and eventually excludes him from their business. In fact, he is nasty to everyone: his friends, his colleagues, his girlfriend, and has the same



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respect for them as for animals at the zoo. Add to this the neurosis and the Jewish origin, and you will get a Woody Allen completely lacking compassion and charisma. Certainly, there are some Hollywood marks, such as Zuckerberg's eventual 'humanization', although it is rather dim, as well. Understanding the gravity of the accusations he has been charged with, he accepts an agreement with the plaintiffs, and then he asks himself whether he really is an asshole, just in time for one of his lawyers to conveniently comfort him, 'You're not an asshole. You're just trying so hard to be.'

Overall, the story's true irony is that all those involved in the trial – each one contributing with something –, have created a small social phenomenon, in the meantime successfully destroying their relationships with one another. An example of black humour is that of the Winklevoss twins, who, claiming that Zuckerberg had stolen their idea of a social networking website for Harvard students, try to solve their conflict in a friendly manner at first, without digressing from the honour of such an academic membership. However, after the university's president dispatches them, and thus the 'amiable' solution does not seem to work out at all, they reach the conclusion that the 'sue the asshole' strategy is the best. All the relationships and good intentions are rotten, as words are uttered, and scandals unfold. I know, it sounds somehow like a grandiose academic demonstration of 'how much the twenty-first century world sucks', but film-making does not involve being too ostentatious. Nothing can ease the feeling that everything seen and heard between the walls of that court room has already been seen and heard many times before, and that precisely those walls confine humanity.

In view of all this, *The Social Network* is not a masterpiece – it is the kind of good and honest film with no particular depth. Some may wonder what has drawn David Fincher to make this film, as he is an excellent stylistic explorer of the *noir* genre. The answer can be very simple – a little variety. This film allowed him to work on the accuracy of the portraits and also to polish the dialogues, many of them full of catchy things. However, it was not a good choice for him to make the characters talk so much and so fast – at one point I felt as if I were in the middle of a hailstorm, with no shelter in sight. Playing not far from the rules of commercial films, but far enough as to allow himself the freedom to create a couple of atypical characters, but at the same time authentic in their lack of charisma, Fincher manages to build a rather gloomy portrait of the contemporary world.

Translated by: *Cristina Firoiu*

Proofreader: *Cristina Cărămida*

MTTLC, Bucharest University



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