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FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES

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Close Up: Film and Media Studies

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Concerning The Local Precursors Of The New Romanian Realism

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Abstract
The article looks at several important Romanian films from the 1945-1989 era, which are said to prefigure the "New Realism" of the 2000s. The article argues that this "New Realism" – the aesthetic introduced to Romanian cinema by director Cristi Puiu and his co-screenwriter Răzvan Rădulescu – was, indeed, something largely new to Romanian films.

Keywords
Cristi Puiu, Răzvan Rădulescu, Lucian Pintilie, Mircea Daneliuc, Alexandru Tatos, André Bazin, Bazinian realism, Italian neorealism, *Reenactment, Microphone Test, Sequences, Stuff and Dough, The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu.*

David Bordwell recommends that, in the enterprise of establishing the causes of a stylistic trend – in our case, the emergence, in the first decade of the new millennium, of an ensemble of screenwriting and directorial norms which have come to define the "New Romanian Cinema" in the eyes of international critics and cinephiles – "to proceed in steady steps, moving from the artwork to the proximate conditions of production (agents, institutions, and communal norms and practices)" and *only afterwards* advancing to immediate social causes and longer-term preconditions[1].

To us, the artworks are first and foremost the Romanian films *Stuff and Dough* (2001) and *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (2005), both directed by Cristi Puiu, because they were made before the others and because there are clear indications that they have contributed to orientating other creators of the phenomenon named NRC (the abbreviation used by Romanian film critic Alex. Leo Şerban for the "New Romanian Cinema"); of this much we can be sure.

As for the proximate conditions, we can be sure that Cristi Puiu's way of thinking about cinema owed a lot, al least at the beginning, to the intellectual discoveries he made during his studies in Switzerland (at Geneva's École Supérieure d'Art Visuel), at the end of which he wrote a graduation paper entitled "Notes on the Realist Film" and, according to his own statements, became obsessed

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with "dissolving the frontier between documentary and fiction", with "reconciling the role of the observer with that of the creator"[2].

From here on, we must, however, proceed with caution. How did the institution of Romanian cinema influence (if at all) the self-definition of Puiu as an artist? Through its small budgets? (It's possible, but to what extent did that influence him?) Through the example of a certain tradition or local figure? (But what tradition? Whose figure?) Or maybe (as Andrei Ujică suggested to me in a conversation) the local cinematic traditions and personalities mattered less than the shock of seeing the 1989 Romanian Revolution live on television? But we've already gone too far. Let's stay in the realm of the verifiable and establish to what extent claims to a local tradition, one that prefigured NRC, can be sustained.

In order to be able to talk about such a thing, it would be necessary to refer to a neorealist movement in the history of Romanian cinema. There were impulses in that direction, impulses which are most clearly detectable in the films of Alexandru Tatos and Mircea Daneliuc, but never an actual movement. The norms of classical cinematic narration, which in countries like France or the United States had achieved a very high degree of consolidation and refinement before the Second World War, were assimilated much more slowly and clumsily in the Romanian cinema of the same period. After the war, these norms were replaced, for a while, by those of Socialist Realism (imported from the Soviet Union), which, from a purely stylistic perspective, can be regarded as a more "monumental" and "academic" version of classical Hollywood narration, and which, in its Romanian practice, never achieved any significant consolidation, either.

The films of Italian neorealism were first screened in this country with a considerable delay – in 1956-1957 – and, even then, with major omissions. In his book *The Critical History of Contemporary Romanian Cinema*, Valerian Sava comments on this Cold War thaw – when, for the first time in many years, local film culture opened itself up to foreign (other than Soviet) product: "A festival of Italian film and a similar event celebrating British cinema delight, but also disappoint somewhat: in the first case, too many of the screened films are conventional commercial fare, while, in the second, pride of place is given to adaptations of literary classics. The most powerful impact belongs to the latter. Prestigious, more or less academic (*Hamlet* and *Richard III* by Laurence Olivier, *Great Expectations* by David Lean and some others), they enter the current repertoire of Romanian cinemas – an accessiblity which helps them influence the tastes of local directors, substitute-producers and virtual screenwriters. On the contrary, the omissions in the Italian selection, the postponed access to many peaks of the Italian neorealism – works by Visconti, Rossellini, Fellini, but also a film like De Sica's *Miracle in Milan*, suspected of mysticism because of its ironic flights of fancy, such as the street-sweepers' final rise to the skies –, all of these compromise the learning of the more difficult artistic lesson offered by the crucial cinematic movement of the era." (A partial compensation is offered – as Valerian Sava also notes –, by screenwriter Cesare Zavattini's visit to Bucharest, in early 1957, to inform us about "the «point of view» of neorealism as «moral deed» [quotation marks by V. S.].[3])

On the other hand, the important writings of André Bazin, inspired in part by the very discovery of the "crucial cinematic movement of the era", were translated in Romanian (at the Meridiane Publishing Press) only in 1968, and until the very recent past they don't seem to have had any impact on the local ways of understanding cinema. In fact, as late as 2011, an academic article (by Adrian T. Sîrbu) about Andrei Ujică's film *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceauşescu* can serenely identify the "nature" of cinema with montage[4], as if the kuleshovian-pudovkinian tenets of the 1920s about the preeminent role of editing in *any* type of cinema had never been questioned.

Premiering in 1956, *The Lucky Mill*/*La moara cu noroc* (by Victor Iliu) was one of the first (and few) important works of the Romanian cinematic classicism – a very delayed classicism, considering that in the France of 1956, a new cinematic revolution ("the New Wave") was just around the corner. The masterpiece of this classical phase, *Forest of the Hanged/Pădurea spînzuraţilor*, arrived in 1965. It was followed by a short-lived period of synchronization with the forms of art cinema flowering at the time all over the rest of Europe (the term "art cinema" is here understood, following David Bordwell, as unsnobbishly describing "a distinct branch of the cinematic institution", "a distinct mode of film practice, possessing a definite historical existence, a set of conventions, and implicit viewing procedures"[5]), the most impressive proof of this synchronization being Lucian Pintilie's *Reenactment/Reconstituirea* (1970). As proven by *Reenactment* (and also by later films like *Microphone Test/Probă de microfon* by Mircea Daneliuc or *Sequences/Secvenţe* by Alexandru Tatos), this synchronization involved, among other things, the assimilation of the modernist idea that "transparency" is suspect (it's a lie: the screen is not a mere window on the world etc.), and "self-reflexivity" is beneficial (it teaches the spectator to question the truth claims of any filmic representation of the world). Even in the absence of a local tradition of well-crafted "classical" (i. e. Hollywood-like) cinematic realism, and even in the absence of any equivalent to the Italian neorealist revolution, artistically sophisticated Romanian films were now compelled to draw attention to the artifice imvolved in their own realistic representations. This imperative was not only up to date, but also genuinely brave in the Romania of 1970, when making a film that taught viewers about the constructedness of oficially-sanctioned filmic representation was a subversive act in the fullest and most dangerous sense of the word.

The idea that *Reenactment* anticipates the films of the NRC is widely accepted today. For example, American critic Jay Weissberg writes that "any discussion about the New Romanian Cinema" must take into consideration "the bridges with the past" represented by some of Pintilie's films[6], while in the critical anthology *The 10 Best Romanian Movies of All Time* (coordinated by Cristina Corciovescu and Magda Mihăilescu), Marina Roman writes that *Reenactment* and *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* are both "*sui generis* investigative quasi-reportages", "[e]ach with a perfectly justified contiguity of space and time", "[c]lassic structures in which ellipsis is declared *non grata*"[7]. Also, it is generally acknowledged that Cristi Puiu admires *Reenactment* (as well as *Sequences* and Stere Gulea's 1988 *The Moromete Family/Moromeţii*, but not many other Romanian films), and that Pintilie supported Puiu to produce his first film (*Stuff and Dough*) and then directed a film co-written by Puiu with Răzvan Rădulescu (*Niki & Flo/Niki Ardelean, colonel în rezervă*, 2004). And yet it's worth posing the question: aside from providing Puiu with a source of moral inspiration (because of its courage, integrity and high level of achievement), is *Reenactment* also an aesthetic forerunner of the NRC? Is it really the manifestation of a kindred way of thinking about the cinema?

The plot of *Reenactment* plays out on the terrace and surroundings of an indeterminately located bar (nearby there are a swimming pool, a railroad, a football stadium and some mountains), in the course of a single day during which two boys are forced to reenact, for the purposes of an educational film, a drunken fight they had had a few days before. The other main characters are a prosecutor, a corporal, a professor, a girl whose apparent purpose for being there is getting a tan (she flirts at one point with one of the two boys, but most of the time she's a passive observer), the director of the educational film and a waiter. (Except for the waiter, we don't see many other locals – until the end, when we see an entire crowd coming back from the stadium.) The behavior of some characters (the long silences of the girl, the eccentricities and clownishness of the boy played by George Mihăiţă, who also wonders out loud, repeatedly, what it must be like up there on the mountain) and the backdrop against which they evolve (through its elegant indetermination) are characterized by a certain allegorical stylization; in other words, the cienmatic spectacle is conceived in a tradition which is verry different from that represented by *Stuff and Dough* and *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu*. Surely, in *...Lăzărescu,* too, there is a tinge of allegorical signaling, but it is limited to Puiu's and co-writer Răzvan Rădulescu's decision to give their characters evocative names like Dante, Virgil (the protagonist's brother-in-law, but also an unseen male nurse called at the end to take him to the operating room) and Anghel (the unseen doctor who will operate on him). Notwithstanding such naming, each character in *...Lăzărescu* (neighbors, nurses, doctors, etc.) gets a highly particularized portrait. No character there is designed to represent the "essence" of some "system", social category or abstract principle. On the contrary, the professor in *Reenactment* is certainly an essence of Impotent Intellectuality (I've used capitals to indicate that I'm referring to an abstraction), who suffers, maybe even protests against the barbarians who seized the power, but cannot act efficiently; while the character of George Mihăiţă is certainly an essence of Victimized Youthful Innocence (a very popular trope in the international cinema of the late '60s), as well as a variation of the Holy Fool figure – the Mad Jester as representation of Pure Spirit. On the other hand, it is also true that the figure of the prosecutor presents a high number of particularizing traits, and the characterization of the corporal is finely balanced between stock figure (an essence of militaristic idiocy) and idyosincratic individuality. And, in any case, I wouldn't want to imply that Pintilie's recourse to allegory is in any way condemnable. I'm merely emphasizing the fact that Pintilie's approach to the matter of characterization and Puiu's approach to the same matter hail from substantially different traditions. Concerning the "classic unity" of time and space noticed in both films by Marina Roman, it is true that in both cases the action unfolds in the course of just a few hours. However, if, in the case of *Reenactment,* such concentration might indeed be indebted to the principles of classical tragedy, the way *...Lăzărescu* is cut suggests a very different principle behind its temporal concentration: not classical unity, but rather a Bazinian reluctance to break the space-time continuum of "the real" – i.e., a principle based on certain convictions about what cinema is *as opposed to* classical theatre. When he cuts, Puiu does nothing to preserve, in spite of it, an illusion of temporal continuity. On the contrary, the cut is often emphasised; the edit (the binding of the shots) is deliberately coarse. Almost each cut in *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* marks an ellipsis (be it of only a few seconds), honestly assumed as an act of violence against the "film of life", as a hole through which something was lost. On the contrary, the cuts in *Reenactment* aren't used just for temporal ellipses; the editing most often works – just as it does in classical cinema – to maintain the illusion of seamless temporal continuity between one shot and the next. In the same train of thought, Marina Roman talks about the spatial contiguity common to the two films, but the narration in *Reenactment* has a much greater geographical mobility, facilitated by the editing (there are portions of the film when in one shot we are with the prosecutor on the pontoon, in the following shot we are with the boys in the woods, in the next one we're back on the pontoon and so on), than narration in *...Lăzărescu*, which is rigorously restricted by the physical possibilities of an observer (admittedly, an invisible one, but still unable to be here in one shot, over there in another, back here in the next etc.) In short, if, in *...Lăzărescu*, the act of narration is disguised as observation, in *Reenactment* it's much more "in the open".

Another Romanian candidate to the title of "father" of the NRC, with a following as large as Pintilie's, is Mircea Daneliuc, for films like *Microphone Test* (1980) and *The Cruise* (1981). For example, the essayist Mircea Mihăieş writes: "All proportions kept, of course, I dare say that just as, according to Dostoevsky, most of the great Russian literature of the nineteenth century came out of Gogol's *Overcoat*, so did the current Romanian cinematic «new wave» of enormous international success partly come out of Mircea Daneliuc's unforgettable *Microphone Test*."[8]

In *Microphone Test*, the director himself plays a cameraman who works for the National Television. Among other things, he shoots interviews with citizens who are guilty of small misdemeanors – for instance, boarding a train without a ticket – in a society in which, according to official discourse, everyone is perfectly moral. In this society, scolding somebody on television is an act of violence that can be extremely damaging for the person who "misbehaved" – since Ceaușescu's Romania had only one television service, being chided in front of the camera meant being chided before the eyes of the country's entire population. Tora Vasilescu plays a woman who "misbehaves": she travels without a ticket, borrows money from everyone, leads a hand-to-mouth existence – she just can't be a worthy citizen of Ceaușescu's fantasy-society. After the cameraman saves her from a chastening on national television, they begin an affair which – the cameraman being too conventional for her, and Ceaușescu's Romania being (as in *Reenactment*) *no country for young men/women* – can only end badly.

It's obvious that it is Daneliuc's ambition to "take the camera out on the street", to capture more life – unsimulated, unedulcorated life – than was customarily alowed on Romanian screens (both cinema and TV) in that era. Like Alexandru Tatos's *Sequences* (which premiered two years later), the film champions realism in a polemical and self-reflexive manner – it says that everyday life is too rich to be confined inside the moralistic forms and formats demanded by the political regime and applied by the man-with-a-movie-camera protagonist. *Microphone Test* contains montage sequences constructed from fragments of interviews – from shots and soundbites that don't always match. The particular form of audiovisual culture in which the protagonist works – the television reportage – also influences the film's stylistic texture at the level of the transitions between sequences, which sometimes come with a TV "snow" (or "white noise") effect. A scene of our hero and heroine arguing outdoors seems to be shot with a hidden camera – the passers-by traversing the space between them and the camera seem to be actual unwitting civilians, not film extras; at one point, one person's body even blocks our view of the protagonists for two or three seconds. And, in a farcical scene in the film, Daneliuc dramatizes his preference for an aesthetic that can incorporate "unplanned minor incidents" (the famous Bazinian "contingencies") over one in which everything has been posed carefully for the camera: the cameraman and his boss, who want to have a dog in a certain shot for a pretty effect (their declared source of inspiration for that shot is the cinema of Claude Lelouch) are forced to chase the uncooperating animal all over the beach.

However, the idea that the realist aesthetic of *Stuff and Dough* and *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* – or, anyway, a substantial part of that asethetic – came out of *Microphone Test* doesn't withstand a close examination any more than the similar claim made about *Reenactment*. Neither Daneliuc, nor Pintilie (or Tatos for than matter) renounce "analytical" editing, i.e. the "classical" norms of storytelling in cinematic images, while Puiu firmly rejects them from his first film (his only "slip" occuring in a scene at the very beginning of *Stuff and Dough*, when a shot of Răzvan Vasilescu's character looking out the window is followed by a shot taken from what can only be his optical POV, and showing a parked red car which will later prove important in the film's plot). And behind his refusal lies an entirely different conception of cinematic narration and – further behind – entirely different presuppositions about what the medium is in its "essence". For example, when cutting from the lovers' conversation in a room to the boy's parents' eavesdropping from another room (an invasion of privacy facilitated by the thin walls of the Ceaușescu-era blocks of flats), Daneliuc's cinematic narration exhibits certain powers – omnipresence and omniscience – that Puiu's narration, rigorously camouflaged as observation, refuses as a matter of principle. It *is* a matter of principle, based on a philosophical position on the matter of the camera's access (the access of cinematic representation) to any true comprehension of "the real". Classical editing – analytical, omnipresent, omniscient – presumes that the real has already been conquered, while the "observational" aesthetic brought into the Romanian cinema by Cristi Puiu (and not really prefigured in the films of either Pintilie or Daneliuc) is more circumspect in advancing such pretentions. Once again, by no means am I trying to diminish the reputations of such films as *Reenactment* or *Microphone Test* – correctly considered by the current Romanian critical establishment as being among the best films ever produced in this country. Nor do I claim that the realism of the NRC is in any way more "real" than that of Daneliuc; as David Bordwell wrote about the distinction between the "realisms" characteristic of classical and post-classical cinema, it's really only a matter of introducing "another canon of realist motivations, a new *vraisemblance*, justifying certain options and compositional effects"[9]. The point I'm trying to make is only that, at the time of its appearance, the species of *vraisemblance* represented by *Stuff and Dough* was in fact *new* to the Romanian cinema.

Of the Romanian films from before 1989 which, according to certain commentators, have inspired the NRC, *Sequences* by Tatos represents, maybe, the most interesting case – among other reasons, because it explicitly pleads for a "more" realistic cinema than was, at that time, common practice in Romania. In the words of critic Tudor Caranfil, *Sequences* presents episodes from the life of a film crew, which are "epically independent", but "always subsumed under the problematic of the transfiguration of fact into art, of the interrelation art-reality"[10]. For instance, in the final episode, the fim crew (played by the actual crew of *Sequences*, fronted by Tatos and the director of photography Florin Mihăilescu) is in a restaurant filming what is (by all appearances) a conventional melodrama about the heroic activity of the Communist Party in the days when it operated illegally, while at one of the tables in the restaurant, where extras are seated, an authentic drama is taking place – a genuine former partisan meets the former policemen who interrogated him. Earlier in the film we see the director at work editing footage for a documentary – also conventionally propagandistic – on the topic of August 23rd 1944; then we see him visiting a factory while scouting for locations, entering the factory eatery with the rest of his crew and stumbling upon an unexpected drama – the heartbreak of a waiter whose wife had just cuckolded him. Several times in the course of this admirable film, we are thus carried, with delicate didacticism, from the official images (the authorized mode of seeing the world through cinema) to the "images between the images". That's where the truth lies – the film tells us – at the table of the extras, or in the spontaneous outbursts of a waiter who's too drunk and too depressed to realize, or to care, that he's making a fool of himself in front of strangers. The definition given by Ivone Margulies to the realist impulse – a corrective impulse, a recuperatory one, an impulse to do justice to the marginal and the minor[11] – corresponds perfectly to the movement of this film. Tudor Caranfil declares himself irritated by the fact that, at some moments in the film, "dramatic time blurs into real time", but this is as it should be – as Margulies also explains, the ambition for moral expansion characteristic of this realism necessarily takes the form of a spatiotemporal expansion. The waiter's breakdown, from his initial alternation of obsequiousness and suspicion to the full indecent disclosure of his intimacy, *must* verge on real time, for the same reason that it's important to have in the same frame, if possible for the whole duration of the scene, both waiter and group of guests – his increasingly sordid exhibitionism, his increasingly abject transparency, and their increasingly forced amusement, their increasingly acute embarrassment. As André Bazin demanded (paraphrased by Annette Michelson), the spectator musn't be guided through "analytical" editing, but should be allowed to repeat in the cinema the existential situation, sometimes uncomfortable, of "being-in-the-world", of "choosing in ambiguity"[12]. From what moment should it stop being funny to watch the waiter's plight? We're on our own. To use a much more recent term, it's "experiential". Indeed, it can be said that this scene in the Tatos film anticipates sequences in the post-*Stuff and Dough* Romanian cinema (although the characterization of the waiter is relatively classical – a by-the-book psychological striptease, culminating with the moment in which he forces the patrons to visit his home, to show them the carpet and collection of pencil sharpeners that he is so proud of; characters in the NRC are rarely that transparent).

But what fundamentally differentiates Puiu from Tatos, just like it differentiates him from Daneliuc, is the radicality of his *parti-pris*. You've opted for the position of the observer – well, then you stick to it: you can't, for instance, cut to a close-up of a phone just before it starts ringing; your camera can't anticipate the next move of a character; and so on. Stylistic inconsistencies are moral transgressions – or at least that might seem to be the implication of some of Cristi Puiu's statements. Until he came along, the Romanian film community wasn't in the habit of spending sleepless nights debating the morality or immorality of a camera move or an editing cut. This type of intransigence was first introduced in the Romanian cinema by Puiu (and co-writer Rădulescu), and quickly contaminated other filmmakers (Cristian Mungiu, Radu Muntean). Similarly, it seeped into the criticism of their films: for example, relying on evidence as frail as a single camera pan from one character to another during a crucial scene of husband-and-wife confrontation in the film *Tuesday, After Christmas* (2010), and also on another brief moment when one of the characters is in focus and the other one isn't, critic Lucian Maier accuses director Radu Muntean of betraying, in that particular scene, the role of neutral observer which he had assumed until then, in order to signal to the spectator that the adulterous husband is blameworthy.

As David Bordwell reminds us, the *locus classicus* of theoretical pleas for an "ethics of cinematic technique" is the attack of critic (and director-to-be) Jacques Rivette (a disciple of Bazin) against the film of Gillo Pontecorvo, *Kapo* (one of the first fiction films about the Holocaust to appear in Europe), an attack that was published in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1961. In the shot denounced by Rivette as immoral, the camera advances toward the body of a woman who committed suicide by "embracing" an electric fence; the position of the woman's arms and the low camera angle posing her against the sky have a studied pictorialism which "deserves only the most profound contempt". Even until that moment, the realism of the film has been consistently diluted by the prettifying compromises of commercial cinema: "make-up that hollows cheeks, somewhat ragged clothes, moderately shabby bunks" – thus runs David Bordwell's summary[13]. To Rivette, the facile pictorialism of that shot is really the last straw – it is proof that the man who made the film was incapable to meditate seriously on the ethical problems that boobytrap any attempts to represent the reality of the Holocaust. "Tracking shots are a matter of morality", writes Rivette (attributing the dictum to Jean-Luc Godard)[14].

Returning to the admirable *Sequences*, what separates it from *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* is the fact that, in the latter film, as explained earlier, all stylistic choices are consistent with an initial position chosen by the director in relation to what he's showing us, a position whose philopsophical grounding is radically different from that of classical cinematic narration, while in the former film, the logic behind many stylistic decisions is still narrative logic of a classical type. When one of the two extras (the former Communist partisan) remembers where he met the other man (the ex-policeman), his emotional shock is expressed through an "impressionist" montage composed primarily of close-ups – the eyes of one man, the mouth of the other… (On the other hand, the "modernistically" dissonant music accompanying the montage has a diegetic justification: as we're reminded by one of the shots in the montage, it comes – in a witty directorial touch – from the group of extras playing the restaurant orchestra and toying with the out-of-tune instruments they've been given.) Even in the encounter between the film crew and the unhappy waiter, which plays out largely in long takes of group shots, Tatos still cuts in some very classical reaction close-ups of the crew members. I'd say Tatos thought out his realist proposition strictly in the context of the then-contemporary Romanian cinema, while Puiu went farther. He went back to the venerable question "What is cinema?", to the history of the ways of "thinking" and "seeing" film, or at least to the great tradition of *one* of the ways of seeing and thinking it. Although it's true that contemporary film theorists like Noël Carroll have turned a very skeptical eye on such traditional quests, all founded on the premise that cinema has *one* essence, *one* nature, *one* big and unique function, Carroll himself admits that embracing such traditions can still be useful to a filmmaker, to the extent that it encourages him or her to think hard about some of the features of the medium, and then rigorously exploit those features through his or her stylistic options[15]. It is my conclusion that no Romanian director before Cristi Puiu contemplated that big question (no matter if it is truly a "fundamental" one or not) as rigorously as he did, achieved a comparable clarity of thought about his aesthetic options, and explored those options as thoroughly as he did in the course of the three films he has made until now (*Stuff and Dough, The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* and *Aurora*). In *Aurora*, he rejects not only the presumptions of the classical mode of telling a story cinematically, but also the presumptions of the mode that he had himself adopted – and that other Romanian filmmakers had meanwhile adopted from him, thus "classicizing" it as a national style: above all, the presumption of understanding the world through its representation. I know of no other Romanian director before him whose work provides a comparable example of continuity in investigation. Puiu himself described the artistic enterprise he's engaged in as an investigation and his films as "research hypotheses", suggesting that they're less important than the research process itself – they are just testimonies of it. In any case, in the course of this process, he reinvented Romanian cinema.

NOTES

1. David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema,* Routledge, New York-London, 2007, p. 32.
2. Quoted by Cristian Lupşa în *Decât o revistă,* Summer 2010, p. 116.
3. Valerian Sava, *Critical History of Contemporary Romanian Cinema,* Meridiane Press, Bucharest, 1999, p. 241.
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Ion Fiscuteanu and Luminița Gheorghiu in *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (2005), directed by Cristi Puiu (still)

Reenactment / Reconstruction (1969)
by Lucian Pintilie (still)

Rhetorical Figures and Romanian Film Acting: From Pintilie To Mungiu

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Abstract
Starting from the assessment that the recent success of Romanian cinema should be considered in relationship with outstanding acting performances, the author analyzes their contribution through the grid of rhetorical figures. Analytical categories such as *hyperbole* and *litotes* serve for the classification of the main trends of Romanian acting techniques and compare the acting style of Lucian Pintilie`s cinema with the acting style in recent films signed by directors of the Romanian New Wave such as Cristian Mungiu, Cristi Puiu or Corneliu Porumboiu.

Keywords
Romanian Cinema, acting style, Caragiale`s tradition, hyperbolic acting performance, minimalist acting techniques, theatrical school influence, Lucian Pintilie, New Romanian Cinema

The present contribution falls within the continuity of my research related to the rhetoric of the figures focusing on the acting performance in silent European melodramas, but also on the study of contemporary cases, as I could demonstrate during the Cerisy la Salle International Congress on "Film Acting" (2005). After a decade of research work and publications on Romanian cinema, I realized the extent to which the recent success of this cinema, almost unknown as it was before the turn of the new century, should also be considered in relationship with the really exceptional performances of the actors. As for the film directors, it is difficult to speak, before the 2000s, of a structured movement, because there never was a genuine wave, such as is the case with their Czech or Polish neighbours, but actually, there were only isolated authors, some of whom came from the theatre, such as Lucian Pintilie, Liviu Ciulei, Mircea Daneliuc, Dan Pita or, more recently, Nae Caranfil.On the contrary, in the case of actors, their film performances are indisputably linked to a theatrical school with very solid foundations, active since the middle of the 19th century and still very dynamic on the Bucharest stage at the beginning of this millennium.

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Given that Lucian Pintilie remains the preeminent figure, the “spiritual father” of contemporary authors, echoing the debt own by the French New Wave to Jean Renoir, it is important to remind not only that he came from the theatre, where he revolutionized acting techniques, but also that, during his forced exile starting the early 70s to the 1989 revolution, he won recognition in France and the U.S. as one of the most important and original directors.

Romanian acting techniques have their roots in two theatrical trends. The first comes from the verbal and gestural genius developed by Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1919), the author of essential plays of the national repertory which have become classics, such as *A Stormy Night*, *Carnival Scenes,* or *The Lost Letter*. The writer was endowed with a formidable gift of satirical observation of the Balkan Romanian society, often veering into the grotesque and favouring genuinely hyperbolic acting performances. The second trend is derived from the theses of Eugène Ionescu, another much more familiar Romanian, since he is at the origins of the theatre of the absurd. Removed from Caragiale’s rather vaudevillian tonality, but very close to his themes and to his sense of irony, the absurd as developed by Ionescu combines the comic and the tragic, refuses psychologism,favours the sub-text and restraint, sensorializes communication by exploiting the body movements and dynamics: speech is no longer the only means of dramatic expression and the use of litotes is more than recurring.

Starting with the 18th century, literary theorists have honed the definition of figures of speech such as the *hyperbole* or the *litotes*. Being the main figure of exaggeration, the hyperbole is a device aimed at striking both visual imagination and mental sensibility. As such,it falls within the following categories: *the synthetic hyperbole*, close to the technique of painting and of histrionic acting; *the analytic hyperbole*, close to the rules of typically cinematic editing, since it acts within a scene or a sequence; and *the iterative hyperbole*, the recurrent functioning of which is half-way between the purely visual representation and the literal one. The *litotes* is a rhetorical figure placed at the antipodes of the hyperbole, which consists in disguising one’s thinking in such a way as to make it guessed in all its strength. A technique which suggests more than it says, the effect of the litotes is triggered by a neutralized vocabulary, by the negation of a contrary or by another form of circumvention. It implies laconism and simplicity and it is expressed, as we shall see, through different sub-categories, from the *litotes by deprecation* to that *by annomination*.

It seemed interesting to confront three pre and post- Communist major films by Pintilie with three essential figures of the New Wave, more precisely, of the “minimalist” trend: Cristi Puiu, Corneliu Porumboiu and Cristian Mungiu. The fact is that the first of the three had already collaborated to the script of one of Pintilie’s films and that the use of figures as antagonistic as the *hyperbole* and the *litotes* within the acting techniques is already present in *Reconstruction* (1969), the only dissident Romanian film of the ‘60s. Lucian Pintilie is first of all an ‘auteur maudit’, whose films were banned from screening in Romania for nearly twenty years. As its title indicates, the movie maker’s second feature film is centered upon a *Reconstruction*, which was meant to serve as an “educational film,” a kind of example not to be followed of an act of juvenile vandalism degenerating into violence. The two young delinquents are summoned to reconstruct their action in detail, under the scrutiny of a more than artisanal camera. The mirror of consensus is broken by a shattered *mise en abyme:* after all, nobody wants to play the game, everybody is tired of make-believe. As the film had hardly been screened back in 1969, it was seen as a novelty in 1990. Faced with its revolutionary content and its stylistic accomplishments, critics and audience developed a quasi-syndrome of “*Reconstruction,* year zero,” unanimously considering it as the first genuine example of Romanian art-house cinema.

A quite common technique in the modernist West, but rarely found in the East-European films of the end of the ‘60s, the prologue actually turns out to be a flash-forward, the perfect counterpoint of which comes at the end of the film, when the young delinquents eventually accept to reconstruct the incidents and one of them is deadly wounded. It is understood, this is the incipit of the film, including the opening clapperboard. We are in the midst of a *mise en abyme,* a technique dear to Pintilie: Vuica, played by young film student George Mihaita, must repeat three times the same sentence before the camera, which we hear from the off, stops filming.

Mihaita's acting is extremely verisimilar, his body speaks as much as his face stuck in the mud: we are clearly in presence of an *iterative hyperbole*, with the actor pushing his expressive skills all the way. In the second excerpt, "the angels with dirty faces," Vuica and Ripu (Vladimir Gaitan), offer a perfect example of provocation against the background of impertinence, by making fun of the wooden-tongued policeman and refusing to play the game of detailed reconstruction. We are miles away from the intial hyperbole, with Pintilie opting this time for *the litotes by metalepsis* (similar expressions with a different meaning) and alternating a performance close to improvisation with a performance which favors body movement, omission and irony.

The second banned film, which was shown ten years after its completion, *Carnival Scenes* (1981) is adapted from the homonymous play by Caragiale, which had already been staged by Pintilie in 1966. The film provides an example of hyperbolic delirium, quite rare in the context of Western film-making. Owing to the remarkable performance by virtuoso actors in expressing the grotesque, there is an abundance of *synthetic hyperboles*, which can be identified through three attitudes translated by physiognomic acting and body movements: pathos, laughter and tears. Says Pintilie in his autobiography *Bric à Brac: Du cauchemar réel au réalisme magique (Odds And Ends: From Real Nightmare To Magical Realism*): "the Romanian actor has a savage and generous nature... When he meets a vampire-director like me, he is ready to die on stage." (Pintilie 2009, p.330).

The Oak (1992), Pintilie's first post-Communist film after a forced artistic exile, has a much wider sway, although it is strikingly similar in tone and discourse. The action of this journey through the circles of the inferno of a blood-drained Romania is placed before the fall of Ceausescu and it follows the itinerary of an atypical young and angry couple, familiar with the decline of Communist society, but trying never to yield to "normalization."

Néla, the feminine protagonist played by fabulous actress Maïa Morgenstern has an extraordinary survival instinct and a resilience to all tests: on the verge of suicide after her father's death, she tries to set herself on fire. Raped by a gang of thugs during a train journey, we will see her undergo a severe punishment in the most radical fashion, when she protests and refuses to submit to the rules of an absurd police. If Pintilie chooses here, again, the path of hyperrealism through the very physical performance of the actress, he nevertheless produces a purely cinematic *analytic hyperbole*, as the scene includes the reverse shot of the man who operates the water hose and who roughs her up. The viewer is thus led to grasp the intensity and the brutality of such an action, which will not shake at all the heroine's determination.

The end brings us in the presence of the central metaphor of the film, the one focusing on the oak where Nela had decided to bury the ashes of her father, a former dignitary of the regime. Nela is terrorized by a previous deadly exchange of fire. The loving embrace with the rebel physician Mitică (Răzvan Vasilescu) and the declaration which follows will put an end to her criminal drives. We are thus witnessing a twofold acting performance. The first clearly favors the hyperbolic approach, because Nela exaggerates to the point of threatening Mitica with death: the analytical staging, choreographed in a shadow play provides us with an alternative of a pictorial hypostasis which could go without words. During the second one, the characters use an impassible tone for a dialogue "*à clef":* Mitică hints at the notorious policy of normalizaton preached by the Ceausescu dictatorship in order to forge "the new man." We are in the presence of a *litotes by deprecation*: "he must be an idiot or a genius, if he's normal, I'll kill him," obtained through Vasilescu's extremely controlled acting.

In fact, it is *Niki And Flo* (2003), Pintilie's penultimate film co-written by Cristi Puiu and Răzvan Rădulescu, which proves the closest to the future minimalist paradigm at the root of what we now call "the New Wave" of Romanian cinema. Sarcastic, static and tragic, this tale of the "new Romanians" confronts two symptomatic representatives of the post-revolutionary social turmoil. It evokes in less than one-and-a-half hour one man's dispossession and spoliation by another. Niki (Victor Rebengiuc, Pintilie's fetish actor both in theatre and cinema) is a retired colonel, nostalgic of communism and still under the shock of his son's accidental death and of the precipitous departure of his daughter to the United States. His brother-in-law, Florian or Flo (Răzvan Vasilescu), is a self-centered hyperactive upstart, the pure product of post-Communism: he films with the same ease a marriage and a funeral, he falls and gets hurt in his bathtub without seeming affected by it, he hurries the departure of his son and his daughter-in-law to an uncertain America in the aftermath of 9/11. He will end up under the blows of an axe, the bloodiest revenge coming from Niki. He destroys Niki's certainties in the presence of his wife Pusha (Coca Bloos) under the pretext of a historical ignorance, mocking his patriotic obsessions. All this time, we also keep watching in the background excerpts from the marriage as filmed by Flo.

Three aspects linked to the evolution of acting techniques, undergo a metamorphosis under the influence of the minimalist script. The first concerns dialogues, which clearly mingle the factual and the absurd, in order to end up with the crossword puzzle Pusha is trying to solve. The second derives from the full framing in extreme close-up, which entails an immediate identification with two perfectly opposed human entities, although the embedded video suggests that the situation has not always been that conflicting. Finally, acting is entirely made up of nuances, combining underplaying with the flawless elocution of the three actors, and thus delivering the full measure of the human and psychological imbalance that Flo has caused (Pusha has clearly gone mad) in a perfectly elliptical fashion. We have here a *pronominal litotes*, where we guess what is left unsaid and which explains why the viewer perfectly feels the gap between essence and appearance. Pintilie will also use the *synthetic hyperbole*, when he chooses to show Niki decked out as Mickey Mouse (with Pusha disguised as a fairy) during the dress rehearsal for Flo's birthday party. The grotesque vein developed by Caragiale perfectly matches the absurd vein of Ionescu.

The two authors behind the script for *Niki and Flo* are chiefly responsible for the generalization of the Romanian minimalist model and its international acclaim. Thus Cristi Puiu is the co-writer of the representative *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu (*2005), along with Răzvan Rădulescu, whose incisive writing also contains metaphysical connotations. The film depicts the Dantesque voyage of a retired, sick old man, tossed around from one hospital to another until the end of a slow agony. The latter reveals the dehumanization of a chaotic health care system. In his style, Puiu strongly recalls the techniques already used in *Niki And Flo*: the recurring use of long shots and live sound, which constantly challenge emotional involvement. The repetitions and textual and visual variations on the same subject obviously echo Ionesco's heritage, in a mixture of sarcasm and absurd humor. Lăzărescu, flawlessly interpreted by the great drama actor Ion Fiscuteanu, is often framed in extreme close-up. The performance of the actors favors restraint, underplaying, such as in the case of the nurse Mioara, interpreted by the fabulous Luminiţa Gheorghiu.

During one of the film's most significant scenes, Mioara has just learned from neighbours that Lăzărescu has been left with not much of a family, since his daughter emigrated to Canada and his sister Eva lives in a remote privincial town. When, after complimenting her ("there is something special about you"), the sick old man, already so frail that he can no longer properly articulate his words, asks her for news about his family, she looks exasperated by his condition. Puiu will thus resort to a *litotes by annomination* (hint at one noun through similar sounds) in order to spark the laughter of the audience, despite a situation which verges on the tragic. Therefore, Lăzărescu will babble in a hesitating voice and with a perfect command of verisimilar acting: "He is coming by the fast train (the Romanian word for it being "acceleratul")," which he will pronounce "scelerat (villain)" instead of "accelerat" in Romanian. Mioara's exasperated reaction, as she threatens to stick a plaster on his mouth unless he stops his rambling, only increases the comic effect for the viewer.

12 h 08 East of Bucarest (2006) by Corneliu Porumboiu, another spiritual son of Pintilie, casts a different a light on the post-revolutionary era. Porumboiu resorts to comedy in order to examine the past, recalling both the grotesque comedy of Caragiale and the absurd vein of Ionesco. In a small town, a live televised show gets phone calls from the viewers, in order to try to establish whether anybody really participated in the December 1989 revolution. These calls trigger hilarious reactions. Despite the dynamic opening credits, the kick-off of the narrative scheme of *12 h 08 East of Bucarest* is unusually long. Porumboiu follows his three main characters through a subtle editing, which faithfully reflects, through comical interludes, the post-revolutionary Romanian province. Starting 40 minutes after the beginning of the film, the show itself, which is supposed to answer the question from the Romanian title: "Did it or didn't it take place?," looks like a botched soufflé: the studio is so improvised that the familiar poster of the town hall hanging in the background seems about to fall down. The experienced comedians, coming from theatre but enjoying a second cinema career, Mircea Andreescu (Pişcoci, the retired widower, who used to play Santa in the past), Teo Corban (Jderescu, the TV journalist who leads a double life) and Ion Sapdaru (Mănescu, the maths teacher and drunkard of sorts) are often placed in the film on the side of synthetically hyperbolic acting (exaggeration through mimicry and body movements).However, Porumboiu uses a technique which evokes the *litotes by allusion*, the understatement, because his main actors balk at playing the game, suggesting that the show is virtually a nonsense. The mise en scène thrives in this direction, as the Keatonian cameraman deliberately has a difficult time in framing the three characters, hence the absolutely hilarious feeling of the spectator.

The last example is drawn from *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2007) by Cristian Mungiu, Romania's first Palme D'Or and the absolute confirmation of the triumph of the minimalist model. The fact that it is about a clandestine abortion in communist Romania deserves, another mention, because the director evokes the "Zeitgeist" in a quite original manner. Thus, the period during which the action unfolds is filmed in a neutral manner and the time of the story barely exceeds 24 hours. The space of the plot, recalling the "Kammerspiel" sets is also very limited, as we have access to a reduced number of places and accessories. In such a context, the characters imagined by Mungiu starting from real facts, are slowly transformed into concepts, despite a fairly verisimilar performance.

One of the key scenes of the film, a frontal sequence-shot via a camera as deliberately unsteady and imperfect as that of Porumboiu, presents the abortionist, Mr.Bebe (Vlad Ivanov) and his "client" Găbiţa (Laura Vasiliu), whose voice we hear only from off the frame, in the presence of the latter's faithful friend, Otilia (Ana Maria Marinca**).** It is Mr.Bebe who practices the *litotes by syllepsis*, through his restrained acting and the tone of his voice that borders on whispering. In his lines, he indirectly hints to sexual blackmail, which he will soon propose in fact: "have I mentioned money? I thought we might come to an arrangement," etc. He clearly represents the figure of the abortionist without any scruples who made many victims among the Romanian women during the age of the anti-abortion terror. Whereas Găbiţa only intervenes at this stage through pleas bordering on the pathetic, Otilia embodies, through her nuanced, understated, non-emphatic acting, the obstinacy and courage of thousands of young women who dared to transgress the ban, at the risk of their life.

Last but not least, the famous supper scene at Otilia's boyfriend's house, after the abortion, took several days to film and was co-written with Rădulescu, because of its complexity both in terms of verbal exchanges and visual setting. It is a synthetic sequence which can serve as a conclusion to our proposals of rhetoric taxonomy at the level of acting techniques. In less than two minutes, we rediscover, alongside Marinca, Mioara from *Lăzărescu*, acting as the fiancé's mother and Mănescu, from *12:08,* playing a member of the nomenklatura teaching lessons on the "healthy and farmer-like" education of the youth. Besides the fact we are offered an extraordinary concentrate of Romanian society from the '80s, we should emphasize the extent to which Otilia, although surrounded by the others, is totally isolated. We, the audience, are the only ones who share her terrible secret. This is an absolute victory for the *litotes* as means of artistic expression, but also a masterly example of *less is more* in the organization of the actor's performance. Mungiu also produces an *oxymoron*, because Otilia's silence tells more about the tragedy of people deprived of liberty than ten thousand other words.

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Recosntruction: the iterative hyperbole (still)

Niki and Flo: the synthetic hyperbole (still)

4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days: litotes by syllepsis (still)

The Death of Mr. Lazarescu: litotes by annomination (sill)

Nae Caranfil and "Maximalist" Aesthetics

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Abstract
This study has a dual aim: to identify in Nae Caranfil's movies the beginning of the renewal of filmmaking in post-communist Romanian cinema, and to evaluate how his personal aesthetics are placed vis-à-vis the creative methods of the New Romanian Cinema. Relying on scrutiny of his movies through the prism of the *auteur* theory, the paper refers to Caranfil's aesthetic principles formulated in a surprising "statement of intent," written when he was 23 years old and restated in recent interviews. The director's "maximalist aesthetics" (as he defines them[1]) are finally confronted by the "minimalist" paradigm of new realistic Romanian movies.

Keywords
Nae Caranfil, *auteur* theory, film history, film aesthetics, Romanian comedy, self-reflexive cinema, post-communist cinema, New Romanian Cinema

Inspired by Nae Caranfil's own description of his cinema aesthetics, the title may suggest the author's style is radically opposed to the frequently evaluated "minimalist" style of the New Romanian Cinema. Of course, if we look closer, both concepts tend overly to reduce the comparison between two important "watershed" moments of our cinema, but the forced opposition offers a possible starting point for a broader discussion, which may reveal, in fact, that they share more than a few common objectives and modes of operation. They all end by destabilizing the idea of *auteur* cinema.

Nae Caranfil epitomized, during the first decade after the Revolution, the idea of young Romanian cinema itself. He was the first young director who tried to shake off the "aesthetic stillness"[2] of the filmmaking of the 1990s. He confirmed the expectations created by his student films (especially *Venice in September* / *Frumos e în septembrie la Veneţia,* 1983) with his feature movie debut *Don't Lean Out the Window* / *E pericoloso sporgersi* (1993). His *opera prima* legitimized by an enthusiastic reception abroad (after being presented in the Quinzaine des réalisateurs selection at Cannes), Caranfil became (as did Lucian Pintilie) a Romanian film director to remember. The film critics' favorable comments were accompanied by flattering statements from famous actors such as Charlotte Rampling (who starred in his movie *Asphalt Tango,* 1996), who has frequently been quoted as describing Caranfil

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as "the Woody Allen of the East." With each new film, Nae Caranfil developed distinctive ways of structuring narratives and a recognizable style. His works confirm the *auteur* film definition given by George Littera, as recognizable "by the force of creating a distinctive poetic universe, based on the coherence of philosophical and expressive substantiation, by his personal message and mythology, a crystallized style."[3]

In the new millennium, Caranfil reached a new status: the director who managed to reconcile the *auteur* film with audience expectations, especially after *Philanthropy* / *Filantropica* (2002) topped the Romanian box office. His fans learn the lines from his movies by heart, while film critics prize the originality of his scripts. They all recognize his signature. At first glance, his situation seems a paradox. Caranfil's work asks to be examined through the prism of the *auteur*, in spite of his constant approach to a popular genre, comedy. His profile is also distinctive owing to the distance he takes from the Romanian *auteur*ist cinema, valued before and after the Revolution. Before1990, the *auteur* status presupposed (in Eastern European cinemas, including Romania) a modernist perception of the medium (as High Art), a metaphorical or allegorical expression, not without a grain of subversiveness. Caranfil's dissenting option is tied to the influences he assimilated during his student years, a time when the Tarkovsky model was embraced by most students and recent graduates of the University of Cinema. Recalling his student days, he muses:

> "Not to be bored while watching *Stalker* was proof you were being accepted into the elite, and besides that, you belonged to the kind of people who secretly opposed the Communist regime. Student films (and many others) were filled with skinny white horses carrying their sadness through crepuscular swamps, everything was so bloody silent, they often shot images reflected in mirrors."[4]

Nae Caranfil admired and assimilated other models, as he confesses in the same interview:

> "In this context, I assumed, somewhat imprudently, less elevated sympathies: the American cinema of the 1930s, 1950s and especially of the 1970s, the Czech school of filmmaking and the Italians from Cinecitta, not primarily the neo-realists, but comedy directors such as Mario Monicelli, Dino Risi, Pietro Germi. Besides, I was interested in the American career of Milos Forman. And above everyone was Billy Wilder, the European who conquered Hollywood. My theory was, by this time, that it's better to become a good craftsman, a perfect professional, than to expect ineffable inspiration to visit you, a better position than running sweaty and ridiculous to abstract and unreachable heights."[5]

This admiration for directors who had "less prestige but more public" invites comparison between Nae Caranfil and the young directors and film critics of the French journal *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s, the arduous cinephiles turned directors of the French "New Wave." They created a precedent for the debut of articulate filmmakers, who stated their principles in writing before they began to make films. Although he hasn`t exactly published a manifesto of a future aesthetic movement, Caranfil wrote a text that sounded something like a personal creed when he was still a student, taking the opportunity presented by a symposium dedicated to film director Jean Georgescu (it was later published in the *Noul cinema* magazine in 1990[6].) The text, entitled *Caragiale's Tradition* (*Traditia Caragiale*), is relatively unknown, overlooked in the context of the radical (and often political) statements of post-Revolution Romanian film directors. But from the perspective of the time, it seems to be a precious key to a better reading of the author's body of works. Without exaggerating, we may say that the ennobling of comedy belongs to an early aesthetic program stated by Caranfil in *Caragiale's Tradition*. No doubt, his essay has a say in the director's evolution and anticipates his aesthetic strategies.

A KIND OF MANIFESTO

As Nae Caranfil's filmography invites examination through the prism of *auteur*, the discovery of a personal "plan" of evolution, grounded on polemical statements regarding most Romanian comedies (and Romanian cinema of any kind) is significant. The ideas and the tone reveal the author's need to break with the "old" mainstream (and art cinema) Romanian filmmaking practice. Although it has no ambitions to be a manifesto, like Truffaut's articles, which attacked the academic French cinema of the 1950s, (such as *A Certain Tendency of French Cinema / Une certaine tendance du cinéma français,* published in *Cahiers du cinema* no 31, January 1954) the article *Caragiale's Tradition (Tradiţia Caragiale*) provides a critical view of Romanian comedy from its beginnings to the 1980s. Sketching the particular profile of Romanian comedy, Caranfil ironically emphasizes its inconsistency. He criticizes the screen adaptations of Ion Luca Caragiale Caragiale's theatrical work: "Some of them were merely a pretext to immortalize stage productions of Bucharest theaters. In other cases, we had adaptations which were conventional or, to use a more appropriate term, cautious, with no other ambition than to crowd onto the screen the greatest number of famous actors."[7]

He comments more ironically on the so-called contemporary comedies, in which he sees only "sentimental troubles placed in fancy resorts, feel-good movies with merry romps, girls and boys living shy and happy in the fairytale world of Romanian cinema. The temptations of satire, the tragicomic vocation, incisiveness were other cinemas' priorities. We preferred snowball fights."[8]

He mentions two happy exceptions in developing Caragiale's legacy, the two adaptations by Jean Georgescu: *A Stormy Night (O noapte furtunoasă*, 1943) and a contemporary comedy whose polemic vigor and satirical character places it in Caragiale's vein, *Our Director* (*Directorul nostru,* 1955). Acording to Caranfil, he was the only director who really perceived the cinematic dimensions of the great dramatist's oeuvre, recognizing his generosity in offering the model of a perfect structure and comic composition, a bright technique of developing situations and, moreover, a caustic spirit of profoundly national essence.

Mastering the basic notions of the nature of the comic genre, he notices:

> "In Caragiale's work, the structure organizes a plot, and its remarkably logical development gives birth to a satirical protest so conspicuous that the comic relief is directly determined. The sense is not added, it emerges naturally from the development of the situations itself. In the struggle between a villain and an imbecile, the winner is a third one, an imbecilic villain (*The Lost Letter/ Scrisoarea pierdută*). The fable has, at the same time, comic substance and critical virulence (...) Look at how, each time, the essential thing is the COMIC STRUCTURE saturated with the substance of life."[9]

A POPULAR VERSION OF THE *AUTEUR*

Supported by a committed cinephilia, Nae Caranfil's profound knowledge of comedy brought remarkable results after he improved his writing techniques during the screenwriting courses he attended in Belgium in 1988 and in France in 1998. Concern for solid screenwriting becomes a key characteristic of the author.

We do not have to look any further for an explanation for the international support he received from Western financing sources, from his very beginnings. Caranfil became the darling of European producers because he proposed projects based on well-written scripts, promising personal movies with strong entertainment value. We should not forget that his first two films, *Don't Lean Out of the Window* (titled in France *Dimanches de permission*) and *Asphalt Tango* were financed by the ECO Fund, set up by Culture Minister Jacques Lang in 1989 to support the development of film production in Central and East Europe, as Anne Jackel highlights in "France and Romanian Cinema 1896-1999."[10] When the function of this fund was taken over by Eurimages, Nae Caranfil got financing from there as well. His success may be tied to his personal aesthetics, which he defined in an interview. He describes them using a tongue-in-cheek analysis of the relationship between the scriptwriter and the film director of the same name, Nae Caranfil:

> "I can't say that I forced onto myself a sort of "maximalist agenda". But, on the other hand, when I'm writing a screenplay and I'm trying to create high-quality entertainment, austerity and excision are not two of my favorite tools. "Kitchen sink drama" is far from being my specialty. Consequently, it may happen that I'm writing huge, cinematically spectacular crowd scenes, well aware that I'm opening the door to a huge pile of production problems and that one day, Caranfil the director will silently curse Caranfil the writer for throwing at him that crazy, mind-bending scene."[11]

Having identified the aesthetic treaty written by Nae Caranfil long before his debut, we could conclude, by exploring his filmography, that it was an efficient "self-development plan," which brought him not only box-office success, but also the honorary title of author, a status acquired mostly by American standards. Once again, at first glance his films are closer to entertainment that to art house, but after the Cahiers du cinema critics established their canon this did not prevent him from being an *auteur*.

Although it was born in Europe, the idea of *auteur* cinema had influential supporters in the "New World". It was film critic Andrew Sarris who reworded the *auteur* theory in American terms and defined it for the first time in close relationship with the movie industry. According to him, a director could not obtain this qualification if he did not confirm his "technical abilities": "Obviously, the *auteur* theory cannot possibly cover every vagrant charm of the cinema. Nevertheless, the first premise of the *auteur* theory is the technical competence of a director as a criterion of value."[12]

Although he values the mastering of technique, Sarris borrows from French filmmakers and critics of the *Cahiers du cinema* magazine the important "personal criterion" and highlights: "The second premise of the *auteur* theory is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature. The way a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way the director thinks and feels. This is an area where American directors are generally superior to foreign directors. Because so much of the American Cinema is commissioned, a director is forced to express his personality through the visual treatment of the material, rather than through the literary content of the material."[13]

Although many critics consider the *auteur* theory somehow passé, it is still effective in analyzing many directors' oeuvre. The Thai Apichatpong Werasethakul, the Iranian Abbas Kiarostami, the American Quentin Tarantino invite, with each new film, a reading within the context of their body of work. If examined in the context of this theory, Caranfil's movies seem to fulfill the criteria, from "technical competence" to some "recurrent characteristics of style," but we could have problems pushing an analogy with the status of the American film director, "forced to express his personality through the visual treatment of the material, rather than through the literary content of the material." Sarris needed to underline the personal efforts of the Hollywood directors to avoid the standardization presupposed by the commissioned scripts of the big studios. In Caranfil's case, this effort is unnecessary, because he is always the author of his films' scripts. The screenwriter and the director are not in a position to dispute their superiority. Even when he accepted a commissioned project, such as the French-Italian co-production *Dolce far niente* (1998) he did it only after being assured he would script it.

Film critics and viewers generally agree that the strongest part of Nae Caranfil's movies is the script. Long before the screenwriting manuals written by Robert McKee or Syd Field became available to each young Romanian dreaming of becoming a filmmaker or screenwriter, Caranfil did everything to improve his natural ability to write for cinema. But his highly-crafted scripts manage always to mark his presence, an operation further accomplished by his directing tools.

Nae Caranfil is an *auteur* by European standards as well, mostly by Jean-Louis Comolli's definition:

> "No matter the origin or the sources of inspiration, the film director always talks about himself. When he stages characters, we find out less about them than about him, even if there are things which are extraneous to his own experience."[14]

Nae Caranfil's films are not openly autobiographical: he always tries to dissolve autobiographical details into agreeable, well-articulated stories. His *auteur* vocation is recognizable thanks to his autobiographical touch, starting with his debut movie *Don't Lean Out of the Window*, a nostalgic-ironic comedy which tells stories about the Communist "golden age," avoiding the usual furious "denouncing" tone of the Romanian films from the beginning of the 1990s. Like Akira Kurosawa in *Rashomon*, Caranfil experiments with the embedded stories technique, a little bit before Quentin Tarantino also used it in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and this "mosaic narrative" turned into an epigonic phenomenon. The stories of the Student, the Actor and the Soldier bring to the screen characters whose destinies cross in a small, suffocating town. In the vivid description of the milieu, full of details relevant to the last bleak years of Communism, we detect autobiographical suggestions in the high-school atmosphere, with the vaguely erotic teasing of the teenagers and the silly farces, or in the army episodes, with bathroom jokes and vindictive superiors. Caranfil's movies always provoke the viewer to discover the author's avatar.

In this comedy, which speaks with humor about the despair that pushed people to risk their lives by swimming across the Danube, hoping to continue their journey to the West, we detect themes and motifs that would recur in the director's next movies: the motif of escaping from a suffocating place, or the obsession of representing the world of show business.

Some of the themes/motifs reappear in *Asphalt Tango* (1996). Built on the road movie formula, this comedy, with its extravagant situations and witty dialog, depicts the anarchic and socially polarized landscape of the Romanian transition from Communism to capitalism.

The movie tells the story of eleven beautiful young women recruited by a cynical French woman (Charlotte Rampling) to perform in a sex show. After boarding a bus, they cross the country, followed by a desperate husband (Mircea Diaconu), who is trying to recover his wife. *Asphalt Tango* develops into a high-speed chase, accumulating funny adventures which confront local and sexist mentalities with Western ideas of women's emancipation. Billy Wilder's lesson seems very well learned by Caranfil in developing hilarious situations and funny lines. Like other bitter comedies of transition from ex-communist countries (such as the big international hit *Kolya*, directed by the Czech Jan Sverak in 1996, or the German *Goodbye Lenin* of 2003 by Wolfgang Beker, *Asphalt Tango* grounds its humor more in the national obsession with migration, trying to avoid Western stereotypes in the representation of "Romanian issues".

The ironic approach to topics like "the communist nightmare," or "the dreadful transition" encouraged in Caranfil's movies a new attitude of debut films in representing the past, welcomed by the Romanian public. As I wrote before, in the early 1990s, "the movies approaching these topics were generally avoided by the public because of their ethical didacticism and schematic plots. There are a few exceptions, such as *Balanta (The Oak*) by Lucian Pintilie and *E pericoloso sporgersi* by Nae Caranfil, the first internationally-celebrated Romanian movies after the Revolution."[15]

After *Asphalt Tango* the director continued to approach ironically the consequences of transition, going even more in depth into the theme in *Philanthropy* (*Filantropica*, 2002), the bright and popular comedy that proved a Romanian box office hit (attracting 113,000 viewers), which turned Nae Caranfil into the sweetheart director of the young Romanian public. Mircea Diaconu, his habitual cinematic stand-in, gives life to Ovidiu, a high-school professor who, humiliated by the students' indifference and his poor salary, tries to recover his dignity by writing novels in his spare time. Having sold only three copies of his first book, he faces writer's block with the second one. After falling in love with a young model with pretentions to luxury, he desperately tries to make easy money and offers his services to an exotic crook, Mr. Pepe, the head of Philanthropy, a foundation whose aim is to transform poverty into a profitable business. Pepe's major gift is writing texts for the beggars and staging situations that activate people's sense of pity. His sophisticated strategy always proves his theory: "The begging hand which doesn`t tell a story does not get anything."

If *Philanthropy* rests its *vis comica* on its solid narrative structure, powerful characters and quick-fire lines, the film directing strategy is equally efficient in providing intelligent humor. Staged in depth, the beggars' casting scene, where Mr. Pepe improvises a different text for each case, is a subtle meta-cinematic moment that lets us follow the birth of a theatrical performance within the frame of a cinematic one. On this occasion, Caranfil brightly exercises his "maximalist" style, which does not avoid high angles and visual stunts, brilliantly executed by the director of photography Vivi Dragan Vasile.

In her review in "Film International," Oana Chivoiu offers a good explanation of *Filantropica's* critical success, by emphasizing the subtle scriptwriting and directing:

> "Caranfil's comedy flirts with drama, stays away from sentimentalism, and loves the raw humor of farces. The commitment to excellent screenwriting seen in Caranfil's previous comedies *Sunday on Leave* (1993) and *Asphalt Tango* (1996) is taken to a higher level of narrative and psychological sophistication in *Philanthropy.* The plot is seasoned with brilliant dialog, quotable lines and numerous twists."[16]

The author is not only an entertainer, but also an observer of the Romanian reality of the transition to capitalism, with *nouveaux riches,* impostors, grotesque imitations of Western models and moral confusion depicted realistically, in a sarcastic, Caragialesque tone. His ironic description never aims to reach the dimensions of a parable, an attitude that is shared by the directors who made their debut in the 2000s.

SELF-PORTRAITS AND SELF-REFLEXIVITY

Watching *Filantropica,* we are tempted to believe that, in a self-reflexive impulse, Caranfil includes a reflection on the scriptwriter's condition. The representation of the writing process (and the occasion to find other avatars of the author) can also be found in *Dolce far niente*, the international co-production (Italy-France) rooted in Frederic Vitoux's bestseller *9 Days at Terracina.* The book imagines a meeting in 1816 between French writer Stendhal and Italian composer Giaccomo Rossini in an isolated inn, during the troubled days that followed the Napoleonic wars.

Caranfil takes the novel's narrative as a pretext to develop personal themes, such as the artist's relationship with the idea of action. "The character I created is Nae Caranfil,"[17] confesses the director, who ironically depicts Stendhal as an anti-hero. *Dolce far niente* turned into "an *auteur* film with a 5 million dollar budget" (Mihai Fulger, 2006, p.14). Distinguished with a prize for the subtlety of the script at the Namur film Festival, the movie proposes an interesting narrative device:

> "A binomial: the one who tells his experiences, Stendhal, and I, who tell the movie and am an omniscient narrator. I created a conflict between the one who apparently tells the events, but tells them badly, because he cannot understand anything, and the events themselves, brought on screen by the film director: what you see denies what the storyteller understands."[19]

This proves it is impossible to avoid speaking of "self-reflexivity" in analyzing Nae Caranfil's movies, whether he uses its techniques to refer to the writer's condition, or to interrogate the relationship between cinema and life. Like the American directors of the 1970s he admires, Caranfil can be included in the category of *auteurs* constantly needing to make film references. He represents the trend that David Bordwell argues became mainstream in the 1990s: "The tradition is now free-standing, and allusions to old movies are expected in virtually every project."(David Bordwell, 2006, p. 24)

This awareness of modern cinema was named by the French scholars Gilles Lipovesky and Jean Serroy as "the distance-image". They claim it is a "form of cognitive distancing, (…) to provoke a reflection on cinema" (Gilles Lipovesky, Jean Serroy, 2006, p. 119). Although all the movies authored by Caranfil are rich in allusions and references to recognizable authors and movies, sometimes their entire narrative substance is nurturing itself with a particular case.

The most relevant example in this regard is *The Rest is Silence* (*Restul e tăcere,*2008*)*, which revolves around the making of *The Independence* of *Romania* (*Independenţa României,* 1912) the first Romanian feature film (by Grigore Brezeanu and Aristide Demetriad). Inspired by the book[20] his father (the well-known film historian Tudor Caranfil) wrote on the making of this movie, Nae Caranfil proves himself seduced by the myth of the young director, Grigore Brezeanu, who was only 19 years old when he started to fight to bring to the screen the 1877 war against the Ottoman Empire and the Romanian victory.

Although Tudor Caranfil claims, in his book, that the true director would be, in fact, the mature actor Aristide Demetriad (co-scriptwriter and co-director), Nae Caranfil prefers to identify Grigore Brezeanu as author:

> "I didn't like this interpretation of events, because I wanted to explore this artist-mogul opposition and I needed a strong and contrasting binomial: the artist had to be a kid and a dreamer, not a prestigious actor of mature age; Grig's youth is a vital element because it burns in its confrontation with money, more precisely with Leon Popescu."[21]

The relationship between the artist and his patron, with its complicity, euphoric and conflictive moments, includes details from the real case, but follows the traditional love-hate director-producer relationship which inspired movies such as *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952*)* by Vincente Minnelli, *The Barefoot Contessa* (1955*)* by Joseph Mankiewicz, *The Last Tycoon* (1976*)* by Elia Kazan and *Hollywood Ending* (2002) by Woody Allen.

By re-enacting scenes and sequences from the historical movie, *The Rest is Silence* places itself in the "distance-image" of the modern cinema of awareness. It also includes ironic allusions, such as the insolent line by the young director who, invited by King Carol I along with the crew of the movie, claims "he is the king on set".

As the director of photography Marius Panduru confesses, "Nae Caranfil aimed to use a classic American formula of the 1960s-1970s, with respect to the photography and the story (...) he proposed to himself to bring various quotes, some of them taken from the early years of production – the Hamlet excerpts, for instance, or the first movie screenings; he wanted to quote the whole history of cinema."[22]

Caranfil approaches self-reflexivity in a different way in *Closer to the Moon* (2013), an international production (his highest budget production) inspired by the so-called "great communist-era robbery" of 1959. The attack on a National Bank car when a sum equivalent to 250,000 dollars was stolen is investigated in the documentary *The Great Communist Robbery* (*Marele jaf comunist*, 2004) by Alexandru Solomon. It incorporates footage from *Reconstruction* (*Reconstituirea*), the educational film made by the Alexandru Sahia Studio in 1960. Watching this documentary, Nae Caranfil was intrigued by the curious "good mood" of the hold-up's perpetrators, arrested and forced to re-enact the genesis and the unfolding of the heist. It seems they agreed to perform for other reasons than the investigators' bogus offer to reduce their sentence if they co-operated. Caranfil decided to transfer the incredible event into fiction and, thanks to the quality of his script about the six Jewish intellectuals who staged the robbery, he won a grant at the national CNC projects contest and, later, the support of the American producer Michael Fitzgerald. Entirely shot in English, *Closer to the Moon* is tailored to the international audience, as the director confesses:

> "I was still aware that it was a film for an international audience and, consequently, I had to work around the topic in a way that could offer more than one key of understanding the Romanian reality of the communist era, so that the uninformed viewer could enjoy the film without the film sounding too much like a history lesson."[23]

Caranfil is aware that his approach "will raise all kinds of controversy, especially because of its topic, but also because it is treated with an unexpectedly "light tone", perhaps too light for its more tragic aspect." The distancing attitude could, however, make the viewer accept the adventure movie conventions and involve him or her in the author's reflection on the manipulating powers of the cinema media. With an international cast, led by Vera Farmiga (*Up in The Air*) and Mark Strong (*Syriana*, *Zero Dark Thirty)*, *Closer to the Moon* has not yet been released (as of March 2013).

NAE CARANFIL AND THE NEW ROMANIAN CINEMA: A MILD OPPOSITION

Returning to the intended comparison between Nae Caranfil's aesthetics and the aesthetic strategies of the New Romanian Cinema (or the Romanian "New Wave"), I have to remind the reader what is internationally understood by this label. The American critic A. O. Scott provides a good definition of it:

> "Though they might be reluctant to admit it, the new Romanian filmmakers have a lot in common beyond the reliance on a small pool of acting and technical talent. Because of the stylistic elements they share – a penchant for long takes and fixed camera positions; a taste for lighting and everyday décor; a preference for stories set amid ordinary life – Puiu, Porumboiu and Mungiu are sometimes described as minimalist or neo-realist. But while their work does show some affinity with that of other contemporary European *auteurs*, like the Belgian brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, who make art out of the grim facts of daily existence, the realism of the Romanians has some distinct characteristics of its own."[24]

With these specifications in mind, we can better understand the differences that separate Nae Caranfil's movies from the generation of new directors:

> "The directors of the "New Wave" are not claiming their films are derived from my work and I don't have the feeling I influenced them. The aesthetic program is different: I look for structure, they linearize; I push the situations to their limits, they deliberately undramatize; I write styled dialog, they look for naturalism; I use music, they don't. I'm trying to seduce; they, to rape, but unlike the penal code, the artistic code can legitimize both approaches; one does not exclude the other."[25]

The difference between the New Romanian Cinema style and Caranfil's aesthetics is also underlined in foreign film critics' comments such as, for instance, in Derek Elley's review of *The Rest is Silence*: "*The Rest is Silence* comes like a breath of fresh air at a time when it's easy to assume, from fests' picks, that (currently "hot") Romanian cinema is all grungy, DV-shot, miserabilist dramas."[26]

Yet, we cannot ignore the existing common agenda of Caranfil and the directors of the New Romanian Cinema. His work virtually started the symbolic abandonment of the Aesopian language preferred before 1990, and initiated the first strong opposition to this metaphorical cinema, acquisitions further developed by the "New Wave". Caranfil and his younger peers make efforts to depict more realistically the Romanians and their issues; they all try to write dialog that sounds more natural and to avoid pompous parables. They all avoid openly political statements, being aware this may reduce the emotional impact of their movies. Beyond the specific directing strategy that characterizes each filmmaker, we cannot ignore the visible similarities; for instance, taking an ironic approach to the Communist past, initiated by Caranfil with *Don't Lean Out of the Window.* Cătălin Mitulescu also includes comic episodes in *How I Spent the End of the World* (*Cum mi-am petrecut sfârşitul lumii*, 2006), a nostalgic and slightly ironic description of the last years of communism. The Cristian Mungiu-supervised omnibus-film *Stories from the Golden Age* (*Amintiri din epoca de aur,*2009*)* makes us laugh at the urban legends from the time of Ceausescu, while Gabriel Achim's *opera prima Adalbert's Dream* (*Visul lui Adalbert*, 2012*)* shows us how artsy movies and propaganda slogans co-existed in a communist factory *cinéclub* of the 1980s. Also recalling Caranfil's style of tragicomic evocation, Tudor Giurgiu's movie *Of Men and Snails* (*Despre oameni şi melci*) was resonant enough to turn it into the Romanian box office champion of 2012. The disappointments and difficulties of the transition are also approached in a light tone by Cristian Mungiu's debut feature *Occident* (*West*, 2002) a movie based, like *Don't Lean Out of the Window*, on the triptych narrative form, being "a delightful contribution to this mosaic mode,"[27] as Christina Stojanova notes.

Caranfil's obsession with the well-written script might have influenced the creative methods of the New Romanian Cinema: although they prefer simpler stories, the new directors develop their scripts with minutiae, with a solid structure. The "New Wave" counts on the ongoing contribution of gifted screenwriters, such as Răzvan Rădulescu. He has scripted (or co-scripted) movies including *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (*Moartea domnului Lazarescu*, Un Certain Regard Award, Cannes 2005), *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Day*s (*4 luni, 3 saptamani si 2 zile*, Palme d'Or 2007) and *Child's Pose* (*Pozitia copilului*, Golden Bear, Berlin 2013). The new directors avoid emphasizing meaningful moments through camera and sound techniques, while Caranfil uses them. Caranfil's movies benefit from the participation of big international stars (Charlotte Rampling in *Asphalt Tango,* Giancarlo Giannini in *Dolce far niente,* Vera Farmiga in *Closer to the Moon*), while the new directors' movies use new names (Dragoş Bucur, Anamaria Marinca, Vlad Ivanov, Bogdan Dumitrache etc.) We can try to chart what is similar and what is dissimilar in their agenda:

Nae Caranfil	**Directors of the New Romanian Cinema**
Prefers non-linear/experimental narrative	Prefer linear narrative
Refusal of metaphorical expression	Refusal of metaphorical expression
Use of non-diegetic music	Use of diegetic music
Post-modern strategy	Realistic strategy
Based on good screenwriting	Based on good screenwriting
Styled dialog	Natural dialog
The characters' goals are clear	The characters' goals are not obvious
Visual beauty, camera stunts	Hand-held camera, avoid beautiful image
Classical, dynamic editing	Long-takes editing
Chronicles exceptional events	Chronicle everyday life
Avoids emphasis and sentimentalism	Avoid emphasis and sentimentalism
Avoids overt political statements	Avoid overt political statements
Uses international stars	Discover new actors

CONCLUSIONS

This chart serves to back up my claim at the beginning of this article: Caranfil and the directors of the Romanian "New Wave" share quite a few objectives. They also have similar strategies in approaching some themes (the legacy of the communist past, the identity crises of the transition) and the diagnosis of social issues.

In spite of the differences in their aesthetics, the directors of the "New Wave" (with different styles inside the "movement") have managed to destabilize, as has Nae Caranfil, the *auteur* image, leaving it with a smaller ego now in Romanian Cinema. Cristi Puiu claims:

> "The *auteur* status does mean something, but it shouldn't be taken for granted. It doesn't mean what most people think it means, some demiurge sitting in an ivory tower, whose genius, isolated from the world, creates a universe on film strip picked from his own brain; things are slightly different (...) A filmmaker will tell you what the world looks like from his window, through the means of cinema."[28]

In other words, the main figure of the Romanian "New Wave" shares Nae Caranfil's ideas on authorship. Neither for Cristi Puiu nor for Caranfil does the *auteur* cinema have an elitist aura. They constantly undermine this view, by different means, but with remarkable results for the renewal of Romanian cinema. Caranfil and his younger peers have managed to create a cinema "saturated with life substance".

NOTES

1. He talked about his “maximalist” style in the interview “From the Earth to the Moon,” with Andrei Cretulescu in *APERITIFF,* Special edition 2012, p.65.

2. The expression “aesthetic stillness” was used by Pierre Billard to characterize the state of French cinema in the fifties, before the movies of the New Wave appeared, quoted by Michel Marie in “La nouvelle vague,” Ed. *Armand Collin*, 2007, p.32.

3. George Littera, “Autor de film,” *Cinema*, no 9/1978, p.12.

4-5. From the interview with Andrei Rus and Gabriela Filippi “Nae Caranfil şi jucăria numită cinematograf,” published in *Film Menu* no 9, February 2011, pp. 24-25.

6-9. Nae Caranfil, in “Tradiția Caragiale,” *Noul cinema* no.2/1990, p.10.

10. Anne Jäckel, “France and the Romanian cinema 1896-1999,” “French Cultural Studies” 2000. http://frc.sagepub.com/content/11/33/409.citation.

11. From the interview “From the Earth to the Moon,” by Andrei Crețulescu in *APERITFF,* Special edition 2012, p.65.

12-13. Andrew Sarris, *Notes on the Auteur Theory 1962*, “Film Culture,” Winter 1962-1963, p.3.

14. Jean Louis Comolli, in *Cahiers du cinema* nr 172, Nov 1965, p.51.

15. Dana Duma, “Are We Still Laughing When Breaking with the Past?” *Kinokultura,* 2007, www.kinokultura.com.

16. Oana Chivoiu, *Film International,* vol.10, no 1/2012, p.80.

17, 19. From the interview by Andrei Rus and Gabriela Filippi “Nae Caranfil şi jucăria numită cinematograf,” *Film Menu* no 9, February 2011, p. 35.

20. The book “În căutarea filmului pierdut” (*In Search of the Lost Film*) by Tudor Caranfil, *Ed. Merdiane* 1988, which investigates the making of the first Romanian feature film, *The Independence of Romania* (1912).

21, 26. From the interview “Nae Caranfil şi jucăria numită cinematograf,” by Andrei Rus and Gabriela Filippi, *Film Menu* no 9, February 2011, p.29.

22. From “Interviu cu Marius Panduru,” by Andrei Rus, Gabriela Filippi, *Film Menu* nr 11, July 2011, p.37.

23. From the interview “From the Earth to the Moon,” by Andrei Cretulescu in *APERITIFF,* Special edition 2012, p.65.

24. A. O. Scott, “In Film, the Romanian New Wave Arrived,” *New York Times,* January 19, 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/01/19/arts/19th-fromarian.1.9340722.html.

25. Iulia Blaga, *Dosar 10 ani cu filmul românesc: Episodul 1: Cineaştii noului val nu se revendică de la mine.Eu caut seducția, ei violul,* Hotnews, 2011, November 14, www: hotnews.ro/stiri-film-10688949-dosar-10 ani-filmul-romanesc-episodul-1-nae-caranfil-cineastii-noului-val-nu-se-revendica-mine-caut-seductia-violul.htm.

27. Derek Elley, “The Rest is Silence,” *Variety*, August 19, 2007, http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117934457.

27. Christina Stojanova, “My Romanian Cinema,” in *Kinokultura* “Special Issue New Romanian Cinema,” 2007, www.kinokultura.com/specials-6/stojanova/html.

28. In the interview “Portretul lui Cristi Puiu” by Andrei Rus and Gabriela Filippi, *Film Menu* no. 8, December 2011, p.27.

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Aurora: Elements from an Analysis of Misunderstanding

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Abstract
The article udertakes a thorough analysis of cinematic nararation in Cristi Puiu's Aurora. It elucidates the functions of the dramaturgical and directorial strategies which make the film "obscure" and "difficult to follow", their role in the film's carefully articulated thematic discourse. The article also systematically tests the application of various notions of "realism" to Puiu's film.

Keywords
Cristi Puiu, *Aurora,* Bazinian realism, Andrei Gorzo, perceptual realism, documentary realism, observational cinema.

Cristi Puiu's latest film has left people puzzled. Indeed, a three hours long epic following the wanderings of an impenetrable character (Viorel, acted by Puiu himself) - about whom we hardly find out for sure *who* he has killed, let alone *why* - could not expect a triumphant reception from the Romanian audience, be it even at the level of Puiu's previous film, *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*. The author seems to have taken this into account. Instead, while the critical reception of the film is yet stuck, with few exceptions, in mere declarations of taste, the film is still waiting for a fully applied analysis. What needs clarifying above all are the various misunderstandings that the film seems to programmatically trigger: why is it that *Aurora* is so difficult to understand and assimilate and what does the author mean by this opacity?

1) THE UNCLARITY OF THE "CINEMATIC SITUATION" AND ITS "REALISM"

First of all, it is clear that a large part of what makes the film difficult to follow is due to its singular style of exposition. As several critics have already noticed: it is not clear who the characters are that we are looking at, what goals they pursue, what significance the events hold that we see on screen

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etc. Labeling all this as “enhanced realism”, the film’s supporters simply regard it as a more radical outlining of the viewer’s situation as an *exernal* observer of the events occurring in the film. Such a view is supported by two of the film’s stylistic norms, explicitly defined as early as the opening shots1: the static camera setups and the elliptical editing. In other words, the film invariably observes two rules: 1) the camera *always* has a fixed position, so that all its movements are pivotal2, that is, fixed-station movements, instead of approaches, retreats etc.; 2) each time, *without exception*, the editing cuts introduce a temporal ellipse, a leap in time, which can be shorter or longer, but is, at any rate, noticeable. In doing so, the author obviously rejects any sort of continuity editing (by which a later shot takes over the action at the precise point in time where it was left by the preceding shot).3

Shot by shot, the two decisions clearly highlight the coordinates of an unusual spectatorial situation, explicitly defining the horizon of understanding and the range of possibilities that the stylistic structure of the film is allowing the spectator. Why this is so is not hard to figure. Since the camera records any scene, for its entire duration, from the same fixed point of view, even allowing the characters to temporarily disappear from view (out of frame or behind other objects), that “point of view” itself is constantly foregrounded, kept in the viewer’s awareness. It is the opposite of what happens in the case of “classic” (ordinary, inconspicuous) cinematic narration, which works to make the viewer forget the whole question of “point of view”. The refusal of continuity editing prolongs the same idea – all instantaneous leaps of perspective being eliminated, the outcome is actually, shot by shot, a *unique,* coherent point of view. By explicitly establishing this unitary point of view – also conceived, evidently, as a *limited* perspective, one than cannot, by principle, cover *everything* – the film definitely invites us to look not only at what is going on on the screen, at the simple succession of events signifying this or that, but to continuously consider what we see in relation with the observational situation thus created for us viewers. The film thus defines, through a precisely determined stylistic regime, the sense of our relationship with the content we are witnessing, the way in which we are involved in the film – in short, *the cinematic situation* which we experience.

According to the usual interpretations, this perspective perfectly matches the point of view of a real observer. In contrast to the conventional narratorial omnipotence of ordinary cinema, which has no problem with changing the optical perspective in the middle of an action, or even with jumping back and forth in time, the spectator is invited here to accept some limits: the very limits which would characterize the realistic situation of an “observer” witnessing in real life the film’s events. Such a conceptualization would naturally entail, from the author’s part, making the filmic events less easy to understand than they are in traditional cinema, where everything is overexplicit etc. The most articulate interpretation of *Aurora* in this vein was offered by Andrei Gorzo, who tied it to André Bazin’s conception of cinematic realism. Now, we might certainly wonder whether such a stylistic option really makes the film more “realistic.” Given the disconcerting ambiguity of the term, this idea might obviously be interpreted in several ways; “empirically”, we can distinguish three main variants:

a) *“Realistic”, That Is, “Life-Like”*

First, we might understand that, due to this style of presentation, the film brings us closer to the way in which we normally observe somebody in daily life. From this point of view, it is clear that, in addition to the two stylistic procedures already mentioned, the observational situation that the film builds is also distinguished by two other characteristics. First of all, the film confronts us with a *stranger*, with a person with whom we have no previous acquaintance. It’s as if we had chosen a passer-by at random and started following him on the street. Obviously, in such a situation, we would not easily understand what that person is doing, what he is talking about with the other people he comes in contact with, where they are going and so on – things that we would perhaps have understood immediately in the case of an acquaintance. Secondly, however, the observational situation in which we are here also presents another singularity, which differentiates it radically from any quotidian observation: in the film, we are not limited to following the character only in his various public situations – *i.e.* those situations in which a stranger usually manifests himself to us – but we also have access to his intimacy, to his apartment, even to his bathroom, and we have that kind of access because we are basically placed in the position of an *invisible*4 witness. Now, this detail certainly makes all the difference, because, though confined or limited in other ways, such an observational position is still one in which we could never find ourselves in daily life. So, in this respect, it is far from realistic or "life-like". Actually, even the ways in which our observation is here limited or confined (by the fixed position of the camera and by the editing) clearly belong to a *constructed* cinematic perspective – they are not genuinely "realistic" (in this first sense of "life-like") limitations, for why should we, as real observers, be stuck to the same spot for the whole duration of every scene5? It is consequently clear that the purpose of such a stylistic option cannot be the mere reproduction of the truthful parameters of real "observation" – the creation of a genuinely quotidian style of visibility and observation, of a "perceptual realism" – since the situation thus created does not actually match its "real" correspondent, but instead it builds a singular *visual regime*, no less conventional or removed from the style of daily visibility than that of a common thriller narated through "analytical editing", though this regime is, of course, founded on different rules.

b) *"Realistic", That Is, The Same As in A Documentary*

We can also understand the term in another way, and it is this sense that seems, at a first glance, to be the guiding one for Andrei Gorzo, when he calls the film "an imaginary observational documentary",6 or when he speaks about "real people followed without their knowledge by a documentary filmmaker"7: the film is "realistic" inasmuch as what it shows us can be regarded very well as a real documentary recording. In this case, *Aurora* would propose, as it were, the point of view of a hidden camera crew, which, after following the character (as it is indeed able to follow him everywhere) for two days, starting from a more or less random moment, shows us the condensed, edited product of this observation8 – the film that we see on screen for three hours –, inevitably containing obscure and unexplained facts.

What meaning can this "documentary" character have, in the case of a fiction film? It is clear that such a film can assume a – certainly fictitious – "documentary" character in two ways: explicitly or only implicitly. *The first possibility:* the film camera and, in general, the films's status as a documentary recording are explicitly shown and asserted in the film itself, which becomes, in this way, a fake documentary, to be more precise: the fictitious reproduction of a documentary film. Of course, such a film might possibly be called "more realistic" than the usual realist film to the extent to which it offers an explanation of itself as a recording (an explanation of the presence of the camera and its point of view), a fact which otherwise remains totally inexplicable at this level. In exchange, it is clear that the effect of this step is not actually an increase in authenticity, that is, in realism, but on the contrary: such a film usually appears to us as even more fictitios, its artifice and constructedness are even more salient. Anyway, it is clear that *Aurora* does not follow this path. *The other possibility:* the film doesn't claim, at the level of its fiction, to be a documentary proper, but it borrows, at a level of suggestion, from the stylistics of documentary cinema, thus obtaining, through the indirect path of translation between cinematic forms, a veristic "air". Of course, this step doesn't bring with itself, either, a structural gain in realism, at the level of actual film presentation (in the way the insertion of colour represents a gain in structural realism, compared to black-and-white presentation), but only an implicit "realistic effect ", whose genuine spring is the inter-referentiality of the two forms of representation – "fiction film" and "documentary film." In other words, we are not faced here with a representation which is more realistic in itself, but only with a suggestion obtained by recourse to a certain style, itself connoted as "veristic" or "realistic" through its association with documentaries and news reports. Thus, it is clear that some of the techniques used today in the so-called "realistic" film - for instance, the hand-held camera, the shaking image, the imperfect framing - are not, purely and simply, "more realistic" in themselves (in Bazin's meaning, for instance), but they are, more often than not, borrowings from the techniques of the documentary and news report, obtaining thus – through the indirect path of association with these cinematic *forms*, rather than through means which are inherently closer to reality (such as sound in relation to silent cinema, or colour in relationship to black-and-white film) – a mere effect of "authenticity", "genuineness", "reality." Hence, these techniques are not "realistic" *in themselves*. *By themselves,* they do not bring the cinematic image closer to the direct experience of reality (in Bazin's meaning, as we shall see further on). They only partly borrow a form of apprehension which has been culturally accredited with veridicity, through its association with the cinematic situation of the documentary and reportage film.

As a matter of fact, when we are dealing with a concept such as, "realism", we are inevitably dealing with an entire history of overlaps and ambiguities between these two forms – documentary and fiction – from the use of fictional tropes and techniques in documentary films and the adoption in televised reports of a "spectacular" manner of presentation borrowed from fiction films (take for example the way in which a soccer game is cut today in a televised broadcast), to the translation of the techniques of the documentary film as aesthetic, stylistic motifs in fiction films, etc. It is certainly useful, in this respect, to ask ourselves what mutations may have occured in our "impression of reality", because of this entire history of interfearences between the two forms (and these mutations would not at all be unidirectional – mere infusions of, "realism" into the fiction film, since one also hears quite often about the, "de-realization" of news reporting), but it is certain that, in the process, the issue of realism has become infinitely more complicated. At any rate, what radically differentiates a documentary from a fiction film is, ultimately, the existence of the camera (and, implicitly, the meaning which the latter transfers to the images that we see): in the filmic regime of the fiction film, the camera *does not exist,* if it is not deliberately introduced into the fiction, and the, "point of view" which the camera produces in the image is purely and simply – as long as it is not "subjectivized" in one way or another – part of the perceptive structure of meaning of the cinematic image. In other words: the respective image is not primarily oriented in relation to the viewer's actual presence in the cinema hall, the way, in real life, the appearance of a constellation of objects depends on the spatial position we occupy in relation to them; the cinematic image is pre-oriented from the very beginning, through the inclusion of a single point of view into the structure of the image itself (the object in the image is seen only from a pre-determined point of view, and this point of view, the only one from which we see the object, irrespective of our seat in the cinema, is included as such in the structure of the image itself, without any reference to the "film camera", which does not exist at all at this level). In the logic of the film itself, understood as a fiction film, the camera crew can only exist, therefore, as a fictionalized camera crew within a fake documentary. On the contrary, in a documentary film, whatever its kind, the point of view of the camera "means", from the perspective of the film itself, the presence on the spot of an camera crew we acknowledge as such, a presence meaning something in the logic of the film itself.

Now, it is clear that *Aurora*, like Puiu's previous films, implicitly leans towards the stylistics of the documentary film. The only question being: is the observational situation that the film constructs – that is, the precisely delimited "point of view" which we are attributed – really an aspect of "(pseudo-) documentary realism"? The answer can only be, I believe, a negative one: it is clear that, as long as a film does not specifically aim to present itself as a fake documentary, it best ensures its veristic effect when it lets the point of view – as Puiu himself did in *The Death of Mr.Lazarescu* – remain altogether implicit and inapparent. In *Aurora*, on the contrary, Puiu sharply emphasizes the perspective from which we look, without explaining this at all through the presence of a "documentarist crew" etc. The effect of the decision itself is not in the least "realistic" in this respect – in the sense of indicating the *source* of the recording, an aspect which does not concern us in the least. Thus, the value of the gesture must be sought elsewhere, namely: in shifting the accent from the forthright story of the character and its meaning, to the way in which he appears to us, to how and how much we can understand him *from the outside*.

c) *"Realistic" in Bazin's Meaning.*

Finally, when we speak about "realism", we can also understand the term – as Gorzo himself does in a series of articles published in the journal *Film Menu*– in André Bazin's sense. Bazin's conception of "realism" is based, on the one hand, on an "ontological" thesis about the status of photographic images (in general) as "documents" (as "traces" or "imprints" of their model, whose substance they share)9. On the other hand, Bazin's conception of "realism" finds its ultimate formulation in the "teleological" idea of "total cinema" (the secret aspiration which inspired the development of cinema being, according to Bazin, the aspiration of reproducing, in the cinematic experience, a total illusion of reality)10. It is precisely the latter perspective which prompts Bazin to praise forms of expression and narrative techniques such as the long take, at the expense of others, such as analytical editing, for being "more realistic" – Bazin frequently uses the comparative degree, rather than praising such techniques for being simply realistic "in the absolute" – his ultimate reference being the very idea of total cinema, the secret teleological aspiration of cinema since always. However, it is clear that, while some contributions to the development of cinematic art (such as the introduction of sound and colour, of a certain style of performance etc., partly also of the long take) can, indeed, be successfully assimilated to this conception (we are continually referring to aspects linked to the content shown in the film, which, through these innovations, becomes ever closer to reality-as-genuinely-perceived), other contributions – namely, those related not to the filmed contents and to their "realism", but to the relationship of the spectator with what he sees on the screen and, especially, with the point of view of the camera (for instance, the introduction of 3D representation, the repeated attempts at presenting the film from the subjective POV of a character, or at identifying, purely and simply, the POV of the spectator with that of the camera, etc.) – cannot be as easily interpreted as being "more realistic". Considered with more attention, the problem is the following: the ultimate idea of "total cinema" that Bazin proposes actually consists in living the cinematic experience as if it were a real situation, and therefore: as if the spectator indeed experienced the situation in the film as being his own. Yet, it is clear that none of the techniques experimented so far in the attempt to eradicate this eternal residue, this point-zero of cinematic "non-realism" – which consists in the basic non-identity between the point of view of the camera, as a structural moment of the represented image, and the point of view of the spectator – have truly succeeded in solving the problem: a film will forever remain, as long as it remains a film and does not become something totally different (for instance, a kind of inter-active simulation, since the sense of a real situation is also defined as a range of practical possibilities, of one's own possibilities of action, which determine the palpable understanding of objects as objects towards which one can change one's position etc.), structurally unrealistic from the perspective of the relationship set between the spectator, the point of view and the filmic situation, that is: from the perspective of the necessarily complex spectatorial situation instituted by the reception of a cinematic image. The presence of the spectator *inside* the cinematic situation cannot exceed the boundaries of his specific way of being placed *outside* the situation being represented on screen (he is, in a way, "behind the scenes" of the respective situation, a behind-the-scenes represented by the space of the cinema hall or any of its contemporary complements); in other words: the spectator can never attend, in the current configuration of film experience, to a genuine, realistic presence *within* the represented situation.

It is clear that Puiu's film does not bring the filmic experience in any way closer to the total illusion evisaged by Bazin; in this sense, it does not construct a "more realistic" positioning of the spectator in the film, but it creates – within the margins of the cinema as we know it - a simple regime of visualisation which has, as such, a precise thematic meaning in the conception of the film itself: it is not a gain in realism, but only a gain in meaning, which the film obtaines not by means of the plot but by its structure.

2) THE UNCLARITY OF THE CHARACTER, ANTI-PSYCHOLOGISM AND THE IDEA OF A REALISTIC CHARACTER

Let us return, however, to the problem of misunderstanding, because the aspect discussed so far – that is, the singular "perspective" which the film builds for the spectator – is, of course, only a first cause of its obscurity, *i.e.* only a first, if by no means negligible, layer in the difficult construction of the film. Indeed, if in real life we could become (no matter how) invisible witnesses to the life o stranger (starting from a random moment in that life), things would be rather difficult for us at first; thrown in the midst of his life, we would only vaguely understand what he is actually doing, who he is talking to, what the sheet of paper he is reading says, etc. However, it is important to notice one fact here: the other characters in *Aurora* – characters who are no less strangers to us when we first lay eyes on them – immediately reveal themselves to us; they immediately start making sense, they continually give plenty of explanations about what they are doing and planning to do ("I am cooking a mousaka", etc.), even if nobody asks them, so it is clear that, should we insistently follow them instead of insistently following Viorel, we would quickly learn quite a lot, and the film would no longer be unclear to us, except in its first stages. In exchange, we are stuck with Viorel, who – and this is precisely the essential aspect of his characterization – is "locked in", who refuses to open himself to us, who doesn't show and doesn't say anything directly about what is going on with him. Therefore, the problem is not only that we plunge into the life of an unknown (hence, the inherent momentary disorientation of such a posture), but also that the unknown whom we are following is in a condition which makes him "unreadable" by us, and the film does not suggest at all – according to its inherent semantics and irrespective of the statements of its author – that all people are like this when approached from the outside, that "everybody is locked inside their own heads" etc.

So we are purposefully made to follow an opaque character, who never reveals himself directly – and it is precisely here that the idea of "observation" actually comes up, as well as the basic unclarity of the film. For it is clear: a "gripping" action film will never turn us into "observers" just because it looks at things from "the outside" in the style mentioned before. On the contrary, as long as we are "gripped" while watching the film, we are caught in a logic of suspense, in which the film is continually dictating our expectations, no matter whether it fulfills them or not; in exchange, when we watch something that we no longer understand immediately and we forget, through a series of perplexed expectations, to function in the terms of a "trained attention", only then can we actually say that we are really in the situation of "observing" - a truly rare situation in cinema.11 True, the effect of such a procedure risks to be a rapid slackening of the interest towards the film, if the spectator is not willing to switch from his forthright interest for the "action" – an interest which can be, and is more often than not, manipulated in any “gripping” film, and which this film is constantly sabotaging through the opacity of its protagonist – to focus on the film’s true level of meaning.

Aurora is essentially a film about a man whom the others - and especially the viewers themselves - cannot reach. As such, it is, of course, not a “clinical portrait”, nor, “a psychological case study” (it is obviously unilluminating on these matters). What we watch is purely and simply a character who no longer accepts to be “understood” by anybody – and especially not by us. “*Especially* not by us”, as we said, because, as “observers”, we only apparently enjoy a privileged position (given the fact that we follow him continually), whereas in reality, the characters who know him have, or at least should have, the minimum advantage, compared to us, of being able to read a little bit more on his face – familiar to them, no matter how devoid of clear expressions we may find it. On the other hand, the character is, even for us, not actually, truly and wholly opaque; it’s only that those facial expressions and gestures of his that we notice *do not reveal him directly and univocally,* as is usually the case with the expressions and gestures of a real-life person with whom we are in relations of “communication” (and it is important to notice that, in a more or less discreet way, ordinary film characters are always “expressively open” to the audience, they are in tacit communication with it), but instead they *“betray”* him rather *indirectly*, against his will, in a way which remains essentially uncertain and ambiguous for us.

Thus, throughout the film, Viorel is not immediately understandable, not for one moment, but he is nevertheless continually characterized at an implied – nearly physiological – level, through the inadequacy of his utterances and glances, through the entire deviating language of his gestures, through his steps and breathing, through his actions – carriers of meanings which are also only implicit – and, in equal measure, through external traces or signs (doors, walls, phones12 etc.). Viorel, therefore, does not “express himself” directly, but rather he “is expressed” through dysfunctions, inadequacies and “signs”: not so much through the concrete content of his spoken utterances, as through their inappropriateness (be it only an inappropriateness of vocal tone) to the dialogue situation – he is in permanent dissonance with the others, on another wavelength than theirs –, not as much through the specific destination of his glances (for it is never altogether clear what he is actually looking at), as through their unadjustment – they are from one moment to the next: distracted, blank, staring, overinsistent, etc. – an inadequacy which obviously causes the more or less explicit discomfort of the other characters, a.s.o. Yet what are all these aspects actually revealing to us? *Nothing concrete* – not something that we might understand, as it were, or directly empathize with, nothing of what is actually happening “inside” him: if he is planning or remembering something, what he is feeling, if he is generally thinking about something or just staring blankly into space etc. The character is constantly enriched with touches of meaning, he fills indirectly with a certain content, although he never acquires for us the type of concreteness, the sort of vivid profile which comes with genuine understanding.

Now, we can very well speak here, as Andrei Gorzo does, about an, “anti-psychological” stance in the construction of the character, understood as a basically realistic stance (in the Bazinian sense). The question is only: how far can and must this tendency go for the character to nevertheless be perceived as a real and concrete person, as a flesh-and-blood man, and not as a bare abstraction? Doesn’t the creation of a, “realistic character” presuppose a minimal intelligibility, in the absence of which he does not become, “more realistic”, but, “more unbelievable” as character? Indeed, if, as Cristi Puiu says in some interviews, he himself does not understand, “what is going on in the mind of a murderer,” and, as a consequence, how the actions of the character in the second part of the film are actually motivated and how they genuinely come together - how could he then convey the realistic impression of a disturbed character whom we simply do not understand? In other words: what exactly is preventing the spectator from suspecting not only that he or she does not understand the psychology of the character, but that the latter doesn’t even have a psychology and that behind the plethora of actions, gestures and expressions that he or she hardly understands, there is really nothing to be understood? The risk is, therefore, that the character might not come across as a fully-fledged human being (in the "realistic" sense) whom we simply do not understand – because for that, he would still need to have that minimum recognizable consistency of meaning which characterizes a living man, even when it is not clear what he is doing and what is happening to him – but as a mere stylized construct, or as the illustration of some behaviorist thesis, impossible to assimilate as "living reality." This risk is certainly more than a mere abstract possibility in the case of *Aurora.*

3) THE UNCLARITY OF THE NARRATIVE AND THE BAKGROUND "THEME" OF THE FILM

All of Viorel's actions and gestures – making up the film's plot – occur under the specter of a similar unclarity. The fundamental lack of clarity of his intentions proceeds from a singular mixture of haste and deliberation that the character's actions constantly emanate. All his actions, including the murders, are shown to us not as much as coherent projects, as clear and precisely motivated intentions, but, on the contrary, as shards in a profusion of diferrent projects, not totally compatible with each other, so that we never really know if the character is continually changing his mind, purely and simply, or if he is carrying out some complex intentions which, even if only for himself, still have a consistent meaning – and this characterization is not linked, of course, only to the "anti-psychologism" of the approach. Actually, the character is a practical man, an "engineer": his entire delirium, if a delirium it is, manifests itself as steadfast action, as pragmatic preoccupation, without us ever being able to immediately understand how exactly his acts tie together and if they tie together at all. Viorel is always preoccupied by something, always on the alert – and then suddenly distracted, as if struck by another intention.13 For sure, lack of clarity is something we usually experience whenever we see somebody committing an obviously premeditated, calculated act, without being able to tell what he is actually doing and to what purpose. Here, however, the problem is more radical, since, while seeing the film, we do not even understand the extent to which the character really follows a goal, a clear, preliminary intention in the chain of his actions, or whether he is on the contrary only distracted by projects that he dreams up on the spot, as everything he sees seems, actually, to continually distract his attention. The interpretation of this point is actually *meant* to be undecidable, and as such, it brings into play a structural misunderstanding14 which affects the entire narrative cohesion of the film, leading, among others things, to an *atomization of the sequences* from the point of view of their understanding, in the otherwise unitary temporal flow of the "action."

The denouement is equally unclear: it does not bring a resolution, it does not put an end to the uncertainty, it does not solve "the mystery"; on the contrary, it provides us with another ambiguous proof of it. Viorel surrenders to the police and "he confesses to his crimes" - but is this the moral pay-off and the explanation of his tribulations, or is it just another symptom of his psychic drift and confusion? Nevertheless, the final scene brings a new element: for the first time – and because the rhetoric of the sequence demands it –, Viorel attempts to "reveal" himself; and – on the strength of the preceding three hours' consistent disorientation, and also on the strength of an entire Romantic imaginary of "confession" as a liberating moment, by which the criminal rebuilds the social covenant he has broken through the crime etc. – the scene promises a revelation. However, what actually happens is a far cry from – the reference is within easy reach – *Crime and Punishment.* We don't know whether Viorel surrendered because of remorse, whether he really is now on a path of "regeneration," and, as the internal moral meaning remains totally obscure, the film concentrates on a new situation of misunderstanding: that of modern "justice," which processes the crime as a bureaucratic case, showing no concern for understanding it – while understanding is, of course, essential to the

Romantic trope of the final confession. The "understanding" meant here is obviously not merely a logical comprehension – such as is normally requested in detective films, when the threads of a case, being very complicated, demand special ingenuity from the "detective" in his effort to disentangle them. On the contrary, the case is more or less clear in this respect, or will become clear when all the details will have been elucidated, but its very processing as "a case," exclusively focused on its logistics and technicalities, implies – and this is precisely the revelation of the scene, in the light of what a "confession" is supposed to mean as a literary motif – the total abandonment of any attempt at understanding in the "human" sense (compassionate understanding, empathy). The lack of understanding, treated so far as a *formal* epiphenomenon of the situation of observation that the film constructs, or, on the contrary, as a mere dysfunction inherent to the communication between the characters and to our apprehension of the protagonist, now reveals itself as being more than that, namely: a structural flaw providing the very *theme* of the film.

Throughout the entire film, we do not understand Viorel as a character; the others cannot get along with him, but neither is Viorel himself willing to understand them. Always aggressive, insinuating, aberrant, placid, absent, confused, his only constant content is his refusal to understand and to be understood. It is precisely this something that is always missing, more or less explicitly, throughout the film, that constitutes the film's intimate preoccupation, the issue described in detail throughout the film, but only *in the negative,* as it were, through its absence. Indeed, no less than *The Death of Mr.Lazarescu*, *Aurora* is, in fact, a film about compassion ("love" was meant to be, according to statements made by Cristi Puiu, the common theme of his planned sextet of "stories from the outskirts of Bucharest"), and it suffices to feel the various nuances of coldness in Viorel's relationships with the others, with his neighbor, his mother, the saleswoman, the teacher – the varying degrees of warmth in all these relationships actually define, parcimoniously, the entire emotional landscape of the film – in order to immediately feel that Puiu's true ambition is, as it was in *Lazarescu,* to speak about "love" by describing a world in which it is missing. "A divorce is not just a separation between two people," Viorel cryptically asserts at one moment, and, indeed, it is primarily the radicalization of a divided world, a world of transactions, of partitions and severe demarcations, of "what is mine" and "what is owed to me," of mutual debts and compared merits, and of a "justice" that can never "substitute" itself to human understanding.

For sure, this also includes a reflection on our own situation as spectators, towards which the film turns again, one more time, at the end. Viorel now starts to chaotically retell the policemen all that has happened, and, for us, his account repeats "in effigy" the experience of the film itself: it plunges the policemen, like the film plunged us, into the maelstrom of obscure meanings which is the story as viewed from the inside – of course, the signification of all this escapes the police as it eluded us. "Who is Amalia?", asks one of them, as we must have also asked ourselves throughout the film, but his attitude – and it is precisely the attitude that we shared as "observers" during the entire projection – is now revealed as a mere surface curiosity, hiding a fundamental unavailability, and thus as being precisely part of the problem that the film was dramatizing all along. By the end of the film, we have actually seen how it all happened, and from the point of view of "justice" we would undoubtedly make the ideal witnesses at Viorel's trial. But what would we in fact be able to say?

Concluding on this note, the film is for sure not actually an apology of observational realism.

NOTES

1. The credits of the film are preceded by four expository shots which - placed in an undefined way outside the continuous temporal flow that the film presents – determine, on the one hand, the stylistic rules which will define the entire film (from editing and camera movement to rhythm, lack of action, the

intelligibility of the character etc.) and, on the other hand, its central thematic motifs: discussions and meetings whose meaning evades us, baffled glances, failed phone calls etc.

2. The pivotal movements of the camera most often follow the moves of the characters – usually, those of Viorel - but sometimes they also concentrate on their glances, taking in what the character "is looking at." The camera *"follows"* glances and moves, as I said, and the term relates to the very fact that it does not have the privileged status of an omniscient narrator - who has been forewarned about those moves, being in a "pre-established harmony" with them - but only the status of an external observer, who must "go along with" the followed characters, being sometimes "surprised" by sudden moves, etc.

3. Consequently, an action such as the entrance of a character into a room is not presented by first showing the character opening the door, and then, from another angle, showing him closing the door behind him and continuing to move inside the room; here, a character walks to the door and then, if there's a cut, the following shot shows him as having already been inside the room for quite a while, etc.

4. "Realism" thus understood stumbles upon the founding convention of fiction cinema – the presence of the camera – which it can skirt only in three ways: 1) by forgetting about the camera, as happens with most of the so-called "realistic" films, which seek to mask the artifice of the cinematic situation through a non-apparent shooting style (this is obviously not the case with *Aurora*); 2) by creating a "realistic" role for the camera's POV in the fiction (for instance, by subjectivizing it as some sort of "character," be it even one whose presence is not really explained) – an option which has rarely led to satisfactory results, most often hindering rather than increasing the "realist" feel of the film (a good example, be it only from this perspective, might be Gaspar Noé's *Enter the Void*), or 3) by explicitly claiming, in one way or another, the status of a "documentary recording" (this is, for instance, what Radu Jude's *Film for Friends* is doing). Or, it is clear that since Puiu's film insists on drawing attention to its own "observational *dispositif*", highlighting the singular spectatorial situation which the camera creates – an essentially "non-realistic" situation in this respect –, the effect is not and cannot be at all a gain in "perceptual realism".

5. Of course, we are pinned down to our seats in the cinema, but as long as we accept the convention which makes us eye-witnesses to a certain situation in the film, and then transports us from place to place with each change of scene, we might as well have accepted the convention that we are moving back and forth in the footsteps of the character.

6. A. Gorzo, *Aurora in Cinemas,* in: Dilema veche, no. 371, March 24-30 2011.

7. Idem.

8. From the point of view of the film, it is important for us not to consider at any moment that the cuts themselves are hiding significant details from us; we must not think that through a dramatic ellipsis, a detail that might have clarified the confusion of the events, and made the actions of the character more comprehensible, has been deliberately hidden from us. The idea is not that, lacking such or such information, we cannot understand what it is all about, but on the contrary, that, even if we had absolute access to everything that goes on during these two days, we could not clarify, from our vantage point, all the facets of a life into which we are being parachuted from the outside. A conventional film easily goes over this fact, simulating, in a most unapparent way, dramatic situations meant to offer the spectator the explanations he needs, but "in reality" such explanations are missing, and the intention of the film is precisely that of plunging us ruthlessly into such an alien universe, as alien in its essence as a universe in which the characters speak without subtitles in a language unknown to us. Naturally, on the other hand, the film might have started from another moment, perhaps a more revealing one, than is actually the case – and there is a specific reason why it starts where it actually does – but the essential point is that, given the observational situation which he film proposes, we find ourselves, wherever the film might begin, in the middle of somebody's life, in a sphere of meanings that we don't share and that we consequently misunderstand ex *officio*.

9. Cf. *Ontologie de l'image photographique,* in : A. Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinema?*, Editions du Cerf, 1981, pp. 9-17.

10. Cf. *Le mythe du cinema total,* in: A. Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinema?*, Editions du Cerf, 1981, pp. 19-24.

11. The film's "narrative" lack of clarity is thus not a mere given, as if the story itself were purely and simply confused, but on the contrary, it is the result of a precise dramatic construction, whose purpose is to *lead* us into confusion – to trigger rash expectations, in order to subsequently disappoint them gradually and unequivocally (see for instance the first scene, in which the impression is inevitable that we are dealing with Viorel's family: while his behavior – for example, the fact that he keeps his distance from the child – can come across from the very beginning as vaguely bizarre under the circumstances, the proper readjustment of that first impression takes place much later in the film; see, also, the sequence inside the department store, where we tend to believe that he is looking for his wife, etc.).

12. Throughout the film, the phone and the peephole are parallel signs – auditory and optical – of the same situation. Just as the other end of the peephole constantly reveals nobody, the phone is itself, continually, only the instrument of failed communication.

13. Even in the bathroom scene, where the character seems to enjoy, at long last, a respite, the respite soon takes the form of an obsessive preoccupation, followed by distraction. The scene is the only one in which we see Viorel alone in a sheltered space of his own (an "of his own" which is actually in a permanent crisis), a space which is not violated by the direct or indirect presence, through "traces," of the others. And it is exactly then that water starts dripping down on him from his neighbors, infiltrating "the others", as though it were impossible to ever shut them out completely.

14. The same structural ambiguity is continually evidenced by all of Viorel's gestures, especially his glances, of which we never know for sure whether they are really focused on something or if they are empty stares, if the character is distracted or, on the contrary, alert. Through repetition, some of them – for instance, his looking through the peephole – are imbued with stronger symptomatic meaning, though they remain no less unclear. You never know: does he hope, or is he afraid that somebody might come? Is he feeling followed or is he just feeling lonely? With the same ambivalence with which he stares, again and again, through the peephole, Viorel, under the pretence of some domestic manoeuvres, also turns twice to face the camera – "he looks us in the face," in a gesture equally lacking a univocal and forthright expressive meaning. The analogy is clear: the dysfunction that we are faced with here is not only that between the protagonist and the other characters, in the context of their mutual communication, but it is also located at the level of the relationship (of "understanding", "empathy," "compassion" etc.) between the spectators and the character he follows.

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Cristi Puiu in *Aurora* (2010) directed by Cristi Puiu (still)

Expanded Image Spaces. From Panoramic Image to Virtual Reality, Through Cinema

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Abstract
A look at the history of cinema reveals that in the early 20th century, the expansion of the panoramic image in cinema was abandoned for technical and economic reasons. In late 20th century the situation changed, the explosive development of computer technology bringing new possibilities for cinema, allowing an advanced involvement of the viewer, transforming him or her from a passive viewer into an active participant. This development has brought to the fore the older subject of the immersive image. What resulted was the birth of a new medium. This environment is built on the dynamic image (inherited from cinema and television), immersion (a legacy of the 19th-century panorama) and interactivity (inherited from digital technologies). This paper aims to identify elements of immersion, spatialization and interactivity in the history of illusion spaces, from panorama to virtual reality.

Keywords
Immersion, interactivity, panorama, cinema, expanded cinema, virtual reality

PANORAMA – THE PRE-CINEMATIC FORERUNNER OF VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

Panorama was patented by Scottish painter Robert Barker in 1787, and was described as a circular pictorial representation of a landscape."It is an artificial, technical term, in other words, created for a specific form of landscape painting which reproduced a 360-degree view and was invented independently arround 1787 by several different European painters" [Oetermann 1997, p.61]. Originally known as "la nature à coup d'oeuil", the invention was quickly adopted, and in a few years became known under the name of *panorama* in almost all European languages. "The word spread like fire" [Huhtamo 2013, p.4].

In constructive terms, the panorama (Fig.1) was a circular structure painted on the interior side, that allowed visualization of a scene without the limitations of the fixed frame, vizualization made

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from the center of the platform, i.e. from within the image. The technical description indicates the absence of building doors and windows, so that light entered indirectly through skylights, and access was via a staircase within the central column, in order not to disrupt the viewing.

It seemed quite natural and beneficial to Barker's contemporaries to abandon the fixed frame of a picture in favor of a broader representation developed horizontally, and the rigid point of view in favor of a mobile one. Hence, one of the reasons for the proliferation that the panorama and its offshoots have enjoyed as a mass phenomenon for a century in Europe, the United States and Australia ([Oettermann 1997, p. 49-97], [Grau 2003, p.65], [Barnard 2012, p.8-16], [Schwartz 1999, p.149-176], [Colligan 2002, pp.97-117], [Comment 1999, pp.51-76]).

This new type of representation has been a controversial art form. The opinions expressed at the time of its appearance were very different: in 1800, shortly after its invention, the *Institut de France* gave it a generous and favorable report [Grau 2003, p.64]. At the same time, the illusionist character of the image provoked reservation, or even rejection, due to the effects of disorientation and vertigo induced sometimes in viewers (*panorama sickness, see-sickness*). The panorama has enjoyed a great public interest. It was an important innovation, and it became and remained a medium of mass communication for a century, until the advent of cinema. In its time, the panorama anticipated the element that the classic cinema hall would become long after. Some ideas were not quite new.

> "The innovation represented by the panorama does not consist in either its attempt to create an illusionary spatial image, an immersive sphere, or in the secular provenance of its themes. In the sense of an optical illusion, or trompe l'oeil, the panorama is, instead, the most sophisticated form of a 360° illusion space created with the means of traditional painting". [Grau 2003, p.62]

Of historical importance to the image evolution is the fact that at that time, the panorama was the best. It was a communication medium which installed the viewer in the center of the image, surrounding him or her, making use of the peripheral human vision, which widescreen cinema later exploited. In addition, the viewer could not see the whole picture at a glance, but had to choose what to see, and could move his or her gaze forward and backward. During its evolution, including wind, smoke, odors, movements, some other senses were addressed too. Thus, the panorama offered the simultaneous possibility of immersion, interactivity and multisensory perception, and became the first communication medium endowed with these characteristics. From a passive spectator, the viewer became an active participant in the picture. "The essence of the panorama was the assumption of being entrapped by the real". [Grau 2003, p.70]

The popularity of panorama is illustrated by the large number of its derivatives. Without being exhaustive, the list includes: "*Diorama, Georama, Giorama, Cyclorama, Betaniorama, Cosmorama, Kalorama, Kineorama, Europerama, Typorama, Neorama, Uranorama, Octorama, Poecilorama, Physiorama, Nausorama, Udorama*". [Cameron 2007, p.305]

Of particular importance is a set of panoramas that are in a closer relationship with cinema. The moving image panorama was invented in 1897, when Raoul Grimoin-Sanson patented *Cinéorama*, a system based on aerial filming at 360°, using 10 cameras. "*Cinéorama put passangers in a hot-air balloon and attempted to show them a panoramic view photographed by movie cameras*" [Schwartz 1999, p.170]. History records it as a failure, not of the concept, but of the presentation, which ended after only three hot days, due to the heat released by 10 projectors and the danger of fire.

Maréorama, the living panorama [Schwartz 1999, p.171], was the first type of dynamic panorama. This facility was designed to simulate a voyage at sea, and consists of a mobile platform for spectators, simulating a ship in motion. Compressed air was added to simulate wind. A large canvas consisting of painted images presented landscapes of the sea and of the visited harbors. (Today's equivalent of the *Maréorama* is the dynamic IMAX).

Another visionary project, unfortunately also unfinished, was that of Baron Auguste. "*Remarkable, but unlucky inventor both of the sound cinema (1896-1899) and of multiscreen: Cinématorama (1896), Multirama (1912)*" [Sadoul 1972, p.16].

The first invention was presented as[1]:

> "a device for circular, panoramic, animated projections in colour and with sound, known as the talking Cinématorama. [...] The aim of this invention is to have spectators travel all over the world without tiring [...]. In the operation of the device, the spectators will occupy the central part of the circumference described by the screen; they will be able to sit down or walk around and, as a result, be able to imagine themselves right inside the projected city."

Since the advent of photography, many artists have approached panoramic photography, both as an extension and enrichment of landscape photography, as well as added support for panoramic painters. Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre expanded his interests and almost simultaneously with his photographic experiments, in 1821 invented, in collaboration with Charles Bouton, the *Diorama*, a type of panorama with "special effects".

> "Daguerre's aim was to produce naturalistic illusion for the public. Huge pictures, 70 x 45 feet in size, were painted on translucent material with a painting on each side. By elaborate lighting - the front picture could be seen by direct reflected light, while varied amounts and colours of light transmitted from the back revealed parts of the rear painting - the picture could 'imitate aspects of nature as presented to our sight with all the changes brought by time, wind, light, atmosphere". [2]

For these effects to be played out, the diorama used a complex control of light direction and color varying over time. The spectators were seated on a rotating platform that brought pictures in front of them in three phases. By controlling the light, it was possible to achieve an enchaîné effect from one image to another. The construction of this system was of considerable size, and the number of viewers could reach 360. Relating it to the present, we can say that the experience of the diorama show is that of 3D cinema.

Eadweard Muybridge was also a creator of panoramic photographic images. In 1878 he made a thirteen images panorama of San Francisco.[3]

In 1900 Louis Lumière patented *Photorama*, a method for recording the entire skyline panorama on a single frame, and also a projection system for this image onto a cylindrical screen.

Invented and developed in Europe, the panorama reached a much more advanced level of popularity in the late 19th-century in the United States, where it was better known as the *Cyclorama*. In response to the growing interest of the public in cinema, panorama makers added sound and special effects to the performance, and adapted fiction and horror. With all the innovations made at the end of the XIX-th century, panorama fade from public attention.

In order to facilitate dissemination, emulating large moving panoramas like mareorama, the scrolling miniature panorama was invented. The specifics of the new medium, in addition to the valences of the classic panorama, enriched the possibilities of expression of the latter. The abandonment of hyper-realistic representation of the panorama through miniaturization had the side effect of shifting the attention from hyperrealistic images to narrative subjects.

The scrolling miniature panorama was based on a reel of painted tape, wrapped around on a small cylinder[4], and was therefore easy to handle and carry, but more importantly to multiply and distribute. The represented subjects were largely chosen in order to allow the introduction of time, achieving the illusion of movement, as well as a narrative presentation.

Meanwhile, another type of miniature panorama used a painted strip running between two rollers. This type supported narrative topics such as a trip around the world, with images representing points on the route, a succession of images juxtaposed physically on the strip, thus creating a closer presentation to what is obtained by editing film. A more complex model integrated a theatrical performance space with an optical device such as narrative panorama, made possible a special type of show. The representation space was a small stage model. Written notes found on the back side of the scrolling strip suggests that during the show, the operator was also a narrator and synchronized the presented images with a narrated story.

Reducing the size of the panorama, from that of a dedicated building to a smaller size that allowed it to be dismantled, moved and presented elsewhere, and later its miniaturization, thereby allowing portability, gave panorama, in addition to its original use, the more important function of the dissemination of recent events. As a visual spectacle this path is comparable to the current "democratization" of cinema from IMAX to portable devices.

The number of viewers increases from that of a cinema hall to mass media size, but in terms of visual quality, this is a process of reducing the image from tens of meters, to one of tens of centimeters, thus losing quality. In terms of synchronicity, the situation was similar to the introduction of "newsreels" in cinema.

Panorama was designed to allow the viewer a contemplative viewing experience in space similar to a real presence in the places represented (static), and in time a participatory one to the events depicted (dynamic). The cumulative effect was to evoke a sense of participation in real life, enhancing the feeling of inclusion in reality, of "being there".

EXPANDED CINEMA, SPLIT-SCREEN CINEMA, MULTI-SCREEN CINEMA, SPATIALIZED IMAGE

The idea of screen spatialization by division and/or multiplication was brought again to attention in two ways. *Expanded Cinema* in the late 1960s was one of them; the second comes from the field of information technology, for which the same decade was also a conceptually widening decade. It was the time when Douglas Engelbart, Alan Kay, and J.C.R.Licklider, among others, developped key concepts of the domain's future. It was the time when, among other things, the principles of future generations of computer interfaces based on multiple windows emerged. Using terms from information technology, we speak about *windows*, using cinematic vocabulary we speak about *split-screen, multi-screen*.

It would be difficult to trace exactly which way the influence went, from cinema to computers, or viceversa; at that time however computers were accessible only to a relatively small group, a specialized public, but cinema was opened to a wide audience. It is likely that the latter was the source of influence. Certainly, later, when the computer became personal and ubiquitous, the concepts and principles of this field migrated to film, influencing its language and aesthetics.

At a larger scale, screen globalization, the digital revolution and media convergence that computers made possible led to global cultural transformations; thus, referring today to opera, for example, we can speak about *Wagner in the age of windows*.

One of the promoters of split-screen aesthetic was Andy Warhol. He used this technique in the films *The Chelsea Girls* and *Outer and Inner Space*[5].

The split-screen technique was not exactly new, but was already being used commercially. In fact, it had a respectable age. Referring to the second half of the last century, Gottfried Schlemmer [Schlemmer 1973, p.113] remembers Charles and Ray Eames who used multi-screen (Fig.9) in the U.S. since 1951. In the first half of the century, an example of special importance is *Napoléon* (Abel Gance, 1927). The *Polyvision* system used marked the start of an extensive series of explorations for widescreen, multi-screen and split-screen projection systems, of which one is *Napoléon*, perhaps the most notable of early film using split-screen technique[6]. The list continues through to recent times[7].

The organization of Universal Exhibitions was probably an important catalyst for the creative energies of cinema research and experiments. Of these exhibitions, those organized between 1958 and 1970 had a significant impact on cinema. It was the time of *Expanded Cinema*, in the broader context of the *Expanded Arts.*

At the 1964 exhibition in New York, Ray and Charles Eames, already mentioned as forerunners, presented a film split on 17 screens developed for the IBM pavilion. At the same exhibition, the short film *To Be Alive*, shown on six screens (Alexander Hammid, Francis Thompson, 1964) won the Academy Award and New York Film Critics Circle Award. The most important important universal exhibition in this respect was held in Montreal, Expo 67. The exhibition brought together a large number of multi-screen innovative systems [Marchessault 2008, p.29-51]. The most interesting films and systems presented at this exhibition were the documentary *Canada 67* made in the *Circle-Vision 360°* system for nine screens arranged circular (Fig.2), *We Are Young* (Francis Thomson and Alexander Hammid) held on six screens and *The Earth is Man's Home* (for three vertical screens).

The documentary *A Place to Stand* by Christopher Chapman for the Ontario Pavilion was one of the few experiments that did not require special equipment. Projected onto a large screen, with surround sound, the film was made using the split-screen technique, a variable number of images up to a maximum of 15 being presented in dynamic windows.

The film with the greatest impact presented at Expo'67 was *Labyrinth* (Fig.8), directed by Roman Kroitor [Youngblood 1970, p.354]. Commissioned for the event and designed to produce a special cinematic experience, illustrating the theme of the exhibition, *Man the Hero*, Kroitor chose the labyrinth theme which was transposed in architecture (a maze being built), and film in a multiple multi-screen system. The main viewing area was designed as an elliptical room with several levels, each one consisting of a number of viewing balconies. The main projection screen was installed vertically across the top of the room. A second screen of the same size was sitting in front of the first, on the floor. Labyrinth continued in another room with projection screens arranged in a cruciform arrangement of five elements.

The spatial distribution of mirrored screens later inspired a type of IMAX projection system, *The Magic Carpet*, to achieve a high degree of immersion. The second screen is placed in front of the first screen, under a transparent glass floor, below the feet of the audience. The resulting image on these screens therefore has a vertical opening of 135 degrees.

Special experiments were presented at the Czechoslovakia pavillion, two of which were notable: the *Diapolyekran* system, a multiple system consisting of 112 mobile surfaces for slide projection, and in particular *Kinoautomat,* directed by Radúz Činčera, which was the first interactive film, whose progress involves the viewers.

The public assisted to a part of the film, after which the show was stopped, a character (sometimes one of the film actors) made an appearance on stage asking the public to vote for further action in the film. The choice was binary and offered many times during the film. In this form, with projection on screen in a cinema hall and the choice expressed through voting, the interactive movie had no significant spread and there was no renewal of interest for almost five decades. *Kinoautomat* uses now a remote controlled computerized system for voting, and *Kiddo* (Milo Simulov, 2012) red and blue lighting sticks, preserving the essence of Činčera's idea.

THE NEW DIMENSIONS OF FILM

This desire to represent as close as posible the reality by the means available at that time was a trend in image evolution, but a high level of realism that would not allow differentiations could be (partially) realized only with the recent achievement of a certain level of technology. Such achievements have made possible the reproduction, creation and simulation of reality at a level sufficient to create the illusion of presence and participation in reality as "*being there*".

Film, television and virtual environments are the first beneficiaries of these technologies. A high fidelity and spatial sound, widescreen, multiple-screen, stereo image, high-definition display systems and the enrichment of perception by extending the range of senses involved in perception, have facilitated high-quality multisensory experiences, from passive viewing to active participation in virtual worlds.

The technical achievements of the early 20th century cinema made possible a faithful transposition of reality. André Bazin wrote about joint efforts on the realism axes: sound, color, relief [Bazin 1958, p.24]. In 1947, Sergei Eisenstein could not conceive the future cinema without stereoscopic image [Eisenstein, 1949].

The main initial efforts went into the image, enlarging the visual field. They were started before the Second World War with the *Magnascope* and *Polyvision* systems (1927) and continued in the early 1950s. The *Magnascope* system introduced in 1924 used a projector screen four times wider than normal. The *Polyvision* system was specially designed for Abel Gance's *Napoléon* (the first widescreen and split-screen movie, Fig.3). Introduced in 1927 it used three cameras, three projectors and three screens. The solution was later partially continued by *Cinerama* systems.

Inherent difficulties in the adoption of *Polyvison* and *Magnascope* systems and the need to adapt existing projection rooms halted these projects shortly after their lunch. In 1956, Abel Gance tried to continue the development of *Polyvision*, introducing the *Magirama* system, also based on three projectors. The project was continued by *Cinemiracle*, a system using additional mirrors, that made the junction of adjacent images less visible on the screen. However, the system was not a successful competitor of *Cinerama* (Fig.4).

The 1950s coined with the great success of television, to an extent that shook the Hollywood studios. Facing the threat of audience loss, cinema adopted the strategy of introducing technologies that could be enjoyed only in the projection room: widescreen, stereoscopic images, surround sound, smell, etc., technologies designed not only to delight the senses, but to use them to engage the viewer, to create a sense of participation. Cinema and film became spectacle.

Between 1952 and 1954 stereo movies reached their peak of popularity. The first 3D movie, *Bwana Devil* was a box office success. Ads insisted on engaging the viewer: „*The flat screen is gone! You - not the room - but you are there*"[8].

The impact of the stereo image was great, and in advertising campaigns producers insisted on *engaging the viewer*, on emphasizing the feeling that he or she was part of the environment and of the action presented. They even insisted on some bewildering effects that in a 2D go unnoticed, but are shocking in 3D (such as throwing objects towards the spectator, effects found today too in stereo movies like James Cameron's *Ghosts of the Abyss*).

After two very successful years, interest in this novelty decreased, in parallel with, or even influenced by another contribution to enriching the participatory experience of the cinema spectator: the introduction of widescreen formats, *Cinerama* and *CinemaScope*.

Human's visual field has an opening of about 45°. In a small cinema room, equipped with normal screen, seen from an average distance, the field of view covers the screen entirely. Through peripharal view, human vision has the ability to perceive what is happening outside this field, up to 146°. Widescreen was invented to exploit the 100° difference, *Polyvision* being a forerunner.

Cinerama was introduced in 1952 by Fred Waller and used three 35mm films, three projectors, a curved screen, and his success was based on the impact of the large image projected. The feeling of immersion was due to the large size of the image, but also to the seven-channel directional sound (up form six previously), creating an audio-visual spatialization with a remarkable psychological impact. Commercials that accompanied these films highlited participation and involvement in the show: "You won't be gazing at a movie screen – you'll find yourself swept right into the picture, surrounded by sight and sound"[9].

Viewer participation was the idea associated with this new type of cinema, widescreen, leaving previous film format screens and television associated with the idea of *passive viewing*. It is to be noted that Fred Waller previously designed another system, *Vitarama*, which used eleven synchronized cameras and a dome projection screen.

Designed for the universal exhibition in New York in 1939, the system did not receive the necessary support, and was dropped. However, during the war the project came to the attention of military forces, being transformed into an anti-aircraft artillery simulator. It was simplified, using only five cameras and a hemisperical screen. Together with Morton Heilig's *Sensorama* Simulator, they were pre-cursors of virtual reality systems[10]. *Cinerama* had several disadvantages, the most important being its complexity, which favored the emergence of the *CinemaScope* system based on anamorphic lenses, a system much more simpler.

The *de facto* standard for wide screen cinema is no longer any of these systems, but systems with very large screen sizes, IMAX (Fig.5) and its derivatives. Presented for the first time at Expo'67 in Montreal, it was released at Expo'70 in Osaka. The system was extended to 3D version, dome-screen version, OMNIMAX (Fig.7), versions with two screens, *Magic Carpet* (Fig.6), and 4D versions (dynamic cinema). This system's image can only be described using superlatives, in terms of clarity, brightness and size. Along with spatial sound it ensures maximum immersion obtained in cinema. It is noteworthy that studies have shown that the image size matters: an image projected on large screens (IMAX) is in itself impressive, while with a 3D image, the screen size is less important than the effect of stereoscopic perception.

Before this system, the high degree of presence was achieved only through image and sound, by sight and hearing. An even deeper participation can be achieved in 4D cinema by activating some of the other senses: sense of equilibrium, smell, touch. This has made perception of the spectacle to be a multi-sensory experience. The experience of dynamic cinema is no more a viewing experience, it became a moving experience. Seats are controlled by hydraulic systems and have a movement synchronized with action on the screen. The concept comes from Douglas Trumbull who stimulates the spectator to feel inside the film.

Various technologies, sometimes curiosities, were introduced into cinema in the 1950s to add smell to the perception process. Two systems became known: *Smell-O-Vision* and *Aromarama* [Kirsner 2008, p.45]. Both used an additional track to direct the generation of flavors in synchrony with the action on the screen. Cinema halls that adopted the Smell-O-Vision system used flavor generators placed under the spectators seats and the Aromarama system used the air ventilation system of the room. The disadvantages were that only a limited number of predefined flavors could be used (one cannot generate flavors based on primary elements, as in the case of color generation) and that their removal was difficult.

The tradition of odors in theater dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. In 1906, the Family Theater in Forest City in the United States used essence of roses placed in front of an electric fan to be spread into the room. In 1929, a Boston cinema hall screening *Lilac Time* spread lilac scent through the ventilation system at the beginning of the movie.

The Smell-O-Vision system was introduced in the U.S. by Mike Todd, whose film *Scent of Mystery* premiered in 1960. Thirty flavors were used, including garlic, bread, coffee and perfume. The system was surpassed by *Aromarama*, with the movie *Behind the Great Wall* (which premiered in late 1959) offering 52 scents. Another system for smell, *Odorama*, was adopted for *Polyester,* in 1982. The audience received a package of blades coated with fragrant substances, which had to be scraped and smelled during the course of the film, on a given signal.

A tactile stimulation system, *Percepto*, was introduced in 1959 for the film *The Tingler*. The system involved the vibration of seats during the film. Percepto was part of a category of effects that the director imagined and used in his films. To the same category belonged the *Emergo* system, which used moveable skeletons suspended above the audience during the film.

In the '70s the *Sensurround* vibrator system was introduced, based on low frequency sounds that triggered vibrations. The system was successfully used in the film *Earthquake* to induce fear.

A remarkable achievement was the *Sensorama* Simulator system, designed by Morton Heilig in the 1950s [Craig 2009, p.4]. The simulator is one of the earliest examples of multimodal immersive technology. Sensorama was a bicycle simulator equipped with a monitor that conveyed riding on the streets of Brooklyn. The simulator used stereoscopic and panoramic image and spatial sound; vibrations were applied to the rider simulating the ground, and a kind of track directed "wind" air jets and emitted odors in sync with locations on the streets. The system is considered one of the first virtual reality systems, and was born long before the computers were widely used.

CONCLUSION

Current technology produces a new kind of cinema that changes the spectator's relationship with the show. The principle is that of a new connection with the moving image through multi-sensory perception. It is a new meaning of the spectator participation, rather than simply watching the screen as a passive observer, creating the feeling of immersion in the world seen on screen, an "inside" viewing of the "film". Today, the significance of watching a film may become the closest thing to virtual reality.

NOTES

1. Baron Auguste, quoted in [Mercier, 1998]
2. see [Wood, 1993]
3. the panoramic image is available online at http://cprr.org/Museum/Archive/san_francisco_1of5.html#Panorama, and the individual images at http://www.americahurrah.com/SanFrancisco/Muybridge/Panorama.htm, retrieved Dec.2012
4. An example of such a miniature panorama measures 8,3 x 554 cm. See [Comment, 1999:65]
5. Made of two black and white segments, *Outer and Inner Space* is a multiple portrait of the actress Edie Sedgwick, a member of his studio, *The Factory*. Four close-ups show the actress talking to the camera, or in a dialogue with someone outside the frame, or commenting on her own images shown on a monitor. The portraits are grouped by two, then multiplied by mirroring the structure.
6. Abel Gance's initial intention for *Napoléon* was to be a showcase of all available film technologies and to use stereo image too. See [Hayes, 1998, p9]

7. The list includes movies like *The Thomas Crown Affair* (Norman Jewison, 1968), *Woodstock* (1970), *The New Book* (Zbigniew Rybczinsky, 1976), *Wall Street* (Oliver Stone, 1987), *The Pillow Book* (Peter Greenaway, 1996), *Jackie Brown* (Quentin Tarantino, 1997), *Requiem for a Dream* (Darren Aronofsky, 2000) and *The Rules of Attraction* (Roger Avary, 2002), with the best known example so far probably being *Timecode* (Mike Figgis, 2000)
8. Ads for *Bwana Devil*, quoted by Ijsselsteijn in [Riva, Ijsselsteijn, 2003, p25]
9. Ads for *This is Cinerama,* quoted by Ijsselsteijn in [Riva, Ijsselsteijn, 2003, p26]
10. For *Sensorama Simulator* see B. Salem, M. Rauterberg, and R. Nakatsu in [Harper, 2006, p106], [Burdea, 2003, p3]

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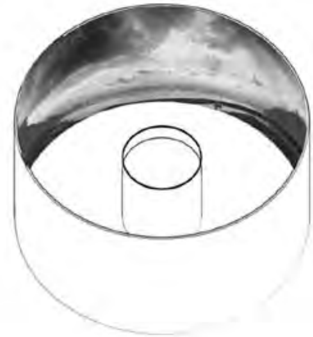

Fig.1 Panorama

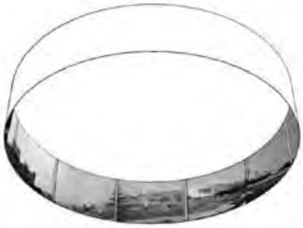

Fig.2 Circle-Vision 360°

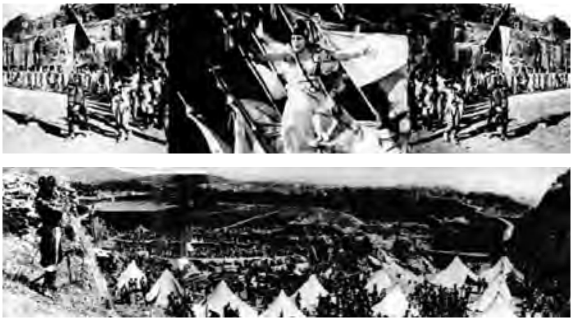

Fig.3 Polyvision

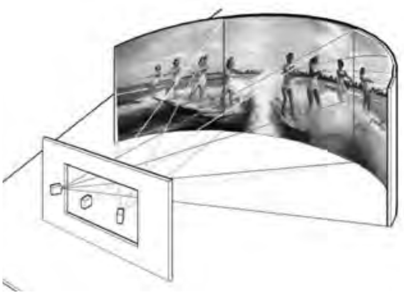

Fig.4 Cinerama

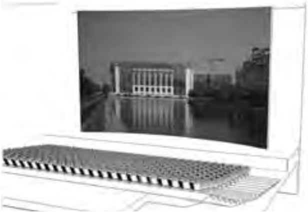

Fig.5 IMAX

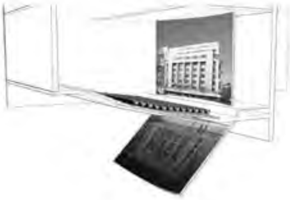

Fig.6 Dual screen IMAX(Magic Carpet)

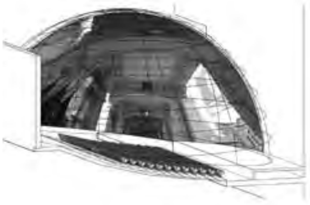

Fig.7 Dome IMAX (OMNIMAX)

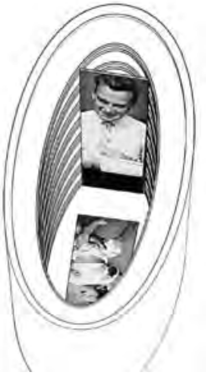

Fig.8 Dual screen - Labyrinth

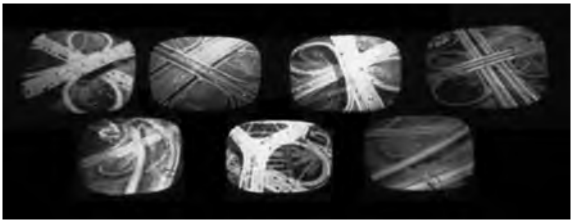

Fig.9 Multi-screen show (Glimpses of the USA)

Alexandru Tatos, Wondering Through *Sequences*

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Abstract

Alexandru Tatos is a central figure in favor of specific narrative structures in Romanian cinema. The author strives to identify a mythology unique to his narratives, an unusual way of cinematic transfiguration, a unique process of creating a world through the power of detail, a special kind of insertion in the aesthetic realm of realism. But it is beyond the aesthetic that the author identifies the drama of Tatos, the creator, who, from the idealism of his first works, reaches the skepticism that can only be attained through the titular question *Who's Right?*

Keywords
Alexandru Tatos, cinematic space, threshold, cinema-reality relationship, sequences, characters, narrative structures, urban vs. rural, realism

> *"And this is how I sometimes think of myself, as a great explorer who has discovered some extraordinary land (...): but the name of this land is hell."*
>
> Malcolm Lowry – *Under the Volcano*

One must enter Tatos's world through a moment of passage: the railway from *Forest Fruit (Fructe de pădure*, 1983), the urologist's room in *Red Apples* (*Mere roşii*, 1976), the courtyard where the wedding is set in *The Wondering (Rătăcire,* 1984), the projection room from *Sequences* (*Secvenţe,* 1982), Voica and Ilarie's arrival in *The House in the Fields* (*Casa dintre câmpuri,* 1979), the road to the factory in *Who's Right?* (*Cine are dreptate*? 1990). These antechambers, as coined by Roland Barthes in *On Racine*[1], have not only the role of introducing the cinematic space, but also of imposing the primary model of a layered structure, whose basis is the symbolic detail, the rhetoric of alternating the hidden and the revealed; the extracting, at a sequential level, of a facet of reality, poignant through the richness of the visual and the acoustic. These primordial spaces are the characters' only protective areas: the rented room in *Red Apples* is the space of the lads' training, frugal meals, illegal medical experiments and attack preparation. During the wedding in *The Wondering*, Doina is protected by the limits of

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her parents' courtyard. The railway and the mountain house from *Forest Fruit* are dependent on the vigilance of paternity, but occasionally allow candid erotic initiations (such as Amalia and Simion's journeys). Tatos the director can maneuver the documentary fragments from *Sequences*; the inspector from *Who's Right?*, initially encased in his Dacia 1300, is detached from the local goings-on.

From these spaces, the passing of every character to the state of conflict begins (or at least is justified): Mitica takes on the entire health system, but also death; Doina's affair is the flight from boring, daily stability (both as daughter and as lover); the director from *Sequences* begins the reconstruction of a world based on truth (his goal is made clear by using the Eminescu quote as motto); Amalia's maturing is limited by the working time of the caboose (covering a year in *Forest Fruit*); the inspector launches himself into a search for an uncertain sense of guilt, doubled by his quest for love (*Who's Right?*).

Establishing these spaces as references, Tatos instills in his opening sequences an unusual character, with each enclosed space being constantly bombarded by details of the exterior world. The town's sounds permeate the walls in Mitica's room, the courtyard of the wedding is situated amid the chaos of an urban area, the railway connects two worlds (the versatility of the city with the patriarchal security of nature), the projection room is the place where the lie begins (the editing of the filmed material), the Ministry inspector's car passes through the Danube-adjacent city.

In *The House in the Fields*, the space of personal stability solidifies only towards the end, and the Voica-Radu's manage to give their marriage a community dimension (the cooperative meeting, purged through the elimination of the parasites in the local hierarchy, manages to contain the marriage bubble). The protective space of the home village is shown as a too-late conclusion for Radu Cosma (*The Darkening,* 1985), who is temporarily blinded in battle, illuminated by the Vardaru clan and then released, through death, into a kind of primordial pool. In this way, Cosma is punished for leaving the area of maternal protection (a sort of vast maternity, covering both the biological aspects, but also the home and the native village).

THE MERCHANT OF WORLDS

Red Apples gives a breath of new realism to the landscape of the 1980s: the camera approaches the characters; it sometimes has the mobility of sight, sometimes the passivity of an idle optical device; it registers the presence of the characters as the focal point of a composition with objects that gravitate in the force field of a sparse symbolism. Mitica Irod evolves in spaces that open horizontally towards annexes, adjacent rooms and an exterior that provides him with information from the outside. Objects have the property of spatiality (their presence is perfectly justified in every scene), connected with each other not just by function but by a deeper, symbolic meaning that exceeds the narrative. Signals enter the inside from the outside, but the reverse is also possible. Mitica's hospital becomes the center of the correction of moral deviation (in the case of Gheghe), the space for balancing excessive bureaucracy (the conflict with Mitroi), the setting for the fundamental battle of doctor versus death. *Red Apples* is based on a cumulative realism at a technical level and an associative realism at a symbolic level.

Symbolic level: the apples

The subsequent Tatos films follow the same patterns as *Red Apples*: Voica's world widens by the passing from individual rebellion to collective attitude (doubled, at a spatial level, by the relationship house/glasshouse); Doina's experience (*The Wondering*), although strictly personal, becomes exemplary through the accumulation of experiences connected to the road she travels; Anastasia breaks out of domestic love and, accompanied by the child-witness (on stilts), into the world of ancestral practices. In *Sequences*, the director-character glides between reality and fiction, taking the experience of annex space to the extreme: Tatos moves to these adjacent pods (adjacent to the filming studios in Buftea), establishing each of these new spaces with a narrative (that of the public phone, that of the director, that of the bar manager).

The world in *Sequences* is the most complex cinematic construction that Tatos made, built on the integrity of truth and the sheer presence of the film set as central element (the only space that can support both fiction and reality).

Cinematic space: layering, graphics, limits

For Tatos, *Sequences* is an *ars cinematica*, a discourse on the filmmaking method; the director, isolated in the concrete tower of the socialist block, gauges his creation according to the measure of truth, though accepting day-to-day lives.

"What is most admired is, firstly, its reflexive quality, reminiscent of Truffaut's *La nuit américaine/ Day for Night* (1973), a device very few directors had used for dismantling contemporary society."[2]

Are real life stories, searching for an appropriate home, the director's indications of the more accurate telling of the truth, archival imagistic arguments for the truth of daily life translated into cinema? Or is the obsession of objectivity forcing the director away from the institution, leading him towards the truth of details, towards ambient realism?

While the skeptical director Alexandru Tatos distances himself from the truth of life, the optimistic director Alexandru Tatos replies that what is important is the truth of a new world, the world of cinema.

Forest Fruit builds the most coherent world in all of Tatos's films, organized on two spatial levels and functioning on the principle of communicating beakers - any action from the mountain settlement triggers a reaction in the city.

Tatos places his heroine mostly in exterior shots during her summer fling. Simion, dressed in military clothing, merges into the forested landscape, becoming the ideal figure to father a flower child. In the limited spaces of the interior shots, the characters engage in close physical contract: the seduction happens in the parental home, and, months later, the father-daughter discussions also take place there; the tent houses the two arranged marriages, detached from each other by the defeated existence.

A duo of events: wedding I, wedding II

The majority of shots from *Forest Fruit* have symmetrical equivalents (except the birth and the hospital scenes), with which they have corresponding significance: the weddings, Amalia's city excursions in search of Simion and Mr. Fluviu, Amalia's meetings with Grigore, Pablo's and the director's appearances.

These symmetries do not order Tatos's world into categories, but mark a trail through time for the characters, a dynamic of their travels and transformations, an opening and a closing in a complex group scene (Amalia's wedding) of all the destinies involved in the story of the seduced and ultimately abandoned girl.

The Darkening captures the moment of illumination (after a temporary physical blinding) of Julian Sorel, who is overwhelmed by doubt, guilt and uncertainty. The theme of water imbues the very structure of the movie with a flow that includes love lives, political involvement and the hero's moral qualms.

The water

Who's Right? uses an intruder (the inspector) to break through the web of interests, fakes and gossip that extends from the provincial factory. If Irod chooses to swap the world for his gentle rebellion against immorality and death, the investigator is the victim caught in the web of deception, paralyzed by the toxicity of the system and mummified by the details of the official report.

THE SECRETS OF STRATIFIED SPACE

Tatos builds his cinematic space with the care of a craftsman: objects with a marked quotidian function get a revealing quality; the depth of the cinematic field reveals plans with intertwining symbolism, and interiors open onto a precisely constructed exterior. While prior to *Sequences*, Tatos exaggerates by building a cinematographic space specific to each sequence, the 1982 film approaches the issue of trans-sequential space, relying on an extensive, stratified construction, registered by the character by traversing its thresholds in the rhythm of the cinematic narrative (much like one would travel and take in a building).

In *Red Apple***s**, Tatos shows two neighboring areas, the individual (the rented room) and the professional-social (the hospital). Mitica Irod, like an apostle, leaves the home and fixes himself in the public realm.

The Wondering, in sequence after sequence, unfolds the pathway of an escape, but also of finding the way back home. *The House in the Fields* overlaps the space of public exercise with that of emotional experiences.

In *Sequences*, Tatos creates a space with a special status that catches the eye of the spectator from the very first scenes: archive imagery and the projection room lead to the idea of an imaginative construction (the first scene). The following prospective sequences place the story in a heavy, overwhelming, constricting and uncertain materiality: the cinematic space of *Happiness* searches for its place in the frigid reality.

All is simply in preparation for the third part of the film. the episode *Four Hands*, which takes place in a layered space consisting of a mixture of points of view, both from in front of and behind the camera. While in front of the camera we see the looped action of the daughter of the deceased entering the restaurant, behind it, in a fractured space, the filmmaking team plays out its own identities and rules which the extras, engaged in a storyline of their own, avoid. "The crew is extra- and intra-diegetical."[3] The experience of hiding what is behind the visible is an obsession with Tatos: in *Red Apples*, the mirror reflects the sixth plane of the cube room, and *The House in the Fields* imposes, by the end, the transparent, open space of the greenhouse.

In *Red Apples,* the differentiated treatment of space mirrors the theme of the film (the truth), but also the obsession with the relationship of revealing/hiding.

Details: the mirror

The *Four Hands* episode structures, somewhat mechanically, this issue, placing a counterfeit truth in the future film *Happiness/ Fericirea* (which we know of because of the title on the roll).

Truth remains hidden amongst the pieces of decor of the movie set, but lies had already seeped into the folds of reality (the episode of the payphone, the congratulatory phone call received by the director on New Year's Eve, the episode of the Novaci house, the prosecutor's lie and that of the local heads, the director's lie regarding Emilia's directions and the reinterpretation of truth in the relationship of the two extras).

The dynamic of truth and lies is always presented as intensely cinematic, following the gradual path from hiding to revealing: in the foreground we see a quotidian action unravel, unlabeled as true or false (e.g. the payphone conversation). Space is abundant in signs, placed in the background in order to link the human world with the world of objects, but also in order to connect the world of the film with the world in front of the screen.

Gradually, the shot widens and the event becomes a detail of the new narrative configuration. What appears to be the riveting truth in a zoomed-in scene becomes a flat lie in the Grand Scheme.

IMAGE FRUIT: *SEQUENCES*

Raised to the level of the title, the sequences in Tatos's films abide by the general rules of the cinematic link, but also have a level of biological growth: on the initial visual framework (Mitica's room, the hospital, Amalia's home, Radu's home, Atanasia's home – this mode of working is much more obvious in inside shots), Tatos projects new information by the opening of doors or windows, through out-of-shot discussions about menus, recipes, pets, bits of music etc.

These visual and auditory insertions link each sequence to the dynamic mundane life, setting the shots in a symmetrical world, constructed to the pattern of a romantic model (the reunion of contraries) and abundant in echoes of a light, natural symbolism. With Tatos, one gets the feeling that a symbolic impulse has generated an entire cinematic universe, announcing or summarizing revolts, fights, interrogations, hopes, failures and the heroes.

Mitica Irod's home (*Red Apples*) is set within solar nature (contrastingly, *Sequences* is set during a dry winter and in *Forest Fruit* the abundance of snow counterbalances the opulence of the summer sequences, filled with wild berries).

Solar space

Winter space

Preparation for the altercation between Mitroi and Mitica is somewhat eclipsed by the bombardment from the exterior of micro-information, profiling a particular means of insertion of the individual into the world – totally absorbed, assimilated by his environment.

Forest Fruit respects the same pattern: Amalia's first appearance places her in the midst of a wild nature that is at the peak of its biological process – the ripening of the fruit. In the first sequences, Amalia is joined by her father, her brothers, the horse, Grigore, her studious friend, the enamored policeman, all of whom signal her condition: belonging to nature. What in *Red Apples* is hinted at, in *Forest Fruit* becomes a method of launching the narrative, with a hero put into a world constructed from his likeness.

At a sequential level, one can detect the primary mechanism of Tatos's realism: minute details from a certain frame (time 1), are incorporated in the narrative continuum through the way that the character relates to the time (time 2). The relationship between time 1 and time 2 catches the heroine in a compact web of motives and graphic signs, a functional structure enlivened by a continuous movement of significations. In a cinema marked by rhetorical obsessions and an architecture of cinematic timing, Tatos's films brought a functional symbolism to the linear, classic story.

Red Apples is built using an abundance of detail, which Tatos himself talks about in *Diary Pages*[4] as constituting the quality of his movies; Mitica Irod transmits to the space the impulse of his actions through the network of small things (the room and Gheghe scenes, the scene clarifying the relationship with Suzi and the one filled with summarizing or pre-figurative detail). The detail transcends the limits of a sequence, the meaning being reactivated in the event it appears at another point of the movie (e.g. the apples, the mirror, the sound of assisted breathing).

Some signs surpass the limits of a film, becoming elements in Tatos's general symbolism: in several scenes from *The House in the Fields*, Tatos develops the domestic relationship between Voica and Radu, bringing them face to face on either side of the table on which the plastic roses, a symbol of artificial love, have place of honor. The local manager's living room in *Sequences* is a still life with artificial flowers, stuffed animals and shiny furniture covered in doilies. The same stiff flowers occupy the foreground in Amalia's room at the moment of her attempt to hide the pregnancy (the other elements of the composition are: four red apples and a doll in the background). The visual accent falls upon an artificial bouquet while, in the background, the first story starts unraveling (Amalia sucks in her pregnant belly).

Three films, three meals, three fake flower bouquets

The mirror and every other object with the property of reflection have the same permanence, registering significant mutations depending on the year of production: while in *Red Apples* the mirror has a way of revealing the unseen (relying on a technical ability), in *Anastasia Passing (Duios Anastasia trecea,* 1979) the reflections of the characters engage in an exercise of self admiration (the sequence in the beginning), while *The Darkening* connects the process of self discovery with the images reflected onto the water.

The photograph and the action of photographing anticipate several turns of events in Tatos's storylines (the photograph freezes a character's journey), but are also the graphic symbol of failure: before the break-up, Ilarie and Voica pose as lovers; Amalia meets Simion while taking a family photo; Luminita, the rented bride, is a photographer; Amalia refuses to photograph the baby on the maternity ward.

Fruit has a symbolism that goes beyond the edible: the apple is the communist Good Samaritan's weapon, a compendium of good manners for children (who will absorb the models of altruism) and a concise moral guide left behind by Irod in the suffocating house of Mr. Gheghe. Amalia's child (according to the hospital records) is a fruit/flower child, thus overlapping the fullness of nature with maternity.

WHO'S RIGHT?

Theme wise, Tatos's last film changes from the issue of truth, established as axiological rule in *Sequences*, to the issue of justice: what did the director-character, together with his other characters, find out during his journey through the fiction? Did Tatos get too close to the fiction's fiery nucleus that burns the guideline of reality? Elevating the narrative to character status, does he increase the creator's knowledge but diminish the ingenuity of the approach?

Forest Fruit, which premiered a year after *Sequences*, is the last film with a monolithic structure, fractured by fluid episodes that rupture the strict monotony of the narrative (the restaurant scene, the Pablo episode).

The story in *The Darkening* disintegrates into a chain of events that is subjected to the emotional oscillations of the hero; *The Secret of the... Secret Weapon (Secretul... armei secrete,* 1988) – Tatos appears to be searching for a pattern! – paraphrases the narrative prototype of the folktale.

Who's Right? dissolves the storyline almost entirely, breaking it into a collage of depositions, ground testing, fake leads and minor attempts at eroticism and sentiment. Justice, equality, morality (and truth!) are sought in the Danubian town, in the depths of the currents of lies, intrigues, gossip, set-ups and fake reports.

The story's dissolution reflects the change in Tatos's film topography: while in his first films the narrative concentrates on the perimeter of a settlement, after *Sequences*, the spatial extension widens into nature, counterbalancing the actions of the heroes. What in *The Wondering* and in *Anastasia's Passing* was only a temporary refuge or an extension of the workplace (*The House in the Fields*) becomes, in *Forest Fruit*, the main space of the story. Amalia, the virgin-mother (the mother's death obliges her to take on the maternal role) is seduced and abandoned on the fruit-laden hills. The city, in *Forest Fruit*, is not just the place where the heroine tries to solve her emotional and marital issues, but also the scale of her moral transgressions (from the negation of marriage to its consummation). For Amalia, the city, linked to the seducers Simion and Pablo, is a forbidden realm, the ending encasing her in the cage that is the wedding tent, located, symbolically, next to her childhood home in the mountain field.

The Darkening defines the moral degradation of a city as being in opposition to the space of childhood and Radu Cosma's childhood village: attending his mother's funeral reveals the hero's moral qualm that engulfs the idyllic rural area. The only release afforded the hero is deadly: birth from seawater (the same as the film's motive). *Who's Right?* links the two terms, nature and city, in an equation with two unknowns: justice and its owner.

The city is featured in its most aggressive state: industrial; it is covered in mud and engulfed in a chemical smog that releases a toxic stench. The edges of the Danube are a refuge for a stubborn Penelope, Lidia Dumitru, the engineer who releases her romantic impulses far from the industrial wasteland and the gossiping gaze of the factory. Nature, invaded by the large number of political instructors, is simply an extension of the urban industrial space. Justice, which has assimilated truth (the factory manager's false reports), is a string of explanations in an unsatisfactory report, signed by an engineer who was removed from the investigative committee.

The hero, Mitica Irod, reaches the end of his urban journey; after the victory over the corrupt bureaucrat and his unjust death, he is re-embodied as the shaky investigator.

The city of *Red Apples* is hidden behind the industrial depot, which is suffocated by moral exhalations; the surgeon's mask has been replaced with the gas mask.

The masks

The journey that Tatos's hero undertakes is the visible trace of a directing experience that starts from the land of great ideals and ends in the inferno. It is not the final discovery of the inferno that is the real drama, but the certainty that, by distancing himself in general, his camera detects the signs of evil even in the perfect geometry of the apple.

It is the drama of a great director, burdened by his own experiences, era, work; or maybe it is the destiny of his creation, balancing on the edge of enthusiasm and loss of hope, of beauty and horror, of insignificant drama and greater meanings.

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Story vs. Cinema in *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye*

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Abstract
The present text, a revised chapter on the *auteur* theory, is extracted from a more extensive and in-depth study centering on two neo-noirs from the 1970s, *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye*. Its thesis is that a film is more than its story: it aims to prove that the precise emotional effects of a film are determined by its formal aspects and that artistic merit should be determined only after taking them into account. *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye* are sufficiently similar in subject and dissimilar in their artistic enterprise to provide a clarifying comparative analysis, while the *auteur* theory – in its original, imprecise expression and its successive revisions – offers a good theoretical substantiation of the importance of form.

Keywords
Auteur theory, film style, mise en scène, film noir, film genre, screenwriting, Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris, André Bazin, *Cahiers du Cinéma*

Any good film is more than its story. When explaining how a movie functions, screenwriting manuals tend to simplify: they choose famous works of fiction as their case studies and reduce them to raw material for a few banal pedagogical observations. Formal singularities are ignored and what is usually retained is the "message", the "universal" meaning derived from the structure of the script. And yet the mechanisms through which a viewer processes a film are much more complex than the obedient following of plot twists and revelations. Aside from the deductions and affective response toward which one is guided by the dramatic structure of a script (and the way this structure uses genre conventions, a benchmark often overlooked in screenwriting manuals), there is also the effect of the spectator's ecological[1] knowledge (what one brings along to the cinema; in other words, the memories reactivated by the film, through complicated and somewhat arbitrary operations) and there is the unconscious effect of his or her prejudices. Also very important is the direction of the film, the mise-en-scène – the formal decisions that amplify or diminish the emotional impact of an on-screen event.

Of course, *Screenplay* by Syd Field and *Story* by Robert McKee are not volumes of film theory, but workbooks for novice screenwriters who have not yet managed to systematize their intuitions. The problem appears only when the structure of the "well-written script" becomes not only a possible

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route, but an obligatory one – the working guidelines become an evaluation chart. If it were true that the screenwriter had to know the ending before starting work for a film to make any sense or impact, it would be unexplainable that *Chinatown*, a nuanced and coherent film, had until the final stage of the creative process three plausible endings; therefore it must be assumed that it communicates the authorial point of view through other means. Similarly, a film like *The Long Goodbye* should not be disqualified because the ending is not "satisfying and fulfilling" – it has good reasons not to be.

THE CRITICAL UTILITY OF DIVERSIFIED APPROACHES

It is useful in clarifying the thesis of the present work to analyze side by side two films with similar stories – *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye*. They have a similar subject – an investigation carried out by an honest detective in a corrupt city – and the dates of their premiere are relatively close (*Chinatown* was first screened in 1974, and *The Long Goodbye* in 1973), and yet they are sufficiently dissimilar in their aesthetic enterprise to permit the style to be distinguished from the subject. It should be noted that this is a risky task, although one well worth accomplishing: analyzing the style of these films as closely as possible might lead to observations that are difficult to corroborate scientifically (since they enter the grey area of folk psychology that Bordwell refers to1). The prudent analyst can, at best, take a few precautions: to avoid defining the effect of an element of the film (whether it derives from the script, the actors' performance or the mise-en-scène) in any irrevocable terms unless it was also described as such in a review, or unless it constitutes a significant deviation from the style of the film (one example of sudden tone shift: the last sequence in *Chinatown* is filmed by the norms of direct cinema, even though almost all the other scenes are by contrast directed like in sophisticated studio film, with a steady camera and a painterly frame composition). It is also necessary for the in-depth study of the two films to reprise the most important critical concepts that are referred to in the analysis: the tradition of film noir (because *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye* have both been classified as neo-noirs); the *auteur* theory (the critical tradition that originated in Europe which placed the director above the screenwriter in the artistic development of a film, whether or not the screenplay was written by somebody else or it respected the conventions of a genre); the state of American cinema in the 1970s (when the commercial value of a film was hard to assess and thus the creative freedom was considerable).

Again, the theoretical grounding of the aforementioned aspects is limited: certainly, the author of the study can indicate the films which, according to the critics, have inaugurated the noir (*The Maltese Falcon* being the most referenced film, but not the sole example); on the other hand, it is more difficult to determine scientifically that *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye* were influenced by the Zeitgeist of the 1970s.

The work is entitled "Story vs. Cinema" because – among other approaches – it considers the influence of cinema in perceiving the narrative: cinema seen not only as a medium (an audiovisual language with modulations that can be controlled by an adept director), but as a consumer practice (creating in audiences a certain set of expectations).

Rather than summing up the present work one chapter at a time (a practice with tedious results, especially since many of the chapters are, themselves, syntheses), it is perhaps more valuable to present a fairly detailed history of the *auteur* theory, from its birth to its eventual triumph as a widespread critical framework, with all the attacks and misinterpretations it has endured in between. The *auteur* theory is relevant to this study because it has forever altered the methods of determining value in a work of art, enriching the previous set of standards that mainly awarded well-executed, respectable projects. The link between *auteurism* and film style works both ways – it is useful for the film form analyst in training to take the time to properly understand the *auteur* theory; and it is profitable to study closely two films separated by style, such as *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye*, to understand more clearly the principles set forth by the *auteur* theory.

THE OVERLAPPING HISTORY OF *AUTEURISM* AND NOIR

Film noir was not, in its origins, a respectable genre, nor was it a clearly defined, voluntarily created genre, like the musical. As far as the history of criticism goes, it was entirely the merit of *auteurist* critics to discover its first masterpieces and place their directors in the pantheon of cinema *auteurs*. Not coincidentally, many directors enshrined by the *auteurists* had at least one noir in their filmography.

These directors previously went unappreciated by the American critical establishment; their work was dismissed as mere craftsmanship. Discussing the noir from a historical perspective makes things seem more complicated than they were at the time. In 1930s and 1940s Hollywood, a film was an entertainment product and little more. If the appreciators of European cinema selected a film by the director – or at least by the title of the novel being adapted for the screen – American cinemagoers picked by the genre and star. Then came the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma*[2] and turned the hierarchies upside down: François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette and Claude Chabrol, among others – a generation of cinephiles formed in the Cinémathèque of Henri Langlois, with a rich diet of American films imported to France after the end of the Second World War. They watched films without preconceived aesthetic expectations (they were still young…) and watched them again obsessively. They paid attention to formal details – their critical knowledge encompassed not only their literary education, but also the aesthetic judgments of elder critic André Bazin, who cherished cinema as a medium with an essence of its own, where the mise-en-scène (the pragmatic options of the director) strongly influenced the emotional impact of a film. The filmmakers they admired – Fritz Lang, Howard Hawks, Nicholas Ray, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Otto Preminger, Samuel Fuller, Raoul Walsh – knew exactly how to use such options for the desired effect. Although *auteurist* critics did not wholly discredit French cinema (Jean Renoir was among their unanimous favorites), they defended "commercial" Hollywood films and disparaged what they called *la tradition de qualité*, the multitude of adaptations of literary masterpieces that had no intrinsic value as films. The *auteurists* were convinced it was more probable that good films be made out of questionable literary material (which brings us back to film noir and the prose of ill repute it adapted, hard-boiled fiction).

The *auteurists'* theories (and their corresponding hierarchies) later pervaded American film critique, chiefly thanks to one man, Andrew Sarris. In 1968 he published *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions*, 1929-1968, a collection of concise yet accurate analyses of the filmographies of American directors whose reputations had been established by the French critics (alongside other chapters of the book with titles such as *Fringe Benefits*, *Lightly Likeable* and *Less Than Meets the Eye*).

The *auteur* theory appeared at a time when all the technological revolutions in cinema had been accomplished: the birth of sound belonged to antiquity, and the arrival of color and the panoramic image had themselves paved the way for a great deal of spectacular outbursts. In other words, cinematic language seemed to have been completely refined. Film history, understood in its traditional mindset to chronicle only major stylistic directions, had almost come to a standstill. Andrew Sarris:

> "The critical problem in the late fifties was how to assimilate new stylistic initiatives in color and composition, and still retain the classical criteria of coherent narrative. The screen suddenly seemed bloated and unnatural [...]. We had no way of coping with apparent failures such as Hitchcock's Vertigo, Ford's The Searchers, Renoir's French Can Can, Ray's Bigger Than Life, Rossellini's Ingrid Bergman movies, Hawks's Rio Bravo, and many, many other latent masterpieces."[3]

According to Andrew Sarris' self-evaluation, critics did not yet know what they should be looking for in a film and were not aware of the transformations that were taking place before their eyes:

> "The dominant critical tone in America was one of sociological sermons in which Hollywood was urged repeatedly to repent. Our discovery of Bazin and the other critics of Cahiers du Cinéma was invigorating largely because it liberated us from this gloomy critical atmosphere in which Left was always right, and in which Man towered over mere men and women."

The *auteur* theory was another way of recording film history – it capitalized not only on the changes in official trends, but also on individual style; it measured film history in directors' careers, not the evolution of form from decade to decade – and it deserves only praise for saving from oblivion all the "inessential" innovations that were so greatly enriching contemporary film. It was the most receptive mode of classification and hierarchization and the least domineering critical method that had emerged until then.

On the other hand, it was nevertheless vulnerable, lacking an articulate set of criteria and keeping the unconditioned reflex of splitting directors into "good" and "bad"; when it was poorly assimilated, it called for irresponsible ranking based on no criteria other than personal taste, and it led to mystical fallacies to which any rational counterargument was derided as reactionary elitism.

AUTEURISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In the pages of the magazine that had espoused it, not long after Truffaut's manifesto[4], *la politique des auteurs* arrived at the point where it had legitimized enough barbarisms in order to stir André Bazin to temper his younger colleagues in a polemic article. Published in 1957 and fulfilling the need of a first scrupulous attack on *auteurism*, "On the *politique des auteurs*" ends with:

> "The *politique des auteurs* seems to me to hold and defend an essential critical truth that the cinema needs more than the other arts, precisely because an act of true artistic creation is more uncertain and vulnerable in the cinema than elsewhere. But the exclusive practice [of the *auteur* theory] leads to another danger: the negation of the film to the benefit of praise of its *auteur*. I have tried to show why mediocre *auteurs* can, by accident, make admirable films, and how, conversely, a genius can fall victim to an equally accidental sterility. I feel that this useful and fruitful approach, quite apart from its polemical value, should be complemented by other approaches to the cinematic phenomenon which will restore to a film its quality as a work of art. This does not mean one has to deny the role of the *auteur*, but simply give him back the preposition without which the noun *auteur* remains but a halting concept. *Auteur*, yes, but what of?"[5]

In the United States, *auteurism* encountered the same hardships as in France, and the American equivalent of Bazin's article appeared in 1963 in Film Quarterly. The title, as pungent as the tone of the column, was *Circles and Squares: Joys and Sarris*[6], and the author, the still relatively anonymous Pauline Kael.

The problem with the *auteur* theory was that the very traits that made it germane were difficult to put into journalistic terms. A film critic of the 1960s who used traditional criteria would try to assess their own spectator experience (and Pauline Kael excelled in this matter). Instead, an *auteurist* would try to evaluate the director's performance – namely the degree of precision involved in the coordination of a film crew and the complexity of the technical actions in which he guided them. This process could have been decomposed by a sharp-sighted spectator, who knew exactly what to look for when watching a film, but it was hard to synthetize in a review, where the formal filmic elements could be only roughly described. (In this day and age, David Bordwell can minutely analyze a film's mise-en-scène and clarify his article at any time by adding stills taken from a copy of the film especially put to his use for study. Critics of the 1950s and 1960s were bound to rely on their own memories from the theater projection; the best they could do was to go and watch it again.)

Sarris defended himself in 1974: "Truffaut reviewed English-language films for years without even a minimal comprehension of the language. I grew up on Hollywood novels, production gossip, star-gazing, etc. It's in my blood stream. I never found Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol et al. particularly sophisticated about the realities of Hollywood. What astounded me was their ability to intuit a creative situation simply from the evidence on the screen."[7]

For the most part, film critics had no experience in film production, and this made it easy for them to commit the mistake of understanding directorial endeavor as the strenuous defense of a script that deserves to be put to screen – the mise-en-scène was usually neglected. In Circles and Squares, Pauline Kael ridicules Sarris' assertion that, "Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material". Kael: "This is a remarkable formulation: it is the opposite of what we have always taken for granted in the arts, that the artist expresses himself in the unity of form and content. What Sarris believes to be 'the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art' is what has generally been considered the frustrations of a man working against the given material. Fantastic as this formulation is, [...] it clarifies the interests of the auteur critics. If we have been puzzled because the auteur critics seemed so deeply involved, even dedicated, to becoming connoisseurs of trash, now we can see by this theoretical formulation that trash is indeed their chosen province of film"[8].

However pertinent Kael's counterargument might seem at first glance, what Sarris is trying to say is that the respective Hollywood films, based on unpolished and conventional scripts, were not trash, precisely because the authors had found ways of eluding conventions. "The unity of form and content" (whatever that means) was a sterile assessment criterion for Hollywood-made films, since the directors were under the obligation to abide by certain rules. On the other hand, intuiting the precise conventions which must be subverted and finding the technical means through which the director can alter the effect of a portion of the film demonstrates just as much creativity and artistic sensibility. The alternative path, for filmmakers, was rebellion (which is not always artistically fertile – sometimes it's unconscious pretension). It's predictable in these circumstances that more directors express themselves by evading conventions than by rejecting them.

BEYOND RESPECTABILITY

There is another subversive aspect of the *auteur* theory, inevitably derived from questioning the (respectable) conventions of Hollywood. *Auteurists* had a high tolerance for discomforting allusions, but traditional critics did not.

The critical establishment was also respectable. Kael comes dangerously close from what the avant-garde would later call bourgeois ideology – a blind spot for critics who consider themselves lucid – when she accuses *auteurists* of having poor taste, or when she replies to Sarris' affirmation that the personality of an author must be conspicuous: "The smell of a skunk is more distinguishable than the perfume of a rose; does that make it better?"[9]

Sarris never claimed that the evaluation of authors was an easy task. He did, however, make the tactless claim that it should be performed by the numbers anyway – it provides the best elementary training for mediocre critics, and not many critics are André Bazin. Kael[10] attacked Sarris when he praised Bazin for being receptive, stating that, "Bazin's greatness as a critic… rested in his disinterested conception of the cinema as a universal entity"; only, once again, Kael's retort says less about Sarris than it does about Kael.

The project of Andrew Sarris involved the reevaluation of films, not by their social importance (as Kael seemed to suggest), but by the refinement of their means of expression – by the manner in which they used the cinematic language, that "universal" entity that Bazin revered. Sarris's prophecy that *auteurism* was the best method for lazy critics (proven true by film journalists formed in the following decades) is a perfectly valid (pragmatic) hypothesis: it is easier for a novice to detect recurring formal options while watching the entire filmography of a director, and then to connect these options (the artistic means) to the author's intentions; otherwise they would not find in films any "meanings" but the same tired, socially important truths, always derived from the script (not the film), which would limit the cinematic language to a functional code.

"Perhaps, taste is a function of scale"[11], says Sarris. And elsewhere in the same essay:

> "The chronological division of the cinema into historical periods tends to perpetuate what may be called the pyramid fallacy of many film historians. This fallacy consists of viewing the history of cinema as a process by which approved artisans have deposited their slabs of celluloid on a single pyramid rising ultimately to a single apex, be it Realism, Humanism, Marxism, Journalism, Abstractionism, or even Eroticism. Directors are valued primarily for their 'contributions' to the evolution of a Utopian cinema efficiently adjusted to a Utopian society. […] What then is the alternative to the pyramid? I would suggest an inverted pyramid opening outward to accommodate the unpredictable range and diversity of individual directors."[12]

Like Bazin, Kael reproached *auteurists* for being insufficiently eclectic. She called them "anti-intellectual", "anti-art."[13] In fact, the American critical establishment in the early 1960s still had the cultural biases of a generation of thinkers nurtured on high culture (naturally, it was and is the pride of any ambitious critic to consider him- or herself more valuable than his or her uncultivated colleagues) – biases which Bazin did not share and which only the American *auteurists* began to dispel. From a pragmatic perspective, it was preferable that each young critic (of a new generation accustomed to pop culture) chose a few favorite authors and then made an effort to define their style, rather than to perpetuate the equally mediocre system through which an entire generation of well-educated critics unanimously admired Ingmar Bergman. (From this point of view, the *auteur* theory was more important in the United States than in France; the American critics could watch and judge every film made in Hollywood, not only those distributed in Europe.)

This is not to say that *auteurism* produces mere archivists. An *auteur* cannot be understood and evaluated outside the context in which he or she creates; therefore an *auteurist* needs to know just as much as any traditionalist critic. At the end of his reply to *Circles and Squares,* Sarris annexes[14] an *auteurist* article he had written some time before, one sufficiently ample in scope to give any historian reason to be proud.

POINTS OF VIEW AND METHODS OF VIEWING

What makes his polemic with Kael even more interesting is that Andrew Sarris wasn't "anti-art", not even in the traditional sense of the term; compared to the supporters of underground cinema, which by 1963 had already gained notoriety, Sarris was conservative. Yet he understood cinema as a form of expression, while Kael seemed to judge by the end result. Sarris on Alfred Hitchcock in his review of

The Birds, published in 1963: "*The Birds* finds Hitchcock at the summit of his artistic powers. His is the only contemporary style that unites the divergent classical traditions of Murnau (camera movement) and Eisenstein (montage).

If formal excellence is still a valid criterion for film criticism, and there are those who will argue that it is not, then *The Birds* is probably the picture of the year."[15]

Kael on Hitchcock: "Hitchcock's uniformity, his mastery of tricks, and his cleverness at getting audiences to respond according to his calculations – the feedback he wants and gets from them – reveal not so much a personal style as a personal theory of audience psychology, his methods and approach are not those of an artist but a prestidigitator. The *auteur* critics respond just as Hitchcock expects the gullible to respond. This is not so surprising – often the works *auteur* critics call masterpieces are ones that seem to reveal the contempt of the director for the audience."[16]

It would seem that, in the end, the difference in mentality between Kael and Sarris cannot be expressed in simple terms, eclecticism + elitism vs. specialization + tolerance. They seem rather to have two different conceptions of how to watch a film. Kael assimilated films through associations and described them in abundantly referential reviews. Sarris focused on catching everything that moved on the screen.

Having allotted such a vast section of the study to explaining the *auteur* theory and its points of dissent with the beloved ideas of high culture, perhaps it is important to articulate why this was necessary: the author of this study believes the *auteur* theory is, among all possible critical theories, by far the most receptive to innovative and hybrid forms.

The critics who processed *Chinatown* through the filter of high culture appreciated the film for less than it has to offer.

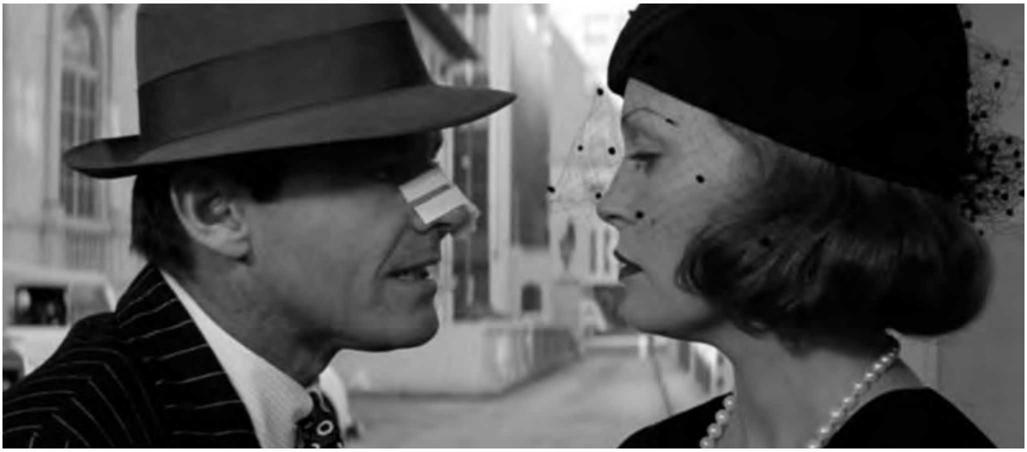
The critics who considered themselves the curators of film history and/or the guardians of moral values reproached *The Long Goodbye* for its insolent portrayal of Philip Marlowe – the hero detective – as an idler. The archivists who keep track of genre transformation would equally praise *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye* for inaugurating the neo-noir, but they couldn't explain why anyone needed them both. Of course, pure *auteurism* is itself unable to offer exhaustive explanations, but we have already established that *auteurism* is never pure.

In fact, no critic remains the inflexible adherent (or opponent) of a single theory, if he (or she) progresses enough and recognizes in films some things to admire that he cannot overlook simply because he would have to temporarily abandon his creed. Some of the enthusiastic reviews about the subversive films discussed in the full-length version of this study were written by Pauline Kael herself.

The modest ambition of the present study is to prove that assessing the value of a film is not nearly the most difficult part of a critic's work; constant development is. The richer the film, the better the critic has to be to appreciate it fully. The inverted pyramid proposed by Andrew Sarris is an apt model for the desirable progress of a critic's range of perception, so that he can always rise to the occasion when discovering a daring work of art. *Chinatown* and *The Long Goodbye* are two films that anyone has time to watch in one afternoon – they are merely five hours of viewing combined – only they are not the first two films ever made.

TWO TELL – TALE FRAMES

The author deems it improbable to achieve a satisfying analysis of the two aforementioned films within the confining dimensions of this text. Instead, it is more appropriate to choose one suggestive frame from each film and explain how its form subtly alters the impact of the scene, making it play out differently than what one would probably imagine while reading the script.



Chinatown

The screenshot displayed above would be a straightforward exposition scene, were it not for a few visual details: the intelligent and ruthless detective played by Jack Nicholson confronts the *femme fatale* with the injurious evidence he has uncovered. However, instead of seeming intimidated, Faye Dunaway's aristocratically restrained character shows no indisputable sign of emotion and only interrupts eye contact to occasionally look at the plaster on the detective's nose. The pronounced contrast between the prestigious art design (even more so since this is a 1970s film set in the Los Angeles of the 1930s) and the droll interplay between the characters is a stylistic mark of *Chinatown*'s *auteur*, Roman Polanski, whose sophisticatedly subversive films often play by the rules, but never quite take them seriously.

Robert Altman's approach in *The Long Goodbye* is seemingly less controlled: while Polanski's neo-noir could be mistaken for a studio picture, Altman's is more likely to be taken for a documentary. All sets employ natural lighting (or commonplace artificial lighting), the camera is perpetually panning and zooming to catch up with what's happening around it, the actors' lines most often overlap – it hardly seems that an *auteur* distilled reality into a narrative before presenting it to us. On closer inspection, one notices that the exact opposite is true – Altman always juggles with more than one narrative or interpretative thread; he controls the reality of his films on several levels.

The Long Goodbye

Altman obtained this particular framing by pointing the camera toward a glass wall; it's clear enough that the viewer can see the conjugal fight taking place inside the house and reflective enough to capture the image of the detective (hired by the wife to be around the house in case she needs to be protected from her husband) while he isstrolling along the beach with his back toward the couple. The fact that the actors' faces are barely visible (although the tone of their voices is clearly heard) makes them no more important in the frame than the silhouette of the detective; their escalating dispute is secondary to the detective's humble non-intervention. It's not about them, they've had fiercer fights before – it's about him; the spectator's attention is guided through non-narrative, purely cinematic means.

The *auteurists* were right to claim that cinema is the director's art, not the screenwriter's, and they were the first to come to this conclusion. The innumerable differences between *Chinatown* and the equally brilliant *The Long Goodbye* should offer ample evidence – although they're both detective stories, they're very different films.

NOTES

1. The term used by David Bordwell in his essay *Common Sense + Film Theory = Common-Sense Film Theory?*, available here: http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/commonsense.php, in which he discusses the cognitive processes through which we understand a film and the manner in which popular prejudices can be exploited in creating narrative suspense.
2. A concise and thorough essay on the French New Wave, written by Jim Hillier, can be found in the Schirmer *Encyclopedia of Cinema,* vol. 3, under the headline New Wave, p. 235
3. The essay *Auteurism* Is Alive and Well, Film Quarterly, Vol. 28, Nr. 1. (Fall 1974), p. 62.
4. "A Certain Tendency in French Cinema", article published in Cahiers... in January 1954
5. Bazin, quoted in Cahiers du Cinéma, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusets, 1985, ed. Jim Hillier, p. 258
6. Film Quarterly, Vol. 16, Nr. 3. (Spring 1963), pp. 12-26
7. Sarris, *Auteurism* Is Alive and Well, p. 62
8. Kael, p. 17
9. Kael, p. 15
10. Kael, p. 20
11. Sarris, The *Auteur* Theory and the Perils of Pauline, Film Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 4. (Summer, 1963), pp. 26-33.
12. Sarris, The *Auteur* Theory..., pp. 29-30.
13. Kael, p. 22
14. Sarris, The *Auteur* Theory..., pp. 30-33
15. Included in the anthology The Village Voice Film Guide: 50 Years of Movies from Classics to Cult Hits, pp. 48-50
16. Kael, p. 15

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Links to online essays

- Bordwell, David, Common Sense + Film Theory = Common-Sense Film Theory?, http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/commonsense.php
- Hoberman, Jim, "A Bright, Guilty World": Daylight Ghosts and Sunshine Noir, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_6_45/ai_n24242080/
- Truffaut, François, *Une certaine tendance du cinéma français,* http://soma.sbcc.edu/users/DaVega/FILMST_113/Filmst113_ExFilm_Movements/FrenchNewWave/A_certain_tendency_tr%23540A3.pdf

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