The New Romanian Cinema and Beyond: The Films of Radu Jude

Andrei GORZO & Veronica LAZĂR

National University of Theatre and Film "I. L. Caragiale", Bucharest; University of Bucharest
Personal e-mail: andrei.gorzo@unatc.ro; veronica.lazar@yahoo.com

Abstract: The paper parses the major existing literature, in English and Romanian, on the New Romanian Cinema (also called the Romanian New Wave) which became an international film-festival sensation in the mid-2000s. It maps the main lines of disagreement among the various scholars who have attempted to define this phenomenon. The paper argues that the Romanian cinema that had made its dazzling debut on the international scene some 15 years ago has gradually turned into something else – something harder to pin down to an aesthetic paradigm, to a core generational group of ten or so filmmakers, or to a limited set of ideological coordinates. Finally, the paper proposes that the evolving body of work of director Radu Jude (who has established himself in recent years as a major innovator) provides a good lens through which to take the measure of those aesthetic and political changes.
Keywords: New Romanian Cinema, Romanian New Wave, Romanian post-communist culture, Radu Jude, esthetics and politics.

Citation suggestion: Gorzo, Andrei, and Veronica Lazăr. „The New Romanian Cinema and Beyond: The Films of Radu Jude". *Transilvania*, no. 3 (2022): 1-9.
https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2022.03.01.

There's a widely shared feeling in Romanian film culture that what has been called the New Romanian Cinema (NRC) has meanwhile become a thing of the past. The present moment is difficult to describe, apart from its being post-NRC. As for the Romanian cinema of the future, there's less certainty about it than at any time during the past 15 years. Even in the late 2000s and early 2010s, when there was a wide consensus regarding what a New Romanian Film (or a Romanian New Wave film) looked like, there was little agreement about how to look at it. A cinema whose traditions had always remained very little known beyond national borders had suddenly become a major phenomenon of the film-festival circuit. How had that happened? What were the characteristics of this New Cinema? Was there a unified aesthetic, a formula? What explained its coalescence and its successful international emergence?

The earliest books to ponder this phenomenon were Mihai Fulger's *Noul val în cinematografia românească* [The New Wave in Romanian Cinema] (2006)[1] and *Noul cinema românesc. De la tovarășul Ceaușescu la domnul Lăzărescu* [The New Romanian Cinema: From Comrade Ceaușescu to Mr. Lăzărescu] (2011),[2] edited by Cristina Corciovescu and Magda Mihăilescu. The former was a collection of interviews with 12 directors – including Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, and Corneliu Porumboiu – associated with a yearned-for renewal of Romanian filmmaking during the early 2000s.[3] The latter was an edited collection gathering mainly thematic readings of the recently emerged NRC canon.[4]

The first book attempting to theorize the NRC, *Lucruri care nu pot fi spuse altfel: Un mod de a gândi cinemaul, de la André Bazin la Cristi Puiu* [Things that Cannot Be Said in Any Other Way: A Way of Thinking Cinema, from André Bazin to Cristi Puiu],[5] was written by one of the authors of the present article. Among many NRC directors, it highlighted the figure of Cristi Puiu, born in 1967 and a graduate in filmmaking with the *Haute École d'art et de design* of Geneva. The book argues that the NRC started to gain momentum in the mid-2000s, when Puiu's *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* (2005) became an object of vigorous emulation for other Romanian filmmakers. The first post-communist decade had been a time of economic, institutional, and aesthetic crisis. Subsequently, from the reorganization of state financing and from the replication of *Lăzărescu*'s virtues (once it became an international critical success) a new Romanian art cinema emerged. Those virtues included formal rigor; a mixture of dramatic immediacy and emphatic ordinariness; a Frederick Wiseman-like feel for the workings of institutions, and an emphasis – also documentary-like – on

process and procedure, depicted in what approximated 'real' duration; a sensitivity to matters of ethics, both personal and institutional; a witty, caustic sense of how citizens interact with representatives of the state, and also of how neighbors or strangers interact with each other in contemporary Bucharest; and an awareness of social and professional hierarchies and their corresponding tensions, of the pervasive faultlines of class and caste.

The 2012 book argued that, following the considerable international success of Cristian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* – which won the Palme d'Or in 2007 –, the NRC quickly developed a formulaic quality: the long takes, the single narrative thread unfolding over the timespan of just a few hours, the militantly mundane subject matter, the 'observational,' no-comment narration consistently depicting the characters from the outside, the de-dramatizing tactics, the almost mandatory scenes showing state functionaries making displays of rudeness, corruption, authoritarianism, absurdity, or exhausted irascibility. Thematically, the NRC was concerned with the fallout of Romania's pre-1989 communist experience; with the post-communist redefinition of the Romanian middle-class; with ethical dilemmas and predicaments; and, increasingly, with what André Bazin, whom Puiu would sometimes quote in those early days, had coined "the ambiguity of the real"[6] – its opacity, its obstinate refusal of univocal readings, its impenetrability.

The 2012 book played down the first item in the above list of thematic concerns: it had been the main – often the only – angle from which the NRC films had been discussed in Romania in the phenomenon's early phase. In fact, the book made little attempt to parse the politics of the NRC, or its institutional background. It treated the 'realism' of this cinema as mainly a matter of film form, applying to it a transnational, Bordwellian understanding of film style. Recent Romanian films not displaying at least some of the stylistic features outlined above were marginalized or excluded from this discussion of the NRC – even if their directors belonged to the same generation or age group as Puiu, Mungiu, Muntean, or Porumboiu (it was, for instance, the case of Tudor Giurgiu, director of the 2006 *Love Sick,* or Cătălin Mitulescu, director of the 2006 *How I Spent the End of the World*). The book argued that Cristi Puiu's basic outlook (which had exerted a galvanizing influence on colleagues like Cristian Mungiu, Radu Muntean, and Corneliu Porumboiu) was Bazinian,[7] and that his exposure (as a student in Geneva) to observational documentaries by Wiseman and Raymond Depardon (completely unknown in Romania at the time) had weighed heavier than any artistic indebtedness to local or regional filmmakers.[8] Finally, the book argued that, after 2008, the NRC had entered a modernistically self-reflexive phase, with directors – Porumboiu with *Police, Adjective* (2009), Puiu with *Aurora* (2010) – increasingly inclined to problematize realistic representation.

2013 saw the publication of Dominique Nasta's *Contemporary Romanian Cinema: The History of an Unexpected Miracle* (Wallflower Press). A Belgian academic born and educated in Romania, Nasta had long felt frustrated by the international obscurity of Romanian cinema, by the lack of reference works discussing it in languages other than Romanian.[9] Her enthusiasm at the arrival of the NRC on the international festival scene was palpable: "Not only has Romanian cinema gained an indisputable global stature over the last ten years or so, but it has miraculously managed to catch up and even outdo in output and quality other Eastern European cinemas."[10] Her book, written in English, was an open celebration of this phenomenon, which also doubled as a short introduction to the history of Romanian cinema and to Romanian culture in general. Nasta leaned towards an essentialist definition of a "Romanian psyche" (the phrase occurs several times in her book) – passive and fatalistic, but also ironic and absurdist; as defining traits she pointed towards the ancient folk ballad *Mioriţa* (for its fatalism) and the plays of Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912) and Eugène Ionesco (1909-1994), whose names crop up again and again in her considerations on the comedic aspects of Romanian films. She equated the NRC with an aesthetic of "minimalism," whose "most important representatives" were Puiu, Porumboiu, Mungiu, and Radu Muntean. In a later essay, she would add that singling out Cristi Puiu as originator of the NRC aesthetic was "misleading and restrictive".[11] Whereas in the work of other critics and scholars, the aesthetic principles of the NRC had been traced back to Bazin, Italian neorealism, and the observational or "direct cinema" nonfictions of filmmakers like Wiseman and Depardon, Nasta would argue with increasing vehemence that their roots were to be found closer to home – for instance, in the work of Romanian filmmaker Lucian Pintilie (1933-2018), whose "*The Afternoon of a Torturer* (2001) is clearly one of the forerunners of the Romanian minimalist trend."[12] Notwithstanding Puiu's contribution to *The Afternoon of a Torturer* (he is credited as a consultant) and his general reverence for Pintilie, shared by most of the directors in the NRC group, this particular title is still a provocative choice on Nasta's part, since *The Afternoon of a Torturer* is a strikingly stylised film that is openly indebted to the theatre (a medium in which Pintilie had toiled for most of his career, while few of the NRC filmmakers have showed any interest in it).

Permeated by a residual Cold War anticommunism (Nasta had left Ceaușescu's Romania during the grim 1980s), Nasta's 2013 book showed very little inclination to parse the politics of the NRC. By then, a number of mostly young intellectuals (some of them affiliated with the influential online platform *CriticAtac*) were beginning to offer broadly Marxist takes on this phenomenon (written in Romanian). Some of those takes were rancorous in tone. In a pioneering article whose title translates as "Laughter, Tears, and the Colonial Gaze", Florin Poenaru saw the NRC as part of a process of Romanian self-colonization – a cinema which turned on contemporary or recent Romanian realities a gaze mimicking that of "the West".[13] Following in Poenaru's footsteps, other authors would blame the NRC of complacency with capitalism (a tendency to accept it as natural, a reluctance to criticize its Western manifestations, saving all criticism for its local implementation), and also with a residual anticommunism which tended to mistrust

anything vaguely resembling collectivism or egalitarianism.[14] Other ideological readings of the NRC were considerably more nuanced, but the merits of this body of criticism went beyond any individual contributions: by drawing attention to the class positions of the NRC filmmakers, to the fact that almost all of them were male, or to the fact that their Romania was somewhat Bucharest-centric (with the films of Porumboiu and Mungiu, followed later by Marian Crișan and Adrian Sitaru constituting the main exceptions), it helped denaturalize the NRC's representations of Romanian reality. The edited volume *Politicile filmului* [The Politics of Cinema], published in 2014, mixed this kind of ideological criticism pioneered by *CriticAtac* with short auteur studies and analyses of film style.[15]

2014 saw the publication of a second book in English about the New Romanian Cinema: written by Romanian academic Doru Pop, it was called *Romanian New Wave Cinema: An Introduction*.[16] Other critics and scholars had noted that, when it appeared, the NRC was in synch with the work of other contemporary (European) redefiners of social-realist cinema (like the Dardenne brothers of Belgium). Pop instead suggested that it would be best to view it as a very belated addition to the European and international New Waves of the 1960s and 70s – the French, the West German, the Czechoslovak, the Brazilian, the Japanese. Hence Pop's insistence that it should be called the Romanian New Wave, rather than New Romanian Cinema. For most Romanian and international commentators, the two labels had been – and continue to be – interchangeable, although Andrei Gorzo, in his 2012 *Lucruri care nu pot fi spuse altfel* [Things that Cannot Be Said in Any Other Way], had suggested that a distinction between the particular aesthetic of the New Romanian Cinema and the generation of filmmakers known as the Romanian New Wave could be of some practical value.[17] However, this insistence that it belonged on that 'old' list of New Waves (rather than, say, with the more recent New Cinemas of Taiwan or Iran) was never turned by Pop into a strong case. His book was so wide-ranging, so eclectic, so full of (sometimes interesting) observations linking this Romanian New Wave to so many other cultural phenomena, that it lost sight of its central argument.[18]

László Strausz's 2017 *Hesitant Histories on the Romanian Screen*[19] was a more rigorous work of film theory. In his ambitious, at times brilliant book, the Hungarian scholar attempts to trace a Romanian cultural tradition whose most recent crowning point would be the New Romanian Cinema of Puiu, Mungiu, Porumboiu, etc. He calls it the tradition of "hesitation" and defines it as "a mode of representation that visualizes an uncertainty about the status of the pro-filmic that these moving images, revolving around social-historical topics, represent."[20] This tradition encompasses a handful of modernist, self-reflexive, politically subversive films from the Ceaușescu era – the very same films seen by Dominique Nasta and other critics as having anticipated the aesthetic of the NRC: Lucian Pintilie's *The Reenactment* (1970), Mircea Daneliuc's *Microphone Test* (1980), Iosif Demian's *A Girl's Tears* (1980), Alexandru Tatos's *Sequences* (1982). All four are fictions about directors and cameramen who attempt "to produce an image of reality commissioned by an official institution (the prosecutor's office, the state television station, the police, and a film studio shooting a political propaganda film)."[21] In each case, the attempt goes awry, "sabotaged by the quotidian," "the real" pursued in vain by the fictional/diegetic filmmakers appearing "in the context of the symbolic-ideological mode of control as a result of political calculation and manipulation."[22] Echoing many Romanian commentators, Strausz concludes that these films are critical towards "the [Communist] regime's attempts to define prescribed identities for individuals and the nation, and forge national history."[23] Something similar goes on, according to Strausz, in the films of the New Romanian Cinema, although the strategies of the NRC directors differ from those of the Ceaușescu-era subversives. Strausz talks about the "modernist hesitation" of Pintilie or Tatos against the "performative hesitation" of a typical NRC film. As for the NRC's own modernist dimension, he sees it as having been more overt throughout early films (2005-2007; Strausz cites a character breaking the fourth wall by looking straight into the camera at the end of Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days*), becoming more suppressed later, camouflaged under a more classical type of narration. This evolution is the exact opposite of the one suggested by Gorzo in *Lucruri care nu pot fi spuse altfel*. Strausz sees the NRC films as countering the "hegemonic social imaginaries of the state socialist past and the dominant narratives about post-socialist transition".[24] He makes a case for Mungiu's *4 Months* (which is set towards the end of the Ceaușescu era, in 1987) as a "multivocal and hesitant representation of history", one that makes the viewer move "between various interpretations of the past", thus opposing, and implicitly critiquing, "uniform [recollections] of the shared past," attempts to uniformize recent history and cultural memory – such an attempt being President Traian Băsescu's 2006 official condemnation of Romanian state socialism as "illegitimate and criminal."[25] Strausz also aligns the films of the NRC with the critical attitude of postcolonial thought[26] and compares them favorably with the films of Hungarian director Kornél Mundruczó, whom he accuses of indulging in auto-colonial exoticization of Hungarian realities. This is, of course, the very same accusation that has been directed at the NRC (particularly at Mungiu's films) by some left-wing Romanian critics.

Among the handful of Ceaușescu-era films committed to "modernist hesitation" and the "performative hesitation" characterizing the NRC films, Strausz lays down a selection of media objects of a very different kind: the December 1989 television broadcasts of the Romanian revolution which overthrew Ceaușescu's regime. Strausz's analysis of the broadcasts is indebted to Harun Farocki's and Andrei Ujică's essential essay-film *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992). It argues that, in covering the live events of the violent regime change, Romanian television didn't just document or reflect those events, but also participated in their construction, in the production of the reality it was covering. "While [broadcast] discourses around the definition of the events often directly contradicted each other, they were advantageous for the several political actors to authenticate their presence and their

own political maneuvers".[27] Strausz coins this "legitimizing hesitation," meaning that hesitation "as a specific subject position constructed for the viewer was used to produce the impression of ambiguity and chaos, which in turn legitimized the acts of an incoming power formation".[28] The revolution as seen on TV, with that televisual rhetoric of "legitimizing hesitation", left a very deep impression on the future directors of the NRC (who were very young in 1989: Puiu was 22, Mungiu 21, Radu Muntean 18, Corneliu Porumboiu 14), and, according to Strausz, the NRC's aesthetic of "performative hesitation" in the representation of history and social change is a "cultural response to the unsettling power of the visual witnessed during the days of the revolution."[29] Still, Strausz suggests that the "tradition of hesitation" has even deeper roots – older than television, older than cinema – in Romanian culture. Searching for said roots, he embraces the view that the old folk ballad *Miorița* – about a shepherd who, warned by a talking ewe that two friends and fellow-shepherds are planning to murder him, serenely instructs the ewe what to do after his death – contains some sort of "national matrix," some sort of key to the "Romanian collective imaginary." Strausz describes the moves of the ewe across the hilly Romanian landscape as a hesitant "spatial practice" which becomes a "recurring signifier in the complex web of Romanian cultural performance in general", elements of "the mioritic" having "important implications for the establishment of hesitation as a trope in Romanian cinematic discourse."[30] Following in the footsteps of Dominique Nasta (who, in trying to explain the NRC, had invoked Lucian Blaga's 1936 essay *The Mioritic Space,* in which the Romanian poet and philosopher "delineates the ballad as some kind of geography of the Romanian poetic imagination"[31]), Strausz, like Nasta, gravitates towards an obsolete, essentialist view of Romanian identity and culture.[32]

The first (and still the only) book-length auteur study dedicated to a NRC director to date, Monica Filimon's *Cristi Puiu*,[33] was also published in 2017. Filimon's short monograph helped strengthen the consensus that, notwithstanding Mungiu's more numerous international awards, Puiu had been the preeminent innovator of Romanian cinema in the 2000s. Its central argument was that this very influential director of cinematic narrative fiction is a documentary filmmaker at heart:[34] not only is he extraordinarily adept at giving his fictions the guise of observational documentaries, at simulating the texture of teeming happenings not staged especially for the camera, but only witnessed by it; he also cultivates an evident reverence or awe for what he calls "the real".

The New Romanian Cinema (Edinburgh University Press) is a collective volume (edited by Canadian-Bulgarian scholar Christina Stojanova with the participation of Romanian scholar Dana Duma) published in 2019. It considered the NRC from a variety of angles, Duma's discussion of its representations of gender[35] being particularly useful, as were the articles – by Ioana Uricaru[36] and Andrea Virginás[37] – linking it to some of the traditional genres of popular cinema (especially the melodrama).[38] As Stojanova noted, the book had been in the works for long: almost ten years.[39] It was noticeable for a reader that many of the articles had been originally conceived in 2014-2015. Some of them bore signs of later revisions, but, on the whole, the volume failed to take heed of more recent developments. What its lateness made apparent was the fact that the terrain which the volume was attempting to map had shifted considerably since 2015. By 2019, few new films were being made in the NRC mould established with such success during the previous decade. The last two really major ones, Cristi Puiu's *Sieranevada* and Cristian Mungiu's *Graduation,* had premiered in 2016 at the Cannes Film Festival (both in the main competition; Mungiu had won Best Director, sharing the award with Olivier Assayas).[40] Neither of them received much attention in Stojanova's edited volume.

Among the contributions to the volume, Doru Pop's "The 'Transnational Turn': New Urban Identities and the Transformation of Contemporary Romanian Cinema" was one of the few to recognize some of the ways in which the landscape was changing. Indeed, beginning with Cristi Puiu's *Stuff and Dough* and *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu,* the canonical NRC films made between the early 2000s and the early 2010s had tended to be locally rooted, with a highly specific sense of place and social milieu, a keen ear for the nuances of spoken Romanian, etc. Unlike those films, a more recent festival hit like Adina Pintilie's *Touch Me Not* (which won the Golden Bear in 2018) was – with its abstract Euro-locations and its English-speaking international cast – sheer Europudding. (Its therapy-talk and exhortations of body positivity were also new to Romanian films.) Stylistically, Corneliu Porumboiu's *The Whistlers* (2019) was the very opposite of what critics like Dominique Nasta had described as the "minimalism" of his early films: a globe-trotting spectacle juggling flashbacks, cinephile quotations, and action-film tropes. For *Malmkrog* (2020), Puiu himself returned to a literary-theological obsession of his youth and experimented with filming (in French) a late-19th-century (Russian) text written entirely as philosophical (as opposed to dramatic) dialogue.

The transformation undergone by the Romanian cinematic landscape in recent years – a transformation which has taken it beyond the classicized NRC of the 2000s and early 2010s – has had more than one dimension. For one thing, the number of women directors has increased, some of them achieving significant prominence: Adina Pintilie, Ivana Mladenović, Ana Lungu, Monica Lăzurean-Gorgan, Ioana Uricaru, Cecilia Felméri, Ruxandra Ghițescu, Monica Stan; whereas, in what we consider to be its classic period, the NRC was by and large a cinema of male directors and women producers – Ada Solomon, Anca Puiu, Oana Giurgiu, Velvet Moraru. Another striking recent development has been a profusion of nonfiction films (many of them low-budget). It was the NRC which first brought attention to the field of documentary filmmaking – hitherto marginalized in Romanian film culture: though working in fiction, NRC directors like Cristi Puiu tended to discuss the ethics and aesthetics of their filmmaking in terms partly shaped by Western proponents of the documentary – particularly in its observational mode. But, in recent years, the interest they had helped nurture has grown beyond

those terms and extended to other forms. There is currently unprecedented scholarly and cinephile interest in the documentaries of earlier eras (communist and precommunist) – long dismissed as state propaganda and artistic hackwork.[41] There is unprecedented interest in found footage and home movies (as opposed to the widespread incomprehension which had greeted filmmaker Andrei Ujică's use of such materials in his landmark 2010 film *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu*). There is a move to assimilate the previously under-the-radar work of 16 mm and video artists from the 1980s and the 1990s.[42] Romanian scholars have written books on the essay film[43] and other nonfiction genres[44]. The first Romanian film ever to be nominated for Oscars was a documentary from 2020 – Alexander Nanau's *Collective.* New cinephile plaforms have sprung up in recent years, trying to keep up with such developments as well as reflecting other interests (queerness, feminism) that are new for Romanian film culture.[45] Another tell-tale sign of our times: in contrast to official NRC masterpieces like *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* and *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days,* which sought to interrogate 'universal' values (like altruism) or to anatomize things like the state of a national health system (*Lăzărescu)* or an entire society (*4 Months*'s depiction of Romania near the end of the Ceaușescu era), younger filmmakers like Ana Lungu (in her *One and a Half Prince,* from 2018), Ivana Mladenović (in her *Ivana the Terrible,* from 2020), and Bogdan Theodor Olteanu (in his *Mia Misses Her Revenge,* from 2020) seem content to use film to document (often in the guise of fiction) the micro-cultures they belong to, and to proclaim group identities. In short, there has been a certain amount of stylistic diversification, as well as a new engagement with politics.

All of which brings us to Radu Jude (born in 1977). An argument could be made (and we intend to flesh out that argument in a forthcoming series of articles) that Jude's work has been at the forefront of a post-NRC redefinition of the New Romanian Cinema. It wouldn't claim to give a full account of the recent and current changes in Romanian film. Nor would it imply that other filmmakers are somehow less worthy of attention. It would simply attempt to show that Jude's work, besides being worth studying in itself, provides a useful lens through which to look at the NRC, at post-NRC developments, at assorted aspects of Romanian literary, artistic, and political culture, at wider issues of national and regional history.

Of course, considering the NRC as a historically determined object with a particular set of stylistic features and thematic concerns, as well as other characteristics having to do with aspects ranging from funding to ideology is hardly controversial in itself: it is only when scholars try to pinpoint those characteristic features that controversy arises. Nor is there anything new about the claim that, since 2015, the NRC has entered a process of transformation: for instance, Chinese scholar Wang Yao was writing in 2018 about "the end of the Romanian New Wave."[46] The novelty of our approach would then reside in using Jude's body of work to clarify crucial political and stylistic aspects of this transformation. For example, focusing on Jude's evolving thematic interests helps us historicize the NRC's pre-2015 preoccupations with memorializing the traumas of the late Ceaușescu years and with documenting post-communist "transition", revealing that those are preoccupations characteristic of an earlier post-communist era.

In its aesthetics, Jude's first feature, *The Happiest Girl in the World* (2009), was a fairly representative example of the NRC formula. It also echoed one of the legendary 'dissident' films of the communist era – Lucian Pintilie's *The Reenactment* (1970) – while (more unusually) expressing a distinctive unease about advertising (if not about capitalism in general). His second feature, *Everybody in Our Family* (2012), was a startling manifestation of the NRC's obsession with legacies of abuse within middle-class families, with toxic mental habitus inherited from one generation to the next. Far more widely noticed than either of those was *Aferim!* (which shared a Silver Bear for Best Director in 2015) – a personal breakthrough for Jude and a turning point for the New Romanian Cinema. Coming from a director associated with the NRC, *Aferim!* was unusual in its 19th-century setting, black-and-white visuals, picaresque narrative, literary playfulness, and general resemblance to a western. Fueled by Cristi Puiu's purist ideas about the separateness of the media (each one bound to follow its true vocation, without mixing with the others)[47], the NRC hadn't been very interested in building a dialogue with the other arts, whereas Jude (whose own interest in literature and theatre has been as consistent as his critical engagement with Romanian and European history, and who as early as 2012 was quoting Bazin's phrase "impure cinema" to describe his own practice[48]) fills *Aferim!* with exuberant allusions to Romanian and international literary classics. He also treats cinema itself as an intertext, self-consciously quoting throughout *Aferim!* Romanian and foreign films and film genres. Even more unusual, *Aferim!* was an openly political film, confronting present-day anti-Roma racism. The NRC, though often praised by non-Romanian critics for being a politically incisive cinema, had actually tended to stay away from explicit political stands (for fear of being branded as political filmmakers, leading directors Puiu, Mungiu and Muntean had generally preferred to define themselves as moralists) and from the sore spots of less recent Romanian history, almost never explored farther back than the memory of Communist repression. And here was a film that, although set in the 1830s, was focusing attention on a racism that is still endemic at all levels of Romanian society (including across otherwise liberal intellectual milieus).

Adapted from a classic of Romanian literature (originally published in 1937), Jude's next film, *Scarred Hearts* (2016), had as little in common with the NRC formula as with the mainstream traditions of prestige costume pictures. The literary source, authored by Jewish-Romanian writer M. Blecher (1909-1938), is an autobiographical account of a young man being treated in a sanatorium for bone tuberculosis. Jude doesn't just illustrate it; nor does he attempt to create a cinematic substitute for it. Instead of trying to replicate a literary sensibility, he simply pays tribute to it while giving

full rein to his own, very different one. He is also interested in seeing Blecher's apolitical writings – and the experience that inspired them – in the historical context of increasing state-commandeered anti-Semitism (which would later provide the Holocaust with a horrifying Romanian chapter). Jude is polemicizing here with a whole literary critical tradition (still influential in Romania) which sees 'apolitism' as a virtue. He associates this 'apolitism' with the fact that the memory of Romania's participation in the Holocaust (or, for that matter, the memory of the centuries-long enslavement of the Roma) continues to be half-suppressed in contemporary Romania. These are horrors that have been largely expurgated from public memory and for which many Romanians have no visual representation – filmmakers prior to Jude having contributed very little to creating this representation.

Following *Scarred Hearts,* Jude has returned again and again to the subject of the Holocaust – in a fiction like *"I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians"* (2018), and also in found footage and archive footage montage films like *The Dead Nation* (2017), *The Marshal's Two Executions* (2018), and *The Exit of the Trains* (2020). He has become Romanian cinema's foremost revealer of repressed histories. He has also entered a restlessly experimental phase, exploring the possibilities of cinematic, photographic, and radio archives, those of montage (the NRC had tended to minimize editing for broadly Bazinian reasons), as well as those of 'Brechtian' aesthetics. (*"I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians"* has been acclaimed as a highly original and robust attempt at rethinking the strategies of late-'60s 'political modernist' cinema – a cinema with no tradition in Romania – for a 21st century context.) Jude's 2021 Golden Bear winner, *Bad Luck Banging and Lucky Porn,* can be seen as a summation of the director's preoccupations.

One of the things that make Jude interesting for the purposes of our investigation, as we tried to outline it above, is that he is a Romanian – and European – filmmaker turned simultaneously towards the future and the past. On the one hand, he is seriously interested in history, in archives, in literary and cinematic traditions. On the other hand, he is unique among Romanian filmmakers in his willingness to meet current challenges and crises head-on. These challenges and crises include the rise of right-wing populism, in various forms, throughout the world. They also include the quickly changing landscape of film production and distribution, and the shifting cultural hierarchies. After *Aferim!,* Jude could have assumed the role of 'big-festival auteur', taking three to six years to make a film that had to be 'important'. (It is a role that Cristian Mungiu took on after *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days.*). But Jude has always been impatient with contemporary art cinema as a system – its channels of production and distribution, as well as its values. From the very beginning, he could follow a film like *The Happiest Girl in the World,* which fits more or less within that system, with a no-budget production like *A Film for Friends* (2011), which in some ways works best if simply distributed through YouTube. He keeps alternating features with short films – some of them very quickly made and conceived as interventions in ephemeral public debates, equivalent to journalistic opinion pieces or even to Facebook posts. The best example of his commitment to quick-reaction filmmaking to date is *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn* – U. S. film critic A. S. Hamrah was by no means the only one to remark that "[t]his is the first film I've seen that is in full pandemic mode".[49] And *Bad Luck Banging* testifies with equal eloquence to Jude's belief that a truly contemporary cinema should allow itself to be contaminated by other forms of contemporary culture that have a strong visual dimension, from social networks (Facebook, TikTok) to DIY porn. Impatient with boundaries, he goes back and forth between fiction and non-fiction, between narrative and more experimental forms.

Jude is also interested in cultural forms – especially forms of humor – which lie beyond the bounds of conservatively defined 'good taste'. Early NRC films like *Stuff and Dough* (2001) had managed to shock conservative Romanian audiences by simply featuring characters who swore a lot. But there was also a strong puritan side to the NRC – not least in its moralistic insistence on a no-comment or observational stance towards 'the real' and on formal rigor (amounting in time to a tight formula) – whereas there is nothing puritan about Jude's cinema. As we'll attempt to show in subsequent articles, his body of work since 2015 amounts to the most sustained attempt to redefine Romanian cinema, to enlarge viewers' and filmmakers' notions of it, and also to confront the challenges now facing the European and international art-film sector from all directions – aesthetics, politics, production, distribution.

Notes

1. Mihai Fulger, *Noul val în cinematografia românească* (Bucharest: Art, 2006).
2. Cristina Corciovescu and Magda Mihăilescu, eds., *Noul cinema românesc. De la tovarășul Ceaușescu la domnul Lăzărescu* (Iași: Polirom, 2011).
3. As early as 2002, a few isolated voices in the field of Romanian film criticism, most notably veteran critic Valerian Sava, had been hailing the emergence of a "new wave" of Romanian filmmakers – chiefly Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, and Radu Muntean. The phrase "new wave" is used several times by Sava in articles from that period – see Valerian Sava, "Cumetria epopeică, legea mafiotă și premiile UCIN," *Observator cultural,* no. 159, March 11, 2003. Online: https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/film-cumetria-epopeica-legea-mafiota-si-premiile-ucin/, accessed on January 5, 2021.
4. Word of a "new Romanian cinema", born after the year 2000, had begun since the mid-2000s. See, for instance, Alex. Leo Șerban, "Charts

and Paradigms," *Martor*, no. 10 (2005): 101-103. Online: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/alex.-leo-serban_site.pdf, last accessed on January 5, 2021.

5. Andrei Gorzo, *Lucruri care nu pot fi spuse altfel: Un mod de a gândi cinemaul, de la André Bazin la Cristi Puiu* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2012).
6. For instance, in "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" Bazin refers to "the ambiguity of reality." See André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. I, translated from the French by Hugh Gray (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1967), 37; in the essay "De Sica: Metteur en Scène", the phrase is "the ontological ambiguity of reality." See André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. II, translated from the French by Hugh Gray (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1967), 68; while in the essay "William Wyler, the Jansenist of Directing" it's "the ambiguity inherent in reality." See André Bazin, *Bazin at Work: Major Essays & Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, translated from French by Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 8. Also see Andrei Gorzo, "In the Name of 'The Ambiguity of the Real': Romanian Cinematic Realism after the 2000s," *Film Criticism* 41, issue 2 (2017). Online: https://doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0041.206, last accessed on May 5, 2021.
7. The relevance of Bazinian theory to the New Romanian Cinema had been suggested before in international reviews and scholarly commentaries of individual NRC films: see J. Hoberman's review of *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu,* "The Art of Dying", *Village Voice,* April 8, 2006, https://www.villagevoice.com/2006/04/18/the-art-of-dying-4/, last accessed on May 10, 2021; see also Dudley Andrew's discussion of *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* in Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!: Bazin's Quest and Its Charge* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 52-56.
8. For a recent article arguing the opposite, see Lucian Țion, "Socialist Sink: The Eastern Roots of the Romanian New Wave", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video,* August 2020, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/10509208.2020.1807284?scroll=top, last accessed on May 6, 2021. Țion's paper considers the formal features of the NRC in relation to Eastern European filmmaking traditions.
9. As Nasta would later put it in an interview with Irina Trocan, "[b]ack in the early 1990s, very few critics from the international scene were able to quote at least one representative Romanian film, while dictionaries and film history chapters were filled with mistakes and misinterpretations." See Irina Trocan, ed., *Romanian Cinema Inside Out: Insights on Film Culture, Industry and Politics 1912-2019* (Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Institute, 2019), 59.
10. Nasta, *Contemporary Romanian Cinema*, 1.
11. Dominique Nasta, "Beyond Modernity: The Stylistic Divide and the New Romanian Cinema," in *The New Romanian Cinema*, ed. Christina Stojanova (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 24.
12. Nasta, "Beyond Modernity," 27.
13. Florin Poenaru, "Râs, lacrimi și priviri colonial," *CriticAtac*, November 15, 2010, http://www.criticatac.ro/ras-lacrimi-si-priviri-coloniale/, last accessed on May 6, 2021.
14. Bogdan Popa, "What's Wrong with the Romanian New Wave? Auteur Cinema, the Communist and the Production of the Violent Working Class," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 9, no. 1 (2018): 89-102.
15. Andrei Gorzo and Andrei State, eds., *Politicile filmului. Contribuții la interpretarea cinemaului românesc contemporan* (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2014).
16. Doru Pop, *Romanian New Wave Cinema: An Introduction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014).
17. Gorzo, *Lucruri care nu pot fi spuse altfel,* 265-268.
18. Romanian critic and scholar Mihai Fulger criticized Doru Pop's book for being carelessly researched. See Fulger, "Cartea de film. Fețele 'Noului Val Românesc'", *Observator cultural* no. 781, July 17, 2015, https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/cartea-de-film-fatetele-noului-val-romanesc/, last accessed on May 8, 2021.
19. László Strausz, *Hesitant Histories on the Romanian Screen* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
20. Strausz, *Hesitant Histories,* 1.
21. Ibid., 52.
22. Ibid., 39.
23. Ibid., 51.
24. Ibid., 115.
25. Ibid., 119-128.
26. Ibid., 240.
27. Ibid., 100.
28. Ibid., 83-84
29. Ibid., 3.
30. Ibid., 30-32.
31. Nasta, *Contemporary Romanian Cinema,* 4.
32. For a critical take on Strausz's book, see Andrei Gorzo, "Making Sense of the New Romanian Cinema: Three Perspectives," *Close Up*, no. 1 (2018): 27-42. The criticism points out that the term "hesitation", as used by Strausz to designate a specifically Romanian practice, is slippery and vague to a degree that casts doubt on its analytical value. Moreover, Strausz never properly explains what would be so uniquely Romanian about this tradition.
33. Monica Filimon, *Cristi Puiu* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).
34. Filimon, *Cristi Puiu,* 5.

35. Dana Duma, "Woman Films: Body and Will," in *The New Romanian Cinema*, ed. Christina Stojanova (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 167-179.
36. Ioana Uricaru, "No Melo: Minimalism and Melodrama in the New Romanian Cinema", *The New Romanian Cinema,* 50-62.
37. Andrea Virginás, "Traces of Genre in New Romanian Cinema: A Narrow Path for a Small Entity?," in *The New Romanian Cinema,* 180-193.
38. Since then, the subject has been further explored: see Hajnal Király, "The Text of Muteness in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Family (Melo)Dramas," in *Postsocialist Mobilities: Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, eds. Hajnal Király and Szolt Győri (Newcasle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021), 82-95; see also Andrea Virginás, *Film Genres in Hungarian and Romanian Cinema: History, Theory, and Reception* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021). For another comparative study of Hungarian and Romanian cinema, emphasizing the construction of space over matters of genre, see Anna Batori, *Space in Romanian and Hungarian Cinema* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
39. Stojanova, *The New Romanian Cinema*, xiv.
40. *Întregalde* – a major NRC film by Radu Muntean, which came out in 2021 – clearly belongs in their company.
41. Scholar Adina Brădeanu's work of investigation and explanation has been essential. The online platform *Sahia Vintage* (https://sahiavintage.ro) and the One World Romanian Film Festival have done a great deal to popularize this interest.
42. Călin Boto, "kinema ikon: grupul care face artă experimentală de jumătate de secol în România," *Scena 9,* December 3, 2019, https://www.scena9.ro/article/calin-man-kinema, last accessed on May 9, 2021.
43. Irina Trocan, *Audiovizualul în opoziție. Gândirea critică în eseuri video și cinema-eseu* (Cluj-Napoca: Idea, 2020).
44. Andra Petrescu and Irina Trocan, eds., *Realitatea ficțiunii, ficțiunea realului. Abordări teoretice ale documentarului* (Bucharest: Hecate, 2018).
45. Two such platforms are *Acoperișul de sticlă* (http://www.acoperisuldesticla.ro) and *Films in Frame* (https://www.filmsinframe.com/ro/), the second of which is bilingual (Romanian and English).
46. Wang Yao, "Adina Pintilie and the End of the Romanian New Wave," *Close Up* 2, no. 2 (2018): 47-60.
47. For an interview in which Puiu elaborates on these views, see Andrei Rus and Gabriela Filippi, "Portretul lui Cristi Puiu," *Film Menu* 8, December 2010, 38, https://filmmenu.wordpress.com/2014/11/30/interviu-cristi-puiu/, last accessed on June 2, 2021.
48. Gabriela Filippi and Andrei Rus, "Radu Jude – spre un cinema impur," *Film Menu* 15, June 2012, https://filmmenu.wordpress.com/2014/12/21/interviu-radu-jude-spre-un-cinema-impur/, last accessed on September 30, 2020.
49. A. S. Hamrah, "Time Is a Rabid Dog," *The Baffler,* January 13, 2022, https://thebaffler.com/latest/time-is-a-rabid-dog-hamrah, last accessed on January 19, 2022.

Bibliography

Andrew, Dudley. *What Cinema Is!: Bazin's Quest and Its Charge*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Batori, Anna. *Space in Romanian and Hungarian Cinema*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Bazin, André. *Bazin at Work: Major Essays & Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, translated from French by Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

Bazin, André. *What Is Cinema?*, vol. I, translated from the French by Hugh Gray. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1967.

Bazin, André. *What Is Cinema?*, vol. II, translated from the French by Hugh Gray. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1967.

Boto, Călin. "kinema ikon: grupul care face artă experimentală de jumătate de secol în România" [kinema ikon: the group that has been making experimental art for half a decade in Romania]. *Scena 9* (December 3, 2019). Online: https://www.scena9.ro/article/calin-man-kinema.

Corciovescu, Cristina, and Magda Mihăilescu, eds. *Noul cinema românesc. De la tovarășul Ceaușescu la domnul Lăzărescu* [The New Romanian Film: From Comrad Ceausescu to Mister Lăzărescu]. Iași: Polirom, 2011.

Duma, Dana. "Woman Films: Body and Will." In *The New Romanian Cinema*, edited by Christina Stojanova, 167-179. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.

Filimon, Monica. *Cristi Puiu*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017.

Filippi, Gabriela, and Andrei Rus. "Radu Jude – spre un cinema impur" [Radu Jude – Towards an Impure Cinema]. *Film Menu* 15 (June 2012). Online: https://filmmenu.wordpress.com/2014/12/21/interviu-radu-jude-spre-un-cinema-impur/.

Fulger, Mihai. "Cartea de film. Fețele 'Noului Val Românesc'" [The Film Book: The Faces of the 'New Romanian Wave']. *Observator cultural*, no. 781 (July 17, 2015). Online: https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/cartea-de-film-fatetele-noului-val-romanesc/.

Fulger, Mihai. *Noul val în cinematografia românească* [The New Wave in Romanian Film]. Bucharest: Art, 2006.

Gorzo, Andrei, and Andrei State, eds. *Politicile filmului. Contribuții la interpretarea cinemaului românesc contemporan* [The Politics of Film: Contributions to the Interpretation of Contemporary Romanian Cinema]. Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2014.

Gorzo, Andrei. "In the Name of 'The Ambiguity of the Real': Romanian Cinematic Realism after the 2000s." *Film Criticism* 41, no. 2 (2017). Online: https://doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0041.206.

Gorzo, Andrei. "Making Sense of the New Romanian Cinema: Three Perspectives." *Close Up*, no. 1 (2018): 27-42.

Gorzo, Andrei. *Lucruri care nu pot fi spuse altfel: Un mod de a gândi cinemaul, de la André Bazin la Cristi Puiu* [Things that Cannot Be Told Differently: A Way of Thinking Film, from André Bazin to Cristi Puiu]. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2012.

Hamrah, A. S. "Time Is a Rabid Dog." *The Baffler* (January 13, 2022). Online: https://thebaffler.com/latest/time-is-a-rabid-dog-hamrah.

Hoberman, J. "The Art of Dying." *Village Voice* (April 8, 2006). Online: https://www.villagevoice.com/2006/04/18/the-art-of-dying-4/.
Király, Hajnal. "The Text of Muteness in Contemporary Hungarian and Romanian Family (Melo)Dramas." In *Postsocialist Mobilities: Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, edited by Hajnal Király and Szolt Győri, 82-95. Newcasle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021.
Nasta, Dominique. "Beyond Modernity: The Stylistic Divide and the New Romanian Cinema." In *The New Romanian Cinema*, edited by Christina Stojanova, 23-35. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.
Petrescu, Andra, and Irina Trocan, eds. *Realitatea ficțiunii, ficțiunea realului. Abordări teoretice ale documentarului* [The Reality of Fiction, the Fiction of the Real: Theoretical Approaches on Documentary]. Bucharest: Hecate, 2018.
Poenaru, Florin. "Râs, lacrimi și priviri coloniale" [Laugs, Tears, and Colonial Gaze]. *CriticAtac*, (November 15, 2010). Online: http://www.criticatac.ro/ras-lacrimi-si-priviri-coloniale/.
Pop, Doru. *Romanian New Wave Cinema: An Introduction*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014.
Popa, Bogdan. "What's Wrong with the Romanian New Wave? Auteur Cinema, the Communist and the Production of the Violent Working Class." *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 9, no. 1 (2018): 89-102.
Rus, Andrei, and Gabriela Filippi. "Portretul lui Cristi Puiu" [Cristi Puiu's Portrait]. *Film Menu* 8 (December 2010). Online: https://filmmenu.wordpress.com/2014/11/30/interviu-cristi-puiu/.
Sava, Valerian. "Cumetria epopeică, legea mafiotă și premiile UCIN" [Epopee Godfathership, Mobster Law, and the UCIN Prizes]. *Observator cultural,* no. 159 (March 11, 2003). Online: https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/film-cumetria-epopeica-legea-mafiota-si-premiile-ucin/.
Șerban, Alex. Leo. "Charts and Paradigms." *Martor*, no. 10 (2005): 101-103. Online: http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/alex.-leo-serban_site.pdf.
Strausz, László. *Hesitant Histories on the Romanian Screen.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
Țion, Lucian. "Socialist Sink: The Eastern Roots of the Romanian New Wave." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* (August 2020). Online: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/10509208.2020.1807284?scroll=top.
Trocan, Irina, ed. *Romanian Cinema Inside Out: Insights on Film Culture, Industry and Politics 1912-2019.* Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Institute, 2019.
Trocan, Irina. *Audiovizualul în opoziție. Gândirea critică în eseuri video și cinema-eseu* [Audiovisual in Opposition: Critical Thinking in Video Essays and Essay Film]. Cluj-Napoca: Idea, 2020.
Uricaru, Ioana. "No Melo: Minimalism and Melodrama in the New Romanian Cinema." In *The New Romanian Cinema*, edited by Christina Stojanova, 50-62. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.
Virginás, Andrea. "Traces of Genre in New Romanian Cinema: A Narrow Path for a Small Entity?." in *The New Romanian Cinema*, edited by Christina Stojanova, 180-193. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.
Virginás, Andrea. *Film Genres in Hungarian and Romanian Cinema: History, Theory, and Reception*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021.
Yao, Wang. "Adina Pintilie and the End of the Romanian New Wave." *Close Up* 2, no. 2 (2018): 47-60.