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The Decade of the *Auteurs*: The Institutional Reorganization of the Romanian Film Industry in the 1990s*

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Abstract
Romanian cinema in the 1990s was defined, among others, by its failed attempt at institutional reorganization, due to which fewer and fewer films were released towards the end of the decade – a process which culminated in 2000, when not a single feature film was released. However, before this virtual collapse of the Romanian film industry, sixty or so films were financed and produced. By taking a look at their opening credits, one would be perhaps surprised to notice mostly familiar names – directors and writers which were highly prominent during the communist era. In cinema, as in other cultural fields, the cultural elites managed, at the beginning of the 1990s, to use their cultural capital gained during the communist years in order to take over the industry. The films made during this transitional period were ideologically conservative, rich in anticommunist rhetoric and – paradoxically – financed and produced using a state-sponsored infrastructure developed two decades earlier, during Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime. Taking into account the long-lasting institutional transformation of the Romanian film industry and the critical reception of Romanian films before and after 1989, this article tries to offer a context for the processes taking shape in the 1990s and to suggest the main causes for the postcommunist reconfiguration of the cultural field, due to which mainly one kind of anticommunist rhetoric gained visibility during this decade.

Keywords: Romanian cinema of the 1990s, film studios, cultural elites, auteur theory, politics of authorship, anticommunism.

Introduction

Romanian films released in the 1990s have an extremely bad reputation among Romanian film critics and spectators. In general, they tend to be remembered in two generic forms: realistic drama, to which the label of "miserabilism" is often applied retrospectively, and cheap comedy, which is far from funny and has a sexist and vulgar content. The reason for the low quality

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films produced in that period of time was usually the inability of many of the directors who had made films during communism to give up the obscure, metaphorical style they had become accustomed to in the 1980s, when censorship had tightened – or, in the case of commercial movies, a poor understanding of what artistic freedom, regained after 1989, actually meant. This ill-adjustment of some of the most talented Romanian directors, such as Mircea Daneliuc or Dan Pița, to the post-communist realities has almost become a commonplace in the few analyses of this period of the history of Romanian cinema. In fact, it explains only to a little extent what happened in the 1990s. This failed departure from the content and practices of communist cinema is, at a closer look, less radical than it might seem. It is astounding, for example, that many of the films released immediately after the revolution of 1989 were in fact abandoned projects from the previous decade, films that had awaited inclusion in the thematic plans of the production studios, or films whose scripts had been rejected or censored during the communist period: Nicolae Mărgineanu's *Undeva, în Est* [*Somewhere in the East*] (1991), George Bușcan's *Tunelul* [*Tunnel*] (1991), Laurențiu Damian's *Drumul câinilor* [*Dogs' Road*] (1992), Mircea Daneliuc's *Tusea și junghiul* [*The Toothless War*] (1992), Elisabeta Bostan's *Telefonul* [*The Phonecall*] (1992), Alexa Visarion's *Vinovatul* [*The Culprit*] (1992), etc. On the other hand, a quick look at the credits of films produced in the early 1990s would lead a connoisseur of Romanian cinema from before 1989 to experience a feeling of *déjà-vu*: the same directors, very much the same screenwriters, and often the same writers whose works were adapted to the screen. It is precisely this continuity this text sets about to discuss.

The main argument of this article is that the Romanian cinema filmed until the late 1990s can be best discussed and understood as the successor of the cinema produced in Romania during the last two decades of communism. This continuity was not necessarily stylistic, although much could be said about the persistence of the aesthetic of the so-called "1970s' generation" in the immediate aftermath of the fall of communism. Rather, there were two entwined phenomena in the 1990s that can be traced retrospectively to the 1970s and even earlier: on the one hand, a peculiar mode of production, and on the other, a peculiar kind of reception for the films that were made in Romania. In both cases, the protagonist was one whose role had been consistently debated in the last half century, in film criticism and in academic studies on cinema, both in Europe and in the United States: the *auteur*. In the 1990s, for about eight years, renowned *auteurs* of Romanian cinema came to decide how films were to be made in Romania. They more or less directly also decided what *types* of films were to be made and what other directors should be encouraged to assert

themselves. At the same time, Romanian film critics in the '90s read the evolution of Romanian cinema using a grid that predicted a clear separation between *auteur* cinema and commercial cinema, promoting the former and promptly signalling the failures of the latter. Perhaps that is why the two aforementioned types of films have remained entrenched in the memory of spectators – miserabilist drama (almost all the *auteurs* who had made films before 1989 also directed at least one film in the first post-communist decade that could be included in this category) and commercial comedy of the likes of *Miss Litoral* [*Miss Seaside*] (1991) or *A doua cădere a Constantinopolului* [*The Second Fall of Constantinople*] (1994). Re-viewed today, the films of this period are much more diverse than this commonplace idea, perpetuated to this day, might appear to suggest. On the other hand, this inherited viewing frame was characterised by a paradox that cannot escape a retrospective gaze: in the years immediately following the fall of communism, during a period in which films were largely appreciated for their truth-telling potential, for their ability to reveal aspects that had been avoided or prohibited by the censorship of the communist era, the distinction between *auteurs* and directors who were not deemed worthy enough of this vague attribute endorsed – in utter disregard for the genuine artistic quality of the films – an anti-communist discourse that was, ironically, a by-product of the infrastructure developed during the communist period. However, in order to see how only part of this anti-communist discourse was validated in the 1990s, two other issues must first be addressed: the institutional system in which films were made in Romania during this period and the role the ambiguous figure of the *auteur* played in the evolution of Romanian cinema.

Production Companies, Film Studios after December 1989 and the Ambiguous Position of the *Auteur* Director

From the point of view of film production, the 1990s appeared to mark a point of departure from the communist period, in terms of the diversified options available to film directors in Romania. The legislation provided for the public financing of films defined as being "of national interest, of special importance for Romanian culture" (Decree-Law no. 80 of February 8, 1990). In addition to this, independent Romanian production companies appeared quite quickly, some of the projects receiving coproduction funding from European or, in some cases, American companies.[1] Still, this diversity is slightly misleading.

[1] An excellent overview of the ways in which Romanian films were financed in the 1990s (as well as in the following decade) can be found in Ioana Uricaru's "Follow the Money.

In reality, most of the Romanian films that were released from 1991 to 1998[2] were produced and financed by state institutions founded in 1990. On the one hand, five autonomous studios, each led by a well-known director, which were called "creation houses" for a short period of time – Alpha (headed by Mircea Daneliuc), Gamma (led by Constantin Vaeni), Star or Star 22 (led by Sergiu Nicolaescu), Profilm (led by Dinu Tănase) and Solaris (led by Dan Pița). On the other hand, a Creation Studio of the Ministry of Culture, led by Lucian Pintilie. In addition to these studios, there was another important institution for the domestic film production – the autonomous Cinerom Company, founded by a government decree in 1991 and headed by well-known figures of Romanian cinema, such as Dinu Tănase or Mircea Daneliuc. The vast majority of the approximatively sixty films made between 1991 and 1998 were products of this infrastructure, created at the beginning of the 1990s. The autonomous Cinerom Company underwent many changes during those years. While it was willing to play a more decisive role, some hybrid forms of financing also emerged. For example, in the mid-1990s, the independent company Filmex, which was founded by Titi Popescu in 1990, coproduced some films made by the Creation Studio of the Ministry of Culture, but also *Această lehamite* [*Fed Up*], a film directed by Mircea Daneliuc.

The output of the five studios was certainly uneven. Gamma made only three films, the last one in 1992. Alpha and Star 22 had produced seven and, respectively, eight films by 1995, when the two studio executives, Mircea Daneliuc and Sergiu Nicolaescu, were removed from office. Profilm managed to make nine films, the last one in 1997. Solaris had the longest and most prolific existence, with fourteen films. Last but not least, the Ministry of Culture's Creative Studio made five films until 1998. The relative importance of these state-funded institutions should not be underestimated, however, in an industry in which the number of films fell dramatically throughout the 1990s, from about ten films a year in the first two years after the studios were established to just two or three films a year towards the end of this period.[3] By comparison, independent Romanian production companies had a rather ephemeral presence in the early 1990s. With the notable exception of Filmex,

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Financing Contemporary Cinema in Romania," in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed. Anikó Imre (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 427-52.

2 The delimitation of this period is made in view of the new legislation that was passed by the government on October 24, 1997. This ordinance stipulated the establishment of the National Cinematography Office and changed the regulations governing film financing. In general, this is the law under which film financing sessions are still organised in Romania today.

3 For comparative figures on Eastern Europe during the same period (which do not include, however, the Romanian film industry), see Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe. The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Films* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 144.

most of them made a film or two before they disappeared. That was the case of the company Tracus-Arte, which produced only the movie *Șobolanii roșii* [*Red Rats*] (1991) directed by Florin Codre, of the company Aldaco, Disim & Astra 22, which produced comedies directed by Mircea Mureșan (*A doua cădere a Constantinopolului* [*The Second Fall of Constantinople*], 1994) and by Cornel Diaconu (*Paradisul în direct* [*Paradise Live*] (1997), of the company Domino Film, which produced only Nae Caranfil's *Asfalt tango* [*Asphalt Tango*] (1997) during this period, and so on.

It should probably come as no surprise that Romanian film production received massive logistical and financial support. The phenomenon was fairly widespread in European cinema. It is interesting, however, that after 1989 this support was patterned in Romania according to a model that had operated for two decades. The organization of production around independent and financially autonomous film studios was based on the old structure of the film industry, first put into practice in July 1972. In that year, in an effort to increase the number of films produced annually, four film studios were established. Although they were subordinated to the Socialist Culture and Education Council, they enjoyed some degree of independence when it came to setting their annual production plans.[4] This was not necessarily an original Romanian model. At different times, corresponding to the major "thaw" periods in various socialist countries, attempts had been made to decentralize film production. Autonomous film units were created (named after the specific terminology in each country of the communist bloc). These worked as more-or-less independent studios, each headed by a director who, in some cases, was a well-known personality in the local film industry. For example, between 1972 and 1983, the director Andrzej Wajda ran one of the seven film units in Poland: the X Film Unit (Zespół Filmowy X), founded in 1972.[5]

From this point of view, there are striking similarities between the evolutions of the various communist cinemas.[6] However, as Petr Szczepanik

[4] The way in which Romanian cinematography was reorganised in 1972 and the hierarchical scheme according to which it functioned at that time were studied in detail by Bogdan-Alexandru Jitea in his doctoral thesis (as yet to be published). See Bogdan-Alexandru Jitea, "Dizidență și conformism în cinematografia regimului Ceaușescu" [Dissidence and Conformism in the Cinema on Ceaușescu Regime] (PhD diss., University of Bucharest, 2012), 54-76. I would like to thank the author here for having kindly made his work available to me.

[5] Marek Haltof, "Film Units" and "X Film Unit," in *Historical Dictionary of Polish Cinema* (Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2007), 54-55, 205.

[6] Bogdan-Alexandru Jitea compares Romanian cinema and Albanian and Yugoslav cinemas, in "Dizidență și conformism în cinematografia regimului Ceaușescu," 61-65, and Dorota Ostrowska, "An Alternative Mode of Film Production: Film Units in Poland after World War Two," in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, ed. Anikó Imre, 453-65.

warns,[7] the most illustrative case of this type of organization, the Polish one, in which the best-known directors led some of these film units from 1955 on, represented the exception rather than the rule. Based on a comparative analysis of the film industries during the communist era, the Polish historian suggests that despite some filmmakers' efforts to set the artistic agenda of the units they were in charge of and to promote particular types of films,[8] the common denominators of these forms of organizing the socialist film industry were: firstly, their pre-eminently hierarchical structure (bureaucratic production, which entailed a centralized management of the tasks, from script selection to supervising shootings in the field); secondly, their pragmatic disciplinary logic (the people who led the units were concerned about meeting the annual production quotas and tried to make sure that the content of the films complied with the regulations, which fostered a climate of self-censorship among directors and writers); and thirdly, their role as cultural mediators (such units housed collaborative projects that involved screenwriters, authors, film directors, etc.). Szczepanik calls this hybrid system, which combined the pragmatic aspects of Hollywood-type productions and centralized decision-making with the imperatives of socialist film production the "State-Socialist Mode of Production."

In Romania, perhaps one of the first attempts to adopt this model dates back almost a decade before the establishment of the four film production companies. In 1964, three "creative units" were set into operation, under the leadership of director Victor Iliu, director and screenwriter Francisc Munteanu and, respectively, screenwriter Petre Sălcudeanu. Each of the three units had to produce a certain number of films per year (five), and it was expected that each unit would develop its own specific vision and rally a set of directors-collaborators around its director's personality.[9] This attempt to reorganize Romanian cinema was short-lived. The stable model that was to guide communist cinema for the better part of the Ceaușescu regime was that of 1972. As mentioned above, the main purpose of this restructuring seems to have been primarily a practical one. It was expected that twenty-five films would be produced annually (a figure that appears obsessively in the mini-reports that Constantin Pivniceru – director of the Bucharest Film Studio since 1971 – published in the *Cinema* magazine, the official mouthpiece that discussed the

[7] *The State-Socialist Mode of Production and the Political History of Production Culture*, in eds. Petr Szczepanik, *Behind the Screen. Inside European Production Cultures,* eds. Patrick Vonderau (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 113-33.

[8] See the examples of Polish units cited by Dorota Ostrowska, for instance, the one led by Wajda, which refused to include directors who did not comply with their agendas, in Ostrowska, "An Alternative Mode of Film Production: Film Units in Poland after World War Two," 457.

[9] See, for example, the *Cinema* magazine, March 1964, 1-2.

problems of Romanian socialist cinema during the communist period). The production efforts had doubled compared to the 1960s, when ten to fifteen films were produced every year. In addition to this, a reform that sounded very much like capitalism was being implemented. In an article by Constantin Pivniceru, in which he explained the principles of this reorganization, the paradoxical nature of this new mode of production was presented as clearly as possible. On the one hand, there would be a relative decentralization (the article discussed "the setting up of film production companies that would have creative and economic management autonomy") and competition incentives would be used ("using the language of the capitalist economy", the author went to great lengths to distance himself from this word). On the other hand, *responsibility* for the quality of the results would be diffused.[10] Whether socialist or not, this new mode of production was operational and was to achieve its targets by the end of the 1970s and over the next decade. Still, the initial efforts the executives of the film production companies had to make in order to reach "the magic number" were almost comical. They took into account, for instance, the two-part feature film *Frații Jderi* [*The Jder Brothers*] (1974) as two stand-alone films or listed the episodes of the TV series they produced as self-standing films. In a first phase, the watchword seems to have been *efficiency*. The aforementioned director of the Bucharest Film Studio noted with great satisfaction in 1975 that the average number of filming days had decreased from 111 in 1971 to 78 in 1974.[11] Towards the end of the 1970s, the focus shifted to *quality*. Once the target of twenty-five films per year was reached, the war of attrition in Romanian cinema focused on quality – a word that meant both conformity with the party line and the official propaganda and the need for professionals in the field to comply with certain artistic standards.

But how did this new way of producing films function from an institutional point of view? Each of the four film production companies had a director with multiple responsibilities, which ranged from the implementation of the annual plan to script selection and budget setting. Because of the very generic role, quite similar to that of a western producer, but acting as an interface between different political authorities, writers, screenwriters and the staff of the film production companies, Peter Szczepanik believes this position was very similar to that of the *dramaturge* – a far from neutral political position, with a traditional mediating role in various cultures of the Central and East European countries.[12] In Romania, these directors usually came from cultural

[10] *Cinema*, April 1972, 48-49.

[11] *Cinema*, April 1975, 4.

[12] Szczepanik, "The State-Socialist Mode of Production and the Political History of Production Culture," 122-24. For instance, Ion Bucheru described his activity in an interview with Florin Mihai in 2009: "'We were looking for topics, reading books, inviting writers for discussions,' says Ion Bucheru. 'I would tell them I was interested in a

fields deemed to be adjacent to the world of cinema. For example, between 1972 and 1974, Casa de Film Unu [Film Production Company 1][13] was headed by the prose writer Alexandru Ivasiuc, while the other executives had worked either as journalists (Eugen Mandric, director of Casa de Film 3 [Film Production Company 3] from 1972 to 1982) or in the audiovisual field (Ion Bucheru, director of Film Production Company 1 from 1974 to 1982, and Corneliu Leu, director of Casa de Film 4 [Film Production Company 4] from 1972 to 1982). Highly influential figures in cinema at that time, they were essentially responsible for the failure or success of every film. Therefore, as of 1974, their name always appeared in the credits of the films they produced in Romania. This responsibility, however, was carefully disseminated from the top to the bottom. A delegate producer (*producător delegat*) was appointed for each film and he oversaw the entire process once a film went into production. A manager (*director*) was also appointed (in charge of the economic and logistical aspects of production). Moreover, each of the film production companies employed several editors for the script selection phase.

Throughout this process, the director was usually the last link in a chain that connected this world of the film intermediaries with that of writers who tried their hand at film scripts as well. As a rule, film production companies first contracted the scripts, then sought directors to stage them. In countless cases, even when a director proposed his own script to a film production company, he was recommended to film an already existing script. This situation had been generated by a phenomenon that was specific to Romanian cinema in communism: the incredible leverage that writers had and their close ties with decision-makers in the world of film, including with the executives of film production companies.[14]

The best illustration of this imbalance of power between directors, the executives of production companies and writers or scriptwriters appears in the diary of director Alexandru Tatos. After finishing the television series *Un august în flăcări* [*August in Flames*] in 1973 (which had also enlisted the collaboration of directors like Dan Pița or Radu Gabrea), Tatos wanted to debut with a feature film, so he chose a script written by the prose writer Ion Băieșu. Corneliu Leu, the leader of Film Production Company 4, and Eugen Mandric,

certain strand of dramaturgy. I would go to the theatre, see plays, have conversations, read synopses," Florin Mihai, "Ceaușescu gave up Steaua for 'The Three Seal Mace'," accessed January 12, 2017, http://jurnalul.ro/scinteia/special/ceausescu-a-renuntat-la-steaua-pentru-buzduganul-cu-treipeceti-522103.html.

13 In Romanian, they were named "case de film," which literally translates to "film houses."

14 The financial incentives for which a writer could decide to turn his literary creation into a script were quite substantial. In the above-quoted interview, Ion Bucheru estimated that, while the monthly wages were about 3,500 lei, the pay for a synopsis was 15,000 lei, while a script that went into production could bring the author 50,000-55,000 lei.

who headed Film Production Company 3, were also interested in that script.[15] The discussions with the film production companies were always carried by Băieșu, who came into conflict with Leu in April 1974. After that, the text was criticized and was eventually rejected.[16] In May 1974, when Dan Pița intervened, Mandric agreed to offer Tatos a script that was already in the portfolio of Film Production Company 3. Later, the director proposed that he should make a feature film after *August in Flames*. For a while, Tatos was in the cards for directing a screened adaptation after Duiliu Zamfirescu, at Film Production Company 4 (*Tănase Scatiu*, which was nonetheless directed by Pița). In November 1974, both Corneliu Leu and Mihnea Gheorghiu (the author of the screenplay for the film adaptation of Zamfirescu's novel) tried to take advantage of Tatos' recently earned reputation as a theatre director, each of them proposing their own play to be mounted on stage. At the end of the same month, Ion Bucheru suggested that he should adapt another text by Băieșu, the novella "38.2 Degrees" (the basis for what would later become the film *Mere roșii* [*Red Apples*]), for Film Production Company 1. The script, written by Băieșu himself, was to be approved in early 1975. Tatos began filming it in August of the same year. As soon as the first sequences were assembled in early September, they were watched by Constantin Stoiciu, the film's delegate producer, who had great reservations because of the ambiguity of the scenes ("Stoiciu saw this material and he immediately got scared," Tatos wrote). After a viewing with Bucheru, who agreed with Stoiciu, Tatos resumed filming. He appeared to be willing, as the diary shows, to re-shoot part of the material. When it was finished, towards the end of the year, *Mere roșii* did pass the screenings at Casa Scânteii with Dumitru Ghișe and Dumitru Popescu (influential cultural officials at that time, since they dictated the fate of cultural products in Romania) and was released on April 19, 1976 – more than two years after Tatos had begun preparing his debut with a feature film.

In Romania, this whole process, which involved several important cultural actors, would usually be interpreted as yet another example of the struggle waged by Romanian directors (or artists in general) against communist censorship. The case of Tatos' debut demonstrates, however, that things were not so simple. On the one hand, in an industry in which writers already had a decisive say when the film production companies were set up, inclusion in the annual plans of this or that executive could depend on the support of a

[15] In order not to multiply the citations unnecessarily, I will summarise here various entries from Tatos' diary from the period 1973 (the beginning year of the entries) to 1976 (the year when Tatos' debut film, *Red Apples*, premiered). Alexandru Tatos, *Pagini de jurnal* [Diary Pages] (Bucharest: Albatros, 1994), 2-160.

[16] Tatos later wrote that the conflict had been sparked by an agreement according to which Băieșu had to be paid as soon as possible; hence, the rush for the script to enter production, see Tatos, *Pagini de jurnal*, 71.

renowned author, who was visible and influential both in the world of culture and in that of politics (Tatos wrote that when Corneliu Leu rejected his script, Ion Băieșu threatened to pay a visit to Dumitru Ghișe, who was vice-president of the Socialist Culture and Education Council).[17] On the other hand, it is obvious that relations with the different gatekeepers in the studio, from the director to the delegated producer, but also with the author of the script entailed a climate of negotiation and compromise. Last but not least, the final form of the film depended to a large extent on the power games played inside the film production companies and on the strategies the directors resorted to in order to see their film premiered.

The lack of institutionalized censorship after 1989 could create the impression that there was only a superficial similarity between the two forms of cinema organization – that of the 1970s-1980s, with the four film production companies, and that of the period 1990-1997, with the five autonomous studios, led by directors. In reality, they had enough features in common that suggested a strong continuity between them. Firstly, the studios set up in 1990 operated according to the same decentralized financial model (with the exception of the Creation Studio led by Lucian Pintilie, which was directly subordinated to the Ministry of Culture), on the basis of an annual plan. Continued funding depended on its fulfilment.[18] Secondly, the form of internal organization of the studios was relatively similar to that existing before 1989 – there were still delegated directors and producers responsible for each individual film. Moreover, in the case of the studio headed by Sergiu Nicolaescu, the old position of editor was recycled under the title of adviser (directors Șerban Marinescu and Iulian Mihu occupied this position at Star 22 in 1990).[19] In some cases, the position of delegated producer was occupied by a person who had worked for the film production companies before 1989. This was the case of Vily Auerbach. He had been delegated producer at Film Production Company 4 and had collaborated with Dan Pița on some of the films the latter had made in the 1980s (*Passo Doble*, 1985, and *Rochia albă de dantelă* [*The White Lace Dress*], 1989). Auerbach resumed this position at the Solaris studio, where he oversaw the production of most of Pița's post-December films and for several other films produced at this studio (e.g. *Vinovatul* [*The Culprit*], *Undeva, în Est* [*Somewhere in the East*], *Somnul insulei* [*The Sleep of the Island*].[20] Thirdly, at

[17] Tatos, *Pagini de jurnal*, 45.

[18] Alexandru Petria, *Convorbiri cu Mircea Daneliuc* [Conversations with Mircea Danieliuc] (Iași: Adenium, 2013), 164-65.

[19] *Noul Cinema*, January 1991, 8.

[20] In general, film critics overlooked the importance of the delegated producer during the premieres of most films released before 1998. One exception was Magda Mihăilescu's review of Mihnea Columbeanu's film, *Neînvinsă-i dragostea* [Undefeated is the Love] (1994), published in *Adevărul.* Mihăilescu lamented the fact that Mircea Daneliuc had abandoned Columbeanu and his debut film in the hands of Haralambie Boroș, a long-retired director, see Magda Mihăilescu, "Neînvinsă-i dragostea. Nu și rușinea"

least in a first phase, the studios used the scripts of some of the people who had written for the big screen even before 1989. These were largely projects that had not been included in the film production companies' plans in the last decade of communism. For example, Ion Băieșu signed the scripts for *Harababura* [*The Turmoil*] (1991) and *Vinovatul* [*The Culprit*] and enjoyed a sort of *remake* of "38.2 Degrees" with Lucian Pintilie's *Balanța* [*The Oak*] (1992), to which he contributed as a writer. Eventually, the old function of cultural mediator that the executives of the film production companies had exercised was now taken over by the directors, who seemed to wield discretionary powers in this position. Not only did three of them – Mircea Daneliuc, Sergiu Nicolaescu and Dan Pița – produce absolutely all of their films until 1998 at the studios they were in charge of, but the fate of all the films they produced ultimately depended on them. Such was the case of Sergiu Nicolaescu, who, following a conflict with the director Nicolae Corjos, replaced him with Mircea Plângău for *Liceenii în alertă* [*High School Alert*] (1993). In the late 1980s Plângău had been assistant director or even second director in some of Nicolaescu's films. Another example was that of Mircea Daneliuc, who – also because of a fall-out – replaced Octav Brânzei with Dan Mironescu during filming *Dragoste și apă caldă* [*Love and Warm Water*] (1993). Sometimes, the studio leader could decide what kind of film to entrust to a director. Of all the scripts that Mihnea Columbeanu had proposed to Mircea Daneliuc, the latter chose *Neînvinsă-i dragostea* [*Undefeated Love*] (1994), on a subject that suited Daneliuc rather than the debutante director, as the film critics noticed at the time of the film's premiere.

We have no document for this period similar to Tatos' diary which would be able to capture the ambiguous relations between the leaders of the five studios and the directors who filmed during this decade. Still, at least two conclusions emerge if instead of examining the films produced before 1998 in chronological order, we regroup them by studio. On the one hand, the directors acting as studio executives often supported their generation colleagues (for example, Dan Pița produced two films for Mircea Veroiu, who had returned from France in 1993, at the Solaris Studio, while Lucian Pintilie produced, at the Creation Studio of the Ministry of Culture, the documentary *University Square: Romania* and two feature films for Stere Gulea). On the other hand, the debuts – as few as they were in this period – were entrusted to directors who had worked on the sets of Buftea before 1989, but had not yet signed a feature film of their own (Ion Gostin, Mircea Plângău, Mihnea Columbeanu), and were not usually followed by a second film.[21] Hence, the disproportionate ratio

[Undefeated is the Love, not the Shame], *Adevărul*, August 27, 1994, accessed on January 12, 2017, http://aarc.ro/articol/neinvinsa-i-dragostea.-nu-si-rusinea.

[21] A special case, which simply confirms the power wielded by the studio directors at that time, is *Mica publicitate* [*Classified Adds*] (1993), an *omnibus* authored by Bogdan-Cristian Drăgan, Constantin Rădoaca, Cristina Ionescu and Flavia Rotaru, consisting of

between the substantial number of films directed by renowned auteurs, who had made a name for themselves in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the few films signed by debutants. This ratio was partially balanced only by the debuts encouraged by the independent production company Filmex. Therefore, one might say that the first decade after the fall of communism was a true decade of auteurs, a decade in which they also got to have real institutional power and to be present on screens with most of the films produced during this period.

A Discreet *Auteur* Politics

But why did this situation arise? Why did Romanian cinema in the early 1990s turn towards auteurs who had peaked two decades earlier, instead of, for instance, focusing on debuts? A simple answer would be a certain impulse to recuperate what was valuable. Many of the directors who made films after 1990 had been prevented from directing or had been harassed by the communist authorities whenever they managed to film. Some of them (Radu Gabrea, Lucian Pintilie, Mircea Veroiu) had left the country for this reason. However, this canonization of some of the Romanian directors had its own history. Its origins lay in the late 1960s and in the early 1970s, when Romanian film critics began to establish a grid of interpretation that separated auteur directors from directors who were considered, at best, decent professionals.

As seen above, the director's position in the communist production system was a relatively precarious one. Caught up in the power games between writers and party line managers of the film industry (to whom were added the leaders of the film production companies in 1972), a director had to permanently renegotiate his status and often had limited control over the finite form in which a film came out on screens. In a strict sense, he was not the author of his own film, both because the script he filmed often did not belong to him, and because the film could be altered in countless ways, not only during production (for example, through the intervention of the film production company's leader), but also afterwards, when the film came to be seen by the leading members of the Socialist Culture and Education Council.

And yet, in the late 1960s, the figure of the auteur director began to gain shape in Romanian cinema as well. Once again, this phenomenon was not specific to Romanian culture. For example, in a study on auteur cinema in the Soviet Union in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, Eugénie Zvonkine shows that many texts eulogising the figure of the auteur director were published at a time when films such as Mikhail Kalatozov's *Letyat zhuravli* [*The Cranes Are*

films made by Dan Piţa's students from the (then) Bucharest Academy of Theatre and Film.

Flying] (1957) or Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivanovo detstvo* [*Ivan's Childhood]* (1962) received international recognition, in an effort to better delineate the role and status of the director in the film industry, more particularly, in his relationship with the writer.[22] As Zvonkine also suggests, this phenomenon had several important aspects, some related to film sociology (for example, the way in which the profession of director was differentiated from the somewhat more technical professions in the industry – with the implicit suggestion that it should be adequately remunerated), and others to film reception. In this text, I will only deal with the latter aspect, examining how the figure of the auteur director was represented in the pages of the main film publication in the communist period, the *Cinema* magazine.

In this case, of course, there is a risk of only partially describing the magnitude of this phenomenon. Most Romanian newspapers and magazines housed sections dedicated to films at that time. However, there are at least two reasons why *Cinema* can be used as a starting point in such an investigation. On the one hand, those who wrote in the pages of this monthly publication with a great circulation were not only its editors (Ecaterina Oproiu, editor-in-chief of the magazine from 1965 to 1989, Alice Mănoiu, Eva Sârbu, D.I. Suchianu, Mircea Alexandrescu, Valerian Sava), but also directors (the most frequent names were Radu Gabrea and Lucian Pintilie), screenwriters or other cinema personalities of that period. Each of the magazine's issues launched thematic surveys related to the state of cinema, capturing the evolution of the film industry in Romania. On the other hand, at the end of the 1960s, the magazine seems to have picked up a reputation for its insistence that the paternity of the film belonged to the director. Thus, at a meeting convened by Valerian Sava, on the specific features of the national film schools, production designer Giulio Tincu, who had worked with director Liviu Ciulei, gave a more or less serious answer to one of the surveys: "The critics and especially some of the reviewers of the *Cinema* magazine champion the idea that the director is the film's unique author and take this opportunity to emphasize it over and over again."[23]

One might suspect at first sight that the reference to the auteur director in the pages of *Cinema* reflected at least some of the debates on the status of the author in western film magazines, such as *Cahiers du Cinéma* or *Screen*. In reality, there were few, if any, theoretical references to the Western critics' positions on the idea of auteur. The debate in the pages of *Cinema* magazine (if we can call it that) was a stagnating debate. While in the late 1960s, the notion of the "author" had been detailed from a Marxist perspective and redefined from a structuralist standpoint (see, for example, the well-known work of Peter

[22] Eugénie Zvonkine, "*Auteur* Cinema during the Thaw and Stagnation," in *A Companion to Russian Cinema*, ed. Birgit Beumers (Malden: Willey Blackwell, 2016), 178-201.

[23] *Cinema*, February 1967, 2.

Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, published in 1969), and critiqued as a residue of romantic aesthetics (see, for example, Edward Buscombe's text "Ideas of Authorship," published in *Screen* in 1973),[24] Romanian articles that defended the director as the author of the film only occasionally mentioned the critics who wrote for *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The reference of choice remained the classical article of Alexandre Astruc, "Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde. La caméra-stylo", published in 1948. The debate was not very wide-ranging as only two issues were endlessly recycled: *why* should the director be the ultimate author of the film and what are those *characteristics* that separate an auteur director from a director with technical skills. None of those efforts to define the auteur director went beyond the distinctions outlined by Jean Mitry in a theoretical text from his *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma*, published in 1963.[25] In the chapter entitled "Cinéma et creation", Mitry at first defined the author from an institutional perspective. In an industrial process that also comprised producers, screenwriters, actors and the technical team that took part in the film-making process, the author was regarded as the one who prepared the final shooting script (*découpage*), i.e., he was in charge of translating a written text into images (whether this was the director or not). Mitry then returned to a viewpoint that was closer to the theoretical stances of the critics from the *Cahiers du Cinéma*: the author of a film is the one who imposes his creative vision (*sa volonté creatrice*) on the film and, since that vision exceeded mere craftsmanship, that individual had to be the director. It was the director who imprinted the defining form and style of a film.[26] A similar symbolical setback, albeit one caused by completely different circumstances (the pragmatic characteristics of the film industry to the somewhat vaguer conceptualisation of an auteur director who was both a total artist and a firm believer in form and style), could also be noticed from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, when *Cinema* hosted debates on the "auteur" in its pages.

It should be noted that the issues of *Cinema* were dedicated not so much to a theory of the auteur as to a politics of the auteur. The distinction was also made in the West in the early 1970s, when the concept of *auteur* was critically reassessed in cinema. Just like François Truffaut and his colleagues at the *Cahiers du Cinéma* promoted the idea of auteur in order to refute a certain kind of French cinema, too dependent on the script, too indebted to literature (see

[24] Edward Buscombe, "Ideas of Authorship," in *Theories of Authorship. A Reader*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 22-34.

[25] Moreover, in a short article examining the notion of "(film) *auteur*", which launched the column entitled "Film Dictionary" in *Cinema* in 1978, at a time when this magazine no longer published debates on authorship, George Littera actually quoted one of Mitry's phrases from the end of "Cinéma et creation," according to which the future of cinema lay in the hands of *auteurs.*

[26] Jean Mitry, *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2001), 17-28.

Truffaut's famous phrase "le cinéma de papa"), and to identify exemplary trends in the works of several French (Jean Cocteau, Robert Bresson) or American directors (Samuel Fuller, Nicholas Ray), or Andrew Sarris used his auteur theory to show that, from the point of view of formal and conceptual unity, the American films produced in studios could compete at any time with European art films, in Romania, the concept of *auteur* was used both for its aesthetic implications and for its pragmatic and political role. To suggest that someone was not an auteur, that his films failed to translate a unified formal or aesthetic vision, was sometimes the only way to criticize a director who was subservient to the regime or who closely followed the directives of communist power. On the other hand, references to "auteur films" should be seen in context as an attempt to change the discussion framework and to delineate, within the communist film industry, an autonomous area generically identified with art films.

To that end, it would be worth reading two special themed issues of *Cinema* (published one year apart, in 1967 and 1968) in juxtaposition. The first one, entitled "Why Are Art Cinemas Needed?", advocated the organization and financial support of cinemas in which art films should mainly be screened, on the model of those *cinémas d'art et d'essai* established in France in the 1950s. The other, bearing the title "Auteur Films: Tomorrow's Films?", was also the only issue dedicated to this subject by the editors of *Cinema.* It contains, in addition to a substantial article signed by Călin Căliman, only two mini-monographs of so-called "difficult" directors, Robert Bresson and Jerzy Skolimowski. What this parallel reading could demonstrate is that references to auteur films did not appear in a vacuum and did not concern solely aesthetic issues. This is seen in the group of texts on art cinemas. One by one, all the people who wrote on this subject, be they directors, screenwriters or academic scholars, said that film distribution should also take into account the well-read spectators, even if they were fewer in number. In the words of the Marxist aesthetics theorist Marcel Breazu, "it's only natural, therefore, that there should be a movie theatre for those who feel the need for higher artistic achievements – just like the Concert Hall of the Athenaeum caters for the needs of the classical chamber music lovers."[27] Art films should satisfy these refined tastes which, according to those interviewed by the magazine, could be seen recently in Romania, confirming a trend that was visible in other European countries as well. The plea for art cinema theatres implied that there was a need for art films. As director Lucian Pintilie stated, at least 2% of the 3,000 films produced annually in the world "should answer the organic needs of an audience that has evolved and that invests new meanings in film watching."[28]

[27] *Cinema*, November 1967, iii.
[28] *Cinema*, November 1967, iii.

Published a year later, Călin Căliman's article rounded off these viewpoints to some extent. The film critic argued that there was still no genuine auteur film in Romanian cinema: Romanian filmmakers "have so far failed to create [...] a tradition, or at least a school of auteur films." Căliman did not necessarily explain or define what an auteur film was (the heading of the section, for example, implicitly almost accused the Bucharest Film Studio of promoting directors "with an academic degree," but not directors who "have something to say"). Still, what he meant by an auteur can be inferred from the examples of directors he chose – Chaplin, Eisenstein, Clair, Skolimowski, Bresson, Buñuel, Fellini, and Godard (whom Căliman considered to be the paragon of auteur directors).[29] This text is nonetheless remarkable because it also provided counter-examples from Romanian cinema: Ion Popescu-Gopo, for example, was seen as a simple author of gags, not as an authentic auteur, while Francisc Munteanu was denied this title despite the fact that he wrote the scripts for his own films (for comparison, Căliman claimed that Alain Resnais was an auteur even though he made films based on the scripts of others). What was the distinguishing criterion? Munteanu's films, the critic wrote, lacked artistic personality, they had "no individualizing stylistic feature". In the subtext, like any manifesto based on an auteur politics, the article suggests that the problem also derived from a lack of generational replenishment – for 10-12 years, Căliman wrote, no new directors had emerged. Therefore, there were very few films that could form an alternative canon of auteur films: the examples he mentioned were *Duminică la ora 6* [*Sunday at 6 O'Clock*] (1966) by Lucian Pintilie and *Meandre* [*Meanders*] (1967) by Mircea Săucan.

Auteurs were the great absentees of this period. Their absence was compensated by a very small number of Romanian films that were beginning to acquire a quasi-canonical status (*Moara cu noroc* [*The Mill of Good Luck*], 1957, *Pădurea spânzuraților* [*The Forest of the Hanged*], 1965), and by an ideal profile of the auteur director compiled from examples like the ones mentioned in Căliman's text: a few classical directors – including, more or less out of convenience, a Soviet director – and the illustrious representatives of modern cinema. (One could reconstruct a history of this alternative canon that emerges from the texts published in the *Cinema* magazine always in this form: as a series of examples, featuring the names of Godard, Bresson, Antonioni, Fellini or Resnais. Obviously, the models to which Romanian filmmaking was supposed to aspire were chronologically and cautiously inserted at the tail of the platoon.) The highly desirable local version of the auteur director was often described as a *total artist*, whose qualifications exceeded those of a simple professional. In 1971, Florian Potra (then a counselor of the National Film Council), highlighted the difference between directors as "technicians" and directors as "artists". He

[29] *Cinema*, March 1968, 4-5.

noted the absence of the latter: "We don't have any artist-directors yet or... they have not truly asserted themselves."[30] The artist-director's potential space for expression was that of art cinema. His appearance was long awaited in a cinematographic world marked, in the opinion of many of the contributors to the *Cinema* magazine, by a definitive rift between commercial and artistic filmmaking. Hence, the repeated efforts to distinguish between mainstream films and films defined by authenticity and artistry.

Two further aspects completed the profile of the auteur director in the timeframe discussed here. Sometime between 1965 and 1975, the claim that the director was ultimately the author of a film became a true mantra in the pages of the *Cinema* magazine. It was not only the directors (from Manole Marcus to Mircea Mureșan, or from Lucian Bratu to Sergiu Nicolaescu) who said that, but also the writers who wrote the scripts (Ion Băieșu, Aurel Baranga) or those responsible for the party line in cinematography, such as Dumitru Ghișe.[31] This new status of the director was, however, fraught with problems. Compared to the early 1960s, when emphasis was laid on the screenwriter-director couple (as seen above, this reflected more accurately the reality of the Romanian film industry), the responsibility for the quality and ideological nuances of a film began to shift towards the director. At a round table organized in 1965, the writer Ion Băieșu said somewhat ingenuously:

> "I used to think that the main author of a film is the screenwriter. Now I think the director has the final say. [...] In other words, I propose that the criterion of personal responsibility should be applied. The director, the head of the group, the general manager – they all are responsible for the film, it is on their shoulders that the entire responsibility for the achievement of the respective work falls. And of these three, the responsibility for the film in question rests, I think, with the director."[32]

Romanian auteurism therefore camouflaged – more or less deliberately – the real power dynamics of the domestic filmmaking business. On the other hand, the concept of "auteur" was often associated with another watchword of that period: the "national film school". Depending on what a particular

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[30] *Cinema*, September 1971, 10. This is just one of the many examples in which a director was included in the category of the ambiguously defined artist. For example, see the intervention of the scenographer Ion Oroveanu at one of the round tables discussing the specific features of national film schools, *Cinema*, February 1967, 3: "Since I share the idea that the film is an author's work and that the director is the sole author, I believe that the director can actually become an author provided he collaborates very well with the other creative factors involved. A film director must be very well informed about art in general, about architecture in particular, about scenography in particular, he must be very well informed about literature in general and about dramaturgy in general. Being a unique author means having all these qualities."

[31] See his interview in *Cinema*, December 1972, 3-4.

[32] *Cinema*, September 1965, 2.

commentator emphasized (the national component or the idea of a school), the notion of a "national film school" became the equivalent either of a professional film industry, in which there were both good technicians and auteur directors, or of a cinematography whose qualities would indirectly reflect the national specificity. The common denominator was the same in both cases: the need for an international recognition of Romanian cinema (on the model of the famous Polish and Czechoslovak "schools", well appreciated at Western festivals in the 1950s and 1960s). This need was simply exacerbated by the prize obtained by Liviu Ciulei's film *The Forest of the Hanged* at the Cannes Festival in 1965.

Chronologically, all these positions in favor of the director as the sole or total author of the film (and, implicitly, in favor of an art cinema) were recorded in the *Cinema* magazine *before* the emergence of a generation of Romanian directors who could at least partially correspond to the criteria promoted by this auteur politics.[33] By the time this generation began to stand out with a series of very good debuts (from the *Nunta de piatră* [*The Stone Wedding],* 1973, to the *Cursa* [*The Drive*], 1975, and *Mere roșii* [*Red Apples],* 1976), the terms of the discussion had already changed, no doubt under the pressure of official directives.

And then, how could one identify an auteur director in a throng of mediocre directors at a time when key terms like "everyday film," "national specificity," "political film," and "national film epic" seemed to become almost mandatory? Naturally, by resorting to the vocabulary specific to the auteur theory, yet without mentioning its central concept, or by claiming that the terms sanctioned by the regime's propaganda could be subsumed to the auteur theory; the "national specificity," for example, could very well become a "national style".[34] The style, the directorial vision, and the film genre thus became the criteria (and the phrases) by which a film that disregarded the usual patterns of communist cinema was recognized. What is problematic, however, is the form that this criticism took when it adopted a vocabulary, but not a method. Reading the reviews of the films of auteur directors that were published the *Cinema* magazine from the early 1970s to the early 1980s, one cannot help but be struck by both the strenuous rhetoric that was used and by the almost generalized

[33] However problematic, the term "generation" is relevant in this case from at least two points of view: the filmmakers who became very active at the beginning of the 1970s (and who made the largest number of films in the period 1990-1998) belonged to the same biological generation – they were all born either in the late 1930s, or in the first half of the next decade – and graduated the "I. L. Caragiale" Institute of Theatrical Arts and Cinematography in the same period, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

[34] See, for example, the way in which the critic Eva Sârbu described the two segments of the 1973 film *Nunta de piatră* [*The Stone Wedding*]: "not only do they attest Piţa's style, Veroiu's style, the style of the operator Iosif Demian or that of the scenographers Radu Boruzescu and Helmuth Stürmer, but all these styles are harmoniously entwined, leaving an indelible mark on the whole national film-making style," *Cinema*, January 1975, 5.

absence of an in-depth formal analysis of the film under discussion. To give an example: in an attempt to sum up the style of Mircea Veroiu while glossing over his film *Dincolo de pod* [*Beyond the Bridge*] (1976), film critic Eva Sârbu identified the following components: "Logic. Clarity. Detachment. Geometry of feelings. Sobriety."[35] Another example: the critic Mircea Alexandrescu, in an appreciative review of Mircea Daneliuc's film *Ediție specială* [*Special Issue*] (1978), describes the latter as "a director of a special nature, who *sees* the narrative destined for the screen through those elements that make the cinematic argument prevail, a director who *feels* the depth and volume of the cinematic framework."[36] Even in the case of more modest films made by the directors of this generation, the argument of style, of the artist with a vision of his own, was invoked to rescue the work from averageness. From this point of view, the *Cinema* magazine had an extremely important role in defining the phrase "the 1970s' generation" and in promoting the films of the directors who belonged to it. But what was the reverse of this discreet auteur politics? On the one hand, the establishment of imprecise distinctions between a good film and, say, a mediocre film – made by an auteur director. On the other hand, a rejection of the idea of commercial or genre films. Even though they also made such films themselves, directors like Mircea Veroiu and Dan Pița were appreciated for their auteur productions in the pages of the *Cinema* magazine, while Sergiu Nicolaescu was dismissed as the maker of genre films by definition.

Auteurism Old and New: *Noul Cinema*

On February 4, 1993, the magazine *Noul Cinema [New Cinema]* organized a round table to discuss the films that were made during post-communism in Romania, in an attempt to define the trends that were beginning to take shape in Romanian cinema.[37] The editors of the magazine (the former *Cinema* had changed its name in 1990 and its new editor-in-chief, appointed in 1992, was Adina Darian) and film critics from other Romanian publications (*România liberă*, *Contemporanul*, the Armenian minority's magazine *Nor Ghiank*) took part in the debate. What everyone experienced was a sense that something new was happening in Romanian cinema. At the end of the meeting, Adina Darian literally suggested that the "new wave in Romanian cinema" was beginning to be appreciated at an international level as well (for instance, in the previous year, Dan Pița's *Hotel de lux* [*Luxury Hotel*] had won the Silver Lion in Venice and Mircea Daneliuc's *Patul conjugal* [*The Conjugal Bed*] had been

[35] *Cinema*, February 1976, 7.
[36] *Cinema*, March 1978, 23; the emphasis belongs to the author of the review.
[37] *Noul Cinema*, March 1993, 4-5.

included in the Berlin Film Festival at the beginning of 1993). The main focus was on auteur films, and Dana Duma (deputy editor-in-chief of *Noul Cinema*) stated at one point that the purpose of film criticism was precisely to be a "trend-setting criticism" for this segment of cinema ("For three years now, however, *Noul Cinema* has been championing auteur films and setting the trends"). The critics did not agree, on this occasion, on the defining feature that set the films newly made by Pintilie, Pița, and Daneliuc apart from their pre-1989 productions. Mircea Alexandrescu believed it was the courage to tackle uncomfortable subjects, prohibited during the communist regime. Dana Duma claimed it was a more direct language and realistic representation. In the first part of the discussion, the critics failed to see eye to eye as regards the value of such projects in comparison with the more well-known films those directors had made in the communist regime. For instance, the minutes of the meeting mention a heated exchange between Sergiu Stelian (*Nor Ghiank*), Mircea Alexandrescu and Adina Darian, in which Stelian claimed that the new films of well-known authors (with the exception of those made by Mircea Daneliuc) did not rise to the standards of films produced before 1989: some exhibited a penchant for commercial filmmaking (*Balanța* [*The Oak*]), while others employed obsolete filmmaking strategies, such as the use of parable in *Hotel de lux* [*Luxury Hotel*].

However inconclusive, this brief conversation between critics nevertheless contains the main positions adopted by the Romanian film critics in the early 1990s in relation to the domestic film production. On the one hand, art cinema and auteur films were privileged. Commercial films were relegated to a somewhat inferior position and no "trend-setting critics" took them into account. With few exceptions, to which I will return, the very idea of "auteur" was never problematized. The films of the consecrated auteurs were analyzed either from a political and ideological viewpoint (in general anti-communist), or from the perspective of the continuity of a certain artistic view of the auteur director who made them. Even though they were marred by formal problems or by a faulty directorial conception, they were seen as either "necessary" (*Noul Cinema* frequently applied this label to films that focused on the communist past or its ramifications in the present), or as "slices of life," evincing a new type of realism (of course, also prohibited during the communist period). What critics almost completely failed to do was to engage in a lucid analysis (easier to do retrospectively, without a doubt) of how the content of this new films decomposed and reversed the meaning of the generic films produced during communism. Certainly, a disavowal of the almost mandatory topics of communist cinema was to be expected; equally, tackling the violence and injustices that had happened during communism was somewhat predictable. However, it is more difficult to explain the grimness of the films made after 1989 – which reversed the maudlin and conventional optimism of the films

produced in the last decade of communism, rejected the solidarity between different social classes or categories, and projected a world in which the elites were isolated and threatened, while the masses (a negative reflection on the working class in the films of the communist era) were pictured as driven by an irrational and unpredictable violence. All in all, the new films conveyed a pessimistic and conservative view on history that was staunchly anti-communist but ignored the fact that such cultural products continued to be made in a centralized institutional, state-financed system. Of course, the institutional system in which the new films were produced was almost invisible in the reviews written by film critics during this period. By and large, the idea they advanced was that a film had in principle two authors, a *de facto* one (the director) and an associated one (the writer whose text was screened).

This local form of auteurism gained shape, as suggested by Dana Duma at the above-mentioned round table, mainly at the *Cinema* magazine. This became *Noul Cinema* in 1990. The reasons were not hard to suspect: the new editorial team, led by Adina Darian, consisted mostly of critics who had started writing for *Cinema* in the early 1970s, at a time when the magazine was fighting a tough war to impose auteur directors and to support the films of the "1970s' generation". What could not be said and written overtly in those years became, in a way, the magazine's official policy after the revolution.

The magazine did not include any theoretical debates on the fate of the concept of "auteur" in the West. The auteur simply existed. A film exhibited the trademark features of an auteur or did not. However, the context in which this theoretical construct reappeared, almost unchanged, was different this time. While in the late 1960s the auteur seemed a definitive, albeit scarce, presence in the landscape of the film industry, at the time of the revolution of 1989 he was almost an endangered species. Since the late 1980s, the *Cinema* magazine had published worrying reports about the fate of European cinema (especially art film), about the ever-decreasing number of cinema-going spectators, and about the invasion of American commercial cinema. Those reports suspiciously reflected the rhetoric of the Cold War. In the early 1990s, in the context of the negotiations around the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), negotiations in which cultural goods (including films) became a real object of contention, the state of siege afflicting European art films risked becoming permanent. In any case, this is the picture pained by the articles on the subject in *Noul Cinema*. For this reason, as described in the pages of the magazine, the status of commercial films was rather problematic: while they had previously been regarded as easy entertainment, in opposition to authentic, art cinema, they had gradually invaded the cinemas and offered a nefarious model for the domestic production of genre films. At the same time, auteurs from Eastern Europe were once again in vogue in the festival circuit for a few years. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, films by Russian directors such as Vitali Kanevsky

or Pavel Lungin (made in the "thaw" climate of perestroika) won major awards in Cannes or Berlin. So did films from the former Soviet bloc (for instance, Ryszard Bugajski's *Przesłuchanie* [*Interrogation*], filmed in 1982, but released in cinemas and at Cannes only after the fall of communism in Poland). Some Romanian directors enjoyed the same appreciation immediately after 1989, especially if they also had a reputation for dissent during communism. For example, Lucian Pintilie's *Balanța* was included in the official selection at Cannes before it was finished. These circumstances fostered the reinstatement of auteurism in domestic film criticism in a form that was practically synonymous with that of the 1960s and 1970s, showing the same suspicion against genre/ commercial films and the same – not very subtly disguised – ambition for the international recognition of Romanian auteur films.

While it was ungrounded in theory, how did this tendency of the critics writing for *Noul Cinema* to place auteur films above all else? First, auteurism provided them with a grid for the overall interpretation of the evolution of cinema. Films or passing trends were reduced to the lowest common denominator. In this sense, Adina Darian noticed, in a review of the film *Basic Instinct*, that it marked a "commercialization of auteur films"[38] (bearing in mind the evolution, up to that time, of the director, Paul Verhoeven). Moreover, in the report from the Venice Film Festival, Darian stated that *Hotel de lux* [Luxury Hotel] was awarded the prize in a year when the jury rewarded mostly auteur films.[39] Film festivals with international prestige represented the reference point – they made visible the trends and revealed to what degree Romanian auteur films were aligned with European or global ones. Occasionally, the comparisons between the Romanian and the foreign auteurs betrayed a frustration reminiscent of the debates from the 1960s and 1970s related to the "national film school". In a report from the Berlin Film Festival, Darian lamented the fact that the films competing that year (*Hikarigoke* by Kei Kumai, or *Gas Food Lodging* by Allison Anders) could very well have been replaced with extremely similar Romanian productions, such as *A unsprezecea poruncă* [*The 11th Commandment*] by Mircea Daneliuc and *Înnebunesc și-mi pare rău* [*I'm Going Crazy and I'm Sorry*] by Jon Gostin.

The reviews of Romanian films employed a very subtle double standard. The films of the newcomers, or those of the directors who were not hailed as auteurs, received serious reviews which pointed out their shortcomings or possible influences, while auteur films were appreciated for their unembellished representation of the Romanian transition and for conveying the personal vision of the film director at a time when "realism" in film was vaguely endorsed. To take an example: Dan Mironescu's debut *Dragoste și apă caldă* [*Love and*

[38] *Noul Cinema*, October 1992, 20.
[39] *Noul Cinema*, October 1992, 5.

Warm Water] was seen to "oscillate between a clumsy simulation of *ciné-vérité* and the observance of 'swell' close-up reminiscent of 'classical' melodrama – which was seduced and abandoned, but with a lot of the 'everyday connotations'". It was also critiqued for failing to overcome "bad taste verism."[40] These commentaries could also apply, to a greater or lesser extent, to many of the films made by renowned directors like Dan Pița and Mircea Daneliuc in the same period of time. However, the authors were not criticized in such harsh terms in *Noul Cinema* until the second part of the 1990s, when Romanian cinema seemed to be facing a serious crisis and only two or three films were produced a year. In the first part of the decade, the greatest sin that an auteur could commit was that of not living up to the status that he had once gained in the eyes of critics. In Dana Duma's positive review of *Vulpe vânător* [*Fox: Hunter*] by Stere Gulea, this film "with very good realistic observations" appeared to have only one drawback: that of not being as good as *Morometii* [*The Moromete Family*], Gulea's previous film from 1987 ("The director has made an honest, well-told film, with memorable passages. But its many qualities lack something that prevents *Fox: Hunter* from being a top title of his filmography, and that would be: the auteur's seal, so overpowering in *The Moromete Family*").[41] In this landscape dominated by authors and directors who lacked the necessary attributes to fit into this category, there was only one intermediate figure: the professional director. He usually made genre films or films with a certain Hollywood look. The debut films of Nae Caranfil and Radu Mihăileanu were appended this label of professionalism. Seen through this lens of interpretation, commercial cinema did not even exist. Compared to most commercial films that appeared then, the diagnosis was unfortunately correct, but it relied on the same authentic art film versus easy entertainment film dichotomy, which did not even take into account the possibility of a professionally made commercial film.

One might ask, how widespread was this critical paradigm in the 1990s? The answer could come only after a thorough analysis of all the publications that had film columns. But it is enough to browse the periodicals of those years to notice how rare were the positions against the "auteur" idea and, implicitly, against the film genres embraced by the Romanian auteurs after 1989. In a by now famous article entitled "On a Cinema that Does Not Exist", published in the newspaper *Dilema* in 1993, the film critic Alex. Leo Șerban maliciously attacked the auteur pretenses of the prototypal Romanian film director ("he usually wants to be a kind of Bergman and Tarkovsky, and to boast some

[40] See Irina Coroiu's review of this film in *Noul Cinema*, June 1993, 4.
[41] *Noul Cinema*, January 1994, 5.

features of Fellini on top of that").[42] There is another, less well-known text by Valerian Sava, published in *Noul Cinema* under the title "Our Authors, 'Almost Total'," that suggested it was time to debunk the term of "auteur". Sava stated that

> "The best course of action in discussing auteur films would be, for us, to relativize the notion, to disburden it of its messianic connotations. We do have, in Romanian cinema, 'proper' auteur films, but one of our dismal tendencies, over the decades, has been to deceive ourselves with labels that we have borrowed uncritically or manufactured ad-hoc, automatically hailing them as absolute priorities, marked by the self-sufficiency that labels always entail."[43]

Sava also wrote about the importance of a more personal cinema, more detached from literary subjects. But these were, it seems, exceptions. There were also no attempts to take this label of "auteur" seriously, to follow its implications through, to conduct an analysis of the plot and style of auteur films, at a time when cinematographic style and vision were still the criteria that defined Romanian art films. Instead of thorough analysis, minor distinctions were made between "good" realism (which was occasionally placed in the lineage of Italian neo-realism) and "bad" realism (judged morally or intuitively and usually approximated by the term "verism"). Once again, the dividing line between the first type of realism from the second was usually identical to the superficially constructed boundary between auteur films (realism with artistic pretensions) and films that did not warrant such a characterization. The term "miserabilism" – the equivalent of "bad" realism – was very rarely used both in *Noul Cinema* and in the "rival" magazine, *Pro Cinema* (published since 1995). Most likely a construct of the 2000s, this term was to define retrospectively both types of films.

Conclusion: Whose Anticommunism?

"Romanian directors […] can only conceive of themselves as total authors", Alex. Leo Șerban wrote in "On a Cinema that Does Not Exist", by way of a partial conclusion to his retrospective overview of Romanian films produced before 1993.[44] This sentence bravely captured the illusions that fueled Romanian cinema at that time. Since then, another version of the history of post-1989 cinema began to circulate, claiming that auteur directors played the

[42] Alex. Leo Șerban, "Despre un cinema care nu există" [On a Cinema that Does Not Exist], in *4 decenii, 3 ani și 2 luni cu filmul românesc* [4 Decades, 3 Years, and 2 Months with the Romanian Cinema] (Iași: Polirom, 2009), 17.

[43] *Noul Cinema*, September 1991, 10.

[44] Șerban, "Despre un cinema care nu există," 19; the emphasis belongs to Șerban.

somewhat dramatic role of ill-adjusted artists who no longer understood the times in which they lived and made art to the best of their knowledge and abilities.

If we take into account the way in which Romanian cinema was reorganized immediately after the revolution and the intellectual climate in which auteur films were received, this narrative is rather fallacious. Never before had the auteurs who achieved prominence in the early 1970s exerted a greater influence on the way cinema was made than during this period. In no other decade were film critics more willing to take their auteur status and claims more seriously. As an indirect outcome of the renown they had gained before 1989, the films they made after the fall of communism enjoyed a somewhat canonical status as well, even though they were not critically approached or examined. Such films were generally described as belated examples of an exacerbated artistic understanding. On the other hand, the conservative content of these films and their obdurate anti-communism have only recently begun to be analyzed in detail. Perhaps even more importantly, conservatism and anti-communism have survived to this day in these films and are now largely perceived in Romania as a somewhat natural reflex of that period. However, this discourse can be seen as one of the ways in which a part of the intellectual elite in the field of cinema managed to monopolize filmmaking resources and to legitimize itself, in an era that avidly searched for the truth of recent history in art, as the purveyor of a realism deemed to be the very opposite of the social realism practiced in communist times.