

**From the Romanian New Wave through New Romanian Cinema to Contemporary
Romanian Cinema**

Review of *Politicile filmului. Contribuții la interpretarea cinemaului românesc contemporan*
[The Politics of Film: Contributions to the Interpretation of Contemporary Romanian
Cinema]. Coordonat de Andrei Gorzo și Andrei State. Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2014, ISBN
606843750, p. 318.

Andrea Virginás

Sapientia Hungarian University of Cluj-Napoca

avirginas@gmail.com

Although a short review does not offer the space and time to thoroughly argument such an opinion, I think that the 2014 collective volume of essays *The Politics of Film: Contributions to the Interpretation of Contemporary Romanian Cinema* coordinated by Andrei Gorzo and Andrei State is a book above the average importance of any well conceptualised endeavour. If compared to the much appreciated 2011 collective volume coordinated by Cristina Corciovescu and Magda Mihăilescu – *Noul cinema românesc. De la tovarășul Ceaușescu la domnul Lăzărescu*, [New Romanian Cinema: From Comrade Ceaușescu to Mister Lăzărescu] – its specific characteristics emerge, making it possible to register changes in Romanian film critical and film theoretical thinking as well.

Already the differences in the two cited titles are telling. The earlier volume does not foreground any specific focus of analysis, unless we consider the latent opposition of a political leader (Comrade Ceaușescu) and a filmic character (Mister Lăzărescu) in its subtitle, the ever-present historical framework and the predilection for thematic description in the essays possibly re-confirming such a hunch. In contrast, the later one explicitly takes a stance in this respect with *The Politics of Film*, evoking the looming, yet disavowed figure of aesthetics and beauty.¹ Also, they conceive of their corpus of analysis in quite different manners: “New Romanian Cinema” has become a more neutral name for the slightly anachronistic “Romanian New Wave”, with the coordinators of the 2014 collective volume

¹ I thank the editor, Hajnal Király for her suggestion that *la politique des auteurs* might be another solution to the riddle.

opting for the denomination of “contemporary Romanian cinema”, of which the previous formation is but a slice. Compared to the ten wide-scope essays organised around concepts like the West, the family, or the road and written by established Romanian film critics or film historians (Mihai Fulger or Marian Țuțui among them) that form the 2011 volume, the more recent, 2014 one contains sixteen essays organised in two parts – “Prim-planuri” [Close-ups], respectively “Planuri de ansamblu” [Master shots/Establishing shots] – and it is co-authored by a totally different group: a much younger generation of film critics and early-career PhDs in the humanities, many of whom are active, even professional in the vibrant Romanian cultural blogosphere.

The first part of *The Politics of Film*, “Close-ups”, contains portraits of figures who supposedly reach the threshold of creative authorship in contemporary Romanian cinema, and, furthermore, the close-reading of the film that seemingly constitutes the nodal point of this interpretative group’s internal canon – Cristi Puiu’s 2010 *Aurora*. The authors covered include screenwriter (and contemporary prose-writer, also director) Răzvan Rădulescu, whose input to an incredible percentage of Romanian films made after 2000 is paramount; furthermore “the usual suspect” directors credited with reinventing Romanian cinema – Cristi Puiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, and Radu Muntean –, with Cristian Mungiu, interestingly, only invoked as a piece of comparison; and finally, with three new names introduced to the pantheon, albeit with great care: Marian Crișan, Adrian Sitaru, and a pre-*Aferim!* Radu Jude. Some common features that might be generally attributed to all the essays in this first part of the volume (authors: Andrei Gorzo, Laura Dumitrescu, Andrei State, Costi Rogozanu, Raluca Durbacă, Irinia Trocan and Andrei Rus) are their film critical, often impressionistic approach, with an effort to be easily understood and up-to-date, and a common attention paid to the kind of “realism” emerging from an author’s oeuvre, as well as the class dimensions of the represented diegetic worlds. However, only occasional references appear to the class dimension inherent in the creator’s lives, as well as other types of social structuring relations and power forces at work, such as gender, ethnicity, or the capital and the periphery in Romanian culture.

The second part, “Master shots/Establishing shots”, presents us with eight longer-breath, better documented essays that might be called academic in their scope. Radu Toderici argues convincingly for points of connection between New Romanian Cinema and 1990s European realist film, with the creations and the poetics of the Dardenne brothers, Bruno Dumont or Ken Loach invoked frequently. The study of Florin Poenaru is structured around the concept

of auto-colonisation, its argument based on Fernando Solanas' and Octavio Getino's *first*, *second* and *third (-world) cinemas*, with the Romanian New Wave and its aesthetic-formal reception and canonisation (achieved by Alex. Leo Șerban or, more recently, Andrei Gorzo) classified as a branch of modernist European cinema made foremost for the educated middle-class. Dora Constatintinovici's contribution makes (absent) popular/mainstream Romanian cinema its central preoccupation, offering a highly enjoyable cultural criticism of its stereotypes, not losing sight of comparing the amount of state funding invested in their production either. Alex Cistelean sketches the outlines of an interesting (affect) theory of how experiences of intimacy permeated the public sphere in the communist period, contributing to the huge success of the *Liceenii* [High-schoolers] teen movie series which experienced a flop in 1993, when post-communism redrew the boundaries of public intimacy. Lucian Maier offers a panorama of the documentary genre in contemporary Romanian cinema, exemplifying Bill Nichols' popular categories with recent examples. Cătălin Olaru outlines the field of what he names "the second wave": those films and even authorial oeuvres that, although recreating numerous formal and thematic, also canonical characteristics of the Romanian New Wave, or New Romanian Cinema, add to the mix a degree of symbolism, metaphors, jump cuts, or highly suggestive non-diegetic music, while being noticed only at smaller festivals – among them titles such as Bogdan Apetri's *Outbound (Periferic, 2010)* or Călin Peter Netzer's *Medal of honour (Medalia de onare, 2009)*. Christian Ferencz-Flatz combines specific philosophical ideas of Marcel Proust, Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin along the concept of "conscience," culminating in the interpretation of Corneliu Porumboiu's 2013 *Metabolism*. Finally, Claudiu Turcuș summarises the dominant models of understanding New Romanian Cinema advanced by Andrei Gorzo, Dominique Nasta and Doru Pop respectively, all founded on various conceptions of realism and/or minimalism. Turcuș concludes, through a joint reading of the much referred to *Aurora* and *Metabolism* as presenting the crisis of authorship through self-reflexive methods that "New Romanian Cinema will possibly reinvent itself by starting to question the cinematic perspective that made its existence possible (at all)" (p. 298, my translation).

The coordinators also included a short preface that justifies the "political" in their title, or a not exclusively aesthetic-formal approach sensitive to class and power relations in the society, and consequently, in film too. They end with an epilogue analyzing Radu Jude's 2015 *Aferim!*, nowadays a popular and important example of contemporary Romanian

cinema, but a very fresh title at the time of editing *The Politics of Film*. That *Aferim!* is much in tune with the critical practice and ideological standpoint of the new interpretative community that we might greet under the guise of *The Politics of Film*, adds an extra – even if not necessary – brick to their legitimacy.