

THE UNDERDOG OUTSIDE BECOMES
AN INSIDE PLAYER:
EVOLUTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN FILM
INDUSTRY IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

■ Ana Bento-Ribeiro
■ Paris Nanterre University
■ France

ABSTRACT

Until the beginning of the 21st century, the Romanian film industry played a marginal role in the larger European context. In this paper, we shall examine the scenario that followed the fall of the communist regime in 1989, focusing on the complex relations between the Romanian film industry and its European counterparts. As of today, both media and academia have largely analysed the aesthetic, narrative and historical features of the so-called 'Romanian New Wave'. Notwithstanding, institutional and economic aspects allowing the (re)birth of this industry deserve further attention. Fifteen years after the release of the cornerstone of Romanian contemporary film *d'auteur*, Cristi Puiu's *Stuff and Dough (Marfa și banii, 2001)*, the dynamics of domestic production has evolved. If the pioneers of the New Romanian Cinema of the last decade defined new aesthetic and narrative standards that put Romania on the cinephiles' map, their works thrived in transnational scenarios involving economic, political and media-related aspects. In a process that developed parallel to Romania's admission in the EU, international film co-production and distribution have become key elements for what is now a more stable, yet relatively small film industry. The Romanian context remains one where institutional grounds and public policies for film are still to consolidate. By examining funding mechanisms and institutional developments, we shall analyse how the factors resulting in the birth of a film trend later evolved into a complex scenario giving way to an industry where transnational relations have become essential for a steady production and larger circulation. The key question is: how did Romanian film overcome isolation, becoming an essential player in the European film world?

KEYWORDS

cinema, Romania, film industry, transnationality, European Union

In his introduction to a collection of texts first published in the French film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma*, former editor Antoine de Baecque, attests to the prominence of Asian national cinemas as centres of interest for this media outlet. Dating back to 2001, De Baecque's piece points out that film critics periodically promote a country or region as places where some exciting novelties are being made, privileging these works in their publications.¹ Creating trends in the film industry by geographically positioning a set of subjects and aesthetic resources that deserve experts' acclaim and the (cinophile) audience's attention is less a consequence of material, political and social conditions of local industries than of the international media's disposition to put these places on the map.

Attesting to the vitality of Asian and Middle Eastern arthouse film at the time, De Baecque closes his text by daring the reader to muse upon the critics' next destination of choice. The volume was published in 2001, the year when the cornerstone-film of this destination was launched. A few years after the release of *Stuff and Dough (Marfa și banii, 2001)*, Cristi Puiu's début feature that inaugurated the so-called Romanian New Wave, Romanian films would receive unprecedented coverage on specialized and general press, circulating and receiving accolades in the international film festival circuit and obtaining international theatrical release.

By the middle of the 2000's, Romanian arthouse films were at the heart of the cinephile debate. The Palme d'Or for Cristian Mungiu's *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days (4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile, 2007)*² in Cannes 2007 then crowned the Romanian film fever. In 2016, Romanian cinema has evolved from an 'unexpected miracle', as indicated by Dominique Nasta (2013),³ into a more complex, varied film industry with steady production and festival circulation. Local and international commentators have also realized the importance of

¹ Antoine De Baecque, 'Présentation'. *L'Etat du monde au cinéma: Nouvelle Géographie*. IX Petite anthologie des Cahiers du Cinéma, Cahiers du Cinéma, 2001.

² All English film titles correspond to the international titles provided by the Internet Movie Database.

³ Dominique Nasta. *Contemporary Romanian Cinema: The History of an Unexpected Miracle*, New York: Wallflower Press, 2013.

the phenomenon and have launched extensive works that discuss historical and aesthetic characteristics of Romanian films made since 2001.¹

The first shock caused by young and innovative filmmakers coming from a country with little known film tradition and a particular historical burden has passed. It is then possible to focus on the wider economic and political conditions that favoured the rebirth of a waning industry and permitted its actual thriving. With regard to a set of productions that surpass the *auteur* gems acclaimed by the international press and festival audiences, it is worth to shed some light on complex aspects that have developed throughout the last fifteen years. At the centre of this progression, issues that at first seemed specific to a local scenario can now be analysed as being at the core of the transnational dynamics that permeate the Romanian film industry.

To better understand how certain views of contemporary Romanian cinema have changed, some points deserve to be more carefully examined. First, it is important to track the evolution of international cooperation concerning Romanian films. After the fall of the communist regime, continuities and ruptures in these relations point not only to the specificities of audiovisual market practices, but also to issues related to the advent of Romania as part of the European Union in a broader context. Next, it is useful to review the institutional framework allowing for the bolstering of the Romanian film industry at the wake of the 21st century, with new auteurs emerging albeit relying on a precarious funding system. Finally, the actual scenario deserves further analysis: learning how the Romanian film industry conjugates arthouse and popular film production helps to comprehend the different stakes at play on domestic and international markets. These three pillars show the evolution of international film co-production and circulation dynamics, providing insightful perspectives on the position of what is seen today as Romanian cinema. More importantly, they show how Romania's relations with *other* members of the European film *club* developed, thus guaranteeing its *membership* in this restricted circle.

SEARCHING FOR NEW GROUNDS

Romania's *passage* to the capitalist world has been more a matter of mediatized astonishment than of a continuous, progressive process of political and economic mutation.² The 1980's severe economic hardship and isolation in the international sphere left Romania in the margins of the

¹ A few noteworthy early works on the subject are Alex Leo Șerban's *4 decenii, 3 ani și 2 luni cu filmul românesc* (Bucarest: Polirom, 2009) and Mihai Fulger's *Noul val în cinematografia românească* (Bucarest: Art, 2006). The authors were originally film critics.

² See Lucian Boia's *La Roumanie: un pays à la frontière de l'Europe* (Paris, Les Belles lettres, 2003) and Catherine Durandin's *Histoire de la Nation Roumaine* (Paris, Éditions Complexe, 1994).

mediascape (to use Arjun Appadurai's term)¹ for a decade. However, the country was violently pushed to the centre of media's attention in 1989, being shown as the place of one of the most violent and (therefore) heavily recorded and broadcasted *revolutions* in the former communist bloc.

Unsurprisingly, the cinephile world of the early 1990's saw Romania through the images of its televised revolution. Within the context of political, economic, and institutional chaos left by communism's decadence and ultimate fall, few cinematic works could be made. As a result, film critics and filmmakers turned to analysing the unexpected broadcast images coming from Romania. One of the only two pieces in the early 1990's regarding Romania in the French film magazine and cinephile bible, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, does not examine any Romanian movie, but reiterates the astonishment over Romanian revolution's images on TV.² Moreover, at that time, the film most often identified with Romania's 1989 events, making full use of its TV footage in a political statement is the documentary essay *Videograms of a revolution* (*Videogramme einer Revolution*, 1992), by Turkish-German Harun Farocki and Romanian-born director Andrei Ujică. Focusing on a Romanian theme and having some local manpower in the creative crew (like Ujică and editor Velvet Moraru), the film is a German-funded production. However, considering the textual and industrial composition of the documentary, one can easily see it as a perfect example of Romania in a transnational film context.

In the past two decades, the transnational approach has become a mainstream framework for film analysis, overcoming the traditional view of film as a 'national' cultural good. Albeit the difficulty in defining the term *transnational* in film, it is commonly associated to international economic, narrative, aesthetic and institutional flows involving film as both art and industry (Fisher; Smith, 2016).

The unsettling nature of changing social-political-economic systems and the specificity of Romania's unprepared process heighten the perception of the 1990's as an era of instability, where post-communist individuals get trapped between the promise of 'free' choices in a capitalist world and the marginal

¹ According to Appadurai (1990), mediascapes 'provide... large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and ethnoscapas to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed.' In Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (eds). *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: a Reader*. Hertfordshire, Prentice Hall, 1993. p 330

² Serge Daney. 'Roumanie, année zéro'. *Cahiers du cinéma* 428, february 1990, pp 129-136. The other one is an article by Jacques Morice of 1992 on Romanian communist cinema.

position their home country occupy in the global market, limiting their options in their now favoured role of consumers (Popescu-Sandu, 2010).

At this point, a transnational analysis of the Romanian film industry is the key. In the wake of the 1990's, the whole communist film production system, sponsored by the state and obeying its policies and ideology was being dismembered. The deep multi-sectorial crisis in the early days of Romania's new capitalism did not stop private investors from betting on a sector that had already been suffering since before 1989. As a matter of fact, the disorder of the media sector at the time allowed private companies to acquire licenses for broadcasting. State monopole was in place until 1993, but private channels had been operating part of its daily programme since 1989. If the first private, full-time autonomous national broadcaster Antena 1 had predominantly Romanian capital, North-American resources largely funded the soon-to-be leading channel in revenue, Pro TV, launched in 1995. The television sector rapidly became dynamic, even though these channels and other, less prominent ones faced difficulties to reach full territorial coverage.

Not the same can be said about the film industry.¹ The 1990's saw a steep decrease in theatrical attendance. Television offers became increasingly diversified, and access to video turned easy and cheap, while the theatrical circuit remained outdated. With production resources scarce and decreasing frequentation in a market now dominated by American blockbusters, the Romanian film industry had to start looking abroad to survive.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, audiovisual production had caught the eye of entrepreneurs in the early 1990's. In 1992, Romanian film producer Vlad Păunescu associated with American Charles Brand to launch Castelfilm, a production facility focused on the co-production of North-American and European direct-to-video B-films, series and TV commercials. At the end of the decade, after years of decadence, the Buftea studios, the state production facility created in 1957, were finally put into auction as part of Romania's privatization programme. In 1999, CME MediaPro, the American-Romanian group behind ProTV, bought the studios. The group invested heavily on modernizing the facility, which would not only provide production resources for ProTV's shows, but also operate as a film location and services provider for more upscale international co-productions and other audiovisual ventures.

Therefore, by the end of the 1990's, two main orientations predominated the Romanian film industry. If profit-bound American co-productions would precariously provide jobs for technical workforce, Romanian arthouse films

¹ In *Paysage audiovisuel et politiques publiques des pays candidats dans le secteur audiovisuel – Roumanie*. IMCA Report for the European Commission – DG EAC, March 2004.

were still made, mostly by the same directors who had met positive critical feedback abroad during communism. Lucian Pintilie, Mircea Daneliuc and Dan Pița would then experience filming in Romania without censorship constraint. Their work, however, did not reach audiences easily. In Romania, local film distribution now faced fierce competition with American films, in a context where theatrical frequentation reached low points for all films. Moreover, arthouse film audiences have naturally been smaller, and their reception has relied heavily on festival circulation and press recognition. Where these spaces are limited in a national scale, the international performance becomes all the more important. Although Daneliuc, Pița and Pintilie's 1990's films could be seen in competition at major European film festivals¹, they were not received with much enthusiasm by foreign critics. As Romanian film critic and scholar Andrei Gorzo notes, Romanian film *auteurs* in the 1990's were 'stooping to the level of the crudest exploitation filmmaking ..., carrying on in the exhausted aesthetic vein of the Kafkian-Orwellian Eastern European anti-totalitarian allegorical parable' or 'dressing, with overbearing insistence, 'as the sick soul of Romania'². For both cinephile and general audiences, such narratives lacked appeal, missing out on novelty, and making use of an old-fashioned coded discourse.

If Romanian arthouse movies were not easy to export, some filmmakers still managed to find funding outside Romania. Lucian Pintilie, who had immigrated to France in the 1970's after being banned from film directing under Ceaușescu's rule, made the most of his *auteur* status. All of his four films made in the 1990's were French-Romanian co-productions. While commercially oriented, minority co-productions were mostly funded by the United States, France was the main partner of Romanian art film in the decade.

France's history of international cooperation in film industry is part of its own national model that started taking its current shape in the 1940's, and aimed to resist the concurrence of American films. Originally based heavily on public financial support responding to quality criteria, the French system has since incorporated elements also privileging commercial outcome, combining mechanisms that involve public and private funding (Creton,

¹ Pița's *Hotel de Lux* (1992) won the Silver Lion award at the Mostra di Venecia, Pintilie's *An Unforgettable Summer* (*O vară de neuitat*, 1994) and *Too Late* (*Prea târziu*, 1996) were both nominated to the Palme d'Or at Cannes, and his *Terminus Paradis* (1998) won the Grand Jury Prize in Venice. Daneliuc's *Patul conjugal* (1993) was nominated for the Golden Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival and *Senatorul melcilor* (1995) for the Palme d'Or in Cannes.

² In 'Realism and Ideology in post-2000 Romanian cinema', available at *Lucruri care nu pot fi spuse altfel, un blog de Andrei Gorzo*. Posted on July 25th, 2016.

2014). This mostly functional resistance model has seduced producers and filmmakers around the globe, who in their turn either directly turn to French companies and institutions to technically or financially achieve their works or lobby for the implementation of similar models in their own countries.

International cooperation helps affirming France as a world reference in arthouse filmmaking, which both reinforces the image of French culture in the global sphere, and economically stimulates its own audiovisual sector. If co-production deals have long been an essential part of French film history (Creton *et al.*, 2011; Forest 2001), the 1990's were the decade where (1) the European communist bloc had disappeared, thus giving way to the expansion of the European Union towards Eastern Europe, that had a well-respected cinematic tradition; (2) Eastern European countries were still adapting to free-market and reforming institutions to fit their new international role while struggling with different degrees of economic turmoil; (3) France, for its part, was reaffirming its leading role in Fortress Europe through culture, as shown in the use of the concept of 'cultural exception' to impose protective measures for cultural goods during the Uruguay round of GATT negotiations in 1993.

In this context, the film industry did not escape serving the interests of both sides. In 1990, France inaugurated the Fonds ECO, a fund for French co-productions with Central and East European countries. Co-producing a total of 65 feature films, the fund was essential to keep cinemas in the former communist block alive at times of deep transformation (Creton; Jäckel, 2004). Romanian cinema was an exemplary beneficiary of this strategic tool. The fund was used for supporting both the well-established of Lucian Pintilie¹, and Nae Caranfil's first features, *Don't Lean Out of the Window* (*Epicioso sporgeri*, 1993) and *Asphalt Tango* (*Asfalt Tango*, 1996).

Even if bilateral co-production deals between France and former communist European countries still stand, the umbrella fund ECO was terminated in 1997. European programmes have replaced it, following therefore the evolutions of the European Union's enlargement.

MEETING EUROPEAN STANDARDS

Launched in 1989, Eurimages is the cultural support fund of the Council of Europe. Operating exclusively in the film industry, it provides funding for cinema co-productions, theatrical distribution and exhibition circuits. Currently, 37 of the 47 member-states of the Council of Europe are members of the programme. Romania joined the Council of Europe in 1993, but only entered the Eurimages programme in 1998. At first, Eurimages

¹ *The Oak* (Balanta 1993), *Too late* (1996) and *An Unforgettable Summer* (1994).

required that co-productions had a minimum of three member-state participants to access funding, but in 1998, bipartite projects became eligible.

Until 2015, thirty Romanian productions by Romanian directors received funding. Ten other films with Romanian participation and foreign directors were also supported. In the same period, the European Audiovisual Observatory listed the release of 200 films with Romanian participation in production schemes. In other words, 20% of the films produced in Romania between 1999 and 2015 received Euroimages production support.¹

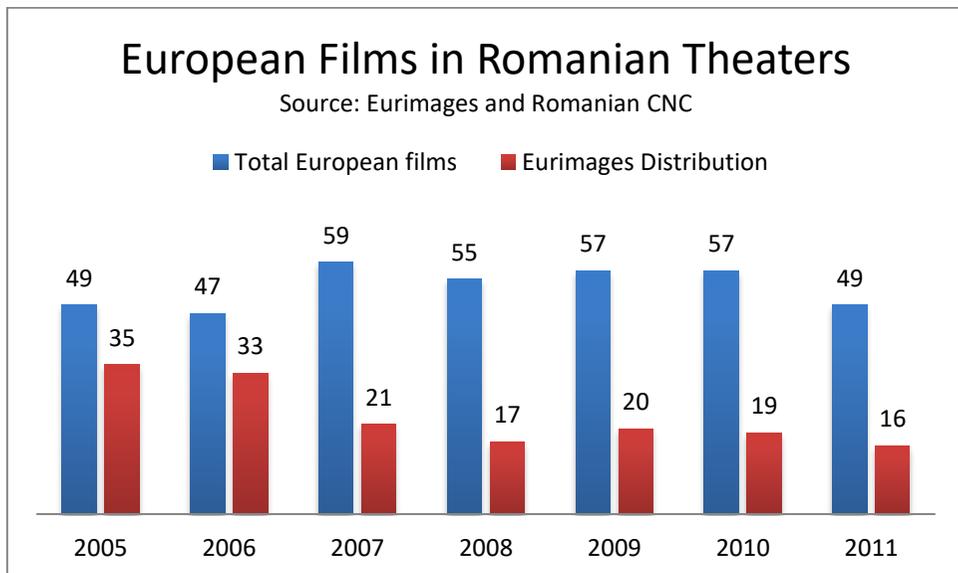
Upon becoming a member of the European Union in 2007, Romania could take part in the audiovisual support programmes that were sponsored and regulated by the European Commission. Its eligibility formally started in 1995², after the country officially applied for EU membership, but effective access only came when the MEDIA programme was in its fourth edition, MEDIA 2007 – Romania became member of the EU that same year. Renamed and reconfigured as MEDIA-Creative Europe in 2014, the EU programme now supports audiovisual-related initiatives in various forms: by stimulating the development and distribution of European films and TV productions and promoting their international sales, exhibition and festival circulation, or championing education and innovation in the area. So far, 64 Romanian feature films and TV shows have received development support. Differently from Eurimages, it is not mandatory that the films applying for MEDIA funding be co-productions, making it easier for films made by new Romanian filmmakers to receive financial aid.

Besides production support, both programmes also stress the important role of distribution for vivifying the film industry. Twenty-four Romanian productions (as a major or minor partner) have received distribution support from MEDIA, thus enabling them to obtain theatrical releases in other European markets. Eurimages, in its turn, has helped to diversify the theatrical circuit in Romania, where American films have constantly reached more than 83% of market share. The most interesting data concerning Romania range from 1998, the year Eurimages funding became available, to year 2011. Since then, Eurimages distribution funds became available only for its members that could not access the MEDIA-Creative Europe distribution programme, limiting its portfolio.

¹ The data is available online at: Lumière Database (lumiere.obs.coe.int) and at Eurimages website, 'Funding History' section (coe.int).

² Ad Van Loon. 'European Union/Bulgaria/Hungary/Poland/Romania/Czech Republic: Participation in Community framework programmes in AV and other sectors made possible'. *European Audiovisual Observatory*.

Between 1998 and 2011 only 14 films by Romanian directors benefitted from distribution funds to reach other territories, especially in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, the exceptions being Pintilie's *Terminus Paradis* (*Terminus Paradis*, 1998), distributed in Switzerland in 1998 and *The Death of Mr Lazărescu* (*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*, dir. Cristi Puiu, 2005), reaching Belgium in 2006. However, considering the predominance of American films in Romania's limited theatrical circuit, Eurimages has been a key-element in improving the variety of European films with theatrical release in the country. In the 2010's, the number of European titles first released in Romanian theatres hardly reached half of the number of American titles. For instance in 2012, 48 European films, all nationalities included, and 113 American films were released; in 2014, 47 European titles premiered in theatres for 113 American movies. The market shares of European films in the past ten years have been low, ranging from 3.7% in 2013 to the historical positive record of 11% in 2015 (Romanian CNC).¹ Therefore, this additional funding seems essential for the survival of local small distribution companies, that cannot rely on the scarce revenue obtained from its European releases in Romania.



After a slow start, in 2005 the number of European films receiving Eurimages aid for distribution in the Romanian circuit reached its highest point: 35 films of a total of 49, corresponding to 71% of the European

¹ Centrul National al Cinematografiei, the Romanian Film Centre.

releases.¹ That year, French and Hungarian productions were dominant (eight for each country), but the offer was varied: thirteen European countries had films receiving support, from Italy to Macedonia, from Austria to Denmark. The same ratio of Eurimages funded distribution was maintained in 2006, with a similar variety of nationalities. For the next four years, however, if the total of released European films increased, the part of Eurimages supported distribution diminished.

Crossing data from the Romanian National Film Centre (Romanian CNC) and Eurimages helps delineate the Romanian distribution landscape in the past fifteen years. Between 1999 and 2003, Romanian distributors benefitting from Eurimages funding were few: communist fossil Româniafilm² was active - and still is -, receiving support until 2001; however, the company in charge of launching most European successes was Independența Films. Its portfolio focused on European arthouse movies, especially those of famous *auteurs*. Until 2003 it had released films by Lars Von Trier, Agnes Jaoui, Aki Kaurismäki, Julio Medem, Nani Moretti, Cédric Klapisch: the European directors that would most surely attract audiences. At the time, some smaller companies would focus on specific national cinemas: Interfilm Rom and GlobCom at first privileged Hungarian films, later diversifying, mostly to other Central European productions. However, in the early 2000's, European blockbusters would also receive support from Eurimages: such was the case of French comedies *Asterix & Obelix Take on Cesar* (*Astérix et Obélix contre César*, 1999), Luc Besson's *Taxi 2* (*Taxi 2*, 2000) and Eric and Ramzi's *Don't Die Too Hard* (*La Tour Montparnasse infernale*, 2001). One company, New Films, would initially focus both on *auteur* and more commercial European titles, from Almodóvar's *Talk to Her* (*Hable con ella*, 2002) to light-hearted French comedy *The Closet* (*Le Placard*, Francis Veber, 2000).

In 2005, other important distributors saw the light. Asociația Moebius and Grafitti Art first focused on Hungarian 'difficult' titles, then diversified their offers to other European productions whose commercial potential was far from granted. In the same year, other important distributors for European and independent film first appeared: Transilvania Film launched Icelandic *Noi, the Albino* (*Nói Albinói*, dir. Dagur Kári, 2003), and Clorofilm released seven films that year alone, including works by Jacques Rivette, Lukas

¹ Between 1998 and 2003, the numbers varied between three and eight. A leap forward happened in 2004, when 34 films had their distribution in Romania funded by Eurimages (Romanian CNC).

² Created in the communist era, Româniafilm was the distribution and exhibition branch of the Romanian film industry. It kept its functions of distributor and theatre administrator after the fall of the regime

Moodyson and Otar Iosseliani. Gradually, Clorofilm, Moebius and Transilvania would be the distributors benefiting the most of Eurimages aid. By the mid-2000's, Independența started receiving help mostly for films that were less likely to guarantee an audience, until disappearing from Eurimages beneficiaries' list in 2008. By then, the company was alive and well.

Actually, Independența still has a portfolio focusing on European and independent world titles that were successful either commercially or in the festival, cinephile sphere. Even with competition from Clorofilm and Transilvania, which thrive in the same niche, Independența still concentrates the main titles that are not American blockbusters in Romania. Releasing between 13 and 18 films in theatres¹, its market share has lately fluctuated between 7% and 9% of the national market. Considering the DVD market, it ranks second in market share among all Romanian distributors, with 10,8% of the releases in 2015. That year, yet another distribution company focusing on European film was created in Romania: Cine Europa, which released ten titles in its first year alone (Romanian CNC, 2015).

Romanian productions are typically distributed by the distribution branch of their production house in theatres and DVD (Romanian edition) or by the same companies focusing on European arthouse films, on DVD only. Even though a fair amount of 'Romanian' films are in fact (mostly) European co-productions, the Romanian National film centre categorizes 'Romanian' and 'European' films separately in its distribution statistics. However, when it comes to production numbers, 'Romanian' films are listed as 100% national, major co-productions or minor co-productions. In reality, 'major' Romanian co-productions and productions made solely with Romanian resources are locally considered a category apart from 'European' films, even if the very fact that Romania is a European country is the main condition for producers to access co-production schemes and for distributors to receive support from supranational programmes.

As discussed above, potential partners largely overlooked the Romanian film industry during the 1990's. Its visibility improved when gaining access to supranational European film funds, a process that concurred its accession to EU membership. Even though this newfound European proximity had facilitated access to co-productions, most of Romanian films were still entirely funded by national resources in the 2000's, including most of those that constitute what the media has called the *Romanian New Wave*. In fact, starting with 2006 onwards, the number of feature films made with 100% of national resources has surpassed that of co-productions. Albeit being object

¹ Not to mention DVD releases. Romanian distributors normally negotiate both theatrical and DVD releases of European films.

of numerous scandals and never-ending debate, the launching of a National Film Centre, the Romanian CNC, partially explains this scenario.

An act stipulating the creation and structuring of a National Film Centre was already approved in 1990, but more specific legislation shaping the functioning of the institution only began being approved in 1997, when Romania started concretely moving towards EU accession. As Claude Forest (2001) notes, it was a common place in former Eastern European countries to shape new state film institutions accordingly to those already functioning in the West, aspiring more specifically to the French *Centre National de la Cinématographie* model. Therefore, such institutions would not only ensure legal repertoire that allowed for participation in European programmes and regulated the film industry, but would also provide public funding mechanisms. As for the Romanian CNC, in the year 1997-1998 a series of judicial decisions drafting the establishment and functioning of a National Film Office, of a National Film Fund and of a Film Registry were made public. Since then, especially in the early 2000's, the organogram and status of the institution have changed several times, making it difficult to guarantee continuous and coherent support of the sector.

In 2002, the previous decisions were put together in what became the cornerstone of the contemporary Romanian National Film Centre. The Law nb. 630, entitled the Film Law, came into force that year. The extensive text covers simple definitions such as the duration of short and feature films to the complex organization of the film centre. Its main contribution though, is establishing the National Film Fund and defining its sources of income: the Fund would be nourished by the exploitation of CNC property, by a tax on the Film Registry operations, by diverse taxes on sales and rentals of films in different supports (such as VHS, DVD and VoD), on television advertising, on theatrical exhibition revenue (except for that of Romanian films), on the sales of exhibition and broadcasting rights of Romanian films, to name a few. It also further regulated the controversial contest system by which the funds were awarded, that was in place since the end of the 1990's.¹

From a general, superficial point of view, the efforts for organizing the film sector might seem valuable. In practical terms, however, this shifting model obeyed to political ambitions instead of corresponding to the needs of a sector begging for renewal. Sergiu Nicolaescu, the leading communist film director, and later on also a senator, proposed the law himself. In 2001 and

¹ The full text of the Law no 630 is available at: legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetailiiDocument/40414. Other legal texts concerning the sector can be found at the Romanian CNC website, at cnc.gov.ro.

2002, Nicolaescu was also part of the CNC jury in charge of choosing the projects that would be awarded public funds. Unsurprisingly, in both years, his own projects were awarded, as well as projects by other members of the jury and by their entourage. These projects received funding in detriment of those by younger filmmakers, whose débuts had already achieved better box-office results and critical acclaim. This situation elicited passionate reactions by the professionals who struggled with the system in place. Rising filmmakers like Cristian Mungiu, Cristi Puiu and Radu Muntean and others like Thomas Ciulei, Alexandru Solomon and Nae Caranfil signed an open letter demanding transparency in the contests and the adoption of simple initiatives like clear selection criteria and that members of the jury could not present their own projects (Mungiu, 2003). Finally, the 2002 law was modified. The Ordinance no. 39/2005 replaced the Law of 2002. It preserved its main contributions, but restricted access of members of the selection committee to funds awarded by the CNC contests. The evolution of legal texts also helps understanding the changing debates in place in the local film industry. In 2016, the Romanian Ministry of Culture made the film industry 'its priority'¹ and set up a work group of film experts in charge of delineating the most needed modifications in the 2005 film law. Leading professionals of the 2000's generation, such as Cristian Mungiu and Tudor Giurgiu were part of the team, whose aim was to make the Romanian regulation closer to those of leading European industries and solve problems concerning the limited theatrical circuit. However, the proposal did not enjoy a smooth reception by professionals who felt left behind and saw the renewed sponsoring role of the state as a reminder of communist mentality and a threat to commercially-bound movies².

In spite of the odds, Cristi Puiu and Mungiu, who soon would be leading directors of the new generation, both obtained CNC support for their first features, released in 2001 and 2002 respectively. However, they had to face unprecedented trouble to actually get hold of the modest sums they had been awarded. Even though, the constant reactions of the new representatives of the industry gradually paid-off. If transparency and appropriate methodology in the selection of projects was still being periodically challenged, the industry then started making its voice heard. Between 2005 and 2009, many projects that would turn into recognized 'Romanian New Wave' films were awarded CNC funding: Puiu's *The Death of Mr Lazarescu* (2005), that would be awarded more than 20 prizes in film festivals around world, including Cannes and Mungiu's *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* (2007), that would receive the highest

¹ Gabriela Lupu. 'Legea cinematografiei, aprig disputata', *România Liberă* online, August 3rd, 2016.

² Petriana Condrut. '58 de cinești îi cer premierului să o demită pe Corina Șuteu, ministrul Culturii?'. *Mediafax*. August 7th, 2016.

reward of the international festival circuit, the Palme d'Or in Cannes. Both received their merited parts, as well as other films by young directors that would circulate internationally. Productions that had full national funding like Tudor Giurgiu's *Lovesick* (*Legături bolnăvicioase*, 2006), Radu Muntean's *The Paper Will Be Blue* (*Hârtia va fi albastră*, 2006) and *Boogie* (*Boogie*, 2008), Cristian Nemescu's *California Dreamin'* (*California Dreamin'* (*Nesfârșit*), 2007) and co-productions like Ruxandra Zenide's *Ryna* (*Ryna*, 2005), Cătălin Mitulescu's *How I Spent the End of the World* (*Cum mi-am petrecut sfârșitul lumii*, 2006), Anca Damian's *Crossing Dates* (*Întâlniri încrucișate*, 2009) and Radu Jude's *The Happiest Girl in the World* (*Cea mai fericită fată din lume*, 2009) were made with CNC support.

By the mid-2000's, the CNC contests were awarding some promising, young filmmakers while still funding films by older directors including Nicolaescu. In 2005, eight Castelfilm's commercially oriented American co-productions also got public funding. By the end of the decade, most of the films released in Romania were made with CNC funding: in 2009, 25 out of 26 and in 2010, 27 of 29 feature films released had received Romanian public funding. The system was not yet fully functional, though: normally holding two sessions per year, there was no contest in 2009, allegedly due to difficulties in implementing new rules for the selection. Considering an average gap of two-years between obtaining funding and finishing a feature film, this may explain the drop on Romanian releases in 2011, to a total of 16 films (Romanian CNC).

The 2010's started bringing to light some bad habits that lingered in the CNC contest: the script for Călin Peter Netzer's *Child's Pose* (*Poziția copilului*, 2011), that later would be awarded the Golden Bear at Berlin Film Festival, did not obtain enough points to receive CNC funding in the first 2010 session. Meanwhile, Nicolaescu's project, that would prove to be a fiasco, was one of the ten features chosen. *Child's Pose* would later obtain CNC support upon reapplying in the following section. In that year, the contest would present two sections for feature fictions, one for confirmed directors and other for first features, alongside separate sections for documentaries, animation, fiction shorts and for the development of projects. This model of separate sections remains to this day, with the number of films awarded at each edition depending on the CNC's and the projects' budgets. Interestingly enough, in the past five years, the same directors that became confirmed *auteurs* in the 2000's and struggled for institutional transparency have been constant names in the list of projects financed. Projects by Mungiu, Puiu, Cătălin Mitulescu, Radu Jude, Corneliu Porumboiu, Adrian Sitaru, Tudor Giurgiu, Florin Șerban have secured their place in the CNC selection.

Furthermore, Romanian film projects with a commercial profile, after facing some initial resistance, have now gained access to public funding. Contemporary directors such as Jesus del Cerro, Cristina Iacob and Iulia Rugină have made national both-office hits oriented to a general audience that do barely make it to the international sphere. Even if their films have achieved some of the best box-office results for Romanian movies, the limited share of Romanian films in the domestic market makes some public funding more than welcome. Giving incentives to films that help develop a larger local audience is a bet that might pay-off in the long run, when this more commercial vein could ideally become self-sustainable. The actual, more coherent profile of the films receiving funding by the CNC is also result of the configuration of the juries that are constantly changing and includes film critics, professionals and scholars that started working or developed their careers concomitantly to Romanian cinema's renewal.¹

Romanian contemporary films have, therefore, the financial model typical of European small cinemas. Partially financed by national public funding, partially or sometimes fully financed by private partners, often participating in opportunities provided by supranational or bilateral co-production schemes. If the film industry is still finding its way and constantly adapting to new possibilities and obstacles, what started as a media trend with uncertain future now experiences the path to maturity, where local issues find solutions inspired by international examples.

REACHING INDUSTRIAL MATURITY

The start of a new generation of Romanian filmmakers in the early 2000's was not tainted only by problems originating from poor institutional policies and difficult access to funding. Given the local conditions, those young filmmakers adapted to the reality of material conditions: having lived the bleak 1980's and chaotic 1990's, these were people who had been able to go to film school or at least earn a graduate degree, go abroad to live or visit, and had access to cosmopolitan culture but still remembered the hardest years for everyday life in communist Romania. Those were young adults who had surely seen a world of possibilities, but were fully aware that they would not come that easy in a country that occupied a marginal role in the Europe it was part of.²

¹ The results of the contests and the lists of the juries' members can be found at the Romanian CNC website, section 'Arhiva'. http://cnc.gov.ro/?page_id=230

² Between 2011 and 2016, the author conducted interviews with key filmmakers of contemporary Romanian cinema, such as Cristi Puiu, Corneliu Porumboiu, Radu Muntean, Radu Jude and Anca Damian, who told about their paths.

The creative solution for these new auteurs was to break with the tradition of coded messages and allegorical discourse; mostly making use of cinematic techniques and narrative resources that would bring about a new kind of realism. Relying on objectivity and simplicity in decor and camera work, developing strong scripts with complex characters, they found an original manner to depict life in contemporary Romania or to communicate their views on communist times, while keeping budgets low (Nasta, 2013; Pop, 2014; Fulger, 2008).

The cornerstone of this kind of filmmaking was Cristi Puiu's *Stuff and Dough*. The movie about three young adults transporting some controversial goods from Constanța to Bucharest is a comedy and road-movie, where the characters use crude, everyday language and the camera-on-the-shoulder closely follows its subject in a documentary style (Gorzo 2016). The film was selected in the Critic's Week at Cannes, being the first *début* feature of a Romanian director to make it to the festival in years. It also ran further in the festival circuit, receiving awards in Thessaloniki, Cottbus and Angers and positive attention from the foreign press. However, its reception in Romania was more than deceiving, attracting merely 2000 viewers to the theatres with a total box-office of little more than USD 1,200. The local critical reaction did not compensate the low commercial performance. Actually, it made things worse: the film was too bold for critics still appreciative of a more classical style and disconnected of the new trends in world cinema. Reviews were harsh, denouncing the film's use of foul language and 'bad' cinematography. Exceptions to these points of view were Mihai Chirilov and Alex Leo Șerban (Chirilov; Șerban, 2001). These Romanian critics readily defended Puiu's venture and became supporters of the new Romanian cinema, frequently stressing the qualities of the new directors in their writings and, in the case of Chirilov, also founding Transylvania International Film Festival, the first event of its type to achieve dynamic international standards and the most important film festival in the country to this day.

Puiu's first feature also inspired other young filmmakers, who recognized its innovative quality. If not as bold as *Stuff and Dough*, Cristian Mungiu's *Occident* (*Occident*, 2002) and Radu Muntean's *The Rage* (*Furia*, 2002) were also fresh *débuts* that attracted totals of 53000 and 61000 spectators to the theatres, excellent results for the local market. The success of Romanian new directors, however, would not be measured by box-office results, but by positive criticism, awards, and circulation in the international sphere.

The Death of Mr Lazărescu (2005) received the *Un certain regard* prize in Cannes inaugurating the wave of awards for features by young Romanian directors such as Cătălin Mitulescu's *How I Spent the End of the World*, Cristian

Nemescu's *California Dreamin'*, Corneliu Porumboiu's *12:08, East of Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost?*, 2006) or Mungiu's *4 months, 3 weeks and 2 days* at Cannes and Berlin festivals between 2005 and 2007. The recurrent presence and accolades in the arthouse film world would quickly attract the foreign press's attention. French magazines *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Positif*, revered cinephile publications that had largely overlooked Romanian films so far, started making place to the films selected in these festivals, and later publishing more in-depth articles on Romanian new films.¹ In this context, the much-criticized expression *Romanian New Wave* is repeated several times, especially in *Positif*. After the Palme d'Or, specialized and non-specialized media outlets from other foreign countries would share the enthusiasm about new Romanian cinema and the *New Wave* label would be largely employed by the press to define contemporary Romanian film.²

The awards for Romanian films kept coming, as exemplified by the Golden Bear for *Child's Pose* in 2013 and the Silver Bear for Radu Jude's direction of *Aferim!* (*Aferim!*, 2015) in 2015. Furthermore, the selection of Romanian films at international festivals is no longer an exception. In Cannes 2016 only, Puiu's *Sieranevada* (*Sieranevada*, 2016) and Mungiu's *Graduation* (*Bacalaureat*, 2016) competed in the main section, and Bogdan Mirică's *Dogs* (*Căini*, 2016) was presented at *Un certain regard*. Two shorts, *4:15 PM The End of the World* (*4:15pm, sfârșitul lumii*, dir. Gabi Virginia Șarga and Cătălin Rotaru, 2016) and *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (*Toate fluviile curg în mare*, dir. Alexandru Badea, 2016) also found their place in dedicated sections. The presence in 'type A' film festivals ensures press coverage in Romania and abroad. Other Romanian films circulate more quietly in less prestigious festivals, but also meet foreign audiences and gain recognition by being part of festivals' programmes³, a process that is useful for finding funding for future projects, via international networking or by receiving points counted for applications at the Romanian CNC.

¹ Mentions of Romanian new films can be found in *Positif* 539 and 551 and *Cahiers du Cinéma* 602, 608, 613, 616, 625, both in individual reviews of films released in the French circuit or in articles dedicated to the so-called Romanian New Wave.

² Ali Jaafar. 'Cannes wins put spotlight on Romania: Awards bring optimism to film business'. *Variety* online, June 15, 2007; Katja Hoffman. 'Romanian cinema on the rise'. *Variety*, online edition, June 22, 2007. Dennis Lim. 'Romanian cinema seizes the spotlight'. *Los Angeles Times*, online edition, January 31 janvier 2008. Bruce Bennett. 'On the Road with the Romanian New Wave'. *The New York Sun*, online edition, 23 avril 2008. A.O. Scott. 'In film, the Romanian New wave has arrived', *The New York Times*, online edition, January 19 2008.

³ Recent examples are Ana Lungu's *Self-portrait of a Dutiful Daughter* (*Autoportretul unei fete cuminte*, 2015), awarded at TIFF (Transilvania International Film Festival), in 2015 and Radu Jude's *Scarred Hearts* (*Inimi cicatrizate*, 2016) selected in film festivals in Ghent, Mar del Plata, Haifa, Sarajevo and awarded at Locarno.

The continuity of film production, whose high standards keep Romanian films under the cinephile radar is not the only reason to consider the renewal of Romanian film more than a fad. It not only involved the establishment of new aesthetic and narrative grounds, it also directed the local industry to a more mature contemporary model. If arthouse films have a hard time reaching local audiences, they are the export products of choice that sell the idea of a dynamic Romania in the cultural market. Circulation in festivals and awards not only legitimate film *auteurs* intellectually, it helps negotiating co-production deals and sales for international release (De Valck, 2007, Wong 2011). International theatrical release remains a challenge for small film industries. Since the Romanian domestic market still resists to national arthouse productions, the performance of these films in the international market remains key.

The current model also gives commercially oriented films its just value. They do not depend on international repercussion for achieving good results in the domestic market. Among the top ten Romanian releases between 2011 and 2015, four are commercially oriented comedies: Cristina Iacob's *#Selfie* (*#Selfie*, 2014), Iura Luncașu's *Sweet Little Lies* (*Minte-mă frumos*, 2012), Jesús del Cerro's *Hobobo 2* (*Hobobo 2: o loterie de familie*, 2012) and Virgil Nicolaescu's *Nașa* (2011). Two others ally qualities of *auteur* and commercial film, Iulia Rugină's *Love Building* (*Love Building*, 2013) and Tudor Giurgiu's *Of Men and Snails* (*Despre oameni și melci*, 2012) (Romanian CNC).

Castelfilm's American co-productions are still made, but they have lost importance in larger the scenario of the sector. In the past fifteen years, co-productions evolved: European co-productions have become more important and diversified. If France, with its efficient funding and production structures is still a favoured partner, other countries such as Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands also appear often in cooperation.¹ More recently, less traditional partners have showed up: Puiu's *Sieranevada* is presented as a Romanian, French, Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian co-production; Adrian Sitaru's *Illegitimate* (*Ilegitim*, 2016) is Romanian, French and Polish. If in the 1990's and the beginning of 2000's minor Romanian participation in American commercial productions were seen as essential for the survival of the film industry and even received support from the National Film Fund, nowadays they are barely mentioned as being part of the Romanian industry. If they still provide technical jobs, they are now identified as a mere product of delocalization. On the other hand, European

¹ Among Eurimages funded films, 19 out of 30 films by Romanian directors had France as a co-production partner.

co-productions with major or minor Romanian participation are perceived as examples of the industry's dynamism, especially when they attain the 'quality' press or festival label identified with contemporary Romanian films that circulate abroad.

CONCLUSION: THE AFFIRMATION OF A TRANSNATIONAL INDUSTRY

Fifteen years after the aesthetic and narrative turning point of Romanian contemporary cinema, the film sector has become a small industry based on the inevitable transnational model. The main persisting issues for Romanian cinema, namely attracting audiences to theatres and establishing criteria for the national public funding mechanism, only confirm the importance of creating a flow of exchanges with other countries.

These flows played a role in the adoption of a new way of making films in Romania, and now operate in diverse areas surrounding film production, circulation and promotion. Romania's accession process to the European Union allowed the country to gradually accede supranational and international funding via Eurimages and MEDIA programmes or bilateral deals. The very establishment of a National Film Centre providing public funding and regulation, inspired by neighbouring counterparts, also facilitated access to international resources, public or private. At the same time, the difficulties imposed by years of political, economic and institutional crisis forced young filmmakers to find alternative aesthetic and narrative models that would adapt to the scarcity of financial resources without harming their creative beliefs. The resulting works paid off, but once again, transnational flows were essential for its recognition.

Only by circulating in international festivals and creating buzz in cinephile networks this young Romanian cinema could find its place, even in its own country. Furthermore, the fact that Romanian films had previously remained either relatively unknown or related to allegorical outdated images reinforced the novelty aspect of the new works, eliciting enthusiasm of festival selectors and the press. The consistency of Romanian arthouse film production and its continuous presence in the international sphere helped confirming the 2000's generation as key players in the industry, provoking changes in the local institutional scenario and making the production scene dynamic. Large studios such as MediaPro and Castelfilm provided for commercially oriented projects and smaller production companies focusing on arthouse cinema not only survived, but developed their portfolios while also operating as trustful partners in European co-productions.

In this sense, arthouse cinema confirmed a Romanian aesthetic and narrative identity in film as a result of transnational interactions. Today, it is at the core of new flows produced by agents in the global film *milieu*, be they producers,

funders, promoters or simply audience. Meanwhile, Romanian commercial projects also have a transnational dimension, since they are stylistically based on successful, contemporary Hollywood models. This inspiration is strategic in an exhibition market largely dominated by American blockbusters.

Theatrical exploitation remains a challenging terrain in Romania, where general frequency has grown but is still low. The theatrical circuit has to conquer audiences, although not at all costs. If American films remain dominant, the current diversification that is taking place, with distributors improving the European offer and Romanian films targeting diverse audience profiles, might result in more people finally going to the movies.

REFERENCES

- Appadurai, A. (1993), 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy'. From *Public Culture*, 2, 2, Spring 1990. Republished in: Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams (eds). *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: a Reader*. Hertfordshire, Prentice Hall, pp 324-339.
- Bennett, B. (2008), 'On the Road With the Romanian New Wave'. *The New York Sun*, online edition, April 23rd.
- Boia, L. (2003), *La Roumanie: un pays à la frontière de l'Europe*. Paris, Les Belles lettres.
- Chirilov, M.; Serban, A. L. (2001), 'Succes la Cannes și fără public la noi - Marfa și banii'. *Observator Cultural*, June. Available at Agenda LiterNet (<http://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/5028/Mihai-Chirilov-Alex-Leo-Serban/Succes-la-Cannes-si-fara-public-la-noi-Marfa-si-banii.html>)
- Creton, L. (2009), *Économie du cinéma. Perspectives stratégiques*, coll. « Cinéma », Paris, Armand Colin.
- Creton, L.; Dehée, Y.; Layerle, S.; Moine, C. (eds.) (2011), *Les producteurs: enjeux créatifs, enjeux financiers*, Paris, Nouveau Monde éditions.
- Creton, L.; Jäckel, A. (2004), 'Business: A Certain Idea of the Film Industry'. *The French Cinema Book*, London: British Film Institute Publishing.
- Daney, S. (1990), 'Roumanie, année zéro'. *Cahiers du cinéma* 428, February, pp. 129-136.
- De Baecque, A. (2001), 'Présentation'. *L'Etat du monde au cinéma: Nouvelle Géographie*. IX Petite anthologie des Cahiers du Cinéma, Cahiers du Cinéma.
- De Valck, M. (2009), *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

- Durandin, C. (1994), *Histoire de la Nation Roumaine*. Paris, Éditions Complexe.
- Fisher, A.; Smith, I. R. (2016), 'Transnational Cinemas: A Critical Roundtable'. *Frames Cinema Journal*, vol. 9, April.
- Forest, C. (2001), *Économies contemporaines du cinéma en Europe. L'improbable industrie*, Paris, CNRS Éditions.
- Fulger, M. (2006), *Noul val în cinematografia românească*. Bucarest, Art.
- Gorzo, A. (2016), 'Realism and Ideology in post-2000 Romanian cinema', in: *Lacruri care nu pot fi șpuse altfel, un blog de Andrei Gorzo*. July 25th.
- Hoffman, K. (2007), 'Romanian cinema on the rise'. *Variety*, online edition, June 22nd.
- Jaafar, A. (2007), 'Cannes wins put spotlight on Romania: Awards bring optimism to film business'. *Variety* online, June 15th.
- Lim, D. (2008), 'Romanian cinema seizes the spotlight'. *Los Angeles Times*, online edition, January 31st.
- Mungiu, C. (2003), 'Nu vreau sa fac filme la kilogram'. *Revista 22 online*. May 12th.
- Nasta, D. (2013), *Contemporary Romanian Cinema: The History of an Unexpected Miracle*, New York: Wallflower Press.
- Pop, D. (2014) *Romanian New Wave Cinema: An Introduction*. Jefferson: McFarland and Co.
- Popescu-Sandu, O. (2010), 'Let's All Freeze Up Until 2100 or So: Nostalgic directions in Post-Communist Romania'. Maria Todorova & Zsuzsa Gille (eds). *Post-Communist Nostalgia*. New York. Berghahn Books. pp.113-125
- Scott, A.O. (2008), 'In film, the Romanian New wave has arrived', *The New York Times*, online edition, January 19th.
- Șerban, A. L. (2009), *4 decenii, 3 ani și 2 luni cu filmul românesc*. Bucharest, Polirom.
- Van Loon, A. (1996), 'European Union / Bulgaria / Hungary / Poland / Romania / Czech Republic: Participation in Community framework programmes in AV and other sectors made possible'. *European Audiovisual Observatory*, Iris.
- Wong, C. H. (2011), *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.