The work briefly presents the history of Romanian cinema after 1990, pointing out the important political and social phenomena that had reflected in the film production.

The new cinematic movements are presented and explained in their relationship with the past, that is with the last years of the socialist period and the so-called transition period (approximately the first decade after the December 1989 Revolution).

A special attention is paid to the movement of the young filmmakers form the New Romanian Wave and to its most representative names, but without neglecting other young talented authors, that can't be subscribed to the enounced movement.

Key words:
New Romanian Wave, The Transition period, The “Year Zero” of Romanian Cinema, political metaphor, direct cinema

THE BEGINNING

It has been several years now that the above syntagm got into use. “The new realistic Romanian cinema”, “the neurotic Romanian cinema”, “the cinema of the new generation”, or simply “the new wave” are just formulae through which specialists and journalists express the fact that something important, too long expected, is, finally, happening in Romania. Several years people have been queuing up for Romanian screenings at international festivals; some of
them are already hosting special sections of Romanian film. For several years, retrospectives of Romanian cinema has been successful in Paris, London, Berlin, Prague, Warsaw, Budapest, Rotterdam, Venice, Athens, Kishinew, Helsinki and New York, in Cyprus, Portugal and Kazachstan; many of them has become a regular event.

Who would have thought of that at the end of the nineties, when the Romanian cinema seemed to have been buried forever? The film production decreased alarmingly. The first years after the political changes from December 1989, Romania had passed through a period of chaotic transition. The governmental instability from the middle of the nineties led to legislative unsteadiness, which caused a lot of abuses in all domains of public life. A tacit struggle had started, a struggle in which the ideological support was often used as a pretext for gaining a powerful position. The official cultural structures were one of the areas of this battle.

Many of the recognized filmmakers created their own production and even distribution companies. But the main sponsor still remained the state, that is the Ministry of Culture and the old National Office for Cinematography (ONC). By gaining these outposts, which were politically dependent, some of “the old guard” of filmmakers from the seventies and the eighties (many of them, talented and innovatory at their time) practically controlled the whole cinema production in Romania. This state of affairs was very destructive and led to an unprecedented catastrophe.

There were only two premieres of fictional movies in 1998, and just one in 1990. Film-historians speak about 2000, when no feature film was released, as the “Year Zero of Romanian Cinema”.

The situation slowly improved when in 2001 the old ONC was transformed into the National Centre of Cinematography (CNC). The film production resumed in the frames of a better, but still controversial infrastructure. Seven new feature films had their release in 2001 and the things started to move on.

THE OLD FILMMAKERS IN THE WIND OF CHANGES

But how were the films of the old masters, made in the so-called “period of transition”? Unfortunately, the pressure of historical changes unfavorably affected the aesthetic views of many of them. The politic metaphor, key-element of the cinematic language in an oppressive political system, became useless. The
Great Enemy, the despotic Communist Party, became a shadow. In the torrent of changes, their fear not to loose contact with immediate reality had the effect of a boomerang. Some of them chaotically imported cheap motifs and futile solutions of Hollywoodian cinema, rashly adapted to Romanian reality. Serious directors once credited for their stylish and inspired adaptations after Romanian classic and modern literature (like Şerban Marinescu), suddenly ventured into the field of cheap sensational events, including political scandals, taken over the pulp literature of the moment. The result was disappointing. But even when they tried to keep their line, their films looked more and more weary. The historical thrillers of Sergiu Nicolaescu (as prolific as ever) lost their rhythm, the few new comedies of Geo Saizescu lost their humor, the dramas of Andrei Blaier gained in vulgarity, and the cryptic metaphoric films of Ion Cârmăzan lost any logic and contact with reality. They lost also a part of the audience and the support of most critics, but not the support of CNC!

There were few exceptions who succeeded to carry forward (some of them only for a short time) at the same level their cinematic universe, be it metaphorical, as that of Stere Gulea (Fox Hunte / Vulpe vânător¹, 1993, State of Things / Stare de fap², 1994) and Dan Piţa (but only in Luxury Hotel/Hotel de lux, 1992, Silver Lion Prize at Venice IFF), or realistic as that of Nicolae Mărgineanu (Somewhere in East / Undeva în Est, 1990; Look Ahead with Anger³/ Priveşte înainte cu mânie, 1993; The Auroch’s Head⁴/ Capul de zimbru, 1996). Even fewer accomplished to take advantage of the merely gained freedom of expression, like Mircea Daneliu (The Eleventh Commandment / A unsprezecea poruncă⁵, 1990, The Conjugal Bed / Patul conjugal⁶, 1992, The Snails’ Senator / Senatorul melcilor⁷, 1994) and Lucian Pintilie (see below). But, sooner or later, most of the quoted authors (with an exception of Pintilie) either diminished their work behind the camera in the benefit of other activities (as Stere Gulea), or started to feel the effects of the social and ideological crisis. By importing in a forced way new social themes of the “transition epoch”, the next films of the latter (as the same Dan Piţa and Daneliu, or the old master of the sixties Malvina Urşianu), express this dramatic pursue for a new perspective; but, even when trying to continue the same artistic

¹ Prize of the Union of Romanian Filmmakers (UCIN), 1993 and The Great Prize at San Marino.
² Prize of the Union of Romanian Filmmakers, 1994-1995.
³ Grand Prize at Mostra Internazionale Del Nuovo Cinema, Pesaro, Italy; The Silver Delphine Award and FIPRESCI Diploma at Troia IFF, Portugal; The OCIC Diploma at Amiens IFF, France; Best Photography at the Skoplie IFF, Macedonia.
⁴ The Professional Romanian Television’s Prize.
⁵ Prize of the Union of Romanian Filmmakers (UCIN), 1991.
⁶ Troy IFF Prize, Prize of The Union of Romanian Filmmakers (UCIN), 1993; screened at Berlin, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Jerusalem IFF.
⁷ Prize of the Union of Romanian Filmmakers (UCIN), 1994-1995; screened at IFF in Cannes – Official Selection, St. Petersburg, Montpellier, and Jerusalem.
direction without visible compromises, they have lost a part of their brightness, concision and inner equilibrium.

But while many of the great masters were drifting, one of them, belonging to the generation of the sixties, was in a constant and powerful ascension. This is Lucian Pintilie, well known abroad before 1989, especially as a theatre-director; for him, the political changes represented the chance to successfully resume his work in Romania. At the same time, his European acknowledgement was an important advantage, both for the co-production and the distribution of his new works. Being at the same time meditations upon the human nature confronted with political oppression, and reference points in film aesthetics, his lately movies, like *The Oak/Balanța* (1991), *An Unforgettable Summer/ O vară de neuitat* (1993), *Too Late / Prea târziu* (1996), *Terminus paradis* (1998), *The Afternoon of a Torturer/După-amiaza unui torționar* (2001), are unmissing from any international retrospective of Romanian cinema.

**THE NEWCOMERS**

But the beginning of the nineties was also the period of some interesting debuts: Sinisa Dragin, Nae Caranfil, Radu Mihăileanu. The first one gained a primary recognition between 1994-96 with his documentaries (*The Sadness of the Black Gold / Tristețea aurului negru*), awarded at important international festivals, as Oberhausen, Leipzig, Ravenna. But he is more credited for his first two feature films, *The Long Train Journey / Lungă călătorie cu trenul* (1998) and especially *God Kisses Us on the Mouth Every Day/În fiecare zi Dumnezeu ne sărută pe gură* (2001), whose original epic and poetry convinced the juries from Geneva, Strasbourg, Dijon, respectively Rotterdam, Cairo, Belgrade etc. But, despite his depthness and originality, he didn’t carry “the germs of the new trend”. Both public and young filmmakers had no more patience in listening or constructing deep moral and metaphysical debates.

A fresh, realistic, dynamic, lighter style was expected. Despite their problems, despite the unsolved mysteries of The Revolution, Romanians desired to laugh and to simply enjoy the freshness of life. How long such things hadn’t been seen on the screens! A new generation of filmmakers was expected.

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8 International French title: *Le Chêne.*
10 Grand Special Jury Prize and nominated to Golden Lion at Venice IFF, 1998; Best Director Award and Best Screenplay Award of Romanian Filmmakers’ Union (shared with Rasvan Popescu and Radu Aldulescu), 2000.
11 International French title: *L’Après-midi d’un tortionnaire.*
The first important name of this new generation is Nicolae (Nae) Caranfil, sun of the well-known in Romania film-critic Tudor Caranfil. His debut Don’t Learn Out the Window/E periculoso sporgersi (1992, selected at Cannes – Quinzaine des réalisateurs and awarded at Montpellier) was followed by the international co-productions Asphalt Tango (1996) and the more recent Philantropic/Filantropica (2002), a first Romanian blockbuster with seven international prizes. They were all huge successes, both in the country and abroad. The list of awards, as well as the box-office and the critics confirm it. The strong script (signed by the author), based on latter-day themes of Romanian society, that hadn’t been touched before, doubled by a fresh manner of acting and an excellent mise-en-scene, together with the irresistible humor and intelligent dialogue, had never been so brilliant in Romanian cinema.

Another remarkable author debuted in the same period is Radu Mihăileanu. His movies, produced in France, based on accurate scripts (written also by himself) attack serious problems of conscience, developed on a political background (the treason in Trahir- 1993 or rasism in Train de vie - 1998 and Va, vis et deviens - 2005). Important international festivals (as Montreal and Venice) confirm his artistic value.

**THE NEW WAVE**

At the same time, an affluence of good short films of the young graduates started to invade the international festivals and thus to change the perception of the public all over the world upon Romanian cinema. In 2000, Hanno Hoffer’s short On the Other Side / Dincolo wins The Cinecourt Prize at Montpellier and is bought by Canal+; in 2002, his new short Humanitarian Aid / Ajutoare umanitare is awarded with five international prizes. 2001 is the debut of Cristi Puiu, whose short film Stuff & Dough / Marfa şi banii is selected at Cannes (Quinzaine des réalisateurs) and gains six international prizes. In 2004, his short film Cigarettes and Coffee / Un cartuş de Kent şi un pachet de cafea obtained five international prizes, including „the Gold Bear at Berlin”.

Another very young author, Cristian (Cristi) Nemescu attains, with three shorts, a rapid acknowledgement: Mihai and Cristina/Mihai şi Cristina wins two international prizes, C Block Story / Poveste de la scara C, nine international prizes, and Marilena from P7 / Marilena de la P7 is nominated at Cannes and gains Best Film Award at Transilvania IFF. Unfortunately, his ascension was brutally stoped in 2006 by a fatal automobile catastrophe.
The year 2004 is the year of three successful debuts. Constantin Popescu’s *The Apartment / Apartamentul* wins the Great Prize at the Short Films Festival at Venice, Corneliu Porumboiu’s *A Trip to the City / Călătorie la oraș* obtains four international prizes, and *Traffic* by Cătălin Mitulescu gets Palme d’Or at Cannes and other two international prizes. About the last two we’ll hear quite soon.

2002 is the debut in long feature film of Cristian Mungiu with *Occident*, already known for his short successful comedies *Mariana, The Hand of Paulista / Mâna lui Paulista*, and *Zapping*. The tender comedy about the many Romanians’ dream of emigration was selected at Cannes (at the section Quinzaine des réalisateurs) and won seven international prizes.

The year 2003 brings two serious dramas. *Exam/ Examen* by Titus Muntean evokes the true story of an innocent, whose life had been destroyed by the corrupted juridical system controlled by Ceausescu. Paradoxically, despite the freedom of expression, subjects directly concerning the abuses of Ceausescu had never been touched before in Romanian cinema! Hundreds of such stories are still waiting to be told. *Maria* by Cătălin Peter Netzer (the script was written together with Gordan Mihic) is a sensitive melodrama about a simple woman, mother of many children, confronted with poverty, domestic violence and alcoholism. The poetical realism of the story telling conferred to the film eleven international prizes.

But the wave of the new filmmakers is still on its growth. The year 2005 brought the hugest success of Romanian cinema after 1989, Cristi Puiu’s *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu / Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*, a black comedy about loneliness, death and indifference shot in a minimalist stile. The film won the award Un Certain Regard at Cannes and other 26 prizes (for best director, best actress – Luminiţa Gheorghiu, best actor – Ion Fiscuteanu, special prizes). The film was very well-promoted by the author itself. Cristi Puiu has become the most representative voice of Romanian new cinema.

And that’s not all. In 2006, three young authors released three very different films about the Revolution. Two of them are at their debut in long fictional movie. They are Cătălin Mitulescu, with *The End of the World/ Cum mi-am petrecut sfârşitul lumii*, Corneliu Porumboiu with *12:08 East of Bucharest / A fost sau n-a fost? 12* and Radu Muntean with *The Paper Will Be Blue / Hârtia va fi albastră*. As they declared, no one had spoken before on this theme with the others. But, even if Romanians try to think about future, the events of December ’89 are still in the air, they are part of the present and it’s worth to remind them from time to

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12 Literal translation of the initial original title: “Has It Been Or Not Revolution In Our Town?”
time. Not for the sake of revenge or political deconspirations (as tried to do some mature filmmakers), but for that of a subjective and very personal remembrance of the most crucial event from the recent history of Romania.

The most poetical film, *The End of the World*, selected at Cannes (at the section Un Certain Regard) is a high-school love-story on the background of the last months of Ceausescu’s regime. Good psychologist and an attentive story-teller, Cătălin Mitulescu succeeds to recreate a nostalgic atmosphere of the socialist schools and the mixture of feelings specific for the end of the communism, using the classical songs of the epoch. The lead actress of the film, Dorothea Petre, was awarded with many prizes for best female role. She was already distinguished in 2005 for the lead character in *Ryna*, the original debut feature of Ruxandra Zenide, also distinguished with a lot of international prizes.

The most dynamical of the three films is Radu Muntean’s thriller *The Paper Will Be Blue*. The filmmaker has already been well-known since 2000, when he released the long thriller *The Anger / Furia*, well appreciated by public and critics. Now he tells the story of one of the hot nights of the Revolution, seen through the eyes of a soldier that desertates the Militia of Ceausescu to protect the National Television.

And the coolest, which obtained the longest and most prestigious list of awards, is Corneliu Porumboiu’s *12:08 East of Bucharest*, a bitter-sweet comedy, shot in a minimalist style, about the perception of great political events from outward the center. In a small town of Eastern Romania, a TV memorial debate upon the Revolution reveals, after 16 years from the event, diverse mentalities, that are far from the official look of the things. The film won the Camera d’Or at Cannes and the prize Europe Label Cinema, the Great Award at Transilvania IFF, “The Gold Swan” at Copenhagen and many other important distinctions.

The new epoch of Romanian cinema also brought into front names of new screenwriters. Even most directors still prefer to sign the story themselves (according to the “author’s cinema” paradigm, very appreciated in the socialist systems) or, at least, to participate to its elaboration. Răzvan Rădulescu is the most known. He is the co-author of the script for *The Paper Will Be Blue*, for Cristi Puiu’s two long feature films and, together with Cristi Puiu, for Lucian Pintilie’s “Nicky and Flo” / “Nicki Ardelean, colonel în rezervă”. He also wrote, together with Cecilia Ştefănescu, the dialogues for Tudor Giurgiu’s *Love Sick / Legături bolnăvicioase*, another debut of 2006.
The common characteristics of the “new Romanian wave” are enthusiasm, diversity, a pragmatic vision of live (let’s call it “thirst for normality”), the science of telling accessible stories and the interest for the immediate reality of Romanian world. Influences from the so-called “direct cinema”, Dogma ’95 and the American independents are visible, as in all European cinema of the moment. Film historians compare it with another favorable period of Romanian cinema, caused by the political thaw of the seventies, which gave rise to the so-called “generation of flood”. But in socialism, “thaws” never lasted too long. We hope that the nowadays wave will not “freeze”. We hope that it will create masterpieces, becoming a prosperous industry of Romanian cinema.


Malobrojni izuzeci uspeli su da održe kvalitet sopstvenog filmskog univerzuma, bilo metaforičkog bilo realističnog. A tek nekolicini je pošlo za rukom da se okoristi stečenom slobodom izražavanja. Početak devedesetih zabeležio je interesantne debitantske filmove, kako na polju dokumentarnog tako i na polju igranog filma; bio je to dah poetskog realizma i nagrada na internacionalnim filmskim festivalima. Ipak, uprkos dubini i originalnosti, ovi filmovi nisu nosili kljuce novog trenda. I renomirani i mladi režiseri gubili su strpljenje u suočavanju sa dubokim moralnim i metafizičkim pitanjima.
Očekivao se svež, realističan i neopterećen filmski stil. Uprkos nerešenim dramama revolucije komunističkog perioda, Rumuni se priželjivali smeh i uživanje u svežini života. Iščekivala se nova generacija filmskih reditelja.

I ona se pojavila! Počev od kraja devedesetih, bujica izuzetnih kratkih filmova tek diplomiranih reditelja počela je da osvaja filmske festivale. Za veoma kratko vreme, isti reditelji dobijali su nagrade i svetsko priznanje za svoje prve igrane filmove. Krajem 2006, nakon ogromnog internacionalnog uspeha, talas novih reditelja još uvek je u porastu. Istoričari filma ovaj period smatraju za novi povoljni period rumunskog filma koga je iniciralo političko otopljanje sedemdesetih i koje je iznedrilo takozvanu „generaciju kreativne poplave“.