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## REAL AND UNREAL IN RECENT ROMANIAN CINEMA

**Abstract.** The aim of the present study is to try and detect a possible explanation for the real media boom obtained by the productions of short fiction movies of the year 2000 in Romania. We will take into consideration a „show case”, containing six titles with a huge notoriety for the national cinematography. This package of movies is nothing more than the result of a selection made by the administrative authority in the field in Romania.

### SHOW CASE

The fiction short movies we discuss, produced between 2002-2004 are among the most award winning at great international movie reunions and, by consequence, selected by the Ministry for Culture and the Cults and by the National Center for Cinematography in order to promote Romanian culture around the world. These movies are:

1. „Un cartuș de Kent și un pachet de cafea”, (English title "Cigarettes and Coffee") directed by: Cristi Puiu, 2003. Awards: „Golden Bear”, Berlin, 2004, Special mention of the jury at Bello Horizonte, 2004, Great prize for short film in Zagreb, 2004, Special prize of the jury, Syracuse, 2005.

2. „Trafic”, (English title "Traffic") directed by: Cătălin Mitulescu, 2003. Awards: „Palme d Or”, Cannes, 2004, ARTE Prize, Angers, 2005, Special prize of the jury, Angers, 2005.

3. „Apartamentul”, (English title "The Apartment"), directed by: Constantin

Popescu, 2003. Awards: „Great prize at the Festival of short films, Venice, 2004, Special prize of the jury at TIFF, Cluj, 2004, The best screenplay, International Film Festival „Anonimul”, Sf.Gheorghe, 2004.

4. „Călătorie la oraș”, (English title "A Trip to the City") directed by: Corneliu Porumboiu, 2003. Awards: Second prize Cinefondation, Cannes, 2004, Great prize for short film, Montpellier, 2004, Best director, „Anonimul”, Sf. Gheorghe, 2004, Special prize of the jury, Kerry, 2004.

5. „Ajutoare umanitare”, (English title "Humanitarian aid"), directed by: Hanno Hofer, 2002. Awards: Special mention of the jury and the Prize of the public, Montpellier, 2002, Great Prize for short film, Cottbus, 2002, The Prize of the Chambers of Commerce, Milan, 2003.

6. „Challenge Day”, directed by: Napoleon Helmis, 2004.

### STUDY CASE

1. *Argument for the ideological determination of the level of public and cultural disinterest for the Romanian fiction movies until 1989.*

This selection of films constitutes a major, significative, moment for what we can appoint as the start of excellency for the new Romanian film (or, why not revival?!) during the years 2000. In the conditions in which the history of Romanian cinema confirms the existence of a real industry, one that is, unfortunately, tarnished by the Stalinist ideological intervention concerning the control (censorship) of the artistic creation, the local productions

were excellent more in quantity than in quality. We are talking here about the particular situation during the period of the Ceausescu regime, which enforced the massive production of feature films, with a strong accent on the indispensable communist message of these movies. Due to these circumstances, the audience, and, especially, the real cinematographic quality of these films made in an industrial way, constitute poor elements in artistic excellency, the few elements that we have hold on to the area of the exception. Thus, amongst the Romanian cinema goes there was a nearly malign state of saturation against the local offer of film productions.

The last decade (and we are talking about the years 1999-2000) of the previous century meant for the fiction film productions as well as in other fields a period of real and difficult „transition”. From an industry and a system of creation and cinematographic production that was highly centralized and ideologically induced the process of liberalization was very difficult. The changing of creation and production mentalities, the movement toward market economy methods, the acceptance of artistic and economic independence, the build up of a professional network for production, casting, organization and distribution, adopting the principles and professional methods in the international cinema slowed down somewhat the way towards great achievements.

2. *Argument for the temporal function of fiction film reception.*

It is not by chance that this „show case” includes short films with an average of 15 minutes (approximatively one and a half reel of film). We realize the fact that the feature films of short length enter into the graces of public attention somewhere during the year 2000, when general cultural production was oriented towards average installments and little temporal frames of consumption. We also have to take into consideration that the individual time disposable for the citizens of the III-rd millennium is very scarce and its appetite for cultural consumption is reduced to some mean temporal parameters. Let us consider, for example, the rapport between long feature, fiction films, with an average length of 120 minutes and the short feature films, with an average of 15 minutes.

*The result is an average report of 1:10.*

We are not discussing here about the time that was allocated to cultural consumption in the century Mozart was composing. We are specifically addressing the diminishing of the time allocated for cultural consumption from one decade to another during the entire length of the XX-th Century and, more recently, the XXI-st Century. It would be an interesting study on the real rates of decline for classical cultural consumption during the modern times, comparatively with the contemporary cultural consumption (for example in the theater we can take into account a decrease, from approximatively

120 minutes of representation, without breaks, to about 50 minutes of representation time). Can we blame, thus, only the temporal average specific to the television serials? In any circumstance, the average standards for emission are adjusted to specific, minimalist, lengths, where the rhythms of 17, 24-25 and 52 minutes have become common places and started to condition the consumption satisfaction to these limits (let's not forget that the above mentioned figures are rounded up with several minutes of advertising). If we take into consideration the average, daily information bombardment, quantified in messages per receiving citizen we grow tired of noticing the fact that, with our without our will, we are simply saturated with information. From the simple and vicious television zapping, to all kind of speakers that pour music, advertising and words, words, a lot of words, from the sounds and visual signals of all kinds at home, on the street, at work we derive a ruthless information assault on us. That is why the adoption of a set of measures intended to protect us becomes necessary: we start exercising a selective attention, we ignore useless information (that functions like spam in our daily lives) and, most of all, we assume the right to concision.

In this context, the young producers and directors involved in the creation of short feature films, at their turn, answer to the cultural call of our times, but also to the conditioning of the rhythms in the media.

*Problems that need  
to be addressed seriously*

Between the saturation generated by the heavy block of feature films production and the phenomenon of concision, understood as a specific attitude of contemporary world, we become more and more preoccupied to find at least a plausible sense for the explosion of feature films belonging to the category of our „show case“. We need to address a couple of questions that contain the possible germs for eventual answers.

First, can we talk about a minimalist art form (whereas by minimalist art we understand a specific genre)? Is the short feature film about to become a special case, a current case or a major case? Obviously we are talking about the substance of these movies, the message they convey and the professional skills involved. Perhaps that, after the long years of cinematographic production that was grouse and industrial like, we need such an approach. After a given type of cinematographic production and after a certain time of cinematographic consumption there were radical changes of mentalities, of artistic conscience, of creative capacities and, last but not least, the technologies of the fields. By consequence, we are witness to a real cultural shock.

On the second hand we need to address the problem of audience. And we need to ask, in a non-rhetoric way: WHO is the intended viewer of these short feature films? WHAT is their real audience? WHICH ways of public viewing are available? Is the tendency of

individual cinema consumption (home cinema) surpassing the public, collective consumption (the traditional cinema)? We know, unfortunately, as it is apparent in the official statistics, that the general rate for public consumption of movies is very low. On the other hand, Romanian cinematographic production faces a big problem: in the conscience of local viewers, perhaps because the old system and all the problems of the old regime, the reception of our movies do not provoke too much of a large interest. We are in a time of deep cultural public trauma. We could interpret this state of disinterest as a cultural shock.

*Elements that drive us close  
to the short feature film*

The daily stress of the institutionalized citizen (where the institutionalized citizen is subject to an agenda that does not belong to him) generates the problem of the degree of patience. HOW MUCH TIME is an institutionalized citizen willing to give to cultural consumption (specifically of cinema consumption)? More precisely, today, in the XXI-st Century, November the eight, this afternoon, HOW MUCH time can we allocate to a serious discussion about some very serious films? This is due to the fact that professionals and normal people alike are interested by this phenomenon. This is our slice of time, politely allowed according to present times.

So we can ask, is the institutionalized citizen happy to consume culturally and intensely, but on a short span of time: a

time according with the television emission time? Probably yes. Is this to his interest? What is his INTEREST consisting of?

Our suggestion is to create a link between the preference of young directors to express themselves artistically in a concise manner and the interest of the citizens towards these productions and the concepts of REAL and UNREAL.

We believe that, as a last instance, the elements of REAL and UNREAL generate the mechanisms of creation and directly influence the perception until the moment of producing interest.

What is REAL and what is UNREAL in the Romanian short feature films (with reference to our show case):

<i>Real</i>	<i>Unreal</i>
AMBIANCE	INCIDENCE
STORY (NARRATIVE)	AXIS JUMP
TIPICAL	ATIPICAL
TIPES	MASKS
LOGIC	ILOGIC
HABITUDE	PERPLEXITY
RIGHT	UNFAIR
REASONABLE	UNREASONABLE
FORMAL	INFORMAL
KNOWN	STRANGE
TRADITIONAL	NOVELTY
RUTINE	SURPRISE
STAND BY	SHOCK
LEVEL OF EXPECTANCY	CONTRADICTION
DEFECTS	BILE
LEGAL	ILLEGAL
ACORDINGLY	UNACORDINGLY
PRAGMATISM	IDEALISM
CREDIBLE	ABSURD
NATURAL	UNNATURAL
CIVILIZED	UNCIVILIZED
VERIDIC	INCREDIBLE
UNIFIED	NON-UNIFIED
ORGANIZED	DISORGANIZED
WESTERN	LOCAL
URBAN	RURAL

Using this list of elements we can extract the polarized aspect of stimuli for the interest, by identifying that which is recognized (rediscovered) from what we know and which gives us a certain comfort, opposed with the challenges of novelty (of no-recognition of non-discovery). It is interesting and, also, real, the fact that these terms become increasingly contradictory the more we are identifying

ourselves with one of them. Accordingly, the new terms, as surprising as they may be, can become unreal for some of us that are not familiar with them. In this case, the INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF UNREAL is perceived as a cultural shock. As shown below, by contradiction, the real becomes simply unreal, equivalent with what we tend to describe as cultural shock.

<i>Real</i>	<i>Contradition</i>	<i>Unreal</i>
MENTALITY		CULTURAL SHOCK
EDUCATION	contradiction	CULTURAL SHOCK
FORMATION		CULTURAL SHOCK

A key, or a possible explanation

Arguments for a concrete way of finding the KEY to the feature films in the SHOW CASE.

Here are a couple of conclusions (the letter F is marking the corresponding number of the order of the movies in the show case):

<i>Movie</i>	<i>contradiction</i>	<i>Result</i>
F. 1.	generations conflict	cultural shock
F. 2.	conflict between ideal and reality	cultural shock
	conflict between need and ability	cultural shock
F. 3.	conflict between routine and surprise	cultural shock
F. 4.	conflict between tradition and novelty	cultural shock
	the therapy of nullity	
F. 5.	conflict between intention and achievement	cultural shock
F. 3.	conflict between obligation and conscience	cultural shock

Finally we come to think and to support the fact that the cultural shock represents the principle that generates this phenomenon. In a state of cultural shock, after an extremely different social regime (one that is by now a strange regime), the young movie makers have surpassed the inhibitions of the ancient regime and those

of a tiring transition in order to conquer the market of excellency for short feature films, films that are in synchrony with what contemporary times demand as a cultural must from every citizen, be it movie maker or movie consumer, that is CONCLUSION.

# Essays

Oana PRESECAN

## WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN. AN INTERPRETATION

*In the same way that some artists  
are destined to undress women, Almodóvar  
is destined to dress them up. To dress them in languorous reds [...],  
on the music played by guitars and violins [...]. (Alex. Leo Şerban)*

### 1. Introduction

Metz's foundational essay *The Imaginary Signifier* is an exemplary account of the film-spectator relationship, providing what was to become a model for the use of psychoanalytic theory in film criticism.<sup>1</sup> "[...] La rationalisation d'un goût en une théorie, sous ses diverses formes nombreuses et courantes, obéit à une loi objective qui ne varie guère

dans ses grandes lignes. On pourrait la décrire, en termes lacaniens, comme un léger flottement entre les fonctions de l'imaginaire, du symbolique et du réel [...]"<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Eco argues that reality is represented in the cinema through a system of cultural codes which are intimately connected to ideology<sup>3</sup>.

The movie I am about to analyse is a product of Almodovar's clearly recog-

<sup>1</sup> Murphy, Paula. *Psychoanalysis and Film Theory Part 1: „A New Kind of Mirror”*, <http://intertheory.org/psychoanalysis.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Metz, Christian. *Le signifiant imaginaire*, Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1984, pp. 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Murphy, Paula, *op.cit.*