

Interview

The “new wave” is a marketing concept interview with Tudor GIURGIU

Question Doru Pop: Tudor Giurgiu, you are one of the people who have done more than it was humanly possible for the Romanian cinema in recent years. You are a director, a producer, the organizer and developer of an International film festival, screenwriter... It seems extraordinary that you can do all these things! From this perspective, of somebody involved in the national movie industry, how do you see the last ten years of Romanian cinema?

Answer Tudor Giurgiu: Well, somehow I see them as a kind of rebirth, because the period between 2000 and 2002 it was a great disappointment for me, since during that time in Romania, for example in 2000, no one has done any movie. It was in 2001 that I thought that

I have to do something, on my own, and together with my team and colleagues we talked about trying to put together a film festival in Cluj, and in 2002 it was the first edition, and we had no Romanian film in the competition. Everyone wondered why we organize a film festival under these conditions, where we did not have, practically, a local product. Most of the foreign guests wanted to see the Romanian film, and we did not have something to show them. Or, if you come to think about it, as a connection over time, we are now in 2011 and we can plainly see that, at this moment, there is a battle between the Romanian filmmakers, who can get selected to different festivals, such and such film goes to Berlin, another lands a prize in Cannes, and the competition is already very hard, and films continue to be produced, I mean that good films have not stopped to be made and it is interesting that, somehow, it turned out that this “wave” was not just an ephemeral process. In fact, these authors belonging to the new Romanian cinema continue to come up with good screenplays and ideas and I think that in the future it will

Tudor GIURGIU

Contemporary film director, owner of an independent production company and the initiator and President of the Transilvania International Film Festival

be interesting to see how we will be able to manage this success, and to make it a little more present in the cinema theaters of Romania. Right now, I believe that we must go past the international recognition, since we suffer, primarily, in our direct relationship with the Romanian cinema audience. Otherwise, I do not think that what happened in the last years was a miracle, it was just the very strong effect of powerful individualities and, in fact, of real filmmakers, coupled with a very interesting process of acquisition and synthesis of elements from the immediate reality, because I think that all the winning scenarios were based and extract their strength from a very consistent source - at least in Romania, where the reality gives you a pile of ideas and subjects for cinema.

D.P.: In the context of realism, again, and this is something that is widely debated in the movie criticism: to what extent there is a kind of a programmatic direction toward realism or not, for the entire young generation of directors?

T.G.: I do not know if this is really a program or a strategy. I think what happened after 2000 was a breaking point from what it was before, and this is a process which began with Cristi Puiu's film, "Stuff and Dough", who proposed a direct cinema, a kind of movie that consisted of shots which were not taken on a tripod, were filmed with the camera "in hand". More so, the language exceeded, let us say, the boundaries of conventional speech and the „political correctness" that existed until then. Or, I think, all this came as a revolt against the old cinema,

an obsolete, very „parabolic", very... (DP: metaphoric!) metaphorical, and which, in fact, was not saying very much, that is it was only using all sorts of associations and metaphors and suggestions, but it did not speak about real life characters, the heroes were some sort of empty patterns, some kind of "ghosts". And everything that happened started with the ambition of Cristi Puiu and Răzvan Rădulescu to make another kind of cinema. From here stemmed an entire movement which, I believe it exists, even if many directors asked are saying that it does not exist, but, from a distance, it is obvious. And if you look at the work of other young people - I know most of the students who graduate from Bucharest Film Academy and whose graduation films I watch every year, there are many films that are trying to emulate that kind of realism, let's say, a minimalist style of moviemaking, not always successful, but it is clear to me that this is the explanation: a complete break from what was before. And this was not by chance that there were short films or feature movies that were representing "slices of life", where you could see people - and the most memorable is Puiu's film, "A carton of Kent and a pack of coffee" - who were simply meeting, we were witnessing a discussion between two characters, at the table. A dialogue between father and son who was talking so much about society, about parent-child relationships, about what was in Romania during that time, about what will be - and I repeat, this was only a 10-minute discussion at the table.

D.P.: I think you just gave one of the best definitions for the new Romanian cinema. Indeed, going from here, how would you comment on the label „new wave”? It was widely used and debated. And, just like you said, some of the “new wave” directors have denied its existence. How do you relate to that concept?

T.G.: I believe that the „new wave” is a marketing concept, that works very well for film criticism and for those coming from international festivals, and associate the Romanian films with this movement. The directors, I believe that they have less to do with it. Many of them, like Porumboiu or others, do not even bother with this kind of things. I think that it is the duty of film directors to make movies and the duty of film critics to analyze them, to put labels, to make evaluations, comparisons and to associate this movement, the new Romanian films, with other contexts. Again, I think that seen from a distance, it’s not accidental that this concept was used in relationship with this movement, because there are not many national film industries where you can see that every year, there appears a new movie. The critics and other people come to ask themselves: „This year again, what is the novelty in the Romanian filmmaking?”, and everyone is curious what will now be at Cannes in 2011, so there is a horizon of expectation. There were Puiu, Mungiu, Porumboiu, Munteanu, Mitulescu, but it did not stop here - it was Florin Șerban in 2010. There appeared new people with interesting films, and their productions have been appreciated. Let us not believe

that Romania is unique in that kind of international appreciation. I am carefully watching the movies that are now made in Greece, because two years in a row, the same thing happened there. It was a movie making industry where nothing happened. And I remember that I was a member in a jury in Thessaloniki, 4 years ago, and I read some awfully bad scenarios, coming from Greece. We had to award one, because it was a political decision, it was proper to reward a Greek script, but they were all very poorly made. And I was wondering why there are no movies, so I was explained the context – is was an old cinema industry with many problems – but it was clear that at some point there will be some changes, that people concerned with changes will appear. And as of now, the Greek moviemakers are already everywhere - four of their films were in Venice, Sundance, Berlin. It proves that what happened smoothly in Romanian movie industry, this so called „new wave”, it works the same and with the same paradigm, if you want, in other cinemas.

D.P.: Do you think that we can say that the „new wave” in Romanian cinema industry has defeated the „old wave”? Since, in 2010, it was for the first time in the history of national cinema that a movie, yours, took more financing money than the “old guard” Sergiu Nicolaescu. Is it a signal?

T.G.: I do not know if this is necessarily a signal, since here on the issues we are addressing, there are two different levels: one level of the quality of films and their

critical value (only the film criticism can confirm this, or the people at festivals). From this point of view, the Romanian films associated with the „new wave”, I think made the difference.

I say this with regret, since I have a great respect for filmmakers such as Pița or Daneliuc, but their latest movies, unfortunately, did not work well and they did not proved to be successful. I cannot give a clear explanation for that... but I think that the explanation is that they lost breath, they are not interesting, unfortunately, neither for the public in Romania, nor for the festivals abroad. Or, from this point of view, I think that there should be a simple assessment, logical and serious. Of course, Romania is represented by some of these movies, obviously of the great masters, like Pintilie, Ciulei, whose films (at least in the case of Ciulei) are only just now rediscovered by foreign audience. I saw this, recently, in the TIFF screenings, people who have discovered with great enthusiasm “The Forest of the Hanged”, for example.

On the other hand, if that’s the kind of reality that one can plainly see, it’s obvious, clear and quantifiable, there are also underground interests, if you will, small local mafias, where there is always the resistance of those who make mediocre or bad movies, but who feel that their position could be threatened by this movement of the “young wolves” and are trying, obviously, by all means possible (sometimes related to political advantages, money, a little corruption in by itself) to keep their positions. So here

is a false problem, because nobody can take the right to make movies from these people. Even Sergiu Nicolaescu, who still has an audience of his own, neither of Geo Saizescu, can be banned from making movies. I mean nobody, least of none of us, has talked about telling someone: „Sir, you cannot make anymore movies”, it is ridiculous to think like this. We, at our turn, will want to make films as long as we can, and one cannot deny anyone else from this right. Ideally, or let’s say where problems arise, we are at a time when we must make a critical evaluation, both economical and practical, and we must realize that maybe it’s a bit unethical to invest millions upon millions in movies that do not bring anything. For better or worse, the films made by Sergiu Nicolaescu are constantly successful for the box-office, and and it seems to me important to make such movies, but other films do not cause any type of reaction, neither in Romania, nor abroad. And then one must wonder why do we spend so much money for them, instead of, perhaps, investing that money, I don’t know, into better education programs in schools or anything else for that matter.

D.P.: Switching gears, you are one of the directors who made films that were interested in putting forward other types of voices. Obviously I am thinking about “Love Sick”, which brings a new type of character in the Romanian cinema, or at least, it seems to me that there is this intent. There were other movies like Ryna and it seems to me very clear that there is a rediscovery of female narrative voices.

Katalin Varga is another movie that you have produced. Is it something here, that we can identify as an explicit intention of looking for some new voices, some new identities that have not been exploited in the Romanian film?

T.G.: This observation, I think, comes rather from the concern for a certain type of cinema. I am not really not a big fan of this type to minimalist approach to the cinema, meaning that there is a trend of making very „dry movies”, so to say, or movies where one does not use music, or a type of cinema very dogmatic at the level of camera moves – I’m not interested in this type of cinema. I respect this approach, and there are, at least in the recent Romanian cinema, some wonderful films like this, “Policeman adjective” or “Tuesday, after Christmas”. I cannot say that the movies that I am interested in or that I myself like to make are necessarily that kind of movies. This is why my previous searches have probably been different, and my present and future movie interests will be oriented towards another kind of cinema. Now I’m more interested in the genre cinema, which can be comedy or horror film. I think it’s more important to recover the lost bet with the Romanian public. That does not mean that I am not interested to develop projects, let’s say movies or art films, but I think we need to tell something a little different from what was said until now. I mean I am looking for some type of films that can become, that can provide other kind of searches than those sought so far in recent Romanian cinema.

For example, the best movie I have produced so far, I hope to finish it this year, is *Somewhere in Palilula*, Silviu Purcărete’s film, which will be a very debated movie, and I am convinced it will be highly reviewed, even very criticized, but that comes with a different vision of cinema, extremely different and in total contrast with the minimalist vein, so to say.

D.P.: I understand this take on the cinema industry. But again, I would like to emphasize very much, since I think that here is an interesting perspective linked to femininity or feminine identity, which was not an issue, a topic, in the classical Romanian moviemaking...

T.G.: If I come to think of it, I believe that one thing which would be important for the Romanian cinema, it is not so much to explore this vein, but offering the opportunities to make movies to the women film directors, because there is now a generation of graduates, and I know those in Bucharest and Cluj, that can bring some very interesting things which can some special changes in the Romanian cinema. You know, I saw their films and I have great confidence in their future. I hope that with Iulia Rugină, a graduate from Bucharest Film Institute, we will work on her first feature film. It is important since the Romanian cinema is very „macho”. For example, I was recently talking to someone and we were taking a look at the recent films, of the last 7-8 years, and the wife character in the Romanian film seen is extremely badly portrayed, that is she is either the ugly wife (DP: the bad housewife), or typical housewife, who

drives the man crazy and blocks his life, the nagging wife, in general, has come with a very negative connotation. But I have never put the question of exploring a feminine trend. "Love Sick" appeared at that time while I was as reading a book, and I loved it. But, again, if I come to think about it, my personal projects, those that I currently work on are not related to this topic, maybe only one of them, another adaptation...

D.P.: Sure, but "Weddings, music and video tapes" is also related to the universe of marriage, in a very ironical way. I find this very telling, I do not know if it's right, but I must ask...

T.G.: Yes, I don't know, I do not think so. I mean, I can tell, the next films will not have anything to do with this, but I'm working on another story that's real strange love-story ... A Romanian writer who goes to Spain, and has a romance with some women out there, so... there's something there.

D.P.: Is this the book recently published by Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari?

T.G.: It is his book, and we were working on it, but this is only one of the projects, there is nothing there...

D.P.: Still, you have there another lesbian couple and their story, an Argentinian woman and a Jewish girl from New York mixed with the car thieves of Romania?

T.G.: Yes, so probably it's something there, but I never paused to analyze. Generally when I make movies (and this is what I recently realized) you just do

it, it's very hard to analyze your own mechanisms, you can see them from a distance only after that. In any case, I admire and I would love to be able to make movie genres as diverse and different as possible. I mean, to me, what Stanley Kubrick did for the moviemaking, who, of course, is a genius, he is somewhere far away and up (I have no intention of making any comparisons)... but my attempts to making cinema and to reach various genres is something that tempts me, at least I would like to do so as to test and experiment my means.

D.P.: We have already talked about your future projects, but I would like to ask you a closing question about your view on the future evolution of the Romanian cinema? Now you're already one of its leaders, and you have a better vision. How do you see the coming years, or how would you want to see it grow in the coming years?

T.G.: I think the only thing that I would like to happen and it will happen at some point, is to have the first Romanian film that will explode at the local box office. That, I think, will be a moment when some things will change, because Romania still has a big potential. There are increasingly more and more screening rooms, and there is money to be made from the exploitation of films as an industry. Or, let us not forget that, whatever we may think and want, the cinema, going beyond the fact that it is the seventh art, it is one of the arts that have a strong impact on the public, and it is a big industry in many countries. Here in Romania, it is just the

aspect which was neglected, because we had no screening rooms, the Romanian filmmakers – anyways their films have nothing to do with this criterion, with the commercial aspects - but that's why I think this to be the decisive moment, when a Romanian film will be able to gather 200,000 spectators, will be a kind of „turning point”, because then, somehow, I am convinced people will follow the trend.

D.P.: Other moviemakers will see that it is possible.

T.G.: Yes, those who are now 15-16-17 years old! Followers of this kind of cinema will appear. And I think that, only then the Romanian cinema will be at a different stage, so that I think there will be a much larger impact. This will happen in Romania too, these things are happening in other countries right now. The industry, the financial figures and the sheer numbers will dictate much of the decisions for funding. And this thing will evolve together with the existence of the author's cinema, who will have a program (which some of them already have), an aesthetic program, well shaped, with a clear conception of their cinema. I've talked about them before, they are the directors who have a very high respect and are widely appreciated abroad - I think they will continue that kind of author cinema. And, I am convinced if this, with a great success. It is then when I think the Romanian cinema will reach a kind of an interesting composition. I do not know how this will take place, but I know it will happen. We have always

functioned with a great delay to all the movements. Nobody has invented the wheel, these processes have happened in other countries, but Romania has always been in a period of delay, between 10 and 15 years. So I do not know, I have no idea how we will evolve over the next 10 years. It will be like a surprize

D.P.: Speaking of this, I was about to ask when do you think that there will be, so to speak, the first regional Romanian film. I mean, when the movie industry will decentralize? I have for a long time discussed with different people that it's time to create a new pole of film production in Romania, perhaps in Cluj, why not around the TIFF?

T.G.: I think that this will happen when several factors, not just those involved in the movie business, but also others will realize that this type of activity can generate revenue. It is a very „cool” thing to do for the youth, for the local talents, and this will generate the economic effects, as in all regions of Europe, as it did in countries like Poland, Hungary, where the involvement of regional government, of the different provinces in a given country, where the film has generated some immediate economic effects. Not only that movies were produced, but production companies came and investors appeared. I think this phenomenon will happen. Again, knowing the slowness of the process (which has nothing to do with Transylvania), but the Romanian slowness of change and the social processes for an area where we are not talking about highways, buildings, investments in the

infrastructure, these are discussions that are hard perceptible. This period of change is difficult to estimate.

D.P.: Yes, it would be an ideal time to see films funded by Transylvania region, just like we see Normandy producing films!

T.G.: Yes, yes! This is everywhere the same!

D.P.: Thank you very much for the time and the inspiring insights.