

# Interview

*Cristi PUIU*

## “THE CINEMA IS A QUESTION OF MALPRACTICE”

*interview with Doru Pop*

**DP:** Cristi Puiu, your role in the Romanian “new wave” was disputed and is still discussed.

One thing is for sure, many have started to emulate this approach. What I would be interested to know is if there is an aesthetic that you make reference to, within or beyond that of the “new wave”. How would you define this aesthetic?

**CP:** Unfortunately, what you say about emulation is true. There is a saying in Romanian, the monkey does what the human does. And it’s unfortunate. I say unfortunate because there are not enough money in the Romanian cinema, and many of the jackals of the old regime, many of

the filmmakers who made propaganda films during Ceaușescu’s regime, still have access to this money. Once the money is dwindling, it is harder and harder for the young filmmakers. But not the youth is the strength, it is about those who really have something to say. And as a side effect, as you well know it happened in the Renaissance workshops, Michelangelo who worked in Ghirlandaio’s workshop, imitated his Master, and mimicry is a first step in learning the language of the craft, it is mandatory, but it valid just for the period of growth. It is like with learning process of the child, he learns, you repeat “mother, mother” several times, until he is learning the language, he acquires certain skills, copying, imitating his parents. But they are only the first steps. When you detach and you become aware of yourself, things must necessarily change.

The directors, those who went through film schools, and those who were not trained in specialized institutions in the moment of their artistic formation, all of us, when we form our skills, we have

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our masters that we enjoy to imitate. Personally I enjoy having such masters and I do everything possible not to disappoint them, even if they are people that I never met and some of them I know I cannot meet since they are long dead. The problems appear when we leave the perimeter of arts, and we enter the area of cinema, especially art cinema, which unlike the other arts, is the "number one" art in terms of prize winning, not only in Romania, but generally. So the media, the television talk very much about these important awards given in the cinema-making, the Oscars, Palme d'Or, it is not the same thing as in literature, so to say, even about literary prizes there is some talking about, but, as you know I did some painting, there is very little discussions about painting. It is even hard to understand how this mechanism works, how the Venice Biennale functions, it is very different. And then, since there is this aspect related to show business, a term I find repugnant, that I reject with all my being, when this component related to prizes and glory kicks in, the perception of the young people starts to be changed, and cinema is perverted by all these social, glamorous issues, which are mundane, and are not related to cinema. And then, lots of them say, in order to get an award, in order to get glory, fame, respect from my fellow citizens, I can make movies in this style. And then, automatically, they try to synthesize this style. What is this style? Hand held camera, so on and so forth... Thus we arrive to a very sad copying manner, because those people

are not actually children, they are no longer at the first steps, the ABCs of cinema, they are a mature filmmakers who cannot do anything more than to resort to a formula which they think it can work, without integrating it, without digesting it. Without understanding what Godard said, in his famous statement, when he claimed that "Traveling shots are a question of morality", they do not understand that cinema making is a moral problem.

What does this mean? It means a lot, it first means that to appeal to any kind of expression you are responsible not only aesthetically, but also ethically. There is a much higher responsibility that you have, when you make a movie, when you tell a story, when put into relationship images and sounds. There is a very serious problem when we talk about cinema, something we do not usually talk about, and this is a subject to which I would devote more time, analysis and research: the cinema as malpractice. Because there is malpractice in cinema. But do not talk about it. Why don't we discuss these issues? It's simple, because people do not die in the cinema theater, and as long as there are no victims, there is no malpractice. But it is totally wrong! People do not die in the theaters, people die on the battlefields and, in many cases, the cinema has played a role in their getting into war. When the movies become a weapon, and I think of propaganda, it can generate in people's minds everything that is bad. Because you have a moral support, you have legitimacy, it is a cultural product, a film,

a certain trend in cinema making, a certain speech supported by a large number of films, and this discourse legitimizes you, you can kill for it... For instance, if we talk about what Western cinema means during the Cold War, I do not want to refer to the movies made during the Second World War, which are highly questionable, it would be a much longer story...

**DP:** Well, basically the Westerners were allowed to kill anybody, anywhere in the world...

**CP:** Exactly. But the movies about the Cold War, where the Russian was the enemy and the Communists were the enemies played a similar role. A friend of mine told me, when I was in Geneva at school, that the military service in Switzerland is a very complicated one. You first have, about four or six months, of continuous service, and then every year, up to 50 years old, one month a year you are recruited again. It is a serious business, they have weapons at home, ammunition and stuff like this in your private house. Hence a series of terrible situations, somebody machine-gunned people in a bank in Geneva, during the celebrations of the city, somebody went out to shoot on the streets of Lausanne, I think... And he told me that when he was training, he target practiced with Russian mockups, wearing red stars! That's direct propaganda, one that you have to accept when you are in the military service. The same way as in Romania they were telling us about the imperialist, capitalist Hydra and stuff like that... Often we speak the same way when we discuss about who owns Transylvania,

and then various battle-camps are born. This is direct propaganda, a propaganda that is fed by all sorts of extremisms, and extremism, again, it is a trap. It is not only that we are dissatisfied with an extremist speech, it's about stupidity, but we do not dare to call it so. It's simply stupid. Stupidity has many forms. If this direct propaganda is so effective and is easily identifiable as propaganda, we do not go forward to think about the extent to which propaganda films are effective. To what extent they generate violence, extremism, crime, intolerance, because we think we know who we are, we know what humanity is, we think that our world is devoid of any mystery. We think we know everything and we do not need any extra effort. But this is not so. And all people who really make an effort on research, regardless of the field, whether we talk about artists, whether we talk about scientists, agree on the subject matter. Just listen Richard Feynman (physicist who got the Nobel prize), a great thinker, listen to him once, to see how reluctant he is, how much doubt is in his discourse, not to say out loud that you know it all.

**DP:** In this context, I think it would be interesting to discuss the fact that you came from a Communist regime, in which cinema was used as an instrument of propaganda and manipulation, and decided to do a different kind of cinema. Aesthetically speaking again, what is the connection here?

**CP:** The aesthetical problem was, for me, a very simple one. It was resolved fairly quickly. I did not come to cinema

accidentally, when I have decided to become a director I did it out of curiosity, I started to study film out of simple curiosity. When I was little I wanted to become a painter, and that's exactly what I did. When I was 10 years old, my father enrolled me in an art school and, although I had many failures and faced many difficulties, I always came back to the only thing that animated me, which I was painting. I considered cinema to be just entertainment, a sort of vulgar entertainment, something that belonged to a circus fair. Then, in 1984 I think, something happened, Matthew, a good friend of mine, who attended the Bucharest cinematheque, himself a painter, he told me, "tomorrow we go to the cinematheque, there is a Buñuel movie, *The exterminating angel*". At that time I was in some sort of blockage, I was not accepted to Tonitza during the 80s, until '83, when I met Matthew I did not touch the pen and the brush anymore, the failure was so painful that I thought: this means it's not for me. That killed me inside and Matthew said, "Let's start again", and I resumed painting due to him. Since this story about going back to painting was ongoing, and since it was at a point where I have left the craft, I did no painting, no drawing, I was into reading. I've got books about painting and, as I was secretly preparing for admission to the History art department, I was very much into that. Matthew's father was a writer, a great poet, Mircea Ciobanu, and in their house there were many important books in that era, in that moment even

the *Bible* was very important and we had discussions on some of the chapters, it was not out of dogmatism, but a form of research about what it actually meant. For me *The Book of Job* was very important at the time. Slowly and painstakingly, as I was starting to paint again, I was interested by everything it had to do with the craft. So, *The exterminating angel* got me very interested, it was very fresh. And that changed my perception of cinema, that was the first film to influence me, there were others before, but they had no impact, yet I still remember this one, it was more important than any of them.

So, going back to aesthetics, it meant everything to me when I came to Geneva, where I started painting and, after the first year of studies, I had to pass an examination in film studies, within the same school, which was called École Supérieure d'Arts Visuels, there were courses in painting, sculpture, graphics, traditional arts, multimedia, film and video. It first started as a school for experimental cinema, and those who wanted to go further, to make another type of cinema they could, but in the school the focus was on the experimental cinema. This was a school that was founded by a theorist, not a practitioner: François Albera, professor of film history and film theory at the University of Lausanne and the Sorbonne. He did this in the 70s, so the approach was different from what I knew, Hollywood was very far. I got there following a path that started slowly, since 1984, with *The exterminating angel*, so gradually I wanted to learn about

other films. What happened from the moment when I arrived in Switzerland, in 1990, and I began to see a lot of movies, to restore my visual culture, to fill holes, since I had lots of gaps, and I was at that time extremely attached to Kurosawa, in terms of composition, of the influence of painting. But slowly, inside that School which has put into question everything cinema was, questioning even the essence of cinema, suddenly I started to ask myself serious problems. What's in a movie that's not painting and not literature, and not just theater, but specific to cinema. Why is there a cinematic art? Does it mean that it exists because it is more than all the other arts, and not just a sum of all the others? I was thinking about it, just as I do think now. And then came along a friend of mine, who gave me a Cassavetes film which changed everything. I saw Cassavetes' movie *A Woman under the influence* and then later I saw all the movies made by Cassavetes, I started reading about it, I read the interviews, the texts, everything, so I began to watch direct cinema, direct documentary and so on. I realized that the only thing that really interests me, although I really liked other movies a lot, maybe the right word is not "to like", I had a boundless admiration for Bresson, for example, for everything that is constructed into cinema, everything that is artificially built into cinema, yet and works, all of this touches me very much. In fact, the road taken by other filmmakers when they choose to build their universe, world starting from turning their back on life, I appreciate all of that, these movies

are very important to me, yet I wondered: "What moves me truly, where am I for real?" And the only place I found for myself, without necessarily looking for a place of my own, but assuming the pleasure, assuming the position of the spectator, I realized that the only things that interests me are the things that relate to life.

I do not think that there is such a thing as realistic cinema. Or, if we accept that there is a realistic cinema, then all cinema is realistic. Personally I do not believe that recording life is more realistic when we are practicing the direct documentary, or direct cinema, or observational cinema, than the recording on film of the objects resulting from this process of imagining the world. Our imagining brain is still present in this reality, and this puts an end to this debate. For me there is either realism, meaning all movies are realistic, or there is no realism – that is, either we accept that all novels are realistic, since our mind together with all it imagines, is a part of this reality, or there is no realism at all.

**DP:** I have been waiting for a long time to ask you this. It is obvious that you allowed the emergence of this style. Everybody should recognize this. If the birth of the new Romanian cinema can be placed once *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu* came out, is it that the sunset of this new cinema comes with your *Aurora*? Who can follow you after you made *Aurora*? Let me rephrase: if *The Death...* was a birth, is *Aurora* a final sunset... Ten years have passed by, and in 2011 there is nothing to

show anymore in our national cinema. Can it be that you raised the stakes to a point where nobody among the filmmakers in Romania can follow you?

**C.P.:** I believe things are much simpler. Each filmmaker must continue his own way, and to define his path, to follow it to the end. As for me, I know that I have so many opened chapters that I will certainly die and I will not be able to make all the movies that I want to do. The road is open, there space for everybody, there are so many things left unspoken and so many things that I personally want to say.

**D.P.:** Still, maybe it is just a feeling, but it seems to me that there is a kind of confusion among the Romanian filmmakers.

**C.P.:** (laughs) This is even better.

**D.P.:** You seem to know very well what you want, but it for me, the others are completely confused...

**C.P.:** Yes, it is possible.

**D.P.:** Going back to the observational instruments of cinema making, they apparently have no more appeal, you yourself took things to another level.

**C.P.:** I've put the camera on a tripod.

**D.P.:** Exactly. You stopped what you were doing and it seems that the others do not know what to make of it.

**C.P.:** (laughs) They do not understand what this guy does.

**D.P.:** Somebody should tell them what's direction. Maybe I'm wrong, it looks like no one tells them where to go from here.

**C.P.:** You maybe right about this type of confusion. But I think this confusion is more fertile. I think people should start their own separate paths. If you want to make movies about aliens, make them. If you want to do musicals, make them. You need to take responsibility. I am formed by Cassavetes and it was him who, in an interview, when asked to provide some young filmmakers with advice, and I was a that time a student myself, and I thought that it fits me to seek the advice of "Mr. Cassavetes", for whom I had so much respect, he said something apparently simple, but extremely complicated: "I have nothing to say, but this: do what you are, not what you think you are, not what you want to be. What you are is enough." "What are you are?" "Wow!" And then I sat down and I thought, gee, this guy was born in Greece, stayed there until eight years old, in a typical Greek family, his father beat him to read the classics, with a single gesture he sends you to a statement from Socrates, "Know thyself" and stuff like this, well that's heavy working to be done. "Who am I?" And, in fact, you never know who you are. The only thing one can say is that we can talk about what you like, you can talk about what you want, but what you really are, this you can never say. And, if it is true that one can never say never, that's probably something we cannot ever say, and maybe there is another way. So I thought that the only answer to this problem is to be effective. But what does this mean, how is it done? If I cannot say who I am, maybe I can be, and while being, I can be talking about

myself. Again, what does it mean to be? And this is what actually became the main drive of the relationship I have developed with my actors.

Back when I had nothing to do with cinema and I was reading heavily, during Ceaușescu's regime there was a collection of academic magazines entitled "The twentieth century", and in one of the issues I found a text by Meyerhold. I wasn't interested in cinema, but I had a revelation. I said to myself, this can't be said any better, what Meyerhold says is as follows: "Did you ever see a worker when he is working on the lathe? And did you see how beautiful this is? There is no extra gesture. He is bent over his work, and everything that he does is just right, it must be there, there is nothing supplementary. And that is beautiful." Beauty is born there. Without accepting a Marxist discourse, a materialistic approach, yet it can be easily integrated there, even if he was shot in prison by the KGB. This has left traces in my mind and, at some point, I realized I was telling this to an actress: "You actors have a vanity as big as a house, there is an immeasurable pride, and you think that what you are doing is more important than what God or the hazard has done when you were created. Man is beautiful as he is. All that you add over the top it makes it ugly, is a form of lying. What you are, this is what you have to be in front of the camera, in the present tense". But how to do that?, they asked. I do not know, I simply do not know. All I can say is that, once we go on the train, this train must end up in the end point, it

goes so to say to Brăila. How does it get there? I have no idea. I can say nothing but there is the place we must arrive. That's all I can tell you. Sure, I can elaborate on this theory, I can discuss this direction, and that's exactly what I do on the set. But meanwhile I say this: everything I say is imperfect, it is not imperfect because I want to trap you, or because I am an idiot and I do not understand anything and I cannot express myself, but because these things cannot be put into words. Do not take heed to the words we say here. Go on your own, take this road, I do not know how to be in the present tense. This is where that typical situation appears, and it became almost a joke, when your actor asks you, how to drink a glass of water, following the example given by Cassavetes, it did not happen to me, to be asked how to drink a glass of water, but something similar happened to me with moving an object from one side to another: "But why do you move it?", I asked. What is the character thinking? He's thinking of... What do you think? Why do you think you have to move it? Why are you doing this? Does everything have to be a gesture full of meaning, a meaning that is added? No! Quite the contrary, nothing of what you do as an actor should have that added meaning. Meaning is there: you have the text, there is the meaning, there is the situation, and there is the meaning, there is the relationship with the time, with the objects, with space, with the duration, there is your meaning. You just have to be. Everything is being done. The production designer takes

charge of the space, the cinematographer takes care of the lenses, the frame size, the sound technician handles the sound, the screen writer deals with the text, it's all there. You must be. Oh, but I do not understand, I do not know how... In fact, the actor says this: "I'm afraid! I cannot do it." Fiscuteanu said this to me in a much more direct way. I was telling him: "Mr. Fiscuteanu, please do not play, please, I am begging you, do not play, stop playing!". And he replied: "I cannot not play! I am an actor, I must be playing!" "No!", I said. "This is wrong! Being an actor is a form of self-knowledge. You are here in a process of research and of self-knowledge. Without going on this road, where you must think about letting yourself go, without giving yourself the permission to just be, without adding anything, because everything you put extra in front of us turns into a cover, into a lie, it hides the fact that you are actually lying. And I do not want this, I just want the opposite. "And then what would my colleagues say? They will say I cannot play anything!" "Oh, your colleagues." So that was the problem, and I was glad that he said it. He was a great actor! An actor with an extraordinary intuition. While he told me this, others did not, knowing very well that, in fact, they are attentive to these aspects. It came as a confirmation. I know that. Appearing in front of the camera you think what would your mother say, what would your friends say, it is so important the image that you have about yourself. I was talking with a friend, Mihai Brătilă, an actor and an acting teacher and at

some point he said "Do you know what all these actors did not understand, and this is a fundamental issue, being an actor is to opposed, by definition, with your own image." You do this job, the image that you have about the character, with the image you have about yourself, but this is a very difficult journey, that many dare not take. Is this where the acting style of the new wave was born? I do not know and I don't think so. It is often a mimicry. If those actors are doing it this way... This is what I have heard from some actors, using this minimalist style is about imitating others.

**DP:** What you said about anthropology, that cinema is ultimately an instrument for the final purpose of and anthropological research seemed to me very interesting. Your contribution in this field seems extraordinary and I would like you to develop your thoughts around this idea of the camera lens as not being artificial, but as a tool which, even if it uses artificial instruments, is meant to build and rebuild the truth.

**CP:** Your truth, in that moment. This is very important.

**DP:** Anyway it's hard to find the truth.

**CP:** It's hard to talk about these things without bringing into question some heavy terms, like the truth, who scares you...

**DP:** But the truth in connection with the disgust towards the artificial?

**CP:** I have a problem with the artificial, because I was practicing painting, before

I did cinema. What I've found in painting and then making movies was that all effects are perishable. What do I mean by effects? The effects used in painting and in literature and in cinema are actually the signs of self-sufficiency. Because when you invent a trick, when you invent a visual effect, a sound, a literary trope, it is the point when you think you have created a world out of nothing. If you really believe you are God's equal, when you did that effect. The cinema exists because there is this need to look, the gaze is what matters.

At one point I tried to formulate what cinema meant for me and I gave a definition, one that ended up annoying me: cinema is a technique to investigate the reality. Period. Later I came to realize that actually, it's interesting that the camera has two ends of the lens, one at one end we look at the world and at the another end the world looks at you. Yet this is not actually true, since the lens looks at the world, and you only look at the world through the lens, but, by the same lens, from the bottom to the head the world is watching your own mind. And this I think is very important, this is why I say that anthropology, in the widest sense possible, the definition of man and the infinite possible definitions that we can imagine about humanity, articulates everything we are, who we are, the brain, and whether the brain responsible for everything, thoughts, images, imagination, with our relatives, fantasies, are part of the definition of human, and then I thought, "that's interesting", since you cannot say the same things about the pen that you can

tell about the cinema, the relationship that you have with the drawing, with the lens. You look at the world, the world looks back at you. I thought about this because there is this formula, I do not remember if it's a Zen statement or a philosophical argument, I might be wrong, that "when you look into the abyss, the abyss looks back at you."

**DP:** It's a philosophical statement, made by Nietzsche. When you look into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.

**CP:** We imagine this type of relationship because it is the result of a wrong education. Because the student-teacher relationship is wrong, the teacher is the one who knows and so he teaches the one who does not know, it is wrong from the start. The relationship must be based on an equality between student and teacher, where the supposed "senior rank" is only an administrative one, that the superior should give grades, that he should do some evaluating, but that relationship should be a relationship of equality, to the extent that student tells you something, and you tell him something, and so on, this is the only way I can imagine it, but this is happening. Starting from this point on, we reach that very delicate situation where we have the demiurge as director, he is the only one who makes everything. This is why I think Cassavetes is important, when he says that "a director on a set, when the production starts, must begin with the assumption that he knows nothing, and that the act of making a movie is about manufacturing knowledge. It helps understand a relationship, a

family quarrel, what it means. So he starts by saying, let's try this, let's try that. You begin to explore the real until you feel real retaliates, and starts giving back, puts everything out in the open. The crisis, most the actors Cassavetes worked with, Peter Falk for instance, when he gave them no indications, was close to madness. Cassavetes was smart, because the indications represent, and that I know very well from my personal experience, a crutch for the actor, it is a form of hand-washing, evidently, a lack of responsibility. Well, you have text, good, let's see what you can do. Imagine, create. This is why I think it's important for a director to know two things, what to say to the actors and where to put the camera, it seems fundamental. This is almost a dictionary definition of what the cinema director is: the person responsible for overseeing the shooting and the acting. And I said the actors, I'm not here to make sure you're talented, I am not here to inspire you, to feed your creative mechanism, I am here to prevent you from making mistakes. That's it. And, obviously, everything is made out of "no"s. That's the basic situation.

**CP:** Before making *Aurora*, I saw a documentary about Celibidache, which I so much enjoyed. Celibidache was saying: "What is a repetition? A repetition is an infinite series of "no"s, not so, not good, and so on. How many "no"s are here? A trillion! And how many "yes"? One, a single one. And that's bad for the actor and for the director as well, but it's even harder for an actor. If pride is present, there is nothing to be done. If you understand that

the director is there as your partner, and he prevents you from being wrong, that you do not know anything, you end up discovering something. Otherwise you do not know anything, you discover yourself being... Costică (Fiscuteanu) said to me: "You are fantastic! You want to show me how to play a father, do you know how many fathers I have played in my career?". No, this is the father in my mind, so you must try to listen to what I am telling you here, maybe I'm wrong, but I am trying to tell you that this is not about a father, it is about a man who has a certain age, who has a given family and so on. What does it mean to be a father? If we enter into this discussion, then we won't be doing any movies. We can debate, we can write a book about what it means to be a male, but you must accept this, each of us sees the world differently. Each of us constructs the reality differently. So you are here to help me to give body to my reality, one that I have built in my mind, and you might have some benefits from this effort, not if the movie comes out good or bad, but because this research, one which I invite you to do with me, can carry you on uncharted territory. And that's all. And the rest, if the movie comes out well or not, whether it gets prizes or not, it does not matter. The movie is a side effect of a research, and more so is an imperfect side effect. What matters is this research we are undertaking. If the film manages to preserve a fragment of this research, it is already a big deal. If the movie manages to generate questions in turn, then it's even a bigger deal. The rest is literature.

This is why I say that the camera is an anthropological tool, that the cinema is a research instrument, not scientifically though. I think what fascinates all of us when we are looking at one another, when we are looking at the important men who have marked our existence, our models, the people who somehow have marked history in a positive way (is true also for those who have marked it negatively, as "the dark side of the force"), but mostly for those who have left a positive mark, we look up at them because we are fascinated by the creative energy that they developed. This has nothing to do with painting, it is not about music, it has nothing to do with mathematics, physics, philosophy, it is about everything. It's the creative energy, something that I can not define it otherwise. Maybe it was described as something else already. But for me is the creative energy. And when I describe it this way, I know it's full of mystery, I do not know what it is. These things are recorded, everything which is related to the creative energy, with the creative, the creator and the creation, they were all recorded in the sacred texts of all religions, of all cultures. So I am therefore tempted to think that this is really what is the most important thing. Not the most important in an absolute way, but the most important when we are talking about people who do things. And when people do things without this creative energy, nothing comes out of it, they are all dead. This is the same routine that lurks on every mathematician, physicist, engineer, and is similar with the routine that lurks

on every artist, even if we do not want to assume it. It's like when somebody comes to you, draws three lines on a canvas and wonders: "Have I created art?" No. You have created nothing! You're trapped in your own statement, which was expressed a long ago and now you are repeating it ad infinitum! And this happens with all kinds of artists, with the artists from the Golden Age, who repeat and copy themselves. This is not a reproach, it is a factual finding.

When the form wins the battle with the content, then it means that the fear has got to you, you are dominated by fear. You cannot use the same form all the time, things must change. Another content, and the movie is different. What is your perspective? Where do you put the camera in this film, how do you tell a story about these things? It's something most of us do not become aware of, that is that we cannot say anything else but our own stories. We cannot tell these otherwise than in our own style. Even if this is confuse and undefined.

**DP:** I find it amazing that you discuss these reactions in terms of different ways of telling stories. It is obvious that *Stuff and Dough*, *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu*, and finally *Aurora* are explorations of your perspective on how to tell the narrative.

**C.P.:** ... how to tell the story.

**DP:** ... and each movie, in its own way, is a way to contradict what we know about telling stories. The question is whether this reaction is only an act of rebellion, a rebellion by negation, or for you this is how you understand your work?

CP: No, obviously this is how I work. There is nothing scheduled. I am so bad at this, that my tone is different all the time. You know, a director does not only make movies. I have a life, I family, I get in contact with the authorities. Often I realize I am speaking up and it gets bad so I easily get into conflicts, but it is not my aim to do this. I think it is more important to tell the truth, the truth which is not truth that I own, but to say what I think about those things, in order to make things clear. Going back to the real serious problem that I have, which is the world that I come from, leaving aside what communism meant, what the University Square movement meant, and everything else in our society, the problem is that right now, and for some time now, and I believe that television has played an important role, the media and all that, we are slowly sinking into an ocean of fiction and are trapped into a great fiction. For me it's very important that someone can tell me what things really are, or this is how you can see from this point of view, I have reservations, there is a tolerance of 20%, but the end game is the truth. You will not catch the truth, one will never be able to be objective, but it's important that one should try to make things clear, not letting ourselves be fooled by the circulating fictions. And when I am speaking about fiction I am not talking about conspiracies, but about the reflexes of our brain to imagine stories about ourselves. We will always protect ourselves. If there is a conflict, all the time the blame is on the other side, not

with us. We cannot say, let's make peace, I am to blame. Thank God not everybody does that. And it is great when you meet people who keep their balance, it's a matter of common sense, no more than that. To understand that is very delicate, that in fact what the other is telling you is not true, and not because they want to lie, but because there is truth and lived experience by your interlocutor, who says what he wants while there is a filter that comes with the package. This is how man is designed, it is related to the instinct of self preservation, which will block all the messages that will hurt them and who will protect yourself. You do not lie, you defend yourself. But why do you defend yourself? There is fear. But why is there fear? Because there is probably violence, and violence is visible, is defined by wars. But there is a potential for violence which is not spoken, and there is not much talk about the potential conflict passing by, and this is the most dangerous violence, which goes as entertainment, show business, or even football. People are killing people, they trample each other while watching the games, and someone is feeding this violence. Why? Well simply because it's a source of income, of profit-making. Probably they like it, probably they don't. Maybe they have been misled, maybe they were deceived because they are stupid, but stupid is not native, the brain is not simply dysfunctional. It is simply uninformed or misinformed, or we are kept in this stupidity.

This seems to me very important. I know very well what I have done, I only made three films, it is not such a big deal,

but even so. Maybe one day I will be able to say, look this is "The Movie". Because right now I cannot say that.

**DP:** Still, you cannot deny what happened. Everything that happened since 2000, when the Romanian film industry was immersed into a quagmire without the hope, it was due to your personal effort.

**C.P.:** I had an advantage here. I did not come from the system, I came from Switzerland. There I encountered another kind of cinema making, made possible by my teachers and my unwilling masters, but I did not come from the movie side, I did not want to make movies. I was a painter, and I was very relaxed about cinema making. And this is why I allowed myself to do some things that the rest could not do, because they were not allowed by the narrow system. In addition, the Geneva School was very much focused on the experiment, and when you had to present for the exams your films, with an experiment, one thing I find very hard to explain to those people in the Bucharest film school, you did not just make a movie and your received a 10 if it was very well shot, and very well edited. No! The teachers were watching the movie and were saying: "Yes, it's very well filmed, it is very well edited, but where are you in this movie? Where is your true self?". And from there on the dismantling started, and you could not understand. Here we are in a school of art, what matters here is what you created, what you bring as a person, not what we have brought to you as teachers. We know what we were teaching

you to do, but you have to put something on the table of your own. And this is a very important thing, this is the moment when things change, the perspective changes. That was the advantage, that I came from this background.

Yet seen from another perspective, from the larger point of view of the grand Romanian culture, which is actually a small culture, a peripheral culture, and as it happens in all peripheral cultures, one of the important sources is to import. This happened in the nineteenth century literature. This happened with many other cultural products. In order to find your own voice, since we are a young state, because we are at the beginning, we still do not know exactly what is our identity. I associate Romania, as it is now, with a pre-pubertal age, we are just before puberty, we are in the making and we are trying for decades, but we are still in training. An unhappy fate, with many faults. On the other hand, our reactions were also sad, because they were cowardly, not cowardly because we are cowards, but because there are always more important reasons that determined us to act as we did. Family, we had children and so on. These reasons are not to be easily disposed of, but I deplore that there wasn't a Prague '68 or a Budapest '56. At the same time, there remains a question. Why it did not happen? How do we see the world from over here in Romania? It might be more complicated, it might be more analyzing, more research to do. Still, in this context, what happened to cinema was similar to what always happened in society. I was in Switzerland, I went to school there, I did

not purposely intended to import that type of cinema here. All I wanted to do was to make films in Romania, as I understood that films are supposed to be like, as I was interested in the movies, how I wanted to see the films in Romania. At that time the discussions we had were very harsh, because my colleagues, my friends, the people I've met in festivals abroad, as it happened when, at a festival in Lyon, I met some students from the Romanian school of film, one of them unfortunately died! I talked with them and they were talking to me about Tarkovsky, and I was talking about Cassavetes, and one of the photography directors tells me: "What do you mean to hold the camera in your hand? This is in-aesthetic, it's ugly". "What do you mean its ugly?" There were these kind of discussions.

When I arrived in Romania this was the only thing we talked about. Because I kept a good relationship with these colleagues, and we were meeting at Papillon, which was the local bar across the film school in Bucharest, there was the place where everybody met, where the world was built and destroyed, where the theoretical discussions took place. When I started doing *Stuff and Dough*, Silviu (Stavilă), which was an ATF trained director of photography, had big difficulties with the moving camera. "Hey, he said, they would say I don't know how to make films" and I told him "What do you care. Let them say! I am taking full responsibility". He was distrustful, but then the movie came out and he watched as it worked, then suddenly everybody saw that it can be otherwise, not as if this was something

invented by me, there it was during the 50s, and the 60s in Western Europe. It was just an import, that's all!

**DP:** It was an import which landed very well, and it happened with the synchrony, without any false comparisons, brought in poetry by Eminescu, since most of his style can be described as a German import. On the other hand, it was him who generated an extraordinary movement.

**CP:** It is more important that he succeeded, that the things he said sound great in Romanian, they have content. It is said in Romanian, even given its lineage, it is still great poetry, and to make poetry is enormous. I was, from my early days in school, very attached to Bacovia, whose poems impress myself a lot.

**D.P.:** And he is an imitator of the symbolists...

**CP:** Yes, he belongs to the symbolist family, but it seems to me that his performance is great. The way one handles the Romanian language in order to say those things that others say in French, German or other language is fundamental. I believe it is more important that you identify the false, you identify the lying. Even if you do not speak that language, you still identify falsity. To imagine a Romanian director, making a movie in English and the actors sound so good, that they are real, this cannot be. They will be true only in relation to some acting clichés, that exist in America and that everybody can identify. Even if cinema feels very good in English.

**D.P.:** Thank you very much for your time.