

# CULTURA

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# 2019

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**is both the piano and**  
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# CULTURA

Fundația Culturală Augustin Buzura



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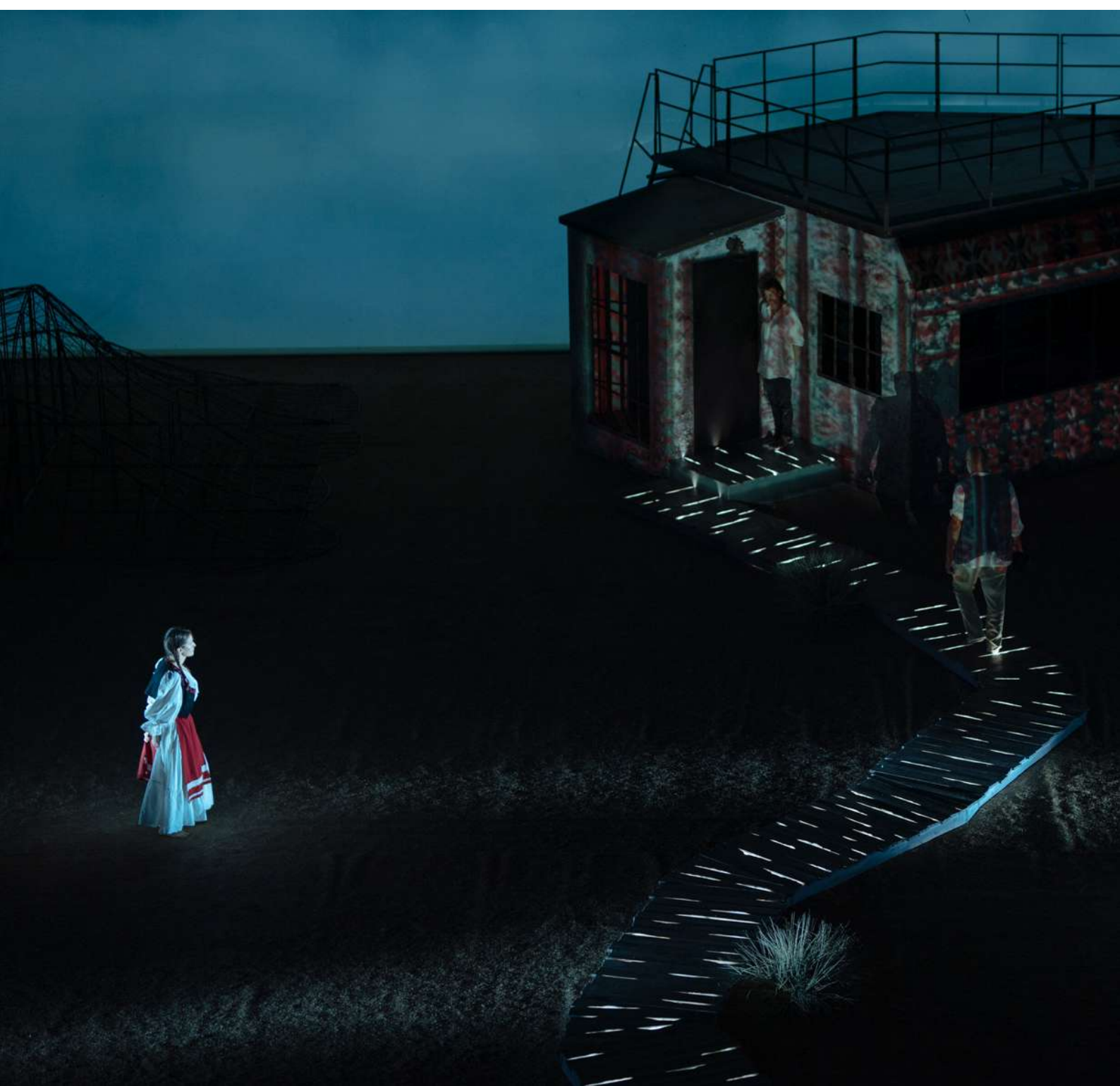
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on cover: „Radio” (after „Talk Radio”, play by Eric Bogosian), directed by Bobi Pricop, „Marin Sorescu” National Theatre Craiova, December 2019 | Photo by Cătălin Cârneau



FNT 2019 – The National Theatre Festival. Source: fnt.ro  
„The Forest of the Hanged” (I.L.Caragiale National Theatre, Bucharest), Directed by Radu Afrim  
Photo: Adî Bulboacă





"The Forest of the Hanged"  
(I.L.Caragiale National Theatre, Bucharest), Directed by Radu Afrim. Photo: Adi Bulboacă

# 30 years

GEORGE CRISTIAN MAIOR

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30 years, on the scale of grand history, is not a "long term" (*longue durée*, as Braudel would say), but a "blink of an eye", as Kenneth Waltz, the philosopher of politics and international affairs, stated back in the day. However, the effects of Communist order's sudden disintegration, in that year of 1989, could be considered a phenomenon of seismic amplitude in shaking the social, political and cultural world order. Yet, as it turns out, while we are celebrating 30 years since those revolutions that fundamentally changed the map of Europe and of the globe, too little time is spent reflecting on these events that left such a deep imprint on our lives, whether by "us" we mean the society, the state, the individual, the nation.

*Disappointment often goes hand in hand with disgust. Disgust towards politics and politicians, the sterile fighting, the devaluation of national moral and cultural values, the economic experiments and policies resulting in crises across all domains – education, sciences, personal security.*

It is interesting to note that America is the stage for discussion and debate on this matter, more so than elsewhere. In a way, it is understandable: America sees itself as the winner of that tough “war”, carried on multiple strategic and ideological fronts, and truly believes itself to be morally entitled to do so. Yet why is it that the peoples, individuals, the states of Central and Eastern Europe – indeed the main actors of the revolution, sacrificed for decades in the Communist gloom until the collapse of the system – do not attempt to take a deeper look back? Not necessarily in order to celebrate or debate in sterile symposiums and conferences the meaning of those dramatic changes, but in order to understand where we are now and, especially, how to devise the future, beyond this historical cycle.

One reason may have to do with the fatigue of what was and may still be a long transition, often painful from an economics perspective and disheartening from an ethical and cultural point of view. 30 years may indeed not mean much in the “long term”, but for an individual it is perhaps the most intense part of a life. Therefore, the mismatch between the ideals of those revolutions, be they political or economic, and the rough realities that followed in the making of the new history, naturally generated great disillusiones and disappointment. As such, at the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of Communism, intellectual Timothy Garton Ash noticed in the “New York Review” that, by contrast with previous celebrations, the question that lingers on the lips of so many confounded spectators is “What went wrong?”

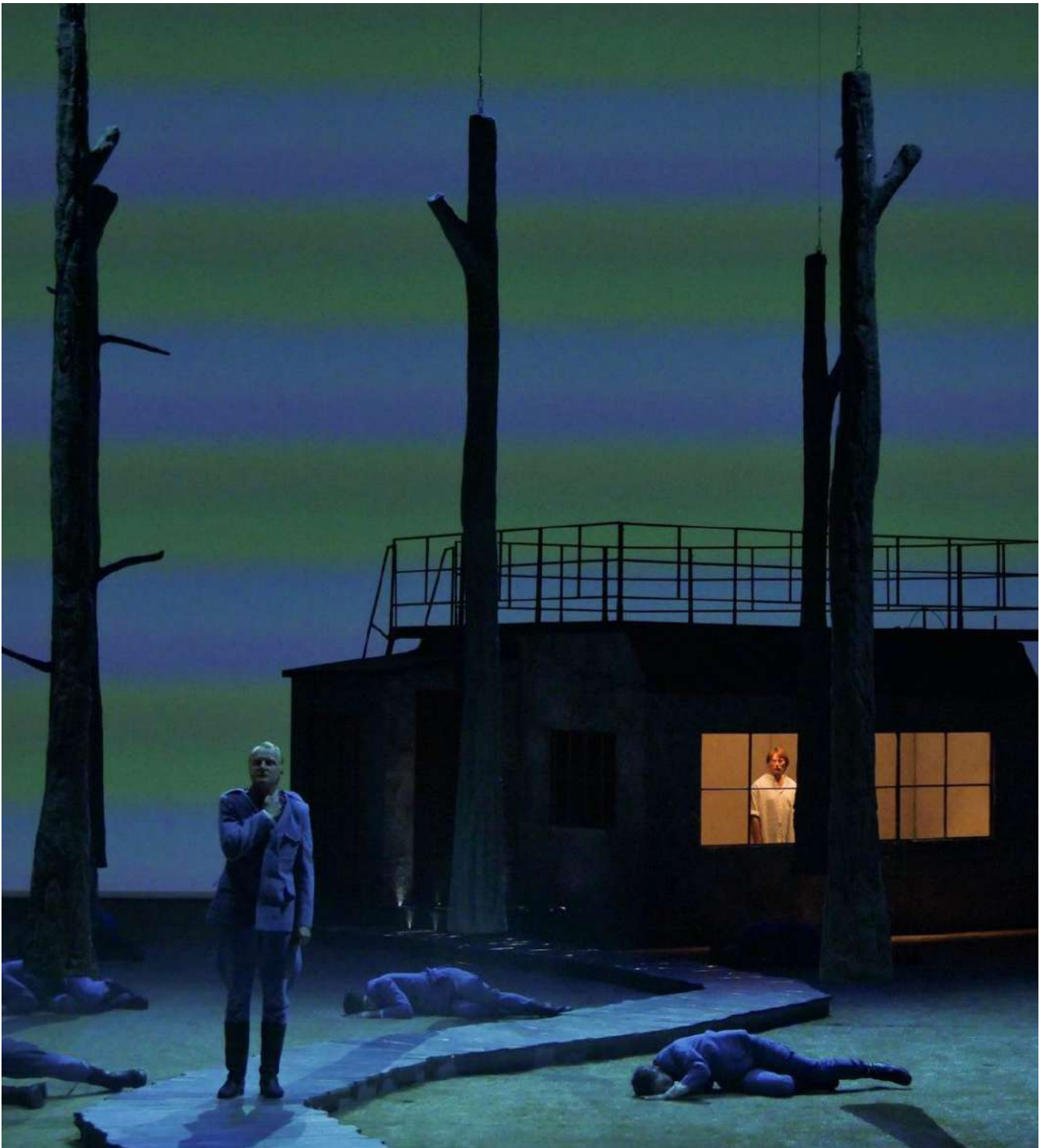
Disappointment often goes hand in hand with disgust. Disgust towards politics and politicians, the sterile fighting, the devaluation of national moral and cultural values, the economic experiments and policies resulting in crises across all domains – education, sciences, personal security. Disgust towards the injustice, towards the proliferation of systemic and individual corruption, towards the mistreatment of institutions that should have made up the architecture of the so-called “strong state”. Disgust towards the marginalization of culture in the vulgar media, often with a devastating impact on the real freedom of expression and knowledge. (Only the growth of knowledge, as Isaiah Berlin stated, creates the preconditions for real freedom.)

Yes, we joined the European Union and NATO, and this prevented the literal collapse of society and the state, and allowed us to hope for a time of less uncertainty, whether related to geopolitics, security or economics. But we were entirely wrong defining these political and diplomatic successes as country projects, rather than strategic goals to aid in implementing the **country project**. The one we wrote 30 years ago and is yet to be fulfilled!

(Cultura no. 09)

George Cristian Maior is Romanian Ambassador to the United States.

FNT 2019 – The National Theatre Festival Bucharest. Source: fnt.ro  
„The Forest of the Hanged” (I.L.Caragiale National Theatre, Bucharest), Directed by Radu Afrim  
Photo: Lucian Muntean



România Mobilementary 2019, an art education program developed and run by the Augustin Buzura Cultural Foundation.  
Still shot from „Village” documentary (by Iasmina Dantîş, Vidra, Vrancea)







România Mobilementary 2019, an art education program developed and run by the Augustin Buzura Cultural Foundation.  
Still shot from „Village” documentary (by Iasmina Dantiș, Vidra, Vrancea)

# Romanian New Wave Cinema A Personal Reflection

MARGARET PARSONS

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*These two outwardly modest scenes comprise the opening moments of two recent Romanian films – Graduation (Bacalaureat) and Sieranevada. In spite of the surface dreariness, both films could easily appear on any critic’s list of the most important narrative cinematic works anywhere during the past quarter century.*

### Preface

*Scenario one:* Our gaze is fixed for a long time on a grim Soviet-era apartment complex in a semi-urban neighborhood. We hear random noises of children mixed with occasional bird song and street sounds. The scene shifts to the interior space of one of these apartments. A window smashes, a man enters from another room, startled by the sound of broken

glass. He leaves the apartment quickly in search of a perpetrator. The man’s movements are tracked by a camera held closely at the back of his head. He runs a few meters, waits for a passing train, then abandons his pursuit. Re-entering the apartment, we see a teenage girl (the man’s daughter) preparing for school. It’s evident that the girl’s mother is laid up, she remains inside a bedroom with the door shut. With the exception of the shattered glass, everything else about this set-up seems ordinary. Yet, there’s a palpable complexity to this simple sequence of events. In the next cut, the camera has assumed a position in the backseat of a car with father and daughter driving out of the neighborhood – again the camera lens is close on the back of the man’s head, and we view the world from his perspective. An opera aria is detectable on the soundtrack – emanating, apparently, from the car’s radio. Father and daughter speak about the girl’s approaching departure for college. The car stops, the girl gets out. The man drives away, parks the car, and suddenly there’s an abrupt shift of scene again: a semi-nude woman in the interior of an apartment (similar to the previous one but clearly not the same place) is kissing the father. Then a phone rings, and another cut – and the viewer is aware that the daughter has just been assaulted by a stranger, moments after leaving her father’s car.

*Scenario two:* An extended take focuses on the exterior of a bleak graffiti-stained building in a commercial section of Bucharest. The time seems to be a mid-morning in winter. There is noise of traffic and congestion. A well-dressed woman and a young girl enter at the left of the frame at medium range, carrying shopping bags. Their movements are brisk and precise as they engage in faintly audible but plainly anxious dialogue. They move toward the graffitized building and enter. As the single long take continues, the viewer observes the congested streetscape at closer range, watching a car maneuver to avoid blocking a delivery truck. Eventually the mother emerges from the building with more bags, but without the daughter. She joins the father in a car that has just shifted location because of the congestion. The camera moves to the backseat of the car, assuming a position just behind the man and the woman, close to the backs of their heads. They

engage in heated discussion about an innocuous matter concerning the young girl. As the car moves through traffic, the man and woman carry on with their conversation until they arrive at a destination – a residential neighborhood in a different part of the city. They park the car and enter a cramped apartment building lobby, stepping into the elevator. When they emerge, an apartment door swings open, its dark foyer hectic with activity, and the couple is immediately subsumed into what appears to be a large family gathering in the early stages.

These two outwardly modest scenes comprise the opening moments of two recent Romanian films – *Graduation (Bacalaureat)* and *Sieranevada*. In spite of the surface dreariness, both films could easily appear on any critic's list of the most important narrative cinematic works anywhere during the past quarter century. Along with other titles from the so-called "Romanian New Wave," they are part of a relatively small body of work created by a group of moving image artists who have been responsible for the resurgence of a strong cinematic tradition in Romania. This relatively recent artistic development should, in my opinion, be regarded as on a par, aesthetically, with the "new waves" of France and Czechoslovakia, both of which occurred nearly sixty years ago and altered the course of cinematic art.

## Finding a Balance

I grew up in the mid twentieth century in a secluded spot in central New York State. My family lived in a blue-collar town that once had been a booming textile center. But by the time I arrived the factories had been abandoned. Winter months in the region were raw and dreary, and the only real amusements were movies since "high culture" was out of reach for most of the year – driving to places like New York City or Buffalo, four hours away, was out of the question. So the cinema – that is, a regimen of Hollywood movies – became a steady feature of my younger life. By the time I was a teenager, I was going to a movie theater at least once or twice a week, absorbing the myths and morals that Hollywood had to offer. Happily, the town had lots of cinemas – at least one in every neighborhood, plus the big palace on the city's main street. Shows were more or less just as they had

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been in pre-war years – cartoons and newsreels with a feature, dark red seats, decorated walls, popcorn and candy. Television was common, of course, but not everyone owned a set and even if you did, movies were still more popular because you could get out of the house. Virtually all the theaters in the town offered American product all the time, though occasionally there might be a foreign film on offer if it seemed to be a money-maker – films like *Zorba the Greek* or *The Seventh Seal*, for example, could compete with the latest hit from Alfred Hitchcock or Billy Wilder and didn't do too badly at the box office.

Years later, when I went to college in New England, I discovered more obscure foreign cinema, the so-called "arthouse fare" of urban movie theaters. My suddenly burgeoning taste for foreign films seemed

*I began to feel that American viewers would benefit from a deeper familiarity with this cinema, and that Romanian films should be seen, at least in cultural institutions if not in commercial cinemas.*

a good thing, pulling me toward a more intricate world outside our borders. The glamor, celebrity, and wealth associated with Hollywood had always, frankly, troubled me a bit – even as I laughed and wept at Hollywood’s melodrama along with everyone else. Why, I thought, should we be expected to idolize actors on the screen and settle for run-of-the-mill stories most of the time. I slowly started to acquire a taste for new releases from France, Italy, and England, though little by little I also discovered rarer treasures – the Japanese gems of the 1950s and 1960s like Mizoguchi’s *Ugetsu* and Kurosawa’s *High and Low*, and the stylishly philosophical cinema of the Swede Ingmar Bergman with its weight and magnitude. Like many Americans at that time, I began to realize that as a child I had been gently “propagandized” by a Hollywood system that either consciously or unconsciously coached me in the so-called American value system. On the other hand, I was also grateful that I had experienced those long-ago Saturday afternoons at the movies back home and even emerged with a new intellectual infatuation – foreign films. I mention this background only to

illustrate that my view of American cinema was not typical for someone who had grown up wholly immersed in its conventions.

Although there have always been many diverging currents in American filmmaking – and though the studio system no longer works in the same well-ordered manner it once did – the Hollywood industry has been this country’s acknowledged standard and, by default, our “national cinema”. In general, most Americans begin to consume Hollywood product at an early age and there is naturally a shared fascination with the history of Hollywood, its moguls, its movie stars, and even its endless streams of advertising. The grand themes, styles, and genres within the various peaks of Hollywood production are familiar to many people in America. More curiously perhaps, it’s also understood and accepted that Hollywood can sway the course of public opinion and current events by releasing films designed to manipulate and rework social or political policy. Two landmark examples of the latter are *All the President’s Men* (1976) and *Erin Brockovich* (2000). Emotional manipulation in the cinema is elicited in a number of ways. Music and the overuse of soundtrack is perhaps the most obvious means of maneuvering an audience. Film music composers are skilled at prompting emotion, and it is customary that a musical score will be commissioned for virtually any Hollywood production (there’s even an Oscar category for Best Musical Score). The prompting of a particular emotion – anger, frustration, despair, or fear – can be established not only through music, but through structure, editing, and cinematography. Color schemes are utilized in set design and cinematography as well – color, as we know, can shape a mood. *Mise-en-scène* can affect emotion as well – comedy, for example, often utilizes crowded stage sets, as in television sit-coms. Hollywood cinema is certainly masterful and even predictable in its manipulation.

The reason for citing these maxims about American cinema is to provide background for the ultimate premise of my short essay. My point of view stems not from the fact that I am a curator or scholar but from a motivation that’s entirely personal – an enthusiasm for recent Romanian films of the “new

wave." This fascination began when I stumbled upon a few titles over a decade ago at a film festival in Rotterdam, Netherlands. It was before the "movement" in Romanian cinema had even been identified as such. I began to feel that American viewers would benefit from a deeper familiarity with this cinema, and that Romanian films should be seen, at least in cultural institutions if not in commercial cinemas. For that reason, I organized a series in the fall of 2007 for the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, *Bucharest Stories: New Cinema from Romania*.

Until twelve years ago, I knew relatively little about the history of Romania or its cinematic traditions. It was during that January in Rotterdam that I first watched Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (2005), the dark tale of Dante Remus Lazarescu who is carted by emergency workers responding to a call from one hospital to another, in a bitterly tragicomic portrayal of official dysfunction, until he finally appears to succumb. Although at the time I did not realize that Puiu's fable was in large part a serious break with previous filmic tradition and a reaction to a legacy of allegory, historical dramas, and classical adaptations (the officially sanctioned cinema in Romania) – a legacy that he and his generation knew only too well from their childhood – that did not matter to me at the time. What I noted right away was the moral weight of the storytelling, the skilled handling of a serious, off-putting human situation achieved with a near literary approach, and a surprising sense of emotional catharsis. It was cinema-as-naturalistic-theater with everything that term suggests: heightened realism; a *mise-en-scène* and set design almost arbitrary in its candor; working-class characters who seemed helpless victims of their own circumstances; difficult and slightly taboo subject matter handled with humanistic intensity; little plot development with an emphasis on exposition of a single situation. In addition, since I was viewing a movie and not a theater piece, I was impressed by the complete absence of music (until the end credits), and the hand-held but tightly controlled camera work.

One of the aims that narrative cinema should aspire to is catharsis – emotional and intellectual

***One of the aims that narrative cinema should aspire to is catharsis – emotional and intellectual release for the viewer through careful rendering of human emotions like anguish or distress. If the mood is right, the viewer can establish empathy, and feel a discharge of bitter emotions. This is the most effective and powerful form of narrative, and it is rarely successful in the cinema, at least in the classical sense.***

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release for the viewer though careful rendering of human emotions like anguish or distress. If the mood is right, the viewer can establish empathy, and feel a discharge of bitter emotions. This is the most effective and powerful form of narrative, and it is rarely successful in the cinema, at least in the classical sense. But I discovered it in viewing the near flawlessly crafted *Death of Mr. Lazarescu*.

Film scholar Dominique Nasta in „Contemporary Romanian Cinema: The History of an Unexpected Miracle” (2013, Columbia University Press) presents an authoritative and detailed survey of the history of Romanian film since its beginnings in the early twentieth century, thus providing an important contextual framework for the current resurgence of this artistic tradition, while also focusing on the intellectual and cultural underpinnings of the new wave. Her book is the first English-language long-form endeavor devoted to the history of Romanian film. The previous lack of English-language critical analyses or histories of Romanian cinema published in the United States is perhaps not surprising given the fact that Romanian culture had little if any presence in American public schools, except for the often required chapter on the theater of the absurd –

a movement that is regularly taught through a focus on the plays of Eugène Ionesco, one of the principal figures of avant-garde theater.

Nasta’s survey includes a detailed analysis of the significance and effects of politics and world events, the early beginnings of cinematic production and exhibition in Romania in light of the challenging and complicated socio-political situation, and the relationship to cinematic traditions of poetry, art, and theater. But she focuses primarily on a number of important artistic forefathers of the new wave, including Dan Pița, Mircea Daneliuc, Lucian Pintilie, Nae Caranfil, as well as more general topics such as the short-lived thaw of the 1960s and Romanian cinema of the 1970s in the period that preceded the downfall of repression.

Returning briefly to *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, here is Dominiuqe Nasta’s interpretation of Puiu’s reaction to pre-1989 Romanian cinema:

“One could imagine that in this sequence Puiu is reacting against the formal and thematic rigidity that handicapped the cinema of his youth. In one of the film’s many enthralling long takes, Puiu opts to feature sickly characters not yet depicted on screen and of no essential value to the story. Puiu moves away from the protagonist to reveal the overall bleakness of the hospital – which is to say, the Romanian healthcare system – at once bemoaning the state of the nation and exercising his agency as a filmmaker, his right to focus on the mundane, the ugly, whatever he feels necessary to express his vision cinematographically. This is the antithesis of a typical scene in a classical Romanian film. In contemporary Romanian cinema, freedom of expression is transposed to the screen in sublime minimalist fashion, and frequently through long takes. . . No Ceausescu-era film could conceivably favor mood over event, let alone a mood marked by sparseness, austerity and a rebellious, socio-political edge.”

It is important to remember that a discussion of cinema as a vital part of any national culture is a legitimate paradigm, despite variations within production. “National cinema” is a term of twentieth

century film theory – a convenient way to categorize or label the film production associated with a sovereign state, or with a population that shares a sense of common ethnicity, geographical region, or nationality. (There is also, on a more pragmatic level, the matter of state financing and regional production). We recognize, from general experience, that cinema allows a viewer to observe a particular culture through various processes and artifacts, including architecture, landscape, language, ritual, institutions, and conventions of gesture, clothing, and furnishings. In the case of Romania's new wave cinema, not only is it true that we can observe these elements of daily life in their most basic expression down to minuscule and signifying details, but more importantly there exists now a huge body of criticism and scholarly analysis of recent films produced within Romania that carefully dissects and provides commentary on this very point. On the whole, this body of writing has been admiring, noting the concentration of raw talent that has been displayed – even acknowledging a shared visual aesthetic and shared philosophical underpinnings. Although there are individual styles represented in the new wave, collectively these films reveal basic realities about Romanian society, recollections about life under Communism and the rule of Ceausescu, as well as the obvious communal cultural background of the makers especially in the aftermath of the 1989 revolution and the fall of Communism.

### **An Inventory of Invention**

While most of the ideas, techniques, and methods revealed in Romanian new wave cinema are not new, the inspired way in which they are brought together marks the movement as innovative and original. I have compiled a summary of many of the characteristics that I find most effective from the body of Romanian new wave work that I have been able to view over the past few years – though I hasten to add that I've not seen every film in the canon. Rather, the listing is more reflective of what I personally find striking or important, and could account in part for the powerful effect that these films have prompted in me over the past few years. This inventory also alludes to a few of the teachings, if you will, that I think are embedded within the

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entire movement – lessons of history, ethnicity, anthropology, even literature.

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At the top of the list is the fact that these works, when they first appeared, seemed to materialize from nowhere, from the ashes of a broken foundation – there was little to work with in the Romanian film industry at the start of the 1990s. Budgets, ideas, and equipment were scarce. Could it be that ingenuity and wise choices arise when one has to make the most of a tough situation? There is a vulnerability, a

serious weakness, involved in producing films that are expected to please an audience, or a festival, or a funding agency. But there was no danger of that in Romania in those post-communist years.

There was also a sense, in the early years of the new wave, that a lot of sharing of resources and exchange of ideas was necessary. This runs against the normal paradigm for more wealthy national studios, illustrating that both wealth and (apparent) competition can have a detrimental effect. The sharing of resources has proved to be an advantage in the case of Romania.

General characteristics which, when seen together, differentiate Romanian films collectively from the rest of the pack are a source of strength for this national cinema: for example the long camera take; the still or nearly motionless shots; natural lighting; frequent reliance on hand-held camera – but camera-work that is nuanced and controlled; complete lack of composed musical score, with any incidental music diegetic or having a visible source; experimental mise-en-scène (as that relates to the arrangement of shots or frames – even the corners of frames are sometimes utilized in a novel way); the viewer's awareness of point of view; and in general, more risk taking with subject matter – a sense of experimentation and lack of regard for old conventions. The general aesthetic for many works appears quasi-documentary: stated differently, there is a nearly fearless representation of reality (the banal or ordinary detail is never shunned, and we are surrounded with mundane displays just as we are in real life); and the absence of exaggerated acting and hyperbolic display. Finally, the tonal schemes are generally subdued and there is an interesting sensitivity to the choreography of the actors' movements.

Even more notably, there often appears to be a philosophic template of some sort at work – for example, one could cite existentialism, absurdism, or even nihilism on occasion – thus lending an intellectual weight, but one that never detracts from the storytelling. Unlike much popular cinema today, there are hardly any abrasive blows to the emotions. The manipulation of the viewer feels less important



than the intellectual content of the work. As in good literature, the viewer can decide to either observe, or to live vicariously with the possibility of catharsis.

I close by citing three Romanian films that I find not only evocative of the points made earlier about the cathartic power of Romanian cinema but also films that I found personally therapeutic and liberating when viewing for the first time. The first of these is *Beyond the Hills* (Cristian Mungiu, 2012), a rigorously dramatic tale of extreme religion and its provocations. *Beyond the Hills* also becomes a kind of philosophical query about the precise nature of morality and redemption.

The story, set within an Orthodox convent in a remote rural region of Romania in a stark wintry location, centers on a friendship between two young female friends who are novitiates in the convent. As the tale moves slowly forward in time, the viewer becomes engaged in a sojourn inside the routines and disciplines of monastic life. The complexities of the two female protagonists' relationship and the dominance of a young priest who leads the convent with an iron will as he struggles obsessively with the position of faith and religion in the contemporary world are also key focal points of the film. Despite the differences of time and place and specificity of religion – and even with the near allegorical aura of the larger-than-life scenario – I found the film to be enlightening in terms of my own life experiences, even delivering a delicate sense of redemption by the end of the film. As a child, I had rebelled against the constraints of a modern fundamentalist protestant sect that, for a variety of reasons, I found stifling and even frightening. *Beyond the Hills's* expression of struggle within a culture of dogmatism and fanaticism, plus its inherent compassion for human weakness and a concern for innocents not recognizing the consequences of their choices, conveyed to me a sense of transcendence.

The other two examples of recent Romanian cinema that I personally found transformative upon initial viewing are the two titles alluded to at the start of this essay, *Graduation (Bacalaureat)*, Cristian Mungiu, 2016) and *Sieranevada* (Cristi Puiu, 2016). *Graduation* weaves a layered parable of nepotism, indulgence,

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ethics, and most of all, human fragility. A doctor and his wife want the best for their intelligent, high-performing only child, Eliza, and hope that her future will be far away from their depressive Ceausescu-era existence in the city of Cluj-Napoca. High-school senior Eliza has provisionally been offered a scholarship to a prestigious British university; but the scholarship is contingent on her final exam scores. Eliza therefore has a shot at leaving Cluj forever, something that would fulfill her parents' dream of a better life for their daughter and also ensure that she is outside the reach of her indolent boyfriend. In

**Graduation weaves  
a layered parable of  
nepotism, indulgence,  
ethics, and most of all,  
human fragility.**

**The world of  
entanglements that  
Sieranevada evokes  
within this tiny  
apartment are not  
only a metaphor for  
families in general and  
for society at large...**

a sudden and uncanny moment just before the final exam is to take place, Eliza is personally assaulted, a development that triggers nervous and psychological damage; plus, the incident appears to mysteriously open up a possibility that Eliza has become aware of

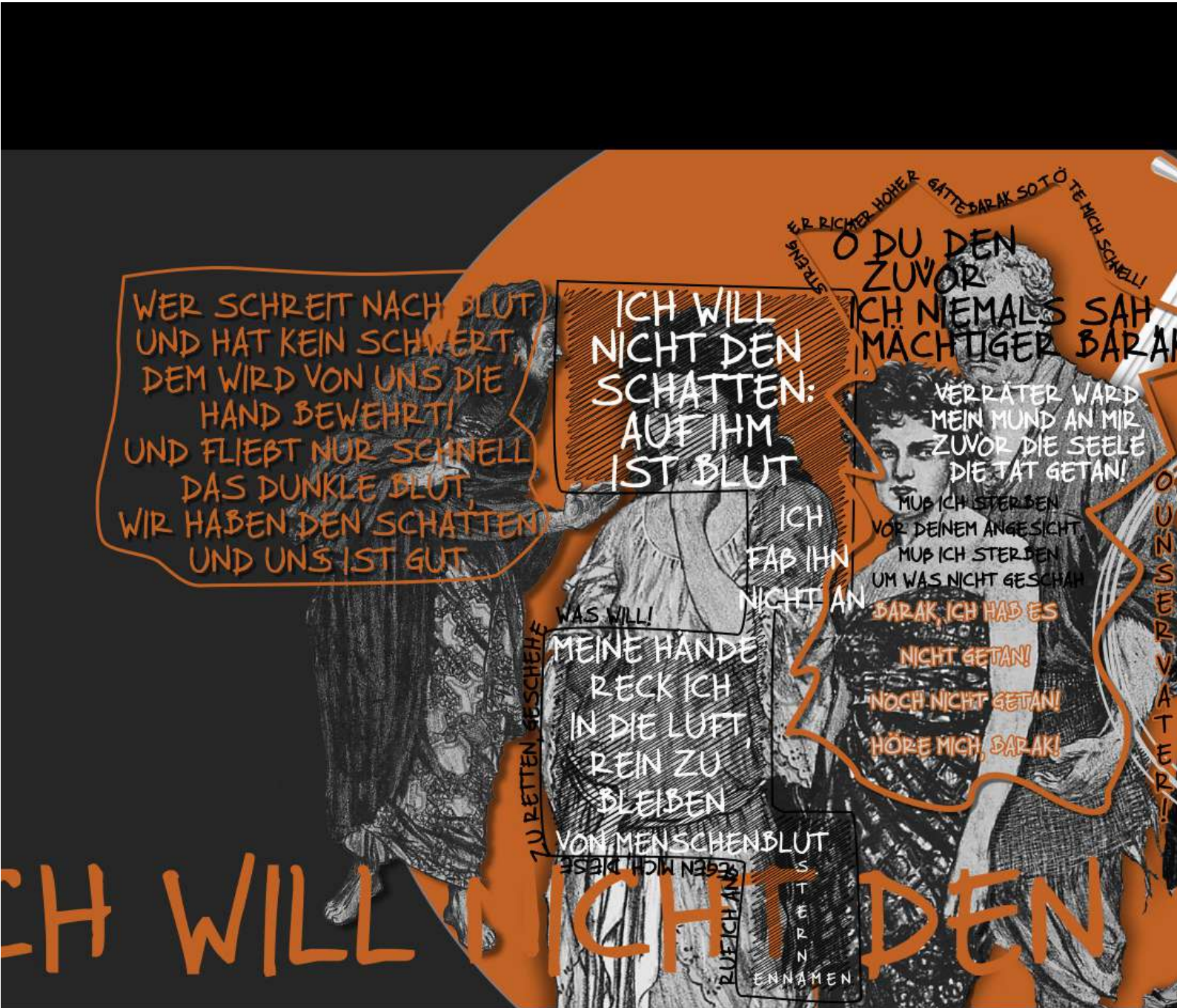
her beloved father's extra-marital affair. Ultimately, in an attempt to assure a good final outcome for Eliza's examination, her father is reluctantly pulled into an underhanded system of pay-back and indulgence to assure that Eliza can be passed through. Furthermore, Eliza herself must participate in this distasteful scheme if it is going to work successfully. The moral complexities suggested by *Graduation* are not only in line with disturbing conditions I have witnessed personally among one-time school friends, but they also interestingly evoke recent high-profile scandals in the United States involving criminal conspiracies to sway undergraduate admissions in several respected American universities. Although the disgrace of the latter schemes involved monetary pay-off rather than cheating on test scores, the integrity of the scholastic systems and resultant personal damages were suggestive of those in *Graduation*.

The third film holding powerful references for me is *Sieranevada*, in some ways the most radical and masterful film of the lot. Its plot centers around a high-spirited urban family gathering for a communal commemorative luncheon in honor of the recently-deceased family patriarch inside the Bucharest apartment of his son. The time of this gathering is specific – the fall of 2001, not long after 9/11. The camera brilliantly records, in what is seemingly real time, an intricate choreography of the characters as they come and go from room to room, while capturing the sort of family quarreling, humor, and internal strife that clearly typifies this particular tribe. The world of entanglements that *Sieranevada* evokes within this tiny apartment are not only a metaphor for families in general and for society at large (and of course, Romanian society in particular, but I would argue it goes beyond that) but also for the fact that difficult communication and human misunderstandings are more than just common occurrences, they are in fact the touchstone, the measure of life itself. Simply put, this is the human condition in all its splendor and ugliness, and ultimately, that becomes the redemptive power of this work, and one could also say of the Romanian new wave in general.

România Mobilementary 2019, an art education program developed and run by the Augustin Buzura Cultural Foundation.  
Still shot from „The Orchestra” documentary (by Florin Raicea, Osica de Sus, Olt)



Enescu Festival. Images from video set design created by Carmen Lidia Vidu for „The Woman without Shadow” opera by Richard Strauss, in the concerto variant of conductor Vladimir Jurowski



# Lidia Vianu: „Any translator is both the piano and the pianist at once”

Interview  
by Monica Manolachi



Enescu Festival. Images from video set design created by Carmen Lidia Vidu for „The Woman without Shadow” opera by Richard Strauss, in the concerto variant of conductor Vladimir Jurowski

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**Before compiling these questions, I read and listened to your replies from previous interviews. You are among those professors from the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest, who have a strong presence in mass media, nationally and internationally, which explains the academics' constant need to communicate with the society, with other institutions, with the world that surrounds us. Nowadays, more than in the past, it is essential to know at least one foreign language, if not more. Fortunately, there are various options. You**

**learned foreign languages from native speakers. What did you use to feel then? How was it when you bought your first TV set and watched the first movies subtitled in Romanian?**

Television came to Romania when I was just a few years old. Under communism, all films had subtitles. At seven, I got lucky: my parents found a French woman who taught me French for over twelve years – grammar, literature, the works. In fourth grade, I had a Russian teacher at school, and that was nice. She made me learn declensions and conjugations by heart. I have forgotten them, but I can still remember some. I am not fluent in Russian, though. Focusing on English pushed all other languages away. Unfortunately, I only had a teacher whose mother tongue was English when I became a student of English, at 17.

**You read a lot when you were a teenager. What authors are still close to your heart and why?**

I would have liked to read so much more... I read my first book when I was almost four years old. It was a communist little story, "The Magic Egg". I cannot forget how indignant I felt. I was sitting in a huge armchair, by the fireplace, and I found myself reading a mass of stupid, artificial words. "If this is what reading means, I could very well do without it", I mused. Now I know that all communist literature, and only communist literature, actually, was that way, but at the time I was genuinely angry.

All the true books I have ever read have stayed with me. I liked the books I could trust. I only began enjoying books in a more intellectual way when I became a student. I was so lucky to escape the communist school system with only 11 years. Some remember primary and high school nostalgically. I hated both – I really hated them. Whatever I learned at that time had to be completely independent from communist handbooks. All my classmates tacitly rejected indoctrination. We ignored this word, but had the very clear intuition of what it was. I couldn't wait to get back home and forget it all, read true books, not lies. The bibliographies we were asked to read in faculty, on the other hand, were fascinating. They were pretty free from censorship. It was an island. I still can't believe that we were asked to read

*Brave New World* and *Areopagitica* [1644, John Milton against censorship!]. The Faculty of English was a citadel that resisted political manipulation. If we could teach our students now as we were taught, if they could now read all day and all night, avidly, as we did, and all through those long summer holidays, especially, well, we would still have an efficient weapon against illiterate thinking. But our present students read summaries on Google, and are asked to parrot ideas drowning in cultural studies for a final grade. So this is what they read – when they are not at their jobs, of course.

**Before 1989, crossing the border was not as easy as today. What did you feel when you went abroad for the first time?**

That was quite sad. I so much wanted to travel. I only did that once, in the summer that followed the earthquake in 1977. I was miraculously allowed to spend ten days in a Bulgarian seaside resort. I never even went to the beach. I wanted to see all the places: Sofia, Plovdiv, Balçic... I liked towns, I liked villages, I liked slums, I liked everything. It was fascinating to see churches turned into homes: an old woman lived in one. We had been warned not to swerve from the route Bucharest-Varna, but we got away with it. I suspect Bulgarian Securitate agents had their hands full with their own co-nationals.

My first true journey took place in 1991. It plunged me from the communist nightmare into the “capitalist jungle”. The Iron Curtain had fallen and, for two school years, I taught as a Fulbright in New York and San Francisco. I allowed myself to be carried away by my mother’s lifetime enthusiasm, “The Americans are soon coming!” Although not quite as she expected, America did her job for me: I spent all day in those stupendous University libraries. At night I would read books borrowed in the evening. How else was I going to be able to teach contemporary British literature, when my students’ years had ended the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Virginia Woolf? My Fulbright grants had become synonymous with “The Americans have arrived” – my parents’ fervent wish...

**By the end of this year, there will have been 30 years since the Revolution. Tell us about the impact of the 1989 on teaching foreign languages.**

*My first true journey took place in 1991. It plunged me from the communist nightmare into the “capitalist jungle”. The Iron Curtain had fallen and, for two school years, I taught as a Fulbright in New York and San Francisco.*

**As for me, in the last three years of high school I forgot the Russian I had learned over the previous five years. Meanwhile, the Ion Creangă High School included Japanese in their curriculum. In the morning of September 11, 2001, I was happy to find out I was to study foreign languages at the university, but when I got home that evening, I saw the Twin Towers from New York burning on our TV screen. Ecstasy and agony within just several hours. What historical days would remain etched in your memory?**

*Contemporary culture is no longer focused on the depth of a thought. The contemporary mind is ubiquitous. It has achieved a prodigious dispersal of attention, so reading one book at a time has become quite impossible.*

I am not so sure we do have a contemporary history yet. We are in a kind of political limbo. I have not seen much happening during these last 30 years. It may be my own fault, of course. I had always struggled to “cultivate my own garden”, as Voltaire put it: I did what was in my power to keep communism away from my mind. I have never been a sociable person. Solitude is my way of life. I do not want to get on any bandwagon. I do not wish to be the boss, I will not join any gang. I expect this is the explanation of the distance between my inner life and the present age. Ten years ago, I founded *Contemporary Literature*

*Press*, and I have worked on it 18 hours daily, without weekends or holidays. No TV, no papers. “Revolution” does not describe what happened here in 1989. Not to me. It was a kind of liberation, no doubt. We were suddenly free to read all books and surf the net – I am really grateful for that. But what happened on 25 December 1989 had very little to do with that freedom.

As to teaching English after 1989, it certainly went wild. And yet, the efficiency of teaching English went down dramatically. We were invaded by “communicative teaching”, whose result our present students are. Romanians had such a solid tradition when it came to the teaching of foreign languages as *langue et civilisation*. Now, 30 years later, a few brave teachers are struggling awfully hard to get back there – which is impossible. A high school teacher’s mind has radically changed. If they can’t keep their students amused, they do not feel fulfilled – which may be right, I don’t know. I myself changed the traditional lectures on literature into interactive courses. It was more fun and much more difficult to stage that intellectual strategy, but I focused on the text, and refused to use the “sacred-cow” words that literary critics often use in order to prove their superiority to the literary text.

**Nowadays, most dictionaries are just one click away and we learn a lot directly from the screen, so, naturally, teaching has had to change. I wonder how ready for these changes Romanians are, how aware, how resistant, how intuitive, how creative... In 2006, you initiated the MA Programme for the Translation of the Contemporary Literary Text (MTTLC), English and Romanian, which I attended with great pleasure too. You believe that “teaching through translation works”. What factors do you think favor it?**

Translation is probably the only way to teach the essence of a literary text. It may be the best tool of literary criticism. In 2006, my students were so eager to grasp ideas, to put into words what they had understood. Contemporary culture is no longer focused on the depth of a thought. The contemporary mind is ubiquitous. It has achieved a prodigious dispersal of attention, so reading one book at a time



has become quite impossible. We live in another world. I admit I have no idea what could touch the student today and arouse his enthusiasm. I expect I could find out, but I have so much left to do that I refuse to waste my time reinventing myself.

**In 2009, you founded the Contemporary Literature Press, a part of this MA, which involves activities that allow you to show students what editorial work means. How is it different? What kind of books do you produce?**

It is called "the online publishing house of the University of Bucharest for the study of the English language through its literature." That description was Professor Sandulescu's idea. He taught me so much. He is the father of the 130-volume series of *A Manual for the Advanced Study of James Joyce's Finnegans Wake*. He was one of the best Joyceans in this world. Our Joyce series has made it to the top.

We have tried a few collections. First of all, we have edited classical books as bilingual texts, sometimes in three languages at once. We have published Petronius in Romanian, English and Latin, for instance. We have published handbooks (recent and old) of English: language and literature. Older handbooks by Romanian authors have often been forgotten, so we have created a series that aims at sketching the history of English Studies in Romania. We included in it forgotten books coming from the Romanian Academy Library, books coming from older personal libraries, such as Professor Sandulescu's and mine. We have also published most of Shakespeare's plays bilingually, in very old and well-known Romanian translations.

I must admit with joy that Cultural Studies have not been a direction that we cared to follow. Debuts are few and accidental. We have focused on books that can teach English to those who read them, among other things. On the whole, we have collected around 400 volumes here: <https://editura.mttlc.ro/>.

**From an earlier interview, with poet Ioana Ieronim, it is clear that the center of gravity of all your activities is this idea of working shoulder to shoulder with your students. How did you become aware of its value? Did you have professors who worked this way or is it a dream you had for a**

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**long time and it eventually came true? How does it work and what are the benefits?**

For ten years, the truth is the publishing house relied on the enthusiasm of our graduate students. I worked with them, they learned how to do pretty complicated things connected to publishing (confrontation, text revision), as well as simpler operations, such as proofreading, text editing, scanning, insertion of images. I taught myself these things, which you learn when you try to use a computer program. For a year now, the students' interest has been waning. I can see the reason: my students will not become editors upon graduation, much as they would like to.

*As a writer, you learn all sorts of tricks in using words. That gives courage and an extra tool to the translator. I suspect this is the reason why I translated more poetry than fiction.*

All philological departments used to train teachers, mainly, and, right now, very few graduates can make a living out of teaching. A faculty that keeps on training students for an obsolete job is in big trouble. I do hope that your young colleagues will manage to offer these students a profession that they can enjoy and off which they can live. I have been trying that for 12 years now. I brought subtitling into my MA program, and also translation of plays acted on stage now, translation of various cultural sites, translations for various national magazines, agreements with the National Television and the Theatre and Film Academy etc. The problem arises from the fact that money-making jobs have strayed away from "culture" to the very unstable field of "services", of multinational firms. Those firms absorb a huge number of graduates. Those are fragile, short-

lived jobs, which may end before our ex-students are ready to retire, but it is a trend one cannot oppose. If we do resist it, we need a lot of courage. This is the essence of our publishing house: the courage to stick to culture.

**Let's change the course of our interview a little. What values do you cherish the most and why? Over the years you have published poetry, prose, critical studies, anthologies, interviews, translations etc. How do you see the rapport between writing and translation? Do they help each other or not? How can they peacefully cohabit?**

We must begin by saying that any academic is forced to obey the principle "publish or perish". This may be one of the reasons why I feel I am prepared to take a step back and change my priorities. I have always wanted to write. So far, the University came first in my life. The University of Bucharest is my *alma mater*, it is the place where I came when I was 17, and all I have ever wanted was to work in it. I can say now that the books I wrote with an academic purpose in mind no longer represent me. Literary theory is always secondary to the literary text. I have had enough of it – to put it mildly. As for the other things I might try to do from now on, *l'homme propose, Dieu dispose*. One of my father's favorite French sayings.

**What differences do you see between those who are only translators and the translators who are also authors?**

As a writer, you learn all sorts of tricks in using words. That gives courage and an extra tool to the translator. I suspect this is the reason why I translated more poetry than fiction, and rather into than from English, and it might also be an explanation why one of those books was even granted a prize by Poetry Society – London.

**After 1989, you published a collection of interviews about censorship with Romanian writers. Tell us about the story of printing that book. What problems were there before it was issued? What about the feedback it received?**

My one joy in 1989 was that I thought I had struggled free from the impossibility to publish under communism. I never published any of my so called “books for the drawer” before the fall of the Iron Curtain. I wrote that book on censorship in English, as an explanation of the state of things in post-communist Romania, and, obviously, Romanians already knew it all by heart. English seemed the correct choice. I had never thought about the publication of my books before, since I knew that would have been impossible.

Luckily for me, a small Joyce congress came to Romania, and one of the American Joyceans put me in touch with Central European University Press, which, at the time, had an American team and an American director. They accepted it at once. They never changed a comma. Unfortunately, they discarded a lot of the texts I had translated from the work of the interviewed authors, and which followed their confessions. By that combination of direct and indirect texts, I was demonstrating something that I was not willing to utter in as many words. I would still hesitate about that, if I were to do it all over again today. To put it in a nutshell, considering that communism censored everything, anything published during that time involved certain compromises. I have never liked compromises. Only now do I realize what a moral book *Censorship in Romania* was. I was hinting at something that will only be uttered when my generation is out of the picture, and a hint cannot replace a clear statement.

*Censorship in Romania* also gave me a taste of the „capitalist jungle”: the Americans left the publishing house to those in Budapest a few months before the book came out. I was amazed to find myself mentioned on the cover as mere „editor” of a book which was all mine: interviews, selection of the literary texts, translation of it all, proofreading. A month after publication, a letter announced me that I even owed the publishing house 500 dollars because I had failed to deliver an index that had never been requested. The musketeers are still selling the book, in Dumas-style, now, 20 years later. Many people find me and ask me for a copy, because the price is a bit uncomfortable, and they can't believe that all I have is one copy sent to me upon publication. Well, stories of liberalization...

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**Let's speak a bit about *English with a Key*, a volume I too used in order to learn how to fish meanings. By choosing “matching words”, you succeeded not only to create a book of language practice for the youth who set off on the road of translations, but also to convey the joy, the enthusiasm of writing and the need to use the power of words to maintain a balance between the source and the target language. What did you feel when you wrote it?**

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This makes him feel  
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When I realized I did not stand a chance of ever publishing anything connected to literature, and at that time nobody even imagined communism would ever go away, I thought I could try to write a book consisting of what I did best: teaching English. We, English teachers, have always had a second job: tutoring. It has always helped us to make ends meet. Having read everything Romanians had written in the field, I knew exactly what a pupil needed in order to pass the entrance examination and become a student of English. I knew their handbooks, I knew exactly what the school never taught them, I realized that I could really help them. I enveloped grammar in humorous sentences. I left aside the communist tractors and new man, and I wrote stories whose heroes were animals, plants, nations, fish, birds (lists of words, in fact). Sometimes, the story was just one sentence long. The recipe was "grammar and fun". Considering the absence of communist symbols, nobody wanted to publish it. In 1990, that "book for the drawer" appeared overnight, and was sold all over the country. To this day, it has been my only bestseller.

**Who or what would you compare a translator with? What about the act of translation, what does it resemble?**

Any translator is both the piano and the pianist at once. He thinks a writer's book in his own words, in his own language: yes, he rewrites that book. He impersonates the author, makes sure he has got the meaning, and then allows his own words to inhabit the author. No dictionary is ever enough. Literature cannot be translated *mot à mot*. A translator does need inspiration. This makes him feel a creator, too. This pride is a danger. He may instill into the translated text meanings that the author never intended. I can't deny that Paul Valéry was right to say: *l'homme de génie est celui qui m'en donne*. I can't deny we all get carried away and it occurs to us that, in our absence, that book that we translate would not exist. Well, we must get a grip before somebody urges us to stop the conjuring tricks. The original work is not in our pockets to play with. It can exist in our minds, and all we can do is to understand and rephrase it in our mother tongue.

**You have translated numerous books over the years, mainly poetry. What are the virtues of a good literary translator and how would you interpret them in the light of our times?**

I would say, *c'est interdit d'interdire*. There is no doubt in my mind that a good translator is a creator himself. His creation is not the author's book entirely. But the only rule here is experience. Theory, which haunted the 20th century, has failed. When all is said and done, nothing can be decoded perfectly. Curiosity is good, but no answer is perfect. We find answers, we apply principles, and eventually we realize that things simply flow, nothing is forever there, everything must be understood and rephrased over and over again.

**People speak about a translator's invisibility. What does it mean?**

It's a goo word, found by a theoretician who is a translator himself. I have often wondered whether he has ever felt that his *bon mots* come back to haunt him, as T.S. Eliot did. It happens to all those who think their theory is the key to all experience. That theory is merely words (words, words...). These words are quoted endlessly, lose their meanings, students start quoting them just in order to show they will be more professional in that way, since everyone has heard about Lawrence Venuti, haven't they? These sacred words, quite often invented by brilliant writers, only make sense in their original context. Repeated like a refrain, they end up doing more harm than good. How right David Lodge was: „words come to the writer already violated by other men”. I have just committed the sin of quoting another critic myself, but... it's for a good cause.

**What do you think about re-translation? When is it necessary and why?**

Since it is my conviction that the translation of literature is the best way to understand it, any new translation brings a new meaning to light. Nobody can call himself the only translator of a work, and no two translators reach the same version, in spite of the fact that they work with the same mother tongue. This mother tongue is like a living body: phrases are lost, or changed, conventions are dropped, mistakes turn into rules. If one translates Dickens as

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a dramatic author, and somebody else focuses on Dickens's humor, the two ensuing books will differ tremendously. A literary work simply says: "Let all translators come to me..."

**What do you think about intralinguistic re-translation (for example, *Alice in Wonderland* for elementary level)?**

Any activity that supports reading literature meets with my approval, because I am afraid that literature is a very endangered species today. Much is lost in a simplified book, of course, but at least it keeps the idea of a book alive.

*At the back of my mind, I always hear the Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica: "If you have not managed to convey at least one of your uncertainties to your young student, it means that you have failed." Well, translation is an enormous uncertainty.*

**You have translated many poems over the years. Which have remained close to your heart and why? When you need to choose the texts you translate, what specific criteria do you have in mind? How do you decide a text is worth being translated?**

I can't give you an original answer to that: I love most the text I am translating right now. I have loved them all when I was working on them. Any text is interesting to a translator. Even slogans are a challenge. My only reason when I accept to translate a text is that I see something in it, it speaks to me and I want to share what it says. I will never try to label that communication theoretically. Intuition is a marvelous tool, and I am happy to rely on it. Now, that we talk about this: out of the multitude of theoreticians in translation studies, not one of them has explained what a "gifted" translator means. Well, that will be the day.

**What are you translating now?**

I am translating a brief anthology of Bloodaxe poets. Then I have a volume of yet unpublished poems by Alan Brownjohn, whom I appreciate a lot. Then there will be the volume of finalists in the Romanian poetry-translation contest „Lidia Vianu Translates”. After that, two wonderful British poets, Imtiaz Dharker and Kavita A. Jindal... And there is more. I just hope I can do all that.

**What are some of the traps young translators become aware of?**

Nobody is safe from blunders. I can only advise young translators to read their own translations from time to time: they will find out themselves what went wrong. Translation Theory or Cultural studies will not help. Translation is not so much taught as stolen. It is desperately hard work. One learns from one's own mistakes, and soon we all realize that our translations grow old, just like ourselves. The only thing to remember is that, whatever we translate, we must do that to the best of our abilities at the moment. I don't think much of those teachers who mock at the mistakes made by beginners. At the back of my mind, I always hear the Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica: "If you have not managed to convey at least one of your uncertainties to your young student, it means that you have failed." Well, translation is an enormous uncertainty. Translation Theory is useless there. Translation experience is the key. All I can tell apprentices in this field is: Read.

**In the collection *Liminal* (2015), poet Oana Avasilichioaei, who lives in Canada, begins her exploration of the space between languages as follows: „Border, you terrify. Border, you must dictate your own dismantling or we will perish. Purge. Border, are you listening? Are you empire?” The frontier seems to be an indifferent monster, it’s shocking, we don’t know for sure if it will reply, and it has an imperial force. How is this face-to-face approach to the frontier seen from an East-European translator’s point of view, considering our long frontier history, perhaps not enough researched from the perspective of translation?**

Come to think of it, the endless discussion about margin and center and transgressing the border between them sounds like a struggle between literary gangs. Some writers want to be allowed into spaces that ignore them. It is not easy to become part of an establishment other than your own. There is nothing wrong with the eagerness to be famous and gang with the best. English is spoken all over the world, but not all writers in English will be accepted by London publishing houses. A remarkable editor told me in all honesty not very long ago: “I only publish authors whose mother tongue is English.” What can be wrong with that? Can we change it? Well, let me answer that question with another question: How come that only those who are outside wail about the existence of the borders?

In 1997, I was teaching in Berkeley. The American state had decided to revoke what they had called “affirmative action”, which had helped certain disadvantaged students to go to university. I was walking on campus when I suddenly noticed that the students freshly pushed back where they had started had climbed up all the surrounding trees, like an army of apes. They not only wanted to be students (which they were now), they also wanted to keep privileges such as be admitted without tests, get easy grades etc. Your question makes me wonder: isn’t this “border” a concept with too many political implications, a means of washing our brains, in the long run?

**At home I have two of the poetry collections you translated with Adam J. Sorkin for the University of Plymouth Press: *Lines Poems Poetry* by Mircea**

*I am infinitely grateful to all the natives who have helped or will help me.*

**Ivănescu and *The Book of Winter and Other Poems* by Ion Mureșan, each accompanied by the works of an artist: Florica Prevenda, in the first case; Ciprian Paleologu, in the second case. How was it to work on these projects?**

In this case, my awareness of a “border” did the trick. I had a co-translator, whose mother tongue was American English, and who taught me a lot. I sometimes wondered at the way he changed words and phrases, but our joint translations did speak to Americans. He trusted me not to misread the Romanian text, and I trusted him to adapt my English to that particular time and place. When one translates into a language other than one’s mother tongue, we can be certain of nothing unless a native of English works with us. Since it so happened that I have translated more into than from English, I have always made a point of having at least an English advisor, if not a co-translator. I must say I was flattered that neither Northwestern University Press nor Central European University Press needed to amend my texts. Nevertheless, I am infinitely grateful to all the natives who have helped or will help me.

*But a translator is a cultural messenger who works for love of the work. Money is irrelevant there. What matters is the cultural network they can or cannot create. I have worked that way all my life. I know many English poets, and they know me. We work together.*

**You are concerned with the fate of Romanian literature in translation and with the way translators do their job. How do our institutions and the international ones stimulate the interest for titles by Romanian authors, when they are relevant? Has this link begun to function or is it still fragile?**

Support from public institutions means public money. That is very tricky. All I can say is that I am grateful to the Romanian Cultural Institute, to the University of Bucharest, to the British Council, to the National Museum of Romanian Literature, the Writers' Union and the Ministry of Culture. Their support gives me a cultural identity. But a translator is a cultural messenger who works for love of the work. Money is irrelevant there. What matters is the cultural network they can or cannot create. I have worked that way all my life. I know many English poets, and they know me. We work together. Of course, there is always (much) room for improvement, but I am easy to please. All I ask for is to be able to go on working.

**Let's imagine we are in a university that wants to invest in modernization and has the necessary means. What would some of your proposals for the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures be?**

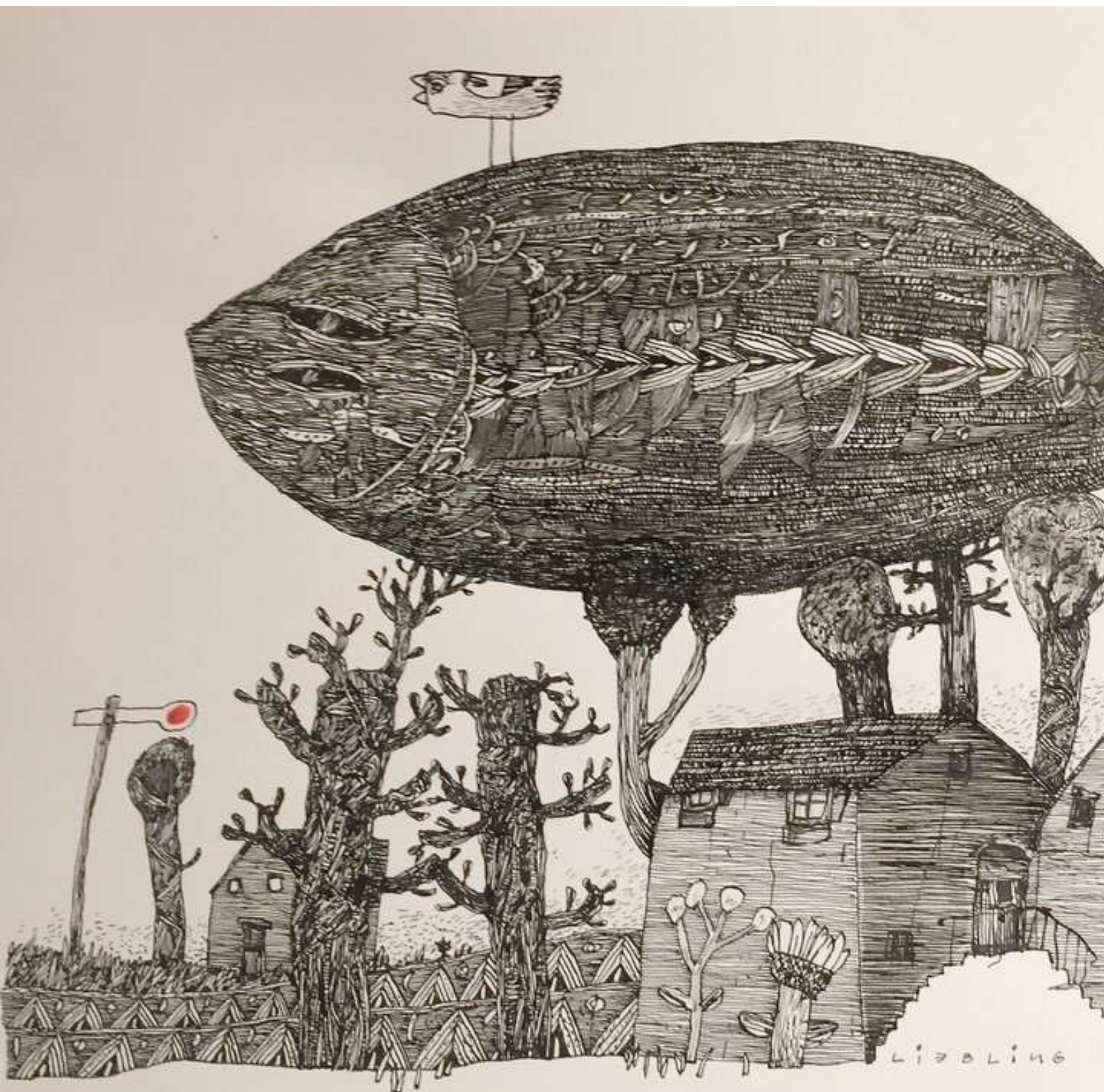
Our faculty is entitled "The Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures." That should be the starting point of this discussion. As far back as 1990, I felt theory was not enough. Cultural studies inform the students, without actually forming them. Of course, you can't rely in a lecture on such an exclamation as "God, I love Dickens!" Besides text analysis, we need a theoretical point of view. We must teach the students how to generalize. Where we fail is in the way we communicate with those we teach. Any lecture delivered as a monologue full of "historiographic metafiction" and similar sacred cows is doomed to fail. There is only one second between that and the student's reaching for his telephone and surfing the net during our class. We need interactivity and we need to focus on the literary text first of all. We must talk in "Demotic English", however complicated the truths we teach may be. There is a whole new world out there. When I began, I knew perfectly well what my students needed. It is the turn of your generation now. The students need a totally new face of literature than the one theory rather hides than explains. You must give them what they need. Either do this or lose them.



Enescu Festival. Images from video set design created by Carmen Lidia Vidu for „The Woman without Shadow” opera by Richard Strauss, in the concerto variant of conductor Vladimir Jurowski



„Liebling”, author: Daniel Ursache, Romanian artist based in Seattle.  
From the „Uncanny Figments” expo show.



# Time to reimagine our hyphenated cultural identity

TEODOR STAN

Thirty years since the collapse of a totalitarian regime that manipulated the sentiment of national belonging and solidarity, we still need to understand and overcome our inherited aversion reflexes in asserting our cultural identity as Romanians and in promoting our common interests through apolitical, trust-based networks of cohesion. Living in free democratic societies on both sides of the Atlantic, experiencing levels of mobility unparalleled in our history, forces us to question and redefine our ways to anchor ourselves within local and transnational environments.



„Liebling”, author: Daniel Ursache, Romanian artist based in Seattle.  
From the „Uncanny Figments” expo show.



**M**onocultures or high cultures directed from on high by titular nation states are increasingly illusory promises, mythical safe havens of conformity, concepts so far removed from the reality of our interconnected world. To what degree cultural identity can remain correlated with a contiguous territory is uncertain, though nostalgia is certainly a potent driver in times of uncertainty and anxiety caused by rapid technological advancements and afferent tectonic socio-political transformations.

It is up to each of us to define who we are, what we stand for, the social constructs and values we choose to uphold and shape as we pass them to our children. All human identity is a composite social construct in evolution shaped by our meaningful interactions and by our need for self-actualization in a community of our choosing, one in which we feel appreciated for who we present ourselves to be. It is a personal choice to define oneself as a Romanian American and it is one far more complex than the passports one carries or the clear allegiance one holds to their adoptive country, often a country chosen as a discerning adult. It is a hyphenated identity, an affirmation that acknowledges the special affinity not only with the country of birth and host country but also with kindred people who chose to affirm that shared heritage wherever they are encountered.

With the recent Romanian presidential elections behind us we are prone to see only a politicized face to the diaspora when in fact it is a far more complex community than its occasional political remittance might indicate. The seemingly monolithic vote is much more than an occasional expression of support for a certain politician or party, it is an aspiration and a mandate for a shift in governance values, one that might bring the country closer to our adjusted expectations of normality as American residents. Those still holding Romanian passports and expressing their views through the ballot box represent only a fraction of the Romanian Americans, a human capital that could be an asset to Romania as it seeks to redefine its centrality within western civilization. It is an asset that should however be nurtured apolitically, beyond occasional electoral or foreign policy interests. Romanian American organizations exist distinct and often historically apart from the social chasms and tribulations in the country of origin. Such organizations grow or fade and are necessarily responsive to their immediate environments, the needs and interests of the stakeholders they seek to serve locally, often disconnected from socio-political evolutions back in the old country. One such organization seeks to understand what such a hyphenated identity might mean today and if it is a viable vehicle for social cohesion.



The Immigration Research Forum (IRF) was established this year by a group of Romanian Americans in Washington, DC as a platform that seeks an in-depth understanding of the factors which promote the successful integration and upward social mobility of immigrants within American society. This apolitical entity currently funded by its members' own donations, focuses on the composite identity of Romanian Americans and how this evolving social construct plays a role in the socialization of diaspora members within American communities. The organization intends to look at how community-based organizations and social entrepreneurs assist members in pursuing their potential in asserting their unique contributions to the host society. It hopes to eventually serve as a platform for the exchange of ideas, experiences and projects of excellence among leading professionals and emerging community leaders within the diaspora in the belief that their vast array of accumulated expertise should be shared, and their achievements and efforts acknowledged.

IRF's inaugural event, the first conference of Romanian American professionals in the nation's capital was hosted at the prestigious University Club of Washington, DC on November 21. It brought together some of the most accomplished professionals within the diaspora calling on them to form advisory councils in the fields of medicine, public policy, exact sciences, litigation, arts and culture. The purpose of these

councils within each professional field is to start mapping out already available resources, to identify influential stakeholders and engage them in assessing current grassroots needs and expectations for various types of social cohesion exercises. In the following months, the IRF seeks to partner with other local diaspora organizations in hosting events that promote Romanian American identity in the United States. In June the local group intends to join the "Immigrant Heritage Month" series of events under the patronage of the Washington DC Mayor's office and later register for the first time diaspora members to march in the nation's capital, in full Romanian folk costumes, within a community parade on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July National Independence Day.

One of the palpable outcomes of this inaugural event was the review of a proposal for an independent evaluation and mapping of Romanian-American community-based organizations and social entrepreneurs in order to assess the possibility of joint organizational capacity-building and the adaptive resilience of the diaspora in addressing its own evolving challenges and needs. The attempt to map organizational capacity is predicated on the belief that all collaborating entities of regional geographic reach or sectional topic-centric focus, would benefit from the sharing of expertise, joint trainings and the ability to respond with coherence, common operating methods and possible common

strategies. This exercise of building trust among a network of community-based organizations holds the distinct possibility that it may enhance not just diaspora's organizational capacity but also its positive image promotion within American society. Such mapping would increase the reciprocal ability to recommend trusted organizations across the American continent which could help established professionals relocating to other diasporic hubs as well as ensure that vulnerable newcomers are not exposed to unnecessary vulnerabilities in their personal adjustment and naturalization.

Beyond inherently blurry statistics about how many and where Romanian-Americans are and who represents their interest, there is a far more important lack of qualitative data about their social values and needs, about the diversity of socio-political profiles they represent within their host American society. In an age of poorly vetted information and superfluous media treatment of immigrant integration challenges, lasting branding consequences may arise and get conflated with misconceptions possibly affecting Romanian cultural affinity in ways difficult to foresee. The presence or absence of recognized, trusted, apolitical, civil society pulpits from which to provide credible rebuttals is something that this exercise intends to address. The proposed project is envisioned as a baseline assessment of actual current needs of the diaspora and as a vetting process for possible projects of excellence that could be replicated throughout the country as recognizable means of affiliation and mutual support. At its core this first voluntary self-assessment hopes to improve adaptability, accountability and transparency as pre-requirements of trust and authenticity in representative leadership within the diaspora. The follow-up steps to be taken in each field are to be drafted by the advisory councils of the organization made up by participants in the event and volunteers they seek to attract.

H.E. ambassador of Romania to the United States, George Maior and Mrs. Ana-Maria Maior attended the meeting as honored guests extending the embassy's full support for the initiatives of the organization. Ambassador Maior intervened suggesting that the diaspora mapping be developed

in such a way as to reach out to the large number of Romanian citizens migrating to the United States from Moldova, individuals who affirm their Romanian identity and who should be part of such a diaspora network. He noted that the large number of dual Moldavian and Romanian citizens applying for visas to the United States might be one of the reasons why Romania has not yet reached the appropriate low rate of visa refusals to be included in the Visa Waiver program. He encouraged participants to extend the scope of the Romanian American diaspora effort for cohesion so as to include those of Romanian heritage and descent hailing from territories outside Romania's current borders, people who have integrated in American society and who bring a positive contributions of their own. Such inclusive efforts may eventually alleviate some of the consular burdens in providing legal counseling. He touched on the incomplete data on various diaspora hubs estimating that total number is somewhere over eight hundred and that the logistic limitations of accounting for the size of diaspora hubs are based on the distribution of the approximately half a million Romanians who have kept active citizenship documentation while declaring residency in the US. Statistics are only one aspect of the real "weight of the community" which Ambassador Maior quantified as based on the impressive influence members exercise locally through various organization he visited and interacted with throughout the continent during his mandate.

One of the most important aspects of the event was to act as a safe venue in which participants could start a genuine discussion about need to reconcile their often traumatic personal experiences of emigrating from Romania with the persistent need felt to positively affirm their unique cultural heritage within the diversity of the host country. Setting the stage for later discussions, the keynote speaker at the event was Romanian historian and currently Georgetown University Professor Dennis Deletant. His speech centered on Romanians' legacy of distorted political socialization and values as evidenced in his recently published study "Romania under Communism: Paradox and Degeneration." He outlined precise historical circumstances for the learned behaviors of social atomization and alienation that still have a

ripple effect plaguing the formation of strong civic associative platforms.

Discussing the repressive nature of the totalitarian communist regime in Romania, Professor Deletant touched on the evisceration of the pre-communist progressive intelligentsia and its discrediting through far-right affiliation. He pointed to the scale of unrelenting collectivization, the resistance and imprisonment of eighty thousand peasants and the uprooting of whole communities through massive relocation of people, the systematization of villages. He reminded us of the dismantlement of another pillar of social cohesion, the suppression of minority religious confessions and the conversion of the dominant orthodox church institution into an extension of the repressive regime's information gathering apparatus, all of which robbed society of their trust in institutions beyond their family or other personalized networks. The intent inculcation of fear and suspicion of the other, combined with complete control over access to and manipulation of information, allowed the sanitizing and delaying of information on descent to the point of irrelevance.

These effective tools in containing social unrest and inculcating a sense of isolation for any individual with dissonant views from the official narrative were not just targeted interventions, they became pervasive, a paradigm permeating all formal and informal means of socialization. It forced individuals to develop duplicity as a coping strategy, one of ingenuine social association, an institutionalization of the lie, of accepting the abnormal as normal. Professor Deletant concluded that "it is my view that the legacy of that experience impacts to a certain degree attitudes displayed today both by Romanians in the motherland and those outside. By recognizing this fact, initiatives to address it can only be to the benefit individually and collectively to Romanians everywhere including those in the diaspora here in the United States."

The intent of delving into this tenebrous past was not to litigate the litany of wrongs so many exiles and immigrants experienced at the time of their departure prior to the collapse of the totalitarian regime. Rather it was meant as an attempt to have a frank discussion and begin to truly understand how those experiences

still inform current instinctive behavioral patterns of reticence in associating and affirming group belonging beyond immediate circles of trust. Participants shared their personal journeys of resilience that led them to the successful career they built. Their personal sagas against difficult odds, the circumstances of their settlement in the United States, the challenges they experienced in their naturalization process, the values and friendships that helped them overcome critical situations, all uniquely shaped their definition of self-perception as Romanian-Americans and the role this identity might play in their lives. Listening of those personal stories was vital to acknowledging that at least within the diaspora the reconciliation with past traumas remains incomplete, explaining in part why many Americans of Romanian descent remain reluctant to affirm their heritage and why many choose to socialize in discreet private circles of trust, often replicating persistent reflexes of suspicion with regards to the potential manipulation of associative platforms for political ends.

The discussion sought to define what Romanian American identity might mean to successful professionals who left at various times. There are yet poorly understood distinctive waves of immigration to the United States and the circumstances of those departures define individual attitudes towards both the country of origin as well as attitudes towards assimilation.

Successful professionals that left the country during the totalitarian regime, expressed their challenge with their forced-upon roles as exiles and the appreciation they held for the opportunities they were afforded. For the younger professionals who emigrated in more recent decades there seems to be less of a conceptualized rupture with the native homeland. Their Romanian cultural identity is more readily taken as a natural part of their individuality within a multicultural mosaic, something only marginally related to their professional desire for self-actualization. Taking for granted the freedom of movement they have experienced most of their adult life, they tend to support social entrepreneurship ventures that would help Romania prosper, help it adopt values and governance expectations aligned to those readily available in their adoptive social settings abroad.

A whole new generation of now young professionals have arrived in the United States with full scholarships and prospects of meaningful careers that might not have been readily accessible in Romania. Their positive attitudes towards the country of origin and host country are intrinsically linked to professional opportunities throughout the United States and globally, feeling better adapted to a labor market that often incentivizes a transnational mindset, constant relocation and a level of mobility that is not always kind to traditional patterns of family formation. Rather than thinking of the country of origin as place left behind, it becomes one of the optional places of comfort and belonging. Diasporic communities outside the country's borders may also become such spaces, though in restrictive circles and fitting within overlapping circles of affiliation within the diversity of the host nation.

What seems to transcend generational profiles from the stories recounted in the meeting is the gratitude felt for the solid education and work ethic that Romania offered them all. Some emigrants voice the feeling of returning to their places of birth in Romania experiencing it as nostalgic tourists, seeing places that once stored childhood memories and realizing that the country has moved on, that the cultural progression of the country is dissonant with both their memories of the place as well as with the persons they have evolved to be in foreign settings. That realization is at the very core of why there is a hyphenated identity tributary to the host nation that substantially altered their worldviews and perceptions. Shifting cultural markers evolving in such distinct milieus might appear diluted but these experiences only help churn out the obvious reduction of cultural identity, that the being a social construct only as relevant as it is constantly reaffirmed, actively expressed through socializations that remain relevant to the present needs of the individual.

We often speak of diaspora as this given body of people but fail to notice how it is constantly being shaped by competing overlaying perceptions of belonging, how it is not simply a statistic on who holds what paperwork, but subject to exclusionary definitions of subgroupings. The panel discussions

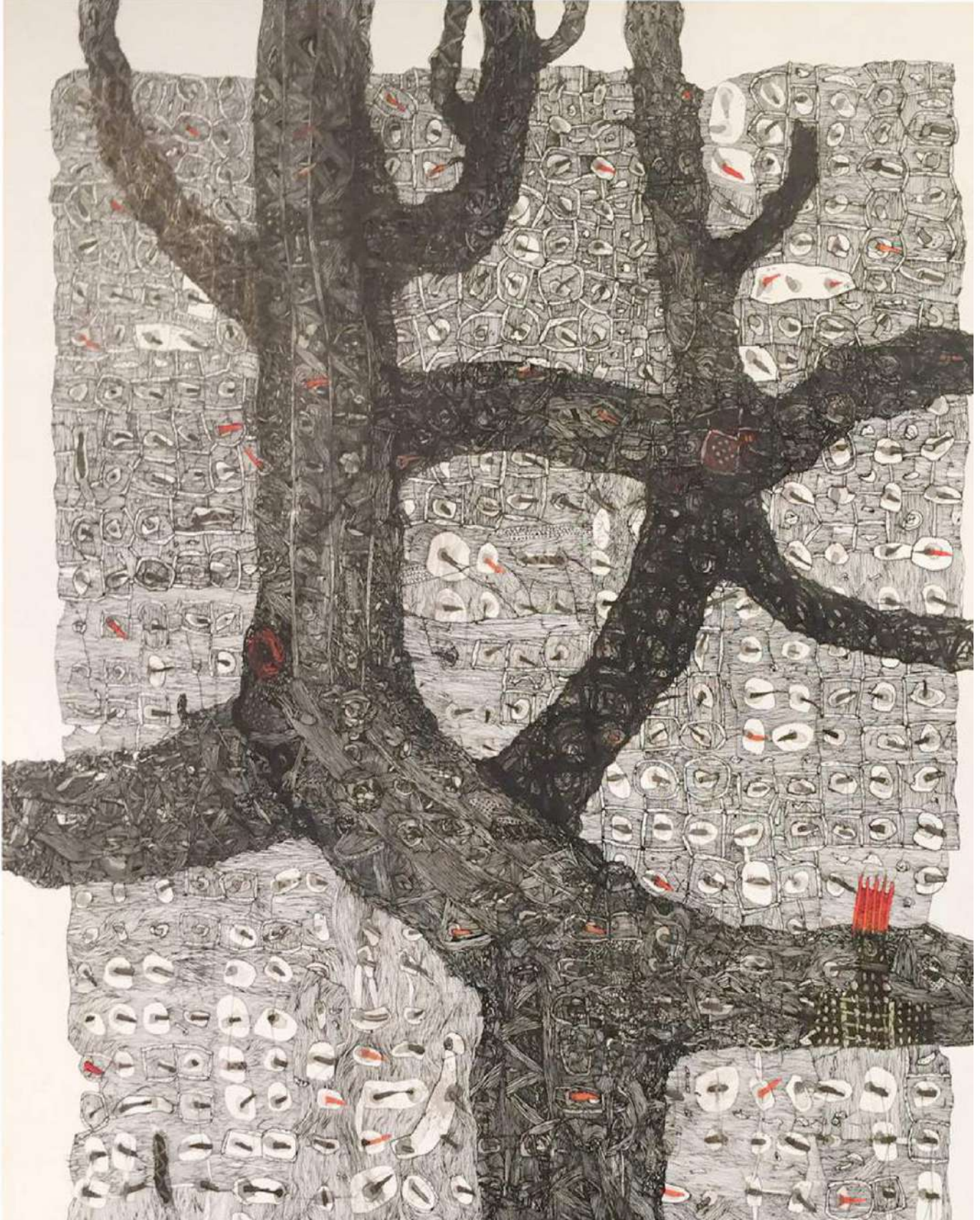
tried to inclusively define Romanian American membership based on asserted Romanian descent, mindful that even a linguistic definition may leave out many of diaspora's children. After all, few if any Irish Americans speak any Gallic but so many remain so strongly tied to their extended kin in Ireland and their multi-cultural make-up does not preclude Ireland to assume them or assert that twenty two of US American presidents are of Irish descent, former president Barak Obama included.

The personal stories shared during the meeting highlighted the confluence of multi-ethnic identities individuals can opt to assume, their multiple options in defining their social standing based on their contributions to academic or professional circles and their mixed attitudes towards belonging to a certain religious confession that may or may not be a vehicle for their self-expression as belonging to a distinguishable Romanian cultural space. The discussion avoided cultural relativism but highlighted the often-overlooked reality that "the diaspora" is a highly heterogeneous social exposed to a great degree of fluidity in membership and presenting multiple options for hyphenation.

In the words of Dadaist Jewish-Romanian poet Ilarie Voronca, "Of all NATIONS I choose imagi-NATION" [*Ilarie Voronca in „Unu” magazine, 6/1928, „Morning at 10” (1928)*]. We should take that verse not as an utterance of transnationalism but as a provocation to redefine the basis of our belonging to a common Romanian cultural space. While for first generation emigrants the hyphenated definition is composed of first-hand childhood experiences and adult decisions, for second generation descendants "being Romanian" is a vague optional notion. If the concept of a Romanian American community is inclusive and tolerant enough to accommodate a diversity of values and family-honored traditions, if it actively incorporates a wide array of positive role models, it will survive and sustain a broad human capital of great potential influence in bridging Romanian and American societies ever closer in their evolution.



„P.O.M.”, author: Daniel Ursache, Romanian artist based in Seattle.  
From the „Uncanny Figments” expo show.



LIDO RICO, „BRAIN INSIDE(OUT)”  
from the exhibition hosted by Carol Galleries, Bucharest, 2019 (courtesy of the gallery)





LIDO RICO, „BRAIN INSIDE(OUT)”  
from the exhibition hosted by Carol Galleries, Bucharest, 2019

# under debate

Abstracts of Romanian editions  
2019 „Cultura” magazine

# Documentary Theatre

## An Attempt to Dismantle Preconceived Notions

CRISTINA RUSIECKI:

**T**he topic of documentary theatre creates a certain divide. For the spectator that I am, a text without characters, that collates, somewhat firsthand, different texts from the news or from interviews, with a lack of systematization as driven by the devising method, as one that holds

no pretense of generality, but is reduced to tightly cropped cases, does not achieve the necessary level of relevance. I can figure out right from the first phrases where the play is heading and, once realizing the issue at hand, in 99,99% of cases I am already convinced by its soundness. There are no characters, the actors speak plainly, so that the discourse is not distorted by dramatic flourish, nothing sets anymore into motion my reflection and sensibility. How can it convince me anymore with a message I am familiar with in the first place?

**Artistic thinking is closely related to the public, to recent history, to ignored, unwritten history, to the immediate reality**

RADU APOSTOL:

**T**he principles of documentary theatre had the purpose of cultivating artistic thinking, in close relation with the public, with recent history, with ignored, unwritten history, with the immediate reality. Romanian society is still in a mimicked relationship with reality, for way too many times we

note with bitterness and disgust the fact that public policies have no connection with reality, they are either empty shells or aberrations grown in ivory towers, and not "in the communities", "on the street", in the so-called "real Romania".

Documentary theatre holds not just the role to bring onto the scene "real life", but especially that of cultivating within the artist and within the public the critical spirit, the civic spirit, sensibility towards fellow people in the coordinates of here and now, vital for performative arts.

(Cultura no 02)

# The Gopo Awards Nominees

## 13 Years of Romanian Cinema As Seen Online

CARMEN CORBU:

**F**estivals and awards create an alternative context of promotion for the cinematographic industry. In Romania, where the relationship between preferences on the level of the social corpus and the tendencies in creative circles is not a linear one, it has been heard, not infrequently, that receiving an award (especially an international one) would disadvantage the reception of the film.

But the presence of the public in cinemas is no longer the only measure of the audience. New media have deeply transformed the connection between the public and the films. Chances to view a cinematic production are maximized for those who prefer consumption in their domestic environment, whether the reasons underlying such a tendency pertain to the lack of time, the decrease of willingness to socialize in the public space, or simply the scarcity of easily accessible infrastructure.

A survey conducted in 2017 by the National Institute for Cultural Research and Training reveals a positive development of the national film market, through the annual growth of revenue in cinemas between 2012-2015, correlated with the development of those

*The presence of the public in cinemas is no longer the only measure of the audience. New media have deeply transformed the connection between the public and the films.*

cinemas. As for the number of Romanian films, the same study refers to the year 2013 as a peak for the presence of Romanian productions, with a share of 13,6% from the total of played films. In absolute figures, this means 27 Romanian premieres within the year in question. However, it is far from the presence of the American cinema, whose share remains almost constantly around 50% of all film consumption in Romania.

(Cultura no 03)

# The Theatre Festival As Cultural Intervention

*The pure interest of specialists and professionals from the domain is doubled by a superior stimulation of the public, but festivals also become an agent of “cultural intervention”...*

NICU ILIE:

**I**n general, things that may be seen in a festival may also be seen outside it. Yet the concentration of artistic supply leads to a critical mass, constituting cultural products with a vastly superior drawing power. The pure interest of specialists and professionals from the domain is doubled by a superior stimulation of the public, but festivals also become an agent of “cultural intervention”, proposing to participants new or innovative social and artistic perspectives, grabbing, sometimes for the first time, the interest of new categories of audience and involving them in the artistic dynamics or forms of cultural dialogue.

If in the countries where artistic and cultural consumption is exponentially more refined than in Romania, the role of festivals is chiefly that of being forms of touristic attraction and regional mobility, the Romanian peculiarity of events is different. This peculiarity is imprinted, in particular, by the necessity of mobilizing local communities and to open their gateways towards artistic and cultural consumption, towards the dynamism and expressiveness of contemporary arts, towards forms of multiculturalism, yet in Romania (less so in Bucharest, but more clearly the smaller a city is) are perceived in a reductionist, simplified way, with preconceptions, eventually rejected.

# Enescu 2019 Opera in Three Acts and One Prologue

ALEXANDRU PĂTRAȘCU:

**T**he acceptance of composer George Enescu has its own course around the world, with “Œdipe” conquering theatre upon theatre, in Vienna, Bruxelles, Covent Garden, Colón, and Salzburg, even this year, and, no matter how much the Romanian cultural authorities tried to take credits for these premieres, it has become clear that they hold no merit. At the same time, the first who needed to understand who was Enescu were Romanians themselves and the Festival succeeded like no one else in doing so.

The opening concert is an event with the size of a dream turned into reality for music lovers: Berliner Philharmoniker, on the first tour with their new artistic director, Kirill Petrenko. The event is not transmitted neither on the radio, nor on any TV channel, holding the status of an exclusivity that not even the spectators from Sala Palatului were happy with. Two months earlier, TVR (the Romanian national TV network) walked away from the negotiation table, betraying once again the sole mission that is important for the public TV: to transmit high-level culture. Given that it had no rights for transmission to pay, national TV claimed money to finance the production. It is a scandal, behind the scenes first of all, then public, because the Orthodox Church makes

*The Romanian cultural world looks at itself with dismay in the mirror...*

an offer that could not be refused and assumed broadcasting the festival. The Romanian cultural world looks at itself with dismay in the mirror, nobody believe it could end up like this, not even the most religious intellectuals.

(Cultura no 09)

# On the State of Poetry, Today

IULIA ALEXA:

**A** discourse with elitist associations, niche, accessed solely by a more or less sophisticated group of connoisseurs. Proceeding with such a definition, poetry seems almost inhibiting in character. Currently, there are

poetry festivals attended by not a large number of participants. The circles in which poetry is being read look like initiation meetings, and poets are perceived with a respect mixed with fear.

## Poetry, Everywhere and Nowhere

YIGRU ZELTIL:

**I** regret that Romanian literature did not get to assume more profoundly its avant-garde tradition and that the only chance for experimental approaches is parasitic entrenching – that is getting more and more productive, it must be said – of the institutions from the field of visual/performative arts (I am not exaggerating if I claim that some of the best and most innovative poetic texts were published in the collection of an art gallery, ODD), where there also

exist a different horizon of expectations. There are still benefits from the act of writing and even from the act of publishing poetry, so it is not “dead”, but in Romania there is no adequate book market. The poetry book seldom becomes – let’s describe it as such, with great difficulty – a saleable product. Yet the relevance of poetry depends not just on the market, but also on the competing media and sociological matters. Poetry no longer really influences written language and neither do we have in place anymore the system and the mechanisms that would allow such a thing (or they may only be used for the perpetuation of a canon that is stuck in the past).

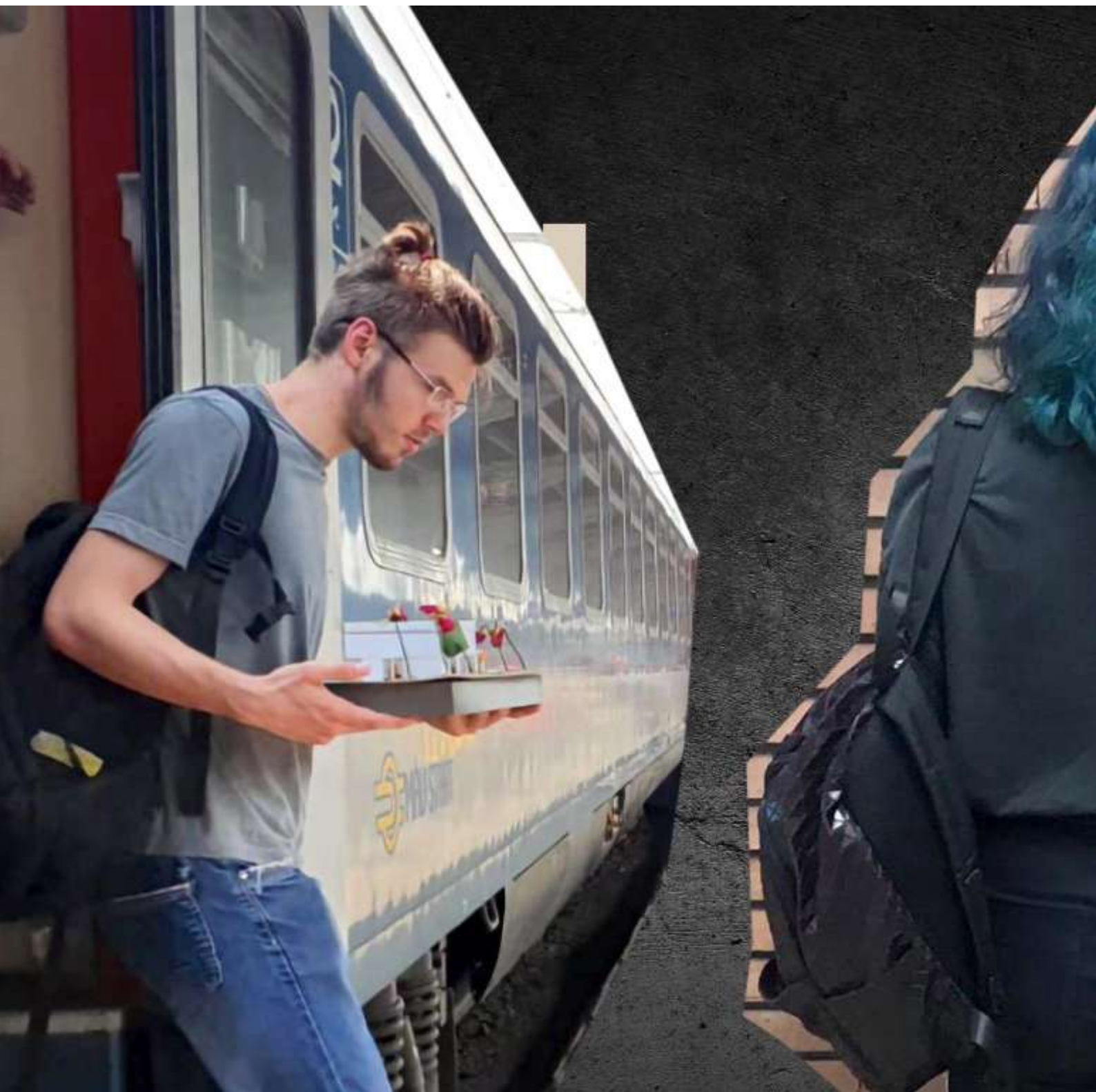
(Cultura no 10)



LIDO RICO, „BRAIN INSIDE(OUT)”  
from the exhibition hosted by Carol Galleries, Bucharest, 2019



Literature & Transmedia 2019, a program for art education set up by Augustin Buzura Cultural Foundation  
Image from „Snow flake” videopoem (by Irina Oancea, Bucharest)





Literature & Transmedia 2019, a program for art education  
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# analysis

Abstracts of Romanian editions  
2019 „Cultura” magazine

# The Strategies for Education

## The Deadlock of Cultural Reciprocity

CARMEN CORBU:

**A**t the end of the last year, the Presidential Administration published the outcome of a project titled „The Educated Romania”. Opinions proved to be divided, in the sense that, for some, the document was not quite enough, while for others it was too much. Failure to achieve a modicum of adhesion through the exposure of a vision is the expression of the failure of any kind of partnership or collaborative initiative inside the concerned field: state, institution, society, family. How a specific partnership relation also

presupposes self-awareness and reach towards the other, failure may be located in the area of cultural reciprocity. Obtaining such a cultural reciprocity, a pillar of efficiency in achieving certain goals, is a process in which the values of the parties are being identified, assumptions and aspirations are being verbalized, interpretations are being adapted and points of convergence are being generated. Otherwise, each party remains on the territory of their own experiences. Society accuses school of being inefficient or even detrimental, parents accuse the state of confiscating their children for the benefit of its army of teachers, while teachers accuse society for merely mimicking cooperation.

HORIA CORCHEȘ:

**W**e have no interest to find out the truth. For instance, that we are very poor when it comes to text comprehension. That we have graduates who have no idea how to express an idea coherently. That we have graduates incapable of having opinions. We are an amorphous society, merely interested in facades. Parents and pupils are preoccupied with notes, not what competencies lie beneath them. Why? Because there is a lack of major values representation in our national core. I do not want to turn to cheap essayism. But the debate on international tests amounts to this: observing that we are very poor in

regards to competencies, that we do not even know how to form them – us, the teachers –, that there is not even a real interest in gaining them – us, pupils or parents –, that there is not even the tolerance necessary for reality to be acknowledged, and resources and time being given to solve the lack – again, us parents, but also us society in general. It is a vicious circle. It can only be surpassed through macrosystemic, institutional taking of responsibility. We admit that we are at X, we admit we need time to reach Y, we establish the process and follow the steps. In short, this means vision and coherence. A strategy such as “The Educated Romania” could be a starting point. What should emerge are the decisional factors who could put the approach into practice.

(Cultura no 01)

# Horizontal totalitarianism and the tyrannies of the majority

NICU ILIE:

**W** eak forms of peer control, exerted horizontally, ones that do not traumatize, that do not limit individual liberty and do not block creativity and innovation, are perceived as legitimate and form part of liberal mechanisms of refining ideas or social actions that are beneficial or desirable on the level of the community. The mechanism of public consultations, in modern legislative practice, that of independent auditors – on different types of projects – or even the academic peer review are

such examples. Moreso, in the same weak, non-totalitarian forms, community control is essential in mechanisms tied to communication (property of terms, orthography), in normative or nomological mechanisms without which the use of social institutions and facilities becomes impossible. As for the harmful, rigid side of this control, horizontal totalitarianism that blocks or delays the adaptive capacity of individuals and communities, only small parts of the entire complex have relatively recently been brought to public observation and analysis.

## Horizontal Totalitarianism in Life and Literature

MARIANO MARTÍN RODRÍGUEZ:

**U** nlike vertical totalitarianism, the horizontal one does not need to dominate public institutions in order to exist and crush the individual, as it is prior and independent from the state. In fact, horizontal totalitarianism is exerted with

no need for the repressive apparatus of the state, as it needs no institution to repress and eliminate dissenters. It is a totalitarianism against which it is hard to fight, since anyone can be its agent and it is not acknowledged by those who practice it with zeal in day-to-day life. This totalitarianism is imposed by the majority of the members of one community against the members of the same community: those who do not respect its unwritten rules, the minorities

and all those who are perceived as threats to the homogeneity of that community, that functions as a sole, unanimous, totalitarian entity. In this type of totalitarianism, will over subordinates is not imposed by exterior authorities against which the oppressed community could revolt. As the mass of oppressors and the oppressed minority are on the same horizontal level, the persecuted cannot count on the solidarity of the other dissenters, since all are isolated and powerless in the middle of the mass that enforce the unwritten law of uniformity.

The danger of horizontal totalitarianism is even greater than the one imposed by the various totalitarian regimes, as it is not being denounced

by intellectuals. On the contrary, they seem to promote it, given the idealization, standing ever since Rousseau, of all types of closed societies, from the primitive tribe to the patriarchal, righteous village. There are countless books that condemn the only place where the individual may escape to a certain degree from the totalitarian conformism imposed by the community, that is the great modern city where economical, political and moral freedom flourishes. In the city, it is impossible for everyone to know you and control you. Unlike the tribe or village, where everyone knows everything about everyone.

(Cultura no 02)

# On the Emergence of Feminist Discourse

IULIANA ALEXA:

**T**here is, probably, no longer a single feminism, but several ideological and social movements with feminist tinges, diverse and versatile, yet they all demand the visibility of women in the academic space, in professional areas, in literature. Is feminism necessary anymore? Are there still battles to carry for gaining equality of rights or for changing wrong perception of women? Is feminism still timely in the academia? Is it still relevant in philosophy or literature? What forms of discriminating women

do (still) arise nearly involuntarily? What feminist phenomenon and discourse is emergent today and what ideas, what claims does it have? What shape does it have in our country and what shape elsewhere? Is Europe champion of equality? Which are the hidden signs of inequality? What changed and what ticked off since the suffragettes and where does a machist bulwark still persist? There are angles of approach, points of view and perspectives that may outline a more extensive image of the actuality (and sometimes urgency) of feminism.

# The lack of female writers in the textbooks. Rigidity and subsurface ambitions

ALINA PURCARU:

**W**hat female writers are missing from the textbook? Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Jeni Acterian and Gabriela Adameşteanu are missing.

It is an essential trio, one that covers the baseline at the very least. A rich list could extend it: female poets, prose writers, essayists, literary critics, publicists. They are missing for reasons that joined in an unfortunate sense and enhanced each other. For one thing, it is the rigidity of the critical canon, made overall to ancient criteria, at remote distance

from the complete and round reality of literature and literary life. Then, most likely, the instruments of the patriarchy, still active among those that set the syllabus. Thirdly, the subsurface ambition, present sub-textually, that the texts which are studied should reflect "strong", "national" values, patriarchal themselves, likewise associated with the works of the great male writers, preferably deceased. I've saved for last the scarce readiness of the system for reappraisals, the rather peripheral attention to contemporary literature (written, in large part, by female writers) and the background misogyny, internalized even by self-described progressive people.

# Versions, Contextualizations, Tensions and Appeasements

ALINA ISAC ALAK:

**T**he projects of Islamic feminisms aimed both at social activism and theoretical, academic reconstructions. It is interesting to mention that the latter contemporary form of Islamic

feminism has been more readily accepted even by secular feminists, who could signal a convergence of feminist objectives in spite of their wording in Islamic idiom. Muslim feminists from Muslim spaces, but also areas where Muslims represent a minority, have directly made egalitarian exegeses of the Quran, from the perspective of Muslim women, making use of hybrid methodologies, specific to traditional Islamic disciplines, but also to

Western academic developments. The Quranic text has been reinterpreted by aiming for a historical contextualization of the verses, as well as a holistic and thematic analysis of them in the light of ethical Quranic objectives. Therefore, a distinction has been made between what pertains to the Quran as cultural produce of 7th century Arabia, text that, inevitably, in order to offer solutions to certain specific problems, needed to describe in the same time, without prescribing norms or transposing into the universal, ideas, practices and beliefs that are common to that medieval society, and the Quran as sacred text with an atemporal, spiritual message, with universal principles and ethical-moral norms.

(Cultura no 03)

# Romanian Culture in the Age of Great Migrations

NICU ILIE:

**G**rounded in economy, the unprecedented demographic fluxes, especially at the scale of a traditionally isolationist state, expose Romanian society and culture to real shocks. The conservatism that characterized them (and offered them the capacity of resilience in the political dictatorships of the 20th century) had become deeply incompatible with the extreme mobility of society. Organizational culture was the first exposed: sedimented through the centuries, retaining even Phanariot traces, conceived for massive, rigid and strongly hierarchic structures, it has been and is an obstacle to social flexibilization, to politico-economical modernizations. Reforms, being mimetic, poorly adapted and lacking resources, had low efficiency. On the polar opposite, material culture has been a trigger of change and an engine of demographic mobility. Embracing new technologies, new devices and their amenities, but also consumption trends, has been massive and represents the main factor of social transformation. As for culture itself, spiritual, artistic and scientific, internal consumption dropped to the lowest rates in Europe, the import of cultural products grew massively, while cultural activities regressed to levels

of handicraft or hobby (considering that, in many artistic disciplines, the professional artist is extremely rare, and creators, even notorious ones, actually work in other fields – teaching, PR and communication, publicity or even public administration). Axiological acknowledgments, when they arrived, happened in the case of artists who managed to enter foreign markets: in painting and cinema rather than literature or philosophy. Without having solved its growth crisis, marked by the internationalization of its own populace, Romania needs to face its second challenge: to provide a multicultural space integrating the populations that shall arrive to fill in the created demography shortage.



# The Second Generation of the Romanian Diaspora

ROXANA BRATU:

In the last years, along the regularization of their status and obtaining economic stability at their destination, more and more Romanian migrants choose to reunite their family and plan a long-stay in their host country. This reconfiguration of migration projects led to the emergence of a specific category, gathering both the second generation (children born and raised in the host country) and the so-called Generation 1.5 – children who joined their parents at the destination in childhood or adolescence.

Statistical data indicate a diversification of migration projects in the last years, beyond the model of temporary migration, oriented towards the financial sustenance of the family in the original space. While regularizing their status and obtaining economic stability at the destination, more and more Romanian

migrants have chosen to reunite their family at the destination and plan a long-stay in the host country. The presence at the destination of some Romanian families (taking care of minors) has been highlighted by the data concerning the number of pupils with Romanian citizenship that are assigned to the Italian educational system, as well as the number of births among women with Romanian citizenship that are registered in the Peninsula. Thus, according to the Italian Minister of Education, the number of pupils with Romanian citizenship has increased constantly from 15.509 in the school year 2002/2003, to 92.734 in 2007/2008, reaching nearly 160.000 in 2016/2017 (source: MIUR). Also, ISTAT data indicate a growth of the second generation of Romanian migrants in Italy. Thus, between 2000 and 2014 there were registered approximately 150.000 births among women with Romanian citizenship, out of which above half in the last four reference years (2010 – 2014).

# Rural Elegy: The Romanian Village Is Dying

AURELIAN GIUGĂL:

We are in the middle of a historical process: once intensely mythologized, the Romanian village is fading away with each passing day. Three processes contribute to this social development now at its peak: Romanian post-Communist capitalism; the opening of the borders post-2007; the decline of

family (negative demographic balance) in the post-modernity of our times. When those who are today over 50-55 years old will no longer be, there will be an abundance of empty, most probably abandoned houses. In this general setting, any public utility investment, water, sewage, paved streets, is/will be perfectly useless: there will be roads to nowhere, meandering among empty streets. A large part of the world of the Romanian village, intensely sung and promoted in the past, lives its last moments in these years, in these decades. The end shall arrive inevitably, with no mercy and no pain.

(Cultura no 05)

# Creativity

## Between Artistic Performance, Competitive Advantage and Life Quality

IULIANA ALEXA:

Unfortunately, school teaches us only what others have done, the categories they have already created, and children memorize them to think identically. Confronted with a problem, we were taught to choose the most probable approach, relying on the past, then work logically in a direction oriented towards the solution. Instead of seeking possibilities, we were taught to exclude them. Traditional logical thinking is one based on patterns and we learn these patterns in

school). Divergent thinking demands moving away from these patterns that school makes us internalize. Confronted with a new idea, we suffer from a kind of conceptual inertia. Habits, thought patterns accumulate and reduce alternative possibilities. Unfortunately, school does not stimulate almost at all the pupils' thinking, it treats them like passive vessels for the information teachers pour into the young minds. Romanian school holds a sad record on this matter: children not only do not learn to generate ideas, they are being taught mechanically some texts that do not speak to them and which will make them unacquainted with thinking with their own heads for the whole rest of their lives.

## A work model

CARMEN CORBU:

It was at the end of the 18th century when Friedrich Schiller spoke of the concept of "game", of its two aspects, aesthetic and anthropological, of the playful urge as human's sensible liberty and reason of human existence. In the meantime, we probably let ourselves distracted by other things and have

forgotten. Now we panicked a little and ended up seriously discussing the wrecking of culture or the crisis of reading. That is how we arrived at the design of the programming of "Literature & Transmedia". Admitting not only that "crisis of reading" really, tangibly exists, but also that it is now exactly where it should be. Why? Because, for a very long time, reading out of pleasure has been seen as an idle do nothing activity. And by saying that, I do not

necessarily mean the world of the deep, archaic Romanian village, nor do I mean organizational culture intensely focused on professionalism and specialization, I mean the school curriculum that programmatic discourages young people from reading, putting the emphasis solely on operating with terms of literary theory and history and putting pressure with examinations reduced to these elements. And so we told ourselves let's try a completely non-didactic approach of reading and, additionally, practice the usage of other newer

forms of expression. A kind of secondary creative act where we start with a literary text and reach at new species such as the videopoem, the motionpoem or the book trailer. The idea was to use efficiently what we had, that is: the extraordinary attachment of the youngsters to using new technologies and their very high level of habit to consume multimedia productions.

(Cultura no 07)

# Biopolitica redivivus

## On Ethnicity, Race, Racism

MARIUS TURDA:

**R**acism and the idea of race are returning to the public discourse in a very perverted form. My interest was – and that is what I attempted in the book about eugenie – to see how we could unpack this very sophisticated paraphernalia in which the idea of race functions as a front for the notion of culture, nation, civilization and society. The idea of Europe and what exactly do we protect. If we manage to comprehend this issue, we can perceive exactly where the conceptual articulations occur, where a much more radical discourse on the biologification of national identity steps into the arena and when it becomes important for certain politicians to use it. From here derives this entire process of stigmatizing certain people. Whether

it's the Romanians from England or the Roma from Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria, the examples may vary, but the essence is the same. That of returning to certain quite radical and clearly biology-based forms of collective identity. Considerations which we long thought no longer matter in the public space, such as skin color or birth place, regain ontological value. We are raising barriers not only between Mexico and the United States, we are raising ideological barriers everywhere. There are internal barriers that pertain to the growth of xenophobic sentiments in societies that, especially after the Second World War, became fairly homogeneous.

(Cultura no 08)

# Public Opinion

## The pro-Western Orientation of Romania

REMUS IOAN ȘTEFUREAC:

**T**he orientation of a state's external policy is the result of numerous variables that pertain to historical or cultural factors, but also very pragmatic compliances such as adherence to fundamental political values, economic interests or security issues. Each of these variables influence the political, economic, cultural elites of a country, but also the social representations of the crowd. The lack of convergence between the choices of the elite and those of the population generate, sooner or later, systemic crises, just like the congruence between the choices of the elite and those of the populace determine the solid and stable geopolitical orientation of a nation. From this latter point of view, the case of Romania is an iconic. In the last quarter of a century, and after a forced hiatus of half a century, the elites and the populace at large resumed simultaneous resonance in the pro-Western orientation.

In an opinion survey conducted by INSCOP Research for the newspaper „Adevărul” in December 2014, to the question „25 years after the fall of Communism, in what direction do you think that Romania should orient when it comes to political and military

*The elites and  
the population  
at large resumed  
simultaneous  
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in the pro-Western  
orientation.*

alliances?” – the vast majority of Romanians (86,1%) indicate the West (EU, NATO). Only 5,2% indicate EAST (Russia), while 8,7% do not know or did not want to answer this question.

Literature & Transmedia 2019, a program for art education set up by  
Augustin Buzura Cultural Foundation  
Image from „Snow flake” videopoem (by Irina Oancea, Bucharest)



Piața Sfatului, Brașov, Romania. Photo by Cătălin D. Constatin  
Image from the project "European Squares and Their Histories", Intotheshquare.org





Piața Sfatului, Brașov, Romania, Photo by Cătălin D. Constatin  
Image from the project "European Squares and Their Histories", intothesquare.org

# studies and research

CĂTĂLIN D. CONSTANTIN

# Towards a Theory of the Square

## Spaces With Center, Spaces Without Center



**I**n theory, things are very simple. There are spontaneous settlements and planned settlements. Dwellings whose map feature a regular structure, carefully thought way before the locality is being built, and dwellings where the map is nothing but a net of convoluted paths, that appeared in time and are developed by chance. There are settlements with a center and settlements without a center or, at least, not a formal center pointed by a square. Intersecting these categories should yield a classification and a coherent evolution throughout history of the squares related to the space around them. In reality, things are not so simple. The above categories interfere all

the time and anywhere in the world. Even the most carefully planned cities, whose streets and buildings were laid on the ground according to predefined urban plans, feature numerous elements of spontaneous development. And vice versa, even the most chaotically developed dwellings hold elements that betray, at a given point, even a minimal attempt of plan systematization, of deliberate adaptation of the space to the needs of the community. Otherwise, regular structures and irregular structures can coexist peacefully, even beautifully, in the same dwelling, forming a continuum.

(Cultura no 03)



RAREȘ MIHAI MUȘĂTOIU

# “Ultras”

## Post-Pop Culture and Neoliberalism

### An Analysis of Football Supporters



**T**he interest for the topic of ultras groups comes from the more and more frequently debates on this phenomenon in the public space. The general tone of mass-media places these supporters at the border between the fringe and the entertainment show, reducing them to violent events and spectacular team-cheering rituals on the stadium. This study aims to analyze the peculiar cultural elements of this group, not to dismantle a certain set of stereotypes and preconceptions. Emphasis is put on the description, most especially, of the elements that I consider peculiar to the studied

community and not on similarities with the other supporters who shape the football phenomenon on a national scale. Also, the analysis is centered on the “ultras”, the supporters with the strongest sense of belonging to a group and the most loyal to the team, culturally speaking. The theme of the present research is rather poorly represented in anthropology studies from Romania, so the study is mainly exploratory, potentially being the source of future analyses, relevant for the comprehension of the phenomenon.

(Cultura no 04)



ADELINA SÂRBU

# „Junii Braşovului”

## Youngsters of Braşov

### A ritual transition in the present

**D**rawn on the coordinates of an initiation ceremonial with pagan core, found at numerous pre-Christian peoples, the model of the masculine bunch, formed of the name of Junia, was subject through the ages, in the aforementioned geographic space, to processes of redefinition and reconstruction, determined by undeniable exterior influences. With its substance being the ceremonial of attaining a new status, that of an initiate within a so-called male secret society (Männerbunde) and detachment from the natural condition of childing, by

gaining cultural condition, defined by a strict canon of values, Junii gained in time new shades.

Starting with a theoretical survey of the part of anthropology that catalogue this type of processions, rites of passage, with reference to the particularization done by Arnold Van Gennep in his work *Rites of Passage*, I shall follow the historical structure of the celebration and its resonance in the contemporary space of Braşov.

(Cultura no 06)

RODICA MONE

# Mental and Behavioral Structures in the Proverbs and Sayings of Romanians

## A Hermeneutic Approach

**I**n the present study, we shall focus our attention on proverbs and sayings referring to bread. And we shall try to surpass the level of analysis and commentary, in the attempt to arrive at an approach of hermeneutic nature, that which proposes, by interpretation and comprehension, the search for meaning. Let's remember that, in the hermeneutic process, there takes place a constant decoding and the main message is that interpretation exists solely where there is a meaning, a hidden meaning. Two are the key concepts of hermeneutics: interpretation and understanding. If interpretation is understood as stage or process that is superior to explaining,



exegesis, it means that it also presupposes wording personal, hence original, perspectives. Understanding, or comprehension, in its turn, represents the end purpose of any hermeneutic endeavor, leading to meaning. We read and analyze books and dreams, we read into the coffee grounds and into the stars, we analyze the whole world and life itself, yet, if we change the approach, the reading key, we could interpret instead of analyzing, thus opening our path towards understanding that, eventually, leads us to the deep meaning.

(Cultura no 08)

DANA BUZURA GAGNIUC

# Rites in the System of Power

## Romanian Election Campaigns and Pre-Campaigns

**P**ower in Romania offers the picture of diverse rites, some times with hilarious touches, other times almost exotic, conducted both among keepers of political power and among those who aspire to gaining it. The spectacles they offer, most of the time, carry staffs formed of ideologues and theoreticians who arrange complicated directing and strategies. What is aimed for is touching certain deep emotional mechanisms of the populace and, thus, influencing their vote decision.

For the last thousands of years, humans tried to impress their fellow people either to gain their goodwill, or to maintain their power or to accede to the hierarchies of power. Around these desires were built rites, rituals, image strategies that are being perpetuated in time. The structure, the purpose and



the actants are generally the same. What became more diverse and more modern in time are merely the means of setting the stage.

Structured on two levels, the present study contains an analysis from a theoretical perspective of rites in the system of power, with all that they include as forms of manifestation, and an application on “the scene of powers” around the presidential elections in 2009

(Cultura no 10)

Marktplein, Bourtange, Holland. Photo by Cătălin D. Constatin  
Image from the project "European Squares and Their Histories", Intotheshquare.org



Piazza Castello, Marostica, Italy, Photo by Cătălin D. Constatin  
Image from the project "European Squares and Their Histories", Intothesquare.org





Piazza Castello, Marostica, Italy, Photo by Cătălin D. Constatin  
Image from the project "European Squares and Their Histories", [Intotheshquare.org](http://Intotheshquare.org)

# profiles

## Interview with Sonia Coman-Ernstoff



“Beauty changes us for the better,  
especially when we are capable  
of detecting it”

DANA GAGNIUC BUZURA

Harvard graduate of art history, having a Ph.D with double major in French and Japanese art at University of Columbia, Sonia Coman-Ernstoff speaks with simplicity and warmth about her preoccupations and ideals.

**S**onia Coman-Ernstoff: We cannot deny the tension building up between these two impulses, that of globalization and that of conserving cultural identity. This tension is negative and destructive,

yet its force could be redirected, turning it into a creative tension. I cannot imagine the intellectual atmosphere from Harvard without the multicultural traits of the professor and student communities. I studied Japanese and French art, learned Italian and Japanese, lived with female colleagues from Tunisia and Turkey, and participated in evenings of Chinese and German cinema. These preoccupations and experiences made me perceive the world as both small and inexhaustible. This dichotomy begins to harmonize only through cultural interferences.

(Cultura no 02)





## Interview with Paul A. Gagniuc

# „I am a kind of... europatriot”

DANA GAGNIUC BUZURA

He is 37 years old. He teaches bioinformatics at the Bucharest Polytechnic University. A man of science with everything implied by this archetype: calm, rigor, being natural, altruism, generosity, frankness. And with the mandatory dose of Bohemian dreaming... He preferred not to talk about his multiple awards for scientific research – among which the Romanian Academy „Constantin I. Parhon” Award in 2014 –, but rather about his mentors, about the beauty of the relationships with people who mattered decisively in his professional evolution.

**P**aul A. Gagniuc: Now, the majority of the bright minds that should be kept in universities for science and quality courses are driven towards corporations. I have the courage to say that these corporations ended up being vastly superior in quality over universities, in certain cases. Let's just think of the research for implementing quantic computers or the research on artificial intelligence and the teams who makes them. Now we could say, well, but corporations are rich. Is this really the cause? I had and still have contact with a large corporation in our country and I can tell from experience that it is true, the majority of the smart people are there with them. Above money, corporations keep in check human malice, frustration and offer respect. A smart mind is more often attracted by these three offers rather than money.

(Cultura no 03)



## Interview with Diana Doroftei

# “My advantage is keeping my identity as Romanian woman”

DANA GAGNIUC BUZURA

**A dialogue on seeking and self-knowledge, but also the importance of guarding Romanian identity, as an answer to the question “Who am I?” in a remote and, oftentimes, unknown space ...**

**D**iana Doroftei: The American dream, as I understand and perceive it, is made up of three essential things: who and what do you want to become, how much are you willing to work in order to become, and who are the people

who show up on your journey of becoming. Sounds a little philosophical, but I can detail based on my personal experiences so far. The first ingredient I had discovered, and without which nothing is possible, is your awareness as human in regards to who and what do you want to become. In my case, the American dream did not constrain me to become only what I thought I could become. I met people who were pianists and are now running very large companies, engineers with successful online businesses, economists who work in technology and people from the world of cinema working in finance.

(Cultura no 05)

## Interview with Diana Iovescu-Tătucu



# „We are testing the traditional Romanian products”

DANA GAGNIUC BUZURA

Diana Iovescu Tătucu is a linguist. She started her career at British Council in Cluj-Napoca, studied public relations and communication at Boston University and entered the world of social entrepreneurship within Ashoka in the United States.

**D**iana Iovescu-Tătucu: So far, we are still testing what traditional Romanian products are having impact. What sold well were the light gray woolen bed throws with embroidery of

geometrically shaped plaits, used as carpets, but we are still experimenting. We are competing with the very low production prices from Asian countries, with India as market leader. This summer, we are working on the second iteration of the carpet collection with woolen plait embroidery, and we are also looking into ceramics. We shall participate in a few International fairs in Washington in the autumn-winter season and we also take into account participating in the largest folk art festival in the world, in July 2020, at Santa Fe. In the fall, we want to also launch a social impact pre-incubator for students, in collaboration with George Mason University, and we also supervise an exhibition project of intelligent textiles in collaboration with two female artists from New York and Smithsonian in Washington DC. Until then, we still have some field work to do. I can barely wait to revisit Maramureș and learn myself how to weave.

(Cultura no 07)

# The Profile of Resilient Identity in the Diaspora

## Writer Cristina Bejan

TEODOR STAN

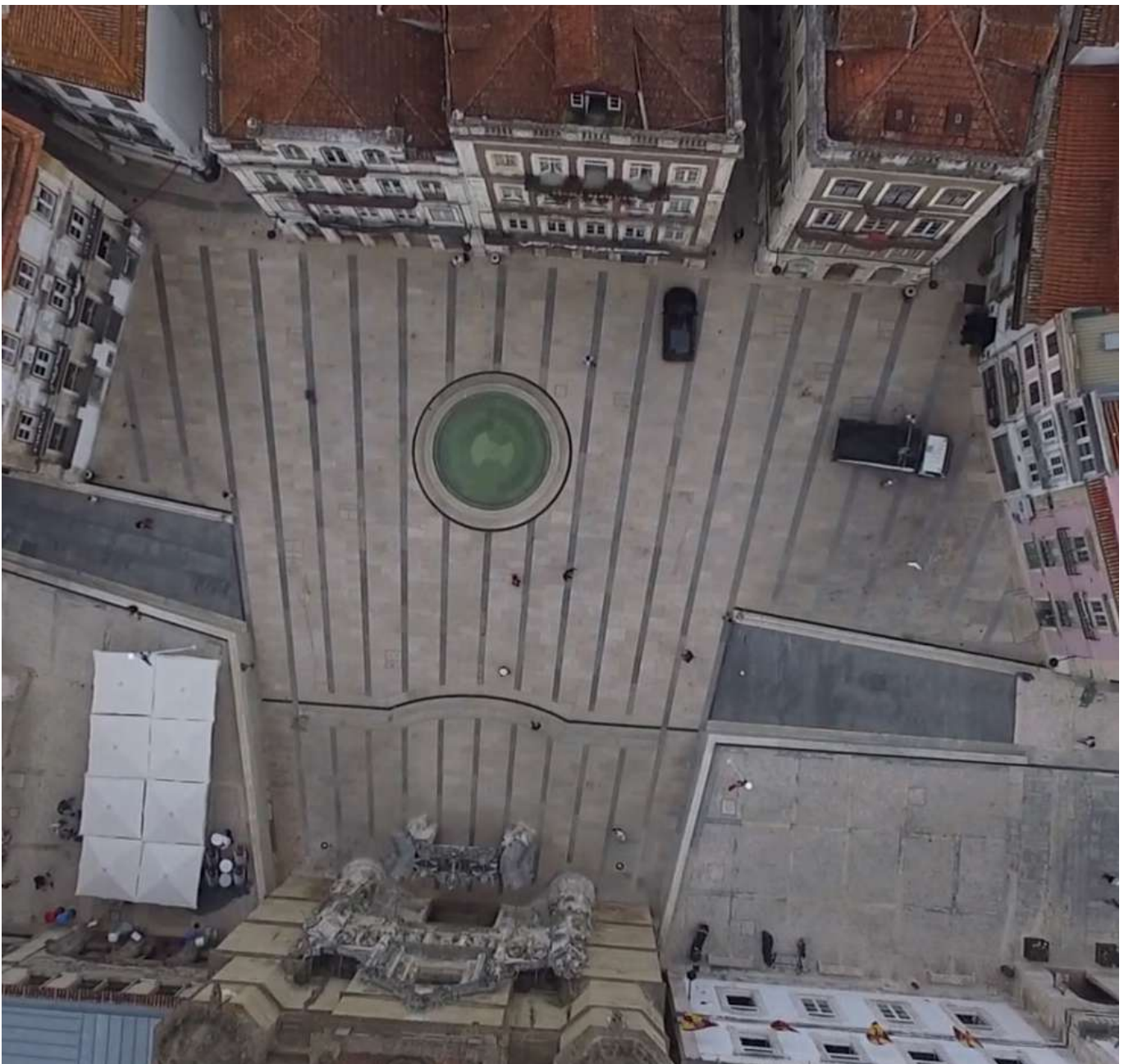
**T**his young Romanian-American woman who grew up in Durham, North Carolina, could not imagine in childhood that she will turn the cultural identity of her father into an academic career and a rich intellectual life, that she will be published and be appreciated both in the Romanian-American communities from Romania and in the American academia. Cristina perceives the chance of being part of the diaspora as a chance to have two nests, live in multiple dimensions, a gift for which she is thankful. She believes firmly that there is a strong connection between the Romanians in the country and those who lead their life abroad. She speaks of her Romanian cultural identity referring to the phenomenon of belonging that is affirmed globally by people like her, of an identity based precisely on

*Cristina perceives the chance of being part of the diaspora as a chance to have two nests, live in multiple dimensions, a gift for which she is thankful.*

assuming a difficult past. She understands the recent history of Romania as being marked by unfortunate geopolitical conjunctures in the heart of an Europe shook by political allegiance hate and the burden of the crimes of Fascism and Communism. The way in which she honors the memory of those who passed away and reaffirm hers own identity stems exactly from the deepened understanding of the sufferings, but also of the life decisions taken by the previous generations. "The stories lived by them must be told to our children", considers Cristina. The feeling of resilient identity of a person who is well integrated and valued in the host society reflects the condition of a mobile generation that is feeding spiritually in the discrete groups of the diaspora, a generation that maintains the authentic spirit of patriotism towards the country of origin, a generation that creates actual bridges with the host countries where they have taken root.

(Cultura no 06)

Praça 8 de Maio, Coimbra, Portugal. Photo by Cătălin D. Constatin  
Image from the project "European Squares and Their Histories", Intotheshquare.org



Theatre Festival „Myths of the Polis” 2019  
(Photo: Courtesy of Constanța State Theatre)





Theatre Festival „Myths of the Polis” 2019  
(Photo: Courtesy of Constanța State Theatre)

# review

# The Fairy-Tale On a 3D Level

The Bee in My Head

by Roland Schimmelpfennig

directed by Theodor Cristian Popescu

Tîrgu Mureş National Theatre



CRISTINA RUSIECKI

**H**ow to reproduce the sound of the inner voice, its meandering course, with perceptions and sensation coming from the outside over which are overlaid indistinguishable fears, images and reflections – this is the challenge assumed by director Theodor Cristian Popescu and stage designer Mihai Păcurar. Their staging, an authentic stylistic exercise, subtly reproduces the puzzle of the disjointed fragments of the inner voices

that the mind proves to be incapable of separating with precision. The play is rather one for children, considering both the simplicity of the message and its character, a pupil who describes the routine of an ordinary day. His ordeal begins since the beginning of daylight, when he has to wake up and prepare for school. The story can be predicted from early on: neglected by his unemployed, alcoholic parents, who don't care to look after him, in order to survive the hostile environment, the child resorts, like any little kid, to a fairy-tale subterfuge: turning into a bee.

(Cultura no 01)



# “Oxygen” Without Mask



Oxygen  
by Ivan Vyrpaev  
a spectacle by  
Antoaneta Cojocaru  
and Daniel Pascariu  
Teatrelli

GINA ȘERBĂNESCU

The play „Oxygen” by playwright Ivan Vyrpaev (44 years old) is considered a manifesto of the young generation in Russia. The topic is, apparently, a simple one, recognizable in a myriad of other texts of world literature: the couple in search of supreme, redeeming love. In its substance, Vyrpaev’s creation represents much more: it is about the condition of the contemporary world, about a becoming that may lead to the extinction of any form of empathy, of any opportunities for the naturalness and authenticity of human interaction to manifest. The play of the Russian authors questions paradigms of morality, doubts what is usually

considered fair in the relations between those who love each other or those who search for a common path in their endeavors and, not a negligible aspect, releases interrogations even of the relevance of certain strategies through which theatrical art manifests. Beyond the fealty in regards to Vyrpaev’s text, the show by Antoaneta Cojocaru and Daniel Pascariu represents a plea for the utility of dance on the scene, for choreography as ideal instrument for materializing meanings with value of principle. Oxygen is not just an element that makes life possible and maintains it. In this context, it is a metaphor of everything that is authentic in the human being and fundamental for its manifestation in the spirit of what defines it.

(Cultura no 02)

# Medea Is All of Us

Medea's boys  
dramatized by Ionuț Sociu  
directed by Andrei Măjeri  
Apollo 111 Theatre



CRISTINA RUSIECKI

A new generation in theatre – this is the most appropriate conclusion after “Medea’s Boys”, with fragments from Euripides and dramaturgy by Ionuț Sociu, directed by Andrei Măjeri, at Apollo 111. Fast pace, non-stop action, emphasis on the spectacle of the bodies and their capacity to provide meanings and attitudes, committed eclecticism, plus the demise of traditional genders

in an exclusively male cast. The lightness that dramatist Ionuț Sociu flaunts by navigating the mythological characters and situations is a succulent attraction. The show retains the solid themes of ancient theatre, yet envelops them in a hysterical rhythm, in dialogs with short, effervescent lines, with a light atmosphere, not at all tragic. Even so, who takes in tragedy anymore nowadays? Well camouflaged in our language, its generally valid traces still spring up.

(Cultura no 03)

# No Answer

153 seconds

written by Svetlana Cârstean

directed by Ioana Păun

The National Centre for  
Dance in Bucharest



CRISTINA RUSIECKI

**H**ow to avoid pathos in a show on the tragedy from Colectiv (club)? How to express the principles of your generation, while still remaining objective? How can you pose questions about the world you live in, where tragedies such as the fire from Colectiv take place, without emotional manipulating or turning off with a vilifying tone?

„Upon meeting with some of those whose life changed forever after the night of the fire in

Colectiv, we decided that *153 Seconds* will not be about corruption, nor about the ending, but about unlearning. Unlearning fear, shame, obedience, resignation and mistrust”, says director Ioana Păun.

Twenty performers dressed identically, in black T-shirts and jeans, express themselves mainly through movement and bodily expressiveness. The soundtrack and the dynamics of the group convey the rush and the uproar from Colectiv. Not a range of singular characters is what the creator of the show is interested in, but the impulses of the shared mass of bodies hounded by the same horror.

(Cultura no 04)

# Mirror Effect

Limits

by Mihaela Michailov,  
and Radu Apostol

directed by Radu  
Apostol

„Replika” Center for  
Educational Theatre



GINA ȘERBĂNESCU

**T**he show should be seen and seen again by as many teachers, pupils and parents, as it represents a powerful exercise of becoming aware of the human limits that disturb or impede the manifestation of what should be the sanity of the educational system in Romania.

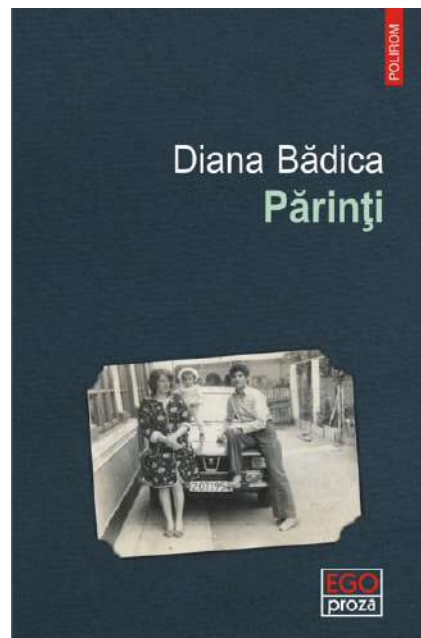
The screenplay written by Mihaela Michailov and Radu Apostol is based on a real case and ingrains

this reality with a style that creates emotion and lucid reflection in equal measures. The featured situation being one that has extended to many contexts, it is easily recognizable by the public, and the fact it is present in the education depict a particular case of a social symptomatology that is alarmingly spread, entailing ethical dilemmas, grave disruptions on the social level or lead at abuse of different kinds.

(Cultura no 05)

# A Family Novel That is Not Really Psychoanalytic

Diana Bădică  
Parents  
Polirom Publishing House



IULIANA ALEXA

The female narrator is not attempting to analyze the constellation of family dysfunctions, they are more than apparent, she is merely presenting them, with an eye detached from time, sad but with comic undertones, pessimistic regarding the possibility of people who never understood much being saved.

What makes this novel a touching read is, paradoxically, its realism that lacks sentimentality or

complicated analytic approach in narration. Ioana goes through a terrible family drama at an age where innocence and safety is supposed to be the norm, while her parents barely can cope and deprive her of affection. Her mother cannot see her, is not paying attention to her needs and, despite everything, even though a psychoanalytic intrigue could have been made out of this, Diana Bădică writes a social novel that is cold, anti-stylistic, with dialogs reduced to the essential.

(Cultura no 06)

# A Poem on Hate and Love



IULIANA ALEXA

**T**he book is a poem of loss, entirely special in present literature, a psychological thriller about a half family, terribly dysfunctional, a perennial theme, yet with an unique stylistic approach in contemporary Romanian literature. It is not just about the pace of the narration that holds you breathless to see what is the key to the strange relationship between a teenager and his mother, whom he hates viscerally, it is also about the signature style that the writer asserts and

sustains from the first to the last page, without a drop.

One could recognize a page written by Tatiana Țibuleac, even if you do not know from what book it is... Maybe it is this unmistakable character that, along other qualities, determined the author to receive the EU Prize for Literature in 2019. The stylistics of hideousness places Tatiana Țibuleac close to Aglaja Veteranyi, but the resemblances end here.

(Cultura no 07)

Tatiana Țibuleac  
The summer when my  
mother's eyes were  
green  
Cartier Publishing House

# A World Running in All Directions

Swan Lake Revisited  
directed by Kokan  
Mladenovic

TESZT Theatre Timișoara



CRISTINA RUSIECKI

**T**he "Swan Lake Revised" play is an eclectic show, with short, often wordless scenes, comprising lots of movement, for which the troupe rehearsed for hours upon hours.

Nothing to complain about, bodily and vocal expressiveness are excellent, especially since the humor, present almost in each moment, is composed with the entire variety of means related to the themes: a plastic pool where the swan swims, inflatable plastic swan buoys, the parody of Tchaikovsky's ballet. Made using the devised method, the staging emerged through the improvisations of the actors on different proposed topics throughout the rehearsals. And the actors have humor. They are good at placing a mock mirror in face of our erratic world, manipulated by

hollow discourses, among which the front seat is taken by the nationalist one. A society that is running in all directions, especially that of bank loans that enslave you for a lifetime.

Someone starts telling a fairy-tale. Like in the old times. In order to take revenge, the wicked wizard turned the princess into a swan. Nothing new, the legend is present in the mythology of several nations. But one of the feminists interrupts him immediately, offended by the victim image of the princess. The story is resumed. Someone tries to make a fire in the woods. Zealous defenders of the environment ignite in rage. Bit by bit, the show pieces together our world without poetry, full of hypocrite rules that clamp down on nothing more and nothing less than... stories.

(Cultura no 08)

# Eye Candy

Post System Geometries  
in the Romanian Art Today

Curator: Erwin Kessler

MARe - Museum of Recent Art



YIGRU ZELTIL

The global contemporary art market throughout the last decade, due to economic unrest and the laziness of the collectors, developed a liking for young painters who prolong the styles of abstract art from half a century ago, but in forms that are suitable for online reproductions, much to the joy of gallerists. The value of those painters has been propelled artificially also thanks to the museums of contemporary art, who cynically exploit the resemblances between the young jaded painters and the artists of the abstract art canon. Like MoMA from New York, who improvised in 2015 the exhibition "Forever Now" to bring to a

common ground the most valued young American painters at the time, MARe from Bucharest delivers a "prospective" exhibitions that proposes for posterity – if possible – a bunch of new Romanian artists who have little in common, except explicitly sampling the canon of Western abstract art (from Mondrian to Mangold and Frank Stella), in addition to a few local influences (from the late Ion Nicodim to Gili Mocanu, mentioned even in the catalogue of the exhibition). The curators argue that these emerging names form a generation of artists freed from the tyranny of the minimalist "system" and strict conceptualization, even though some of the works remain indebted to those frameworks.

(Cultura no 09)



# The Eventuality of Certain Emotions



Don't Take It Personally  
Concept and interpretation by  
Irina Marinescu  
Developing Art Association

ANA-MARIA IRIMIA

The show invites, through its concept, to an inquiry of emotions through movement, sound, texture, color and, last but not least, through the active participation of the public with its own context. A single perspective is not desired, so the public is free to walk through to space, to move, to react or to intervene in the universe of emotions, according to how they feel. The performance space is a mental one, build upon

layers, represented through vertical strips of different materials, from bubble plastic wrappers to sequins, over which images with other textures, with other spaces, are being mapped. The multidimensional visual, done by Alexandra Panaite for stage design and by Alina Ușurelu for video mapping, is like a labyrinth of possibilities in which not a way out is being aimed for, but rather a walk through the known or lesser known gardens of emotions and their symptoms.

(Cultura no 10)

# An Experiment of De-Theatralization



Get 'em!

Written and directed by Ionuț Caras

„The Pitești Phenomenon”  
Summer School

GINA ȘERBĂNESCU

Part of the Pitești Phenomenon Summer School, „Pe ei!” (“Get ‘em!”) takes place at the Pitești Prison Memorial, the space where some of the greatest atrocities of South-Eastern European history took place: between 1949 and 1952, the Securitate put in practice a program of reeducation through torture, with the purpose of a brutal intervention on the level of identity, so that the convict had his personality crushed until he turned into an advocate of Bolshevik Communist causes. The used means proved their evil efficiency by the point the tortured turned into torturer, when the victim transformed into executioner.

Ionuț Caras and the actors he brought with him on board with this undertaking, in equal measures brave and risky, succeed in shaking our dual perception of our everyday world, remove us from the comfort of convenient, non-problematic judgments regarding the moral profile of our fellow people, and shows us that, in unbearable conditions, of the horrendous manifestation of a spirit most of us did not witness, identity may oscillate between parameters that are hard to quantify.

(Cultura no 11)

# The Play of the Layers of Cynicism

Radio

by Eric Bogosian

Directed by Bobi Pricop

Craiova National Theatre

CARMEN CORBU

For whoever might have believed the text written by Eric Bogosian at the end of the ninth decade of the past century remains a text of the past century, that it no longer lives up to the contemporary levels of social knowledge and cynicism, the staging in Craiova proves that the cultural barrier may be surpassed.

Invite people to go on the air in a show, have them speak, then condemn them – we know, we have seen it before, we know. Exposed to all the possible recipes that were used by the countless media that escort our daily life for so many years, we can carelessly show ourselves jaded. And still... The protagonist, Barry, is the producer of a night talk on a radio station. It is assumed that the design of such a show includes also a profile of the target public. It means you already know it will consist of marginals. It means you know already for who do you speak and from who you will receive feedback and you are no longer surprised that you end up with a ship of fools. Because, if you want discourse that is coherent, correct, matching with the “to day” values, you can’t avoid thinking that it is highly unlikely anyone who is going to call will be capable of anything like that. Because the ones that could have the dialogue with Barry that would satisfy him are not there where he is looking. No matter the choice of stimulus, he did not select his appropriate specimen. People who truly have something to say said it already, exhausted the exercise of confirmation, do not need to call at

night, on a radio station, to have someone to listen to them. All these very handy considerations provide the backdrop of cynicism for the story of Barry’s cynicism. To enter this story becomes a game of dog-eat-dog and, thus, the drama of Barry – the one who, in his subsequent dialogs with his listeners, has gone from intrigue to sadness, by turns, then to fury, ultimately to be killed – may not even be the bigger drama. The staging (directed by Bobi Pricop) is faithful to this entire mechanism of correspondences and does not propose to turn the protagonist into a great hero, keeping Barry (Sorin Leoveanu) in a restrained tone, without excesses, throughout the show, losing it in the ending, in the cold light of the bar where he is going to be shot. It is correct – even politically correct – also in the composition of the specimen of listeners-interveners, Kent being the reference character, probably also the hardest to compose, considering a necessary – voluntarily or not – update to the temporal and social space. Kent (Mlad Udrescu) also pleased very much the audience. Likewise, the live music (Eduard Gabia). And the comment of some very young spectators, “It is the coolest play I’ve ever seen”, is a sign that, confronting all cynicisms, even after Andrei Gheorghe, or maybe precisely due to him, Bobi Pricop’s show, an American story of the ‘80s, fits well a certain horizon of the audience expectations.

(Cover image of this issue)



**20**  
DE ANI

**PROMOVĂM  
SPIRITUL ROMÂNESC  
PESTE HOTARE  
DIN 1999**

## Prima multinațională cu capital românesc.

Profesionalismul și perseverența noastră din ultimii 20 de ani au pus România pe harta feroviară globală și la conjuncția strategică a industriilor europene și internaționale. Suntem un pilon de dezvoltare a României și ne propunem să continuăm în aceeași direcție.



România

Austria

Serbia

Germania

Ungaria

Grecia

Bulgaria

Croația